The Might Tower press hall felt like a pressure cooker about to blow. Bodies pressed shoulder to shoulder, the acrid smell of sweat mixing with the ozone scent from overworked electronics. Cameras formed a metallic forest, their red recording lights pulsing like predatory eyes in the dim lighting. Reporters shuffled through notes with trembling fingers, their whispered conversations creating a constant undercurrent of anxiety. Pro heroes clustered near the walls, their usual confidence replaced by tight-lipped tension.

The Hero Public Safety Commission had called this conference with less than two hours' notice, but everyone knew why they'd dropped everything to be here. All Might was speaking. Not about another rescue operation or charity gala—this time, the Symbol of Peace had personally requested the podium.

A photographer near the front wiped sweat from his brow, muttering to his colleague, "Never seen the room this packed. What's got everyone so—"

The room's temperature seemed to drop ten degrees as All Might approached the podium.

Tonight, he wore no hero costume. A sharp, midnight-blue suit clung to his imposing frame, the fabric catching the harsh stage lights and making him appear more like a world leader than the smiling hero on billboard advertisements. But it wasn't the formal attire that silenced three hundred voices at once—it was his face. The warm, infectious grin that had inspired millions for decades was nowhere to be found. In its place sat an expression of granite determination, the kind of look that had once made villains surrender before he even raised a fist.

He adjusted the microphone with deliberate precision, the metallic screech echoing through the hall like nails on a chalkboard. Several reporters winced.

"Good evening," he began, his voice carrying the same deep resonance that had once declared "I am here!" to countless crowds, but now it cut through the tension like a blade through silk. "Tonight, I'm not here as a celebrity signing autographs, nor as a symbol to be admired from a distance. I am here as a hero—a deeply concerned hero—addressing a dangerous poison spreading through our society."

A collective inhale swept through the room. Dozens of reporters leaned forward as if pulled by invisible strings, pens hovering over notebooks, fingers poised over recording apps.

"I am talking about Chizome Akaguro." He paused, letting the name hang in the air like a curse. "The man the media has dubbed 'Stain.'"

The reaction was instantaneous—gasps sharp enough to cut glass, a storm of camera flashes that turned the room into a strobe-lit nightmare. One reporter in the third row dropped her notepad entirely, the sound of it hitting the floor somehow audible above the chaos. All Might waited, unmoved as a mountain, until the last camera click faded into expectant silence.

"I have read his manifesto," All Might continued, his voice carrying a weight that made several people in the front row unconsciously lean back. "Every. Single. Word. And I will be brutally honest with all of you—it was one of the most disturbing, revolting experiences of my entire career."

The silence that followed was so complete you could hear the building's ventilation system humming overhead. A young reporter near the back swallowed so loudly it echoed.

"I had to take breaks," All Might admitted, his jaw visibly tightening. "Multiple breaks. I had to step away from my desk, walk outside, breathe fresh air. There were passages so..." He paused, seeming to search for words that could adequately convey his disgust without being unprofessional. "So personally invasive, so grotesquely intimate, that I found myself physically ill. Yes—literally nauseous."

A veteran reporter in the front row, a woman who'd covered All Might for fifteen years, had never seen him look so genuinely disturbed. She found herself holding her breath.

"There was an entire section," All Might continued, his voice dropping to just above a whisper, forcing everyone to strain to hear him, "where Akaguro... praises me. Idolizes me. Calls me the only true hero, the only one worthy of breathing the same air as civilians." His hands gripped the podium's edges, knuckles whitening. "And then there was... Christ, I can barely say this..."

He exhaled slowly, the sound carrying across the silent room like a prayer. "A love letter. Addressed to me personally."

If someone had dropped a pin in that moment, it would have sounded like a gunshot. Several reporters stopped breathing entirely. A camera operator in the back row mumbled "Holy shit" before slapping a hand over his mouth.

"Yes," All Might repeated, his voice now carrying a mixture of disgust and genuine hurt. "A love letter. Written with such obsessive, unhealthy reverence that I physically shuddered reading it. It described fantasies about standing beside me as we 'purged' the world of false heroes. It was... deeply disturbing. And frankly insulting."

He straightened, his voice gaining strength. "Because he doesn't know me. What Akaguro worships isn't the man standing before you. It's a fantasy he constructed in his own mind, a perfect ideal that no human being could ever live up to. And I guarantee you—I guarantee—that if that man ever met me as I truly am, with all my flaws and doubts and failures, he would call me a fraud just as quickly as he condemned every other hero he murdered."

All Might reached beneath the podium and withdrew a thick folder, its edges bristling with Post-it notes and paper clips. The sound of him opening it was like thunder in the silence.

"Since his capture, people who knew Chizome Akaguro have come forward. Former classmates, colleagues, teachers, even his neighbors. Their testimonies paint a picture of the man behind the mask—and it is not the picture of a noble vigilante fighting corruption."

He pulled out the first sheet, holding it up like evidence in a trial. "Kenji Yamamoto, his roommate at U.A. before Akaguro's expulsion, described him as—and I'm reading his exact words—'a zealot who wouldn't shut up about being the only real hero in our class. He'd corner people in the hallway and lecture them about their 'false motivations' for wanting to save people. It was exhausting and honestly kind of scary.'"

All Might flipped to the next page, his voice becoming more clinical, more damning. "Miho Tanaka, a former classmate, stated: 'He followed students he thought weren't worthy. Actually followed them home. He'd show up at their part-time jobs and berate them for 'contaminating the pure concept of heroism with capitalism.' Some transferred schools just to get away from him.'"

Another page. "And from his combat instructor: 'Akaguro was expelled after we caught him cornering a first-year student in a supply closet, screaming at her for wanting to become a rescue hero because her family had money. The girl was in tears. When we pulled him away, he looked at us like we were the ones in the wrong.'"

All Might closed the folder with a sharp snap that echoed like a gavel. The sound seemed to wake the room from its trance—several people blinked rapidly, as if remembering where they were.

"This man," All Might said, his voice now carrying the full weight of his authority, "is not a hero. He is not some misguided vigilante fighting the good fight. He is a fanatic who justified murder because the world refused to conform to his impossible, delusional standards."

The silence stretched, thick and oppressive. Then All Might's expression shifted slightly, becoming almost contemplative.

"And let me share something else that should concern everyone in this room. Stain's ideology condemned heroes who earned salaries, who worked with agencies, who treated heroism as anything other than pure, unpaid sacrifice. By his own twisted logic..." All Might gestured to himself, a bitter smile playing at the corners of his mouth. "I would be unworthy. I work with Might Agency. I receive compensation for my services. I have endorsement deals that help fund disaster relief. By Chizome Akaguro's standards, I am no better than the men and women he butchered in dark alleyways."

He leaned forward, his voice dropping to something almost conversational, but somehow more terrifying for its quiet intensity. "Would he have tried to kill me too, do you think?"

A reporter near the middle couldn't help herself: "Would he have?" she called out.

All Might's smile turned sharp as a blade. "I think we both know the answer to that question."

He stepped back from the podium, then moved forward again, placing both hands firmly on its surface. His gaze swept across the sea of cameras and faces, making eye contact with individuals as if speaking directly to each one.

"Let me tell you what being a hero actually means," he said, his voice building like an approaching storm. "Being a hero isn't about perfection. It isn't about living up to some impossible, idealized standard that exists only in the fantasies of disturbed individuals. It's about saving people. Period. Full stop. End of discussion."

His voice rose, filling every corner of the hall. "Whether you're paid or volunteer, whether you smile like me or cry from exhaustion, whether you're confident or terrified out of your mind while doing it—you are a hero if you put yourself at risk to help someone in need."

The change in his demeanor was palpable. The cold authority melted into something warmer, more personal, more like the All Might the world remembered from rescue footage.

"Every single day, heroes whose names will never appear in newspapers save lives. Some of them don't smile as much as I do. Some can't—they've seen too much, lost too much. Some come home with burns covering their bodies, exhaustion weighing them down like lead blankets, their spirits beaten down by the endless cycle of tragedy and loss. But you know what they do? They get up the next morning and do it again. And again. And again."

His voice cracked slightly, genuine emotion bleeding through his professional composure. "Are they any less heroic because they aren't me? Because they don't have my power or my publicity team or my trademark smile? Hell no. They are heroes. Every single one of them. And I am honored—truly honored—to stand among them, not above them."

Then, his voice rose one final time, carrying the same unwavering conviction that had once made villains surrender at the sound of his approach. "Chizome Akaguro can call me whatever he wants from his prison cell. He can write all the love letters his twisted mind can conceive. But I will never—NEVER—stand by while a murderer decides who is or isn't worthy of saving lives."

All Might straightened to his full height, and for the first time that evening, his face broke into a smile. Not the carefree grin of a celebrity, not the practiced expression of a public figure, but something fierce and resolute that radiated absolute confidence.

"Heroes are human beings. We are flawed, we make mistakes, we have bad days and good days just like everyone else. But we are here to save people. That is what matters. That is what has always mattered. And that is what will always matter, no matter what any fanatic with a sword thinks about it."

The room erupted. Camera flashes turned the hall into a lightning storm, reporters shouted questions over each other in a cacophony of voices, but All Might simply stepped back from the podium, gave a small, respectful bow to the room, and turned to leave.

The Symbol of Peace had spoken.

Later That Evening

The city had settled into its evening rhythm by the time the last news van pulled away from Might Tower. Street lights flickered to life as the sun disappeared behind the towering buildings, casting long shadows across empty sidewalks. The press conference had sent ripples through every corner of society, from the highest levels of hero agencies to the smallest internet forums where people debated the nature of justice.

In his private office high above the city, All Might sat slumped in his chair, the formal suit replaced by a simple t-shirt and jeans. The transformation from his muscular form had left him feeling drained, as it always did, but tonight there was a different kind of exhaustion weighing on his shoulders. The weight of having to confront such personal, disturbing details in front of the entire world.

Midoriya knocked softly on the door frame. "All Might? Are you okay?"

The man looked up, managing a tired but genuine smile. "Young Midoriya. Come in, please." He gestured to the chair across from his desk. "I should be asking you that question. Today couldn't have been easy for you to watch."

Izuku settled into the chair, his green eyes bright with concern and admiration in equal measure. "I thought you were incredible tonight. The way you defended everyone—not just pro heroes, but rescue workers, volunteers, everyone who helps people. It reminded me why I wanted to be a hero in the first place."

All Might's smile grew warmer. "That means more to me than you know, my boy. But I have to ask—and please be honest with me—are you still struggling with what happened in Hosu? With Stain's ideology?"

Izuku shook his head immediately. "No, sir. Not after tonight. I mean, I was never really tempted by his ideas, but there was this small part of me that wondered if maybe he had a point about corruption in the hero system. But listening to you..." He paused, searching for the right words. "You made me realize that perfect heroes don't exist, and that's okay. What matters is that we keep trying to help people, even when we're scared or flawed or making mistakes."

"Good," All Might said softly. "That's exactly what I hoped you would take from this. Heroism isn't about being worthy of some impossible standard—it's about caring enough to act when action is needed."

They sat in comfortable silence for a moment, watching the city lights twinkle beyond the massive windows. Finally, Midoriya spoke up again.

"All Might? Do you really think Stain would have tried to kill you if you'd met him?"

The older man considered the question seriously. "Honestly? I think Chizome Akaguro was so consumed by his own delusions that he would have found a way to justify killing anyone who didn't match his fantasy. Even me. Perhaps especially me, since his obsession was so personal."

"That's terrifying," Midoriya said quietly.

"Yes, it is," All Might agreed. "But it's also educational. It reminds us why we can never let ideology override our humanity. The moment we start believing that some people deserve to die for not meeting our standards, we stop being heroes and become something much worse."

As if summoned by their conversation, both their phones buzzed simultaneously with a news alert: "Hero Public Safety Commission Reports 23% Increase in Hero License Applications Following All Might Press Conference."

All Might chuckled, some of the tension leaving his shoulders. "Well, at least something good came out of this nightmare."

"More than something good," Midoriya said earnestly. "You reminded the whole world what heroism actually means. That's going to matter for a long time."

Outside the window, the city continued its nightly rhythm, unaware that in the shadows and hidden places, new plans were being made and old obsessions were being questioned. The Symbol of Peace had spoken, and the world was listening—for better and worse.

But for now, in this quiet office high above the streets, a mentor and student sat together in the gathering darkness, secure in the knowledge that tomorrow would bring new challenges, new opportunities to help others, and new chances to prove that heroism was not about being perfect.

It was simply about being present when people needed help.

The city's lights glittered like stars below them, each one representing a life, a story, a person worth protecting. And somewhere in those lights, heroes—flawed, human, imperfect heroes—were getting ready for another night of keeping the world safe.

It was enough. It had always been enough.

And it always would be.

U.A. High School - Class 1-A

The classroom buzzed with the electric energy of teenagers who'd just witnessed something monumental. Most of the students had their phones out, rewatching clips of the press conference, their voices overlapping in excited chatter.

"Dude, did you see his face when he talked about the love letter?" Kaminari was practically bouncing in his seat, grinning widely. "All Might looked like he wanted to take a shower just thinking about it! That Stain guy was completely unhinged!"

"It was so satisfying watching him destroy that psychopath's ideology," Bakugo growled from his seat, though there was a hint of approval in his voice. "About time someone called out all those idiots who were treating that murderer like some kind of philosopher."

But not everyone was celebrating. Tenya Iida sat rigidly at his desk, staring at his phone screen where All Might's resolute expression was frozen mid-speech. His hands trembled slightly before he clenched them into fists, knuckles white with tension.

"Iida?" Midoriya's voice was soft, concerned. "Are you okay?"

Iida's voice came out barely above a whisper. "He's right. About all of it. I almost..." He swallowed hard, his usual perfect posture cracking. "I almost let that ideology consume me. After what happened to Tensei, I was so angry, so ready to believe that there was some noble purpose behind the violence. But listening to All Might..." He shook his head, glasses reflecting the light from his phone screen. "There was nothing noble about it. Nothing at all."

Midoriya reached over and placed a gentle hand on Iida's shoulder. "But you didn't let it consume you. That's what matters."

"Only because you and Sir Nighteye stopped me," Iida replied, his voice thick with shame and gratitude. "If you two hadn't been there..."

Midoriya nodded earnestly, his usual intensity shining through. "All Might didn't just defend professional heroes tonight. He reminded everyone why heroism matters in the first place. Not because we're perfect, but because we care enough to try."

Around them, their classmates continued their animated discussions, but the three boys sat in a bubble of quiet understanding, processing not just what they'd seen, but how close they'd all come to a very different outcome.

Across the Country - Social Media

The internet had exploded. Within minutes of the press conference ending, clips were being shared across every platform imaginable.

HeroWatcher47: "All Might just dismantled Stain's entire ideology in fifteen minutes. THAT'S why he's the Symbol of Peace. Not just because he's strong, but because he understands what heroism actually means. #AllMightSpeaks #RealHeroes"

RescueWorkerMom: "As someone who works search and rescue, thank you All Might for defending everyone who saves lives, not just pro heroes. We're all in this together. #HeroesAreHuman"

FormerStainFan: "I'm ashamed to admit I bought into Stain's message after he saved that kid in Hosu. But hearing about the love letter and the stalking... Jesus, what was I thinking? The guy was just a psycho with a sword. #WakeUpCall"

StudentAtUA: "My teacher made our whole class watch this. I've never seen All Might so serious. It was kind of scary but also... inspiring? Like he was protecting all of us just by speaking."

The shift in public opinion was swift and decisive. Hashtags that had once praised Stain's "pure ideology" were rapidly being replaced with ones celebrating All Might's defense of working heroes. The narrative was changing, and it was changing fast.

A Small Apartment Across Town

Shuichi Iguchi sat cross-legged on the stained carpet of his cramped apartment, the TV's harsh light casting shadows across his scaled face. Empty ramen containers and old hero magazines were scattered around him like the debris of a shipwreck. His claws drummed nervously against his knees as he listened to All Might's words, his reptilian features twisted in stubborn denial.

"No... no, that's not right," he muttered to himself, his voice rough with desperation. "That man, Stain, he was trying to fix things. He had to be right about the corruption, about the fake heroes..." His voice trailed off, becoming almost pleading. "He had to be..."

But then All Might mentioned the love letter, and Shuichi's entire body went rigid. His eyes darted from the screen to his own apartment—the stacks of old pamphlets, the hero memorabilia covering every surface, the newspaper clippings about Stain's "heroic mission" taped to his walls. The parallels hit him like a physical blow.

"Oh, god," he whispered, his voice cracking. "The obsession, the... the stalking behavior..." His hands moved to his face, claws gently touching his scaled cheeks. "He wasn't a revolutionary. He was just... he was just a sick, lonely man who couldn't handle the world not matching his fantasy."

Shuichi slowly pushed himself to his feet, looking around at the shrine he'd unconsciously built to his own broken dreams. The hero magazines suddenly looked pathetic instead of inspiring. The newspaper clippings seemed less like documentation of a noble cause and more like the ravings of someone who'd lost touch with reality.

"Shit," he breathed, then louder: "Shit! I've been sitting here for months, wallowing in this crap, thinking I was... what? Supporting some great cause?" He laughed, but it came out bitter and hollow. "I'm just another loser who can't get his act together."

He started gathering up the magazines, his movements becoming more purposeful. "Time to clean this mess up," he muttered, though there was something lighter in his voice now, as if a weight was being lifted from his shoulders. "Maybe... maybe I should actually try to do something with my life instead of obsessing over someone else's twisted version of heroism."

A Love Hotel Across Town

Himiko Toga lay sprawled across rumpled sheets, twirling a blood-stained knife between her fingers with the casual grace of someone who'd been doing it for years. A half-conscious client lay beside her, breathing shallowly, several small cuts decorating his arms—nothing fatal, just enough to satisfy her particular appetites.

The room's small TV played the press conference, and she watched with the idle curiosity of a cat observing a particularly interesting bug. When All Might mentioned the love letter, she burst into delighted laughter, nearly rolling off the bed in her amusement.

"Oh my god!" she squealed, clutching her sides. "He was totally nuts! Writing love letters to All Might? That's so creepy it's actually hilarious!" She wiped a tear from her eye, still giggling. "I mean, I get being obsessed with someone—I've got my own little fixations—but writing actual love letters? That's just pathetic!"

She sat up, stretching like a satisfied cat, her knife catching the light from the TV. "Well, whatever! Crazy or not, he had the right idea about the cutting-people-up part. Though I do it because it's fun, not because of some stupid ideology." She glanced at her unconscious victim and giggled again. "At least I'm honest about being a psychopath!"

Somewhere in the Shadows

In a room where shadows seemed to pool deeper than they should, Dabi stood with his arms crossed, watching the broadcast with an unreadable expression. The light from the screen cast harsh angles across his scarred features, making the metal staples holding his skin together gleam like stars in the darkness.

Behind him, deeper in the shadows where even the TV's glow couldn't reach, another figure sat in perfect stillness. Only the faintest glint of eyes was visible in the darkness, studying the screen with the patient intensity of a spider watching its web.

"Interesting," came a voice from the shadows, soft and thoughtful. "The Symbol of Peace shows his teeth when pushed far enough. I hadn't expected such... passion in his defense of the current system."

Dabi's voice was gravelly, tinged with dark amusement. "You sound surprised. The old bastard's always been protective of his precious hero society."

"Perhaps," the voice mused. "But this was different. More personal. He didn't just defend the system—he defended the individuals within it. Every small-time hero, every rescue worker, every person who puts themselves at risk for others. That kind of inclusive rhetoric could be... problematic for our future plans."

Dabi glanced back toward the shadows. "You worried about a speech?"

A soft chuckle emerged from the darkness. "I'm concerned about the effect of that speech. All Might just reminded the entire country why they believe in heroes. That kind of renewed faith could make them much harder to turn against the system when the time comes."

The figure leaned forward slightly, eyes gleaming brighter. "We may need to accelerate our timeline."

Tartarus Prison - Maximum Security Wing

The prison cafeteria was a symphony of chaos and mockery. Inmates wearing heavy Quirk Suppression collars jeered and laughed as the broadcast played on the mounted TVs, their voices echoing off concrete walls designed to contain the worst criminals in Japan.

"Yo, Akaguro!" one inmate called out, his voice dripping with false sympathy. "Your boyfriend just broke up with you on live TV! How's it feel to get dumped by the Symbol of Peace?"

"Maybe you should write him another love letter!" another shouted, causing a fresh wave of laughter. "Tell him how sorry you are!"

Chizome Akaguro sat at a metal table, hands clenched into fists that shook with barely contained rage. His teeth ground audibly as he stared at the screen, watching All Might's resolute expression with a mixture of betrayal and fury that seemed to radiate from him like heat.

"They're all fakes," he whispered, his voice venomous enough to cut glass. "Every last one of them. And All Might..." His voice cracked slightly. "You were supposed to understand. You were supposed to be different."

A fellow inmate slid into the seat across from him, seemingly unbothered by the aura of rage emanating from the Hero Killer. The man was thin, pale, with wild hair and an almost casual air despite the heavy collar around his neck.

"Rough day, huh?" the newcomer said, resting his chin in his hand with a sardonic smile. "Yeah, this place sucks for all of us. But hey, at least we get cable TV, right? Better than staring at these lovely concrete walls all day."

Chizome's eyes snapped to him, cold and sharp as winter ice. "Leave."

The pale man raised his hands in mock surrender, though his grin never wavered. "Easy there, Hero Killer. Just trying to make friendly conversation. You look like you're about to bite someone's head off. Literally, in your case."

Chizome's jaw tightened, his knuckles whitening as he gripped the edge of the table. The metal groaned under the pressure. "You wouldn't understand."

"Try me," the man said, his voice taking on an oddly genuine note despite his casual posture. "We're all stuck in the same cage, after all. Might as well talk about what put us here."

Chizome's glare lingered for a long moment before shifting back to the screen, where clips of his own arrest were now playing alongside All Might's condemnation. His voice came out low and poisonous. "I was trying to save this rotten world. To cut away the corruption, leave only true heroes. And he..." He gestured sharply at All Might's image. "He was supposed to understand. He was supposed to be pure."

The pale man tilted his head, studying Chizome with genuine curiosity. "Still hung up on that whole 'true hero' thing? No offense, but that's kind of naive. There's no such thing as purity in this world. Everything's contaminated from the start."

"That's exactly why it needed to be cleansed!" Chizome snarled, turning back to face his unwelcome companion. "Only the worthy should have been allowed to continue. Only those who embodied true heroism deserved to survive and create a better world!"

The man snorted, his casual demeanor never wavering. "Survive to create a better world? That's rich. Your whole killing spree was pointless from the start. You know what they're calling you now in the news? 'Hero Dropout Stain.' Has a nice ring to it, don't you think?"

Chizome's face twisted with fury. "They do not!"

"Oh, they absolutely do," the man replied with obvious delight. "Check any news site. 'Hero Dropout Goes on Murder Spree,' 'Failed Student Becomes Serial Killer,' 'The Man Who Couldn't Cut It Tries to Cut Others.' The headlines write themselves, really."

The Hero Killer's breathing became ragged, his entire body trembling with suppressed violence. The other inmates had started to back away from their table, sensing the dangerous shift in atmosphere.

"You know," the pale man continued conversationally, "I've been watching you since they brought you in. You keep talking about justice and true heroes and making the world better. But you want to know what I see?"

Chizome didn't respond, but his glare could have melted steel.

"I see a man who was so desperate to be special, to be important, that he convinced himself murder was noble. You didn't want to fix the world—you wanted to be the most important person in it. The final arbiter of worth. The last word on who lives and who dies." The man's grin turned sharp and knowing. "Sound about right?"

For a moment, it looked like Chizome might lunge across the table, collar or no collar. But instead, his voice came out quiet and deadly. "I at least deserve to know who I'm talking to before I decide whether you're worth killing."

The pale man's grin widened until it was almost unnatural, his eyes gleaming with an unsettling mixture of madness and intelligence.

"Tomura Shigaraki," he said, extending a hand that Chizome notably did not shake. "And unlike you, I don't pretend my destructive urges are noble. I just want to destroy everything that makes people feel safe and comfortable. Much more honest, don't you think?"

U.A. High School - Faculty Room

The faculty room's large monitor continued playing highlights from the press conference, All Might's words echoing through the quiet space. Aizawa sat slouched on the worn couch, his capture weapon draped loosely around his shoulders, while Principal Nezu perched on the coffee table with perfect posture, his tail curled around his small paws. Present Mic leaned forward in his chair, uncharacteristically silent as he processed what they'd just witnessed.

When the broadcast finally ended, the room stayed quiet for several long moments. The weight of what they'd just seen—All Might's raw emotion, his passionate defense, his obvious disgust—hung in the air like smoke.

Finally, Aizawa broke the silence with a dry, humorless laugh.

"About damn time someone said it. That psychopath's entire philosophy was garbage from day one, but everyone kept acting like he was some deep philosophical thinker instead of just another serial killer with delusions of grandeur."

Present Mic ran a hand through his hair, his usually boisterous voice subdued. "Yeah, but you know how the public is, man. Package a nutjob with some fancy rhetoric about corruption and pure heroism, throw in a couple of 'heroic' rescues, and suddenly half the internet thinks he's the second coming of justice incarnate."

Nezu sipped his tea with delicate precision, his dark eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "What concerns me most is how easily he was romanticized. His methods were always monstrous—there was never any question about that. Yet his words were treated as if they held some profound wisdom about the nature of heroism. It's deeply troubling how readily society embraced his message, even while condemning his actions."

Aizawa's gaze remained fixed on All Might's frozen image on the screen, that rare expression of absolute resolve still visible. "The whole thing reminds me of something a manga artist might write. Take a compelling villain, give him a philosophy that sounds noble on the surface, and watch people debate whether he was actually right all along."

Present Mic blinked, confused. "What manga artist?"

"Never mind," Aizawa muttered, waving off the comment. "Point is, All Might's absolutely right. Heroism isn't about passing some impossible moral purity test. It's about helping people, period. Stain was just an egomaniac who got off on playing judge, jury, and executioner."

Nezu nodded slowly, setting down his teacup with a soft clink. "Agreed completely. I'll be recommending we incorporate this entire press conference into our Hero Ethics curriculum. Our students need to understand not just the technical aspects of heroism, but the philosophical foundations that separate true heroism from vigilante justice."

"Good idea," Aizawa said, finally looking away from the screen. "Especially after what happened in Hosu. Some of our students got way too close to that ideology for comfort."

Present Mic's voice carried a note of concern. "You think any of them are still struggling with it?"

"I think," Aizawa said slowly, "that teenage minds are impressionable, and charismatic killers with compelling philosophies are dangerous for exactly that reason. We need to make sure they understand the difference between questioning the system and wanting to tear it down through violence."

U.A. High School - Hallway

As the morning bell rang and students began filtering toward their classrooms, Izuku Midoriya adjusted his bag strap and headed for Class 1-A. The press conference was still weighing on his mind—All Might's passion, his obvious pain at having to address such a disturbing topic, the way he'd defended not just professional heroes but everyone who risked themselves for others.

Lost in thought, he almost missed the figure that hurried past him in the hallway. Aoyama Yuga kept his head down, his usually perfect posture replaced by something tense and uncomfortable. The sparkles that normally clung to his uniform seemed dimmer somehow, and his trademark dramatic flourish was nowhere to be seen.

"Aoyama?" Izuku called softly, concerned. "Are you okay?"

The French boy stiffened, his shoulders hunching slightly before he forced himself to turn around. His smile, usually bright enough to light up a room, seemed strained and didn't reach his eyes. There was something almost desperate in his expression, like a person drowning trying to convince everyone he was just swimming.

"Ah, Midoriya-kun," he said, his accent thicker than usual with what sounded like stress. "I am... how do you say... not feeling so well this morning."

Izuku frowned, noting the way Aoyama's hands were trembling slightly, the way his eyes kept darting around as if looking for escape routes. There was sweat beading on his forehead despite the cool morning air, and his usual confident posture had been replaced by something that looked almost... hunted.

"It must be pretty bad," Izuku said gently, taking a half-step closer. "Do you need to go to Recovery Girl? You look really pale."

Aoyama's laugh came out forced and brittle. "Non, non, it is just... stomach troubles, you understand? Nothing serious." But even as he spoke, his gaze flickered to his own hands as if he was afraid of what they might do without his permission. "I just need... a moment in the bathroom, oui?"

The way he said it made Izuku's hero instincts prickle with concern. This wasn't just a stomachache—something was genuinely wrong. "Are you sure you're okay? You seem really stressed about something."

For just a moment, Aoyama's carefully constructed facade cracked, and something raw and frightened flickered across his features. "I am..." He swallowed hard, his voice becoming very quiet. "I am fine, Midoriya-kun. Just... very tired, and not feeling well. Nothing that cannot be fixed with time."

Before Izuku could respond, Aoyama had already turned and was walking away with that same awkward stiffness in his stride, leaving Izuku standing in the hallway with a growing sense that something was very, very wrong with his classmate.

Deep Underground - All For One's Lair

In the depths of a facility that officially didn't exist, surrounded by shadows that seemed to move independently of any light source, All For One sat in his throne-like chair before a wall of monitors. The screens flickered between different feeds—news coverage of the press conference, social media reactions, security footage from various locations across the city.

But one screen held his attention above all others.

The footage was grainy, clearly recorded by someone's phone from a distance, but the image was unmistakable. A green-haired boy, battered and bloodied, standing over the defeated form of the Hero Killer. What made the video truly fascinating, however, was the moment just before Stain's collapse—the brief glimpse of something dark and segmented covering the boy's body like armor, alien and organic and utterly unlike any Quirk in his vast mental catalog.

"Interesting..." he murmured, his fingers tapping against the armrest in a slow, deliberate rhythm. "So this is the child who stole Chizome's spotlight... and lived to tell about it."

With a gesture, another screen flickered to life beside the first—recordings from the Sports Festival that he'd acquired through less than legal means. The same boy flashed across the display, his body wreathed in what looked like living armor, black segments with gold highlights that moved like they were alive. The footage slowed as the armor shifted and changed, adapting to different situations with an almost predatory intelligence.

"Fascinating," All For One breathed, leaning forward slightly. "Not the first time I've encountered a Quirk like this, but certainly the most... evolved example. The old mutation-type user I dealt with decades ago was crude by comparison—all instinct, no refinement. But this..."

The next clip began to play: Midoriya facing the Todoroki boy in the tournament finals. The camera caught the moment when flames washed over his armored form, and the dark segments shifted, taking on a reddish tint as they adapted to the heat.

A low chuckle escaped from behind the mask. "Adaptive. Evolutionary. It responds to threats and adjusts accordingly. The armor shifted color and composition when faced with Endeavor's son's flames, almost as if it was learning." His voice carried a note of genuine appreciation. "Remarkable for any Quirk, but especially one so young and seemingly untrained."

He leaned back in his chair, steepling his fingers as the footage looped again. The boy's defiant stance as he faced down the Hero Killer played in slow motion, every detail of that strange armor visible in the grainy video.

"But what truly intrigues me," All For One continued, his voice taking on a contemplative tone, "is not just the power itself, but the timing of its manifestation. High-stress situations. Life-or-death moments. The armor doesn't just protect—it evolves, adapts, learns from each encounter."

Another screen flickered to life, showing news footage from the USJ incident. Though the quality was poor, there were brief glimpses of the same boy, the same dark segmentation covering his body as he fought alongside his classmates against the Nomu.

"Three major incidents. Three different adaptations. Each time stronger, more refined, more... aware." The masked man's breathing was slow and deliberate, like a predator savoring the scent of prey. "Tell me, young Midoriya—what happens when that armor of yours encounters something truly dangerous? Something that pushes it beyond mere adaptation into actual evolution?"

He gestured, and all the screens shifted to show the same image: Izuku Midoriya's face, determined and unaware that he was being watched by one of the most dangerous men in the world.

"I find myself... curious," All For One mused, his voice barely above a whisper but carrying the weight of inevitability. "Very curious indeed."

The screens went dark one by one, until only that single image remained—a teenage boy who had no idea he'd just become the focus of a monster's attention.

In the shadows of the underground lair, All For One smiled behind his mask. It was not a pleasant expression.

U.A. High School - Faculty Room

The UA faculty room hummed with the low murmur of morning conversation, steam rising from coffee cups as teachers prepared for another day. But today carried an unusual air of anticipation, thick enough that even the normally stoic Aizawa glanced up from his papers when Nezu cleared his throat.

The principal stood at the center of the room, his small paws folded neatly behind his back, bright eyes glinting with the particular satisfaction he reserved for announcements that would shake up everyone's routine. The morning light streaming through the windows caught the white fur around his ears, making him appear almost ethereal as he addressed the gathered faculty.

"Following the recent... media attention regarding our students," he began, his voice carrying that deceptively light tone that meant something significant was coming, "we've received a rather prestigious invitation. One that I believe will benefit both our public image and our educational mission."

Aizawa's shoulders sagged preemptively as he rubbed his temples with practiced resignation. "Principal, please tell me this isn't another publicity stunt. We've had enough cameras and reporters to last me several lifetimes."

"Not quite, Aizawa-kun," Nezu replied with a knowing smile that somehow managed to be both reassuring and slightly ominous. "I-Island will be hosting its annual technology exhibition next week. Heroes from around the globe will attend, along with the greatest minds in support engineering and innovation. It's less about publicity and more about... exposure to the cutting edge of heroic advancement."

Present Mic perked up from his slouched position, nearly spilling his coffee. "I-Island? The floating tech paradise? That place is legendary!"

"Indeed," Nezu continued, his tail swishing with satisfaction. "Dr. David Shield has personally requested All Might's presence—and specifically asked that he bring along one student to accompany him. Someone who might benefit from exposure to advanced support technology and international heroic perspectives."

All Might, who had been quietly nursing a cup of tea near the window in his deflated form, nearly choked on his drink. "David wants me to bring a student? That's... unexpected. It's been so long since we've spoken, I wasn't even sure he'd remember our old friendship."

His voice carried a mixture of surprise and something deeper—perhaps nostalgia, or maybe anxiety about reconnecting with someone from his past. The other teachers noticed the shift in his tone, the way his usually confident posture seemed to waver slightly.

"Why bring a student into this?" All Might asked, setting down his cup with hands that trembled almost imperceptibly. "David's exhibitions are usually focused on professional hero work and advanced research. Seems like it might be... overwhelming for a first-year."

Nezu's smile sharpened with the calculating edge that reminded everyone why he was the principal of Japan's most prestigious hero academy. "Several reasons, actually. First, public relations—the world has taken considerable notice of certain students' recent heroic actions. Young Midoriya's presence would inspire confidence and project a positive image of the next generation of heroes, particularly in the wake of the Stain incident."

The principal began pacing, his small form radiating the energy of someone who had clearly thought this through from every conceivable angle. "Second, educational opportunity. I-Island's technology could prove invaluable to a student's growth, especially one whose Quirk might benefit from advanced support equipment. And third..." He paused for effect, his eyes glinting. "It would be beneficial for the Symbol of Peace to be seen mentoring his protégé in a safe, controlled, international environment."

Midnight leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms with a knowing smirk. "Ah, so we're killing multiple birds with one stone. Smart."

Aizawa grunted his grudging approval. "At least it's educational. And it gets one student out of my hair for a week."

"Which student are we talking about?" Cementoss asked, though his tone suggested he already knew the answer.

All Might and Nezu exchanged a look—the kind of wordless communication that happens between people who've worked together long enough to read each other's thoughts.

"I think we all know the answer to that," All Might said softly, a genuine smile finally breaking through his uncertainty.

Later that afternoon, Izuku found himself standing outside Principal Nezu's office, his heart hammering against his ribs like a caged bird. The ornate door seemed to loom larger than usual, and he could hear muffled voices from within—All Might's distinctive cadence mixed with Nezu's more measured tones.

He knocked hesitantly, the sound echoing in the empty hallway.

"Come in, Young Midoriya," came All Might's warm voice from behind the door.

Izuku stepped inside, immediately struck by how different the office felt when it wasn't filled with the tension of disciplinary meetings. Sunlight streamed through the tall windows, casting geometric patterns across Nezu's antique desk. Both All Might and the principal turned toward him with expressions that made his anxiety spike—they looked pleased, which in his experience usually meant he was about to be asked to do something terrifying.

"Midoriya-kun," Nezu said pleasantly, his paws folded on the desk as he regarded the nervous student. "Please, have a seat. We have what I believe you'll find to be a very interesting opportunity to discuss."

Izuku perched on the edge of the offered chair, clutching his bag straps like lifelines. "An... opportunity, sir?"

All Might moved to stand beside Nezu's desk, his deflated form somehow managing to project the same reassuring presence as his hero form. "That's right, my boy. How would you feel about taking a trip? Consider it both an honor and an invaluable learning experience."

"A trip?" Izuku's voice cracked slightly on the words.

Nezu leaned forward, his bright eyes fixed on Izuku with an intensity that made the boy feel like he was being x-rayed. "I-Island, Midoriya-kun. The world's premier floating research facility and technology exhibition center. Dr. David Shield has personally requested that All Might attend their annual expo—and specifically asked that he bring along a promising student."

The words hit Izuku like a physical blow. His mouth fell open, and for several seconds, no sound emerged except a faint squeaking noise.

"I-Island?" he finally managed to whisper. "The I-Island? With all the advanced hero tech and support equipment and—"

"Yes, that I-Island," All Might chuckled, his smile growing warmer at Izuku's obvious excitement. "Dr. Shield is an old friend of mine, and one of the brightest minds in support engineering. The technology there could be incredibly valuable for your development, especially given your... unique requirements."

Izuku's mind raced. I-Island was legendary among hero enthusiasts—a floating paradise of innovation where the world's greatest minds gathered to push the boundaries of what was possible. The support gear alone would be worth studying, not to mention the opportunity to meet international heroes and engineers.

But then the full implications hit him.

"M-me?!" The word came out as almost a shriek. "But I'm just—I mean, there are so many more qualified students, and I've barely figured out my own abilities, and—"

"Midoriya," Nezu interrupted gently, but with enough authority to cut through the mounting panic. "You were specifically requested. Your recent actions have drawn international attention, and your presence would serve multiple purposes. It's an honor that few first-year students would ever receive."

All Might placed a reassuring hand on Izuku's shoulder, and the boy felt some of the tension leave his body at the familiar warmth. "I know it seems overwhelming, Young Midoriya, but this is exactly the kind of experience that will help you grow as both a student and a future hero. Besides," his smile turned slightly mischievous, "it'll be good to see David again after all these years."

"Plus," Nezu added with his characteristic calculating smile, "it will be beneficial for both your development and our public image to show the world that UA's students are not just capable in crisis situations, but are also being mentored by the Symbol of Peace in controlled, educational environments."

Izuku swallowed hard, his excitement warring with his nerves. "I... yes, sir. Yes, All Might. I'd be honored to go."

All Might's smile could have powered half the school. "Excellent! Looks like we're going on a trip, my boy."

As the implications sank in—I-Island, advanced technology, international heroes, traveling with All Might himself—Izuku felt his characteristic mumbling begin to surface. But for once, instead of anxiety, it was pure excitement that drove the words.

"This is incredible, there's so much to learn about support equipment integration, and the floating city engineering alone must be fascinating, and meeting Dr. Shield who's practically a legend in the field, and—"

"Breathe, Young Midoriya," All Might laughed. "Save some enthusiasm for the actual trip."

Izuku clamped his mouth shut, his face flushing red, but his eyes still sparkled with barely contained excitement.

The news spread through Class 1-A like wildfire in a dry forest. By the time Izuku walked into the classroom the next morning, still somewhat dazed by the reality of what was happening, he was immediately surrounded by a tornado of excited voices and grabbing hands.

Kaminari practically launched himself over three desks to reach him first. "Dude! DUDE! You're going to I-Island?!" His voice pitched higher with each word until it was almost a squeal. "That's like... that's like the holy grail of hero tech! Do they really have holographic training rooms? And flying cars? And robots that can make you custom support gear in five minutes?"

"Seriously?!" Mina gasped, appearing at Izuku's other side as if she'd teleported there. Her pink skin was practically glowing with excitement. "That's, like, the most high-tech place in the entire world! I heard they have buildings that float without any visible support systems!"

Before Izuku could respond to either of them, Kirishima's voice boomed from across the room as he bounded over, his eyes shining with enthusiasm. "Yeah! That place is supposed to be incredible! Think about it—seeing all that cutting-edge hero tech up close would be so manly!" He slammed his hardened fist into his palm with a resounding crack. "All those support items and training equipment that's decades ahead of what we've got here!"

The commotion had drawn everyone's attention, and soon Izuku found himself at the center of an impromptu class meeting, voices overlapping as questions and exclamations flew from every direction.

"Is it true they have anti-gravity chambers?" Sero called out from his desk.

"What about those robot assistants I've seen in documentaries?" Hagakure's floating uniform bounced with excitement.

"The architecture alone must be fascinating from an engineering perspective," Iida declared, already making sharp chopping gesions with his hands as his engine quirk unconsciously revved.

Momo, who had been sitting elegantly at her desk, tapped her chin thoughtfully as she processed the information. "Actually, now that I think about it, many of us might have the opportunity to attend as well. Class 1-A has received a group invitation for educational observation as part of the international youth program. The school is currently negotiating reduced rates for students who wish to participate."

A collective intake of breath swept through the classroom.

Jirou raised an eyebrow, her expression skeptical but interested. "So... we'd have to pay for ourselves? That sounds expensive."

"Partially," Momo clarified, then added with a small, confident smile that spoke of family wealth, "though my family will be attending regardless. We have business ties to several of I-Island's primary sponsors, so I'll be there whether it's a school trip or not."

Uraraka's face fell slightly as the financial implications sank in. "Oh... that's... well, it sounds amazing, but..."

Izuku caught the shift in her expression and felt his heart clench. He knew her family's financial situation, knew how hard she worked to help support them. The idea that he was getting to go for free while she might not be able to afford it felt deeply unfair.

"Maybe there are scholarships?" he suggested hopefully. "Or work-study programs?"

"There might be," Momo said thoughtfully. "I could ask my parents about sponsorship opportunities. It would be wonderful if the whole class could experience it together."

Bakugo's voice cut through the excited chatter like a blade. "Tch. Waste of money if you ask me." He was slumped in his seat with his arms crossed, scowling at the enthusiasm around him. "If you extras want to throw your cash away just to stare at a bunch of nerd gadgets, be my guest. I've got better things to do than gawk at toys."

"Aw, come on Kacchan," Kaminari wheedled. "Don't you want to see the latest in support gear? They probably have stuff there that could complement your explosions perfectly!"

"I don't need gadgets to be the best," Bakugo snarled, but there was something in his tone that suggested he was more interested than he wanted to admit.

"Still..." Ochako's voice brought the attention back to Izuku, and he felt his cheeks warm as she smiled at him with genuine happiness. "It's really amazing that you got personally invited, Izuku. You totally deserve it after everything you've done."

The weight of his classmates' admiration made Izuku squirm uncomfortably in his seat. He scratched his cheek awkwardly, his voice coming out smaller than usual. "I-I didn't really do anything special... All Might was the one who got invited. I'm just... tagging along."

"Tagging along with All Might to a world-class hero technology exposition," Kaminari said, throwing his hands up in exasperation. "Dude, do you have any idea how huge that is?"

"The exposure alone to cutting-edge support equipment and international heroic methodologies will be invaluable for your development," Iida declared, adjusting his glasses as he shifted into lecture mode. "You must represent not only yourself, but Class 1-A and UA as a whole! The responsibility is enormous!"

The weight of expectation settled on Izuku's shoulders like a lead blanket, but beneath the anxiety, excitement continued to bubble. "I... I'll do my best! I won't let anyone down!"

Mina clapped her hands together, bouncing on her toes. "This is so exciting! Even if not all of us can go, having Midoriya there means we'll get to hear all about it!"

"You better take tons of pictures," Sero added with a grin. "And maybe see if you can snag some free samples of that advanced support gear."

"I don't think that's how it works," Jirou said dryly, but she was smiling.

As the excited chatter continued around him, Izuku felt a warmth spread through his chest that had nothing to do with his quirk. His classmates weren't jealous or resentful—they were genuinely happy for him. They believed he deserved this opportunity, even when he wasn't sure he believed it himself.

"I'll make sure to learn everything I can," he promised, his voice growing stronger with determination. "And I'll share everything with all of you when I get back!"

Three days later, the massive cruise ship cut through the ocean waters like a knife through silk, its pristine white hull gleaming in the afternoon sun. The vessel was enormous—easily the size of a small city—with multiple decks, restaurants, shops, and entertainment facilities that catered to the international crowd heading to I-Island.

The salty sea breeze whipped across the uppermost deck, carrying with it the mingled sounds of laughter, conversation in a dozen different languages, and the ever-present hum of the ship's engines far below. The sun hung high in a cloudless sky, turning the endless expanse of ocean into a glittering carpet of diamonds that stretched to every horizon.

Class 1-A had claimed a section of the deck near the starboard railing, their excited energy creating a bubble of teenage enthusiasm that other passengers gave a wide berth—partly out of respect, partly out of self-preservation as Kaminari's gesticulations became increasingly animated.

"Man, this is incredible!" Kaminari shouted over the wind, one hand clamped firmly on his cap to keep it from flying away as he leaned precariously over the rail to watch the waves. "I can't believe we're actually on our way to I-Island! This is like something out of a movie!"

Mina had abandoned all pretense of dignity and was taking selfies from every conceivable angle, her phone's camera working overtime as she tried to capture the perfect shot of herself with the ocean backdrop. "The lighting is perfect! And look at those clouds! I'm totally going to get like a thousand likes on this!"

Kirishima stood tall beside the railing, his red hair whipping dramatically in the sea breeze as he struck what he clearly considered to be a manly pose. "This is it, guys! We're heading to the most advanced place on earth!" He slammed his hardened fist into his palm with his characteristic enthusiasm. "I can't wait to see what kind of gear they've got that could make us even stronger!"

Momo stood with her usual elegant poise despite the wind tugging at her perfectly styled hair, a content smile playing at her lips as she watched her classmates' excitement. "My family's private yacht is lovely, but there's something special about traveling together like this. The anticipation is almost infectious."

Ochako had claimed a spot right against the railing, her arms crossed on the metal bar as she gazed out at the endless ocean with a relaxed expression that was rare for her during school time. The sea breeze played with her brown hair, and for the first time in weeks, she looked completely at peace. "It's weird, isn't it? Being on a trip that's not just training or exams or life-or-death situations. This actually feels like... fun."

Izuku stood beside her, still somewhat overwhelmed by the reality of the situation. Every few minutes, he had to remind himself that this wasn't a dream—he was actually on a cruise ship heading to I-Island with All Might, about to experience technology and heroes that most people only saw in documentaries. "Y-yeah... it's going to be amazing though. Seeing all that hero tech up close, meeting Dr. Shield, maybe learning about new applications for support equipment..."

His muttering was picking up steam when Bakugo's irritated voice cut through his thoughts like a buzzsaw.

"Oi," the explosive blonde growled from his position on a nearby bench, arms crossed and permanent scowl firmly in place. "Don't get all starry-eyed, Deku. We're not here for fun and games."

"Actually," Kaminari cut in with a shit-eating grin, "we kinda are here for fun. At least partly. I mean, it's educational fun, but still fun."

"Educational my ass," Bakugo snarled. "This whole thing is just—"

"Oh my god, is that who I think it is?"

Mina's voice, pitched higher with disbelief, cut through all other conversation. Every head turned to follow her pointing finger, and collective jaws dropped at what they saw.

Strolling casually across the deck, looking like he'd just stepped out of a vacation brochure, was a man in the most aggressively tropical outfit any of them had ever seen. The Hawaiian shirt was a riot of neon colors—electric blues, hot pinks, and sunset oranges in a pattern that seemed to depict palm trees, surfboards, and what might have been hula dancers. Dark sunglasses reflected the afternoon sun, and a relaxed smile played at his lips as he sipped from a tropical drink complete with a tiny paper umbrella and a curly straw.

The sight was so completely incongruous with everything they knew about the man that several students had to blink repeatedly to make sure they weren't hallucinating.

"Is that..." Kaminari's voice came out as a strangled whisper. "Why is the school janitor here?!"

Jirou's usually deadpan expression had been replaced by something approaching bewilderment. "And why is he dressed like he's about to enter a limbo contest in Hawaii?"

Kagutsuchi—because it was definitely their mysteriously competent janitor—caught sight of the staring students and paused in his leisurely stroll across the deck. His smile widened into something genuinely amused as he raised his tropical drink in a mock toast.

"I paid for my own ticket," he said casually, as if that explained everything. His voice carried the same laid-back confidence as his outfit. "Why should the students have all the fun? Besides, I've always wanted to see I-Island's engineering up close."

The silence that followed was so complete that the sound of waves against the hull seemed to echo like thunder.

"Is he... legally allowed to do that?" Jirou asked, her tone suggesting she was questioning the fundamental laws of reality.

"I don't think there's actually a rule against it," Momo said slowly, though there was the faintest trace of exasperation in her usually composed voice. "Technically, anyone can purchase passage on a public vessel."

Kirishima was the first to break out of the group's stunned paralysis, throwing back his head and laughing with genuine delight. "Hah! That's so manly! Taking a vacation on your own terms, doing exactly what you want! I respect that!"

"But..." Uraraka looked between Kagutsuchi and the rest of the class, clearly trying to process the situation. "Doesn't he have to work? Who's cleaning the school while we're gone?"

Kagutsuchi's grin turned slightly mysterious behind his sunglasses. "Let's just say I had some vacation time saved up. And don't worry about the school—it'll be spotless when you return."

Izuku stared at the transformed janitor, his analytical mind trying to reconcile this relaxed, tropical-shirt-wearing man with the quietly competent custodian who seemed to know everything that happened at UA. There was something almost surreal about seeing him out of context, like discovering your teacher at the grocery store wearing pajamas.

"This is going to be a weird trip," Kaminari muttered under his breath.

"Agreed," Jirou sighed, though there was fondness in her exasperation.

Kagutsuchi adjusted his sunglasses with a casual gesture and took another sip of his drink. "Don't mind me, kids. Just think of me as your friendly neighborhood chaperone. Enjoy the trip, learn lots, and try not to get into too much trouble." With that enigmatic statement, he continued his leisurely stroll toward the ship's buffet, leaving a trail of confused teenagers in his wake.

"I don't think I'll ever understand adults," Mina declared, but she was already pulling out her phone again. "But this is definitely going in my vacation album."

Several hours later, the excitement on deck reached fever pitch as the ship began to slow its approach to their destination. Students and passengers crowded against the railings, cameras and phones raised to capture the first glimpse of what many considered to be the eighth wonder of the world.

"There!" Uraraka pointed excitedly at the horizon. "I can see it!"

Rising from the ocean like something out of a science fiction movie, the massive silhouette of I-Island materialized through the heat haze. Towering structures of gleaming glass and steel reached toward the sky, their surfaces reflecting the late afternoon sun like crystalline jewels. The island itself seemed to float impossibly on the water's surface, held aloft by engineering marvels that defied conventional understanding of physics and architecture.

"Holy shit," Kaminari breathed, then clapped a hand over his mouth as he remembered they were in public. "I mean... holy cow. It's like a floating city!"

And it truly was. As they drew closer, the sheer scale of the artificial island became apparent. Buildings spiraled upward in impossible curves, connected by bridges that seemed to defy gravity. Gardens hung suspended in mid-air, their greenery a stark contrast to the technological marvels surrounding them. Transport tubes snaked between structures like glowing arteries, carrying people and cargo in smooth, silent capsules.

Momo nodded, her usual composed demeanor softened by genuine admiration and perhaps a touch of professional appreciation. "It's an absolute engineering marvel. The entire island is supported by a network of anti-gravity generators and repulsion fields. The structural integrity alone must require computational power beyond anything available to most nations."

Izuku had pulled out his ever-present notebook and was scribbling frantically, his pen barely able to keep up with his racing thoughts. "Multi-tiered support struts integrated into the base structure... energy-efficient fusion reactors providing power for the anti-gravity systems... but how do they maintain structural integrity during severe weather? The stress calculations alone must be incredibly complex, and the materials science required to—"

"Izuku," Ochako interrupted gently, though she was smiling at his enthusiasm, "you're going to fill three notebooks before we even dock at this rate."

"P-probably!" he admitted sheepishly, but his pen never stopped moving. "There's just so much to analyze! The implications for future architecture and urban planning are incredible!"

Sero whistled low as a formation of sleek aircraft passed overhead, their designs unlike anything in conventional aviation. "Check out those flying vehicles. They don't even have visible propulsion systems!"

"Probably electromagnetic repulsion drives," Momo observed. "Much more efficient than traditional propulsion, and virtually silent."

Even Bakugo, who had been maintaining his grumpy facade, found himself pressed against the railing despite his earlier complaints. His red eyes tracked the movement of the aircraft with obvious interest, though he'd die before admitting it out loud.

Kagutsuchi appeared at the railing beside them again, having traded his tropical drink for what looked like a camera with a lens longer than his arm. He was snapping pictures with the casual expertise of someone who clearly knew his way around photography equipment.

"Impressive, isn't it?" he said conversationally, adjusting his lens to capture a particular angle of the island's superstructure. "Though it's even more spectacular up close. The detail work on the individual buildings is extraordinary."

The casual way he spoke—as if he'd seen it before—sent another small chill of confusion through the watching students, but before anyone could ask questions, the ship's intercom crackled to life.

"Attention all passengers," came the crisp, professional voice of the captain. "We are now approaching I-Island's primary harbor. All visitors please gather your belongings and prepare for disembarkation. Welcome to the most advanced technological center in the world."

The announcement sent a fresh wave of excitement through the assembled students. Bags were grabbed, phones were pocketed, and last-minute pictures were taken as the massive cruise ship maneuvered toward the docking facilities.

As they moved through the disembarkation process, the bustling energy of I-Island hit them like a physical force. The harbor area was a carefully orchestrated symphony of movement—heroes in costumes that ranged from practical to utterly bizarre mingled with scientists in lab coats, tourists with cameras, and support staff in crisp uniforms that seemed to shimmer with their own inner light.

Holographic advertisements projected above the walkways, displaying the latest innovations in support gear and hero technology in eye-catching three-dimensional displays. Robotic assistants glided smoothly through the crowds, their sensors constantly monitoring for any signs of distress or confusion among the visitors.

"This is like stepping into the future," Mina breathed, her eyes wide as she tried to take in everything at once.

"It's overwhelming," Iida declared, though his tone suggested he was fighting between excitement and his natural inclination toward order. "The coordination required to manage this many people while maintaining security protocols must be extraordinary!"

All Might appeared beside them in his hero form—clearly transformed for the benefit of the crowds—with Principal Nezu walking at his side. Both wore expressions of fond satisfaction as they watched their students experiencing something truly special.

"Now then, everyone," All Might said, his voice carrying its usual commanding warmth but with an extra note of pride. "Welcome to I-Island! This is going to be an educational experience unlike anything you've had before. Enjoy yourselves, absorb everything you can, but remember—you are representatives of UA. Make us proud."

The chorus of enthusiastic "Yes, sir!" that rose from Class 1-A was loud enough to turn heads throughout the harbor area.

Nezu's whiskers twitched with amusement. "The main exhibition doesn't begin until tomorrow, so tonight you're free to explore the public areas and acclimate yourselves to the island's layout. Don't stay up too late—tomorrow will be quite intense."

As the group prepared to step into the gleaming heart of the world's most advanced hero technology center, Izuku felt his excitement and nervousness reach a perfect balance. This was it—the opportunity of a lifetime, surrounded by his classmates and guided by his mentor.

What could possibly go wrong?

The main plaza of I-Island pulsed with an energy that seemed almost alive, as if the very air was charged with innovation and possibility. Towering above everything was a massive dome of reinforced glass that formed a crystalline ceiling, its hexagonal panels refracting the afternoon sunlight into cascading rainbows that danced across the polished surfaces below. The architectural marvel stretched so high overhead that birds could be seen circling within its confines, their wings casting tiny shadows on the crowd below.

A banner the size of a city block unfurled across one section of the dome, its holographic letters shifting through a spectrum of colors as they proclaimed: WELCOME TO THE I-EXPO: HEROICS & INNOVATION FOR THE FUTURE.

Class 1-A followed closely behind All Might and Nezu as they entered this technological wonderland, their formation unconsciously tight as they tried to process the sensory overload surrounding them. Every surface seemed to pulse with its own inner light, holographic displays flickered to life as people approached them, and the very ground beneath their feet appeared to be made of some kind of smart material that adjusted its texture for optimal grip and comfort.

"Holy..." Ochako whispered, craning her neck back so far to take in the dome's full majesty that she nearly lost her balance. Her voice carried pure awe. "It's like being inside a giant crystal. Or maybe a spaceship. A crystal spaceship?"

Izuku's notebook was already out, his pen moving in sharp, precise strokes as he tried to capture the technical details flooding his senses. "The structural engineering is incredible—that hexagonal lattice design distributes weight perfectly across the entire surface. It must be reinforced with some kind of composite alloy to support that curvature without internal supports, and the transparency suggests they're using molecularly aligned transparent aluminum or maybe—"

"Midoriya," Kaminari interrupted with a fond grin, reaching over to gently close the notebook before Izuku walked into a display case. "You're geeking out so hard you're about to become a safety hazard."

"He can't help it," Mina teased, bouncing on her toes as she tried to peer over the crowd at a demonstration involving what looked like a suit of power armor assembling itself. "Look at those notes! His handwriting's getting smaller because he's trying to fit more words on each page!"

Meanwhile, Momo had straightened into what the class privately called her 'networking posture'—perfectly straight spine, hands clasped elegantly behind her back, and that subtle smile that suggested she was already cataloguing the various high-profile figures moving through the crowd.

"There are some of the most influential minds in support engineering present," she observed, her voice taking on the carefully modulated tone she used when discussing business matters. "Representatives from the top agencies in America, Europe, and Asia. I should introduce myself when appropriate opportunities arise."

Jirou, walking with her characteristic relaxed slouch and hands buried deep in her pockets, glanced at her wealthy classmate with amusement. "Try not to sound like you're negotiating a merger, Yaoyorozu. This is supposed to be fun, remember?"

"Business can be fun," Momo replied with a slight smile, though she did make a conscious effort to relax her posture slightly.

Kirishima had found his attention completely captured by a display showcasing various exosuits and power armor configurations. His eyes were practically glowing as he watched a demonstration of a suit that increased the wearer's physical capabilities by over 300%.

"Dude, look at that exosuit display!" he exclaimed, his voice carrying enough excitement to draw stares from nearby adults. "That armor could probably let someone punch through a concrete wall! That's so incredibly manly!"

Bakugo, predictably, scoffed from his position slightly apart from the group, though his red eyes tracked the power demonstration with obvious interest. "Tch. Bunch of extras drooling over gadgets and gizmos. If you need a machine to make you strong, you're already weak."

Despite his dismissive words, he made no move to leave the group or look away from the displays, and more than one of his classmates noticed the way his gaze lingered on certain pieces of equipment.

"You say that," Sero pointed out with a grin, "but you're staring just as hard as the rest of us."

"Shut it, Tape Arms."

Not far behind the main group, Kagutsuchi had somehow acquired yet another tropical drink—this one appeared to be some kind of blue concoction with fruit garnishes that defied several laws of physics—and had added a wide-brimmed straw hat to his vacation ensemble. He strolled through the high-tech wonderland with the casual air of someone window shopping at a mall, occasionally pausing to examine displays with the kind of attention that suggested deeper knowledge than his relaxed demeanor implied.

"You kids should pay attention to the small details," he commented casually as he passed a display of precision tools and micro-manipulators. "Sometimes the tiniest components are the most revolutionary. A single misaligned gear can bring down the most impressive machine."

The comment earned him several curious glances from the students, particularly Izuku, who was beginning to compile a mental list of oddities about their supposedly simple janitor.

All Might clapped his hands together, the sound echoing across the plaza like a gunshot and immediately drawing everyone's attention. In his hero form, surrounded by the technological marvels of I-Island, he looked like a bridge between the classical age of heroism and the high-tech future spreading out around them.

"Alright, my students!" His voice carried easily over the crowd noise, that familiar warmth and authority making several nearby tourists turn to stare. "Today represents both an incredible educational opportunity and a chance to make connections that could shape your entire careers. Explore everything, ask questions, engage with the demonstrations—but remember to conduct yourselves with the dignity and respect expected of UA students!"

Nezu stepped forward, his small form somehow commanding attention despite being dwarfed by the towering displays around them. "There's also a welcoming ceremony in the main auditorium in two hours. Some of the world's most innovative minds will be presenting their latest breakthroughs. I strongly recommend attending—you'll be witnessing history in the making."

"A ceremony with actual inventors?" Izuku's eyes lit up like Christmas morning. "People who are actively pushing the boundaries of support technology and hero equipment?"

"Indeed," Nezu replied, his whiskers twitching with amusement. "Dr. Shield himself will be presenting, along with representatives from the major support companies and research institutions."

The class exchanged excited glances, the weight of the opportunity settling over them like a warm blanket.

"For now, though," All Might continued, "feel free to split into groups and explore. The expo is vast, and there's something here for every type of hero. Just remember—meet back here in ninety minutes so we can attend the ceremony together."

With that official permission to scatter, Class 1-A dissolved into smaller groups based on interests and friendships, each drawn toward different sections of the vast exhibition space like iron filings following magnetic fields.

Kirishima was the first to break away from the main group, practically magnetized by a demonstration booth where a massive, armored exosuit was effortlessly lifting what appeared to be a two-ton steel block. The suit was a marvel of engineering—sleek lines combined with obvious durability, painted in matte black with red accent strips that pulsed with inner light.

"Man, look at that power!" he exclaimed, pressing as close to the safety barrier as possible. His eyes tracked every movement of the demonstration pilot, cataloguing the fluid way the suit responded to human input. "That's so incredibly manly! I bet someone wearing that could punch through a building!"

The demonstrator, a cheerful woman in a lab coat, noticed his enthusiasm and smiled. "Actually, this model is designed for rescue operations rather than combat. The strength enhancement allows a single operator to move debris that would normally require heavy machinery, but the control systems are calibrated for precision rather than destruction."

"Even better!" Kirishima's grin grew wider. "Saving people with style!"

Nearby, Kaminari had discovered a booth showcasing electrical management systems for hero costumes, his fascination evident as he watched holographic displays showing how different materials could channel and redirect electrical energy.

"This is like it was designed specifically for me," he breathed, studying a demonstration of conductive fibers that could store and release electrical charges in controlled bursts. "If I had gear like this, I could actually control my output instead of just... you know, going full blast and frying my brain."

Jirou paused in her own exploration to glance over at him. "That would be nice. For all of us, really. No more babysitting you after you overcharge yourself."

"Hey! I'm getting better at that!"

"Marginally," she replied dryly, but there was affection in her voice. She'd found her own point of interest at a sound technology display, watching with professional curiosity as speakers smaller than her fingernail produced audio with perfect clarity and no distortion. "Now this is interesting. The sound quality is incredible, and the power requirements must be minimal..."

Across the expo floor, Mina had discovered what could only be described as a playground for mobility enhancement. Adjustable magnetic boots, friction-reducing suit coatings, momentum redirection harnesses—each more fascinating than the last.

"This is amazing!" she squealed, trying on a pair of the magnetic boots for a demonstration. With the safety supervisor's guidance, she was soon walking up the side of a mock building wall, her acid-resistant hero costume glittering under the expo lights. "I'm like Spider-Man! Or Spider-Woman! Or maybe Acid-Spider!"

"Please don't give yourself a spider-themed nickname," called Sero from a nearby booth where he was examining advanced polymer materials that could apparently extend and contract while maintaining tensile strength far beyond traditional materials.

Meanwhile, Momo had gravitated toward the more technical displays, engaging in detailed conversations with engineers about molecular composition and material science. She stood in front of a presentation about adaptive armor plating, taking notes with practiced ease as a researcher explained how the material could shift between flexible and rigid states based on applied pressure.

"The applications for rescue work alone are extraordinary," she observed, her analytical mind already running calculations. "But I'm curious about the energy requirements for the state transitions. Would the power consumption make it practical for extended field operations?"

The engineer's eyes lit up at her technical knowledge, and soon they were deep in a conversation that would have been incomprehensible to most of their peers.

Not far away, Ochako had found herself drawn to an anti-gravity research station, watching with professional interest as researchers demonstrated various approaches to gravitational manipulation. The technology was different from her Quirk but complementary in fascinating ways.

"It's incredible seeing how technology can replicate some aspects of Quirk abilities," she murmured to herself, studying a device that could create localized gravity fields. "Though I bet I could still do things this can't..."

She was so absorbed in the demonstration that she didn't notice the small crowd of researchers who had begun watching her with obvious interest—word had spread quickly about the UA students' presence, and her gravity manipulation abilities were already generating curiosity among the scientific community.

While his classmates explored their various interests, Izuku found himself drawn toward a more general display area showcasing the fundamentals of support equipment integration. It was less flashy than some of the other sections, but his analytical mind was fascinated by the underlying principles that made all the other technology possible.

He was deeply engrossed in studying a holographic breakdown of power distribution systems when a familiar booming laugh echoed across the expo floor. His head snapped up to see All Might—already transformed back into his hero form for public appearances—striding through the crowd with obvious pleasure. Beside him walked an older man in a pristine white lab coat, his silver hair neatly styled and his face animated with the joy of someone reuniting with an old friend.

"Young Midoriya!" All Might called, his voice carrying easily over the ambient noise of the expo. He gestured for Izuku to join them, his smile bright with genuine pride. "Come here! There's someone very important I'd like you to meet!"

Izuku hurried over, nearly tripping over his own feet in his haste and excitement. The closer he got, the more details he could make out about All Might's companion—the man had the kind of presence that spoke of both intellect and authority, and there was something in his eyes that reminded Izuku of his own mentor.

All Might placed a large hand on Izuku's shoulder, his gesture both protective and proud. "Young Midoriya, allow me to introduce my dear friend, Dr. David Shield—one of the greatest support engineers alive and the man whose innovations have saved more heroes than I could possibly count!"

David stepped forward, extending his hand with a warm smile that reached his eyes. "So you're Izuku Midoriya. Toshinori's told me quite a bit about you in his messages. It's an honor to finally meet the young man who's been making such impressive headlines."

"M-me?!" Izuku's voice cracked as he shook the offered hand, his grip perhaps a little too enthusiastic. "I-it's an incredible honor to meet you, sir! Your work on adaptive hero gear completely revolutionized the field of support engineering! The applications for Quirk enhancement and safety protocols alone have changed how entire agencies operate, and your research into energy distribution systems has—"

David held up a hand, chuckling warmly at Izuku's enthusiasm. "I can see you've done your homework. That's refreshing—most young heroes are more interested in the flashy applications than the underlying principles."

"The principles are the most important part!" Izuku exclaimed, then immediately flushed red as he realized how loud he'd gotten. "I mean... understanding how something works is what lets you use it properly, right?"

"Exactly right," David agreed, his approval evident. "You'll get along very well with my daughter."

Almost as if summoned by his words, a cheerful voice chimed in from behind them. "Dad, are you embarrassing our guests already?"

Izuku turned to see her approaching—a young woman roughly his own age with blonde hair that caught the expo lights like spun gold and a confident stride that spoke of someone completely at ease in this technological wonderland. Her smile was bright and genuine, and there was an intelligence in her eyes that immediately put Izuku at ease even as it made his cheeks warm.

"Hi there," she said, extending her hand to Izuku with easy confidence. "You must be Midoriya, right? I'm Melissa Shield. Dad's told me a lot about you—it's nice to finally meet someone who gets as excited about hero tech as I do."

Izuku's face turned an even deeper shade of red as he shook her hand, his words tumbling out in a nervous rush. "Y-yes! It's incredible to meet you too! Your work on support gauntlets is absolutely amazing—I've read all the published papers about the force distribution algorithms and the impact absorption matrices!"

Melissa blinked in genuine surprise, her smile widening with delight. "Wow, you really have done your research. Most people just focus on the strength enhancement aspects, but the engineering challenges were so much more complex than that."

"That's what makes it so interesting!" Izuku replied, his nervousness beginning to fade in the face of shared enthusiasm. "The problem wasn't just amplifying force—it was controlling it, distributing it safely, preventing feedback damage to the user's joints and skeleton. The elegance of the solution is what makes it brilliant!"

David and All Might exchanged a knowing look, both men recognizing the spark of mutual intellectual curiosity that was already beginning to form between the two young people.

"I think," David said with obvious amusement, "that you two are going to have a lot to talk about."

Melissa turned her attention to All Might, and immediately her expression softened into something warmer, more familial. There was genuine affection in her eyes as she stepped forward to embrace the towering hero.

"It's been way too long, Uncle Might," she said, her voice carrying the kind of warmth reserved for family. "You look good—tired, maybe, but good."

All Might returned the embrace gently, his usually boisterous demeanor softening into something more intimate. "You've grown so much, Melissa. Your father's been keeping me updated, but seeing you in person..." He pulled back to look at her properly. "I'm incredibly proud of you. Both of you."

David's smile grew softer as he watched the reunion. "She's worked hard to get where she is. Following in her old man's footsteps, but carving out her own path too."

Izuku stood slightly to the side, his heart warming at the obvious affection between All Might and the Shields. It was a side of his mentor he rarely saw—not the Symbol of Peace, not the larger-than-life hero, but simply a man reconnecting with people he cared about.

"You have to tell me everything that's been happening," Melissa continued, stepping back but keeping one hand on All Might's arm. "Dad gets the official reports, but I want to hear the real stories. What's it like teaching at UA? Are your students driving you crazy? Please tell me they're driving you at least a little crazy."

All Might's laughter was genuine and unguarded. "They're... remarkable. Challenging, certainly, but remarkable. They keep me on my toes in ways I never expected."

His gaze drifted to Izuku, who was pretending to study a nearby display while obviously listening to every word. "Some more than others."

"I can imagine," Melissa said, following his gaze and noting Izuku's careful eavesdropping with amusement.

David clapped his hands together, drawing everyone's attention back to the present moment. "Well then! We have the entire expo to explore, and I'm sure Melissa has been dying to show off some of her latest projects. Shall we make a day of it?"

All Might nodded enthusiastically. "Lead the way, old friend. I want to see everything you've been working on."

As the small group began walking deeper into the expo, Izuku found himself falling into step beside Melissa, their shared enthusiasm for technology already creating an easy conversational flow.

Technology and Revelations

The expo floor seemed to stretch endlessly in every direction, each section more impressive than the last. Melissa proved to be an excellent guide, her knowledge of the displays combining with obvious pride in her home to create commentary that was both informative and engaging.

"This section focuses on defensive applications," she explained as they approached a series of booths showcasing various protective technologies. "Everything from impact-resistant fabrics to energy-absorbing shield systems."

Izuku's notebook was already out, his pen racing to keep up with the technical specifications being displayed. "The materials science alone must be incredibly advanced. Are those molecular chains in the fabric display actually self-repairing?"

"Good eye!" Melissa's approval was evident. "The polymer structure can actually reorganize itself after taking damage, within limits. It's not perfect—severe enough damage will overwhelm the system—but for most applications, it's like having gear that can heal itself."

They paused at a demonstration booth where a technician was showing off power regulation equipment, and Melissa's expression grew more animated as she gestured toward a particular display case.

"This is actually something I've been working on," she said, leading them to a collection of sleek, high-tech gloves that seemed to shimmer with their own inner light. "Power regulation gauntlets designed for heroes with strength-type Quirks."

Izuku's eyes widened as he studied the devices more closely. The craftsmanship was evident in every detail—smooth lines that spoke of both functionality and aesthetic consideration, materials that looked like they could withstand incredible stress, and control interfaces that seemed intuitive even to his untrained eye.

"These are incredible," he breathed, his voice carrying genuine awe. "The force distribution systems alone must have taken years to develop."

Melissa beamed at his appreciation. "Three years of research and development, actually. The biggest challenge wasn't amplifying strength—it was preventing the enhanced force from destroying the user's joints and bones. The gauntlets have to absorb and redirect the excess energy while maintaining precise control."

David nodded approvingly at his daughter's explanation. "She solved problems that had been stumping our entire research division. The applications for rescue work alone could save thousands of lives."

All Might studied the gauntlets with obvious interest, his expression thoughtful. "Force regulation... that could be invaluable for heroes who struggle with power control."

As they continued their tour, Izuku found himself relaxing more and more in Melissa's presence. Her enthusiasm for technology matched his own, and her willingness to explain complex concepts without condescension made him feel valued rather than tolerated.

It was during a break in their technical discussions, as they paused to watch a demonstration of advanced mobility gear, that Melissa brought up something that made Izuku's stomach clench with anxiety.

"By the way," she said, her voice bright with curiosity, "I saw footage of you at the Sports Festival. That armor ability of yours was absolutely incredible! It looked like some kind of insect-type mutation Quirk—really rare and versatile. And when it changed during your match with Todoroki, when those flames appeared..." Her eyes sparkled with scientific interest. "That adaptation was amazing! Does it have a specific name?"

For a split second, Izuku's carefully constructed composure wavered. His Agito abilities weren't exactly a secret, but they also weren't something he was comfortable discussing in detail with someone he'd just met, no matter how brilliant or friendly she was.

"Y-yeah," he managed, forcing a sheepish laugh that he hoped sounded natural. "You could say it's mutation-related. I, um, I call that particular form my Flame Form when it manifests like that."

Melissa's expression grew even more fascinated, her scientific mind clearly racing with possibilities. "Flame Form? That's fascinating! But I'm curious about the biological mechanics—how would an insect-type mutation develop flame generation capabilities? Some beetles can produce heat through chemical reactions, but controlled ignition on the scale you demonstrated would require incredibly sophisticated biological structures..."

Panic began to creep up Izuku's spine as Melissa's questions became more technical and specific. His Agito abilities had nothing to do with mutation Quirks or biological processes, and he was rapidly running out of plausible explanations that wouldn't lead to more uncomfortable questions.

Thinking quickly, he seized on the first distraction he could find. "Y-yeah, something like that! It's pretty complex. Anyway, um, what's it like living here on I-Island? It must be amazing being surrounded by all this technology all the time!"

Melissa blinked at the sudden change of subject, but she was gracious enough to follow his lead without pressing further. Her expression softened slightly as she considered his question.

"It really is incredible in a lot of ways," she admitted, her voice taking on a more thoughtful tone. "Living in what's essentially a floating city of the future, being surrounded by the most advanced technology on Earth, having access to resources and knowledge that most people can only dream of..."

She paused, her gaze drifting across the bustling expo floor with an expression that was harder to read.

"But sometimes it can feel... isolated, I suppose. Everyone here is brilliant in their own way—researchers, engineers, pro heroes. The intellectual standards are incredibly high, and the expectations..." She shrugged, a gesture that seemed to carry more weight than it should. "It can be lonely when you feel like you don't quite fit in the same way everyone else does."

Izuku frowned, surprised by the hint of melancholy in her voice. "Lonely? But you're surrounded by people who share your interests, and your work is incredible. You're making a real difference in the world."

Melissa smiled, but it was tinged with something sad. "That's true, and I don't want to sound ungrateful. But..." She hesitated for a moment, then seemed to make a decision. "I'm Quirkless, Midoriya."

The words hit Izuku like a physical blow, his eyes widening in shock and something deeper—recognition, empathy, and a profound understanding that he hadn't expected to find here.

"You're... Quirkless?" he repeated softly.

Melissa nodded, her expression calm but honest. "I've always loved heroes, always wanted to help them save people and make the world better. But without a Quirk of my own..." She gestured to the technology surrounding them. "Support engineering became my way of contributing. It's my way of being part of the hero world, even if I can't be a hero myself."

For several long seconds, Izuku couldn't find his voice. The weight of shared experience—the memory of his own childhood spent believing he was Quirkless, the dreams he'd thought were impossible, the feeling of being on the outside looking in at a world that seemed closed to him—created a connection he hadn't been prepared for.

When he finally spoke, his voice was soft with genuine understanding. "That's... that's really incredible, Melissa. What you've accomplished, the way you've found your own path to helping people... it's amazing."

There was something in his tone, a depth of comprehension that went beyond simple politeness, that made Melissa look at him more closely. "Thank you. That... that really means a lot coming from someone who's accomplished so much already."

"I just..." Izuku hesitated, choosing his words carefully. "I think sometimes the most important heroes are the ones who find ways to help that nobody else thought of. Your inventions are going to save lives in ways that direct heroics never could."

Melissa's smile grew warmer, more genuine than it had been since their conversation began. "Thank you, Midoriya. I... I don't often meet people who understand that perspective."

As they continued walking through the expo, their conversation flowing more naturally than before, Izuku felt something settling in his chest—a comfortable warmth that came from unexpected understanding and shared experience.

But even as he enjoyed Melissa's company and marveled at the technology surrounding them, a small part of his mind remained alert, still processing that moment of instinctive alarm he'd felt earlier. Something had triggered his Agito senses, something that felt predatory and dangerous in this place of innovation and wonder.

He pushed the concern aside for now, focusing on the incredible opportunity before him, but the feeling lingered like a shadow at the edge of his consciousness.

While Izuku and Melissa continued their tour of the expo's technical displays, the feeling of being watched never quite left him. It was subtle—barely more than a prickle at the base of his skull—but his Agito instincts had learned not to ignore such warnings.

During a pause in Melissa's explanation of adaptive armor systems, his gaze swept casually across the crowd of expo attendees. Families with children, international heroes comparing notes, researchers deep in animated discussions about theoretical applications—everything appeared perfectly normal.

But then, just at the edge of his peripheral vision, he caught sight of something that made his blood run cold.

A young man in casual clothes—neat khakis and a button-down shirt that screamed 'harmless tourist'—was walking past their group with deliberate casualness. In one hand, he held what appeared to be a completely ordinary hotdog, taking occasional bites as he moved through the crowd. His other hand was tucked lazily in his pocket, and his delicate, almost boyish features were the picture of relaxed interest as he took in the various displays.

But it was his eyes that set off every alarm bell in Izuku's consciousness.

Behind wire-rimmed glasses that reflected the expo's bright lights, there was something cold and calculating in that gaze of molten gold. Something that spoke of a mind that was cataloguing, analyzing, evaluating everything it saw with predatory precision.

For just a moment—no more than a heartbeat—those eyes focused directly on Izuku. The boy's head tilted slightly, an almost imperceptible acknowledgment that felt like being marked by a hunter. Then, with the same casual ease, he took another bite of his hotdog and continued on his way, disappearing into the crowd as if he'd never been there at all.

Izuku's breathing hitched, his hand unconsciously moving to his chest where he could feel his heart hammering against his ribs. Every instinct he possessed was screaming danger, but when he looked again, searching the crowd with desperate intensity, there was nothing. Only tourists and families and researchers, all perfectly innocent, all completely normal.

"Midoriya?" Melissa's voice broke through his sudden panic, concern evident in her tone. "Are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"H-huh?" Izuku jerked back to the present, forcing his expression into something that hopefully resembled normalcy. "Y-yeah! Sorry, just... lost in thought for a second. All this technology is kind of overwhelming."

He managed a smile that he hoped was convincing, though his hands remained slightly tense at his sides. "What were you saying about the armor systems?"

Melissa studied his face for a moment longer, her intelligence clearly picking up on the fact that something had unsettled him, but she was too polite to press the issue.

"Well, anyway," she continued, though her tone suggested she was filing away his reaction for later consideration, "as I was explaining, the adaptive systems can actually learn from repeated impact patterns..."

As Melissa resumed her technical explanation, Izuku tried to focus on her words, but part of his attention remained split between the fascinating technology and the lingering sense of unease that had settled over him like a cold blanket.

Whoever that man had been, whatever he was doing at the expo, Izuku's instincts were convinced that his presence meant trouble.

He just hoped he was wrong.

Izuku adjusted the cuffs of his tuxedo nervously in his quarters, glancing at the mirror as he tried to straighten his tie. The polished fabric felt strange compared to his usual hero costume. He was still lost in thought about Melissa's words earlier when a knock came at the door.

"Come in," Izuku said, turning slightly.

The door slid open to reveal Kagutsuchi, now dressed sharply in a black and gray suit accented with silver threads. His usual laid-back Hawaiian-shirt attitude was replaced with a composed, almost regal presence. Yet the teasing smirk he wore hadn't changed.

"Well, well," Kagutsuchi said, stepping inside with his hands in his pockets. "You clean up nicely, kid. And judging by how red your face was earlier, I'd say you were really hitting it off with that girl."

Izuku's face immediately went scarlet. "I-it's not like that! We were just talking!"

"Sure you were." Kagutsuchi chuckled, adjusting his cuffs. "I'd say you've got her attention, though. Can't say I blame her."

Izuku groaned, covering his face with one hand. "Please don't start…"

Kagutsuchi waved him off casually, glancing toward the window. "Relax, kid. Anyway, I'm heading to the welcoming ceremony. Some of my people work here, and I want to keep an eye on things."

Izuku blinked, lowering his hand. "You're really attending the ceremony?"

"Of course," Kagutsuchi replied smoothly, straightening his jacket. "But don't worry—my people aren't going to try anything. Something tells me things are about to get a little more exciting soon enough, and I'd rather be here to watch it unfold."

Izuku frowned slightly, tilting his head. "What do you mean by that?"

Kagutsuchi only smirked, already stepping back toward the door. "You'll see, kid. Just enjoy the night while you can."

The door closed behind him, leaving Izuku staring after him, a faint unease twisting in his stomach once more.

Kagutsuchi soon made his way to the reception hall where several UA faculty members were already gathered, dressed formally for the evening. His sharp suit contrasted heavily with his usual casual vibe, earning more than a few curious glances as he strolled in with his hands in his pockets, looking entirely at ease.

Nemuri, clad in an elegant, form-fitting evening gown, let out a low whistle as she approached him, one brow raised. "Well, don't you clean up nicely. Very dashing tonight."

Kagutsuchi smirked, giving her a slow, playful once-over before meeting her gaze. "Look who's talking. You might just steal the whole show tonight."

Nemuri chuckled softly, a faint blush coloring her cheeks. "Flatterer."

From nearby, Hizashi leaned against a pillar, a wide grin splitting his face. "Oi, you two should just get a room already!"

Aizawa, standing beside him with his hands shoved deep into his pockets, sighed heavily. "Do you ever shut up, Yamada?"

Kagutsuchi laughed under his breath, tilting his head toward Nemuri. "Tempting offer, but I'm supposed to behave tonight. Maybe later."

Nemuri rolled her eyes but the amused smile she shot him lingered a little longer than necessary.

Far from the glittering lights of the Expo, a sleek, matte-black stealth cruiser cut through the ocean under the cover of night. Inside, the atmosphere was tense, the rhythmic hum of the engines underscoring the sound of weapons being checked and loaded.

Men in tactical gear moved with precision, loading crates of specialized equipment and checking their firearms. A heavy-set man slammed a fresh magazine into his rifle with a metallic click, nodding to the others.

At the center of the briefing room stood a tall man, his expression hard and calculating as he adjusted the gloves on his hands. He surveyed his crew with quiet authority before turning to a nearby console.

A crackle of static filled the room as a transmission opened. The voice that came through was distorted, run through a heavy modulation filter. "Are you in position?"

The tall man's lips curled into a thin smile. "Everything's ready. We'll be hitting them right after the ceremony begins. No one will know what hit them."

"Good," the modulated voice replied. "Your priority remains the same. Secure the target. Collateral damage is irrelevant."

The man nodded once, his eyes narrowing with resolve. "Understood."

The transmission cut abruptly, leaving only the soft hum of the cruiser as the men continued their final checks.

Izuku adjusted his black suit jacket as he walked down the polished corridor toward the reception hall, tugging at the gold tie around his neck. It felt stiff and formal, nothing like his usual attire, but he couldn't deny how well it fit him. The colors matched his Ground Form almost perfectly—black and gold—and that thought made him pause briefly. Kagutsuchi had given it to him as an early birthday gift, though Izuku had originally thought it was far too much until his mother convinced him to accept it. Now, walking toward the ceremony, he couldn't help but feel how… convenient it was to have this suit ready, almost as if Kagutsuchi had known this occasion was coming. He quickly shook the thought away, focusing on the chatter ahead.

Class 1-A had already begun to gather near the entrance, dressed in their respective formal attire. Kaminari wore a sharp navy blazer with a loosened tie, Mina dazzled in a glittery cocktail dress that matched her bright personality, and Kirishima looked every bit the part in a bold crimson suit, grinning as always. Even Bakugo, though clearly irritated by the whole affair, had grudgingly donned a clean black tuxedo.

Izuku's eyes scanned the group until they landed on one classmate in particular. Aoyama stood off to the side, one hand rubbing his stomach with an expression that was equal parts discomfort and forced poise. Their eyes met, and Aoyama stiffened slightly before giving a strained smile.

"Oh, mon ami," Aoyama said, his voice just a little too high-pitched, "such a magnificent cut to your suit! Très élégant!"

"T-thanks," Izuku replied, his cheeks coloring faintly. His gaze flicked to Aoyama's own outfit, which seemed to shimmer with every movement, practically glowing under the hallway lights. "Yours is… uh…" He hesitated, then forced a polite smile. "…very… shiny."

Aoyama's smile wavered for a split second before he nodded grandly, striking a pose as if that had been the intended compliment. "But of course!"

Just then, Momo and Iida approached, both dressed impeccably for the occasion. Momo wore a sleek, dark blue gown that balanced elegance and modesty, while Iida stood tall in a perfectly tailored black suit, his glasses glinting under the hallway lights.

"Is everyone ready?" Momo asked with a warm smile, glancing around at her classmates.

"Ready as we'll ever be," Iida added firmly, adjusting his tie with practiced precision.

The group gave a collective nod, and together they began walking toward the grand reception hall.

Earlier, before the preparations for the ceremony, Melissa had found herself surrounded by several of the Class 1-A girls, who were more than happy to keep her company while Izuku and David discussed support gear.

Mina had practically latched onto Melissa's arm, her enthusiasm bubbling over. "You live here all the time? That's so cool! You've gotta show us around the good spots!"

Melissa laughed lightly, clearly amused by her energy. "I'd be happy to. There are some amazing cafés and lounges around the central district."

Ochako smiled warmly, walking beside them. "It must be amazing to wake up to this kind of place every day."

Melissa's smile softened. "It is… though it can get a little lonely sometimes. But having all of you here makes it feel lively in a way I haven't felt in a while."

"Aw, that's sweet," Mina said, grinning. "Don't worry, we'll keep you company as long as we're here!"

Momo, walking slightly ahead with her usual composed posture, nodded. "Melissa, if you're comfortable, I'd love to ask you some questions about your engineering projects. Your work on adaptive hero gear is remarkable."

Melissa's eyes lit up at that. "Of course! I'd love to talk shop with you."

Jirou, hands in her pockets, smirked slightly. "Great, and while you two nerd out, I'll keep Mina from bouncing off the walls."

Mina stuck her tongue out at her playfully. "Oh, c'mon, I'm not that bad!"

Melissa giggled, clearly enjoying their lively energy. For the first time in a while, she felt like just another girl her age—not a support prodigy, not David Shield's daughter—just Melissa.

Class 1-A stepped into the grand reception hall, their eyes widening as the sight before them unfolded. The space was packed to the brim—pro-heroes mingled with renowned scientists, flashes from press cameras sparked intermittently, and attendants moved gracefully between guests, serving refreshments and guiding newcomers.

"Whoa…" Kaminari muttered, craning his neck to take it all in. "This place is insane."

Even Bakugo, though trying to hide it, gave the hall a brief look of appreciation before crossing his arms with a huff. Momo and Iida exchanged impressed glances, while Mina and Ochako whispered excitedly to each other about the dazzling crowd.

Then, a familiar voice called out to them. "Midoriya! Over here!"

Izuku's head turned instantly, and his breath caught when his eyes landed on her. Melissa stood a short distance away, dressed simply yet elegantly—a soft, knee-length dress in a pale blue that brought out her eyes, her hair gently tied back with a ribbon. Nothing about her outfit screamed extravagance, yet it enhanced her natural beauty perfectly.

Izuku felt his cheeks heat up as she waved, smiling brightly. "You made it!"

"Y-yeah," he managed, tugging nervously at his tie. "You look… great."

Melissa's smile warmed. "So do you."

The rest of the class exchanged knowing glances, Mina nudging Ochako with a grin, while Kagutsuchi watched from nearby, his expression unreadable as always.

Before Izuku could respond further, another familiar voice called out. "Young Midoriya!"

All Might, now in his casual form for the evening, stood a few feet away speaking with David Shield and a man in a crisp suit. His face lit up as he beckoned Izuku over. "It's wonderful to see you here! Come, let me introduce you."

Izuku hurried over, trying not to look too nervous.

David smiled warmly. "Good to see you again, Midoriya."

The man stepped forward, extending his hand with a friendly smile. "Samuel Abraham. I'm David's assistant," he said, his heavier build and short blond hair giving him a solid, dependable look. His blue eyes, mostly closed in a calm expression, hinted at his easygoing nature. "David and I go way back—high school friends, if you can believe it."

Izuku shook his hand quickly, his eyes wide. "R-really? That's amazing!"

Samuel chuckled. "David's been a genius since he was a teenager. I've just been lucky enough to tag along."

All Might grinned proudly, placing a hand on David's shoulder. "Two brilliant minds changing the world, huh? Young Midoriya, you couldn't be in better company tonight."

Samuel glanced toward Melissa with a good-natured smile. "And it looks like you've already met Melissa. She's been talking about you since this morning."

Melissa flushed slightly, giving Samuel a quick look. "I was just saying he's impressive, that's all."

Izuku's face turned red as he stammered, "R-really?!"

David laughed, shaking his head fondly. "Don't let her tease you too much, Midoriya. She gets that from me."

All Might chuckled warmly at the exchange, clearly enjoying seeing them interact so naturally.

A chime echoed through the hall as the lights dimmed slightly, drawing the attention of everyone present. A calm, professional voice came over the speakers. "Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats. The Welcoming Ceremony is about to begin."

The crowd shifted, pro-heroes and scientists making their way to their assigned places, murmurs of anticipation filling the air. Izuku glanced at Melissa, who smiled encouragingly before turning toward the main stage. All Might placed a reassuring hand on Izuku's shoulder, his own expression soft but proud as the ceremony prepared to begin.

The hall gradually fell into a hush as the house lights dimmed further, a spotlight illuminating the central stage. A host in a sharp tuxedo stepped forward, microphone in hand, greeting the guests with a practiced smile. "Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the annual I-Expo Welcoming Ceremony! Tonight, we celebrate the future of heroics and innovation!"

Polite applause rippled through the hall as he continued introducing notable attendees—renowned scientists, support engineers, and several high-ranking pro-heroes. Class 1-A whispered among themselves, awestruck each time a familiar name was mentioned.

Melissa leaned slightly toward Izuku, whispering with a grin, "You'll get used to all this attention eventually. Maybe one day they'll be announcing your name."

Izuku's face flushed, and he shook his head furiously. "I-I don't think I'm anywhere near that level!"

"Give it time," Melissa said encouragingly.

All Might, seated a row ahead with David and Samuel, glanced back briefly at Izuku and gave him a small nod of reassurance. David, meanwhile, exchanged a few words with Samuel about upcoming presentations, their tones calm yet tinged with pride.

The host gestured to the main podium as a group of technicians rolled out a massive holographic display. "And now, to open the Expo officially, please welcome the brilliant mind behind this year's featured innovations—David Shield!"

Applause thundered across the hall as David rose to his feet, adjusting his glasses before walking to the stage, his calm confidence radiating through the room.

David approached the podium, offering a polite wave to the audience before adjusting the microphone. "Thank you, everyone, for such a warm welcome. It's truly an honor to be here among so many brilliant minds and heroes tonight."

The holographic display behind him came to life, showing rotating models of cutting-edge support equipment. "This year, our focus is on bridging the gap between technology and heroics—making our innovations safer, more efficient, and more accessible to heroes worldwide. Every piece of equipment you'll see here tonight was designed with one purpose in mind: to save lives."

Polite applause followed, but Class 1-A leaned forward in fascination, Izuku scribbling mental notes with wide eyes.

David smiled gently as the applause died down. "But innovation doesn't just come from engineers or scientists. It comes from heroes who inspire us every day. People who push their limits to protect others… people like All Might."

The spotlight briefly shifted toward All Might, who gave a humble wave, earning a cheer from the crowd. Izuku's chest swelled with pride just watching him.

David concluded, "So, let's continue to build a future where technology and heroics work hand in hand. A future where we can all stand a little taller."

Thunderous applause followed as David stepped back from the podium, giving the host a nod. The holographic display shifted to showcase upcoming innovations and brief clips of prototype field tests, eliciting murmurs of excitement from the crowd.

Melissa clapped proudly, her eyes gleaming as she whispered to Izuku, "That's my dad. Pretty great, right?"

Izuku nodded quickly, smiling nervously. "He's… incredible. Everything he said makes so much sense."

The host returned to the microphone. "Thank you, Mr. Shield. Now, please enjoy the evening as we unveil more of this year's innovations." The lights brightened slightly as attendants moved to guide guests toward various interactive booths set around the perimeter of the hall.

Class 1-A began to chatter among themselves again, excitedly discussing David's speech. Iida adjusted his glasses, declaring, "That was truly inspirational! We must take the time to learn as much as we can tonight!"

Mina grinned. "I just wanna see all the cool gadgets!"

As the students settled into the lively atmosphere, the camera shutters of reporters flashed at pro-heroes giving brief interviews. Melissa guided Izuku toward a corner where some of her prototypes were being displayed. "Come on, I want to show you something you might like."

Far away, cutting silently through the dark waters, the stealth cruiser approached the island's restricted dock. Inside the briefing room, a man stood before his assembled soldiers, the dim red lighting casting sharp, angular shadows across their gear as they finished locking and loading their weapons.

He tightened the straps on his gloves, his voice calm but carrying an edge of authority that silenced the room. "This is it. Once we're in, we move fast—take control, secure the target before security has a chance to respond. No mistakes."

One of his men spoke up, his tone cautious. "And our contact?"

As if on cue, a console nearby flickered to life, its screen bathing the room in a faint glow as a distorted, modulated voice filled the space.

"The main systems will be in your control once you breach the security hub," the voice assured. "I'll guide you when the time comes."

The man's lips curved into a sharp smirk, his expression hard in the crimson light. "Good. We strike after the opening events are in full swing. They won't know what hit them."

"Do not disappoint," the voice replied simply, before the transmission cut abruptly.

Turning back to his men, he straightened, his presence filling the room. "Gear up. We're making history tonight."

The cruiser surged forward through the dark waves, its course set straight for I-Island.

The reception hall glowed under the warm light of chandeliers as the evening's energy shifted from formal speeches to mingling and exploration. Attendants moved smoothly among the crowd with trays of hors d'oeuvres and sparkling drinks, while reporters clustered around prominent heroes for interviews.

Class 1-A stayed close together at first, their eyes darting between the booths and displays lining the hall. Izuku followed Melissa to a table showcasing her latest prototypes, occasionally glancing around as that lingering sense of unease gnawed at him. His Agito instincts whispered warnings, though nothing around him seemed out of place.

"Are you alright, Midoriya?" Melissa asked softly, catching the way his eyes kept scanning the crowd.

Izuku forced a smile. "Y-yeah, just… taking everything in."

"Good," Melissa said, her tone bright again as she pointed to a new gauntlet design. "This one's for regulating high-impact Quirks. It could help heroes who put too much strain on their joints."

Before Izuku could respond, a faint tremor shivered through the floor. It was subtle, almost too light to notice, but his senses flared immediately. His head snapped toward the far end of the hall.

"Did you feel that?" he asked quietly.

Melissa blinked. "Feel what?"

Another tremor followed, slightly stronger this time, causing a few glasses on nearby trays to rattle. Guests paused, looking around in confusion.

From across the hall, Iida frowned. "That was not part of the evening's program."

A third tremor hit—heavier, decisive. This time the chandeliers swayed slightly, and murmurs rose among the guests. A security guard near the entrance pressed a hand to his earpiece, his expression hardening as he moved briskly toward the exit.

Izuku's unease spiked as his instincts screamed louder now, urging him to be ready. Something was very wrong.

Earlier...

The stealth cruiser now rested against the island's hidden dock, its engines humming softly as figures blending into the darkness disembarked in precise formation. The night air was still, broken only by the quiet sound of boots on metal.

"Move," their leader ordered, his tone clipped and confident. His men fanned out, carrying compact breaching equipment.

Inside the island's lower service tunnels, they advanced quickly, taking out isolated security personnel with silencers and stun rounds. A handheld device in Wolfram's grip beeped steadily as they neared their first objective.

"Contact," one of the men whispered, crouching by a locked service door.

"Set the charges," the leader replied.

Within moments, the door blew inward with a muffled pop, revealing a darkened control hub. The team swept in silently, subduing the technicians inside before Wolfram approached the main console.

A light blinked on the screen as the modulated voice returned through his earpiece. "Begin transferring control to me. The security systems will soon be ours."

The leader's smirk widened. "Then it begins."

The fourth tremor was no accident.

The floor lurched suddenly, hard enough to send drinks spilling and guests stumbling. Panic rippled through the crowd as the chandeliers overhead rattled violently. A sharp hiss filled the air as the massive reinforced doors to the hall slammed shut with a resounding clang.

"W-what's happening?!" Mina yelped, gripping the edge of a nearby table.

Security personnel scrambled for their earpieces, shouting into comms, but their radios crackled uselessly. The lights flickered once… twice… before cutting to an emergency red glow, casting the entire hall in an ominous hue.

Iida moved to the front of Class 1-A instantly. "Everyone stay calm! Group together and await instructions!"

Kirishima gritted his teeth, fists clenched. "This doesn't feel like just a malfunction!"

Izuku's Agito instincts screamed now, his entire body tensing as his eyes darted to the sealed entrances. "Something's coming…" he muttered.

Melissa clutched her tablet close, her face pale. "The systems shouldn't lock down like this unless—"

A booming thud shook the doors nearest the main stage, cutting her off. Then another, louder, until with a final deafening crash, the doors buckled inward. Smoke and sparks burst from the shattered frame as a squad of armed men stormed inside, weapons raised.

Guests screamed, scattering for cover as the attackers fanned out with military precision.

At their center strode a man, calm and composed amid the chaos. His sharp gaze swept the room, and his gloved hand clenched into a fist, causing stray metal debris to rattle ominously under his Quirk.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the man said, his voice carrying over the panicked murmurs, "remain where you are, and you won't get hurt. Cooperate, and this will be over quickly. Wolfram is the name, and from this point forward, I shall be your gracious host."

His men took aim at the pro-heroes nearest the stage, forcing them to stand down under the threat of hostages.

Izuku's fists clenched as he instinctively shifted into a defensive stance, his heart pounding. His eyes locked on Wolfram, instincts roaring.

"This… this is bad," Izuku whispered, every nerve screaming to act as the chaos fully erupted around them.

The chaos in the hall escalated with every passing second. Guests cowered behind overturned tables, pro-heroes exchanged uneasy glances, and Wolfram's men tightened their perimeter, keeping their weapons trained on the crowd.

All Might rose slowly from his seat, his casual form radiating quiet authority as he stepped forward. "You're making a mistake," he said firmly, his voice cutting through the panic. "Release these people now."

Wolfram's lips curled into a faint smirk. "Ah… All Might. I was hoping you'd be here. But this isn't about you. Stay out of my way, and maybe no one gets hurt."

The tension spiked as Wolfram gestured sharply. Two of his men fired warning shots into the air, the sound echoing through the hall. Guests screamed, and the pro-heroes hesitated, unwilling to risk the hostages.

Izuku's Agito senses roared louder than ever. His gaze darted between Wolfram's men, analyzing their positions. His heart pounded, but his body shifted slightly lower into a ready stance, his instincts urging him to move.

Beside him, Melissa gripped his arm tightly, whispering in fear, "Midoriya, don't—"

"I have to," he whispered back, his tone resolute.

A split second later, one of Wolfram's men turned toward their section, raising his weapon toward a group of terrified guests.

That was the breaking point.

Izuku surged forward, his body moving before thought could catch up. In an instant, black and gold armor began to snap across his frame, gleaming under the crimson emergency lights. Gasps erupted around him as his transformation completed, his masked gaze locking onto Wolfram.

Wolfram's eyes narrowed, intrigued. "Well… looks like we've got ourselves a hero who doesn't know when to sit still."

"Class 1-A!" Iida shouted, already stepping forward with his arms out. "Defensive formation! Protect the civilians!"

Kirishima grinned, hardening his skin. "Let's go!"

Bakugo cracked his knuckles, a feral grin spreading. "Finally."

The hall exploded into motion.

Izuku lunged first, his black-and-gold armor flashing under the emergency lights as he tackled the gunman threatening the civilians. The man barely had time to react before Izuku slammed him into the floor, the weapon skidding across the polished tiles. With a sharp twist, Izuku disarmed him completely and sprang back, already scanning for the next threat.

"Move the guests to safety!" Iida barked, his engines roaring as he darted between frightened civilians, herding them toward the far wall.

Kirishima hardened his entire body, stepping in front of a cluster of guests as stray bullets ricocheted harmlessly off his skin. "Don't worry! You're safe behind me!"

Bakugo leapt into the air, palms sparking. "You picked the wrong damn place to crash!" He blasted forward, an explosion propelling him into two attackers at once, knocking them aside with brutal precision.

Jirou and Kaminari worked in tandem—Jirou's earphone jacks stabbed into the floor, sending sharp vibrations to disorient nearby enemies, while Kaminari fired off controlled electrical bursts to incapacitate them.

Melissa clutched her tablet, ducking behind a table but refusing to look away, her eyes locked on Izuku as he moved with almost inhuman precision. She whispered under her breath, "He's even faster than the Sports Festival…"

Across the hall, All Might stood tall at the center, his casual form hiding no sign of weakness as he squared his shoulders. His sharp gaze locked on Wolfram, his voice carrying authority that silenced even some of the panicked murmurs. "Wolfram. This ends now. Whatever you're after, you won't succeed."

Wolfram tilted his head, his confident smirk faltering slightly. "Still putting on a brave face? I heard you were just a shell of what you used to be."

All Might didn't move, his eyes narrowing. "You heard wrong."

The metal fragments around Wolfram shot forward like spears, but this time All Might reacted with the explosive speed of his prime. He darted forward, his fists blurring as he shattered the incoming shards mid-air, the shockwaves cracking the tiles beneath him. Guests gasped as the Symbol of Peace's presence filled the hall once more, radiating overwhelming strength.

Wolfram's eyes widened, his smirk twisting into something far more serious. "Impossible… you're supposed to be done. Broken."

All Might stood firm, his muscles tensed and posture unyielding. "Not tonight."

He launched forward, his fist slamming into a chunk of rising metal with such force that it shattered into fragments, scattering Wolfram's control for a moment. The villain stumbled slightly, his expression darkening.

"Interesting," Wolfram growled, regaining his composure. "So you've still got some fight left after all."

Izuku caught sight of Wolfram's Quirk in action, his instincts screaming again. His armor plates shifted subtly, preparing for a counter as he dashed toward the front lines.

"Midoriya, wait!" Iida called, but Izuku was already moving, every sense locked onto Wolfram.

The two finally faced each other across the chaos, Wolfram's calculating gaze meeting Izuku's masked one.

"Well," Wolfram said, his voice almost amused despite his earlier surprise. "Looks like the kid wants to play hero."

Izuku tightened his stance, his voice low but firm. "I'm not playing."

With that, they both surged forward, the clash at the reception hall truly beginning.

Izuku met Wolfram head-on, his armored fists clashing against walls of manipulated metal. Sparks flew as black-and-gold strikes tore through the twisted steel constructs Wolfram hurled at him. Izuku ducked under a massive shard, sliding across the floor before vaulting off a broken table, driving a kick into one of Wolfram's braced metal barriers.

Wolfram grunted, his Quirk reinforcing his defense just in time. "Persistent brat," he hissed, sending another barrage of metal spears toward him.

Izuku weaved between them, his armor shifting subtly to absorb the impacts of stray fragments, his movements instinctive and precise.

All Might joined the fray, his fists smashing aside Wolfram's metal projectiles with overwhelming force. The Symbol of Peace's speed and power left even Wolfram visibly unsettled.

"This shouldn't be possible," Wolfram muttered, barely shielding himself from a punch that cratered the floor beside him. "You're supposed to be weaker than this!"

All Might's eyes narrowed, his voice calm but cold. "Who told you that?"

Wolfram's smirk returned, though his breathing had grown heavier. "Wouldn't you like to know." With a sudden motion, he slammed his hands to the ground, creating a massive wall of steel between them.

Then, just as quickly as the attack began, Wolfram turned and retreated through a gaping hole his men had blasted in the side of the hall. His forces began pulling back, smoke grenades filling the room to cover their escape.

Izuku started forward. "He's running!"

All Might didn't move, his mind racing as he watched the villain vanish into the smoke. How did he know I was supposed to be weaker? Only one man could've told him that…

Across the hall, Class 1-A regrouped quickly, cleaning up the stragglers Wolfram had left behind. Kaminari and Jirou worked in perfect sync, disabling the last of the armed men with precision, while Kirishima and Bakugo knocked out any who tried to resist. Pro-heroes soon joined them, coordinating effortlessly to secure the guests and subdue the remaining attackers.

Within minutes, the hall was under control again. Guests were escorted to safety, and the last of Wolfram's men were restrained.

Momo stood at the edge of the hall, her eyes narrowing as she glanced at the defeated mercenaries. This was… too easy, she thought. Even with the pro-heroes present, they should have brought more men, more firepower. They had to know we'd counter this quickly.

Her expression tightened as the realization struck her. This was never meant to succeed outright. It was a distraction… but for what?

Not long after, David hurriedly led All Might, Melissa, and Izuku through one of the secured corridors toward his private lab. His expression was grim, his steps quick and purposeful.

"We need to erase everything in the database," David said firmly as they moved. "If Wolfram's men managed to access even a fraction of I-Island's systems, the technology here… it's too dangerous to risk falling into the wrong hands."

All Might nodded, his voice serious. "He's right. This island is a treasure trove of advancements—villains across the world would salivate over what's stored here. We can't let that happen."

Melissa, though worried, stayed close, her eyes determined. "I'll help however I can, Dad."

Inwardly, David's thoughts darkened. But what is Wolfram really after? He forced the thought aside, his jaw tightening. No. Focus. The priority is making sure the data doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

They reached the lab, and David immediately sat down at the main console, his fingers flying across the keys as the system booted up. Lines of code filled the monitor as he prepared the data purge.

Then the screen flashed red. A loud beep echoed through the room.

David's eyes widened. "No… We're locked out." He slammed his hand against the console in frustration, quickly trying to override the system, but every command was rejected with the same blaring red alert. "Someone's already seized control of the core systems… they were ready for this."

All Might stepped closer, his expression grim. "Can you trace it?"

David shook his head, typing rapidly, sweat forming at his brow. "Not without more time. Whoever did this knew exactly how to lock us out."

Melissa's face paled as she looked between them. "Then… they can access anything on the island?"

David swallowed hard, his fingers still moving over the keys. "If we don't regain control soon, yes."

Izuku straightened, his expression firm, the weight of the situation settling heavily on his shoulders. "Then let me guard the outside of the lab. If they're coming for you, I can at least hold them off." His tone carried a determination that left no doubt he was ready to fight.

Melissa stepped closer, her brow furrowed, shaking her head. "No, I can help with the override, Dad—" Her voice wavered slightly, betraying how anxious she really was.

David paused mid-typing, his eyes narrowing as his mind raced. After a tense beat, he turned to her, his gaze sharp with urgency. "You can help in another way. Melissa, you know the vault's access codes."

Melissa froze, her eyes widening. "The vault? Dad, are you sure?" There was a tremor in her voice—she understood exactly what that meant.

David nodded, his tone low and urgent. "We don't have time to debate this. Most of the tech stored there is experimental—dangerous and unpredictable. If Wolfram gets his hands on it… we can't let that happen. You and Midoriya need to get there and destroy everything before they do."

Melissa hesitated, visibly torn. "Is there… something specific you're worried about?"

David's jaw tightened, the grimness in his face deepening. "Over a year ago, I developed a device meant to stabilize unstable Quirks. It backfired when I tested it on myself—my fingers nearly exploded from the strain. We discovered it wasn't stabilizing Quirks at all; it was amplifying them to dangerous levels. We locked it away until we could find the time to properly recalibrate it."

All Might's eyes narrowed, his voice grim. "If Wolfram knew about that device… it could be his objective from the start."

David's hands stilled briefly, doubt flickering across his features. But how would Wolfram know about it? The thought lingered only a second before he pushed it aside, his urgency overwhelming everything else. "There's no time. Go, now. Hurry."

Toshinori stepped forward, standing tall despite the chaos. His voice carried the same unwavering resolve that had once inspired millions. "I'll stay here and guard David. Go, you two—and good luck."

Izuku gave a firm nod, glancing at Melissa, his own nerves hardening into steel. "Let's move."

Melissa tightened her grip on her tablet, her hesitation fading as determination replaced it. "Right."

Back in the reception hall, the tension had eased, though unease still hung thick in the air. Amidst the cleanup efforts, Kagutsuchi sat lazily at the buffet table, forking another piece of meat onto his already crowded plate, completely unbothered by the lingering chaos.

Aizawa stood a few feet away, arms crossed, his gaze flat and disapproving. "You could help, you know."

Kagutsuchi didn't even bother looking up, chewing leisurely. "I did help. Knocked out one or two of Wolfram's men. The rest of you had things under control."

Present Mic let out a short, incredulous laugh. "Man, you're something else."

Before Aizawa could respond, another figure stepped up beside Kagutsuchi, moving with the same casual indifference. He reached for a plate, his motion so smooth and unhurried that it took a moment for anyone to notice.

"Graviel," Kagutsuchi greeted without looking at him, his tone calm, almost bored.

The name hit like a spark. The entire UA staff froze, their heads snapping toward the newcomer. For most of them, this was the first time seeing him in person.

Graviel stood barefoot, wearing a plain white button-up shirt with the sleeves rolled to his elbows, neatly pressed black trousers, and thin hipster-style glasses perched low on his nose. His boyish, almost delicate features contrasted with the quiet, unnerving sharpness in his presence. He calmly picked items from the buffet, utterly unconcerned, as though he were just another guest enjoying the evening.

Aizawa's eyes narrowed slightly, his body instinctively tensing. "So this is him," he muttered under his breath.

Present Mic, unusually quiet, leaned toward Aizawa. "You're kidding me… that's Graviel? The way you've been hyping him up, I was expecting—well, not this."

Graviel glanced at them briefly, his expression unreadable, before calmly returning to selecting food. "Staring is rude," he said mildly, his tone carrying no hostility, just a simple fact.

Kagutsuchi smirked faintly, finally glancing his way. "Ignore them. They're not used to seeing High Lords act so… casual."

Graviel gave the faintest shrug, lifting a plate. "We all have to eat."

Kagutsuchi lazily speared another piece of meat with his fork, giving Graviel a sideways glance. "So, how are you finding the festivities?"

The question was casual, almost teasing, but the weight of it settled heavily over the UA staff. They could feel it now—the quiet pressure radiating from Graviel just by standing there, as if his very presence pressed against their chests. None of them dared to speak.

Graviel, unfazed, considered the question as he added a few more items to his plate. "Adequate," he replied simply, as though commenting on the weather. "Though I can't say I came for the food."

Kagutsuchi's smirk widened slightly, his tone still deceptively casual. "Then what did you come for? Not that I don't already know."

Graviel didn't pause, calmly reaching for another serving as though the question meant nothing. "To observe the boy," he said plainly. "He already accessed an alternate form during the Sports Festival."

Kagutsuchi let out a low chuckle, his gaze sliding toward him. "You were there watching the entire thing, weren't you?"

Graviel's lips curved faintly, almost into a smile. "I had better popcorn in America."

A quiet moment stretched before a small voice finally broke the tension.

"So, Graviel," Nezu said, perched atop Vlad King's shoulder, his tone polite but edged with careful curiosity. "What brings someone like you here, really? Surely it isn't just for… observation."

Graviel slowly turned his head, his golden eyes locking onto Nezu's with an unblinking intensity. The air in the room seemed to grow heavier as his gaze swept briefly over the rest of the staff, and several unconsciously stiffened under the pressure.

"Curious little creature," Graviel murmured, his voice even but carrying a subtle, unsettling weight. "You already know the answer—you simply want to hear it from me."

Nezu's whiskers twitched, but he didn't look away. "Perhaps. But sometimes, the answer is less important than how it's given."

For a moment, Graviel held Nezu's stare, as if weighing the exchange. Then he returned his attention to his plate with the same calm indifference as before. "Then take it as you will: I'm here to watch. Nothing more… for now."

David's fingers raced across the keyboard, his eyes darting between lines of rapidly scrolling code and the security schematics of I-Island. Toshinori stood nearby, watching over him with that familiar calm vigilance, arms crossed, though his gaze occasionally flicked toward the door.

"You're certain you can erase everything?" Toshinori asked, his tone steady, but the weight in it was unmistakable.

David gave a short nod without looking up. "If I can break through this lockout, yes. Once the purge starts, every sensitive file—prototype designs, research notes, experimental tech—will be permanently erased."

Toshinori's eyes softened, though his jaw tightened slightly. "Good. We can't let any of this fall into the wrong hands."

There was a brief silence, broken only by the rhythmic tapping of keys. Toshinori's gaze shifted to the door again, his brow furrowing. "Where's Sam? Shouldn't he be here by now?"

David hesitated just slightly, his fingers pausing for half a second before resuming their work. "I… don't know," he replied, voice quieter than before. "He was supposed to check on the secondary security grid. Maybe he got held up."

Toshinori hummed thoughtfully but said nothing further, though the crease in his brow remained as he glanced toward the door one more time.

Izuku and Melissa hurried down the dimly lit corridor leading to the vault, their footsteps echoing against the metallic walls. The tension in the air was palpable, every second ticking by like an eternity.

Melissa gripped her tablet tightly, glancing at Izuku. "If we don't hurry, they could get there first."

Izuku nodded sharply, his senses on high alert. "Stay close to me."

They rounded a corner, the massive reinforced door to the vault now in sight—when Izuku suddenly froze. His instincts screamed, a cold rush shooting down his spine.

"Get down!" he barked, grabbing Melissa and pulling her to the side just as the wall beside the vault exploded inward.

A hulking figure crashed through the debris, dust and smoke filling the corridor. Its distorted, grotesque frame twitched unnaturally, its eyes glowing with a feral intensity. A Nomu.

Izuku's eyes widened beneath his mask, his breath hitching. "A Nomu…!" His hands tightened into fists as realization struck him. All For One. He's behind this.

Melissa stared in shock, clutching her tablet to her chest. "W-what is that thing?!"

"Stay behind me!" Izuku said firmly, stepping in front of her as his armor began shifting, plates locking into combat form. His voice was steady, but his mind raced. If All For One sent this thing… then Wolfram's attack really was just the opening move.

David's fingers danced across the console, sweat beading at his temple as he worked to bypass the lockout. Toshinori stood just behind him, his eyes locked on the door, body tense despite the quiet hum of the machinery.

Then it hit—a loud, thunderous crash as the reinforced door buckled inward, warping under tremendous force. Both men turned sharply just as the metal bent outward with a deafening boom, and a Nomu barreled through the shattered frame, its monstrous form illuminated by the flickering lights.

David flinched back instinctively, nearly falling out of his chair. "A Nomu?! Here?!"

Toshinori moved instantly, stepping in front of David with his shoulders squared. His eyes narrowed, his voice steady despite the danger. "Stay behind me, David. I'll keep it away from you." Of course. Only he'd be daring enough to mount an assault on I-Island.

The Nomu let out a guttural roar, claws digging into the floor as it crouched, ready to pounce. Toshinori shifted his stance, his fists clenching as his body swelled into his Muscle Form, steam curling faintly from his skin.

"You're not getting past me," he declared, his voice carrying that commanding weight of the Symbol of Peace. Then, glancing back at David, his tone softened just slightly. "Keep working. Finish the purge. I'll hold it off."

David swallowed hard, forcing himself back to the console. "R-right. Just… don't get yourself killed, Toshinori."

Toshinori smirked faintly, eyes never leaving the beast. "You know me better than that."

The Nomu roared again—and then lunged, the control room erupting into chaos as Toshinori surged forward to meet it head-on.

With a roar, the Nomu barreled forward, claws swiping down with brutal force. Izuku darted to the side, his sharpened reflexes allowing him to dodge just barely as the claws gouged deep trenches into the floor. He countered with a sharp strike to its side, the impact strong enough to make it stagger but not enough to bring it down.

"Melissa!" he called over his shoulder, dodging another swipe. "Run! Get to the vault!"

Melissa hesitated, her hands clutching her tablet tightly. "But—!"

"Go!" Izuku snapped, twisting his body to deliver a spinning kick to the Nomu's knee, forcing it to stumble. "Every second counts!"

His sharp tone broke her hesitation. Melissa gave one quick nod, determination flashing across her face before she bolted down the hallway, her footsteps echoing as she disappeared toward the vault.

The Nomu roared in frustration, swinging toward her retreating form, but Izuku was already moving. He slammed his shoulder into its torso, driving it back into the wall, his armored claws digging into the creature's arm to pin it in place.

"Your fight's with me!" he growled, pulling back and delivering a flurry of rapid strikes, each one forcing the Nomu to focus back on him.

The monster retaliated with a wide sweep of its arm, sending Izuku skidding across the floor, but he dug his clawed gauntlets into the metal plating to stop his momentum. He pushed himself back up, his red compound eyes gleaming with his resolve.

"I can't be pinned here," Izuku muttered under his breath, resetting his stance. His visor flared as his grip tightened. "I have to finish this fast."

With a burst of speed, he charged forward again, ready to end the fight.

Back in the control room, David's fingers flew over the console, his frustration mounting with every failed command. All Might stood protectively nearby, exchanging blows with the Nomu that had already broken into the room, each strike echoing through the walls.

"Come on, David," Toshinori urged between strikes, his voice calm but edged with urgency as he parried a heavy swing. "You can break through this!"

"I'm trying!" David shot back, ducking lower behind the console as dust and debris rained down from the ongoing fight. Sweat rolled down his temple. "The security lockout was designed to hold off even the best engineers, but… if I can just—" His hands moved faster, typing in override after override, frustration mounting as the Nomu let out a guttural roar.

Toshinori's eyes narrowed, muscles coiling as he shoved the Nomu back with a powerful blow. "Stay focused. I'll keep you safe no matter what."

Finally, a loud chime cut through the tension, and the screen flashed green. David froze for half a second before leaning in, relief washing over his face. "I'm in!"

"Good," Toshinori said firmly, ducking under a swipe. "Delete everything. Now."

David nodded, his fingers now steady as he began initiating the full data purge. "Once this starts, there's no going back. All of I-Island's confidential tech files will be wiped."

"Do it," Toshinori replied without hesitation, his eyes locking back onto the Nomu. "We can't risk this falling into the wrong hands."

David swallowed, starting the sequence. "Alright… here goes nothing."

The confirmation tone chimed again as David pressed the final key. Toshinori's stance shifted instantly, his eyes hardening. "Good. Now I can end this."

The Nomu roared and lunged at him once more, but Toshinori was already moving, his fist pulled back, power building in a single decisive motion.

"TEXAS SMASH!"

The punch connected with explosive force, sending the Nomu flying back through the hole it had entered from, its body crumpling lifelessly as it hit the ground outside. Silence followed, save for the steady hum of the purge sequence running.

Toshinori lowered his fist but stayed alert, glancing back at David. "Keep going. I'll handle anyone else who tries to interrupt."

The room was still tense from earlier events, but Graviel simply sat calmly at the buffet table, still eating as if the world outside hadn't descended into chaos. His expression was as flat as ever, each motion measured and deliberate. Beside him, Kagutsuchi lazily picked through a plate of food, entirely unconcerned, while the U.A. staff kept their distance, tense and watchful.

Then, without warning, Graviel froze mid-bite, his golden eyes narrowing slightly. His expression didn't change, but his tone carried a quiet irritation. "Can't even eat in peace around here."

Before anyone could ask, the wall at the far end of the hall exploded inward with a deafening crash. A Nomu barreled through the rubble, letting out a guttural roar as the staff instinctively moved into defensive stances.

"A Nomu?! Here!" Hizashi barked, already shifting his weight to attack.

But Graviel simply stood, setting his utensils neatly on the table. Without any urgency, he began walking toward the beast, hands stuffed casually into his pockets.

"Hey, are you just—?!" Midnight began, but her voice caught in her throat as an oppressive wave of killing intent rolled across the room, heavy enough to make even the seasoned heroes stiffen where they stood.

The Nomu, mid-charge, suddenly froze, its muscles locking under the sheer weight of Graviel's presence. It twitched as if unsure whether to move.

"Just stay where you all are and watch closely," Kagutsuchi muttered, chewing lazily.

Graviel stopped directly in front of the monster, head tilted slightly, eyes glowing faintly. With one smooth motion, he raised a single hand and pressed it lightly against the Nomu's chest.

There was no visible impact—no blast of energy, no sound. The Nomu simply convulsed once, its eyes rolling back before it collapsed to its knees, slumping forward completely unconscious.

The staff stared, wide-eyed.

Hizashi was the first to speak. "He just… patted it on the chest! What the hell was that?!"

Kagutsuchi shrugged. "Placed just the right amount of pressure. Any more and that thing would've been paste."

"And it didn't even try to attack," Vlad muttered, still staring.

"Because it couldn't move," Kagutsuchi replied simply. "Too busy drowning in the killing intent he was directly feeding it."

Graviel didn't acknowledge any of this. Without another word, he turned back to the table, resuming his meal as if nothing had happened.

The remaining Nomu roared, lunging again, its claws gouging deep furrows into the floor as it swung. Izuku darted aside, his black-and-gold armor glinting under the harsh lights as he narrowly avoided the strike. His breaths came hard but steady, his focus razor-sharp.

I have to end this fast—Melissa's depending on me!

The Nomu charged, its claws tearing through the floor as it lunged. Izuku planted his feet firmly, lowering his stance, his gaze locked dead center on the creature's chest.

His right fist tightened, a golden aura sparking to life around it, pulsing and growing brighter with every heartbeat. The energy coiled tightly, almost vibrating with anticipation, as if the Agito itself was responding to his resolve.

"DETROIT… SMASH!"

Izuku thrust his fist forward, all that gathered power erupting in a single devastating blow. The impact detonated like a cannon blast, the golden energy surging outward in a shockwave that hurled the Nomu backward, smashing it into the far wall and leaving it motionless in a heap.

Izuku lowered his arm, breathing heavily, steam rising faintly from his armor. He didn't waste a second to check his work—the Nomu was down, but Melissa was still ahead.

"Hang on, Melissa," he muttered, already breaking into a sprint.

His boots pounded against the floor as he tore down the hallway, his figure a streak of black and gold disappearing into the distance, racing to catch up before Wolfram could reach the vault.

Melissa finally reached the vault, her breathing heavy as she skidded to a stop before the massive reinforced door. Her hands trembled slightly as she raised her tablet, fingers hovering over the screen, ready to input the access code.

"Melissa!"

Her head snapped toward the familiar voice. "Uncle Sam!" she exclaimed, relief washing over her face before concern quickly replaced it at the sight of his anxious, almost panicked expression. "What happened? Are you okay?"

Sam stepped closer, darting nervous glances down the corridor as if expecting something to jump out at any moment. "Melissa, listen to me—you need to leave. Now. Get out of here while you still can."

"What? Why?" Melissa asked, confusion and worry mixing in her tone.

A new voice, calm and mocking, answered before Sam could respond.

"Well… isn't this convenient."

Melissa began to turn, but before she could fully react, a sharp blow struck the back of her head. Pain flared and her vision blurred, her knees buckling as the world tilted around her. The last thing she managed to see before everything went dark was Sam's horrified, helpless expression.

Behind her, Wolfram loomed, lowering his arm with a grim, self-satisfied smile. As he scooped Melissa up effortlessly, Wolfram handed the tablet to Sam, his smirk never fading. "Don't worry, Mr. Abraham. I'm not going to hurt her so long as you fulfill our end of the bargain. Unless…" His golden eyes narrowed slightly. "You're not having second thoughts, are you?"

Sam's hands trembled as he accepted the tablet, his expression twisted with guilt. He glanced at Melissa's unconscious form, then back at Wolfram. "We had an agreement… you promised you wouldn't hurt her."

"And I won't," Wolfram replied smoothly, almost mockingly. "Now do your part."

Sam swallowed hard, saying nothing more as he reluctantly turned to the vault, his fingers hesitating only briefly before beginning to access it.

"Mr. Abraham?" The voice was quiet, almost fragile, yet it carried down the corridor like a crack of thunder.

Sam stiffened, his head snapping toward the sound as Wolfram slowly turned. Izuku stood at the far end of the hallway, his black-and-gold armor catching the dim light, his wide eyes locked on Melissa's limp form in Wolfram's grasp.

"Ah… the bug boy," Wolfram said, his grin curling with amusement. "Go on, make a move. You won't get a better shot than this, kid." He shifted Melissa slightly, tilting her toward Izuku as if to emphasize the threat.

Izuku's fists trembled at his sides, anger burning behind his mask, but he didn't move. His jaw clenched tight; one wrong step could put Melissa at risk.

The vault gave a sharp beep as Sam finalized the access codes, the reinforced door unlocking with a slow, grinding hiss of machinery. The sound echoed through the corridor, heavy with finality.

The man holding Melissa never took his eyes off Izuku, his grin widening with satisfaction as the door slowly slid open. "Good. That's more like it. Now… let's get what we came for. Samuel."

Samuel Abraham stepped inside, his movements stiff, almost reluctant, as he approached a secure compartment. His fingers lingered for a brief moment over the final lock before releasing it with a soft click.

Inside sat a sleek, ominous-looking device. Its dark metal caught the dim corridor lights, glinting like polished obsidian, while the crimson jewel at its center pulsed faintly, almost taunting him with its sheen. Samuel's hands trembled slightly as he lifted it from its resting place, the weight of what he was doing seeming to settle on his shoulders.

He stepped back into the corridor, cradling the device carefully before presenting it to the waiting man.

Izuku's voice cut through the tense silence, his tone sharp, edged with accusation. "All For One wants that badly, huh?"

The man chuckled darkly, shifting Melissa in his grip while taking the device with his free hand, his eyes gleaming with greed. "All For One?" He scoffed. "He could choke on dust for all I care. This beauty's going to whoever pays the most."

Sam's voice cracked as he took a tentative step forward. "Now, Wolfram… please, give Melissa to me."

Wolfram's gaze slid to him with lazy disinterest, his grin hardening into something cold. "I said I wouldn't hurt her, and I won't… but using her as leverage? That's a different story." His golden eyes narrowed, voice dropping to a dangerous edge.

Sam opened his mouth to respond, but Wolfram's fingers twitched ever so slightly. Sam's body jerked violently, his eyes widening in horror as if some unseen force gripped him from within. A strangled gasp escaped his throat, and blood trickled from his lips before he collapsed lifelessly to the floor.

Izuku's eyes widened behind his mask. "Mr. Abraham…!"

Wolfram turned his attention back to him, completely unfazed, lifting Melissa slightly as if to taunt him, her unconscious form dangling in his grip. "I'll be taking my leave now. She's my one-way ticket off this island—a chopper should be here for me any second."

Izuku's fists tightened, anger surging through him like a living thing. It felt as though something ancient and primal stirred deep within, answering his desperation, feeding on his drive to save Melissa. His body moved almost on its own, guided by instinct, as his hand shot toward the left module of his belt.

With a mechanical click, his armor shifted, plates unlocking and rearranging. The black deepened to the ominous hue of storm clouds, while gold trim sharpened into sleek, aerodynamic fins along his forearms and shins. His hands and feet reformed into clawed gauntlets and greaves, imbued with the raw force of a swirling gale. The visor flared to life with a crackling, electric cerulean glow, and the golden horns on his helmet stretched back, swept into an aggressive curve. A low, resonant hum built within his core, rising into a roaring crescendo as the transformation completed.

An explosive burst of wind tore through the corridor, whipping debris into a vortex as Izuku stood transformed, radiating the untamed power of a raging storm.

Wolfram arched an intrigued brow, his grin returning. "So the boy from the Sports Festival does have more tricks. And what's this supposed to do, huh? Blow me away?"

Izuku didn't answer. Guided by instinct, he took one sharp step—and in an instant, he was at Wolfram's side, moving so fast the man barely had time to react. Izuku wrenched Melissa from his grasp and vanished back into the swirling wind before Wolfram could grab hold again. His eyes widened slightly in genuine shock at the sudden burst of speed, but Izuku didn't linger to see it. Clutching Melissa securely, he bolted back down the corridor, the storm still howling around him as he raced toward the control room. He had to get her to David and Toshinori—there was no time to waste.

Wolfram exhaled through his nose, irritation flickering across his features before twisting back into a cold smile. "Tch. Fine. I already got what I came for." Adjusting the device in his hand, he turned sharply toward the opposite hall.

Back at the reception hall, Graviel set his utensils neatly on the table, his expression as unreadable as ever. "The food was good," he remarked simply, as if commenting on the weather. Standing, he dusted off his hands and glanced toward the gathered U.A. staff. "It was nice meeting you all. Till next time."

No one responded. The staff stood rigid, unease thick in the air; some exchanged wary glances, others subtly tensed as if bracing for something, but no one dared to speak.

Except for Nezu.

The principal tilted his head slightly, perched atop Vlad King's shoulder, his gaze sharp and unwavering. "Before you go, I have to ask—are you a threat to U.A. and its students?"

Graviel's golden eyes shifted to him, and instantly the room seemed to grow heavier, the pressure of his gaze alone enough to make several staff members stiffen further. A few instinctively looked away. "Kagutsuchi already told you—we can't kill mortals."

Nezu's whiskers twitched, but his stare didn't falter. "Yes, but killing and hurting are two very different things."

Graviel held his gaze for a long, tense moment. "Then I'll try not to leave too much of a mess," he said finally, his calm tone carrying a subtle, unnerving edge.

Turning, he started toward the exit but glanced at Kagutsuchi on his way out. "Our annual meeting—don't forget."

Kagutsuchi waved him off lazily, not even looking up from his plate. "Yeah, yeah."

Izuku burst into the control room, the storm-like energy fading around him as he skidded to a stop. His gaze swept the room, immediately catching on the crumpled Nomu at the far end—its broken, twisted body a grim reminder of the battle that had just taken place.

Toshinori turned sharply at the sound, his eyes narrowing as they took in the unfamiliar storm-colored armor. "Midoriya…?" he asked, voice tentative.

Izuku gave a short nod, his voice firm but carrying the weight of urgency. "It's me."

David rushed forward, his eyes widening the instant he saw Melissa in Izuku's arms. He took her carefully, his hands steady but his face etched with worry. "Melissa…!" His tone softened, but his expression darkened as he looked back at Izuku, suspicion and dread flickering in his eyes. "Sam…?"

Izuku lowered his head slightly, his voice quiet and heavy. "I'm sorry."

David's shoulders sagged as his eyes closed, shaking his head slowly. The grief was clear in his voice when he spoke, low and strained. "Sam… I… I can't believe he…" His words trailed off, weighted with disappointment.

Izuku straightened, taking a steadying breath before glancing at Toshinori. "Wolfram's escaping. There's a chopper coming to pick him up."

Toshinori's jaw tightened, determination hardening his features. "Then we stop him. The two of us."

Izuku felt his heart pound in his chest, his resolve reigniting. "Right!"

David carefully rested Melissa on an intact sofa, brushing a hand over her forehead before turning back to the console. His hands curled into fists as he sat down, his face set with focus. "I'll stay here. If I can get into the island's defense systems, I might be able to keep that chopper from taking off."

Toshinori gave him a firm nod before turning to Izuku, his voice steady. "Let's move."

Without another word, both launched themselves toward the exit, every step fueled by the resolve to stop Wolfram before he could escape with the device.

The helicopter's rotors thundered against the night sky as Wolfram climbed aboard, clutching the Quirk Amplification Device in his hands. The briefcase containing I-Island's most dangerous technology sat beside him as the aircraft began to lift off from the landing platform.

"Finally," Wolfram muttered, his eyes gleaming as he stared at the device. "I-Island's greatest treasure. With this, I'll reshape this world of false heroes!"

The helicopter rose into the dark sky, victory seemingly within Wolfram's grasp—until two figures burst through the access door onto the platform below.

"WOLFRAM!" Toshinori's voice boomed across the night, his muscular frame radiating the unmistakable energy of One For All. Beside him, Izuku stood in his Storm Form, the teal and gold armor gleaming under the helicopter's searchlights. The segmented carapace, like insect chitin but flowing like compressed wind, moved with every breath as golden markings pulsed faintly across his chest and arms.

Wolfram's eyes widened in shock, then narrowed with fury as he clutched the device tighter. "All Might! And the boy... How did you—"

"It's over, Wolfram!" Toshinori declared, One For All crackling around his fists. "Release the device and surrender!"

The villain's laugh echoed from the helicopter above, harsh and grating. "You're too late! I'm already airborne! There's nothing you can do to stop me now!"

But Izuku was already moving. His enhanced perception analyzed the helicopter's trajectory, the wind patterns, the optimal angle of attack. Time seemed to slow as his Storm Form processed the tactical situation at superhuman speed.

"All Might," Izuku called out, his voice cutting through the rotor noise. "I can get us up there, but we'll need perfect timing!"

Toshinori nodded without hesitation. "I trust you, my boy. What's the plan?"

Izuku's armor plates began to shift, optimizing for maximum aerodynamics. Wind swirled around both heroes as he prepared his aerokinesis. "I'm going to launch us both. When we hit the helicopter, you take Wolfram—I'll handle the pilot and try to bring us down safely!"

"Understood!"

The chitinous plates of Izuku's Storm Form channeled massive amounts of compressed air beneath them, creating a launching system more powerful than any spring or catapult. The golden markings across his armor blazed brilliantly as he reached maximum output.

"NOW!"

Both heroes shot into the sky like rockets, Izuku's precise wind control guiding their trajectory directly toward the helicopter. The aircraft's pilot barely had time to react before two figures crashed through the cabin.

Toshinori landed with tremendous force, his presence immediately filling the cramped space. Wolfram scrambled backward, still clutching the device protectively.

"Give it up, Wolfram!" Toshinori commanded, One For All energy crackling around him. "There's nowhere left to run!"

Meanwhile, Izuku had landed near the cockpit, his Storm Form's enhanced speed allowing him to subdue the pilot before the man could draw a weapon. "Set us down on the platform, now!" he ordered.

But Wolfram's eyes blazed with desperate fury. "You think you've won?" he snarled, raising the Quirk Amplification Device above his head. "I'd rather die than let you stop me!"

Before either hero could react, Wolfram slammed the device against his skull. The technology immediately began to integrate with his body, red veins of energy spider-webbing across his skin as his steel Quirk was amplified beyond any natural limit.

"No!" Toshinori lunged forward, but it was too late.

Wolfram's body began to expand rapidly, steel flowing across his form like living metal. The helicopter shuddered as his growing mass caused the aircraft to list dangerously to one side.

"Now you'll see what perfected steel can do!" Wolfram roared, his voice already becoming distorted as metal consumed his throat. His massive form was tearing the helicopter apart from the inside.

"The helicopter's breaking up!" Izuku shouted over the alarms and groaning metal. "We need to get back to the platform!"

Toshinori grabbed the still-transforming Wolfram with both hands, One For All surging through his body. "Then we're taking you with us!" With a tremendous heave, he hurled both himself and the steel villain out of the disintegrating helicopter.

Izuku was right behind them, using his aerokinesis to control their descent. Air currents swirled around the three falling figures as he fought to slow their fall and guide them toward the landing platform below.

They crashed onto the metallic platform with tremendous force, the impact sending shockwaves through the entire structure. Wolfram hit first, his still-expanding steel form cratering the metal surface, followed by Toshinori who landed in a perfect superhero crouch. Izuku touched down last, his Storm Form's armor plates adjusting to absorb the landing impact.

Above them, the pilotless helicopter spun out of control before crashing into the island far below, a pillar of flame and smoke rising from where it struck the ground.

By the time the three had landed, Wolfram's transformation was complete. What had once been a man was now a towering nightmare of living steel—his body expanded into a grotesque fusion of organic flesh and metallic armor, each limb thick as a tree trunk and gleaming with razor-sharp edges. The Quirk Amplification Device was now fused completely to his skull, pulsing with ominous crimson light.

"Now it's just us," Toshinori said, rising to his full height as One For All energy crackled around him.

Wolfram pulled himself out of the crater, his massive steel form gleaming in the platform's emergency lighting. "Perfect," he growled, his voice now completely distorted by the metal. "Now I can crush you both without worrying about escaping!"

The platform groaned under his weight as Wolfram slammed both massive fists into the metal surface. Instantly, the steel beneath their feet began to shift and rise. Spikes erupted around the heroes like a deadly forest, each one thick as a lamppost and sharp enough to pierce concrete.

Izuku moved first, his enhanced speed turning him into a blur of teal and gold. The chitinous plates of his Storm Form flexed naturally as he weaved between the rising spikes with impossible agility, his heightened perception allowing him to read their growth patterns before they fully formed. Air jets hissed from strategic points along his armor, letting him redirect momentum mid-step and change directions in ways that defied normal physics.

Toshinori channeled One For All into his legs and leaped high, avoiding a cluster of spikes. But Wolfram was ready—steel tendrils shot from the platform like striking serpents, seeking to bind the Symbol of Peace mid-air.

"All Might!" Izuku called out, already moving. He compressed the air around him and released it in a focused burst, the pressure wave slamming into the tendrils and deflecting them just enough for Toshinori to land safely.

"Thanks, Midoriya!" Toshinori replied, One For All surging through his body. "His control is absolute—he's turned the entire platform into a weapon!"

Wolfram pressed his advantage, reshaping the battlefield with every gesture. Walls of steel rose and fell in crushing waves, trying to separate the two heroes. The platform became a maze of death, constantly shifting and adapting.

But the duo was adapting too. Toshinori's One For All-enhanced strength smashed through steel barriers like paper, while Izuku's Storm Form allowed him to sense air displacement through his armor's specialized plates, feeling the movement caused by each rising wall before it fully formed. The golden markings on his chest pulsed brighter as he processed information at superhuman speeds. They moved in perfect synchronization, covering each other's blind spots.

"You're fast, boy," Wolfram snarled at Izuku, "but speed means nothing if you can't hurt me! And All Might—even the Symbol of Peace can't break perfected steel!"

To prove his point, Wolfram's torso opened like a blooming flower, revealing dozens of steel projectiles. They launched in a coordinated barrage, filling the air with deadly metal.

This was where their teamwork truly shone. Toshinori charged forward, One For All blazing around him as he deflected the larger projectiles with precise punches. Meanwhile, Izuku manipulated the air currents around the smaller ones, creating pockets of high and low pressure that curved their trajectories harmlessly away.

"DETROIT SMASH!" Toshinori roared, his One For All-enhanced fist slamming into Wolfram's chest. The impact was tremendous, sending shockwaves through the steel giant, but the amplified armor absorbed most of the damage.

Wolfram countered immediately, his massive arm sweeping toward Toshinori. But Izuku was there, using his enhanced speed to create a cushion of compressed air that absorbed the impact while launching Toshinori safely backward.

"He's too durable," Toshinori noted, One For All crackling powerfully around his fists. "Even at full strength, that amplified armor is incredibly resilient!"

Izuku accelerated to his maximum speed, his Storm Form's armor plates shifting to optimize his aerodynamics. The teal carapace gleamed as he sprinted up a rising wall of steel, his feet finding purchase on surfaces for mere milliseconds before they shifted away. His enhanced perception—time seeming to slow around him—was mapping Wolfram's defenses, the golden lines across his armor pulsing with each new piece of tactical information.

"The device!" Izuku called out as he dodged another massive fist. "It's the power source, but it's too well protected. We need to hit it with everything we have, at the same time!"

But Wolfram had heard enough. His fury reached a breaking point, and his body began to expand massively, drawing steel from the entire platform to add to his mass. He was becoming a living mountain of metal, sacrificing all mobility for absolute defensive power.

"If I can't catch you," Wolfram bellowed, his voice now echoing from multiple points across his mountainous form, "then I'll destroy everything! I'll bring this whole platform down!"

The platform began to collapse as Wolfram absorbed its structure. Chunks of metal and concrete fell away toward the island far below. Soon, there would be nowhere left to fight.

But Izuku wasn't panicking. He was thinking, his mind racing at superhuman speed as he analyzed the situation.

"All Might!" he called out, wind beginning to spiral around him in an unprecedented pattern. "He's made himself bigger, but that means his internal structure is more complex! The device is drawing more power to maintain all that mass!"

Toshinori's eyes lit up with understanding, One For All crackling more intensely around his form. "You're saying we can overload it!"

"Exactly! But we need perfect timing and maximum power!" Izuku began to move, not to attack, but to prepare. He ran circuits around Wolfram's massive form at incredible velocity, his enhanced perception mapping every surface while he did something that pushed his aerokinesis to its absolute limit.

With each circuit, Izuku was layering compressed air into a specific pattern, the specialized vents in his Storm Form's armor releasing precisely controlled bursts. His chitinous plates adjusted constantly, channeling wind currents into a three-dimensional web of pressurized air that surrounded the steel giant like an invisible launching system. Meanwhile, Toshinori was building up One For All power, energy crackling around his body as he prepared for a devastating attack.

"What are you doing, boy?" Wolfram snarled, lashing out with steel tentacles. But Izuku was ready for each attack, weaving between them while maintaining his aerial construction.

"Setting up our victory!" Izuku replied, finally skidding to a stop beside Toshinori. The two heroes now stood at the edge of what remained of the platform, the compressed air web invisible around Wolfram, waiting.

Izuku pointed to a specific spot on Wolfram's mountainous form. "There—where all the energy conduits converge near the device. We hit there, at the same time, with everything we have."

Toshinori nodded, One For All surging to incredible levels around his body. "I'm with you. But we'll only get one shot at this."

"Then we make it count," Izuku grinned, wind beginning to roar around both of them. "I'm going to use my air currents to accelerate us both beyond what either of us could manage alone. Your One For All and my speed—combined."

Understanding dawned on Toshinori's face as One For All power built to tremendous levels around him. "A double Detroit Smash... amplified by your wind."

"Exactly. Once we commit, there's no changing course. We either end this, or—"

"We end this," Toshinori said firmly, clasping Izuku's forearm. One For All energy crackled between them. "Let's show him what real heroes can do!"

The two heroes crouched side by side, Izuku's Storm Form armor gleaming as the compressed air web began to activate. Wind howled around them, but the chitinous plates of his form channeled the currents into precise vectors that would carry them directly to their target. The golden markings across his chest and arms blazed brighter as his armor's systems reached maximum output. Toshinori's One For All blazed like a star beside him, ready to be unleashed.

"Ready?" Izuku asked, his voice barely audible over the howling wind.

"Plus Ultra," Toshinori replied.

"NOW!"

The compressed air exploded outward, launching both heroes forward like bullets from a cannon. But this wasn't just raw speed—Izuku had calculated the exact trajectory, while his air currents guided them both. Simultaneously, Toshinori poured every ounce of One For All into his fist, the power blazing so brightly it was like a miniature sun.

Time seemed to freeze as they approached Wolfram's massive form. The steel giant's eyes widened as he realized what was happening, but it was far too late to defend against their combined assault.

"DOUBLE DETROIT SMASH!"

Their fists struck the convergence point simultaneously—Toshinori's One For All-enhanced punch carrying the full might of the Symbol of Peace, while Izuku's compressed air created a drilling effect that focused all that power into a single, devastating point.

The effect was catastrophic. The impact sent shockwaves through Wolfram's entire form, but more importantly, it overloaded the Quirk Amplification Device completely. The device couldn't handle the sudden surge of conflicting energies—One For All's raw power and the precise pressure from Izuku's aerokinesis created a resonance that shattered the amplification technology from within.

Arcs of electricity cascaded across the steel giant's body as the device exploded in a shower of sparks and twisted metal. Without the amplification, Wolfram's massive form began to collapse in on itself. The stolen steel fell away like water, leaving behind only the broken man at its core.

Wolfram crashed to the platform, unconscious and defeated, the device's remains smoking around his head.

Izuku and Toshinori landed hard, both heroes breathing heavily from the enormous exertion. One For All's energy gradually settled around Toshinori's form, while the golden markings on Izuku's Storm Form armor dimmed and finally went dark, the teal chitinous plates losing their lustrous sheen as the form's power depleted.

"Is it over?" Izuku asked, his Storm Form finally dissipating in wisps of fading air currents, leaving him in his torn suit.

Toshinori's muscular frame shrank back to his true form—lean but no longer skeletal, his blonde hair falling across tired but determined eyes. He managed a weary but genuine smile, looking at the broken device sparking its last. "It's over, my boy. The threat is neutralized."

In their powered-down states, both heroes finally allowed themselves to truly feel the weight of what they'd accomplished. Toshinori extended his arm, and Izuku clasped it firmly—forearm to forearm, the same gesture they'd used to launch their final attack, but now a quiet acknowledgment of their partnership and victory.

They had won, but the cost was written in every labored breath, every trembling muscle. The platform, weakened by the battle, groaned ominously beneath them but held. In the distance, the sound of approaching sirens promised that help was finally on the way.

As the golden light of dawn began to paint the twisted metal around them, both heroes knew they had given everything they had. It had been a battle that pushed them beyond their limits, but together—the Symbol of Peace with his One For All and the young hero with his Agito powers—they had not fallen.

In the growing light, Wolfram's unconscious form lay motionless among the debris—defeated, but alive. It was a victory that would resonate far beyond this single battle, a testament to what heroes could accomplish when different powers combined with perfect trust and unwavering resolve.