The morning sun streamed through the large classroom windows with deceptive normalcy, its golden rays illuminating motes of dust that danced in the air like tiny spirits. The light should have been warm and welcoming—a promise of another ordinary day at U.A. High School. Instead, it felt harsh and surreal, highlighting the stark contrast between the mundane classroom setting and the earth-shattering revelations that had shattered their understanding of reality just hours before.

Classroom 1-A had never been this quiet.

It wasn't the comfortable quiet of focused study, nor the expectant hush before an important announcement. This was the suffocating silence of collective shock—twenty-one teenage minds struggling to process information that challenged the very foundations of their worldview. The usual morning chatter was conspicuously absent. No one discussed weekend plans or complained about upcoming tests. Even Kaminari, who could usually be counted on to fill any silence with nervous energy, sat motionless at his desk, staring at his hands as if they might hold answers to questions he didn't know how to ask.

Izuku sat rigidly upright, his characteristic notebook and pen lying forgotten on his desk's surface. His emerald eyes were fixed on the whiteboard with laser intensity, but his mind was miles away, replaying the previous evening's impossible conversation on an endless loop. The gentle, almost paternal voice of their school's unassuming janitor. The casual admission of an identity that should have been impossible. The deliberate crushing of Yaoyorozu's transmitter—a gesture that somehow managed to be both considerate and terrifying in its implications.

The Archangel Michael is Kagutsuchi.

The thought circled through his consciousness like a mantra that refused to make sense, no matter how many times he examined it from different angles. Kagutsuchi—the name that had become synonymous with his own transformation, the one who had mentored him as he learned to use the Agito power, an existence beyond Quirks. Yet here was Michael, a figure whose presence in human mythology pre-dated written history, claiming that same impossible title with the casual ease of someone mentioning their lunch plans.

The implications sent tremors through Izuku's analytical mind. Had Michael been watching him all along? Guiding his development from the shadows? The memory of quiet advice delivered at precisely the right moments, of timely appearances when guidance was most needed, of that persistent feeling of benevolent observation even in his most private moments—it all took on new, overwhelming significance.

A sharp intake of breath from across the room snapped Izuku back to the present. He wasn't alone in his mental spiral. The classroom had become a gallery of shell-shocked expressions, each face reflecting a different stage of processing the impossible.

Katsuki Bakugo, typically a barely-contained explosion of energy and aggression, sat unnaturally still. His crimson eyes were fixed on some point beyond the classroom windows, his usual scowl replaced by an expression of blank incomprehension. His hands lay flat on his desk—not clenched into his characteristic fists, just... empty. For someone whose entire worldview was built on the concept of strength and the straightforward application of power, the revelation that cosmic forces had been operating in the shadows of his daily life seemed to have short-circuited his ability to process reality.

Nearby, Tenya Iida's leg bounced with a frantic, irregular rhythm beneath his desk—a nervous tic that would have been imperceptible if the classroom hadn't been so unnaturally quiet. His usually immaculate posture had devolved into a slight hunch, and his glasses reflected the morning light as his head moved in small, agitated movements. Iida, who found comfort in rules and protocols, was clearly grappling with a situation for which no manual existed.

Even Shoto Todoroki, master of emotional compartmentalization, showed signs of internal upheaval. His heterochromatic eyes stared blankly at a water bottle on his desk, which had begun to accumulate frost on one side while condensation beaded on the other. The unconscious manifestation of his Quirk—ice and fire responding to emotional turmoil he couldn't quite suppress—created a perfect metaphor for the collision between the ordinary and the divine that had upended their understanding of the world.

The tension in the room was palpable, a living thing that seemed to press against their skin. It was the silence of a group of people who desperately wanted to speak but had no idea what words could possibly be adequate for the magnitude of what they'd learned.

Finally, mercifully, someone found the courage to break the oppressive quiet.

"Hey..." Ochako's voice was barely above a whisper, trembling with uncertainty that made her usual bright confidence seem like a memory from another lifetime. She twisted her hands in her lap, gathering courage. "Do you... do you guys think it's actually true? I mean, really, truly, actually happening? Not just some... I don't know, elaborate joke?"

The question hung in the air like a lifeline thrown to drowning swimmers. Several heads turned toward her, grateful for any excuse to acknowledge the shared crisis rather than suffer alone with their spiraling thoughts.

Bakugo's head snapped around from the window with mechanical precision, his expression shifting from blank incomprehension to familiar fury—though even his anger seemed muted, filtered through layers of disbelief.

"What the hell else would it be, Round Face?!" The words exploded from him, but there was something hollow beneath the aggression, like shouting into a void. "You think someone's running some kind of sick prank on us? 'Oh hey, surprise! Your janitor's actually a fucking biblical figure, hope that doesn't screw with your worldview too much!'"

His voice cracked slightly on the last words, revealing the fear beneath his bluster. Bakugo dealt with challenges by meeting them head-on, with explosive force and unwavering confidence. But how do you fight a revelation? How do you explode your way out of having your entire understanding of reality restructured?

"The logistics alone make deception highly improbable," Iida announced, his voice carrying its usual formal precision despite the circumstances. His hands moved in sharp, agitated gestures as he spoke, the mechanical chopping motions more frantic than usual. "I have already conducted a thorough review of all available documentation during my sleepless evening. The U.A. Student Handbook, the complete faculty directory, official Hero Commission statutes regarding supernatural phenomena, historical precedents for divine intervention in educational settings..."

His movements became more frantic with each item listed, his voice rising with barely contained panic.

"There is absolutely no established protocol for discovering that a member of the school maintenance staff is a mythological figure of cosmic significance! The proper course of action is entirely unclear! How does one file an incident report for this?"

The admission seemed to pain him physically. Iida's entire worldview was built on the premise that there were correct procedures for every situation, that proper preparation and adherence to established protocols could handle any challenge. The idea that he had encountered something truly unprecedented was visibly distressing.

"Look," Todoroki said with that characteristic calm that somehow made everything he said sound more ominous, his mismatched eyes still fixed on his frost-covered water bottle. "We all heard the same conversation, didn't we? Unless Yaoyorozu's transmitter was somehow malfunctioning, or we all experienced some form of collective auditory hallucination..."

He finally looked up, meeting their eyes with unsettling directness.

"We have to accept that we may have received significantly more information than we initially bargained for when we decided to eavesdrop on our janitor's dinner date."

His measured tone was like a cold breeze in the heated atmosphere, forcing them all to confront the logical conclusion they'd been avoiding. The evidence was incontrovertible. They had heard what they had heard. The impossible had to be accepted as fact.

Silence descended again, heavier than before. The weight of acknowledgment settled over them like a shroud.

From his corner seat, Mineta's voice emerged as a nervous squeak that seemed to come from somewhere deep in his chest. "Did anyone else notice that our group chat just... died after that? Like, completely flatlined?"

His usual perverted bravado was nowhere to be found, replaced by genuine anxiety that made him seem younger, more vulnerable.

"I tried posting a meme around midnight to, you know, lighten the mood or whatever. Then I tried again at two AM. Then four. But nobody responded. Not even an emoji reaction. It's like we all just... broke. Like our brains collectively blue-screened."

The observation was uncomfortably accurate. Their usual digital lifeline—the constant stream of messages, jokes, complaints, and random observations that normally connected them even when physically apart—had gone completely silent. Twenty-one teenagers, all processing the same impossible information, and none of them had found words adequate to share their thoughts.

All eyes gradually turned toward Momo Yaoyorozu, who sat at her desk like a statue carved from pale marble. Her usually perfect posture had collapsed into a slight forward lean, her dark hair falling in curtains around her face. Her hands were clenched into tight fists in her lap, knuckles white with tension. Her lips moved silently, forming words that never quite emerged, as if she were having an internal argument with herself.

"Yaoyorozu?" Izuku's voice was soft, gentle, filled with the kind of concern that made him such a natural leader. He leaned forward slightly in his seat. "Are you okay? You look..."

She flinched as if his voice had been a physical blow, her head snapping up to reveal wide, frightened eyes. The confident, analytical Momo they all knew seemed to have vanished, replaced by someone who looked haunted.

"The other voice," she began, her words coming out in a rush as if she needed to expel them before she lost her nerve. "The woman who interrupted their dinner. The one that Kagutsuchi—"

She stumbled over the name, then forced herself to continue with visible effort.

"—the one that Michael identified as Selaphiel..."

She paused, swallowing hard, her face growing even paler. "I think... no, I'm certain... I know who that was."

The temperature in the room seemed to drop several degrees. Every face turned toward her with expressions of growing dread, as if they could sense that whatever she was about to say would make their situation exponentially worse.

"My parents," she continued, her voice barely above a whisper, each word carefully measured as if speaking too quickly might make the truth more real. "They have extensive business dealings with international partners. High-level corporate relationships, joint ventures, strategic partnerships with individuals of... significant influence."

She took a shaky breath.

"There's this couple from Switzerland. They've been to our house several times for private dinners, strategic planning sessions. Always very polite, very cultured. The woman has this particular way of speaking, very precise, almost musical..."

Her voice trailed off, then strengthened with terrible certainty.

"The woman's voice last night. I recognized it immediately. It was definitely her. Mrs. Morgenstern."

The words fell into the silence like stones into still water, creating ripples of implication that spread through the classroom. What had seemed like a distant cosmic drama—powerful beings having relationship conflicts in expensive restaurants—suddenly became intensely, terrifyingly personal.

Mina Ashido, usually the embodiment of vibrant energy, had gone completely still. When she spoke, her voice was barely recognizable—thin, shaky, stripped of all her usual enthusiasm.

"H-Her... husband..." The words came out in stuttering fragments, as if her mind was rebelling against forming them. "Y-You guys all heard last night, right? Who... who this Selaphiel lady was having dinner with, right? What name she used?"

The question hung in the air like a sword suspended over their heads. They had all heard. They all understood the implications. Selaphiel's dinner companion, the figure she addressed with casual intimacy, the being whose very name carried millennia of weight and opposition to everything divine and holy.

"She called him..." Kaminari's voice was barely audible, his usual confident demeanor completely shattered. "She called him Lucifer."

The silence that followed wasn't just quiet—it was the sound of twenty-one young minds simultaneously grappling with the realization that the mythical had become horrifyingly personal. Somewhere in Japan, possibly in their very city, figures whose names had shaped human understanding of good and evil were conducting business with the parents of their classmate.

The morning sun continued to stream through the windows, illuminating a classroom where childhood had died and been replaced by the terrible knowledge that the world was far more complex, dangerous, and impossible than any of them had ever imagined.

The U.A. faculty lounge buzzed with its usual morning energy—a comfortable chaos of coffee brewing, papers rustling, and the low hum of professional educators preparing for another day of shaping young minds. The familiar ritual of morning preparation continued unchanged: Aizawa curled in his sleeping bag in the corner like some sort of professional caterpillar, Recovery Girl organizing her medical supplies with practiced efficiency, and Cementoss reviewing architectural plans for the day's training exercises.

It was aggressively, almost insultingly normal.

Nemuri Kayama sat at her usual spot near the window, nursing a cup of coffee that had long since gone cold. Her perfectly applied makeup couldn't quite hide the faint shadows beneath her eyes—evidence of a sleepless night spent staring at her ceiling, replaying impossible conversations and even more impossible revelations. Every time she'd closed her eyes, she'd seen golden irises reflecting candlelight, heard that warm voice casually discussing the fall of angels and the weight of eternal duty.

She'd kissed the Archangel Michael goodnight.

The thought sent another wave of surreal disbelief through her system. How exactly did one process that information? Was there a support group for women who'd accidentally started dating biblical figures? Hi, my name is Nemuri, and my romantic interest is a cosmic enforcer who's been alive since before human civilization developed agriculture.

"Morning, gorgeous!" Hizashi Yamada's voice cut through her spiraling thoughts like a sonic boom, his trademark enthusiasm cranked up to eleven despite the early hour. He slid into the chair across from her with characteristic flair, nearly knocking over his own coffee in the process.

"So! How did it go? The big date with our mysterious janitor? I've been dying to know since yesterday! Did he finally reveal the secret behind his impossible maintenance skills?"

Nemuri nearly choked on her cold coffee. She'd forgotten that half the faculty had been present when she'd first asked Kagutsuchi out, which meant they'd all been waiting for the aftermath report.

"The post-date glow is absolutely unmistakable!" Present Mic continued, practically bouncing in his chair as he gestured wildly. "You're looking particularly radiant this morning, which means either it went fantastically well, or you discovered something so mind-blowing you're still processing it! Come on, which is it?"

If only you knew, her traitorous mind supplied. How was she supposed to explain that yes, she'd had dinner with someone last night, but that someone happened to be an ancient divine being who'd casually mentioned that timelines could get rejected if they didn't follow the correct history?

"You're imagining things, Mic," she said weakly, but she could feel heat creeping up her neck.

Thirteen, who had been quietly grading papers at a nearby table, looked up with what might have been amusement behind her mask. "Midnight-san does seem... different this morning. More subdued than usual. Less likely to make inappropriate comments about the male students' hero costumes."

"Subdued?" Vlad King glanced over from where he was reviewing student files, his eyebrows raised in genuine surprise. "Our resident R-rated hero? That's definitely newsworthy. What did this man do to you, Kayama?"

"I'm not subdued!" Nemuri protested, but even to her own ears, it sounded halfhearted. The truth was, she felt like she was walking through a dream—or possibly a very elaborate nightmare. Every mundane detail of the faculty lounge seemed surreal when viewed through the lens of her new reality.

Present Mic's eyes lit up with the predatory gleam of someone who'd scented gossip. He leaned forward conspiratorially, lowering his voice to what he probably thought was a whisper but was actually just slightly less deafening than usual.

"Ooh, mysterious AND defensive! This is getting juicy! Come on, give us details! How was dinner with our enigmatic janitor? Please tell me he's as mysteriously charming one-on-one as he is when he's somehow fixing impossible maintenance problems with nothing but a stern look!"

Try an archangel who's been maintaining cosmic balance since before our species learned to make fire, she thought wildly. Someone whose day job involves making sure reality doesn't unravel, and whose idea of casual dinner conversation includes explaining the theological implications of free will.

"It was just dinner, Mic," she said instead, aiming for casual dismissal while desperately hoping her voice didn't crack. "Nothing worth discussing."

"JUST dinner?!" Hizashi's voice rose dangerously, causing several faculty members to wince. "Nemuri Kayama doesn't do 'just dinner' with anyone, let alone the most mysterious man at U.A.! You do elaborate romantic campaigns! Strategic seduction! Calculated charm offensives!"

He gestured dramatically, nearly knocking over a stack of papers.

"And with someone as enigmatic as Kagutsuchi? There had to be revelations! Confessions! At minimum, you must have learned something about why he can apparently commune with the school's infrastructure!"

"I do need you to lower your voice before you wake the dead," Aizawa's muffled voice emerged from the yellow cocoon, sounding more annoyed than usual. "Some of us are trying to achieve a few more minutes of unconsciousness before dealing with whatever fresh crisis the students have cooked up today."

Present Mic immediately dropped his volume by approximately two decibels, which for him was practically whispering.

"Sorry, sorry! But seriously, Nemuri, details! Our resident cosmic janitor, the fancy restaurant—we need the full report! Did he finally explain how he fixed the air conditioning system by talking to it?"

Nemuri felt panic flutter in her chest like a trapped bird. How could she possibly explain the truth? That their enigmatic janitor—the man they'd all learned to work around, the cosmic wildcard who'd quietly terrified half the faculty while somehow becoming indispensable—was actually Michael, warrior of heaven, enforcer of divine will, and apparently excellent company for dinner conversation about the nature of existence?

"There's more to him than meets the eye," she said defensively, which was possibly the understatement of several millennia.

"More to him?" Vlad King had looked up from his papers, genuine curiosity replacing his usual stern expression. "Nemuri, that man terrifies half the faculty on a good day. He shows up in places he shouldn't be able to reach, he fixes things that should be impossible to fix, and last month I swear I saw him have a conversation with a shadow that talked back."

If only you knew, she thought desperately. Our mysterious janitor is actually the Archangel Michael, and somewhere in this city his estranged brother—who happens to be Satan—is probably having morning coffee with his wife while they plan their next business venture.

"And he fixed the elevator on the seventh floor," Cementoss added thoughtfully, his stone features somehow managing to convey bewilderment, "by staring at it disapprovingly until it started working again. I've never seen mechanical components look ashamed before."

"Don't forget the incident with the security system," Recovery Girl chimed in with a knowing smile that suggested she suspected more than she was letting on. "Three different technicians couldn't figure out why it kept malfunctioning, but one conversation with Kagutsuchi and suddenly it's running better than the day it was installed. Almost like he convinced it to behave."

Nemuri felt her panic rising. They were describing his casual reality maintenance as if it were quirky janitorial skills, completely unaware they were witnessing cosmic intervention in action.

"So our resident R-rated hero," Present Mic said with growing delight, settling back in his chair like he was preparing for a long story, "has fallen for the school's most enigmatic employee. The same man who somehow always knows exactly what needs fixing before anyone reports it broken. The guy who speaks to the building's infrastructure like it's a personal friend."

Because he's maintaining the fundamental laws of physics that keep this place from collapsing into interdimensional chaos, her mind supplied unhelpfully.

"It's not like that," she protested weakly, but her voice lacked conviction. "He's just... attentive to details. Very... observant."

"Details like what?" Hizashi leaned forward conspiratorially, his eyes sparkling with mischief. "Come on, Nemuri! You've been keeping us in suspense since yesterday! What's he like when he's not being mysteriously competent at impossible tasks? Does he explain his methods? Share his secrets?"

The image of Kagutsuchi—Michael—sharing millennia-old stories over expensive sushi flashed through her mind. How could she possibly explain that their enigmatic janitor had revealed himself to be one of the foundational figures of human mythology, complete with family drama that literally shaped the concept of good and evil?

"He's... very knowledgeable about history," she said carefully, choosing each word like she was defusing a bomb. "He has interesting perspectives on... classical literature. And theology."

Like the fact that he lived through most of it personally and has strong opinions about how humans interpreted divine interventions.

"Ooh, an intellectual!" Present Mic rubbed his hands together gleefully, his eyes lighting up with romantic possibilities. "I love it! Dark, mysterious, surprisingly cultured—very romantic hero novel! So, are you bringing him to the next faculty party? I'm dying to see him in a social setting!"

The thought of Kagutsuchi at a faculty party nearly made her laugh hysterically. Everyone, I'm sure you already know my boyfriend. You know him as our janitor, but he's actually the Archangel Michael. Please don't mention the time you complained about him reorganizing the supply closets—turns out he was probably preventing reality from unraveling.

"It's still very new," she managed, her voice slightly strained. "We're... taking things slowly. Getting to know each other."

"Slowly?" Present Mic looked genuinely confused, his eyebrows climbing toward his hairline. "Nemuri Kayama taking things slowly? Are we talking about the same woman who once had three pro heroes competing for her attention at a single charity gala?"

"That was different," she said, which was the absolute truth. This was so different from anything in her previous experience that she didn't even have vocabulary for it. How do you date someone who predates human civilization?

From his corner, Aizawa's voice emerged with dry amusement. "So, Kagutsuchi has managed what dozens of pro heroes couldn't—actually slowing down Midnight's romantic timeline. I'm almost impressed. Should we be concerned about his methods?"

"It's not that impossible, Aizawa!" she protested, but there was no real heat in it.

"Impossible or not," Present Mic continued, leaning back in his chair with a thoughtful expression, "still doesn't dismiss the fact that Kagutsuchi can be really... unsettling at times. No offense, Nemuri, but the man has this way of looking at you like he can see straight through to your soul."

You have no idea how literally accurate that probably is, Mic, her mind supplied helpfully.

Before she could even attempt to steer the conversation toward safer territory, the faculty lounge door opened with its usual soft whisper. Kagutsuchi entered with his characteristic quiet efficiency, pushing his maintenance cart with the same calm precision that had always marked his movements. His golden eyes swept the room with practiced casualness, and Nemuri felt her heart perform some sort of complicated gymnastics routine in her chest.

There he was—the man who'd held her hand across a candlelit table, who'd shared impossible truths with devastating honesty, who'd kissed her goodnight with the tenderness of someone who'd forgotten what gentle affection felt like. And he looked so perfectly, aggressively normal in his janitor's uniform that for a moment she wondered if the previous evening had been an elaborate dream.

"Morning, everyone," he said in that familiar warm voice that had whispered confessions of cosmic loneliness against her ear. "Hope you're all having a productive start to the day."

The casual greeting hit Nemuri like a physical blow. How could he sound so ordinary? How could he make mundane small talk when they both knew who and what he really was?

Present Mic, oblivious to the significance of the moment but very aware of the romantic implications, gave his usual energetic wave with extra enthusiasm.

"Well, well, well! Good morning, Kagutsuchi! Funny thing—we were just talking about you! Specifically about your dinner date with our dear Nemuri here!"

The maintenance cart paused for just a fraction of a second. Kagutsuchi's golden eyes found Nemuri's across the room, and she saw something flicker in those ancient depths—amusement mixed with what might have been sympathy for her obvious distress.

"Is that so?" he said mildly, resuming his methodical routine with the same unhurried grace he always displayed. "I hope it was nothing too scandalous."

"Oh, it was VERY scandalous!" Present Mic practically vibrated with gossip-induced excitement, his voice rising again. "Our dear Nemuri was just telling us all about her mysterious evening! How did it go, by the way? She's being awfully coy about the details!"

Instead of the awkwardness she expected, Kagutsuchi simply continued his cleaning routine, though Nemuri caught the slight upturn of his lips that suggested he was far more amused than concerned.

"Well," he said conversationally, his tone carrying layers of meaning his audience couldn't possibly grasp, "that would explain why she looked so radiant this morning. Some conversations have a way of... illuminating one's perspective."

The casual compliment, delivered with the same tone he might use to comment on the weather, sent heat flooding through Nemuri's cheeks. Around the faculty lounge, she could practically hear her colleagues' minds exploding with questions.

"So it's true?" Vlad King leaned forward with genuine curiosity, his stern expression softening slightly. "You two are actually... involved? This isn't just Yamada's overactive imagination?"

"We had dinner," Kagutsuchi confirmed, and there was something in his tone that suggested layers of meaning his audience couldn't possibly grasp. "It was... enlightening. We discovered we have more in common than either of us initially realized."

Enlightening, Nemuri thought with near-hysteria. That's one way to describe learning that your date is a biblical figure with a complicated relationship with his fallen brother.

"Just dinner?" Present Mic pressed, leaning forward like a bloodhound on a scent. "Come on, you two are being awfully coy about this! Details, people! Spill the romantic tea!"

Kagutsuchi's smile became more pronounced, and when he spoke, his voice carried a warmth that made Nemuri's stomach flutter in ways that had nothing to do with fear.

"Some things are better experienced than explained, Yamada-san," he said, and the way his golden eyes found Nemuri's across the room made her remember the gentle pressure of his hand in hers, the patient way he'd answered her impossible questions.

"Experienced how?" Hizashi demanded, but Kagutsuchi was already moving toward the door, his cleaning routine apparently complete.

"Have a good day, everyone," he said with that same mild pleasantness, though when he passed Nemuri's chair, he paused just long enough to murmur quietly, "We should continue our conversation soon, Nemuri. There's still so much to discuss."

The loaded words, spoken quietly enough that only she could hear them, made her shiver. There was indeed much to discuss—like how they were supposed to navigate a relationship when one of them was an eternal divine enforcer and the other was a mortal hero who'd just learned that reality was far more complex and dangerous than she'd ever imagined.

As the door closed behind him, the faculty lounge erupted in excited chatter.

"Okay," Present Mic said, his eyes bright with vindicated curiosity and romantic scheming, "that was the most romantically charged janitorial interaction I've ever witnessed. The tension! The subtext! The mysterious implications! There's definitely something happening here!"

"And did you notice," Thirteen added thoughtfully, her masked head tilting slightly, "he wasn't even flustered. I guess it's only natural when it comes to someone like him."

I wish that level of cosmic awareness wasn't a completely accurate assessment, Nemuri thought desperately. "You're all reading too much into it," she said weakly, but she could feel her carefully constructed facade crumbling under the combined weight of their curiosity and her own impossible secret.

Izuku's legs felt like lead as he walked through the empty corridor. He had needed to escape the suffocating quiet of the classroom, to get away from the silent judgment of his peers as they all processed the same terrifying information. The excuse of needing to use the restroom had been flimsy, but his teachers, apparently lost in their own faculty lounge dramas, had barely noticed him slip out.

The hallway was a welcome relief—a long, empty corridor of beige-painted walls and linoleum floors that squeaked softly under his shoes. It was quiet. It was blessedly, completely normal. Just fluorescent lights humming overhead and the distant sound of classes in session behind closed doors.

The Archangel Michael. The thought still haunted his every step, each footfall echoing the rhythm of his racing heart. It was one thing to know that the person who had been guiding him through his trials as an Agito was an actual divine being. It was another entirely to learn that this same divine being was the quiet, unassuming man who had been a constant, steady presence in the background of their lives for months.

How many times had Kagutsuchi simply appeared when needed? How many perfectly timed interventions had they dismissed as coincidence? The more Izuku thought about it, the more obvious it became—and the more terrifying the implications grew.

A sudden, soft rattle of wheels echoed down the hallway.

Izuku froze mid-step, his heart leaping into his throat. He looked up, his eyes widening as recognition hit him like a physical blow. Coming toward him from the other end of the corridor was Kagutsuchi, pushing his maintenance cart with the same calm, unhurried pace he always used. He wore the same plain janitor's uniform, his hands resting on the cart handle with an air of complete and total normalcy.

The janitor's cart was a perfect still life of mundane existence: a broom with well-worn bristles, a mop with frayed strings, a yellow bucket marked with scuff marks, and a bottle of all-purpose cleaner that had seen better days. It was aggressively, almost mockingly ordinary—and yet it was being pushed by a being whose existence was anything but.

This is it, Izuku's mind screamed, suddenly hyper-aware that he was utterly alone in the hall with the man who had been serving as his mentor for months. The man who was apparently one of the most powerful beings in existence, casually disguised as a maintenance worker.

Kagutsuchi seemed to notice him then, and the change in his demeanor was subtle but unmistakable. The janitor's lips, which had been set in a neutral line, curled into a gentle, knowing smile that somehow managed to be both reassuring and terrifying. His golden eyes—how had none of them ever questioned those impossible golden eyes?—met Izuku's with an intensity that sent a fresh jolt of awe and terror through him.

"Midoriya-kun," Kagutsuchi said, his voice as soft and warm as always, but now Izuku could hear the weight behind it—centuries, millennia of experience compressed into that gentle tone. The sound of it in the empty hallway felt like a personal secret, a shared intimacy that made his skin crawl with the magnitude of what he was facing.

"Just the person I was hoping to run into."

Izuku's mind went completely blank. Every carefully organized thought about Quirks and heroes and divine beings collapsed in on themselves like a house of cards in a hurricane. His analytical mind, usually his greatest asset, simply shut down under the pressure of trying to process the impossible.

How do you respond to casual conversation with an archangel? Was there etiquette for this? Should he bow? Should he run?

Kagutsuchi's smile seemed to deepen just a fraction, as if he could read every panicked thought racing through the boy's head. When he spoke again, his voice carried that same patient understanding that had guided Izuku through countless training sessions.

"I was just wondering," he continued conversationally, as if he were talking about weekend homework instead of cosmic intervention, "if you're free for a bit of training after class? We haven't had a good session in a while, and I think it's time we worked on some of the more advanced applications of your abilities."

He paused, tilting his head slightly.

"Bring Aoyama along, since we still need to work on his transformation. His progress has been... interesting."

The invitation, so casual and so simple, was too much. Izuku's brain rebooted itself with a jolt of pure panic. Training. A gentle, knowing smile. A question that held so many layers of meaning he couldn't even begin to unpack them.

This was Kagutsuchi—no, Michael—the Archangel Michael, asking him to training like it was the most normal thing in the world. Like reality-bending cosmic entities regularly offered afternoon tutoring sessions.

He needed to respond. He needed to be normal. He needed to pretend that his entire worldview hadn't been shattered less than twelve hours ago.

"Y-y-yes!" Izuku choked out, the word exploding from him in a series of staccato, choppy syllables that echoed embarrassingly in the empty hall. "I-I-I can! A-absolutely! Thank you! I mean, yes sir! I mean—"

He cut himself off before he could embarrass himself further, his face burning with mortification.

Kagutsuchi's expression shifted into something that was unmistakably fond—a gentle, approving warmth that somehow made the impossible situation feel almost normal.

"Excellent," he said simply, and there was genuine pleasure in his voice. "I'll see you then, Midoriya-kun. And try not to worry so much—you're handling this better than most would."

Without another word, he continued pushing his maintenance cart down the hallway, the soft rattling of the wheels gradually fading into the distance. Izuku was left alone in the corridor, his back pressed against the cool wall, his heart pounding in his chest like a war drum. He watched the janitor—the archangel—disappear around the corner with that same unhurried grace, leaving him alone once more with his frantic, racing thoughts.

The normal world was gone, replaced by a new reality where a simple invitation to training from the school janitor was a promise of an encounter with the divine.

The low hum of life-support machinery was the only sound in All For One's hidden chamber. The space, a stark contrast to the flamboyant chaos of their previous hideout, was a study in minimalist functionality. Sterile white walls reflected the cold LED lighting, while banks of medical monitors cast their screens' blue glow across surfaces that had never known warmth or comfort. It was a room designed for survival, not living—a perfect reflection of its primary occupant's current state.

All For One sat in a high-backed chair that was more medical apparatus than furniture, his scarred face a roadmap of past defeats. His voice, when he spoke, was a distorted, synthesized rasp that seemed to emerge from the machinery keeping him alive rather than his own throat.

Across from him, Tomura Shigaraki stood with an unnerving stillness that was perhaps more disturbing than his former manic energy. Gone were the disembodied hands that usually clung to his body like macabre accessories. He was dressed simply—a plain black shirt and dark trousers—creating a visual representation of the patience he now claimed to possess. His own hands, still scarred and chapped from years of nervous scratching, were tucked into his pockets in an odd gesture of restraint from a man who once needed to touch everything he sought to destroy.

"You've had time to rest, and I've had time to think," All For One's voice broke the oppressive silence, each word carefully modulated by the synthesizer. His head tilted slightly, an almost imperceptible gesture that somehow conveyed volumes of sardonic amusement. "I see your time in Tartarus has... changed you, Tomura."

Tomura met his gaze without flinching, his red eyes steady and focused in a way they'd never been before his imprisonment. When he finally spoke, his voice was calm and measured—a sharp departure from his former volatile outbursts.

"Deprived of my Quirk, I had no choice but to learn patience. To wait. To watch. To listen." His lips curved into something that wasn't quite a smile. "I learned that opportunities can be found even in the deepest despair, sensei. Sometimes the most valuable lessons come from losing everything you thought you needed."

All For One's chair gave a soft pneumatic hiss as he shifted slightly, the sound like a mechanical sigh. "Indeed. And those opportunities led you to four new allies in Tartarus, if I'm not mistaken. Tell me about them."

"Their loyalty is absolute," Tomura replied, his voice carrying a confidence that was entirely new. "They were lost causes before I showed them a purpose. Broken by the system, abandoned by society, left to rot in cells designed to contain monsters." His eyes gleamed with something that might have been satisfaction. "I gave them hope. More importantly, I gave them a reason to hope."

"We shall see," All For One replied, his tone flat and noncommittal. "But that is not the main topic of our discussion today. Tell me, Tomura—now that you are free, what do you intend to do about the people who put you there? All Might and the boy, Izuku Midoriya. Surely they must be at the top of your list for... retribution."

A long pause hung in the air, thick with unspoken expectations. All For One leaned forward slightly, anticipating the familiar surge of rage, the promise of violence and destruction that had always defined his protégé's responses to setbacks.

Instead, a genuine, unsettling smile appeared on Tomura's face. It was an expression of gratitude, not malice—and it was perhaps the most disturbing thing All For One had ever seen from him.

"I am grateful to them," Tomura said, his words soft but shocking in their sincerity. "Had they not arrested me after the failure of the USJ attack, I would never have gained such valuable intelligence about Tartarus' infrastructure and security protocols. More importantly, I would never have been given the opportunity to find the people I did."

He paused, his smile widening slightly.

"The League of Villains is stronger now because of their intervention, sensei. Sometimes defeat is just victory in a different form."

All For One's head tilted again, but this time there was something calculating in the gesture. "I shall reserve judgment on your new recruits until they can prove their worth in the field. For now, there are more pressing matters that require your attention."

The smile on Tomura's face didn't fade, but it shifted subtly—becoming more focused, more attentive.

"You are to go to Giran," All For One continued, his synthesized voice taking on a tone of command. "There have been... whispers in the criminal underworld. Reports of a new player making moves in the black market, one that could potentially make it difficult for us to secure the resources we need for our operations."

"Someone's muscling in on our territory?" Tomura asked, his voice carrying interest rather than immediate anger. "What kind of resources are we talking about?"

"That," All For One said with finality, "is what you're going to find out. This must be investigated thoroughly before we can determine the appropriate response."

Tomura's posture shifted slightly, and for a moment his old self flickered through—the young man who had always defaulted to violence as a solution.

"Should I eliminate them?" he asked, his tone almost casual. "Send a message that certain markets are off-limits?"

"That is not the purpose of this mission," All For One said sharply, his voice carrying a warning that made the medical equipment seem to hum more ominously. "This is another test, Tomura. A test of your newfound patience and resourcefulness. You will observe. You will gather intelligence. You will report back to me with comprehensive information."

He leaned forward slightly, the machinery around him whirring in response.

"No more, no less. Do you understand?"

Tomura let out a quiet sigh, but the fire in his red eyes remained steady and controlled. "Understood, sensei. Intelligence gathering only. No direct action without your approval."

"Good. You are dismissed."

Tomura nodded once and turned to leave, his footsteps silent on the polished floor. The door hissed shut behind him with mechanical finality, leaving All For One alone in his sterile chamber.

For a long moment, the only sounds were the steady beeping of monitors and the whisper of air recyclers. Then, so quietly it was almost lost among the mechanical noise, All For One spoke to the empty room.

"Aoyama may already have been compromised, but it doesn't matter. Pawns can always be replaced... and sometimes the most useful pieces are the ones that don't know they're still on the board."

The wind on the U.A. High School rooftop was a familiar, constant companion that carried the scent of the city and the promise of approaching evening. It tugged at the edges of Izuku's uniform jacket and ruffled his unruly green hair as he stood with his hands deep in his pockets, watching his friend with a mixture of concern and fascination. The late afternoon sun cast long shadows across the concrete, painting everything in warm golden hues that somehow made the impossible seem almost normal.

A few yards away, Yuga Aoyama stood in one of his characteristically dramatic poses, but the usual theatrical flair was replaced by intense concentration. His eyes were squeezed shut, his perfect posture rigid with effort. His arms were outstretched toward the sky, his entire body trembling slightly as if straining against some unseen force. He had been trying to transform for almost ten minutes, but nothing was happening. The golden, segmented armor that should have been his Agito form refused to manifest.

Izuku shifted his weight from foot to foot, watching his friend's struggle with growing concern. "Maybe you should take a break, Aoyama-kun?" he suggested gently, his voice carrying over the wind. "You've been at it for a while now. You look exhausted, and pushing too hard might—"

"Non!" Aoyama's eyes snapped open, revealing a flash of desperate determination. He shook his head vigorously, his perfectly styled hair catching the light. "I cannot stop, Midoriya! This... this power, it is a part of me now, oui? It is my brilliance, my destiny—but it will not shine!"

He clenched his fists, his voice cracking with thinly veiled frustration and something that might have been fear.

"I am trying to force it, to push it out like my Navel Laser, but it is not working! Why will it not work? What am I doing wrong?"

From his post by the rooftop door, leaning casually against the cool metal frame with his arms crossed, Kagutsuchi had been a silent observer for the entire session. His golden eyes tracked every movement, every expression, with the patience of someone who had watched countless students struggle with powers they didn't understand. Now he finally spoke, his voice carrying easily on the evening breeze.

"And that," he said softly, pushing off the wall with fluid grace, "is your mistake."

Aoyama's concentration broke completely. He turned to face the janitor—the archangel, his mind corrected with a jolt—his brow furrowed in confusion. "But... surely it requires effort, non? My Quirk, Navel Laser, it required concentration and exertion. I had to push the energy out, to force it through my body..."

Kagutsuchi approached them slowly, his footsteps silent on the concrete. When he spoke, his voice carried the weight of eons of experience, but also a gentle understanding that made the cosmic seem personal.

"Your old Quirk was an ability you were given," he explained, stopping a few feet away. "Something external that you had to tap into and force out of your body. A tool that you wielded, rather than something that was truly part of you."

He gestured toward Aoyama's chest, where beneath his uniform shirt, the power waited.

"This is different. The Agito power, the Will of Light... it's not an add-on or an external force. It's part of who you are now. It's a seed that's already been planted within your very soul."

He paused, letting the words sink in while the wind whispered around them.

"You do not force a flower to bloom, do you? You cannot grab its petals and pull them open. You allow it to grow. You give it what it needs—water, sunlight, patience, time—and it blossoms naturally, in its own way, at its own pace."

Kagutsuchi's golden eyes met Aoyama's with gentle intensity.

"Your Agito form is the same. You need to stop pushing it away with your effort and simply... allow it to come forth. Don't push it; invite it. Don't force it; welcome it. It's already there, waiting for you to stop fighting and start trusting."

Aoyama stood motionless for a long moment, processing the words with visible effort. Izuku watched, fascinated, as understanding slowly dawned on his friend's face. The wisdom of the advice struck him as well—the fundamental distinction between wielding a tool and becoming something greater.

Slowly, carefully, Aoyama closed his eyes again. This time his posture was completely different. The rigid tension melted away, replaced by a quiet stillness that seemed to resonate with the evening air around them. His hands relaxed from their desperate fists, coming to rest naturally at his sides. He took a deep breath, and Izuku could almost see the moment he let go of the struggle—the moment he stopped fighting himself and started listening.

The change began immediately.

The air around Aoyama began to shimmer, subtle at first, like heat waves rising from summer pavement. Then a faint light bloomed around him, starting as the familiar brilliant gold that Izuku associated with Agito transformations. But as the radiance intensified, something unexpected happened.

A new color began to seep in, starting from the center of Aoyama's chest and spreading outward like ink in water—a deep, rich green, the color of ancient forests and deep ocean depths. It wasn't the bright, vibrant green of new growth, but something darker, more primal, carrying undertones that spoke of earth and shadow and things that grew in hidden places.

Izuku's eyes widened, a quiet gasp escaping his lips. "What's happening?" he whispered, concern threading his voice. "That's not... that's not what I expected."

This wasn't like his own transformation at all. Where Izuku's Agito form emerged in brilliant gold and black, noble and heroic, this was something else entirely—something that felt more ancient, more connected to the wild places of the world that existed before cities and civilization.

Kagutsuchi, however, remained perfectly still, his expression one of quiet approval. His golden eyes fixed on Aoyama with what might have been satisfaction, as if this was exactly what he had expected to see.

As the golden hue was completely overtaken by the dark green radiance, armor began to form. It started as thin, segmented plating over Aoyama's torso, each piece fitting together with organic precision. The material looked almost alive, like the carapace of some magnificent insect, growing and thickening with natural grace. Pieces of armor wrapped around his arms and legs with flowing, elegant lines that spoke of function and beauty in perfect harmony.

The helmet formed last, rising from his collar like a crown being placed by invisible hands. It was crested with two delicate antennae that swayed slightly in the wind, and set into the faceplate were compound eyes that glowed with intense, focused red light—not harsh or threatening, but alert and aware in a way that seemed to encompass everything around them.

Aoyama's face, which had been serene just moments before, now showed powerful, unwavering concentration visible through the translucent sections of his visor. He wasn't passive in the transformation—he was an active participant, guiding and tempering the flow of power until the armor fully encased his body in living protection.

He stood tall against the evening sky, the wind whipping around him without affecting his perfect balance. The Agito form was complete, but it was like nothing Izuku had ever seen. This wasn't just Yuga Aoyama wearing armor—this was something new, something that bridged the gap between human and something wilder, more connected to the fundamental forces of nature.

He was no longer just Yuga Aoyama. He was Kamen Rider Gills.

Behind his helmet, Aoyama's consciousness exploded with new sensations. The world, which had been a familiar blur of cityscape and afternoon light, was now a tapestry of hyper-clarity that took his breath away. The compound eyes of his new form didn't just enhance his vision—they transformed it entirely.

He could see a commercial jetliner, a tiny silver speck against the endless blue sky, gliding along its flight path from a distance that would have previously required him to squint and strain. But now he could make out individual windows, could track its precise trajectory, could even sense the slight variations in its engine noise carried on the wind.

The detail was overwhelming and wonderful. Every brick in the distant buildings had texture and character. Every leaf on the trees below moved in patterns he could predict and follow. The very air seemed alive with information—temperature gradients, humidity levels, the faint chemical signatures of the city's breath.

He took an experimental breath, expecting the suffocating restriction he'd always imagined armor would bring. Instead, the air flowed in freely, cleaner and more refreshing than anything he'd ever experienced. The armor wasn't a prison—it was a second skin that enhanced everything about his physical form.

Looking down at his hands, Aoyama was shocked to find his typically pristine, pale fingers now encased in dark green, segmented plates that gleamed with an inner light. The armor terminated in sharp, black claws that looked capable of rending metal. They were alien, unrecognizable—and somehow, perfectly right.

He flexed his fingers experimentally, watching the claws extend and retract with fluid precision. The sensation was strange but not unpleasant—like discovering he'd always had these capabilities but had simply never known how to access them.

As he examined the rest of his armored form, a complex mixture of emotions washed through him. This wasn't the elegant, majestic armor he had half-expected—something akin to Izuku's noble appearance with its clean lines and heroic presence. This was rawer, more primal. It felt less like knightly protection and more like the natural armor of some magnificent predator.

For a moment, disappointment flickered through him. Where was the sparkling brilliance he'd always associated with his identity? This form was beautiful in its own way, but it was the beauty of storms and deep forests and things that hunted in moonlight—not the glittering splendor of staged performances and admiring crowds.

He lifted his head to gauge Izuku's reaction, seeking reassurance in his friend's expression. Midoriya's face was a complex mixture of concern, amazement, and deep thought. His hand had come up to his chin in his characteristic analytical pose as he studied the transformed Aoyama with fascination and slight bewilderment.

Kagutsuchi, however, simply clapped once—a sharp, resonant sound that cut through the evening air and drew both boys' attention immediately.

"Excellent," he said, his smile widening with unmistakable pride. "That is indeed the condition known as Gills. A perfect manifestation."

He stepped closer, circling Aoyama slowly, his golden eyes taking in every detail of the transformation with professional assessment.

"How do you feel, Aoyama-kun?"

"I... I feel..." Aoyama began, then stopped in shock as his own voice reached his ears. It was deeper than usual, carrying harmonics that resonated strangely in his chest. The sound was rich and complex, like hearing his voice through water or at a great distance.

He immediately clapped both armored hands over his mouth plate, his compound eyes wide with profound surprise. The gesture was endearingly human despite his alien appearance.

After a moment, he slowly lowered his hands and tried again.

"It is still... très bizarre," he admitted, the strange voice making even his familiar French accent sound foreign. "I will need time to become accustomed to this. Everything feels... different. Sharper. More intense."

Kagutsuchi's smile remained warm and encouraging. "That's perfectly normal. Your senses have been enhanced far beyond human baseline. The adjustment period can be overwhelming at first."

Then his expression became more focused, taking on the tone of instruction.

"Now then, let's begin your first proper training regimen. I want you to remain in that form for six hours straight—until well after sunset. After that, you'll have six hours in your normal form, then back into Gills for another six hours."

Aoyama's compound eyes widened in surprise, the red glow flickering with what might have been alarm.

"Six... hours?" His distorted voice carried a note of uncertainty. "But that is an entire quarter of the day! Will I not become fatigued? Will my body not reject such prolonged transformation?"

Izuku stepped forward, placing a reassuring hand on Aoyama's armored shoulder. The contact felt strange—warm despite the barrier of the armor, as if the friendship itself transcended the physical transformation.

"It's the same schedule Kagutsuchi-san put me on when my powers first emerged," he explained with the tired understanding of someone who'd been through the same struggles. "Six hours on, six hours off, around the clock for weeks. It's the only way for your body to fully adapt to the transformation."

He offered a sympathetic smile.

"After a while, switching forms becomes as natural as breathing. You won't even think about it—it just becomes part of who you are."

Aoyama's attention shifted back to Kagutsuchi, curiosity evident even through his alien features. "And what of sustenance? Food and drink?" He gestured delicately toward his mouth plate with one clawed hand. "Or... other biological necessities?"

A mischievous glint appeared in Kagutsuchi's golden eyes, and his smile took on a decidedly impish quality.

"As an Agito, your body's needs change significantly. You can sustain yourself without food or water for several days while transformed—your armor processes ambient energy to maintain your physical functions. When you're in human form, you're free to eat and drink normally."

He paused dramatically, clearly enjoying himself.

"As for other needs, your digestive system becomes far more efficient, and waste production drops to nearly zero. You can even metabolize atmospheric nitrogen if necessary, and the armor can recycle—"

"A-AGH! KAGUTSUCHI-SAN, NO!" Izuku shrieked, his voice cracking with mortification as he clamped his hands over his ears. His face turned a brilliant shade of red that rivaled his hero costume. "PLEASE, NOT THE DETAILED EXPLANATION AGAIN! I'M STILL TRAUMATIZED FROM LAST TIME!"

Aoyama's helmeted head tilted to one side, his compound eyes somehow managing to convey utter bewilderment as he looked from a mortified Izuku to a quietly chuckling Kagutsuchi.

"What is he talking about?" he asked, his distorted voice full of innocent confusion. "What explanation? What happened last time?"

Kagutsuchi's chuckle deepened into genuine laughter—warm, rich, and entirely too amused for comfort.

"Let's just say," he said with barely contained mirth, "that young Midoriya learned more about enhanced biology than he was quite prepared for during his first training session."

Izuku made a sound that might have been a whimper, his hands still firmly clamped over his ears.

The secure bunker beneath U.A. High School felt like a different world from the family home the Aoyamas had once known. The space was practical and sparse, furnished with only the essentials provided by the Hero Commission's witness protection program. The walls were plain concrete painted institutional white, and the furniture was simple but functional—a far cry from the elegant French provincial pieces that had once graced their previous life.

A small wooden table, scarred with years of use by previous occupants, was set for three people, though only two were seated. The dinner—simple rice, miso soup, and grilled fish—sat cooling in modest bowls that bore no resemblance to the fine china that had once been their standard.

Yuga Aoyama sat at the head of the table, but not in his usual immaculate attire or even casual clothes. He was still encased in the strange, primal form of his Gills armor, the dark green plating catching the harsh fluorescent light. He stared down at his bowl of steamed rice with an expression that was difficult to read through the compound eyes of his helmet, but his posture spoke of embarrassment and uncertainty.

His mother, Marie Aoyama, sat to his right. Despite their reduced circumstances, she still managed to maintain an air of refined elegance that no amount of government-issued furniture could diminish. Her dark hair was pulled back in a simple but elegant chignon, and her concerned gaze was fixed entirely on her transformed son.

"Mon cher," she began softly, her accented English warm with maternal worry, "why are you still wearing that... that armor? It must be uncomfortable, sitting in those hard plates. Surely you can remove it for dinner?"

Aoyama shifted carefully in his chair, the subtle scraping of segmented armor against wood filling the quiet space. When he spoke, his voice carried that same disconcerting distortion that made him sound like a stranger to his own ears.

"Maman," he began, the French endearment sounding strange in his transformed voice, "I must remain like this. It is part of my training, you understand? To master and control this form, I must stay transformed for six hours at a time."

He gestured awkwardly toward himself with one clawed hand.

"It will be a full six hours by morning, then I will be able to change back and join you for petit déjeuner. Perhaps we can have those croissants you mentioned?"

His father, Henri Aoyama, sat across from his wife with the patient expression of a man who had learned to adapt to circumstances beyond his control. He was dressed simply in a worn cardigan and slacks—clothing that would have been unthinkable in their previous life but which had become their new normal. When he spoke, his voice carried gentle understanding.

"And you will have to sleep in it as well, then?" he asked, though it was clear he already knew the answer. "That seems... challenging, mon fils."

The question brought a fresh wave of embarrassment to Aoyama, visible in the way his shoulders hunched slightly. He nodded slowly, the motion somehow conveying his mortification despite the helmet obscuring his expression.

His mother's gaze softened with the understanding that only comes from unconditional love. She opened her mouth to ask the questions that had been building all evening—Is this a new Quirk? How did this happen? Are you safe?—but the words died on her lips.

A shadow passed over both parents' faces as they looked at their son's transformed state. These questions felt like betrayal, painful reminders of the choices they had made in desperation and fear. The memory of their dealings with All For One, the artificial Quirk they had allowed to be implanted in their son, the years of lies and pretense—it all rose between them like a wall of regret.

Aoyama, with the enhanced senses his new form provided, caught the change in their emotional state immediately. His compound eyes, alien as they were, somehow managed to convey panic and distress.

"Non! Maman, Papa!" he said quickly, reaching across the table with one armored hand before stopping himself just short of contact. "Please, you must not think like this! I am not angry with you, I promise! This is not... this is not punishment or consequence!"

His distorted voice carried desperate sincerity.

"I am a hero now. This power, this transformation—it is my choice. My decision. I chose this path, and I am proud to walk it. Please do not blame yourselves for my becoming something greater than I was before."

"It still doesn't change what we did, Yuga," his father replied, his voice soft with the weight of old regrets. "We allowed ourselves to be manipulated by a villain. We put you in danger because we were afraid, because we wanted so desperately for you to fit in, to be accepted."

Henri's hands, clasped on the table before him, trembled slightly.

"Had we simply... had we thought differently, trusted in your worth as our son regardless of Quirks or powers, your life could have been simpler. You would never have had to carry those burdens, those secrets. We would have been proud of you no matter what, because you are our son."

Aoyama's armored shoulders slumped, and when he spoke, his transformed voice somehow managed to convey the depth of his emotion despite its alien quality.

"I know, Papa," he said, each word careful and sincere. "I know what you sacrificed, what you risked, what you endured—all for me. But please understand—I have never been anything but grateful for the love you have shown me, even before I received Navel Laser. Even when I was just... ordinary."

His compound eyes seemed to glow brighter for a moment.

"For all the affection, all the support, all the times you made me feel special and wanted and loved—for all of that, I am utterly grateful. I love you both very much, more than this strange voice can properly express."

Tears began to spill from his mother's eyes, and she reached out instinctively toward her son, her hand stopping just short of his armored form. She had been prepared to apologize again, to repeat the litany of regret that had become their evening ritual, but something in his posture stopped her.

Aoyama saw her hesitation and reached out as well, then paused as he looked at his own hand. The dark green armor plates, the sharp black claws, the alien configuration of his transformed fingers—it was such a stark contrast to his mother's delicate, human hand. For a moment, he saw himself as she must see him: her beautiful, sparkling son encased in something that looked more like a monster than a hero.

But then understanding washed over him, deeper and more profound than anything he'd experienced before. He had been living a lie for so long—all the flamboyant poses, the constant need for validation, the glittering persona of a shining prince. It had all been performance, a carefully constructed facade built on the foundation of an artificial Quirk and desperate insecurity.

Looking at his transformed hand, he realized something that both terrified and liberated him: this wasn't a costume or a disguise. This was him. This was the real Yuga Aoyama, stripped of pretense and artifice, revealed in his truest form. The armor wasn't hiding who he was—it was showing who he had always been beneath the sparkles and the lies.

Raw. Primal. Connected to something deeper than human civilization and social expectations. Not the glittering prince he had pretended to be, but something more honest and infinitely more powerful.

His thoughts were interrupted by sudden warmth. Both his parents had risen from their seats and moved around the table, wrapping him in a careful but heartfelt embrace. They pressed themselves against the hard, segmented plates of his armor, completely uncaring about his alien appearance. Their arms found the spaces between armor pieces where they could touch him more directly, and they held him with the same fierce love they had always shown.

All they cared about was that he was safe, that he was happy, and that he was theirs. That simple truth, Aoyama realized, was all they had ever truly wanted. Not a son with a powerful Quirk or social status or glittering achievements—just their son, loved unconditionally for exactly who he was.

The emotion overwhelmed him completely. Tears began to spill from behind his helmet, hot tracks that traced paths down his face and dripped onto his mouth plate. He sniffled, the sound muffled and strange through his armor, but unmistakably human in its vulnerability.

Carefully, mindful of his claws and the rigid plates, he wrapped his armored arms around his parents, holding them with a tenderness that defied the predatory appearance of his transformed state. For the first time in years—perhaps for the first time ever—he felt completely accepted for exactly who he was. Not who he pretended to be, not who others expected him to be, but simply himself.

They stayed like that for long minutes, a family reunited not despite the strangeness of their circumstances, but because of the honesty it had finally allowed them to share.

Eventually, his parents pulled back and returned to their seats, both wiping at their tears with slightly embarrassed smiles. The emotional intensity had left them all feeling drained but cleaner, as if some long-festering wound had finally been cleansed.

"It's quite alright, mon cœur," his mother said, her voice still shaky but warm with love. "You can skip dinner tonight. We will have a long, lovely breakfast tomorrow when you can change back. I'll make those croissants you love so much."

Aoyama nodded gratefully, touched by her understanding. He had been prepared to power down and join them despite his training requirements, but the thought of disappointing Kagutsuchi—Michael—held him back. The archangel had been clear about the importance of maintaining the transformation schedule.

As he was formulating a polite way to explain his decision to remain armored, his mother blinked, her attention focusing sharply on his helmet.

"Yuga..." she said slowly, her eyes widening with surprise. "Did you just...?"

She pointed a trembling finger at his mouth plate, her voice filled with wonder.

"I could have sworn I saw that move. The armor around your mouth—it shifted!"

"Maman," Aoyama replied, confusion evident even through his transformed voice, "are you certain? I did not consciously—"

"Oui! Yes!" she nodded emphatically, leaning forward with excited interest. "It shifted, just a little. I am positive! Like it was... responding to something!"

Aoyama looked down at himself, a new idea taking hold. If the armor was truly part of him now, as Kagutsuchi had explained, then perhaps it could adapt to his needs in ways he hadn't yet discovered. He focused his attention on the area around his mouth, not pushing or forcing, but simply inviting the armor to respond to his needs.

I want to share this meal with my parents, he thought. Please, let me show them that I'm still their son, even like this.

A moment later, a soft, mechanical hiss was audible throughout the small dining area. The segmented mouth plate on his helmet slowly, carefully began to shift apart with the precise movements of advanced engineering. The pieces retracted and folded with elegant efficiency, exposing his human mouth deep within the protective confines of the helmet.

Both his parents gasped in unison, their expressions shifting from surprise to pure wonder.

"Incroyable," his mother whispered. "Amazing."

"I... I don't understand how that's possible," Aoyama stammered, and now his voice came through clearly—still slightly muffled by the helmet's interior, but recognizably his own without the electronic distortion. "The armor, it just... responded?"

Slowly and carefully, he reached for his bowl of rice and the chopsticks beside it. His clawed fingers, despite their alien appearance, managed to grip the utensils with surprising delicacy. But as he attempted to pick up the first bite, his enhanced strength proved problematic.

Crack.

The wooden chopsticks snapped cleanly in half with a sound like breaking twigs.

His father chuckled—not mockingly, but with the gentle, loving amusement of a parent watching their child navigate a new skill.

"Hold on, mon fils," Henri said, rising from his chair with a warm smile. "I'll fetch you a spoon. And perhaps we should invest in some metal utensils if this is going to be a regular occurrence."

As his father rummaged through their limited kitchen supplies, Aoyama carefully touched his exposed lips with one clawed finger, marveling at the sensation. The armor had somehow created a perfect seal around the opening, allowing him access while maintaining the integrity of his protection. It was like having the best of both worlds—the power and security of his transformed state, with the ability to connect more naturally with the people he loved.

"This is remarkable," he murmured, more to himself than to his parents. "The armor is more responsive than I ever imagined."

His mother reached across the table and gently touched the edge of his helmet, her fingers tracing the elegant curves of the alien design.

"You are still our beautiful boy," she said softly. "Different, perhaps, but still ours. Still perfect."

The atmosphere in Class 1-A the following morning was a study in contrasts. The usual morning energy had returned—students chatting about homework, comparing notes from the previous day's training, and engaging in the comfortable rhythms of teenage life. But underneath the surface normalcy, there was an undercurrent of excitement and curiosity that seemed to center around one particular figure.

Yuga Aoyama stood near the windows at the front of the classroom, but not in his usual sparkling hero costume or his impeccable school uniform. Instead, he was encased entirely in the dark green, primal form of his Gills armor. The morning sunlight streaming through the windows caught the segmented plates and made them gleam with an inner radiance that was both beautiful and slightly intimidating.

It was such a dramatic departure from his usual effervescent persona that several of his classmates had initially mistaken him for a visiting hero or some kind of training demonstration. Only when he'd spoken—that strange, harmonically rich voice emerging from behind the compound eyes—had they realized who they were looking at.

"Whoa, Aoyama!" Denki Kaminari had been the first to recover from his surprise, practically bouncing out of his seat with excitement. "Your new look is absolutely insane! That armor is like something out of a sci-fi movie! Is that really all you? Like, no machinery or external support?"

Aoyama's helmeted head tilted slightly, the compound eyes glowing with what might have been pleased embarrassment. When he spoke, that rich, distorted voice carried obvious pride despite its alien quality.

"Oui, it is indeed all me, Kaminari-kun. The armor, it is... how do you say... part of my very being now. Not a costume or equipment, but an extension of my true self."

The class had begun to gather around him like iron filings drawn to a magnet, their usual morning routines forgotten in favor of examining this miraculous transformation. The change in their dynamic was palpable—where once Aoyama had seemed to fade into the background despite his flashy attempts at attention, now he commanded genuine fascination.

"That is so cool, Aoyama-kun!" Ochaco Uraraka's voice was bright with genuine admiration as she circled him slowly, taking in every detail. "It looks so... powerful! Like you could take on anything!"

Her enthusiasm was infectious, and soon other voices joined in.

"The craftsmanship is incredible," Momo Yaoyorozu observed with her analytical eye, apparently grateful for a distraction from her own cosmic concerns. "The way the plates articulate, the organic flow of the design—it's like the perfect fusion of biology and engineering."

Eijiro Kirishima, grinning widely, couldn't contain his excitement. He reached out and tapped one of Aoyama's clawed hands with his own hardened fingers, the contact producing a sharp metallic ring.

"Dude, 'cool' doesn't even begin to cover it! This is the manliest armor I've ever seen! Those claws look like they could shred steel, and the whole predator aesthetic is just—" He made an appreciative gesture. "—it's like you've become some kind of apex warrior!"

From his usual spot near the back, Fumikage Tokoyami nodded with dark approval. "It is a fascinating metamorphosis, Aoyama. Where once you embodied light and sparkle, now you have embraced the shadows and depths. A testament to the power found in accepting one's darker nature rather than hiding from it."

Aoyama's posture straightened with visible pride. Despite his initial disappointment at not achieving the glittering, heroic appearance he'd envisioned, his classmates' reactions were helping him see his transformation in a new light. This wasn't a failure or a deviation from his dreams—it was something unique and powerful in its own right.

"Merci beaucoup," he said, his strange voice warm with gratitude. "Your words, they mean more than you know. I was... concerned that this form might be too frightening, too different from what you expected."

"Are you kidding?" Mina Ashido had recovered from her previous day's shock enough to bounce excitedly around him, her usual vibrant energy restored. "It's like you've become this mysterious, powerful warrior! It's totally different from your old sparkly prince vibe, but in the best possible way!"

Tsuyu Asui, ever practical, tilted her head with curious interest. "How does it feel, Aoyama-chan? The transformation, I mean. Is it comfortable? Can you move normally?"

"The sensation, it is... magnifique," Aoyama replied, flexing his clawed hands experimentally. "Everything is sharper, clearer. I can see details that were invisible before, hear sounds from great distances. It is as if the world has become more real, more vivid."

"But that's not all!" he continued, his voice taking on a note of theatrical excitement that was purely, recognizably him despite the electronic distortion. "This armor, it is far more advanced than any of us realized! Observe!"

With dramatic flair that would have done his old persona proud, Aoyama held up one clawed hand and concentrated. The class watched with bated breath as, with a soft mechanical hiss, the mouth plate on his helmet began to split apart with elegant precision. The segmented pieces retracted smoothly, revealing his human mouth nestled deep within the protective confines of the helmet.

A chorus of amazed exclamations erupted from his classmates.

"Whoa! That's incredible!"

"How is that even possible?"

"The engineering must be impossibly complex!"

Kirishima's eyes were practically shining with excitement. "Okay, that is officially the coolest thing I've ever seen! Your armor can adapt like that? That makes it even more awesome!"

The attention and praise was clearly having an effect on Aoyama. His posture had shifted from uncertain to confident, and there was something in his bearing that suggested he was beginning to truly embrace this new aspect of himself.

Ochaco, her curiosity piqued by the display, turned to Izuku with bright interest. "Hey, Izuku-kun! Can you do that with your armor too? I bet you never thought to try!"

All eyes turned to Izuku, who had been watching the entire exchange with a complex mixture of fascination, pride for his friend, and growing self-consciousness. His hand came up to his chin in his characteristic thinking pose as the question hit him.

"I... honestly, I've never even considered it," he admitted, his voice carrying a note of embarrassment. "I've been so focused on the basic combat applications and transformation stability that I never explored the more... adaptive possibilities."

"Well, try it now!" Mineta demanded from his seat, his voice carrying an unusual note of genuine interest rather than his typical perverted enthusiasm. "Don't let Aoyama show you up! You're supposed to be the expert on this stuff!"

The challenge in the air was unmistakable, and Izuku could see the expectant faces of his classmates all turned toward him. There was no backing down now without looking like he hadn't mastered his own abilities.

Sighing in resignation, Izuku moved to the center of the classroom and assumed his familiar transformation stance. The golden light that had become so familiar to all of them flared around him, warm and brilliant, as he shifted into his Agito form. The black and gold armor materialized with its usual elegant efficiency, and he stood before them in the heroic configuration they all knew.

The contrast between his form and Aoyama's was striking—where Aoyama's Gills armor spoke of primal power and natural adaptation, Izuku's form was noble and refined, like a knight stepped out of legend.

With the entire class watching intently, Izuku focused on his helmet, trying to replicate what Aoyama had just accomplished. He concentrated on his mouth plate, visualizing it opening, inviting it to respond to his needs just as Kagutsuchi had taught them.

One minute passed in tense silence.

Nothing happened.

The mouth plate remained stubbornly solid, showing no signs of the mechanical adaptability that Aoyama's armor had displayed so effortlessly.

Izuku stood there for another moment, his helmeted head tilted down in what was clearly focused concentration. He tried different approaches—pushing gently, then inviting more firmly, then attempting to understand the mechanism on a technical level.

Still nothing.

Finally, with visible defeat, he powered down his transformation. The golden light faded, leaving him standing in his regular uniform, his shoulders slumped in a theatrical display of disappointment that drew sympathetic sounds from his classmates.

"Well," he said with a rueful laugh that carried only the smallest note of actual frustration, "I guess Aoyama-kun has me completely beat on that particular feature. His armor is apparently more advanced than mine in some very specific ways."

The admission seemed to please Aoyama enormously. His compound eyes somehow managed to convey smug satisfaction, and his posture straightened with obvious pride.

"Eh bien," he said, his distorted voice carrying a note of playful superiority that was entirely new for him, "perhaps this means that each Agito form has its own unique capabilities, non? We are not meant to be identical, but complementary."

Izuku nodded thoughtfully, his analytical mind already spinning with the implications. "That actually makes a lot of sense. If we're meant to work together as a team, having different specializations and abilities would be much more effective than simply being multiple copies of the same power set."

"Plus," Kirishima added with his usual enthusiasm, "it means you're both unique! No one else can do exactly what either of you can do! That's way more manly than just having the same abilities!"

The morning sun continued to stream through the classroom windows, illuminating a scene that perfectly captured the strange new reality they were all learning to navigate. Ancient powers manifesting in teenage heroes, cosmic forces working through the mundane setting of a high school classroom, and friendships adapting to encompass the impossible.

And in the center of it all, Yuga Aoyama stood in his alien armor, finally comfortable in his own skin—even if that skin happened to be segmented plates of otherworldly material. For the first time in his life, he wasn't pretending to be something he wasn't. He was simply, honestly, magnificently himself.

The transformation was complete in more ways than one.