The warm, inviting glow of paper lanterns cast soft shadows across the private tatami room within Toriyoshi Shoten, an Izakaya renowned for its grilled skewers and convivial atmosphere. But within this particular room, the usual cheerful din of the restaurant was a distant hum, replaced by a silence so thick it felt almost suffocating.

Seated on plush zabuton cushions around a low, lacquered table, the four occupants formed a tableau of stark contrasts. Izuku Midoriya, still pale but now discharged from the hospital, sat with quiet intensity, his wide eyes fixed on the man opposite him, observing everything. Beside him, Toshinori Yagi, miraculously restored to his prime, was a picture of bewildered elation. He repeatedly flexed his powerful hands, felt at his now unblemished stomach, and took deep, unhindered breaths, as if constantly reconfirming the impossible miracle. Next to Toshinori, Detective Naomasa Tsukauchi sat rigidly, his posture stiff with professional caution, his gaze unwavering, a silent sentinel in the face of the inexplicable.

Across from them, Kagutsuchi was the epitome of composure. He sat with an almost languid grace, his dark coat draped casually over his shoulders. With a delicate, almost ritualistic motion, he lifted a small, ceramic sake cup to his lips, taking a slow, contemplative sip, his dark, unreadable eyes sweeping over the trio with a faint, knowing smile. The aroma of grilled chicken and simmering broth wafted faintly from beyond the sliding shoji screen, a mundane counterpoint to the profound, unsettling mystery unfolding within the room.

The tense silence stretched, punctuated only by the distant clatter of dishes and the murmur of other patrons. Naomasa, his patience fraying, finally opened his mouth.

"Before you ask, Detective," Kagutsuchi interjected smoothly, his voice calm and even, cutting off Naomasa's nascent question with effortless precision. He lowered his sake cup, his gaze settling on Toshinori, who was still marveling at his own restored physique. "No, you're not imagining things. And yes, Toshinori Yagi, you are genuinely healed. Every organ, every muscle, every last scar. All of it, exactly as it should be. A gift, if you will." He took another sip of sake, a faint, almost imperceptible chuckle escaping his lips. "Consider it a down payment on a very interesting conversation."

Naomasa's jaw tightened, his gaze hardening. "Interesting conversation, you say?" he repeated archly, skepticism dripping from his words. "You still haven't explained much since we left the hospital. Just... ramblings about God and evolution."

Kagutsuchi merely shrugged, his smile unwavering. "But I did tell you everything, Detective. You just chose not to believe it."

"How the hell could we believe it?" Naomasa scoffed, disbelief lacing his voice. "That was effectively the ramblings of someone with an advanced healing Quirk! You healed All Might's injury, an injury that defied all known medical science! That's all we know!"

Kagutsuchi darted his dark eyes up from his sake cup, meeting Naomasa's gaze with unnerving intensity. "And the telekinesis, Detective?" he asked, his voice a quiet challenge. "It's highly improbable for common people to have more than one Quirk, wouldn't you agree?"

Naomasa scoffed again, a dismissive sound. "That could have been anything. A trick of the light. A localized air current. You could have a Quirk that affects perception, for all we know."

"Your denial is irrelevant," Kagutsuchi replied, his voice still calm, a faint, almost bored tone entering his words. He took another sip of sake, his gaze drifting back to the amber liquid in his cup.

Toshinori, who had been silently examining his hands, clenching and unclenching his fists, finally spoke. His voice, now deep and resonant, filled the small room, a stark contrast to his earlier raspy whispers. "I... I am grateful for what you've done for me, Kagutsuchi-san," he began, his tone sincere, but his eyes, though clear and vibrant, held a guarded wariness. He looked from his restored hands to the man across the table. "However, that gratitude does not absolve you. You are still a suspect in the attack on young Midoriya." His gaze hardened, a flicker of his heroic resolve returning. "And you still haven't explained your involvement with that... creature."

Kagutsuchi merely set down his sake cup with a soft clink, his smile widening into a knowing, almost predatory grin. "Guilty as charged," he said, his voice utterly devoid of remorse or even a hint of denial. He leaned back slightly, his hands casually returning to his pockets. "I was indeed involved. With the creature, and with young Midoriya's... awakening."

A collective gasp, barely audible, escaped the trio. Naomasa's hand instinctively twitched towards his holstered pistol, his jaw tightening. Toshinori's eyes narrowed, his restored muscles tensing, ready to spring into action. But it was Izuku who reacted most profoundly. His breath hitched, his eyes widening in pure, unadulterated terror. He instinctively recoiled, pressing himself back against the tatami wall, his gaze fixed on Kagutsuchi, half-expecting the man to lunge across the table and finish what the skeletal creature had started. The air in the room, already tense, crackled with a new, chilling dread.

Kagutsuchi's smile softened, a faint, almost reassuring curve that somehow made him seem even more unsettling. His dark eyes, however, were fixed on Izuku, a subtle, almost paternal amusement in their depths. "Relax, Izuku Midoriya," he said, his voice a low, calm murmur that cut through the tension. "Killing you is far from what I had in mind with this little excursion. Quite the opposite, in fact." He gestured vaguely around the room with an open hand. "I brought you all here to explain myself. To tell you what my business is, and what the hell is truly going on."

Naomasa, still wary, prompted him. "Well? We're waiting."

Kagutsuchi took a deep, almost theatrical breath, his gaze sweeping over the three of them, a faint, almost mischievous glint in his dark eyes. "Alright, then. As I said before, back at the hospital... God is real." He paused, letting the words hang in the air, allowing them to absorb the weight of his declaration. "And I," he continued, a subtle, almost imperceptible shift in his posture, a quiet authority entering his voice, "am, effectively, an angel."

The statement hung in the air, utterly absurd yet delivered with such serene conviction that it momentarily stunned them into silence. Toshinori, who had been flexing his miraculously healed arm, froze, his hand mid-air. Izuku, still pressed against the wall, blinked slowly, his terror momentarily replaced by blank bewilderment. Naomasa's jaw, which had been set in a grim line, slowly slackened. The three of them stared blankly at Kagutsuchi, their minds struggling to reconcile the mundane setting with the fantastical claim.

After a long, disbelieving moment, Naomasa finally found his voice, a strained, incredulous whisper. "What the hell are you smoking?"

Kagutsuchi snickered, a low, dry sound that held no genuine humor. "That reaction never gets old, I swear." He shook his head, a faint smile still playing on his lips. "But in all seriousness, Detective, I am truly an Angel. A Malakim. An Annunaki. Tengu. Deva. Whatever kind of name and label people have stuck to us over the eons, that is what we are. Messengers from Heaven, serving under the Will of Darkness."

"The Will of Darkness?" Toshinori echoed, his voice a low rumble, the words tasting strange on his tongue.

Kagutsuchi nodded, his dark eyes twinkling with a peculiar amusement. "Precisely. He is, in essence, God. Yahweh, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Amaterasu... or basically every creator deity ever written, if you prefer those labels." He paused, taking another sip of sake. "Except, that's only partly correct. He indeed created the universe, the cosmos, the very fabric of existence. But it was the Will of Light that created all living things, including, yes, humans."

"Will of Light? Will of Darkness?" Naomasa interjected, his brow furrowed in confusion, trying to grasp the new, bewildering terminology. "Clarify, please."

Kagutsuchi set his sake cup down, his gaze becoming surprisingly serious, though the faint smile never quite left his lips. "They are, in essence, Chaos and Order. The fundamental forces that gave shape to the larger universe. The Will of Darkness crafted the void, the stars, the galaxies, the very laws of physics. The Will of Light, on the other hand, brought forth life, consciousness, the spark of being within that cosmic framework." He paused, his gaze drifting towards Izuku for a fleeting moment. "It wasn't until the Will of Light created humans, however, that they had a bit of a... disagreement."

He picked up his sake cup again, swirling the liquid thoughtfully. "Long story short, they had a fight. A rather spectacular one, I assure you. And the Will of Darkness won, scattering His counterpart's essence apart, piece by piece, across the nascent Earth." Kagutsuchi took a slow sip, his eyes glinting. "But, that wasn't necessarily the end for Him. For His scattered essence then fell upon humans, effectively jumpstarting their evolution. A rather unexpected turn of events, something the Will of Darkness did not calculate."

"Evolution?" Toshinori repeated, his voice laced with a new layer of bewilderment.

Kagutsuchi nodded, his smile returning, a knowing glint in his dark eyes. "Indeed. Without that... 'Chaos Factor' that the Will of Light brought into the mix, humans wouldn't have had the capacity for true innovation. You wouldn't have had the spark to build fire, which would subsequently escalate into civilization. You wouldn't have today's modern comforts, your skyscrapers, your technology, your... Quirks. All of it, a direct result of that scattered essence. A beautiful, unpredictable ripple effect."

Naomasa, still struggling to process the sheer scale of Kagutsuchi's claims, rubbed a hand over his face. "So... what you're essentially telling us," he began, his voice slow, filled with a disbelief that bordered on exasperation, "is that humans only became what they are today through divine intervention? That our entire history, our very existence, is because of... a cosmic fight?"

Kagutsuchi merely raised a brow, a faint smirk playing on his lips. "Isn't that essentially what tons of written scripture have been telling you since time immemorial, Detective?" he replied, his voice calm, almost amused. "You were just... off by a few metrics."

Toshinori leaned forward, his expression grave. "Even if... even if we were to entertain these outlandish claims, Kagutsuchi-san," he said, his voice firm, "how can we be sure you're even telling us the truth? That this isn't just some elaborate ruse?"

Naomasa, after a moment of hesitation, sighed. His unwavering gaze on Kagutsuchi shifted, revealing a flicker of professional bewilderment. "He's right, Yagi-san," he admitted, his voice low, almost a murmur. "I've had my Quirk locked onto Kagutsuchi-san since the hospital, and for some strange reason... I've been getting strange results." He looked back at Kagutsuchi, his brow furrowed. "It feels like the truth, but not the kind of truth I can pin down. It's like trying to grasp smoke."

Kagutsuchi chuckled, a soft, knowing sound. He raised his sake cup, taking a slow, deliberate sip. "That's because Quirks don't work on me and my brethren, Detective," he revealed, his voice calm, utterly devoid of triumph. "They never did."

The three exchanged looks, a silent, bewildered conversation passing between them. The idea that Kagutsuchi was immune to Quirks, especially Naomasa's truth-discerning ability, added another layer of unsettling impossibility to his already fantastical claims.

Kagutsuchi, observing their reactions, set his sake cup down. "So, what kind of proof would make you true believers?" he asked, his dark eyes sweeping over them. "Other than the miracle of healing Toshinori, of course. Given the advancements in medical technology and the variety of healing Quirks in existence, it doesn't make much logistical sense as definitive proof." He paused, a faint, almost challenging smirk on his lips. "There's this guy in Saudi Arabia, for instance, who's developed working prosthetic organs. With your resources, Toshinori, you could have procured his services, couldn't you? It's a plausible, if expensive, alternative to a divine miracle."

Toshinori sputtered, caught completely off guard. "W-well, I... I haven't had the time!" he finally managed, the excuse sounding flimsy even to his own ears.

Kagutsuchi's smirk widened. "Flimsy, indeed. You could have taken some time off for real treatment, Toshinori. Shuzenji has been telling you as much. But you refused. Every time." Toshinori could only flinch.

Even Naomasa couldn't rightly argue over the point. To do so would be an insult to his own intelligence, given the clear logic of Kagutsuchi's statement. The detective merely sighed, running a hand over his face in exasperation.

Kagutsuchi, seeing their silence, nodded slowly. "Regardless of whether you choose to believe me or not," he continued, his voice dropping to a serious, almost chilling tone, "it is an undeniable fact that I am indeed a divine herald under the Most High's employ. And it is the job of all those like me to scour the globe and kill Agito."

Now this managed to perk the other three up. "Agito?" Naomasa repeated, his voice sharp with renewed interest.

Kagutsuchi smiled, a genuine, if somewhat unsettling, curve of his lips. "Ah, now we're getting somewhere. Agito are, basically, the true next step of human evolution. Quirks were just the mistake."

Izuku gasped, a raw, involuntary sound, his eyes wide with a mixture of shock and offense. "Mistake?!" he choked out, the word feeling like a physical blow. His entire life, his entire world, revolved around Quirks. The heroes he admired, the dreams he chased, even his own recent, terrifying awakening – all tied to Quirks. Toshinori, beside him, stiffened, his own expression a mask of disbelief.

Naomasa, ever the pragmatist, pressed Kagutsuchi. "What do you mean, 'mistake'? And what exactly are these Agito, then? What makes them different from Quirks?" He leaned forward, his professional curiosity overriding his lingering skepticism. This, at least, was a tangible threat, a concept he could grasp, even if its origins were divine.

Kagutsuchi leaned back, a faint, almost wistful look in his eyes. "Quirks are a chaotic byproduct, a random mutation of the Will of Light's scattered essence, uncontrolled and often inefficient. They manifest in myriad ways, some powerful, some utterly useless, often causing more problems than they solve for the user and society." He gestured dismissively. "A gross inefficiency, from a cosmic perspective. Agito, however, are a pure, directed manifestation. They are the Will of Light, coalescing, reforming within a human host, granting them abilities that are not merely 'powers,' but extensions of universal principles. They are... a return to a more fundamental state of being."

Toshinori, his brow furrowed, sought clarification. "A return to a more fundamental state? What does that mean, exactly? How are these 'Agito' different from Quirks, if Quirks are also a manifestation of this 'Will of Light'?"

Kagutsuchi's smile returned, a touch of dark amusement in his eyes. "Ah, Toshinori. You ask the right questions. Quirks are like static on a radio, a faint echo of a grand symphony. Agito are the symphony itself, played perfectly. They are considered the true Post-Humans. And unlike Quirks, they do not have a ceiling. Their potential is limitless, constrained only by the will and imagination of the host."

For a long moment, the three said nothing, each lost in their own thoughts, processing the staggering implications of Kagutsuchi's words. The idea of "limitless potential" hung heavy in the air, a concept both alluring and terrifying.

Slowly, a chilling realization dawned on Naomasa. His eyes widened, fixing on Kagutsuchi with a new, horrified understanding. "These Agito are..." he began, his voice barely a whisper, trailing off as he connected the dots.

Kagutsuchi's smile broadened, a knowing glint in his dark eyes. "You get it, Detective. They're nascent deities. Proto-divine. Set to grow and take their place as the new Gods of the universe. Which would, in essence, plunge said universe into chaos."

Izuku swallowed, trying and failing to take this all in, his mind reeling from the sheer magnitude of the claims. The others were faring no better, their faces etched with a mixture of disbelief, fear, and dawning comprehension.

Toshinori, his voice strained, finally broke the silence. "Kagutsuchi-san," he said, his gaze fixed on the enigmatic man, "if what you're telling us is even the slightest bit true... then young Midoriya..." He trailed off, his eyes darting to Izuku, a new, terrible suspicion forming.

Kagutsuchi's gaze settled on Izuku, his smile softening, a hint of something unreadable in his dark eyes. "Indeed, Toshinori," he confirmed, his voice calm, almost gentle. "Izuku Midoriya is an Agito. Albeit, one that has freshly awakened."

The confirmation hit Izuku like a sledgehammer, trying and failing to grasp and reconcile this incredible turn of events. Him? The once Quirkless boy? Recently Bug Boy and all around overnight celebrity? His breath hitched, his mind a whirlwind of impossible notions. "M-me?" Izuku stammered, his voice barely a squeak, his eyes wide with disbelief and a rising tide of fear. "An... an Agito? But... how...?"

Kagutsuchi merely inclined his head, his gaze unwavering. "It's exactly what I just told them, Izuku Midoriya. You are set to become an all-powerful God, come the right moment. The purest manifestation of the Will of Light, reborn."

Toshinori and Naomasa exchanged a long, heavy look, trying to fathom the impossible weight of this revelation. The Quirkless boy, the symbol of humanity's past, now revealed as the harbinger of its divine future. The implications were staggering, threatening to unravel everything they knew.

"Why him?" Toshinori finally asked, his voice low, filled with a desperate need for understanding. "Why young Midoriya? Why would he become an Agito?"

Kagutsuchi's smile held a strange, almost serene quality. He simply met Toshinori's gaze, his dark eyes seemingly seeing right through him. "Because he's pure."

"Pure?" Naomasa repeated, a blink of confusion on his face. He glanced at Izuku, then back at Kagutsuchi, trying to understand what kind of "purity" could be relevant here.

Kagutsuchi took another sip of his sake, his gaze lingering on the bewildered detective. "It's precisely because he does not have a Quirk that he can become Agito. Think of it this way, Detective: Quirks are like a filter, a distortion. They are a partial, imperfect connection to the Will of Light's scattered essence. Every Quirk, no matter how powerful, warps that connection, making the individual's vessel 'impure' in a cosmic sense. But Izuku," he tilted his head towards the boy, "he is an empty canvas. An unmarred vessel, capable of holding the full, unadulterated power of the Will of Light without interference. His Quirklessness isn't a deficiency; it's his greatest asset. It makes him the ideal conduit."

Izuku's world tilted on its axis. The words echoed in his mind, shattering decades of ingrained self-perception. His quirklessness wasn't a deficiency. It was his greatest asset. The very thing that had defined him, that had been a constant source of shame and insecurity, was now being reframed as the ultimate advantage. It was a truth so profound, so utterly contrary to everything he had ever been told, that it left him breathless. The idea that his past "handicap" was, in fact, the gateway to a power that went beyond what could even be conceptualized as a Quirk, a power that Kagutsuchi described as "limitless," was almost too much to bear. His eyes, already wide, widened further, reflecting a chaotic mix of terror, wonder, and a nascent, unbelievable hope.

Naomasa frantically interrupted, as if trying to grasp onto something more grounded, something he could process with his logical mind. "Kagutsuchi-san, hold on!" he exclaimed, leaning forward, his hands flat on the table. "You're telling us... that the kid with us, Izuku Midoriya... is set to become a God? As in, an actual divine being? Now you're just talking bull!" His voice was strained, a desperate attempt to cling to the familiar reality he understood.

Kagutsuchi chuckled, a low, amused sound that seemed to mock Naomasa's frantic disbelief. He raised his sake cup, his dark eyes sparkling. "Can I, Detective?" he playfully countered, taking a slow sip. "Can you really tell that, with your Quirk so conveniently... useless on me?"

Naomasa bristled, biting into his lips, his gaze fixed on Kagutsuchi. He had been putting his Quirk to its absolute sensitivity, straining to detect even a single lie, an embellishment, a false positive in the man's outlandish narrative. But so far, he had been getting nothing. The unsettling truth was, Kagutsuchi's words, as insane as they sounded, registered as genuine. It was a truth his Quirk couldn't quite process, a reality that broke its very parameters. The detective's frustration was palpable, a silent scream against the impossible.

"Then tell us," Toshinori interjected, his voice cutting through the tension, his gaze now steely, focused on the most critical question. "Why was young Midoriya attacked by that creature?"

Kagutsuchi's expression remained calm, almost detached, as he met Toshinori's gaze. He simply stated, his voice devoid of any emotion, "It's precisely because of his potential, Toshinori, that they are set to kill him and others like him. If the universe is to come into chaos because of Agito, then it is our job to maintain order, per the Will of Darkness' prerogative."

The silence that followed Kagutsuchi's chilling declaration was absolute, a heavy shroud woven from disbelief and a dawning, terrible understanding. Izuku, still reeling from the revelation of his own nature, felt a cold knot form in his stomach. They were set to kill him. Others like him. The skeletal monster from the junkyard, its faceless mask and serrated blades, flashed in his mind with renewed horror. It hadn't been a random attack; it had been an execution attempt.

Toshinori's restored face, usually a beacon of heroic resolve, was now etched with grim determination. His eyes, fixed on Kagutsuchi, burned with a fierce protectiveness that transcended his own miraculous healing. "They?" he repeated, his voice low, a dangerous rumble. "Who are 'they,' Kagutsuchi-san? And why are you, an 'angel' of the 'Will of Darkness,' trying to save him, if your purpose is to 'maintain order' by killing Agito?"

Naomasa, ever the detective, picked up on the contradiction, his frustration momentarily forgotten in the face of this new, terrifying puzzle. "Yes," he pressed, his voice sharp. "Your story doesn't add up. You claim to be an agent of order, yet you just saved an Agito from another one of your kind. Explain yourself."

Kagutsuchi took another slow sip of sake, his dark eyes sweeping over their faces, a faint, almost imperceptible smirk playing on his lips. "Ah, the logical inconsistencies. Always so amusing to watch you mortals grapple with them." He set his cup down with a soft clink. "You see, the Will of Darkness is not as... monolithic as you might imagine. There are... factions, if you will. Different interpretations of 'order.' Some of my brethren believe that the only way to maintain true order is to eradicate any potential for chaos, which includes all Agito, regardless of their intent. They are the purists, the zealots."

He paused, his gaze lingering on Izuku, a flicker of something akin to pity, or perhaps a detached fascination, in his eyes. "And then there are those like me. We believe that true order can only be achieved through balance. Chaos and Light, they are necessary components of existence. To simply snuff out the Will of Light entirely would be to create a void, a sterile, lifeless universe that would ultimately collapse in on itself. A universe without the spark of evolution, without the potential for something new."

"So," Toshinori interjected, his voice laced with suspicion, "you believe in... nurturing these 'Agito'?"

Kagutsuchi chuckled, a dry, knowing sound. "Nurturing? Perhaps not in the way you humans understand it. More like... guiding. Observing. Ensuring that the nascent deities don't, shall we say, accidentally unravel the fabric of reality before they've even had a chance to understand their own power." He leaned back, his hands returning to his pockets. "Think of it as damage control. A very, very long-term damage control project."

Izuku, who had been listening intently, finally found his voice, a shaky whisper. "So... the creature... it was trying to... to kill me because I'm an Agito?"

Kagutsuchi nodded, his expression calm. "Precisely. Its directive was simple: eliminate the threat. You, Izuku Midoriya, are a threat to their version of 'order.' A very significant one, given your potential."

"And you... you saved me," Izuku continued, the words feeling strange on his tongue. "Why?"

Kagutsuchi's smile broadened, a touch of genuine, if still unsettling, warmth in his eyes. "Because, young Midoriya, you are a variable. An anomaly. And anomalies, when properly guided, can be far more interesting than predictable certainties. Besides," he added, a mischievous glint in his eyes, "it's always more fun to play with the rules than to simply follow them, wouldn't you agree?"

Naomasa slammed his hand on the table, the quiet thwack echoing in the room. "This is insane!" he exclaimed, his voice rising in exasperation. "You're talking about cosmic battles, divine beings, and now you're telling us you're playing some kind of twisted game with a child's life?!"

Kagutsuchi merely shrugged, unperturbed. "Life, Detective, is always a game. And the stakes, in this particular game, are higher than you can possibly imagine. But rest assured," he said, his voice dropping to a low, serious tone, "I have no intention of letting young Midoriya come to any harm. Not yet, anyway. He has a role to play. A very important one."

"What role?" Toshinori demanded, his voice sharp. "What do you want from him?"

Kagutsuchi's gaze swept over Izuku once more, a faint, almost prophetic look in his eyes. "He is the purest vessel, the unmarred canvas. He is the potential for a new path, a different kind of evolution. He is the one who can truly bridge the gap between your world and ours. He is... the next step." He paused, then added, his voice a low, resonant murmur, "And he will need to learn to control his power. To understand what it truly means to be an Agito. To embrace the chaos within him, and to wield it for a purpose yet unknown."

The weight of his words settled on Izuku, heavy and suffocating. A purpose yet unknown. He was a pawn in a cosmic game he barely understood, a vessel for a power he couldn't control, hunted by beings he couldn't comprehend. The terror returned, colder and more profound than before. He was no longer just Izuku Midoriya, the Quirkless boy who wanted to be a hero. He was Agito. And his life, as Kagutsuchi had so casually stated, had just begun to get very, very interesting.

The aroma of grilled skewers, once a comforting backdrop, now seemed almost sacrilegious in the wake of Kagutsuchi's pronouncements. The low, lacquered table, laden with plates of yakitori, tempura, and bowls of steaming ramen, felt less like a convivial feast and more like a stage for an unfolding, impossible drama.

Toshinori Yagi, still basking in the miraculous restoration of his body, picked up a piece of chicken yakitori with a hand that no longer trembled. He brought it slowly to his lips, his eyes wide with a profound, almost childlike wonder. For years, his diet had been restricted to bland, easily digestible purees and nutrient supplements, a constant reminder of his shattered internal organs. Now, the rich, savory taste of the grilled chicken, the satisfying texture of the meat, was an overwhelming sensory experience. He took a small, deliberate bite, chewing slowly, savoring every nuance, as if relearning the very act of eating. A faint, bewildered smile touched his lips, a mix of joy and disbelief. "It's... it's incredible," he murmured, his voice deep and resonant, almost to himself. "I can... I can actually taste it. All of it."

Beside him, Izuku Midoriya stared down at his bowl of ramen, the steam curling around his face like a ghostly shroud. The noodles, usually his favorite, looked unappetizing, a tangled mess in the broth. The revelations, the cosmic battles, the terrifying truth of his own existence as an "Agito" – it all swirled in his mind, a nauseating vortex that made the thought of food unbearable. His stomach churned, not with hunger, but with a cold, hollow dread. He picked up his chopsticks, but his hand trembled, and he set them back down, unable to bring himself to eat.

Across the table, Kagutsuchi, utterly unperturbed by the weighty atmosphere, was already halfway through a plate of assorted sushi. He picked up a piece of tuna nigiri with practiced ease, popping it into his mouth. His dark eyes, however, flicked to Izuku, observing the boy's distress with a detached, almost clinical air.

"Eat, Izuku Midoriya," Kagutsuchi said, his voice calm, a faint chew audible as he spoke. "Last I checked, humans don't do so well on an empty stomach. Especially when they're undergoing... significant changes." He gestured vaguely with the hand that wasn't holding sushi. "You'll need your strength. The universe isn't going to save itself on an empty tank, you know."

Naomasa Tsukauchi, who had managed only a few bites of his own meal, slammed his chopsticks down with a sharp clatter that cut through the strained quiet. His face, usually a mask of professional composure, was now etched with a simmering fury. He glared at Kagutsuchi, his jaw tight.

"Dismissive, aren't you?" Naomasa bit out, his voice low and dangerous. "You can't expect a child to just act like nothing's wrong after everything that just happened! He's just been told he's a pawn in some divine war, that he's a target for assassination, and that he's a 'nascent deity' for crying out loud! Give him a break!" The detective's hand instinctively twitched towards his side, a silent reminder of the pistol he no longer felt confident wielding against this impossible man.

Kagutsuchi merely waved a dismissive hand, a faint, almost bored sigh escaping him. "Breaks, breaks. I've given plenty of those, Detective. Figuratively and literally." He popped another piece of sushi into his mouth, chewing slowly, his gaze returning to Izuku. "The boy is going to need to eat eventually. And get back on his feet. The world, as you know it, is about to get significantly more complicated for him. Best to be well-fed for it, wouldn't you agree?" His dark eyes held a knowing glint, utterly unconcerned by Naomasa's anger or Izuku's distress.

Naomasa leaned forward, his voice dropping, a chilling question in his tone. "Have you... have you killed Agito before, Kagutsuchi-san?"

Kagutsuchi paused, a piece of tempura halfway to his mouth. His dark eyes met Naomasa's, a flicker of something unreadable in their depths. He then brought the tempura to his lips, taking a slow, deliberate bite. "Of course," he said, his voice utterly flat, devoid of any emotion. "Many times. That was before I got bored with it." He chewed, then swallowed. "Didn't mean I didn't meet Agito who deserved a good death, simply because they were scum. Some of them, truly, were quite... unpleasant." His lips curved into a faint, almost nostalgic smile that sent a shiver down Izuku's spine.

Toshinori, who had been halfway through a mouthful of ramen, froze. The words, "deserved a good death," echoed in the room, chilling him to the bone. He slowly lowered his chopsticks, his gaze fixed on Kagutsuchi, his face contorted in a grimace of pure, unadulterated fury.

"Who," Toshinori began, his voice a low, dangerous rumble that seemed to vibrate through the tatami mats, "who even gave you the right to do such a thing?"

Kagutsuchi looked at Toshinori, a piece of sushi still poised between his chopsticks, as if the Symbol of Peace had just sprouted an extra arm out of his head. His dark eyes blinked slowly, a faint, almost bewildered expression on his face. "Who else?" he replied, his voice calm, utterly devoid of any hint of irony or self-doubt. "The Most High, of course. My purpose, Toshinori. My directive." He then popped the sushi into his mouth, resuming his meal as if the conversation was entirely mundane.

Toshinori stared, his anger momentarily battling with a profound sense of disbelief. He wasn't sure if he could even believe the man. "That's... that's still murder!" he finally choked out, his voice strained, raw with indignation. "Taking a life, regardless of your 'directive,' is still murder!"

Kagutsuchi merely nodded, his expression unperturbed. "Indeed," he agreed calmly, wiping his lips with a napkin. "That's precisely what taking a life is. It's better for people to get with the program than sugarcoating it with anything else, wouldn't you agree? No need for euphemisms when the act itself is so clear." His dark eyes held a chilling clarity, as if the concept of 'murder' held no moral weight for him, only a factual definition.

Izuku didn't think he could sink down even further. The fact that he had actually… taken a life. It wasn't just a vague concept anymore; the memory, once a terrifying blur, was slowly, agonizingly coming back to him. The skeletal creature, its purple etchings flaring, arcing through the air, and then his golden-charged kick, the sickening impact, the implosion. He had done that. He had ended something. And now, this being, this 'angel,' was calmly discussing it as if it were a chore, a mundane task, even admitting to doing it many times before. A cold, suffocating wave of nausea washed over him, far worse than any hunger pang. His hands, resting on the table, felt alien, stained with an invisible, unbearable weight. He curled his fingers into tight fists, pressing his palms against his thighs under the table, as if trying to physically push away the horrifying truth. His breath hitched, a silent, desperate gasp, and his eyes, wide with unspeakable horror, darted from Kagutsuchi's placid face to Toshinori's furious one, then to Naomasa's grim expression. He was a monster, wasn't he? A tool. A weapon. And the thought was far more terrifying than any villain he had ever imagined.

A gentle hand landed on his shoulder, a large, warm presence that broke through the suffocating fog of his despair. Izuku flinched, then slowly, hesitantly, looked up. It was Toshinori, his face etched with a profound, tender concern. He had abandoned his meal, his chopsticks lying forgotten beside his bowl.

"Young Midoriya," Toshinori said, his voice soft, yet firm, pulling Izuku's gaze away from the horrifying memories. "Look at me. What you did... it wasn't your fault. You were protecting yourself. You were protecting us." His thumb gently stroked Izuku's shoulder, a reassuring gesture. "Even if it was... if it was a choice, which it wasn't, you were acting in self-defense against a lethal threat. A hero's duty is to protect, and that includes protecting oneself when faced with such danger."

Kagutsuchi, who had been observing the exchange with a faint, almost amused expression, cleared his throat. "Now, now, Toshinori," he interjected, his voice calm, a subtle warning in his tone. "Didn't we just discuss sugarcoating things? Let's not start now, after such a productive conversation about the nature of... realities."

Toshinori's head snapped towards Kagutsuchi, his eyes narrowing into scornful slits. He shot the enigmatic man a glare so intense it could have melted steel, a silent, furious promise of retribution that spoke volumes more than any shouted words.

Naomasa, seeing the boy's distress and Toshinori's efforts, added his own calming voice, though his gaze remained sharp on Kagutsuchi. "He's right, Midoriya. You're not in trouble. Not with us. You had no real agency over what happened. No court, no law, would ever charge you with murder given the circumstances. You were attacked, and you defended yourself. That's the truth of it."

Kagutsuchi then leaned forward slightly, his dark eyes fixed on Izuku, a faint, almost challenging smile playing on his lips. "But what if you were in control, Izuku Midoriya? What if you had full agency over that power? Would you still claim it wasn't your fault then? Would you still be absolved when the next one comes for you, and you choose to end them?"

Toshinori's hand tightened on Izuku's shoulder, his gaze hardening as he met Kagutsuchi's eyes. "He won't have to," he vowed, his voice steely, radiating a fierce, unwavering determination. "I will protect him. I will protect young Midoriya from anyone who tries to harm him, Agito or otherwise."

Kagutsuchi merely tilted his head, a faint, almost pitying smile touching his lips. His dark eyes swept over Toshinori, then to the side, as if looking at something only he could see. "You speak with such conviction, Toshinori Yagi," he mused, his voice a low, almost mournful murmur. "But tell me, how did you fare against my old friend, the one from Dagobah Beach? The one who left you bleeding? May he rest in peace." The last words were delivered with a chilling, casual finality that sent a fresh wave of dread through the room, a stark reminder of the insurmountable power Kagutsuchi wielded, and the cosmic game they were all now unwilling players in.

Toshinori could only bristle in silence, his jaw clenching. The memory of that fight, the speed, the precision, the sheer, alien power of the skeletal figure, was still vivid in his mind. He had been utterly outmatched, his strength and experience useless against an opponent that defied all known laws. But then, a spark ignited in his eyes, a renewed defiance. "That was before," he growled, his voice low, "before I was healed. Before I was back at full strength. Now... now I might actually have a chance."

Kagutsuchi's smile widened, a dry, almost mocking amusement in his eyes. "No, you don't," he replied, his voice calm, utterly devoid of doubt. "Even at your strongest, Toshinori, you wouldn't have been able to defeat him. Incapacitate him, perhaps, for a time. But put down? Not a chance. They are divine beings, practically indestructible to mortals. That's the only reason Izuku was able to kill him. Because he, too, is an Agito."

"Does that make you one, then?" Naomasa asked with a glare, and was caught off guard by a snicker this earned him from the other man.

"Nope," Kagutsuchi replied, shaking his head slowly. He picked up another piece of sushi, his movements unhurried. "I told you already, I work under the Will of Darkness. I am not an Agito in any sense that I can defy the natural order. My existence, my power, is bound by His design. Only Agito do that. Only they possess the innate capacity to truly unravel the cosmic fabric, to destroy beings like my old friend, whose very essence is woven into the laws of this universe. That they can actually destroy our bodies at all is proof that they hold the potential to tip the scales, to rewrite reality itself. It's why they are so... problematic, to some of my brethren." He finished his sushi, a faint, almost philosophical sigh escaping him. "And why they must be watched very, very closely."

Izuku, his voice still shaky but imbued with a nascent, desperate resolve, finally mustered the strength to speak. "I... I wouldn't do such a thing," he stammered, looking up at Kagutsuchi, his eyes wide and earnest. "Misuse my powers, I mean. It's always been my dream to become a hero. To help people. I would never... never put the world in peril. Never."

Toshinori's grip on Izuku's shoulder tightened, a proud, unwavering look in his eyes as he met Kagutsuchi's gaze. "He speaks the truth," All Might affirmed, his voice resonating with conviction. "That is why he will be taught. He will learn to control this power, whatever it is, and become the hero he is meant to be. The greatest hero."

Kagutsuchi stared at both of them for a long moment, his dark eyes unreadable. Then, slowly, a faint smile once again came onto his lips, a peculiar mix of amusement and something else – perhaps a hint of genuine, if detached, interest. "Cute," he murmured, almost to himself, but loud enough for them to hear. He didn't comment on it any more, simply picking up another piece of sushi. "Well," he added, with a casual shrug, "it seems you've certainly got your work cut out for you, then."

"And that's why," Toshinori continued, his voice firm, his gaze unwavering as he looked directly at Izuku, "I've decided. Young Midoriya, I want you to be my successor."

The words hung in the air, shattering the tense quiet of the room. Izuku's eyes, already wide, stretched even further, his jaw dropping in utter, speechless shock. His mind reeled, trying to process the impossible declaration. Successor? All Might's successor? The thought was so monumental, so utterly beyond his wildest dreams, that it rendered him completely silent, his breath caught in his throat.

Toshinori, seeing the boy's stunned reaction, took a deep breath, his expression softening slightly. "My Quirk, One For All," he began, his voice dropping to a confidential tone, "is not like other Quirks. It is a sacred torch, passed down from one generation to the next. A singular power that accumulates strength with each wielder, growing stronger, more potent. It is a Quirk that can be given, and it is a Quirk that must be inherited by one with a true heroic spirit." He then recounted the history of One For All, the sacrifices, the immense power, the burden it carried, and the unwavering resolve of its previous holders. He spoke of the fight against All For One, the injury, the dwindling time limit, and the desperate need for a new Symbol of Peace.

When he finished, Toshinori looked at Izuku, his gaze filled with a profound conviction. "And after seeing your heart, your unwavering desire to help others, even when you had no power of your own... after seeing what you did at Dagobah Beach, even then... I know it. You are the one, Young Midoriya. You are worthy to inherit One For All."

Kagutsuchi, who had been listening to Toshinori's heartfelt monologue with a serene, almost bored expression, suddenly raised his chopsticks, a half-chewed mouthful of rice still visible. "It doesn't work that way," he interjected calmly, his voice flat, cutting through the emotional weight of Toshinori's declaration like a dull knife. "One For All won't be transferred. His status as an Agito will reject it."

The admission hit Toshinori and Izuku like a physical blow, leaving them reeling in stunned silence. Toshinori's jaw tightened, his eyes wide with disbelief. "What... what do you mean?" he finally managed, his voice strained. "It... it has to work! It's how One For All is passed on!"

Kagutsuchi calmly swallowed his rice, then lowered his chopsticks. "Precisely. And if you attempt to transfer it, it will become utterly irrelevant. It will simply bounce back to you, Toshinori." He leaned back, a faint, knowing smirk on his lips. "Agito are naturally immune to external Quirk factors. Their very essence, being a pure manifestation of the Will of Light, is fundamentally incompatible with the chaotic, mutated energy of Quirks. Think of it as a divine firewall. Even poison won't affect Izuku, for instance. His immune system, his entire biological framework, has been supercharged, optimized to a level far beyond anything your Quirks could ever hope to achieve. He is, as I said, an empty canvas, but one that actively repels any paint that isn't of its own divine making."

The implications of Kagutsuchi's words settled over the room like a suffocating blanket. Izuku felt his breath catch in his throat, his mind struggling to grasp the sheer enormity of this new barrier. Not only was he an Agito, a being of cosmic significance and danger, but now he couldn't even receive the power he had idolized his entire life. The dream, the very core of his being, was suddenly snatched away, replaced by a terrifying, alien reality. His wide eyes, already swimming with confusion and fear, now held a fresh, profound despair. He looked from Toshinori, whose face was a mask of utter bewilderment, to Kagutsuchi, who merely watched them with that infuriatingly calm, knowing smile. The world, which had just begun to offer him a path to heroism, was now slamming a door in his face, revealing a destiny far grander, and far more terrifying, than he had ever imagined.

Kagutsuchi observed Izuku's reaction, a faint huff escaping him. "He can still be a hero, Toshinori, if you truly wish it," he stated, his voice even. "He just has to cultivate the power he has now. With my input, of course."

Toshinori and Naomasa exchanged a quick, meaningful glance, a silent agreement passing between them. "Absolutely not," Toshinori said, his voice firm, his eyes narrowed at Kagutsuchi.

"There's no way we'd allow that," Naomasa added, his tone equally resolute.

Kagutsuchi merely shrugged, unconcerned. "Your opinion is noted, Detective. And yours, Toshinori. However, it is also irrelevant. You actually need me. I am, after all, the only one who knows how Agito work, and I am, at least, willing to help you to a degree. Unless you prefer to let the boy stumble blindly into his own destruction, or worse, become a tool for those who do wish to plunge the universe into chaos." He picked up another piece of sushi, his gaze sweeping over their faces, a silent challenge in his dark eyes.

"Never," Toshinori insisted, his voice a low, unyielding growl, his eyes blazing with a fierce protectiveness. "You cannot be trusted, Kagutsuchi-san. Not with Young Midoriya's future, and certainly not with his power."

Kagutsuchi finished his sushi, then slowly, deliberately, wiped his mouth with a napkin. "Oh, I'm quite fine with that, Toshinori," he replied, his voice calm, almost serene. "I'll still persist, regardless of your trust. You see, you can't realistically stop me. Not unless Izuku himself steps up and actively tries to. And frankly," he added, a faint, almost dismissive smirk playing on his lips as he glanced at the still-reeling Izuku, "I don't believe the kid is ready for even that kind of fun. Not yet, anyway."

The casual dismissal, the utter lack of concern for his feelings, struck Izuku with a fresh wave of humiliation and despair. Not ready for even that kind of fun? The words echoed in his head, twisting the knife of his already shattered dreams. He was a pawn, a variable, a problem to be "watched," and now, apparently, too weak to even defy his cosmic overseer. His fists, still clenched beneath the table, trembled with a mixture of impotent rage and overwhelming sadness. His vision blurred, not from tears, but from the sheer weight of the impossible situation. He wanted to scream, to shout, to prove Kagutsuchi wrong, but the words caught in his throat, choked by the crushing reality of his powerlessness. He was just Izuku Midoriya, the Quirkless boy, all over again, but this time, the stakes were infinitely higher, and the path to his dream seemed to vanish entirely.

Toshinori grit his teeth, the muscles in his jaw clenching so hard they ached. He processed Kagutsuchi's words, the calm, unwavering certainty in his tone, and the chilling implications of his power. A cold knot formed in his stomach, a bitter realization that they were, indeed, at a stalemate. He could try to fight the man off, yes. He was back at full strength, the vibrant power coursing through his veins a testament to Kagutsuchi's impossible healing. But the thought of testing that strength against a being who casually referred to the Dagobah monster as an "old friend" and dismissed his own might as insufficient to "put down" such a creature… it was a gamble he wasn't willing to take. Not now. Not when so much was at stake, especially Izuku's safety.

And then there was the other, more shameful truth. He had been healed. Given the most coveted second chance he had been aching for in his most private of moments. He hadn't felt this good, this whole, in years. The thought of that restoration, that miraculous reprieve, being taken away as simply as it had been granted, by the very being who had given it… a cold, insidious fear snaked through his newfound strength. He was afraid. Afraid to lose it. Afraid to test the limits of Kagutsuchi's patience, or his power. He could only clench his fists, his gaze locked on the table, a silent admission of his unwilling compromise.

As if reading his thoughts, and really, he just might have, Kagutsuchi sighed. "No, Toshinori, I'm not so petty as to relinquish my miracle. We have protocols over such things. This was a one-time deal. For free. What you do with your life from now on?" He shrugged. "Not in my ballpark. But, I will tell you this. If you would be so willing to still get involved with the boy, then be my guest, but just know it's not going to be the mentor-student dynamic you think it'll be. It will be far more... symbiotic. A partnership, if you will, between the two of you, with me as the necessary, albeit unwelcome, third party."

"That's provided I would even let you," Toshinori countered, his voice low and dangerous, a vein throbbing in his temple. His gaze was fixed on Kagutsuchi, a silent, furious challenge. "I am not going to let Young Midoriya be used or exploited by you, or anyone else. He is not a tool, and he is not a pawn in your cosmic games."

Just as Toshinori finished, a small, choked sound escaped Izuku. His head snapped up, his wide, desperate eyes darting between All Might and Kagutsuchi. He opened his mouth, a raw, inarticulate plea forming on his lips, a desperate need to finally speak his heart out, to reclaim some semblance of agency in a conversation that had stripped him bare.

"But… but I… I want to be a hero!" Izuku finally managed, his voice cracking, barely above a whisper. The words tumbled out, laced with a raw, desperate pain that belied his usual timid nature. His eyes, brimming with unshed tears, pleaded with Toshinori, then flickered towards Kagutsuchi. "I… I don't care if I can't have One For All! I don't care if I'm… if I'm an Agito! I just… I just want to help people! I want to save them! That's… that's all I've ever wanted! Please… please don't… don't take that away from me!" His voice broke on the last word, a choked sob escaping him, the dam of his carefully contained emotions finally bursting.

Toshinori, hearing the raw, unbridled pain in Izuku's voice, felt a fresh surge of determination, solidifying his resolve. He placed both hands firmly on the boy's shoulders, his grip a grounding anchor in Izuku's tumultuous world. His gaze, usually so full of heroic might, was now brimming with a profound tenderness and unwavering support. "Young Midoriya," he said, his voice deep and resonant, a promise in every syllable. "No one is taking that away from you. Not while I stand here. We will find a way. Together."

Meanwhile, Naomasa, his eyes still narrowed on Kagutsuchi, muttered under his breath, almost to himself, "I should just take him in. Run every test imaginable. See just how infallible he truly is." His hand twitched again, this time towards his phone, a fleeting thought of calling for backup, of bringing in the full force of the law against this impossible, infuriating being.

Kagutsuchi, however, seemed entirely oblivious to Naomasa's simmering rebellion. His dark eyes, boring into Izuku like he could see into the boy's very soul, held a peculiar mix of disinterest and something almost like… assessment. He just shrugged, a casual, almost bored gesture. "Yeah, whatever," he drawled, the words dismissive, yet carrying an undercurrent of something far older and more knowing. "It's not like I was going to groom him to be the destroyer of everything. That's more All For One's current schtick, wouldn't you agree?" He took another sip of sake, his gaze never leaving Izuku, as if waiting for a reaction that might never come.

Toshinori froze, the casual mention of his nemesis, All For One, hitting him like a physical blow. Naomasa, too, seemed to pause, his hand still hovering near his phone. Slowly, Toshinori lifted his gaze to Kagutsuchi, his voice barely a whisper, laced with a dangerous tremor. "What... what did you just say?"

Kagutsuchi, mid-chew on a piece of sushi, looked at them with an air of mild annoyance, as if they had interrupted a fascinating internal monologue. He swallowed, then replied, bluntly, "All For One is still alive. And he's currently grooming a successor of his own. Tenko Shimura." Toshinori's eyes widened further than they possibly could, a gasp catching in his throat, the name hitting him with something far greater, far heavier. But before he could react further, Kagutsuchi corrected himself, a slight frown on his face. "Ah, no, my apologies. The boy's current name is Tomura Shigaraki."

Then, Kagutsuchi paused, his head tilting slightly, his gaze unfocused, as if listening to something only he could hear. "No," he murmured, responding to seemingly no one, a faint roll of his eyes. "You heard it wrong. It happens. Alright, fine, it's your grandson. Happy?" He finished with a sigh, looking back at Toshinori and Naomasa, an expression of long-suffering patience on his face.

Toshinori, reeling from the casual mention of his nemesis and the bizarre correction that followed, could hardly say a word. His mind, still grappling with the impossible miracle of his own healing and the revelation of Izuku's true nature, found itself utterly overwhelmed. He stared at Kagutsuchi, his jaw slack, haunted by the implications of a foe he thought vanquished, and the unsettling, almost playful way this 'angel' spoke of such grave matters. A cold dread, deeper than any physical pain, settled in his restored stomach.

Naomasa, however, was less concerned with the identity of some distant villain and more with the immediate, unnerving presence before them. He had watched Kagutsuchi's head tilt, his gaze unfocus, and the faint, almost petulant murmur directed at seemingly no one. The detective's brow furrowed, his professional caution warring with a profound sense of bewilderment.

Naomasa's jaw, which had been set in a grim line, slowly slackened further. He rubbed a hand over his face, as if trying to wipe away the absurdity of what he'd just witnessed. "Who in the name of...?" he muttered, his voice strained, his gaze darting to the seemingly empty space Kagutsuchi had been addressing. "What the hell was that, Kagutsuchi-san? There's no one else here! Are you quite alright, or are you just enjoying watching us lose our minds?" His eyes narrowed, searching for any tell, any logical explanation for the man's bizarre behavior.

Kagutsuchi, however, seemed to ignore Naomasa's increasingly exasperated questions. His dark eyes, which had been fixed on some unseen point beyond their comprehension, slowly refocused, a deep sigh escaping his lips. "Oh, I'm going to get into so much trouble for this," he murmured, almost to himself, his voice laced with a strange mix of resignation and mischievous delight. He then raised his right hand, a subtle, almost imperceptible shift in the air around his fingers.

With a sharp, decisive snap! that echoed unnaturally loud in the small room, the very fabric of reality seemed to ripple. The air shimmered, distorting like heat haze over asphalt. Then, from the shimmering distortions, figures began to coalesce. First, faint outlines, then rapidly solidifying into distinct forms. One by one, seven individuals materialized around the low table, their expressions a mixture of shock, confusion, and dawning recognition. Each wore clothing from a different era, their eyes wide with disbelief as they looked around the tatami room, then at each other, and finally, with profound intensity, at Toshinori and Izuku. The vestiges of One For All, in temporary, corporeal forms, had been summoned.

The sudden appearance of seven new people in the already cramped tatami room sent a fresh wave of shock through Toshinori, Naomasa, and Izuku. Toshinori stumbled back, his restored body momentarily forgetting its newfound strength, his eyes wide with a mixture of awe and profound disbelief. Naomasa, ever the professional, instinctively reached for his holstered pistol, his gaze darting between the newcomers, assessing the sudden, impossible threat. Izuku, already overwhelmed, could only stare, his mouth agape, recognizing the faces from the brief, fleeting glimpses he'd had within the Vestige world.

The newly materialized figures themselves were no less bewildered.

First among them, a slender young man with disheveled white hair that framed a gentle, somewhat tired face, the First User, Yoichi Shigaraki, blinked slowly, his green eyes wide with profound bewilderment. He wore a simple, light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers, clothing that seemed to belong to an earlier, less chaotic era. He looked down at his own hands, clenching and unclenching them as if testing their newfound solidity, a faint tremor running through his frame. "What... what is this place?" he murmured, his voice soft, almost a whisper, yet resonating with an ancient uncertainty. He then looked around at the other materialized figures, his expression shifting from confusion to dawning recognition, before his gaze finally settled on Izuku, a flicker of something akin to wonder in his eyes.

Beside him, a burly, rugged man with spiky, reddish-orange hair and a perpetually stern expression, the Second User, Toshitsugu Kudo, stood rigidly. He wore a dark, high-collared shirt beneath a tactical vest and large, gauntlet-like arm supports. A low growl rumbled in his chest, and he immediately took a defensive stance, eyes narrowed in suspicion as he scanned the unfamiliar surroundings. "Where are we?!" he demanded, his voice a harsh rumble, his gaze immediately locking onto Kagutsuchi with a primal distrust, ready for a fight he didn't understand. "Who the hell are you, and what have you done?!"

A lean, muscular man with spiky gray hair tied back with a dark bandanna, and a serious, focused expression, the Third User, Bruce, stood with his arms crossed, his eyes narrowed as he took in the scene. He wore a sleeveless, dark green tactical jumpsuit with white bandages wrapped around his forearms. He rubbed at his temples, his eyes squeezed shut for a moment, as if trying to dispel a profound disorientation. "This isn't... the void," he muttered, his voice a weary sigh, opening his eyes to a world he shouldn't be in. "Did someone finally figure out how to pull us out, or are we just dreaming this?"

Next, a man with long, somewhat wild blonde hair and a scarred face, the Fourth User, Hikage Shinomori, stood with a slight hunch, his eyes wide and unfocused as if still processing an internal struggle. He wore a tattered, dark green hooded jacket over a light shirt and loose-fitting trousers, with knee pads and bare feet, giving him a somewhat reclusive appearance. He blinked slowly, his gaze sweeping the room with an almost pained bewilderment, then looked down at his own bare feet, flexing his toes. "This... this feels too real," he whispered, his voice raspy, a profound sense of unease emanating from him. "The static... it's gone. But how?"

A bald, heavily muscled man with a confident, almost cocky grin, and a bandolier of cartridges across his bare chest, the Fifth User, Daigoro Banjo, stood with his hands on his hips, his eyes wide with a mix of surprise and a hint of his usual boisterous energy. He wore an open black jacket with golden shoulder pads and dark trousers. He let out a surprised whistle. "Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed, his voice a booming laugh that filled the room. "Look at us! Back in the flesh! What kind of crazy Quirk pulled this off?!" His gaze immediately went to Kagutsuchi, a challenging glint in his eyes.

Then, a quiet, unassuming man with short, dark hair and a high-collared, long red coat that obscured most of his face, the Sixth User, En Tayutai, looked around with wide, bewildered eyes, his hands tucked into his pockets. He seemed the most disoriented, his posture slightly slumped. "But... we were just... waiting," he stammered, his voice soft, almost lost in the sudden cacophony, his face a mask of utter disorientation at being thrust into a physical space. "This... this isn't right. What's happening?"

Finally, a powerful, determined woman with long, dark hair that swept over one shoulder, and a confident, kind face, the Seventh User, Nana Shimura, stood tall, her eyes scanning the room with a mixture of profound confusion and fierce protectiveness. She wore a classic hero costume, complete with a white cape and yellow gloves. Her presence exuded an aura of unwavering resolve, but her gaze, however, settled on Toshinori, a profound, almost tearful recognition dawning in her eyes, quickly followed by bewildered disbelief. "Toshinori...?" she whispered, her voice thick with emotion, utterly bewildered by the sight of her former student, whole and in his prime, in a place she shouldn't be. "You're... you're really here? And... what is this place?"

All seven of them, each a legend in their own right, stood in varying states of shock and confusion, their gazes sweeping the room, trying to make sense of their impossible return to the physical world. The air crackled with their combined presence, a silent symphony of disbelief and dawning questions.

Toshinori, who had been reeling from the sheer impossibility of the situation, felt his breath catch in his throat. His gaze, wide with a mixture of terror and a nascent, unbelievable hope, was drawn inexorably to the last figure to materialize. Nana Shimura. His mentor. The woman he had revered, the one who had sacrificed everything, the one he had mourned for decades. She stood there, solid and real, her dark hair, her strong jawline, the familiar, kind yet determined expression on her face. She was exactly as he remembered her, untouched by time or the void.

"Nana...?" he breathed, the name a fragile, disbelieving whisper, barely audible above the sudden clamor of the other Vestiges' bewildered exclamations. His eyes, usually so sharp and heroic, were now swimming with unshed tears, blurring the edges of this impossible reality. He took a hesitant step forward, then another, his hand trembling as he slowly, almost reverently, reached out. It wasn't just seeing her; it was the impossible weight of decades of grief, of guilt, of the burden of One For All, suddenly lifted and replaced by a raw, overwhelming surge of emotion. He saw not just his mentor, but a living, breathing symbol of everything he had fought for, everything he had lost, and everything he had miraculously regained. The world tilted on its axis, and for a long, agonizing moment, nothing else existed but the sight of her, alive. "Nana... it's... it's really you."

Nana Shimura's eyes, previously wide with confusion, now narrowed slightly, focusing solely on the man who had spoken her name. Her gaze swept over Toshinori, taking in his unblemished form, the vibrant health that radiated from him, so starkly different from the emaciated figure she had last known. Disbelief warred with a profound, aching tenderness on her face. A single tear escaped her eye, tracing a path down her cheek.

"Toshinori..." she repeated, her voice a choked gasp, stronger now, filled with an impossible hope. She took a step forward, then another, her own hand reaching out, mirroring his, as if to confirm the reality of his presence. "But... how? You're... you're whole. The injury... it's gone. What is this?" Her voice broke on the last words, a sob catching in her throat as she closed the distance between them. The years, the pain, the separation, all collapsed into that single, impossible moment. Her hand, firm and warm, met his, and then, without another word, she pulled him into a fierce, desperate embrace, burying her face in his shoulder. The Symbol of Peace, the man who had carried her legacy for so long, was openly weeping, holding onto his mentor as if she might vanish at any moment.

The other Vestiges, witnessing this raw, emotional reunion, fell silent. Yoichi's gentle eyes widened further, a look of profound understanding and quiet sadness on his face. Kudo's grim expression softened, a flicker of something akin to empathy in his hardened gaze. Bruce lowered his crossed arms, a rare vulnerability touching his features. Hikage's pained bewilderment shifted to a quiet, almost reverent observation. Banjo's boisterous energy dimmed, replaced by a solemn respect. En, still disoriented, simply stared, perhaps sensing the immense emotional weight of the moment without fully comprehending it.

Izuku, standing a few feet away, felt a fresh wave of tears well up in his own eyes. He had only ever seen All Might as the unwavering Symbol of Peace, the unbreakable hero. To see him so vulnerable, so human, clinging to this woman with such raw, unbridled emotion, was a profound experience. He didn't understand who these new people were, or why they had appeared, but the sheer depth of Toshinori's grief and relief was palpable, pulling at his own heart. It was a side of his idol he'd never imagined, a raw, powerful display that resonated deeply within him.

Naomasa, ever the pragmatist, could only watch, his pistol still half-drawn. The scene before him defied every logical explanation, every law of physics, every understanding of life and death. Yet, the raw, undeniable emotion radiating from Toshinori and Nana was undeniably real. He slowly lowered his hand, his mind struggling to categorize this new, impossible reality.

Kagutsuchi, meanwhile, merely observed the reunion from his seat, a faint, almost imperceptible smile playing on his lips. He took a slow sip of sake, his dark eyes glinting with a detached amusement, as if watching a particularly engaging play unfold. "Well," he murmured, his voice just loud enough to be heard above the soft sounds of Toshinori's sobs, "that's certainly one way to break the ice."

As the emotional reunion between Toshinori and Nana continued, the First User, Yoichi Shigaraki, slowly turned his gaze from the embracing duo to Kagutsuchi, his expression a mixture of profound curiosity and lingering confusion. His white hair seemed to shimmer faintly in the soft light of the lanterns.

"Excuse me," Yoichi began, his voice still soft, but now with a clearer, more direct tone, cutting through the stunned silence that had fallen over the room. "You. The one who... did this." He gestured vaguely at the assembled Vestiges, then at his own solid form. "Who are you? And what exactly is going on here?"

Kagutsuchi lowered his sake cup, his smile broadening slightly. He met Yoichi's gaze, a knowing glint in his dark eyes. "Ah, a very good question, First User," he replied, his voice smooth and unhurried. "And one I would be most happy to answer in full detail. Provided, of course, that you all agree to share a meal with me. My treat, naturally. This establishment has excellent grilled skewers, and I imagine you've all worked up quite an appetite, being... well, un-voided." He gestured expansively around the room, inviting them all to take a seat at the low table, as if summoning the previous users of One For All into corporeal form was merely a preamble to dinner.

En Tayutai, who had been quietly examining the texture of his own coat sleeve, then the solid wood of the table, looked up, his expression a mix of disbelief and a dawning, cautious hope. "These bodies," he began, his voice still soft, but with a newfound urgency. "Are they... are they real? Are we... permanent?"

Kagutsuchi's casual demeanor shifted, though his smile remained. He met En's gaze with a surprising seriousness, his dark eyes holding an ancient weight. "Real, for now," he stated, his voice losing its playful edge, becoming resonant and firm. "Permanent? No. Consider this a temporary reprieve, a very significant exception to... well, to a great many rules." He sighed, a genuine, weary sound this time. "I'm breaking quite a few protocols here, I assure you. This is a chance, a very rare opportunity, granted after what one might call... years of impeccable service on my part." He gestured vaguely upwards. "But I will still need to report back to heaven, eventually. And when I do, you will return to where you were. So, make the most of this visit."

After the initial, unbelievable excitement of the Vestiges' materialization and the raw emotion of Toshinori and Nana's reunion had begun to subside, a more practical, albeit still surreal, atmosphere settled over the private room. The air, once thick with disbelief and tears, now hummed with a strange blend of lingering shock and the mundane reality of a shared space.

Kagutsuchi, with a flourish, gestured towards the menu. "More food, then?" he prompted, his voice light, as if this was merely a slightly larger than usual dinner party. The others, realizing the truth in his earlier statement about appetite, began to nod, some hesitantly, others with a surprising eagerness. The restaurant staff, seemingly unfazed by the sudden increase in clientele, efficiently brought out additional platters of grilled skewers, bowls of rice, and steaming cups of tea.

It was only as the new dishes were being laid out, and the Vestiges began to tentatively reach for chopsticks, that Naomasa, ever the observant detective, noticed something peculiar about the room itself. The private tatami room, which had already been comfortably spacious for just the original four, now seemed to perfectly accommodate all eleven individuals. The low table, which had initially seemed generous, now held enough space for everyone without crowding, and the zabuton cushions appeared to have multiplied just enough for each new guest. His eyes narrowed, scanning the seamless arrangement, then he glanced at Kagutsuchi, a fresh wave of suspicion washing over him.

"You... you planned for this, didn't you?" Naomasa murmured, his voice low, almost accusatory, his gaze fixed on the enigmatic man. "This room... it's exactly the right size. You knew they were coming."

Kagutsuchi merely offered a slow, knowing wink, a faint, satisfied smirk playing on his lips. "A good host always anticipates the needs of his guests, Detective," he replied, his tone utterly unrepentant, as he picked up a skewer of perfectly grilled chicken. "Especially when they arrive with such... unexpected company."

As the food arrived, Daigoro Banjo, with a triumphant grin, snatched a large mug of beer from a passing tray. He brought it to his lips, tilting his head back and chugging it down in one long, satisfying gulp. A deep, resonant "Ahhhhh!" escaped his lips as he slammed the empty mug back onto the table, a broad, almost ecstatic smile on his face. "Man, I missed this!" he declared, wiping a bit of foam from his lips. "Real food, real drink... it's been too long, folks!"

The others, after a moment of hesitation, gradually began to join in. Hikage cautiously picked up a piece of grilled fish, examining it with a thoughtful frown before taking a bite, a faint look of surprise crossing his face at the taste. Bruce, with a more straightforward approach, began to methodically eat the skewers, his focused expression unwavering. Even En, after a moment of internal debate, reached for a small bowl of rice, though his movements remained hesitant.

Only Toshitsugu Kudo, the Second User, remained standing, his gauntlets now removed and placed carefully beside him, but his arms still crossed, his eyes narrowed in a wary assessment of the scene. He watched the others, particularly Yoichi, as they ate. Yoichi, catching his gaze, offered a small, gentle nod, a silent reassurance. Kudo's stern expression softened almost imperceptibly, and with a grunt that might have been a sigh of resignation or reluctant acceptance, he finally reached for a skewer, his movements still stiff, but now joining the meal.

Toshinori, his eyes still a little puffy from his emotional outburst, but now alight with a profound, quiet joy, gently nudged a plate of assorted tempura closer to Nana. "Here, Nana," he said, his voice a little hoarse but full of warmth. "You should eat. You must be starving after... well, after so long." He offered her a soft, encouraging smile.

Nana, still visibly moved but now regaining some of her characteristic composure, looked at the tempura, then at Toshinori, a playful glint entering her eyes. She reached out and lightly flicked his forehead. "My, my, Toshinori," she teased, a soft laugh bubbling up from her throat, a sound he hadn't heard in decades. "Are you doting on me now? It's almost like you've missed me." Her smile was wide and genuine, a beacon of warmth that seemed to fill the room.

Toshinori's smile widened, a genuine, unburdened expression that hadn't graced his face in years. His eyes, still a little red-rimmed and puffy from crying, shone with an undeniable truth. "More than words could ever describe, Nana," he confessed, his voice a low, heartfelt rumble. "More than words could ever describe." He reached out, gently taking her hand, his thumb tracing over her knuckles.

Then, as if a sudden thought had jolted him, Toshinori turned slightly, his gaze falling on Izuku, who had been sitting quietly, almost shrinking into himself amidst the overwhelming presences. The boy, still wide-eyed and a little teary-eyed from witnessing All Might's raw emotion, flinched slightly as Toshinori pointed to him.

"Nana," Toshinori began, his voice softening further as he looked at Izuku, a proud, almost paternal warmth entering his tone. "There's someone I want you to meet. This is... this is Izuku Midoriya."

Izuku, caught completely off guard, hesitated for a moment, his cheeks flushing. He felt the intense, scrutinizing gazes of all the newly materialized figures on him, especially Nana's. Swallowing hard, he finally bowed his head deeply, his voice a nervous, almost inaudible squeak. "I-Izuku Midoriya," he stammered, then quickly added, "It's a pleasure to meet you all!"

Nana's gaze, sharp and perceptive, lingered on Izuku. Her eyes, which had been so full of tender emotion for Toshinori, now held a curious intensity as she took in the boy's shy demeanor, his unruly green hair, and the familiar, earnest look in his eyes. A faint, almost imperceptible spark seemed to pass between them, a recognition deeper than mere sight. A soft smile, tinged with something knowing, touched her lips.

"Izuku Midoriya, then," Nana said, her voice warm and clear, a gentle strength in her tone. She offered him a small, polite bow in return. "It's a pleasure to meet you too, young man. I am Nana Shimura."

Izuku, still overwhelmed, repeated her name, a soft, questioning sound. "Nana... Shimura?" His gaze flickered between her and Toshinori, a new, even more profound question forming in his mind. He then looked around at the other enigmatic figures, his brow furrowed in confusion. "And... who are all of you? Er, I mean... who are you all?" he corrected himself, gesturing vaguely to the entire group of Vestiges. "I... I don't understand."

The seven users exchanged glances, a silent communication passing between them. A collective understanding seemed to settle, a shared recognition of the boy's confusion and the weight of what they represented. Nana, still holding Toshinori's hand, turned her gaze back to Izuku, her smile softening with a hint of melancholy and immense pride.

"It's quite a story, young Midoriya," Nana began, her voice gentle, yet carrying the gravitas of history. "A story that connects us all. Toshinori, here, is the eighth wielder of a power called One For All. And I... I was the seventh." She paused, her eyes sweeping over her predecessors. "Each of us, in our time, carried that same torch. We are the previous users of One For All."

Izuku's eyes widened in awe, his jaw dropping slightly. "One For All... the previous users?!" His usual analytical fervor, momentarily subdued by the emotional whirlwind, returned with a vengeance. His eyes darted between them, a million questions forming in his mind. "Do you... do you all have Quirks? Or was One For All your only Quirk? And if you had Quirks, what were they? Did they combine with One For All? How did that work? Did you feel the previous users too? Oh, this is incredible!" His words tumbled out in a rapid-fire, breathless torrent, his hands beginning to gesticulate wildly, his notebook and pen suddenly feeling miles away.

Daigoro Banjo, having just finished his beer, let out another hearty laugh at Izuku's frantic tangent, a booming sound that momentarily cut through the boy's excited babble. "Hah! This kid's got spunk, Toshinori!" he declared, wiping his lips again with the back of his hand, a wide grin on his face. "Just like you used to be, all fired up about Quirks!"

En Tayutai, however, eyed Izuku with a more calculating, almost suspicious gaze from behind his high collar. He leaned forward slightly, his voice a low, clear murmur that nonetheless carried across the table. "Toshinori," he said, his tone devoid of Daigoro's joviality. "Are you... are you aiming to make this boy the Ninth?"

The question hung in the air, sudden and direct, cutting through the lightheartedness. Toshinori, caught completely off guard, visibly stiffened. His eyes, which had been shining with pride as Izuku spoke, now darted to En, then back to Izuku, a flush creeping up his neck. He stammered, searching for words, unsure how to respond to such a blunt, public inquiry. "U-Um, well… I… that is to say…" he began, his voice trailing off, unable to form a coherent answer.

Kagutsuchi, who had been observing the exchange with a subtle smirk, now intervened, his voice smooth and authoritative, cutting through Toshinori's stuttering. "It's practically impossible for him to inherit One For All, En," he stated, his tone surprisingly serious, dispelling any lingering mirth. His dark eyes, which had been glinting with amusement moments before, now held a deep, ancient understanding as he looked at Izuku. "At least, not in the way you or Toshinori know it. This boy, Izuku Midoriya, is fundamentally different from the current baseline human. His very essence... it's not compatible with the traditional transfer of One For All. It would be akin to trying to pour an ocean into a teacup. The outcome would be disastrous for him."

Yoichi, who had been listening intently to Kagutsuchi's explanation, frowned slightly, his gentle features etched with confusion. "Fundamentally different?" he murmured, his gaze shifting between Kagutsuchi and Izuku. "What do you mean by that? And... who are you, really? You keep speaking in riddles, and then you just... summon us into existence. Clarify what is going on here."

Kagutsuchi sighed, a theatrical gesture, as if burdened by their mortal limitations. He leaned back on his zabuton, taking another slow sip of sake. "As I explained before, First User," he said, his voice calm, almost patient, "I am a divine herald. A messenger, if you will, from a realm beyond your comprehension. My purpose here is... complicated. And what is 'going on' is a matter of cosmic intervention, a necessary deviation from the established order." He paused, his gaze sweeping over the skeptical faces of the Vestiges.

Kudo scoffed, a low, rumbling sound. "Divine herald?" he grunted, crossing his arms once again, his eyes narrowed in disbelief. "Sounds like a load of nonsense to me. You're just some powerful Quirk user, aren't you? Trying to play god." Bruce nodded in agreement, his expression grim.

Hikage Shinomori, however, mused aloud, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "A divine herald... or a Quirk. If it were a Quirk, to accomplish what you've done – materializing seven distinct consciousnesses, healing Toshinori, altering the spatial dimensions of this room, and possessing knowledge of One For All's inner workings – it would require an exceptionally powerful Quirk, or perhaps even multiple Quirks, operating on a scale previously unimaginable." He emphasized the last word, a challenge in his tone.

Kagutsuchi let out a long, drawn-out sigh, a sound of exaggerated weariness. He set his sake cup down with a soft clink. "Honestly, I'm getting quite tired of having to prove myself," he stated, his voice a low, theatrical rumble, though a mischievous glint still danced in his dark eyes. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table, his gaze sweeping over the assembled heroes, a playful challenge in his expression. "What will it take, I wonder? Should I turn Japan into a smoking crater and then remake it, perhaps? Would that satisfy your theories, Fourth User?"

The Vestiges, along with Toshinori and Naomasa, stared at him, their expressions a mixture of shock and horror at the casual, almost bored, suggestion of such cataclysmic power. Even the usually composed Naomasa felt a cold sweat trickle down his spine.

Kagutsuchi, seeing their reactions, burst into a peel of laughter, a rich, deep sound that filled the room. "Relax, relax!" he chuckled, waving a dismissive hand. "Goodness, you mortals are so dramatic. No, I don't have the clearance for that. Not yet, anyway. And besides," he added, a more genuine, albeit still enigmatic, smile returning to his lips, "it would ruin the skewers."

Everyone slowly relaxed, though a palpable wariness still lingered in the air. The casual mention of cosmic destruction, even in jest, had a sobering effect. Kagutsuchi, seemingly unfazed by their reactions, picked up another skewer and began to enjoy his meal once more, the aroma of grilled meat filling the momentary silence.

"Alright, alright," Kagutsuchi said, his voice now a little more serious, though still with an underlying current of the fantastical. He chewed thoughtfully, then swallowed. "You want to know what's going on? Very well. Let's start at the very beginning, shall we?" He leaned back, his gaze becoming distant, as if seeing beyond the confines of the room, beyond the very world itself.

"In the beginning, there was nothing. And then, there was everything. A clash, a dance, between two fundamental forces: the Will of Light, and the Will of Darkness. Creation and Destruction, order and chaos. They are not good or evil, merely opposing aspects of existence. And from their eternal struggle, the universe, your world, all of existence, was born." He paused, letting the words hang in the air, watching their reactions with keen interest.

The Vestiges exchanged bewildered glances. This was far beyond Quirks, far beyond anything they had ever conceived. Izuku, however, was listening with rapt attention, his analytical mind trying to process the sheer scale of the information.

"And you, First User, and your brother," Kagutsuchi continued, his gaze now settling on Yoichi, "were early, significant manifestations of this cosmic dance on this particular planet. Your Quirks, and the subsequent creation of One For All, were ripples from that initial grand event. A response, if you will, to the growing imbalance." He then turned his gaze to Izuku, his expression becoming profoundly serious, almost reverent.

"And this boy, Izuku Midoriya," Kagutsuchi stated, his voice dropping to a near whisper, yet resonating with immense power, "is something far, far more. He is not merely a wielder of a Quirk, or even a successor to a powerful legacy. He is... Agito. A living, breathing nexus point, a unique manifestation of both the Will of Light and the Will of Darkness, balanced within a single vessel. He is, in essence, a living universe in miniature. And because of that, his existence poses a profound, existential threat to the grander picture."

A stunned silence fell over the room, heavier than any before. Izuku's eyes were wide, his face pale, as if the weight of Kagutsuchi's words had physically pressed down on him. Toshinori stared, utterly speechless. Nana's hand instinctively tightened around Toshinori's, her gaze fixed on Izuku with a new, protective intensity.

Finally, Nana broke the silence, her voice trembling slightly. "A living universe? A threat? What do you truly intend to do, Kagutsuchi-san? Why are you telling us this? What is your purpose here, if not to... to just cause chaos?"

Kagutsuchi met her gaze, his expression surprisingly earnest, devoid of any playful malice. He took a deep breath, and for the first time, seemed truly serious, truly vulnerable. "My true intention?" he repeated, his voice softer now, almost weary. "My true intention is to teach him. To guide Izuku Midoriya, Agito, how to exist without tearing apart the very fabric of reality. To teach him how to not collapse the universe someday."

Izuku paled, his eyes wide with a mixture of fear and profound confusion. The idea of being a "living universe" and a "threat" was far beyond anything he could comprehend. He looked at Toshinori, his hero, his mentor, his eyes pleading for reassurance.

Toshinori, seeing the terror in Izuku's eyes, immediately came to his defense, his voice firm despite the lingering shock. "Collapse the universe?! That's preposterous, Kagutsuchi-san! Young Midoriya would never—he's a good boy, a hero to the core! He would never consciously do anything to harm anyone, let alone the entire universe!"

Kagutsuchi merely raised an eyebrow, a faint, knowing smile playing on his lips. "Consciously, perhaps not," he conceded, his voice calm, almost dangerously so. "But tell me, Toshinori, do you recall the incident at Dagobah Beach, when the boy first manifested his... awakening?" His gaze flickered to Izuku, who flinched at the memory. "He wasn't precisely in control then, was he? A surge of power, an uncontrolled reaction to extreme emotion. Who's to say that if he reaches the very peak of his power, if he fully 'awakens' to what he truly is, he won't simply do so without conscious control? Wishful thinking isn't going to keep that from happening, Toshinori. Which is precisely why," he concluded, his gaze sweeping over all of them, "I am not against a collaboration."

The word "collaboration" hung in the air, a strange, almost mundane term in the face of such monumental revelations. Toshinori, still reeling from the casual mention of universal collapse, could only stare at Kagutsuchi, his jaw tight. Nana, her hand still clutching Toshinori's, narrowed her eyes, a fierce protectiveness radiating from her. The other Vestiges, though still bewildered, watched with a mixture of suspicion and dawning comprehension.

"Collaboration?" Nana finally echoed, her voice sharp, cutting through the stunned silence. "With you? After you just admitted to orchestrating an attack on a child, and casually discussing 'murdering' other 'Agito'?" Her gaze was unwavering, a challenge in her eyes. "Forgive me if I find that difficult to swallow."

Kagutsuchi merely chuckled, a low, dry sound. "A fair point, Seventh User. And I wouldn't expect you to swallow it whole. Think of it less as a collaboration, and more as a necessary evil. Or, perhaps, a mutually beneficial arrangement." He leaned forward, his dark eyes glinting. "You want to protect the boy, yes? To ensure he doesn't inadvertently unravel reality? And you, Toshinori, you want him to become a hero, to wield his power responsibly. And you, Detective," he glanced at Naomasa, "you want answers, and a semblance of order maintained." He paused, a faint, knowing smirk playing on his lips. "I offer you all of that. And more."

"What 'more'?" Kudo grunted, his arms still crossed, his suspicion palpable. "What's in it for you, 'angel'?"

Kagutsuchi's smile widened. "Ah, the pragmatic approach. I appreciate that, Second User. What's in it for me? The satisfaction of a job well done, for one. The cosmic balance maintained. And perhaps," he added, his gaze sweeping over the materialized Vestiges, "the opportunity to observe a truly fascinating anomaly. You see, an Agito who learns to control their power, who embraces both the Light and the Darkness within them, is a rare and beautiful thing. A true masterpiece of creation. And I, as an agent of the Will of Darkness, have a vested interest in seeing such a masterpiece come to fruition."

"So, you're saying you want to... train him?" Yoichi asked, his voice soft, a hint of cautious hope in his eyes. He looked at Izuku, who was still pale and trembling, but now listening intently.

"Train, guide, observe, nudge," Kagutsuchi rattled off, ticking off the words on his fingers. "Call it what you will. The boy needs a mentor. Someone who understands the true nature of his power. And frankly," he shrugged, "I'm the only one here who fits that bill. Unless you'd prefer to let him stumble blindly, potentially destroying everything you hold dear, and then have my more... zealous brethren come calling to clean up the mess. And believe me," his voice dropped, a chilling undertone, "their methods are far less... collaborative."

Naomasa, ever the logical one, rubbed his chin. "And what about us? What would our role be in this... 'collaboration'?"

"Your role, Detective, would be to provide support, resources, and perhaps a touch of your human perspective," Kagutsuchi replied, waving a dismissive hand. "And to ensure that your 'heroes' don't interfere with my... unconventional methods. After all, what I teach him will be far beyond your Quirk-based understanding. It will be about the fundamental forces of the universe, about balance, about existence itself. Not about punching villains harder."

Toshinori, his initial shock giving way to a fierce determination, finally spoke. "And what if we refuse?" he demanded, his voice low and firm. "What if we decide to protect Young Midoriya ourselves, without your... 'guidance'?"

Kagutsuchi's smile never faltered, but his eyes held a cold, unwavering certainty. "Then you would be condemning him to a very short, very chaotic existence, Toshinori. And yourselves, perhaps, to a front-row seat to the unraveling of your reality. I am not here to force you. I am here to offer a solution. A necessary one. The choice, ultimately, is yours. But choose wisely. The clock, as they say, is ticking."

He took another sip of sake, his gaze sweeping over the silent, stunned faces around the table. The aroma of grilled skewers still wafted through the room, a stark contrast to the cosmic stakes that had just been laid bare. Izuku, caught in the crossfire of divine wills and heroic determination, felt the weight of the universe settle on his young shoulders. His dream of being a hero had just become infinitely more terrifying, and infinitely more profound.

A heavy silence descended upon the room, thick with the scent of grilled food and the weight of an impossible decision. Toshinori's gaze, now more collected but still etched with a profound weariness, swept over the faces of his predecessors, then to Naomasa, and finally, to Izuku, who sat trembling slightly, his eyes wide with a mixture of fear and a desperate, nascent hope. The Vestiges, each a fragment of One For All's history, exchanged silent, knowing glances. Yoichi's gentle eyes held a deep concern, Kudo's stern features were unreadable, Bruce's brow was furrowed in intense thought, Hikage's gaze was distant, contemplating the vastness of Kagutsuchi's claims, Banjo's usual boisterousness was subdued, En remained quietly observant, and Nana's fierce protectiveness was palpable. The choice was not merely about Izuku's life, but about the fate of their world, and perhaps, the very fabric of existence. The ticking clock Kagutsuchi spoke of resonated in the unspoken thoughts of all present, a chilling reminder of the urgency of their predicament.

Yoichi, his gentle eyes still fixed on Kagutsuchi, finally broke the silence. "Are you truly sincere in this, Kagutsuchi-san?" he asked, his voice soft, yet carrying a profound weight. "Is your goal truly to guide him, or is there some other, hidden agenda at play?"

Kagutsuchi met Yoichi's gaze, his smile unwavering, a faint, almost bored expression touching his lips. "Sincere?" he mused, taking a slow sip of sake. "As sincere as I can be, First User. My job is to ensure the world keeps turning, to maintain a semblance of order. And frankly," he added, a subtle, almost mischievous glint in his dark eyes, "I'm doing this partly to relieve my boredom. Try something new, as you mortals say."

Naomasa's jaw dropped, his face contorting in horror. "Boredom?!" he choked out, his voice a strained whisper of disbelief. "That's your reason?! You're playing with a child's life, with the fate of the universe, because you're bored?!"

Kagutsuchi merely raised an eyebrow, his gaze flat and direct. "You should try being alive since the beginning of time, Detective. Doing the same thing, over and over again. See how you like it." He watched Naomasa wince, a faint, almost imperceptible flinch. "Didn't think so."

Daigoro Banjo, who had been listening with a mixture of awe and growing impatience, finally spoke up, a booming question cutting through the lingering tension. "Alright, alright, enough with the existential dread!" he boomed, gesturing with a piece of tempura. "So, 'angel' boy, what exactly do you and your kind do all day? Do you just float around on clouds and sing hymns like in the Bible, or what?"

Kagutsuchi chuckled, a dry, amused sound. He set down his tempura, wiping his lips with a napkin. "We do a great many things, Fifth User. Mostly, we keep everything in check. The cosmic balance, as it were. And yes, that includes killing Agito, which, frankly, I'm trying to avoid these days. It gets rather monotonous."

Daigoro glared at this answer, his boisterous energy replaced by a deep-seated suspicion. "Monotonous?!" he scoffed, his voice low and dangerous. "You think taking a life is 'monotonous'?"

En Tayutai, his quiet voice cutting through Daigoro's indignation, asked, "For how long have you been... killing Agito, Kagutsuchi-san?"

Kagutsuchi met En's gaze, his expression unperturbed. He picked up his sake cup, swirling the liquid thoughtfully. "Since time immemorial, Sixth User. As I alluded to earlier. It's not something I do often, but if one happens to be an actual threat – a true destabilizing force – then I still have an obligation." He took a slow sip, his dark eyes sweeping over Izuku. "This one, however, is still young. Promising. And I want to try my hand in making sure the threat he represents becomes, not neutralized, but controlled."

Toshitsugu Kudo, a cynical sneer twisting his lips, finally broke his silence. "Or maybe," he grunted, his voice laced with suspicion, "you just want to overthrow God, and the kid here is your meal ticket."

Kagutsuchi's expression remained utterly unbothered, a faint, almost weary sigh escaping him. He met Kudo's gaze directly. "I am not the least bit interested in that, Second User," he replied, his voice flat and devoid of emotion. "The last guy who tried it, yes, you should all know him, paid dearly for it."

A collective gasp, sharp and involuntary, escaped the Vestiges. Yoichi's gentle face paled, his eyes widening in horror as he understood the unspoken implication. The name, though unsaid, hung heavy in the air, a chilling specter. Toshinori's jaw tightened, his gaze fixed on Kagutsuchi, a cold dread settling in his stomach.

"You mean... Lucifer?" Yoichi whispered, his voice barely audible, laced with a profound, ancient pain.

Kagutsuchi merely offered a faint, almost sympathetic nod. "Indeed, First User. He sought to usurp the Will of Darkness, to seize control of the cosmic balance for himself. A rather foolish endeavor, I assure you. The consequences were... severe. He was cast down from the heavens, his light extinguished, his very essence fractured and scattered into the abyss, forever bound to the darkness he embraced. A rather fitting punishment, don't you think? To be trapped in the very chaos he sought to unleash." His dark eyes held a chilling satisfaction, devoid of malice, merely stating a cosmic truth. "So, no, Second User. I have no desire to follow in his footsteps. The view from the top is rather dull, and the fall, as he can attest, is quite painful."

Daigoro Banjo, his eyes wide with a sudden, dawning horror, blurted out, "So... Satan is real?!"

Kagutsuchi turned his gaze to Daigoro, a faint, almost amused smirk playing on his lips. "Yes, Fifth User," he confirmed, his voice calm and even. "He is. And he continues to stand as a testament to how divine punishment is carried out, among other things."

Bruce, rubbing his eyes, murmured exasperatedly, "This is just getting too good." He then looked at Kagutsuchi, his serious expression unwavering. "What guarantee do we have, Kagutsuchi-san, that you will stick to what you are intending? That this isn't just another one of your... 'games'?"

Kagutsuchi's smirk widened. "If I'm lying, I'm dying, Fourth User," he replied, his voice snide, a hint of playful malice in his tone. He then leaned forward, his expression shifting to one of surprising sincerity. "No, truly. We cannot lie about what we intend to do. It would get problematic if management didn't take that into account."

A wave of varied reactions rippled through the group. Hikage let out a tired sigh, running a hand through his wild hair. En's shoulders slumped almost imperceptibly, a quiet sound of resignation escaping him. Kudo merely grunted, a cynical twist to his lips, while Banjo's boisterous energy seemed to deflate, replaced by a thoughtful frown. Nana's gaze, however, remained fixed on Izuku, a profound concern in her eyes.

Izuku, who had been quietly watching the exchange, his initial terror slowly giving way to a cautious, almost desperate optimism, felt a flicker of resolve. If Kagutsuchi truly couldn't lie about his intentions, and if his goal was genuinely to help Izuku control this terrifying power, then perhaps... perhaps this was the only path forward. He knew, with a chilling certainty, that he couldn't control the Agito power on his own. And the idea of becoming a threat, of inadvertently collapsing the universe, was far more terrifying than any 'angel' or 'devil'. He took a shaky breath, gathering his courage.

"M-Maybe..." Izuku began, his voice a hesitant whisper, drawing all eyes to him. He swallowed hard, then continued, a newfound determination entering his tone. "Maybe I... I should accept."

Toshinori's head snapped towards Izuku, his eyes wide with alarm. "Young Midoriya! No! We can't possibly—"

"Toshinori, hold on," Nana interjected, her voice firm, cutting off her former student. She looked at Izuku, her gaze softening, a profound understanding in her eyes. "Maybe the boy should have the right to decide."

Toshinori turned to Nana, his expression a mixture of disbelief and exasperation. "Nana, you can't be serious!" he admonished, his voice low and urgent. "This is Kagutsuchi-san we're talking about! He's... he's dangerous! He's playing with things far beyond our comprehension!"

Nana met his gaze, her eyes tender, yet unwavering. "Toshinori," she said softly, her voice a gentle reminder, "I took a similar chance with you, didn't I? A scrawny, Quirkless boy with a heart too big for his body. And look at what you became. Sometimes, the greatest risks lead to the greatest heroes."

Toshinori's expression gradually softened, remembering those days. The frail, desperate boy he had once been, and the unwavering faith Nana had placed in him. He looked from Nana to Izuku, then his gaze hardened, settling on Kagutsuchi. "Do you intend to keep your word, Kagutsuchi-san?" he asked, his voice low, a challenge and a plea intertwined. "To truly guide him, and not... not use him for some other purpose?"

Kagutsuchi merely smiled, an easy, almost effortless curve of his lips. He raised his sake cup, a faint clink as he tapped it against the table. "Yes, Toshinori," he affirmed, his dark eyes glinting with amusement. "Every word. To that, I toast." He took a sip, his gaze unwavering.

A long silence stretched, punctuated only by the distant sounds of the Izakaya. Toshinori's shoulders slumped, a deep sigh escaping him, a concession. "Very well," he finally said, his voice heavy with the weight of the decision. "But there will be conditions to such an arrangement. Strict ones."

Kagutsuchi's smile broadened. "Excellent," he replied, unperturbed. "I had been intending to hash out such a contract from the start. Now, please, keep eating. All of you. And Nana," he added, his gaze flicking to the Seventh User, a casual, almost conversational tone entering his voice, "yes, your grandson, Tenko Shimura, is indeed in the clutches of All For One. He is still alive, by the way. Weakened, but alive."

The words hit Nana Shimura like a physical blow, far more potent than any villain's attack. Her entire body stiffened, the playful glint in her eyes vanishing, replaced by a profound, soul-deep horror. Her hand, which had been resting gently on Toshinori's arm, clenched into a white-knuckled fist. The name, Tenko Shimura, echoed in her mind, a ghost from a past she had desperately tried to protect. Her grandson. Alive. And in the clutches of him. The very monster who had taken everything from her.

A choked gasp escaped her lips, a sound of pure agony. Her eyes, wide and disbelieving, darted to Toshinori, then to Izuku, then back to Kagutsuchi, as if searching for some sign, any sign, that this was a cruel jest. Her face, usually so strong and composed, was now a mask of utter devastation, tears welling in her eyes, blurring the edges of the impossible reality. "Tenko...?" she whispered, her voice a fragile, broken sound, barely audible. The weight of decades of grief, of sacrifice, of the belief that her lineage was safe, shattered in an instant.

Toshinori, seeing Nana's raw, unadulterated pain, felt a fresh wave of protective fury surge through him. His own jaw tightened, his gaze burning holes into Kagutsuchi. The casual, almost flippant way the "angel" had delivered such a devastating revelation was infuriating.

The other Vestiges reacted with varying degrees of shock and sympathy. Yoichi's gentle features twisted in a pained grimace, remembering the weight of All For One's existence. Kudo's hardened expression softened with a rare flicker of empathy. Bruce's eyes narrowed, a silent, grim understanding passing between him and Hikage, who merely closed his eyes, a tired, knowing sorrow on his face. Daigoro's boisterousness was completely extinguished, replaced by a stunned silence. En, ever the quiet observer, simply watched Nana, a profound sadness in his gaze.

Naomasa, though not directly connected to Nana's personal tragedy, felt the immense emotional impact radiating from her. His professional composure wavered, his eyes widening in sympathy. The sheer cruelty of Kagutsuchi's casual delivery of such a devastating truth was chilling, even for him. He instinctively reached out, a futile gesture of comfort towards the grieving hero.

Izuku, witnessing Nana's heartbreak, felt a cold knot form in his stomach. He had only just met these legendary figures, but the raw, human emotion radiating from Nana was undeniable. He understood, with a painful clarity, the depth of her connection to this grandson, and the horror of him being with All For One. The cosmic stakes of their conversation suddenly felt intensely personal, woven into the very fabric of heroism and sacrifice.