The silence that followed Gran Torino's words was a living, breathing thing—heavier than any silence Izuku had ever experienced. It wasn't the comfortable quiet of a sleeping city or the tense hush before a battle. It was the absolute, crushing stillness of a world shattering.

"Why?" Gran Torino's voice echoed in the cavern of Izuku's mind, the casual question striking like a hammer blow. He remained oblivious—a fact that made the horror even more profound. The old hero was still looking at Izuku, waiting for an answer to a question that had just annihilated the foundations of his life.

Izuku felt a wave of nausea wash over him. Inko. His mother. A simple, kind woman who made killer katsudon and cried when she was proud. She was somehow a piece of this impossible, world-ending puzzle. All For One, Nana Shimura, One For All, the Lords—and now, her. The pieces of his past, his present, and his future had just collided into a single, incomprehensible point.

He looked at Toshinori, who was staring into the middle distance, his face a mask of ash and fear. The man who had been a symbol of hope, a pillar of strength, looked like a child who had just witnessed something he could never unsee. The twin expressions of horror on their faces weren't born from a shared memory of battle, but from a shared, terrible truth.

Izuku finally found his voice—a raw, strangled sound he barely recognized as his own. "Inko Midoriya..." he started, his voice trembling. "That's... that's my mother's name."

Sorahiko's eyes, which had been narrowed in mild exasperation moments before, widened slowly. The realization dawned on him like a terrible sunrise. "Your... your mother?" he asked, his own voice now laced with a rare, disbelieving tremor. "Are you certain, kid? That name... it can't be a coincidence."

"Wait," Melissa spoke up, her voice serving as a fragile anchor in the rising storm of emotions. "Inko is a fairly common name. It could just be a coincidence. Maybe Inko Shimura and Inko Midoriya are two separate people who just share a first name."

The idea was a fragile hope that crumbled instantly. With trembling hands, Izuku slowly pulled out his phone. He navigated to his gallery, the simple action feeling like an impossible, monumental task. He showed the elderly hero a photo of his mother—her bright smile captured just weeks prior. Then he swiped to another: an old, grainy picture from her high school years.

Sorahiko gasped, the sound low and choked. He grabbed the phone with both hands, his knuckles white as he stared at the image. The resemblance was uncanny. Nana's gentle, kind smile was reflected perfectly in the face of the woman in the photograph.

"Nana's daughter," he whispered, the words ragged with profound grief that had lain dormant for decades. He lifted his gaze from the screen, his eyes locking with Izuku's. For the first time, he didn't see a young hero-in-training. He saw the face of his oldest, dearest friend—a connection he had long believed severed forever. Was this fate? Divine providence? The question hung unspoken in the air, a physical weight in the oppressive silence.

Toshinori, still seated between Melissa and Izuku, felt that silence like a physical blow. A cold dread, far worse than any battlefield wound, settled deep in his bones. His mind, still reeling from the revelation, drifted back to a grocery store aisle. He saw her again—a simple woman with gentle eyes and a radiant smile that had, for one terrible, beautiful moment, made him stop in his tracks.

He'd mistaken her for Nana. He'd dismissed it, of course—the physical differences, the aura of ordinary kindness that Nana had never had the luxury of possessing. But now, that old intuition, buried for a lifetime beneath layers of grief, screamed a terrifying truth. The coincidence, he now understood, was no coincidence at all. This wasn't some strange twist of fate; it was the past rising up to consume the present.

Meanwhile, Izuku had his fingers pressed tightly against his mouth, his mind a furious, chaotic storm. If Inko really was Nana's daughter, then that would make him and Tenko... Tomura... cousins. The thought was so grotesquely convoluted, so impossibly cruel, that a bitter, silent laugh escaped him. First, the discovery of the hidden world of Agito and Angels, and now this—a connection to not only one of Japan's greatest heroes, but also its worst villain. A cosmic joke so elaborate it defied belief.

A more terrifying thought followed: if All For One had chosen Tomura, he could have just as easily chosen him. A future of abduction, grooming, and corruption swam before his eyes—a life that could have so easily been his. Worse, if he had been given a Quirk by All For One out of ignorance of the Agito Factor, he could have mutated in ways far more grotesque than what had happened to Aoyama. Bile rose in his throat, deep, visceral revulsion for the path that could have been.

Then, a pair of arms—gentle and warm—wrapped around his neck from behind. Melissa, without a word, held him in a tender embrace. The simple action was enough to bring him back down to earth.

The oppressive silence finally broke.

"What do we do now?" Sorahiko asked, the question ringing with weary finality. His eyes, fixed on Izuku, were filled with profound sorrow and dawning understanding.

Toshinori straightened from his slumped posture, taking a slow, deliberate breath as if steeling himself for an impossibly heavy task. "We... we tell them. Nezu. Mirai. Chiyo-san. The entire circle." His gaze fell upon Izuku, still being comforted by Melissa, and a fresh wave of memories washed over him.

He thought back to that bridge—that horrifying, near-fatal day that now felt like a lifetime ago. How they'd first met: an ordinary boy and a hero on his last legs, their lives intertwining in ways neither could have predicted. He thought of Nana at the izakaya, bringing Izuku into a hug, her hand running through his unruly hair. Everything about that moment had felt right, felt destined. And now, he realized, she might have even suspected it—some primal, blood-deep recognition that told her this boy, this stranger, was family.

He worked his mouth to call out, but even the name felt heavy on his tongue now. Izuku, as if sensing the shift in the room, turned to him, green eyes still wide with confusion and pain.

"Does this... does this change anything?" Izuku asked, his voice barely a whisper.

Toshinori's gaze dropped, and for a long moment, he said nothing. When he finally met Izuku's eyes, a slow, painful honesty entered his own. "I'd be lying if I said it didn't." But even as the words left his mouth, he felt a strange, defiant surge of emotion. He reached out, his large hand gently ruffling Izuku's hair. "But we've made it this far without knowing, so... maybe it doesn't have to change everything."

The answer felt inadequate, even to Izuku. But then he thought of everything Toshinori had done for him—the care and guidance he'd offered, a kindness far more profound than his own father had ever shown. He thought of that day on the roof, when Toshinori had given him a path, hope, and kindness that transcended the simple words of a heroic dream. That was who Toshinori was, in the end—a hero defined not just by his power or title, but by his profound, human heart.

A smile, small and fragile, formed on Izuku's lips as tears welled in his eyes. He nodded. "No," he said, his voice stronger now. "I guess it doesn't change much... other than everything else."

A quiet, choked laugh escaped Melissa's lips before heat bloomed in her cheeks. She realized she was still holding him, her arms wrapped around his neck, and broke away instantly, her face flushing brilliant red. Izuku, equally embarrassed, turned scarlet.

Toshinori chuckled—a genuine, warm sound that cut through the tension. Sorahiko watched them with a faint smile. "Kids these days," he muttered, more to himself than the others. "Always so bold."

The bus ride to the training camp buzzed with excitement and quiet anticipation. The sun, a brilliant disc in a clear blue sky, cast warm light through the windows as Class 1-A rumbled along the highway. Laughter and lively chatter filled the air—a stark contrast to the grim tension that had become their recent normal. They were dressed comfortably in hoodies, t-shirts, and jeans, their hero costumes and training gear packed away overhead. At the front, Aizawa sat with his perpetually tired expression, though a faint, almost imperceptible air of relief hung about him.

Izuku, lost in thought, sat next to Yuga Aoyama. The blonde boy stared out the window, his usual bright, flamboyant smile replaced by a thoughtful frown. The incident with Graviel and the subsequent revelations had taken their toll on everyone, but Aoyama, who had nearly been lost to the Agito transformation, carried a different kind of burden.

"Hey, Aoyama-kun," Izuku said softly, his voice gentle. "Are you doing okay?"

Turning to him, Aoyama offered a small, sincere smile and nodded. "I am fine, Midoriya," he replied, his voice softer than usual. "Only..."

He didn't finish the thought, his gaze drifting back to the window, lost in the passing scenery. Izuku, understanding that some conversations were too complex for a bus ride, decided to table their discussion for later.

At the back of the bus, Katsuki Bakugo sat alone with arms crossed, crimson eyes narrowed. He stole glances at Izuku and Aoyama, his mind a cauldron of simmering emotions. The training with Kagutsuchi had been brutal—a relentless gauntlet of physical and mental challenges. At first, he'd been outraged by the discovery of the Agito, believing he could simply train harder, work harder, push himself beyond his limits to catch up or surpass Izuku. But after Aoyama was revealed to be an Agito as well, the competition had become almost insurmountable. Part of him couldn't help but feel left out, frustration gnawing at him. He saw it as a grand conspiracy—a celestial joke that handed Izuku and Aoyama premium power while leaving him with scraps.

He bristled at the sheer unfairness of it all before his mind, for the first time in a long while, turned inward. He thought of his own past behavior—a history of bullying and cruel words aimed at the Quirkless boy who now sat near the front of the bus. The recent news of Quirkless people being trafficked and exploited, only to be rescued by All Might and other heroes, had stirred emotions that had nothing to do with righteous fury. Instead, it was guilt. Guilt over being reminded how powerless the Quirkless were—often overlooked or outright rejected by society. They were barely considered second-class citizens when animals were arguably treated better. He had been oddly quiet watching the news with his family, a change in demeanor that neither parent had left unnoticed.

In the middle of the bus, the rest of the students were deep in conversation.

"I wonder what this training camp will be like," Sero said, leaning forward in his seat.

"I bet it'll be amazing!" Mina chirped, her eyes sparkling. "Maybe we'll get to fight some pro heroes!"

Kirishima, always eager for a challenge, pumped his fist in the air. "I hope the training is even harder than what we went through with Kagutsuchi-san!" he declared, flashing his wide, toothy grin.

The grin quickly faded as he saw the incredulous looks on his classmates' faces. Tsuyu's long tongue flicked out thoughtfully. "I can't think of anything harder than that, ribbit," she said matter-of-factly. "That was probably the most difficult thing we've ever done."

A hush fell over the students as they found themselves unable to refute her point. The memory of those grueling, relentless battles against Kagutsuchi and the seemingly invincible Graviel remained fresh in their minds.

Then Uraraka's surprisingly chipper voice broke the silence. "Well, what about the Wild Wild Pussycats? I bet they'll give us a hard time!" she said with a small, determined smile. Her expression quickly became nervous as she let out a sheepish laugh. "Wait, did I just say that? I can't believe I'm actually hoping for more brutal training!"

Her comment drew collective, amused laughter from the group, lightening the mood. Even Iida, who had been sitting with his usual stiff, upright posture, managed a thin smile. He cleared his throat and adjusted his glasses.

"Regardless of what awaits us, we will persevere through it as a class!" Iida announced, his voice ringing with conviction he desperately wanted to spread. "We are stronger now, and we will face any challenge head-on!"

The words, though well-intentioned, still rang somewhat hollow. Kaminari, ever the unfiltered one, let out a nervous chuckle. "I don't know, man. I'd almost rather get another training session with Kagutsuchi than a camp."

Tense silence followed. Kaminari immediately shrank back in his seat, realizing his mistake. Aizawa's voice, tired and laced with a low rumble of warning, came from the front without him even turning around. "Care to say that again, Kaminari?"

The boy could feel the invisible weight of the Erasure Quirk hanging in the air. Sweating profusely, Kaminari waved his hands frantically. "N-no, I'm good! I take it back! I didn't say anything!"

Jirou shook her head with a hint of laughter in her expression, and the bus continued its journey.

The bus finally rumbled to a stop, its air brakes hissing through the laughter and chatter. The door slid open, revealing a breathtaking view of lush, sprawling mountain landscape. The air—crisp and smelling of pine—was a welcome change from the bus's recycled atmosphere.

The students piled out, stretching their legs and taking in the scenery with wonder. Before they could fully register their surroundings, however, an energetic voice shattered the peaceful atmosphere.

"HEY, HEY, HEY!"

From atop a large boulder, a figure in a vibrant cat-themed hero costume struck a flamboyant pose. Behind her, three other heroes in similar outfits were arranged in synchronized, high-energy formation. Together, they comprised the hero team known as the Wild Wild Pussycats.

"We are the Wild Wild Pussycats!" their leader, Mandalay, announced with a grin that could rival All Might's. "And we are here to make your training camp a memorable experience! Meow!"

The students' collective response was a mix of awe and bewilderment. Mina's eyes widened with pure excitement while Sero blinked in profound confusion. Izuku, ever the hero-analyst, was already muttering to himself, trying to recall their full roster and Quirk specifics, his hand hovering near his notebook.

With fluid, athletic movements, the four heroes leaped down from the boulder, landing in a perfectly choreographed line. Their high-heeled boots thudded softly on the grass.

Mandalay stepped forward, her cat ears twitching with enthusiasm as she surveyed the group. "Welcome to our domain, future heroes!" she declared, sweeping her arm toward the vast wilderness behind them. "I'm Mandalay, and these are my teammates—Pixie-Bob, Ragdoll, and Tiger!"

Pixie-Bob bounded forward with feline grace, her blonde ponytails bouncing as she practically vibrated with excitement. "Oh my gosh, look at all these adorable little kittens!" she squealed, hands clasped together. "They're all so young and full of potential! I could just eat them up!"

"Please don't," Aizawa muttered from behind the students, his expression flat as ever. "We need them alive for training."

Tiger, the most imposing of the four with his muscular build barely contained by his cat-striped costume, crossed his arms and nodded approvingly. "Good. They look like they have some fight in them. That's what we'll need for what's coming."

Ragdoll, her wild blue hair matching her energetic demeanor, suddenly darted between the students like a hyperactive cat, her eyes gleaming with almost unsettling intensity. "Ooh, ooh! I can see so much about you all already!" she chirped, stopping briefly before Todoroki. "You! Icy-hot! Your power levels are off the charts!" She spun toward Bakugo. "And you, angry kitty! Such explosive potential!"

"Don't call me angry kitty, you maniac!" Bakugo snarled, his palms already crackling with small explosions.

Ragdoll giggled and continued her circuit, pausing before Izuku. Her head tilted curiously. "And you... interesting. Very interesting." Her gaze lingered longer than on the others, something almost knowing flickering in her eyes before she bounded away.

Mandalay clapped her hands together, drawing everyone's attention back to her. "Alright, kittens! Let me lay down some ground rules. First, you're not guests here—you're students in training. Second, this isn't a vacation. The wilderness you see behind me? That's your classroom for the next week."

She gestured toward the dense forest that stretched endlessly toward the mountains. "Beast's Forest is home to creatures created by Pixie-Bob's Quirk. They're not real animals, but they'll treat you like real prey if you're not careful."

Kaminari raised his hand nervously. "Um, when you say 'prey'..."

"I mean they'll chase you, corner you, and test every ounce of courage and skill you have," Pixie-Bob interjected with a sweet smile that somehow made her words more terrifying. "But don't worry! They probably won't actually eat you!"

"Probably?" Mineta squeaked.

"The base camp is at the foot of that mountain," Mandalay continued, pointing to a distant peak. "Your first challenge is to make it there before sunset. Oh, and lunch won't be served until you arrive, so I suggest you don't dawdle."

Iida's hand shot up immediately. "Excuse me! Are we expected to traverse that distance on foot? What about our luggage? And shouldn't we have a proper orientation before beginning such a strenuous—"

"Your luggage will be waiting for you at the base," Tiger interrupted gruffly. "As for orientation, consider this it."

Aizawa stepped forward, his capture weapon shifting slightly around his shoulders. "You heard them. This is part of your training. Use your Quirks, work together, and remember everything you've learned so far." His eyes swept over his students, and for just a moment, his expression softened almost imperceptibly. "You've all grown stronger. Now prove it."

Ragdoll suddenly appeared beside him, her energy barely contained. "Ooh, Eraser! You're so mysterious and brooding! No wonder the kids respect you!"

Aizawa's eye twitched. "Please maintain professional distance."

"But you're so—"

"Professional. Distance."

Mandalay cleared her throat, suppressing a laugh. "What he means is, we're all here to help you become better heroes. This training camp will push you to your limits and beyond. You'll discover new aspects of your Quirks, learn to work as a team under pressure, and hopefully emerge stronger than when you arrived."

Pixie-Bob raised her hands, and the ground beneath them began to tremble slightly. "Now, let's see what you're made of! The forest is waiting!"

As if on cue, distant roars echoed from the treeline, causing several students to jump. Uraraka instinctively grabbed onto Tsuyu's arm, while Tokoyami's Dark Shadow stirred restlessly.

"Remember," Mandalay called out as the students began to gather themselves, "the base camp has hot food, soft beds, and showers. All you have to do is survive the forest to get there!"

Izuku looked toward the dense wilderness ahead, his mind already racing with strategies and possibilities. Behind him, he could hear Bakugo cracking his knuckles and muttering something about "extras slowing him down." Todoroki stood calmly beside them, ice crystals already beginning to form around his right hand.

"Well," Kirishima said, his sharp-toothed grin spreading across his face, "this is going to be one hell of a training camp."

"Language," Iida chided automatically, but his own excitement was barely contained behind his glasses.

The Wild Wild Pussycats watched from their boulder as Class 1-A prepared for their first real challenge. Mandalay's expression grew more serious as she observed them.

"Think they're ready for what's coming?" Tiger asked quietly.

"They'll have to be," she replied. "After everything Aizawa's told us about what they've already faced... they're stronger than most first-years. But this will test them in ways they haven't been tested before."

Down below, Aizawa gave his students one last look. "You have until sunset. Don't make me come looking for you."

And with that, Class 1-A's forest training began.

The first earth beast emerged from the forest floor like a titan rising from slumber—a massive, lumbering golem of dirt and stone, easily fifteen feet tall. Its crude features twisted into what might have been a snarl as it swung a boulder-sized fist toward the nearest students.

Pixie-Bob stood atop her observation point, arms crossed with supreme confidence. "Let's see how they handle my babies! These earth beasts are tougher than anything they've faced in school!"

The golem's fist crashed down right where Kirishima had been standing a split second before.

The redhead materialized behind the creature, his hardened form gleaming like polished stone. Without breaking stride, he drove his elbow into the golem's spine. The impact rang like a church bell—and the fifteen-foot monster simply crumbled, reduced to harmless dirt in an instant.

"Huh," Kirishima said, dusting off his hands. "That was... easier than I expected."

Pixie-Bob's confident smile wavered. "What? But that was a Category 3 earth beast! It should have—"

Her words were cut off as three more golems burst from the treeline, roaring with earthen fury. They charged toward different groups of students, massive forms thundering across the forest floor.

Todoroki raised his right hand almost lazily. A wall of ice erupted from the ground, flash-freezing all three beasts solid. Then, with his left hand, he sent a controlled burst of flame that shattered the ice—and the golems within it—into steam and scattered earth.

The entire engagement lasted maybe five seconds.

"Next?" Todoroki asked, his tone perfectly calm.

From her perch, Pixie-Bob's jaw dropped. "But... but those were supposed to take at least ten minutes each! They're designed to test teamwork and endurance!"

More roars echoed through the forest as a pack of smaller, faster earth beasts—wolf-like creatures with razor-sharp stone claws—bounded toward the group. Their strategy was clear: overwhelm with numbers and speed.

Iida's engines flared to life. He became a blue blur, weaving between the pack with surgical precision. Each beast he passed simply... stopped. Collapsed. His strikes were so fast, so perfectly placed, that the golems' earthen forms couldn't maintain cohesion.

In less than thirty seconds, eight wolf-beasts lay scattered as harmless piles of dirt.

"Incredible!" Iida called out, barely winded. "The structural integrity of these constructs is far more brittle than expected! A single precise strike to their core matrix is sufficient to—"

"WHAT IS HAPPENING?!" Pixie-Bob shrieked, her composure completely shattered.

Above them, Mandalay's telepathic voice reached every Pussycat member: "These kids... they're not normal. They're moving like seasoned pros. How is this possible?"

The ground rumbled ominously. Pixie-Bob, desperate to salvage some semblance of her planned training, poured more power into her Quirk. The earth split apart as truly massive forms began to emerge—creatures that dwarfed her earlier attempts. A dragon-like beast with wings of stone. A serpent longer than a bus. A humanoid giant with arms like tree trunks.

"Alright, kids!" she shouted, sweat beading on her forehead from the effort. "Let's see you handle THESE!"

Bakugo looked up at the stone dragon, his expression somewhere between bored and annoyed. "Tch. Is this supposed to be impressive?"

He launched himself skyward, explosions propelling him in a tight spiral around the dragon's neck. The creature tried to track him, but Bakugo was moving with precision that would have been impossible weeks ago. His movements weren't wild or reckless—they were calculated, efficient.

He landed on the dragon's head and placed both palms against its skull.

"Howitzer Impact."

The explosion wasn't massive—it was focused, controlled, all force channeled directly into the construct's core. The dragon didn't just crumble; it vaporized, turned to dust so fine it was swept away by the wind.

Meanwhile, the serpent had coiled itself around a cluster of trees, preparing to strike at Yaoyorozu and Jirou. But before it could attack, Tsuyu's tongue shot out, not to the creature itself, but to a specific point on its underside.

"There," she said simply, and gave a sharp tug.

The entire serpent unraveled like a pulled thread, its earthen form losing cohesion instantly.

"How did you know where to strike?" Jirou asked, genuinely curious.

"Ribbit. All of these constructs have the same structural weakness," Tsuyu explained matter-of-factly. "Pixie-Bob's Quirk creates them with a central binding point. Hit that, and they fall apart."

The giant humanoid raised its massive fists, preparing to bring them down on Uraraka and Sero. But Uraraka simply touched its ankle, made it weightless, and Sero used his tape to redirect its now-floating form into the canopy, where it crashed harmlessly into the trees and crumbled.

In the span of less than three minutes, every single earth beast had been neutralized.

Class 1-A stood in the clearing, barely breathing hard, looking around expectantly for the next challenge.

The silence was deafening.

From her observation point, Pixie-Bob stared in absolute shock. Her mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water. Behind her, Tiger, Ragdoll, and Mandalay watched with varying degrees of amazement and concern.

"Those were... those were supposed to last hours," Pixie-Bob whispered. "Days, even. They were designed to push U.A. students to their absolute limits."

Mandalay's voice was tight with something approaching worry. "What kind of training have these kids been through?"

In the clearing below, Midoriya looked up toward their instructors, his green eyes sharp and alert. There was something different about him—a presence that hadn't been in their files. He didn't look like the nervous, analytical boy they'd expected. He looked like a warrior.

"Is there more?" he called out, his voice carrying clearly across the distance. "We're ready for the real challenge."

The words weren't boastful or arrogant. They were stated as simple fact.

Aizawa, who had been watching silently from beside the Pussycats, finally spoke. His voice was dry, almost amused. "I tried to warn you. They're not the same kids they were a month ago."

Pixie-Bob turned to stare at him. "A month ago? What happened a month ago?"

Aizawa's smile was razor-thin. "Would you believe me if I told you just some good 'ol fashioned training?"

A fresh, defeated sigh escaped Pixie-Bob as she slumped against a tree, her blonde ponytails disheveled. "This... this wasn't how it was supposed to go," she panted. "They were supposed to struggle! To work together! To learn teamwork through adversity!"

Ragdoll bounced over, her usual hyperactive energy dampened. "I've never seen anything like it! Their power levels are off the charts, but it's not just that—they're so efficient! So precise! It's like they've already learned everything we were going to teach them!"

Tiger crossed his muscular arms, his expression troubled. "In thirty years of doing this, I've never seen first-year students move with that kind of coordination. They weren't just fighting those constructs—they were dissecting them."

"And the way they analyzed the structural weaknesses," Ragdoll added, her wild blue hair sticking to her sweaty face. "That frog girl figured out my earth beast construction pattern in seconds! SECONDS!"

Meanwhile, down in the clearing, Class 1-A stood around casually. A few students were stretching—not from fatigue, but more out of habit. Kaminari was actually yawning.

"Well, that was a nice warm-up," Kirishima said cheerfully, rolling his shoulders. "Think there's more coming?"

"I hope so," Mina chimed in, not even breathing hard. "I barely got to use my acid!"

Sero was coiling up his tape with practiced ease. "Yeah, I was just getting started. These forest exercises are way more relaxing than—" He caught himself before mentioning Kagutsuchi's training, glancing toward Aizawa.

Tokoyami nodded solemnly. "Indeed. Dark Shadow was hoping for a more... substantial challenge."

From his perch, Dark Shadow's voice echoed with disappointment: "Those constructs crumbled like tissue paper! Where's the drama? The struggle? The DARKNESS?"

The Pussycats stared down at them in growing disbelief.

"Are they... are they complaining that it was too easy?" Pixie-Bob whispered, her voice cracking slightly.

Mandalay, trying to maintain some semblance of professional composure despite her own elevated breathing, cleared her throat loudly. "Well! That was... certainly impressive! You've all exceeded our initial expectations."

She paused, gathering herself and smoothing down her costume. "For now, let's head to your accommodations. Pussycat Lodge is just through those trees—it's a traditional hot spring cabin where you'll be staying for the week."

She pointed toward a well-worn path leading deeper into the forest, where the peaked roof of a rustic building was visible through the canopy.

The students perked up at this—not because they needed rest, but because the prospect of a hot spring sounded genuinely pleasant.

"Oh, awesome!" Uraraka said with genuine enthusiasm. "I love hot springs!"

"Finally, some real relaxation," Jirou added, adjusting her earphone jacks.

"A hot spring sounds perfect after that little exercise," Yaoyorozu agreed, though she looked like she could run a marathon without breaking a sweat.

As Class 1-A began walking toward the lodge, chatting among themselves about the amenities, the Wild Wild Pussycats remained behind, watching them go.

The four heroes looked at each other in stunned silence.

Then, as if choreographed, they all let out a long, collective sigh.

"We're going to need to completely redesign our training program," Mandalay said flatly.

"From scratch," Tiger agreed.

"Maybe we should ask them to train us," Ragdoll muttered, then immediately looked horrified at her own suggestion.

Pixie-Bob just stared at the retreating students, her eye twitching slightly. "I used enough earth magic to level a small mountain. They treated it like a warm-up routine. A WARM-UP!"

Aizawa, who had been quietly observing the entire exchange, finally spoke up. "Welcome to our world. You should see them after they've actually been challenged."

The Pussycats turned to stare at him.

"After they've been challenged?" Mandalay repeated slowly.

Aizawa's smile returned, sharper than the last. "That's when you should really start trying."

The Pussycats stared back down at the students in stunned silence, a shared understanding of their own inadequacy dawning on their faces.

The Pussycat Lodge was exactly what its name promised—a traditional mountain cabin with natural hot springs carved into the rocky hillside behind it. Steam rose from the mineral-rich pools, and the scent of sulfur mixed pleasantly with pine and mountain air. After claiming their rooms and unpacking their gear, Class 1-A had eagerly made their way to the baths.

The boys' side of the hot spring was filled with contented sighs as the students sank into the warm water. The natural pools were surrounded by smooth stones and bamboo partitions, creating a peaceful, secluded atmosphere.

"Now this is what I'm talking about," Kirishima said, settling back against the rocks with a satisfied grunt. "Nothing beats a good soak after training."

"The mineral content is excellent for muscle recovery," Iida noted, adjusting his glasses even in the bath. "Though I suppose we hardly need it after such light exercise."

Kaminari stretched his arms above his head. "Man, I could get used to this. Way better than ice baths after Kagutsuchi's—" He caught himself, glancing around nervously.

"Training," Todoroki finished diplomatically. "Yes, this is quite pleasant."

Near the edge of the spring, Mineta had positioned himself strategically, his eyes gleaming with perverted intent as he eyed the bamboo partition separating the men's and women's baths.

"Hehe," he giggled quietly, "if I just climb up this rock and peek over—"

"What do you think you're doing?"

The voice was sharp, young, and filled with contempt. Everyone turned to see a small boy, maybe five or six years old, standing at the edge of the spring. He wore a simple red cap and had the most unimpressed expression any of them had ever seen on a child's face.

"Kota!" came Mandalay's voice from somewhere in the distance. "Don't wander off!"

The boy—Kota—completely ignored her call. Instead, he fixed Mineta with a withering stare that would have made Aizawa proud.

"Trying to peek at girls like some kind of pervert," Kota sneered. "Disgusting."

Before Mineta could respond, Kota grabbed a nearby bucket and hurled it with surprising accuracy, nailing the grape-haired boy right in the head with a solid thunk.

"Ow! Hey, you little—"

"Heroes," Kota spat, the word dripping with disdain as he looked around at all of them. "You're all the same. Perverts, show-offs, and attention seekers. Makes me sick."

The hot spring fell silent. Even the cheerful chatter from the girls' side seemed to quiet down.

Izuku, who had been relaxing peacefully in the corner, sat up straighter. There was something in the boy's voice—not just dislike, but real pain. Deep, cutting pain that went far beyond simple childhood crankiness.

"All of you, with your stupid costumes and your stupid dreams," Kota continued, his small hands clenched into fists. "Playing dress-up and calling yourselves heroes. It's pathetic."

"Hey now," Kirishima said gently, trying to defuse the tension. "That's not very—"

"Don't!" Kota snapped, whirling on him. "I don't want to hear it! I don't want to hear any of your hero garbage!"

With that, he turned and stomped away, leaving the students in stunned silence.

After a moment, Kaminari whistled low. "Wow. That kid really doesn't like heroes, huh?"

"There has to be a reason," Izuku murmured, staring in the direction Kota had gone. "Kids don't develop that kind of anger without cause."

Dinner at the lodge was a hearty affair of traditional mountain cuisine—grilled fish, rice, pickled vegetables, and hot soup that warmed them from the inside out. The students chatted and laughed, the earlier encounter with Kota already fading into background concern for most of them.

But not for Izuku.

He found himself glancing toward the kitchen occasionally, where he'd caught glimpses of the small boy helping Mandalay with preparations, his expression sullen and withdrawn.

After the meal, as his classmates began heading to their rooms for the night, Izuku lingered behind. He found Mandalay in the main room, tidying up the low tables they'd eaten at.

"Mandalay-san?" he called softly.

She looked up, her expression immediately shifting to one of embarrassment and concern. "Oh, Midoriya-kun. I'm so sorry about Kota earlier. His behavior at the hot spring was completely unacceptable."

"Please, don't apologize," Izuku said quickly, moving to help her stack the dishes. "I was actually hoping to ask about him. Is he... is he okay?"

Mandalay paused in her cleaning, her hands stilling on a ceramic bowl. She was quiet for a long moment before sighing deeply.

"You're very perceptive," she said finally. "Most people just write him off as a difficult child. But you're right—there's more to it."

She gestured for him to sit beside her on one of the cushions. Her hero persona seemed to fade away, replaced by something more vulnerable—an aunt worried about her nephew.

"Kota is my sister's son," she began quietly. "His parents... they were heroes too. The Water Horse duo—they weren't famous, but they were good heroes. They cared about people, about doing the right thing."

Izuku felt his chest tighten. "Were?"

"They died two years ago," Mandalay continued, her voice barely above a whisper. "Fighting a villain called Muscular. They managed to save everyone in the area, but..." She trailed off, unable to finish.

"They didn't make it home," Izuku finished gently.

Mandalay nodded, tears threatening at the corners of her eyes. "Kota was only four when it happened. He doesn't understand why they had to die. Why they chose to be heroes when it meant leaving him behind. In his mind, if heroes hadn't existed, his parents would still be alive."

Izuku sat in silence for a moment, processing this. The depth of Kota's pain suddenly made perfect sense—not just grief, but the complex anger of a child who couldn't understand why the thing that took his parents away was celebrated by everyone around him.

"He blames heroism itself," Izuku said softly.

"Exactly. And when he sees young people like you, so eager and passionate about becoming heroes... it just reminds him of what he lost. Of what he sees as the futility of it all."

Mandalay wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "I know you and your classmates probably seem incredibly patient, but honestly, after what you all showed us today, I'm not sure Kota's wrong to be skeptical about heroes. You're all so far beyond what normal students should be capable of."

"We've had some... intensive training," Izuku said carefully. "But that's not important right now. Thank you for explaining about Kota. It helps me understand. Grief like that... especially for someone so young... it's not something you just get over."

"I'm hoping that maybe, being around heroes-in-training who are closer to his age, might help him process some of his feelings. But I understand if you'd prefer to keep your distance. He can be quite harsh."

Izuku shook his head firmly. "I don't mind. And I don't think my friends will either. Well, except maybe Kacchan—he's not exactly known for his patience with attitude. But the rest of us... we understand that pain makes people say things they don't always mean."

Mandalay smiled through her tears. "You're very mature for your age, Midoriya-kun. Thank you for being so understanding."

As Izuku headed back to his room, he found himself thinking about loss, about the different ways people dealt with grief. Kota's anger wasn't really about heroes—it was about a little boy who missed his parents and couldn't understand why they'd chosen to leave him behind.

It was pain he could understand all too well.

The forest surrounding the Pussycat Lodge was shrouded in the deep darkness of midnight, the only light coming from scattered stars piercing through the canopy above. On a ridge overlooking the peaceful cabin, seven figures crouched in the shadows, their forms barely visible against the treeline.

Tomura Shigaraki adjusted the tactical vest strapped over his usual black hoodie, the military-grade equipment a stark contrast to his typically disheveled appearance. Without the severed hands that had once adorned his body, he looked less like a deranged child and more like what he truly was—a calculated killer with the power to reduce anything to dust.

"The target is confirmed," he whispered into his comm unit, his red eyes fixed on the lodge below. "Class 1-A is bedded down for the night. Intelligence suggests they'll be exhausted from today's training."

Beside him, Dabi's scarred face was illuminated briefly as he lit a cigarette, the flame dancing in his turquoise eyes. "Exhausted? From what I saw through the thermal scopes, they barely worked up a sweat dealing with those earth constructs. These aren't normal students, Shigaraki."

"Which is exactly why we're here," Shigaraki replied, his voice carrying a cold edge. "All For One wants to know what makes them so special. And I have a personal score to settle with that green-haired brat who cost us the USJ operation."

Toga Himiko giggled softly, her knife glinting in the moonlight as she traced patterns in the dirt. "Ooh, I can't wait to see their surprised faces! Especially that cute boy from the Sports Festival. Midoriya, right? I wonder what his blood tastes like when he's scared?"

"Quiet," rumbled Muscular, his exposed muscles rippling as he stretched. "Save the chatter for after we crush them. I'm looking forward to a real fight this time."

The Chainsaw Nomu beside him made no sound, its mechanical augmentations gleaming dully in the darkness. Unlike the mindless beasts typically created by All For One, this one retained enough intelligence to follow complex orders while possessing the physical capabilities to match multiple pro heroes.

Mr. Compress adjusted his mask, his theatrical nature barely contained even in this tense moment. "A most ambitious performance we're about to stage. Though I do hope our young audience appreciates the artistry of our entrance."

Moonfish said nothing, his blade-covered form motionless save for the occasional glint of metal as his weapons shifted restlessly.

Magne cracked her knuckles, magnetic forces causing small metal objects in the area to tremble slightly. "So what's the play, boss? Hit them hard and fast while they're sleeping?"

Shigaraki nodded, his gaze never leaving the lodge. "We move in fifteen minutes. Dabi, you take the main building—flush them out but don't kill anyone yet. We need them alive for questioning. Muscular and the Nomu will handle any pro heroes that respond. Toga, Moonfish, you're with me—we're going straight for the students."

"And if they're stronger than expected?" Dabi asked, taking a long drag from his cigarette.

"Then we adapt," Shigaraki said coldly. "But teenagers are still teenagers. Catch them off guard, separate them, and even the strongest Quirks become manageable."

What they couldn't know—what their intelligence had failed to uncover—was that thirty feet below the lodge, in a hidden basement room that served as an emergency shelter, Class 1-A was very much awake.

Yuga Aoyama stood before his classmates, his usual flamboyant demeanor replaced by something far more serious. The weight of his confession hung in the air like a physical presence.

"They will come tonight," he said quietly, his French accent thicker with stress. "Shigaraki's forces have been watching the lodge since this afternoon. I... I know this because I was meant to guide them to you."

The silence that followed was deafening.

"Aoyama..." Izuku began, but the blonde boy cut him off with a shake of his head.

"Non, mon ami. Let me finish." His hands trembled slightly. "All For One... he gave me information about their plans when he believed I was still his agent. They expect to find you sleeping, defenseless. But now..." His eyes hardened with resolve. "Now they will find us ready."

Bakugo's palms crackled with small explosions, but his voice was surprisingly controlled. "How many?"

"Seven," Aoyama replied. "Shigaraki himself leads them, along with Muscular, Moonfish, Magne, Mr. Compress, Dabi, and something called a Chainsaw Nomu. Toga Himiko rounds out their number."

Even Todoroki's composed expression flickered with concern. "Those are serious threats. Multiple A-rank villains and a high-end Nomu."

"Which is why we're not running," Izuku said firmly, and something in his voice made everyone turn to look at him. In his green eyes was a determination that went beyond simple heroic resolve—it was the look of someone who had faced impossible odds and emerged stronger.

Aizawa, who had been listening from the corner of the room, stepped forward. "This isn't a training exercise. These villains are here to kill or capture you. Some of you should evacuate with the Pussycats while the others—"

"No." The word came from multiple voices simultaneously. Kirishima, Iida, Todoroki, even Uraraka spoke in unison, their faces set with unwavering determination.

"We fight together," Kirishima said, his hands hardening into diamond-sharp claws. "That's what we learned from our training. No one gets left behind."

Above them, Shigaraki checked his watch. "Time. Move out."

The League of Villains descended toward the lodge like wraiths in the night, expecting to find their prey defenseless and vulnerable.

Instead, as Dabi's flames engulfed the main building's exterior walls, the front doors exploded outward—not from fire damage, but from the inside.

Class 1-A emerged in perfect formation, their movements coordinated with military precision. They weren't the scattered, panicking students the villains had expected. They were a unified force, and they were ready for war.

"Surprise, assholes!" Bakugo roared, launching himself skyward on a pillar of explosions.

But it was what happened next that truly caught the villains off guard.

HENSHIN!

As Izuku stepped forward to meet Shigaraki's charge, golden light began to emanate from his body. Ancient power caused the air to sing around him, pulsing with otherworldly energy. His form shifted and changed, armor materializing piece by piece—sleek, organic-looking plating that seemed to grow rather than simply appear.

Beside him, Aoyama underwent his own transformation, his frame encased in similar armor. Where Izuku's armor was black with gold accents, Aoyama's was vibrant green and gold, a stark visual contrast that nonetheless looked perfectly harmonious.

"Let's go," Izuku said, his voice now carrying otherworldly resonance through his helmet's vocal systems.

"Oui," Aoyama added, his own transformed voice filled with quiet determination.

Shigaraki skidded to a halt, his red eyes widening with shock and rage. "What the hell is this? Another Beetle Boy?!"

But before either transformed hero could answer, the night erupted into chaos as the strongest Class 1-A had ever been met the League of Villains head-on.

The real battle was about to begin.

"Scatter formation!" Shigaraki snarled, his tactical mind adapting quickly to this unexpected development. "Don't let them fight in pairs! Dabi, Muscular—split them up!"

But as the villains moved to separate their targets, they would soon learn that Class 1-A had grown far beyond what any of them could have imagined. The students who had once struggled against simple training exercises now moved with the confidence and skill of seasoned warriors.

The night air crackled with tension as both forces clashed in the clearing around Pussycat Lodge. What the League of Villains had expected to be a simple assault turned into a nightmare of coordinated resistance.

Dabi's flames roared toward the students, but Todoroki's ice wall rose to meet them, steam hissing as fire and frost collided. In the same instant, Bakugo rocketed overhead, explosions propelling him in a spiraling attack pattern that forced Dabi to split his attention between offense and defense.

"These brats are moving like pros!" Dabi snarled, his flames intensifying as he tried to keep up with their coordinated assault.

Across the battlefield, Muscular charged toward what he thought would be easy prey—only to find Kirishima meeting his charge head-on. The collision rang like thunder, but where Muscular expected to crush a mere student, he found himself matched blow for blow by diamond-hard skin and precise counterstrikes.

"You're stronger than I expected, kid!" Muscular grunted, his artificial muscle fibers bulging. "But I've got more power than—"

His boast was cut short as Sato appeared from his blind spot, sugar-enhanced strength driving a devastating uppercut into the villain's exposed ribs. The perfectly timed combination sent Muscular staggering.

"Teamwork," Kirishima said with a sharp-toothed grin. "You wouldn't understand."

Meanwhile, Toga had targeted what she thought would be the easiest victim—gentle, kind Uraraka. Her knife flashed in the moonlight as she lunged, expecting fear and panic.

Instead, she found herself weightless, floating helplessly as Uraraka's touch sent her drifting toward the trees. Before she could recover, Tsuyu's tongue wrapped around her ankle with crushing force.

"Sorry," Uraraka said, not sounding sorry at all as she released her Quirk, sending Toga crashing into the ground.

Mr. Compress attempted his signature move, compressing Yaoyorozu into a marble with a flourish of his cape. But the marble that appeared in his hand was wrong—too light, too small.

"Looking for me?" Yaoyorozu's voice came from behind him. In her hands was a flash-bang grenade, pin already pulled. "I learned to counter compression techniques. That marble contains a decoy."

The explosion of light and sound left Mr. Compress stumbling blind and deaf, easy prey for Jirou's sound-based attacks that followed immediately after.

Even Moonfish, the blade-covered killer, found himself outmaneuvered. His razor-sharp appendages sliced through the air with deadly precision, but Dark Shadow moved like liquid night, Tokoyami's control absolute as he directed his Quirk in defensive patterns that turned Moonfish's attacks back on himself.

"Your bloodlust makes you predictable," Tokoyami said coldly, Dark Shadow coiling around Moonfish's limbs like living rope. "Darkness consumes those who live only to cut."

At the center of the chaos, Shigaraki faced the two armored figures with growing fury. His hands shot out toward Izuku, five fingers spread wide to activate his Decay Quirk.

The moment his palm touched the golden armor, he expected to feel the familiar dissolution beginning. Instead, there was nothing—just the solid impact of hand against unyielding armor.

"Impossible!" he hissed, pressing both hands against Izuku's chest plate. "Why won't you rot?!"

Izuku's response was a precise strike to Shigaraki's solar plexus, the enhanced strength of his armor driving the villain back. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

Beside them, Aoyama engaged Magne with fluid grace, his transformed state allowing him to dance between her magnetic pulls with supernatural agility. Each of her attempts to manipulate his movement was countered by precise footwork and carefully timed strikes.

The Chainsaw Nomu roared as it charged toward the students, its mechanical augmentations screaming with mechanical fury. But it found itself facing not panicked children, but a wall of coordinated heroes-in-training. Iida's speed, Sero's tape, Kaminari's electricity—all working in perfect synchronization to bind and overload the creature's systems.

"NOW!" Iida called out, and the coordinated assault reached its crescendo.

Just as the tide of battle seemed to fully turn in Class 1-A's favor, the Wild Wild Pussycats burst from the lodge, followed closely by Aizawa, his capture weapon already unfurling.

"About time we joined the party!" Pixie-Bob called out, her earth constructs rising from the ground to trap the struggling villains.

Mandalay's telepathic voice reached every hero on the battlefield: "Coordinate your attacks! Don't let any of them escape!"

Tiger's muscular form slammed into the Chainsaw Nomu with devastating force, while Ragdoll's Search Quirk fed tactical information to every hero present, turning their already impressive coordination into something approaching prescience.

Aizawa's capture weapon wrapped around Moonfish's blades, his Erasure Quirk nullifying the villain's weapon-generation ability. "Class 1-A, excellent work! Maintain formation and finish this!

But Shigaraki, for all his rage and frustration, was still a tactician. Seeing his forces being systematically dismantled, he made the call that every good commander learns to make.

"Dabi! Smoke screen, now!"

Blue flames erupted in a wide circle, filling the clearing with thick, choking smoke. In the confusion that followed, Shigaraki's voice carried through the haze:

"This isn't over, green boy! I don't know what you are, but I'll find a way to make you crumble! Count on it!"

When the smoke cleared, four figures were gone—Shigaraki, Dabi, Toga, and Magne had vanished into the night, leaving behind only scorch marks and the acrid smell of burnt vegetation.

The remaining villains weren't as fortunate. Moonfish lay unconscious, wrapped in Aizawa's capture weapon. The Chainsaw Nomu sparked and twitched, its systems fried by Kaminari's overload. Mr. Compress sat dazed against a tree, his marble-compression quirk still disrupted by Yaoyorozu's countermeasures.

"That's three down, four escaped," Tiger counted, breathing heavily from the intense fight.

Aizawa nodded, his eyes scanning the scene. "Good work, all of you. Your coordination was—"

"Wait," Kirishima interrupted, looking around frantically. "Where's Muscular? I was fighting him right here!"

A chill ran through the group as they realized the massive villain was nowhere to be seen among the defeated or the missing.

"He must have slipped away during the smoke screen," Pixie-Bob said grimly. "That's five escaped total."

The heroes were just beginning to secure the captured villains when a blood-curdling scream pierced the night air from inside the lodge.

Mandalay burst through the front doors, her face white with terror and panic in her eyes.

"KOTA!" she screamed, her voice breaking with raw emotion. "Kota is gone! His bed is empty, and the window—the window was forced open from outside!"

The victory celebration died instantly. In the sudden, horrible silence that followed, everyone understood what had happened.

While they had been fighting the main assault, Muscular had circled around to the lodge itself. And now, the bitter, hero-hating little boy was in the hands of the man who had killed his parents.

Deep in the forest, Muscular bounded through the trees with inhuman speed, his augmented muscles propelling him across impossible distances with each leap. In his massive arms, Kota struggled weakly, the small boy's red cap askew and tears streaming down his face.

"Stop squirming, brat," Muscular growled, his grip tightening just enough to emphasize his strength without causing serious harm. "You're my insurance policy now. Those hero wannabes back there won't risk hurting their precious little civilian."

Kota's small fists beat uselessly against the villain's chest, his voice cracked as he shouted, "Let me go! I hate heroes, but I hate you more!"

Muscular's laugh was harsh and grating, echoing through the darkness. "Oh, you remember me, don't you? Good. That'll make this more interesting." His voice dropped to a cruel whisper. "Your parents thought they were so brave, so noble. But in the end, they were just as fragile as everyone else."

The boy's struggles intensified, but his small form was no match for the villain's overwhelming strength. "They were... they were trying to save people!"

"And look how that worked out for them," Muscular sneered, leaping to another tree branch with casual ease. "But don't worry, kid. Soon you'll join them, and then I'll have a complete set. The whole family, courtesy of these hands."

Behind them, the sound of pursuit was growing louder—voices calling Kota's name, the crash of heroes moving through the underbrush. But Muscular wasn't concerned. With the boy as a hostage, he held all the cards.

That confidence lasted exactly thirty more seconds.

A streak of blue light tore through the forest canopy like lightning, moving faster than sound, faster than thought. The trees themselves seemed to part before the approaching figure, leaves and branches whipping aside in the wake of impossible speed.

Muscular had just enough time to look up before the impact hit.

The collision was like being struck by a meteor. Izuku, transformed into his Storm Form, slammed into Muscular with the force of a bullet train, blue energy crackling around his armor and painting the entire forest in electric light. The villain's grip on Kota loosened instantly as the sheer kinetic force drove him backward, sending him crashing through three massive pine trees before he could even process what had happened.

Kota found himself caught gently in armored hands, the child's frightened sobs muffled against the blue and silver chest plate as Izuku landed gracefully on a thick branch, his Storm Form's energy creating a protective cocoon around them both.

"You're safe now," Izuku's voice was different in this form—deeper, carrying otherworldly resonance that somehow managed to be both powerful and comforting. "I've got you, Kota. You're safe."

Fifty feet away, Muscular pulled himself from the wreckage of shattered wood and scattered earth, his augmented muscles rippling as they absorbed the impact damage. Blood trickled from a cut on his forehead, but his grin was as vicious as ever.

"Well, well," he said, cracking his neck as he stood. "Looks like the green kid got himself a new toy. But speed won't save you when I crush every bone in your body."

Izuku carefully set Kota down on the branch behind him, the boy clinging to the bark with white knuckles. "Stay here," he said softly. "This ends now."

As he turned to face Muscular, wind began to dance across his armor in increasingly intense patterns. The Storm Form wasn't just about speed—it was about the raw, untamed power of nature itself.

"You just made a big mistake, kid," Muscular rumbled, his muscles churning as he ambled closer, morbid excitement coating his words. "I'm gonna enjoy cracking you like an egg!"

"Come on then!" Izuku called out, his Storm Form crackling with wind-based energy. Gales began to swirl around him, leaves and debris caught in miniature tornadoes that danced across his armor.

He launched himself backward through the forest, wind propelling him at incredible speeds. The strategy was simple—draw Muscular away from Kota, keep the boy safe while dealing with this monster.

Muscular took the bait, his augmented legs driving him forward in massive bounds that shattered tree trunks and left crater-sized footprints in the forest floor. "Running already? I thought heroes were supposed to be brave!"

But Izuku wasn't running—he was leading. Each gust of wind that surrounded him carved through the forest canopy, creating a clear path away from where Kota waited. When they reached a clearing a quarter-mile from the boy's position, Izuku turned to face his pursuer.

The collision was tremendous. Muscular's fist met Izuku's wind-enhanced strike with a sound like thunder, the shockwave flattening grass in a perfect circle around them. But where Izuku expected to push the villain back, Muscular's artificial muscle fibers simply absorbed the impact and expanded.

"My turn!" Muscular roared, his body swelling as more muscle mass erupted from his arms and torso. His next punch came with the force of a wrecking ball, but Izuku twisted away on currents of air, the wind itself seeming to bend around him.

The battle became a deadly dance. Izuku's Storm Form granted him incredible mobility, allowing him to strike from impossible angles before darting away on controlled gusts. But Muscular was learning, adapting, his muscle fibers reaching out like grasping tendrils to catch his opponent.

"Got you!" Muscular bellowed as his expanded arms suddenly wrapped around Izuku's torso, muscle fibers beginning to constrict like a python. "Let's see how tough that armor is when I crush you from the inside out!"

The pressure was immense, threatening to crack even his transformed state. Izuku could feel his ribs straining as Muscular's artificial muscles tightened like steel cables. The wind around him was being compressed, suffocated.

But within his armor, a different power stirred.

Heat. Pure, overwhelming heat.

Golden flames erupted from Izuku's body as he shifted forms, the Storm armor dissolving and reforming into something altogether more aggressive. Where the Storm Form had been sleek and aerodynamic, the Flame Form was heavier, built for raw power rather than speed.

The temperature spiked instantly. Muscular's muscle fibers, which had been constricting with crushing force, suddenly recoiled as if burned. The villain stumbled backward, his augmented flesh actually smoking from the contact.

"What the hell—" Muscular started, but Izuku was already moving.

The Flame Form didn't rely on speed like Storm had. Instead, it was pure physical might enhanced by pyrokinetic power. Izuku's fist, wreathed in golden fire, drove into Muscular's solar plexus with enough force to crater the ground beneath them.

But if anything, the escalation only excited the villain more.

"YES!" Muscular laughed, his muscle mass swelling even further as he grabbed a boulder the size of a car. "This is what I wanted! Real power! Real violence!"

He hurled the massive stone with enough force to pulverize a building, but Izuku's flame-enhanced fist met it head-on, shattering it into harmless pebbles. More debris followed—chunks of earth, broken tree trunks, anything Muscular could get his hands on became a projectile.

Each obstacle met the same fate, destroyed by determined strikes that painted the night in golden fire. When Muscular finally charged forward himself, their fists met in the center of the clearing.

The shockwave was enormous. Trees a hundred yards away bent backward from the force. The very ground rippled like water, stone and earth liquefying under the impossible pressure.

But Muscular didn't let up. His augmented strength had found its match in Izuku's Flame Form, and the villain was in his element now—a pure test of power against power, violence against violence.

Izuku felt himself being pushed to his absolute limit. The Flame Form's power was immense, but Muscular's artificial enhancements seemed to have no ceiling. Each exchange of blows left both fighters more battered, but while Izuku's energy was finite, Muscular's augmentations just kept adapting.

Just as the villain pulled back for what looked like a finishing blow, a small splash of water hit him directly in the face.

Muscular blinked, stunned, and turned to see a small figure standing at the edge of the clearing. Kota, his red cap slightly askew, held his hands out in front of him. Small streams of water swirled around his fingers—his Quirk, activated by raw emotion and determination.

"My parents were heroes!" the boy shouted, his voice cracking but defiant. "They saved people! They were brave and strong and everything you're not!"

More water splashed across Muscular's face and chest, pathetically small compared to the power being thrown around, but carrying more emotional weight than any physical attack.

"They died protecting others, and that makes them a thousand times better than a monster like you!"

The words hit Muscular harder than any punch. His attention shifted fully to the boy, his face twisting with rage. "You little—"

But Izuku was already moving. Seeing Kota's courage, understanding that this fight needed to end before the boy got hurt, he felt something deep within his transformed state stir—a sensation he'd never experienced before.

Power. Not the focused might of Flame Form or the swift energy of Storm Form, but something that encompassed both and more.

He shifted back to his basic Ground Form, the crimson armor settling into its familiar black and gold configuration. Then, with absolute certainty, he reached for both sides of his transformation belt simultaneously.

"Kota, close your eyes!" he called out.

The boy obeyed instantly, throwing his hands over his face. Muscular, still facing away from Izuku, started to turn—

Light. Pure, blinding, divine light that turned the entire clearing into a miniature sun. Both Muscular and Kota instinctively looked away, their retinas unable to process the intensity.

When the radiance finally faded, a new figure stood where Izuku had been.

The armor was magnificent—a perfect fusion of all his previous forms, but elevated beyond anything he had achieved before. Gold dominated the design, but it was shot through with veins of teal and accented with deep crimson. The helmet bore a horn configuration that seemed almost divine in its symmetry, and ancient symbols pulsed along the chest piece with otherworldly power.

This wasn't just another transformation. This was evolution.

"Trinity Form," Izuku said, his voice carrying harmonics that seemed to resonate with the very air around them.

Muscular turned back to face him, and for the first time since the battle began, genuine uncertainty flickered in the villain's eyes.

The hesitation lasted only a heartbeat.

Then Muscular's face twisted into a mask of pure rage, his artificial muscle fibers exploding outward in a display of power that dwarfed everything he had shown before. His body swelled to grotesque proportions, muscle upon muscle layering until he resembled some primordial beast more than a human being.

"I don't care what fancy costume you put on!" he roared, his voice distorted by the sheer mass of flesh surrounding his throat. "I'll crush you! I'll crush everything!"

He launched himself forward with earth-shattering force, his augmented limbs reaching out like the arms of some monstrous kraken. The very air screamed as he moved, his overwhelming bulk promising to engulf and destroy everything in its path.

But Izuku didn't move.

He stood perfectly still in his Trinity Form, golden armor gleaming in the moonlight. As Muscular's massive form bore down on him, Izuku slowly drew back his right fist.

Power began to gather around his knuckles—not just the pyrokinetic might of Flame Form or the wind-based energy of Storm Form, but something far greater. The combined essence of every transformation he possessed coalesced into a single point of pure, divine energy.

Gold. Teal. Crimson. All the colors of his various forms swirled around his fist in a spiral of radiant power that seemed to bend reality itself. Ancient symbols flared to life along his arm, pulsing with otherworldly strength.

Muscular's bulk was mere inches away now, artificial muscles ready to wrap around and crush—

"DETROIT SMASH!"

The words erupted from Izuku's lips with such force that they seemed to shake the very foundations of the earth. His fist drove forward, meeting Muscular's charge head-on.

The impact was biblical.

A shockwave exploded outward from the point of contact, a perfect sphere of compressed air that flattened everything within a hundred-yard radius. Trees didn't just bend—they were uprooted entirely, flung through the air like matchsticks. The very ground rippled like water, stone and earth liquefying under the impossible pressure.

Kota, despite being at the edge of the clearing, was caught by the wall of displaced air and sent tumbling backward. But fortune favored the brave—his small body rolled down a gentle slope and came to rest in a soft bed of grass, unconscious but unharmed.

Muscular himself didn't fly backward as physics would normally dictate. Instead, the sheer concentrated force of Izuku's punch seemed to warp his massive form, compressing all that artificial muscle before driving him straight down into the earth. He carved a perfectly straight crevice through the forest floor, his body plowing through stone and soil for nearly a quarter mile before finally coming to rest.

The devastation was absolute. Where half the clearing had once stood, there was now only scarred earth and scattered debris. Ancient trees that had weathered countless storms lay broken and smoking. The very landscape had been reshaped by a single punch.

And in the center of it all, Izuku stood victorious.

His Trinity Form armor gleamed unmarked by the battle, the divine symbols along his chest piece pulsing once more before fading to a gentle glow. Steam rose from his right fist where the concentrated power had been released.

In the distance, at the bottom of the earthen trench his attack had carved, Muscular lay motionless. Miraculously, impossibly, his chest still rose and fell with shallow breaths. The villain was alive, but completely unconscious—his artificial muscle enhancements finally overwhelmed by a force greater than anything they had been designed to absorb.

Izuku slowly walked to where Kota had landed, his heavy footsteps the only sound in the devastated landscape. The boy was stirring, his red cap somehow still clinging to his head despite the chaos.

"Kota," Izuku said softly, his transformed voice gentle as he knelt beside the child. "Are you hurt?"

The boy blinked up at him, then slowly sat up, staring at the armored figure with wide eyes. Behind Izuku, the path of destruction stretched out like a scar across the earth—testament to power beyond comprehension.

"You... you saved me," Kota whispered, his voice filled with something that might have been wonder.

Izuku's armor began to dissolve, golden light streaming away like morning mist until only the familiar green-haired boy remained, kneeling in his simple training clothes. But somehow, he seemed different now—older, more certain of himself.

"That's what heroes do," he said simply, extending a hand to help Kota to his feet. "We protect people. Not for glory or recognition, but because it's the right thing to do."

Kota stared at him, then at the devastated battlefield, then back at Izuku. Tears began to stream down his face—not tears of fear or pain, but something deeper. Something that had been locked away for two long years.

"My parents..." he whispered.

"Were heroes," Izuku finished gently. "Real heroes. They saved everyone they could, and they never gave up, even when it cost them everything. You should be proud of them."

The boy's small frame shook with sobs as everything he'd been holding inside finally broke free. "I miss them so much! I was so angry... I thought if there were no heroes, they'd still be alive, but..."

"But then there would be no one to stop villains like Muscular," Izuku said, pulling the crying child into a gentle embrace. "Your parents understood that. They chose to stand between monsters and innocent people, even knowing the cost. That's what makes them heroes."

In the distance, the sounds of approaching voices echoed through the forest as the other heroes finally caught up. But the battle was over.

The monster who had killed Kota's parents, who had terrorized countless innocents, had finally met his match.

And a small boy who had hated heroes was beginning to understand what true heroism really meant.

As the first rays of dawn broke through the forest canopy, Class 1-A gathered around the scarred clearing that bore witness to the night's climactic battle. The Wild Wild Pussycats worked with local authorities to secure the captured villains, while paramedics tended to minor injuries.

Kota sat quietly on a fallen log, his red cap now clean and properly positioned, watching as the cleanup efforts continued. Beside him, Izuku sat with his notebook, sketching the damaged landscape and making notes about his new Trinity Form.

"Hey," Kota said quietly, his voice no longer carrying its previous venom. "Midoriya... san?"

Izuku looked up from his notes, smiling gently. "Just Izuku is fine. What's up?"

"When I get older..." the boy hesitated, then squared his small shoulders with determination. "When I get older, I want to be a hero too. Like my parents. Like you."

Around them, the other members of Class 1-A paused in their conversations, turning to listen. Even Bakugo, who had been loudly complaining about the early morning, fell silent.

"That's a big decision," Izuku said seriously, treating the boy's declaration with the respect it deserved. "Being a hero isn't easy. It means putting others before yourself, even when you're scared. Even when it hurts."

"I know," Kota nodded firmly. "But someone has to stop the bad guys, right? Someone has to protect the people who can't protect themselves."

"Yes," Izuku agreed, closing his notebook and giving the boy his full attention. "Someone does. And when you're old enough, if you still feel that calling, I think you'll make an excellent hero."

Mandalay approached them, her expression mixing relief with lingering worry. "The authorities are almost finished. We should head back to the lodge soon. Kota, you need rest."

The boy stood up, but before following his aunt, he turned back to Izuku one more time. "Thank you," he said simply. "For showing me what heroes really are."

As they walked back toward the lodge, the early morning sun painting the forest in warm golden light, Class 1-A reflected on the night's events. They had faced one of their greatest challenges yet and emerged not just victorious, but stronger.

The training camp would continue for several more days, but already they could feel the change within themselves. They were no longer just students playing at being heroes.

They were the real thing.

And in a world full of villains and darkness, that made all the difference.