The morning air carried the crisp bite of autumn, tinged with the exhaust fumes and urban decay that characterized this particular corner of Musutafu's industrial district. Toga walked with measured steps down the cracked sidewalk, her stolen face maintaining the perfect mask of a U.A. student heading to an early morning study session. Every detail of her appearance had been meticulously crafted—the slightly rumpled uniform that suggested she'd rushed to get ready, the backpack slung over one shoulder with just the right amount of casual carelessness, even the faint dark circles under her eyes that spoke of late nights spent cramming for exams.

The extraction point was exactly where Tomura had said it would be: a nondescript alley tucked between a shuttered electronics shop and a convenience store that looked like it hadn't seen a paying customer in months. The kind of forgotten urban space where deals were made and bodies were disposed of, where the city's carefully maintained facade crumbled away to reveal the rot underneath.

A black sedan sat idling at the mouth of the alley, its engine purring with mechanical contentment. The windows were tinted dark enough to hide whatever lay within, and a thin wisp of exhaust curled up from the tailpipe like incense in some twisted ritual. To any casual observer, it would have appeared to be nothing more than someone waiting to pick up a friend or family member—the kind of mundane scene that played out thousands of times across the city every day.

But Toga could see the subtle wrongness in the picture. The way the car sat too still, too perfectly positioned. The driver's silhouette was visible through the windshield, but something about the proportions seemed off, as if the person behind the wheel was wearing the shape of humanity like an ill-fitting costume. Her enhanced senses, sharpened by months of infiltration work, picked up the faint chemical scent that always clung to Nomu—that distinctive mixture of preservatives and artificial biology that no amount of cologne could completely mask.

As she approached the vehicle, a genuine smile of anticipation spread across her borrowed features. This was it—the moment she had been working toward for weeks. Soon, she would shed this suffocating disguise, abandon this shrine to normalcy, and return to the beautiful chaos of the League. Soon, she would be free to indulge her true nature again.

The driver's door opened with a soft click, and the Nomu emerged in its human disguise. It had been crafted to look like a middle-aged businessman—slightly overweight, thinning hair, the kind of unremarkable appearance that would be forgotten moments after being seen. But Toga could see the telltale signs: the way it moved with just slightly too much precision, the complete absence of natural fidgeting or unconscious gestures, the flat, emotionless eyes that stared without truly seeing.

"Package delivery," it said in a voice that was mechanically correct but somehow hollow, like words being spoken by a sophisticated recording device.

Toga nodded, her pulse quickening with excitement as she followed the creature to the rear of the sedan. The trunk popped open with a pneumatic hiss, revealing the car's precious cargo.

The real student—the girl whose life Toga had been living, whose face she had worn, whose friends and family she had deceived—lay curled in the cramped space like a broken doll. Her hands were bound behind her back with industrial zip ties that had already left angry red marks on her wrists, and a strip of duct tape covered her mouth, muffling any sounds she might have made. Her eyes, wide with terror and exhaustion, darted frantically between Toga and the Nomu as if she were trying to process a nightmare that refused to end.

She had been missing for weeks, her disappearance carefully orchestrated to coincide with Toga's infiltration. To everyone who knew her, she had simply gone home to visit a sick relative—a perfectly plausible cover story that had bought Toga all the time she needed to study her target, to learn her mannerisms, to become her so completely that even close friends hadn't noticed the substitution.

But looking at the girl now—seeing the fear and confusion and desperate hope for rescue written across her features—Toga felt something unexpected twist in her stomach. Not guilt, exactly, because guilt required a moral framework she had abandoned long ago. But something resembling... discomfort? Unease?

The feeling was gone as quickly as it had come, burned away by the familiar rush of adrenaline that always accompanied a successful mission. This was what she lived for—the moment when all her careful planning and patient observation paid off, when she could finally drop the mask and reveal the beautiful truth underneath.

"Perfect," she murmured, reaching into her backpack to retrieve the small vial of blood that would allow her to maintain the girl's appearance for a few more hours if necessary. "Everything's going exactly according to—"

The words died in her throat as shadows erupted from three different directions at once.

Shouta Aizawa materialized from behind a dumpster like a wraith given form, his capture weapon already uncoiling from around his neck in sinuous, predatory loops. His red eyes blazed with the activation of his Quirk, and Toga felt her transformation ability suddenly severed as cleanly as if someone had flipped a switch in her brain. The stolen face began to melt away like wax under flame, revealing her true features underneath—sharp, predatory, beautiful in the way that venomous creatures were beautiful.

From the opposite side of the alley, Nemuri Kayama stepped out from behind the electronics shop with fluid, dancer-like grace. Her hero costume seemed almost out of place in the grimy urban setting, but there was nothing playful about her expression now. Her whip was already in her hand, and she was reaching for the atomizer that would fill the air with sleep-inducing pheromones.

But it was the third figure that truly made Toga's blood run cold.

Toshinori Yagi emerged from the shadow of the convenience store, and even in his unassuming civilian form, he radiated an authority that seemed to warp the very air around him. He might not have been able to access One For All anymore, but he was still All Might in every way that truly mattered. His presence alone was enough to make hardened criminals surrender without a fight.

"Himiko Toga," Aizawa said, his voice carrying the flat, professional tone of someone who had done this countless times before. "You're under arrest for infiltration, kidnapping, conspiracy, and about a dozen other charges we'll figure out later."

The Nomu, its primitive brain struggling to process this sudden change in circumstances, began to shift toward its true form. Artificial muscles bulged beneath its human disguise as it prepared to defend its charge, but Nemuri was already moving. Her whip cracked through the air with surgical precision, wrapping around the creature's throat before it could complete its transformation.

"Sleep tight," she purred, triggering her Quirk. The concentrated dose of her pheromones hit the Nomu like a hammer blow, and it toppled backward onto the concrete with a sound like a felled tree.

Toga found herself frozen, caught between the three heroes like a deer in headlights. Her mind, usually so quick to adapt and improvise, seemed to have short-circuited completely. This wasn't supposed to happen. The plan had been perfect, the extraction foolproof. How had they—

"How?" she whispered, the word escaping her lips before she could stop it.

All Might stepped forward, his blue eyes fixed on her with something that might have been pity. "Did you really think we wouldn't notice when one of our students started acting differently? When her handwriting changed, when she stopped using familiar phrases, when she suddenly became interested in subjects that had never held her attention before?"

"We've been watching you for over a week," Aizawa added, his capture weapon shifting like a living thing as it prepared to strike. "Waiting for you to lead us to your extraction point, to whatever backup you had arranged. Though I'll admit, the Nomu was a nice touch. Very professional."

The compliment, delivered in his characteristically dry tone, somehow stung worse than any insult could have. Toga had been so proud of her infiltration, so confident in her abilities, and now she was being told that she'd been made almost from the beginning. That all her careful work, all her patient observation and meticulous attention to detail, had been nothing more than an elaborate performance for an audience that had seen through her act from the first day.

"You can't prove anything," she said, but even to her own ears, the words sounded hollow and desperate.

Nemuri laughed, the sound sharp and bitter. "Sweetie, we don't need to prove anything. We caught you red-handed with a kidnapped student and a bioengineered monster. I think we've got plenty to work with."

In the trunk of the sedan, the real student had begun to struggle more frantically, her muffled cries growing more urgent as she realized that rescue was finally at hand. The sound seemed to break whatever spell had been holding Toga frozen, and she suddenly lunged forward, her hand reaching for the knife concealed in her uniform.

But Aizawa was ready for her. His capture weapon lashed out like a striking snake, wrapping around her wrist and yanking her arm back with enough force to dislocate her shoulder. She cried out in pain and surprise, all thoughts of resistance evaporating as she found herself thoroughly immobilized.

"Don't make this any harder than it needs to be," he said, producing a pair of Quirk-suppressing handcuffs from his utility belt. "You're already looking at life in Tartarus. No point in adding 'assaulting a pro hero' to the list."

As the cold metal clicked around her wrists, Toga felt something she hadn't experienced in years: genuine, bone-deep fear. Not the thrilling excitement that came with danger, but the crushing weight of inevitability. The understanding that her carefully constructed world was crumbling around her, and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

"The League will come for me," she said, but the words sounded weak even to her own ears.

All Might knelt down beside the sedan's trunk, his gentle hands working to free the traumatized student from her bonds. "I'm sure they'll try," he said without looking up. "But they'll have to get through us first."

And as sirens began to wail in the distance, growing louder with each passing second, Toga finally understood that her game was over.

The hideout existed in a perpetual state of decay—peeling wallpaper, water stains spreading like cancer across the ceiling, and the ever-present smell of mold and desperation. Tonight, it felt more like a tomb than a sanctuary.

The television's blue glow painted everything in harsh, unforgiving light. On screen, a news anchor with perfect hair and dead eyes recited the day's "victory" with the enthusiasm of someone reading a grocery list. But the footage—grainy, shaking, captured by some civilian's phone from three blocks away—told a different story.

"—major breakthrough for pro heroes today as they successfully apprehended League of Villains member Himiko Toga, ending what authorities are calling a 'sophisticated infiltration operation' at U.A. High School..."

The camera zoomed in on the arrest scene. There was All Might, his golden hair catching the afternoon sun as he stood over a small figure in a U.A. uniform. Eraserhead's capture weapon coiled around the girl like a snake, while Midnight crouched beside her, one hand glowing with sedative mist. And there, in the center of it all, was Toga.

Even from this distance, even through the poor video quality, her expression was visible. She wasn't screaming or struggling or cursing their names. She was smiling. That same twisted, adoring smile she always wore when talking about her "darlings." As if being captured was just another game, another chance to get closer to the people she obsessed over.

Tomura Shigaraki sat on the edge of what had once been a decent sofa, now reduced to exposed springs and stained fabric. His hands rested on the heavy wooden coffee table before him, fingers spread wide like a pianist preparing for a concerto. But instead of music, he was conducting destruction.

The wood groaned under his touch, molecular bonds breaking down under the influence of his Quirk. Dust began to form in perfect finger-shaped patterns, spreading outward in slow, deliberate circles. He wasn't trying to destroy the table—not yet. He was simply... thinking. And when Tomura Shigaraki thought while angry, things tended to fall apart.

"Perfect," he whispered, the word dripping with venom. "The plan was absolutely perfect."

Behind the bar, Kurogiri continued his eternal ritual of cleaning glasses that would never be truly clean. His mist-wreathed form moved with practiced efficiency, but his glowing yellow eyes never left his master. He had seen Tomura angry before—screaming, ranting, tearing apart everything within reach. This quiet fury was worse. More dangerous.

"Every detail," Tomura continued, his voice so low it was barely audible over the television. "Every contingency. Toga had been in place for weeks. Weeks. She knew their schedules, their routines, their security protocols. She had access to everything."

The decay spread further across the table's surface, creating intricate patterns like frost on a window. Or like cracks in a foundation.

"She was supposed to be extracted during the chaos of their training exercise. Simple. Clean. They would never know she'd been there until it was too late." His grip tightened, and the groaning of stressed wood filled the silence. "So how—how—did they know exactly when and where to be waiting?"

From his sprawled position in the armchair, Dabi exhaled a stream of smoke that curled toward the stained ceiling. His scarred face remained impassive, but there was something in his posture—a coiled tension that suggested he was paying more attention than he appeared.

"Maybe your 'perfect' plan wasn't so perfect after all," he said, his voice carrying just enough mockery to be insulting without being openly insubordinate.

The temperature in the room seemed to drop several degrees. Tomura's head turned with mechanical precision until his red eyes fixed on Dabi. The decay effect stopped spreading, but the silence that followed was somehow more ominous than the sound of destruction.

"What did you say?" The words came out perfectly calm, which anyone who knew Tomura understood meant he was one breath away from murdering everyone in the room.

Dabi took another drag from his cigarette, completely unbothered by the death glare being directed at him. "I said maybe you're not as smart as you think you are, leader." He emphasized the title just enough to make it sound like an insult.

The coffee table exploded into dust.

The destruction was instant and total: one moment there was furniture, the next there was nothing but a pile of gray powder and the ghost-memory of wood grain. Tomura rose from the sofa like a storm system gaining strength, his red eyes blazing with an intensity that made the television footage of rampaging Nomu look tame by comparison.

"I could kill you right now," he said conversationally, as if discussing the weather. "Touch you once and watch you crumble into nothing. Would you like that, Dabi? Would you like to find out if your fire burns faster than my decay spreads?"

Dabi's response was a laugh—not nervous or frightened, but genuinely amused. It was the sound of someone who had already accepted that death was inevitable and had decided to find humor in it.

"You could try," he said, stubbing out his cigarette on the arm of his chair. "But we both know you need me too much. Just like you needed Toga. Just like you need all of us." His scarred lips curved into a smirk. "Face it, Shigaraki. Without us, you're just another angry kid with daddy issues and a dangerous Quirk."

For a moment, the only sound was the drone of the television. The news had moved on to a weather report—sunny skies ahead, perfect conditions for outdoor activities. The irony wasn't lost on anyone.

Then Tomura laughed. It started as a chuckle, low and rough, but quickly built into something manic and unhinged. He threw his head back, and the sound filled the room like breaking glass.

"You're right," he said, wiping tears from his eyes. "I do need you. All of you. That's what makes this so much worse."

He gestured at the television, where the news cycle had moved on to sports scores. "Because if I need you, and you're all here, and the plan still failed..." His eyes swept across the room, taking in Kurogiri's tense stillness and Dabi's carefully maintained indifference. "Then someone told them we were coming."

The words hung in the air like a curse, and suddenly the decay spreading across the coffee table seemed less like random destruction and more like a preview of coming attractions.

The conference room at U.A. High felt different today. Usually, these emergency meetings carried an air of barely controlled panic—reports of villain attacks, security breaches, student injuries. Today, for the first time in months, the atmosphere was one of cautious celebration.

Principal Nezu sat at the head of the polished conference table, his small paws folded neatly before him. His usual enigmatic smile had been replaced by something warmer, more genuine. Around the table, the assembled faculty wore expressions ranging from relief to satisfaction to exhausted triumph.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Nezu began, his voice carrying its usual cheerful tone but with an underlying note of steel, "I'm pleased to report that Operation Safeguard has concluded successfully. Miss Himiko Toga is in custody, and our student has been safely recovered."

A collective exhale seemed to fill the room. These were professional heroes, individuals trained to handle crisis situations with calm efficiency. But the past weeks of knowing a League infiltrator was among their students had taken its toll on everyone.

"Aizawa-san," Nezu continued, turning to the homeroom teacher of Class 1-A, "your report on the victim's condition, if you please."

Shouta Aizawa looked even more exhausted than usual, but there was a glint of satisfaction in his bloodshot eyes. He stood slowly, his capture weapon shifting around his shoulders like a living thing.

"The student is currently receiving care at Musutafu General Hospital," he began, his gravelly voice filling the room. "Physically, she's suffering from severe anemia due to repeated blood extraction, dehydration, and malnutrition. The doctors estimate she lost approximately thirty percent of her blood volume over the course of her captivity."

Present Mic winced visibly, his usually boisterous demeanor subdued. "Thirty percent? How was she even conscious?"

"Toga's Quirk," Aizawa replied grimly. "She needed the victim alive and relatively functional to maintain the disguise. She was careful to take just enough blood to sustain her transformation without causing complete physical collapse. Medical torture disguised as necessity."

The room fell silent as the implications sank in. This wasn't just infiltration—it was systematic abuse, carried out with clinical precision over the course of weeks.

"Psychologically," Aizawa continued, "she's... struggling. The trauma of being replaced, of watching someone else live her life while she was trapped and helpless, has left significant mental scars. The psychiatric team is optimistic about her recovery, but it will take time."

All Might, his skeletal form hunched in his chair, spoke up. "Have we been able to learn anything about how long this had been going on? How Toga selected her target?"

"We have." Aizawa's expression darkened further. "According to both the victim and her parents, Toga had been stalking the family for several weeks before making her move. She knew their routines, their relationships, their personal history. The level of preparation was... extensive."

"And the actual captivity period?" Nezu asked quietly.

"Two and a half weeks," Recovery Girl replied grimly. "Two and a half weeks of that poor child being held prisoner while that monster played dress-up with her life."

"There's more," Aizawa said, and somehow his voice managed to become even grimmer. "During our interview, the victim's mother mentioned something interesting. She said that despite Toga's perfect impersonation—knowing private family jokes, mimicking mannerisms, even adopting new interests her daughter had recently developed—she occasionally felt deeply unsettled in her presence."

Nezu leaned forward slightly, his black eyes bright with interest. "Unsettled how?"

"She described it as an instinctive revulsion. A gut feeling that something was fundamentally wrong. The mother said it was like..." Aizawa paused, searching for the right words. "Like sensing a predator wearing the skin of prey. Her parental instincts were screaming that this was not her daughter, even though her rational mind saw no evidence to support that feeling."

"Fascinating," Nezu mused. "And deeply troubling. It suggests that Toga's transformation, while physically perfect, cannot mask what she truly is underneath. A small comfort, perhaps, but an important one."

Midnight, who had been unusually quiet during the briefing, finally spoke up. "What about security protocols? How do we prevent something like this from happening again?"

The question everyone had dreaded hung in the air. U.A. was supposed to be the most secure educational facility in Japan. If a League infiltrator could maintain cover for weeks, what did that say about their protective measures?

"We're implementing several new security measures," Nezu replied, his tone becoming more businesslike. "Enhanced background checks, regular DNA sampling for all students and staff, and most importantly, a buddy system where students are required to check in with designated partners multiple times daily."

"DNA sampling?" Vlad King looked uncomfortable with the idea. "That seems... invasive."

"Less invasive than having a villain drinking our students' blood and wearing their faces," Aizawa replied flatly, and no one could argue with that logic.

Present Mic raised his hand like an eager student. "What about the League? Any intel on how they'll respond to losing Toga?"

The room's mood darkened again. Victory was sweet, but everyone understood that the League of Villains wasn't going to simply accept this defeat and move on.

"Unknown," Nezu admitted. "But we must assume they'll escalate. Losing an infiltrator of Toga's caliber is a significant blow to their intelligence gathering capabilities. They may resort to more direct methods of attack in the future."

"Let them come," All Might said, and despite his less imposing form, there was still steel in his voice. "We've shown them that U.A. High won't be their hunting ground. Our students are under our protection, and we won't fail them again."

The meeting continued for another hour, covering logistics, media relations, and psychological support for both the victim and the students who had unknowingly interacted with Toga. But underneath all the professional discussion was a shared understanding: they had won this battle, but the war was far from over.

The Class 1-A homeroom buzzed with an energy that was equal parts excitement and unease. The television at the front of the room displayed a news report on loop—the same grainy footage of Toga's capture that had been broadcasting all morning. But seeing it for the dozenth time hadn't made it any less surreal.

"I still can't wrap my head around it," Mina Ashido said, her usually bubbly voice subdued. "She was here. In our school. Pretending to be one of us."

Her pink skin had paled to an almost gray tone, and her usually perfect posture was hunched with anxiety. The revelation that a League member had been walking the halls of U.A. had shaken everyone, but it seemed to hit the more empathetic students particularly hard.

"Technically," Tenya Iida said, adjusting his glasses with mechanical precision, "she wasn't pretending to be one of us. She was pretending to be someone else entirely. The report clearly states that she had replaced an existing student."

"That doesn't make it better, Iida!" Mina snapped, her voice cracking slightly. "If anything, it makes it worse! Some girl our age was trapped somewhere while that psychopath lived her life!"

The classroom fell silent. Mina rarely raised her voice, and never with genuine anger. Her outburst served as a stark reminder that despite their hero training, they were still teenagers processing something genuinely traumatic.

Katsuki Bakugo, who had been unusually quiet, finally spoke up from his position with his feet on his desk. "Her Quirk is worse than we thought. Way worse." His crimson eyes were fixed on the television screen, watching Toga's satisfied smile as she was led away in restraints. "She doesn't just get stronger from drinking blood. She becomes you. Completely."

"The implications are terrifying," Momo Yaoyorozu said, her voice tight with barely controlled fear. "To maintain such a perfect disguise, she would have needed extensive knowledge of her victim's life. Months of observation, studying habits, memorizing relationships..."

"She was stalking someone," Ochako Uraraka whispered, her hands clenched into fists on her desk. "Some innocent girl who did nothing wrong except catch the attention of a monster."

Eijiro Kirishima's usually cheerful demeanor had been replaced by something harder, more serious. "How long do you think she was here? At U.A., I mean. Could we have... could we have actually talked to her? Eaten lunch near her?"

The thought sent a collective shudder through the class. The idea that they might have unknowingly interacted with Toga, that they might have smiled at her or helped her with homework, was deeply unsettling.

"The news report mentioned the faculty had been watching for over a week," Izuku Midoriya said quietly, his green eyes focused on his hands. "Which means she was here longer than that. Maybe two or three weeks total."

"That's what makes this so messed up," Hanta Sero said, running his hands through his black hair. "She was just... there. Living someone else's life like it was nothing."

Tsuyu Asui, her finger pressed thoughtfully to her chin, spoke up. "If you think about it objectively, ribbit, it was actually a very intelligent strategy. Using a villain with a Quirk like that for long-term infiltration shows the League is capable of patience and planning."

"Don't give them credit, Tsu," Kyoka Jiro said sharply, her earphone jacks writhing with agitation. "There's nothing intelligent about torturing an innocent person for two and a half weeks."

"I'm not giving them credit for the cruelty," Tsuyu replied calmly. "But understanding their capabilities is important. This wasn't a spur-of-the-moment attack or a crime of opportunity. They planned this for weeks. That level of organization is still dangerous."

Momo nodded reluctantly. "Tsu's right. The psychological profiling alone would have taken significant time and resources. Even in a shorter timeframe, Toga would have needed to study not just her victim, but the victim's entire social network. Family dynamics, friendships, academic performance..."

"She probably knew more about that girl's life than the girl knew about herself," Fumikage Tokoyami said darkly, his red eyes reflecting the television's blue glow. "To steal someone's identity so completely... it's a violation of the soul itself."

The dramatic pronouncement would normally have earned some good-natured ribbing, but today it only added to the oppressive atmosphere. Even Tokoyami's tendency toward melodrama couldn't make this situation feel less genuinely horrific.

"What I want to know," Denki Kaminari said, his usual cheerful demeanor notably absent, "is how the teachers figured it out. I mean, if she was that good at pretending..."

"Maybe she made a mistake," Rikido Sato suggested hopefully. "Got careless, slipped up somehow."

"Or maybe," Mashirao Ojiro said quietly, "someone figured out what she was and reported her."

The suggestion hung in the air like a dark cloud. The idea that there might have been another spy, someone feeding information to the heroes, was almost as unsettling as Toga's infiltration itself. If there were League members at U.A., could there also be heroes within the League?

In the corner of the room, Yuga Aoyama sat quietly at his desk, his usual flamboyant demeanor notably subdued. His hands were folded neatly in his lap, and his gaze remained fixed on the desktop rather than the television screen that held his classmates' attention.

The conversations about infiltration and betrayal, about trust violated and identities stolen, washed over him like cold water. Every word his classmates spoke about the horror of having a spy among them felt like a weight added to his chest.

He had been forgiven—officially, at least. His forced complicity with the League, the impossible situation he'd been placed in since childhood, had been understood by both the faculty and his classmates. But forgiveness from others was different from forgiving himself, and sitting here listening to their genuine horror at the idea of betrayal made his stomach churn.

"At least the teachers caught on quickly," Ojiro was saying. "The surveillance network they put in place after..." He glanced briefly at Aoyama, then away. "Well, after recent events, it's clearly working."

A few other students followed his gaze, their expressions a mix of understanding and lingering awkwardness. The revelation of Aoyama's situation had been handled with surprising maturity by the class, but it had still changed things. There was no malice in their looks, but there was a careful distance that hadn't been there before.

Aoyama felt each glance like a physical touch, a reminder that while he was still here, still part of Class 1-A, he was also forever marked as the one who had been compromised. The one who, however unwillingly, had put them all at risk.

He wanted to contribute to the conversation, to show that he was just as horrified by Toga's actions as they were. But the words stuck in his throat. How could he express revulsion at infiltration and betrayal when he had been guilty of both? How could he join their condemnation when he knew that in their place, he might have seen no difference between himself and the girl on the television screen?

Instead, he remained silent, listening to his classmates' voices and trying to find a way to carry the weight of their trust—trust he was still learning how to deserve.

The bell rang, signaling the end of homeroom, but the conversations continued as students filed out. They would carry this uncertainty with them for days, weeks, maybe longer. The knowledge that evil could wear a friendly face and that safety was always, ultimately, an illusion.

Behind them, the television continued its endless loop, Toga's smile frozen in eternal satisfaction. Even in custody, even defeated, she had accomplished something the League would consider valuable.

She had taught the future heroes of Japan that nowhere was truly safe, and that trust, once broken, was the hardest thing to rebuild.

The two hero classes, 1-A and 1-B, were assembled in Training Ground Gamma, an industrial labyrinth of factories, heavy machinery, cranes, and pipelines. Today's exercise was a change from their usual structured battles: a free-for-all mock battle, with the simple goal of being the last hero standing.

Aizawa, looking even more haggard than usual, stood alongside Vlad King, his counterpart from Class 1-B. Before the rules could even be fully explained, Neito Monoma stepped forward, a defiant smirk on his face. However, the students from both classes noticed the dark, heavy bags under his eyes, a stark contrast to his usual pristine appearance. The sleepless night after his confrontation with Kagutsuchi was evident.

"What's the point of this, anyway?" Monoma asked, his voice dripping with condescension. "We all know how this is going to end. Class 1-A will win, just like always. It's not a real battle of equals."

Aizawa's eyes narrowed, but it was Vlad King who responded, his voice a deep rumble. "The point, Monoma, is to test your adaptability. To face a variety of Quirks and tactics without the safety net of a team. It's a fundamental lesson in solo heroism."

Aizawa let out a tired sigh. "Besides, if you're so worried about losing, maybe you should focus less on what Class 1-A is doing and more on what you can do. The point isn't to win every fight, it's to learn from every loss."

Monoma's smirk faltered, replaced by a flicker of genuine frustration. He fell back into line, but the tension between the two classes was palpable. The students from 1-B, who were usually ready to back him up, remained quiet, their gazes shifting between their rival class and the exhaustion on their own classmate's face. They knew this was more than just a jab at Class 1-A; it was a symptom of a deeper, more personal defeat.

Izuku Midoriya met Bakugo's eyes from across the crowd, an understanding passing between them. Bakugo, without a word, raised his hand. Aizawa nodded, and the entire atmosphere shifted.

"I have a proposal," Bakugo said, his voice flat and serious, devoid of his usual arrogance. "Instead of a free-for-all, we do this: Class 1-A acts as villains, and Class 1-B acts as heroes. It's a one-sided battle against a team that's stronger and more experienced. And you get to fight a real threat."

Aizawa and Vlad King exchanged surprised glances. The students of 1-A, however, were not surprised. A few, like Kirishima and Todoroki, had already figured out what Bakugo was getting at, their expressions thoughtful.

Monoma's head shot up. "We don't need your pity offers!" he snarled, a fresh wave of anger replacing his exhaustion.

Izuku stepped forward, his voice calm but firm. "This isn't pity, Monoma. It's how heroes learn to cope with an opponent who's stronger and more capable. Class 1-A fits that description. This isn't an olive branch. It's a chance for you to prove you're not just 'the reserves,' but actual heroes who can stand on your own."

The two teachers exchanged another long glance, a silent conversation passing between them. Finally, they both nodded in agreement. "Proposal accepted," Aizawa said, and Vlad King echoed his words. Class 1-B's protests were silenced, and they were left with no choice but to accept.

The battle royale began. Class 1-A, without hesitation, moved into their roles, deciding that holding back would only insult their rivals' pride. They took up strategic positions within the labyrinthine industrial site, a unified force ready to play their part.

Class 1-B, however, was still struggling with their own doubts. Pony Tsunotori looked terrified, her hooves scraping nervously against the concrete. "They're just going to crush us," she whispered, her voice trembling.

Shihai Kuroiro, Tsuburaba, and others followed suit, with mutters of agreement spreading through their ranks. They were frozen in place, paralyzed by the sheer power of the opponents they were about to face.

Itsuka Kendo clapped her hands together, the loud sound echoing in the massive space. "Snap out of it, everyone!" she yelled. "This isn't them feeling sorry for us! This is our chance to show them what we're really made of! So what if they're stronger right now because of special training? Should that really be what puts us down? This is our chance to prove we deserve to be here!"

The silence in Training Ground Gamma was suffocating. Class 1-B stood in a loose formation, their earlier confidence evaporating like morning mist under the harsh industrial lights. The weight of what they were about to face—their supposed equals turned into an overwhelming force—pressed down on them like a physical thing.

"This is insane," Awase muttered, his hands trembling slightly as he stared across the industrial maze. "We're supposed to fight all of them? At once?"

"It's not about fighting them," Tetsutetsu said, but even his usual bravado sounded hollow. His steel skin flickered uncertainly, metal rippling across his arms like water. "It's about... proving something, right? That we're not just second-string heroes?"

Monoma stood apart from the group, his arms crossed, jaw clenched so tight it could crack diamonds. "This is exactly what they wanted," he spat. "Another chance to show us how inferior we are. How we'll always be the backup dancers to their main act."

"Monoma, that's enough." Kendo's voice cut through his bitter monologue like a blade. She stepped forward, her expression fierce but not angry—determined. "Look around you. Really look."

The others followed her gaze. Class 1-A had taken their positions with the fluid grace of a pack of wolves. There was no mockery in their movements, no showboating. Bakugo crouched on a steel beam overhead, his red eyes scanning the terrain below with predatory focus. Todoroki stood like a statue of ice and fire, steam rising from his left side while frost gathered on his right. Iida's engines hummed with barely contained power.

"They're not treating this like a joke," Kendo continued. "They're not holding back because they pity us. They're giving us everything they have because they respect us. Because they know we're strong enough to handle it."

"Respect?" Honenuki's voice cracked slightly. "Kendo, they've fought actual villains. Real ones. With kill counts and everything. We've sparred in training exercises."

"So what?" The words came from an unexpected source—Komori, quiet Komori who usually kept to the background. Her fists were clenched, mushroom spores beginning to drift around her like glowing snow. "So what if they've seen real combat? We're here, aren't we? We made it into U.A. We survived the Sports Festival, the training camps, everything else they threw at us."

"The girl with the mushrooms has a point," Kaibara said, his drill-like Quirk spinning slowly. "We didn't come this far to back down now."

Pony pawed the ground with her hoof, her horns gleaming with anticipation. "In my home country, we have saying: 'The stallion shows his strength not when he runs with the herd, but when he runs alone against the storm.'"

"That's... actually pretty inspiring," Bondo admitted, his glue already beginning to form in his palms.

Monoma stared at his classmates, watching as something shifted in their postures, their expressions. The fear wasn't gone—but it was being transformed into something else. Something harder.

"You're all insane," he said finally. Then, after a long pause: "But maybe that's what it takes to be a hero."

Kendo stepped closer to him, her hand extended. "Neito. We need your tactical mind. We need someone who can adapt, who can turn their own strengths against them. But most importantly..." She met his eyes directly. "We need our classmate. Not the bitter copy of someone else, but the real you."

The silence stretched between them. Then, slowly, other hands joined Kendo's. Tetsutetsu's steel palm, Shiozaki's vine-wrapped fingers, Tsunotori's gloved hand, one by one until nearly the entire class had formed a circle.

Monoma stared at the offered hands—at the trust being freely given. His throat worked silently for a moment before he spoke, his voice unusually quiet.

"I've spent so long trying to prove we're better than them that I forgot..." He reached out, his hands touching multiple Quirks at once. The familiar sensation of copying washed over him, but this time it felt different. Not like theft, but like a gift freely given. "I forgot that maybe we don't need to be better. Maybe we just need to be ourselves."

The air around him shimmered as multiple Quirks activated simultaneously. Kendo's strength, Shiozaki's creation, Honenuki's softening, Kaibara's rotation—but controlled, focused, united by a single will.

"Alright then," he said, and for the first time in months, his smile wasn't cruel or mocking. It was genuinely excited. "Let's show them what Class 1-B can really do."

Across the industrial maze, Class 1-A had settled into position with the efficiency of a well-oiled machine. But there was tension in their formation, visible in the tight set of shoulders and the occasional glance between teammates.

"Anyone else feeling weird about this?" Kaminari asked, electricity crackling nervously between his fingers. "I mean, beating up our classmates feels wrong, you know?"

"It's not beating them up," Izuku said firmly, his golden Agito armor materialized and gleaming in the harsh lights. "It's showing them respect. If we hold back, if we treat them like they're fragile, then we really would be looking down on them."

"Plus ultra doesn't mean going easy," Bakugo growled from his perch. "It means giving everything you've got, no matter who's standing across from you."

Todoroki nodded slowly. "They asked for this. They need to know they can stand against overwhelming odds. If we're not those overwhelming odds, then what's the point?"

"Still feels weird," Sero muttered, but he was already calculating angles for his tape swings.

"Trust them," Iida said, his engines revving. "Trust that they're strong enough to handle what we're about to give them."

Yaoyorozu finished creating a tactical headset, her expression thoughtful. "They're not the same students they were at the beginning of the year. None of us are. This battle... it's not just about winning or losing anymore."

"What is it about then?" Jiro asked, her earphone jacks picking up the subtle sounds of Class 1-B's preparation.

Izuku's helmet formed around his head, the golden faceplate reflecting the industrial lights. "It's about proving that heroes rise to meet any challenge. All of us."

The starting signal echoed through Training Ground Gamma like a gunshot.

Class 1-A moved like a force of nature—not chaotic, but inevitable. Bakugo launched himself skyward with controlled explosions, each blast calculated to drive 1-B toward predetermined positions. Todoroki's ice erupted in geometric patterns that looked random but created perfect channels for his teammates' movements.

But Class 1-B was ready.

"NOW!" Monoma's voice cut through the chaos, and suddenly the industrial maze became their ally. Honenuki's Quirk turned the steel flooring into liquid metal that flowed like mercury. Awase welded debris into impromptu barriers that redirected Bakugo's explosive assault.

"Spiral Horn Storm!" Pony's horns detached and spun through the air in complex patterns, each one guided by her precise control. They struck Todoroki's ice walls at exact stress points, shattering them into glittering fragments that Shiozaki's vines caught and weaponized.

The collision was magnificent and terrible.

Tetsutetsu charged directly at Kirishima, steel meeting hardened skin in a ringing crash that sent shockwaves through the ground. "Come on, knock-off!" he roared, his metallic fists hammering against his rival's diamond-hard defense. "Show me what the original can really do!"

"KNOCK-OFF?!" Kirishima's face flushed red with indignation even as his hardening intensified to its maximum. "I'll show you knock-off!" His fist connected with Tetsutetsu's jaw in an explosion of sparks and the screech of metal.

Above them, the air battle raged as Bakugo found himself actually working to maintain aerial superiority. Pony's horns whirled around him like angry wasps, each one she recalled and redirected with increasing accuracy.

"You've gotten faster, horse girl!" he called out, genuine approval in his voice as he corkscrewed between two spinning horns.

"Is not 'horse girl'! Is Pony!" she called back, launching her horns in a spiraling pattern that forced him to use his explosions defensively for the first time in months.

On the ground, tactical warfare erupted as Yaoyorozu found herself matched against not one but three opponents working in perfect coordination. Manga's onomatopoeia attacks—"CRASH!" "BANG!" "SLICE!"—manifested as physical forces that disrupted her creation process, while Komori's spores filled the air around her and Reiko's poltergeist power sent her own created weapons flying back at her.

"Impressive coordination," Yaoyorozu muttered, quickly creating a gas mask and air filtration system. "But two can play that game." A series of flash-bang grenades materialized in her hands, which she immediately passed to—

"Mineta!" The purple-haired student caught them with practiced ease, his pop-off balls already forming. "Combo attack!"

The flash-bangs flew on sticky trajectories, their explosions precisely timed to blind and disorient while Yaoyorozu created a series of weighted nets that Jiro launched with her earphone jacks.

But Class 1-B adapted.

"Mushroom spores aren't just for breathing problems," Komori said with uncharacteristic intensity. Her Quirk shifted, different types of fungi erupting from the ground. Bioluminescent varieties that countered the flash-bangs' light, sound-dampening types that muffled Jiro's attacks.

"She's been studying," Jiro realized, her usual casual demeanor replaced by focused respect. "They all have."

The battle's tempo shifted when the lights suddenly dimmed. Emergency illumination cast strange shadows throughout the industrial maze, and in those shadows, something moved.

The first sign was the sound—not quite a roar, not quite a scream, but something alien and predatory that made several students on both sides freeze instinctively.

Then Yuga Aoyama stepped into view.

The Gills armor was a masterpiece of intimidation. Deep green and gold plates caught the light like a beetle's carapace, while the helmet's red compound eyes seemed to track multiple targets simultaneously. The prominent antennae twitched with predatory awareness, and when the mouth plate slid open and closed with a mechanical hiss, the sound that emerged was utterly inhuman. Like a predator slowly creeping toward prey.

"Mes petits héros..." The voice was layered, distorted, carrying harmonics that shouldn't have been possible from a human throat. "Do you truly believe you can stand against us?"

Several 1-B students actually stepped back. This wasn't their flamboyant, dramatic classmate anymore. This was something else wearing his face—a perfect predator playing the role it was born for.

"That's... that's still Aoyama, right?" Sen whispered, his drill rotation stuttering to a stop.

"Aoyama?" The helmeted head tilted with unsettling precision. "That name holds no meaning for us. We are Gills. We are evolution's answer to your heroic pretensions."

Kendo was the first to recover, her training overriding the primal fear response. "He's playing a role!" she shouted to her classmates. "He's being the monster we need to overcome! Don't let him get in your head!"

Her fists expanded to their maximum size as she charged. "We're not afraid of you!"

But Gills was already moving. The armor's enhancements weren't just cosmetic—they augmented every aspect of his physical capabilities. He leaped impossible distances, landed with inhuman grace, and struck with precision that seemed almost mechanical.

His claws—when had he grown claws?—swept through the air where Kendo's head had been a split second before. She rolled, came up swinging, and found empty air as he flowed around her attack like liquid mercury.

"Predictable," he purred, his voice now coming from behind her. "Your movements lack the desperation of true survival. You still think this is a game."

Kendo spun, but he was already gone, leaping onto a steel support beam with spider-like agility.

"Allow us to show you what real monsters are capable of."

What followed was a three-way battle that pushed everyone beyond their limits. Class 1-A maintained their formation while dealing with both 1-B's coordinated assault and the unpredictable threat of Gills stalking through the shadows.

Izuku, in his golden Agito armor, found himself in the unique position of fighting both with and against his fellow Kamen Rider. Their movements created a deadly ballet—Agito's precise, controlled strikes countering Gills' feral, predatory attacks while both carved through 1-B's defenses.

"You're really committing to this," Izuku said during a brief moment when they fought back-to-back against Tetsutetsu and Kaibara's combined assault.

"We are what heroes must be prepared to face," Gills replied, his voice never breaking character even in private conversation. "Monsters do not hold back. Neither shall we."

The battle reached its crescendo when Monoma made his boldest play. With multiple Quirks active simultaneously, he had become a one-man army. Kendo's strength let him shatter concrete barriers, while Shiozaki's vines gave him reach and Kaibara's rotation added devastating force to every strike.

But it was when he copied Todoroki's Half-Hot Half-Cold that the real fireworks began.

"Let's see how you handle your own medicine!" he roared, ice and fire erupting simultaneously. But this wasn't a simple copy—Monoma had been watching, learning, analyzing. His attack pattern was different, unpredictable, using the temperature differential in ways Todoroki had never considered.

The industrial maze became a hellscape of steam and flame, ice and smoke. For a moment, it actually looked like Class 1-B might achieve the impossible.

Then Izuku moved.

Not with overwhelming speed or crushing force, but with the fluid precision of someone who had learned to read the flow of battle itself. He stepped through Monoma's chaotic assault like he was dancing, each movement perfectly timed to exploit the millisecond gaps between fire and ice.

His fist connected with Monoma's solar plexus—not a devastating blow, but a precise strike that disrupted his breathing and broke his concentration. The multi-Quirk assault collapsed instantly.

"Incredible technique," Monoma gasped, but there was admiration rather than bitterness in his voice. "You didn't overpower me. You out-thought me."

"I learned from watching you," Izuku replied, offering his hand. "Your analysis skills are better than mine. I just had more experience reading the patterns."

One by one, the battles concluded. Not with brutal defeats, but with the kind of exhausted mutual respect that comes from giving everything you have and recognizing that your opponent has done the same.

Tetsutetsu and Kirishima lay side by side, their respective defenses finally overwhelmed, but both grinning despite their exhaustion.

"That was the manliest fight I've ever had," Kirishima said.

"Totally manly," Tetsutetsu agreed. "We're doing this again tomorrow."

"Hell yes we are."

Kendo pushed herself up from where she'd fallen, her enlarged fists finally returning to normal size. Around her, both classes were picking themselves up, offering hands to rivals and teammates alike.

"That was..." she started, then stopped, looking for the right words.

"Incredible," Pony finished for her, pulling one of her horns from where it had embedded itself in a steel beam. "We fought like real heroes."

"You are real heroes," Bakugo said, smoke still rising from his gauntlets. For once, his voice held no mockery or condescension. "That was a real fight."

Gills emerged from the shadows, the alien predator persona sliding away as Aoyama's helmet retracted. His usual flamboyant demeanor was subdued, replaced by something more genuine.

"Forgive me for the performance," he said quietly. "But heroes must be prepared to face monsters that show no mercy. I wanted to give you that experience without the actual danger."

"Don't apologize," Monoma said, still catching his breath. "That was exactly what we needed. A real challenge. A real test."

Vlad King and Aizawa descended from the observation room, their expressions unreadable.

"Well?" Vlad King asked his students. "How do you feel?"

The question hung in the air for a moment. Then Kendo spoke up.

"Like heroes," she said simply. "For the first time since we started at U.A., we feel like heroes."

Aizawa nodded slowly. "Good. Because that's what you are. All of you." His eyes swept across both classes. "Class 1-A, you learned what it means to be the standard others aspire to reach. The responsibility that comes with strength."

His gaze shifted to Class 1-B. "And you learned that you already have everything you need to reach that standard. You just needed to stop comparing yourselves to others and start believing in yourselves."

The industrial maze bore the scars of their battle—melted steel, shattered concrete, twisted metal that would take hours to repair. But more importantly, it had witnessed the forging of something greater than victory or defeat.

It had witnessed the birth of true rivals who would push each other to become the heroes the world needed.

As they walked away together—not as separate classes, but as future heroes who had earned each other's respect—the echoes of their battle seemed to whisper a promise.

This was only the beginning.

The late afternoon sun cast long shadows across the U.A. campus as the students of Classes 1-A and 1-B emerged from Training Ground Gamma. Their bodies bore the honest marks of their struggle—torn uniforms, scuffed armor, and the kind of exhaustion that comes from giving everything you have and then digging deeper still.

But there was something else in their faces now, something that hadn't been there when they'd entered the industrial maze. A gravity, a maturity that seemed to have aged them years in the span of a single afternoon.

They moved together now—not as two separate classes maintaining careful distance, but as a unified group bound by shared experience. Tetsutetsu had Kirishima's arm slung over his shoulder, both of them sporting matching grins despite their battered condition. Pony walked alongside Iida, animatedly discussing the physics of her horn trajectories while he nodded with genuine interest.

"My hooves, they create different aerodynamic properties than I first calculated," she was saying, her accent thick with excitement. "The spiral pattern, it works like... like..."

"Like a rifled barrel," Iida supplied, his engines still cooling with soft metallic clicks. "The rotation creates gyroscopic stability. Fascinating application of physics to Quirk usage."

"Exactly! You understand!" Pony beamed, and for a moment she looked less like a warrior who'd just battled overwhelming odds and more like the enthusiastic girl who'd first arrived at U.A.

Nearby, Komori walked in comfortable silence with Koda, both of them surrounded by a small cloud of bioluminescent spores that cast dancing patterns of light on the ground. They hadn't spoken much, but their shared understanding of nature-based Quirks had created an instant bond.

The camaraderie wasn't universal—some students still walked alone, processing what they'd experienced in their own way. But even in their solitude, there was no longer the bitter division that had marked the relationship between the classes.

As they rounded the corner toward the main building, they saw him.

Kagutsuchi stood waiting for them with the patience of stone, his silhouette stark against the setting sun. He wore an impeccably tailored black suit that somehow managed to make him look both more human and more otherworldly at the same time. His hands rested casually in his pockets, but there was nothing casual about the way he watched them approach—like a teacher evaluating the work of students he cared deeply about.

The conversations died away as the students unconsciously formed a loose semicircle around him. Even Bakugo, usually too proud to show deference to anyone, found himself standing attentively.

"Congratulations," Kagutsuchi said, his voice carrying easily across the group without being raised. There was warmth in the simple word, but also something deeper—acknowledgment, respect, perhaps even a hint of pride. "That was exceptional work. All of you."

His gaze moved deliberately across the assembled students, lingering on each face as if memorizing this moment. When his eyes found Class 1-B, his expression softened almost imperceptibly.

"Especially you, Class 1-B." His words carried weight, not just sound. "You faced impossible odds today. Not just in numbers, but in experience, in reputation, in your own self-doubt. And you didn't just survive—you fought. You fought with intelligence, with courage, and most importantly, with unity."

Kendo felt tears prick at the corners of her eyes, but she refused to let them fall. Not yet. Not when her classmates needed to see her strength.

Kagutsuchi's attention shifted to Monoma, who seemed to shrink under the scrutiny despite his best efforts to maintain composure. The blond boy's face was a canvas of conflicting emotions—shame, exhaustion, defiance, and something new that he hadn't allowed himself to feel in months: hope.

"You fought not just to win," Kagutsuchi continued, never breaking eye contact with Monoma, "but to prove something. To yourselves, to your rivals, to everyone who had written you off as 'the other class.' That takes a different kind of courage than facing villains. It takes the courage to be vulnerable."

Monoma's hands trembled slightly at his sides. The sleepless nights, the bitter jealousy, the crushing weight of always feeling second-best—it all seemed to crystallize in this moment. But instead of the usual acidic response, he found himself simply listening.

"This," Kagutsuchi gestured toward the group, "is the kind of experience that forges real heroes. Not the sanitized training exercises or the controlled environments, but the moments where you have to reach beyond what you think you're capable of. Where you have to trust not just your own strength, but the strength of others."

He took a step forward, and somehow the movement made him seem both more approachable and more formidable. "If you truly want to walk the path of heroes, you need to understand the full weight of what that means. The responsibility. The sacrifice. The very real possibility that you might not come home one day."

The words hung in the air like a physical presence. Several students shifted uncomfortably, but Kagutsuchi's expression remained steady, almost gentle.

"I'm not trying to frighten you," he said softly. "I'm trying to prepare you. Because there will come a moment—for every one of you—when doubt creeps in. When the cost seems too high. When a voice in your head whispers that maybe you should walk away, live a normal life, be safe."

His eyes found Uraraka, who had been unusually quiet since the battle. "When you're floating helplessly in the air, watching a building collapse toward innocent people, and you realize you might not have enough time to save them all."

Then to Iida: "When your engines are damaged and you're the only thing standing between a villain and a school full of children, and you have to choose between your own safety and theirs."

To Yaoyorozu: "When your creation Quirk is exhausted, your body is failing, but people are still depending on you to make something—anything—that might save them."

Each example hit like a physical blow, not because they were cruel, but because they were true. Because every student could suddenly see themselves in those scenarios with crystal clarity.

"That doubt isn't weakness," Kagutsuchi said, his voice growing softer but more intense. "It's human. And there would be no shame in choosing to step back, to find another way to help the world. Living is not a failure."

"Easy words from someone who's probably never had to make that choice," Bakugo snarled, his hands sparking with small explosions. The words came out harsher than he'd intended, born from the raw emotion of the day rather than genuine disrespect.

Kagutsuchi turned to face him fully, and for a moment, something ancient and weary flickered in his eyes. "I've watched civilizations rise and fall, Katsuki Bakugo. I've seen heroes whose names are sung in legends, and heroes whose sacrifices were forgotten before their bodies were cold."

The sparks in Bakugo's palms died out.

"I've seen the ones who succeeded—who survived their trials, who grew stronger, who inspired generations to come." Kagutsuchi's voice took on a quality that seemed to resonate from somewhere deeper than his throat. "And I've seen just as many who didn't. Who died not in glorious battle against impossible odds, but quietly, ordinarily, in ways that made barely a ripple in the world's memory."

Shiozaki's hands came together in silent prayer, her vines rustling with her barely suppressed emotion. Around the circle, students found themselves grappling with mortality in a way they'd never had to before—not as an abstract concept, but as a very real possibility.

"That's the truth of it," Kagutsuchi said, his voice returning to its normal tone but losing none of its gravity. "Some of you will be remembered as legends. Some of you will save thousands of lives and be forgotten by history. Some of you will die young, and some will live long enough to see the world change around you in ways you never expected."

The silence that followed was profound—not uncomfortable, but heavy with consideration. These weren't just high school students anymore, listening to a lecture about hero work. These were young people coming face to face with the reality of the path they'd chosen.

"But that uncertainty," Kagutsuchi continued, "that fragility—it's what makes every moment precious. Every life you save, every person you inspire, every small act of heroism matters precisely because it could be your last. Because you chose to give everything you had, knowing the cost."

Monoma stood in the weighted silence, feeling the truth of Kagutsuchi's words settle into his bones like cold. The shame that had been building since yesterday's outburst finally crested, washing over him in a wave that left him feeling hollowed out and strangely clean.

He looked around at his classmates—really looked at them. Kendo, who had offered her Quirk without hesitation. Tetsutetsu, who had charged into battle with a smile despite the odds. Pony, whose determination had never wavered even when facing opponents she'd only dreamed of fighting.

They had all been there, fighting beside him, trusting him to use their gifts well. And he had—not because he was trying to prove he was better than Class 1-A, but because he was trying to be worthy of his own classmates' faith.

The realization was like a physical blow.

"I..." he started, then stopped, his throat tight. The words he'd been preparing, the explanations and justifications, all seemed suddenly inadequate.

Kendo placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Neito."

He looked up, meeting her eyes, and saw not judgment but understanding. Behind her, the rest of Class 1-B stood with expressions of quiet support. They had all seen his struggle, his bitter jealousy, his desperate need to prove their worth. And somehow, they were still here.

"I'm sorry." The words came out rougher than he'd intended, scraped raw from the depths of his chest. "Not just for today, but for... everything. For letting my ego, my need to prove we were better, poison everything we were trying to build."

He turned toward Class 1-A, his hands clenched at his sides—not in anger now, but in the effort it took to be this vulnerable. His eyes found Izuku, who stood quietly in his civilian clothes, the golden Agito armor dismissed but somehow still present in the way he carried himself.

"I looked at you," Monoma said, his voice gaining strength, "and I saw everything I thought we should be. Everything I thought we deserved to be. And instead of using that as inspiration, I let it eat at me. I let it make me bitter and small and... and cruel."

Izuku started to speak, probably to offer forgiveness or understanding, but Monoma held up a hand.

"Let me finish. Please." He took a shuddering breath. "I convinced myself that if I could just prove you weren't special, weren't better than us, then somehow that would make us special instead. But that's not how it works, is it? That's not what being a hero means."

Around the circle, students listened with the intensity of people witnessing something important—not just an apology, but a transformation.

"Being a hero means fighting not because you're the best, but because someone needs you to fight. It means working together not because you like each other, but because together you're stronger." He looked back at his classmates, his voice thick with emotion. "You all showed me that today. You gave me your Quirks, your trust, your faith, even after I'd spent months being... what I was."

"Neito," Shiozaki said softly, her usual formal speech patterns relaxed in the emotional weight of the moment, "we all have our struggles. Our moments of doubt and jealousy and fear. What matters isn't that you felt those things—it's what you choose to do with them."

"She's right," Pony added, her accent making her words seem somehow more sincere. "Today, you chose to fight with us, not against them. You chose to be our strategist, our leader, our classmate. That is who you really are."

Monoma felt something break inside his chest—not shatter, but crack open, like an egg releasing something that had been growing in the dark. "Thank you," he whispered.

Then, louder, to everyone: "Thank you for showing me what it really means to be part of Class 1-B."

The tension that had defined the relationship between the two classes for months finally bled away, not in a dramatic rush but in a slow, natural release. Like pressure escaping from a valve, it left behind not emptiness but space for something better to grow.

Izuku stepped forward, closing the distance between himself and Monoma. "You don't need to apologize to us," he said simply. "That battle said everything that needed saying. You fought like heroes. All of you."

"We did, didn't we?" Tetsutetsu said with wonder, as if the realization was just hitting him. "We actually held our own against the class that fought real villains."

"More than held your own," Bakugo said gruffly, his usual antagonistic tone notably absent. "You made us work for it. Haven't had to fight that hard in training since..." He paused, considering. "Ever, probably."

"Your tactical coordination was exceptional," Iida added, his formal speech pattern making the compliment seem official. "The way you adapted to our strategies in real-time showed remarkable analytical skills."

"And Monoma," Todoroki spoke for the first time since leaving the training ground, his heterochromatic eyes serious, "your use of copied Quirks wasn't just imitation. You understood them well enough to use them creatively. That takes real intelligence."

Monoma stared at them, these students he'd spent so long resenting, and realized they were offering not pity or condescension, but genuine respect. The kind of respect that could only be earned through shared struggle.

"We're not rivals," he said suddenly, the words surprising even himself. "Are we? Not the way I thought we were."

"No," Izuku agreed with a small smile. "We're something better. We're challenges for each other. Reasons to keep improving."

"Exactly!" Kendo's enthusiasm burst through the emotional heaviness like sunlight through clouds. "We can push each other to be better! Real competition, not bitter rivalry!"

"I want a rematch," Pony declared, pointing at Bakugo with one of her horns. "Your aerial maneuvers, they are very impressive. But next time, I will be ready!"

Bakugo's expression shifted into something that might generously be called a grin. "You're on, horse girl. But don't expect me to go easy on you!"

"Is not 'horse girl'!" Pony protested, but she was laughing.

Around the circle, similar conversations began sprouting. Komori and Koda comparing notes on their nature-based Quirks. Kaibara asking Iida about engine optimization techniques. Awase and Yaoyorozu discussing the molecular principles behind their creation abilities.

Kagutsuchi watched it all with something approaching satisfaction. This was what he had hoped to see—not the erasure of competition, but its evolution into something productive. Something that would make them all stronger.

"Remember this moment," he said, his voice cutting through the conversations without being loud. The students turned to him with the automatic attention of people who recognized wisdom when they heard it.

"Remember not just the battle, but this—the choice to support each other instead of tearing each other down. The decision to use your differences as strengths instead of weaknesses." His eyes swept across both classes. "You'll face real villains soon enough. When you do, you'll need to be able to work with heroes you've never met, from schools you've never heard of, with Quirks you don't understand. Today, you learned how to do that."

"Is that what this was all about?" Jiro asked, her earphone jacks curling with curiosity. "Teaching us to work together?"

"Partially," Kagutsuchi admitted. "But more than that, it was about teaching you to respect each other. To see past your own perspectives and understand that everyone is fighting their own battles. Everyone is struggling to become worthy of the title 'hero.'"

He gestured toward the damaged training ground visible through the windows. "The villains you'll face won't care about which class you're from, or which school trained you, or whether you think you're the main character of your own story. They'll only care that you're in their way. Your only advantages will be your skills, your teamwork, and your willingness to sacrifice for others."

"And our determination," Midoriya added quietly.

"And your determination," Kagutsuchi agreed with a nod. "Your refusal to give up, even when the odds are impossible. Even when doubt creeps in. Even when you're tired and scared and just want to go home."

The late afternoon was deepening toward evening, painting the sky in shades of orange and purple. Soon, they would need to return to their dorms, to homework and normal teenage concerns. But for now, they stood together in the aftermath of transformation.

"What happens now?" Monoma asked, and there was no bitterness in the question—only genuine curiosity about the future.

Kagutsuchi smiled, and for the first time, it reached his eyes. "Now, you become the heroes you were always meant to be. Together."

As the students began to disperse, conversations continuing in smaller groups as they made their way back to the dorms, Kagutsuchi remained behind. He watched them go with the expression of someone who had just witnessed something precious and rare—the moment when potential began to transform into reality.

The rivalry between Classes 1-A and 1-B wasn't over. If anything, it was just beginning. But it would be a rivalry built on mutual respect, shared goals, and the understanding that they were all walking the same difficult path.

In the end, that might be the most important lesson of all.

Later…

The students filed into the private viewing room with a mixture of curiosity and exhaustion still clinging to them from their battle. The space was intimate compared to the usual lecture halls—circular seating arranged in tiers around a central presentation area, with soft lighting that seemed designed to focus attention rather than simply illuminate.

Kagutsuchi stood waiting at the podium, his black suit as immaculate as ever despite having witnessed their entire grueling exercise. His presence seemed to fill the room in a way that had nothing to do with physical space and everything to do with the weight of ancient knowledge.

"Please, take your seats," he said, his voice carrying easily through the chamber. "What you're about to experience will require your full attention."

As the students settled in—Classes 1-A and 1-B naturally sitting together now, their earlier division forgotten—Shiozaki practically vibrated with excitement in her seat. Her vines rustled with barely contained joy, creating a soft whisper of anticipation.

"Kagutsuchi-sama," she said, her formal speech patterns even more pronounced in her enthusiasm, "are you truly going to lecture us personally? This is such an honor! To receive instruction from the Archangel Michael himself—"

"Not quite, Shiozaki-san," Kagutsuchi interrupted gently, though there was warmth in his voice. "While I appreciate your faith, today's lesson comes from a different perspective entirely."

Her face fell slightly, confusion replacing elation. "Different perspective?"

Kagutsuchi's eyes swept across the assembled students, lingering on Izuku and Aoyama—the two Agito among them. "Today, I want to tell you about the Agito. Not the sanitized version you might find in hero databases or academic papers, but their true history. The real story of what they were, what they became, and why they disappeared from the world."

A ripple of interest passed through the students. Even Bakugo, who had been slouching in his seat with his usual indifference to lectures, straightened slightly.

"But this won't be a normal viewing," Kagutsuchi continued, moving around the podium with fluid grace. "I'm going to show you a vision of the past. You'll see it as if you were there, experiencing history as it truly unfolded."

"A vision?" Yaoyorozu asked, her analytical mind already working. "How is such a thing possible? Is it some form of mental projection Quirk?"

Kagutsuchi smiled, but there was something sad in the expression. "Something like that, yes. Though the mechanism is... older than what you might call Quirks."

"What kind of vision, exactly?" Iida pressed, his engines ticking softly as they cooled. "Will we maintain our individual consciousness, or will we experience it as passive observers?"

"Think of it as..." Kagutsuchi paused, considering his words carefully. "Have you ever watched Superbook?"

The room fell silent. Several students exchanged bewildered glances, clearly having no reference point for what he was talking about.

"Super... book?" Kaminari ventured, his expression completely blank.

"It's an old animated series," Kagutsuchi explained with the patience of someone used to generational gaps. "Children would be transported back in time to witness biblical events firsthand. You'll experience something similar—you'll observe the past as if you're present, but unable to interact with or alter what you see."

"That sounds... intense," Uraraka said quietly, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

"It is," Kagutsuchi acknowledged. "But it's necessary. The history I'm about to show you has been lost, deliberately forgotten, or twisted beyond recognition. You need to understand what the Agito truly were before you can understand what they might become."

His gaze found Izuku again, and there was something heavy in it—not accusation, but warning. "Are you ready?"

The students nodded, some more uncertainly than others. Even Monoma, still emotionally raw from his earlier revelation, sat forward with genuine interest.

Kagutsuchi raised his hand, and the lights dimmed until the room was wrapped in gentle darkness. "Then let us begin."

Reality dissolved around them like watercolors in rain.

When their vision cleared, they found themselves standing on a vast plain under an alien sky. The sun hung larger and redder than any they had ever seen, casting everything in hues of amber and bronze. The air itself felt different—thicker, more alive, crackling with an energy that made their skin tingle.

"Where... when are we?" Jiro whispered, her earphone jacks twitching nervously as they picked up sounds that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at once.

Before anyone could answer, the landscape began to change around them. Mountains rose from the earth like time-lapse photography, rivers carved their channels, and forests spread across the plains in waves of green. But it was the cities that made them gasp.

Massive spires of crystal and metal thrust toward the sky, their surfaces pulsing with veins of light that seemed almost alive. Architecture that defied conventional physics twisted and flowed like frozen music, while bridges of pure energy spanned impossible distances between floating platforms.

"Those cities," Todoroki breathed, his heterochromatic eyes reflecting the alien light. "They're incredible. The engineering alone..."

"And ancient," Tokoyami added darkly. "Older than anything we know."

Through the crystalline streets moved figures that were recognizably humanoid but distinctly other. They were tall—taller than any normal human—with proportions that suggested both grace and power. Their features were sharp, almost predatory in their beauty, and their eyes held an intelligence that seemed to burn with inner fire.

The Agito. The Nephilim.

But as the students watched, they began to understand why this vision was necessary. The beauty of the cities was built on ugliness. In the shadows of those soaring spires, smaller figures scurried like ants—normal humans, but bent and broken by endless labor.

"Slaves," Kendo whispered, her fists clenching unconsciously. "They're using humans as slaves."

The vision focused, showing them scenes that made their stomachs turn. Humans worked until they collapsed, driven by Agito overseers whose casual cruelty was more chilling than any rage. Families were separated on whims. Children were taken from parents who would never see them again.

"They were stronger, faster, and more intelligent than baseline humans," Kagutsuchi's voice echoed around them, coming from everywhere at once. "They saw this as proof of their superiority. Their right to rule."

An Agito lord lounged on a throne made from what looked like living wood, his hand resting casually on the head of a human child who couldn't have been more than six years old. The child's eyes were vacant, empty of hope.

"They lived for centuries while humans barely reached their fortieth year," the voice continued. "They could reshape matter with thought, command the elements, heal from wounds that would kill lesser beings instantly. And they used these gifts not to elevate humanity, but to dominate it."

Bakugo's hands were sparking despite his best efforts to stay calm. "These bastards..."

"Language, Bakugo-kun," Iida started automatically, then stopped himself. Even his strict adherence to propriety couldn't survive what they were witnessing.

The vision shifted, showing them great battles between the Agito and beings of pure light—Angels, the students realized with shock. But these weren't the gentle, benevolent creatures of Sunday school stories. These were warriors, burning with divine wrath, their very presence causing the air to ignite.

Yet for all their power, the Angels were losing. The Agito had learned to work together, to combine their abilities in ways that could challenge even celestial might. They had become a force that threatened the very order of creation.

"For generations, they held back the hosts of Heaven," Kagutsuchi's voice took on a note of grudging respect. "Their power was... considerable. But power without wisdom, strength without compassion... these things inevitably lead to corruption."

The scene changed again, focusing on a single Agito who stood apart from the others. Unlike the cruel lords in their crystal palaces, this one worked alongside humans, his hands dirty with honest labor. His face was kind, his eyes filled with sorrow as he watched his kin's cruelties.

"Noah," several students breathed simultaneously, recognizing the name from countless stories.

But this Noah was nothing like the old man of traditional tales. He was tall and powerful, with the unmistakable features of an Agito. Yet there was something different about him—a humility that set him apart from his arrogant brethren.

The vision followed Noah as he wandered through the cities, pleading with his fellow Agito to change their ways. He spoke of mercy, of justice, of the responsibility that came with great power. Most laughed at him. Some threatened him. None listened.

Then came the dream.

Noah collapsed in his modest dwelling—small and simple compared to the grandeur surrounding it—writhing in the grip of a vision that seemed to burn through his very soul. Images flashed: water rising, cities drowning, the proud spires of the Agito crumbling beneath an ocean's rage.

When he awoke, tears were streaming down his face. But there was also determination.

"The Will of Darkness," Kagutsuchi's voice was barely a whisper now, heavy with ancient memory. "What you might call God, though that name carries too much human interpretation. It had seen enough. The judgment was decided."

But as Noah prepared to accept his fate along with the rest of his kind, something extraordinary happened. The darkness around him seemed to shift, to coalesce into a presence that was felt rather than seen.

The students watched in awed silence as Noah fell to his knees, not in worship, but in genuine remorse. His conversation with the divine presence was conducted in words they couldn't hear, but the emotion was clear—pleading, bargaining, begging not for his own life, but for the chance to save something good from the coming destruction.

"A test," Kagutsuchi said, and now his voice carried a note of wonder, as if he was still amazed by what had transpired. "Build an Ark. Preserve the innocent. Prove that not all of Agito-kind was beyond redemption."

The vision accelerated, showing them Noah's incredible labor. Not the simple wooden boat of children's stories, but a massive construct of wood, metal, and Agito technology. It took shape over decades, weathering mockery, sabotage, and outright attacks from other Agito who saw it as an insult to their power.

"Thirty years," Komori whispered. "He worked for thirty years."

Throughout it all, Noah pleaded with his friends, his fellow Agito, anyone who would listen. Come with him. Help him save what they could. But pride and arrogance had blinded them to the approaching doom.

All except one.

A young Agito—Noah's youngest son—stood at his father's side as the sky began to darken with unnatural clouds. Unlike his older brothers, he had inherited the power and the wisdom to use it wisely, as their father had taught him.

The first drops fell like tears from heaven.

Then came the deluge.

Water rose not just from below, but from above, as if the very sky was falling in liquid sheets. The crystal cities that had stood for millennia began to crack and crumble under the assault. The Agito, for all their power, discovered that they could not command the wrath of the divine.

Panic spread through their ranks like wildfire. These beings who had lived for centuries, who had considered themselves above mortal concerns, suddenly faced their own mortality. They turned their fury on the one symbol of salvation they could see—Noah's Ark.

The battle that followed was apocalyptic. Agito who had spent millennia perfecting their destructive capabilities unleashed everything they had against the simple wooden vessel that represented their judgment. Lightning that could split mountains, ice that could freeze rivers solid, fire that burned hotter than the sun itself—all hurled at the Ark in desperate fury.

But Noah and his son stood in their way.

Golden light erupted from both figures as their Agito armors materialized—Noah's was ancient and weathered, bearing the patina of countless battles, while his son's gleamed with youthful determination. The distinctive horns and insectoid features of their transformed states made them look like divine guardians given form.

Father and son fought with the desperate courage of those protecting something infinitely precious. Noah's power, honed by centuries of restraint and guided by genuine compassion, proved more than equal to the frenzied attacks of his corrupted kin. His son, younger but no less determined, flowed between his armored and human forms like water itself, using the transitions to redirect attacks and confuse his enemies.

"They're incredible," Kirishima breathed, watching the young Agito phase out of his armor to dodge a massive energy blast, then instantly re-armor to deliver a devastating counter-strike. "The way they fight... it's like they're part of the storm itself."

The other corrupted Agito fought in their transformed states as well—some with armor that looked almost demonic, twisted by their cruelty and arrogance into forms that barely resembled the noble designs they had once worn.

But even Noah's power had limits. As the water rose higher and the attacks grew more desperate, exhaustion began to take its toll. His ancient armor flickered, the golden light dimming as his strength waned. One by one, the other Agito broke through his defenses, forcing him back toward the Ark. His son's armor similarly wavered, the young warrior pushing himself beyond his limits as he covered his father's retreat.

"Go!" Noah roared to his son, his voice carrying over the thunder of the storm even as his armor dissolved back into human form, leaving him vulnerable but determined. "Get to the Ark! Get everyone to safety!"

The young Agito hesitated for just a moment—his armor flickering between states as he was torn between duty to his father and responsibility to those they were protecting. Then he made his choice, his armor solidifying one final time as he turned and ran, using its enhanced speed to race toward salvation through the rising waters.

Behind him, Noah made his last stand.

But just as it seemed the corrupted Agito would overwhelm him, the sky tore open.

The Lords descended.

These were not the Angels the students had seen before. These beings were older, more primal, shaped not by human expectation but by pure divine will. They moved like living disasters, their very presence causing reality to bend and flex around them.

At their head was a figure the students recognized, though he bore little resemblance to the composed man in the black suit who had been teaching them. This Kagutsuchi was elemental force given form—fire and shadow and the promise of endings, beautiful and terrible in equal measure.

The battle was brief and absolute. The corrupted Agito, for all their power, were swept aside like leaves in a hurricane. Their proud cities crumbled, their ancient knowledge was lost, their very existence was erased from the world as if they had never been.

But when the Lords reached Noah, something different happened.

The ancient warrior knelt in the rising water, exhausted beyond measure but still defiant, still ready to protect those he loved with his last breath. Kagutsuchi approached him, and for a moment, the students thought they were about to witness another execution.

Instead, the Lord reached down and helped Noah to his feet.

"A promise is a promise," the ancient being said, his voice like distant thunder. "You have proven that redemption is possible, even for the Agito. You and yours will be spared."

Together, they walked toward the Ark, where Noah's family waited in terrified hope. The young Agito son stood at the vessel's edge, tears of relief streaming down his face as he saw his father approaching alive.

The vision began to fade as the great ship sailed across an endless ocean, carrying its precious cargo toward a new world. But just before it disappeared entirely, the students caught one last image—Noah's son, older now, standing on a mountaintop as the waters receded, his eyes filled with the weight of terrible knowledge and impossible hope.

"The last of the Agito bloodline," Kagutsuchi's voice whispered as reality returned to the viewing room. "Sworn to never repeat the mistakes of the past. To use their power not to dominate, but to protect."

The lights came up slowly, giving the students time to readjust to their own reality. Several of them were crying—Uraraka's cheeks were wet with tears, while Koda's entire body shook with suppressed sobs. Others sat in stunned silence, processing what they had witnessed.

Izuku felt hollow, as if something fundamental had been carved out of his chest. The weight of genetic history, of inherited responsibility, pressed down on him like a physical thing.

"That's... that's what we are?" he whispered, his voice barely audible. "That's what the Agito were?"

Kagutsuchi, returned to his human appearance but somehow diminished by it, nodded gravely. "That is what they became. Power corrupts, Midoriya-kun. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. The Agito forgot that strength exists to protect others, not to elevate oneself above them."

"But Noah..." Shiozaki's voice was thick with emotion. "He was different. He chose differently."

"And that choice," Kagutsuchi said, moving to stand before Izuku and Aoyama, "is what allowed the bloodline to survive. What allows you to exist. You are the inheritors not just of the Agito's power, but of their responsibility. The question now is: what will you choose to do with it?"

The room was silent except for the soft sound of controlled breathing as twenty young heroes contemplated the weight of history and the burden of choice that lay before them all.

But Kagutsuchi wasn't finished.

"There is more," he said quietly, raising his hand once again. "You need to understand what became of Noah's bloodline. What happened to the Agito in the centuries that followed."

The darkness returned, and with it, another vision.

This time, the images came in fragments—flashes of different times, different places, different faces. But all bore the same unmistakable features, the same golden light that marked them as inheritors of Noah's legacy.

"After the flood, the Agito were scattered," Kagutsuchi's voice narrated as the scenes shifted around them. "Fewer, rarer, appearing at random throughout history. Some became prophets, speaking truths that kings didn't want to hear. Others were simple people living ordinary lives, unaware of their true nature."

The students watched as the vision showed them brief glimpses: a young woman in ancient Egypt whose golden armor manifested as she protected Hebrew slaves from their overseers. A warrior in medieval Europe whose transformation saved an entire village from raiders. A healer in feudal Japan whose power could mend both body and spirit.

But each vision ended the same way. Lords descended from the heavens—not Kagutsuchi, but others of his kind—and the Agito fell. Lightning from clear skies. Swords of pure light. Divine judgment swift and merciless.

"They were hunted," Todoroki observed, his voice tight with something that might have been sympathy or fear. "Systematically eliminated."

"The other Lords feared another uprising," Kagutsuchi confirmed, and there was genuine regret in his voice. "They had seen what unchecked Agito power could become. Better to end the bloodline entirely than risk another age of tyranny. I... did not always agree with their methods."

Shiozaki's hands were clasped so tightly in prayer that her knuckles had gone white. "But why? If these Agito were trying to help people, why were they killed?"

"Fear," Kagutsuchi said simply. "And perhaps... pride. The other Lords could not accept that they might have been wrong about the entire bloodline. That redemption was possible." His voice grew heavier, more troubled. "And not all Agito were stable... or just."

The vision shifted briefly, showing darker scenes—an Agito in Roman armor whose power had corrupted him into a tyrant, slaughtering innocents in the name of order. Another in medieval times who had declared himself a god-king, demanding worship from terrified peasants. A third whose madness had led him to believe that humanity needed to be "cleansed" for their own good.

"The bloodline carried both potential for great good and great evil," Kagutsuchi continued grimly. "For every Noah, there was the possibility of another pre-flood despot. The other Lords saw these corrupted Agito as proof that the entire lineage was tainted beyond redemption."

The visions continued, century after century of brief flames snuffed out before they could grow into beacons. Until suddenly, the tone shifted.

"But then," Kagutsuchi's voice took on a note of something that might have been wonder, "came one who defied all our expectations."

The scene stabilized, showing them a dusty street in what they recognized as ancient Palestine. The architecture was simple, the people dressed in rough cloth and sandals. It looked like any number of biblical movies they might have seen.

But walking through this ordinary scene was a man who, despite his humble appearance, commanded their immediate attention.

He wasn't the majestic, divine figure from stained glass windows or Renaissance paintings. This was a working man—callused hands, sun-weathered skin, simple robes that had seen better days. His hair was dark and unruly, his beard practical rather than ornamental. But his eyes...

His eyes held depths that seemed to contain entire universes.

"Yeshua bin Yusuf," Kagutsuchi said softly. "Though you would know him as..."

"Jesus," Shiozaki whispered, and then she was on her knees, tears streaming down her face as she gazed upon the figure she had worshipped her entire life. "The Messiah. The Christ."

But this wasn't the serene, untouchable deity of religious art. This Jesus laughed with genuine humor as children ran around his feet. He argued passionately with Pharisees, his voice rising with righteous anger. He wept openly at a friend's funeral, his shoulders shaking with very human grief.

The vision followed him through his ministry—teaching in synagogues, healing the sick, gathering disciples who quickly became more like beloved friends than mere followers. They watched him share meals, tell stories, even engage in what looked like playful wrestling matches with the younger apostles.

"He was as flawed as any human," Kagutsuchi continued, "but also wise beyond his years. He knew anger, grief, joy, doubt—all the emotions that make us human. But he channeled them toward compassion, toward service, toward love."

The students watched, mesmerized, as this very human Messiah went about his work. There was something profoundly moving about seeing the figure at the center of the world's largest religion as simply... a person. A good person, but still recognizably human.

Then the vision focused on a particular moment.

Jesus walked alone along a rocky path, his disciples having gone ahead to arrange lodgings in a nearby town. The sun was setting, painting the landscape in shades of gold and crimson. It should have been peaceful.

Instead, a figure stumbled out from behind a boulder—a man, but something was wrong with him. His clothes were torn and filthy, his hair wild, his body covered in self-inflicted wounds. When he raised his head, his eyes held no sanity at all.

But it was what happened next that made the students gasp.

The madman's body began to change, muscles bulging grotesquely, limbs stretching and twisting into unnatural proportions. His face elongated into something bestial, while additional appendages erupted from his torso. Within seconds, he had become a writhing mass of flesh and rage that barely retained a humanoid shape.

"Legion," a voice spoke from the monster—not one voice, but dozens, all speaking in unison with harmonics that hurt to hear. "We are many. We are fallen Lords, servants of the Morningstar, but we remember our duty. Agito must die."

The creature that had been a man fixed its multiple eyes on Jesus, who stood perfectly still, showing no fear despite the abomination looming over him.

"You are welcome to try," Jesus said calmly, his voice carrying a quiet authority that seemed to make the very air vibrate. "But it is not yet my time."

A belt of golden light materialized around his waist—similar to the ones Izuku and Aoyama used, but somehow more primal, more fundamental. Jesus placed his hands on either side of it and spoke a single word in a language that predated modern civilization:

"Ethpakh (Henshin)..."

Golden radiance erupted from the belt, washing over the landscape like a sunrise compressed into a single moment. When the light died down, Jesus stood transformed.

His Agito armor was magnificent—a perfect fusion of divine authority and humble service. The golden carapace bore the unmistakable design of a stag beetle, its horns curving gracefully upward like a crown. But unlike the armor they had seen in their first vision, this one radiated not power for its own sake, but power tempered by infinite compassion.

The battle that followed was unlike anything the students had ever witnessed.

Legion attacked with the fury of the damned, its twisted form flowing like liquid nightmare as it struck with appendages that could shatter stone. But Jesus moved with fluid grace, each dodge calculated not just to avoid harm but to minimize the damage to their surroundings.

When he struck back, it was with precision rather than overwhelming force—targeted blows that disrupted the demons' hold on their host rather than simply causing destruction. Even in the midst of combat, he was trying to save rather than destroy.

"This is incredible," Midoriya breathed, his own experience with Agito armor giving him unique appreciation for the technical mastery on display. "He's not just fighting Legion—he's trying to exorcise the demons without killing the host."

The battle raged for what felt like hours but was probably only minutes. Legion's form grew more grotesque with each exchange, the fallen Lords pushing their stolen flesh beyond its limits. But gradually, inevitably, the golden warrior began to gain the upper hand.

A final, perfectly placed strike sent the monster crashing to the ground, its twisted form already beginning to revert to human proportions. Jesus stood over it, his armor gleaming in the fading sunlight, but there was no triumph in his posture—only sadness for the suffering he had witnessed.

"Leave him," he commanded, his voice carrying absolute authority even through the armor's vocal modifiers. "Your quarrel is with me, not with this innocent man. Find other hosts, if you must, but trouble him no more."

The demons complied—not out of fear, but out of recognition of a power greater than their own. They flowed out of the man like smoke, seeking new vessels. A nearby herd of wild pigs suddenly went berserk, running full-speed toward a cliff and throwing themselves over the edge rather than contain the fallen Lords any longer.

Jesus knelt beside the freed man, his armor dissolving back into simple robes as he checked for injuries. The former host looked around in confusion, his mind slowly clearing after who knew how long under demonic influence.

"What... where am I?" the man asked, his voice hoarse from disuse.

"You are free," Jesus said simply, helping him to his feet. "Go in peace, and sin no more."

As the vision faded, Kagutsuchi's voice returned, thick with emotion the students had never heard from him before.

"That," he said quietly, "was one of my favorites. Not because of the power displayed, but because of the restraint. The compassion. Here was an Agito who could have destroyed Legion utterly, but chose instead to save the innocent caught in between. Who saw enemies not as things to be eliminated, but as souls to be redeemed."

The lights came up slowly, revealing a room full of profoundly moved students. Even Bakugo sat in stunned silence, his usual aggressive posture replaced by something approaching awe.

But it was Shiozaki who spoke first, her voice thick with tears of joy.

"He was an Agito," she whispered. "The Messiah himself was one of them. One of us." She looked at Izuku and Aoyama with something approaching reverence. "You carry the blood of Christ himself."

The weight of that revelation settled over the room like a physical thing. The Agito weren't just inheritors of ancient power—they were part of a lineage that included the most important figure in human history.

But instead of the reverent awe Shiozaki clearly expected, both Izuku and Aoyama looked deeply uncomfortable.

"Ah, no, no, please don't—" Izuku waved his hands frantically, his face flushing red. "I mean, that's... that's incredible and all, but I'm just—I'm nobody special! I can barely handle my own problems, let alone carry on some divine legacy!"

"Oui, what he said," Aoyama added, his usual flamboyant confidence completely absent as he gestured awkwardly. "I am just Yuga Aoyama, not some... some descendant of the Messiah! This is too much responsibility for someone who still forgets to do his laundry!"

"But you are—" Shiozaki started, her eyes shining with fervent belief.

"We're really not!" both boys said in unison, their synchronization only making their embarrassment more obvious.

Izuku buried his face in his hands. "I trip over my own feet half the time. I cry at commercials. I once got lost in a convenience store for twenty minutes!"

"And I," Aoyama added dramatically, throwing his hands up, "once spent three hours trying to figure out how to open a childproof medicine bottle! C'est pathétique!"

Kagutsuchi chuckled softly at their embarrassment, the sound warm and oddly fond. "Your humility is perhaps the greatest proof of your worthiness," he said gently. Then his expression grew more serious. "But there is one more vision I must show you. The culmination of that particular story."

The darkness returned one final time, and with it came a scene that made several students gasp in recognition.

The vision showed Kagutsuchi in his true form—the elemental being of fire and shadow they had glimpsed during the flood. He moved through a moonlit forest with purposeful strides, his otherworldly presence causing small animals to flee and ancient trees to sway without wind.

He emerged into a clearing where a large cave had been carved into a rocky hillside. A massive stone had been rolled across its entrance, and two Roman centurions stood guard, their bronze armor gleaming in the pale light.

Kagutsuchi raised one hand, and the guards' eyes immediately grew heavy. Within moments, they had slumped against their spears, lost in supernatural sleep that would leave them with no memory of what transpired.

With casual strength that defied physics, the Lord placed both hands against the enormous stone and pushed. It rolled aside with surprising silence, revealing the dark mouth of the tomb beyond.

"Is that...?" Yaoyorozu whispered, her analytical mind already connecting the pieces.

"The tomb," Shiozaki breathed, her hands pressed to her heart. "Christ's tomb."

Kagutsuchi disappeared into the darkness, and for long minutes, nothing happened. The students watched the empty entrance with growing tension, unsure what to expect.

Then two figures emerged.

The first was Kagutsuchi, unchanged from his entrance. The second made every Christian student in the room fall to their knees in reverent awe.

Jesus stepped into the moonlight, portions of burial wrappings still clinging to his form for modesty, but very much alive. He stretched languidly, working out what appeared to be some serious stiffness, before turning to his companion.

"Well," he said with a remarkably casual tone for someone who had just conquered death itself, "that was a wild time."

Kagutsuchi's response was delivered in his characteristically stoic manner: "It was as the prophets foretold. That didn't mean it was going to be painless."

Jesus chuckled—actually chuckled—at that, the sound so perfectly human it was almost jarring in the context. "Ah, but that's the human experience for you. Pain, joy, suffering, triumph... all mixed together in ways that don't always make sense."

There was a pause as Kagutsuchi seemed to consider this. Then, with what sounded like genuine curiosity: "Is it really all that?"

Jesus rolled his eyes skyward in thought, his expression contemplative. After a moment, he shrugged with the casual gesture of someone discussing the weather rather than the fundamental nature of existence.

"You should try it, Michael."

The suggestion hung in the air between them like a challenge wrapped in casual conversation. Kagutsuchi—Michael—stood perfectly still, his elemental form flickering slightly as if the very concept had disrupted his ancient composure.

"Try... being human?" His voice carried notes of incredulity that would have been amusing if the source weren't a being capable of reshaping reality with a thought.

Jesus nodded, brushing the last of the burial wrappings from his shoulders with the matter-of-fact efficiency of someone getting dressed after a long nap. "The full experience. Birth, growth, learning, love, loss..." He paused, meeting Michael's burning gaze directly. "Choice. Real choice, with real consequences."

"I have observed humanity for millennia," Michael replied, though there was something in his tone that suggested the protest was more reflexive than convinced. "I understand their nature."

"Understanding and experiencing are different things entirely." Jesus began walking toward the edge of the clearing, his bare feet making no sound on the rocky ground. "You've watched them from above, seen their grand triumphs and spectacular failures. But have you ever wondered what it feels like to doubt? To be uncertain whether you're making the right decision?"

Michael followed, his form gradually shifting toward something more human in appearance, though flames still danced around his edges like living shadows. "Doubt is... inefficient. It leads to hesitation, poor judgment, suboptimal outcomes."

"Does it?" Jesus asked with a slight smile. "Or does it lead to growth? To empathy? To the understanding that strength isn't about never falling down—it's about getting back up?"

They walked in contemplative silence for a few moments, the moonlight filtering through ancient olive trees that had witnessed centuries of human drama. Finally, Michael spoke again.

"The other Lords would never approve. Gabriel especially. He believes too much contact with humanity leads to..." He gestured vaguely. "Complications."

"Since when do you need Gabriel's approval for anything?" Jesus's tone was gently teasing, carrying the familiarity of old friends who had weathered countless discussions. "Besides, he's just worried you'll develop what he calls 'inappropriate attachment to mortal concerns.'"

"Perhaps he has reason to be concerned," Michael admitted, his voice growing quieter. "I have been... questioning certain decisions. The systematic elimination of the Agito, for instance. Some of them were genuinely trying to help."

"And that troubles you."

"It does." The admission seemed to surprise Michael himself. "Which is precisely why I should maintain proper distance. Doubt leads to hesitation. Hesitation leads to—"

"Better decisions, sometimes," Jesus interrupted gently. "Michael, you're not a sword to be wielded without thought. You're a person—an incredibly powerful one, but still a person with your own will, your own conscience."

They had reached the edge of a small valley, where a modest village lay sleeping in the pre-dawn darkness. Smoke rose from a few chimneys where early risers were beginning their daily routines. It was such an ordinary scene—the kind that played out across the world every single day—but Michael found himself studying it with unusual intensity.

"I would not know how to... be one of them," he said finally. "To live with their limitations, their fragility."

"That's the point," Jesus replied. "You wouldn't be you anymore—not entirely. You'd be someone new, someone who had to learn and grow and make mistakes. Someone who could understand, from the inside, what it means to be human."

"And after? Assuming I survived such an experience?"

Jesus was quiet for a long moment, watching the village begin to stir with the coming dawn. "After, you'd still be you. But you'd also be more than you were before. You'd understand what it means to protect not from a position of absolute power, but from genuine care for those who can't protect themselves."

Michael's form had become almost entirely human now, though his eyes still held depths of fire that spoke to his true nature. "The other Lords would see it as weakness."

"Let them." Jesus's voice carried a note of steel beneath its gentleness. "I thought the same thing once. But experiencing human limitations—human mortality—it didn't make me weaker. It made me understand what strength really means."

"And if I choose wrongly? If I become corrupted by the experience, as so many Agito have?"

"Then you choose differently next time." Jesus placed a hand on Michael's shoulder, the contact somehow both casual and profound. "That's what free will means, my friend. The right to make mistakes, to learn from them, to become better than you were."

The vision began to fade around the edges, but not before the students caught one final exchange:

"You would really recommend this path?" Michael asked, his voice carrying genuine uncertainty for perhaps the first time in his existence.

"I would recommend," Jesus said with a warm smile, "that you trust yourself to make the right choice. Whatever that might be."

As the lights came up in the viewing room, the students found themselves staring at Kagutsuchi with new understanding. He stood before them, no longer just their mysterious janitor, but a being who had once stood at a crossroads not unlike the ones they faced every day.

"You chose to become human," Izuku said quietly, his voice filled with wonder. "Not just to observe us, but to really live as one of us."

Kagutsuchi nodded slowly. "It was... educational. And more difficult than I had anticipated. The first time I experienced genuine physical pain, I thought I had made a terrible mistake." He paused, a small smile playing at his lips. "The first time I laughed until my sides hurt, I realized I had made the right choice."

"But why tell us this?" Monoma asked, still processing everything they had witnessed. "What does this have to do with us? With the Agito?"

"Because," Kagutsuchi said, his gaze moving between Izuku and Aoyama before encompassing the entire room, "you are all at crossroads of your own. You have power—some more than others—and the question you must answer is the same one that has faced every generation: What will you do with it?"

He moved to the center of the room, his presence somehow both commanding and reassuring. "The Agito of old chose domination. Noah chose sacrifice. Jesus chose service. And now it falls to you—all of you—to choose who you will become."

"No pressure," Kaminari muttered, but his usual joking tone was subdued by the weight of what they had learned.

"There is always pressure," Kagutsuchi acknowledged with surprising gentleness. "But that pressure creates diamonds from coal, heroes from ordinary people who decide to do extraordinary things. The choice is always yours to make."

As the students filed out of the viewing room, their conversations were hushed, reverent. They had entered as aspiring heroes learning about ancient history. They were leaving as young people who understood, perhaps for the first time, the true weight of the path they had chosen to walk.

The rivalry between Classes 1-A and 1-B seemed almost trivial now, compared to the responsibility they all shared. They were not just training to become heroes—they were inheritors of a legacy that stretched back to the very foundations of civilization itself.

And in the quiet moments before sleep that night, each of them would face the same question that had confronted Michael in that moonlit clearing so long ago:

What kind of person did they choose to become?