The faculty room at U.A. High, typically a vibrant hum of lesson plans, Quirk discussions, and Present Mic's booming laughter, was now steeped in an unnatural silence. The only sound was the faint thrum of the large projector screen, where a raw, unedited live broadcast flickered. A desolate quarry, scarred with scorch marks, stretched across the image. Green motes of light drifted lazily where a silver-armored monster had just disintegrated, leaving only a charred crater.

At the center stood Izuku Midoriya, unmistakable even within the sleek black and gold armor that now encased him. His helmeted head hung low, chest heaving with exhaustion.

The faculty stared.

Toshinori Yagi, still in muscle form, stood closest to the screen. His broad shoulders were rigid, fists clenched so tight that crescent cuts opened in his palms, blood staining his white sleeves. His bright blue eyes, usually so full of warmth, were dark, locked on the boy with a furious, unblinking intensity.

Principal Nezu sat at the head of the table, his teacup untouched between his paws. His usual cheer had vanished, replaced by a cold, calculating stillness. His black eyes moved methodically, tracing every twitch of Izuku's posture, every drift of the glowing dust.

Then, a voice slid through the speakers, smooth and unnervingly calm.

"There it is," Kagutsuchi purred, stepping casually into frame, the faintest trace of amusement curling his lips. "Bravo."

A collective breath hitched in the room.

"It's him again!" Present Mic barked, slamming his hand on the table hard enough to rattle the projector. "The bastard from the Entrance Exam! What the hell is this?!"

Kagutsuchi kept walking toward Izuku, his words rolling out with infuriating ease. "Impressive, Agito. You're learning. You're adapting. Just as I knew you would."

On-screen, Izuku's head lifted slightly. His voice, though muffled by the helmet, carried clearly through the feed—strained, almost desperate. "Why did you even ask me that? About why I want to be a hero? You already know."

Then, with a sudden, unexpected bark that made even Aizawa flinch, Kagutsuchi's voice boomed: "THAT'S A RIDICULOUS LIE! A pathetic, sugar-coated fantasy you've concocted to dress up the ugly, festering truth inside you!"

Toshinori's jaw clenched so hard a muscle jumped violently in his cheek. The blood from his hands smeared onto his suit, but he didn't notice, his entire focus consumed by the screen, his body trembling with a barely contained, primal rage.

"What truth is he talking about?!" Midnight hissed, her eyes wide with a mix of disgust and dawning comprehension. Her usual playful demeanor was completely absent, replaced by a grim, almost feral protectiveness.

Kagutsuchi's voice on the broadcast dropped to a furious whisper, each word a venomous dart. "You think people would like you any better if they found out the real reason you want to be a hero? The Quirkless Nobody no one would give the time of day? The pathetic, crying child who watched others soar while he crawled in the dirt, dreaming of a power he could never have?"

Recovery Girl, clutching her cane, paled, her small frame shaking with indignation and profound worry for the boy.

Aizawa's eyes, usually half-lidded, were wide open now, glowing faintly red as he stared at the screen, his capture scarf tightening around his neck. His expression was a mask of grim understanding, a deep-seated weariness settling even further into his bones. "He's not just testing the kid," Aizawa muttered, his voice a low, dangerous rasp. "He's dismantling him, piece by piece. He's found the cracks."

On screen, Izuku's helmeted head snapped down, his body trembling violently.

Kagutsuchi's grin returned, but it was a cruel, mocking twist of his lips, utterly devoid of warmth. "No, Midoriya. You didn't want to be a hero to help people. You wanted to be a hero to matter. To get the love and attention you thought you'd finally get. You wanted the world to look at you, the ultimate nobody, and apologize for every slight, every sneer, every moment they dismissed you."

Snipe's hand instinctively went to the revolver holstered at his hip, his eyes narrowed behind his mask. "He's hitting him where it hurts," he said, his voice low and gravelly. "That's not a villain's taunt; that's a precision strike. He knows exactly what he's doing."

"Remember the praise after your little 'awakening'?" Kagutsuchi continued, his voice dripping with condescension. "The awe in their eyes? How hollow and empty it must have felt, knowing it wasn't for you, but for the power you wielded? How much you must have wanted to shout back at them, to scream about how terrible they all were to you, how they ignored you, how they made you feel worthless?"

Cementoss, usually unshakeable, shifted heavily in his seat, his stony features seemed to harden further, reflecting the gravity of the situation.

"You didn't want to be a hero to help people, Izuku Midoriya," Kagutsuchi concluded, his voice dropping back to its usual calm, but now laced with a chilling finality. "You just wanted to be like everyone else."

The broadcast feed suddenly cut out, leaving the faculty room in stark silence, the projector screen now displaying only a blank, humming blue. The words, however, hung in the air, echoing in their minds like a death knell.

Toshinori stood frozen, his chest heaving, his fists still clenched, the blood from his palms staining his suit. His furious gaze was fixed on the now-blank screen, as if he could still see Kagutsuchi's smug face.

Nezu slowly, deliberately, placed his teacup back on its saucer. The faint clink was the only sound in the room. His small eyes, though still narrowed, now held a terrifying, cold resolve. He had assessed the scene, calculated the threat, and the implications were staggering. This wasn't just about a new villain; it was about a fundamental challenge to everything they believed in, orchestrated by a being who understood the human heart with chilling precision.

The silence that followed the abrupt end of the broadcast was thick, suffocating. The only sounds were the faint hum of the projector and Toshinori's ragged breaths, still coming in furious gasps. He finally slammed a bloodied fist onto the table, the impact rattling the teacups.

"That bastard!" Toshinori roared, his voice raw with unadulterated fury, his blue eyes blazing. "He deliberately… he broadcast that! He's trying to break Young Midoriya's spirit! He's trying to twist everything he believes in!"

Nezu's gaze remained fixed on the blank screen for a long moment, his small paws resting on the table. "Indeed, Toshinori," he said, his voice unusually grave, devoid of his usual playful lilt. "This was not merely a display of power. It was a calculated psychological assault. Kagutsuchi understands the human psyche with disturbing clarity."

"But how?" Midnight demanded, her voice tight with disbelief and anger. "How could he know about Midoriya's past? About him being Quirkless?"

"Given Kagutsuchi's nature, as we've come to understand it, infiltration might be too simplistic a term," Nezu replied, his eyes narrowing further. "He possesses a perception that transcends conventional means. To a divine being, perhaps reading a soul is as simple as reading a book. Naomasa-kun's Quirk being negated by him… it further supports a non-human, perhaps even spiritual, level of awareness."

"He's not just a villain, he's a manipulator," Aizawa stated, his voice flat, his glowing eyes still fixed on the screen. "He's using Midoriya's own vulnerabilities against him. This isn't a fight; it's a game to him. And Midoriya is the pawn."

Present Mic slammed his fist on the table again, though with less force than Toshinori. "A game?! Our student is out there fighting for his life, and this guy is playing mind games?! We need to do something!"

"And risk playing directly into Kagutsuchi's hand?" Ectoplasm countered, his voice a low, analytical hum. "He broadcast this for a reason. To show us what he's capable of, yes, but also to provoke a reaction. To demonstrate his control. Any rash move could endanger Midoriya further, or expose more of our weaknesses."

"He's testing us," Snipe said, his voice grim, his hand still on his holster. "Testing our resolve, our weaknesses. And he's testing the kid's resolve, too. That kind of psychological pressure… it's designed to make a hero question everything they are."

Recovery Girl's voice wavered, her cane shaking slightly. "He's just a boy. How much longer can he take this before it… breaks him?"

Cementoss, his massive form still and silent, finally rumbled, his voice deep and resonant. "The implications are… profound. If Kagutsuchi can expose and exploit such deep-seated insecurities, then no hero is truly safe from his influence. This is a threat not just to Midoriya, but to the very foundation of heroism as we know it."

Toshinori, still breathing heavily, finally turned from the screen, his gaze sweeping over his colleagues, his eyes burning with a fierce, protective fire. "But… but Young Midoriya isn't like that!" he insisted, his voice cracking with a desperate denial. "He's selfless! He always has been! He's always put others before himself, even when he had no Quirk. He's nothing like Kagutsuchi is saying about him."

Nezu tilted his head, his small eyes fixed on Toshinori. "Toshinori, consider Izuku-kun's background. A Quirkless child in a world obsessed with power, constantly dismissed and overlooked. His deep-seated need for validation, for recognition of his worth, would naturally manifest in a desperate drive to prove himself. His supposed selflessness, in such a context, wouldn't be uncommon or strange; it would be a means to garner that very worth and approval he craved."

Toshinori shook his head vehemently, his fists clenching tighter. "No! He's pure! He's… he's the most genuinely selfless person I've ever met! He doesn't want praise or attention; he just wants to save people!"

Nezu's gaze softened almost imperceptibly, a hint of something knowing and ancient in his eyes. "And was that always true for you, Toshinori? Once upon a time, when you first donned that smile and declared yourself the Symbol of Peace… was your aspiration entirely selfless? Or was there, perhaps, a desire to be seen, to be the one who could finally bring order to chaos, to be the unwavering pillar that the world so desperately needed?"

Toshinori's jaw dropped. He stood utterly silent, his eyes wide, his furious energy draining from him, replaced by a profound, uncomfortable stillness. He opened his mouth, then closed it, the words dying in his throat.

The desolate quarry, still reeking faintly of ozone and scorched earth, was eerily quiet. The green motes of light, remnants of the now-disintegrated Lord, had finally faded, leaving only the fine, grey dust of pulverized rock. Izuku Midoriya, still encased in the sleek black and gold armor of the Agito Ground Form, stood motionless. His helmeted head remained bowed, his chest heaving with exhaustion, the silent accusation of Kagutsuchi's words still ringing in his ears.

With a low groan and a final, faint hum, the Agito armor vanished, leaving him in his tattered tracksuit, drenched in sweat, his body trembling. He swayed, his legs threatening to give out, and he had to brace himself with a hand against the rough quarry wall.

He took a ragged, gasping breath, the cool afternoon air stinging his lungs. The physical exhaustion was immense, but it was the emotional weight that truly crushed him. Kagutsuchi's words, dissecting his deepest insecurities, had left him feeling exposed, raw, and utterly ashamed. Was it true? Was his desire to be a hero truly so selfish, so rooted in a desperate need for validation? The thought was a bitter, nauseating taste in his mouth.

A sudden, frantic cry pierced the quiet. "Midoriya-kun!"

Izuku's head snapped up, his eyes widening. Bursting through the treeline at the edge of the quarry, their faces etched with a mixture of fear, relief, and profound concern, were Ochako Uraraka, Tenya Iida, Momo Yaoyorozu, and Mezo Shoji. They had clearly run all the way, their uniforms disheveled, their breaths coming in ragged gasps.

Ochako was the first to reach him, her usual cheerful demeanor replaced by a look of utter distress. "Midoriya-kun! Are you okay?! We saw… we saw everything! What happened?! Are you hurt?!" She reached out, her hands hovering, unsure whether to touch him, her eyes scanning him frantically for injuries.

Iida, ever the stickler for order, skidded to a halt beside Ochako, his arm chopping through the air with uncharacteristic speed. "Midoriya! Your condition! And that man! Explain yourself, please! We were all incredibly worried!" Despite his demanding tone, his concern was palpable, his usually rigid posture softened by genuine anxiety.

Momo, her expression a mix of shock and concern, stepped forward, her eyes fixed on him. "Midoriya-kun, what exactly is going on here?" Her voice was steady, but her brow was furrowed with deep worry.

Shoji, his multiple arms spread slightly, creating a protective barrier, surveyed the quarry with his many eyes. His concern was profound, his gaze unwavering.

Izuku could only stare at them, a wave of conflicting emotions washing over him. Relief at seeing their familiar faces, shame at the thought of Kagutsuchi's accusations, and a deep, aching weariness. He wanted to reassure them, to tell them he was fine, but the words caught in his throat. He felt a fresh sting of tears in his eyes, not from pain, but from the sheer overwhelming kindness of his friends.

"I… I'm fine," he managed to croak, his voice hoarse, barely a whisper. He swayed again, and Ochako instinctively put a hand on his arm, steadying him.

Kagutsuchi, who had been observing the reunion with a faint, unreadable smile, finally stepped forward, his hands still casually in his pockets. His presence, even when silent, seemed to hum with an unsettling power.

"Ah, the cavalry arrives," he purred, his voice smooth and calm, completely at odds with the chaos he had just orchestrated. He looked at Izuku's classmates, his dark eyes sweeping over them, a hint of amusement playing on his lips. "Such genuine concern. It's almost… touching. Though I daresay, young heroes, you arrived a little late for the main event." He chuckled softly, a sound that sent a shiver down Izuku's spine. "Don't worry, your friend here is merely… reflecting."

The moment Kagutsuchi finished speaking, the attention of Izuku's friends snapped to him. Their expressions, which had been solely focused on Izuku, now shifted to a collective wariness, their eyes narrowing, assessing the calm, dangerous figure before them. Ochako instinctively moved a step closer to Izuku, a subtle protective gesture. Iida's chopping arm paused mid-air, his gaze fixed on Kagutsuchi with an almost accusatory intensity. Momo's brow furrowed further, her analytical mind clearly trying to process the anomaly that was Kagutsuchi. Shoji's multiple eyes, though unreadable, were clearly observing every minute detail of the man.

Kagutsuchi, seemingly unfazed by their sudden scrutiny, slowly raised his hands, palms facing outwards in a gesture of peace, though his faint smile never wavered. "Easy, easy, young heroes. There's no need for alarm. I assure you, I mean no harm to any of you." His voice was still that unnervingly calm purr. "I'm merely here to ensure young Midoriya is getting his proper dose of… training."

"Training?!" Iida's voice shot up, laced with incredulity, his arm chopping emphatically. "You can seriously call that training?! He was just fighting someone who was clearly a villain, and you were... you were psychologically tormenting him! How can you possibly justify such a dangerous and irresponsible method?!"

Kagutsuchi blinked slowly, his dark eyes widening slightly, as if genuinely surprised by Iida's outburst. He tilted his head, a single eyebrow raising in a perfect arch. "Yeah? I can pretty much justify it quite well, if you must know."

Iida, for once, was stunned into silence. His mouth opened and closed, but no words came out, his usually articulate protests replaced by pure, unadulterated shock.

Momo, however, recovered quickly, her gaze hardening. "Who are you, really?" she demanded, her voice firm, cutting through the lingering tension. "You clearly aren't a pro hero, and your methods are… unorthodox, to say the least. What is your true identity?"

Kagutsuchi merely shrugged, his hands still casually raised. "The only name I can use is Kagutsuchi. The others, I feel, aren't appropriate."

"What do you mean, 'aren't appropriate'?" Momo pressed, her brow furrowed in confusion and suspicion. "Are you some kind of criminal using an alias?"

Kagutsuchi's smile broadened, a hint of genuine amusement now in his eyes. He lowered his hands, tucking them back into his pockets. "Let's just say, young Yaoyorozu, that some names carry a weight that mortals aren't quite ready to bear. But enough about that. Now, how about we all make a little trip to U.A.? I believe there are some rather important individuals there who would be very interested in a debriefing."

Shoji, who had remained silent until now, finally spoke, his voice deep and resonant, laced with a clear threat. "We will do no such thing. You are a highly suspicious individual, and your actions here are deeply concerning. If you attempt to force us, I will immediately contact the police and the pro heroes. We are not without means." His multiple arms subtly shifted, ready for action.

Kagutsuchi sighed, a sound of exaggerated weariness. "Ah, the police. I truly don't want to go through all of that again. It was quite a bore the first time, and I'm rather pressed for time." He met Shoji's unwavering gaze, his own eyes holding a glint of something ancient and unyielding. "So, I insist. We go to U.A. now."

Izuku, still trembling slightly, but with a newfound resolve in his eyes, looked at his friends. "It's… it's okay," he said, his voice still a little shaky, but firm. "Just… just do as he says. We need to go." The look he gave them was a silent plea, a desperate request for them to trust him, despite the terrifying circumstances.

Ochako, swallowing hard, her eyes wide with fear as she glanced between Izuku and Kagutsuchi, whispered, "Midoriya-kun... is he... is he a villain? Do you... do you need help?"

Izuku shook his head, a desperate urgency in his voice. "Just listen to him, Ochako-chan. Please. Just... just comply before something else happens."

Moments later, the group found themselves inside a sleek, dark grey Honda Odyssey, cruising down the road with surprising speed. Kagutsuchi was behind the wheel, a serene, almost beatific smile on his face, his eyes fixed on the road ahead. From the car's speakers, a surprisingly upbeat, yet jarringly melancholic, city pop tune blared: "Stay With Me" by Miki Matsubara. The vibrant saxophone and synth melodies filled the confined space, creating an utterly surreal atmosphere.

The four students in the back were jarringly silent, their earlier anxieties and protests replaced by a bewildered stillness. Ochako, Iida, Momo, and Shoji exchanged wide-eyed glances, each too stunned or unnerved to speak. The contrast between the chaotic quarry, Kagutsuchi's unsettling presence, and the cheerful, retro Japanese pop music was almost comical, yet deeply unsettling.

Izuku, riding shotgun, stared straight ahead, his hands clasped tightly in his lap. He could feel the tension radiating from his friends in the back, and the sheer absurdity of the situation was starting to sink in. He glanced sideways at Kagutsuchi, whose smile remained fixed, seemingly oblivious to the palpable discomfort of his passengers. The afternoon sun streamed through the windshield, glinting off the car's polished interior, as they sped towards U.A.

Kagutsuchi glanced at him briefly, his faint smile unchanged. "Ah… I haven't heard this one in ages," he said conversationally, his tone warm, almost nostalgic. "Brings back… fond memories."

No one answered.

Kagutsuchi didn't seem to mind. His dark eyes flicked to the rearview mirror for a fraction of a second, sweeping over the students' tense faces, and his smile widened just slightly—subtle, but there.

Then he turned his attention back to the road, humming softly as the saxophone solo kicked in, as if nothing in the world were out of place.

The faculty room at U.A. High was no longer its usual hub of chatter and work. The atmosphere now was suffocatingly heavy, the air thick with unspoken tension. Every seat around the long table was occupied, every pair of eyes fixed on the lone figure standing at its center.

Kagutsuchi stood there with his hands in his pockets, posture loose, head slightly tilted as if this were a casual meeting and not a tribunal. The soft click of the door closing behind him was the only sound for several heartbeats.

Across the table sat Principal Nezu, his paws folded neatly on the polished wood, his black eyes sharp and unblinking. Beside him was Toshinori Yagi, still in his muscle form, shoulders tight and trembling, his fists pressed against the table hard enough to make it groan under the strain. Aizawa slouched in his chair as always, but his narrowed, glowing eyes were fixed on Kagutsuchi with quiet, predatory precision. Present Mic sat rigid, unusually silent, his fingers drumming the table, his usual energy subdued by a simmering anger. Recovery Girl leaned forward on her cane, her lips pressed into a hard, thin line. Cementoss, Snipe, and Ectoplasm sat further down the table, all silent, but their stern expressions betrayed no sympathy for Kagutsuchi.

The silence was broken by Toshinori.

"What you did today was unacceptable!" he roared, slamming a fist onto the table so hard the teacups rattled. His voice was raw, his normally calm demeanor replaced with unfiltered fury. "You pushed a child—my student—to his breaking point! Psychological torture, forcing him into a battle that could've killed him, and for what?!"

Kagutsuchi didn't flinch. He merely smiled faintly, as though indulging an old friend's rant. "For training, of course. And he didn't die, did he? Quite the opposite—he adapted beautifully."

"Training?!" Present Mic barked, slamming his palms onto the table. "You call that training?! You broke him down like some kind of sick science experiment! That's not hero work, that's villain crap!"

Kagutsuchi's smirk widened slightly, his voice maddeningly calm. "Villainy is a matter of perspective, isn't it? You train your students to smile while they fight, to leap into danger before they're ready. Tell me, Yamada—how many students have died because you weren't willing to push them hard enough?"

Present Mic froze, his jaw tightening.

"Enough," Aizawa's voice cut through, low and razor-sharp. He didn't raise it, but the weight of it pulled all attention to him. His scarf twitched ever so slightly, coiling near his arm like a waiting viper. "You risked not only Midoriya's life, but civilians. You don't get to stand there and pretend your methods are justified. You're not a teacher here. You're not even licensed as a hero."

Kagutsuchi turned his head slightly, meeting Aizawa's glare with quiet amusement. "And yet, your student survived something that would have killed most Pro Heroes outright. He's stronger for it. You should be thanking me, Eraserhead."

"Thanking you?!" Toshinori thundered, slamming his fist again. "You think you can just waltz in here, toy with our students' lives, and act like you know better than the entire faculty?!"

Kagutsuchi finally shifted, taking a slow, deliberate step toward Toshinori. His smile never faded, but there was a glint in his dark eyes now—something sharper, colder. "I don't think I know better, Toshinori. I do know better. Because unlike you, I'm preparing him for what's coming. You've coddled this boy, filled his head with naive ideals. But tell me—" his tone dipped, soft, cutting, "—will those ideals save him when the next Lord comes to tear him apart?"

Toshinori's jaw tightened, his teeth grinding audibly.

Recovery Girl's voice finally broke through, trembling but firm. "He's just a boy," she said, her tone thick with restrained anger. "A child. You've already damaged him in ways you don't even begin to understand. What gives you the right to decide how much he can take?"

Kagutsuchi turned to her, inclining his head slightly, almost respectfully. "Because, Recovery Girl, no one else will do what needs to be done. No one else will push him where he needs to go. You all want to protect him… but protection will get him killed."

"Protection is our job," Cementoss rumbled, his deep voice resonating in the room.

"And mine," Kagutsuchi countered smoothly, "is to make sure your job isn't futile."

The words hung in the air like a challenge.

Nezu, who had been silent the entire time, finally spoke. His voice was calm, measured, but the weight of authority behind it silenced the room instantly. "You understand, Kagutsuchi, that your actions have undermined U.A.'s trust in you as… whatever it is you're attempting to be here. Your presence is already controversial, and this—" he gestured toward him with a small paw, "—only confirms the worst fears of those who oppose your involvement with our students."

Kagutsuchi tilted his head slightly, regarding Nezu as though he were examining an interesting puzzle. "And yet," he said slowly, "you haven't expelled me. You haven't called the police. Which means you know I'm right. You know he needs me."

Nezu's eyes narrowed ever so slightly, but he didn't answer.

Kagutsuchi smiled again, taking a leisurely step backward, turning slightly toward the door. "You can scold me all you like, heroes. But you know as well as I do—this was necessary. And Izuku Midoriya… knows it too."

With that, he turned fully, walking toward the exit without waiting to be dismissed. The faculty's anger burned at his back, but Kagutsuchi moved as if it were nothing, his steps unhurried, his hands sliding back into his pockets.

But before he could reach the door—

"Wait."

Toshinori's voice, low but thunderous, cut through the tension like a blade. Everyone's heads snapped toward him.

Kagutsuchi paused mid-step, tilting his head slightly, though he didn't turn around.

Toshinori straightened, the muscles in his jaw flexing as he stared at the man's back. His fists were clenched so tightly his knuckles whitened, fresh blood smearing across his palms. His blue eyes burned with something far deeper than anger—it was resolve, old and heavy, the same fire he once carried into battle as the Symbol of Peace.

"You think you know what's best for him," Toshinori said, his voice steady, every word deliberate. "You think you're the only one who can push him to survive. But I won't stand by and let you keep torturing him just to prove your point."

Kagutsuchi finally turned, slowly, his dark eyes meeting Toshinori's. His faint smile didn't falter.

Toshinori took a step forward, his full height casting a long shadow across the room. "Fight me. Right here. Right now."

A ripple of shock passed through the room.

"Yagi—!" Aizawa started, rising halfway from his seat, but Toshinori didn't look at him.

Ochako, Iida, Momo, and Shoji, who had been standing nervously near the back of the room, stiffened at the words. Ochako's eyes widened in alarm, Iida's hand jerked upward as if to object, and even Shoji's calm expression shifted, his eyes darting between the two men. Izuku, pale and tense, stood frozen near the doorway, his mouth opening but no words coming out.

Kagutsuchi arched a brow, amusement flickering in his gaze. "A fight?" he repeated, his tone calm, almost amused.

Toshinori didn't waver. "If I win, you leave him alone. No more 'training,' no more testing him, no more pushing him past his breaking point. You stay out of his life."

A slow, almost feline grin spread across Kagutsuchi's face, his dark eyes gleaming with something ancient and unyielding. "And if I win?"

Toshinori's jaw tightened. "Then… then you do what you want. But I'll know. I'll know for certain if you're as untouchable as you claim to be."

The silence that followed was deafening, the air thick with anticipation. The students were glued to the scene, too shocked to move, while the faculty exchanged tense, wary glances.

Kagutsuchi studied Toshinori for a long, almost uncomfortable moment. Then, slowly, his smile widened.

"…Very well," he said simply, his tone still infuriatingly calm. "I accept."

The late afternoon sun cast long golden streaks across U.A.'s Gamma Gymnasium, its vast, empty expanse stretching beneath the open sky. The faint hum of the boundary field generators—the only precaution hastily set up to keep the inevitable collateral damage contained—was the only sound breaking the tense silence.

The U.A. staff and students gathered along the perimeter, a loose semicircle of grim faces. Aizawa stood with his arms folded, scarf draped loosely but ready, his usual apathy sharpened into something close to concern. Nezu watched from atop a nearby crate, small paws folded neatly, his black eyes calculating, reflecting every detail. Present Mic paced anxiously, his usual energy stripped down to nervous twitches.

And at the center of the field, walking with a deliberate, heavy stride, was Toshinori Yagi—All Might—in his full muscle form. His cape fluttered slightly in the breeze, his towering frame tense, his expression set in unshakable resolve. His every step seemed to echo, even across the soft dirt.

Behind him, almost jogging to keep up, was Izuku. His hands were clenched into tight fists at his sides, his green eyes wide with a panic he was barely keeping contained.

"All Might—wait!" Izuku's voice cracked as he hurried closer. "You don't have to do this! Please, you don't know what he's capable of—"

Toshinori didn't turn, didn't slow his stride. His gaze stayed locked forward, fixed on the figure standing casually at the opposite end of the gymnasium.

Kagutsuchi.

The man stood with his hands in his pockets, posture loose and infuriatingly relaxed, as though this were nothing more than an idle distraction. His black button-up sleeves were rolled neatly to his elbows, and his calm, faint smile betrayed no anticipation, no aggression—just quiet amusement.

"I know exactly what he's capable of, Young Midoriya," Toshinori said finally, his deep voice steady, though the muscle in his jaw twitched. He glanced down at Izuku briefly, his blue eyes softened for only a fraction of a second. "And that's why I can't let this stand. He humiliated you—our student, our future—like you were nothing. If I don't stop him, if I don't at least try, then I've failed you… and everyone watching."

Izuku's breath caught. He wanted to argue, to grab him, to stop this, but the unyielding conviction in Toshinori's voice made the words die in his throat.

"But—"

"Enough, Young Midoriya," Toshinori interrupted gently, placing a massive hand briefly on Izuku's shoulder. "Have faith in me. I'm still All Might."

Before Izuku could say another word, Toshinori stepped away, leaving him frozen at the edge of the field.

Across the gymnasium, Kagutsuchi finally tilted his head, his smile deepening just slightly.

"All Might," he greeted smoothly, his voice carrying effortlessly across the space. "In full regalia, no less. Should I be honored?"

Toshinori stopped a few meters away from him, his towering frame rigid, fists clenching.

"This isn't for honor," Toshinori said, his voice low but firm. "This is to stop you. If I win, you leave Midoriya alone. You don't test him, you don't push him, you stay away from him."

Kagutsuchi blinked slowly, then chuckled—a soft, amused sound, completely at odds with the gravity of the moment.

"And if you lose?"

Toshinori's jaw tightened. "…Then do what you want. But I'll know for sure if you're as untouchable as you pretend to be."

Kagutsuchi gave a small shrug, almost bored, but his dark eyes glinted with something ancient, something predatory.

"Very well," he said simply. "Impress me, Symbol of Peace."

He took a single step forward, the soft crunch of his shoe against the dirt unnervingly casual. The air seemed to thicken, the tension around the field tightening like a coiled spring.

The students on the sidelines held their breath. Ochako clutched her hands together nervously, Iida stood stiff as a statue, Momo's sharp eyes darted between the two men, and Shoji's arms twitched subtly, ready to react if something went wrong.

Izuku, standing at the front of the group, could barely breathe.

Toshinori raised his fists, his iconic grin fixed firmly in place, but his eyes were steely, serious—no theatrics now, only determination.

Kagutsuchi remained perfectly relaxed, one hand still in his pocket.

The silence stretched.

Then, without warning, Toshinori moved first.

His massive frame blurred forward, dirt and dust exploding under his feet as he shot across the field with all the raw power that had once made him the Symbol of Peace. His fist cocked back, air already rippling from the sheer force of his speed.

For a heartbeat, the onlookers thought Kagutsuchi might move to dodge.

But he didn't.

He didn't even raise both hands.

In the space between one blink and the next, Kagutsuchi's free hand flashed upward—faster than anyone could follow.

The sound hit first.

SLAP—SLAP—SLAP—SLAP—SLAP— a rapid-fire series of cracks so fast they blurred into one continuous whip-like rhythm. Toshinori's head jerked left, right, forward, back, his massive body snapping with each strike like a ragdoll caught in a storm. Dust puffed violently with every impact, each slap timed perfectly, mercilessly, almost playfully.

In less than a second, Toshinori—All Might—was sent staggering backward, skidding across the dirt, his boots gouging deep furrows into the ground before he barely managed to plant himself. His face was red, welted from the sheer speed and force of the strikes.

The entire field fell into stunned silence.

Ochako's eyes went wide, her hands flying to her mouth. "D-Did he just—?!"

Iida froze mid-step, his arm half-raised as if to intervene, his glasses sliding slightly down his nose. "I… I didn't even see it—!"

Momo's brows furrowed in disbelief, her analytical mind racing. "That… wasn't a Quirk. That was pure speed and precision."

Shoji's arms tensed, multiple eyes tracking Kagutsuchi as if trying to process how he had even moved.

Izuku just stood frozen at the edge of the field, his mouth slightly open, his breath caught. All Might—his mentor, his symbol of unshakable strength—hadn't even landed a hit.

Kagutsuchi, meanwhile, straightened casually, sliding his hand back into his pocket as though nothing had happened. His faint smile never wavered.

"Hmm," he mused aloud, almost conversationally, his tone carrying easily across the shocked silence. "Still standing after that. Impressive. Most would be unconscious by now."

Toshinori wiped at his face with the back of his hand, his teeth clenched so tight the muscle in his jaw jumped. Blood streaked faintly at the corner of his lip.

"…You—" Toshinori growled, crouching slightly as he prepared to charge again, his blue eyes blazing with renewed fire. "—won't get away with toying with me!"

Kagutsuchi tilted his head slightly, his smile turning into something sharper, predatory.

"Toying?" His voice was soft, but it cut like a blade. "Oh, All Might… I haven't even started yet."

The air seemed to thicken again, the weight of his words making even the seasoned Pro Heroes on the sidelines tense instinctively.

Kagutsuchi shifted his footing slightly, loosening his shoulders like a predator stretching before the kill.

"Come then," he said, his tone almost lazy, though his dark eyes gleamed with something ancient and unyielding. "Show me why they call you the Symbol of Peace."

And with that, Kagutsuchi lunged.

He didn't blur like All Might. There was no explosive burst of power, no displaced air. He simply moved, a ripple in the fabric of space itself, appearing instantly before Toshinori. His movements were fluid, graceful, almost like a dance, yet each strike was delivered with terrifying, surgical precision.

A flurry of blows rained down on All Might—not wild, powerful swings, but sharp, focused jabs and open-palmed strikes that targeted pressure points, joints, and the very core of his balance. Each impact was accompanied by a soft, almost imperceptible thwack, yet the force behind them was immense. Toshinori grunted, his massive frame rocking, his own powerful counter-punches finding only empty air as Kagutsuchi weaved and flowed around him, a dark, inescapable shadow.

Kagutsuchi moved with an economy of motion that was terrifying to behold. He wasn't just faster; he was smarter. He anticipated, he redirected, he exploited every opening, every shift in Toshinori's weight. It was like watching a master artisan carve a statue, each strike deliberate, shaping the outcome with chilling intent.

Toshinori roared, a frustrated, desperate sound, as he tried to bring his full power to bear. He unleashed a Detroit Smash, a wind-pressure attack that tore at the ground, but Kagutsuchi was already gone, reappearing behind him, delivering a sharp, precise kick to the back of his knee that buckled All Might's leg.

The Symbol of Peace stumbled, gritting his teeth, his iconic smile faltering under the relentless, almost casual assault. He spun, throwing a wide, sweeping punch, but Kagutsuchi merely ducked under it, delivering a series of rapid, open-palmed strikes to his ribs that echoed with a sickening thud.

The students watched in horrified silence. This wasn't a fight; it was a demonstration. A brutal, one-sided lesson in overwhelming, effortless superiority. All Might, the invincible hero, was being systematically dismantled, not by brute force, but by an inhuman grace and precision that defied comprehension.

Toshinori's boots dragged trenches in the dirt as he staggered back, his massive chest heaving, blood running from his lip. His body screamed in protest with every motion, but he grit his teeth, refusing to fall.

And then Kagutsuchi moved again.

It was almost lazy, the way he closed the distance—no explosive burst of speed, just a step, a shift, and suddenly he was there. Toshinori swung instinctively, a desperate right hook aimed for Kagutsuchi's temple, but the High Lord slipped under it with insulting ease.

A sharp kick to Toshinori's ankle made his leg buckle, and before he could regain his footing, Kagutsuchi's hand shot up, clamping around his throat with frightening precision.

The Symbol of Peace's feet left the ground.

The sheer strength behind that grip was overwhelming, not crushing, but absolute—Toshinori could feel the tendons in Kagutsuchi's fingers flexing, the controlled power of a man who knew he didn't need to squeeze any harder to make his point.

For the first time, a flicker of panic crossed Toshinori's face.

"Do you know what your problem is, All Might?" Kagutsuchi's voice was low, calm, yet it carried across the silent field like a sermon. His dark eyes locked onto Toshinori's, unblinking, dissecting.

Then the first punch came.

THUD.

A sharp strike to the gut, just below the ribcage. Toshinori's body jerked violently, air bursting from his lungs in a ragged gasp.

"You've modeled your entire life after this," Kagutsuchi continued, his voice still maddeningly steady. "A comic book. A children's cartoon. A shining, smiling hero standing against evil. THUD. A symbol for the masses to worship."

Another punch, a mirrored strike to the opposite side of his ribs. Toshinori choked back a groan as pain radiated through his chest.

"This isn't some comic book, Toshinori Yagi. THUD." A strike to his sternum. Toshinori's head snapped forward from the force, blood flecking his teeth.

"This isn't some Saturday morning cartoon kids can curl up on the couch and watch with warm breakfast in their laps. THUD." A strike to the jaw, snapping Toshinori's head sideways like a ragdoll.

Each punch landed with almost mocking casualness. Kagutsuchi didn't even shift his footing, didn't even tighten his grip. He was calm, collected, his movements measured. There was no effort in his body language—just the calculated efficiency of a man who wasn't fighting… he was teaching.

"You think you can smile through the blood, wave at the cameras, and that somehow makes it better? THUD. That this world follows the rules you've built up in your head?"

Toshinori gasped, struggling to force his arms to move, but every counterstrike was batted aside with a flick of Kagutsuchi's elbow, dismissed like a child's tantrum.

"Wake up, Symbol of Peace." THUD. Another punch to the stomach, harder this time, lifting Toshinori slightly in Kagutsuchi's grip before letting him drop back down.

"You've spent your life being a character, not a man. You're not saving people because it's right anymore—you're saving them because you think that's what the hero is supposed to do. That's not heroism, Toshinori."

The final punch came fast, snapping Toshinori's head back as blood sprayed from his lip. The Symbol of Peace's arms fell limp at his sides, his legs barely able to keep kicking.

Kagutsuchi tilted his head slightly, examining the man dangling from his grip as if disappointed.

"This isn't your fantasy world. This is real. And in the real world…" Kagutsuchi leaned forward slightly, his voice dropping to a soft, almost pitying whisper, "heroes die screaming, and no amount of smiling will save them."

The entire field was frozen in silence.

Izuku stood rooted at the edge, trembling, his hands balled into fists so tight his nails cut into his palms. Ochako looked pale, her lips pressed together to hold back a cry. Momo's analytical mind faltered completely—there was no logic to what she was witnessing; this was slaughter. Iida's arm twitched upward again, but he couldn't move, couldn't breathe.

Toshinori gasped, straining against the grip on his neck, his blue eyes still burning even as blood dripped down his chin.

And Kagutsuchi… just stared at him, utterly calm, as if waiting for him to admit defeat.

Then, with a final, almost dismissive flick of his wrist, Kagutsuchi released Toshinori.

All Might's massive form crumpled, hitting the dirt with a heavy, sickening thud. He landed on his hands and knees, head bowed, body shaking violently. He coughed, a wet, rattling sound, and a trickle of blood escaped his lips, staining the ground beneath him. His muscle form flickered, threatening to recede, but he fought it, clinging to the last vestiges of his power with desperate tenacity. He tried to push himself up, but his limbs trembled, refusing to obey.

Kagutsuchi merely watched, his expression unreadable, his hands sliding back into his pockets. The faint smile had returned, but it held no warmth—only a cold, satisfied finality.

The silence on the field was absolute, broken only by Toshinori's ragged, struggling breaths. The students and faculty alike were stunned, their faces pale with shock and horror. The Symbol of Peace, brought to his knees, utterly defeated, not by a powerful villain, but by a calm, almost indifferent display of overwhelming superiority.

Izuku felt a cold dread spread through him, colder than any fear he had ever known. He had seen All Might fight, had seen him win, had seen him stand invincible. To see him like this… it shattered something deep inside him. The world tilted. The unshakeable pillar had crumbled.

Toshinori remained on his hands and knees, his massive frame trembling as he fought for every breath. Blood dripped steadily from his lip, dark spots staining the dirt beneath him. His fingers dug into the ground as if sheer willpower alone could hold him upright. His muscle form flickered weakly, his body screaming to give out, but he refused to let it.

He was All Might. And All Might didn't fall.

But the truth was undeniable: he wasn't standing.

The Symbol of Peace—the unshakable pillar the world had worshipped—was on his knees before a man who hadn't even broken a sweat.

Kagutsuchi regarded him with the same detached calm as if observing a stubborn child. His hands were tucked lazily back into his pockets, his posture perfectly relaxed, and yet he radiated a quiet, suffocating dominance.

The silence around the gymnasium was crushing.

Aizawa's scarf twitched slightly, his usual calm fractured by the sheer weight of what he was witnessing. Present Mic's mouth opened, but no words came; his usual booming voice was stolen by disbelief. Momo's analytical mind ran blank, Ochako covered her mouth to muffle a trembling gasp, and Iida's glasses caught the fading sunlight as his arm twitched uselessly at his side. Shoji's multiple eyes flicked between Toshinori and Kagutsuchi, as if waiting for the killing blow.

Izuku, however, couldn't move. His hands were shaking at his sides, his nails biting into his palms hard enough to draw blood. His heart pounded, his breathing ragged. All his life, he had looked up to this man—the strongest man alive, the Symbol of Peace. Seeing him brought so low… it felt like the world itself had cracked.

Kagutsuchi's faint smile returned, sharp and predatory, though his tone remained maddeningly casual as he finally spoke.

"Well," he said softly, almost as if to himself, "that was… educational. For you, Toshinori, and for them." He glanced toward the stunned students and faculty, his dark eyes glinting with quiet amusement.

Toshinori forced his head up, his blue eyes still burning despite his broken state. His jaw worked soundlessly for a moment before he managed a strained whisper, his voice hoarse. "I… won't… let you… hurt them…"

Kagutsuchi tilted his head, studying him for a long, quiet moment before letting out a soft chuckle—low, smooth, but carrying a weight that seemed to sink into everyone's bones.

"Still clinging to that smile… still pretending the world plays by your rules." He sighed, shaking his head slightly, almost pitying. "You're still trying to be the hero. Even now."

Then, with a slight shift of his weight, Kagutsuchi turned his back on him, beginning to walk away as if the fight had never mattered.

No one moved.

The sound of his shoes crunching lightly against the dirt was the only thing in the suffocating silence. He walked past the stunned students, past the Pro Heroes, past Izuku—who flinched as Kagutsuchi's presence brushed by him like a cold wind.

As he reached the edge of the gymnasium, Kagutsuchi paused, glancing over his shoulder just enough for his dark eyes to catch the sunlight.

"Oh," he said suddenly, his tone almost playfully light, as if just remembering something trivial. "By the way…"

The pause hung like a blade in the air.

Nezu's ears twitched. Izuku's heart skipped. Even Toshinori, still kneeling, forced himself to look up.

"Nezu accepted my application as a janitor."

The words landed like a bomb.

Kagutsuchi's faint smile widened a fraction, the glint in his eyes dancing with quiet mischief.

"I start next week."

And then, after the briefest beat, he gave a small, almost mocking two-fingered wave.

"Toodles."

With that, he stepped through the exit, disappearing casually into the fading afternoon light, leaving only silence, disbelief, and the broken Symbol of Peace behind him.

The soft hum of medical equipment and the faint antiseptic scent filled the U.A. infirmary, but the usual calm, methodical rhythm of the room was absent. Instead, it was heavy with quiet tension, the kind that pressed down on everyone present.

Toshinori Yagi lay on the infirmary bed, no longer in his Muscle Form but, for once, not the frail, emaciated figure so many had grown used to seeing. Kagutsuchi had healed him weeks earlier, restoring much of his former physical strength. His frame was still broad, still solid—but now bruised, battered, and marked with deep discolorations where Kagutsuchi's strikes had landed with surgical precision. His breathing was steady but labored, his chest rising and falling heavily under the crisp white sheets.

Recovery Girl hovered over him, her expression unusually grim as she adjusted the monitoring equipment. "You're lucky nothing's broken," she muttered, though her voice lacked its usual stern bite. Her eyes softened as they scanned his injuries. "But every inch of you is bruised to hell. He knew exactly where to hit to avoid permanent damage."

Toshinori didn't respond immediately. His blue eyes stared at the ceiling, unblinking, lost somewhere far away.

Gathered in the room were most of the faculty and the students who had witnessed the fight. Aizawa stood at the foot of the bed, arms crossed, his usual detached expression now carrying a faint but noticeable furrow in his brow. Present Mic sat slouched against the far wall, for once completely silent, his sunglasses reflecting the harsh fluorescent lights.

The students clustered near the door, subdued and shaken. Ochako's hands were clasped together so tightly her knuckles were white. Iida's posture was rigid, his jaw clenched, his usual energy replaced by a grave stillness. Momo kept glancing between Toshinori and the floor, her expression troubled, as if trying to rationalize what had just happened but finding no answers. Shoji stood slightly in front of them, his large frame almost protectively positioned, though his own eyes betrayed his unease.

Izuku was the closest to the bed, standing near Toshinori's side. His green eyes were wide with worry, but more than that, they held something deeper—fear, not for himself, but for the man lying before him.

Toshinori finally shifted his gaze, slowly turning his head toward Izuku.

"...Young Midoriya," he said, his voice low and hoarse, but steady.

Izuku leaned in slightly, desperate for reassurance. "All Might, I—"

Toshinori's faint smile returned, though it was strained, almost painful. "I'm fine… It'll take more than that to put me down for good." He forced a weak chuckle, though it sounded hollow even to him.

Recovery Girl gave him a sharp look. "You're not fine, Toshinori. Don't act like this is nothing." She tightened the straps on a cooling pad across his ribs with a firm tug. "He didn't just beat you. He dismantled you. If he'd wanted to, you'd be dead."

The bluntness of her words made the room fall even more silent.

Toshinori didn't flinch. He just kept staring at the ceiling for a long moment before murmuring, "I know."

Aizawa shifted, his voice breaking the silence next. "You challenged him knowing this would happen."

Toshinori turned his head slightly toward him. "…I had to try." His blue eyes hardened faintly, that familiar determination glinting even through the exhaustion. "If I didn't stand up to him, even once, how could I ever look Young Midoriya in the eyes again?"

Izuku swallowed hard, guilt washing over him. "This… this is because of me…"

Toshinori's gaze snapped back to him, his voice firmer despite his condition. "Don't you dare blame yourself, Young Midoriya. This was my choice. My responsibility."

Nezu, who had been unusually quiet at the corner of the room, finally spoke, his tone calm but edged with a weight that made everyone look at him. "It was a choice," he agreed softly, his black eyes unreadable. "But one that has shown us all exactly where we stand against him."

Everyone seemed to tense at that, the unspoken truth heavy in the air.

Kagutsuchi hadn't just defeated Toshinori. He had done it with almost insulting ease.

The silence stretched on, thick and uncomfortable, until Recovery Girl finally broke it with a sigh. "He needs rest. All of you—give him space."

Reluctantly, the faculty and students began filing out of the room, though several cast lingering, worried glances at Toshinori as they left. Izuku stayed until the very last moment, his hand gripping the edge of the bed as if unwilling to let go.

Toshinori managed another faint smile, his eyes softening as they met Izuku's. "Go on, Young Midoriya. I'll be fine. Really."

But as Izuku finally stepped away, Toshinori's gaze drifted back to the ceiling, his smile fading, replaced by a quiet, grim contemplation.

For the first time in his life, Toshinori Yagi had felt powerless—and worse, he now truly understood that Kagutsuchi hadn't been fighting to kill.

If he had wanted to, it would have been over in seconds.

The classroom was silent, thick with tension. Dust motes drifted lazily through slanted bars of late-afternoon sunlight, and the only sound was the soft rustle of clothing as four students sat close together, waiting.

Izuku sat hunched forward at one of the desks, his fingers laced tightly as if holding himself together by sheer will. Ochako sat nearest to him, leaning in, her wide brown eyes filled with worry. Across from him, Iida sat stiff and upright, his posture proper but betraying a restless agitation. Momo sat beside Iida, a pen forgotten in her hand, her usually composed expression clouded with confusion. Shoji stood near the window, half-turned toward them, multiple eyes quietly fixed on Izuku's face.

For a long, unbearable moment, no one spoke.

Finally, Iida broke the silence, his voice unusually subdued. "Midoriya-kun… You said you wanted to explain what happened."

Izuku swallowed, his throat dry. He glanced at them—his friends, the ones who trusted him, who followed him—and the weight of what he was about to say pressed down on his chest like a stone.

"I… I need to tell you the truth," he began, his voice quiet, hesitant. "About him. About… Kagutsuchi."

The name alone seemed to change the air. Ochako's hands gripped the edge of her desk, knuckles whitening. Momo straightened, her eyes narrowing slightly. Even Shoji's posture shifted, his broad shoulders tensing.

Izuku took a shaky breath. "He's not… he's not like anything we've dealt with before. He's not a villain. Not in the way we think of villains."

Ochako tilted her head, her voice barely above a whisper. "Then… what is he, Midoriya-kun?"

Izuku's gaze dropped to his hands. "…He's not human."

The silence that followed was suffocating.

Iida leaned forward, his voice tight. "Midoriya-kun, are you saying—"

"I mean it," Izuku cut in, louder than intended. His voice cracked slightly before steadying. "He's something else. Something old. He's been around for thousands of years. The fight with All Might? That wasn't even a fight to him. He was holding back. If he wanted to…" Izuku's hands tightened into fists, his voice dropping, "he could've killed All Might in seconds."

Ochako's face went pale. "Th-Then… why didn't he? Why do all this?!"

Izuku's jaw clenched. "…Because he's testing me."

The words landed like a verdict.

Shoji's deep voice was calm, but heavy. "Testing you… for what?"

Izuku looked up, his green eyes hardening, though fear still lingered behind them. "…Because of what I am. He called me an Agito. I didn't even know what it meant until he told me. But it's not a Quirk. It's… something I was chosen for. Something tied to him."

Momo frowned deeply, confusion and disbelief warring in her eyes. "Chosen? Midoriya-kun, do you understand how unbelievable that sounds? You're saying this man—this being—knows what you are better than you do?"

Izuku nodded, his voice grim. "He does. And he's not the only one. There are others like him—Lords. And they're watching me. Waiting to see if I can survive. If I'm… worth keeping alive."

Ochako's breath caught, her voice trembling. "Midoriya-kun… are you saying if you fail this test…"

Izuku didn't answer. He didn't need to.

Iida slammed his hands onto the desk, the sharp crack echoing in the empty classroom. His glasses slipped slightly as his voice rose, full of raw frustration. "This is unacceptable! If these… these 'Lords' intend to test you like this, we must alert the pro heroes! They can't be allowed to—"

"No." Izuku's interruption was firmer than any of them expected, cutting Iida off mid-sentence. His gaze was steady, almost frighteningly so. "No one can stop them. Not All Might. Not anyone. You all saw what Kagutsuchi did to him. If they come for me, no one here can stop them."

The truth dropped over them like lead.

Shoji shifted slightly, his calm voice betraying a hint of unease. "Then… what are you going to do, Midoriya?"

Izuku looked down, his fingers trembling before curling into fists. When he looked up again, there was something unyielding in his eyes, something that made even Iida falter.

"…I'm going to survive. Whatever it takes. Because if I don't… people I care about will die."

Ochako's lips parted as if to protest, but no words came. She only nodded faintly, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears.

Iida sat back stiffly, his moral certainty shaken, though after a long moment, he gave a reluctant nod.

Momo lowered her gaze, her analytical mind racing for answers that didn't exist.

Shoji inclined his head slightly, his voice quiet. "Then we'll stand with you. As much as we can."

The silence that followed was heavy, but different now—less fear, more a grim understanding of the path ahead.

But Izuku wasn't finished.

He took a slow breath, his voice quieter but heavier, as if every word cost him something. "You need to know more. Kagutsuchi… and the others like him… they're not just powerful. They're not even of this world in the way we think." His eyes flicked up to meet theirs, and when he spoke again, his words felt almost sacred. "They're angels."

Four pairs of eyes widened instantly.

"A-Angels?!" Ochako whispered, disbelief cracking her voice. "Like… actual angels?"

Izuku nodded grimly. "Not like you imagine. Not the ones in paintings or old stories. They're soldiers. Enforcers. They answer directly to God Himself."

The weight of those words pressed down on the room like an invisible hand.

Iida stared at him, his voice strained. "Midoriya-kun, are you absolutely certain of this? Angels—divine beings—working here, among us? That's… that's impossible to even comprehend."

"I didn't believe it either," Izuku admitted, his tone low, almost haunted. "But the way Kagutsuchi explained it… it makes too much sense."

Momo leaned forward slightly, her voice careful, almost wary. "Then… what are you, really? What's an Agito to them?"

Izuku's gaze hardened. "…The next step. The next step of human evolution. Quirks… were a mistake. An unintended branch. But the Agito… we're what humanity was supposed to become."

The silence that followed was deafening.

Shoji finally spoke, slow and deliberate. "…A mistake? You mean to say Quirks… shouldn't even exist?"

Izuku nodded reluctantly. "That's what Kagutsuchi told me. Quirks weren't part of the original design. They just happened. But the Agito… we're deliberate. We're made to keep evolving, to keep growing stronger with every fight. That's why I keep changing, adapting. It's… built into me."

Ochako's hands flew to her mouth, her voice muffled. "That's insane. You're saying you're supposed to… replace us?"

Izuku looked pained. "I don't want to replace anyone, Ochako-chan. But evolution doesn't care what we want. It happens, whether we're ready or not."

Iida slammed the desk again, his voice shaking with anger. "Then what are we, Midoriya-kun? Are we just… failures in the eyes of these 'angels'? Obsolete?"

Izuku's silence was answer enough.

The classroom went still again, shadows stretching longer across the floor as the sun dipped lower. For the first time since they'd come to U.A., they all felt small. Fragile. Just human—and painfully, unmistakably mortal.