The U.A. faculty room, usually a bastion of controlled chaos, was now a tableau of simmering tension. A week had passed since the brutal, one-sided "sparring match" between All Might and Kagutsuchi, and the memory of the Symbol of Peace brought to his knees still hung heavy in the air.

Principal Nezu sat at the head of the long conference table, his paws steepled, his sharp eyes fixed on the two figures who had just entered. Behind him, Toshinori Yagi, still bearing faint bruises no amount of Recovery Girl's healing could fully erase, sat stiffly, his gaze a burning, unblinking laser on Kagutsuchi. Aizawa, ever the stoic, had his capture scarf draped loosely, but his narrowed eyes missed nothing. Present Mic, usually boisterous, was uncharacteristically quiet, his fingers tapping a nervous rhythm on the table. Midnight, Cementoss, Snipe, and Ectoplasm all watched with a mixture of suspicion and weariness.

Kagutsuchi, however, seemed utterly oblivious to the hostile reception. He stood with his hands casually tucked into his pockets, a faint, almost serene smile playing on his lips. Beside him, a new figure shuffled in: a man of indeterminate age, with a perpetually rumpled appearance, a five o'clock shadow, and a perpetually disgruntled expression. He wore a faded, ill-fitting janitor's uniform, and his eyes darted around the room with a shifty, irritated glance. This was Jin.

"Good morning, esteemed faculty," Kagutsuchi purred, his voice smooth and entirely too cheerful for the mood in the room. "As per our previous arrangement, I'm here to begin my duties. And I've brought a… colleague." He gestured vaguely towards Jin.

Jin grumbled, shuffling further into the room, then immediately started patting his pockets. "Damn it, no smoking in here, right? Figures." He slumped into an empty chair near the wall, away from the main table, and began to pick at a loose thread on his sleeve, pointedly avoiding eye contact.

Nezu's gaze, however, remained fixed on Kagutsuchi. "Kagutsuchi," the Principal began, his voice calm but with an underlying steel, "we were under the impression you would be working alone. And who, precisely, is this individual?" He gestured towards Jin with a paw. "Is he… another one of your subordinates? One of your 'Lords'?"

Kagutsuchi chuckled softly, a sound that grated on Toshinori's nerves. "Oh, no, Principal. Nothing so dramatic. This is Jin." He paused, as if expecting a round of applause. When none came, he continued, "Jin is… well, he's human. A vagrant, actually. Down on his luck. A string of misfortunes, you see. Lost his job, then his apartment, then his… well, let's just say life hasn't been kind to him." Kagutsuchi's smile softened almost imperceptibly. "I came across him muttering to himself in an alleyway. Seemed like he needed a bit of a hand up."

A scoff broke the tense silence. It came from Present Mic, who finally leaned forward, his sunglasses glinting. "You? A Good Samaritan? The guy who just psychologically dismantled All Might and then beat him senseless in front of all of us is suddenly helping vagrants? Please. Don't make me laugh."

Kagutsuchi blinked, a faint, awkward expression crossing his face—a fleeting moment of something almost akin to human discomfort. "Well, Hizashi," he said, using Present Mic's given name with an infuriating familiarity, "angels aren't above helping people. You know, like in the Bible?" He offered a small, earnest nod, as if this explained everything.

Jin, from his corner, let out another low grumble. "Can we just get this over with? My feet are killing me."

The faculty exchanged bewildered glances. The sheer audacity, the casualness of it all, was almost too much to process.

After a moment, Nezu's small, black eyes shifted from Kagutsuchi to Jin. "Mr. Jin," he began, his voice still calm, "it would be beneficial if you could properly introduce yourself."

Jin, who had been engrossed in picking at his sleeve, froze. He slowly lifted his head, his disgruntled expression deepening. He glanced at Kagutsuchi, who gave him a subtle, almost imperceptible nod. With a heavy sigh, Jin turned to face the faculty, his shoulders slumping.

"Fine, fine," he muttered, his voice raspy. "Name's Jin Bubaigawara." He said it quickly, as if getting it over with.

"And could you tell us a few things about yourself, Mr. Bubaigawara?" Nezu pressed, his tone polite but firm.

Jin's eyes narrowed. "What is this, a last-minute job interview? Or an interrogation?" he grumbled, casting a suspicious look at Aizawa, whose glowing eyes seemed to bore into him.

Kagutsuchi stepped forward slightly, placing a hand gently on Jin's shoulder. "Now, now, Jin. The faculty are merely curious. And he's had a rather rough time of it, I assure you," Kagutsuchi interjected, his voice taking on a sympathetic, almost tender tone that was utterly jarring coming from him. "He was, shall we say, a victim of circumstance. Lost his last job, for instance, over some… unfortunate business with a fellow trying to commit insurance fraud by jumping in the way of his delivery bike."

Jin nodded glumly, rubbing the back of his neck. "Yeah, that was a mess. They pinned the whole damn thing on me. Then, one thing after another, you know? Ended up having to swipe some things just to get by." He trailed off, his gaze dropping to the floor. "And then some real crap happened. Kinda lost it, you could say. My head went screwy. Wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy." He shivered, a genuine tremor passing through his frame. "It's only 'cause Kagutsuchi took pity on me that I'm even standing here, not a total wreck, you know?"

The faculty exchanged glances, a silent conversation passing between them. Suspicion still lingered in the air, a thick cloud of disbelief, but there was also a flicker of something else—a cautious curiosity, perhaps even a sliver of sympathy. Toshinori's gaze remained hard, but even he seemed to be processing the unexpected vulnerability in Jin's tone.

Nezu, however, seemed to have made up his mind. His black eyes, usually so sharp, softened almost imperceptibly as he regarded Jin. "Mr. Bubaigawara," he said, his voice gentle, "it sounds as though you've indeed faced considerable hardship. U.A. High is a place that believes in second chances, and in the potential for good in everyone. Perhaps, with us, you can find a fresh start. We believe you could do good work here."

Jin blinked, genuinely surprised, his perpetually disgruntled expression momentarily replaced by a flicker of something unreadable. He mumbled something inaudible, looking away.

"Now, one final formality," Nezu continued, his tone returning to its usual professional cadence. "Is your Quirk registered, Mr. Bubaigawara?"

Jin grunted. "Yeah, it's registered. Been on the books for ages."

Before anyone could ask for details, Midnight, who had been quietly tapping away on a laptop, looked up, her expression one of mild surprise. "He's right, Principal. Jin Bubaigawara. Quirk: Double. Registered." She raised an eyebrow, a hint of professional curiosity in her gaze. "It says here… he can create exact duplicates of anything he touches, including himself, though the duplicates are unstable and degrade over time."

The revelation of Jin's Quirk sparked a fresh wave of intrigue among the faculty. Present Mic leaned forward, a low whistle escaping his lips. "Whoa, 'Double'? That's a pretty wild one!" Even Snipe and Cementoss seemed to shift, their expressions betraying a quiet, professional interest.

Nezu's eyes, however, lit up with an almost predatory intelligence. He instantly saw the myriad possibilities, the strategic applications of such an ability. Ectoplasm, ever the pragmatist, gave a silent, almost imperceptible nod of impressed acknowledgment.

"Mr. Bubaigawara," Nezu began, his voice now laced with a keen interest, "are these duplicates capable of full function? Can they, for instance, interact with their environment, or perform tasks independently?"

Jin hesitated, glancing nervously at Kagutsuchi, who offered another subtle nod of encouragement. Jin sighed, rubbing his chin. "Uh, yeah, they can. Mostly. They're… well, they're like me, but not quite. They can do stuff, pick things up, talk, all that. But…" He paused, clearly weighing his words. "I can only pop out two of 'em at a time. Any more than that, and things get… messy. Like, real messy. My head starts to feel like a blender, and they start acting up."

Aizawa's glowing eyes narrowed. "Acting up? You mean you can't control them?"

Jin shook his head, a grimace on his face. "Nah. Not really. They got their own… thoughts, I guess. Their own attitudes. Sometimes they listen, sometimes they don't. It's a real pain in the ass, honestly."

The faculty exchanged another round of glances, this time tinged with dawning realization. A Quirk of such potential, yet so seemingly unwieldy, had been under their noses this whole time, perhaps dismissed as too problematic to be truly useful. But under the right guidance, with proper training and resource management… the possibilities were immense. Imagine the tactical advantages, the rescue capabilities, the sheer diversionary power. A collective, unspoken thought passed through the room: a secret, almost guilty relief that Jin Bubaigawara, with his powerful yet volatile Quirk, hadn't stuck to a life of crime.

The two men—Kagutsuchi and Jin—were finally dismissed, the door clicking shut behind them. What followed was a heavy, oppressive silence. The faculty room, once filled with measured debate and quiet planning, now felt suffocating, as though even the air had turned wary of what had just been agreed to.

Nezu sat unmoving at the head of the table, his small paws steepled, his black eyes sweeping slowly across the faces of his colleagues. The tension was palpable; unspoken questions, doubts, and worst-case scenarios hung in the air like smoke.

"Alright," Nezu said at last, his voice calm but carrying a weight that pressed on every ear, "let us discuss our options."

Toshinori was the first to break. He slammed a fist onto the table—hard enough to rattle a teacup, though noticeably restrained compared to his usual outbursts. His blue eyes burned with frustration.

"Options? Principal, we cannot possibly allow that man to roam these halls! He's dangerous! He humiliated me in front of our students, and he toyed with Young Midoriya's mind—"

"And he defeated you with insulting ease, Toshinori," Aizawa cut in flatly, his tired eyes narrowing. His tone held no malice, only brutal honesty. "He wanted to prove a point, and he succeeded. We're dealing with someone operating on a level far beyond any Pro Hero. Pretending otherwise won't change that."

Present Mic, uncharacteristically subdued, shifted in his seat, his sunglasses catching the dim light.

"But what about the kids? What about Midoriya? He said he was only interested in this… 'Agito' thing, but are we seriously supposed to trust that?"

Nezu's head tilted slightly, his expression unreadable. "Trust? No. But we must acknowledge patterns. Thus far, Kagutsuchi has limited his actions to Izuku-kun. His remarks about 'Agito' being his only focus suggest a… self-imposed restriction. Whether that's genuine or part of some larger scheme, we don't yet know."

Midnight folded her arms tightly, her playful demeanor gone, replaced with a grim edge. "That's a massive gamble, Nezu. One wrong step, one student accidentally pushing him too far… and what then?"

Ectoplasm's many faces shifted slightly, his voice low and analytical. "But if his interest truly is singular, then keeping him here under our watch gives us an advantage. We can study him. We can monitor his interactions. Better that than letting him disappear into the world, free to do as he pleases."

Toshinori gritted his teeth, his fists clenched. "And what about Midoriya? You saw what he did to him. You think I'm going to just sit here and let that happen again?"

Nezu's sharp gaze softened—just slightly—as he regarded Toshinori. "Izuku-kun's well-being will be our primary concern. Every conversation, every encounter, will be monitored and logged. If Kagutsuchi deviates from his stated intentions or shows signs of becoming… unstable, we will intervene. But for now, Toshinori, this keeps him here, where we can at least attempt to understand him. You know as well as I do—" Nezu's voice lowered, almost pitying, "—if he wished to act against us, none of us could stop him."

Toshinori's jaw worked soundlessly, his pride and protective instincts warring with the grim logic of Nezu's words.

The room fell quiet again. Midnight stared at the table, her lips pressed thin. Present Mic shifted uncomfortably, muttering something under his breath. Even Aizawa, ever pragmatic, gave a small, reluctant nod, his scarf tightening loosely around his neck.

No one liked it. No one trusted it. But letting Kagutsuchi slip away, unmonitored and unchallenged, was far worse.

Nezu broke the silence, his voice steady but heavier than usual. "We are allowing the fox into the henhouse," he said, his black eyes gleaming. "Our only hope now is to watch every step he takes… and pray he doesn't decide to start biting."

The hallway of U.A. High was unusually quiet, the muffled chatter of students fading as class periods settled in. Sunlight streamed through the tall windows, cutting soft golden stripes across the polished floor.

Izuku walked with his usual stiff posture, though there was something different about him now—his shoulders held a tension he couldn't quite shake. Ochako kept close to his side, her worried glances almost constant. Momo walked slightly ahead, her notebook tucked under her arm, though her usual focus seemed distant, her mind clearly still turning over everything Izuku had told them. Iida, of course, marched with proper form, but his movements carried an edge of agitation, like his body couldn't fully relax. Shoji trailed quietly behind them, his height casting long shadows on the sunlit floor, his multiple eyes scanning everything with quiet vigilance.

They spoke in low voices, their conversation careful but natural enough to blend in if anyone overheard.

"…Classes today should be relatively straightforward," Momo said, though her voice was far more subdued than usual. "Foundational training, then rescue drills after lunch."

Iida adjusted his glasses, his jaw tight. "All the more reason we must remain focused. Regardless of… current circumstances," he added, lowering his voice further, "our duty as students does not waver."

Ochako glanced at Izuku, who hadn't spoken since they'd left the classroom. "Midoriya-kun? You okay?"

He gave a small, automatic nod, but his mind was elsewhere. His gaze was distant, his hands clenched slightly at his sides. "Y-Yeah. Just… thinking about today's drills, that's all."

They turned a corner—and stopped almost in unison.

A man stood with his back to them, mopping the long stretch of polished floor ahead. His movements were slow, casual, and oddly relaxed, the mop sliding in steady, practiced strokes. But what really caught their attention wasn't the mop—it was the faint, cheerful whistling that echoed off the walls.

The tune was instantly recognizable—Miki Matsubara's Stay With Me, clear as day.

Ochako froze, her mouth parting slightly. "Is… is that…?"

Iida's eyes went wide, his composure faltering for the first time that morning. "N-No. It… it can't be…"

Momo's brow furrowed deeply, her analytical mind already processing the absurdity of what she was hearing. "That's… that's city pop. He's whistling city pop in a U.A. hallway."

Shoji said nothing, but the tension in his broad frame tightened, his many eyes narrowing at the man's back.

And then, almost casually, the janitor turned his head slightly—not fully, just enough for them to see his profile.

That faint, infuriatingly familiar smile was unmistakable.

Kagutsuchi.

He didn't stop mopping. Didn't even glance fully their way. Just kept working, whistling that same cheerful tune, as if he hadn't been the one to humiliate the Symbol of Peace in front of half the faculty only a week ago.

The students were frozen, their reactions a perfect tableau of disbelief.

Ochako whispered, her voice barely audible. "He's… he's really…?"

Momo pressed a hand to her forehead, closing her eyes briefly. "He's actually doing it. He wasn't joking about the janitor thing."

Iida's arm twitched upward, as if ready to start chopping emphatically, but he caught himself, his glasses sliding slightly down his nose as he stared in stunned silence.

Even Izuku, who'd known this was coming, felt his stomach twist with a mix of frustration and resignation. "…I told you," he muttered quietly, mostly to himself.

And Kagutsuchi—completely ignoring them—kept whistling.

The late afternoon sun cast long, golden beams across the U.A. courtyard, students trickling out in small groups, their chatter echoing faintly through the open campus. The day had been long, but for Izuku, it had felt endless—every class overshadowed by the quiet tension of knowing he was somewhere on school grounds.

And sure enough, as Izuku and his friends descended the front stairwell, there he was.

Kagutsuchi sat casually on the low concrete ledge by the stairwell, his janitor uniform slightly wrinkled, one sleeve rolled lazily to the elbow. He twirled an unlit cigarette between his fingers with idle precision, his posture relaxed, as if he had been sitting there for hours without a care in the world.

When he spotted them, his lips curved into that faint, infuriatingly pleasant smile.

"Ah. There you are," he said smoothly, as if greeting an old friend rather than a boy whose life he had been systematically dismantling.

Izuku stiffened instinctively, but his friends closed ranks around him immediately. Ochako stepped slightly ahead of him, her expression determined despite the nervous tension in her hands. Iida stood ramrod straight at Izuku's side, his jaw tight, glasses glinting in the sunlight. Momo crossed her arms, her brow furrowed with cool suspicion, and Shoji loomed just behind, his tall frame angled protectively, multiple eyes locked on Kagutsuchi's every movement.

"What are you planning?" Iida asked sharply, his voice firm but cautious. His chopping arm twitched as if barely restrained. "Why are you waiting here for Midoriya-kun?"

Kagutsuchi blinked, tilting his head slightly in genuine confusion, the cigarette still spinning lazily between his fingers. "Planning?"

"Yes," Momo pressed, her tone careful but unwavering. "You clearly aren't here just to… loiter. What do you want from him?"

Kagutsuchi's brows rose slightly, his expression shifting into something between mild offense and amused disbelief. "Want from him? Young heroes, please… I'm not here to steal him away or challenge him to another fight."

Ochako narrowed her eyes, stepping half a pace closer to Izuku. "Then what are you doing here?"

For a moment, Kagutsuchi just stared at them, then gave an exaggerated shrug, as though the answer were painfully obvious.

"…I'm working," he said, his tone almost offended at the implication otherwise. He gestured vaguely to his uniform, his faint smile twitching into something that almost looked like a smirk. "I am a janitor now. What? A fella can't even make ends meet these days without being accused of plotting world domination?"

The group blinked almost in unison.

Iida froze mid-motion, his glasses slipping slightly down his nose as he processed the sheer absurdity of the statement. Ochako's jaw dropped slightly, her confusion plain as day. Momo pinched the bridge of her nose as if fighting off a headache. Shoji, though silent, tilted his head slightly, his many eyes narrowing as if trying to determine if Kagutsuchi was being serious—or simply toying with them again.

Izuku, to his credit, only sighed quietly, running a hand over his face. "…I told you," he muttered to his friends, his voice carrying that familiar mix of resignation and frustration. "He really… means it."

Kagutsuchi spread his hands slightly, cigarette still balanced between two fingers, his smile turning almost boyish in its simplicity. "See? Even Midoriya believes me. I sweep floors, mop halls, change lightbulbs… very noble, honest work, I assure you."

The silence that followed was heavy, not with fear this time, but with sheer, collective disbelief.

Kagutsuchi glanced at his cigarette, giving it an idle twirl. "…Now, if you're all done glaring holes through me, I still have a hallway to finish before I clock out."

He stood smoothly, tucking the unlit cigarette into his breast pocket, and strolled past them with the same casual grace he'd had during his fights, as if the entire exchange had been nothing more than a minor inconvenience.

The four students stayed frozen for a long moment, still processing the surreal sight of Kagutsuchi—the same being who had humbled All Might in front of the entire faculty—just walking away to finish mopping.

Finally, Ochako whispered, almost dazed, "This… can't be real life."

The low hum of chatter and the sizzle of frying oil filled the air, mingling with the sharp scent of salty fries and grilled meat. The neon sign outside flickered against the window, painting streaks of red and yellow across the table where Izuku and his friends sat.

Ochako picked idly at her fries, her usual cheerful energy noticeably dimmed. Momo sat across from her, a paper cup in hand, her posture proper as always, but her brow was furrowed in thought. Iida sat ramrod straight beside her, one hand still resting on his untouched burger, and Shoji, silent as ever, sat at the far end of the booth, his multiple eyes scanning the restaurant in quiet vigilance.

Izuku sat at the center of it all, hunched slightly, his milkshake straw turning slowly between his fingers as he stared into the melting swirl of chocolate and vanilla. His green eyes were tired but alert, his mind clearly still working through everything.

For a moment, no one spoke, the weight of everything they'd been through—everything they had learned—settling heavily over them like an invisible curtain.

Finally, Ochako broke the silence, her voice low and hesitant. "Midoriya-kun… is this how it's going to be now? Him just… showing up, testing you, and… working at U.A. like nothing's wrong?"

Izuku sighed, finally taking a sip from his milkshake before answering. "Yeah. Pretty much." His voice was soft, resigned. "He said… he's just a janitor right now. That he's only here to 'watch.' But you saw him. He's not the type who's just going to stay in the background."

Iida's hands tightened on the table, his jaw set. "This situation is unacceptable. The faculty allowing a being like that—after what he did to All Might—! It's outrageous. If he's truly only there for observation, that doesn't mean he's not dangerous."

Momo spoke up next, her tone calmer, though no less serious. "They're letting him stay because they have to, Iida-kun. You saw what he did to All Might. If they forced him out, if he felt threatened… things could escalate in ways we're not prepared for."

Shoji finally shifted, his deep voice even. "He's here because he wants to be. If Kagutsuchi wanted to hurt anyone else, he would have by now."

Ochako frowned at that, her eyes softening as she looked at Izuku. "But why you, Midoriya-kun? Why is he testing you? Why does it always have to be you?"

Izuku didn't look up at first, his hands tightening slightly around his cup. "…Because of what I am," he said finally, his voice quiet but steady. "He's not going to stop. Not until he knows for sure if I'm… the one he's looking for."

The words hit the table like a stone dropped in still water.

Momo's brow furrowed further. "And if you're not? What happens then?"

Izuku didn't answer right away, his lips pressing into a thin line. "…Then they'll kill me. Or someone else will. That's just how it is."

Ochako's eyes widened, her hand flying to her mouth. "Midoriya-kun…"

Iida slammed his hand on the table, though it was more out of frustration than anger. "This is absurd! We can't just accept that as the only outcome! There has to be something we can do—some way to—"

"No," Izuku interrupted, finally looking up, his gaze sharper than they expected. "There isn't. This isn't like fighting villains. This isn't about justice, or hero work, or… or anything we can control. They're not villains. They're…" He stopped, glancing at each of them. "…They're gods. And we're just people."

The table went quiet again, each of them lost in their own thoughts. The chatter of the restaurant continued around them, people laughing, fries being salted, drinks being poured, like nothing was wrong—like the world hadn't changed forever.

Finally, Shoji spoke again, his voice steady, almost grounding. "Then all we can do… is make sure you don't face this alone."

Izuku looked at him, and then at Ochako, Momo, and Iida—all of whom nodded, some more reluctantly than others, but with equal determination.

The smallest, faintest smile tugged at the corner of Izuku's lips. "…Thanks."

The weight didn't go away, but for the first time all day, it felt just a little easier to bear.

The faculty room was thick with tension, though not the usual kind born from busy mornings or a looming schedule. It was a different kind—tight, suffocating, a coil of frustration and unease shared by everyone present.

And at the center of it sat Kagutsuchi.

He was lounging in one of the chairs near the window as though he owned the place, one leg crossed casually over the other, a folded newspaper spread open in his hands. He hummed quietly under his breath, seemingly absorbed in an article about stock markets, as if nothing in the world—let alone the previous week's catastrophic "sparring match"—concerned him. The bright janitor's uniform he wore only made the image more surreal.

Toshinori sat stiffly at the table, his jaw tight, blue eyes fixed firmly on the floor. Present Mic shifted restlessly in his seat, tapping his foot under the table. Midnight leaned forward on her elbows, her chin propped in one hand, irritation practically radiating off her. Cementoss's stone-like face was unreadable, but the tension in his posture was unmistakable.

Aizawa stood near the corner, arms crossed, his scarf draped loosely around his shoulders, eyes barely open but watching—always watching.

Nezu sat at the head of the table, paws steepled, his sharp little eyes tracking Kagutsuchi in silence.

"Why is he still here?" Midnight finally hissed under her breath, leaning toward Present Mic.

"Because we can't exactly kick him out," Mic muttered back, his sunglasses flashing in the light. "The guy's practically a walking natural disaster. We push too hard, we get flattened."

"This is ridiculous," Cementoss rumbled, his voice low. "We're letting him waltz in here, unmonitored, like a staff member. He hasn't even been properly vetted."

"He has no documentation," Midnight whispered sharply, glancing over her shoulder at Kagutsuchi. "No records, no history. He could just be—" She lowered her voice further. "—the strongest Quirk user alive, and we'd be sitting here letting him read the paper."

Aizawa's eyes narrowed slightly. "Or," he said, his tone flat but cutting through their whispers, "he's exactly what he says he is."

The others glanced at him.

"You think he's really an angel?" Midnight asked skeptically.

Aizawa didn't answer at first, his eyes shifting back toward Kagutsuchi. The High Lord didn't so much as twitch at the conversation, still turning the pages of his paper with quiet, methodical motions, his expression faintly amused by whatever article he was reading.

"I think," Aizawa said finally, "that it doesn't matter what he says he is. What matters is whether he's bluffing."

There was a pause.

Then, with a slight push off the wall, Aizawa straightened, his scarf sliding slightly as his eyes began to glow faintly red.

"Aizawa—" Toshinori started, his voice low and warning.

But it was already too late.

Aizawa's Quirk activated, locking on Kagutsuchi like a vice. His hair floated slightly, his glowing gaze sharp and unrelenting.

The faculty held their breath, every eye trained on the High Lord.

Kagutsuchi didn't move.

For a fraction of a second, it seemed he might not have noticed at all. Then, without lowering his newspaper, without even glancing at Aizawa, his free hand slipped casually into his janitor's uniform pocket.

There was a faint metallic click as he withdrew a cigarette, rolling it lazily between his fingers.

Still not looking up, he raised his other hand.

A small flame sparked to life at the tip of his thumb.

The cigarette caught immediately, glowing red as he took a slow, deliberate drag. Smoke curled lazily toward the ceiling.

Aizawa's eyes narrowed further, his Quirk still burning bright.

Kagutsuchi didn't so much as twitch.

He turned a page of his newspaper with the same slow, methodical motion, utterly indifferent, as if the man erasing his very existence wasn't even worth acknowledging.

The silence was deafening.

Present Mic shifted uncomfortably, muttering under his breath, "The hell…"

Aizawa finally deactivated his Quirk, his hair falling flat, his eyes narrowing with something between irritation and unease. Kagutsuchi gave no reaction—no glance, no smirk, not even the barest sign that he had noticed.

He simply exhaled another stream of smoke, eyes still on the paper, like nothing had happened.

The tension in the faculty room lingered, thick as smoke, and not just from the lazy trails curling toward the ceiling from Kagutsuchi's cigarette. He remained seated, completely absorbed in his newspaper, his expression one of serene disinterest. The rest of the room, however, was anything but calm.

Midnight tapped her fingernails against the table, her usual playful smirk absent, replaced by something harder, more frustrated. Finally, with an audible sigh, she straightened in her chair, crossing her arms.

"Alright," she said flatly, her voice cutting through the quiet like a whip. "I'm sick of this."

All eyes turned to her, some wide with disbelief at her boldness, others silently grateful someone had finally decided to speak.

Midnight tilted her chin up, her eyes locking on Kagutsuchi. "Let's stop dancing around the issue. Are you really what you claim to be?" Her voice gained weight, her usual teasing tone replaced by something grimly serious. "And by that, I don't mean some metaphorical 'angel.' I'm talking about the real thing. Biblical. Old Testament. Wrath-of-God, fire-and-brimstone angel. Is that what you are?"

For the first time since he entered the room, Kagutsuchi moved.

He slowly folded the newspaper, setting it down on the table beside him with deliberate care. The sound of the pages flattening against the wood echoed unnaturally loud in the otherwise silent room.

Then, he turned his head toward Midnight.

His dark eyes met hers, calm, unblinking, and for a moment, there was something in them—something vast, ancient, and uncomfortably aware. It felt like being stared at by a force that saw straight through flesh and bone to the very soul.

"Yes," Kagutsuchi said simply. His voice was as calm as ever, but there was a weight to it now, something that made the hair on the back of every neck in the room stand on end. "I am."

A collective breath seemed to leave the room all at once.

He leaned back slightly, exhaling a slow ribbon of smoke. "But before you start asking for divine secrets or some grand revelation, don't bother." His gaze swept lazily across the stunned faculty, lingering briefly on Nezu, then Toshinori. "There are things I can't tell you. Classified. Personal. All that jazz."

Nezu's sharp mind was already racing, his paws steepled tightly, but even he stayed silent, his expression unreadable.

Kagutsuchi tilted his head slightly, almost amused at their stunned expressions. "So, yes. You have your answer. I am what you think I am."

He returned his attention to the newspaper, flipping it open again with one hand, as if the matter were already settled. "Now, if you're done asking obvious questions, I'd like to finish reading the sports section."

The silence stretched long after his admission, the weight of his simple "Yes" pressing on everyone in the room. Kagutsuchi sat comfortably, cigarette dangling from his fingers as he resumed reading the newspaper, as if he'd just admitted something as mundane as his favorite food.

Midnight was the first to recover, leaning forward slightly, her brows furrowed. "Then give us something. Anything. You drop this on us and expect us to just sit here twiddling our thumbs? If you're really an angel, then how… how does any of this even work? How organized are you? Are there more like you out there?"

At that, Kagutsuchi paused mid-page turn. He exhaled a lazy curl of smoke, staring at the print as if debating whether this conversation was worth the energy. Finally, with a faint shrug, he lowered the newspaper onto the table.

"You want to know how we operate?" His tone was casual, almost conversational, which only made his words all the more unnerving. "Fine. The basics, then. It's not exactly a secret."

He leaned back, twirling the cigarette between his fingers, his dark eyes sweeping the room. "There's a hierarchy. Lords don't act without purpose. The ones Midoriya's been running into—the ones testing him—are Minor Lords. They're the first line. Their job is to eliminate weak Agito, the ones that don't show promise. Call it… culling. They act under strict parameters, with enough restraint to keep things from spiraling out of control."

Toshinori's jaw tightened, his blue eyes narrowing. "And when an Agito does grow stronger? When they get past those 'parameters'?"

Kagutsuchi gave a faint, almost amused smirk. "That's when people like me get involved."

Nezu's sharp black eyes widened slightly, his mind already racing ahead, connecting the implications. His voice, though steady, carried an edge of dawning realization. "…You mean… you're…"

Kagutsuchi's grin widened just a fraction, though his tone remained infuriatingly calm. "Yes, Principal. I'm the nuclear option."

The words landed like a physical weight.

Present Mic shifted uncomfortably in his seat, his usual bravado muted. "The nuclear option…? You mean if you're ever sent in—"

"Then whatever's in the way," Kagutsuchi interrupted smoothly, taking another slow drag from his cigarette. "Doesn't walk away. When they're too strong to be contained, too dangerous to let live. That's when a High Lord like me is deployed."

A heavy silence pressed over the room as the implications sank in.

Present Mic shifted uncomfortably, his usual bravado gone. "So you're saying… "

Kagutsuchi flicked ash into the tray, his tone utterly matter-of-fact. "I'm sent to end things. Cleanly. Permanently."

The room went still. Toshinori's fists clenched on the table, his knuckles white. Aizawa's eyes narrowed further, but his face betrayed nothing. Nezu steepled his paws, his calculating gaze fixed on Kagutsuchi as if already running through a thousand possibilities.

Kagutsuchi took another slow drag, leaning back and picking up his newspaper again as if the conversation was already over. "You wanted to know how organized we are. Now you do. But don't bother asking for more. The rest?" His dark eyes didn't leave the page. "Not your business."

The air in Ground Beta crackled with an almost palpable anticipation. Students buzzed with nervous energy, their voices a low murmur as All Might, larger than life, boomed out the instructions for the Hero/Villain exercise. Costumes, vibrant and varied, stood out against the stark, industrial backdrop of the training facility.

Izuku Midoriya stood slightly apart from the excited throng, his new hero costume fitting snugly. It was a dark, almost entirely black tactical suit, designed for stealth and protection. It featured prominent padded sections across the chest, shoulders, and forearms, suggesting robust defense. A dark, stylized symbol, resembling a bird or a phoenix with outstretched wings, was subtly embossed on the center of his chest. A utility belt with multiple pouches cinched his waist, and his hands were encased in dark, reinforced gloves. His neck was covered by a high, dark collar, and a respirator-like mask covered his lower face, adding to his formidable silhouette. This new attire subtly hinted at the Agito armor beneath. His usual fidgeting was absent. His hands, though still prone to clenching, were held steady at his sides. His eyes, no longer wide with anxious wonder, scanned the blueprints All Might projected, absorbing every detail of the simulated urban environment.

He wasn't nervous. Not in the way his classmates were, with their excited chatter about Quirks and strategies. He was... calculating. The frantic, desperate energy that once fueled his every move had been replaced by a cold, precise focus. Kagutsuchi's words, about the ultimate fate of Agito, about proving himself, echoed in his mind. This wasn't just a training exercise anymore. This was another test.

"Alright, Young Midoriya!" All Might's voice cut through the air, pulling Izuku's attention back to the present. "You're paired with Young Uraraka for Team A, as the Heroes! Your opponents, Team D, are Young Iida and Young Bakugo!"

A ripple of surprise went through the class. Bakugo and Iida were a formidable pair. Ochako, beside him, gave a small, nervous squeak. "Bakugo-kun and Iida-kun? Oh, no..."

Izuku, however, merely nodded, his expression unreadable. His gaze flickered to Bakugo, who was already glaring at him, a familiar sneer twisting his lips. But Izuku felt no fear, no surge of the old inferiority complex. Just a quiet assessment. Bakugo's explosions are powerful, but predictable. Iida's speed is impressive, but his movements are often linear.

"Team A and Team D, proceed to your designated starting points!" All Might announced, his voice booming. "The rest of you, join me in the observation room!"

As they walked towards the building, Ochako tried to lighten the mood. "Don't worry, Izuku-kun! We can do this! We'll just have to be super careful against Kacchan's explosions and Iida-kun's speed, right?"

"Right," Izuku murmured, but his mind was already miles ahead. He wasn't thinking about being careful. He was thinking about angles, about structural weaknesses, about the most efficient path to the objective. The building's layout, memorized from the blueprints, was already forming a three-dimensional model in his mind. He could almost feel the vibrations of the concrete under his feet, the flow of air currents, the subtle shifts in pressure.

"Uraraka-san," he said, his voice quiet, almost detached. "When we enter, I need you to create a distraction. A big one. Focus on drawing Bakugo's attention. Iida will likely try to secure the weapon."

Ochako blinked, surprised by his directness. "A distraction? Like... what kind of distraction?"

Izuku paused at the entrance, his eyes scanning the dark interior. "Something that forces him to engage. Something loud. Something explosive, if possible." He looked at her, and for a fleeting moment, a flicker of the old Izuku returned, a hint of concern. "Can you do that?"

Ochako, though still a little taken aback, straightened her shoulders. "Y-Yeah! I can do it! Leave it to me, Izuku-kun!"

He gave a curt nod, then pushed open the heavy steel door, stepping into the dim, echoing interior of the building. The air was cool, carrying the faint scent of concrete and dust. His senses, heightened by the Agito's subtle influence, were already picking up distant sounds, faint tremors.

The explosion came seconds later.

A thunderous crack echoed through the building, followed by Bakugo's familiar, furious roar. Ochako darted down an intersecting hallway, panting, her gloves glowing faintly as she hurled chunks of broken concrete she'd loosened with her Quirk.

"COME ON, BAKUGO-KUN!" she shouted, more bravely than she felt. "I'm right here!"

Bakugo barreled around the corner, smoke curling from his palms, his teeth bared in a feral grin. "You picked the wrong damn teammate to piss off, Round Face!"

A blast of smoke and fire tore through the hallway, making Ochako leap sideways to avoid it, her body weightless for a split second as she used her Quirk to rebound off the walls. But even as she scrambled to stay ahead, Bakugo wasn't focused on strategy—he was fixated, all his rage directed at the one who dared to stand between him and his real target.

Exactly as Izuku predicted.

Meanwhile, Izuku moved like a shadow.

He traced Iida's movements through the faint vibrations of the floor, every step resonating through the building's structure. Kagutsuchi's words whispered in his mind: "Adaptation is instinct for you now. Stop second-guessing it."

He turned a corner sharply—and there was Iida, standing rigidly in front of the mock weapon, his engines whirring as he scanned the hallway for movement.

Iida's eyes widened when he saw Izuku. "Midoriya-kun! I won't allow you to take another step!" His engines roared, and in a blur of blue streaks, he lunged forward with incredible speed.

But Izuku didn't flinch.

He shifted his weight slightly, his eyes following every motion with surgical precision. Iida's speed was impressive, but he was linear—predictable.

As Iida closed the distance, Izuku stepped aside at the last possible second, catching Iida's forearm and twisting with perfect timing. Using the momentum of Iida's own dash, he pivoted, sending him crashing into the wall shoulder-first with a heavy thud.

Iida grunted, stumbling, but recovered quickly, spinning to face Izuku again. "Impressive, Midoriya-kun! But you won't—!"

Iida launched himself again, engines screaming, this time zig-zagging slightly to throw him off. But Izuku was already moving, reading the pattern before it fully formed. He ducked under the first swing, tapped Iida's calf with a quick, precise strike, and used the opening to shove him backward.

Iida skidded, breathing hard, his eyes widening as he realized Midoriya wasn't charging recklessly, wasn't hesitating like before—he was reading him.

Izuku's voice was calm, even as he advanced. "Your balance shifts just before you dash. It's subtle, but you telegraph the direction of your next step every time."

Iida gritted his teeth, pushing forward again, but Izuku was already moving, slipping past his guard with smooth, almost inhuman reflexes. In one swift motion, he grabbed Iida's sleeve, hooked his leg, and brought him down hard against the floor, pinning him.

The "villain weapon" lay unguarded.

Izuku looked down at Iida, his expression unreadable. "It's over."

Before Iida could recover, Izuku touched the mock bomb.

All Might's voice boomed over the speakers: "TEAM A—VICTORY!"

In the observation room, the silence was heavy. Students stared at the monitors, wide-eyed. Izuku's movements had been clean, efficient, almost too professional for a first-year student.

"That wasn't luck," Yaoyorozu murmured, her brows furrowed. "He… analyzed Iida-kun's movements perfectly. And the way he moved—like he'd trained for years."

Bakugo, watching on another screen as he chased Ochako, growled, his teeth grinding. "Damn nerd…"

The monitors flickered as the simulation ended, the bold letters "TEAM A – VICTORY" flashing across the screens. For a moment, no one said anything. The usual cheer and playful jabs that followed a Hero/Villain exercise were conspicuously absent.

The students stared at the replay as it looped—Izuku's movements slow and precise under the cameras, every dodge and counter executed with a cold efficiency that didn't look like a first-year student improvising. It looked practiced. Deliberate. Professional.

Yaoyorozu was the first to speak, her tone thoughtful, almost uneasy. "That… wasn't what I expected from Midoriya-san at all. His strategy was perfect, but… the way he fought—there was no hesitation, no wasted movement."

Kaminari let out a low whistle, scratching the back of his head. "Seriously… that was kinda scary. I mean, he didn't even look nervous."

Ashido nodded quickly, her usual bubbly tone edged with unease. "Yeah… and the way he pinned Iida at the end? That wasn't just luck. He knew exactly where Iida was gonna move."

Shoto Todoroki, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, simply hummed in quiet agreement, his heterochromatic eyes narrowing slightly at the replay. "He fought like someone who's been doing this for years."

Meanwhile, Bakugo sat rigid in his chair, his palms still faintly smoking. His crimson eyes were glued to the screen, narrowing with every passing second. He could see it too—the calm, the confidence, the lack of frantic energy he remembered from the "Deku" he used to know.

"Tch…" Bakugo's hands clenched into fists. "That damn nerd… He's different."

Izuku and Ochako emerged from the building, the rest of the class gathering around them as All Might called out praise.

"WELL DONE, YOUNG MIDORIYA, YOUNG URARAKA!" All Might's booming voice carried across the training ground. "Textbook strategy! Excellent communication! You should both be proud!"

Ochako, still a little out of breath, grinned sheepishly. "I-It was all Izuku-kun's idea, really. He told me exactly what to do…"

All eyes shifted to Izuku.

But the green-haired boy only gave a polite nod, his expression calm, almost detached. "It was a team effort," he said simply, his voice quiet and measured.

It was such a simple, modest statement, but something about the way he said it—the way his posture remained relaxed, his gaze already wandering toward the distance as if he was still thinking through the battle—made the others uneasy.

Mineta leaned toward Sero, whispering, "Dude… is it just me, or does he look… kinda scary like this?"

"I don't think he blinked once in that whole fight," Sero muttered back.

Ochako, noticing the quiet tension, stepped closer to Izuku. "Hey, Izuku-kun," she said, trying to bring him back to the group, "you really were amazing back there! But… you're okay, right? You're not, like… overthinking again, are you?"

Izuku blinked, finally meeting her gaze. For a moment, the cold, focused look softened, replaced by the familiar flicker of warmth. He gave her a small, reassuring smile. "I'm fine, Uraraka-san. Really."

But even as he said it, his eyes drifted back toward the ground, calculating, distant—already reviewing every move in his head, already analyzing what he could have done better.

And as the class filed back toward the observation deck, the murmurs followed him: admiration, curiosity… and just a hint of unease.

The clatter of trays and low hum of conversation filled the cafeteria, but at one corner table, the atmosphere was quieter, almost subdued. Izuku sat with Ochako, Iida, Momo, and Shoji, picking absently at his food. His posture was straight, his movements precise, but his gaze kept drifting—somewhere distant, caught in thought.

Ochako was the first to break the silence, setting down her chopsticks with a soft clack. "Izuku-kun… are you okay? You've been acting… different lately." Her eyes were soft, worried.

Iida nodded firmly, adjusting his glasses. "Uraraka is correct, Midoriya-kun. Your tactical performance during the Hero/Villain exercise was extraordinary, but… you've seemed unusually tense these past few days. Is something troubling you?"

Momo leaned forward slightly, her brows knitting with quiet concern. "You shouldn't stress yourself like this, Midoriya-san. Training is important, yes, but if you overwork your mind, you won't be at your best when it really counts."

Shoji, ever quiet, inclined his head slightly in agreement, multiple eyes glancing at Izuku with quiet expectation.

Izuku blinked, pulled from his thoughts by their worried faces. For a moment, his serious expression held—but then, seeing the genuine concern in their eyes, it softened. He forced himself to exhale slowly, his shoulders easing as a small, apologetic smile tugged at his lips.

"You're right," he admitted, his voice quieter, warmer than it had been all morning. "I've just… been tense. My mind's been a little clouded lately. And honestly,"—he rubbed the back of his neck with a sheepish chuckle—"I think a lot of it was just stress over designing my costume."

That made Ochako tilt her head. "Your costume? But it looks great!"

Izuku chuckled again, looking embarrassed. "Thanks, but… it wasn't what I originally planned. At first, I was trying to make it brighter, modeled after All Might. Something… you know, heroic."

Momo's eyes sparkled with curiosity. "You had an original design? Do you still have the sketch?"

Izuku hesitated for half a second, then nodded, pulling his hero notebook from his bag. "Of course I do. Here—" He flipped through the pages, finally turning the notebook toward them.

The sketch showed a bright, slightly clunky version of his current costume: lighter colors, an exaggerated smiley mouthguard, and long, pointed ears attached to the hood.

Ochako blinked. Iida adjusted his glasses, leaning closer. Momo tilted her head thoughtfully.

And then Ochako spoke, her tone hesitant but honest. "Um… Midoriya-kun… were you… going for a bunny design?"

Izuku froze.

His face turned red instantly. "W-What?! No! It was supposed to be—! I mean—it's a reference to—!" He waved his hands frantically, looking mortified as his voice pitched higher. "It was supposed to symbolize All Might! The ears are like his tufts of hair! Not… not a bunny!"

Ochako tried to hold back a giggle, her cheeks puffing as she covered her mouth. Momo raised a polite hand to her lips, but even she was smiling faintly. Iida, for his part, looked like he was fighting very hard not to laugh, his shoulders stiff as his mouth twitched against his usual stoicism.

Shoji, ever polite, simply looked away, though one of his eyes seemed suspiciously amused.

Izuku groaned, burying his face in his hands. "Why does everyone always think it's a bunny…?"

Ochako finally broke into soft laughter, shaking her head. "It's cute, though, Izuku-kun. I think it would've looked great!"

"No, it wouldn't have!" Izuku muffled into his hands, but there was no heat in his voice—just embarrassment.

And for the first time in days, the group's laughter felt easy, natural. The tension around the table seemed to lift, at least for now.

The muted clatter of ceramic cups and the gentle hiss of the espresso machine provided a quiet backdrop to the small, unassuming coffee shop. Detective Naomasa Tsukauchi sat across from the man he now knew as Albus, formerly Haruto Yasuda. A steaming mug of black coffee sat untouched before Naomasa, a mirror to the tension in his rigid posture. Albus, in contrast, nursed a latte, a faint, almost imperceptible smile playing on his lips as he gazed out the window at the bustling street. His usual crisp police uniform was replaced by casual, well-fitting civilian clothes, yet he still exuded an unnerving composure.

"Thank you for meeting me, Yasuda-kun," Naomasa began, his voice calm, professional as always, though a steeliness underscored each word. He took a sip of his coffee, letting the warmth spread through him, but his eyes never left the Lord's face. "I appreciate you taking the time out of your… current duties, whatever they may be."

Albus chuckled softly, a pleasant, almost melodic sound that grated on Naomasa's nerves. "It's no trouble at all, Detective. I always enjoy a good cup of coffee, and the company is a bonus. Besides," he added, turning his gaze back to Naomasa, his amber eyes holding that familiar, knowing glint, "I imagine you had a few more questions after our… last encounter at the precinct."

Naomasa's jaw tightened almost imperceptibly. "Indeed. A great many, in fact. Starting with your continued presence in the city, and your… association with Kagutsuchi." His voice dropped slightly, losing its casual edge. "You were introduced as a Lord. I'd like to understand the implications of that, now that we're no longer in a police interrogation room."

Albus's faint smile didn't waver. He simply raised an eyebrow, inviting Naomasa to continue, his composure absolute.

"Specifically," Naomasa pressed, leaning forward just a fraction, his voice barely a whisper now, "your role. Your purpose. Kagutsuchi was… less than forthcoming with details, beyond the fact that you were 'conveniently' placed within our ranks." Naomasa watched, his heart hammering, for any flicker of evasion, any sign of a lie.

Albus took another slow, deliberate sip of his latte, his amber eyes never leaving Naomasa's. He swallowed, then set his cup down with a soft, precise motion. His smile widened, just a fraction, revealing nothing but a quiet, almost serene amusement, tinged with a hint of pride.

"And what," Albus finally said, his voice as calm and unhurried as ever, perfectly level, "do you expect to hear, Detective? What truth do you believe will satisfy your curiosity?" He didn't deny his nature or his allegiance. He simply met Naomasa's gaze, the depth in his eyes seeming to stretch into something vast and unknowable, a silent, chilling affirmation of his identity as a Lord.

Naomasa leaned back, his gaze unwavering. "Very well, Yasuda-kun. Let's start with something simpler, then. Your job at the precinct. What was your intention for taking that position? Why infiltrate the police force?"

Albus's smile remained, calm and unbothered. He picked up his latte again, swirling the foam gently with a spoon. "My intention?" he mused, his voice utterly devoid of malice or deception. "I was merely curious. The human systems of law and order are quite intricate. I wished to observe them firsthand. From the inside."

Naomasa's brow furrowed, a flicker of skepticism crossing his face. "Curiosity?" he echoed, the word flat, disbelieving. "You expect me to believe that a 'Lord' of Kagutsuchi's hierarchy, a being capable of… that," he gestured vaguely, recalling the disintegration of Luteus, "took a menial clerical job out of simple academic interest?"

He waited, his Quirk, Truth Serum, poised to detect the slightest falsehood. But there was nothing. No tell. No hum of deceit. Just the maddening, serene calm of Albus's expression.

Then, the memory surfaced, sharp and cold: Kagutsuchi's casual admission that his kind could not be swayed by human Quirks, that their very nature rendered such abilities inert. And the chilling truth that Lords, as he had implied, seemed incapable of outright lies. Albus wasn't denying it. He was simply stating what he perceived as the truth.

Naomasa's jaw tightened. He was telling the truth. Or, at least, he believed he was. And that was perhaps even more unsettling than a blatant lie.

Albus stirred his latte slowly, the faint clink of the spoon against porcelain the only sound between them for a moment. "You're overcomplicating this, Detective," he said finally, his tone almost indulgent, like a teacher explaining something to a particularly stubborn student. "Curiosity is not such a strange motive. We are not machines, bound only to our duties. Some of us… enjoy watching the world you've built for yourselves. Seeing how you rise, how you fall. You'd be surprised how much can be learned by simply sitting at a desk and filing paperwork."

Naomasa's frown deepened. "Learned for what purpose?"

Albus's amber eyes slid back to him, sharp now, glinting with something ancient and unyielding. "Preparation."

The word hung in the air like a blade.

Naomasa shifted slightly, leaning forward. "Preparation for what?"

Albus's faint smile returned, though his gaze didn't soften. "You already know the answer to that, Detective. You just don't want to say it aloud." He leaned back in his chair, folding his arms loosely as if to signal the conversation was beneath further elaboration. "My work here was observation, nothing more. Had I been deployed for something else, you wouldn't be sitting here questioning me over coffee."

That last statement carried no threat in tone, yet the weight of the truth behind it pressed down on Naomasa like lead.

For a long moment, neither spoke. The bustle of the coffee shop outside seemed strangely distant, muffled by the gravity of the conversation.

Finally, Naomasa broke the silence, his voice low, measured. "And now? Are you still observing, or should I be worried you're preparing to act?"

Albus regarded him for a long beat, then set his cup down with a soft click. "If I were here to act, Yasuda-kun would no longer exist." His smile widened just slightly, but it lacked any real humor. "Consider my continued presence… a good sign."

Naomasa's gaze hardened, a flicker of genuine anger in his eyes. "A 'good sign'? You were inside our system, Yasuda-kun. You had access to sensitive information. To cases, to Quirks, to the identities of heroes and civilians alike. What did you do with that information?"

Albus met his stare, his expression unperturbed. "I observed it. I processed it. I filed it." He paused, his amber eyes holding a faint, almost imperceptible gleam. "And I learned from it. Just as I said."

Naomasa slammed his fist softly on the table, the ceramic cups rattling. "Don't play coy with me! You know what I'm asking! Did you transmit any of that data to Kagutsuchi? To other 'Lords'? Is our entire network compromised because you decided to indulge your 'curiosity'?"

Albus sighed, a soft, almost weary sound, as if Naomasa's persistence was tiresome. "Detective, I am a being of observation. I do not 'transmit' data in the way you understand it. My purpose was to understand your systems, your methods, your vulnerabilities. The knowledge I gained is inherent to my being. It is simply… known." His gaze was calm, utterly sincere. "And yes, Kagutsuchi is aware of what I know, just as I am aware of what he knows. We are… connected, in that regard."

Naomasa gritted his teeth, the implication chilling him to the bone. Not a data breach, but a direct, internal acquisition of knowledge by a being seemingly immune to their defenses. He was telling the truth. His Quirk remained silent.

"So, you're telling me," Naomasa said, his voice strained, "that everything you learned, every piece of information you processed, is now accessible to Kagutsuchi and presumably other Lords, simply because you existed within our precinct?"

Albus nodded slowly, a faint, almost sympathetic curve to his lips. "In essence, yes. It is a… natural consequence of my presence. Think of it as a form of… passive intelligence gathering. No wires, no hacking. Just… being."

Naomasa closed his eyes for a moment, a wave of profound weariness washing over him. The sheer audacity, the terrifying simplicity of it, was almost too much to bear. It wasn't a betrayal in the human sense, but a fundamental violation of their security, their trust, their very understanding of how information could be compromised.

He opened his eyes, fixing Albus with a grim stare. "And what about the cases you handled? The victims, the witnesses, the confidential informants? Are their lives now at risk because of your 'curiosity'?"

Albus tilted his head slightly, his expression unreadable. "The information I gathered pertains to the systems of law enforcement, Detective. The patterns, the weaknesses, the operational methods. Not the individual fates of your… 'criminals' or 'victims.' My interest was in the machine, not its cogs." He paused, then added, his voice softer, "Unless, of course, those individuals became relevant to the Will of Darkness. But that is a separate matter, and not one that was part of my precinct duties."

Naomasa scoffed, a bitter, humorless sound. "Convenient."

Albus merely shrugged, a subtle, almost human gesture. "It is simply the truth."

Naomasa sat back, his hand loosening from the cup he'd been gripping too tightly, his knuckles white. There was a sharp, bitter taste at the back of his throat—anger, frustration, and a dawning, unavoidable understanding. There was never a breach to stop. No system to patch. Just his presence alone was enough to undo everything.

Albus, as if sensing the shift in his thoughts, offered a faint, almost pitying smile. "Detective," he said, his tone softening just a fraction, "if it's any comfort… had we intended to use what I learned against you, you wouldn't be sitting here right now."

That did little to ease the knot in Naomasa's chest.

His fingers tightened around his cup again, the ceramic creaking faintly under the pressure. He stared at Albus, his jaw set, his voice dipping lower, quieter, as if lowering it could make the weight of his question any less crushing.

"Then tell me about the Agito," Naomasa said.

Albus blinked once, his faint smile not fading but softening slightly into something closer to curiosity. "The Agito?" he echoed, as though the term were no more loaded than the word rain.

"Yes," Naomasa pressed, leaning forward again, his elbows now on the table. His dark eyes burned with something dangerously close to desperation. "Why are they really hunted? Kagutsuchi… he said something to Midoriya, didn't he? Something about testing him. About… killing them." His voice tightened with each word. "But I want to hear it from you, Yasuda-kun. Not Kagutsuchi. Not from his smug, half-truths and cryptic games. From you."

Albus tilted his head slightly, the motion slow, deliberate. "Detective, if Kagutsuchi-sama has already explained it, then—"

"No," Naomasa cut him off sharply, his voice cracking just a little. He sat back only to slam his palm on the table again, drawing a glance from a nearby customer before he lowered his voice to a strained whisper. "I said I want to hear it from you. I don't trust him. He plays with people. You… you're different. You at least talk straight. Please."

The last word hung in the air, not quite a plea, but dangerously close to one.

Albus regarded him for a long, quiet moment, his amber eyes unreadable, and for the first time, his usual air of detachment seemed to waver—not from discomfort, but as though he were genuinely surprised by Naomasa's earnestness.

Finally, he sighed through his nose, setting his latte down again with a soft click. "Very well, Detective," he said, his voice as calm as ever, but softer now, almost… indulgent. "But understand—what I tell you won't make you feel any better."

Naomasa's hands tightened on the table, but he nodded sharply.

Albus leaned back, crossing one leg over the other, his gaze turning momentarily to the window as if considering where to begin. "The Agito," he said, his tone now shifting into something closer to a lecturer's, "are not… accidents, as Quirks are. They are the intended progression of human existence. A refinement. The next step in evolution. Stronger, faster, more adaptable. They are, in essence, humanity's… replacement."

Naomasa's jaw tightened, but he didn't interrupt.

"That is why they are tested," Albus continued. "The weak are culled early—Minor Lords are deployed for that. It's efficient. Those who survive prove themselves capable of evolving further. Only when an Agito grows strong enough to be considered… dangerous, or rather significant, do High Lords like Kagutsuchi-sama step in. Not to train them. Not to nurture them."

Albus finally looked back at Naomasa, his gaze steady, almost pitying. "To determine whether they are worthy of continuing to exist at all."

Naomasa's breath caught, his mind flashing through Midoriya's face, the boy's determination, his quiet desperation.

"And if they're not?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Albus tilted his head slightly, his words simple, final. "Then they are erased. Completely. Because evolution has no room for mistakes."

The silence that followed was suffocating. Naomasa stared at Albus, his nails digging into his palms, and for a fleeting moment, he looked almost… defeated.

Albus, however, simply picked his latte back up, taking another slow sip, his expression as composed as ever. "You wanted the truth, Detective," he said after a moment. "Now you have it."

Naomasa sat rigid, his mind racing, his chest tight. For the first time in years, he felt like a man standing at the edge of something far larger than anything his badge or his Quirk could protect him from. His fingers tightened further against the table's edge, his knuckles white. He forced himself to speak, his voice low, strained, almost hoarse.

"Why?" he asked. "Why does it have to be this way? Why kill them at all? If the Agito are supposed to be humanity's next step, then why not… let them live? Let them evolve?"

Albus didn't answer immediately. He watched Naomasa for a long, quiet moment, his amber eyes calm, almost sympathetic—but not wavering. When he did speak, it was in that same measured, matter-of-fact tone, as if he were reciting an unchangeable law of nature.

"Because we have to," he said simply. "It isn't a choice, Detective. It's a Divine Decree."

Naomasa's brows furrowed, his breath catching as he leaned forward. "Divine Decree?"

Albus nodded, his expression utterly steady, his tone almost clinical. "Every Lord, from the lowest Minor to the highest seats, operates under them. It is not a suggestion. It is not… negotiable. The Agito are a trial, a test of worthiness. Those who cannot prove themselves must be culled, because allowing them to persist would contaminate the purity of the next stage. That is the Decree we are bound to carry out."

Naomasa's jaw tightened. "And Kagutsuchi? He acts like he's untouchable. Like he's above everything. Don't tell me he follows orders."

Albus's gaze didn't flicker, but there was a subtle weight to his next words, a quiet, unshakable certainty.

"Even Kagutsuchi-sama is beholden to the Decrees. High Lords are granted autonomy in how they carry them out, but not whether they do. Not even he can disobey."

Naomasa sat back slowly, his pulse hammering in his ears, his mind racing with the horrifying implications. "So if the Decree says Midoriya fails… Kagutsuchi will kill him."

Albus didn't soften, didn't flinch, didn't lie.

"Yes."

The word landed with the weight of a gavel, final and absolute.

Naomasa stared down at the untouched coffee before him, his fists tightening so hard his nails dug into his palms. For the first time in his career, he felt utterly powerless—not against a villain, not against corruption, but against something far greater than any human institution.

He took a slow, deliberate breath, trying to steady his racing thoughts. The implications of what Albus had just revealed about the Agito, coupled with the chilling knowledge of Kagutsuchi's absolute power, left him feeling profoundly exposed. But one question still gnawed at him, a cold, persistent dread.

"Yasuda-kun," Naomasa began, his voice hesitant, almost a whisper, as if speaking it aloud would make it more real. "Are there… are there others like you? Other Lords, working within… our government? Our institutions?"

Albus tilted his head slightly, a faint, almost imperceptible smile touching his lips. He picked up his latte, swirling it gently. "Detective, it is not as intrusive as you imagine. We do not 'work' in your government, not in the way you understand it. We simply… take up positions. Live what you would consider normal lives. If only to blend in."

Naomasa's brow furrowed, his skepticism warring with the chilling certainty that Albus was, somehow, telling the truth. "And why? For what purpose do they 'blend in'?"

Albus took a sip of his latte, his amber eyes calm, unblinking. "Many do it for the same reason I did, Detective. Curiosity. The human world is a fascinating tapestry. Seeing how your societies function, how your laws are made and enforced, how your economies rise and fall… it provides valuable insight." He paused, then added, his voice dropping slightly, "Others, well, they are simply being vigilant."

The word hung in the air, heavy with unspoken meaning. Vigilant. Not observing for curiosity, but for something more active, more predatory. Naomasa's blood ran cold. He thought of the countless faces he saw every day—colleagues, civil servants, politicians. Any one of them, a Lord, living a mundane life, silently watching, waiting.

His gaze swept around the coffee shop, suddenly seeing every customer, every barista, every passerby through a new, terrifying lens. The quiet hum of conversation, the innocent laughter, the ordinary rhythm of life—it all felt like a fragile illusion, a thin veil over a hidden reality. The sheer scale of the potential infiltration, the casual, almost indifferent way Albus spoke of it, was horrifying.

Naomasa's hands clenched into fists under the table, his knuckles white. He had always believed in the clear lines between good and evil, hero and villain. But this… this was a pervasive, insidious presence, woven into the very fabric of society, indistinguishable from humanity itself. And his Quirk, his most reliable tool for discerning truth, was useless against it. He was blind. They all were.

Naomasa swallowed hard, forcing himself to keep his breathing steady. "Vigilant…" he repeated, his voice low, careful. "Vigilant for what?"

Albus's faint smile didn't waver, but his amber eyes shifted to meet Naomasa's, and for the first time, there was a subtle sharpness behind them—a glint that felt less like curiosity and more like a warning.

"For deviation," Albus said simply.

Naomasa's throat tightened. "Deviation?"

"From the Decrees," Albus clarified, his tone calm, almost conversational, but with a weight that pressed down like a storm about to break. "The world must move toward the path laid out for it. Too much chaos, too much resistance to what comes next… and intervention becomes necessary. Think of it as course correction."

Naomasa stared at him, his mind racing, and for a long, cold moment, he felt as if the ground beneath his feet was slipping away. "And you—" his voice was tight, strained, "—you'd intervene? Or any of you would? If you decided… society was straying too far?"

Albus tilted his head slightly, his smile faint but almost pitying now, as though speaking to a child who had only just grasped how the world truly worked. "It wouldn't be my decision, Detective. It never is. Orders come from above. We simply… carry them out. Sometimes that means watching. Sometimes it means… cleaning up."

Naomasa's jaw locked, the words hammering in his head. Cleaning up. He didn't ask what that meant. He already knew.

Albus glanced at his wristwatch, then back to Naomasa, his serene demeanor settling back over him like a well-fitted coat. "I should be going. You've asked much, and I've answered more than I probably should have. But… I appreciate the conversation, Detective. You're an honest man. That's rare."

He rose from his seat with an unhurried grace, setting a few bills neatly on the table for his coffee. Before he turned to leave, he paused, his amber eyes meeting Naomasa's one last time.

"For what it's worth," Albus said, his voice soft, almost kind, "I hope your Midoriya-kun survives. Kagutsuchi-sama is not without… respect for strength."

And with that, he left, weaving through the quiet hum of the café as if he were just another man heading back to work. But to Naomasa, watching his retreating back, the room felt colder, smaller, and infinitely more dangerous than it had only minutes ago.

The faculty room was quiet when Naomasa entered, the door sliding shut behind him with a soft hiss. The usual hum of mild conversation and shuffling papers was absent, replaced by an almost oppressive stillness. Principal Nezu sat at the head of the table, his paws folded neatly, his black eyes sharp and focused on the detective as if he had been waiting for this very moment.

Aizawa lounged in his usual chair, arms crossed, scarf draped lazily around his shoulders, but his tired eyes tracked Naomasa with an alertness that betrayed his disinterest. Toshinori stood near the window, still in his civilian form, his jaw tight as if he had been holding himself in check for hours. Present Mic, Midnight, Cementoss, and Snipe were already seated, their expressions ranging from mild curiosity to visible unease.

"Detective Tsukauchi," Nezu greeted calmly, though there was an edge of expectation in his tone. "You've spoken with Yasuda-kun, I take it?"

Naomasa nodded, setting a file folder on the table, though he didn't open it. His face was drawn, the usual quiet confidence replaced with something far heavier. "I have. And I think you all need to hear exactly what he said."

Toshinori shifted, his blue eyes narrowing. "And?" he asked, his voice clipped.

Naomasa took a slow breath, steadying himself. "The Agito aren't just… anomalies. According to Albus—Yasuda-kun—they are the intended next step of human evolution. Quirks were a deviation. The Agito are… a correction."

A ripple of unease went through the room. Midnight leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms, her playful demeanor gone. "A correction? You mean to say—what—Quirks were a mistake?"

"That's exactly what he said," Naomasa confirmed grimly. "The Agito are meant to replace us. Slowly, but inevitably. And the reason they're being hunted by these so-called Lords isn't to stop them—it's to test them. Minor Lords are deployed first. Their job is to cull the weak, kill the ones who can't evolve fast enough. If an Agito grows too strong, too… significant, that's when High Lords are deployed."

At that, Toshinori turned fully from the window, his fists clenched so tightly his knuckles whitened. "High Lords… like Kagutsuchi."

Naomasa nodded, his tone hardening. "Exactly. Kagutsuchi's earlier implications are now confirmed. They only intervene if an Agito fundamentally disrupts their grand design."

A tense silence followed. Present Mic finally spoke, his usual boisterous tone subdued. "So you're saying… Midoriya's life is basically on a timer. If he doesn't pass this test of theirs, if he's not strong enough—"

"He's erased," Naomasa said flatly. "Completely. And if he is strong enough, then…" He hesitated, his jaw tightening. "Then he becomes exactly what they want him to be. The next step. Humanity's replacement."

Midnight swore under her breath. Cementoss shifted heavily in his seat, his stone-like features grim.

Aizawa, however, spoke up after a long moment, his voice low but sharp. "So either he dies, or he becomes something that might not even be on our side anymore."

"Correct," Naomasa confirmed, his voice tight. "But that's not all."

All eyes turned to him again.

Naomasa glanced at Nezu, whose sharp gaze betrayed that he had already begun to suspect what was coming. "Yasuda-kun admitted something else. The Lords aren't just confined to places like Kagutsuchi's current post. They live among us. Not in hiding—not really. They take jobs. They blend in. He said many of them do it out of curiosity… but some are simply vigilant."

The word hung in the air, heavy and cold.

"Vigilant for what?" Midnight asked, her voice lower now, almost cautious.

"Deviation," Naomasa said grimly. "If humanity—if society—strays too far from the course they've been ordered to maintain, if things start to spiral in ways that threaten this… 'design,' they intervene. Quietly. Subtly. And if necessary—"

"They clean up," Aizawa finished, his expression unreadable but his eyes narrowing with grim understanding.

Present Mic looked around at the others, his jaw tight. "So what, any one of us—hell, anyone in the government—could be one of them? Just… waiting?"

"That's exactly the implication," Naomasa said. "Yasuda-kun wasn't trying to threaten me when he said it. To him, it's just… fact. They're everywhere, and we'd never know until they acted. And worse, every bit of information they learn—every piece—is passively shared. Kagutsuchi knows everything Yasuda learned while he was in the police force, just because Yasuda existed there."

Toshinori slammed a fist lightly against the wall, his head bowed. "Damn it… damn it all…"

Nezu, however, remained still, his paws folded. His eyes, however, glinted with something far sharper than anger—calculation. "So," he said slowly, "we are dealing not merely with an outside threat, but with an entity that considers our entire society a… field experiment. With agents placed wherever they choose, acting with complete autonomy, answerable only to orders we cannot even begin to trace."

"More than that," Naomasa added, his tone grim. "Even Kagutsuchi is beholden to those orders. Yasuda-kun made it clear—this isn't personal for him. It's a Divine Decree. Even he doesn't get to disobey."

The silence that followed was suffocating. Every pair of eyes in the room betrayed the same quiet, dawning horror.

Finally, Nezu exhaled softly, almost thoughtfully, his small paw tapping against the table. "Then the question becomes…" His gaze swept the room, sharp and deliberate. "How long can we keep Midoriya-kun alive, under their watch, before they decide to intervene?"

No one answered.

The silence in the faculty room stretched, heavier than before, thick enough to smother the usual rhythm of quiet conversation. The implications of Naomasa's words hung over them like a storm cloud, every breath in the room taut with unease.

It was Present Mic who finally broke it, his voice uncharacteristically low. "So, let me get this straight… we could be sitting across from a Lord right now and not even know it? Hell, we could've worked with one for years without a clue?"

Naomasa gave a slow, grim nod. "That's exactly what Yasuda-kun implied. They don't hide in the shadows. They don't need to. They take jobs. They live normal lives. Blending in is easy for them because they don't need to pretend. And some of them…" His gaze swept the room, his expression grim. "…are placed specifically to watch. To wait. To act when ordered."

A low curse slipped from Midnight, her arms folding tight across her chest as if warding off the thought. "So, what? Any one of our old colleagues, heroes, even Pro Heroes we trust—they could've been a Lord all along?"

Cementoss shifted uncomfortably in his seat, his massive hands tightening. "Even former students," he muttered, his stone-like features hardening at the thought.

Aizawa's tired eyes narrowed further, though his voice remained steady. "We wouldn't know. Not unless they wanted us to."

Toshinori, still standing by the window, turned sharply, his civilian frame tense with anger. "You mean to tell me… that for all these years, while we were fighting villains, saving lives, teaching kids—they could have been standing right beside us, watching, judging, reporting everything to some… some 'Divine Decree?'" His fist slammed lightly against the window frame, his frustration evident.

Naomasa didn't flinch. "Yes. That's exactly what it means. And there's nothing we can do to detect them. Yasuda-kun made it clear—our Quirks are useless against them. They can't be compelled, can't be coerced. Truth and lies… don't mean the same thing to them. What they know is simply… known. And shared."

A chill rippled through the room. Even Nezu, for all his composed demeanor, was unusually still, his small black eyes narrowing in thought.

"Think about it," Naomasa continued, his voice low but firm. "How many Pro Heroes have you all worked alongside, trusted implicitly, without question? How many of them have access to sensitive information, or have taken sudden retirements or left the field for 'personal reasons'? How many government officials move quietly in and out of posts, unremarked upon?" He leaned forward, his hands flat on the table. "Any one of them could be a Lord. And we wouldn't know until they acted."

A heavy silence followed. Present Mic shifted uncomfortably, his usual easygoing smile absent. "That's… that's messed up. We've been looking for villains in the shadows all this time, but the real danger's been sitting in the same damn room with us."

Midnight rubbed her temples, her voice low. "And we can't do a thing about it. We can't investigate them. We can't confront them. Because what? They're just… part of society, like any other civilian?"

"Exactly," Aizawa said flatly. "And even if we did find one, what would we do? Fight them? You saw what Kagutsuchi did to All Might. Picking that fight would get us all killed."

Cementoss grunted in agreement, his usual calm giving way to unease. "If Kagutsuchi is the 'nuclear option,' as he said, what does that make the others? How many are out there, just… waiting?"

All eyes turned to Nezu, who remained silent for a long moment, his paws steepled, his expression unreadable. When he finally spoke, his voice was calm, almost unnervingly so.

"It doesn't matter how many, or where," Nezu said. His sharp gaze swept across each of them, his tone cool and deliberate. "What matters is that we now know the truth: our society has never truly been ours to control. We've been living under the illusion of autonomy, while they've been… managing us."

Toshinori looked at him sharply. "So what do you propose we do? We can't exactly fight back against that."

Nezu's black eyes glinted, a flicker of something sharp and calculating behind them. "We do what we've always done. We protect our students. Midoriya-kun, in particular. Because if these Lords are content to let us carry on so long as we remain… useful, then the worst thing we can do is appear unpredictable." His tone dropped slightly, colder. "We don't antagonize them. We watch. We wait. And we prepare for the day when that… 'Divine Decree' decides to turn its attention on us."

The weight of his words settled over the room like a shroud. No one spoke after that.

Because, deep down, they all understood the truth Nezu hadn't voiced outright.

They weren't just teachers anymore.

They were pawns in a game they hadn't even known they were playing.