### **Notes:**

* Still year 2
* Deku-kun, like everyone else, is missing a few screws in his head
* also getting brava + gentle, so they have real security cameras and booting up computers

## Deku-kun

### **Waking Up as Not Helmet**

Deku blinked slowly, waking up was always so hard. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, counting slowly from one to ten, and then opened his eyes again. He took in the walls around him and then suddenly realized that this wasn’t his room.

He shot up to a sitting position and rolled right off the bed, in a hurried effort to get to his feet. He clattered to the ground, feeling the world spin around him and he hissed as his entire body screamed in protest.

Where the fuck was he? The last thing he remembered was… was Kouta.

Was Kouta okay? More importantly, if he was here, what happened with the fight? Was he… was he dead? He wasn’t that much pain, and now that the vertigo was fading, he had a better sense of himself. Aside from his underwear and the array of bandages, he was naked. Whoever undressed him, patched him, put him into this bed, they saw his scars and the remains of his body. How long was he out? He didn’t seem to have a lot of injuries in general.

The door suddenly opened, and he scooted as far back as he could, just barely managing to remember to grab one of the sheets to cover himself. His back and head hit the dresser, nearly knocking it over and thinks that he’s drowning in his panic.

“I’ll leave!” he shouted out, his voice breaking from how long it's been since he spoke, “Please, I’ll leave! I-”

“Hey!” Yamada’s voice boomed over, louder than the panic, and Deku sucked his breath in hard. The action made his entire body protest, and he shuddered against the pain. The blond kneeled down in front of him, keeping both of his hands open and in eyesight. “Hey, none of that, okay? I need you to breathe for me. Ready? In,” Deku trembled, but managed to pull some oxygen into his lungs. “Out.”

He exhaled hashly, but remained tense.

“That’s it. Keep doing that, okay?”

Deku focused on breathing. He closed his eyes in to just focus on his breaths, and slowly opened his eyes again. He was gentle, he was so gentle, and it was going to make him cry. He forced himself to think beyond that. When his panic receded just a little bit more, he could see that behind Yamada was Chisaki.

Chisaki.

Did he… Overhaul him? It would explain why most of his body was patched up. Not all his injuries were from monsters, like the burns and the hits that Muscular had left on him…

He squinted his eyes, but relaxed his shoulders and accepted defeat.

They had left the door open, and Deku had no doubt that there were others outside. He didn’t dare delude himself. There was no way in hell he would be able to get out on his own when he doesn’t even have his clothes on. Of all the people in the room, he was the only one that needed a weapon to defend himself, and he had no doubts that they would show no mercy to put him down.

No way to run, no way to fight, Deku could only hope that they would just let him leave. Or that they would kill him quickly. No, considering what he had done, that was wistful thinking. In fact, if anything, he should be honored for receiving death from their hands.

“Hey, none of that,” Yamada said softly, collecting his attention, “Let’s get you back on the bed, okay?”

He extended his hand out and Deku stared at it.

“...It’s okay,” Deku said quietly. The panic in his heart had quieted down, but he couldn’t get his mind to quiet down. As a result, all the words that he could have said boiled over and the only things he managed to utter was a quiet, “I… I leave.”

There was a long silence. He clutched the blanket to his chest a little tighter, and then took a deep breath. He relaxed his grip and dipped his head forward. His back and neck ached, pulling on bandages and the mending skin.

He knew how this looked. This whole time, he had lived by lying to them. He had taken advantage of their weakened-state and lured them here with a false sense of security. He indulged in their resources and killed many of their friends and family. Even if he didn’t mean for it to ever become like this or for them to stay, he never came clean to them either. This was the worst way for them to find this out.

He was just a little, weak, worthless, quirkless boy this whole time. Even death was too good for him.

Whatever they decide to do to him, he had to accept it. It was the least he could do. It was the right thing to do.

He could only hope that his childhood friend will forgive him for being unable to protect this place. From his memory of him, it was unlikely.

“I got it from here,” Chisaki said as he stepped forward. Deku tensed, and when Yamada stepped back so he could kneel down in front of him, forced his body to relax. “...I need to do a check-up on you, alright? You got banged up pretty badly.” He spoke very slowly, like he was trying to coax a small and frightened animal out from underneath the bed, “Does anything hurt?”

The young man blinked, looking up at him in shock, like he didn’t understand why Chisaki was asking him this, and then shook his head. What was the point of patching him up when he was just going to die? Deku couldn’t understand it. Was this kindness? It was a waste of supplies, if they weren’t careful.

“I’m… I’m fine,” he said quietly.

Those gold eyes lingered on his face. If he thought that the man could read right through him with a helmet on, that had nothing on how it felt to feel his eyes on his bare face. “...Let’s get you back to bed. I’ll be the one to decide that.” With that, he extended both of his hands out to him.

Deku eyed the gloves for a second before his eyes flitted up to Chisaki’s eyes before they dropped to the ground instead. He couldn’t even bear to stare at that piercing gaze, but did he have a right to refuse?

He lifted his trembling, thin, scarred hands, and paused right before he touched the man. He pulled his hands back into himself.

“...Dirty,” he said.

Chisaki arched an eyebrow, but his voice didn’t change in pitch or tone. “Actually, I just got these gloves out of the box.”

The green-eyes flitted up to his face and then back down.

“...Are you… talking about yourself?” he asked quietly, there was a long silence before the young boy gave a nod. He took a deep breath, “...Those hands of yours are what created this. With those hands, you have offered me and Eri and everyone else here salvation,” he explained. “I don’t know what happened to you before this, what made you turn into that helmet for so long, but you’re not…” his words trailed off, and the calculating and calm Chisaki who always had too many things to say, turned into the man in front of him instead. “It’s not dirty. It’s human.”

He extended his hands out once more.

“You got us back on our feet,” he said, “And we’ll get you on yours.”

Green-eyes met gold again, before they fell to the extended hands.

This time, he took it.

His words were sweet like honey. He wanted to drown in them. It was okay to lie to himself just a little bit longer, right?

-

“As you know, my Quirk Overhaul makes it so that I can disassemble and reassemble anything,” Chisaki said, almost bored, “We’ve been using this to its fullest since I’ve recovered it.”

Deku nodded slowly.

The others had been excused, and they closed the door. Chisaki sat down on a stool against the wall across the bed. He crossed his arms in front of his chest as he spoke.

“...You also know that the only thing that I cannot fix are mainly injuries dealt from monsters,” he said, turning away from his patient to grab one of the notebooks and began recording this and that inside of it. He looked up at him, and spoke clearly, “All the injuries you still have are from them.”

Deku nodded back, but to be honest, this wasn’t the worst thing that’s happened to him. But knowing that he didn’t have to deal with the worst of the injuries was really nice. He was really thankful for that-

“...Thank you,” he said. If he had a voice, he should use it.

Chisaki’s figure froze, and Deku wondered if, perhaps, he said the wrong thing, or maybe he wasn’t supposed to speak at all, but he didn’t want to back down on something like this.

“Thank you, Chisaki...san?”

Chisaki’s eyes narrowed and frowned. His calm demeanor was completely abandoned in that moment, leaving some hostile in its wake.

“Why are you thanking me?” he asked, as though receiving gratitude was something to take offense at.

Deku’s gaze dropped to his hands. He doesn't really get what the older man saw, but all he could see were those damned scars that reminded him of all the people he had wronged. His hands trembled.

“I-”

Meanwhile, Chisaki looked ready to start yelling, but stopped himself right as his eyes caught Deku’s pale face, and he gritted his teeth.

“...I have done nothing to earn your gratitude,” Chisaki said instead, turning away. “More importantly, do you think you can eat anything? We can get you something light you… you haven’t been eating much, right?”

The young man didn’t respond.

“...Well, whatever, I suppose it doesn’t matter. We brought something for you anyways. From now on, we’ll do a better job taking care of you,” he said.

“You don’t…” Deku said quietly, trailing off. The older man turned to see how the young man balled the sheets in his hands, his knuckles turning white. “I’ve… I’ve already received too much.”

Chisaki frowned, eyes narrowing when there was a polite knock on the doorframe.

“Come in,” he called out, and Kurono walked in with a tray of a stone pot. Half a step behind him, trying to peer around Kurono and rush him in was Yamada, who waved at the patient excitedly. Deku tensed considerably, which was impressive concerning that Chisaki didn’t think he was capable of tensing anymore.

“...Kai, we got some rice gruel,” Kurono said quietly, his eyes never leaving Deku’s face. The young man didn’t dare lift his eyes.

Chisaki nodded and stood up from the seat.

“We’ll leave it to the side,” he said, motioning for Kurono to do just that, “...And leave you to it.”

“Uh, what?” Yamada spoke up, looking a little upset that he had to leave now that he was regranted entry.

“Eat, sleep, rest,” Chisaki said as he stood up. “If you need anything, we’ll leave someone at the door.”

Suddenly, he was by himself again. Left alone like this, he felt his sense of dread amplify.

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“Is it alright to leave him like that?” Kurono asked.

“He should be able to eat the gruel,” Chisaki said, “But I imagine he doesn’t want us to watch him eat.”

He tapped his cheek, and remembering the mess of scars Deku had instead of a right cheek, Kurono understands.

“...Right now, we need him to remain calm. He needs to rest to heal, and he needs to be calm to rest.” He narrowed his eyes at Yamada, “Rushing and pressuring him is going to make everything worse for everyone involved. If the first thing he thought about was leaving as soon as his helmet came off, then it’s possible that he’s a flight risk ready to happen.”

Kurono sighed back, “I… I just don’t understand. Wouldn’t most people be proud and happy to have assimilated something like this together?” he asked, motioning to the area around him.

Chisaki shrugged back. “If he was most people, I doubt we would have ever made something like this.”

It was a solid point, and looking at how tightly his hand was clenched into a fist, Kurono has no doubts that it was taking everything Chisaki had to run in and demand answers himself.

### **Yamada’s Thoughts**

“...You didn’t see his face,” Yamada whispered back, his glasses to his side as he rubbed his eyes with the bottom of his palms. “He… He really thought that we were going to chase him out.”

Trust is a fickle thing, and more than being betrayed, it stung more to know that the person you wanted to protect didn’t believe you when you said you didn’t want to hurt him.

"More importantly," Aizawa said quietly, eyeing the former criminals across the way, "We should figure out what we want to do."

"He's… A kid, right?" Taishiro said quietly, his hands wrangling each other in front of him. "I know that… that it’s not right to just leave this in his hands, but…”

“But there is currently no one here that everyone will listen to,” Aizawa finished.

There was an uncomfortable silence.

“...What a waste of time,” Enji replied back, “Don’t clutter my space with this nonsense.”

“Endeavor, what did you-”

“Even if, by some incredibly stupid idea, we force Helmet to step down. There is no one to step up. Despite all the different people here, we have yet to get into any fights bigger than small skirmishes. He’s clearly doing something right.”

He didn’t look up at them, glaring a hole into the table as his hands clenched tightly into fists.

“Moreso than that, I am ashamed that the only reason why I know his face is because he was too injured to keep it hidden.”

“So, I guess that puts him in the ‘nothing changes’ camp,” Kayama sighed back. She stared back at the table. “I get what you mean, that… that nothing has changed but…”

“...This is a waste of time,” Enji said, standing up. “Helmet is currently out of commission, we should be working in ways so that he can focus on recovery.” Without another word, he left, probably to go on another patrol and burn off his excess energy. “To suddenly change how we interact with him because we now know what he looks like would only prove to him that he should hide.”

The words stung. No one knew who his words were really directed to.

“We’ve always wanted to help,” Taishiro snapped back. “It’s not like we didn’t want to help-”

“But now it’s unacceptable, right? Because you know what he looks like now. If that’s the extent of your dedication then it doesn’t matter if it’s today or last week, you’ll never be any help!”

“Endeavor, that’s enough!” Yagi slapped his hands onto the table. “Right now, tensions are high but we cannot afford to split against each other-”

“Then accept that nothing has changed! Regardless of whether or not we know what he looks like, it doesn’t change the fact that he never trusted us! We found out that he was injured. We found out that he was fighting. We found out what he looked like. Where, in that, did you think that he ever trusted us?”

The fire ignited on his face, before he ignited all of it off. He took a deep breath, calming himself down. His words had brought about a silence, and it seemed to ring through the room. He gave a sharp exhale, and stalked out of the room.

“...He’s as intense as always,” Yamada sighed after a moment.

“But he’s right,” Aizawa scowled, balling his hand into a fist.

If Helmet was as young as they all said, then it was probably a huge burden on his shoulders. With every passing survivor that was saved, that burden must have gotten heavier and heavier.

### **Friction**

“Well, we figured that we would still go out and do some supply-hunting,” Tensei explained.

Setsuno looked up, “Ah, if it’s about that, then we got it,” he said. He lifted a paper in his hand and waved it about, “Chisaki-san already compiled the next list of things we should be looking for, and going by the maps Helmet compiled, the places we should sweep by.”

“Why are you here again?” Himiko asked, tilting her head as her eyes seemed to peer right into Tensei’s soul, “And more importantly, why should we listen to you? Any of you?” She turned to Setsuno, who shrugged back.

“We just want to stretch our legs out,” he said. “Figured we might as well grab whatever extra stuff we need while we’re out. Don’t worry, it has nothing to do with you.”

Her smile was sweet, but the gaze in her eyes wasn’t friendly.

“...It was just a suggestion,” Tensei said, trying to smile but it came out more like a grimace instead. It was amazing how quickly their tentative peace shattered. “As it is, we still have a lot of people here to take care of-”

“Eeeeh?” the blond drawled out, “Isn’t that your problem? Since it’s your people? You should do what you want to do, and leave us out of it.”

“Yeah, but working together is what makes us last so long,” Kirishima spoke up from the other side of the table, “So, shouldn’t we just keep going-”

“Kids who live peacefully and quietly within the apartment because they piss their pants at the sight of blood should keep quiet,” Shigaraki snapped back, uncaring for the stricken look on the young boy’s face as he jerked backwards. His eyes slid over to Tensei, “And we owe nothing to you.”

“...To be honest, that attitude of yours always annoyed me,” Dabi replied back from where he was leaning against the wall. Cold eyes lingered on Shigaraki’s form before he looked away with a sigh, “And I still don’t get why Helmet bothered saving you that night. You’re still just a whiny, little bitch. Always the first to pick fights but it’s not like you really come out to join us either.”

Red eyes seemed to slice through the room as he glared back at Dabi. While they’re postures seemed relaxed, no one had any doubts that they would destroy the complex within seconds.

“Hey guys, let’s not get into a fight now,” Takeyama called out, clapping her hands together. “Infighting is what leads to the whole thing collapsing. We just thought that maybe we should get together to talk about what we’re going to do since we don’t know when Helmet is going to be-”

“How come you guys are only doing this now?” Setsuno suddenly spoke up, ignoring the sharp look that Hojo shot him. “He’s been here this whole time, taking in us scumbags. So why are you guys trying to do this now?”

There was a brief moment of hesitance, before Takeyama spoke again.

“...Helmet’s still a kid, we should be protecting him-”

“Helmet’s still Helmet! Why are you guys stepping up now that you think you have to?!” the former yakuza snapped back, and Hojo flinched, surprised that the man was getting so worked up. He reached out to his longtime friend.

“Setsuno-”

“You fucking heroes are all the same! You need a reason to do anything! That’s why all of your places couldn’t stay up! If you can’t handle that, then you should be the one to leave!”

“Setsuno!”

“No, he’s right,” Dabi said, eyes never leaving Shigaraki’s eyes, “Since Helmet’s out of commission for the moment, maybe we can finally trim the fat around here.”

Tensei winced, and quickly exchanged a glance with Tsukauchi and his tight expression. This isn’t what they wanted.

The tension between groups was at an all-time high. To be fair, the tensions were always there, and they were always awful. However, with Helmet as the ultimate buffer that no one challenged, telling each other to leave was an unspoken rule. All of them. No exceptions.

More importantly, Helmet was the one that (literally, in some cases) carried some of them into the base and forced them to live. For the longest time, since he seemed to be for or against anything, didn’t say or make any inclinations towards one person or the other, it was as though they were all equal in Helmet’s eyes.

And yet, the reveal of what was under the helmet was enough to shake them. Or maybe it was the fact that they had all seen the state he was in, the blood that he was half dragged in, and the tension ramped up.

They didn’t know why Helmet hid. They just know now that Helmet wasn’t a small adult, but a literal boy. Their questions about the future, one that had slowly formed in the shape of a man in a helmet, became a little more muddied.

### **Moving forward**

Deku rubbed his neck as he got onto his feet. He was a little sore, but otherwise felt good as new, maybe even better, with the exception of some of the bites he couldn’t fend off. Now that he finally got to experience it for himself, he truly understood the full specs of Chisaki’s Overhaul.

His joints were moving without creaks or pains, and he could finally feel his pinky again. His arm didn’t tremble as badly as it used to, and when he practiced a few of his punches, felt that he had regained some of his strength. Words couldn’t describe how satisfied he was about this whole thing. The thought that Chisaki had decided to use his quirk, the quirk that he apparently (according to the gossip he heard between Hejike and Soramitsu) hated using, was used to make him better. Almost all of his old injuries were pretty much gone, except the bites. No broken bones. No infected cuts.

The worst of the bites were pretty much healed though. He always had a quick recovery rate. More than anything, he couldn’t believe that they used their IV’s and medicine on him too. While they could make more, he knew that they were using their supplies sparingly. Most injuries were walked off, barely patched up, and only rarely does Chisaki use his quirk on someone.

As someone who had no quirk to contribute, he never thought it was right to demand that someone else use their quirk. As someone who spent every day of his existence lying to them, he never thought that they would waste such precious resources on him.

More importantly, all the most recent burn wounds were gone. It was good to know that the explosions from the monsters could be healed. From what he understood, the infections were the only exceptions from Overhaul. And so, the explosion, the metal pipes, the chunks of flesh taken from him, the pound of flesh extracted out of him, the hours he spent in the freezing cold in his boxers, all evidence that he was ever subjugated to those incidents were gone.

The memory remained, of course, but Deku could live with that. He didn’t want to live with trying to work with some of those injuries though. He will be able to help sooner.

He rolled his shoulders, feeling good.

He… He needed to repay the kindness that was given to him. He needed to make it up to them for what he had wrongfully done. Even if he would rather pitch himself off the side of a building, or be buck naked standing down several hundred walkers, he needed to swallow down his anxiety and pay his dues.

Deku pulled on his jeans, overwhelmed with the feeling of gratitude at the thought that they left him a change of clothes, even if they were an entire size and a half bigger than he was. Well, jeans were an easy fix with a belt, and rolling his pants leg up, but his shirt was showing his entire collarbone and bits of his shoulder no matter what he did. They even left him a facemask, and even though it was cold to touch, he was so warmed at the gesture.

Their makeshift infirmary, he thought as he looked around in it, felt cramped. There were stacks of bookshelves crammed with notes, and boxes of various first-aid supplies like bandages and ointments of all kinds. None of the medical cabinets looked the same, so there was a mis-match of anything that could be locked, that he assumed held all their heavy-duty medicine that they had.

Well, he wasn’t a doctor, but he didn’t think that it was good to have such differing compartments. He’d have to look for something a little better for that.

He paused at the thought, and felt a little lonely. Would they… even want him anymore? Chisaki tried to explain something, but honestly the entire encounter from Muscular on felt like a long, long blur, like he was viewing it from someone else’s eyes, but at a bad angle. This was the most lucid he has felt since he fell and those nails were put through his arm.

He… he couldn’t really imagine any of them turning against him in any stretch of the word, but these were scary times.

One fuck-up and everything they built up for would come crunbling down. It’s happened again and again. Muscular proved that to them, with how the base at UA had fallen apart from his efforts. And no matter how much he wanted to protect each and every single one of them, and keep up this place he called home, he’s been lying to everyone.

And now, it was time to face those lies.

He only wished that he could grab a picture of his mom from his room before he is chased out. If he didn’t have a reminder, he was certain that he would forget what she looked like. More likely, he’ll just be killed and burned like he did to every single corpse he found. It would only be right, and a fitting end for a liar like him.

More importantly, he shouldn’t delay the inevitable. He looked around a little more. Even though he knew he didn’t deserve it, he wanted a weapon. Just in case. Preferably a bat, but a knife would do. If someone here tried to kill him, he has no doubt that he would lose even if he tried, but he didn’t really think he had the right to fight it.

In a world like this, prisoners were a drain on resources. On top of that, exhilement could come back to bite them in the ass, perhaps even literally, so murder might actually be the best option.

The thought of death doesn’t scare him, but the thought that he wouldn’t be able to keep his end of the promise bothered him. He took a deep breath, trying to remember an explosion and the shock of blond hair and a grin that represented all the hope in the future, and found courage.

On the counter was his helmet. He grabbed it, put it under his arm and took a deep breath. He placed his hand on the doorknob and centered himself.

Deku took a step out of the room.

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One step out of the room, Hejiki stood in front of him.

“...Helmet… kun?”

Deku nodded at him, but tried to stick to the wall.

“Wait! Are you… Are you feeling okay?” he asked, “I … I can call the doctor for you.”

He paused, feeling that exceeding warmth permeate through his chest and he shook his head. His eyes focused down the end of the hallway, where he could hear the muffled commotion of some sort, and was glad to know that everyone was still lively.

“Uh, let me… Lemme walk with you then,” he said, falling into step next to him.

Deku could feel his gaze, concentrated on his face, and his fingers scratched with the urge to put his helmet on. The facemask provided little comfort. As soon as he walked out into the main commons area, he was hoping that they would be too engrossed with each other to notice him, but as always, the dogs ruined any attempt at hiding his presence.

Three of them came running at him, barking and jumping with so much more energy than Deku ever thought he would be capable of. He awkwardly maneuvered around them, and even though he had no blood on him so he didn’t have a reason to not pet them, some habits were harder to break than others.

He almost tripped when one ran through his legs again, but he managed to stay standing after stumbling for a moment. By then, he realized that he was standing in the commons room, just a few feet from the center.

“...Hel...met?”

He took a deep breath, and lifted his head. He looked for the person who called his name, his idol in his deflated-form but looking much healthier than when he was first brought in, and nodded. Facing the man who once told him he couldn’t be a hero, it made this entire thing sting even more. He didn’t belong here. He knew that.

“...Hello.”

The silence was deafening.

“...Are you… alright? Does it hurt anywhere?” Yagi asked, speaking very slowly and carefully.

He shook his head, and replied back, “I’m… okay.” After all this time he didn’t speak, he didn’t know his own voice anymore. He didn’t know how loud was too loud, how to breathe with his words, how to say his formulated sentences. He, however, didn’t forget his manners. He gave a proper bow, hopeful that he wouldn’t look like uncivilized swine even after all the lies, “Thank you.”

“So you can speak,” Aizawa said, no less biting than usual. Somehow, it felt a little different now.

Deku winced, but straightened. He returned the piercing gaze with a defeated look as he nodded.

“...Look,” Aizawa said, heaving a big sigh, “It’s a lot to take in,” he said.

He understands. There was nothing easy about this. There was nothing forgivable about this. Depending on how they deal with this, it will decide what will happen next.

“...I… answer,” he said, “Questions.”

“...Then,” Dabi said, “sit down. It’s going to be a long talk.”

Twice rolled up a chair just then, giving it jazz hands and all, and Deku gave a little smile in response. He had heard, more often than not, the others complaining about how cold and cruel they could be, but the young man had yet to see it.

“Kurono, go get him some water with a straw,” Chisaki called out, taking his seat.

Kurono nodded and left the room.

Even if they try not to be obvious, as they called others down and about, he felt the stares across his skin. When he gets the water, he bows politely, and tries his best not to show the mess his face was while taking slow sips.

Whatever they want, however, he would give.

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Everyone had filled into the common room, and they opened all the windows up to keep cool air circulating through. With some exceptions of the people on patrol at the moment, everyone that currently lived on-base were piled into the room in a large, strangely shaped circle. The area in the center was open, and Deku was stationed to sit furthest from all possible exits, by himself, against the wall.

“Alright,” Tsukauge said, “Why don’t you start with introducing yourself?”

Deku looked at his hands and slowly nodded. “...Deku,” he said.

“Uh, can you speak up a little?” Yamada called from the other end of the room.

The young man blushed a little, clearly uncomfortable with the entire thing, but nodded anyways.

“My name… Deku,” he said, speaking up much more. His voice cracked, and he coughed to clear his voice some.

It was clear that, even if he could speak, he hadn’t spoken in so long that the sound was falling apart in his mouth.

“We’re not calling you that,” Aizawa snapped back, voice low like poison. From the side, Yamada nudged him with his elbow, giving him a meaningful stare that he refused to meet. Deku blinked at him, surprised and he scowled back, “You’re not… You’re not useless.” he said, making a motion with his hand. “What’s your name? Your actual name.”

There was a long silence, and Deku tilted his head to the side.

Aizawa hesitated. Did Helmet, Deku… not understand the situation? It was bizarre to think that someone who was smart enough to assess the strengths and weaknesses of some monster in an instant to know how to fight was someone who didn’t know how to answer this question.

The silence was starting to turn awkward, and before anyone else got to speak, another young man across the room spoke up suddenly, raising his hand like he was in class. From the look on his face, it was clear that he could not hold back anymore.

“Okay, I got a question,” Todoroki Shouto said and didn’t wait to ask, “Why did you save Endeavor?”

All eyes turned to the youngest Todoroki, Enji’s expression cycling through several emotions starting at surprise and ending at resigned, and Deku blinked back. He frowned, and replied back matter-of-factly.

“...Bright.”

There was a long, long silence that followed. A hundred different things ran through their head as they tried to decipher it in several ways. And those who risked a look at the rare, soft expression on the older man’s face, realized that there must have been an entire story that they weren’t privy to.

“...That’s it?” Shouto asked, shocked.

Deku nodded.

“...Moving away from the past that we can’t change,” Yamada called out, “It’s more important to talk about things going forward. So, uh, what do you want to do with all of this?”

At that, the young man straightened.

“I don’t know,” he said, full confidence. “But I… I can leave.”

“What?”

“Whoa, whoa-”

“Wait, what do you mean-”

“Leaving?!”

There was only one reaction that seemed to be unanimous and Deku flinched backwards into his seat in his shock. His hand gripped his knees tightly, surprised at the outrage when he thought that this was going to be the acclimation of their decision. His face drained of all color as he clenched his jaw tightly.

“What do you mean leaving!?” Shigaraki snapped, getting up to his feet, as his voice won out over the others. His chair clattered loudly behind him, but the sound drowned out under his voice, “Why do you have to be the one to leave!? To begin with, they’re the ones that came into your life so why do you have to make more sacrifices to make them happy?!”

“Is this because you think that you can infect others?! You can’t, so it’s fine, isn’t it? There’s no need to leave!” Twice called out from the side, “//If you leave, I gotta start packing!”

“...It’s okay,” Deku replied, voice shaky as he got progressively more and more quiet as he kept talking in an effort to explain himself a little better, “I’m used to… alone. Group harmony… important. So I… leave.”

There was another silence.

“So if we say that we don’t want you to leave,” Hawks spoke up, starting to see the bigger picture, “You’ll stay?”

Deku looked puzzled, “...Stay?” he parroted back.

“Yes!” several people shouted at once, making the man flinch backwards again. He blinked, tears beginning to well in his eyes as he dropped his head.

“...I see,” he said, staring at his lap. A smile came onto his face, his eyes shining with unshed tears and his cheeks dusting with a blush. “Okay… I do my best.”

“No,” Chisaki suddenly spoke up. And the young man turned to the former yakuza head. “...Now that your stupid silent treatment is over, we’re going to take our sweet time to figure out what the fuck you’ve been thinking this entire time,” he said. To his credit, Deku didn’t look bothered at the rare use of profanity as the older man shook his head, “But first, there’s something that I’m going to get through your head right now.”

He blinked as golden eyes narrowed.

“From now on,” he said, “You don’t have to be alone anymore. There’s more than enough scumbags here to get the work done. So, you rely on us.”

Green eyes blinked at him, and so focused on him, he didn't realize the rest of the room came to a slow agreement on something he didn’t know about.

“With that said,” Tsukauge said, “Deku, what’s the future you’re running towards?”

The young man shrugged back, “See tomorrow?”

“...You’re not certain?” Sasaki frowned. He pushed his glasses up, “I don’t believe that. You have such detailed notes about the area and everything you’ve done, but you have no goals? Then, why did you create this space?”

His eye lit up, like he understood what was being asked of him. Straightening, he answered. “I’m waiting for someone,” he said.

“So cleaning up all the infected, hanging up the lights, all of that?” Tsukauchi gaped back, “You did all of that…”

Deku nodded to confirm, “Easier to find.”

Just like that, there was nothing left to talk about and they learned a lot about Deku (even if most of them didn’t want to call him that). By that, they meant that Deku’s breathing was starting to get labored, and one of his hands was pressing against his side. It was clear that he had long-since passed his limit, and it was taking everything in him to remain upright and vigilant. It was amazing how much easier he was to read now that they could get him into a chair without that blasted helmet.

Enough things have been cleared up at the moment, and they wanted him to make a full recovery soon. Or at least everything but one thing was covered...

“...Okay, I’m fine with it if Hel… Deku-kun stays as our leader,” Kayama said, raising her hand.

“Eh?” Deku, who had never been present during their leadership talks, was totally caught off-guard from the sudden declaration.

“...Tch, it wasn’t a question to begin with,” Dabi replied back, eyes a little softer as his gaze lingered on the young man. “It’s not like there’s much that’s going to be left over if he kicks the bucket.”

Deku pointed at himself, and then turned to Aizawa. Honestly, it was surprising that it was Aizawa that he turned to, but it was nice to know that there was someone he turned to.

“...Yeah,” Aizawa nodded, “There’s no excuse now. We’ll get our asses into high gear.”

“Get better quickly, Deku,” Miruko cheered, a wolvish grin on her face. “We got a lot to do, right?”

And the young man just looked confused.

When he made to get up, a hand came down onto his shoulder and he flinched under the touch. When he looked up, Dabi looked unrepentant as he slid his arm from his shoulder to his waist, halfway hauling Deku against him.

“Well then,” Dabi said, “You’re much lighter than you look.”

“Don’t be so rough with him,” Natsuo scolded as he came up to the other side of Deku. “He’s a big bruise at this point.”

Dabi snorted, but relented his hold a little. “I doubt this is the dumbest thing he’s done.”

“Yeah, that’s saving Endeavor, right?” Toga laughed, making finger guns at her stitched friend.

The walking crematory actually laughed at that.

Just like that Deku was escorted, rather forcefully, back to the infirmary, but in the corner of his eyes, he saw Yagi’s worried gaze before he exited the room.

-

There were a lot of things that they agreed on. It would be, seemingly for the first time, that they all united under one ideal.

Whatever Deku wanted, he would get, so they would do their absolute best to support him. Whether he liked it or not, they were permanent residents now. They were here to stay, and likewise, he would be too.

It would be the first step among many, and it was a step towards something that was stable and accepting. It was a start. And for the first time in a long time, the future felt a little stable and hopeful under their feet.

And they’re going to drag Deku with them, no matter what.

### **That First Dinner**

Deku once faced off a hundred something monsters at once. It was a blistering hot day that made him feel as though he was going to melt into a puddle. It was a long and arduous battle that broke his arm and taught him the valuable lesson of wearing clothes on top of his padded guards no matter how hot it got.

And in all honesty, he would rather face those odds again than stand in this moment.

Dinnertime. He was expected to eat dinner with everyone. He knows because Eri’s extremely expectant eyes peered up at him and asked him if he was going to eat with them after the strange questionnaire that made his stomach roll and his head hurt, and he caved in an instant.

Now that the whole questionnaire was done (and it was a lot less painful than he thought it would be, if only because he wasn’t homeless), he was forced to face reality. At least, during the question, he just needed to focus on the questions and answer them. But dinner? It was a free beast.

Three hours after they finished talking, Deku was pacing his room a little. He did his regular training routine in an effort to calm himself and it got rid of some of his nervous energy. He felt good, like his body was finally living up to his expectations instead of suddenly giving out because of injuries he thought had healed. He was starting to get hungry, but was it… really okay?

He had dreamed about it, of course, the thought that he would be able to eat with other people again. But with the more people that joined him here, the further that dream felt.

Leader, they called him a leader. God, he thought he was going into cardiac arrest when they said that? Him? A leader? When there’s Pro-Heroes here? Charismatic adults? Calmer people? Smarter people in general who were useful and strong? He shook his head, he couldn’t get lost inside his head now.

His hand came to the door. His breathing had calmed down, but now that he was physically within means of getting out, he felt uncertain again. The doubts started to creep back into his head, and he wondered if this was okay.

Even if they said that they were okay with it, that didn’t mean they would be <forever>. He’ll fuck something up sooner or later. He always does. But when he closed his eyes, he remembers Kouta’s bright eyes over a bowl of Katsudon and found courage in his heart, where he always forgets that he has it like a pair of socks at the bottom of his closet.

He took another deep breath.

The longer he waited, the harder it would get.

He opened the door.

“...Oh, hey. Did you… rest well?”

His eyes flickered up to where Uraraka stood in front of his door. She gave a big smile at him, holding her hands in front of her chest like she was nervous.

He felt light-headed.

“You uhm, look good.”

She was staring. He could feel it. She was staring at him. She was assessing his scars, wasn’t she? She was a smart girl, so Deku was certain that she could take a look at him and know that there were marks that should not be on a living human. This was it.

After all, Chisaki said that he couldn’t Overhaul the Infection away, and Deku once lost a chunk of his neck to something when he was much more naive about the world.

“Lunch-Rush called for dinner a while ago, but I’m sure there’s plenty of food still. If you want, we can head down for dinner together? If not, I’m sure we can bring something up for you, so whatever you want is fine.”

He wasn’t wheezing or anything, but he had long lost feeling in his entire body. Could he eat like this? While he was definitely hungry before, the amount of anxiety he had overpowered everything else in his body. All he wanted to do was run away.

No, he thought to himself. He had long lost that choice, didn’t he?

He needed to take responsibility for his actions. In exchange for their overwhelming kindness, he would offer his entire being.

He turned to her, meeting her eyes briefly before dropping them to the ground. He left the helmet behind, comfortable with a face mask for the bottom half of his face, and his full padding otherwise. His goggles sat around his neck, but it didn’t do much to hide the scar underneath. He didn’t have his bat, but his knives did not leave his side. Just in case he has to run out to fight or something.

He prays that just in case occurs. Walkers were easier to deal with than people.

“...Okay,” he said. “Let’s… dinner.”

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He took a step into their designated dining area. It had glass walls to look outside into their makeshift garden and park area, where they often ate if the weather was nice. He rarely dined with them, since he didn’t eat and he thought he was going to go crazy when he did smell the food that he couldn’t risk eating.

No matter how hard he tried to appreciate the base that everyone worked so hard to create, the elephant in the room was hard to ignore. Reality was much crueler than that, however, and with his every step, brought forth silence.

He didn’t dare lift his eyes off the ground. He stood at the doorway for another moment, feeling his heart slow down and the world tilt off axis. His hands trembled, and he could feel the stares.

“I’ll go get something to eat,” Uraraka said, “If you want to wait for me?”

He shook his head. But before he could say anything else, felt himself slip. Not literally, of course, he was (somehow) still on his feet.

He had once longed with all his heart for the ability to eat with the people he worked and lived with. Now that he could, he wished for those fruitless days of nativity instead. This was the last thing he wanted.

“...ku… Deku!”

He physically jerked and he took a deep, shuddering breath as he focused in on Yamada’s frown in front of him.

“...Hey,” Yamada said. “You’re hungry, right? Lunch-Rush really knocked himself out with the curry today. Why don’t you sit down, and I’ll grab you some, okay? Thanks, Uraraka, I’ll take it from here. Why don’t you get something to eat?”

The brunette hesitated, but swiftly taking a look at Deku, nodded.

Numbly, Deku nodded as the words slowly processed into his head. Yamada smiled back.

“Atta boy. Go sit with Shota… uh Aizawa,” he said motioning to the former underground hero who lifted his hand. “Yeah, him.”

He nodded again and slowly made his way to that table. He sat down and stared at the wooden surface.

“...As I was saying,” Aizawa said, turning to Snipe next to him, “I figured that we should start getting ready for the fall pick. Maybe this time, we can get some more groups to travel down to the orchid. We might be able to nab some farm animals or something to bring up here, too.”

The man, who was clearly trying his best not to just sit and stare at Deku, was forced out of his stupor.

“Uh… yeah, that sounds about right.”

“Augh, to think that this was the only open place to sit,” Shigaraki complained loudly he took his place next to Deku. He had a plate of hot rice and curry, and the smell was making him salvate a little. The man sat close enough that he could feel the heat radiating off of him against his skin, but not close enough that they were actually touching.

It was reassuring. He never considered Shigaraki as the type to care about other people, but there was no other way for him to describe him, especially since he voluntarily came to sit with the former heroes and was now being used as Deku’s emotional crutch.

...Would it be okay to stay?

“Wow, it’s packed over here today, huh?” Hawks asked, an easy grin on his face as he climbed in on the other side of Deku. “You finally change your mind on the whole hero-villain thing, Shigaraki?”

The man replied by flipping him off and taking another bite out of his curry.

Boxed in by people that towered over him, Deku felt something loosen as he was taken out of the immediate view of most people. He ducked his head down a little more.

And slowly, the sounds and the whispers picked back up. The noise that signaled to Deku of the normality that he craved returned. His breathing evened out. He almost felt fine.

The curry that came in front of him smelled delicious. When Yamada placed it down in front of him, he stared at it. A spoon was placed into his hand and he could feel his mouth water. The hot food made steam in front of his face, and for a moment, he forgot about everything else. He pulled the mask over his nose.

He dug in.

He had always wanted to eat with them. He had always wanted to eat this. While everyone else got to eat piping hot food with fresh vegetables and fruits, he had always made sure to wait until everyone else had eaten before sneaking down to eat something that no one would ever touch. It was a sacrifice he was willing to make, if only because he didn’t to hurt anyone. It was just better for everyone. So this was safer and better and now...

Now, he doesn’t think he’s ever had anything more delicious. It burns the roof of his tongue, and it’s delicious in a way that he’s reminded of something long lost. He’s so thankful that he’s alive with every bite.

“...There’s plenty of food,” Aizawa’s voice suddenly cut into his head and he jerked to a stop.

He painfully swallowed everything down and blinked. His bowl was already empty?

“There’s no need to cry.”

His hand shot up to his eyes, and realizing that the man had pointed out such an embarrassing thing, he buried his face into his sleeve at his shoulder. He sniffled loudly as he tried to get his tear-ducts in control and failed. He took in another raggedly breath as his body trembled. He gave up and covered his eyes with his hands, clenching his jaw with all his strength as he struggled to find himself.

“It’s delicious,” he croaked out, his voice cracking.

“...Deku,” Aizawa said after a moment, “From now on, you don’t have to eat by yourself anymore, okay? You can… just like everyone else you brought here, eat as much as you want.”

He doesn’t know if it was because of the food or the words, but there was an overwhelming amount of warmth boiled over inside of him and he nodded.

“Thank you,” he said, remembering himself.

From the frown on Aizawa’s face, he thinks that it wasn’t the right thing to say.

-

“I’ll take that for you,” Hawks said, using a feather to take the plate from Deku’s table.

When the young man stood up, probably to protest, the blond ruffled his hair in response, not even watching as their bowls were taken away by feathers.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said. “More importantly, you wanna take a walk after this? It’ll help with digestion.”

Deku hesitated, but understanding that he had no place to complain, nodded. He kept his eyes on the blond, and in doing so, conveniently avoided the sharp glares that many others were sending the winged-hero and himself.

“Great!”

And if, in exchange for his anxiety and discomfort, Hawks could shine like he’s never been hurt, then Deku would make that exchange everytime. They walked down the hallway, a strangely slow pace given how fast he knew Hawks liked to go, before he realized that the hero was probably moving slowly because of him.

He was so considerate. His eyes burned.

“So, you answered a lot of our questions, but you have some too, right?” Hawks asked. “I probably can’t answer all of them, but I can try. So, what’s up? What do you want to know?”

Deku was silent, but Hawks was patient. He was rewarded a little later when the young man began to speak up quietly.

“...Your… name?”

“...My name?” Hawks parroted, before a large grin stretched across his face. He stuffed his hands into his pocket as he turned around, walking backwards to face the younger man, “Huh, I guess I never really introduced by myself... I used to be the Pro-Hero Hawks. But… you should call me Keigo.”

“...Keigo-san?”

The blond shook his head, “I’m not that old,” he said, absent-mindedly rubbing his unkempt scruffle at his chin. “So just Keigo. Nice to officially meet you, Deku.”

Green eyes stared at him for a moment longer before dropping to the ground. Very, quietly, he continued.

“Keigo,” he said, like he was tasting the word in his mouth. “Okay, Keigo.”

“Yeah, that’s me,” the blond nodded. “So, you got any other questions? Like my star-sign or something?”

“...Do you know… what happened to the men that hurt Kouta?”

The blond froze, all of his features turning unreadable for a split-second. He turned back around, making sure to keep his wings folded and behind him.

Was that how he remembered the incident? That the people didn’t just beat him for sport and desecrate the dead? But that they hurt that small kid? He wasn’t certain why this bothered him so much, but it rang loud and clear. This was how Deku remembered that incident.

“...Stain and the others went back to do the usual clean-up,” the blond explained. It wouldn’t do any good to lie or sugar-coat it. He doesn’t want Deku to think of him as anything less than reliable.

He peered over his shoulder, curious to see how Deku would react. Would he be happy that they got revenge for him? Would he be angry that someone else exacted revenge instead of him? Did he want them? Did he care?

He watched as the green eyes closed and he nodded. His expression looked like he was in pain. Did something hurt? Was it his injuries? Was it the walk? Was it Hawks? Did he think it was sad and a little painful that those awful people who beat him an inch into his life were killed?

If Hawks didn’t know Helmet, he would have said that Deku was a naive child.

But he did, and instead, he thought that Deku was a pitifully kind soul, wasn’t he?

“...Did you want them spared?” he asked, more for himself than anything.

They started walking again, Hawks stepping forward to grab the door for Deku. Out of habit, he checked the surrounding with a quick glance while he held the door open for the young man to walk through. When he saw that he had stopped instead, he turned around to see why he stopped.

“Deku?”

At what point could he ask? Is this pushing it? Would Deku go back if he pushed too hard? He couldn’t tell if Deku had forgotten how to be with other people, or if he didn’t want to be with other people.

He hoped not the later.

The young man shrugged back, before his eyebrows twitched, probably from how much the gesture hurt him.

“...I don’t know,” he said quietly. “But if they had to die, it should have been my hand.”

Children, when saddled with responsibility, are suddenly adults and Hawks hated how much he related to him.

“Next time, I won't shrink from my responsibilities.”

However, unlike Hawks, who had given into his despair until he found a string of lights on a rooftop, Deku’s eyes remained on the future.

If it didn’t scare (worry) the blond so much, he would have praised it. Even though none of them would probably be here if it wasn’t for that trait of his, he wanted to relieve that pressure from Deku. Even though his helmet came off and he was talking more, the blond felt like he had gotten even more distant.

“That’s wrong, you know,” Hawks said, because someone had to say something and he was once a hero that flew near the top of the billboard for a reason.

And kids like Deku put him there.

“Next time, you won’t be alone.”

### **Equipment**

"Alright, I gotta know," Kaminari said as he plopped down next to Deku, where there was an impromptu meeting in the main living room. "Don't you get hot in all of that?"

"Hot…. better than dead. Tired good."

Majima and Hakamata, who were unofficially in charge of equipment and clothing for everyone here, gave Deku a sharp glance.

“Really, is it good?”

Deku nodded back, “Being tired is… humbling.”

“Humbling?” Kaminari frowned. “You know, I think you confused me less when you didn’t speak.”

The smaller man winced back.

“...Sorry,” he muttered back.

“Nah, it’s fine. We all have things we’re not good at, right? Don’t worry, I’m really good at talking, so maybe you can I can teach you a little bit of that. And you can teach me how to get stronger,” he said, his grin bright and confident.

Green eyes widened at that, filling with tears before he looked back down. The words failed him, but his hand tightened into a fist.

Stronger. He needed to get stronger.

### **Silence in his steps**

Compress turned the corner, and suddenly realized that Deku was here. He jerked to a stop, because the young man was coming this way, and even though there was only the two of them in this hallway, Compress never heard him coming. Not a second later, he dipped his head.

“My, what a pleasant surprise!” he said, because it was really rare to see Deku alone on base. “Good afternoon, Deku. How are you today?”

Deku nodded his head at him, raised his hand in a wave, and did a full body wince when the action pulled at something. He grimaced. When Compress stepped forward to help him, however, he flattened his back against the wall. Still quiet.

He looked confused and Compress felt a dull pang in his heart.

### **Kouta-kun: Choosing to Stay**

“Well, I don’t mind looking after him,” Yamada said, lifting his hand up, “But we gotta find him first, you know?”

Deku, walking by at the time, stopped in his trek to peer into the room where some of the former Pros were talking. Next to him, his unofficial (and unwanted) escort Hawks, also stopped, and peered down at him curiously. He didn’t understand why the older man was still with him, even though they had been walking silently around the base for the past twenty minutes.

As it was, the silence felt a little threatening, and so Deku kept his mouth shut as he had desperately looked for something to distract himself with.

So, he was the lucky one when he heard Yamada’s voice by happenstance.

-

“...I can’t… stay with you?”

Deku paused. He stared at Kouta and then looked around.

“...I’m ...dirty,” he said at last. “Others better.”

“It’s okay,” Kouta said, eyes brighter than Deku has ever seen them before. “No one wants me either.”

The green-haired man opened his mouth, closed it, and then took a deep breath. Then, he made the mistake of looking back at the young child, the acceptance in his eyes.

At the same time, Deku was one of the people that left the most often. It wasn’t hard to think that he wouldn’t come back one day. In all honesty, it wasn’t a stretch of the imagination in the slightest to think that. For a while, he even welcomed it.

“I might not come back,” he said, blunt and to the point.

“But you did.”

Deku thought about that kid he told to just stay fucking put so that he could go and save him, and felt his heart clench all over again. In the same regard he held Chisaki, he’s certain that Kouta saw him. At once, it made it even harder to say no.

If he dies out there, Kouta will still be here, waiting for him.

The thought was so warming that he agreed, but he doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to apologize enough times to earn Kouta’s forgiveness for placing the same curse he had onto him. He wouldn’t know it, and would never believe it, but Kouta saved him.

Kneeling down, Deku looked at Kouta and said something that neither of them ever expected to hear.

“Then, come with me.”

Afterwards, he would have to avoid Twice and his screaming-wails as he cried when Kouta went up with him to the apartment. He would also have to avoid Aizawa’s piecing gaze and the way Hawks’s smile didn’t reach his eyes. He would pretend that he didn’t make Eri cry and he straight up avoided any route that could cross with Shigaraki. Or Dabi. Especially Dabi.

Still, the unfamiliar weight of Kouta falling asleep in his lap made a home in Deku’s heart.

## New Years

### **New Years & New Goals**

During New Years, they set off fireworks.

As ironic as it sounds, the thundering sound is comforting. After all this time, using fire and explosions to kill and kill and kill, seeing it as something so artistic and beautiful was beyond amazing. He watched the flowers explode across the sky for a brief second, before the impressed sounds came.

He watched on, leaning a little against the railing, and felt crushed under the relief that every single person who shared these apartments with him remembered to smile. There was no way he would ever be able to articulate how grateful he was that each and every single person was alive.

The fireworks popped in the sky, and while everyone else stared in awe, Deku suppressed the urge to cry. He failed miserably, and ended up in his apartment bathroom, doing his absolute best to stifle his cries for the remainder of the night.

For as long as they wanted, for as long as they would have him, it doesn’t matter. Deku would do just about anything if it meant their safety and happiness. He was no hero, could never be, but he can do other things. Until he expends their kindness, he will do anything. His heart ached at the thought of continuing to take advantage over these people, but he’s Deku.

Greedy, selfish, useless Deku.

He won’t die until he repents. Guys like him don’t deserve a peaceful death and will die in a brutal and painful way. He understood this, and awaits it. But until then…

Until then, he will bask in the light of their smiles, and the hum to the tune of their laugh. He will experience and cradle these memories close to his heart even as he sunk further into hell.

-

The New Year usually inspires three kinds of responses from people. Disdain from the people who are filled with more anger than they know what to do with. Cheer from the people who are excited for the new year. And apathy, from the people who wouldn’t have known it was a new year until someone told them.

“Good morning, Deku! Happy New Year!”

Aizawa slowly turned his attention to where Uraraka was. Usually, he was in the ‘apathy’ corner, and Yamada was in the ‘cheer’ corner, much like Uraraka was, but after everything that had happened, the entire base was lit with cheerful buzz.

The fireworks display was amazing, undoubtedly, but more importantly, they were all pleasantly surprised that they were all here to see the next year. Fireworks might have been a ballsy move to do, but it was so, so worth it. Even now, he could feel his heart race at the memory, and the lights of the fireworks dancing across the snow. It had been some time, but he was glad that he was still alive. He was glad that he was here.

Still, Deku looked the same as ever. It was almost disappointing.

Aizawa tried not to be as disappointed as Yamada, but he does hope that Uraraka never loses her cheer.

He watched as Deku turned around. In his arms was a stack of papers, and Aizawa could already see steam coming out of Chisaki’s ears if he ever saw the kid-

“Oh, hey, lemme help you with that,” Uraraka said, bless her kind soul, “Where are you heading?”

“...Rental Office,” Deku replied back quietly, but otherwise allowed her to take the papers. “...I could do it.”

“But it’s more fun to do it together, don’t you think?” she replied.

Yamada, quietly, cheered loudly, and Aizawa felt something inside of him relax. He had seriously worried over Deku and his social capabilities, but he’s glad that he was getting better with that too. One day, they’ll hear full sentences outside of him giving reports about whatever awful atrocity he was going to fight with a bat.

Aizawa couldn’t wait.

### 

### **Not nearly healed**

Not even three days since his reveal, Deku was preparing to head back out. His body, for seemingly the first time in a long time, felt like it was his. The only thing that remained was that restless feeling residing inside of his bones.

Replacing the eternal exhaustion and the constant agony, his entire being was filled with nothing more than guilt.

It was time for him to return to the field, and stop burning through other people's resources.

He opened his door, mentally going down a checklist of the stuff that he needed to get from his room before he left. He blinked as someone fell to the side and in front of his feet.

"Wha-Oh! You're up! How are you feeling // I'll kill you myself!"

Deku stared back, not sure how to react to the sight of Twice scrambling up to his feet. The man looked down on him, and his hands hovered right above his shoulders, as though he had to remind himself not to touch him.

He stared at him for a moment longer, a thousand questions in his head before he looked down instead. There were several blankets and a flashlight, as well as a few guns and a bag of ammo, scattered in the hallway right in front of his door. He could see some magazines on some of the pillows as well, and a giant teddy bear against the wall across the hallway from him.

"Ah, sorry it's like a mess out here," the blond said, bending down to gather the blankets and pillows into his arms, "I was camping out here and Spinner was just with me but I guess he left to get something to eat. // What a backstabbing bitch! We should cut him up and eat him! I bet lizard stew is delicious!" he said, flailing his arms about and dropping everything to the ground.

Deku shook his head, and moved to walk around the mess and leave.

"Oh, are you leaving? You feel good, then? Okay, let's go then? Where do you want to go? // It's been so quiet and tense here since you were injured. I was going to kill something just to stop the boring-ness!"

And just like that, Twice fell into step next to him. The steps that slowed to match his might as well have been his heartbeat, strong and steady and everything that he needed to stay alive.

"Ah, don't worry, Spinner will take care of the mess," Twice said, "//Otherwise Kurono will kill us!"

Somehow, Deku could picture it in his head with alarming clarity. He could see the way his eyebrows pinched and his eyes narrowed, a tired slump in his shoulders as he eyed the mess with disdain and exhaustion.

The thought caused conflicting feelings of guilt and amusement.

"So, where to?"

Deku stared back, and as though reminding himself that he could speak, opened his mouth.

His voice scratchy from in use, came out broken and his face flushed. He covered his mouth with one hand, and felt his ears burn.

"Easy there, no rush. I've been waiting this long, so take your time. // I can't wait to hear you scream!"

The patience and accepting attitude was nauseating. Or maybe it was because he knew that he didn't deserve it, and the guilt of basking in their kindness was going to make him rot faster. Was it possible to rot before the body was dead? It had to be, since that's was him.

"...Just... on a walk."

"A walk, huh? // That's stupid, let's go run!"

Twice jogged up to the door, pushing it open and leaning against it to prop it open. he looked back at Deku and motioned him through.

The young man hesitated, but walked through the door anyways.

"T-Thank you," he said, quietly. Like an afterthought. Not to say that he didn't feel gratitude, or needed to be reminded of it. Actually, all he felt was gratitude and guilt. Gratitude for all the things that everyone did, and the incomprehensible amount of guilt for still being here and still profiting off of their earnest effort.

"Nah, you're good," Twice replied back, almost giddy. The door swung behind them as they resumed their walk. "To be honest, I think I've always wanted to do that."

Deku paused, and tilted his head to the side.

"I really wanted to do something that you'd thank me for," he said.

Deku's steps stopped. After a second, Twice did too. The young man felt his mind whirl to a stop before rapidly beginning again. No way, it couldn't be...

Did they think that he saved them or something? That they owed him something? He hadn't had many chances to speak with the others, and since he spent the last few weeks in a constant daze between fever and exhaustion, his memories weren't the best.

"You don't need to anymore," the told the older man, as honestly as possible.

The words must have been liberating, because Twice stood there in shell-shocked silence, even when Deku walked away.

He hoped the best for Twice. In a place far, far, far away from Deku, Twice may even find peace. Regardless, he hoped that he would be safe, since he could not promise that here.

### **First Run Back**

The weight was familiar, and almost comfortable, as he stepped back out. He looked to the fire hydrant. Normally, he strapped it on the leg that hurt the most. If he can't dodge, then he needed to provide a better support for himself to withstand getting hit and swung around.

But now... It would be arrogant to say that he didn't need it, just because he wasn't aching as bad.

He strapped it onto his left leg.

Okay, this was as prepared as he was going to get. He grabbed an extra bat, and strapped his backpack across his chest. He pulled the cloth drenched in bleach up and over his mouth, and clasped his helmet on.

He stepped out of his apartment.

-

"Deku?"

Deku jerked, not used to someone calling his name, and spun around to where Shouji stood with some logs in his hand.

Ah, it was too late to pretend he didn't hear, wasn't it?

He lifted his hand to wave, and turned back around, ready to leave. It was like there was an itch in his mind, and it was throbbing like an open wound. He had to go. It felt too overbearing for him to call it 'restless energy'.

There was something wrong, and he was going to check. With that, he turned on his heel and left.

### **[An entire section that I took out because it was really bad]**

## Springer War

### **Springer War - Finale**

“Get outta my way, damn extras!”

In the instant the Springer spoke, Deku felt a chill run down his spin. He knew that voice. It was the voice of a person that he was waiting for the return of. He was…

For this Springer to have his voice, didn’t that mean that…

The Springer with Bakugo’s voice slithered away, and Deku pushed himself up onto his hands. His useless body refused to listen, though, and felt something tear against his thigh. He couldn’t bring himself to care though, because all he saw was that almost-dead Spiner with Bakugo’s voice getting away and he lost everything.

[“If you want a quirk so badly, then just do a swan dive off the roof and pray you get one in the next life!”]

It couldn’t be. It can’t be.

[“You know, the kanji for your name means ‘Deku’ doesn’t it? Since you’re so useless?”]

He can’t ever imagine that he could have ever outlived him. He was the walking personification of strength. It was impossible, the same way that the sun would always rise. The sun wouldn’t disappear one day. He couldn’t. There was… There was just no way. He was useless, weak, quirkless Deku. He was-

[“...Did you see that! He was so cool! Bam! Bam!”]

At the face of his undeniable failure, Deku gave into despair. He opened his mouth and he screamed.

Everything inside of him, his frustrations, pain, agony, and despair all concentrated into one center point as he clenched his fist and expelled everything he had into one yell.

[“I wanna be like All Might! He never loses!”]

A sudden explosion caught his attention, and he watched as the Sprinter - with the voice he spent a childhood with - screamed out before incinerating under the might of blue and red flames. He watched the last remaining anything he had of that man burn to ash.

“...Not the way I wanted to hear you,” Shigaraki said, stepping in front of him.

Deku’s jaw hung open.

Hawks descended down like an angel next to him, his expression tight as he eyed Deku and all his injuries, “Don’t look so shocked. I thought I told you that I would come if you just called.”

Dabi and Enji kept control over the fire as Hojo made his way to them.

“Deku,” he said, eyeing the young man on the ground, “You look like shit.”

And the young man stared at them, eyes wide as his jaw slackened. As the reality of the situation began to sink in, his eyes watered and his lips quivered.

“...Thank you.”

He pushed himself up to his knees. He gritted his teeth, clenching his jaw, but managed to get into a sitting position. Next to him, a feather flew to his side to help him balance. He stared at the burning mess in front of him as the rest of the action team came together around him.

It burned so beautifully.

Deku had counted. 40 Walkers. 16 Spiders. 9 Springers.

“Just did a sweep,” Snipe said. “I killed 20 Walkers. Two of those Spider things. And,” he motioned to the Springer laying a few feet from where Deku killed it, “One of those.”

Hojo spoke up next, “Endeavor and I got six walkers. Eight of the Spiders and three of those, counting that one,” he said, motioning to the charred mess behind him.

Dabi scowled as Shigaraki sighed, “Lost to the fucking Heroes,” he sneered. “We cleared out 10 Walkers. 1 Spider. And the bitch burning behind us.”

Hawks rubbed the back of his neck, “I didn’t get any Walkers. Four Spiders. Ectoplasm and I knocked out two Springers.”

Deku breathed a sigh of relief. The numbers matched out. “Okay, they’re all dead then.”

“...Deku, what did you count?”

Deku gave a sheepish smile, “Four Walkers, two Spiders,” he said quietly. And then, he eyed the Springer behind him. “And four of those.”

With that, the thing that Deku was most worried about was cleared. They were all dead. Letting something escape was a terrible idea, and he’s glad that they didn’t.

“You… killed four of those?” Snipe said slowly.

Deku nodded, exhaustion hitting him as the relief did. He slumped forward as his hand came up to his side, where he swore his organs were going to start spilling out. Since the adrenaline had worn off, the pain was starting to get excruciating.

“... I was scared that that one was going to get away. I’m glad you came…” he admitted. He rubbed the back of his neck, uncaring about how much blood he was smearing around. He wondered if he could get his helmet back, but remembering what an awful state it was, accepted the loss. “Let’s clean up and go home.”

He moved to kneel before getting up on his feet, but as he was getting to his feet, he collapsed back onto his knee. His hand came to his side, and he gritted his teeth as hard as he could in an effort to keep any sound from escaping him. He dragged his breath through his teeth in giant heaves, and a hand came to his back.

“I’m begging you, Deku,” the man said, his voice light-hearted even though his eyes narrowed and worried, “We’re here too.”

Deku blinked back slowly, processing the words and then slowly nodded. Hawks was, in fact, here with him.

“You have no idea what I’m saying, do you?” the blond sighed back. “The others will handle the clean-up, we know how you like it done. Lemme look at your injuries.”

Deku’s hand lifted off his side and the former pro grimaced at the amount of sticky blood that had already stained his side and hand.

“Alright, we gotta get this looked at… I’m going to fly you back as fast as I can, okay?” he said.

“Go now. We’ll take care of this here,” Enji said, eyes locked onto the burnt mess the Springer was, as though it had personally offended him somehow.

“Yeah, I was thinking the same thing,” Hawks replied, pulling his jacket off to wrap around the younger man.

“...Dirty,” Deku said, pushing back a little and the older man tutted back.

“It’s nothing a good wash won’t get out,” he replied back, “C’mon, let’s get you out of here.”

Deku reached one of his hands to grab the front of Hawk’s jacket as he was carefully lifted up into his arms. Hawks had a good grip from where he was carrying him, bridal-style, and was glad that the young man was so small that he could fit so easily against his chest. Something dripped, like a cup that spilled, and Hawks caught the stricken look on Hojo’s face. Now, at least, the injured side was right against his chest. He really hoped that the flight wouldn’t rub it too badly. When he took off though, he could feel the wetness begin to grow against his skin.

He really hoped that Deku would pass out, if only to save him from the pain.

But when he heard the barking, when he met Kurono’s eyes as he landed, and when he placed Deku’s coherent and alive state on the makeshift operating table, he realized that the young man was very good at not letting the pain get to him. He was awake and lucid.

“Thank you,” he whispered quietly, and if Hawks wasn’t so attuned to hearing people’s quiet cries, he might have just missed it.

### Those who wait

The thing about not being injured was that there was no excuse. They should be working hard like anyone else to do their best.

Was it better to be injured, and just waiting for the others to return?

### **Surgery**

Deku was in surgery for a few hours.

Chisaki was not a doctor or a surgeon. He was a researcher at best and had a quirk that made the world his playpen. He could recreate organs, reform limbs, reconnect and create nerves. He disassembled people down to their cellular makeup and then reform them back, healthier than before.

However, it was useless when it came to the Bite and anything relating to it. Against those injuries, he might as well not have a quirk at all. It was awful, especially since Deku, the one person he swore to be of assistance to, was usually the person that came back with some of the worst injuries that he couldn’t Overhaul.

As it was, he was the one that was usually stuck with the full recovery time.

Luckily, they did have an on-site doctor now. A real surgeon, and Chisaki could deal with the other bastards that got injured while out and about. He knew that Hawks was fine aside from some minor burns and bruises, and that the others must be okay since Deku was the only one that Hawks flew in. If someone else had been injured, Chisaki had no doubts that Deku would have forced Hawks to fly the other person in first.

Idiot.

He didn’t see much of him, but what he did see from the bloodied mess of pulp he was beaten into, it was ugly.

Chisaki had stepped out for a fucking second because he was informed that the rest of this expedition had returned and he went out to greet them after psyching himself up to use his quirk.

He eyed them critically, glad that his work was minimal at best. He patched them all up in an instant, and made careful certain that they all removed their bloodstained clothing and took thorough showers. It was bad enough that he had to use his quirk, he really didn’t want to touch them until they had cleaned up all the gore. However, there were more important things, and he wanted to be ready the instant someone told him that they were going to cut off Deku’s arm and he needs a new one or the doctor was tired so he needed to Overhaul him to a state when he wasn’t.

“...How come he was so badly injured but the rest of you are almost fine?” he asked.

“There were nine of them,” Dabi responded. Of course, he expected Dabi and Shigaraki to be the least injured out of all of them. They were sent out for the full purpose of eliminating everything as the ultimate failsafe. Yet, Shigaraki had a gash running from his wrist to his elbow and Dabi broke one of his fingers.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t the middle one. But regardless, Chisaki had it fixed in an instant. Gross.

As it was, they were cleaned up and otherwise fresh like they had never left to fight.

“Deku got four on his own,” he said. “The rest of us managed the rest.”

“Didn’t you go together so that we didn’t have him fighting by himself?” Kurono spoke up from the side.

Hojo hung his head in shame. It was well deserved, but Chisaki kept his comments to himself. If Hojo was hanging his head in shame, the look on Enji’s face was downright thunderous when he had come in.

“We got separated as soon as we got there,” he said quietly. “We ended up fighting inside of a small mall, but half of the place had the ceiling caved in. ...They were ready for us.”

Chisaki grimaced, it must have been the worst place to fight for their sniping team. It would make sense why Hawks and Snipe were even less injured but way more frustrated.

And yet, he couldn’t help but mull over Hojo’s words. They were ready...for them? The thought made him uncomfortable, and the impatience that Deku exhibited made a lot more sense. It was probably the most obvious to him, who has spent the most amount of time out and about the area, to know and feel a change every time he goes out. Child or not, the dedication that Deku had was really paying off in these moments.

“And you didn’t torch it all down?” he asked.

Dabi scowled, telling enough, and Chisaki rubbed his temples.

“But they’re all dead,” the former yakuza head tried.

“All nine of them are nothing now. We killed the rest on our way out, and made sure nothing remained. We even got rid of the ash,” Shigaraki confirmed.

“So, how is he?” Hojo asked quietly, derailing conversation. “Deku… sustained a lot of damage.”

“...He’s sleeping off the surgery,” Chisaki replied back. “We’ll know for certain when he wakes up, but he’s definitely going to be on bedrest for a month, minimum. Assuming he gets good food and good rest, he’ll eventually start rehab so he can still move on his own.”

And then, suddenly, the door opened and Deku walked in. They fell silent in an instant.

The young man looked over, saw them, nodded and kept walking. He had a tank-top on, and it showcased his bandages to the world to see. He was covered like a mummy, and walked with a slight limp, probably since the gaping bite wounds have just recently been stitched up. His left arm was in a sling, casted from his fingers to his elbow. He leaned heavily to one side, like every breath was too heavy for his left side. Anyone else would be dead or a Walker at this point, but Deku just looked exhausted.

“...Didn’t he just come out of surgery?”

Chisaki froze for about half a second longer before he was on his feet and marched up to the young man. The young man, hearing his footsteps turned a little, and then some more when his eyepatch got in the way of his peripherals.

Looking at him, the way he was wrapped up, the way he moved with his injuries, they’re grateful that he’s alive at all.

“Why are you up? You should be sleeping. If you had woken up, you should have called someone. Who is slacking off? What are you doing anyways?”

Deku stared at him, taking a step back as he talked and dropped his eyes to the ground.

“...Thirsty.”

Just then, a frazzled-looking Katsukame came running in. “Boss!” he said as he saw Chisaki, “Emergency! I went to the bathroom and when I came back, Deku…” he trailed off as he eyed the young man.

He lifted his fingers in his sling a little, a far-cry from a wave.

Chisaki rubbed his face, took a deep sigh, and nodded. “I’ll get you some water, go back to your bed and sleep. Aren’t you in pain? The meds can’t be that good.”

The young man stared at him, clearly amused, and shrugged back. He winced immediately at the movement.

“Go back to the room,” Chisaki repeated. “Or else I’m carrying you there.”

Deku grimaced back, but did start to make his way back to his designated room. He gave a little wave to the others in the room while Katsukame flinched at the look that Chisaki shot him.

“E...Excuse us,” Katsukame said, nearly running out of the room.

Chisaki turned to Kurono, jerking his head and the man nodded as he rushed out behind them. He gave a sigh.

“...That bad?” Dabi asked quietly.

“All those injuries,” he said, motioning to where Deku had walked back towards, “are injuries from bites. I did what I could, and all of that’s what’s left.” He started to sound a little more frustrated, probably on edge after seeing Deku out and about, before he kept going. “I don’t know what the fuck you guys were doing out there, but whatever bit him crunched through his bones. We’re looking at anything from six to eight months of plain recovery after resting for a month, and that’s not talking about rehabilitation.”

Shigaraki frowned, “Rehab?”

Chisaki’s eyes slid over to him before he dropped his gaze to the ground. “...You really think that this was the only time he’s suffered grievous injuries? Of course not, then, do you think that he, by himself in that hole of an apartment gave himself proper medical attention? All those bites, all those old injuries, we’re finally taking care of them now, but some of those he’s going to live with for the rest of his life.”

There was a long silence.

Chisaki, feeling as though he’s aged more in the last two months than he has in the last ten years, ran his hand through his short hair.

“And that’s not thinking about what problems he got up in his head.”

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The following morning, Deku was geared up and ready to go when Kurono opened the door to check on him. He had to step out to grab his things from the extra equipment area that he had down the hall, from his special case, but he’ll return it when he returns. More importantly, he wasn’t going to go out to fight, so he didn’t need nearly as many things as he would on the regular. He couldn’t risk Hawks finding him while he goes upstairs, or worse, learn that he can’t quite move the way he wanted to.

“What are you doing?” Kurono asked. His eyes narrowed, “Are you planning on going out?” he asked.

Deku stared at him for a moment and nodded. He pulled his on his gloves, and adjusted his trusty fire hydrant to strap to his thighs. He shifted his weight left and right, trying to get used to the feeling after being without it for so long.

The familiar weight made him ache. However, most of the pain has finally subsided into a dull ache that he’s certain he could ignore. It’s hard to even lift his arms, so he knows that he’ll have to be careful when he gets out. As it was, he probably had three good hits before he just stopped feeling anything in them at all.

So it’s fine. He’s alright with this. He can work with this. He’ll have to avoid battles for a bit, but he’s certain that the area here will be okay.

“No. Oh no no no no no,” Kurono shook his head, and then took a step out of the door to yell down the hall, “Hey! Deku’s trying to escape!”

Deku really wonders when they became so close. Or better yet, why were they so close and so nice to each other but only when thwarting his plans? Why was this what they decided to do now that they learned how to work together? He couldn’t have been out that long.

But bam! There was Dabi, a thunderous expression on his face, and Stain hot on his heels. This wasn’t even fair. A fluttering was heard and he didn’t need to turn around to know that Hawks was here too.

He stared at them, wondering why they were doing this. When did they even get this close? He opened his mouth, ready to say something, and several others showed up on the other side of the hallway. Seriously?

“There’s someone I want to see,” Deku said quietly.

“But why now?” Kayama stressed, a frown on her face. Her hand was on her sleeve, ready to make him pass out in an instant. “Why can’t it wait another week?”

Chisaki shot her a dirty look. Week? If he had it his way, Deku wouldn’t be moving anywhere for a year.

“...Springers dangerous,” Deku replied back, ignorant and uncaring about their opinions, “My friend out there.”

“Wait,” Tsukauge said, lifting his hand up as he tried to process this,“You mean, there’s someone else out there? That you knew about? Just… another survivor?”

He nodded.

“And you didn’t just bring them back before?” Iguchi squinted at him hard.

He nodded, “He didn’t want to. I ask again now.”

“...Alright, let’s go,” Aizawa said, much to the collective shock of the others in the room. His eyes remained on Deku, pinning him to his spot. “But we’ll choose the recon team this time.”

Deku frowned back, and the other man shook his head.

“You’re going to, somehow, find a way to go anyways. Let’s save us all the trouble and just go together. Besides, I said it already, right?” he turned to the younger man, “You can rely on us.”

“If you don’t agree and try to leave on your own,” Shigaraki spoke up, joining his side because he’s a traitor and Deku doesn’t like him nearly as much as he used to, “we’ll lock you next to Lunch Rush for a week.”

He grimaced at the thought, and wondered when they started to get along. And, more importantly, if they were going to get along, why did it have to be against him? This question would come back to haunt him, again and again, and he would never find an answer.

### **Travel**

The team set-up, in Deku’s humble opinion, is ridiculous.

Hawks on one side, Tensei on the other, Deku doesn’t think he’s ever felt so defeated at seeing such happy expressions on people before. There was a fierce argument about who else would go, and it was ultimately decided that Compress, Twice, and Tatsuma would also be the ones to go with them after a long rock-paper-scissors match.

Seriously?

Deku looked at them and blanched back. Aside from him, Compress and Twice, it was a mobility heavy team. He said that, but Twice and Compress made for some of the best get-away duos known to man. It was clear what the message was.

If anything looks even the slightest bit wrong, they were going to grab him and run.

The look on Sasaki’s face was unrepentant though, and he knew that he wouldn’t be able to argue back.

As it was, he nibbled on the onigiri that was brought to him, sipping on hot tea while wondering if they knew that they could come and go whenever they wanted. His jaw ached, but he was too hungry to do anything other than stuff his face. It was delicious, and he had no complaints. Maybe dropping the identity is a good thing, if only because he could freely eat as he pleased now.

While eating, he thought a little harder. They weren’t tied down to this place. As far as he was concerned, no one would stop them and harass them as much as they did him. He’s pretty certain that they weren’t like this to anyone else, too.

He watched with detached amusement when Enji glared at his fist, like all of his problems and issues could be boiled down to the fact that he lost because he threw rock. Next to him, Yagi looked just as disappointed at his own fist.

“I’ll be carrying you the whole way,” Hawks said with much more glee than Deku felt comfortable seeing.

He leaned backwards at that, away from him.

“...Leave now,” he said quietly.

“How far is it?” Tensei asked.

Deku lifted his hand, probably to show the number on his fingers like he usually did, and grimaced when pain laced up his arm instead. He sighed quietly and said, “Few blocks. Sooner is better though.” He finished the onigiri, and finished his tea. As soon as he let everything go to pull his mask up, Kamui took it before he could even try to stop him.

He could put his own dishes away, but he figured that it wasn’t worth the fight right now. Not when his arms shook just lifting food to his mouth.

His greatest concern would be that, should they come into a fight, they wouldn’t be able to fight. With his arm as it was right now, he was going to be sitting duck. His fire hydrant had been taken from him, as well as all of his usual weapons except a single switchblade in his pocket. He couldn’t even close his hand into a fist. It wasn’t painful, but the cast made it really hard. And for the other hand, he felt nothing but pain when he brought it up above his shoulder. He would be holding them back, and if they weren’t careful, they would be leading whatever was following them straight to the base.

No matter how well they fought against those fucking Springers and the Spiders, there was still nothing for Deku to think that they were safe. Not when the rooftops of his safe houses still haunted his dreams.

At least, by going in a completely different direction than before, they might luck out with a real discovery instead of a bunch of questions.

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This was ridiculous.

They pulled the apple-picking wagon out, citing that it would be helpful if Gentle and his crew have a lot of things that they want to move. It was a fair point until they put him into the wagon, with blankets and cushions, and when he made any movement to get up, was stopped by the smiling Hawks.

Augh.

His legs were fine. There was a small chunk missing from it, but he’s worked with worse before. Jumping hurt, and he doubted he could do a second story fall without some part of his body giving out. As it was, he already felt like he was holding everyone back. With his right arm in a sling and taped down in an effort to relieve as much of the burden off his shoulders as possible, he couldn’t even swing his bat or fire a gun.

If they get caught by something, he would be deadweight unless he was willing to re-break his shoulder again. While he was fine with it, the thought of dealing with Chisaki and Sasaki at the end of it made him shudder.

As it was, Twice was the one pulling the wagon on a deluxely made motorized bike. According to Maijima, they exchanged speed for something much quieter. Twice had written down some measurements and the likes should they need to abandon it and make a new one, and said that if he gets really tired, he’ll make a clone but they will be otherwise fine.

As it was, Hawks, Tensei, and Tatsuma were walking around the wagon in a triangle, all with their own modest-sized backpacks. Next to the biking Twice was Compress, the two were clearly talking about something entertaining through hushed whispers, and the sight of it made him warm.

“I’m not the same man you saved last year,” he said, a grin on his face so big that his mask crinkled a little, “//I’m going to kill you!”

“If all else fails, I’ll do the pedaling,” Tensei called out, at ease with the death threat.

“Let us know if you get tired,” Hawks said to him, even though he was just sitting in the wagon.

Deku, through the helmet, gave him the most dead-pan stare he could manage, even if the man couldn’t see him. He bit his lip instead and nervously tapped on his thigh.

“What’s on your mind, Deku?” Twice called out, as he pedaled on. Deku had told him to keep pedaling straight for a couple of miles, and that the first turn wouldn’t be until they get through the entire neighborhood. Since the roads were in pretty good condition, all things considered, he wanted to pedal through it, instead of burning through their gas. “I can hear you thinking from here.”

Did he… have any right to refuse?

The wagon rolled, shaking over the bumps of the road, but Deku wasn’t too bothered by it. If anything, being in a moving vehicle after so long was making him a little queasy. Still, he managed to answer. “...I can’t help much,” he said. “Sorry.”

“Deku,” Tatsuma said, “We volunteered to come, so don’t worry too much about anything other than getting us to the place. We’ll take care of the rest.”

Her smile was beaming, and Deku was just happy that it had finally returned. He nodded.

“...Thank you,” he said quietly.

### **Travel - Not Attending:**

“...He really shouldn’t be going,” Chisaki sighed, eyeing the leaving wagon critically.

He had never felt the itch to leave a safe nest until he came here. And even then, rather than cabin fever, he felt that oppressive thought that no one would be able to back Deku up like he could.

“Hawks won’t let anything happen to him,” Enji replied back.

The former yakuza man gave a wave, “Yeah, but when they run into trouble, and they will, Deku is with them, after all, the force of picking him up and flying him back is going to mess with his arm.”

“...Why didn’t you try harder to stop him then?”

The older man sighed, “Because holding people back is what heroes do,” he said. “And caging him won’t make him trust me.”

“...Trust, huh?”

-

“...What’s on your mind?”

Yamada looked up to where Aizawa looked over at him.

“Huh?”

“You look like you’re constipated.”

“You couldn’t have phrased that better?”

His friend cracked a small smile, something that most people wouldn’t have noticed, but Yamada and their very long-standing friendship wouldn’t ever miss. He thinks back to a time when he thought he would never be able to see it again, and looked back to the ground.

“...What’s up?” Aizawa asked again.

Yamada leaned his head back, watching a white puffy cloud slid on by.

“...I just realized this a while ago, and I can’t shake the thought that… that Deku is a kid and all, right? But when he woke up… I don’t know how to describe it but like… he was more afraid of what we would say than he was about dying.”

### **Gentle**

While they were making their merry trek, Hawks flew above every once in a while. He would let them know if there was something wrong or there were any stray Walkers lingering around. Peering up at him, Deku is a little jealous to see that the man is in great health.

He thought that, and remembers the tattered remains of the former pro appearing on the rooftop all those months ago and knows that he didn't mean it.

More importantly, they were nearing their destination. He sat up a little straighter, and coughed a little in a feeble attempt to clear his throat.

“Oh, around here?” Tensei asked. “Hey, Twice-”

“Yeah, yeah, this was closer than I thought,” the blond said, “Or maybe I got stronger!”

“I’m sure you have, Twice,” Compress said, every bit compassionate in his voice.

Deku pushed up to stand up, and Hawks flew down to land at the mouth of the wagon. He lifted his hand up, probably to help Deku down, and the young man just sat down at the edge of the wagon to get himself down. The blond gave a huff as he grabbed the younger man. With one leg under his knees and the other arm around his shoulder.

“Whoa there,” he said, while the young man grabbed his arm, and gently brought him down to his feet. He gave him a cheeky grin. “Was that so hard?”

Helmet didn’t even turn to him, but Hawks wouldn’t forget how hard he grabbed his arm. Did he think that he would drop him? The thought miffed him the more he thought about it.

“We’re here, then?” Tatsuma asked, looking around.

Deku reached into his pocket and pulled out a whistle. They stared at him, as he fiddled with the latch of his helmet and lifted it just a few inches so that he could pull down his face mask and blow the whistle three times. He took a break, and then repeated it.

“I see,” Compress nodded, tapping his chin, “You guys called each other through the whistle. That's why you didn’t give us a certain destination."

They waited for a little bit longer, and Deku repeated the call. Only then did he put the whistle back into his pocket and relatched the helmet.

Right when Twice was getting antsy from waiting, a rapidly approaching footsteps could be heard. They turned as one, as a haggard looking man came from the other end of the intersection.

-

“...You have friends now,” Tobita said quietly, “...How nice.”

“Come with me,” Deku replied back.

“...You know I can’t,” he replied back, “But thank you for thinking of me. In this time of suffering, it’s heartening to think that there are people who still have their humanity intact.”

“Bring La Brava,” the younger man said, pushing back more. He knows that it probably doesn’t mean much, but he placed his casted hand against his heart, “I protect.”

Tobita paused, hesitating.

“Together better.”

“...Okay,” he said.

-

La Brava is a young girl with hearts in her eyes and an energy that couldn’t possibly be contained in a wheelchair.

“If Gentle trusts you,” she said, eyeing him, “Then I will too. You’re the one that kept bringing us supplies, right?”

“Yes, this is the gentleman who continued to get us rice and canned goods.”

Deku stared back and nodded. That made sense. He took a step forward with full intentions to carry her back to the wagon on his back, when Twice stepped in front of him instead.

“Allow me,” he said, dramatically cracking his knuckles and creating four clones. Two of them took her in her wheelchair and the others helped Tobita collect all of the things they wanted to take. Compress, in the meantime, was working with Gentle to gather their belongings in the easiest way possible.

Just like that, Brava and Deku were in the wagon with a modest bag filled with small little balls. Tobita turned down the offer to ride the wagon, and walked so that he was almost next to La Brava.

During their ride back, the majority of the questions that La Brava had were answered by Compress and Twice, who were excited not to walk in silence.

"You… really trust them, huh?" Tobita asked quietly.

"Yes."

"...But just because you trust them doesn't mean that I can. You understand, right?"

The young man was so different from what he expected. He sat with the helmet on his lap, his arm in a sling, and a vacant look in his eyes as he gazed out. He needed to know though, was it naivety?

"If I trust someone," he said, "then t's my fault for getting betrayed." He shrugged back as he absentmindedly traced patterns on the shiny part of the helmet. "I think that… if I did get betrayed, it would mean that I deserved it."

Deku gave a little smile to the older man, but he was more interested in the suddenly stiff expression of the people around them.

"You should make your own decisions," Deku added. "More importantly, I need to tell you about what we found."

By the time they got back, he was just about done. When he was getting off the wagon, this time through Tensei, Tobita spoke up.

“To be honest… we found some of those as well,” he said quietly, as though speaking too loudly would attract the said monsters to them.

Deku was quiet for a second. "By the little river?"

He nodded and the young man sighed. "I thought so…"

* Hawks, Tensei, Tatsuma, Compress, Twice + Gentle, Brava

## Rehab

### **House-arrest**

And just like that, Deku was pretty much under house-arrest.

“It’s bad enough that we can’t even get an x-ray or run tests to see if there are any other issues,” their resident doctor explained, “and since this is cursed, Chisaki-san can’t Overhaul either.”

He leaned forward from where he was kneeling in front of the young man, looking deeply into Deku’s green eyes, and waited for the young man to meet his eyes.

“Best case scenario, these are just awful bruises and you’ll be healed with proper rest and good nutrition. Worst case, it’s permanent damage…” he gave a sigh, “Well, we don’t want to think about that. So we’re going to deal with that if it happens. Right now, we’re going to do everything we can to make sure that you’re going to return to tip-top shape.”

He stared at the surprise on the younger man’s face, and grimaced.

This should not be a surprise. The fact that he thinks that this is a surprise is irrefutable proof that they had failed this young boy, but no longer. He will not allow this any longer.

“Please let me know if there are any pains or discomfort,” he said. He already knew that no one really stopped him from doing what he wanted to, but he had lectured all of the others until he was blue in the face that it was of utmost importance that they let him rest. “As you know, there’s a lot of things you shouldn’t be doing,” he said slowly.

He can’t be lifting heavy things. He shouldn’t be running with the dogs. And of course, he absolutely cannot, on any circumstances, be outside fighting for the foreseeable features. If they think he’s in any form of discomfort or pain, they need him to stop what he was doing immediately. The young man looked pained when he said that, and he almost, almost, almost, gave in to do anything to get that expression off his face.

Almost.

“I also heard about your… choice of armor and padding. No more of that for now. Dress comfortably, and let someone know if you need help getting things on and off,” he said. He took a quick glance at Deku’s shoulder, and hoped that it really wasn’t as bad as it looked.

It was probably suffocating to do this to him, but there were too many questions. If the doctor had it his way, he would just have the young man strapped down to the bed for another week.

But knowing him, he’d break his arms in an attempt to escape.

“The road to recovery is going to be long. At times, it’s going to feel suffocating,” he explained and hoped and wished and prayed that the young man could understand him as he said, “But we truly wish for your good health. Please, please, try to work with us. We won’t abandon you. We will not leave you. We want to help you, the person who has always helped us. Please take this as an opportunity to get some rest, and learn how to rely on us.”

The young man hesitated and then, very slowly nodded.

“If there is anything you would like to ask, please don’t be shy. After all, nothing ventured is nothing gained, right?”

He nodded again, and he opened his mouth to say something. The doctor straightened back, ready and almost a little excited to hear what he had to say.

“...Ahm…” Deku said very quietly at first, “...Thank you.”

He didn’t really know what he was expecting, but it definitely wasn’t the weight of gratitude.

“...No, I think I’m the one that should be saying that,” he said, glad for this opportunity. “Thank you for being alive.”

The young man stared at him strangely at that, but that’s fine. The road to recovery was long, but it wouldn’t be lonely.

-

Outside of the doctors office, Hawks gave him a lazy salute.

“Hey there,” he said, leaning against the wall across the door, “What a coincidence to meet up here,” he said like he wasn’t clearly waiting for him. “Gonna get something to eat? Me too. Let’s get something together.”

The young man stared at him for a moment, and then dropped his gaze. Hawks wondered if, during that whole time he was under the helmet, he never really looked at their faces. As it was, he was unashamed as he stared at the young man in front of him.

He was in some loose-sweatpants, soft-looking slipper and thick wool socks. Since he couldn’t get his arm up properly to get into most shirts and sweaters, he only had the bandages on his chest and a jacket over his shoulders. He had a mask over the bottom half of his face, but since there was a pad of bandage on his left ear and the black eye on his right side made sure that he couldn’t wear anything over the top half of his head. Hawks took the visible bits of skin, pale or purple and nothing in between, and the way he shivered.

“...Are you cold?”

The young man started at him, and then shook his head.

What a shit liar.

It… It bothered him a lot more than he thought it would. It bothered him the longer he thought about it too. He thought about all those times he wanted to help, and all the times he second-guessed himself on if he wanted to help or not.

Hero or not, he just wanted to help him. This went beyond paying back debts or whatever.

“Well, too bad,” he said, wrapping his wing around him. He quickly used two of his feathers to rest by his armpits in an attempt to relieve the burden by helping support his weight.

Green eyes came up to meet his gaze, and he gave a smile back. Was it comforting? Could he convey all his feelings and support with just this smile? He hoped so. The young man blinked and then nodded, his eyes focused back in front of him, and a shadow of a smile graced his lips.

For a guy that was missing chunks of his flesh, he moved like he always did. The ease he moved with injuries brought ugly questions to the forefront of the blond’s head.

All the time before this, Hawks thought to himself, was such a waste of time. He felt as though he had finally taken off from the starting line for a race that has been ongoing for a long time. Well, he supposed that it was better to be late than never.

### **Kouta’s Job -**

“Hey there, Deku-kun.”

Deku blinked twice before he jolted. Straightening, he pulled a dagger out and then realized that he was on a couch. He winced at the pain that shot up his arms as a result, and pretended that those gold eyes weren’t glued to his face. He looked from Chisaki to Kouta, who looked guiltily at the ground and then back to Chisaki’s golden eyes. Behind him stood Kurono, who kept throwing gazes at his boss like he didn’t know who it was.

He wanted to pull the blanket over his shoulder a little closer, but he couldn’t muster the strength too. As it was, the blanket draped over his shoulder was about to fall off, and his entire chest, heavily bandaged and in his regular padding, would be completely exposed. In his apartment, that had minimal to no heat, the chill of winter crept in and goosebumps broke out over his entire body.

His arms, however, were bare and his mask was off his face. His helmet was on the coffee table in front of him, and he missed it’s familiar weight.

Literally, anything that could obstruct Chisaki’s eyes from his life would be a welcomed addition to his wardrobe.

“Haven’t seen you in a while, huh?”

The young man pulled his eyes away. He didn’t really know much about Chisaki, but anyone that could smile like that while simultaneously sending death threats through their aura alone was not someone that he wanted to deal with.

There is a power in everything that Chisaki does. From the way that he carries himself to the way he breaths and when he blinks, there is power in the way he carries himself and it demands fear or respect (or both) where he is. He takes a seat in front of Deku, and the young man just wants to go back to sleep and pretend that today wasn’t happening.

“Imagine my shock, this guy post-surgery just disappears. He’s nowhere to be found on base and no one has seen him since he returned from an extra trip that everyone told him not to go on. He hasn’t come down for a check-up or food since. Is he resting well? Is he dead? No one knows.”

Golden eyes glimmered in a poorly contained mixture of emotions, and none of them were good for Deku’s heart at the moment.

He understands where Chisaki was coming from, but really, couldn’t he just rest? Kouta brought up enough food for the two of them, not that he had much of an appetite, and he spent more time trying to sleep than anything else. Getting up and walking around was hard, and sometimes, even breathing felt exhausting. Couldn’t he just rest if they weren’t in immediate danger?

“And so, I decided to make a house-visit,” he said, bright in a way that a man with his level of hostility couldn’t be. “How are you today, Deku-kun?”

He was fine just moments ago, Deku wanted to lie. He took one look at Chisaki’s sweet expression and looked away instead. He couldn’t lie. This man would see right through him and then make his life even more uncomfortable.

“Okay,” he said quietly.

“Really? Because you look like shit.”

Deku flinched at the balantant statement and Kurono winced for him. He was glad someone was on his side, even if they were only there to stare at him so pityingly.

“Oh,” he responded, not knowing what else he could say.

“Yeah, if I didn’t know any better, I would say that you look like shit since you haven’t been sleeping well. And I assume you haven’t been sleeping well because you’ve been sleeping on a couch.”

To the side, Kouta said, “Oh.” It gave a spark of… something sinister in Chisaki’s eyes and Deku wanted to cry.

“But surely, someone who shattered their shoulder blades wouldn’t dare sleep on the couch because they want to get better, right? And surely, that person who wants to get better quickly would be checking with me or the other doctor-staff we have here to make sure that they’re getting the correct amount of nutrients and substance in their body, right?”

Deku gave Kurono a sympathetic gaze, Deku might be on the receiving end of this, but Kurono had to work with this man. Probably has worked with him for a very, very long time.

“Uh… sorry,” he said, hoping it sounded a lot more genuine than how it came out.

If the way Chisaki tilted his head and smiled back was any indication, not even close. He was subjugated to the scrutinizing gaze for another moment. Eventually, however, the older man relented.

“Well, here,” he said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out some pain medication. “You can take one up to one every four hours. A real easy way to count this is one after every meal and once before you go to sleep,” he explained. He paused for a moment, and then added quietly, “It’ll help with the pain. So, if it doesn't hurt, you don’t have to eat it.”

Deku hesitated.

“...You don’t like pills?” Chisaki asked, “We can get them dissolved in tea or food or something.”

The young man shook his head, and Chisaki took a deep breath, as though having more air could give him more patience. He was, by no means, a kind person. And so, he patiently waited for the young man to speak up.

“I like… being alert,” he said at last.

Chisaki stared at him for a long, long moment, before he stood up and walked out. Kurono, shocked that the young boss just left, followed after sketching a hasty bow to Deku, clearly just as confused as the young man.

The pills remained untouched on the coffee table.

-

He was outside, leaning against the railing in front of the apartment door. He took a deep breath through his nose, and jerked his chin to the side.

“Kurono, bring the kid out,” he said.

The man hesitated and poked his head in. After a moment, the young boy came teetering out, a hastily thrown jacket on top of his sweater. He peered up at him curiously.

“...Hey,” Chisaki said, leaning down to be closer in eye-level to the kid. “...I need to ask a favor from you.”

Kouta’s soulless stare seemed to pierce through Chisaki, and the older man rubbed the back of his neck with a sigh. He hated kids. It’s only gotten worse since he’s gotten here and had to deal with all sorts of lost and broken children in all shapes and sizes. Broken kids became broken adults, and it was just a matter of if they decided to hide it or not. Apocalypse or not, this was a certainty.

However, none of that mattered at the moment. His discomfort is negligible. The entirety of his presence and existence here on this base he called home was based off of that. The only thing that mattered, from the moment his life was saved in that dirty alleyway all those months ago, was the young man that refused to look after himself.

Which was fine too, he would be more than happy to take care of him, in a non-threatening, yakuza way. He was perfectly capable of taking care of someone in order to ensure their perfect health and a greater strength.

At the very least, he wanted Deku to need him. It would be the ultimate proof that he had lived, and at this moment in time, it was the only thing that meant anything to him.

“As it is, the only person with unrestricted access to Deku’s place is you. That means, I need you to let me know if he’s pushing himself too hard,” he explained easily. “He doesn’t act like it, but he’s in a lot of pain. I want him to get better sooner, and that means that he has to play the good patient. You understand, right?”

Kouta blinked, and that soulless stared turned into something more determined. Perhaps this kid wasn’t as broken as he previously thought.

“Okay,” he said.

“Just call for me, or Bird Boy… Hawks,” he said, like he was trying to remember what his name was, “And I’m sure that word will get around to the others eventually. He needs to go out for walks as well. Please let him know we can let him enter therapy too, but it has to be under our supervision,” he said.

There was no answer. He paused, was his words too hard to understand? Eri seemed to be fine, but he didn’t know about any other kid that might be roaming around the base. Especially not about this one.

“...Therapy?” Kouta asked. “He needs therapy?”

Chisaki nodded, “He’s can’t use his arms while he waits for it to heal,” he explained. “That makes the muscles atroph… uh… get weaker since they’re not in use.” He rarely stumbled over his words, but there was a time and a place for everything. “Therapy will make that transiti… uh, will make sure that he doesn’t get too weak.” The young man nodded slowly.

“Oh, like how Izu-nii can’t open the door?”

“...He what?”

Kouta nodded back, and Chisaki cursed long and hard in his head. No wonder Deku never seemed to take him seriously. Why should he? As far as Deku was concerned, he was certain that he looked like a man flaunting out on hot air.

His shoulders were shattered. Something took a bite out of him and fucking chewed him up and spat him out like fucking bubble gum. Of fucking course he was having a very hard time operating his arms to do anything.

He didn’t leave because he couldn’t open any doors. No, it wasn’t just that either. Deku probably didn’t want to leave because it was too damn cold to not wear any proper layers but he couldn’t lift his arms to get it into shirts or jackets. Of course he wasn’t going to go outside if he can help it.

And naturally, since he was someone that lived completely alone even when there were plenty of people around, he never asked for help. Why should he? Chisaki practically proved it to him that they were all talk. From the sounds of it, he wasn’t even in the habit of talking. Deku could barely stand to eat, couldn’t pick things up to eat, and probably couldn’t get up to make his own food.

Fuck.

They wanted him under house arrest but they didn’t want to make him a prisoner. As it turns out, they were just helping him die a slower death than one he’ll end up with outside.

In addition to that, he didn’t even trust them to take the fucking pills and take it easy. In all honesty, Chisaki doesn’t even blame him. There was no reason for him to think that they could care for themselves when every little problem they have explodes out of proportion and he has to come in and play referee.

“...Kai? Is… everything alright?”

Chisaki felt his vein pop. Well, to think that someone would try and pull a fast one on him? Deku will regret making an enemy out of him.

“It’s fine,” he said. “I’ll make him regret ever making an enemy out of me,” he declared, ignorant to the look of shock on Kurono’s face. “I’ll make him fucking eat his words. He’ll need me, even if it’s the last thing I do.”

(not that Deku was, and internally, Kurono didn’t know whether to cheer that his best friend has finally learned empathy or mourn for Deku instead.)

### **Arms (1) - Tensei**

Chisaki had informed a few people loudly enough to start rumors, and within an hour and a half, he had a line of volunteers assembled by the Rental Office.

Note to self, never underestimate Asida Mina’s gossip range.

“So,” Tensei said, smile bright despite the promise of pain in his eyes, “Deku-kun.”

Deku looked like he was going to be sent to war. He gave in as soon as he saw him, and dropped his head in defeat. He looked to the side where Kouta waved at him.

“I have to go downstairs and help with the dishes today,” the young man said, already a self-respecting member of their small settlement. Deku felt his heart ache.

If only he wasn’t injured. He wouldn’t just be a fucking liability, but one of the helping figures. He hated being idle. He hated being injured. More than anything, he hated the thought that they were sacrificing valuable resources and manpower on him.

“Wow, getting in was easier than I expected,” Tensei said, ignorant to the way Deku’s heart was palpitating from where he was sitting.

Deku wondered if he’ll ever be used to having people in his home. Just last year, he didn’t think that he would ever see a survivor, and some time before that, he didn’t think he would ever get to eat with a Pro-Hero and well… here he was.

In all honesty though, he really just wanted to sleep. He knew his body best. This wasn’t the first time he’s suffered injuries for a long period of time, and he sincerely doubted that it would be the last. He tries not to think about that. The sensation of something chewing him was still fresh, and it haunted his dreams.

“You don’t look so good,” Tensei said, frowning as he leaned in a little closer, “You need anything? That’s what I’m here for.”

The young man stared at him and then nodded.

Former pro-Hero Ingenium straightened at that, a big smile already forming on his face as he leaned in with great anticipation. So much that Deku almost felt sorry when his next words crushed all those expectations.

“Sleep.”

Promptly, he laid back down on the couch and went to sleep. He was fucking tired, okay?

-

Deku didn't dream anymore. He thought it’s because he’s too tired to dream. Some nights, he knew he’s too tired to sleep, and instead laid on his back, feeling as though eternity could pass and he wouldn’t even know.

Other nights, he’s in so much pain that he kept waking up. It would be anything from every hour to every breath, and he wished that he was stronger, if only so that he would just be used to the pain and could get some rest instead.

And so, if something touched him while he was in this state of almost-sleep, his hand would pull out a dagger and his entire body would lurch to fight-and he stared at Tensei’s shocked expression as he dropped the blanket and lifted his hand up to the side of his head. The universal sign of surrender.

Everything in Deku’s body ached as the reality settled. He closed his eyes and laid back onto the couch, counting backwards from 10 in his head. He returned his knives to where they were on his thighs and he sighed.

“Sorry,” he raspd out, feeling even more exhausted.

Tensei pulled the blanket up and over him.

“It’s okay,” he said. “I think… I think we made a huge miscalculation, and we’re paying for it now,” he said. “It’s a little late, and I’m sorry for that. But I swear to you that we will do our absolute best to protect you and this place too. So you don’t have to be so tense all the time.”

The older man gave him a big grin, and Deku thought that he’s radiant.

“It’s okay to rely on us a little more. I promise that we’ll do our best to live up to expectations.”

Deku nodded, but still had no idea how to live up to their expectations. What did it mean to rely on someone? What did it mean to have expectations of someone? He used to know, but it’s long gone now.

As long as everyone got along and were mostly healthy and happy, he didn't know what else he could want from the world.

With that thought in mind, he drifted back to sleep.

-

Day five, Deku could finally eat by himself. And by that, he means that he can lift a very small ball of rice up to his lips without pain shooting up and down his arm and back. He takes this as a blessing.

He also makes sure that not to ever display any signs of being in pain.

### **Up & About - 5 days since**

For them most part, no one saw Deku. For the most part, he was passed out on a couch, jolting awake every few hours. His guard at the time had food on hand for him, should he wake up with an appetite. For the most part, he barely got through two bowls of soup in a day.

Still, his naps were getting longer as he got used to having a presence next to him.

And then, by day five, Deku sat up and didn’t feel like all his organs would come spilling out, and that his bones didn’t feel like liquid pain.

That day, he ate three meals, and eagerly listened to Yamada’s dramatic retelling of his high school days for the majority of the day. Aizawa rushed in to grab his leech of a friend to save the kid from listening to his man occupy all his time, but Deku shook his head and asked Yamda to politely continue.

Kouta and Twice entered the apartment complex with dinner for the two of them to join Deku, and instead got full visage of Yamada’s fluttering feelings, Aizawa’s reproachful expression, and Deku’s eager gaze.

-

“...Deku?”

Deku pulled his mask up and he turned to where Kouta stood. Holding his pillow tightly to his chest, he peered up at Deku with wide eyes.

“...Where are you going?” he asked, fear in his words.

Since they came back, this would mark the first time Kouta had seen Deku on his feet. And in fact, the last time he saw him dressed like this, cargo pants and sweater, it was when he was getting the rest of his clothes ripped off to go participate in a deathmatch. Standing here, like this, in the same moss green sweatshirt no less, he imagined that Kouta was remembering something painful.

However, since it was one of the only jackets he had that was split down the middle, since it was torn in the last fight. Honestly, wrestling himself into this was hard enough. He couldn’t manage to get his arms in any shirts, so his sweatshirt-gone-jacket was his closest best.

“...Breakfast,” he said slowly. “Let’s go?”

“Y-you’re coming to breakfast?”

Deku paused at how genuinely happy Kouta sounded about it.

He looked at him, and hesitated. Would anyone want him there? He couldn’t imagine it. Even if they were kind enough to let him show his face, he doubted that they would have an appetite once they saw it. He did his best to keep it hiden after all.

“O-one sec, let me get dressed-”

He gave a faint smile, however, knowing that he was powerless against the young boy and his obvious enthusiasm. He couldn’t believe that someone could be that energetic just because he was joining breakfast.

He was planning to get the soup and move somewhere else, check how his legs did on the stairs, and most importantly, prove to everyone that he didn’t need the silly-guards anymore. Speaking of which, his current guard stepped out an hour or so ago for something, when Deku suddenly awoke, probably to go see what Deku was so concerned about.

And of course, it did nothing for his nerves. It was most definitely not the reason why he was suddenly so impatient to stand again.

### **Dabi - Names**

Deku, still unused to people staring at his face (the visible part), took his food elsewhere. Since he was pretty much stripped of all responsibilities and told very firmly by several intimidating people around the base that he wasn’t allowed to be out and about or even use his arms, there wasn’t much he could do other than walk around the base.

However, although their base wasn’t cramped, there were plenty of people out and about at all and any hours.

The gaze of the people that he would give his life for was surprisingly heavy, and he doesn’t think he could lift his eyes to meet theirs. He can’t handle seeing the betrayal and disappointment in their eyes, because even though he has a mask and goggles, everyone knows who he really is now. They’ve seen the scars from where his body tried to recover from where chunks of flesh had been lost, and they all know that he has fresh wounds from the last fight.

His chest hurts, but it doesn’t feel like it’s because of his ribs.

He’s not strong enough. He’s not strong enough to protect them, and he’s not strong enough to live up to their expectations. But still, he’s shameless enough to take advantage of their kindness, and remain here even though he knows that he should leave.

So when he has to eat, when Lunch-Rush sends someone to hunt him down, when the dogs give away his position to whoever was stuck with the duty of making sure he eats and takes his medicine (he thinks it’s a waste of resources, but Chisaki’s cold gaze made it clear that he wasn’t going to take anymore objections), he tries to go somewhere no one will just sit and look at him.

Sometimes, he wishes that he could disappear like he never existed.

He leans back into his seat, his mask and goggles in his lap, and loses himself.

He nearly jumped out of his skin when someone sat down in the passenger seat next to him, and he snapped his head to stare at Dabi. In his hand, the blade of his pocket knife gleamed before he put it away. The older man side-eyed him and lifted up the bowls in his hands. Deku stared owlishly for a moment, surprised that Dabi was the one that had been stuck with lunch-duty, and the fact that he did it.

Dabi, while he was good at doing what was asked of him, never liked to get ‘in’ with communal events. Taking care of someone didn’t seem like something he ever liked being saddled with.

“...Scoot over, I brought you lunch.”

Deku did just that, quiet and obedient, and the man settled down next to him. They were sitting on the outside corner of the courtyard, where their various fruit trees surrounded the area in a mock forest. Of course, there was at least another month or so until the Spring came along, so it was just cold and a little icy at the moment. It was also why almost no one was outside. There was a car that was abandoned since before the fall of society. It didn’t have any doors or windows, and was overgrown with greenery. As it was, Deku and Dabi were in the back seat, surrounded by the frigid cold of winter, with their warm breaths painting the air in front of their mouths.

Before, right when Deku thought he was going to lose his mind in his solitude, he would crawl up into the back seat and pretend he was a child playing hide-and-go seek. He would pretend that someone would find him and that the kids in the play group would tease him at being so easy to find. So desperate for that touch of familiarity, he spent two and a half days pushing this car all the way to his apartment complex. No one here needed to know that though.

“It’s onigiri,” Dabi said, “Eri molded them, so they’re bite-size,” he said.

Deku stared at the small clumps of rice in the bowl, barely three inches in diameter. One of the bowls was clearly more packed than the other, and Dabi was determinedly pushing the fuller one towards him. Deku stared at it, wondering why Eri thought he could eat so much in one sitting. He could just picture Eri, bright-eyed and wide grin, determinedly molding the ingredients together. The thought warms him instantly, but he can’t help but wonder if it’s okay that he eats something that she worked so hard to make.

“It’s fine,” Dabi said, “she made it for you.”

Deku blinked back at him.

“You were talking aloud,” the man said.

He reached up to his lips and then felt his face burn to his ears. He was so used to his breath catching on the cloth in front of his face, that he got into the habit of being silent when something was over his mouth. As it turns out, now that it was gone, he had completely reverted back to his uncontrollable muttering from his middle school days.

“...C’mon,” he said, and then after a moment, gave a loose smirk, “unless you need someone to feed you.”

Deku scoffed back and rolled his eyes. He took the bowl in his hands, and hoped that Dabi didn’t realize that his hands were shaking. He put the bowl in his lap and slowly started to eat. The bowl was surprisingly warm, and he wondered if Dabi had activated his quirk to retain its warmth. While he didn’t doubt Dabi’s control, he did have doubts that the man would do something like that for him.

He hesitated for another second.

He pulled his clothes off. They were already cold, but holding the bowl brought some blood flow back and it almost hurt how warm the bowl was in comparison to his fingers.

He started eating. Like everything else he’s ever eaten here, it was delicious and it brought a smile to his lips. The two sat in silence for a bit, content with watching water drip off the icicles on the trees in a shared silence. The sun beat down on them, but the temperature unexpectedly dropped overnight and everything froze. Slowly but surely, it was thawing out now that it was noon, but Deku had no doubts that it would be frozen again soon.

“Your name,” Dabi suddenly spoke up. Deku turned his head to watch as Dabi’s eyes flickered from the ground and then back up to his eyes, and then back down to his almost empty plate. Deku stared at him for another moment, and he scowled. “I’m asking what your name is.”

The silence in the outside was deafening, but Deku wasn’t paying attention to it.

“...Deku,” he said after a long pause, like he had to remind himself of it.

Dabi closed his eyes slowly, like he was listening to his favorite song or something.

“Deku,” he said, rolling the name in his mouth. He nodded, “Got a nice ring to it. You know my name, right?”

“...Dabi.”

The man hummed back, eyes turning forward to the thawing winter. The sunlight hit some of the icicles, and the light refractured causing his vision to fail him a little. He’s certain that his eyes were failing him, at least, since it almost looked like Dabi was smiling.

“...You should say it more often,” he said.

-

“Alright, let’s go back in,” he said, getting out of the car. He jumped a little in place and brought some flames out to his hands and legs as he shook them. Deku felt something tense in his gut again, and the older man stared back. “...We don’t have to talk to anyone or go anywhere special,” he said, grabbing the top of the car frame as he leaned in a little, “but your lips are turning blue.”

Long done with the ridiculous amount of food that was given to him, Deku couldn’t believe that he had forgotten to pull his mask back up his face. He flustered a little to do it, but the sudden tense movement of his arms made him wince.

“I got it,” Dabi said, reaching over to pull the mask up and over his nose. “...Christ, you’re cold.”

He opened his hands and gently cupped Deku’s face. The young man sucked his breath in, his eyes widening as his entire body tensed.

What warm hands, he thought.

“...I get it,” Dabi said, pulling his hands back and closing his eyes. “I know you don’t like being touched. Sorry.”

“No!” the green-haired man called out, surprising both of them with his volume.

The older man turned back towards him, his eyes wide as Deku pursed his lips. He didn’t want Dabi to hurt anymore, and he knows that his words have hurt him many, many times over and over. If at all possible, he would like this one time for him to say the right thing.

He thinks about that illusion of a smile. He wants to make it a reality. Even if he isn’t a hero or anything, he wants to return back the kindness that he was always given.

He looked up at him, uncertain about how he was supposed to act and speak, but certain about what he wanted to get to Dabi.

“It’s okay,” he said. A thousand words crossed his mind but what came out was, “Since it’s you.”

Did… that make sense?

Fire suddenly erupted from Dabi’s arms and Deku’s eyes widened. Just as fast as it came forward, a hot heat-wave washed over him and the car he was in, and then it was gone in an instant.

“Shit!” Dabi said, uncharacteristically loud as he patted himself down in an effort to put out his own fire. “Fuck!”

“...Are you okay?” Deku called out, a frown on his face.

In the distance, they heard some barking, and the older man shot him a glare. He stared for a long time before his expression soured up tighter and he heaved a great sigh. He rubbed his temples and took a long, deep breath.

“You…” he said, “You’re a dangerous son of a bitch.”

Deku tilted his head, uncertain and the older man sighed back. How could he say that after losing control over his flames like that?

“...I have it under control, as long as you don’t pull any fast ones on me again.”

“...Fast ones?”

“C’mon,” Dabi said, ignoring the question. He walked around the car to stand by Deku’s side, and extended his hand out towards him, “Let’s go back in.”

Deku stared at the hand, and did something that he had always wanted to do. He reached out and placed his hand on his. Curiosity overtook him, and cupping the hand with one hand, he took his other hand to trace from his arm to his fingers.

Dabi’s hands weren’t scarred, but his wrists were. The staples dug into Deku’s hand, and the feeling of different types of skin was a lot more rougher than he thought it would be. He didn’t know if it was because of Dabi’s quirk or because he was cold, but he swears that it was warmer than anything he has touched before.

“...Wow…” he whispered quietly.

“...There’s nothing impressive about it,” Dabi said, his lip twitching to show his dissatisfaction that Deku was feeling up his arm. Still, he didn’t pull away, and Deku is reminded that he was incredibly lucky to find someone as kind as Dabi.

“...You are,” he said, a smile on his face as he looked at his hand, and totally missing the expression on Dabi’s face, “much more.”

These hands have saved him so many times, have helped him out so many times, and Deku could finally touch them now.

“Thank you,” he said, voice as quiet as falling snow.

“... God, you’re so embarrassing,” Dabi said, taking his bowl from him. When Deku looked up to fight him on it, the older man wrapped his arm around his shoulders and brought him to walk right against him.

His scarred hand came up to his head, tucking him against his chest so that neither could see the other’s face.

“C’mon, we’ve been out here long enough. We can fight indoors,” he said before releasing him.

Deku walked about half a step behind Dabi, walking briskly despite the dull pain so that he could keep up with the taller man’s long strides, and wondered why this felt so familiar.

### **La Brava & Machines**

With La Brava comes something that no one thought they would have again. Of course, the entire complex was made up of things that they thought they would never have again, but La Brava brought that feeling again tenfold.

Because La Brava had a talent with technology, the knowledge to back it up, and now has the resources to do it. Hatsume, with stars in her eyes, gushed over the newfound ideas and tidbits about something that she never thought she would learn, and their world expanded just a little more.

Comm Links, a control room, video and motion sensors at various locations around this little residential area they call home, were all new things that they could add.

And then, Deku placed a map down onto the table. It remained open and his hands trembled as he placed his phone down on top of the map and pointed to a location on the map.

“...Cell phone tower,” he said, quiet and unable to bring his eyes up to the people around him.

“...With enough time,” La Brava said quietly, “I can probably get it up and running. But… But Deku, you know that just because we have one cell phone tower up, that doesn’t mean the others will come up. If you’re waiting for someone to pick up or call you, they might not be close enough to do this.”

The young man’s lips trembled until he bit down on them hard. He kept his eyes on the paper map, worn at the edges from use and age, and nodded.

“Right,” he said, putting the cracked phone into his pocket and folding the map back up, “Sorry.”

La Brava stared up at him, a frown on her face because he still can’t meet her eyes, and she thinks that the world has done him a disservice. She wonders if there’s something that she could do, anything at all, for the man who returned a light into Gentle’s eyes.

She can’t think of anything, and he walks out.

-

Chisaki Kai has seen enough people lose themselves to delusional hopes and fantasies to not say anything. While he has no doubt that Deku wouldn’t fall into those traps, that was before the Helmet came off and now he can read everything off the young man’s face.

He feels like a fool almost every time he sees him.

Stress aged his face, and Chisaki has no doubts that this boy is much, much younger than he had ever thought. God, at worst, he thought he would be a little younger than Setsuno or something, but for him to actually be closer in age to Eri than him?

And so, he speaks up probably even more than he did before.

Part of it was frustration. He had used this young man as his emotional crutch and support since they had met. He had gorged himself, and then even allowed his men, onto his resources. While he doesn’t think he’s as bad as the Pros since he’s a little more independent and useful, the bags under Deku’s eyes always bring a fresh wave of shame inside of him.

“Deku,” he called out.

The young man stopped and turned around to face him. His eyes flitted to his before dropping down to the ground, and Chisaki waited for him to make eye contact again before speaking.

“Did you ever think that perhaps he’s dead? It’s been what, two years now? And you’re still waiting for him? How can you be certain that he’ll even return?”

Deku stared at him for a moment and then looked down to his feet.

“You did.”

Chisaki opened his mouth, and then he closed it. He rubbed his temples and gave a long sigh.

“That’s not fair,” he said.

### **Check-ups - 2 weeks**

“...You’re healing poorly.”

It has been about two week since they returned from that awful battle. About fourteen days since Chisaki had found out about how bad the damage goes. Two weeks for the injuries to be mending.

While their doctor wasn’t expecting Deku to bounce back like some of the other children his age, he was expecting that he would have at least healed somewhat. Since he had been up and walking around the day after his surgery, he thought that he was much stronger than he looked, but now he was beginning to think it was something else entirely.

“...Deku,” Natsuo said slowly, “Are you sleeping alright?”

There was no response.

“I want to help you,” he repeated instead. “But I can’t do that if you don’t let me help you.”

There was another long silence, and the doctor suppressed the urge to sigh. He knows that the young man was only here because he was practically dragged here, but still. He had always wanted to help Helmet, but he couldn’t help him if the young man didn’t let him in.

“...Well, I won’t keep you here if you don’t want to be so-”

“Hard to sleep,” Deku said, almost so quiet that the doctor would have talked right over him without meaning to.

He… had no doubts about that. Some nights, he thinks that he’s still in that hospital room, waiting for the end. He doesn’t know how Helmet, how Deku, managed to go outside so often. The damage on his body, the things that could not be fixed by Overhaul, had to have been caused by the things out there.

“I see. We have something to help with that,” he said, rolling backwards to get the medicine when the young man spoke up again.

“I don’t like medicine,” he said quietly. “It’s … hard to stay alert.”

“...Alright,” the doctor noted.

It would be a thousand times easier to just force the pills into Deku’s hand, but when his eyes fall back to the tired slump of his shoulders, the thick bandages and his misshapen flesh, doesn’t. For the Deku who never cuts corners for their safety and security, he wants to repay that in kind.

“I think there are some great teas that might help you get to sleep,” he said. “Even warm milk with some honey could do you some good.” He got up to grab his memo and scribbled this and that down. “Here, if you give this to LunchRush, I’m sure he’ll provide something delicious for you so you can take it to your room tonight.”

Deku stared at the paper, and the doctor felt like a fool. He leaned down to place it into Deku’s hands, and basked in his bright eyes.

“...Thank you,” he said.

“No, no,” he said, shaking his head, “Thank you, Deku-kun. Let’s get you recovered soon, alright?”

The young man, with a renewed determination in his eyes, nodded.

Ah, youth.

-

In a few days, Deku will meet his eyes across the room. He would stare, slowly lift up his lesser injured arm, and slowly open and close his hand into a fist all while keeping it even at his shoulder. His smile was small, but bright like a candlefire, and Natsuo was incredibly blessed to have lived so long he could witness this moment.

Excellent, they both thought. Progress.

“Now, just because you’re feeling a little better doesn’t mean that you can just run off, okay?” Natsuo said slowly. “You’re starting to recover, but it’s a fragile process, okay? If I think that you’re doing more harm than good, I’ll give Chisaki full reign in your recovery.”

From the full-body wince that Deku gave back, Natsuo was certain that this was the best threat he could use. He could only hope that he took it to heart and exercised caution.

### **Avoidance - Yagi**

“...Are you avoiding me?”

“...You frown,” Deku suddenly said, “when I’m there.”

Yagi’s eyes widened as his hand came up to his mouth, as though to confirm for himself.

“But… All Might doesn’t frown,” he said quietly. “I thought this would be better.”

“...I see,” the blond said quietly, his chest clenching painfully. “Is that so.”

Deku’s hand clenched tightly into fists.

“...And you wanted to protect that? My smile?” Saying it aloud made it sound cheesy and corny, but the words carried a weight in his heart.

All Might would never be able to stand up, not like he used to, but for the kid in front of him, Yagi Toshinori’s smile was the Symbol of Peace.

He took a deep breath. Since he discovered who Helmet was…no, it was before that. It was before he realized that some of the people closest to him were still around. It was before he was saved by this man and brought here. Probably since the start of all of this, he thought, since he couldn’t even turn into his muscular form.

He hadn’t been looked at as someone that could stand on his own, or someone that could smile on his own.

“...Deku-shounen,” he said, “Thank you for your concern, but I am alright.” He gave a wide grin, hoping that it conveyed all the gratitude that he had for him. “And I am glad you are here.”

He didn’t even realize how much he frowned until Deku brought it up like this, but he wasn’t wrong. He felt himself overcome with worry for this young man, like a basin overflowing with water. To stand at the top without even considering looking for help was a scary prospect, and one that he couldn’t condone for someone who looked as young as Deku.

And as a result, he was looked after. How embarrassing. How unbecoming.

He wanted to be relied on.

“And it would… make me happier if I could see you more often.”

Deku hesitated at that, plain as day on his face and in his eyes, and Yagi smiled. It was amazing that someone who often returned dripping in blood was someone whose eyes could be clear.

“...Really?” Deku asked, taking several steps forward. Yagi’s eyebrows hiked up higher at the obvious eagerness of the young man, as he came forward, “Is that… Is that okay?”

He was breathless, the hope in his eyes so thick it could have been tangible, and his eyes caught the surprise in Yagi’s eyes. He immediately took a step back, his face paling.

“S-sorry. I…” He turned around, and Yagi surged forward to grab his wrist.

“No, no, I was just surprised,” he said. The distrust in Deku’s eyes were palpable and he quickly let go. “I uh... Yes. I would truly enjoy it if we could meet more often. I worry about you a lot, but being able to be with you will bring me much more relief.”

The shine returned to his eyes, his eyes welling with tears and Yagi smiled despite the grief.

He imagined that Deku, who had been under the guise of Helmet while the rest of them remembered what human company was like, hadn’t been reminded that he counted. He was one of the people here too.

### **New Changes - Mornings**

“Morning,” Sasaki greeted him.

“Ah, good morning!” Mirio chirped back brightly, ready to replace the sun with his radiance.

Deku paused for a minute, and even though he was still covering the bottom half of his mouth, they could see how often his eyes darted back and forth. He nodded, and they could overlap the helmet right on top of him. His body posture and everything was exactly the same, but his eyes gave him away.

If eyes weres the window to the soul, then Deku’s were fucking gates that were flung open to let everyone know how he felt. A melting anxious wreck with curly hair, he looked ready to run and hide at the next opportune moment.

“...G… Good morning,” he said at last, voice quiet.

The weather was overcast, but no one could tell with how brightly Mirio shined when he smiled.

### **Rehab - Chores**

Aizawa rubbed his neck as he came in from the night shift. He stifled a yawn, but he was hungry and tired and he knew that they weren’t done yet. He was on his break for the moment, at least until Ectoplasm came to relieve him, but Inui said he’d finish checking the perimeter with the dogs before heading in for the morning. Still, he was on standby.

Despite how tired he felt at the moment, he couldn’t help the elated feeling that he was on standby. They had managed to salvage something, and there were enough of them that he was now on standby.

As it was, he was just sitting in the dining hall in the hours before dawn. Lunch Rush was beginning to rummage around the kitchen, and Aizawa took a moment to take in the quiet. The peace felt calming, and the hours leading up to dawn reminds him of a time before.

The unmistakable smell of coffee came then. He wondered if he had lost his mind just a little bit more than he thought, until a cup of steaming hot coffee was placed right in front of him. He stared at it, surprised that the coffee machine was on so early in the morning, and looked up to see the culprit.

He stared, and Deku looked at him for a brief second before his eyes fell to the ground. There was that mask on the bottom half of his face, and a pair of goggles on top of his head, but no helmet in sight.

“Goo… Good work,” their base leader said, voice as quiet as the steam coming out of his coffee.

Aizawa stared for a moment longer. He squinted at the young man, the fact that his arm is still in a sling, and then frowned.

“Aren’t you injured?” he asked.

“Rehab,” he said, voice quiet enough that Aizawa had to strain to hear it.

“Rehab,” he repeated back.

The young man nodded.

Aizawa frowned. He didn’t know the extent of injury that Deku faced from the last battle, but he knew it was bad enough that he was in surgery for it, and that it wasn’t something that could be Overhaul’d. He knew that Deku could only wore ponchos or just draped a blanket over himself, and had to have someone open doors with door knobs for him. Any effort that he made to get closer was shot down, and as someone who was versatile in his skillsets, he decided to focus on other things that he could do to help their entire group instead.

Like night-patrol.

He took a sip of the coffee. It was standard. It was nothing delicious, but it wasn’t the questionable black drink that Kayama gives out with a sweet smile, so he’ll take it.

His eyes trailed on the sling again, before he could stop himself. The thought that something out there had literally chewed up and spat Deku out like old gum, made him feel cold. Then, the recurring issue that Deku wouldn’t hesitate to throw himself back into that danger was humiliating and frustrating for him all at once.

Ridiculous. Even now, Aizawa felt wary of leaving the base alone, or at all. There was no reason to feel like this, but with how long he has gone without seeing any corpses, he swears that he can feel himself becoming lazy. At the same time, there was someone who wasn’t even half his age, fighting their battles so that they could all see tomorrow.

Pro Hero, he reminds himself.

“Thanks,” he said, stopping his thoughts there. He took a sip and nodded. It wasn’t some GodTier coffee. It was clearly made from the instant stuff that probably went bad a couple of months ago. Still, given to him by a guy who is always injured trying to help other people, it tasted especially bitter.

But Deku’s eyes were shining under the single word response. He didn’t know it, but the sight of it made him feel even worse.

-

"...What are you doing?"

Deku wondered if he'll ever be left alone. He looked from the dishes he was washing and then to Spinner, who was carrying a stack of plates himself, and then back down to the sink he was working in.

"...Dish-duty," he said quietly. "You can set those there," he continued briefly.

"...Why?"

Oh no, just when he thought that he might have been able to get away easily, Dabi showed up.

"All these worthless guys are around, why are you doing the dishes?" Dabi said, his eyes as sharp as a blade.

"...It's... my turn?" Deku replied back, narrowing his eyes. He frowned, as he tried to figure out why the older man was scrutinizing him. What did he want him to say? That he was bored? That he wanted a clean kitchen?

"And?"

Deku's eyebrow rose a little higher, but finding nothing to say, turned back to Spinner. He opened his hand, and motioned for the empty dish to be placed on the counter.

"I uh... I can do it," Spinner said, "And uhm, I can take yours too."

Deku frowned back, but deciding that the conversion was done, he turned back to the task at hand. Briefly, he saw Dabi’s lips curl down into a frown.

Seriously? They were going to do this over fucking dishes?

"Ah, Deku," Kaminari said, waving his hand. He blanched when Dabi's eyes turned to glare at him, "I can take the dishes, you did it yesterday."

"I can do it," Deku replied back, almost snippy.

"Wait, I wanna clean Deku's dishes!" Jin yelled out, running into the fray.

Deku tipped his head back, took a long breath, and walked away to wash his dishes. As always, he ignored everything else around him and focused only on the work.

Spinner eventually took to helping wipe down the dishes that Deku finished washing, but Dabi kept his piercing eyes on Deku’s back as he continued to work through the piles of dishes. Everyone else, as soon as they realized the tense atmosphere, left as quick as they came.

-

“...You’ve been active.”

“... I should pull my own weight.”

### **Names (Gen)**

“...Dabi,” Deku’s quiet voice whispered out as he rounded the corner and walked into the room. In an instant, everything fell silent and suddenly under the scrutiny of everyone in the room, he took a cautious step back. “...Dabi?” he tried again.

The man stared at him in a rare moment of speechless shock before he calmed down and gave a little huff of a smile instead.

“What’s up, Deku?” he asked, abandoning the book he was reading to approach the smaller man.

Right before Deku could say anything however, Twice was on his feet with Ashida.

“That’s not fair!” the blond yelled out first, “I’ve been here longer than Dabi-”

“-Wait, wait, wait, how come he gets to call you Deku!” Ashida snapped back.

“-I should kill him for trying to jump on you-”

“-Can we call you by your name, too?”

Deku, who had taken several steps back in an effort to distance himself from all of this, looked pale in the face. In response, Dabi took a step in front of him. His fire licked his arm, a showcase of power and no one doubted that they would be ash in an instant if he wanted it.

“Shut up. You’re annoying.”

There was a very, very brief beat of silence before even more outbursts came out. Where Deku looked ready to die, Dabi just looked unimpressed.

“Maybe if you guys would just fucking shut up, you’ll get an answer,” he eventually said, ending the conversation as all eyes swiveled back to Deku.

“You care what they call you?” Dabi asked.

Deku shook his head. “...Deku is fine,” he eventually said.

“Now that’s cleared up,” Dabi turned on his heel to face the younger man, remaining a body-shield between him and the others’ gaze, “What’s up?”

He stared at him before he began to speak. The words were quiet, and easy to drown out. Surely, if they hadn’t met him as the ‘the Silent Helmet’ before, they would have easily tuned him out. But as they were starved to get any form of insight on their young benefactor and his thoughts, they were silent as mice when he spoke.

“...Need help by the furnace,” he said.

“Ah, figures,” Dabi rubbed the back of his head.

Right as the two began to walk away, there was something that awoken inside of Ashida. She straightened out and spoke up loud and proud. With a grin just a little brighter than the sun, she said, “Deku-kun! Call me Mina!”

“Me too!” Bunbaigawara said, “Jin’s fine!”

And Deku turned back to stare at them with wide eyes. Then, he gave a nod back, as though to indicate that he heard them.

But only Dabi, who was walking next to him at the time, would know that he was smiling.

### **Other Names (2)**

"Enji," Deku said as he walked into the room. His helmet was under an arm as he lifted a packet of papers in the other, "Do you remember the radius you checked? I want to double check something."

Enji looked up from where he was wiping down tables. He straightened, looking confused.

"Of course," he said. "I checked about 10 km around. We didn't fine comb any buildings, except the open garage lot north of the extraction point."

Deku placed his helmet down and opened the paper, a folded map, and looked through it. He ran his hand through his hair.

"What's wrong with it?" Enji asked as he finished wiping the tables.

"...The numbers aren't adding up," Deku shook his head, "I'll go out and check on it tonight."

"Alright, I will join you."

He nodded his head and stood back up, whether or not he was nodding because he agreed or just for the sake of nodding, no one knew. After a second, Deku straightened up, "We'll know for certain tonight."

"You planning on bringing anyone else? We should let them prepare."

"...Probably Aizawa-san, if he's not too busy."

"Shota."

Deku's head snapped to where Aizawa was walking towards them, a mop in his hands as he came closer.

"You can't call him 'Enji' and me 'Aizawa-san,'" he said. "So me, Shota, Elder Todoroki here, and who else? Concerning skillset, we could use a sniper. I'd like to reccomend-"

"-Me, right?"

With a flourish and a flutter, Hawks appeared right next to them. A grin stretched across his face. His wings stretched out wide before it behind him.

"...Keigo," Deku said, meeting eyes with him. He looked to the others, "We'll leave at midnight."

"Understood."

"Roger that."

"Sounds good."

-

Deku had a foot out the door when Yamada stopped right in front of him.

"Heya, Little Listener," he said. "You know my name?" he asked.

Deku nodded, "Yamada Hizashi-san."

The blond blinked back. He rubbed the bottom of his nose, a little embaressed and he laughed back.

"Well, I'll be," he said. "I didn't think you'd actually know my name. But you know, you hsould just call me Hizashi."

Deku's eyes looked up at him, blinking twice before his cheeks turned a rosy pink. The sight had Yamada's eyebrows hiking up higher on his face.

"Uhm," the voice was quiet, and much higher-pitch, as he nodded his head slowly. "Hizashi-san," he said quietly.

Distinctly, from a long time ago, he remembered the feeling he got when he saw a small kitten pawing at his pants leg. It was very similar to the feeling he had now, looking down at Deku and his wide green eyes.

"Hizashi," he replied back. "No need to be so formal. Is it uh, cool if I call you Deku?"

The kid nodded back. "R-right," he said.

This kid, Yamada thought, didn't hesitate to jump back into battle even after being impaled by glass and iron. He wouldn't blink twice if he shattered his arm on his way to saving on of their own. All that, and well, Yamada thought that it was a little sweet that he looked so flustered after calling someone by their name.

Well, they could start here.

The doorframe to their side broke under Miruko's foot as she used the side of the wall as a landing post from... wherever she came from. She dropped to the ground, a wide grin on her face as she towered over Deku.

"Rumi," she declared. "You get to call me Rumi and Ryouko, Ryouko."

"O-okay."

"And if you value your life, do not call Kayama 'Nemuri-san'," Yamada said, "Add any more years to her, and," he dragged his thumb across his neck, "she'll come for you."

"Oh, okay."

### **Q&A about Chisaki :**

“...You know, there’s something that’s always bothered me,” Iguchi said. “Deku, do you mind if I ask you a question?”

The young man looked like he minded it very much, but he nodded.

"Why didn't you share the plans about the future with us? Why was it Chisaki first? At first, I thought you were waiting for someone with a compatible quirk, but you also have those notes so that just anyone could put together some of those things, right? So that couldn’t be it. So… so why did you tell Chisaki?"

And Deku stared at him because wasn't it obvious?

Out of all of them, Chisaki was the only one that came back. He made a choice and his choice was here. That alone made it certain for Deku that this man was going to stay for the foreseeable future. Then, wasn't it only obvious that he told Chisaki all of his future dreams and wishes for this place to grow? So that he would know what they were trying to build up to?

He has, for a long time, already conditioned his heart to know and understand that people leave, but Chisaki chose to stay. So even if it was meaningless, and that it was naive of him, he was just so overjoyed that someone chose him that it felt like it was only natural that they would share opinions about the future with each other too.

“...Came back,” Deku decided on quietly.

### **Bark, bark-**

They had probably forgotten, with the whirlwind of events and emotions that they rode through recently, that Deku used to survive all on his own before. He defended his place, and never hesitated to take on any number of enemies and left no survivors. He had a system and habits and even though they spent all this time together, they were still learning things about each other.

And other things, they forgot.

A dog started barking.

Well, actually, the dog barked twice. It wasn’t something that they weren’t used to, but it was rare for it to sound like that. And it didn’t sink in, since it had been so long since they heard that urgent kind of barking, until an apartment door was slammed open.

Eyes sharp and movements fast, no one would ever guess that he was injured.

As it was, Deku flung himself over the railing in front of his apartment complex, doing his regular stunts where he dropped floor by floor in an impressive feat of physical exertion.

At the very bottom, he landed on his feet, did a body roll forward and was sprinting as soon as he was upright again. His signature helmet was on and his bat was in his hand, and it was almost as if the entire incident with Kouta and the empty mall and everything never happened.

Right as he got to the dog, however, he was suddenly hauled off his feet.

His head turned to where the near-maniac grin where Usagiyama looked down at him. Her arms wrapped around his middle and had him around her chest, leaving his arms and legs to hang uselessly.

“Heyya, Deku,” she purred at him. “Where’s the battle?”

Please, he begged with all his heart, please let him go.

“Usagiyama, good work,” Enji’s deep voice was unmistakable. “Deku, well take it from here.”

With a loud laugh, Usagiyama placed Deku down. She placed her hand on top of his helmet, her grin turning bloodthirsty as she looked towards the sidewalk. “I missed out the last one, but I won’t miss this one.”

A low growl was heard and Inui stepped forward. The gruffer man grabbed Deku by the shoulders, and growled again.

“You!” he hissed, his hands tensing on his shoulders, “Rest!”

Deku, too shocked and surprised to do anything else, nodded. And when the dog rubbed his head against the back of his thigh, he recentered himself. Armed with a bat, he turned to leave the area when Inui’s large hands grabbed him again.

“No! Stay here and rest!”

About another four words from breaking out into howls and barks, Kan stepped in.

“Ah, he’s just worried about you, so don’t take it to heart,” Kan said. “We’ll take care of it, so just go back and rest.”

They couldn’t see his expression, since Deku’s face was obscured by the helmet, but they could see how he tilted his head. Was it that confusing? Was it that surprising that they would do this? It was bad if he believed that, but it would be even worse if they did let him continue to think that.

Remembering how young Deku looked, it made something bitter rise up in his throat.

“My, what reliable adults, don’t you think, Deku?”

The sickenly sweet voice made Deku stiffen. Slowly, he turned over where the bright smiling face of Chisaki looked down at him. Despite how bright he looked, a dangerous aura poured from his essence like a shadow. He reached over to grab the young man’s shoulder like an anchor.

Every bit of his body wanted to just run away, but he was surrounded on all sides. There was no escape, and if the guilty look on Hojo’s face a few feet away was any indication, no one would come to help him.

“Leave this to us,” Enji said, his eyes looking out into the darkness of the street, “We will protect the place you treasure.”

And just like that, he, Kan, Usagiyama, and Inui headed out into the night with the dog from earlier.

The dog looked from him to them, and Inui must have said something, because it led them out.

Traitor.

“Now then,” Chisaki said, collecting his attention again, “What part of ‘pain’ do you not understand? There’s no way you didn’t get banged up from that stunt coming down. You know we have stairs, you were with me when we fixed them, so why can’t you just use them like any normal person?

“Honestly, after recklessly saving all these people, why are you still convinced that you’re all on your own? Did you seriously think that you could keep anyone safe right now? Worry about getting better first…”

And he went on and on and on as he all but dragged Deku back to the infirmary.

If Deku had been a little braver, he would have begged the man to not waste his kindness on him. Instead, he was dazzled by the light in the eyes of the adults around him, and even though he didn’t deserve it, basked in their kindness.

### **Death - ShiraDeku**

“...If you die,” Shigaraki said quietly, “I’ll follow you.”

The young man’s head snapped up, and Shigaraki stepped closer.

“So, when you die, know that you also killed me.”

Deku clearly took it at face-value, and dropped his gaze. On the other side, the others thought it was a little cute that he was taking it so seriously.

Shigaraki stood up, fully intent on leaving the area.

Right before he could make it to the door, however, he froze in his place. His hand was on the doorknob, and Compress gave a little gasp. In another moment, Shigaraki would have hit him for that, but right now, his entire attention was focused on the person who stopped him.

Deku’s trembling hand snagged the back of his shirt. He gripped it between his fingers, and Shigaraki had no doubts that he could slip away easily. This was done to get his attention, and make sure that he was heard. And Shigaraki was certain that it was Deku, because there were only two people in the whole world who would ever touch him, and only one of them was here.

“...I want,” Deku said, his voice barely a whisper, “to protect you.”

Shigaraki remained silent for another moment, eyes wide as he stared at the door, unseeing. He clenched his jaw tightly as he tried to stay in control over his thoughts.

“Then, it’s easy to see what you need to do, right?” he asked, pushing the door open.

The grip on his shirt disappeared, like he was slipping through water. He turned around to push the door open with his back and motioned for Deku to step out.

“What he means to say,” Compress said, unable to handle how bothered the young man looked about all this, “is that you should take better care of yourself. Don’t die out there.”

“Tch.” Shigaraki clicked his tongue, but the grin on his face showed no sign of hostility. If Shigaraki was capable of emotions like amity and goodwill, it would be in that gentle smile. “Don’t say unnecessary things,” he said, waiting for Deku to step through with him.

And when the young man did, Shigaraki looked as though Christmas came early.

...For a guy who could disintegrate anything by touching it, his expressions could get surprisingly innocent.

-

It was probably easier for guys like them. They didn’t really have anything tying them down. It was expected that they were rude and annoying, and a pleasant surprise when they weren’t. They had nothing going for them, not goals or friends or family or anything.

So what little they did have, what little they managed to salvage up for themselves, is what they protected fiercely.

His name, as they finally learned, is Deku. Which most of them called bullshit on, but it was the only thing that he reliably responded to. Instead of losing interest or getting angry at the young man, they would feel a sense of loyalty to someone for the first time. It was a little scary, to be that vulnerable in, but for some odd reason, it felt fine.

The peace was startling, terrifying, and all at once, dreamlike. Hopefully, they won’t wake up from this.

### **New Habits - Kamui & Dek**

And suddenly, a branch wrapped around his ankle.

“No hard feelings,” Nishiya said calmly, and Deku seriously felt betrayed. The older man looked to the side, too guilty to look at the young man in front of him. “But I don’t like seeing you hurt either.”

His heart clenched tightly in his chest.

Deku didn’t know what to do with the misplaced kindness they all showered him with.

“Oh, Deku, there you are!”

The pair looked to where Fuyumi gave him a wide smile, Shoto next to her, and both of them held a tray of food and drinks.

“Hey, Lunchrush mentioned that you haven’t swung by, so we brought you something to eat.”

Deku tugged on the branch. No good, he wasn’t going to escape unless he yanked hard. He didn’t want to do that, even if it’ll be easy. If he ran away, they would let him go. They wouldn’t fight it and they wouldn’t try to make it harder for him to run away. Their kindness and gentle disposition would be wasted on him then, and he knew he couldn’t do that.

“...I’m okay,” he tried, but immediately regretted his words at the crestfallen look on Fuyumi’s face.

“Oh, do you not like onigiri?” she asked quietly. “S-sorry, haha, that’s my fault. Should have asked you what you wanted first, huh?”

Augh, he might as well have punted a puppy across the street.

“No, I …” he hesitated, “I… I mean that…” he tried to look for the words and then decided on, “I already ate.”

Nishiya frowned, “I thought that you haven’t had breakfast since you just woke up.”

The thought that he was being cornered occured, but given their gentle expressions, he banished the thought.

“If you want, I really don’t mind getting you something else to eat,” Fuyumi piped in.

Briefly, they all considered how strange that must sound. Just a few months ago, they didn’t even know if they could see tomorrow, but now they could eat as much as they wished. They could afford to be picky about their food. It was truly bizarre.

He hesitated, and Nishiya spoke up.

“It’s fine, isn’t it? Do you need to go anywhere right now?”

There was a beat of hesitation, and ultimately, he shook his head.

-

Deku ate by pulling the bottom of his mask or his bandana up. He ate by using one hand to hold it there, and taking small bites of his food. It was an incredibly defensive way to eat, and everyone tried their best not to stare and make any motions at it.

For the most part, they all understood learned trauma when they saw it now.

“I would like to join the patrols soon,” Shoto suddenly spoke up. His gaze turned to Deku sharply. “If that’s okay.”

The young man shook his head, and frustration flickered past Shoto’s face before he spoke up. “Too much snow right now.”

“Then, when it melts.”

He nodded. So focused on eating so that he could leave, he missed the look Nishiya and Fuyumi shared.

“Ah, Deku,” Fuyumi asked quietly, “Are you planning on continuing patrols?”

He nodded. Of course he would. There was still much to do. Made even worse by the fact that the entire thing with Muscular ruined the majority of his plans. He would have a lot to do come spring time. The fact that he’s been unable to do any runs to kill anything that came too close weighted heavily on his head.

For his laziness, other people will pay the price.

“Aren’t you… scared?” Fuyumi asked.

Green eyes flew up to her face and she flustered. Shouto frowned, but Nishiya gave her a knowing look.

“Ah. sorry, I didn’t mean it like-”

“I am,” Deku replied back, cutting her off.

Nishiya’s face contorted into something painful, and Fuyumi remembered to close her mouth.

Finished with his food, he tugged again on his foot. In his surprise, Nishiya relaxed his grip and Deku got up.

“The more I have to protect, the more scared I get.”

With that, he left.

### **Data & Responsibilities**

Deku figured that, since he was pretty much useless for the time being, he would take this opportunity to properly catalogue all the things that he had been saving up on. In case something happened to the paper copies, it would be nice to have an electronic copy, and vice-versa.

It was probably a little childish to think so, but since La Brava did set up a computer lab and the likes, complete with hardware and memory, he thought that he could be helpful in other ways.

And more importantly, he’ll be able to properly list out all the things he has stolen over the years.

-

“...While I am sure someone will be grateful for all of this,” Makoto said as she helped punch in some of the data files while Tokoyami made quick work of the stack of ID’s that they had, “Why did you collect all of these?”

He passed one of the notebooks, detailing all the things that Deku had ever taken from a store or home, including the address and when he had taken it, as she eyed the other two boxes of notebooks that the young man had brought down with an Ectoplasm copy.

They weren’t in any rush to get these done, but it was nice to have something to do, even if it was something as menial as data-entry. It was also nice to spend any time with Deku, and working with Deku was the best way to see and observe the young man as he was without all his anxious energy that appears as soon as he meets eyes with someone.

Definitely not the first pick for anyone to be a leader, but right now, after everything, she couldn’t imagine anyone else.

“People at least I understand, but these?” she asked, leafing through the long lists of all the household detergents that Deku had taken from other houses.

“...Someone… needs to take responsibility,” Deku said quietly.

Tokoyami’s fingers stopped typing for a second, and they both turned to where Deku took a stack of notebooks out of the box and onto the table. Once he realized that the typing stopped, he looked up at them curiously.

“...You think a lot about the future, huh?” he said.

The young man tilted his head, a little confused.

“...Deku,” Makoto said, “You have my word. I’ll do my absolute best so that you don’t get in trouble.”

Green-eyes widened, and they dropped to the ground as he shook his head. A little smile came onto his face, like he didn’t really believe them but thought the sentiment was kind. It was mocking and disheartening all in one.

They silently returned to work afterwards, but they never forgot what was said.

-

“...Nii-chan,” Makoto said quietly.

Tsukauge looked up from where he was talking to Yagi and Torino. He gave a confused smile and she sketched the other two a bow.

“What’s up?” he asked.

“...Did you know that Deku-kun thinks that he stole all the supplies here and murdered everyone?”

His eyebrow arched at that. She nodded back.

“Yeah. He thinks that they still count as crimes and he expects to be tried for it,” she continued. “And that he, alone, should be convicted for it. He keeps track of all the Walkers he gets and all the supplies he’s ever taken. I know… I know that he’s right but… That just feels wrong.”

As a police officer, Tsukauge knows the correct thing to do. As a big brother who never thought he could live so simply with his sister and some of his friends after everything blew up in their face, he understands the expression on her face.

“...Okay,” he said. Uncertain about what was the correct or lawful thing to do anymore, he instead decided to go what he felt was right. “We won’t leave him high and dry.”

-

Toga suppressed a snort when she managed to overhear that snippet of the conversation. And when she told the people she was with, could see their immediate disgust and disappointment.

“It’s fine,” Sako pipped in, “If that does happen, we’ll just grab him and go.”

The blond cheered at that.

### **Let’s Make Farm**

The future is a scary prospect. Even under normal circumstances, the future could be a scary prospect.

“We don’t know the future,” Midoriya said, “That means it must be good.”

“Huh?”

“Because we have a future.”

As it turned out, their resident leader was quite optimistic.

“I’m sorry, one more time?”

“Let’s make a farm,” Deku repeated, and after a moment, tried to explain further, “Make our own food.”

“I… I figured that is what you meant,” Chisaki nodded back, “Wouldn’t it be faster to just leave for the farmland?” he eyed the place on the map that Deku had circled, “You clearly know where it is.”

Deku tilted his head back, and frowned. Or, Chisaki assumed he frowned, with how his mask crinkled and his eyebrows furrowed.

“Let’s make a farm,” he repeated one more time.

“Yes,yes, I heard you the first time, boss,” Chisaki sighed, understanding a pointless battle when he saw one. He looked to the map and then back. “What were you thinking?”

Deku could light up a room with how bright he got.

“In the next year, huh?” he murmured, looking through the documents. “Lots to do…”

## Quirk

### **Giving Deku a Quirk**

“Do you want a quirk?”

Deku looked up from where he was cleaning his blades. He squinted at Chisaki and tilted his head. Whatever he was thinking, however, he stopped and focused back to the task on hand.

“I know you heard me,” Chisaki said, and rolling his eyes, said again, “Do you want a quirk?”

“Does it mean that someone else will be quirkless?” Deku spoke up at last.

The former yakuza blinked back, and must have taken too long to respond, because their de facto leader shook his head.

“Then I don’t want it,” he said. “It’ll be nice, but if it’s not practical, helpful, or it’s harmful to someone else, it won’t be worth it.” He stood up, finished with his cleaning and turned to the man. “Is that all?”

“...You won’t reconsider?” he asked quietly. The deadpanned look that Deku gave him, however, was more than enough.

“...Why?”

“Does it matter?” Chisaki asked, arching his eyebrow, “It… I don’t think it’s a bad thing, if it will help you come back.”

“I’ve been coming back fine,” the young man replied back.

Gold eyes narrowed, and his hand grabbed his wrist, just a few inches shy from his latest injury. Deku didn’t even flinch, and kept eye contact with Chisaki.

“Really?” he asked quietly.

“If all we needed was quirks to be uninjured,” he said, yanking his arm out of the grip, “the world wouldn’t have ended.”

-

With that memory still fresh in his mind, he squinted at his former mentor in front of him.

“...Shouldn’t you give it to someone who… who is more ...like a hero?”

“...I inherited this power from my Master and I made it my own. I wanted to become the Symbol of Peace for the world,” he explained quietly. He made a fist with his hand, as though he could concentrate the power into his hand as he extended it out towards Deku. “And I want to pass it onto you. I believe that you are the hope for the future, and a pillar for a future for everyone.”

The young man hesitated. “But I’m not… I’m not a… hero...”

It felt so long ago, that moment when he stood on the rooftop with his idol, being told that quirkless people can’t become a hero. By the same person, even if neither of them remembered.

“What we need isn’t a hero,” All Might, the former Number One Hero that Deku chased with his whole heart, said, pressing his fist against Deku’s chest, right above his heart. “We need a leader. We need you.”

Deku felt his world swim, and he looked down. Yagi’s gaze was heavy, filled with expectation and a hope that he didn’t want to squander.

“But I’m weak,” he said quietly.

“We can work on that.”

“...What if I can’t… do it?”

“Shounen,” both of his hands took his shoulders, in a gentle and firm way, and Deku wondered if he would just float away if he didn’t have this to anchor him down into the world, “You already have. No worries, I will not let you be alone any longer ”

Deku, who couldn’t save his friends and couldn’t save his family and killed a long, long list of people, felt his floor turn instead underneath him. Of course he was alone. Who would stay? Why wouldn’t he be alone? He killed everyone else that chose to stay, so why wouldn’t he still be alone, even now? How could there even be anyone left?

“It’s alright, Shounen,” Yagi said, his boney hands firmly squeezing his shoulders. “You’re not alone anymore.”

Being saved by someone wasn’t loud or powerful. It was four words that he didn’t know he was waiting for.

His heart trembled under the weight of his sincerity, and understood that there was only one way to respond to someone’s kindness.

“...Alright,” Deku agreed.

Because some selfish part of him, far, far away in his heart, probably knew that he had nothing and he was nothing. So, if he could be something, anything, to the people that have redefined what it meant to be alive, he’ll do it. This quirk was the actual representation that someone trusted him, someone had faith in him, even though he was just an ungrateful liar.

“I’ll protect you,” Deku said. “I’ll protect this.”

He’d be a leader, their figurehead and ultimate sacrifice. He’ll be the pillar for this place, and the stepping stone for the future.

“I won’t let you down.”

He’ll be hope until reality came.

### **OFA runs its course**

Getting a quirk isn’t an easy thing. Deku thought that he understood that, but when he ate a strand of Yagi’s hair, he would be lying if he said he started to underestimate it. Now, here he was, barely able to stand on his own feet, felt like his entire body was tearing itself apart.

Feeling like he was boiling alive, being torn apart by his ligaments, splintering his bones, Deku suddenly woke up. He’s experienced so much pain that he momentarily thought that he was going to die, and he woke up just so he could die. Clenching his teeth hard enough that he was choking on his blood, he heaved and fought for every breath as he tumbled off the couch.

And this would all be fine except now, Kouta stays with him.

-

“...Deku-nii?”

He recognizes the voice, and still, he’s on his feet in less than a second, a blade drawn as he looks at Kouta and then around.

“...It’s just me.”

He relaxed by a fraction, and focused on the young child.

“...Are you okay?” he asked, his voice barely a whisper as he squinted his eyes. He felt like Kouta was really blurry. Was it because he was so tired he couldn’t see straight? It’s happened a few times, and all it meant was that he needed to rest a little more.

He hasn’t felt this awful in a while. A whole week, in fact. Was this going to be the new normal?

“...Yeah,” Kouta said after a beat. He stared for another moment, and Deku slowly pulled himself onto the couch, feeling the exhaustion pulling him down more than gravity. He must be even more tired than he thought, if just standing was too much for him. “Are … you okay?”

He wanted to say yes. He wanted to say yes and mean in. Instead, he rested his face in his palm, and his arm on his knee as he responded, “...Just tired.”

“Do you wanna get something to eat?”

“I’m… not hungry,” Deku replied back. Thinking was making his head ache, and he felt like he could feel his heartbeat pulsing in his head, like someone was beating him with a brick. It was amazing how much easier talking was now that he couldn’t think much. “Sorry.”

“Oh. Should I bring you something so you can eat later?”

“No, I… I’m going to sleep a little more.”

“I can… ask Lunchrush to put something to the side.”

Deku knew that he just wanted to be helpful. He knew that he needed to eat. He doesn’t know what he did to deserve such a small wonder in his life, and gives a little smile. The sight of it made something in Kouta’s expression brighten. He wants to protect that expression.

“It’s okay, Kouta,” he said. He could handle pain. He could handle discomfort. He could do anything, now that he remembered what he wanted to protect. “Thank you though. Go ahead and eat enough for me too, okay?”

It must have not been what he wanted to hear, because he looked so disappointed.

“Okay,” Kouta said. “I’ll go get dinner.”

Deku slumped back down onto the couch, falling over onto one side. His body trembling in his pain, he felt too tired to even sleep.

-

Normally, Deku doesn’t sleep long enough to dream. Sometimes, he’s too fucking tired to dream.

So he’s ill prepared when he gets this soul-crushing dream that has him wheezing and awake in an hour. His entire body shuddered, as though the very thought of living was revolting. On instinct, he presses his hand to his mouth to stop any sound he can’t choke out, and then his stomach rolls.

He runs for the bathroom, running into the doorframe but making it. He crashes his head against the tank and his empty stomach strains to get something to get rid of. He shivers, a full body shake that leaves him as a sweating mess, and for a brief second thinks that he’s dying.

When he thinks it’s all over. He flushes and gets up. A shock of red garners his attention and he stares in shock at the blood smeared on the toilet. Oh no. Who… Whose blood was this? The blood he brought back should have all been dried out, and Kouta hasn’t been to the bathroom and-

He coughed, and feeling something thick and wet come out, brought his hand up to his mouth. And moreso than his mouth, there was a lot of wetness right at his mouth and he turned to the mirror.

It was his blood. That was a lot of blood to come out of his nose. This was a nosebleed? Why was his nose bleeding so much? He assumed that the blood was what he choked on, and there was just too many globs of it so he was choking on it, he was choking on his own blood-

And it didn’t bother or surprise him as much as he thought it would. He didn’t know what to do with that kind of information. He took a deep breath, and felt his breath itch and catch in his throat and he started coughing again.

It was getting harder and harder to breath, and his coughing was getting bad enough that he felt as though his organs were rattling in his chest as a response. Despite his best efforts, his body slipped into panic.

He walked out of the bathroom and straight into the wall. All his strength decided to suddenly abandon him, and he laid there, on his side, coughing painfully into his hand for some time and the door swung open-

“Deku-nii, I know you said you’re not hungry but-” Kouta, who rarely speaks up and rarely speaks out, took one long moment at Deku, on the ground, blood dripping from between his fingers, looking like absolute shit, and does something that he would have never done just a few months ago. He turned around and called for help.

He’s so incredibly grateful that Kouta has enough sense to get help instead of staring in shock like what he would have done when he was about Kouta’s age. At the same time, he felt such an incredible amount of shame to ever subject him to all of the shit he brought him into.

As it was, he can hear Kouta’s faint, “Deku-nii is dying!” and a flutter.

His eyes trail up, and Hawks is staring down at him, looking far more serious than he ever wanted to see him. Next to him, a feather falls. It’s amazing what someone could focus on when they’re knocking on death’s door.

“Hey there, Deku. I’m going to pick you up and take you to our doc at my fastest, okay?” he said quietly.

His arms wrapped around him, something that he was used to at this point, and when he picked him up, Deku coughed harder into his hand. His other hand came up, as though to catch any other bits of blood that could escape from his hand, and the force of it had him closing his eyes. He missed the pinched expression as the blond took off.

-

“Deku-kun,” Natsuo said, so frustrated and tired that Deku winced, “do you… understand what happened?” he asked.

The young man didn’t reply.

“...You’re borderline dying, Deku-kun. Aside from your actual injuries, you’re clearly not eating or sleeping well. That’s a nosebleed from stress, coupled with the fact that your blood is plenty thin from your terrible lifestyle choices.”

Deku resolutely kept his eyes to the ground.

“You don’t have any energy because you’re not intaking enough food to give you energy. You’re getting constantly injured, and you heal poorly because you’re not sleeping, and you’re not eating. Everyone wants to help, okay? If you’re injured, just come to me or Chisaki-san or something, because at the rate you’re going, you’re going to just die.”

“Oh, okay.”

“...Okay? That’s all you have to say about it?”

It wasn’t professional but this was frustrating.

“...I’m … sorry?” Deku asked, tilting his head to the side.

Natsuo stared back at him, pinched the bridge of his nose, and took a deep breath.

“Deku,” he said, “...Do you like it here?”

Green eyes seemed to focus, and without any hesitation, he nodded. His eyes met his, green and vibrant like summertime trees, and the former resident physician is just glad that he finally met his eyes. Maybe he could turn this around.

“And you want to protect here, right? And everyone here?”

He nodded again, a little more certain.

“The thing is, Deku, we all feel that same way about you,” he tried. “We like you, and we like you here.”

The confusion came back into his eyes and Natsuo wanted to despair. He clenched his jaw, hard, but kept his tone level.

“So, if you want to protect everyone here, you need to take care of yourself too. Or let someone else do it.”

No good, he lost the kid. But Deku nodded and Natsuo was grasping at straws. So desperate, he makes an incredible error.

“And if you want to protect everyone, you have to be in good shape and health. If you … die, then who will protect us?”

He was going to go to hell for this. Or worse, Aizawa was going to figure out what he told this kid. As it turns out, he took after his dad after all. Even if he really didn’t mean it like that, who else just uses people like that? Certainly not his mom or Fuyumi.

But if it gets Deku to eat a little better, if it gets him to come out of the room a little more, if he would just try a little harder to live instead of doing the absolute barest minimum to see tomorrow, he thinks it’ll be well worth it.

The light dawned in Deku’s eyes and Natsuo knew he was going to hell.

“...I’ll try harder,” he said.

Natsuo nodded slowly, feeling like he aged ten years in ten seconds, “I’m... Going to assign people to you. At least until you make some better habits. And you better be in my office again everyday. I will know if you aren’t following it.”

Deku winced in response. It would be weird to force time in his schedule to eat and sleep or whatever again, but he doesn’t want to be a burden. So, he agreed.

A leader, he reminded himself, even if it’s just in name. He needed to become a worthy leader.

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Hawks was leaning against the wall next to the door when Deku left the clinic room. The blond’s eyes quickly took in his pale features, and his expression quickly reverted to his normal lazy smile.

“Yo, Deku,” Hawks said, giving a two-finger salute with a big smile.

Deku tried to repress (and failed) a full body shudder. His eyes turned downcast, and Hawks wanted to scream. He was the one who told them that his name was Deku. He didn’t (no one did, actually) want to call him that, but if that was what he said his name was, then what the fuck else are they going to say?

It wasn’t like he responded to anything else.

“...How was the checkup?” he asked, trying to play it cool. He wanted to be reliable. He wanted Deku to know that he’s going to be on his side, no matter what. Words clearly didn’t work, so maybe his actions could.

From the blank stare Deku was giving him, unlikely.

Hawks thinks that this would be easier if he just said something. Anything. Just. Please. He’s going to go crazy at this rate.

“...Okay,” Deku said.

The blond jerked, reeling in his surprise as he looked at Deku. He huffed a laugh out, too surprised to breath correctly, and he covered his mouth with one of his hands, a bright expression on his face.

“That’s good,” he said, suddenly winded, “That’s really good.”

“...Thank you,” the young man continued, his cheeks turning pink. His eyes downcast, he missed the absolute gobsmacked expression on the blond’s face.

Three words. He heard three words from Deku’s lips today.

“Yeah,” he nodded, barely remembering to keep talking. Hawks was once in the Top Five ranking for Pro Heroes. His reflexes and adaptability was nothing to scoff at. Yet, the best he could come up with was to say, “Anytime.”

Deku gave this small smile to the ground, and it made a home in Hawks’s heart.

Progress was a small thing, but so damn rewarding.

### **Post: Emergency Call**

The following morning, Deku was armed as he always was, standing in the Rental Office. His helmet was off and next to him on the table, and he was leaning over the table, marking this and that up on the map. He looked as pale as always, but he didn’t look nearly as exhausted as he did yesterday.

Hopefully, he had his helmet off because he trusted them, and not because he was in too much pain to wear it.

“...Morning,” Enji greeted as he came in.

He didn’t even look up from his papers, and Enji scoffed back. Normally, the only people who ignored him was his family, so while this wasn’t an unfamiliar feeling, he wasn’t used to getting this kind of treatment from anyone else. Granted, he supposed that he wasn’t really being ignored if Helmet, Deku, had his helmet off and didn’t react to him coming in. He’s seen this guy hunt something down a mile away. There was no way he didn’t hear Enji walk in.

“You look better. Heard you got carted to the infirmary,” he continued, as though he wasn’t being ignored. He made his way into the office, taking care to make sure he wasn’t stepping on any of the discarded pieces of paper and pens around the room. “Did you sleep well?” he asked, searching his mind for a normal conversation that Fuyumi asked him in the morning.

They weren’t much of a family, but Fuyumi somehow came out as the most sweetest human being. He’s certain that following her example won’t lead him astray.

Still, there was no answer. Not a problem. Enji was used to this kind of treatment.

“Deku?”

That got a response. The young man lifted his head, as though surprised that someone called out to him, and Enji arched an eyebrow at him. Maybe, this whole time they were wrong. Deku was never ignoring them at all. He just assumed that they were never talking to him.

Green eyes peered at him, before Deku gave a curt nod and returned to whatever it was that he was doing. In return, Enji huffed back. Looks like this would be the best he gets today.

“What are you looking at?” he asked, walking up to him. In response, the young man placed the map flat on the table.

“...Perimeter-check,” he said quietly. “And expansion here,” he said, pointing at the next neighborhood.

“Hm?” Enji leaned in closer to get a better look. He felt a little breathless at the fact that he was being included into his thoughts. “Oh, I see,”

“Oh, good morning, Todoroki-kun, Deku-kun!” Yagi said, walking into the room, “It’s a beautiful morning today, isn’t it?”

“...I guess,” Enji replied back, not understanding it at all.

Next to him, Deku took out a pencil to trace something on the map, collecting his attention again.

“What are you guys looking at?”

“...I have an idea,” Deku said, tapping the map. “But...” he trailed off and hesitated, “materials…”

“That’s fine,” Enji nodded, placing both his hands on the table. “That’s why we’re here.”

Blue eyes rested on where Dekus’s hand hovered. He couldn’t help but think that it would be perfect. This time, he’ll make sure that Deku understood his sincerity.

“The orchids… huh?”

Deku nodded, and Yagi quietly waited to be brought into the discussion. However, no one noticed, and the two continued to talk in their own world.

“Lots to do then,” Enji said. “When were you planning it?”

“Spring,” Deku replied back.

“You have to be fully healed for it then.”

The young man looked up from the map, and a slow smile began to spread on his face. His eyes brightened to a shade of green they hadn’t seen in this desolate world made of crumbling buildings, and his face mask crinkled.

“Yes,” Deku nodded. “I will be.”

-

“...How are you doing?” Yagi asked quietly.

Enji had decided to stay in the room and leaf through the old data Deku had compiled concerning what they had just talked about, while the two walked out. The blond wasn’t sure where they were going, and he didn’t ask either. He was more concerned about this.

How did the quirk transfer go? He imagined that it went fine, and that there were no complications, but he heard that Deku was flown down into their infirmary by Hawks yesterday evening.

“It’s… settling,” the young man said, his hand coming up to his chest. “How are you?”

“...I’m doing very well,” he said, a bright expression on his face. “I’m glad to hear that you're adapting well! I was so worried when I heard that you had to be checked over last night.”

“I’m okay,” Deku said quietly, so quiet that it could have been his own private thought.

### **Slight Changes: Guard Rotation**

Other things that changed, that had to change, were the people who did go out on rotational guard duty.

It wasn't really necessary, not with how well the dogs worked as an alarm system thus far, and the motion detector perimeter that La Brava helped set up, but it was decided to do this.

“...Just in case,” Deku replied back. He had a map for these kinds of things, but as part of his rehabilitation, he also went out on walks with their given guard group to go out. It was severely frowned upon and it was never with a group smaller than six with someone who can make it back to base in less than three minutes.

Still, he took this time to show them the things he’s made overtime. He had several safe houses, planted here and there. He showed them how he boarded up the walls, what he boarded it with, and where to find what if they ever found themselves in need of hiding. Majority of them, who had come along with him for a long time, finally had reasons behind the strange things that Deku did.

More importantly, he was learning how to speak and they were learning what his voice and thoughts sounded like.

It really, really, really helped with the cabin fever haze too. They went by volunteers and it was always a mixed bag when they headed out. If, by some rare reason, they ran into a Walker, they were to dispatch immediately. If they ran into something worse, they had to blow the whistle to alert the dogs to alert the people at base.

Deku had some good ideas, some good initiative, and although there was a great amount of uncomfortable feelings, the first people to volunteer were the younger kids of the base. With the weight of their words tossed back in their face, taunting them for backtracking on their promises of support now that they knew who was under the helmet, many of the responsible adults lost their footing to argue back.

However, it also meant that those that looked as young as Deku lost the only argument that stopped them from joining up with patrols.

“I want to go!” Kirishima said, “Especially since Hel… er, Deku is injured, that means, more than ever, it’s our turn to protect this place, right? Even if it’s scary, I don’t want to live in fear for the rest of my life. I don’t want to watch anyone die trying to protect me anymore.”

“...Me too,” Uraraka said, standing up. “I’m sick of waiting around to be protected. This time, I want to do something.”

Taishiro, moved by that kind of initiative to face the trauma outside of their comfortable base, felt torn between the protective surge and the beaming pride that came from watching kids grow up.

“There will come a point where we will no longer be able to shelter those kids,” Aizawa said quietly. “During that time, the people who will protect them have to be each other.”

He shrugged and Yamada snapped his fingers.

“Well, we are teachers,” he said brightly as he sobered up a little, “Gotta teach them how to live in this world, right?”

### **Sleep Habits**

One of Deku’s unspoken habits was his impeccable ability to sleep anywhere, anytime, and his quick response time.

It was telling how often he had to do it, for him to be such a light sleeper even at their home base. And also implicitly that he could rest at any opportunity.

One moment, they thought that he was just sitting in his chair, looking out the window, but then they’d realize that his eyes were closed. And then someone’s voice would carry in from down the hall or someone's footsteps would hit just a little too close, and his eyes would be open and alert.

Thinking about how fast his reaction time was, how he seemed to always be ready to fight, Hawks feels so inadequate.

With the exception of the times where Deku’s body was out of commission, it was clear that he had shaken off the habit of sleeping for long periods of time.

Katsukame opened one of the supply doors, and grabbed one of the gallons of bleach. When he pulled it off the shelf, his heart nearly stopped when he saw a foot behind it. He stared for a moment longer and pulled some of the other bleach gallons towards the edge of the shelf as quietly as he could. Between handles, he could see him.

There he was.

Deku was sleeping on his side, curled up in a rather uncomfortable way on the hard surface of the shelf, and was using his arm as a pillow. He shivered occasionally, and Katsukame wondered how the young man managed to sleep here of all places.

And then he thought a little more about it.

It was someplace no one would come to look. It was a quiet, almost silent place, separated from most of the common areas that people come through. The window was tiny and minimal- no way for anything to come in or out.

Katsukame had one of two options. He leaves with the weight of guilt that he left this shivering boy that Chisaki (and therefore all of them) personally owes a debt to, or he doesn’t and probably alarm the young boy.

Chisaki or Deku.

“...Deku,” he spoke up, and the effect was instantaneous.

The young man’s eyes flew open, and scooted a little backwards so that his feet were flat against the wall-probably to use it as a spring to shoot out-, there was a switchblade in his hand, drawn and ready, as his eyes darted left to right.

Katsukame had to admit, he had good reactions. He can’t imagine how often he needed to do this so that he has these instincts, but he’s still alive, isn’t he?

“...You shouldn’t sleep here,” the man said quietly.

The young man stared at him before dropping his head to the shelf with a sigh.

“Quiet,” he said, his voice barely a whisper. “And cold.”

He took a deep breath, closed his blade, and pulled some of the gallons of bleach around so that he had the room to get out.

Very vividly, Katsukame remembers Chisaki scolding Deku for holding his own dinner, and then lecturing the flustered Mirio for letting Deku hold his own dinner, and he moves. He taps the shelf next to the young man’s head, waiting as he tensed so tightly that Katsukame was worried he would break his own back in his tension. He watched green eyes snap at up, and dart from his hand to his face. Then, he gave a curt nod as he reached to take his hand. Just like that , Katsukame helped him slowly get down to the ground. As soon as Deku was on the ground, he pulled out of the older man’s touch, still tense but not really as much. .

His back hits the shelf, and every part of him looked wary except his eyes. His eyes, somehow, remind him of Chisaki. They were clear, like he was seeing Katsukame as he was, not the scumbag or former yakuza, but just Rikiya. He was not assessing him as a danger, but as someone. Under his pure stare, Katsukame suddenly felt dirty.

“Do you prefer sleeping in the cold?”

“...It hurts less,” Deku replied. He was lucky that it was so quiet down by the storage room, or else the older man wouldn’t have heard him.

“...If you let them know, they can give you something for the pain,” he explained.

The green-haired man shook his head, “Then, sleepy.”

The words rolled around in his head, until it suddenly clicked. Oh, Katsukame thought to himself.

“... You don’t want to sleep?” he asked, more for clarification.

The young man looked up at him and then back down, probably contemplating how much information he wanted to give out versus his limited speaking ability, and then spoke. “Medicine… makes me drowsy. Bad reflexes,” he said.

Katsukame felt oddly touched that he had told him. It was small, but the thought that Deku did trust him with information, even though he pretty much stated that he didn’t trust anyone to keep track of things while he slept, was warming. It was a small step, but it was undeniably a step.

The young man gave a yawn, rubbing the back of his neck and he gave a big sigh. He looked up to the taller man and gave a small bow, “Thanks for waking me.” No one was ever this polite with genuine respect to him before.

“...Anytime,” he replied back. And, in a moment of great courage, added, “Next time, just find me. I will… keep track of your nap. And you can rest more peacefully for longer durations. It’s good for you.”

The young man’s eyes shined brightly, and his entire demeanor seemed to straighten under the words. Right when he was about to respond, something settled into his head and Katsukame could pinpoint the exact second the realization of something dawned on him. It brought his shoulders back into that defeated slump and the young man dipped his head forward again.

“Thank you.”

“Amazing,” Chisaki deadpanned when Katsukame reported in, “We have bastards that can’t keep their fucking hands out of prescription pain meds, but we’re going to have to force Deku to take some drugs.”

“...Boss,” he said, unable to help himself, “Wouldn’t it suffice to put it into his food?”

His former boss narrowed his eyes, “That paranoid shit? No way, it was hard enough to get to this point. If we try to force his hand, we’ll be back to square one.” He scowled at the thought dangerously, “I’m gonna make that shit trust me.”

It was the second most kindest thing he has ever heard Chisaki say (and mean), even if it was said in a rather threatening way.

“...And then…?” Kurono, who seemed to be getting bolder and bolder with every passing day, questioned from where he was, counting through their inventory.

“And then?” Chisaki parroted.

“Like, are we going to betray him or something?”

Chisaki frowned back as though it was the dumbest thing he had ever heard. “Why?”

Katsukame and Kurono exchanged a glance, and the right-hand shrugged back.

“Nevermind then,” he said, “So to clarify, we’re just going to earn Deku-kun’s trust. Just because.”

The former yakuza boss nodded back, “Correct. It’ll be the ultimate victory I have over him. He will give me his unconditional trust.”

Kurono nodded back, already used to this, as he turned his dead-eyed look to his comrade in confusion.

“You heard that, right?” he said to him. “Unconditional trust.”

Katsukame, numb, thought about all those times he heard people say things like, if Chisaki were to gain humanity, the world would end, and wondered.

### **Sparring**

"Deku, how is your rehab going?" Akakuro asked

"I'll be joining patrols next week."

The man nodded, as though it matched up what he was thinking, and then said, "Good. Let's spar."

The young man nodded back, and right when Akaguro was about to leave, the exclamations began.

“What do you mean spar?!”

"Where is your bat?"

"I don’t want to hurt you."

“You can’t, so go get your bat.”

Sparring wasn't a new occurrence. Like everything else that they had set up here, they pulled it together, and it was open to anyone at any time, and most complaints were minimal.They had first-aid on hand, but it was rare for Chisaki to deal with anything worse than a broken nose or finger.

Normally, they tussled on a stage made by Cementoss, a little down the way from the complex. The grassier areas also made for a great place to throw down. Some groups clumped together to work out here as well. However, in the cold winter months, they tried to use their modest-sized indoor facility. Most people didn’t spar, or didn’t need a lot of room to spar, so it wasn’t a very popular place. They had a few lamps to help light the place up, and thin, long windows. At some point, a bomb of some sort must have gone off in this place, because no matter how hard they tried to wipe it down or air it out, it still smelled like smoke.

It was one of the rooms in the extra building they had reconstructed (courtesy of Chisaki) and repurposed to be a makeshift dojo. Here, Deku hit the wall hard enough to knock his breath away for the third time in four minutes. And same as all the times before this moment, was back up on his feet in seconds.

Standing at the center of the room, not even having worked up a sweat, Akakuro frowned at him.

"... Isn't this enough?" Yamada asked, with a frown on his face. "He's still recovering."

“The problem isn’t his recovery,” Aizawa said, watching the scene in front of him. His friend turned to him, frowning, but seeing how focused Aizawa was, reluctantly dropped it.

He turned his attention to the scene in front of him. He winced as Deku was tossed back again, and wanted to steal the kid and hide him away when he returned like a boomerang, only to be tossed violently back again.

And then, right when Stain lifted his leg to kick him to the other side of the room again, Deku narrowly dodged and dropped to the ground. With nimble movement but no elegance, his jerky movements propelled himself to successfully execute the reckless move. His legs managed to swing out to the other man’s leg.

Had he been stronger, he might have knocked Akakuro down and landed a real hit. Instead, Akakuro’s leg came back around and kicked him down. The leg he kicked didn’t even flinch. With his heel digging into Deku’s sternum, his eyes shined with a particular kind of interest.

It didn’t look like he was happy to have pulled a win over him. It wasn’t a win that was high off victory or something built from pride. It looked like he was having fun, and eagerly anticipating the next move that Deku would pull. The young man flailed a little, pushing futility at the foot pressing against his chest as he wiggled.

And then, he went limp, as though giving up.

Still, Akakuro didn’t budge, until the young man suddenly swung his leg in a fan kick. His impressive flexibility managed to knock into the back of Akakuro’s other knee. He bucked suddenly, but Deku’s hands were tight on the foot on his chest. He sucked in a breath and used his palm to shift the foot off of him, and managed to roll away safely.

A few feet away, he was already on his feet. Panting hard, his eyes bright with a challenge, Deku stood at rapt attention from across the way.

“...Excellent,” Akakuro said, looking from his feet to Deku. “You have some great instinct, but your execution is sloppy. You can learn form and you can get stronger, but instinct is something you have to feel for yourself.”

Bashfully, Deku gave a small smile back, “Thanks,” he said quietly, probably because he was still working on catching his breath. “You were going easy on me, right?” he asked. “I wouldn’t have been able to get out of that hold otherwise.”

The older man shook his head, “I wasn’t going at full since you’re injured, but I didn’t think you would escape the hold like that. When you’re back at full health, you should focus on gaining some weight. Your current strength is going to deteriorate because you don’t have the body to back it up.”

From the exasperated smile on Deku’s tired features, it was obvious to see that this was a lecture he got often. It wasn’t surprising, all things considered, but it seemed to fuel something in Aizawa’s heart.

Yamada’s too, and he gave a short sigh through his nose.

He wanted to get stronger.

### **Todoroki-san**

“Is there a reason why this plate is out here?” Fuyumi asked, motioning to the small pot on the side.

“Hm? Oh, it’s Deku’s,” Lunchrush explained. “I never know when he comes in, so I always make it in advance. I just heat it up before I give it to him.”

“I see,” she nodded her head. “What does he like to eat?” she asked, genuinely curious.

“No idea,” Lunchrush replied, “He never put in a request before. He always eats everything, too.”

Fuyumi nodded, he didn’t strike her as someone who would waste anything, especially not food.

“But… He eats soups better,” he continued. “If I get him something like curry or fried rice, he’ll take it and won’t eat anything until the next day. But if it’s soups, he returns it by the next meal. I guess that’s easier for him to eat and digest, so that’s what I usually make for him.”

The young woman stared at him for a bit and then back to the tray sitting innocently in the corner of the kitchen.

“Really? Then, what about fruits…?”

The older man stopped stirring the pasta for a moment.

“To be honest, I’m just glad that he’s eating. When he was Helmet, he never ate anything from here. I really worried about him. I still do, but at least I know he’s eating.”

“...Yeah,I think I understand that,” she replied back.

Deku nodded as he took the tray from her, “Thank you, Todoroki-san.”

Fuyumi beamed back, and Deku felt as though he could see the flowers blooming behind her.

“Natsuo already told me about your diet. Don’t think that you can escape. Make sure you eat all of that, you hear?”

He winced, “Todoroki-san said that…”

“Not a problem Fuyumi, I’ll make sure of it.”

Deku’s plate was suddenly taken by above, and when he looked up, the imposing figure of Enji loomed over him.

“...Enji-san,” he sighed, already accepting defeat from a fight he wasn’t prepared for.

“I’ll make sure he eats all of it,” Enji said, blue eyes boring into Midoriya’s.

“...You know, if you call Natsuo and I by our last names, people are going to get confused,” Fuyumi said, her smile looking a little scarier than just a few seconds ago. “Just call us all by our first name too, okay? It’s weird that you only call our dad by his name.”

Deku blinked at her, his face turning pink. He dropped his gaze, because now that she stated it so plainly like that, it was pretty embarrassing, wasn’t it.

“Oh is he finally going to stop referring to them as ‘Todoroki-san’ and ‘Todoroki-san’ and ‘Todoroki-san’ and ‘Todoroki-kun’? Shame, I thought it was pretty funny,” Taishiro said, a radiating ray of sunlight today too.

“

### **StainDek - daggers**

"Try this."

Deku stared at the twin short blades the older man dropped in front of him.

"Hm?"

"I'll teach you," Akaguro said, pointingly ignoring the way Iguchi spluttered at him. "You're small and fast. You have a good sense of balance. This is a better option for you than a bat."

The young man nodded and picked them up. After a second of weighing them, changed the grip for his left hand into a reverse grip.

He's not weak because he's small, Stain thinks. He clearly only fights hard enough to survive. He isn't a seasoned veteren like the other adults here. He’s never had proper training, or any training for that matter.

His muscles are trembling just because they're exhausted. This is a full body exhaustion that occurs when people are too hungry for too long and their body begins to shut down bit by bit. Stain, who only started eating habitually and well once he got here, is ashamed that it took him so long to notice.

## Return To Patrols

### **Late Feb- Return to Supply Runs**

Deku finally returns to doing supply runs when the Sakura petals begin to bud sometime late-February. He’s well enough that he is content with his rehab and stuff, and no amount of yelling, pleading, or begging was going to stop him. He needed to step it up. He had no intention of living so frivolously.

He gets up, a few hours before sunrise. Suited up in a way he hasn’t for a while, rolled his arm, winced right when he managed to raise his arm to be even with his shoulder, but recognizes progress. Slow progress, but he couldn’t even twitch his arm without pain shooting up and down his arm two months ago so this was a huge improvement.

Once he was done with his morning stretches and routine, he tried to throw a few punches. A few weeks ago, one punch was enough to knock his entire balance off and his arm would throb for the rest of the day. He’s slower, weaker, but he can go through the movements he wasn't able to before.

Thank god, he thought, he still has his uses.

He ruffled Kouta’s hair, feeling a little bad for waking him up at all, but he had to let him know that he couldn’t be in the way when he came back.

“I’ll be in a lot of blood. I don’t want you to be here until I clean up,” he explained. Kouta was a smart kid, and has already seen too much of the world. But, Deku already committed to this. He would protect him.

Slowly, almost blearily, he nodded back and Deku ruffled his hair.

“Why… why do you have to go?” Kouta asked quietly.

Deku stared at him, “Because I want to.”

Kouta stared back, internalizing those words like they were something precious instead of a whim. More and more everyday, however, Deku is a little more certain that Kouta will be fine. Eventually. And more importantly, if Kouta keeps using him as a crutch, he’ll never understand that for himself.

The uncertain future was scary, but it was also their greatest weapon.

He leaves an hour before dawn. Stain is at the gate, looking as though he was coming in from whatever it was that he was doing, and stopped to stare at Deku. Next to him was a large Akita dog, and she came right up to the young man, walking around him and rubbing against his thigh. After a second, he gently placed his hand down onto her head, wistfully wishing that he didn’t have his gloves on so that he could properly pet her.

“Helmet… Deku,” Stain said, quickly fixing himself, “Where are you going?”

Deku pointed his bat towards down the street, and then, as though remembering that he doesn’t have to hide, said, “Rehab.”

“...Alright, I’ll come with you,” he said.

Deku hesitated, but eventually lifted his hand up and said, “I’m okay,”

Stain gave him a dead-eyed stare.

“...I can call Eraserhead.”

“I’m already here.”

They both turned to where the former underground hero stood, looking pissed six ways to Sunday as his narrowed eyes focused in on Deku. The young man winced, and figured that his run was going to end right here and now, because there was no way he would be able to escape either of them now.

To his surprise, the older man sighed instead.

“Alright,” he said, coming to stand right next to him, “Where to, Deku?”

Deku straightened a little, surprised, and the older man scowled.

“You’ll find a way out anyways, so I might as well just go with you to stop you from pushing yourself too far,” he said. He eyed Stain, and the other man gave a curt nod. Between them, Stain’s dog gave a nod too, like she could understand what was going on and agreed wholeheartedly.

“Wouldn’t want an incident like last time,” Stain agreed.

Deku doesn’t know when these two became close enough that they could understand each other with a nod. For a bunch of people who always say things like they were in his debt and that they hated each other, he really felt like they were always working together against him.

Well, he wasn’t going to stop them from coming along. He felt some guilt when he realized that he felt comforted at the thought of being with people.

He had planned to get out towards the edges, to the broken roofs and check out his safe houses out there. He doesn't think anything too drastic would happen, and if he gets that weird feeling, he knows he’ll turn back to get some real fighting power instead.

As it was, the three headed out.

As expected, everything was left almost exactly as he expected, with the exception for the place that he was tossed into. He stood in front of the broken wall, staring at the inside of the house from where he was on the street.

“Something here?”

Aizawa approached him looking around the silent street. He and Stain walked quickly and silently, carefully avoiding the broken debris. Quietly, their accompanying dog panted as she followed carefully. Aside from them, there was nothing else here.

“Should have been,” Deku said, leaving the place on the wall. He looked around.

There was no body. Not even a speck of blood. There were no signs of the bloodstains, even though he found the discarded bottles of hairspray he looted. It made something sink inside of his chest.

“...I killed one here,” he said, tapping the ground with his bat. “And now there is nothing there.”

His hand came up to rub his arm, right by his elbow, where he distinctly remembered the feeling of something sinking its teeth into his arm.

So, something else had to have come through here. Something stronger and with a perchance to lick and suck up all the blood in the area. If it hasn’t come to them, he has reason to believe that it either died, got killed, or was chased out. All of it spelled out a pain-in-the-ass problem that dumped itself into his home.

Fuck, he didn’t even know what it was.

He looked down the street. Going straight will lead him to that strip mall. There could be answers there.

“Going on a walk,” Stain suddenly spoke up, breaking his concentration. He gave a meaningful look to Deku as he continued, “If we wanna go further, then we should go back and gear up.”

A walk. Right.

Deku wanted them to trust him, but at the same time, he didn’t. He wanted them to trust him enough to let him go. But he didn’t want them to trust him if it means that they’ll start liking him or caring about him.

He looked at them, and his selfish greed won.

“You’re right,” he said. “Let’s head back.”

They finished sweeping through the area, a peaceful and quiet jog around the neighborhood, and returned back right when everyone seemed to be awake for breakfast.

Stain and Aizawa seemed to suddenly disappear from his side as Inui came marching up to him, seething in his anger, and Enji barely a step behind him. Surrounded by them, their growls and snarls failed to hide the worry as they lectured and lectured and lectured him.

In the end, Deku ended up walking to the Rental Office, only to be cornered by Sato and a tray of warm food. Green eyes flitted from Sato to the food, and he took one of the onigirs. With another nod, he moved to start working on the clerical things.

Sato looked absolutely crushed, holding the tray in his hand, but Deku didn’t see it.

### **Almost Better**

“Well, I guess you’re good to go,” Natsuo said, almost regretfully. “Just don’t push yourself too hard, okay?”

Deku opened his hands and then closed them into fists.

“Yes,” he nodded. “...Thank you for your patience,” he said.

The older man gave an exasperated smile, “And all that I just said went over your head, huh? Please do us all a favor and keep yourself safe.”

The young man looked down, and gave a sheepish smile in return.

“I will do my best,” he said earnestly.

“I have no doubt,” Natsuo said, almost absent-mindedly as he rolled backwards to the counter. He wrote this and that and then rolled back to Deku. “Well, it’s not like the only time we can talk is if you’re injured,” he explained. “Deku, this is a little premature, but let’s keep working hard together.”

Green eyes shined back, brighter than any fresh spring fields with morning dew clinging to their leaves and making them glimmer like jewels, and he nodded back.

### **New Weekdays**

Deku was carrying a gallon of disinfect in one hand, a bucket in the other one, and a backpack bulging on his back. On sight, everyone was starting to recognize it as a sign that he would be spending the majority of the day cleaning off bloodstains and rot off the streets and building walls. As a result, the group that would follow him around for a bit was a group that were prepared to help clean.

“Helme… oh, I mean uh, Deku… Deku-kun? are you heading out?” Nishiya asked as he approached him. He looked a little awkward, like he didn’t know exactly how to address him properly. “I’d like to join you, if that’s alright.”

“Me as well.”

Deku, underneath that helmet of his, didn’t say anything. He turned on his heel to leave instead, and the other two figured it was the best they were going to get from him.

Thinking that it was just going to be a quick walk to the closest bloodstains, they were both out of their element when Deku kept walking instead.

“W-whoa, wait, where are we going?”

### **With Jiro - A Strange Apology**

They stared as Midoriya took the drink, downed it within seconds, and then turned to enter the kitchen and wash his cup.

“I can take that for you!” Jiro’s voice came suddenly, piercing his thoughts and he jerked in his surprise. Eyes wide, he stared at the young girl, who came rushing up to him. “Please, let me take care of that for you!”

He remembered, rather vividly, the girl who was hidden in a closet as he brutally murdered his parents a room over. He remembered, the agonized scream that ripped from her lips and it haunted him. Staring at her, he found some part of him relieved that her eyes could still be so bright.

“I-I know,” she said, “why you uh… did that, back when we first met.” Her hand opened towards him, “I get it. It was hard to understand at first, but I get it. By then, they weren’t… They weren’t my parents anymore. And I know that, if you wanted to hurt and kill me, you would have done it by now, too. Or left me to them and then k-kill us in one fell swoop.”

Oh no, he thought, a pit opening in the bottom of his gut for his heart to fall through. Oh no, because he had this sickening feeling that he knew what she was going to say. Please, he almost started to beg, don’t forgive him. Don’t understand him. Don’t justify his unforgivable actions.

“I’m sorry for the way I’ve been treating you,” she said, bowing her head and straightening it up, “And thank you for saving me back then and everyday since.”

She was honest and earnest. The same way that people squint at the sun when they peer up at the sky, Deku felt his entire being shrivel up under her kind words.

“You don’t have to,” he said, his heart breaking because it felt like no one even understood that they deserved far better than this. That he could barely scrap together all the pieces that made a life, but in reality, every single person here pulled themselves together.

How could he word it, so that they would understand that Deku wanted to do more, wanted to do better, but since he was inherently weak and useless, he couldn’t even do that? He didn’t want their gratitude, he didn’t deserve it. He didn’t want their apologies, he wasn’t worthy.

At any point, if someone thought that he should die or be permanently ruined for the things that he did, he wouldn’t have fought it. Deku knew that he deserved a fate worse than death. His hands clenched his mug tightly, he turned to leave.

“You don’t owe me anything.”

Her face fell. It would be hard, but this was better. If he accepted her words, her feelings, she might hold onto him. That would be bad, because Jiro was a beautiful and wonderful person.

Just standing next to her, he felt like he was dirtying that.

### **Children Joining Patrol -**

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"If you don't want to fight, it's okay," Yamada said. "If you don't want to use your quirks, that's fine. We're not out of the race just yet."

"You guys," Aizawa continued, pointing at them, "Grow at your own pace. Do what you need to do. As long as we're here, you have that leeway, so use it."

The words seeped into Todoroki's heart, and he wondered about that. In his mind eye, with severe clarity, he could see Deku, leaning against the wall with a hand on his ribs as he tried to catch his breath as quietly as possible. He saw that picture and shook his head.

“But then, by the time we are strong enough to protect what matters to us,” he said, looking at his hands, “Doesn’t that mean we won’t have it anymore?”

Aizawa’s hands dropped to his shoulders.

“Don’t underestimate the adults here. We have just as many things that we want to protect as you.”

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“I’m shocked that you thought that they would believe you,” Dabi said, eyebrow raised, “a bunch of washed-up heroes taking refugee at someone else’s place.”

Aizawa grinded his teeth down, but couldn’t refute his words.

“You’re right,” Tensei replied back, “But I didn’t tell them because I am… was a hero,” he quickly amended myself. “I told them because I don’t want to watch anyone die anymore. It’s purely selfish, you’re right.”

Armed to the teeth, helmet on his hands, he took a deep breath.

“I became a hero to make the world a better place. It’s different now, but … that hasn’t changed. Deku’s got goals. I can see what he’s trying to do, so I’ll follow him. Even if it’s for different reasons, it sounds like you’re doing the same thing, aren’t you, Dabi?”

Dabi tilted his head, eyes narrowed into slits, but he didn’t respond.

### **Youngest Todoroki Joining up**

Enji actually growled when this happened.

“...I’ve always wondered what it was that you were looking at.”

Deku looked up where Todoroki, the youngest, came to stand next to him.

“I thought that… if I could come and stand next to you, I would understand.”

The young man stared at him through the vizor.

“But in reality, now that I’m here, I still don’t understand,” Shoto said, shaking his head. He turned to the young man, eyebrows furrowed, “What did you fight so hard for?”

Deku blinked. Him? Fight hard? Wasn’t it obvious?

“I’m weak,” he replied back, matter-of-factly, “If I want to do anything, all I have is hard work.”

If Deku was smarter, he might have had a better answer.

“But now it’s different,” the youngest Todoroki explained, “since we have each other. So instead of one person working really hard, we can split the work between us.”

His words were earnest. He knew that Shoto was serious.

“I don’t want to,” Deku declared, plain and simple. He could see it clearly in his head, Shoto was powerful. Splattered in blood, a painful expression on his face, his voice shot from how hard he’s been screaming, scarred from memories and close-calls and returning alone and Deku couldn’t do it. “I don’t want to share.”

Heterochromatic eyes stared at him for a long moment, but Deku didn’t look at him.

### **Perimeter**

With some exceptions, there were rarely anyone who wanted to go outside. Normally, the only times anyone went outside were to do perimeter checks. These days, the amount of people that were willing to join these patrols have increased, as have the well-trained dogs.

Part of it was because the lingering fear of what could be and leftover trauma from what had happened had mingled together and festered into something that could paralyze the best of them. The other part was the part that was far too used to relying on other people instead. While a scouting team, or a scavenging team for that matter, was nice to have, it wasn’t a necessity given what they did have. Therefore, if they didn’t dedicate time and effort to it, then it was fine.

Needless to say, when Deku returned with his trademark helmet, starting to go on trips again, more than one person was surprised at the number of volunteers that wanted to go too.

But more than surprise, Deku eyed them all with disdain and deep dissatisfaction. Did he think that they would slow him down? Probably. That sounded right. In reality, however, Deku could feel a headache coming on.

“We should take someone capable of recon with us. Hawks or Iida will be good options, in that sense. As far as a vanguard, Miruko is more than capable.”

“...Us?” Deku repeated back, too quiet to be heard and thus ignored.

“A team filled with heroes is doomed to fail,” Shigaraki shot back, his eyes narrowing. “Since we’ll be scavenging, versatile people like Jin or Sako would be a better option.” He, if Deku could believe it, just sounded bored and disinterested even though he looked hostile.

“...We?”

“Since we’ll be going out for the first time in a while, we should go for stealth. Iguchi’s a good shot, so we should take him to support us at the front,” Stain explained.

“...Well, compared to everyone, our ages are the closest,” Mirio chimed in brightly, and next to him Kirishima nodded in full agreement.

His hold tightened on his helmet, and the young man felt even more uncomfortable as he understood what was happening around him.

“This place was pretty much our backyard,” Takeyama said brightly, “We should be the ones a part of the advance squad.”

Several others also took this moment to throw their two cents in, when a hand dropped onto Deku’s shoulder. His head snapped up to where Chisaki’s golden eyes looked down at him.

For a brief second, he honestly thought someone like Chisaki, who always seemed to think things through logically and impartially, who always took his side and helped see through almost all his plans, would be able to help him.

Reality had never been kind to Deku. There was no reason for him to ever think that anything had changed.

“Well, there’s no easy way out of this,” Chisaki said, heaving a great sigh like this was a huge hassle to deal with. But everyone could see the way his eyes twinkled in their mirth, clearly getting a kick out of this entire situation while he dared say, “guess you have to pick your team.”

Deku had tried. He really, really, really tried. His team was his usual one.

He didn’t want to put anyone in unnecessary danger, and he was probably the healthiest he’s ever been. However, saying something like that would make the current fight even worse.

The dog next to him, seeming ignorant to his current inner dilemma, barked happily while wagging his tail.

### **Enter: Shindo**

Sakamata, Tenya, Shouto, Atsuhiro, Katsukame.

Deku is a particular kind of guy who always ends up getting into a mess that he’s not prepared to handle.

The next time they saw Deku, they were jogging and turned the corner when something just came out. They jerked backwards, ready to fight, and in front of them, the < something > that came out tried to stop from full speed and slid a little bit.

The shine on the helmet was unmistakable.

“Deku!” Sakamata gasped. And then the relief gave way to frustration. “There-”

There was a young man he was carrying on his back. He was clearly bigger than Deku, as his arms hung limply over his shoulders and down to his waist, and his feet almost swung to the ground. As soon as they saw him, Tensei was by his side.

“Head injury,” their young leader said as soon as he saw them.

As it was, Deku kneeled down, and Tenya took the young man on his back. Sakamata shed his jacket to wrap around the stranger and they propped him up against the wall. Shoto fished out his first-aid kit and crouched down next to the new stranger. As soon as they turned back, they realized that he was awake. His eyes were looking around wildly, clearly in a state of shock, but he was frozen stiff.

“I’ll keep watch,” Katsukame spoke up, understanding what they needed to do. He wasn’t someone that could offer comfort or someone that was good at taking care of injuries.

But he can protect them. And if there are some great amount of enemies, he’ll buy them time or carry them away. This, he can guarantee. He waved at Deku, and the young man nodded back.

“...How are you?” Sakamata kneeled down in front of the young man, and was still much too tall.

Deku nodded and stood back up. His chest was heaving in an effort to get some air back and leaned heavy to one side. If Sakamata wasn’t so intimately aware of how much Deku hated to be touched, he would have tried to get him to lean against him.

As it was, he asked, “...How’d you lose your shoes?”

Their leader shrugged back. “Lots of glass. Got stuck,” he eventually said.

A thousand things ran through his head, all sorts of bad situations leading to equally bad events swam around his head. Some were morbidly awful, if only because he knows about Deku’s tendency to downplay injuries, and his initial assumption that Deku was out fighting began to crumble and something much colder settled in.

“...Go sit down and take a break. We’ll take it from here,” he said, a lot more gruffly than he meant to. But Deku is also the reason why Chisaki, Aizawa, and Stain were always in a bad mood, so he’s certain that he’s not nearly as bad as they could be.

And when the young teen immediately sat down where he stood, they realized that he was much more tired than they thought.

His fire extinguisher and both his bats were nowhere to be seen. He was painted in blood, especially around his arms and legs, like he took his limbs and dipped them into pots of red paint.

He rested his arms across his knees, tipped his head forward, and if it wasn’t for the irregular way his chest was heaving, they would have assumed that he was sleeping. As it was, it was clear to them that whatever happened, Deku was exhausted and in pain.

“Deku, perhaps you should take off your helmet…” Sako tried until his eyes focused on the way his hands were trembling. “Would you like me to take off your helmet? We have some water, if you would like.”

Deku shook his head. His pants were barely audible. Not needing to hide was great and all, but he didn’t want to risk getting too relaxed here. He could relax when they returned, and he just needed to hold on till then.

“...You should get some water.”

He hesitated, and relaxed. He lifted his chin so that there was better access to the buckle keeping his helmet clipped on. He was so stupid.

He wasn’t alone anymore.

“Is… Is he fucking crazy?” Shindo muttered quietly. His trembling hands clutched at the jacket Sakamata draped over his shoulders while Shouto kneeled in front of him to apply some basic first-aid.

They were silent, recognizing the absolutely confused look on his face as something that they had (and are still trying) to get used to.

“Who… Who the fuck just… just tries and saves someone they just… I … I don’t even know him. He doesn’t even know me,” Shindo whispered, his shoulders trembling as his eyes watered. “I don’t… I don’t get it.”

Shoto understands. Once the world came to the mess it was now, it was strange to think that there was anyone alive who would do the things that Deku wanted to do. It was hard to think of someone else, of some stranger, as someone to help unconditionally. Actually, even before society collapsed, he’s hard-pressed to think that there were many people who helped people as instinctually as Deku did. Even some heroes seemed to have a reason, a reputation to hold up or an agenda to push, and Shoto seldom knew anyone who was willing to help someone else without recognition or reward.

And thinking of it like that, he’s a little jealous that Shindo gets to know of Deku as Deku from the get-go. After all, he and everyone else met Deku as Helmet and still jerk at the thought of that he had green eyes.

As it was, Deku was sitting with a fussy Tensei and Atsuhiro, trying to salvage the mess that was his feet. Next to him was his helmet, and a water bottle rested between his legs. They lectured him about this and that, but it was clear that Deku would have no intention of living as carefully or as safely as they wanted him too.

Chisaki took a long, slow breath.

He pinched the bridge of his nose, and then spoke very slowly.

“Do you even want to get better? Honestly, I am beginning to think that you like being in pain.”

Deku seemed to shrink away, but even Kurono seemed to have sided with his former boss instead, evident from the frown on his face as he looked down at him.

“It just… happened.”

“God, and if you don’t exercise any amount of caution, you’re just going to…” he made a motion with his hand, “roll over and die.” He rubbed at his temples. “I can’t believe this. I can’t believe you’re still alive.”

“...Sorry,” he said quietly.

“...It’s your body that you should be apologizing to,” the older man snapped back. “Well, at least most of this, I can Overhaul but… your shoulders? That’s on you.”

On that day, they learned that Chisaki cannot Overhaul new wounds if those new wounds are directly on top of Bites. It’s as annoying as it sounds, and the thought gave Chisaki a migraine as he assessed the wounds decorating the man who saved him. Without the damned helmet on his face, it was clearer to see that he was feeling pain everytime he moved his neck, but it was only a reminder for Chisaki that he was no help. He couldn’t even reduce the pain.

It was like his fate was to never pay back his debts or something.

The young man got to his feet and off the bed. For a brief second, Chisaki honestly contemplated finding a cage to put this man into, but ultimately decided against that.

“How is he?” Deku asked instead, and the final puzzle piece fell into place.

He thought it was weird that the young man allowed himself to be subjugated to Chisaki. Of course, it would be so that he could get an answer to his question. That made more sense. Chisaki was wondering why he seemed to be more compliant. He had hoped that he trusted him now or something. Jokes on him.

“He’ll be fine. Once he gets into some good habits, there will be nothing to worry about,” he responded back. “He’s a little overwhelmed, and he’s sleeping the rest of the shock off.”

After putting all his clothes back on, he pulled his chest padding on, clipping it down. If he felt any discomfort from it, it was in the way he stilled after moving and taking a deep breath. Vaguely, he wished that some of his men could have that same kind of mental fortitude. However, instead of putting back on all his equipment, he was stuffing the rest of his padding he had into his helmet.

At the very least, he wouldn’t have to worry about Deku suddenly taking off the base. He would never leave without his padding on. Chisaki was thankful for small mercies.

“...You saved him. Good job.”

There was a brief pause, wide green eyes turning to him with unshed tears and Chisaki lost his breath in his shock. Moreso than locking Deku in a cage, it might be more accurate to say that he was already trapped here, chain and ball.

“...Really?” he asked quietly, eyes wide and innocent in a way an apocalypse survivor couldn’t be.

Something tightened in Chisaki’s heart, an encroaching kind of discomfort that seemed to spread the longer he thought.

“Yes,” the former yakuza spoke with more certainty, even if it might just sound like lip service to someone else, he’s certain that Deku will take him seriously, as he always had done. “He’ll be fine.”

Those green eyes looked up at him, bright in a way that made him look even younger, and Chisaki swore he’ll make this a reality.

### **Aizawa & Deku - learning about justifying**

Deku rubbed his face with the inside of his arm. He sniffled loudly, and took a deep breath. It felt as though his organs were made of lead, and it was determined to come crashing down on the ground. But he couldn't do that. He needed to keep moving forward.

Like that, Aizawa came running into the hallway. The man's steps came to a sharp stop.

"Deku," he called out, his eyes widening as he took in Deku's features.

"Shota," Deku's voice was a little more coherent than a strangled croak. He tried to clear his throat, but it didn't help much. "It's clear here. We should move up."

The older man stared for a moment longer before he made his way to Deku. In less than a second, he had an arm around Deku's shoulders and pulled him close to his chest. The young man gasped, flustered and shocked, but when his hands came up to grab Aizawa's arms because he was caked in blood and it was gross why would anyone want to hold him now-

"Welcome back," he said, voice right next to his ear. "I'm glad you're alive."

And the part of Deku that had been alone, alone because he couldn't help someone, alone because he killed everyone else, alone and alone and alone, broke inside of his heart. The feeling or someone waiting him was painful. His arms hung uselessly by his side, and he could feel the warmth from Aizawa seeping into his empty self.

He pulled back, and Deku, the fool he was, stepped forward to follow him. When he realized what he did, he jerked backwards.

"...Sorry," he said, because someone should apologize for this entire thing going belly up. He tried to clear his throat again, and his eyes stung as they watered. "I-"

"You don't have to apologize for returning alive," Aizawa said, his voice tight. "Not to me. I am and I always will be grateful and relieved to see you alive."

Body breaking into shudders, Deku shook his head. Aizawa needed to stop. He needed to stop before Deku believed him. He needed to stop before Deku believed and started to think that it was actually okay to live.

"Deku-"

"We need to go," Deku blurted out, even as his back hit the wall. His hands clenched and unclenched from fists and opened and then back into fists. "So, don't... Don't say that."

Aizawa's expression tightened, teetering onto something that looked painful, as he regarded Deku. In these moments, Deku regretted ever letting it be known who he was. This man was much happier back when he didn't know who was under the helmet.

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"Welcome back, everyone!"

Deku flinched. It would have been funnier, but Aizawa had seen him impaled by claws before and he didn't flinch then. He flinched when people welcomed him back. Before, with the helmet on, they always thought that he was sensitive to loud sounds. Now, he was closer to a harsher truth.

Still, the young man raised his hand, recognizing that he heard them, or whatever and that wasn't something that they ever got from Helmet.

Far away, in the privacy of his own mind, Aizawa wondered if Deku always assumed that someone else was being welcomed.

### **Devotion & Q/A: Save- to be reassembled**

“...So like, why did you save me? Us? Anyone?” Setsuno asked casually.

The young man looked up at him and then back down to his lap where he was transcribing some of his planner notes to the other notebooks.

“...Everyone always asks me that,” he said. “...But I don’t get it. Why wouldn’t I?”

After everything that they have gone through, Setsuno has no doubt that Deku has seen a lot of shit in the world. It makes it even harder to wrap his head around the fact that the man harbored no ill will to anyone or anything, and that he forgave thoroughly and genuinely. It made him almost angry, as he couldn’t help but wonder if he had lived his entire life wrong this whole time.

“...Everyone says that I saved them, but isn’t it really that they were the one that wanted to live? Why else would they have gotten better?”

He stopped writing, tapping his pen against his lip as he thought about it and shrugged.

“I don’t get it. When I killed Muscular, and I left Moonfish for dead, it was me. I killed them, but everyone said that I didn’t kill them. Isn’t it the same thing? If I didn’t meet them, they wouldn’t have died then. Then, if I had been there or not, would everyone else have been saved?”

Setsuno’s head began to spin at the thought. He wasn’t ever really a thinker, more of a feeler, so instead, he turned it all off and took a deep breath.

“I think you’re thinking too hard about it,” he said, “When we mean save, we don’t mean like, how a hero rescues someone out of a burning building. But that… that we’re comfortable. We’re like, finally comfortable.”

He really didn’t know how else to describe it. But, since that other group has come in, he thinks he has a better way to put it into words. They were just going to give this new life that Deku put back into them, and give it to him.

If he wanted them to die, they’d do that. If he wanted them to live, they’re doing that.

“Like, I… Before everything, I was tossed out by everyone,” he explained. “My family tossed me out but my girl found me. But she had me and then threw me away. She threw me away because I’m just some useless piece of trash, you see.” He lost energy for a second before he started up again. “But then Chisaki-san found me! And he said that I’m still useful! Me!”

Deku nodded slowly, and the man laughed.

“And you said that it was okay if I’m alive.”

He grinned.

“Thank you for saving me, Deku,” he said.

Deku’s eyes welled with tears instantly. He sniffled and wiped at his eyes as his throat closed up. Of all the things he knew he would never deserve, he never thought that one of those would be gratitude.

### **Gunshot -**

He wasn’t too sure what he expected when he saw Deku with a gun, but he was secretly hoping that the young boy would be a shit shot. It was probably petty to think of it like that, but he really didn’t want the kid to be good at everything.

But the last thing he expected was for Deku to fire a gun and have it recoil him so hard that he fell backwards and also bashed his face in with said gun. If the gunshot wasn’t so deafening, they would have heard the crack when the gun hit his face.

Yamada and Spinner, who were also practicing their shots, watched Yaoyorozu rush for the fallen man.

And so, they learned that Deku wasn’t a shit shot (he hit the target) but perhaps guns weren’t for him. It wasn’t a shock, considering that he was known for his melee combat.

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“...He can’t handle the recoil,” Chisaki said quietly, “He doesn’t have the muscle for it. You’re asking him to bear that brunt fully though his bones.”

“Well, you can just grow your muscles,” Yamada chirped in, still giggling at the mental image of Deku flying backwards. “Until then, I guess we’re not out of a job just yet.”

Kurono hesitated, and it caught the blond’s eye.

Was he missing something important?

“...Yamada-san,” Kurono said quietly, his voice low like he was wary of who else might be listening, “Deku-kun doesn't have those muscles. They were bitten off. It will take a long time for him to grow those again, if he can.”

Suddenly, all Yamada could think about was the tight expression on Stain’s face when he had to take the daggers away from Deku. The words weighed heavy in his gut, and he felt a little cold.

“That’s not funny,” he said quietly.

Chisaki didn’t even look at him, and Kurono’s gaze turned pitying. He wasn’t sure which was worse.

“That’s not funny,” Yamada repeated hollowly.

## Sprinngtime - Familiar

### **New Group w/ Old Faces**

*(literally in one case)*

Four things changed with the new group of 20 that joined them. This group would be the first, and only group thus far, that Helmet didn’t go out and personally bring back.

As it was, the team that led them back was Nejire, Mirio, Tamaki, under the guidance of Nishiya, Sakamata and Hawks. While many were uncertain about the fact that they were letting the kids out, one look at Helmet’s young face was enough to destroy almost all debates.

It would be the first group of survivors that they found since Kouta that previous December.

Apparently, they had survived several months with each other. And where even Shigaraki and Nishiya could have a civil conversation, some of them could not talk to each other. According to their stinted report that they gave Sasaki and Tsukauge, they used to be over 100 of them. The strongest of them were taken by the Liberation Front, then their remaining group split up, and of the split group, most of them had died off, leaving just them.

First, was the former salarymen and one of the associates of the Hero Public Safety Commision, who were vocal about their disapproval to their current leader. They flinched when well-known criminals came into the room, and in general reminded everyone of what used to be.

The second were the people who were so far lost and so far convinced that they needed to ‘climb’ the ranks in order to ensure their safety and survival. It varied from person to person, but it was clear that they wanted to find someone with a Presence, and will do anything, say anything, if it meant furthering themselves. It was a product of spending a very long time on their own, and abandoning their dignity and humanity in the effort to live for another day.

The third were the people who kept to themselves around their former leader. They were quiet, distant, and distrusting to the fullest extent of the definition.

The last was a boy called Akira-kun. He was the youngest member in the group of 20, and referred to as *Akira* as their physical proof that there is a future in the world and he is it. His real name was something or another that no one seemed to actually know, but they all called him Akira.

Akira-kun, as it turned out, went to school with Deku.

They stood around, in awe and rapt fascination as they approached the streetlamps and their brightly decorated apartment complex. They were all beyond exhausted, and this was truly the best thing that has happened to them since this whole thing began.

“Electricity? You guys have… electricity?”

Yeah, Sakamata thought to himself, understanding exactly where they were coming from when they said it.

“It only really started to take off recently,” Nejire said, “But this is our pride and joy. Don’t worry, we even have running hot water!”

They gasped, eyes widening considerably as they excitedly squabbled more between each other. They entered the complex area and Mirio loudly announced that they were back with more survivors.

“...Survivors?” a young man said, sticking his head out, “Oh wow, we haven’t had those in a while.” The blond waved his hand at them, a big grin on his face before he turned around, “Hey, I’ll go tell Chisaki that we got some newcomers.” He turned and ran off then, and the other two behind him, a man with white cloth coming out of his elbows, and a red-head.

“Damn it, Kaminari, at least wait until we finish!” he snapped out with a sigh as he waved at them. “We haven’t had survivors since… Kouta, right?”

Next to him, the red-head nodded, “Welcome back!” he said with a big grin and then nodded at the group of unfamiliar faces, “And I guess welcome to you guys! Dinner doesn’t start for another hour or so, so you guys came right on time!”

“Nice!” Mirio said, brightly, he turned back with a wide grin. He started to talk about this and that as he took off his backpack and looked around.

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During dinner, after a thorough wash and fresh clothes, they were seated with hot food and told to eat as much as they would like. After a second of hesitation, they dug in, famished. The people around them, pro-heroes or their greatest fans, gave hearty welcomes as they piled in to eat vigorously as well.

But after they finished eating, when the shock began to die down and they weren’t just standing around in awe, the questions came back.

“So, Hawks, how… how did you manage this? It’s very impressive!”

“Eh?” The former hero stared at them and shook his head, “Oh no, I’m not the leader here,” he said. He was holding a bowl of food, getting served when they all did, but he seemed to stand around instead of sitting and eating like the rest of the survivors. He kept his eyes on the doorway, and it took a moment before they realized that he was waiting for someone.

Just then, Enji walked in, tall and imposing, they all gawked at him in shock, as he was talking to someone with their arm in a sling. The young man looked up, looking tiny next to Enji, and on the other side of him was the well-known secretary of All Might, Yagi Toshinori.

“That’s him,” Hawks said, and he raised his hand. “Yo, Deku,” he called out, surprising all of them when the young man with the green eyes looked towards the blond, “We got some new survivors,” he said.

The green-haired man nodded as he walked by them, not bothering to even stop at their table. His eyes did a quick sweep of faces. It was good if he was looking for threats, but left a poor impression on meeting people otherwise.

“...Welcome,” he said, voice softer than a whisper. Just like that, he had walked right past them, and the others frowned in shock at the treatment and the disappointment that this very curt man was the supposed leader of this settlement.

“He’s a little shy,” Hawks said, over his shoulder as he kept his body facing Deku, “But we wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for him.” He gave a lazy, two-fingered salute to them, ready to follow the younger man into the line for food when one of the survivors spoke up.

“...Deku? Is that you?”

Deku froze in his spot, and very slowly turned over. Even though the bottom half of his face was covered, hiss wide, almost fearful eyes stared back as Akira stood up.

“Oh my god, it is you!” he shouted, pointing at him. He left his spot at the table to run around to stand at the center of the cafeteria. “Holy shit, you survived? This whole time? You survived?!"

Deku, who didn’t flinch when he had to fight a new type of mutant, took a step back.

Enji frowned at the yelling child, and Yagi’s eyes darted between the two. Hawks turned over in surprise, but his eyes narrowed. The hostility in the air increased by tenfold.

“You mean the guy who you guys all listen to is Deku?!” Akira gasped, pointing at the man, “Why? How did that weak, useless, quirkless Deku manage to be the head of all these great guys? Did Bakugo do it? I bet he did and you took all the glory for it, didn’t you?! Then what, did you leave him for dead, too?! I bet-”

And suddenly, an oppressive feeling of bloodlust made his blood run cold and his words stopped mid word.

“Look kid,” a cold voice came from behind him, and he slowly turned around to face a blond with a scar covering up a fourth of his forehead. “I’d be real careful with your next words. Some of us have a lot less control than we look. // I’ve killed plenty of people, another kid isn’t going to make a difference.”

Akira nodded, shivering as several people in the room seemed to stare him down.

“Bu… But why’s he the leader?” he asked, again.

The blond narrowed his eyes, taking a threatening step closer, but Deku spoke up.

“Jin-san,” he said, “It’s fine. Let’s eat dinner.”

And to Akira’s shock, the blond backed off. The way he eyed him however, showed that there was no change in his thoughts, though he turned around to give the young man a big grin. The bloodlust, although it didn’t disappear, faded back to a manageable degree.

“...Akira-kun,” Deku said, expression blank as he assessed him, “People change.”

He turned back over his shoulder and went to ask LunchRush for something in a container. Right when he was about to take it, however, Enji plucked it out of his hands. He ordered, grabbed his food, and took both of their meals out of the dining area, never once looking at the younger man, but sparing an absolutely chilling look to the new group of survivors.

Deku opened his good hand up, nearly jogging to keep up with Enji’s long strides, as Jin laughter followed them out. Yagi, holding his own lunch, heaved a great sigh as he followed after them.

“I… I don’t get it,” Akira whispered.

### **Quirkless**

“...You’re quirkless?” Yagi asked quietly. “I mean, before the whole…”

Deku stiffened for a second, and right before he could make any motion to nod or say anything, Enji cut in.

“It’s none of your business if he doesn’t say it.” Enji said, tone final and borderline hostile, “There are plenty of us who cannot use our quirks here. Having a quirk or not makes no difference in the identity of the man we follow, the same way it doesn’t matter whether or not he dons a helmet or eats with us.”

His sharp eyes narrowed down at Yagi and Twice laughed back, enjoying himself.

“Looks like we can get along about something, huh, big guy? // Damn, to think that I’d have something in common with Endeavor. I need to kill myself or kill him.”

Deku stared at him, eyes wide and bright and relieved.

And the fact that someone was willing to jump to his defense was so endearing that he smiled a little. It was helpless and a little bitter as he balled his hand into fists and nodded.

“I used to be quirkless,” he said, confirming it for everyone with a self-depreciating smile.

The look on Enji’s face was thunderous.

“...What annoys me,” Enji said, “Is that the amount of things that you can disclose to us is reducing, yet the amount of things that you want to tell us never increases.”

Deku looked up at him and then back down to the bowl in his hand.

“...I’m sorry,” he said quietly.

He shook his head, “No, I’m the one that should be apologizing. You have nothing to apologize for.”

The young man’s eyes flitted from Enji’s face to the bowl in front of him, and then back up. He took a deep breath and looked back up. His eyes were sharp and Enji privately wondered if this was the gaze he held underneath that helmet when he went out to fight.

“Then wipe that look off your face,” he said, startling the other man. “Because there’s nothing to apologize for.”

Enji blinked, in a rare moment of surprise before he gave a chuckle. Next to him, Jin covered his mouth and Yagi fretted nervously.

“...Yes, I can do that for you.”

There was a long moment of silence, as the four made their way through their food quietly.

“...What do you want to know?” Deku suddenly asked. “I… I don’t know what you want to know if you don’t ask.”

“Are you actually quirkless?” Jin immediately asked. “Or did you lose your quirk when everyone else did?”

“...I have a quirk now,” Deku said, “But I was born quirkless.”

Yagi gave him a sharp glance when another voice cut in.

“I gave it to him,” Chisaki said, walking up to where they were sitting. He eyed the other three with no little amount of disdain before he looked down to Deku. “I thought you wanted it to be a secret.”

Deku shook his head, “Secrets are useless. Can’t feed anyone, can’t protect anyone.”

Gold eyes seemed to glimmer in their approval and the older man nodded.

“Great, then you can come down to the infirmary later for a check-up, right?”

Deku grimaced, but nodded his head. He walked into that one.

### **The [Missing]**

“Uhm, excuse me,” one of the women came forward, “I… I know that this is … is probably pointless but I couldn’t…”

Tenya peered over to where one of the women pursed her lips as she eyed Tsukauchi. From her stringy hair to her sunken cheeks, it was obvious what kind of life she led before she managed to get here.

“B-by any chance, did you see… uhm… a woman named Higatsuka Toko?”

Tsukauchi felt his heart clench tightly. Regardless of the relationship, when someone asked these kinds of questions, they were looking for the same answer. If they weren’t here, physically, then it was pretty obvious what had happened to them.

The best he had were all those identification cards that they had been storing all this time. Was it okay for them to just allow someone to look through that? There were a lot of cards, but he didn’t want to give clearance to let just anyone go through the cards-

“I killed her,” a voice came from behind them. Deku walked in, a box in his arms. He placed it downand looked at the woman, “Her, the child she was holding hands with, and a Higatsuka Atsuki, at the part last April.”

The woman stared at him for another moment. Her eyes welled with tears as her slips twisted down and she screamed out.

“You monster! How could you just kill her?! She was the sweetest woman! My best friend! My sister!”

Tsukauchi rushed forward, Tenya jumping in to grab her when Deku raised his hand to stop them both. He shook his head at them, even when the lady ran forward to grab him by the front. He let it happen-since they’ve seen the gorey mess that Deku left behind outside- and didn’t flinch when she brought her hand down and across his face.

At that, however, Tsukauchi did grab her.

“Hey!” he yelled out, “I understand how you feel but this isn’t the answer!”

And the woman dropped to her knees, unraveling at the seams as she buried her head into her hands and sobbed.

“Toko,” she sobbed, “oh… Toko…”

“C’mon, let’s get you to some company,” Tenya said, kneeling down next to her. He shared a look at Tsukauchi, motioning at Deku, and then after a short bow, escorted the woman out.

The former detective turned to Deku.

“I… I understand why you did that, but there are better ways to word that,” he said. However, under his current line of question, he could feel his heart splintering at the thought that Deku had painstakingly memorized the names and locations of all the people that he had killed.

If they could even say that he killed them.

“...If I found out who killed the sweetest woman I know,” Deku said, bending over to pick up the box again, “I’d be angry too.”

Responsibility was a child standing in the face of a grieving adult, calmly accepting the situation as it spewed acid into his heart. He looked at Tsukauchi, one of his cheeks painted red and accented with a new cut.

“It’s okay,” he said, “I knew that I would have to face the consequences of my actions.”

He turned back to Tsukauchi, his eyes flitting from the silent man and down to the box in his arms and then back.

“You don’t… have to look like that. It’s okay. I knew what I was getting into,” he said.

And in Tsukauchi’s mind, his little sister’s words replayed again. Over and over again and he hated how it took him such a long time to even notice. In his negligence, his words became air, and Deku would never know how fundamentally wrong this entire situation was.

“Deku,” he sighed, “That’s not the problem.The way you worded that… it sounded like you made the conscious choice to kill her.”

Deku nodded. “I did.”

Tsukauchi shook his head, “If she… if she turned, then that’s not the case. It’s different-”

“If it turned out that one day, this is a reversible condition, or that there is a treatment for it, it would be the same either way.” And Tsukauchi’s blood turned into ice inside of his veins. “I took that opportunity from her. Even if the blood was already black, it’s still blood that I spilled. I went into that park with the full intentions of killing everything that I encountered.”

His eyes were certain. It was the same certainty he had when he told them that there would be no walls. It was the same certainty that he had when it came to getting something that someone mentioned off-handedly.

Tsukauchi wished, desperately, that there would be a way for him to release that kind of guilt.

“She must have been a great person,” Deku said quietly, almost absent-mindedly as he took his steps back to the door, “if someone was willing to get that angry for her.”

Tsukauchi got the door for him, wondering what he could say that would permeate the fortress of guilt Deku was tucked under.

### **Twice - Rusted Nails**

Jin peered over the railings when he saw Deku walking behind the building. It’s been a long time since he’s seen him, muchless seen him by himself. It’s been a whole three days since he’s seen him alone, and he only saw him at breakfast, which was a long time ago. He figured that it was probably because the kid was sleeping off the injuries and stuff, but it didn’t stop him from jumping off from the second floor.

There was a question that rested against his chest heavily. It kept him up at night sometimes, especially after finding out that the Helmet they knew was quirkless.

He ran for the young man, “Hey, Deku,” he said, even though he should have said this long ago, “How’s your arm?”

Under a helmet, Jin didn’t know anything about him. Without a helmet, he can read him clear as day. Which was really saying something since no one ever comes to ask Twice about his opinion on people for a reason. Deku tilted his head, his eyebrows furrowing as he peered back at Twice.

“Like,” the blond motioned uselessly to the arm that he remembered nails going through once, “that one time? When you stopped me from falling on my head? And you got those nails in your arm?”

The blank stare that he was given in response almost gave him relief. If Deku didn’t really remember it, then maybe it was because it wasn’t a big deal. Maybe Jin had been worried all this time for nothing. Maybe …

“I’m fine,” Deku replied. “It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

Jin nodded slowly, “That’s good,” he said. And he took a step forward, “I uh… I know that it was a long time ago so this is way late but uh thanks. For the save.”

The young man dropped his gaze to the ground. “I didn’t do anything,” he replied back.

“Aw, don’t be like that,” the blond said. “When someone thanks you, you should take advantage of them! \\ Make them do something for you!”

His eyes seemed to shine at that. Jin, who never knew that he could be on the receiving end of such a bright gaze, felt his chest swell.

“You don’t have to say anything right now, but I got your back. \\ So I can stab you!”

When Deku relaxed, Jin beamed back. Here was someone who relaxed in his presence. If he had known that all it would have taken was the world ending, he would have been a lot more earnest in being a villain a long time ago.

“...Thank you,” Deku said at last, his voice thick and his eyes watering.

Jin faltered, “Dude, didn’t you hear me? I just said that you’ll get taken advantage of-”

“Yes.” His curls bobbed a little when he nodded his head, “You did.”

Jin stared at him, the gears whirling in his head before it all broke down.

“I don’t get it. I just told you…”

He trailed off when he saw Deku’s expression turn into something fond.

“I trust you, Jin-san.”

It was almost amazing, how a single sentence could make him feel whole. His eyes ran with tears as he rubbed at them. He sniffled loudly, a blubbering mess in seconds as he walked up to Deku and threw his arms around him. It should have been embarrassing, to fall apart so easily, but he’s lived a long time without ever mattering to anyone.

There weren’t many people who would trust him. There were even less that would say it like that, genuine and kind. And there was exactly one person who he really, really, really wanted to be an asset to.

The young man turned stiff under the touch, but leaned into the embrace. His arms awkwardly wrapped around his middle, but his hands couldn’t meet around his back. Meanwhile, the blond’s arms wrapped around him so that he could touch his own elbows.

Still, Deku didn’t feel small.

The world didn’t end. No, for Jin, it was like the world was finally his.

### **Offer for Hawks**

“Oh well, it’s just so strange that, with all the heroes here, a young boy would be in charge of this area!”

Hawks leaned back, and lifted his hands up in front of him in a mock placating gesture. His smile was still present, though it looked more exasperated and tired as the man rubbed his hands together. After such a long time of not needing to, his face hurts from trying to smile all the time.

He felt tired in a way he hasn’t since he landed on that rooftop all those months ago.

“Ah, but he’s done a great job,” the blond said, hoping that it came much more sincere than his regular tone, but he doubted that the man in front of him could tell the difference. “And we like what he’s doing. There’s no need to interfere with that for something like age,” he tried to explain the umpteenth time.

He didn’t bother explaining that almost all the heroes and civilians were from places where they were in charge or were suddenly entrusted with the lives of many for an indefinite amount of time. He didn’t think the man in front of him would understand what that did to his nerves, to watch the people he was supposed to protect turn against each other. However fragile and tentative it felt, what they had here on this base was a godsend. He didn’t even know how to begin explaining the feeling of acceptance when he came to the end of his ropes, betrayed and abandoned after watching what little humanity he had left rot away.

Besides, it wasn’t that they were leaving it to him.

In all honesty, the monster uprising didn’t cause the end of the world. People did. Looking at the man now, Hawks couldn’t believe that he was so satisfied and content here that he could have ever forgotten that.

“But you were the Number Three Pro Hero for a reason!” the man said. “The people believed in you!”

“...Then, have you asked Endeavor the same thing?” he asked, a lot sharper than he would have a few years ago. His smile didn’t falter, ever bit the perfect picture hero everyone expected him to be.

The man flinched backwards, breaking out into sweat at the mention of the fire-hero, “Oh well, uh… Endeavor looked incredibly busy! Yes, busy! And I goodness, his scar looks awful! I think he’s just lucky that he’s alive at all!”

Meaning, he was scared of Enji. He was scared so he came crawling down to the next guy down on the ladder.

Hawks wasn’t a fool. He understood what was going on. Before everything here, he played this game as little as he could, but it never stopped from rearing its ugly head back into his life. The man in front of him was of a certain type of poison. If not him, Best Jeanist will be next.

He had hoped that they were desperate and tired, but it turns out, they had brought poison back to the base.

Hawks had one of three options then. The first would be to laugh it all off and pretend this newcomer was joking. It would be his normal go-to, but he’s certain that this man would just keep harassing him anyways. He didn’t mind it, but he didn’t want this to spread. He didn’t want to hear it, so he didn’t want to subjugate anyone else to this. If some of the… more susceptible people heard this, more drastic measures would have to be taken.

The second option would be to end this right now. Put the man in his place with a thinly veiled threat. If he scared him enough, he’ll leave him alone. He’s certain that he had a good Enji-impression that he could whip out. While it would tank his reputation, he didn’t really care about it, but he doesn’t want this to reverse back and hinder Deku in any way.

Lastly, he could kill him. In theory, he could just take the man out and leave him for dead if he didn’t want to make a mess at the base and deal with clean up. Perhaps he could let this man outside instead. He could spin a story about how he tried to stop him but this man panicked too hard and got himself bit. It’s a story that everyone here could relate to. It would be the fastest and probably the cleanest.

He had no doubts that he’ll cover his tracks well, and he knew that no one would question it if he said it.

No, that’s a lie. If he were to commit every sin around onto this man, made every second of his life absolute agony and misery, and came clean to all the people here about it, he had little to no doubt that he would be forgiven. Once they learned why he did what he did, what this man said about Deku, he is certain that some of them would even praise him. And then, they would help him make sure that Deku never found out.

If he could meet himself, just three years ago, he’s certain that his past self would be disgusted at what he had become.

After all, he was ready to throw everything he has ever tried for away if it meant that he could see Deku smile with confidence one day. For the man who makes life less about surviving and more about living, who locked himself away in silence because he didn’t know if he could infect anyone else, who brought the lights back into his world, he thinks that there is very little he wouldn’t do for him.

With that, he came to the simple conclusion that this man must die. Right now.

“Oh, Hawks-san, there you are,” Tokoyami called out from the hallway. He stared, looking between the former pro-hero and the former salary man, “...Are you busy?”

“...Not at all,” Hawks replied, walking towards him, “What’s up?”

He wouldn’t be sloppy about it, after all. He ignored the salaryman, and while walking outside, briefly met eyes with Dabi across the way.

Perhaps he could enlist some help.

The next were two of the girls.

He thinks that they used to be beautiful. However, a year without a proper bathing schedule, minimal food, constant stress, and anguish has made a greater mark on them, and they are a shadow of the women they used to be. Before, he would have been able to muster some form of pity for them. As it was, the only feeling that Hawks held for them was annoyance. His eyes had caught the sight of Deku as he walked by the doorway, and armed with a blanket to wrap him in this time, he was suddenly blocked by these two women.

“Kya, Hawks!”

“Oh my god, you’re even more handsome in person!”

It was amazing to himself that in this single moment, he is reminded of who he used to be, what he used to do, and could swear that he just had an out-of-body experience.

One of the girls, bold and certain, stepped forward to wrap her arms around one of his, pressing himself against him as the other one placed her hand on his chest and smiled. With her half-lidded eyes, those lips spelt out a sin, but Hawks didn’t even feel the temptation. As it was, he pushed away their hands and marched right out the door, not bothering to spare them a second glance.

“Deku,” he all but sang-out, giving a big grin when the young man turned to stare at him with those wide-green eyes.

Immediately, he felt purified. Hm, perhaps he had spent too much time away after all.

And then, his good vibes immediately evaporated away when he clapped sights onto Dabi, who stood on the other side of again.

“...We’re busy,” Dabi said. He lifted his hand, as though to shoo him away “Go away. Don’t you have those girls to tend to, Hawks?”

Since coming here, it was almost unspoken how they wanted to avoid their hero identity, but a glaring sore spot like that was just asking to be brutally humiliated by their resident assholes.

Green eyes darted between the two and he turned away, full intentions on escaping, when both of them grabbed one shoulder each.

“Stay put,” Dabi said, his hand on the injured shoulder, fingers wrapped in a thinly veiled threat that he would squeeze down if he tried to run.

“Don’t worry, Deku, we’ll leave in just a second, alright?”

Despite the grip on him, he still leaned away.

After that, they found him when he landed after a quick fly around.

“Excellent, Hawks! For a moment, I thought that it was back before the time before this!”

His eyes flickered to the older man and felt exhaustion settling in his bones.

“Ah, yeah,” he said, folding his wings in. The man was extending a towel towards him, but the whole thing felt dirty.

If he took this towel, what will the man expect him to take next?

He smiled but didn’t take it. He made his way down, ready to put in the report that nothing special happened today too, and the man kept following him. It had only been three days or so since they last talked right? Didn’t he have other things to do?

Shit, if only Hawks didn’t go for the patrol so early. He could have gotten rid of him today. He sighed and-

“Ah, sounds like you are tired, Hawks. I can only imagine how hard it must be since you are the only flyer here. Isn’t it tiring to work all the time like that? When do you take breaks, Hawks? If you would like, perhaps maybe I could help you relax?”

He paused at that. Relaxation? What a foreign concept, but he was certain that he hasn’t been this tense in a while.

No, that was undoubtedly true for almost everyone on the base. No matter how much they said things to Deku to dissuade him from leaving the base, the fact that he was mostly confined to his room or the fact that he had to be confined at all wasn’t something anyone wanted. For the guy who promised them the utmost freedom, it felt like they were cheating him.

Of course, that was mostly cleared up since Chisaki had to explain to them that he couldn’t lift his hands to get into clothes, and that opening doors would be very hard for him. The man didn’t say much, but anyone can see how much it bothered him.

It bothered all of them, of course. Some more than others, and Hawks was definitely part of the more category.

He saw Deku, pushing himself up to stand when he was a bloodied mess. He had to carry that bloody mess back to base, in desperate hopes that he made it just in time.

“You think I work hard?” he asked, as lazy-sounding as always. They were on the second floor, and the nostalgic sound of life as everyone tried to get through their chores resonated out.

“W-why, yes! I’m certain that you are often working much too hard-”

“There’s a guy here,” Hawks said, “Who works doubly harder than me.” The blond gave a smile as he thought about the man with a helmet. “And he’s definitely where he belongs at the top.”

“My, you are so modest-”

And this man would never understand. He will never try to either. Hawks knows that, and thinks it’s a shame that he put this off for so long-

“Hawks-san.”

It was like there a gunshot, all life in the main area was silenced. His head snapped over to where Deku stared at him from across the way, and jerked his head to the side. Without another moment of hesitation, Hawks stepped onto the railing and flew to his side. He was almost beside himself in joy.

What did Deku need him for? What did Deku want so that he could call him?

“Eugh, why’d you have to call him over?”

And Dabi. Of course Dabi was here.

“What couldn’t you do that Deku called me here?” he responded in kind. Blue eyes narrowed back and Deku spoke again. “And I told you, ‘Keigo’ is fine.”

He was much quieter than his sudden summons, but Hawks wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

“...You looked tired,” he said quietly. Green eyes flickered between the ground and then back to the blond, “And like you needed escape.”

Ah, he thinks, he can’t fool this man. It was frustrating to think that someone knew what he wanted and delivered, but he couldn’t quite return the favor.

“...Thank you,” he said. “I was just trying to-”

“He doesn’t like me,” Deku continued, “I understand why.”

Dabi tensed at that, and Hawks’s smile fell off his lips.

“I don’t care,” their small leader said. “So you shouldn’t either.”

Despite the fact that one of his arms was still in a sling and the other arm was barely able to hold a spoon, Deku looked strangely accustomed to the weight of their entire complex on his back. It was frightful and aggravating all in one.

“More importantly, we’re going to try and hunt down some deer,” he continued, turning to Dabi who gave a nod back.

“Ah, the hunter group…” and suddenly, Hawks was acutely aware of how well-perceived Deku was, to see him coming down the stairs and call out to him because he looked tired.

Hah.

Hawks fell into step next to him, hoping that he could make a space just for him right here by Deku’s side.

### **Kaminari-kun - 1 Year Anniversary**

The day, for the average person on base, began at about seven AM. Those that were a part of any farming or hunting group would be up earlier, but everyone else got up around then.

Kaminari was one of those people.

He woke up, worked out with some of the others for morning training, and then they went to eat breakfast. 9 AM, 1 PM, 7 PM. Those were the times that Lunchrush worked, so that's when people rolled in for food. If someone wanted to eat at another time, they could, but they would have to make their own food.

And well, why make your own food when Lunchrush's is going to taste better anyways? At least for Kaminari, that was it.

“Oh, Kaminari-kun, good morning!”

Kaminari looked to where Taishiro gave an energetic wave to him.

“Good Morning, Taishiro-san!”

It was hard not to call them by their Hero-Name, even after all this time, but no one minded if they slipped up. Most of them don’t introduce themselves as their Hero-Persona, and none of them really wear their usual Hero-Costume get-up either.

And well, he was just glad to be in the bright company of others. Taishiro especially had a grin that could light up the whole world. Just looking at him already put Kaminari in a better mood.

...It was pretty fucking crazy, that he could live like this, but here he was. It had been a whole year since he came here.

And he could even feel happy now.

### **Midoriya Izuku: A Leader**

Deku is painfully weak. As a small, young boy that never seems to fully heal before getting injured again, with shit eating habits and downright awful sleep schedules, he was too thin and small for his age.

In addition to that, he was quirkless.

More often than not, he still has no idea why anyone refers to him as a leader. He doesn’t really order anyone to do anything or not, and really is fine with whatever people do as long as they’re not trying to kill each other.

And even if they don’t listen or follow him, he has no way of punishing them. Almost everyone here could easily overpower him or had a quirk that could overpower him in an instant. Of course, he doesn’t think he would be able to put up a fight against anyone here. It’s just not in him.

He has burnt bodies to ash, desecrated them, and even killed people in cold blood. There was no way for him to ever consider raising his hand against the people here. If they wanted him to hurt and die, he’s certain that he would have deserved it. He wouldn’t fight it.

So, why?

At first, he thought it was because they were polite and they didn’t want to be presumptuous with the man who lived here first. But thinking about Toga and Shigaraki, he didn’t think that being respectful was something that they would care about. Being polite and caring about how other people saw them was definitely not a priority for them.

The next thought was that it was because they were being threatened by other people, but that still goes back to wondering why the people who were threatening others followed him in the first place. There was just no point. It was a drain on the psyche too, for either side. In addition to that, they had plenty of people here who could call out that kind of behavior the second they saw it.

Then, what was left?

It couldn’t be that they were going to butter him up to turn against him. They had several, perfect opportunities for that, but didn’t do anything then either. In addition to that, they knew that he was pathetically weak. What could they be waiting for?

Still.

“Deku,” he paused in his steps to turn to the person who addressed him, Ishiyama, and dipped his head. Right when he was about to get a proper and formal greeting befitting a man of his caliber, he continued to speak instead, “Are you busy? We have some plans we want you to go over with us.”

“Don’t give him a choice or he won’t come,” another voice came and Deku winced when Aizawa narrowed his eyes at him. Figures. “Hey, we’re having a meeting about the future so come with us.”

Please, Deku begs in his heart, why did you bother asking?

Still, he follows them. See? He wasn't really a boss or a leader. At least with them, it was clear that they were doing it because they were just being polite. They didn’t need to though. Before he would even mention that, however, they’re moving on.

He follows, and in the familiar Rental Office, they make their claims.

His heart warms when he sees Chisaki with the stack of notebooks that he gave him all those months ago, some of them a little worn and all of them well taken-care of.

“Oh, Deku,” Chisaki said, his eyes finding Deku in an instant. His mask crinkled, “Excellent. Someone who sees reason.”

More often than not, he feels like he’s a tie-breaker. When they suggest something and someone is unsatisfied with the answer that they get, they pull him in and everyone seems to agree that they won’t argue against the tie-breaker.

Still, it was a little intimidating to stand between Chisaki and Sasaki when they get like this, all hostile energy. This must be huge if Enji was leaning against the wall with that huge frown on his face too, and Deku feels the anxiety twist his stomach again.

Quickly, he’s seated. This will be long and they don’t want him to run away. Great.

A cup of tea comes in front of him, and Deku thanks the high heavens for Makoto and her bright smile.

“We need to knock down some houses to start some of these plans,” Chisaki started, tapping the notebook with a finger. His gaze felt heavy, but Deku was used to it. “But if we keep expanding like this, we need to fix here first. I think that we should move everyone into the houses for the time being for the few weeks it takes to rebuild this place.”

Even without looking at the notebook, he had a good idea what the man wanted. He knows because he stressed and daydreamed about it. Thinking back on the things he wanted and tried to push onto these people, he understands that he was just some daydreaming child. To Chisaki, who was working so hard to make his dreams come true, he’s so grateful.

“It’s dangerous to let people spread out like that. Not to mention, there are plenty of people who aren’t ready to take a step outside,” Sasaki said, talking as though this was an argument they’ve had many times before.

“Time to learn,” Chisaki said, his eyes narrowing dangerously, “We can’t deal with dead-weight forever.”

“For christs’ sake, you-”

Deku raised his hand meekly, and the conversation stopped dead.

“...Do we have a plan for recreating something here?” he asked quietly. There was a brief pause and he tilted his head. When Chisaki looked like he was going to wave the notebook at him, he shook his head, “...Lots of people need different things,” he said. “The plans from then should change to reflect that.”

In all honesty, he’s been thinking about it for a while.

“If people want to leave or stay, they should have a choice.”

There was some grumbling, and he supposed that if he wasn’t called in to be the tie-breaker, he was called in to be the third-side that the other two teamed up against.

“What do you mean having a choice!?” Chisaki snapped back, “If we let everyone do as they please, these lazy bums will never do anything!”

“Should we just survey everyone and see what’s necessary? And then how will we decide what’s important enough to classify as something we need?” Sasaki pointed out.

Look, Deku sighed, he wanted to say that he tried okay?

“We need to worry about how pipelines and wiring will work too!”

“This isn’t something that we can leave to other people. We have to make decisions and they have to live with them!”

But it did seem like they did agree on something after all.

Deku stared and then sighed back.

“...You have something else you want to add to that?” Aizawa asked, his piercing stare never wavering from his face.

“...I think we should have three main tests to figure out who goes to Tokyo,” he blurted out. “The first test will be to rotate through everyone and see their comfort level in sleeping outside. Once we get through volunteers, we should have a better grasp on what we need."

There was an entire moment of silence before the room exploded into sound.

Deku winced, and like he did everything else, took it on headfirst.

Strong isn’t a word that describes Deku. Durable might be a better word.

Strangely, even ironically, Deku is a lot like the Walkers that he kills. He fights with everything he is, but when it comes down to it, he’s super easy to dispatch. The problem lays in the fact that he doesn’t stay down. No matter how broken, beaten, battered and tired he could be, he will get back up.

It was a little frightening.

But he doesn’t know how else to fight, and the thought of letting someone else fight for him brings back memories of a blond he once considered a Hero on par with All Might.

### **Keigo & Izuku - recentering**

“...Hawks,” Deku said as they returned in. While getting rid of their outer layers and washing their hands in the makeshift outdoor wash area they had by the entrance after their successful and relatively peaceful scouting trip, the former hero was suddenly called on.

He blinked back, pleasantly surprised and curious, as the two pretended that they weren’t being gawked at by the others.

Shyly, a soft blush on his face as his eyes darted from the ground and back up to Hawks’s eyes, Deku whispered out, “...Come to my room.”

The blond gaped back at him for a moment, his mouth running dry as his mind raced to try and process what had just happened.

“Yeah…” he said, breathlessly, “Sounds good.”

What… had he been expecting? He wasn’t sure. There was no way Deku had feelings and was going to confess to him or something when Deku usually had to be convinced that people cared about his safety and well-being (and even then, that was always an uphill battle).

But still, he had never felt so nervous in his life.

And then, Deku’s green eyes found his after he closed (and locked, his dirty mind supplied gleefully) the door behind him.

Kouta was usually here, but he tends to stay in the main quarters when Deku heads out. Hawks knew that, but his brain had to remind him that they were alone together here, after Deku called him up here.

His wings fluttered a little, despite his best efforts to remain calm and collected.

“...It’s okay,” Deku spoke up at last, ending the anticipation and replacing it with confusion.

“Huh?”

“You … want to leave, right?”

“...What?”

His fuzzy feelings all evaporated as he tried to make sense of this in a very different way than what he was doing before.

“What do you…” the blond stopped and took a deep breath. “If you’re leaving,” he said, figuring that this would be a good place to start, “Then I’m leaving. Until then, I’ll be staying right here.”

He exemplified this by taking a step closer, and relaxed when he saw the relief in Deku’s eyes.

The teen was so damn easy to read without that helmet.

“...Now, can you tell me why you thought that?” Whatever started this, it had to end now.

“...You looked stressed. It hasn’t gotten better,” the young teen said after a moment. “I… I don’t know how to help you, so I thought…”

“...That you could give me a way out instead?” he finished for him.

He gave a curt nod. And Hawks took a deep breath. Immediately, the glee and energy he had before faded away into nothing, and it was replaced with a feeling that this was all meaningless and a bit annoying.

Something that made him stressed enough to leave, but Deku would never think about leaving, would he?

“...Deku, could I ask you a question?” he asked.

The curls on his head were matted down, showing how sweaty he must have gotten inside that helmet of his. Still, Deku didn’t look bothered by it and nodded again. They were both in need of showers, but now that they had this moment to be alone, his confidence wavered.

“I… Shigaraki was right. I haven’t really lived up to the whole ‘hero’ thing,” he admitted. “I… I’ve watched more people die than I have saved. I can’t remain impartial to this whole thing.” His hands trembled as he brought it up to his head. The smile hadn’t left his face, but it was tinged with all the disappointment he harbored since the new group came in. “I… Is it okay? That I’m here? That… I’m the one that made it out?”

“...Hawks-san,” Deku said quietly, “I don’t know.”

The blon’s smile dropped at the same time as his heart did, leaving him empty and cold.

Boldly, however, Deku did take a step forward.

“But I’m glad that you are.”

Hawks understood that he has become incredibly weak, if he was easily swayed by a few words. At the same time, he feels a relief blown off his shoulders in an instant. He took a slow, shuddering sigh and gave a watery grin to Deku.

However, the young man wasn’t done.

“I’m glad that you are here. And I’m glad that you chose me. I will…” and he hesitated briefly before his hand came up to his mask and took it off his face. He looked back, his entire face and all his scars on it exposed to Hawks’s eye, as he said, “Thank you for being alive, Hawks-san.”

“I see,” he said after a moment. He gulped, his eyes feeling like they were burning as he shook his head, “I think… I should be the one saying that.”

His shoulders slacked, and he stood by his decision. It’ll be disappointing to all his loyal fans, but he can no longer find it in himself to care. What matters is in front of him. If Deku wants it, he’ll do it. Undoubtedly, it’s pathetic that he has sunk so low, but that was okay.

If he can stay in those green eyes, he’s okay with being just Keigo.

“...Can I ask for a favor?” he asked, his grin returning to his face in a more natural way.

Deku tilted his head to the side, but nodded without hesitation. Which was fine too, Hawks will be here to make sure that to protect him from his own kindness.

“Keigo,” he said. “Can you call me by my name from now on?”

The smaller man blushed, and it was so sudden and innocent that Hawks couldn’t help but laugh brightly.

After a second, he looked less affronted, but he nodded. A small smile graced his lips, stretching the scars by them. At the sight of it, he could feel the cracks in his heart filling up slowly with his gentle warmth.

“...Keigo,” he said. “Good job on patrol today.”

The blond grinned back. He could live with this. He could live for this.

“Yeah, anytime, Deku.”

Oh man, he couldn’t wait to see the look on Yamada’s face when he found out.

“Ah! There you are, Hawks-san!”

Burden lifted, Hawks turned to the businessman with an easy smile. The sight of it must have brought hope to the man, because he brightened gleefully.

“Something wrong?”

“I thought that perhaps your confidence might have waned since the start of this, so I went out of my way to talk to some of the others. We all believe that you should take the reigns of this base,” he immediately began.

“Ah, you’re right, I should meet up with all of them-”

He almost cackled when the man preened at the thought, and kept speaking.

“-and let them know that they can pack up and leave.”

The man froze.

“It’s only natural, right? If you’re unsatisfied with the current leadership, then you should leave,” he said easily.

“W-what are you saying…?”

He tilted his head and smiled, bright and brilliant like a thousand cameras were on him again as he stood at the Hero Rankings again.

“But of course, no one would want to leave this place, right? Then, there’s no reason for anyone to think unkindly of the person who has been working tirelessly to keep this place up and running, right?”

In the end, it was clear what he should have done. From the beginning, he should have declared his allegiances, and stand firm in his claim. He can keep an eye on them, and if things get bad, he’ll get rid of him. Them. It doesn’t matter.

He’s not a hero anymore. He is Deku’s Keigo.

If this was corruption, it was a peaceful feeling.

### **The Second Trip**

After the relative success of the first trip, the second trip was decided by lottery. This time, there would be two groups that head out. While they would go altogether, the first group would return after getting to the first stopping point and the second group would forge onward. This was decided to increase the number of people that got used to going out and about, as well as to make sure that they could still have a group focus on continuing and the second group can focus on maintaining. Whether it was their ‘territory’ or not, didn’t matter to Deku, as he just wanted it to be cleared of anything harmful.

Deku, as they have learned, cares very little for things like territory or power. He values safety and security, but in its fullest sense and meaning, as in going out to figure out the world instead of remaining eternally speculating.

Yes, the most important thing to Deku was information.

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“After that, we’ll clear out the cars in the road and start working on the houses in the neighborhood. When we clear everything out, we’ll return,” Deku said, reading straight from his small notepad. To signal that he was done speaking, he looked up and opened the floor, “Questions?”

“How come you speak fine now?”

He blinked slowly and then looked back down into his notebook, as though he could find the answer there. He couldn’t, and looked back up, looking ten parts uncomfortable before he tilted his head, as though he didn’t understand the question and it was starting to pain him.

“Ah, uh,” Ojiro hesitated and then shook his head, “Nevermind.”

Deku opened his mouth, closed it, and then bit on his bottom lip. After another moment, he spoke up.

“...Speaking… hard.”

With that, he turned around, signaling to all of them that they were going to move out.

“Don’t be like that, Deku,” Jin cheered, “I think you’re plenty cute, just the way you are!”

Face flushed red, Deku quickly clipped his helmet on. He turned away quickly and started to walk faster.

“Ah, are you embarrassed? Haha, you know, you don’t have to hide!”

“Mou, Jin, you’re awful,” Toga whined, “Ne, ne, I think you’re plenty cute too,” she said as she came around the other side of him. Despite her words, her smile was teasing. “Let’s ditch him and go,” she giggled.

Resolutely, Deku kept walking forward.

## **[Year 2: Spring]**

### **(March) Next steps - To Tokyo**

"..I want to go to Tokyo."

There was a long, long silence before Chisaki’s incredulous voice broke through.

“You, you want to go where? The Nation’s Capital? The place that’s crawling with god knows what? And if they’ve survived that awful shitfight with those monsters, you really think that there are any humans left? Deku, what the fuck are you thinking?”

There was a silence. The young man stared at him, surprised. It took a few seconds, but he managed to find his voice. His eyebrows creasing, he said.

“You asked,” he reminded him, “what I planned.”

If a piece of paper were to fall down in that room, at that moment, it would have echoed. The pause was deafening before Chisaki sat down.

“...Please excuse my outburst,” he said. “This was something you’ve been thinking about for a while, right?”

Deku nodded his head.

“I see. Then, what… Why do you want to go? We should prepare accordingly.”

Even though he said that, Chisaki’s hands clenched tightly into fists. Green eyes took in his features for another second before the young man started to speak again.

"I think that’s where the center of all the mutated ones are coming from. There has to be something there. I want to know what. So I’m going to go there next."

"At this rate, we are going to actually clean through the entirety of Japan."

Deku nodded, confirming it and looking as though it was only obvious that this was their next step, and half the room blanched. For people who remembered losing everything so vidily, it was hard to think that they would expand out the way Deku was planning. No need to poke a bee’s nest, and all that.

“...Do we really need to?”

All eyes fell to Yagi, who leveled the young man with a firm stare.

It was such a strange thought to think that anything could shake his confidence, but Deku wasn’t going to bend on this. The expression on his face, his choice of words, it made it clear to all of them, that this young man was going to go. He was just informing them of his plans, but they would bear no weight on his thoughts and goals. And short of them locking him up somewhere, chaining him and breaking all his bones, he’ll go. And even then, they were certain that he would find a way to get out.

When it comes to finding a way, Deku ranked the top of the charts. Their only point of reprieve was that he was now telling him his general goals.

“...Deku-shounen, you still haven’t fully recovered,” Yagi spoke slowly, as though he was uncertain about how to speak so that he didn’t offend him, “More than that, we finally have a way to sustain ourselves, and a better security system than anyone else could boast. Is this something that we really need to do right now?”

“Yes,” he spoke without hesitation. “Winter travels are hard, so now is the time,” he continued.

It was clear that he wasn’t going to budge on this.

Where in other places, they wanted to just maintain what they had, Deku had clear goals for the future. He had these goals, and it was becoming increasingly more and more clear and obvious that he was gunning for it, regardless of what it would do to him.

“...Then, who goes?” Shigaraki asked, “It sounds like it’s going to be several trips that are going to get longer with each travel, right?”

There was a long silence. The young man stared back, and tilted his head, clearly confused.

“No way,” Kayama gaped back, the reality of the situation and his words settling into the room like dust, “You want to go alone?”

Deku shrugged back.

“Still,” Yamada said, leaning forward, “...that last battle was brutal. There’s plenty of things we have to get through here, too.”

It was hard. Deku understood. The need and desire to hole up somewhere and rest peacefully was a long-time dream after all this time. This apartment complex was the closest thing to serenity that they had, and Deku understood that. He did.

That’s why he knew he had to do this.

He gripped his arm, “I should be able to use it in three days,” he explained. “I can’t guarantee anything, but I don’t want to live believing that everything will be fine even if I don’t do anything. I’m starting with Tokyo.”

He needed to know how other places were doing, if they were starting to face troubles here. There were people that depended on him now, people that he couldn’t disappoint. But first, he needed information. Right now, with almost everyone at full health and in good spirits, he knew that this would be a good foundation.

The doubt etched their faces, but it was okay. Even if Deku didn’t come back, he was certain that they would all be fine. It wasn’t like any of them were emotionally attached to him anyways. They had each other, and he kept his distance.

For all he knew, he would disappear like the stars when the sun came up. Now that it wasn’t so dark anymore, he’ll naturally step back as something brighter and warmer came in instead. Before they get any closer, he should leave.

Before he started to long for company and kindness, he should leave.

### **Magne Leaves**

"...Deku, a moment please."

Deku stopped in his steps and turned to stare at Magne. With his green eyes meeting Magne’s, it was easy to see that he had his entire and undivided attention. This was much easier than trying to guess what he was thinking behind that Helmet. In the back of his mind, he wondered if Helmet had been ignoring them all along after all.

“Could I bring a friend?” he asked.

Deku nodded.

“She’s good and she’ll be a help. I cover for her while she gets used to life here and otherwise, so I… uh… what?”

Green eyes blinked at him, and figuring that the conversation was done, turned to leave again.

“You sure? I mean, she could be as bad as me. Since I’m a… villain… You know, murderer and all that?”

Deku didn’t even turn around as he walked away.

Magne watched his back as he walked away. No, he was wrong. Helmet or not, he had no goddamn idea what the hell this guy was thinking. He did as he pleased, as he always done. They could just see his eyes now when he did it.

It was, at once, frustrating and liberating. Didn’t this mean that he trusted Mage?

Laughing to himself, Magne prepared to leave. Her friend was going to love it here. She wouldn’t have to hide. She wouldn’t need to pretend. She could just be herself and they could find a domestic peace here where they couldn’t before.

Deku’s trust, Deku’s kindness, Deku’s ability to do as he pleased, they’ll protect it. They won’t let him regret it.

### **Overnight Trip (1):**

“No matter how far we get,” Deku said, “We will turn around tomorrow.”

“Eh?” Yamada turned to him, surprised. “Really? Tomorrow?”

“It’ll be two and a half days when we go back,” Deku replied back, “So that means we will be gone for almost five days. We should head back now.”

The blond sighed back. “Yeah, I guess that makes sense. But I feel like we didn’t make it very far.”

The young man shrugged back.

### **Dabi & Izu - a Light**

Deku lifted his lighter up to the corpses, ready to set it all on fire. This would be the last thing they do, and they could all go home once it’s all gone. He clicked the lighter, trying to get the fire to stick, when a hand dropped to his shoulder.

A warm body leaned over him, towering over him with little difficulty. Unmistakable blue fire sparked before engulfing the hill of corpses with ease.

Looking down at him with a crooked grin, Dabi’s arm draped over his shoulders. It would be a loose hug from anyone else, a symbol of easy camradaise, but Deku knew better. Dabi was smiling, but his eyes promised pain.

“...Look at that,” the older man said, motioning to the way the bodies crumpled underneath each other as they were reduced to ash. He opened his hand up, letting the fire dance around his palm before he extinguished it by closing his hands into a fist. “Much better than a 500 yen lighter, right?”

...Seriously?

“Yes, seriously,” he replied back, his lips dropping into a frown. “I swear, you’re the type that only hears what he wants to.” He took a step back, standing between him and the blue fire behind him, as one of his hands dropped onto his helmet. “I told you, just use me.”

The emptiness that Deku thought he was used to started to fill with Dabi’s warmth. It made a home in the vacancy of his heart, and it scared him.

He turned away, pulling away from that warmth before he started to look for it.

## **Orchids**

### **(April) Orchid - Adventure**

Deku woke up in the morning feeling oddly refreshed. He took a deep breath and began his morning stretches. He felt great. He felt like he fit into his body perfectly fine.

Today was the day.

Really, the only silver lining of that earthquake was that it tore up most of the road and overturned a lot of soil for them. They only needed to clean it up and repack the dirt.

### **Enter Chimera**

In a world where the strong ruled, it turned out that he was weak.

Chojuro Kon watched the blur of green come from seemingly nowhere, knocking down the heavy monster that had been stalking him for the last few days. He must have finally seemed weak enough, because it had been relentlessly trying to eat him for the last day and a half.

Whether or not it was God’s intervention meant nothing to him.

-

“...Why did you help me?”

The stranger didn’t respond, and right when he was about to ask again, turned around. Chimera frowned, because the guy was small. Was he so far removed that even a child could defeat that thing while he couldn’t? The thought made his stomach twist.

Now that he could see him, he could see that this guy was suited up. He was in some sweater and cargo pants, with two shortswords crossing behind his waist. He had a baseball bat in his gloved hands, and several belts and latches going down his legs. It almost looked like a more casual-armor, with heavy emphasis on short-range melee combat. Thinking of his fight, it made sense.

Still, the guy in the helmet had killed the thing that had come for his life. The guy in the helmet had saved him, intentionally or not.

And he… he had nothing. Nothing to give or offer. This was a man who killed something that was following him for days; he wasn’t lacking in strength. The way he killed him made him certain that this man was smart. If he had survived this long, he clearly didn’t need companionship.

Still, this was the first living person that he’s met in months. Even the part of him that hated and hated and hated people, wanted to hear the sound of another person’s voice.

“I… I have nothing to offer,” he admitted. His voice was gravelly, since he couldn’t remember the last time he had spoken, but the silence between them felt wrong. “I have no food, and no water. I have nowhere to return to.”

Was he too quiet? He couldn’t even remember how to speak. At some point, it had become such a habit that he never thought twice about it. If anything, he had tried so goddamn hard every day to reject the world that had rejected him. Now that he had to do it again, he couldn’t remember anything about being a member of polite society.

“I…”

He trailed off. What was he doing? What was the point of this? Why was he bragging about what he didn’t have? Why was he complaining? When had complaining ever helped?

The man in the helmet took his backpack off and after a moment of rummaging through it, and pulled out a neatly wrapped box. In a time before this, he would have thought it was a bento. Except, who would make a bento now, in this day and age?

The package was extended towards him.

Numbly, he lifted his hand and accepted it.

“For… me?”

He nodded, and passed a water bottle as well.

“Are you sure?”

There was no response. But his nose twitched and his stomach roared, and like the beast, the monster, every always called him, he tore open the bento and scarved the food down. It wasn’t a lot of food, but it was food. It was fresh-food, with crunchy vegetables and soft meat. The rice was white and chewy. It wasn’t stale. It wasn’t rotting. It wasn’t something overflowing with insects. It was food.

It was delicious.

He didn’t even realize that he was licking the containing to suck up the last of the sauce and catch the last grains of rice, until he did. And then he was acutely aware that he was acting like an absolute savage. He.

He looked up, and saw the backside of Helmet.

How could it be that now that the world had ended, he had found someone who treated him with kindness and respect?

In that moment, when he understood that he was going to die pitifully and pathetically, when his stomach finally had something inside of, when Helmet saved him in more ways than just one, he swore that he’ll do it. His life might have been meaningless and full of pain, but his death, he can choose.

He’ll die for this man.

“...My name is Chojuro Kon,” he said. “My… acquaintances call me ‘Chimera’. If at all possible, would it… be alright if I came with you?”

The man in the helmet turned back around to him, and nodded his head. Was he mute? Was that why he was so quiet? Was he shy? Is that why he kept his guard up? Or was it that he didn’t feel safe here, in the clearing next to a forest, with the carcass of a huge monster next to him? He didn’t know.

And now, for the rest of his life, he’ll learn.

“...Thank you.”

Just the presence of another human was doing things to his head. He didn’t know what to feel or even how to feel it. He hoped that he could be useful to this man. It was clear that he had just eaten his lunch, and he almost started salivating at the thought of eating like that again.

In the meantime, Helmet pulled what looked to be a small plastic bottle. He climbed up the monster’s body, and started to pour the contents onto it. He could smell it in an instant.

Gasoline.

When Helmet jumped off, pulling a matchbox out of one of his side pockets, Chimera stepped up.

He needed to prove his worth. This would be a good start. The best way for them to learn about each other would be to showcase each other’s strengths.

“Allow me.”

He took a deep breath in, and breathed fire.

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Burning a monster like this, there was less fire and more smoke. Still, he didn’t know if it was luck or something, because he met his second survivor within the first ten minutes of smoking.

“Deku!” the call came from above.

Helmet lifted his hand up to wave at the figure flying at breakneck speed, and Chimera paused. Had he been a part of a group? When Chimera offered up his loyalties (in his head), did he give it to someone who already had a group? Then, if they were a group of survivors, would they really accept him? Or would they be more like the groups he had encountered before? If so, then he didn’t have to wait very long.

Fast like lightning, a blond flew in. His red wings spread wide open before he dropped to the ground and they folded behind him. He eyed Helmet and then Chojuro.

“...And a friend?”

Deku, the man in the helmet, nodded curtly.

But the man was one that Chimera recognized. It wasn’t someone he wanted to see. As much as he was certain people didn’t want to see him, he didn’t want to see this man either. His stomach dropped and he eyed the way the blond frowned at the sight of him.

In front of him, former pro-hero Hawks, ranked Number Three before the world went to shit, stood.

“I see,” Hawks said. He gave a smile, something sickenly sweet that made Chimera raise his guard.

### **Return & Orchid**

“Welcome back,” a voice called from above.

Deku, who was normally the first person to react in any given situation, didn’t even flinch when the man dropped down in front of them like a ninja.

“Whoa! Where did you come from?”

If Stain ever cared about how other people perceived him, it didn’t show. He smoothly ignored all of them to look at Deku before turning his gaze up to the wagon they pulled for him.

“You did it,” he said, an impressive smile twisting onto his lips. “As expected. I’ll let the garden team to get ready.” He waited another second, staring at Deku, who didn’t even turn to face him.

With that, sharp red eyes landed on Chimera for an extra second before he turned back and jumped onto one of the walls separating the homes with the street. He rushed away.

### **Chimera The New Kid-**

“Huh, there’s quite a bit of you, huh?”

Deku nodded back, seemingly oblivious to the way some of the others were eyeing the giant wolfman next to him.

“Precious,” he replied back, tapping his heart, “to me.”

“...Man, I just had to be saved by someone like this, huh?”

Deku paused in his steps and faced the man. Stopping because Deku did, Chimera turned around to stare at the young man. He lifted his bat and pointed at the way they came in.

“Free to leave,” he said swiftly.

Deku probably wanted to emphasize the fact that people had a choice to come and goals they pleased. He truly and honestly didn’t care as long as no one actively tried to kill anyone here and they let him know so he could plan out the supplies that they’ll need. Of course, his grasp on the language was rough, and his interactions with people had been nonexistent. It was understandable that he would still be misunderstood.

So for Chimera, with his face obscured and their very limited contact from before, it was a clear message. He wasn’t needed here. He wouldn’t be missed if he left. No one would know or care. Deku cared more about the base as a whole, than he did Chimera. He was probably allowing Chimera to stay because he might have use. Chimera was expected to earn his keep here, even though Deku’s place in him was already cemented.

The way Deku was special to Chimera was something that wasn’t reciprocated.

(Or at least, not yet.)

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“Are you certain that you should heal me? I could easily break this place you all seem so proud of.”

“Perhaps. It would also be the last thing that you do,” Chisaki said, his eyes glinting like gold under light.

Still, his body returned to normal, the normal he had before the world collapsed in on itself. He felt like he could breathe and move the way he used to, like he gained his health and his youth just from the touch of the man. His fur wasn’t matted and there weren’t missing patches anymore. The aches and pains were all gone. What a dangerous quirk.

If it put him back together so easily, he had no doubts that he would be nothing just as easily.

“For some crazy reason,” the man said, leaning back into his seat after sanitizing his hands and placing his gloves back on, “Deku saved you and brought you back. Don’t know why, but until you do something against him, no one will actively hurt you here. No one worth their weight here will make a move against a life that Deku saved.”

Chimera nodded back, grateful for the warning and short explanation.

“What should I do?”

“If you wait for him, you’ll be waiting forever,” Chisaki stood up, signaling that this discussion was over. He opened the door, “You should know what you’re good for.”

“Murder and carnage,” Chimera said without a missing a beat.

“...Deku really knows how to find them, doesn’t he?” the miracle-worker said dryly as he walked out. “Well, start there.”

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“...You’ve killed before,” Stain commented, tilting his head.

Chimera scoffed and his eyes fell to Stain. There was a brief moment, as he found something in those red eyes before he titled his head.

“So have you.”

It was just something that people could tell. It was in their aura and their demeanor, but for people who met as many murderers as they have, it was as obvious as telling what another person’s hair color was.

But to see so many of them, or someone as experienced as Stain stand in front of him, was bizarre. When people think about a settlement where remaining survivors have banded together to live and march towards a future, they don’t think that villains and criminals would be here.

But villains and heroes were all things of the past.

“Deku has a bad habit of hesitating when it comes to people,” Stain said suddenly, breaking his train of thought. “If you really mean what you say, then make sure to get rid of the trash where he doesn’t see.”

His eyebrow arched. “This is an on-going problem then?”

Stain nodded. “Fair warning.”

“And if I don’t follow it?” Chimera asked, more out of curiosity. He never took to taking orders very well, but this wasn’t a particular warning that he found surprising.

He barely counted as human in the eyes of most people when society was standing and monsters were myths, but Deku didn’t even try to come for his life. The man saw him, spared him, killed the actual monster, and then offered him something to die for. He wasn’t about to turn tail so quickly, when he had nothing better to do.

“Then I will come for you,” Stain replied back. His tone was grave, and his eyes were cold. Chimera didn’t doubt him for a second. “And it will be the last thing you do.”

Interesting.

### **Chimera + Shoji - Monsters**

“...Oh,” Chimera said, “There’s a lot of us here, isn’t there?”

Mezo stopped where he was taking care of the dishes. “Pardon?” he asked as he turned to the newcomer.

“People like us. Physically different. The Monsters before the monsters came.”

It was definitely a sore subject, because Mezo took a step back.

“Or, I suppose we’re still monsters either way,” he sighed, facing forward instead.

### **Tentative Schedule**

“We can’t live like this anymore!”

It took some time before they decided which times worked best, but eventually there came a decision. Lunchrush will work and make whatever (while supplies last) at 6 am, 12 pm, and then once more at 6 pm. Should others wish to eat at other times, they may, but those who wanted to eat Lunchrush’s food had to come by these times.

And, only those who will be leaving the base could request a bento to take and eat at a later time.

## **Summertime**

### **(May) Trip 1:**

"So…" Bunbaigawara said slowly, "Not to be rude but like… why did you choose me?"

Midoroya stared at him and lifted his hand up, palm up and facing him.

"Oh, my quirk," he said quietly, almost resigned. It made sense, but a part of him did feel a little disappointed. Since he was always so quiet, he didn’t know what he was expecting, but somewhere, deep inside of Twice, he knew that he still wanted to be special to someone.

But Deku then started to speak. "You have a good attitude," he said, putting his pointer finger down. "You can fight and run well," he continued, putting down another finger. With every extra thing he said, he placed another finger down. "You notice things that I don't. You have good instincts."

Twice stopped walking then, so shocked that he even forgot to breathe. He stared, unified in his shock but Deku wasn't done. He turned around to him and then lifted his fist, their go-to gesture to let everyone know that they were there.

"And I like your voice."

Numbly, Twice gaped back like a fish.

Now, more than ever before, Twice wished that Deku didn’t wear his helmet. He would have loved to know what kind of expression someone who wanted him wore.

“Let’s go,” Deku said, as though Twice would do anything other than follow.

### **Questions**

"But if you know that you're just going to go and take it off anyways, isn't it better to not have anything at all?"

Deku shrugged back.

"I would rather it be an annoyance than a regret."

Cementoss frowned back. In these moments, when Deku said things like that with such certainty, he wondered if it would be better to just make the damn walls.

### **Mutant Case: Spine Splitter**

“You’re fucking kidding me,” Aizawa said, squinting around the corner where the… whatever that was prowling. “You have got to be fucking kidding me.”

Twice was down for the count. He had broken his arm and sprained his ankle. He must have hit his head somewhere too, because he seemed to start making even less sense than usual, and hasn’t stopped mumbling. By his side, Nishiya was worriedly fretting over him.

If someone had a concussion, it was common knowledge that you keep that person awake. If they go to sleep, they might not wake up, and it wasn’t a gamble that they wanted to take.

That said, if Twice doesn’t shut up, the thing was going to come towards them-

Suddenly, a car alarm went off. In an instant, the mutant turned away and began marching on over to the source of the sound. It slid out of the window, leaving a trail of blood behind it. They didn’t dare let their guard down until it had climbed out of a window and out of sight.

“Just… what the fuck is that,” Aizawa said, rubbing his temples as the exhaustion began to seep through his bones. This was bad for his heart.

“...Wait,” Nishiya said quietly, “...Who set the car alarm off?”

Despite asking that question, they both knew exactly who.

“Fuck,” Aizawa said, standing up. The last hit left him with terrible vertigo, and the world spun him around like a carnival ride.

### **Compress’ Mistake:**

What a fucking shame. Compress was never going to live this down.

With one of his shoulders dislocated and the other arm broken, pinned down on his chest in a way that made it hard to breathe, he had been caught through and through. He kicked uselessly, unable to even move the man pinning him down with his tail.

Damn physical quirks.

"This one's yours, ain't he?"

And he wanted to beg Deku to let him go. He wasn't worth it. He knew what kind of brutes these particular group of bandits were. They were the type of people that got the job done as ruthlessly as possible, and once upon a time, he used to work with them. So he can tell Deku with certainty that it was faster and better for him to die, here and now, than cause Deku any form of humiliation.

And no matter how much Compress didn't want to die, he didn't-

The man ontop of him was flung backwards.

"Get off him," Deku spoke out, clear and firm in a way that made his voice ring out.

"What was that?!"

"You think we'll let you-aaahhh!"

Compress looked over to see the blur of Stain stretching across the air like a shadow. Just as fast, Deku jumped from where he was, taking out the leader with a swift punch to the gut.

Compress had watched buildings crumble when Deku punched them. He had no doubts that his ribcage shattered under the weight of that fist. He coughed uselessly, still trying to collect his thoughts.

"Wow, Mister, they got you good," Dabi's voice said, right by his face. He gave a crooked grin and Compress wanted to punch him. Still, Dabi's hands were warm as the bleeding was stauched.

His vision blurred, and he looked a little further, where green eyes never stopped to stare at him. Facing forward, Compress looked up to the man who saw value in his life.

And if there was someone that he was okay [belonging] to, it would be...

### **Miruko and Deku**

"Thank you for being alive," Deku said, right before he left.

Miruko stood there, for another moment with a crooked grin on her face.

What a little brat she thought detachedly. How dare he thank her when she didn't even get a change too.

Now more than ever, she was beginning to understand.