### Notes

* Year 3
* Sewage & they got to Tokyo
* Meet destro & that group + earthquake
* rebuilding and eventually meets Nine & Slice
* figures out Air Whips. Loses his arm (but also learns a bit about Chisaki's)

## **June Trip**

It was fucking hot. Shit. Was June always this hot?

Right when he was about to complain, he looked to the front where Midoroya was leading their scouting group in the blistering heat with that stupid fucking helmet. He was in that ridiculously hot-looking dark green sweater and denim jeans with all that padding for makeshift armor, but he was still moving at the same pace as he always did.

Or maybe he looked like he was moving faster because everyone else was dying from the heat.

Ojiro wiped at the bottom of his chin. Wasn’t he hot? He was sweating, just standing out here, but Deku was under the intense sunlight. Weren’t they about the same age? How could there be this much of a difference between them? He could hardly believe it.

And then Deku stopped running, he motioned at a house, and Ojiro released a breath of relief. A break would be great right now.

-

“Hey, Deku,” he said, handing a bottle over to him, “You got enough water?”

The young man was rummaging through his backpack for the moment, probably just re-ordering this and that, before he stood up and slung it back over his back. Ojiro cleared his throat, thinking that he wasn’t heard, and tried again.

“Deku? Water?”

He stopped, turning the front of his visor to the man and shook his head. He turned away.

“Eh? You’ll get a heat stroke like that,” he said, and immediately felt stupid, because this was Deku, who was lived in that helmet for almost an entire year. “Ah, sorry, I was…” he stammered, feeling hot shame rise up to his face, “...No, there’s no excuse. I’m sorry. Excuse me.”

He left quickly, flushed for reasons different than the heat, and Deku looked up at the sky. As though this was previously planned, Hawks came down next to him.

“Whoa, he runs fast,” the blond said, “everything okay?”

The young man didn’t respond to him, but the former hero wasn’t waiting for an answer.

“Streets are quiet,” he reported. “I guess it’s too hot for them to be out.” He wiped at some of the stray sweat beading at his head. “God, it’s hot out here. How are you in that helmet?”

Deku still didn’t answer him, and instead, he withdrew his bat. Dropping his backpack to the ground, he walked over to the next house. Hawks stared back, a bit exasperated before his entire body tensed.

### **A Room of Dying Men**

Deku thought it was strange that there were so many of them above. He had jumped into the chute to chase the last one, but he never thought that it would lead him to a room like this.

“D-Deku-kun!”

He spun around, shocked that someone had followed him and felt his heart drop because he couldn’t say it in time-

“-Wh-what is… What is this?”

And instead, he, Uraraka, and Iida the Younger were at the bottom floor from wherever the chute dropped them to. More importantly, it was a place where there was a single light from the dingy skylight window above, and surrounding them were the limbless bodies of groaning, crying, whispering of 30 people.

“...kill me…”

“....please… let it end…”

Among other things filled their ears as they took a moment to realize what they had dropped into. The stench of blood and rot flooded into their nose. Uraraka took a shaky step back, tears filling her eyes and hands coming up to her mouth while Tenya turned around to vomit everything out of his stomach. Deku stood there, frozen stiff as he took in the sight in front of him.

“...Let’s get to the exit,” Deku said, voice deceiving calm, “There’s a door at the end.”

He turned over to where Uraraka and Tenya’s trembling, terrified expression looked back at him. He knows that, the proper thing to do would be to hold them, to wrap his arms around them and let them know that someone here was okay. This wasn’t their fault, and it was okay if they wanted to forget this ever happened.

But he couldn't be certain if they were alone here. With that in mind, he knew that he kept his grip on his bat steady, because right now, he was their only support. He was the prime fighter and their defender. No matter how weak and useless he was, this was all he could do. He had to protect them, and lead them back to safety.

He took the first step forward, and waited to hear their quiet shuffling behind him, over the sounds of the pleas before taking the other. Once they got to the door, he pressed his hand on it and realized that these were once double-doors, but now they were made to swing either way now. With that in mind, he kicked it down. They swung wide, looking much lighter than they looked, and he rushed out. Looking left and right quickly, he relaxed for a moment when he realized that they were alone.

He closed his eyes briefly, listening for anything and heard nothing.

On one side of him, there was a doorway at the top of a flight of stairs, no door, and it looked like it led straight outside. He could hear the yells of his people, and then stared down the other way. It was longer than he could see, and since all the lights were out and there were no windows, he knew that he was going to have to wait until they got some flashlights back.

He turned back. “...Iida-kun, get Iida-san. Uraraka, go ahead and head out that way too,” he said. The young man jolted back, and he jerked his head towards Uraraka.

“W-What about… you?” he asked quietly.

“We… We shouldn’t be alone…” Uraraka said quietly, her large eyes puffy from crying.

He nodded, “I want…” he hesitated, but didn’t want his words to fail him, “...to check something.”

“I-I’ll stay,” she said. “Because… Because they said you’ll do something stupid if you’re alone.”

He has no doubt that Ryuku grabbed her to tell her that. He wished that they wouldn't spread such terrible rumors about him. It wasn’t like he got into any of these incidents because he wanted to anyways.

“...I’l… I’ll be right back. Please,” Tenya’s eyes seemed to focus a little better as he looked back at Deku. “I’ll bring help. So please don’t go anywhere.”

The young man stared back, and thinks that even though he was throwing up just moments ago, he had a very quick recovery rate. Actually, they both did. He knew that people learned how to adapt when they were put into strenuous and mentally-taxing situations, but he thinks that they would have made exceptionally great heroes one day.

As soon as Tenya made his way up the stairs at full speed, Deku knew what he had to do. He walked right back to the room, and hesitated right at the door.

“...You should stay here,” he said.

“Are… you going to kill them?”

Deku paused, readjusting his grip on his bat.

He wasn’t a hero. If he was, he would save all those people in there. He would have saved them before the only thing they could do was beg to die. As it was, there was only one thing that he could do for them right now.

“...Oh god…” she whispered, her hands coming up to her face, “Oh my god…”

“...Go wait outside for Iida-kun.”

Deku walked through the swinging doors.

-

He took off his helmet and his gloves for this. It felt more right.

The last thing they would know is that a human had taken them out of this pitfall of misery. When they were walking through it initially, he had only taken a moment to make sure that they got through, but now that he was seeing it like this, all sorts of thoughts were impeding in his head.

First of all, the amount of the four-legged crawlers that were upstairs were staggering. It was rare for any group to amass to something of that size. If they hadn’t come with Endeavor, he’s certain that things would have ended much differently. The second thing would be that the doors swing, meaning that with the smallest amount of force from either side could push the entrance and exit open.

Then, all his thoughts returned to what was in front of him. The crying, limbless people who begged for death with what little life they had left.

Before he lost himself to his theories and his thoughts, he lifted his bat and put them out of their misery.

He was certain about one thing though. These were people that were being used as a food source for the shits they killed upstairs. These were people that they had probably dragged in here, one after another for god knows how long, and were slowly taken apart to be consumed.

“...Please rest now,” he said as he swung his bat down to the next one.

Some didn’t have eyes, gorged out, and others seemed to be unable to see him even with their eyes. None had their limbs past their elbows or knees, and some didn’t have anything past their hips and shoulders Their clothes were drenched in human waste, sweat and blood. Not one had clothes on, exposing their entire body and all the miscellaneous wounds, filled with puss and maggots, to the air. The rotting smell of vomit, flesh, was suffocating, and all at once, familiar.

He took a deep breath. His hands trembled, and his vision started to darken around the corner. His mind spun with the reasons and the theories took hold of his heart before he knew what to do with it.

...Who brought them here? With wounds like these, there was no way they lasted longer than a few weeks. But if he thought about how many of the monsters were roaming around, another thought began to take root in his heart.

If there were that many of them, eating these people bit by bit, didn’t that mean that they had a steady source from somewhere?

The more and more he thought he understood about the world, every time he stepped outside of his home, the more questions he got. Every time he got a new question, however, he thought that he’s a little closer to figuring something out, but some days he wished he didn’t know anything at all.

At the same time, it wasn’t like he could just stop thinking. The moment he stopped thinking, he would have to accept reality. He had killed each and every single one of these people. No matter how hard he tried to cover it up with sweet words or comforts like how they were begging for it, or that they had no way of helping them, he still killed them. One of them, who somehow managed to hold onto some part of his sanity, looked up at him and smiled as best he could without his lips. It was all teeth, in a painful matter that made Deku curl his toes.

“Thank you,” he had whispered.

He killed people he didn’t know. He killed people before he knew if they were infected or not. He just raised his bat and even though he’s been busting skulls since this whole thing started, the weight felt so much heavier. His stomach lurched. His vision blurred.

No good.

He got to a corner, and puked until there’s nothing inside of him. He dry heaved for a bit, before he wiped his mouth on his sleeve. He headed out, grabbing his gloves and pulling them on. By the time he pulled his face mask up and picked up his helmet, numb in a way that has nothing to do with pain, a stampede of footsteps came from the doorway.

He placed his helmet on, taking a calm breath as he tried to calm his heart.

He could feel it, the way Tenya’s eyes fell to him, and then to his bat. The silence was suffocating, and his own breath seemed to echo in the helmet.

“...You… killed them all?”

Uraraka, with her hands to her mouth, dropped to her knees. She hunched over herself as new tears came pouring down his face.

“I’m sorry,” he wanted to say, but ultimately didn’t.

“...You sent me… to get my brother so you… could kill them all?”

“...Tenya…”

Behind Tenya was Tensei. The brothers were both panting, indicating to him that they had probably ran here at full-speed. Deku was glad that he moved so quickly, otherwise he wouldn’t have finished in time. There was no need for others to suffer needlessly.

“Yeah,” Deku nodded. “...I did.”

“But you...You… murdered them.”

“Hey, is everyone alright!?”

At the entrance at the end of the hallway, Nishiya made his appearance. Next to him, a disgruntled-looking Enji came, fire beginning to die out. Tensei, after a tense moment, made way to try and enter the room, but Deku lifted his bloodied bat up.

“... Finished,” he said lamely. He didn’t want to call it ugly when these were once people before they were so terribly dishonored. Wasn’t it enough that they had witnessed it? He didn’t want to let others see it. He wanted to shield them from this.

“...Let me see,” Tensei said, pushing onwards past Deku. the young man closed his eyes and mourned.

“What’s going on here?” Enji said, his voice stern. Even though he didn’t direct his question at anyone in particular, his gaze never let Deku’s figure. Specifically, he hasn’t been able to stop staring at the way the baseball bat was gripped tightly in his hand.

Deku, who just wanted today to end, took a deep breath and explained it as simply and as quickly as he could.

“I killed them all,” he explained, short and concise. He felt numb, but this wasn’t the first (nor the last) time he would do this. His dirty, dirty, dirty hands were good for this, so he didn’t mind.

-

Mercy killing is something that a lot of them skit over. There were all sorts of moral and ethical arguments for and against, as well as several ideas behind the logic and theory to argue whether or not someone should live or die. For some people, the answer was fast and instinctual, and others could rave for hours.

Still, Deku took that choice away from everyone and carried the burden of that decision alone. He just figured that this would be the easiest for everyone.

Walking through the second part of the passage, lighting the way with a flashlight, he forged onwards to make sure that he would be the only one to ever make those decisions.

He didn’t slow his pacing down, but someone came up to start walking next to him.

Without looking, he knew who it was. The heavy footsteps, and the tall-tale signs of fire lighting the way, it was Enji, wasn’t it?

“They’re all ash now,” he reported, but didn’t leave Deku’s side.

Deku’s heart ached at the thought that the former Hero had to burn them to ash. He would have never wanted the man to soil his hands like that. At the same time, he was grateful that the man did it.

Being sent off by a hero would be better than someone like him. The last warmth that their body would face would be from a hero, and not some neighborhood brat. While he would never burden someone by asking it, he was a little jealous that they would be sent by this man.

Enji’s footsteps were loud, and listening to their steady confidence, Deku selfishly felt comfort.

“I’m sorry,” the former hero said quietly, “That you’ve been alone this whole time.”

Deku didn’t stop walking, but his hands were clenched tightly in his fists. Right now, if he opened his mouth, he would start to babble and cry. He would lose himself in his self-pity, and burden this man with his worthless thoughts.

So deep and far away in his heart, he buried his gratitude for this man with everything else.

One day, he would be strong enough to express his thanks.

Right now, he needed to keep moving forward.

### **Post - Mercy**

Deku's hands were still shaking. They shook and trembled, and it got so bad that he knew he couldn’t do anything but return straight to his complex.

He was drenched in blood, as he always was, but it’s also dry enough that it’s caked and stiff and everything about it is a reminder of the < action that cannot be undone > . He doesn’t know when he became this kind of person. He didn’t know that he was capable of killing someone else. It wasn’t something that he could just apologize for and move on like it never happened. He doesn’t know and if he could go back in time…

He thought back to those eyeholes, the quiet begging to be put out of their misery, the whispered pleas, and knew that he’d do the same thing again and again. He would send everyone out so that he was the only person in that fucking room to see those fucking people, to hear those fucking words, and he would do it again and again. He’d give them what they wished for, and left behind, pray that they were at peace.

His heart ached; his stomach turned. The world spun around him a little, and he was beginning to think that he was no longer in control of his body. He couldn’t feel anything with it, and didn’t think he could control it either. There was a lag between what he was thinking and wanted, and what he was actually doing.

He got up to the complex, unintentionally ignoring everyone around him.

Did… did he still count as human, at this point?

The question has always lingered about in his head, but now he feels like it’s echoing louder and louder in his head with every reverberation.

“Deku, welcome back!”

He stopped cold his eyes finding Kouta’s bright eyes, small and shy smile. He was standing next to Tsuyu and Natsuo, who gave him a smile and a wave, and felt nothing but gratitude that Kouta had healed enough to let other people in. He gave a half-hearted wave out of habit. His hand was caked in blood. He smelled like blood.

He doesn’t know how, but he’s in his complex, barely remembering to close the bathroom door behind him as he threw everything on his head off or off enough so that he could empty his stomach into the toilet bowl. And when he ran out of things to throw up, bile came out instead. And when he ran out of that, he dry-heaved hard, and wondered why he can’t even cry.

He flushed.

Got up, used valuable mouthwash.

Then, he proceeded with his usual. He took off everything that was covered in blood, he placed it in a bucket with water and bleach. He let it sit and robotically began the meticulous task of scrubbing everything off. His stomach churned, and he forgot the world.

He lost track of everything. When he was satisfied, he finally left it to soak a little longer as he took a shower. He used cold water, trying to numb the sensation out and failing miserably as his hands still tremble the same amount it always did.

The blood came off, but it didn’t feel like it.

He got out after a good scrub down and dried off. He was good until he slipped trying to get out of the tub and collapsed. The tub hit perfectly under his arm and his ribcage and when he got up, there was already an ugly bruise forming but Deku couldn’t feel anything.

He couldn’t feel anything.

When he dried off enough, he got his spare padding on. Got his clothes on. He’s used to it. His hands were still trembling and it took him longer than usual.

He made it to the couch. He should go downstairs. He should dry his hair. He should eat something. He should go and interact with people that are alive and whole and looking forward to the future. He should go and try a little harder to be alive and a functioning member of this place instead of a liability. He should live twice as hard for the people who couldn’t.

He laid down on the couch, and threw an arm over his eyes.

In his dreams, there is nothing because he is nothing. It’s terrifying and comforting all at once.

-

Something clicked and Deku was already on his feet.

His eyes met Chimera’s, his pocket knife out and ready, before he relaxed slightly.

“...I came with your dinner,” Chimera said. “Let’s eat.”

Green eyes flitted from the fluffy man and then back down. Slowly, he put his knife back and then walked over to where he dropped off all his things. He grabbed his bag and slung it over his shoulder, grabbing a bat and then looked at the older man.

Without another word, the two left the apartment and moved down to the Rental Office, where Deku began to recompile his notes. His helmet was next to him, on the desk, and he pulled the cloth down from his mask when he put food in his mouth. Otherwise, he kept it up as he updated the kill counts that he found.

Chimera was silent as he chowed down on the onigiris next to him. When he was done eating, he would start cleaning out some of his weapons, but until then, he simply stared at the map on the wall.

It was such a simple thing, but the presence of another person in the same room as him helped him tremendously.

“Next time,” Chimera said suddenly, “You won’t be alone.”

Deku’s blood turned to ice as he stared at him in shock. Chimera, seemingly satisfied with his words, placed his plate to the side to begin cleaning out his guns.

It was the worst thing that he could hear. He didn’t want that. He wanted to protect them from this feeling and that memory. He was the worst scum in the world, so it was okay if he suffered. For Deku, it was better to suffer than to be happy, because the hope that Chimera instilled in his heart with those words was dangerous.

That kind of hope wasn’t for people like him.

He bit his lip, as it was the only thing stopping him from breaking underneath hope.

“I would like to apologize for my shameful display earlier!” Tenya said, his body bending in a perfect 90-degree angle as he spoke.

Deku looked from the door handle to Tenya, and then to Uraraka and then back to the door. He stepped out of his apartment complex and closed the door behind him. He locked the door, and when he turned around, they kept going.

“We didn’t mean to make you feel bad about what… what you had to do,” Uraraka continued. “And we get that you… uh, did it because we were there. And that it was wrong for us to drop all the blame on you when you weren’t in the wrong to begin with. So, well, more than anything…”

The two bowed again, together this time, as they chorused, “We’re sorry.”

Deku hesitated. What was he supposed to do? He wasn’t sure what they were apologizing for to begin with. If they were apologizing for the dead people, then they were apologizing to the wrong person.

“...It’s fine,” he said, figuring that they would stand like that all day if he didn’t say anything. He waited for them to stand up, and he looked through the visor to stare at them.

If they were apologizing for the dead, then he welcomed their anger. Someone should be angry for them, and he was too damn tired to feel something like that. He took this as a good reminder for himself. This was what he wanted to protect. This was why he could keep fighting and why he could keep killing, no matter how heavy his body felt.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said. “As long as I’m here…” he wouldn’t let anyone else take this burden. It was heavy for him, so why would he give it to anyone else, “I’ll take care of it. You don’t have to apologize for it.”

He walked away from them, ready to launch himself into their objective for the day. They were going to clear out the office spaces now that they’ve cleared out almost all of the residential area. He needed to focus on the now and the future. In his sleep, he will choke on his guilt. When he dies, he’ll pay for everything he’s done. Until then, he would give everything to live.

Behind him, he’ll never know how lonely the two thought his figure was.

Tensei kept his face blank as he listened to his brother.

“He looked… accustomed to it, aniki.” Tenya said quietly. “I thought that, since I finally got to join him on the trip that I…” His hands balled into fists, “that I was closer to standing next to him.” He gnawed on his bottom lip, and closed his eyes in frustration, “But he said he’ll take care of it as long as he’s here.”

Placing his hand on his little brother’s back, he rubbed soothing circles like his mom used to do for him a long time ago.

His little brother was tough, even when Tensei didn’t want him to be.

### **The Other Survivor: Deku’s Greatest Weakness**

On occasion, they find other survivors who saw the entire world in terms of “threat” and “prey.” In terms of danger, they were one of the most volatile and dangerous of all possible enemies to run into. These were people who have abandoned all sense of reason and logic, and were unwilling to stop and listen and understand. There was nothing more dangerous than a person, desperate to survive at all and any costs.

It’s a lesson that’s hard to swallow and harder to forget. It’s important to know, and crucial to learn from it.

Deku, who embodied strength and certainty in their mind, hesitated when they encountered one.

Perhaps, if someone was with him at the time, he would have prioritized the safety of the person next to him and would have shot down the stranger. Perhaps, if the stranger had tried to ambush them first, then there wouldn’t have been this beat of pause.

As a result, the savage survivor launched herself at him. He clattered to the ground with a painful sounding thud, but he didn’t make a sound. The knife in her hand swung down, fully intent on stabbing him when her body was kicked off of him. She clattered against the railing, twitching in pain as she screamed.

Deku took one heaving breath, before everything fell into place. Someone was above him, so he shoved him off and rushed. It took less than a second, but Deku’s hand suddenly shot up to catch Stain’s wrist in his, stopping the taller man before he could cut down the woman.

The woman, clearly in a state of panic, barely managed to scramble up to her feet and bolted. Stain reached for the extra dagger at his side when Deku kicked him in the shin, throwing off his balance.

Stain’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “You… Letting her go isn’t a kindness. You really think that she won’t come back with a vengeance or go out there to be easy prey?”

Still, Deku didn’t respond.

Well, he supposed that he wasn’t expecting him too. He tugged on his wrist, trying to get out of Deku’s death-grip, and when he did, felt the fight in him dissipate when he caught eye of Deku’s trembling fingers. He didn’t know if he knew what to look for now, or if Deku was letting him see it now. Just a few months ago, he would have been shocked to have any kind of response from Deku, but he supposed that they came a long way. He hoped that they came a long way.

Obviously not long enough, but he figured that it was also because Deku was still a kid. There was a part of him that was still starry-eyed. Maybe he thought this was the best course of action. Concerning all the other people that were walking around the base, he’s not shocked.

But Stain knew better.

There was a particular strand of despair that no one could help. When people hit that low, the only way they could claw back up was if they do it themselves. It’s a hard lesson, and he doubted that Deku had it yet. Whatever, he’ll just go and hunt that woman down later.

Whatever Deku couldn’t do, he’d do it. And that would be the proof that he lived.

As he came to that understanding, Deku pulled his knife out of his thigh pocket and threw it. With incredible precision and strength, it went straight into the back of the stranger’s head.

She fell without fanfare.

It would appear that Deku was protecting him from getting his hands dirty.

### **Dabi & Deku - Give & Take**

Everything would have been fine

“Fight back,” Dabi snarled out. His hand gripped at Deku’s shoulders, his tight control over his fire slipping and scorching the cloth and skin.

Deku didn’t even blink. Green eyes peered up at him, curious in their light, and the sight of it pissed him off even more.

“I said, fight back!” Dabi snapped, heaving Deku by the shoulders and throwing him on the ground.

The young man fell to the ground, and before he could get back to his feet (and he was slow, Dabi mourned), Dabi kicked him in the chest. Flailing backwards, Deku’s head hit the ground. If it hurt, or even bothered him, he didn’t show it. Instead, he sat up, and looked up at Dabi, confused but not hurt. He looked at him like Dabi had asked him for the answer of a math question and the sight of it made his fire reach a fever pitch.

In an instant, he pinned him down. One hand grabbed each of his wrists and he dragged them up above his head.

“You’re fine, aren’t you? So fight back. Let’s see that strength! Come on!”

He paused for a moment, his mind racing to figure out what he needed to do so that he could prove his point. He dragged his other hand to Deku’s chest, running his hand down his front and then back up. He was toned, definitely, but he could still feel the indentations of where bones should be. His hand came up to grab his chin, uncaring of the bruising grip he laid.

“If not, I might take something sacred from you.”

He would. He was fully prepared to. He’s done worse things before, and he used to be a villain anyways. Forcing himself onto someone wasn’t something outside his realm of shit he would do just to inflict agony on someone. For the person who saved him from certain death, Dabi could do anything.

“...It’s okay,” Deku said, his eyes as frustratingly clear as they were when they started this. “I’ll give it to you.”

Blue eyes widened as his jaw slackened, and his grip loosened. Deku pulled one of his hands out and reached for the older man, cupping his face gently.

“If it’s you, I don’t mind.” He spoke quietly, as though it was actually just a voice in the back of his head, “so don’t make that face.”

And Dabi, who has never had anything worth losing, felt his whole world crashing down.

“Then don’t give up so easily,” he croaked out, unable to name the emotion that surged out of him. “Fight for your life.”

“...It’s okay,” Deku said quietly, “I trust you.”

And that was the problem.

Dabi didn’t know what to do with someone that he couldn’t hurt.

### **Mei & Brief Trip**

“Mei… chan?”

Mei looked up from where she was working on one of her babies and waved at the man at the door.

“Oh! Deku!” she called out excitedly. She placed her child down and milled on over to where the leader was. He gave a polite nod, and she laughed brightly instead. “You need one my babies?”

He nodded once, and she squealed in delight. While she always had a thousand things that she wanted to build and had good ideas on, it was so nice to have someone willing to test out her things, as well as provide feedback. With Deku, she really did feel like that sky was the limit.

“I… want something to help support my arms.”

Mei thoughtfully tapped her chin.

“You know, I’ve been thinking, but it’ll be easier for me to see for myself when you’re in action, you know? I noticed it with the last pair too, but there’s a lot of damage from other places that I never considered when I was making it. From what the others say too, you’re more like the in-the-action kind of guy, right? Then, I should make something for that!””

Deku tilted his head, considering the words, and nodded. “Okay. Come to the next run with us.”

“Oh, that’s a great idea!” she cheered back. “I haven’t left the base since I got here! This is exciting! Oh man, I can’t wait to whip my babies out!”

He nodded, turning to the door, “Let’s go after dinner.”

“Oh, so late?” she turned back.

He pointed at the headlights she had created at the corner and she could almost cry. How could she ever forget about these babies?! She spun back.

He nodded, “Five of us. Including you. See you later.”

“Aye, aye!”

He left and by then, Majima finally returned.

“Crazy child,” he called out, a tray of enough food for two in his hands, and when she didn’t respond called out again, “Mei, lunch!”

He paused for a brief moment, as she was standing right at the door. She cheered happily, taking the bowl of stirfry with glee as she looked over the notes for the next couple of things she would have to get ready.

“...That was Deku-kun, right?” he asked, leaning back to watch his figure fade down the hallway. “Did he…” he looked from her to him and then back, “request something?”

“Yeah,” she said, “But then we both decided that it’ll be better if I just go with them to figure out what he needs.”

“What?”

-

“Deku!”

It was… hard. Majima didn’t not trust the man who brought them all together. While he definitely thought that the kid made some questionable decisions, his overall ability to understand the situation and react accordingly was something to admire. After all, while he quivered and still had trouble sleeping at night, Deku never hesitated to go back outside.

At the same time, he couldn’t codone the thought that Mei, someone who didn’t have any experience in fighting, would head out.

More importantly, he eyed the people that Deku had elected to take. He firmly put down any other offers, and said that this team was perfect for what he wanted. It’s the most amount of initiative and opinion he’s ever shown.

Kendo, Akakuro, and Iguchi.

It was a purely short-distance team.

“...I’ll protect her,” Deku said, more to Majima, and then explained simply, “We’ll all come back.”

-

Spinner frowned at the blond, was this really going to be okay?

“You gotta write on the move-”

“No,” Deku cut Spinner off. His gaze met Stain’s as he finished dropping his backpack to the ground. The older man gave a curt nod, even though they didn’t say anything.

Akakuro had thought that it was strange that he was called in. Standing next to Deku and briefly meeting Iguchi’s eyes over his head, he felt oddly honored. Deku had specifically called the two of them out. He had looked around the base until he found the two of them.

Pulling out two short daggers, Iguchi drew his katana swiftly.

“Spinner. Flank out,’ he spoke curtly and Iguchi, understanding what was going on with a single command gave a helpless laugh.

“Understood,” he said, and the two scattered out, Stain to the left and Spinner to the right.

Deku, meanwhile, looked to Mei, “Watch me.”

-

As promised, they all returned safe and unscathed.

“Wait, we went out to get you support equipment?” Iguchi asked, eyes nearly bugging out.

“Oh, was that enough?” Kendo asked, her face etching with concern. “After all, the worst of your injuries come from fighting indoors.”

“I can’t guarantee her safety inside a building,” Deku explained, “This was the next best thing.”

“More than arm support, I think you need something for your legs and hips as well,” Mei continued, her eyes shining, “Ah! My babies are going to be even shinier!” Immediately, she made a beeline for the workshop. “I’ll have something ready in a week.”

The young man nodded back, waving at her back weakly.

### **Summertime (jul-aug? )**

Deku wiped at the sweat on his brow with deep sighs. He reached for his pack of water and greedily swallowed half of it down.

“...Feeling the heat?”

He looked up where Yamada gave him a friendly wave. He closed his bottle and sketched out a proper bow in greeting while quickly pulling his mask up to his nose. The older man came in step next to him.

“It’s a hot day,” he said in return, internally smacking himself for saying something so stupid. Judging by the laugh that came out of the blond, he wondered if there was some unsaid joke between what he said.

A little more privately, he didn’t mind being laughed at. He was just glad that the blond could still laugh. For that moment, he just basked in the man’s bright demeanor, feeling as though he was standing under gentle sunlight and not the blistering heat he was actually under.

“You don’t have to have that on, isn’t it hot?” Yamada asked, motioning to the mask on his face. “Don’t get a heatstroke.”

Deku hesitated, and shook his head.

“...It’s fine,” he said quietly, unable to meet his eyes. Honestly, he felt like he was melting, but he didn’t want to scare anyone just because he wanted a momentary comfort. “I’m used to it.”

“...That’s what I mean,” Yamada said, shaking his head. “You don’t have to be used to it anymore,” he explained. “And I’ll sing at anyone who tries to say otherwise!”

In moments like this, Deku was reminded how blessed he was and smiled back.

“Thank you.”

He could only pray that Yamada never lost that kindness.

-

He gave another bow before leaving to go help with other chores, and Yamada ran his hand through his hair.

“Hizashi?”

He didn’t bother looking at Aizawa when his longtime friend came up next to him. Instead, he gave a long sigh.

“Not today, either,” he said, giving him a helpless shrug.

In an instant, Aizawa understood.

People heal at different rates. Unfortunate as it was, they couldn’t force anyone to get better either. In these moments, they found comfort in the fact that there was any change at all.

“One day,” he said.

The blond grinned back.

“One day.”

## Sewage

### **Initial Checking**

"...One more time?"

"The sewage system," Deku confirmed. "I want to check it out."

Chisaki, predictably, made a face like he would rather Overhaul the whole thing away.

“It’s a good point,” Enji said, nodding. “I haven’t even considered it. We should start on this as soon as we can-”

“Not you,” Deku said. “Too hot.”

There was a brief silence, and Yamada coughed in his hand to suppress his laugh.

“..Guess it’s finally time for those with less-flashy quirks to stand up, huh?” Aizawa noted.

“Not you,” Deku said, shaking his head, “But strong people.”

Yamada gave up with that, slapping the table in his laughter. His friend turned around and socked him in the arm. His laughter quickly died.

“Alright then,” Aizawa said, his eyebrow twitching. “Who were you thinking of?” he asked.

Deku stared at him for a moment, and right when he opened his mouth, a voice from the other side came up.

“You’re not going alone.”

Green eyes narrowed at the former Number Two hero. Deku really didn’t want to say it, but it almost felt like he was pouting. But, that wasn’t possible.

-

“-Me?”

Deku looked at Stain for a long moment, and then nodded.

“A possible infestation in the sewers,” Stain repeated, slowly, “And you came straight to me?”

The young man blinked at him and nodded.

The older man covered his mouth, in a poor attempt to cover the pleased smile on his face. He turned around instead, already counting the blades he should bring.

“We should be properly prepared then, huh?”

### **Breeding**

Right, Deku thought to himself, his mind somehow distant from the situation in front of him. If there were feeding grounds, why wouldn’t there be breeding grounds? It would make sense, concerning the fact that they’ve all but hunted humans into extinction. If they can’t turn other humans into their kind, then they would have to find other methods to procreate.

The thought felt distant and nauseating all at once.

He lifted his bat up and made sure to leave nothing behind.

### **Post-Sewage - Stain’s Injury**

Stain stared at Deku for a long moment and shook his head.

“When… When I was a kid,” he started suddenly, leaving Deku to stare at him in gobsmacked shock (not that the man could see it), “I ….I wanted to be a hero.”

Deku, focused primarily on breathing, stared at the older man. He gently placed Deku onto the ground, placing his hand on his head.

“I wanted to be a hero so bad that I fought my mom and applied to a dorm school for it. And I… When I got to the hero course, I was so…” he paused, as though he was looking for the right word to say, but Deku really wished that he would be more focused on the encroaching enemy. His thoughts and concerns went unnoticed, and Stain kept going. “It was so disappointing. I thought that, if I wanted to save the world, then I had to get rid of the people impersonating as heroes first. That I would leave a stain on society, and they would learn from it.”

Even Deku, who wasn’t quite thinking correctly through the haze of pain he was in, couldn’t help but think that there was something a little flawed in Stain’s logic. However, it was hard to breath, and he didn’t even know what he should say, or had enough air to say it.

In his hesitance, Stain continued to speak.

“I know that… I never said this before but thank you, truly. I… You reminded me of why I wanted to be a hero.”

His lips pulled back, looking more like a grimace than a grin, but the image of him burned into Deku’s mind. He gave Deku’s helmet a pat, and stood up, his eyes focusing on the monster pulsating a few feet away. It’s rolls of flesh continued to pour out, making it inch forward bit by bit. The older man took a deep, slow breath. The smell was putrid, overwhelming his senses for a moment.

The regenerating types were always a pain in the ass. It didn’t matter if it was a monster or a quirk. He pulled out his last dagger from its place on his leg, and swung his arm around. Pain shot up his arm, but it wasn’t anything he couldn’t push through.

He wouldn’t fall. Not while there was someone behind him.

-

When Stain woke up, he realized that he was in the room for patients. Still, he didn’t register what he saw and instead tried to sit up. Sharp pain shot down his back, and he clenched his jaw. He could barely crane his head off the pillow. However, there was a pressure squeezing his hand and when he turned, saw Deku’s green eyes looking back at him.

He blinked and then looked down to where both of Deku’s hands had barely managed to wrap around his. He didn’t bother with his fingers, and Stain’s lips quipped when he realized how small the hands that always protect him really are.

Pathetic.

The hands tried to pull away, and with a long sigh, he turned his hand over to grab one before he could make an escape.

“...I wanted to go to Tokyo with you,” he rasped out.

He sounded as awful as he felt. He must have spent a few days out. Aside from how awful he felt and how little he could move, he already knows that there will be no chance that he’ll join the Tokyo Party. If he was still feeling the injury, it wasn’t something that Chisaki could get rid of. He’d have to wait and heal the old-fashioned way.

“...Next time,” Deku said, because it wasn’t enough to save his life every single time. These days, Stain felt like the empty throne where he used to keep his Ideal Hero was being filled with something entirely different. “We can go together next time.”

Stain closed his eyes. He rode through every burst of shame and regret in his heart until he anchored himself to the words Deku told him.

“Next time,” he swore back.

He must have fallen asleep shortly afterwards, but even in his dreams, his hand was exceedingly warm.

### **Patrolling Habits**

It took some time, but they are finally understanding something incredibly important.

If they wanted something, it was better to just go and do it.

“I’ll take the left,” Hawks said, his wings spreading out before he took off.

“We’re going right,” Dabi muttered, turning towards the corridor. Excitedly, Toga waved at him before they ran off.

“Yosh, then I guess we’re going to go up, huh?” Mirio laughed.

Deku wasted no time moving straight up for the staircase, uncaring if anyone knew or cared. Mirio wasn’t sure if this was independence or something else.

### **Hawks - Survival Speculations**

“Still, to actually make it this far, is a feat all on its own,” Hawks murmured to himself.

His eyes followed where Deku was dutifully helping out with the chores, as he always did, and then got chastised badly by some of the others in the area, especially Yaoyorozu and Shoji. From the way they were standing, with their arms crossed over their chests, and the worry etching their face, Hawks could only imagine what they were saying, when they saw the young man helping out despite the limp in his leg.

Deku looked at the ground, guilty as charged, and Hawks couldn’t help but laugh a little.

It was hard, getting used to people again, wasn’t it? He understood that, and couldn’t wait to teach him otherwise.

“How cute,” he noted, absolutely endeared. He opened the window, his wings stretching out to the sides of him as he climbed onto the windowsill. “Time to save him, I suppose.”

A grin stretching his lips, he stepped onto the ledge and jumped.

### **[homeless] DabDek - belt**

Deku’s hand reached out to grab Dabi by his belt buckle. The gesture collected several attention, but it was Deku’s following words that brought a collective hush over them.

“Give it to me,” he said.

“...Normally, I’d take you to dinner first,” Dabi said, licking his lips as he stared at Deku with narrowed eyes. His hands, trembling just the slightest bit, lifted up to grab Deku’s hand, “But I don’t think I could ever say no to you-”

His words were cut off when Twice came sprinting up to Deku.

“I can make you another Dabi!” he cried out, theatrical tears coming from his mask as he kneeled right next to the younger man, waving his hands frantically. “Why don’t you try me instead? I bet I can treat you a thousand times better than Staples here!”

But Deku was plenty good at ignoring others as his eyes didn’t leave Dabi’s face. He tugged on the buckle again, and Dabi’s eyebrows flew up to his hairline. A dark blush began to creep up his face, and his grin twisted even wider. The earnest gaze in Deku’s eyes never wavered, and the older man knew that he’d never be able to refuse.

“Man, you don’t even care if we have an audience, huh? Go ahead, I’ll give you whatever I got. Shit, you’re just-”

And everything seemed to stop as Deku unclasped his belt and then yanked it out in one fluid movement. Satisfied, he straightened up, and then walked away, the belt in hand.

Behind them, Hawks fell to the ground, laughing so hard he couldn’t breath.

-

“So,” Dabi said, trying his hardest not to pout, “Whatcha need my belt for?” It was definitely a question, but his tone failed him and he just felt a bone-weary exhaustion etch into his bones.

He did his absolute best not to turn around and see Twice and Hawks, who couldn’t look at him without chortling. He was ready to lit them on fire. Nope. It wasn’t worth it. Deku would mourn for them, and he didn’t want to give them any bit of his attention.

Deku looked up at him, and stood up. Dabi stared back, his eyes zoning in on his belt, fastened around Deku’s chest. More importantly, there were several other belts that were fastened on his chest, the buckles facing various directions, with barely a few centimeters between them. All in all, it looked uncomfortable and Dabi frowned.

“Can you even breath in that?” he asked.

Deku nodded in return, but his breathing was shallow.

“...Hey, you doing alright?”

Green eyes kept focus on something ahead. The older man turned towards him, when the young man reached for his small knife on his thigh. Dabi, understanding what was going on, turned to look at what Deku was staring at, and wished that his quirk was mind-reading or something.

He stood for another moment, lowering his center of body, and Dabi took a step back. The fire danced across his fingers, and he tried to concentrate on the possible threat and not how nice Deku looked with his belt on his chest.

Augh, he thought to himself. Just. Augh.

### **Fantasy-Shattering: Rule # 2**

Shigaraki, Mina, + Akira (OC)

It was painfully easy to figure out what had happened. Akira had returned, all alone, closed-mouth and trembling about what had happened aside from the absolute certainty that Helmet was dead. No one else came back with him, and he admitted to running away all the way back to the apartments.

Which meant that he didn’t run into anyone, or there was some serious shit going on.

The sight of him was enough for them to organize an emergency relief. If they all did died, then there was something that would be coming straight for them now. With the promise to contact back, even if they died too, Tenya and Miruko took off.

Their questions were short-lived as the rest of the group came back within the hour. All of them in varying amounts of pain and exhaustion, but Mina was draped over Deku’s back as they came in running. It had been quite some time since someone had gotten so injured, and it was surprising, but not as shocking as seeing how fucking livid Shigaraki was.

He zoned in on Akira, who whimpered and backed away, but right before he could close the space between them, Deku had grabbed Shigaraki by the back of the shirt. Their young leader had already given the injured and unconscious Mina to Rimi and Ochako before he had jogged after the older man.

“Let go,” Shigaraki said, “I’m going to kill that fucking bastard.”

Deku tugged again, and the man spun around to face him. He released him then, and walked past the man. The familiar feeling of confusion clouded his anger, and they all watched as Deku approached Akira. With the way all his muscles were tense and his veins seemed to bulge on his neck, it was clear that it was taking Shigaraki every ounce of himself to hold back.

“I-I didn’t know!” he cried out, “I-”

But then, to everyone’s shock, Deku lifted his fist and punched him right across the face. The man fell out of his chair, sliding across the ground as Deku took a few steps towards him. He picked him up by the collar and punched him again, same cheek but the angle was towards the down, so Akira went crashing to the ground, his head colliding against the ground with a dull thud and bouncing back up. He cried out in pain, the scream echoing around the room, until it was cut off when Deku’s foot came kicking into his chest.

He wheezed, and his eyes flew wide-open. In that unseeing clarity, he focused in on what was going on behind him, and felt relieved when he caught sight of some of the other pros. They would stop him, and everyone would see how terrible this boy they called leader was.

Everything was perfectly falling in plan. Helmet’s hold on this group will be relinquished, all because Akira pushed that girl off the side of the building where the Walkers were gathered down below. Abandoning Mina, pushed or not, would have been the correct choice that anyone would make, and no leader, who would blindly jump out of a second-story window to save some injured chick, could be considered a good leader anyways. He was doomed to fail, and the only reason why he didn’t was because of the others who foolishly joined the battle in an attempt to help.

They managed to save Mina. Everyone came home alive. Still, they lost all the supplies that they hunted for, and they would have to send a second group out to make sure that everything that locked onto their trail was dead.

Everyone that he met since the world ended, seemed to share the same belief in that sense. People who can’t keep up would be left behind. People can be used as bait and can be sacrificed so the greater majority of people can move on.

But Deku never learned that lesson. Maybe it was because he was alone or he was abandoned or because he has been waiting for the same guy since this whole thing blew over, but it’s not something that he knows or understands.

So when Deku kicked him, again and again, dragged Akira up by the collar of his shirt to beat him back down, he realized something. Why wasn’t anyone helping Akira? Why were they letting this happen? It couldn’t be because Deku was strong or something, the man was quirkless for god’s sake. He’s painfully easy to take-down, and their training sessions proved that.

A cold sinking realization began to wash over him as Deku’s heel pressed against Akira’s neck, feeling the creak of his collarbone in protest.

“W-Wait,” he rasped out. One of his eyes was swelling bad, but the other one looked around wildly. No one? No one was going to help him? All these heroes and witnesses were just… standing around? He could see that they were all just watching, and it wasn’t that they were being stopped by someone from jumping in either.

Even Shigaraki was leaning against the furthest wall, staring down at him.

“No sacrifices,” Deku said, pushing down on his windpipe, ignorant to what the others are doing around him.

“No… No sacrifices,” Akira parroted.

Deku lifted his heel off and turned around. He walked out of the room.

And no one, not a single fucking person, as they all turned to leave one by one instead, even came to ask Akira if he was alright.

Deku spent a night in his apartment, before he woke up in the middle of the night to puke everything out of his gut. He stared blankly at the toilet bowl, knowing that it was bad enough that there was nothing in his stomach, and tried to repress the shudders that racked his body. He felt the burn of acid all in his throat, and it tasted putrid in his mouth.

Well shit.

His stomach growled, hungry, but he didn't feel like eating.

His hands shook, and he couldn’t get that imagine of Mina’s face as she fell down. He doesn’t think he’ll ever forget it. The feeling of beating a life human is very similar to beating a rotting on, if a little warmer, and he emptied his stomach acid into the ceramic bowl again.

He hated this. He hated himself.

He’s just. He’s killed so many people. He’s abandoned and let so many more die. To willingly throw someone into a bad situation for the sake of surviving on their own was infeasible to him. If someone could be saved, then he’ll do everything to help them. Losing control of himself like that was just as unacceptable, but...

But more importantly, he couldn’t believe that no one else stopped him.

He sighed, leaning back as he wiped his mouth. Hopefully, this will be the last time tonight. Probably not, and he got up. His front ached, and he stared down.

Was he bleeding through his shirt? Now that he thought about it, he did just go straight to sleep. He stepped out, and found that Kouta had left him some onigiri in tupperware. His heart warmed at the sight, even if he didn’t deserve this kindness. He swears that he’ll protect what kindness is still here.

He grabs a spare shirt and heads down to get some first-aid and fresh air without waking up Kouta. Out of habit, he suits up a little, and brings his bat. He left his helmet, and grabbed his goggles and mask instead.

"...Which dumb bitch is in my fucking office-"

Chisaki stared and Deku, who had his shirt bunched up as he sloppily tried to put some first-aid on the mess of his chest, flinched backwards.

Gold eyes stared at the intruder before they closed, and Chisaki took a very deep breath. Rubbing his temples with his hand, he wordlessly entered the room and closed the door behind him quietly.

“Deku,” he said, approaching him, “Just tell me.”

The young man gave him this helpless look, and the older man wished he was reliable.

“...You know,” Chisaki stated, after a clean Overhaul and then beginning to disinfect the wounds that remained “You wouldn’t be so fucking injured if you didn’t beat him so much,” he commented. As an afterthought, he added, “Or just came straight to me at the end of it.”

“...I lost myself,” Deku admitted. “I thought... someone would stop me.”

“If someone knew how messed up you were,” the man said, stopping to grab some more gauze. He returned and finished his sentence, “I’m sure that someone would.” He couldn’t imagine Shigaraki doing anything less. The guy was surprisingly loyal when it came to his agenda of ‘Deku or death’.

The young man shook his head, “I think they were surprised that I hit someone like that. I haven’t… I haven’t lost myself like that in a while.”

He side-eyed the kid. ...Did he seriously not get it?

“To be honest, I’m more shocked that someone didn’t stop you to beat him up themselves,” the older man replied back. He grabbed Deku’s hands, frowning at how it was already bleeding through his bandages, and sighed deeply through his nose. “I didn’t think you could lose your cool,” he explained, ignorant to how often Deku cried himself to sleep.

He squeezed the small hand in his, and it was enough for those green eyes to come up to meet his. He stared for another moment before speaking, “...You shouldn’t get your hands dirty anymore, at least not with that scum’s blood. Next time, just let me know who, and I’ll take care of it.”

Deku shook his head, “I don’t want to kill him. I just want him to know that we don’t sacrifice.”

Chisaki’s eyes found his. This would be the one thing that they don’t agree on, and that Chisaki wouldn’t bend on.

The world has long since lost all value in his eyes, Chisaki thought to himself as he finished dressing the wounds. For as far back as he remembered, there wasn’t much to live for or much to fight for. The world was filled with scum, born and bred. Through all of that, he never thought that he would find an exception.

“Deku,” Chisaki said.

Deku looked up at him curiously, “Yes?”

But there was one exception.

“...No, it’s nothing,” he replied back. He would die with this.

### **Kouta - Gun safety**

“I want to go, too,” Kouta declared.

There was no hesitation.

“No,” Deku shook his head.

The young boy flinched backwards, like he had been hit by something, and then gritted his teeth. Focusing himself again, he stepped forward.

“I won’t slow you down! I wanna help! I don’t want to be waiting for someone anymore.”

“Then get stronger.”

“How?” he demanded. “I don’t… I don’t know how to be strong.”

Deku pulled at his gloves, adjusting it one last time before he adjusted his balaclava, right where his eyeholes were. Then, he grabbed his motorbike helmet and strapped it on. He shook his head, and satisfied, he pulled his backpack on.

Watching him, as he had almost everyday he got to see him suit up, Kouta wondered what the answer would be.

“Kouta,” Deku spoke up, “You’re not alone.”

Seemingly satisfied with how he was dressed, he moved to the door. Kouta walked to follow him out, fully intending on walking him out to the edge of the compound until he was told to turn around. As soon as the door opened, however, there was a flutter as Hawks flew into the area right in front of the door.

“Morning,” he said, a lazy smile on his face. He tilted his head, seeing the young boy. “Oh? Kouta-kun, you’re up early.”

“G’morning,” Kouta chirped back.

People call Heroes strong, right? Kouta peeked up at Deku, who waved back at Hawks as he closed the apartment door behind him and locked up. He tucked his key into one of his back pockets. Without a second glance, he walked to the stairwell.

Despite how dark it was, at the twilight hours, Deku had no hesitation when he walked. Once, Kouta had worn his helmet, so he knew how dark it was in there. Maybe that was strength?

“I wanted to come,” Kouta explained to Hawks as the two fell into step behind Deku.

“Eh? It’s… a little early for you, isn’t it?”

“Deku said I can go if I get stronger,” he replied back.

The blond’s expression didn’t even twitch, but he brought a hand up to his face. “Is that so?”

“...Hawks-san, how do I get stronger?”

“...Well, that’s a loaded question, isn’t it? I did a lot of training and studying. I grew up in safe circumstances, with good food and a warm bed. Repeat for twenty years,” he explained.

For good measure, he pulled his arm up and flexed, as though to show the physical proof of his hard work. Kouta looked unimpressed.

“I don’t have twenty years,” he explained with a frustrated sigh.

The blond thought about it for a moment, and explained, “I became a hero to protect the people that can’t protect themselves. For me, that’s where my strength comes from.”

“...So you’re not strong anymore?”

The blond blinked, “Sorry?”

“Because the Deku was the person to protect people who can’t protect themselves,” he said. He tilted his head, doing his absolute best to understand the circumstance. “So who are you protecting?”

Hawks opened his mouth, and then closed it. He waited for an extra moment, as though trying to figure it out himself. He didn’t respond, however, and Kouta heaved a great sigh instead.

So much for that.

-

Kouta’s hand came up to grip Kurono’s pant leg.

“Me too,” he said, pointing at the gun in his hand with his other hand, “I want to learn, too.”

Kurono stared at the kid for a moment and frowned.

“You want to learn how to shoot a gun?” he asked, incredulous.

The kid, who barely came up to his knee, nodded. He was just a little bit taller than Eri, and just as thin and pitiful.

Kouta nodded.

“...You know, this is a dangerous weapon. It’s powerful, and most people can’t survive after getting shot. It’s hard to control, and if you’re not careful, you can get yourself or your allies killed instead. It’s not like in manga or movies.”

“But I can’t run. And I can’t fight,” Kouta said. “I don’t want to wait to die.”

The former yakuza eyed him critically as he kneeled down so that they were closer in eye-level. If Deku wanted him to learn, then Deku would be here. This kid came to this conclusion on his own. There were adults who were afraid of even looking beyond the grounds, but this kid wanted a gun so he could head out? Kurono didn’t want to damage that courage.

The thought that Kouta was arrogant, or just boasting on hot air, never occurred to him.

“You know, if I give you this gun, there are a lot of people here who will hate me even more. And, if you learn how to do this, there will be even more people that criticize Deku.”

Kouta frowned back. “So?”

It was Kurono’s turn to stare back in surprise.

“I don’t want to live following what other people say. I’m sick of it. I just don’t want to be alone anymore. If we’re all going to die anyways, why can’t I go die with Deku?”

It was a dangerous line of thought. Kurono was instantly glad that this kid didn’t ask someone like Setsuno, but he wished the kid went to a former hero or policemember. They were much better equipped to deal with these kinds of things. He was one of the last people who should be caught alone with a child as mentally and emotionally vulnerable as Kouta.

He related too much.

He sighed.

“...I’m really not someone you should be talking to,” he said. “None of us are really. But you know, just because you know how to fire a gun, that doesn’t mean that you’ll be taken out with Deku. There’s a lot of people who want that place.”

Kouta looked at the ground.

“What else can I do?” he asked.

If Kurono had an answer for that, he would be the one that accompanied Deku out the most often. But he didn’t. He was hard-pressed to think of anyone that Deku did try to take around. If he was a sensible adult that grew up under normal circumstances, he might have ruffled his hair to show some solidarity. However, Kurono wasn’t articulate in his words or his actions.

“I think… you already have a good idea on that, don’t you?”

Kurono motioned to their makeshift gun range.

“I think I have something that might work for your size.”

And thus began Kouta’s gun lessons.

-

“...Deku, a word.”

Deku looked up to see Tsukauge and Yagi’s pinched expression at the doorway. He gave a nod, and closed the notebook in his hands. At the table with him, Spinner gave them a curt nod but made no move to leave the room. The other two exchanged a glance, and after a second, Tsukauge spoke up with a resigned sigh.

“Deku, are you aware that… Kouta-kun has a gun?”

Spinner’s eyes flitted from the pair to Deku and then back to the map, giving a poor show that he wasn’t listening to their conversation. Their resident leader tilted his head, and furrowed his eyebrows.

“He wanted one,” he replied back.

“S-so we’re going to just give anyone who wants a gun a gun?” the former police officer asked, aghast.

Green eyes blinked at him and he nodded curtly. “They have to pass Chisaki’s test though.”

“But why?” Yagi almost shouted. “He’s a child!”

There was a long silence as Deku looked down at the notebook in front of him.

“One day, I won’t be here anymore,” he said. “And neither will you. At that time, whatever did us in will be coming for him. It doesn’t matter if he’s a kid.”

From the look on the others’ faces, it wasn’t the answer they wanted. Right when they were about to start arguing back, Deku looked at them calmly.

“I’m not strong enough to protect everyone. I’m sorry,” he said, dipping his head forward in a poor show of a bow.

The blond wasn’t having it. “But here? At home? Where it’s safe?”

“Safe?” Deku frowned, like he’s never even heard of the word before. “Where?”

Yagi looked severely wrong-footed, as he took in the confused expression of the kid in front of him. Spinner gave up all pretense of not listening, and stared at Deku, just as confused.

“...Here?” Tsukauchi said quietly, “the place where we are right now?”

His expression morphed into shock.

“...Here?” the young man repeated. He looked between the two of them like he didn’t know who they were. “This place isn’t safe.”

It was like they were living in two different realities this entire time.

“It’s convenient,” he said. “But not safe.”

“Why do you say that?” Tsukauchi asked. “Then, surely, there’s a way to dissuade those thoughts.”

He shook his head, “If it was truly safe, we wouldn’t be afraid.”

On occasion, it was moments like these that reminded them the lengths of paranoia that Deku endured. However, it was also true that it was his paranoia that led to the place that they currently live in. In that case, it was hard to ever imagine a place or time that Deku would be able to say it was ‘safe’. The knowledge was both humbling as it was terrifying.

### **ChisakiDeku - Angel**

Deku reached for the door, and as soon as he pulled the handle to open it and leave, a hand came up and above him to slam the door shut.

“When I… first met you, I thought you were an angel,” Chisaki muttered, his voice rumbling in his chest and echoing into Deku’s back from how close he stood, “an awful angel who came to collect my sinful soul. When I woke up here, I honestly thought I had arrived on the promised land.”

Deku slowly turned around to face him, but froze when Chisakis other hand came up to his back. His hand rested right between his shoulder blades.

He remained silent, facing the wall.

Chisaki moved his hand from the door down, to rest on Deku’s hand on the doorknob.

“Nowadays, I’m… content.”

He finally stepped back. The younger man slowly turned around and stared, pensive.

“I’m glad you returned safely,” he said. He dipped his head forward in a shallow bow, “And hope that you will continue to do so.”

Deku turned just a little bit, so that he could see Chisaki and then back to the ground.

“Kai, I’m not an angel,” he said bluntly.

The man arched an eyebrow back, and lifted his hand to do a poor job at covering his face. The young man watched his lips twitch.

“No, I suppose not.”

“But… If I was, I would exchange all that for strength..”

Chisaki’s smile slid off his face, but Deku’s gaze dropped to the ground.

“And with all that strength, what would you do?”

Green eyes hardened with a resolve that could stop his heart when his gaze cut up to Chisaki’s eyes, “Find the person that started this and kill them.”

Golden eyes widened before a smile stretched across his face.

“And, in that hypothetical world or this one, I will accompany you,” he said, bowing a little more politely, like Deku was someone of great power and weight in the world. “To heaven or hell.”

“Hypothetically,” Deku said, but Chisaki caught his smile.

“Hypothetically,” he agreed.

Deku turned to leave, and Chisaki was already looking forward to the next time he would get injured and return to the infirmary.

### **Chimera & Deku - Favor**

Deku took three steps outside when he was suddenly approached from the left. He looked to where Chimera was staring down at him.

“You called?”

Deku nodded. He turned on his heel and started to walk away, and had it been anyone else, Chimera would have been miffed at being dismissed so easily. However, this was commonplace by now, and he followed wordlessly.

“...Your team for Tokyo, I’ll go with you,” he said as they made their way to the Rental Office. “Knowing you, you’re going to take people who have some sense of independent action. Perfect, I fit the bill. You don’t have to worry about me, and you don’t have to constantly watch your own back, either.”

As they approached the door, Chimera stepped in front of him to hold the door open for him. Deku eyed him out of the corner of his eye, but with a small bow, entered the room. He took his helmet off and placed it on the table before turning to Chimera.

“I have a favor to ask,” Deku said quietly.

“Consider it done,” Chimera nodded back. “What do you want?”

The young man’s eyebrow went up, and the former villain wondered if he always looked that exasperated under his helmet.

“...You should listen first,” he said quietly, “I could have asked for your heart.”

He arched a brow in return, “Do you want it?”

Deku sighed back, shaking his head and abandoning the conversation then and there. Which was fine, because Chimera will prove it to him overtime.

He pointed at the map, specifically the ocean at the southern tip of where they were.

“...You want me to check on the docks? Hm, alright. I’ll have to go alone. I don’t trust anyone here but you. It’ll take me a few months, but I’ll make it back by the first snowfall.”

“...Thank you,” he replied back, “I’m sorry that-”

“Deku, don’t look at me like I’m a person,” the man said, “but a tool to help you. You don’t apologize to your tools or show your gratitude, right? As long as I can return to you, don’t don’t have to worry about anything else. Consider this done.”

He needed to make his preparation. He turned on his heel, ready to leave. The faster he went, the more time he could spend in the area, and ultimately return with a complete report. Concerning the fact that Deku was pushing to go to Tokyo, he had a good idea on what he would be looking for in the docks.

“No.”

Chimera jerked backwards, staring at defiant green eyes. They shined in their certainty, and Chimera got lost between shades of green. A small hand came up to grip Chimera’s sleeve, stopping him where he was.

“Not a tool,” he said firmly, “You are… reliable Chimera-san, Chojuro Kon. Please prioritize your safety, and come back.”

He released him and looked back down. He grabbed his helmet.

“Excuse me,” he said quietly before leaving in a quick scurry.

Confirmed then, Chimera thought to himself. He was in service to an idiot who didn’t see him as a tool or an instrument, but someone reliable. How deplorable. Of all the people to pledge his service to, why did it have to be some naive brat?

He must return. He must return with this mission completed perfectly. He must, because he didn’t want to disappoint, he wanted to exceed. Lips curled back into a grin, he hummed to himself. How terrible. What a slave-driver.

-

He left in the middle of the night. No one noticed and no one cared, and when he took his first break, learned that Deku left him a talisman among his provisions.

## **[Year 3: Autumn]**

### **Sept - Tokyo**

By the time Deku stepped back into the compound, he had made up his mind on who he was going to take. His backpack slipped off his shoulders and he placed it on the ground.

“Oh, Deku? Is something wrong?”

He looked up to where Kirishima and Toyomitsu had turned to stare at him. He must have zoned out for a while, but this was something he had finally come to a decision on. He didn’t want to hold it off any longer than he had to.

He reached up and pulled his helmet off, alerting all of them that he wanted to speak.

He knew that there was an epic competition of sorts going around to decide who was going to come with him to Tokyo. And by that, he means that they bickered and fought and would continue to bicker and fight until the moment they leave. Perhaps, if he expresses his opinion, they would stop hissing at each other, and they could come to a happy agreement instead.

And so, Enji, Hawks, Dabi, Setsuno, and Deku prepared for the long trip. Originally, Hawks wasn’t apart of the original team composition, but the near-desperate look on their faces required him to bring someone fast, just in case. A rock-paper-scissors match between Hawks and Tensei quickly laid that to rest.

However, as far as anyone else, he wasn’t going to budge.

-

“...Are you sure?” Setsuno asked quietly as he helped Katsukame unload the wagon they brought in from their last run. His almost brother side-eye him, even though the blond kept his eyes on the leader of their area, “A shield like Hojo or Hejike might be better. And Kurono is a better shot than me.”

Deku nodded. There were a thousand things that he could say or try to explain why he chose Setsuno. It starts with the fact that the man had a good amount of energy and focus, and also includes the fact that the two of them shared a good rhythm. Ultimately, there was one thing that stood out above everything else though, and he hoped that it would be what Setusno needed to hear.

“...Reliable,” he said.

“...Of all the people that I know, I think you’re the only one who uses that word to describe me,” the blond said, looking at Deku like he was the crazy one and the young man shrugged back.

-

“...I’m sorry,” Deku said quietly.

“For what?” Enji replied. He stared at Deku, who couldn’t meet his eyes. He wondered if the day that he could was any closer.

Right when he thought he found his voice, found his words, Enji beat him to the punch.

“If you’re here to tell me that I don’t have to come, then don’t waste your breath,” Enji replied back. He took a step closer to Deku, closing their distance in an instant. He kneeled down in front of him, so that Deku stood taller than him, and looked up at him. “I already told you that I’ll burn for you.”

“..I’m just using you for my personal ambitions.”

That personal ambition of his was what brought the Todoroki family (somewhat) back together. Enji doesn’t mention it, but the words swirled in his head. Was this what he thought about? Was this how he viewed it?

“...Go ahead.” Green eyes snapped to Enji’s face, surprised, and Enji barely suppressed a scowl. “If I can become the pillar for your ambition, use me until I burn out.”

He clenched his hand into a fist, thinking back to those dark, dark, dark days and then relaxed.

“My fire,” he said, opening his hand up and lifting it to Deku with a fire lighting up in his palm, as though he was offering it to the young man, “is yours.”

He extinguished it when Deku’s hand grabbed his. Both of his hands wrapped around his palms, proving to Enji again how much smaller this man was in comparison to him. The de facto leader of all these survivors looked as though he was about to cry. He placed his forehead against the back of Enji’s hand, his back bending like a wilting tree, and he squeezed his eyes shut.

“I can’t believe you’re taking me and Endeavor onto the same team,” he sighed. “You really think you can trust him?”

Deku, who had been methodically cleaning out his blades, shrugged back. He lifted the blade to inspect it and satisfied, put it down to start on another. Across the table, Dabi kept his head propped on his fist as he eyed the man in front of him.

“You don’t want to go?” he asked, pausing to grab some more disinfect onto his rag before resuming scrubbing.

Dabi didn’t get it, the blade was clean enough that he could see his own reflection. It was probably cleaner than the dishes that they were eating off of.

“Well, I’d go whether or not you asked me to,” the man said. “...Is that how you made the team?” he asked dryly.

It would definitely explain the bird.

The young man looked up at Dabi, unable to tell him that he took the people that he thought no one would miss. He purposefully brought people who could survive on their own for some time. He brought people who he believed would value their own life over his, either because it was a habit or because they had something else to return to. His gaze fell back to the blade, but he stopped touching it. Meanwhile, Dabi took the silence as confirmation and chuckled.

“What a riot. I was all excited for nothing. Man, you should be a hero, you’re great at getting people’s hopes up.”

“I’m not a hero,” he cut in, coming off much sterner than he meant to.

Blue eyes widened, but must have seen something comforting in Deku’s green eyes, because he relaxed.

“No,” he agreed, “You’re not.”

Deku’s first mistake was believing that he understood the people that he lived with.

“Kai…?”

“...I said heaven or hell,” Chisaki said as soon as he saw him. His face was blank, but his eyes looked like someone had melted gold, or perhaps his glare was so heated that he had melted them himself.

“...Hypothetically,” he repeated.

The older man stared at him for a long moment before he closed his eyes and sighed back.

“...Kai,” Deku said quietly, “Please look after this place while I’m gone.”

“And now you’re dumping this place onto me? Don’t you have heroes to rely on for protection?”

Green eyes dropped to the ground.

“...But it’s important,” he said.

There was a long silence, but since he was staring at the ground, Deku missed the expression on Chisaki’’s face. The former yakuza turned around before he could see how he looked when he spoke again.

“Consider it done.”

Deku bowed down to his waist, “Thank you.”

“You don’t have to ask again,” he continued. “Or ever bow your head. I will definitely protect what’s important to you.”

Chisaki turned back around, his expression devoid of any emotion as he walked up to Deku and placed his hands on his shoulders.

“When you ask for something, you are giving the person you asked the power to ask a favor from you.”

He furrowed his brows. It made sense, but he didn’t really believe it.

“So, will you… listen to a favor of mine?”

Deku nodded. He learned best by example. He wondered what strange impossible thing Chisaki would ask for so that he could prove his point.

“Please return alive.”

And Deku, who had tried his best not to lie, hesitated. He didn’t want to make promises he couldn’t keep. He didn’t want to leave someone waiting uncertainly for his return. He’s lived that life and he didn’t want it.

“Do you understand now?” Chisaki replied back, releasing him. “Command me, if you cannot return favors.”

But Deku also wanted to be stronger. He wanted to be a better person. He wanted to live up to everyone’s expectations, and create something solid for them to hold onto.

He can’t give the safety and security, but he wanted to foster hope.

“...I will… do my best,” Deku said. “So when I see you again, please look after me too.”

“...Ha,” he scoffed back, “Alright. I’ll have another request prepared for you then.”

### **Tokyo - Departure (and the planning)**

“And so, we will leave tomorrow morning,” Deku added.

“No!” Everyone present chorused back.

The young man leaned back, looking uncomfortable as he eyed the sudden chorus. He didn’t even realize that there were so many people listening into their conversation. It never ceased to amaze him how quickly they seemed to unify against him. He rubbed the back of his neck.

“You gotta give it at least five days,” Yamada said, lifting up all of his fingers on one hand, “You guys are going to be gone for what, two weeks? It’s only going to be getting colder and colder from now on. Leaving now is already a push as it is. You literally just got back.”

Behind him, the others came out to help with the unloading, even though no one called them. Deku frowned back, and shook his head. They always moved so quickly.

“Go now to learn, and prepare during winter,” he replied. “And then we will decide what we need to do for the summer.”

When they looked unconvinced, he folded.

“Three days,” he relented. “We leave in three days. And we come back in two weeks.”

There was a restless quiet that greeted his words, but they all knew that it was as good as they were going to get. It would be a brutal pace. Walking nonstop from where they were in Shizuoka to Tokyo, would be about a two day trip. Factoring rest and the inevitable fights, as well as the mess that was the roads and building, they have no doubt that it’ll be more towards four or five day trip just going there. Rounding up, it’s a 10 day round trip, meaning they will have four days to survey the land.

Since no one knew what was going on in Tokyo (or anywhere really), that was ambitious.

With that, Deku figured that they were going to try and pull another meeting out of him later, but that could wait till later. He wanted to clean himself up and sleep for the foreseeable future.

The other began to disperse, focusing on the situation at hand, and he pulled the backpack back onto his back. He would have to double check his fire hydrant, he wanted to bring a smaller one…

Someone was approaching him. He looked up, slinging his backpack over his shoulder.

Enji stared down at him, every bit an impassive mountain as he always was. “No leaving early,” the older man said, eyes narrowing down.

The young man blinked back. He gave a little smile as he ducked his head down. Come to think of this, this time last year, they were doing some crazy shit then too, right?

He wasn’t the only one that remembered.

Just like that, he always had someone right next to him at all times.

“So, are we really dragging this wagon all the way to Tokyo?”

“No,” Deku shook his head, “Halfway.”

“Halfway, huh? Oh, like at a safehouse?”

Deku gave a curt nod. “It’ll be our rendezvous point. If we get separated in Tokyo, we have three days to meet up at the safehouse. After three days, whoever is there returns back to base,” the young man explained simply. “No matter what. Even if there’s only one person who made it back.”

“Man, you really bring some cheer into this, don’t you?” Hawks said, walking right next to him. He reached over, pulling the handle out of Deku’s hand with a wry grin, “At times like this, you gotta say that we’ll all find our way back together.”

The blond gave a lopsided smile at him.

“Besides, I bet you’re the last person to take that advice,” he said. “You’re the type to not rest until you at least find the body, aren’t you?”

Somehow, Setsuno couldn’t help but feel that he was in the middle of something.

Deku really didn’t know what to expect when they got to Tokyo, he really, really didn’t.

However, he was so incredibly happy that Tokyo was here at all.

“Good,” he breathed out. He turned over to them a smile on his face, even though they couldn’t see it because of the helmet. “We’re here.”

### **Tokyo - DabDeku**

“...Dabi,” Deku said, much too quiet for their battlefield, yet Dabi seemed to hear him just fine.

“What?” he nearly snapped out.

“...Do you trust me?” he asked suddenly.

“...With everything I am,” the man replied back, though a little confused and annoyed at the question for whatever strange reason, “What kind of question is that?”

The young man shot him a grateful smile, even if he couldn’t see it, and nodded.

“Me too,” he said to him, “I trust you.”

Dabi’s shoulder slackened in his surprise, and Deku gave a breathless laugh.

“Keep your eye on the sky, okay?”

-

And so, when Deku found himself falling from the third story, he relaxed into what should have been a brutal fall. Instead, two arms wrap around him as he’s tackled out of the air, and rolling with the older man across the grassy lawn instead of the concrete, is incredibly glad that Dabi chose to live, all those months ago.

“Idiot,” Dabi hissed back, “If you save someone, you should live with the consequences.”

He gave a watery laugh back, too fucking tired to even get up by himself, and the older man helped him sit up. The two of them were panting hard, and even as the rush of adrenaline slowly drained out of their systems and everything started to ache instead, an overabundance of gratitude was shared between the two.

“Thank you,” Deku said anyways, because he wanted to, because he should, because he could.

Dabi gave him this look, like Deku was the one that went crazy, and dropped his gaze. His lips twitched up into an almost grin, but it had too much teeth and just looked downright predatory against his mess of scars. It was the most genuine thing he had ever seen on him.

They must look like a pair of idiots, Dabi with this lop-sided grin on his face, and Deku in his stupid motorbike helmet next to him, both of them heaving like they ran a marathon when in reality they just barely escaped death.

And they remained like that until the others caught up.

-

"...I've killed.. A lot of people with this quirk," Dabi said, the fire in his hand. "It was.... important to me. that I killed people with this quirk. It was... Looking back on it, it's pretty fucking stupid, huh?"

Deku peered up at him and reached his hand out. After a second of staring at it, Dabi lifted his hand and gently laid it across Deku's palm, carefully. The gesture, the hesitance, brought a smile to Deku's face.

"Dabi," he said quietly, taking Dabi's hand and bringing it closer to his face. He rested his forehead against the back of Dabi's hand. The man tensed, but he wasn't on fire, so he figured that this was fine. "Dabi," he repeated again, his voice as gentle as Dabi's grip on his hand, "You saved one."

### **Other Survivors**

Deku sucked his breath in when the man with the knife, his knife, split his clothes and padding straight down the middle. He clearly didn’t care if he broke skin, and in less than a second, the autumn evening chill was washing over his skin. He tried to bring his knee up to stop the man, to get him in the side, but the man pinning his arm down pressed down hard on his broken arm and he lost focus for a second.

He must have fought too hard, because they didn’t hesitate to swing their hammer down on Deku’s knee. He flinched, and swore that he could feel his bones ringing with every swing.

And his bare skin, open to their eyes and their tongues and their teeth, broke quickly. He gave a sharp hiss, flexing and pulling at his limbs futilely. As it was, there was no way that he could win against four men holding him down in various ways.

“Delicious!” one of them cheered. He bit down on the side of Deku’s chest, tearing the skin off and lapping at the blood, like he was biting into fried chicken.

Deku’s stomach rolled at the feeling of his muscles giving out under that man’s teeth, and he wanted to cry. He tried to buck his hips, but it was futile, as he ended up rolling his hips right into the man above him.

“What? You want this? Great!”

Further back, bleeding out was someone else, and Deku wished that they didn’t go after him. The figure, he didn’t even know who, wasn’t someone that would help anyone if it would make more trouble for themselves, so there was no need to go out of their way to attack them. From their half-naked figure, Deku had some idea what would happen to him for intervening, but was grateful that he managed to save someone from it. As it was, he couldn’t even tell if they were breathing.

Exchange one shame for another, he supposed.

“I want…” The man kneeling by his head panted harder, his lips pleading for something that Deku didn’t want to give. He rocked his hips against Deku’s head, uncaring about anything other than his own desires. He pressed down against the knife that was pinning Deku’s hand down, twisting it just by leaning against it, and the young man gritted his teeth.

He got careless. He lost. This is what happened to losers. He could only hope that they would be satisfied with him, and the other person would be spared.

And then, suddenly, there was no weight on his legs anymore. Deku watched the flash of blue fire came and the man was ash in seconds.

The man by his head screamed as he scrambled backwards. He was going to run, and when Dabi looked like he was going to give chase, Deku yanked his broken arm off the ground and reached up to grab the end of his jacket between his fingers. As a result, it pulled awkwardly on his other hand, but he didn’t let it stop him. He pursed his lips, the pain of everything shocking him through his muddled haze of his mind.

“...You’re going to let that piece of shit go?” Dabi asked quietly, not looking at him. Deku couldn’t really see, more close to exhaustion and unconsciousness than anything else, but he’s certain that the thunderous expression on Dabi’s face was his mind playing tricks on him. “You’re really going to let that piece of shit go?”

Blue eyes seemed to glow in his rage as he turned to Deku, a sharp contrast to that lifeless stare he used to give a year and a half ago. Deku returned the gaze evenly, and his hand dropped to his side, where the blood continued to flow where his muscles were almost torn out to be eaten. He jerked his head towards where the other person was.

His unsaid wish was heard, since Dabi scowled.

“I can’t believe you,” he said, breathless and exhausted.

"This way!"

Enji hesitated. He wasn’t a man who usually hesitated, so for something to make him hesitate made him reconsider the entire situation. He was a man built on strength, focus, and instinct. Honed by his experience, he had been in enough situations to know better than to doubt himself.

“W-why did you stop-”

“Something is wrong,” he said. He turned around, “I’m returning to the camp.”

“Wait! You can’t go back, Endeavor! W-what about the thing we found-”

“You are mistaken about something,” Enji spoke slowly, “I am not Endeavor, a Pro-Hero. I am Todoroki Enji, and there are people waiting for me and my companions’ safe return.”

With that, he turned on his heel and made his way back to camp. Within a few seconds he saw a flash of blue, a fire so hot that it burns blue, and he realized that something was incredibly wrong. A smear of red flew right over the trees and he felt his stomach drop. Why was Hawks away from the camp?

He rushed back, just in time to see Setsuno trying to take care of Deku with Hawks and Dabi stood just a few feet away. His eyes zoned right to Deku, because in all the time he knew Deku, the man was on his back for one of two reasons. He was incredibly injured, or he was almost incredibly injured.

“What happened?” he asked, rushing over to Hawks’ side.

“Todoroki-san,” Hawks’s unusually serious face met his confused gaze, “The people we were with had… some ill intentions-”

“These fucking shitheads were beating Deku an inch into his life here. What the fuck were you doing?” Dabi bit out, his fire escaping across his fire in his irritation. “I left camp for 15 fucking minutes!”

“...Getting distracted,” Enji said quietly, his eyes downturned in his shame, but before anyone could say anything, Deku lifted his hand up. Hawks immediately leaned closer, reaching to take his hand, but he stopped when he realized that the young man was motioning for the former hero to come towards him. Enji didn’t hesitate.

The former hero kneeled down by his side immediately, ignoring the other two, “Deku?” he asked, leaning in close.

The young man’s trembling hand grabbed his (and Enji tried to smolder the burning rage in his heart at the obviously broken arm, didn’t it hurt? Why was he still using it? How could he still use it?) and placed it against his bleeding wound on his chest. His hand was immediately damp and sticky from the warm blood gathered at his chest. Soft green eyes, startling clear despite how much pain he must be in, looked at Enji and then nodded slowly. The weak whimper that let Setsuno gave out, just a few inches from him, was drowned out by the thundering beat his heart took.

“...You… Do you want me to cauterize it?”

He nodded, a little jerk of his head, and Enji took in his pale complexion. Shit, he was barely gone for ten minutes, right? How could this fall so far apart in ten fucking minutes? His hands trembled, even though he wasn’t the one injured, and Deku’s small hand gripped his finger tightly. He’s done this plenty of times as a hero, sure, but that was a long time ago, and it was never for someone so small.

“Please,” Deku said quietly.

Enji… Enji never wanted to hear Deku plea. He really doesn’t. He thinks that this kid never asked for anything, never wanted anything, so what little he does ask for should be given to him. He thinks that he has more than deserved it, and he has no doubts that if Deku is asking for it, there is a good reason for it.

Not too long ago, he had sworn to himself that he would repay this man for igniting his fire.

That promise was being put to the test, however, and he placed his hands on the open wound. God, it was fucking huge. He came late, right? Why was it bleeding so much?

“Hold him down,” he instructed Setsuno, even though they all knew that Enji wouldn’t have any trouble dealing with Deku if push came to shove.

As it was, his fire licked his hands and came down onto Deku. From what little he could see, he could tell that chunks of his flesh had been torn off, leaving a gorey picture that he burned with his hands. The smell of charred flesh would haunt him for nights to come. The young man, as though he was meditating, took a slow exhale out and closed his eyes. If they didn’t know any better, they would say that he didn’t feel pain, and relaxed like he was about to fall asleep.

However, Enji has reason to believe that it was a bravado.

High pain tolerance or not, the way he clenched his jaw told him that this was a child who didn’t know how to scream out in pain. Instead, he took slow breaths. Sweat perispertated off his body, soaking his clothes and rolling on his skin. His body trembled underneath Enji’s massive hands, and he could only pray that this would be enough.

“Thank you,” Deku whispered, like Enji didn’t burn his entire chest and probably a few bones. He sat up and Hawks’s hands flew to his shoulders. The young man didn’t push against them, and the blond tried to push him down but the young man tried to look around him, “The other-”

“-will be fine. I did all I could.” Setsuno said. “He’s got a nasty bump on his head, and his arms are broken, but it’s nothing that Chisaki-san can’t Overhaul.”

“...Let’s head back,” Dabi spoke up, his eyes focused on the patch of grass stained with blood. “Two of us are down. We have a good idea on what’s crawling around here. Let’s go back. We’re done.” No one mentioned it, but it almost sounded like he was begging.

Deku stared at him, and his eyes turned to other person figure, laying still and unmoving, and nodded.

They had no doubts that, if the young man was the only injured person, they would have had to fight tooth and nail with him to get him back to base. As awful as it probably sounded, they were glad someone else was injured.

Barely through their seventh day, they turn back with nothing but injuries and an unnerving truth.

### **Artificial Injuries -**

His eyes trailed over Deku’s figure, already cataloguing how long he was going to chain Deku to the base and how hard it was going to be. He and that Twice-guy already struck up a deal of some sorts, and looking at the wounds that riddled Deku this time, it’ll be sufficient to only have one guard.

And then he Overhaul’d the kid, and realized that he was now pretty much fully healed.

He had, for certain, seen several bite marks along his arm and his chest. The char-job that Endeavor did was well-controlled, but a minor infection had set in by the time he got to them. Still, everything was gone. His eyes narrowed in on Deku’s clothes, when he was first carried in and he remembered thinking that it was nice that they were such straight and clean cuts. His eyes fell back on Deku, who sat up.

“Tha-”

“A human bit you?”

When Deku’s eyes widened, Chisaki was given far too much information for him to be comfortable with. It made him uncomfortable how easy Deku was to read now that he could see his face, but it didn’t make the information he got any easier to digest. Chisaki clenched his jaw, and took a very, very slow breath.

“Okay,” he said. “Alright. If you don’t tell me, I’ll just ask them-”

“We ran into some people,” Deku finally spoke up. “When we got to Tokyo…”

His hands wrung each other in his lap. There was a long silence and Chisaki leaned back into his shitty plastic chair. Next to him, Kurono tensed. He knew he should have sent him with Rappa or someone.

“And?”

“...They heard I was quirkless and thought that… that if they took a bite, they’ll be safe from the virus.”

Deku’s voice was quiet, but Chisaki thought he would go deaf with the revelation. As it was, he took another deep breath and tried to process his thoughts and feelings.

“...And you killed them all, right?”

Deku didn’t meet his eyes.

“These fucking shitbags,” Chisaki said, speaking very slowly, and making sure to punduate his each and every word, as he felt foreign type of rage bubble up inside of him. Next to him, Kurono leaned further against the wall, looking like he wanted to become one with it. “Tried to eat you alive. And you let them go? So what, they can go and kill and eat someone else?”

“...I couldn’t do it,” Deku said motioning at his newly fully healed chest.

“I’m sure Dabi would have been happy to clean them off the face of the Earth…”

He trailed off as sharp green eyes met his. He met the gaze head-on for a minute before he faltered. He gave a frustrated sigh and ran his hand through his hair. He couldn’t believe it. He? Chisaki Kai? Fucking bowing out of a battle just from the way he looks at him?

But what else could he do? That same kindness that Deku still draws from is the same kindness that saved his life, just a year ago. That genuine empathy in his eyes, determined to take on the world the way he wants, and Chisaki can’t help but feel so powerless against it.

Maybe it was better when he had a helmet on. He felt unapproachable and Chisaki didn’t have to feel ashamed for cowing before a child.

What a notion.

At the same time, he couldn’t let this go. He knew he couldn’t let this go. Another time, another place, another person, he wouldn’t care if they live or died but it was different.

“...Next time,” he said, eyes bright with an anger he didn’t think he could ever feel for another human being, “don’t let them go alive. You think that they won’t try again on someone else?”

Deku looked down at his lap, and clenched his hands into fists.

“...I’ll decide if it happens,” he said, never one to listen.

Figures that Chisaki would end up working for someone like this.

-

“...And he’s fine?”

Chisaki stared at Dabi. He was going to go through the rest of them now, and Shigaraki groaned behind him. He sat up on the table, and Chisaki wished at least one person would be a good patient here. Just one. At the very least, the most troubling one, Deku, was well-accounted for and he wasn’t a walking hazard for once.

“Yes. All his injuries are all gone,” he said.

He looked at Dabi and then to Hawks. The blond gave him a smile and Chisaki leaned away from him on instinct. He hates slimy bastards like himself, and Hawks just reeked of the same type of malicious, sugary sweetness he could muster.

“...And he was fine… dealing with you?”

That made Chisaki pause. There has been one and only one time where Deku acted negatively towards his presence and it was when he was forced out of the helmet for the first time.

“Is there a reason why he wouldn’t?” he asked.

Dabi stared at him for a moment and then he turned away.

“...I killed the one that was on top of him,” he admitted, “but only him,” he continued quietly. “But his clothes were ripped and they were on top of him.” Despite how calm he looked, it was clear that he felt anything but.

Chisaki, who knew the severity of Deku’s injuries and the extent of them, felt something inside of him churn.

“...He didn’t mention that,” he said. “Just that they were trying to eat him. And that he didn’t want to kill them.”

Dabi snorted at that, “Of course he did.”

“Wait wait wait,” Hawks said, his smile sliding off his face as he regarded the others, “You mean… they were trying … to force themselves onto him?”

The former villain didn’t respond for a second, but the thought permeated through them, leaving behind an ugly visage they’ll never unsee. He waited and then sighed.

“...Don’t worry about it, Hero-kun,” Dabi said, glaring at something on the wall, “And leave it to the clean-up crew.”

### **Fighting**

“...Oh this is new,” Twice said, looking from Deku to Dabi and then back. “Lovers’ Spat?”

Dabi flipped him off.

Even stranger was the fact that even Hawks was in a foul mood. He hasn’t seen this man smile this dangerously since they realized that they were living under the same roof.

“To that bastard,” Dabi said, jerking his head towards where Enji was placing Deku onto the rollaway bed Kurono pulled out, “we’re still the weakass bitches he pulled in all those years ago.”

Oh?

Oh.

“You’re upset that he’s still not taking you seriously?” Twice asked, with far more glee than Dabi wanted to deal with at this moment. “ // At this time, you gotta beat him down and make him yours!”

“...You and your split double personality or whatever,” Dabi said, eyes narrowed into slits, “have been getting awfully unified lately.”

“No way! // Hell yeah!”

### **Post Tokyo - Debrief**

Deku placed one hand over his left eye, and then moved his hand to cover the right eye instead. He took a deep breath, as his hand fell limp in his lap.

He figured, with how much it was deteriorating, it would happen eventually, but it had happened.

This was irrefutable proof then, this was a problem with his brain. Like how Chisaki couldn’t Overhaul his memories back, his eyesight was a problem that was in his head. Or perhaps, the initial injury was from a monster.

There could have been many different things, but regardless, it didn’t matter.

Deku could no longer see out of his right eye.

“...And that goes for the report,” Hawks said, finishing his small speech. He leaned back against the wall, and prepared himself for the next onslaught of words.

“...I see,” Yagi said, whispering quietly to his hands, “I see, there were other survivors.”

The blond thought back to the people, and tried to smile, but it came out more of a grimace. From the other side of the table, Setsuno scowled, “If you could call them that,” he said.

“What do you… mean?”

“They’re hungry enough to eat the first people they’ve seen in weeks,” Dabi replied back flatly, “But I supposed that you all would accept cannibalism with open arms, hm, Hero-san?”

Before anyone could jump to hiss back, Deku spoke up.

“We won’t be caught unprepared again,” he said certainly. His eyes met Dabi’s and he gave a nod as he placed his hand on his chest. “I’ll eliminate them.”

Despite the determined words, Enji couldn’t help the shame seeping into his heart again.

“Did you really mean that?”

Enji caught the conversation of Setsuno and Deku, when he had been returning from the meeting.

“...Yeah,” Deku replied. “Next time, I won’t hesitate.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Setsuno sighed. “What I meant to say… What I wanted to say… I…” he stumbled and stammered through his words before he found himself. “What I meant to say is that next time, I won’t hesitate either! I won’t be dead-weight again!”

Sometimes, Enji couldn’t help but think that everyone else was moving much faster than him, as though intent on leaving him behind. He shouldn’t falter anymore, and properly keep up. It wouldn’t do if he has to retire already, after all.

"It's getting colder," Deku commented off-handedly.

A heavy jacket dropped down onto him, immediately engulging him in warmth. He jolted, surprised, while Shigaraki took the seat next to him. He leaned back, stretching his legs out as he crossed them and placed his arm around the back of the couch they were sitting on. His arms were so long that they reached past Deku's frame across the top of the couch. There was a few inches between them, more than enough space for him to grab his throwing knives.

Shigaraki yawned, and he tipped his head to the side to face Deku a little more.

"Better?"

"...Yes," Deku nodded. The action made his chest grow warm, and the jacket kept it in. "Thank you."

"Yeah, whatever. Knowing you, you'd just quietly get frostbite and then sick Overhaul on us."

"...No, I wouldn't."

"Yes, you would."

"No, I really wouldn't."

"Yeah, you really would."

"Oh, Deku, are you cold?"

Shigaraki's almost smile dissipated off his lips, souring up into a frown as Toyomitsu walked in. The former BMI-Hero gave a friendly grin.

"You know, we were in the middle of talking," Shigaraki said, a scowl on his face. "I'd think that a hero would have known that."

"Hm? Oh, I didn't realize that was a conversation. You just seemed to say the same things over and over again. I guess that's what we should have expected from someone like you."

Shigaraki's frown stretched into a scowl.

"You fucking bitch-"

Deku stood up. He took his jacket off and tossed it to Shigaraki.

He fought every goddamn day. Regardless if he's awake or alseep, he was plagued by aches and pains and heartache. As soon as this was done, he had no doubts that he would go back out to fight some more. So yeah, he doesn't want to hear this.

"D-Deku?"

"Oi, where are you going?"

He left the room.

Other conflicts, he couldn't leave. It was mainly because it was such a big deal that no one wold let him, and also because he knew that he shouldn't run away from responsibilities.

"No!" Mineta yelled back, eyes bloodshot as he clutched a bright pink and frilly bra to his chest, "This is mine now! You shouldn't have left it out if you didn't want to lose it!"

When Deku came back to base, soaked to his knees and elbows in blood, he was confronted to this scene in the courtyard. He eyed the small area desginated to clean-up. Even though he knew that he couldn't get the entire stench of blood out, he really wanted to not be soaked in it anymore. He wanted to take off everything on his head, lay his head down and rest. When did that become too much to ask for? Well, he supposed that he needed to submit his reports and update his records, double-check his numbers and clean out his weapons, as well, but still.

"Guys, we literally just spent the whole time fighting. Can we please get a break first?"

Thank you, Kaminari, for speaking up.

"You can say that because it's not your underwear!" Hagakure snapped back, making the man reel back.

"...You guys can't even figure out your own problems?" Dabi dralwed out, "So, what can you do? Don't have cops here and shit?"

"We just don't want any retaliation! If we can get Deku to just... get him to stop, then everything will be fine! As the Leader, shouldn't he be the one that decides what happens here?"

Deku felt something cold sit in the pit of his stomach.

"That's just an easy way to pin all the responsibility on him," Dabi scowled back. "Isn't that just convienent for you?"

"Alright," Deku said, surprising everyone. "Let's settle this now."

"I... What?"

Deku pointed behind him, "Get him to Natsuo," he said, pointing at Spinner. The lizardman flinched, probably shocked that Deku had noticed his injury at all and he shook his head.

"I-It's not that bad..."

Deku motioned for their makeshift infirmary, and with a tight expression on his face, Spinner walked off. The young man motioned for Setsuno. "Get those to Kai," he said.

"Yes sir," he said, giving a polite bow. He hesitated, looking from Deku to the other teenagers, and then made up his mind to say, "Whatever you say, I will follow." He gave the ensemble group another look before he left to do just that.

With the traveling group dispersed, Deku turned his attention back to the people in front of him.

"Go ahead."

There was a brief second before Hagakure stepped forward. Her gloved hand pointed at Mineta.

"He's stealing underwear! We want him to stop and never do it again! Him "

Deku nodded and turned to Mineta.

"If they didn't want it to be stolen, then they shouldn't leave it out!" he shouted back. "Deku! Hunks like you wouldn't understand what it's like to always be overlooked and forgotten into the corner! For guys like me, this is the closest I'll ever get to losing my virginity!"

His eyes welled with tears, and they began to stream down his face. Deku nodded again and then turned to Hagakure.

"What do you want him to do?"

"He should never do it again!" Hagakure snapped back. "And we should punish him for stealing!"

"...So the punishment is because he stole something!"

Her hands clasped into fists, "Of course! Stealing is bad, so he should be punished accordingly."

"God," Dabi sighed loudly, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"What do you want the punishment to be?"

"Eh?"

"This was a crime so bad that you stopped us from coming back in," Deku replied back, his voice calm and even. "It's a bad enough crime that informing us took priority over the supplies we got and the injured."

Next to him, Dabi straightened.

"So, what's the fitting punishment for this heavy crime?"

"I... We thought that we should bring that up to you. And you could help enforce that so this never happens to anyone again."

Deku tipped his head forward. He felt so goddamn tired. This was something that was probably long overdue. Having this many people not fight and not demand justice just wasn't going to happen. If they were a smaller group, having little to no rules was much easier.

No, no, no, Deku scolded himself for thinking like that. It was a good thing that there were more people here. More people usually mean more opinions and thoughts, and that usually meant that there would be more opportunities. As the supposed 'leader' of this place, he needed to shoulder that burden.

"We don't have prisons," Deku reminded them, "Nor the manpower to facilitate them. So what do you mean, punishment?"

"...He could do the chorse! Like, dish-washing duty every dinner for a week," Ashido said. "And a letter that says he won't do it again."

"That's not hefty enough," Hagakure muttered quietly back.

"...With this punishment," Deku started, "Will you give him your forgiveness?" he asked.

"Well, if he never does it again-"

"If you are waiting for someone to do something again, have you really forgiven him?"

"I guess... not? Well, maybe he should have a different punishment instead. Something that will deter him from doing it again."

"Just cut his hands off and be done with it," Dabi snapped back. "Fuck, can we at least go wash up?"

Still, he made no motion to leave Deku's side.

"W-What?"

"Then," Deku stopped talking to turn around to where Stain was watching them. He walked over to him and yanked one of his daggers from the side of his belt.

The older man arched an eyebrow at him, but didn't move otherwise.

Deku came back up to Hagakure.

"Let's get this over with. Since it's your forgiveness, here," he said, holding the dagger out to her.

"Whoa-wait, wait," Mineta flailed backwards but Dabi cut off his exit with a bit of fire.

"Shut up. We're all tired," he said, beyond annoyed. "Let's just get this over with."

"Waaaaaah!" Mineta cried out. "You guys are crazy! You can't do this!"

"Oh shut up. Overhaul will probably put you back together," Dabi said, his hand coming to his neck to hold him in place.

"We're not dolls!" the young man screamed out, panic evident in his eyes as he tried to pull away. Between losing a limb and getting some burns, he wondered which was better. A small part of him desperately hoped that they would let him go anyways.

"Take responsibility for your actions," Deku said.

"I-I can't do this," Hagakure said, waving her hands in front of her. "I don't think it's a suitable punishment."

From the back, Twice booed.

"So please, please don't do it again," she said. "If you do, we'll cut it off then."

"How about, he gets on dish-duty for the rest of the week and we call it quits there?"

Dropping down next to them in a blur of red, Hawks stood.

"Haaaaaawks!" Mineta cried out in joy.

"Augh, fucking shit," Dabi muttered under his breath. "All the goddamn heroes, but he's the one that showed up?"

The blond ignored everything and focused solely on Deku.

"...You sure about this?" he asked.

The young man nodded, the barest movement of his head. The blond stared for another moment, his face devoid of any emotion, before he closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"Then, I guess I should be on dishduty for a couple of months, huh?" he said, speaking aloud. "Since we all stole."

"What?"

"I mean, I don't know about any of you guys but," he motioned at himself, "I don't even know who these last belonged to. And," he looked at Deku, "there's a list of each and every single product you took from the stores around here, isn't there?"

"Well, that's different. We did it so that we could survive."

"...Once we allow for exceptions," Deku declared, "It'll never end."

And so, everyone who ever went outside and stole from those who were dead and gone took care of dish-duty.

### **Kouta Joins Patrol**

“Whoa wait, how come he gets to join patrol?”

“He asked,” Deku said.

“I’ve been asking too!” Kaminari snapped back.

“I trust him.”

“T-Trust? You trust him over me?!”

Deku nodded back, certain in his words, “He never skips on chores.”

It was a well-known fact that there were no punishments because there were no rules. However, until this moment, it was clear that Deku did notice the people on the base. For people that didn’t go out, the most important thing for Deku to know was their work ethic. If someone was unwilling to do something as easy and miniscule as dishwashing, skimped out on it or didn’t do a very good job, then it made logical sense for Deku to not put them on any teams.

If they can’t be trusted to wash dishes, after they had volunteered to do it, what would they do when they go out? They were moving in small units of teams. Depending on how far they went, Deku might not be able to reach them in time.

Regardless, it wasn’t a risk that Deku could take.

Dabi arched an eyebrow at Kouta before looking back to Deku. However, he didn’t say anything. Next to him, Sasaki looked as uncomfortable and upset as any of the other heroes or ‘sensible’ adults in the area.

Well, he supposed that they were still uncomfortable with the thought that an elementary student was carrying a handgun that was about as long as his forearm. Made even worse because this kid didn’t idolize heroes like some of the teens on base, and kept everyone at arms’ distance.

Well, almost everyone.

“I-I won’t let you down!”

And Deku, who doesn’t like working in teams and never stays in the teams that they make, nodded at him.

As inappropriate as it probably was, given how young and small Kouta was, Dabi couldn’t help that bubbling feeling sitting under his gut.

It should be him that Deku took onto his team.

Well, they had four miles between them and the office space that they were going to clean through. He could probably slip into that group and abandon him. Or (more likely), their groups could merge.

But, unlike before, Deku turned to the road and started to run. Shocked but getting over it quickly, Kouta began to run after him. Dabi arched an eyebrow, he always thought that Deku cared for Kouta in a kinder way than the rest of them, but the kid was left in the dust. At the speed he was going at, there was no way that Kouta would make it to the apartment.

“...Why’s he going so fast?” Twice asked, looking from Kouta to Deku and then back.

There was something else going on.

“Hey, Kouta-”

Dabi’s hand caught Twice’s arm to stop him.

“Let’s go,” he said.

“But, Kouta’s-”

“Then I’m leaving you behind,” he said. Funny, now that he would never do it, he could say it so easily.

He really didn’t want to explain it more, since he was certain, but he had a good idea on what Deku wanted. Twice didn’t understand, but he was a dumbass. He believed his heart since his head failed him, so he looked to Dabi and trusted him.

They passed Kouta in an instant, Twice shooting him a worried gaze as they heard his harsh panting.

There was four miles before they even started the objective for the day.

“What’s the point of bringing him if you were going to leave him behind?” Enji snapped at him. “If you weren’t going to guide him, then why did you bring him to your team? You should have left him behind like you always did. What changed?”

The young man, who always did as he pleased whenever he pleased, remained focused on tossing the bodies onto the pile in the parking lot next to the office building they cleaned through. Enji’s frown turned even more pronounced.

Hawks had been doubling back to keep an eye from the sky, and as a result, knew exactly how far behind Kouta had been lagging. By the time he came to join up with everyone else, Kouta was bent over his knees, gasping for air. This was clearly too much to have asked from a kid that, in normal circumstances, was in the second grade. Needless to say, Deku had finished his floor and was working on the body-burning part of their job while the others were finishing cleaning up the place indoors.

Still, since Deku brought him and Deku left him and Kouta never asked for help, this was the most they were comfortable helping him.

“I… I’m here,” Kouta wheezed out.

Deku finally paused in what he was doing to turn to the young man.

“Kouta,” he called out, “Why did you come?”

The kid looked like he was about to start crying.

“I… I wanted to help-” He cut himself off as he tried to catch his breath.

“Oi! It looks like we finished first!” Twice’s voice came as the man came running up to Deku, “How’d we do? Aren’t we so cool? // Dabi’s a slob!”

Twice was not deterred when Deku didn’t even turn to him. He did, however, look over to see what Deku was facing, and saw Kouta. He gave a wave.

“Wow, did you just get here?”

While he probably meant well, the crest-fallen look on Kouta’s face was painful. The former hero turned, a thunderous expression on his face until Dabi stepped forward.

“Now, now, everyone that comes out has to be held to a standard, don’t you think so? We got our hands full just trying to keep ourselves alive. Anyone that can’t keep up should stay behind.”

Enji narrowed his eyes, clearly gearing up to argue back, when Deku turned around.

“Let’s finish up. I wanna eat lunch at base.”

This was the first time that they had heard him talk about eating. It was clearly done to put more pressure on their youngest. As it was, the young child was still panting hard and he nodded.

When everyone made it back to base, Deku remained at the gates. He stood there, looking back, and Sasaki looked like he was going to start yelling again. However, Stain was standing right next to Deku, a hand on his blade as he eyed the other heroes.

The message was clear. If anyone came forward, he’d cut them down.

Of course, the part of them that wanted to trust Deku, and that didn’t believe that this man was capable of being heartless, kept them from rushing out themselves. First, they would see what Deku would do. Then they would make a decision. But right now, they would see how this played.

Kouta stumbled in, exhausted and weary as he took small, uneven steps forward. His knees were torn up, as though he had fallen several times, and his clothes were dusty and filthy. Just the sight of him had a boiling type of anger bubble up in several people. He finally entered the compound grounds, before promptly collapsing, face first into the ground. He must have bone-tired, since he didn’t even lift his hands up to cushion the fall.

There was a long silence, before Uraraka shot forward with a first-aid kit. She darted past the adults, disappointed and disheartened, but her steps slowed as Kouta pushed himself up on his shaky arms. Almost gasping to catch his breath, he finally managed to say what he wanted.

“I-I… I’m back,” he wheezed out.

“Welcome back,” Deku said. “What did you learn?”

“I’m… I’m weak,” Kouta replied back, trembling under the truth.

At that, Deku turned on his heel and walked away, leaving the young boy on the ground. Uraraka grabbed him, thinking that this whole thing was beyond extreme and awful, until she say the determined gleam in Kouta’s eyes.

And promptly wondered what the fuck she had been doing all this time.

Kouta spent a week in bed, exhausted and weary. Everyone got a long lecture from Natsuo, but when Kouta woke up, it was clear that the young man wasn’t deterred. If anything, he looked even more determined to go out and join the fight outside.

It would have spelled out a wonderful story, inspirational and all, but instead, it scared them all.

“Was this how you learned?” Shigaraki asked as they helped with the weeding effort.

Deku was silent for another moment, and figuring that he wasn’t going to an answer, he was pleasantly surprised when the man did speak up eventually.

“No,” he explained. “No one waited for me.”

Red eyes flitted to Deku and then back down.

“...You too, huh?”

### **October - Meeting Re-Destro (Yotsubashi Rikiya)**

“And please, your weapons here,” Re-Destro said.

“W-What the hell-”

But, without a moment of hesitation, Deku stepped forward and placed his bat down. He turned to the other man, and stared back.

They, who knew Deku as the quiet kid that didn’t really like making trouble even if he ended up at the center of it, couldn’t help but feel the swell of shame at the sight of him giving in so easily.

“My, what obedience!” one of his retainers laughed loudly.

“Now, now, no need to be so rude to our guests,” the man said, quelling his men in an instant. “Then,” Re-Destro said, a smug grin on his face, “These quirk-reducing bracelets as well.”

Again, Deku lifted his hand up, pulled his sleeve up a little so that his wrist could be easily seen, and stared at them.

They stared back, probably not expecting his easy acceptance. Behind him, his own looked just as puzzled.

“...It’s alright,” Deku said, turning to the people who had not moved, “to stay here. I’ll be back.”

Re-Destro’s smile dampened, just a little bit, as a different kind of light came onto his eyes.

Green-eyes met his, “Whenever you’re ready.”

“...These are quirk-suppressants,” he said. “And you left your weapon. You will be walking into enemy territory without any weapons.”

The young man stared at him, and nodded, “Yes.”

Re-Destro lifted his hand up to stop his own from lashing out, “...And you are alright with this?”

Deku shrugged back, looking nonchalant as he flicked his eyes from the bracelet to the man and then back down. “This makes you feel safer, right?”

There was a brief second as the words settled in.

Skeptic scowled hard, but Re-Destro began to laugh instead. He gave a full belly laugh, clearly enjoying himself more than he thought he would.

There was a long moment, and Deku patiently waited for the man to stop laughing.

“Haha…” his laughter died like fire, and the few embers left some chuckles and a large grin on his face. “Interesting… Alright then, as a token of appreciation, please, take your weapons. Don’t bother with the quirk-suppressant. Nothing less than the most hospitable we can be for our guests!”

Deku gave a curt nod, but otherwise remained silent and impassive. Reluctantly, another person came forward to return his bat.

It was amazing how Deku could get going the same way he always did. He would bull-headedly go forward.

“...I can’t believe you left here to follow a kid.”

“What can I say? Kid’s helluva lot more convincing than your shitstain of a god.”

“You filthy beast, you take that back right now! Re-Destro has-”

“Cool it, Geten.”

The man spun to snarl back, but Trumpet’s eyes still hasn’t left Aizawa’s across the table.

Silence fell back onto the group.

And then, a loud crash was heard. The door that had held the conversation between the two leaders was blasted down in the resulting explosion. In an instant, the present guards came flooding into the room.

Inside, where the dust slowly cleared, sat the impassive-looking Deku, holding his teacup in both hands as he stared at the liquid in it and then back at the much-larger than they remembered Re-Destro. The man stared back, turning back into the size they met him at, staring at Deku with no little amount of wonder before he began to laugh.

The tension melted away into confusion, and no one moved as the man laughed and laughed and laughed. Deku finished the tea, and placed the cup down onto the remains of the table, almost meekly. Everything in his composure and posture spoke of a weak-willed person who qualified at the sight of a strength that knocked the wall behind him out so that they could see the skyline illuminate his figure. His eyes were well-focused.

“Hahah!” Re-Destro finally calmed down, wiping a stray tear out of his eye. “What an interesting fellow! Are you sure you don’t want to stay here?”

Deku gave a small smile and nodded. “No, thank you.”

Looking at them, no one would think that civilization ever came close to falling apart. They would just see a born-and-bred businessman finding something interesting in a young boy half his height, and not the leaders of the remaining colonies in this half of Japan.

They walked out just fine afterwards, like they were coming home after a tense business meeting and not after a discussion that could lead to potential war and conflict.

They were quiet for the most part, but as soon as their complex area was in sight and the dogs came out to greet them, a group of them had come out to meet them. At that moment, Deku’s legs bucked from underneath him.

Aizawa just barely managed to grab him by the upper arm, catching him before he collapsed with an alarmed look on his face. His other hand came out to wrap around him, steadying him by the shoulders before he slowly let him down.

“Deku?!” Several voices overlapped.

He took a deep breath, his trembling hands coming to grip his knees as he gave a helpless smile to the ground.

“I… I can’t feel my legs,” he said quietly.

Aizawa’s eyes turned softer as he kneeled down next to him.

“...What happened in there?” he asked quietly.

“...He’s so cool,” the young man said.

“He could have killed you,” Shigaraki piped in from the back.

“But he was so cool,” Deku repeated, a little more certain. “He was super strong and super cool. God, his quirk-”

“-And there’s nothing that he can be that you don’t have here.”

Deku stared at him for a moment, his eyes focusing a little better as a warm smile came onto his face.

“Undoubtedly,” he said.

“...Re-Destro?”

The older man turned over, his calming smile somehow feeding into the nervous anxious energy his officers were.

“Yes, is everything alright?”

“...Why didn’t you kill him? You seemed ready to.”

“I didn’t think I could,” Re-Detro replied back. “He strikes me as the kind of person that, if I had killed him then, he would have won.”

“...What?”

“After all, he didn’t panic in the slightest when I came at him with all my strength.”

“Maybe he had bad reflexes?”

“Nonsense,” Re-Destro said, his eyes positively shining, “His eyes could follow my movements, he chose not to react.”

Re-Destro, who always wins and sits at the top of the world, has become fascinated with the kid that wins if he dies.

## Earthquake

### **Earthquake - Staying**

They had a lot of work ahead of them, but it wouldn’t be able to start until they take care of this first. This was a terrible thing in hindsight, but there wasn’t much they could do about it. They would just have to be flexible and adapt quickly.

Deku is just glad that they don’t have walls. It would have made the evacuation much harder.

But first, they’ll kill that worm-monster that caused this earthquake. They will make sure that everyone is safely evacuated into the safehouses Deku had around the area. He already has some ideas on how they should build those teams. Then, they would rebuild the old apartment complex, fix the streets, and live on, as they have always done. At the very least, since he wasn’t alone anymore, they could split the work like this.

“...It’s probably safe to assume that everything in at least a 30 miles radius has heard this,” Chisaki said, narrowing his eyes at the sight of the remains of their home. “So, what now?”

“The apartment is down,” Dabi reported, leaning heavily on one leg. His breathing was labored, but he didn’t look ready to collapse. “There’s like, eight feet of straight pitfall underneath it. Whatever came, it ate the ground underneath it too.”

“Everyone is out, but we have more injured than not. There’s no way some of them are in any condition to run,” Hawks added, landing right next to them, his arm in a sling.

“Even if we run, where would we go? It’s November and we evacuated as fast as possible,” Aizawa said, “We barely have coats, and pretty much lost everything in there. Going to scavenge isn’t going to be easy.”

“None of the injuries are fatal, but almost everyone has sustained injuries.” Natsuo reported, joining the awkward group. “But if they don’t get proper rest, somewhere warm with proper nutrition, we’re going to all get sick again.”

“We should go and chase down that bastard!” Taishiro snapped out, his anger bubbling right under his skin and tumbling out of his mouth, “We’re not going to be able to rest easy while it’s out there.”

“How? Who?” Nighteye asked, his voice cold, “We didn’t even see what came for us. Whatever came was something that was powerful enough that it nearly knocked this entire neighborhood ten feet literally into the ground. How do you propose we fight that, even if we find out what it is?”

The resulting silence was sobering.

“There’s already movement coming in,” Inui inputted, one of his hands on a dog’s head. “Whatever we decide, we gotta decide quickly.”

“Sundown will be in four hours,” Sakamata reminded them, “It’ll be ghouls if we hesitate for too long.”

Deku, who was sitting down on the curb, nodded along quietly. They’ve been shooting him uncertain glances, but it was clear that he was beyond exhausted. His hand was holding a handkerchief to a bleeding wound above his eye, and his pale features did nothing more than accent the bruises coloring his across any visible skin. But, Chisaki’s Overhaul was being used to first save the critically wounded, and Deku wasn’t injured enough to categorize into that.

By that, they meant that if he was injured enough to fight back, then they would be able to Overhaul him.

With his helmet nowhere to be seen, and just his regular facemask, it was clear that he was one of the people who were caught way off-guard. In his slippers, one of his long-sleeves ripped from his elbow down, and a pair of sweatpants, he had taken a beating. He wasn’t even standing. Ugly bruises decorated his arms, purple lilacs blooming down his pale features, and if the way Eri was clinging to his side was any indication, they could guess why he got them.

As it was, the young girl was soundly sleeping, dried teartracks staining her face as her small hands balled Deku’s shirt and pants in her hands.

“So,” Tsukauchi said, the guilt and shame wrapping around his heart in equal measures as the uncertainty and fear began to seep in with fatigue, “What should we do?”

“I can carry the injured, no problem,” Hawks said, stretching his wings before folding them back against his back. “But that doesn’t mean anything if we don’t have a place to go.” He spoke clearly, but his arm was in a makeshift sling.

“Deku! We’re ready!”

The discussion abruptly came to a halt when Kouta came running towards them. He squeezed past Kan and Enji, a nervous Sero barely a step behind him. While it wasn’t like they were trying to keep anyone out of their discussion, and didn’t speak quietly, it was always a little hard for the people who didn’t feel like they were ‘strong,’ experienced,’ or particularly ‘useful’ to jump into this conversation.

“...Ready?” Yamada slowly parroted.

Deku stood up, cradling Eri in his arms and handing her off to Kurono as he turned to Kouta.

Kouta handed him a plastic bag filled with an assortment of… firecrackers and disposable cameras?

Looking through the bag, he then gave a small bow. “Thank you.”

At that, Deku turned back to the others. His eyes were as certain as ever, as though his entire homebase didn’t just fall apart.

“Let’s split into three groups,” he said. “Medical team for the injured. Scavengers for the apartment, and patrol for defense. I have eight safe houses in the area. The injured take priority, so place them in that one,” he said, pointing down the street.

The people who had been on patrols with him several times knew exactly what he was talking about. He wasn’t too concerned about it. Once they sort out how they’re going to do this, everyone will calm down and realize that nothing had changed.

“There’s enough food and water to last a few days. Prioritize the water-purifiers, generators, and food. We can build this back up, so focus on seeing the end of the week first.”

“R-Rebuild?!” Sero, like many of the others, reeled in his shock. Even though it made sense, concerning who they had, it was still a shock to hear so soon after the destruction of their home.

“...Deku,” Chisaki said, very slowly, “You want to stay here? Knowing what’s here? After that?” he asked, pointing at the still-smoking mess of their apartment.

Deku raised an eyebrow, the one that wasn’t covered in blood. “Home,” he said, as though that was reason enough.

“So, are you saying you want to fight it?” Enji slowly spoke up, no doubt cataloging his wounds..

Deku lifted his plastic bag. “I’ll kill it. But there’s no point in that if there’s nothing for me to come back to.”

“So what, you want us to hold down the fort while you go out and play the hero?” Shigaraki asked. “Fuck that,” he declared, walking right up to him. He opened his mouth to say something, but Deku beat him to it.

Maybe it was because he’s been so quiet for so long. Maybe it was because they wanted someone to say something. Maybe it was because they were waiting for Deku to say something.

“This is my home,” Deku snapped back, his frustration lacing his words. He lifted his plastic bag up, “Everyone is free to leave or stay. But this is my home. This is what I’m going to put my life on the line to fight for, because it’s my home. It’s important to me.”

Shigaraki stared at him for a long moment. Finally, his eyes dropped to the bag in his hand.

“And you’re going to do it with that bag of fire? Didn’t you hear him? It’s not just the apartment! We lost about ten feet underneath it, too! You think you can fight whatever the fuck did that much damage in ten minutes?”

“If you’re going to choose to believe people, why don’t you choose to believe me?” he asked.

Red eyes widened, before his shoulders slowly sagged.

“...And if you don’t come back?”

“Then fire doesn't work,” Deku’s reply was cold and blunt. As his gaze took in Shigaraki and the taller man’s figure, the way his eyes were fixated on the ground and his hands clenched tightly into fitsts at his side. He took a deep breath and asked, “And you?”

“Huh?”

“When I come back, what are you going to do?”

The male blinked back and Deku took a step towards him.

“When I come back, will you be on my side again?”

There was a brief moment of hesitation but it was enough.

Deku turned away from him, from all of them.

“Those that wait for me, I’ll show you morning light,” he declared. “I’ll be back in three hours, so ake your choice.”

-

The hardest part about this was probably the fact that even now, Deku was perfectly content fighting on his own.

But unlike before, Deku asked something of them.

// Those that wait for me, I’ll show you morning light. //

It was, by far, one of the most humiliating things that they could have been told.

“...If he thinks that we’re just going to obediently sit here and wait around, he’s got another thing coming,” Aizawa said, a scowl unfitting of a hero on his face.

Gravely, Kan nodded next to him.

“Looks like we got our work cut out for us.”

### **Earthworm - Journey**

“... It’s not just revenge, is it?” Sero asked quietly. “You didn’t… strike me as the type to care about things like that.”

Deku looked over at Sero and then back forward. Without the helmet, it was super easy to see if they were heard or not. It made them wonder if Deku really was ignoring them all this time, or if he just had a hard time transitioning his thoughts into words.

“I’m waiting for someone there,” Deku said quietly.

Sero stopped running in surprise, but started to run again when he realized that no one else was slowing down, “Serious? You’ve been waiting all this time for a promise?”

Deku shot him another look, looking half-amused and half-depreciating all in one.

“Yeah.”

“...Why are you still waiting then? The person you’re waiting for… they might not even be alive.”

It was cold and callous and definitely not something he should have brought up as they ran for the mouth of doom.

But still, he was so surprised that he couldn’t help but ask.

Deku shook his head. “I promised.”

That was enough.

Sero thought about how hard Deku worked, all day, everyday, for some time since probably the start of The End. He thought about how everyone on base seemed to respect him, respected him for the same thing, and now that he was facing it like this, Sero understood it better. Deku’s words carried a weight.

Their young leader continued, “It’s home. That’s reason enough to return.”

And that, Sero agreed with wholeheartedly.

### **Earthworm - fight**

* Earthworm has a hardening quirk. And it can spike like a hedgehog. And in it’s folds, there are starving zombies/ghouls that have been caught/capture or whatever. Not fast, but damn it’s hard to do damage & it got lots of friends.
* Mido Sero Uraraka Shoto + Twice

### **(Post ) - return**

“...They’re back!”

“Hey, guys!” Sero called back, looking exhausted as he gave a tired grin and waved his arms about, “We’re back! It was hard but we killed that thing!”

However, relief didn’t come for Hawks until he checked himself.

Deku rolled his shoulders as Hawks dropped down next to him. Even a few feet away, he could smell the stench of blood coming off the young man. Nearly drenched with fluid, he had no doubts on how the battle must have gone down.

“Are you-”

Deku nodded curtly, “We’re all fine,” he said. “How’s-”

“Everyone injured is accounted for and stable. We got them into houses,” he said, eyes lingering on the way Deku’s chest moved with every breath. His smile slowly returned as he waved to the other kids, remembering to acknowledge them. “No deaths. Half the apartment is gone though,” he continued to report.

Deku nodded slowly. “Supplies?”

“We’ll see the end of the week. The garden is trashed. Yaoyozuro can do just about anything but she needs calories. Chisaki says that he’s fine but it’s obvious that he’s exhausted…” The blond stood right in front of him, standing firmly on the ground, “Are you sure that you’re okay?”

Uraraka looked at him, and he waved back at her. They others took it as a sign of dismissal, especially as the others came towards them. Deku side-eyed Hawks, not that he could see it with the helmet on. Once the others ran by him, he extended his hand out to the blond.

Hawks plopped his hand on top of the extended hand, and kept it there when fingers wrapped around his wrist. Since they were both wearing thick gloves, he couldn’t feel any of the heat to really confirm that Deku was alive and well, and he fought off any urges he had to yank him closer and force him to their infirmary.

“What’s up?” he asked, calm as he tried to channel what little inner peace he had left.

Deku’s hand was small in his. Even now, he never expected it. He still had all of his fingers too, and Hawks counted every blessing in the world that he hadn’t lost this boy yet.

“I’m home,” Deku said.

He shifted his hand a little, so that their palms were facing each other. He interlaced his fingers with his, and squeezed.

“You don’t have to look at me like that.”

Hawks gave a watery laugh in return. Was he that obvious? He didn’t even realize it himself.

“Welcome back,” he said, meaning every word.

Ever since he was a kid, and he was starting his hero-training, he was always taught the importance of words. They were powerful weapons, or the greatest comfort. What he said and what others said could give him a lot of details and information that he may not have otherwise had. What people said, and what people choose not to say, were all powerful things.

And Deku’s words were powerful things, since all he needed were two words to take all the breath out of his lungs.

“Thank you.”

His heart steady, Hawks released a long breath.

“Alright,” he said quietly, “But seriously, let’s get you cleaned up and something to eat.”

Tugging on the hand interlocked with his, it’s almost as though nothing had changed.

“No injuries?” Natsuo said, arching his eyebrows. “Hm. Why do I doubt that?”

Deku shrugged back, but didn’t say anything. He did pass him a gaudy-looking string-bag, neon-green with a faded sports logo on it. The older man took it and opened it. His eyebrows rose significantly.

“Alright, I’m not taking these because I don’t believe that you’re not injured,” he said. “But I’m taking these because we’re going to be needing this soon enough anyways.” He pointed at Deku. “Full check-up, come on.”

Deku frowned back, but Hawks pulled their conjoined hands forward.

“You heard him,” he said with a beaming smile, “Let’s go. If you have nothing to hide, it’ll be done in an instant!”

Deku frowned.

Traitor.

Aside from being a walking bruise, however, it was clear that Deku hadn’t broken anything for once. No ruptured organs, no missing chunks of skin, and he seemed to actually be fine. He was almost in good health, or at least better than the majority of the people that Natsuo and the others were looking after.

“...Alright,” Natsuo said, “I’ll let you go.” Even though he said that, the regret was clear as day in his eyes. One of his hands came onto his shoulders and squeezed firmly. “But truly, if you’re not feeling well…”

Deku’s hand came up to Natsuo’s hand and squeezed back. “... I’ll leave myself to you then,” he finished.

The older man swallowed hard and he nodded.

“Deku I… Thank you for coming back, coming back safely,” he said. “I… I don’t think I…”

He bit down hard on his bottom lip, dropping his gaze down, and Deku’s eyes softened.

He couldn’t finish his words, but even someone like Deku had to know the truth.

Without him, there would be no base here.

### **Young Looking Old Guy**

“Deku-san,” Hojo said quietly as he approached the young man. “...We have an issue. Chisaki-san asked me to call for you.”

Said man paused where he was holding a sack of rice over his shoulder. He gave a curt nod, and stepped away to place down the sack. He waved at Nighteye, who was taking care of the supplies on this end, and the man gave a big frown. Before he could say anything, Deku turned to Hojo, and the two left.

Hojo eyed Deku uncertainty. It was strange to call someone who was clearly younger than him so formally, but it felt wrong to call him anything else.

Without a helmet, he could still be just as impassive. At least, without his helmet, he could see what Deku was staring at, but that didn’t mean he had any clue what he was thinking.

They got to the door, Hojo knocked.

“Chisaki-san, Deku-san is here.”

The door swung open, and Chisaki’s gold eyes found Deku’s surprised eyes.

“We have a problem,” he said.

Deku stared at the man on the bed in front of him. The man, looking anywhere from 25-30, looked familiar as he laid, sleeping peacefully. He wasn’t hooked up to anything, and the room didn’t feel like the regular sterile room Chisaki holed himself and his patients up in.

Green eyes found Chisaki’s.

“He’s physically fine,” the man reported. “Breathing, heart-rate, health, everything. He doesn’t even have a bruise despite the fact that he was caught underneath one of the streetlights.”

Feeling like the report hadn’t been concluded, Deku kept quiet.

“...Do you recognize him?” he asked quietly, almost hesitantly.

Deku arched an eyebrow at him. The man sighed back, his eyebrows furrowing.

“Don’t look at me like that, it’s hard for me to explain on this end,” he sighed, and after a brief second of pause looked back up. “...As you know, Eri’s quirk is time-manipulation on an individual. It must be human. She… When she woke up, she… she tried to look for you.”

Deku’s expression didn’t change, but his eyes slid down in front of this man.

“...Then, this is…”

“Yep, Gran Torino.”

Deku closed his eyes.

“And everyone saw her… turn his time back.”

“...I see.”

So, if he woke up, then they’ll check his condition. If he was the same as always, then this could be really, really bad for them. If he woke up, and he lost all the memories from when he was actually his physical age to his actual age, then they had to explain to this man that the world ended, and that will just be a minor annoyance. However, he didn’t dare hope that this man would never wake up again.

“I’m sorry,” Chisaki blurted out all-at-once, like he couldn’t hold the sound back. He dropped his head and hunched forward into an almost bow. “It was due to my carelessness.”

The young man didn’t respond, his eyes trained on the man on the bed. After a long moment, Chisaki brought his head back up.

“I-”

He was about to say something, but cut himself off when he realized that Deku was moving. He turned around to fully face Chisaki, and lost in those green eyes, the older man forgot the passage of time.

“Kai,” he said quietly, “I’ll forgive you if you stay by my side.”

He gave a little smile, crinkling his mask just a little bit.

And Chisaki’s wide-eyed expression melted down into a smile of his own.

“Yes, I believe that’s within my capacity,” he replied back.

With the way they exchanged knowing looks, no one would guess that only Chisaki was taking this very seriously.

### **Mourning**

Dabi suppressed a shiver. He can set people on fire, and they’ll be less than ash in minutes.

Deku can turn his heart into ash with a look.

“Hm? What’s Deku doing over there by himself?”

A hand shot out to grab Mina by the shoulder. She gasped, surprised because she thought she was alone, and spun around to see Stain. The older man, however, wasn’t looking at her and allowed her to escape his grip easily. Her eyes traced Stain’s gaze back to where Deku was standing on the top of the rubble.

“Is everything alright?” she asked.

“Let him mourn in peace,” he explained quietly. “He lost more than a home.”

The words brought a chill to her, rocking her straight to the core as she looked back at Deku. The young man was sitting at the top of one of the rubble piles, just staring off into the desolation all around him.

She couldn’t help but think that he looked awfully lonely.

“Then, shouldn’t he think that he didn’t lose everything?” she asked.

And when red eyes widened, she rushed to the rubble where he stood.

“Hey Deku! You wouldn’t believe what we did to Kaminari!”

### **Rationing in an Emergency: KamiDeku**

By some miracle (and a lot of blood, sweat, and tears on Chisaki’s and Cementoss' part), they manage to have something resembling their former home.

But more importantly, for the first time since most of them had gotten there, they had to ration their supplies.

“Tighten your belts now,” Nighteye said, “We can go back to eating how we used to at the end of this. Just be patient this time.”

However, no matter how exhausted everyone seemed to be, how tired they looked or felt, they kept the complaints to a minimum and tried to keep the energy up. It helped in most cases and was annoying in other cases. The best people could do was keep to themselves and focus on making sure on tomorrow.

“Oh, Deku!” Kaminari waved at him, and thinking that he was needed, Deku walked over to the other teen. He lifted a plate of four onigiris towards him, “Here, that’s your share for dinner. Keep up the good work!”

His grin was shining.

Deku stared at the plate and nodded. ‘Thank you,” he said, lifting his hand to take the small plate into his hand. The young man beamed at him, taking a moment to marvel at Deku’s eyes.

It was just rare to see the man’s face, any part of it, and Kaminari didn’t hide his open gawking. The other man, probably uncomfortable by his gaze, gave a jerky nod before leaving.

Kaminari, meanwhile, watched him from the corner of his eyes as he helped clean up their little serving area. Sneaking glances, curious to what Deku’s face looked like when he was eating, he was shocked to see Deku just place his plate of dinner on top of Kouta's empty plate as he walked by.

The kid’s head snapped up, and Deku kept walking onwards like nothing had happened. He stared in shock as Kouta tripped over his own foot to catch up to the young man.

“Uh!” he shouted, “Deku-nii!” he cried out, “W-wha-”

Deku paused for a second, turning over just enough to place his hand on Kouta’s hair. The gloved hand ruffled his hair.

“I’ll eat after my patrol,” he replied back. “Running on a full stomach is painful.”

Recognition dawned on the kid’s face and he nodded.

“Take care of that for me,” he said.

Kaminari eyed his cast and then looked back at his face. Now that Deku couldn’t wear his helmet, it was easy to see how tired he was. He didn’t blame him, while Kaminari and the others were split scavenging supplies from their demolished apartment, and running emergency aid as makeshift (and poorly trained) nurses, Deku and some of the others were out checking on patrols frequently, and in groups.

Patrols were switching off every few hours, with overlapping rounds, with the promise that they'd relax as they got situated into shelter. It sounded nice, but since this wasn’t something that they have ever done before, they sat on a ball of anxious energy. For many, the last time something this destructive happened, they were on the road and on the run.

The fact that they weren’t abandoning this place, and instead working to rebuild it, was shocking. But Kaminari, who heard Deku’s voice shout out how he felt about this place, couldn’t find it in himself to run.

But still, Deku was injured. At least, he was much more battered than Kaminari.

He always thought it back when Deku was helmet, but now that he could see how the toll on the young man, he was really starting to question it now.

Was this really the best that Kaminari could do?

### **Twice & Deku - to die for**

“You know, I didn’t really ever care about anything. And so, when the world ended, I thought ‘take that!’”

Deku remained quiet, but Twice had a feeling that he was listening to him.

“But it’s been really bad even after the world ended and everything,” he continued. “It still sucks and I can’t get laid and I can’t smoke.”

He gave a dramatic sigh at that last one in particular.

“So, when you came and saved my life, I was really sad. Like, I couldn’t even die properly, you know? The ultimate failure. I …. I don’t have anything and I don’t know anything. My quirk can be useful but I’m not,” he gestured to himself, “really smart or handsome or together or anything.”

They were quiet for a moment as Deku kicked the door down. They checked up and down the hallway, and then resumed.

“So for a while, especially when you didn’t even talk to us or see your face, I was really angry and I… I hated you for a bit too. Like, dude! Let me die!” His voice rang through the corridor, and Deku moved to stand right in front of him, as though to protect him from any danger coming ahead. His bat was drawn and Twice stared at the smaller man in front of him.

Deku did know that he had a gun, right? He was at the peak of his health. He wasn’t smoking anymore and he ate three whole meals everyday (and sometimes, even a snack). He was fit and full and whole in a way he had never been when society was up and running. Instead of doing what any sensible person should have done and telling Twice to shut his trap, Deku prepared to fight anything that could be drawn to his sound instead.

A squirrel ran right in front of them and out of sight. There was another moment, and then Deku relaxed. The front of his helmet shined when he turned back to Twice and he nodded, as though to let him know that it was okay to keep talking.

Twice felt his heart do that thing again, as it always did when Deku did something like this. It took him a while, but he knew what this feeling was now. He’s never felt like this until the world ended, and wasn’t that a joke all on it’s own? He lived long enough to know that this kind of relationship, this kind of silent loyalty (or any loyalty, did you know who Twice even used to be?) wasn’t something he deserved or ever expected to have.

“Thanks, Deku,” he said, genuine and a thousand times lighter than he ever thought he could be. “I’m glad that you saved me.”

There was a long silence, and Twice finally felt used to the quiet.

“I… I didn’t save you,” Deku said quietly. “Nothing came out,” he said, motioning to the empty hallway in front of them.

“You can’t just take a compliment, can you? I’m talking about when we first met. // When you saved me with a fire hydrant!”

He didn’t react, but Twice didn’t let it bother him. He was surprised when Deku spoke up.

“I think everyone likes to say things like that,” he said, “but it feels wrong to accept it. Before… Before I met you and everyone else I… I was so tired.”

For once, Twice managed to keep his mouth shut as he stared at the young man.

“If that’s how you feel though, I… Twice… Jin,” he said, his voice quiet like it was a secret for the two of them, “Then, thank you for letting me save you. I’m glad that I got to meet you.”

Twice felt his jaw unhinge and a warmth fill his chest.

“Hey, Deku and Twice, where are you guys?” their commlink came to life, and Tensei called for them.

“I’m trying to ask this man to marry me,” Twice deadpanned into the commlink, “Read the mood and fuck off.”

Deku spluttered back, and even though he had his helmet on, Twice could probably accurately pinpoint the exact shade of red his face was.

“On our way,” Deku eventually got out, his voice whispering through the commlink.

“I’m just saying,” Twice said, “I wouldn’t cheat on you. And if you wanted to cheat on me, I could just make you a clone of them so I could watch. No cheating required, you know?”

Deku dedicatedly kept marching forward. Twice could only tell that he was bothered by the mechanical way his arms moved with every step. He gave a grin. Even though he was joking for the most part, there was a part of him that wasn’t. The thought of sharing the future with someone who thanked him for being alive, who enjoyed listening to him, and who liked partnering up with him was foreign, but not unwelcome.

“And I’d be a cool dad to Kouta.”

“Kouta isn’t my kid…”

But he didn’t think it would be bad.

Whether or not surviving to the end of society and fighting a monster-apocalypse was lucky or not was up for debate. Guys like Twice, however, found only one difference between the world before and after.

He wanted to live now.

“And when we get back,” Twice continued, “Let’s grab dinner.”

Deku turned to face him, and he nodded. The blond didn’t know what expression he had right now or how he felt or anything, but his face split into a grin under his own mask.

Looking forward to something was a precious thing. And more than any food, money, or material good, Twice felt rich in something else.

-

“What took you guys so long?” Compress asked.

“I was confessing my love,” Twice said without missing a beat. “Deku didn’t give me an answer, but I think he’ll have one by dinner.”

“Don’t let Dabi hear you, we won’t even have a body to bury,” he replied back.

The blond scoffed back. “Dabi loves me too, so I’m not too worried about that. We all just want some loving, after all. // I’ll kill him before he does.”

“You wanna bet?” Dabi’s voice sounded through the commlink.

“Get off the comms,” Aizawa’s voice crackled through the walkie.

Compress and Twice eyed each other.

## Winter Construction

### **Working Home - Rental Office**

"So we made it larger," Chisaki said as he pushed the door open.

Deku stepped in, eyes wide as he took in the changes. The older man smiled at him, his gaze taking in the open awe in Deku's eyes. The rental office had been expanded considerably. At the very least, those that come in won't be as crammed when they have impromptu meetings here anymore.

"What do you think?"

Deku stepped forward to the wall, where the notes that he posted and string remained. His hand came up to the stained paper, exposed to the stagnant air in the Rental Office. There were notes concerning whatever he thought was time and area sensitive. The accumulation of all his continuous efforts were recorded onto these pieces of paper.

The fact that they were still here made his insides twist. The fact that the people who also lived here respected them made his chest swell.

"...Before, when I was alone," he said slowly, "I thought that if I could leave behind one thing, it would be this."

His gloved hands grabbed one of the papers. All the information that was written were recorded in other notebooks as well. He and the Tsukauchi siblings spent some time organizing them out. There was no need for this to be up, especially since some of these were outdated and over.

He tugged on one or two, ready to throw them away, when a hand came up to rest on top of his. The sudden warmth that engulfed him made him pause.

His chest to Deku's back, Chisaki's hand laid across the back of his. Standing like this, Deku became intimately aware of how much bigger Chisaki was.

"...Kai...?"

"You would leave behind a lot more than your notes," Chisaki said, his voice low as it blew past one of his ears. The touch was too intimate, and any other person might have been off-put by his forward approach.

But Deku only found comfort in his words.

"...I suppose so," the young man said, turning his hand to hold Chisaki's. "Help me take this down."

"Of course."

-

"Oh wow, I almost didn't recognize this place," Taishiro whistled as he came into the room.

"Just cleaning out what we don't need," Chisaki said in way of explaining. "We're going to put them in one of the binders we found."

Taishiro laughed back, "Sounds good. Need any help?"

"No. You may leave."

"Oof, tough crowd," the blond replied back, not at all bothered. He came in and started to put the paper clippings into the plastic sleeve so that they could be ordered and put into binders. "How are we ordering it?"

"Why ask when you're going to just do whatever you want?"

And as though nothing was going on, Deku continued to file the stacks of paper away.

### **A Fast Run**

Deku was a relatively hands-off kind of leader. So hands-off, in fact, it often felt like they were all running amok on their own. Sometimes, it as as though Deku wasn't there at all, since he was so quiet and often kept to himself.

So the moments where he gave explicit instructions were particularly frustrating.

"Snipe, focus everything on the west end. Chimera and Hojo, take the east. Rappa and Stain, provide support to the south end. Shoji, get into the third room on the right from the stairwell. Hawks, keep an eye on the fifth floor. Aoyama, get some light into the third floor in four minutes. Everyone else, get to the north entrance to catch stragglers. We're ending this now."

It wasn't a hard plan, but it took trust and knowledge. Deku had to know where everyone was, what they could do, how many enemies there were and their attack patterns, and most importantly, the others had to listen and believe him too. Anyone else could have figured it out, especially so if they were on the outside looking in. But getting everyone on command wasn't something anyone could do.

Aside from the fact that there were plenty of people that didn't take well to orders, there were plenty more that often failed to meet expectations.

In exactly ten minutes, everything that they came here to kill was dead. The bodies were dragged and burning into nothing. The building's third floor was ashen while the fourth floor was coated in ice. The ice melted onto the fire rapidly, and put the fire out quickly.

In 30 minutes, the office building was completely cleared out and almost all of the monsters were nothing more than a pile of ashes. This was the fastest that they had managed to clear out the area.

At the bottom floor, helping the others pool the boxes of supplies they managed to salvage while separating out the trash, Deku walked up to the area.

"You know, that was probably the fastest we cleared out a building," Kaminari said, taking the box from their base leader's hands. "How come you don't lead the chase usually?"

Deku, whose helmet was securely fastened on his head, tilted his head up to look at the red-head before he bent down for the next box.

"Why would I?" he asked.

"...Since you're... the leader?" Kaminari said, sounding uncertain himself.

Deku shrugged back.

"One day," he said slowly, "I won't be."

It was much more ominous than anything that he was expecting to hear.

"And, I was lucky it worked out this time. Next time, we might be lucky."

Kaminari stared at Deku for a long moment.

"...You're a really depressing guy, huh?" he said, blunt and to the point. He moved the last of the boxes and dropped down next to Deku. "You trusted Dabi to take the whole floor by himself."

"He can do it."

"Even if he got unlucky?"

Deku nodded.

"Then, what about Fuyumi? She's been nonstop taking care of all the organization and first-aid in the trucks."

Deku nodded back. "She's really good at it."

"You don't think she'll ever make a mistake?"

"Nothing she can't fix," Deku confirmed.

He pointed at himself, "And me? You left your entire left side to me this time without telling me anything."

"Kaminari-kun is kind," he replied back, his voice turning into a gentle tone that made Kaminari's cheeks heat up. "Of course I can leave my back to you."

"I... then you?"

It wouldn't do for Kaminari to get lost in the fuzzy feelings. He tried to recenter himself.

"You should trust yourself more," he said. "Because I do. And you trust me."

He wished that the young man would take his helmet off, just so that he could verify with his eyes if he did hear him or not.

"You're a smart guy, Deku. And you're right, we can't do much if all we do is rely on luck. So, if we've lasted this long, it wasn't just luck."

He couldn't see it, but the expression on Deku's face was akin to realization, as though the thought had never occurred to him.

### **Cowardly**

“Being a coward is okay,” Deku said, “Because we’re together.”

He swung his bat down, the blood splattering across the ground. He turned around, the eyes of a forgiving angel in the body of a blood-drenched demon.

### **HawksDeku - Being warm**

Deku was standing by the railing, eyes watching the horizon as he held his little backpack to his chest. Hawks, who was coming by with some snacks, was more than happy to find him at last (before Chisaki this time too). He took a moment, taking in his features before he came up to wrap his wing around him.

The young man jolted, and he thought that Deku must have really dropped his guard if he didn’t hear him coming.

“Cold?” he asked, an easy smile on his face as he handed him the snack. “Here, freshly roasted sweet potato.”

Deku blinked at him and the food before taking it with a smile.

“Thank you.” Unlike usual, he pulled his mask down and under his chin before he pulled back the aluminum foil. He blew on it a little, marveling at the way the steam rose into the air.

Was it for the sweet potato? Was it for the extra warmth? Hawks didn’t know, but he didn’t want to hear it. He’s never really considered himself incredibly bullheaded or anything, but he didn’t want to hear gratitude from Deku. He didn’t know how to explain it other than that.

After all, he never realized that Deku hugged his bag to his chest because he was cold until today.

It was like, even now, they were noticing all the little ways they could have helped but didn’t. They could see in stark clarity how much Deku endured on their behalf. They could see, and it was almost as though they had willingly ignored all of the desperate and quiet cries for help from him.

But right now, with Deku under his wing, blowing on his sweet potato as he took slow breaths with several gasps, he thinks that this is fine. It’s the little stuff that really spoke out to him.

Like how Deku freely ate in front of him now. Or how Deku leaned into his side a little now.

He’s so glad.

“I’m really glad,” Deku said, and for a moment Hawks thought that he was the one speaking. “That you’re here.” The young man looked up at him, all shy smiles and tender gazed, “It’s warm.”

Faced with such honesty, Hawks felt like he was soaring through the skies.

“I was thinking the same thing,” he said.

### **Mid-February: Cold-Ass Water**

Kayama, Enji, Sakamata, Sero, Yaoyozuru

When Sero falls into the water, the ice breaking out from underneath him, Deku is 30 feet away in a building watching it happen. As the ice breaks, he doesn’t think about anything other than the utter fear on Sero’s frozen face, and runs to save someone who looks like they <wanted to be saved> .

He’s throwing off his jacket, chucking off his shoes, pulling at the fire hydrant at his thigh, gets to his shirt, manages to get the bulkiest of his padding off, slides his socks off against the ice and throws his helmet off.

When the human body is suddenly submerged into cold water, the <cold shock response> will make them involuntarily inhale the water. In worst cases, people immediately drown, especially as the cold can close off blood vessels because the warm human body and easy smile of Sero wasn’t meant to be suddenly thrust into ice cold water.

The temperature of water under ice is usually right at 4 degrees celsius. The human body can hold their breath for about two minutes, but in cold water, that number can drop to seconds.

Sero… how long has he been underwater? It had to be at least ten seconds for him to get here. He wasted too much time trying to take things off as he got there, and it slowed his pacing. He didn’t waste any longer and jumped right in.

-

Jumping into cold water wasn’t even close to the top 100 things he ever wanted to do when he left the complex today. However, letting Sero die wasn’t an option for him. He couldn’t even imagine that kind of future, so he would most definitely make sure that it will never be a reality-

Deku hasn’t swam in literal years. It’s painfully obvious. Holding his breath isn’t easy, and slugging through the water isn’t easy. It was so sudden and so cold that for several aching moments, he thinks that he’s burning from how cold it is.

But Deku has always been good at pretending he doesn’t feel pain.

He gets Sero. He apologized in his head again and again as he cuts off his overcoat and got rid of his shoes, because if he was faster Sero wouldn’t have fallen at all and if he was stronger, Sero wouldn’t lose anything but body temperature, but this is what he can do.

Swimming up, he swears, is harder than swimming plunging in. And it doesn’t help that Sero is unconscious and the panic in his heart swells with every passing second.

He breaks the surface, and the cold air threatens to freeze him as he is. His heart drops, but he’s almost certain that temperature was easier to control than air, so he tries his best to get Sero back over the edge of the broken surface. The young man flops over, his head landing on the ice and Deku winces at the sound it makes.

The ice doesn’t even crack under his head. Briefly, he’s annoyed that it doesn’t break, but also relieved.

Deku’s bare hand got onto the ice, and he hissed as it seemed to immediately freeze. The ice felt sticky, pain lacing up and down his arm, and he placed his other hand right next to it. It was so cold it burned him. He tries to get up, but he can’t feel anything-which was awful because Sero needed CPR stat, when two large hands picked him up and hauled him out of the water.

Immediately, a long, warm jacket completely encompassed him, and he was cradled into someone’s embrace. He gave a breathless gasp as his teeth chattered and his eyes only focused on Sero laying on the ice, where Kayama and Yaoyozuru is hunched over trying to save him-and that impossibly large and warm hand came up to turn his face into his chest and away from the elements.

He’s not alone.

More than anything, that thought was the warmest part of the embrace.

-

“...Sero?” he murmured out as soon as he was conscious.

“We got him out. We’re almost back, and we don’t think we have any damage that Chisaki can’t Overhaul,” Kayama said from the other side of him.

He distinctly heard the soft conversation of the others a little further away. As though confirming that everyone was safe and in relative good health, he nodded. He could feel all of his digits. He pressed his head against the meaty shoulder of Enji and basked in the natural warmth the man emitted.

“I can… walk,” he said quietly.

“Bullshit,” Enji replied with little fanfare. “Go back to sleep if you’re not going to be helpful.”

The stars were beautiful tonight. Even if he could see his breath with every puff, and someone’s jacket had tied him uncomfortably tightly to Enji’s back, he’s grateful.

“...Thank you,” he whispered quietly.

Enji looked down at him, eyes narrowing as though he was offended by the offer of gratitude, not that the young man saw it. Next to him, Kayama seemed to melt at the soft expression on his face as he began to fall back asleep.

-

Natsuo narrowed his eyes.

“But … how?” he hissed.

“I-I uh fell, into the water,” Sero said. Even though he was checked out with a clean bill of health, he had Enji’s thick jacket over his shoulders and Kayama’s jacket over his lap. “The surface broke under my feet-”

“Yeah, I got that part,” Natsuo snapped back,

### **Unwanted, Unexpected Visitor - Shapeshifter**

Deku’s memory was spotty at best. People often think that memories work like an on-off switch, but Deku didn’t feel like that. It felt like he was looking into an old house filled with dust and cobwebs through the foggy and stained window. All his memories were inside of that house, he was certain about it, but he couldn’t get inside.

However, from where he stood outside of it, he could barely see any details inside of it, like the number of furniture in the small room that he could peer inside.

That information, in his head, equated to the fact that he used to live in this apartment, back when society was up and running. He lived there and went to a school in the area. He couldn’t remember the name, but he wore a gakuran. Things like that.

Today, it was as though he learned what color the wallpaper was.

He lived with his mom. He doesn’t remember anyone else, and it doesn’t feel wrong that he thought it was just the two of them.

He had the color of the wallpaper, but couldn’t see if it had patterns or rips.

Waking up with that thought in mind, Deku felt an oncoming headache. He rubbed his temples and took a deep breath through his nose. His shoulders pulled, and he wondered if his body would ever stop feeling so heavy.

What was her name? What did she look like? He had a feeling that she smiled a lot, but he couldn’t remember what it sounded like.

The hole in his heart grew bigger. He wondered if it would be better if he just didn’t remember anything at all. Then, instead of an uncertain past and future, it would just be the future that he would care about. He’s tired of this helpless feeling.

-

“Morning, Deku.”

Deku, who was fully decked out in his regular traveling gear, didn’t give anyone a second look as he made his way to the Rental Office. The few days that Deku didn’t wear his helmet were very nice, as they could see how his eyes darted around the room from face to face and the way his lips pulled up into an awkward smile when he saw them, but he wasn’t injured enough to leave his helmet behind.

“Please!” the woman yelled out, “Please help! My son, my son is-”

She was a small, plump woman, stumbling as she ran through the streets, screaming for help as soon as she laid eyes on them. Half her green hair was tied up, or it used to be. Stray pieces had fallen out in a disarray, accenting how tired she looked as she ran.

Like any hero would have, Toyomitsu opened his hands open to show that he meant to harm as he walked forward.

“It’s alright!” he said, “I will help you!”

However, she made no effort to slow down as she sprinted for him. Her moves were unorthodox, running with her knuckles scraping against the ground as she favored one leg. It was unnerving, but not the worst thing he had seen. More importantly, people could act a little different or strangely under extreme circumstances. He understood that personally.

However, she didn’t have to be hurt anymore. It was a little crass and could be crude, but there were plenty of people here who had enough kindness remaining in their heart to invite her into their ranks.

He was one of them.

“Ma’am, it’s going to be alrigh-”

The gunshot was deafening as the woman’s head seemed to explode. Shellshocked, Taishiro just stood there. His arms were still open and his jaw went slack. Briefly, he thought he just went deaf. Eventually, the ringing stopped.

Slowly, he turned around to see the smoke coming out of the shotgun in Deku’s hand. Next to him, with his shotgun now missing, Spinner stared at Deku with no little amount of shock.

Without dropping his gun, Deku walked forward.

“She was… why did …. But she was…”

Taishiro didn’t understand it.

“What the hell is wrong with you?! She was asking for help! We could have-”

“That’s not a she,” Spinner snapped back, moving to stand between Taishiro and Deku. He pulled his lips back into a sneer. “Deku wasn’t wrong.”

Taishiro turned back, stared as the women became a person, and Deku’s spoke clearly.

“I killed her before,” he said.

## Sacrifices

### **The Survivors Who Lived off Sacrifice**

"Well, you're just a kid."

Deku paused. A kid? Did he count as someone as innocent as a child? His thoughts flashed to Kouta's bright eyes when he saw sparklers for the first time, and Eri's excited babbling when she got candied apples. Did he qualify?

Some days, he felt like there was so much blood caked onto his hands, he couldn't even bend them.

"So, why don't you leave this to the adults to deal with?"

The young man looked to his backpack, where they had marveled over the supplies he had on hand. Well, if this was how they wanted to deal with the situation, he'll respect it. They weren't his, so he this was the furthest he could go for them.

He had other things to deal with. Other people were waiting on him.

When he turned away to leave, however, someone grabbed his shoulder. Being grabbed, by anyone, anywhere, resulted in Deku slapping that away. It was a bad reflex to have in polite human company, but it was a reflex that had saved his life time and time again.

He tensed and took a step back. Apologize. Right. Even though he knew what he needed to do in his head, he couldn't get the words out of his mouth. The surging rage of panic choked him, as he saw the surprised expression on the other man's face. He needed to say it. He needed to say it right now. He-

"...What an ungrateful brat."

The man turned back, and his blank expression of disappointment pinched something in Deku's chest.

Deku took this time to leave.

He never ran from a fight, but he'd never fail to tuck his tail and flee from a person.

If he knew anything, however, he knew this. Wherever he went, this was the same.

He swung his bat. The resulting crack of a skull splintering under the might of his swing comforted him more than he would like to admit. Doing things that he had always done, regardless of how violent it was, brought a calm to his mindset.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?!"

Taking a long breath through his nose and out through his mouth, he concentrated on the calm he finally achieved. If it could be tangible, it would never leave his side. It would be like the helmet that sat on his head, or the pair of daggers that Stain got him. He would treasure it.

"Oh my god, did he kill all of these?"

Standing at the center of twenty-four fallen corpses, Deku looked to the group of survivors that he ran into. He stared at them for a moment and then turned away.

“Hey, I’m talking to you!”

Suddenly, something was thrown at them. The man all but threw him backwards as he jumped back as well, and he looked wildly to the person who shot it out. Landing gracefully next to him, Spinner stood in front of Deku. His blade was drawn as he eyed the man.

“Found all the bodies, and what would you know,” the lizard said, eyeing Deku from the corner of his eyes and then back to the men in front of them, “it led me back to you.”

The young man nodded his head, and reached for his arm. Firmly, he pushed the arm with the extended blade down, letting him know that these men weren’t threats.

Getting the message, Spinner relaxed. The blade remained out and in his hand, but he turned towards Deku. Eyes roamed his figure, checking for any visible injuries and changes, and returned back up to the visor.

“W...He had friends?”

“Yeah, he has friends,” another voice spoke out.

Former Number Two hero, from a time when society stood and heroes were dazzling, came out of the area that Spinner did. He made his way to Deku and Spinner without ever taking his eyes off the other humans.

“E-Endeavor!”

“Endeavor is here!”

“We’re saved!”

The man scowled back.

“...Eggs?” Spinner said, his face pale. “Not that I don’t believe you, but I just…” his face twisted in disgust. “Oh gross.”

The rest of their group had met up at last. The group of survivors warmly welcomed the other as they all filed into the area.

“Ah, don’t worry about that, Endeavor-san!”

“Yes, yes, it’s just that those crazy ideas kids come up with. There’s no such thing!”

“More importantly, Endeavor-san, what’s the place you’re staying at like?”

“Oh, yes!”

“That bastard! He sold us! This whole time! He had been sacrificing us!”

Still, Deku didn’t move. Standing between the man who was willing to sacrifice his people, and the people who were overflowing with grief, he held his ground.

The young man was small. Small enough that even though most of these people watched him tear through thrones of monsters on his own, the group of remaining survivors thought that they could question his authority. It didn’t help that he was clearly injured, if the visible bandages were any indication.

### **Kido:**

The last time Kido saw Endeavor, it was a week before the World Ended. It was a foggy memory, but there were some things that he never forgot. Endeavor's imposing figure, burning brighter and truer than anything else, was one of them. The radiance of the hero he once worked under. The brilliance of the Number Two Hero's flames...

These were all things that Kido held onto, even when the world was swallowed by chaos and mayhem.

And never, in a hundred years, did he ever expect him with the most violent survivor group he's ever seen.

Kido, who had come running after he heard the alarmed screaming of some of the people he had come out with, jerked to a stop when came to the scene of carnage. Even from where he had came out from between buildings, he could smell the stench of blood. The grisly sight made his stomach churn, if the smell hadn't already. Stepping out into the street, ready to give support, he felt his strength leave him. Torn apart and smeared around, the remains of body parts scattered around the way. Blood, thickening and darkening with every second, continued to ooze out until it came to his shoes.

Even though he understood how much blood a human body could hold, he never wanted to see visual confirmation like this.

The small man that they had encountered stood at the center of the bloodbath. He swung his bat down, splattering the loose drops of blood across the mess at his feet. No mater how well he shook it off however, the blood soaking his arms dripped down his hand, down the handle, and ran down the bat.

"K-Kido-san!"

He jerked as one of the survivors he appointed himself to protect came running to him. He was cradling his arm to his chest, and he was splattered in blood, but the look of panic on his face wasn't fear.

"Kido-san, that... that guy is a monster!"

If Deku could hear him, and Kido had no doubht he could, he didn't say anything.

"He just-" the man next to him made wild arm gestures, his eyes wide and shocked. "He punched and-and-" He flailed his arms, looking from their guest to him, "Bam! Like that!"

Kido felt dread pool in the pit of his stomach.

That man, who barely came up to his chest, did this? It would be one thing if he split open their heads, or broke their spines. It was a completely different for their bodies to be torn asunder with chunks of flesh in puddles of drying blood.

Without once turning around to face them, he kept walking forward instead.

"W-Where are you going?!" Kido asked, mentally kicking himself for stuttering.

If he was heard, he wasn't going to be answered. He gritted his teeth, and marched forward.

"Hey-" he reached out, bold and certain because he wasn't going to take this kind of disrespect.

And then, Endeavor, the hero he admired the most, came jogging in. He wiped at the sweat dripping at the bottom of his chin, as he panted hard. Sharp blue eyes immediately zoned in to the young man in the helmet.

"Heard yelling," he explained, not at all sounding out-of-breath. Kido always admired that about him too. Endeavor never let it show how tired he really was. He channeled all his exhaustion into his work, and used it to fuel his fire.

"I-"

"Endeavor-san!" the man next to him cheered, "It was this man! He's crazy. Just, tore apart all these guys in an instant! He almost came swinging at me! He could have killed me!"

Kido winced. He understood that the man must have experienced a great amount of trauma, but the clear, desperate hope in his eyes as he regarded Endeavor was not good. Endeavor was not someone that bolstered himself based on how other people percieved him. And since the world ended, being confronted with that expression wasn't at all heartening.

"Thank god a real hero is here!" he continued.

Kido, who didn't even realize that he could still feel, couldn't believe when his heart throbbed at the words.

A little further out, the kid in the helmet was halfway down the street, the lizard-man from earlier by his side.

...Spinner, was it?

"Endeavor!" the lizard yelled out, "There's 14 left!"

The older man nodded to show his understanding. "I came from the West," he reported. "I got four."

"Then, ten left," Spinner nodded. Next to him, their quiet companion immediately left to go east instead.

"I'll head South," Endeavor said, turning around to go that way.

"W-Wait, what?" Kido spluttered back. "That's it?"

"If he said that, then it must be true," Endeavor said, certain as the sun.

Kido frowned back. That... didn't sound like something Endeavor would say. He was the kind of person that valued fact and evidence. He would look at the information availiable and then decide on the 'Best Possible Method'. It was why he had the most amount of criminals apprehended and cases handled every year, without fail.

"...Kido," he said, his voice dropping in pitch and quiet and gentle like candlelight. "I am... truly and honestly relieved to see that you are alive and well. However, there is no need for you to come with me. You... should do what you want to do."

Kido hesitated.

"What if... what I want to do isn't the right thing?"

Endeavor offered a crooked grin at him, something that he would have never seen while he was 'Endeavor'.

"Then, be prepared to shoulder the responsibility," Enji replied back.

"...Could I come with you then?"

"You'll be disappointed."

Enji's fire is similar to Endeavor's. It's bright and radiant. It's blinding and it's warm. It saved his life, but it had a different purpose than what he remembered.

Kido made his decision.

"Well, if you trust me like that," he said slowly, "There must be a reason."

When the world ended, 'saving someone' hadn't really changed.

The right words from the right person, or the consistent pressence of someone, could save someone the same way a hero could rush into a burning building for someone.

The right person at the right time.

"I'm sorry," Kido leaned in, too surprised and shocked. "I... His name is what?"

"I'm sure it's not his real name," Enji replied back, "But it's the only thing that he reacts to."

Kido grimaced.

"He says he doesn't remember," Enji told him, eyeing the look on his face. "Don't take it too close to heart."

"...Memory-loss, huh?"

It, in Kido's humble opinion, was an easy and convienent excuse. Or at least, that's how he thought until he saw how recklessly he fought. It was clear that his Helmet was a nessesity for his survival.

However, what bothered him the most about this entire ordeal was Enji. It was that Enji was okay with this situation. Enji, one of the top heroes for several years in a row, was okay with this.

The feeling soured further when he came to the base that they were staying at. As one of the newest resident, he didn't think it was prudent to say anything, but it settled in his gut like a rock. The base itself was fine, and he could have cried when he saw that there were children, who were loud and cheery and laughing. The area was much cleaner than he had seen in a long while, filled with modern amenities and comfort that he didn't think people had anymore.

All that, and the person that pulled it all together, according to everyone, was the young man in a helmet that didn't even remember his name.

He watched one of Enji's child, the middle son who was on the path to become a doctor of some sort before the world ended, slowly unclasped Deku's helmet. At first glance, it would have percieved as some sort of power-play, where the leader of the settlement demonstrated how far and wide their control over people was, but as it turned out, it was because Deku had broken several fingers and could not unclasp his own helmet.

Kido thought about how hard the kid fought. He's not shocked that he broke something, all things considered, but at the same time, the disgusted shock he felt threatened to burn a hole through his chest.

"S-sorry," he said, because he thought someone should say it.

"Don't be," Todoroki Natsuo said, "It's his own damn fault for doing this."

He kneeled down in front of him, lifting his hands to hover over his gloves.

"Ready?"

Deku jerked his head in a nod, and Natsuo took a deep breath.

He pulled the gloves off, peeling it off the swollen purple flesh slowly. It was almost as though parts of the gloves had dug and fused into his hands because it was pulling the skin on Deku's hands apart as Natsuo tugged it off.

If it hurt, Deku didn't even breath differently.

"...Yeah, we're going to need to call Chisaki-san," Natsuo said, eyeing the wound. "He's on his way. You want any water?"

Deku shook his head, and instead nodded at Kido.

"Hm?" Natsuo turned to Kido, "You want some water?"

The nonchalance scared him. The ease that people accepted this scared him. The dispassionate stare Deku had scared him.

"...If something bothers you, then do something about it. And if you don't know what to do, then gather information. It's the duty of a Hero to light the way for the world."

It was something that Endeavor told him a long time ago. Sometimes, when he gets lost and scared and uncertain, he repeated the words in his head like a prayer.

"No, I'm good," Kido said. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Natsuo looked at him, pleasantly surprised, as he gave a little smile.

"They're going to be getting ready for dinner soon," he said. "They always need help."

At those words, Deku tried to stand up. As though anticipating that, Natsuo put his hands out to shove the young man back into the chair.

"Not you," he said. He turned back to Kido, and gave a curt nod with a grin. "Glad to see you're doing okay."

"...Thank you," Kido said, smiling back.

The genuine warmth in those words made him feel fuzzy on the inside. Even if things were a little strange here, he wanted to be useful. He wanted to be a part of something bigger. So he'll see what's up here. Then he'll make a choice.

### **Post: Learning About Eggs**

“...So, when did you learn that they have offspring?”

Deku looked up from his bat and then back down. He wiped it, and then quietly asked, “Does it matter?”

“Yes.”

He looked up to where Enji was staring at him, and then to where Spinner was leaning against the wall. The lizard man looked like he was going to be

“...When we went into the sewers,” Deku said quietly, “That’s when I had confirmation.”

“...But you speculated it earlier,” Enji pitched in.

Deku nodded, a small movement that barely caught light.

“And you… never thought to share this?” Spinner asked quietly, “Especially when you got confirmation.”

The young man stopped wiping his bat down. He placed the rag onto his thigh as he inspected his weapon of choice.

“...I’ll take care of it,” he said quietly. “It’s… hard.”

### **Merging with another group**

To be fair, it was going to happen eventually. The more people they found, the longer they had been alone, the worse state of mind they were in.

Deku was sitting and eating lunch while pouring over the map that Sasaki brought in. While waiting for the four reports that they sent Kurono and Enji to collect while they tried to plan the next route. The door slid open and three girls came in.

Sasaki frown as he sat up, "...Is everything alright?" he asked.

They were three of the girls from the newer group they came back. He was certain that Jirou and Hagakure were the ones who were in charge of the new group. Sasaki tilted his head, and wonderd if they had gotten lost.

Until they suddenly took their clothes off.

Sasaki jerked to stand in front of Deku.

"Wh-What are you doing?" he demanded.

"It's okay, we'll do what you want so don't kick us out. Please don't send us away we'll do anything! Truly do whatever you would like!"

They rushed forward. Their faces etched with desperation and their bodies marred by trauma.

"...You don't have to do this," Sasaki said, his voice dropping to a gentle level. "Please put your clothes back on and-"

"No, no, we're useful! We're useful!"

"And if not her, then me!"

"You- how could you sell me out-"

The door slammed open.

Cold eyes stared down at the girls assembled.

"If you wish to be useful, find a use to fill."

"...Todoroki-san," Sasaki said, shocked but a little relieved.

Or at least, until the second where they came running at him.

"Oh, Endeavor-san!" they said.

"Please, I will be of great service to you!"

"If you wish to be of great service, put your clothes on and find your own strength instead of relying on others."

With that he shoved right past them and to the desk they were at.

"The reports you mentioned were in one of the ripped notebooks. I collected what I could find, but there's a chance that we don't have it anymore."

Deku, seemingly unshaken, took the bundle of papers and began to look through it.

Almost ashamed, the girls eventually collected their clothes into their hands and left.

"...I'll warn the others about that," Sasaki said, getting up. "I'm sure there are some... unsavory of the likes that may take advantage of this. This is something we should nip in the bud. Please excuse me."

Deku didn't look up. Sasaki exchanged a look with Enji, and with a quick bow, left the room.

"...Are you okay with this?" Enji asked.

Deku didn't answer him though, and Enji gave a resginated sigh through his nose. He didn't think that the young man would respond, but he had hoped that they were close enough that he would at least share his thoughts.

Enji looked back to the notes, and got to work.

"...Enji," Deku spoke up suddenly, and Enji looked over at him, abandoning his work immediately.

"Yes?"

There was a long silence, and since Deku's eyes remained on the page, Enji honestly thought that he had misheard him. Was he losing his mind to the point where he was fantasizing about Deku calling him? Maybe he did need a break.

Well, that could wait when they were done with-

"What did they mean by being useful?"

He froze.

"...Is... being useful a bad thing?"

"...Deku, when they said that they're being useful, it means that they wish to give sex in exchange for protection."

There was a thousand better ways to have worded that. If Fuyumi or Rei was here, they would have done a thousand times better than what he just did.

"...And that's bad?"

Enji jerked, and hesitated. He felt like his next words were going to weigh heavily.

"If you want to be protected, if you want to protect someone, shouldn't you be prepared to do anything and everything?"

"...Did you want to have sex with them?" he asked slowly. The words made his gut twist. He couldn't quite explain it.

He shook his head.

"But the others might. That's why Sasaki went, didn't he?"

"...Deku, these kinds of things don't end pretty."

"What," Deku's voice was sharp like a knife as he placed his papers down, logs and detailed entries of the things he's killed in the neighborhood for the past few years, "part of this is pretty? After everything, do you really think that that this could have ended pretty?"

"Is that what you've been thinking this whole time?" Enji blurted out, unlike himself. "This entire time, you've been thinking of things like that?"

"...How should I be thinking then? I didn't know that it was a bad thing to do, we're just trying to survive."

His time since the end of the world, since working with Deku, had taught him a lot about patience. It could be age. It could be humility. It could be the constant back-and-forth with Deku that finally ended when Deku relented after Enji showed patience.

Enji stared, and took a slow breath.

"It's not that it's a bad thing. However, it's not something that needs to be done. Deku, why did you take them in?"

"I didn't," Deku shook his head with a firm frown, "They just haven't left yet."

The older man huffed, crossed his arms, rolled his eyes, and looked incredibly at ease despite the answer.

"They don't understand that," Enji explained. "So, they think that they will be allowed to stay here as long as they are helpful. I'm assuming that this was how they... were used in their previous location."

"Oh," Deku said, "Like how you can use fire. They use sex."

Enji was rather uncomfortable with that metaphor, but it seemed that it triggered something inside of Deku's head. Hesitantly, he cautioned forward. "Yes, I suppose so. In a really limited sense. Would you abandon Sasaki because he doesn't use his quirk? They think that, if they can't be useful, they'll be forced to leave."

The realizzation dawned on his face, giving his eyes a brightness he didn't have before.

"I see," he said quietly. "They don't have to."

Enji stared for a moment longer, a wry look crossing his face.

"No, they don't. They're thankful for being included here. They want to secure a place here by contributing themselves in any way they could."

Deku tilted his head. "I see. No one else has done this before."

Enji's jaw tightened as Deku casually flushed the last four years of them bending over backwards for him.

"You..."

No, Enji, be calm. Imagine the rustling leaves and a big forest. He took a deep breath.

Apparently, their conversation was over. Deku turned his full attention back to the papers on the desk.

However, and Enji always admired this about him, Deku didn't complain. He just got to work in order to work towards the future that he saw.

-

Once they were done with this, and Enji was by himself again, he would repeat this conversation in his head several times.

He would never ask, and he doubted Deku would ever share to begin with, but if he ever found the people who desecrated anything that Deku had, he would ruin them.

"Yeah, you're doing great!" Uraraka's voice snapped him out of his thoughts as he peered over. "We try to keep this place as clean as possible," she explained, "But since this place just keeps getting bigger, we have a lot to do. Thanks for helping out! Do you mind helping us out again tomorrow?"

One of the girls from before, holding a dirty rag to her chet, looked as though Uraraka just gave her the world.

"I would..." her voice failed her. She sniffled loudly and bowed at the waist, "Yes! Yes, I will be useful!"

"No, no," Uraraka said, shaking her head, "Helpful. You are helpful."

Enji stared at them for a moment, and felt his heart calm down. Perhaps it wasn't really something that they should worry about.

### **Sleeping Peacefully**

Deku leaned against Twice's chest. His breathing slowed and evened out as his eyes closed. A small smile crawled onto his face, and he fell asleep listening to Twice's heartbeat.

### **Research Tapes, if you can call them that**

Deku, Chisaki, and Naomasa watched all of the videos, a whopping 90 hr marathon that lasted for six straight days, where they only took breaks when Deku left for patrol.

-

Deku leaned back in his seat.

"Abia, this is enough. you... You don't have to watch this if you don't want to."

The young woman looked from the base leader to Chisaki, who was looking through the papers that Deku brought back.

"Huh? Uh, you sure? If I'm right here, I can make sure-"

"I don't think you're going to enjoy the content matter," Chisaki spoke up. "This isn't research. This is torture."

Aiba, who really was never a fan of violent crimes, pursed her lips.

"Alright. Let me know if you run into any other problems," she said, and rolled herself out the door.

"Oh, excuse me," Naomasa's voice came up before he poked his head into the room. "I am here."

"It's not... going to be easy to stomach," Deku said, looking a little regretful.

Naomasa's pinched expression turned to Deku. He gave a quiet sigh.

"All the more that I should be here then," he said. He placed a notepad on the table. "May I join you?"

"If you get queasy just leave," Chisaki spoke up. "But no objections here. Naomasa isn't an idiot, and I'm sure having a former detective will let us see something else."

Deku hesitated. "...Naomasa, you're a kind man," he said quietly, "you don't... you don't have to take responsibility for this." Green eyes looked to him, and Naomasa wanted to throw those words back to him and the bags under his eyes.

Eventually, he motioned for Naomasa to take a seat. He turned to press play.

-

"...Nii-chan?"

Naomasa flinched, his head snapping up and seeing his sister, felt his heart waver.

"Yeah, what's up?" he asked.

"...You look hella stressed," Makoto said. "...Is everything okay?"

Back when he was a detective, he didn't bring his work home. No matter how much prying and questioning he was subjected to by his little sister, he never succumbed to her words. As such, he was pretty good at keeping his work and personal lives separate.

This was neither work or personal. He hadn't worked in a while. Old habits were hard to break, he supposed.

"...I hope you're not thinking something like 'I can't tell you about my cases,' right?" Makoto said.

Naomasa snorted. As expected of his sister.

"And just now, you thought, 'as expected of my cute little sister,' didn't you?"

"...I wouldn't say cute."

Makoto giggled, but took a seat next to him. Sitting on the brick surrounding their courtyard, Naomasa couldn't help but think back to when they were both students, waiting for their mom to come and pick them up.

"...Someone took a video of their findings and research," he said quietly, "Someone who held a grudge and got a rush when they held more power than another."

Makoto leaned her head against his shoulder. He was grateful for her presence.

"But you know, Deku-kun didn't even flinch," he murmured. "I imagine that, since he was the one to find and bring this back, he must have been at the center of that... lab."

He didn't want to call it a lab. He didn't want to call someone who abandoned morals and ethics and treated other human beings like that a researcher.

"He told me that I didn't have to be there. Because I was kind, I didn't need to feel like I needed to take responsibility for them." He pinched the bridge of his nose. "What the hell is he then?" he asked quietly. "Isn't he the one taking responsibility for all of us-dead and alive?"

The burden of the ten creeping on nine people he was with at the hospital was suffocating. The agony of meeting people he used to know, and having to explain that he was the only one that made it out, was a fresh pain that haunted his dreams. And yet.

"...I didn't realize that being looked after could be so annoying."

"Yeah," Makoto agreed. "It really is."

He paused in his words and narrowed his eyes at her. "Haha."

"Welcome to the club, big bro," she said, giggling. "You should hurry up and be more reliable, if you hate it so much."

He scowled at her.

"It's annoying, isn't it? But Nii-chan, he found us at our absolute worse, you know? I bet that to him, we're still those unreliable adults who couldn't do anything other than sit around and wait for someone to come save us."

He thought about it. How quick he (and several others) were to fall into despair. How often he had looked for guidance from someone half his size. It was glaringly obvious, now that he had some distance.

"Well, your nii-chan is going to be doing his best," he said.

"Good, Deku-kun deserves better than a bunch of dead-weights that are so lazy they can't think of something to do."

He shot her an incredibly dry look, but knew that he didn't have any weight against her. After all, even without words and the likes, Makoto and Aizawa single-handedly figured out a chores-list and rotating schedule for everyone on base to contribute into their current lifestyle.

From her knowing smile, she had known this for a while back.

"Welcome back, nii-chan. Don't worry, I'll be here to comfort you when Deku-kun rejects your unhelpful assistance."

Ah, good old Makoto.

-

"Deku," Naomasa said when he saw him again, "I went ahead and sorted the research and notes with stickies. The stickies correspond to the videos we have," he explained as he motioned to the three stacks of papers he had. “I didn’t finish the parts we haven’t gotten to yet, but I did for the parts we did.”

Even Chisaki looked mildly impressed. He looked at the papers with a small amount of interest.

"This will cut back on re-watching time. My gratitude."

Deku, however, was staring at Naomasa.

"...It must have been hard," he said, "we won't let this go to waste."

And doesn't that just sound too much like Naomasa had no other thing to do?

"Let him in," Chisaki said, "You could use the break."

Deku frowned, and Naomasa blinked back. Did... Chisaki just come to his defense?

"...If you're certain," Deku said, turning to Naomasa.

-

"It's crazy, right?" Chisaki said when they adjourned for the evening, "Who would have thought that I'd defend the usefulness of a policeman, hm?" he placed the papers down onto the table. "But well, that's not here or there."

"...While I am grateful, I hope you understand why I am confused."

"Simple. You're confused because you, and all the other simpletons here, still think in terms like 'hero' and 'villain' when right now, you should be thinking in terms of use." And then, he laughed, a barking and mocking sound. "To think that I'd be giving someone else a talk of prejudice."

He tapped the papers in front of him.

"Well, it's not like I don't understand," he said, "Just a few years ago, these were the kinds of experiments I was doing."

Naomasa's eyes narrowed, his shoulder pulling back, and the other man waved it off, as though it didn't really matter to him.

"It was a different time, of course. Deku is willing to break himself to save anyone on this base, so I will not harm or experiment on them either," he continued. "Which leads me to why I vouched for you. That bleeding heart of a boss is foolishly taking personal responsibility on the subjects. I had hoped that, by introducing another person into the equation, he would be able to split that emotional baggage with someone. I know that I, nor any of my boys, can do that for him." The look he gave the former police was cold and unfeeling, despite his earnest words, "That’s why I have decided that you would be a worthwhile investment of faith."

Naomasa took a deep breath through his nose. He wasn't sure how to take this entire situation at hand. This wasn't what he was expecting from this man.

"Alright. We work together to help alleviate his burden," he summarized.

"Oh, you caught on quickly."

Which was a knock against him, but Naomasa didn't live the majority of his adult-life arresting some of the worst shitbags that ever lived for nothing.

"I'll do what I can," Naomasa said with a nod. "And I would like to remind you that you also count as someone that Deku would break himself to save."

Chisaki's eyes widened, and the first human expression the former yakuza had given him turned out to be a pleasant kind of surprise.

"...Thank you for the reminder. I will do well to remember that."

### **Leftovers - post research**

The footage ended with a monster coming in and destroying everything. It was predictable, a little anticlimactic, and Overhaul shattered and then immediately overhauled it back twice before Deku's chair clattered behind him. He leaned over to rewind and rewatch the destruction of the building.

Obviously, since the best they had was a laptop and a shitty school projector, they ended up rewatching the scene several times since Deku couldn't get the screen to stop in the place he wanted it to be stopped.

He stared for a few long seconds before he shot up to his feet, and was out of the door.

“D-Deku?!” Naomasa shouted out.

And something must have changed because Deku did turn around and point at it. “I didn’t kill that one,” he said. Where he would normally just get up and go, he told them clearly, “I’m going.”

“Don’t go alone,” Chisaki called out, calmly standing up. “And when you return, we will have finished transcribing this.”

Deku looked at Chisaki and then to Naomasa and then back. He gave a curt nod.

“I’ll leave it to you.”

And he was gone.

-

## Nine

### **Reading: Twice + Cementoss**

"Okay, then what does it say?"

Twice stopped and pulled the walkie away from him, staring at it in disbelief.

"Say?"

The walkie crackled back to life. "Yeah, what does it say? Anything about the locking mechanism?"

"...Say? Books can speak?"

There was a long silence.

"...I'll be there in a few seconds," Hawks declared.

Kouta, who was flipping through the book, frowned back. He grabbed his walkie.

"The mechanism is on the second floor, and there's another one at the top floor. The security room in the parking lot has another," he announced.

"...Sprinkles will be going up," Enji declared.

"Whipped cream here, we're heading downstairs," Aizawa pitched in.

"Mochi, going for the second floor," Setsuno reported into.

Kouta was still looking through the manual, pulling a pen out to write something into his small planner. Twice peered around to his side, curious on what he was writing. Vividly, he was reminded of back when he first traveled with Deku, back when he was Helmet, and was scribbling away in that small planner of his.

"Whatcha writing about?" he asked.

Unlike Helmet, however, Kouta answered him after giving him a nasty side-eye.

"I don't know these kanjis," Kouta said, "I'll ask Cementoss about it when we get back."

Twice felt the tinge on his pride. Kid was way more responsible than he needed to be.

"Huh, you're really a bookworm, aren't you?"

"I'm not strong," Kouta started. "I'm not particularly useful either. So this is all I have until I am. I don't want to die because of something I could have prepared better for."

This time, Twice felt the jab at him.

"I... I never thought that reading was important," he said. "I did terribly in school, and I never finished high school either."

"It's okay," Kouta said, "because you're not useless."

He kept scribbling away, but the words sank deep into Twice's heart.

"Hey, so like, you're, like, super literate, right?"

Cementoss slowly turned his attention to the man standing next to the table.

"...Yes?"

"Okay," Twice said, dropping several books on the desk. With a yelp, Yamada yanked his food out before they were crushed by the books. The blond boldly sat down across from Cementoss, taking out his pen and opening one of the textbooks. "What's this?"

Cementoss exchanged a glance with Yamada, as though to confirm that he wasn't crazy, and that this was actually happening, and slowly leaned over the book. It was a history textbook, made for middle schoolers, and he looked back up to Twice.

"Which one?"

"This whole," Twice circled the page with the back of the pen. "I don't know any of these kanjis."

"...Then why are you reading a history textbook? It might be easier to start with a vocabulary book." Some of the words in a history textbook were harder to understand, especially since they weren't apart of the normal vernacular. His eyes skimmed over the page, there were some passages that were probably transcriped from the original source.

"A what?"

"A... vocabulary book," Cementoss said slowly. He stared at Twice for another moment before standing up, "Here, I'll show you where they are."

He turned and gave a nod to Yamada, who hadn't scraped his mouth off the table yet.

"I'll catch up with you later, Yamada," he said. He left, Twice trailing after him.

"So, like, how come you're helping me?"

"Because... you asked?" Was this a trick question?

"Oh, so you'd like, help anyone. As expected of a hero! // You shithead, you won't win any brownie points from me like this!"

If Cementoss had any eyebrows, he would arch them at Twice. Instead, he gave a sigh and focused on the task on hand.

"If you want to learn, that's enough for me. I'll help you." He pushed open the door to their makeshift library, holding it open for the blond to step through. "Then, I might have some more people to talk to about my favorite books."

Twice grinned back.

"I like selfish bastards more than heroes. // Damn, you heroes say some cool-ass shit."

"I... I think your thoughts got mixed up."

The supposedly unstable Twice was surprisingly diligent in his studies.

### **Nine & Slice**

Hasaki Kiruka wished for a world where she and the people she loved and cherished and cared for.

Today, the number of people that she cherished increased by one.

### **Nine @ Base**

“...And you can store up to nine at a time?”

“... And so we learned that he cannot take the quirks from any clone,” Chisaki said. “If we want to see his quirk-stealing, we need someone to actually sacrifice their quirk…” his lips quipped up into a smile when he saw the way Deku shook his head, “...Yeah, I figured you’d be against that.”

He sighed dramatically, but the amusement was clear in his eyes.

“Well, it doesn’t seem like he’s lying when he said that he’ll lay his loyalty to you,” Chisaki continued.

“Of course not,” Nine piped in, “There’s no merit in deceit.”

The yakuza turned to Deku at that. “Well, since you’re the one who brought him, we don’t have any complaints. But we figured that you’d want to know.”

“...I wanted to know if he’s hurt,” the man deadpanned back.

“Oh yeah, nothing we couldn’t Overhaul,” Chisaki replied back airly, like it wasn’t a concern at all. “This is far more interesting.”

“...Not interesting,” Deku cut back in sharply. “Nine.”

The gleam in Chisaki’s eyes receded back, and he looked to the green-haired teen next to him.

“...Yes, you’re right,” he agreed. “My apologies.”

Nine watched on, intrigued by the turn of events.

### **Survivor @ Office Space**

"...He's a survivor," Nishiya said, the confusion apparent in his eyes and his voice as he motioned to the haggard-looking man eyeing them warily. "Aren't we going to... uh do something?"

If Deku heard, he didn't make any acknowledgement that he did. As it was, he shrugged his backpack off, opened it up and placed his bento for the day and his first-aid kit onto the ground. He hefted the backpack up onto his shoulder and clicked his walkie on.

"I'm leaving," he announced.

Nishiya blanched, as their communication link exploded with everyone trying to yell into the walkie. In the meantime, Deku gave a short nod to the survivor, living here and alone for who knows how long, and left.

But why?

"Wait, Deku," he yelled out, "Wait, why are we... We could... He needs help!" he shouted after him, but left the room that the man had holed himself up in.

Deku's steps stopped, just as Hawks descended down next to him. Bright red wings stretched open, looking about ready to engulf the younger man, as he looked over him with critical eyes and an easy smile. Around them, a few stray feathers fell down.

"All good?" he asked, his voice low.

"I'm leaving," Deku repeated himself

"But why?!" Nishiya shouted back.

The young man was silent, and when Nishiya thought that he was being ignored, he finally answered.

"Because if someone came into my house like this, I'd kill them."

There was a brief silence, before he turned to walk down the stairs.

"Yo, bossman, what gives?" Twice asked as he appeared in front of them. "This place is a fucking goldmine. // I'll kill for these supplies."

Deku walked past him, and Twice looked from the boxes in his hand and then Deku.

"Aw, come on, really? Deku, please?"

There was a brief silence before Deku turned on his heel. He walked right up to the blond.

"...Are you coming with me?"

Twice grimaced, even though his mask, they could see it.

"Aw, that's cheap. // You know you're the only one for me, babe.”

Deku left, and Twice looked mournfully at the boxes in his hands before placing them down. He quickly followed the other man out.

### **Slice & “Good Jobs”**

“Well, they won’t know when they do well if you don’t ever tell them, right?”

Deku paused, the thought rolling in his head. He looked at her and nodded.

“No,” he agreed, “They wouldn’t.”

### **“Good work”**

On their way back, the excitement at such a successful trip was mitigated by their own physical exhaustion. Once they got used to it, they’d bring out the wagons to help move things, but as it was, they were still struggling with the traveling aspect.

Deku understood though, because they haven’t showered but have been fighting. The smell of rotting flesh was rougher in places that they have never been to. They had volunteered to leave the comforts of the complex, the hot baths, electricity, delicious food, nice beds, clean clothes, and friends for this. No matter how willing and ready for it, doing it was another matter.

Training their body was no easy feat, especially when people were still scared of leaving the complex area to go out on runs and the likes. He knows that they finally made a gym of some sorts, but it wasn’t the same as being out, surrounded by the remains of society, choking on the smell of death on every corner. Most of them avoided combat altogether, courtesy of Deku and the scout team, but it was draining. He’s never had to guard a group larger than six.

Watching their pace, however, Deku stood against the decision to push Tokyo to next year. He had that nagging feeling that this wasn’t something he could push off for long, so he won’t. And instead, he would work on making sure the path there would be cleaned up. As it was, he was still pretty happy that no one was injured, even if the mood was a little low. He was really, really glad.

Everyone was starting to make steps to become stronger. They were willing to step out of their comfort dream and confront their fears. Looking at them, he felt relieved.

He needed to pull himself together and work harder. He won’t disappoint them. He’ll become stronger.

“...We’re almost home,” he spoke up suddenly. Stopping at the intersection, he turned to see the sweaty and tired expressions on everyone’s face turn into something a little surprised. He looked down at the ground, and promptly forgot the next thing he wanted to say. However, he wasn’t moving until he remembered, so he thought really, really hard, unaware at the way he was being stared at. Finally, the words returned to him, and even less confidently, he said, “Let’s finish strong.”

He turned back to lead the way back, steps a little hurried, and flinched when he heard them start shouting.

“Ohhhhh my god.”

“My heart, oh my god my heart-”

As they made it back into their home, the wild look in their eyes had the other occupants leaning away from them. As they were going through their usual routine, however, Deku watched as Yamada rolled his shoulders after finally unpacking.

He didn’t think much of it, but he had always been so impressed with the Former Pro’s ethic and big smile. He often found himself drawing strength from it himself, and before he understood what he was doing, he approached him.

“Heyya, little Listener,” Yamada greeted him with a big grin, “What’s up?”

Mina’s words often lingered in his head, and now that he had found his voice again, he hoped that this was okay. No, even if this wasn’t okay and unacceptable, he still wanted to try. He still wanted to get better and stronger every day. He wanted, more than anything, to properly convey to everyone in his life that he’s grateful and so incredibly happy every single day.

He had more of a life now than he did before the world ended, and he had the people around him to thank for that.

He pulled his helmet off, tucking it under his arm and maybe he shouldn’t have done it since his hair was probably a mess, but he figured that it was important that they could see his eyes now. He nodded at the man.

“Good work,” he said, trying to smile with a fraction of the radiance Yamada could. He leaned in, wrapping his arm awkwardly around the older man without touching him aside to give him a light pat on the shoulder.

He couldn’t quite meet his eyes, still too nervous and uncertain about himself to do something as bold as that, and left quickly.

In hindsight, he should have realized that there was something weird going on. As it was, he had escaped right up to his apartment complex, giving a wave to Kouta before headed in, and then he changed out of his clothes into something that wasn’t drenched in disinfect. He still hadn’t kicked the habit of keeping almost all of his padding and several weapons on him, even if he knew that several others were keeping their eye on the perimeter and Aiba was keeping a close eye on the security.

He trusted them, he really did. It just… He felt so naked without it.

He took a very quick shower, scrubbing off the smell of blood and careful around his new bruises. He checked for the rest of his injuries, pleased that they were minimal for once. He knew, in his head, that he should eat dinner and then go to sleep, but his body was accustomed to not eating by this point.

So he sat down on the couch for a break, and promptly fell asleep.

When he woke up, the door was being rattled and he rubbed at his eyes. Kouta came in, chirping a quiet, “I’m back.”

The words were endlessly nostalgic, and Deku replied back, “Welcome back,” and smiled at the feeling of the words in his mouth.

“Evening, Deku!” the happy chirp from Hawks came and Deku’s smile fell.

“...Hawks-san,” he said, a lot less enthused than he meant to show.

“Keigo is fine,” the blond replied, clearly unbothered. “You didn’t show for dinner. So I figured I’d tag along with Kouta to bring it to you instead,” he beamed back at him, and Deku narrowed his eyes at the combined radiance of the former Number Three and the young boy next to him.

“...Thank you,” he said, even though he wasn’t hungry. A little lie wouldn’t be bad.

They settled in quickly. And Deku salvated a little at the smell of the fried rice. He ate slowly, making sure to chew everything before swallowing it, because he was a careful man and not because he was so tired that he was fighting to keep his eyes open.

“So, I brought this up for you,” Hawks repeated again.

Deku nodded.

“Me. With Kouta. We brought this up, for you, to eat.”

He nodded again, a little slower. Did Hawks think he didn’t hear him the first twenty times?

“...Thank you,” he repeated again. Was the man alright?

“So like,” Hawks sat a little closer, his smile big and his eyes expectant. He jerked his chin at him.

“...Is there something else?”

“C’mon, I heard you even gave Yamada pats. So?”

“...So?”

“Gee, you’re going to make me ask for it? Man, you’re a real slave driver.”

Deku tilted his head and Hawks shifted closer.

“C’mon, reward me. I brought you dinner.”

“Oh,” Deku said. “I have nothing to give you though?”

“Nah, the way you rewarded Yamada.”

“...Good job?” Deku said, gently patting the older man on the shoulder.

And god, if he thought he was radiant before, the sun had nothing on the face-splitting grin on the man’s face.

“Haha!” he laughed, long and loud and proud.

Deku didn’t get it then, content to be blinded by that gleam. If he could make someone that happy, he wondered if it was okay that he was alive.

### **Tokoyami & mido - trust**

Deku's hand came up to his ribs, as he took a slow, deep, breath. When he bent down to grab his bat, Tokoyami's hand came to grab his wrist.

He looked up, eyes wide as the birdman shook his head.

"I... It wasn't a mistake. I won't let anyone say that it was a mistake that you trusted us."

The young leader stared, as Tokoyami stepped back to pick the bat up instead.

"So please," he said. "Please let me look at your wounds. I'm sure that Shoji and Hawks will return victorious."

It was a high risk.

"If they don't return," Deku said quietly, "or they let the monster escape, how will you take responsibility?"

Briefly, Tokoyami wondered if that was how Deku viewed the word.

"They will return. The monster will be dead," Tokoyami said. "And you will be alive and well to greet them when they come back."

Green eyes stared at him, and for a moment, Tokoyami thought that he was going to be brushed off in favor of running into another fight. But maybe Deku was even more tired than he thought, because he sat down.

Tokoyami did his best not to show his surprise. Instead, he got to work on helping Deku out of his outer layers so that he could get to the gashes running across his chest and arm. Next to him, Dark Shadow whimpered and flinched at the gore, but didn't shy away from helping out.

-

"...Tokoyami-kun," Hawks called out to him a crooked grin on his face. "Heard about what you did for Deku. My thanks," he said.

"...Not at all," Tokoyami shook his head. "My apologies for taking back-up away from you."

The blond laughed back, a bright and vibrant sound that echoed in the hallway and chased the quiet away. "Nothing we couldn't handle." He gave a wide grin, "Well, anyways, thanks again," he said.

And with another wave, he left.

-

"Heard you didn't come to save me this time," Hawks said.

Deku tilted his head at him, "Did you need it?"

The blond grabbed a seat, sitting so that the back of the chair was at his front. His wings folded behind him. He propped his chin onto his fist and stared.

"No," he admitted, "But I'm surprised that you listened to Tokoyami-kun and trusted us. I thought for certain that you would forge on anyways," he made some wild gestures with his hands, looking to be as uncaring and indifferent to the entire ordeal. "I thought that you were actually dying when we found out that you didn't follow us."

Green eyes took him in for another moment before he looked at his lap.

"If there's something you want to say, then say it."

Hawks stared at him for a moment more before he looked down. His grin reduced down to a small smile as he cocked his eyebrow at Deku.

"...I just wanted to be the one you trusted," Hawks admitted. He pressed his hands together in front of his face and turned his head away. "I thought that you trusted me but when I came back, it was actually that you believed Tokoyami-kun, right? I... I was just a little annoyed by that."

He looked at the base leader, and meeting Deku's gaze, he gave a sheepish grin. He rubbed the back of his head as he looked to the ground.

"I thought that I was special to you, I guess."

There was a brief moment of silence, and where most poeple would have died of embaressment for saying something like that, Hawks just felt stupid. He almost hoped that the ground would split open and swallow him up.

Deku, who was selfless and doing his best everyday, shouldn't have been burdened with Hawks' meaningless feelings. The more he thought about this, the more regrets he had. The kid was still recovering from the thing that ripped his side out. There was no reason for him to be here. He's certain now that this was the reason why Enji kept away from the medical wing when Deku was recovering.

"Keigo," Deku's voice was deceivingly kind, and like the greedy fool he was, he fell for it. He looked to the young man and his confused stare. "Of course you are special to me."

The blond felt his chest constrict painfully.

"I... I haven't fully learned how to be a good leader yet, so I'm sorry for letting you feel that way."

Hawks lips fell to a frown as Deku dipped his head forward into a shallow bow.

"I'll work harder."

And Hawks wondered how the hell Deku came to this conclusion.

"Uh no," the blond said. "That's really not the problem."

Deku shook his head, his gaze certain. And Hawks had lost him.

## Air whips

### **Train station - pre**

“Where?”

Deku jolted out of his stupor where he was pouring over his notes. He stared at the person who broke his train of thought, and then tilted his head to ask his silent question.

Next to him, Miruko’s grin was nothing less of bloodthirsty.

“That’s the same look you had on your face when you went to Tokyo,” she said, eyes bright. “This time, it’s my turn. So where to, boss?”

Deku’s lip twitched as he stood up. It was like everyone all had different things to call him. He spread his hands onto the map and pointed to the area.

“There was a cave-in near the start of this whole thing,” he explained. He tapped the map with the bottom of his pen. "We’ll have to clear this area. I don't want another ambush."

“...The station, huh?” she said, her eyes bright like shimmering jewels. “We got no idea what the hell’s going to be down there either. Sounds great. When do you want to go?”

He tilted his head, “If it goes bad, it’ll take us days to clean it up…” unless they cause another cave-in. From the look on her face, he knew that she wouldn't like that.

Well, he didn't like it either. Monsters that have already experienced fighting humans were much stronger the second time around. He can’t think like that. He couldn’t afford to. Whatever they do, they had to get rid of everything then and there, and live with a new entrance in their neighborhood before they settled in for the winter.

“...Two weeks,” he decided on. “Rotating teams of three,” he muttered to himself. And then one extra for emergency and standby. A total of six teams that would be moving in rotation. At the same time, they can't neglect the other sides.

As soon as he’s certain that the farming plans were a success. They’ll prepare otherwise. And more importantly, he needed to decide on who he was going to take.

Six teams... Maybe of three each? Then it'll be about 18 people total moving in pairs.

-

“I’m coming too.”

Deku stared to where Hawks stood in front of him. He figured that this would happen, but he didn’t think that the man would chase him down as soon as the meeting ended. Couldn't he have waited until he got out of the room. As it was, Deku was awkwardly standing in the doorway, holding the door open.

“No.”

“Why not? If it’s rescue, speed, cave-ins, or taking on many enemies at once, I’m the best. No one is faster than me, and we,” he motioned at the two of them, “are comfortable with each other. Why aren’t I on this team? You’re nervous about this, so you should construct the best possible team, shouldn’t you?”

Deku took a deep breath, but he didn’t waver. He nodded his head, and met Hawks’ gaze evenly. This cemented it.

"You're right," he said, nodding his head. Good, he would have this prepared.

Hawks relaxed, his smile returning to his face.

“Please protect my treasure," Deku said, bowing his head.

There was a long silence before Hawks grabbed him by the front of his shirt and pushed him against the door that Deku was trying to pass through. His wings closed off the space around him, as though to make sure that Deku couldn't escape through the sides.

“If I go with you, there’s no need for back-up," he tried.

“Keigo, we’re not the only people here.”

He clicked his mouth shut, and the question formed in his eyes. His grip loosened, and he leaned in closer.

“Please,” Deku tried once more.

“If you’re uncertain then why are you pushing to leave?” Hawks asked, his voice low.

“Gut feeling.”

If it had been anyone else, Hawks would have laughed. If it had been anyone else, he would have probably flushed their thoughts and feelings and continued to push for real reasons or information.

But this wasn’t just anyone. This was Deku. That was enough.

He swallowed the bitter resentment back down. There was no room to be upset here. Deku had left this in his hands because he trusted him. He was being left behind because he was trusted to keep what was important to him safe. If it didn’t feel so bitter, he would have been honored.

Hawks took a deep breath through his nose. He stepped back, his wings folding behind him. He took a deep breath and managed to plaster a smile on his face.

“You better come back.”

Deku looked down, unable to even look at him and Hawks felt his heart quiver. If he couldn’t give a guarantee, or even try to make a promise, then it must be dangerous. It must be dangerous and it must scare him.

And Hawks would be left behind.

### **Air Whips**

Nightmares were uncommon to Deku. It was mainly because he rarely slept long enough to dream. These days, however, he was often badgered about sleeping and resting, and he did start to sleep a little more.

At first, he was too bone-weary exhausted to dream. He would close his eyes, and the next time he opened them, a few hours would have passed. And that was fine.

Since receiving a quirk, however, he started to dream. Sometimes, the shadowy-figures would recognize him and other times, he was intruding in their memories. He watched blue skies dotted with white clouds and soaring skyscrapers. He watched civilians scatter when their peaceful lives shattered by villains, and he watched hope ignite in their eyes when a hero appeared.

And other times, he felt something in his body change. He felt it as his predecessors' hand gripped his shoulder. He couldn't say anything back, but the man's eyes were hopeful. His grin was encouraging. He looked proud, as he stared at Deku.

Deku woke up to hearing Kouta's choked cry, a ringing pain shooting from his fingertips to his shoulder in both his arms. Ash coated his tongue and he choked on the taste. He rolled to his side, momentarily losing himself to vertigo as the entire world flipped upside-down and inside-out.

"D-Deku!"

He must really be out of it, if he didn't even notice that Kouta was next to him until he felt tiny hands grab his arm.

"A-Are you okay? I-I'll call Na-Natsuo-nii, p-please don't die."

The ringing quieted down into whispers at the back of his mind. He couldn't feel his arms, but he could feel them trembling against his leg.

"I'm fine," he said. "Could you get the door?"

Indeed, there was frantic banging on his apartment door. He should get it answered before his door came down. Still, from the way it was, it was clear that this quirk was out of his control. He needed to work on that ASAP. Holding things like this off often resulted in something worse than death.

He didn't want Kouta to be scared anymore.

He stood up and got ready to leave. Nothing important, in case he didn't come back. Strapping a fire hydrant to his thigh, he remembered to grab a bag and stuff it with some clothes for Kouta. He didn't need anything except the barest of essentials.

"We heard an explosion."

Aizawa was on duty then.

Deku stepped out, bat in hand and pulled a small bag over his shoulder.

"I'm stepping out," Deku explained. He passed the bag to the young man. "Kouta, go stay with Shouji."

"W-What?"

"Where are you going? Why now?" Aizawa asked, eyes narrowing. "We hear an explosion and now you're leaving? At least give us some time to prepare and a report on what happened."

Deku stared at Aizawa blankly. How long would he be gone? He didn't want to bring anything, since he couldn't really pick anything up. Just to be safe, he grabbed his usual first-aid and some water. If he meets survivors while he's out there, he'll reprioritize. Otherwise, the bare minimum will be enough.

"Helmet," he said aloud, turning back around to collect said equipment. He managed to get it on, but his hands were trembling. He barely managed to clip it on snugly.

"And you didn't even hear me," the older man sighed back.

Come to think of it, given who why he ended up in this situation, there was someone else that he should bring here. Then, he should leave at the end of that conversation.

"Hey, is everyone alright? I brought Natsuo!"

"I'm here!"

The three of them turned to where Toyomitsu, carrying Natsuo in his arms like a princess, came running up the staircase.

Deku looked to Kouta, "Did you get hurt?"

"I-I'm fine," Kouta said quietly. He gave Deku an uncertain look. "Are... you okay?"

Deku nodded. "My arms exploded, but it's fine."

There was a brief pause before the exclamations began.

### **Training Air Whips**

"Are... are you sure you're okay?"

Deku nodded as he took a seat in front of him.

"...This never happened to you?"

"Well, I only had the strength," Yagi replied back. "I suppose though, if you received one of their quirks, you will receive the rest of them."

The young man nodded, that made sense. And if Yagi didn't know what that entailed, then this was the extent of this conversation. At the very least, he could prepare himself a little better. Well, now that he knew this, he had to change his priorities. His hand came over his mouth, as he thought hard about what he would need to do.

First and foremost, he needed to make sure that he got this in control. He didn't want Kouta to wake up like that ever again. The kid rarely slept as it was.

He stood up and took his bat.

"Thank you," he said, sketching a bow.

"Ah, are you leaving?" Yagi asked.

The young man gave a curt nod. "I need to get this under control," he explained.

"W-What are you planning on doing?"

"There's some volatile areas out west," Deku explained. "I'll start there."

"Oh, uh, not alone right? Surely, you won't be going alone? If you are, I may not be much, but please allow me to accompany you..."

His voice trailed when Deku and he stepped out of the room, and was face-to-face with Enji.

"...Preparations are complete," the older man replied. "As soon as you're ready."

"I see. I-I suppose Enji-kun will be a great support," the blond behind him said, quietly.

"The retired should stay back," Enji said, eyes narrowed at the former number one.

Deku walked right by him, already on his way to leaving, and Enji scowled at him. It was almost a comical sight, given how much smaller and thinner Deku was as the bigger man pressed himself against the wall so he could leave. Right when he turned to leave, however, blue eyes flitted back to Yagi.

"We will return. So you should sort out whatever it is that you want to say before he returns."

Yagi’s eyes widened as Enji's face scrunched up in embarrassment. He turned away and quickly left afterwards. His steps echoing on with every heavy step.

"Thank you, Enji-kun. Please return safely. All of you."

"Tch," Enji clicked his tongue. "Of course we will," he said, like there was any other option.

-

Deku's eyes swept across the area. There were too many people here.

"I'm going to train," he tried to explain.

"I'm going to make sure you come back," Enji said.

"I'm going because you're going to inevitably land yourself in big shit," Hawks said with a blinding smile.

"I want to observe how you train," Spinner added, a little sheepishly.

"A nice job will be good!" Toyomitsu explained excitedly.

Chimera adjusted the straps on his rifle, “You need aerial support,” he said, blatantly ignoring Hawks.

"I'm tagging along because I'm bored!" Mirio explained cheerily.

"Someone here has to be responsible," Aizawa explained as he stood up, "And when you want something done, you should do it yourself, right?"

From the sharp look he gave Deku, it was clear that none of them were planning on budging. While he should be grateful and touched that they still had the capacity to care about someone, he really wished they would expend that energy to someone who actually deserved it. Well, he supposed this was better than Miruko and Rappa both tagging along too.

"...The dangerous thing that'll be out there won't be monsters," he said bluntly. "It'll be my quirk. I can't control it."

"That's fine, everyone here is good at evasion," Mirio explained. "I'm even bringing an extra pair of pants, just in case!"

"I'm carrying it!" Toyomitsu announced, turning around to show off his backpack.

Deku, sick of wasting time, turned to lead the group out. There was a locked office building, complete with their own parking deck that he had his eyes on. It had a few feet of space on either side of it, devoid of anything but abandoned cars.

He was going to clean it out later in the week, but plans moved up. The one good thing about the apocalypse is that there was always something else to fight.

### **Losing Arms**

Desperate was a feeling that Deku was familiar with. Sometimes, he felt like he only had two modes in his life and emotions, ‘desperate’ and ‘not as desperate’. It was so ingrained into him by this point in his life.

The familiar surge of panic and shock made his heart tremble as he watched the beast in front of him stand up. It was hideous and morbidly large, easily taking up an entire floor by itself. Looking to be a large lump of pale flesh, like a tumor that grew in extreme bulbous amounts, it was disturbing to see. It was made even worse as it had several thousand pore-like holes decorating its skin. In each of these holes, there was a headless human torso hanging limply on it. Some had two arms, complete with hands, others had four to eight arms lopsidedly placed on it.

When Deku fell through, and he made sure that the beast that dragged him down here died on impact, but he didn’t think that there would be something else in the basement of this building. Now, he felt stupid. Of course everything upstairs was vacant and quiet with the occasional straggler. They were running and avoiding this guy at all costs.

However, the hole that he came through brought sunlight down.

Slowly, all the torso bodies began to stand up. The arms that hung limply regained their vitality, and began to reach up towards the light. If that wasn’t disturbing enough, the arms began to elongate. However, instead of stretching out the forearms or upper arms, more than a hundred arms were being pulled out from the torso, each one connected to the next part by a joint.

His instincts screamed at him. He needed to run because this thing was Bad News.

Which was why Deku knew that he had to kill it then and there. Whatever happened, he could not allow it to escape up or out. He didn’t want those that were up there to see what their neighbors and other humans had become. He didn’t want them to feel the same fear that was choking him. This had to end here.

His arm was tingly from the fight earlier. His legs were shaking, from the fall or the fear, he wasn’t sure. He felt as tired as he always did, feeling like his nerves were starting to fray at the seams.

Using 70% of his full power, he picked up a rock and launched it at one of the arms, shattering it on impact. It tore off and fell to the ground. The arms were as fragile as a regular human’s arm then. He found strange comfort in that and barely had enough time to dodge when it flung one of the arms at him. It destroyed the cement and plaster of the building floor he had been standing on.

As he saw that, another hand came swinging at him, and this time, nicked him over his head. The arm was like a whip, and Deku forced himself to relax his muscles before he broke them trying to fight the force of the arm. The arms may not be fast, but there were literal hundreds of them.

So yeah, Deku was desperate. If he was going to die, he needed to kill this first.

A searing pain tore through his arms at that second. That insistent voice that had been haunting him since he returned from Tokyo spoke again. His arms felt like something was trying to tear through his skin, muscle and bone in an effort to come out.

And a black mass of something he’d never seen before, but felt incredibly familiar, burst from his arm to grab the arms that were coming for him. Even though it was a completely different experience for him, he already, instinctively, seemed to know.

These were his air-whips now.

-

Deku was truly and honestly grateful that he was alone. If, after losing control over this quirk, hard resulted in someone getting hurt, he would have killed himself in his guilt.

However, his inexperience and naivety made a terrifying connection to reality, as his negligence resulted in the absolute destruction of the floor above him.

The remains of the ceiling came crashing down, and it destroyed his best efforts to keep conscious.

-

Someone was calling for him.

“Deku!”

Deku blinked slowly. Did he pass out?

“Deku, you fuck! Answer!”

He turned his head to the side, pain shooting down his body like electric currents. The frantic yelling sounded from his walkie, and through the blanket of pain muffling his senses, felt a little warm at the thought that someone cared. He should let them know that he was fine.

A cold realization pricked through the fuzzy feelings, and he felt his focus come to point. The bastard that he was fighting… Where was it? He really, really hoped it was dead. However, he couldn’t see around the demolished parts of the building around him. He needed to get up. He needed to figure out why they were so panicked. He tried to push himself up, and jolted at the sudden influx of pain that lit fire to his body. Eyes dropped to where a pipe was sticking out of his thigh, pinning him down like an insect on display.

Lucky, he realized. He was really, really fucking lucky. An entire building came crashing down around him, but he wasn’t in mortal danger. He would have died, but instead, he only had a flesh wound and an awful headache.

Closing his eyes, he took a slow breath in. A dull pain stretched across his back, and he wondered how badly he landed. What a mess. He couldn’t even twitch his fingers, how was he going to pull a pipe out of his leg? A terrible combination of exhaustion and pain laced through his body, which was normally fine. Deku was excellent at persevering through, no matter how broken or tired his body was.

But his body wouldn’t respond. Normally, he could twitch them and force them.

He wanted to grab his wallkie and let everyone know that he was fine and would be joining back up with them within the hour. However, with his arm the way it was, he had to check if they were still attached. He couldn't feel either of them, but they were attached. Okay, so this wasn't awful.

Suddenly, a shadow loomed over him and he looked up.

...It never failed to amaze him how quickly he could get surrounded. Or rather, he might have been knocked out much longer than he thought. This would be his luck. However, if they were coming for him, did that mean that everyone else he came with was also being attacked?

Unforgivable.

When the first one dropped down on him, he barely had enough time to brace himself. It was clear that these were the remaining beasts that they hadn’t caught yet. Their sides were concaved in, and he imagined that he must have looked like easy prey to consume.

The first attack was harsh. It must have been human at one point, but it hardly looked like one anymore. It had four long and lanky arms, one pair connected to each shoulder. Despite how thin its legs looked, it moved fast but with little elegance, as though it poured everything into speed and nothing else. As a result, it crashed into him and its body flailed, hitting the pipe in his leg. He gritted his teeth as white-hot pain flashed across his vision. He jammed his other knee into it’s head, breathing through his nose as the pipe shifted again.

Well, whatever, he just barely managed to throw the first one off of him. They were lighter than they looked. He supposed that’s why they worked together, and why they nearly flew when they ran. Another dropped on top of him, nearly breaking his neck at the awkward angle it dropped right on his helmet. He gave a hiss, and tucked his chin and slammed back onto the ground. It worked as well as he could hope, and the thing rolled to the side with a squeal.

And while worrying about them as they came, he was unprepared for four to attack him at once.

One dropped on his head, again, but learning from the one before it, grabbed his arms and dug its knee into Deku’s back. His helmet was immediately pinned against the ground, and he was bent over his good leg. It yanked his arms behind him, but he couldn’t feel it, even though he heard one of his shoulders pop. With his body twisted and stuck underneath the weight of three monsters, it pulled relentlessly on his pierced leg.

Feeling as though his head was filled with cotton, choking on the pain that wrapped around his neck like a noose, Deku finally managed to get some feeling in his fingers. They twitched, he was sure of it, and he took a few, slow breaths.

Air whips, from what limited amount he managed to use before he lost total control over it, came from his forearms. Perhaps, it didn’t matter if his arms were broken or not.

And then, something wet slid across his thigh. He froze before he came to that sinking realization that something was slurping up the blood on his thigh. His fear manifested into something cold before white-hot pain seared right through his focus when the pipe was torn out of him.

He didn’t scream, but the squeals of delight that sounded was deafening. The pipe clattered elsewhere, and he saw two other of the four-arms drop down to slurp up his blood off of it.

How many of them were here? Were they just increasing? When they screamed, were they calling for their friends?

Wasn’t that good then? That meant that the others wouldn’t have to worry about it.

A shudder ran down his spine, and he felt his stomach roll when he felt a slimy appendage force its way into the hole the pipe left behind in his thigh. It sucked hard, and at the same time, something bit down on his arm.

He could hear the bones in his forearm crunching, but he couldn’t feel it. Or maybe his thigh hurt too much for him to feel anything else. Face down to the ground, he wondered if the blood dripping was his. Somewhere, he heard one of the four-arms screech before running past him.

What could have made it run like that? Why would it run so hard and fast when it was in the middle of sharing a meal with its companions? When he thought about it, it was almost insulting how slow he was at getting an answer.

Obviously, something was threatening them and their meal. Obviously, the only thing that was left in this area after a building fell were these guys and the humans that he brought. Obviously, these fourarms must think that the others, that his people, were a walking buffet.

His heart hardened.

The people that he came with were stupidly kind, if they were looking for him.

Thinking of the people who were waiting for him realigned his thoughts. With a deep breath, he recollected his thoughts. It was okay if he didn’t have arms anymore. It was okay if he destroyed his body. It was okay, as long as he could protect what was important to him.

As though agreeing, he managed to call out the air whips again. It was just as wild as before, but that was fine. He’ll kill each and every single one of these before they ever touch one of his.

If they wanted his arm, that was fine.

He yanked one of his arms out of the jaws. His forearm and hand detached from his elbow and he managed to swing the other arm at it. The two monsters collided against each other with a whimper. The one on his back scrambled off when the airwhips lashed out of his remaining forearm. It smacked it across its head, snapping the neck in an instant.

In exchange, he’ll take their lives.

-

Deku leaned against the broken piece of rock, too tired to do anything else. He wanted to just close his eyes and sleep for a while, but he knew better. He should get off his lazy ass and finish up their patrol and get back home. They wasted enough time here, after all.

He got up to his legs, unsteady like a newborn fawn. He took a slow breath, and tried to recenter himself. He lost a lot of blood for no reason this time, didn't he? His arm was missing, elbow down. Since it was bitten off, it probably wasn't likely for him to get it back.

Unless...

He pulled his knife out.

He had been meaning to try this for a while now. This was a good opportunity.

Taking a deep breath, he broke the bone in his upper arm. Everything that wasn't connected immediately slid out. Uncaring about how it plopped down in a small puddle of his own blood, he took the knife to the area around it and hacked off what he could.

If he lost elbow-down to a bite, and they couldn't get it back. What if he lost shoulder-down due to himself? Could they work with this?

Well, he wasted enough time here. He stumbled to his back, what remained of it, and tried to apply some basic first-aid. By that, he meant that he burned what he couldn't stop the bleeding of and taped it down with duct tape instead.

Afterwards, he managed to pull the monsters that ambushed him onto the massive one he fell with before he suddenly realized that he had nothing to set them on fire with. His flint was all wet and slick with his blood, his lighters shattered during the fall, and he didn't bring any of the heavy duty stuff since he thought he'd be out patrolling not exterminating.

...So be it. He'll find his companions first instead.

-

Unable to hold anything else, he managed to pull himself through the area and to the staircase. Walking was... hard. Even though the bleeding was cauterized, the throbbing pain echoed through his entire body.

Losing an arm was as painful as he thought it would be, but he was unprepared for how much it ruined his balance. It was times like this that he really missed his fire hydrant. It would have helped offset the weight, but not having an arm was really inconvenient.

Deku wasn't the type to hope for much, but it would be nice if this was something Overhaul could fix up for him. Otherwise... well, he supposed that he'll figure it out when that happens. Regardless of their verdict, he would be returning. Killing something as big as this usually meant that he ruined the power balance in the area. All sorts of monsters will be crawling out. This place will have to take priority for the next few days.

Shit. And he didn't really have control over his quirk. He had a better idea but one of his arms were gone now so he didn't know if it was a good idea. The feel of his arms splitting open was caused by his quirk, but it hurt just as much as having his arm torn off. It was a strange place to be.

As he got through the flight of stairs, he found a red feather sticking to the wall.

A smile came onto his face as he grabbed it and pressed it against his lips. His breath tickled the vane, like how the breeze ran through a field.

"Keigo, bring Enji."

Within a moment the hall next to him burst down and Enji was there. A flutter came with a gust of wind, and Hawks was standing next to him.

"Deku, are you-"

"This was where you-"

Both of them stopped, no doubt taking in his injuries.

Deku pointed at the doorway he came from, "Burn," he said.

"We need to get you back to base, stat," Enji said. "I'll take care of the fire. Hawks-"

"I'm on it," the blond said, walking up to Deku. His expression turned pinched, "How are you even standing right now?"

Deku leaned against the wall, and shook his head when the blond came closer enough to touch him. He took his only hand and placed it on his extended one.

"I... got lazy," he said. "Didn't check perimeter."

For a brief second, it almost felt like Deku would fight that so that he could keep fighting. They would have to knock him out and take him away, but it wasn't going to be easy. Even though Enji and Hawks would have no problem taking him in, Deku was not the kind of guy who would go down easily. Case and point, he was missing an arm and still prioritized finding someone to incinerate the monsters.

"We will handle that," Enji said, voice firm and certain. "The injured should cooperate."

"...Alright," Deku said, nodding his head. "Thank you."

And then he pitched to the side. Hawks jerked forward, managing to catch him before he hit the ground. Deku didn't whimper or cry out, but his breathing hitched just for a second. His forehead landed on Hawks' shoulder. The blond's arms wrapped around his chest, keeping him upright.

"Sorry," Deku whispered. "Slipped."

He placed his hand on his shoulder, and tried to stand, but his hand slipped and Hawks swept him up into his arms instead.

"Nothing to worry about," Hawks murmured quietly, "We got it from here."

"...Thank you," Deku said, so quietly that Hawks could have misheard him. Behind them, Enji updated their group on their current position, while informing the base that they were returning with a fatal injury.

-

“...He killed… all of those?”

“Ah, you shouldn’t look…” Toyomitsu tried to warn Mirio, but it was far too late.

The blond stared at the mess of mangled bodies, and the huge monster with human arms coming out of pores on the ground. It nearly covered the entire ground, and the resulting mess of smoke coming out of it was thick and pungent.

“...Yeah,” Toyomitsu said, “C’mon, the least we can do is finish up the patrol.”

"Yes, sir!"

The least he could do... the words stung him more than he would like to admit. However, the former heroes around him looked just as upset. He imagined that it was especially bitter.

Eventually, Usaigiyama, Tenya, and Sakamata joined them to provide assistance.

### **Post-Torn Arm**

“It’s… fully healed.”

Deku flexed his hands into a fist and then opened them up. Somewhere in his heart, he had figured that he would have to live without his right arm for the rest of his life. At least this way, he’ll be able to protect what’s important to him just a little bit longer. As best as he could while still being seated, he turned to the older man and gave him a small bow.

“Thank you-”

“Of course,” Overhaul said, cutting him off. His back was to him as he removed his gloves by the counter as he continued, “I can fix you up for anything that wasn’t made by those monsters.”

And just like that, the temperature in the room dropped. Deku’s new and functioning arm came up to his elbow, there the flesh was still mangled and he still couldn’t feel anything in it. Hopefully, it was a numbing agent and not a prelude to another problem.

“So, perhaps you could now tell me how you lost it in the first place.”

Deku would, undoubtedly, take to the grave what he knew for certain now. Chisaki’s Overhaul can fully heal any injuries not made from monsters. So, if something had chomped down on his fingers, he could get his arm back as long as he was the one to lop it off hand-down. It was okay that he lost a little, because if he could cut off a little more, then Chisaki could Overhaul the rest back. It was good to know, but not something he would ever say. Injuries should be avoided at all costs, and tiring out Chisaki was never good, just in case something else should be prioritized.

But. Just in case. They had that.

He made a fist with his hand and then opened it again.

“I got stuck. So I-”

“Tore off your own arm? Didn’t you go in with a whole team? What happened to them? Are they accessories or something?” Chisaki’s questions went rapid fire, and even though he looked completely unaffected by this, his words and tone made Deku feel otherwise. Gold eyes, a storm of melted gold, narrowed as he turned around to pin him with a harsh, “Do you even feel pain?”

Enough pain to throw up, Deku kept to himself.

“It was faster,” he replied back. At the moment, it was an incredibly calculated move. After all, if he had been attacked and pinned down, then the others might also be attacked as well. Instead of being a burden, he should be an asset.

“Immense strength, almost on par with All Might himself,” Chisaki sighed, “Yet you couldn’t punch what was around your am instead? You had to amputate yourself?”

It sounded so bad when Chisaki said it like that, but without anything to say otherwise, Deku nodded back. It could have been a fluke. There could be another, underlying reason why his arm could heal back. So he kept to himself that it was bitten off and that he cut off a chunk of it. He didn’t want to say it until he was certain.

“One day, you’re not going to recover,” the older man continued, coming up to take the seat next to his bedside. “This might all heal this time,” he said, motioning at his broken elbow, “but that might not always be the case.”

“Not today,” Deku replied back. As long as he breathed, as long as he could move, he'll keep fighting.

“You idiot,” Chisaki said, swatting him over the head with his gloves. Deku blinked, surprised because the hit didn’t hurt, and the man looked so exasperated. “This is when you ask me to stay, and I remind you that I’ll never leave.”

“Why would I do that?” the young man tilted his head, confused at the notion.

“Because you always, foolishly might I add, take responsibility for the lives you saved,” Chisaki explained, his golden eyes warm like the evening sun, “and it appears that I’ve spent too much time with you.” He pulled his mask down so that it bunched under his chin, showing the smile that tugged on his lips, “Since I’ve become a fool, too.”

Green eyes blinked at him for a few moments, confused and shocked because Chisaki could not possibly mean what he thought he did. Words frequently had a double meaning, so wasn’t it possible that this was also one of those instances?

But Chisaki lifted his casted arm up, bringing his lips to whisper the next words against Deku’s knuckles.

“If you would like, I will take responsibility for the life I saved. As long as you return to me, I will prove that to you as many times as you would like.”

He pressed the back of Deku’s bandaged hand against his forehead.

“Welcome back, Deku.”

The young leader had faced, by this point, a large array of bodily mutilation and painful moments. Still, without fail, the hardest thing for him to face was the unbridled and honest kindness that was given to him. His eyes watered, heating up his entire face.

Before, he would have closed his heart because he knew he didn’t deserve it.

These days, he wanted to be worthy of it. He wanted to be a part of the future everyone else saw.

“...Kai,” he said quietly, “...I’ll put myself in your care.”

Chisaki lifted his head, his eyes shining brilliantly, and this time, Deku didn’t turn away from it.

“Yes,” the man said, breathless in a way Deku’s never heard him. “I’ll serve you well.”

Naively, Deku thought he was the only one to change.

“How’s everyone else?” he asked quietly. “Are they back?”

The look on Chisaki’s face collapsed before he pulled something exasperated back on. He adjusted his facemask to cover the bottom of his face as he sat back down into the seat next to Deku’s bed.

“Yes, yes, they’re all back. We had some bruises and cuts, but you were the only one that required immediate medical attention to this degree,” the man said. “Todoroki-sensei’s taking care of the rest.”

Deku nodded slowly, and took a deep breath.

“Just take it easy for now…” Chisaki’s words trailed off when he noticed that Deku swung his legs over the side of the bed. He placed his hand on Deku’s shoulder to stop him where he was, “No, no. Just because your arms were a wreck does not mean that the rest of your body wasn’t a mess.”

The young man looked up at him, and pushed the hand off of his shoulder.

“And you’re just going to go, aren’t you?”

The older man sighed.

“You probably don’t feel anything since we pumped you with pain-killers, but you lost a lot of blood and your legs are bruised to hell. Do us all a favor and just rest up for the day.”

“...Reports,” Deku replied back quietly.

“I’ll get you some paper. But you’re not leaving this room,” the older man said. And then, he paused for a moment, as though in consideration, before he looked back at Deku. he gave a small, sly smile. His eyes glinted mischievously. “Well, unless you want to be carried out and around,” he said.

Deku grimaced but stayed put.

-

Natsuo was, understandably, livid.

However, Chisaki looked calm, as though all was well in the world.

Deku, while still in his room, was up and suiting up.

"What part of just 'sit back and rest' did you not hear?! Where the hell do you think you're going?!"

The young man flinched, green eyes wide in his surprise. It did nothing to deter Natsuo as the man stormed in with a large frown.

"...Patrol...?"

"Oh no, you're not," Natsuo snapped back. "Of course you can't! Your arm is in a sling! You shouldn't be standing! It hasn't even been a day!"

"But-"

"And it's not like we're desperate either! I promise that several of us are trustworthy enough to entrust the safety and security of everyone here for a few days," he said, like he didn't say this before and won't need to say it again.He heaved his next breath, eyes reddening from his mounting stress and frustration and grief that Deku was such a stranger to rest. "So please, lay back and relax."

Deku hesitated.

"I do trust you," he said quietly. "I don't want to make you upset, either. I..." he placed his hand over his chest as he looked to the ground. "I get restless."

They had come a long way from their stifling one-sided conversations, if Deku was finally explaining what he had been feeling. Strangely, neither of the other men in the room could find any feeling of victory.

"You can go tomorrow," Natsuo said quietly, "We'll set that up so you can. But today, please, just go and rest. Tonight, you don't have to fight."

Deku must have been more tired than they thought, because he did just that.

Natsuo placed his cool hand over his forehead, "Thought so. Fever."

Right, because Deku, in the right mind, would have never explained himself. It was only because he was delirious with a fever that he had said something like that. While the thought was annoying to think about for too long, it was also heartening. After all, some time ago, a delirious Deku would bull-headedly run into battle.

This was, in Natsuo's case, clearly a huge improvement.

For Deku, however, it was another reminder of how inadequate he was.

### **Best Jeanist & Mido - up and about**

"Deku? You're up already?"

Hakamata felt a rock settle in the pit of his stomach as he turned around to stare in this dread-drenched shock.

Because Deku, who had been constrained to bedrest in the infirmary for the last day, was suited up and making his last checks with his bat. Unlike normal, however, his helmet was missing. The bottom half of his face remained covered, and he had a pair of repurposed-ski goggles covering his eyes. When he realized that Hakamata was there, he pulled it up and to his forehead. The gesture was small, but it really stood out to Hakamata.

His calm exterior didn't falter.

"...I'm going to walk a little," Deku said. Which, for all they knew, could mean that he was going to raid on a nest of monsters by himself again and not be back for three days. Hakamata sincerely doubted that he was out and about by himself, but it was a shock to see that he was alone.

Well, he supposed that they had gotten extremely busy trying to clean up the mess that had occured for the past few days.

"...May I accompany you?" Hakamata asked, moving to stop so he stood next to him.

Somehow, he didn't think that saying things like "you should be resting" and "where's your guard" would work. It was better to just go and supervise himself. If the streak of red above was any indication, Hawks thought the same.

Deku nodded back, and Hakamata fell into step next to him. He was more willing to believe that he was actually just going out to stretch his legs since Deku's pace was atrociously slow.

Hakamata matched his pace, content to take a slow walk around the block. More importantly, he was just glad (and shocked) that they were alone to share this moment between each other.

"How is your arm?" he asked as they turned onto the main street.

"It works," Deku said.

"That's good," he said a smile on his face. He was glad to know that he would be okay. Something in his heart loosened. "Any word on when you'll be fully recovered?"

"I won't."

"...What?"

"This is as recovered as I get."

Hakamata's steps slowed to a stop.

"...What?"

The leader of their base stopped his steps. He looked to Hakamata and tilted his head, "Are you coming with me?"

"R-right," Hakamata started to move again.

There was a brief silence, the thoughts swimming in his head as he side-eyed Deku.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said, because someone should apologize. "I..."

"Why?"

Deku motioned for him to come forward, and the older man did just that. They stepped out into the place right in front of their courtyard...

"Oh? Deku! Hey there!"

"Hi Hakamata-san!"

...where several members of the base had gathered to play an impromptu game of soccer with a bright orange bouncy ball. It was clearly not planned, and they paused in the game to wave excitedly back. Deku raised his hand, and moved to the side. Hakamata followed, after waving off the others, and they made their way off to the side.

Deku looked up at Hakamata, his eyes bright in a way that couldn’t be obstructed, and he gave a curt nod.

"See?" he said quietly, "Nothing to be sorry about."

On occasion, the more Hakamata learned about Deku, the worst he felt.

"...Do you think that all's well as long as it ends well? That, all injuries are justifiable as long as everyone else lives?"

Green eyes found his.

"Aren't you the same?"

And yes, Hakamata thought to himself, he used to think like that too. Back when this whole thing started and no one knew if heroes were to be sacrificed or protected.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I... I don't want to be that person anymore. I don't want to live off of another person's sacrifice."

When he met Deku's eyes again, he wondered if the man could see that he was getting better. Not all wounds may heal, but this one was finally starting to close.

"If at all possible, I'd like to see the future with you."

He wished that he didn't look so shocked about the proclamation.

“Deku,” Hakamata said slowly, “I’m truly relieved that you are alive.” He turned to fully face the young man, “However, if you wish to live moreso than survive, and dsire to find joy in your health and good fortune, then I don’t think that’s a bad thing. No, that’s a lie, I think that’s a great thing.”

Reaching out to hold Deku’s shoulders, a firm grasp as though to ensure the young man wouldn’t slip away so easily, he revealed his truest thoughts.

“Deku, it’s alright to be happy. It’s okay to enjoy your successes and live in the moment.”

Green eyes stared back, and his jaw unhinged. Unable to hide his surprise, he stared blankly at the older man for a few minutes. His eyes started to water, and he dropped his gaze down. Biting down on his bottom lip, Hakamata ached.

### **BBQ**

"Ah, as expected, you're working, huh?"

Deku looked up from the textbooks he was reading through. At the door, holding a plate of cookies, two cups, and a pot with steam coming out of the sprout, was the former pro-hero Gang Orca stood.

"Do you mind if I join you?" he asked, motioning to the empty seat at the table.

Deku gave a curt nod.

"Thank you," he said. "Also, the Fuyumi-chan wanted me to share these with you."

He placed the tray down.

"...Do you mind if I move some of these?"

Green eyes widened, and he jerked to his feet. He reached out to grab the books and yank them from under where Sakamata was waiting. A hot flush crossed his face in embaressment. However, the movement was too fast, and he could feel the pain ricochet through his arm. He jerked backwards, his legs hitting the back of his chair when a hand suddenly grabbed him by the forearm.

It jerked him back forward and solidly on his feet. He closed his eyes and clenched his jaw shut tightly, willing the pain away. He rode out the wave of agony, and he took a slow breath.

"...Sorry," Sakamata muttered quietly. "I... I did not mean to... Are you okay? Should I call Natsuo?" Deku didn't trust himself to speak. He shook his head and slowly took his seat. With a slow breath, the pain became more manageable. Reading would help turn his focus into something else. That should help his focus.

"...I see."

The cup rested a little further then he expected. Deku looked to it and then the open books in front of him. He would have to stand to bring it closer to him, but he really didn't want to accidentally spill anything.

He looked back at the cup. The tea smelled good. The smell wafted through the room, filling the room with the relaxing smell of a tea that he didn't know. Still, it smelled pleasant, and he suddenly felt parched.

His eyes fell to the book. No, no, he needed to work more. Everyone else was working for their keep, so he should too.

"Here."

Sakamata pushed the book in front of him by just a few inches, making room for a steaming hot up of tea. With that, the older man sat back down with a book of his own, across the way from Deku.

What a kind man.

"...Thank you," Deku said, remembering his manners. He dipped his head a little.

"Anytime," Sakamata said. He poured himself a cup and started to munch on the snacks.

He took the drink into his hand. The cup was hot to the touch, and took a sip. Heat seeped down into his bones, chasing his exhaustion and fatigue away. He felt his heart settle. This cup embodied the kindness and strength of the people in this area. Even though he knew that it was arrogant to think so, he wondered if he had protected them. Somehow, his injuries didn't hurt as bad.

A polite knock came on the window, and Nejire flashed a grin at them.

"Deku? Sakamata-san?" she asked, poking her head in.

Deku's pen stopped scratching out some notes and he looked up to where the young girl walked around to poke her head in. Across from him, Sakamata nodded his head at her and closed his book.

"The hunting team really went above and beyond today. We're going to have bbq in the courtyard," she said excitedly. She rolled on her feet as a giddy smile appeared on her face.

"Oh ho? Impressive." Sakamata nodded. "Is there anything that I could help assit with?" he asked as he stood up.

"We're getting everything set up, I'm just going around letting everyone else know to come out." Deku flipped the page in his book, already tuning them out. Sakamata and Nejire exchanged an uncertain glance.

"Deku, would... you like to come as well? It'll be really delicious! The vegetables are super fresh and ripe, and there is more than enough meat to go around!" the woman said brightly.

"Deku, a break is good," Sakamata agreed.

The leader of their base sribbled something down and continued reading. No amount of pestering was going to get to him now. If they were to physically get in his way, he'll leave and disappear for the rest of the day instead.

"Right," she said. Her smile was frozen on her face as she nodded slowly. "Okay. Then I... I guess I'll just be going then."

Desperately, she looked back at Sakamata, who nodded back at her. She bit down on her lip, clearly regreting that there was nothing more she could do. After another moment, she left.

Sakamata stared at Deku for a moment longer.

"Deku," he spoke cautiously. The young man looked up at him briefly and placed his pen down. "Do you... dislike large gatherings?"

"...No," he said.

"Truly?"

"It makes... everyone happy," he said quietly.

"Does it make you happy?"

Deku blinked. He tilted his head and furrowed his brow.

Sakamata stared at him for a long moment and waited.

"...Is that okay?"

Deku closed his hands into a tight fist.

"Is it... really okay that I'm happy?"

Sakamata's eye widened, and Deku mistook his expression.

"Yes," he said quietly. "That's what I thought too."

The older man quickly understood the problem and he shook his head. "...Whatever you just thought, it's wrong. It's alright to be happy. There is nothing wrong with finding pride in your work."

They had already wasted far too much time to allow this to continue.

"Deku, I hope you will consider joinging us for dinner, even if it's just for a moment. This is something that we have all worked to earn."

Deku wasn't a strong person. He couldn't find any wods, nor the courage to say them. He gave a curt nod and returned to his reading.

However, he was grateful for these large events. It felt like a giant breath of relief. Sitting back in the seat, he looked up to the monitors. He would have never guessed that they would have the ability to monitor the surrounding areas like this.

One of the monitors caught the center of the bbq event going on in the courtyard. Watching them, he felt immense relief again. In another, he caught Tobita and Brava eating on a bench together.

Good, it wasn't good to work all the time. He was grateful for all the hard work that every single person put into this area. He hoped that this would help alleviate the burden of having someone as worthless as him as their leader, even if it was just for a moment.

"Knock, knock!"

He jerked as the door swung open. Holding a tray of food in his hands with a wide grin on his face, Hawks pushed into the room with his feathers propping the door open.

"Special delivery for our resident workaholic," he said brightly. "I didn't see you at the dinner, but I ran into Brava. Figured that you'd be up here, hungry and lonely."

Indeed, the smell of food was mouthwatering. Deku almost started to salivate a little.

"C'mon, don't fight me and help me finish this."

Deku, who wouldn't hesitate to jump off a four-story building to get into a fight to help another person, hesitated from the preoffered food.

But it was fine, Hawks was all about speed, but that didn't mean he didn't have patience. He leaned back into the extra seat and looked up at the monitor. Deku would move in his own time. There was no need for him to push him.

He reached out to grab one of the kabob sticks to start eating. Looking across the monitors, he wished that Deku could be out there, eating and enjoying the ressence of the people that he helped, but he supposed that baby steps would be better.

He moved the kabob over his lips, hopeful that it was enough to cover the giant grin on his face when Deku reached over to start eating himself.

From the corner of his eyes, he watched as his cheeks buldged with the food. His eyes shined brightly, and Hawks couldn't believe that he wasn't planning on eating. The sauce smeared across his lips, making them glisten under the light of the monitors.

Hawks bit down on his food, the savory taste of meat and crunch of vegetables filling his mouth. They really outdid themsevles this time. While there were rarely any complaints about the food, this really blew it out of the park. Impressive.

"It's good," Hawks said, blowing on the next bite.

"Yes," Deku agreed, huffing quietly.

"I really like the sauce they use."

"Me too. It's sweet and tangy, and the aftertaste is savory. The meat is so tender and it really soaked up the sauce. The vegetables are crunchy but the grill marks are really..." he trailed off, as Hawks' surprised eyes met his.

His cheeks burned bright red, and Hawks grinned.

"It's super delicious!" he agreed.

The embarrassed flush receded just a little, a grateful smile on his face, and Hawks hoped that this moment could last for eternity.

Instead, it ended in the next sentence as the door slammed open.

"Deku, are you busy?"

There was Nine.

Hawks grimaced. Nine narrowed his eyes. Deku wiped his mouth with a napkin.

"I see that you're not," Nine said, staring pointedly at Hawks before turning his attention to their base leader. "Would you like to dine with me tonight?"

"No, I'm on duty."

"Hawks-san could do that too," he explained. "Can't you?"

"Ah, but it'll get so boring if I'm here alone," Hawks said, the smile on his face didn't come to his eyes. "I don't know... But luckily, Deku and I are already eating dinner so I guess your kindness could be used for someone else, hm?"

"...Your reputation exceeds you, Fastest."

"To think I'd get a compliment from you, today really is my lucky day."

Potentially, this was gearing up to break out into a fight of epic proportions. At another time, in another place, they would already be fighting to the bitter ends. Here, however, the words and the tension dissipated the instant Deku stood up. His eyes were trained on one of the monitors until he left.

Nine and Hawks stared at each other. Uncomfortable and unhappy.

"I'll go keep an eye on him-"

"Oh! Deku-shounen, why are you up here?" At once both Hawks and Nine closed their eyes and sighed.

"Go enjoy the party," Nine said to the blond. "I'll keep an eye on things here."

Hawks' eyes were downright hostile, but his smile didn't fade. He leaned back into his seat and turned to stare at the monitors. "Maa, Deku pretty much left it to me, you know?"

"You're right," Nine nodded back, making alarm bells ring loudly in Hawks' head. He tilted his head,

"I'll just go patrol with him instead. It looked like something caught his eye. after all."

He turned on his heel to leave.

### **Shouto + Deku - flower-viewing**

Sometimes, Deku got that feeling in the pit of his stomach. He didn't know how to explain it, but it was a sobering feeling. It made him seek out their flower garden, sit down and watch how the sunlight hit the petals. He'd watch the shine and shimmer for several hours on end, before he left.

If there could be one last memory to accompany him, he would like it to be this field of flowers, dancing with the wind and shining under the light.

"Here."

Suddenly, shade came above his head. He looked up, eyes wide as Todoroki Shouto stood above him, an umbrella in his hand to filter out some of the sunlight.

"Being under direct sunlight for a long time is bad for you," he said as explanation.

"I see," Deku lifted his hand, ready to take the umbrella from him, and Shouto lifted his hand up so that he couldn't. Green eyes blinked, confused.

"I got it."

"I can..."

"I got it."

Shouto kept his eyes forward, his back ramrod straight, and for a moment Deku wondered if the young man thought that they were at some military academy of some sort. Because they weren't. Deku would never want that for them, but somehow felt like if he said something, the man wouldn't even pretend that he heard.

With a sigh, Deku looked back to the sprawling spread of colors blurring in front of him.

"I want to protect this," Shouto suddenly said.

That pit in Deku's stomach grew a little darker, grew a little bigger.

"But right now, this is the best I can do."

His tone was even, his features blank, but his eyes were brighter than any flower. They blazed, a certain promise ignited in heterochromatic, and Deku felt like he could choke on his jealousy.

He wanted to know what Shouto was looking at, what he was looking for, that he could look so unflinchingly at it. What was so beautiful, so enchanting, that he could focus on it and move forward? Deku wanted to know. If he did know, would it be easier to get out of bed everyday? He didn't know.

He felt like there was something heavy, flexible like a blanket and immovable like concrete, laying across his chest. It pressed down even more with every exhale, and he prayed that it would crush his chest and organs and bones sooner because feeling his body ache and pulsate underneath the weight was unbearable-

Of course it wouldn't. The world will take their payment from his body, squeeze out every last drop, wring him of any foolish hopes, and suck him dry of his dreams. He understood that, down to his core.

With a deep breath, he stood up.

"One day," Deku said, "I won't return here. When that day comes," he turned to Shouto, a gentle smile on his face because they will be okay. With or without him. "You don't have to either."

The weight didn't shift in the slightest. His selfish desire to shove this weight on someone else didn't work. He wasn't expecting it to, to begin with, and he would never wish upon anyone.

He should leave.

A hand grabbed his wrist.

"We will return. We will all return back. And I will bring you an umbrella so you can enjoy flower-viewing at any time, regardless of the weather."

Deku, momentarily blinded by the earnest shine in Shouto's eyes, felt like he was a child finding a hero for the first time. Lost in that radiance, he nodded, and for just a split second, felt weightless.

Hope, he realized, Shouto looked out to the same flower garden Deku did and saw hope.

The humbling realization was completely wrong, but Deku didn't know that.

-

Shouto was on his way to... actually, he didn't remember what. He just saw, from the corner of his eyes, a small speck of a darker shade sat at the edge of the garden. He turned right back around, abandoning all of his plans.

Everyone has their own... thing that they do before or after patrol. Some before, some after. It could be a habitual ritual, like cleaning their own weapon and equipment a hundred more times. Others pig out, perhaps spend more time with others, some go do target practice, and some train. Shouto was the type to train. He'd run through his katas, breathing deeply and hyper-focused on an enemy that wasn't real.

For the most part, everyone let each other be. It was something that they all did, that they all had to do, and as long as no one got seriously injured or destroyed things, no one cared. Everyone knew themselves well enough to know what to do, and everyone else left them alone.

But Deku.

Deku was always alone. He was never not alone. Even when he stood next to someone, he was alone. Alone, alone, alone.

To the point that Shouto got sick of it.

He grabbed an umbrella, and made his way down to the garden. The young man sat down at the edge of the garden, right on the ground. There was a bench that they put out, for this reason, but here they were. The base leader had a jacket over his shoulders, his shoulders bare and bandages still pristine white over his chest and arms. There were several bandages stretched and taped down across his shoulder and neck, from a stray claw that came too close. Another inch, and it would have split open an artery, and Deku wouldn't be here.

Today, they were going to go and clean out the supplies in an apartment building. From their previous experiences, they will probably meet a survivor that did not want to be found, kill a few stray monsters, and spend a long time ransacking people's homes for supplies. It was going to be a long and grueling process.

Leading that would be Deku, regardless of the current state he's in.

Shouto tried to walk loudly so that he wouldn't alarm him as he came in.

He popped the umbrella open, and angled it to make sure that the sunlight beating down on Deku was minimal.

"Here."

Green eyes, peered up eyes wide because he was used to being alone. He was used to his undisturbed solace.

And Shouto hated that so, so, so much.

### **Man in his dreams**

And then, some random night, he met that man. The larger man with a clean head, a jaw like framed steel and a grin that was as warm as it was encouraging.

### **Cars**

Deku stared up at the garage building for a long moment.

"Something wrong?" Sakamata asked, stepping up next to him.

"I want it," the young man said. He sighed, rubbing the back of his head.

"Want... the building?"

Deku nodded slowly. He looked to the cars.

"I thought about scrapping them at first, but we might need the metal later," he explained. "So maybe we can store them somewhere so we can slowly strip them down. We can keep them in better condition than leaving them exposed to the elements." He rubbed the back of his head. "I've been trying to pull in a few cars at a time but..."

"But there aren't enough hours in the day for that, is there?"

Deku sighed, rolling his shoulders back. In his head, he ran through the numbers. They were waiting on one scout group to come back, and Chimera finally returned with his yesterday. It would be fine to dedicate the day to doing this. He could clear out the rest of the suburbs here. They can keep a few working cars to be out and about. With the roads the way they are, it wasn't likely that anyone would be using them. But it was better to play it safe.

First, he'll clean off the main roads. All the vehicles parked at a home will remain there unless they are in the way. Cars that are too old or unsuable will be scrapped immediately. Cars that are in relative good shape will be kept for them to use. Just in case, he would ike to have enough that, should everything go belly up, everyone will have an access point out but... But that wasn't feasible, was it?

He'll think harder on it when he gets back. This wasn't the place for that.

Sometimes, when he used Air Whips, his arms still trembled for hours afterwards. He doesn't know if it's lingering trauma or the likes.

### **S**