Warning: messy feelings

Disclaimer: I don’t own anything.

Summary: Demon Apocalypse AU. “While Bakugo was out closing the demon portal…” ...Midoriya Izuku isn’t a hero or anything, but accidentally becomes the leader of a human settlement.

A/N: sigh.

Pairing: ¯\\_(ツ)\_/¯

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## [Year 1: 9months]

### Can't be a hero

In hindsight, Midoriya Izuku was probably the last person that All Might got to rescue before the world ended, or started to end.

To think that by telling a 13 year old that a quirkless kid can’t be a hero would save him, but maybe it was because he knew that he couldn’t ever be a hero, he acted like this.

He’s not a hero. He doesn’t even have a quirk. As far as redeeming qualities, he’s down on that count too. He’s not smart or strong or fast or anything. He’s awkward at best and a stuttering mess at worst. These days, he thought that he was always at his worst.

### Stain & Doggo (1)

There was this crazy guy, Stain thinks, that has been diligently killing every walker he comes across.

He was small and slow, and from the way he throws his body into each of his swings with reckless abandon, Stain was certain that he was a young kid or a really dumb and small adult. It was hard to get a gauge on him since he was completely covered from head to toe in athletic clothing and various protective equipment from several different sports. Good try. But his actions would only lead to the same result, another Walker waiting to be turned.

Whatever, it kept majority of the Walkers’ in the area busy and away from him. So he went on his way.

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The fourth time he saw the stranger in a helmet, about two months since he had first seen him at all, he was holding a dog.

One of those bastards then.

Stain knows that, eventually, he’ll be starving and hungry enough to turn to hunting any of the numerous strays that wandered the streets, but he wants to get that desperate first. There was plenty of food, if you knew where to look, that is nearing their expiration date, and he wanted to get through first.

The dog was already dying, if its slow labored breathing and dripping blood was any indication. It would be kinder to just put it down. That bastard was probably marked by the other dogs in that pact now, and if Stain thought it was surprising that he lived this long to begin with, he was shocked beyond words when he saw him again, several weeks later.

Some dogs by his side, running around him, barking once or Twice, before running away. He gave them a little nod, and with his trusty bat on his shoulder, he keeps moving to take out more Walkers.

What?

### Chisaki - Unfamiliar

Honestly, Chisaki Kai felt more dead than alive. With every passing day, the filth in the world became worse and worse, and honestly, he’s more surprised that there is anything left at all to ruin. After a year of wandering and wondering, he gets careless.

And he and Kurono end up exhausted and fatigued, surrounded on all sides of Walkers and he doesn’t even care anymore. They’re both injured from a messy get-away from the first horde that found them. It’s hard to stand on his sprained ankle, and he was bleeding from the probably infected cut on his arm.

They hadn’t been bit yet. But he thinks that it’s a matter of time now.

He was too tired and hungry to even try to use his quirk, and there wasn’t much that Kurono could do either. He doesn't want to kill himself. He doesn’t want to commit suicide. He knows that would desecrate the last memory of the Boss, but he doesn’t want to be alive anymore.

His lab had been destroyed and abandoned. All his research to cure the Quirk epidemic was lost before it could even begin. Still, he had little Eri back at their temporary base and he thinks that killing her to send her back to her family would be a mercy.

But even if he died, he had no one to reunite with. He knows that he’ll probably just be dragged straight to hell. He doesn’t know if that’s preferably to the eternal state of purgatory this lifetime was.

It was made even worse because the idiots that followed him, still followed him, still stared at him with awe and expectations. The bastards truly believed that he would find a way to cure all of this. For a bunch of tools, they had some audacity to try and expect anything out of him.

Bullshit.

They’ve been on the run for too long. He’s too tired to think, and as his entire life seems to play in front of his eyes, he thinks that he’s going to die today. Next to him, Kurono must be coming to the same realization. But alas, he didn’t know what he was saying because he couldn’t hear him.

The exhaustion hit him suddenly, and he succumbed to the pain.

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When he woke up, the first thing he smelled was laundry detergent. It was such a wonderful and nostalgic smell. He doesn’t know how he made it to heaven, but he never wants to leave.

And then the pain sets in.

He hissed, and tried to sit up. He got about halfway there before the door opened and Kurono walked in. He stared at him, and Kurono stared back. He opened his mouth, closed it, and then his eyes started to water.

“Kai…” he whispered out quietly, “You’re… up?”

Chisaki stared at himself. He was patched up, and he can recognize Kurono’s work when he sees it. The man had patched him up? How? How did he get out of that position?

“We got saved,” Kurono explained. “Lemme get you some…” he rushed out and came back in a few seconds with two bottle waters, a bottle of pain medication, and a can of peaches. His hands were shaking as he dropped them onto Chisaki’s lap, and he apologized.

“...Where did you get these?”

“...After you… After you passed out, someone came and saved us. He killed every single last one of the Infected. Then, he carried you all the way here. We are currently at an apartment complex about four miles from the alleyway we were at. I haven’t seen him since, but he brought all this food, medicine, clean clothes to us,” the more he talked, the calmer he became. His report, as always, was short, to the point and simple.

“...You mean a survivor? A single survivor?”

“Yes.”

It sounded too good to be true. Had someone truly survived, after all this time, there had to be something wrong with him. There was just no feasible way for anyone to be alone and offer all of this to a bunch of strangers. And yet, Chisaki noticed with a critical eye that nothing had been tampered with.

“...This is cold.”

Kurono nodded, “At this apartment complex, there is running electricity and hot water.”

Despite himself, Chisaki straightened. Did that mean… they could take a hot shower? Or even a bath?

Kurono must have seen the desperate look in his eyes because he nodded again. “The guy who brought us here said we could take hot baths.”

The former yakuza boss felt his breath catch. Could they… really be clean again? Even washing with cold water felt like a waste of such a precious resource, he couldn’t imagine the thought of taking a hot shower after all this time. Their water heater broke on the second week of winter, and it wasn't like they could rely on their quirks...

“...You said you haven’t seen him since?”

His childhood friend hesitated, “No. He dropped us off, gave us supplies, and left.”

He then pulled out a single key out of his pocket.

“...You mean…”

Kurono nodded back, “I don’t know if he has any master keys, but I have the door bolted and barricaded. We are on the second floor, and all of the windows have already been boarded up.”

Chisaki stared at the supplies on his bed, and came to a decision.

He… wanted to figure this out.

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Chisaki met the ‘man’ that Kurno spoke of about three days after the incident. Both of them were almost back to full health, thanks to their good diet and plentiful rest.

There was an abundance of food in the apartment, and after a year of living frugally, it felt wrong to eat all of it. However, they found perishable food in the fridge, fruits and vegetables that they never thought they could see again.

They indulged on those. It would be a waste to let them spoil, after all.

But they otherwise lived minimally. Chisaki allowed himself one boiling hot shower, but got out quickly. It had felt so good, too good. He wanted to stay here forever.

More importantly he needed to stay on his guard. A place like this just couldn’t exist. It goes against everything every survivor stood for. People rarely helped others for nothing before the world ended, why would they change now that the world has fallen into disarray?

The sun is starting to dip into the horizon when he finally claps eyes onto the man.

With the way that Kurono described him, the first thought he had was that he was very short. He didn’t think that he had lost that much weight since the start of all of this, but he must have since this shrimp barely came up to his chest, but had apparently carried him the four miles and two flights of stairs with a bag of supplies.

He was in a baggy sweater and loose jeans. The sleeves at his wrist and ankles were tucked into his large gloves and bright red sneakers, and taped down with duct tape. He had an obnoxiously bright yellow backback on his back, a fucking fire hydrant at his side-duct taped to his thigh, but he doesn’t walk with a lean. It was something that he was clearly used to. He had two metal bats, one fitted snugly against his back, held by the straps of his backpack, and another in his hand.

He had a black full-face helmet, and his dark visor made it nearly impossible to see any facial features. His neck was completely covered, and with the way it seemed to tuck under the helmet, it was clear that he had himself completely bundled up.

All in all, his attire was clearly homemade, probably made from stealing various sporting goods and a generous amount of do-it-yourself kits.

“...Thank you for helping us out,” he said. “As well as sharing your supplies and resources.”

It was hard because there wasn’t much to go on. Without a face to look at or any obvious signs of body language to go off of, he might as well have been talking to a wall. As it was, he just kept talking.

“It means a lot to me that you came to save me and my friend Hari. Please, let us know if there is anything we can do to repay this debt to you.”

And of course, if the price was too high, he was certain that he could get rid of this man before he does anything unsavory to them. Kurono never mentioned a quirk, which led Chisaki to believe that this man was someone whose quirk wasn’t useful in combat, or someone whose quirk only worked on living beings and not the infected.It was a dangerous gamble, but Chisaki was feeling at the top of his game.

The man stared at him, or he assumed that he was staring at him, since the helmet was facing him head on, before he turned away and began to walk away.

“Hey!” Chisaki snapped out before he managed to stop himself. With all the tension and disparity that had been building for the last few days, weeks, months, his nerves had all been shot to hell and his temper was dangerously short.

It was made even worse because of the place they were at. It was everything his lab used to be, safe and clean. It was well-stocked with supplies that could easily last them a few months, especially if the other apartments were similar.

“...Do you… understand me?”

The helmet turned back to him and nodded.

“...Are you mute?” he asked.

Again, another jerk of a nod.

Chisaki took a deep breath.

“...Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help,” he said. “It’s the least we can do for you.”

The helmet shook left to right and he frowned.

“...We’re trying to settle a debt. Do you understand? You saved our lives, gave us clean clothes, sheets and hot water. You gave us medicine and food in no little amount. We are trying to repay that back to you,” he stressed back.

This time, the helmet just turned back to the staircase and walked up instead. Chisaki stood there in shock.

It would be another day and a half before they saw each other again.

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Kurono and he felt good enough to take a walk around the block. It was a little scary, a little worrying, because they didn’t know what to expect.

As it turns out, their expectations were for naught, because there was literally nothing.

For a moment, if they just ignored the bloodstains here and there, it was like it was just the two of them in the whole world. With nothing but the breeze blowing between them, they walked around the block without even seeing a body. After all this time, it was such a strange concept.

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"...We will come back with our friends," Chisaki said, something burning brightly in his eyes.

It was such a nostalgic sight, and looking at it, Kurono felt dazed. He had forgotten how bright those eyes could get.

"Thank you again," he said. "We will definitely repay this favor."

## [Year 1: Winter2Spring(Feb?)] - to be amended

### 9 Months Later…

Nine months was a long time.

### LOV

Deku finds a batch of survivors, surrounded and injured. From the way that they’re all barely conscious and still struggling, he’s certain that they aren’t infected.

He thought it was strange that he hadn’t seen any Walkers even though he was branching out of the residential area. His suspicions are confirmed when he sees a horde of them shuffling to a building.

He doesn’t really know what possessed him to go running at them. There was probably no way for some of them to survive, and in all honesty, some of them even looked just about ready to die. There were four men, one almost man, a young woman, and a lizard man. They were all in various stages of injury, but it was clear that they were unable to fight the oncoming hoard of Walkers. Their backs were to the wall, literally and figuratively, and several of them seemed to be bleeding out.

“Oh shit! Oh, shit! Guys, guys I think we’re going to die.”

Of the men, two of them were covering their faces with a mask. All of them were otherwise in t-shirts and jeans. It was clear to Deku at the sight of them that they must have all come from the same place. If they weren’t infected with those injuries, he’s certain that it means that someone else inflicted those injuries on to them. Someone else must have left them for dead here.

For all the times that he saw something like this, he’s finally close enough to make a difference. There were a group of 15 of them, with three more from down the street.

“Shut up, Twice-”

But, his eyes were drawn to one of the men in particular.

He had ashen-blue hair, and piercing red eyes. He looked like it was taking everything he had to lift his head. He didn’t look like he wanted to die. In fact, even if he died, he looked like he was going to go out with a bang.

Looking at him, he’s reminded of the person that he’s waiting for.

He doesn’t hesitate after that, and pulled the lever of his fire extinguisher. He took aim, and fired without further ado. He stopped when the resulting white foam freezes the first two and the others closest to them starts to stumble closer.

He pulls his bat and fights. He thinks that he’s gotten stronger, because their heads concave within a single swing. He doesn’t feel as tired either. Half of them turn around, moaning and groaning and as a group, they slowed down. If they are attracted based on proximity, Deku is certain that they will be targeting him. He’s proven correct.

He jumps back, and messed up his landing. His foot catches on the flesh of a fallen body and he stumbles down. He rolls with grace, and when he’s back onto his feet, something drapes over his back and eager rotting hands claw at his helmet and shirt. He adjusted his feet, and leans forward. It topples over his shoulder and he doesn’t waste any time brining the bat down to its head.

A high pitch keen left it before it laid limply. He kept his focus though, because he needed to keep himself together. If not, they would all die. He lifted his arm up just in time, and the Walker opened its mouth to clamp down on his forearm. The padding and his thick layers of duct tape kept him safe from tearing his flesh apart, and he shoved it backwards.

Two on his left and three on his right approached him. He didn’t even realize that he was surrounded until it was too late. He adjusted his grip on the bat, to bring the flat top of the bat right onto the eyesocket-crunching the bone without further ado. He jerked to the left, swinging his bat, and managed to knock one into the other. The resulting collison knocked them down, so Deku jumped up to gain some extra force behind his next swing.

One head collided against his swing, it crashed into the head next to it, and he experience told him that it would be enough. He turned over his shoulder for the next three. Behind them, closer to the group of people hes trying to protect, he thinks that they’re fixated on the easy prey.

Oh hell no.

He turned around and with a mighty effort, threw his bat and knocked one of them over. He balled his hands into fists and ran. At first, he wanted to get his bat, but one of them turned around to lunge at him. He dropped to his back, lifted his feet to rest against its chest, and grabbed its chin when it came down with its mouth open. Blood and saliva came dripping onto his helmet and with some more effort, he snapped its neck. He shoved it off to the side and rolled over the other way, he jumped backwards, grabbing his bat and got up to his feet.

He surged forwards, his strength returning by the tenfold because there was someone behind him. He couldn’t afford to fall now.

He thinks that they said something, but he didn’t focus on anything except the remaining ones staggering in front of him. He took a deep breath and dived in.

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With every last one of them dispatched, Deku swung his bat hard in an attempt to get off the loose and wet drops of blood off of it. He turned over his shoulder, where the assorted group of individuals stared back at him in varying amounts of surprise.

He took a step towards them, and the lizard man lifted his hand up, “Stay back!”

He stopped at that, and realizing how intimidating he must look covered in blood, dropped the bat and lifted his hands up to show that they were empty. His gloves were taped down with duct tape, and suddenly realized that he was covered in blood. His bat did very little to protect him from the ensuing gorefest that spread around, and remembering how many of them puke blood all over him, he understood why they didn’t want him close.

He eyed the people huddled against the wall. It looked like they had some open wounds. More importantly, they were poorly dressed and clearly had nothing on their person. No weapons. No bags. Just injuries.

The ashen-hair one with eyes like fire had dropped his head against the ground, and both of the women weren’t doing any better. Both of the masked men were passed out against the ground, and the lizard-man panted hard as he kept his hands against his side. The last one was a tall man, with sharp blue eyes and scars stitched onto his face.

“...There’s nothing for you to take,” he said quietly, and a small smirk curled onto his face, “Too bad for you. We have… no supplies or weapons... You just wasted … your time.”

If he was a hero, he would be able to save them with a big smile. He would laugh their aches away, carry them back to a safe and secure base where they could spend their days in relative peace. Just ten years ago, he would have seen this as a chance to be more like the dazzling people he strived to be like. But he wasn’t a hero. Nothing made that more obvious than these last few months that he had been living like this. Try all he might, he doubted that he, or anyone that wasn’t a real doctor with infinite resources, could save the people by his side.

But, but he could do something for them that no one else could. He could do something that he never got to do for all the other people he had to watch die and rot away.

He could let them die like people.

This wasn’t a waste.

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Against all expectations, they would all make a full recovery and decide to make a home in some of the apartments on the second floor that Deku put them in the first night they came in.

>>so like the LOV didn’t even know each other until they were rounded up, roughed up, and tossed out

>> they were ‘released’ and ended up finding each other. About ~20 of them were exiled, and these were ones that Deku managed to salvage

### Care -

Deku suddenly realized that he was way in over his head once he realized that he had to carry all of these guys back, possibly one at a time, to his base a place a mile away. While he was certain that there was more than enough supplies to house all of them, and there would be minimal Walkers between here and his home, he looks down and wonders how the fuck he’s supposed to prioritize some over others.

He’s not a doctor.

Fuck, when he broke something six months ago, he literally duct taped it and has been walking on it since. He had, of course, enough experience with his own body to know the basic dos-and-don’ts of human first-aid but.

But one of them was bleeding from her eye.

He stared at them for another moment, taking a deep breath, and pulled his backpack off. He unstrapped his fire hydrant and placed it next to him.

First thing was first. He needed to stop the bleeding. He left the area with a bat, dispatching others as he saw them and leaving a corpse, just the corpse, on the ground. He’ll come back for them at a later time. The living mattered more right now.

He returns, after ransaking an office just a few doors down. He takes all their medicine and first-aid, glad that this office was relatively untouched, and came running back. He ran for a custodial closet, breaking the doorknob with his bat, and getting the paper towels.

It wasn’t as clean as he would hope, but he had bigger things to worry about right now. As it was, either they die or get infected anyways. Right now, he just wanted to try.

Next, he took his bat and broke off wooden sticks off of chair stools, and desks. The sound brought forward another four Walkers, and Deku dispatched them with a lot more mess than he had hoped. He took a deep breath, trying to calm his racing heart. He couldn’t afford to be caked in more blood now. He grabbed the supplies he came hunting for and ran back to that alleyway.

When he returned with some more supplies, he felt his strength return to him by tenfold. They were still there just as he left them. There was someone waiting for him, there were some people who were waiting to be saved, and he didn’t think he could handle disappointing another person ever again. There was only one that was conscious, so he put a bottle of pain relievers and a bottle of water right in front of him via the papertowels and moved to grab the others.

He all but tore off his outer gloves, thankful that he got into a habit of wearing gloves underneath the pair he was wearing right now. It started as something he did because his hands were too small to fit into adults’ pair without it slipping off and too large for children gloves, and additionally so that he could have a bloody pair to fight with and a clean pair to gather supplies with minimal discomfort. Bless paranoia, because it might just make the difference between regular dead corpse and reanimated corpse right now.

He grabbed all of them and flipped them onto their backs. Since they were in white t-shirts, it was easy to see where the bleeding injuries were so he started there. For the most part, it looked like they all underwent severe trauma to their body, but the bleeding was minimal. Good. That meant that he didn’t have to worry as much about them getting infected.

They must have passed out from exhaustion and pain. From their sunken cheeks, dark bags, and pale skin, it was clear that they were on their last leg when they happened to stumble into Deku’s hunting grounds. Whether or not this was lucky for them was something none of them would know until weeks later.

If they had weeks.

He grabbed some face masks and promptly covered their mouths. The ones who had arms or legs twisted in ways that limbs shouldn’t be twisted were snapped back and given a makeshift split from the office desks and chairs that he broke before he came back.

It wasn’t much, but he did find some fire blankets, and deftly wrapped up the one that looked the worst. The one that brought him here to begin with. The thin man with ashen-blue hair. He grabbed his backpack and opened it up to get some more duct tape out. He taped down the sides of the blanket around him, so that he looked like a well-cocooned caterpillar, and hefted him up to his shoulders.

For a guy who was probably starving, he was heavy. Deku had no doubts that he could get him back, but he eyed his backpack warily. He would have to abandon it. He had the stranger over his shoulder, and when the man groaned, a little, was a little glad that he was still alive, even if he was probably in comprehensible amount of pain.

Okay, time to do the next step. Getting them back to the apartment.

“...Why?”

He turned over to the lizard man. He stared at him, jaw slack, as he trembled.

“Why… are you…?”

If Deku was a hero, he would have said something amazingly inspirational. If Deku had a strong heart and believed that he could save all of them, he would have laughed brightly and vibrantly.

But he wasn’t a hero. He was barely 14 and there was a man on his shoulder who was more dead than alive. He had been alone and out of practice with speaking to another human being for the better part of a year. So he turned away and left.

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The lizard man looked just as lost when he came back.

Deku didn’t think too hard about it. There were still five other people he needed to get out first. Hopefully, the drugs would kick in and he wouldn’t have to carry the lizard man. It would be exhausting, especially since he knew that he would have to stay up all night to make sure that none of them turned.

This time, he grabbed the girl with the eyepatch, and was glad that she was lighter. He thought really hard about it, especially when he felt his legs buckle under the stress of another body, and ultimately decided to take her last. He placed her back down and grabbed the tallest woman next. He was going to need all his strength for this one.

Then came the longest man who didn't have an arm. Then the blond man with the scar down his face. Then the one with stitches.

He grabbed the blond girl who looked the smallest last, and standing up carrying her like he did everything else, shot his backpack a mournful glance.

He didn’t have a lot of sunlight left. Probably, before he even made it back to the apartment complex, he wouldn’t have any light left. He stared at his backpack and wondered if he should just take it. No, lives come first. He turned to the lizard man on the other side, who was still sitting in shock as he stared at him.

Was… Was he alive? Did this count as being alive?

He stared at him and extended his hand out to him. His lost eyes suddenly focused onto his hand. And with a beckoning motion, stood up with the girl draped over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. He stood there, staring at him, and the lizard man began to stand up.

He hissed immediately, his hand coming to his side, and Deku felt so dumb.

He walked over and kneeled next to him. He grabbed the lizard’s arm and pulled it over his shoulder and wrapped his arm around the middle of his torso, hauled him up to his feet. Since he was, like everyone that he found that day, much taller than him, it was insanely easy for the lizard to use him as a crutch.

“I… I-” the man stuttered out, “I don’t… I don’t understand…?”

Deku wished he had words to give him. A thousand possible things crossed his mind, but not one of them made it past his lips. He thinks, for a second, that he had forgotten how to speak. They walk slowly, much slower than Deku wanted, and it turned into night before they got to the apartment complex. It was truly lucky that there was a full moon tonight, or they would be fumbling through the dark.

He leads the lizard to the staircase and slowly helps him and the young girl up the stairs. His legs are trembling, but if he falls, all three of them would go crashing down. Right now, they needed a good, strong support. He can’t tell them that everything was going to be okay, but he can do this.

If they die tonight, they die knowing that he tried.

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Iguchi, Iguchi Shuichi, was going to die. He had a thousand regrets, and even though he felt like he had nothing to live for, didn’t want to die. He really wanted to try living first.

And then, he and a bunch of people that he has never met before, were suddenly tossed and abandoned by one of the only remaining survivor groups. They called themselves the ‘Liberation Front’ and they hated anything that didn’t follow them.

They were starved for a few days, beaten up a little, and then tossed out to die. As it turns out, there were Walkers in the area. They must have locked into their weakness, and they were going to die a gruesome death being eaten alive.

After everything, he didn’t think that he would die like this. He didn’t want to die like this. Fuck, he didn't want to die at all.

And then, a man in a helmet came swinging. Armed with a baseball bat, a fire hydrant strapped to his thigh, and a black helmet, he came swinging. He was small, but it was clearly a strength as he gave powerful swings and moved like he was water.

Then, as though that wasn’t enough, he had tirelessly came to offer them aid.

Not once did he say anything. He didn’t ask for names or wounds. He didn’t ask about where they came from or why they were here. He just passed him some water, got him some pain relievers (good god, he hadn’t even seen a bottle of pills in so long), and slowly but surely took each and every single one of them to another place.

The man in the helmet beckoned him to go with him. In his pain medicated-daze, he blindly followed. If this man were to kill him or lead them to a fate worse than death, he thinks that he’d just accept it.

When society was up and running, and he so desperately wanted to be saved, no one came for him. Now that the world had ended and he had hit a point where he could accept his own death, he’s saved.

They climb up the stairs to the apartment, and Iguchi didn’t even realize that he was so small until he used himself as a crutch under his arm. He marveled at the strength and stamina this guy must have, since he went back and forth between carrying bodies for however far away this place, after dispatching every single Walker so that they could have a smooth walk home.

He takes them into one of the apartment complexes. The door swings shut behind them, and he settles Iguchi down into a chair while he takes the young girl on his shoulder to one of the rooms in the back.

It was a modest three bedroom apartment. He can see that the blond man with the scar on his face was on the couch in the living room, and assumed that everyone else must be in the bedrooms.

The young man came back out, and rummaged through the kitchen area. Due to the opening in the walls, Iguchi could just barely see the man rummaging around. After a moment, he just walked out.

Iguchi’s eyelids felt heavier and heavier as he waited, but didn’t want to sleep. He wanted to see more, he wanted to see what this man would do.

He fell asleep anyways.

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When he woke up, he realized that the man was still rushing around the apartment. He hissed loudly, feeling pain lace up and down his side, and almost immediately, there was someone next to him.

That’s when he realized that he had been moved from the chair he was sitting on to a futon in the main living room. While he had no doubt that the young man had moved him, he was more shocked that he didn’t even stir.

Iguchi was near certain that it was still the same man, because he was still wearing that bright yellow sweater, but instead of a helmet, he was wearing a full face mask. It looked like a balaclava, and a pair of yellow goggles across his eyes. It looked like he was ready to go skiing.

Was… someone sick? Was he wearing because he thought someone was sick? Then what about him? Was he safe? Or was he the one sick? He didn’t know, but there was something being pushed into his hands. He looked down, water and a granola bar.

Well, he didn’t need to be told twice, and the thought of food made his stomach lurch. Without further ado, he ripped open the plastic and chomped down. It was gone embarrassingly fast, and left him nowhere near sated.

Remembering himself, he looked back up, but the man was gone. He peered over, got up on unsteady legs, and unable to feel any strength, fell right back down.

It couldn’t be… was he… nursing them all back to health?

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The young man came back out, this time with a bowl and a spoon. He set it down and Iguchi was salivating at his mouth.

It was rice porridge. It looked simple and plain. The sight of it brought back memories he thought he sealed away and he all but snatched it out of the young man’s hands. He slurped and gobbled it all down. When he finished, he greedily licked the plate.

This would be the first warm dish he had in weeks. It was delicious.

Before he knew it, he was crying. The bowl sat on his lap, as tears came dribbling down his face. He choked and cried as the warmth of the dish filled his stomach and stretched to every part of his body.

He was alive.

“...I apologize for that display,” he said quietly. Once he had calmed down, he remembered that he wasn’t alone and the thought that someone watched that embarrassing display of lack of self control had him blushing. “I … It was delicious,” he said.

To which the young man gave him another bottle of water, some pain medication in a napkin, got up with the clean bowl and used spoon and walked away. Iguchi took the medication, drank the water, wondered who this man was, why he decided to help them, and right when the man came back asked.

“...Who are you? I… I don’t mean to sound ungrateful or anything, but I would like to know your name so I could properly thank you. Are you… are you alone here?”

His head turned to him, and he nodded, but didn’t say anything else. Iguchi thought back to the wild way he fought, and began to wonder if perhaps he couldn’t speak. He disappeared back into the rooms and came back out with a blanket. He opened it up, and laid it over the lizard-man. When Iguchi spluttered at the thought that, at this age and day, he would be getting tucked in by someone who didn’t even come up to his chest, the fight in him died at the familiarity in the contact.

He, warm and full, felt comfort and closed his eyes to sleep.

-

The next time he woke up, he felt much better. Of course, everything that hurt still did, but he had the energy to get up to his feet. He stood up and stretched a little. Assessing the damage, he thinks that he really lucked out.

### Atsuhiro Sako - Compress

He didn't have an arm.

Waking up, he thinks that it could have been a dream, but the reality wasn’t so kind. He didn’t have an arm, and he was still alive.

But then, he thought to himself, what kind of crazy, sick fuck would keep his armless self alive?

-

The crazy, sick fuck is a small man with a helmet seemingly permamently glued onto his head. He (probably a he? Seems to be flat-chested enough) looked much larger when he stood over all the fallen bodies, but seeing him next to Iguchi, he thinks that he’s very small.

He’s a good head or so taller than Iguchi, so he’s certain that he would just tower over the crazy man that brought him here. Still, Iguchi has only repeated to him (and everyone else) over and over again that the helmet-freak had carried every single one of them here.

Looking at him, from where he was, almost two stories above from where the young man was walking into the compound, Iguchi eagerly walking with him, with a bit of a limp.

What… was he supposed to do?

### Dabi -

Dabi woke up and there was an unexplainable tension that rippled in the air. The only thing that people knew about Dabi was what they saw. They saw the patchwork of scars and reeled backwards because he looks like an infected.

But like, honestly, there were Walkers out there who looked more human than Dabi.

And so, seeing his face come out of the room, they had jumped to grab a weapon, scrambling to their feet and Dabi scowled back in annoyance.

He couldn’t even pull his fire out. Like many others, he stopped being able to use his quirk.

So, who was the crazy dumbass that saved him?

### Bubaigawara Jin - awaken

### Rice - Magne

The first thing Magne smelled when she woke up was rice. It was such a wonderful and nostalgic smell that she felt the tears run from her eyes. She took a heaving breath and then when pain laced all up and down her body, realized that she was alive.

She was alive and she could smell rice.

She shot up. She was clearly in someone’s room, as evident from the obscure band posters on the walls, bookshelves lined with manga, and a small computer at a desk. It was something she hadn’t seen in such a long time, that for a moment, she thought she was back in time.

But that was impossible. The pain proved that.

She could vividly remember what it was like to be back-stabbed. She remembered that feeling when they casted her out with a bunch of other people. She remembered and right when the anger threatened to boil over, she saw that there was bottled water on the desk.

Well, finders keepers.

She greedily drank it, and just barely managed to stop herself halfway. Just in case.

More importantly, rice.

She got up, mindful of her injuries, and wondered who took care of her? And if they took care of her, what happened to the others that were with her? Surely, no one would just take in a bunch of injured pieces of trash like them right? Right when they were thrown out by someone else, no less.

Thinking back to how badly that Shigaraki-boy was tousled, she can’t imagine why anyone would waste precious resources like medicine on him.

She opened the door, and was face-to-face with one of the masked men she was tossed out with.

“Oh, good morning!” he cheered, waving a hand, “You want some rice?! This thing is wicked! I can’t believe that we got rice here! Here, go ahead and help yourself! // But I’ll kill you if you try to steal from me!”

“...What?”

Aside from the man who speaks with two different voices, Magne was in a state of shock. But, even if this was just a dream or she was dead, she decided to take it at face value.

“Thanks for the food,” she said, more out of habit than anything.

“You should tell the Helmet guy when he comes back! Apparently, he’s the one that brought us back and patched us all up.”

If she didn’t have confirmation before, she had it now. There was no way this was real.

The rice was as delicious as she remembered. Her eyes watered as the warmth filled her up. This was a good way to die.

### Himiko Toga -

### Rental Office

There is a room that is propped open on the first floor by a block of cement. It’s marked as the rental office, but the plaque is faded, and barely hanging onto the door. There were dents along the wooden door, chipped paint here and there, and no doorknob-as though it was broken off.

Looking at the bat that Helmet was never seen without, they could get a good idea on what had transpired.

As it was, the rental room was packed to the brim with paper. There were three maps of the area, one more residential, one of the prefecture, and one of Japan as a whole. Japan’s map had the smallest amount of wallspace, and the residential area was packed with thumbtacks of notes and yarn trailing to other parts of the room. String lined across the room, suspending other notes in the air, and it looked like such a masterpiece that they never bothered to actually walk in.

But Helmet, who dropped his backpack off at the ground, headed into his room for a few hours to get rid of all his bloodstained material and goods, can spend hours writing in there. He makes notes for his notes, pinning them up, replacing old ones, marking up the map.

With the world as it was, Twice was certain that stationary and pens must be one of the resources that they had plenty of.

If the wall wasn’t covered in notes, there were bookshelves packed with notebooks. Places on the ground were stacked up with notebooks by a few feet. They way they were haphazardly station, it felt as though removing one thing would make the entire structure come crumbling down. Spiral notebooks, composition notebooks, were stacked around the corner of the room and there was another one on top of the office desk at the center of the room.

Looking at it, they knew that Helmet has been here for quite some time.

-

However, these days, Helmet is never seen without his helmet. He keeps it on, replacing the goggles and facemask that he used to wear. He wears gloves underneath his gloves, and the second pair is always taped down to his sleeve. As far as any of them are concerned, this guy is an alien, with blue skin, and they would just never know.

The part of Iguchi that was always mocked for looking different from other, ‘regular’ humans, wondered if he was saved by someone who was so different he was the same as him. But the rest of him couldn’t get over the fact that he didn’t trust them.

Or at least, he assumed that it was a trust thing, because he couldn’t think of any other reason. He wouldn’t know, and even if he asked, it wasn’t like he would get a response. Was he silent because he couldn’t speak? Was he silent because he didn’t want to scare them?

He doesn’t know. And after everything that has happened so far, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to know.

### ID & Corpses

Dabi lifted his hand up, a fire igniting from his elbows to the tip of his fingers as he readied to fire. Right when he was going to swallow three corpses into an inferno that’ll burn until there is nothing left, Helmet stood in front of him.

Swallowing his surprise, he barely managed to snuff his flames before he fired it out.

“You-get out of the way,” he hissed out. “Do you want to get burned?”

The smaller man faced him for another moment before he turned on his heel and went to take out each Walker with a mighty swing each. Behind them, Toga and Twice joined him as he finished with the three. They watched with disgust as the man that saved them kneeled down next to the corpses and began fishing through their pockets to pull out… their wallets?

“Are you stupid?” Dabi growled out, “There’s no point in shit like that. You seriously wanted to…”

His voice trailed as Helmet pulled out a card out of most of the wallets before dropping the wallet back down onto the corpse’s chest.

“...Are you collecting their IDs?” Twice asked, peering at the way he pocketed the identification into one of his side pockets. “...Why? // This is a fucking waste of time.”

Helmet didn’t answer them. The way he was cramming it into his pockets looked uncomfortable, and it wasn’t like he was going to answer them no matter what they did so they quietly stood there. It wasn’t anything bad, and it wasn’t like they were in a rush to do whatever it was that they were following Helmet to do.

When he was done, he straightened himself out and began his trek to their destination, a convenience store. Toga and Twice cheered loudly when they got to the destination, and before they could go in, Helmet lifted his bat in front of them. They stopped, confused, and he dropped the tip of his bat and walked in. They gave each other a look.

Do they follow?

They peered in curiosity and the unmistakable sound of his bat making contact with something and it rupturing resounded. Coming back to the broken window of the convenience store, the young man was dragging a Walker with a concaved head behind him. He looked at them and then nodded.

“...Oh! Were you checking if it was safe for us to go in?” Toga chimed.

Helmet turned to face them, and gave a curt nod. It was the closest thing they had to getting any kind of communication out of him.

“So… We can go in now, right? What should we get? // Are you like a knight or something?”

Helmet turned his head towards them and gave a curt nod.

“Nice! Ah, do you want dibs on anything? // I’d kill for a smoke right now.” Twice asked, even though he and Toga were making their way in. .

Helmet didn’t respond, scuffing something off his shoe and then inspecting his bat. Afterwards he looked down the street and started to walk.

“Then, where are you going?” Dabi called out. The man kept walking.

He gritted his teeth, torn between running after the man and raiding the convenience store.

“Shit.”

The man kept walking, and as fast as he left, there were several thudding sounds. Dabi abandoned the two in the store and ran after the last man, eyes widening when he realized that the man was taking out other Walkers in the area. He was knocking three more out when he realized that Dabi was behind him and everything was dead, he lifted his arm to do a shoo-ing gesture with his hand before he put the bat down and rifled through the corpses pockets.

Dabi hasn’t been shooed in fucking years. The amount of disgruntled rage in his heart was snuffed at the shock of being shooed away

But whatever, if the man didn’t want his fucking help, what the fuck ever. He returned to the convenience store, looking for anything of use. He was careful to keep away from the two blonds, more comfortable being alone.

He was more comfortable being alone, yet he didn’t like the idea of letting Helmet go.

-

There wasn’t really much to take from this store. It was clear that it was a place where there wasn’t much left at all.

“...What are you doing?”

Twice walked over to where Mdidorya was tearing open some of the pet food in the pet food isle. He watched as the young man placed it on the ground, and tore it all the way open. He opened some of the canned pet food and dumped it onto some of the plastic pet food containers on the side and left them out.

And well, Twice supposed that everyone does crazy shit to keep themselves sane. In a world like this, he supposes that this is just one of Helmet’s many quips.

-

The day came to a close before midday. The walk served as a reminder that they were grossly out of practice moving around for long periods of time, and their body ached at the brisk pace they had. It was tiring and exhausting, but it also felt really good.

### Change of Heart -

“But I’m tired,” Toga sighed, stomping her feet a little, “Ne, we already have all of our supplies, right? Do we really need to stay out any longer?”

Iguchi really didn’t want to agree with her, but yeah, he was fucking exhausted. Getting up before dawn was not something any of them were used to, but in order to stay by Helmet’s side, it was a sacrifice he was willing to make. And well, they had been surviving all this time for a reason, and even though their time with the Liberation was brief and awful, they did learn a thing or two from them.

It was just a little past mid-afternoon. Their pace was slow because Helmet goes off to bash in the head of every single Walker they come across. When they tried to stop to go into a house for supplies, he kept walking, so they abandoned the thought. While they were certain that they could find their way back to the Apartment Complex, the idea that they would be left behind without a second of hesitation was something that left a foul taste in their mouth. After an hour or two of really irritatingly following around a guy who had no intentions of communicating anything to them, they came to one conclusion.

This guy doesn’t want them.

Which made absolutely no fucking sense, because why else would you help someone if not to use them? They all told him their quirks by now, some of them several times, and that they want to be helpful, and that they don’t mind being used, but he didn’t even bother with a note.

They knew that he writes, because they have often seen him in the main rental room, scribbling this and that onto a map, making measurements and taking notes on a small planner attached to a lanyard that he keeps around his neck, under his shirt. From what they can see, he wrote pretty simply, and it’s notes jotting down how many Walkers he took out here and how much supplies he took from there. He has a detailed weather report, among other things as well. Nothing in the rental room was kept from them. Actually, nothing on base was kept from them.

They knew that his hearing works, because he’s the first one to go out swinging when he hears shuffling, even over Twice’s voice. He looked at the person who is speaking or at least faces them sometimes, and when they had complained or mentioned something, would do something thoughtful for them.

Like finding a mask for Compress and Twice, among other clothes. Or getting Toga a new jacket. Or leaving packs of water for them outside of their designated sleeping quarter as soon as they even thought they were running out.

So like, what the fuck?

But perhaps Helmet was more tired than they thought, because he nodded and began to lead them back to the apartment complex.

Just. What?

With how bull-headedly he seemed to keep going, it felt like he wasn’t going to stop until there was no daylight. The thought of this guy, keeling over at some side of the road, brought an uncomfortable feeling inside of them, and Twice doubled in.

“Yeah!” he said, cheering back, “I’m sure Compress is giving Magne-nee a hand,” he giggled at the image, and Toga cheered back, “so we should be back for dinner instead of keeping them waiting! // The food will be shit.”

It wasn’t something they never thought someone could say and mean.

Dabi, however, remained silent as he hung around the back, his eyes never leaving Helmet’s figure. And Helmet led them back.

-

“...I thought you would do this.”

Helmet didn’t even flinch, but Dabi’s certain that if he could hear a Walker shuffling two streets away, there was no way he didn’t hear his footsteps against the broken asphalt as he approached.

“I figured it out today for certain. This is the second time we went out, but the bodies were cleared out from last night,” he explained, unusually chatty as he stepped forward.

His hands remained comfortable in his pocket, in the jeans that he pulled out from the mountain of clothing that Helmet brought them, and tried to stand as casually as he could. While he doubted that anything could unhinge a guy who can clean out an entire piece of territory of Walkers alone, probably since the world ended, he didn’t want to come off as threatening.

He just… He just wanted to help, okay? He wanted to repay back the favor of saving his life because Dabi wanted to get rid of this awful feeling in his chest. He did not owe people.

And Helmet here was making it very hard for him to pay this back.

“You’re going back out to burn all those bodies, right?” he said, stepping forward. He pulled his hand out and called his fire into his hand. It burned even brighter, since there was no other light here, and he wondered how Helmet could wear such dark shades even as night fell. “My quirk is cremation,” he explained quickly, closing his hand and extinguishing the fire. “I’ll take care of it for you.”

Helmet turned away from him and walked outside, a flashlight in his hand, and Dabi blindly followed him. Even though he was carrying the light, so to speak, he didn’t think that he was lighting the way or leading it at all.

Normally, people would walk slower when they can’t see and there’s uneven ground. However, Helmet moved with the same purpose and speed that he did in the morning. Dabi stumbled twice, cursing himself as he caught himself before he tumbled to the ground.

Okay, so he might be a little tired. He didn’t realize how lazy he had gotten while he was gorging himself out on food and healing up, but surely he wouldn’t be stumbling this badly just because he couldn’t see the ground and was a little tired, right?

Helmet paused, turning to stare at him, before he gave him the flashlight. Then, he turned around and walked at a slower pace.

Dabi hasn’t felt this embarrassed or ashamed since he was six and living with his family. It was even more mortifying because Helmet didn’t treat him like he was invalid, and he wasn’t condescending. He just handed him the flashlight and went back on his way like it meant nothing to him that Dabi was probably slowing him down. Like Dabi was nothing.

He didn’t like the feeling.

-

They passed three bodies, and Dabi frowned.

“...Don’t you want me to ignite them?” he asked.

As always, there was no answer. He sighed deeply through his nose, wondering how a quiet person could be so annoying. But, once they passed a junction where there was nothing, Helmet turned around and pointed at the wall.

“...You want me to burn that?” he asked. He could do it.

The man shook his head. He pointed again and Dabi walked over to it. He looked at the wall, inspecting it with the flashlight and turned back around. The young man had put his backpack down and set it on the ground opposite of him.

...What?

He opened the bag and pulled out another bag out of it. He pulled out his bat, and abandoned his bright yellow backpack. He passed the small bag in his hand to the taller man.

Dabi opened it, confused, and froze when he saw a bottle of water and three granola bars.

He, thinking that they would only be out to burn shit and come back, didn’t even bother with a backpack or snacks or water or anything. ...How long was this man planning on being out here?

“...Isn’t this yours?” he asked back. “Don’t you need this more than me?”

Helmet turned around and walked away. Dabi stared back in surprise, but when he tried to follow, the smaller man turned around and lifted his hand up for him to stop. He did. Helmet pointed at the wall he pointed at earlier. Dabi gritted his teeth.

“I’m not tired,” he said, “I can keep going.”

To think, after all this time, someone would dare to try and fucking coddle him-

But when something shuffled, Helmet turned around with his bat and Dabi took a step back on reflex.

For him, that was the simple and undeniable proof of their difference. Helmet didn’t hesitate to surge forward to engage while Dabi hesitated and he won in a single swing. He took a moment to kneel down and rustle through the pockets of the dead one. As always, he pulled out the wallet and looked through it for an ID card.

The ID card was pocketed into one of his side pouches underneath the fire hydrant at his thigh, before he grabbed the body of the Walker and picked it up.

Uh, what?

He turned over and then placed it at the center of the crosswalk a little further down.

And Dabi watched as he started to jog off and drag back every single corpse into a single location. Once the number exceeded 32, he took a step back and pulled out a tank of gasoline from the side. Dabi didn’t even realize when he had brought it out, did he bring it out when he was getting one of the bodies?

If Dabi didn’t believe it before, he definitely believed it now.

This guy had insane stamina. While it made sense, given what Iguchi said, about carrying them all back, one by one, up a flight of stairs and into an apartment unit, he never truly believed it. Watching this guy move, never once faltering in his steps and never slowing down despite what he was carrying, he believes it.

This guy has been out since the crack of dawn to collect this and that for them. He brings it back and then heads back out when he thinks he needs more. He doesn’t hesitate with his swings and never leaves a Walker remaining. The stench of rotting corpses clearly doesn’t bother him.

He gritted his teeth, bore the brunt of the godawful stench, and stepped forward.

“I got it from here.”

The resulting roar of blue fire consumed all the corpses. Within minutes, there was nothing but ash left. He turned to stare at Helmet, who was holding the fire-hydrant at the ready. He snorted back. The bodies were gone because he burned them all away. He collected their ID and gets rid of everything else, and by morning light, there would be nothing but ash and scorch marks left.

“My name is Dabi,” he called out, “The Cremator. While I’m here, you’ll never have to worry about fire again.”

He doesn’t know why he said that, or if Helmet understood the meaning behind his words. Perhaps Dabi was infected after all. Perhaps he was infected with something much worse than the disease that runs through their streets.

Perhaps, this masked man had infected him with the disease <loneliness> and now, he’ll never be able to leave again lest the symptoms run wild through his veins and make him lose his mind.

Regardless, Dabi wasn’t someone who broke his promises. He had a debt to repay, after all. Once he paid this back, he’ll go back to doing something else. He’ll go back to living free and about. He doesn't know what that means but he’ll do it.

After he gets rid of this stupid feeling of being indebted to someone who does not want him.

### Dabi & Mido - Kitchen

While the other guy, Shi-something, was still out with a fever and tucked into the bedroom, Helmet frequented the apartment complex.

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Dabi leaned against the doorframe as a guy in a motorcycle helmet stood in front of the (their? Could they make claims to something that he let them in on?) stove, boiling the packets of soup inside of it. With how much steam is rising, he’s surprised that he seems to see so well even though the vizor of the helmet was fogged up.

“...Hey,” he said. “...It’s enough, right? You know that none of us are infected, right?”

He took a step closer.

“...So why don’t you show us who you really are?”

His hand reached for Helmet’s helmet, and the smaller man slapped his hand away. He scowled.

“C’mon, don’t be so stingy,” he growled out. “Why? Is it because you don’t trust us? Then, why did you save us?” his voice started to climb in volume, in a rare moment for Dabi to lose his composure. “Did you think that I’d be grateful just because you saved me? Hah! Joke’s on you, I’m not that kind of man. You understand? If you’re looking for gratitude, you won’t get it from me! I didn’t ask you to save me!”

His chest is heaving at the end of his rant, unused to yelling like that to begin with.

Helmet made no motion that he heard him, despite how his voice rang through the room. Normally, Dabi would have incinerated him to ash at this point, for being so damn annoying, but he knew that this mystery would gnaw at him. It wasn’t gratitude. It wasn’t that he was dependent on this stranger either.

The man suddenly turned off the stove, deeming the food done. He grabbed some plates and began to distribute the food.

Dabi, standing there like some idiot, glared at him a little more and pointedly ignored any offers to take the plate.

Except, it clearly wasn’t food for him, since Helmet left the serving spoon in the pot and there were six more bowls, neatly stacked ontop of each other. He took the seventh bowl with a small amount of soup, and left the kitchen without a break in his stride. Regardless of if Dabi was there or not, it was clear that Helmet would continue to do as always has.

It didn’t take him long to realize that he was taking it to ashen-haired kid who had yet to get up yet. Wasn’t it exhausting?

Confused and lost, Dabi realized that they might have escaped their previous hell for something far worse.

### Cleaning -

The one time they managed to get up before Helmet, they didn’t realize that they got up before him until he suddenly came out. A gallon of bleach in one hand and a bucket with a rag hanging out of it.

“Morning, Helmet!” Twice called out as soon as he got close, “What are you up to today…” his words trailed as the man continued to walk right past him. “That’s fine,” Twice called out. “That’s fine too.”

Not one to be easily deterred, the blond kept up with him easy.

“You know, you’re really breaking my sweet little heart by ignoring me like this. There’s only so much rejection a man can take, you know? // I’ve killed people for less.”

And then, he took a deep breath, his shoulders hunching as he wordlessly followed Helmet out and around the area. They walked down the sidewalk until they got to a street where there were blood smears, and Twice finally understood why this place was so different.

Unlike everywhere else, it was clean. There was no broken class or bloodstains or anything. After months of poor maintenance, the roads were cracked and there were some plants growing through, but that was it. Looking around, Twice was hard-pressed that the lazy residential area right here suffered from an apocalypse. It looked like from before the world went to shit, give or take a wall and excluding buildings.

Helmet stopped and he narrowly missed it. He stared as the man leaned down, poured some bleach into the bucket, and grabbed the rag to start… cleaning?

He stared, absolutely flabbergasted as Helmet began to wipe down the blood off the walls and ground of the road.

What?

“What?”

Helmet didn’t answer him. He didn’t look at him. He just sat there and kept wiping.

As it turns out, and they would learn this very quickly, Helmet does this every few days. What was he supposed to do? Help? How? With what? He needed a little more instruction. Not to brag or anything, but thinking really wasn’t his strong suit.

### Shigaraki

Shigaraki Tomura’s life was 9/10 tragedy and 1/10 pitiful.

He was missing two to three fingers in both his hands. With three fingers on his left hand and two fingers on his left hand, Shigaraki woke up in pain and in anger.

Why did he have to live like this? Why was this his life?

And then, those questions twisted and twisted until finally, he laid in bed for hours or an eternity and was left to wonder.

Why was he still alive?

-

There were a pair of archery gloves in the bag. He stared at it and quietly fumbled with the plastic coating and pulled them on. They were a little tight, right at the base of his fingers, and a little loose by his wrist. They were otherwise snug, and the cold touch of the cloth was the warmest gesture he has ever gotten from another person.

-

Shigaraki knew how to read, but that didn't mean he liked it. He was good at reading, but it was out of necessities, more than anything.

And it had nothing to do with the fact that Helmet wrote all the time. It most definitely was not because he wanted to communicate with Helmet in any way. It really, really wasn't that. He was bored. There was nothing to do, and there wasn't much he could do while he got used to having one arm.

Conveniently ignoring all the other books and the likes, he made his way to the Management Office of the apartment. He took a seat at one of the shitty foldable chairs and shitty plastic tables. He probably should have been more careful coming in, since he knocked over two stacks of notebooks, but to be fair, there wasn't much room for him to breath without running into something. He'd probably apologize or something if he needed to.

Pushing off all those thoughts, he took a seat and grabbed a notebook. It looked to be a journal of some sort. Every page was dated, and it detailed the monsters that he had encountered and where on that day.

He ran the pads of his fingers against the faded ink, as though he would be able to talk to the man who brought him here just by touching the ink.

“...What the hell am I doing?” he said quietly.

### Rain (1)

As soon as they thought that they knew what Helmet was going to do, and that he had a schedule to follow, it was completely trashed when the rain comes.

Majority of them had spent the day and night indoors, staying out of the rain. Catching a chill of any kind could result in death or an extremely painful experience without any medication or proper food. It wasn’t a real concern anymore since they got here, but some habits were hard to break.

The first day of sunlight, they took some time to go outside and saw that Helmet was already sprinting all around the grounds. Hefting buckets and large containers filled with water in a wagon, he looked incredibly busy.

“...Oh, he caught the rainwater,” Toga realized aloud.

“Oh, I see,” Mr Compress nodded next to her. “He’s collecting the rainwater.”

In a few hours, Helmet would (indirectly, because they are beginning to learn that Helmet only goes at his own pace) lead them to a place where there was ‘extra water’. In large containers of varying shapes and sizes, packed to the brim were cases and containers of water. The sight of it was heartening.

Helmet kept the door closed, but it was unlocked.

He trusted them. That much was clear. Right? This was a sign of trust, wasn’t it? What else would it be?

### Dogs (1)-

Dogs and cats, and other household pets but these two species especially, hated humans.

It was a well-known fact that the common furry friends did not like humans. They will go as far to make noise and blow the cover of survivors to nearby Walkers because of how much they hated humans. However, they were fine with Walkers. Probably because Walkers don’t try to eat them.

Or torture them. Or lock them up. Or just otherwise make their already short lives painfully awful.

There were some fucked up people in the world. And despite the fact that many just viewed the former pets as fresh meat, others took them as a way to vent their stress. While there was sure to be people who didn’t think like that, they were far in the minority, if there were any left alive.

There were a couple of theories about this, none of them have been proven true or false, but it wasn’t hard to figure it out.

Somehow, however, even though there weren’t really anyone left to raise or feed the strays, their populations sky-rocketed and remained high as time progressed on. In the gaping hole that humans have left behind, these were among the first to grow.

So hearing dogs, a pack of dogs ranging in all shapes and sizes, had them tensing in anticipation. They barked twice, nice and loud, and then fell silent. If they were running from something, they would be more barking and there would be getting louder as they got closer and then quieter as they ran away. If they were here because they had guided something here, then they would be continuously barking to lead them.

“...Are they… waiting for something?” Iguchi asked quietly.

“Whatever,” Dabi said, fire collecting at his fingertips, “I won’t give them the chance to.”

They had, since there weren’t many animals where they were from, had totally forgotten about the existence of household pets. It was a gross overestimate, and as though the universe wanted to ensure they never had anything nice, they wondered if they needed to abandon this place before it got swarmed.

But the dogs had stopped barking. They just sat at the entrance of the apartment complex instead.

Dabi had opened the door, fully intent on burning every barker into ash when something fell down. He surged forward in his shock, grabbing the railing and peering over to where Helmet had unmistakably fallen from somewhere above him. Before he could even start to panic, he realized that the man was grabbing the railings as he passed down the floor for a brief instant before he dropped down to the ground and into a roll before getting back up his feet in one fluid motion.

It was clearly a move that he had done many times before.

“Was that Helmet? Did Helmet seriously just parkour his way down over four flights?” Magne asked, coming next to him, looking up to where he had fallen from. "So, that's where he has been staying."

The staircase between the floors were uneven and some were completely broken. The thought that he was someplace almost completely inaccessible to them made them feel a little hollow.

“Damn,” Iguchi said, correctly summarizing his thoughts.

But Dabi kept his eyes on Helmet, and more importantly, where he was running to. The man was in his standard helmet, had a bat, but he didn’t have his backpack or his usual fire hydrant. The man is usually in a sweatshirt of some sort, and he knows from the one time he grabbed him, that he was wearing some form of padding underneath it.

The man is fast- like he was ready for this, and Dabi wondered if he never takes off his armor. And if that was the case, when did he rest?

The thought gnawed at him more than he thought it would.

“Should we… go after him?” Iguchi asked quietly, looking torn between jumping in or staying back.

“Wait, wait wait,” Twice said, pointing forward, “No way,” he muttered, in total and complete shock as one of the dogs came up to rub against Helmet’s leg and the young man took a step away from it.

The dog came closer and he nudged it away with his bat. The other dog ran around him once, and gave a bark. Then, it turned to start running down the street. Helmet turned towards it, and broke out into a sprint.

"Are they leading him somewhere..?"

“...What did I just see?”

-

Twice, who loves dogs, has always loved dogs, and will always love dogs, stood outside of the complex by the street as he waited for Helmet to return. In his hand was a water bottle, and he ran his revised speech over and over again in his speech.

Funny how the guy who doesn’t speak is the guy he's most concerned over what he says and how he says it.

He took a deep breath, jumping up and down a little as he tried to pull himself together and shake off the growing amount of anxiety snaking through his heart. He needed to calm down. It was easier said than done, of course, but let it be known that Twice didn’t try.

“Hey, there Helmet, glad to see that you’re alive and that the dogs didn’t just maul you and eat you or whatever. How’d you get the dogs to even like you? All the ones I’ve seen are dead one or ones that cause someone else to die.”

Okay, he got this.

A few hours before daylight returned, he heard footsteps. He jerked awake, not sure when he even began to fall asleep, and snapped his head to the source of the sound.

Walking towards him was Helmet. His bat was propped onto his shoulder and his footsteps even as he walked to the entrance of the complex. There were no dogs to be seen. As soon as he was close enough, Twice shot up to his feet, “Hey!” he said.

Helmet stopped where he was, several steps away from Twice.

“I … uh…” he gulped as his words failed him, his courage deserted him, and he stammered out, “Ah, uh…” And then lifted the water bottle towards the man, “Welcome back.”

The man stared at him, or he assumed he was staring at him, since his helmet was fully facing him. The single light that they had on, attached to the ceiling above the office rental room, was bright enough for them to see where they were going and nothing else.

While he was super grateful that they had light and electricity, he couldn’t help the feeling that he wanted more at times.

The man then walked right past him, making certain to take a wide berth around Twice to make sure that there was ample space between the two of them, and the blond looked at the water bottle in his hand.

He was starting to get really sick of this feeling.

### The Helmet Incident

-

A week later, he comes back. They only know this because Twice is a loud blubbering mess when he saw Helmet come back. It has nothing to do with the fact that they haven't slept well since his abrupt departure.

In his hands are, as always, plastic bags filled with more supplies. He has a new backpack this time, and they're filled with fruit-smelling shampoos and modest deodorants. Magne cries then.

They promise not to fuck with his helmet again. They promise not to pry again. The bone deep fear that came with his departure will haunt them for a long time to come.

It should be more disturbing, the fact that they had latched so hard to someone they have never heard the voice of in such a short amount of time, but all of those thoughts are washed away against the relief that he came back.

For most of them, he would be the first person to ever <come back>.

-

"...Lights?"

There were some battery powered fairy lights, and at least 50 ft worth of Christmas lights.

It's hard to figure out what goes on in Helmet's head on a good day. But when he brings in new, seemingly random things, it really throws them for a loop.

But what were they gonna do, stop him? With his departure so fresh in their mind, they know they can't do that. They couldn't risk it. Without meaning to, they were already too dependent on the silent man for everything, ranging from supplies to comfort.

It would have been easier if he could just tell them to leave or stay, to die or work. But they can’t even tell if he even noticed that they’re there or not some days.

### Deer Meat

“M-meat?”

“Holy shit, it’s real meat.”

“Oh my god, I haven’t had fresh meat in so long-”

“Then, what are you eating?” Dabi asked, cutting all of them off.

Helmet, as always, didn’t respond, but placed the huge container of raw meat on the ground in front of them. He took a step back and pointed to the something to the side, and when the others rushed outside, he motioned to a small picnic area that wasn’t there before. In fact, Spinner was out there, helping set something or another out. They must have pulled it together for them.

He had been wondering where they had been for a few hours. That tight feeling returned into Dabi’s gut, and he frowned. He couldn’t believe that he was actually regretting taking a break. What was the world coming to?

Ah, right, it ended. That’s why he was here to begin with.

### Enter Hawks -

Of the things that Deku has always wanted to do but never got to figure out, was string lights up. Now that he got the generator up and running, he felt brave enough to at least try it.

Standing at the rooftop with all his rain-catchers, he looked around the ridiculously gaudy display of bright Christmas lights and plugged the cords in. With only the stars above as company, he mimicked their light from the top of his apartment building. He sat there, watching the area where the glow joined the darkness above.

He had gotten into the habit of doing this since he got these lights. Every night, he could crawl up here and take a moment to gaze at the stars. At first, it was because it calmed him nerves and looking at the eternal abyss above, he felt grounded in his insignificance. It was calming. It was soothing.

Somewhere, far away, he knew that there was someone else looking at the same stars.

And then, he got the lights to work and he turned them all on. Light shined the brightest the darker it was, after all. He prays that Kaachan would see this, and it would help him find his way home.

Day three since he turned the lights on. He doesn’t like the idea of burning through all their electricity, especially since it would be unfair to the others downstairs that he stole all their electricity for something that he was doing behind their backs. So, he only turned them on for a few hours before he heads out for his next supply run. Usually, he spends this time finishing up gearing up. With the broken staircase between the third and fourth floor, he is certain that no one will come up here to bother him.

Not that the others aren't smart enough to figure a way up, but he didn't think they would. It would be too much trouble, and he didn’t think they cared that much about what he does.

Right when he turned around to turn the lights off for the day, something fluttered behind him. He whipped back around, his bat in his hands and ready to kill, when the fight drained out of him. In front of him, looking as surprised as he felt, was former Pro Hero Hawks.

He… He looked like he'd seen better days.

Deku’s certain that all of them had better days a long time ago, but looking at Hawks brought a special kind of pain to his heart. The blond’s chest was wheezing. Those gorgeous red wings that once decorated the spread of magazine covers and dominated train advertisements looked ragged and weary, barely a fraction of what they used to be, like just having them was a weight that he couldn’t sustain anymore. There were bags under his eyes, and a permanent shadow across his sunken cheeks, and his features were pale against the soft fairy lights around them.

All in all, that handsome Hero Hawks looked more dead than alive.

“I… I saw the light,” he said, voice hoarse like he had been screaming for hours. With how the world was, Deku wouldn't have been shocked if it were weeks. “I… I didn’t… All I saw was light.”

Since Deku was about to go out on a supply run, he was totally and completely geared up and ready to fight. Concerning how long he had spent putting it all together, it was something that he didn't want to stand and undo without good reason, as it was, he was really glad he had it all on. A lot of adults got weird whenever they met kids, and right now, Hawks needed to focus on himself.

So he took a deep breath, and motioned for the man to follow him. If he could fly all the way up the six stories to get to where Deku was standing on the rooftop, he had no doubts that he would be able to fly down to the first floor.

Just in case, however, Deku is certain that he could carry this man. Luckily, he’s not covered in blood and he’s not tired, so it shouldn’t be too hard. Looking over the Pro Hero, he looks beaten and battered, but not in need of extreme medical conditions.

He unplugged the light, heard wings flutter behind him, and turned it back on. He stares at Hawks, and wonders what the man had seen to look so utterly lost. While he could take a guess, it was probably better if he didn’t ask. He couldn’t. He’s certain that if he opens his mouth right now, he’ll ask for the man’s autograph. He can’t help it, okay?

So it would be better not to say anything at all.

But first, he stopped to open his backpack. His night runs became increasingly more often, especially since he wanted to spare others the sight of the undead and ghouls as he cleaned up, and he had gotten into the habit of bringing along glow-sticks for the really dark places.

At least, if he’s alone, he could take off the helmet and put on goggles and a helmet instead, but that wasn’t an option if Dabi caught him on the way out. Even more frustrating was that infuriating smirk on the taller man’s face when he joined him. Although, it was nice to have company and he was comforted with the thought that someone was waiting for him at <home>. Other times, he really wanted to knock Dabi out and leave him behind, where he knew it would be safer.

He cracked a glow stick, and under the green light, handed it back to Hawks. He took it into his hand and stared at it with a fascination that Deku didn't know how to describe. This time, when he turned off the lights, his feathers remained quiet.

He walked down, the man barely a step behind him. He didn’t like the idea of this man following him out to another part of the city or even to the bottom floor. It broke his heart to see his wings sag and droop behind him, most of all his feathers long gone. It was easy to see that it probably took everything he had left to get up to this rooftop. The blond stumbled and teetered dangerously twice, but the second time he did it, he braced himself against the wall and slid a little. He stopped for a second, taking a slow breath, and Deku felt so stupid.

Of course he was injured. Of course he was hurt. Of course he was exhausted. He was reduced to this state, for god knows how long. And Deku, so lost in his own thoughts about the most < convenient> thing to do, had forgotten the single most important thing.

Once upon a time, he wanted to be a hero. And a hero, right now, wouldn’t be worried about what was the easiest thing to do or the simplest way to do it. Right now, a hero would do the right thing.

He stopped in the middle of the stairwell, and felt his heart break when he heard Hawks’ stuttering breath.

“...It’s alright,” the blond said, “I can keep going.”

No, he wanted to say, you can’t.

But, he decided on instead, they could.

He turned around, grateful for being so much shorter than the man and also being on a lower step than him, because it made this next part much easier. He leaned in, wrapping his arms around the man’s waist and pulled him in. The man went from surprised to panic in an instant, and his hands came up to grab his arms, but if Deku didn’t think that he was weakened before, he definitely believes it now.

He could pick up Hawks, with the man weakly protesting, up and over his shoulder and the side of his neck, trying to have him hang diagonally over his back and mostly succeeded. The older man’s breathing turned a little more even, like he was right about to fall asleep, and Deku hoped that his backpack was a comfortable weight to sleep on. Probably not, since the only thing inside of it were small bags of snacks, two water bottles, and his metal bat.

“Hah…” the man wheezed against his shoulder, “You’re… stronger than you look,” he said.

Deku turned to his side and carefully maneuvered his way down the rest of the stairs, crab walking as needed. Right when they were about to get to the bottom, he adjusted his hold so that he was carrying the man in a fireman’s carry. Much better. This was much easier to move around in. He crossed the hallway in no time at all, and made it down the next flight of stairs. He got to his apartment complex.

Well, with the desolate wreck that was the staircase from the fourth to third floor, it wasn’t like he could take Hawks down to the lower floors when even he struggles to go between floors some days.

It hurts him to do this, his heart aches at the thought of it, but to think that he was going to have the Number Two Hero in the country in his home?

Wow.

He fished for his house key, and it was ridiculously hard with his stupid gloves, but he’s eternally glad that he decided to clip it onto him. And then he hated himself for thinking that clipping it was a good idea, but whatever, he had the key, his apartment was open now, and he made his way inside.

“...This… your place?”

He didn’t bother with his shoes. Fainly, he hears his mom’s admonishing tone at that, and reflexively apologizes to her memory. He managed to get Hawks to the couch and set him down gently. He went back to place his backpack on the ground and take his shoes off.

There, mom.

He hasn’t had a guest… A person, just any body, in his apartment complex since the first time he ended up holed up here. Aside from the fact that there was no way to get up, he only got his first batch of survivors recently. None of them were in any condition to climb a flight or two to have tea with him or whatever. His hands trembled but he pushed away all of the extra thoughts as he tried to focus in on the right now.

He tore off the larger gloves, throwing them on his backpack.

First, something small. He didn't have much food in his apartment since he was rarely hungry and usually only ate when he was done with all of his cleaning and stuff, but luckily, he still had his untouched bag of rice.

Bless.

He grabbed two granola bars and handed them to Hawks with a bottle of water. The blond stared at it like he has never seen it before. Right when he started to think that he needed to open it for the man, he spoke up.

"...Are you sure?" He asked quietly.

Deku thought back to the time he got into a fight with Kacchan about how cool Hawks was, back when they were brats in elementary school and he first debuted. He thought back to how people said things like "only girls like Hawks" and he felt his heart ache.

He grabbed Hawks' fingers and made them curl around the bars before turning to the bathroom. He doesn't know if anyone has used up the hot water yet, but it would be nice if he could let the man soak in his tiny tub. He turned the water on, happy that the water was warm and came back out.

He made it about two steps before he realized that the man was on his feet, halfway into the hallway. He stared at him, wide-eyed with the granola bars in his hand, though one of them was just the wrapper, and a water bottle in his other hand.

Oh no, Deku thought with sinking realization. It couldn’t be.

Was… did the Hero come looking for him?

“...S-Sorry,” Hawks said, his eyes dropping even though he managed to keep the smile on his face, “Lost myself for a moment there.”

He felt his heart break all over again. He came looking for him even though he just left the room? He took a step back and motioned for the bath.

“...Oh, you guys… have running water too, huh?” he asked quietly, “Wow…”

Deku motioned, a little more aggressively, for the bathroom.

“Ah… I guess I am a little dirty, huh?”

Deku, with a little more frantic panic, motioned and Hawks finally seemed to get the message.

“Oh! Right. I’ll go in now I guess.”

Deku pointed at him, and then pointed to the pile of laundry he had to bleach and detox his next break, tucked away in the corner of the bathroom.

“Haha… duly noted, sir,” Hawks said.

He walked into the bathroom. Deku felt his heart was going to leap out of his chest.

A Pro Hero was using his bathroom.

He took a deep breath, shaking his head to get the feelings from erupting out of him in an effort to stop himself from making him look like a fool.

He walked into his room, grabbing one of his larger shirts, a pair of unworn briefs still in their package, and sweatpants, and placed them in front of the door. It was all he had. Since Hawks was only a head or so taller than him, he hoped that it would be enough-if a little uncomfortable. But it would have to do until they could get out and get him something else to wear.

He got to make something sustainable for the man to eat. The rice won’t take too long, but he doesn’t know how long Hawks was going to take in the baths.

He… he had some canned chicken, but he didn’t think it would be appropriate to give it to the Wing-Hero Hawks. But at the same time, to only offer water and rice as a meal to a Pro Hero had him nauseous with guilt.

The man came out impossibly quick. But he looked clean. He didn’t bother with the shirt, and his eyes widened at the sight of the rice machine. Deku felt so stupid at the same time, of course he wouldn’t wear a shirt, he has fucking wings. In the meantime, his eyes traced the way his rib-cage was protruding against his skin, the way his hips cut in, how defined his muscles looked, to the point where it felt like it was deformed because of how thin the man was now.

Deku can’t just give him rice. Look at him. He needs real, good food. It’s something that Deku can’t really offer him at the moment, so he lifts the meager can of chicken instead.

The man’s eyes shine back, and he gives a laugh.

“A feast,” he says, breathlessly and almost in disbelief. “...Thank you. I… I truly,” his hand came up to pinch the bridge of his nose, “God… Thank you.”

Deku motioned for him to sit down at the kitchen table, and turned around to prepare some chicken and rice porridge. The blond all but collapsed into his seat, but since all his clothes still looked clean, Deku hoped that he wasn’t too injured.

“You’re pretty quiet, huh?” the blond asked. “I won’t… bite, so you can take off your helmet at least. It can’t be comfortable in that.”

Deku, not registering that Hawks was talking to him, took the pot and placed it on a hotplate on the table. He passed Hawks a bowl with a spoon and a serving spoon. The blond blinked at it slowly, and he could see that he was about to start salivating. Figuring that he should give him the privacy to eat at his own leisure, Deku turned away. He had other things to do.

“Oh, you don’t want… any?” The blond’s voice was light, as he looked from Deku to the bowl and then back. The man gave a wave, hoping it looked dismissing and not disrespectful.

Former Number Three was eating at his fucking breakfast table, he was about to have a stroke. Reminding himself to focus, he walked away.

He fumbled around the entryway dresser and fished out an extra key.

This… This was his mom’s key.

He scribbled a note and headed back to the kitchen. The blond had taken a few bites, but stopped eating when he came back in. Before he could say anything, though, he handed the note to the man.

“Door auto-locks.”

Deku turned to put his shoes on and get his gloves on. He taped it down with the same amount of diligence he always does, hefted his backpack on and straightened. Right when his hand touched the doorknob, he heard something behind him and he turned to where Hawks was standing right behind him.

What was he doing?

“Ah… uh… Safety in numbers and all that,” the blond said, trying to smile and failing, and Deku shook his head.

The smile finally turned into a frown, and he rubbed the back of his head.

“Well, you already helped me out a ton, so I… I want to return the favor,” he added. “I look like this, but I’m still pretty strong. I don’t know where you’re going, but the supplies… these are your supplies that I’m hogging, right? Lemme help out.”

Deku shook his head again. He pointed at the door, then at Hawks.

“I-”

He opened the door and closed it behind him. He waited a moment, and crossed his arms knowingly when Hawks opened it. The blond stared at him, sheepishly and Deku shook his head. He opened his hand and extended it out to Hawks. The former pro stared at it for a moment and then extended his hand back.

Taking the much bigger hand in his, he took his finger and wrote out on the palm, tracing familiar kanji, and the older man sighed back in defeat.

“Alright,” he said, “Next time for certain.”

Good, Deku thinks, certain that there would be no next time. He won today, and he’s hopeful that Hawks will get some much needed rest. He’ll make sure to grab some iron supplements, among many other things, for the blond.

He walked out, this time to finish his stupid supply run. He must have waited too long, since Shigaraki is also outside. He’s holding a gameboy in his hand, but he’s not focused on it. Deku is just glad that the video games he found are still getting some action.

“...I thought you already left,” he said, genuinely surprised to see him. “Oi! Twice!” he yelled out as Deku walked away.

Augh. today just wasn't his day, huh?

-

When he returned to his apartment building, he’s splattered in minimal blood. His backpack is full and heavy, and he hopes that Hawks isn’t an extra-large in anything.

He pushed the door to his home open, and was greeted by the warm candlelight and a quiet greeting. It’s exceedingly familiar, and he can feel his eyes water from behind the visor. If… If at all possible, he wished this moment could last forever.

The thought that he had <come home> to someone was overwhelming.

“Hey, uh welcome back,” Hawks said, raising his hand up in greeting. “I hope you don’t mind that I used the candles. But uh, I left some food so maybe we could eat together-”

Deku peeled his backpack off his shoulders. If the man was here, this would make his life much easier. He ignored everything he said, too focused on the task on hand, and flipped his backpack over so that everything would come pouring out. He motioned at the mess it was and pointed at Hawks.

“Uh… oh, is this… for me?”

Deku nodded once, and walked past him and into the bathroom to give the man some privacy.

### Fever & Hawks

After meticulously washing everything, he didn’t expect to step out of the bathroom in his wet and disinfectant-smelling clothes (he forgot to grab a change of clothes when he went in), to find Hawks standing right outside of the bathroom door.

“Hey!” he said, breathless. “You were uh, cleaning up, huh? I saw that you had a lot of bleach,” he said. “You want any help?”

Deku wondered if this was going to be the new normal, until the older man felt better.

He shook his head, the straps of the helmet dragging against his shirt. Thank god he decided to keep it on.

“Ah, you wear the helmet inside, too?” he noted aloud.

Deku, who knew that he wouldn’t be able to keep his mouth shut if he opened it, wisely kept it shut. He didn’t want to annoy the man, and he was scared that if he opened his mouth, the man would be burdened with his words. He didn’t want that. The man clearly went through enough shit. If he would like, Deku would just let him rest his wings here, for as long as he wanted, whenever he wanted.

He didn’t know what Hawks needed, but he would give him anything.

“So, you uh, gonna eat? Sorry for rummaging through your stuff, I-”

Deku walked by him and towards the kitchen. Food sounded great right now, but he needed to take the helmet off to do that, and he didn’t want anyone to see his face. He knew that it wasn’t very attractive right now, and he didn’t want to disturb Hawks. He stared at the neat piles in the living room.

Hawks worked quickly to separate everything into categories. Medicine, clothes, supplements, snacks, water, everything was neatly organized. He was really grateful. He hoped that Hawks found use for these.

He grabbed his bag, it was all he needed, and looked back to the apartment. He was going to miss this place, but he’ll let Hawks stay as long as he wanted to. Everything he needed, he could grab at a later time. He placed the key on the dresser. He never thought that he would need to move out like this.

“Wait, wh-where are you going?”

His wings fluttered, and Deku frowned. Maybe he should stay longer? Until this man was ready to fly on his own again? Wouldn’t it be easier to rest alone though? He didn’t know. He’s been alone for a while, so he just assumed that everyone was used to being alone.

He lifted his bag again and then pointed at the door.

“Are you… are you leaving? If you left the key, are you leaving this place?”

He nodded.

“...Why? There’s no… It’s plenty big enough for the two of us. If anything, I should be the one leaving-”

Deku shook his head violently. The straps of his helmet slapped against each other in the movement. The sound seemed to echo between them.

“...Is it because I’m intruding? Sorry, I… I haven’t seen another survivor in a while. I didn’t mean to overstep my boundaries.”

No no no no, Deku wanted to say. He felt like Hawks was the last person to apologize. Especially to him. He shook his head.

“Then, you’ll stay?”

Deku paused, and even though it almost felt like a trap, nodded his head. He placed the bag back down on the ground, and watched Hawks’ shoulders sag.

“Haha… Thank you. Thank you.”

He didn’t think that Hawks was thanking him for the meal though.

-

As it turned out, he had a fever. Hawks had taken the couch, despite how hard Deku tried to push him towards his bed. And after a brief moment to fanboy (Hawks, former Pro Hero Hawks was sleeping on his couch, he was about to have an aneurysm) Deku had realized it.

Former Pro Hero Hawks was sweating on his couch. Shit, this couch was going to be a family heirloom. The man looked a little cramped on his couch, but Deku pulled out the futon. It hadn’t been aired in a while, but it was probably better than being curled up on his wings like that...

Oh wait, fever.

He moved over to hover by the blond. How could someone be halfway to starvation and flushed with a fever, but still look this handsome? Amazing. He really was a hero. A real life hero, right in front of him. Wow.

He pulled blankets for the man, more than used to this whole taking-care-of-a-stranger’s-fever situation. He ran some hot water and got a towel. Had some water and some supplements. It was a shame that he didn’t have any actual fruits and vegetables, but this would have to do. When Hawks’ fever breaks, he’ll get him some medicine and more rice porridge. He’ll have to go downstairs for some more rice, but he doesn’t think the others downstairs would care.

It’s fine. He won’t take more than for one person.

When daylight came, his fever hadn’t broken. Deku wiped his sweat meticulously. He had been looking through his old notes and writing up some more of his thoughts in another journal. This would have been fine, but since he came back in a rush yesterday too, the things he needed to do have just been piling up.

But he didn’t want anyone else up here. He didn’t want to get used to having life in his apartment complex again.

“Don’t… don’t leave me…”

And Deku, who was weak and useless, took Hawks’ hand in his and squeezed it just a little bit.

“It’s alright,” he whispered, even though the man probably couldn’t hear him. “It’s alright. I am here.”

Normally, the only time he would be able to hold a hero’s hand or even meet one in person would be in a meet n’ greet hosted by the hero’s agency or a charity event.

Normally.

-

The next time Hawks was coherent, he jolted into a sitting position. His wings were almost back to full health, and he felt bone-weary tired. His eyes immediately jumped to Helmet, the man who lit the lights on an apartment complex.

He sat with a journal on his lap, and gave a small wave at Hawks.

“...Was I…” he stopped himself from speaking, his voice so raspy it hurt to speak. Instantly, there was a water bottle in his hands and he took it. He took a drink, suppressing the urge to just chug it all down, and looked to the man. “Did you… nurse me?”

Helmet stood up and left. Did he say something wrong? His mind was still hazy from the effects of sickness and hunger, and he tried to tally up the right and wrong things to say. Right when he thought he could get to his feet and give chase, Helmet came back. In his hands was a modest bowl of porridge. He set it to the side, within arms’ reach of Hawks.

Humanity wasn’t dead, the former Pro Hero would think. He may not have done anything to protect his life, but he sure as hell wasn’t dead.

Hawks didn’t know anything about this guy. He didn’t know his name or what he sounded like or what he looked like or anything. If he wanted to kill him, he would have done so by now, but instead, he was still here. He didn’t know anything about the man who guided him someplace safe to recuperate and rest.

And Hawks, who was raised to be a hero, knew that this was the type of people that he was told to protect.

Day four since they met, and Hawks has returned to almost full health. This would be the closest he had gotten to a full recovery since this whole thing started.

His body was finally recovering. His spirits were torn asunder, but he was prepared to face tomorrow.

### LOV & Hawks-

Of course, Deku swore that Hawks wouldn’t spend any longer than he absolutely had to in his apartment. However, it was hard to even try and formulate words, but he managed to get the man out of his apartment complex.

However, the older man could be strangely obtuse, or perhaps he couldn’t tell that Deku didn’t want his presence breathing down his neck, and Deku wanted to scream. Please, he wanted to beg, please let me have my home again.

While someone was inside his complex with him, he had to be extra careful, and it was beginning to get exhausting. It was starting to get really hot in the apartment, so he really wanted to take off his helmet. He could just lock himself inside his room, but he doesn’t think that he’ll have to since Hawks wouldn't barge into his room, right? Surely, that smiley blond wouldn’t just storm into his room unannounced, right?

But locking his room also means he’ll be that much later to react to anything that could possibly happen. If something were to happen to the people outside, would he be able to live with himself?

As it was, he took a deep sigh and decided to abandon this and leave. There were plenty of empty apartments that he can make a new home in, no matter how bad he felt about it. He had personally confirmed that several of the residents will never return.

But, Hawks was clearly in a much better state than he thought, because the man followed him down and out of the apartment. Of course, Deku was happy to know that he was in good health, but didn’t he have better things to do than follow him around? Like, people to save?

“Oh, there you are Hel… Isn’t that a Pro-Hero?” Twice sounded dumb-founded.

Right, speaking of people who he thought would have left by now.

“Pro-Hero?!”

Before Deku realized what was going on, they were assembled together. Almost all the (tentative) tenants were finally face-to-face with one another. Even Shigaraki, their resident loner, was there, looking shocked and slightly out of breath at the entire ordeal.

Hah. He thought he was shocked. Deku is certain Shigaraki has no idea what real shock is. Real shock is that feeling when the Number Three Pro Hero, battered and lost, comes flying from the depths of the dark in the middle of the night while you’re taking a break on the rooftop. That’s shock.

“What the fuck?” Shigaraki said, accurately summing up how he felt right then and there.

He couldn’t get the words out. Because Deku was shy and didn’t remember how to get his vocal chords working anymore, and just wished that this whole thing would just end instead.

“...I see,” Hawks said, his eyes glazing over all of them, “Well, I guess that answers the ‘are you alone’ questions,” he said. He side-eyed the young man by his side and then looked at them, “Yo,” he greeted casually, lifting his hand to wave at them, “Nice to meet you, I flew in after I saw the lights. Glad to see other people made it out.”

“You should leave as soon as possible if you value your life, hero. You won’t enjoy our company,” Shigaraki said, eyes narrowing.

Hostile. Why were they hostile?

Deku understood why they were bitter, but he didn’t understand why it was so hostile. It didn’t seem like they knew each other from Before, but he couldn’t think of any other reason why they were so on edge. Even Bunagaiwara, who Deku thought was the easy-going and happiest of the ground, was uncharacteristically quiet as he eyed the former pro with uncertainty.

Wasn’t it supposed to be heartening to have a hero here?

“Funny,” Hawks said, narrowing his eyes despite the smile on his face, “If that was really the case, I sincerely doubt that Helmet-head here would have worked so hard to nurse me back to health.”

A shiver ran down Deku’s spine. The temperature of the area plummeted. He couldn’t deal with this.

“Hey uh, Helmet? What are you-”

They all turned to where Twice was watching Helmet jump up to sit on the ledge. They watched in mortification as he swung his legs over the edge and then just jumped. Hawks surged forward, his wings stretching out as Twice ran forward in an attempt to grab the young man, a fraction of a second too late as he slipped down.

Four feathers flew out, but the lack of practiced use really showed, and they didn’t fly as fast or as precise as they normally would have. His hand grabbed the ledge, a fraction of a second away from jumping over it to get the man who returned the stars to the skies, and stared down at the way Helmet grabbed the railing to the floor below him, temporarily stopped before jumping down to the next floor, and then landing on the ground with a roll.

A perfect landing. Bubaigarawara gave him full marks.

Two of Hawks’ feathers were on his shoulders, one was in his hand, and the last feather floated down to the ground as Hawks lost his focus. Was he… this out of practice?

“Wow, you saved people like that?” Dabi asked, snorting, “No wonder you’re all alone here.”

Shigaraki peered over the ledge, “Fucking show-off,” he muttered. “Iguchi! Don’t let him get away!”

At the bottom of the area, making his way to the Rental Office, Deku gave a nod to Iguchi, who was looking between him and the three floors above where Shigaraki and the others were, and then back to him.

“W-what?”

Needless to say, Helmet got away safely.

“Damn, I thought I hadn’t seen him in a while,” Dabi sighed, as he eyed Hawks from the corner of his eyes, “He was taking care of someone who’ll just leave him high and dry.”

“It’s okay,” Twice said, flashing a thumbs-up, “We won’t ever abandon the guy who pulled us out of the gutter. // Yeah, let’s stab him in the back!”

“So, where’s he going?” Hawks asked, pointedly ignoring their words.

He was ignored with nothing more than a knowing smirk as they walked off. He sighed, and rubbed the back of his neck, tough crowd.

Well, he wasn’t Number Three for nothing, and he was long overdue for a flight. His wings stretched open and he took flight.

### Helmet & Hawks - (another) stalker

Hawks watched Helmet. He moved efficiently, but his fighting was a mess. He got the job done, in a gorey and slow manner, but Hawks saw this whole thing as a good thing. If the man was perfect, it would be much harder to find a place for himself, or worse, he’d be competing with the others for scraps.

It was clear that they didn’t want him here. He really didn’t care.

However, there was a guy here who helped him. There was a need here that he could fill. There was no reason for him to leave just yet. There was no one here waiting to be saved, or even wanted help from him.

And the quieter part of Hawks, the one that missed and ached for human companionship, for someone that looked at him like a person and not an idol, didn’t want to give up.

So first, he would learn about Helmet.

-

First, it was clear that Helmet wanted him out of his apartment.

Hawks really, really didn’t want to be somewhere where he would be alone again, but he agreed with an easy smile. Maybe, if he explained himself, the other man would relent and let him stay.

...No, he knew that he didn’t deserve that. Swallowing his fears, he gave his trademark smile instead. Don’t be a burden, he reminded himself. Don’t be selfish. He needed to demonstrate his worth first. He spent his entire life for other people, he wasn’t about to break those habits now.

In the Rental Office, Helmet pulled out a thick piece of cardboard. On it, several keyrings, each with one key, were pinned to the board. There was a piece of masking tape over each of the keyrings, and some numbers scribbled on it.

Was Helmet offering him a room?

“Then, I’ll take the room next to yours, if that’s okay?”

Helmet didn’t twitch, and remained unmoving. Hawks took one of the keys, the one next to Hemet’s room, and carefully pocketed it. Immediately, it became one of his most precious possessions.

“Then, let’s get along, neighbor,” he said with a wide grin.

Helmet nodded back at him, or maybe he was just putting the board away. It could be either, and the blond gave a short sigh.

-

As expected, the apartment was dusty. It was, strangely enough, stocked with a few days worth of food, canned peaches and a pack of water. There were some books, and a couch, but it was otherwise unfurnished.

It was barren and empty and he didn’t like how well it fit him.

His smile didn’t fall, of course, but he would have rather stayed in Helmet’s disinfectant-stained apartment than here alone. The man was quiet or absent, so the blond didn’t think that he would make any noise throughout the day. It was like he was alone again. There was someone next door, who was alive, but he felt alone.

There was a knock on the door, despite the fact that he left it wide open, and he turned around to see Helmet. The small man was carrying a box and two large bags. He set them down at the doorframe, and Hawks came to join him.

“You can just come in, the door’s open,” he said.

Helmet did exactly not that, and the blond wondered if maybe he was clingy. He wasn’t clingy, was he? Was he the clingy one? No, no, he’s probably just acting like this because this was the first person that hasn't asked anything of him. Eventually, this film would break, and he would return back to normal. He just needed to get used to being with someone again.

After placing everything down, Helmet turned to leave. Hawks supposed that it was a kindness to give him all these supplies, but did he have to leave so soon? Well, he supposed that he didn’t have any tea or treats to entice him to stay, and Helmet was probably going to head out on patrol of some sort.

“Ah, thanks for these…”

Hawks’ voice trailed off as Helmet jumped off the railing. Did… Did he move like this all the time? That sounded like a waste of energy to do it every time. However, he saw the state of the staircases, and figured that this was one of his only options.

He sighed.

If Helmet thought that this was all it took to get rid of him, he had another thing coming. He threw the boxes behind him, and closed the door behind him. He didn’t bother locking it, since the only thing that mattered to him was heading out to patrol.

His wings opened behind him and he took flight, feeling like himself for the first time in a very long time.

-

Trying to figure out Helmet was surprisingly easy. He was a straight-forward guy, who moved with purpose. Once Hawks figured out what his priorities were, he knew that he'd be better able to help him reach those goals.

It helped that there was a trail of gore and bits mapping out the path he took.

-

Eventually, he went through the supplies that were brought to him. In the box, there were some more canned goods like spam, corn, and an assortment of dried fruits. This would have happily fed an entire family for a week back at his old place. There were a small handful of salt and sugar packets near the bottom, inside of a small pot. He assumed it was so that he could cook something it if he wanted to.

One of the bags contained some blankets and a futon, and the other bag had some clothes, ranging from sizes M to XXL. He snorted, and when he found a pair of scissors at the bottom of the box, wondered if he was expected to cut some holes for his wings.

He didn’t even realize how much he was smiling until he was curious on why his face hurt so much.

This meant that he was wanted here, right? If someone looked after another this much, this meant that he was wanted, didn’t it?

-

A few days afterwards, they were all given dried meat.

“That doesn't mean you’re special though, alright?!” Twice hissed at him, “Helmet here gives everyone some! And you gotta work for the rest!”

“Hm, you guys call him Helmet?” Hawks replied back.

As though realizing what he did, Twice covered his mouth, since he had a mask on, it was doubly strange to see.

“I can’t believe you made me sell him out like that! Gah, as expected of a hero!”

He was an easily excitable guy, Hawks thought, amused. He was glad that there were people who still had a lot of energy in a place like this.

### Iguchi Shuichi: Spinner- Loyalty

Iguchi waited over thirteen hours at the staircase for this man. While he would have normally been upset at the fact that someone had kept him waiting for so long, he didn’t have it in his heart to ever think that of this specific person. It wasn’t like they had promised on a specific time anyways. He watched as the man walked into the apartment complex area, and stood at the staircase that he was climbing up.

He was in steel-towed boots, with several pieces of duct tape accessorizing it. There was a fire-hydrant taped to his left thigh, and he carried a bulging yellow backpack that looked ready to pop open. And then, a black, full-face helmet that Iguchi associated with motorbikes covered his entire head.

His head tilted to face him.

“Thank you,” he said. Even though he had been practicing these lines in his head, had replayed this situation in his mind, over and over again, it was something completely different now that the man was standing just a few steps below him. He realized that he didn’t bow when he said it, and quickly gave one.

He truly hoped that his actions and words didn’t appear as insincere.

“Thank you so much for… for saving me and … and bringing me here. Thank you for sharing your resources and taking care of me. I can’t… I can’t even begin to imagine why you wanted to do that, but if there is anything I can do for you, please, just say the word!”

He lifted his head up.

“I… As you can see, my Quirk is Lizard! But I’m also adept at combat-fighting and stealth! I am-am I… I can be a great asset to you!” he continued on, losing his fire as the silence continued to draw on.

He gulped, wondering if perhaps he didn’t understand him. Then, all he needed to learn was how to be understood right? He wasn’t really a fan of trying or learning because of the things he associated with it, but now that the world had ended, he thinks he’s willing to put in the effort.

“Please!” he said, dropping his head as his eyes started to well up in tears.

He doesn’t think he could handle it if he was abandoned again. How could he dare to even dream of competing against Hawks? If he was abandoned again, left alone like that again… then he might as well die. But with the life that this man had given him, had patched him up, fed and clothed him, he wanted to give it all to this man.

He lived a meaningless life. Maybe, now that the world has ended, something could change.

“I-”

He stopped cold as the man began to move. He stood there, frozen in his bow, until Helmet was only a few steps away. He lifted his head up just a little bit, and realized that he was being handed something. He took the plastic bag into his arms, and stared in slack-jawed shock as the man walked right by him.

His eyes watered some more, because if actions spoke louder than words, he was fucking mute.

In the bag were vitamin supplements. It was clear that he had spent a longer time than usual out hunting for supplies, if he had brought back vitamin supplements of all shapes and sizes. He brought this for them.

If that didn’t tell him that someone wanted him -and the people he was with- to be alive, he doesn’t know what will.

-

“Well if you don’t like it then just leave!” Iguchi snapped back. “If you’re so unhappy and dissatisfied, then do something about it! This guy took us in, took you in, nursed us back to health when he knew nothing about us! He shares his resources with us! His medicine and his food and his water! He hasn’t asked anything of us!”

“So you’re going to throw your life away like a common dog? Just because he gave you some food, a nice place to sleep? Wag your tail when he comes by?” the man bit back and the lizard scowled.

“It’s not like that!” Iguchi snapped back, his face red with his frustration. He stared at Shigaraki for another moment before he sighed. “… I just… I want to die for something. I want to choose what to die for. I’m sick of living in fear and I’m sick of being alone! We’re all going to die anyways! So I might as well die somewhere where someone cared if I woke up tomorrow or not!”

There was a long silence following his words.

“...If that’s a fool’s way of living, that’s fine. I don’t mind dying a fool. I just want to choose that.”

“...Yeah,” Shigaraki said quietly, “You’re a fucking idiot.”

Somehow, he didn’t sound nearly as angry as before though. He walked out afterwards, and Spinner was more than surprised to see him stay.

But, even if they left, where would they go?

-

The following day, however, Spinner’s jaw unhinged when he came to join Helmet for the patrol.

“...Shigaraki?” he asked, mouth agape.

Shigaraki, in a comfortable-looking sweater and loose-fitting jeans, scowled back at him. He rubbed his hands over his arms.

“What’s takes you so damn long to get ready?” he asked, voice snippy.

“Uh…” he hesitated, “This is… our usual time?” he tried. He wondered what was going on. Didn’t they literally just fight about this? Like, last night, they were screaming in each other’s faces about this, weren’t they? Then what was all of this about?

“What?” Shigaraki frowned, “But he goes out when the sun goes down.”

“He does what?”

The other man scowled, “How many times does he go out a day?”

And Spinner really, really wished he knew. He wanted to know that. He wanted to know why Shigaraki was here. He wanted to know why the world ended and he was stuck here.

Red eyes narrowed at him, and Spinner frowned back. Anyways, who the fuck did he think that he was, to demand things like this from him anyways?

“Why are you here again? I thought this was the fool’s way of living?”

“...Yeah,” Shigaraki nodded, “I’m an idiot. Oh, here he comes.”

Helmet, flanked by Toga and Compress on either side, came up to where they were standing.

“W-what?” Spinner spluttered. He looked torn between reacting at Shigaraki’s words or stuttering out some embarrassing greeting to Helmet again. Eventually, he took too long to make a decision and Helmet walked right past them, like they weren’t even there.

It was amazing how the only person who came to save him was the same person who always ignored him.

Still, if he was a pushy and demanding person, he didn’t think that the others would have ended up joining his efforts.

### Normality

After several days of tense glaring and posturing, something resembling normal was made. For the most part, everyone was content to live on their own, doing as they pleased.

The only time anyone deviated from that unspoken rule was when they forced themselves into Helmet’s life. Unfortunately, no one was willing to sacrifice their time with Helmet, despite the fact that the man was like a brick wall when it came to conversation and company.

Still, the silent company of someone who saved you could be a comforting thing. He never said or did anything that made them think that they were doing anything wrong or right. It was as frustrating as it was liberating, and it just depended on the day.

At the end of that week, right when they thought that they had a handle on life, Helmet returned with a Pro-Hero on his back.

Eraserhead.

## [Year 1: Spring - March]

### Enter Aizawa

Deku didn't know how to describe the look on Eraserhead's face, but he was certain about one thing. He never wanted to wake up and see that expression looking back at him.

The man was slumped against the wall, looking at him like he’s seen a ghost, and from the way one of his hands tightly gripped his shoulder, understood what must have happened. Deku looked down at his bat, thinking that it was a little sad that the next survivors he met were the type to abandon a hero like that.

Or perhaps, this was a hero who had abandoned them.

He wasn’t sure what was pitiful, but then again, he supposed it didn’t matter.

All survivors were pitiful.

He turned back to the group that was meandering towards them, unevenly stepping towards them with every second. Deku took a deep breath, no matter how many times he did this, he felt that pull on his heart again. He knew this was wrong.

But there was someone behind him.

He wasn’t a hero or anything, but even he had things he wanted to protect. Bat at the ready, he figured that the least he could do was let the man behind him know that there was someone willing to fight for him.

-

“God fuck,” Shigaraki sighed deeply rubbing his face with his hands, “Another fucking Pro Hero?”

As a response, the young man walked right by him and walked into one of the second floor complexes, the one closest to the stairwell, with said Pro Hero slung over his shoulder as Hawks held the door open.

“Yeah,” Hawks said, a little breathless, “I can’t believe it.”

Shigaraki scowled back, but he couldn’t deny the feeling that something was changing.

### Monster Who Looked Human, Human Who Looked Like a Monster - Shoji

“Shit, there was one more-”

Dabi grabbed Twice by the shoulders and yanked hard. The man came crashing down onto the ground while Dabi raised his hand up to fend off the extra monster they found curled up here. His fire burned, bright blue and small at his fingertips as he tried to adjust the output since they were in an enclosed space.

His concentration broke and his fire died when a chair came flying at him. He jumped backwards and further into the room, eyes narrowed as the chair clattered right through the place he used to be. It crashed against the wall, and for a second, the only sound in the world was Twice’s pained groans.

Helmet stepped into the room, bat drawn and definitely stood in front of the monster.

...No way. Dabi’s respect for this man would plummet through the ground if it turned out that this guy made exceptions to the rules he never explicitly said. But seriously? He was going to fight them for this monster?

But Helmet dropped his bat and took his backpack off. He kneeled down in front of the monster and for a moment, just sat there. Slowly, he opened his backpack and pulled out several things, water, jerky, and a few packets of trail mixes. He pulled out a white box with a red-cross, a first-aid kit, and then stood up. He grabbed his bat and walked out of the room.

“W-What?” the monster in the corner said, proving to all of them that perhaps he wasn’t a monster. “You’re… not going to kill me?”

“...Well, he stopped us from doing it,” Dabi said, eyeing the supplies. He couldn’t believe that anyone would just give away their supplies like this. Of course, he was only alive because someone did, but that didn’t mean that he suddenly understood why anyone would do that.

He thought back to the room of supplies that Helmet left to them. At the very least, there seemed to be a constant going on. Regardless of who, or what they looked like, it was clear that Helmet was going to be giving them supplies.

“Next time,” Twice groaned, sittig up, “Just fucking say ‘don’t kill it’, okay? // I’m gonna kill all you bastards in your sleep.”

Dabi, with a deep scowl on his face, stalked out of the door and after Helmet.

Twice sat up, rubbing the back of his head as he stood up.

“So,” he turned to the Not-Monster in the corner, “If you’re coming, you need to keep up.”

-

“...Mezo Shoji,” he said quietly. “My name is Mezo Shoji.”

“You’re useless till you prove otherwise,” Shigaraki chimed in.

Shoji tensed at the words.

“C’mon, don’t bully him.”

Shigaraki rolled his eyes as the winged-man dropped down.

“Yo,” he said, giving a small, two-finger salute, “There’s not much, but make yourself comfortable,” he said.

“...I don’t…”

“...deserve it?” Hawks finished for him, he gave a toothy grin, “Yeah, none of us probably do. It’s why we’re still alive.”

It… wasn’t the words he expected a hero to say. Maybe something more inspiring, or something about how he needed to hold onto hope or anything other than that. Even though Hawks looked at him with a lazy grin, his eyes were sharp in a way that made Shoji feel vulnerable, like he was being seen right through.

“What you do with that life is up to you. But you know, Helmet saved you, brought you here, gave you his supplies, and all that jazz.”

The blond’s grin was just like the things he had seen on billboards and magazines, but in front of him now, Shoji wondered if he traded an easy death for something completely different.

“Food for thought.”

-

“If it’s work,” Aizawa said, “We have plenty of things to do without going outside with Helmet and the others.”

The seemingly emotionless man stared at Shoji for a moment longer.

“...Being alive isn’t a sin. And life isn’t about paying back debts.”

“But I… I want to be useful,” Shoji said.

“Yeah,” the man didn’t say it, but Shoji’s eyes fell to his arm that was in a sling, “I understand that feeling. But if you want to help someone, you have to help yourself first.”

“...So, what… can I do?”

“We can always use some extra hands to clean up the area.”

### (Children)

Then came the children. It was like they were suddenly coming out of the woodwork, but Hawks and Helmet were coming in carrying people all shapes and sizes.

It made him really uncomfortable.

Some of them were running fevers, most were injured, and all of them were just drains on their resources.

The strangest part of it all was how the others, no matter how uncomfortable they felt, didn't say anything against it.

### Enter Present Mic

Right when Yamada thought that he was okay with dying, a young man in a helmet dropped down in front of him with a baseball bat. He came like a hurricane, leaving nothing but crushed skulls in his wake, and as though he wasn’t in shock before, suddenly found himself being carried up into the sky.

He stared in abject shock as former Pro Hero Hawks gave him a wave.

“Hey there,” he said, “We’re here to help.”

He was a sight for sore eyes. However, Yamada had already resigned himself to his fate. He had ran out on the group he promised to protect because they abandoned his best friend, he had no way of finding his friend or putting him down if he had turned like he has promised to do, and he just. He didn’t deserve to live or die or anything. And on several occasions, he wished to cease existing as a whole.

Overall, he was just really, really tired.

And when he was flown to a six story apartment complex, he didn’t know what to expect. However, a bowl of warm white rice, packed four inches over the bowl edge and fried canned sausages in front of him, was not it.

Especially when Aizawa Shota’s rugged face complete with his lazy half grin and half-opened eyes came in front of him with the food.

“...Oh, I died,” Yamada suddenly realized.

Aizawa snorted back, “Good try,” he replied back. “You can’t leave me that easily. C’mon, eat up before it gets cold.”

Which was good, really good, because Yamada really, really didn’t want to be alone.

-

Yamada must have hesitated for a long time, because his friend nodded. “It’s all yours. They got plenty more where it came from.”

The blond gave a breathless laugh, and to think, just last week they learned that someone had been sneaking food out of their storage unit so everyone was under a strict diet. And now, they were free to eat whatever he wanted, whenever.

“So, who’s our mysterious savior?” Yamada asked, mouth full with food. “Should go give our greeting and thank them and stuff, right?”

Aizawa scowled back, but it had none of his usual sharpness.

“Swallow before you speak, idiot,” he said, mouth full of rice as he deftfully stole Yamada’s peaches.

“Hey! I was saving those!”

“Shoulda moved faster,” his friend grinned back, looking utterly unrepentant.

The blond, even though he was a little miffed, couldn’t hold onto the grudge for long. Since this whole thing started, he hadn’t really seen Aizawa this relaxed in a while.

It was good. And it also said a lot about this place, if they managed to get his friend to drop his guard, even if it was just for a moment.

### Iidas

-

“Good to see you again,” Aizawa said, passing him a water bottle.

Tensei stared at the building in front of him, a laugh spilling from his lips as his eyes watered.

“Something… something survived,” he said, in awe.

His entire body trembled, and Aizawa really felt for this man. Just a few weeks ago, Aizawa was exactly where Tensei was.

“Yes,” he said quietly, “We survived.”

And it didn’t sound nearly as awful as it used to.

### (re)enter - Stain

Life was good and almost easy. And then he fucked up and was surrounded on all sides.

Shit.

He was running, of course he was running, and if he wasn’t running he was hiding.

-

### Shigaraki & Decay

In that moment, Shigaraki felt dread. A cold kind of feeling that made the whole world slow down for just a moment. The world fell so quiet in that moment that it felt like his heartbeat thundered across the world. He couldn’t see anything or think about anything other than a sinking realization that Helmet would not get out of this unscathed.

And he, who had used so many of Helmet’s medical supplies, knew that even if Helmet could walk off this injury, he might die when they got back. No one else could help. No one else would help. After all, the only person in the world who was willing to help a stranger was Helmet and he was the one that needed to be hlped right now.

The thought, the dread, all mounted up to a single conclusion.

He ran forward, even if it was useless, even if it wouldn’t help, because he didn’t want Helmet to die. Not now. Not yet. And that meant that someone, anyone even him, had to protect Helmet.

He lifted his hand up, and his remaining two fingers touched the surface.

As it turned out, he didn’t need five fingers to activate his quirk after all. Just someone to use it for.

### Stain v(?) LOV

“...So you’ve done nothing?” Stain asked, voice cold and curt. “What gratitude.”

-

Being with people was just as hard, tedious and annoying as Stain thought it would be. Those who eyed him like a threat, those who eyed him like he was a waste of space, they were all the same to him.

Still, he wasn’t someone who left debts unpaid. That’s the only reason why he stayed.

“Please! Make me your disciple!”

Stain stared at Spinner.

“I-I find your fighting style and ability incredible! I really admire the way you carry yourself!”

The taller male stared at the lizard, hoping and praying that someone would notice that this wasn’t supposed to happen and take him away. That didn’t happen, and his prayers went unheard.

“So I was… I know it’s a little impudent to say this, but I was hoping that you could… take me in as your student! I want… I want to get stronger! I don’t want to be satisfied just watching what happens next and instead take part in it!”

Children, because only children could have eyes as bright as Spinner’s, were blinding.

Briefly, Stain thought that he had lost his mind after all.

“It won’t be easy.”

### Mineta & Jirou - Girls Have It Easy

“Girls have it so easy,” Mineta sighed back, “We have to work for our food and bed but you guys don’t even have to do that right? All you need to do is do some ecchi things with whoever is at the top, and everything is taken care of for you.”

Jirou flinched back, angry and ready to fight even though she knew he was right. In that sense, it was much easier to survive anywhere as a woman as long as there was a man to give herself too. She knew that. She’s seen it, over and over again.

And as someone with a useless quirk and three broken fingers, she knew that it was probably her only option.

### Vlad King & the Other Teachers Arrive

“Yeah, our base fell a part,” Midnight said, sighing deeply. “...A lot of people probably turned.”

“Shocking,” Shigaraki replied back. “If Heroes could protect people that well, this whole thing wouldn’t have gone to shit to begin with.”

Vlad King shot up to his feet at that, frustrations bubbling over.

“You! How dare you say that? We’ve been working so hard-”

“For what, old man?! You say you worked so hard but it’s not your hard work that put food in front of you, now is it?!” the man snapped back. His lips twisted into a malicious grin, eyes glimmering in delight as he took in their defeated postures, “When it came down to it, you don’t even know the name of the guy who saved you right? All you fucking Pros are the same, you stand at the top, looking down on everyone else but in the end, you’re just as bad as us.”

“Hey, if we want to stay here and cohabitate-”

“If you can’t stand the truth then get out,” Dabi said, speaking up for the first time, “It’s annoying enough that there’s so many of you suddenly. But it’s not like any of you are even making an effort to contribute or help out.”

“That-We didn’t know how to help,” Midnight said, “And your leader, Helmet, right? He hasn’t said anything once.”

Shigaraki gave a sharp laugh at that, sounding like broken glass, “You’re heroes, and you need someone to tell you how to wipe your own asss?”

Twice clapped loudly, before turning to flip them off, “We don’t have any clue why he decided to help you out, but don’t think the rest of us want you here! / We’ll kill all of you if Helmet wants!”

It seemed that both sides of him agreed with him on that.

“Eh, but lucky you Hawks,” Toga sang back, “You finally found your flock, right?”

The easy-going smile on Hawks’ face tightened considerably at that.

The group of them shared a good laugh at that when the door suddenly opened and Helmet came walking in with a bag of rice over his shoulder. He didn’t even stop to stare at them as he walked right by them and placed the bag of rice on the table. Then, he turned around and left.

They stared at the table, a little amazed that he could carry the 50 pound bag of grains with seemingly little to no difficulty, and also a little shocked that he had come in so abruptly. It seemed that, even though they knew he could be unpredictable, they were still never prepared for what it was that he decided to do.

“Ah, wait, Helmet, please, I can help. My quirk is incredibly useful if you… you would just…”

Compress who had followed him into the room paused as he stared at all of them. He looked left to right, and when Helmet walked by him, snapped out of his trance.

“This is where all of you were?!” he asked, “Help me! Helmet’s been moving all these bags of rice and he’s absolutely awful at letting us help him!”

At that, Dabi was already on his feet and out the door, “Augh, that fucking shithead.”

Shigaraki stood up as well, scowling. He pointed at the other teachers, “You guys better learn your place.”

Which he hoped that they would hear as “get the fuck out and take all the kids with you” but instead they heard it as “pull your own goddamn weight."

### Villains v Heroes - trust

If there were any misconceptions that Helmet wasn't attached to the villains, or anyone really, or had any expectations from the heroes as heroes, they were blown away in a single moment. It's easy to make large assumptions based on little gestures, and every little thing that Helmet did (or didn’t do) was a thousand times more dramatic and important than anyone else doing that same gesture.

"How… how can you trust them? For all we know, they're just going to betray us!"

Aizawa turned sharply to Helmet who resolutely stood between them.

"Do you know who those people are? These are some A-rank criminals."

Helmet shook his head, standing in front of Twice as though to protect him. Behind him, Twice placed both of his hands over his heart, as though to catch it should it beat right out of his chest.

“I wouldn’t betray him!” Twice snapped back, “ \\ But I’d murder him in his sleep!”

Dabi facepalmed when another voice spoke up.

“It’s fine,” Stain, the newest (and possibly strangest) member of this unofficial base spoke up. “Helmet here can do what he wants. And I’ll get rid of the ones that get in your way. Don’t worry about things like this.”

He dropped down next to Helmet, glaring down at Twice before his eyes slid over to Aizawa.

“I’ll… Stain my hands to protect your decisions,” he said as a slow grin stretched across his face. He looked down on Helmet, as though there was something that only the two of them could understand. “I will stand by you. That’s what I will do with the life that you saved.”

And after a declaration like that, it was harder for anyone to make any other argument.

-

“So you picked a fight with them?” Kan asked, the disbelief on his face plain as day.

“I didn’t pick a fight,” Aizawa scowled back.

“No, I’m pretty sure you made things worse,” Kayama sighed, shaking her head.

“Well, it’s not like you’re doing any better on your end,” Yamada said, coming to his friend’s defense, “At least Shota tried.”

“We shouldn’t be arguing amongst ourselves over this,” Ishiyama replied back, voice soothing the same way he always was, as though their entire situation wasn’t exploding back in their faces. Not for the first time, his presence was greatly appreciated. “We can’t change what’s done, so let’s work on what we can work on. If the complaints are that we aren’t pulling our own weight, then we can work on that. There has to be something that we can do that he will view as beneficial.”

“That doesn’t mean anything if we have to keep looking over our shoulder. At least we can defend ourselves,” Yamada said, shaking his head. “The kids deserve a childhood.”

“Well, at the very least, it seems that if Helmet will come to their aid, he’ll come to ours too,” Aizawa said.

“Shota, you going to risk these kids’ lives on that?” the blond asked quietly.

“What are you guys talking about?”

The group of former teachers looked up where Hawks flew right down next to them. His wings folded behind him, and he gave them a lazy smile.

“Something wrong?”

They gave each other a look before Aizawa bit the bullet.

“...Hawks, you’ve been here for a while, right?” he asked.

“Ah, not that much longer than you, but I guess,” he responded.

“Do you think this is a safe place, especially concerning the… other occupants here?”

The blond folded his arms over his chest, tilting his head as he thought about it. He gave a hum and then shrugged. “Does it matter?” he asked. “They’ve been here longer than me, actually,” he explained, “and from what I gathered, Helmet picked them off the street after they got chased out of their previous camp.”

“And he’s letting them stay here?” Yamada grimaced.

“I guess so,” Hawks nodded. “But if they wanted to do something, I think they would have done it by now. So like, they’re all bark and no bite.”

They looked like they wanted to disagree and the man shrugged back.

“Well, that Stain guy is pretty dangerous. But he’s not the only one that’s keeping tabs on the people here.”

His wings fluttered a little at that, and the smile on his face felt like a sweet poison. Despite the fact that they should have been comforted with the fact that a former Pro-Hero like Hawks was here, they couldn’t find it in themselves to feel that measure of security. There was something off about this man, although they didn’t know if it was because the apocalypse had unhinged him.

“Just don’t go out of your way to upset him, and you should be fine. As long as Helmet doesn’t actively try to stop you or whatever, no one will come for your life. He went out of his way to bring you guys here and take care of you, and they won’t do anything to take away from his effort.”

Yeah, no shit, Yamada wanted to say. But Hawks’ eyes had already found something, someone else, because his wings fluttered just a little bit. So, he lost his chance to say anything or even ask what the fuck that meant, before Hawks was gone.

“Hey Helmet, are you heading out? I’ll come with you.”

### Deer Meat

“No, I just… thought that you would know how to gut something.”

Aizawa raised an eyebrow. What the fuck did they think he was?

“No way, Shota is a convenience-store bug!” Yamada said when he stopped laughing. Aizawa had beaten him up for less.

### Cementoss - Walls

It was only obvious that, when you find a place with an abundance of resources, relatively safe, with many people and some injured, that you would try to hole yourself inside of it. It was such a natural, human response to find solace with walls, that Cementoss was shocked that they didn't have any walls around their perimeter.

So, in an effort to be helpful while simultaneously trying to provide more comfort to the crying and uncertain children, Cementoss erected a border.

It had nothing to do with the fact that he was excited to be able to use his quirk again.

He was peacefully enjoying lunch when something break and Midnight's distinct yell of "What the hell are you doing?!"

He met eyes with Snipe before they sprung into action, equipped with the strange and painfully familiar notion that they would be able to return to this lunch once the situation was cleared up.

-

Imagine their shock at seeing half of Cementoss walls destroyed, some disintegrated and burned away to ash, and others smashed into bits.

"W-what's going on here?!"

Yamada, accompanied by a better-looking Aizawa with his arm still in a sling, approached with their own frowns and confusion.

"That's what we want to know too," Snipe said.

"These guys just started to destroy the walls!" Midnight shouted back, gesturing to Shigaraki, Dabi and four Twice clones with sledgehammers.

"Hah? You're the ones living off of our resources!" One of the Twice clones snapped back, flipping them off. "You should be grateful we don't even ask you to pitch in to feed your fat asses!"

It was completely true. They were busy making sure that they were okay and the injured students were still safe. Concerning what they were doing, they weren't giving back at all, but were greedily consuming the resources. In addition to that, nothing was ever asked of them, but they figured that the would have been asked to chip in eventually-

"Our squad leader Helmet is the reason why any of you are here and alive at all! We would have just abandoned you where you were and come back to put you out of your misery! And this is how you repay us?"

"...Isn't having a wall necessary? For defense?" Cementoss worded carefully.

"Helmet doesn't want them," Dabi replied, his hands glowing with the fire, "No walls."

"Wait, let us try and talk to him-"

"Guys what gives? C'mon, I wanna eat lunch so let's get going!" Another Twice clone called outcoming over. "Get your ass in gear! Helmet is half done with all of his!"

"We're working on it!" Dabi snapped back, turning over. "Jeez. I knew this would happen. You get a couple of heroes and suddenly, they are going to lead us all."

"That's not-"

Midnight was cut off as Twice snorted back.

"Then you wouldn't have needed help, right? Since the last place you were at still had heroes right?"

"But still…"

The words hit hard, and while they might have tried to fight it harder once upon a time, after constant failure met them at every turn and corner of their lives, their self-esteem was too tattered to make a stand on. They stood like chasitized children, with the sound of the crumbling wall surrounded them.

"...He's over there, right?" Aizawa asked, turning to leave. "Alright."

He stopped though, since the helmet-wearing man came jogging around the corner. Bat in his hand, it was clear that he was here for a fight. He looked at all of them, turning his head left to right and then placed the tip of the bat to the ground.

"No fight here, sir!" Twice said, saluting at him. "Just a bunch of old people tryna play hero!"

"Why don't you want walls?" Aizawa asked as soon as he saw him

Helmet turned his head to face the taller man and then shook his head. He turned back to leave and when the frustration boiled over, he reached out to grab the man by the wrist.

The effect was immediate. He jumped backwards to narrowly avoid a blade as Iguchi ran in from behind Helmet. Snipe brought up his guns and Midnight was ready to tear off her sleeve. The blue fire exploded across Dabi's shoulders and the tension skyrocketed.

"Don't touch him," Shigaraki said, lifting his hand up menacingly.

Suddenly, loud barking was heard and a pack of eight Shiba Inus came running from the outside of the border. They barked loudly as they ran around the group of humans and then right to Helmet. They circled him once and barked at the wall.

Helmet's hand tightened on his bat and started to run towards the ruined walls. Right before he left the border, he tapped his bat against the concrete walls and ran.

Above, Hawks descended. "Hey there's some Walkers … The dogs beat me here?!"

"... He doesn't want walls because he has strays watching the borders?" Cementoss whispered out.

"Of course he has dogs," Dabi muttered back, just as shocked as the others at the sudden appearance of dogs. He gave a sigh, "I'll go help with clean-up." He threw the group of former heroes another glance, "No walls, you ungrateful bastards."

-

"Man that felt good," Twice said, sighing deeply. He looked down at his hands, “but man, dogs!? Did you see them? They were so cute!” he rubbed his face, “Why can’t we take them in? They should be with us, so I could hold them! Oh my god, could you imagine puppy piles! We wouldn’t need to put the heater back to work ever again!”

Togra placed her head on the table and kicked her feet wildly under the table, “No fair,” she wailed back. “ I want to play with little puppers,” she whined loudly, “They’d be so cute splattered in blood.”

“And we’d have real meat again too,” Dabi noted.

Toga’s hands flew to her mouth as she gasped in surprise, “Dabi, that’s terrible! How could you say that?!”

“I mean, if were going to be cutting them anyways…”

Iguchi shook his head, still wondering whether or not he was lucky for surviving with them or not. Across the way was Shigaraki, who was still alone, who was always alone, yawning as he tapped away on a handheld game console as he leaned against the wall next to the door.

Right before he got to ask why he was there, the door opened and Helmet walked out with a small bag of dog food.

“...You’ve been feeding them?” Iguchi asked quietly.

Helmet nodded as he walked out with the bag of treats, and Shigaraki pushed off the wall and followed him out. The others, since it wasn’t like they had anything better to do, followed.

Leading them to seeing one of the Shiba Inus standing at where they had cleared out the walls, nothing left but large lumps of concrete and piles of dust and sand. They had noticed that it was here since earlier, but they didn’t realize what it was waiting for. Any chance that of the others, anyone, coming closer ended with it running away, but returning in a few moments.

The young man opened the bag of treats and placed it on the ground. The dog got up, barked, picked up the bag in its mouth and then sat, waiting at the man’s feet. There was a long pause, and when Helmet turned away, the dog got up to sit down in front of him. He turned gain and the dog tried again. It put the bag of treats down and barked.

The idea that the dog was waiting for a treat or food, that Helmet had somehow trained these stray dogs to patrol around and call him when Walkers were sited nearby, died away. Helmet shot them a glance before his shoulder heaved and he stuck his hand out. The dog eagerly pushed its head against the palm of his gloved hands.

“Oh,” Twice said.

Then the dog, with the bag of treats, trotted away.

“Huh,” Iguchi noted.

“...So if I warn him about an incoming attack,” Toga said slowly, “I’ll get headpats?”

Iguchi choked a little.

“No way,” Shigaraki said, “He hates touching people.”

The lizard spun to stare at him, wondering why he felt so suddenly betrayed by the normally quiet man.

-

### More on Dogs

“...They say ‘Thank you’,” Koda said quietly. He wrung his hands together, “And that if… if you needed anything or wanted some help, they would be happy to help you.”

Aizawa stared as Helmet looked from Koda to the dog in front of him. He hesitated and put his hand out, hesitantly, and the dog pressed its head against his gloved hand. It barked some more times and Koda gulped loudly.

“They uh… they also want you to know that uhm… that they can leave someone here for you.”

Helmet pulled his hand back and looked down at the dog. The dog pulled his ears down flat, staring up with wide-eyes and everyone else stared in trepidation.

“If you can look at those eyes and say you’re not going to agree…” Kaminari whispered quietly.

“...Damn, that’s heartless.”

Then, Helmet shrugged. He turned away and left.

If anyone noticed that there was more dog food and cat food in the designated pantry rooms, they squealed loudly but didn’t mention it to Helmet.

### Garden

“...A garden?”

Helmet sat up a little straighter at that, and everyone took note of it.

Shiozaki nodded, a smile growing on her face, “I think it’ll be great. Helmet already gave us the seeds, so we will be working on it.”

“...We?”

She turned to where Koji rubbed the back of his head sheepishly.

“Yes, Koji-kun and I will like to head this. Koji said he’ll convince the cats and dogs to take care of any of the pest problems, and I’ll make sure that everything grows ripe and well.”

“...Huh,” Shigaraki nodded, “Not bad.”

### Bleaching Station

Of all the things he wasn’t expecting to see in the morning, Helmet shoving by the front of the apartment complex was definitely wasn’t one of them.

...Was he looking for something?

No wait, Aizawa thought as he rubbed his eyes. Better question, why was he awake? How long has he been awake?

By the time he realized what the man was doing, and had made his way over, he realized that there was something seriously wrong about the entire thing. He squinted at the man and made his way over. He didn’t make any effort to silence his steps, and made his way to the man.

It was a large square he was digging up, and looking at the ground, he could see there was an outline. It was too big to be a burial site, and it was too small and oddly placed to be another garden either.

“...Morning,” he called out to the man who never answered him.

Helmet, who didn’t have his fire extinguisher or his bats on his person but on the ground a few feet away, didn’t even pause as he kept shoveling. He was about a foot into the ground when he stopped shoveling. Could it be? Did he notice that Aizawa was talking to him?

No, actually, he started to use the back of his shovel to pat down the dirt. Did he even exist to this guy? Aizawa wasn’t sure.

“Oh! Helmet, there you are! Morning!”

He looked to where a blond came running up to him, Twice, if he remembered from the mugshots. It was seriously unnerving to share so many domestic habits with him, and the others like him.

“Ah, and Hero-kun,” he said pointing at Aizawa, “I guess, former Hero-kun.” He laughed, and Aizawa ignored the pinch in his heart at the words. Just as quickly as he came, he dismissed Aizawa and turned back to the guy who finished building a hole. “Whatcha doing, Helmet?”

Helmet stepped out of the hole and grabbed his fire extinguisher. He strapped it onto one of his thighs, using some poorly constructed mess of belts and duct tape, but it stayed on well enough. They watched as he dragged in some large pieces of concrete, the pieces that once formed a wall around the perimeter of the apartment complex. Seeing it made something pinch in Aizawa’s heart, but after watching Helmet drag the pieces to lay out in the hole, Twice jumped in.

“Got it!”

Aizawa wasn’t too sure what he ‘got’ but he helped drag some pieces of concrete back. Again, he felt useless, and the weight of his arm in the makeshift sling felt oppressive.

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Eventually, the bottom and sides were lined unevenly in the bits of concrete. It was done relatively quickly, but they didn’t even know that they were done with the supposed task until Helmet got up and left.

He slung his backpack on and just left the area. It was so sudden, that Twice and Aizawa stared at his back dumbly before Twice scrambled to follow and Aizawa wished he could.

-

Eventually, Aizawa got to watch Helmet return and go to the area where he dug a hole and lined it with concrete. He watched with interest, and felt all the final puzzle pieces fall into place.

He was building a place for people to clean up in. A place where the remaining bleach solution and disinfect won’t run through the ground. It was placed close to where people came in through, probably to minimize how much cleaning they had to do on the main floors.

Whatever Helmet was working towards, it never failed to amaze Aizawa.

He moved to go find Ishiyama. They could do the rest from here.

### Hawks & Helmet -

“...Wherever you are,” Hawks said, “I’ll fly there.”

If Helmet heard him, if only Helmet could hear him, he wouldn’t know. It would be nice to think that he heard him, and it would be even nicer to think that he believed him. If not, Hawks supposed that that’s fine too.

He doesn’t have much of a repertoire anymore. He was a hawk without territory, trying to find a place to perch and something to eat. Pathetic and lonely, Hawks no longer had anything or anyone.

### 

### Aizawa’s Healed

Right before the third month since he got there, Aizawa finally healed up enough that he was comfortable enough to do this.

“Alright,” he said, waking up right before dawn and camping out at the front of the compound for this moment. He stared down as Helmet made his way outside, flanked by a dog on one side and Mr. Compress on the other. “My turn tonight,” he said, even though no one was keeping track. “Let’s get along well, Helmet.”

The look of scorn on his face wasn’t aimed at Helmet, but himself, but from the way Mr. Compress tried to place his body between them, figured he came off a lot more aggressive than he meant to.

But he’s seen the way some of these bastards rip into the (especially) younger kids. Kids shouldn’t be expected to do these kinds of things right now. The fact that they’re alive is already so meaningful. They, as the functioning adults in the situation, should be taking the head of it.

And in order for Aizawa to do that, he needed to first make an indispensable position here. He needed to make his stand so that he could argue things and have people listen to him. Right now, that was his biggest concern.

He can’t waste anymore time, or resources.

-

Aizawa was not a weak person. He knew how to prioritize, and he knew how to stick to it. More importantly, he knew how to work with people who may not have the same priorities as him.

Even though he understood what Helmet was doing, any why he was doing it, watching someone who barely came up to his chest burn piles of bodies was nauseating.

“If you’re so tired, why don’t you head back?” Dabi said, his lips stretching into a mocking smile.

He stared for a moment longer before he returned the hostile smile with one of his own.

“You should be more careful. It almost sounds like you’re worried for my well-being,” Aizawa replied back. “That would be awful, since it looks like you can barely take care of yourself as it is.”

The heat of his stare turned into something dangerously cold, and Aizawa met it evenly with one of his own.

He didn’t take this shit when society was functioning. Like hell he would take it just because the world ended.

His capture scarves may be raggedly, and his quirk didn’t work on zombies since there were no quirks to erase, but that didn’t mean he was suddenly useless. He was almost fully healed, and there were people that he wanted to see tomorrow with.

Like hell he’d go down now.

-

Patrol is otherwise uneventful.

All they did was drag bodies out into the sidewalk and burn them down to ash.

Standing next to the fire, watching the former residents burn away into nothing, he felt strangely cold. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Helmet stare up at the pile, and he wondered what he was thinking about as he watched everything burn away.

“Gruesome, right?”

He looked to where Hawks landed next to him, a familiar smile, though it looked strained enough to be more like a grimace.

“...It’s to minimize infections, isn’t it?” Aizawa asked. All sorts of disease and infections sprout from the dead if left alone. “It’s not like we can bury all of them either.”

Right now, here in this area, there were more people dead than alive. To give each and every person a burial would be too taxing on them. And at least this way, no one could desecrate the dead anymore.

But still, it made him feel hollow.

## [Year 1: Summer]

### Summertime: Equipment

“But man, that’s pretty fucking manly too,” Kirishima said, gesturing to Helmet. He wiped the sweat off his chin as he eyed the founder, “This kind of heat and he’s still in that helmet.”

“...Helmet...san?”

They all paused as Ojiro approached the man, despite standing several feet away, it was clear to see how much taller Ojiro was than him. Nearly a head and a half smaller than them, but they didn’t know how to approach the man who saved them.

“Uh,” Ojiro started, “Would you… like some water? It’s a very hot day.”

Helmet turned his head towards the young man and then faced forward again. He walked away, as though Ojiro didn’t even say anything at all.

“Ouch,” Kaminari winced.

“Ooooh a cold front in the middle of summer,” Ashida winced back sympathetically.

“...He’s going to get a heat-stroke,” Shouji frowned back.

“Him? No way, he probably knows what he needs to do.”

-

Little did they know, Deku was so hot he felt like he was melting. He felt like his mind was being taken out of his body and floating around in space. Since there was no A/C working in his fourth-floor apartment complex, and he spent all his time outside hunting down things to kill, there was little to no opportunity to cool down.

And now, he couldn’t take off his helmet anywhere since someone was always with him.

Sweating bullets under the helmet, feeling as though he was baking alive, Deku continued to swing. Bodies decompose faster during the summer, and some times, it felt like the stench would never leave him.

Little did they know.

### Eri

Deku swears that he’s melting. Underneath his helmet and his masks, he was sweating so much that his clothes were soaked through and heavier than they needed to be. He caught a glimpse of Twice lifting his shirt up to wipe at the sweat gathering at his chin and momentarily felt a rush of jealousy and anger.

He quickly averted his eyes, and felt shame fill in for where that surge of emotions came. He didn’t know how, but he always managed to be surprised at how disgusting of a human being he could be.

Jealous of someone when he made his own decision to cover up?

He shook his head, as though to shake the thoughts out of his head. He knew better than to be distracted. He can’t get lazy.

It was that very focus that caught onto the Quiet around him. It was rare for it to ever be this quiet.

He lifted his hand, signalling to the others to pause and take caution. They stopped and quieted down in an instant, and he closed his eyes.

It’s not that it was quiet, but that he was too far away from the Sound.

In an instant, he heard something and ran for it.

-

At the height of summertime, Helmet came running into the compound with a tiny girl in his arms. His bat and backpack were being held by Hawks, and Shigaraki was wheezing about a block back.

The girl, small and little, can’t find any words to speak but her little fingers clenched tightly to Helmet’s sleeve like it’s a lifeline. For her, it probably was. The blood on him stained her dirty clothes, making them stick to each other, and she’s running a fever. Or maybe it was just that hot. He didn’t know.

He didn’t put her down until he got into a room though.

### Powdered Milk

Today was a little different.

Today, Helmet suddenly appeared in the kitchen. In the time it took Lunchrush to sprint to the kitchen with a frying pan, however, he had placed a bag of boxes on the table.

Curious, Natsuo poked through the box.

“...Powdered milk?” he questioned. He tilted his head to the side, and suddenly remembering their newest, youngest resident, snapped his fingers. “Oh, for Eri-chan?”

Helmet gave him a polite bow, and deciding that the conversation was over, left.

“Wait…” Lunchrush said quietly after him, “Don’t you wanna… eat something…”

He sighed, his arms falling to his sides. He turned to the boxes of powdered milk. Knowing Helmet, he wouldn’t be shocked if there were more in the back or whatever, but if he gave this much right now… wasn’t it because he trusted them with it?

### Enter: Best Jeanist

Seeing survivors is a strange thing.

The last group he was a part of were the last batch of people that he had seen. It’s been… four days? Four weeks? It couldn’t have been four years. But honestly, Hakamata was just tired. Did it matter how many days had passed?

But he could hear laughter. It was a bright sound that he hadn’t heard in a very, very long time. It was such a hopeful sound that Hakamata thought he was dead. Where else could such a sweet sound ring other than in the embrace of death?

These days, it didn’t sound so bad.

The worst thing about being a hero was when someone looked at you with Those Eyes. It wasn’t anger or resentment for not protecting their loved ones, but the expectant gaze they have for a Hero to choose them. Time and time again, they’ll turn against each other, no matter how well they worked together before that.

And Hakamata didn’t know how to save the people he saved from each other.

So, Hakamata thought that it was okay to close his eyes and take a break.

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Hawks stood there for a moment, looking left then right over the destruction. His feathers were out and about, trying to check every nook and cranny, but when he opened his mouth, he had nothing to say.

What could he say? “Hey, Helmet, if you’re alive, wave.”

Hawks didn’t even know his name. The best he got was a nickname they gave him that he never responded to. Hell, for all he knows, he wasn’t even a man.

So here he was, uselessly standing around with a growing amount of anxiety chaining his heart, as he lost himself. Helmet wasn’t dead. He couldn’t be dead. He was just quiet and that’s all Hawks could hold onto.

He didn’t know what he would do, if the first and only time he ever saw Helmet’s face would be the day that he died.

It felt like someone was extinguishing each and every single one of the lights that once guided him through the darkest nights.

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Toga could say with certainty that she never expected to ever touch Best Jeanist. Not that she minded. He was a very attractive man, especially since he was splattered in blood and all, but she never really thought that she could be carrying his legs while Twice grabbed his arms, as they ran back for the base.

“W-wait,” the blond gasped, “H-he’s alone back there-”

“Helmet is pro at this!” Twice said.

“But he wanted to help you so we’re going to help you,” Toga said, a big grin on her face, “So don’t die, okay?”

Was this a blessing or a curse? No one would know.

Eventually, Hawks came sweeping down, taking Best Jeanist from them with an easy smile. It was probably better for him to be carried away on the feathers than be half-dragged by Toga and Twice.

But it was hard to bite back on the bitter feeling that a hero took this from them. It was a sharp pinch in their gut when Helmet eventually came back to base, and Hawks landed next to him to explain what had happened to Best Jeanist.

It brought them a little glee (relief) that Helmet just walked by him like it didn’t matter to him, but it wasn’t like it didn’t bother them. For a brief moment, that gut-curling fear that the society that shunned them would return settled into their heart. The feeling of waiting for Helmet, day after day, with the uncertainty if he would ever return, haunted them.

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### Chisaki Joins Up Again

“...Of course you came to save me again,” Chisaki said, breathless as his eyes focused in on the man in a helmet in front of him.

“Hey there,” Former Number Three Pro Hero suddenly descended in front of them, wings fluttering before they closed against his back as he landed in front of them, “Is this all of you?”

Chisaki gave a curt nod, “Yes, thank you for the assistance." His eyes trailed to Helmet, who turned to face off the oncoming horde of Walkers. The man didn't even turn to him or look at him. He made no motion to even acknowledge his or his men's existence.

“Yeah, he does that,” Hawks said, sending his feathers out to various Walkers’ pockets and yanking out wallets, keycards, and bags off of them. "Don't get offended, he's just a quiet guy. He was the one that found you."

Another man came up to them. He sighed, rubbing the back of his neck as he inspected the area in front of them. In the meanwhile, Helmet was making quick work of the Walkers in front of him, spinning with his bats with an expertise that could only come from experience. For Kurono, who had seen him fight before, it felt like he had learned some grace to back up his heavy hits.

“What a pain,” the man with ashen-blue hair said. He pulled off one of his gloves. “Get me some cover,” he said. His hand reached for the Walkers that extended their arms to him, and by simply batting their hands away, disintegrated them into nothing.

“Helmet, Shigaraki and I got it from here, get out of here!”

"Don't call me so familiarly," Shigaraki called out, narrowing his eyes at the hero. Hawks waved him off with a lazy smile in return.

The man in the Helmet, and who would have thought he could feel such relief at seeing a familiar stranger, tapped the back of his heel with his bat before swinging it up. He gave a wave to the people behind him without turning around before he dropped his bat and started to sprint. He weaved between Walkers with ease that could only come from someone with such a small statue, and jumped up to land on Walkers that bent down to get onto him. He flipped over one, used another as a springboard, grabbed one of the walls and scrambled up.

“He got some new moves too,” Kurono noted.

“And some new friends,” Chisaki said, eyeing how another Pro-Hero stood up on the wall. Kamui Woods, was it?

Helmet scurried off then and Hawks frowned.

“...Are you sure there’s just you?"

“Yes, all present,” Chisaki said, beginning to frown, “Is there something wrong?”

“...Damn, I guess we found two groups in one,” he took a step back, “Hey, Helmet’s got something!”

“On it!” A lizard man called back, scaling the walls. Hawks took a moment to toss a feather onto the man as he ran right past them before turning to the fight in front of him.

Feathers brought him the wallets, purses, and cell phones towards him as the man with decay on his hands dissipated the remains in front of him.

“45 total,” Hawks said, counting up the ID’s.

“...I touched 53,” the other man said. He wiped at his chin, probably tired and a little strained after using his quirk so much, and the two sighed back.

“Well, nothing we can do about it now, I’ll explain it to him,” Hawks said, calling the rest of his feathers back. He collected the rest of the ID’s out, and left everything else into a pile of trash on the ground. He looked back at Chisaki and the group, “...Let’s get you back,” he said.

“Are you guys still at the Apartment Complex?” the former yakuza asked.

Shigaraki and Hawks exchanged a look before they turned back.

“...You were here before?”

Chisaki nodded, “Saved by Helmet over there. I went back to get my group and my daughter. I’m glad that he’s still alive,” he said with a calm that didn’t fit a survivor. “Now, I can properly repay my debt to him.”

“Yeah,” Shigaraki growled out, “Good luck with that.” He turned on his heel and sighed, “Let’s get out of here.”

Hawks looked around their group and a little cautiously asked, "...A girl named Eri?"

"...I see," Chisaki said, overwhelmed with a feeling that had his shoulders relaxing, "She was with you then?"

"...Yeah, she's at the apartment."

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In the meantime, Sasaki had come to join them from the other side.

### Eri & Chisaki

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“...Milk?” Chisaki stared in shock, “You have milk here?”

“Hm?” Yaoyozuro stared at the man and then nodded slowly. It was obvious that she was uncomfortable with his presence and demeanor, possibly because he was a former yakuza, possibly because he was a large man, “Yes… Would you like a cup?”

He shook his head, remembering to keep his demeanor cool. “No, thank you. I was just surprised that there’s still milk here. I figured it would have all gone bad by now.”

At this, the young girl seemed to smile, her eyes shining.

“Actually, we thought so too. But once Eri-chan got here, Helmet went and found some powdered milk for her,” she explained. “Right, Eri-chan?”

Eri reached for the cup, her eyes shining in a way he has never seen before. He didn’t think a cup of milk could make her so happy when all the expensive toys in the world didn’t.

“Yeah,” she said, voice quiet but filled with an enthusiasm that didn’t seem to fit inside of her small frame. The sight of it had the young girl beaming right back, like she had seen something absolutely wonderful.

Golden eyes widened for a fraction. He didn’t even consider that. While he could always Overhaul someone into health, he didn’t know what kind of long-term effects it could have. For all he knew, it would create a dependency on the human body to Overhaul. It was something he was willing to risk, but the thought that Eri wouldn’t be able to grow up independently with proper bodily functions always lingered.

He’s, again, grateful.

“I see,” he said.

Eri looked over at him, curious in a way she never was of him.

“...That’s good, isn’t it, Eri?” he asked.

She stared at him, and for a moment, he sees her mother’s gaze. It was the same gaze that the Oyabun gave him, something all-seeing, and he wondered what she could see in his muddled, sin-stained soul.

“...Yeah,” she said. “So, it’s okay, Chi-ossan.”

His eyebrow twitched back. Definitely took after her mother.

“Eri, I’m not even 30.”

Yaoyozuro gasped back, and when his eyes turned to her, found that she couldn’t meet his glance.

...Seriously?

### Chisaki & Helmet - to keep a promise

“...Well,” Chisaki said, heaving a deep sigh, “Regardless of the… extra baggage, I made a promise that I intend to keep.”

He turned to Helmet, and the smaller man turned back to him.

“The vision that you want, whatever it is that you are working towards, please include me in that future and I will make it a reality.”

He gave a full bow to the man, prim and proper, formal and certain.

Helmet faced him for another moment before he turned and walked out, making no motion to indicate that he understood or acknowledged what was going on.

The door closed behind him, while Chisaki remained bowed.

"That… that little…" one of his men growled out, frustrated and upset that the man he entrusted his entire being to was getting so disrespected, was cut off when Chisaki started to laugh.

The man threw his head back, laughing almost maniacally as he covered his eyes with one of his hands. The men that he came with and Eri stared in wide-eyed shock.

"Good!" He said, calming down to a few chuckles, "I was a little worried when I saw the heroes, but it seems it was for nothing. Helmet… hasn't changed a bit."

"Wh… what do you mean, Boss?"

Yellow eyes, looking more alive at the end of the world than ever before, shined back in its mirth. He turned to Irinaka and gave a little shrug, looking more relaxed and comfortable than they have ever seen him.

"Think about it," he said, and it was telling that he was willing to explain himself at all. "All these heroes, some women, and all these people with differing and powerful quirks, but he's allowing us, a group of men and one child, with unknown backgrounds and quirks, in with no questions."

He chuckled again.

"A fool who has still remained alive this whole time. Even going as far to continuously take in scumbags of all sorts ..."

He pulled on his jacket, straightening it as his eyes narrowed fondly.

"Gentlemen," he said, addressing them, "we must repay this kindness. Should I hear a single complaint of you here, or another person complaining about you, punishment will be in order. I will not allow Helmet to think that I have brought him something useless, understand?"

But more so than the unnamed punishment, what scared his men was how taken their boss was by this mysterious man.

Chisaki, however, was just happy to be the person who follows instead of the person who leads in this uncertain darkness when all he wanted was to die.

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### Summertime: Fuyumi - Ice-type

Deku had to take a detour to find some bleach for his bat when he stumbled upon the sight of Fuyumi and Eri talking.

“Wow!” Eri said, her hands coming up to her face in surprise.

Fuyumi stared back, a warm smile on her face as she leaned forward to give the carefully constructed ice-butterfly to Eri.

“Here, you can have it,” she said.

Eri gasped again, reaching for it, but right before her fingers could touch the ice, pulled her hands back.

“Won’t it melt?”

“It should be good for another week,” Fuyumi said, “and I can just make more, so let me know if you want another one oka-”

She yelped in surprise as Deku ran for her. He clearly didn’t see anything else, as he knocked over a chair and collided with the table. The screech brought others forward, but Deku reached for her. He suddenly stopped himself, as though remembering something, about four feet from her. He stood there for a few minutes, and they watched him take a slow, heaving breath.

“Fuyumi?” Natsuo called out, and frowned. “What’s going on here?”

It seemed to snap Deku out of his stupor, because he suddenly ran out of the room.

“...Wasn’t that Helmet?” Natsuo asked, narrowing his eyes as he twisted his head to follow where the man had ran out. His lips curled down into a clear frown, “What did he want? Did… Did he…” he narrowed his eyes and Fuyumi shook her head.

“Uh…” she blinked, more confused than anything. “Oh no, I’m fine. I was just surprised…”

Eri peered up at Natsuo, hiding a little behind the other woman, and Fuyumi redirected her gaze to the adorable girl at her side. She suppressed the urge to squeal loudly.

“That was weird, huh?” she asked. While Helmet was an interesting … identity, she didn’t distrust him as much as her brother did, or trust him as much as some of the other adults here did. In all honesty, she didn’t think she had enough information to make any form of judgement on the man.

Fuyumi had no doubts that this man wouldn’t hurt him. If he wanted to demand something from her or watch her suffer, he would have done so from the get go. It helped that he stopped himself from coming into arm’s range. Something, apparently, startled him.

She thought it was strange that he never took off his helmet and was pretty much never seen outside of his room, but he also made sure that there was an ample amount of resources and supplies for everyone here. From what she heard from the other Pro-Heroes, he was the person who had pulled this entire settlement together.

“...I’ve never seen him like that before,” Eri said quietly.

And then, the man in the helmet came running back. In his arms was a large insulated tote bag. He thrusted in front of her and she felt even more confused. She stared at the bag and then Eri spoke up.

“...Did you want a butterfly, too?”

He nodded, and staring at the bag and the butterfly, Fuyumi put it together.

“...My ice can keep things cold for a few hours under sunlight. If you take good care of it, it’ll last to the end of the day,” she said quietly, making a small icicle and placing it in the bag. “You can eat it too, but it won’t taste very good since it’s made from the moisture in the air.”

Deku pulled the bag to stare at it. He nodded and turned to leave the room. But right before he did, picked up the chair he knocked over and moved the table back.

She didn’t think he was a bad person. Perhaps a little isolated from society, but not a bad person. And more importantly, she didn’t think she had any place to refuse him as it was. He was the reason that they could eat whatever they want, however much they wanted, and didn’t ever ask or imply for something in return.

-

The following day, Fuyumi is eating breakfast when Deku comes in to stand in front of her. She blinked and stopped eating to stare at the man, and didn’t fail to notice the silence that followed. He lifted up an insulated tote bag in front of her and she smiled back.

Easily, especially now that she had ample food and rest, she filled it to the brim with ice. In hindsight, it was probably a little too much since the young man couldn’t quite close the tote bag, but he rushed back out.

“...Did he seriously just ask for a bag of ice?”

“Uhm... yeah, I guess,” she replied back, turning to her little brother. Still a little surprised at the fact that she could do this, didn’t miss the opportunity, “Good morning, Shoto. Did you sleep well?”

“...Yes,” he said, ducking his head, a little embarrassed. “Did you?”

She beamed back. In reality, she didn’t sleep well at all, but there were suddenly so many more things to look forward to. To think, she would be at a place where her nightmares weren’t preludes to an awful reality anymore.

So, when Helmet came jogging back in with another tote bag, she filled it up too. And then, when he came back for the third time, she paused.

“Is there more after this?” she asked.

His hands stilled and he leaned back. For a guy that she’s never seen the face or know the name of, she thinks that he says a lot with body language. He was clearly uncomfortable with the question, but she didn’t know why. So, she hoped her new words would alleviate the discomfort instead.

“Instead of making you run around like that, I’ll go and help you instead,” she said, standing up. “Shoto, I’ll come back for my breakfast, so keep an eye on it for me, okay?”

Her little brother frowned, but nodded back.

So this time, she followed Helmet, and when she saw the sizable wooden cart with several insulated tote bags, was glad she did so.

But really, with all these bags, what was he going to do?

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While she filled the bags up with little difficulty, she shivered a little. Using too much ice could really ruin her body temperature. She didn’t even realize that her teeth was chattering until the tote bag in front of her was slowly being closed. Her head snapped up and Helmet stood on the cart, looking down at her. He closed the bag fully and pulled it to rest against the back edge of the cart. He nodded at her, and handed her a thermos.

She stared at it and opened it. Immediately, the delicious aroma of hot barley tea flooded her nostrils. The smell of it immediately warmed her to her core. She looked up to thank him, and the words died in her mouth as she watched him mount a bicycle at the front of the cart. And she watched in shock as he began to bike out of the main entrance and onto the road with it.

….That’s it?

She stood there, a little shell-shocked, and must have stood there for quite some time because Natsuo came running up to her.

“Fuyumi? What’s up? Shoto said you’ve been out here for a while. Did something happen?”

“He just left,” she said, quietly. She turned to her brother. “Is… Is this normal? Is this how supply runs work? He’s going on a supply run, right?”

He stared at her for another moment, “Someone left? Who?”

“H-Helmet!” she responded back, “Helmet just left!”

“What?!”

They both turned to where former Pro-Hero Eraserhead stared back with a scowl on his face.

“You’re kidding me,” he growled out.

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In about a week, he would return with half an orchid’s worth of apples and former number two hero Endeavor.

### Endeavor & Long Ride

What Deku learns, and he never wanted to learn this, was that Endeavor had a breaking point.

The man is fucking delusional. Deku almost feels bad, but he also doesn’t need to be a doctor to know that Endeavor was going to fucking die. It was awful. The man was about to die and all Deku could think was that he would never ever even get a chance to get an autograph from this man, since he’s going to die.

But he does his best. If he dies, he’ll die knowing that someone cared, and someone respected him and someone wanted him to live.

“...It’s okay,” he said, legs aching to make-up for the lost distance since he still had to get back to the complex within the week and he’s got about a day and a half left. He gotta make sure these apples make it back before they start to spoil.

Eri’s favorite food is candied apple. She doens’t know it yet, but it’s fucking delicious, and the thought of her smile makes him pedal harder.

“...We ignite light.”

He didn’t know it, since he’s talking to himself like a fucking loon, and wasn’t that just a joke, a fucking loon pulling another one in a cart filled with the Number Two Hero and apple, but Enji heard him.

Enji heard him, and his entire body betrayed him by latching onto hope.

### Returning with Endeavor -

"Why…? I…I was okay with the world ending," Todoroki Shouto whispered, before the expression morphed into anger as he narrowed his eyes back, "if it meant a world without you."

It was… unexpectedly cold, and Enji took a step back in his surprise. Or maybe he wasn't actually surprised, as his eyes dropped to the ground and he clenched his fists tightly to his side instead. Since the first gates opened and the monsters poured in, cruelty was the new norm.

“Perhaps… it was a mistake to have survived after all,” he said quietly. “I’m sorry, that all your resources and efforts could not bear fruit.”

Across the way, Shoto and Natsuo were all but snarling. Blue fire kept igniting from his hands, but Dabi kept his sharp eyes on the man next to Helmet. The young man looked around to see how confused everyone seemed to be, and how disgruntled some of the others looked.

Walking into this conversation wasn’t something that anyone could have been prepared for. He had literally just stepped in to grab some more bleach and had stumbled into this fight. However, he was far too loud when he came in and it was made evident with the way everyone turned to him in an instant.

He winced, but the way they were looking at him was painful. The way they seemed to perk up, and Fuyumi’s silent plea for help, was something that Helmet couldn’t abandon.

He just… He got so nervous trying to think of what to say. But he had gotten used to Natsuo’s sunshine-like laughs, Shoto’s small smiles, Fuyumi’s eternal kindness, and Dabi’s patience. He would even dare say that he even treasured them. If they all left right now, he would be sad to see them go, but glad that they’re finally ready to leave on their own accord.

But now, it seemed that they would leave.

What did he need to do? How can he protect people that can stand each other? Why did they look to him for this? Whose side does he take?

A thousand things and possibilities opened up, and he lifted the bleach in his hands and placed it on the table. The rag that he had been planning to use to finish wiping down the staircase fell got caught on the lid and also fell from its place on his wrist. He stared at it, mortified that he had possibly ruined this emotional atmosphere with his insincerity.

With that, he spun on his heel and nearly ran out of the room, ready to scream into his hands.

-

This… was a sign, right?

For Helmet to throw the rag with the bleach down in front of them like that, it felt like he was telling them that there were more important things to do and worry about. Or maybe it was his way of telling them to clean up and move on. They didn’t know.

But regardless, he had left them a bottle of bleach and a rag.

More than forgiveness or acceptance, they all had the same experiences and the same conclusion.

They all were trying to live.

### Dabi & Helmet - Endeavor

Desperately needing an outlet, he got ready to leave instead. He had abandoned the bleach in his quest, so he figured he’d grab another one instead. He left his apartment unit and made his way down the stairs. It looked like everyone was busy somewhere else, and he wouldn’t be harrassed again on his way out.

“Once I knew what to look for, you’re really easy to predict and read,” someone called out from behind him.

Fuck.

He turned around and stared as Dabi came forward. His posture looked casual, but he could see how tight his shoulders were even from here. Vaguely, he wondered when they became so close that he could read Dabi that easily, from this distance, through his visor.

“... You always leave before dawn on days you're not burning shit late into the night. You make a line right for the main entrance and you always take the left staircase. You got two bats if you’re going out to check the perimeter and you take one if you’re just grabbing supplies. If you’re trying to find something new, you’ll spend a couple more minutes in the Office before you head out. These are all things that you’ve always done, and I finally get it. And then, as soon as I think that… that I can understand you, you do something outside of my expectations.”

He slammed his hand against the wall, and a flash of blue painted the space between them before dying out just as fast. As someone who that fire has always helped, it was strange to see it then and there, when there were no bodies to burn.

“What… What are you thinking? Where are you going? What’s your goal? Everything about you is a contradiction. You bring in people, save them, help them, feed them, but you don’t ask anything of them. You know all the tips and tricks and have great ideas to make them happen but you don't make them do it. You let them sit on their asses, sucking away at all your resources.

“But I know you’re not someone too weak to let them walk all over you. I know you don’t want glory or respect, since it’s not like you ever spend time with them either,” he said, going on a long rant about everything that he’s been holding in for so long.

Deku stared back in shock, but behind his helmet, no one could see it.

“When I think that you just like helping people or being with them, you slap them away if they get too close and then disappear for days on end. You don’t ask us for anything or talk to us. If you’re distrustful then don’t bring more people to hide from. If you don’t want to be with anyone, then stop bringing them here.”

Dabi rubbed his face with his hand before he pushed it through his hair.

“This is exhausting. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to care. I don’t…”

He looked at Deku, so wretchedly lost that the young man almost took a step forward on instinct to try and help. When he did that, Dabi gave this laugh, like there was no hope left in the world, and his shoulders slumped in defeat.

“How come, now that the world has ended, I find someone that I want to help? I don’t… I don’t even know what you look like.”

Deku, from what he knows of Dabi, knew that he was a lost man. He’s someone who has been wronged by the world and then decided that it was too much trouble to try and navigate through it any longer. He’s someone who wants to indulge in his desires without hesitation or remorse. He’s someone who wants to live as he wished, without anything holding him down. He was someone who moved when he wanted to, and someone who spoke as he pleased.

Truly, he was the kind of person that Deku would never get along with, understand, or ever voluntarily interact with. He was like the sun of a different solar system, spinning and burning away in a far away land that Deku could only see in passing, at night, a thousand light years away.

He wondered what he should say. Then he wondered what he could say. He wondered why the man had come to him, and why he cared at all.

“What the fuck am I supposed to do? What do you want from me? What should I do so that I can be useful to you?”

Deku stared back for a moment, a long moment, and thought hard about it.

He was fine. He really was fine. He only went out and did things because he wanted to keep his body in movement. He liked the work-out, and the strain on his muscles. He liked helping people, and he didn’t mind getting extra supplies as needed for them. He knew that one day, he won’t be able to come back, so it would be better to let the people here have whatever. It’ll be a waste otherwise. It gave him something to focus on and something to do. It wasn’t like he was going out of his way to save people, they just managed to live long enough that he could help them.

He wasn’t a hero, after all.

He got a little overwhelmed at times, of course, just because he wasn’t used to seeing and being in close proximity with all these people all of a sudden. But he really, really didn’t mind it. The life that people brought with their voices and footsteps and existence was something that Deku used as a source of comfort.

He had been alone far too long.

Just having people here was great. He felt like there was a purpose to his life aside from waking up and waiting to see someone who felt like a distant memory now. They had come great strides from where he used to be. They had running water, electricity, water filters, food, medicine and good company who didn’t actively try to endanger each other. There was plenty of space for people to step away and take some time for themselves. There were plenty of people who were healing, and many who had regained their smile.

He stared at the man in front of him, satisfied with his conclusion.

“Nothing,” he said, because Dabi had already done enough.

The Dabi that was dying, that was okay with dying, on that day when they first met, was no longer the Dabi that Deku knew. The Dabi that Deku knew laughed through his nose, teased Iguchi, and was willing to burn himself to light the way home. His Dabi was the Dabi that greets him in the morning and in the evening, and can talk for hours on end as they make their way through desolate roads.

And that was enough for Deku.

Of all the things he could have said, he didn’t realize that he said the worst possible thing for a while. Saying nothing at all, for him, was normal. He liked how everything was now, and there was no reason to change.

Deku turned on his heel and walked out, leaving behind the shell-shocked man behind him.

-

“Oh, Dabi, there you are,” Iguchi said, rounding the corner to approach the man. “You coming for dinner?”

He paused as he took in the sight of his friend. He was leaning against the wall, looking at his hands.

“Haha,” Dabi laughed hollowly, “I got rejected by someone who I don’t even know the name of, could you believe it?”

-

Dabi had lived a pitiful life. He had lived, thinking and believing, that all he wanted to do was make Endeavor suffer. There might have been a concrete reason, but all he knew was that he wanted to make the whole world burn down. He wanted Endeavor’s life to come crashing down all around him.

For a long time, he thought that it would be worth surviving if he could see it.

And then, between then and now, the world went to shit. He ended up with that fucking Liberation Front and then abadoned again, and then was saved by a tiny guy in a helmet. In those few months where nothing was said and nothing was expected and nothing should have changed, Dabi felt his whole world kilter off-course.

Looking at Endeavor’s broken and bleeding body, his tired and dead eyes, when he came in on the back of Helmet’s cart, Dabi didn’t feel anything.

But, when he thought about killing Endeavor, to let him burn away into nothing and grant his wish to die, he couldn’t.

Helmet still didn’t take his helmet off. Then, if Dabi killed someone that he had carted in, wouldn’t it mean that he wouldn’t take it off ever? Or worse yet, would the first expression Dabi see on Helmet’s face be disappointed?

Who was he kidding?

He just didn’t want to disappoint Helmet.

He didn’t know who he was anymore.

### Cleaning

It was rare to see Helmet without his fire extinguisher and his large bag, but here he was. With a gallon of bleach in his hand, and a bucket with a rag hanging off of it in the other, he walked out of the area with the same amount of ease as he always did.

Turns out, he was cleaning off the bloodstains that painted the walls and roads that came up to the apartment.

This, Shoji thought to himself, he could start here. Even he could do this.

“Could I… Could I help?” he asked.

Helmet paused in scrubbing off the walls and then stared at Shoji. His head turned to the bucket, back to the young man, and then to the stain on the wall. He wiped like nothing happened.

Shoji felt his will crumble.

“Ara? Are you joining us? You should just suit up and jump in.”

He turned to where Hawks stared back at him. And Shoji mentally smacked himself when he realized that the former pro had his own bucket and rubber gloves.

“R-Right,” he said nodding.

It was probably meaningless and nothing to be proud of, but this time last week, Shoji broke into tears at the thought of leaving a safe area. With a deep breath, he sat down and started to scrub at a particularly gruesome stain that painted the wall. He tried not to breath in too deep, and his stomach churned, but this was a start.

If someone smaller than him was going out and making things better. Saving people of all types and sizes, and sharing his precious resources in a time like this without ever explaining anything, Shoji wanted to do something too.

He didn’t want to be satisfied just being a survivor.

### Construction

A few hours later, the rare sight of Helmet walking around the apartment complex came to the focus of the others. Even rarer was that he didn't have his backpack, his bat, or trademark fire extinguisher strapped to his thigh.

It would be the most casual they have ever seen him.

He walked around, looking and peering around with several notebooks in his arms. Seeing him, Mirio stepped forward.

"Heyya, Helmet-san. You need help with that?" He asked, motioning to the stacks of notebooks he was holding. The visor of the helmet faced him, and he shook his head a little.

Despite the rejection, the young man straightened. From what he heard, Helmet rarely acknowledges anyone as it was. Perhaps, he was unused to all of them before, but he was better about it now.

The thought comforted him.

"Then, do you mind if I come with you?" he asked.

Helmet responded by walking around him and then away. Well, since Mirio knew that he would shake his head to indicate 'no’, he’s certain that this must be his ‘yes’.

Walking next to him, Mirio is forced to recognize how much smaller Helmet is than him. When he dropped down and dispatched all those Walkers all those weeks ago, almost completely on his own, he thought that he was much bigger than the person walking next to him right now. Helmet barely came up to his chest, probably half a head or so shorter than Nejire, and with the way his clothes seemed to swamp him, was probably thinner than Tamaki.

They made it down the corridor when Mirio saw the (former) yakuza gathered around in the room. He kept the smile on his face, but he tensed a little. Sasaki didn’t say anything to him about it, but he had overheard some of the heroes talking about the number of villains here.

Overhaul, being one of them.

What was the likelihood that they, the remains of a hero agency and the only active yakuza group from that same area would end up here? He didn’t know, but they had to live together now.

This would be the tensest safe-area Mirio had ever been to. With people on all sides showing open hostility against each other, it was hard to think that they had managed to cohabitate altogether. For a guy who never speaks, Helmet clearly has some charisma that he holds over everyone else here. His presence was enough to squander any sense of rebellion against each other.

However, it sounded like Overhaul and Helmet had some personal history. There was, of course, the possibility that Helmet was also a villain or yakuza or some other dark-dealer, but with the amount of heroes and children here, it didn’t feel likely. Mirio had seen what regular people do to their heroes once they realized that even heroes couldn’t stop an apocalypse. He doesn’t really want to think about what a villain would do to them.

At the same time... Was Helmet really just some random guy? After all this time? With all these resources and a rather stable and pretty normal apartment? Collecting people as he finds them in the street like they were in one of those card-collecting games Tamaki used to play when they were middle school? Why did Helmet start now? Where was Helmet when this whole thing began?

It made Mirio want to scream. There was something like this the whole time? And after the anger and the sadness and disappointment in himself that he couldn’t make this a reality at the places he was at, he wanted to know and see for himself what made this place so different.

As it was, there were some places, some unnamed tensions between people that made it suffocating to be in some rooms. However, it was also clear that there was only One Rule here.

Let Helmet do what he does, whatever it may be.

And so, he watched with mild alarm, that one rule keeping him still, as Helmet made his way right up to the yakuza group. At the sight of him, the men parted for him, and Chisaki visibly straightened when he realized who was there.

While standing, he spoke up. “Helmet? What do I owe this pleasure to-”

Helmet lifted his stack of notebooks higher, and understanding, Chisaki nodded to Kurono, who cleaned up their card game. If they were upset, they didn’t dare say anything. As it was, Helmet dropped the notebooks onto the table and grabbed one. He flipped to one of the pages marked with a post-it note and slid it over to the former boss. Chisaki arched an eyebrow as he looked at it. The man who stared down Nighteye with so much scorn didn’t hesitate to take the offered notebook.

“...Do you want me to... make this?”

Mirio’s eyes widened, vividly remembering the absolutely defeated look on Maijima’s face as he quietly explained to some of the other teachers about how he wants to help but has no idea on how to help.

“...This will take a lot of energy and time,” he said, “...It pains me to say this, but we should enlist the help of the others here. Their quirks can be a lot more helpful for some of these than I can. It’ll help expedite the entire process.”

Helmet tilted his head back and nodded. Then, he pointed at the clock.

“...Hm? You want to go over this… soon?”

Helmet raised his entire hand up, splaying out his fingers and Chisaki’s eyebrow arched.

“In… five minutes?” Setsuno piped up.

Helmet shook his head.

“...5:00 PM then?” Kurono asked.

Helmet nodded.

“...Haha,” Chisaki chuckled, “I see. To think that I wouldn’t understand something as simple as that… alright.”

Helmet, seemingly satisfied with the turnout, turned on his heel to leave. The blond next to him stared in alarm, shocked that there was no further point of contact, but right when he turned away, the (former) yakuza called him.

“Young man, I can trust you to inform the other heroes here, right? At 5 PM, we will have a meeting about the reconstruction of this area,” he said. His gaze then dropped to the notebooks, “In the meantime, it looks like I have my work cut out for me.”

Mirio hesitated, and casting one last glance to Helmet’s back, called out, “I’ll go tell the others,” he said. Helmet didn’t even stop.

The blond has never met anyone as kind and as cold as Helmet.

-

“...Kai,” Kurono asked quietly, “...Why are you bringing in the other Pros?”

“First of all,” he said, motioning to the open-page spread, “I want to give Helmet the best product as fast as possible. No doubt, this is all things that should be done before the worst of winter, so it should be ready by October. Then, we can make any adjustments as needed clear before November, when we will be needing it.”

Kurono’s eyes widened at the markings of various engine types that littered the page. His eyes glanced to Chisaki, who made the motion for him to go ahead and read it. He took the notebook, uncaring about how the others scooted closer to read over his shoulder.

There were notes about making generators, and padding up the rooms to make sure that they were better insulated. There were cost-benefit analysis for each type of generator, as well as the sources and the storage that could be made. There were details concerning how they could make back-ups and use alternative energy sources as needed.

Chisaki kept flipping through the next notebook.

Water purification, ideas on where and how it would run… He wondered how long Helmet had been holding on to these. And then, he wondered who was here with Helmet before, as he noticed that the handwritings varied greatly from page to page.

“Second, tensions here are way too high. We’re a spark away from burning up this entire camp. It’s impressive that Helmet managed to keep all of them in line just by being himself, but if we keep expanding, we will eventually find people who will challenge him more than not. Inevitably, we will clash and fight then. At that time, who do you think that Helmet will side with?”

Kurono nodded, even without saying anything, he understood exactly what would happen. Undoubtedly, Helmet wouldn’t take their side. Why would he? There were heroes of great caliber and impressive statues here.

“Then, the best chances of unification would be if everyone is working together for the same goal. As long as it’s Helmet’s goal, I doubt there will be many complaints.”

At this, he gave a long sigh, betraying how his eyes slid eagerly over the pages. His fingers traced some of the words and he flipped through the notebook with an extraordinary amount of care. Golden eyes softened, soaking in the words and diagrams like they were so much more than ink on paper.

“This guy has some lofty goals,” he said, and despite making it sound like a trouble and a giant pain in the ass, his eyes were bright with a light they hadn’t seen in a very long time.

Chisaki was excited. He didn’t want to let someone down.

“How annoying,” their boss said, putting one notebook down and carefully opening the next one, “Geez, I can’t believe him. What a slave-driver. Figures I would owe my life to a relentless guy like him. Could you believe it? He brought this to me to figure it out for him,” he continued. The corners of his lips twitched up, looking pleased.

They all eyed each other, differing amounts of confusion and worry etching their faces. Comparing this Chisaki to the Chisaki that they knew before The End came, it was a slight difference. All except Kurono and Irinaka, who were suddenly reminded of the Chisaki at the end of Middle School Graduation, when Oyaji came to personally congratulate him when they came back to the manor, never realized that Chisaki could be like this.

It was as nostalgic as it was painful. It was as strange as it was fascinating.

At the end of the world, Chisaki looked like he was having fun.

### Nighteye - Sasaki Mirai & Notes

Sasaki sat down and leafed through the papers in front of him with meticulous scrutiny. His eyes slid through, following the crammed mess of words onto the page, and squinted every once in a while when the handwriting got particularly messy.

“...These are some great details,” he said, leafing through the worn notebooks with great care. “I’m truly impressed that you managed to even make some of these observations.”

Aizawa stared at him for a moment and then took the seat in front of him. He slid the cup of hot tea towards the older man, who took it graciously.

“It’s not mine,” he said. “They were like that when I came here.”

Sasaki’s fingers stilled as his eyes flitted up to the former Pro’s face, “You mean…”

Aizawa nodded, “You’re looking at the notes of our resident Helmet-head.”

“...Amazing,” Sasaki said, but no, now that he was thinking about it, this made a lot more sense.

Someone had managed to pull all of this together, and from what Aizawa and the others had reported, that someone was calm and collected and resourceful to the nth degree. It was someone who has redefined peace in their minds, and gave them something familiar without ever saying a word.

And to think, they were this meticulous in their writings. They had kept careful notes about everything from the weather, the temperature, the supplies, and the Walkers and monsters they encountered, day by day, hour by hour. Maps were marked, notebooks were carefully logged. The organization brought tears to Sasaki’s eyes.

Some of the notes got rough, and there were some Kanji that was harder to read than others, but it wasn’t the worst handwriting he had to squint through.

“And he updates these every day?”

“Every couple of days,” Aizawa said, “Or at least that’s how it’s been since we got here. Sometimes, he’ll scribble this and that down when we’re out and about. I’m sure that he’s got plenty of things filled with his writing at this point.”

“Have you tried to talk to him through writing instead?” Sasaki asked.

The older man rubbed his neck, already showing what he needed to know about how troublesome it must be to do just that. “It’s hard to get him as it is,” he explained, “either he’s leaving or coming in. The only other exception is if he’s unloading supplies or he’s in here writing.”

Sasaki frowned at that. “Does he rest? Eat?”

Aizawa shrugged back, “We assume so since he’s in his room for hours on end.”

The frown on his face looked even more sterner, and the teacher scowled back.

“Look, it’s nearly fucking impossible to talk at him sometimes. Most days, I still can’t believe that someone as cold as him did save us all. Made even worse because he’s got those villains hanging around him.”

It wasn’t heroic, by any means, but they were really at the end of their ropes. What else were they supposed to do? It wasn’t like they could just ask-

In that second, Mirio popped his head in, “Sir! Aizawa-sensei!” he called out, “Helmet is calling a meeting at five pm tonight.”

Aizawa’s jaw dropped.

“What?”

“Yeah, something about construction,” the blond said, “I gotta go tell the others, but please tell everyone you see.”

“Wha-Mirio!”

“Yes?”

Sasaki narrowed his eyes, “And Helmet… said this? Where did you get this information?”

“I was with him when he asked Over… uh… Chisaki-san to make something, and Chisaki-san said that it’ll be easier if everyone was here together.”

### Meeting - Construction

The meeting was held in the dining room.

“Come one, come all,” Twice cheered loudly.

“This is our first meeting, right?” Hawks said, climbing in through the windows and taking a seat on the windowsill. “Or at least, the first meeting that Helmet called in?”

“Okay,” Kirishima nodded, ‘Then why did he leave?”

“...What?”

They all turned to the redhead, who took a step back at the sudden attention.

“Uh yeah, he just left.”

### The Nail Incident

Kan Sekijiro felt it again. The cold fingertips wrapping around his neck like a noose, and slowly freezing him from the inside-out. Since he got here, this would be the first time he was going to join the supply party out. He agonized over this for a long time, thinking and praying that he would be needed and that he wouldn’t need to, until he came out.

He didn’t want to live like this anymore. He didn’t want to be accustomed to living in fear. And most importantly, he was sick of watching people (children especially) die.

“Whoa, you’re super tense!” Toga commented, startling him out of his thoughts. She walked around him with a big grin, like a shark locking onto bleeding prey. “You going to be okay out there, Mr. Hero-san?” she asked sweetly, both knowing the nerves he was facing.

He shot her a look from the corner of his eye, but compared to someone who had been going in and out of the base, he knows that he has no ground to fight on.

“I’m sure that it will be hard, but I have the greatest confidence that I will be an asset! I am excited to join the supply group today.”

There was a beat of pause as all eyes turned to Mirio and his beaming smile. It should have been comforting, but Kan had personally seen those kinds of smiles splattered in blood.

“Uh no,” Toga said, frowning as she stepped forward, “It’s my turn this time. And with me, there’s four already here.”

The blond arched an eyebrow as he tilted his head, “Is there a limit to how many people that can go out?”

She hesitated at that, because to begin with, Helmet never seemed to care (or notice) how many people came in or out with him. They only said things like “four people” because that’s just how they ended up working it out. It wasn’t a hard-set rule.

There were no hard-set rules.

If you wanted to come on a supply run, you just had to show up. If you wanted to leave, just go. There was no actual enforcement nor were there any guidelines. People were free to do what they wanted to do, whenever they wanted. Kan remembers Aizawa scolding some of the younger kids on supplies, but there was never a hard limit to begin with.

Toga took too long to answer, however, and Mirio’s smile turned even brighter.

“Then, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with coming along!” he cheered.

“If you hold us back, we’ll leave you behind,” Dabi called out. “And if you get in our way,” his lips stretched into a cruel resemblance of a grin, as he condensed a small fire across his fingers. “We’ll let you go quickly.”

The threat, as it could have been nothing else, didn’t phase Mirio in the slightest.

“I wouldn’t expect anything less!” he said instead, seeming to mean it. In response, Dabi and Toga both lost their smiles.

Just then, Helmet walked right past them. With the tip of his bat resting against his shoulder, he didn’t even pause when he walked by them. Instead, he moved on, Twice chatting brightly right next to him.

Without another wasted moment, Dabi and Toga turned to join them.

Standing a little further back, Mirio took a deep breath. It caught Kan’s attention, and his focus centered on the way his hands were trembling next to him.

Immediately, a flood of shame washed over him. Mirio was a kid. He wasn’t even 18. He hadn’t even graduated (and most likely, never will get a chance to). But here he was, doing his best to keep a smile on his face and persevere.

And look at Kan, who needs to be reminded of that.

Pathetic, he thought.

And just as fast, he made up his mind.

This was the end of his pathetic moment. He wasn’t going to let this rule him.

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Supply Run:

>> Twice , Deku, Toga, Vlad King &&& >> Tensei, Dabi, Mirio

While falling wasn’t something foreign to him, the landing was always something he took for granted. He has always been pretty decent at the whole falling in a way to minimize the amount of damage on himself. And well, occasionally, he fucks up bad.

Part of the problem is that he still doesn’t know how to fall with someone and mitigate all damage on both of them. It wasn’t too bad when he was on his own, and he does his absolute best to mitigate the damage that happens to them, it does occasionally end up really badly for him.

“...Helmet…?”

He had used his arms as a cushion of some sort for Twice, and he had extended his legs to take the brunt of the fall, but his entire weight did crash against the man. He felt bad, but feeling Twice’s arms tense around his waist, he was infinitely relieved that he was still alive.

For a brief second, he lost control of himself and his thoughts, and rubbed the top of Twice’s head, like someone would a dog. He was just too happy to not do that. He gave a big grin, the rush of adrenaline following their death-defying stunt was great.

And then he realized that his arm was stuck. He patted Twice, and tried to stand up but couldn’t because his arm was stuck. He gave a sharp exhale, the pain beginning to set in as he realized what had happened. Underneath him, the man groaned as he rolled over, and the two eventually disentangled from each other.

“Man, what a fall, huh? // Hey, Helmet, you’re fucking heavy, you know that?” he said, but he got up to his and shook his entire body. He rolled his neck and jumped up and down. “Aw, man that was only two floors?” he asked, looking up and shouting out, “Hey! You bastards! We’re fine!”

Toga, peering over the window ledge, waved back. “Yay, you guys are alive!”

Twice blew her a kiss in response, waving like mad and cheering.

“We’ll meet up with you in a second, stay put!” Kan yelled out, from next to Toga.

Next to him, Helmet didn’t budge, so Twice turned his attention to his … saivor? Friend? He wasn’t too sure what their relationship was, but he definitely didn’t want this man to die.

“Hey, Helmet, is everything okay?” he asked, “You’re just sitting there. You injured? // You jump off higher back at home, why would this bother you?”

He approached and gave a sharp gasp when he saw his arm. More importantly, the three nails sticking out of his arm. He probably fell on a part of the fence where there were nails hanging out, and instead of letting Twice’s head make contact like normal people would have, took the brunt of the hit himself.

“Oh,” he said. “Oh god. That… That really hurts, huh? Wow. Uh… Guess we have to head back early, right? //Are you going to die?”

If Helmet heard him, he didn’t care. He placed his foot onto the larger part of the fence and yanked his arm away. The high pitch scream that emitted out of Twice was something that was more surprising than getting nails in his arm.

Helmet didn’t even flinch, however, and pulled his backpack off and began digging through it, like this was a normal occurrence or something. He pulled out a roll of duct tape. He quickly wrapped, as tight as he could, from his elbow to his wrist, while Twice tried to process what was going on.

“What is he doing?”

“...N-nails… //You got pierced straight through and you’re going to duct tape it?!”

For good measure, he duct taped his bat to his hand. He put the duct tape away, zipped up his backpack, and with some careful maneuvering, he put it on. He rolled his shoulders, lifted the bat and swung it a couple of times, and felt satisfied.

“No,” Kan, who had managed to get an idea of what happened through Twice’s inconsistent babbling, said, “No, no, we should… We should go back and get that looked at,” he said.

Helmet walked right past him, clearly intending to just keep going. The other three eyed each other, as uncertain as always when it came to Helmet and the way that he operates.

“...You sure he’s injured?” Toga asked Twice quietly.

“I think I’d know if there were things going through his arm or not. // Should we knock him out and take him away?”

It painted a rather crude picture in their minds, but with each one of Helmet’s certain steps, it made them more and more uncertain about themselves.

“I mean, we don’t know his quirk still, right?” Twice spoke up, “So maybe he has a healing quirk?”

It was a better idea, and it did well to alleviate their worries for the moment.

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One day, Deku hopes to repay all the kindness he had received from the others.

After the fall, Deku was only focused on his arm. As it turns out, there were three nails that were sticking out of the remains of the broken fence they crashed against. His padding and clothes made sure to keep the splinters and wood pieces out, but something as sharp as the nails, at the speed they were going at, had broken through. His clothes were punctured, the cardboard underneath was broken, and it was right through his padding on his forearm.

He grimaced at it. He was lucky he didn’t break anything, broken bones were a bitch to deal with, and he was luckier that it didn’t puncture his veins or anything. But looking at the tips of nails, red with rust and blood, as it poked out from the center of his forearm, he couldn’t muster up the thought that he was <lucky>.

But, hearing Twice behind him, his heart steadied itself.

He tried to put some strength into his hands, to close it into a fist, or even twitch his fingers. It wasn’t happening. Alright, it was either pain, shock, or the nails punctured through his muscle.

Fuck.

Deku, who had been doing his best to not cry, somehow found it in himself to smile under his mask instead. Twice was kind, and he was grateful for that. It wasn’t easy to care about other people, but Twice reached out to him. It was humbling, and it pulled his head out of the worst of his thoughts instantaneously.

Pulling the nails didn’t hurt. He could work through it, and if he just repeated it enough times in his head, he’s certain that everything will stop hurting.

That’s right, getting injured wasn’t a goal and it wasn’t something worth crying and dying over. This wasn’t anything. He’s had much worse, if only because he used to be alone. The footsteps of others came closer and he took a deep breath and yanked his arm out.

Experience kept him from screaming.

And the worried expression from the others was enough to keep pushing onwards. He’ll protect this.

### Chisaki & old injuries

“... You want a new arm?” Chisaki asked suddenly.

Compress paused for a moment.

“Pardon?”

“Your arm wasn’t bitten off, right?” the man replied, “Of course not, you’re still here. And frankly, having an armless person walk around is going to be a strain more often than not, especially since it’s clear that you’re not used to being one-handed."

He pulled his glove off, looking as disinterested as ever.

“So, what will it be? Do you want a new arm?”

Compress… has seen what he could do. It was a terrifying ability, all things considered. Still, when he thought about the way Shigaraki looked down at him and Dabi’s snort when they saw him, knew that this was his chance.

He nodded.

-

Afterwards, Chisaki was suddenly confronted by Shigaraki. He looked at him, then his hands-the remains of his fingers- and the back. He smirked under his mask as he reached for his glove. He knew why this man was here. Compress wasn’t discreet about having his arm back.

“Yes?” he asked.

The man normally slouched hard, but he pulled his shoulders back and titled his head. As a result, his bangs split so that his eyes could be seen and Chisaki snorted. Like he would falter just because some child glared at him.

“Is there an issue?”

Shigaraki took a deep breath. Chisaki is certain that this is someone who has never needed to bow his head to someone else before. While he would never say it aloud, he really did like watching people swallow their pride and put their head down.

“...Compress’ arm,” he said slowly, without even a greeting. Jeez, who taught this boy his manners? They clearly failed. “You fixed it, didn’t you?”

“I might have.”

“Could you… fix mine too?”

He could. It would be laughably easy. And once upon a time, when using his quirk didn’t wear him down so much, it would have been a quick and easy thing to do. And of course, he wouldn’t do it until he knew for a fact that it would benefit him directly and greatly.

“Hm… why would I do that?”

He’s seen children with powerful quirks before. He was one of them, before he was taken in by Oyaji. Then, he was a powerful kid that learned manners and had good control. No doubt, guys like Shigaraki deserved every bad thing that happened to them, and none of the good.

“I…” he scowled, and for a second, Chisaki thought that he would walk away in his fit of anger. He was proven wrong when Shigaraki clenched his jaw hard and bowed his head. “I want to help Helmet. So… Please.” He took a deep breath. It must have really taken a lot out of him to squeeze these words out from between his teeth. “Please, heal me.”

In times like these, he wondered if Helmet would have still helped and saved them if they knew what kind of scumbags they were.

He doubted it. That would just be stupid. And well, Chisaki didn’t want to give him a reason to.

Let it be known that he would never allow Helmet to regret saving him.

“...It’s not that I’m healing you,” Chisaki said, as he pulled his gloves off. “But that I’m reassembling you. This will hurt, so brace yourself.”

The look from those red eyes, certain and unrelenting in their gleam, Chisaki had no doubts that this was a man who had suffered before. But, for the first time in his life, will be suffering for another.

If the world didn’t end, Chisaki would have enjoyed working with Helmet outside of this. It would be interesting to work next to someone who didn’t need to speak to win the respect and loyalty of the people around him.

### And Dabi Waits

Deku couldn’t help but think that things were… different than he remembered.

He had come back right at dinnertime, where half of their residents start eating on rotation for whatever strange reason. And he almost hates these dogs, because he used to be able to sneak in and out of the complex with the minimal amount of people noticing, but now that four or five dogs were running out to greet him every time, it really ruined his discretion.

They’ve been barking since he came within three blocks. He knows that it’s because the stench of blood that clung to him was so strong, but at the same time, he wonders why they still come running at the scent of blood. The dogs and the Walkers have nothing to butt heads over. Yet, they’ve never failed to let Deku know when something was wandering too close by.

He couldn’t help but think that dogs are social creatures. Perhaps they missed the company of humans…?

No, these things were pointless to think about. It wasn’t like he could do anything to change it, and understanding it wasn’t going to make a difference. He just really wishes that they stop running in between his legs or running around him in circles because he’s sick of tripping over them.

As expected, Dabi was standing outside of the complex area, arms crossed over his chest as he narrowed his eyes at Deku.

He… He really wish Dabi would stop this. It's clear and obvious to everyone that supply-hunting and clearing out the infected like he does is hard to do and awful. Any small mistake could lead to someone getting infected. It's taxing on the heart, body and mind. The smell is wretched, and sight is disheartening. He knows this and understands it, and so is also totally fine doing this on his own.

He has grown accustomed to it. The others don't have to be.

"Hey," Dabi said, "Nice evening today, huh?"

God, was this better or Aizawa? He doesn't know, and he wishes that he didn't have to deal with either. He didn't really have an answer though, nor did he think that Dabi wanted one, so he just didn't respond. What the fuck would he save said anyways?

He wasn't sorry. Or at least, he wasn't sorry about this. As though sensing his mood, the dog at his side rubbed against him and he hated him too. If he had known that helping all of them would have accumulated into this giant, daily, shitfight, he would have….

He would have done nothing differently, actually. He didn't wish these kinds of awful circumstances onto anyone ever. Thinking in terms like that, he supposes it's better to be annoyed and frustrated than endlessly lonely.

“Good job, you guys,” Dabi said to the dogs around him. Augh, figures.

He turned to stare at him, and not for the first time, thought that Dabi could see right through the visor and into his heart or something, when those blue eyes zeroed in on his face. The man remained a little slouched as he ended up walking next to him.

“Are you hungry? Dinner just started, but I’m sure that Lunch Rush will give you priority.”

Deku rolls his eyes at that. He’s seen the line that Lunch Rush gets, to cut in front of everyone and demand the man to stop what he was doing to make him something sounded like something Lunch Rush wouldn’t tolerate. And, more importantly, everyone else would pitch a fit about it. He doubts that he’ll be an exception, but he thinks these are the moments that prove to him that Dabi’s much kinder than he lets on.

“But, knowing you, I bet that you would rather take a shower and get a change of clothes, right?”

Was there a point to this?

Deku stopped his trek and turned over to stare at Dabi, what did he want?

“...Let me take that for you,” he said, extending his hand out.

Usually, the man would just take it. What was his ploy? Why ask now? Deku looked at Dabi, looked at his gloved hands, and then back to the plastic bags he was holding. There weren’t any visible bloodstains on them, but he knew that his gloves were fucking drenched. Could he risk it?

He was dead tired, too. Thinking hurt and these days he felt like there were too many things that cluttered his mind.

Whatever, he’ll just drop everything off next to the rental Office and then head up to get some of this blood off. Everyone here is a little squeamish with blood, so he knows that it’ll remain unbothered.

“...Haa…” Dabi gave a little sigh, “It’s always a fight with you, huh?”

He ignored him, and did as he always did, with or without Dabi.

### Setsuno & Deku - on a walk

What possessed him to go?

When Setsuno saw Helmet, down the street from where he was, blaring an airhorn to attract everything unsavory towards him, he just stood there. He stood there, shell-shocked. He wondered how the fuck he was going to show his face to Chisaki ever again, if Helmet had gone to die for him.

And, as he watched the vicious and desperate struggle of Helmet turn the tide, felt something stir inside of him. It was a feeling that he hadn’t felt since he was a kid wondering if a hero would finally save him from his drunk uncle.

Hope.

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“For scumbags like us, there’s nothing to do and nothing to go for,” Setsuno explained, “so when we get taken in, we live and die for that person. It’s just how it is. That’s how you show your gratitude. I know that’s not really how people who walk in the light live, but that’s the only way scumbags like me know how to.”

Setsuno looked to Helmet. Was he sleeping? Was he listening? He didn’t know. However, holding this in his heart was heavy, and he didn’t know what to do with these thoughts. He couldn’t really say them to any of the people he came to. Half of them didn’t care what he thought and felt. The other half have already heard him say this a hundred thousand times and are sick of hearing him.

But Helmet may not be listening, so it was fine, wasn’t it? And even if he was listening in, he wasn’t going to say anything. If he was going to say something, he would have said it by now, wouldn’t he? Besides, it wouldn’t hurt to know more about the people that he saved, right?

With that thought in his mind, Setsuno thought that it was fine to talk and talk.

“I don’t really know the details, but Chisaki-sama was taken in by the Oyabun when he was a kid. Like, really took him in. Like, Kai was actually registered into his family, kind of took him in. It’s a super big deal, you see since usually, they’re just the little brats that run along in the compound.”

Setsuno’s eyes turned wistful, as though remembering something fond.

“...I’m not … really yakuza. I’m more of Chisaki-sama’s extra. He saved some worthless scumbag like me, so I knew then and there that I’ll devote myself to him. Death, and life, and all. To be honest, I don’t really get what it is that he wants, but I want it too. Anything that makes him want to live, I want it too. And maybe, if the guy that saved me and helped me out started looking forward to living again, I could too.”

He turned to Helmet again, a growing grin on his face to match the warmth in his chest. On him, he looked painfully young, as though he was just a kid with grand dreams.

“See, Helmet, you saved me but you didn’t know who I am. But Chisaki-sama saved me despite knowing what I am. And I don’t really get it, but you’re important to Chisaki-sama. That means that you’re important to me.”

He sighed deeply, laying down on his side. He yawned, as the events of the day slowly crept up.

“Wake me up when you want me to take the shift,” he said.

He slept through the whole night, however.

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### Music

Jirou felt her jaw dislodge as her eyes trailed from Helmet to the sight in front of her.

She didn’t know what to expect when the man had brought her here. It was rare enough that someone would call her over, and even rarer that Helmet would call anyone over. She felt everyone’s eyes on her, and she could just hear Mineta’s words echoing through her head, again and again.

So really, the last thing she ever expected was that Helmet would take her to this room where there were a variety of instruments. It was clear that he had probably collected the instruments over time and stuck them all into this room, but her heart ached at the thought of feeling the vibrations under her fingers again.

“...Is this… for me?”

Helmet stared at her, or she assumed he was, since he was facing her. He brought his fist in front of her, and she stared at it blankly for a moment. She blinked twice and lifted her fist up and gave him an awkward fist-bump.

His hand remained as it was, so she was clearly wrong about this whole thing.

“I don’t…. Understand. Sorry,” she said quietly. Her eyes kept dragging back to the stacks of instruments, and that one guitar that stood on its stand. It was covered in dust. It looked untouched and uncared for many months.

It was beautiful.

Helmet tapped the back of her hand, gathering her attention back onto him. Right before she could blush, he opened his fist up to show her a key. She took it, confused, and that was all he needed to walk out like he was never a part of this.

Did… Did he just give her a key? To this room?

Her eyes trailed back to that guitar.

So this was okay, right?

### Chisaki joins a run

“Today, I will be joining you.”

He was smiling, but no one could tell with the facemask covering the bottom half of his face.

“Welcome! // I don’t want no dirty ikeman being with us!” Twice yelled out. Chisaki leaned away from him.

He looked to where Helmet was adjusting his backpack straps. He turned and walked away, and the blond that was hissing at him (but like seriously, who would literally hiss at him) turned around as he rushed after Helmet.

“Yosh! Helmet, where are we heading to today? How’s your arm by the way, are you doing alright? Well, you look like you’re in tip-top shape as always!”

The chatterbox walked next to the silent man, and Chisaki eventually started to follow. It was disjarring to leave without any fanfare, but he didn’t find it in himself to care too much. More importantly, he had hoped to use this as an opportunity to get closer to Helmet, even if it’s just a little bit. He needed to keep up and prove his worth.

He wouldn’t realize it for a while, but many others thought the exact same thing.

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Following Helmet w

### Hospital Run

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In all honesty, Deku knew that they couldn’t live like this forever. It was too stagnant. However, now that everyone seemed to be more comfortable, he knew that this would be a good time to do something a little more daring.

More importantly, they had a little kid here now. And very quickly, he learned how little he knew about the world, especially children.

They still didn't have a doctor. Chisaki, as he kept stressing to everyone, was not a doctor. He was using his quirk to reset people. It was exhausting for him, no matter how he tried to act otherwise, so Deku didn't want to rely on it. He knows what that kind of dependency leads to. He doesn't want to let it happen, even if it would be easier to deal with.

Also.

He flexed his hand, the dull ache in his wrist was familiar but consuming. His hand was getting harder to move. The tremble in his hand was getting worse and worse. He couldn't feel the tips of his fingers anymore but he felt the wound pulsing in time with his heartbeat.

He was trying to be careful but everytime he thinks he is better, he comes home and realizes that he had torn the wound open again. At this point, it just felt like a waste of resources. The disinfect, bandages, ointments and water he used on it would never be returned and, more importantly, no one else would be able to use it.

A lot of people here don't leave. Meaning all the resources he uses or wastes are resources from everyone else. He doesn't want them to suffer because of his selfish desires.

And lastly.

He walked into their main dining area. It was the tail end of the dinner hour, and the people who weren't finishing their food were here to clean up the area. He was always impressed by how meticulously they all got into cleaning, but he supposed living with the Infection did that to people.

As always, Enji was one of the last people to eat, as was Shigaraki, who was the main person to deal with any and all leftover trash. However, different from usual, Fuyumi was eating with her father, and Tetsutesu, Kirishima, and Rappa were sitting at one of the other tables, arm-wrestling. There were others lingering about, but Deku paid them no mind as he approached Enji.

He stopped at the table, hesitating and feeling a little bad for interrupting his time with his daughter. Usually, familial reunions were painful since someone was always dying or infected, but even living and healthy relatives weren't well reciprocated.

He thought that it was sad. He doesn't know how to help, but to sit back and pretend nothing is wrong isn't the kind of person he wanted to be. He's no hero, and doesn't have any potential to become one, but he doesn’t know how to pretend that there isn’t a problem when it’s staring him in the face.

"Oh, Helmet? Is there something wrong? Can we help you with anything?" Fuyumi said and Enji stared at him in shock.

This was it.

He placed the packet of papers under his arm down onto the table. And slid it over to them.

They both stared at the page, and Fuyumi gave an audible gasp. “...This is…” Her head snapped up to meet his gaze, eyes watering, “You’re going to try to go to the General Hospital?”

“I’m sorry, Helmet, you want to what?!”

Several of the others came swarming, and their dining table was suddenly swamped on all sides.

Helmet, however, kept facing Enji.

“...Are you… asking if I want to come?” the older man asked.

He nodded.

“If you are asking something of me,” he said slowly, “The answer will always be yes.”

“Oh, Chisaki’s going to be pissed,” Rappa sighed back.

“Chisaki-san? Are you kidding me?” Kirishima repeated, looking at them in shock, “Aizawa-san is going to be livid.”

Tetsutetsu shook his head, “Oh man, how are we going to explain this to Sasaki-san?”

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### D1 -> Hospital

Supposingly, there was a group and they were going to leave early Thursday morning when the sun was beginning to peep up. It would give them about four days to prepare and make final decisions on who would come.

Helmet was present at the conversation. They were certain of that, yet he and a few others were nowhere to be seen.

“...He left, didn’t he?”

“Yeah.”

“Fuck,” Aizawa spat out.

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Enji looked over his shoulder to where the base was and then back to Helmet in front of him.

Was this… okay?

He had ran into the man when he felt too antsy to sleep. His first clue that something was up was that Helmet was heading out. However, unlike his usual get-up, he had a large dagger strapped to his thigh. His fire hydrant is a little smaller than usual, and his left arm looks bulkier than usual, as he had refortified it with more cardboard and duct tape on the outside of his sweater. He had two bats, and his bright yellow backpack had been replaced with something a little sleeker, with two belts wrapping around his chest.

He was on his way out of the Rental Office, no doubt making his way to leave the apartment complex area.

Enji is certain that, if he didn’t see him in that moment, he would have been left behind like they had everyone else. What was the point of coming to him after dinner about this, if he wasn’t even going to wait for him to go?

He supposed it didn’t matter. He would never understand this man.

Once upon a time, he didn’t ever think that he would want to understand someone else.

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He’s not shocked that Helmet decided to go alone, because the pace was brutal.

### Hospital

-

Deku stared at the syringe. It was probably really inappropriate to do this right now, but as far as he’s concerned, he doesn’t know anything. He doesn’t know if the vaccine will help get rid of it, or if tetanus is something that makes the vaccine ineffective after some time.

Actually…. Was this even tetanus? He just assumed it would be, since it was infected and a rusty nail that did the damage. What if he was wrong this whole time? Fuck.

In fact, he doesn’t even know how to use a syringe. He hasn’t been to the doctor’s office in ages, and all the times he remembered getting vaccinated ended with him crying all the way home.

His fingers twitched. Was it bad if he punched in the wrong vaccine? Well, getting any exposed skin out from all his padding and his clothes sucked as it was. He looked to his bare arm, a mess of blood and half-formed skin, and then to the vaccines he had out.

Well, one way to find out.

Deku didn’t want to die. Not yet. He still had things he wanted to do. He had a good idea on how to do it, and figures this will be fine.

If at all possible, he hopes that he could meet that Doctor again, and let him know that he didn’t cry when he got the shots anymore, even when he missed, and even when his fingers slipped and he nearly ripped out a chunk of his skin. He would like to think that the doctor would be proud.

Instead of the All Might bandaids for a starry-eye kid, he duct tapes his wounds closed.

-

"Well… a lot of the medicine is at the bottom floor supplies."

He looked uncertain .

"We put many of the… undead down there."

Enji blanched and Helmet nodded like he was expecting it. In that instant, Enji knows what he’s going to do.

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Deku was fine with this. He came here knowing that this would be the case.

He was so incredibly grateful that he came here with someone. He can just leave the survivors to them and he can go do the one thing he's useful for.

Unable to die, unable to live, Deku gets to the bottom floor, where an unknown but rather large number of walkers are locked behind.

He opened his hand and then closed it back into a fist. He could still feel it as well as it could have. He doesn’t know what he was going to do with himself if this wasn’t tetanus. Then, he wasted several, perfectly good shots on himself. Well, regardless, he couldn’t pretend that he didn’t know what was here now that he did. He stared at the door, seemingly innocent except for the chains keeping it shut.

He picked up the bolt cutters.

It’s fine, he reminds himself, he can’t get infected. He’s padded enough, so at the very least, he will survive the fight here.

He pushed the doors open, allowing the first signs of light to embrace all the undead that the hospital staff managed to stuff down there. He tapped his bat on the ground, took a deep breath, and started. They converged on him at once.

### Return - Hawks & Deku

"Hey, if you're planning on dying, you'd let me know, right?"

Hawks felt like he was unraveling at the seams. He's been feeling like that, actually, since before all of this started, but it hadn't gotten this bad in a while. His hands trembled, his smile falling apart as he took a shaky step towards him.

"Don't save anyone if you can't take responsibility for it."

His hand shot out to grab Helmet's shoulder, slamming him up against the wall. His grin promised pain, a far-cry from the hero he used to be hailed as.

"If you're not going to let me die, then you better be here as well."

It would be so easy to tear that helmet off his head right now. He could expose Helmet's face to his eyes and then hold this against him forever. He wanted to ensure that he could never leave, the same way that Hawks would never leave.

He jerked backwards when something came swinging at him. Regretfully, he also released Helmet, and his expression returned to his default easy smile.

Standing between them, Stain narrowed his eyes at Hawks.

"Rather unbecoming of a hero, don't you think?"

“I really don’t want to hear that from you.”

Helmet suddenly stood up and pushed past Stain. He made his way through the doors behind Hawks and left like nothing happened.

It was the part that both of them hated the most about him.

### Return - Todoroki

Todoroki Rei finds a new home in this strange place, and at the center of the apocalypse, her entire family was reuinted.

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“...Did you think that… just because you saved mom, we are going to suddenly forgive you and be this… this happily functioning family? Even though you were the one to send her away to begin with?”

“Natsuo!” Fuyumi admonished in return.

“I can’t,” Natsuo said quietly, “I can’t just… forgive and forget.”

No, Enji agreed with his on, that would be too easy. And from the way Natsuo couldn’t even meet his eyes, he knew that it wouldn’t be the case.

Still.

He doesn't think he’ll ever forget the surprised smile on Rei’s face, when he knocked down that hospital room to get her out. In fact, he dared to think that, at the end of the world, he was the one who had been saved.

-

"...My thanks, Helmet," Enji said quietly. "I will never forget what you have done for me. I-"

Helmet walked right by him, as though he didn't even speak at all

To be treated so disrespectfully, for someone to just walk out while he was speaking words of gratitude no less, has never happened before. It was staggering to believe that there was someone in the world who was willing to risk everything for a potential lost cause, succeed, and then blatantly ignore any sense of glory or even thanks offered.

It's humbling and humiliating all at once.

### Enter: Toyomitsu Taishiro: Fat Gum

If he was

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“...It’s okay,” Aizawa said slowly, “Eat as much as you want.”

He can’t imagine what it was like to have a quirk so dependent on eating, like Saito or Yaoyorozu, especially in times like this. For a Pro like Fat Gum, who relies on having fat and instinctively tries to save lives, he must have had a rough time. Being hungry could really mess with someone, and as a hero known for his appetite, it would have been awful.

Case and point, here he was, several hundred of kilometers from his regular base.

It was made even worse when he saw the hesitance lace through him. The happy-go-lucky man that he once did undercover missions with, all those years ago, seemed so far away. Inappropriately enough, he felt a little older, and a stirring of anger at their entire situation.

“Is it… really okay?” he asked, a shadow of the confident man he once was.

“Yeah,” Aizawa nodded, “There’s plenty of food to go around. If you feel bad about it,” he tilted his head and smirked at him, “then you can join us on the frontlines.”

Toyomitsu stared for a moment longer before a familiar grin stretched on his face instead. It was a pathetic thing, a fraction of the radiance he used to be, but the thought that Toyomitsu had the strength to smile made something loosen in Aizawa’s chest in relief.

“Sounds great!”

### Mido’s Lowkey Dying

Deku, vaguely, thinks that he’s dying. It wasn’t this soul-crushing revelation, and it wasn’t a blessing. It was just something he realized when he woke up one day and when he leaned down to pick up his helmet, felt it slip right out of his hand. The realization settled on his heart like a blanket of snow, muffling the shock and leaving him cold.

It was now just another problem that he would have to deal with.

He couldn’t feel his arm. Before it was a numbing, throbbing sensation, but he could still feel it. When he swung and his blood stained his sleeve, he could feel the wetness. Now, he couldn’t feel anything anymore.

It wasn’t infected anymore. He knew that. There was no more oozing and there were no pus. But the mess of scars that were finally beginning to heal, so he doesn’t get it. He opened his hand and then he closed it into a fist. He couldn’t close his hand all the way, and his entire arm trembled at the strain. It took all his focus to do so.

This was bad.

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He felt awful for thinking this, but he was glad that there were others to come out with him.

Of course, he doesn't want them to. He doesn't want to subjugate them to whatever traumas they face on the outside. Many of them have finally started to laugh and smile again. The shadows that haunted their starving features have subsided into something a little more healthy, a little more alive.

Deku wanted to protect that.

At no point were they supposed to be satisfied with being here, but Deku doesn't have the heart to kick them out. However, if they want to stay, then he will need to go.

With his arm like this, it was only a matter of time before he was just deadweight. And, more importantly, he doesn't know what he will become when he dies. The best case scenario, he'll just be a corpse.

His heart ached. Despite all his grand ideals, he doesn't want to leave them.

He shook his head. Winter was rapidly approaching and he needed to decide how much longer he can handle this lie. He needs to leave before he can no longer function, so he can get the duck away and ensure that his body, regardless of its state, will be properly disposed of. He doesn't want anyone to find it or even know that he just died.

Is it better to know that someone’s dead or was it better to think they’ll come home? He still doesn’t know.

Regardless, he doesn't want to leave a half-assed job for everyone here to be forced to deal with.

Again, he's so grateful for Chisaki. Again, he feels nothing but guilt. These feelings continued to mix about in his heart, leaving room for nothing else.

But, he thinks as he begins to duct tape his bat to his hand, this was better for everyone. They don’t know him. Even if he dies, he’s hard pressed to think that they would notice or care. They’ll be fine. They have each other.

-

The first thing that they noticed was that Helmet was late. That, or they weren’t going to go clear out the area they were in yesterday. It wasn’t like Helmet to leave something like that completely undone, but right when they thought that they had just missed him completely, he came down the stairs.

A late day then.

The thought provided little comfort, but could be dismissed as Helmet didn’t see it as a threat that was worth worrying about. They could take their time with it and not fear repercussions.

Still, seeing that his bat was already out and duct taped to his hand, brought uncomfortable questions up instead.

Why would he need to duct tape the bat to his hand? What were they going to do today that he needed to duct tape his bat to his hand?

Their mute benefactor, as always, didn’t even seem to regard them as he walked right past them and out of their compound space. Even though he did this every single day, every single time, it never failed to bother them.

All of these thoughts and feelings evaporated instantly when they saw Helmet conduct himself as though nothing had changed. If anything, his swings seemed to be even stronger, and there was less time wasted between swings.

“Damn, Helmet’s badass as always,” Twice whistled as they approached the next area.

While Helmet took care of the Walkers in the area, going as far as taking a lap around the block to double check, Twice and the others ransacked the store. They wore gloves and gathered the bodies into one location, and set everything on fire.

It was a lot more therapeutic than it sounded.

### Flowers

“I think flowers will be great! Because then everyone walking by them will feel happy because they see them!”

It was a sweet idea. Clearly, it was something that a child would think of, and the idea behind it was precious. However, reality was a little harder than that.

“Eri, don’t bother Kurono with things like this,” Chisaki’s voice was curt and cold as always. She was glad that he was in good health, even if it was annoying. Kurono gave her a sympathetic look, but she was already out the door. Stupid Chisaki.

“Sorry, Eri-hime,” Setsuno said, apologetically, “I have to help with construction.”

“My deepest apologies, Eri-hime,” Nemoto sighed, shaking his head, “I’m afraid that I will be useless in this venture. I must go help take inventory.”

“Ah, sorry about that Eri-chan, but I don’t really know anything about the area and I don’t know where to plant them,” Fuyumi said, an apologetic smile on her face. “Maybe we can figure it out together later. Right now, do you want to stay in and read instead?”

But Eri didn’t want to read. She didn’t want to study. She didn’t want to play or eat or cook or clean or whatever. She didn’t want to try on new clothes and parade around in them. She wanted to help out. Almost everyone is always talking about how important it was to work for their stay, but Eri knew that she hadn’t done anything yet.

Just like Dabi said. She was just a drain on the resources.

But she wasn’t strong and she wasn’t smart, so she didn’t know what she could do. But, maybe, if she could put a smile on everyone’s face, make the lights in their eyes dance when they saw flowers, she would be useful enough.

Then she could even ask for canided apples.

Imagine her shock when a bag suddenly dropped in front of her. It was a small ziplock, labeled with “seeds” on them, and there were several grams collected seeds. She stared at it, in awe, and looked up to the person who dropped them in front of her.

Helmet, with a baseball bat taped to his hand and a fire hydrant on his thigh, stood in front of her.

“Is this… for me?”

He nodded.

“Do you.. Are you going to come with me?”

He nodded again.

Her eyes welled with tears.

A hero was a strange man in a helmet that drove Chisaki to scream noncoherently when he thought he was alone.

“I-I’ll get ready right now!”

He nodded again and pointed at the door.

“Should I… meet you there?”

He nodded once more and she felt like she would burst open with how happy she felt. She leapt up to her feet and rushed away to her lodgings. What would she need? A snack and water right? Maybe a pail?

No wait, if Helmet had invited her, with his regular yellow backpack, it was clear that he was probably completely prepared. With newfound confidence, she just grabbed on of her bags to place the small bag of seeds in.

She’d protect them. With her life.

-

“Huh? Eri-chan? Where are you going?”

Kurono, who was finishing up the work for the day and returning the updated reports on their current construction projects back to the Rental Office, paused in his steps as he heard some of the younger tenants call out to the boss’ daughter. He turned, his frown becoming apparent, as he saw little Eri walking towards the gates.

“I’m going on a walk!” Eri replied back, her rosy cheeks darkening under her excitement.

Still, her cheer did nothing but bring a cold tide of dread into Kurono. He didn’t think twice and sprinted to where she was standing.

“That’s pretty dangerous,” the kid replied back.

“Nuh-uh. Helmet is taking me!”

While Kurono would believe someone if they said that Helmet was the strongest and most likely to survive anything, it only made the pit in his gut deepen.

Oh fuck no.

“Wait, Eri-hime!”

She turned over her shoulder, her complexion brightening at the sight of Kurono. And then, slowly remembering how Kurono had been refusing to play with her since he was busy with the construction, turned away with a pout instead.

“I’m not talking to you, Kuro-baka! You’re a meanie-head!”

He winced, but he could not let, under any circumstance, this go.

“I… am sorry about that, hime-sama,” he said, slipping into the most polite terms he could. He bowed deeply before he crouched down in front of her. “But there is no need to be rash. Please let us know if you want to leave the premises-”

“I am leaving the premises,” Eri replied back, cutting him off.

“Does Kai know?” Kurono almost snapped back, far-cry from his regular, calm demeanor.

“... I might have… forgotten to tell him.”

“Then you need to go and tell him right now.”

“No, then he’ll say I can’t go! But Helmet is waiting!”

Kurono acutely wondered if this is how people felt when they were stuck between their boss and their boss’s boss. What was the correct thing to do? No, the best thing to do would have been to ignore this situation when it occurred and then play ignorance when it inevitably blew up in his face. Plausible deniability and all of that.

He racked his mind for the best possible solution in this case. He wasn’t the right-hand for nothing, and he came with a fast answer. If you can’t stop the crime, join it, or so the saying goes.

“Then, give me just a moment. Let me join you.”

“Noooooo,” Eri whined. Ste stamped her feet while declaring, “This is my time with Helmet!”

“Then I’m going to go tell Kai.”

She pouted at him, and after a long moment, relented.

“Hari-jii,” she said, “You’re not a meanie-head. You’re a party-pooper. And a cheater. You NTR trashbag.”

Kurono gave an exhausted sigh. “And where did you learn that?”

She gave an unrepentant grin, “Twice!”

“You really shouldn’t spend so much time with them…”

-

As promised, Deku was waiting by the entrance. Unlike the promise, however, Shigaraki was standing with him.

“...Huh, there is a way to make you wait for someone,” the older man said.

### Deku’s Injury - Walk It Off

With their quirks finally responding as they remembered it to, fighting had gotten much easier.

And during this time, they had gotten arrogant.

Normally, the worst of the monsters only came out at night. When the sun was high up in the sky, the worst that they dealt with were essentially zombies. Former humans that wandered the world, unable to die, but definitely not alive.

The only thing that they should have had to worry about, while the sun beat down on them, was zombies.

They forgot to account for the fact that humans could be crafty people. And when someone was desperately trying to survive, it was only natural to forget about the consequences.

-

“...What the fuck is that?!”

A blur of yellow came sweeping past their vision, a backpack crashing into the body of the zombie. It stumbled before falling backwards, and the other ones around it moved forward. Helmet came in not a moment later. His bat swung hard against the head of one zombie, crushing its skull like it was candy, and continued into a spin to get a clean hit on the next one.

He dropped low, sliding on the blood splattered on the ground to adjust his stance and swing against the leg of the next. He jerked backwards, lifting his bat up before smashing it onto the head of the next one. The bat shattered the nose of the rotting body, and then the skull as it lodged itself into the face.

Wasting no time, he yanked the bat backwards and kicked the corpse into the shambling ones behind it. Predictably, the others turned to start chowing down on it, and Helmet took advantage of that distraction.

With every swing, the heads popped like tomatoes, splattering thick and dark blood across the walls and floor.

Eventually, Helmet had dispatched the entire group that came out like that.

Tensei stared, his mouth slackening in his shock at how efficiently Helmet moved, even though his swings were wide and slow. This was someone who clearly made every move he made count, and had a lot of experience to know exactly what he could get away with. Given his statue, Tensei had expected Helmet to rely on speed more than his power, but he was clearly wrong.

“Holy shit,” Yamada gasped next to him. “Oh my god, I thought we were going to die.”

Tensei, who had taken a bad fall on his back, grimaced. He was starting to get feeling in his fingers again, even though it was tingly. He would be able to get back up and walk home, but he didn’t think he would be very reliable to do anything else.

“Man, what took you so long?” the blond next to him whined, “Like, thanks for coming to save our asses, but that was really cutting it close, don’t you think?”

His voice trailed off, as Helmet remained standing, facing forward. Even though there were no other enemies, he didn’t turn around. Instead, one of his hands came up to his ribs and the two former pros realized that there was blood dripping off his elbow. Unlike the blood around him, it was bright red, glistening and wet as it dripped to the ground.

“...Helmet?” Yamada tried again, “Are you… hurt?”

Immediately, the worst-case scenario began to fill Tensei’s head. If they lost Helmet, that was the end. He had no doubt that there were several people on base that would go on a carnage rampage. His own health and safety was no longer a concern. The condition that Helmet is in will literally decide if their base will be standing tomorrow.

He tried to force himself up, when Helmet kneeled down next to the bodies and began rummaging around their pockets. The man moved so smoothly that, for a moment, they thought that they had seen wrong.

Helmet was fine. He stood up without a problem, and walked without a limp. He didn’t lean more towards one side than another, and he fought as he always did, brutal and efficient.

So desperate to believe that nothing was wrong, they assumed that they had observed wrong.

-

The rest of the patrol went without a hitch. As far as injuries went, everyone was expected to take the following two days off to recuperate. The only exception to that was Tensei, who would be out for a week to make sure his back recovered fully.

-

“Well uh… Guess he’s fine then,” Setsuno noted, seeing Helmet the following day.

There was a rumor going around that Helmet probably had some regeneration quirk. These moments supported that idea. After all, he moved just like they remembered him to. He wasn’t limping or favoring one side over the other, and he came out to join the patrols like nothing was wrong.

“Ah, Helmet, are you uh… well? Heard you took a bad fall,” Twice, who was always one of the first to greet Helmet, said brightly.

The man, as always, didn’t respond.

Instead, he walked right past Twice, as though the man didn’t say anything at all, and made his way off their base.

“Guess he’s fine,” Twice said with a big sigh. He turned over his shoulder, “Well, as expected, right? If that was enough to do him in, we’re all fucked.”

Dabi kept his eyes on Helmet, blue eyes seeming to pierce right through the helmet.

“...Yeah, you’re right. We would be,” he said nonchalantly.

“Hm? Dabi, you say something?”

“No,” the man said, “C’mon, we’re getting left behind.”

“That’s cuz you started muttering!” Twice hissed back, “ // I bet you were abandoned as a kid!”

“I’m sure you were too,” the scarred man muttered back, already on his way out.

## [Year 2: Fall (ish)]

### Police (Pre)

>> Aizawa, Yamada, Inui, Twice, Tsukauke

By complete happenstance, he stumbled onto a radio.

At first, he just heard something resembling a voice and just ran for it. It was behind a door, and with a good swing from his bat, the doorknob fell off. He kicked it down without fanfare, and the door slammed open to reveal a man in a police uniform behind him.

It used to be a man, at least. However, Deku didn’t spend all his time beating the shit out of the undead for nothing, he felt as though there was something different about this man than the other undead that he smashed. It turned to him, alarmingly fast, and he realized it.

This guy was recent. He wasn’t decaying nearly as bad as everything else outside. This was someone who had recently been turned. He ducked under the first swing. It had been a long time since he found something with more parts attached then dangling, and moved quickly.

But with his arm being what it was, it took much longer than he had hoped to get three clean hits to the head. The skull caved inwards, and it stopped moving, sprawled on the ground. He gave it another good whack just to be certain.

He looked around the room. There were three other dead ones here. Two were missing arms and the last was missing legs. All of them had several wounds lacing their body, and they kept opening and closing their jaws at him. Dispatching them with ease, he took a moment and understood the situation.

From the way they were, it was clear that the former policeman had gotten bit trying to deal with these three.

Deku felt his stomach roll, but once he was certain that none of them wouldn’t move again, bent down to rummage through the former policeman’s pockets and pull out his ID.

It wasn’t cold enough for him to think that flesh wouldn’t decompose quickly. The days were blistering hot sometimes, but the nights could be considered mild. Often, he feels like he’s so sick or so hot that he can’t see clearly. Given that, the amount of decomposition that the former officer in front of him had made no sense.

Unless…

His eyes fell to the radio strapped to the man’s side.

He grabbed it, and again, he heard it. This was it. The voice that he drew him here.

“Please! Answer me! Are you okay? Where are you?”

Oh god, he thinks. His heart was aching for someone that he didn’t even know. His eyes burned, and he didn’t even know that he had tears left to shed. However, he looked at the ID in his hand, and knew what he needed to do.

He needed to give them closure. Waiting for someone who couldn’t come back was hard. He should at least tell them the truth. They could draw their own conclusions.

As it turns out, and he hated to think of it like this, this policeman could have been saved. While this man was fighting for his life here, what was Deku doing? Last night? Wasn’t he making peace with death again or something?

And while he was making peace with death, this man was robbed of his life. He just. This man could have been human, could have died a human. He could have been returned to the person that was calling for him. He could have…

“Please, please, please, answer me!”

No matter. Deku took a deep breath. The radio was clearly put on a low sound-setting, possibly to stop attracting attention or to save battery.

“We’re still where we are, okay? We didn’t move from the station! So, don’t worry. Just come back. Please, just come back. We just-” it clicked, and no matter what he did or how he tried to fiddle with it, it wouldn’t say or play anything. Shit. He should be glad that it had lasted this long at all, because otherwise, he wouldn’t have known.

It's begging for help. They, the someone who was waiting for the guy Deku bashed the skull of, was waiting. They're at the local, he assumed, police station. From what he gathered, this man went out to get some supplies or help. Regardless, however, they’re begging for help.

And Deku couldn’t pretend that he didn’t know after that.

“Hey, Helmet!” Yamada called out, jogging up the stairs, “We heard some loud sounds! You need some help?!”

Deku didn’t even look at him as he pushed past him. Someone was waiting. He didn’t want them to wait any longer than they had to.

-

Aside from the strenuous situations where survivors are found, they do not ever return in the middle of a scavenge. So when Helmet suddenly crossed through the clearing, heading back to the complex, they were tripping over their own feet to catch up.

Normally, he moved at a brisk walk, or a slow walk as he carefully snuck up and around the things that lingered in his neighborhood. He jogged when he was going through a complex or retracing their steps back home, and he sprinted only when he was approaching a fight or when someone was in immediate danger.

With how he moved, it definitely felt like he knew exactly how much he could and wanted to handle. He moved exactly enough and avoided expending more energy than he had.

But he was at a jog. He jogged all the way back to the compound, while they were still trying to figure out what he was doing. They caught up with minimal difficulties, although they didn’t know if he was holding back on their account or not.

Anyone who has seen Helmet move could testify to the near infinite-level of stamina he had.

Regardless, this was still something that they have never seen before.

As soon as the complex was visible, Helmet started to sprint the rest of the way back. Was something wrong? Did they completely and utterly miss something?

In the back of his mind, the part of Aizawa that wasn’t convinced that Helmet’s quirk was physically based wondered if perhaps Helmet’s quirk made it so that he could just find trouble. A trouble-magnet, that would be Helmet’s quirk. Everything would make sense too.

At Helmet’s sprinting speed, Aizawa (and most of the others) could still keep up, but the long-term sprint was something that they had lost on. He didn’t realize how much his stamina had diminished because of this, and made a mental note that they would have to work on this.

“What’s wrong?” Ectoplasm asked as soon as they came into eyeshot, “Helmet’s running like the devil himself is on his heels.”

“I wish I could tell you,” Aizawa said, panting hard.

The former teachers stared at him and nodded. “No complications?”

“None, as far as we’re concerned, Helmet there just turned around and left mid scavenge.”

Ectoplasm’s stilled, doing his best to make sense of this entire situation, “But no reason why?”

“None that we could see,” Aizawa said, shaking his head. “But he got to this… room, you see? Four bodies in there, all of them infected. I don’t… Maybe it has something to do with that-”

“Dabi! Shigaraki!” Twice shouted out as he ran in, “Hey! Helmet needs help!”

And just like that, several heads seemed to turn around.

“What’s going on?” Iguchi asked, arriving at the scene first.

The blond, bent over his knees as he caught his breath, took in a huge breath. “I don’t know! But he only moves like that when the dogs are barking, you know? // Helmet’s going to die!”

-

Helmet had dropped his backpack by the Rental Office before he ran up to his apartment complex. In a few moments, he had another bag and another bat.

Hawks poked his head out, his wings folding neatly against his back as he rested against the doorway and watched the young man run right past him.

“Helmet, you’re back early…” his voice trailed when the man ran by him. It wasn’t like he was a stranger to being ignored, but he liked to think that they had gotten sorta better than this.

When he made his way down the stairs, meandering behind Helmet as his wings fluttered anxiously. It was never a good thing if he was this rushed. He turned away, moving to start making preparations on his end. Right as he did, he caught Enji’s eye down the way and gave a curt nod to the man.

Below, Helmet makes it back to the Rental Office.

He has two bottles of water and a box of granola bars from who knows where in his bag. It’s a small pack, but it wraps around him tightly and doesn’t seem to move much on his back, like his usual bag. He has two bats and a large knife strapped to the thigh that doesn’t have a fire extinguisher. In addition to that, he’s duct-taping the edges of his sleeves of his pants leg down and to his shoes as well.

The look Hakamata gives when he sees that would have made them laugh, if they weren’t so focused on what it was that Helmet was doing.

He eventually tapes down his gloves to his hand, and tapes his neck area. It minimizes all of the already not-exposed skin, and looked to provide a little more support around his joints. A growing amount of dread continued to build. He stared at the maps for a couple of long minutes, and then he finally left.

He’s broke out into a jog, and doesn’t bother slowing down.

Hawks, Endeavor, Twice , Stain, Spinner, and Tsukauchi quickly join him. The others were left in the dust. They didn’t know where he was going, but they were certain that where ever he was going, it was going to be dangerous.

45 minutes after they left, Dabi and Shigaraki came out from various parts of the base, and when they asked what the huge commotion was about, was told that Helmet left for some emergency or another.

### Police Run

They had all known that Helmet had insane stamina.

Chasing someone, especially in a situation where they didn’t know where they were going, burned more stamina than most people assume. The confusion concerning their destination and the trip in general weighed heavily against them. It was even worse because Helmet did not give them direction.

They ran after him voluntarily. They choose to follow him out, without knowing the situation, because they wanted to be of assistance since it looked like Helmet was sprinting for their life. It was probably arrogant to think that they could do anything at all, but the thought that they haven’t even begun to repay Helmet back was humiliating.

So when Helmet finally slowed down, the only person who didn’t look like he was tired at all was Hawks and Stain. Figures.

Helmet paused for a moment, peering out and around the corner and then turned back to them. He took his small backpack off, the only indication to them that shit was going to get real right now, and turned to leave the corridor.

Or he would have, except he jerked to a stop. He turned right back to them. He opened his hand up to them, as though to tell them to stop, and they stared back at him. He made the motion several times, and Twice finally spoke up.

“You want us to stay here?” he asked, hissing it out incredulously.

Helmet nodded his head, and then moved his fingers to hold up three digits instead.

“You want us to wait three minutes?” the blond clarified.

He nodded again. And then reached into one of his pockets on his pants to grab something and he handed it to Tsukauchi. The older man stared at it in absolute shock.

“Where did you…” he asked, unable to find the words to describe the weight of the metal in his hand.

By then, Helmet had already moved on. He rummaged through his bag with his free hand, and pulled out an air horn. He looked at it, his bat, and then back to the others before giving a nod.

“Wait, that’s it-”

And Helmet ran out of the alleyway at full speed. He ran for a couple of blocks and then lifted his hand up to blare the airhorn.

Even though they were expecting it, the shock of that sudden, loud sound was enough to make them all flinch. Outside like this, making sounds made people vulnerable, but there Helmet went, making the most amount of noise this side of the neighborhood has ever heard in a very long time.

But as promised, three minutes passed and they poked their head out. There was a large horde just shuffling and shambling towards the center of the air-horn sounded. It was a little further away, and quieter because of it, and when they realized what Helmet had handed to Tsukauchi and what they were standing in front of, understood what Helmet wanted from them.

Tsukauchi held the police badge in his hand, the sunlight reflecting off of it, and they stared at the police station in front of them.

“Tsukauchi-san?”

Staring through the glass was a younger officer.

-

“Wow, I-I can’t believe that you’re… that you’re still-”

“Yes,” Tsukauchi said, his heart tight as he took in the man in front of him. “Yes, I’m glad you made it.”

-

Among the survivors, Helmet suddenly reaches into his pocket to pull out an ID. He placed it onto the table and stepped away. The others crowded it and one of the women broke down into tears.

“Oh god,” she said, “Oh my god… did he die?”

Helmet nodded. The blood on his bat was still dripping.

“Oh god… Oh god…”

Briefly, Spinner wondered if Helmet had found the badge, the ID, and just knew to come to the place where that person had someone who was waiting for him. And this way, they wouldn’t have to wait any longer. He thinks that, even if the woman was acting the way she was, it was a blessing in disguise.

The thoughts lingered in his head, and gave way to the thought that, perhaps, Helmet had a quirk or something that made it easier for him to find people who were waiting.

-

“...You know, Best Jeanist is about ready to start begging you to let him make you something,” Tsukauchi said as he approached the young man in the helmet, “Maybe you should talk to him about making you something.”

Said man was currently putting on one of the police vests. It was clear that he was trying it on, but it was times like this that Tsukauchi thought that Helmet was much thinner than he thought. He put the vest on top of everything else he was wearing, and it was still much too large. The arm holes hung far low, and the bottom of the vest went to his thighs. It was moments like this when he thinks that Helmet is much smaller than he feels. And it unnerves him more than he would like to think, especially since he can’t help but worry.

Also because he was getting sick of being harassed over things he had no control over.

The man in the helmet gave a soft breath, like he was annoyed by the whole ordeal.

“Yo, Big Boss Helmet, we’re about ready to eat lunch and head out,” Twice said, coming into the office. “Ooh? Getting a new suit! I’m totally digging the look! // Not really, it’s ugly.”

-

Kaniyashiki Monika and Tamakawa Sansa...

### Pol Survivors -> return home

When the impromptu team returned, everyone was alerted when almost all of the dogs sprinted for the doors. It was still unnerving for most of them to see that many dogs run around, but with so many days without incident, they were getting used to it.

“Hey, we got some survivors!”

Indeed, the remaining four survivors that were in the police station all came with them. They walked in, awe on their faces as they took in the sight before them.

### Post Police Run - Back on Supplies

As soon as the survivors filed in, Helmet walked to the Rental Office, where he had left his stuff before. He looked around, seeing that it was nowhere to be seen, until someone called out to him.

“Helmet? We moved your stuff over here,” Kayama called out, “since we didn’t want anyone to trip over it.”

He must have been capable of listening after all, since he nodded and followed her to the destination. He grabbed the bag and slung it over his shoulder, leaving his current bag in its place.

And just like that, he turned around to leave again.

“Eh?”

Kayama, curious, followed after him, and when he walked towards the main street, stood in front of him.

“Uh? I thought you were done for the day?” she asked, sounding uncertain. “Sounds like you did a lot today too, you sure you don’t want to kick back and show the new guys around?”

In moments like this, however, she truly believed that Helmet didn’t or couldn’t hear them after all, because he walked right past her. She hesitated. Knowing that Helmet didn’t like being touched, but knowing that no one should be leaving alone, she wondered if she should yet.

A blur of red answered her question.

“Heya, Helmet,” Hawks said, his eyes bright and his smile tight, “Where are you goin’? Can I tag along?”

Helmet kept walking, and Kayama was grateful that Hawks would at least be going with him. A blur of green ran past her, slithering with an impressive speed. Without a second glance, Spinner had rushed right past her and caught up to Helmet’s steady walking pace.

...Certainly, the only reason why they had peace on this base must be because they all agreed on one thing.

-

They returned with supplies, the stench of burnt flesh pugnant on them.

### Guns

“Oh wow, it’s been a while since I’ve held one,” Setsuno said, looking down at the revolver.

They had unceremoniously taken over the Rental Office, which now doubles as their meeting room, and dumped all the weapons that they pulled from the police run onto the the table. Inui, among some of the others, looked uncomfortably at the sheer amount of firepower they presented on the table, while the others took to fish in the water.

“Right?” Twice chorused back. Checking the weight of one of the sniping rifles, “These things were so useful until the world became quiet.”

Helmet, walking by, was only noticeable because Tsukauchi’s and Chisaki’s voices pulled their attention to them.

“Oh, hey! Chisaki-san, Helmet-san!” Setsuno called out, with a big smile, “We got real guns now, so do you guys want any? Figured that the Helmet should get dibs.”

Chisaki arched an eyebrow, “It’s a lump of metal unless we have bullets. We need metal if I want to make bullets. And more importantly, it’ll make everyone uncomfortable if we walk around with guns. Keep them for whoever runs patrol.”

“And the bullets we have are limited,” Tsukauchi added. “I doubt we’ll make it to the JSDF to take whatever’s left.”

There was a brief pause before Helmet walked into the room. Everyone immediately pulled to full attention, regardless of whether or not Helmey recognized it. He walked to the back and picked up a hammer that was laying in their open toolkit.

“...Helmet?”

He pointed at Chisaki and then at Tsukauchi, and then made the ‘follow me’ gesture, beckoning them.

Curiosity piqued, Setsuno and some of the others followed him out to several rooms down. It was one of the locked rooms that no one had the key for. He grabbed the doorknob and shook it a little, as though confirming for everyone that it was locked.

“I can unlock-”

Helmet brought the hammer down to the doorknob, silencing Chisaki in a second. The others, too shocked that he just broke off a doorknob instead of getting a key (doesn’t he own this place anyways?). Within three hits, the door knob was rolling away on the ground, and Helmet pushed the door open and walked in. He stood off to the side of the room as they poured in.

“...You had an armory here?” Chisaki asked, looking mildly impressed at the sight.

“Oh my god,” Bunbaigawara gasped back, “Yo, Dabi’s going to be pissed. // Man, I’m pissed! We had this much shit this whole time?!”

And Helmet walked out afterwards, like he had finished his duty and had to leave to do something else. It wasn’t like they could stop and really press him for answers anyway, so they let him be.

While it stung to know that he didn’t trust them enough to show them before, it meant a lot that he did now.

-

“Guns are loud though,” Tsukauchi said, “Even if we use it, it would have to be an absolute late resort. More importantly, there are more people here who have never used a gun. The recoil isn’t a joke.”

As strange as it was, Chisaki didn’t disagree with him. He gave a curt nod, showing his agreement, and Kurono swallowed his surprise. He knew there was no point in being so surprised, but he wonders if he would ever get used to seeing a former yakuza and former policeman sitting down side-by-side like this.

“Well,” Chisaki said, lining up the pile of bullets on the table. “Should we need to have a ‘last resort,’ we will go out with a bang.”

The words were morbid, the curvature of his lips was definitely a smile, and Kurono was again thankful that someone saved them. Chisaki, frank and honest, if a little biting, looked alive. His words could be seen as cold, but Kurono was glad that he wanted to fight. He could hardly believe the fact that Chisaki wanted to fight to live now.

Tsukauchi gave a side glance towards him, but looked down at the table.

“A bang, huh?”

### Helmet is a girl?

“...Eh?” Mountain Lady blinked in surprise, “What are you talking about? Helmet is a girl, isn’t she?”

There was a long pause that stretched at the table and Kamui Woods spluttered back, “W-What?” Next to him, Vlad King’s eyebrows shot to his hairline.

“Of course she is,” Midnight said, turning to him in shock, “Did you seriously think that Helmet was a man?”

“Uh, yes,” Kamui Woods replied back, and then squinted a little, “Why… did you think that Helmet is a girl?”

“Helmet is a girl?” Present Mic asked, walking by. His voice, his regular talking voice, however, was loud enough that the entire room seemed to fall quieter as everyone seemed to zone in on the conversation.

“I mean,” Takeyama flustered, “I just assumed she was,” she hissed out, trying to keep it quieter.

“Wait, what’s this about Helmet being a girl?” Toga asked, stepping closer.

“You guys have been with Helmet the longest, shouldn’t you be telling us?” Present Mic asked.

The blond shook her head, “We let Helmet have her space,” she said, ignorant to how her words might sound to them. She looked to be pondering something before she shrugged, “Well, whether or not Helmet is a girl or a boy, it doesn't really matter to me, But if she’s a girl, she’ll be softer right? That means she’ll just be that easier to bleed,” she sighed, dreamily, and the others leaned away from her.

“Well, I will say that it doesn't matter either,” Nishiya said, wisely deciding to ignore the later part of Toga’s explanation, “But… why are you convinced that Helmet’s a girl, Takeyama?”

The blond stared at her senpai, dumbfounded, “Oh come on, you’re kidding me, right? Think about it. Someone has been alone all this time, closed off from everyone, never speaks, and is always hiding their face? If she’s been out here by herself for a while, she probably knows what happens to small girls in a world like this.”

The thought sent shivers down their spines, making them incredibly uncomfortable as they carefully gauged her words.

“And on top of that, it’s not like Helmet ever makes demands, you know? But… there’s some people who would force this and that out of girls,” Midnight continued, nodding along, “Instead, we’re all treated fine here, regardless of anything, class, gender, quirk-status, or otherwise.”

“I mean, I don’t care either way either,” Takeyama added. “But I just… If it’s true, I wish she’d come out and tell us. I want her to trust us that we won’t do those kinds of things to her and we got each others’ backs.”

Unknown to them, however, the rumor spread like wildfire. Different people believed different things, of course, and just by knowing that Takeyama was the one who said this made many turn their nose. Yet, the lingering doubt remained and the unshakable question remained strong.

Who is Helmet?

### Reckless

If Deku was going to die anyways, then he needed to clean up as much as possible while he still could. He needed to ease the burden of the remaining people in the world by killing as many of these monsters as he could. It was the least he could do.

His head throbbed. He wasn’t sure if it was the heat or the fuzzy things that kept growing from his wounds. Was it a fever or was it the summer heat? Was it because he was tired or was it because he was weak? He didn’t know, but he did know one thing.

He wouldn’t last like this.

Just yesterday, he slipped going up the stairs in a building, and he didn’t even realize that he fell until on his ass, at the bottom of the flight. He completely blacked out during the fall. And then, when he tried to get up, his body quaked and for a moment, he thought that he wouldn’t be able to get up. Luckily, that wasn’t the case but he was almost certain that it wasn’t too long now.

Soon, he thought to himself. Hopefully, there was nothing after death, because all Deku wanted was to be nothing.

But first, he was alive. And he needed to do this. For the people that will still be alive, and all the people who wanted to live, he was going to keep going.

-

For the most part, Deku rarely made mistakes. He rarely messed up. At this point in time, making mistakes meant dying, especially if they were as alone as Deku had been. Mistakes dead to death or fatal injury (that will in turn lead to death).

However, the most important part was that Deku tried his best not to make errors and mistakes where anyone could see him. The last thing he wanted was for anyone to waste their time and energy trying to help him. It would drain them, and it would break his heart trying to explain that to them without saying anything else.

But then, while fighting off the fever from hell, he swung too hard and too high and didn’t kill anything. His bat clattered loudly out of his hand and he was flung to the side of the building. The hit rattled him, making him feel like his organs were being shaken violently as his bones creaked under the hit. He fell to the ground, unable to breath through the mask and helmet, feeling as though his heart had just erupted inside of his chest.

“Helmet!”

Something bubbled out of his mouth, staining his mouth and he grimaced as the stench of vomit coated his lips and was smeared across his face due to the mask.

“Oi, Helmet, are you okay?”

Shit, this was the last thing he wanted. But he couldn’t muster any feeling in his arms. They trembled, the weak twigs that they were, and he swore in his head.

If they knew that he, some young teenager was the Helmet that died, it would devastate them. He couldn’t do that. He needed to die far away where they would never know.

He needed to die a no one.

His legs felt weak, and then, he felt a hand on his arm.

“Helmet…?”

No, he thought to himself. Not Hawks. Why did it have to be Hawks? He couldn’t do this to Hawks.

He was a scumbag. The worst of the worst. He didn’t deserve that tender gesture and soft tone. He didn’t. He didn’t deserve to be mourned and missed and remembered.

Renewed with the strength to die distantly, he slapped the hand away and got up. Grabbing his bat, he rushed back to the street where Dabi’s ever reliable fire consumed those that wandered.

He watched as corpses became ash.

If he was a decent person, he would have thanked them. He would thank them for reminding him that he couldn’t die here, where the body would be seen and remembered. He would thank them for giving him the strength to force himself back up to his feet so that he could die a death befitting of the piece of shit that he was.

But he wasn’t a decent person. He wasn’t even close.

He stared at them, jealous that they were nothing more than ash.

“...Are you… okay?”

He turned on his heel, refocused on the next building they came to clear out. The stench of vomit permeated his nose, tainting him and making his stomach churn in a nauseating way. The world spun around him and the ground felt uneven, but he marched onwards. The cloth clung to his face, a constant reminder of his weakness.

He was only glad that he didn’t really eat anything. At the very least, there weren’t half-decomposed chunks of food smeared across the front of his face.

Deku marched on.

A hand came out in front of him, but he walked around with. When someone came to grab him, he yanked his hand away from their grasp and stalked on.

“Wait, are you upset that Dabi took your kill? I promise he didn’t mean it. // Damn bastard stole my kill,” Twice said, his voice bordering on whiny.

“Hey, Helmet, maybe you should… take a break? That was a pretty nasty hit…” Hawks tried.

Deku, who knew that their kindness would break him, moved on.

### Uraraka Finds Out

When she finally got to see his eyes for the first time, the only thing that ran in her mind was that he had vibrant green eyes, and it was a shame that no one else knew.

The second thing she thought was that he looked young.

While everyone always mentioned how small Helmet was, no one ever thought that he was young. Aloof and alone, but not young. It… The thought just never occurred to them. She didn’t know about the er… scarier residents of this area, but for her and the people close in age to her, she saw how the Pro Heroes listened to him and always deferred back to him about any major decisions. And so, naturally, they just saw Helmet as their silent, small, and sturdy leader.

Never once did she ever consider the notion that he could be her age. Or younger. He looked that young.

He yawned, clearly just woken up and rubbed his face. And then, he froze as his eyes snapped up to her and then his hands flew to cover his face.

Looking at him like that, taken-off guard and surprised, he looked even younger. She… doesn’t know how to feel about that. But, seeing him this uncomfortable that someone saw his face made her feel a bit sad.

Like, she knew there was no reason for him to explicitly trust her, since she never helped out with the supply runs or the defense or anything, but it was still a little painful to think that someone that cared so much for her and everyone here didn’t trust them at all. She found the helmet on the ground and passed it over to him. He flinched when she came close, and she didn’t understand how someone who could dive into a swarm of Walkers could be so scared of a girl who couldn’t even fight off one with a weapon.

“Here,” she said quietly, “I…” she considered her words carefully, “I didn’t see anything.”

His arms slowly came down from his face, so that those green eyes could catch her gaze and he stared at her in obvious wonder. She could see her reflection in his eyes, clear as day, and understood in an instant why he never unmasked himself.

He was so easy to read.

“But if possible,” she said quietly, “one day, I would like to properly eat with you.” She gave a toothy grin at the man. “I won’t let anyone know you’re here. So, go ahead and rest up.”

She left. She approached Aizawa and lied to him, telling him that she didn’t see him in any of the supply closets. The man, as stressed as always, sighed back and nodded at her that he was grateful that she checked. She felt a little twinge of guilt, and then excused herself from the nightly social activities to head to her room.

She laid down on her new bed, it smelled like her and bleach. The blankets were in good condition, soft and plush, and she felt herself relax against a comfort she didn’t think she’d ever get back. The memories of what had just occurred finally hit her full-force, she buried her face into the pillow.

Eating together? What a fucking joke.

Helmet would never do that. He couldn’t.

Helmet was a smart guy. She knew this. She’s certain of this. So she’s also certain that he already figured out that if it comes out that he’s young, the others will collapse in on themselves when they realize that they have been led around by such a young person. It was made even more obvious when she compared how the adults treat them versus other adults. While she had some hope for the heroes, she’s also seen, on several occasions, how fragile they actually are.

If heroes save the people, then who saved the heroes?

A small boy who couldn’t even share his name.

She’ll take this secret to the grave. She takes a deep shaky breath, because it’s just too sad. How could the person who has given them all <company> and the ability to be safe and secure together is the person that is the most insecure out of them all?

-

“...Ochako, are you okay?”

She looked to where Tsuyu stared at her worriedly.

She… She honestly felt like shit.

Because now that she thought about it, if Helmet lived here and that’s why he holed up in these apartments, that meant he probably never gave his name out because he knew that someone would have looked it up.

When she thought about it like that, she felt even sadder. Didn’t that mean that there was no one here who knew his name? No one would ever call his name, and no one would ever remember him by his name. He would die, nameless except for the fact that he wore a helmet. He was called Helmet because he wore one.

All these people he helped, that he saved, that he gave meaning to, and not one of them could pay him back or even remember him properly.

As someone who grew up watching the Golden Age of Heroes, it was hard to stomach.

“Just a bad dream,” she said with a tight smile.

The frog girl stared for another moment and then placed a large hand onto her back, “It’s okay,” she said, “Today will be a good day, so I’m glad that you woke up.”

The people here were infinitely kind. It just made her sad to think that Helmet probably doesn’t know about the kindness he managed to salvage at the end of the world.

“Me too,” she agreed wholeheartedly.

There had to be something that she could do. Because, once upon a time, she wanted to be a hero so that her folks could take it easy.

### Sickness

“Haha, what are you talking about? I’m fine. I just didn’t sleep well…”

Saying something like “I’m fine” before face-planting into the ground is a contradictory statement.

-

A cold breaks out at their base. Normally, this wouldn’t be an issue, because they have a few doctors, good medicine, and sensibility. And if the situation was severe enough, Chisaki could Overhaul just about any illness and most injuries away without any problem. However, this time, Chisaki is one of the first ones that’s knocked out.

It’s a fever that’s bad enough that it leaves him bedridden for days. He’s barely coherent, and he can’t even stand up on his own on the rare occasion that he can open his eyes. As though that wasn’t bad enough, the others start dropping like flies as well.

Within the first three days, half the base has been knocked out with an illness that leaves them shivering and weak.

Helmet, like always, moved with an efficiency that spells out to the rest of them that no one will be left behind. No one will be abandoned. Everyone who wanted to live will be given a chance. He didn’t ask anyone to help him, but even if he wanted to, by the fourth day, there was seldom anyone who wasn’t sick.

-

It wasn’t like just because everyone was sick that suddenly, the world would stop and let them ride it out. No, things that needed to be done still needed to be done.

Just a few months ago, going out alone like this was a normal thing. But now, Deku couldn’t help but miss the presence of another. Still, he supposes that it was only a matter of time anyways. It wasn’t good to get used to having people.

Armed with his bat, he resolutely swears that he will protect what remains.

Something growled to his left, and he moved efficiently to kill it.

-

Helmet returns, caked in blood and the stench makes his stomach roll. Just as quickly as he felt it, he felt the shame flood his features instead.

Here was Helmet, doing his absolute best to take care of everyone and going out on his own to run patrols and get supplies, and here was Tamaki, a little nauseous at the sight of blood.

“I… I want to help,” he said, and then rushed to the smaller man. He still couldn’t believe that Helmet was actually smaller than him, but he wouldn’t let this stop him now.

He took another deep breath while Helmet meticulously kept cleaning off his clothes and padding into a small kiddy pool filled with bleach.

“Please, Helmet, how can I help?”

The man’s hands stilled for a brief second before he stood up. His head turned to face Tamaki, and Tamaki was ready to do just about anything.

But there was no response, and he walked right by him instead.

That feeling of worthlessness made its home in his heart, but when he thought about the painful smile Nejire gave him and the harsh pants from a feverish Mirio, turned back around.

He’ll help Helmet, even if it was the last thing he did.

-

By some miracle, Nejire was the next person to wake up. Tamaki felt exhausted, and had no idea how Helmet was still moving at the same speed and energy he’s had since this whole thing probably started.

He made rice gruel for everyone to consume, he had the medicine out and delivered it to each and every single individual without fail, every day, three times a day. If he wasn’t doing that, he was out cleaning the dirty laundry covered in sweat, vomit, and some days, even feces. There was a constant rotation of sheets and clothes that were hung outside in their front lawn, a kiddy pool filled with bleach and other disinfectant items, and then a place for the clothes to be washed with something resembling detergent. And then, sometime during the nights, he would rush outside and return covered in blood.

Tamaki tried his best. He got nervous cooking and ended up burning some of the gruel, and he tripped into the bleach pool twice and ended up just sitting and crying the chemicals out of his eyes. Being with the other sick people made his stomach twist painfully, partly from the stench and partly from guilt, and he didn’t know how anyone could just go in and out of their rooms, changing sheets, wiping down bodies, feeding people, while death reeked in the air.

But Nejire woke up. And bless Nejire’s heart though, since she gave a big grin and said, “Leave the ladies to me!”

Tamaki felt his heart recenter. This wasn’t for naught. The walking proof that their actions bore fruit was Nejire and her healthy smile.

Taking a deep breath, Tamaki focused. It’s okay if he failed this time, he’ll just get better. He’ll keep going. He’ll keep pushing. This wasn’t the end, not even close.

Once upon a time, he wanted to be a hero. He thought that this was the closest he has gotten to that dream since the world ended.

-

The sun could stop shining but no one would even notice because Mirio. Just. Mirio.

“Are…. are you sure?”

“My side hurts from sleeping for so long,” Mirio said, stretching his sides before he gave a thumbs-up and a wide grin, “But otherwise, I feel fine!” He sniffled, still working through the last bits of the cold, but doing much better than he was just two days ago.

Tamaki wasn’t crying, but it was really hard not to.

“Thanks for taking care of me, Tamaki! Let’s save everyone else together now!”

He couldn’t quite get the words out, but he managed to grin right back. It might not be as bright as Mirio, but the hope rekindled in his heart.

-

Then came the patients who were able to stand but were still sick.

“I’m fine, get off me,” Aizawa all but hissed.

Nervously, Tamaki bit on his bottom lip, but he had to.

Suddenly, Aizawa slumped forward. He was caught when an arm wrapped around his middle and gently guided him to the floor. Behind him, Helmet placed his bat through his backpack straps as a makeshift holster. He leaned down and picked the former underground hero up with minimal effort and walked back up the stairs to deposit him in the room where a few of the other male patients were.

“Well,” Mirio whistled, “That’s one way to do it.”

“That just gives us more work though,” Tamaki said, wincing on the inside. Given how groggy Aizawa was, he didn’t think that it would have taken much of a hit, but it still looked painful.

“Back to work!” Eri cheered, “So he doesn’t have to be whacked anymore!”

Mirio beamed back, “Yeah, you’re right about that, Eri-chan!”

### Enter Gang Orca: Sakamata Kugo

Sakamata is ready to die when the world gives him one more chance.

-

### Sakamata - and the sick

The man in the helmet (actually, he isn’t sure if he is a man, or if he’s even a he, but he’s uncomfortable to think that someone who tore through all those bodies was a child) led him to a small house. He motioned at it, and passed him a small key.

“Ah, you want me to stay here?” he asked.

His helmet bobbed, nodding to affirm.

“...And you?” Sakamata asked.

He pointed down the way.

“May I… see?”

The visor turned to face him, and he wondered what this person looked like under the helmet, but he turned around to keep walking. After a moment, Sakamata followed. After watching all those bodies be torn apart and being just alone and alone and alone, he didn’t want to relinquish the one sense of company he had. So even if he may come off as clingy, he stuck close to Helmet.

He was tired of being alone.

-

However, the last thing that Sakamata expected was a base of some sort. He could feel his heart stir at the thought that there were many people in the same location, living and working together in harmony.

His joy was short-lived when a young man, and he knew this blond, came up to greet them.

“Helmet, welcome back!” Mirio, who had really started making a name for himself in his second year at UA, stood in front of them. “Oh, a survivo… Gang Orca-san!?”

Meeting survivors were great. Seeing a familiar face, however, was a joy that could not be described in words. He took a shaky step forward, and Mirio took a step back.

“Whoa, sorry about that, but these are really dirty sheets. Man, I’m glad to see you, but this is some terrible timing. Everyone is sick, but I’m sure that there is a place where the sickness hasn’t spread to, if you want to wait there?”

“They’re sick…?”

He turned sharply to the person who saved him.

“That’s why that house…”

He thought about the people he had to abandon, and then to the people who had abandoned him.

“Let me help,” he decided in an instant.

Mirio stared at him for a moment.

“...Helmet, is that okay?”

In response, Helmet walked away, leaving the conversation without another glance.

“...Well, I guess if you’re here that’s good enough. Welcome on board, Gang Orca-san!”

### Post-sickness

Deku is the last to get sick. When he realized what was happening, why he can’t tell left from right, and why his body felt like lead, he walked to the main commons where Tamaki was still washing the sheets, Nejire is keeping the fire to have hot water bottles up and going, and Mirio is faithfully delivering the water bottles with an optimism that could replace the sun.

Around the base, life had returned. Sharp orders to keep everything sanitized and clean, making sure that everyone got the medicine they needed, and otherwise returning to their normal resounded all around the area. Deku’s limited knowledge of plants was addressed and he wasn’t running alone anymore when he left the base.

In that moment, he understood that everyone will be okay. He grabbed some supplies, thought about it, and then put them back. If he didn’t come back, they would be wasted on him. He waited for the moment Gang Orca talked to Nejire about something, and ran for one of the safe-houses closer to the edge of the border when they turned their backs.

These people are foolishly kind. He doesn’t want to take anything else from them.

Right when he thought that he wouldn't make it, he got there without a problem. He pulled himself into the bed of someone he’s waiting for and passed out after locking up. He felt miserable, awful, but he hoped that morning light would come.

For the first time in a long time, he thought that it would be nice to stay alive.

There is a switchblade in his hand. He doesn’t remember a time when he doesn’t have it. Just in case. He can’t really grip it because of how hard he’s sweating, but it’s there in case something goes wrong.

Locking himself into the room of a childhood hero, Deku hoped that the person he was waiting for would forgive him for this. He dragged out the futon that he used to use when he came over for sleepovers, all those years ago, and laid down. Between one slow breath and another, he drifted between memories and dreams and wondered who they belonged to.

-

It’ll be three days until he deemed himself healthy enough to return. He spent the grand majority of it chomping through the leftover granola bars he left here, grateful that they were untouched, and sleeping off the fever. He knew that eating something warm would be helpful, but when the whole world kept spinning around him, decided that starting a fire in the kitchen would be fucking awful. As it was, he finally returned when there was no more runny nose. His stomach was painfully empty, his fever was gone, and he felt like he’s dying.

Excellent, he thought, because pain means he was alive.

Well, he supposed that this is his new normal at this point. He tipped his head back, took a deep breath, and made a decision.

He returned after breaking into a house down the street. He took another half-day to get around the perimeter to double-check that he was just fine. His reflexes hadn't dulled, and he felt like all the rust in his body from being out of commision was gone now.

Now that he’s completely alone, he’s glad that he can eat as much as he wanted in privacy and away from prying eyes. He can keep his helmet off, but doesn’t take off much else since he never knew when he would need it.

He found a group of walkers, and knocked them out easily. Even hungry and exhausted, this was easy and their bodies felt light. Good. Once he pocketed their IDs and piled them up, he leaned back and realized that he was still alone.

Regardless of how full he could be, the familiar sensation of turning around and seeing someone who had his back was more comforting. He could hear their voices already, exasperated and annoyed but alive, and he wondered when they made a home in his heart. Feeling a little stronger and better, he finished out the old-fashioned way. He gathered the bodies to one area and lit it. It’s familiar, but it’s been a long time since he had to do it.

The smoke brought Hawks to him.

“...Of course you were hard at work,” he said, landing right next to him. He whistled at the pile of corpses that were burning away, and then turned to the young man. “Ready to go home? Everyone’s pretty much better now.”

He stared for a moment longer, and Deku kept his eyes on the fire for a bit longer before he turned to the blond.

“...I…” for a minute, the former hero looked like he was going to say something, and then he said, “We’re waiting.”

He nodded back, and the two watched until the fire died out completely before they went back.

-

“Alright, let’s commence this meeting,” Sasaki said, pushing his glasses up, “This… incident cannot repeat itself.”

Chisaki sighed back. “From the sounds of it, this was a combination of multiple things. The first being that we suddenly got a bunch of new arrivals from a variety of different locations. The second is the changing seasons, and we still can’t get the heat or air-conditioning units up and running in every room. The third is that the tension of the last few years has finally broken. The resulting relief fever was probably the main reason why the fever didn’t break so easily..”

He leaned forward to rest his elbows onto the table. To think that the joys of finishing construction, having a place to be free, safe and sound, would have such detrimental effects.

“And of course, the reason that this got so out-of-hand in the first place was that I was the first one out. As far as healing-related quirks, I’m the closest one that fits the bill. Otherwise, we got a regular doctor, two nurses, and limited medicine and no ways to do medical tests yet.”

Kurono thinks that the old Chisaki, the one that broke out in hives when blood splattered on him and could get physically ill from using his own quirk, has come a long way. He doesn't say anything though, but he does wish that Oyaji could see him now.

Across the table, Sasaki nodded back, “It’s good to know the cause. However, we cannot allow this to happen again. We got lucky that we didn’t all get sick at once, and that the ones who didn’t get sick were capable of helping others.”

Mirio’s smile was a little tight, even under the unsaid compliment, “But Sir, more than us, Helmet was the one that did most of the work.”

The man nodded back, “I have no doubts. Still, for standing in like that, even though you could have gotten sick, was a great contributing factor. In those moments of panic, you kept calm and worked on helping out. That’s a good thing, Mirio.”

“Getting back on track,” Endeavor spoke up, “Our supplies took a hit from this. We were well-prepared for this emergency, but we might not be as lucky next time. What if, next time, we are under attack or it’s something more permanent than a cold? Or worse, the weather locks us in for the foreseeable future?”

The thought was numbing. After the constant ring of success all around, they had gotten high on the thought that they were invincible and that they couldn’t lose, but the reality of the situation was much more bitter.

Indeed, they had gotten lucky this time.

“But what really bothers me about all of this,” Tsukauchi started very slowly, “is that right when we all started to get better, Helmet left. He was gone for three days, right?” he asked. “His supplies don’t reflect that…”

“What are you trying to say?” Twice said, unhappy with how all these <good guys> always had to talk in circles. Why couldn’t they be more to the point? “// He probably just wanted a break from all the sick fucks living in his house.”

Tsukauchi grimaced at the words but it was Chisaki that spoke up.

“You think he caught the cold and ran off?” he asked, “Hid himself away for three days to take care of himself before he came back?”

Twice crossed his arms in front of his chest, that uncomfortable feeling beginning to bubble back up into his chest, as it always did when he was confronted with this fact. The same feeling he had when he saw

“Someone that won’t abandon anyone in need but doesn’t trust them enough to even show his face,” Aizawa sighed, rubbing his face with his hands and seeming to age three more years, “What a problematic guy.”

The hardest part of it, however, was how easy it would be to see. Helmet was the living personification of the word <independent>.

### Celebration

For Deku, the cold reminded him of his own weakness and frailty. Not just in physical strength and durability, but in how weak his spirit has become. He never thought that he had already become so dependent on the presence of the people around him.

He doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to prepare for their departure. When they leave, he knows that he’ll have a hard time saying goodbye.

“Ah, I just think it’s a bit of a shame to live just to see tomorrow, you know?”

It might have been a little thing that Kayama mentioned, but the truth behind the statement really resonated with him. It was something she mentioned a long time ago, but he thinks that right now, more than ever, he wants to deliver on the statement.

And so, he walked around until he found Chisaki, his usual go-to for things like this, and waved at the man to catch his attention. He felt a little bad, since it looked that the man was reading through something, but the man smiled at the sight of him.

Or at least, with the way his mask crinkled, Deku was hoping that it was a smile.

“Helmet,” he greeted, “What do I owe this pleasure?”

Deku gave a smile, even if the man couldn’t see it, and handed him a picture book.

“...For Eri?” he asked.

He shook his head and then tapped onto the cover.

“...Ah,” Chiaski said, eyeing the cover, “Would you like me to read it to you?”

Deku froze for a second, what?

“...A joke,” he muttered back, but then opened the book up, “...Hm, then, could it be that-”

Deku tapped the book again, getting impatient, and the older man turned his head from the book to the man. He pushed the book closed and traced out some lines on the cover.

“...Oh, are you trying to spell out matsu…” he paused, and as the words came out, his eyebrows arched up, “You want to do a Matsuri? Here?”

The green-haired boy grinned brightly, more than pleased that he finally understood and gave a curt nod. Chisaki stared back at him and barked out a laugh.

“Alright,” he said, “It’ll do well for morale, too. Let’s call everyone in again.”

-

And so, the next meeting that was called was about a Matsuri event.

“And at the end of the festival, we can do votes on who had the best event,” Makoto said, her eyes shining. “A healthy competition is good, right?”

Deku nodded back, excited with how everyone else was getting excited no matter how much they tried not to show it.

>> (late) autumn matsuri

### Sake

That Matsuri was a big hit. It would mark the first time for many of them to be outside of the complex, but it wouldn’t be a matsuri if they didn’t take to the streets, would it? It wasn’t quite like how he remembered, barely a shadow of what it used to be, but it was a good start. They were barely a candle in comparison to where the streets would flood with lights and people.

But the laughter was unmistakable.

They managed to get about four stalls open, various stall foods pre-prepared, some games that were out and about. More importantly, it went without a hitch. No lingering walker, no one got into a huge fight, and Deku would even go a step further and say that everyone enjoyed it.

No matter where they were from, something that reminded them of home and peace was well-respected here. He was thankful for it.

But now the lights were out. They were going to take down starting tomorrow, so people can go to sleep with a pleasant buzz tonight, and he left the sake out for the adults to drink. From the happy cheers he heard down the hallway, he’s glad to know that he was correct.

“...So, while everyone else gets wasted, were going to handle patrol until they’re all better?”

Helmet paused from where he had been getting ready to take a lap around the school.

Standing a few feet back, Enji was staring down at him, as imposing as ever.

“...Is this fun for you?” he asked quietly, “Allowing others to take advantage of your hard work like this? To work hard so that others may reap the rewards? Is this how you wish to live?”

As always, he didn’t get a response. It couldn’t be because he was too quiet, since Enji was not a quiet man. There was no need to yell, but he was getting frustrated enough to consider it. Far away, in the back of his mind, he knew that yelling wouldn’t make a difference, but he didn’t know what else to try. Of course, he wouldn’t do that, since he knew his presence and voice would ruin the happy atmosphere that rested on their base.

He just wanted an answer. He thinks back to a time where people used to trip over themselves in an attempt to try and talk to him and wonder where the time has gone.

He took a step forward, fire appearing right on his face, and Helmet pulled his hand up, as though to indicate that they should keep it down. He turned over, and Enji followed his direction and saw where there were a bunch of dogs meandering in and out of the little shelter they had built them a few months back.

The fire was extinguished off of his face, and he took a deep long sigh.

“Alright Fine. Let’s do this your way.”

One day, Helmet will choose to talk to him, will take off his helmet, and one day, they’ll be safe and secure enough that they don’t even need to have guard rotation. One day, Helmet will trust him, and ask him to come join him on patrols instead of taking it all on himself. And when that day, in the distant future, comes (and Enji is certain that it will come, this guy can work *miracles*), he will pour Helmet a drink.

-

That night, Helmet took his helmet off and wiped it down. It was much easier, and a little relieving to think that he had to wipe down his helmet for any reason not related to blood. He hummed quietly, the little tone that Yamada was drunkenly singing stuck in his head like an earworm.

His eye caught his reflection. He took in the scarred features and green eyes and matted curls. The person staring back at him, the person in his reflection…

...What was his name?

While fighting for the unknown future, it seemed that he had forgotten something important as a result.

Deku, he realized. That’s right, that was his name. If he closed his eyes, the thoughts that weren’t about killing and narrowly avoiding death was a distant memory of someone who had flowers bloom in their hand. That person, even if he couldn’t really remember what they looked like or what they sounded like, was the person that called him that.

<Deku.>

### Enter: All Might

There is a peaceful-looking man sleeping at the center of the ground floor of the warehouse. He has wild blond locks, and looks more like a skeleton than a human. He looks like he’s been specifically placed there, under the single patch of sunlight from the broken ceiling above.

Everything about it smells like a trap.

But all Deku sees is the Hero who once told him that a Quirkless boy couldn’t become a hero. That day was also the day that the virus broke out, and Deku often thought back to that day with a resounding ‘Yes, All Might, you are right. A quirkless guy like him could never be a Hero.’ He was such a naive fool then.

And standing, staring at that man, at the shell of what used to be the Symbol of Peace, he thinks it’s too sad if he were to turn his back and pretend he didn’t see this.

Even if it was a trap, even if this will end blowing back up in his face, he doesn’t think it’s right to let the person who always tried to save people with a smile on his face die without anyone knowing or caring.

And then, after hauling the man onto his shoulders, Deku suddenly realized that the walkers that shifted right outside were stepping away. He didn’t know what to think, but his curiosity won out and he took a step closer to them. He marveled as they stepped away.

…It couldn’t be.

Perhaps, the reason why so many things stayed away and this man was left alone at the warehouse, wasn’t because something put him there, but because nothing wanted to come close. It was a terrifying thought and a revolutionary idea-should it not just be a baseless theory.

Deku didn’t have the heart to experiment it, and instead felt the weight of the world against his shoulders.

-

When Deku and Aizawa managed to bring him back to base, a disgruntled Shigaraki trailing behind them at the thought of having another person here, they handed off their new arrival for Chisaki’s attention and care.

Gran Torino and Sasaki manage to corner him.

“Thank you,” they said, voice thick with sincerity and another emotion that Deku never got used to hearing.

-

It was something that, to Deku, was super random. He had, on his way back in, stumbled upon the man. He looked much better than before, looking as though he was starting to fill in and become something more human and less skeletal. No matter what anyone else said, he rarely went out of his way to avoid people, with a few exceptions. One of those exceptions was this man in front of him.

He heard that Chisaki was mending what was lost inside of him, similar to what he did for Compress’s arm, but it was still different to see it right in front of him.

“I’m sure that, had the world never fallen apart,” Yagi said, “...You would have been a great hero.”

He nodded at them and kept walking away, his head spinning. He climbed up to his apartment, closed the door behind him and then sat at the doorstep for a moment.

He collects himself, takes off his helmet, his blood-soaked gloves and his top layer. He drops them to the side, too distracted to meticulously clean off the probably infected blood, and instead makes a beeline for something that he hasn’t even thought of for months.

Tucked away in the furthest corners of his room was his precious hero merchandise that he squirreled away because he was scared of getting blood on it by accident. They were in as pristine condition as he remembered them, and didn’t dare take them out.

Instead, he slept on the ground, curled around the box where his childhood laid, Yagi’s words echoing inside of him.

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### Shooting Range

“It took a lot longer than I wanted,” Chisaki admitted. “But we got it set up.”

Deku looked to their small shooting range. He had no idea how big a shooting range was supposed to be, so he was super happy when they had found a police officer like Tsukauchi. He could entrust the training and the likes to him.

“Oh, you’re not going to try it out?”

A long time ago, back when a different type of life filled the apartment homes here, the person who ran the armory that he showed the others here, gave him a rundown on the revolver he had on hand. It was Deku’s gun.

He also used that same gun on the person who ran that little armory, and spent the rest of the week throwing up whenever he looked at that revolver.

With more ease than he expected, he took the gun on the table. He stood at the shooting range, and swears he could hear that man’s voice walking through all the steps and all the safety regulations. He thinks about all of them, ignoring some of them, but stands with just him and the target.

He lifted up the gun. Take a deep breath, try not to think about the quiet pleading and fires.

The shot, he always forgets, is much harder than he thinks it will be. The weight of the gun almost flies back in the recoil, and his hand trembled for some time afterwards.

## [Year 2: Winter]

### Snow

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It snowed.

Going outside, after a night of heavy snow, was like a dream come true. But as soon as Aizawa saw it, he narrowed his eyes and looked around.

“Yooooo Shota, did you see! It’s all snow!”

“...Hizashi,” Aizawa said quietly, “...I didn’t even hear anyone shoveling. Did you?”

“Huh?” Yamada finally looked at the ground and then back, “Oh, you’re right!”

Aizawa had this inkling feeling about it but-

“Good morning!”

The two peered down the way, where some of the younger students were gathered around. They waved up at the two, and Aizawa let a sigh of relief when he saw the shovels in their hand.

“You guys are so late to wake up!”

“Man, we’re barely done! Hurry up!”

“C’mon, you old timers!”

Aizawa snorted back, cheeky brats. The cold breeze rushed at him, but this time, it didn’t seem to settle in his bones.

-

“Yeah, when we woke up, the path from the Rental Office and around the apartment and stuff were shoveled up,” Kirishima said, and then sheepishly, he rubbed the back of his head, “So we figured we’d help with the rest of the clean-up.”

“...He did that, huh?” Aizawa sighed back. He rubbed the back of his head.

“Aizawa-san, if you are tired, I highly recommend you move to the inside so that we may finish shoveling up this path!” Tenya, and seriously how is he related to Ingenium, said while moving his hand in chopping motions.

“Who said I’m too tired?” he scowled back, feeling miffed that such a thing would ever be suggested. He was still damn young, alright? “Give me that shovel.”

Next to him, Yamada snickered and Aizawa suppressed the urge to hit him.

### Dec: Christmas Lights

The last matsuri idea was a hit, even for the people that were initially resistant to the idea. So, it was only natural that, as he watched the days pile on by and marked the calendar as such, that they do something for Christmas day. He stared at it, wondered what they should do this year, this time, and wanted something truly amazing to end the year.

He often thought about how some of them mentioned how awful and dreary everything could be here. He never really thought about it, but if he has learned anything by this point, it was this one thing. Everyone here was so incredibly talented and tough in a way that he didn’t think he could ever be. It was really inspiring to be by their side, and watch them create necessities in an effort to make a better future.

When December rolled in, Helmet wanted to pull out all the boxes of Christmas lights, from all sorts of lights of all shapes and sizes. As always, everyone was in great spirits. He was glad that they were all well and healthy, all things considered.

He was eternally grateful for it.

It was also why he didn’t mind how tired he felt. There was a lot to do, and not much time to do it. These days, it was hard to move almost all of his fingers in his arm now. Days where he doesn’t have to tape his hand to a bat were almost non-existent. He wanted to just take a few days off to have a break, but if he doesn’t show his face for a day and a half, they came knocking.

They’re worried. He knew they were worried. He hasn’t been worried-over in a very long time. It hurts his heart, so he tries a little harder. He doesn’t know how or why they care about him, but he greedily soaks it up.

A little more certain, he prepared for some long days.

-

Normally, Helmet went out about three times a week, sometimes two. He left early in the morning and returned sometime in the afternoon, or late at night and returned early in the morning. Either way, he came back with a bag of goods (some more than others), and splattered in blood. Most of them, who have been here for a few months, have gotten used to this. Newer arrivals may comment on it, but ultimately accept it. It was clear that Helmet wasn’t going to listen or let anyone know what he wanted to do, so it was better for them to mold around him.

So, this was not normal.

“...Helmet-san? Oh, welcome back!”

Yagi paused, and next to him, Torino did the same once he realized that the man stopped.

“What’s up, Toshinori?” he asked, hopping up onto the railing. “Ara? That’s… Kirishima, right? And Helmet.”

“Yes,” Yagi confirmed. “I thought the morning team already came back from their recon mission right before lunch.”

In fact, Snipe and Hakamata were discussing how cold it was this morning over lunch. They had joked that Helmet’s quirk must be related to temperature, because he didn’t seem to be bothered by the cold, the same way he wasn’t bothered by the heat in the middle of the summer.

Regardless, the fact that Helmet was walking into the compound grounds, in different clothes than he was wearing earlier that day, meant that he had left before. The former heroes watched as Helmet raised his hand, acknowledging Kirishima, and then kept walking in.

Torino frowned. Yagi frowned. The two stared at each other and turned to hunt down anyone who was apart of the morning travelers.

-

“Helmet came back with us,” Hakamata said with certainty. “And you’re telling me that he left and came back in?” He frowned at the thought, looking uncomfortable at the thought.

“

### Getting the lights

December 20th begins with Helmet pulling out the wagon. The sight of it, since they hadn’t seen it since the orchid incident that ended with Endeavor joining their ranks, brought dread. The last time Helmet took it out, he was gone for several days.

The days have gotten extremely cold. Even though the majority of the apartment complex had a mostly functioning A/C and heating, generating enough energy for it was a little hard. To find something sustainable for them to use for an unknown amount of time was something that Majima, and several others, worked tirelessly for. While the fire-quirk and other warmth-creation related quirk users were happy to volunteer, no one wanted them to exhaust themselves.

Four of the dogs were making laps around him, one laying by his side and whimpering, as Helmet pulled and rattled at the wagon. Next to him was an open bag of tools, and on the other side of the wagon was Mei.

“I gotta say, Helmet,” she said, “What do you even need this for?” she asked. And when she predictably didn’t get a response, tapped the wagon. “Well, the bike and the wagon are good to go. The wheels won’t last if you go off-road. Treat my baby well, okay?”

She gave him a blinding grin, and Helmet gave a respectful bow in return. He stood up and pulled at the front of the bike, and slowly rolled it up to the entrance of the complex. He stretched his neck, rolled his shoulders and then, something suddenly dropped into the wagon.

He jerked, his hand coming up to his bat, and faced the ever-smiling Hawks. His hand dropped from his bat, but he didn’t relax.

“Morning, Helmet!” he cheered. His happy demeanor didn’t make it to his eyes however, and Helmet leaned back at the near-threatening aura that emitted from the winged-man. “You know, you should just let us know when you’re planning on going on a journey, don’t you think? Whatever it is that you’re doing, isn’t it better to go together? Safety in numbers and all that.”

He was asking questions, but with the way he spoke, it didn’t feel like he was asking at all. As it was, Helmet stared at him for another moment and then got on the bike without further fanfare. The blond blanched.

Even if Hawks has never received a different kind of response from Helmet, being ignored like this wasn’t something he was used to. He didn’t think he ever would get used to it.

“...Well,” Hawks stood up on the wagon, and back-flipped off of it. With his wings, it was an easy feat, and he landed without a problem behind the wagon. “Two can play this game.”

If Helet didn’t want to speak, that was fine. He’ll speak up enough for the two of them.

He cupped his hands around his mouth, and as loud as he could yell, shouted out, “Hey, everyone! Helmet and I are heading out with the wagon! We don’t know when we’ll be back so take care!”

Helmet snapped back to him, was he shocked? Confused? Alarmed? Hawks didn’t know. But he did know that a good portion of the base probably heard him, if the sudden stampede of footsteps were any indication. Helmet promptly got on his bike, ready to pedal off, when Tensei came to them.

“Whoa there!” he cried out, good-naturedly and a little sweaty. He gave them a broad grin, “What’s the rush?” he asked. “Something we are in a dire need of? You know, it’s going to be really cold-”

“And where are you planning on going?”

With a streak of flames going behind him, Enji descended down by their side in an instant.

To their defense, they’ve been tense all month. Everyone had been noticing that Helmet has been going out more. Everyone who went out reported back different things too.

Helmet folded his arms over the handlebars, placed his head on his arms and took a deep breath. The display of frustration made Hawks feel just a little bit bad, but overwhelmingly, he was glad that their benefactor could emote after all. They weren’t just nothing to him.

This meant that he trusted them a little, right? Even if it was just a little? Since he was showing that he was frustrated?

“Helmet’s just going down the street!” Mei called out to them. “He’s just transporting some stuff over.”

“Then,” Enji decided, his voice stern as his heavy gaze fell on Helmet, “it’ll be fine if we all go, right?”

At that, the mood shifted just a bit, and another person ran up.

“Helmet! If you’re transporting stuff, then might I remind you that my quirk is good for easy transportation!” Atsushiro called out, jogging up to them. He gave a large flourish before he bowed at the waist, every bit a performer. “I will be honored to join you.”

“Welcome, then,” Hawks said, waving at him lazily. “Well, Helmet seems to be in a rush, so let’s get this show on the road, alright?”

Without further fanfare, the group of them left. One of the dogs trotted along Helmet, tail wagging in its eagerness to come along.

-

The silence during the walk felt oppressive. Luckily, they really didn’t go too far before Helmet stopped pedaling. It was just a few blocks away, at the closest convenience store in the area. It has long since been plundered, and very little of anything was left.

Helmet reached over to grab the small bag of tools, slinging it over his shoulder before he made his way through the glass and debris and into the store. All the rooms have already been broken into, doors broken off their hinges or swung open.

“I’ll keep an eye on the perimeter,” Enji called out to them.

“Then, I guess the rest of us will join him,” Tensei replied back, while Atsuhiro was half a step behind Helmet in entering the store. “...What are we looking for?”

They weren’t sure what they were expecting. Was Helmet checking on the conditions of the other houses? Did they miss something?

When they returned, they were all carrying one box each. They piled it into the wagon, and at Enji’s curious gaze, Hawks gave him the tiredest grin he’s ever seen on the man.

“They’re Christmas lights,” he explained.

“...Excuse me?”

-

Stringing up all the lights, getting all the streetlamps to come on, creating a light to stretch outside of the apartment complex and around the block had nothing on the shine in Eri’s eyes. While everyone was a little excited and pleasantly surprised at the sight of the lights, there was a particular joy that emitted off of the awe on Eri’s face.

Jirou, standing at the make-shift stage at the center of their home, yelled out into the microphone.

“Merry Christmas, everyone!” she shouted into the mic.

The sound that erupted out of their small band filled the air and the streets with a life long-forgotten.

Side-eying him, Toyomitsu wonders if Helmet understands the symbolic importance of what he just did.

-

She imagined that he liked the lights, since he could see them better through that visor. If that was the case, she wondered what he attributed the laughing faces of almost everyone on base to.

Even on this base, there was always the danger and the threat looming over the head. If the uncertain threats of the future didn’t plague them, the weight of survivor’s guilt seeped into their bones and wore them down. Those that needed something to do, or couldn’t rely on someone else to do everything for them like Helmet did, was suffering from other issues. So to say that having something to smile about, that they all still have the ability to smile, was heartening.

Even moreso, because it felt like the entire mood of the base had lifted. It lifted so high that they could breath and pick their heads up and stare at the collection of lights. They were mismatched and discolored, and unevenly distributed across the street. She was hard-pressed to think that she’s ever seen anything more beautiful.

Looking at it, and recognizing how relaxed people around the base were, even the really scary ones, she couldn’t help but wonder.

The boy underneath the helmet, she thought to herself, was he smiling too?

### Toga’s Declaration

“...To be honest, if Helmet dies, I want to die with him,” Toga blurted out once.

“Eh? A sudden love confession?”

“Hm… I guess,” the blond replied back, a smile on her face, “I don’t know about love or anything, but I didn’t really care if I was alive or not, you know? The person who changed that was Helmet, you know?” She tapped her chin before a big grin came onto her face, “Even if I’m alive, what’s there to live for? It’s not like this place would last without Helmet, anyways. If I don’t stay here, then I’m back to going through day by day in the streets.”

She shrugged.

“At that point, I might as well just die with someone who wanted me to live.”

“Damn,” Twice said, wiping away at his tears, “That’s fucking beautiful, Toga.”

Dabi wisely didn’t mention anything. He could understand her sentiment to an extent, but he knew that it didn’t apply to him.

After all, by the time Helmet died, it would only be after Dabi did. That, he would make sure of.

### Liberation Front (1)

There is another group of survivors out there. Apparently, it’s the closest thing to a <society> that resembles what they used to know. Well, concerning their motley group, he supposed that anything would be better. Helmet was walking into the base from another day of cleaning up the streets when he learned of this. In reality, he really wanted to grab a warm blanket and sleep the day away, since his clothes were soggy from when he spilled some of the bleach on himself.

His mood twisted at the news.

Tsukauchi (the older) and Majima, who had found the recording, played it for them.

[ This is the Liberation Army! We are the next frontier for humanity! We offer safety and security to those who wish to fight for us! ]

Deku thought that it was going to become very noisy, and then, the base would be silent again. He would be back to being alone again. For all the shit that he gave them in his heart, he knew that he’ll be a little lonely without their presence anymore. More than anything, he was glad that they would be okay. He told himself that he should be glad that they would be okay.

“So, do we believe them?” Aizawa asked. “And even if we did, there’s… a lot of things we would have to do to migrate everyone.”

“Safety and security?! That’s a fucking lie!” Twice shouted. “People who don’t fit in with their rules and structure are left for dead! People who aren’t useful are trash! What the fuck do they mean safety and security!” The blond heaved in his anger, his veins popping on his neck from his overwhelming frustrations.

“They’ll be fine since they’re upstanding citizens or heroes,” Dabi cut in. His cold eyes were lifeless, and his smile was so sharp it could cut someone. Deku hadn’t seen him like that since they met. “Lucky them. They’ll be treated better than us scumbags.” His eyes turned to Tabe to the side, “Though I doubt they’ll be kind to your kind.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Setsuno snapped back, deftly standing in front of his friend.

“...We came from there,” Compress said slowly, turning to Deku. “The people who left us for dead when you, dear Helmet, found us were them.”

The bubbling kind of anger that Deku felt when Spinner said that to him when he woke up returned in full-force. He took a deep, slow breath to release that feeling before he blinded himself with it.

“I implore you,” Compress continued, “to reconsider even contacting them. They aren’t kind to the free-spirited or the independent.”

“So, at least you guys will be okay,” Dabi said, cold eyes finding Tsukauchi. “And maybe you’ll finally stop bitching since they have so many rules you can’t even breath without doing something wrong.”

Deku really wished they would stop fishing for fights like this.

“So,” Dabi turned back so he stood right in front of Helmet, just an arm’s reach away, “What about you? We’re pretty comfy here, but I imagine that sustaining all these leeches is a drain on you, right? Are you going to leave?”

Leave?

Leaving was never an option for him. Perhaps Dabi wasn’t speaking to him. Yes, he was pretty short so maybe Dabi was speaking to someone behind him. Goodness, would it kill these people to look down sometimes?

He sidestepped the taller man and made his way to the Rental Office to drop off his supplies. If people leave, they would have to leave in the Spring, where traveling conditions would be optimal. Until then, he would have to make sure that everyone is comfortable. The people here were smart, so he was certain that they would be able to figure out what they needed to leave. All he needed was to know when the next time would be the last time.

It was a little lonely, but he wouldn’t let them down. If there was anything he could do, he would do it.

-

“Well,” Dabi said, tipping his head backwards with a long sigh, “that lets us know what Helmet wants.”

Helmet walked by them, like this didn’t even concern him. He supposed that they were lucky he managed to stay still in one spot for long enough that they could barely squeeze out the information to him. This wasn’t someone that did things at anyone else’s pace. While it normally annoyed him, right now, it was comforting.

He wouldn’t be thrown away again.

“So be it,” Enji nodded. “I plan on staying as long as Helmet does.”

Dabi clicked his tongue.

“Shame,” he sighed. “You’d be happier over there. Hailed as a Great Pro Hero and all that.”

The older man shook his head, “I am no hero. And I have no interest in a pipe-dream. If I can be of any assistance for Helmet and the future he is working towards, then I will be a pillar for his vision instead.” He closed one of his hands into a fist as he placed it over his heart, “I’ve already decided what I wanted to do with this life.”

He peered at Dabi, their gazes clashing like a violent ocean storm.

“And it seems to me that you are no different.”

Dabi scowled, but walked away.

-

Shoto closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

He liked here, with Helmet, more than he hated Enji. It was just that simple.

### Kouta-kun

There was a small child. It was a simple thing and for Deku in that moment, there was nothing else he could have done. The child, clearly too tired to even scream, curled up in a tight little ball as the daywalkers shuffled closer to him. Without a moment of delay, Deku smashed the window in front of him and jumped from the second floor window to get down to the child.

He’s killed more kids than he’s ever met. If at all possible, he’d like to not kill this one.

-

This child is not alone. In fact there are people with him, also alive, also surviving.In this moment, Deku is forced to confront the fact that he is weak.

And survivors are scary.

### Wrong time and wrong place

In all honesty, Deku understood his own weaknesses. He had many, enough that it felt like it was all he had, but there was one thing that he hated about himself more than anything else.

This weak heart of his was infuriating. It was so easy for him to become distracting. Truly, the thing that probably hurt him and damaged him the most was his heart. It wavered dangerously and constantly.

Like now.

Somehow, after all this time, he still associated small explosions with something nostalgic. He can't quite remember who or why or what, but he knew that it was something special to him. And when the first zombie came shuffling at him, he was fine until it's chest started to glow. Or rather, the vein inside of it began to glow and shine through the gray skin. It pulsed in time with a heartbeat and then, the chest cavity would suddenly expand like a balloon.

Then, it would explode.

Deku was tossed off his feet and sent flying to the other side of the room. It knocked all the air outo hif him, but all he could think was that the explosion of a human body almost looked like a blooming flower, as it always did.

This thought brought comfort to him.

And then, several others, with their veins shining through from under their skin, shuffled in and Deku only felt resignation.

"Do you think that you can run!?"

He was surrounded on all sides, but a sudden thought occurred to him. These flower-these exploding zombies- could be used. He could use them.

He abandoned his humanity, and prepared to desecrate the dead again. There was a man that was coming for his life as live-game, and there was a little boy that he had to make sure he got help. There was much to do, and no time to waste. He was going to die if he didn't fight, and if he died, then he couldn't wait for the person he can't remember anymore.

Deku got up to his knees when the walls came down and Muscular came barging in.

Sooner rather than later, he realized. Still, his eyes met the crazed grin on Muscular's face, and his heart wavered.

Again, he has to do this again.

### Revealing “Deku”

A popular daydream fantasy that many of them had was about the Mystery Behind the Helmet.

But with time, it fell out of priorities. It was just a little joke that they shared amongst each other, or it was something that they would come back to to share their wildest ideas and theories. Most of them and no basis, but it was just a small activity that they did.

No matter how many times they joked and brought it up, there was a quiet understanding that it was probably a good thing that they didn’t know who was under the mask. They could make all the wild speculations that they wanted, but at the end of the day, they could just assume that their silent Helmet was the most perfect person ever in their own mind.

As people who suffered through a rather desolate and hopeless time, this was more than they could ever ask for.

-

Tensei felt his heart stuttered as a child came running up to him. He was in a t-shirt and track pants as he hobbled through the snow in a pair of slippers that were far too large for him. Hawks blurred right by him, landing in front of the kid.

After all, he would recognize that Helmet anywhere.

“T-That helmet,” he said, stuttering as the whole world threatened to collapse in on itself around him, “...Where is the owner to that helmet?”

“H-He… he told me to run away!” the kid cried. He pulled the helmet off of his head, and Tensei felt his heart tighten at the sight of the sobbing child. “He said that there would be help if I kept running! He said to get someone to help because he can’t fight-and he can’t- they… they kept beating him up! And… and then I.. I-I left him… I left him behind! I-”

“It’s okay,” Hawks said, ruffling his hair. He gave a bright smile, and Tensei has no doubts that this man was once the Number Three Hero, his grin was comforting. They were all close to Helmet, but he knew that Hawks and Helmet shared a special relationship, the news couldn’t be easy to hear. “You got to the Help part,” he said, “We’ll take care of it-”

He was cut off when a sudden explosion rang through the air and shook the walls around them. Instinctively, he grabbed the child against his chest, his wings curling around them to minimize any possible effects. The three stared in absolute shock as a building that stood half a mile out shuddered and began to collapse into a vortex of fire.

“...Th...That’s where he was,” the child whispered quietly. “No… No way… No, he…”

“Hawks, get your thumb out of your ass!” Shigaraki snapped as he ran to them, “There’s something seriously wrong, let’s go! At the very least, we gotta find the body!”

The blond didn’t need anything else. He took off.

-

Deku had to say, this was probably the closest he’s been to death in a while. He took a deep breath as his eyes took in the burning building in front of him.

He tried to sit up and winced as his entire body began to pulsate. The burns, bruises, cuts, and all joined his other assortment of scars that carved up his body. He sighed deeply, and shivered violently. He couldn’t tell if the cold was because of the winter chill, the fact that he was pretty much naked without anything but this dirty rag that he managed to snag and his boxers, or because he lost too much blood. He’s not sure if he cares anymore.

His head throbbed, and it’s easy to guess what had happened. Since that last explosion that lit up the entire building, he went flying out of the building, through the glass, and crashed against some of the metal frame. Then, gravity dragged his limp body down to the ground, and here he was. The only thing impressive about this entire thing was the fact that he was still alive.

He was still alive.

It would have been nice if he was closer to the fire, if only so that it would be warm.

Around him, something fell from the sky. He looked up, snow? How beautiful, he thought, if it were snow. And then, he realized very slowly that it was ash. No, that made more sense. It couldn’t be snow. To die as snow to gently descended on him would be too romantic and pretty. Ashes make more sense.

….He was dying, wasn’t he?

He thought, briefly, that he’s sorry to his mom that this was the best he could do. He thought, for a second, that he’s sorry to Kacchan, for being unable to tell him. And then, he thought of the people at the apartment and hoped that they would forget about him as soon as possible. He doesn’t know if he can pick his body up and throw it into the fire so that there would be nothing left. Figured that he couldn’t even do this. To the end, he would still be weak.

He hoped that Kouta was okay.

“There’s someone here!”

He took a deep breath, and feeling the footsteps and people arrive, understood that he was going to die a human, by human hands. No doubt, they could see how much of his leg was eaten, what little is left of his left bicep, and that’s just from the things that they can clearly see. They don’t know how hard Moonfish bit down or how hard Muscular hit him or how often Mustard tried his knives on him. He hoped they don’t ever find out.

And with the way the fire burned and how shocked they were at finding him, he’s certain that they won’t ever know. Everything will end with him. Even though it was selfish, he was happy that someone would know that he, Deku, was dead.

“Hey are you-”

The familiar fluttering of wings landed somewhere behind him, and Tensei stopped right in front of him. He couldn’t see the man’s facial expression, not with how blurry his eyesight was, but the way he cut himself off already told him enough.

He … probably looks even worse than he thought. He wished that he could have spared them this.

“Shit, he’s bit. He’s like… really bit. // We gotta kill him. Put him out of his misery.”

Ah, Twice. Could always count on him. It hurt, but he smiled.

“...I’ll make it painless,” a sword was drawn.

Iguchi would, too. He’s grateful for that. However, Deku sincerely doubted that he could feel any pain at all at this point. How lucky.

“No! No no no! He’s fine! It’s not infectious! Moonfish just likes eating people!”

His head slowly picked up, his heart rate increased, his eyes widened, as Kouta came running to his side. He held his helmet tightly to his chest, even tripped over his foot and tumbled down to close the distance between them. Deku’s heart ached when those desperate eyes turned to him.

“I-I brought help! I brought help! They said, they said that they’ll protect you and that they’ll help!”

Fucking christ, he thinks, why did they let him come back?

“It’s okay! Look, I even brought your helmet back! So you don’t… please don’t leave me, too.”

Deku stared hard at the kid, the helmet he was pushing into his hand, and couldn’t. He just. He just fucking can’t do this. No matter how much he wanted to take a break, or how much he wanted to just die and return to his mother’s side, he doesn’t think he can do it. He can’t abandon someone who reminds him so much of the person he’s waiting for.

He turned over to his side, and then to his front. He forced the remains of his trembling arms to push him into a kneel. He took the helmet from his small, trembling hands, and slipped it on. He can’t even curl his fingers, so he let the latch dangle. He swore that someone gasped around him, but he didn’t think too hard about it. He didn’t want to think about anything anymore.

“Thank you,” he said quietly. “...Do you want to come back with us?”

But this kid looked so radiant. And he didn’t want to look away.

“Yes! Yeah,... I’ll… I’ll go wherever you want.”

Deku nodded, and the helmet shifted a little. He knew that he took a lot of damage this time around, but he suddenly couldn’t feel it anymore. Body like lead, yes, but he didn’t feel pain. He took a deep breath and slowly made it up to his feet (foot and stub, really, with the mess they made of him) when a hand came down next to him.

He turned his head. Twice.

“...Helmet…?” he asked quietly.

He nodded back.

Twice took a deep, slow breath, before he pulled his mask off his face and reached to grab his arm. Without a second to waste, he licked the blood off of his fingers. Kouta gave a disgusted gasp, and the clone, because there was no way this was the original Twice, gasped.

“Well,” he said, “I’m not turning.”

“...Okay, so we know that he’s not infected-”

Deku pulled away from the touch, nearly crumpling back to the ground. The Twice Clone’s hand grabbed him immediately, stabilizing him as best he could. His heart broke under the kind gesture, even as the pain shot up and down his entire body. However, in the makeshift-toga and his boxer-briefs, he’s certain that they could all see how much blood he’s lost and how much flesh he was missing.

“I’m okay,” Deku said. He gave a short sigh, and rolled his neck. “Let’s go home,” he said.

He took a step, and then another, the world spun around him, and he felt like his head was stuffed with cotton.

Probably, Twice was half-dragging him moreso than he was walking himself, and he apologized over and over again, hopefully aloud. The world was hazy and he didn’t really get what’s going on. Something ran down his neck, and he wondered if he’s sweating that badly or if it was blood. He didn’t know, and not able to feel any pain, just assumed that this is a very nice and pleasant dream where he’s not infected and he can return to the place he called home.

Against the cold, he doesn’t think that he can feel anything. He can’t feel their stares or the pain, or how something is sliding down his legs. He’s… fine.

There were people who came for him. He was going to die anyways, so this was fine, right? He gave a smile to Kouta, even though he couldn’t see it, and reached out to him. The tiny fingers wrapped around one of his. This was enough. Maybe, for saving Kouta, he could be enough.

It would be nice if this dream could continue for a little bit longer.

-

They made it home. Deku was certain that this is a dream, because the walk feels so short. He didn’t think much, and let his heart settle. It almost feels like he’s lucid dreaming.

He didn’t mind dying if it meant that people were happy.

Right in front of his apartment, he swore that he could just see his mom standing on the railing, waving at him. There was a lot of movement, because there were lots of people coming in and out in the bustle of rush hour. The thought was comforting, and then, the world went black. It must be time to wake up then.

He hoped that these peaceful days would be protected forever, even if he wouldn’t be the one to witness them.

### Extra - Revenge

“Okay, you guys go and wrap that up then,” Twice said, nodding at them.

“You’re not coming with us?” Tensei asked.

“Of course not,” Dabi snorted back.

“They took care of Helmet for us,” Shigaraki pitched in.

“And we’re going to take our payment back,” Twice finished.

“Stain-y got the trail!” Toga said, waving her hand. Her smile was wide but there was a coldness edging in her eyes. “So let’s go.”

“Hero-san,” Twice called out, “We’re different from you guys. We don’t care about honor and mercy and shit like that. We live for each other.” He seemed unified in that ideal and he turned around.

Tensei watched, three roofs away, Stain stand up before he disappeared into a blur of a shadow with a red streak, where his scarf bled across the air. Even though Dabi and Shigaraki had some incredibly devastating quirks, and Tog and Twice could easily ruin lives, the person that bothered him the most was Stain.

That kind of bloodlust, the kind that Tensei felt in his bones even though Stain wasn’t even facing him and four blocks away, was dense like lead.

-

“Get your fire under control,” Stain warned.

Dabi exhaled loudly, and despite his lazy and uncaring demeanor, the fire lessened just a bit. It was rare for him to let his fire climb up to the third floor, but he was just as upset as anyone else.

### Helmet

As it turned out, Deku was as small as he was young. They wouldn’t know for certain until he woke up, but it was impossible to believe that he could be older than twenty.

However, a universal consensus was that they never wanted to find out like this. Many of them believed that Helmet should have told them in his own time, on his own terms. This wasn’t…

Getting the helmet off of him was a necessity. The kid was literally dying. Bleeding out and sustaining enough wounds to kill most grown adults, he would have died. He should have died. However, Chisaki was swift to Overhaul him. The bleeding didn’t stop. He’s going to wring the neck of those Pros.

No, that was a lie. He wanted to ruin all of them.

All their fluffy speeches and all their promises, but they were all trash. If Helmet didn’t save them and so obviously care about them, he would have gotten rid of them long ago. Filthy scumbags. If they weren’t going to be his meatshield, then what was the point of them anyways?

“All that remains is the injuries from the monsters,” Chisaki announced.

Natsuo looked at Helmet, tried not to think about how young he looked, and focused on the array of wounds that was still left on his body. While most of his broken bones and the worst of his injuries had been fixed, there was plenty that would need to be stitched back together.

“...God,” he whispered quietly. He took a deep breath and shook his head. He could cry and despair and wallow in his guilt later. “Alright, let’s get to work.”

But first, he needed to save this man. This was his first priority. This was his only priority.

However, if Helmet never opened his eyes again, Chisaki swore that he would send this entire base and everyone in it with him, to the other side.

-

“...He’s a kid,” Chisaki said quietly. “Of course he hid.”

He rubbed his temples. Of course he hid. No matter what happened, he had figured that Deku hid because he had to hide. Maybe it was because Helmet was a woman, and she was scared because of the number of surviving men here. Maybe it was because Helmet looked atrociously ugly, but surely, he would have at least been comfortable around Dabi.

No, instead, it turned out that Helmet was a young boy. It was so obvious why he hid, and it was so obvious that it made Chisaki sick.

He hid because he knew no one would take him seriously. If the top of the chain was a young kid who didn’t even have pubic hair, then no one would listen. No one would believe him. His actions would have been dismissed as naivety. He knew that because he would have brushed him off the same.

Helmet had no voice because no one would listen. He had no face because he knew no one would see him. He left them to spin their own stories and make their own conclusions, because then, they would be holding him to the ideal in their head. It was a hefty burden to bear, but since he never spoke and was never seen, it worked.

Ridiculous. He thought to himself.

“...Kai? Is everything alright?”

“We’ve been obediently playing to his tone this whole time,” he informed his longtime friend. “...No longer. We aren’t going to dance to this tone anymore.”

Kurono looked alarmed. Golden eyes turned to him.

“Helmet will live only long enough to pay back this humiliation he has done unto me.”

It was a threat. There was no way anyone listening to this man could heat it as anything but a threat. However, Kurono grew up with Chisaki. He knew what this man looked and sounded like when he was threatening someone, he’s seen it many, many times. The Chisaki in front of him, eyes brighter than anything he’s ever remembered, was not speaking of a threat.

### Waking Up as Not Helmet

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He exhaled hashly, but remained tense.

“That’s it. Keep doing that, okay?”

Deku focused on breathing. He closed his eyes in to just focus on his breaths, and slowly opened his eyes again. Now that he wasn’t just panicking, he could see that behind Yamada was Chisaki.

Chisaki.

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

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

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

No way to run, no way to fight, Deku could only hope that they would just let him leave. Or that they would kill him quickly.

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

He extended his hand out and Deku stared at it.

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

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

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

He was just a little, weak, worthless, quirkless boy this whole time.

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

He could only hope that his childhood friend will forgive him for being unable to keep up his end of the promise. From his memory of him, it was unlikely.

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

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

“I’m… I’m fine,” he said quietly.

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

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

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

“...Dirty,” he said.

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

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

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

He extended his hands out once more.

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

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

This time, he took it.

-

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

Deku nodded slowly.

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

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

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

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

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

“Thank you, Chisaki...san?”

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

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

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

“I-”

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

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

The young man didn’t respond.

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

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

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

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

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

Chisaki nodded and stood up from the seat.

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

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

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

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

-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Yamada’s Thoughts

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

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

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

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

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

There was an uncomfortable silence.

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

“Endeavor, what did you-”

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

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

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

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

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

The words stung.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Friction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Setsuno-”

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

“Setsuno!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Moving forward

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

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

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

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

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

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

He rolled his shoulders, feeling good.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And now, it was time to face those lies.

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

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

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

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

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

Deku took a step out of the room.

-

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

“...Helmet… kun?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Hel...met?”

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

“...Hello.”

The silence was deafening.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...I… answer,” he said, “Questions.”

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

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

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

Kurono nodded and left the room.

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

Whatever they want, however, he would give.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Bright.”

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

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

Deku nodded.

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

At that, the young man straightened.

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

“What?”

“Whoa, whoa-”

“Wait, what do you mean-”

“Leaving?!”

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

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

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

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

There was another silence.

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

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

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

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

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

He blinked as golden eyes narrowed.

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

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

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

The young man shrugged back, “See tomorrow?”

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

“I’m waiting for someone,” he said.

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

Deku nodded to confirm, “Easier to find.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And the young man just looked confused.

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

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

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

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

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

The walking crematory actually laughed at that.

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

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

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

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

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

### That First Dinner

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He took another deep breath.

The longer he waited, the harder it would get.

He opened the door.

“...Oh, hey. Did you… rest well?”

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

He felt light-headed.

“You uhm, look good.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Okay,” he said. “Let’s… dinner.”

-

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...ku… Deku!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Uh… yeah, that sounds about right.”

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

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

...Would it be okay to stay?

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

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

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

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

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

He dug in.

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

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

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

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

“There’s no need to cry.”

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

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

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

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

“Thank you,” he said, remembering himself.

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

-

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

“Ah… I can…”

The blond ruffled his hair in response, not even watching as their bowls were taken away.

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

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

“Great!”

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

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

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

“...Your… name?”

“...My name?” Hawks parroted, before a large grin stretched across his face. He stuffed his hands into his pocket as he turned around, walking backwards to face the younger man, “...I used to be the Pro-Hero Hawks. But… you should call me Keigo.”

“...Keigo-san?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Deku?”

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

He hoped not the later.

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

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

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

“Next time, I’ll be prepared.”

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

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

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

And kids like Midoriya put him there.

“Next time, you won’t be alone.”

### Equipment

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

"Hot…. better than dead. Tired good."

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

“Really, is it good?”

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

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

The smaller man winced back.

“...Sorry,” he muttered back.

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

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

Stronger. He needed to get stronger.

### Kouta-kun: Choosing to Stay

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

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

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

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

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“...I can’t… stay with you?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“But you did.”

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

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

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

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

“Then, come with me.”

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

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

## [Year 2: “Deku”]

### Springer War - Finale

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“Get outta my way, damn extras!”

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

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

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

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

It couldn’t be. It can’t be.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Deku’s jaw hung open.

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

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

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

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

“...Thank you.”

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

It burned so beautifully.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Deku, what did you count?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Surgery

Deku was in surgery for a few hours.

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

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

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

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

Idiot.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Thirsty.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...That bad?” Dabi asked quietly.

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

Shigaraki frowned, “Rehab?”

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

There was a long silence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He nodded.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Travel

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

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

Seriously?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He leaned backwards at that, away from him.

“...Leave now,” he said quietly.

“How far is it?” Tensei asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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This was ridiculous.

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

Augh.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Did he… have any right to refuse?

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

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

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

“...Thank you,” he said quietly.

### Travel - Not Attending:

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Trust, huh?”

-

“...What’s on your mind?”

Yamada looked up to where Aizawa looked over at him.

“Huh?”

“You look like you’re constipated.”

“You couldn’t have phrased that better?”

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

“...What’s up?” Aizawa asked again.

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

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

### Gentle

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Come with me,” Deku replied back.

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

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

Tobita paused, hesitating.

“Together better.”

“...Okay,” he said.

-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### House-arrest

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Almost.

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

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

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

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

The young man hesitated and then, very slowly nodded.

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

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

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

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

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

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

-

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

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

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

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

“...Are you cold?”

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

What a shit liar.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Kouta’s Job -

“Hey there, Deku-kun.”

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

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

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

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

“Haven’t seen you in a while, huh?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Okay,” he said quietly.

“Really? Because you look like shit.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Deku hesitated.

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

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

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

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

The pills remained untouched on the coffee table.

-

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

“Kurono, bring the kid out,” he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Okay,” he said.

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

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

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

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

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

“...He what?”

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

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

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

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

Fuck.

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

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

“...Kai? Is… everything alright?”

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

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

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

### Arms (1) - Tensei

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The young man stared at him and then nodded.

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

“Sleep.”

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

-

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

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

And so, if something touched him while he was in this state of almost-sleep, his hand will pull out a dagger and his entire body will lurch to fight-

-and he stared at Tensei’s shocked expression as he dropped the blanket and lifted his hand up to the side of his head. The universal sign of surrender.

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

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

Tensei pulled the blanket up and over him.

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

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

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

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

As long as everyone gets along and is mostly healthy and happy, he doesn’t know what else he could want from the world.

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

-

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

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

### Up & About - 5 days since

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

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

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

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

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

-

“...Deku?”

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

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

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

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

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

“Y-you’re coming to breakfast?”

Deku paused at how genuinely happy Kouta sounded about it.

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

“O-one sec, let me get dressed-”

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

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

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

### Dabi - Names

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Scoot over, I brought you lunch.”

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

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

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

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

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

Deku blinked back at him.

“You were talking aloud,” the man said.

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

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

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

He hesitated for another second.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Dabi.”

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

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

-

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

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

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

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

What warm hands, he thought.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Did… that make sense?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Fast ones?”

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

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

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

“...Wow…” he whispered quietly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### La Brava & Machines

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

-

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

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

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

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

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

“Deku,” he called out.

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

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

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

“You did.”

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

“That’s not fair,” he said.

### Check-ups - 2 weeks

“...You’re healing poorly.”

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

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

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

There was no response.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Alright,” the doctor noted.

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

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

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

“...Thank you,” he said.

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

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

Ah, youth.

-

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

Excellent, they both thought. Progress.

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

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

### Avoidance - Yagi

“...Are you avoiding me?”

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

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

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

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

Deku’s hand clenched tightly into fists.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He wanted to be relied on.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### New Changes - Mornings

“Morning,” Sasaki greeted him.

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

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

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

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

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

### Rehab - Chores

-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Aren’t you injured?” he asked.

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

“Rehab,” he repeated back.

The young man nodded.

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

Like night-patrol.

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

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

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

Pro Hero, he reminds himself.

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

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

-

"...What are you doing?"

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

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

"...Why?"

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

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

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

"And?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

-

“...You’ve been active.”

“... I should pull my own weight.”

### Names (Gen)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“-Can we call you by your name, too?”

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

“Shut up. You’re annoying.”

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

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

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

Deku shook his head. “...Deku is fine,” he eventually said.

“Now that’s cleared up,” Dabi turned on his heel to face the younger man, remaining a body-shield between him and the others’ gaze, “What’s up?”

He stared at him before he began to speak. The words were quiet, and easy to drown out. Surely, if they hadn’t met him as the ‘the Silent Helmet’ before, they would have easily tuned him out. But as they were starved to get any form of insight on their young benefactor and his thoughts, they were silent as mice when he spoke.

“...Need help by the furnace,” he said.

“Ah, figures,” Dabi rubbed the back of his head.

Right as the two began to walk away, there was something that awoken inside of Ashida. She straightened out and spoke up loud and proud. With a grin just a little brighter than the sun, she said, “Deku-kun! Call me Mina!”

“Me too!” Bunbaigawara said, “Jin’s fine!”

And Deku turned back to stare at them with wide eyes. Then, he gave a nod back, as though to indicate that he heard them.

But only Dabi, who was walking next to him at the time, would know that he was smiling.

### Q&A about Chisaki :

“...You know, there’s something that’s always bothered me,” Iguchi said. “Deku, do you mind if I ask you a question?”

The young man looked like he minded it very much, but he nodded.

"Why didn't you share the plans about the future with us? Why was it Chisaki first? At first, I thought you were waiting for someone with a compatible quirk, but you also have those notes so that just anyone could put together some of those things, right? So that couldn’t be it. So… so why did you tell Chisaki?"

And Deku stared at him because wasn't it obvious?

Out of all of them, Chisaki was the only one that came back. He made a choice and his choice was here. That alone made it certain for Deku that this man was going to stay for the foreseeable future. Then, wasn't it only obvious that he told Chisaki all of his future dreams and wishes for this place to grow? So that he would know what they were trying to build up to?

He has, for a long time, already conditioned his heart to know and understand that people leave, but Chisaki chose to stay. So even if it was meaningless, and that it was naive of him, he was just so overjoyed that someone chose him that it felt like it was only natural that they would share opinions about the future with each other too.

“...Came back,” Deku decided on quietly.

### Bark, bark-

They had probably forgotten, with the whirlwind of events and emotions that they rode through recently, that Deku used to survive all on his own before. He defended his place, and never hesitated to take on any number of enemies and left no survivors. He had a system and habits and even though they spent all this time together, they were still learning things about each other.

And other things, they forgot.

A dog started barking.

Well, actually, the dog barked twice. It wasn’t something that they weren’t used to, but it was rare for it to sound like that. And it didn’t sink in, since it had been so long since they heard that urgent kind of barking, until an apartment door was slammed open.

Eyes sharp and movements fast, no one would ever guess that he was injured.

As it was, Deku flung himself over the railing in front of his apartment complex, doing his regular stunts where he dropped floor by floor in an impressive feat of physical exertion.

At the very bottom, he landed on his feet, did a body roll forward and was sprinting as soon as he was upright again. His signature helmet was on and his bat was in his hand, and it was almost as if the entire incident with Kouta and the empty mall and everything never happened.

Right as he got to the dog, however, he was suddenly hauled off his feet.

His head turned to where the near-maniac grin where Usagiyama looked down at him. Her arms wrapped around his middle and had him around her chest, leaving his arms and legs to hang uselessly.

“Heyya, Deku,” she purred at him. “Where’s the battle?”

Please, he begged with all his heart, please let him go.

“Usagiyama, good work,” Enji’s deep voice was unmistakable. “Deku, well take it from here.”

With a loud laugh, Usagiyama placed Deku down. She placed her hand on top of his helmet, her grin turning bloodthirsty as she looked towards the sidewalk. “I missed out the last one, but I won’t miss this one.”

A low growl was heard and Inui stepped forward. The gruffer man grabbed Deku by the shoulders, and growled again.

“You!” he hissed, his hands tensing on his shoulders, “Rest!”

Deku, too shocked and surprised to do anything else, nodded. And when the dog rubbed his head against the back of his thigh, he recentered himself. Armed with a bat, he turned to leave the area when Inui’s large hands grabbed him again.

“No! Stay here and rest!”

About another four words from breaking out into howls and barks, Kan stepped in.

“Ah, he’s just worried about you, so don’t take it to heart,” Kan said. “We’ll take care of it, so just go back and rest.”

They couldn’t see his expression, since Deku’s face was obscured by the helmet, but they could see how he tilted his head. Was it that confusing? Was it that surprising that they would do this? It was bad if he believed that, but it would be even worse if they did let him continue to think that.

Remembering how young Deku looked, it made something bitter rise up in his throat.

“My, what reliable adults, don’t you think, Deku?”

The sickenly sweet voice made Deku stiffen. Slowly, he turned over where the bright smiling face of Chisaki looked down at him. Despite how bright he looked, a dangerous aura poured from his essence like a shadow. He reached over to grab the young man’s shoulder like an anchor.

Every bit of his body wanted to just run away, but he was surrounded on all sides. There was no escape, and if the guilty look on Hojo’s face a few feet away was any indication, no one would come to help him.

“Leave this to us,” Enji said, his eyes looking out into the darkness of the street, “We will protect the place you treasure.”

And just like that, he, Kan, Usagiyama, and Inui headed out into the night with the dog from earlier.

The dog looked from him to them, and Inui must have said something, because it led them out.

Traitor.

“Now then,” Chisaki said, collecting his attention again, “What part of ‘pain’ do you not understand? There’s no way you didn’t get banged up from that stunt coming down. You know we have stairs, you were with me when we fixed them, so why can’t you just use them like any normal person?

“Honestly, after recklessly saving all these people, why are you still convinced that you’re all on your own? Did you seriously think that you could keep anyone safe right now? Worry about getting better first…”

And he went on and on and on as he all but dragged Deku back to the infirmary.

If Deku had been a little braver, he would have begged the man to not waste his kindness on him. Instead, he was dazzled by the light in the eyes of the adults around him, and even though he didn’t deserve it, basked in their kindness.

### Death - ShiraDeku

“...If you die,” Shigaraki said quietly, “I’ll follow you.”

The young man’s head snapped up, and Shigaraki stepped closer.

“So, when you die, know that you also killed me.”

Deku clearly took it at face-value, and dropped his gaze. On the other side, the others thought it was a little cute that he was taking it so seriously.

Shigaraki stood up, fully intent on leaving the area.

Right before he could make it to the door, however, he froze in his place. His hand was on the doorknob, and Compress gave a little gasp. In another moment, Shigaraki would have hit him for that, but right now, his entire attention was focused on the person who stopped him.

Deku’s trembling hand snagged the back of his shirt. He gripped it between his fingers, and Shigaraki had no doubts that he could slip away easily. This was done to get his attention, and make sure that he was heard. And Shigaraki was certain that it was Deku, because there were only two people in the whole world who would ever touch him, and only one of them was here.

“...I want,” Deku said, his voice barely a whisper, “to protect you.”

Shigaraki remained silent for another moment, eyes wide as he stared at the door, unseeing. He clenched his jaw tightly as he tried to stay in control over his thoughts.

“Then, it’s easy to see what you need to do, right?” he asked, pushing the door open.

The grip on his shirt disappeared, like he was slipping through water. He turned around to push the door open with his back and motioned for Deku to step out.

“What he means to say,” Compress said, unable to handle how bothered the young man looked about all this, “is that you should take better care of yourself. Don’t die out there.”

“Tch.” Shigaraki clicked his tongue, but the grin on his face showed no sign of hostility. If Shigaraki was capable of emotions like amity and goodwill, it would be in that gentle smile. “Don’t say unnecessary things,” he said, waiting for Deku to step through with him.

And when the young man did, Shigaraki looked as though Christmas came early.

...For a guy who could disintegrate anything by touching it, his expressions could get surprisingly innocent.

-

It was probably easier for guys like them. They didn’t really have anything tying them down. It was expected that they were rude and annoying, and a pleasant surprise when they weren’t. They had nothing going for them, not goals or friends or family or anything.

So what little they did have, what little they managed to salvage up for themselves, is what they protected fiercely.

His name, as they finally learned, is Deku. Which most of them called bullshit on, but it was the only thing that he reliably responded to. Instead of losing interest or getting angry at the young man, they would feel a sense of loyalty to someone for the first time. It was a little scary, to be that vulnerable in, but for some odd reason, it felt fine.

The peace was startling, terrifying, and all at once, dreamlike. Hopefully, they won’t wake up from this.

### New Habits - Kamui & Dek

And suddenly, a branch wrapped around his ankle.

“No hard feelings,” Nishiya said calmly, and Deku seriously felt betrayed. The older man looked to the side, too guilty to look at the young man in front of him. “But I don’t like seeing you hurt either.”

His heart clenched tightly in his chest.

Deku didn’t know what to do with the misplaced kindness they all showered him with.

“Oh, Deku, there you are!”

The pair looked to where Fuyumi gave him a wide smile, Shoto next to her, and both of them held a tray of food and drinks.

“Hey, Lunchrush mentioned that you haven’t swung by, so we brought you something to eat.”

Deku tugged on the branch. No good, he wasn’t going to escape unless he yanked hard. He didn’t want to do that, even if it’ll be easy. If he ran away, they would let him go. They wouldn’t fight it and they wouldn’t try to make it harder for him to run away. Their kindness and gentle disposition would be wasted on him then, and he knew he couldn’t do that.

“...I’m okay,” he tried, but immediately regretted his words at the crestfallen look on Fuyumi’s face.

“Oh, do you not like onigiri?” she asked quietly. “S-sorry, haha, that’s my fault. Should have asked you what you wanted first, huh?”

Augh, he might as well have punted a puppy across the street.

“No, I …” he hesitated, “I… I mean that…” he tried to look for the words and then decided on, “I already ate.”

Nishiya frowned, “I thought that you haven’t had breakfast since you just woke up.”

The thought that he was being cornered occured, but given their gentle expressions, he banished the thought.

“If you want, I really don’t mind getting you something else to eat,” Fuyumi piped in.

Briefly, they all considered how strange that must sound. Just a few months ago, they didn’t even know if they could see tomorrow, but now they could eat as much as they wished. They could afford to be picky about their food. It was truly bizarre.

He hesitated, and Nishiya spoke up.

“It’s fine, isn’t it? Do you need to go anywhere right now?”

There was a beat of hesitation, and ultimately, he shook his head.

-

Deku ate by pulling the bottom of his mask or his bandana up. He ate by using one hand to hold it there, and taking small bites of his food. It was an incredibly defensive way to eat, and everyone tried their best not to stare and make any motions at it.

For the most part, they all understood learned trauma when they saw it now.

“I would like to join the patrols soon,” Shoto suddenly spoke up. His gaze turned to Deku sharply. “If that’s okay.”

The young man shook his head, and frustration flickered past Shoto’s face before he spoke up. “Too much snow right now.”

“Then, when it melts.”

He nodded. So focused on eating so that he could leave, he missed the look Nishiya and Fuyumi shared.

“Ah, Deku,” Fuyumi asked quietly, “Are you planning on continuing patrols?”

He nodded. Of course he would. There was still much to do. Made even worse by the fact that the entire thing with Muscular ruined the majority of his plans. He would have a lot to do come spring time. The fact that he’s been unable to do any runs to kill anything that came too close weighted heavily on his head.

For his laziness, other people will pay the price.

“Aren’t you… scared?” Fuyumi asked.

Green eyes flew up to her face and she flustered. Shouto frowned, but Nishiya gave her a knowing look.

“Ah. sorry, I didn’t mean it like-”

“I am,” Deku replied back, cutting her off.

Nishiya’s face contorted into something painful, and Fuyumi remembered to close her mouth.

Finished with his food, he tugged again on his foot. In his surprise, Nishiya relaxed his grip and Deku got up.

“The more I have to protect, the more scared I get.”

With that, he left.

### Data & Responsibilities

Deku figured that, since he was pretty much useless for the time being, he would take this opportunity to properly catalogue all the things that he had been saving up on. In case something happened to the paper copies, it would be nice to have an electronic copy, and vice-versa.

It was probably a little childish to think so, but since La Brava did set up a computer lab and the likes, complete with hardware and memory, he thought that he could be helpful in other ways.

And more importantly, he’ll be able to properly list out all the things he has stolen over the years.

-

“...While I am sure someone will be grateful for all of this,” Makoto said as she helped punch in some of the data files while Tokoyami made quick work of the stack of ID’s that they had, “Why did you collect all of these?”

He passed one of the notebooks, detailing all the things that Deku had ever taken from a store or home, including the address and when he had taken it, as she eyed the other two boxes of notebooks that the young man had brought down with an Ectoplasm copy.

They weren’t in any rush to get these done, but it was nice to have something to do, even if it was something as menial as data-entry. It was also nice to spend any time with Deku, and working with Deku was the best way to see and observe the young man as he was without all his anxious energy that appears as soon as he meets eyes with someone.

Definitely not the first pick for anyone to be a leader, but right now, after everything, she couldn’t imagine anyone else.

“People at least I understand, but these?” she asked, leafing through the long lists of all the household detergents that Deku had taken from other houses.

“...Someone… needs to take responsibility,” Deku said quietly.

Tokoyami’s fingers stopped typing for a second, and they both turned to where Deku took a stack of notebooks out of the box and onto the table. Once he realized that the typing stopped, he looked up at them curiously.

“...You think a lot about the future, huh?” he said.

The young man tilted his head, a little confused.

“...Deku,” Makoto said, “You have my word. I’ll do my absolute best so that you don’t get in trouble.”

Green-eyes widened, and they dropped to the ground as he shook his head. A little smile came onto his face, like he didn’t really believe them but thought the sentiment was kind. It was mocking and disheartening all in one.

They silently returned to work afterwards, but they never forgot what was said.

-

“...Nii-chan,” Makoto said quietly.

Tsukauge looked up from where he was talking to Yagi and Torino. He gave a confused smile and she sketched the other two a bow.

“What’s up?” he asked.

“...Did you know that Deku-kun thinks that he stole all the supplies here and murdered everyone?”

His eyebrow arched at that. She nodded back.

“Yeah. He thinks that they still count as crimes and he expects to be tried for it,” she continued. “And that he, alone, should be convicted for it. He keeps track of all the Walkers he gets and all the supplies he’s ever taken. I know… I know that he’s right but… That just feels wrong.”

As a police officer, Tsukauge knows the correct thing to do. As a big brother who never thought he could live so simply with his sister and some of his friends after everything blew up in their face, he understands the expression on her face.

“...Okay,” he said. Uncertain about what was the correct or lawful thing to do anymore, he instead decided to go what he felt was right. “We won’t leave him high and dry.”

-

Toga suppressed a snort when she managed to overhear that snippet of the conversation. And when she told the people she was with, could see their immediate disgust and disappointment.

“It’s fine,” Sako pipped in, “If that does happen, we’ll just grab him and go.”

The blond cheered at that.

### Let’s Make Farm

The future is a scary prospect. Even under normal circumstances, the future could be a scary prospect.

“We don’t know the future,” Midoriya said, “That means it must be good.”

“Huh?”

“Because we have a future.”

As it turned out, their resident leader was quite optimistic.

“I’m sorry, one more time?”

“Let’s make a farm,” Deku repeated, and after a moment, tried to explain further, “Make our own food.”

“I… I figured that is what you meant,” Chisaki nodded back, “Wouldn’t it be faster to just leave for the farmland?” he eyed the place on the map that Deku had circled, “You clearly know where it is.”

Deku tilted his head back, and frowned. Or, Chisaki assumed he frowned, with how his mask crinkled and his eyebrows furrowed.

“Let’s make a farm,” he repeated one more time.

“Yes,yes, I heard you the first time, boss,” Chisaki sighed, understanding a pointless battle when he saw one. He looked to the map and then back. “What were you thinking?”

Deku could light up a room with how bright he got.

“In the next year, huh?” he murmured, looking through the documents. “Lots to do…”

### Giving Deku a Quirk

“Do you want a quirk?”

Deku looked up from where he was cleaning his blades. He squinted at Chisaki and tilted his head. Whatever he was thinking, however, he stopped and focused back to the task on hand.

“I know you heard me,” Chisaki said, and rolling his eyes, said again, “Do you want a quirk?”

“Does it mean that someone else will be quirkless?” Deku spoke up at last.

The former yakuza blinked back, and must have taken too long to respond, because their de facto leader shook his head.

“Then I don’t want it,” he said. “It’ll be nice, but if it’s not practical, helpful, or it’s harmful to someone else, it won’t be worth it.” He stood up, finished with his cleaning and turned to the man. “Is that all?”

“...You won’t reconsider?” he asked quietly. The deadpanned look that Deku gave him, however, was more than enough.

“...Why?”

“Does it matter?” Chisaki asked, arching his eyebrow, “It… I don’t think it’s a bad thing, if it will help you come back.”

“I’ve been coming back fine,” the young man replied back.

Gold eyes narrowed, and his hand grabbed his wrist, just a few inches shy from his latest injury. Deku didn’t even flinch, and kept eye contact with Chisaki.

“Really?” he asked quietly.

“If all we needed was quirks to be uninjured,” he said, yanking his arm out of the grip, “the world wouldn’t have ended.”

-

With that memory still fresh in his mind, he squinted at his former mentor in front of him.

“...Shouldn’t you give it to someone who… who is more ...like a hero?”

“...I inherited this power from my Master and I made it my own. I wanted to become the Symbol of Peace for the world,” he explained quietly. He made a fist with his hand, as though he could concentrate the power into his hand as he extended it out towards Deku. “And I want to pass it onto you. I believe that you are the hope for the future, and a pillar for a future for everyone.”

The young man hesitated. “But I’m not… I’m not a… hero...”

It felt so long ago, that moment when he stood on the rooftop with his idol, being told that quirkless people can’t become a hero. By the same person, even if neither of them remembered.

“What we need isn’t a hero,” All Might, the former Number One Hero that Deku chased with his whole heart, said, pressing his fist against Deku’s chest, right above his heart. “We need a leader. We need you.”

Deku felt his world swim, and he looked down. Yagi’s gaze was heavy, filled with expectation and a hope that he didn’t want to squander.

“But I’m weak,” he said quietly.

“We can work on that.”

“...What if I can’t… do it?”

“Shounen,” both of his hands took his shoulders, in a gentle and firm way, and Deku wondered if he would just float away if he didn’t have this to anchor him down into the world, “You won’t be alone.”

Deku, who couldn’t save his friends and couldn’t save his family and killed a long, long list of people, felt his floor turn instead underneath him. Of course he was alone. Who would stay? Why wouldn’t he be alone? He killed everyone else that chose to stay, so why wouldn’t he still be alone, even now? How could there even be anyone left?

“It’s alright, Shounen,” Yagi said, his boney hands firmly squeezing his shoulders. “You’re not alone anymore.”

Being saved by someone wasn’t loud or powerful. It was four words that he didn’t know he was waiting for.

His heart trembled under the weight of his sincerity, and understood that there was only one way to respond to someone’s kindness.

“...Alright,” Deku agreed.

Because some selfish part of him, far, far away in his heart, probably knew that he had nothing and he was nothing. So, if he could be something, anything, to the people that have redefined what it meant to be alive, he’ll do it. This quirk was the actual representation that someone trusted him, someone had faith in him, even though he was just an ungrateful liar.

“I’ll protect you,” Deku said. “I’ll protect this.”

He’d be a leader, their figurehead and ultimate sacrifice. He’ll be the pillar for this place, and the stepping stone for the future.

“I won’t let you down.”

He’ll be hope until reality came.

### OFA runs its course

Getting a quirk isn’t an easy thing. Deku thought that he understood that, but when he ate a strand of Yagi’s hair, he would be lying if he said he started to underestimate it. Now, here he was, barely able to stand on his own feet, felt like his entire body was tearing itself apart.

Feeling like he was boiling alive, being torn apart by his ligaments, splintering his bones, Deku suddenly woke up. He’s experienced so much pain that he momentarily thought that he was going to die, and he woke up just so he could die. Clenching his teeth hard enough that he was choking on his blood, he heaved and fought for every breath as he tumbled off the couch.

And this would all be fine except now, Kouta stays with him.

-

“...Deku-nii?”

He recognizes the voice, and still, he’s on his feet in less than a second, a blade drawn as he looks at Kouta and then around.

“...It’s just me.”

He relaxed by a fraction, and focused on the young child.

“...Are you okay?” he asked, his voice barely a whisper as he squinted his eyes. He felt like Kouta was really blurry. Was it because he was so tired he couldn’t see straight? It’s happened a few times, and all it meant was that he needed to rest a little more.

He hasn’t felt this awful in a while. A whole week, in fact. Was this going to be the new normal?

“...Yeah,” Kouta said after a beat. He stared for another moment, and Deku slowly pulled himself onto the couch, feeling the exhaustion pulling him down more than gravity. He must be even more tired than he thought, if just standing was too much for him. “Are … you okay?”

He wanted to say yes. He wanted to say yes and mean in. Instead, he rested his face in his palm, and his arm on his knee as he responded, “...Just tired.”

“Do you wanna get something to eat?”

“I’m… not hungry,” Deku replied back. Thinking was making his head ache, and he felt like he could feel his heartbeat pulsing in his head, like someone was beating him with a brick. It was amazing how much easier talking was now that he couldn’t think much. “Sorry.”

“Oh. Should I bring you something so you can eat later?”

“No, I… I’m going to sleep a little more.”

“I can… ask Lunchrush to put something to the side.”

Deku knew that he just wanted to be helpful. He knew that he needed to eat. He doesn’t know what he did to deserve such a small wonder in his life, and gives a little smile. The sight of it made something in Kouta’s expression brighten. He wants to protect that expression.

“It’s okay, Kouta,” he said. He could handle pain. He could handle discomfort. He could do anything, now that he remembered what he wanted to protect. “Thank you though. Go ahead and eat enough for me too, okay?”

It must have not been what he wanted to hear, because he looked so disappointed.

“Okay,” Kouta said. “I’ll go get dinner.”

Deku slumped back down onto the couch, falling over onto one side. His body trembling in his pain, he felt too tired to even sleep.

-

Normally, Deku doesn’t sleep long enough to dream. Sometimes, he’s too fucking tired to dream.

So he’s ill prepared when he gets this soul-crushing dream that has him wheezing and awake in an hour. His entire body shuddered, as though the very thought of living was revolting. On instinct, he presses his hand to his mouth to stop any sound he can’t choke out, and then his stomach rolls.

He runs for the bathroom, running into the doorframe but making it. He crashes his head against the tank and his empty stomach strains to get something to get rid of. He shivers, a full body shake that leaves him as a sweating mess, and for a brief second thinks that he’s dying.

When he thinks it’s all over. He flushes and gets up. A shock of red garners his attention and he stares in shock at the blood smeared on the toilet. Oh no. Who… Whose blood was this? The blood he brought back should have all been dried out, and Kouta hasn’t been to the bathroom and-

He coughed, and feeling something thick and wet come out, brought his hand up to his mouth. And moreso than his mouth, there was a lot of wetness right at his mouth and he turned to the mirror.

It was his blood. That was a lot of blood to come out of his nose. This was a nosebleed? Why was his nose bleeding so much? He assumed that the blood was what he choked on, and there was just too many globs of it so he was choking on it, he was choking on his own blood-

And it didn’t bother or surprise him as much as he thought it would. He didn’t know what to do with that kind of information. He took a deep breath, and felt his breath itch and catch in his throat and he started coughing again.

It was getting harder and harder to breath, and his coughing was getting bad enough that he felt as though his organs were rattling in his chest as a response. Despite his best efforts, his body slipped into panic.

He walked out of the bathroom and straight into the wall. All his strength decided to suddenly abandon him, and he laid there, on his side, coughing painfully into his hand for some time and the door swung open-

“Deku-nii, I know you said you’re not hungry but-” Kouta, who rarely speaks up and rarely speaks out, took one long moment at Deku, on the ground, blood dripping from between his fingers, looking like absolute shit, and does something that he would have never done just a few months ago. He turned around and called for help.

He’s so incredibly grateful that Kouta has enough sense to get help instead of staring in shock like what he would have done when he was about Kouta’s age. At the same time, he felt such an incredible amount of shame to ever subject him to all of the shit he brought him into.

As it was, he can hear Kouta’s faint, “Deku-nii is dying!” and a flutter.

His eyes trail up, and Hawks is staring down at him, looking far more serious than he ever wanted to see him. Next to him, a feather falls. It’s amazing what someone could focus on when they’re knocking on death’s door.

“Hey there, Deku. I’m going to pick you up and take you to our doc at my fastest, okay?” he said quietly.

His arms wrapped around him, something that he was used to at this point, and when he picked him up, Deku coughed harder into his hand. His other hand came up, as though to catch any other bits of blood that could escape from his hand, and the force of it had him closing his eyes. He missed the pinched expression as the blond took off.

-

“Deku-kun,” Natsuo said, so frustrated and tired that Deku winced, “do you… understand what happened?” he asked.

The young man didn’t reply.

“...You’re borderline dying, Deku-kun. Aside from your actual injuries, you’re clearly not eating or sleeping well. That’s a nosebleed from stress, coupled with the fact that your blood is plenty thin from your terrible lifestyle choices.”

Deku resolutely kept his eyes to the ground.

“You don’t have any energy because you’re not intaking enough food to give you energy. You’re getting constantly injured, and you heal poorly because you’re not sleeping, and you’re not eating. Everyone wants to help, okay? If you’re injured, just come to me or Chisaki-san or something, because at the rate you’re going, you’re going to just die.”

“Oh, okay.”

“...Okay? That’s all you have to say about it?”

It wasn’t professional but this was frustrating.

“...I’m … sorry?” Deku asked, tilting his head to the side.

Natsuo stared back at him, pinched the bridge of his nose, and took a deep breath.

“Deku,” he said, “...Do you like it here?”

Green eyes seemed to focus, and without any hesitation, he nodded. His eyes met his, green and vibrant like summertime trees, and the former resident physician is just glad that he finally met his eyes. Maybe he could turn this around.

“And you want to protect here, right? And everyone here?”

He nodded again, a little more certain.

“The thing is, Deku, we all feel that same way about you,” he tried. “We like you, and we like you here.”

The confusion came back into his eyes and Natsuo wanted to despair. He clenched his jaw, hard, but kept his tone level.

“So, if you want to protect everyone here, you need to take care of yourself too. Or let someone else do it.”

No good, he lost the kid. But Deku nodded and Natsuo was grasping at straws. So desperate, he makes an incredible error.

“And if you want to protect everyone, you have to be in good shape and health. If you … die, then who will protect us?”

He was going to go to hell for this. Or worse, Aizawa was going to figure out what he told this kid. As it turns out, he took after his dad after all. Even if he really didn’t mean it like that, who else just uses people like that? Certainly not his mom or Fuyumi.

But if it gets Deku to eat a little better, if it gets him to come out of the room a little more, if he would just try a little harder to live instead of doing the absolute barest minimum to see tomorrow, he thinks it’ll be well worth it.

The light dawned in Deku’s eyes and Natsuo knew he was going to hell.

“...I’ll try harder,” he said.

Natsuo nodded slowly, feeling like he aged ten years in ten seconds, “I’m... Going to assign people to you. At least until you make some better habits. And you better be in my office again everyday. I will know if you aren’t following it.”

Deku winced in response. It would be weird to force time in his schedule to eat and sleep or whatever again, but he doesn’t want to be a burden. So, he agreed.

A leader, he reminded himself, even if it’s just in name. He needed to become a worthy leader.

-

Hawks was leaning against the wall next to the door when Deku left the clinic room. The blond’s eyes quickly took in his pale features, and his expression quickly reverted to his normal lazy smile.

“Yo, Deku,” Hawks said, giving a two-finger salute with a big smile.

Deku tried to repress (and failed) a full body shudder. His eyes turned downcast, and Hawks wanted to scream. He was the one who told them that his name was Deku. He didn’t (no one did, actually) want to call him that, but if that was what he said his name was, then what the fuck else are they going to say?

It wasn’t like he responded to anything else.

“...How was the checkup?” he asked, trying to play it cool. He wanted to be reliable. He wanted Deku to know that he’s going to be on his side, no matter what. Words clearly didn’t work, so maybe his actions could.

From the blank stare Deku was giving him, unlikely.

Hawks thinks that this would be easier if he just said something. Anything. Just. Please. He’s going to go crazy at this rate.

“...Okay,” Deku said.

The blond jerked, reeling in his surprise as he looked at Deku. He huffed a laugh out, too surprised to breath correctly, and he covered his mouth with one of his hands, a bright expression on his face.

“That’s good,” he said, suddenly winded, “That’s really good.”

“...Thank you,” the young man continued, his cheeks turning pink. His eyes downcast, he missed the absolute gobsmacked expression on the blond’s face.

Three words. He heard three words from Deku’s lips today.

“Yeah,” he nodded, barely remembering to keep talking. Hawks was once in the Top Five ranking for Pro Heroes. His reflexes and adaptability was nothing to scoff at. Yet, the best he could come up with was to say, “Anytime.”

Deku gave this small smile to the ground, and it made a home in Hawks’s heart.

Progress was a small thing, but so damn rewarding.

### Post: Emergency Call

The following morning, Deku was armed as he always was, standing in the Rental Office. His helmet was off and next to him on the table, and he was leaning over the table, marking this and that up on the map. He looked as pale as always, but he didn’t look nearly as exhausted as he did yesterday.

Hopefully, he had his helmet off because he trusted them, and not because he was in too much pain to wear it.

“...Morning,” Enji greeted as he came in.

He didn’t even look up from his papers, and Enji scoffed back. Normally, the only people who ignored him was his family, so while this wasn’t an unfamiliar feeling, he wasn’t used to getting this kind of treatment from anyone else. Granted, he supposed that he wasn’t really being ignored if Helmet, Deku, had his helmet off and didn’t react to him coming in. He’s seen this guy hunt something down a mile away. There was no way he didn’t hear Enji walk in.

“You look better. Heard you got carted to the infirmary,” he continued, as though he wasn’t being ignored. He made his way into the office, taking care to make sure he wasn’t stepping on any of the discarded pieces of paper and pens around the room. “Did you sleep well?” he asked, searching his mind for a normal conversation that Fuyumi asked him in the morning.

They weren’t much of a family, but Fuyumi somehow came out as the most sweetest human being. He’s certain that following her example won’t lead him astray.

Still, there was no answer. Not a problem. Enji was used to this kind of treatment.

“Deku?”

That got a response. The young man lifted his head, as though surprised that someone called out to him, and Enji arched an eyebrow at him. Maybe, this whole time they were wrong. Deku was never ignoring them at all. He just assumed that they were never talking to him.

Green eyes peered at him, before Deku gave a curt nod and returned to whatever it was that he was doing. In return, Enji huffed back. Looks like this would be the best he gets today.

“What are you looking at?” he asked, walking up to him. In response, the young man placed the map flat on the table.

“...Perimeter-check,” he said quietly. “And expansion here,” he said, pointing at the next neighborhood.

“Hm?” Enji leaned in closer to get a better look. He felt a little breathless at the fact that he was being included into his thoughts. “Oh, I see,”

“Oh, good morning, Todoroki-kun, Deku-kun!” Yagi said, walking into the room, “It’s a beautiful morning today, isn’t it?”

“...I guess,” Enji replied back, not understanding it at all.

Next to him, Deku took out a pencil to trace something on the map, collecting his attention again.

“What are you guys looking at?”

“...I have an idea,” Deku said, tapping the map. “But...” he trailed off and hesitated, “materials…”

“That’s fine,” Enji nodded, placing both his hands on the table. “That’s why we’re here.”

Blue eyes rested on where Dekus’s hand hovered. He couldn’t help but think that it would be perfect. This time, he’ll make sure that Deku understood his sincerity.

“The orchids… huh?”

Deku nodded, and Yagi quietly waited to be brought into the discussion. However, no one noticed, and the two continued to talk in their own world.

“Lots to do then,” Enji said. “When were you planning it?”

“Spring,” Deku replied back.

“You have to be fully healed for it then.”

The young man looked up from the map, and a slow smile began to spread on his face. His eyes brightened to a shade of green they hadn’t seen in this desolate world made of crumbling buildings, and his face mask crinkled.

“Yes,” Deku nodded. “I will be.”

-

“...How are you doing?” Yagi asked quietly.

Enji had decided to stay in the room and leaf through the old data Deku had compiled concerning what they had just talked about, while the two walked out. The blond wasn’t sure where they were going, and he didn’t ask either. He was more concerned about this.

How did the quirk transfer go? He imagined that it went fine, and that there were no complications, but he heard that Deku was flown down into their infirmary by Hawks yesterday evening.

“It’s… settling,” the young man said, his hand coming up to his chest. “How are you?”

“...I’m doing very well,” he said, a bright expression on his face. “I’m glad to hear that you're adapting well! I was so worried when I heard that you had to be checked over last night.”

“I’m okay,” Deku said quietly, so quiet that it could have been his own private thought.

### Slight Changes: Guard Rotation

Other things that changed, that had to change, were the people who did go out on rotational guard duty.

It wasn't really necessary, not with how well the dogs worked as an alarm system thus far, and the motion detector perimeter that La Brava helped set up, but it was decided to do this.

“...Just in case,” Deku replied back. He had a map for these kinds of things, but as part of his rehabilitation, he also went out on walks with their given guard group to go out. It was severely frowned upon and it was never with a group smaller than six with someone who can make it back to base in less than three minutes.

Still, he took this time to show them the things he’s made overtime. He had several safe houses, planted here and there. He showed them how he boarded up the walls, what he boarded it with, and where to find what if they ever found themselves in need of hiding. Majority of them, who had come along with him for a long time, finally had reasons behind the strange things that Deku did.

More importantly, he was learning how to speak and they were learning what his voice and thoughts sounded like.

It really, really, really helped with the cabin fever haze too. They went by volunteers and it was always a mixed bag when they headed out. If, by some rare reason, they ran into a Walker, they were to dispatch immediately. If they ran into something worse, they had to blow the whistle to alert the dogs to alert the people at base.

Deku had some good ideas, some good initiative, and although there was a great amount of uncomfortable feelings, the first people to volunteer were the younger kids of the base. With the weight of their words tossed back in their face, taunting them for backtracking on their promises of support now that they knew who was under the helmet, many of the responsible adults lost their footing to argue back.

However, it also meant that those that looked as young as Deku lost the only argument that stopped them from joining up with patrols.

“I want to go!” Kirishima said, “Especially since Hel… er, Deku is injured, that means, more than ever, it’s our turn to protect this place, right? Even if it’s scary, I don’t want to live in fear for the rest of my life. I don’t want to watch anyone die trying to protect me anymore.”

“...Me too,” Uraraka said, standing up. “I’m sick of waiting around to be protected. This time, I want to do something.”

Taishiro, moved by that kind of initiative to face the trauma outside of their comfortable base, felt torn between the protective surge and the beaming pride that came from watching kids grow up.

“There will come a point where we will no longer be able to shelter those kids,” Aizawa said quietly. “During that time, the people who will protect them have to be each other.”

He shrugged and Yamada snapped his fingers.

“Well, we are teachers,” he said brightly as he sobered up a little, “Gotta teach them how to live in this world, right?”

### Sleep Habits

One of Deku’s unspoken habits was his impeccable ability to sleep anywhere, anytime, and his quick response time.

It was telling how often he had to do it, for him to be such a light sleeper even at their home base. And also implicitly that he could rest at any opportunity.

One moment, they thought that he was just sitting in his chair, looking out the window, but then they’d realize that his eyes were closed. And then someone’s voice would carry in from down the hall or someone's footsteps would hit just a little too close, and his eyes would be open and alert.

Thinking about how fast his reaction time was, how he seemed to always be ready to fight, Hawks feels so inadequate.

With the exception of the times where Deku’s body was out of commission, it was clear that he had shaken off the habit of sleeping for long periods of time.

-

Katsukame opened one of the supply doors, and grabbed one of the gallons of bleach. When he pulled it off the shelf, his heart nearly stopped when he saw a foot behind it. He stared for a moment longer and pulled some of the other bleach gallons towards the edge of the shelf as quietly as he could. Between handles, he could see him.

There he was.

Deku was sleeping on his side, curled up in a rather uncomfortable way on the hard surface of the shelf, and was using his arm as a pillow. He shivered occasionally, and Katsukame wondered how the young man managed to sleep here of all places.

And then he thought a little more about it.

It was someplace no one would come to look. It was a quiet, almost silent place, separated from most of the common areas that people come through. The window was tiny and minimal- no way for anything to come in or out.

Katsukame had one of two options. He leaves with the weight of guilt that he left this shivering boy that Chisaki (and therefore all of them) personally owes a debt to, or he doesn’t and probably alarm the young boy.

Chisaki or Deku.

“...Deku,” he spoke up, and the effect was instantaneous.

The young man’s eyes flew open, and scooted a little backwards so that his feet were flat against the wall-probably to use it as a spring to shoot out-, there was a switchblade in his hand, drawn and ready, as his eyes darted left to right.

Katsukame had to admit, he had good reactions. He can’t imagine how often he needed to do this so that he has these instincts, but he’s still alive, isn’t he?

“...You shouldn’t sleep here,” the man said quietly.

The young man stared at him before dropping his head to the shelf with a sigh.

“Quiet,” he said, his voice barely a whisper. “And cold.”

He took a deep breath, closed his blade, and pulled some of the gallons of bleach around so that he had the room to get out.

Very vividly, Katsukame remembers Chisaki scolding Deku for holding his own dinner, and then lecturing the flustered Mirio for letting Deku hold his own dinner, and he moves. He taps the shelf next to the young man’s head, waiting as he tensed so tightly that Katsukame was worried he would break his own back in his tension. He watched green eyes snap at up, and dart from his hand to his face. Then, he gave a curt nod as he reached to take his hand. Just like that , Katsukame helped him slowly get down to the ground. As soon as Deku was on the ground, he pulled out of the older man’s touch, still tense but not really as much. .

His back hits the shelf, and every part of him looked wary except his eyes. His eyes, somehow, remind him of Chisaki. They were clear, like he was seeing Katsukame as he was, not the scumbag or former yakuza, but just Rikiya. He was not assessing him as a danger, but as someone. Under his pure stare, Katsukame suddenly felt dirty.

“Do you prefer sleeping in the cold?”

“...It hurts less,” Deku replied. He was lucky that it was so quiet down by the storage room, or else the older man wouldn’t have heard him.

“...If you let them know, they can give you something for the pain,” he explained.

The green-haired man shook his head, “Then, sleepy.”

The words rolled around in his head, until it suddenly clicked. Oh, Katsukame thought to himself.

“... You don’t want to sleep?” he asked, more for clarification.

The young man looked up at him and then back down, probably contemplating how much information he wanted to give out versus his limited speaking ability, and then spoke. “Medicine… makes me drowsy. Bad reflexes,” he said.

Katsukame felt oddly touched that he had told him. It was small, but the thought that Deku did trust him with information, even though he pretty much stated that he didn’t trust anyone to keep track of things while he slept, was warming. It was a small step, but it was undeniably a step.

The young man gave a yawn, rubbing the back of his neck and he gave a big sigh. He looked up to the taller man and gave a small bow, “Thanks for waking me.” No one was ever this polite with genuine respect to him before.

“...Anytime,” he replied back. And, in a moment of great courage, added, “Next time, just find me. I will… keep track of your nap. And you can rest more peacefully for longer durations. It’s good for you.”

The young man’s eyes shined brightly, and his entire demeanor seemed to straighten under the words. Right when he was about to respond, something settled into his head and Katsukame could pinpoint the exact second the realization of something dawned on him. It brought his shoulders back into that defeated slump and the young man dipped his head forward again.

“Thank you.”

-

“Amazing,” Chisaki deadpanned when Katsukame reported in, “We have bastards that can’t keep their fucking hands out of prescription pain meds, but we’re going to have to force Deku to take some drugs.”

“...Boss,” he said, unable to help himself, “Wouldn’t it suffice to put it into his food?”

His former boss narrowed his eyes, “That paranoid shit? No way, it was hard enough to get to this point. If we try to force his hand, we’ll be back to square one.” He scowled at the thought dangerously, “I’m gonna make that shit trust me.”

It was the second most kindest thing he has ever heard Chisaki say (and mean), even if it was said in a rather threatening way.

“...And then…?” Kurono, who seemed to be getting bolder and bolder with every passing day, questioned from where he was, counting through their inventory.

“And then?” Chisaki parroted.

“Like, are we going to betray him or something?”

Chisaki frowned back as though it was the dumbest thing he had ever heard. “Why?”

Katsukame and Kurono exchanged a glance, and the right-hand shrugged back.

“Nevermind then,” he said, “So to clarify, we’re just going to earn Deku-kun’s trust. Just because.”

The former yakuza boss nodded back, “Correct. It’ll be the ultimate victory I have over him. He will give me his unconditional trust.”

Kurono nodded back, already used to this, as he turned his dead-eyed look to his comrade in confusion.

“You heard that, right?” he said to him. “Unconditional trust.”

Katsukame, numb, thought about all those times he heard people say things like, if Chisaki were to gain humanity, the world would end, and wondered.

### Sparring

"Deku, how is your rehab going?" Akakuro asked

"I'll be joining patrols next week."

The man nodded, as though it matched up what he was thinking, and then said, "Good. Let's spar."

The young man nodded back, and right when Akaguro was about to leave, the exclamations began.

“What do you mean spar?!”

-

"Where is your bat?"

"I don’t want to hurt you."

“You can’t, so go get your bat.”

Sparring wasn't a new occurrence. Like everything else that they had set up here, they pulled it together, and it was open to anyone at any time, and most complaints were minimal.They had first-aid on hand, but it was rare for Chisaki to deal with anything worse than a broken nose or finger.

Normally, they tussled on a stage made by Cementoss, a little down the way from the complex. The grassier areas also made for a great place to throw down. Some groups clumped together to work out here as well. However, in the cold winter months, they tried to use their modest-sized indoor facility. Most people didn’t spar, or didn’t need a lot of room to spar, so it wasn’t a very popular place. They had a few lamps to help light the place up, and thin, long windows. At some point, a bomb of some sort must have gone off in this place, because no matter how hard they tried to wipe it down or air it out, it still smelled like smoke.

It was one of the rooms in the extra building they had reconstructed (courtesy of Chisaki) and repurposed to be a makeshift dojo. Here, Deku hit the wall hard enough to knock his breath away for the third time in four minutes. And same as all the times before this moment, was back up on his feet in seconds.

Standing at the center of the room, not even having worked up a sweat, Akakuro frowned at him.

"... Isn't this enough?" Yamada asked, with a frown on his face. "He's still recovering."

“The problem isn’t his recovery,” Aizawa said, watching the scene in front of him. His friend turned to him, frowning, but seeing how focused Aizawa was, reluctantly dropped it.

He turned his attention to the scene in front of him. He winced as Deku was tossed back again, and wanted to steal the kid and hide him away when he returned like a boomerang, only to be tossed violently back again.

And then, right when Stain lifted his leg to kick him to the other side of the room again, Deku narrowly dodged and dropped to the ground. With nimble movement but no elegance, his jerky movements propelled himself to successfully execute the reckless move. His legs managed to swing out to the other man’s leg.

Had he been stronger, he might have knocked Akakuro down and landed a real hit. Instead, Akakuro’s leg came back around and kicked him down. The leg he kicked didn’t even flinch. With his heel digging into Deku’s sternum, his eyes shined with a particular kind of interest.

It didn’t look like he was happy to have pulled a win over him. It wasn’t a win that was high off victory or something built from pride. It looked like he was having fun, and eagerly anticipating the next move that Deku would pull. The young man flailed a little, pushing futility at the foot pressing against his chest as he wiggled.

And then, he went limp, as though giving up.

Still, Akakuro didn’t budge, until the young man suddenly swung his leg in a fan kick. His impressive flexibility managed to knock into the back of Akakuro’s other knee. He bucked suddenly, but Deku’s hands were tight on the foot on his chest. He sucked in a breath and used his palm to shift the foot off of him, and managed to roll away safely.

A few feet away, he was already on his feet. Panting hard, his eyes bright with a challenge, Deku stood at rapt attention from across the way.

“...Excellent,” Akakuro said, looking from his feet to Deku. “You have some great instinct, but your execution is sloppy. You can learn form and you can get stronger, but instinct is something you have to feel for yourself.”

Bashfully, Deku gave a small smile back, “Thanks,” he said quietly, probably because he was still working on catching his breath. “You were going easy on me, right?” he asked. “I wouldn’t have been able to get out of that hold otherwise.”

The older man shook his head, “I wasn’t going at full since you’re injured, but I didn’t think you would escape the hold like that. When you’re back at full health, you should focus on gaining some weight. Your current strength is going to deteriorate because you don’t have the body to back it up.”

From the exasperated smile on Deku’s tired features, it was obvious to see that this was a lecture he got often. It wasn’t surprising, all things considered, but it seemed to fuel something in Aizawa’s heart.

Yamada’s too, and he gave a short sigh through his nose.

He wanted to get stronger.

### Todoroki-san

“Is there a reason why this plate is out here?” Fuyumi asked, motioning to the small pot on the side.

“Hm? Oh, it’s Deku’s,” Lunchrush explained. “I never know when he comes in, so I always make it in advance. I just heat it up before I give it to him.”

“I see,” she nodded her head. “What does he like to eat?” she asked, genuinely curious.

“No idea,” Lunchrush replied, “He never put in a request before. He always eats everything, too.”

Fuyumi nodded, he didn’t strike her as someone who would waste anything, especially not food.

“But… He eats soups better,” he continued. “If I get him something like curry or fried rice, he’ll take it and won’t eat anything until the next day. But if it’s soups, he returns it by the next meal. I guess that’s easier for him to eat and digest, so that’s what I usually make for him.”

The young woman stared at him for a bit and then back to the tray sitting innocently in the corner of the kitchen.

“Really? Then, what about fruits…?”

The older man stopped stirring the pasta for a moment.

“To be honest, I’m just glad that he’s eating. When he was Helmet, he never ate anything from here. I really worried about him. I still do, but at least I know he’s eating.”

“...Yeah,I think I understand that,” she replied back.

-

Deku nodded as he took the tray from her, “Thank you, Todoroki-san.”

Fuyumi beamed back, and Deku felt as though he could see the flowers blooming behind her.

“Natsuo already told me about your diet. Don’t think that you can escape. Make sure you eat all of that, you hear?”

He winced, “Todoroki-san said that…”

“Not a problem Fuyumi, I’ll make sure of it.”

Deku’s plate was suddenly taken by above, and when he looked up, the imposing figure of Enji loomed over him.

“...Enji-san,” he sighed, already accepting defeat from a fight he wasn’t prepared for.

“I’ll make sure he eats all of it,” Enji said, blue eyes boring into Midoriya’s.

“...You know, if you call Natsuo and I by our last names, people are going to get confused,” Fuyumi said, her smile looking a little scarier than just a few seconds ago. “Just call us all by our first name too, okay? It’s weird that you only call our dad by his name.”

Deku blinked at her, his face turning pink. He dropped his gaze, because now that she stated it so plainly like that, it was pretty embarrassing, wasn’t it.

“Oh is he finally going to stop referring to them as ‘Todoroki-san’ and ‘Todoroki-san’ and ‘Todoroki-san’ and ‘Todoroki-kun’? Shame, I thought it was pretty funny,” Taishiro said, a radiating ray of sunlight today too.

“

### StainDek - daggers

"Try this."

Deku stared at the twin short blades the older man dropped in front of him.

"Hm?"

"I'll teach you," Akaguro said, pointingly ignoring the way Iguchi spluttered at him. "You're small and fast. You have a good sense of balance. This is a better option for you than a bat."

The young man nodded and picked them up. After a second of weighing them, changed the grip for his left hand into a reverse grip.

-

He's not weak because he's small, Stain thinks. He clearly only fights hard enough to survive. He isn't a seasoned veteren like the other adults here. He’s never had proper training, or any training for that matter.

His muscles are trembling just because they're exhausted. This is a full body exhaustion that occurs when people are too hungry for too long and their body begins to shut down bit by bit. Stain, who only started eating habitually and well once he got here, is ashamed that it took him so long to notice.

### Late Feb- Return to Supply Runs

Deku finally returns to doing supply runs when the Sakura petals begin to bud sometime late-February. He’s well enough that he is content with his rehab and stuff, and no amount of yelling, pleading, or begging was going to stop him. He needed to step it up. He had no intention of living so frivolously.

He gets up, a few hours before sunrise. Suited up in a way he hasn’t for a while, rolled his arm, winced right when he managed to raise his arm to be even with his shoulder, but recognizes progress. Slow progress, but he couldn’t even twitch his arm without pain shooting up and down his arm two months ago so this was a huge improvement.

Once he was done with his morning stretches and routine, he tried to throw a few punches. A few weeks ago, one punch was enough to knock his entire balance off and his arm would throb for the rest of the day. He’s slower, weaker, but he can go through the movements he wasn't able to before.

Thank god, he thought, he still has his uses.

He ruffled Kouta’s hair, feeling a little bad for waking him up at all, but he had to let him know that he couldn’t be in the way when he came back.

“I’ll be in a lot of blood. I don’t want you to be here until I clean up,” he explained. Kouta was a smart kid, and has already seen too much of the world. But, Deku already committed to this. He would protect him.

Slowly, almost blearily, he nodded back and Deku ruffled his hair.

“Why… why do you have to go?” Kouta asked quietly.

Deku stared at him, “Because I want to.”

Kouta stared back, internalizing those words like they were something precious instead of a whim. More and more everyday, however, Deku is a little more certain that Kouta will be fine. Eventually. And more importantly, if Kouta keeps using him as a crutch, he’ll never understand that for himself.

The uncertain future was scary, but it was also their greatest weapon.

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He leaves an hour before dawn. Stain is at the gate, looking as though he was coming in from whatever it was that he was doing, and stopped to stare at Deku. Next to him was a large Akita dog, and she came right up to the young man, walking around him and rubbing against his thigh. After a second, he gently placed his hand down onto her head, wistfully wishing that he didn’t have his gloves on so that he could properly pet her.

“Helmet… Deku,” Stain said, quickly fixing himself, “Where are you going?”

Deku pointed his bat towards down the street, and then, as though remembering that he doesn’t have to hide, said, “Rehab.”

“...Alright, I’ll come with you,” he said.

Deku hesitated, but eventually lifted his hand up and said, “I’m okay,”

Stain gave him a dead-eyed stare.

“...I can call Eraserhead.”

“I’m already here.”

They both turned to where the former underground hero stood, looking pissed six ways to Sunday as his narrowed eyes focused in on Deku. The young man winced, and figured that his run was going to end right here and now, because there was no way he would be able to escape either of them now.

To his surprise, the older man sighed instead.

“Alright,” he said, coming to stand right next to him, “Where to, Deku?”

Deku straightened a little, surprised, and the older man scowled.

“You’ll find a way out anyways, so I might as well just go with you to stop you from pushing yourself too far,” he said. He eyed Stain, and the other man gave a curt nod. Between them, Stain’s dog gave a nod too, like she could understand what was going on and agreed wholeheartedly.

“Wouldn’t want an incident like last time,” Stain agreed.

Deku doesn’t know when these two became close enough that they could understand each other with a nod. For a bunch of people who always say things like they were in his debt and that they hated each other, he really felt like they were always working together against him.

Well, he wasn’t going to stop them from coming along. He felt some guilt when he realized that he felt comforted at the thought of being with people.

He had planned to get out towards the edges, to the broken roofs and check out his safe houses out there. He doesn't think anything too drastic would happen, and if he gets that weird feeling, he knows he’ll turn back to get some real fighting power instead.

As it was, the three headed out.

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As expected, everything was left almost exactly as he expected, with the exception for the place that he was tossed into. He stood in front of the broken wall, staring at the inside of the house from where he was on the street.

“Something here?”

Aizawa approached him looking around the silent street. He and Stain walked quickly and silently, carefully avoiding the broken debris. Quietly, their accompanying dog panted as she followed carefully. Aside from them, there was nothing else here.

“Should have been,” Deku said, leaving the place on the wall. He looked around.

There was no body. Not even a speck of blood. There were no signs of the bloodstains, even though he found the discarded bottles of hairspray he looted. It made something sink inside of his chest.

“...I killed one here,” he said, tapping the ground with his bat. “And now there is nothing there.”

His hand came up to rub his arm, right by his elbow, where he distinctly remembered the feeling of something sinking its teeth into his arm.

So, something else had to have come through here. Something stronger and with a perchance to lick and suck up all the blood in the area. If it hasn’t come to them, he has reason to believe that it either died, got killed, or was chased out. All of it spelled out a pain-in-the-ass problem that dumped itself into his home.

Fuck, he didn’t even know what it was.

He looked down the street. Going straight will lead him to that strip mall. There could be answers there.

“Going on a walk,” Stain suddenly spoke up, breaking his concentration. He gave a meaningful look to Deku as he continued, “If we wanna go further, then we should go back and gear up.”

A walk. Right.

Deku wanted them to trust him, but at the same time, he didn’t. He wanted them to trust him enough to let him go. But he didn’t want them to trust him if it means that they’ll start liking him or caring about him.

He looked at them, and his selfish greed won.

“You’re right,” he said. “Let’s head back.”

They finished sweeping through the area, a peaceful and quiet jog around the neighborhood, and returned back right when everyone seemed to be awake for breakfast.

Stain and Aizawa seemed to suddenly disappear from his side as Inui came marching up to him, seething in his anger, and Enji barely a step behind him. Surrounded by them, their growls and snarls failed to hide the worry as they lectured and lectured and lectured him.

### Almost Better

“Well, I guess you’re good to go,” Natsuo said, almost regretfully. “Just don’t push yourself too hard, okay?”

Deku opened his hands and then closed them into fists.

“Yes,” he nodded. “...Thank you for your patience,” he said.

The older man gave an exasperated smile, “And all that I just said went over your head, huh? Please do us all a favor and keep yourself safe.”

The young man looked down, and gave a sheepish smile in return.

“I will do my best,” he said earnestly.

“I have no doubt,” Natsuo said, almost absent-mindedly as he rolled backwards to the counter. He wrote this and that and then rolled back to Deku. “Well, it’s not like the only time we can talk is if you’re injured,” he explained. “Deku, this is a little premature, but let’s keep working hard together.”

Green eyes shined back, brighter than any fresh spring fields with morning dew clinging to their leaves and making them glimmer like jewels, and he nodded back.

### New Weekdays

Deku was carrying a gallon of disinfect, a bucket in his other hand, and a backpack bulging on his back. On sight, everyone was starting to recognize it as a sign that he would be spending the majority of the day cleaning off bloodstains and rot off the streets and building walls. As a result, the group that would follow him around for a bit was a group that were prepared to help clean.

“Helme… oh, I mean uh, Deku… Deku-kun? are you heading out?” Nishiya asked as he approached him. He looked a little awkward, like he didn’t know exactly how to address him properly. “I’d like to join you, if that’s alright.”

“Me as well.”

Deku, underneath that helmet of his, didn’t say anything. He turned on his heel to leave instead, and the other two figured it was the best they were going to get from him.

Thinking that it was just going to be a quick walk to the closest bloodstains, they were both out of their element when Deku kept walking instead.

“W-whoa, wait, where are we going?”

### Eating vs Drinking

They stared as Midoriya took the drink, downed it within seconds, and then turned to enter the kitchen and wash his cup.

### Shoto Joins Patrol

Enji actually growled when this happened.

“...I’ve always wondered what it was that you were looking at.”

Deku looked up where Todoroki, the youngest, came to stand next to him.

“I thought that… if I could come and stand next to you, I would understand.”

The young man stared at him through the vizor.

“But in reality, now that I’m here, I still don’t understand,” Shoto said, shaking his head.

### Perimeter

With some exceptions, there were rarely anyone who wanted to go outside. Normally, the only times anyone went outside were to do perimeter checks. These days, the amount of people that were willing to join these patrols have increased, as have the well-trained dogs.

Part of it was because the lingering fear of what could be and leftover trauma from what had happened had mingled together and festered into something that could paralyze the best of them. The other part was the part that was far too used to relying on other people instead. While a scouting team, or a scavenging team for that matter, was nice to have, it wasn’t a necessity given what they did have. Therefore, if they didn’t dedicate time and effort to it, then it was fine.

Needless to say, when Deku returned with his trademark helmet, starting to go on trips again, more than one person was surprised at the number of volunteers that wanted to go too.

But more than surprise, Deku eyed them all with disdain and deep dissatisfaction. Did he think that they would slow him down? Probably. That sounded right. In reality, however, Deku could feel a headache coming on.

“We should take someone capable of recon with us. Hawks or Iida will be good options, in that sense. As far as a vanguard, Miruko is more than capable.”

“...Us?” Deku repeated back, too quiet to be heard and thus ignored.

“A team filled with heroes is doomed to fail,” Shigaraki shot back, his eyes narrowing. “Since we’ll be scavenging, versatile people like Jin or Sako would be a better option.” He, if Deku could believe it, just sounded bored and disinterested even though he looked hostile.

“...We?”

“Since we’ll be going out for the first time in a while, we should go for stealth. Iguchi’s a good shot, so we should take him to support us at the front,” Stain explained.

“...Well, compared to everyone, our ages are the closest,” Mirio chimed in brightly, and next to him Kirishima nodded in full agreement.

His hold tightened on his helmet, and the young man felt even more uncomfortable as he understood what was happening around him.

“This place was pretty much our backyard,” Takeyama said brightly, “We should be the ones a part of the advance squad.”

Several others also took this moment to throw their two cents in, when a hand dropped onto Deku’s shoulder. His head snapped up to where Chisaki’s golden eyes looked down at him.

For a brief second, he honestly thought someone like Chisaki, who always seemed to think things through logically and impartially, who always took his side and helped see through almost all his plans, would be able to help him.

Reality had never been kind to Deku. There was no reason for him to ever think that anything had changed.

“Well, there’s no easy way out of this,” Chisaki said, heaving a great sigh like this was a huge hassle to deal with. But everyone could see the way his eyes twinkled in their mirth, clearly getting a kick out of this entire situation while he dared say, “guess you have to pick your team.”

Deku had tried. He really, really, really tried. His team was his usual one.

He didn’t want to put anyone in unnecessary danger, and he was probably the healthiest he’s ever been. However, saying something like that would make the current fight even worse.

The dog next to him, seeming ignorant to his current inner dilemma, barked happily while wagging his tail.

### Enter: Shindo

>> Sakamata, Tenya, Shouto, Atsuhiro, Katsukame.

Deku is a particular kind of guy who always ends up getting into a mess that he’s not prepared to handle.

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The next time they saw Deku, they were jogging and turned the corner when something just came out. They jerked backwards, ready to fight, and in front of them, the < something > that came out tried to stop from full speed and slid a little bit.

The shine on the helmet was unmistakable.

“Deku!” Sakamata gasped. And then the relief gave way to frustration. “There-”

There was a young man he was carrying on his back. He was clearly bigger than Deku, as his arms hung limply over his shoulders and down to his waist, and his feet almost swung to the ground. As soon as they saw him, Tensei was by his side.

“Head injury,” their young leader said as soon as he saw them.

As it was, Deku kneeled down, and Tenya took the young man on his back. Sakamata shed his jacket to wrap around the stranger and they propped him up against the wall. Shoto fished out his first-aid kit and crouched down next to the new stranger. As soon as they turned back, they realized that he was awake. His eyes were looking around wildly, clearly in a state of shock, but he was frozen stiff.

“I’ll keep watch,” Katsukame spoke up, understanding what they needed to do. He wasn’t someone that could offer comfort or someone that was good at taking care of injuries.

But he can protect them. And if there are some great amount of enemies, he’ll buy them time or carry them away. This, he can guarantee. He waved at Deku, and the young man nodded back.

“...How are you?” Sakamata kneeled down in front of the young man, and was still much too tall.

Deku nodded and stood back up. His chest was heaving in an effort to get some air back and leaned heavy to one side. If Sakamata wasn’t so intimately aware of how much Deku hated to be touched, he would have tried to get him to lean against him.

As it was, he asked, “...How’d you lose your shoes?”

Their leader shrugged back. “Lots of glass. Got stuck,” he eventually said.

A thousand things ran through his head, all sorts of bad situations leading to equally bad events swam around his head. Some were morbidly awful, if only because he knows about Deku’s tendency to downplay injuries, and his initial assumption that Deku was out fighting began to crumble and something much colder settled in.

“...Go sit down and take a break. We’ll take it from here,” he said, a lot more gruffly than he meant to. But Deku is also the reason why Chisaki, Aizawa, and Stain were always in a bad mood, so he’s certain that he’s not nearly as bad as they could be.

And when the young teen immediately sat down where he stood, they realized that he was much more tired than they thought.

His fire extinguisher and both his bats were nowhere to be seen. He was painted in blood, especially around his arms and legs, like he took his limbs and dipped them into pots of red paint.

He rested his arms across his knees, tipped his head forward, and if it wasn’t for the irregular way his chest was heaving, they would have assumed that he was sleeping. As it was, it was clear to them that whatever happened, Deku was exhausted and in pain.

“Deku, perhaps you should take off your helmet…” Sako tried until his eyes focused on the way his hands were trembling. “Would you like me to take off your helmet? We have some water, if you would like.”

Deku shook his head. His pants were barely audible. Not needing to hide was great and all, but he didn’t want to risk getting too relaxed here. He could relax when they returned, and he just needed to hold on till then.

“...You should get some water.”

He hesitated, and relaxed. He lifted his chin so that there was better access to the buckle keeping his helmet clipped on. He was so stupid.

He wasn’t alone anymore.

-

“Is… Is he fucking crazy?” Shindo muttered quietly. His trembling hands clutched at the jacket Sakamata draped over his shoulders while Shouto kneeled in front of him to apply some basic first-aid.

They were silent, recognizing the absolutely confused look on his face as something that they had (and are still trying) to get used to.

“Who… Who the fuck just… just tries and saves someone they just… I … I don’t even know him. He doesn’t even know me,” Shindo whispered, his shoulders trembling as his eyes watered. “I don’t… I don’t get it.”

Shoto understands. Once the world came to the mess it was now, it was strange to think that there was anyone alive who would do the things that Deku wanted to do. It was hard to think of someone else, of some stranger, as someone to help unconditionally. Actually, even before society collapsed, he’s hard-pressed to think that there were many people who helped people as instinctually as Deku did. Even some heroes seemed to have a reason, a reputation to hold up or an agenda to push, and Shoto seldom knew anyone who was willing to help someone else without recognition or reward.

And thinking of it like that, he’s a little jealous that Shindo gets to know of Deku as Deku from the get-go. After all, he and everyone else met Deku as Helmet and still jerk at the thought of that he had green eyes.

As it was, Deku was sitting with a fussy Tensei and Atsuhiro, trying to salvage the mess that was his feet. Next to him was his helmet, and a water bottle rested between his legs. They lectured him about this and that, but it was clear that Deku would have no intention of living as carefully or as safely as they wanted him too.

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Chisaki took a long, slow breath.

He pinched the bridge of his nose, and then spoke very slowly.

“Do you even want to get better? Honestly, I am beginning to think that you like being in pain.”

Deku seemed to shrink away, but even Kurono seemed to have sided with his former boss instead, evident from the frown on his face as he looked down at him.

“It just… happened.”

“God, and if you don’t exercise any amount of caution, you’re just going to…” he made a motion with his hand, “roll over and die.” He rubbed at his temples. “I can’t believe this. I can’t believe you’re still alive.”

“...Sorry,” he said quietly.

“...It’s your body that you should be apologizing to,” the older man snapped back. “Well, at least most of this, I can Overhaul but… your shoulders? That’s on you.”

On that day, they learned that Chisaki cannot Overhaul new wounds if those new wounds are directly on top of Bites. It’s as annoying as it sounds, and the thought gave Chisaki a migraine as he assessed the wounds decorating the man who saved him. Without the damned helmet on his face, it was clearer to see that he was feeling pain everytime he moved his neck, but it was only a reminder for Chisaki that he was no help. He couldn’t even reduce the pain.

It was like his fate was to never pay back his debts or something.

The young man got to his feet and off the bed. For a brief second, Chisaki honestly contemplated finding a cage to put this man into, but ultimately decided against that.

“How is he?” Deku asked instead, and the final puzzle piece fell into place.

He thought it was weird that the young man allowed himself to be subjugated to Chisaki. Of course, it would be so that he could get an answer to his question. That made more sense. Chisaki was wondering why he seemed to be more compliant. He had hoped that he trusted him now or something. Jokes on him.

“He’ll be fine. Once he gets into some good habits, there will be nothing to worry about,” he responded back. “He’s a little overwhelmed, and he’s sleeping the rest of the shock off.”

After putting all his clothes back on, he pulled his chest padding on, clipping it down. If he felt any discomfort from it, it was in the way he stilled after moving and taking a deep breath. Vaguely, he wished that some of his men could have that same kind of mental fortitude. However, instead of putting back on all his equipment, he was stuffing the rest of his padding he had into his helmet.

At the very least, he wouldn’t have to worry about Deku suddenly taking off the base. He would never leave without his padding on. Chisaki was thankful for small mercies.

“...You saved him. Good job.”

There was a brief pause, wide green eyes turning to him with unshed tears and Chisaki lost his breath in his shock. Moreso than locking Deku in a cage, it might be more accurate to say that he was already trapped here, chain and ball.

“...Really?” he asked quietly, eyes wide and innocent in a way an apocalypse survivor couldn’t be.

Something tightened in Chisaki’s heart, an encroaching kind of discomfort that seemed to spread the longer he thought.

“Yes,” the former yakuza spoke with more certainty, even if it might just sound like lip service to someone else, he’s certain that Deku will take him seriously, as he always had done. “He’ll be fine.”

Those green eyes looked up at him, bright in a way that made him look even younger, and Chisaki swore he’ll make this a reality.

### Devotion & Q/A: Save- to be reassembled

“...So like, why did you save me? Us? Anyone?” Setsuno asked casually.

The young man looked up at him and then back down to his lap where he was transcribing some of his planner notes to the other notebooks.

“...Everyone always asks me that,” he said. “...But I don’t get it. Why wouldn’t I?”

After everything that they have gone through, Setsuno has no doubt that Deku has seen a lot of shit in the world. It makes it even harder to wrap his head around the fact that the man harbored no ill will to anyone or anything, and that he forgave thoroughly and genuinely. It made him almost angry, as he couldn’t help but wonder if he had lived his entire life wrong this whole time.

“...Everyone says that I saved them, but isn’t it really that they were the one that wanted to live? Why else would they have gotten better?”

He stopped writing, tapping his pen against his lip as he thought about it and shrugged.

“I don’t get it. When I killed Muscular, and I left Moonfish for dead, it was me. I killed them, but everyone said that I didn’t kill them. Isn’t it the same thing? If I didn’t meet them, they wouldn’t have died then. Then, if I had been there or not, would everyone else have been saved?”

Setsuno’s head began to spin at the thought. He wasn’t ever really a thinker, more of a feeler, so instead, he turned it all off and took a deep breath.

“I think you’re thinking too hard about it,” he said, “When we mean save, we don’t mean like, how a hero rescues someone out of a burning building. But that… that we’re comfortable. We’re like, finally comfortable.”

He really didn’t know how else to describe it. But, since that other group has come in, he thinks he has a better way to put it into words. They were just going to give this new life that Deku put back into them, and give it to him.

If he wanted them to die, they’d do that. If he wanted them to live, they’re doing that.

“Like, I… Before everything, I was tossed out by everyone,” he explained. “My family tossed me out but my girl found me. But she had me and then threw me away. She threw me away because I’m just some useless piece of trash, you see.” He lost energy for a second before he started up again. “But then Chisaki-san found me! And he said that I’m still useful! Me!”

Deku nodded slowly, and the man laughed.

“And you said that it was okay if I’m alive.”

He grinned.

“Thank you for saving me, Deku,” he said.

Deku’s eyes welled with tears instantly. He sniffled and wiped at his eyes as his throat closed up. Of all the things he knew he would never deserve, he never thought that one of those would be gratitude.

### Gunshot -

He wasn’t too sure what he expected when he saw Deku with a gun, but he was secretly hoping that the young boy would be a shit shot. It was probably petty to think of it like that, but he really didn’t want the kid to be good at everything.

But the last thing he expected was for Deku to fire a gun and have it recoil him so hard that he fell backwards and also bashed his face in with said gun. If the gunshot wasn’t so deafening, they would have heard the crack when the gun hit his face.

Yamada and Spinner, who were also practicing their shots, watched Yaoyorozu rush for the fallen man.

And so, they learned that Deku wasn’t a shit shot (he hit the target) but perhaps guns weren’t for him. It wasn’t a shock, considering that he was known for his melee combat.

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“...He can’t handle the recoil,” Chisaki said quietly, “He doesn’t have the muscle for it. You’re asking him to bear that brunt fully though his bones.”

“Well, you can just grow your muscles,” Yamada chirped in, still giggling at the mental image of Deku flying backwards. “Until then, I guess we’re not out of a job just yet.”

Kurono hesitated, and it caught the blond’s eye.

Was he missing something important?

“...Yamada-san,” Kurono said quietly, his voice low like he was wary of who else might be listening, “Deku-kun doesn't have those muscles. They were bitten off. It will take a long time for him to grow those again.”

Suddenly, all Yamada could think about was the tight expression on Stain’s face when he had to take the daggers away from Deku. The words weighed heavy in his gut, and he felt a little cold.

“That’s not funny,” he said quietly.

Chisaki didn’t even look at him, and Kurono’s gaze turned pitying. He wasn’t sure which was worse.

“That’s not funny,” Yamada repeated hollowly.

## [Year 2: Spring]

### (March) Next steps - To Tokyo

"..I want to go to Tokyo."

There was a long, long silence before Yamada’s voice broke through in the most exasperated tone yet.

"But why?”

"I think that’s where the center of all the mutated ones are coming from. There has to be something there. I want to know what. So I’m going to go there next."

"At this rate, we are going to actually clean through the entirety of Japan."

Deku nodded, confirming it and looking as though it was only obvious that this was their next step, and half the room blanched.

“...Do we really need to?”

All eyes fell to Yagi, who leveled the young man with a firm stare.

It was such a strange thought to think that anything could shake his confidence, but Deku wasn’t going to bend on this. The expression on his face, his choice of words, it made it clear to all of them, that this young man was going to go. He was just informing them of his plans, but they would bear no weight on his thoughts and goals. And short of them locking him up somewhere, chaining him and restraining his movements, he’ll go. And even then, they were certain that he would find a way to get out.

When it comes to finding a way, Deku ranked the top of the charts. Their only point of reprieve was that he was now telling him his general goals.

“...Deku-shounen, you still haven’t fully recovered,” Yagi spoke slowly, as though he was uncertain about how to speak so that he didn’t offend him, “More than that, we finally have a way to sustain ourselves, and a better security system than anyone else could boast. Is this something that we really need to do right now?”

“Yes,” he spoke without hesitation. “Winter travels are hard, so now is the time,” he continued.

It was clear that he wasn’t going to budge on this.

Where in other places, they wanted to just maintain what they had, Deku had clear goals for the future. He had these goals, and it was becoming increasingly more and more clear and obvious that he was gunning for it, regardless of what it would do to him.

“...Then, who goes?” Shigaraki asked, “It sounds like it’s going to be several trips that are going to get longer with each travel, right?”

There was a long silence. The young man stared back, and tilted his head, clearly confused.

“No way,” Kayama gaped back, the reality of the situation and his words settling into the room like dust, “You want to go alone?”

Deku shrugged back.

“Still,” Yamada said, leaning forward, “...that last battle was brutal. There’s plenty of things we have to get through here, too.”

It was hard. Deku understood. The need and desire to hole up somewhere and rest peacefully was a long-time dream after all this time. This apartment complex was the closest thing to serenity that they had, and Deku understood that. He did.

That’s why he knew he had to do this.

He gripped his arm, “I should be able to use it in three days,” he explained. “I can’t guarantee anything, but I don’t want to live believing that everything will be fine even if I don’t do anything. I’m going to Tokyo.”

He needed to know how other places were doing, if they were starting to face troubles here. There were people that depended on him now, people that he couldn’t disappoint. But first, he needed information. Right now, with almost everyone at full health and in good spirits, he knew that this would be a good foundation.

### Magne Leaves

"...Deku, a moment please."

Deku stopped in his steps and turned to stare at Magne. With his green eyes meeting Magne’s, it was easy to see that he had his entire and undivided attention. This was much easier than trying to guess what he was thinking behind that Helmet. In the back of his mind, he wondered if Helmet had been ignoring them all along after all.

“Could I bring a friend?” he asked.

Deku nodded.

“She’s good and she’ll be a help. I cover for her while she gets used to life here and otherwise, so I… uh… what?”

Green eyes blinked at him, and figuring that the conversation was done, turned to leave again.

“You sure? I mean, she could be as bad as me. Since I’m a… villain… You know, murderer and all that?”

Deku didn’t even turn around as he walked away.

Magne watched his back as he walked away. No, he was wrong. Helmet or not, he had no goddamn idea what the hell this guy was thinking. He did as he pleased, as he always done. They could just see his eyes now when he did it.

It was, at once, frustrating and liberating. Didn’t this mean that he trusted Mage?

Laughing to himself, Magne prepared to leave. Her friend was going to love it here. She wouldn’t have to hide. She wouldn’t need to pretend. She could just be herself and they could find a domestic peace here where they couldn’t before.

Deku’s trust, Deku’s kindness, Deku’s ability to do as he pleased, they’ll protect it. They won’t let him regret it.

### Overnight Trip (1):

“No matter how far we get,” Deku said, “We will turn around tomorrow.”

“Eh?” Yamada turned to him, surprised. “Really? Tomorrow?”

“It’ll be two and a half days when we go back,” Deku replied back, “So that means we will be gone for almost five days. We should head back now.”

The blond sighed back. “Yeah, I guess that makes sense. But I feel like we didn’t make it very far.”

The young man shrugged back.

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### Dabi & Izu - a Light

Deku lifted his lighter up to the corpses, ready to set it all on fire. This would be the last thing they do, and they could all go home once it’s all gone. He clicked the lighter, trying to get the fire to stick, when a hand dropped to his shoulder.

A warm body leaned over him, towering over him with little difficulty. The staples on his arm were unmistakable, and a blue fire flashed before engulfing the hill of corpses with ease.

Looking down at him with a crooked grin, Dabi’s arm draped over his chest in a loose hug. It would be a loose hug from anyone else, a symbol of easy camradaise, but Deku knew better. Dabi was smiling, but his eyes promised pain.

“...Look at that,” he said, motioning to the way the bodies crumpled underneath each other as they were reduced to ash. He opened his hand up, letting the fire dance around his palm before he extinguished it by closing his hands into a fist. “Much better than a 500 yen lighter, right?”

...Seriously?

“Yes, seriously,” he replied back, his lips dropping into a frown. “I swear, you’re the type that only hears what he wants to.” He took a step back, standing between him and the blue fire behind him, as one of his hands dropped onto his helmet. “I told you, just use me.”

### (April) Orchid - Adventure

Deku woke up in the morning feeling oddly refreshed. He took a deep breath and began his morning stretches. He felt great. He felt like he fit into his body perfectly fine.

Today was the day.

Really, the only silver lining of that earthquake was that it tore up most of the road and overturned a lot of soil for them. They only needed to clean it up and repack the dirt.

### Enter Chimera

In a world where the strong ruled, it turned out that he was weak.

Chojuro Kon watched the blur of green come from seemingly nowhere, knocking down the heavy monster that had been stalking him for the last few days. He must have finally seemed weak enough, because it had been relentlessly trying to eat him for the last day and a half.

Whether or not it was God’s intervention meant nothing to him.

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“...Why did you help me?”

The stranger didn’t respond, and right when he was about to ask again, turned around. Chimera frowned, because the guy was small. Was he so far removed that even a child could defeat that thing while he couldn’t? The thought made his stomach twist.

Now that he could see him, he could see that this guy was suited up. He was in some sweater and cargo pants, with two shortswords crossing behind his waist. He had a baseball bat in his gloved hands, and several belts and latches going down his legs. It almost looked like a more casual-armor, with heavy emphasis on short-range melee combat. Thinking of his fight, it made sense.

Still, the guy in the helmet had killed the thing that had come for his life. The guy in the helmet had saved him, intentionally or not.

And he… he had nothing. Nothing to give or offer. This was a man who killed something that was following him for days; he wasn’t lacking in strength. The way he killed him made him certain that this man was smart. If he had survived this long, he clearly didn’t need companionship.

Still, this was the first living person that he’s met in months. Even the part of him that hated and hated and hated people, wanted to hear the sound of another person’s voice.

“I… I have nothing to offer,” he admitted. His voice was gravelly, since he couldn’t remember the last time he had spoken, but the silence between them felt wrong. “I have no food, and no water. I have nowhere to return to.”

Was he too quiet? He couldn’t even remember how to speak. At some point, it had become such a habit that he never thought twice about it. If anything, he had tried so goddamn hard every day to reject the world that had rejected him. Now that he had to do it again, he couldn’t remember anything about being a member of polite society.

“I…”

He trailed off. What was he doing? What was the point of this? Why was he bragging about what he didn’t have? Why was he complaining? When had complaining ever helped?

The man in the helmet took his backpack off and after a moment of rummaging through it, and pulled out a neatly wrapped box. In a time before this, he would have thought it was a bento. Except, who would make a bento now, in this day and age?

The package was extended towards him.

Numbly, he lifted his hand and accepted it.

“For… me?”

He nodded, and passed a water bottle as well.

“Are you sure?”

There was no response. But his nose twitched and his stomach roared, and like the beast, the monster, every always called him, he tore open the bento and scarved the food down. It wasn’t a lot of food, but it was food. It was fresh-food, with crunchy vegetables and soft meat. The rice was white and chewy. It wasn’t stale. It wasn’t rotting. It wasn’t something overflowing with insects. It was food.

It was delicious.

He didn’t even realize that he was licking the containing to suck up the last of the sauce and catch the last grains of rice, until he did. And then he was acutely aware that he was acting like an absolute savage. He.

He looked up, and saw the backside of Helmet.

How could it be that now that the world had ended, he had found someone who treated him with kindness and respect?

In that moment, when he understood that he was going to die pitifully and pathetically, when his stomach finally had something inside of, when Helmet saved him in more ways than just one, he swore that he’ll do it. His life might have been meaningless and full of pain, but his death, he can choose.

He’ll die for this man.

“...My name is Chojuro Kon,” he said. “My… acquaintances call me ‘Chimera’. If at all possible, would it… be alright if I came with you?”

The man in the helmet turned back around to him, and nodded his head. Was he mute? Was that why he was so quiet? Was he shy? Is that why he kept his guard up? Or was it that he didn’t feel safe here, in the clearing next to a forest, with the carcass of a huge monster next to him? He didn’t know.

And now, for the rest of his life, he’ll learn.

“...Thank you.”

Just the presence of another human was doing things to his head. He didn’t know what to feel or even how to feel it. He hoped that he could be useful to this man. It was clear that he had just eaten his lunch, and he almost started salivating at the thought of eating like that again.

In the meantime, Helmet pulled what looked to be a small plastic bottle. He climbed up the monster’s body, and started to pour the contents onto it. He could smell it in an instant.

Gasoline.

When Helmet jumped off, pulling a matchbox out of one of his side pockets, Chimera stepped up.

He needed to prove his worth. This would be a good start. The best way for them to learn about each other would be to showcase each other’s strengths.

“Allow me.”

He took a deep breath in, and breathed fire.

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Burning a monster like this, there was less fire and more smoke. Still, he didn’t know if it was luck or something, because he met his second survivor within the first ten minutes of smoking.

“Deku!” the call came from above.

Helmet lifted his hand up to wave at the figure flying at breakneck speed, and Chimera paused. Had he been a part of a group? When Chimera offered up his loyalties (in his head), did he give it to someone who already had a group? Then, if they were a group of survivors, would they really accept him? Or would they be more like the groups he had encountered before? If so, then he didn’t have to wait very long.

Fast like lightning, a blond flew in. His red wings spread wide open before he dropped to the ground and they folded behind him. He eyed Helmet and then Chojuro.

“...And a friend?”

Deku, the man in the helmet, nodded curtly.

But the man was one that Chimera recognized. It wasn’t someone he wanted to see. As much as he was certain people didn’t want to see him, he didn’t want to see this man either. His stomach dropped and he eyed the way the blond frowned at the sight of him.

In front of him, former pro-hero Hawks, ranked Number Three before the world went to shit, stood.

“I see,” Hawks said. He gave a smile, something sickenly sweet that made Chimera raise his guard.

### Return & Orchid

“Welcome back,” a voice called from above.

Deku, who was normally the first person to react in any given situation, didn’t even flinch when the man dropped down in front of them like a ninja.

“Whoa! Where did you come from?”

If Stain ever cared about how other people perceived him, it didn’t show. He smoothly ignored all of them to look at Deku before turning his gaze up to the wagon they pulled for him.

“You did it,” he said, an impressive smile twisting onto his lips. “As expected. I’ll let the garden team to get ready.” He waited another second, staring at Deku, who didn’t even turn to face him.

With that, sharp red eyes landed on Chimera for an extra second before he turned back and jumped onto one of the walls separating the homes with the street. He rushed away.

### Chimera The New Kid-

“Huh, there’s quite a bit of you, huh?”

Deku nodded back, seemingly oblivious to the way some of the others were eyeing the giant wolfman next to him.

“Precious,” he replied back, tapping his heart, “to me.”

“...Man, I just had to be saved by someone like this, huh?”

Deku paused in his steps and faced the man. Stopping because Deku did, Chimera turned around to stare at the young man. He lifted his bat and pointed at the way they came in.

“Free to leave,” he said swiftly.

Deku probably wanted to emphasize the fact that people had a choice to come and goals they pleased. He truly and honestly didn’t care as long as no one actively tried to kill anyone here and they let him know so he could plan out the supplies that they’ll need. Of course, his grasp on the language was rough, and his interactions with people had been nonexistent. It was understandable that he would still be misunderstood.

So for Chimera, with his face obscured and their very limited contact from before, it was a clear message. He wasn’t needed here. He wouldn’t be missed if he left. No one would know or care. Deku cared more about the base as a whole, than he did Chimera. He was probably allowing Chimera to stay because he might have use. Chimera was expected to earn his keep here, even though Deku’s place in him was already cemented.

The way Deku was special to Chimera was something that wasn’t reciprocated.

(Or at least, not yet.)

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“Are you certain that you should heal me? I could easily break this place you all seem so proud of.”

“Perhaps. It would also be the last thing that you do,” Chisaki said, his eyes glinting like gold under light.

Still, his body returned to normal, the normal he had before the world collapsed in on itself. He felt like he could breathe and move the way he used to, like he gained his health and his youth just from the touch of the man. His fur wasn’t matted and there weren’t missing patches anymore. The aches and pains were all gone. What a dangerous quirk.

If it put him back together so easily, he had no doubts that he would be nothing just as easily.

“For some crazy reason,” the man said, leaning back into his seat after sanitizing his hands and placing his gloves back on, “Deku saved you and brought you back. Don’t know why, but until you do something against him, no one will actively hurt you here. No one worth their weight here will make a move against a life that Deku saved.”

Chimera nodded back, grateful for the warning and short explanation.

“What should I do?”

“If you wait for him, you’ll be waiting forever,” Chisaki stood up, signaling that this discussion was over. He opened the door, “You should know what you’re good for.”

“Murder and carnage,” Chimera said without a missing a beat.

“...Deku really knows how to find them, doesn’t he?” the miracle-worker said dryly as he walked out. “Well, start there.”

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“...You’ve killed before,” Stain commented, tilting his head.

Chimera scoffed and his eyes fell to Stain. There was a brief moment, as he found something in those red eyes before he titled his head.

“So have you.”

It was just something that people could tell. It was in their aura and their demeanor, but for people who met as many murderers as they have, it was as obvious as telling what another person’s hair color was.

But to see so many of them, or someone as experienced as Stain stand in front of him, was bizarre. When people think about a settlement where remaining survivors have banded together to live and march towards a future, they don’t think that villains and criminals would be here.

But villains and heroes were all things of the past.

“Deku has a bad habit of hesitating when it comes to people,” Stain said suddenly, breaking his train of thought. “If you really mean what you say, then make sure to get rid of the trash where he doesn’t see.”

His eyebrow arched. “This is an on-going problem then?”

Stain nodded. “Fair warning.”

“And if I don’t follow it?” Chimera asked, more out of curiosity. He never took to taking orders very well, but this wasn’t a particular warning that he found surprising.

He barely counted as human in the eyes of most people when society was standing and monsters were myths, but Deku didn’t even try to come for his life. The man saw him, spared him, killed the actual monster, and then offered him something to die for. He wasn’t about to turn tail so quickly, when he had nothing better to do.

“Then I will come for you,” Stain replied back. His tone was grave, and his eyes were cold. Chimera didn’t doubt him for a second. “And it will be the last thing you do.”

Interesting.

### Chimera + Shoji - Monsters

“...Oh,” Chimera said, “There’s a lot of us here, isn’t there?”

Mezo stopped where he was taking care of the dishes. “Pardon?” he asked as he turned to the newcomer.

“People like us. Physically different.”

It was definitely a sore subject, because Mezo took a step back.

### Tentative Schedule

“We can’t live like this anymore!”

It took some time before they decided which times worked best, but eventually there came a decision. Lunchrush will work and make whatever (while supplies last) at 6 am, 12 pm, and then once more at 6 pm. Should others wish to eat at other times, they may, but those who wanted to eat Lunchrush’s food had to come by these times.

And, only those who will be leaving the base could request a bento to take and eat at a later time.

### (May) Trip 1:

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"So…" Bunbaigawara said slowly, "Not to be rude but like… why did you choose me?"

Midoroya stared at him and lifted his hand up, palm up and facing him.

"Oh, my quirk," he said quietly, almost resigned. It made sense, but a part of him did feel a little disappointed. Since he was always so quiet, he didn’t know what he was expecting, but somewhere, deep inside of Twice, he knew that he still wanted to be special to someone.

But Deku then started to speak. "You have a good attitude," he said, putting his pointer finger down. "You can fight and run well," he continued, putting down another finger. With every extra thing he said, he placed another finger down. "You notice things that I don't. You have good instincts."

Twice stopped walking then, so shocked that he even forgot to breathe. He stared, unified in his shock but Deku wasn't done. He turned around to him and then lifted his fist, their go-to gesture to let everyone know that they were there.

"And I like your voice."

Numbly, Twice gaped back like a fish.

Now, more than ever before, Twice wished that Deku didn’t wear his helmet. He would have loved to know what kind of expression someone who wanted him wore.

“Thank you, Twice,” Deku said quietly, “I’m glad you came with me.”

He didn’t understand. Why did Deku make it sound like he was the one who was lucky?

### Questions

"But if you know that you're just going to go and take it off anyways, isn't it better to not have anything at all?"

Deku shrugged back.

"I would rather it be an annoyance than a regret."

Cementoss frowned back. In these moments, when Deku said things like that with such certainty, he wondered if it would be better to just make the damn walls.

### Mutant Case: Spine Splitter

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“You’re fucking kidding me,” Aizawa said, squinting around the corner where the… whatever that was prowling. “You have got to be fucking kidding me.”

Twice was down for the count. He had broken his arm and sprained his ankle. He must have hit his head somewhere too, because he seemed to start making even less sense than usual, and hasn’t stopped mumbling. By his side, Nishiya was worriedly fretting over him.

If someone had a concussion, it was common knowledge that you keep that person awake. If they go to sleep, they might not wake up, and it wasn’t a gamble that they wanted to take.

That said, if Twice doesn’t shut up, the thing was going to come towards them-

Suddenly, a car alarm went off. In an instant, the mutant turned away and began marching on over to the source of the sound. It slid out of the window, leaving a trail of blood behind it. They didn’t dare let their guard down until it had climbed out of a window and out of sight.

“Just… what the fuck is that,” Aizawa said, rubbing his temples as the exhaustion began to seep through his bones. This was bad for his heart.

“...Wait,” Nishiya said quietly, “...Who set the car alarm off?”

Despite asking that question, they both knew exactly who.

“Fuck,” Aizawa said, standing up. The last hit left him with terrible vertigo, and the world spun him around like a carnival ride.

### Miruko and Deku

"Thank you for being alive," Deku said, right before he left.

Miruko stood there, for another moment with a crooked grin on her face.

What a little brat she thought detachedly. How dare he thank her when she didn't even get a change too.

Now more than ever, she was beginning to understand.

### New Group w/ Old Faces

*(literally in one case)*

Four things changed with the new group of 20 that joined them. This group would be the first, and only group thus far, that Helmet didn’t go out and personally bring back.

As it was, the team that led them back was Nejire, Mirio, Hawks, under the guidance of Nishiya, Sakamata and Hawks. While many were uncertain about the fact that they were letting the kids out, one look at Helmet’s young face was enough to destroy almost all debates.

It would be the first group of survivors that they found since Kouta that previous December.

Apparently, they had survived several months with each other. And where even Shigaraki and Nishiya could have a civil conversation, some of them could not talk to each other. According to their stinted report that they gave Sasaki and Tsukauge, they used to be over 100 of them. The strongest of them were taken by the Liberation Front, then their remaining group split up, and of the split group, most of them had died off, leaving just them.

First, was the former salarymen and one of the associates of the Hero Public Safety Commision, who were vocal about their disapproval to their current leader. They flinched when well-known criminals came into the room, and in general reminded everyone of what used to be.

The second were the people who were so far lost and so far convinced that they needed to ‘climb’ the ranks in order to ensure their safety and survival. It varied from person to person, but it was clear that they wanted to find someone with a Presence, and will do anything, say anything, if it meant furthering themselves. It was a product of spending a very long time on their own, and abandoning their dignity and humanity in the effort to live for another day.

The third were the people who kept to themselves around their former leader. They were quiet, distant, and distrusting to the fullest extent of the definition.

The last was a boy called Akira-kun. He was the youngest member in the group of 20, and referred to as *Akira* as their physical proof that there is a future in the world and he is it. His real name was something or another that no one seemed to actually know, but they all called him Akira.

Akira-kun, as it turned out, went to school with Deku.

They stood around, in awe and rapt fascination as they approached the streetlamps and their brightly decorated apartment complex. They were all beyond exhausted, and this was truly the best thing that has happened to them since this whole thing began.

“Electricity? You guys have… electricity?”

Yeah, Sakamata thought to himself, understanding exactly where they were coming from when they said it.

“It only really started to take off recently,” Nejire said, “But this is our pride and joy. Don’t worry, we even have running hot water!”

They gasped, eyes widening considerably as they excitedly squabbled more between each other. They entered the complex area and Mirio loudly announced that they were back with more survivors.

“...Survivors?” a young man said, sticking his head out, “Oh wow, we haven’t had those in a while.” The blond waved his hand at them, a big grin on his face before he turned around, “Hey, I’ll go tell Chisaki that we got some newcomers.” He turned and ran off then, and the other two behind him, a man with white cloth coming out of his elbows, and a red-head.

“Damn it, Kaminari, at least wait until we finish!” he snapped out with a sigh as he waved at them. “We haven’t had survivors since… Kouta, right?”

Next to him, the red-head nodded, “Welcome back!” he said with a big grin and then nodded at the group of unfamiliar faces, “And I guess welcome to you guys! Dinner doesn’t start for another hour or so, so you guys came right on time!”

“Nice!” Mirio said, brightly, he turned back with a wide grin. He started to talk about this and that as he took off his backpack and looked around.

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During dinner, after a thorough wash and fresh clothes, they were seated with hot food and told to eat as much as they would like. After a second of hesitation, they dug in, famished. The people around them, pro-heroes or their greatest fans, gave hearty welcomes as they piled in to eat vigorously as well.

But after they finished eating, when the shock began to die down and they weren’t just standing around in awe, the questions came back.

“So, Hawks, how… how did you manage this? It’s very impressive!”

“Eh?” The former hero stared at them and shook his head, “Oh no, I’m not the leader here,” he said. He was holding a bowl of food, getting served when they all did, but he seemed to stand around instead of sitting and eating like the rest of the survivors. He kept his eyes on the doorway, and it took a moment before they realized that he was waiting for someone.

Just then, Enji walked in, tall and imposing, they all gawked at him in shock, as he was talking to someone with their arm in a sling. The young man looked up, looking tiny next to Enji, and on the other side of him was the well-known secretary of All Might, Yagi Toshinori.

“That’s him,” Hawks said, and he raised his hand. “Yo, Deku,” he called out, surprising all of them when the young man with the green eyes looked towards the blond, “We got some new survivors,” he said.

The green-haired man nodded as he walked by them, not bothering to even stop at their table. As his eyes did a quick sweep of faces.

“...Welcome,” he said, voice softer than a whisper. Just like that, he had walked right past them, and the others frowned in shock at the treatment and the disappointment that this very curt man was the supposed leader of this settlement.

“He’s a little shy,” Hawks said, over his shoulder as he kept his body facing Deku, “But we wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for him.” He gave a lazy, two-fingered salute to them, ready to follow the younger man into the line for food when one of the survivors spoke up.

“...Deku? Is that you?”

Deku froze in his spot, and very slowly turned over. Even though the bottom half of his face was covered, hiss wide, almost fearful eyes stared back as Akira stood up.

“Oh my god, it is you!” he shouted, pointing at him. He left his spot at the table to run around to stand at the center of the cafeteria. “Holy shit, you survived? This whole time? You survived?!"

Deku, who didn’t flinch when he had to fight a new type of mutant, took a step back.

Enji frowned at the yelling child, and Yagi’s eyes darted between the two. Hawks turned over in surprise, but his eyes narrowed as the hostility in the air increased by tenfold.

“You mean the guy who guys all listen to is Deku?!” Akira gasped, pointing at the man, “Why? How did that weak, useless, quirkless Deku manage to be the head of all these great guys? Did Bakugo do it? I bet he did and you took all the glory for it, didn’t you?! Then what, did you leave him for dead, too?! I bet-”

And suddenly, an oppressive feeling of bloodlust made his blood run cold and his words stopped mid word.

“Look kid,” a cold voice came from behind him, and he slowly turned around to face a blond with a scar covering up a fourth of his forehead. “I’d be real careful with your next words. Some of us have a lot less control than we look. // I’ve killed plenty of people, another kid isn’t going to make a difference.”

Akira nodded, shivering as several people in the room seemed to stare him down.

“Bu… But why’s he the leader?” he asked, again.

The blond narrowed his eyes, taking a threatening step closer, but Deku spoke up.

“Jin-san,” he said, “It’s fine. Let’s eat dinner.”

And to Akira’s shock, the blond backed off. The way he eyed him however, showed that there was no change in his thoughts, though he turned around to give the young man a big grin. The bloodlust, although it didn’t disappear, faded back to a manageable degree.

“...Akira-kun,” Deku said, expression blank as he assessed him, “People change.”

He turned back over his shoulder and went to ask LunchRush for something in a container. Right when he was about to take it, however, Enji plucked it out of his hands. He ordered, grabbed his food, and took both of their meals out of the dining area, never once looking at the younger man, but sparing an absolutely chilling look to the new group of survivors.

Deku opened his good hand up, nearly jogging to keep up with Enji’s long strides, as Jin laughter followed them out. Yagi, holding his own lunch, heaved a great sigh as he followed after them.

“I… I don’t get it,” Akira whispered.

### Quirkless

“...You’re quirkless?” Yagi asked quietly. “I mean, before the whole…”

Deku stiffened for a second, and right before he could make any motion to nod or say anything, Enji cut in.

“It’s none of your business if he doesn’t say it.” Enji said, tone final and borderline hostile, “There are plenty of us who cannot use our quirks here. Having a quirk or not makes no difference in the identity of the man we follow, the same way it doesn’t matter whether or not he dons a helmet or eats with us.”

His sharp eyes narrowed down at Yagi and Twice laughed back, enjoying himself.

“Looks like we can get along about something, huh, big guy? // Damn, to think that I’d have something in common with Endeavor. I need to kill myself or kill him.”

Deku stared at him, eyes wide and bright and relieved.

And the fact that someone was willing to jump to his defense was so endearing that he smiled a little. It was helpless and a little bitter as he balled his hand into fists and nodded.

“I used to be quirkless,” he said, confirming it for everyone with a self-depreciating smile.

The look on Enji’s face was thunderous.

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“...What annoys me,” Enji said, “Is that the amount of things that you can disclose to us is reducing, yet the amount of things that you want to tell us never increases.”

Deku looked up at him and then back down to the bowl in his hand.

“...I’m sorry,” he said quietly.

He shook his head, “No, I’m the one that should be apologizing. You have nothing to apologize for.”

The young man’s eyes flitted from Enji’s face to the bowl in front of him, and then back up. He took a deep breath and looked back up. His eyes were sharp and Enji privately wondered if this was the gaze he held underneath that helmet when he went out to fight.

“Then wipe that look off your face,” he said, startling the other man. “Because there’s nothing to apologize for.”

Enji blinked, in a rare moment of surprise before he gave a chuckle. Next to him, Jin covered his mouth and Yagi fretted nervously.

“...Yes, I can do that for you.”

There was a long moment of silence, as the four made their way through their food quietly.

“...What do you want to know?” Deku suddenly asked. “I… I don’t know what you want to know if you don’t ask.”

“Are you actually quirkless?” Jin immediately asked. “Or did you lose your quirk when everyone else did?”

“...I have a quirk now,” Deku said, “But I was born quirkless.”

Yagi gave him a sharp glance when another voice cut in.

“I gave it to him,” Chisaki said, walking up to where they were sitting. He eyed the other three with no little amount of disdain before he looked down to Deku. “I thought you wanted it to be a secret.”

Deku shook his head, “Secrets are useless. Can’t feed anyone, can’t protect anyone.”

Gold eyes seemed to glimmer in their approval and the older man nodded.

“Great, then you can come down to the infirmary later for a check-up, right?”

Deku grimaced, but nodded his head. He walked into that one.

### Twice - Rusted Nails

Jin peered over the railings when he saw Deku walking behind the building. It’s been a long time since he’s seen him, muchless seen him by himself. It’s been a whole three days since he’s seen him alone, and he only saw him at breakfast, which was a long time ago. He figured that it was probably because the kid was sleeping off the injuries and stuff, but it didn’t stop him from jumping off from the second floor.

There was a question that rested against his chest heavily. It kept him up at night sometimes, especially after finding out that the Helmet they knew was quirkless.

He ran for the young man, “Hey, Deku,” he said, even though he should have said this long ago, “How’s your arm?”

Under a helmet, Jin didn’t know anything about him. Without a helmet, he can read him clear as day. Which was really saying something since no one ever comes to ask Twice about his opinion on people for a reason. Deku tilted his head, his eyebrows furrowing as he peered back at Twice.

“Like,” the blond motioned uselessly to the arm that he remembered nails going through once, “that one time? When you stopped me from falling on my head? And you got those nails in your arm?”

The blank stare that he was given in response almost gave him relief. If Deku didn’t really remember it, then maybe it was because it wasn’t a big deal. Maybe Jin had been worried all this time for nothing. Maybe …

“I’m fine,” Deku replied. “It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

Jin nodded slowly, “That’s good,” he said. And he took a step forward, “I uh… I know that it was a long time ago so this is way late but uh thanks. For the save.”

The young man dropped his gaze to the ground. “I didn’t do anything,” he replied back.

“Aw, don’t be like that,” the blond said. “When someone thanks you, you should take advantage of them! \\ Make them do something for you!”

His eyes seemed to shine at that. Jin, who never knew that he could be on the receiving end of such a bright gaze, felt his chest swell.

“You don’t have to say anything right now, but I got your back. \\ So I can stab you!”

When Deku relaxed, Jin beamed back. Here was someone who relaxed in his presence. If he had known that all it would have taken was the world ending, he would have been a lot more earnest in being a villain a long time ago.

“...Thank you,” Deku said at last, his voice thick and his eyes watering.

Jin faltered, “Dude, didn’t you hear me? I just said that you’ll get taken advantage of-”

“Yes.” His curls bobbed a little when he nodded his head, “You did.”

Jin stared at him, the gears whirling in his head before it all broke down.

“I don’t get it. I just told you…”

He trailed off when he saw Deku’s expression turn into something fond.

“I trust you, Jin-san.”

It was almost amazing, how a single sentence could make him feel whole. His eyes ran with tears as he rubbed at them. He sniffled loudly, a blubbering mess in seconds as he walked up to Deku and threw his arms around him. It should have been embarrassing, to fall apart so easily, but he’s lived a long time without ever mattering to anyone.

There weren’t many people who would trust him. There were even less that would say it like that, genuine and kind. And there was exactly one person who he really, really, really wanted to be an asset to.

The young man turned stiff under the touch, but leaned into the embrace. His arms awkwardly wrapped around his middle, but his hands couldn’t meet around his back. Meanwhile, the blond’s arms wrapped around him so that he could touch his own elbows.

Still, Deku didn’t feel small.

The world didn’t end. No, for Jin, it was like the world was finally his.

### Offer for Hawks

“Oh well, it’s just so strange that, with all the heroes here, a young boy would be in charge of this area!”

Hawks leaned back, and lifted his hands up in front of him in a mock placating gesture. His smile was still present, though it looked more exasperated and tired as the man rubbed his hands together. After such a long time of not needing to, his face hurts from trying to smile all the time.

He felt tired in a way he hasn’t since he landed on that rooftop all those months ago.

“Ah, but he’s done a great job,” the blond said, hoping that it came much more sincere than his regular tone, but he doubted that the man in front of him could tell the difference. “And we like what he’s doing. There’s no need to interfere with that for something like age,” he tried to explain the umpteenth time.

He didn’t bother explaining that almost all the heroes and civilians were from places where they were in charge or were suddenly entrusted with the lives of many for an indefinite amount of time. He didn’t think the man in front of him would understand what that did to his nerves, to watch the people he was supposed to protect turn against each other. However fragile and tentative it felt, what they had here on this base was a godsend. He didn’t even know how to begin explaining the feeling of acceptance when he came to the end of his ropes, betrayed and abandoned after watching what little humanity he had left rot away.

Besides, it wasn’t that they were leaving it to him.

In all honesty, the monster uprising didn’t cause the end of the world. People did. Looking at the man now, Hawks couldn’t believe that he was so satisfied and content here that he could have ever forgotten that.

“But you were the Number Three Pro Hero for a reason!” the man said. “The people believed in you!”

“...Then, have you asked Endeavor the same thing?” he asked, a lot sharper than he would have a few years ago. His smile didn’t falter, ever bit the perfect picture hero everyone expected him to be.

The man flinched backwards, breaking out into sweat at the mention of the fire-hero, “Oh well, uh… Endeavor looked incredibly busy! Yes, busy! And I goodness, his scar looks awful! I think he’s just lucky that he’s alive at all!”

Meaning, he was scared of Enji. He was scared so he came crawling down to the next guy down on the ladder.

Hawks wasn’t a fool. He understood what was going on. Before everything here, he played this game as little as he could, but it never stopped from rearing its ugly head back into his life. The man in front of him was of a certain type of poison. If not him, Best Jeanist will be next.

He had hoped that they were desperate and tired, but it turns out, they had brought poison back to the base.

Hawks had one of three options then. The first would be to laugh it all off and pretend this newcomer was joking. It would be his normal go-to, but he’s certain that this man would just keep harassing him anyways. He didn’t mind it, but he didn’t want this to spread. He didn’t want to hear it, so he didn’t want to subjugate anyone else to this. If some of the… more susceptible people heard this, more drastic measures would have to be taken.

The second option would be to end this right now. Put the man in his place with a thinly veiled threat. If he scared him enough, he’ll leave him alone. He’s certain that he had a good Enji-impression that he could whip out. While it would tank his reputation, he didn’t really care about it, but he doesn’t want this to reverse back and hinder Deku in any way.

Lastly, he could kill him. In theory, he could just take the man out and leave him for dead if he didn’t want to make a mess at the base and deal with clean up. Perhaps he could let this man outside instead. He could spin a story about how he tried to stop him but this man panicked too hard and got himself bit. It’s a story that everyone here could relate to. It would be the fastest and probably the cleanest.

He had no doubts that he’ll cover his tracks well, and he knew that no one would question it if he said it.

No, that’s a lie. If he were to commit every sin around onto this man, made every second of his life absolute agony and misery, and came clean to all the people here about it, he had little to no doubt that he would be forgiven. Once they learned why he did what he did, what this man said about Deku, he is certain that some of them would even praise him. And then, they would help him make sure that Deku never found out.

If he could meet himself, just three years ago, he’s certain that his past self would be disgusted at what he had become.

After all, he was ready to throw everything he has ever tried for away if it meant that he could see Deku smile with confidence one day. For the man who makes life less about surviving and more about living, who locked himself away in silence because he didn’t know if he could infect anyone else, who brought the lights back into his world, he thinks that there is very little he wouldn’t do for him.

With that, he came to the simple conclusion that this man must die. Right now.

“Oh, Hawks-san, there you are,” Tokoyami called out from the hallway. He stared, looking between the former pro-hero and the former salary man, “...Are you busy?”

“...Not at all,” Hawks replied, walking towards him, “What’s up?”

He wouldn’t be sloppy about it, after all. He ignored the salaryman, and while walking outside, briefly met eyes with Dabi across the way.

Perhaps he could enlist some help.

-

The next were two of the girls.

He thinks that they used to be beautiful. However, a year without a proper bathing schedule, minimal food, constant stress, and anguish has made a greater mark on them, and they are a shadow of the women they used to be. Before, he would have been able to muster some form of pity for them. As it was, the only feeling that Hawks held for them was annoyance. His eyes had caught the sight of Deku as he walked by the doorway, and armed with a blanket to wrap him in this time, he was suddenly blocked by these two women.

“Kya, Hawks!”

“Oh my god, you’re even more handsome in person!”

It was amazing to himself that in this single moment, he is reminded of who he used to be, what he used to do, and could swear that he just had an out-of-body experience.

One of the girls, bold and certain, stepped forward to wrap her arms around one of his, pressing himself against him as the other one placed her hand on his chest and smiled. With her half-lidded eyes, those lips spelt out a sin, but Hawks didn’t even feel the temptation. As it was, he pushed away their hands and marched right out the door, not bothering to spare them a second glance.

“Deku,” he all but sang-out, giving a big grin when the young man turned to stare at him with those wide-green eyes.

Immediately, he felt purified. Hm, perhaps he had spent too much time away after all.

And then, his good vibes immediately evaporated away when he clapped sights onto Dabi, who stood on the other side of again.

“...We’re busy,” Dabi said. He lifted his hand, as though to shoo him away “Go away. Don’t you have those girls to tend to, Hawks?”

Since coming here, it was almost unspoken how they wanted to avoid their hero identity, but a glaring sore spot like that was just asking to be brutally humiliated by their resident assholes.

Green eyes darted between the two and he turned away, full intentions on escaping, when both of them grabbed one shoulder each.

“Stay put,” Dabi said, his hand on the injured shoulder, fingers wrapped in a thinly veiled threat that he would squeeze down if he tried to run.

“Don’t worry, Deku, we’ll leave in just a second, alright?”

Despite the grip on him, he still leaned away.

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After that, they found him when he landed after a quick fly around.

“Excellent, Hawks! For a moment, I thought that it was back before the time before this!”

His eyes flickered to the older man and felt exhaustion settling in his bones.

“Ah, yeah,” he said, folding his wings in. The man was extending a towel towards him, but the whole thing felt dirty.

If he took this towel, what will the man expect him to take next?

He smiled but didn’t take it. He made his way down, ready to put in the report that nothing special happened today too, and the man kept following him. It had only been three days or so since they last talked right? Didn’t he have other things to do?

Shit, if only Hawks didn’t go for the patrol so early. He could have gotten rid of him today. He sighed and-

“Ah, sounds like you are tired, Hawks. I can only imagine how hard it must be since you are the only flyer here. Isn’t it tiring to work all the time like that? When do you take breaks, Hawks? If you would like, perhaps maybe I could help you relax?”

He paused at that. Relaxation? What a foreign concept, but he was certain that he hasn’t been this tense in a while.

No, that was undoubtedly true for almost everyone on the base. No matter how much they said things to Deku to dissuade him from leaving the base, the fact that he was mostly confined to his room or the fact that he had to be confined at all wasn’t something anyone wanted. For the guy who promised them the utmost freedom, it felt like they were cheating him.

Of course, that was mostly cleared up since Chisaki had to explain to them that he couldn’t lift his hands to get into clothes, and that opening doors would be very hard for him. The man didn’t say much, but anyone can see how much it bothered him.

It bothered all of them, of course. Some more than others, and Hawks was definitely part of the more category.

He saw Deku, pushing himself up to stand when he was a bloodied mess. He had to carry that bloody mess back to base, in desperate hopes that he made it just in time.

“You think I work hard?” he asked, as lazy-sounding as always. They were on the second floor, and the nostalgic sound of life as everyone tried to get through their chores resonated out.

“W-why, yes! I’m certain that you are often working much too hard-”

“There’s a guy here,” Hawks said, “Who works doubly harder than me.” The blond gave a smile as he thought about the man with a helmet. “And he’s definitely where he belongs at the top.”

“My, you are so modest-”

And this man would never understand. He will never try to either. Hawks knows that, and thinks it’s a shame that he put this off for so long-

“Hawks-san.”

It was like there a gunshot, all life in the main area was silenced. His head snapped over to where Deku stared at him from across the way, and jerked his head to the side. Without another moment of hesitation, Hawks stepped onto the railing and flew to his side. He was almost beside himself in joy.

What did Deku need him for? What did Deku want so that he could call him?

“Eugh, why’d you have to call him over?”

And Dabi. Of course Dabi was here.

“What couldn’t you do that Deku called me here?” he responded in kind. Blue eyes narrowed back and Deku spoke again. “And I told you, ‘Keigo’ is fine.”

He was much quieter than his sudden summons, but Hawks wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

“...You looked tired,” he said quietly. Green eyes flickered between the ground and then back to the blond, “And like you needed escape.”

Ah, he thinks, he can’t fool this man. It was frustrating to think that someone knew what he wanted and delivered, but he couldn’t quite return the favor.

“...Thank you,” he said. “I was just trying to-”

“He doesn’t like me,” Deku continued, “I understand why.”

Dabi tensed at that, and Hawks’s smile fell off his lips.

“I don’t care,” their small leader said. “So you shouldn’t either.”

Despite the fact that one of his arms was still in a sling and the other arm was barely able to hold a spoon, Deku looked strangely accustomed to the weight of their entire complex on his back. It was frightful and aggravating all in one.

“More importantly, we’re going to try and hunt down some deer,” he continued, turning to Dabi who gave a nod back.

“Ah, the hunter group…” and suddenly, Hawks was acutely aware of how well-perceived Deku was, to see him coming down the stairs and call out to him because he looked tired.

Hah.

Hawks fell into step next to him, hoping that he could make a space just for him right here by Deku’s side.

### Kaminari-kun - 1 Year Anniversary

The day, for the average person on base, began at about seven AM. Those that were a part of any farming or hunting group would be up earlier, but everyone else got up around then.

Kaminari was one of those people.

He woke up, worked out with some of the others for morning training, and then they went to eat breakfast. 9 AM, 1 PM, 7 PM. Those were the times that Lunchrush worked, so that's when people rolled in for food. If someone wanted to eat at another time, they could, but they would have to make their own food.

And well, why make your own food when Lunchrush's is going to taste better anyways? At least for Kaminari, that was it.

“Oh, Kaminari-kun, good morning!”

Kaminari looked to where Taishiro gave an energetic wave to him.

“Good Morning, Taishiro-san!”

It was hard not to call them by their Hero-Name, even after all this time, but no one minded if they slipped up. Most of them don’t introduce themselves as their Hero-Persona, and none of them really wear their usual Hero-Costume get-up either.

And well, he was just glad to be in the bright company of others. Taishiro especially had a grin that could light up the whole world. Just looking at him already put Kaminari in a better mood.

...It was pretty fucking crazy, that he could live like this, but here he was. It had been a whole year since he came here.

And he could even feel happy now.

### Midoriya Izuku: A Leader

Deku is painfully weak. As a small, young boy that never seems to fully heal before getting injured again, with shit eating habits and downright awful sleep schedules, he was too thin and small for his age.

In addition to that, he was quirkless.

More often than not, he still has no idea why anyone refers to him as a leader. He doesn’t really order anyone to do anything or not, and really is fine with whatever people do as long as they’re not trying to kill each other.

And even if they don’t listen or follow him, he has no way of punishing them. Almost everyone here could easily overpower him or had a quirk that could overpower him in an instant. Of course, he doesn’t think he would be able to put up a fight against anyone here. It’s just not in him.

He has burnt bodies to ash, desecrated them, and even killed people in cold blood. There was no way for him to ever consider raising his hand against the people here. If they wanted him to hurt and die, he’s certain that he would have deserved it. He wouldn’t fight it.

So, why?

At first, he thought it was because they were polite and they didn’t want to be presumptuous with the man who lived here first. But thinking about Toga and Shigaraki, he didn’t think that being respectful was something that they would care about. Being polite and caring about how other people saw them was definitely not a priority for them.

The next thought was that it was because they were being threatened by other people, but that still goes back to wondering why the people who were threatening others followed him in the first place. There was just no point. It was a drain on the psyche too, for either side. In addition to that, they had plenty of people here who could call out that kind of behavior the second they saw it.

Then, what was left?

It couldn’t be that they were going to butter him up to turn against him. They had several, perfect opportunities for that, but didn’t do anything then either. In addition to that, they knew that he was pathetically weak. What could they be waiting for?

Still.

“Deku,” he paused in his steps to turn to the person who addressed him, Ishiyama, and dipped his head. Right when he was about to get a proper and formal greeting befitting a man of his caliber, he continued to speak instead, “Are you busy? We have some plans we want you to go over with us.”

“Don’t give him a choice or he won’t come,” another voice came and Deku winced when Aizawa narrowed his eyes at him. Figures. “Hey, we’re having a meeting about the future so come with us.”

Please, Deku begs in his heart, why did you bother asking?

Still, he follows them. See? He wasn't really a boss or a leader. At least with them, it was clear that they were doing it because they were just being polite. They didn’t need to though. Before he would even mention that, however, they’re moving on.

He follows, and in the familiar Rental Office, they make their claims.

His heart warms when he sees Chisaki with the stack of notebooks that he gave him all those months ago, some of them a little worn and all of them well taken-care of.

“Oh, Deku,” Chisaki said, his eyes finding Deku in an instant. His mask crinkled, “Excellent. Someone who sees reason.”

More often than not, he feels like he’s a tie-breaker. When they suggest something and someone is unsatisfied with the answer that they get, they pull him in and everyone seems to agree that they won’t argue against the tie-breaker.

Still, it was a little intimidating to stand between Chisaki and Sasaki when they get like this, all hostile energy. This must be huge if Enji was leaning against the wall with that huge frown on his face too, and Deku feels the anxiety twist his stomach again.

Quickly, he’s seated. This will be long and they don’t want him to run away. Great.

A cup of tea comes in front of him, and Deku thanks the high heavens for Makoto and her bright smile.

“We need to knock down some houses to start some of these plans,” Chisaki started, tapping the notebook with a finger. His gaze felt heavy, but Deku was used to it. “But if we keep expanding like this, we need to fix here first. I think that we should move everyone into the houses for the time being for the few weeks it takes to rebuild this place.”

Even without looking at the notebook, he had a good idea what the man wanted. He knows because he stressed and daydreamed about it. Thinking back on the things he wanted and tried to push onto these people, he understands that he was just some daydreaming child. To Chisaki, who was working so hard to make his dreams come true, he’s so grateful.

“It’s dangerous to let people spread out like that. Not to mention, there are plenty of people who aren’t ready to take a step outside,” Sasaki said, talking as though this was an argument they’ve had many times before.

“Time to learn,” Chisaki said, his eyes narrowing dangerously, “We can’t deal with dead-weight forever.”

“For christs’ sake, you-”

Deku raised his hand meekly, and the conversation stopped dead.

“...Do we have a plan for recreating something here?” he asked quietly. There was a brief pause and he tilted his head. When Chisaki looked like he was going to wave the notebook at him, he shook his head, “...Lots of people need different things,” he said. “The plans from then should change to reflect that.”

In all honesty, he’s been thinking about it for a while.

“If people want to leave or stay, they should have a choice.”

There was some grumbling, and he supposed that if he wasn’t called in to be the tie-breaker, he was called in to be the third-side that the other two teamed up against.

“What do you mean having a choice!?” Chisaki snapped back, “If we let everyone do as they please, these lazy bums will never do anything!”

“Should we just survey everyone and see what’s necessary? And then how will we decide what’s important enough to classify as something we need?” Sasaki pointed out.

Look, Deku sighed, he wanted to say that he tried okay?

“We need to worry about how pipelines and wiring will work too!”

“This isn’t something that we can leave to other people. We have to make decisions and they have to live with them!”

But it did seem like they did agree on something after all.

Deku stared and then sighed back.

“...You have something else you want to add to that?” Aizawa asked, his piercing stare never wavering from his face.

“...I think we should have three main tests to figure out who goes to Tokyo,” he blurted out. “The first test will be to rotate through everyone and see their comfort level in sleeping outside. Once we get through volunteers, we should have a better grasp on what we need."

There was an entire moment of silence before the room exploded into sound.

Deku winced, and like he did everything else, took it on headfirst.

-

Strong isn’t a word that describes Deku. Durable might be a better word.

Strangely, even ironically, Deku is a lot like the Walkers that he kills. He fights with everything he is, but when it comes down to it, he’s super easy to dispatch. The problem lays in the fact that he doesn’t stay down. No matter how broken, beaten, battered and tired he could be, he will get back up.

It was a little frightening.

But he doesn’t know how else to fight, and the thought of letting someone else fight for him brings back memories of a blond he once considered a Hero on par with All Might.

### Keigo & Izuku - recentering

“...Hawks,” Deku said as they returned in. While getting rid of their outer layers and washing their hands in the makeshift outdoor wash area they had by the entrance after their successful and relatively peaceful scouting trip, the former hero was suddenly called on.

He blinked back, pleasantly surprised and curious, as the two pretended that they weren’t being gawked at by the others.

Shyly, a soft blush on his face as his eyes darted from the ground and back up to Hawks’s eyes, Deku whispered out, “...Come to my room.”

The blond gaped back at him for a moment, his mouth running dry as his mind raced to try and process what had just happened.

“Yeah…” he said, breathlessly, “Sounds good.”

-

What… had he been expecting? He wasn’t sure. There was no way Deku had feelings and was going to confess to him or something when Deku usually had to be convinced that people cared about his safety and well-being (and even then, that was always an uphill battle).

But still, he had never felt so nervous in his life.

And then, Deku’s green eyes found his after he closed (and locked, his dirty mind supplied gleefully) the door behind him.

Kouta was usually here, but he tends to stay in the main quarters when Deku heads out. Hawks knew that, but his brain had to remind him that they were alone together here, after Deku called him up here.

His wings fluttered a little, despite his best efforts to remain calm and collected.

“...It’s okay,” Deku spoke up at last, ending the anticipation and replacing it with confusion.

“Huh?”

“You … want to leave, right?”

“...What?”

His fuzzy feelings all evaporated as he tried to make sense of this in a very different way than what he was doing before.

“What do you…” the blond stopped and took a deep breath. “If you’re leaving,” he said, figuring that this would be a good place to start, “Then I’m leaving. Until then, I’ll be staying right here.”

He exemplified this by taking a step closer, and relaxed when he saw the relief in Deku’s eyes.

The teen was so damn easy to read without that helmet.

“...Now, can you tell me why you thought that?” Whatever started this, it had to end now.

“...You looked stressed. It hasn’t gotten better,” the young teen said after a moment. “I… I don’t know how to help you, so I thought…”

“...That you could give me a way out instead?” he finished for him.

He gave a curt nod. And Hawks took a deep breath. Immediately, the glee and energy he had before faded away into nothing, and it was replaced with a feeling that this was all meaningless and a bit annoying.

Something that made him stressed enough to leave, but Deku would never think about leaving, would he?

“...Deku, could I ask you a question?” he asked.

The curls on his head were matted down, showing how sweaty he must have gotten inside that helmet of his. Still, Deku didn’t look bothered by it and nodded again. They were both in need of showers, but now that they had this moment to be alone, his confidence wavered.

“I… Shigaraki was right. I haven’t really lived up to the whole ‘hero’ thing,” he admitted. “I… I’ve watched more people die than I have saved. I can’t remain impartial to this whole thing.” His hands trembled as he brought it up to his head. The smile hadn’t left his face, but it was tinged with all the disappointment he harbored since the new group came in. “I… Is it okay? That I’m here? That… I’m the one that made it out?”

“...Hawks-san,” Deku said quietly, “I don’t know.”

The blon’s smile dropped at the same time as his heart did, leaving him empty and cold.

Boldly, however, Deku did take a step forward.

“But I’m glad that you are.”

Hawks understood that he has become incredibly weak, if he was easily swayed by a few words. At the same time, he feels a relief blown off his shoulders in an instant. He took a slow, shuddering sigh and gave a watery grin to Deku.

However, the young man wasn’t done.

“I’m glad that you are here. And I’m glad that you chose me. I will…” and he hesitated briefly before his hand came up to his mask and took it off his face. He looked back, his entire face and all his scars on it exposed to Hawks’s eye, as he said, “Thank you for being alive, Hawks-san.”

“I see,” he said after a moment. He gulped, his eyes feeling like they were burning as he shook his head, “I think… I should be the one saying that.”

His shoulders slacked, and he stood by his decision. It’ll be disappointing to all his loyal fans, but he can no longer find it in himself to care. What matters is in front of him. If Deku wants it, he’ll do it. Undoubtedly, it’s pathetic that he has sunk so low, but that was okay.

If he can stay in those green eyes, he’s okay with being just Keigo.

“...Can I ask for a favor?” he asked, his grin returning to his face in a more natural way.

Deku tilted his head to the side, but nodded without hesitation. Which was fine too, Hawks will be here to make sure that to protect him from his own kindness.

“Keigo,” he said. “Can you call me by my name from now on?”

The smaller man blushed, and it was so sudden and innocent that Hawks couldn’t help but laugh brightly.

After a second, he looked less affronted, but he nodded. A small smile graced his lips, stretching the scars by them. At the sight of it, he could feel the cracks in his heart filling up slowly with his gentle warmth.

“...Keigo,” he said. “Good job on patrol today.”

The blond grinned back. He could live with this. He could live for this.

“Yeah, anytime, Deku.”

Oh man, he couldn’t wait to see the look on Yamada’s face when he found out.

-

“Ah! There you are, Hawks-san!”

Burden lifted, Hawks turned to the businessman with an easy smile. The sight of it must have brought hope to the man, because he brightened gleefully.

“Something wrong?”

“I thought that perhaps your confidence might have waned since the start of this, so I went out of my way to talk to some of the others. We all believe that you should take the reigns of this base,” he immediately began.

“Ah, you’re right, I should meet up with all of them-”

He almost cackled when the man preened at the thought, and kept speaking.

“-and let them know that they can pack up and leave.”

The man froze.

“It’s only natural, right? If you’re unsatisfied with the current leadership, then you should leave,” he said easily.

“W-what are you saying…?”

He tilted his head and smiled, bright and brilliant like a thousand cameras were on him again as he stood at the Hero Rankings again.

“But of course, no one would want to leave this place, right? Then, there’s no reason for anyone to think unkindly of the person who has been working tirelessly to keep this place up and running, right?”

In the end, it was clear what he should have done. From the beginning, he should have declared his allegiances, and stand firm in his claim. He can keep an eye on them, and if things get bad, he’ll get rid of him. Them. It doesn’t matter.

He’s not a hero anymore. He is Deku’s Keigo.

If this was corruption, it was a peaceful feeling.

### The Second Trip

After the relative success of the first trip, the second trip was decided by lottery. This time, there would be two groups that head out. While they would go altogether, the first group would return after getting to the first stopping point and the second group would forge onward. This was decided to increase the number of people that got used to going out and about, as well as to make sure that they could still have a group focus on continuing and the second group can focus on maintaining. Whether it was their ‘territory’ or not, didn’t matter to Deku, as he just wanted it to be cleared of anything harmful.

Deku, as they have learned, cares very little for things like territory or power. He values safety and security, but in its fullest sense and meaning, as in going out to figure out the world instead of remaining eternally speculating.

Yes, the most important thing to Deku was information.

-

“After that, we’ll clear out the cars in the road and start working on the houses in the neighborhood. When we clear everything out, we’ll return,” Deku said, reading straight from his small notepad. To signal that he was done speaking, he looked up and opened the floor, “Questions?”

“How come you speak fine now?”

He blinked slowly and then looked back down into his notebook, as though he could find the answer there. He couldn’t, and looked back up, looking ten parts uncomfortable before he tilted his head, as though he didn’t understand the question and it was starting to pain him.

“Ah, uh,” Ojiro hesitated and then shook his head, “Nevermind.”

Deku opened his mouth, closed it, and then bit on his bottom lip. After another moment, he spoke up.

“...Speaking… hard.”

With that, he turned around, signaling to all of them that they were going to move out.

“Don’t be like that, Deku,” Jin cheered, “I think you’re plenty cute, just the way you are!”

Face flushed red, Deku quickly clipped his helmet on. He turned away quickly and started to walk faster.

“Ah, are you embarrassed? Haha, you know, you don’t have to hide!”

“Mou, Jin, you’re awful,” Toga whined, “Ne, ne, I think you’re plenty cute too,” she said as she came around the other side of him. Despite her words, her smile was teasing. “Let’s ditch him and go,” she giggled.

Resolutely, Deku kept walking forward.

## [Year 2: Summer]

### June Trip

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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 does.

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

Tokoyami 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.

### 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 things he finds out about the world, every time he steps outside of his home, the more questions he gets. Every time he gets a new question, however, he thinks that he’s a little closer to figuring something out, and some days he wishes he didn’t know at all.

At the same time, it wasn’t like he could 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 his sanity, looked up at him and smiled as best he could without his lips.

“Thank you,” he had whispered.

He killed people he didn’t know. He killed people that he didn’t know 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 gets into a corner, and pukes until there’s nothing inside of him. He’s dry heaving, but he wipes his mouth on his sleeve. He heads out, grabbing his gloves and pulling them on. By the time he pulls his face mask up and picked up his helmet, numb in a way that has nothing to do with pain, a stampede of footsteps comes for 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. He wanted to take this from them.

“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 smoother 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 three of them had to look at it? He didn’t want to let others see it. He wanted to shield them from this.

“...Let me see for myself,” Tensei said, placing his hand on Deku’s shoulder and squeezing just a little before he pushed onwards.

He pushed the door open, and immediately stiffened.

“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.

-

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.

Still, Deku took that choice away from everyone and carried the burden of that decision alone.

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. 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.

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

“I’m sorry,” he 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.

### 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 is, 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 > and he doesn’t know when he became this kind of person. He didn’t know that he was capable of killing someone else. He doesn’t know and if he could go back in time…

He thinks about those eyeholes, the quiet begging to be put out of their misery, the whispered pleas, and knows 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, and climbed up to his complex.

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 forgot the world.

He loses 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.

He got his spare padding on. Got his clothes on. He’s used to it. His hands are 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 are one of the most volatile and dangerous of all possible enemies to run into. 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.

In moments like this, Deku, who embodied strength and certainty in their mind, hesitated. 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 blade in his, 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. 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.

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 desperate that no one could help. When people hit that low, the only way they could claw back up is if they did 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.

### 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, 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 him boil.

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

“Well! 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 was a villain anyways. Forcing himself onto someone wasn’t something outside his realm of shit he would do just to inflict agony on someone.

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

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

“You can have anything I am,” he said quietly, “so don’t make that face.”

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

“Ten 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. “Heyo, what’s up?! 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 tonight 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, “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. “He requested another item?”

“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 thinks 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 continued 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.

Miruko, Akakuro, and Iguchi.

It was a purely short-distance team.

“...I’ll protect her,” Deku said, “We’re coming back.”

-

“You gotta write on the move-”

“No,” Deku replied back. He turned back to the marching horde. “Watch carefully, Mei-chan,” he said, pulling his bat down towards the ground. “We won’t let anything interfere.”

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 feels oddly honored. Deku had specifically called the two of them out. He had looked around the base until he found the two of them.

Stain pulled out two short daggers, and Iguchi drew his katana swiftly. Deku took a step forward, rolling his shoulders as he lifted his bat up.

### 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.

Well, 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 now 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.

Deku hesitated, and shook his head.

“...It’s fine,” he said quietly, unable to meet his eyes. Honestly, he feels like he’s 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 is reminded how blessed he is and smiled back.

“Thank you.”

-

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 he stood 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.

“One day,” he said.

The blond grinned back.

“One day.”

### Sewage

"...One more time?"

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

Chisaki, predictably, made a face like he would rather burn 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 grin.

“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 nauseated 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.

“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 looked to the left, where Hawks was out of sight, and then to the right, where Dabi was already making his way down the hallway, and then to the staircase. He faced Mirio and nodded.

### 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 looks of the way they were standing with their arms crossed over their chests and worried expressions on their face.

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 on 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 Midoriya 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.

“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 and he was told to turn around. As soon as the door opened, however, there was a flutter as Hawks flew in to the area right in front of them.

“Morning,” he said, a lazy smile on his face. “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 hesitance when he walked through. Once, Kouta has worn his helmet, so he knew how dark it was in there.

“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.

“I became a hero to protect the people that can’t protect themselves. For me, that’s where my strength comes from,” Hawks explained.

“...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.

-

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.

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.

“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 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 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. If he was a sensible adult that grew up under normal circumstances, he might have ruffled his hair to show some solidarity. However, Kurono was neither that 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. “For protection. 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.”

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.

“...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.

“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.

### ChisakiDeku - Angel

Deku reached for the door, and as soon as he pulled the handle to open it, 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, “an awful angel who came to collect my sinful soul. When I woke up here, I honestly thought I had arrived to 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 with one of his hands still on the world.

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 afterwards.

“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.

“No, I suppose not.”

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

Chisaki’s smile slid off his face, but Deku wasn’t staring at him.

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

Deku’s eyes looked up at him, green eyes hardened with a resolve that could stop his heart, “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 prepared for the trip to Tokyo.

### 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.

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.

-

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.

What an idiot, to adorn his tools with decorations, he thought to himself fondly.

## [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.

-

“Guess we were worried about nothing,”

### 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 sweat rolled 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.

“...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, “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 not 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, it was clear to see how he was banged up. 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?

He looked through the bag for a moment and then gave a small bow. “Thank you.”

The young leader 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.

“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.

“If we start running now, then that’s all we’re ever going to do,” Deku snapped back, his frustration lacing his words. “You run and you run, but if they catch you, you’re head. If there’s no point in running from something we can’t outrun, then fight it now. I have something that’s precious to me.” He lifted his plastic bag up, “Everyone is free to leave or stay. But this is my home. This is where I want to be.”

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?”

Deku nodded. “I’ll be back within three hours,” he said. He gave the others a sweeping gaze as he spoke, powerful and certain, “Those that wait for me, I’ll show you morning light.”

“...And if you don’t come back?”

“Then fire doesn't work,” Deku replied back. He turned back to Shigaraki, his green eyes piercing right through the man, “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 and looked at Sero.

“Let’s go.”

-

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.

-

Midoriya 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.”

Midoriya’s expression didn’t change, but his eyes slid down in front of this man.

“...Then, this is…”

“Yep, Gran Torino.”

Midoriya 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 he 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 sound.

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.

“Thanks, Deku,” he said. “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 got 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, “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 eat dinner together.”

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. “He 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.”

“Get off the comms,” Aizawa’s voice crackled through the walkie.

## [Year 3: Winter]

### 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 do Deku's back, Chisaki's hand laid across the back of his. Standing like this, they both became intimately aware of how much bigger Chisaki was.

"...Kai...?"

"You would leave behind a lot more than your notes," Chisaki said. The touch was too intimate, and any other person might have been off-put by his forward approach.

But Deku only found comfort in Chisaki's 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-ff, 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 omnious 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.

### 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.

### 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.

## [Year 3: Spring]

### 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.

"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 chase 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 seeing Deku's eyes, 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 decievingly 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.

He reached out to him, and Hawks surged forward to take his hand in his.

"I... I haven't fully learned how to be a good leader yet, and 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, but Hawks tugged his hand closer to him.

### 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 said. “I think we can take it now.”

“...The station, huh?” she said, and grinned. “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.

But even then, 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

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.

-

“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.

“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.

“Please protect my treasure.”

There was a long silence before Hawks grabbed him by the front of his shirt.

“If I go with you, there’s no need for back-up.”

“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.

“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 prayed that they were worried over nothing.

### Air Whips

Desperate is 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. Looking to be a large lump of pale flesh, like a person who hadn’t seen sunlight in many years, 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, 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. 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 to touch the others.

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. 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. He didn’t want to die. And he needed to kill this.

A searing pain tore through his arms at that second. That insistent voice that had been haunting him since he returned form 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 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.

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.

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. This was 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 concave 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 for 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. 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 fell with the fall. 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 Midoriya’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.

-

Surprisingly, Taishiro was the one that found him first.

Deku leaned against the broken piece of rock, too tired to do anything else. However, when he saw the man, he knew that break was over. He should get off his lazy ass and finish up their patrol and get back home. They wasted enough time here, after all.

“...Deku?”

He nodded his head, bending one of his legs and pushed against the ground so that he could push his body up the side of the wall.

“Hey, hey, easy,” a large hand came up to one of his arms. He gave this strangled noise, and Deku snapped his head up, was he injured?

“...You… okay?” he asked quietly.

Toyomitsu, who towered over him on a good day, had this pinched expression on his face.

“...Yeah, you’re the last one we lost,” he said quietly. His hand came up to his walkie, “Fat reporting in at the bottom floor. I found him. Hawks, requesting immediate-”

Before he could finish his words, there was a fluttering sound before a blur of red appeared.

“...Deku?” the blond said quietly, his hands coming up and then hovering right around Deku’s chest. “You gave us one hell of a scare, you know. I’m going to take you back to base-”

He cut himself off when Deku leaned away from his touch. It was a slight movement, but the action caused a shudder to tear right through him. He hissed quietly and managed to shake his head.

“You-”

“Burn,” Deku said quietly, “It needs to burn.”

Hawks expression tightened.

“We’ll get it done, but we need to get you to Natsuo,” he said. Still, Deku didn’t move any closer so he sighed back and reached for his walkie, “Endeavor-san, please come downstairs to start burning.”

“On my way.”

“Okay, can I take you now?”

As the words came out, Deku crumbled down. Toyomitsu’s arms shot out to help balance him, but Hawks was faster in collecting him in his arms. He kneeled down so that the young man’s helmet came to his shoulder, and wrapped his arms around his trembling figure. For a brief moment, something cold overcame his entire being, as Deku’s quiet pants resounded in his ear. Something wet seeped into his hand, and he realized with a start that he could feel something seep into his gloves.

The larger man at the side paled when he saw Deku’s back, confirming Hawks suspicions.

Fourteen of them came, but Deku was still alone. He didn’t know how to feel about it.

-

“...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, he briefly touched the young man’s arm, and only found mangled flesh. Now, the sensation wouldn’t go away. “C’mon, the least we can do is clean it up.”

### 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.

He made a fist with his hand and then opened it again.

“I got stuck. So I-”

“Tore off your own arm? Do you even feel pain?”

Enough pain to throw up, Deku kept to himself.

“It was faster,” he replied back.

“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.

“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, he would live as he always had.

“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 much warmer than 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 shock because Chisaki could not possibly mean what he thought he did.

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.

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 then.”

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. “Natsuo-kun’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 was 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 meds, 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.”

“...Report,” Deku replied back quietly.

“Yeah, yeah, 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. “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.

### 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 the same amount of shock as everyone else.

Because Deku, who had been on constrained to bedrest in the infirmary for the last few days, 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 over the top of his head. When he realized that Hakamata was there, he pulled it down and over his eyes. 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. 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, standing 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. In the

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. "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! Good morning!"

"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 side.

Deku looked up at Hakamata, his eyes bright behind his goggles, and he gave a curt nod.

"See?" he said quietly, "Nothing to be sorry about."

On occasion, the most he 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.

## [Year 3: Summer]

### Birds -

Deku was asleep. He was finally, finally asleep. He was resting, laying down on his back, in a bed, with his eyes closed. He couldn't go a few minutes without his eyebrows furrowing, but Natsuo was a quick learner.

When he wiped the sweat or held his hand, Deku's expression smoothed out. Whatever was plaguing his dreams could be chased away by the touch of a human hand. Natsuo felt immensely grateful for that.

The battle was brutal. Even though Chisaki managed to Overhaul his arm back, his other arm and entire side was a mess. Luckily, his legs were mostly intact and fine, with the exception of the bruises that coated the side of his leg, but in comparison to the rest of his body, it really was the better parts. The thought made him feel so guilty.

-

"I said to GET AWAY!"

Officially speaking, Todoroki Natsuo's quirk was recorded as "Ice."

However, in that moment, watching the monsters that came down with beaks made of bone pick at his patients, his friends, his companions, he brought forth a maelstrom of fire. Or at least, it started as fire, something that burned everything in its path, but it wouldn’t subside.

He spent an entire lifetime running and flinching from fire, so he was so certain that he knew what it was.

Ice so red that Natsuo thought it was fire. Ice so cold it burned through his enemies, and encased them in a solid-form of fire. He watched as the symptoms of burning flesh was encased and eroded the monsters he encased.

Burns laced up his arm, and his fire licked up the sides of the building in its rush to get to the damn flyers plaguing his home.

He couldn’t believe it.

In that instant, where he managed to save what was important to him, he was thankful that he had been born.

The ice shattered with ease, when Deku got up enough to come swinging. His fist crushed the solid bits of fire, and exploded the head of the monster on impact. The blood splattered out, painting the halls in a thick layer.

Once all the enemies were just pieces floating around in pools of blood, Deku’s hand came up to his side. Natsuo sprinted to his side, a lecture on his lips, but it died against the sticky sounds his shoes made against the ground. Deku’s sharp eyes came up to his face and it was like he lost his ability to speak.

Outside, the screaming hadn’t subsided. That was good, not that they were getting attacked, but that they were still alive. Even Natsuo knew that.

“You’re… going, right?” he asked, his hand throbbing from the burns.

“...Adrenaline,” he said. “...Do we have any adrenaline?”

“That will kill you,” Natsuo said.

Deku shook his head.

“That could save us.”

And Natsuo, who often felt as though he only knew how to sit still and be saved, never hated himself more. He turned back to do exactly that.

-

“...Testing, testing.” Their PA system came alive, and the panic, for a moment subsided. Everyone eagerly turned to their leader. “Everyone, this is Deku. I don’t have much time, so I’ll keep this brief.”

There was a brief silence. Those staring down their assailants and those running to a hiding place all pinned their hopes on the speaker systems. The enemy, who clearly didn’t know what or where the source of sounds came from, peered around curiously.

“...We are being attacked right now. Their numbers are large but they are light. Blunt force between their eyes or through their mouth is confirmed to work.”

As expected, Deku must have already torn through several.

“We have no backup. Our current ability on base is all we have for a counterforce. I-”

Several loud banging sounded out through the speaker, as though someone was trying to knock down a door or window.

“...But if there is anything here that you find precious, if there is anything here that you wish to protect, hold your ground. And I swear that we will see tomorrow together. Deku out.”

With that, the line died.

It was amazing how, with just a few words, the entire mood seemed to shift.

*>> Nine & Sasaki*

“I am here,” he said, stepping out. The dragon snapped and snarled right next to him, coming up to loom menacingly above them. “Hm, I am beginning to see the appeal in saying that,” he said, looking terribly amused despite the raging devastation around him.

While he, and everyone else, had heard of the things that Nine could do with his quirk, it did little to assuage the dread pooling in Sasaki’s gut.

Even as an ally, he was terrifying. He imagined that facing off against him would result in disparity and desolation. He had no doubt that if Deku didn’t make explicit instructions to protect the community here, they would have all been an unfortunate tragedy.

“My, what a mess to have occurred while I rested. Well, no longer.”

### Birds - Backup

“...That’s smoke.”

Chisaki stopped as he turned to Houjou, and realizing that the man wasn’t facing him, whipped around. His eyes widened as he took in the thin trail of smoke coming up to the sky.

“Oh, that’s close to our base, isn’t it?” Setsuno asked.

Chisaki hissed.

“You idiot, that is our base.”

Once that ran through their head, they started to run.

-

### Birds Conclusion-

Deku watched as the flock of bird-like demons flapped towards him. Their numbers were great, so many of them that for a moment, it was as though they made a blanket across the sky. If Deku wasn’t stuck fighting them, he’s certain that he would be in awe.

As it was, he couldn’t get a good count of them.

The one that he had underneath him started to squirm more. With his foot on its back, each wing captured by one of his hands, he watched as the worst possible thing flapped down around him. It writhed underneath him, desperate to escape, but Deku had a firm grip on it as he eyed its friends descending down around them.

These were beasts who came when the one he had cried. He tugged on its wings, and when it screamed out, saw the mass fluttering of the demons all around him. He didn’t want this. Of course he didn’t want to do this, and knowing that they were rushing as fast as they could for one of their own made everything worse. They came here, abandoning whatever it was that they were doing, because they heard the sound of one of their own crying. He really, really didn’t want this.

But he had people he wanted to protect too.

Hoping that the rest of them had gathered here, and that everyone else had bunkered down somewhere else, Deku took a deep breath. Readjusting his hold on the wings, he yanked them off.

The scream that emitted from the beast was almost human, but Deku had already resigned himself to sleepless nights. The righteous fury of the monsters who watched came flying at him. Which was fine. He was fine with this.

He understood that they were angry because he had killed many of their own. They had watched him kill one of their own in a painful and torturous way. He understood that they were angry and now were coming for him, to save the one under his foot and avenge the rest he killed. His heart ached, and he buried that feeling far away.

Maybe, if he was strong, they wouldn’t need to do this. Or maybe, if he was smart, he could find another way. Maybe, if he was a hero, everyone could be saved.

But Deku isn’t any of those. He’s a leader to all the lost and desperate that are foolish enough to follow him.

He clenched his hands into fists.

-

By the time he got some assistance, he was already making a pile of bodies onto the concrete. Unlike the majority of the things that he fought, they were lighter and had one main body. In addition to that, they came at him in a flurry of movement. While they didn’t hit hard, the long gashes that decorated his skin sapped at his strength through ribbons of blood.

As a result, he was as much of a mess as the area around him.

He didn’t know where his blood stopped and where their blood began. He was sticky, and he wasn’t certain what it was. His mind was swimming in and out of consciousness, to the point where he didn’t know if he was going to suddenly wake up in a pool of his own blood again. At that moment, he thought that he could forget his name, who he was, what he stood for. It was like there was a thick layer of mist all around him, obscuring his visions as he waddled through.

The only thing that was certain were the remains that laid scattered around him. Placing them, one after another into a pile, he was certain of this. These were all the ones that he killed. He did this. He was the sole person who was responsible for this. He…

...He really did deserve a fate worse than death, didn’t he?

“Deku! Deku, you need to… you need to get these checked out. Okay? I… I’m going to pick you up, alright?”

The hands that came to his shoulders were tight, and he focused in on them like they were his anchor back to reality. His eyes flitted up, and Tensei’s worried eyes stared back. His expression was pinched, and Deku briefly wondered what he was looking at that he was so concerned.

When his hands came down to his elbow, however, he saw something move. No, that’s a lie, he couldn’t have seen it, since it wasn’t like Tensei was a small person that he could see through. But he knew, there was something there. There was something, and it was hostile.

As though he hadn’t spent the last few hours getting torn apart, Deku’s hand shot up and grabbed Tensei’s shoulders and shoved him to the side. In his shock, the older man fell to a roll while one of the monsters screeched. It was missing its wing, but it catapulted itself at Deku with a ferocious roar. Its maw was wide open, fully intent on chomping down on the human.

As it came closer, Deku swung his fist up. If it had made contact, they would have learned that the mess of gore that caked their courtyard was done primarily from these swings. As it was, a jet blast blew a hole straight through it, and Gran Torino landed in front of him.

The man gave Deku a critical gaze, his expression twisting into something dark.

“What a mess,” he muttered darkly. “We need to get you to the infirmary, ASAP.”

“Deku,” Tensei was back, his face twisted into something stuck between pain and concern.

Slowly, as though he was processing the whole world at half the speed it actually was, he shook his head. He couldn’t go yet. He took a step, then another, surprisingly steady for someone who was riddled with injuries and drenched in blood. Hands, impossibly warm, came to his shoulders again, and he wondered who was shaking so hard. Tensei wouldn’t shake him, so was the ground shaking?

“Deku, please-”

“14,” Deku said, his voice coming out slowly as the world slowed down. “I let 14 away...”

Taking a few, slow breaths, he looked to where Spinner had appeared, seemingly out of nowhere. He watched as the lizardman pulled out his walkie and announced into it.

“14 stragglers! Orders from Deku to leave none alive!”

“Roger that.”

“There’s four taking off in the sky.”

“I’m on it-”

And the sounds seemed to drown out as Deku’s body swayed. The anchors at his arm were the only reason why he didn’t kiss the ground. Was he grateful?

No, he was relieved. There was no other reason why he closed his eyes in that moment and took a deep shuddering sigh. Good, that meant that he could focus on burning the rest. He tried to control his legs, but the hands were like vices that kept him where he was.

“...Burn,” Deku tried to explain. He had to do it.

“Leave it to us,” Gran Torino said. “You’ve done enough.”

A weight lifted off of his back, and Deku slowly nodded.

“I’m going to carry you now,” Tensei said, his eyebrows pinched.

With the scars that ran across Deku’s face, coupled with the fresh layer of blood that stained his skin, he doubted that it was any attractive or pleasing to see, but he managed to nod. Despite how putrid he must have smelled, Tensei smiled back. It was a shame that Ingenium wore a helmet, a long time ago, since head a very reassuring smile. Once he gave a nod, the older man scooped him up into his arms.

The feeling of being carried by someone is similar to the feeling of bleeding out. It felt like he was flying.

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The monster was dead, and Deku sighed. He gave a ragged sigh as he relaxed slightly. With one hand on his side, hopeful beyond hope that none of the stitches ripped when he realized that Aizawa had this expression on his face.

“...How long have you lost your eyesight in that eye?” he asked.

Which was stupid and silly because Deku had hit the monster perfectly. It was strange for anyone to ask if there was anything wrong with Deku’s eyesight when he had knifed down a monster from over 10 feet. It was strange, and it felt like a waste of time.

It would have been, except Deku’s right eye was bandaged up. He couldn't see out of that eye. However, his sense of balance was as good as ever. His accuracy hadn’t changed in the slightest. Battle genius or not, there was no way that someone could adapt that well and that quickly to something as critical as ½ of one of their senses.

As though realizing his mistake, Deku’s expression tightened. He took a deep breath and turned to the man.

“It’s not important-”

“Then when?”

At this point, some of others had arrived to see what the commotion was about. Waking up to Aizawa, Yamada looked worriedly from his friend to the resident leader. “Hey, we heard the commotion-whoa, Deku-”

“Answer me. When?” Aizawa hissed out, “It’s not important, is it?”

“...Tokyo,” Deku admitted at last. He looked back to his feet, “I started to lose it earlier, but I stopped once we came back from Tokyo.”

### Back on the Street

"The injured should stay back."

Enji's voice was stern, and his eyes never strayed from his target. Deku, looking up at his back, wondered how someone could look so reliable just by standing there. He took a slow breath before he stood up.

"Just stay down," Enji said, a frown stretching on his face, "And wait for Hawks to come-"

"You called?"

The man dropped down onto his feet, his eyes taking Deku's features in.

"Hawks."

Enji, who never sounded excited to see anyone, sounded particularly dead when he greeted the former hero.

"Heya," the blond greeted lazily. His eyes remained on Deku, however, and he stepped closer. One of his wings wrapped around Deku's back, more out of habit than anything, and he gave a charming smile. When he took a step closer, Deku placed his hand on his chest and pushed him backwards.

Immediately, his face fell.

Somewhere, behind them, Dabi's chortling laugh rang.

He pulled his wings back, folding them against his back before Deku looked off to the right. Whatever he saw had him on his feet and walking over, Hawks trailing right behind him.

Enji gritted his teeth.

Stay put, he said. Why was that so hard? What was the point of Hawks coming if he was just going to enable Deku anyways? Scowl in place, he spun on his heel to go after Deku.

If he wanted anything done, he better damn well do it himself.

### Questionable Teams

“No, I got a question,” Kaminari said, raising his hand. “Is uh… who decided the teams?”

He, like any good, young, healthy boy, grew up admiring heroes. Of course, that was pretty much a relic of the past at this point, but it used to be everything to him. Just a few years ago, he daydreamed daily about being a hero of his own. He would be so cool and girls would love him. His face would be everywhere and everyone would know his name.

But standing between Sakamata and Stain, he felt his heart waver.

“...Deku did,” Aizawa said, Deku conveniently right next to him, “Something wrong?”

Kaminari hesitated. He really didn’t know where anyone stood anymore. By all means, when Deku was unmasked and revealed to be a kid his age, he didn’t think that they would still listen and abide by his words. Deku was his age, didn’t know his name, ran away from social interactions, and Kaminari was honestly scared that if he said anything resembling impolite to him, someone was going to disintegrate him or burn him. Either way, there would be nothing left of him.

“I uh… just wanted to know why these teams were formed like this,” he said, hoping he didn’t sound too rude.

“...Teams are good,” Deku said.

Kaminari grimaced back, he really hoped this wasn’t going to turn into a lecture. Actually, he wished he never spoke up at all.

“They remind us that we need to come home.”

He paused. And around him, the others stared at Deku in just as much surprise.

Since he was Helmet, Deku was always alone. He moved by himself, and he never waited for anyone to come with him. Often, it felt like he was just dragging everyone along for the ride. This could be chalked up to the fact that there was no one else here, so it became natural for Deku to be alone. Kaminari knew that plenty of the adults, especially Sasaki and Inui, tracked down Deku to lecture him about the importance of teamwork.

For them, survivors that have grouped together or have been with other survivors, it was natural to group together. It made survival chances go up. People can rely on each other to watch their backs. They can cover more ground, have more eyes, the list goes on and on.

“And Kaminari has good energy,” he said. “It’s relieving.”

And Kaminari really did take it to heart.

### Subway

“So are you uh… like… better?”

Deku looked to where Twice sat on the table. The man opened his hands up and made a few wild motions.

“Like, you were down an arm earlier this month. And then the whole bird thing happened so you were out-out for like a week. You sure you wanna go now? There? It’ll still be there next week.”

He gave a curt nod.

“There’s no need to push it off,” he explained easily.

-

### Twice: the Villain

“I… I never told you this, but the truth is that before all of this, I was a villain.”

In all honesty, he never hid it. Twice was his villain name, and he’s certain that the people who recognized him had probably warned Deku at one point or another about him. And Magne. And Dabi. And Toga, even though she’s super cute. Oh, and Compress too, huh? He’s certain that Stain was suspicious enough to be his own brand of evil, but he couldn’t quite name it.

Anyways, the point was, it turned out that there were a bunch of them here.

Well, not to toot his own horn or anything, but he was definitely one of the more well-known of them. He’s gotten in a lot of trouble before, and if the world didn’t end, he would have continued to get in trouble. Now…

“I did a lot of bad things, and hurt a lot of people. So, you shouldn’t be surprised when I lie and stuff,” he continued, “Because that’s what a villain would do.”

He and him and other him and other-other him pushed and pulled against the large slab that was over his leg, his other double pulling Deku out from underneath the widened gap he and his clones made.

“So I won’t run when you tell me to. I won’t do as you say,” he said. “Not listening, is exactly what a villain would do, right?”

He grinned, wide and proud, and his other clones started to cheer.

“Yeah! We got your back whether you want us or not!”

“It’s a package deal! You can’t get rid of us!”

“We’ll kill you like this!”

“Your biggest mistake was ever helping us!”

He was a villain. He didn’t listen to rules or follow social norms. He didn’t care about things like that, and wanted to watch things fall apart. He didn’t care about anything and did things as he pleased. He wanted the big and the glamorous, and more importantly, he wanted someone to share it with.

One of his clones helped prop him up.

And protecting his friends, the people that accepted him, the person that treasured him, was something that he would do. Especially if that was something Deku didn’t want him to do.

“W...wait,” Deku’s soft voice called out.

Twice turned his back to him, ready to take on the whole damn world if it was for his friends. Because he was a villain.

That’s what villains did.

-

Deku didn’t have the courage to say it, but he was the same.

He was the same kind of shit that Twice claimed he was. The same kind of scumbag that Setsuno talked about. He was the worst of the worst.

It was about time that he remembered that.

### Thoughts on a Dying Leader

Deku knew that the world would be a better place without the monsters. And he also knew that many people on base didn’t like him because he made them question things. In many schools of thoughts and the rules that tthey tried to enact, he stood as an outlier that made them curb their tongue.

Which was fine. He knew that he wouldn’t last long like this. And then, he will pass away and they will no longer be held down by him. They would be free.

He didn’t realize that helping someone live put shackles on their person, but now he did. He wasn’t sure how to cut those bounds off, so he’ll kill everything first. Then, he would pass on. Then, they’ll be free and safe to do as they please.

It was, in his mind, the perfect plan and an ultimate goal.

Which was why, they needed to clean out the subway sooner rather than later.

## [Year 4: Autumn]

### Saving - KamiDeku

“...When you do things like this, I feel like you do trust me, us,” Kaminari said, quickly correcting himself. “So, how come you never ask for help anyways?”

Deku soldiered on, and for a moment, Kaminari wondered if he was going to be ignored.

“...If Dabi had the choice of saving me or Enji, who do you think he’ll save?”

That was a no brainer.

“You,” he replied back.

Deku nodded back, and the conversation ended there, as though that was all he needed to explain this.

“No, I still don’t get it,” Kamninari said, stopping Deku before he could leave.

The young man stared at him and gave a quiet sigh. “It means that, while saving me, he’s not saving someone else.”

### Shoji - Complaints From Someone Else

It was really hard to complain.

It was mainly because Deku didn't complain, and even when soaked in his own blood with broken bones protruding out of his skin, he made sure to finish out his patrol. Of course, this was far and few in between (thank god), but that didn't make it any easier. He snapped his fingers back into place, and pulled some duct tape out of his backpack. With an ease that Shoji would never be able to imitate, he taped his hand down to one of his daggers before he placed the duct tape back, and rumaged around for something. He pulled a water bottle out before he shouldered his backpack. Already, he was on his feet and ready to keep moving.

He passed the water bottle to Shoji.

"Here."

And more importantly, it made any general complaints they had sound so miniscule and uninportant in return.

Shoji, who was never one to complain to begin with, found it hard to even groan about the shoulder he scraped on the way down.

"...I'm okay," he said. It didn't feel right to use any supplies.

"Hey, they're over here!" the loud voice came from above. Shoji looked up to where they had fallen from.

It looked like the building flooring had broken through, and they fell into the underground parking deck of some sort. Needless to say, Shoji's fingertips were tingling from how hard they fell. It looked like the car had broken their fall. Well, he should just be happy that there was something that broke their fall.

Relief filled him to know that the others had come back for them. There were two types of people that came to patrol with them. The first type, which Shoji also counted as, were the type to look around for a way down and call out.

"Are you gentleman alive down there?!"

Like how Compress called out for them.

And then, there were the other type of people. The type that came sweeping down. Normally, it was Hawks, or other people that can safely jump to the ground.

Dropping to the ground with matchin expressions of annoyance, Miruko and Enji dropped down next to them.

"Injuries?" he asked while Miruko looked around where they fell.

Even after all this time, Enji felt just as imposing as he did when they first met. Shoji looked up at him, still, even after all the time and the extra foot he grew.

"I..." his shoulder ached, "I'm fine," he lied instead.

Blue eyes took in his features carefully. For a brief moment, Shoji thought that he was going to be called out. To his shock, the man nodded back before turning to Deku.

But where he and Enji only had a few inches between them, Enji still towered over Deku like a building.

Still, Deku didn't pay him a second of mind. Enji didn't say much, but his eyes fell to his hand.

"...You-"

Deku walked by him and to where Miruko was, uncaring and dismissive. Enji's expresison twisted to one where Shoji thought that Deku would be carrying burns on the way back, but he took a deep breath instead.

"Incoming!" Miruko called out, killing any other conversation that could have started.

-

"Oh jeez, Shoji-kun, that looks awful."

Shoji looked up to where Makoto's concerned expression was staring at his shoulder. He dropped his gaze into his lap.

"Oh," he said quietly. "It's not that bad."

"Is that why you aren't using your arm as much as you used to?" she asked.

He jolted, eyes snapping up to her unimpressed expression. She came around to take a seat next to him on the couch, keeping a respectful distance between them, but one that would easily be crossed if either of them reached for the other.

"Let me guess," she said, thoughtfully tapping her finger on her chin, "You probably thought that, since Deku-kun wasn't complaining, you didn't deserve to, right?"

Shoji frowned, was he that easy to read?

"My brother was the same," Makoto said. "I think that it's pretty stupid though."

His bottom lip trembled, and he narrowed his eyes at her.

"I mean, you guys aren't the same person, you know? Different things bother you, and it makes sense that your pain threshold is different too."

"...What?" Shoji said, struggling to internalize the words.

"For you and my brother, you guys probably think that you have to learn how to hide your pain so you don't worry anyone else. But you know, for Deku, he's been alone for a long time. He probably hasn't learned how to express that he's hurt."

Shoji frowned, because that sounded stupid. Most people cried when they were in pain, why would Deku be any different? From a young age, people are always taught to hide their pain and stop crying, after all.

"Well, what I wanted you to take from this conversation is that you are your own person. And hiding injuries like this might result into something that can't be healed later."

He hesitated.

"Isn't it better to throw it all in now?" he asked. "Since if we don't do everything we can now, we'll die and we'll lose that future anyways."

Makoto swatted his head. It didn't hurt, but the shock of the blow had him reeling backwards in shock. He cradled his head in his hands, eyes wide.

"Don't be stupid. It's not the just the two of you here. We have plenty of reliable people here to put to work."

Her grin was bright and shining, and she left like that. As she did, Shoji noticed that her belt was fully stocked with magazines.

Later, he went to Nine to get it looked at.

### JSDF convoy

-

When they woke up, it was to the smell of something sweet and delicious.

“Why … did you help us?”

Deku’s arm was in a sling and the way he slightly leaned to the side was the irrefutable proof that they weren’t good people. They were lost people, drunk on their incurable loneliness as they shuffled through their life, wondering what was reality and what was the nightmare.

“If I was in your shoes, I would have done the same thing.” he explained quietly.

If the look the lizard guy shot him was any indication, it was a full-faced lie. But still, he appreciated it.

### JSDF Base Remains (enter Koiichi)

“Wow…. More weapons.”

### Jiro’s Turnaround

"W-Wait," Jiro said, "I'm... I'm out of bullets."

It was shameful, she knew that, but hiding it would be even worse. Besides, knowing Deku... she watched as the man pulled his handgun out of his holster and pulled some extra magazines out of his back pouch. He handed them to her, and took his gloves off. He stuffed the gloves into his back pocket while Jiro took the weapon gratefully.

"I won't let you down," she swore.

He paused, and turned back to her.

"...The only thing that we need to do is return to base," he said. "There is nothing more important than that."

She stared at him, her eyes watering. She clenched her jaw tightly and gave a curt nod.

"...Ready?" he asked quietly.

She gave a grin.

"Let's go home, Deku," she said. "We got people waiting for us."

The man in the helmet nodded, before he stood up and started to walk through the hallway.

-

In her head, Jiro knew that Deku was alone before they met. He spent a long period of time, surviving on her own. And even though she knew that, she was still caught off-guard at how well he moved alone.

There weren't many monsters that they encountered, and between Jiro's hearing and Deku's swings, they had the upper hand. Making it out would have been easy until they heard wild gunfire from outside. Rushing to the window, Jiro stared as Kaminari and Tamaki were surrounded on all sides from the same group of monsters as before. In total, there were fourteen of them.

Without another word, Deku flung something at the monsters, nailing one in the head. The head splattered outwards, as though it had been shot by something.

Jiro stared at Deku, shocked that he could throw something at this distance with accuracy, until she realized that his fingers were bleeding. When he pulled his hand back and threw something again, even though his hand was empty, she came to a halting realization.

He was flicking his nails at the monsters.

Why? She had a gun.

Oh, she had the gun.

She took aim. But Deku's bleeding hand opened up in front of her.

"Loud," he explained easily as he started on the second hand.

He flicked out four nails before Kaminari and Takami regained control of the situation. They looked towards them and waved and Deku took a step back.

Following him down and out, Jiro felt so stupid. Why did she hesitate?

-

"...You know, when you guys said that you were going to pull your own weight and stuff," Toga commented when Jiro came into the gunrange. "But as it turned out, you're all talk, aren'cha?"

She gave a toothy grin as she emptied her magazine. Jiro gritted her teeth, but didn't say anything.

"What's the matter? Are you going to cry again? Hm, maybe you'll call one of those sweet heroes to wipe your tears and tell you that you'll be stronger one day?"

"W-What's your issue?" she hissed. "I-I'm trying my best. I made my mistake, and I won't make it again."

The blond pulled her gun back, putting it back into the holster before turning to the young girl at her side. The unsettling grin didn't change.

"I don't believe you," Toga said, laughing brightly. "But I mean, it's fine since no one died this time, right?"

Jiro, who still felt so stupid for hesitating and waiting for orders, who still remembered the hopelessness she felt when her parents hid her in the closet when mosnters came tearing into her their home, felt everything bubble up inside of her until it hit a boiling point.

"Then what am I supposed to do?" she screamed out. "What can I do? I don't know how to fight! I just learned how to fire a gun! I don't want anyone else to die trying to save me! I don't want to be left alone because someone tried to save me! I-" she took a heaving breath in, her frustated tears making her eyes burn hotly and the air in her lungs turned thin. "I don't want to be weak."

She scrubbed at her eyes. After her outburst of emotion, the only thing left was the shame inside of her for exposing herself like this to the blond.

"...If you're sick of being so weak, then get stronger. If you're sick of being useless, then become useful," Toga said bluntly. Jiro's eyes snapped up to Toga's face, where her grin had turned into something more gentle and well, sane. "But don't become too useful, because I'll kill you if he starts to use you more than me."

Jiro stared at her for a moment, and that hopeless bundle of emotions converted into something else.

"...Not," she said quietly, before clearing her throat and glaring right back at Toga, "if I kill you first."

There was a brief moment of shock, and Jiro couldn't believe that she actually said that, and meant it. However, now that the words were out, she wanted to uphold them.

She didn't want to be a burden to anyone anymore. She didn't want to be the default person that has to be looked after and saved.

"Ehhh, looks like I should step up my game too."

This time, she won't be the person that sits and waits in that closet while her family is torn from her hands.

This time, she'll fall with them.

### DabDek - to call for help

Deku leaned against the wall, his shoulder and head hunched up as he tried his best to breath slowly through his nose. His hand came up to his ribs, gently prodding at it to see if it was broken. There was something embedded, a stick of some sort, sticking out of his thigh, but it didn't mess with his breathing like his ribs did. Since he could still walk, he assumed that the leg-injury wasn't actually that bad.

"Hey there, Sweetheart."

Deku turned so that his back was leaning against the wall instead. Looking up, he met Dabi's cool blue eyes.

"Looks like you took a heavy hit," he murmured quietly. He kneeled in front of him, "Do you want me to take this out?"

Deku placed his hand on the stick and yanked it out. Dabi's eyebrow arched.

"Alright, that works too."

"Burn."

The man stilled. Dragging his eyes to the wound and then back up to the vizor.

"You got it, boss."

He stood up, placing his hand on Deku's shoulder and pushing him against the wall more firmly. He placed the other hand on the open wound, feeling the sticky blood tainting his palm. Just touching it, he understood that Deku had this wound for a while.

He closed his eyes and called his fire. An amount that wouldn't kill the person he was holding. He never needed to control his fire like this. However, he wouldn't mess this up.

"You could have called me."

"I know."

"If you knew then why didn't you..." his voice trailed, as he realixed that Deku had answered after all. "You... knew? And you still didn't call me?"

Deku nodded.

"I knew you'd find me."

Dabi's hand gripped his shoulder tighter, sitting on an tight ball of anxiety. "I can't believe you." he murmured.

He shook his head in disbelief. His hand came up to show Deku the stain of blood on his hand. It wasn't more than just dried and burnt bits anymore.

"You don't have to wait."

Deku placed one of his hands on Dabi's chest and pushed him back. When the older man leaned back, he straightened up. Without another word, he continued to walk down the street. Dabi took a deep breath, really thinking that he was used to this by now and feeling stupid for ever expecting different, when Deku turned back.

"Ready?"

...And Deku had never done that before.

His heart flip-flopped in his chest as he quickly closed the space between them. The two walked almost side-by-side down the street, and Dabi never thought he would be one of the pathetic people who could feel moved from this simple gesture.

"So, where to?"

Deku lifted his bat and pointed at a nearby building.

"Cleaning."

Dabi blanched. In a normal world, with society functioning, he's certain that Deku would be the type of guy who would choose the worst first date destination, like a haunted house or something.

It... sounded a lot better than he thought. Dabi would have gone.

"Hm, alright," he said. His eyes slid to Deku. "Let's go then."

Wherever, whenever, whatever. It wasn't like Dabi had anything better to do.

### Kouta + The Incident with Survivors

>> Mahoro Shimano & bro: Mahoro Katsuma

-

Kouta stared at the group of survivors. There were about twelve of them. All of them were in varying states of disarray. Their clothes were torn, they were dirty and some were injured. Weapons were bent, dented, dirty, and just as tattered as their clothing and backpacks. Their eyes and cheeks were sunken in, a product of relentless unrest and a bad diet.

It had been a long time since Kouta had seen anyone like them. No one on base made lightly of their health and well-being.

"A... child?"

God, Kouta thought to himself, he hated adults. Why did he have to find survivors? Why did they have to be a group of adults?

No, that's a lie, there were a small child among them. Two, actually, since a woman had a toddler in her arms. 14 total then.

"Are you... alone? Do you want to come with us?"

"No," Kouta said, putting his gun back in its holster. He grabbed his walkie right as one of them hissed out.

"A gun? Why does a child like you have a gun?!"

Kouta rolled his eyes. Adults. Wasn't it obvious why he had a gun? In this day and age? Did they think that he was out on a walk to the store or something?

"Kid, that's very dangerous to have. Why don't you give it to this oji-san instead?"

Kouta was going to strain his eyes from how hard he was rolling them. He pulled his walkie out from his pocket.

"Survivors by the Westside," he announced into the walkie.

"On my way," the walkie crackled back to life.

"Wait... are you apart of a group?"

Kouta thought it was pretty fucking obvious, giving his equipment and the fact that he had a walkie-talkie that someone answered, but nodded.

"Yes," he said.

"C-could it be?" their eyes shined as they regarded him, "Is your group with Kaname? Are we finally here?"

Kouta frowned and shook his head. "No, that's not who we are. Are you going somewhere?"

If they were going somewhere, didn't that mean that they could leave? Personally, Kouta didn't like people. He especially didn't like other survivors. The people at base were occasionally tolerable, but if he had a choice, he'd rather not spend any more time with them than he absolutely had to. He couldn't help but think that it would be better to send them on their way. It would be better than trying to add them into their life, when he was almost certain that these people who scoff at the fact that Deku was their leader.

"Yes, we received a broadcast that there's a group by the Bay area that promised a safe zone..." one of the men said slowly. "Uhm, so are there any adults in your group? Like an older person that we can talk to about it?"

Most definitely, they wouldn't take well to the fact that Deku was their leader. He took a deep breath, because no matter how much he didn't like them, he knew what Deku would do.

"...We can help a little," he said, "And make sure you get there."

"Kouta-kun!"

He raised his hand to where the younger Iida and Spinner came running up to him.

"When'd you get so far?" Spinner asked.

Kouta shrugged back, "I saw something move. Turned out to be alive." He motioned to the ground behind him.

Spinner grimaced at the sight of survivors and then looked back to Kouta. "Injuries?"

"They're good enough to walk around," the young man reported back.

"No, you," Iida said, "How are you?"

Kouta felt something warm and fuzzy grow inside of his heart.

"I'm okay too. They don't want to stay," he said, quickly changing the topic. "They're going somewhere else."

The lizardman nodded. He looked them over.

"Hm, that's good. Why haven't they left yet?"

"Wait, please, just a little bit. We just..." one of them eyed them, eyeing their clothing and equipment longingly. "Please, you said a little bit of help."

Spinner's eye widened as he spun to Kouta, "Did you truly? Promise them help?"

Kouta blinked back, taken back from the intensity that the man leveled him with and slowly nodded.

"...That's... what Deku would do," he said.

"Yes," Iida nodded next to him, "This was the right things to do," he said. "I'm sure that Deku will understand. Helping someone can not be the wrong thing."

Kouta, who looked more and more disbelieving the more Iida spoke, gnawed on his bottom lip.

"Can't we just take care of this now, and send them on their way?" he asked quietly.

"Normally, I'd agree," Spinner nodded, his face twisting into a grimace. "But if they're traveling through, then I'm sure that Deku will want to hear about their travels."

The revelation made Kouta's eyes widened.

"...Well, you guys were lucky you didn't run into the trigger-happy ones first," Spinner said, turning to the group of strangers. "Fair warning, there's plenty of us who will be looking for a reason to kill you. Do your best not to give them one."

At that, the three gave the group of strangers a cold look.

"This way," Spinner said, stepping back to lead the group back.

"I'll get the back," Kouta said.

Iida gave a small salute, "I'll head back and let them know we're coming."

"Ah, thanks."

It may look like extra work, but Kouta realized that it was because they didn't want the survivors hearing the report. The inkling feeling that he did something wrong worried it's way further into his heart.

-

Takahiro Takeshi was a normal business man before this whole thing blew up in his face. Since then, he had been a part of several survivor groups.

That's why, he knew for certain that this group would never survive.

He and the 11 other adults here managed to scrape by so far by living cautiously. They only moved when they were certain that it was safe and doable. Their safety and security was the most important thing. They've all come from other groups that had fallen apart. They knew a thing or two about survival at this point.

And taking everything that they knew and neatly tossing it out the window, was the person that stood at the top of this group.

"Deku, guess what I found today!" Kouta, who seemed to just be an angry boy just a few moments ago, went bouncing up to the group of people standing in front of a giant bonfire.

Takahiro felt all the color drain out of his face.

They were burning bodies. There were a large pile of bodies, taller than Kouta, piled up and burning. The smell was absolutely atrocious, and Takahiro shot a hand out to keep the children from getting closer. There were some things that they wanted to protect the innocent from. However, next to the burning pit, stood former Pro Hero Endeavor.

Takahiro felt his jaw loosen.

Number Two here was here. With a ugly scar running from his forehead to his chin, he otherwise looked as though he was about to go out. Dark cargo pants made of denim and a sleeveless hoodie, so that his bare arms were exposed to the eyes. His arms flexed and his muscles contorted with every move, strength brimming under the skin. Bright blue eyes watched over the fire, as though he was there to make sure that the campfire wouldn't blaze out of control, instead of watching bodies burn into nothing.

Looking at him, no one would ever think that the world had ended.

The Deku that everyone kept referencing turned. He was

What had they come in to?

-

"...Kouta," Deku spoke quietly, but his words carried weight. The area fell silent in an instant. "Did you tell them that we would help?"

"J-Just a little," he said, confused on why Dabi groaned into his hand and Aizawa gave a long sigh through his nose. "Did I do something bad?" he asked quietly.

Dabi got to his feet, "Fucking shit. We have to teach them to be distrustful,' he muttered under his breath.

"...It's fine," Deku confirmed. He stood up, clipping the strap of his helmet back into place. "I'll escort them."

"No, let's "

### New Survivors, Same Problems

"Augh," Kouta groaned. "I hate adults," he muttered.

"What's up?"

"All they do is complain. They make more work for everyone too. It's so stupid. They act like they're better than everyone, even though they don't do anything."

\*

"I don't like you," Eri said bluntly, pointing at Katsuma.

Katsuma's eyes welled up in tears, probably never expecting that meeting another kid his age would end like this. Next to him, his sister geared up to fight right back and Eri shook her head.

"I don't like any of you," she clarified. "Especially not the stupid adults you brought."

Fuyumi, who was trying to run damage-control, frantically tried to get into the middle of it.

"E-Eri-chan," she tried to sound calm and reasonable, "Eri-chan, you can't just say things like that. It could hurt someone's feelings."

"Yeah, but now he knows that I'll never come to save him," she explained frankly. "You can't feel if you're dead."

Fuyumi's eyebrows shot up. "Eri-chan!" she snapped out, and the sudden tone made the young girl flinch back. "That's not something that you should ever say! Okay? You just don't say it!"

The young girl's furrowed back, but kept her mouth closed.

"Now, apologize. That was very mean of you to say."

And Eri, her eyes blazing with a fire that had never been turned to Fuyumi, turned on her heel and ran out.

"Eri!"

-

"...What does it matter what you think?" Kouta asked, his eyes narrowed like he was both confused and irritated. "Why does your opinion matter when you aren't even going to stay?"

## [Year 4: Winter]

### Deku’s Amnesia Incident (p2)

The time Deku forgot everything again, except this time, he remembered more.

### ‘Recovered’ & Out

The first time Deku got to go out after losing his memories, about eight different people pulled him to the side to explain how to use a walkie-talkie. The conversation usually started with "this is a walkie, press this to speak" and ended with them repeatedly mentioning how essential it was to speak.

After the third time they did it, he stopped thinking it was funny.

"So, where to, bossman?"

Deku arched an eyebrow at Twice.

"...Shouldn't... I be asking that?" he asked quietly.

The man looked at him and scoffed.

"You really want me to believe that, if we ask you to go somewhere, you will?"

Both of Deku's eyebrows raised.

"Yes?" he tried, but somehow, it sounded like a lie.

Next to him, as though he told him the Joke of the Century, Twice bent over and laughed long and loud.

"What's up?" Dabi asked, coming up next to them as he pulled on his gloves.

"He just asked me where we were going to go!" Twice laughed, the sound reverberated around them. "// I'll kill you if you come too close, Dabi!"

Dabi smoothly ignored the second part of his words, and turned to Deku with an amused expression.

"Even if we choose, you're not the type to follow," he said. Despite how annoying that should be, he just looked incredibly fond. "Just go and leave us scrambling in the back."

"...That sounds counter-intuitive."

Dabi shrugged back, "It worked." He leaned to the left and then the right, and pulled his boot up to tug at one of the daggers he tucked into it. Straightening out, he met Deku's eyes. "Well? What are you waiting for?"

"...You're ready?"

"Me? You're waiting if I'm ready?"

Deku looked at Dabi, then to Twice (who was still laughing) and then back to the taller man. He gave a curt nod, and Dabi's lips twisted into a bigger grin. He tipped his head back and gave a huff.

"Damn," he said. "Sorry to make you wait."

It was times like this where Deku was almost scared to remember what happened before. Why did he do the things that he did? What did he do, so often, so that the people around him acted like this? From the sounds of it, he kept to himself in the most extreme of ways. At the same time, he doesn't believe that, since he felt so close to the people around him.

Surely, if he was as alone as they made him sound, he wouldn't have cared THIS much about the people around him.

"Alright then, where to?"

He stared at him blankly.

"...You got any... ideas on where you want to go?" Twice tried, "// Anywhere is fine as long as something dies."

Deku hesitated, but apparently he was super easy to read because Dabi nodded to encourage him.

"...If we go west for a few," he said quietly, "...there hasn't been any updates on the records. Maybe it'll be a good place to... start?"

Blue eyes stared at him for a moment longer, an expression that Deku didn't know how to describe, as he sighed back.

"You know, I thought ... that if you ever told me what your plan was, I would be like, happy or something."

He placed his hand on the back of his neck, and he looked like he lost something.

But Deku didn't know what he was supposed to do.

"What does that have to do with me?" he asked, a frown on his face. "If there was something you expected of someone, then shouldn't you be the one to describe it?"

Both men stared at him in surprise, and Deku shook his head.

"Let's go."

-

"And if you say to meet back up to our rendezvous point," Yamada explained, "That means here."

"Here."

"Yeah, since the streetlamp here is tall and has a giant ribbon on the top, it'll be easy to find as a landmark. Then, even if you're lost, you'll be able to find your way back."

Deku, who was more or less used to the fact that everyone assumed that he would break rank and wander away, looked up to stare at the dirty red ribbon that sat at the top of the streetlamp. It looked like it used to be a part of a Christmas decoration, from a long, long time ago.

"Why would I get lost?"

"Oh, do you remember this place?" the blond asked.

Deku looked around and pointed at Enji. "Isn't he coming?"

Enji, as though sensing that someone was talking about him, looked up. Seeing that Deku was pointing at him, he stalked his way over, his expression thunderous. It looked like he was nervous, maybe a little concerned about something, but it made Yamada's back go ramrod straight.

"What."

When Enji asked about something, it did not sound like a question.

"Are you coming with me?" Deku asked.

The blond looked nervously between Enji and Deku, but the young man couldn't figure out why.

Enji, however, arched an eyebrow at him.

"That was the idea," he said.

Deku nodded and turned to Yamada, "Then, I won't get lost."

The words sank in deeply, and the confusion on Enji's face melted into something that looked painful. On the other side, Yamada's expression was hidden as he covered his face with his hands.

"...That's good," the blond said, but he managed to give a tired smile at them.

## [4+ Year]

### Bakugo - The Man From the Tear in the Sky

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Twice made a face, as he stomped his feet, “But I don’t want to be the one that have to take him. Aren’t you stronger than me? Shouldn’t you do it? // Let’s just kill him and be done with it.”

“Don’t be like that. You lost when he plated rock, paper, scissors,” Tensei said, good naturedly.

Twice whined again, but he leaned down. His hand grabbed the mysterious blond’s arm when a sharp voice made his entire body freeze.

“Get away from him!”

He jerked backwards, at the same time as Tensei, and the two lifted their hands up in the universal sign of surrender.

To their shock, Deku came running past them. He stumbled hard, as though his legs had stopped working, before he managed to throw himself onto the blond on the ground. His hands went to grab him, but they stopped right before he could touch him.

“He-he’s bleeding,” Deku whispered. He reached for walkie and immediately spoke into it, “Keigo, I need help-”

Before he could finish his words, a fluttering was heard and Hawks was next to him. The blond’s concern and uncharacteristically serious expression slowly morphed into the same confused expression that Twice had.

Still, he moved to kneel right next to Midoriya, who flinched when he came close. After a shocked beat of silence, the young man’s hand shot out to grab Hawks’ shirt.

“Please,” he said quietly, “Please help me.”

Hawks stared for a moment longer before his hand came up to grab Deku’s. He squeezed it as gently as he could.

“Of course,” he said quietly. His feathers went to grab the blond on the ground, and he watched in alarm as Deku flinched when the blond’s body was lifted.

He looked to Twice and Tensei, who shrugged back at him.

Who was the blond?

-

Deku, for the first time since any of them had known him, abandoned the cleaning section and just continued following the blond that Hawks had carried on his feathers.

“Hey, go sanitize…” Nejire, who was in charge of making sure the patrol got cleaned up today, felt the words die in her mouth. She stared at the young man in shock, but Deku didn’t even notice her.

He tried to walk right past her, and it was enough time for Aizawa to get there.

“You know that you have to clean up that blood,” he said, moving his body in front of Deku’s path. “Hey, Deku-”

“But he’s… He’s…” Deku’s voice broke and as soon as the mysterious blond went through a door, he stopped completely. “Oh,” he said quietly. He looked around, as though finally recognizing where he was for the first time. “Oh, we… We came back.”

Aizawa shot Hawks a glance, hoping to get anything, and the former hero shrugged back.

### Spring: Telling Kacchan about Kaya

“..Kacchan,” Midoriya started. The blond he called for stared at him, his expression blank and red eyes carefully focused on his face. “Kaya-chan wanted me to tell you that she’s waiting for you under the big tree in the courtyard.”

There was a long silence, and the blond stared at him.

“...Were you waiting this whole time to say that?”

Midoriya nodded.

“...Is she even alive?”

He shook his head.

“But I promised her that I would tell you.”

There was another silence and Bakugo rubbed his temples.

“I can’t fucking believe you. This whole time, you’ve been holding on to that?”

Almost four years later, Midoriya fulfilled his promise.

### Kacchan v Deku

“I… I waited,” Midoriya said quietly. “I waited here and I tried to protect but I couldn’t. I… I couldn’t protect anything but I-”

“Protect?” Bakugo frowned, “Since when the hell would anyone ask you to protect something?”

Green eyes widened and the blond scowled.

“What, you got a quirk now so you think you’re hot stuff?” he asked, his voice dropping in pitch and dripping in venom. “You think that you can slack off now that you stole that quirk? Is that it? You just sat on your ass and waited around-”

“I was waiting for you-”

“You weren’t waiting for shit!” Bakugo shouted back, “What the fuck have you spent these last years doing?!”

Midoriya felt his temper flare. He shot up to his feet, and his chair clattered behind him.

“I wanted to protect a place that you could return to?”

“Return to? You think I would have ever wanted to return to you?” Bakugo snapped back, jumping to his feet as well. In less than a second, he tackled the other man into the wall. “You’re the exact fucking same, aren’t you Deku?! You hide behind your pretty words but in reality, you’re fucking nothing! You’ve never been anything and that’s why you follow other people!”

“It’s not like that!” Midoriya snapped back. He swung hard at Bakugo.

The blond dodged, much more accustomed to fighting with his anger than Midoriya was. Their current injuries didn’t help their situation, but it also served to hinder their movement. It didn’t do much to stop them. Bakugo unleashed his quirk against the young man’s stomach, sending him flying out of the room. In a split second, a whip wrapped around his ankle and tossed him into the wall.

The wall broke apart, and Bakugo growled back. In less than a second, Midoriya was already charging at him like a bull. The blond met the attack head on, wrapping his arms around his childhood friend’s torso and tossing him over using all his strength.

“Then what is it like?!” he screamed back. “Everyone here calls you Deku, don’t they?! You’ve already completely replaced everything from back then, haven’t you?!”

“No, I … I forgot for a moment but I remember now! I didn’t leave because I was waiting!”

“Waiting?! I never asked you to wait!”

“I promised Kaya-chan-”

“You never listened to anyone before so why did you start now?!” Bakugo screamed, his words hitting Midoriya’s heart harder than his fist. “You never kept your promises before so why did you start now?!”

Their stitches and other old wounds were probably all tearing open, but the rush of adrenaline blocked out anything that could stop their fight. The years of pent-up emotions came flooding out between their yells and firsts.

“You fucking nerd! You never listened when I told you to stop fucking following me, so why did you wait now?” Bakugo’s expression twisted, his frustrated tears escaping his eyes as his voice turned raw. “Why didn’t you follow me?”

Gran Torino and Aizawa, who finally made it to the scene, finally ripped the two boys off each other. They were yelling something, but Bakugo’s and Midoriya’s full and undivided attention were on each other instead. Eventually, Bakugo wrenched himself out of Aizawa’s grip as Tamaki looked worriedly between Midoriya and the fuming blond.

Bakugo was taken back to the infirmary, forcefully, while Midoriya laid on his back.

He pressed his heels into his eyes, his entire body shuddering. His spirit mourned, but he couldn’t bring himself to cry. His throat burned hotly, but his eyes remained dry.

Why… didn’t he go?

### Patrol

Midoriya’s eyes watered as words of gratitude got stuck in his throat. Because the thing was, he didn’t really care about recognition or reward. He could live without A/C and heating. He didn’t need the convenience of grocery markets, and he was certain that he would be fine in a world without heroes.

More than anything else, what he missed the most and what he wanted the most was this.

“You? Alone? Yeah, right. You couldn’t even go to the bathroom by yourself till we were in the fifth grade,” Bakugo snapped back. “C’mon, you stupid nerd.”

He wanted someone who didn’t believe him when he said that he was okay being alone.

### Kacchan -

From the corner of his eyes, he saw Bakugo walking across the way to get rid of some of the trash. His heart swelled at the familiar sight, and he rushed over.

“Ka-”

“Ah, Deku-shounen, good timing. Are you busy?”

The young man hesitated, looking at Yagi’s smile and then back to where Bakugo had already left his line of sight. He gave a little sigh but turned to the older man. He shook his head, and walked towards him, ready to help in any way he could.

Next time, he told himself.

-

Once, their eyes met. Across the way as Midoriya returned from his recent scouting trip. He scrambled to take his helmet off, and by the time he got free of it, Sako excitedly stood between him and Bakugo.

He blinked at the older man, who was fretting over him for some strange reason. When he tried to look around Sako, it was to no avail, as Bakugo was nowhere to be seen anymore. A little sad, he moved on from those feelings as he focused his attention on Sako.

It was rare enough that this man was happy as it was. He thought that it was a good look on him.

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“Kacchan, can you help me with the laundry-”

Before he could finish his words, Mirio phased through from the floor above.

“I would be happy to help!” he shouted with poorly contained enthusiasm. His shining grin was far too bright for Midoriya’s eyes, and in his surprise, was whisked away. Flustered at the appearance of a suddenly naked man, Midoriya lost his ability to fight back.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Bakugo turn the corner and away.

Drat. Maybe next time.

### Mountain

“...We should leave,” Midoriya spoke up one day, looking over a map.

“And go where?” Bakugo asked dryly, leafing through the notebook in front of him. “This kanji is wrong too, dumbass. God, you still don’t know how to read?”

“I never had a lot of chances to read,” Midoriya pouted back, but leaned in to see what the man was talking about. “But, we haven’t been to the mountains in a while. Lots of greenery, a little farm, and access to some more resources.”

“Tch, sounds pretty half-assed,” he replied back, but there was an unmistakable glint in his eyes as he looked at the man. “You just want to eat those apples, don’t you? I won’t carry you even if you pass out halfway up.”

Midoriya gave a cheeky grin back. “Sounds like fun, right?”

“Hm, whatever. I guess leaving you to do it will result in our deaths,” the blond replied back, a smile hanging on his face as he remembered a childhood far away. “When should we go?”

“Traveling will be best in autumn, but that means we will have to hunker down for the winter. Maybe we should go right after winter, right when it gets warm? There should be some left and we’ll be back before the start of winter.”

“...Huh, I guess you can really use that head of yours when you want to, hm, nerd?”

“Mou, Kacchan, you make it sound like you wouldn’t go either.”

Bakugo snorted in response.

A loud clattering suddenly drew their attention to where Tamaki had entered the room. The tea that he was bringing had clattered and clashed onto the ground, and brought the attention of the others.

“Oi, you fucking extra!” Bakugo snarled, getting to his feet and grabbing the trash can to help with the clean up. “Fuck, be careful! Hey, get a towel!”

Midoriya reached over to the box of towels behind him, and when he turned around, realized that Tamaki’s pale face was staring right at him. Behind him, some of the others have appeared, probably alerted to the sudden crash.

“What… what do you mean, leaving?”

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“...Your words carry a lot of weight here,” Bakugo said. “Do us all a favor and be more aware of it.”

“...I don’t get it,” Midoriya said.

The blnd stared at him and then grinned, wolfish and confident in a way that embodied courage to Deku.

“Then, fucking say it. If you don’t say it now, it’s only going to get worse from here.”

And Midoriya thinks that a world without Bakugo would be a quiet place.

He stood up, and walked out. And for every single person he saw, announced loud and proud, “After dinner, I have an announcement to make.”

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“This isn’t the whole world,” Midoriya said, his gaze falling to Kouta. “I don’t want you to think that it is.”

“So you’re just… gonna leave?”

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