

MY HERO ACADEMIA

**SCHOOL
BRIEFS**



60

**ORIGINAL STORY BY
KOHEI HORIKOSHI**

**WRITTEN BY
ANRI YOSHI**

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The Red Oni Won't Weep





U.A. HIGH SCHOOL

Hero Course: Class 1-A



Izuku Midoriya

Birthday: July 15
Quirk: One For All



Katsuki Bakugo

Birthday: April 20
Quirk: Explosion



Shoto Todoroki

Birthday: January 11
Quirk: Half-Cold Half-Hot



Tenya Ida

Birthday: August 22
Quirk: Engine



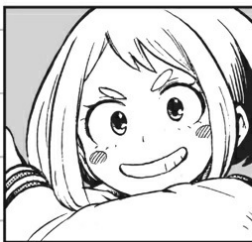
Fumikage Tokoyami

Birthday: October 30
Quirk: Dark Shadow



Minoru Mineta

Birthday: October 8
Quirk: Pop Off



Ochaco Uraraka

Birthday: December 27
Quirk: Zero Gravity



Momo Yaoyorozu

Birthday: September 23
Quirk: Creation



Tsuyu Asui

Birthday: February 12
Quirk: Frog



Yuga Aoyama

Birthday: May 30
Quirk: Navel Laser



Mina Ashido

Birthday: July 30
Quirk: Acid



Mashirao Ojiro

Birthday: May 28
Quirk: Tail



Denki Kaminari

Birthday: June 29
Quirk: Electrification



Eijiro Kirishima

Birthday: October 16
Quirk: Hardening



Koji Koda

Birthday: February 1
Quirk: Anivoice



Rikido Sato

Birthday: June 19
Quirk: Sugar Rush



Mezo Shoji

Birthday: February 15
Quirk: Dupli-Arms



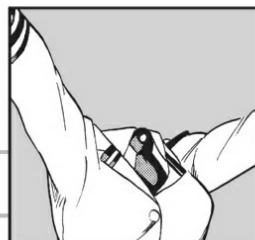
Kyoka Jiro

Birthday: August 1
Quirk: Earphone Jack



Hanta Sero

Birthday: July 28
Quirk: Tape



Toru Hagakure

Birthday: June 16
Quirk: Invisibility

Hero Course: Faculty



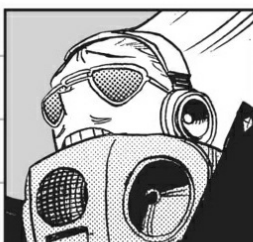
All Might

Birthday: June 10
Quirk: One For All



Shota Aizawa

Birthday: November 8
Quirk: Erasure



Present Mic

Birthday: July 7
Quirk: Voice



Midnight

Birthday: March 9
Quirk: Somnambulist



Vlad King

Birthday: November 10
Quirk: Blood Control

General Studies: Class 1-C



Hitoshi Shinso

Birthday: July 1
Quirk: Brainwashing

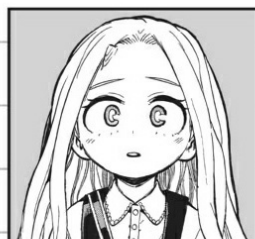
Hero Course: Class 3-B



Mirio Togata

Birthday: July 15
Quirk: Permeation

Other



Eri

Birthday:
December 21
Quirk: Rewind

STORY

People in this world possess exceptional abilities called "Quirks." Some use their Quirks in pursuit of peace, while others choose to commit crimes with their powers, but they're all part of the same superpowered society. Izuku Midoriya may have been born Quirkless, but he nonetheless gets into U.A. High School, an academy for heroes in training. There, he walks the path toward becoming a true hero! The stories in this book offer a heretofore unrevealed glimpse at the everyday lives of the students attending U.A. High.



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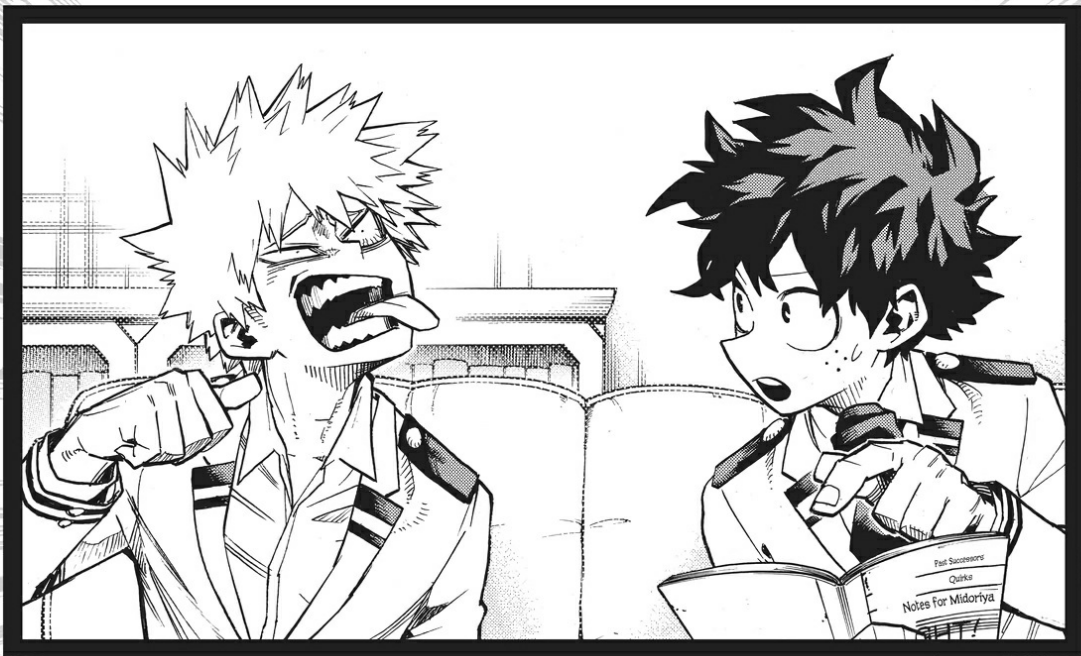
[Contributors](#)

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Part 1

The Red Oni Won't Weep



The work-study program for hero hopefuls had started up again at the government's request, leading the students of the Hero Course to spend another chunk of time at hero agencies where they could hone their skills and improve their teamwork. Meanwhile, it came to light that Kurogiri—the member of the League of Villains currently confined at the maximum-security facility known as Tartarus—had in fact been created from the corpse of Oboro Shirakumo, a friend of Shota Aizawa and Present Mic from their school days. The authorities had summoned the two schoolteachers for a confrontation with the villain, and their appeal to Kurogiri had yielded a single fragment of intel. It wasn't much, but it was enough for Hawks (who had already infiltrated the Paranormal Liberation Front) to suss out the location where Tomura Shigaraki was in the process of having his Quirks powered up. Behind the scenes, the plans for a massive mobilization effort were coming together—one that would ideally take out the entire Paranormal Liberation Front in one fell swoop, and which would involve both professional heroes and the Hero Course students of U.A. High School.

Winter's icy bite was still a bit too fierce for the cherry blossoms to bloom, but early February brought with it the Japanese holiday of Setsubun, marking the last day of winter according to the old calendar. The exact customs for the holiday differ from region to region, but the one nearly universal practice involves driving away *oni* (horned Japanese ogres) by throwing roasted soybeans and shouting, "Oni, begone! Good fortune, come in!" Oni have been a familiar concept within the Japanese collective consciousness for ages, between this bean-scattering practice, the game of *onigokko* (known in the West as tag), appearances in fairy tales, and any number of oni-related sayings and idioms. In modern times, there's even an app for receiving phone calls from oni. Surely, though, one reason for the deep-rooted position of oni in Japanese culture is the tale of Momotaro. As the story goes, Momotaro (a boy born from a giant peach) enlists the aid of a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant to defeat an island's worth of wicked oni. In that sense, Momotaro is synonymous with the concept of oni slaying.

"... Which is why you'll be splitting up into a 'Team Oni' and a 'Team Momotaro' for this face-off," explained Shota Aizawa. An excited gasp rose

from the members of class 1-A, all lined up in their gym uniforms. A lesson at school had to be taken seriously, but Aizawa's use of the word *face-off* brought to mind a game, and games meant fun. The location of the lesson also played a role in the kids' excitement; a hill rose in the center of the space, surrounded by a modest forest. Boulders dotted the area, providing plenty of hiding spots, as well as vantages from which to launch sneak attacks.

Before the students could get too worked up, Aizawa unveiled a box.

"You'll draw lots to determine which team you're on. Make it quick, now."

As the class gathered around their teacher, only Katsuki Bakugo looked less than thrilled.

"Bakugo," Aizawa called out. "No need for you to pick. You're on Team Oni."

"Huh?" grunted Bakugo, clearly taken aback at being singled out.

"You were born to play an oni, man!" said Denki Kaminari with a snort.

"Say that again, sparky!" Bakugo spat back.

"I'll explain why later," said Aizawa.

Even Bakugo in all his discontent was no match for the homeroom teacher of class A, so he backed down while his classmates drew lots.

Assigned to Team Momotaro were Izuku Midoriya, Ochaco Uraraka, Tsuyu Asui, Minoru Mineta, Denki Kaminari, Kyoka Jiro, Hanta Sero, Mina Ashido, Mashirao Ojiro, Toru Hagakure, Rikido Sato, and Koji Koda. Meanwhile, Bakugo, Shoto Todoroki, Fumikage Tokoyami, Tenya Ida, Mezo Shoji, Eijiro Kirishima, Momo Yaoyorozu, and Yuga Aoyama found themselves on Team Oni.

"Sensei!" yelled Ida, one hand shooting into the air. "There seems to be a discrepancy in the number of members per team!"

"Because Team Momotaro is at an overwhelming disadvantage, as I was about to explain," said Aizawa as he distributed three bean-sized balls to each member of Team Momotaro and a single cudgel to each newly minted oni.

"If a Momotaro gets whacked by a cudgel, they're out. And an oni is out if they get hit by three beans, which can be collected and reused after being thrown. Team Oni's goal is to wipe out every member of Team Momotaro,

while Team Momotaro can only win by rescuing the ‘hostage’ held by Team Oni.”

“Did you say *hostage*?” asked Midoriya. Aizawa turned away from the confused students.

“Playing the part of the hostage is none other than Eri. She’s sitting in the hut at the top of the hill as we speak. Both teams must treat her as if she were an actual hostage. Understand what that means?”

They did not understand what that meant.

Aizawa’s gaze drifted back to the kids and landed on Bakugo, who scowled.

“Bakugo—you have a special assignment. Throughout the course of this exercise, you’re going to become friends with Eri.”

“Huhh?”

It took a moment for Aizawa’s words to sink in, but then Bakugo’s eyes bulged wide in shock. The rest of class A was just as dumbfounded.

“You may be on the villain team this time,” explained Aizawa, “but someday you might find yourself needing to rescue young children. When the time comes, the mission’s success may ride on your ability to win over a child.”

“The hell? What’s wrong with just grabbing the kid and calling it a day?” said Bakugo.

“Imagine it from the hostage’s point of view. Say you sneak past the villain and try to drag the child away by force. You’d be no different than the villain in their eyes. Say they start crying, alerting the villain to your presence. Suddenly you’re thrown into combat while trying to protect the hostage. Any decent hero prioritizes the victim’s well-being. Understood?”

Aizawa’s steely stare left no room for argument, and the thorough explanation cowed Bakugo into silence.

“Anyway, Team Oni will start from the hut, and Team Momotaro will start from the edge of the forest. To your places, now. The face-off begins in ten minutes,” said Aizawa, prompting the teams to split up and march off.

Still pissed and doing little to hide his bad attitude, Bakugo stomped his way

up the hill.

“Bakugo, dude!” said Kirishima, running up to his friend. “That’s one crazy assignment you’re stuck with, huh? But hey—I’m here to help! You’ll be besties with Eri before this is done!”

“We will all contribute to the cause!” said Ida, who led the rest of the charge.

“But how on earth will Bakugo befriend Eri?” said Yaoyorozu, who rested her hand against her chin as she pondered the uphill task.

“Bakugo must befriend a youngling ... An oge of a challenge, to be sure,” said Tokoyami.

“I have to agree there,” said Shoji.

The group struggled to imagine how Bakugo might pull this off, but Aoyama, at the back of the pack, spoke up.

“It all begins with a dazzling smile, *non*? Much like my own, or Midoriya’s. ☆”

“Right. Midoriya made friends with the girl,” said Todoroki, pausing to recall. “Try following his example?”

“Did your brain spring a leak?” roared Bakugo. “Deku can follow my lead ’til he dies trying, but it’ll be a cold day in hell when I take a cue from *him*!”

Meanwhile, as Team Momotaro moved to the far edge of the forest, they too were feeling anxious about Bakugo’s special task.

“Kacchan and Eri? Let’s hope for the best ...” muttered Midoriya.

Uraraka was just as worried. “Step one: not yelling at Eri ... the way he does with everyone else,” she said. “That’d be a good start.”

“I doubt he would scream in Eri’s face, but what if she sees him raging at the rest of us? That could be enough to scare her,” said Asui, placing a single finger on her chin.

“Him? Make friends with a kid? No way!” said Kaminari, who already saw it as a lost cause.

“Sensei really cooked up a cruel assignment this time ...” added Mineta.

“I get being worried about Bakugo and his problems,” said Jiro, already at her

wit's end with the boys, "but remember—our job is to actually *rescue* Eri."

Team Momotaro's mood suddenly grew tense.

"Right," said Midoriya with a nod. "So, what's our plan of attack?"



"H-hello. I'm Eri, the hostage. I hope to be a good hostage."

The girl was clearly all nerves, but she managed to introduce herself to Team Oni once they made it up the hill and found her waiting in the hut.

"Hiya! Don't you worry—you're the best hostage we could ask for," said Kirishima, who had felt a connection with Eri ever since he'd joined the big operation to rescue her from Overhaul.

"We're so very glad to have you join us," said Yaoyorozu. She, Uraraka, and the other girls had visited Eri in the teachers' dorm a number of times, so they had a bit of history.

The remaining members of Team Oni were acquainted with Eri and knew her story, but they had never really interacted. Todoroki and Aoyama, who famously lived in their own worlds, weren't fazed by the nervous girl with her trembling and her balled fists, but for Ida, Tokoyami, and Shoji, her discomfort was infectious.

In the meantime, Eri spotted the scowling Bakugo at the back of the pack, and she jolted in shock when his gaze turned to her.

"Tch."

He clucked his tongue out of frustration over the task he'd been saddled with, but Eri had no way of knowing that it wasn't personally directed at her.

"Bakugo," said Ida. "You mustn't make such aggressive noises in front of the girl."

"Oh, cram it," Bakugo shot back, though his retort to Ida's chiding lacked some of the usual explosive punch.

Since Eri had started living with the faculty in their dorm building, they'd been

sure to mind their language around her, so Bakugo's prickly demeanor was unfamiliar and instilled some fear in the girl. The rest of Team Oni stared at each other, united by their discomfort, but the tension was interrupted by a buzzer that signaled the start of the showdown.

"You're on guard duty, dude. Watch over Eri!" said Kirishima to Bakugo, barely concealing the concern in his voice.

"Huhh?" uttered Bakugo.

"Oh," said Eri.

The explosive high schooler and the little girl looked at each other for a second before quickly and awkwardly breaking eye contact.

The moment the buzzer sounded, Team Momotaro split up. The plan? Scale the hill. In a battle involving varied elevation, those with the high ground had the advantage. Instead of sticking together and possibly getting wiped out as a group, Team Momotaro scattered in the hope that even one member of their ranks might reach the peak.

On the path leading up the hill, a fallen branch suddenly snapped, triggering Shoji to emerge from the shadows of the crags.

"Is that you, Hagakure?" he said.

"Eek!"

The invisible girl was second to none when it came to covert ops, but hearing her name called out caused her to yelp. Realizing her blunder, she clammed up and tried to flee, but the ears at the ends of Shoji's dupli-arms picked up the cracking and crunching of sticks and leaves beneath her feet, allowing him to lock on to her exact position.

"No escape from me," he said, closing in on her.

"Yeah? Then I've got no choice!"

Hagakure's beans were hidden in her mouth, and now she spat them at Shoji. Her ploy was no match for his dupli-arms, though, which caught every last bean and, in one smooth motion, brought the oni cudgel down upon her.

"Hagakure is out," came Aizawa's voice over the speakers without delay.

Cameras placed around the area let him catch all the action in real time. Hagakure was now bound for a super-duper cute jail cell set up for players who were knocked out of the exercise.

“Blah! I was sure nobody’d spot me,” she said, crestfallen.

“Good thing I scattered those sticks and leaves around,” said Shoji. “Just the thing to make some noise and alert me.”

Elsewhere, Sero was swinging through the trees with his “Tape” Quirk, but his plan to reach the hut as the crow flies was interrupted when Ida came barreling down on him.

“Ida?”

“Rawwr! I am a fearsome oni!” yelled Ida, brandishing his cudgel.

Sero was quick to alter course and dodge that first attack, but Ida weaved back through the trees to home in on Sero without a hint of slowing. While still swinging, Sero tossed his beans to ward off the speedster, but Ida dodged each one with some deft footwork and used the opening to smack Sero with the cudgel.

“Sero is out.”

“That’s two of us down,” muttered Ojiro, who was halfway up the hill when he heard Aizawa’s announcement. But his ascent came to a halt at the appearance of Kirishima, who had brazenly swung his cudgel over one shoulder.

“You ain’t getting past me,” said the grinning Kirishima.

“The mano a mano approach?” said Ojiro with a grimace as he shifted into a battle-ready pose.

As the two boys prepared to clash, Midoriya and Asui rendezvoused on their way up the opposite side of the hill.

“So Toru and Sero are out of the game,” said Asui.

“Uh-huh,” said Midoriya. “The closer we get to the peak, the higher the probability of encountering an oni, so we’d better ...”

Before he could say “be careful,” walls of ice sprang up around the Team

Momotaro pair.

“You’re making this too easy, Midoriya,” said Todoroki as he raced down an ice slide, cudgel at the ready. But Asui had already wrapped her tongue around Midoriya to drag him out of harm’s way.

“Thanks, Asu ... I mean, Tsuyu!”

“Don’t mention it.”

This particular oni was possibly the toughest they could’ve run into, so Midoriya shouted “You go on ahead!” to Asui and tried to lead Todoroki away. Todoroki responded by trapping Asui with more ice and dashing after his other quarry. Yet another ice wall sprang up in Midoriya’s path, with Todoroki’s cudgel closing in fast from behind. Without even turning to look, Midoriya flicked one of his beans straight back at Todoroki, but the looming oni blocked the bean with his cudgel. Both boys wore wide grins, excited for their first rematch in quite a while.

“Ice walls ... That’s gotta be Todoroki, yeah?” said Uraraka.

“And I bet he’s fighting ... Midoriya?” said Jiro.

The girls, who had just bumped into each other, were far enough away not to get caught in the action but close enough to notice the ice.

“Anyway, let’s make for the hut,” said the ever-vigilant Jiro as she scanned their surroundings. She picked up on footsteps and some sort of clacking. “Wait, Uraraka. Someone’s coming.”

The girls hid behind a boulder, and Jiro reflected on the sounds she’d detected with her sensitive hearing.

Those footsteps must be ... Momoyao? And that other noise is something she’s carrying, but what?

Jiro whispered her thoughts to Uraraka, and the pair held their breath as Yaoyorozu marched straight toward their boulder. They realized their cover was blown, made eye contact with each other, and waited for the incoming oni to get just close enough before popping out from either side of the rock. No sooner had they tossed their beans than they heard the click of a switch and a

low, rumbling whoosh.

The massive vacuum hanging from Yaoyorozu's shoulder sucked the thrown beans right out of the air, leaving Jiro and Uraraka stunned.

"How do you like my high-powered vacuum cleaner?" said Yaoyorozu with a smile. "Your beans are hereby confiscated."

The Team Momotaro girls took a second to recover from the shock, but then they snapped out of it and put some distance between themselves and the oni.

"Nice defense, but you're all bark and no bite," said Uraraka.

"You would be correct," said Yaoyorozu, "as I decided to outsource my offense to another."

Overhead, Tokoyami came flying in, held aloft by Dark Shadow.

"I'm that other!" cried Dark Shadow. The girls realized what that meant when they spotted a pair of cudgels—one held by Tokoyami and one gripped by Dark Shadow's claws.

"Oh, c'mon!" protested Jiro. She and Uraraka ran and tossed another pair of beans at the airborne menaces, but Yaoyorozu's vacuum sucked those out of the air as well.

"We're screwed!" said Uraraka, quickly losing hope.



As these brutal battles unfolded outside, only silence pervaded the interior of the hut where Bakugo and Eri waited. Aizawa's special assignment for the boy felt like a total paradox. Bakugo was meant to play the part of a fearsome, kidnapping oni while treating Eri like an actual hostage, and yet somehow he also had to befriend her? It didn't make any sense to him.

What, am I supposed to hope Stockholm syndrome kicks in? Where's the logic, here?!

Bakugo's thoughts turned to Stockholm syndrome—the phenomenon where, over a long, stressful period of time spent together, a captive eventually feels

solidarity with or even love for their captor. In any other situation, Bakugo would have let his explosive frustration show on the outside, but based on Eri's previous reaction, he had learned that his typical outbursts would be a sure way to sink this mission. He would keep his thoughts to himself for now, even if they escaped a little bit in the form of a scowl. Besides, Bakugo could begrudgingly admit to himself that, paradoxical or not, there was some value to this exercise. Not that conceding that point would lead him to a solution. Bakugo was talented in ways that allowed him to tackle just about any challenge, but thoughtful, careful communication was practically uncharted territory for him.

What's a convo with a kid even s'posed to sound like?

He remembered Todoroki's suggestion.

"Midoriya made friends with the girl. Try following his example?"

"Screw that!"

Eri flinched at Bakugo's unwitting roar, and he clucked his tongue out of frustration at his childhood friend and his own inability to control himself. The last thing Bakugo wanted to do was to take a cue from Midoriya, but he realized that Midoriya just happened to excel at thoughtful communication—the one skill he really needed here. There was no better role model in this particular area, but Bakugo's long-held pride held him back and showed on his face. Upon seeing Bakugo's twisted visage, Eri balled her fists and started trembling, just as an actual terrified hostage might. Her reaction went unnoticed by him though. With another cluck of the tongue, Bakugo started thinking again.

Like hell I'm following his lead ... I'll get this done my own way.

But how would he play the role of an oni while getting through to the girl's heart?

Except there's just no freakin' way to do it!

He wondered to himself how a proper oni was even supposed to act. Coming up with nothing, he abandoned that line of thought and switched gears to the hostage angle. If he had been kidnapped as a little kid, what could the hypothetical hostage taker have done to win him over? Bakugo was no stranger to being taken hostage in recent times, so no matter how many scenarios he

ran through his head, the answer always involved him fighting back and beating the villain into submission.

What kinda crappy hostage would open up their heart to some bad guy?

Perhaps, in a truly unusual situation, the villain and victim might have to work together, and some sort of affinity might bloom in the process. Still, the hostage would have to be pretty lacking in the self-respect department to be charmed by a criminal who wouldn't think twice about using a human shield for their own selfish goals.

They'd have to be a top-tier moron.

Having come to that conclusion, Bakugo scratched his head furiously and moved on to the next line of thought. After pondering for a moment, he slowly opened his mouth.

"Tell me your favorite food."

"Huh? Me? Um, I like apples the best ..." replied Eri.

The food question was the safest, most innocuous one Bakugo could think up. Meanwhile, the quizzical look on Eri's face seemed to say, "Why would you ask me that?" If anything, it was clear that she trusted him even *less* now.

I'm just some shady character, huh?

Bakugo scowled grimly as he realized that his conversation opener hadn't done the trick.



By this time, Tokoyami and Dark Shadow's aerial assault had taken out Uraraka, Jiro, Ashido, and Ojiro, so only six members of Team Momotaro remained to fight on—Midoriya, Asui, Kaminari, Mineta, Sato, and Koda. Meanwhile, Team Oni hadn't lost a single ogre yet, so what was left of Team Momotaro beat a temporary retreat to a location behind a particular outcrop they'd selected at the very start—a place where they wouldn't be spotted for the time being.

"Half our forces are lost," said Sato. "And we're running low on precious

beans. What now?"

"We're gonna be oni chow before we even come close to saving Eri," said Kaminari somberly.

Asui thought for a moment before speaking. "We need to beat them with limited beans, so we'd better get them in a situation where our throws can't possibly miss."

Asui's idea made the gears turn in Midoriya's head, launching him into mutter mode.

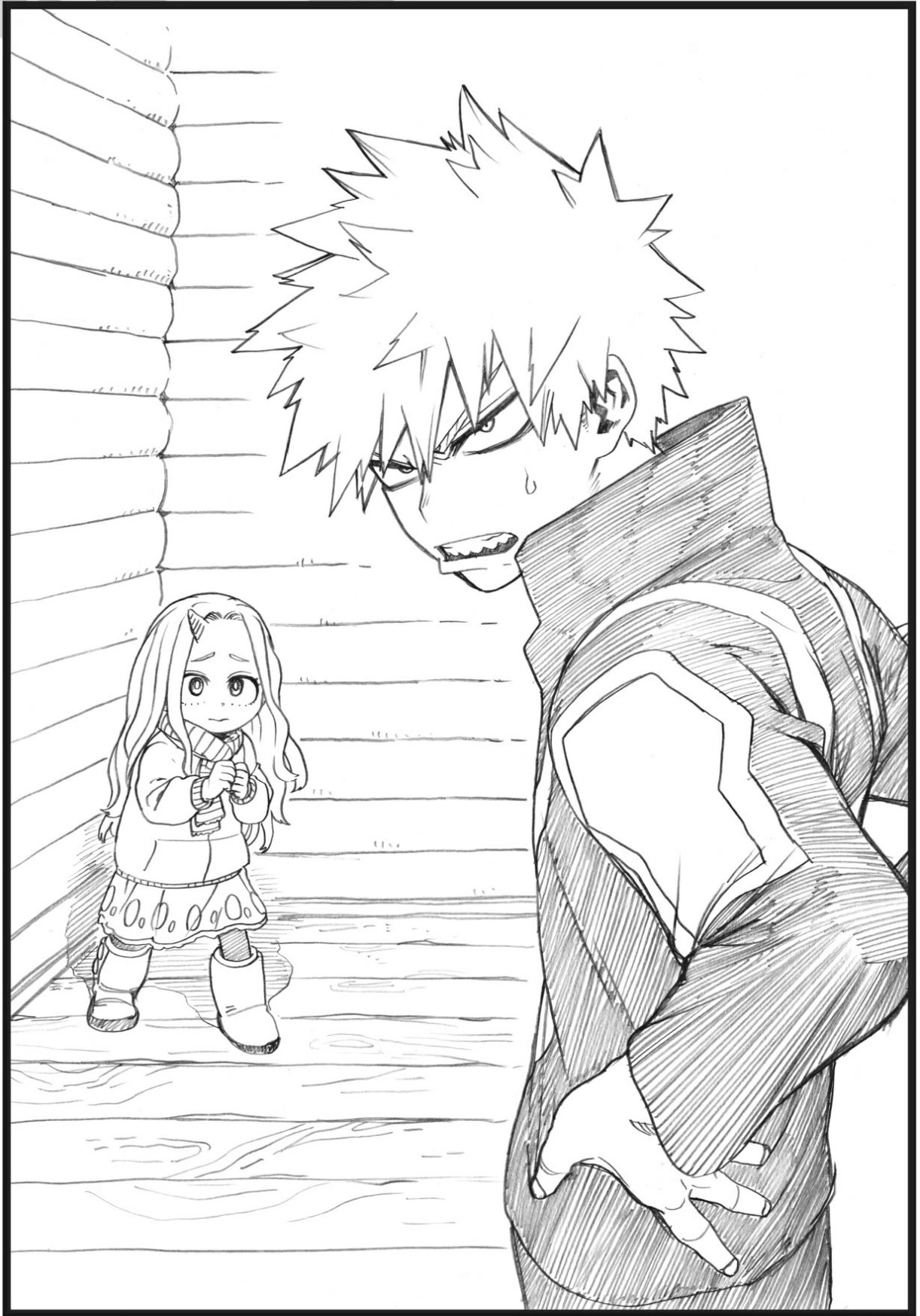
"Rescuing Eri should be the top priority, but Team Oni won't let us near without a fight ... Clearly we can't just dodge past them ..."

"Coming up with a plan there, Midoriya?" asked Mineta.

Midoriya looked up at the group and explained what he was thinking.



Back at the hut, Team Oni opened the door to find their worst fears confirmed. Bakugo snarled at them like he'd just swallowed something unbearably bitter, while Eri was trembling and whimpering in the corner, just like an actual hostage. The pair had clearly not become pals yet, and the tension was thick enough to cut with a knife. Ever the class president, Ida took a bold and decisive step forward.



**MY HERO
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“Eri! Despite how he might come off, Bakugo has a number of appealing qualities! Isn’t that right, friends?”

Ida turned to the group and blinked hard repeatedly, as if to say, “There’s your cue!” Apparently his outrageously straightforward strategy was simply to educate Eri on the appeal of Bakugo, but the rest of Team Oni struggled to catch the curveball Ida had pitched them. After a moment, Kirishima was the first to speak up.

“No matter how he seems, Bakugo’ll never lie to ya! He’s as honest as they come!” Kirishima shot Bakugo a big smile that seemed to say, “I got your back, pal!”

Yaoyorozu was the next to step forward. “Right, yes!” she said. “You might not believe it, but ... Hmm, let me think ... Ah, of course! Bakugo prepares the most exquisite food! His every move in the kitchen is like a masterful performance.”

Relieved that her turn was over, Yaoyorozu looked over at Shoji, the next in line.

“Uh, believe it or not ...” began Shoji. “Believe it or not ... um ... Bakugo is a real morning person. I’ve never seen him panicked or running late for anything.”

Shoji shot a glance at Tokoyami, who’d been deep in thought.

“Who, me? Oh. Bakugo may appear uncouth, but ... Ah, he keeps the bathroom immaculate. When a single drop of water lands outside of the sink, he’s sure to wipe it up.”

Tokoyami seemed satisfied at having come up with a compliment, and he now passed the baton to Todoroki.

“Despite what you might think ... um ...”

Todoroki was at a loss for words, so Aoyama interjected and stole his place in line.

“Allow me!” said Aoyama. “You might not think it, but Bakugo is quite dexterous. He would have you believe that the sagging waist of his pants may

fall at any moment, but I have never seen it happen even once. ☆”

Todoroki raised his head as Aoyama finished; he’d finally come up with something to say.

“Despite what you might think, Bakugo is great at lessons and learning stuff. Also, he’s Midoriya’s childhood friend,” said Todoroki.

The target of these compliments had scowled in silence and allowed each classmate to say their piece, but that last bit was the straw that broke Bakugo’s back.

“The hell?! Why is ‘he’s known freakin’ Deku since they were kids’ on the list of what makes me great?” he shouted.

“Huh? Did you say ‘Deku’?” asked Eri.

That got her attention and earned Bakugo a stare, but her interest in that aspect of his life only fanned his raging flames.

“Y’don’t get to *choose* who you’re pals with as a little kid!” he explained. “Besides! What’s with all this ‘Despite what you might think’ and ‘Believe it or not’ crap? Tell me how you jokers really feel about me, why don’tcha!”

This Baku-blowup took Eri by surprise, and she shrank back even deeper into the corner of the hut. The rest of Team Oni winced to see Bakugo take one step forward, two steps back, which prompted Todoroki to say, “Sorry, I guess.”

Not wanting to make the Bakugo-Eri Friendship Experiment crash and burn harder than it already was, Team Oni reluctantly snuck back out of the hut to resume annihilating Team Momotaro. It just wasn’t in their power to help Bakugo with his special task.

“Only six of them left, yes?” said Ida.

“And they should be running quite low on beans,” added Yaoyorozu.

“We know they’ll come for the hut,” said Shoji, “so if we just stand guard—”

Before he could finish, something long and slick lashed out from the underbrush and caught around Aoyama.

“Ahhh!”

Aoyama's screams faded as Asui dashed down the hill, her tongue wrapped tightly around her captive.

"Aoyama!" cried Kirishima as he and the rest of Team Oni gave chase. They lost sight of Asui and Aoyama about halfway down, so Shoji used his dupli-arms to start searching.

"This way," he said, beckoning the others.

"Could it be a trap?" asked a cautious Todoroki, glancing ahead.

A moment later, Shoji gasped. "Someone's coming!"

Leaping from tree to tree, Midoriya soared over the heads of Team Oni, holding all of Team Momotaro's remaining beans. In response, Tokoyami and Dark Shadow took to the skies, while Yaoyorozu switched on her powerful vacuum cleaner. Before the vacuum could swallow up any beans, however, one of Mineta's "Pop Off" balls shot down from a tall tree.

"What now?" gasped Yaoyorozu, whose vacuum intake was instantly plugged up by the sticky ball.

Meanwhile, Midoriya had scooped Mineta off the tree and now leaped toward Tokoyami.

"How about a Pop Off sandwich?" said Mineta.

Before Tokoyami and Dark Shadow knew what had hit them, their two cudgels were bound together by one of the purple orbs. Then Koda unleashed a dozen or so crows toward the earthbound oni. Caught off guard by the avian attack, the oni dove into the underbrush for cover, only to plummet into a massive pitfall dug up by Sato. To cap it all off, the dazed Team Oni looked up to see Kaminari standing over them.

"Sorry, guys, but we're low on beans, so you had to be fish in a barrel if this was gonna work," he said with a grin. The ensuing "Electrification" jolt put Team Oni down for the count, allowing Team Momotaro to casually toss three beans at each zapped enemy. Aizawa's voice rang out.

"Ida, Aoyama, Todoroki, Kirishima, Tokoyami, Shoji, and Yaoyorozu are out."

"Great! All that's left is to save Eri," said Midoriya, but a flustered Kirishima

had one last thing to say.

“I know we got no right to ask for a darn thing from the dudes who beat us, but please! Help Bakugo make friends with Eri! You gotta!” Kirishima clapped his hands together and held them up as he begged.

“Not going well, I take it?” asked Midoriya.

“Pretty much ...” said Kirishima with a slow nod.

Then Ida spoke up. “First we tried leaving them alone, and then we attempted to assist ... but nothing seems to bring those two any closer. As your humble class president, I implore you to help Bakugo with his assignment!”

The members of Team Momotaro glanced at each other. No objections.

“Of course!” said Midoriya on behalf of the team. “I was actually worried about those two myself.”

“We’ll get it done, guys!” said Kaminari. “But, uhh, how do we get it done, exactly? Hard to picture Bakugo and Eri hanging out like good buddies.”

“That’s the whole problem,” said Asui. The others agreed.

“What if,” said Yaoyorozu after some thought, “we model our strategy on ‘The Weeping Red Oni’?”

“Red oni? Who’s that?” asked a confused Sato.

“Oh, I know this one!” said Mineta. “There’s this red oni who wants to be friends with humans, right? So his blue oni pal decides to help out. The blue guy attacks the human neighbors so that the red oni can save them and win brownie points. The plan works like a charm, but afterward, the blue oni realizes he’s gotta hit the road so that the people don’t catch on to their trick.”

“Oof, yeah, that sad bedtime story,” said Kaminari, remembering. “It’s like, don’tcha get it, Blue? *You* were Red’s best bud all along!”

“I’m sure we all came away with various impressions from the tale,” said Yaoyorozu. “But what’s clear is that if an oni and human are to become friends, some sort of villain is essential. Meaning ...”

“We play the part of the blue oni so Kacchan can be the red oni?” said

Midoriya, deep in thought.

“Perhaps. Or instead, what about the tale of ‘The Setsubun Oni’?” suggested Yaoyorozu.

“How do you mean?” asked Aoyama.

“As the story goes, one year on Setsubun, an old man who lived all alone heard his neighbors chanting, ‘Oni, begone! Good fortune, come in!’ However, he got the saying wrong and instead shouted, ‘Oni, come in! Good fortune, begone!’ Hearing this, an oni stormed into the old man’s house, but it somehow worked out for the best. They feasted together, and the old man found himself with renewed vim and vigor for life. In any case, if we were to use *that* tale as an example, our plan might be executed entirely peacefully, without the need for a designated villain.”

“So, we’re gonna make Eri have sympathy for the devil? I mean, for Bakugo?” asked Kaminari.

“I wonder if Bakugo will go along with our plan, though,” said Asui.

The members of both teams tried to imagine Bakugo as a willing participant, which prompted them to scrunch up their faces and go “Hmmm ...” in unison.

“The Setsubun Oni option would be nicer for Eri, but yeah, Kacchan might not go along with it,” said Midoriya, looking troubled.

The others nodded in agreement.

“In that case,” said Midoriya, looking around the group, “let’s go with the Weeping Red Oni plan.”



A peeved Bakugo peered out the window of the hut.

I’m the last man standing? Well, let ‘em come. I’ll wipe the floor with ‘em ...

He would’ve loved nothing more than to run off and launch an attack—waiting around was not one of Bakugo’s many talents—but obviously he couldn’t leave Eri by her lonesome. Nor could he openly express his steadily

growing irritation in front of the girl.

He turned from the window to glance at Eri, who was still cowering in the corner of the hut. She noticed him looking, flinched, and quickly averted her eyes.

What are my damn options?

Eri would flinch at Bakugo's every move, to the extent that he wondered if this exercise really had transformed him into an oni. Right when the hopeless task had him scratching his head again, he felt something soft poking him in the back. Bakugo whipped around to find Asui's tongue extending a note toward him. Following the tongue, he spotted Asui herself hiding in the bushes outside. She gestured at the obviously puzzled Bakugo, imploring him to read the note.

READY TO HELP W/ YOUR ASSIGNMENT.

COMMENCE OPERATION: WEEPY RED ONI.

Once Bakugo had read the message, Asui nodded at him, retracted her tongue back through the open window, and vanished.

What? I'm the red oni?

The brief message was enough for Bakugo to get the gist. He guessed (correctly) that Kirishima has begged Team Momotaro to help out with the Eri assignment. This triggered another cluck of his tongue and a scowl.

Just because they were prepared to "help," Team Momotaro wasn't necessarily giving up on winning the game, which meant they would probably still rescue Eri after Operation: Weepy Red Oni was over. Just as Bakugo was considering how best to destroy his rivals after receiving their help, a group of cloaked, shouting figures stormed into the hut. It was Team Momotaro, obviously, with concealing cloaks courtesy of Yaoyorozu's Quirk.

"Hrahhh! Hand over the kid!"

"We're villains! Can'tcha tell?"

"Evil, nasty villains!"

Sato, Kaminari, and Mineta were hamming it up big-time, and the nonsense Bakugo was left speechless for a moment by their shenanigans. But

the insolent incursion flipped a switch in him.

“Over my dead body, asswipes!”

All that snowballing frustration finally exploded out, and Bakugo realized that maybe this ridiculous farce represented his best shot at actual victory over Team Momotaro. Cudgel in hand, the liberated Bakugo came alive with sparks in his eyes. That bright, animated look and the impending violence transformed him into a bizarre, villainous monster. As he quickly dispatched the boldest of the three invaders, Bakugo had no idea how fascinated Eri was by this new mode of his.

“Too scared to come at me? Then lemme do the honors, you wastes of oxygen!” he roared at Midoriya and the rest of Team Momotaro, who were still standing around. Seeing the enraged Bakugo charging at them in the cramped hut, they started to panic. Perhaps they hadn’t realized that he would take the playacting quite so seriously. In fact, Bakugo’s ferocious response left them fearing for the integrity of the hut itself.

“H-hang on a sec, Kacchan!”

“Nah, now it’s your turn, Deku!”

“Huh?” said Eri. The whole hullabaloo had startled her, but her ears pricked up upon hearing Midoriya’s nickname. Then the hood of Midoriya’s cloak fell back as he frantically dodged Bakugo’s strikes, revealing his face.

“Psst! Kacchan!” said Midoriya. “What about us helping you with the ... y’know?”

“Thanks a *whole lot* for the assist! But this’s looking like two birds, one stone to me!”

At last, Bakugo had Midoriya cornered, but just as he raised his mighty cudgel ...

“Oni, be gone! Oni, come in!” shouted Eri, throwing something at Bakugo.

“Huhh?”

Bakugo felt the lightest of impacts against his body and heard whatever it was scatter to the floor. He stared in disbelief—first at the three beans that had

found their target, and then at Eri, who was still scared but was now giving him a defiant look.

“Bakugo is out. Team Oni has been eliminated. Team Momotaro wins,” came Aizawa’s voice.

Bakugo broke his stunned silence to yell, “What’s the big idea?”

“As I mentioned, you were meant to treat Eri like a real hostage. A hostage is typically eager to escape, and they may conceal weapons of their own. Which is why, from the very start, Eri was equipped with beans so she could fight back,” explained Aizawa.

“Is that right?” Midoriya asked Eri. He was as shocked as anyone about this turn of events.

Eri gulped, nodded, and said, “I was so nervous cuz I didn’t know when I should throw my beans.” She clutched her chest and heaved a deep sigh of relief.

“Thanks, Eri!” said Midoriya, beaming. “You totally saved me there.”

Eri smiled back, just as wide.

As Bakugo stared at Eri, he thought back on her behavior. Nearly the whole time, she had been cowering in the corner of the hut and flinching at his every move. It dawned on Bakugo that throughout the exercise, she’d been biding her time and trying to figure out when to unleash the beans at him.

“I got something to say,” he said, moving toward Eri, who stared up in terror at the looming Bakugo and braced for impact.

“Not bad, kid. You got me good.”

“Huh?” said Eri, her eyes growing wide.

“Better to a be a hostage with some fight in ya, I say,” said Bakugo with a snort.

“Eri!” said Midoriya, eyes wide, barely able to contain his excitement. “You got a genuine compliment from Kacchan! That’s as rare as they come!”

“R-really?” said Eri.

“Uh-huh! You did a great job! We’re all impressed!”

Eri glanced back at Bakugo, who clucked his tongue and clarified.

“Compliment? Nah, just saying what’s on my mind.”

The girl stared harder at Bakugo’s stony side profile, and her own expression softened just a bit.



Once Thirteen had shown up and left with Eri, Aizawa gave the class his evaluation.

“Though Team Momotaro did come away with the win, your strategy was rough around the edges and full of inefficiencies. When time is of the essence, it’s critical to form a rational plan without delay. Understood?”

“Yes,” said the students in unison, nodding.

Aizawa surveyed the class and settled his gaze on Bakugo. “As for your special assignment, Bakugo,” he said. “Eri does have a better impression of you now.”

“Oh yeah?” said Bakugo, too stunned to say more.

“Apparently she was grateful for that compliment at the very end, and though she was scared, she appreciated how enthusiastically you embraced your role as an oni.”

“Pfft!” snorted Kaminari. “The enthusiastic performance? Except that wasn’t even acting!”

“Cram it!” roared Bakugo, but before he could hurl more abuse at Kaminari, Aizawa resumed.

“Let’s say ... you passed.”

A sense of relief washed over the entire class, and Kirishima threw an arm around Bakugo’s shoulders.

“Hear that, dude?” he said. “That was touch-and-go for a while, but you pulled it off!”

“Why, as the class president, nothing I could hear could make me happier!” said Ida.

“Aw, I wish I coulda joined Operation: Weepy Red Oni!” said Uraraka.

Bakugo’s eternal scowl grew scowlier and scowlier as his classmates gathered around with quips and comments.

“Leave me the hell alone!” he bellowed, but this was nothing new for class A and did nothing to diminish their excitement.

“They’ve grown close,” said an exasperated Aizawa under his breath, but there was a hint of cheer to his voice.

As the Japanese saying goes, “The world is full of kindness—not oni.”

Part 2

Who Gets Heartfelt Chocolate?!



February, that most frigid and brutal of the winter months, also happens to be the shortest on the calendar, passing by in what sometimes feels like the blink of an eye. Despite this, a certain holiday in the West is placed smack-dab in the middle of this blink-and-you'll-miss-it month, on the fourteenth. Valentine's Day is a celebration rooted in Christianity whose main modern-day custom involves the exchange of gifts between sweethearts. Somehow or other, Japan's confectionary companies tweaked Valentine's Day into a moment for women to profess their love by giving men chocolate. Even that custom evolved over time to include just-friends chocolate (for expressing platonic friendship and gratitude) and Galentine's chocolate (given by one gal to another gal pal). Though Valentine's Day doesn't boast a particularly long history in Japan, it established itself by fulfilling a certain cultural demand. That is to say, Japan has scant few customs geared toward expressing love, so Valentine's Day and Japan found themselves hitched in a marriage of convenience.

Over at U.A. High, a sweet aroma wafted through the kitchen of class 1-A's dorm building, where Valentine's operations were in full swing. Vast quantities of wholesale chocolate were tossed into double boilers, transforming the hard blocks into a glossy, gloopy, coffee-colored substance. As Ochaco Uraraka stirred her batch of chocolate, a fleck flew onto her hand, which she promptly licked up.

"Taaasty!" she said, in absolute bliss.

Tsuyu Asui—her partner holding down the bowl—chuckled and said, "Oh, you."

At the other table, Mina Ashido let a drip drop from her spatula onto her hand for a taste test of her own. "Yummm! I could drink this stuff straight," she said.



MY HERO
ACADEMIA

“Lemme try too!” said Toru Hagakure, Ashido’s chocolate-prep partner. She lifted one invisible hand from the bowl for Ashido to dab with chocolate, licked it, and said, “Um, yeah, that’s totally yummy!”

Nearby, Momo Yaoyorozu, who was taking a break from melting chocolate, grabbed two spoons and marched over to the other girls. “That’s poor etiquette, ladies. Any taste testing must be done with designated taster spoons. Here you are, Jiro,” she said, scooping a tiny spoonful of chocolate and handing it to Kyoka Jiro.

“Oh, thanks,” said Jiro, slightly taken aback, though one taste of the chocolate was enough to melt her stiff expression.

“C’mon, girls!” said an exasperated Rikido Sato, who had watched this scene play out. “Like I told you, tempering chocolate is a delicate art that can totally affect the flavor. Make sure those temperatures are just right.”

At this, the six girls straightened their backs and said, “Yes, Sensei! Sorry, Sensei!” in unison. Sato was class A’s resident sweets-making expert, so today the amateur pâtissier was coaching the girls through the ins and outs of making chocolate. Which isn’t to suggest that Sato didn’t enjoy the activity; all seven classmates were having a grand old time in the kitchen.

“Keep up that mixing!” said Hagakure. “I can’t wait to taste the finished product.”

“Don’t forget—we’re making this for the others as well,” added Asui.

“Yeah, uh-huh!” said Uraraka with a smile. An image of Izuku Midoriya floated up into her mind’s eye, but she did her best to shove it down into a deep, secret place within her heart.

The chocolate-making scheme had all begun when a certain clique of boys (namely, Minoru Mineta and Denki Kaminari) had pressured the girls with demands for Valentine’s Day chocolate. From there, the girls had decided that everyone could enjoy the treats together, and soon enough, the rest of the boys were jazzed about the plan. Rising to meet expectations is a core tenet of future heroes, but at the end of the day, it seemed like a fun opportunity to indulge in sweets made together, as a team.

“What a delightful holiday!” said Yaoyorozu, barely able to contain her excitement. “Friends giving each other chocolate? How lovely.” She had only recently learned of the concept of “Galentine’s” from the others, and since they were going to the trouble of making the chocolate, the group had decided to exchange Galentine’s chocolates while they were at it.

“Totally!” agreed Hagakure. “I’m more hyped about sharing with you gals than giving any to the boys.”

“Back in middle school, girls put so much effort into this stuff. I never really got why it was such a big deal,” said Jiro.

“Maybe cuz so many girls were doing it? It makes you wanna do an extra-good job, in the hope that whoever you’re giving it to realizes how much time and hard work went into it,” said Hagakure.

“Yep,” said Uraraka.

“I get it,” said Sato with a nod. “When someone bites down on your little masterpiece, all that hard work finally comes to fruition. Still, I’m happy enough to hear them say ‘Yum’ and be done with it. I guess.”

Sato was in the habit of serving his homemade pastries to the rest of the class, and a bittersweet look rose on his face as he reflected on the typical reaction from the other boys. Seeing this, Yaoyorozu raised a hand to her cheek woefully, thinking about the tea she was prone to serving alongside Sato’s sweets.

“I can empathize ... I put quite a bit of thought into the balance of my tea blends, so when the feedback is a simple ‘Yum,’ I feel a tinge of disappointment.”

“I know who you mean! Kirishima, Todoroki, and Kaminari, right?” said Hagakure, singling out three of the boys, though not out of ill will. And she wasn’t wrong. Kirishima’s feedback was usually a bold “Yum!” while Todoroki’s “Yum” was on the candid side, and Kaminari might say, “That’s like, yum!”

“Meanwhile,” said Jiro, “Midoriya’s food reviews are perfection, though a little on the long side.”

“I’ll take a lengthy critique any day of the week!” said Sato.

“I feel much the same!” agreed Yaoyorozu, nodding.

“Midoriya’s got that mind for analysis and attention to detail,” Sato elaborated. “The other day, he figured out that I used maple syrup in my cake as a way of making the flavors deeper and richer.”

“Indeed. Though Midoriya wasn’t all too savvy about tea to begin with, he seems to learn more about the art with each tasting. There’s nothing like an eager learner to make the brewing seem worthwhile,” said Yaoyorozu.

“Yeah, there’s nobody I’d rather have sampling my goods,” added Sato.

As the two flavor artisans swapped satisfied smiles, Hagakure thought of another classmate prone to unique feedback.

“Ah, Bakugo too, come to think of it. He doesn’t always join the tea party, but when he does, he speaks his mind, yeah?”

The smiles were replaced by stern looks on Sato’s and Yaoyorozu’s faces.

“That Bakugo’s a sharp critic,” said Sato. “There was this one cake I burned—just a tiny bit, mind you!—and he totally picked up on it. Said it was drier than the previous one.”

“I had a similar experience,” said Yaoyorozu. “One time when I let my tea steep a moment too long, he commented that it tasted more bitter than usual. Ordinarily I’m overjoyed to hear that people can tell the difference at all, but when it’s coming from Bakugo, it almost feels as though I’m being graded ...”

“Yeah, it’s like he’s scoring us or something!” said Sato.

The ever-talented Mr. Bakugo was a skilled food critic with a discerning palate, which forged a bond of solidarity between Yaoyorozu and Sato.

“I suppose, in that sense, I am grateful to hear a simple ‘Yum’ after all ...” said Yaoyorozu.

“Yup. There’s worse feedback for sure,” said Sato.

“Sato, what about the tempering?” asked Asui, interrupting the bonding session over food critiques.

“Shoot, sorry! Yeah, keep going with that,” said Sato, before resuming his

own skillful stirring.

“Actually,” said Yaoyorozu, not ready to move on from the previous topic. “Even Mineta managed to give me proper feedback recently.”

The other girls flinched at the mention of that name.

“You *know* he’s got shady motives, Momoyao,” said Jiro.

“Yeah, the pest just wants some chocolate outta you!” said Ashido.

“You don’t mean ... *heartfelt chocolate*?” asked Yaoyorozu, taken aback.

“Duh!” said the other five girls, all at once.

Mineta’s recent transformation was extreme enough that they’d all noticed. Normally, he’d seize every opportunity to make a lewd comment or a creepy move, but lately he’d been treating his female classmates with unusual kindness, as if he might be suffering from personality-altering head trauma. Nothing was more unexpected or bizarre to those who knew him, but his current attitude suggested that he’d never been anything less than a perfect gentleman. The explanation? The fact that Valentine’s Day was coming up. A day for girls to profess their affection, and one for boys to sit back in the hope of being someone’s—*anyone’s*—crush. In other words, a test to see how popular a given boy was with the ladies. That sort of attention was Mineta’s greatest, longest-cherished desire, but alas.

“Aw, c’mon ... Try to think about how he must feel,” said Sato, who viewed Mineta’s dirty deeds as something pure and perfectly understandable. There was something *almost* adorable about the boy—but given that the girls were the perpetual victims of his dirty jokes and worse, they had no desire to consider his feelings on the matter.

“He wishes to receive heartfelt chocolate, does he? Then he ought to clean up his act permanently,” said Yaoyorozu.

“No more creepy jokes! Start with that!” added Hagakure, earning nods from the other girls.

Thoroughly outvoted, Sato could only grimace in defeat. After all, the law of the jungle states that desperately seeking popularity in the romance

department is the best way to remain unpopular and lovelorn. As they chatted more about Mineta and other topics, the group continued working away on their chocolate-based projects. They whipped up old standbys like truffles, cookies, and ice cream, as well as full-blown cakes such as *gâteau au chocolat*, *fondant au chocolat*, and Sacher torte.

“Great!” said Sato. “The decorating comes after we chill these guys, so let’s handle that before dinner.”

With only the finishing touches remaining, they stowed the cakes and treats in the fridge.

“Phew. Break time ...” Jiro said. After hours in the kitchen, the girls stretched a bit to loosen up and began to leave.

At the back of the pack, Uraraka noticed Sato looking over the ingredients. “Not taking a breather, Sato?” she asked.

“Not just yet,” he said.

Having inhaled saccharine chocolate aromas for so long, the girls decided to head outside for a breath of fresh air. The chill of winter enveloped them as they stepped out the front door of the dorm. It was a stark contrast to the heated interior, but even as they shivered a bit, the bracing air was somehow refreshing and invigorating.

“Hey,” said Hagakure, pointing with an invisible finger. “Those’re cherry-blossom trees, yeah?” The others realized where her sleeve cuff was vaguely pointing and nodded.

“Yeah, I think so? I remember thinking how pretty they were, back when school started last spring,” said Uraraka.

“Man, that brings me back,” said Jiro, sounding almost surprised.

“It’s been nearly a year, yes,” said Yaoyorozu with an air of profundity. “Time and tide wait for no one.”

“What have the tides got to do with it?” asked a puzzled Ashido.

“Ah, the saying simply means that time passes with no consideration for our mortal whims and machinations. A reminder that we ought to value the time

we are given,” explained Yaoyorozu.

“True enough!” said Ashido. “I’m always wishing time would slow down a little when I gotta study the night before a test, but nope!”

“Or right before the deadline for one of our reports for Aizawa Sensei!” said Hagakure, sounding quite serious about this specific example. The girls winced in solidarity.

“So strange how each day of our lives feels so rich and full, but at the same time, the weeks and months seem to fly by, ribbit,” said Asui.

“Whoa,” gasped Ashido. “When those cherry blossoms bloom again, we’re gonna be second-years, huh?”

“Unless they catch us by surprise with a last-minute advancement test or something,” said Jiro with a snide grin.

“No way! Say it ain’t so!” said a stunned Ashido, clutching Jiro’s arms as if holding on for dear life.

“Just joking, geez!” sputtered Jiro.

“Oh, I know!” said Hagakure cheerily. “When they do bloom, let’s do a *hanami* meetup! A picnic under the cherry-blossom trees!”

This bright idea received instant approval from the others, and Uraraka in particular suddenly had stars in her eyes.

“Hanami ...” she said. “That means we get bento boxes, right? And we can eat *Inari-zushi*? *Onigiri*? *Chimaki*?”

“Rice on the brain much?” asked Asui.

“You know I love it!” said Uraraka, smiling from cheek to cheek.

“Mm, let’s have *karaage* too. And we’ll buy a ton of sweets!” said Hagakure.

“What are the perfect sweets for a hanami event? Or hey—we could have Sato make us something!” said Ashido, getting more and more into the idea.

“*Sakuramochi*!” yelped Uraraka.

“There we go—more rice-based stuff!” said Hagakure with a giggle.

“Dumplings over flowers, as they say,” said Yaoyorozu. “Or practicality over aesthetics, which explains Uraraka’s preference for rice.”

“Dang, good point! Can’t forget the dumplings!” said Uraraka, who was snorting with excitement.

“There she goes again!”

“Okay, now I’m ready for this hanami meetup to happen, like, *tomorrow*,” said Uraraka with a sheepish chuckle.

“As for today, we have our Valentine’s Day treats to enjoy,” said Asui.

“Let’s hope it all turns out tasty,” said the impatient Uraraka, her white breath hanging in the chilly air.

“It had better,” said Jiro. “Bee-tee-dubs—how exactly are we doing the Galentine’s swap?”

“Why not draw lots? That seems fair and impartial,” suggested Yaoyorozu.

“Oh! Well, a lottery is fine,” said Ashido, “but how about, like, musical chairs? But instead of us running around chairs, we’re passing the sweets around in a circle, and when the music stops, whatever you’re holding is yours to keep!”

“Sounds like a party game, ribbit,” said Asui.

“Yeah, it adds a little excitement to the mix!” said Ashido.

“I’ve never participated in such a game, but yes, let’s. It certainly sounds delightful,” said Yaoyorozu.

“Cool beans!” said Ashido.

“Sooo, let’s make it a light dinner?” said Hagakure, patting her stomach. “I wanna stuff myself silly with chocolaty goodness after!”

“What, don’tcha have a second stomach just for desserts?” said Uraraka with a straight face.

“Second stomach! Maybe a third and a fourth too?” said Ashido.

“Yeah, fair enough!” said Hagakure, fully convinced of this new biological theory. As the six girls laughed, a stranger approached them.

“Um ... Ahem ...”

The fidgeting, blushing girl wore glasses and carried a small decorated paper bag.

“Yes? How can we help you?” asked Yaoyorozu, speaking for the group.

“Well, umm ...” the girl stammered. “Could you ... give this to class A’s Prince Charming?”

With that, she thrust the bag into Yaoyorozu’s hands and ran off in the other direction. The girls of class A stared at each other, unsure about what had just happened.

“Our class’s Prince Charming?” said Uraraka.

“Who could that be?” said Asui.

Unlike her confused classmates, Ashido’s eyes sparked with a sudden realization.

“That’s gotta be *heartfelt chocolate*!”

Ashido slipped past the stunned girls to grab the paper bag and peek inside.

“I knew it!”

The others followed suit and spotted in the bag some sort of present with cutesy wrapping, giving off that familiar chocolate aroma.

“H-heartfelt chocolate! For real!”

Being in the presence of such a momentous offering left them stunned for a second, but then they realized they’d better find the girl with glasses, who, unfortunately, was long gone.

“W-w-whatdowedonow?” yelled Hagakure.

“‘Give this to Prince Charming,’ she said? Like we’re s’posed to know who that is?” said Uraraka.

“Take a chill pill, girls!” said Ashido, decidedly more excited than panicked. “The chick with the glasses was obviously waiting around here to bump into her Prince Charming! She was too chicken to ring the doorbell, but that wasn’t gonna stop her. When she spotted us leaving the dorm, she realized we could

solve her problem!”

As Ashido painted this picture, the girls’ imaginations took over. They envisioned Glasses Girl pining away, too nervous to confess her love directly. Plenty of sleepless nights, no doubt. As she made the chocolate, she wondered if her beloved Prince Charming even had a sweet tooth to begin with. All that longing and tension and fear had been poured into the chocolate that the group of girls now held. They stared at the gift bag in fascination.

“Whoa! She must be in love!” said Hagakure.

“I thought I was sensing something like that,” remarked Yaoyorozu.

“She was super embarrassed about it ... Hey, maybe she just bought this rather than making it,” said Jiro.

“Even so, I’m sure selecting this gift was a painstaking process for her, ribbit,” said Asui.

“Either way, she trusted us with this, so we have a sacred duty to fulfill!” said Ashido, her eyes blazing with excitement. The girls nodded resolutely.

“Uh, duh!” said Uraraka, getting worked up. “We gotta help the gal out with her mission of love!”

“But we still have an issue,” said Yaoyorozu, sounding troubled. “We still don’t know who Prince Charming is.”

“Hang on, there’s a card inside! Would it be naughty of us to take a peek?” suggested Hagakure.

“Hmm,” said Ashido, pausing to think. “I say ... we have no choice. The guy’s name might be written in there.”

“Don’t mind if I do,” said Hagakure, extracting the card and opening it. The girls discovered a succinct message within.

TO THE PRINCE CHARMING OF CLASS A,

THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME.

The girls furrowed their brows and grumbled. The card didn’t reveal Prince Charming’s identity, but it did provide one hint; apparently, he had once helped Glasses Girl in one way or another.

“So one of our knuckleheads is a prince. But who?” said Jiro, deep in thought.

“If only we could just ask the girl,” said Asui.

“That girl wasn’t a first-year, yeah?” said Hagakure. “I think we’d know her if she was in our grade.”

“A second-or third-year, then?” said Ashido, whose eyes were aflame again. “An older lady, head over heels for a freshman dude? How wild is that!”

The girls gasped at the thought. Students from different grade levels rarely had the chance to interact, but Glasses Girl was attempting to overcome that insurmountable social barrier and profess her love nonetheless. The very idea sent their minds racing. The greater the obstacles, the hotter the fires of passion burn, and even as cheerleaders on the sidelines, the girls of class A felt those flames spurring them on.

“Amazing! Okay, that settles it—we gotta deliver these chocolates to the right guy!” said a motivated Hagakure, prompting nods and fervent *mm-hmms* from the rest of the girls.

“That will involve identifying Prince Charming. Who could he possibly be?” said Yaoyorozu.

Could it be ... him?

As Uraraka mulled things over, a certain face came to mind. After a moment of panic, she shook her head, slammed the lid of her heart closed, and put a weighty padlock on it.

“Uraraka ... Care to share something with the class?” said Ashido coyly, her senses as keen as ever.

By now, Uraraka was shaking her head so violently that her face had become a blur. “Nope! I mean, not whatever you’re thinking!” she yelped. “I, uh, saw a bug! That’s all!”

“Uh-huh, suuure ...” said Ashido.

“Shake any harder and your head might fall off, Ochaco,” said Asui, genuinely concerned. Sure enough, Uraraka was dizzy and reeling by the time her head came to a stop.

“The most obvious Prince Charming ... would be Todoroki, right?” suggested Hagakure. The girls murmured in agreement. Shoto Todoroki’s classically handsome features did bring to mind the concept of Prince Charming. In fact, his good looks had made the national zeitgeist thanks to a TV interview in the wake of beating some villains with Katsuki Bakugo.

“Todoroki is a strong possibility,” said Yaoyorozu, nodding.

“If we’re just talking looks, Aoyama kinda resembles a prince,” said Jiro. More agreement from the group, as they pictured Yuga Aoyama’s sparkling eyes and silky blond hair. Even the manner in which he carried himself was evocative of a stereotypical prince.

“Yeah, I’d buy that!” said Hagakure. The girls considered the rest of their male classmates, but only Todoroki and Aoyama seemed to fit the “prince” bill.

“Great,” said Ashido. “Let’s go after our best guesses—Todoroki and Aoyama.”

“But we can’t tell them what this is about at first. Only once we figure out who Prince Charming is for sure,” said Jiro.

“Exactly. We can’t blow this for Glasses Girl by revealing what she came to us about,” said Uraraka.

“All right, so where can we find those two?” asked Asui, tilting her head.

“I’m betting Aoyama’s up in his room,” said Hagakure, pointing at the dorm. “I spotted him heading into the elevator with some cheese!”



“Non! It is not me. ☆ I have no memory of aiding a girl wearing glasses,” said Aoyama, who was busy munching on cheese.

Process of elimination left Todoroki, but he must have been out and about, because the girls couldn’t find him in his room. They left the dorm again and headed for a path in the woods where they hoped to find Todoroki, perhaps out for a job. It was the weekend, so plenty of other students were enjoying the campus grounds, either exercising or relaxing.

“What actually defines a Prince Charming?” asked Jiro, on a whim. “Does that mean he’d look good with a frilly collar?”

The girls thought it over.

“Or, like, fluttery, flowing clothes and capes?”

“Like some kinda nobleman?”

“With a rose between his teeth?”

Hearing these suggestions, Ashido gasped and stopped dead in her tracks.

“Hold up ... I think we’ve got this all wrong!” she said.

“What do you mean?” asked Uraraka.

Ashido looked deadly serious as she faced the others and made her case.

“We shouldn’t be searching for a class A dude who *looks* like a prince. When Glasses Girl said Prince Charming, she meant that that’s how *she* sees him! It’s probably got nothing to do with looks! Cuz when you fall for a guy—whoever he is—he’s gonna be a total Prince Charming in your eyes!”

More gasps from the group.

“You get what I’m saying, right?” continued Ashido. “Like in shojo manga, when the girl falls in love with her guy, those sparkly effects suddenly pop up all around him! It’s just like that!”

Ashido had never fallen in love herself, so her best textbook on the subject was shojo manga. Those stories might have been fiction, but hidden beneath the sparkles was a foundation of raw human emotion. There was always a kernel of truth within the fantasy, in the sense that one’s crush in real life might really seem to glow and sparkle. Going by that logic, the girls realized that any of the class A boys (except Aoyama, who’d already been ruled out) might be the intended recipient of the heartfelt gift.

“Indeed, we were wrong,” said Yaoyorozu, shaking her head. “The object of one’s love is viewed through the lens of the heart ...”

“So we’ve just gotta ask *all* of them now!” said Hagakure.

With this new objective, the group kept walking, now on the hunt for any of

their male classmates. Before long, they spotted Kaminari and Mineta coming toward them. The girls locked eyes, communicating a silent message to each other—“Don’t mention the chocolate gift.” These two boys were the hungriest for Valentine’s chocolate, so to speak, so a slip of the tongue here could be disastrous.

“Hey! Where are you ladies off to?” said Kaminari cheerily.

“Hello,” said Mineta, almost formally. He wore a sober, sullen expression. “It’s chilly out. Better bundle up if you don’t want to catch cold.” This was a 180-degree reversal from his usual pervy shtick, so the girls narrowed their eyes in suspicion. As conspicuous as his sudden reformation was, there was still a chance—albeit a slim one—that Mineta was Glasses Girl’s target of affection.

Jiro stepped up to the plate.

“Say, you two ...” she said, as casually as she could manage. “Did either of you help out a girl recently? Or a while back, even? At some point? Maybe a girl wearing glasses?”

“A chick with glasses? Nah, I don’t think so,” said Kaminari, looking puzzled.

“Me neither ...” said Mineta. “But why’re you asking?”

“Oh, no reason, really,” said Jiro. “It’s just that this girl said a boy in our class helped her or something, so we’re trying to find him.”

“In that case, I’d be happy to help you search,” said Mineta, keeping up his odd nice-guy act.

Convinced that Prince Charming was neither of these two, the girls turned down the offer of help politely but firmly.

“Thanks, but we’ll manage,” said Jiro.

“Hang on now!” said Kaminari, practically sparking with excitement. “So ... got any chocolate for us?”

“Oh, sure. Chocolaty cakes, pudding, truffles, you name it ...”

“Naw, not like that. I’m talking Valentine’s chocolates!” said Kaminari.

“Huh?”

“C’mon, it’s Valentine’s Day! I’m hoping for a mini mountain of chocolates from girls! So much that I’d need a bucket to haul it all!”

The girls barely had time to express contempt for Kaminari’s overly direct begging because some voices from behind shouted, “Oh! Over there!” Another group of girls came running up, grinning widely and carrying decorated boxes of what was presumably chocolate.

“For me? You shouldn’t have,” said Kaminari.

“Or maybe ... for me?” said Mineta.

The very thought sent the two boys’ hearts racing, but the unfamiliar girls (most likely first-years, though not from the Hero Course) thrust their gifts toward none other than Jiro.

“Whuh? These’re for me?” stammered Jiro.

“The way you sang up on that stage ... You rock, Jiro!”

“We were instant fans.”

“So yeah! This is for you!”

“W-wow, thanks, I guess,” said Jiro. Their mission complete, the gaggle of delighted girls ran off again.

“All that? For *you*?” snapped Kaminari, practically weeping in frustration.

“Your singing was indeed lovely,” said Yaoyorozu, remembering the performance in question.

As the rest of the girls nodded in agreement, Jiro blushed almost imperceptibly and said, “Knock it off ...”

“Let me help with those, Jiro,” said Asui, taking a chunk of the pile.

Having watched this whole scene play out, Mineta’s extreme jealousy began to peel away the sheep’s clothing concealing the wolf within. “Chock ... Choco ... Ch-chawk-lettt ...”

“Uh, Mineta?”

“Gimme the damn *chocolate*!” he screamed, choking back bitter tears as he lunged at Jiro’s gifts like a beast finally off his leash.

“Whoa!” Jiro shouted, but Asui was quick to restrain the boy with her tongue.

“What do you think you’re doing, Mineta?” she asked.

“Oh, stuff it! Why don’t I get any, huh? I’ve been a perfect gentleman for a whole week!”

Perhaps the stress of refraining from perverted behavior for seven whole days had finally gotten to him, or maybe his envy over Jiro’s good fortune had served as the last straw. There’s nothing scarier than someone who’s hit their limit, dropped the act, tossed aside all semblance of pride, and is charging at you, hungry for chocolate.

“Gimme choccy!”

Mineta began tearing the Pop Off balls from his head and throwing them at the girls. Knowing that the balls would stick to anything for hours, Asui reflexively withdrew her tongue, allowing Mineta to ramp up his ball-based assault.

“Acid Veil!” shouted Ashido, tossing out a wave of acid that stopped the balls in their tracks.

“Chill out, Mineta!” said Kaminari, but his friend was no longer human—just a chocolate-crazed zombie.

“Chawwk-let!”

The bloodcurdling roar and ghastly expression on the zombie’s face made the girls’ hair stand on end. Was chocolate really such a devilish luxury, capable of transforming a person like this? No, Mineta’s obsession with chocolate defied explanation. And when we can’t explain something, we instinctively fear it.

“I’ll hold him back, ladies! Get outta here! Save yourselves!” shouted Kaminari as he put life and limb on the line to stop the manic Mineta.

“No, Kaminari!” said Jiro.

Ever the would-be cool guy, Kaminari flashed her a thumbs-up, which unfortunately gave Mineta a chance to slip away.

“Hwah?” said Kaminari.

“Dumbass!” said Jiro.

Meanwhile, Yaoyorozu tossed a net for capturing prey—one she’d made with her “Creation” Quirk. Mineta found himself tangled in the net, but it did little to stop him from hurtling toward the girls.

“Choc-choc-choco!”

“Eek!” screamed Uraraka, in spite of herself. The girls realized that every fiber of their beings should be devoted to fleeing from the chocolate zombie, so they turned around and booked it.

“Mineta’s a little monster!” said Uraraka.

“Hardly human, I must agree!” added Yaoyorozu.

Driven by primal fear, they fled until they reached the main school building, at which point they finally glanced behind them. Whether it had been Kaminari or the net that had done it, Mineta was nowhere to be seen. They breathed a sigh of relief.

“Something the matter?” asked Sen Kaibara of class B. With him were Kosei Tsuburaba and Shihai Kuroiro. The girls exchanged glances before smiling at the class B boys, hoping to brush the matter under the rug.

“No, we’re quite all right,” said Yaoyorozu. Chocolate zombie or not, Mineta was still a classmate, and the girls weren’t about to hurt class A’s reputation by relating the sordid tale.

“Oh, by the way,” said Asui, remembering their mission. “Have you seen any of the class A boys around? We’re looking for them.” She addressed Tsuburaba, who had walked over to them.

“Uh, the boys?” he said, caught off guard for a second. “Yeah, we saw Todoroki heading into the school a few minutes ago.”

“Thanks, ribbit,” said Asui with a smile, before the girls headed for the building.

Tsuburaba looked almost wistful as he watched Asui walk away, prompting jeers from Kaibara and Kuroiro.

“Aww, didja think you’d get chocolates from Asui, lover boy?” teased Kaibara.

“I sure did!” shouted Tsuburaba, almost pouting. “I was wondering if she was going around handing out just-friends chocolate! And sure—maybe I coulda been on her list!”

“Fair enough, man. I guess a guy would get his hopes up, seeing a girl walking up to him holding something on Valentine’s Day,” said Kaibara, feeling a little more sympathetic.

“Keh heh heh,” snickered Kuroiro. “Foolish hopes are dashed on this darkest of days ...”

An indignant Tsuburaba fired back. “You’re one to talk, Kuroiro! We all saw you struggling to string two words together with Komori this morning, twitching and fidgeting the whole time.”

“I ... was only saying hello,” said Kuroiro.

“Pfft. Yeah, right,” said Kaibara. Kuroiro’s face seemed to contort in agony.

“Fine. I *was* hoping,” he said.

“And there you have it!” said Tsuburaba smugly.

“Hang on ...” Kaibara said. “Do you think class A is buying into the whole Valentine’s Day thing, like, together?”

“Must be nice. Our girls told us to buzz off and buy chocolate for ourselves if we wanted it that bad,” said Tsuburaba, clearly jealous.

“I bet they’re no different. Doing all that chocolate stuff takes time, money, and hard work,” said Kaibara.

“For real,” said Tsuburaba. “Besides, if a guy gets chocolate, then he’s gotta worry about repaying the favor come March because of White Day. More trouble than it’s worth, yeah?”

“Agreed,” said Kuroiro.

The three boys fell silent for a moment before Kaibara blurted out what they were all really thinking, deep down.

“Still, I wouldn’t mind if a girl walked up with some chocolate for me!”

“Dammit, this holiday’s got us dancing in the palm of its hand!” shrieked

Tsuburaba, startling some nearby students. Feeling the awkward stares, the boys decided to step away.

“Vending machine, anyone? I’m feeling like hot cocoa,” said Kaibara.

“Yeah, I need something sweet,” agreed Tsuburaba.

“Coffee for me. Black,” said Kuroiro.

“True to character,” said Kuroiro’s two friends in unison. The boys headed for the vending machine, chatting and laughing all the way.



Blissfully unaware of the class B boys’ conversation, the girls of class A made their way to the school building in search of Todoroki. Along the way, they bumped into Eijiro Kirishima and Hanta Sero doing some training, and then Koji Koda, who was out for a walk with his pet rabbit, Yuwai. None of the three could recall an incident involving Glasses Girl. Shortly after, the girls spotted Fumikage Tokoyami, Mezo Shoji, and Mashirao Ojio, all in the process of receiving chocolates from some other girls. The six girls of class A quickly hopped off the path and hid behind some trees.

“Wow, are you seeing this?” said Uraraka excitedly. “All three of them getting actual chocolate!”

“Well, aren’t they popular!” said Jiro.

“Ojio’s stash is huge!” added Hagakure.

It was true—Ojio held a number of gift bags, but upon closer inspection, each was fairly small. The girls fell silent, eavesdropping on the gift givers.

“Thanks for the other day, y’know.”

“This is nothing too special, but I hope you like it.”

“Oh, and don’t worry about returning the favor.”

From these comments, it was clear that Tokoyami, Shoji, and Ojio were receiving just-friends chocolate.

“Any reason you’re hiding over there?” said Shoji toward the trees. He’d

known they were there from the start, so the girls awkwardly emerged and walked over.

“We just, uh, caught you in the middle of that chocolate action, so it seemed like the sensible thing to do!” said Uraraka, rubbing her neck sheepishly.

“That would be just-friends chocolate, I presume?” said Yaoyorozu with a great deal of curiosity.

“Yeah,” said Ojiro, looking a bit embarrassed. “One came from a girl who I helped when she dropped something the other day. And this other one was because I lent her an umbrella.”

“Such a nice guy! So typical of you!” said Hagakure.

“He makes a habit of being kind. It’s that plain and simple,” said Shoji.

“Indeed,” said Tokoyami. “An ordinary man of character.”

Ojiro blushed, but something else bothered him. “Any way you could say those nice things without using the words *typical*, *plain*, or *ordinary*?”

At this, Dark Shadow emerged from Tokoyami, excited to contribute to the conversation. “Because you’re the King of Normal, Ojiro!” it said.

“What on earth does that mean?”

“The normalest among the regulars! The ultimate ordinary guy!”

“Okay, that doesn’t even sound like a compliment anymore ...” said Ojiro, getting gloomier by the second.

“Hmm,” said Hagakure, thinking. “I know! Forget all that—let’s call you the Just-Friends Chocolate King! JFC King for short! How’s that?”

Always ones to join the fun, Uraraka and Ashido cheered, “Let’s hear it for the JFC King!”

“I wanna be the JFC King too!” shouted Dark Shadow, chiming in again.

Ojiro looked far from satisfied. “Still doesn’t sound like a compliment,” he said.

But before the conversation could continue, they all heard it. A demonic roar to shake the very foundations of the earth.

“Chawwwk-let!”

The girls flinched and began to tremble.

“A chocolaty smell? Where? There!”

Mineta the chocolate zombie had tracked down the concentrated volume of chocolate by scent alone. Kaminari was nowhere in sight, as he’d found himself immobilized by the net and Pop Off balls a ways back.

“Mineta? What’s gotten into you? Whoa!”

Mineta lunged at Ojiro, who had more chocolate on him than anyone else. But the zombie quickly lost interest when he noticed that Ojiro’s gifts were all clearly just-friends chocolate, and he began sniffing the air again, having picked up a new scent.

“What’s wrong with him?” asked Ojiro, stunned by the turn of events but glad to be off Mineta’s radar.

“Deep, deeeep choccy smell ...” muttered Mineta. He staggered away, hot on the trail. Terrified as they were, the girls were curious, so they decided to follow the lurching zombie. The three boys went with them.

“Choco ... Chockums ...”

At last, the quest led them behind the school building, where they found ...

“Baku—”

Before she could finish, Uraraka clapped her hands over her mouth. Yes, there stood Bakugo, facing a female student—presumably from one of the other courses of study at U.A.

“Um ... There’s something you need to know,” said the girl, clasping a gift bag that presumably held chocolate.

The group kept hidden, and when they saw the grave expression on the girl’s face, they exchanged excited glances. Here it was—a true-blue Valentine’s Day profession of love.

“Is this for real?” whispered Jiro in disbelief.

“Oh, this is hype! Here it comes!” said Ashido, practically snorting.

“A fearsome contender ...” murmured the ever-serious Tokoyami.

Beside them, Mineta began to tremble. “Heartfelt ... chocolate ...? How ... dare he!”

He craved nothing more, and yet he couldn’t bear to see it happen for another guy. That blend of greed and loathing swirled in Mineta, revitalizing the forlorn chocolate zombie. He was seconds away from leaping at Bakugo, but the others weren’t keen on having him ruin this earnest, dramatic moment. Shoji grabbed Mineta and pinned him down, allowing Yaoyorozu to bind the zombie with special bands she’d created. Finally, they gagged Mineta with a hankie.

“Mmrghmph!”

“Apologies, Mineta,” said Yaoyorozu, who was genuinely sorry. But nothing less than these drastic measures would keep the choco-zombie from rampaging.

As they set the immobile Mineta down behind a tree, out of sight, a pair of voices called out to the group.

“What are you all doing over here?”

“Have you spotted a rare insect, perhaps?”

“Deku! Ida!” said Uraraka before once again slapping a hand over her mouth. The two boys had just been passing by after a jog, and they didn’t know what to make of this scene. The others silenced them with a “Shh!” and beckoned them to join the peanut gallery.

“Some girl’s about to confess to Bakugo!” explained Uraraka.

“Confess to what? A crime?” asked Ida.

“To *love*! What else would it be? It’s Valentine’s Day!” said Ashido. They watched with bated breath as the girl at last seemed to find her courage.

“Um! It’s wide open!” she shouted.

“Huhh?” said Bakugo.

“Your fly! Down there! Wide open!” she said, pointing at the crotch of Bakugo’s pants. She wasn’t wrong. “Anyway, just had to let you know! I gotta

run and meet my boyfriend, so see ya!”

Relief washed over the girl’s face as she ran off, and the group hiding behind the trees struggled to hold back bursts of laughter as they watched Bakugo glance down and slowly zip his fly.

“Not what we were expecting,” said Ojira.

“Oddly enough, Kacchan has never gotten any chocolates on Valentine’s Day, at least as far as I’m aware,” said Midoriya.

“Really?” said a shocked Ashido.

“Even when we were kids, he never went out of his way to be especially nice to girls,” Midoriya explained. “Aunties in the neighborhood would get mad and tell him to play nice, but that just made him more annoyed at women in general. Honestly, I doubt he’s ever gotten just-friends chocolate, even.”

“Dammit, Deku! Always blab, blab, blabbing about crap that ain’t your business!” shouted Bakugo, who’d walked over to the group while Midoriya was caught up in his story. “In fact, crap’s the only thing that comes outta your mouth, so let’s just blast it off your face!” He aimed an explosion at Midoriya.

“Yikes! Cut that out, Kacchan!” said Midoriya, dodging the blast.

“Bakugo! You mustn’t unleash your explosions outside of designated training sessions!” Ida said.

“What he said, Bakugo!” said Uraraka.

“You got a problem? Then blame *him* for starting it!” said Bakugo.

“Look, I’m sorry! Really!” said Midoriya.

“As if you even get what you did wrong!”

Their grinning classmates watched as Midoriya and Bakugo’s cat-and-mouse exchange intensified, knowing full well that if either were actually fighting seriously, this battle would’ve already turned deadly. The two boys’ relationship had been more than a little fraught at the start of the school year, but by this point there was something almost charming about watching them bicker like true childhood friends.

“Crud!” gasped Ashido. “We forgot about the Prince Charming of class A!”

Reminded of their mission, the girls asked Ojiro, Shoji, and Tokoyami if they had run into and helped a girl with glasses. The tale didn’t ring a bell, though.

“Midoriya? Bakugo? Got a minute?” said Asui. Her beckoning brought the mini battle to a cease-fire, but neither of the boys could recall aiding such a girl.

Phew ...

Uraraka breathed a private sigh of relief.

Bakugo had answered the question willingly, but now his brow began to furrow all over again.

“Hang on. Why’re you after this girl, anyhow?”

“Whaddaya mean, why?” said Ashido.

“If she wants to say thank you that bad, she oughta step up and say it to the guy’s face,” said Bakugo. His sharp intuition led him to realize there must be more to the story.

“He has a point,” said Ojiro. The other boys agreed.

“Lemme guess—she tossed some chocolate at you and asked you to deliver it,” said Bakugo, hitting the nail on the head.

“H-how’d you know?” blurted Uraraka.

The rest of the girls—who’d been determined to keep the secret—sighed in disappointment.

“Whoops. Sorrrry ...” said Uraraka, clapping her hands together in apology.

“You’re hardly to blame, considering that Bakugo had already guessed the truth,” said Yaoyorozu. “You see, what happened was ...”

She proceeded to explain the story, which got the boys strangely excited.

“Our class has a Prince Charming?”

“A secret prince ... Keeping to the shadows ... A prince of darkness ...”

“You think it’s you, Tokoyami?”

“No ... I was merely brainstorming.”

“You sure you didn’t forget meeting this girl, Ojira?”

“Nah. Pretty sure, anyway ...”

“In any case, this bespectacled upper-level student clearly feels grateful toward her Prince Charming! Is it not our duty as future heroes to come to her aid?” Ida asked.

“Not my problem,” said Bakugo, but before he could storm off ...

“What’s everyone up to?” said Todoroki, walking over with a large cardboard box.

“Whatchu got there, Todoroki?”

“For some reason, people sent me all this chocolate.”

“What! That’s full of chocolate?”

“Yeah. Too much for me to eat, anyway,” said Todoroki. He placed the box down and opened the flaps. The box was crammed to bursting with colorful boxes and bags of Valentine’s chocolates.

“Awesome!” said Uraraka, who couldn’t help but gasp in wonder.

“I have no idea why so many strangers would send me these things all at once,” said Todoroki, looking puzzled.

“It’s probably people who saw your interview on TV, right?” suggested Midoriya. “The one you did after beating those villains with Kacchan on the day you got your provisional licenses.”

“Yeah!” said Uraraka. “Folks were talking about that for days.”

“Indeed! Although every instance of Bakugo speaking was cut from the final interview!” said Ida.

“Cram it, Four-Eyes! Nobody asked for a freakin’ recap!” shouted Bakugo.

“Oh, that reminds me,” said Todoroki, reaching into his pocket. He pulled out two wrapped chocolates—the kind one might find for cheap at a shop.

“Midoriya, Ida—here.”

“Oh. Thank you,” said Midoriya.

“But why?” asked Ida. Neither quite understood what was going on.

“Yaoyorozu told me that friends give each other chocolate on Valentine’s Day. Is that wrong?” said Todoroki.

“Aw, Todoroki!” said Midoriya, Ida, and Yaoyorozu in unison. The two boys were shaken to their cores, and Todoroki’s unofficial tutor on cultural matters was also moved by the gesture. Bakugo looked ready to lose his lunch, but the rest of their classmates couldn’t help but smile at this pure display of friendship.

“Friendship like that ... Just too precious!” said Hagakure, and everyone but Bakugo nodded in agreement.

“Ah, I’d better go buy some of those from the school store!” said Midoriya.

“I will accompany you! I must procure Valentine’s Day chocolate as well!” said Ida.

Todoroki watched with a soft smile as his two friends dashed off to the store, eager to return the gesture. The others remembered how icy and aloof Todoroki had been at the start of high school, and they smiled to realize how far he’d come. The coming spring would mark a full year since their education at U.A. had begun, and just as the buds of trees bloomed over time, so too did people grow and change.

“Incidentally, Todoroki, do you recall meeting a certain upper-level student? A young lady with glasses?” asked Yaoyorozu. She explained what had happened, and as Todoroki pondered the matter, the girls started to get their hopes up. Surely Todoroki was the long-sought Prince Charming.

“No. Wasn’t me,” he said. The girls wore their disappointment on their faces, but Ashido quickly got things back on track.

“Great. So the only boy left is Sato,” she said.

“Does that make Sato our Prince Charming?” said Uraraka.

“We shall simply have to ask him!” said an eager Yaoyorozu.

But before the group could turn back toward the dorm building, the all-too-familiar demonic cry pierced the air.

“Chaw-let!”

Yes, Mineta the chocolate zombie had somehow escaped his bindings.

“Todoroki, I got nothing against you personally,” said the zombie. “But any guy who gets that much heartfelt chocolate ... and crosses my path ... won’t live to see tomorrow!”

“Um, are you having a problem, Mineta?” asked Todoroki, feeling like he was missing something. But before anyone could react, Mineta began tossing his Pop Off balls not just at Todoroki, but at everyone, in every direction.

“Calm the heck down, Mineta!” said Uraraka as she and the panicked girls ducked for cover.

Bakugo blasted himself into the air to dodge the balls, and it was there that he noticed a certain someone, at a distance.

For Todoroki, a small ice wall was enough to block the sticky balls.

“Chill out already! Dessert comes later! Get through dinner, and you’ll have all the chocolate treats you want!” said Uraraka.

“All I want ... is *heartfelt chocolate!*” groaned the desperate Mineta, bitter tears running from his bloodshot eyes.

For the first time, the girls hesitated, unsure what to do. The source of their terror had turned out to be a simpler creature than they’d imagined, and it was hard to despise him now, knowing exactly what was driving him. In fact, there was almost something *cute* about this being, so desperately clawing its way through life.

“Hey! I think I found your four-eyed girl,” yelled Bakugo to his classmates.

“Oh? Ahh!”

Bakugo’s thumb pointed straight at the girl, who was indeed the bestower of chocolate from earlier.

“I-I’m sorry!” she said. “I spotted the Prince Charming of class A and couldn’t help but gawk ...”

“What? The prince?”

“He’s here? Among us right now?”

The bashful student nodded, and the girls' hearts nearly pounded out of their chests as they surveyed the boys who were present and accounted for. They held their breath, knowing the prince was near.

"Give it to him yourself, then! You got this, babe!" said Ashido, handing the gift back to the girl. The others nodded to show their support, and as if the encouragement had given her a shove, the still-nervous girl stumbled straight toward one boy in particular.

"Who ... ? Me?" said Mineta.

"Um, a week ago, at the shoe cubbies ... You really don't remember?" said the girl. "Anyway, I tripped and dropped my glasses, and there you were. You reached out and said, 'Need a hand there, m'lady?'"

Mineta was temporarily stunned, but then he gasped.

"Ah! That was you!"

"No one's ever used such a cheesy line on me before in my whole life ... I couldn't stop thinking about it afterward. So please—accept this gift, from the bottom of my heart," said the girl—her face now beet red—as she extended her arms.

"Aaah!" shrieked the rest of the girls, practically writhing with emotion.

"Um. Hello?" said the girl, now more puzzled than embarrassed, but Mineta made no effort to take the gift. The class A girls approached and realized that in his ecstasy, Mineta had fallen unconscious.

"Wake the hell up, Mineta!" said Ashido, shaking him by the shoulders. "It's real live heartfelt chocolate! The thing you always wanted!"

With a gasp, Mineta came to his senses. His eyes darted from the girl to the gift and back again. This time, the tears that flowed from his eyes were pure and clear, without a hint of bitterness.

"Th-that chocolate? For me?" he said.

The girl nodded, once again feeling bashful.

"Y'mean, you l-l-l-love me?"

“M-maybe a little soon for that ... so let’s start as friends first ...”

A fantastical equation took shape within Mineta’s mind palace.

Heartfelt chocolates + “let’s start as friends” = basically dating = getting to do this and that and everything I’ve ever fantasized about.

He gulped at the thought of this sequence of events that he’d conceived.

“Sooo, shall we head back to my room? Or we could pick a shady corner of the woods and get started right away!” he said.

“Huh?”

Glasses Girl apparently didn’t understand. Mineta’s bloodshot eyes bulged, and his breathing grew ragged as his slack jaw opened up to provide further explanation.

“I’m talking @\$*%\$#! #\$@%&#*\$? We @\$#% until I %#\$ \$% @\$%@\$ \$#@!!”

The girl recoiled in horror as Mineta rattled off a string of the foulest, most depraved utterances to ever escape his mind. It was as if every dirty thought he’d ever had had been poured into a sickening stew and left to boil down into this condensed distillation of vileness, a concoction most unsuitable for an audience of, well, any age, really. Meanwhile, Mineta’s classmates could do nothing as Glasses Girl’s face contorted into an expression of rage and loathing, like a *hannya* mask straight out of Noh theater.

“I thought you were different!” she cried. “Never speak to me again!”

The girl grabbed the gift bag back, laid a powerful open-handed smack against Mineta’s cheek, and ran off. The smack snapped him out of it and stopped the litany of filth he was still spouting, but when he tried to pursue his would-be sweetheart, the girls of class A stood in his path, looking grim.

“Mineta. When a gal says she might be into you, that’s not your cue to say that gross stuff,” said Uraraka.

“Guess what, Mineta? News flash: you suuuck,” added Ashido with a withering glare.

“Dumped within seconds,” said Asui, shaking her head.

“Huh? But she basically said she loved me,” said Mineta, who still wasn’t entirely sure what had gone wrong.

“Dumped *and* hated forever,” said Jiro.

“And when you make a girl mad like that, there’s no coming back from it,” said Hagakure.

“I’m afraid you’ve ruined your one-and-only golden opportunity,” said Yaoyorozu.

Mineta seemed dumbfounded by the girls’ scathing feedback. As it began to sink in, he turned pale.

“No ... No way ... Say it ain’t so ...” he said, looking like a walking corpse.

“Hey, buddy ... Buck up, okay?” came a voice full of compassion and mercy.

“S-Sato?”

Sato walked over carrying a box done up in cutesy wrapping.

“Here you go,” he said a little awkwardly, and everyone gathered around as Mineta opened the box. Inside was a giant heart-shaped chocolate, decorated with a caricature of Mineta’s face and the words “Love You ≡” drawn and written in frosting.

“I realized you probably weren’t getting any heartfelt chocolate today, so why not from me? And hey, it’s your favorite flavor—grape,” said Sato, sounding proud of himself.

“There ya go—heartfelt chocolate!”

“Isn’t that great?”

Mineta’s classmates did their best to play up the gift, but tears began to fill his eyes once again.

“What’s the point ... if it ain’t coming from a chick?!” he screeched.

At that, Bakugo gave a final cluck of his tongue and marched back toward the dorm, having witnessed enough nonsense for the day. Meanwhile, the girls stared down at their pitiable, openly weeping classmate and found it in their hearts to console him.

“I bet chowing down on some chocolate will cheer you up!” said Hagakure.

“I’m sure it’s tasty,” said Asui.

“Ugh, fiiine. You can have some of my chocolate pudding as long as you quit blubbering,” said Ashido.

“Would my chocolate ice cream turn that frown upside down?” asked Uraraka.

“Mineta, earlier I said you had wasted a golden opportunity,” Yaoyarozu said. “But allow me to amend that statement. So long as you still live, the opportunities will keep coming.”

“What she said,” said Jiro. “One day, I bet you’ll get heartfelt chocolate from a chick. Probably? Maybe?”

With that, the search for class A’s Prince Charming came to a close, just as the Valentine’s Day party was about to begin.

Chocolate has long been thought of as an aphrodisiac, but as for whether or not it can make true love bloom? Heaven only knows.

Part 3

Springtime Snowy-Mountain Camping



A sparkling, silvery snowscape spread as far as the eye could see, punctuated only by a towering, snow-covered mountain that threatened to pierce the blue sky above.

“Would you look at that!” said Izuku Midoriya, his eyes as glistening as the snow.

“For real! Couldn’t ask for better weather for camping, either!” added Denki Kaminari.

Joining the two boys were Katsuki Bakugo, Shoto Todoroki, Tenya Ida, Eijiro Kirishima, and Hanta Sero, all decked out in winter-weather gear and massive backpacks. The events that had led these seven boys to this wintry wonderland had begun a few days earlier.



“Getting cabin fever over here!” moaned Kaminari.

It was just before dinner, and class A’s resident spark plug was slouched on a sofa in the communal space of the dorm. Beside him, Sero stopped fidgeting with his phone and laughed.

“Where would we even go?” said Sero.

“Dunno! But c’mon—we’re talking spring break here,” said Kaminari. “Oh? Look who it is!”

He turned to spot Bakugo, Midoriya, Todoroki, and Kirishima, who had just returned from their respective work studies. Students had the option of lodging at their work-study agencies, but that involved filling out extra paperwork and navigating red tape. Besides, the dorm was the best place to be to shift focus back to their usual studies.

“Yeah, we’re back. Got a problem?” said Bakugo.

“Good to be home!” said Kirishima.

“What were you two just talking about?” asked Midoriya.

“Kaminari was saying how it’s spring break, so he’s got the urge to blow this

place and have some fun,” explained Sero.

“What kind of thinking is that, Kaminari?” said Ida, who’d already returned from his own work study and was passing through the common area. “A student’s duty is to their studies, and we are now residents of this dorm. Where would you even presume to run off to at a moment’s notice? Ah, welcome back, classmates!”

Before the newcomers could so much as say “Hi” to Ida, Kaminari groaned.

“They call it spring *break*, though. Breaks are for relaxing. Unwinding. Chilling out!”

“I admit this doesn’t feel much like spring break, given the intense work studies,” said Midoriya with a nod.

“This guy gets it!” said Kaminari. But Midoriya wasn’t fully on the party bus just yet. “Still, being at the agency is so much fun since we’re learning new things every day! Thanks again for inviting us to come along, Todoroki!”

“Uh-huh,” said Todoroki. A simple response, but his expression softened a bit.

Kaminari observed the exchange and pouted. “Yeah, yeah, I get that! But spring break is a blink-and-you-miss-it window! Way shorter than summer and winter breaks, so it’s much more valuable!”

“Hey—why don’t we have a *fall break*, anyway?” asked Kirishima in earnest.

“They must think we can power through fall after taking it easy over the summer,” said Sero.

“Makes sense to me,” said Kirishima.

“You’re losing the point, guys!” shouted Kaminari, who was getting fed up with the tangents. “I’m saying we gotta make the most of this chance! It doesn’t gotta be a full-blown trip! Just somewhere we can go to hang out and chill!”

“Hoping to go somewhere, Kaminari?” said a low voice from behind.

“Sensei!”

At the appearance of their homeroom teacher, Shota Aizawa, the boys’ backs stiffened straight as ramrods, as his icy stare convinced them they were in for

some kind of talking-to. They knew that Aizawa's austere nature came from a loving place, but that didn't make him any less intimidating. As they waited for the hammer of judgment to fall, the boys prayed they'd get away with *only* a three-page essay reflecting on the error of their ways; they could never have expected the words that actually came out of Aizawa's mouth.

"How about mountain camping?"

They were too stunned to respond, so Aizawa continued while glancing at some sort of schedule in his hand.

"One of the school's training facilities simulates a full-blown wintry mountain. There's the mountain itself, plus a forest, and even a lake for fishing. Looks to me like you all have some overlapping days off coming up, so you could head out there for a night's stay."

This bolt from the blue seemed too good to be true, so the slack-jawed boys could only stare and blink.

"What? Nobody's forcing you. You're welcome to go nowhere at all instead," said Aizawa.

"Wait, no—yes, sign us up! But who came up with this awesome idea?" said Kaminari.

"At the faculty meeting, we discussed opening up some of the school's facilities to students for spring break. The change of pace should leave you feeling refreshed and ready to tackle the duties ahead more efficiently. Well? How does that sound?" said Aizawa.

The boys agreed instantly and unanimously, and with that, the mountain camping plan was put in motion.



"S'like we're at the edge of the world!" shouted Kirishima, surveying the sprawling snowfields. "If I got blindfolded and dropped off here, I'd have no clue this was still part of the school!"

"U.A.'s got property up the wazoo!" added Sero.

Kaminari, who was fidgeting with excitement, tossed aside his bag and dove on top of the snow with a “Woo-hoo!”

“Real snow! Chilly! But awesome! Hey, who’s up for a snowball fight?”

Kaminari’s excitement was cut short when his bulky bag was tossed back on top of him.

“Oof! What gives?”

“You’re in for a world of pain if you make light of the mountain,” said Bakugo, somehow glaring with even more intensity than usual.

“Huh?”

“Listen, dweebs. There ain’t some cozy cabin waiting for us. We’re out here on our own, and there ain’t a second to spare for fun and games when it comes to survivalist camping.”

Bakugo’s calm, steady tone rattled the other boys.

“Survivalist? C’mon, man,” said Kaminari. “We’re out here for one measly night. Why all the doom and gloom?”

“Cuz from now until tomorrow at noon, we’re locked up in this place,” said Bakugo.

This reminded the boys of what Aizawa had said after they’d agreed to sign on the proverbial dotted line.

“Once you’re in there, the entrance is locked for the next twenty-four hours, come what may. Keep in mind that your phones won’t work either. Still sure about this?”

The ominous warning and caveats hadn’t scared the seven boys off. They might’ve even had an eighth member if Minoru Mineta had returned to the dorm when Kaminari and Sero had (all three were doing work studies at the same agency), but at that moment, he was busy being Mt. Lady’s errand boy, under the guise of what she called “training.”

“Pfft, what’s the big deal?” said Kaminari with a snort. Bakugo narrowed his eyes and clucked his tongue.

“You try sleeping out in this cold without proper prep? You’re dead. So if turning into a frozen corpse is your thing, be my freakin’ guest,” said Bakugo.

Midoriya’s eyes glinted with joy over the knowledge nugget he was about to share.

“Kacchan’s big hobby is actually mountain climbing, we should trust him when he says a snowy mountain can be dangerous.”

“Ah! How fortuitous for us, then!” said Ida. “I have basic knowledge on the topic from books but little confidence when putting it all into practice. Care to take command of this operation, Bakugo?”

Bakugo scowled at Ida’s suggestion.

“Me?”

“Yes! I’m sure an experienced mountaineer such as yourself knows much that we do not. You’re the right man for the job!” said Ida, with a trusting smile.

Bakugo paused before clucking his tongue again and consenting. “You’d all be lost without me, so fine. But the first one to start whining gets a snowy grave, courtesy of me.”

“You got it, boss!” said Kaminari, and he meant it.

Meanwhile, Midoriya blinked in puzzlement at Bakugo, and Todoroki noticed.

“What is it, Midoriya?”

“Hmm? Oh, nothing. Probably just my imagination ...” said Midoriya, still looking bewildered.

“Ears open, now,” said Bakugo, turning to the group. “We got three jobs to start with: set up the tents, find food, and collect firewood.”

With that, the boys split into three teams. The experienced Bakugo enlisted Kirishima to help set up tents for the group, while Midoriya, Kaminari, and Sero were responsible for fishing at the lake, which left Todoroki and Ida to gather kindling in the forest.

“And break! Get out there already!” said Bakugo, signaling the Food Force and Kindling Crew to set out for their respective destinations.

“Good luck, dudes!” shouted Kirishima before turning back to Bakugo. “All right—gimme an order. Whatever you need!” To show his enthusiasm, Kirishima punched one fist into his other open palm.

Meanwhile, Bakugo turned a shrewd eye to the snowy landscape around them. “Over there,” he said after a pause, motioning toward a flatter area.

“Tents go here?” asked Kirishima, after hauling the group’s tents to the spot.

“Yeah. Nice and level here,” said Bakugo.

“Then what’re we waiting for?” said Kirishima.

But before he could unfurl all the rods and tarps, Bakugo had another order. “First, we gotta pack the snow down to form a base. Gonna sleep like crap otherwise.”

“That’s a job for me, for sure!” said Kirishima. He ripped off his gloves, applied his “Hardening” Quirk to his fists, and pounded a section of the snowy ground while letting loose with a war cry. Once Kirishima had finished, Bakugo popped open a one-person tent and masterfully smacked a stabilizing stake into the ground to hold the tent in place.

Meanwhile, Ida and Todoroki of the Kindling Crew arrived at the edge of the forest, where they were once again impressed by the scope of the facility.

“Look at that! A full-blown forest!” said Ida.

“Crazy,” said Todoroki.

The two boys cautiously checked their surroundings before heading in. Towering trees of all types sprung from the ground, making the fabricated forest seem all too natural, and the dappled beams filtering through the canopy seemed like real sunlight.

“We’re here for dry sticks, right?” Todoroki asked. “And maybe some big rocks to surround the campfire?”

“I might also suggest leafy branches as a barrier between our kindling and the snowy ground. The fire won’t burn with too much moisture, after all. In any case, our mission to provide heat for the group is an essential one! Let’s start gathering!” said Ida.

“Sure.”

They set off to complete their checklist. Todoroki swept aside snow to hunt for stones, while Ida—with a botanical guidebook in hand—picked up fallen branches.

“I gotta say,” said Todoroki, causing Ida to turn to him, “I didn’t expect you to come camping. It’s hard to get much schoolwork done during these work-study periods, so I assumed you’d wanna focus on that for now.”

“The thought did occur to me,” said Ida. “But there could be plenty to learn from this camping experience too. Most importantly, I knew I would be out here with you and Midoriya. The chance to go camping with two dear friends surely doesn’t come along all too often.”

These final words came out a bit awkwardly, but Todoroki appreciated the sentiment.

“Yeah, I agree,” he said.

“Wonderful! Then let’s enjoy this camping trip to the best of our abilities!”

Ida returned to gathering dead branches, but then he saw something that made him pause.

“What might this be?”

In the meantime, Midoriya, Kaminari, and Sero of the Food Force were peering through the thin layer of ice covering the lake. Beneath the ice, they could just make out fish swimming back and forth.

“Real live fish! In the fishy flesh! And tons of ’em, at that!” said Kaminari.

“Looks like there’ll be more than enough to feed all of all,” said Midoriya.

“Assuming we find a way to catch any,” said Sero, glancing at Kaminari.

“Look, I said I was sorry! I screwed up, okay?” said Kaminari, clasping his hands in apology. He’d been responsible for bringing the fishing rods, but he’d overslept and forgotten them as he rushed to pack.

“Guess we could make a rod using a tree branch.”

This got Midoriya thinking. “Hmm ... And your tape would be perfect as fishing

line, Sero, so all that's left is the hook and the bait ..."

Given the survivalist nature of this expedition, the boys hadn't brought any food in their packs. They pondered in silence for a moment until Kaminari—getting gloomier by the second—rubbed his stomach and said, "Of course I'm getting hungry *now*, right when it looks like fish is off the menu. If only we could scoop 'em all up at once somehow ..."

"A net!" said Midoriya with a start. "That could be our answer."

"Except nobody brought a net either," said Kaminari.

"You forgetting about my tape?" said Sero, before turning to Midoriya and nodding.

"Ohh, I get it!" said Kaminari, lagging a few seconds behind in the inspiration department.

The boys found a few curvy branches nearby and bound them together with Sero's tape, creating a circle two meters across. From there, they simply wove a latticework of tape across the circular frame and added another branch as a handle to complete their DIY net. When finished, it resembled a giant version of the little tools used to scoop up goldfish at Japanese festivals.

"Now it's my turn to shine," said Kaminari.

"Exactly," said Midoriya. "You zap the fish to incapacitate them, and I'll do the scooping."

He lowered the improvised net into the shallow water and shivered when it splashed up against his fingers.

"Brrr, that's cold!" said Midoriya, before turning to Kaminari and pointing at the water. "Whenever you're ready."

"Awesome! Three, two, one ..."

The burst of Kaminari's Electrification spread through the water and zapped the nearby fish, rendering them unconscious and motionless. Without missing a beat, Midoriya swung the net through the water to collect the stunned fish.

"It's really working!" said Sero.

“We’re feasting on grilled fish tonight!” said Kaminari.

Just as Midoriya was hauling their bounty out of the water, Bakugo and Kirishima—who had finished their tent task—walked up to the group.

“Dang, what a haul!” said Kirishima, running up and staring at the fish in the net.

“All finished setting up the tents?” said Midoriya.

“Yup. You shoulda seen Bakugo’s tent skills! Anyway, we got done so fast, I was thinking we could help you dudes out, but you did totally fine on your own! Whoa, this one’s a whopper!”

“Hmph,” snorted Bakugo. “Anyone who can’t catch fish in a lake deserves an icy bath.”

“Still plenty of fish in there, so we’ll catch more tomorrow morning,” said Kaminari.

“Yeah? That so?” said Bakugo, stepping closer to the water’s edge for a look. Just as he did, one of the larger fish in the net regained consciousness and performed a mighty flop into the air, nailing Bakugo in the back and pushing him into the freezing water.

“Gahh!” he yelped.

“Bakugo!”

“You okay, dude?”

The boys started to panic until Bakugo’s head popped out of the water. Since Midoriya was closest, he extended an arm toward his soaked friend.

“Need help? Let’s get you out of there quickly,” said Midoriya.

Bakugo flinched.

“Need help? Can you stand?”

Somewhere in the recesses of Bakugo’s mind, he recalled a similar scene from their childhood, when he’d fallen off a bridge into a shallow stream. Back then, that same childhood friend had been there to offer a helping hand. That was the first in a series of bitter memories that had been gnawing away at Bakugo

ever since, so his reflex now was to lash out in revulsion.

“Mind your own business,” he said.

Bakugo knew that his own subdued response was evidence that he’d done some growing. Still, that thorny edge of rejection would always find its way into his tone of voice. Perhaps Midoriya took note, since he almost hesitated before saying, “But ...”

Bakugo ignored the appeal and hauled himself out of lake, but Midoriya found his resolve and placed a hand against Bakugo’s forehead.

“Getcher hands off me,” said Bakugo, smacking the hand away.

“Kacchan, you’ve got a fever,” said Midoriya. “Wait, didn’t you say your head hurt yesterday, back at the agency? Are you sick? Did you take any medicine?” The others detected genuine concern in his voice and came rushing over.

“You shoulda said something, dude!” said Kirishima, panicking. “What now? We gotta let Aizawa Sensei know, and ...”

“Not happening,” said Sero. “We’re trapped in here until tomorrow, remember? Our phones won’t work either.”

Kaminari gave the matter some thought. “That means we just gotta survive the night. Crap, Bakugo! You’d better find dry clothes before you get even sicker!”

All the worrying for his sake made Bakugo’s eyebrows slant at dangerous angles.

“Enough!” he shouted. “It ain’t your problem! Besides, I can kill off a stupid cold through willpower alone!”

“Nuh-uh,” said Sero. “The only way to beat a cold is sleeping it off in a warm bed.”

Before the furious Bakugo could react, Sero had wrapped him up with tape. Then Kirishima took charge by slinging his burrito of a friend over his shoulder.

“Hang in there, Bakugo! I’ll get you back to the tents in a jiffy!” said Kirishima.

“Put me the @#%# down!” screamed Bakugo, to no avail.

After being toted back to the tents, Bakugo was freed so that he could change into fresh, dry clothes and crawl into his sleeping bag. Ida and Todoroki had already returned from their mission, so they and the other three donated spare clothes and single-use hand-warmer packs to keep Bakugo toasty.

“Bakugo, quit fighting back and just get some rest!” said Kaminari.

“If you gotta tinkle, gimme a shout!” said Kirishima.

“Think you’ll be up for some grilled fish later?” asked Sero.

“Bakugo, I must apologize for forcing you into a leadership position when you were ill!” said Ida.

“My ice could cool down your forehead if you want,” offered Todoroki.

Seeing the boys standing over him with pity in their eyes was too much for Bakugo.

“You doting dopes are pissing me off and making the fever worse, so get the hell outta my face!”

The boys got the message loud and clear and moved away from Bakugo’s tent, but Midoriya’s genuine concern wouldn’t let him leave without saying something.

“Kacchan, really ... Speak up if you need anything,” he said.

“Not another damn word outta you,” said Bakugo, who even shut his eyes to save him from the sight of Midoriya’s face. The boys’ footsteps receded, but still Bakugo’s irritation twisted within him like a jagged knife. The others were close enough for him to overhear their conversation.

“Good looking out, Midoriya,” said Kaminari. “I never would’ve realized he was sick.”

“Well, before, when Ida asked him to take command, I noticed that Kacchan’s usual reaction was a little delayed. That tipped me off that something else might be wrong.”

Bakugo’s eyes popped open upon hearing this, and his anger flared. He’d known he wasn’t in peak condition earlier, but he had never planned on mentioning it. It’s simple biological instinct to be wary of revealing weakness to

others. In the wild, doing so lowers one's odds of survival, whereas flaunting one's strengths is a good way to remain at the top of the food chain and survive. So says the law of the jungle. Consequently, any third party who perceives one's weakness represents a threat worthy of elimination.

Years ago, when Midoriya had extended that helping hand, Bakugo had instinctively felt that his own weakness was laid bare—that it was suddenly a known fact. He'd disguised that deep-seated fear with unbridled rage, but it had seeped into him and accumulated, like pockets of dust within his very being.

In truth, both then and now, Midoriya's offers were always made out of genuine concern—nothing to do with strength or weakness. This was incomprehensible to Bakugo, but at least in recent times, he'd made peace (to some degree) by accepting that he would never fully understand Midoriya. Why the unceasing irritation, then? His inability to explain his own anger only angered him further. He felt his fever worsening as he pondered, so with a final cluck of his tongue, he willed himself to sleep.

It was sunset by the time the boys had finished prepping the campfire and started grilling the fish, checking in on the sleeping Bakugo now and then. While they sat around the fire and waited for the fish to cook, the last traces of daylight vanished.

"Taaasty!" shouted Kaminari, after sinking his teeth into his first bite. "Fish hits different when you catch and grill it yourself!"

The other five followed Kaminari's lead and began to chow down. The crispy skin, fresh off the fire, smelled savory beyond belief, and the soft flesh went down like butter. Perhaps Kaminari was right—it really did seem to taste better when you'd worked for it.

"I could down two or three of these little guys."

"Feel free—we got plenty."

"This is filling me up! Circle of life, and all."





MY HERO
ACADEMIA

“Yummm.”

As each boy finished his first fish, he immediately reached for a second.

“Man, your Quirk is a godsend out in the wilderness, Todoroki,” said Kaminari.

“Oh?” said Todoroki curiously.

“Of course!” said Midoriya, whipping his head around to face Todoroki. “Fire is indispensable for keeping us warm and cooking our meals, and it can even light up the dark, serve as a beacon, and ward off animals. Plus, your ice could provide drinking water or be helpful for first aid purposes. Ice and fire really do make for a powerful Quirk ... Oh, you could even heat up water for a bath! You’re basically a one-man wilderness machine!”

“Oh,” said Todoroki, letting the thought hang in the air for a moment. “But I would still want to go camping with you guys. Not alone.”

“Yeesh! What a schmaltzy thing to say! Pre-upgrade Roki would barely recognize ya,” teased Sero.

“Of course! It’s much more fun doing it together,” said Midoriya, nodding.

“An astute point!” said Ida. “Camping is a way to deepen the bonds of friendship!”

Kaminari paused in the middle of a hearty bite of fish to gasp.

“Oh, I know!” he said. “We’re forgetting those old, uh, camping traditions!”

“What kinda traditions are those?” asked Kirishima.

“I mean, here in the great outdoors, we oughta join shoulder to shoulder and sing! Or talk about our dreams and stuff!”

“Old sounds about right. Old-fashioned, more like,” said Sero with a skeptical grin.

“C’monnn!” said Kaminari, pressing his point. “Being out in nature is s’posed to be freeing, yeah? Here, we don’t gotta be embarrassed about anything!”

“Except there’s nothing natural about this place. Your ‘great outdoors’ is actually a man-made indoors,” said Sero.

“Oops. Forgot about that,” said Kaminari.

“I did too, actually,” said Midoriya, looking up. “Easy to forget, seeing those stars.”

Thousands of stars twinkled in the simulated night sky overhead.

“Wow. It’s like a planetarium,” said Todoroki.

“Well, I say this is the perfect setup to reveal stuff we might be kinda shy about! So let’s swap dreams here under the fake stars! Personally, my goal is to be the awesomest hero you ever saw!” said Kaminari.

“Real original, this guy,” said Sero. “Anyway, these fish are decent, but our meal could use some veggies.”

“Hang on, what happened to the sharing circle?” asked Kaminari.

“Uh, every guy here’s got the same dream as you. Duh,” said Sero.

“That’s probably true,” said Midoriya a bit bashfully.

“Basically, yeah!” said Kirishima. “I’ll be a badass hero who’s as manly as they come!”

“Yeah, a hero. Me too,” said Todoroki.

“Broadly speaking, I have the same dream!” added Ida.

The boys’ specific goals may have varied in their nuances, but “hero” was the shared endpoint. A simple, clear, and definitive goal.

“Yeah. Fair enough ...” said Kaminari, sounding deflated. The rest of the boys laughed—not teasingly—and a wholesome mood fell over the group.

Then Ida remembered something. “Ah, Bakugo’s illness made me forget an important discovery,” he said.

“Oh? What is it?”

“While gathering kindling earlier, I came upon evidence of an animal in the forest. Something rather large,” said Ida.

“There’re animals in here with us?”

“Apparently so,” continued Ida. “I observed claw marks on trees and found

bits of fur ... Look.”

He extracted a handkerchief from his pocket and unfolded it for his camp mates. Within the cloth sat a clump of tangled white fur. Midoriya took a closer look by the light of the fire.

“It’s awfully long fur ... What sort of animal, I wonder?” he said.

“What the heck?” gasped Kaminari. “Wouldn’t Sensei have said something if there was a huge beastie stuck in here with us? Or d’you think they’re trying to make the snowy-mountain simulation extra deadly?”

“Deadly how?” asked Sero.

“Like, by filling it with monsters.”

“Hrm, a hibernating bear or two wouldn’t be out of place on a true-to-life wintry mountain,” Ida said with a nod.

“Polar bear fur, then?” suggested Todoroki.

“Todoroki, my man ... Polar bears live at the North Pole. Oh, actually ...” said Sero, with an unusually curious look on his face.

“What is it, Sero?” said Ida.

“Well, before we trekked out here, Nejire Hado told me a bonkers rumor about this place.”

“Yeah? Fill us in!” said Kaminari, leaning forward, fully invested.

“They say the magnetic field is all out of whack somewhere in this facility. It’s a place where space-time gets warped, forming a connection to other dimensions.”

“Tokoyami would go gaga over a story like that,” said Kaminari.

The mention of this spooky sci-fi concept brought a scowl to Kirishima’s face.

“I heard about that too,” he said. “Some kid said they saw a freaky monster pop out. Something not of this world ...”

“Wait, you think that fur came from an extra-dimensional eldritch terror or something?” said Kaminari.

“Not saying I believe it, dude. Only, it’s funny that I just heard about it too,” said Kirishima.

The boys stared at each other as an eerie silence descended over the group, until Kaminari and Sero burst out laughing.

“Nah, not a chance!” said Kirishima.

“What’re we, five?” said Sero.

“Hey now—I was actually hyped for a second there!” said Kaminari.

Midoriya started chuckling too, but a grave expression remained on Ida’s face.

“If the magnetic field is truly disrupted somewhere within the facility, then we ought to inform Sensei tomorrow,” Ida said. “In fact, we should take it upon ourselves to verify the rumor during our time here. What do you say? Who’s up for an expedition tomorrow morning?”

“Seriously?” said Kaminari, getting hyped up again. “I mean, I never say no to an adventure!”

“Let’s just hope Bakugo is back in top form by morning,” said Kirishima. “Yo, Bakugo! Think you can stomach some fish yet?”

Just as he got up to peek into Bakugo’s tent, a powerful wind began to blow. Before the boys knew it, the simulated stars were hidden by virtual clouds, and snow began to dance on the wind.

“Heck yeah, it’s snowing!” said Kaminari, but his enthusiasm didn’t last long when the tame snowfall quickly grew into a ferocious blizzard.

“What’s with this weather?” shouted Sero. “No warning or anything!”

“Perhaps it’s a deliberate function, meant to provide us with blizzard training!” said Ida.

“Gimme a break! So much for my laid-back camping trip!” said Kaminari.

“In any case, our tents should provide adequate shelter for now,” said Ida.

The fierce wind battered the sides of the tents noisily, and Todoroki hastily used his ice to extinguish the raging fire before the wind could spread it to the flammable tents.

“Kirishima!” said Ida. “How is Bakugo faring?”

“Sleeping like a baby!”

“Good. I’ll check on him later, then. I believe it’s time for bed, so good night, gentlemen!”

The boys murmured “Good night” to each other and crawled into their respective tents, eager to take shelter from the blizzard, which only grew worse as the night went on. The violent snow and wind lashed and howled, enveloping the boys in a world of white without light. A winter storm is indiscriminate and bares its fangs at one and all.

As the wind slammed the tents with aplomb, Midoriya’s brief and fitful sleep was interrupted by the sound of someone calling his name.

“... riya! Midoriya!”

“Ida? What’s going on?” said Midoriya, rushing to open the zipper on his tent. He found Ida squatting and scowling on the other side.

“Several minutes ago, Sero announced that he needed to relieve himself, but he still hasn’t returned.”

“You think he’s in trouble?” asked Midoriya.

“Well, it’s hard to imagine that he went far or got lost. Anyhow, I’m off to locate him, but I thought I ought to inform someone first.”

“Let me come too.”

“Nonsense. I alone should suffice. I’ll let you know when we’ve returned.”

With that, Ida vanished into the blizzard. Midoriya was uneasy about it, but he had to have faith in Ida. He waited in his tent for what felt like forever.

Still not back yet?

Midoriya checked his watch. It had only been five minutes, but what could possibly be taking those two so long? A nasty gust of wind blasted the tent, threatening to twist and crumple it, and Midoriya realized that wind like this wouldn’t allow footprints to stick around for long. Just as he was gearing up to go after Ida and Sero, he heard a far-off scream.

“Is that you, Ida?”

Midoriya flew out of his tent just in time to spot Todoroki, Kirishima, and Kaminari popping their faces out of their own tents.

“You guys heard that too?” said Kaminari.

“I think it was Ida!” said Midoriya. “He went off to find Sero, who was taking an awfully long time going to the bathroom. I think I’d better look for them!”

“Count me in,” said Todoroki.

“Me too! Kaminari—you keep an eye on Bakugo for us,” said Kirishima.

“Sure thing! Careful out there, guys!”

The three boys set off in the direction of the scream they had heard. The small flame in Todoroki’s hand was whipped by the wind, and the freezing snow pricked the boys’ cheeks like a barrage of tiny needles. They could only see a few meters ahead as they struggled to push forward through the monstrous blizzard without losing each other.

“Ida! Sero!”

“You out there? Give us a shout!”

No response. They continued to cry into the darkness until something smacked Midoriya in the face.

“Bwuh?”

“You okay, Midoriya?” said Todoroki.

“Yo, what is it?” said Kirishima. “Hey, ain’t that Ida’s ... ?”

Kirishima was right; it was Ida’s heavy coat, or at least a torn shred of it.

“His coat’s been all ripped up ...” said Midoriya.

“How, though?” wondered Todoroki.

“Um, dudes? What’s that?” said Kirishima, pointing to a depression in the snow. A closer look revealed it to be a massive animal’s footprint—a footprint that was easily one meter across.

“That’s big—way too big ...” said Midoriya.

“The monster, you think?” said Todoroki.

“What, like the one from the stories?” said Midoriya.

The boys locked eyes.

“Aw, hell!” said Kirishima, looking grim.

“We’d better find Ida and Sero. Quickly,” said Midoriya, gripping the scrap of Ida’s coat.

“Shouldn’t we tell Kaminari and Bakugo first—” started Todoroki, but he was interrupted by Kaminari’s scream, which came from the direction of the tents. They spun around to race back, but Midoriya tripped over his own feet and fell.

“Midoriya?”

“I’m fine! Let’s hurry!”

Midoriya activated his Full Cowl and fought through the blizzard back to the tents, with Todoroki and Kirishima just behind him.

“What on earth ...”

Midoriya was the first to see what had become of their campsite; the tents were torn to ribbons, and those same giant footprints dotted the area.

“Kacchan! Kaminari!” said Midoriya, coming to his senses. He raced over to Bakugo’s tent—which was somehow still intact—and found a very much alert Bakugo, alone and bundled in his winter-weather gear.

“Where’s Kaminari, Kacchan?”

“We heard some kinda noise out there, so he popped out to take a look. Then he screamed, but he was gone by the time I got up to check,” said Bakugo.

“Oh no ...” said Midoriya.

“Yo, Midoriya! Bakugo!”

Kirishima and Todoroki had finally caught up.

“The hell’s going on here?” said Bakugo, glaring at the three others.

Midoriya explained the events of the past few minutes, though none of the campers could quite believe what was happening to them. It felt like something

out of a dream or a movie. They had to accept reality, though: Sero, Ida, and Kaminari were gone, their tents were trashed, and they were stuck in the middle of an unforgiving blizzard. For the time being, a makeshift ice structure from Todoroki sufficed to shelter them from the cruel wind.

“Assuming there really is a monster,” said Midoriya, “it has a habit of abducting people. We’ll figure out why later. Right now, we need to focus on finding the other guys ASAP.”

An impatient Kirishima fidgeted and said, “Yeah, no time to lose!”

“But where do we look?” said Todoroki. “There’s so much ground to cover.”

“Likely the forest, since the monster needs a place to hide,” said Midoriya. “Or if it’s really coming after us, it could be lurking in wait somewhere nearby ...”

He gasped.

“Wait. Since it’s been picking us off one by one, it probably needs to stash its victims somewhere before coming back for the rest of us. I bet it sensed Kacchan’s presence when it took Kaminari, so there’s a decent chance it’s on its way back.”

“Wanna make me the bait, huh?” said Bakugo. “Works great for me. Best chance I got of blowing this thing to hell and back.”

“Still, it’s possible that the creature is satisfied with three victims and won’t be back for more,” said Midoriya.

“Sounds like a job for two teams, then,” said Kirishima. “One of us should hang back with Bakugo while the other two hunt down our pals.”

In the end, the boys decided that Midoriya would stay with Bakugo (the bait) and Todoroki and Kirishima would resume the search.

“Try to get some rest, Kacchan. You’re not too cold, right?” said Midoriya.

Bakugo had gotten fired up over the idea of blasting the monster with his patented explosions, but now that Midoriya was back to babying him, a deadly edge of anger crept into his voice.

“Shut up.”

“But we’ve really got to keep you warm ...”

“I said, shaddup! Nobody asked you to care!”

To Bakugo, someone fretting over him was as good as calling him out for being weak, which amounted to no less than a grave insult for a boy who was constantly striving to be number one. Bakugo’s rage made Midoriya flinch for a second, but he shot back with fire and strength in his eyes.

“Of course I care! Why don’t you get that?”

This defiance from Midoriya broke the last remaining thread of Bakugo’s self-restraint.

“Screw off!” he roared. “And keep outta my face until I’m back on top of my game! Who the hell do you and those goons think you are, staring down at me like I’m some kinda sick puppy!”

“It’s only natural to worry about a sick person!”

“And I’m telling ya to cut that crap out!”

Bakugo ripped off one glove with his teeth and lunged at Midoriya, ready to unleash an explosion. But Midoriya was ready, and he grabbed the ticking time bomb of a hand before it could do any damage. Feeling Midoriya’s warm flesh against his own, Bakugo’s eyes bulged.

“What is it, Kacchan?” said Midoriya, unsure why the charging bull had stopped so suddenly.

Bakugo summoned the most disgusted expression he could muster, clucked his tongue, and placed the heel of his hand against Midoriya’s forehead. “I ain’t the only one with a fever,” he said, before shoving Midoriya’s head away with force.

“What? No way,” said Midoriya, who regained his balance and raised his own hand to his forehead. “Ah, I do feel pretty warm ... Did I catch a cold out here? I *have* been feeling kind of sluggish. Hmm. Maybe this nasty weather is to blame.”

This guy, I swear ...

Bakugo stared as Midoriya prattled on with his objective analysis, but just

then a distant scream pierced the howling wind.

“That sounded like Kirishima! You stay here, Kacchan!”

By the time Bakugo emerged from his tent, Midoriya—powered by his Full Cowling—had already dashed off into the night and vanished. This summoned an unspeakable frustration deep within Bakugo. Midoriya was never one to take his own needs into account, always giving 100 percent of himself to whatever cause had his attention. He never even stopped to question his own actions, as if his approach was the most natural thing in the world. But Bakugo realized that this time, something else entirely was getting to him.

“Tch ...”

He ran off after Midoriya, but he didn’t get far before hearing a monstrous, bloodcurdling roar from nearby. Bakugo kept running, and at last the beast came into view.

“What in the fresh hell ...”

A towering bipedal giant covered in white fur came into view just ahead. It resembled the elusive cryptid known as the yeti, but it was far bigger and quicker than the stereotypical image of the abominable snowman—and equipped with razor-sharp claws to boot. Midoriya, standing nearby on high alert, finally noticed Bakugo.

“Kacchan! Why’d you follow me?”

“Cuz screw you!” said Bakugo.

“Midoriya!” said Todoroki. “This thing is powerful ...”

He and Kirishima were already engaged in battle with the giant. While Todoroki distracted the beast, Kirishima took the opportunity to rush at it with a hardened fist ready for walloping, but the yeti saw him coming and sent him flying with a smack from its colossal arm.

“Kirishima!” shouted Bakugo.

Midoriya fired up his Full Cowling and aimed a kick at the creature, but it dodged deftly, exhibiting a surprising level of agility for its size.

“Darn! It’s so quick!” said Midoriya.

Next up was Bakugo. He flew at the yeti using his propulsive explosions and aimed a Stun Grenade flash at its face, planning to blow the creature to kingdom come while it was temporarily blinded. Unfortunately, the yeti seemed somehow immune to the stunning attack, and it swung an oversized fist at its newest assailant.

“Gahh!”

Bakugo took a direct hit, slammed to the snowy ground by the yeti’s fist.

“Kacchan!” said Midoriya, who wasted no time in rushing at the yeti and landing one of his Smash attacks. The yeti barely flinched before grabbing Midoriya and tossing him like a rag doll.

“Heaven Piercing Ice Wall!” shouted Todoroki.

In a flash, the yeti was encased in a monolith of ice. The boys thought the worst was over until the ice started shaking. Cracks spread across the surface, and they knew it was only a matter of time before the beast would free itself.

“Its power and speed are off the charts,” murmured Midoriya. “Not to mention, nothing we do is dealing any sort of lasting damage.”

Bakugo—the last one to join the hunt—noticed Midoriya muttering to himself near the giant block of ice.

“I guess ... we just have to knock it down and make it stay down somehow,” said Midoriya, sizing up the situation with quiet resolve in his eyes. But an instant later, the ice exploded apart, and a chunk obscured Midoriya’s vision just long enough to allow the newly freed yeti to catch him unawares.

“Midoriya!”

Todoroki shot a blast of fire from the side, but the yeti dodged, charged straight through the searing flames like they barely even tickled, and smacked Todoroki away.

“Oh no! Todoroki!”

Midoriya ran up and sunk a fist into the yeti’s face. Sensing that the blow had had little effect, he swung another fist straight at the monster’s eye.

KRAK!

Midoriya felt that something was off about all this, but the roaring beast didn't give him a moment to ponder. Now locked on to its prey, the yeti gave chase as Midoriya intentionally ran off in the other direction. Bakugo pursued—powered by his own explosions—and soon realized what Midoriya was up to; the plan was to lure the monster to the lake.

The blizzard grew fiercer than ever, obscuring Midoriya's vision, and his feverish body turned numb from the biting cold. Driven forward by sheer instinct, he piloted a body that barely felt like his own. When pride and reputation fade from the forefront, all that remains to face the world is the unadulterated quality of a person, which has a way of exploding forth in an instant. That's when the true nature of someone's spirit emerges.

The image of Midoriya extending that hand resurfaced in the back of Bakugo's mind. Despite having no Quirk and being totally useless (at least in Bakugo's eyes), Midoriya had always pressed forward when it meant helping someone, just like a true hero.

“Need help? Can you stand?”

When Midoriya had reached out to him that day, that was what Bakugo had felt, and it had inspired a nameless dread in him. He realized that this unlikeliest candidate was in fact far closer to the lofty pinnacle he sought than he himself was, and learning this filled him with a blend of panic and fear. The constant frustration he felt with Midoriya was, upon reflection, actually anger at himself for daring to imagine that he might lose in a contest of quality. All along, he would shy away from this truth and refuse to acknowledge it, even when doing so would have been such a weight off his shoulders.

Instead, the irritation remained, because Midoriya himself had never changed over the years. The setting and relationships might be ever shifting, and he never stopped growing as a person, but Midoriya's core essence was rock-solid and immutable. Nothing could distract him from his cause—not even petty arrogance—and so he was able to continue pushing forward, wearing his heart on his sleeve, and he most likely would until the day he died. At the same time, somewhere in Bakugo's mind was a quiet fear that Midoriya's pure, genuine spirit would collapse under its own weight someday, bringing it all crashing down. This thought was yet another nagging thorn in his side.

Bakugo caught up at last and—through the fearsome blizzard—spotted Midoriya dodging the yeti’s attacks.

“Deku!”

“Kacchan? How’d you ... ?”

“Figured out your freakin’ plan is what I did!”

Midoriya’s eyes widened, and he nodded, prompting Bakugo to fly into the yeti’s face and pepper it with explosions.

“I’m the guy you want, you stinkin’ fuzzball!”

As Bakugo propelled himself out of the monster’s reach with his blasts, Midoriya circled ahead and tempted the yeti toward the lake. They took turns luring the monster along, until at last the lake was in sight. Bakugo picked up speed and flew over the water, but an instant before the yeti would’ve plunged into the icy lake, it came to an abrupt stop.

With a cluck of his tongue, Bakugo performed an about-face and prepared to blast the yeti from overhead, but things didn’t work out as planned. Instead, the yeti leaped straight up and snatched Bakugo out of the air.

“Kacchan!”

Midoriya caught up and aimed a powerful kick at the arm holding Bakugo. Rocked off-balance, the yeti took a hit from Bakugo’s explosions, which allowed the latter to escape its grasp. Without so much as glancing at each other, the two boys swung behind the beast and launched attacks at its back in unison.

“Smash!”

“Howitzer Impact!”

With one last roar, the yeti crashed down into the water and sank below the surface.

“Took ya long enough to get dunked,” spat Bakugo toward the water.

“We’d better run back and help the others!” said Midoriya.

But as the boys turned away from the lake, the blizzard was suddenly no more, and night turned to day, as if a switch had been flipped.

“Huh? The hell?”

“Um?”

Before they could contemplate what was happening, a voice echoed down from the artificial heavens.

“Midoriya and Bakugo get credit for that one. Good work.”

“Is that you, Aizawa Sensei?” said Midoriya, responding to what must have been speakers in the ceiling of the massive structure.

“Credit, huh?” growled Bakugo, who now had a nasty hunch about what was going on.

“You didn’t really think this training facility was being made available for a laid-back spring-break experience, did you? This was all part of a special lesson.”

“B-but what about the yeti?” said Midoriya.

“One helluva robot, courtesy of Power Loader, I’m betting,” said Bakugo.

“And the rumors that Sero heard from Hado ... ?”

“Yeah, I asked Hado to plant that seed,” explained Aizawa. “To get you to start believing. All part of a rational deception, of course.”

“We should’ve expected this from U.A.!” said Midoriya, struggling to keep himself from raving about the wonders of their school.

“Messing with us like that ...” grumbled Bakugo, keeping his Baku-blowup to a minimum, since their teacher was watching and listening.

“Ho, there! Midoriya! Bakugo!”

“Ida! You guys!” said Midoriya, as he spotted Todoroki and Kirishima approach along with Ida, Kaminari, and Sero, who apparently were not imprisoned in a monster’s lair. The other five boys had also learned about Aizawa’s “special lesson.”

“When that big fuzzy guy snatched me up and carried me off, I thought I was a goner for sure,” said Kaminari, sounding almost disappointed with himself.

“And I failed to see the beast approaching in the midst of that blizzard,” said Ida, never one to miss a chance to reflect on his performance.

Sero, meanwhile, was fuming. “You think *you guys* had it bad!” he said. “There I was, right after taking a leak, when a guy’s guard is totally down! Couldn’t do a thing to fight back.”

“I tried to put up a decent fight, but I just couldn’t cut it,” said Kirishima, brooding over his failure.

“Same here,” said Todoroki.

“I want a written report from each of you discussing the way you responded to a villain attack within unfavorable environmental conditions, including how you might have done better. Oh, and don’t breathe a word about this lesson to your classmates,” Aizawa added. *“Understood?”*

“Yes, Sensei,” said the boys, realizing that their teacher might eventually unleash this same “rational deception” on their unsuspecting classmates. They looked at each other and broke into weary smiles.

“Well, *that* sure happened!” said Kaminari.

Having the chance to smile at last seemed to strip away a layer of their fatigue. This had been one outrageous camping trip, but in a funny way—training lesson or not—it had almost felt like a breather for these hero hopefuls.

“You’ll be provided with new tents so you can sleep there for the remainder of the night. But, Midoriya and Bakugo—report to the nurse’s office. Minding your health is part of the job, so from now on, you’re to speak up when you know you’re sick.”

“Okay,” said Midoriya, surprising the other five boys, who hadn’t realized he was ill too. As the pair walked back to the entrance of the facility in silence, the artificial sunlight switched off once more, plunging the mountain into the darkness of night.

“That yeti sure was strong,” said Midoriya, hoping to strike up a conversation.

“Just another chump to me,” said Bakugo with a laugh, which earned him a chipper smile from Midoriya.

“Can you imagine if a cryptid like that really did exist?” said Midoriya. “Hard to fight back against something we know so little about, right? We got lucky

with that lake, but what if there hadn't been an easy solution like that? I don't know if we could've ... Ack!"

Midoriya pitched forward, having snagged his foot in the deep snow, but before he could do a face-plant, Bakugo's hand shot out and grabbed his arm.

"Huh? Oh, thanks, Kacchan," said Midoriya, sounding almost confused. Bakugo repaid the confusion by gritting his teeth, releasing the arm, and kicking Midoriya square in the back, sending the latter sprawling into the snow.

"Bwah!"

Midoriya's face popped out of the snow.

"What'd you do that for?" he said.

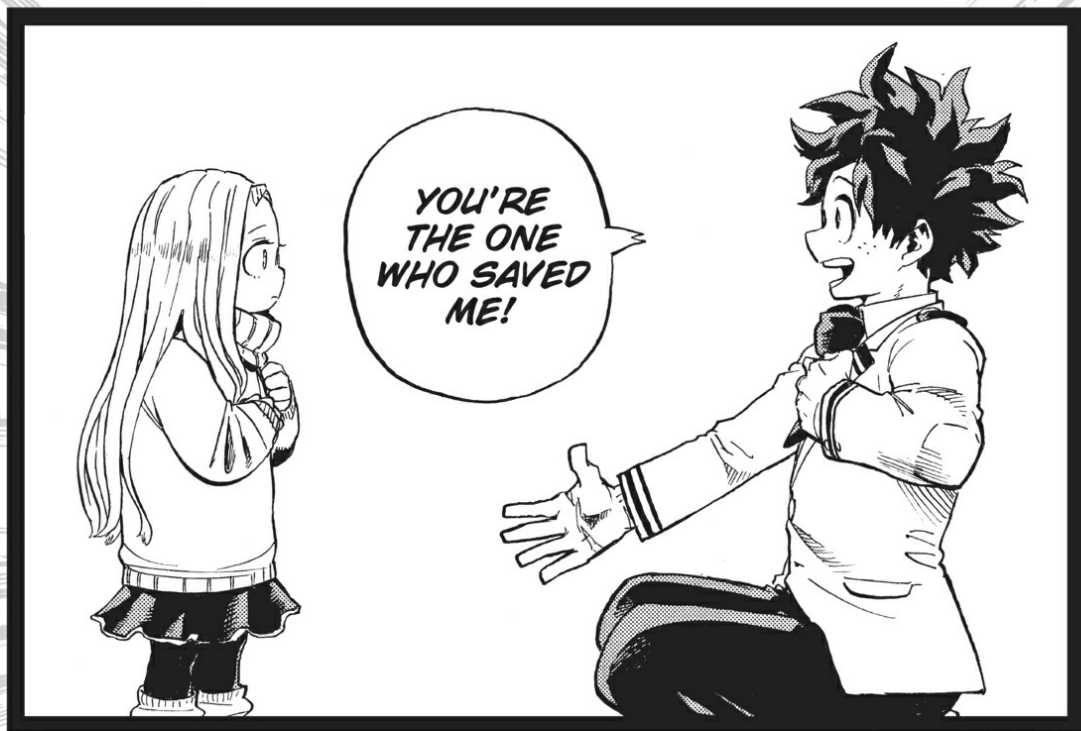
"Shut up and keep marching," said Bakugo, already storming off.

"Wait up, Kacchan," said Midoriya, as he struggled to catch up.

Overhead, the stars twinkled in the simulated sky.

Part 4

Eri's Shichi-Go-San Day



“Do you mean it, Eri? You’ve never celebrated Shichi-Go-San?” said Mic

The two sat on the sofa in the common area of the teachers’ dorm building, having just gotten out of the bath, and Midnight was brushing Eri’s hair like always. The girl blinked in wide-eyed surprise at Midnight’s disbelief.

“Is that so?” asked Thirteen, sitting nearby.

“Y-yes?” said Eri. The teachers had asked if she’d ever worn a kimono for the holiday known as Shichi-Go-San, and she wasn’t sure why they had been so taken aback when she’d answered no. Midnight and Thirteen turned from Eri to stare at each other.

“I guess that makes sense ...” said Midnight.

“She’s been through so much, after all,” said Thirteen.

The edge of sadness in their voices prompted Eri to ask the all-important question: “Um, what’s sheecheegosan?”

The question was just the thing to snap Midnight out of it and put a smile on her face.

“It’s a special day when people visit shrines to pray for their children’s good health,” she said.

Shichi-Go-San, which literally means “seven-five-three” in Japanese, references the ages at which a child celebrates the holiday. The particulars of the tradition differ from region to region, with some people using the traditional East Asian reckoning of counting ages (where a child is said to be one at birth and gains a year every New Year), and others following the Western style (where a child turns one exactly one year after being born and turns a year older on each successive birthday). The traditional reckoning is generally preferred when it comes to this holiday, so for Eri—who was born in December—her Shichi-Go-San celebrations would have been when she was only a year old by Western standards, and then again when she was five. Naturally, Eri had no memory of anything from when she was one, but she knew for a fact that she hadn’t donned a kimono at age five.

“You mean *hatsumode*?” asked Eri, referring to the traditional first shrine visit

during New Year's.

"Nope, not quite. Shichi-Go-San is, uh ... When is it again?" said Midnight, turning to Thirteen.

"Let's see ..." said Thirteen, who took out her phone to check. "Oh, it was November 15!"

"We've missed it then! What a shame," said Midnight, her voice and face full of regret. "Unless ... we just wanna go ahead and do it anyway," she added, her eyes sparkling.

"Huh?" said Thirteen.

"Who cares if it's not on the right day? It's important to celebrate this little lady as she grows up," said Midnight.

"You make a good point. Why not!" said Thirteen.

Eri continued to stare at the two women blankly, still unsure why they were making such a fuss.



Several days later, Eri was busy training her Quirk in one of U.A. High's facilities with Mirio Togata and Aizawa at her side. Hers was a powerful ability that allowed her to effectively "rewind" any living organism she touched to a past state of being, which meant she could heal existing injuries.

Eri focused up and touched a wilted flower. When the horn on her forehead began to glow, the flower sprung back to life before everyone's eyes.

"Phew," she said, moving her hand away quickly and feeling the tension leave her body.

"Wow, wow, wow!" said Togata with a broad grin. "You've already got a real knack for working with plants!"

Eri was thrilled by Togata's unabashed compliment.

"Good," said Aizawa. "Now let's try a bug."

He presented her with a small terrarium containing a beetle missing one of its

legs. It struggled to maintain its balance as it stumbled around its environment. Eri's training had started with plants, and Aizawa had had her move on to small animals in the meantime, in the hope of eventually tackling larger ones. At this stage, injured bugs he found in the woods were ideal recipients of the rewinding treatment.

"Okay ..." said Eri, her smile vanishing and her nerves returning the instant she looked at the bug.

"You'll do great. Just keep calm," said Togata.

"Uh-huh ..." said Eri with a resolute nod as she focused her mind.

This is fine ... I'm gonna do great ... Just gotta heal the bug's leg ...

The girl tried to reassure herself with this mantra as she reached out and touched the insect. Within an instant, its leg regrew itself, and Eri retracted her hand without a moment's delay.

"Phew," she said again. Another release of tension.

"Hooray! I bet Mr. Bug is loving his new leg!" said Togata.

"I'm glad it worked ..." said Eri.

"It seems you've gotten used to working with insects," said Aizawa, his voice as gentle as it had ever been. So far, Eri's attempts with smallish insects had been resounding successes.

"Next up is a lizard," said Aizawa.

Eri's nerves returned with a vengeance, and her whole body stiffened up. Aizawa and Togata noticed this and glanced at each other with concern in their eyes. Eri had practiced rewinding lizards plenty of times already, but something about reptiles made them feel more like real animals, at least compared to insects. During about half of these attempts, it had been clear that Eri was about to take it too far by accident, at which point Aizawa would direct his "Erasure" Quirk at the girl to stop her power in its tracks.

"Or we could take a break?" suggested Aizawa.

Eri considered the offer with a furrowed brow before shaking her head.

“No. I want to try,” she said.

Aizawa presented to her a lizard without a tail. When some lizards sense danger, they can drop their tails as a defense mechanism to raise their odds of escaping the threat. It’s usually no great loss since the tails tend to grow back, and this particular lizard was scampering around its container, seemingly indifferent to its missing appendage.

“Here I go,” said Eri, concentrating hard, though no less nervous about this challenge.

It’s fine ... I’m okay ... I can do this ...

She gently touched the lizard, but her Quirk failed to activate, perhaps due to a lack of focus.

“Hey, that’s okay. Take it nice and slow,” said Togata, hoping to reassure Eri. She gave him a small nod, took a deep breath, and concentrated once more.

It’ll be okay ... I’m okay ...

She reached out her hand again, but this time, the lizard leaped onto Eri’s arm and ran straight up it. “Wahh!” she gasped, grabbing the lizard with her other hand. The creature wriggled around, trying to escape, which made Eri tighten her grip reflexively. That’s when her Quirk finally activated. Instantly, the lizard’s tail grew back, but the Quirk’s momentum couldn’t be stopped. As the lizard’s entire body shrank down in her hand, Eri’s blood ran cold and a pit opened up in her stomach.

Daddy ...

By the time Aizawa stopped the runaway ability with his own Quirk, the once fifteen-centimeter lizard had been reduced to a hatchling capable of sitting atop a fingertip.

“I’m ... I’m sorry ...” said Eri under her breath.

“Hey, it happens!” said a smiling Mirio, placing a gentle hand on her head. “That’s why you’re doing this training, y’know!”

“I think it’s time for a break now,” said Aizawa.

“N-no. I can ... do more ...” said Eri.

“Are you sure?”

“I-I’m okay ...”

Aizawa sensed Eri’s resolve and agreed to bring forth another bug. He thought that the best way to help Eri control her power was getting her used to the sensation, until it came to her as naturally as breathing.

I’m okay ... It’ll be okay ...

She tried to find her focus again, but as Eri stretched out a finger toward the next bug, her blood ran cold again, sending chills down her spine. Her hand stopped and began to tremble.

What if I make the bug disappear just like how I made Daddy disappear?

In a tragic incident, Eri’s father had been holding her when her Quirk had first manifested, and without meaning to, she had rewound him into nonexistence. Her mother had abandoned her after that, so Eri had ended up with her grandfather—the mob boss of the Shie Hassaikai gang. That was how she’d fallen into the clutches of Overhaul—the gang’s would-be usurper—who’d decided to exploit Eri’s unique ability for his own profit and schemes. Since being rescued by Izuku Midoriya, Togata, and the other members of the raid team, Eri had found the resolve to train her Quirk in the hope of being helpful to others, but there were still moments when those nightmarish memories came rushing back, leaving her too terrified to use her power.

“Break time, okay?” said Aizawa. Eri cast her gaze down and nodded. Before Togata could offer more words of encouragement, Midnight entered the facility carrying some sort of bundle.

“Got a moment?” she asked.

“Yes—we’re taking a breather from training,” said Togata.

“Perfect!” said Midnight, approaching the young girl. “Your kimono arrived from my folks, Eri. Take a look!”

All three members of the training team watched as Midnight unfolded the garment. It was a florid thing, decorated with colorful blooms.

“I wanted you to be the first to see it, Eri. It’s going to look gorgeous on you,”

said Midnight.

“Wow ...” said Eri, her eyes sparkling.

“I’ve also got a really pretty *obidome* sash clip and a hair decoration for you to complete the look,” said Midnight, delighted at Eri’s reaction.

“Fantastic!” said Togata. “Did you wear that one for your own Shichi-Go-San?”

WOW...



MY HERO
ACADEMIA

“I sure did. Looks as good as new, huh?”

“Your family kept it in great condition. They must really value it,” said Aizawa, causing Eri to gasp. Something of value. Something important. A treasure.

Do I really get to wear such a pretty thing?

Eri’s Quirk could only affect living organisms, so there was no inherent danger in her touching the garment, but she still couldn’t bring herself to reach out and grab it.

“Something wrong, Eri?” said Midnight, noticing Eri’s sullen expression.

“Hey, Eri! Why don’t we go grab something to drink?” suggested Togata with a smile, but the girl didn’t reach for his outstretched hand either.

“Um, I ...” she started, having a hard time getting the words out. “I’m gonna go for a walk, alone ...”

Eri exited the facility and pushed through the chilly winter air until she reached the shadow of the building, where she let out a heavy sigh. Everyone treated her with such love and care, so why wouldn’t that painful tightness in her chest go away? She squatted down low—as if to conceal the source of the pain—and buried her head between her knees. This warmed her up a bit as her body heat radiated from her core, but this warmth was no match for the forlorn chill she felt within, alone and crestfallen as she was.

What if I never figure out how to use my Quirk for good?

So many people had come together to rescue her. Midoriya—or “Deku,” as Eri knew him—had been badly hurt, and Togata had even been robbed of his own Quirk by the enemy. All those sacrifices, all for her sake.

Eri’s chest grew tight again. She wanted to be helpful. She wanted to rewind Togata and restore his Quirk. That’s why she could grin and bear it and commit to this training. But doubt remained.

What if I can’t?

Eri wondered if failing here meant she’d be shipped off somewhere else entirely, just like before. At this thought, another pit opened up in her stomach, and her throat began to hurt. Her vision blurred, and she pursed her quivering

lips tightly as she resisted the urge to cry. That was when Eri heard a meow from nearby.

“A kitty?”

After rubbing her dewy eyes, Eri decided to follow the source of the sound, only to find an all-white kitten under a bush.

“Hello, kitty,” she said, but the kitten arched its back and hissed. Eri noticed some red stains on one of its hind legs.

“Are you hurt, kitty? Are you okay?”

Eri reached out but immediately stopped herself. What if she touched the kitten and erased it from existence? While the girl hesitated, the kitten took the opportunity to dart away, dragging its injured leg behind it.

“Kitty, wait!”

Eri chased after it instinctively, but she was no match for an agile kitten, injured or not. Determined to evade the human pursuer, the kitten made its way into the nearby forest.

“Kitty? Where are you?”

She searched between the shadows of the trees, but she’d lost sight of the animal.

“Looking for a cat?” came another voice.

Hitoshi Shinso had noticed Eri a few moments earlier, but he’d waited to see what she was up to before calling out to her. Shinso and the rest of U.A.’s students had been informed when the school took Eri under its wing, but the girl was still unfamiliar with most of the student body.

“Y-yes,” she said, unsure what to make of this stranger in the woods.

“What a coincidence—me too. Was it a kitten you saw?” asked Shinso.

Eri spotted a can of wet cat food in the boy’s hand and nodded.

“It’s still pretty young. Oh, what color was it?” asked Shinso.

“White. All white ...”

“That’s the one. That little scamp’s the only one who didn’t show up for dinner yesterday.”

Something about the tone of concern in Shinso’s voice allowed Eri to relax, if only a little.

I guess he likes kitties too.

Eri suddenly remembered the kitten’s injury, and when she mentioned it to Shinso, his concern showed on his face even more.

“It must not be hurt too bad if it’s still running around ... But it needs to be cared for before that leg gets worse,” he said.

“Yeah ...” said Eri.

Shinso took another look at Eri, and it finally occurred to him that she was out there all alone.

“Does anyone know you came into the woods?”

“No ... I didn’t tell them,” she said.

“Then we’d better get you back. I can come with you.”

Shinso spun around toward the edge of the forest, but Eri stood in place and muttered, “Umm ...” It was clear she wasn’t ready to walk with the older boy.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“The kitty could really get lost out here all alone ...”

Though she really did want to help the cat, the fact was that Eri wasn’t prepared to return to her training just yet. There was desperation in her expression, and Shinso sensed that the girl was struggling with something she couldn’t put into words.

“Okay, let’s search together for a bit? But I really should take you back soon,” he said.

Relieved at her delayed sentence, Eri nodded fervently and sighed. With that, the two began their search.

“Kitty!”

“Got your dinner here!”

They moved through the dense forest slowly until they heard voices from a more open area up ahead.

“Too slow, Deku!”

“Yikes!”

Hearing that familiar name, Eri and Shinso peeked into the clearing to find Midoriya and Bakugo training together. The former was trying to evade the latter by using his “Blackwhip” Quirk to fly from tree to tree, but the latter was quick to alter course with precise explosions from his palms. At last, Bakugo caught Midoriya and made him eat a small blast, transforming Midoriya’s usually wavy hair into a frizzled Afro.

“Bakugo, kid! No need for that extra boom once you’ve caught him!” said All Might from nearby.

“Whoa. That’s All Might,” muttered Shinso.

The undisputed number one hero had been a fixture at U.A. for nearly a year now, but the General Studies student still wasn’t quite used to the man’s larger-than-life presence. Shinso’s eyes shifted to All Might’s protégé.

“Midoriya ...”

“It’s Deku ...”

Shinso and Eri spoke simultaneously and turned to look at each other.

“Are you friends with Deku?” asked Eri.

“I wouldn’t put it that way,” said Shinso.

Eri looked puzzled by this answer, so Shinso thought for a moment before clarifying.

“I guess he’s the guy I wanna beat the most,” he said, almost embarrassed by his own explanation. Eri didn’t have the slightest idea what that meant, but if nothing else, she could sense that Shinso didn’t have anything against Midoriya. Another moment passed, and Shinso realized Eri was still staring at Midoriya.

“Do you wanna say hi to him?” asked Shinso.

“But, um ... He’s doing *training*,” she said, shrinking back into the shadows of the trees to make sure she stayed out of sight.

“C’mon! Get your ass up and start running!” said Bakugo.

“As long as you chase me just as hard!” said Midoriya.

“Focus up, Midoriya, kid!” said All Might.

“You got it!” said Midoriya, turning to his mentor.

“Pfft, I could catch you with my eyes shut! Hope you’re ready for that Afro to get a whole lot crispier!” roared Bakugo.

Shinso watched this back-and-forth and thought, *So he’s honing that Quirk that popped outta him during our battle training? He’s still struggling a little ...*

As Bakugo shouted and triggered more of his merciless explosions, Shinso thought about Eri’s evasive attitude and realized with more clarity what he had sensed in her. He hesitated to pry further, but no—he couldn’t abandon the thought. After all, those hoping to become heroes had a tendency to meddle, so Shinso retreated into the shadows to join Eri and press the issue.

“Did something bad happen?”

Eri stared at Shinso, shocked that he would even ask. It wasn’t the kind of question she expected from a perfect stranger.

“Did you have a fight with someone, maybe?”

Eri shook her head.

“Did Sensei get mad at you?”

More headshaking, but this time, Eri spoke up. “Sensei and Mirio and everyone are always really nice to me ...”

“Oh? Good. Sorry for asking those weird questions.”

But the brief conversation had somehow given Eri the urge to share the full extent of her feelings with someone. Shinso happened to be standing there and lending a sympathetic ear, so all the emotions locked away in Eri’s chest were ready to come tumbling out.

“Um, actually ...”

Eri explained how her own Quirk training wasn't going that well, and how she wondered if she was even capable of accomplishing the things being asked of her. She stumbled over her words often, but Shinso listened earnestly, offering only the occasional "Uh-huh" or "Mm-hmm" to encourage her to keep going. When Eri was finally done, Shinso said "I see ..." and fell quiet. Eri stared at her silent conversation partner and wondered if, after hearing her tale, he now found her annoying. Shinso noticed her anxious stare and broke his silence. "Amazing."

"Huh?"

"When I was your age, I'd never even dreamed of doing any sort of training. So it's amazing to me that you're working so hard at it."

Eri blinked at him, and Shinso stared up at the slivers of blue sky visible through the canopy.

"I'm doing my own training now too, y'know," he said. "Sometimes I feel like I'm finally getting the hang of it, but at the same time, I know I've got a long way to go. It's like Eraser Head—I mean, Aizawa Sensei—always says. When trying your best starts to feel really hard, that's how you know you're growing."

"I'm growing? Bigger?" questioned Eri. But before Shinso could explain ...

"Eri! You around here?" came Togata's voice.

Eri froze in place, unsure how to respond, so Shinso spoke up instead.

"Uh, she's over here!"

Togata spotted the pair and smiled in relief at the sight of Eri. "Eri, you gave me the scare of my life, disappearing like that!"

"I'm sorry," said Eri. "But, um ..."

"We were looking for an injured kitten, and we thought it might've come this way," said Shinso.

"And who might you be?" said Togata, turning to Shinso.

"I'm Hitoshi Shinso."

"Oh? Oh! The General Studies kid who's transferring to the Hero Course!"

That's you? Well, it's swell to meetcha, Shinso. Anyway, what's this about a kitten? Ah, hang on—is that Midoriya?"

"Oh, whoops!" said Midoriya from the battlefield.

Bakugo had gotten tangled up in a strand of blackwhip and was now dangling from a tree by the ankle.

"If you did that on purpose, I swear I'll murder you for real this time!"

But Midoriya ignored this latest Baku-blowup and started mumbling to himself.

"I was just thinking how I needed to latch onto those branches tighter, but I still don't have a knack for proper control ... Hmm. That grab-and-release motion could afford to be a lot smoother ..."

"You even listening? Get me down from here, dweeb!" shouted Bakugo.

"My bad!"

After helping Bakugo down, Midoriya dove right back into mutter mode for further analysis.

"Midoriya, kid!" said All Might. "Picture it in your head. Envision yourself swinging from branch to branch!"

"Right! Branch to branch ..."

Midoriya closed his eyes, imagined himself swinging, and opened his eyes again.

"Come and get me," he said, before dashing off.

Bakugo gave chase, and Midoriya launched a blackwhip tendril at a branch. His momentum carried him to the next branch, and the next one after that, but by that point he'd lost enough speed that the next shot of blackwhip missed the mark. Bakugo caught up again and levied an explosion at Midoriya.

"Hmm ..." said Midoriya, the tips of his hair blackened and sizzling. "I'm losing too much momentum as I go ... Maybe I'm thinking about it too hard?"

"Kid! First off ..."

"Keep training for a million years and *maybe* you'd escape this hunter! Nah,

fat chance! Just keep drilling that one move until it comes natural!”

“Oh, good idea! Lemme try that,” said Midoriya.

“Such apt advice,” said All Might, sounding almost dejected.

Midoriya tried swinging around again—this time without Bakugo on his tail—but after a few swings, he fumbled once more and fell.

“Ah!” gasped Eri, who’d been watching the entire time.

Midoriya, who still hadn’t noticed Eri, picked himself up and started swinging again. And once again, before long, he missed a branch and plummeted to the ground.

“More like ... this, maybe?” he muttered. “Grab and release, grab and release ...”

He got up and tried again. And again. Every time he fell, Midoriya would brush himself off and launch blackwhip at another branch.

“Ooh, so close!” whispered Togata from the shadows. “Ah, no, aim higher! Argh! That’s okay, buddy! Walk it off and try again!”

“You seriously can’t keep Midoriya down, huh,” said Shinso.

“Can’t keep him down where? On the ground?” said Eri.

“That means he never gives up,” explained Shinso.

Eri considered this and turned back to watch Midoriya. No matter how many times he failed, the determined look on his face showed that the only thing on his mind was how to improve the next time. Undaunted and unwavering, he had his eyes on that next step toward his future.

“How does Deku try so hard?” blurted out Eri, as if she’d been ruminating on the question but couldn’t hold it in anymore.

“Because he knows who he wants to become,” said Togata, turning to Eri with a grin. “Midoriya has found his target and is running toward it at top speed.”

“I get how that is,” said Shinso, nodding, though Eri’s eyes were still locked on Togata and his smile.

Togata’s words reminded Eri of his own actions, in a way. Even after losing his

Quirk, he had never stopped training. After supervising a session with Eri, he would go for a run on his own or even do some exercises with Tamaki Amajiki and Nejire Hado. The girl had witnessed him in action like that, day after day. The loss of one's Quirk would typically be enough to make most heroes give up on their dreams, but Eri had yet to see Togata looking crestfallen in any way. He might don a look of grim determination during a training session, but at all other times, he somehow maintained that sunny smile.

Here Eri was, surrounded by people who smiled through it all. Ones who always treated others with kindness. Strong people who had somehow found ways to comfort themselves through moments of pain and weakness. In fact, Togata hadn't wept since the death of his mentor, Sir Nighteye. With his last words, the hero had told Togata to keep smiling, so the boy was determined never to stray from his dream.

Mirio and Deku and everyone are all trying hard so they can be the people they want to be.

At this thought, Eri's heart sped up, and she felt her body fill with a gentle warmth.

"Oof!"

Midoriya had fallen again.

"More like this, maybe ..." he said, analyzing his most recent mistake, before launching blackwhip at a branch once again.

"Good luck!" whispered Eri.

She watched Midoriya latch onto the first branch, swing through the air, grab the next branch with another tendril of blackwhip, and then a third. But that was the easy part; it was around the fourth branch that he would usually fall. This time, however, the blackwhip found its mark and kept him airborne.

"Wow!" said Eri.

Midoriya successfully swung again and again, until each smooth action made it clear he'd gotten the hang of it.

"I did it! Did you see that, All Might?" said Midoriya with a smile, after landing

and spinning around toward his mentor.

“I sure did!” said All Might, nodding and returning the smile.

Clearly sick of waiting around, Bakugo blasted off toward Midoriya.

“Why’re you standing still? Better hustle, nerd!”

“Huh? We’re starting up again, Kacchan?”

“Deku is so amazing!” said Eri, as the boys resumed their game of cat and mouse. Her eyes sparkled at Midoriya’s hard-earned success.

“Mm-hmm!” said Togata with a nod.

“Heh, youthful passion is a beautiful thing,” came a voice from behind.

“Midnight! How long have you been standing there?” asked Togata.

The teacher was leaning against a tree, clearly spellbound by the boys and their training. While searching for Eri, the scent of sweat and determination had led her to this spot.

“What’s ‘yooth-ful pashun’?” asked Eri, who had heard that phrase and similar ones before.

Midnight paused to think before answering. “Hmm. It’s like ... when young people are living their lives to their fullest potential.”

Eri blinked in wonderment. “Can I have that too?”

Midnight squatted down and gave Eri an encouraging smile. “Of course you can.” Eri was flabbergasted.

“But!” continued Midnight, looking Eri square in the eyes. “You have to tell grown-ups before wandering off somewhere, okay? Everyone was so worried about you.”

“Okay ...” said Eri gloomily.

Midnight mussed her hair before standing up and glancing around. “Why are we all out here, anyway?”

“Actually, it’s because—” started Shinso, but he was interrupted by a familiar meow. Instinctively, Shinso and Midnight spun around to face the source of the

sound and spotted a white tail in the shade of a nearby tree.

“Aww, a pwecious kitty cat,” cooed Midnight, already going gaga for a cat she’d never met.

“As I was saying, we think that kitten hurt its leg, so we were searching for it,” said Shinso.

“It’s injured? How awful,” said Midnight.

Shinso was about to call out to the kitten, but he stopped himself and decided to approach it quietly instead. The cat-loving Midnight took his cue and did the same, but from the opposite side. They weren’t quite sneaky enough, however; the kitten noticed the looming humans and ran off again in a panic. This time, though, Togata had looped ahead and was ready to intercept and nab the kitten.

“Phew ... Thanks for that,” said Shinso, after he and the others had caught up to Togata.

“No trouble at all,” said Togata with a grin. Cradled within his broad arms, the kitten was meowing for dear life.

“Is the kitty really hurt?” asked a concerned Eri.

Togata dropped to his knees so everyone could get a better look, and Shinso gently parted the fur on the kitten’s hind leg to examine the injury. There seemed to be a number of tiny stab wounds that were still oozing blood. Seeing this, Eri winced in sympathy.

Poor kitty ... That must hurt ...

The kitten’s desperate yowling continued.

It must hurt so much ...

Eri thought the meowing sounded a lot like crying. Was the kitten was crying out for help? At this thought, Eri balled her tiny fists.

“Maybe it got pecked at by a crow?” suggested Shinso, who hadn’t expected the injury to be this bad.

“I think we need a medical professional for this,” said Midnight. “Maybe

Recovery Girl could ... Ah, no, never mind. She won't be back until late tonight."

"For now, it needs some first aid," said Shinso as he stood up, ready to take action.

"I-I want to help ..." said Eri, looking down at her hands with fear in her eyes.

The others hadn't expected this.

"With my Quirk, I mean ..."

Togata shifted his gaze from Eri to Midnight, questioningly. After a pause, Midnight nodded, and Togata placed the kitten in Eri's arms. She looked up at him for reassurance.

"It'll be okay. You can heal the kitty," he said.

Eri nodded and tried to comfort the small trembling animal.

"Kitty ... You're gonna be okay ..."

In her hands she felt that pulsing warmth. The weight of life itself. In that moment, all Eri wanted to do was hold the hurt, crying kitten and take away the pain.

It's okay ... I'm okay ...

Eri began to focus, preparing to use her Quirk. But her glowing horn frightened the kitten, causing it to cry out again, more distressed than ever. Eri's focus broke and the glow faded, edged out by the return of the cold dread in her heart.

What if I make the kitty disappear ... ?

Eri froze up, as if someone had reached into her chest and squeezed her heart.

"It's gonna work out!"

Midoriya's words of encouragement from over in the clearing were actually directed at himself, but in that moment, nothing could have been more reassuring for Eri to hear. She recalled how Midoriya had kept facing that challenge—no matter how many times he fell—and the gentle warmth began to fill Eri's chest once more.

“Yes. It’s gonna work out,” mumbled Eri to herself as she began to focus again. Her horn glowed, and the kitten’s injuries started to close up as its body was rewound to a prior state of being. Within moments, the wounds had vanished, along with the bloodstains on its skin and fur.

“Phew,” sighed Eri, wasting no time in removing her hands from the kitten.

“You really did it, Eri! The kitty’s all better now!” exclaimed Togata, whose praise brought a wide smile of relief to Eri’s face.

The kitten couldn’t possibly comprehend the process it had just undergone, but it remained by Eri’s side, licking her hand and meowing all the while.

“That’s its way of saying, ‘Thank you for helping me,’” said Shinso.

Eri considered this and petted the kitten’s head.

“Is the hurt gone? I’m so glad,” she said with a giggle, causing Midnight’s and Togata’s smiles to grow even wider. For a moment, the kitten licked at the wet food Shinso had brought until it decided to run off again for some unknowable reason.

“All right, I’d better hunt it down again,” said Shinso, then he turned to Eri. “What I said earlier, about growing. It’s all about getting better, day by day, and moving forward.”

“Moving forward,” repeated Eri.

As Shinso walked away, Eri kept muttering those final two words, mulling them over.

“Well, shall we?” said Midnight. She, Togata, and Eri began walking toward the teachers’ dorm together.

“Will I get to meet that kitty again?” asked Eri.

“Of course! Hey, that’s something to look forward to!” said Togata.

“Good,” said Eri.

Midnight looked down at the girl, unsure how to put her thoughts into words.

“Listen, Eri ... I’m sorry for forcing all that Shichi-Go-San stuff on you. It’s no big deal if you’d rather not. As long as you’re growing up healthy and happy,

that's good enough for all of us."

Midnight's soft smile came off as truly apologetic, which shocked Eri. The girl thought it over before raising her head and answering.

"No, I wanna do Shichi-Go-San. Because that kimono is so pretty," she said.

"Really? Glad to hear it! Ah, we'll have to get you some *chitose-ame* too!"

"What's that?"

"They're these loooong candy sticks. You can lick them for what feels like forever before they get any smaller," explained Midnight.

"Candy that doesn't disappear ..." said Eri, starting to drool a little at the thought of a sweet stick of everlasting candy. Now she was fully on board with Shichi-Go-San.

I wanna show Mirio and Deku my kimono. I can thank them again for saving me.

As she imagined showing her saviors her holiday look, Eri glanced around the campus and spotted the main school building not too far off.

Maybe someday I'll get to try hard at this school too, like Deku and everyone.

Eri's heart skipped a beat at the very thought.

"What's up, Eri?" asked Togata.

"Nothing," said Eri with a smile.

Now she could picture herself walking around these grounds in the future, wearing a school uniform.

Part 5

U.A. Studio: Promo Vid Project



“You’ve got a special joint exercise with the Business Course coming up.

Shota Aizawa’s homeroom announcement came out of left field for the students of class 1-A. The U.A. High student body was broken up into the Hero Course, the Support Course, General Studies, and the Business Course. Though the Hero Course occasionally teamed up with the Support Course where costumes and tools were concerned, they never had much reason to interact with the other two groups.

“Excellent!” said Tenya Ida, shooting his hand into the air. “What sort of exercise will this be, Sensei?”

“You’ll be pairing up or forming groups with members of the Business Course to produce hero commercials of sixty seconds or less. Then, the General Studies students will vote on the results. Class B will be participating too, of course,” explained Aizawa.

A chorus of “Ooh!” and “Awesome!” arose from the class. Day after day of harsh training made them eager for a lesson like this—one that felt off the beaten path. Plus, the idea of shooting commercials got them pumped up since that was something pro heroes did all the time.

Aizawa cleared his throat to silence his rowdy class.

“Take note—the Business Course is in charge of this operation. They’ll be the ones deciding how to portray you, meaning that for the duration of these ad shoots, they’re the directors, and you’ll be playing the hero roles exactly as they request.”

This last bit caused the mood to shift, but a glare from Aizawa preempted any griping.

“The Business Course students have already decided on the groups you’ll be forming, so let’s get going and meet them.”

With that, class A began to file out of the classroom.

“We’re really shooting commercials! I hope they capture my cute side but also make me look kinda awesome!” said Mina Ashido.

“For real!” said Toru Hagakure, as both girls practically skipped down the hall.

“I dunno ...” said a blushing Ochaco Uraraka, bringing her hands to her cheeks. “I think I’ll get stage fright once I’m in front of the camera!”

“Same here ... This sucks,” said Kyoka Jiro with a scowl.

“We’ve never done anything like this before, ribbit,” said Tsuyu Asui, sounding anxious.

“I admit, I’m a bit nervous too,” said Momo Yaoyorozu with a strained smile.

Some of the boys had thoughts on the matter as well.

“I’m too shy for this sort of thing,” said Koji Koda, walking beside Mezo Shoji and Fumikage Tokoyami.

“It’s another part of our studies, though,” said Shoji.

“Ads ... Commercials ... All are naught but carefully crafted illusions ...” mumbled Tokoyami.

Behind those three, Ida, Izuku Midoriya, and Shoto Todoroki were also chatting.

“Many agencies these days put quite a bit of effort into their advertisements, as I understand it,” said Ida.

“It’s an important tool when a newcomer emerges on the scene,” said Midoriya. “Not everyone does it, but it’s a great way to come out and tell everyone what kind of hero you are. Some new heroes will even come prepared with an ad or clip reel of their own when they apply to an agency!”

“Sounds pretty useful,” said Todoroki.

“Don’t act like you don’t know, Todoroki!” said Minoru Mineta, butting in. “Having a good commercial could make all the difference between getting tons of *action* with the ladies or being forever alone!”

“I’m not looking for that kind of action,” said Todoroki.

“Good-looking dudes like you always say that kinda thing!” said a fuming Mineta.

“I hope they make me look cool as hell! Like, really suave!” said Denki Kaminari, clearly looking forward to the upcoming exercise.

“I will be sure to sparkle and twinkle on film, ☆” said Yuga Aoyama with a flip of his feathery hair.

“So, same old routine, then?” said Hanta Sero with a snort.

“I don’t think you could stop twinkling if you tried, Aoyama,” said Mashirao Ojira.

“Pain in the ass, waste of time ...” muttered Katsuki Bakugo with a cluck of his tongue.

“Chill, Bakugo!” said Eijiro Kirishima, trying to cheer up his friend. “This could be a heap of fun!”

“Nothing wrong with a project like this every once in a while,” said Rikido Sato. “And I’ve made tiramisu for dessert today, so you’ve got that waiting for you if you power through this!”

“You think dessert’s some kinda reward? Who the hell cares!” said Bakugo.

As the class continued their march, Aizawa listened to his students chatter away from the head of the pack. He almost felt bad for them, ignorant as they were of what truly awaited them.

“Good luck,” he murmured, too quiet to be heard. “You’ll need it.”



One week later, the entire first-year student body—with the exception of the Support Course—found themselves in a gymnasium staring up at a giant screen on the stage, ready to watch the hero commercials directed and produced by the Business Course. The General Studies students (who would be voting on the productions) had the best seats in the house, front and center, and of course Hitoshi Shinso was among them.

Off to the side and separated by a partition were the Business and Hero Courses, waiting for their work to appear on the big screen. The Hero Course students all wore black hoods and cloaks to conceal the costumes that the Business Course had designed for them, which were only to be revealed after each screening. Joint exercises like this were uncommon for General Studies, so

those students were visibly excited. On the other hand, each and every student in classes A and B of the Hero Course wore a grim expression.

“Someone tell me this is all a bad dream ...”

“Are we seriously going through with this?”

Disgruntled murmurs rose from the crowd of future heroes. One could find more cheer in a graveyard, and the mood was so stagnant that the students looked more like rotting zombies than hero hopefuls. The two homeroom teachers—Vlad King and Aizawa—walked up to their classes.

“We get how you guys must feel!” said Vlad King. “But this was an important exercise, so dig deep and find the resolve to stand tall on that stage!”

“Once you go pro, you’ll find yourself facing down irrational nonsense day in and day out. Think of this as a dress rehearsal for that. Some amount of pride is essential for heroes, but when you stand up in front of other people, you need to toss aside any sense of shame,” said Aizawa.

Vlad King’s pep talk was full of fiery encouragement, while Aizawa’s sounded more like a threat. The students trusted their teachers to look out for their best interests, so they took the words to heart as they prepared to watch the screening of the hero commercials.

Class A’s ads would be shown first, starting with Aoyama, as they would be going by their seating order. Aoyama climbed onto the stage with his Business Course partner, who gave a brief self-intro and explained the idea behind the ad.

“My concept was a feeble, sickly hero. It sends a powerful message to society when even someone not so strong in traditional ways can become a hero. Please enjoy!”

The lights dimmed and the screen lit up, showing Aoyama lying in a sickbed with an IV drip attached to his arm. He was watching a mighty hero in action on a television.

“I ... I want to be a hero too!”

New scene. In a dingy back alley, a villain stopped in his tracks and gasped.

“Wh-who’re you s’posed to be?”

Standing to block the villain’s way was Aoyama, clad in his hospital gown and clutching his IV pole.

“What scant life remains in me, I will devote to justice!” said Aoyama decisively, before collapsing and coughing up bloody sputum.

“You okay, buddy?” blurted the villain, crouching toward the sickly hero.

“Gotcha! Blinding Beam!” cried Aoyama, flashing a miniature searchlight at the villain, who fell to his knees, roaring in agony.

“Sickliness is my weapon ... I am the Frail Hero: Oww Yama ...”

The Aoyama on the screen turned to the camera and ended the clip with a wink.

Back on the stage, the real-life Aoyama removed his cloak to reveal the hospital gown underneath, turned to the General Studies students, and hacked up some fake clotted blood.

“V-voilà ... ☆”

The audience was dumbfounded, and the rest of the Hero Course glanced uneasily at each other, trembling at the thought that this hellish viewing party had only just begun. From the moment they’d been informed what sort of heroes they’d be portraying, they’d been dreading this screening, because the Business Course’s ideas were zanier than anyone could have predicted. Exemplary U.A. students or not, kids will be kids, and the ideas for heroes that these kids had come up with were the products of childhood daydreams and fantasies, allowed to percolate and congeal over the years into some truly baffling concepts.

“Never again ... Once was enough for a lifetime,” said Vlad King.

“Yeah, you couldn’t pay me to relive that,” said Aizawa.

Moments earlier, the two teachers had done their best to encourage their students, but now they grumbled to each other as they recalled their own high school days without much fondness. As graduates of U.A., the two men had experienced this ordeal themselves back in the day, and they knew that Hero

Course alums historically called it “the Lesson from Hell.”

Next up was Ashido, who took the stage with her Business Course partner.

“My concept was an old-school delinquent! That punk vibe is timeless, as everyone knows! Enjoy the show!” said the student, hyping up the production.

Against the backdrop of a derelict school building was Ashido, wearing a long Japanese biker gang jacket, clutching a wooden sword, sitting in that distinctive ne’er-do-well squat, and glaring at the camera. Then, a poem pontificating on the delinquent life appeared on the screen in a dramatic font:

ONE LIFE TO LIVE, ONE LIFE TO GIVE.

WHEN THE WORLD FACES DOOM, I MAKE JUSTICE BLOOM.

THE WAY OF THE LADY PUNK.

When the poem faded, Ashido stood and spun around to show the embroidered kanji characters on the back of her jacket, including the Buddha’s phrase “Throughout heaven and earth, I alone am the honored one,” as well as zingers like “Love, courage, carnage,” “Live to fight,” and “Nice to beat you,” among others. As she turned back around, a villain showed up.

“Heh ... Looks like you got guts, girl ... Fine—I’ll take you on,” said the villain, who attempted to strike first but wasn’t as fast as Ashido’s wooden sword.

“Early Bird Strike!”

She tossed the sword away and delivered a powerful punch to the villain’s gut.

“Live to fight!”

As the villain crumpled, Ashido turned to the camera.

“If you ain’t got a place to call home, come to this badass gal. I’ll make something outta ya!”

The video ended, and the Ashido on the stage dropped her cloak to show off that same biker jacket before turning to the General Studies students and flipping the wooden sword over one shoulder.

“I’m the Delinquent Hero: Meana, and I’m made of some tough stuff! Nice to beat you!” she snarled.

She was more into the role than anyone expected, and the audience was intimidated into giving her a meek round of applause.

Next up were Uraraka and Asui, as a pair.

“My concept was a singing, dancing, pop-star hero duo!” said their enthusiastic partner. “Cuteness equals justice!”

The video opened on the two girls practicing their moves in a dance studio.

“Geez, I sure hope we get to perform live at the Budokan someday,” said Uraraka.

“I’m sure we have what it takes,” said Asui.

Scene change. The duo was performing live at the Budokan arena, singing and dancing in cute, sparkly outfits, when out of nowhere a villain appeared to ruin everyone’s fun.

“He’s taken our fans hostage!” said Uraraka.

“It’s up to us to protect them!” said Asui.

The girls continued to sing as they unleashed a flurry of moves at the villain, like a pair of tag team wrestlers.

“We sing! We dance! We kick your butt! ♪”

“The world’s full of our fans, so we protect the world! ♪”

A final double dropkick from the duo brought the villain down.

“We’ll always be close to your heart! I’m Chaco!”

“We hope you never frog-get about us! I’m Ribbity!”

“And we’ve been Chaco and Ribbity!” they said in unison. After a final snappy wink from the duo, the screen faded to black. On the gymnasium stage, Uraraka and Asui revealed their cutesy pop-star outfits and struck a pair of awkward poses.

“Chaco and Ribbity, here for you!”

Oohs and ahhs emerged from the slightly impressed audience.

Next, Ida was up.

“My concept was a Casanova hero who uses his *mature appeal* to defeat villains!” explained Ida’s partner.

The video opened in a dimly lit bar, with Ida the bartender mixing a cocktail.

“Here’s your dry martini,” he said, handing the drink to a customer. On the bottom of the screen, the words NO REAL ALCOHOL WAS USED IN THIS PRODUCTION appeared.

A moment later, a villain burst into the bar.

“My, my. They say the customer’s always right, but now I’m not so sure,” said Ida. *“Apologies, but there’s no seat available for you at my bar, so please see yourself out.”*

The villain ignored the warning and charged forward, so Ida stepped forth with a cocktail in hand.

“Rambunctious customers are doomed to take a snooze against my broad chest ... Try my original cocktail—Liqueur du Tenya!”

Ida circled around the villain, got them in a nelson hold, and force-fed them the drink. Once again, NO REAL ALCOHOL WAS USED IN THIS PRODUCTION showed up on the screen.

“Casanova Hero: Tenya will leave any villain with a hangover,” he said, flashing a seductive, devil-may-care grin as the video ended.

Ida unveiled his suave bartender costume atop the stage and said, “Take note, fellow students! The cocktails shown in this promotional video were not made with real alcohol! In Japan, one must be at least twenty years of age to imbibe legally!”

“Psst!” hissed his partner. “This is where you were supposed to announce your hero name and all that!”

“But I had to clarify that one vital point!” protested Ida as the two left the stage, which cued Ojiro and his partner to step up.

“I’d rather not spoil my concept, so just watch and see! Enjoy!”

The video began with Ojiro in a stiff school uniform and glasses, studying in a classroom. Then, it cut to him standing in a packed commuter train.

“Is this really all there is to life? Am I satisfied? Like hell I am!”

In the next scene, Ojiro stood in front of a mirror, applying heavy black eye shadow and spiking his hair straight up with gel.

“You think you can hold me back, world? Just try it!”

Cut to a dingy live-music venue. Covered in enough wild makeup to render him unrecognizable, Ojiro was shredding on an electric guitar. Then, as usual, a villain showed up.

“How dare you mess with my festival of rage!” yelled Ojiro, before leaping into the air and bringing down the guitar on the villain, smashing the instrument to pieces. He tossed the neck of the guitar aside and proceeded to stab the villain with his spiky hair, drenching himself in blood.

“Deeeep red!” he howled, ending the video with that bloodcurdling declaration.

“My concept was rebelling against society and, like, total destruction! But also, he fights for justice!” said the Business Course student.

“I-I’m the Glam Death Rock Hero: Mashirao! Emphasis on *mash*!” said Ojiro.

Kaminari took the stage next.

“I think you’ll get what I was going for once you watch the clip!” said his partner.

A lightning bolt flashed on the screen, revealing Kaminari in a suit of armor and a red cape.

“In a world ... where the mighty Thunder God Thur has come from the cosmic beyond ...” boomed a typical movie-trailer narration voice. *“Does he herald justice? Or evil?”*

Staring down a villain, Kaminari hurled a giant hammer that boomeranged back into his hand.

“I have learned many things on this planet you call Earth,” he said. *“In fact, I think of it as a second home. The people of this world are now my people, under my protection!”*

Kaminari rose into the air, wreathed by crackling electricity, and brought down a fearsome thunderbolt on the villain. Stirring music started up, and the camera swept around Kaminari as he stared off into the distance at nothing in particular. Then, the Business Course student who'd produced the ad showed up in the scene dressed in black armor.

"Did you think you'd triumph so easily, brother of mine?" said the mysterious figure.

"I-it's you! Laki!"

The two squared off, accompanied by more narration.

"Will the universe survive these brothers' fateful feud? Thunder God Hero: Thur! Coming soon, to a hero agency near you!"

As the video ended, a voice in the audience said, "Total rip-off of, y'know ..."

But Kaminari's partner looked awfully proud. "I'm a huuuge fan of Marvel's heroes! Anyway, thanks for watching!"

"Thunder God Hero: Thur is on the scene!" shouted Kaminari.

More murmurs from the crowd as Kirishima and his partner took the stage.

"I think the coolest profession in the world is being a fisherman! Maybe you'll agree!" said the Business Course student before starting the video.

It opened on a stormy sea, with Kirishima standing valiantly at the front of a fishing boat. He gasped as a gigantic villain resembling an aquatic *umibozu yokai*, a massive shadowy humanoid that destroyed ships, rose from the depths. With a flick of his nose, Kirishima struck a pose, armed with nothing but a fishing pole.

"This'll be one helluva catch!"

He cast his line at the villain, which bit down on the bait and hook. The reel spun like mad, and Kirishima struggled to pull the villain in.

"Puttin' up a real fight, eh! But this villain won't be the one that got away!"

He put his back into it and hauled the villain out of the water.

"Landed me a real whopper, I did!"

The video ended with a grinning Kirishima slinging his latest catch over his back.

Back in the real world, the Kirishima on the stage struck his angler pose and shouted, “The seas’ll be safe so long as I’m around! I’m the Angler Hero: Fisher Man!”

Koda and his partner walked onto the stage next.

“Um, the power of words is unlimited, and I wanted to portray a hero who proves that,” explained the Business Course student.

The video began with Koda in a hip-hop outfit facing a villain wearing similar clothing. As the two stared each other down, a fresh beat started up.

“Yo, hear me out, villain. Quit this lootin’ and killin’. ‘Stead of stealing cash, maybe love would give you fulfillment?” Koda rapped. *“Dreams never came true, for you and your crew? Try to make your folks proud, ‘stead of sorry they had you. Give up on this life of crime, cuz regrets, they last a lifetime.”*

“Shut your face, hero. My violent ways got me here. You only live once—what’s there left to discuss?” said the villain, spitting back.

“I can’t forget and forgive, but you only got one live to life ... Erm, life to live ...”

“Oops, you messed up,” said the actor playing the villain.

Instead of resuming the rap, Koda remained silent and ran at the villain, grabbing him in a joint lock and grappling him to the floor.

“I’m the Hit-or-Miss Rapper Hero: Koji, and I’m here to say, villains causing trouble won’t get their way!” said Koji, ending the video with that final rhyme.

“Well, I suppose the power of words can be limited,” said the Business Course student. “I went for a hero who portrays both sides of that coin.”

“Th-thanks for watching ...” added Koda.

Koda was never particularly eloquent in the best of times, and it had taken a few hundred takes to get even a halfway decent version of the rap on video. As such, he’d decided not to do any live rapping on the stage.

Sato and his partner were up next.

“My folks run a little bar that serves drinks and snacks, so I wanted to spin that concept into a hero.”

The video opened on the exterior of a hole-in-the-wall bar called Shug. Inside, Sato stood behind the counter, dressed as a stereotypical middle-aged proprietress. Then, of course, a villain wielding a knife appeared.

“Really, honey?” said Sato. “You actually wanna rob my little bar? Well, I gotta say, you haven’t got a hint of talent for villainy at all. See, my place barely brings in enough cash to keep the lights on. Oh, hold on, now. Are you hungry? Why don’t you put down that little pigsticker and have a seat?”

Sato placed an onigiri and a bowl of miso soup on the counter.

“Don’t you worry about paying, shug. Lemme guess—you wandered in here because you haven’t a bite to eat in days. Aw, don’t start blubbering on me now. Your soup will get all salty.”

Next, he poured beers for the villain and himself. Once again, NO REAL ALCOHOL WAS USED IN THIS PRODUCTION appeared on the screen.

“That one’s on me, honey. So, why don’t you nurse that beer and tell this old lady your troubles? ... Oh, you don’t say? ... Well, what’s so wrong with that? Not every soul on our planet was meant to fit in with the rest of the crowd. Different strokes for different folks, as they say. If you ask me, everyone sticks out a bit around the edges in their own way, so don’t let it get to you. Next time you feel like going nuts and burning everything all down, just pay me a visit. You’ll always find an onigiri or two, plus this old broad who’ll always lend you an ear.”

The camera panned out from Sato’s compassionate smile to show the exterior of the building again, and a narrator spoke.

“She’s the Run-Down Bar Hero: Rikimama, who pacifies villains with down-to-earth conversation. Which down-on-their-luck villain will find their way to her tonight?”

On the stage, Sato unveiled his bar-proprietress costume. Wielding an onigiri in one hand, he said, “Got problems? Then come on down to my humble spot.”

Shoji walked onto the stage next, and his partner said, “When I was little, puppet theater made a huge impression on me. With my concept, I’m hoping to popularize puppet theater and allow children everywhere to unlock their imaginations!”

The video began at a kindergarten, where the children were watching a puppet performance of “The Seven Baby Goats.”

“Mommy, why are your legs black?”

“Oh my, how very odd ...”

“You must be the big bad wolf!”

Shoji was busy manipulating all the puppets with his dupli-arms and skillfully voicing each of the characters when a villain stormed into the kindergarten. As the children shrieked, Shoji continued to perform as the puppets.

“Oh no! A mean old villain!”

“Let’s get him! Before Mommy comes home!”

He used the puppets to hurl prop rocks at the villain, resulting in a knockout. One of the delighted children in the audience said, *“Mr. Wolf helped beat the mean villain!”*

Shoji proceeded with an impromptu exchange between the goats and the wolf.

“Mr. Wolf, thank you for helping us!”

“You’re more like a big nice wolf!”

“I only wanted to be friends with you all,” said the wolf. *“Won’t you be my friends?”*

“Of course!”

The miniature curtains closed on that happy ending. As the children clapped, the curtains opened up again to reveal Shoji himself with the puppets on his dupli-arms.

“I’m the One-Man Puppeteer Hero: Punch ‘n’ Shoji. Now recruiting more members for the troupe, by the way.”

The screen went dark, and Shoji removed his cloak to reveal the puppets on his hands.

“Thanks for watching!” he said.

Jiro was the next to present.

“My concept was a cool, sultry hero! Enjoy!” said her partner.

The commercial opened in a Chinese restaurant, where Jiro was waitressing in a Chinese dress.

“*Welcome,*” she said to some customers, before slipping down a hallway. She snuck into an office, made sure she wasn’t being watched, and rifled through a drawer to find documented evidence of illegal activities.

“Knew it,” she said. *“He’s definitely part of the shady operation.”*

Then the door to the office burst open and the villainous restaurant owner walked in.

“Whaddaya think you’re doing?!”

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m making sure nasty men like you get what’s coming to them.”

With the documents in one hand, Jiro reached for a small knife concealed against her thigh and tossed it at the villain, pinning him to the wall by his jacket.

“No waitress wields a knife like that ... You must be ...”

“That’s right, big boy. I’m Kyon-Kyon, the lady spy. And your days of covering up these crimes are over.”

Back on the stage, Jiro’s scowling face was as red as the dress she’d been forced to wear.

“That’s right. I’m the, uhh ... lady spy, Kyon-Kyon ... Thanks for watching, I guess ...”

Sero was up next.

“Who makes the world turn?” asked his partner. “That’s right—it’s put-upon office workers! Why couldn’t someone like that be a hero, huh? Hence, my

concept!”

The ad began with Sero in a business suit. With a smile that was all business, he presented his card to a business partner.

“The pleasure is all mine!” he said. *“I’m Hanta Sero, from division 2.”*

The card read HANTA SERO, DIVISION 2, U.A. CORPORATION.

“This product is our pride and joy, here at the company. It comes with our highest recommendation ...”

Apparently, the business deal didn’t go well, because the video cut to Sero plodding home gloomily that night. Along his route, he spotted a villain attacking a little old man.

“You cut that out!” said Sero.

“Butt out, cubicle jockey!” roared the villain.

“Never underestimate a salaryman!” said Sero, as he flicked one of his business cards at the villain.

“Workflow Synergy Kick! Perfunctory Smalltalk Attack!”

The businesslike assault brought the villain down, and as Sero helped the old man get up, the latter recognized Sero’s business card.

“Say, ain’t you the one who came to my company to make a deal once? Welp, this must be fate. You know that product you were hawking? We’ll take a truckload after all.”

“Do you mean it, sir? That’s fantastic!” said Sero, and the video ended on his smile.

On the stage, Sero showed off his suit and business card.

“I’m the Salaryman Hero: Hanta Sero! I fight for justice and quarterly earnings!”

The next to present were Tokoyami and his partner.

“I was going for a sort of romantic, gothic, medieval hero! All those things in one!”

The screen showed Tokoyami—dressed as a European nobleman of yore—standing at the open window of his castle. A bat landed on his arm and squeaked.

“Once more, the gloom of the night calls to me ...”

Down on the cobblestone-paved street, a villain was chasing a young woman.

“Someone, help!” she shrieked.

Tokoyami swooped down between the woman and the villain, striking a gallant pose.

“And who might you be?” said the villain.

“I suppose even those doomed to die deserve proper etiquette,” said Tokoyami. *“If you must know, I am Dark Shadow XIII. Now, behold as I liberate the darkness within ... Hah!”*

Dark Shadow emerged and tore into the villain with its claws, defeating him easily.

“How can I ever thank you for saving me?” asked the young woman, rushing over to Tokoyami.

“I am a nobleman wreathed in dark,” he said, holding up a hand to stop her. *“It is my fate to wander the night in search of the hapless ... But you, my dear, must go on living under the sun, where I dare not tread ...”*

Tokoyami vanished into the darkness with a flourish, and the video ended.

“It is I, the Umbral Nobleman Hero: Dark Shadow XIII,” said Tokoyami on the stage, really leaning into the role. *“The night is my eternal companion ...”*

Now it was Todoroki’s turn.

“My concept was plain and simple,” said his partner. *“A genuine prince!”*

On the screen, Todoroki appeared. He was dressed in princely garb, wearing an iron mask, and galloping across a great grassy plain on horseback.

“I have-eth no right to my royal title, cursed as I am. Alas, I shall never return-eth to the castle,” said Todoroki, with all the gravitas of a man reading from cue cards off camera. Suddenly, his horse whinnied wildly, and horse and rider were

both enveloped in light.

“Huh? Where be-eth this?”

He'd been warped through space and time to the middle of a modern-day city, where a car was speeding down the road recklessly.

“Help!” screamed a nearby woman. *“My little boy’s in that car!”*

Todoroki pursued the car, which came to a screeching halt when his horse leaped in front of it.

“That fair goodwife claim-eth that this contraption hold-eth her child. Hand-eth the babe over,” he said.

“The kid’s mine!” said the driver. *“I got the same parental rights she does!”*

“Then act-eth more like a proper father,” said Todoroki, managing to imbue these lines with at least a hint of something resembling genuine emotion.

“Shaddup!” yelled the villain, tossing a hammer from the car window. It struck Todoroki's iron mask, knocking it off. When the attacker saw Todoroki's bare face, he clutched his chest in pain and said, *“M-my heart ... It’s beating so hard, it’s gonna explode ...”*

In a panic, Todoroki dismounted his steed and donned his mask.

“Such is my curse,” he said. *“Those who behold-eth my face are doomed to have-eth their hearts race-eth to the point of discomfort.”*

The little boy got out of the car and ran to his mother.

“Mommy!”

“Thank you, sir, for saving my boy!” said the mother.

“Has my cursed visage proved helpful? Then I shall remain-eth in this strange world and become-eth a hero,” said Todoroki, turning to the camera and removing the mask. *“I am-eth the Iron Mask Hero: Prince Shoto. My only weapon be-eth my face.”*

As the clip ended, Todoroki revealed his prince costume and said, “Like you just heard, I’m the Iron Mask Hero: Prince Shoto. Glad to be here.”

Hagakure was the next to hop onto the stage.

“I wanted a hero who shows the unlimited potential of *kigurumi* animal costumes!” said her partner.

The video showed a bank robbery in progress. Among the hostages was a little girl who screamed, *“I’m scared, Mommy!”*

To everyone’s surprise, Hagakure made her grand entrance wearing a bunny costume.

“Wh-who the hell’re you?” said the robber.

“I’m Miss Bunny! ... Bunny Kick! Hiyahh!”

After landing the attack, Hagakure stripped off the bunny skin to reveal a cat costume underneath.

“Now I’m Miss Cat! Hisssss!”

She scratched at the villain with the costume’s claws before stripping down again.

“And now I’m Miss Lion! Rawr!”

One big chomp from the lion was enough to finish off the villain, earning Hagakure cheers from the hostages.

“Thank you, um ... Miss Bunny? Cat? Lion?” said the little girl.

“Just call me Morphing Kigurumi Hero: Living Doll!” said Hagakure triumphantly.

The ad ended, and Hagakure posed in her bunny costume on the stage.

“I can be whatever I wanna be! Thanks for watching!” she said.

Now it was Bakugo’s turn.

“Sometimes you need a hero who looks kinda villainous!” said his partner. “I was aiming to thread that charming discrepancy between expectations and reality!”

The commercial started with a band of villains in the process of robbing a jewelry store.

“Looks like you fellas are about to start some kinda party ... Mind if I join ya?”

said Bakugo. He wore a rough 'n' tough costume that might suit a warrior wandering about a postapocalyptic wasteland, and his face was covered in makeup that made him look like a pro wrestling heel.

"What? Get the %#@\$ outta here," said one of the villains.

"Aww, not letting me be part of your wittle club?" sneered Bakugo. *"That really hurts my feewings!"*

He lunged at the villains, but before attacking, he took a quick step back to store up energy.

"Back ... and ... go!"

The ferocious blast made quick work of the villains. Before Bakugo could celebrate his victory, it started raining, and he heard a noise from a nearby cardboard box. He ducked down and discovered an abandoned puppy hiding inside.

"Hmm? You wanna come with me?"

Woof!

"Little bundle of warmth, aren'tcha?" said Bakugo, cradling the tiny dog in his arms. As he walked off into the rain, the screen went black.

"I'm ... the Villain Hero: Back ... and ... Go, ☆" spat Bakugo, his eye twitching dangerously. *"Oh, screw this!"*

Midoriya was the next presenter.

"I came up with a hero beloved by his fellow citizens!" said his Business Course partner.

The video showed Midoriya in a rather childlike outfit giving a neighborhood granny a shoulder massage on her front porch.

"You give the best massages, Li'l Deku," she said.

"Ha ha ... It's always worth it to see you smile, ma'am," replied Midoriya.

Suddenly, a shout from out in the street, where an old man had just gotten his bag stolen.

"That rotten thief made off with my bag! It's got my pension money in it!"

That's my only source of income these days ..."

"Don't you worry, old-timer! I can handle it!" said Midoriya, who caught up to the thief and tried to reason with him.

"Give it back, mister! Gramps earned that money fair and square, and it doesn't belong to you!"

"Buzz off, kid! That cash is mine now!"

"Golly gee, I'm mad now!" said Midoriya. *"Li'l Deku Punch! Li'l Deku Kick!"*

Midoriya's surprisingly vicious attacks took down the thief, and the old man got his bag back.

"There you go, gramps!"

"Thank you, sonny. Here—have a tangerine."

"Wow! I sure do love tangerines!" said Midoriya with a joyful smile.

The ad ended, and Midoriya posed in his little-boy outfit with a tangerine in one hand.

"I'm Helpful Citizen Hero: Li'l Deku! Glad to be here!" said Midoriya.

Second to last in class A was Mineta.

"I made an ad for a hero who catches villains unawares!" said his partner from the Business Course.

The video opened with the robbery of a convenience store.

"Gimme the cash!" said the villain.

Mineta entered the store dressed as an unassuming little kid.

"Hey, mister, why're you pointing that big knife at the nice lady? Mommy and Daddy told me knives are dangerous," said Mineta.

"Shut the hell up, you brat! This ain't none of your business!"

"I'm no brat! I'm Chappy!"

"Like I give a damn who you are. I said, get outta here!"

Mineta approached the robber, and his innocent face contorted into a

devilish grin.

“Now that’s no way to talk to a child!” said Mineta as he delivered a swift kick to the robber’s crotch. When the man keeled over in pain, Mineta bit his neck, putting him out of commission.

“Still think I’m a brat? How d’you like dem apples?”

Mineta hocked a glob of spit at the defeated villain before reverting back to his cherubic, innocent persona.

“You’re in for a world of pain if you drop your guard around Child Hero: Chappy. ☆”

As the screen went dark, the Mineta on the stage revealed his costume and struck a pose.

“With the appearance of a little kid and the attacks of a war criminal, I’m the Child Hero: Chappy!”

The last member of class A to present was Yaoyorozu.

“This idea is based on all those old yakuza movies I love!” said her partner. *“Enjoy the show!”*

The clip began with a pair of villains glaring at each other, ready to throw down, until Yaoyorozu appeared in a kimono and stepped between them.

“You know it’s tough times in this dog-eat-dog world when even villains are picking fights with each other,” she said.

“You looking for trouble, lady? Who are you, anyway?” said one of the villains.

Yaoyorozu slipped her kimono off one shoulder in order to retrieve dice and a dice cup from inside her robe.

“Yayorozu. Momo Yaoyorozu. But some folks call me Spider Lily Momo. Now here’s a taste of honor and humanity, hero-style!”

With that, she flung the dice from the dice cup, hitting the villains on their foreheads and knocking them out cold. As she replenished her dice by creating new ones with her Quirk, she stood over the defeated villains.

“What they never tell you is that being a hero is such melancholy work ...” said

Yaoyorozu as she walked off, accompanied by dramatic music to signal the end of the video.

Back on the stage, she revealed her kimono costume and stooped down with one arm and one leg thrust forward before delivering a final line.

“They know me as Gambling Hero: Spider Lily Momo! The pleasure’s all yours, I’m sure!”

At last, it was class B’s turn to present, and first up was Yosetsu Awase.

“Construction workers deal with risky situations all the time, which is something they share with heroes,” explained his partner from the Business Course.

The clip showed a building under construction, where Awase was deftly adding platforms to the structure with his “Weld” Quirk. Suddenly, a villain leaped down from above to make trouble at the site.

“I’m in the mood for demolition since the company funding this building laid me off!”

“Hey ... Stop that!” said Awase. *“Well, not the type to listen to reason, I guess ...”*

Awase welded more platforms so he could climb up high and tag the leaping villain, fusing his clothes to the steel structure.

“I get where you’re coming from, man, but whatever your reason, you can’t go around wrecking work sites. If you’re looking for a job, why not join us? It’s dangerous work, but you don’t gotta sweat the details so much,” said Awase with a smile, ending the video.

On the stage, Awase showed off his construction-worker outfit.

“Scaffolding workers are the stars of the construction site, and they risk their lives every day, just like heroes! I’m the Steeplejack Hero: Sayftee Furst!”

Sen Kaibara was next, and his partner explained the concept.

“The spinning top is a simple toy, but that simplicity has made it popular the world over! That’s the idea behind my hero!”

The video showed a theater where Kaibara was wearing a traditional Japanese outfit and balancing a toy top on an umbrella. Suddenly, a villain burst in and said to the audience, *“Do what I say if you don’t wanna die!”*

“Did you pay for a ticket, sir? If not, I gotta ask you to leave,” said Kaibara.

He tossed the umbrella aside, letting the still-spinning top drop to the floor. Then, he spun his own drill-like arm with his Quirk and transferred that intense rotational energy to the top, which shot forward violently and crashed into the villain.

“Gahhh!”

But the villain’s screams did nothing to stop the runaway top, which kept rebounding and smashing into him over and over again until he was defeated.

“Hope my act didn’t make you too dizzy, folks ... I’m the Top-Spinning Hero: Rolling!”

The ad came to an end, and Kaibara spun a top for the audience of his peers.

“Just as the world turns, so do tops! Thanks for watching!” he said.

Togaru Kamakiri was the next member of class B to take the stage.

“I set out to promote an especially sharp hero with a keen edge,” said his partner.

The commercial began with Kamakiri—whose hands had turned into blades—giving a haircut to a well-dressed politician in a barbershop.

“Minister, it’s nearly time to address parliament,” said the politician’s assistant, sitting nearby.

Then a vagabond in tattered clothing burst into the shop and pointed a gun at the man getting a haircut.

“Take this, you corrupt political hack!”

“Oh my!” said the politician.

Without a word, Kamakiri leaped forward and sliced the firearm to pieces with his blades before subduing the would-be assassin.

“Much appreciated,” said the politician. *“It’s truly a problem in society when*

these homeless miscreants blame their own failures and wretched lives on the government."

Hearing this from the minister, Kamakiri's eyes glinted with indignation.

"You and your kind's job is to make sure every citizen enjoys health and happiness," said Kamakiri, bearing his blades. *"I oughta slice your career to ribbons ..."*

Back on the stage, Kamakiri posed in his barber's outfit.

"I'll chop off hair! Cut down villains! Slice and dice politicians! I'm the Hairdresser Hero: Barber Cutter!"

Next up were Shihai Kuroiro, Jurota Shishida, and Manga Fukidashi, as a trio. The Business Course student who'd worked with them said, "What do heroes and comedians have in common? They both have the power to make people smile. That's what I was thinking with this hero concept!"

The ad opened in a studio, with a live recording of a variety show featuring a *manzai*-style comedy performance.

"We're Blackbeastonoma," said the three boys in unison. *"And we're happy to be here."*

"Hmm? What's the matter, Kuroiro?" said Shishida. *"Why the dark and gloomy look? Or is that just your face?"*

"Well, I know it's a little late to pipe up about this, but our stage name is just too enigmatic. As incomprehensible as dark matter," said Kuroiro.

"Dark matter?" said Shishida. *"Oh, you mean nonvisible components of the universe whose energy density still scales with the inverse cube of the scale factor, expressed as $\rho \propto a^{-3}$? That doesn't seem so incomprehensible to me. Besides, Blackbeastonoma is simple. We've got 'black' from your Quirk name, 'beast' from mine, and 'onoma' from onomatopoeia, which is Fukidashi's favorite thing. Basic logic, my dear Kuroiro."*

"That's my point, though," said Kuroiro. *"Why does Fukidashi get to use his favorite thing in the name, but not us? I mean, Blackbeastonoma sounds like a type of cancer or something!"*

“You want me to use my Quirk name instead?” said Fukidashi. *“Then we’d be Blackbeastcomic, which is just ridiculous since we’re three comedians—not one! Or, what? You wanna take the ‘man’ from my first name and make it Blackbeastman? Nah, that just sounds like a single hero’s code name. And again, we’re three men—not one!”*

As the boys bantered, a villain showed up to hijack the broadcast.

“Quit this crappy stand-up act and let me speak to the whole nation!” said the villain.

“Bursting in here to see us live and in person?” said Shishida. *“Thank you kindly, sir!”*

“GASP?!” said Fukidashi, and thanks to his Quirk, his quasi-onomatopoeia exclamation emerged as giant physical letters that knocked the villain down.

Kuroiro was ready with a quip of his own. *“Allow me to make my declaration to the nation first,”* he said. *“This comedian form of mine is only temporary until I am reborn as dark matter itself!”*

“GASP!!” said Fukidashi again, and the exclamation that took physical form this time knocked the villain out cold.

“Thanks again to everyone watching out there!” said Fukidashi. *“Once again, we are ...”*

“The Comedian Heroes: Blackbeastonoma!” said the three boys together, ending the ad.

On the stage, the trio said into the microphone in perfect unison, *“Love and laughter will save the world!”*

Itsuka Kendo took the stage next, as a solo act.

“My hero embodies the concept of love and dreams!” said her partner.

The screen showed a music hall in the middle of a dazzling Takarazuka-style production. Suddenly, a man in the audience stood up and pointed a gun at the actress singing on the stage.

“Why didn’tcha answer my fan letter, huh?” he shouted. *“I just want ya to be my bride! That’s all!”*

Screams rose from the audience as the entire theater flew into a panic, but the spotlight swiveled to Kendo, standing atop a grand staircase on the stage, wielding a feathery folding fan and wearing an ornate, masculine costume with feathers sprouting from her back.

“This production is a showcase of love and dreams ... There’s no place for unrefined men who don’t know the first thing about romance,” she proclaimed.

“Shaddup, you!” shouted the man. He fired the gun at Kendo, who deflected the bullet with her fan. She then dashed over to the other actress to shield her.

“If you truly harbor affection for this lovely creature, you’ll leave at once!” she said.

The gunman emptied his clip at Kendo, but she deflected every last shot with her fan while singing and dancing to the live orchestra’s accompaniment. When the villain was done firing, Kendo threw the feathers from her back like darts, pinning him to his seat.

“Sleep amongst the feathers ... You, who know not how to love ... I grant to you, at least, a fleeting dream, ♪” sang Kendo, before turning to the actress.

“You’re safe now, my dear. He won’t be harming a single hair on your head.”

“Thank you!”

The two women joined in an intimate embrace as the crowd went wild. No sooner had the curtain fallen than it rose again so Kendo could wave at the audience and say, *“I am the Rain Troupe Top Hero: Hikaru Shizukuame, and I shall protect love and dreams atop the stage!”*

As the clip ended, the Kendo on the gymnasium stage unveiled her feathery costume and struck a magnificent pose. “Thank you, one and all,” she said.

The next group to step onto the stage was the biggest yet, featuring Yui Kodai, Kinoko Komori, Ibara Shiozaki, Pony Tsunotori, Setsuna Tokage, and Reiko Yanagi. Their counterpart from the Business Course said, “There’s nothing more precious than the love and friendship between magical girls who fight together! Enjoy!”

The ad opened on a school campus, where Tokage, Tsunotori, Shiozaki,

Komori, and Yanagi were walking and chatting.

“You’re saying you spotted a garden gnome in our gardening club’s veggie patch?” said Tokage.

“Yes, I did!” said Tsunotori. *“And the little man was talking too!”*

“Indeed, I saw it as well,” said Shiozaki.

“If you’re lying about this, you’re gonna buy me lunch, shroom!” said Komori.

“Why don’t we all go take a look now?” suggested Yanagi.

The five girls arrived at the vegetable patch and spotted the garden gnome in question lying in the dirt.

“W-w-water ...” it seemed to say.

“You weren’t kidding! It really exists, and it even talks!” said Tokage.

“Let’s give it what it’s asking for,” said Yanagi, splashing some water on the mysterious object, which sprang to life, floated into the air, and spoke.

“I am Kompost, spirit of the field, and I have terrible news! The vegetables of the world are under siege! Won’t you please become the Veggie Pretty Yure warriors?”

The girls gasped.

The scene changed, switching to a city under attack by a giant monster made of ground meat.

“All veggies must be destroyed!” roared the wad of meat.

“Not on our watch, Meat Man!”

The girls appeared on the scene and transformed into the Veggie Pretty Yure warriors, striking poses as they announced their names and respective health benefits.

“Full of the natural antioxidant lycopene, I’m Pretty Yure Tomato!” said Komori.

“Sure to give your immune system a boost, I’m Pretty Yure Carrot!” said Shiozaki.

“With plenty of polyphenol to reduce eyestrain, I’m Pretty Yure Eggplant!” said Tokage.

“My sulforaphane helps prevent cancer! I’m Pretty Yure Broccoli!” said Yanagi.

“And my antioxidants and vitamins are packed with antiaging power! I’m Pretty Yure Pepper!” said Tsunotori.

“Together, we’re the Pretty Yure Five: Veggie Girl Squad!” shouted the entire team.

“Meat ... I’ll fill the whole world with nothing but meat!” said the monster.

“You most certainly will not!” said Shiozaki.

“Now eat your tomatoes, shroom!” said Komori.

The pair launched an attack, but the meat glob fought back. Yanagi, Tokage, and Tsunotori tried their own moves but were just as unsuccessful, leaving all five girls down for the count.

“What now?” moaned Tokage. *“If we fall here, veggies will vanish from the world!”*

“We won’t be able to grow delicious vegetables together anymore!” said a distressed Tsunotori.

Right when things were looking grim, Kodai showed up.

“No,” she said. *“Veggies won’t be lost forever ... because I’m here to fight too.”*

“Wait, aren’t you, uh, Kodai? Didn’t you just transfer to our school today?” asked Tokage.

Kompost then appeared to explain what was going on to the confused team.

“While you girls were fighting, I went and recruited a new veggie warrior!”

“I’m here to cure your fatigue and provide extra stamina!” said Kodai as she transformed. *“That’s right, I’m Pretty Yure Garlic! My garlic power will give you girls the level-up you need.”*

The power of garlic sprinkled down upon the team, and the five warriors nodded at Kodai. Fully recovered and stronger than ever before, the united

veggie girls launched a joint attack at the meat abomination.

“So this is how ... I meat my end!” cried the monster, defeated at last.

Kodai pulled out a club application form and showed it to her new teammates.

“Actually, I was a member of the gardening club at my old school. Could I work on the veggie patch with you girls?”

“Of course!” said the other five in unison, and the video ended on a freeze-frame of the six girls hugging and leaping into the air.

Back on the stage, the girls revealed their Veggie Pretty Yure costumes and struck a group pose.

“Veggies give us the nutrition and friendship power to save the world! We’re the Pretty Yure Six: Veggie Girl Squad!”

Now it was Nirengeki Shoda’s turn.

“Is there anything more comforting than softness and squishiness?” said his partner. *“That’s how the hero I came up with reassures people.”*

The clip rolled, showing a little boy who’d gotten lost at a shopping mall.

“Where’d Mommy go?” he cried, attracting the attention of a leering villain who grabbed the boy’s hand.

“I found your mommy, right over there. Lemme take you to her,” he said.

“Oh, really?” said the gullible child.

But before the villain could pull off a successful kidnapping, Shoda walked up wearing a soft and squishy costume made of giant marshmallow rings and belly bumped the villain to the ground.

“Careful, there!” he said. *“Never go anywhere with a stranger!”*

“What’s your deal?” shouted the villain.

“I’m Marshmallow Man! And I’ve got sweet, soft treats for nefarious villains like you!”

Shoda crammed marshmallows into the villain’s mouth until the man was

practically choking, and he finished the job by binding him with one of the large marshmallow rings.

“Dammit ... Too soft ... and squishy ...” said the villain, struggling in vain.

“Worry not!” said Shoda, turning to the little boy with a warm, reassuring hug. *“Your mommy is on her way!”*

“So soft and squishy!” said the boy.

“Oh, my little Shin! Where did you run off to?” said the mother, running up to her child. She was practically sobbing, so Shoda gave her a hug as well.

“Ahh, soft and squishy ...”

With both mother and child reunited and comforted, Shoda turned to the camera and said, *“Let yourself be enveloped by comfort and kindness! I’m Marshmallow Man!”*

On the stage, Shoda whipped off his cloak to reveal the rotund costume underneath.

“Both the crime fighting and the aftercare, performed as gently as possible! That’s how Marshmallow Man rolls!” he said.

“I realize I kind of ripped off Fat Gum’s whole thing,” said his partner. *“Sorry about that.”*

Kosei Tsuburaba was up next, and his Business Course partner seemed more excited than the rest of them.

“Let’s skip the intro and get to the tape!”

The video opened on an elaborate funeral that a villain had decided to crash.

“I ain’t letting this bastard off the hook just cuz he’s dead! No better way to stick it to him one last time than wrecking his dumb funeral!”

Tsuburaba stepped forward from the crowd of mourners to face the villain.

“Holding grudges is no fun! You gotta let that stuff go, man! Forget all this talk of revenge and just dance! Let’s party! Disco will never die!”

A disco ball descended from the ceiling, and when the jams started to play, Tsuburaba ripped off his black suit to reveal a garish clubbing outfit underneath.

As he tore up the impromptu dance floor, his sick moves struck the villain down.

“I’m the Clubber Hero: Max Hype, and my motto is YOLO!”

As the commercial ended, that same upbeat track began to play in the gymnasium, and Tsuburaba and his partner started dancing.

“Once the music starts, I’ve already won! Thanks for watching me bust a move!”

Now it was Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu’s turn to present.

“Japan’s farmers are the cream of the crop!” said his partner. “That’s the message I wanted to get across!”

The ad opened on a rice paddy where Tetsutetsu was harvesting rice with a combine.

“Got a real fine yield this year, yessiree!” he said.

He ambled over to the bank of the rice paddy and was about to stuff his face with an onigiri when two squabbling villains crashed down from overhead.

“Gimme a break! I only came along cuz you said it’d be the perfect crime!” said one.

“And it would’ve been, if you hadn’t stuck around too long to nab those extra jewels!” said the other. As they fought, they trampled a number of rice stalks.

“Getcher grubby boots offa the rice I worked my keister off to grow!” shouted Tetsutetsu.

“Huh? It’s just stinkin’ rice, bro.”

“Just rice? Just rice? We’re talking the national treasure of this here fine country! Each grain in a freshly steamed bowl sparkles like a little white jewel!”

A narrator then spoke over the scene.

“When his love for rice explodes forth, he transforms into a hero!”

Tetsutetsu entered a stereotypical transformation sequence and finished with a heroic pose.

“I’m the Farmer Hero: Nihongohan!”

He hurled a number of stale, rock-solid onigiri at the villains and beat them down with a hoe before turning to the camera.

“I’m here to protect the world and the rice paddies of Japan!”

A message appeared at the bottom of the screen, saying, INSTEAD OF TOSSING OLD AND STALE ONIGIRI, TRYING BOILING THEM DOWN INTO DELICIOUS PORRIDGE TO SHARE WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

The clip ended, and Tetsutetsu raised a pair of onigiri in his hands triumphantly.

“I cultivate rice and peace! I’m the Farmer Hero: Nihongohan!”

Juzo Honenuki was next, and his partner said, “Tell me, friends—have you heard of the mysterious masked figure who lurks below the opera house?”

The video opened on a plaza near a train station, where a mad villain had taken a civilian hostage.

“Get the police commissioner down here now, or else!”

Out of nowhere, Honenuki appeared on the scene wearing a mask and a cape. With a swish of the cape, he enveloped the villain and disappeared down a manhole.

“W-where am I ... ?” muttered the villain, who found himself in a labyrinth of mirrors.

“What an awful member of humanity you are, threatening innocent maidens for your own wicked ends,” echoed Honenuki’s voice. *“Perhaps you’ll take a new approach to life after this baptism in my domain ...”*

Jets of fire shot out from the floor at the villain.

“Yowch! I dunno who the hell you are, but show yourself, you creeper!” said the villain, prompting Honenuki to emerge from between the mirrors.

“That’s no way to sing. Allow me to teach you ...”

Next came jets of water, and then the mirrored walls of the labyrinth began to close in on the villain.

“E-enough, please! I’ll be better, I swear!”

“Yes, there we go. My little angel of justice ...” said Honenuki with a haunting laugh as he tossed a rose at the villain’s feet and vanished into the dark.

On the stage, Honenuki revealed his mask and cape and said, “Beneath the ground, you’ll find my domain ... I am the Lurking Hero: Phantom of Justice.”

Next up were Kojiro Bondo and his partner.

“Most living things are born from mothers,” said the Business Course student, “meaning there’s no figure more powerful than the almighty mom. Despite being a guy, Bondo was good enough to agree to play a mother in my ad, and I hope my own mom loves the hero concept I came up with!”

The clip showed a villain stirring up trouble in town, but Bondo showed up in an apron to stop him.

“Bad boy! You mustn’t throw tantrums like that! Mommy Beam!”

The ray of light transformed the villain into a baby, so Bondo picked him, squeezed him tight, and gave him a bottle of milk.

“There, there. Now let’s change that stinky diaper. Who’s my little darling angel?” said Bondo, doting on the newly minted baby.

A narrator’s voice spoke over the scene.

“Even the most vicious villains are helpless against the power of a mom! Witness the Mommy Hero: Big Love Mother!”

Back on the stage, Bondo cradled a baby doll and said, “Every villain is a precious baby in my eyes!”

The penultimate presenter was Neito Monoma, whose partner said, “My hero’s motif is all about Japanese Shinto shrines! Please enjoy!”

The ad began with a villain stealing coins from the offertory box at a shrine and stuffing them into his pockets, but the act didn’t go unnoticed by Monoma, who was dressed as a Shinto priest.

“How kind of you to make an offering, sir,” said Monoma.

“Oh, uh, yeah! That’s right! I was thinking I might as well donate to the holy cause!” said the thief.

“So very devout ...” said Monoma with an intense smile. *“In exchange, allow me to offer you a fortune. Surely the gods will smile upon your generous act.”*

“S-sure thing,” said the villain reluctantly, pulling a fortune from the box Monoma held.

The paper showed BIG BAD LUCK in a large font, and Monoma read out the detailed text beneath.

BIG BAD LUCK, IS IT? ACCORDING TO THIS, YOUR HOPES AND DREAMS WILL GO UNFULFILLED. YOU’LL BE INJURED, WITH AT LEAST SOME PAIN INVOLVED. WHEN IT COMES TO LUCK WITH MONEY, YOU’RE ADVISED TO WORK HARD AND EARN YOUR KEEP HONESTLY. BEWARE EVERY CARDINAL DIRECTION. SHOULD YOU EXPERIENCE CONFLICT, HEAVEN’S WRATH WILL SIDE AGAINST YOU ... APPARENTLY.

No sooner had Monoma finished than the skies grew dark, lightning flashed, and a fierce wind began to blow.

“Look at the time! I’d better get going,” said the villain, but the ladle from the handwashing station smacked his face, and a wind-tossed sign struck him on the back. As he lay on the ground, a cat bit the back of his neck and a loose tree branch fell and stabbed his arm. Finally, a great bell blown about by the wind smashed down on the villain’s head. The skies cleared up just as quickly as they’d clouded over.

“W-was that really heaven’s wrath ... ? Are the gods pissed off at me?” said the villain.

“No, nothing like that. I’m a hero, you see,” said Monoma with a venomous grin. *“And my power causes everything in a person’s fortune to come true. Still, the gods smile upon those who mend their wicked ways, so be sure to reflect and repent.”*

“Could a simple fortune change your life?” said the Monoma on the stage. *“I’m the Priestly Hero: Man of the Cloth!”*

The last presenter of the event was class B’s Hiryu Rin, who took the stage with his Business Course partner.

“When I was a little kid, my dream was to be a zombie,” said his partner. *“That explains my hero concept!”*

The video showed a thief at a shopping center emerging from a store toting stolen goods.

“And now to make my getaway ... Wait, what stinks so bad?”

“Mrahhh ... Grahh ...” moaned a zombified Rin. A subtitled translation accompanied the moans: YOU WON’T GET AWAY, VILLAIN!

“Z-zombie! Crap! I’m outta here!” said the robber, but before he could get far, Rin ripped off his own rotting arm and tossed it like a boomerang, knocking the villain to the ground. Zombie Rin then leaped upon the man and pinned him down.

“Grahhh ... Hrahh ... Mrahh ...”

ULTIMATE MOVES: ARM BOOMERANG AND ROTTEN STANK ASSAULT! said the subtitles.

The stench knocked the villain out, and Rin turned to the camera and tried to gnaw at the person filming.

“Grahhh ... Mrahh!” was all that could be heard as the screen faded to black.

“Grahhh, mrahh mrahh, hrahh,” said the real-life Rin on the stage.

“He said, ‘Even dead and rotting, I’m still a hero! The Zombie Hero: Romero, to be exact!’ And if any of you are wondering, George Romero was a great director and a pioneer of the zombie film genre!” explained Rin’s partner.

With that, the presentations were over, and a strange mélange of emotions pervaded the silent gymnasium. Among the Business Course students, one or two were realizing that their concepts had flopped. Meanwhile, at least one of the General Studies kids was genuinely having a hard time deciding whether they’d liked the Pretty Yure parody or the idol duo more. Finally, a few members of the Hero Course were duly impressed by the Dark Shadow XIII skit. But these were in the minority.

Overwhelmingly, the Business Course students were proud of their accomplishments and excited for the voting results, the General Studies classes were largely dumbfounded by the seemingly endless horror show they’d just been forced to endure, and the embarrassed future heroes were mostly thinking, *For the love of all that’s good, please let this be over.* Their teachers

watched over them with pity in their eyes.

KCHAK!

One of the massive ceiling lights hanging directly over the General Studies group suddenly fell, since a stray ball had knocked a bolt loose the previous day. It all happened too fast for the students to do so much as scream, but Rin—who was descending the stage and therefore closest—launched some of his scales with his Quirk and caught the light fixture in midair.

“Phew. Close one,” he said, dropping the zombie act. The General Studies students stared at him in admiration.



“Ahem ... The Business Course hero commercial that earned the most votes was ... Zombie Hero: Romero,” announced Aizawa matter-of-factly.

“Wait, what?” said Rin, looking shocked.

“Most voters said their choice had nothing to do with the zombie thing. They were just grateful for that save a moment ago,” explained Aizawa. “The lesson being, it’s not a hero’s appearance and production values that define them, but their tangible actions.”

Hearing this, the Business Course students each thought about their own concepts and fell into a funk. What was known as “the Lesson from Hell” to the Hero Course happened to be called “the Pride Smasher” by alumni of the Business Course. In a typical year, the Business Course would have to eat humble pie and accept scathing criticism from the General Studies voters, so in a way, this group was lucky to get away with only Aizawa’s commentary.

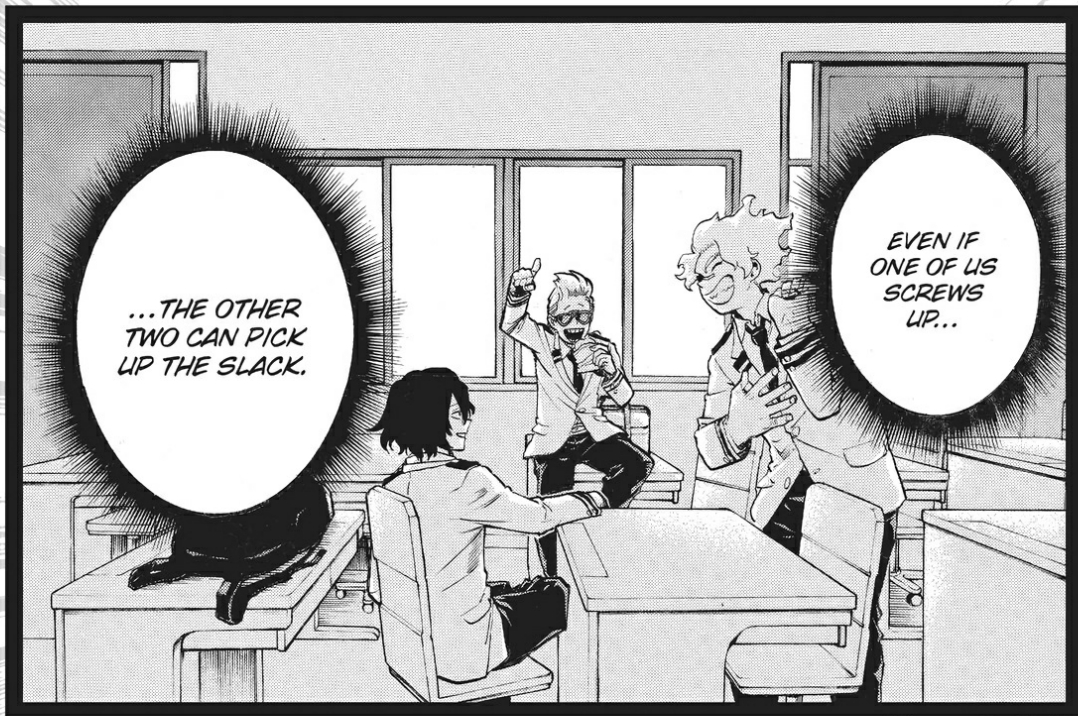
Meanwhile, the students of General Studies had learned that life wasn’t all fun and games for their peers in the Hero Course and Business Course. The absent Support Course, on the other hand, would have to be their own support, as usual.

I sure am glad they got this out of the way before I transferred over, Shinso thought to himself.

Just as broken bones grow back stronger and thicker than before, so too does the spirit rebound from a setback, tougher than ever. The three groups of students had shared a painful experience that day, and perhaps it had planted in them a seed of solidarity.

Part 6

Faculty Hanami Meetup



When the melancholy of an impending Monday inevitably bleeds into Sunday night, one can either accept that cruel fate and rest up to prepare for the coming week, or party like there's no tomorrow in a vain attempt to blow those doldrums away. This time around, the teachers in the faculty dorm building opted for the latter.

"Is Eri asleep?" asked Thirteen from the sofa in the common area.

"In dreamland, yeah," said Midnight, who'd just emerged from Eri's room and was heading for the kitchen. "She's such a precious little angel when she's snoozing."

"That little gal's been training so hard, huh!" said Present Mic, also on the sofa.

"She used to be all nerves about rewinding lizards, but now she's finally getting the hang of it," said Shota Aizawa.

"She must be feeling more confident these days," said Thirteen cheerily.

"Got a healthy appetite too!" said Mic. "Especially for dessert!"

"On that note, I've been meaning to say something. You people have been buying her too many snacks and sweets," said Aizawa.

"Ah, I do apologize," said Thirteen. "When I see something at the commissary that I think she would like, I just can't help myself."

"You're one to talk, Eraser! You're the one always bringing home apples for her," said Mic.

"Apples are *fruit*," said Aizawa.

As the three teachers chatted, Midnight returned from the kitchen. She was clearly in a good mood, which might have had something to do with the large bottle she held.

"Check this out," she said. "I got my hands on some rare sake."

"Oh, is it any good?" asked Thirteen.

"I'll let you be the judge, but this baby's so exclusive that you've got to reserve a bottle ahead of time with the brewer. I've been dying for a taste."

“You had to go straight to the source? You must really have a hankering,” said Mic.

“No, see, a fan of mine works at the brewery, so they sent it as a gift. What do you say we crack this thing open tonight?” said Midnight with a smile, placing the bottle on the coffee table.

Aizawa sensed one of their usual interminable drinking parties on the horizon, so he immediately got up to leave. “Count me out,” he said. “Have to prep for classes tomorrow.”

“Didn’tcha say you finished your prep yesterday?” said a grinning Mic, blowing Aizawa’s cover story. This earned him a withering glare.

“Tsk, tsk, Aizawa ... Educators mustn’t tell lies, you know,” said Midnight.

“It was a rational deception to keep me in shape for the start of the week,” said Aizawa. He was known for taking the rational approach all matters, which made him the type to choose resting over partying on a Sunday night.

“Gotta take a shot, man! As a penalty for fibbing!” said Mic.

“I know how this goes,” said Aizawa. “That single shot will turn into hours sitting around with you.”

“It’s such an exclusive sake though,” said Thirteen. “I might be persuaded to partake. Just a few drops, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course,” said Midnight, just as All Might and Cementoss came into the common area, fresh out of the bath.

“Having a drinking party?” asked All Might, who’d noticed the conspicuous bottle on the table.

“You’d better have some water first after that hot bath,” said Cementoss, moving toward the kitchen.

“Thanks,” said All Might, who downed the glass of water Cementoss brought back. “Hey, it’s almost cherry-blossom season, isn’t it? But I guess it’s maybe a little soon for a hanami picnic?”

Midnight gasped at All Might’s comment.

“Hanami! No better way to enjoy a fine bottle of booze than sipping it under the cherry blossoms!”

“A fine idea!” said Thirteen. “I wonder if those particular trees are blooming yet.”

“Yeah! Those ones!” said Mic.

“Which ones would those be?” asked All Might.

“Some trees in the middle of the woods that tend to bloom early,” explained Mic.

“A hanami event *does* sound nice ...” said Cementoss with a nod, who was already on board with this plan. Meanwhile, Aizawa made a face and tried to sneak away again, but Mic and Midnight were too quick for him.

“We can bring the picnic blanket, right, buddy ol’ pal?” said Mic.

“We’ve got lanterns too,” said Midnight.

“Ugh ...” said Aizawa, who’d been caught in their pincer attack and was forced to give up on his great escape for the moment. Thirteen and All Might were much more enthusiastic about the idea.

“Should we bring some light food?” asked Thirteen.

“We might as well pack the food into proper *jubako* stacking boxes, perfect for a picnic. Ah, how about we make some onigiri too?” suggested All Might.

“That would make it legitimate. I’ll go fetch the others,” said Cementoss, who walked off toward the other teachers’ rooms. All Might and Thirteen made for the kitchen, while Midnight, Mic, and Aizawa left the building ahead of the pack with the picnic blanket and lanterns in tow.



“It’s still kind of chilly,” said Midnight.

The early spring air was still and silent. The students had returned to their dorms for the night, so only the occasional birdcall broke the silence that blanketed the campus atop U.A.’s low, broad mountain. The only light came

from the lampposts marking the path and a few stars in the sky struggling to be seen, and the sky itself was a deep navy, obscured by thick, gray clouds, as still as the chilled air.

“Chilly? That’s nothing some sake won’t solve!” said Mic.

“Are you forgetting that tomorrow’s Monday?” said Aizawa. “You planning to show up to first period reeking of liquor?” His two companions glanced at each other and grinned, prompting him to scowl and say, “What’s so funny?”

“You were always so reluctant about this whole teaching gig, but now you’re the biggest schoolmarm of us all,” said Midnight.

“We knew you were cut out for the job!” said Mic.

“It’s just common sense,” said Aizawa, unsure whether to take the comments as praise or jabs.

Midnight observed his reaction and changed the topic. “How are class A’s work studies going?” she asked.

“Well enough, I think,” said Aizawa.

“You’re singing their praises? That’s unusual,” said Midnight.

“As well as can be expected, I mean. Some of them still aren’t used to the work-study grind, especially since they’ve got to attend classes at the same time now. We’re still in the middle of all that, so it remains to be seen how things turn out.”

“Right. Sure,” said Midnight, leaving something unsaid. Aizawa shot her a questioning look.

“What gives, pals?” said Mic, trying to break the tension. “Is that any way to get hyped for a hanami picnic?”

“Because after these work studies comes, well ...” Midnight trailed off.

“Full mobilization,” said Aizawa darkly, finishing Midnight’s sentence.

“Oh. Yeah ...” muttered Mic, his voice much quieter than usual.

The request from the government had been less “request,” more “arm-twisting,” so it was hard for these teachers to purge the unsettling thoughts

from their minds. Especially since it involved their beloved students, who still hadn't been informed of the upcoming operation. After all, that knowledge could fester into needless apprehension, and ultimately, doom and gloom.

"There's so much I wish they could learn, slowly and carefully. Things that might keep them alive," murmured Aizawa as he stared up at the sky.

Mic and Midnight followed his gaze up to the ashen clouds. It was a color that was hard to place, which somehow reminded all three of their dearly departed friend and the all-too-brief time they'd enjoyed with him.

"Why'd Shirakumo have to go?" said Midnight.

"You're telling me," said Mic.

"He was taken from us too soon."

In life, their friend had shone as bright and warm as the sun, so they'd never forget the cold rain that had fallen the day he died. The death of a loved one has a way of leaving a mark, deep down. A scar that, when picked at, tends to release a flood of dormant emotions. Simple grief. Anger at the absurdity of the world. Indignation at one's own powerlessness. A sense of loss over a promise about the future, made long ago.

And yet, in order to move forward and face tomorrow, they had to accept it all, and along with the feelings came scattered thoughts that built up in their hearts over time. Things left unsaid, much to their regret. Chats about silly things, everything, and nothing. The everyday greetings and pleasantries that filled the silence. But they were mostly fine not voicing these thoughts. Surely Shirakumo would've already known how each of them felt.

"*Dang!*" shouted Mic, breaking the awkward silence and threatening to rend the heavens with his voice. "Would've loved to drink with that guy! I bet he'd be the type who could pound back a bottle!"

"I dunno," said Midnight, with a wry look. "Maybe he would've been a lightweight, against all odds."

"Yeah, maybe," said Aizawa.

"Why don't I scout ahead?" said Mic as the group reached the woods. He ran

off, and the other two watched the light of his lantern fade between the trees.

“Now I’m almost in the mood for a drink,” said Aizawa softly.

“That’s what we’re out here for,” said Midnight with a gentle smile. “What’s great about booze is that it’s there for you no matter how you’re feeling. You’ve got good-times booze, sad booze, or even friend-booze.”

“How convenient.”

“Which usually explains why I end up drinking too much.”

“Everything in moderation,” said Aizawa.

“No dice!” shouted Mic from up ahead. “The trees haven’t bloomed yet!”

“Seriously?” said Midnight, as Mic came traipsing back through the brush. “Like, not at all?”

“Seriously! Just a buncha little buds!”

“Welp, that’ll make for a pathetic hanami event,” said Midnight. The trio decided to head back the way they’d come. After having been so excited about the plan, Midnight was unable to hide her disappointment.

“Ugh. Here I was, ready to pair a quality drink with some cherry-blossom viewing.”

“And the moon ain’t even out enough to warrant a moon-viewing drink,” said Mic.

“What’s wrong with a drink for drinking’s sake?” said Aizawa.

“You just don’t get it, Aizawa. A fine brew demands a worthy occasion,” said Midnight.

“Oh, I didn’t realize,” said Aizawa.

“You got no sense of romance, Eraser!” said Mic.

“Whatever I’m lacking, it seems like I’m living just fine without it,” said a scowling Aizawa as they emerged from the woods. Before he could further express his exasperation with his colleagues, the group spotted two diminutive figures approaching from afar.

“What’s got you three kids out here at this hour?” said one.

“And what, may I ask, is in that bottle?” said the other.

A closer look revealed the duo to be Recovery Girl and Principal Nezu, out for a bit of exercise.

“Oh, erm, I happened to have some good sake on hand, so we were hoping to have a hanami picnic,” said Midnight, sounding a bit bashful about it and looking like a child who’d been caught in the act of making mischief. She and her two colleagues were U.A. graduates, and even back in their day, Recovery Girl and the principal had already been working at the school. The old and new guard mostly interacted professionally as fellow faculty members, but outside of school hours, the younger teachers sometimes felt like school-children again.

“My, my, what a wonderful idea,” said Recovery Girl, glancing at the bottle. She was no stranger to drinking herself.

“Would you like some?” asked Midnight. “Sadly, we couldn’t find any cherry blossoms in bloom, which was sort of the point ...”

“Ah, did you try the early-blooming grove? I would’ve thought they’d be in their full splendor by this point,” said the principal, sounding disappointed.

“As it happens ... I might know just the spot,” said Recovery Girl.



“Blooming blossoms!” shouted Mic as the tree came into view.

Recovery Girl had led them to a spot off the beaten path—though still on campus—where they found a tree half in bloom. The tree itself wasn’t too large; maybe only a decade old. It would be at least a few days before its pink petals would be out in full force, but this was more than enough to enjoy for now.

“I never knew this tree was here,” said an impressed Midnight.

“I found it a few years back,” said Recovery Girl. “It’s been my little secret since then.”

“A bona fide secret spot at U.A.? The breadth and depth of our campus never fails to impress,” said the principal with a sigh and a chuckle. Beside him, Aizawa also stared up at the tree. The petals were pale pink—nearly white—and almost seemed to glow in the darkness. Though short-lived, there was something powerful about cherry blossoms, with their strange way of touching people’s hearts. That universal appeal would always draw people to sit under the trees, like bees tempted by nectar.

“Lemme run and grab the others!” said Mic excitedly, and minutes later, All Might, Thirteen, Cementoss, Vlad King, Hound Dog, and Ectoplasm had joined the party. The faculty members set up their picnic blanket and placed the boxes of food in the middle. There was no shortage of snacks, including cheeses, pickled vegetables, and fermented *shiokara* seafood in one box, and in another, onigiri and rolled *dashimaki* omelets, prepared by All Might and Thirteen.

“As far as onigiri flavors, we’ve got kombu, tuna with mayo, *mentaiko*, and *takana* greens,” said All Might. “And the dashimaki is right out of the pan, so it should still be warm.”

“It feels like a true-blue field trip,” said Vlad King.

“A field trip for adults, indeed,” said Ectoplasm.

“*Adults* is right,” said Midnight, whipping out the bottle of sake. “Which is why we can’t forget *this*.”

She screwed off the top and took a whiff.

“Mm, that’s the stuff ...” she moaned, spellbound by the fragrance. She served the drink into shallow *ochoco* cups, and those who preferred not to drink alcohol made sure to fill theirs with tea or water. Before partaking, all sat and waited for the principal to make his remarks, as was proper etiquette for any faculty function.

“This is as impromptu a hanami meetup as ever there was,” Principal Nezu began, “but celebrating the ebb and flow of the seasons is surely what makes life worth living. Now, I’m not here to monitor anyone, but do try to drink in moderation. Ah, hanami always reminds me of—”

“That’s enough outta you,” said Recovery Girl. “Let’s get this party started.

The dashimaki's getting cold already."

"That's fair enough," said the principal. "I suppose my story can wait until next time. On that note, *kanpai!*"

"Kanpai!" said the teachers, who toasted before downing their drinks.

"Mmm ... So light and smooth, but still fruity, almost floral ... Nice and dry, though. Delicious," was the verdict from Midnight, who seemed to be melting into the picnic blanket.

"Oh, it is good! Quite easy to get down. Oh dear—I feel myself getting tipsy already," said Thirteen, who'd barely taken half a sip of the strong drink.

"Tasty stuff. Where's it from?" asked Vlad King.

"Up north in Tohoku, where they grow the rice," said Midnight.

"Mm, that tracks," said Vlad King.

Beside him, Hound Dog gave the drink a hearty sniff. "The scent alone makes me feel like I've drunk a boatload. It's going straight to my head ..." he said, sounding intoxicated.

Recovery Girl was enjoying her drink while chatting with the principal. "How many years has it been since I last drank under the blossoms, I wonder ..."

"Well, you're always busy, visiting all those hospitals so commendably. But do take care not to imbibe too much tonight, like you did that other time. I'm afraid I can't carry you back on my own," said the principal.

"What other time? You mean all those decades back? They say elephants never forget, but a mouse like yourself should have some tact."

Across the picnic blanket, Cementoss reached for another dashimaki. "Mm, the dashimaki is tasty."

"Really? Glad to hear it," said All Might.

"All Might is quite the chef," said Thirteen. "Who knew?"

"Well, you see, I make bento boxes all the time for Midoriya ... er, and the other kids, of course, when I tag along for their training. They really burn a lot of calories. Teenagers and their appetites, you know?" said a flustered All Might,

unable to take the compliment.

Aizawa rolled his eyes at the conversation before shifting his gaze beyond the blossoms to the ashen clouds. Mic took notice and lifted his ochoco toward the sky night.

“Kanpai!” he said.

Aizawa toasted back weakly and drained his cup, which caught Midnight’s attention and led her to join them.

The burning liquid seeped down into the three teachers, warming the thoughts, feelings, and unspoken words they’d held in their hearts. They kept drinking as the gray clouds melted into the dark-blue sky, and before long, only half the bottle was left.

Alcohol has a way of stripping away the varnish, so to speak, and perhaps that was why Ectoplasm—now in a good mood—started singing.

“This one’s called ‘The Hero Strait,’” he said.

I find myself adrift in Shinjuku Station,

Paddling through the crowds, off to be a savior.

Someone, somewhere, in need of a rescue, but I’m not making headway,

Once again drowning in these urban depths.♪

“You’re rocking it, Ectoplasm!” said Mic between verses.

“A fine voice, as always,” said the principal as he sipped his tea.

Midnight poured some more sake for Recovery Girl and asked her senior colleague a question.

“Is it true that, back in the day, Trendy Boy Jr. proposed to you?”

“Oh my!” interrupted Thirteen excitedly. “Wasn’t Trendy Boy Jr. voted the hero most likely to make the ladies swoon? My grandmother was a big fan of his!”

Everyone was listening to this conversation now.

“Back in the day, yes,” said Recovery Girl with a giggle.

“Our esteemed school nurse had many admirers,” said the principal, with the air of a know-it-all. “And not just in Japan, but among foreign heroes as well.”

“Wow ...” said Midnight, her eyes twinkling.

“Plenty of folks would get the wrong idea because of how I administer my Quirk,” Recovery Girl explained. “I really had my hands full at times. You might know something about that. Correct, young lady?”

“Who, me? Yeah, I guess I’ve been there,” said Midnight, who paused to think before smiling. “But if I’m being completely honest, watching these kids in the prime of their youth is a lot more fun. With all the hustle and bustle here, I don’t exactly have time for *extracurriculars*.”

“I know what you mean!” said Thirteen. “It’s astounding how fast they grow and improve.”

“They’d better. That’s what they’re here to do,” said Aizawa, taking a sip of his drink.

“Don’t be such a hard-ass! You know you love watching those kids grow up before your eyes!” said Mic.

“My class B is also improving by leaps and bounds! Can’t take my eyes off ’em for a second!” said Vlad King, puffing out his chest with pride. As always, he was unable to let the conversation center around Aizawa’s students.

“Listen ...” said a blank-faced Aizawa, who was in such a weak state from the alcohol that he now mistook the large sake bottle for Vlad King. “I practically gotta stick to my kids like glue to keep them outta trouble. Buncha eccentric little troublemakers. But that just means they got more potential to grow.”

“You wanna talk potential! It’s almost scary thinking ’bout the heights my kiddos are gonna reach!” shot back Vlad King.

“Mine aren’t just talented—they’re also well on their way to being emotionally mature enough that I don’t have to fret about them at every turn,” said Aizawa to the bottle.

“Oh yeah? Well, my class is—”

Before the pissing contest could continue, Mic and Hound Dog stepped in

with a “Calm down, now ...” and “Both classes are real special, okay?”

“That sake has really gone to their heads ...” said Cementoss. “Mmrghf!”

Thirteen had crammed an onigiri into Cementoss’s mouth.

“Well?” she said. “How do you like my homemade onigiri? Ah, would you prefer the takana variety? Here you go!”

“Mmmrf!”

All Might realized that Thirteen was more than a little tipsy at this point, so he poured some tea and passed it to her.

“Good to see everyone letting down their proverbial hair,” said the smiling principal, observing his staff.

“Sorry about that,” said Midnight. “Me and my sake are to blame.”

“You might get a talking-to if this affects their work performance tomorrow, but for now, enjoying ourselves is what matters.”

“Life is too short. Blink and you’ll miss it, as they say. Like the cherry blossoms—blooming one moment, falling the next,” said Recovery Girl, staring up at the tree.

“Over before you know it, huh?” said Midnight, whose eyes turned to the pale-pink petals.

“Before you know it, yep. A day you had a decade back can feel like yesterday, so you’ve got to live each day like there’s no other like it because there never will be,” said Recovery Girl.



MY HERO
ACADEMIA

“I guess so,” said Midnight with a thoughtful nod. “There’s no telling what’s down the road.”

Looming over heroes and their heroics was the very real danger they faced, such that every mission demanded the resolve to put one’s life on the line.

“My take on life and death might not be all too uncommon, but I think life’s not about how long we stick around. It comes down to how we use that time,” said Recovery Girl. Her expression softened. “But it’s only human nature to hope for long, healthy lives. Especially for all the youngsters here at U.A.”

“I’m with you there,” said Midnight.

Recovery Girl turned to her younger colleague. “I still think of you lot as my students, you know.”

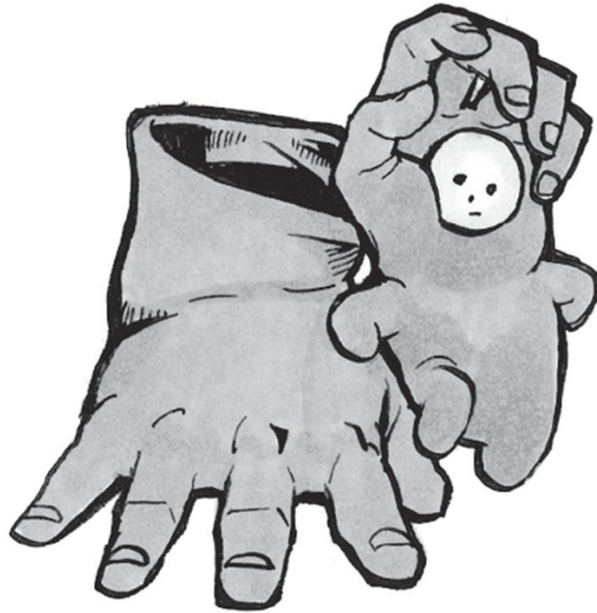
The stern-yet-kind look in the school nurse’s eyes got a bashful chuckle out of Midnight.

“Heh. I know.”

“Anyhow, drink up. This stuff’s the best medicine,” said Recovery Girl, pouring more of the sake for Midnight. The two women toasted and drank.

“I can only hope we get the chance to enjoy the blossoms like this again next year,” said the principal.

A gentle breeze made the tree’s petals flutter, and the ones scattered to the wind heralded the coming of a new season. Sadly, no one could have known of the death and destruction that awaited the world.



A Note from the Creator

We're already at the sixth novel! Someday I'd like to have a *My Hero Academia* spin-off manga solely about the kids' delightful everyday lives, written by Yoshi Sensei and drawn by me. That's a testament to how well Yoshi Sensei understands these characters and brings them to life.

Much thanks, as always!

KOHEI HORIKOSHI



A Note from the Author

I'm sorry for making these stories so peaceful and ordinary when the story line in the manga is currently super serious and brutal ... For some reason, I feel bad about that. But I hope it provides a breather—a pleasant oasis. At the end of the day, *My Hero Academia* is just so fun.

ANRI YOSHI



MY HERO ACADEMIA: SCHOOL BRIEFS—THE RED ONI WON'T WEEP

Written by Anri Yoshi
Original story by Kohei Horikoshi
Cover and interior design by Shawn Carrico
Translation by Caleb Cook BOKU NO HERO ACADEMIA YUUEI HAKUSHO © 2016 by Kohei Horikoshi, Anri Yoshi
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