

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Playing things slow~

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... She couldn't make this decision right now. As much as the thought of Endeavor being robbed of everything he'd ever valued in life did appeal to her... how could Fuyumi possibly decide whether that was worth the lives of her brothers? How could she claim he'd paid for what he'd done if she left him alive in any state, powerless or otherwise?

No... she needed to think about it. And besides...

"It doesn't seem as though I need to make a decision right this moment either way. Especially since you still haven't given me a proper timeline on when such events might take place."

There's a brief pause before Shroud chuckles.

"Hm, I suppose you have a point. Truthfully, I did not expect you to choose right this moment. I simply wanted to make sure you knew it was an option."

He'd done more than that, hadn't he? He'd revealed something truly diabolical about himself, the sort of thing that his enemies would love to know. It was a display of trust even if he wasn't dressing it up as one. Fuyumi wasn't an idiot; she understood that this was as much a test as it was a negotiation.

... She wasn't about to tell anyone what Shroud claimed to be capable of. The possibility that he might be able to empower her enough for her ice to be able to overcome her father's flames was one thing. That he could literally take Quirks away permanently? That was something else entirely. That was... well, it was a game changer, wasn't it?

“Since I have you here, I might as well ask for your opinion on your fellow heroines.”

What? Fuyumi furrows her brow, staring at Shroud’s skeletal mask searchingly. What was he playing at, exactly?

“... You said it yourself; I’ve kept myself at arm’s length. I don’t really know much...”

“Ah, but that’s not entirely true, is it? They don’t know much about you, but you’ve certainly been watching them, haven’t you? Tell me about your observations.”

For some strange reason, Fuyumi finds herself rebelling at the idea for a moment. Only a moment though, of course. After all, there’s no reason for her to deny him what he’s asking for. It’s quite literally the backbone of the deal they’d made. She reports on the Phoenix Program and he gives her the power she needs to defeat Endeavor.

To balk at her part of the deal now... was ridiculous. It wasn’t like she *cared* about any of those fools in the Phoenix Program or anything like that. They were all pawns, mere steppingstones in the way of her getting what she truly wanted!

“I... suppose I’ve been keeping an eye on things, yes. The lynchpin of the entire operation is undeniably our dispatcher, Izuku Midoriya.”

“Oh? Not Blonde Blazer? She’s the most powerful Pro Hero on the Phoenix Program’s roster, is she not?”

Fuyumi scoffs.

“Debatable. Power is... relative. She’s certainly versatile, but that doesn’t mean I couldn’t take her if need be. And now we have Mirko the Rabbit Hero as well. Still, none of that matters. Listen to me, it’s the dispatcher that makes it work. Midoriya is... he’s very, very good at his job.”

Shroud is quiet at that, so Fuyumi continues explaining.

“Frankly, the other Hero Agencies should be utilizing the dispatcher-hero setup just like PDN is. They’re shooting themselves in the foot by not doing so. If you ever want to take the Phoenix Program down, removing Midoriya is the key.”

Not to mention if Shroud did go that route, Midoriya would be the only casualty. Not that Fuyumi necessarily wanted the dispatcher to die or anything like that, but she also didn’t really care if he lived. Prism on the other hand... she found herself not wanting anything to happen to the dark skinned woman.

“Hm. I see. And what of your fellow heroines? What of Prism? You and she are certainly quite the team, aren’t you?”

Fuyumi doesn’t stiffen or bite her lower lip or squirm. But she does remain rather still as she considers Shroud’s question for a long moment.

“Prism is... competent enough. I don’t mind working with her. That said, if you are looking for a weakness... you could easily buy her off.”

“Oh?”

“She never wanted to be a Pro Hero. It was even in those files you stole from the Hero Commission last night. She’s told me enough times how she believes the HPSC was behind everything that had gone wrong in her life. You found the proof. All Prism wants is to be a singer and dancer... she wants to be an entertainer, a star. In fact, now that you’ve exposed the Hero Commission’s corrupt hand in her life path, she might leave the Phoenix Program altogether to pursue a career in music. You could help with that if you wanted to weaken the program.”

That... was a lot of speaking. Or maybe it just felt like a lot to Fuyumi? Either way, she utilizes her Quirk to keep herself under control, her body temperature remaining nice and cold so her ears don’t start burning. Seriously, why did she just talk so much about Prism and her desires? Shroud might get the mistaken impression that she actually liked the other woman or something!

“I see. So you think it would be easy to peel her away from the Phoenix Program, do you? I wouldn’t even have to kill her.”

Those last two words cause Fuyumi to jerk slightly before she remembers herself. She’s not sure if Shroud notices or not... but she has to assume he does. Keeping her tone as dead and cold as possible, she simply shakes her head.

“No. You don’t need to kill her.”

There’s a pause... but Shroud doesn’t call her out for what probably seems like an incredible bias. Fuyumi does not consider Prism to be her friend. She does not consider the Phoenix Program to be her home or anything as asinine as that. However, she also doesn’t necessarily wish any of them ill will. There’s only one man she wants dead... and now she’s not even sure if she’s going to kill Endeavor or try to deliver him to a fate worse than death.

“Thank you for your feedback, Frost. Come here.”

Fuyumi blinks as Shroud suddenly removes a glove and beckons her forward with his bared hand. She stares at his lightly skinned fingers for a long moment in disbelief and trepidation... until they curl again and he chuckles.

“Really, do you want the power to defeat the Number One Pro Hero or not? You aren’t going to accomplish your goals standing there frozen in fear, Frost.”

That finally sees her jerking forward, until she’s in front of him. Finally, Fuyumi puts her hand in Shroud’s... and gasps as something happens. It’s hard to describe. It’s nothing so simple as a burst of new power or a boost of strength or anything like that. Rather, she feels something icy fill her body... and when she finally steps back from Shroud and flicks out the hand she’d just given to him, her ice responds to her even faster than before.

Fuyumi blinks at the reaction time. She'd trained for years and years to get as fast with her Quirk as she could. Suddenly, she was twice as fast from nothing but a simple handshake. With this alone, she might be able to take down Endeavor finally... though Fuyumi isn't about to risk it. She needs more. She needs to be stronger.

Her eyes slide down to Shroud's hand but he's already put the glove back on. Fuyumi knows better than to try and force the issue as well. After all, he'd already admitted he could take as easily as he gave. Every time she put her hand in his own, she was risking her Quirk and all the power she needed to take down her father.

So long as she stayed useful to him though, he would have no reason to leave her powerless... and every reason to make her even stronger than this. She just had to stay on Shroud's good side and everything she wanted would soon be hers.

"A taste of what is to come, Frost. Now, it's about time for you to return... wouldn't want you to be caught, after all."

Fuyumi slowly nods and when a portal opens back to where she'd previously been, she only hesitates for a moment longer before stepping through it. She wants more power... but she knows she has to earn it first. For the time being, she plays with her newfound strength, getting a feel for it. And as she does so, a small smile spreads across Fuyumi Todoroki's face.

One step closer to vengeance.

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Izuku stares after Fuyumi for a long moment before glancing down at his hand and sighing. Had he made a mistake giving her that taste of power? Perhaps. It wasn't exactly conducive to his ultimate goal of getting her to betray Shroud, aka him, for those she'd grown closer to in the Phoenix Program.

Of course, the problem there was that Fuyumi had bonded with the weirdest possible choice in the Phoenix Program. When Izuku had initially set everything up, he had not expected Killer Frost and Prism, aka Fuyumi and Alice, to be two of the most synergistic Pro Heroes on the program's roster.

And yet, that's exactly what they were. Prism's light and Frost's ice combined for a startling force multiplier, and despite their very different dispositions, they got along somehow anyways. Alice did most of the talking with Fuyumi just listened, but he could tell that the latter wasn't just tolerating the former... there was something real being kindled there.

The problem with that was, neither of them had much in the way of strong ties to Pro Hero work. Fuyumi wanted to kill the current Number One Pro Hero and Alice just wanted to be a musician. Both of them had only joined the Phoenix Program on his orders as Shroud, and both of them remained more than happy to betray the Phoenix Program to him in order to get what they truly wanted out of life.

Izuku's ultimate hope is that when the time finally comes, Fuyumi will choose to let him remove Endeavor's Quirk and leave him desolate and lost rather than killing the man with her own two hands. Not because Endeavor deserves to live or anything, but because Izuku believes sparing him will be good for *Fuyumi* more than anything else.

Likewise, he wants Alice to eventually settle into a sort of hybrid thing where she's able to pursue her dream of being a musician while also remaining on call for Hero Work when needed. And not because the Hero Commission manipulated her into it or anything like that, but because she well and truly wanted to help.

It was clear his plans for Fuyumi and Alice were going to be a taller order than most of the others. Everyone else in the Phoenix Program was coming along nicely. Izuku fully believed La Brava, for instance, would admit her duplicity to him any day now. Meanwhile, Invisigal and Malevola already had.

Uravity was... well, she was somewhere in the middle. She was doing fine for herself, but her previous relationship with Himiko Toga had left Uravity a bit more bloodthirsty than most. She was reining it in so far, but she'd definitely broken a few bones since joining the Phoenix Program and had the most 'injuries in the midst of apprehension' on record now.

To be fair, that wasn't a bad thing either. Sometimes criminals needed to be taken down hard. Sometimes, even, Izuku believed that some people needed killing. Uravity though... she was almost worse than Mirko when it came to unnecessary damage.

Hm... perhaps it was time to shake things up a bit. As the Phoenix Program's dispatcher, Izuku could always put his thumb on the scale and start making new teams to spark new interactions and create new dynamics. Stuff like putting Frost with Blazer and Prism with Mirko in the hopes that both would be inspired by the latter's heroics.

However, there was no denying that the program's synergy and therefore success rate could suffer if he tried to do something like that. Right now the Phoenix Program was doing very well. So well, in fact, that half the reason he'd hit the Hero Commission last night was to focus their attention on him and Red Ring and not on the Phoenix Program.

So was it really worth risking that success at this stage? Hm...

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!