

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

A/N: Being honest...

-x-X-x-

Maybe it would be better to lie to Courtney, to put on a brave face and hide her own insecurities. But at the end of the day, Mandy can't bring herself to do it. Of course, that doesn't mean she's going to suddenly blab about her sex dream or anything as ridiculous as that. Her wires would need to be a lot more crossed by this new for that sort of thing to happen!

Still, as they watch the morning news together, Mandy just sighs.

"... I don't know what to think, Courtney. Shroud... Shroud is a villain; there's no doubt about that. But the Hero Commission aren't exactly angels either."

Courtney grimaces.

"So what... you're saying they might have actually done all of these things?"

Looking down at the news reports she was reading on her phone, Mandy sighs.

"I think... I think for now, we need to focus on what matters. The Phoenix Program is doing real, honest good each and every day... when it comes to Shroud and the HPSC... I say we let them fight."

That gets a blink from her roommate and best friend.

"Wait, but what about the taskforce? Aren't we going to be the ones to take Shroud down?! We're the best positioned for it, you said it yourself!"

Ugh, she had said something like that, hadn't she? And to be fair...

“That’s still true. And yes, we’re still going to be looking for opportunities to arrest Shroud. Best case scenario, we’ll capture him all on our own in no time and end the Red Ring.”

Courtney appears a little more mollified by that.

“That’s right. And once we catch Shroud and disband the Red Ring, nobody will be able to question the value of the Phoenix Program or PDN ever again!”

A smile spreads across Mandy’s face at Courtney’s sudden enthusiasm. Funny to think not too long ago, Courtney hadn’t cared one wit about the Pro Hero Defense Network or the Phoenix Program. She was too busy dealing with her own shit, after all.

It was only now that they were actually making it happen that Courtney was invested... and boy was she invested. Maybe that was why she was so gung ho about Shroud being an evil menace that had to be stopped, because if she didn’t focus on his villainy, she would be forced to acknowledge the fact that it was apparently he who turned her into the heroine she is today.

Mandy doesn’t have that same hang-up. She can acknowledge that Shroud played a part in helping Courtney with her Quirk and also recruited Malevola so they could both infiltrate the Phoenix Program. Just as she can acknowledge that he’s a criminal mastermind running a criminal organization and needs to be stopped.

For now though...

“That’s the spirit, Court. Let’s hope the rest of the team feels the same way about all of this...”

Because she had to admit, more than anything at the moment, Mandy was worried about what the other members of the Phoenix Program would think of this info dump about the Hero Commission’s wrongdoings. Especially since many of them were not in the best places before they joined the Phoenix Program too...

-x-X-x-

“Yo Frost, you see the news?!”

Fuyumi Todoroki slowly turns her head to stare at her ‘teammate’ and fellow ‘Pro Hero’, the singer known as Prism. The dark-skinned woman has an exceptionally cheery grin on her face this morning as she saunters into the building, strutting even more like a peacock than usual.

... Truth be told, Fuyumi doesn’t hate Prism. In fact, she... tolerates the other woman. They work well together, Prism’s photokinesis and her ice powers synergizing quite powerfully in most situations. As a result, they were being teamed up more and more often... and Fuyumi didn’t find this truly objectionable, despite them having very different personalities.

That said, she can only offer one response to the other woman’s query this morning.

“No. I don’t watch the news.”

She hadn’t for quite some time now, truth be told. Because the news tended to cover big things as much as possible. Like Pro Hero Work. And of course, if they wanted ratings, they needed to cover the most popular Pro Heroes and whatever they might be doing at any given time.

Essentially, any time Fuyumi watched the news, she was gambling on whether *his* face would show up on the screen. And given how she tended to react whenever she laid eyes on *him*, usually with property damage... Fuyumi avoided her triggers where she could. Especially after the third television she’d exploded with her ice.

Prism blinks and tilts her head to the side.

“Seriously, homegirl? I mean... I guess I get it... but you’re missing out this time! The Hero Commission is being raked over the coals today! It’s a biblical reckoning!”

Prism’s crowing causes Fuyumi to pause. The Hero Commission? What was the other woman talking about? Carefully, Fuyumi takes a few steps closer to the more boisterous heroine... and Prism grins, correctly deducing her interest from the movement.

“Got your attention, didn’t I? Heh, it was all that new villain Shroud’s doing. Him and his Red Ring are spreading the Hero Commission’s dirty laundry all over the place. They’re throwing the skeletons out of the closet and into everyone’s faces, forcing them all to acknowledge the bullshit that those fuckers have been peddling. Even my story is out there now and getting some traction!”

Fuyumi blinks at that last part. She knew Prism’s ‘story’ by this point, of course. The other woman loved the sound of her own voice (and to be fair, it was a nice voice) and they’d been teamed up way too many times at this point for Fuyumi to not know what had happened to her.

Basically, Prism had had no desire to be a Hero or a Villain. All she wanted to do was peddle her music. But the Hero Commission thought she had ‘potential’ and had courted her for a while, trying to get her to try out the Hero Course at her high school and everything.

In the end, Prism had turned it all down before graduation, wanting to focus on her music. Now, she didn’t necessarily have proof that what happened next was the Hero Commission’s fault, but that didn’t stop Prism from telling Fuyumi time and time again that it was.

Essentially, her music career had gone down in flames before it could even get off the ground. ‘Incidents’ and ‘altercations’ and ‘accidents’ galore had resulted in her receiving a rap sheet and being labeled a villain.

“I’m serious Frost, they found my file along with everything else and plastered it all online. And you know what? I was fucking right! All of that shit that happened

to me... it was them. Some fucking pencil pusher insulted that I wouldn't be one of their lapdogs set it all up. They justified it by saying my music wasn't 'conducive' to the 'continued building' of 'proper Japanese culture'."

Ah. Well now, that changed things didn't it? For Prism specifically, did it mean she would even be sticking around at this point. Fuyumi tilts her head to the side, eyeing the other woman curiously... which prompts a response as Prism chuckles.

"Heh, I can tell you're wondering if I'm gonna try to get back into music off of the back of this shit."

Pausing, Prism considers the unspoken question for a moment.

"I mean... I probably should at least try, right? A viral moment like this doesn't come along very often. I'll miss my window if I wait too long. But at the same time... not gonna just abandon the Phoenix Program or anything like that! Heh, I'll talk to Blazer about maybe seeing if I can do music on the side or something."

That seemed fair enough, yes. Of course, then Prism leans forward and now it's Fuyumi who is receiving the curious stare.

"What about you, Frost? You should check the file dump, see if there's anything for you in there."

... There might be. Finally, Fuyumi breaks her silence.

"Thank you for letting me know."

Blinking, Prism smiles brightly.

"Heh, sure. We're a team, aren't we? Besides, out of everyone... I figured you might be the one living under a rock."

She can't even be offended by that, because it's pretty much true. Fuyumi really only has one goal in life at this point. Everything else is superfluous. That said... what was Shroud thinking, going after the Hero Commission like this? He couldn't exactly help her get her revenge on Endeavor if he was behind bars... and poking a dragon like the HPSC was just asking for trouble...

"Anyways, it's pretty interesting that Shroud is involved in all of this, isn't it? What do you think of him anyways?"

Pulled out of her own thoughts by Prism's sudden words, Fuyumi stares at the dark-skinned woman for a moment. What did she think of Shroud? Why did it sound like Prism was fishing for something here? Did she suspect Fuyumi was a mole?

... No, there was simply no way. She'd given nothing away in that regard. Hell, she hadn't had the chance to give anything away. Shroud had yet to so much as contact her to demand a single piece of information from her.

In the end, rather than answer Prism's question, Fuyumi just turns away.

"Goodbye."

"Huh? Oh... alright, see you in a bit for our shift I guess!"

Only once she's retreated to a more private location does Fuyumi bother pulling out her phone and look into what Prism was telling her about. What she finds is honestly a bit shocking... it's a lot more than she would have thought, but it seems the breach at the Hero Commission was extremely extensive.

Indeed, among the files she even finds information about herself. It's not nearly as detailed as others' files, but that's because at the end of the day, the Hero Commission wasn't the main antagonist of Fuyumi's life story. They were a secondary antagonist at best.

And yet... she'd still tried, back in the day. When she was younger, when she had watched the damage her father was doing to her brothers, one after the

other. Fuyumi had gone to the Hero Commission hoping for help. She'd naively thought that they might step in and keep Endeavor from going too far... or even maybe arrest him for his actions, for the sheer abuse her brothers had suffered at his hands.

But no. Of course not. The Hero Commission hadn't done anything except inform her father that she had reported him. Nothing had been fixed. Nothing had gotten better. All she'd done was make things worse.

It was all right there too. They'd documented it, from her report on Endeavor to even them telling Endeavor what she'd done. Just a couple of pages compared to the reams of documents that had otherwise been spilled onto the internet.

For a long moment, Fuyumi doesn't know what to feel. On the one hand, she's certainly not going to complain that the Hero Commission is getting their comeuppance. This is the least they deserve based on what she knows.

On the other hand, what exactly was Shroud up to? If he was going after the Hero Commission, why wasn't he going after Endeavor yet? Were heroes like her father and their agencies next on his list? Would he remember to involve her when the time came?

She... she was only here for one reason and one reason only, no matter how good helping people might make her feel. Shroud had promised her that he would give her the power she needed to kill Endeavor. But when was that to happen? She'd infiltrated the Phoenix Program as he'd ordered her to... but then it felt like he'd all but forgotten her.

Eyes narrowed into slits; Fuyumi considers her options for a moment... and then makes a decision. There's no time for indecision or hesitation, after all. Not for her.

-x-X-x-

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

