

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

A/N: Fuyumi makes her move

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Patience was key. But even ice would not be patient forever before finally moving. Still, Fuyumi had already made one attempt on Endeavor's life and it had landed her in an asylum. If she wanted this next time to go well, she would need Shroud's help. Charging recklessly into things again would only result in yet another failure.

That said, she wasn't inclined to wait forever. That's why she decided in that moment that she was going to contact Shroud at the end of the day and demand to know exactly what he wanted from her in exchange for holding up his end of their bargain.

Of course, before that Fuyumi had to get through the day ahead first. Another day of heroics as a member of the Phoenix Program. Admittedly, it wasn't as irritating as she'd initially thought it would be... though this day in particular would test her patience just a little bit.

It starts with a team meeting led by Blonde Blazer, who addresses the elephant in the room regarding the Hero Commission... and then makes it clear that none of it matters to them, at least in terms of doing their jobs. She's very deliberate about ensuring that they all know the Phoenix Program has no connections to the Hero Commission anyways, so any drama or scandal involving the HPSC is not their problem.

Put bluntly, they are to treat today like any other day and go out and help those who need help, responding to any and all calls they get, just like always.

Fuyumi gets it of course, though she can also understand why someone like Prism is a little annoyed about not getting to celebrate and take her victory lap. Still, the other woman doesn't take that out on patrol with her at least.

Indeed, what follows are a pair of shifts that Fuyumi finds... tolerable if nothing else. Her and Prism are once again paired together quite often, if not the entire time, and working as a team, they're able to use their Quirks to great effect on dealing with the numerous calls they're sent on.

The gratitude of the people they help, the shining eyes filled with thanks and adoration... it does make Fuyumi feel strange, she has to admit.

After all, it was never her dream to be a Pro Hero. Once upon a time, before everything that happened, before losing Toya and then Shoto... she'd intended to be a teacher. That was what she'd been working towards before her life had been turned upside and all the joy and happiness had been sucked out of it.

From there, it had honestly felt natural to become a villain, even if it had never really been her intention to commit crimes or do any real harm to innocents. She'd just needed to gain enough experience and enough street cred to justify sending out someone like Endeavor after her.

In the end, she'd failed obviously... but now here she was all these years later, following in her father's footsteps after all. That thought alone should have been enough to make the feelings of pride and satisfaction curdle in her chest... and yet, it didn't quite manage to do so.

Endeavor wasn't the only Pro Hero out there after all. Fuyumi wasn't one of those crazies who thought all Pro Heroes were a blight upon society or anything like that. However, between the likes of Endeavor and the Hero Commission, there was certainly a corruption at the heart of things.

And yet, then you had groups like PDN and the Phoenix Program, and you had individuals like Blonde Blazer. That woman was a true hero, Fuyumi could admit. And the Phoenix Program was doing good, solid work for the people of Japan.

... She would still betray it in a heartbeat for her shot at Endeavor. She had to. She couldn't let herself falter now.

Eventually, the day comes to an end and she's finally able to get away after begging off an offer to go to the bar with her from Prism. Once she's left the Phoenix Program's building behind and made her way home, Fuyumi places the call. It takes a few seconds to pick up, and then a familiar feminine voice can be heard on the other end of the line.

"Yes?"

Cautious even now, Fuyumi keeps her words vague.

"I wish to speak to him."

Lady Nagant pauses for a moment before replying.

"He's a busy man. Is this important?"

Fuyumi bristles a bit at that but carefully manages her reaction. Of course it's important! But she's not so foolish that she doesn't understand it's only truly important to her. Someone like Shroud probably has a million moving pieces going on after all. She's just one of the many, many plates he has spinning in the air at a given time.

Taking in a breath and letting it out slowly, she nevertheless responds with conviction.

"Yes. It is."

There's another pause before finally Nagant speaks.

"Very well."

Just a few moments later, a purple swirling portal appears in the wall in front of her. Fuyumi only hesitates for a moment before stepping through it, finding herself in the foyer of a well-appointed mansion. Lady Nagant is waiting for her on the other side, a piercing gaze sweeping up and down her person as Fuyumi stiffens slightly.

“... Right this way.”

Whatever she's looking for, Nagant eventually just turns on her heel and leads Fuyumi down the hall behind her. In no time at all, she directs Fuyumi to a set of double doors which open to reveal a study... and at the other end of that study is a desk with Shroud sat behind it.

Fuyumi strides forward, ice in her veins and a projection of confidence in her every movement. She stops a few feet away from the desk, placing her hands in the loose sleeves of the kimono that's become her 'costume' as Lady Frost. The whole Yuki-Onna aesthetic wasn't something Fuyumi ever would have chosen for herself, but she would be lying if she said it wasn't growing on her.

“What is it?”

Fuyumi pauses... but she knows indecisiveness could be the death of her now. Perhaps even literally if she annoyed this man enough. And so she launches into things, even if a small part of her is beginning to worry she'd called this meeting a touch too soon and a tad too frivolously.

“I wished to discuss our arrangement. It's been some time now but you have yet to give me a single task or ask me a single question about the Phoenix Program. I watch on the news as you smear the Hero Commission with their own dark secrets... and I wonder when it will be Endeavor's turn. When will it be *my* turn?”

Silence falls as Shroud considers her query for a long moment. Fuyumi does not fidget or twitch or shuffle her feet. She stands perfectly still, watching and waiting, doing her level best to not give even a hint of weakness away.

“... Your impatience surprises me, Frost. I would have expected you of all people to understand that certain things take time.”

Stiffening at the mild rebuke, Fuyumi's nostrils flare.

“I understand that quite well, Shroud. However, you haven’t used me in my current position even once. I would simply like to know expectations going forward and a potential timeline for when I might take my revenge. Either that or pull me out of the Phoenix Program entirely and allow me to join the Red Ring so that I might earn the power needed to kill Endeavor from you through other means.”

Fuyumi ignores the way her heart twinges at her own words. The thought of abandoning the Phoenix Program at this juncture is not painful per say, merely... uncomfortable. They really have been doing good work after all. And Prism was... she was tolerable to work with. Maybe more than tolerable. Maybe.

That said, by that same logic, part of her didn’t want to have to betray the Phoenix Program either. Leaving and turning back to villainy, joining the Red Ring and working as one of Shroud’s Lieutenants... even if it would break hearts in the short term, long term it was probably the least damaging thing she could do.

From the inside, feeding information to Shroud, the damage Fuyumi might ultimately do to the Phoenix Program would be astronomical. But if she were no longer part of the program, Shroud could no longer use her against her new comrades.

Which is probably why he shakes his head after spending so long pondering her words.

“No. My plans for you are best served with you remaining in the Phoenix Program. Having you join the Red Ring would not be nearly as impactful at this time.”

Tch, that was precisely what Fuyumi was afraid of. In the privacy of her loose sleeves, her hands curl into fists. Exactly how was he going to use her against the Phoenix Program? What impact did he intend to have her make?

“What exactly are these plans then? I cannot serve properly if I do not know what you intend of me. You have not even asked me to tell you anything I’ve learned yet.”

Shroud tilts his head to the side.

“Have you learned much of anything, Frost? The truth is... you are not trusted enough yet for me to make use of you.”

What?

“You have kept yourself at arm’s length from the other members of the Phoenix Program, save for the one called Prism. Even then, you close yourself off from her, making her do all the work. Put simply... they don’t trust you enough yet for you to be of use to me, Frost.”

That’s... Fuyumi still doesn’t flinch or fidget, but it’s a much closer thing now. He wanted her to befriend them? To get in close and gain their personal trust? But that would just make the betrayal so much worse?

“Setting aside what you’re going to do for me for the moment... let’s talk about what *you* want out of this arrangement.”

Fuyumi’s eyes snap back to Shroud’s skeletal metal mask at that. What is he talking about? Her brow furrows as she frowns.

“You know what I want. The power to kill Endeavor, to take down my father. Once and for all.”

Shroud spreads his hands apart.

“There are many ways to kill a legend, Frost. There are many ways to take down a pillar. You wish for Endeavor to die by your hands. That can easily be arranged. But how it is done is just as important as what is being done... just as important as why it is being done, even.”

That... Fuyumi catches herself belatedly shifting from foot to foot, going still as she hopes the voluminous nature of her kimono kept it from being obvious she was doing so. What was Shroud talking about though? All she wanted was to kill Endeavor. The 'how' was simple... she would get enough power from Shroud to finish the job properly this time.

“You would kill your father for his crimes against your family. But what happens after Endeavor is dead? What happens to you?”

Blinking, Fuyumi is quick to shake her head.

“It... it doesn't matter. Once he's dead... it won't matter.”

She'd believed that for a long time now. All these years, both as a villain and locked up in the asylum. Really, Fuyumi had died the day Shoto did. She was only still on this Earth to do one thing and one thing only, like an avenging spirit. Once her last act was completed... she would finally be at peace.

Or rather, that was what Fuyumi had believed for so long. And yet, why do her words sound so weak now? Why do they lack the conviction she once had?

“There is no need to throw yourself away in the process of killing Endeavor. If he is dealt with the right way, then you could continue to be of use to me after his demise.”

He was... he wasn't talking about as a villain, was he? Fuyumi realizes Shroud intends for her to continue to pretend to be a Pro Hero even after Endeavor is dead. How... how would that even work?

“They will know it's me though. My Quirk is too distinctive. His death... they'll all know I did it.”

“Perhaps. But perhaps they will believe you justified in your actions. Or perhaps you might even leave him alive, in the end.”

That last bit causes a full body shudder to race through Fuyumi and the temperature in the room to drop over a dozen degrees on the spot.

“Never. I will not spare him, Shroud, I promise you that. Once I have him at my mercy, there will be no escape.”

Far from being perturbed by her intimidating display, Shroud leans forward and laces his hands together in front of him.

“There is more than one way to destroy a legacy, Frost. And there is often far more suffering to be had in life than in death.”

Before she can do more than mull over those words, Shroud unclasps his hands, holding one palm up.

“Just as I can give power...”

He holds the other palm up as well.

“I can take it away as well. Consider what that could mean for you and your situation, Frost.”

She stares at Shroud’s hands, the gravity of what he’s admitting to her enough to take Fuyumi’s breath away. Her father... deprived of his Quirk? There was a certain poetry to the idea. She could easily imagine him, diminished and pathetic as well as a result. His status, his power... those things were everything to him. Take it away and he was nothing... less than nothing.

And yet, would anything less than death truly satisfy the hatred in her heart?

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