

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

A/N: Revelations are had!

-x-X-x-

After that brief freeze, Courtney is the first to react, sputtering all the while.

“W-What?! No, that’s not it at all!”

Before Mandy can even offer a deadpan look to show how little she believes that, Courtney shakes her head.

“I mean... yes, we fucked! But that’s not why we wanted to meet with you, Mandy!”

Huh? Mandy blinks, even as Izuku’s palm meets his face. The dispatcher lets out an exasperated sigh at Courtney’s ‘openness’. Mandy though, is far too distracted by the fact that there’s something else they want to tell her. Something supposedly even bigger than the fact that they’re sleeping together.

Though at the same time, she’s also a little distracted by her own weakness. She can’t help but feel a strange amount of bemusement over the acknowledgment that Courtney and Izuku have fucked. She’s actually a little jealous of her friend... Izuku is an impressive man after all, and she knows that better than most given she knows he’s the only reason that the Phoenix Program even exists.

“It’s... it’s about Shroud and the Red Ring.”

That gets Mandy’s attention. Any jealousy she might be feeling quickly takes a backseat at those words, her gaze sharpening as she focuses on Courtney. What had they found out? Were they doing something after hours without her knowing?

“What about Shroud and the Red Ring?”

The sharpness of her tone makes Courtney hesitate, her eyes drifting to Izuku for a moment. He gives her an encouraging nod as she seems to squirm a bit, leaving Mandy to frown.

“... If you’ve been engaging in vigilantism Courtney, it’s alright. You can tell me.”

Again, Courtney freezes in a way that makes Mandy think she’s hit the nail on the head. Only for again, Courtney to shake her head.

“It’s not that either. No... I... I’m supposed to be working for Shroud.”

What.

Mandy’s entire world shrinks down at that, even as Courtney begins to explain. She just stands there quietly as her best friend and roommate tells her all about how Shroud recruited her. How he brought her in and cured her asthma. How he intended to use her as a mole within the Phoenix Program, reporting back to him on what they were up to.

Her blood is roaring in her ears by the time Courtney finally finishes talking. She doesn’t know whether she’s furious or disappointed, she doesn’t know whether to arrest Courtney on the spot or just shout at her. She... she doesn’t know how to react to any of this.

Only... Izuku is there. And apparently he knew about this before her if he’s here helping Courtney tell her. Mandy knows she can trust Izuku at the very least. He wouldn’t be bankrolling the Phoenix Program if he didn’t believe in it... if he didn’t believe in her.

Surely he’ll know what to do, right? Mandy looks to him, not even able to look Courtney in the eye at this point. She gives Izuku an imploring look, all but begging him to take over here and tell her what to do. Instead... instead he appears to misread her entirely, letting out a sigh and dropping another bombshell on her head.

“Malevola has also revealed that she was recruited by Shroud, though just like Courtney, she’s made it clear she doesn’t want to betray the Phoenix Program to him.”

Malevola?! Mandy opens her mouth to speak, but no words come out. On the one hand, the other woman literally looked like a demon. She was the most obvious, stereotypically ‘evil’ member of the Phoenix Program. On the other hand, Mandy had never wanted to judge a book by its cover or anything like that. Perhaps that was Shroud’s plan though. His spies were her best friend and a demon woman she would be loathe to suspect, just to avoid seeming discriminatory.

Mandy of course wants to focus on the latter part of what Izuku has said. She wants to latch onto the idea that neither Courtney nor Malevola want to work for Shroud after all with all her heart. However, she can’t just... slide past this. Because frankly.

“How the hell did you find out about Malevola? I understand Courtney admitting the truth to you, but Malevola?!”

Here, Izuku winces.

“Ah... well... Malevola came clean to me and Mei after a... team building exercise.”

Now, Mandy might seem a little bit naïve at times, but the truth was, she wasn’t an idiot. Nor was she born yesterday. With a huff, she crosses her toned arms over her chest and narrows her eyes at him.

“You had sex with her too, didn’t you?”

His silence is answer enough. Honestly, this is getting ridiculous! Is everyone around here getting laid except for her? N-Not that Mandy wanted to fuck Izuku or anything... not that she didn’t want to either... for fuck’s sake, this was giving her a headache.

In the end, Mandy files away the idea of Izuku having a threesome with Malevola and Mei Hatsume in the back of her mind and focuses on the present. She looks between Courtney and Izuku and wonders briefly why the hell Malevola isn't here right now if she's involved in all of this. Huffing, Mandy shakes her head.

"Is there anything else you want to lay on me before we continue? I'd really like to know if I should expect any more surprises at this point."

"I'm Vigil."

The admission comes without hesitation, unflinchingly delivered in the tone of a man who knows he's headed for the gallows already. It still makes Mandy's jaw drop open again in disbelief once she registers what he's just said and what it means.

Vigil. He was perhaps the most infamous vigilante in the past decade, likely because he'd been active for the past decade. Most vigilantes did not last that long... and given everyone was pretty sure that Vigil was Quirkless, it was even more impressive.

Holy shit. Vigil was Quirkless. And so was Izuku Midoriya, the Phoenix Program's Dispatcher as well as its hidden financier. The connection is right there, now that she knows to look for it. Though it's not like there aren't more Quirkless people in the world than just Izuku. Even still... she feels a little stupid for not seeing it sooner.

"... Why are you telling me this?"

Izuku sighs.

"Courtney followed me a while back and discovered that I was Vigil. In the end, she helped me foil a bank robbery and I agreed to train her to make her a better Pro Hero. Given we're doing reveals today and she already knew about me... I figured you should know as well."

Well that was very thoughtful of him. Unfortunately, it left Mandy between a rock and a hard place. By the laws of the land, she should be turning Izuku in. Courtney and Malevola too, really. Sure, it was nice that they wanted to turn on Shroud now, but they should still be remanded to the authorities for breaking the law and what not.

Except... if she did any of that, the Phoenix Program would die. Izuku's assets would be frozen at a bare minimum, leaving the Phoenix Program's funding to dry up in a second. And Momo would be in no position to shore up their losses because as soon as the public found out that the 'Villain Redemption Program' had the latest big bad supervillain's spies in it, Momo would have to distance PDN from all of them asap. The Phoenix Program would be shut down almost immediately.

Now, there were circumstances in which Mandy thinks she could be okay with that. Where the situation was black and white enough that her morals demanded she report the misconduct to the proper authorities. But this was not that sort of situation.

Vigil was a vigilante, yes, but he was also an inspiring force for good in Japan, the kind of person who, despite operating out of the law, didn't have a single blemish on his unofficial record. Meanwhile, Izuku had made her dream possible, bringing the Phoenix Program together and using his own money to make it a reality.

And finally, if they were to be believed, Courtney and Malevola wanted to turn on Shroud, not work for him. They were coming clean now because betraying the Phoenix Program to Shroud had been eating them up inside and they'd decided to just throw themselves at her and Izuku's mercy.

All of this put together left Mandy with only one option in the end. She didn't see another path forward, really. So... she looks to Izuku and lets out a shuddering breath.

"What are we going to do?"

To Izuku's credit, he at least doesn't look too surprised by her decision. Courtney is more confused than he is.

"Huh?"

Heh, she doesn't know then. Mandy maintains eye contact with Izuku as she speaks and is glad to see he's not upset with her, even as it's her turn to drop a bombshell.

"Midoriya isn't just the Phoenix Program's Dispatcher, Courtney. He's also the Phoenix Program's secret benefactor. None of this would exist without him... he's bankrolling the whole project."

Choking on her own spit, Courtney whips around to stare at Izuku in disbelief.

"What?! How does that work?! I thought the Pro Hero Defense Network was paying for all of this! And wait, I thought this was all your idea, Mandy!"

Smiling slightly, Izuku shakes his head.

"While the idea was in fact Mandy's baby... Miss Yaoyorozu could not make the Phoenix Program happen with PDN's current finances, nor in the current climate that the Hero Commission has created. Put simply, PDN needed to be able to focus on continuing to tread water themselves, lest they sink."

Mandy slowly nods to show Courtney that Izuku is telling the truth. Fact was, he'd made this all happen.

"I'm the public, official leader of the Phoenix Program, but Izuku is the true leader. I can make decisions all I want, but in the end, if he wants to veto them, he can."

Courtney scowls at Mandy's words, glaring at Izuku a little bit now.

“Then why the hell did you make us do this whole song and dance? If you’re really in charge and you already knew my secret, why did we have to tell Mandy? You could just tell her to jump and she’d say how high, apparently!”

Mandy frowns... but Izuku just shakes his head.

“Because she deserved to know, Courtney. And you needed to tell her. For both your sakes. Or are you going to try and tell me that it wasn’t eating you up inside, lying to your best friend all this time?”

Courtney flinches hard at that, glancing to Mandy and then glancing away. For a moment Mandy fears she’s a second away from vanishing and fleeing the conversation. But to Courtney’s credit... she stays visible and stays put. Though she also crosses her arms over her chest. And then...

“Sorry... ‘m sorry I betrayed your trust, Mandy.”

Courtney has always had a hard time apologizing for things. Mandy hasn’t even bothered trying to keep track of the number of times she’s forgiven the other woman without ever actually hearing a single ‘sorry’ from Courtney’s lips. She hasn’t for years now.

So... to hear one now actually does go a long way. She’s moving before she knows it, catching Courtney off guard in the process as she takes the smaller woman and pulls her into a hug. Courtney yelps... only to relax into Mandy’s powerful grasp a moment later. And then she starts to shake, sobbing into Mandy’s chest as she continues to apologize, albeit in a more muffled manner.

Mandy rubs soothing circles into Courtney’s back as she lets her childhood friend cry it out. Truth be told, taking a moment to step into Courtney’s shoes... she gets it. She doesn’t like it, but she gets it. Courtney had always struggled in life. Her Quirk combined with her asthma had left her with... less than stellar prospects.

Mandy, meanwhile, had gone from a Quirkless nobody to a ‘late bloomer’ thanks to Melissa Shield and the remnants of All Might’s Quirk. It was a huge

responsibility and one that she'd always taken seriously, but she also recognized that it was a massive gift from on high... a giant stroke of luck.

As much as she'd tried not to, she'd basically left Courtney in the dust for a time. And during that time, Courtney had gotten herself in trouble. No wonder Shroud had been able to get Courtney on side by curing her asthma.

Ever since the Phoenix Program started, she'd been every bit the Pro Hero that Mandy had always believed she could be. But then, how much of that was because Courtney no longer had to fight to make her Quirk for her? How much of her success was because she was no longer struggling with the limitations of her own health?

Maybe part of her should be thanking Shroud, all things considered. Maybe she should be grateful to the supervillain for how he pulled her best friend out of the dumps and gave Courtney a new lease on life. But instead, all Mandy can feel is anger and hatred towards the villain. He'd taken advantage of Courtney. He'd preyed upon her greatest weaknesses and insecurities. For that, he had to pay.

Fortunately, his gambit had failed. They were all standing here now because Shroud's plans had ultimately run into something he couldn't account for... the human element. Courtney and even Malevola... they weren't going to dance to his tune anymore. And they could use that. Oh yes they could.

As she holds Courtney close, Mandy looks over the top of her best friend's head and makes eye contact with Izuku. She's still waiting to hear his plan, after all. She's sure whatever he comes up with... it's going to be amazing. No matter what, Mandy knows she can put her trust in him.

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