

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

A/N: Izuku shuts down Courtney's seduction.

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He kisses her back... but he doesn't let her get away with changing the subject. It's a simple bit of emotional calculus, in the end. Courtney is not the kind of girl who handles rejection well. She has abandonment issues a mile long and a known habit of fleeing from her problems before they get too big for her to handle.

Izuku doesn't intend to reject her... which is exactly why he makes sure to kiss her back, letting their lip lock deepen as he takes control of it. He can feel Courtney's surprise even as his hands go to her waist and clamp down, keeping her in place. His tongue dominates her tongue in short order, leaving her to moan into his mouth as she melts against his chest.

... And then Izuku pulls his lips away from hers, ending the lip lock and looking Courtney in the eye even as he keeps a tight hold on her.

"That's not going to work, Courtney. I'm not letting you deflect when I can tell something is bothering you."

It takes her a moment to come out of her daze and process his words, at which point she flinches, looking caught out. She averts her gaze for a moment, wiggling in his grasp, but when she finds no give in his grip she looks back to him with a narrow-eyed scowl.

"Maybe kissing you was what was on my mind, Midoriya. Maybe you're ruining the moment now with all this paranoia shit. Ever think of that?"

Izuku raises a brow at that, unimpressed.

"Was it? Am I?"

His questions draw out another flinch from the tanned woman, her entire body tensing up. They both knew the answer to those questions. Was she going to double down anyways? Was she going to keep lying to him, even though she knew that he knew?

“You... let me go!”

She pushes against his chest and Izuku stops holding her against her will. She stumbles back a bit as he does so, the sudden absence of the grip on her waist combined with how hard she’s trying to escape making her all but bounce off of him.

For a moment, Courtney just pants, catching her breath as she stares at him with wide eyes. Izuku knows she’s a moment from running again, whatever form that might take.

“... I might not know what’s going on with you Courtney, but whatever it is, you can tell me. You should know by now that I only want to help you.”

Courtney twitches and Izuku imagines she’s thinking back to everything she already knows. She’d probably be less inclined to confess anything if she hadn’t already found out that he was Vigil and started training under him. Add onto that the fact that she’d overheard Malevola’s confession and Izuku and Mei’s muted reaction and he had hope that maybe Courtney would accept that he wasn’t out to get her.

Finally... Courtney’s shoulders slump and she looks down at the floor. The silence continues for a few seconds more before she finally speaks in a quiet voice.

“Just... please don’t tell Mandy.”

Progress. Izuku hums, taking a step forward. Courtney tenses up but doesn’t do anything as he approaches. He, in turn, doesn’t reach out to touch her. He simply puts himself close to her, offering up his physical presence as a comfort.

“Tell her what, Courtney?”

Crossing her arms over her chest in a defensive gesture, Courtney looks to the side.

“... I’m one of Shroud’s too. And I know it’s a ‘too’ because I was watching you with Hatsume and Malevola when Malevola confessed.”

And there it was. The truth had come out. Izuku lets Courtney sit in her confession for a moment, until finally she looks at him and scowls.

“W-Well? I just told you I’m a traitor!”

Slowly, he nods.

“And if you really were there that day with Malevola and Mei, you know that we accepted Malevola’s apology along with her confession.”

Face scrunching up, Courtney scowls.

“You shouldn’t! You can’t trust her... you can’t trust me either! Once a villain, always a villain. And if Shroud inserted the two of us into the Phoenix Program, who knows who else he recruited? Do you really think any of us can be trusted?”

When Izuku doesn’t immediately respond, Courtney growls and thrusts her hand at the office around them.

“You’ve been showing La Brava the ropes for weeks now, I bet she could give Shroud access to this place’s entire system in a heartbeat now, if she works for him. And all the others to, the damage they could do!”

In some ways, she’s not wrong. In others, she very much is. Sure, damage could be done... but given Izuku IS Shroud, he obviously doesn’t intend to destroy the Phoenix Program any time soon.

“You can’t trust us... any of us.”

Tilting his head to the side, Izuku hums.

“What about Mandy?”

Courtney freezes all over again at that.

“What... what *about* Mandy?”

“Can we trust her? Do you think she’s working for Shroud as well?”

“I... n-no!”

Smiling, Izuku chuckles.

“What about me then? Am I working for Shroud?”

“Of course not! You’re literally Vigil! You... I mean...”

Courtney trails off, not seeming to know what to think of this line of questioning. Izuku just shrugs.

“Perhaps it’s okay to extend that same trust you have in me and Mandy to the others as well, at least for the time being. You all have been doing an amazing job so far. Working as a team, successfully challenging everyone’s perception of you. I don’t think you should give up on that now, Courtney. I don’t think you should give up on being the best Pro Hero you can be.”

She stares at him in disbelief for a long moment before pouting, her shoulders hunching in on themselves.

“I’m not though. I already told you... I was planted here by Shroud himself, just like Malevola was. Neither of us are here to be heroes...”

“Fuck Shroud.”

Courtney jerks back as if hit, looking at Izuku with wide eyes.

“Is he here with us right now? I don’t see him anywhere. So fuck him. Unless your loyalty to him is greater than your loyalty to the Program? Do you care more about working for a villain than you care about Mandy or I or anyone else you’ve met so far?”

When Courtney doesn’t immediately respond, Izuku just arches a brow again... finally causing her to grumble.

“... S’not that simple. I don’t *want* to be loyal to him... but I wouldn’t even be here if it wasn’t for him.”

Ah, and there was the hang up. Izuku frowns. He knew full well that he’d created this particular conundrum himself. Courtney could have potentially managed to still excel in the Phoenix Program even with her asthma, but she would have been a lot less effective of a fighter and heroine if she were still wrestling with reduced lung capacity and constantly having to rely on an inhaler.

As things stood, between her improved breathing and his training, she’d been rocketing up the charts in recent days, and was easily top three of the entire program at this point. Hell, she and the others were honestly starting to climb PDN’s overall internal rankings, with the Phoenix Program in no way ranking dead last among all of the Pro Hero Defense Network’s different teams.

Basically, they were more than proving their worth already. However, as a result, Courtney was tying her worth to the upgrade that Izuku as Shroud had given her. An upgrade that did admittedly make her a better hero.

But Izuku wasn’t supposed to know about that, so he just scoffs.

“If you think he got you into the program, think again. You don’t think Mandy wouldn’t have fought tooth and nail, regardless of whatever pull Shroud might or might not have?”

Courtney just shakes her head though, as he's expecting.

"No, it's not that... Shroud... he did something to me. Gave me something... he healed me. I could barely hold my breath for longer than a dozen seconds before. And if I wanted to try anything further, I had to use an inhaler constantly. I had asthma... and Shroud cured it."

Arms still crossed over her chest, Courtney looks down at herself, as if imagining it as she voices her greatest fear.

"... What if he finds out I'm betraying him and takes it away? What will I do then? I'll just go back to being some chump who can't even use her Quirk properly."

It was a valid fear, even if Izuku knew it would never come to pass. Well, not unless he was testing Courtney in some way. And there might be some merit to the idea of stripping her of her new Quirk just to see what she did when she went back to being 'weak and useless'. Personally, Izuku felt like she would rise to the occasion and prove herself to be more versatile and adaptable than she'd ever known.

But of course, he doesn't say that. Instead, he just grunts.

"I won't let that happen."

Courtney, understandably, gives him an incredulous look at that.

"No offense Midoriya... but you're not going to be able to stop Shroud of the Red Ring from doing whatever they want. You might be Vigil, but Shroud is... he's scary powerful. He *broke* into Tartarus of all places."

Ouch. That might have hurt his pride more if she wasn't talking down to him about... himself. But as things stood, Izuku just shakes his head and smiles.

"Then we won't let that happen."

When Courtney just looks confused, he elaborates.

“You, me, Malevola, Mei... and all the others as well. Mandy and all of them. We won’t let Shroud get away with anything. We won’t let him walk all over us anymore than we’re going to let the Hero Commission or other Agencies walk all over us.”

Courtney scoffs, clearly trying not to be too inspired by his words as she looks to the side.

“That seems a little optimistic, doesn’t it? If Malevola and I are plants put here by Shroud... we can’t be the only ones, can we? If he’s going to do two, he’s going to do more than that.”

She sounds so certain of it, heh. She’s right, admittedly... but at the same time, Izuku doesn’t have to tell her that. Instead he just shrugs.

“Or maybe you two are the only ones. Redundancies don’t need to be infinite, Courtney. And we don’t need to spend all of our time being suspicious of our comrades either. We have a job to do... and we’ve been doing it pretty well. Everyone is pulling their weight so far. Until proven otherwise, I think we’re just fine.”

Yes, he’s trying to steer her away from all of the spying she’s been doing since she learned Malevola was working for Shroud also. Yes, Courtney is right that everyone else in the Phoenix Program, except for Mandy and Mirko, are here ostensibly spying for Shroud as well.

But obviously Izuku doesn’t intend to actually use them as spies. They’re here to become better people, full stop. And he really doesn’t need Courtney to be caught stalking her teammates for any reason.

And yet, she still doesn’t look convinced. Which means Izuku is simply going to have to put more effort into tiring her out each day if he wants to leave her too exhausted for more ‘investigatory efforts’.

For a split second, the mental image of him pinning her naked body beneath his and fucking her stupid crosses Izuku's mind. It would certainly be one way to tucker her out. Only, Izuku shakes his head clear of such thoughts a moment later and chuckles.

"Let's head over to my place. If you've got all this time to fret, then you've got time to train, don't you?"

Courtney flushes at that but slowly nods. As they make their way up to the roof to begin the journey to his home gym, she's quiet for a moment before speaking.

"... You won't tell Mandy, right? About... about Shroud?"

Izuku hums at that, looking over at her as they hop from roof to roof.

"She deserves to know, Courtney. And I think deep down, you know that."

He keeps his tone mild and nonconfrontational, without judgment. Courtney still flinches, likely because she knows he's right.

"I..."

Courtney trails off, not seeming to know what to say.

"She deserves to hear it from you... so no, I won't tell her. But you should tell her. And you should do it sooner rather than later."

That gets a fresh stiffness in Courtney's shoulders as she falls completely silent the rest of the way to his building. Izuku hopes it's because she's contemplating her options... and also hopes she'll make the right one, in the end.

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

