

One Change

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by [Critical_KO](#)

Summary

One small thing happening can change everything for everybody. What's life like for everyone else after someone important in it, suddenly, is gone without warning? (MommyNid AU)

Nightmarish Reality

The sun had not yet fully rose. The moon still dangled in the distance, like a fishing bobber adrift over a calm lake, illuminating the large city of Neutral Zone. Night-time was the only duration of real peace for a city of heroes and villains.

Enid, the Level 7 ninja, was in the basement of her home, sporting a short black tank top with light blue pajama bottoms that had a pattern of shuriken decals randomly spread out over them. She was sharpening one of a dozen kunai as she always did after her early morning training. It was all a part of her usual routine before going to work, though her assortment of throwing weapons were becoming too brittle to justify much longer use, she got annoyed that she would need another batch so soon. She had been going through them faster and faster each week, as result she had to keep buying bucket worth's of the kunai.

The near adult teenager leaned back in her chair, staring up at the ceiling, frustrated. She brushed the throwing weapons off the worktop into the trashcan beside her. Several battered training dummies and a couple hole-ridden targets were littered behind her.

Enid figured she could try to sleep for a little while longer. She tried to look at the bright side. However, she could not help but feel irritated whenever her morning ritual got derailed. She stood up and began to leave the training room of the small home.

As she walked through the darkened halls, she passed by many pictures on the walls of her family, friends and co-workers. The purple haired ninja tried to pay the photos little thought, since they were nothing more than a single still moment in a drastically different time now.

She occasionally missed when things were that simple, sadly life didn't work that way. She forced the thoughts aside since it was far too early for being lost in her memories, or to have an existential crisis.

She stretched, with a light yawn escaping her lips, upon entering her bedroom she saw the large variety of items and decorations scattered around the partially dirty room; records displayed on the wall, a few CDs next to the player on her desk, and the single framed picture resting on the nightstand that showed her younger self, with a brushy haired boy, K.O. riding on her shoulders, both of them full of joy while he carried ice cream in his hand. She loved that picture the most, their friend Radicles having taken in when they all were at a fair.

Enid did not get a chance to lay down. She felt a presence nearby. Her senses were a lot sharper than when she was younger.

"Mommy?" she heard a sweet, yet tired, lighter-toned voice chime up from the doorway. She turned around to see a nine-year-old K.O. in his light blue and star patterned one-piece footie pajamas, and his red headband wrapped around his head at this time of night. His brush hair was a little messy as well.

"Oh, morning, K.O. You're up a little early," Enid greeted K.O. with a comforting smile, though she knew that look on his face gave the answer to why he was awake, and it never

was good.

"C...Can I sleep with you?" the Level 5 hero sheepishly requested. Although they used to be co-workers and great friends, a lot has changed in the last couple of years between them. Enid still found it hard to believe sometimes, finding it amazing even more so how strong he had gotten since they first met as well.

"No need to be embarrassed," the Level 7 ninja ran a hand through his hair. K.O. had developed an issue of recurring nightmares, every time he woke up from one, he always went to her. He always felt ashamed for bothering her about it every time. "Come on. I don't want you to be tired for school," Enid insisted they get right back to sleep, though she more so wanted to do it so he could feel better. It was why she had such an early morning routine, just in case he needed her.

Once she was in bed, K.O. got into her bed as well, laying on one of Enid's arms. She pulled up the blanket over them both.

"Comfy?" she chirped, that comforting voice making him feel a lot more at ease. He nodded. He had trouble speaking at first whenever he woke up scared. His vocal chords would just try to lock up.

"Don't worry. As long as I'm breathing, you'll be safe," Enid looked down to him, seeing those eyes that expressed fear, but clear desperation for reassurance. Seeing that cute face looking upset in any regard always tugged at her heart strings.

"Thanks, mommy..." K.O. tiredly spoke out. He rested his head on her chest and closed his eyes, as if just hearing her heartbeat helped him to calm down. Enid kept stroking his head. He always gained a strong sense of comfort from this simple repeated motion. It only took a few minutes for the young boy to begin drifting back to sleep with that sweet smile on his face.

"*You're welcome, K.O... sweet dreams,*" Enid whispered, laying her head back on her own pillow. The high level ninja always had a minor fear of going to sleep herself, but that was more out of worry that she might wake up to this all being one giant dream.

"*Two years... It's already been two years since I became your mom... I still can't believe it sometimes,*" her gaze moved to the picture of them by her bedside resting upon the nightstand. She closed her eyes so she could get her extra sleep, just hoping her son would feel better once he woke up after a better dream.

It all began two years ago.

It had been an average week at Gar's Bodega. Their rivals at Boxmore Industries attacking them every couple of hours, customers coming and going in varying sizes of groups. A few loiterers being fired out of a cannon, everything was as normal as it could be.

Enid leaned back on her chair behind the counter, sleeping away, enjoying what little peace she could get.

"Hey Enid," the voice of Radicles made the Level 5 ninja open one eye. Radicles was a rather odd hero, as well as a Level 4 alien, whose telekinesis earned him a career as stockroom worker.

"Trying to sleep here, Rad. What is it?" Enid bitterly responded. She leaned forward, though she couldn't get back to sleep now. If a slew of customers came up after an interrupted nap like this, then she would gladly have their souls for lunch. Sadly for some reason, with or without their souls, people sure didn't change at all.

"Just wanted to check up on ya. How's babysitting been going?" Rad brushed off her temper as nothing unusual. She sighed, ignoring her personal irritation.

"It really isn't babysitting. With how helpful K.O. is, it's more like he's watching my family," Enid lightly laughed. For the last week she had been watching over their youngest co-worker, K.O., at the request of his mother Carol, a nearby fitness dojo owner. Though it took a lot of convincing on Carol's part to get Enid to agree, since she wasn't fond of the idea of babysitting someone for longer than an afternoon.

"How much longer are you watching him for anyway?" the young alien questioned. It had been over a week now since Carol had left for reasons unannounced to them. Their boss, Mr. Gar, had seemingly vanished around the same time, they feared and respected that man enough to know to keep running the bodega as if he was always there unless ordered otherwise.

"Another day or two, at most," Enid shrugged. K.O.'s mother had been vague on how long she would be gone for. She only said over a week for this task of hers. Even if more weeks passed with no sign of Carol, Enid wouldn't abandon the little hero.

"Hey guys!" they heard K.O. chime up, hopping on top of one of the many shelves.

"What's up, little buddy?" Rad replied, they turned their attention to him.

"Are we under attack again?" Enid groaned. If there was another bad plan by Boxmore, she hoped K.O. already foiled it.

"No, I found a box of Jethro bits out back. I thought we could make another trashcan out of him," K.O. happily explained. Jethro was the largest waste of scrap metal in the Boxmore family, the weakest of them all. They usually cleaned up and threw all the parts away, though occasionally recycled them for other uses.

"Nah, don't worry about it," Enid replied, "For now, jus..." then they felt the ground rumble, an alarm sounding next.

"Okay, **NOW** we're being attacked," K.O. corrected himself, though his happiness unchanged. That usual over enthusiasm showed no bounds since he had got to spend a long time at a friend's with their family. The three heroes heading outside to meet their rivals again.

The trio arrived into the parking lot. A large Boxmore brand crate lay there, the area around it damaged from the impact of where it landed. They watched the crates sides fall off, and out popped three of Boxman's robotic family.

"It's nice to know you three are always ready to welcome us!" the one-eyed Darrell laughed.

"I'm so sick of attacking... I just wanna go back to bed," Shannon complained. These pointless assaults only escalated in how often they happened based on their dad's ever swaying will.

"I can agree there..." Enid mumbled under her breath.

"We just want to make sure you get home faster than you got here," Radicles retorted, cracking his knuckles.

"Well, shall we begin?" Raymond, the sports loving robot, taunted.

"Yeah! Let's do this so we can go get lunch!" K.O. earnestly said, excited for battle. The Boxmore bots were slightly annoyed by his over enthusiasm. Both sides had wins and losses, yet the robots' losses were getting more frequent the stronger the heroes got in contrast to them, that it would later turn into a losing streak until they upgraded themselves to match them in power.

Before they could begin, all six of them felt an overwhelmingly terrifying presence, like someone was willing to crush them all if the slightest wrong move was committed. Even K.O. felt his enthusiasm deflate.

"M...Mr. Gar?" Enid squeaked at his presence. She had seen it one time before. Never again since it took so much effort to get their boss even a quarter near this anger. It was so rare that Rad and K.O. had never seen it. The six equally terrified young heroes and villains saw him in the flesh, approaching, one step at a time, increasing their fears ten-fold.

"Perhaps we should activate self-destruct and tell father we lost..." Raymond whispered, though they learned it was far worse to run from the enraged bodega owner.

"You three. Get lost," Mr. Gar spoke with a voice that was failing to hide the clear anger he had tried to withhold. K.O. swore something was wrong with the hero he had admired for the longest time.

"W-what?" Darrell gulped. The bodega owner took out a small piece of paper and handed it to the Cyclops bot, the paper was very decorative with light gold trimming around the edges and a ton of glitter.

"Oh... it's one of the peace vouchers," Shannon didn't feel relieved by this at all. These strange vouchers were given to the bodega staff as a Christmas present when they helped save Boxman's children when they were in a very bad situation, they guaranteed a full week without a single attack or hostile movement on their part.

"If I see you or any of Boxmore's products in this plaza for the next week, I will tear your base down to the concrete foundation... Understand?" Mr. Gar's glare pierced the three's circuitry through his glasses. The robot trio nodded rapidly before making a run for it. There was nothing left now beyond a tense atmosphere.

"Thanks, Mr. Gar. It's good to have ya back," Radicles shattered the overwhelming silence. Enid still felt more scared than she tried to show. If his anger was not aimed toward Boxmore, then it meant he was most likely upset with one of them.

"You didn't need to waste one of the vouchers. We could've handled them," Enid insisted with a failed attempt at trying to sound confident. K.O. hid behind her legs in fear of his idol.

"K.O., I need to talk with you in my office," Mr. Gar ignored the others. What he said unnerved the young boy further. Just when the high level hero had finally returned, he was so enraged, yet K.O. swore there was a hint of sorrow behind the anger too.

"*Wa*-wait, what's going on, Mr. Gar?" Enid asked, worried more so for their Level 3 friend than anything.

"Did I do something...?" K.O. couldn't speak up past a fearful whisper. Rad had no chance to speak up as their boss glared at them.

"Enid, Rad," Mr. Gar forced out in a humble manner, "You two can take a paid day off, today or tomorrow, if you want. Or you can keep working. I don't care which. Right now, I have to talk with K.O. about something very important... Please don't make my day any rougher than it already is."

K.O. stepped out from hiding. "Y-yes, sir, Mr. Gar."

His other co-workers had no chance to say anymore as their boss and young friend went inside the bodega.

"*Di*...did Mr. Gar actually just offer us a free day off?" Enid had to wonder aloud. Normally under any other circumstance she would gladly accept that offer if the atmosphere wasn't so thick. They felt uneasy leaving K.O. alone especially now too.

"Something's definitely up... All we can do is wait and hope he'll fill us in once he calms down," Rad said. Enid usually found it suspicious when the stockroom worker acted with any form of real intelligence, but she had to agree with him. For now they had to wait and see what would happen.

"Come on. Let's get back to work. Boxmore won't be bothering us for a few days now at least," Enid shrugged, walking away to get back to her post in the bodega. Except she knew that there was no chance of her getting back to sleep now.

"Man, I miss when things were easy," Rad groaned. He followed her so they could work to pass the time. Both anxious to hear what had happened while their boss had been absent from the bodega.

Enid stayed more or less idle at the counter, waiting anxiously. There had been nothing since Mr. Gar had taken K.O. to his office for the private talk, and it had been going on for at least an hour now.

The Level 5 ninja looked over her cellphone again having tried to get ahold of Carol for the past hour, but to no avail. There was just one text message left from the night she had taken off that just read, *"Tell K.O. I love him and I'll be home before he knows it"*

Enid tilted her head upwards, feeling an overwhelming sense of dread in the air. She did not even notice when Rad approached the front counter.

"Sorry, I tried to listen in, but there's not exactly a sneaky way into that office..." the Level 4 stockroom worker stated, just as worried for their tiny friend as she was.

"So, we really can do nothing but wait, huh," Enid muttered in clear annoyance. She was grateful that it was a very slow day for the bodega.

They both heard the office door opening. "Looks like the wait is over." Radicles said in relief, going off to approach their bosses office quickly.

"Wait, Rad!" the young girl tried to stop him from rushing off to meet their friend and boss, he was already gone by then. She understood his worry, however knew timing was important to these kind of matters.

Enid barely took two steps out from behind the register before she heard a loud crash and products falling to the floor with two shelves.

"Rad?!" the Level 5 ninja quickly came over, seeing the alien in and out of consciousness, though most of the damage was more from the stuff he crashed into, rather than whatever threw him into it. Radicles moaned. "What happened? Did you trip on a blaster gauntlet again?" She asked. Radicles coughed in reply, the wind being knocked out of him clearly. She noticed K.O. out of the corner of her eyes, who ran out the front door as if he needed to get out of there quickly. **"K.O.! Wait!"** Enid called to him, however he was already gone. She helped Rad back to his feet, letting him lean on a nearby wall for support while he recovered.

"Sorry... K.O. didn't handle our discussion well," Mr. Gar apologized, stepping past them, too ashamed to see their normally respectful if fearful gazes.

"K.O. bashed Rad through two shelves? What's going on?" the ninja demanded bitterly. Everything was going wrong seemingly at once. Whatever this news was, she was torn between getting answers first or going after K.O., she decided on the former since he tended to be easy to find no matter what.

Mr. Gar took in a breath. Grief was flavoring it. "Me, Carol and a few other former P.O.I.N.T. members were invited on a mission. It was supposed to be simple. They were shorthanded, and it couldn't wait, so we agreed," he turned towards them, "It was easy, took us about three days, so we all decided to enjoy the rest of the week as a vacation... unfortunately, whenever P.O.I.N.T. deploys, word spreads like a fire, and when we had our guard down, we got attacked."

Rad got himself out of his daze. "I didn't think there was anybody out there with the guts to take on P.O.I.N.T.," the Level 4 alien commented, a lot of villains were out there, some stronger than others, but each one knew the dangers of messing with P.O.I.N.T. They had a strong reputation for a reason.

"They separated us by using explosives. We handled them, they didn't get further beyond the surprise of the attack... most of us," the high-level hero moved his glasses aside to rub his eyes.

"Don't tell me..." Enid began to piece it all together.

"Carol had bad luck, she got pierced by some stray rebar. No one noticed until the fight was over, and by then, she lost a lot of blood. We took her to a hospital, but she just kept getting worse," Mr. Gar shook his head, "Even when hurt she kept fighting."

"She's stuck in the hospital?" Rad asked, assuming that she was just extremely sick or recovering, however his hope fizzled out upon noticing his co-worker holding her head with one hand as reality slowly sank in. The atmosphere began to get tenser. Even their boss was obviously afraid of accepting that reality.

"No. She... she died last night."

Anxiety

Enid was suddenly awoken by the sound of an alarm. She looked around and saw K.O. already sitting up beside her, rubbing his eyes tiredly.

"Ah, jeez. I must've set the alarm too late..." the Level 7 ninja realized. She was so focused on comforting her son last night that she had mistakenly set her alarm twenty minutes too early for her to have any hope on arriving to work on time. "You feeling okay, K.O.?" Enid asked, standing in front of her mirror and beginning to fix her hair up back into its ponytail.

"Yeah... thanks mommy for letting me sleep with you again," K.O. said, seeing her smile reflected in the mirror.

"Like I said, I'll always be around if you need me... You should probably hurry and get ready for school though," the near adult teenager informed him. He nodded, hopping out of bed and going off hurriedly to get ready. "Hope old man Garren doesn't mind if I'm a little late," she joked to herself. It was far from the first time this had happened. She just focused on getting ready for the day ahead.

After a few minutes, both of them were outside their home to be greeted by the bright sun, without any clouds obscuring it. K.O. was munching away on a piece of toast. His nightmare from the night before was a distant memory.

"Alright, I gotta get to work, K.O.," Enid told him, digging around in her pocket and pulling out ten technos which she handed to him. It was sort of a daily allowance, but more so emergency cash in case he needed it. "Remember, if you need anything..."

"Fhust chall you," K.O. finished for his mother with his mouth half full. That same cute smile still showed on his face. Enid patted his head. She crouched down to his height and briefly exchanged a tight hug with him.

"I'll see you after work, honey... bye, I love you," Enid told him, watching as K.O. took off to get to the bus stop.

"Bye Mommy, I love you too!" K.O. called back as he left. The young mother smiled before standing back up, hoping that it was just as good of a day as it looked. She began to leave, wanting to get to work to see what her assignment for the day would be.

Enid spent some time walking through the city. Every mile away from home, the cityscape stretched bigger in view. She still wasn't used to the place after all this time. She occasionally missed her old spooky home a fair amount but was glad to have a lot more privacy than when she lived with the rest of her family.

After another hour, the Level 7 ninja arrived to a home that had a very awkward contrast in its size compared to the many tall buildings around it.

"Gate's open... guess he's waiting for me," Enid shrugged, seeing the wide open gate with a stone walkway, which that led to the home. She approached the front door, paying little mind to the large garden of plants around her.

After ringing the doorbell, she heard light coughing from the other side. "Yes, yes, come in!" An older voice called out once the coughing fit ended.

Enid stepped inside. The interior was one giant workshop. She recognized the couple lines of books based around magic on the shelves, she had donated several of them after all.

"Hey, old man Garren, sorry I'm late," she greeted him.

"If I ever expected you to be on time, I wouldn't sleep in," the old man replied, leaned over at a workbench that had a vice in the center holding a rather large gem held in its clamps. Enid watched as the elder dragged a large file across it in slow motions.

"So what's my assignment today?" Enid took a seat nearby. She had gotten a new primary job, having made the bodega a secondary workplace to act more so as a gap filler when there was no work for her otherwise.

"How's your family doing?" Garren responded in trade, trying to at least treat the conversation like it was more than just raw business, though they both found it awkward in the good way.

"It's a slow process, but my son is doing better... He's still having nightmares though," Enid replied happily, treating the older gentleman more like a great uncle than her boss. P.O.I.N.T had begun a new extensive hero program. Retired heroes would act as handlers for lower leveled heroes, giving them assignments, missions or tasks, varying in unpredictable sizes that they thought they could handle.

Enid had started on this line of work a little over a year and a half ago. It saved her a lot of financial woes and had gotten her stronger. This program began because of P.O.I.N.T beginning to become overwhelmed by all the increasing villainy, so they decided to give the lower level heroes chances at contributing to justice.

"You know, if you just used some of my jewelry, you would be able to remove the memory of the trauma," the retired hero reminded her, though he still refused to look up from his current process. Garren turned magic stones he found into spectacular jewelry. The powers each one individually withheld however was unknown until they were finished.

"Sorry, old man Garren. I really can't do that to K.O. He needs to remember to heal, not forget," Enid quoted one of K.O.'s friends in that regard. It had been something she considered heavily at one point when the Level 16 magic jeweler first offered it, but that dear friend of her adopted son, Dendy, convinced her why that would be awful. Erasing a critical moment from someone's life would change them in unforeseeable ways as well. "Anyway! Back to focusing on work. What do you need me to do?"

Garren scoffed as he rested the file aside and turned to her. "Neo-Riot City is a place that uses a lot of power. You know, tons. It also generates one of the largest sources of power in this

part of the world," the old wizard stood up and walked over to a nearby stove to begin preparing tea for himself.

"And let me guess. Another literal power hungry maniac is trying to steal some of it," the Level 7 ninja guessed. It was practically a running joke about what happened in that city. Doing such a thing in the same place that had P.O.I.N.T.'s headquarters set up within was guaranteed failure. It was what made it all the funnier whenever it was attempted.

"As always... only difference is that P.O.I.N.T. is actually unable to find the one doing it this time and the energy thief is succeeding quite well," Garren returned to his seat beside her.

"Someone that can avoid P.O.I.N.T. detection..." Enid crossed her arms, finding that a little hard to believe, "How?"

"It's not so much avoiding detection, as much as the one doing it is very clever. Whenever power starts getting stolen, it happens in eight places at once, all over Neo-Riot City," the old man reached into the nearby drawer before pulling out a small folder for his technical employee to see for herself. "And by the time they decide where to search the thieves are long gone with enough small bits of power to make a large amount. No matter how much preparations P.O.I.N.T. made to intercept this guy, they always start in completely new areas of the city."

"You sure I can handle this? I'm used to fighting people stronger than me, sure, but this sounds like more of a group problem," Enid questioned. She hated it when she had to admit she couldn't handle a problem on her own. The old man held similar feelings there.

"Well, you're fast and pretty smart for your age... P.O.I.N.T. is too overwhelmed with too many problems to focus on one power thief, but I'm more worried about what they're stealing power for," Garren announced his fears. Usually power thieves just loaded special power chargers to try and sell the energy individually at high prices. This was obviously not the case this time.

"...fine, I'll try and handle it," Enid sighed in agreement. It would take a while of traveling to get to Neo-Riot City. She removed the map from the folder, folding it up before slipping it into her pocket. She stood up to leave.

"Hey, you're forgetting something," Garren called to her and threw to her a small ring, Enid caught it and inspected it. The ring had a bright green gem in the center with a carving of circles with a thin line running out of the center of them. "That'll get you there and back a lot faster. Just return it when you're done. That's a very rare ring of mine," Garren requested. Enid rolled her eyes. That old man always tried to hide that concerned fatherly behavior of his. She always saw through it.

"Thanks, Garren. I'll let you know how it goes," Enid gave a last wave before walking out the door, letting the retired hero get back to his work.

"Heroes these days... far spunkier than they were when I was young... Then again, with how annoying villains are becoming, maybe it's a good thing," he chuckled to himself and returned to his workbench.

When Enid got outside, she looked over the ring, sighing reluctantly as she slipped it onto her left hand.

"Just because I know witchcraft doesn't mean I like actually using magic," the ninja murmured to herself. She used one of her free hands fingers to reach into the ring, spinning the line in the center of the many circles, watching as they all began rotating.

"Teleport... *please*," Enid reluctantly requested, always feeling embarrassed when having to ask for a piece of jewelry to help, but it was how Garren made them. She aimed her hand at the ground beneath her feet. Several rings of light appeared around her that began to grow into pillars. The bright trail of light shined around her, and she disappeared, leaving nothing behind.

K.O. was going through the day like it was normal, though he was having trouble focusing on his teacher. He tried his best, but he always had rougher days whenever nightmares happened the night prior.

"Mom...! Wake up, please! Mom! Mommy!"

"**K.O.!**" a lighter monotone voice snapped him out of his daze.

"Wuh? O-oh, hey, Dendy... sorry," K.O. mused to his genius friend, Dendy.

"Class ended approximately twelve minutes ago, and the teacher asked me to check on you," the similarly leveled kappa adjusted her goggles, "I assume you suffered another nightmare last night?" she had been one of his best friends for years. She still kept her straight face and monotone voice, though thanks to him her straight face broke with a smile quite often. Nonetheless, she had greatly supported him in recovering from the incident a few years back, much like Enid did, though she helped his new mother far more than him, that was with another matter.

"Yeah... I didn't break anything this time at least," K.O. chuckled half-jokingly. Sometimes the nightmare that repeated got so bad, he would break something in his room inadvertently.

"Do you wish to accompany me for lunch outside?" the kappa offered to her dear friend, Dendy preferred the peace outside compared to the cafeteria. He nodded, getting out of his seat before following her out of the classroom, thinking some fresh air would be good.

The two sat outside, viewing the bright sunny sky. It felt nice to have the warm sun on his skin. He felt nothing but cold terror in his nightmares whenever they reemerged.

"Have your dreams altered at all recently?" Dendy questioned, getting out her lunch from her backpack. K.O. shook his head. This conversation was normal for them now. His nightmare had become different at one point, it was only a small change yet a large noteworthy one. However, he had not told Enid that so he did not pile more onto her worries.

"It's always the same... It's just as bad as the old nightmare though," the Level 5 hero solemnly stated, unpacking his lunch from his own backpack and eating immediately.

"And I take it you still haven't heard from T.K.O.?" Dendy asked while she lightly munched on her sandwich.

"No... I'm starting to think he's never coming back," K.O. confessed. T.K.O. lived inside his own head. They could swap places to who controlled their body or combine their powers together. But now T.K.O. seemingly vanished from existence a few years ago, no word or anything either.

"I'm sorry, K.O...." she wished she could help with finding his inner twin, doubting they could simply cease existing. K.O.'s glorified bad side took Carol's death as badly as K.O. himself did.

"I owe you enough, Dendy. There's no need to be sorry," the brushy haired boy reassured. An awkward silence began to take over. As he ate, he took out his P.O.W. card. His stats were unchanged, he always checked for the much needed reminder that he was indeed becoming more of a hero by the day.

"It's funny... if I hadn't broken down like I did, I'd probably be Level 6 by now," K.O. chuckled, though saying it aloud did not make the reminder any less bitter to his companion. K.O. had given up on his heroic desire for a few months after his mother died. The feeling had been smothered under the weight of depression. As result, he lost a level due to inactivity. At least it hadn't hit an all time zero, or a negative number like villains did.

"Has Enid been okay?" the kappa girl tried to change topics, not wanting to dredge up more sorrow like that. She only wished to check on his mental state for any form of changes that might need immediate addressing, or notice to Enid secretly by the kappa.

"Mom's been good, she just is tired whenever I get to work," K.O. simply replied, not knowing why Enid was tired by the time they met-up at the bodega, he presumed it was her new jobs fault. The two continued eating lunch together gladly. They had not much time before their next class.

"I'm just relieved to see you two assimilating to your new relationship quite well," Dendy confessed. She feared how the two would do when Enid announced her plans on adopting K.O. Going from a co-worker friendship to mother and son was a jarringly large change.

"She takes me to mom-... *I-I* mean Carol's grave once a month," K.O. added. It was his new mother's insistence that he should not forget his old life and all the good times from it, no matter how much he loathed it now. The kappa hated to hear him be so reluctant to the mere mention of Carol. He was stubborn to the idea of keeping memories of a time that no longer existed, nor could be reclaimed.

Dendy noticed his breathing was becoming a bit rougher, and his expression shifted into one of a failed attempt at looking well. K.O. felt his heart racing as his gaze shifted to the ground. "Oh, do you need to contact Enid?" she asked.

"N-no, I'll be fine. She's... *she's working*..." the brush haired boy held himself. Panic attacks were another issue that he had developed against his will. It was far better than it used to be, but whenever it happened, he usually needed to at least hear his new mom's voice to help calm him down.

"Don't worry, I'm here for you, K.O.," Dendy gave him a gentle hug. She could never stand to see the most optimistic person in her life in such a sad state of being. She owed him a lot.

"*Th*-thanks, Dendy," K.O. sniffled while calming a little, grateful for her very presence. They heard the sound of the bell ringing. Time to get back to class. Dendy helped him up, taking him inside, wanting to aid K.O. in focusing on their schoolwork for the time being.

Verge Of Death

Enid had been stuck wandering the streets of Neo-Riot City for the last couple of hours. She had spent that time since she arrived, investigating several of the areas that the power thieves had pilfered from, yet had so far turned up absolutely nothing, and none of the people she inquired had an answer.

"Guess I might not be meeting up with K.O. at the bodega..." the Level 7 ninja grumbled. She always got anxious whenever she was unable to directly meet her son after he got out of school, despite K.O. knowing to call her if he needed anything. Sometimes he needed a lot more than just words.

"...Hey, wait a sec," Enid had that thought suddenly spark in her head. She pulled the map back out of her pocket, looking at all the areas that had been marked where power had been stolen. "Garren said they always start in a new area, and if they steal power in small amounts from eight different places, then I might just be able to get lucky by waiting," Enid pondered aloud to herself, leaning against a nearby wall, debating if this was a good plan, since there was a good chance she would still miss them.

"No pattern to the places they hit though... no rhyme or reason. Not much choice," the purple haired girl gave into the plan, getting up and beginning to head for the nearest location that hadn't its power stolen.

Enid wound up at an open back alley, meant for the nearby restaurant to set people outside, though it was far beyond deserted at this point. She stayed hidden in the shade of several trees in the background, with line of sight on the locked power box nearby.

Enid decided it would take a while, trying to stay relaxed. She disliked this gambling approach she was taking, though the location reminded her more of her memories from last night, as if everything in the world was out to refresh them.

It had been a week since the news of Carol dying had hit. It was the worst week for the Bodega staff. Not only did they lose a great hero, but her son had been missing since he first found out and had ran out of the store.

"Where could he have gone...?" Enid held her head. Most of the day was spent searching for their youngest friend, the same as the last six days. There was no sign of him at his home, their workplace, or anywhere he loved to go. Rad and Enid had gotten so desperate they even requested the Boxmore bots to help them find him.

"He couldn't have left Neutral Zone, could he?" she rubbed her head. She knew K.O. was emotional, but they had no clue what he would do now. Dendy insisted that leaving him alone and hoping he returned on his own was not even a remotely good option for this.

The young ninja took out her cellphone, dialing Rad's number as she continued on her search, partially thankful that Mr. Gar had given them as much time off as they needed to find the

missing kid.

"Enid! Any luck?" Radicles answered, trying to remain optimistic throughout this, but just like his co-worker, it faltered as time passed.

"I was calling to ask you that," Enid solemnly spoke. She could hear the stockroom worker deflating more at that reply.

"Sorry... I've asked around at his school with Dendy today, but no one's seen him," Rad explain. He had put much hope in K.O.'s schoolmates, since he was quite known in his own school for his helpfulness, no such luck.

Enid rubbed her eyes with her free hand, feeling nothing short of frustration. She was supposed to be the one skilled at stealth and hiding, not K.O.!

"What do you think is gonna happen to him Enid?" the Level 4 alien tried to keep a conversation going while they both kept searching.

"He'll probably just go through the stages of grief... honestly, I'd prefer to be dealing with T.K.O. right now," the high-level ninja confessed. Dealing with a rampaging enemy was far easier than handling fragile emotions, they both preferred to find K.O. so he didn't have to go through everything alone.

"No, not that, I mean... with his mom dead, what'll happen to him?" Rad specified more, not sounding too fond about talking of the recently dead in any sense of the word. He may act tough, but he was a lot softer than most knew.

"I... I guess he'd either wind up with his dad or in foster care," the ninja responded, now realizing what her friend was worried about. K.O.'s dad was a villain that they had their fair share of run-ins with. He was a lot more tolerable now. Even K.O.'s technical sister wasn't too bad to them now. However, they didn't like the sound of either option.

Enid paused when she saw several large cracks in the ground. Something had impacted them from a high place. Same for part of a nearby building in the area of the neutral zone she had been investigating.

"Whoa... hey Rad, have you heard of any large monster attacks today?" the ninja asked her co-worker. Usually if a giant monster appeared, it was hard to miss.

"Uhhh... I've heard a lot the past few days about something smashing stuff randomly. It's weird for a monster to be sneaky though. Why do you ask?" Rad explained. The damage matched a large sized monster attack, but so far, no monster to match with the attacks.

Enid began to pick up her pace to follow the trail of damage. "I think I might've found K.O.!" she hung up shortly after saying that, recognizing the damage all too well. T.K.O.'s rampages were like this. The minor control from doing more damage in the areas was what made her think that K.O. had been through here in the midst of a long running mental breakdown. Seeing Rad get bashed through a few shelves a couple weeks back added onto that vague hope of an idea.

Enid had been able to follow a gradually decreasing trail of destruction that once started at large dents in the ground, then shattered walls of buildings, then cars, then windows, a few knocked over trees. The entire time, she called out for her young friend until the trail ended at a small back area.

"K.O.?" Enid chirped at the familiar figure of the young boy lying against a nearby wall, looking very disheveled; emotionally, physically and mentally. "Thank goodness, I found you, K.O.," the Level 5 ninja sighed in relief. She had worried about finding him in a far worse state. She approached him. "We've been looking everywhere for you this week... look I'm sor-*ehh*?!" Enid felt power fist smash point blank knocking her back a fair distance and causing her to skid across the hard ground, scraping her right arm, leg, and lower side a lot.

"*Oh... right... T.K.O. probably isn't under control right now...*" the bodega cashier grumbled. She hadn't taken their friend's glorified alter ego into account. T.K.O. tended to get out of control when K.O. got so upset. Enid guessed he did not take the news of Carol dying well either.

"**K.O.!** It's me!" Enid called out to him, only for another power fist to get thrown her way. She dodged it, seeing it crash into another car and turn it into a scrap heap. She could see that expression of his sorrow, anger and hatred. His attacks were obviously telling her to get lost. She had spent a week searching for her young friend. She sure was not going to give up and go home now.

"Okay, words aren't working..." Enid mumbled, starting to feel a sense of irony here. They contrasted her rage-induced soul thieving rampages, discounting the lecture from Mr. Gar afterwards.

"*Jus...* Just leave me alone," K.O. choked out his words, his voice sounded far more exhausted than he himself did.

"K.O., I know that you're hurting... Everyone is worried about you though. Me, Rad, Dendy-heck, even the Boxmore bots have been looking for you!" Enid explained, although announcing the Boxmore bots' sympathies in helping them still felt weird to her. She swore they were forcing themselves into becoming good guys at the rate they had been helping them, that or they were becoming very sick of villainy.

"**Leave me alone!**" K.O. suddenly screamed, firing a flurry of power fists with barely any warning. The Level 5 ninja did her best to dodge most of them, but she was making no progress otherwise. "There's no reason to go back! There's nothing now!" he slammed his fists onto the ground hard enough to cause a minor tremor. It was enough to make Enid fumble and catch the end of the aura knuckle assault.

The ninja bounced off the ground from the attack. She had gotten a lot of bruises from that, though it felt like bones were on the verge of snapping from the force of the attacks.

"*I can't... I can't go back to nothing...*" K.O. whimpered out. He may love his friends like family, but with the person he respected most now dead and gone, it was like his entire life was undone in that one motion. He didn't even believe it for a few days himself. He was

forced to face reality anyway, and it still cut him like a large sword shredding his heart into a million pieces.

"K.O., there's always something to go back to... We all love you and want to do everything we can to help," Enid explained to him. Anything her dear friend or a coworker needed; they would help him get it. She doubted they could ever make up for Carol's departing, but they could help him deal with the pain. It was what friends were for. Everybody K.O. interacted with in his life adored him and would gladly help him.

"It doesn't matter anymore... *please*... leave me alone," he weakly responded as tears began to escape his eyes. He pulled back, ready to attack again while the warm liquid rolled down his cheeks. K.O. was unwilling to stop attacking until he was alone.

"I can't dodge and get close enough to him at the same time... Guess I have to do this the hard way," Enid pushed herself off the ground, getting back onto her feet and rubbing her sore neck, getting ready for what she was about to go through.

He saw her beginning to step toward him with clear determination behind each step. K.O. didn't want to hurt her. However, there was no other way to return to his lonely somber. He couldn't outrun a ninja, nor could he outsmart her of all people.

"I said **GO AWAY!**" K.O. threw another large power fist. She put up her guard, taking the full impact of the attack as the fist more or less exploded upon crashing into her. She kept stomping toward him.

This process just kept repeating. Enid simply tanked every hit thrown her way. Her arms worsened with each passing attack to the point that they started to bleed in some areas.

K.O. froze in place when the bodega cashier got close to him with nothing short of an aura of sheer frustration about her. The young boy balled up his fists, about to attack again. Enid suddenly tackled him into a hug, not giving him a second to react.

K.O. instinctively threw a lot of power fists in his partial flailing, missing most of them only to damage the area around the two, but she wasn't letting go. He finally began to lose the last of his shallow energy, and that spark of anger in him started to wither in her arms while she held him.

"It's okay, K.O..." Enid said in a hushed tone, keeping K.O. in a tight hug. K.O. looked up to her with his watery eyes. He did not have to apologize for her to know he felt horrible for it. The ninja kept embracing him. She could feel his racing heart and trembling body.

Enid felt him bury his face into her chest as he began to break down into a pool of tears. She remained seated there in the damaged area with him in her arms, clinging onto her despite her sore parts.

"The only thing that matters is making sure you're alright, K.O. You cry all you need to, and once you're done, I'll carry you to a hospital to make sure you're okay," Enid advised. She planned on staying with K.O. throughout his breakdown, though knew he needed a checkup to be safe since he had clearly hurt his own hands a lot in the last few days. She felt he

desperately needed the company. K.O. could not answer through his streaming tears and choked sobs. He returned the hug tightly during his fit of tears. Enid kept stroking his back to comfort him, not caring about her ever dampening shirt. She let out a sigh of relief knowing the most painful part was handled.

The young mother suddenly snapped out of her daydreaming as she heard her cellphone ringing with a robotic sounding rhythm. She paused briefly, giving a second glance to the area she had been staking out to make sure nothing had changed.

"Hey Dendy," Enid answered her phone to the familiar ringtone she had set for the young kappa. The ninja had personal ringtones set for everybody since the importance of the call tended to be related to whoever called. Dendy was very high up on that list of importance.

"Hello, Enid. Is this an appropriate time?" Dendy's voice chimed up from the phone. The young kappa had figured out what her best friend's new mother did for work now, though she dared not tell K.O. out of fear of making his anxiety problems worse.

"Even if it wasn't, you know I'd answer your call," Enid reminded the genius hero. She'd answered a fair amount of phone calls while under duress unless it was on a stealth mission. "Is everything okay?" she leaned back against the nearby wall, staying hidden in the shadows to be safe, since she had been surprised due to carelessness before.

"Unfortunately, no. K.O. dozed off slightly in class and had his nightmare relapse," Dendy explained. Despite her best friend's pleading not to, the genius decided to inform Enid what happened behind his back.

"How badly?" Enid held her head with her free hand, not wanting another meeting with their principal. Three in the last two months was enough.

"I was able to snap him out of it, but he is suffering from a panic attack. It is just gradually getting worse," Dendy said, sounding disappointed in herself for not being able to help K.O. calm down enough to really matter.

"Why didn't he call me himself?" the purple haired girl asked, glancing up to the power box she had been spying on. So far, no change. She had a feeling she knew the answer already.

"K.O. did not wish to distract you from work. He seems persistent on trying to resolve his anxiety attacks alone... despite each prior massive failure," Dendy apologetically spoke, not trying to be rude, it was just K.O. being K.O. thinking of others more than himself as always.

"Thanks for telling me, Dendy. I'm on my way," Enid hung up afterwards. She was about to reactivate the ring Garren gave her, thinking she could catch this power thief at a later date, until she cast one last gaze to the area she had been spying on.

"...No way," the high-Level ninja blinked, noticing somebody at the power box. There was no way the criminal could show up right when she needed to get to her son. "I feel unlucky today," Enid growled. The person broke the cover for the protective casing and hooked up

several cables attached to a bag, carrying several special batteries. That was enough proof for her. Enid pulled out a shuriken, aimed, and threw it.

"...Hm? Why isn't it working?" the thin young man mumbled aloud. The batteries did not begin to charge like they usually would. He looked down at their pack. The cables connected to it had been sliced in two by the shuriken.

"Don't suppose you'd be willing to give up without a fight?" Enid spoke up to get his attention, stepping out from her hiding place. The perpetrator's tool was cut apart by her shuriken to make sure he did not steal another drop of power.

"Darn it... knew I was pushing my luck tonight," he spoke aloud, sounding more bothered than actually threatened by her presence. "You with P.O.I.N.T.?" he turned around. He was young, had black hair and looked like more of a punk. If Enid didn't know any better, she would be worried about him being in turbo mode.

"Sort of," Enid responded. She may be a real hero, but her desire to join P.O.I.N.T. was not as strong as others. She had a dear friend coming to mind that she made a note to check up on later.

"Well, I'm in no mood to fight right now. So, think you can just pretend you didn't see anything?" he requested. As much as Enid really wanted to say yes right now, she knew he was not a simply misguided teenager. Leaving the criminal to his own devices would only end in more theft.

"Yaaaah, nope," Enid stretched her legs, ready for battle. The young man began rummaging around in his bag.

"You're just like my mom. No fun, all stress," he grumbled, and then pulled out two metallic triggers. At first, Enid felt her heart stop momentarily, thinking he had brought a bomb. Except when he hit the buttons on top of the triggers, two large metallic gauntlets wrapped around his fists and wrists. Enid let the relief hit her that there was at least no bomb. "My name's Thunder Fist. Hope you don't value your teeth," Thunder Fist grinned. Enid shook her head.

"If you want to make it harder for yourself, then so be it," Enid tapped her foot against the ground, her leg lighting ablaze. "But when I'm done with you, you'll be crying for your mommy," she grinned.

Thunder Fist suddenly bolted up to her with unexpected speed. She ducked under Thunder Fist's wide swing. He hit the tree behind her in its place, breaking off a large chunk of wood, as well as scorching it with his electricity.

Enid quickly gathered what it was he was gathering power for now, it was just to amp himself up, like some pseudo glorb-esque system. She attempted high kicking her opponent in the jaw only for him to catch it with his gauntlets.

Enid yelped, feeling her leg shoot out a shockwave of pain from impacting metal. These metal boxing gloves were a lot tougher than most robots she tore apart. She kicked him in the

chest, sending Thunder Fist back a few feet to get some breathing room between one another.

"How about this then?!" Enid jumped up, swinging several kicks in the air, shooting waves of fire bolts at her enemy. Thunder Fist punched through the first few, though by the time the barrage ended, the ninja was suddenly right behind him.

"*What-!?*" the criminal had two handfuls of shuriken thrown at him. He was able to guard against most of them, yet some cut him all over, scattering the shuriken all over the area around them.

"That's the problem with you heroes. None of you know how to finish something quickly!" Thunder Fist declared. Enid didn't have a chance to react before he charged at her. She put up her guard, but his punch to her guarded face shoved her across the ground.

"You want it finished fast?" Enid gained a toothy smirk, while quickly getting up. The metal gauntlet clad thief noticed her holding another several shuriken in her hands wrapped around her fingers. He put up his guard, expecting another hail of projectiles. "Then I'll give you a quick finish!" Enid yanked back the many shuriken, which were all connected on invisible wires. They all wrapped around Thunder Fist, wrapping them together in one tight bundle.

"You think this'll hold me?!" Thunder Fist growled, though each time he struggled against the restraints, the many shuriken dug into him. The young ninja plunged the ninja stars in her hand into the ground, sticking them there like nails.

"Sorry, but you *REALLY* got me in a bad mood," Enid tutted. Her legs lit on fire. She began to charge for him. Thunder Fist could not escape. She high kicked him in the jaw, launching him into the air. Enid hurriedly ran off and bounced off the nearby walls, one after another, launching into the air high above him.

The power thief went wide eyed in horror, seeing her figure practically shimmering in the afternoon sun.

"**Cauldron eruption!**" Enid came soaring down, landing a devastating dropkick to her opponent's chest, sending the both of them into the ground, causing an eruption of flames to burst out around them from the shuriken's impact sights.

Enid took a moment to stand up straight after the attack. "*Ahh...* feels good when I get to do something with both my ninja and magic skills," Enid stretched. The criminal laid behind her, bound, unconscious and heavily burned. She stepped over to him, picking up one of the many ends of the bindings. "Alright, time to take you to Garren," she insisted to the already knocked out thief. She had to get back to the Neutral Zone immediately so she could get to her son.

Enid tried to activate the ring. "Teleport please," she aimed at the ground. However, nothing happened. She blinked, worriedly slipping the ring of her hand and looking at it. "Oh, crap! I forgot to take it off before the fight!" Enid gasped. The ring was broken. A dozen cracks ran all throughout it from when she blocked one of Thunder Fist's punches. Now she had no fast way back to Neutral Zone.

"Great... guess we're going to take the long way home," Enid grumbled. She began dragging the power thief behind her, irritated. She hoped her son would be alright by himself a while longer, but she doubted his panic attack would subside on its own. "And that's *IF* Garren doesn't kill me for breaking a rare ring," Enid held her head with her free hand. There was no way her luck could possibly get any worse.

Dendy and K.O. had spent a most of the afternoon at the plaza. The young hero worked his job the best of his ability, though it became increasingly harder for him as his anxiety increased.

"You can stop now today if you want, little buddy," K.O. heard. He looked up and saw the Level 7 Radicles. He'd become content in his job at the bodega, though after Carol died Mr. Gar more or less shut down. The alien had become the assistant manager now. Rad was happy with it, but not the circumstances with which it happened.

"S-sorry, Rad. I just... don't want you to have to handle everything by yourself just because I'm scared and Mommy couldn't show up," K.O. apologetically spoke. Rad patted his back reassuringly.

"I told ya, little buddy, you don't have to worry about making up for her. We have a few rotating part timers now, remember?" the near adult alien reminded him. When Enid took a step away from this job, downgrading it to a part time role, they had several small part timers rotating in and out with each other each day while she was gone.

"Thank you for being understanding, Radicles. It is much appreciated," Dendy told him as she helped K.O., feeling his partially quivering body when doing so.

"I owe K.O. a lot and he's more than earned it," Rad stated. The young alien still had trouble believing how much had changed in the last few years. One event reshaped a lot of their lives from whatever path they were once on. "Maybe you two should go for ice cream. I'll keep an eye out for Enid for you," the assistant manager offered to them. He couldn't stand whenever the young boy got like this. It was like a far worse case of PTSD, according to Dendy.

"You have my gratitude, Rad..." Dendy thanked him. She had tried calling Enid several times since she initially informed her of what was going on with K.O. There was no answer since then, which made her anxiety raise in itself.

"Thanks, Rad," K.O. simply squeaked out, trying his best to remain calm. He left with his classmate to go get that ice cream, though once they were gone from the bodega, the alien sighed.

"I know he was a momma's boy, but wow... Enid must be doing a really golden job at being his mom if he's that attached to her," Rad spoke to himself, though admittedly, he found it adorable. He just doubted he would ever get used to seeing friends go from being like family to actually being family.

Rad worked on restocking the many shelves. A lot of the health potions had been selling out like crazy lately and stocking anything in glass was always annoying. Rad felt himself

beginning to drift off as he worked, and the memories drove to the forefront of his mind.

That day had to be the top of the mountain when compared to the week they had spent searching for K.O., that in itself was a nightmare. The young alien was just arriving to the hospital, barely parking straight as he got out of his van in a hurry.

The Level 4 stockroom worker got to the third floor's waiting room of the hospital. So many people were hurt recently, and so it was nearly jam packed.

"Rad! Over here!" Enid's voice caught his ears. The teenage alien went over, trying to keep a straight face, despite his severe worry overwhelming him. He saw Enid, with Dendy seated beside her.

"Enid where's- oh jeez! What happened to you?!" Rad stared at the heavily bruised girl. Both of her arms had wrapping on them. The ninja was obviously in quite some discomfort from the pain as well, she was tolerating it.

"She's suffering from stress fractures in both arms from K.O.'s assault... she'll be fine as long as she does not over-exceed her limits," Dendy explained. Enid was given medical aid immediately when she came through the front doors carrying K.O., having gotten the worst of his assault when she decided to take the hits instead of dodging them.

"It's nothing, Dendy," Enid said in a tone that implored their genius friend to not describe her injuries in full detail.

"K.O. got you too, huh? You got it way worse than I did, that's for sure," Rad commented. He still had some pain in his back from when he got smashed through two shelves a week ago by K.O. "But you found him?" he asked, with hope in his voice. His friends' expressions held nothing but uncertainty.

"Yeah... K.O., or T.K.O., or maybe both, they had been rampaging around all of Neutral Zone for the last week," Enid nodded, thinking it was irrelevant to whether which half of K.O. was causing the damages, since she assumed that they both took Carol's death horribly.

"We've been waiting for one of the doctors to grant us permission to visit K.O., they would not let me back there despite my intelligence due to my age," Dendy replied. Rad took a seat by them, feeling his own lack of energy catching up with him.

"I'm just happy to hear he's alive..." the stockroom worker let out a sigh, relieved. He had worried that K.O. might have actually fought to the point of death from challenging the wrong opponent or such.

"Are you okay though, Rad? You look as bad as I feel," Enid asked, he looked more tired than they did comparatively speaking.

Rad gave a hesitant nod with a forced smile gracing his face. "Well... I've kind of only gotten two days of sleep in the last week," the Level 4 alien confessed. Most of his days and nights

were spent trying to find their tiny friend. The only times he slept were in his van, not for too long of times either.

"It appears we all sacrificed our own health in this search endeavor," Dendy commented. No one had to say so to know that was true. Things began to become awkwardly silent from that point forward.

Their waiting was tense and felt like an eternity. At last a doctor stepped out the door and approached them.

"Are you with these two?" the medical expert asked. Rad nodded.

"How's K.O. doing?" Dendy requested. The doctor motioned them to follow him into the ward.

"Do you know of any relatives we can call for him? We tried getting ahold of his emergency contact, but she never picked up," the doctor explained. They were aware he was talking about Carol in that regard.

"His mom died last week. That's what started this. Plus, none of us exactly have a clue where his dad is," Enid answered. They knew who K.O.'s dad was, but they had no means of contacting him since his base got destroyed. They heard he and K.O.'s technical sister, Fink, were rebuilding some place new. That was it though.

"Could ask the Boxmore bots about it if we need to," Radicles pointed out. He hated to rely on their former rivals, however Boxman was far closer with K.O.'s father than his own robotic children.

"Can we focus on K.O. for now?" Dendy demanded. The doctor was wasting so much of their time that her usual monotone expression was lost, and a tone of contempt was in place.

"Right, right... yes, your friend's right in here," the medical expert guided the three to the fifth room. The sight of their young friend terrified each of them.

"*Holy blorp...*"

"Oh gosh!"

"I have no phrase to express my horror at this."

K.O. lied in the hospital bed, fast asleep, with restraints on his wrist and ankles keeping him attached to the bed and multiple IVs attached to his left arm.

"Given the circumstances, the fact he is alive is a miracle alone," the doctor's joking comment gained him three sets of angry eyes, the heroes barely held themselves back. Dendy wound up going into the room to get to her friend's bedside. "*I-I didn't mean it like a bad thing...*" the physician coughed, feeling his own fear. He treated heroes often enough that it was not unusual to have a few anger prone heroes. It did not make it hurt any less though when that did happen.

"Then what did you mean?" Radicles demanded while crossing his arms, feeling like he had just found K.O. on his own near-death bed. It really tore into his heart from this.

"When she brought in your friend there, his body was beginning to shut down from constant exhaustion and stress," the doctor explained, "He hadn't eaten or drank in that week probably. He was surviving off merely adrenaline... So, when he began to calm down, subsequently his body stopped producing adrenaline. Now his organs are trying to give up. The second that happened, he started dying."

Enid looked mortified. She wound up falling against the nearby wall. "*I... that means I-I killed K.O.?*" the Level 5 ninja could not believe it. She insisted on not moving until he stopped crying and went quiet in her arms. She thought he had simply finally tired himself out. K.O. had begun essentially dying during that. She nearly broke down on the spot upon this revelation.

"Don't be ridiculous, Enid!" Rad insisted that she had no reason to blame herself. If Enid had not found K.O. as soon as she did, he might have died with no other chance otherwise. The alien looked to the doctor for help in comforting the teenage cashier.

"*We...* won't know how he will do unless we get a response from the medicine in the next day or two. Otherwise, he is partially comatose for the time being. But again, given the circumstances, there is a slim chance that he'll bounce back, and we have to keep him strapped to the bed for his own safety," the doctor left on that note, not able to give any concrete reassurance, he clearly was withholding himself from telling them to expect the worst. It did not take a genius to understand that if nothing changed for K.O.'s condition in the next two days, he would in all likelihood die.

Rad did not know what to say, he heard a choked sob. Looking back to Enid and seeing her sat on the floor against the wall with her knees against her chest and face buried into her hands, knowing K.O. might die from her prioritizing comforting him instead of getting him to a hospital sooner ruined her.

"Enid, come on. Look, everything will be okay! It's K.O.! He's able to handle anything!" the Level 4 alien tried to comfort her. The young boy had helped them all and taken his fair share of injuries. However, this was something entirely different. Not something from battle. Just simply refusing to eat, drink and always fighting for a week straight. Not even T.K.O. could have withstood that.

"*R*-Rad, if he dies... *I*-It'll be my fault, because I didn't stop him from leaving the bodega... *B*-because I didn't find him sooner, what kind of hero can't even find one missing kid?!" Enid couldn't imagine this. First Carol, now K.O. Both of them dying so soon from one another, she couldn't bear the thought nor emotional burden that came from her self blame. Her voice was getting lost in the ever-increasing sobs, the alien stockroom worker felt terrible seeing her blame herself for stuff that was nowhere near even in her control.

Rad could see Dendy by K.O.'s bedside, holding one of his hands with both of hers. The alien knew this was going to be one of the most painful moments in their lives. The only thing he could think to do to try and comfort Enid was by giving her a tight hug.

"Don't worry, Enid... you know how stubborn K.O. is. He'll never give up like that," Radicles spoke. He received no response from Enid. He kept the embrace up, understanding why she was upset. He did not want to imagine life if their little friend, who brightened the moods of everybody in the plaza's, ended up joining his mother in death's embrace. He hated to imagine that maybe that was what K.O. might have partially desired himself.

"**Rad!** Hey, Rad!" Enid's voice snapped Radicles out of his recollecting daydream. He saw her, exhausted and sore.

"Jeez, Enid, where've you been? You look bad," Rad saw her battered and bruised body. He figured she had been fighting for a full day and night with how that looked.

"I know, I know... I tried to get here as fast as I could, I had to drag an idiot all the way to the Neutral Zone from Neo-Riot City and deal with my boss's lecture for breaking the ring he gave me for the job," Enid explained, looking far beyond angry at the avalanche of bad luck she had over one small moment of forgetfulness. "So where's K.O.?"

"I let him off early so Dendy and him could go get ice cream. Maybe you should take a second to rest. You look like you're about to pass out," Rad offered.

"Sorry, but K.O. needs me right now. Thanks for watching him and sorry for missing out on work today I'll be here tomorrow," Enid thanked their close friend. He did not get to say anything else before she left to go find her son and his classmate.

"Sheesh... this place'd be really screwed if the Boxmore bots hadn't stopped their attacks," Rad murmured to himself. He was not mad at his friends but defending the bodega by himself against large robot armies was not a reassuring thought. Thankfully, most of Boxman's children had went off to lead their own lives. Their father lost his desire to conquer the plaza when Mr. Gar vanished.

K.O. and Dendy were seated at a small bench, trying to enjoy their ice cream. It helped the young boy calm down somewhat, but distractions never tended to last long. The genius kappa therefore preferred to use talking as a means to distract him.

"May I inquire as to why you don't wish to inform Enid about your nightmare changing?" Dendy blurted out the question she had been pondering all day, as she did most often whenever he started to break down. The debate on whether to tell his mother without his consent was another debate in her head.

"*W*-Why? It's the same in every way, just... now with Enid... *I*-I mean mom, instead of Carol," K.O. caught himself, having trouble keeping his words straight without fumbling over himself. Dendy could tell he was torn between what to refer to Enid. After all, she was his mother now.

"Even the smallest detail can mean a lot in a nightmare... it's quite remarkable you're able to remember them so thoroughly," the genius stated, unsure if it would aid his recovery. She figured K.O. needed to share any problem that he truly had, since handling it alone was not

working as he hoped. "It could be just your mental status is decreasing due to psychological troubles extending from..."

"Sorry Dendy, I can't keep up with your giant words today..." K.O. huffed. He wasn't the smartest kid out there. He liked Dendy a lot, but when she got too deep into her technospeak, it became impossible to keep up with her, even with his best efforts.

"Apologies," Dendy nodded, having tried to get a grip on taming her vocabulary for him to mixed results.

"K.O.!" they heard Enid and saw her appear from behind them, the young boy instantly becoming ecstatic.

"**Mommy!**" K.O. joyfully hopping over the bench, ran to her, leaped up and hugged her tight. The ninja gladly returned that embrace of his, not caring for her injuries throbbing sorely from how hard he was hugging.

"Sorry for being so late. I had a lot of setbacks at work," Enid apologized. K.O. rested his head on her shoulder, just happy to have her back. He was already beginning to calm down.

"It's alright... do you require medical attention?" Dendy offered.

"Nah. I'll be fine, I just need to eat," she shook her head. She missed lunch during work, caring more for her empty stomach rather than the her pains. The sun was already starting to set now. "Sorry again, Dendy... do you wanna spend the night at our place?" Enid offered, feeling bad that the genius young girl had to spend a lot of today taking care of K.O. after school.

"I'd be very grateful for that as long as I'm not imposing," Dendy nodded. She spent a fair few days out of every week at K.O. and Enid's home. She just liked being there more than just being home alone in her lab all the time.

"It's the least I can do to pay you back for all you've done for us... that and I could never say no to K.O.'s girlfriend," Enid reassured with that said they began to leave Lakewood Plaza Turbo.

"I just am glad to be of servic-... *girlfriend?*" Dendy paused. K.O. had not been paying attention, but Dendy could see a teasing grin on Enid's face. The genius developed a light crimson tone on her face fast. Enid always loved teasing the kappa like this.

Things remained quiet as they walked. The night began to encroach the area. K.O. was feeling far better already just by being in his mother's arms. Enid was relieved to know his breakdown had not been as bad as it usually tended to be, she took it as a good sign, optimism helped her a lot more than she ever thought it would that was certain.

Consolation

When the trio did arrive back to the small family's home, things had calmed down. K.O. felt far better already. Dendy was helping Enid with preparing dinner, while K.O. was cleaning up in the bathroom.

"Thanks for helping me, Dendy. I appreciate it," Enid spoke to her. She was never the best at cooking, though tried her best. It made the ninja a little annoyed when she had to go to her own mother for advice on that.

"It's my pleasure, Enid. It's the least I could do for you allowing me to reside here for the night," Dendy responded, while she laid out the dinnerware. The ninja decided it was the opportunity to bring up a question on her mind.

"So... K.O.'s nightmare has changed, huh?" Enid's words made the kappa pause briefly. Dendy was not surprised though. A ninja for a parent was naturally going to listen in one way or another, even if it was by accident.

"I had a feeling we were being watched while we ate our ice cream," the young genius sighed as she adjusted her goggles, unsure if she should feel relieved that Enid now knew or not, at least now K.O.'s request to keep it secret could be discarded.

"Sorry... I was worried about how bad K.O.'s breakdown was," Enid spoke. She always approached like that to see how to handle the situation, since each one tended to be far different from the last. Dendy thought it over briefly. She only wished for K.O. to be better, and thought the more information his adoptive mother had the more she could do to help.

"Yes. His nightmare changed indeed... I still am unaware to what the nightmare is. But I do know that Carol is no longer a part of it," Dendy began. Nobody really knew what this nightmare K.O. was always having exactly was in full detail. They only knew the ending of it. The young boy could never go through with telling them without breaking down at the first instance.

Enid stared, finding that shocking. "She isn't?"

"Indeed... She was replaced by you. Both in reality and in his mind. So, as result, it has affected his dreamscape to match," Dendy explained. The ninja hadn't a word to reply with. Things were awkwardly silent. "Forgive me for inquiring, but... I do have to ask if you are happy to be his mother, despite your lack of biological connections to each other." The young girl requested, more so for her own psychological gathering for K.O., it was understandable if she had only agreed to being his parent to save him from foster care.

"It's a lot more fulfilling than I ever expected it to be... I just hope he's happy to have me as his mom," Enid responded without hesitation. She never pictured herself as having children. Then she found herself content with having K.O. as a son figure. Back then they were simply co-workers and friends. Now, she couldn't be happier to be a mother.

"His psyche, and his reliance on you, proves how large his affection for you is," Dendy exclaimed, trying to sound reassuring, but her large vocabulary stunted that attempt. "I just don't understand why you insist on taking him to Carol's grave monthly... it seems counter-productive to his recovery," the kappa admitted. Her curiosity had mounted for the answer to that for a long time. She had tried to be polite, though she could not deny her mind's desires any longer since they were having a discussion on a serious topic to begin with, it seemed like the prime time to query for the answer.

"Because, Dendy... Carol may be dead, but she taught him most of what he lives by as a hero. I want him to remember her," Enid put the answer as simply as she possibly could. She knew K.O.'s brain was desperate to forcibly forget everything about Carol to avoid the pain it tended to cause. It didn't take a genius to figure that out either.

"I see..." Dendy did not know what else she could say. Her curiosities were satisfied, aside from wondering if Enid would try to teach K.O. any witchcraft or ninjutsu, though she had a feeling he inevitably would want to learn a little bit of both on his own accord.

"Don't you worry, Dendy. K.O. might be a little hardheaded, but he'll pick up on your signals. Just keep at it," Enid lightened the mood by focusing on Dendy's affection for K.O. The kappa began to become nervous and flustered.

"Is it really that obvious...?" Dendy sheepishly chirped. The Level 7 ninja patted her back.

"Very," Enid gave a toothy grin, happy to have learned more about what bothered K.O. currently at least, how to go about handling it was another issue entirely.

"Is everything okay?" K.O. caught their attention. He stepped out from the hallway to see the two.

"Yeah, dinner's just about done," Enid reassured nothing was wrong, letting the two preteens get seated at the table. Dendy tried to hide her embarrassment. K.O. looked back to his old self and eager to eat.

"Affirmative. Everything is perfectly fine," Dendy tried to hide her sheepishness, though that discussion with Enid made her memories refresh once more. It was hard to forget the time when K.O. was on death's doorstep. The incident was a common thing whenever the genius had a nightmare herself, she felt her mind drifting back to then as she began to eat.

Three days already had passed since K.O. had first been admitted into the hospital. Nothing changed at all. People came to visit and wished him the best, leaving flowers, get well soon cards and balloons. Enid, Rad and Dendy never really left. Mr. Gar. Though, refused to come. He couldn't consider being by another person's deathbed. Not after being beside Carol's while she slowly deteriorated to the end.

"So... this is what hopelessness feels like... I'm sorry I made you feel that way when testing you and T.K.O.," Dendy told the comatose K.O. Rad lay asleep on a nearby chair. Enid was out getting some air in this late night, after Dendy persisted.

The genius hero wished she could remain optimistic like the others. She did not believe thinking happily would magically make everything better. Not even science could help her dearest friend either.

Dendy heard the sounds of boots clacking against the floor. She looked over to the doorway, going slightly wide eyed upon seeing a familiar mouse. She recognized the long green hair that belonged to K.O.'s sister.

"Fink?" Dendy was surprised to see the mouse alone. She tended to be extremely clingy to her boss and father.

"Great. I was hoping nobody'd be here," Fink huffed, looking annoyed to even be in this area. It was clear that she had a façade going on.

"What are you doing here? Are you... here to pay your respects as well?" Dendy questioned. Fink and K.O. were siblings to an extent. His father had adopted the rat after all. Though the kappa hated her, since anytime the siblings did interact, it ended with K.O. somehow getting into trouble or cleaning up a mess on Fink's behalf. Yet the young boy never minded.

"Boss told me to come... He said he'll try to drop by later, but he's absorbing everything," Fink answered, walking to the opposite side of the comatose boy's bed. Prof. Venomous was their father, a hero turned villain. It was only natural that word of Carol's death inevitably reached him. Finding out what happened to K.O. then was easy, from her wording it was clear that he was taking it poorly as well, even if the two had not been together for quite some time.

Dendy was at least appreciative of the mouse keeping her usual vocabulary subdued, though doubted it was out of respect. More so forced by depression.

"I take it by your behavior, you're saddened by Carol's passing as well?" the genius kappa asked. Fink crossed her arms, glaring, though her intimidating stare wavered quite fast. Her gaze shifted to the floor.

"*It's no fair*," Fink complained, "He got to spend time with boss. Why didn't I get to spend time with his mom?"

"Priorities are not your strong suit, I take it?" Dendy rhetorically spoke. Fink was the definition of spoiled; she knew that much. Fink launched a death glare at her. Jealously was a terrifyingly lethal emotion.

"Take the lummo there and leave us alone for a few minutes," Fink commanded. Dendy initially wanted to punch her out of the room out of instinct, a voice in the back of her head screaming that this was a bad idea, but they would just be outside. There was nothing the small mouse could possibly do that they could not react to swiftly.

"Fine. Be informed I only do this because you are related to K.O.," Dendy huffed. She hated being ordered around like this, she was in no mood to argue. Dendy shook Rad. "Rad, wake up, we're leaving."

Rad mumbled upon being shaken awake. The kappa began to pull him off his seat.

"Where're we going, Dendy? Wait, was that Fink? What's going on?" Radicles's many questions got drowned out and ignored as the kappa closed the door behind them. K.O.'s technical sister waited momentarily before returning to his bedside. She took in a breath, unsure if she should treat this as a final goodbye or not to the boy she bullied.

"I hate you, and I hate that you stole boss's attention so much," Fink looked to K.O., who looked very peaceful ironically given the circumstances. "I hate myself more for what I'm about to do too, but... boss being happy is more important," she sighed as if fighting every character instinct inside her. She rummaged around through her inner pockets. "So I went rummaging through Boxman's old junk... guy's been inventing worthless slag for thirty years. Had to be one thing that was actually useful."

Fink pulled out a peculiar syringe. A high-tech syringe with an empty chamber below the liquid that was inside, though the age showed quite heavily. She had barely touched it up for the sake of the job at hand. "Having you owe me big is nice too," the green haired girl deviously smirked, rummaging around in her pockets again and pulling out a small glorb. She always had at least one of those glowing power spheres on her, but that was more so for battle.

Fink loaded the glorb into the empty chamber of the medical instrument. It was absorbed into the blue liquid fusing with it. Fink closed the chamber, the injection ready.

"Good thing you're asleep. This'll hurt," she leaned over his bed, bringing the syringe to his chest, gripping the handle tightly.

Dendy had rested a small camera on the television. She wanted to monitor K.O. whenever she had to be away from the hospital. Once she had turned it on, what the camera showed had shocked Rad, though Dendy was a little less surprised, but more had expected something like this to happen.

"Dude, should we stop her? What if she's...?!" Rad muttered as he and Dendy watched from outside the room, through the live feed from her backpack pulling up a virtual monitor.

"By all means, yes, we should, but clear desperation and fascination wants me to at least see this through," Dendy confessed. She hated to imagine Boxman's old long forgotten gadgets doing only harm and no good. She presumed he at least made some good creations, and whether it for himself or the sake of making money was up to debate for another day.

They heard the door open. Dendy quickly shut off the feed and the two pretended to act natural. Fink passed by them.

"Thanks for giving us privacy," Fink said, though struggling to hide a bitter tone.

"It was nothing. I suppose we'll see you again soon?" Dendy asked, presuming Fink would get Prof. Venomous to come to the hospital, since helping K.O. was a desperate attempt at making sure her boss stayed happy.

"Probably at his funeral," Fink ended the forced kindness there and stomped off, annoyed.

"Y'know, you should wake me up sooner when something important's going on," Radicles told Dendy.

"Affirmative," Dendy agreed, trying not to confess to having lost any real logical thought process to her emotions during Fink's visit.

Dendy felt her dip into her memories come to an end as she was helping K.O with washing the dishes. He looked quite happy now, as if that dozing off in class never happened.

The young kappa peered over to her dear classmate while he worked away on cleaning another plate. Enid was taking a shower, so the two had offered to handle cleaning up after dinner.

"You seem to be feeling far better, K.O.," Dendy commented. The Level 5 young boy nodded, definitely looking like his old self once again.

"Yeah... Guess I'm more worried whenever Enid goes off to work," K.O. admitted. He had no clue what his mother did for work, but it was obvious that it was far from safe, given her injuries that she usually had. The genius played oblivious on knowing that Enid essentially worked for P.O.I.N.T.

"I know about one method on how you can discover what it is she does," Dendy spoke up. Her crush's whole attention diverted to her instantly.

"You do, Dendy? How?!" K.O. begged for her to tell him. She wanted to, but by recalling Enid's advice, she got a devious smile on her face when an idea came to mind.

"It would require two major commitments on your part," the kappa began while they stood face to face in front of the now empty sink.

"**Anything!**" he nodded excitedly.

"The first thing is, if you want to know how to do it, I wish for you to agree to go on a date with me," the kappa straight forwardly stated the terms for telling him.

"Sure! *I*... a date? K.O.'s mind suddenly caught up with his mouth. He blinked a few times in uncertain surprise. He could see a very smug satisfied smile on his friend's face upon hearing the acceptance to her terms.

"Affirmative. One date, in trade for being told how to discover what Enid's primary source of income is," Dendy repeated. K.O. was very confused, though he gave a nod.

"Sure. A date sounds nice... but why me?" K.O. chirped. Being very oblivious he was to his friend's attraction to him. He got no direct answer for that. She was embarrassed slightly and had not planned to get this far, it made her happy nonetheless.

"Alright, so... there's one very easy way to get Enid to tell you what her new job is... you just have to tell her what your nightmare is in trade," Dendy declared.

K.O. lost the color in his face almost instantly. She didn't just say that. "I...I did tell her about my nightmare," he said, only to gain an unamused glare by her.

"No, you've withheld the contents of your nightmare from everybody. The only part anyone knows is the ending. She needs to know everything, and you indeed need to share it with somebody," Dendy elaborated further. K.O. inevitably had to overcome his own fear. As if his courage stat tanking in the last couple of years had not been proof enough of this.

"Y-you... I... really have to?" his expression begged for any other options. He would consider following his adoptive mother when she went to work, though he knew following a ninja would be impossible. He wouldn't keep up with her speed, not even counting the vast skill differences the two had.

"Indeed... don't worry. I'll handle all the proper preparations for the date tomorrow," Dendy insisted. She had no patience left for him being dominated by his fears. Talking about it would help immensely in his recovery. The date was just a bonus gamble in the dark for the kappa. "Remember. If you get afraid, just think about all of us... We're there for you, even if we can't always be around," Dendy then stepped down from the booster step they had been sharing to reach the sink. She walked away, wanting to get started on her homework, leaving K.O. standing there.

"...I'm really not acting like a hero lately, am I?" he mumbled. It was partially true. No hero would be constantly afraid of a nightmare, have anxiety attacks, or further troubles distracting them from the strongest desire in life to help protect lives.

K.O. breathed a long sigh. If only he could talk to Prof. Venomous again. Maybe he could help him find T.K.O. again. He made a mental note to try and talk to Fink about that later. They had contact with each other anyway. He went to his own bedroom to lay down a minute.

"I still dunno if I'm happy with my new life more than I was in my past life. Does that make me a bad guy?" K.O. mused. He loved his life with Enid as his mother. But he still missed Carol a lot. His head echoed wonders of what life would be like if she never died. He closed his eyes, resting his head on his pillow.

He still remembered hoping it was all a bad nightmare when he first woke up.

Everything felt achy to K.O. His eyes felt like they were being forced shut by the overwhelming exhaustion, though he missed that feeling pretty fast when the pain began to set in all over his body. The young hero opened his eyes after heavy fluttering, resisting the immense desire to go right back to sleep.

K.O. groaned. The light burned his eyes heavily for a moment until they adjusted to it. He realized he was in a hospital room. He saw the many cards, flowers and gifts lying on the table, as well as the rest of the room.

K.O. tried to reach for one of the closest cards, though he realized he was restrained when his arm refused to move past a certain point. Normally he could break out of things like that easily, though with how low his energy was at the moment, he couldn't snap this bind.

K.O. groggily mumbled. He felt so awful. His memories of how he ended up here was not even working with him. He focused as hard as he could, concentrating in creating one power fist. It was small and wrapped around his arm like a glove, but it expanded the restraint enough to let him slip his arm out afterwards.

"*Finally...*" the aspiring young hero smiled. He reached up and took the card in front of him. Opening it to read it. His sight improved further the longer he stayed awake.

"Hope you get well soon. If it hadn't been for you I would still be horribly shy. Okay, I'm still shy, but nowhere near as much as I used to be – Shy Ninja"

K.O. recognized her. She was one of the many regulars at the plaza he had helped. He picked up another card out of curiosity.

"I'm sorry about all that's happened to you K.O. You are the sweetest boy I've ever known and I hope it stays that way. I know hospitals suck. I've been here a million times. But once you get out, I'll take you for ice cream. – Punching Judy"

K.O. smiled a little brighter. His old babysitter and one of Carol's best friends.

"...Mom..." K.O. suddenly had his memory reignited. His mom was dead, it all started coming back to him fast. He felt his body go limp again, it was a lot more clear he had accepted what had happened by now while unconscious, though his right arm bumped someone, and he heard a mumble.

"Enid?" the bodega cleaner saw his dear friend beside him asleep, leaned back on the nearby chair. Dozens of cards were set around her.

"Enid? *Hey...* Are you okay?" he asked, noticing her bandaged arms, many bruises and scrapes. He wondered if he had done all that to her in a fit of emotional rage.

"*Wuh?*" Enid opened her eyes, and they instantly went wide upon seeing him awake.

"K.O.? *A-am* I dreaming again?" Enid asked, feeling his hand. She had suffered so many taunting dreams like this.

"*Di...* did I hurt you that badly?" K.O. looked apologetic, and as always, that cute face of his expressed worry for everyone who wasn't him.

He was pulled into a tight hug by her, causing the many cards to get knocked down to the floor. The young hero felt a damp wetness on her face. "Enid? *A-are* you crying?"

"*O-of* course I am! We all thought you weren't going to wake up!" Enid answered, tightening her hug on her dear friend. Rad and Dendy left when the ninja insisted that Rad needed to go get some real sleep, and the kappa couldn't keep missing school or sacrificing her sleep schedule for K.O. They would know the second he woke up.

"*W-why's that? Was I sick?*" K.O. queried. The bodega cleaner was thankful for the affection, but his back was starting to hurt from how hard she was hugging him.

"Don't worry about it... you were just really tired," Enid laughed a little. She still blamed herself for her young friend nearly dying. She spent every night reading him the ever increasing amount of cards that the dozens of visitors had left for him, like reading a bedtime story. She had no clue if he could hear her or not, she did it to make sure he at least heard everyone's goodbyes before he died.

"*Mom really is gone, isn't she...*?" K.O. wanted to ask, when he tried his voice was weak. He had hoped to all that was good he had dreamt all that, but there was no point in trying to resist the reality of it.

"I'm sorry, K.O.... Her funeral already happened," Enid confessed. She had hoped he would wake up in time for the funeral. Sadly, he had missed it by two days during his comatose state. It was an honorable funeral held by P.O.I.N.T. itself since Carol died in the line of duty. The ninja still could not believe how many people had showed up to it.

"*I... don't think I could have gone, even if I was awake...*" K.O. confessed, feeling bad for it. Saying goodbye was never a strong point of his. This was the kind of situation where he was forced to bid them farewell. He couldn't just face it.

"Don't worry, K.O. I'm sure she understands," Enid reassured. She wanted to change topics to something more light-hearted, instead of focusing on the source of this massive domino effect of a living hell the world had seemingly become in the last couple of weeks. "The Boxmore bots dropped by this morning."

"They did?" K.O. was surprised. Enid got up, going over to the many flowers that had been left, rummaging through them and pulling out a small wrapped present.

"They told us to give you this when you woke up," Enid handed the present over to K.O. afterwards, beginning to help remove the bed restraints from him since he was remaining quite calm thankfully, it seemed T.K.O. was under control for the moment.

K.O. took the present, unsure if he should be scared of this. He felt like a gift from a villain was more or less a trick. Nonetheless, he began to open it, taking off the top. "*Ohhhh*," his eyebrow raised, he pulled out and looked over a tiny adorably made doll of himself, with several more peace vouchers attached to the hand by a small band. There was also another note amongst them.

"We know we're bad guys, but we really appreciate that you treat us the same no matter what. Hope you get well soon," Enid read it out loud for him. It had the usual Boxmore Industries logo stamped beneath it, but with signatures from all of Boxman's children beneath it. (And a tread mark from Jethro, as well as a metal paw-print from their family pet.)

"I didn't know they could make dolls," K.O. was amazed by it, he was also so happy. Boxman's family had a lot of skills, some they didn't even know about themselves until they tried. Enid was glad to see him smiling again. She had to confess how strange it was to see Boxman and his own children pay a visit. It just went to show how K.O. didn't care about

good or evil. He helped everybody whom he could see needed it. "Could you ask them to come back tomorrow?" the low-Level hero requested. His dear friend ran a hand through his hair.

"Let's make sure you're better enough first," Enid nodded, assuring they would come back on their own once they heard he was better. "Take it easy I'm going to go let the doctors know you're up again and I'll go grab you some food. You have to be starving," she stood up and stretched.

K.O. nodded, cuddling the plush of himself close for comfort. "Thanks, Enid... for everything."

She simply gave a nod and a smirk before leaving the room, letting K.O. enjoy his presents. She had to let everyone know he was fine right away.

K.O. was suddenly awoken from his small nap. He groaned as if his body had forced him awake again in disagreement for going to bed early. He rubbed his eye sorely as he got out of his bed and staggered to get a drink of water before trying to go back to sleep.

As he passed through the living room, he saw his mother laid on the couch, watching television casually. She noticed him quite fast.

"Oh hey, honey. Did you have another nightmare?" Enid worriedly sat up. Whenever he went to bed early, it tended to be a bad sign for how exhausted he'd get some days. The nightmares did not help his matters either.

"No, I was thirsty... where's Dendy?" K.O. asked, hoping his close friend had not gone home so late in the night by herself.

"I let her have my bed for the night so she could be comfy," Enid claimed. The genius kappa had been very enthusiastic tonight for some reason. She had no clue why though.

K.O. came over to his adoptive mother, taking a seat on the couch by her. He paused for a moment, remembering what Dendy had told him after dinner.

"Something on your mind K.O.?" Enid questioned, seeing that pondering expression on his face. It usually meant he was overthinking something, or he was hesitating with asking about an important matter that he could not decide whether or not to handle himself.

"Mommy, I... I want to try and tell you about the nightmare again..." K.O. forced the words past his vocal chords.

"R-really?" his adoptive mother stared in surprise, "What made you want to do this?" she asked. She hadn't encouraged him to do any of this. It was a pleasant surprise.

"Because I... want to know what your job is, and Dendy was right when she told me I can't keep being afraid and hope everyone will wait for me," K.O. stated, not even trying to hide that. He knew his adoptive parent had been lying about what her primary job was to him for

one reason or another, and he wanted to know it as much as she wanted to know what went on within his head to give him such terror. It was a fair trade, all things considered.

"You shouldn't force yourself to do anything you think you aren't ready to do, K.O.," Enid tried to tell him. K.O shook his before looking to her with that familiar fear in his eyes.

"I-I want to do it for you... please," he begged after another momentary pause. The young mother pulled him closer to her giving him a gentle hug.

"Alright, K.O.... give it your best shot," Enid insisted. K.O. felt a lot calmer just by feeling her heartbeat against his. He nodded and swallowed hard, trying to gather his bravery and nerve.

"Well, it always starts like everything is normal... I get invited to go on a mission with you..." K.O. began retelling the nightmare, doing the best he could to. "Everything starts off fine. We do great, me, you and Rad. We get a party thrown for us and everything... then we just... we just..." K.O. whimpered. That fear was returning to him.

Enid wrapped her arms around him to give a comforting embrace. "We...?"

"I-I don't know," whimpered her son, trying to fight back tears, "Someone screaming that we-we didn't save anybody... th-that all we did was just scare off the bad guy and didn't stop them. Everyone was getting mad."

"Mhm... go on?" Enid reassured. K.O. nodded. This was the farthest he had gotten to retelling his nightmare until he'd shut down from emotional stress. Not this time though.

"They attack us. Rad tries to talk to them, but he's knocked out so fast, then the other heroes we were working with start getting beaten down one by one," K.O. swallowed again, "They start getting weapons... they tell us we were worse than the bad guy and wanted to punish us for letting him to escape. One tries to get me... I'm too slow, and don't notice until a knife's an inch away from me," he felt his voice beginning to give away as he stopped there, feeling the tears getting stronger.

"...Then I shove you out of the way and take the blade for you?" Enid guessed. She had only heard the ending of the nightmare from him before once a while back. She was not seeing the reason this nightmare was so frightening before or after she took the fatal role Carol once had. She wondered if it was the detail of the nightmare that was truly terrifying.

"Ye... yeah... Your side g-gets cut open and... and all I can do is hold you... you keep telling me it'll be okay until... you die," K.O. whimpered out. The blood running between his fingers trying to help her in his nightmare. The cold and violent attitude of the furious crowd, and all the pain, all felt so real.

"K.O., I'm sorry... it's just a bad dream. You shouldn't be scared of something that'll never happen," Enid stated presuming he was done, he looked to his adoptive mother while biting his lip.

"I-I'm sorry, mommy. Just... that wasn't the ending though... it's what I do after that scares me," he claimed, making her raise an eyebrow. He had sworn for the longest time that had been the ending to the nightmare, whenever someone inquired within it. She wondered what this part he kept secret was, since so far this nightmare did not sound too bad.

"Well... what happens then?" Enid insisted. K.O. should keep going while he had the strength. She hated to put him through something she knew would result in a panic attack, but it was what he wished to do.

"I-I... I force T.K.O. to make P.K.O. with me, so I... so I can..." K.O. felt his voice lock up, "So I can *kill* everybody."

His adoptive mother stared in shock. She would never have expected this. Her or Carol dying in the nightmare was one thing. But to hear that the thing that truly made K.O. afraid was himself, this was a whole other level of nightmare.

"T.K.O. even tries to stop me... but I don't listen. I just keep forcing him into this... Bodies all around me, blood was everywhere... I didn't care if they were near us when that riot started or not. I wanted them all gone," K.O. repeated his thought process from the nightmare. It was like watching himself out of his own body. It was like when T.K.O. did take over, but this was far worse in any regard to him. "I remember it all so well that... that when I wake up, I-I can't forget it at all. It just feels so real... The worst part was, the entire time... I was happy to be doing it."

Enid needed a second to process it. She realized the nightmare did not come from the death of his mother or fear of similar happening to his adoptive parent. They certainly planted the seed that formed into said nightmare yes, but it was his actions that followed it that instilled horror in him. K.O. even wondered if T.K.O. vanishing like he did had something to do with the traumatic dream.

There was nothing short of silence for a minute. Enid let K.O. stay nuzzled against her. She could feel his body beginning to tremble. She finally understood. She was unsure if she should be happy or not to finally know the source of that repeated horror he suffered so often.

"You'd never do that K.O.... And I know you know that too," Enid ran her hand through his hair. K.O. looked up to her with that familiar terror in his eyes. "You're scared of what'd happen next... and truth be told, you'll probably never know."

Her son could not say anything more. It took everything he had to tell the full story, and even then, it was very loosely detailed. Enid knew what it felt like to not be able to tell what happened next in a scenario. Most villains she dealt with at her job left her wondering that.

"But that doesn't mean you have to be scared of what could happen next. You might have the answer someday, or never. T.K.O. might have it for you when we do get him back," assured Enid, being honest. She did not want to imagine her son without his technical twin for the rest of his life. Although T.K.O. fell radio silent after Carol's passing, he still had to be around within his head. Her son would be lacking half of his powers without him otherwise, and he had all of his strength still.

"Re...really, mommy?" K.O. wondered aloud.

"Mhm," Enid nodded and gave a comforting smile. "So... you ready to hear what I do for work?"

"Yeah..." K.O. slowly nodded. She kept stroking his back to comfort him.

"Well, I sorta work for P.O.I.N.T. now," she said, straight forward and blunt.

K.O. stared at her in awe. She had to wipe his cheeks somewhat since they were damp from recounting his nightmare. But that look of terror was replaced by whimsical awe. "You do?! *W*-when did that happen?!" the young hero wondered why he never knew, though guessed his mother had just been worried about making his anxiety worse since Carol had died during a mission for them. The ninja did not want to make her adopted son worry every time she went to work that similar might happen to her as well.

"About a year ago they started a new program. Basically, retired heroes act as mission assigners for lower-level heroes, giving them the jobs that they think are too easy for the higher leveled," Enid began explaining.

"Who gives you your missions mom?!" K.O. asked, even more excited. She loved seeing him so energetic over something so simple, that's what happened with every hero he idolized.

"Old Man Garren does," Enid's answer made her son gasp.

"Garren? The gem mage Garren?!" K.O. could not believe it.

"Ohh yea," hummed Enid, "He's grumpy, but sweet. And he sure loves showing off his magic."

"Will you take me to meet him one day?" K.O. almost begged. Enid was just happy that he was taking the news of her working for P.O.I.N.T. so well.

"Tomorrow's a Saturday... Yeah, I'm sure he'd appreciate a surprise visit from us," Enid decided, Garren always went on about wanting time alone to work in peace, but she had seen through that lie after a couple of missions working for him. Though Enid noticed a slightly disappointed look on her son.

"I-I dunno if I can go tomorrow... I have to take Dendy on a date," K.O. admitted. He didn't forget he had to do so as part of the agreement now that he knew where Enid worked.

"So, she finally made progress with you, huh?" Enid stifled a giggle, though paused when getting a confused look from her son. "Well congratulations, honey... don't worry. There's always Sunday," she assured.

"Okay," he nodded, gaining a smile again. Things quieted down between them as K.O. laid on her chest, wanting to rest.

"Say, K.O.... Are you happy that I'm your mom?" Enid broke the silence, just feeling his embrace on her tighten slightly.

"I love you a lot mommy, I miss Carol sometimes... Sorry..." he answered. He loved Enid with all his heart and fought with himself a lot in the first few months of their new relationship to override his vocabulary into actually referring to her as his own mother, the guilt mainly came from that constant internal conflict. He still had trouble keeping names straight sometime's.

"K.O., I'd be more worried if you didn't miss her, it's natural!" Enid reassured. She took him to Carol's grave monthly for a reason. Him not missing someone who had such a large role in his life at one point would be far more concerning.

"Are you happy that I'm your son?" K.O. decided to ask back.

Enid nodded. "You're the best part of my life, K.O., and don't you forget it."

K.O. was happy to hear. He did worry often about not being a good son to her. The atmosphere in the room lightened up. The two's talk had really helped each other with their thoughts.

It did not take long for K.O. to fall asleep. He had seemingly emotionally exhausted himself from the stress of tonight. He was snoring away with his head resting on his mother's chest as they lay on the couch. The ninja stared at the ceiling.

"Y'know... I don't think I've ever actually told you how I did become your mom..." Enid suddenly thought. All K.O. knew was that he got adopted and taken in by her and her parents, a short time after getting out of the hospital, until she got a place of her own. "Guess that's something for another day," she sighed, doubting he needed to hear about his biological Father on top of everything else. Today had been exhausting enough. She simply closed her eyes, stating to drift off to sleep with a content smile. She was glad K.O. was at least getting better, even if it was a slow process. Today was a big step in that recovery. She whispered one last thing.

"Goodnight, Peanut... I love you."

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