A simple blade of grass, that was all that Keno saw. But he knew better than anyone how distrustful the eye could be. It was the same principle that humans had against his kind, he chuckled and squirmed at that, his people. He’s never had people, not from what he remembers. He’s had the random stranger who would pop into his life and help him out. Give him a place to rest his head and give him a meal, but that was it. Most people looked at him and immediately fled to the other side of the street. At first, Keno always assumed it was because he was different because he was a mutant and everyone who seemed to run from him, humans. But then he realized that mutants don’t walk around with a big M on their chest or stamped on their forehead. And he didn’t have any mutations. No, his only physical mutation was his scruffy hair, disheveled clothing, and the dirt that caked too him like dried up paint. And that seemed to be enough to keep others away.

Keno’s attention snapped back to the item in his hand. He had a horrible tendency of letting his mind wander, whether at the most inopportune time or not. He swivels the blade back and forth, focusing before holding out the ball in his hand. One thing Keno had learned, being on your own gave one plenty of time to hone one’s skills. He discovered he had such gifts only because of an emotional response. He watched as an entire group of people was shot down, and their killers cared none. They grabbed what they had come for and then ran away. Keno followed them, curious as to why they had done such deeds. It was when he heard them laughing, mocking and reliving the screams of those that they had killed that Keno had paused. At that age, which wasn’t much younger than he was now, Keno was not intelligent. He knew enough to survive and barely that. But he was brave and curious, a duo that could extend or end one’s life reasonably quickly.

Keno walked up to the group, asking blatantly why they had chosen to kill the people. The men answered but didn’t seem to care much for the street orphan. They answered simply, ‘because they had things we wanted, and because we could.’ Keno next asked if they were mutants, having heard that mutants were the dirty rats that kept crime rampant. The group said no. Keno hardly remembers much after that, only that both anger, shock, and sadness had overtaken him. The world shifted in color, and he could feel his emotions surge out. Things began to change, and the men screamed. Keno remembers grasping something, swinging it back and forth. When he came back, feeling depleted and out of sorts, he was surrounded by dead bodies. That day still haunted him, not because he allowed himself to lose control, but because by his own hand he had brought the end of another's life. His powers allowed him to lose control and to no longer be responsible for his actions, and such thing sickened him. He never again wanted to feel out of control like that. To do that to another, no matter how much they deserved it.

He had half a mind to give the stuff back that day, but something told him to keep it for himself. The decision didn’t weigh on his conscience too much, his belly was full and his clothes better looking after he sold all the stuff off.

But, he did it again, didn’t he? Allow his mind to wander to another subject? He dropped the ball and looked around. Sitting here wasn’t doing him any good, he needed to figure out where his next meal was coming from, or where he would rest his head. Keno tied back his hair and stuffed his hands into his pocket, attempting to make himself look as average as possible. He made his way towards the busier part of the city, passing a slew of people as he went. No one cared much for the child walking amongst them, probably thinking he was just following a parent. Each person he passed received his full attention, his mind running through possibilities and scenarios. None of them were quite what he needed until he found the one.

The man stepped out of a taxi, screaming at someone on the phone as he barged pass everyone. His suit was crisp, and he had a certain air about him, an air that piqued the interest in Keno. Keno decided to follow him at a distance, stalking him like he had done so many others.

Living on the streets gave one little choice in criminal matters. Once upon a time, Keno actually strived to do what was right. To uphold the law, more so to make himself invisible than to show the government who cared so little for him, respect. But that changed when Keno realized that doing what was right did not feed an already empty belly. Returning purses and helping out random strangers gave him a smile and a hearty pat on the back. He used to revel in such things, never before had he been appreciated. A warm sensation would open up in his pit, making him squirm gleefully in place. But that warmth was extinguished quickly, leaving nothing but a nagging and dismayed feeling in its place. And thus, Keno’s life of crime was born.

But that was just it, Keno didn’t see it as crime, he saw it as survival. His parents, whoever they were, didn’t care to help him. And the so-called caring government surely wasn’t about to give him a helping hand. All they wanted to do was put cuffs on him, give him some card that was supposed to represent him, and then throw him in a rehabilitation center. It was a disgusting thought, to say the least.

Keno forced the thoughts from his mind, focusing back on his target. The stalking part was simple enough. He followed his mark just long enough to learn their basic mannerisms and how their life was. As soon as he collected his information, he took their shape. It was Keno’s second power, the ability to shapeshift, morph, whatever one wished to call it, into another human being. All Keno had to do was appropriately picture his target, an easy enough task when one had a photographic memory. Such memory was so keen that he wondered if it was a power as well. After that, he became the person.

Keno understood what this power could do, how far he could take it and all the astonishing things he could do. But he wasn’t there, or at least he didn’t care too. He just wanted a bed and some food. So usually after gaining a new face, he knocked out the person, hid them, and assumed their identity for that night. The next day he wore his face and went about his day, planning when he would need to do it again.

The man turned a corner, and Keno picked up his pace to keep up, hoping to quickly get this over and done with. The building that the man walked into was short of people. And for that, Keno was graceful. As the man headed towards the elevator, Keno waited to see what floor he would get off on. Turning he eyeballed the security officer that gave him a suspicious look, later entering a room off to the side.

Or perhaps a security guard will do. Keno sneered at the thought, hurrying after the man.

**One Week Later . . .**

The worst part for Keno was the moments where he felt the weight of loneliness. Watching as groups of friends passed by, laughing and celebrating whatever they had to celebrate. Couples doting on one another as they whispered sweet and delicate phrases to their partners. Keno fiddled with his fingers as one such couple passed by, the man laughing at whatever his partner had said.

He was used to this, sure. He sometimes even preferred this. But he would do anything for a companion sometimes. There was the time he almost gained one, but upon them learning he was a mutant, they believed it was better for them to go their own way. A choice that still weighed heavily on his shoulders. A voice in the back of his mind cursing what he was. And the other, well, that was one example he didn’t wish to use. Keno’s want for a companion was so great that he was blind to the manipulations of said person, and his blindness almost cost him. After that, he failed to see the need of a companion, but that didn’t make his want for one lessen.

As Keno’s mind wandered, his feet guided him down empty sidewalks. Nights such as these were the worst for him. Nights where he questioned his birth and lack of parents, lack of anyone but the orphanage caretakers. They did their best, he supposes, but the orphanage was overfilled, and he was a quiet young boy. So quiet that no one was the wiser when he finally slipped away.

“Watch where you’re going!” an angry voice suddenly said, pulling Keno from his thoughts. He realized that he had indeed run into someone. Five angry faces stare back at him, all looking him over with little respect.

“I apologize,” Keno replied, his mind in a daze and still trying to take a trip down memory lane.

“Get out of here before I make you sorry,” the boy growled, pushing him away viciously. Keno caught himself just in time, backing away but not taking his eyes off of the group. They were crowded around the entrance to a store, but the store was closing up. Keno knew the signs of a robbery, he’s seen far too many not too. And he was curious to see exactly how this would go down. He stayed close, watching as the young men entered the building. Shouts and screams went out and even from outside, Keno could feel the panic and fear that everyone inside wrestled with.

He didn’t move from his spot as the time went by, only perking up when the boys came out of the store, laughing and applauding themselves.

“Hey!” one of them called out, pointing at Keno. Keno immediately took off, his curiosity dead and his need to see another day, rising. He could hear them chasing him, commanding each other to get him and make him pay. Perhaps they thought him a snitch, or maybe it was just Keno’s unlucky day.

He turned a corner, coming across a large gate. He searched the ground, finding that only cement and brick rested nearby, no natural elements. Yea, it was definitely his unlucky day.

The boys stood taller than Keno by at least two feet, and their muscles were far more developed than his own. Lastly, their anger was fueling them, and Keno learned that anger always outdid fear. He whimpered as the boys lurked closer, his legs shaking.

“He looks like a little chihuahua,” one of them laughed, pushing Keno into the gate roughly. Keno’s body took over, turning around as he attempted to climb the gate and escape. No one touched him, but he felt his body being slung through the air, skidding across the ground. He was then slung back to the gate, his body pressed firmly against it.

“I’m sorry,” he managed to squeak out, tears rolling down his cheeks as the boys laughed. One slapped him harshly across the head, turning him around and grabbing his collar.

“You little snitch,” he growled, poking Keno roughly in the chest. His touch burned and to make matters worse, Keno still could not move. Mutants, that was the only thing that made sense.

“I . . . I’m one of you,” Keno stuttered profusely, “I’m a mutant too.”

The boy in front of him shook him roughly, “some little bitch like you? One of us? You must be crazy.” The boy slapped him, “show me your power. Come on kid, show me.” The taunts continued, and the slaps followed one behind the other. Keno couldn’t focus, and the laughter just made it worse. Until finally they stopped.

Keno took a fresh breath as he finally gained control of his body, but it lasted for only so long.

“Hey,” one of the boys began, walking forward with a sickening grin on his face, “give me your shoes.” The first thought Keno had was to laugh and to question why. But his body responded differently. Against his wishes, he began to remove his shoes, handing them over as if he was simply giving him a gift. The boy tapped his chin and sighed unhappily, “I think I like that shirt too.” Keno could see where this was going, could see what his night would be. He shook his head as his arms began to remove the shirt. A cold breeze rushing by, reminding Keno that fall was coming to an end and winter was fast approaching.

“Please,” Keno cried.

“Only because you said please,” the boy laughed, “now the pants.” Keno could do nothing but cry as he did as he was told, handing over the pants, standing there shamefully.

“What did you see little bitch?” the voice from earlier asked. Keno was ready to reply when a fist connected with his stomach, and another, and another. Then a kick to his leg, a slap to his face. One after another, blows rained down on him and he could do nothing but cover his head, begging for someone to hear his screams.

“What did you see little bitch?” the voice asked, hissing into his ear.

“Nothing,” Keno squeaked out between sobs. And that was it. He heard laughter in the distance, fading away. The cold wrapped around him like an unwanted blanket, clinging to him and reminding him that it was there for him. Keno was unable to care, shivering there half-naked, ashamed and beaten.

Future robberies took place, future crimes that Keno would have been a witness too. And each time, Keno walked on, ignoring cries for help. He had learned two lessons that day. To never stick around, and that mutants were nothing, same as humans. He was all he had.

 **One Month Later . . .**

Keno balanced his newly crafted stone blade in his hand. He was getting better at this, using his ability to turn the elements into objects, mostly weapons. He was also getting better with combat, despite him being self-taught. Whenever posing as someone worth a damn, he used their technology to look up combat videos, practicing when no one was around. Remembering the moves and the discipline, honing his body and his mind. He was still small for a twelve-year-old, that coming from the lack of meals per day and sleep.

He was also getting better at not drifting off into thought, the action only gets him into trouble in the past. His curiosity had died, and his wits had increased. His perception grew but his need for companionship, shrunk.

Keno flipped the blade, catching it with one hand and then immediately sent it flying into the trunk of a nearby tree. He lazily went after it, poking it to see how strong his throw was, and how lodged the blade was. Upon satisfaction, he tore the knife out. His new question was whether or not he should keep it. The blade wasn’t his style, true, but it was one of the best knives he’s made so far.

“Mutant,” a voice barked from behind him. Keno stared at the sky for a minute, wishing to be left alone. He knew who stood behind him and he didn’t really feel like putting up with them at the moment. He turned only his head, eyeing the small gang of five.

“Can I help you? Or are you hear simply to check in on me?” Keno questions, his back still to them.

“Yea you can help us,” the leader says, leaning in close to Keno’s ear, “we have a job and need your help?” There was always a job, always some kind of score or revenge kill. It never changed. Keno turned to stare at the teen, raising a brow to say that he wasn’t sold.

“Come on, this score is big Keno.” He rolled his eyes, more to himself than physically. He was bored, and soon he would need money for food, why not? That and he wished to stay on the gang’s right side, especially since the leader here allowed Keno to come by whenever he pleased.

Despite Keno agreeing, as they walked the leader continued to try and sell Keno on the idea. It was something Keno heard countless times. ‘This would be the last thing we would ever need to do,’ ‘we’ll be rich,’ and so on and so forth. He’s heard it all before and though he didn’t like to admit it, the first few times actually made him excited. He was naïve then, though only a month has had time to claim him.

“What are we even going after?” Keno asked, finding it odd that he was being sold on a plan he knew nothing about. The leader stops him, pointing to a building on the corner. A building Keno was far too familiar with.

“You want to rob the city bank?” The leader nodded proudly, pulling Keno behind him as he bragged about all the reconnaissance that they had done. Keno barely listened, his eyes glancing at how the light reflected off of the large words made of marble. Lomone City Bank. The largest bank in the city and proudly backed by the state of Illinois. As soon as Lomone became a hot spot for powered people, what once was a barely developed city on the edge of Chicago became a bustling city with skyscrapers and city lights. Like any other powered city, it rose as one of the top cities in America. This was all to say, robbing this bank was idiotic. Keno gazed at the leader and his group, all smiles and excitement.

Their plan wasn’t a bad plan, but he could see why he was needed so desperately. They weren’t going to get anywhere without his help, might not even get through the front door. It was a good score, but it was also a risky one. The only good thing was that Keno could hide his face, he could be anyone he wanted to, and no one would be the wiser. These men had something to lose, whether they succeeded or not, Keno could make it out.

Keno eyed the men and with a fake smile, nodded.

The plan was simple, yet effective and highly thought out despite the simplicity. Keno was to go in as someone, find and spot the manager or security officer, someone who looks like they belong there after hours. Once the majority left, he was to let the others in. Simple. Keno favored taking the appearance of either a manager or the head security officer, whichever he could get too first. It turned out, it was the manager. After taking a janitor’s appearance, he entered the woman’s office, knocking her out and taking her face. With that done, Keno waited till it was time. He didn’t know much about managing or financial matters. Heck, the most he knew about it was how to count money.

And so, Keno stayed hidden waiting until the moment for the bank robbery to take place. He walks towards the back entrance casually, thinking about the future and where the rest of the night will go. He unlocked the door and directed the others to where they should be placed. The smartest way to get what they needed was for him to act as if he was a hostage, that way he could control the situation and those already inside.

“Everyone on the ground now,” the leader barked as they entered the central area, the gun barrel resting on Keno’s temple. Screams and hollers go out as everyone does as he says. Much to Keno’s surprise, one man tries to grab the leader, only to earn himself the reward of being pistol whipped. It was a foolish move, even more foolish since he thought he could be a hero.

“That was almost cute,” the leader chuckled, forcing Keno towards a woman hiding near a computer, “tell her to unlock it and let us into the vault.”

“Do as he says,” Keno ordered and the woman, with shaky hands, began to do as they commanded. Her weeping merely background noise as her fingers race across the keyboard. The door to the vault beeped, and the men immediately make their way there, opening it and shouting out their shock at all the loot inside.

“We’re going to be rich!” the leader exclaims, releasing Keno as he races into the vault alongside the others. And this was why Keno refused to work with people, mutant or human. He never claimed himself to be better, that others were inferior in body, soul, and mind. But in his defense, a large number of them was stupid, incomprehensibly so. He could not see fault in the woman as she hastily typed in more commands, sealing the vault door behind all the robbers. He also couldn’t see fault with those who immediately ran, and those who grabbed their phones to dial for the officers. He heard those in the vault, shouting to be let out.

Choices.

Keno pondered how many choices people make on a daily basis. For example, this woman’s decision to lock his compatriots up or her choice to get up and come to work. Her choice to choose this specific job, in this particular city. Her life choices all led her to this situation. A situation she perhaps never imagined but is now living. How another’s life, a total stranger’s decision could affect your life a great deal. Like the leader’s choice to rob this bank, while she was on duty and working. And now, his decision would further affect this woman’s life.

“Open the vault back up,” Keno growled at the woman.

“But the men.” She was unable to finish her sentence as Keno raised a threatening hand, daring her to question him further. His choice was simple. Tell her to reopen the vault or let the cops handle it, and he leaves before he himself was caught. Keno was ready to give the men up to the police, but that would mean his name would be first on their list. They knew who he was and what he could do, and if he thought they wouldn’t snitch to get a deal, he was crazy.

The woman obeys, reopening the vault just as the sound of sirens can be heard outside.

“Finally, grab the money and let’s go,” the leader commands, raising his gun and shooting the woman in cold blood.

Every life choice she ever made has landed her here. Led her to her death.

“We out of here,” the leader barked, quickly going out the back way. Keno’s eyes still rested on the woman’s still body, not knowing how to feel. He also knew that those idiots were running straight towards the cops. Who probably had this place surrounded or was getting there. Keno’s eyes flew back to the woman.

Police rushed into the bank, ordering everyone out, moving them along and questioning where everyone went. Keno watched with tired eyes as only one person was brought out in cuffs. Her eyes pleading for the police to listen to her as she told them she had nothing to do with it.

“Makes sense it would be the manager,” a paramedic stated, wrapping a thick shock blanket around Keno’s womanish shoulders.

“I’ve known her for so long,” Keno spoke, his voice hoarse as he shook, “we were almost okay when she ordered me to open up the vault again, she threatened to hit me.” Somehow, tears managed to fall from his eye, or perhaps that was due to the dead body he had stuffed in a locker in the storage room. They would find her, he had no doubt, but by then, he would be gone.

**One Year Later . . .**

“All rise, for the honorable Judge Henderson.” Keno refused to rise, refused to do anything but glare at the so-called honorary figure that would sentence him to a life that wasn’t worth living. The judge eyes him, noting the lack of respect and snorting.

“Keno Matthews, you are being charged with reckless endangerment, fraud, neglecting to follow the laws set by the PIA, robbery, and murder.”

“I didn’t kill anyone, regardless of what those pigs say.” The crowd murmurs and the judge stiffen in his seat.

“What say you?” Silence filled the vast and crowded room. Eyes moved to Keno, waiting for his reply but he merely sat. This was a farce, a show for those watching. He could say anything, could have the powers of persuasion and still be found guilty. He could have the president as an alibi, and at the end of the day, he would still be taken to their rehabilitation center. So why speak, when his fate was already written?

“He claims not guilty, your honor,” the man beside him answered instead, setting off a quiet flame within Keno.

“Don’t speak for me!” Keno growled, daring the man to say anything else. All of this was a joke, from the state issuing this man his case, and this man thinking he represented Keno in any way.

“So, what do you plead young man?” the judge asked again, and again Keno refused to answer. He instead imagined himself using the air current to make a weapon. He always found it difficult to make air do his bidding, and at times he even disliked it. Air was free, and he rather liked the idea of it being too wild to tame and control. But at this moment, that dislike was petty. Yet it hardly mattered, the cuffs on his hands and around his ankles made sure he could do nothing but sit like a nice little freak.

He was guilty of everything the judge said, besides the murder. His views on murder were strict, and besides a particular group of men from a long time ago, he had never ended another’s life. No, for that charge, they had just assumed. And when you had a list of charges as long as his and was a mutant, what was murder but another item?

No, the only thing that had been killed was his hope for humanity, and for mutant-kin. Perhaps that was the biggest flaw of all when it came to surviving on one’s own. He saw the sickness that every soul had. Their uncaring nature and inability to show love and compassion. He was perhaps a hypocrite, but there was no doubt that some were better off than others.

He recalled a tale told by a passing companion of his. A story about a man who would steal from the rich and then give it to the poor. The rich made their wealth from working the poor and practically stealing from them. And during the retelling of this tale, Keno had only questioned how legal everything was. How the rich were able to do this. It was then that he realized a just world was the real fantasy. The world was going to fail because of the sins and greed of man, mutants included.

He snorted, caring little for the looks that he gained from those surrounding him. He did it again it would seem. He allowed his mind to wander to matters of an extreme kind. He laughed, clearly and loud enough for everyone in the courtroom to see and hear. He laughed for a boy that used to think so innocently, that everything would get better. He laughed for a boy that had allowed his emotions to get the better of him. The laugh was for a poor mutant with no family and powers that the world frowned upon. The laugh was for a boy who once wished for companionship but then realized that the flaws of everyone greatly outweighed that need. And lastly, a tear crept down his face. A tear for a woman whose choices led her to her death.

“Then there’s only one thing left to do,” Keno barely heard the judge say, “Keno Matthews, we find you guilty, and you will be sent to a rehabilitation center where you will complete ten years of rehab before evaluation.”

**One Week Later . . .**

How did he get here? Keno asked himself, drifting in and out from his seat in the large dining area. His eyes darting to a fight that had just recently broken out between two mutants. Simple minded fools, they were caged beasts, and they were putting on a show for the guards.

 **One Month Later . . .**

He flipped the single blade of grass in his grasp back and forth, focusing all of his might into shifting it into something, anything. Tears welled up in his eyes as nothing happened. Nothing at all. He glared at the wristband. He held so much hatred for it that he would rather cut his own arm off then have to deal with this. He yelled, caring little for those who heard him. He screamed and let out his rage.

 **One Year Later . . .**

“This is your third rehabilitation center Matthews,” the woman sighed, signing the papers, “and if I have anything to say about it, it will be your last.” She grabbed him and threw him into a nearby cement wall, Keno weakly noting her superhuman strength.

“You will respect everyone here, and if I hear one thing out of you, you’ll regret it. We aren’t those measly little humans you’re used to, you will pay here.” Keno lifted his gaze to meet hers.

“Okay.”

 **. . .**

The counseling room, Keno repeated to himself as he tried and failed to navigate the halls of Davenport Academy. His mind was still in disarray, losing track of time. He remembered staring at himself in shock when he stared back at a body much older than he expected. Time was no longer something he kept up with, his age as well. Even thinking of the concept of time caused his head to ache. But at least his mind no longer brought up memories that haunted him.

This entire thing was a joke, a school made to resemble both a hero academy and rehabilitation center. It was only a matter of time before he was kicked out of this place just like all the others. Then what, where would they send him next? Costa Rica? He hated the Georgia weather, the weather of the south period. He was a fan of the cold, of the chill that would cling to your bones and refuse to leave as you sit shivering. This southern weather was far too warm, and the muggy feeling in the air also bothered him. It was hard to breathe.

His mind stopped wandering as he glared at the door that matched the room number on his schedule. He took a deep sigh in and opened it, finding an older man standing before a group of what he believed to be his new teammates. He’s never had teammates, his former rehabilitation centers they were just numbers. In a way, he was still a number. After counting those in the room, he could only guess that he was number seven of Team 13.

“Want to take a seat, Mr. Matthews? We would love to hear more about you,” the man said with a smile that was falling by the minute. Keno ignored him, looking at the faces of those inside. One had half her head shaven, messing with her hair as she tried desperately to disappear. Two, a boy and a girl sat on opposite sides of one another but looked alike. Another wore dark shades and was messing with his desk. Another had angelic wings, and the last seemed almost normal. If not for the company of the room, he would be. Keno took the seat beside the girl with angelic wings, sitting down with a huff.

“Can you introduce yourself, Mr. Matthews? Tell us your name, powers, and where you’re from.” Keno suddenly had flashbacks to a particular courtroom, where he owed no one there anything. This room was no different. The man continued to stare at him, groaning as he shook his head.

“Well won’t you get along with the others,” he said and shook his head. Keno raised a brow at that, gazing around at those again. He looked to his side to see Angel Wings extending her hands towards him, her straight hair pulled back into a ponytail.

“I’m Jordan.” Keno glared at the hand, shakily grasping it in his own.

“Keno.” The smile she sent him was refreshing, washing over him like a wave of fresh cold water on a hot day. Her silver eyes inviting as he sat there. He gazed at the others and one by one, they also introduced themselves. When was the last time he actually knew another’s name? The last time someone thought him important enough to utter their name to him? He glared down at his desk as the man in front continued speaking, something regarding law and how to be a proper citizen.

“Why cooperate for a country that won’t accept you anyway?” the girl who said she was Timmi asked.

“Don’t care what you say Teach,” Jordan states and Keno glanced over at her, “you keep saying that, everyone keeps saying that, but this world was designed to see us fail. No one cares.” A smirk danced across Jordan’s features, “but that’s going to change, I yield for none.” Keno didn’t hear the rest of the conversation, the arguments that went out. His eyes stayed on Jordan and her words.

Choices.

Every choice he has made has led him to this moment. To this day, to this school, to this room, and sitting beside this person.

Choices.