**Chapter Twenty**

I got home, feeling half-dead, only to get jumped. I sparked even as my mother cried *“My Baby!”* wrapping me up in a tight hug, not even noticing the voltage that danced through both of us.

“Uh, hi Mom,” I muttered awkwardly, having hoped I could’ve avoided her, not really wanting to talk to anyone right now.

“You said there was *trouble,* not that you were *attacked!”* she cried, holding me tight. “I would’ve made sure you came *right* home if I’d known!” She pulled back arms lengthening as she didn’t let go, and looked at me, eyes widening as her grip on me tightened painfully. “You look *terrible.* What happened? Are you hurt? Why didn’t they *call* us?”

“I’m fine,” I wheezed as I tried to reassure her, only to get a teary glare as she obviously didn’t believe me, though she did let up a little. “I’m fine *physically,*” I corrected, which caused her look to change to one of confusion. “A bit scraped up, a little hurt, but they have Recovery Girl on staff, and I’m healed up.”

Hesitating, she pulled back even further, *still not letting go,* and looked me up and down. Then she took a sniff of my shirt, sighed, and finally let me breathe. “Did you remember to use protection?” she asked, finally releasing me, and letting me breath that sweet, sweet air.

I blinked at her sudden question, wondering how she’d gotten to *that* conclusion. “I said I would!” I reminded her, offended. Then I realized what I’d just said, and quickly added, “I, um, that is. . .”

My mother gave a proud sniff, “Oh my baby’s becoming a man! It was that Ashido girl you keep talking about, wasn’t it?” I hesitated, before nodding, not really seeing what else I could do. “Now you *have* to bring her over!”

“That’s. . . that’s probably not going to happen,” I warned her, the feelings of emptiness crashing back over me. “We. . . had a fight.”

She looked confused, before she let out a low, “Oh, *honey*, you told her you *loved* her, didn’t you?”

“*How?*” I sputtered, not seeing where she was getting these nearly *clairvoyant* insights. *Was I that easy to read?* “I mean, well, *yes,* and I’m pretty sure I do! Why is that a bad thing!?” I demanded at her sad look.

“You’ve known this girl for a couple of months, Denki. That’s a *bit* fast,” she informed me.

“But, but she said it *first!”* I objected.

That got a sad smile from my mother, “Honey, you can’t take what the person your with says when you’re. . . *with* them like you would if you were just talking.” She shook her head, “You’ve gotten so serious lately, so like your father, and it’s good, but you need to slow down a little. Don’t think I haven’t noticed you studying and training all the time.”

“It wasn’t when. . .” I trailed off. “She thought I was asleep when she said it,” I told my mom. I mean, I *was* asleep, but I couldn’t really explain *that.*

She, however, just shook her head, “That means she wasn’t sure. For you to come out and say it, you made her *face* it. She’s a young girl, she might not’ve meant what ever she said.”

“But then why did she say it?” I asked, hating the ‘give them a pass’ excuse when it never, at least in my old life, *ever* went the other way. “How am I supposed to know what she means, and what she doesn’t? Should *I* not be held responsible if I say something I don’t really mean?”

My mother gave me a wry smile, “So should I have taken it seriously when you said you hated me for making you take a bath after you and Kisuke went out playing, and you came back covered in mud?”

“I was *seven,*” I shot back. “We’re in *high school!*”

“Even adults sometimes say things they don’t mean, Denki,” she informed me, which *wasn’t an answer*. “Give it a day or two, and I’m sure she’ll call you,” my mother reassured me, taking another exaggerated sniff. “Now go take a shower, and I’ll make you breakfast.”

“. . . thanks mom,” I muttered. *I* was probably clean, it was my *clothes* that smelled, but it wasn't worth arguing. I hoped she was right, but, given what had *actually* happened, I doubted she was.

<MHA>

After breakfast, and with nothing to do, I opened my phone, to see I had a message

*N3c3ss1ty: U ok? Not @ studio!*

*N3c3ss1ty: Denki?*

*N3c3ss1ty: Heard ppl hurt! plz rspnd!*

I took a moment, and, glancing over, realized that school started in a few minutes, which meant I’d missed our customary meeting.

*Sparky: Sorry. Have day off. Healed up.*

*N3c3ss1ty: (´∀｀；) thnk god.*

*N3c3ss1ty: C u after school? B/c missed u b4 school?*

Part of me wanted to say no, as I’d been pretty firm on that so far, and wanted to avoid a very obvious ‘if you give a mouse a cookie’ situation but. . . *fuck it.*

*Sparky: Sure.*

Her response took a moment, but I had to shake my head at her

*N3c3ss1ty: Gr8! C u @ 311!*

given that the school day ended at 3:*10*. However, that left me with several hours to kill. Grabbing my guitar, I let my fingers dance along it as they moved in accordance with Denki’s, *my*, memories, playing a few songs he’d been working on getting down before he’d taken the UA test.

It was calming, but didn’t really help the sense of emptiness that felt like it was gnawing at my soul. Putting it down, I turned back to the one thing I’d been doing with almost single-minded determination since I’d arrived, *training.*

With the USJ fight fight over with, the biggest danger point had passed. The Sports Festival was *actually* peaceful, and then there was the entire Stain thing, but there was no way to really stop it. I didn’t even remember where it had happened, only that Iida’s brother had been paralyzed by him. Then there was the summer camp, but I had *months* before that happened, and I’d be ready to blitz the fuck out of them.

That is, of course, if I hadn’t butterflied everything I knew out of existence already.

In the end, it didn’t matter. I’d done more than bloodied Shigaraki’s nose, and he’d likely be turning his gaze elsewhere, until he was sure he could defeat me. He’d have a plan, and it might even work, taking me on or trapping me somehow, until, with a grin, he’d put all five of the  fingers of his remaining hand on me, activating his decaying touch, ready to turn me to ash.

And then I’d spit in his face, completely unaffected by his one and only power.

And then I’d kill him, having not remained idle myself.

But to do that I needed to *train*.

My normal powers weren’t the type I could work with in the house, not anymore, but I had a *new* one to work with, and one I barely had a handle on as well. Taking a seat on my bed, I reached inside myself and *pulled*.

The power of One for All was a small, flickering thing, a stray ember that I’d caught for myself, but in that singular spark was the promise of much, *much* more. Concentrating, I pushed it all into my right arm, holding the limb out to watch it take effect. To my surprise thin yellow lines of power didn’t run down the limb, but seemed to emerge from my flesh, like they’d always been there, hiding underneath the surface.

However, it took nearly half a minute to settle. In a fight, that was forever. Pulling it back, I went for a full-body spread instead, in what would eventually be Midoriya’s ‘full cowling’. He’d be able to do it in a second, if less, and be ready to respond to even sneak attacks with speed and strength.

It took me forty-five seconds.

More than that, though, it felt. . . *fragile,* like it’d break if I didn’t consciously keep it going, or if I got hit hard enough. Testing it, I stopped my careful monitoring of it, letting it exist on it’s own. It was fine, until I moved to grab my phone, at which point it shattered, the power vanishing from every limb.

*“Okay,*” I told myself. “Activating it quickly, and keeping it going on its own. Those are good first steps.”

Reaching back inside, I started the process all over again.

<MHA>

Striding through UA’s gates a few minutes before school started, I nodded to Hound Dog, who, other than giving me a sniff, said nothing. The ‘Guidance Counselor’ had a Quirk that was literally called ‘Dog’, which functioned the same way as Asui’s ‘Frog’ Quirk, and whatever he was looking for with his enhanced nose he didn’t find, leaving me to enter unmolested.

I made it to the Design Studio right as the bell rang at 3:10, having swung by the locker-room to pick up Mjolnir, and waited as a small tide of students exited the workshop. I got a few looks from the teens, all upperclassmen, as I was dressed in jeans and a t-shirt instead of the school uniform, but no one said anything.

Not seeing Mei, I poked my head into the workshop, but the only person there was Power Loader, who seemed to raise an eyebrow at my presence, though with the helmet it was more of a head movement thing. Before I could say anything, though, I heard the pounding of footsteps as someone dashed down the hall at full tilt.

I turned around just a Mei leapt at me, calling, “*Denki!*”

Catching her, I spun us both into the Design Studio, looking to Power Loader and telling him with a smile, “Found her.”

He just stared, before walking out the door, muttering under his breath, “*Nezu owes me five bucks,”* before he closed the door behind him.

Not sure what the heck *that* had meant, I looked back to Mei, who, I realized, I was still holding up in the air. “Oh, sorry,” I apologized, putting her down.

“It’s fine!” she chirped, looking me over. “I heard you were hurt, but you look just as good as ever! Recovery Girl?”

I shook my head. “My power apparently comes with a bit of a healing factor. Nothing worth noting in a fight, but I went from down and out, barely able to move and with broken ribs, to okay in a few hours.”

A frown ghosted across her features, before she shook her head violently, a gleam in her eye as she looked at me, grinning. “So, what you’re saying is that you can use things with higher stresses on their user, and heal from the damage?”

“Mei, *no,”* I commanded, seeing where this was going.

“Mei, ***yes,***” she countermanded, grinning evilly.

I shook my head, “Seriously, Mei, *no.* I still *feel* getting hurt, even if it doesn’t put me in the hospital. Having something I could redline in crises is fine, using something that actively damages me as part of my normal kit is another. Do you *want* me broken and bleeding, even if I could be okay in a day or two?

The invetress frowned, before sighing. “*No,*” she admitted. “But if you heal quickly, that means you can get stronger faster, right?”

I thought about it, before shrugging. “No clue,” I admitted in turn. “Didn’t even realize I had it until Recovery Girl mentioned it, though Principal Nezu probably knew, somehow, with how he was pulling shrapnel out of me.”

“Sh-*Shrapnel?*” she asked, stepping in *very* close, irisis expanding slightly as she activated her Quirk, looking over me, pulling one of my arms over so she could examine it in detail. *“What happened?*”

Looking over at the couch that sat in the corner, I picked her up, and she barely noticed, continuing to check me for injuries, as if one would suddenly appear. Putting us both down on the couch, I pushed her back slightly, and she glanced up.

“How ‘bout I just go over what happened yesterday?” I suggested. “Know that I’m fine now, and,” I told her, pulling Mjolnir out from behind my back, where I’d clipped it to my belt, “this thing probably helped save my life.”

“Our Baby?” she asked, looking back and forth from me, to the device in my hand, and back to me, eyes widening in excitement. “You were able to field test our Baby? Did it do good for its daddy?”

“It did *amazingly,*” I reassured her, as she practically vibrated with excitement. “Now, I want you to take a few breaths, and I’ll go grab us some coffee. Two creams, Five sugars, right?” Power Loader seemed to have an eternal pot going at his desk, likely made by some mind-bendingly advanced ‘support item’. Mei didn’t understand how it worked, only that anyone that did anything to the device would be banned from the Studio for two weeks, so even *she* wasn’t touching it.

She nodded, biting her lip, and accepted the drink as I sat down with my own black beverage. “How’d it start?” she demanded as soon as I settled.

“They cut power to the USJ, and jammed communications,” I told her, and she nodded, eyes flickering to the side as she made a mental note. Rolling my eyes, I turned towards a nearby desk and, turning my limb to lightning, grabbed a pad and a pen.

Mei shifted how she sat, crossing her legs and with her drink in her left hand. I passed her the pad, which she propped on her right thigh, and then the pen, which she used to write **1. Comm pierce jam.** Nodding to me, I continued recounting what happened, only leaving out the aspects involving the Company and my foreknowledge of the players involved, explaining how I’d ‘guessed’ correctly about some key details, while messing up others, like how much it’d take to put Nomu down, and she slowly added to an ever growing list.

After the first time I’d gotten hurt, struck by Nomu, she’d demanded I take off my shirt so she could look me over. If her hands weren’t full, she probably would’ve done it herself, but I appreciated the decorum she was showing. Well, decorum by *Mei* standards. I’d pulled it off and had to twist back and forth a little as she’d studied me with her Quirk.

I’d started to put my shirt back on, only for her to ask if I’d gotten hit again, and, when I’d admitted I had, she’d insisted it stayed off, since she’d need to look me over again anyways. Not really having a reason to say no, I’d picked up where I left off, shirtless, and continued to recount what I could remember of that desperate, stupid, and above all else *close* fight.

By the time I was done, at the part where I was waiting for Mina, Mei’d filled several pages, and I trailed off, thinking of what had happened next. This morning, it’d been amazing, but with what’d happened afterwards, it reminded me of the straining, gaping feeling in my chest that, talking with Mei, I’d forgotten about.

“What else?” the girl next to me asked, expression laser focused.

“That’s it,” I said, shaking my head. “That’s all.”

Mei looked at me, eyes narrowing, “No, it isn’t. There’s something else. *Tell me.*”

I flinched at that command, so like what Mina had said this very morning. Not with the warm caring of the pink-skinned girl, which had turned to revolted panic, but with a directness that was very, *very Mei.*

That, if anything, made it worse, the back of my mind telling me that she’d reject me too, if only she knew.

“Denki? What’s wrong?” she asked. “Are you still injured? Should I get Recovery Girl?”

I shook my head, focusing on the here and now, “No, just, well, Mina and I had a fight, an argument, and it went. . . *badly.*”

“What about?” The inventress questioned.

I shook my head again, “I’d. . . I’d rather not talk about it, Mei. I was dumb, and I did a dumb thing, and well, that’s about it.” I flinched again, as Mei leaned forward and smacked me in the forehead with the top of her pen.

“No, you’re not,” she replied. “You can keep up with me, and help me make my Babies. That means you’re not dumb.” It was said with such matter-of-fact confidence that I had to laugh. “What’s funny about that?” she demanded, sounding annoyed.

“Okay, you’re right,” I agreed. “I was *unwise*, and did an *unwise* thing. Happy?”

She nodded, waving away my comment. “Wisdom is dumb, so it makes sense you wouldn’t have it,” she pronounced, with what I was *pretty* sure was a compliment. “Power Loader said mixing those compounds wasn’t wise, but I did it anyways, and I figured out the webbing for my capture gun! After the smoke cleared and they vented the lab,” she added as an afterthought.

I blinked, “Mei, I suggested making that *yesterday.*”

She just nodded, “And now I’ve got it. Or the first version. It destabilizes after an hour, and then it can get kinda explodey, but I think that just makes it *better!*”

“Is it ‘explodey’ *before* it destabilizes?” I asked, and she shook her head no. “Does it still stick to things like webbing *after* it destabilizes?” I questioned and she nodded. “Okay, can you make a version that destabilizes quickly, and a version that’s inert when it destabilizes? Even if the second one only lasts, like, ten minutes, that’ll be more than enough.”

She frowned, eyes going distant, before she slowly nodded. “Maybe, but. . . *oh!”* she exclaimed, grinning, “It could be placable explosives, for demolitions or long range attacks against durable villains! But. . . why should we not make the other one explodey?” she inquired.

“Think about how dumb the average person is. Then realize half are dumber,” I told her, having given this speech to her before, and she nodded, following me. “Now imagine one of that *second* half is a police officer who’s taking in the villain the hero that’s using *your* capture gun has, well, captured. And the cop’s either gotten a memo, or been told that fire might cause the webbing to explode, but he either didn’t bother to read it or didn’t listen when he was told, so he’s smoking a cigarette as he does it, because he wants to smoke, and who’s gonna tell him no? Or maybe he’s built up static cling if it’s an electrical discharge that sets it off, or isn’t careful if it’s kinetic force that makes it explode. What would happen to him, and what would happen to the villain that’s *wrapped up in it?* And what would that make people think about *your Babies?*”

She stared at me, going still for a moment. “So, two different kinds,” she agreed. “And. . . color coded. For dumb people.”

“For dumb people,” I agreed, glad we’d switched topics, even as thinking about what’d happened to Mina made my heart cramp a little.

“So, the thing with your friend, Mana,” Mei said, and as I cursed my luck.

“Mina,” I corrected absently.

“Yeah, Miso,” Mei agreed. “You said you did something unwise?” I nodded. “Did you apologize? People keep telling me that helps.” I nodded again. “And she was still mad at you?” I nodded a third time. “Then she’s dumb, and you shouldn’t be friends with her,” the inventress informed me, “and then you could spend more time with me making beautiful Babies!”

“*Don’t,*” I started to say instinctively, voice harsher than I meant it to be. “Don’t call her dumb, please,” I said quietly, as Mei flinched away from me. “She’s. . . she’s still my friend, and I don’t like people saying bad things about my friends. I wouldn’t like people saying bad things about you either.”

Again, she paused, and went to take a sip from her now empty coffee mug, only to frown at the lack of liquid. “I. . . okay,” she admitted, quieting down for a moment, before seeming to hit the bottom of her allowable energy level and bouncing straight back up to manic. “But that’s not what’s important! You want to know what *is* important?” she demanded, leaning forward with a grin.

“Making new inventions?” I asked with a grin of my own, even if it was forced.

“Yeah! *Making Babies!*” she cheered, springing to her feet and grabbing me, dragging me along with her to a work table. “But first, we need to make you better armor. That cheap stuff *obviously* wasn’t good enough!”

“It came from a group that *specifically* makes hero costumes,” I argued.

She just waved it away, “If it broke, they’re amateurs. I could do better, and you’re gonna be protected!”

“Too much armor and I’m going to slow down,” I pointed out, happily going with the topic change. “I’m not saying no,” I quickly added, as she gave me a hurt look, for some reason, “I’m saying that there’s a balance, and the only reason I survived before was my mobility.”

She shook her head back and forth in negation, dreads whipping back and forth. “No no *no,* Denki! The answer isn’t *less* armor, it’s *more Babies!*”

“Isn’t that your answer to *everything?*” I couldn’t help but tease.

“And I’m *right!”* she shot back, grinning. “Now, let’s make you a *tank!*”