**Chapter Nineteen**

I slowly awoke, feeling *warm* and *safe.* It was an odd feeling, something I wasn’t used to at all, and, despite my desire to close my eyes and go back to sleep, I forced myself awake.

The feeling was odd, like I’d slept with a comforter, but with it only covering half my body, and far warmer than normal. Looking down, I blinked further awake and the spiky mop of familiar pink hair that tickled my nose as I looked down, chin pressing against a small, curved yellow horn.

*Mina.*

We were both naked as the day we were born, and I, flat on my back, had the girl half-sprawled on top of me, her arm across my chest as her legs were wrapped around one of my own. My right arm was holding onto her, and, as I absently massaged her back with my fingers, the girl practically purred as her grip tightened ever so slightly.

*Yesterday,* I decided, seeing the light of morning peeking from out of the curtains, *was a good day.* I mean, I’d almost died *numerous* times, fought the Nomu that was supposed to kill *All-Might* and lost *hard,* derailed canon even harder than I had before by ‘unhanding’ Shigaraki, and been beaten nearly to death, but Mina and I had gotten closer than I’d ever been with anyone, and I wasn’t *just* referring to the sex.

Though that was good too.

I’d never been in love. I mean, I *thought* I had, but those had been small, childish things, a pale shadow to how I felt now. I knew who Mina was, at least I was pretty sure I did, and she, as far as I could tell, knew me, except for the entire Company aspect, and. . . yeah. Part of me wanted to tell her about it, but another part wanted to *never* do that. Not because she would expose me, that. . . just didn’t seem like something she’d do, given I hadn’t abused it. No, I was worried about how she’d react.

*Maybe later,* I decided, hedging my bets. Once I had enough for Sweet Home, and could invite her to journey the Multiverse with me. Yeah, that sounded right. And, with the captures I’d gotten, that might be sooner rather than later.

Speaking of, I should probably go check up on my captures and figure out how to spend my payday. With the nature of the show, assuming it still moved in the same direction, other than Toga it’d be a complete sausage-fest as far as the depraved, villainous, guilt-free capturable foes went.

But that meant I’d have to get up.

. . . I could wait a few minutes.

Almost an hour later I slowly tried to pull myself out of bed, not having expected sleeping naked with someone to be so. . . *sticky.* Not in a lewd way, more in the fact that at least one of us had sweated where we’d been touching, and it’d bonded us together. I had to almost peel her off of me, carefully, so as not to wake her up.

Free, with pillows moved for her to hold onto, I slipped away, grabbing my pants and fishing out my phone. Thankfully, being powered off Bullshit Multiversal Magitech, I didn’t have to worry about it running out of battery, and I sat at the edge of the bed, thumbing through menus.

There was a fairly long list of names, the tiers all listed as question marks, all timing down with fifty some odd hours left. All but one, that is, which, as I read it, made my blood run cold.

**Mina Ashido - Tier 4     +8 points     Sell?    Yes     No     Lock**

Carefully, and with *extreme* precision, I clicked **Lock**.

**Are you sure you wish to lock capture? You will not be able to sell this capture until you authenticate the unlock?**

I had no idea what that meant, but I agreed, a golden border spreading around the image of a smiling Mina on my phone, a little padlock on the bottom. Carefully, *very* carefully, I moved over Mina and pulled the sheet back, looking over her body, searching for the black mark of a stamp tattoo.

There was nothing.

Moving her over, ignoring her sleepy complaint, I checked the rest of her, finding nothing at all other than a few blemishes, certainly no jet black tattoos indicative of her being bound. Re-covering her, I, on unsteady legs, moved to the bathroom so I could figure out what the ever loving *fuck* was going on.

Turning on the shower, to screen anything I might say, I opened up the Waifu Catalog Manual, the first time I had since I’d picked up Science Talent, and started to read it *in detail.* The more I read, the more I realized that I hadn’t really read it the first time, which was as confusing as it was terrifying.

*Why hadn’t I?*

This was a *literal* contract that was apparently tied to my fucking *soul*, and I’d fucking *skimmed it?* That didn’t sound like me. That didn’t sound like something I would do, so *why had I?*

Even my memories of doing so were hazy, like a half forgotten dream, the actions I’d taken like those done in a drunken stupor, and, as I was reading it, everything started to sink in. Ignoring my weird takeover/merge/reincarnation as Denki, there were all sorts of little ‘traps’ sprinkled throughout the document.

They weren’t even malicious, not if you were using the catalog in the spirit which it was obviously supposed to function, but there were little things to ‘help’ that would undermine everything I wanted. And then I found it.

It wasn’t in the Basic section, or the Binding section, but the *Lure* section, which, at the time, I hadn’t paid attention to as I *hadn’t bought any lures*. It was a loophole, and, checking the language of the earlier section which referred to ‘capturing’ and ‘binding’ as two different things, I found how it worked.

The wording was obviously meant to pair with the ‘No Bindings’ option, an option which had been denied to me, but there was nothing that said it was *only* for that option. I read it, and my chest felt tight, but not with fear, for it was as simple as it was unbelievable, but the proof was staring me in the face.

To be considered captured, *but not bound*, a woman had to tell me that she loved me, *and mean it.*

I. . . didn’t know what to do with that. I mean, I was *pretty* sure I felt the same way, but to have empirical confirmation was. . . I didn’t know what to do with that.

I didn’t remember her saying anything like that, *and I absolutely would’ve,* but nothing in the requirement listed stated that I had to *hear* her say it, and, given how I was looking over my captures right before we left UA, it must’ve been either when I was ordering food, or while I was asleep.

However. . . I had a moment of sublime joy as I realized that *also* meant that she wasn’t affected by the Stamp’s corrupting influence! I let out a low *“Holy shit”* as the full implications of what that meant washed over me. Combined with the right Defences, I could protect her, have her gain all of the benefits of being claimed, while she was still, well, *her.* Queuing up the store function, I quickly sped through to the Perks, but then had to hesitate. The mental effects of the Stamp, did they affect the mind, or did they affect the *soul?* There were two different Defenses, Mind & Soul respectively, but which one did I pick?

“You’re being an idiot,” I told myself, buying *both.* It dropped me down to only thirteen points, barely any further than where I’d started, but if it would protect Mina, keep her, *her?*

***I’d fucking go into debt if I had to!***

Feeling them kick in, one after another, I let out a breath I hadn’t realized I was holding. Now, if she somehow was Stamped in the future, she should be able to tell it to go fuck itself. More than that, mind-controllers would never turn her against me, nor any kind of stupid conceptual fuckery that tried to mutilate her soul. It wasn’t the double edged sword of an Invictus effect, which made it so that one's mind could *never* change, it was just a way to ensure that she was her, and that wouldn’t change.

I sat on the toilet, slumping in relief, until I had another thought.

*I needed to tell her.*

It was dumb, I ***knew*** that. It would be far better to act like nothing had changed, and then mention it once I knew she wouldn’t leave but. . . *she needed to know.* The girl had been nothing but honest with me, nothing but straightforward, and I needed to give her the same respect. I loved her, or at least I was pretty sure I did, and I’d always hated that stupid ‘not telling you to protect you’ bullshit when the person wasn’t in the middle of a crisis scenario. We weren’t fighting, nor were we about to fight villains, there was no ‘game’ for her to be thrown off of, and *it’s what I’d want in her position.*

I wondered if, despite what the catalog said, Denki was affecting me, because *all* of my experiences before coming here told me that what I wanted to do was a *bad idea,* but it was the *right thing to do.* If she’d lied to me, if she’d manipulated me, if she’d treated me like so many others, I’d feel perfectly justified returning the favor, but she *hadn’t*, and. . . and I couldn’t bring myself to do that to her.

Maybe it was Denki’s memories, which more and more I could rely on as well as my own. You didn’t live another life without it changing you, at least a little, just like you didn’t go off to college and come back the same. You were the same person, deep down, but the experiences changed you.

I frowned, remembering some of my friends, some of my *family* that had changed irrevocably, to the point that I wondered how much of them had changed, and how much I’d been wrong about the entire time, but, at their core, they were still the same person, even if their values had become so corrupted that their younger selves would be appalled at what their older selves were doing. Was that me? Was that who *I* was?

Shaking my head, I was pretty sure young me would understand old me. Not have the datasets I had now, we’d go about things a bit differently, but, still, I hadn’t changed my core values. If anything, thinking about how I’d been pushed me even harder to tell Mina. I’d told people the truth, exposed vulnerabilities, and been hurt. Never anything on *this* scale, but if anything that made things *worse*.

*But those people weren’t Mina.*

“Fuuuuuck,” I swore, knowing what I’d have to do, if I ever wanted to be able to live with myself. Stepping into the shower, I washed off, getting ready for what I was about to do.

MHA

“There’s. . . something we need to talk about,” I said, getting a confused, and concerned, look from Mina. She’d been so *happy* when she’d woken up that I’d put it off until after breakfast, ordering room service, but I knew if I didn’t say something *now*, I might convince myself not to tell her *at all*.

“Did, did I do something wrong?” she asked, vulnerable, and I shook my head vehemently.

“*No,* no, it’s, well, if anything, it’s something I think I should’ve told you about earlier, but I didn’t know how, and it didn’t really affect you, but now it *absolutely* does, and I don’t really know how to start without sounding *insane,* but I-” I babbled, trying to make her understand it wasn’t her, before she, expression determined, got up, took the bowl from my hands, put it off to the side, and plopped down in my lap.

“Tell me,” she prompted, hands on my shoulders, looking me in the eye.

“. . . an interdimensional mail order bride mafia shanghaied me into working for them, and you accidentally got involved when you told me you loved me and meant it,” I said, going straight for it. “So, you’re now biologically immortal, immune to any poisons, diseases, or body affecting powers. And I spent almost all my funds making sure you couldn’t be mind controlled, either through mental or soul level manipulations, given the way this entire thing works. I kind of freaked out when I realized you got involved.”

“What.”

I winced at her flat expression. “Um, okay, so, to start with, there are other dimensions. I’m. . . *kind* of from one, maybe, sorta, I don’t really understand it myself and I ended up here, but, like I was also born here, but just, um, ‘woke up’ right before the exam, so I have *my* memories, but also my *old* memories.” I’d checked and double checked the language, and while they *said* substitute, the mere fact of being in perfect fitness and health, something that Denki had been since *forever*, meant that the me that was him before the me that was me awakened wasn’t the Denki that I’d thought of when I’d first picked the option.

Dimensional mechanics were both weird and something that I knew pretty much *nothing about,* and while theories abounded, both at home and here, anyone that wasn’t well versed in the *realities* of it directly was pulling any proclamations they made about it directly out of their *ass*.

“So, are you not you?” Mina asked, confused.

I shook my head, “No,” before pausing and nodding, “Yes,” before just kind of wiggling it, “Maybe.”

She laughed, though there was a bit of an edge to it. “Oh, okay then.”

Sighing, “I’m me, I just have memories of a me that was different, but, as far as *you’re* concerned, the person you know is me because for the entire time I’ve been with you I’ve been me.”

She considered that, brows knitting in a way that would be adorable if I wasn’t *terrified* of how this would all go. “Oh. . . okay,” she nodded. “That’s. . . good, I think. But what about your other friends? About your parents?”

“*What* other friends?” I shrugged. “They weren’t as mean as yours, Mina, but, well, it was obvious I was probably going to get into UA, and they weren’t, so they just. . . left me alone. As for parents, they’re *still* my parents, I just also remember parents that aren’t as. . . *good,* so I appreciate them more.”

“Interdimensional?” she prodded, accepting that without comment.

“Most fiction appears to be real, tangible accounts of places elsewhere in the multiverse. You know those old american comic book movies from before the collapse two hundred years ago? How they had two different universes?” She nodded. “Both are real places. They’re also dangerous as *all hell*. Yes, *this* place is fictional somewhere else. Eventually I’ll be able to explore them, and, well, if you want to come with, I’d really like that.”

“Mail order bride?” she questioned, obviously working her way through everything.

I winced, “Yeah, um, to start with I’d like to bring up the entire ‘shanghaied’ thing. I didn’t exactly get a choice in the matter, and the document they left with outright said it didn’t matter if I was willing, mind controlled, or anything else, I worked for them now. So, um, I can kind of. . . *‘capture’* people, *women*, specifically, and The Company, that’s what they call themselves, by the way, can create clones of them to sell, but there’s something about more powerful people that makes them harder to clone or something, I really don’t know the specifics, and I get paid, in well, *superpowers.* I mean, I could also buy people that others have captured, but that, well, seems *wrong,* so I haven’t. I can also sell the people I capture for extra points to spend on more powers, or more, well, people.”

Mina was quiet for a long moment. “How.”

“How do I capture them?” I asked, and she nodded. “Can I get up for a moment?” I questioned, and she shook her head. “Okay, well, I got this stamp, thing, that I can sort of summon, and I well, *stamp* them, and it leaves a tattoo, which binds them, but it takes a bit to kick in. Thing is the Tattoo, it’s. . . corruptive, in a sense. Messes with your mind. It’s why as soon as I saw I’d, well, ‘captured’ you I made *sure* you hadn’t somehow been stamped, *you hadn’t,*” I quickly reassured her, as she started to look outraged. “But it makes those I stamp, um, *loyal,* and also makes sure they’ll like me, and also more okay with the entire ‘stamp’ thing. It’s not obedience, I didn’t go with that option-”

“What do you mean that’s an *option?*” she interrupted, sounding angry for the first time, and I flinched. “I’m sorry,” sighed, “But, honey, maybe you should explain that a bit more.”

I shrugged, “They’re all pretty, well, mind-rapey, like complete obedience, up to personality programming. The only one that isn’t still instills a kind of empathetic connection, but that was, well, *way* more points then I started with, because it’s really attached to, um, well, a magical suit of armor, Sailor Moon style.”

She stared at me. “Uh. Huh. So, I don’t have any tattoos, then how. . .”

*Did she miss it the first time I said it?* I wondered. “It was actually in a different section, one with superpowers that made me supernaturally attractive, which I ignored completely.”

“You did?” she asked, looking down at me.

“I *did,*” I vehemently agreed. “This is just the basic fitness package, which, well, I can give you too. No, that’s things like a Siren-like mind controlling voice, being so good at cooking that it can ruin regular food forever and is psychologically addicting, being amazingly good at sex, havin a mo-”

“You *didn’t* pick the sex one?” she asked, skeptically.

“Um, no?” I asked. “Pretty sure if I had you wouldn’t’ve hurt yourself, or I wouldn’t’ve taken until round three to realize how sensitive your horns are to being lick-”

“Okay. Fine. But, why?” she interrupted, pressing on.

I had to shrug. “Because I wanted anyone I found to like me for me, not because I had downloaded talents?”

She stared at me. “You do know someone would like you *before* they did you, right?”

“. . . That. . . makes sense,” I had to admit. “Um, right, anyways, to capture someone *without* binding them, they have to say they love you, and they have to mean it.”

She blinked, blushing a brilliant purple. *“oh.”*

I grinned, “I mean, I’m almost certain I feel the same. I just don’t have outside confirmation.”

She, if anything, blushed even further. “I, um,” she stammered before going in for a kiss, which I accepted, *gladly,* relieved beyond words. Mina pulled, back, frowning, “Have you actually, you know, ‘captured’ anyone for real. I mean, other than me?”

“Some of the women that attacked us yesterday. They were willing to attack innocent people just wanting to be heroes, they *deserve* what they get,” I said vehemently. “But I haven’t grabbed anyone innocent, let alone any heroes, which includes our classmates. So. . . you believe me?”

Mina hesitated. “Um, uh, it’s kind of a lot,” she hedged, laughing a little. “Not what I expected for the morning afterwards. And, well, it sounds kind of unreal. Like, a bad movie unreal. And, well, do you have any proof?”

“Oh, yeah,” I said, nodding, having already thought of that. “One of the things I picked up, can’t share it unfortunately, is something that’d help me get a handle on my Quirk *way* easier. It has a *secondary* effect that, well, *let’s me learn other people’s.* I have *no* idea how it works, and it starts at a *stupidly* low level, and I’ll probably never surpass the original user, but, well. . .” I held up a cupped palm, and, pulling on my copy of Mina’s power, filled it with the strongest acid I could. “Ta da.”

She frowned, poking the substance, and, in contact with it like I was, I could practically feel her power overpowering mine to take control of it. I didn’t resist, and she pulled her finger back, taking the acid with her.

The woman I loved stared at it, smiling, at first confusedly, then strangely, the expression shifting in worrying ways. Her hand started to shake as she lost control of it, the fluid splashing the carpet, as she muttered, her tone shaking with terror, “It’s true? But. . . but. . .” Her head snapped, to me, and she practically fell over herself as she scrambled backwards. “I, you, *what did you do?*” she demanded, on the edge of hysterics.

I stared, confused. She was just fine with it a moment ago. “I, what do you mean?” I asked, confused as she took a few steps back.

“I, who, *what are you?*” she practically yelled. “If what you said, oh god, then I’m, then *you’re. . .”* She trailed off as I tried to figure out what was happening. Mind Defense let one work under pressure, and let one avoid degenerative mental defects, but she was apparently working just fine while having a panic attack.

“I’m *me*, Mina. The same person, I’ve always been,” I stressed, standing up, which was a mistake, as she took another few steps back. “I just, well, got forced into something and am trying to make the best of it. I wasn’t lying, I’ve *never* lied to you, I just, well, didn’t explain this before because it didn’t matter, and now it *does*, because, well, of what you said. Which I appreciate, and didn’t expect, but I feel the same-”

“Get out,” she commanded, cutting me off.

“What.”

“*Get out!”* she screamed, waving to the door. “I can’t, not now, just *leave.*”

I stood for a moment, as my heart felt like it shattered, even though I’d *known* this was a bad idea, having expected this, somewhere deep down, and I nodded. I grabbed my backpack, I’d finish dressing in the hall, and headed for the door. I could hear her break down into tears behind me, and it felt like I’d been stabbed through the chest, having to stop myself from stumbling.

I opened the door, and hesitate, called back, quietly, “I’m *sorry*, Mina. I *never* meant to hurt you. I *do* love you, but. . . I . . . I understand if you don’t want anything to do with me.” Her sobbing redoubled, and my hands shook as I closed the door, and started my way back home, some dark part of me wishing Nomu had killed me, before I could’ve hurt her.