**MHA 97**

Both of our teams waited, tense, as the sounds of footsteps neared, then slowed.

And then I heard something that made me smile.

*“Okay, guys!”* Mina whispered loudly, the sound faint, but echoing through the chambers. “*Is everyone ready?”*

“*It’s already clear!”* I yelled, smiling, hearing a gasp, a few quick steps, and my girlfriend rounded the corner, hair damp.

*“Sparky!”* she called, grinning broadly, running for me on streams of acid.

*“Pinky!”* I called back, walking forward with my arms open.

“Uh, what?” Sero questioned, looking around. “So, uh we fightin’, or. . .”

Ignoring him, I caught my lover as she leapt into my arms, spinning her about, and taking a moment to kiss her, before putting her back down, as we *did* have a mission to complete.

“Fight?” Mina questioned, cocking a head as she looked past me. “Why would you, *oh, you got some evidence!”*

The rest of her team, consisting of Yanagi, the telekinetic; Kuroiro, the black merger; and Sato, aka Sugar Rush, followed her in. The monochrome boy narrowed his eyes at the black bags, and tensions started to racket up, stances shifting in preparation for combat.

*“Guys, we’re not gonna try anything!”* my girlfriend admonished the others. “Jeez, even if you wanted to *try*, Sparky would kick your asses!”

Her teammates hesitated. “Uh, we thought he wouldn’t fight, cause of you,” Kuroiro, pointed out. “That’s why you got close, right?”

The look my pink-skinned lover gave the monochrome boy was as flat as his color scheme. “I got close because I’m happy to see my *Bae*. Maybe you’ve seen him? The one who can hit people close to him with *electricity?”* she rolled her eyes, before smiling my way. “I’m just glad to see you! Getting through all of these dirt dudes has been cra-zy!”

“It *has* been a bit much,” I agreed, noting that Monoma’s team was still eying Mina’s. “Guys, we’re all, *theoretically,* here to bust a ‘criminal organization’ together. Would you *really* fight other heroes in the field as Pros?”

That got through to them, and they stood down, Monoma walking over to Yanagi and asking her something as I turned back to Mina. “So, we’ve fought small guys, big guys, *taser* guys, and a giant snake thing that we *probably* weren’t actually supposed to fight. You?”

“Oh, we fought this guy with a cold gun. Froze Sato solid!” she revealed, and I looked at the un-frozen man, noting his uniform was a little damp. “He broke right out right after, but it *def* shook us for a mo’.”

“Okay, yeah, I’ve worked on one of those devices,” I nodded. “The safety feature to freeze *around* someone is more complicated than Shoto makes it look, but it’s a pretty well-known piece of kit.”

Mina nodded. “Yeah, so if someone points a frosty gun at you-”

“Get in a position to break out a moment later,” I nodded. “*Gotchya*. We’ve been following air currents down to find the evidence rooms.”

“And we accidentally found the way up to the surface, *twice*, by following the signs,” she laughed, pointing upwards. I followed her finger, confused, before. . .

“The way out’s on the ceiling,” I noted flatly, seeing the light green vents, noting that they formed a semi-circle on the top of the chamber, with sections missing in the direction where I knew the way *down* was. However, there were glowing green vents where there was no solid wall. . .

Grabbing a coin from my necklace, I turned, making sure the range was clear, and called out “Firing!”, letting it rip, and, *yes,* it blew out *another* tunnel entrance.

“And that’s why I didn’t notice,” I sighed, as the others stiffened. “*You* were looking for correlations, while *I* was looking for causations, as it were. Good job, Mina. Told you you were smart.”

She rolled her eyes, but she was smiling. “Still not a *complete* nerd like you and YaoMomo, but I got my moments,” the gold-eyed girl announced smugly.

“I. . . do you want to-” I started to ask, knowing it’d be a hard sell to the others, but she cut me off.

“Aw, I appreciate it, Sparky, but you guys are *already* good. If we finish this, I want it to be on our *own*, ya’know?” Mina told me, guessing *exactly* what I was about to propose. “‘Sides, finding *thirty* bags would take forever.”

I sighed, “Yeah, fair enough. Just, be careful, okay?”

She laughed, *“Which* of us keeps getting hurt on these things?”

“I can heal,” I countered, and, at her flat stare, admitted, “And I don’t want to see you hurt.”

“And you think I *do?”* she noted softly, smiling to cut the edge of that statement. “Don’t worry about it, Sparky. The Pussycats know what they’re doin’, and don’t *you* keep telling me that ‘it’s better to bruise in practice than break on the field’?”

I nodded, the truism one of the growing number of things that I knew, but I didn’t know *how* I knew, only the faintest sense of cold, with a heavy weight in my hands, stirring at the memory. “Fair enough. Well, we *are* on a time limit,” I sighed, pulling her in for another kiss, before letting her go and turning to the others. “*Okay! New intel! Vents above us correlate to the exits, and there’s a non-lethal cold minion out there! Now let’s keep going!”*

Turning to Mina, I pointed out, “We’ll be going down that tunnel, we *came* from over there, so if you’re looking for the evidence rooms, go *that* way. Just be warned, they’re heavily defended, and the more they’ve got guarding it, the more evidence there is.”

My lover winked, giving me a jaunty salute, “Aye mon Capitan! Come on guys, let’s get going!”

I watched as Mina’s team ran off the way I suggested, Monoma coming up on my left and patting me on the back, *hard,* the bit of OfA I had running letting me ignore him as he practically yelled, “Of *course* Class A would waste time instead of completing our mission! Too busy consorting with the enemy and thinking with the *wrong* head! But what else can you expect from the ‘rockstar class’, too busy with *fame* instead of hard work!”

“You mean how I talked a possible fight down into intel sharing,” I shot back, brushing off his hand, as the annoying boy was *still* trying to do the ‘I’m hitting you, but being a passive aggressive douche about it by framing it as ‘congratulating’ you by ‘patting’ you on the back’ thing. “Now, if *you’re* so concerned about our time limit, *let’s get going.*”

Taking off at a jog, I headed for the other downward facing tunnel, the others following me, as we headed downwards, reaching an intersection, and. . . *yes,* two of the paths had a vent right above where they branched off, while one *didn’t*, and, heading down it, the area opened up into another large chamber, with an easy-to-manage mix of two loam-lugs and a baker’s dozen of mudmen.

Hanging back a moment, I let the others catch up, Monoma, Shiozaki, Komori, and Aoyama all starting to breathe hard, and while I didn’t say anything, I was *definitely* thinking judgy thoughts. “Sero, Shiozaki, tie down the little guys, Monoma, Shoda-”

Running up past me, *again* trying to bump me aside, despite the fact that it *hadn’t worked the last three times*, the petty power copier informed me me, “We’re working together, Kaminari, but *you* don’t give me orders!”

Rolling my eyes, as he ran froward, I continued, “Shoda, make sure he doesn’t get hurt. Aoyama, rest up, we’ll need you for the main room, Komori, do your shroom thing, and Mineta, you and me will,” I paused, seeing Monoma had decided to pick a fight with the loam-lugs, “go support those two with the big guys. *Let’s go!”*

The remains of both teams broke into action, not exactly a well-oiled machine, but one that at least didn’t seem like it’d seize up on the first bump. Monoma and Shoda were *trying* to handle the larger enemies, but their strength, even with them able to double up on their hits, just wasn’t enough. They tried to dodge the attacks, but while the smaller, rounder Shoda was surprisingly quick on his feet, Monoma got clipped and was sent flying.

Thankfully, the loam-lug’s fists were fairly soft, so while he got half a car-crash’s worth of kinetic energy, the transfer was spread out over half a second of impact instead of all at once.

Running on lightning legs, I leapt up onto the large construct’s back, as it turned around, and, cycling through my increasingly standard spread, I drew down on most of the OfA across my body, keeping a half of a percent running, while I stuffed about *four*-percent into my legs, hips, chest, and right shoulder/arm, feeling the slight burn as, with a grunt, I *slammed* a fist into my opponent’s ‘skull’, the material under my hand cratering, as it stumbled, but didn’t go down.

*Ah, the benefits of a non-exhaustible power set,* I thought with a smile, chambering another punch and driving a second into the creature’s cranium, feeling something *crunch*, and splattering the stone with the dirt that made up its ‘flesh’.

Riding it down, I saw that Mineta had the other on lock, his sticky balls holding it to the ground by its orange harness, the *only* part of itself that wouldn’t come apart when the loam-lug was restrained by. Sero and Shiozaki had the smaller masses tied up, or down, and they were already starting to sprout lines of fungus.

Clapping, I congratulated them, “You’re all getting faster! Komori, time?”

“‘Bout a hundred seconds, shroom!” she grinned.

“Isn’t there a way to do this *faster*?” Monoma complained.

“We’ve still got *hours* to go,” I countered, but I understood what he meant. “Shoda, hit the big one’s head until it ‘passes out’, and I’ll handle the small ones.”

The grey-haired boy nodded, and I leapt over to the gathered mudmen, trying to gauge the amount of strength it’d take to ‘subdue’ them. They were all tougher than a standard person, but dropping the strength with each rapid blow I figured out a single hit at about *two* percent was enough to do it, the tenth requiring two hits, but the last three were down in rapid succession.

Glancing up, the mapping above us was clear, now that I knew what to look for. “*Okay,* since we’re in a hurry, *double time it!”* I ordered, jogging for the correct exit, the others quickly moving to follow. Down we went once more, navigating another split, turning down the right way, evidenced as the rough stone once more shifted to worked ‘tiles’.

Slowing, I peered through the doorway into the next evidence room, and got a face full of *something* in the process, a small rubbery pellet hitting my face and exploding, **Body Defense** tanking the irritant. Leaning back, I informed the others, “Heads up, they’ve got pepper balls.*”*

Mineta stared, “Uh, dude, you okay?”

Running a hand over my face, removing the bright-orange gunk, I shrugged. “Not that bad. They’ve got two throwers, four of the big guys, a shocker, and about two dozen little ones, but *six* bags at the back. We do this and we’ll be two-thirds of the way there. Everyone ready?”

Getting nods, I ducked down and threw myself through the doorway, two more balls ruffling my hair as I dashed forward, leaping high over the front line of mudmen, arranged like pawns in a chess match, heading for one slingshot wielding minion, and, with an arm chambered at about three percent OfA, twisted about and hit it with a flying punch that sent it careening back into the far wall, going limp in an instant.

Pixie-Bob took a second to make her constructs respond, which let me dodge around the nearest loam-lug’s punch, climbing it, Aoyama’s blast hitting the next one over and sending it staggering back, giving me time to work. Shifting once again to my ‘strike-distribution’, I hauled back, putting my all into the OfA infused punch, the blow booming loudly in the small space, sending my target to his knees.

Beside me, the black evidence bags suddenly flew off the back all, passing by me, and I realized that Monoma must’ve picked up Yanagi’s **Poltergeist** Quirk when we met, which was rather useful, though useless against the big guy he’d gone against in the last chamber, given its weight.

*“Hey!”* Komori cried, and, cycling up for another punch, I saw that the bag that *she’d* been carrying had been grabbed as well, along with the ones that Shiozaki had on her.

*“Thanks for doing all the work for us, Kaminari!”* Monoma announced, with a manic grin, snapping his fingers, and suddenly I ***Hurt.***

It was like All Might had struck me, and hadn’t held back, as I went spinning, reflexively re-distributing OfA, slamming into the ceiling, then the floor, then cabinets, mind starting to blank from the pain, only to hit a **Defense** and *bounce*, shocking me back into focus, as my left arm hung uselessly by my side, though I could still curl my fingers, the Loam-Lug right next to me rearing back to hit me, but pausing.

*Dislocated Shoulder,* I thought, *maybe broken bones.* It felt like the joint was full of broken glass, as I staggered upwards, mind reeling, trying to focus, looking around, seeing Shiozaki and Komori were down, Minetta having been tossed into the middle of the mudmen, the boy frantically trying to dodge them.

Monoma, and the rest of his team, meanwhile, were *gone.*

I froze, realizing what had happened.

The [***BETRAYAL***](https://www.youtube.com/embed/V-SfYRac0Qs?start=1&end=130).

And I wasn’t underground for a moment.

I was on the destroyed streets of Tokyo.

Back in that cold, leeching hell.

Windows Broken.

Lights flickering.

Buildings abandoned.

Looking over the Husks that once were my Squadmates.

Drained of all life.

Duke, Alexander, and Jonathan gone completely.

Edward, Sadia, and Aline unrecognizable.

Steven having just breathed his last, the light fading from his eyes, skin withering away.

Just grey shells left, already crumbling to dust.

All because Stacy, fucking *Stacy*, that stupid Flaggy ***Cunt***, sold us out to the Empire, thinking that meant *anything*.

She’d tried to kill us all.

Delivered us, the ones hunting the Generals, on a silver platter.

Licked the *boots* of something that saw us all as a fucking *snack*.

***Fine.***

If that was how she wanted to play it, we’d fucking *starve* the bitch she served.

*Then we’d see how long until Stacy realized she couldn’t feed the tiger she’d caught by the tail.*

And then I was *back,* breathing hard, shaking, sparking, the vision, the *memory*, slamming into me, every muscle tight, taut, ready to snap, trying to clear my head, my **Defenses** flickering on and off, *something* in me, like a splinter in my mind, shifting, before it settled, the sensation fading, as I took in long, shuddering breaths, getting myself under control, the constructs around me leaving me alone.

I tried to hold onto that moment, that *memory*, but it slipped through my mental fingers, like a fading dream, and I was only able to pin down a few things, the smell of the crumbling corpses, the *drain* that pulled, slowly, but insistently, on my soul, and Steven’s face, whose death I mourned, even though I didn’t remember *who he was* or *why I cared.*

But that. . . that didn’t matter right now.

My shoulder was still a mass of pain, but I focused OfA on it, which helped, and I reached over to it, turning my arm electrical to let me extend it for added length, extended fingers painfully gripping the broken flesh, and shifting the joint, gritting my teeth as I popped it into it socket, which, from the shooting pain, was *also* broken, and I had *no idea* how I knew what that felt like, but I did.

I’d need to let my Regen at it, but, turning the joint electrical cut off the pain like someone flicked a switch, which kicked that problem down the road for a moment. Still shaking, I finally brought myself under control, distantly noting that, while injured, Shiozaki had gotten back up, and was assisting Minetta, who wasn’t doing half bad, though two of the loam-lugs had started harassing him. By the subtle lines of fungus, Komori was still in play, but maybe still a minute from insta-winning on the smaller ones, and two or three against the larger constructs.

Working my hands, I looked over to the Loam-Lug standing above me, fist still raised, and nodded to it. “Thanks, Pixie-Bob,” I told it. “I’m. . . serviceable now. We can continue.”

Minutely the large construct nodded, before slamming the fist down at me, as I dodged to the side, slamming a punch from my *good* arm into its knee, destabilizing it. The follow up punch was swift, and I rolled forward on my electric shoulder, shooting it out a little to give me extra speed, the strike missing me as I shot my left arm out, catching the harness, and leaping up onto it, just as I had the others.

This time, however, I, didn’t move for a *punch*, electrical fingers pressed together, using the same strike-distribution OfA pattern, but instead of transferring the energy into a blow, I compressed my hand into an extending blade that, in one swift motion, beheaded my attacker, causing it to drop to the ground.

Toggling OfA down to my legs, I blasted forward off the dropping construct, my focus narrowed, and I hit the next loam-lug, turning my momentum into my strike, attempting another cut, not enough to get clear through, but, splaying electric fingers out, I shifted the distribution and *pulled*, a primal yell ripping its way out of my throat, tearing its head off in a shower of dirt.

Looking to the next one, both were down, and only a few mudmen remained, so I went for those, keeping my blade-hand. It caught on the construct’s uniform, but a shifting thought gave my fingers a grip, and I threw it into a second, stepping forward, reverting the limb, and beheading another. Sighting on my next target. . . there weren’t any.

Every other one was tied down, either with Mineta’s balls or Shiozaki’s vines, and the mudmen were already coming apart at the seams.

. . . good.

Gritting my teeth, I let the **Electrobody** running through my injured shoulder snap back, bringing back the pain in a whip-crack of *agony* that forced a grunt from me, as I reached over again and tried to help shove everything in place, focusing OfA on it.

*“Kaminari!”* Mineta gasped. “*You’re hurt!”*

“*You don’t say,”* I shot back, wincing. “Sorry, that was rude. Gimme a sec, this *really* hurts.”

It was odd, feeling my healing do. . . whatever it was that it did. Theoretically, since I wasn’t *missing* any biological matter, that *should* make it easier, having only bled a bit from where a few bone-shards had likely broken the skin, but carefully feeling them out, they were slowly pulling themselves back inwards, which felt. . . kinda weird.

“Did one of those filthy fiends do that to you?” Shiozaki questioned, but, from the hesitation in her voice, she knee that wasn’t the case.

“No, that’d be your teamkilling *fucktard* of a classmate,” I growled, putting what’d happened together. “Mineta, Monoma didn’t touch you this entire time, did he?”

The small boy’s eyes narrowed, then widened. “He had the short-guy’s Quirk!” At my waiting look, not commenting on the hypocrisy of *him* calling *anyone* short, the baller quickly added, “Uh, no, he didn’t. I think he tossed me with the creepy girl’s Quirk.”

“And you two?” I asked, turning to the B-ers. Shiozaki nodded while Komori’s expression darkened.

“He ‘bumped into me’. Right where he *hit* me. Accidental my aching *mycelium, Shroom!”* the other girl pseudo-swore with dark intent.

Part of me wanted to *chase that fucker* down, and, since the limit of this exercise apparently included *moderate bodily harm*, then I’d only be following the *Golden Rule,* ***wouldn’t I?***

But, I’d need a couple more minutes to heal, and they’d likely be long gone by this point, the multiple paths making tracking *anyone* through this place nigh-impossible with our powerset.

“And every bump, every nudge, was another stored hit. Apparently, as long as he can re-up the power, he can keep it going without dropping any ‘charges’,” I noted, everything clicking together. “And each one of those stupid ‘pats’ was him loading another chamber into the gun he was pointing at me.”

Mineta frowned, “But to do *that much* to you. . .”

“He waited until my guard was down,” I pointed out, the pain slowly fading, the *shattered glass* feeling slowly blunting itself.

*“The logs!”* Shiozaki gasped, and, at the looks from the other two, she explained. “When Kaminari injured himself providing us the lumber required to make our evening meal.”

Nodding, I told her, “I don’t drop it *completely* anymore, or this would take a *lot* longer to repair, but. . . yeah, that’s probably when he noticed.” Prodding the wound, I hissed a little at the pain, but regeneration was *kinda bullshit* and I was *absolutely there for it.* That said, trying to apply my lessons with Mei to the anatomy and trauma-medicine I’d learned from. . . someone, blonde, German accent, though I couldn’t remember her face, or name, but I combined *those* two, along with the mental count I’d been keeping, telling me. . . *fuck,* it’d be another ten minutes before I was combat ready. But we’d only been down here for an hour, *tops*.

We had the time to take that break, and Mineta had been flagging by the end of the fight, so he could use that to recover as wll. Likewise, Shiozaki and Komori were both clearly not used to taking hits, or maybe were more unsettled by Monoma’s actions than they appeared to be.

I could understand that, as it was always a shock when you were ***BETRAYED***.

For a moment, I felt my anger, my *rage,* writhe in my gut, but I got it handled, bringing it to heel. It would fuel my actions, *not* direct them, and, ironically, my *literal* pain helped me wrestle it into place, giving me a sharp-edged focus, even as everything else felt a little fuzzy. The feeling, like more and more things, felt *familiar,* even though it *shouldn’t be*.

With a growl, I sparked a little, and the other three looked at me in concern. “*Sorry,”* I bit out. “Just. . . annoyed. And in pain. But. . .” I looked around them. “Mineta, Komori. Which do you care more about. Continuing to train your skills on these constructs, or *finishing the mission?*”

Both hero-students looked confused, sharing a perplexed look. “Uh, finishing the mission?” the ball-headed boy put forward. “Right?” Looking to the fun-girl, she nodded. “Yeah. That.”

“Alright. Komori, know that, if we *weren’t* on a time-limit, you could *solo* this entire place, as long as you could remain unseen,” I stated, and the girl blinked, surprised.

“Huh. Yeah. I could kick their ascuses, couldn’t I?” she mused.

“With unlimited time, *yes.* Working in a hurry, not so much,” I told her, and, after another moment of thought she nodded, accepting the criticism. “Mineta, you’re a capture *specialist*. If these were *actual* people, you’d be a lot more needed, as, going through them like *I* am would lead to a *very* un-heroic *bloodbath.* But against constructs, especially ones that crumble. . .”

“Nah, I get it. Whatever plan you have, Denki, we’re not gonna be doing much, are we?” he questioned ruefully.

“Sorry, but no,” I agreed without reservation. “No, it’s going to be me, once I heal, but far more than that it’s going to be *Shiozaki* that will be our MVP.”

“Me?” the vine-haired girl questioned. “My gifts are only what the Lord, our God, have seen fit to grant this poor soul.”

“Well, he decided to give you one *hell* of a gift,” I told her. “And, more than that, it’s a gift that you *haven’t* been using to its greatest extent possible.”

The look the Christian gave me was equal parts worried and offended. “You are saying I have been squandering my Holy Gift?”

“Not to the point of *squandering,*” I countered, making a note to ask her about the specifics of her denomination, and how it worked around *Quirks* existing. “But the way you use your Gift is mostly stationary, when there’s *no reason* for you to be doing so.” Walking over to a metal desk, I shifted my uninjured limb into a single long talon, and, with OfA, carved into the faux-wood top as if it were sand, drawing a representation of Shiozaki, in a ball of vines, with others sticking out. “This is you in the Sports Festival. Useful, and you can reach out and pull and push yourself, but for high-speed movement, you need *more* than that.”

The woman frowned, extending a vine into her hands. “But, that is what I can do. I cannot shift it like you shift your body, with joints,” she pointed out, indicating my taloned ‘arm’.

“Cool, cool. Hey, can you grab that cabinet over here and bring it over here?” She nodded, and reached out a dozen tendrils, which smoothly braided themselves together, then the cabling braced itself on the ground to lift the cabinet, bringing it over to me, swinging it around the brace point. “So, was that the push, or the pull?”

“That. . .” she stared, rallying. “That *was* neither, but I had to push against the *ground*.”

“Fun fact, that’s how *walking* works,” I pointed out with a smile. “But, there’s another way of doing this. It’s a little counterintuitive, but the fact that you’ve essentially got an entire mass of disposable, extendable, *kinda* artificial muscles coming from your head means that there’s a *lot* that you can do with it, if you apply just a little science to it.” I paused, seeing her visible distaste. “And that’s bad because. . .”

“Those that turn their faces away from God often do so in the name of ‘Science’,” she stated primly.

Taking a second to mentally configure myself for ‘god-talk’, I nodded, applying the proper lexicon, which resulted in. . . “Do not the agents of the Deceiver often use falsehoods?” I questioned, hoping her denomination was one that included Satan.

“He *does,”* Shiozaki gave, which was all I needed.

“While I do not have anything close to a complete understanding of the Lord’s instructions, I am fairly certain that it is *ignorance* he has a problem with, not knowledge. The problem lays not in Science, but in human Pride, unknowing agents of the Deceiver believing that their paltry understanding of the Lord’s Creation is enough to deny the existence of the Creator himself.”

The fact that ‘Creating Entity’ and ‘Yahweh’ were by *no* means guaranteed to be the same entity was a fact I was carefully avoiding.

The Zealot slowly nodded, with me so far.

“It is by learning how the workings of Creation function that one can gain a better understanding of just how complex and powerful its Creator was, to make it in the first place. By using what you have learned in accordance with his wishes, you are not turning your back on God, but merely better using what tools he has provided. Science is not the sin, *Pride* is, though, all to often, those who seek to understand the world do so because they believe themselves to know *better*, despite knowing, ultimately, very little in the scheme of things,” I stated, hoping I was making sense.

There *was* a tendency for upper-end astrophysicists to gain a belief in the divine, so there had to be *something* there. I just wasn’t sure if I’d gotten close enough for her to accept it.

“And the science you wish to perform. . .” the woman asked leadingly, which wasn’t a *no.*

“Engineering, not science, really,” I said, realizing that I’d been an *idiot,* when I should’ve just been leading with *that*. In my defense, my shoulder *was* still broken, and I was still ***pissed****.* “Tell me, how much do you know about *rigging?*”

“Like elections?” Mineta questioned, confused.

“No,” I smiled, “*Like ships.”*