**MHA 118**

Returning from our lunch with the Gaang, I breathed a sigh of relief, as they were all pretty much how I remembered them from the show, except for the entire ‘not animated’ thing, but then…

*Why was this an Alternate Universe?*

“They seemed nice,” Mina smiled, giving me an amused look, “Though don’t’chya think you’re taking this ‘Spirit’ thing a bit far, Sparky?”

I frowned, considering her criticism, but… “No. I, *theoretically* they’d be fine without our help, at *all*, but if we give them too much, it could… *change* things. We shouldn’t help at all, just watch, as it worked our originally, but…”

“But ya saw they were hungry, and needed help, so you talked yourself into it,” my lover laughed, giving me a quick hug. “*Never change*, Sparky.”

“I… okay?” I replied, unsure, but pressed forward. “Your read on them?”

“They’re cute,” the pink-haired woman shrugged, as we headed up through the Home, plopping down on our deck, the day bright and warm, the sun’s rays oddly comfortable, with a smattering of clouds drifting across the pristine sky. “But they’re supposed to ‘save the world’? Kinda young for it.”

“And we *aren’t*,” I questioned in turn, opening the nearby minifridge and grabbing a drink, handing one to Mina as I sat beside her, the girl looking at me skeptically. “No, seriously, while I don’t know how things would’ve turned out in our old world, before, I, well…”

“Changed things?” she offered.

*“Fucked everything up,*” I agreed, “I very much would’ve doubted if we were allowed to finish our time at UA before *everything* came to a head. And with All-for-One in jail, just like he was *before*… he’s not been stopped. And with what he can do, what he *did…*”

Mina scooted over and wrapped a gentle but firm arm around my waist. “We’re *gonna* stop him, Sparky. Whatever he does.”

“I mean, *yeah,*” I readily agreed, surprising her. “But, it’s gonna be a… *bit*, and the fact that Midoriya was supposed to face *that…* it’s not *that* much different than Aang’s task. Well, Quirk Satan could take on even an *empowered* Fire Lord from the mainline Avatar-verse without breaking stride, so the matter of *degree* is skewed, but, fuck, even when Aang goes full Avatar State, channeling the World Spirit that he is, or, that he’s the host for, or, something, *it’s complicated*, but even then *Endeavor* might be able to kick his ass, let alone All Might, or *Mini*-Might.”

“So, is Aang young? Yeah,” I agreed, “But it’s not *just* him, and Sokka’s just a *little* younger than us, I think. And, once I’ve got a better handle on just exactly *what* exactly is going on… doing more might be safer, but, but well, we’ve *seen* what happens when I try and *help.*”

The girl beside me didn’t say anything for a long moment, just holding me a bit tighter, before quietly stating, “Then slow it is.”

And we just relaxed there, sipping our drinks, enjoying the peace, and each other’s company, until, after she finished her soda and setting aside the glass, she finally asked, “But, uh, why *did* we end up on that mountain?”

“I have *no fucking clue,*” I sighed, doing the same with my tea, as that *had* been bugging me too. “However it’s working, it’s not the same way it does back home, with set locations, but since every important actor, except for the Big Bad, is *constantly* on the move, that’s not necessarily a *bad* thing?” Waving to the extended yard that surrounded our house, open and inviting forest off to one side, a pristine beach on the other, I added, “It’s not like we can’t just turn around head back if it’s somewhere we don’t want to be.”

*“True,*” Mina nodded, lifting a hand and idly making a bit of acid, she shifted to lean against me as she waved it back and forth, until, slowing with concentration, the globule of weak acid detached, lifting into the air, unsupported.

It was a bit hypnotic actually, and, unlike when Mina worked her Quirk, I felt…

*Nothing.*

At least, from my *purchases*, which told me that, whatever this was, it was *one-hundred percent magical.*

She lost control of it after a few passes, the substance splashing, a bit, on her shirt, and she pouted, glancing up at me.

“Um,” I started to say, “Maybe it-”

But Mina reached up to put a finger on my lips, cutting me off, and spun about, removing her arm from behind me only to plop herself in my lap, and then, with a move that was one-part judo, one part… I wasn’t sure what, she hooked her leg around mine while pushing my shoulder in the opposite direction, not really *forcing* but shifting me to lay down on the couch, with her on top of me, her back leaning against my chest as my head rested on a nearby cushion. Grabbing my arms, she moved them around herself, under her own, and rested them there, her horns bracketing my chin.

“There, *much* better,” she smiled, and, resting there, pulled off a bit more of her acid and got to work trying to figure out how to work it, while, trapped as I was, I just… relaxed, under the warmth of my own personal sun, holding tightly onto someone who loved me.

And *watched*.

<MHA>

It wasn’t until the next afternoon that we opened the portal once more, unsure what we’d find, bundled up, and, looking at the swirling energy, I felt a little bit like SG-1, only I wasn’t going to have to deal with alien parasite slavers with delusions of godhood, which, honestly, I was okay with.

Taking Mina’s hand in mind, we stepped through…

Back onto Zuko’s ship.

The prince was on the deck, running through exercises, though he stopped as soon as he saw us, declaring flatly, “Oh, it’s you.”

“Welcome back!” Iroh smiled, much more cordially. “I had wondered when we would have the pleasure of your company once again. I must admit, I was worried that you would visit yesterday, while we were… otherwise indisposed.”

“Zhao?” I asked, and, at the General’s interested upraised eyebrow, I snorted in disgust. “Yeah, from what I’ve heard he’s a piece of shit, and, if the rumors are correct, pissed off Mr. Owl.”

“Who?” Zuko questioned.

“Yeah, *him*,” I nodded, Mina giggling.

But Iroh was now frowning, his voice concerned, as he checked, “He has angered He Who Knows Ten Thousand Things?”

I lifted a warding hand, “Again, rumor before we left, but, yeah, the *good Admiral* pillaged the Library, looking for something, and *burned* it once he found it.”

“Oh. *Dear,”* the, if things were the same, leader of the closest thing this place to the *Illuminati* stated, even as his nephew looked between us.

Pinching the bridge of his nose, the scarred teen questioned, *“Who is ‘He Who Knows Ten Thousand Things’, Uncle?”*

The grey-haired royal asked in turn, “You mean to tell me you have never heard of Wan Shi Tong, Prince Zuko? To think your royal education has been so lacking!” he chided teasingly. “First to question the existence of spirits, when I have been clear on the nature of such things-”

“I thought you were being *metaphorical!”* the younger royal snapped. “Or that they would be *subtle.* Not, not *that!”* he declared, pointing at me.

*“Zuko!”* Iroh reprimanded, more seriously this time.

“Nah, that’s completely understandable,” I shrugged. “So, I’m gonna take it he never met a Spirit before?”

*“No!”* the teen exclaimed. “Not even an Ancestor at a shrine, though *she* hasn’t either,” he muttered to himself.

Looking thoughtful, Iroh considered that. “The Fire Sages *are* quite proficient in their task of keeping Spirits at peace, to allow the war effort to continue without issue, and I have made sure we have not given offense until now. A task that you have not always made *easy*, might I add,” he smiled towards his nephew. “It is to our benefit that our guests are *incredibly* accommodating, as far as Spirits go.”

*That kind of tracks with what I know,* I thought, remembering the forest spirit that went all pocket-kaiju until Aang talked it down. And the Ocean spirit going *actual* kaiju when Zhao *killed the fucking Moon*, though, realistically speaking, if I told them about that now… it would be too much, too fast, and even as much as I was revealing now, I was … *pushing* it.

“However, patching your spotty education can wait!” the general announced. “Let us go inside, so you can give your first lesson as an *instructor*, Prince Zuko! And, Ms. Ashido, may I interest you in some Ginseng Tea while we watch?”

“That sounds great!” she smiled. “And can you give me some of those tips you mentioned? I tried some stuff out yesterday, but I’m not sure what I’m doing wrong. Like, I can unfreeze stuff, but doing it the other way? No dice. *Or* ice!”

Standing from his low seat, Iroh laughed. “Ah, yes, but perhaps another day. I would rather watch my nephew’s lesson today.”

“What, do you think I can’t do it?” the prince challenged.

“Oh, I have faith in your efforts,” the Dragon of the West reassured the boy, “but in teaching one who is not a Firebender since birth, there may be… irregularities. You can handle fire, but should Mr. Kaminari accidentally bend *lightning,* that is not a skill you yet possess.”

Lifting a finger to object, the burned teen paused, then lowered it. “But you will teach me, Uncle?”

“Once you have mastered the advanced set,” Iroh promised. “It is a talent that even your father does not possess.”

“I, *really?”* Zuko questioned, skeptically, and, at his uncle’s simple nod, clearly wasn’t sure how to deal with that, instead striding past Mina and I, commanding, *“Follow me!”*

Looking to my lover, we shared a shrug, and did just that, until we ended up in an interior room, a desk set against one wall. Snatching a candle from it, the teen slammed it down on the center table, negligently lit the wick by pinching it, and plopped down himself, gesturing for me to sit opposite of him, and waiting for the rest of us before he’d start.

I sat where he’d indicated, Mina, at Iroh’s direction, taking a cushion that was off to the side, while, maintaining a bit of flame in his palm, the older man started to heat the water for some tea.

“Alright, what do you know?” the prince demanded.

I thought about that for a moment.

“Okay, so, I’ve got fire,” I stated, pulling on Todoroki’s Quirk to make a flame in my left hand, “And I can *Bend* it,” I continued. Reaching over it with my right, and, with a feeling like untangling threads, I pulled the wisp-like flame out into a thin, flickering arc that slipped through my mental fingers and dispersed in the air between us. *“Somehow.*”

Zuko stared at me.

“… What.”

Clearing his throat, and gathering our attention as Mina tried not to giggle, Iroh prompted, “Perhaps, if you don’t mind, you could tell us of how you, er, *acquired* your Firebending? We are normally born with such a gift, and as such have lived most of our lives with it, since we were *wee* little children. To have one already grown only now awaken such a talent is… *unheard* of. But you *are* Spirits.”

“Fair enough, it was granted to us by my superior right before we left for here,” I stated, truthfully, “in accordance with what we were most aligned with.” Gesturing with a sparking hand, “I, thus, was granted Firebending, while my partner similarly got Waterbending, to use as the people of this world do, instead of how things worked where *we’re* from. So assume I know *nothing,* because, well, I don’t know what I don’t know, and I’m fuzzy on what I do know, but you *don’t*.”

“And what would *you* know that I wouldn’t?” the prince questioned, narrow-eyed.

“I know what lightning *actually is,*” I replied with a smirk, “And why you can shock yourself when you’ve walked on carpet, and then touch metal.”

Perking up, Iroh remarked, “Oh, you do? I have always wondered! Hmm, perhaps we should start with the basics. What do you know of Chi?”

“Oh, like the tea?” Mina asked with a grin.

“That’s *Chai,* Pinky,” I sighed.

The General, meanwhile, looked delighted. “I have never heard of such a blend. You really must make some the next time we meet!”

*“Enough about tea!”* Zuko snapped, pinching the bridge of his nose. “So, Spirits don’t have Chi?”

“Not as *we* do, no,” Iroh agreed. “In some ways, they are *made* of chi.” He paused, glancing my way, “At least normally. If I am to understand you, you now have chi like we do?”

“Probably? I didn’t get a full explanation,” I shrugged, turning to look at the scarred teen. “So, what’s chi to *you?”*

“Chi is… energy,” the prince stated looking down at the candle flame, haltingly, glancing up at me warily, but I just waited, listening. “Everyone has chi, or, at least, *people* do, and every person can learn to move it. It’s what all Benders use to affect their element. And fighters use it, too. Though I guess a lot of them don’t know what they’re doing.”

*Like Sokka,* I thought, nodding, as Zuko started to get into the swing of his explanation, continuing, “A warrior who *does* know is an incredible fighter. Years ago, Master Piandao of Shu Jing resigned from the army and retired. Somebody decided they wanted him back, and they sent a hundred soldiers to convince him. And he is not a Firebender. Not a Spirit. Merely a swordsman. Though there is nothing *mere* about him,” the teen added, before his uncle could correct him.

“Firebending comes from the breath, so… so to start we’ll begin with some breathing meditation. I guess,” the younger royal stated, unsure, glancing over to Mina. “I, I don’t know where Waterbending comes from.”

“The *heart,*” Iroh noted. “And the circulation of the blood in one’s veins.”

Mina considered that, “‘Cause blood’s kinda like water? I guess, but wouldn’t the stomach also work?”

Shaking his head, the General explained, “No, the stomach is the Sea of Chi, or, in my case, *a vast ocean!”*

“Stomach’s the battery, circulatory system’s the circuit for water, and I’m not sure what the bladder would be,” I half-guessed, half-translated.

Either way, I got a chuckle from the older man. “Oh, I had not considered that! Hmm, *urine-*bending, I am not sure if that is genius, or *terrible beyond measure.”*

“Gives ‘scared the piss out of ‘em’ a whole new meaning,” I quipped, eliciting a bark of laughter from the Firebending master.

*“*Can we *please* focus on the lesson?” Zuko growled.

“Sorry, I deal with stress through humor,” I replied blandly. “So, breathing?”

Giving me a wary look, he nodded, “Yes, breathing.”

Walking me through the exercise, it was easy, and I could feel **Martial Talent** picking up a bit, here and there, though I had a feeling it was more from *Iroh* than the prince, though there was a slight… disconnect, like I was only getting part of the picture, but I could at least pick up that part up quickly.

Either way, Zuko saw… *something,* before he told me to keep going, leaving the room, and came back with a futon. Then ran me through how to *fall*, which I *already knew,* but did whatever he asked of me without complaint, as I had a feeling that he was going somewhere with this.

And, to his credit, the Prince didn’t complain about ‘teaching’ me something I was clearly experienced with, just nodded, double-checking my form, and handed the bedroll to the guards outside to return to storage, the two man dropping off the folded up emergency blankets when they returned.

Having me sit back down, Mina had stepped out to make some popcorn, returning and sharing it with Iroh, the old man grinning like a loon as he tried it, commenting on how the Earth Kingdom had a *similar* treat, though there were subtle differences in both taste and seasonings he rather enjoyed.

“Alright, now I want you to reach out to the candle,” Zuko instructed. “Don’t do anything but breathe. Feel your heartbeat.”

I did what he asked, but I didn’t *feel* anything other than the sense of… *moreness* from the fire, like I had with my candle beforehand.

“Now what?” I asked after a few moments.

“*Reach out to it,”* the prince repeated.

Feeling the fire, I slowly said, “I… am?”

Now the scarred teen was frowning at me. “No, you’re not.”

“But it’s *right there,*” I argued.

“It appears that your instincts are not that of a normal Firebender first reaching out to the flame,” Iroh observed, before his nephew could respond. “Perhaps because you already have control of your own natural energies, instead of your newfound reserves of chi? Perhaps you could demonstrate, Prince Zuko?”

Giving me a searching look, I wasn’t sure what I was supposed to do, but the royal harrumphed, and, looking to the candle in front of us.

And the flame, which already seemed more real than the candle it was above, gained… *depth.*

Concentrating, seeing it grow and shrink with Zuko’s breathing, it was… *subtle.* Very, *very* subtle. But I could almost *trace* the, for lack of a better term, *moreness*, back to the Firebender.

“Oh, huh,” I commented, waving towards the enhanced fire. “I think I was watching, not reaching. Sorry. Reaching for things can be… *bad,* in some cases.”

I wasn’t sure *why* I said that, only that I *knew it to be true,* and while the Prince looked at me skeptically, the General nodded sagely. “Tainted chi, that created by malignant Spirits, can harm those who reach for it. It is a lesson that any who wish to become a Fire Sage must learn,” he added, at his nephew’s frown. “However, as our fire draws upon our *internal* chi, it is not a concern for most Firebenders, as it is for those of other nations.”

That mollified Zuko, and, Watching the candle return to normal, I focused on it, reaching out, feeling it.

“Good, now,” my instructor nodded, but I felt something oddly, *calling* to me, so I fed it, the color of the flame shifting, then, pulling deep, I mentally gripped the flame tighter, and it started to-

***SCREEEE!***

A *purple* ***blaze***flared upwards, not in an erupting, expanding cloud but a *bar* of energy, a high pitched noice erupting from the candle as it leapt upwards, and I reflexively shifted a hand to lightning and *yanked,* the searingly-hot burst of *plasma* pulled towards me, the way I knew Denki could absorb electricity, only at a distance, but it was only my changed limb that kept my flesh from charring from the sudden burst of *heat*, as the painfully bright plume it curled around my fingers, but it was even harder to hold on to than normal fire, and was gone in a moment.

Zuko had thrown himself backwards, hands up in a combat stance, as I stared at my hand, and, to the side, Iroh blinked.

Unable to help it, I looked at the wary teen, and asked, as guilelessly as I could, “Oh, was that not supposed to happen?”

Mina, staring, planted her face in her hands with a loud *slap.*

“What *was* that!?” the prince demanded.

“Plasma,” I answered easily, amused, but… that had *potential*. “Same stuff that’s in the *sun*. Apparently, I have a bit of overlap with my other talents, or… *something*. Not really sure. Just know it’s what happens when you combine fire and lightning.”

“The sun isn’t *purple!”* Zuko argued.

“I mean, fire comes in tons of colors too,” I shrugged, Iroh giving me an odd look. “It depends on what’s in the thing being burned. Salt turns it bright yellow, natural gas burns blue, and copper turns it green.”

“He is not wrong,” the old Firebending master nodded. “Though I have not seen such a thing myself before. Then again, I have not dealt with a…” he paused, “*Storm* Spirit before, let alone one who had received Agni’s blessing.”

Considering that, the corner of Zuko’s mouth twitched upwards, but he quickly schooled his features, and pressed on. “I. Once you have a better understanding, we can… look into that. But we need to cover the basics *first,”* he stressed. “At least the most basic of the basics.”

“And that would be?” I questioned.

*“Putting fires out.”*

I blinked. “Oh, yeah, let’s start with that.” With my left hand, I called upon Todoroki’s Quirk, and tossed a tiny fireball, barely a wisp, to the now noticeably *shorter* candle, relighting it. “Okay, reach out, *don’t grab,* and for the love of all that’s holy *don’t feed it.*”

Doing just that, the flame… visually, only grew slightly, but once more gained that added dimension, but the feeling was *much* more intense.

If anything, it felt like it had a *heartbeat.*

But, *no,* and, remembering the prince’s order to focus on my *own*…

“Ah, it’s reflecting my heartbeat back to me, like an echo through my chi, circulating back and forth,” I stated, talking my way through this, in case I was getting something wrong. “Fascinating. I assume, Zuko, that you have to explain to children that the fire isn’t *actually* alive?”

“I, *yes*,” the teen answered. “Though in some ways it *is*. It eats, and moves, and has energy in ways that other elements… don’t. And if you don’t keep it in check, it will kill you.”

“Oh, fire doesn’t have a monopoly on that,” I mused, cupping my right hand, and forming a crystal of ice, which caused the teen to stare as I set it down on the table. “But fair enough. Now, if this is life, *how do I kill it?”*

The prince looked at me warily.

“What?” I questioned, looking from Zuko to Iroh, clearly having said something wrong.

Sighing, Mina reassured them, “Don’t mind Sparky, he’s not as bad as he sounds.”

“That sounded bad?” I asked. “But he just said it was *life*, and if we’re putting it *out*, then-”

“You’re… not wrong,” my teacher interrupted. “To extinguish a flame, just like falling, you take that energy, and take it down, and *out*.”

Lifting a finger, I asked, resisting the urge to experiment myself, since, well, *I had two experts right here*, “What happens if we don’t roll out of it, but just… *fall, hard?*”

Zuko frowned. “I… don’t know. But it hurts.”

“*Sparky,”* my partner warned, *“don’t.* Not ‘till you’re better!”

I wanted to object, but… no, that was an accurate and salient concern.

“Okay, I promise,” I reassured her, looking to the prince. “Should I?”

At his cautious nod, I took my connection to the fire, and…*rolled.*

And it was snuffed out in an instant.

“Huh,” I commented, relighting it with my Quirk, reaching out, and putting it out again. And again. And again.

Clearing his throat, Iroh noted, “Young Firebenders have noted that the extinguishing of flame as a highly unpleasant experience.”

*“Really?”* I questioned, lighting and extinguishing the candle once more, and… *hmmm…* There *was* a faint sense of *loss,* but it was gone in an instant, and, when compared to the *gaping* feeling that the mutilated One-for-All left in the back of my mind, and which I tried to ignore… “I mean, it’s not *fun*, but it’s not *that* bad. And *absolutely* necessary.”

“Perhaps it is the lack of… childish naivete, then,” the General pronounced. “Especially for one that already bends something *far* more dangerous than flame.”

Working with Zuko for another hour, we didn’t really do much more, the teen having me meditate on the candle, and, slowly, *carefully,* feed a *bit* of energy into it to make it grow, removing it to make it bank, as he directed me to.

Only *once* did I pull Plasma, with his grudging permission, which required an odd *twist*, giving it a tiny fraction of the energy I had before, feeling as if I was using my main Quirk *through* that sense of inner fire, and other than causing it to arc, tentacle-like, into the air for a single moment, that was it. Though, in that moment I could feel *Iroh’s* presence for a single instant, clamping on the bit of energy to keep it in place, and that was… *different.*

The man was no *All Might*, but I got an ephemeral sense for why he was the *Dragon* of the West, an image of a *mostly* relaxed aged Wyrm made of banked coals rising to mind, but it was gone in an instant, and I couldn’t exactly say *why* I got that impression… only that I *did*.

However, after only a bit of training, I started to feel worn out, Zuko calling the end of the session, with *strict* orders not to bend until tomorrow, orders that Iroh seconded. According to them, one’s chi was, in many ways, similar to a muscle, and while working it was beneficial, *overworking* it could cause damage, having left more than one overeager student bedridden, the significant look the older man sent his nephew not unnoticed.

I was willing to take a back seat while Iroh worked with Mina, but she insisted we could do that tomorrow, and, returning home, she declared she was making dinner, ordering me to relax out on the porch, as the sun’s rays were apparently helpful for recovery for a Firebender’s overuse of their chi as well, and I was out like a light. Hours later, she woke me up for dinner, and I relaxed with her as the sun dipped below the horizon, and an unnatural looking moon, a featureless blue-white disk unlike the pitted surface of Luna, appeared opposite of it, my partner perking up as it did so.

“Firebenders get their power from the sun, Waterbenders from the moon, at least originally,” I explained. “And, maybe also the ocean? Not sure. You wanna give it a shot at the beach? Only thing in it should be prey species.” She hesitated, and I pressed, “I’ll grab a chair, and you get a towel? You stuck around with me, while I played with my Bending, *let me do the same.*”

“O-Okay, Sparky,” she agreed, and, once we were both down at the gently lapping waves, she stripped down to her underwear and waded into the warm shallows, moving back and forth, the water flowing around with her as she splashed about, and while she was having fun at first, my partner was starting to get a little frustrated.

Skating out of the waves and over to me, she asked, “So, even if you’re wrong, ‘cause this is different, got any suggestions?”

“Bending practices are styled after martial arts,” I offered. “Firebending is Shaolin Kung Fu, and Waterbending is Tai Chi, but it’s not *locked in.* Don’t remember the ones for the other two, but the greatest Earthbender in the world doesn’t use the *normal* way of Earthbending, with its rigid stances and, well, *blocky* movements,” I stated, gesturing with a mimed punch, “she uses something like Praying Mantis style,” I opened my hand into a swift chop. “So, lean towards Tai Chi, but, uh, *be water?* And if you’re feeling tired, *don’t push yourself.*”

She laughed, carefree, “Sparky, I could do this *all night!*” At my concerned look, she smiled, “But how ‘bout for another hour, then we head to bed?”

“Sounds like a plan,” I nodded in agreement, as she went back to the shore, and, shifting her stance, pulled a long tendril of water up, streaming it one way, then another, though, when she tried to pass it over her head, it came apart, dousing her.

Mina yelped in surprise, and I sat up, calling out to her, “Do you want to talk your way through it? I might be able to help!”

My partner considered that, before shaking her head, yelling back, “Nah! I totes wanna figure this out myself!”

Giving her a thumbs up, I relaxed back in my seat, feeling a little lethargic, that sense of… *determination* at a low ebb, leaving me almost woozy, but I could push through it if I needed to. Mina, meanwhile, grabbed another stream of water and tried to pass it over her head… and splashed herself as it came apart once more, going at it again and again, with different stances, and different approaches, until she could swirl it without issue, moving to try and move *two,* at once, which she had a bit of trouble with, but was working on when my phone beeped, midnight approaching, and, reluctantly, she headed back over to me, drying herself off, and we made our way back to the house.

“Anything?” she asked as we both took a quick shower together, my lover, with a graceful flick of her hand, shifting the direction of the falling stream, but only momentarily.

“I don’t know enough to help, sorry,” I apologized, the woman rolling her eyes, and turning to give me a warm, wet, and soapy hug.

*“Don’t beat yourself up, Sparky,”* she chided. “You’ve got *nothing* to be sorry about. But, like, you’ve seen how this works, so, suggestions?”

Considering that, we finished cleaning off, and, as we slipped into bed, I told her, “So, on the easier end, Waterbending is also *Icebending*, like you saw, but not just in feezing and unfreezing, but full-on control like you do for water, so figuring out how to make that work would be a good start. Medium end, and once you’ve got more power and control, *hydraulic cutters* exist for a reason, and being able to cut through steel with a gallon of water is something the protagonists can do after they’ve got some training under their belt, but one of them’s a prodigy, and the other is *the Avatar*. No idea how we match up compared to them, but, given how things work in *your* world, and the limiters, *or lack thereof,* present, there’s some… *possibilities.* Top end of Bending in general is when you start getting meta.”

“Meta?” she echoed, fluffing her pillow… and then ignored it completely to rest her head on my arm.

“Lightningbending is a known talent of Firebending royalty. The Greatest Earthbender in the World would, if things went how they originally did, invent Metalbending in about a year. Not sure what the Airbending equivalent would be. Maybe something vacuum related? *That* could be nasty.”

“And *Waterbending?*” Mina asked. “Don’t think I didn’t notice you left that out, mister!”

“So, *nice* answer is *desiccation,* as it’s completely possible to pull the water *out* of things,” I stated, “though, again, this is based on the show, and the strength boost you get from the Moon will wax and wane along with its phases.” I grimaced, “The *actual* answer is *Bloodbending*. And, yes, it’s *exactly* what it sounds like, but we only ever see it used on the night of the full moon, by an insane old woman who’s the closest thing the show gets to a Hag, in the magical sense.”

My companion was quiet for a bit, before she declared, “So, ice it is! Huh. Do you know…?”

“Not a fuckin’ clue,” I shrugged. “Maybe you just need to be firm with it? Show it who’s boss?”

“Be a real ‘Ice Queen’?” Mina shot back with a giggle. With a sigh, she turned over, throwing an arm over me, and snuggled in close. “We can ask Mr. Iroh tomorrow. Night Denki. Love ya.”

I smiled. “*Night Mina. I love you too.”*

<MHA>

The next morning I woke up *exhausted,* and sore in ways beyond words, my lover feeling it a bit too, so we took the day off. That’s not to say we were *entirely* slothful, as I cracked open the user guide for the **Sweet Home**, the ‘quickstart’ section alone several *hundred* pages, and I could barely get through a few paragraphs without stumbling across a term I didn’t understand, which required me to search that, and then half the time the entry referenced something *else*, and…

It was slow going, to say the least.

Mina, meanwhile, got some Quirk practice in, pushing herself to improve not her acid’s intensity, but its *flowrate,* pushing herself to make more and more in a single motion, a process which left her thirsty, even though, as far as I was aware, she didn’t have a conversion rate like Momo did.

Either way, I kept her well hydrated, able to configure the Home to give her a training space she could let loose with, as, even at vinegar strength, she would’ve absolutely *murdered* our lawn.

I worked on my own Quirks a little, but not to the point of anything past than more-than-slight discomfort, and worked through my repertoire with slightly distressing speed. I wasn’t sure if this was the right thing to do, but, the closest thing I could equate it to was a possibly crippling injury, that would become *permanently* crippling if I let it be. I was reminded of a story my father, my *old* father, had told me, about how *his* mother, after her mastectomy due to breast cancer, was told that, as they’d taken part of her pectoral in the process, would never be able to lift her arm above her shoulder, and that even trying to do that would be iffy.

But, though I never really knew her, my paternal grandmother was… *stubborn,* and, slowly, and with no *small* amount of pain, worked her arm higher and higher in the shower every morning, until she could lift it high with assistance, then on her own, and continued to exercise it, regaining what the professionals had told her she’d lost forever until her last days, decades later.

… Or I was completely off base and *actually* fucking myself up worse than I already was.

I had *no fucking clue.*

But, I charted my capabilities, small as they were, only able to create a single wisp of flame and inch-wide piece of ice with Todoroki’s, for instance, and if I regressed, I’d stop, and try something else.

And so, after a full, but restful day, and after a morning, where, feeling better, we decided to engage in some ‘mutually enjoyable exercises’, a nice shower, a change of sheets, and a *very* late lunch, the sun was already setting when we stepped through the gate, not onto a ship travelling arctic waters, or a snowy mountaintop.

No, we stepped out into an *inferno.*