

Plus One

Von Kroko

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Kapitel 1: Peonies

By now there's no way around it: Deku is avoiding her.

It's been two, maybe three hours since Ochako set foot into the opulent hotel lobby. She's talked to every single one of what must be over a hundred guests, to most even twice. But after the short mumbled greeting, an awkward wave and a sheepish smile, Deku has consistently been at the exact opposite end of every room Ochako has found herself in.

It's been a warm summer day, and it's only now, in the evening, that the first cool breeze wafts through the open patio doors into what seems more like a congress hall for a floristics convention than the premises for a wedding party. The large white curtains are billowing in the wind, and the scent of flowers mixes with that of wet earth and freshly cut grass.

And even though all her friends are here, Ochako is fighting a rising feeling of loneliness, surrounded on all sides by silky white tablecloths, fancy lace-trimmed table runners and the rosy smell of pink peonies.

"Sooo, how about you?", Mina asks, for the second time today, pointedly innocuous. She looks gorgeous, her burgundy dress form fitting and on the verge of stealing the bride's shine. Not that anyone could really hold it against her, because she's just delightful like that.

"Hm?" Ochako pretends she didn't listen in hopes Mina will let it go like she did about an hour ago. Unfortunately, Mina is as persistent as she is pretty.

"Gotta admit, Midoriya and Melissa tying the knot kinda hit me out of nowhere." She makes a pause for Ochako to react, which she doesn't. "But you know what I really don't get? How come you haven't found the right one yet?"

She asks, as if she doesn't know exactly what's going on. As if she expects Ochako to ignore the way her eyes dart over to Deku before the question is even finished.

Ochako shrugs her most blithe shrug and smiles. "Work's keeping me really busy lately!"

She's never minded being on her own. She's had partners, and then she didn't, and then she had a partner again. Neither being in a relationship nor being single had ever been a big deal to her. It's only the way she's being made to feel as if she's sitting on the hot seat ever since she arrived here that makes her uncomfortable.

"Oh sweetie, don't do me like that!", Mina exclaims in mock despair. "I'm starting to get worried about you! I'm watching all my girls getting married off left and right...", she gestures in the direction of Kyouka, Tsuyu, Momo, accompanied by their partners, some even by their kids, "and I just cannot accept you staying all alone!"

"Don't worry, I'll be fine!" Ochako puts as much emphasis on her words as she can without raising her voice, or breaking her smile. Her face feels strained. Not because she has to fake looking happy. She is happy!

Mina nods understandingly, as if Ochako's just admitted to needing time to process the sudden death of a family member. "You know, you can always come to me if you need to talk, right?", Mina offers. In that exact second, Eijirou stumbles over, plates with cake in his hands and his legs circled by two giggling and screeching toddlers with dark pink, fluffy hair who seem very intent on keeping him from reaching his destination. "Hey, hon!", he says, a desperate plea in his voice, as he holds up the plates like an olympic torch. "A little help...?"

Mina hasn't even gotten up yet when one of the kids stumbles, falls and hits his knee. Surprised by the pain, he immediately breaks into tears, and starts oozing what looks like thick acid from his skin. "Oh no!", Mina sighs, picks up the kid to keep him from destroying the rug, her own acid neutralizing that of her son. "Come here, baby, it's alright."

Within a second, half a dozen waiters show up with cleaning gear, and while Eijirou bows and apologizes to everyone around for the mess, Ochako uses the ruckus to slip away unseen.

She's into her second glass of champagne now. She's kept herself from resting her head on her hand twice now, reminding herself instead to sit up straight and make a face as if she's just taking a break from all the riveting conversations. Absent-mindedly, her fingers play with her place card. It reads, in a very neat and curved and decidedly un-Deku handwriting: Ochako. Melissa must have written it. Next to her table card sits another one. It says: Katsuki. The corresponding guest is also situated next to Ochako, and as always, he cares way less about appearances.

He's leaning all the way back in his chair, his arms crossed in front of him and exuding his usual standoffish aura that makes everyone in a 10 foot radius avoid their table. Ochako doesn't mind. She's grateful for the privacy.

There's another reason for her gratitude though. She knows it's a bit selfish, but she did fear she'd end up being the only one without a plus one at the entire party.

She doesn't care about Mina's needling, or Aoyama's allusions, or Momo's sympathetic smile when she softly puts a hand on Ochako's shoulder and tells her to stay strong. But it's different from how it used to be when they were all in school. They're not a group of friends anymore. They are little family units, always busy, always distracted. And Ochako doesn't blame them, taking care of kids is a full time job, especially if they are in the process of developing super powers. Ochako is happy for each and every one of them. Still, it's hard not to feel like the odd one out.

It's moments such as these that you need Katsuki Bakugou next to you. Even better, quite literally in the same boat as you. He seems more stoic, or rather serious, than Ochako remembers. There's something unusually sober about the way he's sitting

quietly, leaning back in his chair with his hands holding onto his elbows. Only his grim frown betrays that something is simmering beneath the surface. Maybe he doesn't even feel much different than she does, and the thought makes her feel simultaneously embarrassed and vindicated.

She was surprised to see him here at all. Honestly, nobody really expected him to show up. Not after the way he reacted to the engagement. But Bakugou is anything if not good for a surprise. And he's behaving, for the most part. Except for the fact that since his arrival, he's been staring daggers at Deku from the word go. Which is probably one of the reasons why Deku is avoiding him as well.

And it's a lot easier to feel bitter for Bakugou, than for herself.

He is the other person she has not exchanged more than two words with, which has been a decidedly awkward affair, considering they've been seated next to each other. After finding solidarity in their solitariness, Ochako decides it's time to break the ice.

"I always pictured Deku's wedding differently", she states, and picks up one of the plush peonies from a bouquet right in front of her. Not that she expected Deku to deck out the entire hall in hero geekery. But she did expect some of his passions shining through. She peeks over at him through a gap in the crowd. He's in the process of talking to Eri, who's had quite the growth spurt in the last couple years. Of course he looks maddeningly handsome, his hair coiffed, his shoulders broad in the perfectly fitting suit, his smile as radiant as ever, and his cheeks tan and freckled from the last couple weeks in America. Even his tie sits in a proper knot around his neck. That last part makes the image slightly unnerving.

Ochako gives the blossom in her hand a sniff. The silky petals tickle her nose and she sneezes.

Bakugou shoots the flower a sour look. "It's Melissa," he states gruffly. "She's one of those girls who had her wedding planned since she was four. And of course doormat Deku goes along with everything."

Ochako makes a little "oh" sound as a response. It suddenly hits her that the decor reminds her of the old timey fairy tale cartoons from America she used to watch as a kid.

"Goes to show how little I talk to Melissa!", Ochako picks up the thread in a pointedly upbeat tone. "I really need to get to know her better."

"Don't see the point in that, what with them pissing off back to the U.S. tomorrow." Bakugou is glowering back at Deku now. He seems to be dead set on letting nothing brighten his mood.

Not that Ochako can really blame him. It's been almost a year since Deku left, and they received barely so much as a note from him. The invitation to the wedding had been the first contact Ochako could recall in months. Deku picked up work overseas, following in All Might's footsteps. It's how he met Melissa again, who's worked hard

for her chair at the I-Island Academy. From what Ochako's heard, Deku teaches there too every once in a while, and the two collaborate on the improvement of support items for both people with and without quirks.

Ochako recalls holding his letter, the typical way the handwriting at times turned more scrawly at passages that had seen Deku getting emotional. In his letter, Deku talked about how he sees his time overseas as a traineeship on how to better serve the people, and that when he was to return to Japan in about a year, he would be an even better hero.

For now though, he's only returned for the week, to prepare and celebrate the wedding, and like Bakugou said, Deku and Melissa are about to head back tomorrow. No news on Deku's plans to move back to Japan either.

The stem of the flower snaps in Ochako's hand. She hastily tries to shove it back into the bouquet without anyone noticing. There are so many flowers in there that she can squeeze the blossom literally anywhere without it making much of a difference.

She sighs. Sitting around and moping is getting old, she decides, gets up, and returns with two more glasses of champagne she got from one of the waiters holding trays that are positioned all over the shop. She offers Bakugou one of the glasses with a smile. "Please do me the favor and join me in getting drunk off this stuff."

Bakugou accepts the glass, actually looking her in the eyes for the first time tonight, his brows raised. The champagne sparkles in the elegant little glass as Bakugou takes the smallest sip from it. "Believe me, none of us wanna find out what happens if I get smashed tonight", he says, and puts the glass back onto the table slowly and measuredly.

That's a surprising amount of restraint he's displaying, and for a moment Ochako feels almost bad about showing her cards. Maybe him being here despite everything really is just his way of paying respects. He's even wearing a fancy looking suit, and even though it's a bit crinkly right now because he's slouching in his chair a bit, Ochako can tell that it probably fits him really well.

She stretches her arms out in front of herself. "Welp!", she says, noticing too late that she's probably too loud. "At least the dance's about to start soon! Are you looking forward to that?" Of course she knows he's not. And he knows she knows he's not. But that's beside the point. The point is that it's entertaining to get Bakugou's goat. And of course Bakugou delivers. He pulls his upper lip over his teeth as if he's smelled something absolutely vile and growls: "Wouldn't be caught dead dancing at fucking Deku's fucking wedding."

Two f-bombs, Ochako thinks. So he really is pissed.

Like the ocean washes the edges off broken glass fragments and transforms them into beautiful colorful pebbles, time and fading puberty have turned Bakugou into a mostly functioning adult. But sometimes he does still remind her of the defiant little brat she met all these years ago. It's simultaneously bewildering and comforting,

especially with how the increasing demands of family and professional life have turned even the most passionate of U.A. students into reliable members of society.

Speaking of the devil, at that very moment, Eijirou has decided to give cheering up Bakugou a shot. He's left the kids over at the table with Mina, who is absorbed in a story Denki is telling with sweeping gestures, not for the first time, if Kyouka's amused eye rolls are any indicator. Their daughter is sitting in Denki's lap and stares up at him completely transfixed.

"Hey, man!", Eijirou greets Bakugou. He doesn't sit down though. Instead, he leans against the table with one arm, grins at Bakugou and nods back towards his own table. "You wanna come with and hang out?"

Bakugou doesn't so much as deign a glance up at him. His face and tone are deadpan when he says: "So that I can listen to you discuss baby buggies?"

"Have you even talked to the Kaminaris yet?" Eijirou, the patience of a saint personified, does not let Bakugou's grumpiness get to him in the slightest. "Their daughter is just the cutest little angel! I bet they'll let you hold her if you ask!"

"Why would I wanna hold a snotty sack of flesh."

To his credit, Eijirou doesn't even flinch. "Dude, that's Denki's kid!", he says lightheartedly, but with enough of a pointed edge to let Bakugou know he's had enough of his sass.

Ochako watches in awe as Bakugou actively ascends to a level of petulance hitherto unbeknown to humanity when he retorts, completely unimpressed: " Stupid snotty sack of flesh then."

Not even Eijirou really knows how to respond to this much impudence. A frown flashes over his face, but within the blink of an eye, it gets replaced by a smile that is equally rare. It's soft and compassionate, and Ochako recognizes it as the same smile Momo has given her earlier. "Alright then", Kirishima says and gives Bakugou's shoulder a firm squeeze. "You hang in there, got it?"

Bakugou harrumphs, Eijirou gives Ochako a quick nod and a smile before he returns to his table. For a second Ochako feared he would invite her over instead. The fact that he didn't makes Ochako wonder whether he's noticed how uncomfortable Mina's eagerness to poke around her relationship status has made her. Ochako smiles as she watches him leave. He really is a bit of a saint.

Since there might be a slight chance that Bakugou could use some alone time, Ochako decides to mingle with the guests for a little longer. Despite her plans, she does not approach Melissa, let alone talk to her. It's silly, Ochako of all people never had trouble making conversation. But she can't for the life of her think of anything that she would want to say or ask.

The music releases Ochako from her self-imposed aspiration to socialize. The

muttering of the guests dies down as the dancefloor gets cleared. With the middle of the ballroom completely empty, it really drives home how gigantic it is. Ochako thought the soft sound of strings was coming from the large black speakers overhead. She only now notices an honest to god string quartet has taken up position on the elevated little stage on the far end of the room. She stares with a mixture of awe and... a much less graceful emotion she does not want to pinpoint, as Deku and Melissa step onto the floor, Melissa holding up one side of her voluminous white dress with one hand and Deku's arm with the other.

Deku's grown since they first met, but Melissa is still almost as tall as him. Her long hair is done up in an impossibly complex chignon that gives it the shape of a rose. In short: She looks jaw-dropping. Once again, Ochako recalls foggy memories of princesses from fairy tale cartoons, and Deku looks every bit the prince to boot.

Ochako is sure that he wraps an arm around her waist and pulls her closer, and that she probably returns his fond gaze, and that their wedding waltz is absolutely magical to watch, because applause breaks out only moments after the two have taken their first steps. But she's gotta assume all of that, cause her brain doesn't seem to want to actually take any of what is happening in front of her in. Instead, her eyes are searching for something else to look at on the opposite end of the dancefloor.

An almost inaudible laugh escapes Ochako as her eye gets caught by Bakugou, barely trying to conceal his indignation, nursing his glass of champagne, or rather holding onto it like a lifeline. She has half a mind to walk over to him right now and tell him that as much as she regrets him having to bear witness to all this, Bakugou has her deepest gratitude for externalizing her exact feelings. Never in a million years would she allow her pettiness to get the better of her like that. But while it's horrifyingly impolite, it is also a kind of admirable trait Bakugou has refused to let go of: His right to be irritated whenever he wants at whatever he wants.

The other guests join in on the dancefloor in pairs, because of course they do. It's a classic partner dance. Ochako smiles at the passing couples, returns Mina's wave, and stands, and waits in the margins. Just like she's been waiting for goddamn years now. She sees Deku in the distance, holding Melissa in his arms and swirling her around. He's laughing.

Ochako cringes. It's getting harder and harder to ignore that in fact... oh god, she is so pissed.

She cringes harder.

Once again she spots Bakugou, resembling a dark familiar summoned at the behest of her grudge, a manifestation of everything about her that she's keeping hidden underneath a smile, stalking along the walls of the ballroom and watching, lurking, his burning eyes fixed to the bridal pair, a resentful spirit that haunts newlyweds whose union left heartbreak in its wake.

Ochako wonders whether she should give the champagne a rest.

Then again, there are only so many things that keep her from drowning in misery right now.

Rolling her eyes at her own dramatics, Ochako retreats back against the wall.

“Thought you wanted to dance.” Bakugou has reached her on his patrol. He’s left his suit jacket at the table between the last time she’s seen him and now. The sleeves of his shirt are rolled up to his elbows, revealing his trained forearms. Ochako’s gaze falls on his wrists, which are adorned with tight leather armbands. She also notices that he’s wearing rings on his hands.

Scraping together what little dignity Ochako has left, she smiles up at him and says: “I’m fine watching!”

His glare does not waver. Apparently he’s not convinced. When Ochako’s smile trickles down her face, she doesn’t turn away. She wasn’t fooling him anyway. And she doesn’t have to fear any judgement from him. Or even worse, pity.

The way he keeps staring at her makes it clear he’s expecting more out of her. Or maybe he’s unsure what to do? With him, it’s hard to discern whether he’s about to throw down or just plain confused.

Eventually, he mutters: “Fuck this”, turns and shuffles away, hands in his pockets. At the edge of the open area, he shoots her a glare over his shoulder and nods his head in the direction of the dancefloor.

Ochako’s brows shoot upwards. She considers whether she’s stepped into an alternate reality. But just in case she hasn’t, she puts the glass of champagne aside and hurries over to Bakugou before he can change his mind.

Kapitel 2: Flashover

Bakugou holds out one hand for her, his face and eyes, frozen in a pointedly neutral expression, are averted the slightest bit. It's the worst attempt anyone has ever made to raise someone's spirits with a dance, but it's coming from Bakugou, and he's not telling her to smile, or to cheer up. He's offering to keep her company, nothing more, nothing less.

Mina and the others mean well, and Ochako knows it. But for the first time this evening Ochako feels a bit of the burden lifted off her chest the moment she touches Bakugou's hand. She can't help but notice that he does look good, now that he's not lounging in his chair. With the scowl gone from his face, the rise of his cheekbones and the vibrant red of his narrow, angular eyes make him look actually quite handsome. The shirt brings out his chest nicely, or maybe that's just his good posture. Before she can gawk at him any longer, he pulls her closer, making her laugh, close enough that she can smell his surprisingly unobtrusive aftershave. He's gotten pretty tall compared to her, too.

Thinking back, Ochako realizes that she's never been this close to him before, let alone for prolonged amounts of time. When they put their arms around each other, it's a bit awkward at first. An embarrassed blush creeps over Ochako's cheeks when the calloused palm of Bakugou's right hand comes to rest against the exposed skin above the small of her back. Suddenly she becomes acutely aware of how much of her dress exposes her shoulders. She avoids his gaze, and he returns the favor.

It's obvious Bakugou is not doing this because he's into it, and he's taking the guiding part a bit too literally. But aside from that, his form is alright, and the slight wooziness of the alcohol makes Ochako grateful that he's all but holding her up by now. His body is pleasantly warm against hers, and Ochako knows her sober self is going to be embarrassed of her for the way she's leaning into the embrace and how secure his arms feel around her - but for now she can't bring herself to care. She's just glad not to feel miserable for two seconds. With a heavy sigh, she rests her head on his shoulder and closes her eyes. Bakugou apparently doesn't mind her cuddliness in the least. He keeps steering them both over the rough sea that is the dancefloor, Ochako a ship adrift and Bakugou a skilled helmsman.

It's hard to keep track of time or space when you're just a useless hunk of junk lost at sea though, and when the music fades, an announcement is made that the bride and groom are about to address their guests. Bakugou carefully loosens the embrace and it's hard not to feel a little adrift again. He takes half a step back to put an appropriate amount of distance between them. Well played. Ochako half expected him to turn around and storm off once he's done his duty. Instead, he waits until she's steady on her feet, and only then heads back to their table. As she follows him and fixes the strands of hair that have fallen out of her updo, Ochako notices Mina, shamelessly ogling her, then Bakugou, then Ochako again.

Deciding she is not ready to open that can of worms, Ochako ignores the unconcealed

nascent greed for romantic entanglement in Mina's eyes as she passes her table, grabs another glass of champagne from a platter, sits down next to Bakugou and fans herself with her hand.

It's a bit surprising that Mina of all people doesn't seem to have gotten the memo that Bakugou is as gay as the night is dark.

Ochako takes a pensive sip off her glass and watches Melissa and Deku step on the little stage vacated by the string quartet. At least things can't get much worse from here on out, Ochako assumes, as Melissa lifts the microphone up to her lips and begins thanking all her guests for the wonderful evening. Melissa's speech is short and sweet - heartfelt, but down to earth and not too sentimental. For a moment, Ochako remembers how much she admired Melissa's fearlessness in the face of danger. She's sure they could be fast friends.

Next up is Deku, and as opposed to Melissa, he's got his speech written down. He unfolds the sheets and they reveal a slight trembling of his hands. Nervously, he adjusts his tie and he shoots the crowd a bashful little smile that Ochako is sure could make flowers bloom on barren fields. His broad shoulders and chest heave under a heavy breath, then he begins to speak. He flounders at first, almost falls over his own words, but recovers just as quickly. It's downright astounding how well he manages to cover up his nervousness with charm by now. He's got a lot more to say than Melissa, mostly about how grateful, even blessed he is to spend this wonderful time with his wonderful friends, about how he can't believe his luck, and about how everyone here has made him the happiest man alive tonight.

Bakugou's chair creaks faintly as he leans back and inclines his head, his jaw clenched with tension.

Ochako half expects Deku to start crying halfway through, but weirdly enough, he doesn't even seem to be tearing up. His speech seamlessly segways from praise for the pro heroes and their assistants holding society together to his own plans for the future. This is the point where Ochako perks up in her seat, hoping to finally learn when Deku has scheduled his return to Japan.

Instead, he reveals that he has been offered a permanent home at I-Island Academy, and that he's looking forward to working with Melissa and her associates on even better ways to support heroes and civilians alike.

Rousing applause. The hall turns into an ocean of faces cheering, congratulating, hands stretching out towards Deku and Melissa, and in the middle of the whole commotion, the calm little center of the storm, are two people frozen to their chairs, pillars of salt.

Bakugou gets up, stands there for a moment, not unlike a sleepwalker, then turns in the opposite direction of where Deku is smiling, and leaves.

The glass in Ochako's hand is completely steady as she downs it in one go. Looks as if this evening just turned into the perfect opportunity to get drunk.

There's one major drawback about getting wasted at this kind of wedding: All your friends are there to witness you making a fool of yourself. And not only them, half your coworkers too. It's too late for Ochako when she makes that realization though. So naturally, her only escape is to flee the ballroom the moment the ground starts spinning underneath her feet. Dodging out of sight, avoiding especially Mina and the other girls, Ochako feels like a secret agent, darting from cover to cover, until she reaches the patio doors and flees into the darkness of the grounds surrounding the hotel.

The cool night air is pleasant on her heated skin. There's a beautiful European style pavilion in the center of the park-like premises, which Ochako reaches almost without rolling her ankle in her way too thin heels. She holds onto the handrail of the stairs, and even though the pain in her ankle is dulled by the drunk dizziness, her vision starts to blur with tears.

"Stupid shoes...!", she mumbles and wipes her cheeks with her flat hands, but the tears just won't stop coming. "Stupid grass", she adds, softly, and swallows down a sob. Another one constricts her throat, and before she knows it, she's all out weeping. She slides down onto one of the benches inside the pavilion, covers her face with both hands and quietly sobs into her palms. Her head feels too much as if it's filled with wool for her to properly sort out her feelings. She only knows that it's too much right now, that she's disappointed, and frustrated, and that she wants to be anywhere but here, and be anything but this sorry weepy little mess.

She's momentarily distracted by a movement in the dark, but her consciousness is too hazy for her to seriously get scared. She looks up and wipes her eyes enough to make out a figure leaning against one of the pillars, and although the next lantern is pretty far off and its yellow light barely reaches the pavilion, Ochako recognizes Bakugou's tousled hair.

She expects a wave of shame to descend upon her, but it doesn't. She doesn't feel much at all at the sight of the man ostentatiously staring into the darkness beneath the trees surrounding them, except maybe a hint of... relief...?

There's no way he hasn't noticed her presence, not with the ruckus she's caused, but he pretends he hasn't heard a thing. He's facing a little away from her, his face, a frozen mask of stern reticence, barely illuminated by the faraway lantern. His hands are resting in his pockets. He's still not wearing his suit jacket, the top buttons of his shirt are undone, and his tie looks as if it got carelessly yanked open and is now lying around his shoulders.

In any other situation, Ochako might have excused herself. But she doesn't really feel

like being well behaved right now.

“So!”, she says, definitely loud enough for Bakugou to hear, but he doesn’t move. Her voice still sounds husky. Nothing she can do about that now. “Permanent, huh!”

Finally, Bakugou drops the act. He makes a noise that was probably supposed to sound rough, but what comes out is a bit of a croak. He clears his throat. “Must have been one hell of an opportunity. Can’t even imagine the kinda money these people pay.”

Ochako snorts good-naturedly. “You know Deku doesn’t give a damn about that.”

“Yeah? Well, what about Melissa”, Bakugou says and draws up his shoulders. It doesn’t sound like much of a question. “You don’t know how many kids she wants.”

That’s true. Ochako knows next to nothing about Melissa, except that she is smart, stunning, and brave, a leading expert on hero support item engineering, and the perfect match for Deku in every way.

She sniffs. Now that her emotions are bubbling to the surface, it’s harder to ignore the jealousy roiling in her stomach. But that’s not even the biggest problem.

“He really wasn’t planning on telling any of us about that beforehand”, she states, and the amount of bitterness in her voice is surprising even to herself. But she doesn’t regret it. She had somehow lived under the assumption that Deku and her... that they were friends.

A distant rumbling from a faraway thunderstorm rolls over the sky, and the treetops curl in a sudden, cool breeze. It’s about to start raining soon.

“From the way he looked, I’m pretty sure All Might was in on it. Secretive fuckers, both of them.” Bakugou hisses the last sentence and turns towards the park. His outline is shining in a soft peach against the gently billowing trees and perfectly trimmed bushes.

Ochako’s mind ties itself into knots trying to wrap itself around what happened. “So he’s just gonna... vanish out of our lives like that. Tonight.”

A lead blanket of heavy silence settles over them, because it is in this very moment that it really hits them. Ochako knows it’s hitting Bakugou too. Deku’s not simply avoiding them both. He’s running from them, as fast as he can.

A painful constriction creeps down her windpipe, her lungs, until it reaches her chest. She grabs her upper arms and tries to keep her body from convulsing from the literal heartache.

Bakugou has the decency to stay turned away and feigns complete deafness. In turn, Ochako pretends not to notice the way his shoulders are hunched up, and the way his head is hanging low, making him look unusually small. They listen as a light drizzle

starts coming down on the pavilion roof. First one drop, then two, then three, then more and more, too many and too fast to keep track of. They sound almost melodious on the wooden shingles and white coated metal rails.

Ochako flinches and looks up as a sudden roar rips apart the calming soundscape, followed by a resounding, thundering BOOM!

An entire facade, the serious man in the suit who attends a wedding out of courtesy, is burned away by the light of his own crackling explosions. It leaves only Bakugou, and his grimace of anger is a mirror of Ochako's insides. The noise of the steady rain muffles most of the sound as Bakugou aimlessly throws another blast at the sky.

"PISS OFF THEN, YOU PIECE OF SHIT!", he screams, accentuated by another handful of flashing explosions that fizzle out in the rain. "DIRTY FUCKING BASTARD!"

A lot of environmental hazards training revolves around fire control. Ochako recalls Thirteen teaching them lessons about coal-seam fires that can smolder underneath the crust of the earth for decades or even centuries. It's possible for them to go unnoticed for years, until they breach the surface, cause wildfires and damage to civilization alike. Incidentally, that's exactly what her insides have been feeling like for... quite some time now.

Bakugou is the flashover.

The flames blast up and disappear again into the night sky, a firework only for the two of them, until eventually, the explosions subside and Bakugou stumbles back against the pillars of the pavilion, shoulders heaving under shaky breaths.

Kapitel 3: Bail

Ochako gives him a moment to catch his breath. She carefully gets up from the bench and approaches Bakugou to stare into the darkness with him. He straightens his back the moment he notices her next to him and rubs the back of his hand over his mouth. For a while, he pretends he didn't just go berserk for a second there. He probably expects her to say something. She doesn't. There is nothing to say. After a while, he throws Ochako a careful look, and immediately starts rustling through his pockets, as if he's searching for something. Apparently not finding what he's looking for, he cranes his neck and steps out into the rain, back towards the terrace of the hotel. "Oi!", Ochako hears him yell at what appears to be a hapless waiter, or another service person, collecting the seat cushions from the chairs on the terrace. "Get me a napkin!"

Even from the distance Ochako can tell that the waiter is not thrilled about getting interrupted in his duty to protect the seat cushions from the rain. But he complies nonetheless, and Bakugou returns with a thin white piece of fabric that he protects from the rain by holding open his collar and shoving the napkin inside.

Hand firmly stuffed into his shirt and with a face as if he's protecting a considerable cash delivery, he rejoins Ochako under the pavilion, pulls his hand out of his cleavage, for a lack of better words, along with the napkin, and offers it to Ochako.

Bewildered, Ochako accepts the piece of fabric, and she kind of wants to say thank you, but she also is not sure what she just witnessed, so she lets out a breathy laugh instead.

"If you don't want it, give it back!", Bakugou snaps, but Ochako shakes her head, which makes her even more dizzy.

"No, no, it's fine!", Ochako says and tries to bite back her giggling.

Bakugou pulls a face, shoves his hands into his pockets and wants to turn away, but she puts a hand on his shoulder. "Really, Bakugou. That's very sweet." She says it with emphasis, smiles up at him, and his face smoothes over a little at that. He breathes out, and the tension melts out of his shoulders while Ochako gets to wiping her face. If even Bakugou notices she could use some help, she really must look like an absolute mess. Of course the fabric of the napkin feels soft and expensive. It's also slightly warm where it was pressed to Bakugou's chest, and the faintest hint of smoke and Bakugou's own scent still clings to it. It smells nice.

All these years it was completely unclear to Ochako what exactly Bakugou was to her. Whatever potential friendship they had kept getting eclipsed by the intensity of Bakugou's and Deku's feelings for each other. It did not take long for everyone around them to assume that Ochako and Bakugou were romantic enemies, vying with each other for Deku's affection. Only that Ochako had never seen it that way. From the moment she met Deku, Ochako knew that she would never get him without Bakugou, and it had never occurred to her why that would be a problem.

Strange. Even when Bakugou and Deku had been together for a while, seeing them had never felt the way looking at Deku and Melissa feels right now. And Ochako recalled that when she had been with Deku a couple years ago, Bakugou had avoided her, but he had never seemed this... crestfallen. This defeated. The opposite was the case, she recalls him looking at her with something not unlike a sort of grim respect at that time.

Through the sound of light drizzle overhead and the rustling of the trees, a shred of music or laughter wafts over to them from the wide open, brightly lit hotel windows.

"I really don't feel like going back inside", Ochako confesses and, at a loss for what else to do with it, ties the napkin around her wrist.

She can't go back to the ocean of faces, all greedily staring at her, waiting for her to slip up. She can't keep on smiling for everyone now. Her makeup is probably a mess. She's wobbly on her feet and as if she's gonna break out into tears at the slightest provocation.

"You know you can just go, right?" Bakugou shrugs. "Wouldn't even be the first one to leave."

"Hmm", Ochako makes and slowly bobs up and down on the balls of her feet. "Maybe." She looks up at him. "How about you?"

"Yeah, I'm about ready to ditch this joint." He watches as she takes a quick step to the side to keep herself from falling, as her bobbing combined with the light spinning of the world around her has her confused about her place in three dimensional space. "You're not planning on driving like this, are you?"

"Actually, I was", Ochako replies and contemplatively tips her finger against her chin.

Bakugou raises his brows. Then he points at the seams between the large white tiles on the floor and says: "Alright, walk down a straight line and I'll let you drive home, no questions asked."

"Pshh!" Ochako makes a dismissive gesture and rolls her eyes. "Please!" She positions herself and walks down a perfectly straight line to the other end of the pavilion with almost no wobbling. She turns around with a little flourish, and to really prove how sober she is, she makes her way back to Bakugou, still doing her best to stay on the tile seams. A moment later she realizes she should have left it at that first impossible feat, to be exact, it occurs to her the second the world turns a little further to the left than she anticipated and she trips over her own feet.

Squeezing her eyes shut, she braces for the impact. Miraculously, she never reaches the floor. Instead she feels herself being caught and held up by strong arms. It takes a moment for her jumbled brain to piece together what's going on. She opens her eyes and looks up, right at the indignant face of Bakugou, who's lifting her up and putting her back on her feet, but doesn't let go of her shoulders. "That's it, I'm driving you

back to the city.”

Despite his forceful tone, he waits for her to nod and murmur: “Yeah, that’s... probably for the best”, before he guides her through the wet grass and back to the hotel. They use the corridors next to the ballroom to reach the main entrance, where Bakugou orders a bell boy to get them their jackets, a bottle of water and bring his car around.

“What about my own car?”, Ochako wonders out loud while they wait in front of the hotel and the steady rain trickles from on the wide awning overhead. The lights of the street reflect in long streaks along the wet pavement. Ochako is grateful that Bakugou has one arm wrapped around her shoulders to hold her steady. What is more, his body radiates heat, and she’s starting to shiver, with her back exposed to the wet night air.

“Let one of your agency dweebs take care of it”, Bakugou answers.

“That’s what you use your assistants for?” Ochako acts scandalized.

Bakugou shrugs. “About all they’re good for.”

Ochako shakes her head and clicks her tongue in mock disappointment. “You don’t mean that.”

Bakugou harrumphs.

The bell boy returns, bringing Bakugou’s suit jacket and Ochako’s little bolero, as well as a bottle of water. Almost simultaneously, a valet pulls up Bakugou’s car. Absolutely nothing surprises Ochako about the streamlined roadster she’s presented with. It’s black with orange trimming, the headlights sleek and narrow - all in all it looks like the car version of a gamer chair. Of course it’s got a muffler delete system, making the engine roar at even the slightest provocation, and a very unsubtle orange X adorns the hood.

“For the record”, Ochako says and pokes a finger into her cheek while regarding the car, “if you were trying to pull me, this would be the exact moment I bail.”

“Believe it or not, you’re not my target audience.” Bakugou rolls his eyes, puts on his jacket and holds the passenger door open for her. “Now quit complaining or I’ll let you walk home.”

The car is lowered so much that Ochako is basically lying down when she gets into the passenger’s seat. She bites back a laugh at the realization that the seats look exactly like gamer chairs. Bakugou gets into the driver’s seat and hands her the bottle of water. “Drink that. It’s gonna be a long drive.”

While Ochako untangles various clips holding her updo together and lets her hair fall down to her shoulders again, Bakugou types her address into the GPS. The display states it’s going to be a two to three hour drive. Immediately, a hint of shame twinges

in Ochako's stomach. She forgot how far out in the boonies this hotel is, and she could have just stayed here for the night. But then again, Bakugou has to get back to the city with or without her. And what's more important, she's glad to be here, where it's quiet, where no one sees her face that is probably all puffy from crying, where she can be alone, and a bit too tipsy, and pissed, and sad, and can sip water off her bottle in silence and watch the night pass by the car window without having to feel ashamed for the state she's in.

They stay completely silent all the way until Bakugou pulls into a parking spot not too far from Ochako's apartment. She sighs and hopes nobody sees her step out of the car that probably woke up the entire neighborhood with its bellowing engine.

Bakugou opens her car door and wants to lend her a hand to help her rise from the almost completely reclined position the car forced her into, but then he signals her to stay where she is. He gets down on one knee and nudges her leg with the back of his hand, prompting her to turn towards him and put her feet on the ground in front of him. He pulls up the corner of his mouth in disdain at the sight of the red streaks where the straps of her shoes have begun cutting into her skin. Bakugou undoes the straps unceremoniously and picks up the shoes.

"What's with these silly heels anyway", he scoffs and helps Ochako onto her bare feet.

"I think they're very nice", she responds, an unperturbed smile on her face. The pavement is wet underneath her feet. She's very happy to find that she can actually stand on her own legs without wavering. Her head is much clearer too.

Bakugou makes a gruff noise and dangles the shoes over his shoulder. "They don't suit you at all."

Smiling at Bakugou's potshots, Ochako stretches her arms over her head while screwing her eyes shut. "I think I'm almost sober again", she states. "Good news is, I still got some pretty good stuff upstairs. You wanna come?"

"Absolutely not." Bakugou's tone is firm, but the night has left its marks on his face as well. He looks exhausted, in a way that's got nothing to do with being tired.

"Alright, but you should at least stay the night. How far away do you live?"

"Not far", Bakugou grumbles.

Ever since he moved there, not a single day has passed without tabloids gossiping about Bakugou taking up residence in the really lofty part of town. Of course the exact address is kept secret, but Mina has shown Ochako photos of a state of the art penthouse far above the city, decked out with all the modern bells and whistles a pro hero could ask for. Ochako also knows it's at least another hour from here. "I promise my couch is the coziest. You'll never want to sleep anywhere else ever again", she says. When Bakugou still doesn't move an inch, she puts her hands on her hips and decides it's time to put her foot down. "I'm not letting you drive all the way through town in the middle of the night. Now get moving."

She pictures herself as a lion tamer when Bakugou draws himself up to his full height, which is a good six or seven inches taller than her, straightens his shoulders and glares at her for a couple seconds. She neither yields nor even blinks. Then, without another word, Bakugou locks the car and shuffles towards the front door, Ochako's shoes still dangling from his shoulders. Feeling rather accomplished, Ochako follows him.

The elevator has barely enough room for three people in it. Entering it, Ochako becomes suddenly acutely aware of the fact that Bakugou has not buttoned his shirt back up after he hid her napkin inside, as his cleavage is right below her eye level and close enough for her to peek into it. His chest describes a perfect dip between his pecs. Not that she expected anything less from him. Not that it's anything new to her. But somehow, in this state of post-inebriation, she can't help but notice the tension in Bakugou's shoulder muscles, the perfect slope of the nape of his neck, and she catches herself wondering what the soft skin of his throat would feel like against her lips.

Her eyes dart up at him. His furrowed brows imply that he's noticed her staring. She quickly averts her gaze, only to be met with their reflection in the mirror.

After what must have been the longest elevator ride of her life, they arrive at one of the top floors. Ochako hurries to squeeze past Bakugou and makes for her apartment door. Hit by another wave of self-consciousness, Ochako apologizes for the state the place is in before they even enter. They step inside Ochako's cozy and practical apartment.

"Over here's the bathroom, that's the kitchen", she says and points to the doors on the one side of the corridor. "This is the living room, and that's the bedroom." She points to the doors on the other side of the corridor. "It's not much, and my parents keep telling me to get something bigger. They say I can afford it, and I mean, I guess that's true, but I don't need anything else. Also a bigger apartment would mean so much cleaning!" She turns towards Bakugou, who's standing behind her, has put down her shoes and is now in the process of getting out of his own. "I guess I could get myself help with the cleaning!", Ochako adds, hoping that she's read his thoughts. "But honestly, why bother! I got this beautiful view, and I feel cozy up here, and..." She realizes she's rambling, so she lets the sentence trail off.

Bakugou doesn't seem to mind either way. He pushes the apartment door shut behind him, an expression on his face that's hard to read. Ochako takes a step closer, maybe because she wants to help him out of the suit jacket. Or maybe she does it because being too far away from him makes her feel cold, and lost, and she wants to stay close to him. Her hands are on his lapels, and she's fumbling with them. "It's really unusual, seeing you wear something like this", she murmurs with a contemplative smile. "Gotta say, I could get used to the si-"

Her words, and thoughts, the whole world around them stops in its tracks as Bakugou delves down and presses his slightly parted lips to her mouth.

This comes... as a bit of a surprise. And then again, it's no surprise at all.

Ochako's heart thumps against her ribcage for one painful beat, and she can hear her own breath coming out in a huff as her fingers close tighter around the lapels of Bakugou's jacket.

Two calloused hands reach for her, cup her neck, travel up her cheeks and into her hair, hold onto her as if she's a long lost lover.

He breaks the kiss, but keeps holding onto her, and finally she can see his expression for the vulnerable, cracked open rawness that it displays. Bakugou's brows furrowed, his teeth bared, his own breath choppy and strained, like he's barely holding back, it's clear that he's waiting, asking, begging - To hold her, to be held. He has been barely keeping it together these past few hours and only let out his grief for a precious couple of seconds back at the pavilion. But it's not enough. This night is far from over for him.

And Ochako can feel it too, the burning of the scarlet red eyes mirroring the coal-seam fire still scorching away at her own insides.

Ochako doesn't know whether they are saving each other from this mess, or dragging each other deeper into it. All she knows is that it feels warm, and good, when she gently pulls Bakugou closer by the lapel of his jacket, so close that their bodies are perfectly aligned all the way from chest to hip, and kisses him back.

Kapitel 4: Adrift

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Kapitel 5: Anchor

She kneads the back of his neck until his shaking gets weaker, and his grasp onto her feels less like he's a drowning man holding onto a lifebuoy in the middle of a storm. They stay huddled up to one another for a couple more minutes, until Bakugou stirs in Ochako's arms and wakes her from a catnap she didn't know she was having. Something strains against her wrist and she notices that she's still got the little napkin wrapped around it. She unties it and tosses it onto the nightstand. Then she places a kiss on Bakugou's forehead, picks up his shirt from the floor, puts it on as a gown to ward off the nightly cold and makes for the bathroom.

After taking a little shower and brushing her teeth, she feels much more like a person again. Turns out torrents can also have a cleansing effect, because Ochako feels completely and utterly rinsed for now. She gazes at herself in the mirror and finds that she looks tired, and not happy, but still... content. Which is a long shot from where she's been for a while now.

Ochako slips back into Bakugou's shirt, steps outside the bathroom, and finds herself suddenly confronted with her makeshift gown's owner. Bakugou tried to open the bedroom door at the exact same time as her, and now they're standing in the doorway at a bit of an impasse. His eyes and nose are reddened as if he aggressively wiped his face with paper towels. He's back in his underwear and has his pants slung over his arm.

"I'm gonna need that back", he says and holds a hand in the direction of his shirt.

The penny drops.

"Oh no", Ochako says firmly, takes the pants from his arm, properly folds them and places them over the back of one of the seats by the window. She turns forcefully, causing the shirt to blow up around her, and points at Bakugou. "You're not leaving when we're both like this."

"But-"

"No buts." Ochako shakes her head so vigorously it makes her hair fly. "Heartbreak is a serious condition. And guess what, mister? Doctor's in, and she's prescribed you snuggles all night long!"

For a second, Bakugou pulls up his upper lip and looks at her as if she said something mildly disgusting. Then, much quicker than anticipated, he throws his hands up and relents. "Fine", he growls. "Just let me use the damn bathroom."

"Permission granted", Ochako says with a solemn nod.

Bakugou rolls his eyes, harrumphs and plods down the corridor.

When he returns, the smell of gasoline has been replaced with the scent of Ochako's body wash. He's also not in his underwear anymore. He crawls underneath the blanket behind Ochako without any encouragement from her, making her smile. Looks as if someone isn't as dismissive of snuggles as he'd like her to believe.

She turns around and sneaks one arm around his chest. "That was nice", she murmurs against his shoulder.

"You mean considering you had to get yourself the gayest guy at the party for this?"

Her laugh comes out as a huff. More like considering that you are Bakugou, is what she almost says, but she keeps it to herself.

They lie together for a moment, two puzzle pieces that don't quite fit, but still form a whole. As the light drizzle of rain starts pattering on the tall bedroom windows again, they listen to each other's breathing.

"I always just assumed it'd be either me or you", Bakugou mutters, his mouth half buried in her hair.

Ochako nods wordlessly. Despite their prior failed attempts at a long term relationship with Deku, it had become obvious that both of them were more than ready to give it another try. Or rather, that both of them would have been ready to marry Deku off the spot, if given the chance. Ochako had always been pretty convinced Deku reciprocated both their advances, but it somehow seemed as if the clearer she was about her intent, the more skittish he became. She used to think he maybe just wasn't cut out for commitment, and she was ready to work with that as well. Until she heard about his and Melissa's plans, of course.

"When I was younger, I used to pine for him so hard", Ochako says, and is surprised to hear herself talk. She's never told anyone about this, not Deku, not her friends, not even her parents. But somehow, she's been laid bare fifty times over tonight, and this is something she needs to get off her chest. "I used to keep all my feelings and thoughts about him locked up in my head like something dangerous. But part of me was always having these silly little dreams about being by his side, travelling with him, building something with him... maybe settling down..." She pulls her legs up and covers her face with one hand as if she could hide the way she's blushing at the thought even now. "But you wanna know what's funny?" She taps one finger on Bakugou's chest and smiles up at him. "I was always so sure it was going to be you."

"Yeah, right." Bakugou frowns.

"Bakugou, listen. Ever since I met him, not a single day has passed without Deku telling me about "Kacchan this, Kacchan that"", she says with a giggle. "The way he looks at you, it's like you hung up the moon. I was always so fascinated by what you two had. I used to call it a fated battle between rivals." She makes a determined fist and shakes it in the air. With a sigh, she casts her eyes down and wraps her arm around Bakugou again. "And honestly, I think... I think I would have been alright with it being you."

He makes a noncommittal noise, and Ochako already assumes that was his contribution to the conversation, but then he takes a deep breath in and out through his nose and says, with surprising emphasis: "Yeah. Likewise." He scratches the back of his head, as if he said something very embarrassing. "I mean... at least you were a worthy opponent. And if it had been you, I could have been sure that idiot is being kept in check, no matter what."

A warm affection blooms in Ochako's chest at the earnest compliment and she rubs her forehead against Bakugou's shoulder in the same way a cat would.

"But this...", he says, back to frowning now. "This seems like he can't be far enough away from us."

Ochako bites down on her lower lip. "Maybe we pushed him too hard."

"Trying to get him to take a stance is not pushing him too hard", Bakugou says, not without a disgruntled undertone.

"Or maybe it's his way of not trying to hurt anyone", Ochako suggests.

Suddenly, Bakugou pulls his arm out from under her, sits up and pulls his knees up to rest his elbows on them. "You know what I think?", he says, and cracks his knuckles. "That guy just can't allow himself to be happy."

Now wholly confused, Ochako also pushes herself up into a half sitting position next to Bakugou and tilts her head, hoping she's misunderstanding him. "Are you saying Deku is not happy with Melissa? Bakugou, that's... that's terrible...!"

"That's not what I'm talking about." Bakugou's expression is grave, and when he looks at her, his eyes are clear, and there is no resentment in them as he says by way of explanation: "Look, I know Deku. Better than anyone."

Now it's Ochako's turn to frown. "There is more to this."

Bakugou chews around on his tongue for a bit, obviously hoping she'll drop it, but that statement was far too bold for her to let it go.

"Alright, fine." Bakugou drags one hand through his disheveled hair and takes a laboured breath. "Pretty much exactly one year ago, I told him I don't mind if he wants us both." He makes a quick gesture pointing at Ochako and himself in quick succession.

Ochako raises her brows in astonishment. The surprises just keep on coming tonight. "What did he say?"

"That's the thing: Not a single goddamn word. Next day, it's like he's dropped off the face of the earth. Poof, gone!" Bakugou makes an explosion gesture with both his hands. "Maybe he's feeling guilty for stringing us along, maybe it's just Deku being

Deku. But in any case, that fucking nerd is absolutely terrified of... of the idea of having this. Of being able to keep both you and me without sacrificing anything, without any conditions, without consequences. Being happy and accepted." Bakugou rests his elbows on his knees again and watches his fingers as he laces them into each other. "It scared him so much that he started running, and he hasn't stopped running ever since."

"But that's nonsense!", Ochako says, way more forcefully than she intended, and she knows she sounds angry, but she doesn't care. "He deserves to be happy, more than anyone else!"

"Yeah, try telling him that, see how well it goes." Bakugou's voice is oozing bitterness.

And Ochako does feel the urge to do exactly that. But not only has she attempted to get it through Deku's thick skull time and time again, to no avail apparently - it also hits her once more that tonight's the night that Deku got married, and that that train has left the station.

"Either way, Deku's made his choice", she says, much quieter again. "And we just gotta... learn how to live with it."

Bakugou swallows heavily. Weariness creeps into his features again, chasing away the clearness in his eyes. Ochako scoots closer, leans her chin on his shoulder and puts one arm around his waist. She stays that way for a moment and rubs comforting circles into Bakugou's skin with her thumb, until she finally finds the right words. "But we deserve happiness, too. Don't you think?"

Bakugou turns his head a little to look at her, and Ochako immediately realizes that Bakugou has been asking himself that question for quite some time now. She lays back down and stretches her arms out for him. "C'mere", she says quietly, and Bakugou follows her invitation with the least amount of theatrics he's displayed tonight. He pulls the blanket over them both, wraps his arms around her, rests his head on her chest and lets her comb her fingers through his hair. His warmth is calming, and comforting. The weight of his limbs pins her to the mattress, an anchor that keeps her from floating away.

"I'm really glad I had you as my plus one tonight", Ochako says. And it means more than that, but she knows Bakugou understands.

"Yeah", he murmurs. "Anytime."