

Plus One

Bakugou / Ochako

Von Kroko

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.