

Plus One

Bakugou / Ochako

Von Kroko

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.