

quote love unquote

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/12025527) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/12025527>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	僕のヒーローアカデミア Boku no Hero Academia My Hero Academia
Relationship:	Bakugou Katsuki/Kirishima Eijirou , Minor or Background Relationship(s)
Character:	Kirishima Eijirou , Bakugou Katsuki , Ashido Mina , Kaminari Denki , Jirou Kyouka , Uraraka Ochako , Sero Hanta , Aoyama Yuuga , Yaoyorozu Momo , Todoroki Shouto , Midoriya Izuku , Satou Rikidou , Iida Tenya , Yamada Hizashi Present Mic , Toogata Mirio , Amajiki Tamaki , Kayama Nemuri Midnight , Yagi Toshinori All Might , Aizawa Shouta Eraserhead , Fukukado Emi Ms. Joke , Shindou You , Utsushimi Camie , Shinsou Hitoshi
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Celebrity , Musicians , Actors , Entertainment Industry , Celebrity Crush , Fake/Pretend Relationship , Mutual Pining , Slow Burn
Stats:	Published: 2017-09-16 Completed: 2019-04-03 Chapters: 28/28 Words: 135781

quote love unquote

by [newamsterdam](#)

Summary

Sero nods. “It’s the chance of a lifetime, really,” he says. “We want you to date Bakugou, for the sake of his reputation with the press. Some public appearances, a few ‘candid’ photos. For at least a couple of months.”

“Bakugou sent you to ask me to date him?” Kirishima asks, baffled.

“Of course not. We, his *people*, are asking you to date him. He’s going to have to get on board, if he wants his career to survive. And in the bargain, Riot will get all sorts of publicity, because their lyricist will be dating one of the industry’s hottest stars. A win for everyone.”

When Kirishima Eijirou's band hits the big time, he's not prepared for his newfound fame. He's even less prepared to meet the actor he's been crushing on for years, or to start dating him as a publicity stunt. The closer Kirishima gets to Bakugou Katsuki, the more he realizes he's in over his head. But it's hard to stop, once his heart is in it.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The billboard across the street from Kirishima's apartment changes regularly, but there's never been an ad like *this* on it, before.

When Kaminari sees it, he doesn't bother to hide his laughter. Instead, he slings an arm around Kirishima's shoulders and pulls him close. "Oh, *man*," he says, around fits of giggles, "You are so doomed."

Jirou, walking by in the hallway, gives the billboard an assessing look. Then she blinks and shrugs. "I mean, are we supposed to be focused on the jeans, or...?" She gestures vaguely at the rest of the ad.

It's only Ashido who tries to offer any comfort. She bounds into Kirishima's room a moment later, takes one look at the billboard, and then pushes Kaminari away so that she can rest both her hands on Kirishima's shoulders. "Be strong," she says, in an even and sage-like voice. "You're being tested, but I believe in you."

Her words would probably mean more if Kirishima didn't hear her laughing about it in the hallway a few minutes later. So, his friends? No help at all.

Kirishima lets out a rumbling sigh before falling backwards onto his bed. Even from this vantage point, he can see the entirety of the billboard outside his window. And, well. It's not like he's complaining.

Technically, it's an ad for Best Jeanist's new fall line. Best Jeanist, who can get away with embroidering "BJ" into the back pocket of his jeans and still have people paying through the nose for a pair. To be fair, they're *nice* jeans. But Kirishima is more interested in who's wearing them.

His back is turned to the camera, and aside from the jeans he isn't wearing anything at all. The lighting of image accentuates the long slope of his spine, the taper of his shoulders down to his waist. The jeans are tight, perfectly-fitted. One of his thumbs is hooked into his back pocket, the long line of his bare arm bracketing the image. His hair, pale blond, has been gelled and combed to perfection—though Kirishima thinks it's somewhat lacking in personality. But that feeling is quickly eclipsed, because the model's face is half-turned towards the camera, revealing his profile. His lips are curled into a snarl, and one fiery eye stares out at the viewer, daring them to take a step closer or turn heel and run away.

"You're killing me," Kirishima tells the larger-than-life photograph of Bakugou Katsuki that's taken up residency outside his window.

But he's not complaining.

—

Mornings after a show are always a struggle, so when Kirishima wakes up at three pm he decides not to be too hard on himself. When he blinks open his eyes, afternoon sun assaults his vision through his open curtains. And, beyond the window, there is Bakugou Katsuki, still snarling at Kirishima like he's just issued a challenge.

“Morning to you, too,” Kirishima says, rolling his eyes. He scrambles around on his bedroom floor for a pair of jeans, pulling them on along with a faded t-shirt that reads *Crimson Chevalier* in old-fashioned block lettering.

A few minutes later, he stumbles into the kitchen to find Kaminari and Jirou sitting side by side at the counter with matching bowls of cereal. Kaminari’s bright blond hair is stuck out at every angle, and Jirou’s eyes aren’t open at all as she brings her spoon up to her mouth.

“Rough night?” Kirishima asks them, grinning even when Jirou sticks out her leg to trip him.

“Present Mic is just so *loud*,” she complains, which is rich coming from a person who has headphones in so constantly, they might as well be an appendage. Even now, a white cord hangs around her neck, connected to her phone sitting on the counter.

“Ehhh.” The sound Kaminari makes isn’t quite a word. Still, he sticks up his hand and offers Kirishima a thumbs-up.

Kirishima digs around in the fridge, pulls out a plate of leftovers, and joins them at the counter. “At least today’s a day off?”

Jirou sniffs, finally blinking open her dark eyes. “Oh, did Ashido not tell you—”

“*Kirishima!*” As though summoned by the sound of her name, Ashido comes bounding into the kitchen. She’s wearing a neon green, oversized t-shirt that Kirishima is pretty sure once belonged to him, and as she skids to a halt she thrusts her phone in Kirishima’s direction.

“Mina,” Jirou snaps, flailing ineffectively at her with one arm, “It’s morning. You’re too loud.”

“It’s three o’clock,” Ashido says, rolling her eyes.

Kirishima doesn’t catch the rest of their conversation, because he’s too busy looking down at the tabloid website Ashido had pulled up on her phone. The headline reads *High School Sweethearts Growing Up?*. Underneath is a picture of two actors Kirishima recognizes from their multi-season run on the teen drama *UA*. The first, a young woman with warm brown eyes, smiles at the camera even though her cheeks are pink—Uraraka Ochako. The guy behind her has an arm around her waist, tugging her away from the camera. Though he has lifted his other hand to shield his face—at the same time, offering the camera an obscene gesture—Kirishima still recognizes him. Bakugou Katsuki.

It takes Kirishima a long moment to scroll past the picture to the text of the article.

Former co-stars Uraraka and Bakugou were spotted out on the town yesterday. While rumors of their romantic relationship have never officially been confirmed, the pair seemed cozy enough having drinks together. Maybe this finally ends our years’ long question of will they, or won’t they?

Uraraka and Bakugou have both won multiple awards for their roles in UA. Their characters’ tumultuous romance, slow to build but satisfying, left many fans wondering if the two teen stars could be more than friends when the cameras were off. Even though UA ended three years ago, Uraraka and Bakugou continue to be seen together.

On-screen, Uraraka’s character was able to tame Bakugou’s antagonistic one into someone we could all root for. Can she do the same in real life for the notoriously bad-tempered star?

Kirishima frowns down at the phone for a moment, until Ashido taps him on the shoulder and

takes her phone back from him.

“You think they’re really dating?” he asks.

Ashido shrugs, fluffing out her bubblegum-pink hair with both hands. “Who knows? You know I’ve been out of circulation for a while, and even before no one really bothered gossiping about Bakugou.”

It’s funny, Kirishima thinks, how they all talk about Bakugou like they know him. As far as Kirishima knows, none of them have met him—but he’s like Yaoyorozu Momo or Todoroki Shouto—famous enough that everyone *feels* like they know him.

“Speaking of circulation,” Jirou says, nudging Ashido with her foot.

“Oh, right,” Ashido says, clapping her hands together. “I forgot to tell you last night, Kirishima—we’ve been invited to a party.”

The way she says the last word immediately has Kirishima suspicious. He likes parties well enough, but there are parties and then there are *parties*.

“What’s that mean?”

“Don’t look at me like that,” Ashido says with a sigh. “I don’t care if we get a hundred good reviews, if no one knows who we are the album’s not going to sell. So, when I say, ‘we got invited to a party,’ you should say, ‘Thank you, Ashido-san, what would we do without you?’”

“What kind of party?” Kirishima insists.

Ashido pouts at him from the other side of the counter. “Ki-ri-shi-*ma*. It doesn’t matter what kind of party. It’ll be fun, I promise.”

“I’m ready to have fun,” Kaminari puts in helpfully, having woken up a little more.

“I’m ready to keep him from completely embarrassing us.” Jirou points a thumb in Kaminari’s direction, smirking when he rounds on her.

“See?” Ashido says. “Everyone’s on board, Kirishima!”

Kirishima looks her straight in the eye, because he knows her well enough to understand where this is going. He’s already accepted his fate when he asks, “Who invited us, exactly?”

Ashido smiles sweetly at him. “Hagakure Tooru.”

—

It must be nice being the most sought-after model in the industry, if it pays for a penthouse apartment with a rooftop pool. Kirishima isn’t sure he could accurately describe what Hagakure Tooru looks like, because in each photoshoot he’s seen her in she’s sporting a completely different aesthetic. A new hairstyle, different colored contacts, a persona that fits the mood of the shoot exactly. Is she tall or short? Are her features round or sharp? He honestly couldn’t say.

Still, he finds himself standing on her rooftop that evening, nervously straightening the cuffs of his shirt. Music blares from a DJ’s setup across the roof, and in between two dozen people are milling about the pool, talking and sipping on drinks. On the face of it, there’s nothing to be nervous about. Usually, Kirishima has no problem dealing with crowds this size or bigger, and enjoys his time

spent around new people.

But these aren't just any people. Everywhere he looks he spots a model or an actress or a best-selling musician. It's like he can see their resumes floating about their heads, awards and popularity laid out for all to see. And with every face he recognizes, he realizes a hard truth—he's not meant to be here. He can't compete.

Ashido elbows him in the side. "You look like you just stopped breathing," she says, out of the side of her mouth. "What's wrong?"

Kirishima tries to offer her a smile. She certainly looks the part, herself—pink hair and brilliant smile, a leopard-print mini skirt and an air of confidence that can't be faked. Ashido Mina was meant to be in the spotlight.

Kirishima, on the other hand—Kirishima's an imposter, and he's sure everyone knows it.

Before he can get too caught up in that train of thought, Ashido grabs his shoulder and turns him to face her. She'd insisted on picking out his outfit for tonight—a deep red button-down and his nicest pair of black jeans—and now she steps up on her toes to straighten his collar, unbuttoning his shirt enough to expose just a little bit of his chest.

"You're going to be fine," she assures him. "Seriously. You'd better be, because if you ruin this for us I'm going to tell everyone what your natural hair color is."

Kirishima's cheeks immediately turn the same furious red as his hair. "*Ashido.*"

She claps her hands against his cheeks. "Just kidding. Mostly. But, really. Go talk to someone—make a friend. You're good at this stuff!"

"Maybe I'll just stick with you a little longer—" Kirishima's cut off as Ashido cranes her head over his shoulder, letting out a tiny gasp.

"Oh, my—Kirishima. It's *Sero.*"

"Wait—seriously?"

Sure enough, when he turns around to follow Ashido's gaze he sees Sero Hanta—no one's image of a celebrity, too plain and unassuming to be an actor or a model. He looks the same as ever, with his inky black hair and cheerful smile.

But beside Kirishima, Ashido is clenching her hands and biting the inside of her cheek. "I didn't know he was going to be here," she says.

Kirishima half-smiles. "You could go talk to him, you know."

"I know," Ashido says, tapping her foot impatiently. "Ugh—fine. I will!"

She marches away from Kirishima, across the rooftop towards Sero. He's standing amidst a small group of people—celebrities who all greet him like a friend—but as soon as he spots Ashido he pulls away from them.

"Hey," Kirishima hears Ashido say, "How're you?"

As far as opening lines go, it isn't the most brilliant. But Sero looks sheepish and ducks his head as he offers her a greeting.

A minute later, Ashido punches him in the shoulder. “You jerk,” she says. “*I missed you.*”

Kirishima should probably go over and say hi, as well. He hasn’t seen Sero in almost two years, the same as Ashido. But maybe it’s also best that he gives them their space, for now.

Sucking in a breath, he turns back to the bulk of the party. Kaminari and Jirou are on one corner of the rooftop, talking to a woman with dark hair who towers over both of them—Yaoyorozu Momo. Kirishima still isn’t sure how Kaminari approached her so easily. Jirou’s skin had turned green at the thought, but Kaminari had pulled her along with him easily enough. His confidence isn’t quite the same as Ashido’s—more guileless, really—but they have something of the same spark.

Kirishima bites down on the inside of his cheek, barely noticing as someone comes up beside him.

A voice says, “What are you doing over here by yourself?”

Kirishima turns to see who’s addressing him, but as soon as he does he freezes. She’s not particularly tall or imposing—soft brown eyes, round pink cheeks, a kind smile. They’ve never met before, but Kirishima recognizes that smile. He’d watched it once a week, every week, for years.

“Hi,” she says, open and friendly, “I’m Uraraka Ochako.”

“I know,” Kirishima says, before he can think better of it. He winces at himself. “I mean—”

Uraraka laughs. “You recognize me? I should’ve figured. And you are?”

“Kirishima,” he says. “Kirishima Eijirou. I’m here with my band—”

“Oh!” Her face lights up with realization. “Tooru-chan mentioned you—your band is an English word, right? Light? Or, wait—Riot?”

He finds himself grinning at her. “That’s us.”

“That’s so cool,” she says, “Tooru-chan said you were opening for Present Mic right now! That must be so fun.”

“It’s a lot of work,” Kirishima admits. “But yeah, it’s pretty awesome.”

It’s like a dream—Uraraka Ochako standing right in front of him, talking to him like she’s a normal person. She looks just like she does on TV, and sets off talking about how Hagakure had been to one of Present Mic’s recent shows and seen them perform. Kirishima is suddenly very glad that no one had told him about that—he doesn’t know how he would’ve performed, knowing she was in the audience.

“Anyway, she said you were really, really good!” Uraraka says earnestly.

Kirishima laughs because he’s not sure what else to do. “Oh,” he says, cheeks growing redder by the moment. “I mean, Ashido’s an amazing singer, and you should hear Jirou on the guitar. And Kaminari, of course.”

“I’m sure you’re amazing, too, Kirishima-kun.” There’s no choice but to believe her, Uraraka is so sincere. “Your name—Riot? Where’d that come from?”

“It means like, a protest?” Kirishima tries to explain. “A disturbance of the peace. But mostly I liked it because there’s a line in an old Crimson Chevalier song where he uses it.”

“Crimson Chevalier?” Uraraka asks, tilting her head to one side.

From behind Kirishima, someone scoffs. “It’s classic rock, round face. You haven’t heard of him.”

As a strange sensation travels up Kirishima’s spine, Uraraka puts her hands on her hips and scowls at who’d been speaking.

“I might’ve,” she protests.

The same voice lets out a dismissive tut. “Sure. Whatever. And where’ve you been, anyway? I want to get the fuck out of here.”

“Pease forgive Bakugou-kun,” Uraraka says to Kirishima. “He’s this rude to everyone—don’t take it personally.”

Of course, Kirishima thinks. Of course, Bakugou Katsuki is standing right behind him. With great effort, Kirishima turns around slowly enough to not seem too desperate. Then, of course, he ruins it.

“You’re not wearing jeans,” he says, unable to stop himself.

Bakugou Katsuki, in baggy black pants and a plain t-shirt, stares at him. For a moment, Kirishima is privy to his resting expression—a scowl on his face and a deep crease between his brows, but a relative calm still settled over him. Then, Kirishima’s words register, and his jaw visibly clenches and his eyes narrow to slits.

“Yeah,” he bites out. “No shit.”

Uraraka covers her face with both hands, smothering her laughter. “Shh, shh, Kirishima-kun, he hates that billboard.”

“Because it’s a fucking travesty,” Bakugou grouses, voice rising. “I told Jeanist his hairstyling is shit, and he didn’t listen, and now that piece of shit ad is making me look like a *joke* all over the goddamn city!”

This is Bakugou Katsuki, a voice in Kirishima’s mind says, this is Bakugou Katsuki losing his shit at a fancy party that he isn’t dressed for and doesn’t want to be at.

“You don’t look like a joke,” Kirishima says, because that much seems obvious to him. “I mean, the hair was a bit much, but I don’t think anyone’s first instinct is going to be to laugh, man.”

Well, he amends in his mind, Jirou and Kaminari and Ashido all laughed. But that was because of Kirishima, mostly. They might laugh at Bakugou to his face, too, but that’s because they’re good-natured assholes. Hopefully, they’ll never meet and Kirishima will never have to worry about it.

“Ha?” Bakugou rounds on him, expression so angry that Kirishima can practically see the smoke blowing from his ears. “What the fuck would you know about it?”

“Bakugou-kun,” Uraraka says sharply, her smile replaced by a disappointed expression.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Kirishima says to her. “And, well, I’ve *seen* it? So that’s enough to make a judgment, don’t you think?”

“Who the fuck even *are* you, shitty hair?” Bakugou demands, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Kirishima Eijirou,” he says, trying for a grin. He’ll let the hair comment slide, he decides. “Nice to meet—”

“I don’t actually care,” Bakugou says, turning away from him and back to Uraraka. “Look, we showed up. People fucking saw us. Can we *go*, now?”

There’s definitely something different about the way Bakugou talks to Uraraka, even if his language isn’t any more polite. And he’s asking her permission to leave.

A heavy stone of realization falls on Kirishima’s chest. Maybe they really *are* dating. Kirishima knows he has no right to be disappointed about that—it’s creepy, even. Just because he feels like he knows Bakugou doesn’t mean he actually does.

Uraraka sighs and frowns at Bakugou. “I haven’t gotten to talk to everyone, yet! And Deku-kun isn’t even here.”

“If he’s who we’re waiting on, I’m *definitely* out of here,” Bakugou says.

This time, Uraraka rolls her eyes. “You’re so dramatic. Let’s stick around for another hour, okay?”

Bakugou clenches his teeth, every muscle in his body tense. He’s not just angry—he’s uncomfortable. But then he seems to steel himself, because he throws his hands up in the air and says, “*Fine*. You better come find me in an hour.”

Then he stalks away from both of them.

Uraraka lets out another sigh, then smiles apologetically. “He’s not good with new people. Or people, really.”

Kirishima grins crookedly. “Well. I mean, he’s mostly as advertised, then?”

—

Uraraka insists on showing him around, after that. They meet Hagakure Tooru—who has teal hair, today, and a face so perfect it looks photoshopped—who actually stops Kirishima to compliment his music. He’s taken aback at being recognized, even though he knows Hagakure invited them to this party. Sato Rikido, head chef of Sugar Rush, finds them after that. And then they pass by Yaoyorozu Momo, who’s still talking to Jirou and Kaminari. It’s a dizzying whirlwind of introductions and conversations, and Kirishima can barely keep up.

“Who’s that with Sero-kun?” Uraraka asks, cupping one hand over her eyes to see.

“Ashido,” Kirishima says. Because, sure enough, the two of them are still ensconced together one on side of the roof. They have their head leaned together, expressions caught between serious and bashful.

Uraraka taps one finger against her chin, humming thoughtfully.

Then, from further away, someone calls out, “Ochako-chan!”

The two of them turn to see Asui Tsuyu—Japan’s Olympic darling and gold medal swimmer. Uraraka turns back to Kirishima with a brilliant smile.

“That’s Tsuyu-chan,” she says, introducing her like she’s introduced everyone to Kirishima, tonight, even though he recognizes all of them.

“Why don’t you go join her,” Kirishima says, “I think I’m going to go get some air.”

It isn’t very hard to convince her. Kirishima offers Asui a wave, then pulls himself through the

crowd to the edges of the party. Even though they're outdoors, on a rooftop, it's hard not feel stifled by the sheer personality of the crowd. Kirishima edges away from all of it, behind one of the vine-covered walls that makes off the party area. Leaning against the other side of the wall, he lets out a low breath.

"Holy crap," he says, head lifting as he undoes another button on his shirt. He feels like he's just run a marathon.

"What the fuck," someone says, from a few feet away.

Kirishima looks up with a start.

Bakugou Katsuki is crouched there, almost at the edge of the roof. Without the fairy lights of the party illuminating his face, he looks like one of his character posters from *UA*: brooding and shadowed, his pale hair just visible in the moonlight.

Kirishima swallows. Sure, he's been at a party with countless attractive and impressive people for the better part of the evening. But none of them were Bakugou Katsuki.

"What the hell are you doing over here?" Bakugou demands, getting to his feet.

"Just, you know. Getting some space?" Kirishima hates that it sounds like a question—he hates that his voice squeaks, as though he's nervous. With everyone else, he'd been more or less able to fake it. But standing next to Bakugou only emphasizes how out of his depth he is.

Bakugou's brows draw together, and for a second Kirishima imagines that he looks thoughtful instead of angry. Then, he scoffs.

"No point coming to one of these shitty parties if you're not actually seen at it," he says roughly.

Kirishima shrugs. "I think I'm good, actually? There's four people in my band, anyway, and out of us I'm the last person anyone's going to focus on."

The crease between Bakugou's brow deepens. "You say a lot of stupid shit, you know that?"

Kirishima hardly thinks that's fair—he's barely had a conversation with Bakugou, and nothing he's said is all that stupid. But just as he's about to protest, Bakugou steps closer, right into his space.

He smells like a campfire, Kirishima thinks, as the more rational part of his brain shuts down. Bakugou stands just a centimeter or so above him, and he's definitely leaner than Kirishima is. Still, he has this unmistakable presence—it fills the air, and Kirishima can't breathe in anything else.

Bakugou doesn't say anything, and Kirishima's own words are caught in his throat. Bakugou leans over him, pressing one arm against the wall on the side of Kirishima's head. He keeps looking down, searching with his dark, intense eyes. Kirishima doesn't know what he's looking for. But their faces are barely a hair's span apart, and if this were a movie Kirishima could imagine this being the set up for a kiss.

It's a stupid thought, one Kirishima regrets as soon as he's had it. He's just—he's just a filler in a band that hasn't made it big yet, and Bakugou Katsuki is perhaps the most talented actor of their generation. There's no comparison between them, no hope of Kirishima ever being on Bakugou's radar. And that's all before Kirishima even considers that Bakugou is dating someone else.

Somewhere above him, Kirishima hears a clicking noise. “What was that?”

Bakugou takes a step back, eyes narrowed as he seeks the source of the noise. But it’s impossible to see anything beyond the rooftop they’re standing on.

“Fuck,” Bakugou mutters, stuffing his hands into his pockets.

From the party, happening just a few feet away from them, a chorus of noise rises up. “*Midoriya*,” at least five people say at once, joyful and welcoming.

Bakugou’s face contorts. Whereas before he just looked intense, now he’s almost murderous. His jaw clenches, lips pulling away from his teeth in a snarl.

“I’m fucking out of here.” He doesn’t say anything else to Kirishima, just leaves him standing alone.

—

Kirishima wakes up around noon with a headache. He rolls out of bed, pointedly ignores the billboard outside his window, and reaches around for a notebook and pencil. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, he hums a tune off-rhythm as he scribbles across the page. The lyrics aren’t anything much—half-formed thoughts and words that sound interesting, nothing that could be considered a song, yet. But he’s got notebooks and notebooks filled with such snatches, and maybe someday they’ll form something more.

He doesn’t know how long he’s been sitting there, thinking of ways to describe the intensity of dark eyes, when he hears a knock at the front door.

Kirishima walks to the door, nonchalant in his boxers and ratty t-shirt. The rest of the apartment is quiet, and so Jirou and the others must not be awake yet. Kirishima doesn’t remember any of them mentioning having visitors.

When he opens the door, Sero Hanta is standing there in a sharp navy suit. There’s a pair of expensive sunglasses perched on his head, and when he sees Kirishima he smiles.

“Hey, man,” Kirishima says, even though he’s slightly confused. “It’s been a long time.”

“Too long,” Sero agrees.

There’s a stiffness in the air between them, a feeling that Kirishima desperately wants to rid himself of.

“I don’t think Ashido’s awake, yet,” he says, “if you’re here to see her?”

Sero shakes his head. “Um, no. Actually, I’m here to see *you*. On behalf of my client?”

Kirishima blinks at him. “Your client?”

Sero tilts his head. “You checked the internet this morning, didn’t you?”

“No?”

Sero mutters something under his breath, then pulls out his phone and taps around on it for a moment. Then he turns it towards Kirishima.

There’s a picture of him on Sero’s phone. There’s a picture of him from last night on Sero’s phone.

There's a picture of him from last night, *with Bakugou Katsuki*, on Sero's phone.

In the photo, only their faces are visible. Kirishima is leaning against the vine-covered wall, head tilted upwards as his eyes focus on Bakugou. With his spiky red hair, the pale scar above his eye, even the gleam of his teeth—it's unmistakable. It can't be anyone but him.

Standing over him is Bakugou, looking down with narrowed eyes, his lips slightly parted. There's no more than a hair's span between them. They look like they're about to kiss.

Across the image, block letters ask, *Bakugou Katsuki's New Leading... Man?*

"Holy shit," Kirishima says, because he doesn't know what else to do.

Sero smiles at him, all straight teeth. Suddenly, Kirishima's not so sure he's dealing with an old friend.

"Anyway," Sero says, "I'm Bakugou-san's agent. I'm here on his behalf, to deal with this situation."

Kirishima wonders if it's too late to go back to bed.

Chapter End Notes

["out of my league" - fitz and the tantrums](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sero sits at the breakfast nook, looking distinctly out of place. Kirishima remembers him as several years younger, when he was made up mostly of elbows and knees. He's still lanky, but he's grown into his height. Kirishima can't help but notice the stack of dirty dishes in the sink, the crumpled magazines and sheet music that litter the kitchen and spill into the living room. In contrast with Sero, who looks like he's just stepped out of a photoshoot, Kirishima feels grubby and unkempt.

But Sero doesn't affect that attitude. He glances around the apartment, an almost wistful smile on his face, until his eyes land on the framed, enlarged magazine article on the wall opposite the sink.

Get Ready to Riot!, the article reads. The photograph is taken at an upshot angle, Ashido dominating the center of the frame. Her hands are clasped around a microphone, her skin tinged a rosy pink with exhilaration as she shuts her eyes and sings. The dark makeup around her eyes is slightly smudged, giving her a raccoon's look that somehow still works for her. Just behind her is Jirou, her guitar almost vertical as her fingers find the right chord. The moment before, she'd shed her trademark leather jacket, leaving her in a deep purple tank-top and ripped jeans. Off to one side is Kaminari at his drum set, drumsticks moving so quickly that in the photo they're just two blurred lines. The steel drums catch the light, along with the silver jewelry hanging off Kaminari's neck and glinting from his ears. And then, far to one side, is Kirishima. His gaze is fixed downward as he strums his cherry red guitar, but he's smiling—happy enough in that moment to just be playing music, almost unaware of the crowd around him, the hands reaching up from below the stage.

Now, seeing Sero staring at the picture, he blushes and scratches at the back of his neck. "What?" he asks, when Sero doesn't look away.

For a moment, Sero's smile shifts into a sharp frown. Then he shakes his head. "Nothing. I guess the media still loves Ashido, huh."

Kirishima shrugs. "She's the lead singer. Of course, they'd focus on her."

"Of course, you'd let them," Sero mutters.

"What was that?" Kirishima asks. It sounds too much like the starting notes of an old fight, one that he really doesn't want to relive right now. They've all moved on from it—Ashido and Kirishima to this new band, Sero to being Bakugou Katsuki's agent. Which reminds him—"What did you come here to say, Sero?"

Sero smiles again, bashful this time. He looks more like himself, even when he rests his elbows on his knees and fixes Kirishima with a dark-eyed stare. "It's a little awkward," he starts.

Kirishima rolls his eyes. "Dude, this already the most awkward day I've had in a while, and last week I saw Present Mic in his underwear."

Sero shudders at Kirishima's words, then laughs. It cuts through the tension of the room, and when Sero starts up again his voice is more relaxed. "And I told you, didn't I? The media caught you and Bakugou together, last night. I don't know what you were doing—but. This is going to cause some *issues*."

Kirishima thinks of Uraraka and his heart drops into the pit of his stomach. She's going to see that

photograph. She's going to see her boyfriend leaned over another a guy, a guy she took pity on and spent the better part of last night with. What will she think? How could Kirishima have done this to her?

"Bakugou wasn't out," Sero is saying. "I mean, he's still not, technically. But there's only so many ways to explain a picture like that."

"Sero," Kirishima says with a nervous laugh, "*Nothing happened*. Like, seriously. I don't even know why he was over there, and then he just came up to me and..." Kirishima waves his hands, gesturing ineffectually.

Then, Sero's words register, and Kirishima's jaw drops.

"We were trying to keep the stunt with Uraraka-san going so no one would figure it out," Sero is saying, even though there's a grin pulling at the corner of his lips as he looks at Kirishima. "I mean, Bakugou's never really been interested in *anyone*. But then, apparently right before I started working with him, he really started pushing for roles that were beyond what his agency could tolerate. So, he switched over to the agency I work for, but I don't think anyone was ready to start casting Bakugou Katsuki as the romantic lead in gay films."

"He's *gay*," Kirishima says, and his heart starts beating against his ribs like a bird trapped in a cage.

Sero shrugs. "I mean, probably? He's definitely not interested in women. But he *tolerates* Uraraka-san, so it was easy enough to stage a few things. Her people were on board, and it's helped them both stay relevant, so..."

"They're *not* dating?"

Now, Sero snorts. "Bakugou isn't horrible to Uraraka-san, but I still don't think she'd put up with having him as a boyfriend."

So, he's not a homewrecker. That's one less thing to worry about, at least.

"I'm sorry—what does any of this have to do with me?"

Sero leans forward with a glint his eye. Suddenly, he looks every bit the calculating professional he must be, if he manages Bakugou Katsuki. "If Bakugou is going to upend all our efforts with the press, we're going to make it happen in a way that helps his career, rather than tanking it. He's popular enough that people *might* tolerate him coming out. But they're definitely not going to accept him if he's running around, getting caught with a different guy every week. What our agency thinks is that the public can handle a gay man, but only if he's tied down. Committed."

"I don't... understand..." Kirishima's mouth is dry. He's trying very hard not to think about Bakugou, leaning over him and smelling like a campfire. He's trying very hard not to think about his heated stare, or the sharp jut of his collarbones.

Sero looks up and grins widely. "Don't worry so much, Kirishima! I wouldn't even be making this offer if I didn't think it'd help you out, too."

"Offer," Kirishima repeats skeptically.

Sero nods. "It's the chance of a lifetime, really," he says. "We want you to date Bakugou, for the sake of his reputation with the press. Some public appearances, a few 'candid' photos. For at least a couple of months."

“Bakugou sent you to ask me to date him?” Kirishima asks, baffled.

“Of course not. We, his *people*, are asking you to date him. He’s going to have to get on board, if he wants his career to survive. And in the bargain, Riot will get all sorts of publicity, because their lyricist will be dating one of the industry’s hottest stars. A win for everyone.”

Kirishima doesn’t know if it’s because he woke up past noon, but his brain is having a difficult time processing all of this. Somewhere, a voice in his head is crowing *Do it! Date Bakugou Katsuki! When are you ever going to get this chance again?*. But that voice is quickly drowned out by a half-dozen others, each expressing anxiety or confusion or apprehension.

“I’ll give you some time to think about it, okay?” Sero says kindly. He pulls out a metallic gray business card and leaves it on the counter. “I have to go make some calls, deal with the fallout from last night. The quicker you decide, the more it’d help me out. Give me a call soon, okay?”

As he gets up and passes Kirishima, he reaches out to pat his shoulder. “I never really knew what you saw in Bakugou, before I started working him, but now it’s different. He’s not a bad guy. I really want to see his star keep rising, you know?”

—

Two hours later, Kirishima sits on the couch, sandwiched between Ashido and Kaminari. Jirou is across from them, cross-legged on the floor. Ashido and Kaminari haven’t stopped yelling for the past fifteen minutes, and Kirishima is starting to get a headache.

“They want you to date Bakugou,” Kaminari yelps, for perhaps the fifth time. He’s caught between giggles and hysterics. “Can you even handle that? Have you ever tried to fake anything before, in your whole life?”

“You let Sero into our apartment *without even telling me*,” Ashido interrupts, eyes flashing. “What if I had woken up and come to get breakfast? What if I was in my underwear and he was just sitting there *at our breakfast nook*?”

“Why are you coming to breakfast in your underwear,” Kirishima asks weakly.

“You can’t do this, it’ll be a disaster,” Kaminari continues. “Have you seen that guy? I know you have a thing for shitheads with hard abs, but c’mon. Everyone knows his personality’s been run through sewage pipes a couple times.”

“I mean, Sero’s right—it wouldn’t hurt us,” Ashido continues, voice still pitched at a whine. “Being seen around town with him, everyone would ask who you are. And then everyone would ask about the band. It wouldn’t be *bad*...”

“What about the bad fact of our Kirishima dating some guy who’s apparently been *faking it* with the same girl for like, three years?” Kaminari throws back his head. He turns to Kirishima and says, “You’ve got a fragile heart. This guy’s obviously a player.”

“It’d be fake with me, too,” Kirishima says, chewing on the inside of his cheek. “And my heart is manly and tough, get off me.” He pushes Kaminari away, but that does little to deter him.

“Can you idiots get serious, for a moment?” Jirou asks tiredly. She’s been sitting on the ground, contemplating, for long minutes now. “There’s one part of this we haven’t thought about, at all.”

“What’s that?” Kaminari and Ashido ask in unison.

Jirou dismisses them with a wave of her hand, then focuses on Kirishima. “Do you *want* to fake-date Bakugou? Do you want to have to do press events and photoshoots, and all that other stuff? Are you even considering this?”

As soon as she asks, Kirishima knows that he’s not just considering it. He’s already made up his mind. Being around Bakugou last night had been confusing, to say the least. But it was also intoxicating. And if it’d benefit the band, he’d probably be willing to do just about anything. He knows that none of the others are going to force him to do something he doesn’t want to do, but he also doesn’t know what else he can really do to push their collective dream forward.

And maybe, at his core, Kirishima is selfish. He wants to get to know Bakugou, and to just be around him. Even if the premise is a fake one. In any case, it’d be dishonorable to let Bakugou’s career struggle just because someone had caught them standing near each other. Bakugou had moved in, but Kirishima hadn’t moved away. In some way, isn’t this his fault, too?

Ashido rests a hand on Kirishima’s shoulder. “We’re going to support you, no matter what.”

Kaminari sighs. “Obviously,” he says, with only a little reluctance.

Jirou purses her lips to hide a smirk. “At least you won’t have to fake your big, stupid crush on him?”

“Shut up,” Kirishima groans. The others all laugh.

Kirishima calls Sero a little while later. “I’m in, I think. Just, before this goes any further—can I meet him? Like, *really*. Not for the cameras.”

—

Sero gives Kirishima the address of a café downtown that he’s never been to. He rushes out the door before Ashido can insist on dressing him, and immediately regrets it. He’s wearing one of his many faded band t-shirts (this one a tangerine orange, with Fatgum’s logo printed across it) and an old pair of cargo shorts. Still, Kirishima tells himself, this is a condition, not an actual fake-date. There’s a contradiction rolled up in that sentence, somewhere, but in any case he shouldn’t have to worry about how he’s dressed.

A bell rings as Kirishima pushes open the door of the café. It’s a quiet place, decorated all in pale yellow and cream. Kirishima passes by the desert counter, eyes widening as he reads the price cards on the macarons and scones. He glances back up at the signs, and suddenly it clicks.

Sugar Rush, he thinks, resisting the urge to smack his forehead with his palm. Sato Rikido had been at the party last night. This is the café adjunct of his bigger restaurant. No wonder the prices are so exorbitant.

“Kirishima-san?” A young woman in a pale yellow apron approaches him, bobbing her head. “Bakugou-san is waiting for you.”

She points out a booth in the back of the café, with high-backed seats that don’t let other customers see who’s sitting there. Kirishima swallows roughly before thanking the woman and heading for the booth.

Be normal, he tells himself as he walks across the café. Be normal, he’s just a regular guy, and a regular guy you’re going to have to date. Don’t treat him like an alien. Don’t gawk at him. Don’t stare at his abs—wait, won’t he be wearing a shirt? Please let him be wearing a shirt—

Kirishima is so lost in his thoughts, he barely realizes when he comes to stand in front of the booth. Then, someone clears their throat.

“Well?” Bakugou snaps. “Are you going to sit down, or what? Shitty hair.”

Kirishima is definitely underdressed. Bakugou is wearing a crisp black button-down, open over a red t-shirt. There’s a pair of sunglasses pushed back into his hair, and he’s drumming his fingers against the table impatiently. He’s more dressed-up than he’d been at Hagakure’s party, but more real than Kirishima’s ever seen him in a television commercial or billboard.

“Hello?” Bakugou says, reaching over to punch Kirishima in the shoulder. “Are you even listening to me?”

Kirishima winces, rubbing at his shoulder where Bakugou had hit him. “Yes, yes, *geez*.” He quickly sits down opposite Bakugou, frowning at him. “And it’s Kirishima, you know. Not ‘shitty hair.’”

Bakugou leans back into his seat, crossing his arms over his chest. “Whatever.”

“No, not whatever,” Kirishima says, slightly miffed. “I mean, if we’re going to *date*, you should know my name. Honestly, you should probably call me Eijirou.”

Bakugou looks up at him with a disgusted expression. “Like hell.”

There’s something less-than-hostile about his response, more confused than genuinely angry. Kirishima wonders, suddenly, if Bakugou has ever actually dated anyone. If he’s been pretending to be with Uraraka, would he have been able to?

“...I could call you Katsuki,” Kirishima says, unable to stop the smile playing at his lips. He’s reminded of science classes back in high school, of leaning with Ashido over the same lab table and titrating an acid with little drips of solution. Kirishima had often let too much in at once, but Ashido had a defter touch, able to calibrate things correctly with enough patience and effort.

Bakugou glares at him with such intensity, Kirishima is surprised he doesn’t catch fire.

“Call me that ever again and I will rip off your leg and beat you dead with it,” Bakugou spits.

Kirishima laughs. “Dude, that’s not very nice. And I’ll call you Bakugou, then, if you call me Kirishima. Deal?”

“*Whatever*.” Bakugou looks even more sullen, now.

Kirishima doesn’t know exactly how to deal with this. He knew that the dating was Sero’s idea, not Bakugou’s. But he still didn’t expect Bakugou to look so utterly miserable at the idea.

“Look,” he says, pitching his voice a bit lower. There’s no one sitting around them in the café, but there’s no harm in being careful. “I don’t know what Sero’s said to you, but if you don’t want to do this, I don’t want to, either.”

Bakugou’s still staring at him. “You think Soy Sauce can actually tell me what to do?” he demands.

Kirishima rests his elbows against the table, then presses his hands against his face. “Are you just being contrary on purpose?” he asks. When Bakugou doesn’t answer after a moment, Kirishima blinks open his eyes to see that Bakugou’s gaze has dropped from his face down to his arms.

“What,” Kirishima asks.

Bakugou’s brows cut a sharp crease over his eyes. “You have tattoos.”

Kirishima glances down, then shrugs. “Huh? Oh, yeah. I guess you couldn’t see them, last night.” He’s particularly fond of the designs of these—an ornate sword on the interior of his right forearm, cutting a long line from his wrist to the joint of his elbow. On his opposite arm is a matching shield, both inked in stark black against his skin.

Bakugou scowls at him. “You don’t make any goddamn sense.”

Kirishima arches a brow. “I’m a musician with tattoos—I think that makes more sense than anything else about me, probably. Anyway, I chose this spot because when you’re singing into a mic, your arms face the crowd. See?” He demonstrates the position, curling his hands around an imaginary microphone.

“But you don’t sing,” Bakugou tells him.

Kirishima laughs sheepishly. “Well, that’s true. And—wait, how’d you even know that?”

Bakugou rolls his eyes. “I do my fucking research, asshole.”

He pauses to consider that, for a moment, then takes a deep breath. “Hey, how about we start over? Hi, I’m Kirishima Eijirou.” He pauses, but Bakugou says nothing. “And you are...?”

Bakugou blinks at him. “You fucking know who I am.”

Kirishima frowns and kicks him under the table.

“Fuck. Fine.” Bakugou huffs. “I’m Bakugou.”

“Nice to meet you,” Kirishima says with forced pleasantness. “So. Why do you want me to pretend to be your boyfriend?”

“I thought Soy Sauce already explained this shit to you. What am I paying him for—”

“I know what Sero said,” Kirishima interrupts. “I want to know what *you* think.”

Bakugou says nothing for a moment, then shrugs. “He explained it to you, didn’t he? The agency thinks that if I don’t have a boyfriend, it’ll fuck up my image. I don’t really care about any of that bullshit, but I’m sick of the rest of it. If this gets me what I want, then *fine*. I’ll do it.”

And what is it you want, Kirishima almost asks. But he doesn’t think that Bakugou will be any more forthcoming.

“Okay,” he says after a moment. “Then I guess we’re a team, now.”

Bakugou pulls a face.

“Aren’t you an actor?” Kirishima asks, feigning incredulity. “If you can’t even pretend to like me, I don’t see how anyone’s going to want to hire you.”

“Fuck you,” Bakugou says, with less bite than before. “You’re the one who’s going to have to worry about selling it. Just wait—I’m going to date the hell out of you, until you’re coughing up blood.”

“I think someone needs to explain to you how dating works,” Kirishima says, a bit uncertainly. But another part of him thinks, *oh*. Bakugou is going to take dating him very seriously. And Kirishima’s imagination runs with that, until he’s lost sight of the person sitting in front of him.

“I’m leaving,” Bakugou says, getting up and letting his sunglasses drop down over his eyes.

“What for?” Kirishima asks, also getting to his feet.

“I have to get fitted for the premiere, on Friday,” Bakugou growls. “You’re going to be there, too.”

Bakugou Katsuki’s latest role is in *Ground Zero*, a spy thriller co-starring Todoroki Shouto, another UA alumnus. Kirishima had heard about the film, had even marked its premiere date months ago, but had forgotten about it until now. Sitting on the couch, laptop propped on his knees, he looks at the poster with a curious expression.

Bakugou and Todoroki are centered in the shot, both wearing sharp suits and holding guns. They’re angled away from each other, but Bakugou looks back over his shoulder at Todoroki. Behind them, visible inside the bloom of an explosion, is a woman with dark hair and an even darker smile—Yaoyorozu Momo, playing the film’s villain.

“Lucky,” Jirou says, passing by. “I want to go to a Yaomomo movie premiere.”

“Maybe I can bring a guest?” Kirishima suggests.

Jirou waves him off. “Dude, you don’t get a plus one. You *are* the plus one.”

Kirishima supposes that’s right, though he’s still having a hard time wrapping his head around that concept.

Someone knocks on the door, three times in quick succession. Kirishima jumps up to go answer it as Jirou makes her way back to her room.

At the door stands a man with shiny golden-blond hair. His eyes are a blue so bright and pale they seem almost purple, and he’s wearing a silky white shirt and a truly blinding pair of metallic silver snakeskin pants. He has a garment bag casually draped over his shoulder, and when he sees Kirishima, he snaps his fingers, showing off several jeweled rings.

“This is what I’m working with,” he says to no one, words strangely accented. “Hello, Monsieur Kirishima. I’m Aoyama Yuuga, and I’ve been sent to make you look presentable.”

Kirishima has never had a stylist before. The label keeps track of Riot’s image for shows, but no one really cares if Kirishima wants to wear just jeans and t-shirts on stage. Kaminari dresses far flashier, and Jirou has the punk aesthetic locked down. Add in Ashido’s flare for tight, brightly-colored clothing, and there’s enough to grab anyone’s attention. Aside from fussing over his hair, Kirishima’s never cared too much about his appearance. He knows that no matter what he does, he’s not going to be the one drawing eyes.

And yet. Now, he’s being shaved and cologned and made up, dressed in a suit that fits him perfectly even though he doesn’t remember giving anyone his measurements. The suit is a deep blue color, over a black dress shirt. Aoyama does up all of the buttons but leaves off a tie—“You’re not supposed to look like a businessman, you’re a *rock star*”—then attacks Kirishima’s face with makeup. Kaminari, Jirou and Ashido all mess around with eyeliner at the *least*, but Kirishima’s never had much patience for it. Aoyama tuts at him impatiently, mutters something about glare in

photos, but seems content with a bit of powder and some strategic color dusted over Kirishima's skin.

"Do you know what I'm supposed to *do*?" Kirishima asks, as he's lacing up his black dress shoes.

Aoyama gives him a skeptical look. "What does anyone's date do at these things? Hold his hand on the red carpet, step aside when he's giving an interview. Be thankful I won't be there, taking all of the attention for myself."

Kirishima's phone buzzes with a text notification quickly after that—his ride is downstairs—and when he steps back into the main part of the apartment Kaminari, Jirou and Ashido are all waiting to gawk at him.

Kaminari has one hand pressed over his mouth. "Fuck, sometimes I forget how hot you are."

"Knock 'em dead, Kirishima." Jirou gives him a thumbs-up.

"Try not to take all the attention from the movie stars, 'kay?" Ashido chirps.

Kirishima feels his face getting as red as his hair, but thankfully he hears a honk from downstairs and has the excuse of rushing out the door. He doesn't know what to do with the way the others were looking at him. He doesn't know if he even likes that sort of attention.

—

Bakugou is already seated in the back of the town car when Kirishima slips inside. He's sitting with his knees spread apart, dressed in a charcoal-colored suit and white shirt. His shirt is unbuttoned to expose his throat, and he barely casts Kirishima a second glance as he stares moodily out the window.

Kirishima swallows as he gets seated. Bakugou's pale blond hair is fluffed up in its regular style, but there's something more deliberate about the way certain strands fall over his eyes, today. Kirishima imagines that he must be wearing makeup, too, but his skin looks no different than it had the last time they met—smooth and unblemished. The faint smell of cologne drifts through the car, a different scent than the one Aoyama had spritzed Kirishima with.

"So," Kirishima says, after a moment's awkward silence, "Are you excited?"

Bakugou barely turns his head to blink at him. "I've been to a thousand of these stupid things. What's there to be excited about?"

Kirishima considers that. He's performed the same songs dozens of times over, even in the short time he's been a part of Riot. It's still exciting, even if they play the same set two nights in a row. He wonders if he'll ever reach a point at which he finds it boring.

"You're not the star of every movie you go to the premiere of, are you?" Kirishima asks, still trying to break into the realm of normal conversation. "I bet all eyes will be on you, tonight."

"They better be." Bakugou turns back to stare out the window, a clear dismissal.

But Kirishima persists. "What do you want me to do?" he asks.

Now, Bakugou turns back to him, that expression of confusion and frustration ghosting over his face. "I don't want you to do anything," he mutters. "Just be my date, who fucking cares."

Kirishima grinds his teeth together. He thinks back to the later seasons of *UA*, when Bakugou's character had been set on winning Uraraka's. He'd gone about it all wrong, at first—emotional outbursts but no clear declaration of his feelings, being terrible to her friends while still trying to convince her he was worth it. But over time, he'd softened. There'd been a particularly poignant episode when Uraraka's character had lost her mother, and Bakugou's had arrived at the hospital just in time to hold her as she fell. Kirishima remembers the tenderness of that embrace, the softness of Bakugou's expression, because he'd watched that episode at least a dozen times.

But Bakugou isn't that character, is he? He's someone else entirely, someone who's probably never actually been in a relationship, before.

"They should pay me for this," Kirishima says aloud.

Bakugou huffs out something that might be a laugh. "Yeah, no shit. You could've asked for money, and Soy Sauce would've given it to you. Idiot."

Kirishima grimaces, then remembers Aoyama's instructions. "I'm going to hold your hand," he tells Bakugou.

Bakugou's eyes go wide. "What the fuck."

"On the red carpet," Kirishima tells him. "I'm going to hold your hand, so everyone knows I'm your date."

"You're an idiot," Bakugou tells him.

Kirishima shrugs it off. "Maybe. But you're the gold-star actor who's going to sell this, aren't you? And that means you have to hold my hand."

The car comes to a stop shortly after that, with the driver coming around to open the door on Bakugou's side. Bakugou jerks his head towards the door and asks, uncaringly, "Are you ready or not, Kirishima?"

It's the first time he's used Kirishima's name. In return, Kirishima grins. "Hell yeah. Let's do this."

He's not prepared for the roar of noise—people calling out questions, camera bulbs flashing, music playing—or the torrent of light and sound.

In reality, he's not prepared for any of this.

Chapter End Notes

["you've got something" - the jungle giants](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The lights are so blinding that, for a moment, Kirishima can't even see. He'd slid across the seat to get out of the car, but now he stumbles. Someone grabs him by the upper arm and hoists him to his feet, and before he can mumble out a thanks he realizes that someone is *Bakugou*.

Bakugou straightens up, lets go of Kirishima and steps away from him. And, in that moment, he transforms completely. It's nothing truly obvious—he doesn't smile, doesn't affect affability, doesn't say a word. But he lifts his head and looks out at the crowd with a challenge in his fiery eyes, and instead of the person who'd been sitting in the back of the car with Kirishima—closed off, internally-focused, guarded—he becomes a star, giving off light and attracting everyone's notice. He doesn't smile, but his expression isn't sullen—it's aloof and confident and cocky in the most attractive way. There's something inviting about him, enticing, even when someone calls out his name and he barely spares them a second glance.

This is the Bakugou Katsuki of the magazines, the billboard ads, the TV commercials. This is Bakugou, who's captured the public's attention since his first role at the age of four. This is Bakugou, who can get away with throwing tantrums in front of the press, because even when he's angry and bratty they all remember what he can be in other moments. And not many people are strong enough to resist this light, this gravitational pull.

Kirishima definitely isn't strong enough.

He walks with wide strides to catch up with Bakugou, falls in step as they head down the long carpet towards the front of the theater. Massive set-ups show off *Ground Zero*'s posters—larger than life shots of Bakugou and Todoroki walking away from explosions, of Yaoyorozu holding a knife to Todoroki's throat, of Bakugou jumping from a plane towards the ocean. Even amongst these perfect, monumental images of himself, it's the real Bakugou who draws all eyes. He faces forward, eyes focused straight ahead, gazing out at something the rest of them can't notice because he's dominating their vision.

Then, the torrent of noise and cheers abates for a moment, and Kirishima hears someone say, "*Is that him? The boyfriend?*"

And, just like that, the focus of the crowd shifts. Kirishima feels hundreds of eyes trained on him, the weight of their curiosity a suffocating force. He pauses mid-step, unsure of what he's supposed to do. Does he answer the question? How would he even tell who answered it? He and Bakugou are dating, supposedly, but are they *boyfriends*?

A strong grip encircles his wrist as Bakugou tugs Kirishima forward. His hand is softer than it has any right to be, even as he squeezes around Kirishima's wrist so tightly it's almost painful.

"Keep up," he mutters out of the side of his mouth. "You act like you've never had a camera pointed at you, before."

Kirishima has definitely had cameras pointed at him, before. But never several hundred of them, at once, and usually only when he's performing. Hearing a dozen flash bulbs go off every moment is not the same as someone taking shots of him while he's on stage.

And yet Bakugou navigates this environment as easily as breathing, and more comfortably than he had the party or the café or the car ride. He's in his element, tugging Kirishima down the carpet to reach the professional press at the entrance of the theater.

Once there, he stops and spits out, "That son of a—*he's late.*"

"Who?" Kirishima asks, keenly aware of the fact that Bakugou hasn't let go of him, yet.

"Todoroki, that icy bastard, I'm going to *kill* him—"

"Bakugou-san!" A voice calls out, high-pitched and chipper. "A moment of your time, please?"

Bakugou mutters something under his breath and straightens up. "C'mon," he says to Kirishima, "Interviews."

Surely, Bakugou can manage those himself. But he pulls Kirishima along with him, and when he stops in front of a pretty reporter with an oversized microphone, he makes sure Kirishima is right next to him.

The reporter smiles as she introduces herself, then sets off asking questions about the film. They're typical—how much training did Bakugou have to do, what was the dynamic like on set, what was it like working with the director, what was his favorite scene to shoot. Bakugou has practiced, clipped answers to each of her questions, full of interesting sound bites filtered through his gruff personality.

Then, the tenor of the interview shifts.

"So," the reporter says, smiling coyly at Kirishima, "who's this, Bakugou-san?"

Bakugou rolls his eyes. "Like you don't know."

"I might," the reporter agrees, "But isn't it polite to introduce your... companion?"

Bakugou gives her a look of thinly-veiled exasperation. "Since when do I care about being polite?"

Kirishima, sensing that Bakugou's fuse has been lit, steps in before he has a chance to explode. "I'm Kirishima," he says, "I've never been to a movie premiere, before."

The reporter beams at him. "But we'll see you at more from now on, I hope?"

Kirishima laughs. "I mean, if Bakugou keeps inviting me."

Bakugou's grip on his wrist grows impossibly tighter, but Kirishima does his best to ignore it.

The reporter laughs prettily. "Would you say that's very likely? I mean, this is only the second time we've seen you two together. How serious are you?"

"I don't do things I'm not fucking serious about," Bakugou mutters under his breath.

Kirishima shrugs. "That's a tough question, don't you think? I mean, no matter how much hope you have for a relationship, it's always up in the air, right?"

The reporter nods earnestly. "Of course. But, of course, you have to know what a surprise it was, seeing Bakugou-san with you and not Uraraka-san. How did you two meet?"

Bakugou opens his mouth to answer, and then his brow wrinkles. He hasn't thought this through,

Kirishima realizes. He doesn't know what to say.

"At a concert!" Kirishima cuts in. "At my—Riot's—concert, that is. You know Hagakure Tooru? She's a fan of ours. She brought Bakugou along to a concert, and the rest is history, you could say!"

"History is news, while it's still happening," the reporter says. "And we all certainly find the two of you newsworthy."

Bakugou rolls his eyes. "Get a new hobby," he tells her. The reporter only laughs in response, before a coordinator waves her on and calls in the next interviewer.

And so it goes, for several minutes. Bakugou answers questions about the movie, Kirishima cuts in to answer questions about their "relationship." He re-spins the story of Hagakure and Bakugou coming to Riot's concert enough times that he almost believes it's true.

Finally, there's a break in the crowd, and Bakugou turns to look at Kirishima suspiciously. "How are you so good at this?" he demands.

Kirishima has to stop to think about it. *Is he good at this?* "I'm just talking," he says with a shrug. "I wasn't really planning on it, but everyone's nice and they're not asking super invasive questions."

"You were nervous about the cameras, but interviews are fine?" Bakugou's glaring, now, like Kirishima's a puzzle he can't figure out.

"I guess?" Kirishima says. "I haven't really thought about it."

"Idiot." Bakugou starts to turn away, then glances back to ask, "Who told you? About the concert."

"What are you talking about?" Kirishima asks, but the rest of his words are swallowed up as the crowd, once again, explodes.

Bakugou turns towards the noise and hisses under his breath. "*Motherfucker.*"

A shiny, metallic blue car has just pulled up to the red carpet. And getting out of it is Todoroki Shouto.

—

It's hard to compare Bakugou's presence to Todoroki's. Bakugou is blazing and hot, too powerful to ignore. Todoroki has a subtler presence that draws attention all the same, graceful but strong. He's wearing a blue suit several shades lighter than Kirishima's and white shirt, his tie perfectly straight as he gets out of the car. His hair, half-white and half-red, should make him look ridiculous, but instead it just adds to his almost otherworldly beauty. Marring one side of his face is the scar he's had since childhood, the one that somehow adds gravitas and character to his appearance rather than detracting from it. He turns back to help someone else out of the car, and once again the crowd explodes with cheers.

Yaoyorozu Momo steps out onto the red carpet with a grace that Kirishima can't quite describe. Her red gown flows out behind her, diamonds glittering at her ears. Her dark hair is pulled away from her face, and she stops every few paces to wave and smile at the crowd, blushing all the while. Todoroki walks to one side of her, not responding in the same way to the onlookers but eliciting just as many cheers.

“Those *assholes*,” Bakugou is saying, “They’re late on purpose to make an entrance, I wanted to be the last one here, I’m going to *strangle* Todoroki with his shitty rich boy tie and then I’m going to set him on fucking fire—”

“Woah, dude,” Kirishima says, resting a hand on Bakugou’s shoulder. “Calm down, maybe?”

Bakugou rounds on him. “I *am* calm,” he spits, even though as he speaks his mouth opens so wide that Kirishima can count all his teeth.

“Whatever you say,” Kirishima says with a sigh.

Todoroki and Yaoyorozu have made their way up the red carpet, and Bakugou stops hissing under his breath long enough to take a step away from Kirishima. His eyes narrow as Todoroki and Yaoyorozu step away from each other to take separate pictures. Then, Bakugou smirks and shifts his position just as Todoroki begins walking towards him.

It takes Kirishima a moment to realize what he’s doing. But, sure enough, Bakugou is trying to trip Todoroki on the red carpet. Kirishima takes a moment to be stunned by the sheer pettiness of that action. But then he’s stepping towards Bakugou and grabbing his shoulder, pulling him back.

“Hey, cut that out,” he says, pulling Bakugou out of Todoroki’s path.

“What the hell,” Bakugou grouses, twisting around to shake Kirishima off, “Let go of me—”

They move together, Bakugou trying to pull away and Kirishima trying to keep his grip, and then Kirishima feels his expensive shoes slip against the red carpet. Bakugou’s eyes widen with surprise—it’s amazing how different he looks in that moment, eyes round and lips slightly parted—and then he’s falling backwards. Everything happens in slow motion, and for a moment they’re suspended in air, weightless. Then, they hit the ground with an audible thump, Bakugou on his back and Kirishima poised over him.

Bakugou still looks shell-shocked, as though it has never occurred to him that he could fall, before. He lays there, looking up at Kirishima, his brow furrowing slowly as he processes.

Kirishima is poised on his hands and knees over Bakugou, their faces too close together. If Kirishima leaned down at this moment, just a bit, his lips would brush against Bakugou’s. If he let that happen, would Bakugou have that same awe-struck expression?

A camera clicks. Then another, and another, until the noise all blends together in a wave that washes over them both. Bakugou moves as though to push Kirishima away, but before he can Kirishima leans down to whisper in his ear.

“*Cameras*,” he reminds Bakugou. “Don’t freak out, remember?”

“You don’t need you to fucking tell me that,” Bakugou hisses at him.

Still, he keeps his expression relatively neutral as Kirishima gets up and helps him to his feet. The cameras are still flashing around them, and both Bakugou and Kirishima stand awkwardly, a few paces apart.

“Bakugou,” Todoroki calls out, over the noise. He’s standing to one side, face impassive as though he’d seen none of what just happened. “They want all three of us for interviews.”

Bakugou glances back at Kirishima. “Go wait over there,” he says carelessly, as he shoves his hands into his pockets and trudges towards Todoroki and Yaoyorozu.

Kirishima is left to watch from afar as the three of them stand in front of a crowd of reporters and photographers. Yaoyorozu is between Todoroki and Bakugou, smiling at the cameras and taking the lead with the interviews. Todoroki answers in curt sentences, and Bakugou's facial expressions give away more than his words. But somehow, looking at them, it's easy to tell that they've spent months shooting this movie. They fit together, somehow, like the way Kirishima fits together with Jirou and Ashido and Kaminari.

The crowd shifts, obscuring the three actors from view. Kirishima frowns—there are other actors from the film here, the directors and producers as well, plus a crowd of other celebrities who enter the theater without stopping by the reporters. But Kirishima is still waiting, wondering what he should do.

“Kirishima-san?” a voice calls out to him.

He blinks, and when his vision clears Yaoyorozu is standing right in front of him. She's even prettier close up—oil-dark eyes and perfect skin, a smile that could charm probably anyone but Bakugou.

“Oh,” he says, “Hi.”

“We're going inside now, to watch the film. Are you coming?”

Kirishima nods, and Yaoyorozu waits as he walks over to her. She walks with the commanding grace of a general, or some ancient goddess of war in a video game. Kirishima doesn't know what to say to her, until he remembers—

“Oh, Jirou says hi. You talked to her a few nights ago, I don't know if you remember—”

Yaoyorozu pauses mid-step, looking at Kirishima with bright eyes. “Really?”

“Uh, yeah. You spoke to her and Kaminari for while—”

Yaoyorozu shakes her head. “No, I meant, Jirou-san wanted you to say hi to me?”

Kirishima huffs out a laugh. “Of course. She was actually really disappointed she couldn't come tonight, she sees all your movies.”

Yaoyorozu's cheekbones have gone the same color as her dress. “I didn't think—I mean, they're not really her *style*—she's so, you know, *punk rock*, and I'm—”

“Woah, woah,” Kirishima says, holding up his hands. “I mean, yeah, Jirou's the coolest, but she's also really sincere. I'm sure she'll enjoy this one, too.”

Yaoyorozu smiles again, less stately and more human, somehow. “I hope so. You'll have to tell me what you think, too.”

“Hurry up,” Bakugou calls, when Kirishima and Yaoyorozu reach the entrance of the theater. He's standing next to Todoroki, and Kirishima can't sense any real tension between them now that they're out of view of the cameras.

“Sorry,” Kirishima says brightly, as he reaches Bakugou and the two of them head into the theater. “I got a little distracted.”

Bakugou huffs, but the two of them walk side by side until they've found their seats.

Once the movie starts, it's hard to remember that Kirishima's here as anything more than a fan. The lights dim, the music starts, and Kirishima rocks back and forth in his chair as *Ground Zero* pops up on the screen in bright white letters. Next to him, he hears Bakugou huff, but in the darkness he can't make out his expression.

The movie starts out typically enough—Todoroki's an ace spy who's become washed out since he lost his last partner. Bakugou is an up-and-coming agent, eager to prove himself Todoroki's equal or better. Their partnership is a disaster from the start, with Todoroki hesitating while Bakugou rushes in, the two of them completely out of sync with each other. The action sequences come fast and brutal, with Bakugou and Todoroki losing embarrassingly in the first few fights when they can't manage to work together.

As the deeper plot unfolds, Yaoyorozu's character enters. She's the head of the intelligence underworld, a shadowy figure in crisp black suits who commands a formidable army. When she breaks into the action, she's all fierce smirks and cackling laughter.

"Oh, *shit*," Kirishima says, after a particularly powerful scene, "She's acting like *you*."

"What?" Bakugou demands out of the corner of his mouth. "What are you talking about, shit-for-brains, no she isn't."

"She totally is," Kirishima insists. "She's even got that murderous squint thing you do. I bet you 20,000 yen that she's doing it on purpose."

"Shut up," Bakugou hisses, sitting back in his chair. "Watch the fucking movie."

At the climax of the film, Todoroki's character faces off with Yaoyorozu's—realizing, at last, that she's his former partner. Seeing the normally placid Todoroki's face break with grief, Kirishima is struck by the depth of his acting. For the entire film, he's been so closed off, it was easy to think that he had no emotions at all. But now, they all come roaring to the surface—his grief and anger and joy all mingle together as he points his gun at her, hand shaking.

On screen, Yaoyorozu has Bakugou in a headlock—Bakugou, who'd rushed in when Todoroki had hung back. Now, Yaoyorozu might kill him before Todoroki has a chance to stop her.

Kirishima's heart beats against his ribcage, the tension of the scene sinking into his bones. His mind scrambles to come up with a way out for both Todoroki and Bakugou—because, even after their dysfunctional journey, surely there's more they can learn from each other? Surely the agency still needs both of them to recover, from this?

Todoroki's character drops his gun just before he lunges for Yaoyorozu's. She tosses Bakugou aside, but not before setting off multiple shots of her own. She and Todoroki tangle together, attacking each other brutally. Blood stains their clothes, tears gathering in Todoroki's eyes as he manages to subdue her.

Kirishima is holding his breath, but then the magic is broken. Beside him, Bakugou has gotten to his feet and is walking past him, out of the row of seats.

"Where are you going?" Kirishima whispers.

Bakugou doesn't answer him.

Kirishima turns his attention back to the film, just in time to see Yaoyorozu and Todoroki die in

each other's arms. Bakugou stands over both of them, looking shell-shocked. Blood stains his cheeks as he leans down over the bodies, his expression finally shifting from shock to resolve.

By the time the credits roll, the real Bakugou still hasn't returned.

As the theater lights turn on, Kirishima pushes his way through the crowd to look for Bakugou. The crowd is buzzing happily, and he sees Todoroki and Yaoyorozu standing with the director, exchanging congratulations. He wonders if they, too, are asking where Bakugou's gotten off to. Or maybe this is normal, for him.

Kirishima makes it out into the hallway, and sees twin shadows cast against the wall across the theater. He heads towards them, and then stops short when he hears Bakugou's harsh voice.

"Just what the fuck do you think you're doing here? Did you think I wouldn't notice?"

Kirishima doesn't round the corner—this might not be the best time to interrupt. But he also doesn't move away, or make any effort not to hear the rest.

"I wasn't trying to hide," another voice, softer but not hesitant, says. "Todoroki-kun invited me. I came to support you, both of you."

Bakugou lets out a strangled noise. "Do I look like I need your *support*? I'm not like you, I don't need to ride other people's coattails to be successful, you—"

"Stop yelling," the other person says. "Just—it has nothing to do with success! I want both of you to do well, of course I do—"

"*Shut up*," Bakugou hisses. "What part of 'I never want to see your goddamn face again' is so hard to understand? See Todoroki on your own fucking time, suck his dick for all I care, just stay the hell away from me—"

The other person lets out a sigh. "You know that's impossible. And if you won't listen to me, about the rest of it, or accept my apology—"

"*You did it on purpose*," Bakugou says, his voice coming out hoarse and strained. "You can trick every other fucking idiot on the planet, but I *know*, you can't make a fool of me again—"

Kirishima stands just out of view, increasingly confused. It's no secret that Bakugou has an anger problem (or maybe more than one), but this is more than he'd been prepared for. And, in any case, he can hear the thunder of hundreds of steps behind him. Whoever Bakugou is chewing out, the two of them are about to be caught by a crowd of people.

"*Yes*, I did think it was a great movie," Kirishima calls out, loud and exaggerated, "So wonderful to see so many rising stars."

He doesn't really know what else people say after movies, but he stamps his feet a few times, hoping that Bakugou hears. Maybe he wants to be caught screaming at whoever this is, but Kirishima is at least going to give him a bit of warning, first.

It's Bakugou who peeks out from around the corner first, eyes bloodshot and jaw clenched. When he spots Kirishima, he barks out, "What the fuck are you doing here?"

Kirishima jabs a thumb over his shoulder, where he's sure the rest of the crowd must be visible by

now.

“Well, *darling*, you kind of ditched me, and you’re my ride home.”

Bakugou’s face contorts at the endearment. “Do you *want* to die?”

“I’m sorry—did you just call Kacchan *darling*?” A second person has stepped out from the hallway, now—slightly shorter than Bakugou and Kirishima, with a wild tangle of dark green hair and a face covered in freckles. His pointed nose and wide eyes are familiar, because, like Uraraka and Todoroki and Bakugou, he’d been a star on *UA*. Midoriya Izuku, recently cast in a string of films with the legendary director Yagi Toshinori, is covering his face with both hands. Whether he’s trying to hide laughter or horror, Kirishima can’t tell.

“Shut the fuck up, Deku,” Bakugou says.

“No, you’re right,” Kirishima agrees, “That doesn’t really suit him. What’s that you called him? Kacchan?”

Midoriya grins crookedly; at the same time, Bakugou grabs Kirishima by the collar and yanks him forward.

“I will kill you,” he promises. “I’ll bury you alive with Deku and you’ll have to listen to his stupid fucking muttering until you finally suffocate, is that what you want?”

“You probably shouldn’t threaten to kill me so much,” Kirishima says, as conversationally as he can with Bakugou’s face so close to his own. “I mean, if the press hears, I guess we could spin it somehow, but then they’re going to think we’re into some *really* kinky stuff—”

“Shut *up*,” Bakugou orders, shoving Kirishima away.

Midoriya is covering his face, again. Kirishima feels star-struck, again, standing in front of him. He’s in a deep green suit that somehow doesn’t clash with his hair, but he’s paired it with a pair of beat up red sneakers and a tie that looks like it’s just been stuffed into his shirt. On *UA*, Midoriya had played the central character. He’d grown from a scrawny, nervous-looking boy to one of the most endearing characters on television, to the point that the show’s ratings had survived his risky endgame romance.

“There you are,” Yaoyorozu calls out to them, as she and Todoroki approach. “Oh, Midoriya-san! I didn’t know you were coming.”

Midoriya smiles sheepishly, rubbing at the back of his neck. “It was sort of a surprise.”

Yaoyorozu glances between him and Bakugou. “I see.”

Todoroki huffs out a puff of air. “I’m glad you made it,” he says to Midoriya, and his expression doesn’t shift much, but his voice is suddenly warmer than it had been on the red carpet.

Midoriya grins at him. “Wouldn’t have missed it for—”

His voice is cut off as Bakugou elbows him in the stomach.

“Hey,” Kirishima says, but Midoriya waves him off.

“It’s fine,” he says, straightening his shirt. He glances at Bakugou, pursing his lips. “Kacchan, you —”

“I’m leaving,” Bakugou announces.

“What?” Yaoyorozu asks, “But we were all going to my home, for tea.”

“Is *he* invited?” Bakugou asks, jerking his head in Midoriya’s direction.

Yaoyorozu hesitates for only a moment. “Of course he is, Bakugou-san. Kirishima-san, you’re welcome to come, as well—”

“We’re leaving,” Bakugou repeats, and this time he grabs Kirishima’s wrist and starts pulling him away from the others.

“Hey,” Kirishima starts to say, “Wait a second—”

“I said we’re not going!” Bakugou roars, not even turning as he speaks. “C’mon, we have to get out of here before the fucking cameras follow us.”

Behind them, Kirishima hears Midoriya say, “I can go, I’m sorry if—”

“Let him go,” Todoroki says.

“Is it because he wants more time with his boyfriend?” Yaoyorozu asks.

“*Boyfriend?*” Midoriya squeaks.

Bakugou’s grip tightens around Kirishima’s wrist, and he doesn’t let go until the black town car pulls up and they’re able to get inside. As soon as they’re seated, Bakugou twists bodily to stare out the window, chin balanced against his hand.

“Dude,” Kirishima says, once he’s caught his breath, “What the hell was that about?”

“Fuck off,” Bakugou mutters without turning his head. “Just, shut the hell up, Kirishima.”

Kirishima’s brow furrows. “No, hey. Wait a minute. You don’t just get to yank me around like that. If I’m going to change my whole life over this, you at least have to be open with me. This isn’t going to work, otherwise.”

Bakugou lets a breath out through his teeth. “You think I give a fuck? Go ahead, walk away.”

It hurts, more than it should considering that this is only a business arrangement. But Kirishima doesn’t back down so easily.

“No,” he says, leaning into Bakugou’s space. “Look, wouldn’t it have made sense to go to Yaoyorozu’s? If someone saw, and took pictures, or whatever?”

“You’re an idiot,” Bakugou tells him, and before Kirishima can complain he continues, “She’s not going to have a publicity party—they’re literally going to sit around in her giant ass mansion and have tea, like *friends*. Like fuck I’d want to be there.”

“They seemed like your friends, earlier,” Kirishima says, thinking that Bakugou trying to trip Todoroki probably doesn’t count against that assessment.

“I don’t have any fucking friends,” Bakugou says. He’s still turned away from Kirishima, still not meeting his eyes.

He doesn’t say it with any more emotion than his usual grouching—no heat, no fire behind his

words. And yet they hit Kirishima as though Bakugou had screamed them. He thinks about the amount of passion Bakugou had displayed on screen, the subtlety of his emotions. And he thinks about Bakugou's presence on the red carpet, how everyone had clamored to be nearer to him.

It just doesn't make sense. Regardless of Bakugou's attitude, he's clearly the type of person who pulls others towards him. So why isn't anyone close to him? Why is he so determined to walk away from the people who might be his friends?

"I think we've been going about this the wrong way," Kirishima says, slumping down against the leather seat. Bakugou doesn't respond, so Kirishima continues, "We're never going to sell this if we don't actually get to know each other."

"Don't tell me you have some hair-brained plan," Bakugou mutters.

Kirishima grins. "Oh, I do. And I think Sero's going to want you to go along with it."

Chapter End Notes

["no friends" - san cisco](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

At a certain point, there are more clothes strewn over Kirishima's bed and across his floor than are left in his dresser and closet. He scowls down at his options, pulls on a shirt, and then runs from his bedroom back to the living room.

“Well? What about this?”

Jirou and Kaminari, sitting together on the couch with their eyes glued to the TV, don't bother looking up at him. Jirou's legs are draped over the coffee table, her back flat against the couch cushions. Kaminari hugs his knees against his chest as he sits forward on the couch, teeth clenched in anticipation as he watches the screen. Around them, empty take-out boxes and ice cream cartons litter the floor and end tables.

“Guys!” Kirishima insists.

“Shh!” Kaminari hisses at him. “This is the good part!”

Kirishima glances at the TV, purses his lips and sighs. On the coffee table, pushed aside so that Jirou can use her makeshift footrest, are boxed sets of Blu-rays. Midoriya Izuku, Uraraka Ochako, Todoroki Shouto and Bakugou Katsuki are printed across the various boxes, along with the embossed golden logo of *UA* and a season number, one through five.

On the screen, Uraraka's character Ayane is standing in the rain, biting down on her lower lip to keep from crying. Her face is a blotchy red, etched with determination even as the rain soaks through her school uniform and leaves her shivering. As they watch, a shadow falls over Ayane, and Bakugou's character Nobuhiko appears at her side, holding a bright red umbrella that provides the only spot of color in the otherwise gray-washed scene.

In the many times that Kirishima has re-watched this episode, his heart always skips a beat during this scene. Ayane and Nobuhiko had interacted only barely in the first season, usually in tension over Nobuhiko's treatment of Midoriya's character Daiki. But in this next season, they'd had more and more scenes that didn't involve Daiki at all.

Usually, Kirishima loves this episode. But watching it now, he feels something uncomfortable curl up in the pit of his stomach. The cameras are careful not to focus on Nobuhiko's face for the majority of the scene—only wide shots of his silhouette, his hands holding out the umbrella, the way the rain plasters his pale hair to the back of his neck. But Kirishima knows what's coming, next.

As Ayane looks up, startled by the appearance of the umbrella, the camera follows her gaze. And then the shot finally lands on Nobuhiko's face—guarded as it always is, but eyes soft with concern rather than sharp with derision. The first real sign of compassion that *UA*'s viewers saw from Nobuhiko—or Bakugou Katsuki.

Kirishima physically turns his head away from the TV and clears his throat. “A little help, here?”

The credits begin rolling on the screen a moment later, and Jirou looks up at Kirishima only to shrug. “I really don't see how this outfit is any different than the last five.”

“Which means it still sucks,” Kaminari says without looking up.

Kirishima glances down at his glaringly bright red shirt and denim shorts. Not anyone’s definition of fancy or stylish, but he’s quickly running out of options. He groans and runs a hand through his hair, which he hasn’t had a chance to gel up yet.

“Well what am I supposed to do, then?”

“Go shopping?” Kaminari suggests.

“I’ve only got twenty minutes!” As Kirishima speaks, he sees Jirou reaching for the remote to turn on the next episode of *UA*. “Stop that!”

“We’re doing research,” Jirou says matter-of-factly, propping herself up on her hands so that she can pull herself into a proper seated position. “You go out on your date, and we’ll keep watching your boyfriend’s show.”

“It’s not even a real date,” Kirishima mutters, shifting from one foot to the other. “And I let you borrow my Blu-rays! Don’t ignore me, now.”

“I still don’t get what they’re going to do with Daiki now that Ayane’s into Nobuhiko,” Kaminari says, stroking his chin thoughtfully. “I really thought they were going for the childhood friends to lovers thing.”

“Yeah, for a main character his love life is all over the place,” Jirou says.

Kirishima chokes, momentarily distracted from his fashion dilemma. “Wait,” he says, “You don’t *know*?”

Jirou and Kaminari turn to him in unison. “No?”

Kirishima holds back a laugh, then says, “Shit, I really have to get ready—just, don’t watch season four without me, got it?”

“What are you doing, Kirishima, we’re going to be *late*.” Ashido walks in carrying a designer shopping bag, already dressed in a zebra-print shirt dress and purple tights. She glances at the TV and sighs. “Not you guys, too. I already had to put up with five years of watching every episode ten times.”

Kirishima rounds on her, slightly affronted. “No one was making you watch with me!”

“Enough of that,” she says, pushing the bag into Kirishima’s hands and then nudging him back towards his bedroom. “Forget your fictional boyfriend! You have to deal with your real one! Or your real fake one—whatever. Just go get dressed before the car gets here!”

Jirou and Kaminari are snickering behind their hands, but they hush up quick as *UA*’s theme song starts. Kirishima glances back at the screen just once—sees Bakugou-as-Nobuhiko staring off into the distance as a bittersweet melody plays—and then he bolts for his room.

—

Ashido, as it turns out, is a godsend. She must have realized the deficiencies in Kirishima’s wardrobe long before he had, because her rescue option is perfect. By the time he gets a text that the car is waiting for them downstairs, Kirishima is ready and looks good enough not to embarrass himself. The Suneater t-shirt is his, bought at a concert almost three years ago, but the black jeans

are new, more fitted than he'd buy for himself, and the denim jacket was probably much more expensive than its fraying sleeves indicate. He'll have to ask Ashido and pay her back.

Honestly, including Ashido in his plan was almost entirely selfish. If he's going to go through with this, he can't keep feeling like he's the fish out of water. Every time he enters Bakugou's world, he's thrown off his balance and can't act like himself. And as Kaminari had pointed out, Kirishima's not good at pretending.

"Come on, come on," Ashido says, stamping one foot as she ushers him out the door. She probably never worries about her own appearance, having long-since mastered her particular style of animal prints and neon colors, but there is flush riding high on her cheeks today. She might be actually nervous.

The car waiting for them isn't the same one that had taken Bakugou and Kirishima to the premiere. Instead, it's a sleek silver Acura, expensive but much less conspicuous. Sero rolls down the window from the driver's seat and waves.

"Hey, you two!" He's smiling from ear to ear, the sleeves of his shirt rolled up to his elbows. Thankfully, he's not dressed like a junior executive, today. It makes him seem like Sero, again, and not someone who belongs to another world.

Kirishima and Ashido slide into the back, and that's when Kirishima notices Bakugou sitting in the passenger seat. He doesn't turn around to acknowledge them.

Ashido, however, has no fear of death. She leans forward and jabs Bakugou in the shoulder. "Hey—we haven't met before."

"So?" Bakugou leans away from her, and in the rearview mirror Kirishima can see the scowl that etches across his face.

"So, hi, I'm Ashido. It's nice to—"

"I don't care," Bakugou says.

"Oi," Sero says mildly. "Don't be rude."

"I'm not the one dragging you along to my fucking high school reunion," Bakugou hisses from between clenched teeth.

Kirishima can't help but laugh, at that. "Are you feeling left out?"

Bakugou finally turns around, glaring fiercely. "*You* shut up. This is all your fault."

"Nice to see you too, sweetheart," Kirishima says dryly.

Bakugou visibly shudders. "Do you see any fucking cameras, here? Don't call me that bullshit."

"No one's going to believe that one, anyway," Sero says as he pulls onto the main road.

"Bakugou's not exactly sweet, and we're still trying to figure out if he has a heart."

"Fuck you, Soy Sauce," Bakugou mutters murderously.

"Anyway, you're wrong," Ashido tells him.

"Hah?"

“We didn’t go to high school together,” Ashido says matter-of-factly. “I had almost graduated when my first single came out, and Sero didn’t start interning with the agency until after. Isn’t that right?”

Sero nods. “We were eighteen when we started dating.”

“I. Didn’t. Ask.” Bakugou looks like he’s about to bang his head against the dashboard for emphasis. Then, he turns back to Kirishima. “You don’t think they’re being fucking weird? Just hanging out with us when they used to *date*?”

Ashido rolls her eyes. “It’s not like we hate each other now, or something. We just—didn’t work out, that’s all! And anyway, maybe you two should be taking notes. Unless you plan on faking this forever, someday you’re going to have to act like exes, too.”

The thought hadn’t occurred to Kirishima before, though now he realizes it should have. Of course, he and Bakugou aren’t going to pretend forever. A couple months, Sero had said. Someday, this is going to end, and Bakugou is going to be his fake *ex*-boyfriend.

The idea sits uncomfortably with him for the rest of the car ride.

—

No matter how insistent he’d been when he’d brought up the idea, Kirishima is still surprised that Bakugou actually agreed to come. Especially the way he’d suggested it—*If we’re going to fool people into thinking that we’re dating, we can’t just show up in public together all the time and pretend like we’re so close! You’re going to have to actually spend time with me!*

But Bakugou, even though he’d looked unhappy about it, had at least agreed that Kirishima’s suggestion was a logical one. They didn’t know each other well enough to pull this off, and so they’d have to fix that.

Kirishima had roped in Ashido for selfish reasons, then asked Sero to come along to keep the balance and because he knows Bakugou best. On his suggestion, they end up back at Sugar Rush.

“What the fuck are we doing here,” Bakugou asks as they get out of the car. Today, he isn’t wearing designer clothes or fancy sunglasses. Instead, he slouches in his black t-shirt with a white skull printed across it, his black pants sagging as he shoves his hands into his pockets.

“It’s a pretty classic date, you know,” Ashido says brightly, moving to walk beside Bakugou. Again, she seems entirely impervious to waves of hostility radiating off of him. “You know—a cooking class!”

Bakugou stops mid-step, shoulders hunching as he turns away from Ashido to glare daggers at Sero. “You goddamn *traitor*.”

—

“Don’t be mad at Sero,” Kirishima says for the tenth time as they find their way to Sugar Rush’s kitchen classroom. “I was the one who asked him for suggestions.”

“And he was the one who sang like a fucking canary,” Bakugou says, still hunched over and looking at the ground.

They’ve come around the side of the building to an entrance separate from the café’s. Here, the décor is still yellow and joyful, but instead of cozy booths and tables the space is made up of a

half-dozen cooking islands arranged in straight rows. At the front of the room is a larger counter, and behind it stands Sato Rikido himself—a man who looks more like a pro-wrestler than a professional chef, but Kirishima isn't going to judge.

Sato is just as friendly as he'd been at Hagakure's party. He's unbelievably tall, with spiky brown hair and impressively-muscled arms visible past the short sleeves of his chef's coat. After he greets Kirishima, Sero, and Ashido, he looks over at Bakugou with a funny smiling playing at his lips.

"You know, when Sero called me, I didn't think you'd actually show."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Bakugou asks, voice gruff and impatient. He's eying the sleek white cooking appliances like they might be a robot army in disguise.

"I dunno," Sato says easily, as though it doesn't really matter to him one way or the other. "I guess I just never imagined you actually going on a date like this."

Bakugou's face may as well be made of stone. He stomps across the room, grabs Kirishima by the wrist, and tugs him over to one of the kitchen islands. "Would I fucking be here if this wasn't a date?"

Kirishima isn't sure what to do—as far as he knows, only Sero and the other members of Riot know that he and Bakugou *aren't* dating. But he'd meant for this to be something casual and private, a place where he and Bakugou wouldn't have to put on a show. Sero had suggested Sato's ridiculously expensive private cooking classes, and Kirishima trusted his judgment enough to go along. But if they have to put on an act for Sato the whole time, doesn't that defeat the whole point?

Then Sato starts to laugh, warm and good-natured. "Oh, thank god you're being *normal*."

"I'm always fucking normal," Bakugou growls at him.

"In those pictures you were all heart-eyes," Sato tells him. "I thought you were possessed, or something."

Bakugou fixes Sato with another glare. "Are you going to teach us how cook something, or what?"

"Oh, right," Sato says with another laugh. "Give me a second, then we'll get started."

Kirishima, standing next to Bakugou at the counter, has a moment to look him over as Ashido and Sero get situated at a different island across the aisle from them.

"So, you and Sato are friends, then?"

Bakugou looks up at him with a furrowed brow. "No."

"But he like, knows you?"

"*Everyone* fucking knows me, shitty hair. You knew who I was before we'd even met."

"Kirishima," he reminds Bakugou, since he'd thought they'd moved past the *I-can't-call-you-by-your-actual-name* thing. "And you know what I mean! He knows you enough to know when you're acting differently. That's a big deal, isn't it?"

"He isn't the worst person I have to be around," Bakugou says blandly, as though that explains it.

"Alright," Sato calls out in a booming voice, even though the four of them are at the first row of

counters and he's only a couple meters away from them. "Who's ready to make some macarons?"

Bakugou jabs an accusing finger at Kirishima. "You said *cooking*. This is *baking*."

"Baking is cooking!" Kirishima says, honestly baffled. What does it matter, anyway?

"No, it isn't," Bakugou snaps.

Kirishima sighs. "Maybe just stop looking for things to be unhappy about, and try to enjoy yourself?"

Bakugou doesn't say anything in response. Sato is calling out instructions and passing out trays of ingredients—perfectly-measured bowls of sugar, and almond flour, and whatever the hell cream of tartar is. Sero and Ashido are laughing as they take their own set of ingredients, leaning across each other and talking non-stop. At least for them, this won't be like pulling teeth.

"Hey," Kirishima says, "you think we can make better macarons than those two?"

Bakugou gives him a look that says *I know exactly what you're doing, and I'm not going to fall for it*. But then something other than his disdain for Kirishima must win out, because a fierce smile cuts across his face.

"We're going to crush them," he promises.

—

Kirishima had engineered this outing to get to know Bakugou better, so in the most technical sense, it's a success. He learns that Bakugou's competitive streak is enough to motivate him no matter what his mood. He learns that Bakugou is a control freak when it comes to baking—or maybe anything. And he learns that Bakugou does not trust him to mix a bowl of ingredients.

"You're not doing it right," Bakugou snaps at him.

Kirishima, holding a whisk poised over their bowl of flour and sugar, blinks in confusion. "There's no way to mix wrong."

Bakugou clicks his tongue against his teeth, coming up behind Kirishima and placing one hand over his. With rough movements, he corrects the angle that Kirishima is holding the whisk at, then forces him through a rhythm of mixing two or three times until he steps away, trusting Kirishima to do the rest on his own.

It's a simple thing—a moment, barely more than a few seconds. But when Bakugou moves away, Kirishima can still feel the pressure of his grip, the heat of his body. It was a moment of closeness, but it'd been natural instead of staged.

"Why did you stop?" Bakugou demands.

Kirishima shakes his head, trying to break through his reverie. "What?"

Bakugou clicks his tongue again, grabbing both the bowl and whisk out of Kirishima's hands. "You're fucking useless."

As Bakugou goes through the next few steps, Kirishima leans his chin against the counter and looks up at him. "So, you like cooking?"

Bakugou barely looks up as he pushes the mixture through a sieve. "I'm good at cooking," he says,

as though it's something different.

"I wouldn't have guessed," Kirishima admits. "I mean, I've read a lot of your interviews in magazines, but you've never mentioned it."

Bakugou makes another of those impatient, slightly-disgusted noises. "Why would I tell a shitty magazine anything real?"

Kirishima supposes he can't argue with that. After all, his own "relationship" with Bakugou is a farce for the media. But does that mean that nothing he knows about Bakugou is real?

"What else do you like?" Kirishima asks.

"When idiots with obnoxious hair know when to shut up," Bakugou mutters, smacking the sieve with a spatula.

Kirishima huffs. "What is it with you and my hair, anyway?"

"I wasn't expecting it," Bakugou says under his breath, almost to himself. Then he turns around and gestures at the ingredients spread out over the counter. "Are you going to help, or what?"

"Now you want my help," Kirishima says teasingly, shaking his head. But he's reminded of an earlier conversation, when something else Bakugou had said stuck out to him. "Hey—before you said. I mean. Have you really been to one of our concerts?"

Bakugou's hands don't stop their methodological movement through the steps of the recipe, and it takes him a moment to respond. In that moment, Kirishima thinks that Bakugou is going to pretend like he hasn't heard.

"I went," Bakugou says, finally. "But not with Hagakure. It was a few weeks ago. When Present Mic started his string of shows here."

"Wait—you were at our *opening night*? How did I not know that? I don't think any of us—no one told me you were there!" Kirishima can barely remember that night, he was so high on adrenaline and endorphins and nerves. Did he play well? Did he embarrass himself? Where had Bakugou been, in the crowd? How could he have been there and gone unnoticed?

"Oi, Kirishima," Bakugou says, jabbing him in the side with an elbow. "Don't go making a big deal out of it. And obviously you didn't know I was there, because when people know that I'm somewhere, it becomes a big fucking deal. I just wanted to go listen to some music. Don't freak the fuck out about it."

That makes sense, Kirishima supposes. And in a way, it was *nice* of Bakugou to not make his own presence at the concert a big deal, and steal the thunder of their opening night. But that still leaves Kirishima with one question.

"Did you like it?"

"What?" Bakugou blinks at him.

"Our music. My songs. Did you like the concert?"

Bakugou purses his lips and focuses on very violently cracking an egg and then separating it into a mixing bowl. "It was fucking fine," he says at length.

“*What!*” Kirishima yelps. “No, it was awesome, c’mon!”

“If it was awesome, I would’ve said so!” Bakugou yells back at him.

“No, you wouldn’t have!” Kirishima insists. “You say everything sucks, anyway. And if you *didn’t* think it was awesome, you have to come again! If I know you’re there, I’ll blow you away this time, I promise!”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Sero calls out from across the aisle. “I mean, if we want to make a thing of it.”

“Fuck off,” Bakugou says to no one in particular. He picks up another small bowl after he finishes cracking eggs, doing his best to ignore Kirishima.

“Just say you’ll come—please?” He really doesn’t think he’ll be able to live with himself if the only time Bakugou ever hears his music has already come and gone. He didn’t even get to know it was happening. It might have been his only chance to impress Bakugou, to show him that he actually does have skills and talent.

“Shut up,” Bakugou snaps, his voice so loud it belies how gently he’s nudging the ingredients into the mixing bowl.

“C’mon, Bakugou—just say so! It’ll be great! I can dedicate a song to you, as my boyfriend!” That last part he says without really thinking about it—anything to make Bakugou come, again.

Bakugou jerks back so suddenly that the bowls on the counter all rattle, and then he looks at Kirishima with an enraged fire shining in his eyes. “If you make me drop this fucking mixture we’ve been working on I will murder you,” he says, without taking a breath. “And how’re you going to dedicate a song when you’re not even near a mic?”

Kirishima wonders, for a moment, why Bakugou was paying enough attention to notice that. It’s not like his voice is in any of their songs—Ashido’s the singer, and her voice is *amazing*. But Bakugou had picked out the fact that Kirishima doesn’t typically speak at all, during their shows.

But he’s not about to back down. “Was that a challenge? Fine. When you come, I’ll talk to the crowd, and I’ll tell them we’re playing a song just for you.”

“I didn’t say I’d—”

“Alright, guys,” Sato calls out, clapping his hands together. “Let’s add some flavors and color, okay? What were you guys thinking—”

“Red!” Kirishima calls out, on instinct, at the same moment that Bakugou snaps, “Orange.”

They turn to look at each other, each looking affronted. But then, Kirishima starts to smile at the fierce look in Bakugou’s eyes.

He’s having fun, Kirishima decides, even if he won’t admit it.

—

The macarons end up being a mix of red and orange, flavored like raspberry and honey and apricot and black tea. Kirishima would never have thought to add any of those flavors together, but he trusts that Sato knows what he’s doing. They spend the better part of three hours cooking, and then they get to pack their small macarons into white-and-yellow striped Sugar Rush boxes.

Bakugou reaches over and grabs one of Sero's chocolate macarons, biting into it. Then he scoffs. "Ours win," he decides.

"Not everyone can be a secret baking genius," Ashido says, grabbing one of their raspberry macarons and munching on it. "Ugh, these are so good. I hate you."

"Should we head out?" Sero asks. "I can drop you two off, and then I've got to figure out when I can fit a concert into this guy's schedule."

"I never agreed to that," Bakugou mutters.

"Mm-hmm," Sero says, shaking his head. They say their goodbyes to Sato and head back towards the entrance, but just before they leave the building Kirishima waves Sato and Ashido ahead.

"Go on," he says, motioning for Bakugou to stay back. "I just wanted to talk about something."

When Ashido and Sero have gone on, Kirishima turns to Bakugou with a thoughtful expression.

"What," Bakugou says, sounding unduly harassed.

"I just wanted to say thanks, for agreeing to come," Kirishima says, smiling in a way that he hopes is reassuring. "I mean, I know it wasn't part of the deal, but I'm happy we did this."

Bakugou crosses his arms over his chest. "You're so weird."

Kirishima notes his posture—the way he's trying to keep the world at bay, with every hard glare and unfriendly gesture. Then, he leans in closer to Bakugou's space.

"You know, you're going to have to get better at this," he says, resting one hand on the wall near Bakugou's head. In that moment, he realizes he's mimicking what Bakugou had done to him, that first night they'd met.

Bakugou glares back, but there's a color rising on his cheeks. "Better at what?"

Kirishima hums thoughtfully. "You know, *this*. Being close together. You were fine before, when we were cooking and you weren't thinking about it. But even in front of the camera, at the premiere—you kept staring at me like I make you nervous, or something."

"You're the nervous one," Bakugou snaps, but he makes no move to get away.

Kirishima's smile deepens. "Yeah, but I *am*. I've never done something like this, before."

"I'm not nervous," Bakugou reiterates. But he makes no move to get away from Kirishima.

There's something familiar about his expression, now—the way he stares straight ahead, unwilling to show weakness by looking away. But his eyes aren't narrowed and angry—they're wider, open and searching. His lips are parted slightly, his pale skin still flushed. His brows draw together slightly, like he's worried over something or holding something back.

What's he thinking? Kirishima can never be sure. But oh, he wants to know.

"Let's just go," Bakugou says, finally. He brushes aside Kirishima's arm and stalks off, looking nothing like the confident, magnetic movie star as he hunches over and keeps his striped pasty box tucked under one arm.

But even without that magnetic pull, Kirishima still feels a pang, watching Bakugou walk away

from him.

Two days later, the four members of Riot have managed to eat through every macaron that Kirishima and Ashido had brought home. Now, all of them sit scrunched together on the couch, deep into *UA*'s fourth season.

On the screen, Midoriya's character Daiki is running down the street, chest heaving as he forces his legs to keep moving. But he isn't successful, because someone grabs him by the arm and turn him around—Todoroki's character, Yuki.

Daiki looks up in shock, desperately brushing the tears out of his eyes with the back of his hand. Yuki looks at Daiki with an equal amount of emotion, evident in the tense set of his jaw and the pleading look in his eye.

"I'm sorry," Yuki says. *"I don't know what I did to upset you, but I'm so sorry—"*

"Don't apologize to me," Daiki says, wrenching himself out of Yuki's grasp. *"Just—please, don't. Don't you get it?"*

"No," Yuki says honestly. *"I thought—I thought you'd return my feelings."*

And Daiki doesn't respond, for long moment. Instead, he stares up at Yuki, struck dumb by this confession. He stares straight ahead, his eyes wide and searching. His lips part slightly as a flush rises in his skin, and then his brows draw together... like he's worried over something, or trying to hold something back.

"Yuki," he says, just before the credits roll.

"What!" Jirou screeches, picking up a pillow and throwing it at the TV. *"They actually went there, I don't even believe it—"*

"You didn't know?" Ashido asks. *"Don't you remember, it was all over the media forever, how UA dared to make good on all their teasing? It was a big deal, at the time."*

"Is this why you like this show so much?" Jirou asks, turning to Kirishima. *"Because there are actually gay characters?"*

Ashido rolls her eyes. *"Kirishima was having a crisis over this show long before this episode aired."*

Kaminari starts laughing, and soon Jirou joins in. It's a good-natured, warm sort of laughter, and even if Kirishima were paying attention to it he wouldn't be insulted at their teasing.

But he's not listening, and barely hears what they're saying. He's too busy wondering why Midoriya's character had worn an expression that looked so much like Bakugou's. It's an uncanny similarity, too exact to ignore. But Kirishima has no idea what it means.

Chapter End Notes

["stuck on you" - new politics](#)

when i said slow burn, i meant *s l o w b u r n*. ignore the lies of my total chapter number.

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kaminari is leaning towards the mirror, eyeliner in hand, when the door slams open. He startles, his hand jostling as he draws a crooked line from the corner of his eye to his ear.

“What the hell—!”

No one really listens to his exclamation. Ashido, who’d been the one to throw the door open, strides right past him to Kirishima, stopping in front of him and resting her hands on her hips.

“You *have* to do something about Bakugou,” she says. It should be hard for her to appear intimidating— she’s already dressed for the show in a cheetah-print dress and fishnets, her pink hair a cotton-candy cloud around her face. But Ashido still manages to look murderous, her eyebrows slanting dangerously, emphasized by the heavy eye makeup she’s wearing.

Kirishima had been hunched over his own vanity, eschewing makeup in favor of scribbling notes on a pad of paper. Now, he very carefully sets both pad and pen aside as he looks up. “We gave him his own room to wait in, didn’t we?”

“Yes,” Ashido confirms, arms shifting to cross over her chest. “But Jirou and I can still hear him screaming down the hall.”

Kirishima vaguely wonders what Bakugou could be screaming about. When Sero had arranged for him to attend tonight’s concert, Kirishima hadn’t heard anything about pushback from the star himself. And it had been reported to Kirishima that Bakugou-san had arrived on schedule, just half an hour ago. Kirishima had planned to go say hi before they were due on stage.

“Did anyone ask what’s wrong?”

“Oh, no,” Ashido says, still glaring at Kirishima. “That’s *your* job. He’s your boyfriend.”

“Fake boyfriend,” Kaminari supplies helpfully, as he rubs at the side of his face with makeup remover.

“Whatever!” Ashido snaps. “Just, stop him from yelling. You know how Jirou gets— she’s got headphones in and is trying to drown out the noise, but. If she’s off today it’s your fault.”

Kirishima winces. Jirou likes to fully immerse herself in music before a show, and the three of them have long-since learned to leave her alone during that time.

He sighs and pushes himself to his feet. “Okay, okay. I’ll take care of it.”

“This guy’s really a piece of work, isn’t he?” Kaminari asks, frowning.

“It’s fine,” Kirishima says adamantly. He doesn’t know why he feels the sudden urge to defend Bakugou— he *is* a piece of work, and pretending to date him has caused Kirishima no shortage of headaches. And yet— “I’ll take care of it,” he repeats.

—

He hears Bakugou before he sees him, even though the door to the backstage waiting room is shut.

“I don’t *care*,” Bakugou screeches. “I’m not *doing* it, you can’t fucking make me—”

Without context, it sounds like a child’s tantrum. Kirishima wonders if it can really be that simple. He takes a deep breath, knocks on the door, and then goes in without waiting for a response.

Bakugou is standing up in the middle of the room, hands clenched at his sides as he looms over the other person in the room— Sero, sitting in a comfortable armchair with his legs drawn up, not even looking as Bakugou berates him.

“I don’t know what you want from me, then,” Sero says patiently. “It’s a good contract, and top billing.”

“I *told* you,” Bakugou seethes, “I’m not working with Ponytail again, not after what she fucking did —”

“I still think that’s mostly in your head.” Sero shrugs. “And besides, do you have any idea how long your blacklist is? If you actually never worked with any of those people, again, you’d be stuck doing one-man shows.”

“Maybe I’ll just fire your useless ass—”

“Hey, hey,” Kirishima says, stepping further into the room when it becomes clear that neither of them will notice him, otherwise. “What’s the problem?”

Bakugou spins around so quickly that it gives Kirishima whiplash. His cheeks are bright red, his eyes shining with anger. And yet—

It’s unfair, how good he looks in that moment. He’s wearing cropped pants and a pair of leather loafers, a v-neck and a burgundy-colored baseball jacket. His blond hair is brushed back from his face, and when his gaze lands on Kirishima, for a moment his expression changes. His mouth drops from its snarl for just a moment, before he recovers himself and throws his hands in the air.

“What the hell do *you* want?” Bakugou demands.

“A little peace and quiet before my band goes on would be *great*,” Kirishima says, honestly. “You’re causing a bit of a scene.”

Bakugou’s face contorts, and then he turns bodily away from Kirishima. He crosses his arms over his chest and mutters something that Kirishima can’t make out.

“Look,” Sero says, “It’s just one option. There was the other one, too—”

“*No*.” Bakugou’s answer is explosive, even though his voice goes quiet as he utters the single word.

“Oh, come *on*,” Sero says. He turns to Kirishima— “He’s got an offer to go in and read for this awesome movie— huge budget, the whole thing—and he won’t even look at the script.”

“Shut up,” Bakugou snaps at him.

“I just don’t get it,” Sero says honestly. “I know you and Midoriya have issues, but you’ve worked together before. For *years*. Why can’t you do one movie together?”

“Because I don’t fucking want to,” Bakugou says, voice rising again.

Sensing that Bakugou may be about to explode once more, Kirishima raps his knuckles against the

back of Sero's head. "Hey, could you give us a second, maybe?"

Sero lifts his brows, as though to say *You sure you want to be alone with this?*

Kirishima rolls his eyes. "Just— go get some of the snacks they keep for us backstage, or something. Come back in ten."

Sero gets to his feet, stretching his long arms over his head. "Good luck," he says, and then he leaves the room before Bakugou can start screaming at him, again.

Bakugou is still standing in the middle of the room, petulant. It's a nice room, meant for VIP guests. A plush couch is pushed up against one wall, and Kirishima walks over to sit himself down on it.

"Want to come sit with me?" he asks.

"No," Bakugou spits.

"Okay," Kirishima says agreeably. "I'm gonna sit, though."

"I don't fucking care."

For a moment, Kirishima lets the silence hang in the air. He imagines that he can hear Bakugou's heavy breathing. He works himself up with his entire body when he's angry, so much so that Kirishima wonders how he has the energy. Being upset takes a lot of effort, and Bakugou always seems to be upset.

"So," Kirishima says, leaning back against the couch, "What's the deal with you and Midoriya Izuku?"

Bakugou lets out an impatient tut. "There's no *deal*," he says viciously. "I'm never working with him. Ever."

"O-kay," Kirishima agrees. "Why? I mean, you were on *UA* together for five years. And I know your characters hated each other, on the show, but by the end you got along really well, and all the reviews said the development of the Daiki-Nobuhiko relationship was one of the best and most complex on the show—"

Kirishima cuts himself off when he sees how fierce Bakugou's glare has gotten.

"I'm just saying," he finishes off, somewhat lamely, "You must've gotten along, having gone through all of that?"

"It's called fucking *acting*," Bakugou snarls. "It's all fake, and I just happen to be really goddamn good at it."

"Okay," Kirishima says again. "So, what's the actual problem?"

"What are you, my fucking therapist?"

Kirishima shrugs. "No, I'm your boyfriend."

Bakugou makes a noise like a boiling kettle. "Like hell, you are."

Kirishima lets out a long breath. "You know that, and I know that, but we don't want everyone else to know that, do we? And when we're at a movie premiere and you sneak off to scream at some

other guy, that's pretty weird."

"I wasn't *sneaking off* with him, you stupid fucking—"

"Okay, okay," Kirishima says, lifting his hands in a gesture of surrender. "But, you know, it'd be great if you'd keep me in the loop, at least."

For a moment, he thinks that Bakugou is going to brush him off, again. But then Bakugou's shoulders lower from where they've hiked up to his ears, and he deflates just a little. Pursing his lips, he walks over to sit on the couch, on the opposite end from Kirishima.

"I don't want to do another fucking project with him," he says, finally. "And I *told* Soy Sauce what I wanted, and if he can't get me that I don't know why I even keep him around."

"He's doing his best," Kirishima says, feeling that he should stand up for Sero's honor. "I mean, if you're getting offers that's good, right? Weren't you worried that when you came out, it'd be a scandal?"

Bakugou huffs out another breath. "I don't give a shit about any of that. Coming out, or whatever."

"Oh," Kirishima says. He supposes Sero had mentioned that, saying it was Bakugou's PR team that was scrambling more than Bakugou, himself. "Me, too. I mean, most people I know figured it out pretty easily? It was different, for Jirou. She was at this big conservatory when she was younger, everyone thought she was going to end up first chair in the symphony, or something. She doesn't hide the fact that she likes girls, now, but—"

Kirishima stops when he sees Bakugou looking at him flatly.

"I don't care," Bakugou says.

At that, Kirishima cracks a smile. "No, I guess you wouldn't."

Bakugou glares at him, eyeing him sideways from the other end of the couch.

For a moment, there's silence between them. Kirishima glances up at the wall clock, calculating how much time he has. He's already dressed for the concert— low-necked black tank, comfortable dark jeans— and his hair is spiked up. A thick red leather bracelet is fastened over his left wrist, a gift courtesy of Kaminari. It's a simple enough ensemble, but that's what he needs with all the energy he expends onstage.

Bakugou mutters something, too low to be intelligible.

"Huh?" Kirishima turns back to him.

"I *said*, are you just going to sit there? Why the hell are you even here?"

Kirishima blinks. "Oh, well, you're my guest. And you were upset. It's basically my responsibility to make sure you're having a good time, right?"

"No," Bakugou says, immediately. "This is fucking fake, Kirishima. Why would you care if I'm— ugh."

He says it like it's the most unbelievable thought— that Kirishima wouldn't want him to be miserable. Kirishima wonders, for a moment, if Bakugou could possibly be unaware of how attractive he is. Not just in aesthetic sense, either, but in the way that he pulls other people towards

him. Surely he realizes how much Kirishima is drawn to him? Even when Bakugou is screaming or ranting, Kirishima is curious. He doesn't get how someone could be so wrapped up in their own emotions, to completely block out everyone else's.

"I told you," Kirishima says, "I want you out in the audience tonight, and I want to know that you're there. So I can perform *for* you. So I know that when you see me, I'm being the absolute best I can be. Anything else would be— I dunno— disgraceful to my honor as a man!"

Bakugou deliberately draws his eyes from Kirishima's head to his toes. "What man?" he asks snidely.

Now Kirishima pouts, puffing out his chest. "I'll have you know that I am the *manliest* member of this band. Well, aside from Ashido, maybe."

Bakugou's brow crinkles as he tries to make sense of that statement. Then he huffs out something that Kirishima is beginning to recognize as a laugh.

"You're such a fucking idiot," he says, but there's no venom in his words. If Kirishima didn't know any better, he'd say that Bakugou is looking at him almost *fondly*.

That idea makes his heart flip over in his chest. It's a stupid, impossible thought. But what if Bakugou really did like him? What if he wanted to spend time with Kirishima, too? Even, just as friends. What if there was anything between them that wasn't a contrivance?

"I want you to watch me, tonight," Kirishima blurts out, suddenly. "I'll— I'll prove it to you. We're great, our music is amazing. And if you watch me— you'll see. I know you will."

Bakugou leans away from Kirishima, brows drawing together again. "What the fuck are you talking about," he mutters. "The whole point of coming was to watch you, wasn't it?"

He says the words petulantly, arms crossed over his chest. And of course, he's right. That was the entire point. Of course, if Bakugou is here, he's already agreed to that much.

Kirishima looks away, embarrassed. He'd gotten too excited, let his emotions run away from him. He gets to his feet, awkwardly clearing his throat.

"Anyway," he says, "Have you calmed down, now?"

Bakugou looks like he's about to take issue with that question, but then he just rolls his eyes and sinks further back against the couch. "Whatever."

"Okay," Kirishima says, not trusting himself to look over at Bakugou. "I've gotta go— sound check— but try to have fun tonight, okay?"

—

In the abstract, Kirishima knew that having his name and picture plastered all over the tabloids was going to change his life. He knew that being tied to Bakugou Katsuki would bring him more fame and attention than he'd ever had before, in his life. But, for some reason, he hadn't been prepared for this.

The venue where Present Mic has been in residency for the past few weeks is a massive stadium, repurposed from an Olympic judo arena. Kirishima has never looked up the exact number of seats — the idea of it is too overwhelming— but he knows that Present Mic sells out shows wherever he goes.

He also knows that, as the opening act, Riot is there to pad out the timing. The audience filters in during their shows, and although they always play to a crowd, it's not the packed seat-by-seat extreme of what Present Mic draws later in the same night. Usually, when Riot takes the stage, Kirishima can pick out the empty seats throughout the venue.

Tonight, he looks out and sees a sea of faces, people dressed in red, purple, pink and yellow, and he hears an ear-splitting uproar as the stage lights go on in dim amber, so that the silhouettes of the band members are visible.

"Riot! Riot! Riot!"

He's used to enthusiasm, to applause and cheers. But this, this is specifically for them.

A purple light goes on over Jirou, standing posed with her guitar. As soon as the light hits her, her fingers begin to dance across the strings, starting up a melody.

Next, a yellow light flashes over Kaminari. His drum beat starts out steadily, filling out the foundation for Jirou's notes.

The red light is next, over Kirishima. He knows his role by rote, lets his fingers start moving before he even thinks about it, guided by Kaminari's steady rhythm.

"Kirishima!" The entire crowd seems to scream in unison, the noise breaking Kirishima's concentration like he's a cord that's just been yanked out of an amp.

He glances up, surprised, even as he forces himself to keep playing. Some more unaffected part of his mind takes over the music, muscle memory helping it along. But Kirishima is still looking out over the crowd, lips slightly parted, as he takes in the hundreds of people shouting his name.

In front of him, on stage, a pink light shines on over Ashido. She grips her microphone in both hands, and without any preamble she begins to sing.

Her voice soothes the crowd, focusing their energy so that all eyes are drawn towards her. Her voice isn't perfectly smooth or melodious—there's an edge to it that comes out at high moments of the song, a bit of personality and emotion that breaks the flow in a way that keeps everyone's attention.

It's then that Kirishima remembers the last time he felt quite like this. It had been years ago, the last time he'd played at this venue before Riot had accepted the gig with Present Mic. He hadn't been much of anyone, back then—just a stupid kid with lank black hair, a love of music and a heart too weak to fulfill his own ambitions.

Ashido had been singing on that night, too. Still a teenager, wearing angelic white and made up with rosy cheeks and pink lips. Her voice had also drawn the crowds the attention, but the music hadn't been Riot's high-charged, erratic rock.

And Kirishima, playing behind her with the rest of the band, hadn't been given his own spotlight. No one in the crowd had known his name.

But now, everything is different. He's only slightly behind Ashido, and the crowd is yelling his name and singing along to lyrics he wrote. Kirishima breaks out into a smile as he strums his guitar, the song building to a furious crescendo.

Then, Kaminari stops playing, and Jirou pauses her skilled dance over the strings of her guitar. Kirishima picks up the melody, and Ashido sings over the simple line of music.

It's a song about joy, about the manic energy of youth, of singular moments to live in that get remembered like the negatives of photographs— never quite clear, though they leave an impression all the same.

This is what he loves. These moments, when he can feel the energy flowing through him and channeled by his bandmates, when they act as a unit in perfect sync. They sing Kirishima's lyrics and play Jirou's melodies and follow Kaminari's beat, and Ashido ties them all together.

As the song comes to a close, the crowd bursts into furious applause. Kirishima leans back on his heels, winded.

It's Ashido who leans forward, waving out at the crowd enthusiastically.

"We're Riot," she says with a wink, gesturing at the rest of them. "Welcome to the show."

—

They've played this set enough times by now that it should be routine. But the energy of playing to a full crowd, of hearing his own name on their lips, changes the atmosphere for Kirishima entirely. He's hyper-aware throughout the performance, his heart stuttering in his chest whenever he takes conscious note of the amount of people he's playing to.

And there's the small fact that this isn't the exact same set they always play. At Kirishima's suggestion, they've changed up their finale. But now that the moment to implement that change is drawing closer, he's suddenly more nervous than he can remember being.

It's towards the end of the show that Ashido turns to Kirishima in the middle of a song, crooking her finger and gesturing for him to step towards her.

Kirishima has no idea why she does that— she never has before, on stage— but his body reacts before his mind can catch up. He steps towards her, the stage crew following his movements with the spotlights until red and pink are intermingled on stage.

The crowd explodes. Ashido pulls her microphone off its stand, holding onto it in one hand as she sings, using her other hand to pull through Kirishima's spiked hair.

He's used to her touching him— the four of them have all grown used to being cuddly, given how much time they spend together— but this is a more deliberate move. She circles around him, hips swaying in time to the music, words washing over him as though she's whispering them in his ear.

It takes longer than it should for Kirishima to realize what she's done. By the time she's finished moving, they've completely reversed positions— now, Kirishima stands at the center of the stage, tethered only by his amp chord, and Ashido has become a moving target, slightly left of center.

She's given Kirishima the spotlight.

The song comes to a close, and again the crowd erupts into applause. Kirishima stands on stage, looking out over the faces and raised hands. Are there more people in the crowd now than there were only a few songs ago?

Beside him, Ashido nudges Kirishima with her hip.

He startles, realizing that he's meant to start the next, last song. But instead, he keeps staring out at the crowd. Kirishima has never lacked for dreams, and since he began scribbling down lyrics and tapping out beats, he's wanted to be a performer. He wants to bring people joy through his

music, to connect to them in the way he's connected to Crimson Chevalier's music since he was a kid. But this is— this is—

He doesn't know where to look. He doesn't know who to focus on. He doesn't know how he's supposed to reach any of these people, when his mouth is too dry for him to speak. When his fingers feel numb, frozen over the strings of his cherry red guitar.

And then, he glances up. The VIP boxes are above general seating, close enough to the stage to give those important people the best views without requiring them to mix in with the masses. Kirishima has never had anyone to offer those prized seats to, before now.

In the closest box, he can make out two figures among the rest. The first is a man in his forties, with long dark hair. There's a gray scarf wound around his neck, hiding half of his face. He slouches back in his seat, eyes sleepy.

But Kirishima's gaze doesn't rest on that man, even though he registers as vaguely familiar. Instead, Kirishima glances over to the person next to him.

Bakugou is sitting up in his stadium seat, leaning forward. He has his chin rested against one hand, eyes narrowed with anger— no, not anger. Focus. He's looking right at Kirishima, just like he'd been asked. He's not looking at anyone else. Under the flashing lights, his eyes stand out a stark red, and Kirishima is drawn in by them.

Kirishima coughs, clears his throat. The moment seems to be dragging on forever, but the awkwardness hasn't registered with the crowd, yet.

Ashido slings an arm over his shoulders, her laughter echoing through her mic and over the crowd. She's not laughing at him, but instead trying to calm him down.

"Was there something you wanted to say?" she asks, playing coy for the audience's benefit.

"Yeah," Kirishima breathes out, eyes still pulled towards Bakugou. His voice crackles over the mic, and heat floods his face. But then he clears his throat, and says softly, "This is for you."

He doesn't specify who he's talking to. But a hush falls over the crowd, as though hundreds of people have simultaneously drawn the same breath. In that moment of stillness, Kirishima begins to play.

He loves music, but he can't write an entire song on his own. He comes up with lyrics, snatches of rhyme patterns and general beats that sound good enough in his head. Then he'll bring what he's come up with to Jirou, and she'll refine his ideas and add the melodies, making the music more complex and beautiful than Kirishima could've managed on his own. Kaminari lays the beat in, grounding Jirou's ambitious notes. And then Ashido will layer her voice on top, and while they'll rehearsing and writing she and Kirishima will sing together, filling in the gaps for each other and building on everyone's ideas.

So now, standing in the center of the stage, Kirishima plays a song that doesn't belong just to him. His hand trails up and down the neck of his guitar like an athlete running staircases, barely pausing for breath. The song spreads out over the crowd— not the erratic energy of the last number, but something calmer and more deliberate. Despite that, Kirishima feels the intensity of this song more than any other.

He's only playing alone for an instant, but it drags out in his mind for an age before Jirou and Kaminari begin to play around him. And then Ashido steps up again, lifts her mic and sings.

Despite the fact that it took four people to write this song, it conveys a simple and direct message. It's a song about meeting someone, and wanting to fall in love with them. About the moment of certainty, looking at their face, and knowing that if you step forward even a bit, you'll fall into a deep well of emotion just waiting to be discovered.

And as he plays this song, and listens to Ashido singing his lyrics, Kirishima keeps his gaze on Bakugou.

By the time they get off stage, Kirishima is drenched with sweat and coming down off an adrenaline high. His entire face is heated, cheeks red and hair matted with sweat. The echoing cheers of the crowd follow Riot as they leave the stage and head to one of the lounges backstage. The four of them throw themselves into the room, letting out a collective sigh of relief.

Kaminari lays flat on the couch, reaching up to unbuckle his black choker and massage his neck.

Jirou slumps down beside him, resting her head against Kaminari's shoulder without caring about how the colorful triangles she'd painted on her cheeks have smudged.

Ashido forgoes furniture entirely and lays out on the floor, limbs splayed like those of a starfish. Her hair puffs around her face, and she reaches up to yank off her yellow headband and press at her temples.

Kirishima stands frozen in the doorway, for a moment, the screams of the crowd still ringing in his ears and the image of Bakugou's blazing stare burned into his memory.

None of them move, or speak. They don't have to. Each of them recognizes how different the energy had been tonight, couldn't help but notice the surge of the crowd and the way more people had known the lyrics to sing along.

Eventually, Kirishima slumps down against the wall, and the four of them slowly turn their heads to look at each other. It's Kaminari who laughs first, followed by Ashido, and then Kirishima. Jirou joins in last, the infectious energy of her band catching like a spark on dry brush. Their happiness burns through them like a wildfire, and for a moment they don't have to think about anything else.

"What are you still doing here?" a voice snaps at them, sometime later.

Kirishima glances up to see Present Mic— or Yamada Hizashi, as he's known off-stage. His blond hair is coifed to perfection, even after the two hours he's spent on stage, though he's shed his leather jacket to reveal the tight t-shirt he wears underneath. Kirishima wonders, vaguely, if Yamada-san had thrown the jacket out into the crowd for some enthusiastic fan to catch.

"Huh?" Kirishima glances up, tired now that the energy of the crowd isn't fueling him.

Yamada claps his hands together, jolting the rest of them from their stupor. "There's a crowd outside," he says impatiently. "They're waiting for you."

It's Jirou who speaks up, glancing at Yamada skeptically. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," Yamada grouses. "Go, sign some posters, so my fans can have their chance."

Kirishima almost laughs, at that. Yamada may be something of a prima donna, but Kirishima has seen him spend hours making his way through a signing line. He's never left a fan wanting.

Achingly, Kirishima gets to his feet. "Let's go."

The crowd outside the stage door is much smaller than the one inside the stadium had been, but it seems larger. Without the buffer of the stage itself, and the shield of his music around him, Kirishima is overwhelmed by the amount of people screaming as soon as the four of them step out the door.

One of the crowd managers hands out metallic permanent markers—gold for Kaminari, pink for Ashido, purple for Jirou, and red for Kirishima.

The crowd is a mix of people, all ages and genders and styles of dress. Some of them have hand-made posters, many of them are holding out a copy of Riot's single, all of them are making noise.

"Kirishima!" One of them shrieks as he approaches.

"That's me," Kirishima says, because it's true. He lifts the marker to sign the man's CD, writing out the characters of his name and then two interlocking English R's, all written in red.

Ashido, Jirou and Kaminari make their way through the crowd around him, signing various things as they go. Ashido stops for selfies every few steps, putting up both her hands in victory signs as she tries to balance her marker. Kaminari shoots a thumbs-up at his fans, and occasionally pulls Ashido in for a group picture. Jirou's more aloof, signing her name with quick efficiency, and blushing whenever someone asks for a picture.

Kirishima goes through the crowd, smiling as much as he has, thanking everyone who speaks to him. It's when he's made his way halfway through the line that he notices what this particular fan is holding out for him to sign.

It's a magazine, open to a specific page. And on that page is a picture of Kirishima, on the ground at a red carpet event, bracing himself over Bakugou Katsuki. Their eyes are locked, as though they don't even notice the picture being taken.

"You want me to sign this?" Kirishima squeaks.

The young woman holding it up nods emphatically. "If you don't mind? It's just, I support you and Bakugou-san so much, I—"

Kirishima scribbles his name across the page without a second thought, before the heavy weight of guilt has time to settle over him. He hadn't even seen those pictures, yet, hadn't bothered to go looking for them. But now that he cares to notice, he sees many people holding up similar magazines. They must've heard the interviews from the red carpet, seen that first picture from weeks ago. And maybe it was through Bakugou's fame, and Kirishima's by association, that they'd come to be here.

But they'd all been chanting Riot's name all night, dancing to their songs, singing along to Kirishima's lyrics. What does it matter how they got here, as long as they're enjoying themselves now?

The thoughts swirl around Kirishima like a heavy fog as he continues stepping through the crowd. He's genuinely happy that these people are here, and their enthusiasm has reignited his energy.

Even without the music connecting them, in this moment, he still feels immeasurably close to them. And beyond that, he's grateful that they've given him a chance.

It's in that haze that Kirishima gradually makes his way to the back of the line. A low gate cuts the crowd off from where the members of Riot are walking, so that none of them can rush in too quickly. Kirishima barely registers getting to the end of the gate, until someone calls out to him.

"Hey, asshole."

That's not the tone anyone else in the crowd has been using, to say nothing of the words themselves. Kirishima glances up, and there, at the end of the crowd, separated by the venue's security from the rest of the crowd, is Bakugou.

He pays no attention to the gate, hooking one leg over it and vaulting himself to the other side. As soon as the crowd realizes who he is, they begin screaming, and the flashes of dozens of cellphone cameras appear like sunspots in Kirishima's vision.

Bakugou doesn't seem to mind any of it. He stops towards Kirishima, his face etched into hard, intense lines.

For a second, Kirishima wonders if he should be bracing himself for a punch.

But then Bakugou is right beside him, reaching out and grabbing the low neck of Kirishima's tank to pull him forward.

For a second, they stare at each other, Bakugou's eyes smoldering and Kirishima's widening.

Then, Bakugou leans in and presses his lips against Kirishima's.

The crowd grows impossibly louder, and from somewhere beside him Kirishima hears Kaminari shriek, "Bakugou!"

But then, everything else fades out of focus. Instinctively, Kirishima lifts a hand to grip Bakugou's upper arm, holding him close. He's the one who leans in the second time, and when Bakugou lifts his head in surprise the kiss goes off center, so that Kirishima's lips are pressed to the corner of Bakugou's mouth.

Something electric sparks through him, and Kirishima closes his eyes and breathes deep. He doesn't want this to end.

Chapter End Notes

["heart out" - the 1975](#)

consistent update schedule? i don't know her.

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The problem isn't that Bakugou kissed him. No, the problem is that afterwards, Kirishima can't stop thinking about it.

It's not the first time he's imagined kissing Bakugou Katsuki. He remembers being a teenager, laid out in bed and imagining. He'd been fifteen when *UA* had first come on air— the same age as Bakugou. But it hadn't been until years later that he'd been able to categorize his fascination with the actor as attraction. That was after he'd started to parse why he admired Crimson Chevalier so much, why he found Suneater's masculine voice more attractive than teen idol Nejire-chan's.

Being attracted to men was not something Kirishima had struggled over. It was a realization that had come upon him over time. It had taken shape and rearranged the facts of his life so that they made more sense. His posters of Bakugou Katsuki just took on new meaning, when Kirishima looked up at them and thought of Bakugou not just as someone to emulate, but someone he wanted to be with.

But those had been the far away fantasies of a boy who never imagined his dreams of fame becoming a reality. He never thought he'd meet Bakugou, and so his fantasies had been safe and distant and purely hypothetical. Now, though—now everything is different.

Now. It's been two days, and Kirishima is lying in bed, thinking about how deceptively soft Bakugou's lips had been. How quick the kiss was, over entirely too soon. How the crowd had shrieked as Bakugou pulled back, how Bakugou had looked down his nose at Kirishima and left, without any sort of explanation. Kirishima had stood there, stunned, until Kaminari had pulled him away.

He'd woken up the next morning to his face on every celebrity gossip website, his hair a blazing fire under the harsh lights of phone camera flashes. The pictures had been proof that he hadn't just hallucinated the entire night.

But it had left him unsatisfied. Bakugou had kissed him in a way that played well for the cameras — visible and unmistakable for what it was. But Kirishima hadn't gotten to hold him, or lick into his mouth, or bite down on his soft lips—

"Fuck," Kirishima says aloud, staring at his ceiling. "I'm so fucked."

At a baseline, Kirishima knows he's being selfish. Bakugou isn't pretending to date him because he wants to be close to Kirishima, physically. And really, Kirishima shouldn't want that either. But the acting is confusing his body, probably. Whenever he's around Bakugou, he feels the electric current running between them. And he can't help but want more.

His phone is lying on the bed beside him, and he rolls over to grab it before he can think better of it. He taps out a message and hits send.

Kirishima doesn't know how long he lays there, but the next thing he knows his bedroom door is slammed open.

"What— *Bakugou!*"

It's like he's been summoned by Kirishima's imaginings—Bakugou Katsuki, standing in his doorway, wearing that old skull t-shirt and a disdainful expression. He looks down at Kirishima with raised brows, his arms crossed over his chest. "Damn," he says idly. "You live like this?"

Kirishima glances around his room, color rising in his cheeks. It isn't so bad— a bookshelf full of CD's, a free-standing punching bag, some clothes littering the floor, everything a violent shade of red—

He leaps to his feet and jumps across the room, coming to stand in front of *UA* poster hanging on his wall. It isn't a poster of *just* Bakugou, thankfully, but he's the central figure in the image. Kirishima stands up as straight as he can, hoping to block the poster from view.

"What— what are you doing here?"

Bakugou scoffs. "You're a piece of shit, you know that?"

Kirishima frowns. "What—"

Bakugou silences him with a glare, then fishes his cellphone out of the pocket of his jeans. He unlocks the screen and reads off in a deceptively calm voice, "That kiss after the concert was pretty lame. Have you ever kissed anyone, before?"

Kirishima is sure, now, that his face is the same color as his hair. "Well," he starts to explain, "It was kind of just, a peck? And if we're supposed to be madly in love, we should really—"

"I'm going to fucking kill you, now," Bakugou says in that same calm voice. It's honestly more terrifying than when he yells.

"How did you even know where I live— hey!" Kirishima dodges as Bakugou rushes at him, sidestepping and running to the far corner of the room. "Calm down, okay, it was a *joke*."

Bakugou's hands are balled into fists at his sides, and he lets out a barely-human growl as he charges at Kirishima, again.

Kirishima's not exactly sure who'd win in an all-out fight between the two of them. He's not really interested in finding out.

"How'd you even get in here," Kirishima says, laughing nervously.

"Your front door was unlocked," Bakugou hisses from between clenched teeth. "But you don't have to worry about that, because I'm going to fucking bury you *after I kill you*."

"If you kill me, you'll never get any better at kissing," Kirishima says in a rush, running around to the other side of the bed so that it's between him and Bakugou.

Bakugou freezes, at that, face contorting with rage and something like bewilderment. "I'm not bad at kissing, you fucking idiot."

The way he says it is like a child's retort. Kirishima can just imagine him saying, *I'm not bad at anything*.

"Maybe," Kirishima allows. "But I bet I'm better."

"Are you shitting me," Bakugou seethes. "You should be grateful I'd even consider kissing a shitty-haired bastard like you."

Kirishima is *very* grateful. But Bakugou doesn't need to know that, right now.

"Have you?" he asks, instead.

"Have I what," Bakugou spits back.

"Kissed anyone, before."

Bakugou throws out a hand, gesturing at the *UA* poster at the wall. "Obviously."

Kirishima can't blush any more than he is, already. But it's like he's just been called out, for having a poster on his wall three years after a show has stopped airing.

He imagines, for a moment, all the kisses on *UA*—Uraraka and Bakugou's characters, mostly, and the gradual development of their relationship through carefully-orchestrated touches and measures of affection.

Kirishima snorts. "That doesn't count. Those were like, stage kisses. For a show."

For a long moment, Bakugou doesn't say anything at all.

Kirishima is definitely a horrible person, but he can't help the sly smile he wears in that moment. "Have you never kissed anyone off-camera, before?"

"Shut the fuck up," Bakugou orders. His expression shutters, now guarded. He crosses his arms over his chest, again. "Like you're any better."

Kirishima isn't *much* better, but he does have a little experience. His grin widens as he says, "Actually, I am."

Bakugou's jaw visibly clenches.

"But, hey," Kirishima says, trying to sound as appeasing as possible, "there's a really easy way for us to, you know, bridge the gap."

"What the fuck are you talking about."

Kirishima sucks in a breath and then answers quickly, before he loses his nerve. "We could practice."

For a second, he's sure that Bakugou is about to hit him. But then Bakugou's clenched hands loosen, and he looks at Kirishima with assessment rather than murderous intent.

"Fine," he says, moving to sit at the edge of Kirishima's bed.

"Wait— *really*?"

Bakugou turns his head to the side to glare at Kirishima. "Get the fuck over here, before I change my mind."

Kirishima doesn't need to be told a second time. He comes around the other side of the bed, sitting on the opposite end from Bakugou. In his earlier daydreams, he had imagined today going something like this. But those had been fantasies, wishful and unrealistic. Now Bakugou Katsuki is sitting on his bed and waiting for Kirishima to kiss him.

"Holy shit," Kirishima mutters, clenching and unclenching his hands.

“Are you going to just stare into space, or are you going to kiss me?” Bakugou says irritably.

Kirishima clears his throat and readjusts his position, turning to face Bakugou fully. Bakugou has his lips pressed together in a firm line, glaring at Kirishima but pointedly not looking at his lips.

Something inside of Kirishima softens. He leans closer to Bakugou and raises his hands, stopping just short of touching Bakugou’s face.

“Hey,” he says, “Relax.”

“Shut up,” Bakugou mutters.

But that’s enough. When Bakugou’s lips part around the words, Kirishima leans in. He rests one hand against Bakugou’s shoulder, curls the other around the back of Bakugou’s neck. Then he pulls Bakugou closer and presses their lips together, more deliberately and with far more awareness than he’d had two nights ago.

Bakugou doesn’t react, for a long moment. His lips are as soft as Kirishima remembers, but they’re still against Kirishima’s. Then, Bakugou reaches out and grabs Kirishima around the wrist, holding him in place. He pushes into the kiss, rather than pulling back.

It’s Kirishima who leans away, gently detaching himself from Bakugou so that he can look him in the eye. “You can move, you know,” he says. “There’s a rhythm to kissing.”

“Shut up,” Bakugou says, “I *know* that.”

“Okay,” Kirishima says agreeably. “Should we try again?”

They lean in at the same time. Bakugou’s lips part readily against Kirishima’s, now, and when Kirishima gently traces Bakugou’s lower lip with his tongue he feels Bakugou shudder against him. Not to be outdone, Bakugou reaches out and grabs at Kirishima’s hair, loose today around his face. Kirishima licks his way into Bakugou’s mouth as Bakugou pulls at his hair, and the conflicting sensations are enough to push everything else out of his mind, for that moment.

Something buzzes against Kirishima’s thigh, jolting them both out of the kiss. Bakugou curses under his breath, grabbing his phone out of his pocket and throwing it to the other side of the bed.

“Fuck off,” he mutters at the phone, for good measure.

Kirishima chuckles. He wonders if Bakugou knows how much he uses that phrase as a space filler. He can’t possibly mean it every time he says it, just like he can’t possibly mean it every time he threatens to kill someone.

With a huff, Bakugou turns back towards him. “Stop slacking off,” he says.

Kirishima’s smile goes crooked as he lifts a hand to press against Bakugou’s cheek. “I’m pretty sure I’m going to wake up in a second and this will have been a dream.”

Bakugou rolls his eyes, brushing off Kirishima’s hand and pressing his lips against Kirishima’s experimentally. He isn’t hesitant—the pressure of his lips is firm and solid—but he moves away too quickly for Kirishima’s liking.

“I’m serious,” Kirishima says, and then he kisses Bakugou again. He mirrors the angle Bakugou had gone for, but lets himself go off-center at the last moment so that his kiss lands half against Bakugou’s cheek.

“Obviously. I’m everyone’s fucking fantasy,” Bakugou says, with an arrogant assurance that really, really shouldn’t be as attractive as it is. He pushes Kirishima back, his hands a comfortable weight on his shoulders, until Kirishima falls back against the bed. Bakugou looms over him, now. “You’re not special, that way.”

Kirishima blinks up at him, wondering what Bakugou means by that. Of course, there are probably thousands— millions?— of people who find Bakugou attractive. Best Jeanist wouldn’t be selling so many pairs of jeans if that wasn’t the case. But Kirishima resents the assumption that his feelings are *typical*.

“Yeah?” Kirishima says, reaching for Bakugou and pulling him down so that they can kiss, again. “Does everyone get to do this, too?”

Bakugou acquiesces to the kisses, pressing forward on his own and mirroring Kirishima’s technique. Even amidst their conversation, they’re getting better at this. Their lips fit together naturally, with fewer awkward clashes of teeth.

Bakugou huffs and bites down on Kirishima’s lower lip. “Wouldn’t you like to know,” he growls out. He’s sitting over Kirishima’s legs, now, as Kirishima leans up to meet him halfway. It’s not the most comfortably position, but like hell Kirishima is going to say anything that’ll move Bakugou away from him, at this point.

“Dude, you already played your hand,” Kirishima says, one of his hands settling at the base of Bakugou’s neck. The short hairs there are soft as he brushes his fingers over them. He kisses Bakugou’s cheek, then the line of his jaw. “It’s okay, though. If this is all new to you.”

Bakugou mimics Kirishima’s motions, kissing his cheek and then his jaw. But as Kirishima speaks, Bakugou pulls back. “No one is worth *this*,” Bakugou informs him. “There’s literally no one out there I want to do this shit with.”

“You’re doing it with me, right now,” Kirishima says, even though he knows that getting Bakugou to realize that he doesn’t want to be doing this is not in his best interest.

“Whatever.” Bakugou, emboldened by something, bites down on Kirishima’s tongue the next time their lips meet.

The pain jolts through him, not entirely unwelcome. “It’s okay,” Kirishima assures him. “I don’t mind helping you practice.”

“You talk a lot,” Bakugou says irritably.

“Character flaw,” Kirishima returns. “I’ve got a lot of ‘em. Besides, I bet there was no real way for you to get close to anyone else, right? When you were pretending to date Uraraka.”

Bakugou sits back fully, the entirety of his weight on Kirishima’s legs. “Don’t fucking start with that,” he warns. “I never even agreed to that. The reporters just made shit up, took pictures of us when we were standing next to each other and acted like that made us fucking lovers. What a joke.”

Kirishima blinks. “But you agreed to this. With me.”

Bakugou looks down at Kirishima with an inscrutable expression. His cheeks are flushed, from the kissing, and his hair is slightly mussed. “Easier than giving Soy Sauce one more fucking thing to nag me about.”

But even as he says it, his logic seems weak to Kirishima. The media had played up Bakugou and Uraraka's relationship for *years*. Bakugou may not have endorsed it, but that was still an incredibly long time to not dispel the rumors. And then he'd immediately delved right into this fake relationship with Kirishima, going at it with more gusto than he'd ever shown the charade with Uraraka. He'd kissed Kirishima two nights ago, without any prompting whatsoever. Kirishima doesn't get it.

"Hey, can I ask you something?"

"What," Bakugou says, so flatly it's hardly a question.

"What are you getting out of this? I know Sero said your reputation was on the line, and that they had to, you know, soften the blow of you being gay and all. But that all seems like stuff Sero would worry about, more than you. Why'd you agree, at all?"

Bakugou doesn't answer, for a long moment. His eyes narrow to slits as he stares Kirishima down, like he's thinking hard about what he's going to say. Then he lets out an irritated noise.

"It's whatever," he says vaguely, turning away so that he's not looking Kirishima in the eye. "But lying about who I'm dating isn't as shitty as lying about who I am."

"Oh," Kirishima says, dumbly. That, he can understand. He's always felt supported, in who he is, more worried about what he thinks of himself than what others think of him. But Bakugou, who's been in the public eye his entire life, maybe he's never had the luxury of answering just to himself. How can he even be sure of who he is, when everything he does is so scrutinized and twisted by an audience?

Kirishima settles his hands at Bakugou's waist, for a moment just content to have that point of contact. "I don't know why this all landed on me," he says, truthfully, "But I'm happy I can help."

When he looks up, he finds Bakugou staring at him openly. His eyes are no longer narrowed and angry, but rather wide and incredulous. He's looking at Kirishima like he's a puzzle, or a riddle, something completely indecipherable.

"Fuck," Bakugou mutters. "You really mean that, don't you. Idiot."

"You need to work on your pet names, *boyfriend*," Kirishima says.

Bakugou snarls. "Hell's going to freeze over before I call you a *pet name*."

"Okay, okay," Kirishima says with a laugh. He can't really imagine calling Bakugou by a pet name, either, even if they were *really* dating. That just seems— too soft for him, somehow.

Bakugou presses one hand down against Kirishima's chest, keeping him pinned with physical pressure even as he corners Kirishima with his gaze. "Pay attention," he orders.

Before Kirishima can ask what he means, Bakugou leans down until he's laying almost directly on top of Kirishima. He kisses him soundly on the lips, adopting a steady rhythm that pauses only when Kirishima's lips part and Bakugou thrusts his tongue into Kirishima's mouth. The kiss goes wet and messy, after that, and Kirishima's blood pounds in his veins.

When Bakugou finally pulls back, he leaves Kirishima gasping for breath. "So?" he demands.

"Ha— what?"

“The fucking kiss,” Bakugou snaps. “That was better than any of the ones you gave me, wasn’t it?”

Is Bakugou asking Kirishima to *grade him*? Kirishima can’t quite believe that, except that Bakugou is looking at him insistently, like he’s expecting an assessment.

Kirishima gurgles out a laugh. “Ah, yeah. Definitely the best one, ever.”

Bakugou clicks his tongue against his teeth. “Fucking useless,” he mutters.

The atmosphere between them is comfortable, lazy, even punctuation by Bakugou’s irritation and Kirishima’s nervous energy. For a moment, Kirishima is completely disconnected from the world, alone in this moment with just Bakugou.

The moment breaks.

“Kirishima,” Kaminari calls out, bursting through the door, “we ordered pizza— what the *hell!*”

“Has no one in this apartment heard of knocking?” Kirishima asks.

Kaminari stands in the doorway, looking like he’d just been struck by lightning. He blinks at Kirishima and Bakugou, then says, “I— ah. Bakugou. In your bed. On top of you.”

Bakugou takes no heed of Kirishima’s limbs as adjusts himself, getting to his feet and not even bothering to straighten his clothes. Kirishima has no idea how he looks so— well, not *calm*, exactly, but unaffected. He’s flushed and rumpled, his lips kissed red. But he stands with all the assurance of a god amongst mortals.

“Thank fuck,” he says, sounding bored. “I’m starving.” He strides out the door, shoving Kaminari ahead of him.

“Er, right,” Kaminari says, “I guess you can have some pizza, too, Bakugou.” But then he cranes his head back at Kirishima and mouths, *What was that?*

Kirishima shrugs apologetically. He’s not exactly sure, himself.

—

It takes Kirishima a moment to get his bearings, after Bakugou and Kaminari have left the room. Just as he’s gotten to his feet, preparing to follow them, his phone lights up from where it’d fallen amongst the blankets and pillows.

Incoming Call - Unknown Number 1

Kirishima slides open the display. “Hello?”

“Hello, Kirishima-kun? This is Uraraka.”

Kirishima is sure that this a dream, that he’s about to wake up and be fifteen years old, again. He’ll yawn and open his eyes and realize he’d fallen asleep watching *UA*, again, and any moment Ashido will come to wake him up because they’re about to leave for Hokkaido or something.

“Kirishima-kun? Are you there?”

Kirishima shakes his head. This isn’t a dream. “Yes! Hi, Uraraka. Um— how do you have my number?”

“Sero-kun,” Uraraka explains. “I’m glad I caught you! I’ve been trying Bakugou-kun all day, but he won’t answer any of my calls. He’s being such a baby.”

Kirishima’s not exactly sure what that means, but he doesn’t have long to dwell on it. It’s like a bucket of water has just been thrown over his head. Last time he and Uraraka had talked, it had been at Hagakure’s party. It had been when Bakugou and Uraraka had still been *together*, at least in a press sense.

“Uh,” Kirishima says, suddenly very nervous, “Is there something I can help with?”

“I hope so,” Uraraka says. She doesn’t sound upset, or like Kirishima had ruined her image in the press or stole her fake boyfriend. In fact, Kirishima can’t remember hearing anything about Uraraka in the media for the past couple of weeks. “Actually, this is more of an invitation! A bunch of us are going to spend a few days at the beach, at one of Momo-chan’s estates.”

“Okay,” Kirishima says, very lost.

“I wanted to know if you wanted to come with us,” Uraraka explains. “I know your band performs pretty frequently, right? But it’d only be for two days, or maybe you could just come for one day if that’s too much? And of course, the rest of your band should come, too! It’ll be me and Deku-kun and Todoroki-kun and a few other friends, too.”

“You want me to come?” Kirishima asks, baffled. “Why?”

Uraraka laughs. “Because we *like* you, Kirishima-kun! This trip is a tradition, we go every year, when all of us can get together. But Bakugou-kun never agrees to come, and I was thinking if his boyfriend was there, he’d maybe at least think about it.”

Kirishima remembers *Ground Zero*’s premiere— Yaoyorozu had invited Bakugou along then, too, but he hadn’t agreed to go. But they all keep trying, for some reason.

“You want him to come?” Kirishima asks. He doesn’t mean it unkindly— hell, he knows better than anyone the strange pull of Bakugou’s overtly off-putting personality. But he’s not sure that others see things the same way.

Uraraka lets out a little puff of a sigh. “Of course! I mean, we’ve all had our issues, over the years. But Bakugou-kun worked with all of us for five years. We’re friends, whether he wants to admit it or not. And anyway, it’s really time that he and Deku-kun talk things out. It wasn’t Deku-kun’s fault, no matter what Bakugou-kun thinks.”

“Um, you’ve definitely lost me,” Kirishima admits. “I have no idea what’s going on between Midoriya and Bakugou.”

Uraraka hums knowingly. “He’s like that even with you, hm? When I heard he was *actually* dating someone, I thought that meant he was opening up! I thought it was a good sign, at least.”

Actually dating. It hits Kirishima like a punch to the chest. Uraraka doesn’t know. She thinks that Kirishima and Bakugou are really dating, that these newest developments in Bakugou’s life are signs of some grand shift in personality. But they aren’t. It’s all a lie, and one Kirishima is helping to keep.

“Listen, I—”

“I’ve probably said too much,” Uraraka says apologetically. “Bakugou-kun will tell you in his own time, I’m sure. But you should come with us, and you should try and get him to come, too. I

promise, it'll be fun! At least for you. I never know, with Bakugou-kun."

Kirishima smiles as he talks to her. Uraraka's aura of levity and kindness is infectious. "Sure," he says, trying to push aside his guilt. "I'll see what I can do."

"Oi," a gruff voice calls out, "are you gonna come eat or— *who are you talking to.*"

Bakugou is standing in the doorway, balancing a plate laden with pizza in one hand. He glares suspiciously at the phone held against Kirishima's ear.

"Is that Bakugou-kun?" Uraraka asks, over the line. "Tell him to stop being a jerk and screening my calls!"

Bakugou must hear her voice in the enclosed space of Kirishima's bedroom, because all at once he drops the plate of pizza to the floor and lunges across the small space.

Kirishima doesn't have time to react. He yelps as Bakugou rushes him, only thinking to hold the phone out of reach at the last moment. But Bakugou isn't deterred. He tackles Kirishima around the waist, sending them both toppling backwards onto the bed. The fall knocks the wind out of Kirishima, and in the resulting confusion Bakugou grabs the phone out of his hand.

"What the hell d'you think you're doing, Uraraka?" Bakugou yells into the speaker. "Don't fucking talk to Kirishima. And stop calling me!"

He jabs his thumb against the end call button, tossing the phone aside with angry exhalation of breath. "Meddling asshole," he mutters, rolling away from Kirishima to lie on his back.

"Do you treat all of your friends like that?" Kirishima asks tentatively, a moment later. They're lying side-by-side, both looking up at the ceiling.

"She's not my goddamn friend." Bakugou crosses his arms over his chest, which makes him look a little ridiculous as his legs hang off the edge of the bed.

"That's not what she thinks," Kirishima says, reaching up to rest his hands behind his head. "She wants us to go on vacation with her."

"Like I could stand going on a trip with her."

"What about with me?" Kirishima bites down on the inside of his cheek, mulling this all over. "I mean— I think it'd be fun. But it'd be weird if I went and you didn't go, you know?"

"Why," Bakugou asks blandly, "it's not she's going to complain if you go and I don't."

Kirishima doesn't think Uraraka would complain, exactly. But she clearly wants Bakugou there. Kirishima imagines the four UA alums like the members of a band— they'd spent so much time together, worked on such a meaningful project for so long. But maybe, like in a band, there had been creative differences.

"Do they— ah. Would it be weird for you, showing up with a boyfriend? Uraraka didn't seem phased by it, but did anyone else know?"

Bakugou keeps his gaze fixed on the ceiling, letting out a harsh breath. "Are you asking if fucking Deku and Todoroki know I'm not straight?"

"Um, yeah?" Kirishima laughs, trying to cover up his nerves. Talking to Bakugou is like walking

through a minefield. “I mean, they wouldn’t care, right? Midoriya and Todoroki played a gay couple for the entire last season, they wouldn’t have done that if they’d—”

“*Shut up,*” Bakugou growls. “Fuck, why do you have to keep poking at it? I don’t fucking care, anymore.”

“Dude, you obviously do. You freaked out, the last time I saw you with Midoriya.”

Bakugou barks out a harsh, cold laugh. “Right. Because he’s so goddamn innocent, and I’m the one overreacting. *Of course.*”

Kirishima frowns. “I can’t take your side if you don’t tell me what your side is.”

“Deku knew,” Bakugou spits out. “Of course, he did, he’s a goddamn stalker. Always watching people, figuring out everything about them.”

“So... he figured out you weren’t straight?”

“It was my idea,” Bakugou says, licking over his lips. “The only thing anyone remembers that stupid show for, I came up with it. I pushed for it. The fucking show-runner was a coward. It took two years to convince him that it wouldn’t tank his show, to take that risk. It was supposed to be my fucking storyline.”

Kirishima blinks. He had never even considered the possibility that Nobuhiko would be the character to come out on *UA*. His storyline with Ayane seems inevitable to Kirishima, looking back on it. But he’s had three years to re-watch the show in its entirety, to allow the various seasons and storylines to fuse together into a coherent whole. At the moment each episode was being filmed, surely there was more room for possibility.

“That’s amazing,” Kirishima breathes out. “I mean, whether it was Nobuhiko or Daiki, in the end — dude. You have no idea. Seeing it happen, on TV, with the whole world watching. The fact that *UA* went there at all meant everything, to me.”

He’d been eighteen, a year and a half into his career as a performing musician. The lead guitarist of up-and-coming star Alien Queen’s band. At a time in his life when Kirishima hadn’t know what he wanted, or exactly who he was, *UA* was his anchor. And it had helped him feel okay, about a lot of things.

“I don’t fucking care,” Bakugou says, but his words sound more like a reflex than anything with actual intent. “It should have been me.”

Eighteen-year-old Kirishima probably would not have been able to handle Bakugou playing out a coming out scene. He probably would’ve exploded.

“So, you’re mad at Midoriya because he got the storyline you wanted?” As petty as it sounds, saying it aloud, Kirishima gets it. Bakugou had been a teenager himself, a young actor with nothing but promise. It must have been a risk, fighting for that storyline. And to have it not given to him— Kirishima thinks he can understand that anger. “But that wasn’t Midoriya’s fault, was it?”

“He only looks innocent,” Bakugou growls. “The two of you’d probably get along, fuck. You both just keep smiling like idiots, no matter what’s going on in your heads.”

“I can’t imagine him being some kind of, I dunno, role-stealing mastermind,” Kirishima says.

“Because you’re an idiot,” Bakugou tells him.

“Maybe,” Kirishima says agreeably. “But I have a pretty good imagination.”

Bakugou huffs, not offering anything immediate response.

It’s sort of nice, just lying there beside him. Kirishima has never dated anyone all that seriously, before. The time he’s spent with Bakugou has now thoroughly outlasted any of the strings of dates he’s been on with anyone else. And now, it’s like Bakugou has honestly opened up to him. Like he would have if he and Kirishima were really dating.

“Thanks for telling me,” Kirishima says, sincerely.

“Like it matters. You’re not going to be on my side.” He says the last of that snidely, mocking Kirishima’s earlier words.

“But I am,” Kirishima says. “I mean, I don’t want to kill Midoriya or whatever it is you’re after, but I get you, man. And if us doing— you know, *this*—is going to help you get the roles you want, I am so for it.”

“Yeah?” Bakugou drawls, “And what the fuck’s in it for you?”

Kirishima can think of a lot of things. Because he’s selfish, and even if all of this will mean nothing, in the end, he’s enjoying this time with Bakugou. He likes being with him.

But the first thing that makes it out of his mouth is no grand declaration. “Well, you know. I get to take credit for you not being terrible at kissing, now.”

Red rises from Bakugou’s neck up to his temples, like the temperature rising in a thermometer. Then he shoves Kirishima off the bed.

Chapter End Notes

["i'm glad i hitched my apple wagon to your star" - the boy least likely to](#)

i'm sorry it's taking me awhile to respond to everyone's comments! i truly appreciate each and every one of them, and will get through my inbox as i have time. thanks for all your support, so far!!

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Kirishima-san, everyone!” Yaoyorozu is standing at the door to greet them, her dark hair and long dress blown back by the sea breeze. She waves. “I’m so glad you made it, welcome!”

With a groan, the four members of Riot topple out of the car and onto the pathway in front of Yaoyorozu’s summer home. A few days ago, booking a two-day vacation to the remote seaside town had seemed like a great idea. But after playing a show last night and waking up before sunrise this morning to drive out, they’re having second thoughts.

“I hope your drive was alright,” Yaoyorozu is saying, coming towards them. It’s only mid-morning, but she’s styled to perfection. Her dress is turquoise and peach and white, the loose fabric conveying class and comfort all at once.

Jirou’s the first to recover herself. After stifling a yawn, she rubs a hand over her face. “Yeah. It was— great. Totally great.” She stands up a bit straighter, smoothing down her hair and trying to appear less than dead on her feet.

Ashido and Kaminari nod in time. “Thanks for the invite,” Ashido says. “And for sending the car. It’s too much, you know.”

Yaoyorozu waves them all off. “Nonsense! The house is just sitting here, otherwise, and there’s room for everyone! Now, come it— I’ve had breakfast laid out for all of you, and everyone else is inside! The omelet bar should take a moment to warm up, but we’ll get you started with tea, or coffee!”

She turns around to lead them inside, but the others linger for a moment before they follow her. The house looms in front of them, a massive structure that sits on the edge of the beach and casts a long shadow across the entire landscape.

“I feel like I just got slapped in the face with how rich she is,” Kaminari mutters ruefully.

“She’s so cute about it, though.” Ashido shakes her head.

They go after Yaoyorozu, leaving Jirou on the curb with Kirishima. Just before they, too, follow the others inside, Kirishima hears Jirou mumbling under her breath.

“Some people really are just completely different from the rest of us, aren’t they...”

There’s not much time to linger on Jirou’s words. Inside the house, a veritable feast of breakfast food has been laid out for them. Yaoyorozu is motioning them towards different options— rice and fresh fish, a juice bar, fresh waffles and pastries. Ashido and Kaminari grab plates and start loading them, smiling at Yaoyorozu’s enthusiasm.

Kirishima piles his own plate with breakfast sausages and then pulls out a chair at the long table. The kitchen opens out onto a deck, the glass doors pulled open so that the breeze and sunshine are let into the room. Soon enough, the others join him, and for a moment the five of them enjoy a companionable meal. And, then—

“If you would just listen, I’m sure you would see the sense in my position,” a loud, authoritative

voice says. “It would be in your best interests, in addition to benefitting the careers of your peers —”

“How many times do I have to tell you to *get lost*?”

Kirishima knows that voice well enough by now to expect it when Bakugou comes stomping into the kitchen. He’s dressed for the beach in black and red swim trunks, a familiar pair of expensive sunglasses hanging from the neck of his tank top. He’s looking over his shoulder, incensed, but as soon as he turns around he stops short.

For a moment, he just stands in the doorway, staring at Kirishima. Then, Sero and another dark-haired man crash into Bakugou, all three of them tumbling forward.

Ashido throws back her head and laughs as the three men get back to their feet. It’s Sero who recovers first, and he helps to detangle Bakugou and their other companion.

“Thank you, Sero-kun,” the man says, straightening his thin-framed glasses. He’s tall and broad-shouldered, wearing a track jacket over his beach attire. Kirishima doesn’t recognize him, though he feels like he should.

“Both of you get away from me,” Bakugou grounds out, sidestepping them and pulling out the chair next to Kirishima. He turns the chair around and sits in it backwards, reaching out to grab a piece of meat from Kirishima’s plate.

“Hello to you too, babe,” Kirishima says, rolling his eyes. “You know there’s a whole spread of food like, right there, right?”

The man in glasses clears his throat. “Bakugou-kun, aren’t you going to introduce us?”

Bakugou looks back at him with a look of disgust. “No.”

Kirishima elbows him in the side, then turns to newcomer. “I’m Kirishima—nice to meet you.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you,” the man says, extending a hand for Kirishima to shake. “I’m Iida Tenya. I’m an agent with Ingenium Talent, which you may have heard of. We’ve been very interested in you all, Kirishima-kun. Your band’s right has been nothing short of meteoric, and I have to ask you about who’s managing—”

He shows no signs of slowing down until Yaoyorozu gets to her feet and says, “Iida-san, didn’t we decide that there’d be no work talk, this weekend?”

Iida steps back, abashed. “Of course. I didn’t mean—”

“It wasn’t his fault,” Sero puts in. “I got him started, asking him to talk to Bakugou. We’ll lay off now, Yaoyorozu. Promise.”

“Talk to you about what?” Kirishima asks Bakugou.

“Some bullshit,” Bakugou mutters, and then he reaches out and drains Kirishima’s glass of orange juice.

Kirishima raises a brow. “You don’t have to be a brat,” he says casually. “Besides, you shouldn’t be grumpy, anymore. Look, I’m here now.”

He means it as a joke. He doesn’t really expect that Bakugou will be happier with him around, or

that he was waiting for Kirishima to arrive. Honestly, he's found that the only way he can really play at being Bakugou's boyfriend is if he turns all of it—the affection and familiarity—into a joke with himself.

But then Bakugou surprises him. He scoffs, “Yeah, only after sticking me with these losers for a day.”

Kirishima grins despite himself. “Sorry?”

“Tida-kun, have you see—” Again, from the hallway, Kirishima hears a voice before he sees who it belongs to. But before he has a chance to recognize the person, they let out a gasp and run towards him. “Kirishima-kun! You made it!”

Uraraka is suddenly in front of him, grabbing both of his hands and smiling widely. “I’m so glad you’re here,” she says, before she spots Bakugou and suddenly turns indignant. “Is that why you just ran away? You were coming to meet Kirishima-kun?”

Bakugou leans forward in his chair, staring Uraraka down. “So what?”

“You’re impossible,” she tells him. She turns to Kirishima. “He’s impossible.”

Kirishima nods sagely. “Believe me, I know.”

The kitchen is open enough to not feel crowded, even as the newcomers grab their own plates of food and pull up chairs around the table. They go through introductions, and it’s only Bakugou who holds himself back from the laughter and conversation. He’s not doing much of anything, until the last members of the group arrive.

Todoroki and Midoriya come into the kitchen together. They’re talking in low voices, but stop when they realize how many people are gathered there. Kaminari, Jirou and Yaoyorozu are talking on one side of the table, Ashido and Uraraka between them and Bakugou and Kirishima. Iida and Sero complete the circle, with Sero across from Ashido and next to Kaminari.

“Everyone’s here,” Midoriya says, smiling brightly. “It’s good to see you again, Kirishima-kun.”

Kirishima has never been able to quite label the nature of Midoriya’s appeal. He doesn’t have Bakugou’s fierce good-looks or Todoroki’s sculpted beauty. But there’s something so warm and open about his face, a kindness and sincerity that radiate through everything he does. The world had fallen in love with Midoriya Izuku through *UA* and his character Daiki, and now, being in the same room as him, it’s impossible not to see why. He’s a person who lights up a room with his very presence.

Midoriya’s gaze drifts to Bakugou and Kirishima, his brow furrowing slightly as he takes in the sight of Bakugou leaning across Kirishima to steal food off his plate.

“Dude,” Kaminari says, looking up, “We watched your entire show in like, four days. It was *amazing*.”

Midoriya’s cheeks turn a bit pink, but he and Todoroki go over to sit with Kaminari on his side of the table.

Before they can get settled, Bakugou kicks his chair back from the table with an audible slide across the wood-paneled floor. He gets to his feet without looking at anyone, and then stomps back out of the kitchen.

Midoriya watches him leave, the smile frozen on his face.

Uraraka frowns after Bakugou. “Honestly,” she murmurs. “I wanted them to talk this out *before* everyone got here...”

Kirishima doesn’t ask her to clarify. Instead, he gets up and follows Bakugou out of the kitchen, waving his apologies at the rest of the group.

It doesn’t take him long to find him. The house is wide and open— the rooms blend into each other, many of them connected just doorways. Bakugou is in a sitting room, standing up and staring out at the ocean through the massive glass panels.

Kirishima steps up beside him. If they were in public, maybe he’d feel comfortable touching Bakugou— resting his hand on Bakugou’s shoulder or his hip, grabbing his hand. But without any eyes on them, Kirishima doesn’t have the excuse to do any of those things.

“Hey,” he says, when Bakugou doesn’t acknowledge his presence for a moment, “Is this— okay? I know I asked you to come, but if you really can’t stand it you should have told me.”

“It’s fine,” Bakugou grits out. His hands are clenched at his sides.

Kirishima doesn’t believe him. From what Uraraka had told him, from what Bakugou himself had said, Kirishima figured that this outing would be good for him. That he’d have a chance to be among his not-friends again, in a relaxed way, and that they’d maybe be able to mend some broken fences. But Bakugou doesn’t even want to try.

“I don’t want you to be miserable for the next two days,” Kirishima says, brow furrowing.

“He’s going to figure it out,” Bakugou spits out.

“What?”

“Deku,” Bakugou hisses, voice going low. “He’s a fucking— ugh. He notices *everything*. He can’t know that we’re in a bullshit relationship.” Bakugou’s facial expression barely changes, but the crease between his brows deepens. He’s genuinely concerned about this.

“Why? I mean, Ashido and the others know. So it wouldn’t—”

“It would ruin *everything*,” Bakugou says, his voice so fierce and insistent and Kirishima immediately believes him. Bakugou wouldn’t care this much, if Midoriya didn’t represent an actual threat to what Bakugou is trying to do.

“Okay,” Kirishima says. “It’s fine, we’ve practiced. No one’s going to figure it out. Everyone thinks we’re dating, it’s fine.”

Bakugou opens his mouth to respond, but then freezes when they both hear footsteps just outside the room.

“Fuck,” Bakugou growls. Then he grabs Kirishima by the neck of his t-shirt and pulls him forward, covering his mouth in a wet, sloppy kiss. It’s been a few days since they were together last, but Kirishima remembers how to respond to these kisses. For a moment, he just shuts his eyes and lets himself lean into it. Bakugou reaches up a hand and tugs on Kirishima’s ponytail, carding his fingers through Kirishima’s loose hair.

“Bakugou-kun, Kirishima-ku—” Uraraka’s voice is lost in a squeak as she enters the room. “I’m,

ah—sorry to interrupt!”

The last words come out all in a rush, and Kirishima feels Bakugou’s lips pull into a smile against his just before he lets Kirishima go. Kirishima sucks in a breath, smoothing out his hair and trying not to look disappointed that the kiss is over.

“What the fuck’re you doing, walking it on us?” Bakugou growls, sounding honestly indignant.

“I didn’t mean to,” Uraraka says, waving her hands in front of her. “Besides, you could’ve found a room with a door.”

“You were looking for us?” Kirishima asks. He smiles, but it feels strained. That was one way to keep their cover, he supposes, but a little warning would have been nice.

“We’re going down to the beach,” Uraraka says, voice returning to a normal range even though her face is still red. “And I don’t care how in love you guys are, Bakugou-kun isn’t allowed to keep you all to himself!”

She grabs Kirishima by the arm and tugs him forward, Bakugou rolling his eyes even as he falls into step with them. Uraraka’s chatter carries them through the house to the others, but the entire time Kirishima is distracted.

Whatever Bakugou wants from this weekend, from him in general, Kirishima can deal with. As long as he gets to be close to Bakugou, he’s willing to play along.

—

It takes a few minutes to gather everyone up to head down to the beach. Yaoyorozu takes the lead, walking with Jirou and Ashido and pointing out the various points on the horizon to them. Bakugou walks more or less with Todoroki, and Midoriya and Iida bring up the rear of the group with Sero and Kaminari. Kirishima and Uraraka end up in the middle of the crowd.

“It’s a private beach,” Uraraka explains. “Honestly, I’d never been to one before Momo-chan started inviting us here. I was in Hawaii last week, with my parents, and we went to a public resort. I sometimes like that better, but at home it’s impossible. One of us alone would be recognized, so all of together is basically impossible.”

Kirishima winces sympathetically. “I only end up in the tabloids when I’m with Bakugou, but even that’s a bit weird.”

Uraraka hooks her thumbs into the pockets of her jean shorts. Her pink swimsuit leaves her shoulders bare, and she’s tied up her hair so that the dotting of freckles across her shoulders and the back of her neck is visible. “Mm-hm. I’ve seen those pictures, you know.”

She smiles slyly at him, and Kirishima shifts with embarrassment. He’d mentioned the tabloids without thinking, and he knows Uraraka doesn’t mind his relationship with Bakugou, but it’s still so awkward. She played his love interest for five years, and they’d been thought of as a real life couple for longer than that. Surely, if anyone was going to discover their secret, it’d be her?

“I still feel like I should apologize,” Kirishima says, “I mean, I didn’t mean for it all to come out without warning, to you. That day, at Hagakure’s party—you must think I was trying to fool you, or something.”

Uraraka waves her hands, flustered. “Of course not! To be honest, it happened almost at a perfect time—I take my parents to Hawaii every year, at the same time. I didn’t wake up to a media

ambush, or something. Iida-kun handled the press while I was out of the country, and I didn't have to deal with it at all."

Kirishima feels a bit better, about that. He hasn't been ambushed by any media, himself, but he imagines that's because Bakugou's the real draw to the story. No one really cares about Kirishima Eijirou, rhythm guitarist and lyricist of Riot. Even the fame Riot is gaining from the relationship is just that— a new hype around the band, rather than Kirishima himself.

As though she senses his discomfort, Uraraka nudges Kirishima with her elbow and pitches her voice low. "It's okay," she says conspiratorily. "I'm happy you and Bakugou-kun have found each other. You really like him, right?"

She says it as though it's a given. She'd seen them kissing, and to her they'd probably seemed like a young couple caught at the height of passion. And, foolish as it is, Kirishima wouldn't call that a lie. At least, not on his end.

"I really do," he says, with quiet intensity. "I really like— *oh*."

They've stopped a ways down the beach, everyone setting down umbrellas and towels and bags. Bakugou has wasted no time in shedding his shoes and stripping off his tank top. But he pauses when he feels Kirishima's eyes on him.

"You do a hell of a lot of staring," Bakugou says, voice sharp and satisfied. It's like he *likes* having Kirishima watching him.

Kirishima swallows roughly, dragging his eyes from Bakugou's abs up to his face. Play it cool, he thinks. Act natural!

"I'm allowed to, aren't I?" he says, then resists the urge to smack his hand against his forehead. What a stupid line.

Bakugou scoffs, turning away. "Whatever. We're racing out to the island, are you coming or what?"

Kirishima blinks and looks around— Midoriya and Todoroki have also stripped down to their trunks, Midoriya stretching out his arms and Todoroki waiting with a staid calm beside him.

"Um— no one else?" Kirishima asks, glancing around.

Uraraka rolls her eyes. "Bakugou-kun just wants to race because Tsuyu-chan isn't here to wipe the floor with him. It's better not to indulge him, Kirishima-kun."

"It's more trouble than it's worth," Sero says, laying out on the sand. "It won't stop with the race, Kirishima. You're going to be proving how strong or fast you are for the rest of the day."

Kirishima lets out a chuckle. "That sounds pretty fun, actually."

"Then get a fucking move on," Bakugou says, heading for the waves. His trunks sit low on his hips, revealing the shape of his hipbones.

Kirishima sighs a little— out of appreciation, probably. "You're on."

—

The island is really a collection of large rocks, some meters out from the beach. By the time he

reaches it, Kirishima knows he's come in fourth in the race. Bakugou and Todoroki had sped ahead almost immediately, and Kirishima had kept pace with Midoriya until the end. Now, he staggers onto the rock and sees Todoroki and Midoriya lying out against it. There isn't much space left, and Kirishima edges around Todoroki's head and tries to avoid stepping on anyone's outstretched arms. Bakugou is sitting on the edge of the rock, legs dangling into the water.

There's no place for Kirishima, here. Not just physically, but— the three of them, they've known each other for so long. They became famous together, grew up into a world where everyone knows who they are. Even though Bakugou had yelled something about Midoriya only being allowed to come because he'd lose—there was still a natural rhythm to that. Why did Kirishima ever think that he could fit, here?

“Oi, hair for brains,” Bakugou snaps at him. “What are you doing?”

He doesn't gesture overtly, but Kirishima follows his gaze to the stretch of rock left between him and Midoriya. Kirishima breaks into a grin as he sits between them, heaving a bit as he catches his breath.

“Who won?” he asks, when his lungs stop burning.

“This candy-cane fucker cheated,” Bakugou growls, reaching out to shove Todoroki.

Todoroki barely blinks as he edges out of Bakugou's reach. Instead of denying it, he rolls gracefully off the rock and into the water, causing a splash that drenches Bakugou from head to toe.

“Fuck,” Bakugou repeats, viciously, before diving into the water to engage in a water war. He chases after Todoroki in the water, sending up splashes like watery explosions.

Next to Kirishima, Midoriya laughs. His dark green hair is flattened by the water, making his eyes look even larger.

Kirishima chuckles, himself. “Are they always like that?”

Midoriya rolls over to face Kirishima. “Mn, not always. Kacchan's been a lot happier than usual, lately. I think Todoroki-kun finds him easier to deal with when he's not upset about something.”

Kirishima wonders if this is what Bakugou is like when he's happy. It must show on his face, because Midoriya cocks his head to one side and gives Kirishima an assessing look.

“You probably already know this, because you and Kacchan are dating, but it's hard to get how he actually feels out of him. After this morning, I thought he was mad at me, but— right now it feels like how it used to when we were kids.”

Something about his tone makes Kirishima think that he's not talking about being fifteen-years-old and on the set of *UA*.

“How long've you guys known each other?”

Midoriya rolls up to a sitting position, legs crossed as he holds onto his ankles. “Forever, really. We grew up in the same neighborhood. I know what I'm talking about when I say Kacchan is happy, right now.”

Kirishima looks out at Bakugou, still splashing around in the ocean as Todoroki stays just beyond his reach. Bakugou's eyebrows are narrowed dangerously, cutting a sharp line into his face, but

he's smiling. There's a fierce glint in his eye and the bright sun shines off the white of his teeth. It's unfair, how beautiful he looks at that moment. It reminds Kirishima of the barely-contained sensuality of the Best Jeanist billboard, or the brooding depth of emotions that Nobuhiko showed on *UA*. Everything Bakugou does, he does with complete commitment and deep intensity.

"He's really talented, isn't he," Kirishima mumbles, idle thoughts escaping him.

Midoriya puffs up with something like pride. "Kacchan's the most talented person I know," he says honestly. "Definitely the best actor I've ever met, even though he can be kind of a jerk about that. But there's no denying it."

Of course, Kirishima has always known that. Bakugou is an unfairly talented actor. He is so very, very good at what he does.

And right now, he's playing out a role in his real life. He's worried about Midoriya finding out the truth, and so he's acting the part with perfect subtlety.

Kirishima knew all this, has always know it. So why does it hurt to remember it, now?

They let the sun dry the water off their backs, until Bakugou demands another race back to shore. It's harder to tell the standings when they all stumble onto the beach, exhausted.

"Can we take a break, now," Todoroki asks, voice barely inflected.

"Fine," Bakugou concedes, "But after lunch we're deciding a champion once and for all. Kirishima, we better fucking win."

We. Like he and Bakugou are a team, in this together. Kirishima doesn't know when Midoriya and Todoroki became their enemies, but that's hardly important.

"Duh," he says, ringing the water out of his ponytail. "We'll be the ultimate champions."

While they've been gone, the others have laid out a picnic lunch. Bentos are stacked on one blanket, which is laid in a patch-work with several others to make room for everyone to sit. Sero is manning a cooler, handing out sodas and beer. Kirishima takes a can gratefully, sipping on his drink as he takes a seat.

Kirishima sits next to Bakugou with his lunch, with Ashido on his other side. Jirou and Yaoyorozu are next to Ashido, everyone else arranged in smaller groups. Kirishima doesn't expect Iida to grab his bento and come to sit beside him and Bakugou.

"Hello again, Kirishima-kun," he says, sitting with a strange sort of formality.

Bakugou shoots him a glare, but otherwise ignores him in favor of methodologically shoveling rice into his mouth.

"Yo," Kirishima says. "You guys have fun on land?"

"Of course," Iida says, with a smile. "But besides that, I wanted to thank you."

"What for?" Kirishima has never met Iida, before today. He doesn't know what the guy would have to thank him for.

Iida casts a significant look in Bakugou's direction. "I believe we can credit you with making this a complete reunion," he says. "Midoriya-kun and Uraraka-kun may not say so, but this means a lot to

them. And so, we are grateful to you.”

Gratitude is an uncomfortable burden, especially when unearned. Kirishima smiles in a strained way, under the weight of Iida’s matter-of-fact thanks.

“I didn’t do anything,” he tries to protest.

Bakugou lets out an irritated huff. “I wouldn’t be here if you weren’t.”

And maybe that *is* true— Kirishima had asked Bakugou, over and over, if he’d consider going. And part of that was Kirishima’s selfishness. He wanted to go, to spend time with Uraraka who’d invited him so kindly, to get to know these people who shine like bright lights in a cityscape. And he’d also been meddling— wanting Bakugou to reconcile with his own friends because Kirishima thought that that would be best for all of them.

Iida tilts his head to one side, considering the space between Kirishima and Bakugou and nodding to himself. “Just as I thought. Anyone who Bakugou-kun would start a relationship with would surely be a very special person.”

“Not really,” Kirishima says. “I’m just a normal guy.”

Bakugou rolls his eyes and stabs at his lunch more viciously than is strictly necessary.

“In any case,” Iida says, “I believe you are a good influence. Has Bakugou-kun spoken to you about the movie he’s been offered?”

Not exactly, Kirishima almost says. But around a bite of his lunch, he recalls, “The one that Midoriya is going to be in?” He casts a worried glance in Bakugou’s direction, but he doesn’t react.

Iida nods again. “Actually, Uraraka-kun, Midoriya-kun and Todoroki-kun are all signed on. I represent all three of them. And the director and producers agree that if Bakugou-kun were in the movie, as well, the entire value of the production would skyrocket.”

Kirishima can just imagine. The four *UA* alum haven’t worked together since the show wrapped. Todoroki and Bakugou were both in *Ground Zero*, and Uraraka and Midoriya have done a project or two together. But this would be a true reunion.

“I don’t think he really cares about that,” Kirishima says honestly.

Midoriya has gotten up from his side of the picnic, going around the group with a bag of popsicles and single-serve ice cream. But when he gets to Iida, Bakugou and Kirishima, he pauses. He passes Iida an ice cream, then bites down on his lower lip like he’s mulling something over.

“You know, Kacchan,” he says softly, “It’s not for any of the press stuff that All Might wants you on this one.”

Now, Bakugou does react. His eyes flick up to Midoriya’s and he sneers. “You still fucking call him that? Grow up, Deku.”

Red rises in Midoriya’s cheeks, but he looks indignant rather than embarrassed. “That’s not the point—”

Bakugou reaches out and grabs the bag of desserts from Midoriya, riffling through until he finds something he wants. He throws the bag back in Midoriya’s face. “If Yagi wants me on his stupid movie, he can ask me himself.”

It's when Bakugou says the name that Kirishima finally makes the connection— Yagi Toshinori, the highest-paid actor in history, star of the multiple-installment *All Might* series of superhero films. He had retired after a long-term illness had taken him out of the game for several years. He'd resurfaced just a few years ago, returning not to acting but directing. And Midoriya has had considerable roles in his last two movies, both of which were run-away successes.

"Holy shit," Kirishima says, "Yagi Toshinori wants you in his movie? That's— that's amazing."

Bakugou scowls at him. "It's not that goddamn special."

Midoriya frowns like he's about to take issue with that.

"You say that like you know for sure. I'm not even a film guy and I know that Yagi is like, next level." Kirishima forgets that he's supposed to be acting the supportive boyfriend— he thinks about watching a movie with *UA*'s complete main cast, directed by a legend. He couldn't have dreamed up anything better.

"Because I do," Bakugou growls, biting into his popsicle.

"Kacchan was in the seventh *All Might* movie," Midoriya puts in, helpfully. "It was his first role, when we were four-years-old. They used to bring it up, sometimes, when we did interviews for *UA*."

That rings a bell, albeit vaguely. Kirishima had paid attention to those interviews, but had taken it as given that *UA* was Bakugou's breakout role. Now he wonders, with a strange sort of fascination, what Bakugou was like as a four-year-old actor.

From a few feet away, the picnic erupts with noise. Kaminari is sitting cross-legged on the blanket, surrounded by Jirou, Ashido and Sero. Sero is leaning over Kaminari's shoulder to point something out on the phone screen that they're all glued to.

"No way," Kaminari shrieks, "he's so *cute*."

Bakugou's head whips to the side, eyes roaming over Kaminari and the others until they come to rest on Sero. "Soy Sauce, you better not've—"

Sero looks up and smiles guiltily. "Too late."

"Kirishima," Ashido calls out, "Come look at this!" She waves the phone at him.

Kirishima goes, even though Bakugou makes a strangled sound of protest. Ashido holds out the phone to him, on which an old movie trailer is playing on a loop. Most of it is action shots and explosions— Yagi Toshinori in his prime, golden hair and bulging muscles and unflappable smile. But then, amongst the clips of Yagi's character All Might punching his way through walls, is a small boy. He's being grabbed by a shadowed figure, crying as he's ripped out of All Might's arms.

When the title card comes up, it ends on a scene of the boy reaching out for All Might's hand. It's Bakugou, his features unmistakable even without his trademark scowl. His pale blond hair is like dandelion fluff, his expression open and genuine and heart-wrenching.

Kaminari is barely holding back his laughter. "I can't believe it," he wheezes, "he's so grumpy all the time but look at him! He's like, a little angel. What the hell."

The others are covering their faces in their hands, smothering their laughter and cooing over the

image of Bakugou as a small child. Behind him, Kirishima hears another strangled noise as Bakugou steps up and wrenches the phone out of his grip.

“Shut the fuck up,” he seethes, holding the phone in a painfully-tight grip.

“Are they... *making fun* of Kacchan?” Midoriya asks in the world’s least-subtle whisper to Iida.

Iida nudges his glasses up his nose and nods. “It would appear so.”

“We’re not saying anything bad,” Ashido says to Bakugou. “You *were* cute. And Kirishima definitely needs to see this, as your boyfriend.”

Bakugou squeezes the phone so hard that they all hear a crack.

“Dude!” Kaminari says, “That’s my phone!”

Bakugou chucks it back at him, then stalks away. He wrenches up one of the free blankets and makes his way up the beach, away from the rest of the group.

“Huh,” Midoriya says, like he can’t quite process what he’s just witnessed.

Kirishima jogs up the beach to join Bakugou. He’s laid out the blanket and is now sitting up on it, knees against his chest as he stares out at the ocean.

“Nudge over,” Kirishima says to him, coming to sit beside him.

“If you say anything,” Bakugou starts, but Kirishima cuts him off.

“What, I’m going to make fun of you for being a professional actor when the rest of us were still in the playpen?” He laughs at how ludicrous the thought is. “You know, I’ve known you were pretty cool for a while, but I had no idea you were so young when you got started.”

The scowl is etched across Bakugou’s face like carvings into stone. “We’re not fucking talking about this.”

Kirishima doesn’t bother pointing out that Bakugou had not made good on that statement, in the past. Instead, he sits cross-legged on the blanket with Bakugou, watching the gentle ebb and flow of the waves against the sand.

Bakugou doesn’t say anything for several long minutes. But he doesn’t tell Kirishima to leave, even as he leans back to lie down against the sand. The sunlight catches on his pale hair, making it stand out a stark gold— almost like Yagi Toshinori’s.

Kirishima doesn’t know how long he sits there watching Bakugou. But it’s long enough to notice when the tension eases out of his limbs, when his eyes flutter closed as he falls asleep. The sun is warm against Kirishima’s face, and he thinks Bakugou has the right idea of it. The blanket is big enough for both of them, so Kirishima lies back and lets the rhythm of the waves lull him.

He’s half asleep already when Bakugou lets out an incoherent mumble and rolls over, closing the last bit of distance between them. They’re both still bare-chested from their swim, salt and sand dried against their skin. But even so, it’s natural and comfortable to drape an arm across Bakugou’s chest, to let his hand rest against the nape of Bakugou’s neck. Kirishima can feel Bakugou’s breath against his cheek, imagines his heart beating in time to the waves.

["family friend" - the vaccines](#)

we clearly need more than one chapter of beach vacation, am i right. also i officially don't know how many chapters this fic is going to be, even though there's definitely an ending we will definitely get to. your guess for how long this will end up is as good as mine, at this point.

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He wakes up to a leaden weight against his chest, somehow comforting rather than suffocating. As Kirishima opens his eyes, he sees the ocean dyed red and orange by the setting sun. Lying across his chest is Bakugou, fast asleep. The sand is gritty underneath Kirishima's back where he's been pushed off the beach blanket, and he's cold where the ocean breeze passes over his bare skin. Still, he's reluctant to move.

Bakugou's face is softer in sleep, even though there remains a line of worry between his brows. His lips are gently parted as he breathes through his mouth, and one of his arms is draped over Kirishima's waist.

Kirishima has fantasized about waking up to the sight of an unfairly good-looking man, before. But his daydreams are never like this, never this soft, like a watercolor painting. He holds his breath, tenderness welling up inside of him as he looks down at Bakugou and imagines kissing him awake.

"Damnit," Kirishima mutters, betrayed by his own thoughts, his own desires.

Immediately, Bakugou stirs. The crease between his brows deepens, and he makes an unhappy noise as he curls closer to Kirishima.

Kirishima's heart beats furiously against his chest as he says, "Sorry, sorry!"

It's an instinctive response, the same one he makes whenever he wakes up one of his roommates too early in the morning. But it's exactly the wrong thing to do at this moment, because it causes Bakugou's eyes to flutter open as he wakes.

Kirishima sucks in a breath and braces himself for impact. He's sure that at any second, Bakugou will register exactly how they've been sleeping, and there'll be hell to pay.

But Bakugou doesn't explode. His eyes go from clouded to sharply alert, and he pushes himself up into a seated position as he rubs at his eyes with the heels of his hands. All the while, Kirishima holds his breath and waits.

"What?" Bakugou growls, after a moment. His voice is sleep rough, and Kirishima desperately tries not to think of other situations that would cause his voice to pitch that low. "What the fuck're you staring at, Kirishima?"

I'm waiting for you to realize you want to kill me, Kirishima thinks. But the moment doesn't arrive. Bakugou proceeds to brush the sand off his skin, shivering in the cooling air. He doesn't move away from Kirishima, even though their legs are practically tangled together. He doesn't avert his gaze from Kirishima's bare chest, doesn't put any space between them.

It's then that Kirishima realizes—Bakugou did not wake up to the same situation that he had. Bakugou did not wake to fantasies of a romantic kiss, or the impossibility of lying next to his long-time crush. The only reason Kirishima is embarrassed, right now, is because he fears his reactions will reveal too much. He's scared that Bakugou will realize how he feels.

But Bakugou can be utterly casual, can sit too close beside him without giving a single fuck, because this doesn't mean anything to him. It's a role he's paying, and he needn't fear revealing

feelings he doesn't have.

"What's wrong with you?" Bakugou says, shoving half-heartedly at Kirishima's side. "You look like you're going to puke."

Kirishima isn't nauseous, not unless what he's about to throw up is his heart.

The furrow on Bakugou's brow deepens, confusion and irritation warring over his face. "What are you—"

"Kirishima, Bakugou! Time to get up!"

They turn simultaneously to see Ashido and Uraraka running up the beach towards them. They're both smiling widely, but when Ashido spots the two of them her expression turns sly.

"You guys've been sleeping for hours," she complains, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Kirishima, come hang out with me."

Bakugou lets out a huffy breath. "Maybe he wanted to get away from you losers."

"Don't be rude," Uraraka says. "And anyway, Kirishima-kun came here to spend time with all of us, didn't you?"

Kirishima smiles weakly as he looks around at the three of them. So far, he's proven nearly incapable of saying no to any of these people.

"We can all hang out together?" he suggests, grabbing Bakugou by the elbow so that he can hoist them both to their feet.

Bakugou sputters and edges out of his grip. "Gross."

"That's kind of sweet," Uraraka says, tapping one finger against her chin. She looks at Ashido and says, "Bakugou-kun doesn't want to share his boyfriend with us."

"Too bad," Ashido says, grabbing Kirishima's hand and tugging him forward. "I had dibs first, Bakugou!" She sticks her tongue out.

"Fuck off, Black-eyes," Bakugou grouches, stomping forward so that the four of them are walking in a line.

Kirishima reaches back to grab up the beach blanket, draping it over his arm as he walks between Bakugou and Ashido. Uraraka walks on Bakugou's other side, still wearing a thoughtful expression. When Kirishima accidentally catches her eye, he blushes and looks away.

—

Yaoyorozu has a lot of ideas about what a proper beach trip entails. The picnic meals had been one item on her list, and another is dinner around a bonfire. They move their party up the beach to where a few fire pits are marked out, and it's Todoroki who kneels in the sand and gets the blaze started. They settle in a circle around the glowing flames just after the sun has set completely, hoodies and t-shirts thrown on in a hurry as the night grows colder.

"You know what goes great with bonfires," Kaminari says, tapping his fingers against his thigh.

"No," Yaoyorozu says, leaning towards him with rapt attention, "I don't."

Kaminari grins and putts up both his hands in finger-guns. “Music, of course.”

Yaoyorozu claps her hands together, nodding. “Of course! We’ve never had musicians with us, before, but you all must play us something! I haven’t even gotten to see you in concert, yet.”

Jirou, sitting next to Kaminari, sits up with a look of mild panic on her features. “I don’t think— I mean— we’re a rock band, that’s not really your scene, is it?”

Yaoyorozu frowns thoughtfully. “I like music,” she says, “And I’m sure I’d like anything you were a part of, Jirou-san.”

Jirou laughs nervously. “Er, if you think so.”

On the other side of their lopsided circle, Bakugou rolls his eyes and leans further against Kirishima. “Shit, Ponytail’s so obvious.”

Kirishima blinks at him. “What do you mean?”

Bakugou gives him a flat look that says nothing so much as *You’re an idiot and I don’t know why I hang out with you*. But then he waves a hand towards Yaoyorozu and Jirou. “Yaoyorozu. Whatever the stuck-up, rich version of getting in someone’s pants is, that’s what she’s trying with your bandmate over there.”

Kirishima chokes on a laugh. “What, *no*. Seriously?”

“Like I said, it’s fucking obvious.” Bakugou takes a sip from the soda can he’s nursing, shaking his head. “No wonder everyone loses their goddamn minds when someone comes out, this gay shit really is contagious.”

This time, Kirishima laughs properly. “Can’t argue with you there. But Jirou’s been out for as long as I’ve known her, at least.”

Bakugou makes a noncommittal noise. “Good news for Ponytail, then.”

Kirishima can’t help but wonder how that would play out— he’s never heard anything in the media about Yaoyorozu liking women. Not everyone is as resilient as Bakugou, who was outed so unceremoniously.

“Kirishima,” Jirou calls out, waving one hand at him. “Get over here, we’re going to play!”

Sure enough, someone has procured the two acoustic guitars that Jirou and Kirishima had brought with them to the beach house. Kirishima smiles an apology at Bakugou as he extracts himself from his side, going over to join the rest of Riot. He takes one of the guitars and sits next to Jirou, Ashido and Kaminari on either side of them.

The others— Yaoyorozu, Sero, Uraraka, Iida, Midoriya and Todoroki— gather around so that everyone is on one side of the fire. Bakugou trudges over last, sitting down with Todoroki and Iida when he makes sure that Midoriya is sitting on the other side of the group with Uraraka.

All eyes are on the four of them as Jirou starts strumming out a steady rhythm. Ashido picks up the lines of the song. It’s not one of theirs, but instead an old classic that calls to mind the fleeting days of summer and youth. It’s a crowd-pleaser, and when it’s through Yaoyorozu leads the others in rapturous applause. Bakugou sits with his arms crossed over his chest, frowning.

“Keep going!” Uraraka calls out, and so they oblige.

It's easy to get lost in playing music, especially in such a casual setting. Kirishima strums his guitar, following Jirou's lead through a series of songs as Kaminari taps out beats against his thighs and punctuates their rhythms with claps. Ashido pulls them along with her voice, as enticing as a siren's when they can all hear the ocean waves crashing behind them.

When they've made it through a couple songs, Jirou nudges Kirishima in the side. "How about the new one you've been working on."

"I haven't taught Ashido the lyrics, yet," Kirishima protests.

Beside him, Ashido lets out an exaggerated sigh. "So? You can sing it."

"No one wants to hear that," Kirishima insists.

"You're being stupid," Ashido says. She addresses their audience, "Tell him he's being stupid."

"You can do it, Kirishima-kun," Uraraka says, giving him a thumbs-up.

Bakugou, on the other hand, glares him down. "You're being stupid."

Ashido grins at him when he says it.

Surrounded by an eager crowd, Kirishima gulps a breath and feels his heart speed up in his chest. It's not that he doesn't sing—of course, he does. He sits at his window and writes songs all day, singing without any self-consciousness. He sings when the band practices together, just the four of them. He'd sung his entire life, and then when he'd met Ashido it'd been the two of them singing together.

He doesn't want to call it stage fright. He gets up on a stage nearly every night of his life and plays before the kind of crowds that Present Mic draws. But he's never managed to use his own voice when performing. Instead, it's Ashido who sings his lyrics. And he wants her to do it, wants the band to come together over the feelings he puts into words. But when someone else sings the words, they change meaning. They aren't his anymore, not in quite the same way. There's a safety in that. He can hide the true depths of his feelings, because he's not the one signing them into the world.

But now, with ten pairs of eyes on him, he has no excuses. He isn't standing on a stage, surrounded by strangers. Instead, there's the comfortable intimacy of the fire's glow and the distant sounds of the ocean. There's Ashido and Kaminari and Jirou surrounding him, and Bakugou sitting right across from him.

It's Bakugou he's looking at when he strums out the right chord. He smiles as he starts to sing, even though the song isn't necessarily a happy one. The lyrics come to him easily, since he's been scribbling them out for weeks now, refining them. Now, the story comes easily.

The feeling lives deep down inside of you, as sure as the blood in your veins. It's something you wouldn't notice unless you think to look for it, because it's a part of you before you even realize it. Like oxygen, you don't know that you rely on it until it's missing. But there's a reason you keep the truth hidden, even from yourself. Because once you give it a name, once you acknowledge it, there's nowhere left to hide. You're not the only one painfully aware of the truth—everyone else can see it now, too. And that's the riskiest thing, because something seen can become something rejected. Your feelings, safe when they are unknown, are vulnerable when brought into the light. You keep pretending, because it's easier than admitting you're in love.

Kirishima's fingers pause against his guitar before his voice stops. He looks down, catches a

breath, and then he lifts his gaze.

Nine people are facing him, their attention displayed in different ways. Iida and Yaoyorozu are leaning forward like they can catch more of the song, that way. Midoriya has one hand cupped over his mouth, gaze sharp and analytical. Todoroki's eyes are closed, and Uraraka is swaying in time to the echoes of the music. Sero catches Kirishima's eye and grins widely. But Bakugou sits in the shifting shadows caused by the fire and glares, his eyes burning like smoldering embers.

Kirishima lets out a hiccupping laugh, then sets his guitar aside. "It's not really finished," he says by way of apology, "Usually we work on the songs all together, but that one's still just me, so."

"So?" Kaminari says derisively, planting a hand on top of Kirishima's head. "Dude, *shut up*. That was amazing."

And then, all around him, the others start agreeing. Yaoyorozu and Iida are clapping and Sero is calling out praise and Ashido is wearing an I-told-you-so expression. Kirishima's entire face goes red, but he can't help but smile through his embarrassment. Moisture gathers at the corners of his eyes, and he brushes it away impatiently.

Surrounded by these people, each of whom is immensely talented in their own way, Kirishima thought he would feel inadequate. But instead, he's surrounded by warmth and acceptance, and his heart has never felt so full before.

But then he looks up and catches Bakugou's eye, again, and he wonders how they went from leaning against each other on the other side of the fire to Bakugou staring at him with a cold anger in his eyes.

—

The fire has gone down to embers, but everyone is still laying out against the sand, too lazy and content to move just yet. Jirou is leaning against Kaminari as she holds out a hand and displays the tattoo inked across the inner portion of her forearm—a treble clef against the five lines of a musical staff, and then a line of precise notes.

Yaoyorozu trails her fingers across the tattoo almost before she's aware of it, then sits back with pink cheeks. "Is it just random notes, or a specific song?"

"It's a song," Jirou tells her. Her cheeks are getting redder, too. Instead of elaborating, she lifts her other hand to show off a second tattoo on her wrist. This one is in color—deep purple and black ink forming a jagged speech-bubble like the kind found in comic books. Inside the speech bubble, block letters read *RIOT!*.

"For the band," Yaoyorozu says, nodding. "That's a lot of dedication."

Jirou shrugs, thumbing over the tattoo as she sits up. "Well, we're in this together, now. We all went and got the tattoos at the same time, after we recorded our first song together. We knew it was something special."

"That's right," Kaminari cuts in. He lifts the hem of his tank to show off the yellow and black version of the same tattoo that's inked against his hipbone. "We all match."

Everyone is following the conversation, now, and they turn to Kirishima next. He shrugs and points out the same tattoo, his red and black, on his bicep. "You guys have already seen mine, I wasn't even wearing a shirt for most of the day."

“We didn’t realize it was special, then,” Uraraka tells him.

Kirishima grins. “The name was definitely my idea, but it wouldn’t mean anything if it wasn’t the four of us. So yeah, it is pretty special.”

All eyes are on Ashido. She’d been lying on her side next to Uraraka, but now she sits up and turns around so that her back is facing everyone else. She pulls the neck of her t-shirt down, revealing the pink and black tattoo on the back of her shoulder.

“You have one, too?” Sero’s voice echoes in night air, shocked.

Ashido whips around to stare at him. “What’s that supposed to mean, of course I do.”

Sero waves his hands in front of his face, quickly trying to backpedal. “Oh, yeah. Of course. I didn’t mean—”

Ashido’s eyes narrow, glowing yellow like a cat’s in the low light. “No, I think you did.”

“What are they talking about,” Jirou mutters to Kirishima.

And Kirishima thinks he can guess, can hear the ghosts of an old argument starting to stir. He wishes he could stop it.

“It just didn’t seem like something you’d do,” Sero says, deciding to stand his ground. “I thought maybe you’d move on, or. You were never one to share the spotlight, Mina. I was just surprised.”

Ashido purses her lips like she’s trying to hold her tongue, but then she fails. “How do you know what I would do, or how I feel? And of course, I share the spotlight, we’re a *group*—”

“You didn’t used to be,” Sero says, a bit helplessly. “You were solo for a long time, Mina, and even now you’re sort of the focus?”

“I was *seventeen*,” Ashido seethes, her voice burning. She’s on her feet, now. “And you were the one who left, remember? So how would you know whether I can share the spotlight or who’s the focus of our band? None of that has anything to do with you!”

Sero is uncomfortable with Ashido’s ire directed at him, but his brow scrunches with frustration. “You’re still the only one singing, aren’t you? Even though we all just heard what Kirishima is capable of!”

Now, he has to intervene. “Hey, don’t blame Ashido for—”

“Just shut up, Sero!” Ashido yells, stamping her foot ineffectually in the sand. “If I’m so awful, why were you ever even with me? Just—you could’ve stayed away, you know! I didn’t ask for you back!”

She pivots on her heel, grabbing her things off the ground and she stops away from the fire and towards the path leading back to the beach house.

Everyone is shocked into silence. Jirou is the first to move, jumping to her feet and running after Ashido. Yaoyorozu and Uraraka share a look, and they both follow.

Kaminari rounds on Sero. “What the hell was that? Why’d you go after her, like that?”

“I wasn’t going after her,” Sero says, crossing his arms over his chest. “And you weren’t there, before, so—”

“I know her now,” Kaminari says, frowning. “Ashido’s a good person. She’s not like, using us, or whatever. She’d never do that.”

Sero casts a furtive glance in Kirishima’s direction.

“She wouldn’t,” Kirishima reiterates. “You should apologize to her, in the morning. Give her some space, for now, and let’s all just get back to the house.”

Iida, Todoroki and Midoriya have been pretending like they haven’t been privy to all of this. Now, they enthusiastically start rounding up the rest of the gear. Kaminari deflates a bit, though his movements are snappish as he works with Sero to fold up the blankets. Finally, they’re ready to head back.

Todoroki says in a soft aside to Midoriya, “I thought we were the ones in the teen drama?”

Kirishima grimaces. He doesn’t think of it that way, but he also acknowledges that he wasn’t at the center of things when Sero and Ashido broke up. He’d been a sounding board and a shoulder to cry on for both of them, but he’d only understood their fight as much as it pertained to him. Years later, he’s still uncomfortable with how it all went down.

Sero had told him that if he didn’t get out of Ashido’s shadow, he’d be lost in it forever. But it wasn’t Ashido’s idea to start Riot, or ever her decision to be the sole vocalist for the group. Whatever Sero thinks happened, he’s wrong.

At the same time, Kirishima can’t blame him. Having a fundamental disconnect from someone you care too much about—that’s pitiable, not contemptible. But if this old fight is going to blow up, again, he doesn’t want to be the excuse for it anymore.

—

There is no peace to be found, tonight. When they reach the beach house, Yaoyorozu emerges from one of the bedrooms to inform them of room assignments—Ashido is sharing with Jirou, Uraraka with Yaoyorozu. Kaminari is bunking with Iida and Sero, and then there’s another room for Todoroki and Midoriya. Which leaves—

“It is only a vacation home, after all,” Yaoyorozu tells Bakugou and Kirishima. “We don’t have eleven bedrooms. But I’m not fussy enough to think that the two of you would want separate beds, anyway. It’s a very comfortable room, Kirishima-san, I’m sure you’ll have everything you need.”

“Oh, yeah, I’m not complaining,” Kirishima says, even as he casts a nervous glance in Bakugou’s direction. He definitely isn’t happy, angry energy visible in the tense curl of his spine. “Listen, can I talk to Ashido, for a second?”

Yaoyorozu smiles sympathetically but shakes her head. “Jirou-san already got her to go to sleep. She was very upset, but I’m sure she’ll want to see you in the morning.”

Kirishima stifles a sigh. Chances are, in the morning, Ashido will act like none of this ever happened. She’s resilient, that way. But she isn’t so confident that she’s never been hurt.

“Thanks,” he says to Yaoyorozu, then shoulders his bag and heads down the hall.

It truly is a massive bedroom—a large double bed dominates most of it, but one wall is made up entirely of glass panels that look out onto the ocean, shielded only by sheer curtains. There’s an en suite bathroom, which Bakugou heads to without preamble. The water starts running a minute later.

Bakugou emerges from the bathroom with skin ruddy from the shower's heat, wearing loose cropped pants and a clean tank top. He towels off his hair and doesn't say anything to Kirishima.

Kirishima gathers his own bundle of clothes and toiletries, heading for the bathroom. Bakugou isn't usually one for ambient conversation, but there's something pointed about his current silence. Kirishima doesn't know what he did to earn Bakugou's anger, but it's like they've taken a leap backwards just when they'd started to make progress.

He leaves his hair loose and damp around his shoulders after his shower, pulling on a t-shirt and boxers. When he reenters the main room, Bakugou is lying on one side of the bed, on top of the covers. He has his arms folded behind his head as he stares at the ceiling.

Kirishima sits down on the edge of the bed. "What're you thinking about?"

Bakugou blinks, a grimace ghosting over his features before he makes his face go blank once more.

"Is it the bed thing?" Kirishima asks. "'Cause we already basically slept together, earlier, and you didn't seem to mind that."

An angry flush colors Bakugou's cheeks. "Just shut up."

"I'm serious," Kirishima continues, "It's not that big a deal, is it? Kaminari and I fall asleep together all the time, same with Ashido. Jirou's a little pickier. And I'd believe that you are, too, except for earlier—"

Bakugou moves so quickly that Kirishima barely registers what he's doing, until Bakugou's foot slams into Kirishima's side, kicking him off the bed. Kirishima lands in a heap on the ground, head spinning as he tries to reorient himself.

"Shut. Up." Bakugou is back in the same position, lying down and staring at the ceiling. It's like he'd never moved.

Kirishima pulls himself to his feet, staring at Bakugou with confusion. "Dude. What is your problem?"

"You," Bakugou snaps. "You're really pissing me off."

Kirishima blinks. "I didn't do anything?"

Bakugou swallows a curse, rolling his eyes towards the ceiling. "You don't even fucking see it." He curls upwards until he's in a seated position, staring Kirishima down with fire in his eyes.

"See *what*?" Kirishima snaps, truly frustrated. Why does Bakugou keep expecting him to read his mind?

Bakugou points at him. "Why don't you sing for Riot?"

The question blindsides him. "What?"

"You heard me. Why are you up there like an extra when it's your music?"

"It's *our* music," Kirishima protests. "It's not like I could do it all by myself even if I wanted to, every piece of it is important."

Bakugou makes a strangled noise in the back of his throat. "You don't even try."

Now Kirishima is genuinely affronted. “Look, I don’t know what brought this on, but what does it even matter? I’m not telling you how to act, or what roles to pick, or anything. You don’t tell me how to handle my music.”

“At least I know my own worth,” Bakugou says, crossing his arms over his head. “Sero might be the world’s biggest fucking idiot, but he was right. You let Ashido take the spotlight. You do it on purpose.”

“I—” Kirishima stops himself, shakes his head. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It’s pretty damn obvious,” Bakugou snaps. “You know what’s worse that someone with no talent forcing themselves where they don’t belong? Someone who has talent and hides it, who doesn’t believe in themselves.”

Kirishima’s voice catches in his throat. He loves music. He’s always dreamed of being on a stage and sharing his songs with the entire world. But it doesn’t matter what he wants, or what he’s dreamed of. He’s known that for a long time, now.

“Thanks for your opinion,” he says slowly, voice hollow. “But I can’t do anything to change it.”

“The hell you can’t—”

“I *can’t*,” Kirishima says, and it comes out strained. “I freeze up! The instant I open my mouth on stage, I can’t do anything! You think I haven’t tried? I have. I’ve been trying for years. And maybe it’s easy for you, Bakugou, when you’ve been acting since you were four and you’ve never had to worry about whether you’re good or not. You’re amazing, and everyone knows that! But not everyone is that amazing! Not everyone can do what you do.”

Bakugou is looking at him with eyes flickering like candlelight. Kirishima can’t tell what he’s thinking, and for once he’s not even trying. He doesn’t have the energy to spend on figuring Bakugou out, not when he’s just driven home that Kirishima might never achieve the things he wants to. It’s one thing for Ashido to push him to do more, for Kaminari to encourage him. But to be laid bare in front of the one person he wants to impress more than anything? That’s excruciating.

“It must suck, huh,” he says quietly. “Having to pretend to be with someone who isn’t good enough.”

Bakugou’s face scrunches with irritation. “You’re so *stupid*,” he says, and there’s a quality to his voice that Kirishima can’t parse.

“Yeah,” he says. “I guess I am.” For a second there, he had himself thinking that he could be worthy of Bakugou. What a lie he’d told himself.

They don’t say anything else to each other, and the bed is big enough that when they both lie down they don’t even touch. Kirishima curls up on his side, acutely aware of the space between them, wider than the ocean.

Chapter End Notes

["i always knew" - the vaccines](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The other side of the bed is cold, sheets pulled crisply back into place. Kirishima rolls over to glance at the place where Bakugou had slept. It gives no indication that he was ever anything but alone. Sighing, Kirishima stretches his arms over his head and blinks at the sunlight filtering into the room. New light, a new day— he needn't carry over the weight of yesterday's emotions.

Bakugou's bags are already packed, set to one side of the bedroom door. He must've woken a while ago, and left the room as soon as he was able. Kirishima gets dressed and repacks his own bag. This vacation was always going to be short, but Kirishima never imagined it'd leave him so hollow.

He wanders into the kitchen and sees half the group seated at the table, nibbling on breakfast and talking amongst themselves. Jirou and Yaoyorozu sit to one side, heads bowed together as they discuss something. When they hear Kirishima approach, they look up suddenly and nudge over to make room for him.

"Don't worry about it," Kirishima says, not taking the space now between them. "I'm just looking for Bakugou."

"He was here to eat a little while ago," Yaoyorozu tells him. "But he left as soon as he'd eaten."

Kirishima runs a hand through his hair. "Figures."

"Yo, Kirishima," Jirou says, tugging on the end of his t-shirt to stop him from walking away. "Everything ok?"

She looks straight into his eyes when she asks, and Kirishima knows that he's not doing a good job of keeping up the act. Jirou isn't asking Kirishima the fake boyfriend if he's alright— she's asking Kirishima, the real person she knows.

"Yeah," Kirishima says, forcing a smile. "I just misplaced him, that's all. I'm gonna go find him before he gets too grumpy about it."

Jirou's sharp gaze follows him out of the kitchen.

In the open and interconnected rooms of the first floor, it's easy to track the murmur of voices until he picks out the one he's searching for. But before Kirishima steps into the living room to follow the sound of Bakugou's voice, he pauses.

"You'll do it," Bakugou is saying roughly. "You fucking owe me."

"You don't need to threaten me," a voice that Kirishima recognizes as Midoriya's responds. "Honestly, Kacchan, you know I—"

"You. *Owe*. Me." Bakugou repeats the words with all the venom of a snake's bite. "You'd be nothing if you hadn't been riding my coattails our whole lives, would you? So, when I ask you for something, you shut up and do it."

Midoriya lets out a long-suffering sigh. "You know that's not true. Maybe in the beginning— but.

You know I'd do you a favor anyway, right? We can just have a conversation, like normal people. Like friends—"

"Shut up, Deku," Bakugou grinds out.

"I'll ask them," Midoriya confirms. "I'm sure they'd be happy to do it, anyway."

"Whatever." Bakugou's voice is like the burn of open palms hitting gravel and scraping open. "This isn't me asking you for help. Don't get any ideas."

"Of course," Midoriya says, his voice echoed by his nervous, abortive laugh. "You'd never ask me for help. I know that."

When the conversation doesn't continue for a moment, Kirishima backs up from the doorway. And not a moment too soon— Bakugou comes out of the room with his hands in his pockets, brows drawn together in a sharp V over his eyes. He pauses mid-stride when he spots Kirishima.

They stare at each other. The emotions they'd revealed last night haven't abated, at all.

"What're you staring at," Bakugou mutters, finally.

"You," Kirishima says honestly. He means it to be flippant, but it comes out with a hint of longing.

Bakugou blinks, then glowers at him. "What the fuck're you ever talking about."

He stomps away, after that.

Kirishima had thought that they'd talk things out, that he'd explain to Bakugou that he really is happy with how things are. If Riot gets famous, what does it matter what role Kirishima has in it? He's happy with how things are, and just because he hasn't lived up to every one of his dreams doesn't mean he's failed. He's told himself these things over and over again, and if he can just get Bakugou to believe them everything will be alright.

But maybe Bakugou would see straight through those lies.

"Kirishima-kun?" After Bakugou's gone, Midoriya pokes his head out of the doorway. "What are you doing out here by yourself?"

There's something about his expression— open and inviting— that topples the last of the walls Kirishima had been trying to build up. He slumps against the wall, covers his face in his hands.

"I fucked up, Midoriya," he says. "I fucked up so bad."

He hears Midoriya step towards him, and when he uncovers his eyes Midoriya is leaning over him, frowning as his gaze flicks to one side to where Bakugou had just been.

"I was worried about this," he says under his breath. Then, aloud, "Don't blame yourself too much, for Kacchan's moods."

"I want to make him happy," Kirishima says. *I want to impress him, I want him to be proud of me.*

Midoriya gives him a wobbly, sympathetic smile. "You probably do, more than anyone else. But Kacchan is a complicated person. And if you beat yourself up every time he gets upset, *you* won't be happy."

There's the echo of experience in what Midoriya is saying, drawn from a wealth of memory.

When Kirishima doesn't respond, Midoriya keeps going. "It took me a long time to figure that out. Kacchan is— it's hard to step away from him, once you get close. I don't want to intrude too much, on what's between you two. But if he's opening up to you, it's because he values you. So, give yourself some credit, okay?"

Kirishima rubs at his eyes with the heels of his hands. "Damn, Midoriya. You're really smart."

Midoriya waves his hands. "No, no, not at all. I just— if what I know about Kacchan can help, at all..."

"Thanks." Kirishima smiles, and he doesn't have to force it.

The beach house seems like a dream, as soon as they return home to their apartment. The schedule of Present Mic concerts on the wall is slowly ticking down, with fewer and fewer left. They return to a series of messages from their label and manager, asking about studio time and the last few songs they need for their full album. It drags them away from thoughts of Sero and Bakugou and everyone else, if only for a little while.

Kirishima sits at the kitchen island, one foot flat against the seat of his stool and the other dangling as he knocks his pen against the counter. His notebook lays open in front of him as he crosses out words and scribbles down new possibilities.

"You've been at that for hours," Kaminari says from the couch, "You wanna take a break?"

"No." Kirishima bites down on the inside of his cheek. "We need— just two or three more. I can finish this."

Kaminari shrugs. "Suit yourself." He turns back to Jirou. She's leaning over her phone, rapidly tapping out a new message. Kaminari groans. "Hey, hey— aren't you supposed to be the workaholic and I'm the slacker?"

"You are the slacker," Jirou says without looking up. She bites down on a smile before she sends off the text.

Kaminari throws his hands up in the air. "You're all impossible! You know, I thought this was a bad idea from the start. We start hanging out with a bunch of people who're too pretty and too successful, and it throws us totally out of whack. This is all your fault." He points an accusing finger at Kirishima.

Kirishima looks up. "Huh?"

Kaminari shakes his head. "This is exactly what I'm talking about! You know, you don't even look happy, right now. Are you sure you want to keep this up?"

Kirishima knows what he's talking about, even if he doesn't want to admit it. He frowns, turning pointedly back to his notebook. He doesn't think his scribbles, full of dark thoughts of inadequacy, would convince Kaminari that his fake relationship was any better of an idea.

"Hey, Kirishima." Ashido wanders into the kitchen. She looks— well. She's wearing another of Kirishima's old t-shirts, the neck hanging off one of her shoulders. Her hair is a tangled cloud around her head, her eyes tired and ringed with residual dark makeup.

She hasn't wanted to talk about Sero. Kirishima had asked, the first day they'd been home, and

then again. But Ashido had grinned and dodged the subject. Whatever she feels, it's clearly taking its toll. But Kirishima doesn't know how to help.

"What's up?" Kirishima asks.

Ashido pulls up a stool, scooting close so that she can look over Kirishima's shoulder at his notebooks. "I want you to help me write a song."

That's not how they work, usually. But Kirishima looks up and says, "Okay. What about?"

Instead of answering the question directly, Ashido frowns. "You know I wouldn't have asked you to play in my band, back then, if I thought you wouldn't want to. If I thought it would be bad for you, or make you feel worse."

Kirishima blinks. "Of course I know that. You were *helping* me. Sero doesn't know what he's talking about—"

"But he's not completely wrong," Ashido says. "I wanted to help you, but I also wanted to be the best singer *I* could be, with the best songs. I am selfish. I do like it when everyone's looking at me."

From the living room, Jirou and Kaminari are listening. Ashido must know this, must want them to hear, too.

"That not true," Kirishima protests. "You've got a big heart, Ashido."

Ashido smiles crookedly at him. "Not always. But you know, Sero *knew* that. When we first met, I was a teen idol. A diva. And he liked that about me, I know he did. I made his life exciting. He felt special, because I liked him, and I was *me*."

A heavy weight falls on Kirishima's chest. He's felt that, before—not from Ashido's perspective, but from Sero's. Of course, it feels good to be the one noticed by someone who doesn't have time for anyone else. Of course, it feels good to be the one liked by someone who only ever hates. It's addicting, it's affirming, it's dangerous.

"But he knew that." Ashido's brow furrows, and her hands clench into fists. "He *knew* that, when we started dating, so he doesn't get to hold it against me now. He doesn't get to judge me."

"He's a jerk," Jirou says, from the living room couch. "You don't have to feel bad based on what he said, Ashido."

"It's fine," Ashido says, shaking her head. "I just. I'm feeling a lot of things. And that's what we do, isn't it? We turn feelings into music."

Kirishima catches Jirou's eye across the room, and understanding settles between them. The potency of what Ashido is feeling can be, should be, channeled into something.

Kaminari drums his fingers against the arm of the couch. "I don't know whether I want to hug everyone or tell you all to get back to work." He sounds harassed about this.

Jirou scoffs, then loops an arm around Kaminari's shoulders. "We can do both. Hand me that sheet music."

Jirou and Kaminari work on music, while Kirishima continues to scribble out his lyrics with Ashido's input. Beside him, his phone buzzes against the counter. He frowns when he sees who

the message is from.

Sero (12:15): can we get 3 tickets for your next show?

Kirishima takes a moment to consider his response before sending it.

Kirishima (12:17): Maybe not the best idea to ask me for a favor right now.

Sero (12:18): it's not for me. it's for him.

There's no need for Kirishima to ask for clarification. He wonders if he can keep this up, if he even wants to see Bakugou right now. He wonders why he's upset that Bakugou wants to bring someone else—*two* someone else's—to his concert.

But he still hasn't learned to say no

Kirishima (12:20): Ok.

—

The show is over before Kirishima even realizes it's begun. He's so focused on not looking towards the VIP box, on not relying on seeing Bakugou there, that time passes him by entirely. After the set, he stumbles off the stage with the rest of Riot and it's only the ache in his muscles and the sweat beading down his brow that tells him he was there at all.

Yamada is in their waiting room backstage, pulling a comb through his golden hair even though it's been sprayed into a solid mass. He glances up when they enter, pocketing the comb to offer a thumbs-up.

"Yo, kids. Good job out there."

"Thanks, Yamada-san," Ashido chirps, as the rest of them flop down on the couches. After months in residency with Present Mic, their stamina is much better than it had been when they were just playing at clubs and the like. But the impact of the show still hits them.

"Hm," Yamada says, giving them a considering look. "We're winding down to the end, now. Have you all thought about what you're doing, next?"

Kirishima's head falls back against the couch. He hasn't given it any thought at all. Ashido's been the one to guide most of Riot's trajectory, and the management from their label. But the gig with Present Mic had been stable enough that none of them have thought past it. The last few weeks have flown right by them.

"Er," Kaminari says, "We'll think of something?"

"Sure," Yamada says, though there's a skeptical glint in his green eyes. "I've gotta get on stage, but the staff dropped that off for you." He points towards a large cardboard box in the corner, then heads out the door.

Ashido lets out an excited squeak as she lunges for the box.

"What's that?" Jirou asks, barely lifting her head.

"Our *merchandise!*" Ashido days, pulling the box open. "Kaminari had the idea, and the label loved it, so!"

Kaminari goes over to join her, a smug expression on his face as he pulls a set of soft cotton hoodies out of the box. The first is purple, with Riot's black speech-bubble logo printed across the front. "Here, Jirou." He tosses the hoodie at her, then sniggers as it lands over her face and she growls at him.

Ashido grabs a pink hoodie from Kaminari and immediately pulls it on over the black dress she's wearing, zipping it up and twirling around to model for the rest of them. There's a yellow one for Kaminari, and finally—

A red sweatshirt lands in Kirishima's lap, and he looks down at it with a sense of wonder. When they've all put theirs on, matching except for the colors, they look exactly like Kirishima imagines them— variations on a tune, the same melody played in different keys. He smiles widely, fingers lingering on the soft hem of his hoodie.

"You know what the problem is, though," Ashido says, scooting in next to Kirishima on the couch. "Now, when we see people in our merch, we'll know exactly who their favorite is."

"That's not a problem, that's the *point*," Kaminari tells her. He wears his hoodie over his black tank, so that from head to toe he sports the sharp contrast of lightning against the night sky— all yellow and black. "Don't be too jealous when mine sell out first, you guys."

"I'm not holding my breath, for that," Jirou tells him.

"Pink's going to win," Ashido adds.

"I think we're all going to do just fine," Kirishima says. He imagines a sea of their colors, evenly interspersed. He doesn't need it to be dominated by red— Riot is all of them, and whether someone wants to wear purple or yellow won't change that.

Ashido elbows him in the side. "Where's your manly pride, hm? Tell us you're going to beat all of us!" She dissolves into laughter, Kaminari joining in with her.

Someone knocks sharply on the other side of the door, and then one of the stage managers pokes her head in. "Sorry to interrupt, but some of the VIP guests would like to come backstage and meet you. Should I send them in?" She looks straight at Kirishima as she asks the question.

Bakugou hadn't wanted to come backstage, last time.

"It's your boyfriend," the stage manager says, a sly smile playing on her lips. Because, of course, she's just one more person who only knows the public version of the story. She has no idea that Bakugou and Kirishima are— fighting, or frustrated with each other, or however they'd left it. And how could she know, when Kirishima himself can't even figure it out?

"Yeah, that's fine," Kirishima says. "Send them back."

She tilts her head to give him a questioning look, but quickly disappears behind the door again.

"He brought people with him, didn't he?" Kaminari asks. "Who d'you think it is?"

Kirishima shrugs. "Honestly, I have no idea. He doesn't even want friends." But some part of Kirishima is more angry than curious. He can't imagine Bakugou inviting even Uraraka to come see a concert with him. And he'd certainly never spend more time than he had to with Midoriya or Yaoyorozu. Even Sero he only tolerates, really. But is Kirishima just completely unaware of another category of person in Bakugou's life? Someone he likes more than all these people he's forced to spend time with or passively tolerates?

Is there someone he likes more than me?

Heat washes over him. He's been working so hard, trying his best to break through to Bakugou, and he casually just shows up with *friends*? What the fuck is that?

There's a knock at the door before it opens, again. Kirishima looks up, face set into fierce lines, and then his jaw drops.

The first person to enter the room is tall and broad-shouldered. His eyes are dark but his hair is a shining gold, curled over his brow in a way so perfect it must be natural. Kirishima has seen his face before, plastered over town in posters for the indie film with some French title— *Lemillion*?— something like that.

Toogata Mirio, who has so many acting awards it's almost laughable, given that he's only a few years older than Kirishima.

Coming up right behind him, following like a shadow, is a lanky young man with pale skin. His dark hair is cut jaggedly, shadowing his eyes and framing his face. His hands flutter nervously at his sides, belying the aesthetics of his outfit— combat boots and ripped black jeans, leather bracelets at his wrists and a choker tight around neck.

Kirishima's heart stops.

"Oh my— holy—" He can't even get the words out as he jumps to his feet, pointing at the man. "You're *Suneater*. I mean— Amajiki-san!"

A red flush paints Amajiki Tamaki's face as he grabs for Toogata's arm and turns his face away from the room. "Yes," he says, voice soft and resigned.

Kirishima barely registers that Bakugou has entered the room behind them. He's too busy rushing forward to stand in front of Amajiki, eyes wide and full of stars.

"You're my— I mean— your music is *incredible*. I've seen you in concert five, maybe six times? Every chance I get! You're such an inspiration, I don't even know what to say."

Amajiki doesn't look Kirishima in the eye, face cast down with embarrassment. Beside him, Toogata chuckles.

"We could say the same to you, couldn't we, Tamaki? Good job, Riot, we loved your show."

Amajiki nods, mumbles, "You were awesome."

Kirishima is sure that his smile is about to split his face in two. Even after Riot was signed to the same label as Suneater, he'd never thought he'd have the chance to meet the other band's front-man. Amajiki is one of the most adaptable musicians Kirishima has ever heard, his songs shifting styles and genres as easily as a chameleon changes color. Kirishima lays awake at night and prays to have a fraction of that genius.

"Tamaki loves going to shows," Toogata is saying, as the rest of Riot gathers around them. "But sometimes it's hard because we get recognized too easily, and all we want to do is listen to the performers, you know? But then Midoriya— well, I guess it was actually Bakugou here, wasn't it? — invited us here, and we just had to come."

"We're glad you enjoyed it," Ashido is saying, and while Jirou nods.

“You guys are like, really famous,” Kaminari blathers. “This is kind of amazing.”

Toogata leads the conversation, but Kirishima is focused on Amajiki the whole time. He doesn’t say much, stays close to Toogata’s side. But every nod, every slight smile, every approving word — they all make Kirishima’s heart swell. This is clearly someone who doesn’t offer praise easily, who has a truly discerning ear for music. And he’d liked Riot’s show.

Ashido and Kaminari pull Toogata towards the merch box, determined to find him a sweatshirt. That leaves Kirishima and Amajiki together, still standing.

“You really are one of my favorites, ever,” Kirishima says, looking up at Amajiki. “Your song— ‘Chicken Legs’ — when I first saw the record for it I thought it was the weirdest thing ever, but then I listened to it and it— it changed my life. Sorry, am I babbling at you? I think I’m babbling.”

Amajiki shifts from foot to foot, but then he smiles softly. “Thanks,” he says. “It was supposed to be a bit weird.”

“Yeah? Yeah,” Kirishima agrees, nodding vigorously. “That’s why it works, though.”

“You guys really were good, tonight,” Amajiki says. His voice is reedy, which puts an amazing tone into his music. Spoken and not sung, it emphasizes his reticence. “We should collaborate, sometime.”

Strobe lights are going off in Kirishima’s brain. It’s such a casual thing to say— the kind of thing that amazing musicians probably say to each other all the time, whether they mean it or not. But if Amajiki Tamaki is saying it to him, he must actually consider Kirishima worth the comment.

“Amajiki-san wants to collaborate with me,” he says, as though speaking to someone else. He turns, looking for Bakugou, wanting to share this with him. But Bakugou is no longer in the room.

Kirishima turns fully, eyes narrowed as he looks for Bakugou. There’s Jirou back on the couch, and Ashido and Kaminari pulling a pink Riot sweatshirt over Toogata’s shoulders, and Amajiki leaning against the wall, looking at him curiously.

“I think I just lost my boyfriend,” Kirishima says, frowning.

“I should probably go rescue mine,” Amajiki says, under his breath.

Kirishima doesn’t know whether he was meant to hear that, and when he glances back at Amajiki the other man lifts a single finger to his lips. As their eyes meet, an understanding passes between them. Kirishima’s been entrusted with a secret. He nods, places his hand over his heart for just a moment.

Then he calls out, “Anyone see where Bakugou went?”

Jirou points out the door. “He said he had to get some air.”

Kirishima doesn’t know how he could have missed that. He takes his leave of the rest of them, then races out into the hallway. It takes him only a minute to find the stage manager, who points him towards the back entrance. A good place to go, if all you want is air. The back entrance leads out onto the parking lot for the staff and crew. It’s fenced off enough that no overenthusiastic fans could find their way there.

There’s a storm inside of him, the cold front of his anger meeting the solid warmth of his excitement. Bakugou had invited Toogata and Amajiki, tonight— or he’d asked Midoriya to invite

them on his behalf. Why had he done that? And why would he do it and then not stick around?

Kirishima grinds his teeth. He just can't figure Bakugou out. Is all of this just for his own purposes, or did he know that meeting Amajiki was one of Kirishima's dreams?

He pushes open the doors leading outside, then stops in his tracks.

As summer comes to a quiet close, warm rain falls. The paved parking lot is lit by a series of floodlights, bright and glaring against the damp ground. The atmosphere is muggy and oppressive. The light catches on the falling rain, each drop visible for a moment before it continues to fall past the beam of light.

Through it, Kirishima sees Bakugou.

He's standing utterly still, his head tilted towards the sky. Rain plasters his pale hair to his forehead and neck, and he doesn't blink to shield his eyes from the drops. Over his maroon t-shirt he wears a white button-down that's turned transparent, soaked through. Rain drips down his neck and pools at his collarbone. His hands are clenched into fists at his sides.

Kirishima is frozen at the sight. How could he have ever stopped noticing Bakugou, even for a moment? His gravity is so strong, it pulls the breath out of Kirishima's lungs.

As Kirishima looks at him now, he can't decipher what Bakugou is feeling, why he's doing this. There's anger in the tension of his clenched hands, the pull of his spine. He glares up at the sky with bloodshot eyes, but his expression is more empty than angry.

"What are you doing?" Kirishima calls out, as soon as he finds his voice.

Bakugou doesn't respond. Instead, he closes his eyes and stays very still. It's like he's gathering strength. He lifts his hands to rub the rain off his face, and then finally he turns to look at Kirishima.

"Fucking nothing. Why do you care?" He shivers as he speaks.

The weather is warm enough that Kirishima doesn't mind getting slightly damp, but who knows how long Bakugou has been standing out here. His clothes are completely soaked.

"I can get behind the whole manly, you against the weather thing," Kirishima says, stepping forward, "But this is a little much."

Bakugou glares at him. His forehead and cheeks are red.

"Dude," Kirishima says, "You look kind of awful. Or, as awful as you can look, anyway."

The color in Bakugou's cheeks deepens. "Stop saying shit like that."

One side of Kirishima's mouth lifts in a crooked smile. "I can't help it, I blabber."

"Obviously," Bakugou grumbles. "You never know when to shut up."

He takes a step towards Kirishima, but sways on his feet. Kirishima lunges forward to steady him, and Bakugou doesn't even bother trying to fight him off. Bakugou ends up leaning against Kirishima's side, shivering.

"You're burning up," Kirishima tells him, concerned. He pulls away from Bakugou for just a moment, tugging off his hoodie so that he can drape it around Bakugou's shoulders. It's slightly

too big for him, making him look young and vulnerable as it hangs off him.

“C’mon, let’s get out of the rain,” Kirishima says.

Bakugou grunts, but doesn’t resist as Kirishima guides him back into the building. He shivers again, sending beads of water out from his hair. As they step through the hallway, he pulls his arms through the sleeves of Kirishima’s hoodie and tugs it tighter around himself.

Kirishima gurgles out a laugh. “You’re the first person to have my merchandise.”

Bakugou gives Kirishima a sideways look. “Makes sense,” he mutters. “I’m your fucking boyfriend.”

Right, Kirishima thinks distantly. Bakugou in a Riot hoodie would definitely make for good photo ops.

“How do you know Amajiki-san, anyway?” Kirishima asks, sticking close to Bakugou’s side.

“I don’t. Deku did a movie with Toogata. He makes friends everywhere.”

Kirishima hums softly. “You know, I’ve figured something out about you,” he says.

“What’s that?” Bakugou eyes him suspiciously.

“You must be a huge Riot fan,” Kirishima says smugly. “Because you came back, a second time.”

Bakugou shoves at Kirishima. “Fuck right off, shitty hair.”

Chapter End Notes

["sweet tangerine" - the hush sound](#)

@gabzilla_z is to blame for the riot hoodies. :')

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

brief mentions of vomiting in this chapter, though it's nothing especially graphic. there's also a throw-away line about cancer, if that's something you're sensitive to.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As the song ends, Kirishima lifts his hands from his guitar's strings. His fingers throb, old callouses worn down over the past few days smarting. Next to him, Ashido pushes back from the mic and brushes her sweaty hair off her forehead. Jirou keeps one hand pressed against the sleek black body of her guitar, eyes closed as though she's memorizing the sound of the last few notes as they reverberate through the air. Kaminari sits back, his skull pressed against the wall as he stretches out his spine. In the aftermath of the music, all of them are focused on themselves and the sound—it's as though nothing else exists.

It's been two days of straight recording, and Riot's worked itself to the bone in the process. Outside the recording booth, lyric sheets and pages of music litter the coffee table and couches where they've been taking most of their breaks. In the past five hours, they've laid out three tracks. If the studio has its way, the album will be done by the end of the week.

For Kirishima, who builds up songs like a running stream slowly gathering force, it's a distinct change of pace. Like someone has thrown open the floodgates and now he's careening down a rushing river. It's exhilarating as much as it's exhausting and terrifying.

He understands the need for the rush—ever since Kirishima started “dating” Bakugou, more and more attention has come Riot's way. And when reporters and bloggers and tabloids call their label and ask for information on the band, there needs to be something there to promote. Not just a couple songs available as mp3 downloads, not concert tickets only available to those in the city. No, what the studio needs is an album they can sell—a clear statement of who Riot is and why the world should take notice.

They've recorded nine songs, written over the space of the couple of years that Riot has been together. The narrative of the album doesn't quite flow, yet—there's something missing, and Kirishima winces as he thinks of listening to the entire thing. Before he releases it to the world, he needs to make sure it says what he wants it to.

“That was great,” the sound engineer says over the intercom. “Take five, or ten. We'll start on the next track after lunch.”

Kirishima and Jirou immediately get up and exit the recording booth, but Ashido lingers as Kirishima sets down his guitar.

“What's up?” he asks.

Ashido laces her fingers together in front of her, bites down on the inside of her cheek before she replies. “I saw you were working on something new, and I was wondering...”

It's rare for her to be so hesitant, but now her dark eyes flick from side to side. When she'd asked

Kirishima to write a song specifically for her, she'd revealed something of herself that Kirishima had never thought to look for. She'd entrusted him with something, and now he needs to prove worthy of that trust.

"It's something," he tells her, frowning slightly. "I mean, it's not done yet. But we could go over it now, if you want."

Ashido throws her arms around his neck, holding him close for a moment. "You're the best, Kirishima. You know that, right?"

He smiles wanly. "Sure."

Ashido pushes him away with a huff, rolling her eyes. "You don't know it. Which seems impossible, but that's also sort of *why* you're the best."

He tilts his head, trying to parse what she means. But eventually he gives up, and goes to retrieve the sheet music that he and Jirou have been working on.

"I'm warning you, it's rough," he says, hoisting an acoustic guitar from its stand in one corner of the booth.

Ashido waves off his words. "It's fine, just play it for me!"

Kirishima takes a deep breath, then strums out a few chords to ready himself. The song has only the barest hints of a melody, the notes deceptively delicate. He plays through the main line one time, then another. Then he starts to sing.

Ashido keeps her eyes trained on him the whole time. They do this often enough— Kirishima will sing a song like he'd imagined it in his head, then Ashido will give her own rendition. She often adds things he hadn't thought of, runs and musical quirks that add character to the song or shift its tone. Together, their two visions of what the song should be come together into a whole.

This time, when he finishes, Ashido just stares on at him in silence.

"What," he says, shifting. "You didn't like it?"

Ashido shakes her head. "No," she says, "it's beautiful. It's almost more than I wanted to say."

Discomfort gnaws at Kirishima's stomach. He'd taken what Ashido had told him for the song, but he'd embellished. He brought his own feelings, too, and now the song tells two stories. Or maybe the same story, from two angles. He's not quite sure, yet.

Ashido pulls up a stool and sits beside Kirishima, grabbing the sheet music out of his hand. She glances over the lyrics, a frown creasing her brow.

"Sing it with me, this time?"

They start off in a round— Kirishima sings a line first, and then Ashido echoes him. She makes some changes, he pushes back on others. Before he knows it, they've gone through the entire song six or seven times.

Kaminari and Jirou are back in the studio, sitting at the sound engineer's station instead of coming back into the booth.

"We can hear better from here," Jirou explains. "With a little distance."

“Start again,” Kaminari instructs. “From the top, together.”

Kirishima begins the song on his guitar, shutting his eyes as he starts to sing. This time, Ashido joins him at once, so that they’re traveling through the song at the same pace.

He wonders if Ashido is thinking of Sero as she sings. Kirishima knows whose memory he’s pulling on. He imagines Bakugou, radiating an energy that pulls people in at the same time it pushes them away. He imagines what it would be like to be at the center of a force like that— what would you think of yourself, if people treated you with equal doses of admiration and frustration? How would you approach the world?

The feeling comes through in his words, as he pitches lower and his voice takes on a gravelly tone. Ashido’s voice, sharp and clear, layers over his almost perfectly. Her words are laden with as much emotion as his, and for a moment it’s like they’re both wading deeper and deeper into a river, held down by more water the further in they go, as it comes up over their heads and sweeps them away.

When they finish and Kirishima’s hands still on the guitar, the world around them is silent except for the last reverberations of music. Slowly, Kirishima opens his eyes.

From the other side of the glass panels, someone is staring at him with a satisfied smile playing at her lips.

Kirishima nearly drops his guitar in surprise— the weight of it leaves his hands, and it’s only the cloth strap around Kirishima’s shoulder that keeps it from crashing to the floor.

“Kayama-san! When did you get here?”

Kayama Nemuri lifts her hands and offers Kirishima and Ashido a round of applause. She’s a tall woman with a jagged mane of black hair, lips painted blood red and bright eyes hidden behind red-rimmed glasses. She wears perfectly-tailored white cigarette pants and a matching blazer over a black corset. As she claps her hands, the silver bracelets at her wrists jingle.

“Well done, Kirishima-kun, Ashido-san,” she says. Her voice is rich and melodic, even though her talents lie behind the scenes of a microphone. “That’s definitely the version we want on the album.”

Kirishima squeaks in surprise. “You were *recording*?”

Pressing down on the intercom, Kaminari offers him a thumbs-up through the glass. “I thought you’d want to hear it played back! But I didn’t know Kayama-san would be walking by.”

Kayama’s lips pull into a sly grin. “This is my record label, isn’t it? I’m allowed to walk my own halls.”

“Of course,” Kirishima says, as Ashido gets up to grab a drink of water, “But, Kayama-san, that wasn’t a real version— I’m not singing on the album!”

Kayama pushes up her glasses as she looks down her nose at him. “I know a hit when I hear one, Kirishima-kun. Sometimes, you get a song right the first time, and when that’s so, you don’t mess with it.”

“But—”

She lets out a sigh, brushing back her dark hair. “Aren’t you the one who declared yourself to me

with so much boyish enthusiasm and dedication? Where has that Kirishima-kun gone?”

His cheeks burn crimson at the memory— six months ago, when Riot had been playing at a small club. It had been in the beginning, right when he felt that he needed to do something to push himself forward. When his shame had faded enough to let him breathe again, when he’d been determined to change the trajectory of his life. He’d heard that an executive from Midnight Records was at the venue, and charged in with reckless abandon.

“Riot, hmm?” Kayama had asked him, nursing a glass of wine as she sat to one side of the stage. “That’s an interesting name.”

“It’s from an old Crimson Chevalier song, actually,” Kirishima had said, sheepishly scratching at the back of his neck. He’d been prepared to face a suited, wooden executive, not the full might of Kayama Nemuri herself.

“It takes some confidence to pick up the mantle of another artist,” Nemuri told him. “Are you up for that?”

Kirishima had shut his eyes, steeling himself for a moment. “Yes,” he’d said a moment later, with utter certainty. He knew how good his band was, even then. Riot was something special. “We’re going to be worthy of it.”

Kayama had grinned at him and clapped her hands together. A few days later, they were signed with one of the biggest labels in the country and rehearsing to be the opening act for Present Mic, one of Midnight Records’ most famous acts.

“Anyway,” Kayama says now, with an air of finality, “I’m producing this record, and *this* is the version of that song I want. So that’s the version we’ll have.”

She leaves no room for argument, though her smile gentles as she glances around at the four of them. “You’ve done good work, all of you. Stop by my office before you leave for the day— we need to talk about where Riot is headed, next.” She blows them a theatrical kiss before she leaves the room.

“Just being around her makes me dizzy,” Kaminari says, watching her leave.

“Why’d you do that?” Kirishima asks, leaving the booth to join Kaminari in the outer room. Ashido follows behind him.

Kaminari shrugs. “Because the song sounds good that way. I told you, I didn’t know she was outside.”

“It doesn’t matter what it sounds like,” Kirishima says, voice sharper than he intends.

“Um, doesn’t it?” Jirou puts in. “Isn’t the whole point for the album to sound as good as possible?”

“But— ugh! Ashido, tell them!” Kirishima throws his hands up.

But Ashido is standing to one side with her arms folded, looking at Kirishima severely. “How’d it feel?”

“What?”

“Singing with me,” Ashido explains. “How’d you feel, just now?”

Kirishima takes in a steady breath, thinking back just a few moments. It had felt— different. Singing in time with Ashido, acknowledging what they could be, together. Singing his feelings with his own voice.

“I—” He hesitates before answering. “It didn’t feel wrong.”

Ashido smirks. “Mm-hmm.”

Kirishima’s face heats, and he runs a nervous hand over his spiked hair. “It’s not—I mean. I *like* singing, you guys know that. That was never the problem.”

Kaminari spreads his hands, pushing himself back in his chair and propping his feet up against the wall. “Mm-hmm.”

“Stop doing that,” Kirishima says, fighting back a laugh. “You know I know what you’re doing, right?”

Jirou reaches over and pats Kirishima lightly on one cheek. “Mm-hmm.”

“You guys are impossible,” Kirishima groans.

“Do you want to listen to your song, dude?” Kaminari asks, eyes wide and innocent.

Kirishima doesn’t fight his grin, this time. “Yeah,” he says. “I really do.”

—

Kirishima stands in the hallway, flushed and excited as he taps on his phone. He’s had it turned off while they recorded, so now he waits for any new messages that might’ve arrived in the last few hours. But a blank screen greets him. Frowning slightly, but not to be deterred, he taps out a quick message.

*Kirishima (2:15): You won’t believe this! We’re recording a song, and I actually sang on it. And I think it’s really good? Like, *really* good. I want you to hear it.*

He waits for some acknowledgment of the message, but none comes. Frown deepening, he scrolls back up to read the string of unanswered messages.

Kirishima (3 days ago): Did you make it home alright?

Kirishima (2 days ago): Studio called us in for recording this week. I’m going to be pretty busy, but we could go get lunch or something if you’re around?

Kirishima (2 days ago): Dude, did you lose your phone or something?

Kirishima (yesterday): Another day of recording. What are you doing this week?

Kirishima (8:10): Bakugou.

No answer has come, not since the last time Kirishima saw Bakugou at Riot’s last concert. It’s not that Kirishima expects constant communication. Bakugou has made it clear how self-sufficient he is, how little he needs Kirishima or anyone else. But before that, he’d at least acknowledged the messages. Kirishima knew he’d been reading them. This sudden silence, after the strangeness of their last encounter, leaves Kirishima worried.

Biting down on his lip, he composes a new message, this time to Sero.

Kirishima (2:25): Hey. Where is he?

Instead of a text, Sero's response is to call Kirishima a moment later. Kirishima's heart skips a beat as he answers.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Kirishima," Sero says, his voice light but not nearly as warm as it usually is. *"No word from Bakugou?"*

"No," Kirishima says cautiously. He wishes he knew how to bridge the distance between him and Sero without feeling like he's betraying Ashido. He wants to go back to the days when all of them were friends and nothing was quite this complicated.

Sero lets out a little huff on the other end of the line. *"Sounds about right,"* he mutters. *"He's probably just being a baby. He came down with a bad cold on Monday, we had to cancel a bunch of interviews and readings this week while he recovers. I told him to tell you, so you'd know if someone asked."*

"He's sick?" Kirishima tries to imagine it. Bakugou had been flushed, that night in the rain, but—Kirishima sighs. "You really thought he'd tell me? C'mon, man."

Sero laughs lightly. *"I don't think you get it, Kirishima. He's more open with you than he is with just about anyone else. He actually cares about what you think."*

Kirishima's about to protest that, but decides that he has more pressing concerns at the moment. "Who's taking care of him?"

"No one," Sero says. *"You think he'd let anyone? No, he's probably just holed up in his apartment. I tried to make him a doctor's appointment and he freaked out about it. Y'know, even more than usual."*

"So he's just alone? For the past three days?"

Sero's shrug is practically audible. *"Hey, you may be good at crashing past his objections, but he still can fire me, you know. Sometimes, when he tells me to fuck off, that's what I've got to do."*

Kirishima presses his lips together. The last couple times he's been sick, he'd come down with the flu at the same time as Ashido or Kaminari. There'd always been a few extra, healthy people around to run to the pharmacy or brew tea or listen to sniffling complaints. Kirishima can't imagine being alone, like that.

"Hey, Sero. Where does Bakugou live?"

—

A doorman lets Kirishima in, directs him to the elevator and then up to the top floor of the building. Kirishima tries to compare the building to Hagakure Tooru's, or Yaoyorozu's beach house. Both places had reeked of money and luxury, in different ways. Bakugou's building is probably just as expensive, but it's toned down. Everything is dark wood and steel and glass, muted colors in the lobby and strange abstract art pieces that look like explosions hung in the hallways. Kirishima's arms are laden with grocery bags as he taps his foot and waits for the elevator to pause on the right floor.

He should have guessed that Bakugou lived in a penthouse apartment, in a nondescript corner of

the city where he can blend in with business people and other rich-but-not-famous types. Given how often the paparazzi seem to be dogging him, Bakugou probably needs a place other people can't find easily.

There's a keypad by the front door, and Kirishima shuffles his grocery bags so that he can enter the code that Sero had given him. The alarm system chimes as the door swings open, announcing Kirishima's entry into Bakugou's home.

He doesn't know what he's expecting as he walks through the threshold. For all that Bakugou occupies his thoughts, there are some things about the actor that Kirishima just can't contemplate. Him having a normal life is one of them—Bakugou seems to exist only in the public eye, an explosive force that exists, bright and loud, before fading out of existence.

But the apartment is startlingly normal. There's a shoe rack by the door, boots and loafers neatly arranged in it, all Bakugou's size and style. The hallway is impeccably tidy, a well-cared for house plant stood to one side as the space opens up into a main room.

An enormous flat-screen TV is mounted on the wall, playing the scrolling credits of a movie. Surrounding it on either side are sleek shelves, laden with rows upon rows of movies, television shows, and video games. Kirishima's eyes roam over the sheer volume of titles, trying to take them all in. Facing the TV is an L-shaped leather couch, and curled up in one corner of it is a mass of blankets. Sticking out of the blankets like dandelion fluff is a mess of pale blond hair.

"Bakugou," Kirishima calls out, setting down his grocery bags and kicking off his shoes, "You okay, man?"

There's no answer, so Kirishima whispers a quiet apology for intruding as he steps into the living room. The mass of blankets doesn't stir, even when Kirishima comes right up next to the couch. As he lowers a hand towards Bakugou's head, he can feel the heat radiating off him. He's making soft snuffling noises as he sleeps.

"You're gonna suffocate yourself," Kirishima whispers, reaching out to pull aside the top-most blanket.

Bakugou mumbles something in his sleep, curling in on himself as Kirishima tries to tug his blanket away.

"Hey," Kirishima says again, shaking him slightly. "Get up, for a second. You should be sleeping in a bed, at least."

Bakugou mumbles again, and this time it sounds distinctly like *Fuck off*.

Kirishima grins wryly, then says, "You want me to carry you to bed?"

Bakugou's eyes flutter open for a moment, glassy and unfocused. Red color sits high on his cheekbones, and his nose and upper-lip are crusted over with post-nasal drip. He blinks blearily at Kirishima, not really seeing him.

"... 'm fine," he says, almost coherently, after a moment.

"O-kay," Kirishima says, struck for a moment by how small Bakugou sounds and looks, curled up like a kitten in one corner of the massive couch. "Can I sit here with you, then?"

"No," Bakugou says, pulling his blankets over his head. "Go away."

“Nope,” Kirishima says affably, taking a seat beside him. Bakugou’s apartment is wide and open, full of natural light. He clearly has a lot of stuff, if the shelves full of movies are any indication, but the apartment creates the illusion of space and Spartan sensibility.

Bakugou shudders visibly, then very slowly pulls himself upright. Leaning back against the couch with the blanket wrapped around him like a cape, he squints at Kirishima as he tries to focus his eyes.

“What,” he rasps, “are you doing here.”

“I was worried about you,” Kirishima says, leaning forward to press a hand against Bakugou’s forehead. “You don’t answer my texts for three days, I start to think you’re skipping out on me, or something.”

He means it as a joke, but Bakugou’s expression crumples into something caught between anger and sadness.

“You’re not allowed to say that, t’me.” He spaces his words carefully, but they still manage to slur in the end as Bakugou’s head falls back against the couch. He groans, shivering.

“Right,” Kirishima says softly. “Because we’re not actually dating. But I can still worry, you know? And look, you were sick and all alone! That’s not acceptable, at all.”

Bakugou breathes out through his mouth, pulling his legs up against his chest. “I’m alone all the fucking time,” he mumbles, pressing his chin against the top of his knees.

Kirishima frowns at that. “Sure,” he starts, “but you don’t have to be, you know? If you’d called me, I would’ve been here.”

Bakugou shakes his head, shoulders hunched. “Go record your album.”

Kirishima lets out a little gasp. “You *did* read my messages!”

Bakugou brings his hands up to press against his temples, glaring at Kirishima. “Shut up. Stop being loud, or go away.”

“I’m not going away,” Kirishima says. “I brought— soup! And medicine! And everything else I need to take care of you. Don’t worry, okay? I’m going to make you feel better.” He ends this with a wide grin.

Bakugou looks up at his face for a moment, then winces. “I’m going to throw up.”

“Hey,” Kirishima starts, and then his eyes go wide. “Oh, you’re serious. Do you have a bucket? Bathroom? Where’s your bathroom, Bakugou?”

They end up staggering down the hallway together, Kirishima trying to support Bakugou as Bakugou tries to push Kirishima off him. He ends up retching over his black-tiled bathtub, but there’s not much substance to the clear fluid he brings up.

After a few minutes, when Bakugou is leaning his forehead against the wall, Kirishima looks critically at him.

“When was the last time you ate?”

“Stop talking,” Bakugou groans.

“No, I’m serious,” Kirishima says, “I haven’t seen you in three days, have you just been lying on your couch that whole time?”

Bakugou doesn’t answer, just hunches further in on himself as he shivers against a cold that Kirishima can’t feel.

Kirishima heaves a sigh and crosses the distance between them, pulling Bakugou against him so that he can hoist him to his feet. “Geez,” he says, when Bakugou slumps against him instead of pulling away, “Why do you have to make everything so difficult for yourself?”

“I don’t need you,” Bakugou says petulantly.

Kirishima rolls his eyes. “Sure, whatever. Just let me help you to bed, alright?”

It takes a bit of coordination, but Kirishima first manages to towel off Bakugou’s sweaty face and neck before practically dragging him down the hallway to his bedroom. Again, it’s far more well-kept than Kirishima would’ve imagined (or could’ve managed, himself). Bakugou’s bed is made, and there’s a desk in one corner, home to a sleek computer and many neat stacks of paper. Kirishima sets Bakugou down on the bed and then roots through his dresser for some clean pajamas.

“Ugh,” Bakugou groans, laying down on his back as his feet dangle off the edge of his king-size bed, “I hate you.”

“Sure, sure,” Kirishima agrees. He pulls out a pair of sweats and a loose t-shirt, throwing them in Bakugou’s general direction. “Can you get dressed yourself while I go heat up some soup?”

Bakugou fumbles with pulling off the tank he’s wearing, utterly disregarding Kirishima’s presence.

“Alright,” Kirishima says, sighing softly. He pads back into the hallway to reclaim his grocery bags, then spends ten minutes navigating his way through Bakugou’s futuristic and intimidating kitchen. Everything is perfectly-labelled and seemingly made of stainless steel. His cupboards are full of spices and there’s nothing pre-prepared in his fridge.

Not trusting his own culinary skills, Kirishima brought pre-made soup with him. In all fairness, it’s more of a broth, clear and mostly flavorless. Kirishima helps himself to a tray and bowl out of Bakugou’s cupboards, lays out some medicine and makes his way back to the bedroom.

Bakugou is lying more or less where Kirishima left him, except now he’s wearing flannel pants and the t-shirt Kirishima had picked out for him. He’s still shivering, but appears to have lost his energy halfway through getting under the covers. When Kirishima enters, Bakugou blinks up at him with a murderous expression.

“How are you in my house,” he demands.

Kirishima shrugs him off, shifting some of the papers on Bakugou’s desk so that he can set the tray there for the moment.

“Don’t touch that,” Bakugou snaps, which of course makes Kirishima take a second look.

It’s a script, he realizes. It’s probably hundreds of pages long, all bound together and titled in neat block writing—*Because He Is My Hero*, the cover page reads, *A Film by Yagi Toshinori*. A bright post-it note sticks out off a page about a third of the way through the script, and on it someone has neatly written *Bakugou to read for Dragon King*.

Puzzling over that, Kirishima goes back to the bed to help Bakugou under the covers. He stacks three pillows together so that Bakugou can sit upright while still leaning against them, then tucks the covers back around them. Bakugou accepts this treatment with an impotent kind of hostility—he glares, but has no strength to fight back.

“Why isn’t anyone here with you?” Kirishima asks, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Bakugou lets his eyes fall shut, still breathing heavily. “I don’t want anyone here.”

Kirishima purses his lips. “You want me to go?”

Bakugou’s eyes open just enough for the angry red slits of his irises to be visible. “No. I just fucking hate being sick.”

“Why’s that?” Kirishima gets it; no one likes being sick. Sure, it’s a good way to get out of school or to be pampered for a bit, which is nice. But ultimately that stuff isn’t really worth it. But Bakugou’s words had been getting at something else.

Bakugou clenches his eyes shut. Whether it’s the fever or the nausea, something about his current state must be loosening his tongue. Because when he blinks open his eyes, he says, “Because something terrible always happens when I am, ok? Just, fuck off about it.”

“It really does suck to be sick,” Kirishima says, leaning over to brush the hair back from Bakugou’s brow.

He shudders against the coolness of Kirishima’s skin, but doesn’t push him away. “That’s not what I meant.”

Kirishima waits, and after a moment Bakugou continues.

“You can’t *do* anything when you’re like this,” he mutters, turning his face so that he’s talking to the wall instead of to Kirishima directly. “I’m just—stuck. And powerless. I can barely fucking see, or think, and then when I wake up the entire world has gone to hell.”

“I think everything’s fine,” Kirishima says, trying to be helpful.

Bakugou snorts, which turns into a cough. “You don’t get it.”

“You can explain it to me,” Kirishima tells him. “I mean, I know you like keeping everything bottled up, but. When you talked to me about Midoriya, that helped, right? I mean, it helped me understand you. If you need to tell someone things, to get them off your chest, that person can be me. I don’t mind. I want to tell you things, too.”

Bakugou turns over, blinking blearily up at Kirishima like he can’t keep him centered in his vision. “I was in a movie when I was four,” he says, at length.

“Yeah.” Kirishima nods. “Sero showed us the trailer. The seventh *All Might* movie, right?”

Bakugou blinks, which must be some sort of confirmation. He coughs again, then scowls at himself before continuing. “It was my first movie. Not even real acting—just standing around and saying lines, then looking scared. It took months to film, but halfway through I got really sick.”

Kirishima can just imagine what the grueling pace of a movie production would be like for a four-year-old. “Yeah?”

Bakugou grimaces. “Fucking dehydration, or something. I was in the hospital, they had to push production back for two months since I looked so shitty even after I was better. They couldn’t just reshoot with another kid, All Mi—Yagi wouldn’t allow it.”

Yagi Toshinori, Kirishima thinks. The actor behind *All Might*, and the director of the movie script currently sitting on Bakugou’s desk.

“He’s so fucking stupid,” Bakugou says, hands clenching against his bedcovers. His eyes are wet.

“What do you mean?” Kirishima asks. He doesn’t really know how movies work, but he’d expect anyone to be grateful for the opportunity to work with Yagi.

Bakugou clenches his eyes shut again, gritting his teeth. “He’s *stupid*, because he was sick! And he fucking knew it, too. But he let them stall the production, and he kept pushing himself through it. He didn’t tell anyone he had goddamn leukemia. He should’ve been in the hospital, and he would’ve been if we’d finished the movie on time. But we didn’t, and he acted his way through a debilitating illness, doing all his own goddamn stunts, and when it was all over he couldn’t do it, again. He was coughing up blood and they had to take him away and— and then he couldn’t be All Might, anymore. Stupid— fucking— *idiot*.”

“You think that’s your fault?” Kirishima asks quietly. “Bakugou, you were a little kid. You couldn’t have controlled any of that. If Yagi-san was going to get sick, it would’ve happened anyway.”

Bakugou glowers at him, lowering himself further into his nest of blankets and pillows as moisture leaks out of the corners of his eyes.

“Fuck,” he mutters, rubbing at his face. “I fucking hate being sick.”

Kirishima edges closer. “You should take some medicine, and then get some rest. You’ll probably feel better after you get some proper sleep.”

“I don’t want to sleep,” Bakugou growls.

“You’ll feel better,” Kirishima tells him.

“No, I won’t,” Bakugou snaps. “I’ll wake up and you’ll be gone and I’ll feel like *shit*.”

Kirishima blinks, sitting back for a moment. “You don’t want to go to sleep because you think I’ll leave? Why would I do that? I came to take care of you.”

Bakugou blinks up at him suspiciously. “You have to leave at some point.”

Kirishima shrugs. “Sure, eventually. But for now, I’m all yours. You don’t even have to sleep, just rest. I’ll stay and hang out with you.”

“Meaning you’ll annoy me to death,” Bakugou mutters, then covers his face as he starts coughing, again.

Kirishima rubs his back, wincing in sympathy as Bakugou’s chest rattles. “You’ve got to work on the mixed messages, Bakugou. ‘Should I stay, or should I go,’ you know?”

“No,” Bakugou hisses. Then he groans and lets his head fall back against the pillows. “Fuck, just stay.”

Kirishima smiles softly. “Sure, whatever you want.”

Bakugou’s brow furrows, like he’s trying to catch a second meaning in Kirishima’s words. “But don’t make a big deal about it. I don’t need your pity.”

Kirishima laughs before he can help it. “Dude. I don’t pity you. I *care* about you.”

And as he says it, Kirishima realizes the truth of the matter. He genuinely does care about Bakugou, more than he’d ever thought possible. It isn’t just attraction, or being star-struck. Everything Bakugou shares with him, every emotion he reveals—it all makes Kirishima want to take care of him more.

“I really do,” he continues, before Bakugou can interrupt him. “I think you’re completely awesome, I know you can take care of yourself. You probably would’ve just popped up again in a few days and never even told me you were sick, right? But right now, you’re here and you were alone and feeling shitty. I don’t want to leave you like that. I never would.”

Bakugou is rubbing at his eyes again. “It’s – embarrassing.”

Kirishima nods. “Sure. But who am I going to tell?”

“You won’t leave,” Bakugou says, not inflecting his words with a question but asking all the same.

“I won’t leave,” Kirishima promises.

Chapter End Notes

["christmas tv" - slow club](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Three days later finds Kirishima sat on Bakugou's couch, legs crossed in front of him as he balances the heavy script on his lap.

Bakugou's on route to recovery. A doctor had shown up two days ago to look him over, had handed over some prescription medication and muttered under her breath about celebrities who never grew up or learned to take care of themselves. Kirishima was a bit affronted, by that; even if Bakugou couldn't be trusted to take care of himself, Kirishima was there to pick up the slack. But the medicine is doing its job, even if Bakugou has spent most of the past few days asleep. Kirishima can be grateful for that, at least.

(Bakugou had asked him not to leave, and so Kirishima stayed. He was left with too much time to watch Bakugou as he slept. His face eased of all tension except the barest furrow in his brow, he'd curl beneath his layered blankets and murmur quietly in his sleep. Kirishima, sitting across the room, would look at him and wonder what thoughts were intruding upon his dreams.)

Tonight, Bakugou had woken up late and dragged himself to shower with only the barest grumbling. Kirishima had vacated the bedroom for him, grabbed the script as an afterthought and brought it to the living room with him.

Because He Is My Hero, by Yagi Toshinori. Bakugou clearly doesn't want him looking at it, but that just ensured Kirishima would. Now, he sucks in a breath as he pushes back the cover and begins to read.

He's never looked at a script, before, and it takes him a moment to adjust to the formatting. The scenes and staging directions are sparse and economical, giving just a hint of what the movie will look like. The dialogue starts off fast and snappy, but there are moments when it lingers, and by the time Kirishima's been skimming for ten minutes he's already come to one monologue, an epic speech.

The main character is an unassuming young man who receives an enchanted sword from a strange old beggar, and soon sets off on an adventure. He falls in with a friendly apprentice witch and a straight-laced knight, and together they journey to defeat a great evil. Eventually, they rope in the neighboring kingdom's runaway prince to their enterprise, too.

Kirishima finds himself grinning as he flips through the pages—the characters are bursting with personality, and if he pauses between scenes he can see them playing out before him. After a few minutes, he flips ahead in the script, looking for the character marked for Bakugou by the note on the script.

The dragon king enters the story in the second act. He introduces himself by attacking the young hero, then refuses to listen to the other companions' explanations and leads the entire group into an ambush, all because he won't take anyone else's word as true.

Kirishima winces as he reads—the dragon king is a formidable character, but he's also his own worst enemy. He has his own reasons for wanting to defeat the evil the hero is going after, but he can't allow himself to accept help or ally with the group. He constantly throws himself into danger, insistent that he can do it all on his own.

All told, he's a bit of an idiot, even if Kirishima finds his fiery independence endearing.

"What are you doing?"

Kirishima snaps the script shut and looks up, caught red-handed. "Er..."

Bakugou is standing just by the doorway, wearing nothing but a fluffy towel wrapped around his waist. His hair is wet, plastered to his forehead and neck. His skin is a ruddy red from the shower, rivulets dripping down his chest and the length of his arms. His chest rises and falls unevenly, illness still holding a cough inside him. There are bags under his fierce eyes, but when he fixes Kirishima with a glare he's nothing but intimidating.

Fuck, Kirishima thinks, dragging his eyes from Bakugou's pecs and up to his eyes.

"Well?" Bakugou demands, utterly unabashed by his nakedness.

(Kirishima can't really blame him, for that. They *are* in Bakugou's house, and Kirishima is the one who read the script without permission, and obviously Bakugou has nothing to be *ashamed* of, body-wise, since he's the hottest person Kirishima has ever laid eyes on, days of vomiting illness or no.)

"I... got bored?" Kirishima tries, holding up his hands in what he hopes is an innocent gesture.

Bakugou opens his mouth to respond, then just shakes his head and mutters something to himself, under his breath.

"What was that?"

"Don't touch my stuff, asshole. Ever heard of a NDA?" He stomps into the room, reaching over the back of the couch to grab the script from Kirishima's lap. His fingers leave wet patches against the script's pristine cover.

"No?" Kirishima tries. Bakugou hasn't tried to murder him yet, which is generally a good sign.

Bakugou rolls his eyes. "Nondisclosure agreement. As in, when they send you a fucking script like this, you're not supposed to let the entire goddamn world read it."

"I'm not the entire world, though," Kirishima protests. "I'm your boyfriend. I mean, as far as these script-people know, right?"

Bakugou stares at him for a long moment, like he's trying to make Kirishima stop existing through sheer force of will.

"Like *that*'s the kind of scandal I need," Bakugou spits out, disgusted. "'Actor's dumbass boyfriend leaks script of the biggest movie of the year.' 'Yagi's epic ruined by big gay crush.'"

Maybe it's because he's still on the mend, but Bakugou's muttering is decidedly audible and coherent. Kirishima rests his arms along the back of the couch and pushes himself up, looking at Bakugou with round eyes.

"Is that what our story is?" he wonders aloud, "*You* had a crush on *me*?"

Bakugou hisses like a boiling kettle, one hand clenching where it holds up his towel and the other crushing the script until it's folded in two.

"Don't you even pay attention," he seethes.

Kirishima blinks, thinking back. They'd told the press that the two of them had met at a Riot concert, but the way they'd worded it, Bakugou had just been dragged along by Hagakure. And Kirishima hadn't put a lot of thought into that narrative, to begin with. In his imagination, they'd been two people in the same extended circle of fame, who'd happened to collide.

"I mean, who'd believe that, anyway," Kirishima continues, laughing. "Why would you have even known who I am, before we met? Forget having a crush on me."

"Don't people generally have crushes before they get together," Bakugou grinds out from behind clenched teeth.

Kirishima rests his chin against his hand, considering. "Sometimes? Oh, man, you should have seen Sero when he first started working for Ashido's management company, back in the day. He's friendly to everyone, right? Of course, you know. But he'd *always* be hanging around, waiting for Ashido to finish rehearsal or whatever, and he'd bring her flowers and those sour candies she really likes, all before they were even dating! It was sweet, you know? But he was definitely the one with the crush."

"Do you have a point," Bakugou says tiredly.

Kirishima shrugs. "No really. Just, you know. If anyone had a crush, between the two of us, it was me."

When Bakugou looks straight at him, his eyes look like coals warmed over a fire—bright hot, a vivid and violent red.

Bakugou must step closer, but Kirishima doesn't register his movement. Instead, he just realizes that Bakugou is in his space, standing on the other side of the couch, leaning forward so that their faces are only inches apart. His skin is still a ruddy pink from his shower, his shallow breaths audible in the short space between them.

"Do you?" Bakugou asks roughly.

Kirishima is frozen in place, looking at him. Does Bakugou know what he's asking? And shouldn't the answer be obvious to him, by now? Kirishima had told him he cared about him, just a few days ago. And while he *cares* about a lot of people, no one has ever provoked as much feeling in him as Bakugou has.

And all of that has really just been layered on top of what Kirishima felt for Bakugou before he'd ever met him—admiration, and *attraction*, and the undeniable pull of Bakugou's star.

He could just say yes, and admit it. Say that his feelings have been tangled up since before he started pretending, and that things have only gotten more complicated since then. He could lay it all out for Bakugou, tell him what he really wants.

Kirishima opens his mouth to speak, but all that comes out is a hiccup of noise. He leans back, trying to put distance between himself and Bakugou, but ends up tipping over from where he's balanced on his knees. He flails, both his arms windmill-ing, and one of his palms smacks against something as he struggles.

"Motherfucker."

Kirishima lands sideways on the couch, scrambles to get himself righted. When he looks over, Bakugou is covering his eye with one hand, wincing and cursing up a storm.

“Shit!” Kirishima rolls himself over the back of the couch and comes up next to Bakugou, reaching for him with nervous hands. “I’m sorry—I panicked!”

“Fuck off,” Bakugou growls, pushing Kirishima away with one hand.

Kirishima presses closer, grabs for Bakugou’s chin and tries to get a good look at his eye. It’s a little red, but he doesn’t look hurt otherwise. Kirishima breathes a sigh of relief.

Once again, they’re so close together. Kirishima is painfully aware of Bakugou’s nakedness, of how much of Bakugou is laid bare before him.

This is dangerous, he thinks. But even so, he can’t bring himself to step away.

“You’re so useless,” Bakugou mutters, finally putting space between them. He frowns, thinking something over. “Go grab a jacket, we’re going out.”

“Huh?”

Bakugou clinks his tongue against his teeth, gathering his patience. “I’m going to go get dressed, and then you’re going to buy me some fucking dinner. I haven’t eaten anything but your stupid store-bought soup for three days.”

“The soup was *great*,” Kirishima says first, on instinct. Then he frowns right back at Bakugou. “Plus it’s like, close to midnight. Where are we going to get dinner?”

Bakugou lets out an impatient noise, shaking his head. He reaches down to grab the script up from the ground where he’d dropped it, then turns and stalks off towards his bedroom with far more dignity than any man clad in only a towel should have.

—

At some point, Kirishima is going to have to stop being surprised by Bakugou. But for now, he’s still awed when Bakugou reappears within a few minutes, bundled up in Kirishima’s red Riot hoodie with a black denim jacket pulled over it. The feeling persists as Bakugou ushers him out of his apartment, then marches him down several city blocks until they reach a hole in the wall restaurant with a fluorescent neon sign that announces yes, they’re open at 12:30 am.

“Welcome,” one of the waitstaff calls out, as Kirishima and Bakugou enter and the bell hanging over the door chimes. The woman, dressed in black with a red apron at her waist, looks at them with recognition. “Bakugou-san! We haven’t seen you in a while.”

Bakugou responds with nothing more than a noncommittal grunt, then leads Kirishima to an empty two-person booth in the far corner of the restaurant.

“Shouldn’t we wait for them to seat us?” Kirishima asks.

Bakugou scoffs at him. “Look around, dumbass. Does this look like the kind of place you get seated at?”

Maybe he has a point. The entire restaurant would fit into Bakugou’s apartment three or four times over. There’s two free-standing tables, and booths lining the walls. The chef is leaning against the counter, waiting for orders. The only other customers at this hour are a middle-aged couple huddled in another booth on the opposite side of the restaurant.

“You picked it,” Kirishima says, sliding into the booth and shrugging out of his jacket. There are

menus balanced against the wall, and he grabs one to start flipping through.

“Whatever,” Bakugou mutters, taking his own seat across from Kirishima.

The waitress comes over after a minute. “The usual, Bakugou-san?”

Kirishima mouths, *you have a usual?* Bakugou ignores him.

“Make it two, Nakamura,” Bakugou says, not bothering to look at the menu.

The woman—Nakamura—glances between Kirishima and Bakugou with a glint in her dark eyes. “You’re Bakugou-san’s boyfriend?”

Kirishima shrugs helplessly. “Seems that way, doesn’t it!”

Nakamura laughs. “Make him take you somewhere nice, next time! He can afford it.”

Bakugou scowls at her. “Are you going to get our food, or what?”

“Yes, yes,” she says, lazily. “Don’t be rude, Bakugou-san.”

She walks back towards the kitchen after that, leaving Kirishima squinting suspiciously at Bakugou.

“What?” Bakugou snaps.

“This is *your place!*” Kirishima says, pointing an accusing finger at him.

“My place,” Bakugou echoes, in his Kirishima-is-an-idiot voice.

“You know! Your place, your haunt, the restaurant where you’re a regular and everyone knows you and you have *rapport* with the waitress!”

“It’s ten minutes from my apartment, of course I come here a lot,” Bakugou mutters, rubbing one hand down his face. “Don’t make a big thing of it.”

“Fine!” Kirishima says, sitting back with a happy little grin. He looks around the restaurant again, this time with a more curious eye. This is a place Bakugou *likes*. That’s enough to make it interesting to him.

Bakugou sits in grumpy silence until Nakamura returns with their food—two bowls piled high with steaming noodles, meat and vegetables. She sets the bowls down in front of them, winks at Bakugou, and the retreats to the front of the restaurant.

For all that the restaurant isn’t much to look at, the food is delicious. Kirishima can’t resist the enticing smell, stuffing his face with noodles until the spiciness of the dish catches up to him and he lunges for his glass of water.

Bakugou looks up from where he’s been methodologically shoveling noodles into his mouth. “Weakling,” he says, the corner of his lips lifting in a smirk.

“You could’ve warned me.”

Bakugou shrugs. “I could’ve.”

With renewed determination, Kirishima digs back into his meal. Everything is cooked to

perfection, and when he finds an almost-boiled egg in his noodle broth, he nearly moans with how good it is.

Bakugou must've been starving, because he eats through his entire meal all at once. When he's done, he sits back in his seat and watches Kirishima fish around in his noodles.

"So," Kirishima says, in between bites, "Are you going to do the movie?"

"Are you seriously starting on that, right now."

"Yeah, I am," Kirishima says, crunching on green onions. "I mean, I'm curious. It seems like a really good script! It's the only one I've ever read, but I'd definitely go see that movie."

Bakugou rolls his eyes. "It's a fucking blockbuster. *Everyone* is going to go see it."

"That's more reason to do it, right? Good for your career, and all that."

"I don't need exposure, I'm not a fucking amateur. I'm not doing it."

Kirishima looks up, a little crestfallen. It's probably not his place, but he thought there was something nice about the idea of Bakugou working with Yagi Toshinori again. Something that would help Bakugou get over the past, maybe.

"Why not?" he asks, keeping his voice carefully casual.

Bakugou grinds his teeth. "Because it's not the kind of bullshit I want to do."

Kirishima takes another bite to hide his smile. "So what kind of bullshit do you want to do?"

Bakugou's cheeks color a startled pink, but eventually he looks up at Kirishima and mutters, "The same thing I've been trying to do forever."

It takes Kirishima a moment to realize what Bakugou is talking about. But then, the answer becomes obvious. Ever since his days on *UA*, Bakugou's been pushing for one kind of storyline. And he's never gotten to play it out, yet.

"You want to do a romance?" Kirishima asks, around another mouthful of noodles.

Bakugou taps his fingers impatiently on the table. "*No*. I get offered about ten shitty romances a day, who the hell do you think you're talking to? If I get one more script for a character who's an asshole to some girl and she falls in love with him anyway, I'm going to lose my mind."

Kirishima chokes on a laugh. "You get typecast a lot, huh."

"People are just fucking lazy. I'm good at this shit, and I don't need to keep playing characters that are just what people think I'm like."

"I think you could play anyone," Kirishima says, honestly. "Your character in *Ground Zero* wasn't an asshole, though I guess Nobuhiko was, for a while. But if he'd been an asshole to Ayane I wouldn't have liked them together so much. I always thought they were really sweet."

Bakugou rests his elbows against the table, chin against his hands. "You're a real fucking fanboy, aren't you."

"I never said I wasn't," Kirishima reminds him. "And besides, Yagi-san's movie seems different from everything else you've done. It's all fantasy and magic and *dragons*. You don't think that'd

be cool?”

“Don’t,” Bakugou says warningly. “I’m not going to do his piece of shit movie, so everyone can just stop, already.”

Everyone? Oh. Yagi’s movie is the one Iida was talking about, back at the beach house. The one he was encouraging Bakugou to take, because Midoriya and Uraraka and Todoroki had already signed on.

“You really hate them all that much?” The words are out before Kirishima can think better of them, before he can think of a way to phrase the question that isn’t so much of an accusation.

Bakugou grimaces. “Who says it’s about them? Maybe I’m just tired of playing the bad guy to make shitty Deku look good, all the time.”

Ah. Midoriya must be playing the film’s protagonist—which probably makes Uraraka the helpful witch and Todoroki the runaway prince. In the young hero’s clashes with the dragon king, he’d definitely come off better.

“I sort of figured they’d end up friends,” Kirishima says, leaning back. “Isn’t that usually how stories like that go? I mean, even if they don’t like each other, they’re still on the same side.”

Bakugou makes an irritated noise in the back of his throat. “I fucking told Sero what kind of script I want, next. And I’ve done every possible thing to make it happen. So if I don’t get what I want, then maybe I need to find a new agent.”

Kirishima winces. Sure, her and Sero aren’t the friendliest they’ve ever been, but that doesn’t mean he wants to see him fired. “Don’t worry so much,” he says. “I’m sure whatever it is you want, it’ll come through.”

Bakugou huffs and sits back in his seat again. “Yeah,” he mutters. “Whatever I want.”

He’s so bad at saying things directly, Kirishima thinks. The times when he’s truly opened up to Kirishima have been moments of frustration or vulnerability. But at a baseline, he doesn’t want to say what he’s thinking, what he’s actually feeling, at all.

For some reason, that makes their situation seem—special, somehow. Sitting along together in the middle of the night, in the place that Bakugou frequents. He’s letting Kirishima in, albeit in a different way that Kirishima was maybe asking for. But he’s probably still getting more of Bakugou than anyone else has.

“At least you know,” Kirishima says thoughtfully. “Sometimes people can’t even figure out what they want.”

“Yeah, dumb people,” Bakugou says, staring down at his hands. He looks up, sees the expression on Kirishima’s face, and bites down on his tongue. “What? *You* don’t know what you want?”

When he says it like that, it does seem stupid. But all Kirishima can do is shrug. “Sometimes, I don’t know, I just get a bit confused about it! I mean, I love making music, I love Riot, I love writing songs. And sometimes I think I really want to sing, perform that way for everyone. But I can never do it, so maybe it’s not something I actually want? I don’t always know exactly which way I want to go. I can’t help it.”

Moments like these, Bakugou’s gaze is too intense, too perceptive. “Do you not know, or are you telling yourself you don’t want it because you think you can’t have it?”

Kirishima swallows nervously. How is he supposed to know the difference? If you hold yourself back from something for long enough, how can you remember if you wanted it at all?

Bakugou frowns. “Just—do whatever you want, in the fucking moment. It’s not that complicated. If you want to sing, then do it. No one’s going to tell you can’t, or that you suck at it. Because you don’t. People aren’t that dumb. They wouldn’t keep listening to your stuff if they didn’t like it.”

A weight lifts off his chest as he processes what Bakugou is saying to him. And maybe it’s something that Bakugou has tried to say, before—that he thinks Kirishima is good, and worth it, somehow.

A moment of clarity hits him like a bolt of lightning, illuminating everything around him. Right here, right now, Kirishima knows what he wants. He looks up, and sees Bakugou leaning towards him, and thinks—*maybe he wants the same thing*.

Kirishima reaches over the table, brings his hand to rest on Bakugou’s cheek like he’s asking for permission. And Bakugou, who always wraps up what he means in a shield of pretense, just blinks at Kirishima and leans a fraction of an inch closer.

Kissing Bakugou has by now become familiar. Their lips press together, soft and chaste, before they pull apart and then come back together again. Bakugou’s still running warm, heat radiating off his skin. Kirishima strokes his thumb along Bakugou’s jaw, rhythmic and soothing.

For all that they’ve practiced this, for all that they’ve acted like a couple, this moment is different. When Kirishima kisses Bakugou, now, there’s an honesty in it he cannot mask and does not want to.

When they pull apart enough to look at each other, Kirishima smiles and Bakugou purses his lips like he’s fighting the urge to do the same.

Endeared, Kirishima laughs. “You know, I don’t care what Nakamura says.”

“Ha?”

“This is probably the best date I’ve ever had.”

—

He ends up crashing on Bakugou’s couch for the night, since it’s well past two am by the time they make it back to the apartment. He passes out quickly, rousing some indeterminable amount of time later when Bakugou stalks into the kitchen to make himself breakfast. Kirishima turns over, groaning, and quickly falls back asleep.

The next time he wakes, it’s because his cellphone is shrieking at him. Extending one hand out from his heavy blankets, Kirishima gropes around until he finds the phone, pulling it into his nest and trying to read the blurry screen with sleepy eyes.

Kaminari (7:15): You didn’t come home last night!! Everything ok?

Jirou (8:30): you do remember we have a 9am meeting with kayama-san, right?

Ashido (8:45): KIRISHIMA WHERE ARE YOU THIS IS IMPORTANT

Kaminari (9:15): Ashido’s freaking out, just so you know! And because she’s freaking out, I’m freaking out!! Where are you??

Jirou (9:30): the other two are freaking out, in case you didn't get the memo. but we're rescheduled with kayama-san for after lunch. let us know you're alive before then, please.

Ashido (10:15): KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA

Kaminari (10:25): KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA

Ashido (10:35): KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA

Kaminari (10:45): KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA KIRISHIMA

Kirishima winces, and scrolls past another five or so messages to the same effect.

Jirou (11:50): our meeting's at 1:15. be here, call me, whatever. just do something before i murder ashido and kaminari.

Slightly dazed, Kirishima checks the time—12:30. Jolted into awareness, he throws back his blankets and jumps to his feet. He's got time, he can make it—he just needs to get himself presentable and across town, before then.

“Bakugou!” he yells out, not waiting for a response, “I'm late for a meeting and I've got to go but I'll see you later, okay? Okay! Bye!”

—

By some miracle, Kirishima makes it to the studio. He's wearing yesterday's clothes and his hair is down around his face, but he makes it and that's what matters. The staff at security and reception shoot him odd looks as he runs for the elevators, but he waves them off with a laugh.

“It's okay, I'm Kirishima Eijirou!” he calls out. “You know, from Riot? I'm mildly famous, don't worry!”

No one tries to stop him, so that's a plus. Three minutes later, he slides into Kayama's office looking like he was brought in by a tornado.

“Sorry I'm late, sorry for everything, I'm here!”

Ashido, Jirou and Kaminari are sitting around Kayama's desk. They turn to stare at him, and then everyone starts speaking at once.

“Dude,” Kaminari says, throwing his hands up in the air. “What the hell!”

“If you're going to ditch us for your boyfriend, you could at least tell us.” Ashido crosses her arms over her chest, pouting.

Jirou purses her lips for a moment before saying, “Everything okay, Kirishima?”

From behind the desk, Kayama clears her throat. “*Children.*”

They all turn to face her. Kayama is wearing her usual black and white, with silver bangles at her wrists. Today, her dark hair is pulled into a knot at the back of her head. She looks down at Kirishima over the rims of her glasses.

“Take a seat, Kirishima-kun,” she says. “We've got things to discuss.”

Feeling uncomfortably like he's just been called to the principal's office, Kirishima pulls up a chair

and squeezes in to one side of Jirou.

“As I was saying,” Kayama continues, “You all are at a crossroads, right now. Your album is almost complete, you have your last concert with Present Mic next weekend, and you need to start considering next steps. Ways to capitalize on your recent... notoriety.”

She casts Kirishima a significant look, as she says this, and he can't help but be offended. He and Bakugou haven't been in the tabloids for a while, and even before that it was supposedly for the band's own good.

“What?” he says, as Ashido and Kaminari look at him.

“You must've seen Twitter this morning,” Jirou says tiredly.

“I think you're overestimating me,” Kirishima says, confused.

“Set up a Google alert for yourself like the rest of us,” Kaminari tells him, reaching over Jirou to punch Kirishima in the side.

Ashido, for her part, just passes over her phone.

Kirishima takes it and glances down at the screen, sees his own shock of red hair first. It's a photograph that looks like it was taken through a window—Bakugou and Kirishima, sitting at a booth in a run-down restaurant, kissing over the table. Both of their eyes are closed, and they they're utterly oblivious to the fact that they're being watched, photographed.

Something twists in Kirishima's gut like a snake, cold and tangled. Last night hadn't been for the cameras, or for fame. It had been genuine, and seeing it captured in a photograph where the lights are too bright and the picture is blurred makes it seem like it wasn't even real—like it was as fake as everything else.

“I,” Kirishima starts to say, but then his voice tapers off. What is he supposed to say about this?

Kayama sighs softly. “It's not bad press,” she says lightly. “But I'm here to make your music careers, not just buy you some cheap fame. I want the focus on you, on this album.”

The four of them turn back to her, nodding. Kirishima's never felt the atmosphere between them be so serious.

“I think you need to go on tour,” Kayama continues. “Get out, let the country see you, let the people hear you. We can announce it when we finalize the date for the album. I've already lined up a few acts you'd make good openers for. One in particular, actually.”

Kirishima barely hears her. He looks back down at the picture, at the growing count of likes and shares.

This is what they all wanted, isn't it?

Chapter End Notes

["hop a plane" - city and colour](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

i've been truly honored by all the amazing art for this fic-- please check in out [here](#)!!

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The trip back to their apartment is quiet, or maybe it only seems that way. Kirishima goes through the motions like he's underwater, insulated from sound and clear vision and touch. By the time he surfaces for air, he's sitting in their living room, unsure of exactly how he got there.

Ashido is leaning over him, hands on her hips and brow furrowed. "Kirishima? Are you okay?"

He shakes his head, hopes that'll clear his mind some. "Sure. Yeah. What were we talking about?"

Kaminari, sitting perched on the arm of the couch, lets out an exasperated breath. "Our tour with your favorite band, maybe?"

Oh, right. They'd been in Kayama's office, and she'd been going over her plans for them. They have one more concert opening for Present Mic, and then she wants them to go on tour as soon as their album comes out. And she wants them to go on tour with—

"Suneater," Jirou says, from the other side of the couch. "I wouldn't have put the two of us together, but it makes a certain amount of sense. Plus, we couldn't ask for better exposure."

Ashido is still leaning over Kirishima, trying to look him straight in the eye even though he keeps turning away from her. "You're supposed to be bouncing off the walls," she tells him. "What's wrong?"

"He's daydreaming about his boyfriend," Kaminari huffs.

"No, I'm not," Kirishima protests. He doesn't know what he's feeling. Was it really just twelve hours ago that he was sitting in the diner with Bakugou, feeling happier than he's ever been? It was a perfect moment, like the scene in a snow globe—untouchable and preserved.

"Sure," Kaminari says, disbelieving.

"Leave him alone," Jirou says lightly. "We wouldn't have the kind of traction we do, right now, if he hadn't gotten our names in every tabloid in the country."

Because that was the point, Kirishima reminds himself. It wasn't about him actually falling in love with Bakugou, it was about Riot getting famous and Bakugou preserving his own career. It wasn't about the two of them as individuals, at all. And he needs to stop thinking about it that way.

Ashido lays a hand on his shoulder, and Kirishima finally looks up. Ashido's eyes are liquid dark, round with concern. She's startlingly beautiful, in that moment—her cheeks flushed a subtle pink, her long lashes accentuated by her dark eye makeup. But maybe what makes her so striking, just then, is the emotion in her eyes. It's raw concern, like she's aching for him alone.

Kirishima sucks in a breath. "I don't know if I want to go on tour, right now."

Kaminari smacks a hand against his forehead, and Jirou's face takes on a pinched look. Ashido holds up a hand before either of them can say anything.

"Explain," she says.

Kirishima folds his hands in his lap, dropping his gaze from Ashido. He wonders if Bakugou would be disappointed in him for his indecision. He wants to be a person of conviction, who can just reach out and take what they want. But he's not like Bakugou. He has none of that certainty. What he may have wanted before has been eclipsed by something else.

"It's months on the road," he says, thinking through it even as he speaks aloud. "We'd be all over the country, in a different city every night. We wouldn't be back home for weeks and weeks."

"So?" Ashido asks, not unkindly.

"So," Kirishima says, and suddenly his voice is miserable, suddenly there's a heat in his eyes and he feels like he's going to cry. He's letting them all down, he knows he is. They've been in this together from the start, the four of them. And now he's going to be the one who ruins everything. He sucks in a breath, tries to keep himself together. "So, nothing. It's fine. Let's go on tour."

"*Kirishima.*"

Three voices say his name in unison, so harshly it's like a pianist hitting the wrong key in the middle of a song.

He looks up and sees them all staring at him, matching expressions of frustration on their faces.

"Dude, don't *do* that," Kaminari says, wrinkling his nose in distaste.

"I wasn't—"

"Don't say what you think we want you to," Jirou continues, with a soft sigh. "Just because you're doing it for us."

"We don't want that," Ashido says. Her brows crease into an angry V over his eyes. "Why would we want that? We love you, Kirishima. We want you to be happy."

The other two nod solemnly.

The dam breaks. Looking at them, feeling their concern and love, Kirishima folds in on himself. He rests his forehead against his knees, and his shoulders start to shake as the tears come. Furious and angry, they roll down his cheeks even as Ashido sits herself down on one side of him and Kaminari takes his place on the other. They lay their hands on his back, gentle and reassuring, but Kirishima can't stop crying.

"I don't know what to do." The words come out in between sobs, like they're being ripped out of his throat. "I don't want to have to choose."

Even a week ago, the thought of touring with Suneater would've filled him with nothing but joy. The idea of standing on the same stage as Amajiki Tamaki is beyond even his wildest dreams. Playing to the same audiences, standing in the same signing lines, spending time with one of his idols— it's too good to be true.

But the past few months with Bakugou have been exhilarating in a completely different way. The small moments he's build up with Bakugou, the thin string of connection between them that's grown stronger and stronger— how could he give that up?

"I really like him," Kirishima says, aware that he's not making any sense. "I like him *so much*, and if I leave— it's not real, we're not *together*, if I leave it's going to end."

From beside him, Kaminari lets out a hiss. “We really are stupid.”

Kirishima rubs at his eyes, pulling himself up. Immediately, Ashido puts a hand around his shoulders and pulls him against her side. He rests his head against her shoulder, feels the warmth of her body and the solid comfort of her presence.

“We should’ve seen this coming,” Kaminari is saying, shaking his head.

“What?” Kirishima asks, breathless.

Jirou is hugging her legs against her chest, chin against her knees. “I think what Kaminari means is that, when you first started acting like Bakugou’s boyfriend, we should’ve known you wouldn’t be able to keep your own feelings out of it.”

They’re right. This is his fault.

“I’m sorry.” He doesn’t know what else there is to say.

“No,” Kaminari says, so fiercely it startles him. “No, shut up, you’re not the one who’s supposed to be sorry! *We*’re sorry. We shouldn’t have let you do this. We should’ve protected you.”

“What?”

Kaminari looks him straight in the eye, and his eyes are red like he’s about to start crying, too.

“You care about everyone,” Kaminari says, like an accusation. “And we’re supposed to know that better than anyone. This was bound to happen, and we let it.”

Kirishima looks around at the three of them, all with equally guilty expressions on their faces.

“No,” he protests, “no, it’s not your guys’ fault! How could you even think that?”

Jirou’s lips pull into a thin smile. “Maybe because you’re sitting here, miserable, and it happened on our watch?”

“That doesn’t make it your fault.” Kirishima rubs his hands over his face, trying to get his thoughts straight. “If I feel guilty for making you guys feel guilty for how I feel, we’re just going to keep going like this forever.”

Kaminari barks out a laugh, punches Kirishima lightly in the side. “You really fell for him, didn’t you? You fell for Bakugou Katsuki.”

Kirishima doesn’t know what to say to that. It’s not inaccurate—he feels something for Bakugou, can’t stop thinking about that last kiss. But his feelings aren’t as simple as he’d like them to be.

“Looks that way, doesn’t it,” he says, thinking to the photo on Twitter. Whatever is happening between the two of them, it’s out there for the entire world to see. He can’t shield it.

“We won’t go on tour unless all four of us agree to it,” Jirou says, toying with the ends of her bangs. She usually isn’t the decision-maker, and maybe that’s why she looks down at the ground when she says it.

“No, guys, you can’t worry about me—”

“Kirishima, shut up,” Kaminari says again, slapping his hand down on the crown of Kirishima’s head.

“You brought us together,” Jirou says. “We’re not going to do anything, unless you’re on board with it, too.”

Kirishima starts crying, again, but these aren’t tears of despair. Rather, it’s as though happiness is leaking out of him, too big to be contained in his chest.

“You guys,” he says, voice watery and rough.

“But if you decide we’re not doing this, you get to tell Kayama-san that, okay?” Kaminari says, winking.

Jirou kicks him. “Knock it off.”

Kirishima laughs, even though the sound comes like it’s being scraped from the back of his throat. When he has a moment to think, he realizes that Ashido hasn’t said anything, though she hasn’t moved her arm from around him. He looks up at her questioningly.

“Could the two of us talk?” she says, while Jirou and Kaminari are distracted by each other. “Alone?”

—

They step into Kirishima’s bedroom a minute later. Kirishima gestures Ashido to take a seat on the bed, and only happens to glance out his window as he moves to join her. He gasps at what he sees, shock going through him like arrow into his heart.

Bakugou’s billboard—the Best Jeanist ad, the one that went up weeks and weeks ago, before any of this started—is being plastered over in white. Workers are preparing the billboard for a new ad, and as they do they systematically erase Bakugou’s fiery image. The provocative jut of his hips in those jeans is already gone, as is the sharp angle of his bare arm, and now they’re working on the pale color of his hair.

It shouldn’t hurt, the way it does. But Kirishima physically reaches out, as though he can stop the work that’s already been done, as though he can keep that image of Bakugou preserved and whole. As though he can keep the real Bakugou to himself.

“*Kirishima*,” Ashido says sharply, grabbing his wrist. “What’re you doing?”

Kirishima shakes his head, rubbing the back of his hand over his eyes. He needs—sleep. He needs to get himself together, and to get his emotions in check. That’s why everything seems to bad right now, isn’t it? Because he was out until the middle of the night and slept on Bakugou’s couch and ran to get to the meeting at Kayama’s office on time. He just hasn’t had time to process, or rest, or do anything at all. When he’s settled himself, none of this will feel quite as bad. He has to believe that.

He slumps down onto the bed beside Ashido, lying flat on his back as his legs dangle over the edge. Staring at the ceiling, he asks, “What was it you wanted to talk about?”

Beside him, Ashido stifles a sigh. “Kaminari was right. We should’ve seen this coming.”

“You don’t have to say it like that,” Kirishima mumbles.

“Like what?”

“Like it’s a tragedy,” Kirishima breathes out. Liking someone, isn’t it supposed to feel good?

That's what he's always tried to write into his songs—a love that fills you up from the inside and then spills out of you because it's too strong to be contained. Like drinking champagne too fast, and feeling the bubbles rising through your body until you're giddy with them. Bakugou has made him happy, hasn't he? Where has that happiness gone?

"If it's not tragic, then why are you looking like that?" Ashido asks. She flops back, so that they're lying side by side. Next to Kirishima's broad chest, she's slim and slight. Her shirt rides up a bit, revealing the curved line of her stomach and her rosy skin.

He takes a moment to think about it, to figure out how he feels.

"I don't know what to do," he admits, whispering the words like a secret. "I don't know what I'm *supposed* to do."

Ashido hums, reaching up and resting her hands behind her head. "Can I tell you a story?"

He's always known her to be flighty—to jump from one topic to the next, to be more concerned with herself than the people around her, in a nonchalant but not unkind way. But right now, he doesn't think she's changing the subject.

"Okay," he says.

She's silent for a moment, still staring at the ceiling instead of looking at him. Then: "I really did love Sero, you know."

Kirishima doesn't interrupt, just nods. He's not sure she can see the motion.

"I mean, I was seventeen. And some people think you can't love anyone, when you're that young, but I think I loved him more *because* of it. He was—he *is*—so good, you know? He's funny, and he's down to earth, and he doesn't take any crap from anyone. He never let anything phase him. Even me! And I was a big deal, you remember that?"

Kirishima laughs, this time. He remembers Ashido at seventeen—bright pink hair and brighter smile, commanding presence and killer voice. He remembers standing behind her on stage and thinking, *she's it. She's everything a star should be.*

"You were like a hurricane," he tells her.

"Right?" Ashido laughs, too. "I mean, maybe I should be embarrassed by how much of a diva I was, but I don't think I'd do it any differently, now. But somehow—Sero got that, about me. He anchored me. I really, really loved that about him. He talked to me like I was a real person, but also like he'd follow me anywhere. I barely knew what to do with that, how he felt about me."

He blinks at her phrasing. Not how she felt about him, but how he felt about her.

"But we had our problems, too," Ashido says with a labored sigh. "I got an offer to—I don't know if you ever heard about it, but—my publicist wanted me to write a song, for a TV show. Then perform it, for cross-promotion, and stuff. And Sero and I had a huge fight about it."

Kirishima remembers the fight, but not what caused it. When had Ashido been on a TV show?

"I didn't end up doing it," she says, like she's read his mind. "Because—because of what we were fighting about. Sero asked me, he said—" She cuts herself off with a deep breath.

"It's okay," Kirishima says, "You don't have to tell me, if you don't want to."

“No,” Ashido insists. “I *have* to tell you, Kirishima. Because I don’t want to see you do something stupid, or something you’ll regret, when I could’ve helped you.”

They’re both silent, for a beat.

“Sero asked me if it was all worth it. If I wanted to be famous, more than anything else. More than I wanted to be with him.”

The words curve around Kirishima’s heart and squeeze. “Ashido—”

She smiles sadly. “I didn’t know. I loved him, sure, but I loved being a performer, too! And I thought, I’m *seventeen*! What happens if I give this life up for him, and then we don’t last? What if he doesn’t love me as much as I love him? What if he doesn’t love me anymore, if I’m not a famous idol? What then?”

Kirishima can’t imagine Sero’s feelings changing for such a reason. But as he’s quickly learning, maybe he never knew much about Sero and Ashido’s relationship, at all.

“Not knowing, it wasn’t good enough,” Ashido says. “And so, he moved on, and so did I. And then, six months later, I quit. Being an idol wasn’t what I wanted. But Sero was already gone by then, and so I had neither of the things I thought I wanted.”

Only now does Kirishima realize why Ashido’s telling him this story. Suddenly, he can’t get enough air. His throat is closing up, constricting his breathing.

“I’m not telling you what to do,” Ashido says. “And I don’t regret it, not really. I love what my life is, now. I love being in Riot, and performing with all of you. But you’ve got to make that choice for yourself, Kirishima. I want you to be happy, I want you to get whatever it is you want. But if you’re giving up one thing, I want you be sure the other is worth it.”

Ashido had given up a real relationship to chase her own dreams. And Kirishima has what, by comparison? A couple of stolen moments within a much larger lie. He hears the warning in Ashido’s words.

“I think you’re like Sero, in a lot of ways,” she says idly. “A lot of good ways, I mean. But I’m scared that maybe Bakugou is like me. He did start this whole thing just to save his career. Are you sure that’s not the only thing he’s after?”

What if he doesn’t like you as much as you like him? Ashido is asking. *What if you give up your career, and at the end of it you don’t even have him?*

Kirishima shakes his head, draping one arm over his eyes. “Fuck,” he mutters. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

Ashido curls up next to him, laying her head against his chest. “Be selfish, Kirishima. Make a decision for you, and not for anyone else. But do it with your eyes open, okay?”

He lets his arm drop down onto her shoulders, bolstered by her warmth.

“What would I do without you,” he murmurs.

She pokes him in the side. “That’s my line, Mister.”

He still has no idea what he should do. But for a moment, he’s content to just lie beside her.

That is, until a moment later. When he looks up and glances out the window, and sees all that's left of Bakugou's Best Jeanist ad: one startlingly bright red eye, smoldering as it looks out at him from an otherwise blank canvas of white. That eye stares at him, like it's pinning him to the spot. Like it's reminding him of something.

Maybe it's a blessing, that Kirishima's life is so hectic. It keeps him from thinking too much, at least. Even when he hasn't decided what to do about the tour, when he hasn't managed to get ahold of Bakugou in two days, he can't really dwell on it. Because tonight is Riot's last concert opening for Present Mic.

The atmosphere is different, tonight, even though they've played this show countless times. One of the managers bursts into their dressing room an hour and a half before they're supposed to go on, and insists on decking them out in new outfits. Kirishima's usual black tank is replaced by a furiously crimson one, with *Riot!* stamped across it in black lettering. Jirou gets one in purple, Kaminari one in yellow, and Ashido one in pink.

"We'll sell more of them if we wear them first, I guess," Kaminari says, pulling his tank over his head. He's wearing a black choker around his neck, a small metallic lightning bolt dangling from it. His jeans are black, so tight they might as well be painted on. With his long legs and jaggedly-cut hair, he's like lightning in a bottle. His energy is hectic, but somehow contained in these moments before they get on stage.

Kirishima feels like he's leeching his strength off of all of them as they get ready to take the stage. Ashido's cheer and Kaminari's energy and Jirou's focus. He'll need all three, if he's going to make it through tonight.

Before the lights have gone down, he looks out at the crowd, at the VIP box. Amajiki Tamaki is there, accompanied by his bandmates and his boyfriend, Toogata Mirio. Behind them, a man with shaggy black hair is leaning back in his seat—Kirishima blinks, because he can swear that the man is dozing off, despite the din around him. But beside him—beside him is Bakugou.

Kirishima swallows roughly. Bakugou isn't looking toward the stage, not yet. He's wearing a black button-down and has his arms crossed over his chest. His expression is neutral, for him—which means he looks like he's ready to commit a murder.

And Kirishima's in love with him. He's so in love that just looking at Bakugou hurts, like there's something inside him that's grown too big for his chest and is about to burst out.

"He's *here*," Ashido says from beside him. But she's not looking at Bakugou. She's looking to the seat beside him, where Sero is sitting. He's leaning forward, elbows against his knees, like he can't wait to see the show.

Kirishima reaches for Ashido's hand. "He's seen our shows before," he reminds her. "He always comes with Bakugou, doesn't he?"

From Ashido's other side, Jirou sucks in a breath. "Yeah, but in those shows, we didn't have a bunch of new songs to play."

"Including one that's about Sero," Kaminari finishes, brows inching upwards towards his hairline.

"It's fine," Ashido says definitively. She pulls away from Kirishima and snaps her fingers. "I'm a professional, you know! And this is fine."

When they're on stage, Kirishima can breathe easily for the first time in days. Music has always been like that, for him. It pulls him into a different world, where the only things that matter are the sounds and the feelings. Everything that's been swirling around inside of him—love and confusion and indecision and despair—they seem to leave him as his fingers strum the strings of his guitar, as Ashido sings his words to the crowd, as Kaminari bangs out a beat and Jirou pulls off a particularly skillful solo.

This is the world he's always wanted to be in. Why would he—*how* could he—give this up for anything?

This time, he's barely aware of Bakugou in the crowd. He can't be, because if he looks towards where he knows Bakugou is that will break the spell. He'll be pulled out of the peace of this moment, and all his feelings will come roaring back to the surface. Right now, he can't afford that.

They play a particularly long set, new songs littered in amongst the ones they've been playing for months. As their time on stage winds down, Ashido pulls her mic off its stand and addresses the crowd.

"I hope you've all been having a good night," she says, and the crowd roars in response. Laughing, Ashido fluffs her hair. "Well! Save some of that energy for Present Mic, will you? It'll be our secret that you liked us best."

The crowd laughs, clapping and cheering. Ashido has that way with them, always manages to charm them entirely by the time Riot leaves the stage.

But now, her voice drops just a little lower, and her smile fades into something more open and honest.

"We have one more song to play for you," she says. "It's incredibly special to me, and I hope you listen to it with all your heart. Because we've all put our hearts into it."

She takes a step back, and Kaminari taps out a slow, gentle beat. Ashido replaces her mic on its stand and wraps both her hands around it.

The first words come easily. Ashido stares out at the crowd as she sings, the rest of them playing the simple melody that Kayama-san had so approved of that day in the studio. They strum their guitars slowly, and Ashido's voice falls like stones into a stream, soft and deliberate.

But the song gets more honest, the longer it goes on. It starts out with a romance and turns to something darker, something selfish and raw. And as Ashido is carried away in the current of the song, her voice cracks. She hitches a breath, and then she stops singing entirely.

Kirishima glances up, and realizes that Ashido's looking straight out at the crowd, to where she knows Sero is sitting. She's looking at him, and she's frozen.

Kaminari tappers off in his playing, staring at Ashido. Jirou's fingers falter a minute later. Their song peters out, noise echoing through the stadium as the crowd begins to murmur restlessly.

This can't be happening. Ashido doesn't freeze. She's the confident one, the one who was made for the spotlight. She's the one who's carried them this far. But she isn't moving, isn't singing. Something's gone terribly wrong.

She's never asked Kirishima to write a song for her, *from* her before. And so maybe she's never

bared herself so fully to a crowd, never been so honest in her singing.

He's moving before he's even really thought about it. One moment, Kirishima is standing back and to the side, and the next he's standing right next to Ashido, guitar still in his hands. He strums out the opening bars of the melody again, like they're shifting back into the song. He pauses, then plays them again. But Ashido doesn't join back in, doesn't start singing.

Kirishima is looking at Ashido when he begins to sing. He's still strumming out that melody, and the words come easily—it's like being back in that recording booth, with just him and Ashido, not realizing they had an audience. He sings, and he plays the song he wrote for her. The one in which he'd tried his best to understand her feelings, and melded them with some of his own. His perception of Bakugou, and his perception of Ashido, and the feelings shared between all these people he cares about so much. He sings them, and his voice carries from the stage, out over the crowd.

Ashido blinks up at him, wetness in her eyes that shine golden under the stage lights. But she sings with him, then—their voices mingling one more, deep and rich and high and intense. They look at each other and sing, and around them there is utter silence from the crowd.

They both stop singing at once, as Kirishima plays the last few notes on his guitar. On cue, the lights of the stage dim.

"Kirishima," Ashido whispers, hands coming up over her mouth, "you were *singing*."

He's still a bit dazed when the noise finally reaches him—the enormous din of the crowd as they cheer and cheer and cheer, a mix of *Riot!* and *Kirishima!* and *We love you!*

The sound rushes up around him like he's just dunked his head underwater, like he's in the ocean and the current is pulling him under. He's too numb, too stunned to feel anything like horror or fear at what he'd just done.

Because he wasn't singing for himself, just now. He'd been singing for her. For Ashido, and a for another person, out in the crowd like a single luminous star in the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

["bad ones" - matthew dear and tegan & sara](#) (and also, [the live version](#).)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He's still riding high on adrenaline a few hours later, when Present Mic throws an arm around Kirishima's shoulders and pulls him close.

"Who do you think you are, kid?" Yamada demands, still flushed from his own performance. His golden blond hair is pulled back into its usual, improbable style, but he's shed the leather jacket for a plain black t-shirt. "Why didn't I know that you had pipes like that, hah?"

"Um, sorry?" Kirishima blinks into the bright lights, the sheer volume of Yamada's voice.

Yamada rolls his eyes, blinking at the ceiling. "And you're not even cocky about it. If I wasn't already a star, I'd be sizing you up as a rival."

If they were anywhere close to the same league, Kirishima wouldn't even be in Yamada's weight class. Yamada has to know that, and is probably just being nice.

Kirishima immediately throws his hands up in front of his face. "It's not like that, Yamada-san! I'm not a singer, I was just trying to keep the performance going! Anyway, that's Ashido's job—"

Yamada snorts, with no patience for Kirishima's deflections. "No one's doubting her. Hell, you've been opening for *me* for months, you think I don't know she can sing? But the two of you, together—that was something else, kid. You'd be smart not to let it go so quickly."

Kirishima is sure that his face is as red as his hair. He really doesn't know what possessed him to sing tonight—or he does, but doesn't want to face those emotions so directly.

Yamada had invited them back to his penthouse apartment for an after-party, of sorts. That was his last show in-residence at the arena, and Riot's last time opening for him. Some executives from the label are around, along with everyone who'd been in the VIP box earlier in the evening. Kirishima gulps, remembering that last detail.

The sitting room is massive—hardwood floors and glass walls that look out over the lights of the city. People are milling about with drinks, chatting and dancing and looking out onto the city. Kirishima barely has time to register all their faces as Yamada tugs him across the room.

There's a sunken section of the room, where a handful of people are sitting on sleek leather couches. Kirishima recognizes a few familiar faces before Yamada tugs him in front of a man who's draped over the couch like he might fall asleep on it at any moment.

He's tall, with wan-looking skin and eyes surrounded by deep bags. His hair is dark, jaggedly cut and falling over his forehead and around his shoulders. He's dressed all in black, but instead of put-together he seems careless—his clothes baggy, his face dotted with stubble.

On the couch across from him are Bakugou and Sero. Bakugou has his arms crossed over his chest, brow furrowed as he broods. Sero, on the other hand, is waving his arms excitedly as chatters to the tired-looking man.

In that moment, a surge of harsh anger rises through Kirishima. Why does Sero look so *happy*? Doesn't he know what he'd done to Ashido? How badly she feels, because of him? Why should he

get to feel happy when she doesn't?

As though sensing Kirishima's thoughts—or maybe just spotting his glare—Sero looks up and his cheery expression disappears for a moment, replaced by a frown and the flash of something like guilt in his eyes. And immediately, Kirishima regrets, because Sero is also his friend, and—this is too complicated. He doesn't know if he's supposed to pick a side, or how he's supposed to feel about Sero when he only has Ashido's perspective on their story.

"Shouta," Yamada says, breaking through Kirishima's thoughts. "*There* you are."

The tired-looking man looks up at Yamada and blinks like he senses a headache coming on. "I haven't moved," he says in a deep, slow voice. "You're the one flitting about like a hummingbird."

"I wanted you to meet all the kids," Yamada says, excitedly. "This is Kirishima."

Kirishima steps forward, prepared to introduce himself, but the man—Shouta?—just sighs.

"I know who he is," he says, waving a vague hand at Bakugou.

And, it should be impossible, but Bakugou's cheeks stain a furious red as the man gestures at him. Then he jerks his chin up and says, "Obviously. He's my boyfriend, why else would I be here."

His words are sullen, impatient, but they send sparks through Kirishima's veins. Has Bakugou ever claimed him so readily, before? Usually it's Kirishima who steps in to keep their cover story going.

"Kirishima," Sero cuts in, smooth and professional like the agent he is, "This is Aizawa Shouta-san. He's an incredible director, from Eraser Head Features."

"He's an incredible director, when he isn't firing every single actor off his set," Yamada sneers, elbowing Aizawa in the side. Aizawa grimaces at him.

Kirishima looks away from Aizawa, only to meet Bakugou's glare. His eyes are burning with something that Kirishima can't name, but they look like hot coals. He's definitely not happy.

"Hey," Kirishima says, moving towards Bakugou. "I really need to talk to you."

Before Bakugou can answer, Sero steps between them. He shrugs apologetically. "Sorry, Kirishima. But we actually really need to finish this conversation." He gestures at Aizawa, who's still trading barbs with Yamada.

"Shouta," Yamada is saying, "What did you think of my show, huh?"

Aizawa rolls his eyes. "Was it any different than the last dozen?" he asks blandly. Yamada lets out a sound like a boiling kettle, but Aizawa just shrugs. "My ears aren't bleeding, I suppose."

Sero is raising his hand like he's waiting for Aizawa to call on him, or at least return to their conversation. But before he does, Aizawa turns to Kirishima.

"You got quite the reaction tonight," he says, assessment in his dark eyes. "Not bad."

For some reason, the simple words are truer praise than the platitudes Kirishima's gotten from others tonight. He smiles brightly, bobbing a half-bow in Aizawa's direction.

"Ah, thank you!"

Aizawa turns towards Sero and Bakugou. "Where were we?"

Sero starts talking at a mile a minute, and Kirishima can barely follow what's said. He knows a dismissal when he sees one, and he edges around Yamada and heads back into the crowd before he can be pulled in any more directions.

On the other side of the room, Kirishima spots Amajiki Tamaki. He's dressed as usual, in dark jeans and a baggy jacket, metallic piercings glinting from his face. There's an air of casual cool around him that Kirishima wishes he had. Amajiki slumps forward in his seat, hands folded in his lap as he talks to Kayama Nemuri.

She's another matter, entirely. The head of Midnight Records is in a slinky black dress, straddling the line between cocktail and casual. Her dark hair is loose down her back, and she balances a flute of bubbling champagne in one hand as she murmurs something to Amajiki. He looks up at her, cheeks flushing, and she throws back her head and laughs. She reaches out with her free hand to pat him consolingly on the shoulder. She looks up and makes eye contact with Kirishima.

"Just the person I wanted to see," she calls out, gesturing him over.

Kirishima walks towards them. He's been wearing the same smile all night—genuinely happy, in some respects, but bashful. He can feel a dozen pairs of eyes on him, and when Kayama's dark blue eyes focus on him, she looks like the cat that's just eaten the canary. Under her gaze, Kirishima feels like the second course.

"I knew the brash Kirishima-kun I'd met so long ago was in there somewhere," she says brightly, poking Kirishima square in the chest with one red-lacquered nail. "But even I didn't see such a spontaneous performance coming. Ah, youth!" She takes a long sip of her champagne.

"I didn't mean—I mean, it wasn't *planned*—" Kirishima sputters, unsure of how to explain himself. There's some part of him that's inordinately pleased that people honestly seem to have enjoyed his performance. But there's still a voice in the back of his mind, wondering how that could possibly be the case. He's not the star of this band, and he certainly didn't want to wrestle the spotlight away from Ashido. He wanted to help her, help the band hold things together. He wasn't thinking of what would come after.

"Of course, it wasn't," Kayama says. "But it was perfect. That's part of why you're such an asset, Kirishima-kun. You're very genuine. Even your love story, all the drama with that boyfriend of yours, everyone can tell that's your real self even when you're in the tabloids. We couldn't have constructed better press for you."

A heavy stone drops to the bottom of Kirishima's gut. He's not genuine at all, is he? He's never wanted to deceive anyone, in his entire life. But somehow he's caught in a lie so complicated that Kayama thinks it's the real thing. But it's not quite fake, either, is it? After all, what he feels for Bakugou has become genuine. He's not even sure where the lie ends and the truth begins, anymore.

Kirishima dips his head back and laughs nervously. "That's not how I would put it..."

"Modest as ever," Kayama says fondly. She gets to her feet, high heels hitting the ground with a click. She leans in and pinches Kirishima's cheek between her thumb and forefinger. "Don't lose that spark you have, alright? I can sell the world your music on its own, but having such a personality attached doesn't hurt in the slightest. And once the two of you go on tour..."

She looks significantly between Amajiki and Kirishima, and Kirishima wishes the ground would

open up and swallow him whole. He just wants to be excited about the opportunity, to face Amajiki with all the excitement he *should* be feeling right now. Instead, it's one more thing tugging at him. He's going to be ripped in half, at this rate.

"Anyway," Kayama says, smoothing down her dress. "I'm going to go make sure Shouta and Hizashi are behaving themselves. The two of you, though—I'll see you and all your bandmates in my office first thing on Monday. We have planning to do, boys."

With that, she strides off, heels clicking against the ground as she walks.

Kirishima lets out a deep sigh, sinking into the seat Kayama had just vacated.

"Yeah," Amajiki agrees. "Kayama-san never stops being overwhelming."

Kirishima looks over at Amajiki, laughing again. "Most of the time, I find her really fun," he admits. "Tonight has just been... a lot, I guess."

Amajiki is still looking down at his hands, thumbs nervously circling one another. "I had no idea you could sing like that," he says quietly.

"I sing all the time," Kirishima admits. The others at the party aren't paying much attention to them, at the moment, and Kirishima feels like he can talk more freely with Amajiki. "But just not—I mean. I tried, in the past. To sing in front of crowds. But I just couldn't do it."

Amajiki purses his lips together like he's trying to hide a smile. "And tonight was different?"

"I wrote that song for Ashido," Kirishima tells him. "We've been through so much together, and singing with her was different than being on stage alone."

Amajiki nods in understanding. "Going on stage still makes me nervous."

"What?" Kirishima gapes at him. "But, Amajiki-san, you're *Suneater*! You're the *best*! What do you have to be nervous about?"

"I know I'm skilled," Amajiki says, smile self-deprecating. "But my mind works against me. I'm not strong enough to do it on my own."

Kirishima huffs at him. "I don't believe that! I've looked up to you for so long, Amajiki-san! And if you can get past your nervousness, and still perform the way you do—that makes you even stronger, to me!"

Now Amajiki looks up, dark eyes meeting Kirishima's. "So then, you're stronger than you think you are, too?"

Kirishima opens his mouth to object, and then snaps it closed again.

Amajiki laughs, a little. "I hate parties," he says, changing the subject. "But Mirio convinced me to come. Because I wanted to tell you how amazing you were, tonight."

Warmth surges in Kirishima's chest, burning away the hollow indecision that's been eating at him for days. Amajiki Tamaki thinks *he's* amazing?

"I don't really get it," Kirishima says. "You go on tour, and you're so cool, all the time. I've seen you perform. Everyone loves you."

Amajiki shrugs. "It's different to perform, than to be around people in person, like this. Even when

I'm nervous, I get on stage and everyone seems far away. I can just focus on my music."

Kirishima laughs. "I think it's the opposite, for me. I'm much better at talking to people than performing for them."

Amajiki smiles, tongue-ring glinting as he licks nervously over his lips. "Maybe we can learn from each other, then. We'll be spending a lot of time together, soon."

Because Kayama-san wants them to go on tour together. Suneater and Riot, travelling around the country for months. There's so much that Kirishima could learn from Amajiki, so much that just being around him would do for Kirishima's music and performance. But—

"How do you do it, Amajiki-san?" Kirishima demands. "Toogata-san isn't with you, when you go on tour. How do you leave him for so long?"

Amajiki blinks, a blush coloring his cheeks. He glances across the room, to where Toogata is standing with Kamanari and Ashido, laughing at something one of them has said. Amajiki's face softens when he looks at Toogata, a warmth filling his eyes.

How has no one else figured them out? Kirishima wonders. It's obvious how much Amajiki loves Toogata.

"He's always waiting for me," Amajiki breathes out, "whenever I leave, I know he'll be there when I get home. He comes out to see me whenever he can, and I'm not very good without him. But he gives me strength, and he wants me to be my best. I'm not good at being optimistic and bright, the way he is. The way you seem to be, Kirishima. But he helps me get there."

Kirishima blinks. Of course, Amajiki and Toogata are in a *real* relationship. Toogata is Amajiki's boyfriend, and will be waiting whenever Amajiki comes home.

"I'm scared," Kirishima admits.

"To leave Bakugou?" Amajiki asks. He tilts his head. "It isn't easy. But I think... you can make it work. Mirio and I have."

But what you have is real, Kirishima wants to yell. He doesn't have anything so solid to hold onto. He doesn't have something real—but *could* he?

"He needs to know how I feel, before I leave," Kirishima mutters, chin pressed against his clenched fist. "I can't leave him when things are still uncertain."

Amajiki's hand comes down on his shoulder, giving him a tentative, supportive pat. "I think the whole world knows how you two feel," he says, not unkindly.

Kirishima looks up and laughs sheepishly. But maybe it'd be more truthful to cry.

—

"I *really* need to talk to you," he says, grabbing Bakugou's elbow and pulling him out of the crowd.

"Hey—!" Bakugou growls, until he spots the look on Kirishima's face. "Fine, asshole. Don't grab me." He yanks himself out of Kirishima's grip, striding towards one of the tall glass doors. It's off to one side, out of sight. It leads out onto a balcony, and Bakugou steps out onto it.

Present Mic's apartment looks out over the entire city, bright lights blinking down below them like

stars. Kirishima rubs at his elbows as the cool air blows past them. Bakugou walks over to the edge of the balcony, leaning his elbows against the railing and staring out at the skyline.

It was months ago, now, but Kirishima is struck by the memory of the last time they were up this high, together. When they stood on the rooftop at Hagakure's party, back when they were still strangers. Now, when Kirishima looks at Bakugou he doesn't see a famous actor with a furious expression. He sees Bakugou Katsuki, a man full of vulnerability and strength. He sees the person he's come to love.

"You wanted to talk," Bakugou grumbles, not turning back to look at him. "So, talk."

"Is something wrong?" Kirishima says, instead of the words he's been mulling over in his head for the past half-hour. "You don't seem happy."

Bakugou shrugs. "Do I ever?"

"Yes," Kirishima says, coming up to stand beside him. "Maybe not the way other people do, but I know when you are. At least, I think I do."

Bakugou turns towards him just a fraction of an angle, enough for Kirishima to see the slow arch of his brow.

"At the diner," Kirishima mutters, embarrassed. He scratches at the back of his head. "I mean, *I* had a good night, and I thought you did, too. But you didn't call me after, and..."

"Isn't that what people do after *real* dates," Bakugou says blandly.

"Well, yeah. But I—I really wanted you to call me, Bakugou."

It's enough of an admission that Bakugou turns more fully towards him, red eyes reflecting the bright lights of the city. His gaze feels like the heat of a fire, close enough to burn straight through Kirishima.

"You're pretty fucking brave tonight, aren't you," he says, and Kirishima can't even begin to parse his tone. "Singing on a stage in front of hundreds of people, and then telling me you expect a goddamn phone call. What happened to being too scared for all of this, huh?"

Is Bakugou scolding him, or praising him? Didn't he want Kirishima to work up the guts to sing in front of a crowd? And if he wanted that, does it mean he also wants this relationship to be more than a front?

"I'm really confused," Kirishima admits quietly. "I have been, for a while now."

"I could've told you that."

"It's your fault, you know!" Kirishima says suddenly, throwing up his hands. "You keep trying to convince everyone that you're such an asshole, but guess what? I don't believe that, anymore. I *know* you, and I know you're better than what you want everyone to think."

Bakugou blinks at him, like this is the first time Kirishima has truly caught him off guard. "Shut the fuck up," he says, but the heat in his words has gone from a blazing inferno to crackling embers.

Why did you do it? Kirishima wants to ask. Why did you show me parts of you that no one else has seen? Why did you show me things that would make me fall in love with you?

Far below them, the lights of the city twinkle in and out of existence. Everything seems far away—the entire world, everything Kirishima has been carrying around for so long. Right now, it's just him and Bakugou. And he has to get Bakugou to listen to what he has to say.

“Kayama-san wants us to go on tour,” he says, all in a rush. “As the next step, in promoting Riot. Us and Suneater, nationwide. And that means I'd be gone for *months*, Bakugou. I wouldn't be able to see you, or take pictures for the press, or be your date to movie premieres. I'd have to be focused on my band. Do you understand?”

Bakugou crosses his arms over his chest, in a way that seems almost defensive. It's like he's trying to shield himself. “So what? You want out?”

“No!” Kirishima cries, more fervently than he intends. “No, that's not what I want, at all!”

For a moment, something like doubt flickers across Bakugou's face. For a moment, he looks as open and vulnerable as he had when he'd been sick and his guard had been down. Something genuine and insecure and *hopeful* shines in his eyes.

“Bakugou,” Kirishima says, taking a step forward, reaching for him. “Bakugou, I want—”

“I'm going to be in Aizawa's next movie,” Bakugou spits out, stepping just out of Kirishima's grasp. “That's what we were talking about, before.”

“What?” Kirishima blinks.

“His production company is the artsy, indie bullshit one inside of the same studio Yagi works for,” Bakugou explains, words coming fast but with clinical detachment. “He does all sorts of weird shit that the critics lose their goddamn minds for. And he wants me to be in his next movie.”

“That's... great,” Kirishima says, forcing a smile. “I mean, if that's what you want.”

Bakugou shrugs, like he couldn't care less. “It's shooting on location,” he mutters. “On Miyakojima.”

“The resort island?” Kirishima asks.

Bakugou gives a curt nod. “It's a summer beach movie. A romance.”

A summer romance doesn't sound like the special project Bakugou's been waiting for. Unless...

“It's opposite another man,” Bakugou says. “The budget's shit and the studio expects it to tank, but they'll let Aizawa do whatever the fuck he wants because it's him. So, he goes and decides he's directing a summer romance with a gay couple.”

“The storyline you wanted,” Kirishima says quietly. “Bakugou, that's great. That's—that's so great.”

“There's a catch.” He's looking out at the city again, hands clenched over the railing. His every muscle radiates tension, like he's choosing every word carefully.

“What is it?”

Bakugou huffs a sigh. “You probably don't know how studios work, do you.”

“Not really,” Kirishima admits.

“Figures.” Bakugou shakes his head. “They’ll try to tie down big actors, when they can. Give the actor a movie he wants to be in, but anchor the contract to another project the studio wants. A good role for the actor with a money-maker for the studio.”

“Makes sense,” Kirishima says, though he’s not quite sure where Bakugou is going with this.

“They’re not going to give me just Aizawa’s movie,” Bakugou grumbles, gnashing his teeth. “They’re too sure they’ll take a hit on it, and I can’t do it for nothing. If I don’t make them acknowledge me, and who I am, the movie won’t mean as much. It has to cost them *something*, so that they take me seriously.”

No wonder he’s been brooding, Kirishima thinks. He’s been trying to figure out how to make this whole thing work.

“So...?” Kirishima prompts.

“So,” Bakugou seethes, “they tied Aizawa’s movie to Yagi’s. If I want to do the romance, I have to do the fucking blockbuster.”

Because He is My Hero, the script Kirishima had read at Bakugou’s apartment. With Midoriya, and Uraraka, and Todoroki. Where Bakugou will play the villain to Midoriya’s hero. The film everyone has been pressuring him to do, that Bakugou has adamantly refused. Directed by the actor Bakugou so admires, but who fills him with guilt and regret.

“Are you sure you want to do that?”

Bakugou rounds on him, eyes flashing. “I don’t do anything unless I’m fucking sure,” he says, so loudly and with such heat that it’s like he’s trying to convince himself, rather than Kirishima. “I *told* Sero to find another fucking way, but this is it. And I’ve been waiting too damn long to let this movie go. So, I’ll do it. I’ll show them all what I’m capable of. I’ll show the whole damn world.”

This time, when Kirishima smiles, it isn’t forced.

“I know you will,” he breathes. “You’re amazing, Bakugou. You’re my favorite actor, you know. And not just because of the way you look, or the roles you play. For a long time, I’ve felt close to you because of the way you act.”

Bakugou is looking at him, breathing heavily. “You don’t fucking get it, do you.”

Kirishima knocks his head to one side. “Get what?”

Bakugou runs a hand through his hair impatiently. “It’s two movies, back to back. The romance is going to be at least two months on location, and then who knows how long Yagi’s movie is going to take. I’m going to be tied up for the next *year*.”

Kirishima will be touring the country, and Bakugou will be stuck in one place, shooting his movie. Would they ever be able to see each other?

Maybe if they were really dating, had a real foundation to move forward from, this wouldn’t matter. They could go off on their separate paths with something solid between them, and return to each other when all was said and done. But when it’s been fake from the start, how can they hold onto it? Does Bakugou even want to?

“So... you got what you wanted, then,” Kirishima says. “Does that mean... you’re done with me?”

Bakugou clicks his tongue against his teeth. "I just told you, I won't have time for fucking anything for a year, what do you expect—"

"I don't want to break up," Kirishima says suddenly, desperately. "We don't need to, do we? I mean, wouldn't that be more trouble than it's worth, anyway? More drama than we want to deal with? We can just—go. Do the things we need to do. And it'll make sense if we aren't taking pictures together, or showing up places. Because everyone'll know you're shooting a movie and I'm on tour. No one'll ask questions."

"What's the fucking point, then," Bakugou starts to say.

But Kirishima cuts him off. He surges forward, grabbing Bakugou's face in his hands and pressing their lips together. He doesn't know how to say all that he needs to. Maybe if he had time, he could write it into a song. And maybe his feelings would reach Bakugou that way, be easier for him to understand. But right now, all he has is this surging sensation in his chest, this sense of urgency that pushes him closer and closer to Bakugou. He can't let him go, not without at least trying to convey his feelings.

He kisses Bakugou for all he's worth. And after a moment, Bakugou kisses him back. He lifts a hand to fist in the back of Kirishima's shirt, and they're pressed so close together than Kirishima can feel the thunderous beat of Bakugou's heart. His lips are rough and insistent against Kirishima's, and Kirishima's kiss is desperate and thorough.

Don't let this be the last time, he thinks. Please don't let this be the last time we're together, like this.

They break away from each other, gasping for breath. Bakugou lifts a hand to his mouth, fingers against his lips like he can still feel Kirishima against them.

"I've gotten a lot of good advice, lately," Kirishima says quietly. "From a lot of people who know a lot more than I do. One of them told me to be selfish, to go after what I want. And I think, I need to do that."

"Isn't what you want to be a musician?" Bakugou asks accusatorily. "To be famous, because of your music?"

"Bakugou, I—" Kirishima starts to say, because Bakugou *has* to know. Before they leave each other, Bakugou has to know.

"No." Bakugou cuts him off, lowering his hand and looking at Kirishima with challenge in his eyes. "Don't you fucking dare, not now. When we see each other, again. Tell me then."

He squares his shoulders and steps away from Kirishima, back towards the door. But Kirishima pushes forward again, grabs Bakugou around the wrist.

"I'm going to miss you," Kirishima says. His eyes burn as tears gather there. "Bakugou, I'm gonna miss you so much."

Bakugou tugs his wrist out of Kirishima's grasp, then shakes his head. "Fucking idiot," he mutters. "You're going to be famous. People're going to be screaming your name every night. When will you even have time to miss me?"

"I will," Kirishima insists. Fuck, he's crying. He rubs at his eyes with the back of his hand.

"You're a rock star," Bakugou reminds him. Something about his voice is far away, hollow and

lonely. “Try to enjoy it.”

He stalks off, back towards the party and the future he’s been wanting for so long.

Kirishima stands alone on the balcony, the city lights shining far below him and tears dripping slowly down his face. He sucks in a breath, wiping at the tear tracks and biting down on his lower lip.

“When I sing on tour, it’ll be for you,” he says quietly.

Bakugou is already far away, and Kirishima doesn’t know if he’s heard.

Chapter End Notes

["hammond song" - the roches](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

happy s3 day, everyone! we've officially reached the halfway point of this story.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's the first time in a week that Bakugou doesn't have a hellishly early call time, and he isn't even happy about that. Waking up without having somewhere to be, something to do, gives him too much time to think. And that's something he's been avoiding for six weeks, now. (And longer, but he really won't let himself dwell on that.)

The apartment he's been staying in is comfortable, but it's blank. There are no personal touches, no comforting reminders of anything or anyone. He can't stay here for any amount of time, because it drives him fucking nuts with its emptiness.

He pulls on his running shorts and sneakers. Glancing out the window, he sees the sun barely rising over the horizon, dyeing the ocean around the island a vivid crimson. He scowls at the color, shoves his headphones into his ears and heads out the door.

As he starts running in a parallel line to the ocean, an old song croons at him through his earbuds. The voice is soft, tentative, but the message is clear. He's been listening to it, on and off, for years now.

Love isn't a muscle. It doesn't grow weaker when it isn't used. It doesn't decay when you can't move it for some time.

Love is like breathing. It's involuntary. Even if you've been drowning, the moment you hit the surface you'll breathe it in. Your body will respond before you can think, gasping for air. You'll pull it into your lungs for all you're worth and you'll be surrounded by love.

And it won't be distant or foreign anymore. You'll know what to do.

He listens to the song on repeat as he runs along the ocean, as the mild winter wind blows across his skin and the slowly rising sun tinges the world around him the colors of a blazing fire. He runs, and tries to push past everything that's weighing him down. But his every thought, his every emotion, pulls against his muscles until he's gritting his teeth and nearly screaming as he climbs up to the top of a hill overlooking the beach.

He flops down onto the ground, pulls out his earbuds as he pants heavily. He rolls over and pulls himself up to a seated position, bracing his hands against his knees as he stares out at the horizon. The sky is still a furious red, and Bakugou stares out at the color and his entire body aches.

"Fuck," he growls, wishing there was something around for him to take his anger out on. But there's only the cloudy sky, the clear ocean, and wind whistling through the grass. Everything is perfect and beautiful, and he hates it.

He hates it, and he misses Kirishima more than he'd ever thought possible.

—

Bakugou pushes open the door to his apartment and sees Sero waiting for him, sitting at the kitchen island like he owns the entire damn apartment. Bakugou throws him a particularly filthy glare before grabbing himself a bottle of orange juice out of the fridge and drinking straight from it.

“You can’t always blame your bad moods on me, y’know,” Sero tells him. He’s dressed for a day on set, in pressed slacks and a pale blue polo short. His stupidly expensive sunglasses are pushed back into his hair, and there’s wearing the fancy watch that Bakugou got him for his birthday two years ago. Everything about him says, *Yes, I’m young, but if you don’t take me seriously you’ll regret it*. Everything, that is, except the stupid smile on his stupid face.

“Fucking watch me,” Bakugou mutters, wiping off his mouth with the back of his wrist. Despite his attitude, he pulls out the chair next to Sero and sits himself down in it.

Sero lifts both his brows, looking at Bakugou with disbelief. “Dude, *seriously*. You could just call him, you know.”

Bakugou hates the idea of being so transparent, but with Sero there’s not much he can do about it. The fucker *knows things*, and Bakugou can’t take those pieces of knowledge back any more than he could actually fire Sero. It leaves him trapped with a person who is entirely unintimidated by him. Which means Bakugou has to play dirty.

“Oh, yeah?” he challenges. “How’d it go, then? When you called Raccoon Eyes?”

Sero’s cheeks heat and he waves his hands in front of his face, because of course he hasn’t called Ashido. He’s not going to call Ashido, because he’s a damn coward.

(It’s not the same, for Bakugou and Kirishima. It’s never been the same.)

“You know it’s not the same thing,” Sero protests. “If I call Ashido, it’s going to make things worse. You’re not calling Kirishima because you’re too scared to be happy.”

Bakugou lunges without conscious thought, shoving Sero off his kitchen chair and onto the floor. Sero lets out an undignified yelp, and Bakugou leans back against the counter with his lips pursed into a straight line.

“You were saying?” he says, as Sero gets to his feet and then back into his seat.

Sero shakes his head. “He sang a song for you,” he says quietly.

Bakugou snorts out a laugh. “*She* sang a song for *you*, dumbass. He just helped because he’s a sucker for his fucking friends.”

“Ashido doesn’t write songs,” Sero reminds him. “You’ve gotta know that. And forget the song—what about the rest of it? Why’d you just walk away?”

Bakugou pins his agent-slash-manager with a livid gaze. “There’s a small list of things I’ll take your shit about, Sero. And this is nowhere near on it.”

Sero doesn’t back down, just frowns at Bakugou and crosses his arms over his chest.

He doesn’t know when he let his life get this tangled up—this whole thing with Kirishima, and Kirishima knowing Sero, and Sero being hung up on Ashido, and Ashido being in Kirishima’s band. Everything is so convoluted at this point that it’s like a minefield—if he approaches just one part of it, the entire thing will blow up in his face.

He runs a hand over his face, scowling at himself. This is the exact reason that he’s avoided all this shit for so long.

“Lose the attitude,” he snaps. “We’ve got to get to work.”

He's just gotten through hair and makeup when he spots an unwelcome figure striding towards him. Bakugou doesn't bother hiding the scowl that deepens on his face as he glances at a woman with a shock of green hair and an obnoxiously wide smile.

"Oh, Bakugou-kun," Fukukado Emi chirps at him, "What's got you so angry today, huh? How can we turn that frown upside down?"

"None of your business," Bakugou grumbles, which probably isn't the best thing to say to the movie's script writer. He'll never understand how Fukukado, who doesn't appear to have a serious bone in her body, wrote the heart-wrenching drama he's currently filming. But he doesn't understand much of anything, these days.

"Come on, now," Fukukado says, slinging an arm over Bakugou's shoulders. She's not a large woman, but she's got an immense presence. Plus, she's *loud*. "Tell me about it. I'm sure it'll cheer you up."

"I'm sure it won't." Bakugou bites at the inside of his cheek. He's never gotten the inclination this industry has to form on-set families. He doesn't want Fukukado to mother him, or to even try and be his friend. All he wants is to do his job, do it well, and then go home and never talk to any of these people ever again.

Thankfully, Fukukado doesn't push the point. The two of them arrive on set together, but Bakugou pulls away from her as soon as he's able to take a seat and wait for his call. Unfortunately, there's another fly buzzing around this morning.

"Yo, Bakugou," a falsely-cheerful voice says.

A shadow falls over Bakugou, blocking out the sun and his view of the clear blue ocean. He doesn't look up, just stares resolutely forward as he says, "Fuck off."

Shindou You chuckles as he takes his seat next to Bakugou's. Like Bakugou, he's already been through wardrobe and makeup for the morning. (After the first few days of filming, the crew had learned not to have them in their makeup chairs at the same time. It's impossible to do Bakugou's face when he's scowling that hard.) Shindou is left looking impeccable, almost too perfect in his short-sleeved button-down shirt and dark board shorts.

"Oh, you're in a bad mood today," Shindou comments, smile never leaving his face. There's a touch of red-pink gloss over his lips. He's just enough taller than Bakugou for the difference to be noticeable, and with his dark hair and open expression he stands in direct contrast to everything Bakugou is.

"Is being around a fake asshole like you supposed to put me in a good mood?" Bakugou demands, unwilling to uncross his arms from over his chest.

Shindou shrugs, utterly unbothered. "I dunno, I thought we'd have some cute behind-the-scenes banter to tease everyone with before the movie comes out. You know, costars who become incurable pranksters or darlings on set. It'd be fun, you know?"

Bakugou stares Shindou down, unblinking. "You're out of your goddamn mind."

Bakugou has just fumbled his lines for the third time when Aizawa calls cut and lets out a

frustrated hiss. Shindou still has his hands at Bakugou's waist, fingers flexing as he no doubt jeers at Bakugou's mistake. The morning's cloud cover is gone, leaving Bakugou overheated and uncomfortable. He growls, pulling out of Shindou's grip and pushing him away unceremoniously.

(It was supposed to be a sweet scene, the two of them fighting and then flirting by the ocean. Bakugou's character stalked away, embarrassed, and then Shindou pulled him back with his hand around Bakugou's wrist. They ended up pressed close together, Shindou holding onto Bakugou, minutes away from a first kiss.)

From over by the camera, Aizawa pinches the bridge of his nose. He gestures blandly at Shindou, but addresses Bakugou. "Let's review. This is the person you're currently falling in love with. Stop looking like you're about to clock him."

Bakugou sends Shindou a sideways glare, even though he knows Shindou isn't the problem. Fuck, he's spent the majority of his career pretending to fall in love with *women*. Compared to that, this should come more naturally to him, shouldn't it? In any case, he's a goddamn actor. None of this should be this hard. He should just disappear into the role, and forget his own feelings entirely. What's wrong with him?

"Well?" Aizawa prompts. Despite the blazing sun overhead, he's dressed in his customary black. His long hair is pulled back into a knot at the nape of his neck. Over the past few weeks, Bakugou's grown accustomed to the fierce focus of his eyes underneath jaggedly-cut hair and the tired lines of his face.

He thinks he respects Aizawa. Likes him, even, in some distanced way he's not quite ready to admit to. But right now, with Aizawa looking at him and Shindou being smug beside him and Fukukudo standing back on set, laughing for some goddamn reason—

Bakugou lets out a frustrated noise, hands clenched at his sides.

"I don't need your ego," Aizawa says. "I need your emotion."

Bakugou deliberately uncurls his fingers, but there's tension running down every line in his body and he's hyperaware of the fact that every person on set has their eyes trained on them. He's suffocating under the weight of their gazes.

"I need a break," he snaps. Without waiting for permission, he stalks off set and towards his trailer.

—

Some well-meaning production assistant has left him a fruit basket and a stack of glossy new magazines. Bakugou shoves them off the low table, grinding his teeth as apples and mangos rolls across the floor. He's about to throw himself down on the couch when the cover of one of the magazines catches his eye.

The background of the image is a solid white, and in the foreground of the image are two men, standing back to back and staring out at the viewer. One of them is tall and lean, with dark hair hanging in his eyes and his hands resting on a sleek guitar. But Bakugou barely registers Amajiki Tamaki's face, because the person he's standing next to is so much more important.

Kirishima is dressed in a black sleeveless hoodie, his Riot tattoo a bright red against his bare skin. His teeth flash as he grins out at the camera, expression open and joyful and mischievous. His hands are curled around a microphone.

Bakugou hasn't seen him in almost two months, since he left him at Present Mic's after party. He

hasn't seen that smile, or that stupid red hair, or those muscled arms. He hasn't heard Kirishima's voice, or felt the touch of his fingers, or—

He throws the magazine down onto the couch, but because the universe fucking hates him it flops open to the feature article. Which means Bakugou is greeted with a page full of snapshots of Riot and Suneater, on stage and behind-the-scenes, smiling and singing and laughing and dancing and—

“Fuck you,” Bakugou snaps at the magazine. “Fuck you, I don't want to see how happy he is, I already goddamn *know*!”

But because he's determined to pick at this scab until it starts to bleed, Bakugou reaches down and picks up the magazine, eyes darting over the text of the article and its interview with *everyone's newest crush, Riot guitarist and lyricist Kirishima Eijirou*.

Most of the interview is useless fluff, but Bakugou can hear Kirishima's voice in his answers, his bashful laughter and genuine enthusiasm. Three-fourths of the way down the page, however, Bakugou pauses.

Interviewer: So, Kirishima-kun, let's talk about the elephant in the room.

Kirishima: Elephant? I'm not sure what you mean.

Interviewer: Don't be coy, now! A few weeks ago, you and Bakugou Katsuki were getting cozy in local diners, and now there's no news about you two, at all! What's the story, there?

Kirishima: Ha! Maybe you could tell me? Sometimes these magazines have the story before I do.

Interviewer: Now I know that isn't true! You both took a big risk, coming out into the public with your relationship. We just want to know—what's next for Bakugou and Kirishima?

Kirishima: Well. You know what's next for me—I'm on this tour, and having the time of my life working with Suneater. As for Bakugou—keep an eye out. He's always got a few projects cooking.

Interviewer: You know that's not what I meant! What's next for the two of you, together?

Kirishima: That would be telling you a lot. You'll just have to wait and see. But he's working hard, right now, and I know he's doing his best just like I am. I'm sending him all the luck I can.

Interviewer: Just luck?

Kirishima: Who knows?

Interviewer: Well, here's hoping we get to see some more pictures of the two of you together, soon.

Bakugou doesn't read the rest of the interview. It ends with a snapshot of Kirishima, backstage at one of Riot's shows. He's sitting up, his blue shirt unbuttoned to halfway down his chest. His smile is lax and easy, softer and smaller than usual, almost wistful.

This is better, Bakugou tries to remind himself. If Kirishima is on the cover of magazines and giving exclusive interviews, then Riot is getting where it deserves to be. Nothing is holding them back, and soon Bakugou will become a footnote in their story.

Every cell in his body rebels at the thought. He's *no one's* footnote, no one's path to fame and nothing more. He should be the singular event of Kirishima's life, not something he can pick up and move on from with so little fanfare. Kirishima should be as miserable as he is, damn it!

But he's already made Kirishima miserable enough, hasn't he? Because seeing Kirishima crying on Present Mic's balcony all those weeks ago had given him no satisfaction. The smiles in these photographs, genuine and bright—they're much better than the alternative.

Kirishima is out there doing his best, reaching the stars, and what is Bakugou doing? Fucking up the one thing he's always wanted.

"Okay, let's try this again," Aizawa says, in a tone of voice that indicates he'd rather be doing anything else.

By the time Bakugou had made it back to set, the sun had shifted enough that picking up his scene with Shindou had been impossible. Instead, they've shifted to an indoor set, to a scene that Bakugou acts in alone.

The lights are dim and a rain effect is in progress, a gentle rhythm rolling over the set.

"You've just found out he's been lying to you," Aizawa says, setting the scene before they begin. "Everything you thought you knew about him, everything you were falling in love with, that was a lie. You know, and you've just left him standing out in the rain, and now you're trying to figure out how you feel and what you need to do."

Bakugou's face is impassive as he listens to Aizawa's words. Of course, he knows all of this already. He's memorized the script, knows it backwards and forwards. His shameful performance from this morning is made all the worse for the fact that Bakugou knows this story, chose this story, and wants to portray it as best as it can possibly be. He doesn't need Aizawa to remind him of all this.

"You're losing him," Aizawa says. "Maybe you never had him to start with. All you feel is the crushing emptiness that comes when he isn't there, and now you can't move forward."

When Aizawa stops speaking, Bakugou takes his place on set. It's the entryway of his character's apartment, and he strides in through the front door and slams it with a deafening thud behind him. He's soaked through, his hair plastered against his brow and the back of his neck, his shirt weighed down.

Before this, they'd been out in the rain, and he'd been the one to walk away.

As the door closes, Bakugou sinks to his knees. The cold of the rain gets under his skin, into his very bones. He's shaking, staring straight ahead without seeing.

Aizawa's earlier words echo in his mind—*Everything you knew about him, everything you were falling in love with, that was a lie. You're losing him. Maybe you never had him to start with.*

He doesn't know when the tears start, only that they are hot and angry compared to the cold hollowness of the rain. These are not pretty, performer's tears. His eyes ache with them, his throat closing over as he gasps for breath. He hugs himself around his knees, finally pulling his head down so that he's no longer looking straight at the camera.

What does he want, in that moment? For something to quiet the hurricane of emotions tearing its way through him. For someone to hold him together until the storm subsides. For everything to make sense, so that he'd have something to hold onto.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. He knows what he wants. He couldn't admit it to himself, before. But now it

seems obvious, and he isn't his character and he isn't thinking about Shindou You.

He imagines a kind face, a warm smile. He wants Kirishima back.

The sob that rips its way out of him is harsh and discordant. From somewhere around him, the gentle *tap-tap-tap* of simulated rain slows and then ends.

"Cut," Aizawa says, taken aback.

A silence settles over the set, eerie considering just how many people are present there. When Bakugou looks up, everyone is staring at him—Aizawa, with perceptive and considering eyes; Shindou, standing back with his mouth slightly agape; Fukukado, for once not laughing, one hand against her chin. And behind them, the other actors and production assistants and camera men and makeup team and set crew and everyone else. All staring, all looking at Bakugou with something like awe.

Shindou is the first person to start clapping, but his applause is eclipsed by everyone else's within a moment. All of them, all of them staring at Bakugou and offering him a standing ovation for the performance, for the emotion, he'd just given.

—

The thing of it is, Bakugou doesn't even like bars. Growing up as a child actor determined not to become a cliché, he turned up his nose to the use of alcohol as a coping mechanism. But he isn't a child any longer, and when his work is directly related to the issue he's trying to avoid he doesn't have many other options.

They're living in a resort town on a remote island while they film the movie, so there aren't many places to go. Thankfully, it's the off-season, so he doesn't get crowded by the unwelcome attention of fans and gawkers. Instead, he sits at the bar and orders a beer, staring at it for long moment instead of drinking it.

"Wow, I can't believe it," an annoyingly familiar voice says, "Bakugou Katsuki, in the flesh!"

He barely flicks his gaze upwards to see Shindou, standing over him with his hands braced on his hips. He's out of costume, now, and dressed in black jeans and a tight white t-shirt. His black hair is windswept, and he looks down at Bakugou with a smile that doesn't reach his eyes.

Bakugou is suddenly sure that there's no one on earth he hates more than Shindou, other than fucking Deku. But Shindou's closer at hand, if he gives into the urge to commit a murder tonight.

"What the hell are you doing here," he bites out, one hand still curled around his sweating bottle of beer.

"Looking for a little excitement," Shindou says with a shrug, sitting down on the stool next to Bakugou despite Bakugou's warning growl. "It's not my fault you picked the best bar in town to hang out in, you know."

Everything is his fault, Bakugou wants to say. But he knows that's not true, even if Shindou is currently the focus of all his surface anger.

"Then pick the somewhere else," Bakugou snaps at him. On reflex, he takes a sip of his beer, the taste foreign and sharp on his tongue. "Go find some other hellhole to get lost in."

Shindou just smirks at him, lifting a hand to signal the bartender. After he's ordered, he turns back

to Bakugou. “You know, I really do want to be your friend.”

Bakugou’s glare goes from furious to incredulous. “I don’t give a fuck.”

“Yeah,” Shindou says, emphatically, “I really mean that. I admire you a lot, you know. It’s a dream come true to be working alongside a UA alum. And that performance today, well. That was just more proof of your strong heart, wasn’t it?”

“You’re full of shit.” Bakugou turns his head away. He just wanted some time to himself, alone. He should’ve stayed home in his apartment, told Sero to go out and buy him some drinks if he wanted to take the edge off for the night. But instead he’s here, and if he makes a scene with Shindou someone is bound to notice.

Everything in his life, someone notices. Nothing is private or sacred.

Shindou sighs, but there’s something indulgent and patronizing about the way he does so. He leans back against the bar, sipping at his own drink. “Please don’t screw this movie up for me, Bakugou.”

He’s as slippery as an eel, and that’s only one of the reasons that Bakugou can’t stand him. It’s hard to get a read on Shindou, hard to figure out what game he’s playing.

“I could say the same fucking thing to you, asshole.” Despite his blunders earlier in the day, Bakugou is the last person to ruin a movie. His very presence elevates the entire thing, damn it.

Shindou hums thoughtfully. “Could you, though? This is really important to me.”

Bakugou’s not about to admit to this piece of shit how important the movie is to him, too. Shindou doesn’t deserve to know that, doesn’t deserve to have Bakugou opening up that vulnerable part of himself.

So instead he just lifts his chin and grinds out, “Yeah, I could. Shut up about it.”

Shindou lets out another of those thoughtful hums, and the next thing Bakugou knows Shindou is leaning into his space, their faces too close for comfort.

“If that’s so,” Shindou says, and his breath ghosts across Bakugou’s face, “Then you should really start selling it better, you know.”

His brain short-circuits. Shindou is too close to him, and Bakugou, for the first time in his life, is frozen. This isn’t the controlled atmosphere of a movie set, where Bakugou knows exactly what Shindou’s about to do. Instead, this fucker is just *too damn close*, and Bakugou can’t read the intent in those dark eyes.

Shindou smiles slowly, like a lioness about to pounce at unsuspecting prey. And in that moment, Bakugou thinks—is Shindou attractive? He’s a goddamn movie star, with eyes like night stars and a sharply-cut jaw. Bakugou’s done enough shirtless scenes with him by this point to know he abs that would make any athlete weep with envy. But he doesn’t feel any attraction towards Shindou—it’s the opposite, really.

Don’t touch me, Bakugou thinks. Shindou leans closer. Don’t touch me, get the fuck away from me, I’m going to kill you—

A hand lands against Bakugou’s shoulder. But instead of jumping up, getting away, he relaxes into the touch in a way he hasn’t in weeks. He knows this touch—he doesn’t hate it.

“Hey,” a voice says, somewhere above him. The hand on his shoulder squeezes. “What’s going on here?”

The voice isn’t accusing, just mildly curious. The person steps closer, and Bakugou can feel the reverberation of their voice through their chest, against his own back.

Shindou glances up, eyes widening and then smile blooming wide on his face. “Oh, ho,” he says, like he’s just won some kind of lottery. “The boyfriend. This is unexpected!”

“Is it?” The person standing behind Bakugou laughs bashfully, but when he speaks again his voice is full of confidence. “I mean, of course I’d come see my boyfriend the first chance I got.”

And Bakugou leans back, feels the hot line of contact against his back, and his lips pull into a savage, satisfied grin.

“Fuck off, Shindou,” he says, without even looking behind him. There’s nothing about this touch, this voice, that he could possibly misinterpret. He knows exactly who’s standing behind him.

Because Kirishima is here, and Bakugou doesn’t want to share him with anyone else.

Chapter End Notes

["burn your life down" - bleachers](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

happy birthday, bakugou :')

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They'd get used to flying first class, Kayama had promised, as she'd laid out the plans to get them to Miyakojima. But after weeks of traveling the country in a tour bus, it's a bit much to be handed flutes of champagne as they take their seats in the luxury cabin. And some things—well. There are some things that Kirishima is sure he'll *never* get used to.

“You're the in-flight magazine,” Kaminari jeers at him, leaning over the back of Kirishima's seat to rub his knuckles against the crown of Kirishima's hair. “You've really made it, now!”

Jirou, sitting next to Kirishima, twists around in her seat to bat Kaminari away. “We're all in that magazine, you know.”

“Yeah, but we're not all on the cover,” Ashido adds, putting up her footrest and lounging as far back as possible. “Don't forget us now that you're super-famous, Kirishima!”

Kirishima laughs, because he's not sure what else to do when he's nervous. “It's not like that,” he mutters, trying to tilt his head away from the magazine. But wherever he looks, from every seat-back pocket, there's the familiar flash of red hair and his wide grin. Kirishima, standing back-to-back with Amajiki, like he's someone people would buy a magazine for.

(Amajiki still thinks like that, too. He'd told Kirishima as much, as they'd been styled for the photoshoot. So maybe things like this will always be a bit surreal, no matter how much other people tell him he deserves it.)

Honestly, he liked doing the photoshoot. The stylists were nice and the photographer was awesome, and working with Amajiki is always the best thing that's ever happened to him, even though they've been on tour together for weeks, now. But the night before the interview, he'd stared at his phone for hours, thumb poised over the call button.

Hey, Bakugou, he'd imagined saying, You've been on a ton of magazine covers before. How do you deal with it? How does it feel to have everyone staring at an image of you, all the time?

He'd thought of the Best Jeanist billboard outside his apartment, of how he'd started at Bakugou's smoldering gaze and wanted him so badly. With that thought in his mind, and with his last memory of Bakugou being the other man walking away from him, Kirishima hadn't been able to work up the courage to call.

(And that had only been one moment of many, over the past several weeks. Every time he got off stage, every time he wrote a particularly good new lyric, every time he saw a new city and fell in love with it. He wanted to share all of those things with Bakugou.)

When he'd stood in front of the camera the next day, he'd thought—if *Bakugou stared at me the way I stare at him, what would I want him to see?*

He wanted to be friendly, but enticing. Welcoming, but impressive. Someone you'd want to get as close to as possible, and who you'd be happy to be around once you were in their orbit. He wanted to be someone who'd pull you back in, even if you managed to break away the first time.

And now, identical copies of that image stare back at him. As the seats around them fill, other

passengers pull out the magazine and flip through it—to the snapshots of Suneater and Riot, to the interviews with all the band members, to the rest of the stories in the magazine. Well-bred as first class passengers tend to be, none of them turn to gawk at the four of them, sitting in two rows of two.

“You should get some sleep,” Jirou says, tapping Kirishima gently. “We might not get the chance again for a while.”

Behind them, Kaminari and Ashido are trading Pokémon on their handheld systems. Their chattering is comfortable background noise, and Kirishima lets himself drift off. It’s easier than thinking about where they’re going, and who else is there.

Kirishima turns his phone back on when as they deplane some hours later. His screen immediately lights up with three new text notifications, and Kirishima stares at them with gritted teeth.

“Why now,” he mutters, pulling his guitar case over his shoulder.

“What is it?” Jirou says from behind him, lugging a case of her own. The label arranges to ship most of their equipment, but neither of them want to leave their trademark instruments to others.

“Nothing,” Kirishima says, slipping the phone into his back pocket.

Jirou rolls her eyes at him, fixing him with a stare. “You know it’s no secret that Bakugou is here, right?”

Ashido and Kaminari are walking a few paces ahead of them, and they pointedly do not look behind them as Jirou broaches this topic of conversation. Kirishima wonders if they’d planned this, to have Jirou be the one to talk to him.

“You don’t have to spend so much time worrying about me,” Kirishima tells her. “It’s been over a month. If Bakugou wanted to talk to me... *well*. He could’ve called.”

Jirou doesn’t tell him that he could’ve called, himself. That’s what Ashido’s been reminding him of for weeks, sometimes gently and sometimes not. Three nights ago, she’d thrown a pillow at his head and told him to stop pining if he wasn’t going to do anything about it.

They’ve been worried about Ashido. Ever since their last performance with Present Mic, when she’d frozen on stage singing a song to Sero. It’s not that she’s been different—in fact, she’s been almost defiantly optimistic, as confident and energetic as ever. But they’ve known each other for long enough for the rest of them to recognize a front when they see one.

Kirishima usually only joins her in singing for their encores, for that single song. When their voices mingle together, he can feel every emotion she’s keeping locked away. But he can’t tell her to call Sero, or to leave behind her feelings for him if they’re causing her pain. He doesn’t know which type of advice she wants, and which would serve her best.

Jirou sighs from beside him. “I really wish I could fix all your problems for you,” she says. “*All* of you.”

Desperate to shift the mood, Kirishima opens his mouth to ask how Yaoyorozu is. She, at least, has been texting and calling Jirou non-stop.

But before he gets the change, Kirishima is blinded by a series of camera flashes, so quick and

bright they're like a chain reaction of bombs, each setting off the next.

"What the hell—" Kaminari says, from somewhere in front of them.

"*Riot!*" Someone calls out, cheerful and too loud, "Welcome to Miyakojima! How do you feel about performing here tomorrow night?"

"Ashido-san!" Another yells, "Could we get a comment on your outfit?"

"Er," Ashido says, cheeks turning red. She's wearing leopard-print sweatpants and a loose tank-top, one of Kirishima's hoodies tied around her waist.

"Kirishima-san," a third person says, "How are things going with you and Bakugou-san?"

He doesn't know how to respond, and it seems like none of the others do, either. For the length of the tour so far, they've gone from place to place via tour bus. They usually arrive at their hotels in the early hours of the morning or late, late at night. There's never been a reception like this waiting for them, before.

Off to one side, someone clears their throat.

"Excuse me," a good-natured voice says, long arms waving to get everyone's attention. "But Riot's not taking any questions, right now! In fact, I have a car waiting, everyone. Come with me."

But the four members of Riot stand frozen in their tracks. Ashido moves first, hand extended as she takes an abortive step forward.

"Sero..."

And sure enough, there stands Sero Hanta. He's wearing cropped pants and a polo shirt, the way he stands conveying nothing but authority even as he smiles his widest. In response to him, the paparazzi have begun to disperse.

Sero blinks at Ashido, smiling sheepishly. Before he can say anything to her, there's a blur of motion. One moment, Jirou is standing beside Kirishima. The next, she's taken three quick strides forward, arm swinging as she punches Sero straight in the jaw. He goes staggering back, stunned and reeling.

"You've got some nerve," Jirou spits. She points a finger at him, face a mask of fury. "Apologize!"

"Jirou," Ashido says weakly, clutching at her sides. She starts laughing, the rich sound of her voice filling the air. "It's okay. *Really.*"

Kaminari goes over to help Sero up, even as the last few lingering paparazzi snap a couple photos. Sero massages his jaw, then shrugs.

"I do have a car waiting for you," he says. He casts a long, lingering look in Ashido's direction, but turns finally to Kirishima. "And we need to talk."

—

The car ride is awkward, to say the least. The five of them sit in the back two rows of seats, as the driver heads for the hotel where Riot will be staying. Sero presses his elbows against his knees, looking at them like he's not sure why he's a persona non grata.

"I did text you," he says to Kirishima.

Kirishima runs a hand over his hair, mussed from the plane trip. "I know."

Sero had sent three messages, all in quick succession:

*You're heading to Miyakojima next, aren't you?
I can make time for you to meet Bakugou, if you want it.
You two really need to talk.*

Ashido, Jirou, and Kaminari looking curiously at Kirishima. Jirou's lips are still pursed with anger, but she'd agreed to let Sero give them a ride. Kirishima considers laughing all of this off, but instead he sighs.

"Look. It's been six weeks. If Bakugou wanted to talk to me, he could've called. And, well. I do have some pride, you know."

Bakugou hadn't even wanted to hear it, last time. Kirishima had worked up the courage to tell him how he felt, and Bakugou had pushed him away entirely. He's had weeks to think about that, despite how hard he's tried to distract himself with the tour.

And fuck, it *hurts*. He wants Bakugou to want him as much as he wants Bakugou. He wants that to be worth more than anything else. But it's not, and how can he keep throwing himself forward when Bakugou is never there to catch him?

Sero shakes his head, his smile twisting into something ironic. "Look, Kirishima. Bakugou is an idiot."

Kaminari and Ashido start laughing, but Jirou just nods, emphatically. Some of the anger fades from her gaze, like Sero's begun to redeem himself with that comment.

"He *is*," Sero insists. "I mean, he's the smartest guy I've ever met, but he's still an idiot. And he's been miserable for weeks, because he refuses to let himself call you."

Part of Kirishima wants to retort, wants to snap that if Bakugou was so miserable, *he could've called*. But another part of him just hates the thought of Bakugou being miserable at all, if there's something he can do to help.

"He misses you," Sero says softly, looking down at his clenched hands. "I know he does. So I'm asking you, as both a friend and his manager, to talk to him. Because if he screws up this movie because he's too busy thinking about you, I won't be happy about it."

Sero looks up then and grins, and Kirishima sees his friend more than Bakugou's manager. His heart softens.

"Okay," he says after a moment. "Okay."

"Great!" Sero claps his hands together. "Because this is your stop."

The car pulls over abruptly, and Sero opens the door. Before Kirishima can blink, Ashido and Kaminari are pushing him out onto the street.

"Wait, now? Guys? *Guys!*"

As soon as Kirishima gets his feet under him, the car speeds away.

Some days, Kirishima's not sure whether his friends are the best or worst thing to ever happen to

him. But he takes a deep breath, because Bakugou is waiting for him.

It's a bar, not the kind of place that Kirishima imagines Bakugou in at all. Kirishima shuffles self-consciously, very aware of the fact that he's wearing the crushed clothes he'd been in for an entire plane trip. A sleeveless hoodie that leaves his arms bare, and loose dark pants tucked into his designer red sneakers. The sneakers were a gift from the designer, not the type of thing he'd usually buy for himself. His hair is un-styled, half of it pulled back into a ponytail. This is not how he'd choose to see Bakugou after six weeks.

But he's so *close*, and somehow that stokes Kirishima's courage into a single desire—to see Bakugou, to drink him in and hold his hand and be with him. He heads into the bar, expecting to find Bakugou waiting there for him.

Instead, he sees Bakugou sitting at the bar with someone else. Someone who is tall, broad and handsome, and who's leaning into Bakugou's space like he deserves to be there. He's got dark hair and a dazzling smile, and fuck, he's *hot*. His dark eyes flash under the bar's amber lights, and Kirishima has never felt more inadequate.

But then he pulls his eyes away from the dark-haired man and back to Bakugou. Bakugou, who's sitting ramrod straight, his eyes narrowed as he glares at his companion, his hand clenched too-tightly around his bottle of beer. He radiates unhappiness and hostility.

Despite that, Kirishima pauses for a moment just to look at him—the pale hair, the furrow of his brow, the pressed line of his lips. Kirishima has missed him so much, and for a moment it's enough just to see him so close.

But then the dark-haired man leans back and laughs, and there's something discordant about that laughter. Bakugou stiffens even more, but the dark-haired man leans closer, one hand hovering just above the small of Bakugou's back.

Rage like fire burns through Kirishima. What's wrong with this guy? Can't he tell that Bakugou doesn't like it?

When Kirishima steps forward, and gets a good look at the way the man is looking at Bakugou, the fire within him blazes red hot. This man is looking at Bakugou with *intent*. And though Kirishima has always known how much the world loves Bakugou, how people have half-naked posters of him in their rooms and scream for his attention—this is different. This is someone looking to cut through the facades of stardom and get to Bakugou's core. The reality that Bakugou has shared with Kirishima. And Kirishima finds that he doesn't want anyone else to have it. Not when they make Bakugou look so angry and uncomfortable.

Sero had said that Kirishima could make Bakugou less miserable. And maybe that starts with making him comfortable, and soothing away some of the tension that's radiating off him in waves. If Kirishima can do even that much, this will have been worth it.

He sucks in a breath and gathers his courage, stepping close to the bar. He doesn't know if Bakugou hears him approach. He acts on instinct, laying a hand on Bakugou's shoulder.

(He doesn't think of it like laying a claim. He's reminding Bakugou that he has another option—that Kirishima will always be an option, if Bakugou wants him.)

“Hey,” he says, addressing both men at once. He squeezes Bakugou's shoulder, just to reassure

himself that Bakugou is really there. “What’s going on here?”

The dark-haired man looks up, but he doesn’t look unhappy to be interrupted. Rather, his eyes light up like stars. “Oh, ho. The boyfriend. This is unexpected!”

“Is it?” Kirishima asks, before he can help himself. Is it weird, that he’s just show up here? Is Bakugou going to be mad at him for it? But that uncertainty is quickly swallowed by another feeling—protectiveness. Bakugou hadn’t been happy with this guy looming over him, and now he’s leaning back against Kirishima like he’s happy he’s here. Like Bakugou is *comfortable*, now that Kirishima has arrived. “I mean, of course I’d come see my boyfriend the first chance I got.”

Bakugou leans back against Kirishima. “Fuck off, Shindou.”

And it isn’t until that moment that Kirishima makes the connection, realizes who’s standing in front of him. Shindou You, a relatively-famous television actor, and perhaps someone Bakugou is working with. He’s definitely someone in the industry, which means Kirishima has probably just interrupted something very important.

(Somehow, he’s not quite as ashamed of that as he should be.)

“Hi,” Kirishima says, stepping away from Bakugou to extend a hand towards Shindou. “I’m Kirishima.”

Bakugou lets out a grunt of annoyance.

Shindou is smiling widely, the amber lights of the bar accentuating his handsome features—high cheekbones, the elegant curve of his lips. “Oh, I *know*,” he says, shaking Kirishima’s hand firmly. “I mean, the tabloids say enough, even if Bakugou here doesn’t say anything about you.”

“Didn’t you hear me, shithead?” Bakugou barks. “Get lost.”

Kirishima laughs, turning his head to look at Bakugou. “Hey, don’t be rude.” He turns back around quickly, because Bakugou’s eyes are burning like coals, and if Kirishima focuses on them, he doesn’t think he’ll be able to look away.

“It’s fine,” Shindou says, waving a hand. “I’m used to it, by now.”

“You and Bakugou are working together, then?” Kirishima asks.

Shindou nods, leaning his elbow against the bar and propping his chin against his hand. “That’s right! And I’ve already learned so much from him. I’ve always wanted to work with one of the *UA* alumni. Those guys are all in a league of their own, you know.”

Kirishima laughs again, good-natured and not at all nervous. “Yeah, I know.”

Bakugou kicks him in the back of the shin, and Kirishima finally turns to face him. He’s sitting on his barstool with his arms crossed over his chest, expression somewhere between baffled and murderous.

Is Shindou still speaking? Kirishima can’t be sure. Because his eyes meet Bakugou’s, and it’s like the past six weeks were just a dream. It’s like he’s just surfaced from the deep ocean, and needs to take a gasping breath to fill his lungs with air. Because Bakugou’s eyes are just as inscrutable as they’d been that night on Present Mic’s balcony, and Kirishima can’t wait anymore. He has to know.

He reaches out, grabs Bakugou's hand. Bakugou doesn't pull away from him.

Kirishima barely turns back to Shindou as he says, "Sorry, Shindou-san, can you excuse us for a second?"

If there's a reply, Kirishima doesn't hear it. He's too busy trying not to trip over his own feet as he tugs Bakugou along, trying to find somewhere private. Because everyone—Ashido and Jirou and Kaminari and Sero—they were all right. He and Bakugou need to talk.

Somewhere private ends up being a side hallway of the bar, in-between the bathrooms and the kitchen. The space is cramped, but maybe that's for the best. This way, Kirishima can stop Bakugou from walking away.

Bakugou only tugs his hand out of Kirishima grip. "Don't manhandle me, asshole."

Kirishima doesn't laugh, even though he wants to, even though Bakugou's voice is familiar and soothes something he didn't know was aching inside of him. "You didn't miss me, at all?"

Bakugou leans back against the wall, arms crossed over his chest protectively. He looks at Kirishima and bites down on his lower lip, so hard that the flesh turns white.

Kirishima waits, breath caught in his throat. He can't just impose his feelings on Bakugou. He wants to believe that Bakugou likes him, that they've come this far because something between them works. But there's only so far he can push and pull Bakugou, without Bakugou taking a single step on his own.

Hands press against his shoulders, forcing him back against the opposite wall. Kirishima grunts as his back hits the wall, but there's no time to process beyond that. Because Bakugou is in front of him, crowding his space, and his face is one a hair's breadth away from Kirishima's. And then there's no space between them at all, because Bakugou is pressing his lips to Kirishima's in a fervent, desperate kiss.

Kirishima reaches up, cups Bakugou's face in both of his hands and kisses him back. Unlike the last time they kissed, there's no sadness here. It's a warmer feeling, something like relief blooming in his chest. The past six weeks of separation haven't changed anything. He and Bakugou are still drawn together like magnets, pulled impossibly closer together the instant they make contact.

He licks into Bakugou's mouth, over the line of his teeth. Bakugou shudders against him, pressing closer. Bakugou's hands move from his shoulders to the back of his neck, anchoring himself off of Kirishima.

This is the person who's consumed his every thought, for the past six weeks and beyond. This is the person who crackles like a fire, his warmth drawing Kirishima in even when he knows that if he moves too quickly, he'll be burned. This is the person that Kirishima wants more than anything.

Bakugou makes a noise in the back of his throat, one hand smoothing down Kirishima's bare arm, the other pushing up the hem of his hoodie to press against Kirishima's abdomen. And now Kirishima shudders, arching into Bakugou's touch.

For a moment, Kirishima is entirely sure of what they're doing, what they feel for each other. But then the shadow of six weeks ago falls over him, and all he can see is Bakugou walking away like Kirishima meant nothing to him at all.

Have they ever been sure?

It's painful, but he pulls away from the kiss. He plants his hands firmly on Bakugou's hips, and pushes him back. Bakugou growls, and all Kirishima wants is to kiss that expression off his face, to swallow down that growl. Instead, he takes a deep, steadying breath. He keeps his hands on Bakugou's hips, holding him back.

"Hey," he says, his voice like gravel, "*I missed you.*"

Bakugou looks like he's about to punch him. He bites out, "And who's fucking fault is that?"

The sheer audacity of that statement startles a laugh from Kirishima. "Yours, you jerk!"

Bakugou hisses. "*Idiot.* I—" He cuts himself off, his breathing labored. His eyes dart nervously, focusing on everything but Kirishima's face.

Kirishima leans in, presses his forehead against Bakugou's to steady him. "You missed me, too?"

"Whatever." Bakugou pushes off Kirishima grip, presses forward to kiss Kirishima again. His hands are on Kirishima's neck once more, and Kirishima's mind goes utterly blank as it tries to process that Bakugou Katsuki is in his arms, kissing him like his life depends on it.

Oh. This is what people write songs about. This is what's impossible to describe, to even process, without putting it into some other form. Kirishima could spend the rest of his life trying to put it into words, trying to make poetry out of it. But what it all comes down to is that he's never cared about anyone the way he cares about Bakugou, and when Bakugou kisses him, Kirishima feels like Bakugou might feel exactly the same way. And what would you even call that? The relief that comes from knowing your love is requited?

Emboldened by that feeling, Kirishima pulls away from the kiss once more. "Hey, Bakugou?"

"What?" Bakugou snaps. He might as well have said, *Stop interrupting.*

"Be my boyfriend," Kirishima says, all in one breath. He can feel Bakugou's breath against his skin, the pulse of Bakugou's heart when he reaches out to press a hand against his chest. "For real, I mean."

Bakugou looks up at him, eyes bright as the oil in a candle. There's a wetness in his eyes, and if Kirishima didn't know any better he'd think that Bakugou was about to cry. Instead, Bakugou fists his hands into Kirishima's hoodie, holding him there.

Kirishima bridges the distance between them, pressing his forehead against Bakugou's once more. "You don't have to say anything," he says softly. "Just kiss me, again."

Now Bakugou is smiling, savage and fierce. And his answer is everything Kirishima hoped it would be.

Chapter End Notes

["if you wanna" - the vaccines](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

fingerguns in everyone's general direction ;)

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Bakugou wakes up with a weight against his chest. That in and of itself isn't unusual—for his entire life, there have been things weighing him down, and it usually takes only a moment after he wakes for him to remember this fact, and for the heaviness of his life to settle back over him. But this weight, the one he registers this morning, it's different. It doesn't feel like a burden.

Slowly, Bakugou blinks his eyes open. Morning light filters into his bedroom from the window, and as Bakugou glances down his vision is dominated by a warm red, like fire. Because there is a person snuggled up to him in bed, a leg draped over both of his own, and a head using his chest as a cushion. Under the covers, someone is holding tightly to his hand.

This is what he wants to wake up to every morning. This is *who* he wants to wake up to every morning.

Under the weight of Kirishima's head, a feeling is blooming in Bakugou's chest. He doesn't have a name for it, but it's warm and satisfying and—and he's *happy*. He can't remember the last time he woke up happy.

A sigh escapes him, catching him by surprise. His breath ghosts over Kirishima's face, and Kirishima shifts in his sleep, eyes fluttering open.

It takes Kirishima a moment to wake up, even once his eyes are open. But as he wakes, a smile pulls at his lips, going wide to reveal his sharp teeth.

Bakugou is so busy trying to memorize the lines of that smile that he doesn't realize that Kirishima has let go of his hand, that he's leaning up on his elbows so that he's above Bakugou, looking down on him. Then, he lowers his head, going in for a kiss.

Bakugou panics, slapping a hand over Kirishima's mouth before their lips meet.

"Gross!" Bakugou snaps, pushing Kirishima away. "What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

Kirishima quirks his head to the side, and when Bakugou pulls his hand away Kirishima is smiling at him—not the warm, indulgent smile of the moment before, but a *smirk*.

"I'm wearing your clothes, and sleeping in your bed," he says, blinking at Bakugou in a guileless way that doesn't match that smirk at all, "but I can't kiss you?"

And of course, Bakugou remembers—Crawling all over Kirishima in the back corner of a bar, like he could never stop kissing him, never stop touching him. How the physical contact hadn't been a distraction from what Kirishima was telling him—what they were both feeling—but had somehow made it all easier to understand. Like all the forms of his desire had come together at once, and in kissing Kirishima he'd told him what he needed to. And Kirishima had understood, and held him just as tightly, kissed him just as fiercely.

They'd stumbled home together, after Kirishima had laughingly admitted he had no idea where he was staying. So Bakugou had brought him back to his apartment, and thrown a pair of shorts and a t-shirt at him, and when they'd both dressed they'd crawled into Bakugou's bed like it was no big deal at all. They'd done it before, Kirishima reminded him with another laugh. Bakugou didn't say

that the last time they'd shared a bed, they'd stuck to opposite sides of it like there was a brick wall between them. No, he'd just let Kirishima press close to him, and had fallen asleep to the rhythm of the other man's breathing, and the warmth of his presence. And then he'd woken up happy.

But expressing all that in words is a distinct impossibility. Instead, he just scoffs. "You can kiss me after you've brushed your fucking teeth," he mutters.

Kirishima is looking down on him, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "No."

"No? What the hell?"

"I wanna kiss you now," Kirishima says, and he's still wearing that goddamn smirk, along with one of Bakugou's t-shirts, and it's too small for him, and Bakugou can see the muscles in his arms flex as he adjusts his position.

Kirishima lunges for him, pinning Bakugou down against the bed. Bakugou squirms against him, trying to get a knee up to jab Kirishima in the stomach, but they just end up rolling over. Once, then twice, and then Bakugou is on his back again, with Kirishima draped over him.

A sound bubbles up from the back of Bakugou's throat as Kirishima's fingers dance up his abdomen. He tries to hold it back, but it erupts out of him, and before Bakugou can stop it he's laughing, open and easy.

Kirishima beams at him, and then he kisses Bakugou's neck, and then his collarbones. He leans up to plant two wet, smacking kisses to each of Bakugou's cheeks, and all Bakugou can do in return is laugh so hard his whole chest aches with it.

Fuck, he wants this forever. Can he have it forever?

Kirishima rubs a thumb against his brow, like he's trying to smooth out the lines forming there.

"What're you thinking so hard about?" he asks, and then he kisses the spot he had just touching.

Bakugou sighs, wraps his arms around Kirishima's waist and pulls him as close as he possibly can.

He's Bakugou fucking Katsuki. Everything he's gotten in his life, he's worked his ass off for. This thing with Kirishima, it won't be any different. As long as he holds on as fiercely as he can, he'll get what he wants.

—

"I hope you're both decent!" an annoyingly familiar voice calls out, accompanied by a rhythmic tap-tap-tap on the door. Bakugou doesn't have time to warn Kirishima before Sero unlocks the door and lets himself in. The apartment is small enough that as he steps into the entryway, he can see the two of them tangled up on the bed together. Bakugou can't quite see Sero roll his eyes, but he knows that he is.

"I was innocent, once," Sero says mournfully, pressing a hand against his heart. The other is clutching a plastic bag from the konbini down the street.

"Get the fuck out, Soy Sauce!" Bakugou shoves Kirishima away from him, not because he's ashamed of what they were doing, but because he really, really wants to punch Sero for interrupting.

Sero snaps his fingers. "Nope. No can do, Boss Man."

“Excuse me?” Bakugou hisses, just as Kirishima grabs his wrist to hold him back from lunging across the room towards Sero.

Sero just shakes his head, shooting a sly smile at Kirishima. “You cause me so many headaches, man,” he says to Bakugou.

He definitely needs to dock Sero’s pay, or something. This asshole is taking way too many liberties with him, lately. He needs to find some way of putting him back in his place, otherwise he’s going to have an employee/confidante/maybe-friend who’s entirely immune to him. And that’s just unacceptable.

Kirishima gets up off the bed, tugging Bakugou along with him. And Bakugou lets him, because, well—because he likes the weight of Kirishima’s hand around his wrist, the comforting touch of his skin.

Sero pulls up one of the kitchen stools to the sitting area, and Bakugou and Kirishima sit themselves down on the couch. Immediately, Bakugou crosses his arms over his chest and shoots Sero the dirtiest glare he can muster, this early in the morning.

“It’s not that early,” Sero says, like he can read Bakugou’s mind. “Perk up, we’ve got some things to discuss.” He reaches into the konbini bag and throws a chilled bottle of orange juice Bakugou’s way.

Bakugou huffs, even as he twists the lid off the bottle and takes a long, refreshing gulp.

“So, Number One, this is for you,” Sero says, pulling a crumpled slip of paper out of the pocket of his jeans and handing it over to Kirishima.

Kirishima quirks a brow as he unfolds the paper, and then his cheeks heat to a furious red. Bakugou, intrigued, reads the paper over his shoulder.

Hey Kirishima—

When you didn’t call last night, we figured either that Bakugou had killed you, or that you were finally getting laid. Either way, there was nothing we could do about it!

Congratulations, or so sorry, we’ll miss you!

—Denki & Mina & Kyouka

(Jirou did not actually help us write this note.)

When Kirishima notices Bakugou reading the note, the rest of his face turns as red as his hair. It happens so suddenly that Bakugou huffs a derisive laugh, even as he thinks that Kirishima is impossibly cute, like this. Bakugou likes that he’s bashful, that he’s not always as casually confident about these things as he appears.

“I guess I should’ve called,” he says, scratching at the back of his neck. “Shit, how long were we asleep? I’m supposed to be at sound check at some point, I didn’t even check the schedule—”

He’s up and off the couch, patting down his pockets before realizing he’s not wearing his own pants, so he doesn’t have his phone. Sero laughs, unflappable as ever. He grabs the neck of Kirishima’s shirt, pulling him back down.

“What kind of manager do you think I am?” Sero asks, clicking his tongue against his teeth. “After I got the call that *you* missed your morning call time, I let all the relevant people know that I

wouldn't let either of you miss anything else, today." He says this while sending a pointed look Bakugou's way.

Of course, Bakugou flips him off in return.

Kirishima turns to Bakugou, eyes wide with concern. "You were supposed to work, today? Are you going to be in trouble, for this?"

Bakugou shrugs. Truth be told, the last time he *ever* missed a call time was years ago, when he'd first gotten sick on the set of the All Might movie. It's not a happy memory to linger on.

"He'll be fine," Sero says, with a wave of his hand. "At least, he will now that I've straightened things out with Aizawa-san. You're lucky you're such a good actor, man. Otherwise you'd be on pretty thin ice."

"I'm not going to thank you for doing your fucking job, Soy Sauce."

"Since when is my job enabling your love life," Sero says under his breath, but loud enough for both Kirishima and Bakugou to hear. Bakugou hisses, and Kirishima coughs like he's choking.

"Anyway," Sero continues, "Number Two, you guys have caused me yet another headache, and I hope you're ready to apologize."

Bakugou gnashes his teeth. "How'd you figure that?"

Sero holds up his index finger, indicating that they should wait a moment. He pulls out his tablet and clicks it on, then turns it to face the two of them so that they can see the trashy gossip rag website he's pulled up.

For a moment, Bakugou just stares. Then, he lunges, grabbing the tablet out of Sero's hands and flipping through the pages with rising incredulity and anger.

BAKUGOU AND RIOT'S KIRISHIMA REUNITED, one headline reads, above a picture of the two of them slinking out of the bar last night. They're not doing anything worse than holding hands, but their hair is mussed and it doesn't take much to guess that they'd just been trying to suck each other's face off.

BAKUGOU KATSUKI: EVERY MAN'S MAN?, another asks, and this is the one that causes a vein in Bakugou's forehead to start throbbing. There's another picture of him and Kirishima, Bakugou pressed back against the wall. But next to it is another picture taken at the bar, of Bakugou sitting with his drink and Shindou standing over him, smirking as he leans into Bakugou's space.

The rest of the articles continue like this, pictures of Bakugou and Kirishima and Shindou, and headlines wondering whether Bakugou is cheating on Kirishima, whether there's something going on between him and Shindou, whether Bakugou is just out for fun with every attractive guy he's been seen with.

"Don't freak out—" Sero starts to say, but it's too late.

Bakugou surges to his feet, throwing the tablet behind him as he balls his hands into fists. "What the actual *fuck*! As if I'd *ever* be interested in that fake-ass piece of shit!"

Kirishima has picked up the tablet, now, looking for himself. After a moment, he shrugs. "I mean, Shindou is pretty hot. He's not the worst person in the world to be linked with."

“Are you laughing at me, shitty hair?” Bakugou demands, wheeling on him.

Kirishima looks up at him and smiles softly, tenderly. “A little, maybe. More because anyone who’d actually seen you two last night would never, ever believe this. I thought you were gonna punch him, before I walked up.”

“I was,” Bakugou seethes from between clenched teeth. “Fucking asshole.”

“See that? That is exactly the kind of thing we do not need you to be saying, right now.” Sero’s gotten up, standing right in Bakugou’s path. “You’re shooting a movie with this guy, a love story. You don’t get to punch him in public, or even say you want to.”

Bakugou’s nails dig into his palms as he clenches his fists tighter. He definitely wants to punch *someone*, at this point.

Sero sighs, brushing a hand through his straight black hair. “You, Kirishima, you were supposed to be the solution to this problem. Remember that, nice fake press-ready boyfriend?”

Kirishima laughs bashfully, covering his mouth with the back of his hand. “Well, yeah. We sort of screwed that up, a bit.”

And Sero, the asshole, just looks between the two of them and beams. Because he’s actually happy that they’ve finally figured things out, and of course he can tell, and of course he was the one behind Kirishima’s appearance at the bar last night.

“You did!” he chirps. “You really, really screwed up being a fake boyfriend! But guess what? You can still fix things.”

“Fix fucking what,” Bakugou grumbles, because he hates that Sero looks so pleased.

“That brings me to point Number Three,” Sero says, holding up three fingers. “You, Bakugou Katsuki-san, were supposed to be an innocent gay in a committed relationship.”

Bakugou blinks at him. “I’m none of those things.”

Kirishima clears his throat, then casually lays an arm across Bakugou’s shoulders.

Bakugou gnashes his teeth. “Fine. I’m *one* of those things.”

Sero stifles a laugh. “We’ve gone over this. No one cares what you actually are. It’s about what they see. C’mon, man. This has been your entire life. You *know* this.”

And of course, Bakugou knows it. He hates it, he hates that he has to worry about how much people fucking like him, or what they think they know about him. He just wants to be on screen, to spin a story so powerful that it knocks the audience off their feet. He wants to create the same feeling in them that he’d gotten, as a kid, watching all those All Might movies. He knows that people want to follow him off the screen and into his life. He’s always known it. But he still thinks it’s fucking stupid.

Sero pulls his stool closer, this time, and Kirishima tugs Bakugou back down to the couch. He’s being strangely quiet, through this, a thoughtful and almost guilty look on his face. Like he thinks it’s his fault that the fake-boyfriend ploy didn’t last. Bleeding heart idiot, that’s what he is.

“You can’t disavow your costar,” Sero is saying. “Or say you want to punch him, or that you think he’s an asshole. That’s exactly the wrong kind of press for this movie. It needs to be casual, and

innocent in the right ways, so that the gay part of it is more palatable to the public at large. You can make the most revolutionary movie you want, but if you ruin it with bad press and no one sees it, all your hard work will be for nothing.”

Bakugou knows that. But he also really, really wants to punch Shindou You in his stupid, fake-smiling face.

“Anyway,” Sero continues, “People don’t need to be thinking about whether you’re punching your costar, or cheating on your boyfriend with him, when they’re considering whether to see this movie. It’s just too much complication.”

“It’s his fucking fault,” Bakugou seethes, because really, what was Shindou even playing at last night? What was he hoping to achieve?

“So what? You want to make more movies like this or not?” Sero leans back on his stool, shaking his head.

Kirishima tips forward, hands pressed against his knees. “What can we do? How do we fix this?”

Sero presses his chin against one hand. “Well, there’s a couple things we could try, but there’s one way to smooth things out directly. And that would be an interview! Everyone wants to know more about the two of you anyway, so it’ll be great.”

For once, Bakugou doesn’t have a kneejerk insult to lob back at Sero. He’s done interviews before, of course. Hell, he and Kirishima had done interviews on the red carpet days after they’d decided to be fake boyfriends. But this is different. Now that this thing between them is real, they’ll be letting the press into something genuine.

He huffs out a sigh. No part of his life is ever private. It never has been.

Kirishima grabs Bakugou’s hand, squeezing it tightly until Bakugou looks up at him. He smiles reassuringly.

“This’ll be fun, don’t you think?”

Bakugou purses his lips. “Fine. When?”

“It’ll have to be almost immediately, since Riot’s only in town for a few days,” Sero says, grabbing back his tablet and pulling up a calendar. “It’ll be a tight fit, but there’s someone who I think would be willing, and she can probably come by before the second concert...”

Bakugou rolls his eyes. It’s Sero’s job to consider all the details like this, and either way it’s not like he has much choice in the matter.

“Just make sure it’s not someone completely annoying.”

Sero nods. “Kirishima, I’m not technically your agent, but I’ll talk to someone over at Midnight and clear everything up. They don’t seem mad about the press you two get, at least.”

“Thanks a lot, Sero,” Kirishima says. He grins, holding out a fist, and Sero bumps his own against it.

Bakugou blinks at that, before remembering that Sero and Kirishima have a history. They’ve been friends for a long time, and he still doesn’t know exactly when or how the rift formed between them. He chews on the inside of his cheek—this is something he needs to figure out.

“I’m glad you two worked things out,” Sero says, getting to his feet. He tosses the konbini bag at Bakugou, who finds all his favorite snacks inside it. “You better get ready to grovel, Bakugou. Aizawa-san is probably going to make you get down on your knees and beg forgiveness.”

Bakugou, half way into a choco pie, bites down on his tongue instead. “I thought you said you straightened things out.”

Sero shrugs. “For the moment, yeah. But you’ve still gotta get down to set by the afternoon, and he’s probably not gonna be happy with you. As for you, Kirishima, I can give you a ride if you want. Kaminari mentioned getting you back in time for sound check?”

“Oh, right,” Kirishima says, jumping to his feet. “Man, I really wanted to...” He trails off, running both of his hands through his sleep-messy hair. For a moment, he just stands there, staring at Bakugou.

Bakugou swallows down the last of his snack. “What?”

Kirishima grabs Bakugou by the hand and pulls him up, wrapping one arm around his waist and pressing his lips to the corner of Bakugou’s mouth. And before Bakugou can even think, he’s sighing into the contact, leaning against Kirishima and wanting more.

But Kirishima pulls away. “I’ve gotta go. I want to spend the whole day with you, but Ashido and Amajiki-san and the others are counting on me. I can’t let them down.”

Bakugou straightens up, trying to save face. “Obviously.”

Sero motions Kirishima back towards the front door before turning back to Bakugou. “Go to set, okay? And try not to bite Shindou’s head off, please.”

“No promises,” Bakugou says flippantly. He gives Sero a critical look. “You talk to Raccoon Eyes, yet?”

Sero smiles, but it doesn’t reach his eyes. “Not exactly?” He rubs at his cheek as though remembering something.

“Get a fucking move on,” Bakugou tells him.

Sero just shakes his head. “You’re welcome, by the way!”

Bakugou flips him off before padding back to his bedroom.

Fuck. He probably owes Sero a raise.

—

He doesn’t end up groveling to Aizawa, because he’s got some goddamn self-respect. But he does have to deal with the director’s bland exasperation, and Shindou’s smirking, and Fukukado looking between them all and laughing hysterically all afternoon. Thankfully, the condensed schedule is too busy to give him and Shindou any real alone time, so Bakugou doesn’t have to worry about how he’s going to reign in his temper. He’ll deal with all of that another day.

As irritating as it all is, Bakugou isn’t really angry. He’d never admit to anyone, but there’s a bubbly feeling in his chest all day. He wouldn’t describe the feeling as *butterflies*, because that’s stupid and cliché. But there is something fluttering around inside of him, and he has to catch himself to keep from smiling too much on set.

He's never had a boyfriend before.

When things finally wrap for the day, Bakugou takes the long way home and lingers on the hillside overlooking the ocean, a few blocks away from his apartment. The wind blows through his hair, and the light of the stars and moon glitters in reflection across the dark sea.

He's not going to screw this up.

And fuck, he hadn't walked away from Kirishima all those weeks ago just to be cruel. He'd wanted to stay, but had known how impractical it would have been. Now, they're going to have to live with the consequences. Kirishima's only here another two days, and Bakugou won't be back in the city for weeks. They're not going to have any time to spend together.

What would they even do, if they had the time? When he'd gone on his stupid fake photo-op dates with Uraraka, she'd always wanted to go for iced coffee or ice cream. Or she'd want to go to the boxing gym to hit a few rounds. Bakugou had actually enjoyed that, because as slight as she looks Uraraka packs a surprising punch.

Kirishima probably likes going to the gym, and he'd be like a kid in an ice cream shop, Bakugou bets. He probably wouldn't be able to decide on a flavor, and then would insist on trying Bakugou's, and...

Goddamn it. He can imagine it so clearly. He just likes being around Kirishima, listening to the sound of his voice. But they have fun together, too. The roiling, clenching feeling that usually lives in his chest eases a bit, when Kirishima's around.

Bakugou trusts his instincts, but he usually thinks things through a bit more. Things with Kirishima had gotten away from him even realized it. And now they're so complicated, even if he *likes* Kirishima, and Kirishima likes him back.

He kicks at the sand on the hill, sending a cloud of it floating away on the breeze.

"I'm fucked, aren't I," he says aloud.

As though in answer, his phone buzzes from inside the pocket of his jeans. Bakugou pulls it out, takes one look at the caller ID, and snarls.

"Who gave you this number?" he demands, without any preamble.

Someone sighs softly on the other end of the line. "Kacchan..."

"Don't fucking start with me, Deku," Bakugou says poisonously.

And Deku, idiot nerd that he is, just starts rambling. "Of course, I have your number. You obviously have mine, since you knew it was me calling. And I know we don't talk much, but maybe someday you'll need to call me and—"

"Oh my god," Bakugou groans, "Shut up and get to the point."

"I saw the tabloids this morning," Deku says.

"So you're still a celebrity-gawking freak. What the fuck do I care?"

"I'm not," Deku says, with a nervous little laugh. "And anyway, you had as many All Might posters as I did, Kacchan."

“Go fuck yourself,” Bakugou spits out, more as a reflex than anything else. “What do you *want*?”

“To see how you’re doing, mostly. And well, to clear the air. You know, before...”

“You can’t even say it.” Bakugou rolls his eyes. No matter what his problems, at least he’ll never be as pathetic as Deku. He’s got everything going for him, a handful of Yagi Toshinori films under his belt, and he still talks like he’s scared of his own shadow.

“Before we’re working together for months,” Deku says, a little more steel in his voice. “We got used to things on *UA*’s set, but this’ll be different. I don’t want our relationship to get in the way of the movie.”

“I’m a goddamn professional,” Bakugou reminds him. “If the film is ruined, it’s going to be your fault.”

“Kacchan—”

“And *anyway*,” Bakugou continues, as though Deku hadn’t tried to interrupt, “I’m not going to forgive you. So, forget it.”

“That wasn’t...” Deku starts, and then lets out a deep sigh. “All Might—that is, Yagi-san—wants to talk to you, too. I don’t think he knows how to approach you, but maybe you could call him?”

“No,” Bakugou says immediately, ignoring the churning in his stomach. “If he wants to talk to me, he can face me himself.”

“I told him,” Deku mutters, in a voice so soft Bakugou isn’t sure he was meant to hear it. “Anyway. I hope you’re doing well, Kacchan. You’re definitely in the papers a lot, lately.”

“What the fuck do you care about it?”

Deku hums. “I like Kirishima-kun,” he says, apropos of nothing. “And I think he *really* likes you. So, be kind to him, okay?”

“I don’t need you to tell me that, you presumptuous piece of—”

“Not everyone can figure you out so easily, you know! Anyway, I’ll talk to you later, Kacchan.”

“The hell you will,” Bakugou starts, but Deku, that fucker, hangs up before he can get the words out.

The last thing he needs is relationship advice from Deku. He needs that less than he needs a million gawkers watching his every move and scrutinizing his relationship.

Still, he’s got a *relationship*, now. Fuck whatever anyone else thinks.

Chapter End Notes

["strange love" - halsey](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He's been on a national tour for the past several weeks, and Kirishima still thinks that this is the most tired he's ever been. He'd gone straight from Bakugou's apartment to the venue, yesterday, had made it through sound check and Riot's set and then promptly fallen asleep backstage. Jirou had shaken him awake sometime later, telling him it was time to go out the stage doors and greet the fans. With a tired smile, Kirishima had let her hoist him to his feet and lead him along.

Afterwards, all he'd wanted to do was get some proper rest. But after only a few hours of crashing in the hotel room he's sharing with Kaminari, Kirishima was woken up again. Apparently, Sero had sent a car for him.

Now he's at a ritzy-looking studio, scrutinizing himself in the mirror and hoping no one will notice the bags under his eyes. After all that was supposed to be taken care of by—

"I'm begging you, Monsieur," Aoyama's voice filters back to Kirishima through the open door of his dressing room. "A simple request— skinny jeans. Then all your problems will be solved, and mine too."

Kirishima grins, fatigue forgotten for the moment. The instant he'd entered the studio, Aoyama had attacked him with combs and hair gel and cover-up. When he'd declared Kirishima presentable, he'd gone off to deal with his other assignment.

Kirishima heads across the hall to the other dressing room, stopping to lean in the doorway with his arms crossed over his chest. "I'd listen to him, if I were you," he says nonchalantly. "You do look good in jeans, babe."

He isn't precisely sure where this confidence comes from, only that every time he starts to second guess himself, he remembers that Bakugou wants to be his boyfriend, *is* his boyfriend. And then all his doubts melt away.

"I look good in everything." Bakugou, standing in the center of the room in the same loose cargo pants and t-shirt he'd shown up in an hour ago, starts to scowl before his gaze lands on Kirishima. He swallows down whatever is left of his tirade, then crosses the room in two quick strides. He grabs for the skinny red tie Aoyama had tied under Kirishima's collar and tugs.

Kirishima bends easily with the motion, leaning in as Bakugou pulls him closer. Bakugou smirks at him, red eyes blazing with humor and want. And then he gives Kirishima a full kiss on the lips, tongue sliding into Kirishima's mouth to graze over his teeth.

Stepping back, Bakugou huffs out a mildly-approving noise. "Guess you're good for something after all, Sparkles."

Aoyama, in white silk blouse and pale purple cravat, holds a hand to his chest in mock offense. "Monsieur Bakugou, I am a master. And if you didn't want me to dress you, you shouldn't have let Monsieur Sero call me."

Bakugou has his arms crossed over his chest, still assessing Kirishima-- his faded black, impossibly skinny jeans; the black button-up with its sleeves rolled up past his elbows, revealing the tattoos on his arms; the aforementioned red tie; and the two black metallic hoops curving

around the helix of Kirishima's left ear. (Aoyama isn't responsible for that last item. That had been Amajiki's work, his enduring love of piercings somehow infectious.)

"You look good," Bakugou says simply.

Kirishima fights contrary urges—the first to deny the statement, the second to lick his lips to taste Bakugou again. He settles for neither, merely shrugging. "Aoyama is the expert."

"Merci beaucoup," Aoyama says, smiling beatifically. He brandishes a garment bag at Bakugou. "Now, you must get dressed!"

With one last look at Kirishima, Bakugou grabs the garment bag. "Fine," he mutters.

"And you," Aoyama says, gesturing Kirishima out the door with both hands, "need to get set up on stage! Go, go. I'll have Monsieur Bakugou join you when he's ready."

As Kirishima hurries out into the hall, he hears Aoyama murmur, "Ah, young love."

—

He doesn't know what he'd been expecting from this interview. All the press he's done for Riot has been out on tour, with photographers and writers rushing in and out backstage to get a few moments with them. The cover story with Amajiki had been a bit more of a production, but even that happened during normal day, in between rehearsals. The magazines and websites that wanted stories had come to them.

This, however, is on an entirely different level. The room is small and cozy—white walls with burnt orange accents, plush peach couches with lavender throw-pillows and a glass coffee table in between. Three mugs are laid out on fancy coasters, with the long couch facing the two cameras set up a few feet away. The arm chair is angled towards the couch, to make conversation easier.

"It looks like one of those fancy talk shows," Kirishima says aloud, resisting the urge to fidget with the mic pinned to his collar.

"It *is* a talk show, stupid," a voice growls in his ear.

Kirishima half-turns, sees Bakugou, and immediately understands how Bakugou had felt earlier when he'd tugged him into that smug kiss. Because really—*bless* Aoyama Yuuga.

Bakugou stands with his arms at his sides, utterly confident in his overwhelming attractiveness. The t-shirt is mulberry colored, the deep V-neck revealing the jut of his collarbones. The dark-wash jeans are indeed skinny, and the brown loafers make the whole ensemble look richer, more mature, somehow. Bakugou's wearing a dark gray blazer over his t-shirt, his own mic pinned against his lapel.

"You look like a movie star," Kirishima says to him, grinning crookedly.

Bakugou grins back, all teeth. "Yeah? No shit."

There's no time for anything else—no time for Kirishima to grab Bakugou and smudge the lip color Aoyama had surely put on him—because the stagehands are gesturing them towards their seats, and the cameras are rolling.

—

Glamour's host, Utsushimi Camie, apparently owes Bakugou or Sero a favor. Utsushimi sits in her armchair with one leg crossed over the other, her little black dress fitting her like a glove. She flicks her pale hair back from her face as she talks, laughs with all her might and leans forward when she's talking so that she's impossible to ignore. Kirishima likes her from the start, because she's full of that attention-grabbing confidence he's always found admirable, and not a little bit attractive.

"So," she starts off, when introductions are through, "it's been awhile since we heard about you two, on the record."

Bakugou snorts. "But you've heard enough otherwise."

She winks at him. "Well, I'm not one for gossip, you know that. But when I hear things, I listen."

Bakugou crosses his arms over his chest. "And what've you been hearing, exactly?"

"A little of this, a little of that," Utsushimi says, waving a hand. "I'd rather have it from the horse's mouth, though. As I'm sure my viewers would." She bats her eyelashes.

Bakugou rolls his eyes. "Like you're even interested. Aren't you always chasing after news of Todoroki's boring-ass life?"

Utsushimi laughs. "I never miss out on the chance to hear about a young, hot, available star," she says. "And between you and me, he's a bit of a dreamboat, isn't he?"

Bakugou rolls his eyes again, more exaggeratedly.

"Don't you think so, Kirishima?" Utsushimi asks.

Not knowing what else to do, Kirishima answers honestly. "He's not really my type."

"Don't worry," Utsushimi assures him, "You're a total catch, too."

Kirishima sputters a laugh. "What? No. Between us, it's definitely Bakugou."

Utsushimi throws her head back and starts laughing.

"What?" Kirishima asks. "What did I say?"

"Nothing, nothing." Utsushimi dabs at the corners of her eyes with a tissue. "It's just, I know Bakugou pre-e-etty well."

Bakugou glares at her, but it's missing his usual heat. "You wish," he says, with that same fierce grin he's been wearing all day.

Camie claps her hands together. "So? Tell me everything! What's going on between you?"

The question gives Kirishima pause, though of course he should've been expecting it. But really, what is everything, between him and Bakugou? What is the story they're now going to tell the world? Surely not that they weren't actually dating until only last night.

Bakugou grumbles. "You all think what you want to, anyway. Does it even matter what we say?"

"Hey, buddy," Utsushimi says, "You tell me the truth, and I'll believe it. And I'm sure everyone who's been wondering about you two will, too."

Kirishima's about to step in, to relay the same story he'd told on the red carpet months ago. But Bakugou speaks first.

"I've liked this asshole for ages," he says, jerking a thumb towards Kirishima. "Now that we're dating, I'm not going to let it go for anyone else."

It's a clean way of addressing the Shindou issue without actually addressing it—putting it to bed without fanning the flames. But while Kirishima's thinking about that, his mind catches up with the rest of what Bakugou just said.

"You *liked* me?" he says, voice cracking.

Bakugou turns to him, exasperated. "What the fuck did you think? We're *dating*."

"Still," Kirishima says, laughter bubbling out of him. It's ridiculous, isn't it? That Bakugou would have a crush on him, and not the other way around. "Aren't you too cool for crushes? Too manly?"

Bakugou throws his hands in the air. "You're an idiot."

Utsushimi is laughing, again. "I can definitely feel the bond between you," she says. "I'm glad you're both happy."

It's a good story, Kirishima thinks. It fits with what they've told the world before—that Bakugou came to a Riot concert and noticed Kirishima then. But it's just that—a story, another version of the lie they've been telling all along. He can't bring himself to believe it, to buy into the illusion Bakugou is weaving with Utsushimi's help.

The rest of the interview goes smoothly enough, and soon enough they're on their feet, saying their goodbyes. Utsushimi leaves a smacking kiss on each of Kirishima's cheeks.

"Don't be a stranger, m'kay?" she says. "I want to see more of the both of you."

"Leave him alone," Bakugou starts to say, but then Utsushimi is giving him the same treatment. He glares, rubbing at his cheeks.

"Don't be so grumpy, Bakugou," she says to him, removing her mic. "Do you have any idea what *Glamour's* viewership is, right now? By tomorrow night, the whole world's going to know about your epic crush and your charming boyfriend."

—

After the interview, Kirishima still gets no time to rest. Sero has a car drop him off at the band's venue for tonight, a spacious club with a stage that stands just a few feet over the crowd. Like a lot of the places Riot's played with Suneater, it's intimate and edgy. When Kirishima walks in in the late afternoon, it's filled with light and the crew setting up on stage. Several of them turn to wave and grin at Kirishima, and he sketches a half-bow, taking their good-natured mockery for what it is.

"How's the boyfriend, Kirishima-san?" one of them asks, as another behind him whistles.

"Fine," Kirishima says, then thinks better of it. "Better than fine, of course! Since he spent the day with me."

The crew laughs, still going about their business.

“Hey, have any of you guys seen Ashido?” Kirishima asks. It’s getting close to show time, and he has no idea what outfits she’s picked out for them for tonight.

“She was through here a while ago,” the same crewmember says. “Then she rushed off, said she had something to take care of? I think she’s backstage.”

Kirishima thanks the man and wanders behind the thick curtains, looking for any sign of a cloud of pink hair.

But he doesn’t see her, first. He hears her.

“Not that it isn’t nice to see you,” Ashido chirps, just before Kirishima rounds a corner. He freezes. “But you can’t just show up here! I’ve got a show to put on, you know!”

Her voice is light, purposely so.

“I needed to talk to you,” another voice says, equally mild. It’s *Sero*.

Ashido laughs. “You’ve got my number. You can call me whenever, I’ll get back to you when I’m not busy—”

They’re both like that, aren’t they, Kirishima thinks. They’re open and friendly, good at dissolving tension and casting everything with levity. In that way, they’re sort of the opposite of Bakugou.

“Mina,” Sero says, suddenly more serious. “I really am sorry.”

Ashido’s laughter cuts off, and she inhales sharply. “I’m not mad.”

“Yes, you are,” Sero says. “And you deserve to be. I was a jerk.”

Ashido laughs again, but it’s high-pitched and tense. “Oh,” she says, “Are you going to tell me who I am and what I’m feeling, again?”

Kirishima pokes his head around the corner to see them. They’re ensconced in a corner, standing so close together that there’s barely a few inches of space between them. Their bodies don’t seem to have gotten the memo of the distance they’re trying to keep with their voices.

Sero pinches the bridge of his nose. “That was a mistake,” he starts to say.

“Was it?” Ashido cocks her head to one side, blinking large, dark eyes at him. “It’s what you thought, isn’t it?”

“Does it matter, anymore?” Sero asks. His hands flutter at his sides, like he’s about to touch Ashido but keeps thinking better of it. “I mean, Kirishima’s happy now, isn’t he? He and Bakugou are figuring things out. So, in the end, it’s not like anything’s completely ruined.”

A frown pulls on Kirishima’s lips. Why are they talking about him? Isn’t this about their relationship?

“Hanta...” Ashido does reach out, places her hands on Sero’s cheeks.

And then they’re kissing, Sero placing one hand on the small of Ashido’s back, the other getting tangled in her hair. They lean into each other, until Sero is practically carrying her, as her arms go around his neck and she tugs him closer, closer, closer.

They look desperate, longing, and a little sad. Like this is all they want, and for some reason they

can't let themselves have it.

But Kirishima can watch for only a moment. He remembers how he'd felt when he'd seen the pictures of his and Bakugou's kiss at the diner. He doesn't want to do that to Sero and Ashido. Hell, he wants them to be happy, however they can be. He's not going to intrude upon this moment.

He steps back around the corner, as quietly as he can. Whatever Sero and Ashido had been talking about, however he's involved, he's going to find a way to help them. Because Sero had pushed him towards the thing he wanted most, and it's thanks to him that Kirishima has it, now.

A few hours later, Riot is dressed and primed to take the stage. In jeans and color-coded Riot t-shirts, Jirou and Kaminari are ready to take their places. Ashido moves to follow them, tugging up her high-waisted shorts and brushing a hand through her hair. Kirishima grabs her, hand curling around her wrist.

"Hey, wait up a second."

The others turn to face him, questioning. But Kirishima's question is really directed only at Ashido.

"Do you want to try out what we've been working on, tonight? I'm up for it."

Ashido looks up at him searchingly, like she's trying to figure out what brought on this change of heart. She nods. "I think it's the right night for it."

"Sure," Kaminari says, throwing up his hands, "Let's change the set list one *second* before we go on stage!"

Actually, it doesn't change much. Riot goes through its usual set, with Ashido singing on every song and Kirishima providing minimal backup when it's required. But as they wind down, the mood of the set shifts from energetic, jumping-up-and-down music to something more subdued. Eventually, Kirishima trades out his electric guitar for an acoustic one. The lights shift onstage, from Riot's bright, trademark colors to a warm, pale glow.

"We're going to share something new with you all, tonight," Ashido says, taking her mic off its stand. She shifts the stand aside, then comes to sit on the edge of the stage, legs dangling over the edge. The crowd roars its approval, and she grins at them.

Jirou and Kirishima take seats on either side of her, each with an acoustic guitar. Finally, Kaminari joins them with just his drumsticks.

"So, this is something Riot does all the time, but usually not at a show," Ashido continues. "We play music just for fun, wherever we are and however we can. A lot of the time that's one of us walking in on Jirou or Kirishima in the morning, as they're mumbling out some new song. And sometimes, we're hanging out with our friends by the beach, and we sing around the campfire."

With the warm lights and their new positions, it really does feel like they're at a bonfire. Jirou starts to strum on her guitar, and Ashido hums along, building up the melody until she starts to sing.

Her voice is rich and low as she sings, all her usual pep abandoned in favor of something soulful and sad. She sings to an absent lover, someone she longs to be with but can't quite reach. As

though she's speaking only to him, alone instead of in a crowded club surrounded by hushed fans.

When her voice peters out, Kirishima's picks up the thread of the song. He sings a reply to her words, the other half of the story. He'd written this song over the long weeks he'd spent apart from Bakugou, not knowing if they'd ever be able to pick up where they'd left off. But he'd wished, and he'd hoped, and so he'd filled in the story with those emotions.

Ashido joins in again, and their voices mingle with hope and sadness.

Kirishima doesn't sing every night that they're on tour. He's building up to it slowly, joining Ashido on some songs or singing along when he needs to. Tonight, he's seized with the same feeling he'd felt on their last night opening for Present Mic—that he's not singing for himself, or even as himself, but rather that he's here to support Ashido and help her convey what she needs to. The same way she's helped him get his feelings out to the world for ages, now.

But maybe that's not quite honest. Maybe Ashido needs to sing this song for herself, but so does Kirishima. Because as happy as he's been for the past few hours—and it hasn't been more than that, there just hasn't been the time—he's running up on the end of this dream. Riot's only going to be on this island for another night, and then they're off to the next city, the next show.

His voice breaks on the last line of the song, emotion hitting him like a punch in the gut. Immediately, Ashido reaches out and grips his hand, holding on tightly.

She hums out the last few lines of the song, her voice sweet and comforting. As the song ends, the crowd bursts into applause and cheers of her name, of Kirishima's name, of *Riot!*, *Riot!*, *Riot!*.

—

He's dead on his feet when he gets dropped off at the apartment. The others, heading back to the hotel, didn't spare him a glance as he stepped over to the waiting car. They'd grinned at each other, knowingly, and told him they'd see him in the morning.

Bakugou is waiting for him in his living room, dressed in sweats and a loose tank-top. Kirishima collapses beside him on the couch, face-down with his torso against the cushions and his legs across the floor. Bakugou grumbles something at him, but it still takes Kirishima a few minutes to lift his head.

Bakugou's face is a storm cloud, his chin pressed against his chest as he looks anywhere but at Kirishima.

Despite his fatigue, Kirishima pushes himself up onto his elbows and then reaches over to brush a hand through Bakugou's pale hair. "What's wrong?"

"I'm supposed to take you on a date," Bakugou says blandly, like it should be obvious. "A real one, that'll be so good you're fucking bleeding by the end of it."

"Um, would that really be good?" Kirishima tries to cut in.

"Shut up," Bakugou says, pushing at him. "I'm trying to be a good goddamn boyfriend."

Kirishima chuckles, turning himself over so that he can sit up and look Bakugou in the eye. Kirishima kisses him on the cheek, smoothing down his hair. "I like this, too. I'm glad you invited me over."

Bakugou gives him that feral grin. "Of course you do, fucking softy."

Kirishima keeps petting his hair, littering kisses all over Bakugou's face. "You're pretty soft, yourself."

Bakugou shoves him away, but before Kirishima can be offended Bakugou grabs him by the arm and hoists him to his feet. "You look worse than dead. C'mon, let's just go to bed."

That's nice, too. Bakugou's bed is spacious and soft, with sheets that probably cost as much as one of Kirishima's guitars. He gets dressed and slides under the covers, sighing in contentment as the weight of the last few days holds his body down and he finally lets his eyes flutter shut.

There's a warmth pressed against him, the weight of an arm thrown over his chest.

"Don't be sad," Kirishima says, without opening his eyes. He strokes a hand across Bakugou's bare arm. "It's only a few more weeks. Then your movie will wrap and our tour will be over, and —"

"And then I've got another movie to film," Bakugou grumbles, his breath blowing over Kirishima's ear and the side of his face. "It never fucking ends."

"I know," Kirishima says soothingly. "But I'm in this for the long haul, you know? I'm not with you just because it's easy. That'd be stupid."

Bakugou snorts. And it is laughable, isn't it? Bakugou's personality is the furthest thing from easy, and so is his schedule and the scrutiny that comes with his fame. But he also isn't difficult. Lying here beside him, touching him, being with him—it's the easiest thing in the world.

"Let's just not worry about anything else tonight," Kirishima says to him. "Not when we don't have to. We'll just deal with things as they come."

Bakugou presses closer to him in answer, and Kirishima turns his head and blinks open his eyes so that he can land a kiss against the tip of Bakugou's nose.

"Sap," Bakugou says to him, accusingly. But he tilts his head up, like he's waiting for more.

Kirishima rolls over him, kisses his neck and the collarbones he'd been staring at for half the day. Bakugou digs his fingers into Kirishima's biceps, holding on as their lips meet, as everything else between them melts away.

It's the last night they'll have for who-knows-how-long. They deserve to enjoy it.

Kirishima's phone alarm wakes him a few hours later, as the light of the sunrise is filtering in through the wide window of Bakugou's bedroom. Groaning, Kirishima sits up and stretches his arms over his head.

Beside him, Bakugou frowns in his sleep and reaches for Kirishima, arm still draped across his waist.

Kirishima smiles softly, brushing a thumb against Bakugou's brow until his expression eases.

"I really love you," Kirishima whispers, kissing Bakugou's forehead.

Bakugou doesn't stir, not as Kirishima gets out of bed, and not as he eventually heads out the door.

Chapter End Notes

["duet" - rachel yamagata](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

as a quick note, the next few months are going to be a bit hectic for me! i'm going to try and get another chapter out in a few weeks, and then i'll be on a brief hiatus until mid august. thanks for your patience and support!

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“So, we’re almost at the end of the set, and Kaminari’s in the middle of this epic drum solo. When he goes all out, like that, it takes him a minute to recover, y’know? Like he’ll look a little blank and make this ‘wehhh’ noise, like he’s put everything he’s got into the music.”

Kirishima is rambling, but he’s so enthusiastic about it Bakugou can’t bring himself to cut in. Instead, he lies across his bed, phone pressed between his ear and the pillow.

“Then Jirou walks over and sort of nudges him up, and he goes off towards the edge of the stage, holding his drumsticks above his head. The audience is totally into it, like waving along with him, yelling his name.”

Bakugou shuts his eyes, imagining it. Kaminari’s an idiot, but he’s also an electrifying presence. It makes sense that a crowd would respond to him.

“And then Jirou *pushes* him, straight into the crowd!”

“Heh. Knew I liked her.”

Kirishima laughs, loud and full. “She’s laughing the whole time, and Kaminari barely has time to look mad at her, because the crowd caught him! And then he’s crowd-surfing, actually *crowd-surfing*, and Jirou’s laughing her head off and Ashido and I are trying to keep singing but we’re laughing, too—”

He says it so casually, now. Like he thinks nothing of the fact that he’d been singing at the concert only a few hours before. Bakugou grins to himself, smug—he’s always known that Kirishima would be a natural on stage, if he would just stop thinking so damn much about it.

“It was really fun,” Kirishima finishes, laughing like he’s still half-caught in that moment. “I’m almost sad the tour’s over.”

“Oh, yeah?” Bakugou huffs.

Kirishima scoffs over the phone. “Don’t give me that, I said *almost*.”

“Then you’re stupid,” Bakugou informs him stiffly. “Aren’t you living your dream, or whatever?”

“Or whatever,” Kirishima says, and Bakugou can imagine him rolling his eyes, grinning so that one sharp tooth pokes out between his lips. “I can’t believe you’re gonna make me say it again. All of this would be perfect, if you were here, too.”

Over the past few weeks, Kirishima has said any number of equally sentimental things. He tells Bakugou he looks cute when they video chat, he sends him texts full of heart emojis and flexing muscles and thumbs up. There seems to be no limit to Kirishima Eijirou’s affections.

And yet every time Bakugou comes face-to-face with them, those feelings are overpowering, unbelievable. Why should something so bright and warm be directed at him, while asking for nothing in return?

“A-hem.” Kirishima mimics clearing his throat. “This is where you say, ‘Babe, I’ve missed you so much, too. I can’t wait to see you tomorrow.’”

Well, asking *almost* nothing in return.

“I’m not gonna fucking say that,” Bakugou growls.

“How about just, ‘I miss you’?”

Bakugou rolls over onto his stomach, clutching his cell phone against his ear. “You already know I do,” he says accusingly.

“I can guess,” Kirishima says, voice rich and happy. He yawns. “Maybe I should let you go. You’ve got a big day tomorrow, right?”

“Not really,” Bakugou says, and Kirishima laughs again.

“Okay, then. I’ll stay on the line as long as you want.”

—

Sero finds him asleep on top of his covers the next morning, phone still pressed against his face.

“You were both snoring,” Sero tells him in a sing-song voice, once Bakugou has showered and eaten and doesn’t *quite* want to strangle him anymore.

“Fuck off,” Bakugou says, snatching back his cellphone.

“Mm-hm,” Sero says, sipping his latte. “Please, remember to smile today, alright?”

—

Bakugou’s face fills the screen, tear tracks cutting two parallel lines down his cheeks. He looks up into the camera and glares, his eyeliner miraculously untouched despite the falling rain and the wetness on his face.

“Hey!” he yells out, and the camera pans out, showing him in profile. He raises a fist as though to strike. “Just who the hell gave you permission to break my heart?”

Shindou is racing towards him, grabbing his outstretched arm by the wrist and pulling Bakugou in close. Bakugou takes in a shocked breath, looks as though he’s about to start yelling again. But then Shindou leans closer and covers Bakugou’s mouth with his own.

Bakugou rips his arm free of Shindou’s grasp, but instead of pulling away he fists his fingers into Shindou’s dark hair, pulling him closer.

Rain falls around them, but they’re both oblivious. The music beats out a rhythm that may as well be their heartbeats—a fierce pounding that drowns out everything else.

But then, with excruciating slowness, Bakugou pulls himself away.

“No,” he says, forcing the words out. “That’s not enough, anymore.”

—

Inside the studio, the lights go back on as the screen fades to black, and the audience bursts into

furious applause and cheering.

On stage, Utsushimi gets up from her plush armchair to clap along with everyone else. “*Wow!* That really was something! Thanks again to Hero Films and Eraserhead Studios for providing us with that *exclusive* clip. Like, what’d we think, everyone?” She throws out her hands and the audience continues to shriek, pounding their feet against the floor and standing up out of their seats.

Utsushimi turns to wear Bakugou and Shindou are sitting on the loveseat beside her, offering them a conspiratorial wink. “I think they liked it, maybe.”

Shindou is beaming out at the crowd, but beside him Bakugou merely lifts his chin in the air. Of course, he’s glad the movie’s been well-received, so far. But he doesn’t have to let anyone else know it.

After the applause dies down, Utsushimi retakes her seat, crossing one leg over the other and leaning forward so that it appears that she’s talking only to Shindou and Bakugou, and not a packed studio audience.

“So, Shindou-kun,” she starts out, flipping her pale hair back over one shoulder. “You’ve been climbing up the ranks with independent films and supporting roles for a while, now. But this is the first time we’ve really seen you take center stage. How does it feel?”

Shindou shrugs bashfully, and the crowd goes wild for it. Bakugou barely resists the urge to roll his eyes, though he snaps his jaw shut with an audible click.

“It’s an honor, really,” Shindou is saying, still sporting that hundred-watt grin. “I mean, we can’t all be Bakugou Katsuki, but I’m certainly trying to get on his level!”

Utsushimi and the audience laugh as Shindou playfully elbows Bakugou in the side. It would be so easy, and so satisfying, to push him off the couch and onto the floor.

“No, no,” Utsushimi laughs, “You’re great. Don’t we all think he’s great?” The crowd evidently agrees, but that might just be due to Utsushimi’s uncanny gift to spin a story and have everyone around her buying into it immediately.

“And speaking of you two,” Utsushimi continues, “What was going on on-set? There were all sorts of rumors flying, I’m dying to know the real story!”

At this, Bakugou turns and gapes at her. Not even a month ago, she’d hosted and then aired that interview with him and Kirishima. Where does she get off, bringing up rumors now?

Still, he knows how to play this. Before Shindou can answer, Bakugou jerks a thumb at him and huffs dramatically. “This guy’s still alive, isn’t he? So, it went better than I expected.”

The audience bursts into laughter and applause, at that. A good portion of them are probably here as *his* fans, so they’ll be used to his mannerisms from all the interviews he’d done with Todoroki and Uraraka and fucking Deku, back in the day. It had been a running joke, then, that Deku survived the experience.

Utsushimi had been part of that world, too, at least peripherally. She and Bakugou had modelled for a teen fashion line together, and then she’d played Minori, a recurring guest star on *UA* and rival to Uraraka’s character. Bakugou had loved shooting episodes with Minori in them—Utsushimi was hilarious, even when she was hyping up Todoroki’s princely (and non-existent, if you ask Bakugou) charms.

“Hey, hey,” Shindou cuts in, giving Bakugou a sideways smile, “It wasn’t that bad, was it?”

Instead of looking at Utsushimi or back at Shindou, keeping up the farce that this is a conversation between them, Bakugou looks straight out at the audience when he says, “Worse.”

Bakugou glances to the side of the stage, where members of the crew are working, out of sight of the audience. He makes the mistake of catching Sero’s eye, and Sero takes the opportunity to smack an exasperated hand against his forehead.

Bakugou’s about to mouth something uncomplimentary at Sero when Shindou leans in close and drapes an arm across his shoulders.

“Such a teaser, this one,” he says, clicking his tongue against the back of his teeth.

Bakugou barely manages to restrain his flinch, but he doesn’t even try to stop himself from slapping Shindou’s hand away. He already had to film make outs with this guy over the course of several weeks—he doesn’t get to *keep* touching him.

Utsushimi’s still laughing, rubbing at the corners of her eyes. “Okay, okay. Settle down, boys. Let’s get personal here, for a moment. How’s the boyfriend, Bakugou?”

Sometimes Bakugou forgets that the entire world knows. The moments he has with Kirishima seem to belong to another place and time—something quiet and private and protected. Like last night, when he’d fallen asleep listening to the rich tenor of Kirishima’s laugh. That belongs to him alone, and not to the saccharine world of daytime talk shows.

He scoffs. “Wouldn’t you know better than me?”

“What, because I got to interview him on the road?” Utsushimi grins, smug. “You all caught that, right? When we caught up with Riot between shows?” The crowd roars its assent, and Bakugou doesn’t doubt that many of them watch every single episode of *Glamour*.

Utsushimi moves on to Shindou, after that, asking him about another actress named Nakagame. Bakugou tunes out most of their conversation—he really doesn’t care what Shindou does with his time, or who he does it with.

“Anyway,” Utsushimi says after a few minutes, “Back to the point at hand. *Make My Story* is hitting theaters soon, and that clip you shared with us reminded me of something.”

He can’t explain why, but Bakugou’s heart drops as Utsushimi speaks. He tenses up, hands curling into fists where they rest against his thighs.

The studio goes dark again, the screens lighting up with another clip. But this isn’t a snippet of Bakugou and Shindou’s new movie. Instead, it’s an old episode of a show that Bakugou finds all too familiar.

His vision goes green as Deku’s face appears on screen. He’s years younger, dressed in UA’s school uniform. Beside him, Todoroki grips Deku’s wrist, keeping him close even as Deku’s face wars with emotion.

“*I do love you, Yuuki-kun,*” Deku—or rather, Daiki—is saying. “*I want that to be all that matters, but...*”

“*But what?*” Todoroki—Yuuki—asks.

Daiki pulls himself out of Yuuki's grip. "*It's not enough, anymore.*"

The scene fades out again, the audience waiting with baited breath.

"We're all familiar with *UA*, aren't we? Probably the most popular teen drama ever, right, Bakugou?" Utsushimi smiles widely at him.

Bakugou sits stiff as a board, hands clenched so tight he can feel his nails digging into his palms. Backstage, Sero is gesturing wildly at him, trying to get him to smile.

"Sure," Bakugou grits out.

"The scenes are pretty similar there, aren't they?" Utsushimi asks. "Were you making an homage to your old co-star?"

Bakugou can almost hear Sero's voice in his ear, chanting *Don't freak out, don't freak out*. But every time he even thinks about Deku and *UA*, he wants to punch his fist through a wall. Deku's never managed to get anywhere on his own, he's always had to leech off Bakugou's success and talent and his very emotions. And now Bakugou's the one being called a copycat? It's fucking unreal.

Bakugou leans back into the too-plush couch, crossing his arms over his chest. "Maybe he was making an homage to *me*, you ever think of that?"

Utsushimi grins at him. "Midoriya-kun made an homage to a movie you wouldn't make for another three years?"

Both she and Shindou laugh at the notion, likely writing Bakugou's words off as another one of his instinctively contrary retorts. Bakugou gnaws on the inside of his cheek to keep himself from correcting them.

They don't make much more of it, and the more Bakugou thinks of it the more he realizes that this was the studio's doing. They want to draw a line of continuity between what *UA* did and what *Make My Story* is trying to do—to comfort audiences with the idea that gay romances aren't new or actually controversial. Look, they seem to be saying, you enjoyed it last time two boys loved each other on screen. Come see our new movie, and enjoy it again!

It's a good way of defanging this most fraught part of the marketing. Attract the audience that's already there, appease those who'd otherwise be up in arms. It's smart, it's logical.

But Bakugou still spends the rest of the interview with his teeth gritted, as though keeping a lock on everything else he wants to say.

—

By the time the car pulls up at the airport, he's a good fifteen minutes late. Bakugou hasn't changed since the interview—he's wearing dark jeans cropped at the ankle, tan loafers and a burnt orange coat thrown over his black button-down—but he barely feels the cold as he slams the car door shut and rushes into the terminal. His hair's a mess and the makeup he'd been caked in for the cameras is smudged.

On any other day, he'd worry about the press seeing him like this. On any other day, he'd think about the consequences. But not today.

He's been antsy for hours, and Sero's still at his elbow, yammering out assurances.

“Chill, Blasty,” he says, as they head for Arrivals.

“Don’t call me that,” Bakugou snaps, still moving, barely sparing Sero a glance.

“But Kirishima does,” Sero says slyly.

Bakugou growls. “Letting you and Pikachu exchange numbers was the worst fucking decision I’ve ever made.”

“Oh, for sure.” Sero laughs.

Before Bakugou can retort—or better yet, punch Sero in the stomach—he stops short. A stream of people is coming out of the arrival gate, pulling along suitcases and talking on cellphones. Bakugou waits as the crowd thins from a stream to a slow ebb. Now, only a few people are coming through at a time.

The first one he recognizes is Kaminari, who looks cheerful enough despite the bags under his eyes. He’s got a leather jacket draped over his shoulders, his arms bare underneath it. He spots Bakugou and smirks, but doesn’t say anything.

Then comes Jirou, heavy headphones around her neck and a guitar case at her back. She’s walking along like a zombie, and only stops when she butts straight into Kaminari’s back. She lingers there, half-asleep as she leans against him.

Bakugou is tapping his foot impatiently by the time Ashido appears. She looks the peppiest of the band’s members so far, skipping along and calling out that she wants to stop on the way home for cheesecake from Pablo’s.

He doesn’t care about any of them, at least not right now. Eyes fixed on the gate, Bakugou stares until he sees a familiar head of bright red hair. Then, he’s moving before he can even think about it.

(How does Kirishima always manage to get him to do that? How does he affect Bakugou so thoroughly, that all rational thought just deserts him?)

Kirishima has earbuds in, but as soon as he spots Bakugou he yanks them out and his entire expression shifts. His face blooms like a rose, opening up and taking on shades of relief, joy and excitement.

Bakugou’s running, and Kirishima meets him halfway. He catches Bakugou around the waist, lifts him up and spins him around and around, and Bakugou doesn’t even care. He’s *laughing*, clutching onto Kirishima’s shoulders and feeling too much to remember to be angry.

“Holy shit,” he says, still laughing, “I’ve missed you.”

All the texting, the phone calls, the video chats—none of it was enough. None of it compares to having Kirishima in front of him, his grip firm on Bakugou’s hips, his laughter echoing through Bakugou’s chest. *Fuck*. How has he lived without this?

He buries his face in Kirishima’s hair before he can say something else that’s too honest. But Kirishima shifts them around so that he can pull Bakugou back towards him and kiss him square on the mouth.

And, shit—Bakugou may keep calling Kirishima an idiot, but right now he’s the smartest person on earth. Because there’s nothing Bakugou would rather be doing right now, nothing else that

matters, except the feel of Kirishima's lips, the pressure of his tongue.

When his head stops spinning, Bakugou punches at Kirishima's shoulder. "Let me down, asshole."

Kirishima smiles sideways at him. "But you like this."

Bakugou snarls, "People are *looking*."

"But *you* like it." Kirishima spins him around again, and Bakugou digs his fingers into Kirishima's shoulders in an attempt to keep his balance.

He doesn't know what to say to that, so instead he shifts his hands to the back of Kirishima's neck and kisses him again. He bites down on Kirishima's lower lip, and Kirishima makes a low, needy sound that Bakugou wants to hear again, and again, and again.

"You know we have an audience, right?" Kirishima says breathlessly, pulling away.

Bakugou scoffs at him. Isn't that what he'd just said five seconds ago? And what does it matter, anyway? He *always* has an audience. There's no getting away from that.

He lifts one hand away from Kirishima's neck, pulling his arm behind him to flip off whoever might be watching. He kisses his boyfriend again, and again, and again.

—

"So," Jirou says, plopping down onto the couch beside Ashido and reading over her shoulder, "This is charming."

Kirishima and Bakugou are sitting side by side on the other end of the couch, Kaminari on the floor with his back against Kirishima's legs. In response to their questioning expressions, Jirou grabs the phone out of Ashido's hands and passes it around.

It's the homepage of a familiar tabloid, one that seems to be writing about Bakugou every other week. Months ago, they'd run one of those bullshit stories about whether he and Uraraka were dating. Today, Uraraka is nowhere to be seen.

Instead, it's a full-length picture of Kirishima and Bakugou. Kirishima is holding Bakugou up, Bakugou is flipping off the people watching them make out (and consequently, also the camera), and the bustling scene of the airport is frozen behind them.

Kaminari snorts out a laugh. "You guys just have to attract attention everywhere, don't you?"

Kirishima has the sense to look bashful, but Bakugou just scoffs and kicks Kaminari in the side. "Yeah, so what? I'm fucking famous, and so're all of you. Deal with it."

Jirou yawns, stretching her arms over her head. "We've been dealing with it for months. Right now, I just want to sleep."

"Oh, come on," Ashido whines, "We just got back! We've gotta catch up with everyone in town. Bakugou, how's Uraraka?"

"What? How the hell should I know?" He hasn't seen her since he's been back in town. She's probably busy filming the next season of *Zero Gravity*, anyway.

"We should throw a party!" Ashido continues. "Since everyone else invited us to the beach, last time. So that'll be Uraraka and Yaomomo, and Todoroki, and Iida, and Midoriya..."

She goes on, but Bakugou is no longer listening. Thinking of all of them—Uraraka and Todoroki and Deku, especially—reminds him of the next movie he’s going to shoot. Of all the reasons he didn’t want to in the first place. And that makes him fucking angry.

He gets to his feet, yanking Kirishima up with him. “I’m bored. We’re gonna go make out on your bed.”

“Dude,” Kirishima says, half a reprimand. But he can’t pretend he’s not interested in the suggestion—or order, as it was.

“Too much info,” Kaminari chirps, but Bakugou ignores him and pulls Kirishima down the hall to his bedroom.

Once he’s through the door, he pauses for a moment, taking several deep breaths. It isn’t fair—he’s not supposed to be angry, right now. He’s supposed to be happy that Kirishima is back.

“Hey,” Kirishima says from behind him. “What’s up?”

“Nothing,” Bakugou grits out. And then, reflexively, “Idiot.”

“Your idiot,” Kirishima says warmly, wrapping his arms around Bakugou from behind and pulling him back against his chest.

It feels so good, warm and certain. Bakugou forgets to correct Kirishima about who he was actually calling an idiot.

He turns in the space of Kirishima’s arms, looks him straight in the eye before their lips meet again. Kissing on screen has always been a chore—with Uraraka, it wasn’t bad, just awkward. And with Shindou, it’d been something to be endured. With both of them, and all his other romantic co-stars, he’d been more focused on making the kiss look good than on the feeling itself.

With Kirishima, everything is different. He loses himself in the sensations, barely notices when they end up on the bed, lying side by side. It’s only when he opens his eyes once more that he notices what’s just outside the window.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” he snarls, pulling away from Kirishima’s grabbing hands.

“What,” Kirishima whines, following Bakugou’s gaze. “Oh.”

Make My Story, the billboard reads in bold red print. The background is black, so that Shindou’s dark hair fades into it where his profile is depicted. In the foreground is Bakugou, staring straight out at the viewer. His expression is guarded, conflicted. His eyes are lined in red, his shirt a stark white against the dark billboard. He has one hand clutched into the fabric, right over his heart.

“Shit,” Kirishima says, sitting up in bed. “You look really hot...” He bites down on his lower lip, eyes fixed on the billboard.

The rage burns through Bakugou, igniting as quickly as a match catching a flame. He growls, seizing Kirishima by the shoulders and pushing him back onto the bed. He climbs on top of him, pinning Kirishima down and blocking his view of the window.

“You wanna focus on that?” he demands, licking his lips and looking down at Kirishima with predatory intent. “Gonna get distracted by a fucking picture when you’ve got the real thing in your bed?”

Kirishima swallows, licks his lips. His red eyes are hazy as he looks up at Bakugou.

“Only focus on me, you got that?” Bakugou says, leaning in close.

Kirishima nods, laughter gurgling out of him. “Babe, I can’t do anything else.”

Bakugou leans down to kiss him, sharp and biting. Kirishima runs his hands through Bakugou’s hair, tugging at it and making Bakugou moan into his mouth. He can feel Kirishima everywhere—the hard press of his body, the pressure of his hands, the sharpness of his teeth. He wants to lose himself to this, to pay attention only to Kirishima the way he wants Kirishima only to think of him.

They kiss like that for long moments, Bakugou lying on top of Kirishima, their legs tangled together. But soon enough, Bakugou has to surface for air. And when he does, he finds Deku and Todoroki staring down at him.

“Motherfucker,” he startles, pushing away from Kirishima and backing up to the edge of the bed.

“What?” Kirishima looks around wildly for the source of Bakugou’s distraction. “What is it?”

Bakugou is glaring up at Kirishima’s wall, where a full-size *UA* poster stares down at him. Todoroki has one arm around Deku, and Deku is leaning up to kiss Todoroki’s cheek. In the opposite corner of the poster, Uraraka is laughing and hugging Bakugou around the waist while he makes a pinched face and tries not to smile back at her.

“That!” Bakugou gestures at the poster, chest heaving with rage and breathlessness. “Take that shit down, *now*.”

Kirishima looks at the poster, almost endearingly confused. “What—that? I’ve had that for years, it’s been there every time you’ve been here.”

He surely must have noticed it, before. Or maybe he’d been too distracted, thinking about how surreal it was to have ended up in Kirishima’s bedroom.

“And now you have *me*,” Bakugou spits back at him.

Kirishima blinks. “I mean, yeah, but—”

“But what?” Bakugou demands. In the back of his mind, he knows he’s being unreasonable. Kirishima doesn’t know everything that’s happened today, or everything that’s happened in his life. He doesn’t get why Bakugou can’t stop fucking thinking about this.

“It means a lot to me,” Kirishima says defiantly. He looks up at the poster, a half-smile tugging on his lips. “I get that you don’t have the best memories of the show, but, dude, I still love it.”

It’s not just the memories. Bakugou’s not a fucking child, and he could get past things that happened years and years ago. But every time he tries, they come back to haunt him. None of this shit will let him be, will let him just have his happiness.

“Fucking *Deku*,” he seethes, sneering up at the poster. “He couldn’t act his way out of a goddamn paper bag! He just fucking copies me, and everyone thinks he’s the genius? Give me a break.”

“He does?” Kirishima blinks.

Fuck. He hadn’t meant to say that. Bakugou breathes heavily, pressing his fists against his thighs and staring down at the floor. “Fucking. Whatever.”

The mattress shifts as Kirishima sits beside Bakugou, draping one arm over his shoulders. “I guess we could always just sleep over at your place, if the poster bothers you that much.”

—

They sit like that, in tense and then companionable silence, for long moments. Bakugou leans back against Kirishima and feels the rage leaching out of him, unable to withstand Kirishima’s comforting presence. He’s half-asleep when Kirishima gently nudges him.

“Jirou’s making okonomiyaki,” he says with a toothy grin. “It’s really good. You want some?”

Bakugou looks up at him and inhales a sharp breath. How is he like this? Why isn’t he demanding more explanations? Why doesn’t he walk out when Bakugou explodes on him? How can he be so accepting, so kind, so *cool* about it?

“Fuck,” Bakugou says, rubbing at his eyes with the heels of his hands. “I think I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

["half drunk" - slow club](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

i lived, binch.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

How do you wake up on a new day, remembering that someone loves you?

It's the sort of thing that Kirishima always used to fantasize about. Specifically, he'd fantasize about waking up to Bakugou Katsuki in bed—inexplicably dressed in his old *UA* costume of tight jeans and leather jacket—looking at him with challenging eyes and a fond smile.

Reality doesn't quite match up.

As it turns out, he wakes up the same as on any other day. Kirishima's dreams are a whitewashed blur of affection and terror. He tumbles out of bed and onto the floor, dragging the blankets and sheets with him. When he pulls himself back up he's looking down at an empty bed, the fitted sheet slightly indented to show the space where Bakugou had slept.

“What?” Bakugou had scoffed, looking up at Kirishima with a challenging smile after a few minutes' silence. “Too chicken shit to say it back?”

Kirishima had leaned forward and kissed him, instead. Crawled on top of Bakugou like he could melt against him, live inside of him, if he tried hard enough.

Bakugou had accepted his kisses, dug his fingers into Kirishima's hair and moaned against his mouth. Somehow, they said more that way than they ever managed with words. And maybe it was unfair, because Kirishima knew this would be a distraction, but Bakugou didn't press the issue, either.

When they fell asleep, Kirishima hadn't said anything back.

Kirishima shakes his head as he wanders into the bathroom. The door separating the sink from the bath and toilet is locked, the sound of running water slightly muffled. Kirishima runs a hand over his face and reaches for his toothbrush. He's halfway through his mental count to thirty, running the brush over pointed teeth, when he realizes who's showering in his bathroom.

“Bakugou?” He spits the toothpaste into the sink when he calls out, the name becoming garbled.

The water doesn't stop running. “What?”

Kirishima swallows, the burn of spearmint against his throat. He chuckles. “Just making sure it's you.”

Bakugou scoffs. “No, dumbshit, it's a fucking burglar using your shower.”

“As long as he leaves my record collection alone, I'm okay with that,” Kirishima replies.

There's the tutting sound of Bakugou's impatience, and then only the running water. Kirishima finishes with his teeth, then runs his hand through his lank red hair.

“Hey, Bakugou?”

“What.”

“You’re not mad, are you?” Kirishima’s looking at himself in the mirror while he speaks—his sleep-mussed hair, wide eyes and uncertain expression. It’s easier to talk honestly when he can face Bakugou instead of himself.

“I’m always mad,” Bakugou says back, so fast it’s like a joke.

Kirishima smiles wanly. “Well, yeah. But are you mad at *me*?”

“Why?” Bakugou’s voice is rough, careless.

Because you told me you loved me, and I didn’t say it back. I stared at you for what seemed like forever, and then you rolled your eyes and shook your head and didn’t say anything else. Because I think I do love you, more than I’ve ever loved anyone, but the idea of saying that to you scares the shit out of me. Even though I know you think you feel the same way. I’m not sure I deserve the love you’re offering me, but I want it so bad.

“Because of what you said, last night.”

Kirishima hears the squeak of his shower faucet being turned off. The wet pat-pat-pat of Bakugou’s footsteps. The door opens, revealing Bakugou with one of Kirishima’s red-and-black striped towels around his waist, water dripping from his bare arms and chest as he leans in the doorway.

Bakugou smiles at him, fierce and challenging.

“You were running too far ahead of me,” he says. “I had to get the lead back somehow.”

“...huh?” Are they running a race?

Bakugou leans forward and flicks Kirishima’s nose. “I’m the best at everything I do. If I’m gonna be someone’s boyfriend, I’m gonna be the best at it. If you haven’t figured your shit out yet, who cares? You’ll catch up.”

He’s not mad. He wears his love as easily as his arrogance, wrapped around him like a shield against the world. He’s beautiful, dyed the colors of the sunrise after the hot shower.

Kirishima chokes out a laugh. “Okay, but I still think you’re gonna be mad at me.”

Bakugou’s expression goes from sly to suspicious. “Why?”

Wordlessly, Kirishima points towards the foggy bathroom mirror.

Bakugou turns and looks. Blinks, and then looks again. Wipes the mirror down with one hand, and then looks a third time. Turns back to Kirishima very slowly.

“Kirishima.”

“Yes?”

“There’s hair dye in your shampoo.”

“Conditioner, but yeah. There is.”

“*Red* hair dye.”

“Just a drop,” Kirishima says quickly, “Enough to keep the color fresh!”

“Because you dye your hair red.”

“Mm-hmm.” Kirishima pats his head self-consciously, as though the black roots will suddenly be visible.

The drop is enough to keep his hair a color that Crimson Chevalier would be proud of. But for Bakugou...

“I take it back,” Bakugou says through gritted teeth. “I’m going to fucking kill you, now.”

For Bakugou, a little red hair dye has turned his pale blond hair a dusky, startling *pink*.

Sero sits on the couch in Riot’s living room and laughs uproariously. There are tears gathering in the corner of his eyes as he points at Bakugou. “Your—hair—”

Kirishima can’t help but join him, doubled over as he has been ever since he ran from Bakugou’s first attempt to murder him.

Bakugou sits on one of the kitchen stools, arms crossed over his chest as he likely considers how to kill both his boyfriend and manager while making it look like an accident. The effect of his ferocious scowl is ruined, somewhat, by his now-dry rose-colored hair.

“Oh god,” Sero wheezes, “I guess I gotta call Aoyama, see what he can do about this.”

“Yeah,” Bakugou says scathingly. “You *do* that.”

“Don’t be like that,” Kirishima says, trying to sound appeasing. “I think it looks kinda cute.”

“*Cute?*” Bakugou sounds like a tea kettle boiling. “I’m not fucking cute, like that airhead.” He throws a hand towards the hallway, where Ashido just happens to be walking in.

“Hey,” Sero and Kirishima both say sharply.

“It’s fine,” Ashido says with a yawn. She walks over to Bakugou and ruffles his hair. “Why’re you stealing my look, Blasty?”

“I’ll *kill* you.” Bakugou bursts up from his chair, but is met only with laughter.

Kirishima comes up behind him, drapes an arm around his waist. “It’ll be okay,” he promises.

Bakugou looks at him through narrowed eyes. “Fucking hair dye. Should’ve fucking realized.” He’s glaring at Kirishima fiercely—not like he’s angry, but like he’s trying to figure something out. Like he’s remembering something.

Kirishima grimaces. He tries not to make a big thing of it, but his red hair is part of who he is—who he wants to be. Not the pathetic kid with nothing to offer, who’d been too scared to chase his dreams and too nondescript to matter. Most of all, he doesn’t want Bakugou seeing him that way.

“Don’t worry,” Kirishima says, leaning his chin against Bakugou’s shoulder. “You’re still manly and tough and way hot.”

“Of course I am,” Bakugou scoffs.

“And also *really* cute.”

“Die.”

Kirishima wrote the lyrics to this song on the night he left Bakugou on Miyakojima, thinking about how he felt and what that meant, after pretending for so long. After hearing Bakugou says that he loves him, Kirishima takes another day or two to tweak the lyrics. It all has to fit together perfectly, to say exactly what he means it to.

“I want to shoot the video at the end of the week,” Kayama-san says, wrapping one red-lacquered nail against her desk. “Time is money, and we have to strike while the iron is hot!”

“That’s a lot of metaphors, Kayama-san,” Jirou says.

But somehow, they pull it together—Riot’s next single, their first music video, and the first song on which Kirishima and Ashido will sing together equally. The dawn of a brand-new era for their band.

The four of them go through several hours’ worth of styling for the video. Winter is truly setting in, now, and in the bare-walled warehouse they shiver in their street clothes. The camera crews have already set up, the instruments are set.

“Hello,” a deep voice says, and when Kirishima looks up he’s met by a pair of dark eyes in a gaunt-looking face. “Shinsou. I’m directing.”

He’s dressed in a baggy black knit sweater, his purple hair messy and unkempt. He looks like he just rolled out of bed, but something about his voice is sure and certain. Kirishima thinks they can leave this in his hands, definitely.

While he’s been working on the song, Kaminari has taken the lead on the video’s concept. He greets Shinsou like an old friend, throwing an arm around his shoulders even as Shinsou winces at the contact.

“We’ve talked on the phone a bunch,” Kaminari explains to the other three. “Shinsou here’s the real deal, he’s going to make us one of those awesome artsy videos!”

Shinsou shrugs off both the praise and Kaminari’s grip. “We’ll be ready to get started, soon. We’re just waiting on our star.”

Kirishima blinks. He hadn’t realized that anyone other than the four of them was going to be in the video. He probably should’ve paid more attention to Kaminari’s planning.

“It’ll be great,” Kaminari is saying excitedly, perhaps in response to Kirishima’s confused expression. “The hottest star on the planet, plus our music, plus Shinsou’s directing! It can’t get any better.”

It’s a bit too revealing about where his mind has been, but when Kirishima hears Kaminari describe their star, he’s prepared for Bakugou to walk into the warehouse.

Instead, he hears the tap-tap-tap of a more delicate gait as a familiar woman rounds the corner.

“Everyone,” Yaoyorozu Momo calls out. “Sorry to keep you waiting!”

“Yaomomo!” Kaminari calls out, running over to wrap her in a hug. It’s been a while since they’ve seen her—she’d video chatting with them a couple of times while they were on tour, showed up to

a few shows when she was in the area. Jirou and Kaminari always seem to be texting her.

She steps back from Kaminari and waves at the rest of them. She's wearing a silky, blush-colored blouse tucked into tight, high waisted black shorts. Her sneakers are white and rose gold, her dark hair loose and wavy around her shoulders. She's beautiful, dazzling.

Jirou moves towards her, and Yaoyorozu murmurs a quiet, "Kyouka-san," before leaning in and kissing Jirou on either cheek.

"Oh," Kirishima says.

Ashido elbows him in the side, rolls her eyes at him.

"Anyway," Shinsou is saying, "We've had to make some last-minute adjustments, but we can shoot through with you four, first, and then with the stunts after."

Stunts? Kirishima *really* should've been paying more attention to the planning.

—

Kaminari worked with Aoyama on their wardrobes, everyone in black and white accented by soft pastel shades. Kirishima wears a white tank-top over pink skinny jeans, while Ashido is a cropped seafoam top that reveals the diamond piercing on her navel. That, like Kirishima's new ear piercings, is a souvenir from their time with Amajiki. They'd all gone out together, after Amajiki mentioned that he got a new piercing to commemorate the completion of a tour.

The instruments are set up on the roof of the warehouse. Two mic stands face each other, with the drums and Jirou's bass completing the square of lines facing inwards. Jirou's dressed in pale peach, her shirt dipping off one shoulder to reveal her pale skin. Kaminari is in lavender, laughing as he stands near the free-standing drums.

"We'll do a couple takes," Shinsou is saying. "Ashido, Kirishima, you two face each other as you're singing. For now, let's just play it through."

It's a special song, one that Kirishima has been working on for a long time. One that wouldn't work without both him and Ashido. He'd written it as a dare to himself, that if he could see it through and perform it, it would mean he'd finally gotten over his fears.

Shinsou speaks in a low, firm voice. His instructions are clear and direct, and it's easy to just follow along with what he's saying without thinking too hard about it.

Kaminari starts off first, slamming out a beat on the drums. Then, before anyone else comes in, Kirishima starts to sing.

It takes courage to do a lot of things—to be a musician in the public eye, to date a man like Bakugou Katsuki, to date a *man* at all. He'd seen how Amajiki and Toogata were with each other—clearly intimate friends, but careful never to push the boundaries of that when other people were around. In a lot of ways, Kirishima is lucky. He was out to the world before he could second guess himself about it. Now, he doesn't have to hide how he feels about the person who means most to him.

Most of all, he can push himself further because there's someone ahead of him, behind him, beside him. Always pushing and pulling him to be more than he'd dared to, before.

He sings all his feelings into the song, strumming along on a black-and-white electric guitar. He

barely notices when Ashido's voice joins his, and then when he stops to let her take on the second verse.

For Ashido it's a different feeling—the beginnings of an emotion, wanting to be pushed even further. A spark that's ready to burst into a full-blown flame. She's radiant as she sings, pale pink hair flying around her face, lips curving around the words like she's casting a spell.

Jirou leans in and back with the movement of the music, her notes keeping the rest of them steady.

Kirishima sings again, sings about how writing love songs is like taking a leap—letting yourself fall, giving your feelings form and trusting them to catch you.

All of this, everything about his life, has become one big game of chicken. He has to keep going, keep pushing, because the minute he stops and thinks about it, he'll fall straight down.

Through it all, he imagines a pair of burning red eyes, taunting him, saying *Keep going, I dare you*.

—

By the time they're done, they've broken the song down into a thousand parts and played each of them a hundred times. Shinsou wants every angle of their performance, tells them how to school their expressions and move their hands.

Kirishima sits back on a stool, exhausted. Performing takes energy and effort, leaves him feeling drained, but it doesn't feel like *work* the same way that filming does. He has no idea how Bakugou does this day in and day out.

“Throwing in the towel already?”

Kirishima whips around, sees the challenging eyes and fond sneer of his boyfriend. Bakugou's hair is still a pale shade of pink, but he isn't bashful about that in the slightest. He's dressed in a black shirt and loose white pants, rose gold sneakers a perfect match to Yaoyorozu's.

“Wh-what're you doing here?”

Bakugou's lips quirk, and Kirishima is sure that his intelligence is about to be insulted. But then Bakugou just leans in close. “You thought you could feature a celebrity in your first music video and leave me out, ha?”

He looks so arrogant, so sure, and Kirishima wants to wrap Bakugou up in his arms and kiss him silly. Instead, he shrugs.

“Kaminari's the one planning the music video! I'm not good with this kinda stuff, everyone says I don't have good taste.”

“Your sheets are red and black tiger print,” Jirou reminds him, walking by while sipping from a water bottle. “Yo, Bakugou.”

Bakugou gives Jirou a nod of greeting, then scoffs at Kirishima. “I've seen your room. Your taste is shit.”

“Ashido's just as bad,” Jirou sighs. “If we let the two of them loose, we'd all be in animal prints and clashing pastels. Much as I hate to admit it, Kaminari's pretty good with this stuff.”

“Go figure,” Bakugou mutters.

“Excuse me,” Kaminari says, making his way over and jabbing a finger at Bakugou’s chest, “I invited you, didn’t I?”

“Only after I heard about it from Ponytail,” Bakugou snipes back.

“I had to rework the whole concept!” Kaminari says. “I had storyboards, Bakugou. *Storyboards!* And then you had to go all jealous boyfriend on me.”

“You want your video to be the best? Then you put the best in it. It’s not fucking rocket science.” Bakugou huffs, leaning back with his arms crossed over his chest. His face reddens a bit, cheeks as pink as his hair.

“You were jealous?” Kirishima says, out of the corner of his mouth.

Bakugou’s frown deepens. “You don’t tell me this important shit, and then you expect me to sit it out? No way.”

Ashido and Yaoyorozu have walked over, and now Kirishima can see the deliberate coordination of Yaoyorozu and Bakugou’s outfits.

“I’m glad you’re here, Bakugou-san,” Yaoyorozu says. “This would all be a bit much to do alone.”

“Wait,” Kirishima says, “What, exactly, are you doing?”

—

At first, a lot of the filming is just Yaoyorozu and Bakugou posing on the edge of the roof, overlooking the city. Fans are used to blow fake wind through their hair. Yaoyorozu curls her dark locks around her fingers, looking uncertain. Bakugou bites down on his lower lip, like he’s holding something back. They walk past each other, not making eye contact or really seeing each other at all.

Then, a stunt crew brings out the levers and harnesses. They hook up both Yaoyorozu and Bakugou, each of them stepping out onto the edge of the roof.

“Wait,” Kirishima says, “Are they going to *jump*?”

“Quiet on the set,” Shinsou orders.

Kirishima can only watch in silence as Yaoyorozu lets herself fall backwards off the roof, and Shinsou films her falling. Then, it’s Bakugou’s turn. His face shines with determination, then goes carefully blank. He jumps off the roof headfirst.

Kirishima’s heart clenches, even as the rigging holding Bakugou goes taut.

When the many takes are over, Bakugou steps towards Kirishima with a smirk. “What, were you worried?”

“A little warning would’ve been nice,” Kirishima admits. “But I know you can handle yourself.”

Bakugou licks over his lips, shoves Kirishima playfully. “You’d better.”

—

The final scene of filming is inside the warehouse, where a bunch of extras have been gathered. There’s a dance party going on, fog machines filling the space with smoke. Against that smoke,

lights project pink and green and peach and yellow and purple lights. Low music plays in the background, the basic beat of Riot's song.

"You four get in the middle and dance," Shinsou says while pointing out to the crew where to arrange the cameras. "Ashido, you and Kaminari first. Then we'll focus on Jirou and Kirishima."

Ashido and Kaminari are usually on the same wavelength, and when they dance that effect is multiplied. Kaminari puts his hands on Ashido's hips, and she rocks back against him. She lifts her arms over her head, and he runs his hands up her sides, their faces turned towards each other. The energy between them is electric, sparking and alive.

They dance across the line between sensual and sexual, Kaminari's lips pressing against Ashido's throat as the two of them rock their hips in time. Kaminari splays one of his hands across Ashido's bare stomach, the jewel of her piercing glimmering under the strobe lights.

Bakugou and Kirishima are leaning against a wall, observing.

"You're lucky Soy Sauce didn't insist on coming along," Bakugou mutters.

Kirishima frowns. "Ashido can do what she wants. And besides, she and Kaminari aren't like *that*. They just like dancing. They're having fun."

Sero's never struck him as the jealous type, anyway. Ashido would never put up with that. But things are still so weird between the two of them, and Kirishima never worked up the courage to ask her about that time he'd seen them making out. Are they together, or do they want to be? It's not like Ashido to keep that part of her life a secret from the rest of them.

Still, Kirishima has some sympathy for the fact that Sero must have watched Ashido like this a lot—all eyes on her, everyone drawn to her presence. It's hard to feel special to someone like that.

"Jirou, Kirishima," Shinsou is calling out. "You're up."

Jirou's never been one for public displays. She's Ashido's opposite in that way, cool and reserved where Ashido is warm and open.

Kirishima's surprised when Jirou smiles wanly at him, grabs his hand and pulls him towards the dance floor. They let Shinsou arrange them—they move carefully in interlocking circles, sometimes facing each other and sometimes looking away. They aren't dancing together, the way Ashido and Kaminari had been. Instead, they're like planets in orbit, caught in the same gravity but interacting directly with each other.

Kirishima lets himself get lost in the beat, even though it's awkward when he's being stopped every few moments, when Shinsou directs Jirou to push his tank top up to bare his abs.

He loses track of Shinsou's direction for just a moment, and that's when Yaoyorozu enters the scene. She walks up to Jirou with calculated intent—hips swaying, not-quite-dancing. She extends an arm towards Jirou, grabs her hand and pulls her away from Kirishima.

She tips Jirou's chin up and kisses her on the lips. Jirou wraps her arms around Yaoyorozu's neck, standing up on her tip-toes to reach. They're still swaying in time to the music, even this made into part of the dance.

Kirishima doesn't realize he's stopped dancing, that he's gaping, until Shinsou calls out an impatient, "*Cut.*"

He runs a hand through his already-messy hair. “Kirishima,” he says shortly, “You’re supposed to keep moving.”

“I just—I didn’t realize—”

Kaminari comes up beside Shinsou, raises both his brows at Kirishima. “Hey, remember when you explained what you wanted this song to mean to us?”

Kirishima nods. He often talks through his ideas with the others, to make sure they’re coming across the right way. “Yeah, of course. It’s a song about...” He trails off, acutely aware that Bakugou is standing only a few feet away. He swallows. “It’s a song about having the courage to love someone.”

“Exactly,” Kaminari says, shooting finger-guns Kirishima’s way. “So what’s more courageous than this? The love story of my two favorite ladies.”

Ashido reaches over to pinch him in the side, and he amends, “Ouch! You’re my favorite too, Ashido!”

“It’s not our love story,” Jirou says quickly, “We’re playing characters, Kaminari.”

“Of course,” Yaoyorozu says, blushing delicately. She really is an incredible actress, because the fierce, determined woman from a moment ago is gone completely now.

“Anyway, if you didn’t keep running out on band meetings to make out with your boyfriend, you’d know all this,” Kaminari finishes off. He shoots Kirishima a toothy grin.

Kirishima lifts his hands, smiles apologetically. “Message received, I’ll pay better attention from now on.”

“And you approve?” Kaminari says.

“We’re not doing this over if he doesn’t,” Shinsou puts in.

“Of course I approve!” Kirishima bursts out. “It’s awesome, I mean—when the whole thing with me and Bakugou happened, he took most of the heat for coming out since no one really cared about me, and now—this feels like something we can actually do, that’s ours, our brand, you know?”

Kaminari throws an arm over his shoulders. “I knew you’d feel that way, bro. We’re going to make a masterpiece of gay cinema, here.”

“It’s a music video,” Shinsou reminds him flatly. “Let’s not get carried away.”

Maybe it’s Kirishima’s imagination, but there’s something sad, almost longing, in Shinsou’s voice.

—

It’s another three takes of Jirou and Kirishima dancing, of Yaoyorozu pulling Jirou in and kissing her senseless.

It’s hard to keep moving to Shinsou’s instructions when he wants to watch, when he wants to unpack all the emotions he sees in Jirou’s face and in her eyes. She’s always been so quiet about her preferences—never hiding them, but never broadcasting them, either.

He knows Jirou likes Yaoyorozu, and he’s always gotten the feeling that Yaoyorozu likes her, too.

He winces in sympathy—if they’ve gotten this far without confessing, they’re in the same boat Bakugou and Kirishima were in not too long ago.

He barely registers it when a familiar hand grips his wrist, spins him around. Bakugou is standing there, not smiling. There’s a predatory gleam in his eye, a frustration in the way his lips curl.

“Our turn,” he whispers, just before he grabs the neck of Kirishima’s tank top and pulls him in for a kiss.

It’s not the first time they’ve kissed in front of a camera, but this time Kirishima barely thinks about that. Instead, he’s licking into Bakugou’s mouth, letting his arms rest against Bakugou’s shoulders. It’s a long kiss, lazy and satisfying.

“*Guys*,” Kaminari whines at them. “That was *not* in the plan!”

“Leave it,” Shinsou says, though he’s frowning. “I think I can work with this.”

—

The six of them go out to eat, afterwards. Shinsou begs off, though Kaminari invites him along, as well. As he’s leaving, hands tucked into his pockets, he frowns at Bakugou, eyes narrowing.

“Dude,” Kaminari says, nudging Bakugou, “Does *everyone* hate you?”

Bakugou stomps on Kaminari’s foot. “Fuck if I care.”

Yaoyorozu suggests they eat a conveyor-belt sushi place, a little hole in the wall that she excitedly calls *delightful*.

It’s late enough that there’s not much of a crowd, and the six of them sit at the counter and order beers and soda and pour themselves green tea.

“So,” Bakugou says, staring at Yaoyorozu over the rim of his glass, “How long’ve you been thinking about doing this, Ponytail?”

Kirishima isn’t sure what he’s getting at, but from the way Yaoyorozu straightens she understands Bakugou’s words.

“It’s something we all have to think about,” she says, tracing the rim of her teacup with one slim finger. “I’ve been in the spotlight for as long as I can remember, so when I started having feelings for other women, it wasn’t something I could be open about.”

Jirou is quiet, beside her, but she reaches over and lays a hand atop of Yaoyorozu’s. Yaoyorozu smiles at her gratefully.

“What changed?” Ashido prompts.

Yaoyorozu smiles, glancing at Bakugou. “Would you mind if I said it was you, Bakugou-san? After you were so open about your relationship with Kirishima-san, it made me think that there was no excuse for me to hide who I was. Especially if there was someone I wanted to be with, too.”

Bakugou scoffs. “You’re just copying me, is that it? I made coming out fashionable?”

Yaoyorozu lifts her chin, a sparkle in her eye. “No, Bakugou-san. I’m not copying you—I’m *inspired* by you.”

Bakugou blinks and sits back, for once no clever response ready on his tongue.

It's such an interesting distinction. Bakugou hates being imitated, but doesn't he want to be admired?

"Anyway," Yaoyorozu says, "What's done is done, now. I wasn't just pretending for the sake of the video. Your song is a celebration of love, of embracing things even when they're difficult or scary. And I want to embrace who I am."

"Yaomomo," Ashido says, sighing dreamily. "You're the best."

Yaoyorozu laughs, cheeks coloring. "No, of course I'm not. Bakugou-san's the one who paved the way, after all. And Kirishima-san."

He's never thought about that. But hadn't Amajiki-san said something similar, too? Kirishima had never set out to inspire people, or be a trendsetter. He just wanted to express his own feelings, live his own life.

But the feeling blooming in his chest is hopeful and comforting. Being in such company isn't a bad thing.

—

They walk home together—Ashido and Kaminari rushing ahead, Jirou and Yaoyorozu lagging behind, talking quietly with their fingers intertwined.

"About fucking time," Bakugou mutters, as he and Kirishima walk side by side.

"Oh, yeah," Kirishima says, smacking his fist against his other palm. "You called this like, ages ago, didn't you?"

Bakugou rolls his eyes. "Ponytail's so obvious."

"I think it's nice," Kirishima says, "They'll be good for each other."

The group leaves Bakugou and Kirishima at Bakugou's apartment—Bakugou's got an early interview tomorrow, and Kirishima's sleeping over. They crawl into bed together, Kirishima lying flat on his back with Bakugou curled up at his side.

"G'night," Kirishima sighs, exhaustion settling over him.

"Night," Bakugou says back, half-asleep. "Love you."

Bakugou's breathing evens out a moment later, but Kirishima stays awake for a long time, staring at the ceiling. If love is about being brave, why can't he say three simple words?

—

Shinsou sends a rough cut of the video to Midnight Records, and Riot gathers around to watch. The video starts with the four of them playing music on the rooftop—Kirishima and Ashido facing each other, viewed in profile as they begin to sing. Kaminari and Jirou face each other as well, drum beats and bass line alternating. They look for all appearances like they're on top of the world, surrounded by clear sky and distant buildings.

Interspersed with their performance are shots of Yaoyorozu and Bakugou. They stand on the edges of the rooftop, looking out over the city uncertainly. Yaoyorozu presses her hands against her heart,

and Bakugou hugs himself. They walk past each other, two people feeling the same emotion but not seeing each other at all.

Then, as the music picks up to its climax, they both turn and fall from the roof's edge. As Kirishima and Ashido's voices drift over them, they fall down through the sky, expressions at once peaceful and determined.

Back on the rooftop where Riot is playing, Kaminari bangs out an increasingly frantic beat. The ground shakes with it, and as he slams against the drums the roof caves in and Riot tumbles through the wreckage, still playing music and singing.

They've landed in the middle of a dance party, and dusting themselves off they get caught up in their own sound. Ashido and Kaminari dance against each other, as Jirou and Kirishima step round and round in circles.

Yaoyorozu approaches the group from one side, Bakugou from the other.

All the while, the lyrics say—if love's worth it, you'll find a way. If love's worth it, you'll take the plunge. Someone's going to push you there. Someone's going to dare you to go further than you've ever gone. Someone's going to set your soul on fire.

Yaoyorozu reaches for Jirou, Bakugou grabs Kirishima.

They kiss as the music plays, as the pastel lights flash over them, as they revel in this celebration of love and taking chances.

Chapter End Notes

["i dare you" - the xx](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You sure we weren’t supposed to dress up?”

Kirishima is tugging at his t-shirt as they walk towards the elevators. Bakugou’s not stupid enough to have let him dress himself for this—the worn Crimson Chevalier shirt and jeans are normal enough, but Ashido had picked out the red cardigan dotted with bold black stars. He looks casual, but good. Stupidly good.

“It’s just a party,” Bakugou mutters. A part of him had wanted to decline when the annual invite had come. But he hasn’t missed one of these parties in five years, and the thought of not showing up had left a hollow feeling in his chest.

“Still,” Kirishima says, tugging at his sleeves. “Todoroki always looks so *fancy*! I feel like I’m going to be underdressed.”

Bakugou wonders if it’s worth pointing out that the most time Kirishima has spent with Todoroki was on the beach, when Todoroki was wearing swim shorts and a t-shirt. His image in the press is posh, and there’s always another photo of him in a suit, ready for the tabloids. Bakugou has called him a pretentious fuck for it, before. Todoroki always responds with a shrug, like he doesn’t know how else to dress.

What will Todoroki say when he shows up with this entourage?

Ashido in her off-the-shoulder black dress and thigh-high boots, Jirou in jeans the exact shade of burgundy that’s Yaoyorozu’s favorite color, and Kaminari in a truly stupid hat and black jeans with too many zippers. Sero at the back of the group, in a baggy white sweater, looking more at ease than Bakugou has seen him in ages.

“Who would’ve believed it,” Kaminari says. “Us, going to Todoroki Shouto’s birthday party!”

“It’s really not that big of a deal,” Sero says, playing at nonchalance.

“Says the idiot who cried the first year he was invited,” Bakugou snipes at him.

“I thought we were keeping that between us!” Sero presses a hand to his heart, wounded.

Ashido leans up to pinch his cheek. “That’s so cute, Sero. It’s like you don’t hang out with famous people all the time.”

“Todoroki’s sort of in a league of his own, though,” Kirishima says. He must catch Bakugou’s glare, because he puts a reassuring hand on his shoulder and says, “Other than you, babe. Of course.”

Bakugou bristles at the nickname and forcibly lifts Kirishima’s hand from his shoulder. He’s been using that word a lot, lately. It burns through Bakugou in an unfamiliar, but not entirely unpleasant, way.

The elevator dings, rescuing him from his own thoughts.

“All right, losers,” he mutters, leading the way. “Try not to embarrass me.”

They’d been teenagers when Todoroki had confided to Deku that he hadn’t had a birthday party in over ten years, since his mother had gotten sick and been hospitalized. Bakugou wasn’t supposed to hear that conversation, but he’d been getting suspicious of how much time Deku and Todoroki spent away from the rest of the cast. He’d followed them into the hallway, hidden around a corner, and heard a number of things that Todoroki hadn’t chosen to share with him.

Maybe that’s why he feels guilty whenever he thinks about missing these stupid parties. At first, it’d been a small group—Deku and Todoroki, Iida and Uraraka, and Bakugou. But as the years have gone on their circle has expanded, and this year there are twenty or so people milling about in small groups.

Deku’s rented out the entire restaurant for the night. Probably with the earnings from his latest Yagi-directed film, Bakugou thinks. And no, he’s not bitter about that at all.

They don’t need the space so much as the privacy. There are chefs waiting to prepare hot and cold noodles and bartenders setting shots on fire. It’s elaborate, but not over the top. Deku always does these things for others, never himself. He’s still wearing one of those fucking joke t-shirts, white with “tuxedo” written across it in black.

Kirishima and the others have gone to meet Yaoyorozu and Uraraka at the bar, so Bakugou’s alone when Deku corners him. Just his fucking luck.

“Kacchan! Long time no see.” Deku stops a foot or so away from him, like he’s trying not to get too close to a wild animal.

Bakugou bares his teeth. Deku hadn’t tried to contact him since that last phone call, but the memory of it smarts like he’s just skinned his palms against pavement.

“Have you been keeping up with the updates for the movie?” Deku continues, like Bakugou isn’t radiating open hostility. “There are so many cool people on the cast, now—”

In truth, Bakugou has been avoiding even thinking about *Because He Is My Hero*. He shunts all emails about it off to a separate folder and doesn’t look at them. Sero’s been instructed to handle things and keep him out of it unless he absolutely needs Bakugou’s input.

“I’ve been busy,” Bakugou grits out.

“Yeah,” Deku laughs. “I noticed.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Bakugou barks.

“Nothing, nothing.” Deku holds up his hands. “Just—you seem happy, Kacchan. I’m glad.”

“Fuck off,” Bakugou growls. He hates Deku’s little nice guy act. He’s always scheming, always hiding something. No matter how many times Bakugou has tried to leave him behind, he always catches up—sometimes even breaks away and rushes ahead.

“How’s Kirishima-kun?”

“Fine,” Bakugou snaps. “What the fuck do you care?”

Deku frowns. “He’s my friend, too. I told you before—I care if you guys are happy.”

“You can ask him your goddamn self.”

Bakugou isn’t about to confide in Deku, isn’t about to give him more weapons that he can turn against Bakugou later. He already knows too much. Besides, it’s none of his business if Kirishima makes Bakugou stupidly, deliriously happy. That he feels well-rested when he wakes up beside him, caught in a warm embrace. That he hangs out with Riot most days of the week, and though they’re all idiots their company is bearable.

Most of all, he’s definitely not going to tell Deku—of all people!—that he’s in love, but that Kirishima has yet to say it back, and Bakugou’s running out of viable excuses for why that is.

“Oh. There you are.”

Bakugou looks up to see the birthday boy himself. He looks innocuous in his white-and-baby blue-striped sweater, his expression carefully blank.

“Hi, Todoroki-kun,” Deku says with a smile. “Enjoying your birthday?”

Todoroki nods, pressing his lips together to hide the fullness of his smile. He turns to Bakugou, considering. “Your hair isn’t pink, anymore.”

It’s been weeks and weeks since he’d made that particular mistake at Kirishima’s place, and while he’d ridden out the worst of it—he wasn’t about to risk bleaching his hair—there’d been pictures of him all over the internet. He’d had to answer questions about his “bold fashion choices” throughout the *Make My Story* press tour, and fuck. How could he not have realized that Kirishima dyed his hair?

“I’m not taking comments from you, Half n’Half,” Bakugou mutters murderously.

Todoroki lifts a hand to the part of his red-and-white hair, almost self-conscious. He shrugs as if to say, *Fair enough*.

“Why aren’t you hanging out with your friends,” Bakugou sneers, gesturing at the rest of the crowd.

Todoroki blinks. “You and Midoriya are right here.”

Deku covers his mouth with one hand, but that does nothing to hide his smile. Bakugou elbows him in the chest, and he coughs.

“You are one of my friends,” Todoroki says, in his usual staid tone. Bakugou hates it—how is he always so goddamn calm? Even when making these fucking sappy declarations? “Not my best friend. That’s Yaoyorozu, and Midoriya. But still.”

“Don’t get so full of yourself,” Bakugou growls at him.

It’s such a childish way to think about things. And yet, when Todoroki speaks, Bakugou has to come to the startling realization that for the first time in a long time, he *is* surrounded by people he considers friends. (Fucking Deku excluded, thank you very much.) They’re all annoying as hell and too loud and too stupid, but they’re *his*, in a strange way.

“C’mon,” Midoriya is saying, tugging Todoroki towards the long table set up in the center of the restaurant. “First dinner, then dessert!”

He's sitting between Kirishima and Uraraka at dinner, and fuck if that isn't awkward. Uraraka greets him with a kiss on the cheek, like she's forgotten that they don't have to pretend to be affectionate anymore. She doesn't apologize, though, just punches him in the shoulder and laughs before taking her seat beside him.

Is this just his life? A series of pretenses that eventually turn into something genuine? He hadn't even *liked* Uraraka in the beginning, but he'd gotten used to her, and now she's just *there*, an irrevocable part of his life.

He steals a glance at Kirishima and gnashes his teeth. Untangling what was pretense and what was genuine there gives him a fucking headache.

Kirishima places a hand over his, rubs his thumbs gently over Bakugou's knuckles.

"Having fun?" he asks, grin wide and toothy.

Bakugou huffs. "It's the same shit every year."

But it's not. This isn't a cake and some balloons on the set of *UA*, or a week-long retreat to the Yaoyorozu family's ski lodge in the mountains. This is an evening surrounded by people who aren't impressed with the fact that he's an actor, who aren't cowed by his anger and bluster. Kirishima is here, and Kaminari and Sero, and Jirou and Ashido.

He doesn't know if he'd call it fun. But it's comfortable, and that's perhaps a more unfamiliar sensation.

He's quiet throughout dinner, and at some point Uraraka and Kirishima take that as license to talk over him.

"I was so excited for your album," Uraraka is saying. "You're already working on the second?"

"Yeah," Kirishima says, mouth still full of food. Bakugou whacks him on the back, and he swallows before continuing. "I mean, the video is timed for the release of the single, and it'll be awhile yet before we have enough material for a full second album. But we're working towards it."

"Do you know what you're going to call it, yet?"

Riot's first album had been called *Pink*. The album art featured Ashido's startlingly dark eyes looking out from a pink background, the band's name in bold type underneath.

Kirishima shrugs in response to Uraraka's question. "Well, I had one idea, but..."

"It's a *good* idea," Jirou puts in from across the table, where she's sitting between Yaoyorozu and Hagakure Tooru. "Kayama-san wants us to stick to the color thing. Says it'll be good for branding."

"Yeah," Kirishima admits, and it's clear he's embarrassed. On Hagakure's other side, Ashido freezes mid-sip of her drink. "Well, a lot could change between now and when it's released. But I'm thinking *Red*, maybe."

Bakugou frowns at him. "Stop sounding so fucking hesitant. Aren't you the one always going on about manliness?"

“I think that’s Bakugou-kun’s way of saying he likes the idea,” Uraraka says, tapping one finger against her cheek. “I never thought he could be such a supportive boyfriend.”

“Fuck you,” Bakugou tells her. “I went to all of your shitty premieres and product launches, and we weren’t even together.” He doesn’t do things half-way, even when they’re fake. He’s an actor, for fuck’s sake.

“I’m glad they didn’t keep that up,” Hagakure whispers behind her hand to Ashido. “I was worried about Ochako-chan having to spend so much time with Bakugou-kun.”

Ashido throws back her head and laughs—a little too loudly. Bakugou blinks, spends all of five seconds scrutinizing her expression before he realizes what he’s doing and looks away. What’s it matter to him if Raccoon Eyes is moody, today? It’s not his problem.

Dessert is the typical strawberries and cream cake that Deku gets every year. It’s too sweet for Bakugou’s tastes, and he ends up shoving half his slice onto Kirishima’s plate. Everyone is talking and laughing, and Bakugou’s starting to think this party’s going on too long.

“C’mon,” Kirishima says, tugging on his arm. “I wanna dance with you.”

The dancing is new, this year. Jirou has hijacked the speaker system with her phone, putting on a playlist full of radio hits and songs from two or three decades ago. Hagakure had tugged her date—Ojirou, who’d been the stunt coordinator on *Ground Zero*—onto the dancefloor, Jirou and Yaoyorozu following close behind. Ashido and Uraraka joined them, then Kaminari got into it, and finally Sero. Deku, Todoroki and Iida are still on the sidelines, but they seem happy enough to watch.

“I don’t dance,” Bakugou grumbles.

“You do,” Kirishima tells him, still pulling him towards the throng. “You danced with Uraraka for the school dance episode of *UA*.”

Bakugou grits his teeth. How many times does he have to explain that that character wasn’t him? Yes, he’d spent formative years of his life on that fucking show, but that doesn’t mean anything.

Kirishima blinks at him. “I know that was staged,” he says, before Bakugou can bite his head off, “But it proves you at least know how to move to music. C’mon, it’ll be fun. Just hold on to me.”

That’s not such a bad proposition. Bakugou lets his hands settle at Kirishima’s waist, and as they sway in time Bakugou’s barely paying attention to the song or anyone else. The contact, the closeness, that’s enough.

It’s easy to love someone so full of life and laughter. Kirishima is less coordinated than Bakugou would expect from a musician, but he’s enthusiastic and dramatic in his movements. He cups a hand against the back of Bakugou’s neck, bringing their faces close together.

“Have I told you how good you look tonight?”

Bakugou rolls his eyes. He always looks good—even his accidentally pink hair was taken as a bold fashion statement. His version of casual is dark, cropped jeans and his long-sleeved Black V-neck, with a deep red pullover on top. He and Kirishima are *matching*, he realizes belatedly. He’s going to have to introduce some new colors to his wardrobe.

“You look so cute when you’re thinking like that,” Kirishima whispers to him. He pokes at Bakugou’s cheek.

Bakugou turns his head, squeezes his hand against Kirishima’s hip warningly. “What the fuck did I say about calling me cute?”

“I wasn’t listening,” Kirishima says, apparently having no fear of death. “But it’s true, you know. I always thought you were hot, but it’s only now that I’m close that I can see all this.”

That sends a jolt through Bakugou, like he’s been struck by lightning.

“Shut up.” He presses closer, yanks Kirishima in for a kiss.

Around them, their so-called friends start hooting and hollering. Someone has the gall to whistle.

Kirishima pulls back, laughing. But Bakugou is distracted from his smile by Ashido, who’s lingering behind them, frozen in place on the dancefloor. She’s pouting, brows drawn together.

Kirishima spins Bakugou around, and he lets himself be pulled back into the rhythm of the dance.

He has the perfect vantage point to see when Ashido stomps across the dancefloor in her heeled boots, grabbing Sero and pulling him close. He barely has time to blink when she settles his hands on her waist, pulling him into a more intimate dance.

“They’re getting along better,” Kirishima says, but he sounds unsure.

Bakugou bites down on his tongue. As far as he knows, they *haven’t*. Sero’s been just as moody as before, until they all came out together, tonight.

It’s not like he’s invested in the stupid, juvenile dramatics of Ashido and Sero. But what the fuck is Raccoon Eyes playing at, right now?

Ashido maneuvers them to the center of the dance floor, then throws her arms around Sero’s neck and pulls him into a sloppy kiss. Instead of good-natured applause, there’s silence as the kiss continues too long. It’s like a wrong chord struck in the middle of a symphony, too obvious to ignore.

Sero pulls back, putting an arm’s length between him and Ashido. “I,” he starts, face smeared with hot pink lipstick.

“What?” Ashido says, stamping one foot. “Why’d you stop?”

Sero places his hands on her shoulders, holding her still. “Mina,” he says gently, “What are you doing?”

“Don’t you want to kiss me?” Ashido demands.

Sero swallows, takes a step back like it’s physically painful. “Not like this,” he says, finally.

“Ashido,” Kirishima says softly, pulling away from Bakugou and taking a step toward her.

“It’s fine, Kirishima.”

Ashido doesn’t wait for him to get close. Instead, she laughs, light and breezy. “What’s everyone looking at?” she says, waving cheekily at the others on the dancefloor. “It’s a party, isn’t it? Don’t stop just ‘cause of me.”

She turns and walks off the dance floor, and then straight out of the restaurant, her heels click-click-clicking as she goes.

The silence is resounding. Even the crooning of some cheesy ballad over the speakers can't mask it.

Sero rubs a hand against the back of his neck. "I'm gonna go get some air," he says to no one in particular.

He leaves out the door opposite the one Ashido has used. It's Yaoyorozu who breaks the silence, saying she can set up karaoke in another section of the room. She tugs Todoroki and Jirou along with her, declaring that the birthday boy has to go first.

That shifts the crowd, and Kirishima moves to follow. When he notices Bakugou isn't beside him, he turns back.

"Aren't you coming?"

"You're not going after her?" Bakugou asks, instead of answering. He remembers that night on the beach, when all the girls had trailed after Ashido when she and Sero had fought.

Kirishima shakes his head, sadly. "I think we should let her cool down, first. There's no use talking to her when she's like this."

Bakugou huffs. "Whatever." It's not as if he cares.

"Let's go sing some karaoke," Kirishima says.

"I'll be back in a minute." Bakugou gestures vaguely. "Bathroom."

—

Sero is sitting on the short staircase leading down into the lobby. His elbows are against his knees, his hands over his face. His expression is completely obscured, but the way his long limbs cover him, he looks defeated.

Bakugou comes up behind him, and he doesn't have to clear his throat before Sero says in a small voice, "I don't know why she's doing this."

Bakugou blinks. He'd thought that part was obvious. "She fucking likes you." Why else would she kiss him?

Sero lets out a weak laugh, pulls his hands down so that he can look at Bakugou with glossy eyes. "Most of the time I'm not so sure."

"Ha?" Bakugou remains standing, Sero sitting on the low stairs. They both look outwards towards the glass walls, to the city outside, blanketed in snow.

"We're not seventeen anymore." Sero stares down at his hands.

Bakugou resists the urge to kick him. Sero's always been less annoying than the rest, even if he doesn't pay Bakugou the respect that he should. Their lives are irrevocably entwined with Riot's, now, and if this drama continues Bakugou's life will continue to be a headache.

"It's just, you say a lot of things when you're seventeen, and maybe you even mean them," Sero continues, talking more to himself than to Bakugou. "When she told me she loved me, I believed

her. I *wanted* to believe her. But how can it still be true? How could something she felt that long ago still be real? She was an idol then, and now she's blowing up all over again. She's a star, and I'm not even a background character. I'm behind-the-scenes. I've got nothing to offer her."

This, Bakugou takes offense to. "I keep you around. Are you saying I'm stupid?"

Sero looks up and flashes Bakugou a watery grin. "I wouldn't dream of it."

Sero's been part of his team for going on four years now. He's never tried to flatter Bakugou or cushion his ego, but he does what needs to be done. He's always been on Bakugou's side, and has never betrayed him. And when it's just the two of them, Bakugou imagines that Sero really *knows* him—he's well aware of all the fronts Bakugou puts on for other people, but sees past them. There aren't many people in Bakugou's life who see him so clearly. That's worth more than some petty stardom—someone who really knows you, and sticks around anyway.

Everyone's always looking at him. But very few people ever *see* him.

"I don't know who that performance was for," Sero says with a heavy sigh. "Definitely not for me. And I can't—I'm trying so hard not to get swept away by her, again. Because if I let myself hope, and then it doesn't work out again... I'm never gonna care about anyone the way I do her."

He doesn't say love. He had no problem saying that Ashido loved him, but he doesn't reverse the thought. Bakugou feels like he's tonguing at a gap in his teeth, searching for what's missing.

Bakugou clicks his tongue against the back of his teeth. "You really are pathetic, aren't you?"

Sero smiles self-deprecatingly. "I guess so."

Bakugou kicks him in the shoulder. "No, idiot! Don't just agree. Stand up, figure out what the fuck you want, and then do something to get it. Don't just sit out here like trash someone's left out on the curb."

It takes a moment. Sero straightens up, looks Bakugou in the eye, and grins. "Thanks, Bakugou."

"Cut that shit out." He's not out here to earn Sero's sentiments. He doesn't care whether Sero and Ashido decide to get fucking married, or break up forever. He just needs this drama to stop infecting his own life. "I don't care what you do. Just decide and fucking do it."

Sero's still smiling at him, like he sees something that Bakugou is trying to hide.

Bakugou shoves him down the last two stairs, so that he lands in a heap on the carpeted lobby floor.

—

He hears the music first. Bakugou's walking down the hall, back towards the party, when he hears a few slow notes being played on a piano. The voice hits him next, a slow, sad progression through words that are achingly familiar—*Here's what I know—we always hurt ourselves the worst—when I loved you, that's when pain became real to me...*

Under any normal circumstances, he wouldn't care about whoever is singing so mournfully. But fuck, he knows that song. He didn't realize that anyone else did. He's only ever heard it in one context.

It's a side room, across the hall from the restaurant where Todoroki's party is being held. The

piano keys echo more loudly than the voice, but even so Bakugou can recognize who it is. Who else would it be, anyway?

Ashido is leaning sideways against the large grand piano, her face pressed against the music stand. Even from her awkward position, her fingers dance across the keys. Bakugou blinks, at that. He'd never realized that Ashido could play an instrument.

Her singing grows more broken, words intermittent with sobs. Her black eye makeup is streaked, long dark trails running down her cheeks.

He doesn't bother trying to cushion her feelings. That's not what he's here for. "What's that song?" he demands.

Ashido looks up, but isn't startled so much as embarrassed. She rubs at her cheeks with the heels of her hands, straightens up a bit even though there are still tears gathered in her eyes.

"What? Oh. It's nothing. Just one of Crimson Chevalier's old B-sides." She hiccups, fingers still dancing out the rest of the tune across the piano keys.

Crimson Chevalier. Kirishima has at least a half dozen shirts with that name on them, red and black and gray. He's wearing one *tonight*. His record collection is full of modern bands and known classics, but he has a dozen different recordings of Crimson's music. There's a poster of the man himself, wielding a red guitar, hung on Kirishima's wall.

Of fucking course.

"Why'd you want to know?" Ashido asks, voice purposefully light and airy. None of the heavy mournfulness of her singing is left.

Bakugou scoffs. "Why're you sitting here like a loser instead of partying with your dumb friends?"

She puffs out her cheeks. "They're your dumb friends too, you know."

It's easy to roll his eyes at that assertion, less so to refute it. "So? You're still the one moping out here."

Ashido sucks in a breath, like she's thinking over whether to confide in him. To be honest, he's rethinking his question at the same time.

"He hates me."

She says this in a bland way, like it's fact rather than feeling.

"Sero?" Bakugou can feel his lip curling. How fucking clueless is she? "That idiot has stuck around *me* for years. You really think he can hate anyone?"

Sero's trademark is his steadfast, appeasing smile. He deals with shark-like paparazzi and overemotional fans with the same cheery attitude and unfailing politeness. He never has anything but a smile for Bakugou himself, even if that means he's having a laugh at Bakugou's expense. Is hate even in his vocabulary?

Ashido laughs sadly. "Yes. I know he does. I'm so stupid, I honestly thought we could fix things, but now I've just screwed it all up again!"

"Then why'd you fucking kiss him, like that?" They wouldn't even be having this conversation if

she hadn't.

Ashido presses her lips together. "I was jealous."

Bakugou doesn't ask any follow up questions, just waits.

"I was jealous, okay? Ever since—ever since the whole thing with you and Kirishima started, he's been everyone's favorite! And I know it's horrible, I *know* I'm a bad person, okay? I should be happy for him, and I *am*. But everyone's leaving me behind, and what am I supposed to do when I don't have anything else?"

Bakugou regrets entering this conversation more and more with each passing moment.

"What the hell are you even talking about?"

"I'm supposed to be the image of the band! Everyone has something special—Jirou's a musical genius, and Kaminari has all the artistic ideas, and Kirishima writes all those lyrics that tear people's hearts out. And I'm supposed to—I've always been the person who sells it, who sings the lyrics and catches people's eyes. I'm supposed to be the star!"

Maybe he should think less of her for that admission—that the prospect of losing the spotlight is eating away at her. But he doesn't. He's reminded, uncomfortably, at a table read for the new season of *UA*, when Deku and Todoroki had gotten to the last page and played out their characters' first scene of romance, when the staff had burst into applause at their performance. When eyes had turned away from Bakugou and towards them.

"I know, okay," Ashido says, rubbing at her eyes again. Black is streaked all over her face, making her look more like a raccoon than ever. "I know Kirishima's a great singer. He's always had star power. But without this, if everything keeps changing—they won't need me. No one will. So forgive me, if I wanted to feel like someone loved me, and only me, for even a second or two." She sniffs noisily.

"Shitty thing to do to Sero," Bakugou mutters. He would never use someone to make himself feel better, like that. And was it even about feeling loved by him, or about drawing everyone else's attention?

Ashido stares down at her feet, the lights casting a glare on her shiny black boots. "It's not like he can think much less of me. He *still* thinks I trashed Kirishima's audition tapes, and that whole thing happened *five years ago*."

"...audition tapes."

Ashido waves a hand. "It's a long story. And sometimes, when I feel jealous like this, I think—maybe I would've done that. If I didn't love Kirishima so much, maybe I would've let my jealousy get the better of me. But I *didn't*."

She lifts her chin at that, eyes shining with defiance. But then she crumples once more, shoulders hunching as she squeezes her hands together.

"I'd rather he hates me, or thinks I'm awful, than forget me entirely. If he doesn't see me, if nobody sees me, then who am I?"

Being in the spotlight is like living in a house of mirrors. Everyone has a different image of you that they reflect back, slightly distorted. Since you never see yourself clearly, how you think of yourself is shaped by those warped reflections. You see yourself as a reflection of the way others

see you.

Bakugou remembers being a child, thinking—*Everyone knows it's my fault that Yagi-san got sick. He won't say anything, but everyone else is thinking it. This is all I'm ever going to be.*

And then, later—*Deku's the hero, so of course they'll paint me as the villain. He's sweet and fucking nervous with everyone he meets, so everyone thinks I'm a demon just because I'm not bending over to lick every director's boots.*

And later still—*They want me to just be some fucking bad boy that Uraraka managed to tame, like I was a feral dog or some shit. Like I would've just turned around and become the perfect boyfriend just because she batted her lashes at me, just because we played out a relationship on some stupid fucking show.*

What is he, now? An actor who defiantly came out? Boyfriend to music's hottest rising star? The kid who's going back to work with Yagi Toshinori again, after fifteen years?

"I don't know why I'm saying all this to you," Ashido says. "You don't care."

He really doesn't. But he understands, and that empathy is foreign and uncomfortable. Why had he never imagined that someone else might feel the same way he does?

"Be whoever the fuck you want to be," Bakugou growls. "If Sero, or anyone else, doesn't like you, who the hell cares? At least you'll be something real."

Ashido blows out a breath. "Guess you've never had a problem being the bad guy, huh?"

"Fuck off. I'm the *best*."

She smiles up at him, eyes round and tear-glossy, cheeks black and smudged. She looks ridiculous. "You're not so bad, you know."

"What the hell did I just say? Keep up, Raccoon Eyes."

—

There's no small amount of awkwardness when Bakugou, Ashido and Sero return to the party. Ashido beelines for the karaoke set-up, is soon pulled into the crowd of Jirou, Uraraka, Yaoyorozu and Hagakure. Sero goes to apologize to Todoroki for causing a scene, but the birthday boy waves him off. Apparently, while they'd been gone, the others had come to an understanding that they wouldn't make a big deal out of what happened.

Kirishima finds Bakugou after that, lifts a brow when he notices Bakugou returning just after the other two.

"What'd you do?" he asks.

"Nothing," Bakugou mutters. "Let's get out of here."

The party raps up quickly, after that. Todoroki claps Bakugou on the shoulder, remarks blandly that they should do this again next year. Bakugou threatens not to show up, next time. But he makes that threat every year, and he has yet to make good on it.

He's lost in thought the entire way back to his apartment. When he and Kirishima arrive home, Bakugou pulls his keys and phone from his pocket. In all the excitement, he hadn't noticed his

phone ring.

(1) Missed Call (8:17 pm) All Might

Bakugou stares at the notification, all the air suddenly sucked from his lungs.

“Bakugou?” Kirishima asks, placing a hand on his shoulder. “You okay?”

He looks at Kirishima, his round eyes full of concern, his lips pulled down into a frown. Bakugou has never felt so strongly about another person, never wanted to be with someone this way. The last person he’d felt anything remotely this intense for—even if it had been an entirely different emotion—had been Yagi Toshinori. And that had ended in disaster.

Is there something toxic about his admiration, his affection? Does it eat up the people he cares for? Is he doing something wrong?

“Bakugou?” Kirishima asks again.

He ignores Kirishima, walks straight past him and into his bedroom. Kirishima calls after him, but Bakugou doesn’t respond. He searches around in his closet, to one of the neatly-labelled boxes stored on the uppermost shelf. He quickly finds what he’s looking for and returns to the sitting room, where Kirishima looks at him with a frown.

“You’re freaking me out, man.”

Bakugou gulps down a breath, then tosses the objects he retrieved towards Kirishima. Caught off-guard, Kirishima catches them against his chest, then holds them up to get a better look.

They’re two CDs, carefully storied in jewel cases. They’re labelled in red sharpie, block letters written with a youthful hand.

Kirishima Eijirou, and then a date for five years ago.

“These are my…” Kirishima says dumbly. “How do you have these?”

Chapter End Notes

["i guess that's why they call it the blues" - alessia cara](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

five years ago

A-side

Kirishima fiddles with the microphone, adjusting the screen of his laptop. Once he's satisfied, he pulls his cherry wood acoustic guitar into his lap, strumming out a few chords. He brushes his dark hair back from his face, takes a deep breath, and prepares to sing.

“—*Ki-ri-shi-ma!*” The door busts open, and Ashido rushes inside, hands held high in the air. Once she spots him sitting at his desk, she pauses, then brings her hands together in a prayer for forgiveness. “Were you *recording*? Sorry, sorry!”

Kirishima lets out a deep sigh, pulls off his guitar and shuts his laptop with a decisive snap. “It’s fine,” he says, smiling. “I was just messing around.”

Ashido walks towards him, hands on her hips. She’s dressed from her morning on some talk show—a frilly white dress and delicate, dewy makeup. “Don’t say that! I hear you practicing up here all the time. It’s gotta be *something*.”

He swivels around in his chair, neck tilted back as he stares up at the ceiling. He’s barely ready to voice his ambitions in his own head, let alone aloud to another person. Even if that person is Ashido.

“Just getting some ideas down,” he murmurs finally, bashfully.

She clicks her tongue against her teeth, marches towards him and places her hands on his shoulders. “Are you *sure*? It absolutely has nothing to do with the fact that Crimson Chevalier is going to be at the show, today?”

Kirishima blushes the same color as his favorite band’s namesake. Sero had mentioned it in passing—Alien Queen was invited to perform at a televised charity show for New Year’s, and Crimson Chevalier was also on the star-studded lineup. Sure, the rock star has been Kirishima’s idol since he was old enough to know what music was. But that doesn’t mean he’s going to do anything about it. He can’t just go up to one of the greatest musicians of all time and say, *Hey, I play the guitar in a backup band! I write songs sometimes, do you want to hear one?*

“Kirishima,” Ashido reprimands. “Don’t make that face.”

He hadn’t realized that he had stopped smiling. Quickly, Kirishima tries to get it back, but ends up just turning away from Ashido, his dark hair shielding him from her scrutinizing expression.

Ashido sighs, sits down on the floor so that she can lay her arms across Kirishima’s knees and look directly up at him. “You know I think you’re amazing, right?”

The laughter is an involuntary reaction. But what else is Kirishima supposed to do, when Ashido says such unbelievable things?

“I do!” Ashido says, pouting at him. “I don’t lie, you know that! Sometimes I’m scared that you’re

more talented than I am, and as soon as you realize it I'm gonna lose my best friend and favorite guitarist."

Kirishima reaches out to take her hands. "Don't be stupid."

"Take your own advice, then," she says, sticking her tongue out at him. "I know you're incredible, and you need to know it, too. So, whatever you were just psyching yourself up to do, just do it!"

He bites down on the inside of his cheek. "What if—what if it's like last time, again?"

Ashido frowns, her dark eyes wide with sympathy. She shrugs. "I mean, I guess it might be!"

In an instant, Kirishima is back to that moment in time. Taking the stage in front of a panel of judges, just him and his guitar and a microphone. He adjusts the mic, accidentally knocks it with his elbow and a hideous screech echoes across the hall. *Sorry, sorry*. The judges murmur, the host tells him to take his time. Kirishima forces a smile, adjusts his guitar. Strums a few notes, makes sure he's in tune. *Whenever you're ready, Kirishima-kun*. He takes a deep breath, shuts his eyes. The song is already playing through his head, the notes and words that he's finessed into something that properly convey his feelings. He keeps his eyes closed, begins to strum out the opening melody. He opens his mouth to sing. The words, the ones he's sung a million times, are ready on the tip of his tongue. He just needs to let them out, show the world exactly who he is and what he's capable of. He's ready. He strums out another few notes, gets to the cue for the lyrics to begin. And then... nothing. His mouth hangs open, and the words won't come. His fingers falter along his guitar strings. He opens his eyes, and sees the judges staring back at him, waiting. He freezes. His melody stops echoing around the hall. The entire place is silent, except for the judges shuffling papers and muttering to each other. The host, to one side of the stage, forces a smile. *Want to start again?* But Kirishima can't move, can't speak. Everyone is staring at him, and he can't do anything in response. He's frozen, and he's going to be stuck in this moment forever, surrounded by glaringly bright lights and disapproving judges and a pitying host and the suffocating sensation of his own failure—

"Hey!" Ashido claps her hands against Kirishima's cheeks, squishing his face. "Stop that!"

Kirishima shakes his head, biting down on his lower lip. That audition had been such a long time ago, but it still haunts him. He's gotten better at performing on stage, playing as part of Ashido's band. But the spotlight is never on him, and no one knows his name. He's safe in the shadows, and all eyes are on Ashido.

"Look," Ashido says, taking Kirishima's hands in her own, "You don't have to do anything you don't want to. But I remember that little boy in middle school, who played *Crimson Chevalier* songs perfectly and told all our friends that he was going to be a rock star. Don't you think you owe it to him, to try again?"

She's right, because she's Ashido and she's always right. That's why people are so drawn to her. She says exactly what she feels, lets her emotions out into the world without restraint or care. She's so brave. Kirishima wishes he had even a drop of her courage.

Ashido smiles at him, squeezes his hands. "You were gonna record something, right? Is it okay if I stay in here while you do?"

Kirishima shrugs. "I don't need to do it right now..."

"You don't," she agrees glibly. "But you could, and now's as good a time as any!" She walks over to his bed and flops down on it, kicking her legs in the air.

He's still staring down at his lap when she says, a moment later, "Don't you think you'll regret it, later, if you don't even try?"

Somehow, that gives him the courage he needs. He opens his laptop back up, fidgets with the mic again. He starts with a familiar Crimson Chevalier song, one that he's always associated with letting yourself be vulnerable even if that brings pain along with it. Crimson Chevalier has a deep timbre and a voice full of gravitas, and Kirishima's singing is nothing like his. His lighter voice lifts the tone of the song, makes it more hopeful than mournful. When he's done, Ashido claps her hands and laughs in delight.

"Man, I love your version of that song," she says. "Now, go on. More, more!"

It's nice to have an appreciative audience, even if it's only one person. Or maybe because he knows this person, loves her with all his heart, she's the best audience he could have. He doesn't know what he did to deserve Ashido.

The next song is one of his own. The music itself isn't complicated—he's still working on composition, and there's always something missing when he tries for a more complex melody. But the words are what he's put his whole heart into. He closes his eyes and sings, lets the emotions build as he's whisked away to his own world, the kind of place where nothing can hurt him, where he can't fail or disappoint.

When he opens his eyes, Ashido is staring at him, slack-jawed.

"What?" he mutters, shutting off the recording.

"Nothing," Ashido says, shaking her head. "Just... I wish you could see yourself the way I see you."

—

They get to the studio with the rest of the band, and Ashido is immediately whisked away for hair and makeup. Kirishima's in his usual performance outfit—a black button-down, black jeans, and beat-up red sneakers. In his messenger bag are two newly-burned CDs, and Kirishima keeps patting them anxiously, like he's afraid they'll burn a whole through the canvas.

After sound check, the band is left at a loose end, and Kirishima takes up residence on the couch in their dressing room, notepad balanced against his knees as he scribbles out ideas for new lyrics.

"Oh, there you are!"

He looks up to see Sero standing over him, dressed in black slacks and a polo shirt. There's a laminated badge pinned to his pocket—*Sero Hanta, Intern, Cellophane Agencies*.

"Shouldn't you be with Ashido?" Kirishima asks. "What if she needs coffee or something?" He grins, teasing, but Sero blushes a furious red.

"I'm not that much of a gopher," he protests.

Kirishima lifts his brows. From his vantage point, not much has changed since Sero and Ashido started dating. Sero still hangs on Ashido's every word, and Ashido still seems delighted and flattered by all the attention. But whatever works for them, works for them.

"Anyway," Sero says, nudging Kirishima over on the couch so he can sit down beside him, "I thought you'd be interested in *this*."

He passes over his cellphone, browser pulled up to a tabloid article. The photograph that dominates the screen shows two familiar actors—Midoriya Izuku and Bakugou Katsuki. Midoriya has his hands up in a placating gesture, smiling nervously. Bakugou is gesturing rudely, handsome features contorted into a grimace.

Kirishima thumbs through the article, worrying his lower lip between his teeth.

Trouble on UA's Set?

Word has it that sparks are flying on the set of TV's hottest teen drama, and not the sexy sort. Last week, it was announced that star Midoriya Izuku, who plays Daiki on the hit show, would also be featured in an upcoming animated film this summer. The film, The Day, marks a return to the spotlight for Yagi Toshinori, who retired from the big screen a decade ago. Now teaming with Midoriya for an animated tale about legacy, mentorship, and following your dreams, the film is already being tapped as a major triumph.

But all might not be well in Midoriya Izuku's world. Word has it that tensions between him and costar Bakugou Katsuki have been running high, culminating in a physical altercation last week. Bakugou's character Nobuhiko has always been a force working against Midoriya's Daiki. But are two of our favorite actors forgetting where the show ends and real life begins?

Kirishima scrolls back up to stare at the picture of Bakugou again. He has his eyes cast down, not giving the photographer the benefit of even a glance. There's a storm brewing in his fierce red eyes, and Kirishima wishes he could reach into the picture and offer Bakugou some form of comfort.

"So," Sero says, leaning back and folding his arms behind his neck, "Sounds like he's going to be real fun to work with."

"What do you mean?" Kirishima looks up, still frowning.

Sero huffs out a laugh. "Oh, right, you got distracted when you heard about Crimson Chevalier! But they've got to keep this show going until midnight. Plus, it's for charity, which means everyone wanted in on the action. Including UA's cast."

Kirishima stares down at the picture of Bakugou Katsuki, then back at Sero. "You don't mean..."

Sero shoots finger-guns in Kirishima's direction. "You got it! It won't be at the same time, of course, but tonight you'll be on the same stage as Midoriya Izuku, Todoroki Shouto, Uraraka Ochako and Bakugou Katsuki! How does that feel?"

"I'm going to throw up," Kirishima says, jumping to his feet.

"Hey, hey, come on," Sero says, grabbing Kirishima's hand and pulling him back down. "It's not a big deal. I mean, it's easy for me to say that, since I'm just the backstage guy, but really. I'm sure Ashido's going to be introduced to them backstage, and if you want, maybe you could meet them, too."

Kirishima has been daydreaming about meeting Bakugou Katsuki since UA premiered four years ago. There's just something magnetic about him, the life and emotion that he brings to his character. Kirishima's never fallen so hard.

"I really don't think I can do that," Kirishima admits, running a hand through his hair.

Sero frowns at him. "So, what? You're just going to stand two steps behind Ashido and play guitar for her the rest of your life?"

When he says it like that, it makes Kirishima sound pathetic. The truth is, being part of Ashido's band has been a lot of fun. He's a much better musician than he had been at the start, and he's gotten to play in front of incredible crowds. He just isn't playing his own music, or doing anything that anyone would notice.

"No," Kirishima says stubbornly.

"So, you're going to introduce yourself to Bakugou and Crimson Chevalier, then?" Sero's grin is so wide he looks like a jack-o-lantern.

"Maybe I will!" Kirishima says, jabbing a fist in the air. The way his stomach lurches says otherwise, but he also wants to make Ashido and Sero proud.

"That's the spirit!" Sero laughs.

—

The charity show is being hosted by Takeyama Yuu and Nishiya Shinji, who recently costarred in an action romance. They make an odd pair, but it works somehow. Takeyama is talkative and expressive, with her long blonde curls and wild enthusiasm. Nishiya is more soft-spoken, often only uttering a word or two in response to Takeyama's long commentaries. They balance each other out.

Backstage is a zoo. Actors, musicians and other celebrities are running around, in various states of dress and preparation. Kirishima spots Olympic swimmer Asui Tsuyu, and Monoma Neito, a young comedian famous for his impressions. Other faces go by in a blur, too many to recognize or take note of.

It's easy enough for Kirishima to slink back into the shadows. Ashido is having the time of her life, going from one person to the next, introducing herself and laughing and telling jokes. She looks happier than she has in a while, actually. Kirishima can't tell if it's her rigorous schedule that's weighing on her, or the fact that the label so closely controls her image and music. But she's not as enthusiastic about being Alien Queen as she was even a year ago. It's nice to see her smiling so freely tonight, which she usually only does around Sero these days.

Their set is towards the middle of the show, after a few other acts but before the grand finale that will be Crimson Chevalier.

They get off stage and Ashido grabs Kirishima by the arm, yanking him to one side. "So?" she demands, "Where are the CDs? Let's go find him!"

Kirishima is sure that Crimson Chevalier has had to fight off more than a few overambitious fans in his time. He doesn't want to come off like that, but if Crimson hears his music and likes it, then Kirishima will know beyond a doubt that he has the talent to make it.

He finds his bag in his dressing room, holds up the CDs for Ashido's inspection. She beams at him, clapping her hands together.

"He's going to love you," she insists. Her voice drops a bit when she says, "I think everyone is."

He can't quite figure out why she sounds so sad when she says that. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that everyone loves her as Alien Queen, but she doesn't seem happy about it.

"Ashido," Kirishima says, but he doesn't know how to continue. Be a man, he thinks at himself. Find your courage!

“What is it?” Ashido cocks her head to one side.

“Are you happy?” he asks.

Ashido laughs. “What’re you talking about? Of course I am, and I’ll be even happier when we get done talking to Crimson Chevalier. C’mon, we’ve still got a bit of time before he’s due onstage!”

It’s impossible to break through Ashido’s wall of cheer once she’s decided not to talk about something. But Kirishima still has his misgivings about this.

“Why don’t you go catch up with Sero?” he suggests. “I think I need to do this on my own.”

She frowns at him, hands balances on her hips. “You sure?”

“Yeah.” Kirishima grins as widely, as sincerely, as he can. This is something he needs to do, needs to prove to himself that he can do. He grabs the CDs and heads out of the dressing room.

The chaos backstage hasn’t died down any. It’s like playing celebrity bingo—everywhere he looks, there’s someone else to admire for their art or their acting or because they’re just plain *beautiful*. How do famous people handle this, all the time? How do they not feel inadequate and ugly when sizing themselves up against this competition?

But he can’t afford to think like that right now. He believes in his music, and in his desire to share it with the world. If he doesn’t try, how will he ever achieve his own dreams?

Crimson Chevalier has his own dressing room, of course, complete with a bright red star mounted on the door with his name printed across it. Crimson’s been a staple of the music world for decades. He practically invented all the genres of music that Kirishima loves, not to mention revolutionized style and became an icon in and of himself.

The thought of meeting him in person is almost too much for Kirishima to handle.

He clutches the CDs in his hands, sucks in a deep breath before letting it out slowly. Ashido and Sero wouldn’t lie to him. They wouldn’t set him up for embarrassment or failure. He has to believe in himself, as much as they believe in him.

He lifts his hand and knocks on the door.

Maybe these were the wrong songs to record. Maybe Crimson will find think Kirishima is arrogant for covering one of his own songs. Maybe Kirishima’s own writing isn’t up to par. Maybe he’s not showcasing his vocal range enough. Or maybe he pushed it too hard, highlighting his weaknesses. His recording equipment is crappy, and probably didn’t catch him to the best effect. Maybe he’s kidding himself, thinking that anything could make him sound professional, talented, good.

The doorknob turns, and the door begins to open.

He can’t do this. Why did he think he could do this? Why did he let Ashido talk him into this? Why did he let Sero psych him up? Why do they both keep pushing this, when Ashido already has a career and Sero needs to focus on working his way from intern to agent? Are they just playing some kind of grand, long-running joke on him?

No, of course not! They’d never do that, they’re his friends. They’re good, kind people. But maybe they’re too kind. Maybe their kindness, their friendship, blinds them to how he actually sounds. Shit! He should’ve gotten an objective opinion before recording, before bringing these songs here.

How could he have been so stupid?

The door opens, and Kirishima jumps back as though he's been shocked. Standing in front of him is a tall, imposing man whose face is worn with age. His hair is a furious red, sticking out from his head and reaching a prominent peak. He wears a black leather jacket, a heavy silver chain around his neck and rings across his fingers.

Crimson Chevalier.

"Can I help you?" His voice is low and gravely, an echo of the phenomenal sound that Kirishima has been hearing on records for years.

Kirishima looks up into Crimson Chevalier's dark eyes, surrounded by crow's feet. He's wearing a quizzical expression, waiting for Kirishima's response.

He opens his mouth to speak, to introduce himself, to express what Crimson Chevalier's music has meant to him for his entire life.

No sound comes from him. His voice is caught before it even reaches his throat, pulled down into the pit of his stomach. Once again, he's frozen.

"You alright, there?" Crimson asks. His shiny black boots tap against the ground as he takes a step towards Kirishima.

It's too much. He can't speak, but he can move. Hands still clutching his CDs, Kirishima turns on his heel and bolts down the hallway. He runs until his lungs ache, until his chest burns. Stagehands call out to him, tell him to watch where he's going. But he can't see more than a few feet in front of him, because his vision is blurry with tears.

Stupid, stupid, *stupid!*

He keeps running, not trying to get any place in particular. He just wants to get away, away from the shame of himself. But he can't, because there's nowhere to go to escape his own failings.

He slams into something, entire body reverberating with the force. He falls back, weight landing uncomfortably on his palms. He hisses in pain, looking up to see who he'd just crashed into.

The person in front of him is about his own age. He'd fallen backwards, too, but immediately scrambles up to his knees. He's glaring at Kirishima, his red eyes narrowed and holding deadly fire. Pale blond hair frames his face, sticking up in a way that's artfully intentional. He's wearing black jeans and a UA baseball jacket, red and green.

Bakugou Katsuki.

"Watch where the fuck you're going," he grinds out, and his voice is so much more than it's ever been through the TV screen. There're sparks in his voice, acid and fire. He isn't softened at all by Nobuhiko's experiences with Ayane. He's raw and angry and really, *really* hot.

"I— I—" Say something, Kirishima tells himself desperately. Apologize, at least! But he's still on the floor, face streaked with tears, CDs probably crushed from when he landed on his hands. He's a mess of a person who lives off words but can't form them at the most important moments.

"Well?" Bakugou demands, getting to his feet. He reaches out, grabs Kirishima by the shoulder and hoists him up. "You bumped into *me*, didn't you? Not gonna try and claim it was my fault?"

Usually, when people talk about someone stealing their breath away, it's in a romantic sense. Kirishima is breathless, but it's not because he's falling for Bakugou. No, it's because being near him is like walking up to a burning flame—it seals the very oxygen from the air, hoarding it for itself. Bakugou's presence is so overwhelming that it leaves room for nothing—*no one* – else.

Bakugou clicks his tongue against his teeth, pushing Kirishima away with an impatient, disgusted noise. “Whatever.” He stuffs his hands into the pockets of his baseball jacket and turns away.

As soon as Bakugou's gaze leaves him, Kirishima turns on his heel and walks away with as much dignity as he can muster. He ducks behind a corner as soon as he finds one, face burning red. He slinks down onto the floor, hugging his knees to his chest, and tries to remember how to breathe.

It takes him a few moments, but eventually he collects himself and gets back up on his feet. He had just been less than a foot from Bakugou Katsuki. He had *touched* Bakugou Katsuki. And, once again, he'd completely fucking blown it. What's wrong with him?

He looks down at the CDs that he's been clutching like a lifeline. The jewel case on one of them is cracked, a single straight line running across it. Kirishima throws the cases down on the floor, wants to stomp the CDs out of existence. What use are his ideas, his songs, his voice, if he can't muster up the guts to share them with anyone?

At the last moment, he grabs the CDs up from the ground. Shaking his head in disappointment, he drops them into a nearby trashcan. It's probably where they belong.

—

He heads back to the dressing room, throws himself down on the couch and drapes an arm over his eyes. Maybe if he blocks out the rest of the world, the rest of the world will block him out, too. Right now, the last thing he wants is to be seen.

“*There* you are! How did it go?”

Of course, it's Ashido standing over him, smiling brightly. There's glitter dusted across her cheekbones, pale pink accenting her eyelids and lips. She's a fairy princess more than an alien queen.

“Not great,” Kirishima grinds out, not sure what else to say.

Ashido blinks in surprise. “What, why? Everyone's been saying Crimson is really friendly, and when I met him I told him you wanted to meet him! He said he was looking forward to it!”

Of course, Ashido met Crimson already. She probably had no problems talking to him, walked up and introduced herself without a care in the world. It probably hadn't even mattered to her.

The anxiety curling in Kirishima's stomach twists and transforms, from a constricting boa to a poisonous viper.

“Why did you tell me to do that,” he says, voice hollow and dark.

“What?” Ashido asks.

“Why did you tell me to go see Crimson,” Kirishima spits out, self-loathing and disappointment twisting into something vicious and angry. “You knew, you knew that I couldn't do this!”

“What are you talking about?” Ashido says, brows drawing together in concern. “What, did you

not find him? I told you, I can go with you, I'm sure he hasn't gone on stage yet—"

"Stop it!" Kirishima says, slapping Ashido's hand away when she tries to reach for him. "Just, stop it! Not everyone is like you! We can't all just go up to anyone and assume that they're going to think we're the best thing ever!"

Ashido startles, leans away from him. "I don't think that."

Kirishima doesn't hear her enough to process her words, her concern, her hurt. He jumps to his feet, throws his hands in the air. "I'm just—I don't want to keep trying, okay? There's only so many times I can go through this, that I can be reminded how much I *can't do this*! I'm done."

"Eijirou," Ashido says, eyes wet with tears, with pity for him.

"Stop," he sighs, slumping in defeat. "Just—don't. Don't do anything else for me."

He stalks away from her, out the door of the dressing room. He nearly crashes into Sero, who's balancing a tray of drinks in one hand and a clipboard in the other. Of course, he is. Ashido was probably getting thirsty.

"Woah—hey. What's the matter?" Sero asks.

"Ask her," Kirishima says, gesturing back towards the dressing room. He walks further down the hall.

"Wait, what? Kirishima!" Sero moves to follow, but the hallway is crowded and he's balancing too many things. "Hold on a sec! What did Ashido do?"

—

He slumps down in a corner backstage, where the other performers and extras are watching the show live on a large screen. Takeyama Yuu is there in a sparkly purple dress, tossing her curls over one shoulder as she introduces Crimson Chevalier.

"Before you perform for us, are there any words of wisdom you'd like us all to take with us into the New Year? How do we be as cool and manly as you are, Crimson?"

He's ready to perform, shiny red guitar in his hands as he leans forward to the microphone. He shrugs, then squares his shoulders and says, "The only way to truly be manly is to live a life without regret. If you're living out the truth of yourself, there's no need to look back."

Kirishima sinks in on himself as he hears the words. It feels like all he has are regrets—right now, he feels worst about lashing out at Ashido, but he also hates himself for always running away. He wishes he could be someone else entirely, someone who wasn't so burdened by all his failures.

Crimson Chevalier begins to play, and for those moments, Kirishima closes his eyes and listens to the music, and forgets himself entirely.

—

A few days into the new year, Kirishima bundles his notebooks and laptop into his messenger bag and heads to his favorite café. A bell chimes overhead as he enters, and the barista behind the counter waves at him.

"Hey, Kirishima!" Kaminari Denki calls out, adjusting his black-and-white apron. "Long time no

see, man! What's up?"

Kirishima purses his lips for a moment, then takes a deep breath. "Hey, Kaminari. You know a good place to get my hair dyed?"

B-side

Today, his agent has come to him with an *incredible offer*. Bakugou has never done voice acting, but his agent assures him that it'd be easy enough for him to do—after all, he's *Bakugou Katsuki*. Is anything beyond him? Of course, Bakugou can't argue with that.

"What's this job, then," he grumbles, sitting back on the couch in his trailer on *UA's* set, feet up on the table.

His agent goes on to explain the specifics—an animated film by an acclaimed director, a story that was deep with mythology but set in the modern day, about a young boy who meets his idol and grows up into a hero.

"I'm going to play the main character, is that it." Bakugou rolls his eyes.

"Er, no," his agent amends. "Actually, they've already cast the boy and the mentor, and that's why they want you on board as the rival-turned-villain. You've worked with both of them before—"

Bakugou sits forward all at once, his feet hitting the floor with an audible thump. "*What.*"

"It's Yagi Toshinori-san," his agent says, voice rising in excitement. "He hasn't done a movie since, well—" The idiot finally has the decency to realize who the fuck he's talking to, what the hell he's about to say.

"Since the seventh *All Might* movie," Bakugou spits out. "Yeah, I fucking know. I was there."

His agent nods, laughing nervously. "Anyway, even if he's not acting in front of the camera, it's still a huge deal. The press for this film is going to be incredible, and they want you to be part of it."

Bakugou's been part of enough of Yagi-san's news-making moments to last a lifetime. The memory of the last time sits low in his stomach, bitter and undigested. He doesn't think he'll ever get over it.

"And?" He drawls out the word. "Who's playing the main character, then?"

"Midoriya-kun," his agent says brightly. "I'm guessing they want to capitalize on *UA's* success, and you two certainly work well together."

"You're fucking fired," Bakugou mutters.

"Excuse me?" his agent says, leaning back.

Bakugou gets to his feet, jabs a finger in the man's direction. "You fucking heard me, asshole. I'm not doing some shitty movie with Deku and All Might. And you've pulled this shit on me for the last time. You're *fired.*"

"Shouldn't we discuss this with your parents, first—"

“I’m eighteen, fuckhead. You work for *me*. Or you did. Now you can go try and find someone else’s life to fuck around with. I don’t actually care.”

“Bakugou-kun!” his former agent calls out, but Bakugou isn’t listening. He stalks out of the trailer, slamming the door behind him.

In retrospect, going to find Deku immediately after that hadn’t been his brightest idea. But how the fuck was he supposed to have known that the press would be swarming set that day, that they’d see him telling Deku exactly what he thought?

You didn’t just tell him, he reminds himself. *You slammed him into a fucking wall.*

“You’re letting your anger get the better of you,” his father had says on the phone, after the story had broken in the press. “And you fired your agent? What’s going on, Katsuki? Are you alright?”

“He’s throwing a tantrum is what he’s doing,” his mother cuts in, voice sharp. “You get a hold of yourself, you hear me, Katsuki? Stop picking on Izuku before he wises up and gets a restraining order.”

“Shut up, I *know*,” Bakugou hisses. He’d only picked up because it had been his father’s number calling, but he should’ve realized they both would want to talk to him. They’re attached at the fucking hip, anyway.

“Katsuki,” his father says with a sigh. “Don’t talk to your mother that way.”

“Let him talk, Masaru,” his mother says, and Bakugou can hear her sneer in her voice—hates it, because when she talks like that she sounds just like him. “What is it, brat? What are you trying to prove, here? That you can throw your career away as easily as you built it?”

Bakugou feels like he’s swallowing boiling water. It goes down his throat, scalding, and sits bubbling in his stomach. “No. Shut *up*.”

“Then what?” his mother asks. He hears her voice soften, and he *hates* it. “You’ve had a lot of opportunities, kiddo, a lot of luck. I’m not saying you didn’t put in the work, but you can’t assume it’s always going to be so easy. If you don’t soften up, or at least pretend do, eventually your talent isn’t going to be enough reason to put up with you.”

“We love you, Katsuki,” his father says, like Bakugou doesn’t already know that. “We just want what’s best for you. So please don’t throw anyone else into a wall, alright?”

“Fine,” Bakugou spits out, if only to get them to drop it. “But I’m not doing a fucking movie with him! He can go die, for all I care! He and All Might!”

“You don’t mean that,” his father says.

Bakugou lets out a sound like a kettle boiling over. Of course, he means it! He was the one who destroyed All Mi—Yagi-san’s career. If he could stop being reminded of that, maybe he could finally move on.

“We’re going to come up to the city and see you this weekend,” his mother says matter-of-factly. “After we do something about finding you a new agent—”

“I’ll do it myself,” Bakugou snaps at her. He doesn’t need them, just like he didn’t need his fuckhead agent. He’s going to get where he wants to be on his own, without anyone’s help or pity, without idiots like Deku hanging onto his coattails. He *will*.

The ride to the studio is awkward, to say the least. Ingenium Talent sends over a limo, and so Iida, Uraraka, Todoroki and Deku sit on side with Bakugou across from them. He has his arms crossed over his chest, feet splayed out into the space between seats. He glares at all four of them, daring them to make eye contact with him.

He lands on Deku, because of course he does. The nerd is dressed in a white button-down and a red tie that he can't even tie correctly, his hands folded in his lap. Everything about him speaks of innocence, but Bakugou knows better than that. He always has, even though no one has ever believed him.

"Let's try and be civil, okay?" Uraraka is saying.

He turns to glare at her. "Why should I? If I push Deku off the fucking stage, those idiots'll eat it up."

Iida jabs a hand at him, and Bakugou has half a mind to bite off one of his fingers. "That will not do, Bakugou-kun! You represent not only yourself, but *UA* and the studio, as well! You are not playing Nobuhiko-kun at this moment, and you and Midoriya-kun are colleagues!"

"I don't care—" Bakugou bites out.

"Don't push him," Todoroki says tiredly. He's staring out the window, like the rest of them are minor annoyances he doesn't want to put up with. Bakugou hates how aloof he is, how nothing ever seems to really touch him.

"It's fine," Deku says, lifting both of his hands. "The press just caught us at a bad moment, before. You all don't need to worry."

Bakugou bares his teeth at Deku. He doesn't need that idiot covering for him. The press had arrived after the worst of it, after Bakugou had told Deku that he only barely tolerated him on the set of *UA*, that he'd never be caught dead doing another project with him, that if Deku ever thought they were equals he should let go of the idea immediately.

"How about this?" Bakugou says challengingly. "None of you fucking talk to me, and we'll be just fine."

As soon as the limo pulls up, Bakugou throws himself out of the car and storms away from the rest of them. He hears Iida and Uraraka calling after him, but he doesn't respond. He doesn't need the entire *UA* peanut gallery following him wherever he goes.

This is supposed to be some kind of charity benefit, airing until the clock strikes twelve at midnight. They're only one group of stars at the end of a long list, and Bakugou bristles at the idea that he's just one more name tacked on. He should be the main event, if anything.

Backstage, there's a coffee station set up for the guests. Bakugou elbows his way to the front of the line, orders himself a drink and stands back with his arms crossed. The caffeine likely won't help his mood, but he needs to be doing something.

"You know, my man, you might want to work on softening your image a bit." There's a beanpole of a guy standing next to him, trying to maneuver six different drinks into a cardboard container. He's got ink-black dark hair, and a face so plain that Bakugou doubts he'll recognize him if he ever sees him again.

“Who the hell asked you?” Bakugou demands.

The guy shrugs, smiles guilelessly. “No one. But people talk. I think you’re pretty talented, but maybe if you weren’t in the news for beating up your costars you’d get further, you know?”

Bakugou growls, lifts a foot and stamps on the guy’s toe. “Did I fucking ask?”

He winces, takes a step back, careful not to spill his drinks. “You’re exactly as advertised, huh?”

Bakugou hates the thought of being predictable. He knows he’s got a reputation, knows exactly why he was cast as bad boy Nobuhiko in *UA*. His anger isn’t all there is to him, and yet it’s the only part that anyone ever sees.

“So, what do you suggest, Soy Sauce?” he sneers at the guy.

The tall guy shrugs. “I dunno, maybe be seen hanging out with some people you actually *like*, once in a while? Or date someone, the press loves a good celebrity couple. We get it, you don’t like Midoriya Izuku. So, don’t always be in the tabloids when it’s about him.”

It’s such a simple, obvious suggestion. Bakugou’s been so caught up in this show and its associated drama, he hasn’t just had a day to himself in what seems like years. Who even are his friends, anymore? Who would he hang out with, just to relax?

“Who are you supposed to be, anyway,” Bakugou mutters.

“Oh, no one,” the guy says, waving one free hand. “Speaking of, I’ve gotta hand out these drinks and get back to Ashido, so!”

He smiles and then turns away. As he does, Bakugou catches sight of his name badge—*Cellophane Agencies*.

His coffee is finally ready. Bakugou takes a long sip, then stalks off.

—

The person crashes into him without warning, and Bakugou’s coffee cup goes flying. Thankfully, it lands a few feet away from him on the floor, the last few sips spilt a safe distance from Bakugou’s studio-approved wardrobe. Still, he doesn’t appreciate being dropped on his ass in the middle of the hallway.

His temper is already frayed, and this does nothing to help. Scrambling up to his knees, he looks around and finds a target for his ire.

“Watch where the fuck you’re going,” he spits.

The guy is still on the floor, a dark smudge against the bright white tile. He’s dressed all in black, his hair a lank, dark mess hiding his face. The only spot of color on him comes from his bright red shoes—and those remind Bakugou enough of Deku that they don’t help ease his temper in the slightest.

“I—I—” The guy finally turns to look at him, and Bakugou blinks in surprise. Bakugou’s not one to notice people’s looks—usually, that equation runs in the other direction—but it’s hard to ignore his wide, earnest red eyes. He’s got a strong chin, sharp teeth poking into his lower lip, a scar over his left eye.

He looks like he's been crying.

Bakugou doesn't know what to do with any of this. People have approached him crying before—every time they go to a damn *UA* fan event, some kid or the other breaks down when it's their turn to take a photo with him. But this is different—this person isn't excited to the point of hysteria, he's *sad*.

Bakugou avoids sadness at all costs, even if that means wrapping it in so many layers of anger it becomes unrecognizable and unreachable.

“Well?” He gets to his feet, grabs the guy by the shoulder and pulls him up. “You bumped into *me*, didn't you? Not gonna try and claim it was my fault?”

It would be par for the course, really. People have been blaming him for everything, for as long as he can remember. He's used to it. But that doesn't mean he has to take it lying down.

The guy is just gaping at him, noisily gulping down breaths as more tears fill his eyes. He barely seems to register Bakugou's presence—and for a split second, Bakugou wonders if something is seriously wrong with him, if he's having a seizure or a panic attack.

It really would be his luck if this ends up on the news.

“Whatever.” He pushes the guy away, grateful when he doesn't immediately slump back to the floor. Bakugou stuffs his hands in his pockets and walks away.

For some reason, the guy's face is burned into the back of his mind.

—

“We've been looking all over for you!” Uraraka calls out, grabbing Bakugou's elbow to steer him down the hall. “Why did you just run off like that?”

“Because willingly hanging out with you losers is like poking out my own eyes,” Bakugou growls at her, pulling away.

Uraraka huffs out a sigh, her cheeks puffing out to comical roundness. “Don't be such a jerk,” she chides. “And who were you talking to, just now? A fan?”

Shit, was that guy a fan? He hadn't asked for an autograph, or anything. Bakugou has always tried to treat his fans differently from other people—they at least have the good sense to recognize his talent and appreciate him for it. If that guy was just an overexcited fan, Bakugou might have just ruined his impression of him.

“Goddamn it,” he grinds out. He turns away from Uraraka and heads back the way he came, looking around for that nondescript dark-hair. He looks down three hallways, around four different corners. There's no sign of the guy.

The only thing that catches his eye is the shine of the overhead lights hitting something in a trash can. Bakugou glances inside it and spots a cracked CD case.

Grimacing, he pulls out the case and the undamaged one beneath it. Two home-burned CDs, labelled in red sharpie. Today's date, and the name *Kirishima Eijirou*.

It's a whim, and probably a stupid one. But Bakugou takes the CDs with him.

Weeks later, he's back on *UA*'s set for the table read of the second half of the fourth season. His character Nobuhiko's romance with Ayane is heating up, but he hasn't yet seen what Deku and Todoroki's characters will be up to this season.

If the director and showrunner weren't such fucking cowards, they would take his advice. But Bakugou doubts that will ever happen.

He's the first one to arrive at the read, to the big conference room where the staff has already set out everyone's favorite drink of choice. Bakugou takes his seat, a thick script with *UA Season 4B* printed across it in front of him.

Knowing he'll have awhile to wait, he pulls out his headphones and presses play on his phone, listening to one of the songs he's had on repeat since the New Year.

The more he thinks about it, the more he's sure these songs were written for him. The first is a song about everyone seeing only one side of you, about everyone only ever seeing you for one emotion as you hide away the rest. Bakugou feels the words curl around his heart, read him like an open book. He'd be angry at being so transparent, except that no one's ever understood him so well before. And when he feels understood, he's not as angry.

It isn't just the lyrics that catch his attention. The singer's voice is incredible, going from high to low at all the right moments. There's a youthful enthusiasm to the voice, but when it goes soft and low Bakugou wants to reach out and grab it, feel it against his skin.

He knows he'd sound crazy, if he spoke any of this aloud. But he's more attracted to this singer's voice—to *Kirishima Eijirou*'s voice—than he's ever been to a person standing in front of him.

His eyes fall close, his lips part slightly in the ghost of a smile.

"Kacchan?"

He opens his eyes and whirls on the intruder, unsurprised to find Deku standing there. He's wearing a stupid t-shirt that says *Collared Shirt* across it, and those trademark, shitty red sneakers.

Bakugou's lip curls. "*What.*"

"Nothing! You just looked really happy," Deku says, almost wistfully.

"And now you're here and I'm not," Bakugou snaps. "What's your fucking point, Deku?"

Deku swallows down a sigh and shakes his head. He pulls out his chair—two down from Bakugou's—and sits.

Bakugou hits play on his phone again and steadfastly ignores him.

He doesn't realize what's happened until he sees the episode air. Of course, he'd thrown something of a fit when he realized that Daiki and Yuki were going to have a romantic plotline. *His* plotline, the one he'd advocated for almost since the show had begun, and Deku and Todoroki are going to get to act it out? What kind of sick joke is his life becoming?

But that had been just one level of fury. Another emotion entirely had risen when he'd seen Deku's

acted confession, his quiet anticipation of a kiss.

On screen, Deku closed his eyes and tilted his face up. His lips parted slightly in a ghost of a smile, just before he reached out and grabbed Todoroki's hand. When their lips met, his face was wistful and honest and in love.

And Bakugou knew exactly where he'd gotten that expression from.

So maybe he's thrown Deku into a wall or two. Maybe he's refused to take part in *The Day* because he'd have to see Deku simpering all over All Might, when Bakugou himself hasn't been able to face him in over a decade. Maybe he does need to get control of himself, to get where he wants to be.

But at least he doesn't leech off other people's emotions for his own acting. Deku's an imitation, a cheap copy. He doesn't feel things as deeply as Bakugou does, as painfully. So, of course he'd have to copy Bakugou in order to act out anything approaching believable on screen.

One more year, Bakugou tells himself. One more year on *UA*, and then his options will open up. He'll get the roles he wants, be the kind of actor he's always been meant to be. And no one—not Todoroki or Deku or Yagi-san—is going to hold him back.

He takes a deep breath, puts in his headphones, and listens to the songs that have become his solace, his secret from the world.

It's just a matter of time.

Chapter End Notes

["time to be a man" - the airborne toxic event](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

oh hey, it's a chapter that's twice as long as usual! hope you all enjoy this special interlude, and that it makes up for the cliffhanger last time!

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kirishima feels the story go through him like an earthquake, stares down at his shaking hands long after Bakugou has finished speaking. Every word had prompted new questions, and now they all gather on his tongue like passengers fighting to get off a subway train. He doesn't know what to say first.

They've stood just feet apart the entire time, neither of them daring to cross the distance between them as they pieced together a history they didn't know they shared. Or, at least, Kirishima hadn't known. Bakugou, it turns out, is another matter entirely.

"You knew," he says, voice hoarse even though Bakugou has been doing most of the talking. "You knew who I was, when we met?"

One of the sleeves of Bakugou's hoodie has slipped, revealing the pale skin of his shoulder as he stands with his hands crossed over his chest. Kirishima has never thought of him as a duplicitous person, knows he has too much pride to hide the truth of himself. So why had it taken him so long to say all this?

"I knew you were a singer." Bakugou looks straight at him, red eyes burning. "It was a stupid press thing, to be seen more with people. Hagakure wanted to see Ashido, the first night you guys played with Present Mic. I was there, too."

Kirishima remembers standing on the red carpet with Bakugou months ago, spinning a story for the press about how they'd met and fallen in love. But Bakugou had really been there, had seen that concert and him, on stage.

"It was so fucking stupid," Bakugou grumbles. "Your hair was different, and you were smiling. But I was sure it was you. But you weren't singing, so what was the point?"

Kirishima's face is burning; he's sure his cheeks and ears are dyed a furious red. But Bakugou knows that story, now. After all, it was Bakugou who helped him find his courage.

"And then I went to that party, and there you were," Bakugou is still talking, spitting out the words like he's mad about them. Knowing him, he probably is. "Just standing there, looking like a deer in headlights. I saw you talking with Uraraka and I *knew*. I just didn't understand why. Not until later."

He stares Kirishima down, demanding the explanation that's already been given. But maybe Bakugou still doesn't understand what it is to feel shame and embarrassment, to have everyone look at you with pity instead of admiration.

Kirishima tilts his head back and laughs, eyes pressing shut. Images flash through his mind, re-contextualizing the past few months. On stage with Riot, looking out over an anonymous crowd—but no, there's Bakugou, sitting with Hagakure. At the rooftop party, heart caught in his throat as Bakugou approaches him—but now Bakugou isn't an unattainable celebrity, he's someone who's been scanning crowds for Kirishima's face for years.

"So, what." Kirishima's voice bubbles out of his throat, a wispy and desperate thing. "Why didn't you say anything? Were you just screwing with me?"

He knows Bakugou is capable of cruelty. He just didn't think it would ever be directed at him.

"Don't be fucking stupid," Bakugou demands, arms dropping to his sides and hands balling into fists. "I didn't know *you*, then. How was I supposed to know someone would see us, that night? It was Sero's stupid idea for us to start dating, not mine."

"Right." Kirishima's smile is thin and watery. "What a stupid idea."

Bakugou lets out a growl from deep in his throat, throws up his hands in frustration. "Stop it. Stop fucking *twisting* everything like that. I knew your music, okay? I listened to it over and over again, and it—it *meant* something to me! So, yeah, I wanted to know you, too. I agreed to Sero's plan. How was I supposed to know you cared who I was? You ran the fuck away, the first time we met!"

Kirishima presses a fist against his mouth, as though that could possibly hold in everything he's feeling. It's like his current self is melting away—his red hair fading to black, spikes falling to lank strands; tattoos peeling off his skin; his shoulders curling inward anxiously; his gaze drooping down to look at the floor.

"I wasn't anyone you should've noticed." Kirishima speaks to the floor, not to Bakugou's face.

If Kirishima is falling back into himself, Bakugou is growing more agitated, his anger radiating out from him in waves.

"How many times do I have to tell you to cut that crap? Newsflash, asshole—I liked *your* music! I fell in love with *you*! You think I'm the kind of person who'd do all this shit for someone who wasn't worth it?"

Bakugou Katsuki fell in love with him. It sounds like a line out of a fairytale, out of the elaborate fantasies of Kirishima's dreams. But those dreams were safe, insulated away from the world. Kirishima could spin them out as far as his imagination could take them, and never be hurt by them.

When he's silent a moment too long, Bakugou crosses the space between them and grabs onto Kirishima's shoulders, shaking him roughly.

"What the hell are you thinking, ha? Why are you making that face?"

Kirishima has no idea what sort of expression he's making, but he knows it's not the brash smile that's become so natural over the last few months. In a lot of ways, the person who wears that smile is fake. He's a person who can march his way up to Kayama Nemuri and demand she take a chance on an untested band. He's a person who can open for Present Mic and Suneater, who can sing alongside Ashido onstage. He's a person who can stand beside Bakugou Katsuki, take his hand and kiss his lips, and feel like he belongs there.

Right now, Kirishima is not that person. And maybe that's why his breathing is going shallow, why he can feel the bitter sting of tears behind his eyes.

Bakugou's grip on his shoulders tightens, ten individual points of bruising pressure.

"I didn't know, okay?" Bakugou's voice cracks with desperation, like he doesn't know what else to do. "I didn't know they were for a fucking audition, not until Ashido said it tonight. You can have them back, if you're mad. But just fucking *say something*."

It figures that Bakugou would assume he was angry. But what had Bakugou really done wrong? Picked up some CDs from the trash? Not told Kirishima that he knew the stupid, pathetic kid he'd

been? Really, he'd done Kirishima a favor.

Bakugou lets out a strangled, frustrated sigh. He lets go of Kirishima's shoulders, only to grab his arms and pull him forward into a fierce hug. His chin rests atop Kirishima's hair, his strong arms wrapped around his torso and squeezing with all his strength. Kirishima almost doesn't know whether Bakugou is trying to communicate something or squeeze the life out of him.

There's no denying the ferocious love in this embrace. Kirishima is buoyed by Bakugou's love, his utter conviction in how he feels. It's all the things that Kirishima has always admired about him—his wealth of emotion, his utter surety, his confidence. Bright as a blazing sun, it should warm every inch of Kirishima.

But he's still cold. Slowly, so slowly, he peels himself out of Bakugou's arms and takes a step back. Bakugou gapes at him, eyebrows narrowing dangerously over his red eyes.

"I don't believe you," Kirishima says, voice a hushed whisper.

"What." Bakugou's face contorts with anger, with confusion. "What the hell are you talking about?"

A few stray tears escape and make their way down Kirishima's cheeks. "You say you *love* me, but I—I don't believe you. I can't believe you."

There's silence for a moment as Bakugou blinks at him. Shadows flicker across his face, his features left in neutral as his brain tries to register what he's just heard.

"*Excuse me—*"

Kirishima thinks of the person he'd been when Bakugou had first seen him—a person rooted to the ground like a tree but lacking any strength or conviction. Someone whose dreams were right in front of him, but who couldn't take the final step to reach out and grab them. Someone lonely and pathetic.

"You're amazing," Kirishima says with sincerity. "You always have been. No matter how much closer to you I've gotten, I've only ever felt it more. You're smart, and confident, and so, so goddamn beautiful and—you care, so much, about everything you do. You put your heart out there, even if most people can't see that. And it's incredible."

Bakugou's face colors a rosy pink, the heat of anger making way for the glow of embarrassment.

"So why would someone like you ever love someone like me? It just doesn't make sense. I don't get it—I just. *Why?* Why would you ever love me?"

The words crush him as he speaks them, an indictment not of Bakugou but of himself. He's not worth this. He's not the person that all this light and brightness should be focused on.

He thought he'd been in control of how Bakugou saw him—of how everyone saw him. He'd worked so hard to reinvent himself, to become the person he desperately wants to be. But this entire time, all these months, Bakugou has seen through the confident, happy and decisive Kirishima to the pathetic, insecure and useless person he really is. Kirishima hadn't fooled him at all. And the person he really is, that person could never, ever be worthy of Bakugou.

"You must think I'm really fucking stupid." Bakugou's voice is thick as smoke. He bristles like a startled cat. He backs up a step from Kirishima, and the two of them hear an ominous crack.

Bakugou's eyes widen, and he turns abruptly to see the CD cases that had fallen to the floor, to see a second crack running through the one on top. He grabs the CDs up from the floor, snaps open the broken case to examine the CD inside. But it's too late—the CD itself has snapped in half.

"Shit," Bakugou says, holding the two pieces in his hand. The sharp end draws blood from his fingertips. "*Fuck.*"

"Leave it," Kirishima says, reaching for him. He almost wishes he'd stomped the CDs himself. They're emblematic of everything he hates about himself.

Bakugou flinches back like Kirishima's touch has burned him. "Get the fuck away from me." He clutches the CDs against his chest.

"Bakugou," Kirishima says, but he can't think of how to follow that up. What is there left to say, now that Bakugou knows all the worst parts of him?

"No," Bakugou spits out, shaking his head. "Fuck that. *Fuck you.* You think I'm stupid enough to love someone who doesn't deserve it? You think it would make me happy, hearing about how you think I'm so damn great and you're the worst? Get *away.*"

Kirishima tries to get closer, but Bakugou shoves him with one hand, the other still gripping the ruined pieces of the CDs.

"I didn't—I didn't mean it like that!" Kirishima cries out. And now the tears are falling in earnest, clogging up his throat and his brain. He can't think, can't feel past the ache that's going through his entire body. He doesn't know how he expects this to end. All he knows is that everything else seems like some stupid game of pretend, and he can't keep playing.

"It's my own goddamn fault," Bakugou mutters, biting down on his lower lip. He takes a deep, shuddering breath, but he's shaking with rage regardless. Then: "Get out."

"What?" Kirishima wildly rubs at his tears, at the snot dripping from his nose.

"You heard me. Get the hell out of my apartment. I don't want you here."

They've slept together every night since Kirishima's been back in the city. He doesn't know how to wake up without the other half of the bed still warm from Bakugou, doesn't know how to fall asleep without hearing Bakugou's heartbeat.

"I—" Kirishima's voice is caught in a sob, and then he can't stop. The tears are coming, his shoulders are shaking with it. It feels like it will never stop.

"Do whatever the hell you want," Bakugou mutters murderously, "But don't blame it on me, that you feel like shit about yourself. That's not my fault!"

"You could've told me," Kirishima says accusingly, hurt trying to harden itself into anger.

"Would it have been any different if I had?" Bakugou roars. "Or would you still think of yourself as some stupid, useless piece of shit?"

That's exactly what he thinks of himself. And if Bakugou had told him sooner, they just wouldn't have gotten this far. Kirishima would've balked at the prospect of pretending to date him, or he would've pulled back when he realized he was falling too hard. But all the pretense, all the moments when he could tell himself it wasn't real, it had shielded him from this—the truth that he's been hiding from.

He wants to be a part of Bakugou's world. He wants to be someone who reaches people with his words and his music. But he doesn't know how to do either of those things, not really. And more importantly, he doesn't deserve it.

He turns and heads for the door, wordlessly.

"Yeah, that's right," Bakugou spits after him. "Get out! You can't fucking play with me like this, asshole! I told you—I told you *everything*!"

Somewhere in the ruins of Kirishima's hollow heart, a voice tells him to turn around. If he goes to Bakugou now and apologizes, begs Bakugou to forgive him, maybe they can move past this. Maybe he'll still have Bakugou, and maybe that will be enough.

But Kirishima knows deep down that that won't solve what he's feeling. It won't fill him with courage or conviction, at least not the type that will last. He's been leeching off Bakugou's strength for months now, has let himself ride high on the feeling of Bakugou tolerating him, caring for him, loving him. But in the end, none of that adds up to him loving himself.

Maybe Bakugou is waiting for him to turn around, because he shouts after him, "I never want to see your fucking face again. Do you hear me?"

Kirishima rests his hand against the doorknob, turns it slowly and makes his way out into the hallway. Wood-paneled walls and plush carpet greet him in the hall of Bakugou's apartment building. It takes him mere moments to reach the elevator. Bakugou's voice rings in his ears all the while, and Kirishima focuses on it because as harsh as it is, it's a reprieve from how he wants to rake himself over the coals for what he's just done.

He gets home and ignores Kaminari's questioning comments, Jirou's murmur that Ashido isn't home yet. He doesn't have the capacity to speak or explain himself or care about anyone else.

He falls forward onto his bed, pulls a pillow over his head. And only then does he start crying again, for the person he's just lost and the person he'll never truly be.

Chapter End Notes

["i don't believe you" - the magnetic fields](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

long chapter last time, short chapter this time! what will the length be next time? we just don't know.

also you *really* want to listen to the song.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Bakugou and Kirishima On the Outs?

It's been two weeks since we caught site of Riot! guitarist and possible new front-man, Kirishima Eijirou, leaving Bakugou Katsuki's apartment. But while the two stars were previously seeming cozy and close as can be, this time Kirishima was alone and looking none too happy! Since then, we haven't seen our favorite It Couple together at all. Their star has been shining bright for over six months now, but have they finally burned out?

Bakugou's latest film, Make My Story, is set to premiere this Friday, while Riot! is back in the studio working on their sophomore album. We're eager to see what comes next for both of them, but we'd also like to know what's next for them as an item, or not!

The headline flashes a garish red across the screen of Bakugou's phone, taunting him. He presses down so hard against the screen that the image—Kirishima with his head ducked down, hood over his hair and cheeks red—warps beneath the pressure of his fingers. Bakugou growls and tosses the phone away, and it lands harmlessly on the seat of his couch. His face scrunches in frustration; he would've rather the thing had cracked.

Two weeks, and Kirishima hasn't called, or texted, or made any signs of coming back. Bakugou should've known better than to hope for it, but some small, ugly part of him had thought that Kirishima's affection for him would win out over his hatred of himself. But apparently Bakugou isn't even worth that much.

His stomach churns as he marches away from his living room and towards the bedroom. How is it that loving Kirishima had made things *worse*? He's always known he's a lot to handle, but he'd never wanted to consider that he might actually be poisonous.

And yet all he can think about is Kirishima's expression, his red eyes glassy with tears, his smile frozen on a face that didn't match it. Bakugou had done that to him, had insisted on dredging up those feelings just for his own peace of mind, to make sure he hadn't ruined things all those years ago. He'd been selfish, and the cost had been having Kirishima in his life.

Why hadn't the asshole called? They've been working the same way for months—Bakugou would push and push and push, and Kirishima would come back no matter what. Why is this time so different?

Bakugou yanks open the doors of his closet and pulls out a sleek gray garment bag. There's a note affixed to the hanger, written in Aoyama's stupidly curvy cursive.

Bonjour, Monsieur Bakugou! Here's your outfit for the premiere, perfectly fitted as per usual. Tell me, am I to dress Monsieur Kirishima for this event, as well?

Bakugou takes the note in his hands and rips it in halves, and then into fourths. It's too small to rip any more than that, and so Bakugou grinds out a curse between his teeth and lets the pieces fall to the floor like confetti.

That French fucker is fishing for gossip, and they both know it. If he had to dress Kirishima for the premiere, he'd already know about it. But he's probably been whispering behind Bakugou's back

with Hagakure and Ojiro, speculating about his relationship and breakup. They've *all* probably been doing the same. Even Todoroki had texted yesterday with a simple, *You okay?* And Bakugou had known that he just wanted to hear the story. They treat him like a lion or bear caged up in a zoo, prowling up to the bars and roaring for the crowd's entertainment. He refuses to put his emotions on display for them. Not this time.

He'd never invited Kirishima to the premiere. Two weeks ago, it had seemed like a given that they'd go together, that Bakugou could mention it a day before and Kirishima would just be there. Because they belonged to each other, with each other. And now all of that is gone.

He rubs the back of his hand furiously across his eyes as he unzips the garment bag and pulls out his clothes. It doesn't fucking matter. Make-up will cover anything he doesn't want seen.

—

He casts a dark shadow across the red carpet, a solitary figure that draws all eyes. Sleek black slacks, a crisp white shirt, and a red suit vest that shines with metallic threads and subtle embroidery. Aoyama had attacked his face with makeup brushes and eye pencils, leaving him with deep red at the corners of his eyes and a subtle bronze highlighting his cheekbones. He keeps his expression as impassive as a statue's, daring anyone to try and see through his façade. He doubts anyone will.

Aizawa and Fukukado are already being swarmed by the press—Aizawa in black pants and a loose gray sweater, his hair tied back and his face clean-shaven for perhaps the first time in years; Fukukado in a burnt orange romper that leaves her arms bare, her pale green hair loose around her face.

“Well, it's always a laugh, working with this one,” Fukukado says, giving Aizawa a sly look and elbowing him in the side. “He can't resist my jokes, you know!”

Aizawa sucks in a breath, looks like he's praying to any deity that will hear him for strength. “I have never once laughed at one of your *jokes*.”

Bakugou almost considers walking over to them, facing the barrage of the press with the director and writer beside him. Fukukado and Aizawa's personalities are distracting, and they'd keep things on the topic of the movie and not on personal matters.

But Bakugou Katsuki isn't a coward. He's not going to hide behind Aizawa, not when he's been dealing with the press for his entire life. He doesn't need a shield, doesn't need anyone beside him.

Next to him, someone whistles low and drapes an arm across his shoulders. “Look who's cleaned up so nicely.”

He doesn't flinch, but he does briefly consider breaking one or two of Shindou's fingers. Because who else could it be but Shindou, dressed in an impeccable forest green three-piece suit, his dark hair artfully ruffled, his eyes gleaming like stars in the night. Whoever dressed him knows exactly what they're doing, accentuating his long legs and broad shoulders.

This is Bakugou's world. It's full of bright lights and color, beautiful people and extravagance. But it's so goddamn hard to fight through the flashing lights and fake smiles and find something real hidden here. No one proves that better than Shindou You.

“You have three seconds to get off me,” Bakugou mutters to him out of the corner of his mouth.

“C'mon, Bakugou,” Shindou says, slipping his arm down so that his hand hovers over the small of

Bakugou's back, "We've got a show to put on, tonight."

Bakugou deliberately steps in front of him, keeping a half-foot of space between them. Shindou hardly seems to mind, waving and smiling at the crowds while Bakugou stomps ahead with his typical arrogant defiance. They're both forces of nature, in their own ways, but Shindou is someone deceptively inviting while Bakugou never balks from what he is, what he wants the world to see.

After they've walked the red carpet and had their picture taken approximately a thousand times, the cast and crew enter the theater together. Bakugou and Shindou walk up to the front of the auditorium, and Shindou takes the microphone first.

"Welcome to the premiere of *Make My Story*," he says, his voice booming. "It's a very special little film that we've been working on, and we hope you'll love it as much as we do."

He passes the microphone to Bakugou, who takes it before looking out at the crowd and freezing.

He has a canned line, some platitude to introduce the film before it screens for the industry. Something simple and innocuous, so that no one really has to confront what it is this film is about to do. Bakugou grinds his teeth—*fuck that*.

"As actors, we're always telling someone else's story," Bakugou says. He feels Shindou stiffen beside him, registering that these aren't the right words. But he doesn't care. He keeps going. "But like this asshole said, this movie is special. It's not just telling the same story, the same people's story. So pay attention—'cause you're going to want to see it all."

He returns the microphone to its stand and stalks off, just as the auditorium goes dark and the introductory music begins to play.

He's not playing himself in *Make My Story*. The character has different struggles, a different relationship. But he's closer to the truth than Bakugou's ever gotten, and that's a dangerous feeling. He's proud of his work, but when his own life is so broken how can he be satisfied with some on-screen happiness?

Some stars like to watch premieres from within the midst of the audience, others have to wait outside and pace because of nerves. Tonight, Bakugou stalks up to one of the balconies. He watches from above the crowd, taking in their reactions without really participating in them.

Soon, however, he's not paying attention to the audience at all. This is his first time seeing the finished product, and he can honestly appreciate Aizawa's cinematography and direction. The mood of the movie is dark and inviting, the characters lighting up the screen with charm and warmth. Fukukado's snappy dialogue keeps the audience laughing, until those moments when they gasp or cheer. Bakugou leans in, getting wrapped up in the story.

By the time the ending credits roll, he forgets it's him on the screen, forgets he'd been a part of making this story. All he sees is two men, happy and in love, and his heart flares with jealousy.

"So, where's the boyfriend, tonight?" Shindou arrives on the balcony before the auditorium lights go on, leaning against the railing and looking out over the crowd.

"Go fuck yourself," Bakugou mutters, still half-distracted by the movie.

Shindou huffs out a laugh. "I thought it might be like that."

"Like *what*."

Shindou turns around, still leaning against the railing but now facing Bakugou. “That was some timing, on the publicity. You come out, right before taking this movie, and find such a golden boy to be your boyfriend? And then just before the movie comes out, it’s over, so the press can focus on the finished product. Ingenious. I’m mad my press team didn’t come up with it.”

For a moment, the image of Shindou and Kirishima on magazine covers and tabloids together flashes through Bakugou’s mind. His blood turns to acid in his veins, every inch of his body alighting with fury.

“Why the hell would they need to?” he demands.

Shindou shrugs. “I’m not ashamed to admit I’m using your star power to cushion any repercussions this movie might’ve had on my career. I’ve told you before, haven’t I? We’re not all the invincible Bakugou Katsuki.”

Rage builds up inside him, and Bakugou isn’t yet sure what its final target will be. The idea that Shindou has been *using* him is unforgivable.

“I dunno what your deal is,” Shindou says, voice still casual and friendly, “But it’s harder, in some ways, when you’re bi. Everyone wants you to just fall into line, date a nice girl, not rock the boat too much unless it’s for some slightly risqué photo shoot. But I wanted a role like this, too. So thanks for taking all the heat.”

Sero had filtered out a lot of the backlash, but Bakugou knows not everyone was happy with his coming out, with his taking a role in a film with a same-sex romance. He doesn’t really care what those people think, and Shindou’s right about one thing—Bakugou’s star burns bright enough to weather these sorts of storms. If *Make My Story* does well, no one’ll blink at the idea of Bakugou doing another gay drama. His sexuality will start out as ancillary to his art, and eventually become incidental.

“But the press boyfriend,” Shindou says with a laugh, “I really, *really* wish I’d thought of that!”

He thinks that Bakugou is just as calculating as he is. He thinks everything that happened with Kirishima was an act, a front, to ease the way into this film. And the worst part is, Bakugou can’t deny it. Their relationship started as damage control, as something completely contrived.

Is that what he and Kirishima are going to go down in history as? A publicity stunt that only lasted a few months? The thought is unbearable.

“It makes me wonder, you know.” Shindou pushes off from the railing, takes a few steps towards Bakugou. “What else would you do, to keep all eyes on you?”

Bakugou is still sitting back in his auditorium chair, unprepared when Shindou places a hand on the hand rests to either side of him, leaning in close so that their faces are nearly touching. Even after so many months spent with him, shooting a movie with more than one intimate scene, Bakugou still can’t figure Shindou out. He knows he’s playing some game, angling for some hidden motive. But Bakugou doesn’t know what that motive is, and that makes Shindou endlessly dangerous.

Shindou tilts his head, considering. His gaze lingers on Bakugou’s lips.

Bakugou could shove him away. He could duck around him. He could grab Shindou by the collar and hoist him over the balcony. He isn’t trapped—there are a half-dozen ways he could get out of this situation without making an incident of it.

But he doesn't know if he wants to do that. He's been fixated on Kirishima—on the person he expected Kirishima to be—for *years*. He's never defined his sexuality, even to himself, just knows that he likes Kirishima and Kirishima is a man and at the intersection of those lies his own preferences. He's never really had an active interest in other people, has assumed that he just doesn't have any great need for them. But it's been two weeks since he's been with Kirishima, and he's already so goddamn lonely. He doesn't know what's wrong with him, hates himself for feeling this way, but he wants the comfort, the affirmation, of another's touch.

His eyes flutter closed, and he angles his face upwards. He can feel Shindou's breath against his cheek.

In the split second before Shindou's lips touch his own, Bakugou imagines that it's someone else who's come to the premiere with him, who's leaning down to kiss him now. Someone with bright red hair and an infectious laugh, who believes him more than anything and takes the time to understand him when no one else will.

He knows what kissing Shindou is like. And it's not what he wants, or needs.

He fists a hand in Shindou's shirt and wrenches him away, standing up as he lets go so that Shindou lands in a crumpled heap at his feet.

"Don't," Bakugou says dangerously, "Ever try that shit with me again."

Shindou laughs, a brittle and sharp sound in the quiet of the auditorium. He picks himself up and dusts off his suit, casting his assessing glare over Bakugou.

"Hey," someone calls out, "What's going on?"

It's a bright voice, a hopeful voice. It sounds just a little uncertain. It's painfully familiar.

Bakugou remembers the relief, the joy he'd felt when Kirishima had interrupted him and Shindou at the bar. How even though he didn't need Kirishima's support, he'd felt better just having him beside him.

But this isn't Kirishima's voice. Bakugou doesn't get to be that lucky twice.

"Aizawa-san's about to head to the after party," Deku says. He's in a plain black suit with a red tie, his hair messy and his freckles stark against his cheeks. "I came to look for you, Kacchan."

He steps into the already-crowded space of the balcony, half-smiles at Shindou. "And you, Shindou-san. I guess you'll all want to go together, right?"

"Midoriya-kun!" Shindou says, face lighting up. "I didn't know you were coming. It's so nice to meet you." He takes Deku's hand and shakes it vigorously, smiling all the while.

Bakugou looks at Deku's face, sees the way his green eyes narrow for a moment like he's trying to figure Shindou out. Shit—of all people, *Deku* is the only one who sees it, too?

"It's nice to meet you, too, Shindou-san," Deku says, carefully pulling himself away. "Should we get going?"

—

Should he be mad that Deku showed up at that moment? His default response to Deku's very existence has always been anger, so it's hard to tell what he's feeling beyond that.

Bakugou rides to the after party in the limo with Shindou, Fukukado and Aizawa. Fukukado is cracking jokes, Shindou is laughing uproariously, and Aizawa is leaning against the car door trying to take a power nap. Bakugou stares out the window, turning only to glare at Shindou when he feels his stare on him.

His head isn't any clearer as he endures the toasts and celebrations, finally stalking off when the others are pulled away by friends and fans and well-wishers. He's sitting out on the patio, back leaned against the wall, when Deku joins him. He's expecting it, so he barely looks up to mutter, "Fuck off."

Deku ignores him, takes a seat a few feet away and folds his hands in his lap. "I didn't mean to interrupt, but. What was that, exactly?"

"None of your goddamn business." Bakugou stares out at the sky, not even giving Deku the honor of a glance. "What the hell are you even doing here?"

Deku sucks in a breath, but it's hard to tell whether it's in apprehension or frustration. "I go to all your premieres, Kacchan. I have since we were little kids."

Of course, Bakugou knows that. It just still makes him feel uneasy, like Deku is nipping at his heels and waiting to tear him apart, to study him from the inside out. Because if Deku isn't tagging along with him to bring him down, why is he doing it?

Bakugou has never returned the favor. The bitter jealousy and resentment he'd felt when Deku started starring in Yagi-san's movies has kept him away from any of Deku's premieres that he didn't absolutely have to go to. He hasn't walked a red carpet with him since the *UA* days.

Deku twiddles his thumbs for a moment, then looks up to ask, "Did something happen with Kirishima-kun?"

The whole goddamn world knows that something happened. Why Deku has to ask in such an insufferable way, Bakugou doesn't know.

"Why the fuck do you care?"

Deku takes in another of those long, irritating breaths. "I'm not trying to pry! It's just that Jirou-san told Yaoyorozu-san who talked to Todoroki-kun about it, and then I was talking to Todoroki-kun, and it wasn't like we were gossiping about you! But you and Kirishima-kun are both our friends, and we thought—I thought that everything was going really well. So I guess it surprised me, when I saw that he didn't come with you, tonight. And I know Jirou-san and Kaminari-kun and the others would've been here, unless something had happened—"

Bakugou smacks a hand over Deku's mouth, cutting off his rambling. "Fucking hell, Deku, when're you gonna learn to just *shut up*."

Deku shrugs, pulls away from Bakugou's hand and offers a sheepish smile. He smiled like that as a little kid, too. Bakugou turns away.

"People break up. It's not news."

Deku purses his lips. "I mean, in *our* lives..." He shrugs. "I'm just wondering why."

Irritation sparks against Bakugou's skin. "What, you acting out a break up soon? Need some new material to make it look good?"

Deku waves his hands in front of his face. “It’s not like that! It’s *never* been like that!”

They’ve tried to have this conversation a dozen times, and it’s never gone any further than this. Bakugou doesn’t know why Deku still tries, why he keeps trying to pull Bakugou back into the fold, why he shows up at every one of his premieres like they’re best fucking friends.

“Then what the fuck is it like?” he roars. “Explain it to me, stupid Deku, if you know so much!”

“I’m trying, if you’d just *listen*!” Deku clenches his hands, sucks in a deep breath like he’s trying to calm himself down before he continues. “You’re amazing, you know. You’ve always been so good at this.” He says it begrudgingly, like he’s mad about that.

Bakugou stares at him. None of that is news to him.

“You can gain all this insight about characters and how they should act or react, and it’s all from inside of you. It’s like you don’t need other people to make your own acting seem real. We were so little, when they cast that last *All Might* movie, but everyone could see you could do it all—the happiness and the fear and the determination. You were perfect for that role!”

He doesn’t want to hear this. He wishes he’d never taken that role, because as talented as he was he couldn’t stop from destroying All Might—from being the reason Yagi-san lost his career. And now the same thing is happening all over again. He loves Kirishima more than he’s ever loved anyone, but all his love and all his talent just make Kirishima feel worse about himself. He’s fucking poison, and it’s taken him over a decade and countless reminders to finally see it.

“I can’t be like you, Kacchan,” Deku continues quietly. “I have to see how other people are, what their emotions are, to know what I’m supposed to act like. You get all that insight from yourself, but I need to get it from others. I know you’re still mad at me for what happened with UA. But I wasn’t trying to steal from you. I was trying to connect to you, and to everyone watching the show. To give them a story they could believe in.”

Bakugou clenches his hands into fists. That was the entire reason he’d wanted that storyline in the first place—to see someone who felt like him on screen, even if he had to put that character there himself. Maybe he should have known that the Ayane-Nobuhiko romance was too developed at that point for them to switch gears. But he wanted it so badly, had fought for it as hard as he could.

“It didn’t matter to you the way it mattered to me!” Bakugou insists, teeth grinding together like pestle against mortar.

“You don’t know that!” Deku yells back. His cheeks turn pink, and he leans back, embarrassed.

“What,” Bakugou says, nearly dumbfounded, “You’re telling me you’re gay?”

Deku makes a face like he’s just bitten into a lemon. “Bi, maybe. I’m still figuring it out.”

Bakugou rolls his eyes. Trust Deku—*fucking Deku*—to start figuring it out five years after the fact. Bakugou doesn’t know if this revelation makes things better (and it’s certainly not a shocking one, not to someone who’s known Deku his entire life), but it makes things make sense to him in a way that they hadn’t before.

When he was a teenager, feeling trapped by his role on UA and desperate to express himself—his true self—in any way that he could, the storyline of two boys falling in love had meant everything to him. Really, all he’s ever wanted is the freedom to make meaning of his own identity.

“Don’t tell me that kissing Todoroki was your big realization,” Bakugou mutters, running a hand

over his face.

Deku laughs nervously, cheeks going from pink to a brilliant red. *Idiot.*

Bakugou's mind goes in circles for a moment—he wanted to express himself and connect to others, and Deku was able to forge that connection, and in so doing discovered a part of himself—ugh. It's almost like he got what he wanted but not in the way that he wanted it, and Bakugou doesn't know if he can live with that.

They stare at each other, for once in silence. The air between them is charged with heat, with years of connection and aggression and frustration. Have they always been closer than they realized?

All this would be so much easier if he could punch Deku without it ending up in the tabloids.

He tugs at the roots of his hair, suddenly feeling entirely too constricted in his button-up shirt and vest. "I'm ruining him," he mutters, staring back at the ground.

"What?"

"Fucking Kirishima. He thinks I'm so goddamn great, likes me *so* much, that he doesn't think anything of himself. Because I'm around, being too fucking amazing, or some shit."

Deku purses his lips. "Ah."

"That's it? *Ah*?" Bakugou taunts. So much for Deku wanting them to talk.

Deku shakes his head. "No, I'm just thinking! Maybe I understand a bit of how Kirishima-kun feels. I spend a lot of time watching people, trying to learn from them, but sometimes that's hard. You focus on everyone else's strengths, sometimes you forget your own. It's taken me a long time to learn how to be strong because of those I admire, instead of thinking less of myself."

Bakugou is sure there was a way for Deku to say that in half the time.

"So?" he demands. "What the fuck am I supposed to do about it, now?"

Deku lets out a watery little laugh. "You're asking *me*?"

"I don't have fucking anyone else to talk to, dipshit," Bakugou growls at him.

Deku smiles at him, warm and admiring. But his admiration of Bakugou hasn't dwarfed him—he's Yagi-san's golden boy, one of the top actors of their generation. All while Bakugou was trying to run ahead, Deku's done his own thing and come out on top for it. It's infuriating, but also somehow a relief. Here's one person that Bakugou didn't ruin.

"Maybe try and think of it from his point of view," Deku says.

"What the hell does that mean?"

Deku shrugs. "Just—who do you admire, Kacchan?"

—

Make My Story shatters records in its opening weekend. Never before has a tiny art-house film garnered such attention, especially not one that portrays a same-sex romance. Critics are astounded that the story manages to "reveal true human emotion and vulnerability without killing off one or both of its charming leads." Bakugou reads that line in the paper and snorts out a laugh.

He's out for a press tour to promote the film, so it takes him a few days to actually act on Deku's advice. (It also gives him a few days to decide *whether* he's going to act on Deku's advice, and how he feels about that.)

It's Wednesday morning, the sun shining brightly overhead and casting a glare against the new-fallen snow. Bakugou trudges his way up to the front door, notices that no one's shoveled the snow off the drive yet. He scowls as he knocks on the door three times in quick succession.

It takes a moment for the house's occupant to answer him. In that time, Bakugou looks around at the carefully-kept flowerbeds blanketed in snow, the clean white roof over the buttercup yellow house. It's a charming, nondescript place out in the suburbs, far away from the public eye.

Bakugou swallows thickly and tastes acid on his tongue. Is his admiration poisonous? Does the person in this house even *want* to see him?

The door swings open, revealing the skeleton of the actor formerly known as All Might. He used to be a man of incredible height and muscle, with brilliantly gold hair and a booming laugh. Bakugou can't help but see him that way, still.

"Bakugou, my boy," Yagi-san says, voice lifting in surprise. "What are you doing here—" His voice is cut off by a cough, and he lifts his hands to cover his mouth.

Bakugou looks on in horror, unsure of how to offer support. All at once, he's five-years-old again, and he's sure that when Yagi-san lifts his hand away from his mouth there will be blood on it.

But just as suddenly, Yagi-san straightens up, his hands clean. He looks down at Bakugou and smiles kindly, though when he speaks his voice is firm. "Stop looking for what isn't there."

He hasn't met Yagi-san's eyes, yet. He's no one's coward, so he clenches his hands and forces himself to look up.

Even hunched over, Yagi-san stands at an impressive height. But his arms hang limply from his sides and his pants sit awkwardly on his thin hips. His blond hair is lank around his face, his bright blue eyes sunken and surrounded by the loose skin of gaunt cheeks.

Bakugou isn't a fucking doctor. He doesn't know what would've happened to Yagi-san if he'd undergone intensive treatment sooner. But the cancer had been bad—completely debilitating. The fact that Yagi-san has lived to see the past fifteen years is nothing short of a miracle. But Bakugou still feels his eyes prickling with hot tears as he sees the shadow that he's become.

Yagi-san clears his throat. "My boy, would you like to come inside for tea?"

At a loss for what else to say, Bakugou can only nod sullenly and follow Yagi-san inside.

Yagi-san takes his coat as Bakugou toes out of his shoes. They head together to the living room, and Bakugou sits down on the couch as Yagi-san wanders away for the tea. The walls of the house are covered in old photographs, posters, and newspaper articles. There's a lot of Yagi-san as All Might, and a case containing his awards. But there are also newspaper clippings of reviews of *UA*, pictures of Deku and Todoroki standing with Yagi-san, and a blurred photograph that looks like it was taken at an izakaya, showing Yagi-san, Aizawa, Yamada Hizashi and a woman Bakugou vaguely recognizes from parties thrown by Kirishima's record company. There're older photographs, too, of a dark-haired woman in beautiful gowns and sleek suits, smiling out on the camera like the sun shining down on the earth. Then there are the bookshelves, full of scripts that Yagi-san has directed since coming back into the industry.

He swallows against the metallic taste in his mouth. Yagi-san has kept living, these past fifteen years. Bakugou had caused him to go into retirement, but Deku and others had pulled him out and made him something great, again. It isn't fair.

Yagi-san returns with a tray of tea and sweets. He sets a cup down in front of Bakugou, the aroma of matcha filling the air. Bakugou stares down at the tea, shoulders hunched.

"You've gotten so tall," Yagi-san says, taking his own cup and sitting down in an armchair. "Remember, you used to say you were going to grow taller than me?"

He'd been a stupid kid, then, balanced on top of All Might's shoulders. He'd felt invincible, because he'd thought All Might was invincible, too.

"Well, I didn't," Bakugou mutters, still staring down at his tea. "You're still a giant."

Yagi-san hums thoughtfully, but he doesn't have much to say to that. Bakugou keeps one hand curled around his cup of tea, looking down into the green foam.

"I wish you'd look at me, Bakugou, my boy," Yagi-san says after a moment's awkward silence.

But he can't. If he looks up, he'll have to see All Might—Yagi-san—as he is now. The hero of Bakugou's childhood really will be gone.

"You think you can ask me something like that," Bakugou mutters angrily, even though he knows he's being unfair. Why is it so much easier to be mad at the people you've wronged, instead of the people who've wronged you?

"I hope I can," Yagi-san says, laughing a bit. "I care about you a great deal."

Bakugou remembers when he could believe that. When he was a stupid little kid who could be wrapped up in All Might's massive arms, or riding his shoulders, or hanging off of just one of his biceps. When he'd run around set imitating All Might's action shots, and the entire crew had crowed about what a little darling he was.

He hears Yagi-san sigh, but cuts him off before he can speak. "Why do you want me in your stupid movie, anyway?"

He looks up now, because he wants the truth. Yagi-san sits with his elbows against his knees, his blue eyes shining with an inner fire that was never quite visible, before. He smiles wanly.

"Which answer will make you happy? That I want your talent for my movie, or that I want to include you because of our relationship?"

It startles Bakugou that he doesn't know. For so long, he's thought that if people recognize what he can do, it doesn't matter what else they think of him. That as long as he's the best and everyone knows it, he won't need anything else. But somewhere along the way, that ambition had changed. He'd wanted people to see him, the real him, and appreciate and admire him for it. To *like* him, and care about him. He just wants to feel connected to the people around him, instead of like someone surrounded by barbed wire, too dangerous to get close to.

Yagi-san smiles at him kindly, that fire still blazing in his eyes. "I'm very proud of you, Bakugou, my boy. I'm sorry it's taken so long for you to know that. I thought maybe you didn't want my support, but you've been made to handle so much on your own. I'd like the chance to do something with you, to make something we can all be proud of."

Yagi-san's validation feels like a warm fire inside of him, a flame that grows stronger every second that Bakugou accepts the truth of what he'd just said. It's a precious thing, but it's not the only thing he needs. Yagi-san isn't the only person he needs.

He rubs the back of his hand across his eyes. "Yeah, whatever. We know no one else could pull off being the Dragon King without making it into a fucking joke."

Yagi-san gets to his feet, sets down his tea cup and comes to stand in front of Bakugou. He places his thin hands on Bakugou's shoulders and pulls him into a hug. It isn't like a patented All Might embrace, which made Bakugou feel like nothing could touch him. Yagi-san's too thin and frail for that, now. But when he presses Bakugou's head against his chest, Bakugou can hear the beat of Yagi-san's heart.

"Let go, All Might," Bakugou grumbles. "I'm not a baby."

He doesn't realize his slip until Yagi-san has stepped away, smiling at him knowingly.

Bakugou jumps to his feet, growls out, "Do you have a shovel around here?"

Yagi-san blinks. "I'm sure I do—but why?"

"Cause I'm going to shovel your drive, since no one else has bothered," Bakugou spits out, stamping towards the front door. He hears Yagi-san chuckle behind him, but stops short when he sees an old picture on the wall.

It's Yagi-san in his All Might costume, flexing for the camera with another man, dressed all in red, standing beside him.

"I ruined him," Bakugou mutters, reaching out to touch the glass in front of the photograph. All Might seems to belong to another era now, a relic that belongs in a museum.

Yagi-san comes up behind him, presses a hand against Bakugou's shoulder. "You couldn't do that. And that's the nice thing about movies, isn't it? Those'll never be gone."

Bakugou purses his lips, forces himself to nod. Maybe, if Yagi-san reminds him of that fact often enough, Bakugou will eventually start to believe it. Or maybe he can't just hear it from one person. If he lets more people into his life, will it make the dips and downturns seem less catastrophic? Will it make this horrible, aching loneliness turn into something else?

For now, he turns his attention to the other man in the picture, brow scrunching as he thinks through what he needs to do. If he wants the life he's choosing for himself, wants to be the person he imagines he can be, wants to be with the person he loves.

"Yagi-san."

"Yes?"

"You're gonna do me a favor."

"I'd be delighted, of course. What is it?"

["the winner takes it all" - the vaccines](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

i'm basically at a point where i'm *always* behind in responding to comments, but please know that i do read all of them and appreciate them greatly. and please forgive me if you get a response from me three months late-- i figure everyone would prefer i not hold off on updating until i catch up on comments!

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Just before Kirishima reaches the front door, Kaminari grabs the back of his shirt and tugs him back—two hands grabbing at the fabric, both heels dragging against the floor.

“Hey, hey, *stop!*” He grits his teeth as Kirishima tries to fight him off. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Just get off, Kaminari,” Kirishima grinds out. He grabs the door frame, trying to tug himself forward. He’s got a considerable amount of bulk on Kaminari, but Kaminari is determined not to let him get beyond the threshold.

“A little help, over here?” he calls out.

Jirou rushes in from the living room, takes one look at the scene before her and presses her palm against her forehead. “What the hell are you two idiots doing?”

“*I’m* not the idiot,” Kaminari says indignantly. “He’s the one who thinks he’s going to a movie premiere in the PJs he’s been wearing for two weeks!”

Truth be told, Kirishima hasn’t given much thought to his appearance. He’d just noticed the date as Kaminari had tried coaxing him out of his room to eat dinner, and made a wild run for it. His mind is still hazy, sadness hanging over him like a fog. His only clear thought is that the premiere is today, and he should be there.

“Kirishima,” Jirou says in her quiet, calm voice. “You haven’t let the apartment in two weeks.”

“I’m better now!” Kirishima insists.

“You didn’t leave your room for days,” Jirou continues.

The three of them had taken turns bringing him meals, sitting with him, getting the story from him in bits and pieces. They hadn’t said anything judgmental, not against him or Bakugou. But Kirishima heard them out in the hall, talking in hushed voices.

“But—he *needs* me!” Wasn’t this what the entire damn charade had been for? To smooth Bakugou’s coming out with the press, so that he could be himself in the public eye? And why shouldn’t Kirishima get to see the triumphant moment, the premiere of one of the most anticipated gay romance films ever? Doesn’t he deserve that much, when he carved out his own heart for this?

“What about what you need?” Ashido comes down the hallway, ducks under Kirishima’s extended arm and plants herself in the doorway in front of him. “Are you just going to ignore what’s been happening to you? How much this is hurting you?”

Kirishima flinches as though she’s just slapped him across the face. He takes a step back, and Kaminari renews his efforts to pull Kirishima away from the door at the exact moment. The force between them has nowhere to go, and they both slam into the ground and each other.

“Ow,” Kaminari hisses, rubbing the back of his head.

Kirishima just lays on the ground, limbs askew as he stares up at the ceiling.

“This is what he wanted,” he mutters, “And I just thought... it’d make him happy, and if he was happy...” The thought trails off, unfinished.

Kaminari lets out an impatient noise from between his teeth. “Has he *ever* been happy?”

“Yes,” Kirishima says first, reflexively, defensively. But then he thinks about it, because what does he actually know about Bakugou? “No. I mean. I don’t... I don’t actually know.”

Shit, his eyes feel hot again. He thought he’d gotten over the crying after the first few days, and then only a hollow emptiness had been left behind. But now he feels like he’s going to start sobbing, again. He drapes an arm over his eyes, blocking out his friends from view.

From behind closed eyes, he sees Bakugou—Bakugou, face scrunched up, trying to hide a smile. Bakugou, looking at him with fondness, reaching out to poke at his cheek. Bakugou, throwing his head back and laughing, looking younger and less serious than usual. Bakugou, beautiful and happy.

He *had* been happy with Kirishima, hadn’t he?

“I wanted to be the one to make him happy,” Kirishima says, and fuck, he can’t stop the tears now. He hiccups, words interrupted by his ragged breathing. “I want to be there when he’s happy—I want to see it, want to share it with him—”

“You sure we can’t kill him?” Kaminari mutters.

“We’re holding that option in reserve,” Jirou says back, like this is a reminder of an earlier conversation.

Someone comes to sit beside him, reaches out and pulls Kirishima’s arms away from his face. It’s Ashido, looking down at him with liquid-dark eyes and that strangely thoughtful expression she wears so rarely.

“Hey. Listen to me, okay? Bakugou doesn’t get have his happiness at the cost of yours. That’s just—it’s not on, okay? And if we have to stop you from doing that to yourself, we will.”

She looks so fierce, so defiant, so determined to save him from himself. Kaminari is still half-underneath him, but he looks just as resolved. And Jirou, standing right there, poised to barricade the door again if need be.

They love you, Kirishima thinks, and immediately another part of his brain questions if he’s worthy of that love. What is *wrong* with him?

“I don’t know what to do anymore,” he says, and he’s crying again, shaking and unable to stop.

Ashido strokes a gentle hand through his hair, and Kaminari extricates himself enough to grab both of Kirishima’s hands in his own.

“You don’t have to do anything, right now,” Jirou says. “We just want you to take care of yourself. No one’s going to make you do anything you don’t want to do, and definitely not until you’re ready.”

“And dude,” Kaminari says, “Until you’re showering and eating on a regular basis, you’re definitely not ready.”

Kirishima curls in on himself, bringing his knees up against his chest and wrapping his arms around himself. "I'm sorry," he says in a quiet voice.

"Don't be," Ashido says immediately. "We're always gonna be here for you."

"You think we don't know that it'd be the same, if things were reversed?" Jirou asks.

"You don't have to do anything," Kaminari reiterates. "Just. Give yourself some time, okay?"

The three of them encircle him, wrap their arms around him and hold on tight.

—

He does his best to take their advice, and when he forgets it they're there to remind him. It's another few days before he feels up to leaving the apartment. But when he is, Ashido is there to join him.

It's snowing, which catches Kirishima off-guard. How can it still be winter, when he feels like he's been living outside the world for months or years? The powder falls slowly to the earth, gently guided by wind that stings Kirishima's face as he and Ashido walk along.

They end up at a park a few blocks away from the apartment. Ashido stops by a coffee cart and grabs them both drinks, returning with her cheeks as pink as her hair. She's got a black knit cap pulled down over her head, hair sticking out like small clouds from underneath it.

They dust off a bench by the frozen pond and sit down, gloved hands curled around disposable hot cups. Kirishima shifts his woven red scarf aside so that he can breathe in the warmth of his coffee.

"So," Ashido says after a moment, breaking the silence. "We never really talked about it."

Kirishima gulps, taking a too-early sip of his coffee and hissing as it burns against his tongue and down his throat. He doesn't bother to deny it, however.

"I felt bad," he says, and at the same moment that Ashido says the exact same thing.

They look at each other, both laughing weakly.

Ashido takes a deep breath. "You first."

He'd told her about his fight with Bakugou, about the CDs, about how Bakugou had been there that day at the television studio. He told her what he remembered of how he'd yelled at her, blamed her for what had happened. Back then, they'd swept it all under the rug when Kirishima declared he wanted to start a new project, when Ashido announced she was ending her solo career, when Sero and Ashido broke up with little fanfare. They'd all decided without consulting each other that the past was past, and they were moving forward.

"I did blame you," Kirishima says now, looking out across the glassy, frozen surface of the pond. "I shouldn't have, and I know that. But I was jealous of you. Not because you had the spotlight, but because you knew *how* to get it. Because you could stand up on your own, and I couldn't."

It's a horrible way to feel about his best friend, and part of the reason he never wanted to talk about it was because he didn't know that he'd ever stop feeling that way.

"So, whenever something didn't work out for me, it was easy to say that you were the one who was special, and talented, and I was just lucky to be by your side. I could resent you, and still be

praising you, all at the same time.”

Ashido tilts her head back and laughs, loud and startling against the gentle scene of snowfall.

“What?” Kirishima asks, brows knitting together.

“I was jealous of *you*,” she says, setting her coffee to one side so she can wipe at her eyes. “I could barely write my own songs, and I had no idea what kind of music I wanted to make, who I wanted to be as a performer. I let my team push me into being something I wasn’t. And I looked at you, and you were just biding your time, ready to burst out with talent. And I was jealous.”

She folds her hands in her lap, presses her lips together. “Sero knew it, too. He didn’t just take your word for it, when you told him it was my fault. He’s not that unkind. He came to me right after, asked me what had happened, comforted me because I was upset.”

Her voice goes soft and wistful. “Everyone always looked at me like I was a star. But I knew how talented you were—you *are*. I was insecure, and the only person I could tell was Sero. I thought—because he said he loved me, he’d just accept all these little petty things about me, keep all my secrets.”

She lets out a deep sigh. Kirishima leans in, drapes an arm over her shoulders.

“But that jerk held it against me,” she says tartly.

Kirishima remembers going to Yaoyorozu’s beach house, to Sero questioning Ashido’s Riot tattoo by the fire. He wasn’t accusing her—he looked awestruck, like he couldn’t believe she was so committed to being a part of their group.

“You ever think he’s got some hang-ups of his own?” Kirishima asks.

Ashido lets out a breath. “I know he does. He’s worse than you, you know. Always going on about how plain and ordinary he is, when he’s surrounded by *people like us*.”

Kirishima bites down on the inside of his cheek. He’s heard Sero talk like that before, but he’s never given it much thought. But Sero really does surround himself with the brightest of the bright, doesn’t he? First Ashido, then Bakugou.

“Why do you think he tries so hard to be needed?” Ashido says. “I think he’s always worried we’re all going to wake up and realize he’s nothing special. Like he isn’t our friend, like we don’t all love him!” She scowls.

“I mean,” Kirishima cuts in, giving her a crooked smile. “You did sort of use him like a gopher, when we were teenagers.”

“I thought that was what he wanted!” Ashido throws her hands up. “He was always like, ‘Ashido, I’ll get you a coffee!’ Or, ‘Ashido, here’s the notes from the producer!’ Or, ‘Ashido, let me schedule that for you!’ I couldn’t figure out whether he was into me, or trying to kiss up to his boss! And sure, I was a *little* full of myself, and I liked the attention. Who wouldn’t?”

She settles down after a moment, grabs Kirishima’s hand and squeezes it tight. “I’m still a little full of myself, you know. I like it when people look at me. I like it when they call my name.”

Kirishima laughs. “If we split the difference between you and me, maybe we’d both be fine.”

“Hey,” Ashido says sharply, reaching up to poke at Kirishima’s cheek. “You don’t have to smile

for me, or make jokes about this, if you're not feeling it. You don't have to pretend, for me."

Immediately, Kirishima's face falls. His lip wobbles, and he swallows down another laugh that might've come out as a sob.

"C'mon," Ashido says. She gets to her feet, dusts off her cheetah-print coat and grabs for Kirishima's hand again. They walk around the pond until they come to a grassy hill, now covered in a light dusting of snow.

When they've sat down again, Ashido leans her elbows against her knees and says, "I'm really, really mad at you, you know."

That surprises him. "Um. Why?"

"Because every way I've ever tried to help you, and build you up, over the past ten years hasn't even begun to work."

Kirishima inhales and holds the breath. Even if Ashido admits to being jealous, or threatened by him, that doesn't erase the fact that she's always stood by him. She's swallowed down her jealousy and supported him as much as she could, in whatever way she could. From being the first to cheer for his middle school music performances to the past few weeks, when she'd laid in bed with him and held him while he cried.

"I really, really like the kid that you were," Ashido says.

"Huh?"

"He's my best friend," she continues, "With his black hair and beat-up sneakers and voice that cracked a bit before he'd get going with a song. I never, ever thought he was lacking something. I never thought he wasn't cool or lovable."

"Ashido..."

"So, stop shitting on him! Stop saying he wasn't good enough!" Ashido smacks him in the chest. "He was! *You are!*"

Hands shaking, Kirishima lifts his coffee to take a sip. He needs that moment, because he has no idea what to say. Even the coffee burning down his throat does nothing to settle his thoughts, his feelings.

"It's not like I don't want to believe you," he confesses. "I do, I really do. But."

"But?"

He shrugs uselessly.

"Did you stop loving me?" Ashido demands.

"What?"

"Because I was jealous, and I treated Sero badly, and I was happy to have you playing backup to me? Did that make you love me less?"

Kirishima takes a moment to consider that. He doesn't always agree with Ashido, but he's never loved her any less for it.

“No, of course not.”

Ashido smiles at him, kisses his cheek before continuing, “Do you stop loving Bakugou when he’s being an asshole?”

His brain short-circuits, at that question. “He’s not—I don’t—I mean, he *can be*—but I never *told* him—”

Ashido reaches up, presses a hand to his lips.

“You love him for who he is, though no one has any clue why. Isn’t that right?”

Eyes burning, Kirishima can only nod.

“Why can’t he be the same, then? Why can’t he love you for who you are, *all* of you?”

His hands clench. He’s shaking, and he doesn’t even fully register why.

“I’ve seen him be better for you,” Ashido insists. “We all have. That boy has a personality like someone rolled it up in cactus needles, but he’s *soft* for you. I don’t know if being with him is what’s best for you. But I’ve been watching from the start, and I think he really means it when he says he loves you.”

Fuck. Fuck fuck *fuck*. He’s made a terrible mistake, hasn’t he?

Ashido pulls him in, rests his head on her shoulder as she gently strokes his back. “I’ll never get why someone as awesome as you doesn’t see what everyone else sees. But if you ever need the reminder, you’ve got more than one person willing to beat it into your head.”

Kirishima laughs at that, and then he chokes down on a sob. “Do you think I’ve ruined everything?”

“I don’t know. Probably not.” She says it lightly, pulls him back down to earth from his panic. “What about me? Have I ruined everything?”

He shakes his head. “I don’t know what’s best for you, either. But if there’s something you want, you can always work hard for it, can’t you? You can be better for Sero, if he’s who you want.”

Ashido looks down, eyes wet and sad.

“He really likes you, you know,” Kirishima says. And he’s talking to Ashido, about Sero, but he always wants to be talking to himself, about Bakugou. He wants to be worthy of the love of his favorite person, wants to let it fuel him like the energy of the sun.

Ashido says, “I’ll try if you will.”

He wraps both his arms around her waist, buries his face in her shoulder and holds on for dear life. He can believe what she says to him, because she’s never lied. She’s never pulled back, never left him. In most of his happiest memories, she’s there, sharing in his joy. And in a lot of his worst ones, she’s there, too, ready to pick him back up.

He squeezes her as tight as he can. “It’s a deal.”

—

He still doesn’t know if he’s ready, or if he even knows what he needs to do next. When he gets

home, he throws open the window of his bedroom, letting clean light and air in for the first time in ages.

The billboard for *Make My Story* still stares at him from across the road. Kirishima squares his shoulders, cups his hands over his mouth, and yells to it, “Wait for me, okay? I’ve gotta figure some stuff out!”

He sets about organizing his room. His acoustic guitar lies on its side in one corner, and he rights it before picking up all the scattered pieces of paper on his floor. For months now, ever since that night at Hagakure Tooru’s rooftop party, he’s been writing music in frantic bursts and starts. There are songs Riot has premiered at concerts, demos they’ve recorded on tour, pieces of lyrics and melodies that he and Jirou had scratched out in their spare time.

The songs have come to him from across many moments—seeing Bakugou at Hagakure’s party, attending a film premiere with him, kissing him for the first time, going to the beach, singing to a packed stadium but really just for him, spending time away from him, coming back and really having him for the first time. Their story is here, as much as Kirishima has tried to distance himself from it. He’d been all in from the start, and everything he’s written since then reflects that.

Kirishima sits down on the floor, laying out his music in something of a chronological order and laughing to himself. Was he even trying to write about something other than these feelings? *Could* he have?

The story isn’t finished, like many of the songs. He’s still trying to figure out if he has the confidence to keep going, to lay himself bare for others when he doesn’t know how he feels about himself.

But he traces his fingers against his handwritten words, against the sheets of music, and he sighs. He wants to know how the story ends. And even when he doesn’t believe in himself, he believes that there’s something here that’s worth finishing.

“I don’t know if I can do this,” he admits, still looking across the street at the movie poster. “I don’t know if I can try again, what I’ll do if we can’t make this work.”

He knows Ashido, Jirou and Kaminari will stand by him. He hopes he’s built himself up enough that his music will still feel magical and fulfilling, even if he loses someone so vital.

“But I have to try, don’t I?” he asks.

The picture of Bakugou can’t answer him, and Kirishima doesn’t know if he’s ready to pick up the phone and call the real thing, yet.

—

It feels good to be back in the studio. It’s given him a sense of purpose, something he’s been missing. He doesn’t think it’s just for his sake that the others throw themselves into the music as hard as he does.

They have countless meetings with Kayama-san, rearranging songs and hammering out details. Jirou pulls out her violin and cello a few days in, says they should try playing with some different arrangements. Her classical training blends with their modern sensibilities, creating something Kirishima never would’ve imagined, himself.

It’s Kaminari who suggests the piano for another song, and Kirishima who reminds them that Ashido is the most accomplished pianist amongst them. Jirou loves the idea, but Ashido takes a bit

more convincing.

“Hey,” Kirishima says to her, “If I’m going to be singing, don’t you think you should be a part of the music, too? That way we’ll never be able to play a song without either one of us.”

Kaminari laughs, at that.

Jirou murmurs, “Like we’d ever go on without all four of us, anyway.”

But Ashido looks up at Kirishima with true gratitude shining in her eyes.

That afternoon, she takes up the piano to lay in the soft, melodic entry into a song. Jirou falls in with the rich notes of her cello, and finally the drum beat comes in. By the time Kirishima hits his cue with both guitar and vocals, it’s like a whole orchestra is playing out before him, beckoning him to come join in.

There’s something joyous about being locked in the studio with just the three of them and Kayama-san, turning everything they’ve been feeling into songs for the entire world to listen to, to understand and enjoy.

Kayama-san is in and out of the studio, occasionally bringing someone else in with her. Kirishima barely registers the other person’s presence, he’s so focused on the music he’s playing and the words he’s singing. When he stops to think about that, he almost laughs. Who would’ve ever thought there’d be a time when he could sing in front of a total stranger, and barely think about them?

Kirishima’s barely thinking about what’s been weighing on him until after lunch one day when he’s making his way back to the studio. His head is down as he scrolls through his phone. He stops short at the title of an entertainment news piece.

Make My Story Shaping Up to be One of the Best Reviewed Films of the Year

He clicks into the story, thumbs past review upon review praising Aizawa’s direction, Fukukado’s script, and Shindou’s acting. Some of the reviews call the gay romance “gimmicky,” but those are few and far between. Far more focus on the depth of emotion between the two leads, the love story that transcends any labels put on it.

What’s most striking is seeing rising star Bakugou Katsuki at his most vulnerable yet, one critic declares. We’ve always known he’s good at turning up the tension in any scene he’s in, but until now that tension has been more boyish anger than barely-contained sex appeal. In Make My Story, it’s become clear that Bakugou is a true talent. His reluctant attraction for Shindou’s character, coupled with his own emotional turmoil brings out one of the best performances of the year. In the most impacting scene of the film, Bakugou stands alone on screen as the weight of loss hits him, and he crumples with grief. It’s something I never thought him capable of, and I’m happy to be proven wrong. I can’t wait to see where his career takes him next.

Kirishima is smiling by the time he reaches the end of the article. He still hasn’t seen the movie, but he feels an overwhelming sense of relief. Coming out hasn’t ruined Bakugou’s career. The shadow that was cast over them both months ago might finally be lifting.

And anyway, hasn’t Bakugou always been too good to be defeated by that sort of scandal?

“I knew you could do it,” Kirishima says aloud, a split second before he crashes into another person walking down the hallway.

“I’m so sorry,” Kirishima says, looking up as he attempts to keep his balance. He looks at the person he’s just bumped into, his mind momentarily going blank with static.

“Oh, that’s alright,” Crimson Chevalier says, smiling kindly. “I’ve been looking for you, actually.”

—

“*C-c-c-crimson Chevalier!*” Kirishima squeaks like a balloon losing air, his voice going higher and higher until it’s barely audible.

Crimson Chevalier stands in the hallway of Midnight Studios, wearing plain jeans and a black leather jacket. Numerous silver rings on his fingers and a long chain around his neck, he looks at Kirishima with a wry smile. “Koukyou is fine.”

He wants Kirishima to call him by his actual surname. Kirishima is suddenly sure that he must be dreaming.

“Koukyou-san,” he says, “You were looking for me? Are you sure?”

Crimson Chevalier—*Koukyou*—lifts a brow and huffs a laugh. “Pretty sure, yeah. Unless there’s another Kirishima Eijirou who hangs out around here?”

Kirishima actually looks from side to side, like another person with his name might’ve materialized. But it’s just the two of them in the hallway, Koukyou-san chuckling lightly as his antics.

“What are you doing here?” Kirishima asks.

Koukyou-san shrugs. “I make the rounds. When you’ve been in the game as long as I have, you’ve got friends just about everywhere. Didn’t you notice me watching you record earlier? Nemuri-kun invited me.”

Kirishima has always thought of Kayama-san as a giant of the industry. She’s not old, exactly, but he’s always thought of her as definitively adult and almost ageless. But to a titan like Crimson Chevalier, she’s just a kid herself.

“I didn’t realize that was you,” Kirishima says, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly.

“You were busy with what you were doing,” Koukyou-san says, understanding. “In fact, it made me think I should go check out more of Hizashi-kun’s performances, if he had bands like yours opening for him.”

Of course, if Kayama-san is a kid, so is Yamada-san.

Kirishima is by no means a small person, but Koukyou-san towers over him. He’s got broad shoulders and wrinkled, sun-warmed skin. His eyes are dark, shadowed by his trademark pompadour of crimson hair.

“You were looking for me?” Kirishima asks in a small voice.

Koukyou-san chuckles again. “Would you believe that I heard you recording and wanted to know more about who could make music like that?”

Kirishima’s lips pull into a smile, but it’s a strained expression. “I don’t really believe in coincidences like that, anymore.”

Koukyou-san nods sagely, and then laughs with the force of thunder. “That’s probably smart. Really, I’ve got this old friend, Yagi. He calls me up out of the blue a few days ago, says he hasn’t seen much of me around. And I say, so what? I’m old, I’ve earned my right to enjoy my peace!”

Crimson Chevalier’s speaking voice is just as impactful—as manly and intimidating—as his singing. Kirishima takes an involuntary step back from the force of him.

“And he says, you’re not so old, Koukyou! And what am I supposed to say to that, when Yagi picked himself up after leukemia and worse? He’s really out there making the rest of us old folk look bad.”

Kirishima is rooted to the spot. Crimson Chevalier is friends with Yagi-san—All Might?

“Anyway, the long and short of it is that we had a chat, and Yagi really read me to rights. Told me we’re all foolish if we ignore the younger generation, and all that you kids are getting into.”

“Yagi-san said that?” Kirishima asks in a hushed voice.

Koukyou-san nods. “Yeah. But apparently it was some kid named Bakugou that put him up to it.” He tilts his head, raising a brow. His questioning look demands some explanation.

What is Kirishima supposed to tell him? “I—um. Bakugou is—*was*—my boyfriend.”

Koukyou-san runs a hand over his stubble-dotted chin, thoughtful. “That so? Nice that you can be so open about that. Back in my day, my people were always hounding me to get married. Throw people off the scent, as it were.”

Kirishima blinks, tries to think. The static is back in his brain, and no matter how many times he tries to flip the channel he comes up empty. Bakugou told Yagi-san to talk to Crimson about *him*? And Kirishima’s known that Crimson likes men for as long as he’s been aware of him—he’d never really thought about the beginning of Crimson’s career, when he would’ve had to be closeted. Now it sends a pang through him, the echo of pain he’s never had to feel in quite the same way.

“I—that is—um—” How is he still this hopeless? Here he is in front of his biggest idol, and he can’t even form a proper sentence! How is it that five years have gone by, and he’s just as useless as ever?

“Yeah?” Koukyou-san’s voice is kind, patient. He has a gruff exterior, an imposing presence. But the kindness, the understanding in his dark eyes are the same thing that comes across in his music.

“You’re my biggest inspiration,” Kirishima blurts out, all at once. “I have every single one of your CDs—all the greatest hits collections and live albums, too! I’ve seen you in concert six times! I don’t think I ever would’ve picked up a guitar, if it wasn’t for you!”

Koukyou-san’s eyes twinkle. He presses his lips into a flat, fond smile. “Nah, you would’ve. I just heard you playing, kid. There’s nothing that would’ve stopped you from getting there.”

Kirishima’s heart surges so much, he’s sure it’s about to burst straight out of his chest. He still can’t be sure that this isn’t a dream. “Still—thank you. I owe you so much, Koukyou-san!”

Crimson spreads his hands, shrugs. “If you want to give me the credit, I’m happy to take it.” He laughs, rough and warm, brings a hand down on Kirishima’s shoulder.

They start walking down the hall together, while Koukyou-san talks through the songs he’d heard Riot play. His opinions are those of a pro—technical notes, observations about how they each play

—mixed with the affection of a fan—talking about how the songs made him feel, what he thinks of the lyrics, how he'd laughed and clapped along.

Kirishima can't stop grinning. He's sure his smile is going to be twice as wide, permanently, once this moment is over.

As they approach the studio, Koukyou-san cocks his head to one side. "So, why's your boyfriend calling in favors for you, then?"

His happiness doesn't completely evaporate, but a cloud moves to cover its brightness. Kirishima looks down at his feet. "We've been fighting."

He doesn't know why, but he's comfortable telling Crimson these things. It's like Crimson is someone he's known for a long time—almost his entire life.

Koukyou-san nods, hmms from deep in his throat. "Trouble in paradise, is it?"

Kirishima huffs out a breath, runs a hand through his spikey hair. "It's just complicated, you know? I'm trying, but I don't know if we just don't understand each other at all. Just, it's hard to know what to do. I want to—no. I mean. I don't know." He claps a hand over his mouth, ashamed of his babbling.

Koukyou-san looks down at him with a critical eye, arms crossed over his chest. It's like his eyes cut through all of Kirishima's bluster and bullshit, right down to the core of who he is.

After a moment's silence, Koukyou-san says, "You know, no one's ever gonna hear you if you keep cutting yourself off."

Kirishima stops in the hallway, frozen. Is that what he's been doing to himself? Stopping short before anyone else even has the chance to judge him?

He bites down on his tongue before looking up. "I've been wondering what you'd think of me for years," he admits. "But I'm sort of scared about what your answer might be."

Koukyou-san clicks his tongue against his teeth. "Do you need me to tell you you're doing good? Any more than your record sales or reviews can tell you?"

Kirishima shakes his head. When Crimson puts it like that, it seems like a stupid question. Is he ungrateful, to keep asking for affirmations of his success?

"I've been doing what I do longer than most anyone. I've seen my generation come and go, and yours is a few more down from there. Not everyone likes what I do, all the time. But I've had a hell of a lot of fun doing it." Koukyou-san takes in a deep breath before he continues, "Do what you're going to do, kid. For as long as you enjoy it, and find meaning in it. With the people who're going to make it meaningful for you."

Now, Kirishima isn't just thinking of Bakugou. It's Ashido beside him, and Jirou and Kaminari. Kayama-san and Yamada-san. Amajiki-san and the other members of Suneater. Yaoyorozu, Iida, Midoriya, Todoroki, and Uraraka. Sero. Everyone he's met who's brought him this far, who's listened to him, who's shared their world with him.

"But," Koukyou-san says, hand coming down to pat Kirishima on the head, "You *are* doing good, Kirishima-kun."

Kirishima looks up with a smile, and there's no timidity to him when he asks, "Do you think you

want to help me with something, Koukyou-san?"

Chapter End Notes

["secrets" - onerepublic](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

crimson chevalier is my name in this au for crimson riot, who we obviously have very little info about in canon! his civilian name, for purposes of this fic, is just the japanese word for crimson.

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Bakugou feels a headache coming on as soon as Deku enters the room, but it's not as if that's anything new.

With his star rising over the past few years, he's done any number of these talk show interviews. When he was seventeen, he was sandwiched on a couch between Deku and Todoroki, grinding his teeth together as they answered questions about the storyline he had championed, while the audience screamed for him to hold Uraraka's hand. Before that—long, long before that—he was five or six, sitting next to a Yagi Toshinori who had whittled away to skin in bones in a matter of months as they still promoted the movie that was probably responsible for putting Yagi-san's life in jeopardy. And then, over the past few months, he's been running the circuit with Shindou You, ignoring his knife-sharp smiles and doing his best to act like a goddamn professional.

Today should be no different. A makeup artist has attacked his face with concealer and eyeliner, a hairstylist has fluffed his hair for the seventeenth time, and even Sero had come by to straighten the collar of his shirt and offer him two thumbs-up and a wide grin.

Now he's sitting backstage, ready for his cue, and Deku has come to sit beside him. It really is shaping up to be a fantastic fucking day, isn't it?

Deku's t-shirt reads "flannel" on it, and his jeans are cuffed to show off his trademark red sneakers. How Deku turned being a style-less nerd into a personal brand, Bakugou has never quite figured out. He still doesn't *get* what draws everyone towards Deku, what's made him so successful. It's so, so irritating.

"It's kinda weird, being back on this show together, isn't it," Deku says, rubbing a hand through his messy hair. Whoever his hair stylist is, they're either having a conniption or have just given up entirely at this point.

Bakugou barely looks at him. "It was planned this way, moron. The four of us back on the same show we did the first promos for fucking *UA* on."

Deku presses his lips together, gives Bakugou a too-patient look. "I know that! I just meant, now that it's actually happening, doesn't it feel strange? Like we've gone back in time, or something?"

Bakugou turns his head to look Deku straight in the eye and blinks at him owlishly. As loathe as he is to admit it, they aren't fifteen anymore. Deku's grown up to be solidly built, his t-shirt sleeves tight over his muscles. His green eyes are still big, round, and watery, but there's a confidence in him that Bakugou never would've guessed at in a million years, either ten years ago or five. They haven't gone back in time at all. There's no denying how much has changed, how much things have moved forward, since then.

Is it clear when people look at him, too? Yagi-san had mentioned how much he'd grown, had invited Bakugou over for dinner one night so that they could watch *Ground Zero* together and Yagi-san could offer Bakugou all his praises. He had smiled, but held his tongue, when Bakugou's character, on screen, pulled off a stunt that was a direct homage to the first *All Might* movie.

Has he moved forward at all?

Gritting his teeth, he resists the urge to reach into the pocket of his jeans for his cellphone. It's been weeks. If Kirishima wanted to call him, he would've by now. Bakugou's favor from Yagi-san had been a last-ditch attempt to offer some kind of olive branch without totally embarrassing himself, and so far there's been no response. Maybe he was wrong all along, and now all he's left with is this painful emptiness and the shame of having been wrong.

"Not everyone's a nostalgic crybaby like you," Bakugou mutters, sinking further back into the couch cushions, crossing his arms to keep from reaching for his phone.

"No, I guess not," Deku agrees. "Anyway, I like how things are now better."

A flash of envy strikes Bakugou like a slap across the face. He wishes he could be sure that his life now was better than it was before, that everything he's fought for and experienced has been worth it. But with this huge gaping hole in his life (in his heart), he can't parse out the rest of his feelings at all.

Hosted by Takeyama Yuu, *Mountain View* is the most watched talk show in the country. An actress herself, somehow Takeyama has made a brand out of her sharp tongue, bargain-hunting lifestyle, and general love of herself.

"So, kiddos," she says, legs thrown over the arm of her plush black armchair, "Here you are, back again."

Across from her at an angle sit Bakugou, Deku, Todoroki, and Uraraka. They're dressed casually but with style, primped and pressed for this appearance.

It's Todoroki who speaks first, blinking at Takeyama before saying flatly, "You did invite us."

Takeyama throws back her head and laughs, blonde curls bobbing with the motion. She swings her legs around so that her bright purple heels hit the floor, then leans forward conspiratorially. "Okay, okay. Let's get down to it, then. The cast of *UA* reunited and working with Yagi Toshinori-san! What can you tell me about *Because He is My Hero*?"

This time Bakugou's the one who cuts in. "It's a book. A book that's been out for about fifty years. If you're so damn curious, just read it."

Deku leans forward on the couch, waving his hands in front of his face. "A lot of people *have* read the book, and loved it, and that's why we're so excited to finally bring it to the big screen! Yagi-san met the author before he passed away, when he was our age! And now he wants to adapt the novel to tell the story in a way it couldn't be told, back when it was published."

Takeyama arches one perfectly-groomed eyebrow. "Oh, oh? And what does that mean, exactly?"

Todoroki shrugs. "The Prince's right hand, in the book, is a very loyal knight. Instead of casting the role with a male actor, Yaoyorozu Momo is going to play the part."

"I like the sound of Yaomomo-chan with a sword and armor," Takeyama says approvingly. The audience is quick to agree with her.

So will Jirou, Bakugou thinks. That sends a pang through him, because he hasn't seen any of the members of Riot since Todoroki's birthday party. And it's not that he cares, really, but he'd gotten used to having them around. Somehow, they'd become his friends.

“Anyway,” Uraraka is saying, “We can’t give everything away-- we don’t even know everything, yet! But we’re really excited to start filming the movie, and eventually for all of you to see it!”

“It’s so cute seeing you all together again,” Takeyama says. “Not that you haven’t been doing great on your own, you little prodigies. Award season is coming up-- anything you’re particularly excited for?”

Uraraka’s cheeks turn pink. “I don’t like speculating about things like that--”

“I’m rooting for Uraraka-san and *Zero Gravity*,” Deku says enthusiastically. “Aside from the fact that Uraraka-san is one of my best friends, I think it’s the best show that’s been on this year. You guys have all seen it, right?”

The audience cheers, and Uraraka’s cheeks go from baby pink to magenta.

Bakugou huffs, his lips twitching upwards. Uraraka’s bashfulness isn’t an act, but when she’s on her acting is the real deal. And on a prestige drama like *Zero Gravity*? No one else stands a chance against her.

“And someone else has been getting awards buzz,” Takeyama says, eyeing Bakugou.

Bakugou rolls his eyes, all arrogance.

Aizawa Shouta is one of the most awarded directors in the game, even though his persona tends to fly under the radar and people remember the names of his movies and the studio that produces him more than they remember shaggy, scraggly Aizawa showing up to awards shows in cotton shirts and loose pants. *Make My Story* needed a director of his caliber to be taken seriously, to be viewed as a capital-F Film and not just some niche genre fare. They managed to succeed in that. Critics have been lauding the direction, the screenplay, the acting – by all accounts, *Make My Story* is a success.

Bakugou’s been recognized for his TV acting countless times, but *UA* was a highschool drama and viewed as such by the industry. *Make My Story* is his first truly artistic film, with everything hinging on his acting ability.

Now, he huffs. “Who needs an award to tell them what they already know?”

The audience bursts into applause, littered through with whistles and cheers. Of course, if they’re *UA* fans, or Bakugou fans in particular, this is exactly the kind of response they’d been hoping for.

“C’mon, tell me you wouldn’t want to be nominated for a Quirky,” Takeyama insists. “Like that isn’t what every actor in the world is aiming for.”

Officially called the Shimura Nana Awards and widely acknowledged as the highest honor in the film industry, Quirkies gained their nickname via some anecdote Bakugou has never bothered to remember. It’s the last awards show of the season, and the biggest honor an actor, director or anyone else in the industry can win is walking away with one of those little gold statues.

Does he want one? Fuck yeah. Does he want to admit that on live TV? Hell no.

“All the average losers,” he scoffs. “Who cares about being *nominated*? If my performance was good, it should be an out-and-out victory. An undisputed first place.”

He stands by his work, by his talent, by his effort. And if his efforts in *Make My Story* were fueled by the fact that he was falling in love in real time, then so be it. He deserves something from all of

this, doesn't he?

He never told Kirishima that, did he—he never admitted how much he'd needed him to tell that story in a convincing, genuine way.

He shakes his head, dislodging the unwelcome thoughts as Takeyama moves on to ask Todoroki and Deku about what they've been doing this past year, what their awards predictions are, who they may or may not be dating.

Bakugou rolls his eyes when Deku starts blushing, and the idiot very unsubtly steals a glance at Todoroki. Fucking *moron*. If you don't want people speculating about you, don't be so goddamn obvious!

Maybe everyone in the world really is an idiot, because Takeyama doesn't call Deku out on his transparent-as-fuck crush on his costar. Instead, she rounds on Uraraka.

"So, we haven't seen you on the dating scene in a while," she says, curling her blonde hair around one finger. "At least, not since the news was all over you and Bakugou."

"The tabloids really take everything as far as it will go," Uraraka laughs, pressing her hands against her cheeks.

She pauses to glance at Bakugou, who rolls his eyes. As far as he's concerned, his days of being anyone's press boyfriend are over. Or needing a press boyfriend. Mixing all this shit up with what other people think of him is impossible, especially when he can't fix the one relationship he actually wants.

"But some things they get right, eh, Bakugou?" Takeyama says. "What's the story with you and Kirishima, these days? Was that a break-up, or just a fight?"

Bakugou feels his face coloring, knows he's gone some hideous shade of red. This was *not* on the list of topics for this interview. If it had been, he would not, under any circumstances, have shown up.

"Why don't you go fu—"

"I'm sure you've heard, Takeyama-san, about how busy Kirishima-kun's been lately," Deku cuts in, words all in a rush. "Didn't you hear about the charity benefit concert that Riot is organizing?"

The *what* now? What the hell is Deku talking about?

"Oh, yeah," Uraraka says excitedly, sitting forward and clapping her hands. "Mina-chan was telling me about it. They've got so many great artists lined up to be a part of it, including Nejire-chan! She was my biggest idol, growing up!"

Is this a conspiracy? How did everyone know about this but him?

"It's to benefit arts programming for at-risk youth," Todoroki puts in his staid way. "Especially LGBT youth."

Takeyama's lips press together in a thin line, and she sighs mournfully. "Yeah, the music industry is really light years ahead of us, aren't they? Still, I'm glad *someone* is stepping up!"

The other three are all quick to agree with her, gushing about Riot like they're paid advertisers.

Jealousy stabs at Bakugou like a knife in his chest. Would any of them even know about Riot, about Kirishima, if it wasn't for him? Wasn't he the one who'd introduced them all? How are they all so in the know, so friendly with them, when Bakugou's been locked out entirely?

Uraraka taps Bakugou's knee, and when he glances over at her she gives him a pointed look, trying to nudge him back into the conversation.

"So, you'll all be there, I bet," Takeyama says.

Will he? Bakugou wonders. Is he even fucking invited?

A few days later Bakugou is woken up by furious knocking at his door. He feels like death, and it's *not* because he didn't fall asleep until four am, because he was staring at his phone and willing Kirishima to call him. That isn't what happened at all, and if anyone says otherwise he's going to straight out murder them.

Bakugou drags himself out of bed and to his front door, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. It has to be someone he's allowed access to his building, so his guard is lowered when he pulls open the door and is immediately assaulted by a frankly excessive amount of *pink*.

"Were you asleep?" a high-pitched voice calls out, as the blur of pink pushes past him and into the apartment. "Wow, nice place! How come you've never invited us over? And why isn't the TV on? What are you *doing*, Bakugou?"

It's Ashido. Ashido Mina, Kirishima's goddamn *best friend* is standing in his apartment like she has some kind of right to be there. She's holding a bag with one of Satou's restaurant names printed across it, and if the smell is anything to go by, she brought *pancakes*.

Bakugou shakes his head and turns back towards the door, and it's only then that he realizes that Sero had come in behind Ashido. He offers Bakugou a wave as he toes out of his shoes, then kneels to retrieve the two bottles of chilled champagne he'd placed against the wall.

"What the fuck is *happening*," Bakugou groans. He's wearing sweatpants and a tank-top that Kirishima definitely left here, his face is creased from being squished against his pillows, and there's a headache pounding at the base of his skull with all the force of Kaminari's drumming.

"Did you forget," Sero asks, helping Ashido out of her coat and hanging both their jackets by the door.

"Forget *what*," Bakugou grinds out.

"It's *nominations* day!" Ashido throws her arms into the air, takeout bag swaying dangerously until Sero takes it from her. "We're here to watch the show with you and offer moral support!"

Bakugou sputters like he's just been dunked in cold water. The nominations for the Shimura Nana Awards are being announced this morning. And he'd been so caught up in everything else that he'd completely forgotten.

That still doesn't explain Ashido's presence in his foyer, though.

He rounds on Sero and crosses his arms over his chest, waiting for an explanation.

"I, um, we," Sero says, hooking a finger in his shirt collar and tugging nervously, "Well, Ashido

was over last night and then this morning she said she wanted to come along?"

What the fuck. How are Mr. and Mrs. Dysfunctional spending the night together when he and Kirishima are still apart? Where is the justice in that?

Ashido huffs, tapping her foot impatiently. "You don't have look *that* surprised, Bakugou. Anyway, we're all friends. And I want to see the nominations, and eat pancakes, and drink champagne to celebrate when they say you're up for an award!"

She says that with such confidence, it's almost gratifying. Maybe people have friends so that there others around to believe in them as much as they believe in themselves, or more.

Sero glances at his watch. "We've got twenty minutes. Bakugou, you want to go shower or something? We'll set up breakfast and the show."

—

He ends up sandwiched between Sero and Ashido on his couch, TV on and coffee table piled high with plates and drinks and utensils. The pancakes are delicious, and that eases Bakugou's mood enough that he doesn't kick the other two out when they keep stealing glances at each other over his head.

He doesn't think that anyone other than people in the industry actually watch the nominations; they just wait for the list to hit Twitter a few minutes after the show wraps.

It is, in all honesty, boring as fuck. The hosts are dressed to the nines, and they come out in a fanfare to announce each category and all of the nominations. To anyone who doesn't know or care much about film, it's probably agonizing.

But Bakugou has seen almost all of the movies, and he knows people in all of these sub-industries. The set and costume designers, the special effects crews, the screenwriters and directors, and of course the actors. He's been obsessed with his industry ever since he was a child, and now he finds himself explaining its ins and outs as Ashido asks questions in between categories.

"I haven't seen any of these movies," Ashido whines, wrinkling her nose. "We were on tour for most of the year, and it's hard to get to a movie theater when you're playing a show every third night."

Bakugou bites down on the inside of his cheek, because all he can imagine is seeing all the nominated movies with Kirishima, and going on and on about what he thinks of each of them, and Kirishima looking at him and listening all the while, that stupidly-handsome smile on his face.

His mind either focuses on that, or the fact that the acting nominations are coming up. In between, there's no peace for Bakugou.

Make My Story lands its first nomination for Best Screenplay, putting Fukukado-san up for the award. The film is skipped over for Best Supporting Actor, which is where Shindou's performance would've landed him, given his role.

Bakugou doesn't know what to feel about that. The movie couldn't have been made without Shindou, but the guy's still an asshole. But is he an asshole who deserved an acting nomination?

He stops breathing sometime during the Best Actress nominations, knowing what's coming next.

"And for Best Actor," one of the hosts says, pulling open the golden envelope, "Toogata Mirio, for

his role in *The Million Man*. Shishikura Seiji, for *Meat Cleaver*. Nishiya Shinji, for *Out of the Woods*. Kamihara Shinya, for *The Edge of the World*. And Bakugou Katsuki, for *Make My Story*.”

It’s just a nomination, he thinks first. Unless he wins the award, what good is it?

But then Ashido and Sero are embracing him from either side, and they’re both cheering, and Sero is trying to reach for the champagne without letting go of Bakugou, and Ashido is grabbing her phone and saying, “Pictures! I need a picture of the *face* you’re making!” And for a moment, Bakugou doesn’t feel any doubts at all, just a happiness that warms him up like sunshine, because instead of being overshadowed by his rational mind his joy is amplified by the feelings of those around him.

“Quirky Nominated Actor Bakugou Katsuki!” Ashido cheers, and then Sero joins in, and it becomes a chant, “Quirky Nominated Actor Bakugou Katsuki! *Quirky Nominated Actor Bakugou Katsuki!*”

On the coffee table, Bakugou’s phone lights up, a dozen text messages coming in all at once. Deku, Todoroki, Uraraka, Yaoyorozu, Iida, Aoyama, Satou, Hagakure... fucking hell, when did he give so many people his number? And how does he undo that terrible decision immediately?

The rest of the nominations go by in a blur—*Make My Story* doesn’t get a nod for Best Picture, but Aizawa is up for Best Director. For a film of its budget and riskiness, those are some considerable wins. Bakugou feels like he’s just swallowed a cloud, something light and airy rising in his chest.

You’re happy, he thinks dumbly. This is something you can be proud of, without anything casting a shadow over it.

—

“We’ve got rehearsal soon,” Ashido says by way of excuse, as the three of them take the empty plates to the kitchen. She casts a sidelong look at Bakugou, then tugs him by the wrist out into the hall, away from Sero.

“What,” Bakugou grouses. Maybe, *maybe* he’s alright with her showing up here, but he never once consented to being manhandled.

Ashido tugs him in, speaks close to his ear. “Jirou and Kaminari are still on guard duty, even though Kirishima really wanted to sneak out and be here, today. I think—I think he knows his own feelings, and I trust him, but you really, really hurt him, you asshole.”

She doesn’t say this like any sort of accusation. Rather, it’s just a naked fact. That makes it hurt more, somehow.

Bakugou pulls himself away, crosses his arms over his chest. “Well, he fucking hurt me, too. You ever think about that?”

Ashido sighs, hands on her hips. “Of course I did! I’m not here to beat you up for him, or anything —”

Bakugou scoffs, at that. Who does Pinky think she’s kidding? She’d never land a punch on him.

“—or getting someone else to do it, either,” she amends, lower lip curving into a pout. “You’re both my friends, and I know what it’s like to screw up a relationship because you’re scared, or selfish, okay?”

Her dark eyes dart back towards the kitchen. Neither of them is under any illusions that Sero isn't hearing all of this.

"Just." Ashido takes a deep breath. "You both really helped me out, you know? Kirishima is my best friend, and you're important to me, too. So, don't tell the others, but—here."

She holds out a piece of reddish paper, folded neatly in half. Mutely, Bakugou takes it from her.

She rushes back to the kitchen to say her goodbyes to Sero, leaving Bakugou alone to unfold the paper and see what's written on it.

The block letters are painfully familiar; he can almost see Kirishima's strong hand gripping the pen, forming the words.

I knew you could do it! Wish I'd been there with you.

He knew. He must've given the note to Ashido a day ago, long before she'd arrived here. He'd *known*, had believed that strongly in Bakugou's success. There hadn't been a doubt in Kirishima's mind.

Tears prickle in Bakugou's eyes, and he roughly wipes them away with the back of his hand. Fuck. There really is just one thing, one person, who can make his happiness complete.

It's not like he hasn't tried to fix things. He'd told Yagi-san to call Crimson Chevalier, hadn't he? Who else would have been able to pull that off?

But that plan had given him cover, deniability. He hadn't had to lay himself bare, to accept either Kirishima acceptance or his rejection. He hasn't taken that final, irrevocable risk.

His hand clenches around the red paper, and that's when he notices the second item tucked behind the card.

It's a ticket, printed on sleek black cardstock, with words written across it in metallic red, pink, purple and yellow.

*RIOT! And Midnight Records PRESENT:
The First Annual COLOR YOUR WORLD Concert
Featuring Present Mic, Nejire-Chan, Fatgum, Suneater, and surprise guest appearances!*

ADMIT ONE VIP GUEST

Well, shit. If he was waiting for an invitation, it looks like he just got one.

—

"I thought this was supposed to be exclusive," Bakugou grumbles, pushing his way past Todoroki, Uraraka and Yaoyorozu as he tries to get to his seat. Yaoyorozu he'll allow, since she's dating Jirou. But the rest of them? Why do they rank as VIPs?

The VIP box sits on a balcony, overlooking the stage and above the massive area for standing-room in front of it. The stadium is filled with seats—by the time it's full, it will hold tens of thousands of people.

Kirishima is going to perform to this crowd? Does he know what he's getting himself into?

"They are the best seats in the house," Sero says, taking his seat next to Bakugou. On his other

side sits Hagakure, who looks like she's been waving at Bakugou for five minutes before he actually notices her.

"Oh," he says, finally. "Hey."

Hagakure lights up, reaches over Sero to frantically tap on Bakugou's shoulder. "Isn't this so exciting? It wasn't too long ago that we were at one of their very first concerts in the city! And now Riot's gotten so big and famous!"

Obviously, Bakugou wants to say. He'd been the one to tip Hagakure off about Riot's first concert, because he couldn't actually believe it when he'd seen the info—Kirishima Eijirou, in a band, playing as the opening act for Present Mic. Going by himself would've attracted too much attention, but Hagakure's always been good at deflecting press.

"Yeah," he mutters, sinking back into his seat. "It's really fucking great."

Hagakure rolls her eyes, turns back to chat with Uraraka. The box slowly fills up with others—Midoriya and Iida, Toogata Mirio, Shinsou Hitoshi. Bakugou wonders how many of these losers Kirishima invited in person. Has he been talking to all of them, for the weeks he's kept radio silent with Bakugou? And if so, how is that fair?

You ruined it, he tells himself. You should've reacted differently, better, when Kirishima was so upset.

But he was upset himself, and how could he be expected to think straight, then? It's easy for everyone—himself included—to assume he's the one in the wrong. But he'd extended the goddamn olive branch! When is Kirishima going to reach forward and take it, already?

"I can hear you grinding your teeth," Sero says to him.

He still hasn't gotten the whole story out of Sero, about why he and Ashido have decided to try again or what's passed between them. Sero is being surprisingly closed-lipped about the entire situation, and it's annoying as fuck. Hasn't he had to deal with all their drama for months? Doesn't he deserve to know if they're going to crash and burn again?

But Sero has been happier, these past few days, and definitely more at ease. Of course, with Bakugou nominated for a Shimura Nana Award, Sero's own stock is rising. Whether Bakugou wins or not, Sero's going to have his hands full for the next eighteen months at least. But his recent happiness isn't the kind of frantic, productive energy he usually has when he's busy being Bakugou's agent. It's something calmer, more innate.

"Oh, fuck me," Bakugou groans, rubbing a hand down his face. "You're in love."

The tips of Sero's ears turn pink, and he turns to clamp a hand over Bakugou's mouth. "Shh, shh, we're not telling anyone we're back together, yet!"

Bakugou shoves him away, barks out a harsh laugh. "Then maybe don't show up at my place the morning after you've been someone's goddamn booty call, then!"

The blush travels across Sero's face, over his nose and cheeks. "It wasn't like *that*, we were just talking, and one thing led to another—"

"Shut up, you're so embarrassing," Bakugou elbows Sero in the stomach.

"Quiet, everyone," Iida orders from the row of seats behind them. "It's starting!"

Bakugou lifts a hand to flip Iida the bird, but as the stadium lights dim and the crowd roars in anticipation, he forgets his irritation and watches the stage, instead.

Present Mic opens, which is somehow fitting. He doesn't play a full set, but goes through a number of his hits before covering one of Riot's own songs. Before he leaves the stage, he talks about how "those kids" have inspired him, and how happy he is that they still respect the old guard enough to invite him to participate in this concert.

Fatgum is next. Bakugou doesn't think he's ever actually heard his music, until he starts rapping. Then he realizes that *everyone* has heard Fatgum's music, whether they know it or not. The large man wears furious orange, his movements on stage slow and calming even as his words go a million miles a second. He ends his set wishing the audience peace and hope in who they are.

Nejire-chan is on next. Bakugou mostly knows her from her acting work, but as an idol she's adept at most things. She wears a midnight-blue gown that shines like there are stars embedded in it, delicate gossamer wings extending from her back. Everyone in the stadium is screaming her name, singing along to every lyric of her songs.

After her comes Suneater, with Amajiki Tamaki leading the way. Bakugou feels the familiar stirrings of jealousy as he looks out at Amajiki, sees how effortlessly he plays his guitar, the emotion he conveys with his voice. He and Kirishima are bonded through music, in a way that Bakugou can never get close to. But that doesn't mean he's out of luck, does it?

Before Suneater leaves the stage, Nejire-chan returns to it. She waltzes up to the microphone, and she and Amajiki begin to sing one of Riot's songs, the first one Ashido and Kirishima had sung on stage together. Their voices harmonize differently than Ashido and Kirishima's, giving an entirely different tone to the song. But it works, and the crowd erupts with applause and cheers when they're through.

At the close of the set, the stage goes dark once more. It stays that way for agonizing minutes, until everyone knows who must be coming next.

Bakugou's heart beats fast, faster, until he's sure it's about to get lodged in his throat. Next to him, Sero grabs his shoulder, giving it a comforting squeeze.

"Breathe, man," he says. "I think you're going to enjoy this."

A single spotlight shines down on the stage, revealing a sleek black piano and Ashido sitting at it. She's dressed in perfectly-tailored black cigarette pants and a metallic magenta blazer. As the crowd begins to clap, she lifts a hand and waves. Then she brings one finger to her lips, and the crowd immediately goes silent. Ashido smiles to herself, her fingers dancing over the piano keys.

She starts to play, and within a few notes Bakugou recognizes the song. It's the same one he'd caught her singing at Todoroki's birthday party, sad and mournful. She plays through the first verse, her voice rich and deep and filled with sorrow. The entire crowd holds its breath.

Beside him, Sero clutches his hands together. Bakugou wonders if he knows that Ashido is singing for him, *to* him.

As the first verse ends, a second spotlight turns on. Just to one side, Jirou stands with an electric violin perched between her chin and shoulder. Her outfit is like Ashido's, her blazer a deep purple.

As Ashido begins to sing again, Jirou lays her bow across the violin strings and adds a new dimension to the song.

Then, for the third verse, a third spotlight. Kaminari stands up, drumsticks crossed together over his head. His yellow blazer catches the light as he sits down, finally bringing the drumbeat into the song.

It's hard to breathe, because there's only one person left. There's no fourth verse, just a bridge back into the chorus. And as it starts, the fourth spotlight hits the stage.

Kirishima's blazer is, of course, a deep red. From his shiny black shoes to his perfectly-spiked hair, he's man full of confidence and purpose. He ducks his head and shuts his eyes as he plays the melody of the song, the guitar finally lifting the music to the joyful feeling it usually has.

Kirishima doesn't join in on the singing, but Ashido's voice has changed through every verse. Instead of mourning, she's celebrating now. As the song comes to a close, music ending abruptly, the spotlights shut off all at once.

Then, a low light rises from the stage, illuminating the four members of Riot.

"Hey," Kirishima says, into the microphone. "We're Riot. Thanks for being here, and we hope you enjoy the show!"

—

The show goes by in a blur. The four members of Riot rotate on the mic, each introducing songs and poking fun at each other. Ashido and Kirishima are both singing, and the audience is loving every minute of it. They go through songs from their first album, every radio hit and all the lesser-knowns.

Bakugou wonders if he's imagining it, the way Kirishima's eyes keep drifting towards the VIP box. There's no way he can see him up here, right? But maybe he just expects that Bakugou will be there, and that's good enough. Maybe he believes in that as surely as he believed that Bakugou would get his nomination.

This is how Kirishima should always look, doing what he loves with confidence, smiling through it all. Bakugou wants to bottle up how he feels right now, or solidify it so he can hit Kirishima over the head with it every time he starts doubting himself.

They've gone through most of the material they have—Bakugou knows, because he knows all of Kirishima's songs. There's the new album they've been working on, but are they ready to let those songs out into the world, yet? Kirishima was even keeping them secret from Bakugou.

Kirishima has one hand resting on the mic stand, guitar slung across his back. "Hey, everyone. I want to thank you all for being here, from the bottom of my heart. There's nothing manlier than standing up for a cause you believe in, and so I just want to say—all of you guys are my heroes, right now!"

The crowd cheers, whistles, calls out its adoration—they love Kirishima, that much is abundantly clear. Bakugou is caught between jealousy and the thought that it's about fucking time that the world appreciated Kirishima, and realized what Bakugou has known for years.

Kirishima laughs bashfully, runs a hand through his hair. Maybe he's not as confident as he's been projecting, all night. "This is a special night for us for a lot of reasons. And to send it off right, we want to share a new song with you guys. I think we might need a little help, though. What do you

think, Ashido?”

Leaning against her own mic, Ashido shrugs elaborately. “Maybe just a little.”

“Okay, then.” Kirishima slings his guitar back around, as Kaminari begins to drum. “Let’s go.”

Bakugou’s never heard this song before. He shuts his eyes for a moment, letting it wash over him, but then Kirishima starts to sing and he has to open his eyes again, because he has to know how Kirishima looks in that moment.

Ashido’s back at the piano, light notes flowing through the song. Jirou and Kirishima play the song on their guitars, facing each other and laughing as they go. Kaminari keeps up the steady beat, and Bakugou swears it’s the same tempo his heart is pumping blood to.

The first chorus fades out, and then someone else starts singing. Bakugou can’t place the voice until a spotlight hits the stage, and a tall, older man in a rough leather jacket steps up to Kirishima, mic in hand.

He throws an arm around Kirishima’s shoulders, and then the two of them are singing together—Crimson Chevalier and Riot, their music coming together in one song.

Holy shit. *Holy fucking shit*, Bakugou thought they’d just talk, or something! But Kirishima, that stupid genius, he’d gotten Crimson Chevalier to sing on one of his songs! He’s on a stage in front of tens of thousand of people, and he’s singing with his idol, and the entire world is looking at him, and loving him, and everything he represents.

I love him so fucking much, Bakugou thinks, chest tight. He loves him so much he wants to reach out and grab him right now, and tell him so.

The song rises to a triumphant crescendo. Kirishima is singing with such passion it’s like he’s screaming into the mic, Crimson Chevalier and Ashido right along with him.

And then it’s done.

Kirishima reaches up as if to brush tears from his eyes. This time, when he looks towards the VIP box, Bakugou knows he isn’t imagining Kirishima’s gaze on him. Then he says, slowly and clearly, “That was for you. And for me. And for everyone who’s ever felt this way.”

Chapter End Notes

["save rock and roll" - fall out boy and elton john](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

...idk what to say here, so i'll keep it brief. that last scene has been on my mind for over a year now. i really hope you all enjoyed this chapter.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's not blood that's flowing through his veins, but electricity. Every one of his senses is heightened, but he feels far away from his own body. His fingertips throb from where he'd strummed guitar strings, his ears ringing as the crowd cheers. Sweat beads down his brow, and his throat throbs because just seconds ago, he was singing his heart out.

Crimson Chevalier has already left the stage. The four of them step up to the edge of the stage—Kirishima links hands with Kaminari and Ashido, and Jirou joins at Ashido's other side.

"We're Riot," Kirishima says, "Goodnight, and thank you everybody!"

Riot takes a bow as one unit, one organism, sharing one beating heart. The stage lights go black, and the crowd roars as they leave the stage.

Backstage, he can't seem to catch his breath. The noise of the crowd doesn't let up in the slightest, crashing over him in wave upon wave. They're stomping their feet and clapping their hands, whistling and yelling. They're calling for Riot, for Ashido, for Kaminari and Jirou. For Kirishima.

Koukyou-san leans against the wall, arms crossed over his chest as he grins wryly. "Take it from an old man," he says. "When you get an audience that worked up, you owe them an encore."

Kirishima blinks, turns to the other members of the band. They've been playing the opening act for so long, and before that they were playing at clubs and other small gigs. They've never done an encore after a show like this before. Shit, do they even have any songs left to play?

"I know you've got something," Ashido says. She calls out to one of the stage managers, who quickly procures Kirishima's acoustic guitar.

When he sees it, he knows exactly what Ashido is thinking.

As if sensing his objection, Jirou steps forward and jabs him in the chest with one finger. "Riot's had our moment, a million times over, tonight. Now you get out there and have yours."

"We'll back you up, of course," Kaminari says, as though it's a given.

Kirishima inhales deeply, eyes filling with grateful tears as he looks at the three of them. It is a given—they're always going to be right beside him.

He pulls the guitar strap over his head, adjusting the instrument in his hands.

"Let's go."

--

A single, clear spotlight shines down on him. Kirishima sits on a high stool, guitar balanced on one knee. He's shed his bright red blazer, left in a black button-down with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He strums the guitar once, twice.

He looks out at the crowd, but their faces all blur into a mess of indistinct shapes and color. He closes his eyes, and imagines the one face he's been longing for.

He clears his throat and leans towards the mic. "It's not a secret how I feel about you. But I think I've always been better at putting things into a song, instead of just saying them."

The crowd intakes a breath, all at once. In that moment, Kirishima is suspended in silence. He opens his eyes, and swears he sees Bakugou in the VIP box, leaning forward against the railing.

"It always had to be you." It feels like a whisper, but thanks to the microphone his words carry across the crowd, straight to the person he intends them for.

He begins to play.

--

It's finally over. The four of them arrive backstage to a crowd—Koukyou-san and Yamada-san, Amajiki-san and the rest of Suneater, Nejire-chan and Fatgum. Their musicals idols quiet as the four members of Riot approach. Then, all at once, they raise their hands and offer Riot a resounding round of applause.

Ashido is teary eyed as she pulls Kirishima into a crushing hug. "I think I'd be happy if this was the last performance of my life," she says. "It just felt *perfect*."

Kaminari wraps his arms around both of them. "Don't say that," he scoffs. "We've got a lot more to give, right?"

Jirou, who's usually the one who has to be forced into group hugs, ducks down beneath their tangled arms and reemerges in the middle of the embrace. She's smiling openly, her cheeks pink, her dark eyes glistening. "Fuck yeah," she says. "We've gotta do that every night for the rest of our lives."

They spin in a circle together, laughing and laughing even though their feet are throbbing and their throats ache.

"Maybe every other night?" Kirishima suggests. They laugh again, and would fall over if Amajiki-san didn't rush forward to push them upright.

When they finally pull away from each other, Kirishima goes to each of their guests in turn, thanking them profusely. It'd been his own arrogance that had him rushing to put this event together, to even dare to ask these people to perform on the same stage as him.

He doesn't regret it. He still admires everyone one of these artists more than he can properly say. But he doesn't want to spend his whole life admiring them from afar. He wants to be their peer, an artist alongside them. Tonight, he'd gotten to that point, and nothing has ever felt so good.

Every one of his cells is supercharged. They're all singing out their happiness, drowning in adrenaline and endorphins. If he kissed someone right now, would they taste his happiness? Would it be infectious, a startling energy shared between them?

There's only one person he wants to kiss, but Kirishima wants him so badly. He has enough desire for a thousand people.

"Hey!" One of the stage managers calls out, flustered. "Do you have a pass? You can't just rush back here!"

"Tch. Do you know who the fuck I am?" An arrogant voice rings through the corridor, and Kirishima's heart stops.

Bakugou Katsuki steps into view, eyes narrowed dangerously as he scans the crowd. When his gaze finally lands on Kirishima, he huffs out an irritated breath.

“You’ve got some nerve,” he growls.

Kirishima has imagined this moment a thousand times, every second that he’d agonized over sending Bakugou a ticket for tonight. He knew he wanted Bakugou here, no matter what the risks or the costs. But he also knows it can’t be simple—Bakugou’s not just going to look at him and forgive everything. How can he? Kirishima had doubted the very core of his feelings. Kirishima had doubted himself. And it’s the latter that Bakugou found most insulting.

He knows it won’t be easy to fix things. But he’s buoyed by his success, his exhilaration, his joy. He crosses the room, arms spread wide.

Bakugou stares at him, challenge lurking in his deep red eyes.

Kirishima grabs him by the shoulders, tugging him close. Bakugou opens his mouth to protest, but before he can Kirishima presses their lips together. The next moment feels like diving deep underwater, everything he feels rushing up to greet him and blocking out all sight and sound from the outside world. Instead, all he’s aware of is Bakugou in his arms, Bakugou grabbing at the back of his shirt, Bakugou kissing him back.

He could write a thousand songs about this moment. There’s no single thing he can say to do it justice, other than this must be the greatest kiss in history. Nothing is ever going to come close to it, except maybe the next time he kisses Bakugou. He’s got so many plans to kiss Bakugou, because it’s the only thing he ever wants to do, again.

Unfortunately, he still has to breathe. He pulls away, gasping, eyes fixed on the redness of Bakugou’s lips. He forces himself to look up, to take in Bakugou’s expression. Kirishima frowns, confused.

“Are you mad,” he asks, voice coming out in a squeak.

“Take a guess,” Bakugou says, voice low and rough and dangerous.

“Why are you mad at me?” Kirishima tries. All things considered, he thinks he can be forgiven a lot of things. Or at least, that Bakugou should put his anger aside and not ruin this moment.

Bakugou’s hands curl at his sides, clenching into fists. He shuts his eyes, face scrunching up painfully. He looks back at Kirishima, and lets out a frustrated growl.

“I can’t write you a fucking song!” he yells. “All I can do is tell you I love you, and you never even listen, you asshole! And then you just get up on stage and play *that*, and how am I ever supposed to top that? You *wrote me a goddamn song!*”

Kirishima can’t help it—he laughs. It bubbles out of him like he’s just drunken a glass of champagne too quickly. He reaches out and grabs Bakugou’s hands, pressing a line of kisses across his knuckles.

“I didn’t know how else to say I love you too,” Kirishima says, voice barely a whisper. The words couldn’t be more true, but they’re so hard to say when he doesn’t think he’s worthy of them. It was easier to sing with Crimson Chevalier, to sing in front of thousands of people, than to look Bakugou in the eye and tell him the whole truth. But Bakugou deserves that, and more. So Kirishima takes a deep breath, and looks him in the eye.

“Besides,” he continues, as casually as he can, “They’re all for you.”

Bakugou trembles. He rips his hands out of Kirishima’s grip, beating his fists against Kirishima’s chest. “*Asshole*,” he hisses, but his voice is thick. Kirishima can see the tears gathered on his lashes, just about to fall.

Kirishima pulls Bakugou against his chest, holding onto him for dear life. Bakugou melts against him, even as he continues muttering curses under his breath.

“I’m sorry it took me so long,” Kirishima says, resting his chin against the top of Bakugou’s head. “I’m kind of a slow learner. But I got there in the end.”

Bakugou’s hands find Kirishima’s hips, squeezing tightly. “You’re the biggest idiot I’ve ever met. And I fucking love you so much I can’t even stand it.”

“I love you, too,” Kirishima says again.

“*Finally!*”

The voice behind him startles Kirishima, and Bakugou stiffens in his arms. They both straighten up, turning to look at the small crowd that’s been watching them all the while—Ashido and Kaminari and Jirou, Nejire and Amajiki, Fatgum and the rest of Suneater, Present Mic and Crimson Chevalier.

“You owe me five thousand yen,” Ashido says, elbowing Kaminari in the side.

“You bet against us, dunce face?” Bakugou hisses.

Kaminari is outraged. “As if! I thought Kirishima would break down and try to get you back *weeks* ago.”

Still, Bakugou rounds on him, and Kirishima is too stunned to move. A hand comes to rest on his shoulder, strong and comforting. He glances up at Koukyou-san’s twinkling eyes and half-smile.

“So, that’s the boyfriend?”

They hadn’t gotten to discussing the details, but Kirishima nods all the same. “Yeah,” he breathes out in a wistful sigh, “Isn’t he great?”

Bakugou, red-faced, currently has Kaminari in a headlock, while Kaminari shrieks for mercy. Jirou is taking pictures on her phone, and Ashido is still demanding her money.

Koukyou-san chuckles. “I think you kids will be alright.”

--

They hadn’t planned on an afterparty, and the show ended so late into the night that in an hour or so the sun will be rising. Despite this, when the car drops Riot back at their apartment, there’s a small caravan behind them.

Kirishima gets out of the car, stretching his arms over his head and trying to get his thoughts in order. He’s keyed up but exhausted, suspended in some strange state between being awake and being asleep. Is he dreaming? Everything about tonight feels like a dream.

Someone nudges him forward, and within a few moments he’s sitting on the couch in the living room. People keep piling into the apartment, grabbing drinks from the fridge and sitting on the

carpeted floor when the seats fill up.

Jirou and Yaoyorozu are sharing one of the armchairs, and Kaminari is squeezed in next to Kirishima, closer and closer, as others pile onto the other end of the couch. Ashido is perched on the kitchen counter, with Sero standing beside her, one hand resting on her knee.

Sitting in a line on the floor, yawning and laughing in turns, are Midoriya, Iida, and Uraraka. Todoroki and Shinsou are on the couch, both looking like they're not quite sure how they ended up here, or how to join in on the conversation. Hagakure and Ojirou are on the floor near Jirou and Yaoyorozu.

Thankfully, the more experienced musicians had gone off to their own places to get some rest—Kirishima doesn't know what he would do if Crimson Chevalier suddenly appeared in his kitchen.

Bakugou walks in once everyone is already seated. Kirishima's brow furrows—where had he been, until now? Kirishima had thought he'd been in the same car as Sero and Shinsou. Was he pacing outside, wondering whether he was welcome to come inside? Or is Kirishima the only one who's tortured by that sort of insecurity?

“Hey.” Ashido kicks at him lightly with one foot, still covered in sheer black tights. “Where've you been, mister?”

Bakugou bats her away, grimacing. “Ordering pizzas,” he mutters. “What, you thought you'd keep this crowd up the entire night and not fucking feed them? Idiots.”

As soon as Bakugou says it, Kirishima realizes he's famished. He could eat an entire one of those pizzas on his own. But Bakugou had also taken the initiative to provide for their friends, who'd come to Kirishima's place. Forget what Kirishima had thought earlier—Bakugou feels no insecurity. He's treating Kirishima's home as if it's his own.

Half-drunk on exhaustion and happiness, Kirishima stumbles to his feet and crosses the floor to grab both of Bakugou's hands in his.

“Babe,” he says, smiling to show all of his teeth. “You're so good at this, I wanna marry you right now.”

A furious red blush crawls up Bakugou's neck and across his cheeks. “Can you not be a moron for once in your goddamn life?” he says, pulling away half-heartedly.

“Oh, next time, let's get Kacchan to cook for us!” Midoriya says from where he's sitting on the floor. “He's really good at it—remember, when he used to bring food to the set of *UA*?”

Uraraka and Todoroki nod their agreement.

“Shut up, Deku, I'll kill you,” Bakugou says, so quickly that the worlds all run together. It's an automatic response, with no actual feeling behind the words.

“You've never cooked for me.” Kirishima pouts, but he's also intrigued. How many more things does he have left to learn about Bakugou? He wants to take his time, discover them each one by one.

Bakugou elbows Kirishima in the stomach, and when Kirishima lurches forward in pain Bakugou whispers darkly in his ear, “You ever fucking try and break up with me, again, and I never will.”

--

The empty pizza boxes are precariously balanced on the coffee table. Most of them are probably not going to make it until sunrise. Eyes heavy and voices hoarse, they nevertheless persevere to keep the party going as long as they can.

Ashido's still sitting on the counter, swinging her legs back and forth. She clears her throat, gets absolutely no one's attention, and then propels herself forward so that she lands on her feet. "*Hey!*"

Her voice is sharp enough to cut through all the other conversations, and immediately all eyes are on her. In a space full of strong personalities and star power, Ashido can still command the room.

She rests one hand on her hip, raises the other in the air. "I have something to say!"

"Just spit it out, raccoon eyes," Bakugou grouches at her. "Stop being so dramatic."

Ashido's eyes twinkle as she sticks out her tongue at him. "I'm not taking that from you, Mr. I'm-Gonna-Kiss-Kirishima-In-Front-Of-Everyone."

Bakugou barely blinks, no shame to speak of in his expression. "Shitty nickname. Try harder."

"Oh," Ashido huffs out, waving a hand at him dismissively. "*Anyway*. I just wanted to let everyone knows, so no one gets the wrong idea, but—"

"We're dating, again," Sero cuts in, blurting the words out like they're tripping over themselves to make it out of his mouth. "I mean, ah. Ashido asked me if I wanted to try again, and I do, I really do, so. We are. Trying. And Dating."

Ashido purses her lips, trying to stifle her laughter. She reaches up on her toes to pinch Sero's cheek, looking at him adoringly. "I don't think any of you are going to run to tell the press, and anyway we're probably not the same headline material as Kirishima and Bakugou, but we're taking things slow. And we just thought, as our friends, you should know."

The room is quiet for a moment, although from his spot near Kirishima Bakugou just mutters, "Fucking dramatic."

The others are quick to congratulate Ashido and Sero, or tease them. Kirishima, however, gets up from the couch and jabs a finger at both of them.

"Take care of each other, okay?" He means his words to come out stern—looking out for his friends, even if that means trying to intimidate both of them. But instead, the words come out like a question, almost a plea.

Ashido leans in close to Sero, rests her head against his shoulder. "We're going to try."

Sero wraps an arm around Ashido's waist, breathes deeply. "We figured it's better that you all know. So if we get too wrapped up in ourselves, you can remind us of what's important."

Kirishima smiles, at that. After all, it's his duty to return the favor, if he needs to.

"Wait a minute," Kaminari says, looking around the room and doing some frantic calculations with his fingers. "Ashido, you and Sero are back together, and Jirou and Yaomomo are going strong... and Kirishima and Bakugou are making out in front of anyone and everyone... no, no, this can't be!"

"What?" Jirou asks, tilting her head to one side.

“I’m the only one who came out of this whole thing *without even a date!*” Kaminari drags a hand down his face, expression stricken and desolate. “This doesn’t even make sense! I’m as bi as Ashido, my dating pool should be bigger than anyone’s! How does no one want to date me?”

“Maybe because you’re dumber than a bag of rocks,” Bakugou suggests snidely.

“That can’t be it,” Kaminari wails. “Ashido and Kirishima are just as dumb as I am!”

“It’s true,” Jirou says in an aside to Yaoyorozu. “My life is very difficult.”

On the couch, Shinsou tuts and crosses his arms over his chest. “You want it to much,” he says in his deep, even voice.

“I’ve been robbed,” Kaminari is saying, barely hearing him. “I put so much effort into your guys’ lives, now you have to help me! Set me up with the hottest, nicest people you know! As soon as possible!”

--

During the commotion, Kirishima grabs Bakugou’s hand and pulls him out of the living room and into his bedroom. The blinds are open, the purple-pink light of the moment before sunrise lighting the room. Kirishima sits at the head of the bed, and Bakugou at the foot, each of them turned towards the other.

“It can wait,” Bakugou says. “You’re dead on your fucking feet.”

Kirishima does feel like he could either pass out immediately or stay away for the next three days. But he shakes his head, gives Bakugou a reassuring smile. “It can,” he agrees. “But I’d rather we do this now.”

Bakugou inhales sharply, eyes squeezing shut for a moment like he’s bracing for a blow.

“I’ve known how I feel about you for a long time,” Kirishima says. He doesn’t know if he can say what Bakugou wants to hear. All he can offer is the truth. “But I think it was hard to accept, because I didn’t think I was worthy of you. It was okay for me to love you, but if you loved me back that—that just didn’t make any sense.”

A muscle in Bakugou’s neck strains as he clenches his teeth. But he doesn’t interrupt.

“I still think you’re amazing,” Kirishima continues. He looks up and smiles, just because Bakugou is here, close to him, after so long. “I think you’re the coolest person ever, and the smartest, and the most intense, and the most emotional, and definitely the hottest.”

“—who the fuck is emotional, shit-for-brains—”

“But I want to see in me what everyone else sees, too. I want to see in me what you see. And I think, over the past few weeks—or maybe even over the past year—and definitely today, I’ve started to feel it. I think, maybe, I’m not just someone who wants to love you. I’m also someone who wants your love, in return.”

There’s a difference, after all, between the love and admiration they get from their fans, and the relationships they can have with one another. There’s nothing cheap or insincere about a fan’s love, but it asks nothing in return. A relationship is at once stronger and more vulnerable, giving and taking in equal measures.

“And, that’s all I wanted to say,” Kirishima says, smiling nervously. “I understand, if I took too long, or I’ve hurt you too badly. I’m willing to take responsibility, for that. But I just want you to know, Bakugou Katsuki, that I—I really love you. And if you want to try again, want us to be boyfriends again, I’m ready.”

When he’s done speaking, Kirishima closes his eyes and holds his breath. He’s been thinking about what to say to Bakugou for so long, but he’s never dared imagine what Bakugou might say back.

Then the breath he’s been holding is forced out of his lungs as Bakugou wraps his arms around Kirishima’s chest, squeezing him so tightly that he can’t draw in air.

“Idiot,” Bakugou says, mouthing the words just under Kirishima’s ear, his voice husky. “You already gave me the damn song, you stood up on that stage and you goddamn *floored* me. I don’t care about that shit you pulled, anymore. As long as you’ve gotten over that I was an asshole, too. I just—*fuck*. If I have to go another day without you, I’m gonna lose it.”

Kirishima returns Bakugou’s embrace, holding onto him just as tightly. He smiles, presses his nose into Bakugou’s hair. “So don’t. Let’s be together, as much as we want. Not for anyone else’s sake. Just you and me.”

“I’m going to hold you to that,” Bakugou grumbles. “You ever walk out on me again, and I’ll kick your ass.”

Kirishima hiccups, then laughs. “I won’t run away,” he promises.

When they pull apart, Kirishima’s ribs are aching with how tightly they’d held onto one another. They shift on the bed, sitting side by side to look out the window. The sky has gone from deep mauve to orange-gold. The first rays of sun are bursting from the horizon, and in that moment anything seems possible.

Kirishima is, after all, sitting with his boyfriend in bed, greeting a new day. The same boyfriend who’s still his favorite actor, who takes Kirishima’s breath away with everything that he does. The same boyfriend who gives Kirishima a reason to push himself harder, to go as far as he can. Because he wants to steal Bakugou’s breath the same way Bakugou steals his. He wants to give as much love as he receives, for as long as he possibly can.

They curl up together in bed, on top of the covers and utterly exhausted.

“Love you,” Bakugou murmurs sleepily.

Kirishima presses a kiss to the tip of Bakugou’s nose. And then the two of them proceed to sleep away the entirety of the day, wrapped up in each other.

--

Several weeks later, Kirishima kneels on the ground as he seals up the last of his boxes. Records, clothes, workout gear, and songbooks have all been packed away. The posters have been stripped from his walls, rolled up to be transported. He hasn’t quite decided whether he’s going to put the *UA* poster back up, in his new place. It might be a bit awkward. And also a bit redundant, given who he’s moving in with.

He sighs, sitting back on his heels. They were going to outgrow this apartment, sooner or later. He doesn’t regret that, but he’s sad to leave it. Places where memories are made are more than just *places*. They’re feelings, sensations that can’t be easily defined. This apartment has been home and family and excitement and despair and comfort. But now it’s time to move on.

Kirishima hums as he gets to his feet, a melody he's been toying with for a few days. Riot has spent the majority of the past few weeks in the studio, perfecting their second album before its upcoming release. He and Ashido have co-credits on the album for vocals, but the songs themselves are listed as music and lyrics by Riot. They've all come together to make this album; it belongs to all of them.

Outside his window, the billboards have changed yet again. The ad for *Make My Story* is long gone, replaced by a picture of Usagiyama Rumi punching out in a straight line, advertising her next MMA match. Kirishima chuckles—he knows Bakugou wants to go to that, he should look into getting tickets.

He's going to miss waking up in the morning, looking out his window, and seeing Bakugou in all his posed and styled perfection staring back at him.

“Oi, Kirishima,” a voice growls from the doorway. “Stop screwing around. Let's get going.”

The real Bakugou is leaning against the doorframe, dressed in a green army surplus jacket and black jeans. He looks unimpressed as he sees the boxes still scattered on Kirishima's floor.

“Can't do anything yourself, can you,” Bakugou grumbles, leaning down to pile two boxes on top of each other and hoist them into his arms. “C'mon. I wanna get this done before it gets dark.”

Kirishima looks up at him and grins. He gets up, presses a kiss against Bakugou's cheek, and then gathers up the last of his things.

For a while now, home has been with him.

--

The line leading up to Tower Records' top floor has been capped since eight am. Kirishima sits at a long table with Ashido, Jirou, and Kaminari as fan after fan comes down the line, clutching a shiny new album with a red cover. A jagged black line cuts across the solid color like a faultline. In one corner, small block letters read, *Riot!: Red*.

Their second album is projected to make the top five in the first week of its release. Even Kirishima, who's first instinct is to second-guess himself, knows that is nothing to scoff at. Hell, Kirishima is *proud*.

Also, there's something about spending four or five hours signing autographs that makes you believe your own hype.

He's working on muscle memory, signing his name in metallic red ink, then looking up at the fan to smile and have a quick conversation with them. Then he passes the CD down to Kaminari, beside him, and goes onto the next.

When the next CD gets passed to him, he hears the impatient rhythm of someone tapping their foot. Looking up, he sees an angry blond with his arms crossed over his chest, wearing a well-worn Riot hoodie.

“Um,” Kirishima blinks, looking from his boyfriend to the album and back again. “Hey. What're you doing here?”

Bakugou scoffs at him. “Been wanting to do this for a long time,” he says, his voice rough like he's mad at himself even as he admits to this. “Look. I've been following your music since before you joined this band. ...It means a lot to me. I'm a fan.”

For some reason, the simplicity of those last words hits Kirishima the hardest, feels painfully sincere. He looks up at Bakugou and his lips pull into a fond smile.

“Yeah? Thanks a lot.” He gives Bakugou an up-and-down look, then his lips curl into a smirk. “I’m a fan of your face.”

Bakugou’s cheeks flush, but places his hands down on the table and looks Kirishima straight in the eye. “Oh, yeah? What’re you doing later?”

Beside them, Kaminari clears his throat. “C’mon, guys, you’re holding up the line!”

Not only that, but everyone behind Bakugou has their cellphones out, snapping pictures. Ah, well. It’s been awhile since Kirishima and Bakugou have been featured in the tabloids together.

“You should move along,” Kirishima says, handing back the CD. “But I’ll see you later.”

Bakugou clutches the CD in his hands, then glances down at what Kirishima has written beside his signature.

It’s always been you. It’s always going to be you.

Chapter End Notes

["your love is my favorite band" - the vaccines](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

[dr strange voice:] we're in the endgame, now

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Really, Bakugou should have realized sooner that his favorite color is red.

As he steps out of the limo, a hundred cameras flash in his direction. It's like a fireworks display condensed in size and time, each little explosion flashing across his vision in rapid succession. Even practiced as he is, the first few frames will probably be of his instinctive scowl.

But then he steps onto the red carpet, and he's where he belongs.

"Bakugou-san, Bakugou-san!" He can't tell whose voice is actually registering in his ears, because there are a dozen different reporters all saying the same thing. "Who are you wearing?"

He glances down at himself, then looks back up at the cameras with a smirk. Chin held high, he rests a hand on his hip and waits for them to take their pictures before he drawls, "Who else? Best Jeanist."

Thankfully, his go-to designer had let go of his love of denim for the night. Bakugou is wearing black from head to toe, his suit impeccably tailored against his broad shoulders and slim waist. He wears no tie, his silky black button-down undone at the neck. The suit itself is a less stark shade, subtle embroidery in shades of silver and gray depicting the outlines of roses and vines across his jacket and slacks. His shoes are a glossy black. His makeup was done subtly by Aoyama, dark eyeliner accenting his red eyes, a hint of pale color across his lips.

The camera bulbs flash, and Bakugou changes his expression subtly as he turns to give the press a 360-degree view. One moment he's brooding and intense, the next he's flashing a satisfied smirk.

"Bakugou-san, Bakugou-san!" Another torrent of voices, all calling for his attention. "Bakugou-san, do you have a date, tonight?"

He almost rolls his eyes. "I don't know," he calls out, challengingly, "Do I?"

From where he's been hanging back from the backdrop, Kirishima ruefully shakes his head. At Bakugou's slight gesture, he steps forward and lets the press get about a dozen shots of the two of them standing together.

They'd gotten ready together, so how good Kirishima looks shouldn't be a surprise. His shirt is off-white, not competing with the warm pink of his suit. Bakugou had scoffed when he'd seen it, asked if Kirishima was taking a page out of Raccoon Eyes' book. Kirishima had pouted at him, asked, *You don't think it'll look good on me?* And, as boyishly charming and unfairly pretty as Kirishima is, he's pulling it off. Red hair and pink suit, rockstar reputation and guileless attitude. Soft and hard at once, approachable and admirable, humble and confident.

Bakugou drapes an arm around Kirishima's waist, pulling him closer for one last round of pictures.

"I don't want to steal your moment," Kirishima protests, pulling himself out of view.

This time, Bakugou does roll his eyes, even knowing that the paparazzi are bound to catch an unflattering shot of the whites of his eyes. "There wouldn't be a *moment* if you weren't here, Shitty Hair."

Kirishima shakes his head, laughing under his breath at the insult turned endearment.

They head up the red carpet together, crowds roped off to either side of them and reporters and other celebrities dotted along their path. There's Yaoyorozu in a purple gown with an endless train, next to Todoroki in a maroon suit that's bolder than anything Bakugou's seen him in, before. Aizawa is in his customary black, clean-shaven for the occasion and his hair pulled back. Fukukado is wearing pillowing black dress pants and a silky aquamarine top, waving at and laughing with the crowds. Hadou Nejire is in pastel pink, her long blue hair blowing out behind her as she walks. Toogata Mirio is in pinstripes, kneeling down at the velvet ropes to speak at eye level with a young fan, imitating her excited gestures.

It's a little strange, how all these people have become so familiar. They've always been a part of his world, but he'd been content to be an island unto himself for so long. Now, when he sees them, he almost feels like smiling.

Kirishima pokes at his cheek, beaming at him.

Bakugou bats his hand away. "Fucking what," he mutters.

"You have a *dimple*," Kirishima says, inordinately pleased. "Just a little one, but right there, when you really smile—"

He shouldn't be embarrassed. After all, hasn't he already decided to bare himself to Kirishima in every possible way? This guy—his *boyfriend*—has seen his tears, his rage. Why should his happiness be any more secret, make him feel any more vulnerable?

His cheeks heat up, and Bakugou realizes, to his horror, that he's blushing. "Who's smiling?" he snaps.

"You are, babe," Kirishima says, the pet name rolling off his tongue easily. He won't let go of it, no more than Bakugou will let go of Shitty Hair.

"If I am, it's your fault," Bakugou informs him.

Kirishima startles at that, and then there's a blush spreading across his own cheeks, his smile going from pleased to soft, tender. "Bakugou..."

"Shut up," Bakugou snaps. He grabs Kirishima's wrist, tugging him up the red carpet. "We've got to make it through this whole night, I don't need you getting sappy on me, now."

"You started it," Kirishima tells him.

He doesn't have a good response to that. But with the red carpet rolled out ahead of him, and his red-haired boyfriend right at his side, maybe he doesn't need one. Maybe he can just linger in this moment, and not be embarrassed to smile.

—

Embarrassingly, Bakugou first remembers watching the Quirkies with Deku. They'd been four or five years old, sitting on the couch between their mothers in the Bakugou family's living room. They'd both been dazzled by the celebrities and film clips showing on screen, not understanding much of the content but absorbing the feeling.

Yagi Toshinori had won a Quirky that year, and Bakugou still remembers how imposing he was, stepping up onto the stage. His grip on the golden statue was deceptively light, his speech bold and

grateful. At the end of it, a graceful and aged Shimura Nana had appeared behind him and embraced him, and Yagi had to subtly wipe the tears from his eyes when he retook his seat a few minutes later.

The hug hadn't really registered to Bakugou at the time. But he remembers vividly looking at the statue, at the applauding audience, and thinking, *I'm gonna get me one of those*.

Now, he's sitting between Kirishima and Shindou, with Fukukado and Aizawa at the end of their row, and the rest of the main players of the cast and crew around them. The cast of *The Million Man* is in front of them, and *Meat Cleaver* is just behind. Bakugou can barely turn his head without seeing someone else rich, famous, and beautiful.

"You have to practice not scowling," Shindou says lightly, from beside him. Dressed in a bottle green suit, he'd walked the red carpet with his regular date, Nakagame Tatami. "When the camera pans to you, you've got to seem grateful for the nomination, even if you don't win."

"I know the fucking protocol." He hasn't yet decided what he'll do if he doesn't win. Clap for Toogata or one of the other nominees? Keep a blank face? Express his disappointment? No doubt there'll be a camera on him the whole time, waiting for evidence of his bad attitude and lack of grace. Bakugou gnashes his teeth, mad at the very idea.

A soft hand lands on his knee, squeezing gently. "Hey, you got *nominated*. From where I'm standing, that's huge." Kirishima flashes him a smile. "If you don't win, so what? We all already know that the movie means more than some little award."

It had been a few weeks ago, that Bakugou had booked up the private screening room at the studio and invited Kirishima to finally watch *Make My Story* with him. He'd gotten a strange sense of déjà vu from it, remembering the premiere of *Ground Zero*, and how delighted and invested Kirishima was. He was quieter as he watched *Make My Story*, leaning forward with his chin pressed against his hands. When the scene of Bakugou's breakdown had come on, his own eyes had teared up.

After, he'd said quietly, "That was some amazing acting. I really felt my heart break."

And what was Bakugou supposed to say to that? That his own heart had been breaking at the time he'd filmed the scene, that it was the sort of acting that isn't acting at all?

He's made a commitment to be honest with Kirishima. But in that moment, he just reached out and clutched at his hand, and trusted that Kirishima would know what he wasn't yet able to say.

In his seat at the awards, Bakugou shrugs. "It's not just about the movie," he mutters. The movie has made back its budget and then some, and Aizawa is being lauded in all of the reviews. The movie has done its work, has broken through that invisible screen of respectability and popular appeal that has kept gay storylines in the background and on the fringes. But what about Bakugou, himself? Where does his performance rank, compared to his peers? Is he the best, yet? Or is he still just chasing shooting stars?

Those thoughts still crowd in at the slightest provocation. But then he takes a deep breath, and turns to look at Kirishima, whose pride in him is shining in his eyes. Fuck. Bakugou *knows* he gave a good performance—maybe the best of his life, so far. But if he doesn't win tonight, doesn't that just mean he has to keep trying until he does get a Quirky? Until he's an undisputed master of his craft?

He's going to try and keep those thoughts at the forefront tonight. What the press chooses to read

on their face is up to them.

The acting awards come towards the end of the night. Before that, Bakugou is actually enjoying himself. As the awards are handed out, he points out the winners to Kirishima, mentioning his own thoughts on their movies. During commercial breaks, the guests move about, and it seems like dozens of people come by to congratulate Bakugou, to talk about the film, to introduce themselves to Kirishima.

Shindou, it seems, knows everyone. He may not be in as many prestige pieces as Bakugou, but he's done his rounds in the industry. TV, film, commercials, voice acting—the guy's been around. And he's infuriatingly well-liked, which Bakugou takes to mean that most people can't see through his saccharine façade. Idiots.

The commercial break ends, and the guests are signaled to return to their seats. In a flurry of multicolored gowns and suits, they do, just in time for the curtain to rise again.

Bakugou mentally calculates where they are in the night, and then swallows back a curse.

Tatsuma Ryoko steps out onto the stage, wearing a sleek black and silver gown. She'd taken home the Quirky for Best Actress last year. Despite that, she's unassuming as she steps forward, a golden embossed envelope clutched in her hand.

“This list of this year's nominees for Best Actors is full of young talent,” she says. “While each of them has given performances this year that anyone should be aspiring to, we're also so excited to see what's to come in the future from these young men, so early in their careers.”

The audience applauds, at that. The old guard, of Yagi Toshinori and Todoroki Enji and others, seems long gone in this moment.

“And yes,” Tatsuma continues, “I mean you, too, Nishiya-san and Shinya-san. You're still younger than me.”

Kamihara Shinya, the eldest of the year's nominees, leans back in his seat and lifts his hands in surrender. The crowd laughs, in on the joke that Tatsuma and Kamihara had debuted in the same year, on the same film.

“And now,” Tatsuma says, with considerably more gravitas, “This year's nominees for Best Actor.”

The screen behind her lights up and displays first clips of *The Million Man*, before announcing Toogata Mirio. Then *Meat Cleaver* and Shishikura Seiji, followed by *Out of the Woods* and Nishiya Shinji. Then *The Edge of the World*, and Kamihara Shinya.

“This is it!” Kirishima whispers in his ear, a little frantic. “That's you!”

Make My Story and Bakugou Katsuki are the last to flash across the screen.

They've taken a still from the last scene of the movie, when Shindou and Bakugou stands across from each other on the beach, the wind blowing through their hair. The camera pans to Bakugou, his lips slightly parted, his eyes full of hope and wonder at the fact that Shindou has returned.

Is that really him, up on that screen? The character in the movie was more vulnerable than Bakugou is, more open to love. And he'd eventually found that love in Shindou's character,

despite the many obstacles they'd faced along the way.

The audience is clapping, for him and the other nominees. As Bakugou redirects his gaze to Tatsuma, sees her deftly rip the golden envelope open, his heart stops in his chest.

All at once, it feels like he's no longer in his own body. Instead, he's watching the awards happening like watching a movie playing on screen. He's imagined this moment so many times—sitting in the audience of the Quirkies, his own name called among the nominees. But there are things he could never have predicted about this moment. In all of his imaginings, did he ever have someone beside him? Could he ever had dreamed that Kirishima would be here with him, offering him his support and love?

It's fucking cheesy, but Bakugou thinks as he squeezes Kirishima's hand, *I've already won*. There are so many things he wants for himself, for his life. He's nowhere near done. But, shit. If he has Kirishima beside him, if the two of them have now woven their paths so closely together that they'll be together forever – wow. He's actually looking forward to where that journey will take them.

Make My Story was a romance, and so as soon as Bakugou's character had reconciled with Shindou's, the story was over. He'd worked hard with Aizawa and Fukukado to craft a character that could live beyond a two-hour runtime, who seemed real and three dimensional. But ultimately, that wasn't Bakugou's story. It was a part of what he'd felt, combined with other people's experiences, woven together with some imagination to hopefully make the whole thing compelling and resonant.

But he doesn't just want to play a gay character on screen. He wants to live a life where he's beside Kirishima and Kirishima is beside him, and it's as much of a given as any of those old movie star couples.

He wants the romance of the century, of the millennium, with Kirishima. And he wants the entire world to know about it.

"And the Quirky goes to," Tatsuma is saying. She smiles as she reads the name, all sharp teeth. "Bakugou Katsuki, for *Make My Story*."

—

There's wind howling in his ears, so loud he can't hear anything else. The crowd around him has burst into applause, but he doesn't know who they're clapping for. What the fuck did Tatsuma just say?

Kirishima squeezes his hand, grabs his forearm and pulls him up out of his seat. "Bakugou, get *up*. You *won*."

It finally registers. His heart pounds against his chest, and he's about to be swept out to sea by the emotions crashing over him. But then he looks at Kirishima, sees the astonished happiness on his face, and he knows exactly what he wants to do.

He cups Kirishima's face in both of his hands and kisses him soundly. He smacks his lips against Kirishima's, a staccato rhythm of one-two-three, until Kirishima finally pulls away and nudges him towards the stage.

"Your award!" He hisses, a hushed whisper. "Kiss me later, go get your award!"

He knows he's smiling as he heads for the stage, as Shindou reaches out to shake his hand, as

Aizawa and Fukukado pat him on the back. He wonders if that pesky dimple is showing.

He reaches the stags and Tatsuma hands him a golden statuette, depicting the outline of a woman with her hands planted on her hips, a cape flaring out from her shoulders. Looking down at it, Bakugou sees for a moment not Shimura Nana's most iconic character. No, in that moment, he sees All Might.

Throat tight, heart beating frantically, face flushed with heat, he stumbles to the microphone. He doesn't have any remarks prepared, no matter how much Sero had tried to get him to write some. Sero had even tried to write them, himself, but Bakugou had gleefully ripped the index card in half.

Leaning towards the mic, clutching the Quirky in his hand, he breathes out, "Holy fuck. You all see this, right? I just won a Quirky."

He wonders if his words will be taken as arrogance, as him flashing the award in the faces of his colleagues. And there is a fair amount of pride rising up in him, validation that he's always been seeking, and projecting even when he doesn't have it. But for the barest moment, he really is incredulous. He's being *recognized*. His performance was the indisputable best of the year.

He runs a hand through his hair, then grabs for the mic. "Okay. I know you're all waiting for a speech. So first, this isn't a thank you but an I'm sorry—Sero, you were right, you happy? I should've written a goddamn speech."

The crowd burst into laughter.

"Don't laugh. My agent's been waiting a long time for any kind of apology from me, and believe me, that's the last one he's *ever* gonna get. You hear that, Sero? Enjoy your moment."

It is Sero's moment too, isn't it? He's been on this journey with Bakugou from the start. Fuck, he's the one who negotiated the deal to get Bakugou this part in the first place. He was the one who believed that being caught making sex eyes at Kirishima didn't have to be the end of his career, but an opportunity.

"And now I've got to thank some people. And I'm not just saying that to be nice, alright? I know how much work I put into this performance, and you're all right to see that. But no one's ever made a movie alone, not even me. So, here goes."

He takes a deep breath. Gratitude and apology don't come easy to him. And he wouldn't offer them just because they're expected. He knows what it took to get here. And only cowards run away from what they're feeling.

"Aizawa Shouta directed this film. He's unforgiving and harsh, and he'll tell you right to your face when you've screwed up a take. But when he works with you, he can help you give the best performance of your life. He doesn't give a shit what anyone else thinks, and that's why he was brave enough to make this movie."

In the audience, Aizawa presses his chin against his hand, lips tight. He's trying not to smile, Bakugou's sure.

"Fukukado Emi wrote this script and wouldn't let any of us get away with getting it wrong. She's also the only person who can laugh at Aizawa-san and get away with it, so. Tch. You gotta respect that."

Fukukado elbows Aizawa in the side, laughing openly.

Bakugou keeps talking, thanks the crew and the rest of the cast. Something coils in his stomach, the sign that there's something he has to do, but doesn't want to. But hey, he's got a Quirky in his hand. He can afford to be a little magnanimous.

"A romance is the story of the connection between people. When you're acting that, if you can't connect with your costar, the whole thing's doomed from the start. You've gotta be on equal footing with someone, to give the kind of performance that people'll respond to. So. Shindou. You told this story with me. I have to thank you for that."

You're still a bastard, Bakugou thinks.

In the crowd, Shindou lifts his hands and offers Bakugou a deliberate round of applause.

Bakugou eyes skip from Shindou to Kirishima. His boyfriend has both of his hands pressed against his face, his eyes red like he's about to start crying. That idiot—what's there to cry about? Aren't they all supposed to be happy?

But somehow, Bakugou's own throat grows tight as he continues. "I—I love making movies. I'm good at it, obviously. But I *love* it, too. So, I wouldn't have gotten this award without Yagi Toshinori. He inspired me to make movies. He pulled me into this world. He's still—he's still supporting me. So, Yagi-san. I want your notes on my next performance, too."

The crowd laughs again, and Bakugou belatedly realizes that Yagi-san is *directing* his next performance. He's going to be getting more than notes. But instead of the dread he's been carrying towards that film, Bakugou suddenly feels anticipation.

"And yeah, Mom, I'm thanking you, too. Everyone does it, don't read too much into it. You too, Dad. I know you're watching this and probably crying. You better cut that out, or people are going to say you didn't think I'd win."

He knows his time is running short. He looks back at the crowd, then at Kirishima. The idiot's really crying now, isn't he? Did he cry like this when he signed his first record deal? Or when he sang with Crimson Chevalier? Or is there something about Bakugou's accomplishments, his happiness, that really touch him?

Bakugou shakes his head, smiling ruefully. "But really, there's one person who I can't leave off. And they know who they are, but I'm gonna thank them anyway. Because they put up with me at my worst, and still want to stick around to see me at moments like this. And that's a lot of shit to put up with. But—I really love them."

The crowd takes in a breath, even though anyone who's read a gossip rag in the last year has to know who he's talking about.

He looks up, straight out at Kirishima. He smiles with all the sharpness, all the pride, all the joy he has.

"I couldn't have given this performance if I'd never met you. I want to give a million more, because you've... you've inspired me. You've made me feel things I didn't think I could, or wanted to. And I'm really happy because of that. I never knew a person could be this goddamn happy."

He pulls the statue close, presses a kiss to it and thrusts it forward. "I love you, Eijirou. And I want to thank everyone who saw this movie, who thought something of it. You all have good fucking taste."

He turns on his heel and strides off the stage, award still held aloft.

There's a commercial break after his speech, and a lot of reshuffling. When he steps backstage, Shindou is there. He grabs Bakugou's arm, tugs him to the side.

"You didn't have to do that," he says lowly. He isn't smiling. It's a more honest look on his face, now.

"I didn't?" Bakugou scoffs at him. "Sure, and go down in history as the asshole who didn't thank his costar? No thanks."

Shindou's face twists into a scowl. "I don't want you to thank me just because you thought you had to."

This guy really doesn't get it, does he? He's always trying to come off as so charming and agreeable, but when he really wants something, he can't help but push for it in the worst ways. If he wanted Bakugou's respect, all he had to do was earn it.

"I don't do anything because someone else thinks I have to," Bakugou growls at him. "It's a good movie, dipshit. You were good in it, alright? And just because they didn't nominate you for an award doesn't mean everyone shouldn't know that."

Again, he's feeling magnanimous. And dissecting the movie with Kirishima after watching it, he'd been forced to admit that his performance would have been less, without Shindou to play off of. He finds the guy irritating, distasteful, pushy, deceitful—but those strong emotions had translated to a strong performance. If he'd been indifferent to Shindou, could he have pretended to love him?

"Don't do that," Shindou says, almost a whine. "Don't go getting all mature on me now, Bakugou-kun. How am I supposed to resent you, now?"

Bakugou rolls his eyes. "Whatever you do is up to you. You can be whatever the hell you want to be, and you can get there on your own work and talent, just like the rest of us. Just stop playing these fucking games. Or leave me out of them."

It really would be so much easier, so much more satisfying, if he could just punch Shindou in the face once and get away with it. Unfortunately, they're backstage at the industry's biggest night.

Emotions war over Shindou's face. He purses his lips, leans back against the wall in the small niche they've ensconced themselves in. He sighs. "I just... never really know how to feel about you. You're such an asshole, but I still want to work with you. And sometimes I..."

Oh, no. He is not about to say what Bakugou thinks he is.

Bakugou lifts a hand, cutting him off. "You don't fucking *know* me," he tells Shindou. "I *am* an asshole. But I'm good at what I do, and I'm going to keep going until I'm the best. But that's not all I'm gonna do. I'm going to change this entire industry, while I'm at it. You're already doing shit like that, too. So maybe focus on what you can do, and the people who actually *like* you, for some insane reason. You'll last longer."

He doesn't care if Shindou burns out or not. But if no one had ever given Bakugou a chance, he never would've lasted, himself.

His lips twist into something rueful. "You're a pain in the ass. But I'd work with you, again."

“Goddamn it,” Shindou says, rubbing a hand down his face. “Please stop being right. You’re humiliating me.”

“You deserve it,” Bakugou says. Whether he means the humiliation or the advice, he couldn’t say. But for now, there’s nothing more than he needs to discuss with Shindou. They made a great goddamn movie, an *important* movie, and that’s what matters.

The rest of it, Shindou will have to figure out for himself. There’s somewhere else Bakugou would rather be.

There’s the appropriate amount of screaming, and hugging, and fist-pumping, and kissing, when the show is finally over and Bakugou and Kirishima have a moment alone. Then there are the afterparties, where the rest of their merry gang of idiots joins them. Bakugou gets toasted by practically everyone he’s ever met. He even lets Deku give him a hug, although he makes sure it lasts no longer than five seconds. He’s happy, not deranged.

The sun is coming up by the time the limo brings them back home. Bakugou thinks he barely has enough energy to make it out of his suit before he crashes into bed. But when they get into the elevator, Kirishima hits the button for the rooftop access instead of their penthouse.

“What’re you doing,” Bakugou groans, leaning most of his weight against Kirishima, the Quirky still clutched in his other hand.

Kirishima pets down his hair, holds him firmly upright. “Trust me, would you?”

“That’s not fair,” Bakugou groans. “You know I fucking do.”

Kirishima kisses the tip of his nose, and Bakugou likes it too much to complain about it. “I know,” Kirishima says.

The rooftop is predictably deserted at four am. Kirishima deposits Bakugou in a lounge chair, whispering that he’ll be right back. Brain too muddled to really process what’s happening, Bakugou looks out towards the horizon and tries to decide whether the sky is currently red or orange or pink.

In a moment, Kirishima has returned, his acoustic guitar slung on.

“What,” Bakugou says, intelligently.

Kirishima smiles at him, soft and tender. “I finished your song. Can I play it, for you?”

Bakugou is still working on accepting that so many of Kirishima’s songs are written about him, that if he ever wonders how Kirishima feels he can just pull up an mp3 and hear him sing. For so long, Kirishima’s voice has been a balm and beacon. Now, those feelings are only amplified.

“You already played it,” Bakugou says. “In front of the entire goddamn world.”

Kirishima’s lips pull up into a half-smile. “Just like you told the whole world you love me, *Katsuki?*”

His heart jumps into his throat when Kirishima says his name. There are very, very few people who have the privilege of using his given name. But fuck, if it doesn’t feel good hearing it Kirishima’s warm, melodic voice.

Bakugou crosses his arms over his chest. “So what? Why shouldn’t they know? Our lives’re always going to be in the press. I might as well tell them, before they make up some bullshit story about it.”

“That’s one way to head off the rumors,” Kirishima says, grinning toothily. “So, you get up on stage and tell everyone, and I get up on stage and *sing* to everyone, and then they don’t have to bother wondering?”

It’s a simple solution to a problem that’s plagued them since the start.

“You were always a shit liar, anyway,” Bakugou tells him.

Kirishima laughs, and if Bakugou could reach out and grab that laughter, hold it against his chest, he would. He has to settle for reaching out and grabbing Kirishima’s wrist, pulling it in and kissing it. Kirishima presses his fingertips against Bakugou’s lips.

“So, your song?” Kirishima says. “You ready to hear it?”

As far as Bakugou is concerned, Kirishima has been singing right to him, right to his heart, for years and years. But now they’re sitting up on the rooftop, with the morning air chill around them, and the sun rising in the sky.

“Yeah,” Bakugou breathes out. “Play me a song, Eijirou.”

—

“Eijirou, get your ass out here! You’re going to be late!”

The tour bus is already downstairs, and Bakugou has heard it honk twice. He taps his foot against the marbled tile in the entryway, impatient. At this rate, he’s going to miss his own flight. And diva though he might be, he’ll be damned if he’s the last star to arrive on set for the beginning of a shoot.

“*Eijirou!*”

“I’m here, I’m here!” Kirishima rushes out of the bedroom, one sleeve of his black leather jacket on, the other flapping behind him as he rushes forward. His socked feet slide against the tile as he comes to a screeching halt in front of Bakugou. “Shit—is it already nine? I thought we had more time!”

“Because you were stalling,” Bakugou accuses.

Kirishima gives him a shit-eating grin, leans in and smacks a kiss against his forehead. “You like my stalling.”

“Not when it makes both of us late,” Bakugou snaps, even though his face is turning warm and red in a familiar, not unwelcome, way.

Kirishima shrugs his jacket on fully, jams his feet into his beat-up sneakers. “C’mon. You’re not going to miss me, at all?”

Bakugou rolls his eyes, crosses his arms over his chest. “You’re going to come visit in three weeks, anyway.”

“That’s three really long weeks, Katsuki!” Kirishima whines.

“And you’re gonna call me every day until then,” Bakugou reminds him.

“Yeah, but. Talking on the phone isn’t the same thing as seeing you!”

“And then we’ll keep doing that, for all the months I’m on set,” Bakugou grumbles.

“That’s *a lot of months!*” Kirishima grabs both of Bakugou’s hands, clutching them tightly. “I’m going to miss you *so much!*”

Kirishima’s touch is warm, his hands calloused from years of playing the guitar.

It’s going to be three weeks until Bakugou can touch him, again. Three weeks of intense work on an epic fantasy film, working with Deku and Todoroki and Uraraka every day. Being directed by Yagi-san, not wanting to do anything to let him down. He was so sure he didn’t want to make this film, when it was first proposed to him. Because he knew nothing would make him feel lonelier than being surrounded by people who had known him for so long, but who he didn’t—couldn’t—feel close to.

Now, he feels closer to them than ever. And it’s largely because of the person standing in front of him.

“Fuck,” he breathes out. He grabs Kirishima’s arms, pulls him close against his chest, buries his nose in Kirishima’s vibrant hair. “Fuck, I’m gonna miss you.”

Kirishima returns the embrace just as strongly. “But you’ve got to go make a great movie, babe. Knock everyone dead, again.”

“And you’ve got to go on tour, and make sure everyone hears that damn beautiful voice of yours,” Bakugou says, close to Kirishima’s ear.

Kirishima shudders against him, pulls back just to readjust so he can press their lips together. The kiss lasts for one beat, then two, then three. And then—

“*Kirishima!* Can you be a responsible bandmate and say goodbye to your boyfriend on *time*, like the rest of us?”

They pull apart, turn around to see Ashido standing in the doorway. Cheeks flushed pink, hands braced on her hips, hair a fluffy cloud around her. “Hello? We’re on a schedule, here!”

Bakugou embraces him from behind. “I’ll see you soon.”

He can feel Kirishima swallow, doesn’t want to see his lips pull downwards in a frown. “I love you,” Bakugou says. “Go on. Knock ‘em dead.”

Kirishima turns in the space of his arms, gives him one last kiss. “You know when I’m up there, it’s all gonna be for you, right?”

He knows.

Chapter End Notes

["your song" - elton john](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's been awhile since we caught up with our favorite lovebirds, Bakugou Katsuki and Kirishima Eijirou. It's been a busy year for both of them, and unfortunately for us that means less time to see them around town together, either alone or in the company of their famous friends. But we've finally managed to track them down.

Bakugou Katsuki has been in the public eye since his childhood debut. Now a Quirky Award-winning actor, he recently wrapped production on *Because He is My Hero*, directed by Yagi Toshinori. Based on the acclaimed series of fantasy novels by Horikoshi Kouhei, *Because He is My Hero* is set to release for the holiday season. The cast has just begun a six-week long press tour in advance of the film's premiere. And the rumors from set have everyone talking!

Because He is My Hero saw Bakugou reunite with his UA costars: Midoriya Izuku, Todoroki Shouto, and Uraraka Ochako. According to inside sources, there was a blooming romance on set. But no one is quite sure who was involved, although most signs point to one Midoriya Izuku.

Asked about it during an interview, Bakugou only scoffed. "You think that idiot would get there on his own? Of course he needed my help."

Now there's a story we'd love to hear more of! And if Bakugou wants to give any of the rest of us advice about how to land a man like Kirishima Eijirou, we're all ears.

The film is also gaining buzz for another reason. Based on a book series published decades ago, the script—also written by Yagi Toshinori—has been updated for the modern era. That means key characters have been altered somewhat, like the knight, originally written as a man, played by Yaoyorozu Momo. But rumor has it that the strong bonds between the central cast have also been fleshed out with more than romantic undertones.

"It's all there in the books," Bakugou said, flippant, when asked about it. "You think the Dragon King and the Hero's Apprentice got trapped in a cave during a snowstorm and snuggled together just to survive? Don't make me laugh. The King has *fire powers*."

The film is already tracking for an immense opening weekend, and the studio has announced its plans for two additional films, to coincide with the other books in the series. We can't wait to see this one, and not just because the promotional photos show that Bakugou's costuming rarely includes a shirt.

Music for the film is composed by Jirou Kyouka, in her compositional debut. And spotlight songs are being provided by Jirou and Kirishima's band, Riot!. A music video is set to drop the week before the film's premiere, though we've seen a couple snapshots of the band decked out in their own fantasy gear.

It's no surprise that Riot!'s a huge presence on the film set, not when we know that Kirishima was visiting Bakugou every chance he could get. Plus, actress Yaoyorozu Momo and Jirou Kyouka announced their engagement last month, to the surprise of many, who assumed that Yaoyorozu was dating her frequent costar, Todoroki Shouto.

As for Riot!, we're surprised at how much they're jamming into their schedule lately. After the

release of their second album, *Red*, they launched a nationwide tour with multiple sold-out stadium shows. The band's sound continues to evolve, taking in influences from Jirou's classical training, drummer Kaminari Denki's street performance past, singer and pianist Ashido Mina's popstar background, and guitarist and lyricist Kirishima Eijirou's soulful roots.

"We've just all got a lot of ideas," Kirishima explained. "We never want to limit ourselves, and with four of us there's plenty of energy and inspiration to go around. We're working on our next album, already, and we're hoping it's gonna be like nothing we've ever done before!"

When asked what this next album might be called, Kirishima shook his head. "Either *Yellow* or *Purple*, but don't ask the others. Every time we get into it, there's a huge fight."

Riot! is represented by Midnight Records, and through them announced a new initiative for next summer. Riot! will headline and host another music festival in support of LGBT arts education, and proceeds will be used to launch a music camp and workshop for at-risk youth.

"Music didn't just save my life," Kirishima explained in the press release, "It made my life better, and worth living. It's something important, and it helped me connect to other important things. It just seems right to pay that forward, however I can."

With *Red* selling record numbers, it seems like Riot!'s star is destined to keep rising. We can't wait to hear how *Yellow* (or *Purple*) will sound!

Given all that these two have been up to, it's not really surprising that they haven't made any appearances together, recently. But that doesn't mean there's been no quality time. Last weekend, they were spotted at a private beach belonging to the Yaoyorozu family.

[Insert: a photograph of Bakugou Katsuki and Kirishima Eijirou. They're lying on the beach, the ocean coming up to lick at their toes. Bakugou is sitting up, his bare back pressed against Kirishima's back. Kirishima has his arms held loosely around Bakugou's waist. Bakugou wears plain black swim trunks; Kirishima is in red-and-black tiger stripes. Both of them have wet hair, like they've just emerged from the ocean. Bakugou has his head tipped back, looking up into Kirishima's eyes.]

Though they didn't take too kindly to being interrupted, we did have time to ask them a few questions.

Interviewer: So, Bakugou and Kirishima, what's the status of your relationship? Yaoyorozu-san and Jirou-san are getting married next year—any thoughts of a wedding for yourselves? How would you define what's between you?

Kirishima: Guys, this is a private beach, come on! Give our agent a call and he can arrange something—

Bakugou: No, it's fine.

Kirishima: *Really?*

Bakugou: Sure. Hey, assholes. Listen up. I'll even give you a quote.

[Insert: a second photograph of Bakugou Katsuki and Kirishima Eijirou. They're positioned much as they were in the first picture, except that Kirishima wears a slightly frazzled smile and is angled away from the camera, while Bakugou smiles fiercely and raises a hand to flip off the photographer.]

So, what was the final word? What's the scoop on Bakugou and Kirishima?

In Bakugou's own words, it's quote, *love*, unquote.

[Insert: a final picture of Bakugou Katsuki and Kirishima Eijirou, still lying tangled up on the beach. Both of them have their eyes closed, as Bakugou leans back and Kirishima leans forward. They kiss.]

Chapter End Notes

["our song" - matchbox 20](#)

[tumblr](#) | [twitter](#)

--

i'm of two minds about how to close out, here. part of me wants to let the story stand on its own, without my commentary. another part of me thinks i'd be remiss to not say anything, especially not after a year and a half of constant support and enthusiasm from you, the readers.

so let me just say-- thank you. this story started as something small, something silly and fun, and it grew because people were so excited about it. that excitement and support let me write a story longer than any i've written before, and i'm so proud of what that qlu has become.

to everyone who read and commented -- those of you who had something to say about every chapter, those who left "extra kudos", those who recced the fic to friends, those who made fanart and graphics, those who left me private messages, those who were invisible but supportive -- i can't thank each of you enough.

writing this story has been such a fun, rewarding part of my time in fandom and my writing in general. thanks for listening to me tell this story. i couldn't have done it without you.

until next time.

End Notes

please check out the index of [fanart](#) for this fic, and support the artists!

and here is the official [quote love unquote playlist](#), for your listening convenience.

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!