

Split soul

Von Gepo

Kapitel 10: Embarking on a space cruise

He wasn't able to get much out of his alter ego regarding his five-day-long sleeping period. The other one had used his time to absorb and restructure two companies, enlarging their wood products division substantially. Akashi did not really care about it though, it was only a job after all.

Much more interesting was Ayako's idea to show him what living as an Omega meant. He wasn't exactly sure what she planned but she had invited him to her home for the coming weekend. She had added that he should wear casual clothes that did not show everyone how rich he was. He wasn't exactly sure if his wardrobe fit that requirement, so he decided to call Tetsu and ask him about that. It got him an invitation to go shopping with his goddaughter – lucky. His friend texted him a time and location on the outskirts of the shopping district.

Still in his business suit after work he had his driver let him out near the place and decided to go there by foot. When Tetsu saw him he shook his head with a smile and said: "That is unfitting attire for clothes shopping, Akashi."

"I've seen people in suits in malls before." He decided not to phrase that as a question.

"We aren't going to a mall." Kuroko laid one of Tsuki's big napkins over Akashi's shoulder before handing him the baby. "Watch out, she's teething."

"Hello, princess." He smiled at the drooling baby who slept through the hand-over. "So where are we going then?"

"Here." Kuroko pointed at a small shop behind him which overflowed with clothes.

"This is a second-hand-shop."

"What?" His face fell. "You want me to buy clothes other people wore before me?"

"That's what normal people do." Kuroko nodded. "They get clothes from their parents or older siblings or friends and they buy clothes at such shops. So yes, we will get you pre-used clothing."

"I refuse." He stared aghast at the shop. "They smell."

"They have all been washed."

"They have been washed at least ten times."

"Most likely a hundred and more." Kuroko nodded.

"Is Tsuki wearing hand-me-downs? If she is, I can pay for a whole new wardrobe. You really don't need to use clothing again. She is a girl, she deserves some nice, new, pink jumpers." He looked at her yellow and blue stripped one. Had Shiro worn this before?

"At the rate she is growing, she deserves a new wardrobe every month. No, every week!"

"Follow me." His companion just turned away from him and went into the shop.

Akashi stood still. No, he would not enter that shop. Did people really buy used clothes? He knew that there were mass clothing chains where people bought clothing made in low-income-countries instead of going to a tailor but used ones? He knew there were such shops, but he thought they were for homeless people or really poor people or ...

Omegas? He nearly choked on spit. Single Omegas with children were poor people, they lived off various jobs. Of course they would buy clothing in such shops. But Kuroko had never been ... he had been raised by a single Omega mother, hadn't he? Oh. He had just direly insulted his friend, hadn't he?

He went in, found Kuroko looking through some jeans in a pile and murmured: "I'm sorry."

The other looked at him for a moment but did not smile. After a barely discernible nod he said: "So what is your size?"

"Size?" He looked questioningly at his friend.

"Yes, your- oh, all your clothing is tailored, right?" Kuroko mustered him for a moment.

"I think your hips are about as broad as mine after having the babies. So you most likely have my size, just longer." He took a jeans from the pile and held it against Akashi's body. "Yes, this looks about right. Try it on."

"Here?" Akashi looked around. The shop front was open, the two aisles barely fit a human.

"Over there." Kuroko pointed at a niche with a curtain that would only fit a standing slender human. How was he supposed to change in that space? But the other already took Tsuki from his arms and looked at him expectantly.

Akashi took a deep breath. Well, he had agreed to some real world experience, hadn't he? Just like that time where he accompanied Kuroko to the Omega clinic. This was life for normal people. He took the offending piece of clothing – pre-used and washed out, there was even a hole right above the knee, who in their right mind sold those things? – and went to the curtained off space, followed by the eyes of a fat, fifty-something years old woman looking at his ass.

"Akashi looks quite dashing in his new clothes."

"I can't believe people would willingly wear that. With how it already looks, buying a new one would not be more expensive because you could wear it for a longer time. Why would people even sell their clothes if they are still wearable?"

"I presume because they have been washed more than ten times?" Kuroko's voice was cutting. "What happens to your clothes after that time?"

"I guess my butler throws them away and orders new ones?" He asked cautiously.

"How about giving them to charity or to second-hand-shops, so that other people can wear your designer clothes?" Kuroko sighed. "Do you remember that time Aomine hunted me and ripped my jeans?"

Akashi nodded wordlessly.

"It was the same one that Midorima and Murasakibara had ripped before. I stitched it up both times. After Aomine ruined it, I had nothing but my school uniform trousers to wear. Do you remember what I wore when Kise hunted me down?"

"Your sports trousers."

"Do you remember what I did when Kise pinned me to the floor?" Kuroko's voice held no accuse or anger but somehow that cut more than if he had been shouting.

"You took them off and offered yourself to him."

"So he would not rip more of my clothes. Beside that t-shirt I wore I only owned one

from my mom and a pullover." Blue eyes looked up. "It's when you decide not to fight in a rape situation because you can't afford to have your clothes torn that you know what it's like to be an Omega."

"I'm sorry," Akashi whispered, "can I ... get you some dinner? I should have asked you then instead of now. I should have done a lot back then."

"Yes, you should have." Kuroko took out his phone and sent a message to someone. "I told Kagami he should eat without me."

"Is there somewhere you would like to go?"

"Over there." Kuroko looked at a place on the other side of the street. From the looks, it was a fast-food-chain or maybe a family-restaurant. Another one of those cheap places.

Akashi wanted to tell him he could afford something better but stopped himself. Maybe that was why his friend chose this. Maybe it was another of those life-experiences. So he nodded and accompanied the other man while safely holding Tsuki in his arms. He had agreed to this after all.

Akashi had to use all of his self-control to avoid spitting his drink across the table. He swallowed with a grimace before putting down his plastic cup and asking: "What in the name of the gods is this stuff?"

"Barley tea." Kuroko seemed mildly amused by his reaction. "It's not exactly tea, it's water brewed with barley. It's for people who cannot afford real tea."

"It is disgusting." Akashi chucked down his coffee that he had thankfully ordered. It seemed like the whole process happened all over again, making him cough and ask in exasperation: "So this is no real coffee as well?"

"It is real coffee but the beans have been grounded months before, so most of the aroma has left." His friend seemed to take pity on him. "Shall I get you a soft-drink from the vending machine?"

"Some juice, please." Akashi wiped his mouth with something feeling like wallpaper.

"Believe me, you don't want to try what they call juice in here." Kuroko shook his head. "I'll get you some water."

Oh gods, this was awful. It was beyond awful. Should he take back his order? Was one able to take back his order in here? He wanted to go home, this evening was a nightmare. How did people survive living like this? He took the offered cup – a paper cup, oh wonderful – and drank some water which was thankfully not poisoned.

"So this is where you got food as a child?" Akashi asked, trying to keep his voice neutral.

"No, this is where my mom and I celebrated my birthdays. Going to a restaurant is expensive after all." Kuroko gently chided him. "I was allowed one kids meal. When I got older, I was allowed an order up to 1500 yen."

That was the amount he had paid for his daily sandwich and hand-mixed juice at Rakuzan.

"I always wondered why you would not grow and gain muscles." He hung his head slightly. "I am sorry I never noticed how malnourished you were. How were you able to play basketball?"

"Mostly because Aomine stole food for both of us." Kuroko leaned back with Tsuki in his arms. "His parents were alcoholics, so food and money were sparse at his place too. He was an hungry Alpha though, so he began to steal at a very young age. He often shared some of it with me. He also stole money from his parents and paid some of my meals at school. Before he turned violent, he cared for me a lot."

"Why did you never say anything? You know I would have cared for you." He would have done so much more if circumstances had been different.

"It's called being ashamed, Akashi. I don't know if you know that feeling."

He knew. Of course he knew, he felt it right this moment. Whenever he thought about how he had failed Kuroko, he knew what being ashamed meant. Though Kuroko was right – back then he had not known that feeling.

This time he actually took a look at the neighborhood before he rung the bell at Ayako's place. She lived in a 4.5 Tatami apartment in a building which housed a hundred of those. When she had opened the door last time, the entrance had opened into one room behind her, so except for the bathroom, the apartment most likely had only one room which was a kitchen, living room and bedroom at the same time. So Natsue and her mother shared a room, a bed and all of their free time. If Ayako wanted to watch TV, her daughter would have to spend her time next to her. As nice as an evening watching TV with one's mother sounded, how were you able to do that every day? He never watched movies, but if he did he imagined he would watch psychological thrillers. One wasn't able to do that with a child sitting next to them. What did you even do with a four-year-old? He knew he had played instruments and ran around outside after his lessons but did that fill his whole day?

Natsue had mentioned that she sang with her mother or that her mother sang to her. If she wanted to learn the piano, maybe her mother had bought her a child's keyboard to practice on. That might fit into such a small place. Was there any space to store things? Did they even have a TV? He had no idea what one cost. He wasn't exactly Marie Antoinette who asked why the starving people did not eat cake if they had no bread but he only knew the prices of things his company sold. They had a big technology department and produced computers, tablets and monitors but he also knew that his were expensive due to their high quality.

Natsue was the one opening the door, an older boy standing right behind her and looking at him with big eyes. She turned and shouted: "Mama, Mister Akashi is here!" Ayako was sitting just a meter from the entrance, so the shouting was extremely unnecessary but she did not seem to mind. She simply raised her eyebrows at her daughter who turned back, bowed correctly and greeted him: "Good evening, Mister Akashi."

He bowed to her as well, greeting her correctly and asked her about the boy standing behind her. He was informed that this was Teimei Ryou, a child of another kindergarten teacher. He guessed she was in heat right now. He remembered that when he met Natsue, she lived with a Miss Teimei because Ayako was in heat at that time. Didn't she mention Miss Teimei had two children?

"So if this is Ryou, where is Shinta? Didn't you have a brother?"

The shy boy pointed at Ayako who stood to greet him. He noticed only now that she held a toddler in her arms. He looked slightly older than Tsuki but not much. So maybe he was half a year old? Ayako shifted him in her arms to give him a better look and said: "Isn't he cute? I really love babies."

"If I don't have to change their nappies, sure." To him it looked like a normal baby, Tsuki was a hundred times cuter. "I like them more when they are a bit older and you can actually do things with them."

"You can play a lot with babies. You only need to learn their language, they don't speak with the words, they speak with actions." Her smile was what he would have defined as motherly. It was full of pride and love, though he had only seen it on

Kuroko before.

He remembered his friend smiling like that while he stroked his belly. How Aomine could not have noticed, not have made the connection was really beyond him. The guy was an idiot. Happily expecting mothers had that a glow about them, just like fresh mothers. For a women surrounded by three children, Ayako looked surprisingly unstressed.

"I guess I still need to learn." He shifted uncomfortably. She had not commented on his clothes yet, so maybe he really fit in with them?

"Can we go now?" Natsue cut into their conversation.

"It is rude to interrupt an adult talk, Natsue." Her mother lightly scolded her. "How about getting your coat and shoes if you are so impatient?"

"Come on, get your jacket." Natsue ordered Ryou around. Well, that was an Alpha women in the making. He'd doubt nature if this one turned out Omega or Beta.