

Hurt

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Inhaltsverzeichnis

Kapitel 1: Getting to know one another	2
Kapitel 2: Getting intimate	13
Kapitel 3: Getting together	14
Kapitel 4: Getting a future	28
Kapitel 5: Getting a home	37
Kapitel 6: Getting moody	49
Kapitel 7: Getting wounded	50
Kapitel 8: Getting her	59
Epilog: And they lived happily ever after - or something like that	70

Kapitel 1: Getting to know one another

The absolute worst was being a male Beta. You were on the very bottom of the food chain. Male Omegas and female Alphas were by definition unattainable for you. If a male Alpha could not have an Omega, he would choose a female Beta for reproductive purposes. So the most unwanted caste was the male Beta.

Being a completely undistinguished Japanese male of average stature with black hair and eyes, the best he could hope for was finding a Beta woman too ugly to interest the Alphas. If he were not that lucky, it would have to be a Beta male, no matter that he wasn't particularly interested in guys. It was simply better than being lonely. His friends' older brother had shown him what dreaming of something more could do to you. That poor guy had run after an Omega female for years, only to be left for a random Alpha. That was just how it was. No one was interested in you, ever.

He had faced that in middle school, attending a school with an athletic focus. It had been full of Alphas, and the girls there would not look twice at him. So he did his best, became a brain, and went to a high school with an academic focus. He could count the Alphas at this school on one hand. He had thought everything would get better – but of course, it hadn't. The girls here were even more crazy, bullying the few Omegas to have a chance of catching some Alpha's interest.

The absolute worst of the alphas was Midorima Shintarou. The guy was simply nuts. He wrapped and manicured his fingers daily. He came to school carrying lucky items, no matter how embarrassing they looked. He always spoke in a monotonous voice and had no facial expressions or gestures whatsoever. If he spoke – which he rarely did – it was only to tell you that you were an idiot, to obey his commands, or else to die. He had a male human shape, alright, but that was the only thing even remotely human about him. There was something severely wrong with his brain. He could not stand touching people, he sanitized his desk daily, and he repeated some strange gestures every few minutes.

Still, he was an Alpha, so the girls were all over him. Even though he told them he would not eat lunch prepared by their unclean hands, would not take their offerings of chocolate because it was not part of a healthy diet, and would not go home with them because it was too much bother. He was all high and mighty in his glorious, sick as fuck mindset. Takao secretly suspected the guy couldn't even tie his own shoes, but that kind of fuck-up still had women fawning all over him, while he – a completely good-natured, easy-going guy – was still alone.

It was just so damn unfair. He wanted to hit the guy, but of course he was a huge mass of toned muscle, no matter how fucked up his head was. Typical Alpha. No brains, all brawl. That was what he thought until he saw him on the basketball court for the first time. In his short basketball career, he had seen one Alpha after the next dunking balls from all over the court, while an adoring crowd cheered them on for jumping higher, longer, and better than any Beta ever could. Midorima was different. Like an artist, he threw the ball with such a gentleness and finesse that any women would have longed for his touch. For those long seconds while the ball was in flight, Takao understood everything about an Alpha's charm.

With the sound of the ball landing that feeling was gone. What was left was a burning hatred and envy. If one was born with a great physique, good looks, and even intelligence, how fair was it to have pheromones on top of all that? Who needed

Alphas anyway? Even if that guy had had no hormones on his side, he would still have been a magnet for the girls. Not even his completely fucked up behavior scared off girls in search of good genes. Behavior could always be modified, the important thing was genetics. And Midorima had genetics on his side.

It was during one practice, when the guy was acting even worse than usual (socially, never anything else), that Takao had an epiphany. There was a whole pack of girls chasing after the big idiot, and if Takao was sure about one thing, it was that Midorima would never chose any of them as a mate. Really, he would be stunned if that guy even knew how to get himself off. So every week, he left one, two, or even three broken hearts in his wake. And there was no one around to patch those broken hearts back together, was there? So he swallowed his anger, went up to Midorima after practice and asked him right out if they could be friends. No matter what that would lead to, at least he could honestly say he was the first one ever to leave Midorima speechless. And not only for just a moment. The silence went on for over a minute. Hell, he knew the guy was awkward but this? This was stretching it. Finally he was asked: "Why?"

"I want to get to know you better."

Another long silence followed until the other one spoke up again: "Are you asking that as a potential partner?"

"Hell no!" Takao retreated a step. "Only as a friend! I want to get to know you as a friend. Not everyone is into you that way, you know?"

"What, other than my cock, could interest you?" Ugh. Talk about awkward. And he thought those long pauses were strange. The guy really had no tact at all.

"Why are you carrying around a pink llama plushie for example? What are you aiming at? Do you have siblings? I want to know those kinds of things."

"Why?" No suspicion at all in his voice. Was that because he never had any intonation or did he really not understand any of this?

"Because I want to know you better."

"But why?" His eyelids narrowed. Maybe that was how he showed distrust.

"I just wanna. You never talk about yourself. I am curious."

"Do you have a bike?" Wait, what? A bike? What the hell?

"Yeah ... what is it to you?" Takao inclined his head.

"You may drive me to school with it tomorrow. Be at my house at seven." With that he took his things and left. It must have seemed a logical end to the conversation to him. Takao simply asked himself – and not for the first time – "What the fuck did I get myself into?". Still, he drove to Midorima's house the next day, finding himself in front of a very old Japanese mansion. Everything about this guy had to be strange, huh?

Up close, Midorima was even worse. He answered questions – if he wanted to – but never asked any himself. Not even an innocent "And you?", no, nothing. Whenever they had a lull in conversation – or rather a stop in Takao's monologue – Midorima would simply stare into space, as if he were in a completely different world. Sometimes he would not react when Takao picked up the conversation again. Then he would startle, focus on him, and stare as if he were an alien. After just two days Takao decided on simply keeping up a continuous monologue or stay silent. It seemed to be the same to Midorima, so whatever.

Really, some days Takao wasn't sure Midorima wasn't batshit crazy. His multiple quirks – checking everything exactly four times, not stepping on lines, taking stairs two steps

at a time, retreating and doing it over again if the stairs did not add up to an even number – were more obvious the more time he spent with the guy. He once asked what would happen to Midorima if he didn't follow his obscure rules and the answer was that then he would not have luck on his side and he would fail. He never got an answer to the question of what he would fail at.

Still, nearly every day he was propositioned by another girl. Fairly soon, Midorima left all those situations to Takao. He told the girls no for Midorima and asked them out himself. One out of five actually agreed. Half those girls gave up on Takao as soon as they realized that sleeping with him would not get them any closer to their hearts' desire. But that still meant that he scored every other week. Yay for great ideas! For all that sex he was willing to put up with whatever shit Midorima could throw at him. And it was a lot of shit. Midorima found his bike too uncomfortable, so soon he was driving the guy around in a rickshaw. While he had a standing deal with the team to limit himself to three selfish requests a day, he used Takao without limit. Everyday he had to run to the nearest convenience store for red bean soup, fresh seaweed salad, and a can of sparkling Calpis because the vending machines on the way only had bottles. Midorima would not let him go until he finished practice himself – which sometimes lasted two hours longer than the rest of the team.

After three months, Takao had to admit that so much strenuous physical activity wasn't all bad. While he had mostly sat on the bench before, he now ranked as a starter. Not only that: His coach continually praised him for being the only one Midorima would work with. In his opinion he raised Midorima's effectiveness by at least 30%. It did not sound like much, but since the other three players on the court were completely useless on the attack, he was proud to matter so much.

And after three months, he mostly knew what to expect. Midorima was a creature of habit, so he had to do the same chores everyday. The guy never came up with new ones. Once you had trained yourself to ignore all the strange things the guy did, he was actually nice to be around. You did not have to talk, he was happy with silence. They had developed a simple routine, and could relax around one another. Actually it was the first time he'd ever seen Midorima relaxed.

It was early spring, still some weeks before Sakura bloom when they stopped at an ice-cream parlor. Takao got straciatella, Midorima matcha soft-serve. Cones in hand, they were standing in front of an antique store from which Midorima sometimes got his lucky items.

"Shin-chan."

Midorima looked up with a slight widening of his lids. That was another thing, after all this time Takao knew his facial expressions. The other one had them, they were just very subtle. After a moment of silence he asked: "What did you just call me?"

"Shin-chan. It sounds cute." Takao smiled. "You know, if I think of you as cute it is much easier to overlook all your crazy stunts. So as long as I call you Shin-chan, you know that you haven't overdone it."

As expected it took about two minutes of silent staring before Midorima reacted: "Suit yourself."

Still, he relaxed visibly after that. Visibly for Takao at least.

Somehow that initiated a turn in their relationship. Midorima began asking questions, suddenly interested in the world around him. Some of them simply showed his complete lack of basic human needs like "Why do people have girlfriends?", some were just plain strange like "Why do people wear different clothes everyday?". In only

two weeks, he even asked why people got angry or frustrated with him, sometimes right in front of them. It felt a bit like explaining human interactions to an alien. Shin-chan was a good learner though. After Takao pointed out his much too subtle facial expressions, the other trained things like smiling. It looked loop-sided and wrong but somehow it made Takao proud every time he saw that mangled curving of lips.

To his own astonishment it began to feel better than banging girls who only had eyes for the social cripple at his side. He had not expected that, even though he should have known. But number ten finally convinced him that even though one-night-stands were nice, they were not what he was looking for. Only one of the girls had taken any real interest in him, and even that had only lasted for a week or so. So while he still told the girls 'no' for Shin-chan, he stopped asking them out himself. He still stuck to Shin-chan though.

He did not exactly know why, but somehow he had got used to hanging out with him. It wasn't hard, so why not? Shin-chan had money, a hobby he shared, had him exercising daily, and never asked for anything unexpected. Being around him was easy. You did not have to give him anything, not even extra time, but he was always there whenever you needed someone to talk to. Or someone to tell things to, since a conversation with Shin-chan was never really a conversation. Mostly it was like talking to a wall, but it was a living and breathing wall, so he did not feel lonely.

So it came as an extraordinary surprise when Shin-chan asked him – again while eating an ice-cream, that seemed to be a recurring theme – why he still bothered with him.

"What do you mean?" Takao leaned back on his stool. This time they actually sat outside the ice-cream parlor.

"You became my friend to sleep with all those girls I said 'no' to. But you aren't doing that anymore. So why are you still hanging around?"

"You noticed?" With any other person Takao would have felt ashamed to be found out like that. But Shin-chan never got angry anyway, so why bother with shame? "Well, I like you, I guess. We are friends, aren't we? Friends hang out with each other."

"What do you like about me?" Shin-chan seemed openly curious. It seemed to be another of those "Why does the world turn?" questions he sometimes came up with. He never got the obvious when it came to social interactions.

"You like basketball. You come to every game with me that I wanna see. You are never boring. You're a great listener even though you don't react much. You never get jealous. And you never discriminate against me."

"Why would anyone discriminate against you?" Again with those big, asking eyes.

"Erm ... I am half-Korean. My mom married into money. I am simply the result of that decision. She took the money and left, my dad went back to work, and I have been living alone for four years now. I have money and an apartment of my own. Some people get jealous of all that, others tell me that no one wants a half-breed like me. You never even asked. Most people think it is horrifying how honest you are but I find it endearing. You do not care about a person's circumstances, they don't interest you at all. You see a person and judge them for who they are, not for their parents or their history. I know that you see me as I really am. I never have to pretend."

"Pretend to be happy even though you are lonely?"

Takao flinched and averted his gaze. Shit. And here he thought Shin-chan mostly hadn't been listening to his monologues. Seems that he had been listening pretty closely.

"You are always laughing, always in the middle of everything, but you never get close to anyone." Shin-chan ate a bit of his matcha sorbet.

"You noticed?" Takao whispered.

"I have eyes." Pretty ones at that. But the scary thing was that Shin-chan did not blink when he talked to you. He simply stared until the conversation ended. "Why am I an exception?"

"Huh?" An exception to what? Not getting close to people? Takao nearly laughed.

"You are impossible to get close to. We could spend twenty years like this and we still would not cry when we said goodbye. I know you are not a robot but you have the emotional depth of a puddle."

"And that is why you like me? Because I am unable to express my feelings?"

"You express them alright by now." Takao leaned forward and smiled. "I know you can feel. Just not very much."

Shin-chan seemed to think again. He still did that sometimes when he did not know what to say. Sometimes he continued conversations days later. By now Takao was used to it so he did not expect a reaction so soon. "I wonder why. Why does everyone else feel so much more than I do? Even my mother does. Why am I so different?"

"I don't know. Have you checked with a doctor?"

"Yes, my parents have. They were told I have an autism spectrum disorder. This seems to be one of the symptoms." Shin-chan had finished with his sorbet and arranged his spoon on his plate. "I never missed having feelings until now."

"Until now?" Takao inclined his head. Why was that? Why was Shin-chan suddenly unhappy to have so few feelings?

"I have fun being with you." Wow. Really? "I think. But I do not know how to express myself. I am afraid you will get bored with me. But now I'm used to you, so I do not want you to leave."

Takao could only grin. Really, that was kinda like a love confession in awkward Shin-chan-style. He was cute like that. If only he could blush. But alas, he most likely lacked the emotions of shyness and insecurity.

"Don't worry, I like you. I'll warn you if that starts to change, Shin-chan. I know you are no good with changes."

"Thank you." He righted his glasses. "I do not want to be cast aside simply because I no longer provide you with interesting female company."

"That was a cute comment bordering on frustrating."

"You want me to trust in my own charm to keep you with me?" Sarcasm seemed to be something he could express really well.

"Yep." Takao simply grinned.

Autism spectrum disorder. Of course Takao had googled it right away. He had heard the term before. He had had a real bookworm in his class in primary school. That boy may have been a bit strange, okay, but compared to him Shin-chan took the cake. He was extreme in everything, even in having a mental illness. At least he now knew what to call all the strange things Shin-chan did.

It was good to know that the more secure Shin-chan felt, the less strange he would become. They had been friends for more than four months now and Shin-chan had already let go of some of his stranger quirks. He could walk stairs normally now. Sometimes he checked things only once or twice. And Takao realized with pride that those improvements were all due to him and his friendship, because he had read that without intervention the symptoms of autism only grew worse. He really was

important for Shin-chan.

He tried not to feel smug. He did not let that knowledge fill him with pride because that would have meant acknowledging how important Shin-chan had become for him. It took something else to get him to admit that to himself.

The coach had given them the InterHigh league schedule. Like every team, they watched old videos of their upcoming rivals. When it came to Seirin, there were no good videos so they went to see one of their games. They planned to at least, but as soon as Shin-chan saw them he turned and left. Takao ran after him before the coach could remind him that he had now used up one selfish request for today. He found Shin-chan outside, looking around in confusion as if he had just come to. When Takao called him, he blinked owlishly but waited for Takao to reach him.

"Why did you leave?"

"I ... can't tell." Shin-chan averted his gaze. What the hell? Shin-chan averted his eyes? Was the world coming to an end or what?

Takao grabbed his arm and they walked to the park next to the stadium. He sat him down on a park bench and knelt in front of him to ask: "What just happened?"

Of course it took Shin-chan more than a minute to answer: "There is someone on Seirin's team I went to middle school with. He reminds me of things I want to forget."

"Seirin has someone from the generation of miracles?" He would have remembered if the coach had told them that, so he was sure it wasn't the case.

"No, Kuroko was a starter but no one ever called him a miracle. People just never noticed we were six instead of five."

"How can someone forget a miracle?" Takao furrowed his brows. "Was it the red haired guy? He looked like a miracle. His Alpha scent was so strong I could smell him from afar."

"Kuroko is an Omega." Shin-chan's voice got smaller. "He was the blue-haired one next to that Alpha."

"An Omega athlete?" There were things like that? "Shouldn't he be mated and pregnant by now?"

Shin-chan turned his head as if Takao had punched him in the face. It was too obvious a reaction. Whatever he had said, it must have had a real impact.

"Was he ... did you lose a fight over him?" Takao guessed.

"No." Shin-chan looked down as if in shame. It gave Takao a queasy feeling. He had never seen the other look defeated. Something was very wrong here.

He stood and sat next to the other to ask: "Why does this hurt you so much?"

"It reminds me of my failures."

"Failures?" He nearly laid a hand on Shin-chan's shoulder but remembered just in time that autists found no comfort in being touched.

"You are jealous that I am an Alpha, right?" Midorima sounded broken, so it was hard to think about his own envy right now. Of course he wanted to be an Alpha. But not Shin-chan, the guy had too many issues. Being an Alpha was not enough to make up for them all. "I wish we could trade. I would give anything to be a Beta."

"Why?" His voice was surprisingly calm. He would have expected that to come out with the shock he actually felt.

"Because Alphas are beasts when they are in rut. I hate losing control like that."

"I can imagine." He actually could. Shin-chan was the most controlled person he had ever met. Of course he would be loath to lose control instead of riding the hormonal high that came with fucking in rut.

"I don't think you can imagine." Shin-chan's voice sounded grave. "Have you ever seen

an Alpha fuck an Omega?"

"Woah ... I didn't know you had that word in your vocabulary." Takao shakily drew breath. "I watch porn, you know? Alphas and Omegas are really good for making porn."

"How violent do they get? Do a lot of Omegas die?"

"What?" He leaned forward to look at Shin-chan's face. If someone said he had an empty face, he must never have seen Shin-chan like this. He looked ... broken. "Does that ... have you ... what do you mean?"

"They don't seem to show the cruel stuff. I guessed so." The green-haired guy slowly raised his head. "I choked an Omega once. Akashi was the one who revived him. After that he punched me in the face. Akashi, I mean. The Omega never dared."

Takao was silent for once, taking a minute to compose himself before he asked: "Kuroko?"

"Yes." Shin-chan closed his eyes. "He was the only one ever to make me lose control. I hope that Alpha claimed him. He seems strong enough to protect Kuroko from me."

Trauma. He remembered reading about trauma when he had researched autism. Autists mostly had no psychological mechanisms to overcome trauma. They were simply broken down little by little by the traumas they experienced. Seems that hurting someone was just as bad as being hurt.

"Have I finally driven you away?"

"I am still here, am I not?" Even if it did not help Shin-chan, he had to hug him. It was what he himself needed at least. "I am sorry that happened to you."

"It is just so unfair. Omegas have inhibitors, so they can live a normal life. All I can do is chop off my cock and hope that's enough." Shin-chan sounded close to tears. No wonder he was so neurotic when he knew how he got when he lost control. Suddenly a lot of his strange behaviour made sense.

"Please don't do that. As long as you do not go near an Omega in heat, you should be be okay." He hoped. He did not want to lose Shin-chan to an Omega. "So now you are afraid to meet Kuroko?"

"Not really." Shin-chan sat up, thereby drawing Takao closer, since he still had an arm around his shoulders. "Kuroko is fine. He wasn't even angry. I just don't want to go near him when he is in heat. I hope that Alpha claimed him."

"Actually ... why didn't you claim him? Isn't that kind of an instinct?" Hopefully he did not make Shin-chan sad again.

"He wore a collar. He did not wear one today, that makes me hopeful."

"So he was okay with sex but not with mating?" Omegas were strange like that. It was what made them so hot.

"No, I raped him. I was thankful he wore that collar."

"You ... what?" Takao looked up, direly confused by now. "Just by scenting him, you lost so much control that you raped and nearly killed him?"

"Yes." The other sighed. "I hate being an Alpha."

"I ... see." Actually, he did. He had never thought about it that way. Maybe it was okay to be a Beta after all. Neither Alphas nor Omegas sounded good right now. "Was he the only one? Or were there others?"

"He was the only one but it happened ... eight times I think." Shin-chan finally looked at him again. "He had seven abortions."

"I'm sorry." Damn. And here he thought Midorima was pure as snow. He would never have expected something like this. "Is there no way to protect yourself?"

"No, except to run away very fast." He averted his gaze again. "Akashi wanted us all to become the best we could be. He set nearly unreachable goals. The one who came closest to reaching his goal was the one allowed to chase Kuroko that month. Kuroko's goal was to mask his scent, so that he would not be found. His motivation was clear, I guess. And when he had finally learned to mask his scent even in heat, Akashi set more of us after him. The last year of middle school was one gang rape after the next. Even if I weren't in rut myself, I could not resist Kuroko's allure. I could control myself not to rape him when he was out of heat, but as soon as he went into it, I went wild."

"That is sick." Takao felt bile in his throat.

"It was why I chose a high school none of the others would go to. Akashi is quite smart but the others are dumb as bread. And I knew where Akashi would go. I just wanted to get away from all of them. Kuroko did the same, he went to a completely new school none of us would go to. He isn't angry with any of us, he said, but still ... I know I am the worst." A silence followed but Takao did not know how to fill it. "Being an Alpha is about being strong to protect your mate. But how can you protect someone when the beast is you yourself?"

"You are still scarred, I see", said a third voice.

Takao nearly screamed. Where the heck did that guy come from? Wasn't he the Omega they had been talking about all the while? He had not seen him coming and he was known for noticing everything! How come he did not notice him before?

"Adept as ever." Shin-chan looked up. "As sick as it all was, it did teach you what it was supposed to. You are invisible to my senses."

"I could stand here in the peak of heat and you would not smell me." Just like Shin-chan, Kuroko's voice had no intonation at all. Takao did not know if he was an autistic too or if all the abuse he had suffered had stolen his emotions. "I am still not angry. But none of you seems able to forgive yourself."

"Most days I think about killing myself." Shit. Takao strengthened his grip. How could he not have seen that in all those months? Had he really been so oblivious?

"I want you to let go of your hurt. I want you to continue living. I want you to forgive yourself." Kuroko's voice was full of determination. "So I will win our match to show you that I am not helpless. I could have put a stop to all that we did at any time. It was my own choice not to. So you have no reason to blame yourself."

"You want to beat me with that new Alpha you got?" Shin-chan's voice sounded dead, as if all hope was lost.

"No. I'll beat you myself." With that Kuroko turned and left.

And he really did. He made good on his word.

Takao could not help grinning when Kuroko knocked the ball out of Shin-chan's hands. It was their ultimate loss and still he felt elated. Kuroko had beaten them, he had shown that big green-haired idiot his power. Damn, he really was good.

He grabbed Shin-chan's shoulder to get him to move to midfield to thank their opponents. As always he functioned perfectly, even if his head seemed far, far away. Hopefully the world had finally righted itself and his friend could now forgive himself. It had been only two days since Kuroko's bold challenge but sleeping over his words even once was enough to make Takao hope they would actually lose this game.

He wanted Shin-chan to forgive himself.

He didn't know if this plan of the blue-haired Omega would work but he certainly

hoped so. He did not want Shin-chan to die and two days ago he had sounded like he wanted to give up. It scared Takao. Honestly, Shin-chan was his only real friend. As a rule he did not let people get under his skin but Shin-chan was different. Little by little he had earned Takao's trust. When he was fourteen and his father had left him forever, he was sure he would never, ever put his trust in anyone again.

Except for Shin-chan. Shin-Chan was more reliable than a clock, the rain in April, and the phases of the moon put together. He a constant in Takao's life that he wanted to keep forever. Just like he was Shin-chan's only friend, the guy was the only one for him as well. He wanted him to be strong, not to falter on his way, and to bury the pain that plagued him. He wanted a healthy Shin-chan at his side.

"Dude, he looks crushed. Haven't you ever lost, Midorima?", someone from the team asked in the locker.

"Shut up!" Takao admonished him. "This was about more than a game and you don't have the faintest clue, so leave him alone."

"Woah, woah, Takao ... calm down. I didn't mean anything mean by it. I just wondered." The other guys exchanged some silent communication. "Should we leave you alone?"

Takao looked to Shin-chan who was nearly completely changed after showering and answered: "Nah, we'll go. But thanks. Sorry for blowing up at you. It's just ... please let it go."

He changed at high-speed and went after Shin-chan who was already leaving. He still hadn't said a word. Takao decided on simply following. They ended up in the park next to the stadium, exactly where they had sat down two days before. Shin-chan stared at the bench instead of sitting down. After he hadn't moved for more than five minutes, the Beta tried to draw out his thoughts. Two more minutes of silence followed his tentative request before the other answered: "I don't know what to think."

"How about not thinking then?" Takao took Shin-chan's hand and tucked it into his jacket pocket. "He beat you. He showed you that he is stronger now. For him it was training and you were one of his training partners. You didn't do anything wrong in his eyes. Let that sink into your head without overthinking it."

"How?" Shin-chan looked so lost, so dejected.

"What would you like to eat? Or shall we go watch a movie? Something that does not have to do with any of this. What would be a good distraction for you?"

"Distraction." The other looked at him as if he had grown two heads. "We could ... do you have movies at your place?"

"Sure have. You've never been to my place in all this time, have you?" Takao grinned.

"Can we go to your place, watch a movie and order food? I heard that's the best way to relax. I never tried it." For the first time in ... ever actually ... Shin-chan really did look cute. Like a lost puppy.

It tore at Takao's heartstrings. Cute Shin-chan was the best. He took the giant with him, holding his hand in his pocket the whole way.

Takao watched the Alpha next to his bed. He had gotten his spare futon out for him (it had been his Dad's once) and the other had spent the night after they had watched movies until early morning. Even though Shin-chan had been nearly unable to fall asleep, he had been awake when Takao awakened. But he did creepy things again and stared at the ceiling without saying a word.

"Any conclusion to your thoughts?" Takao asked after half an hour of watching the unmoving figure. He had learned to be patient with Shin-chan.

"I believe that Kuroko is not angry. He does not blame me. That means no one blames me for what happened in middle school ... except for myself."

"Why do you still blame yourself?" Takao took the blanket, wrapped himself in it, and sat down next to the futon.

As always it took a few minutes for Shin-chan to answer. No one could rush him, it seemed. He said: "You are right, I do not blame myself. It happened, I can't change it now. I can only do my best for it to not happen again."

"I hope this speech does not end with you chopping off your cock."

"No ... there are better ways. I could neuter myself by removing my balls. It would keep my sexuality intact but erase the Alpha urges." He seemed to spot Takao's disapproving stare. "I don't ever want to rape someone again. What else should I do?"

"Stay realistic. Of course your hormones went wild in middle school. That phase typically ends after high school, or after university at the worst. You'll simply have to steer clear of Omegas until then. After that you'll have enough control over yourself. You don't need to cripple yourself."

"Hm ... are you sure?"

"Positive." Takao leaned forward to Shin-chan's ear. "You'll need those appendages again."

"Are you sure you do not have an interest in them yourself?"

Damn. Takao blushed. Typical Shin-chan to ask such questions out of nowhere. What an idiot.

"Is that a yes?" The other smiled and sat up.

"Are you flirting with me, Shin-chan?"

"No, I am completely inept at that." True, he was trying his best to vary the tone of his voice but he could have been speaking about dissecting corpses. "I only wanted to communicate that if you ever feel an interest in me, you are free to act on it in my opinion."

"Because you do not want an Omega and I am the only Beta around you that you can stand?" His black eyes were trained on his hands. Anything that could made him forget that Shin-chan was only centimeters away.

"Is it an insult to say yes?" The other sounded actually curious.

"It is." Takao smiled, looked up and pecked Shin-chan's cheek. "I am happy you learned that."

"I am happy you can stand me." There was a real, open smile on Shin-chan's lips. It was simply not fair. Somehow he had got the hang of being cute since yesterday.

"I can wait for you." He put two fingertips on Shin-chan's chest, right over his heart.

"Someday you will be able to feel what love feels like. I hope to see that day."

The other took his hands, raised it to his lips and actually kissed his knuckles. Wow. That was very ... romantic. Who had Shin-chan copied that from? Had he planned this in any way? He said: "I want to let go of my hurt. I want to start trusting in myself again. I need you for that."

And he thought he had blushed before? Try tomato now. Takao actually stuttered: "Th- that is n- not very like you. To say. I mean, I know, but for you to actually say it ... that's unexpected."

"I thought about what I want for three days straight. I didn't even sleep."

"Wait a minute, you haven't slept for three whole days? How did you play so good a game?"

"I didn't. I made a lot of mistakes." Shin-chan actually grinned. "Next time we'll crush Kuroko."

"Err ... okay." Takao smiled. "As long as we do it together, I am with you."

Kapitel 2: Getting intimate

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Kapitel 3: Getting together

"I think you learned to pass from every available angle." Otsubo shook his head but smiled. "By now you can pass into his jump when he hasn't even lifted from the ground behind your back. That is simply amazing."

"It would be more amazing if I wasn't the only one able to do that." Takao confronted their captain. "If I got injured or sick, this team would be completely dysfunctional. Of course I am everyone's link as your point guard but you all need to train on passing between each other. I can't be the only one to pass a ball to Shin-chan."

"That is correct." His boyfriend nodded.

"And right back at you! You need to learn to pass to others and trust your teammates." Everyone drew in a sharp breath at Takao's words.

Shin-chan simply lowered his head and pouted. He was cute like that. Takao patted his head for not immediately reacting with refusal. All their teammates simply stared in a mixture of shock and astonishment.

"That is most true, Takao. Thank you for bringing that up. We will use our summer camp this year to focus on passing and teamwork. Your basics are great but as Takao mentioned he is the only one working as a team player. So some of our time will be spend on trust exercises."

"Coach?" Their captain looked at the older man with dread. "Trust exercises with Midorima? That ... really?"

"What are trust exercises?" Shin-chan asked Takao.

"Things like letting yourself fall and others catching you and stuff. Exercises where you are forced to trust in others. It doesn't hurt but it will most likely be quite disturbing for you." He laid a hand on his shoulder. "I'll be with you, don't worry."

"I think that is one of the most horrible things coach can come up with." Kimura said.

"Except for Takao, we will all be miserable."

"Ah, don't be like that. In the end it will be fun." He grinned. "We could even prepare ourselves for it. How about an evening of karaoke?"

"Karaoke?" Miyagi looked at Shin-chan in doubt. "Do you know any pop songs?"

"Kazu makes me listen to them when I am at his house." His boyfriend raised an eyebrow at Takao. "That does not mean I can sing along to them. I can only sing Enka."

"You can actually sing?" He asked in surprise.

"My family specializes in tea ceremony. I can sing Enka, do fan dances and serve tea."

"No way!" He blinked. "How come I didn't know that?"

"You never asked." Shin-chan actually smiled. "And you do not have a professional tea set at your place."

"I direly need to buy that." Takao inclined his head to the side. "You know, I wanted the others to come to karaoke to relax a bit around you but now I am actually curious to hear you sing. Are you good?"

"I was trained in it. What do you think?" Ah, Shin-chan was showing his arrogant self again. Of course he had trained to perfection, just like with anything he did. Tea ceremony suited him, it was a precise art.

"So, who else wants to hear Shin-chan sing?" Takao turned with a grin.

"Well ... it sounds better than doing trust exercises. What do you think?" Miyagi turned to their other two starters.

"I'm in." Kimura said, the other nodded.

Wow. He hadn't expected that. They were all clapping wildly. Shin-chan wasn't only good, he was really great. If he wasn't a genius and a pro basketball player, he could be a singer without problem. It was unbelievable what the guy could do.

"And here I thought you had no emotions. Songs about loneliness are definitely your thing." Miyagi stood to shake Shin-chan's hand. "I am sorry if I ever insulted you, carelessly thinking you would not feel it anyway."

His boyfriend simply blinked in confusion.

"Thank you, Miyagi. Some of your words hurt and I am happy I could get across that I am a human being like everyone else." Takao said over Shin-chan's shoulder mimicking Shin-chan's voice.

"Oi!" The bigger one turned.

"Someone has to represent your human side, Shin-chan. It's because you never let them see you cry or hurt that they think like that." His boyfriend seemed to decide that silence was the best course of action, so Takao let him sit. "Now, who is next?"

"You are." Otsubo gave him a microphone.

"Well, I am not as good as you, Shin-chan." Takao winked at him. "But I specialize in love songs. You can learn to sing about something other than loneliness."

"I guess it is not exactly easy to feel lonely with that guy at your side." Miyagi sat next to Midorima.

"Not when we are alone at least." The bigger one studied his captain for a moment. "I still feel disconnected from everyone else. But Takao helps a lot."

"So you are interested in other people?" Miyagi looked surprised. "You never gave off that feeling."

"I never understood what was positive about talking to others when it was not about achieving some kind of goal. But Takao never stops talking and somehow I learned to like the chatter."

"So put in one, you have no clue how to talk to people?" Miyagi spoke without any accusation in his words.

"Pretty much."

"Huh ... I am beginning to see what Takao sees in you. Even though I still don't understand why he bothers with you. But I guess if it is true you really perfect everything you do, you must at least be quite skilled in bed."

"That's not what we are about." Shin-chan straightened. "Kazu has the same trust issues I do. He simply has another way to deal with them. Do you really think you know him? Then think again."

Miyagi blinked in confusion. It took a moment before he spoke again: "I instinctly wanted to disagree but you are right. He seems like an open and outgoing person but he is close to no one but you. So I guess you know what you talk about."

"Yeah, I've never seen Takao with anyone but you. You seem to be his whole focus in life." Kimura leaned nearer. "Sometimes I asked myself if he might secretly be an Omega or something. It is unusual for a Beta to focus on a person like that."

"True ... since that day I threatened to throw him off the team and he bit my head off, he has been offensive in his affection towards you. He does not hold back at all, he simply refrains from openly kissing you. But anyone could see you are a couple."

Otsubo said and seemed to collect his thoughts. "You know that gay players are not taken on as JBL players? If you stay with him, you won't have a career in basketball."

"If they don't want me it's their loss. My parents want me to study medicine at Todai anyway."

That left all three with their jaw hanging open.

"Oi, Shin-chan!" Takao put down his microphone, the song had just finished anyway.

"Have you said something rude?"

"I am not aware that I did." His boyfriend answered.

"That does not mean you didn't. What has he said?" He turned to Miyagi who was normally the most coherent.

"He says he does not need to play for the JBL, he can study medicine at Todai." The blond shook his head. "Is he for real?"

"He is simply stating facts. Shin-chan finished our last exams as one of the top ten in the country." Takao sat on Shin-chan's other side. "He's a super genius and a great athlete."

"If you were an Omega or a woman I would completely understand the allure but his genes won't exactly help, you cannot get pregnant, Takao."

"Shame that." Still he only shrugged. "I like Shin-chan a lot anyway."

Miyagi couldn't seem to find anything to say to that. Kimura saved the situation by asking: "Does anyone want ice-cream? I'll get some."

"Matcha for Shin-chan and vanilla for me, please." Takao, who nearly laid in his boyfriend's lap to talk with others, looked up. "Now I know why you always get matcha. Do you even know any other flavors?"

"Why should I try? I like matcha. It is healthy."

"Kimura, if they have chocolate, bring a choco one as well. Better yet, I am coming with you. Shin-chan has to try every flavour they have."

His boyfriend only sighed deeply. Still, he would try. After all, he was a tsundere. Takao wished he could kiss him in public.

"Takao?" Shin-chan inquired on their way home. By now he spent half the week at Takao's place anyway, his mother did not worry anymore. "Why is everyone so sure that you bottom when we have sex? Is it so strange that I like it?"

"Not at all." He smiled to the taller one. "Most Alphas are simply too proud to even consider not topping for once. After all, topping is an instinct for Alphas. I guess we Betas never think about the fact that someone could want to act against their instincts until we are confronted with it."

"So you expected me to top as well? Are you dissatisfied with-"

"Please don't even finish that question, it is absurd." Takao went serious for once.

"Sex with you is the best, among other things we can do together. Really, Shin-chan, sleeping with you is the absolute bliss. I completely forget why I was ever into women."

"Really?" The other seemed surprised.

"Nothing beats your muscles, your smooth skin and those cute little noises you make right before you come. For me, you are the best ever. I hope that never has to change."

"You aren't growing bored of me? It's been two months after all. Your girlfriends never lasted more than a week."

"That should tell you that you are nothing like them." Takao stopped suddenly and took his boyfriend's hand. "I might sound very cheesy now but this is important, so listen. You are great in bed, don't worry. But more important than that is the fact that I love you. Even if you did not have this perfect body or couldn't move or I don't know what, it would still be great because it is you."

Sadly it was too dark but he was sure that Shin-chan had a slight blush on his cheeks.

Hell, even Takao might be blushing, this was damn embarrassing. But with Shin-chan you simply had to be honest. He would misunderstand everything else.

"Can we continue home?" The other shyly asked.

Takao was glad they were still standing or he would have stumbled at those words. Home? Had Shin-chan really just called his flat home? His grin could not be tamed when he answered: "Yeah, let's go home."

"Shutoku team members, please gather." They followed their coach's order and came to stand in front of him. "As you know, this team is about tradition and we have been visiting the same training camp for over ten years now. This year we have been met with an obstacle though. Another group already booked the guest house. They have only smaller rooms available now, so no more than the main team and our bench will be able to go. As an apology to the rest of you, we will hold a party where all of you are invited."

"Yes, a party!" Takao grinned.

"You are too happy for this world." One or two shook their heads in humor.

"Come on, it's a high-school party. You smuggle a lot of alcohol, call a stripper or two--"

"Takao Kazunari, there are first-years ... oh well, I momentarily forgot you are one as well. Where do you come up with such ideas?" Their coach shook his head, definitely not in humor.

"The world is such a lonely place without a cute female manager ... why are we the only top high school team without any female support?"

"Well ... err." Their coach looked around as if suddenly looking for one. "Didn't we have one?"

"She graduated last year, coach." An older student said.

"Really? I must be getting old." The man sighed. "Whatever, come see me after practice for the room arrangements."

"I hope we can get a two-bedroom." He said to his boyfriend.

"We are going there for training, you pervert." Shin-chan did not sound too annoyed though.

"Oh, I am all for physical exercise." He grinned. "You are a great partner to train with after all. All those special moves they have given us..."

"Just shut up." Shin-chan still smiled faintly.

It was great meeting Kuroko and Kagami at the guest house. Takao gave them a thumbs up and a thanks, even though they did not know for what. One evening he actually had the chance to chat with Kuroko a bit while Kagami was still out running. Secretly watching their boyfriends had forged enough of a bond for him to freely talk to the smaller boy.

So he learned that Kagami was in fact not mated to Kuroko. Though he planned on asking Kagami, he wanted to do so after he was sure he could stand the "red-haired idiot" (his own words) for a lifetime. It got Takao thinking. He was pretty sure he wanted to spend his life with Shin-chan but he had never even considered doing something about it. It was not as if they could mate. They also couldn't marry. Was there anything they could do? He would have to consider it further.

But before any of that, he would concentrate on the Winter Cup. Of course about two weeks before the event, the worst happened and Shin-chan caught a cold. The team went into a panic, showering him with fruits, medicine and well-wishes to last a lifetime for his boyfriend. So he decided to pay Shin-chan's home a visit.

Before he had always stopped in front of the gate, never entering the premises. He didn't know what he had expected. The Midorima family was into tea ceremony, so of course they would have a traditional house, maybe even a tea parlor or a restaurant. He did not expect an old samurai mansion though. Not only a mansion, it was a two yard house, more expensive than anything Takao had ever seen in Tokio except for the Emperor's palace. The place was huge! Not only did it have two inner yards, it had a front yard and a surrounding garden. It was beautiful. The flowers were still in bloom at the same time that the leaves turned yellow. A paradise of golden hues and orange filled his surroundings, stopping him in his tracks.

"May I help you, dear?" A regal woman in a kimono asked him.

"Ah, I am deeply sorry for intruding." He bowed down low. "My name is Takao Kazunari. I was sent by the Shutoku basketball team to bring their well-wishes and gifts for your son's speedy recovery." At least he hoped Shin-chan was her son and he had not unwillingly insulted a cousin of some sorts.

"That is most kind." She smiled which lit up her whole face. "Would you accompany me to the kitchen, so that we can prepare some of that delicious looking melon?"

"Of course, Madam." He stepped out of his shoes in their entryway and followed her.

"Takao-kun, you said? So you are the boy our son spends all his time with lately?"

"That is correct." What could he say? "He tutors me and we play games sometimes."

"I hope he is not intruding too much. He has good manners but sometimes he seems unable to correctly judge other people and overstays his welcome." They entered the kitchen where Shin-chan's mother bound up her kimono arms.

"Please do not worry, he is polite to a fault. He is more than welcome at my place." He tried to assure her.

"Your place?" She turned to him, a questioning look in her eyes.

"Yes, I am living by myself. My father currently works in another city and changed his living place accordingly. My mother passed away." Or something like that. She left with a lot of money, never to be seen again. She was dead to him at least.

"I am sorry, dear." She had a sympathetic smile that seemed genuine. "In that case I am happy to know my son spends you company."

"Yes, I am really thankful actually. It gets lonely in that flat without him."

"So that is why he also spends his nights. I feared he was into girls now but I did not actually believe that to be true. So I was unsure about his reasons." Her smile grew wider. "It is a relief to finally talk to you. I was so afraid Shin-chan was doing something dangerous."

"You also call him Shin-chan?" Takao smiled as well. "I started doing that to signal him he was behaving alright because he was unable to sense that himself. By now I rarely ever call him Midorima, he is a fast learner."

"I am happy to hear someone is looking after him." She took the melon and began slicing it. "He behaves perfectly as long as everyone follows the old etiquette. But as soon as someone oversteps, he becomes unable to deal with that. I fear today's high-schools are full of people who never even learned those rules."

"Yes, he was quite lost in the beginning." Shin-chan's mother seemed aware of her son's shortcomings though she had nice words for it.

"I fear we were unable to give him a good guiding example how to interact with the outside world. My life is spent in these walls and my husband holds tea ceremonies here and outside. For hundreds of years our family has followed the samurai path until we changed to tea ceremonies after the Meiji revolution. We mostly marry into or from other such families or temples. It is a reclusive life-style that might seem

backwards to modern people like you." She looked at him. "For us it is keeping a tradition that is dying in modern times. We try to keep the life of our ancestors alive." "That sounds most honorable." Wow. Shin-chan was from a really, really strict family. Suddenly his behavior seemed completely normal. "Shin-chan hasn't told me much about his family. I just learned a few weeks ago that he had learned tea ceremony and other skills at a young age. I heard him sing once, it was beautiful."

"He has a great voice, doesn't he?" Her smile was brilliant. "He is not the most social but has a reliable, giving nature. I always fear that people might exploit that but on the other hand, he is an Alpha, so I guess he can fend for himself."

"If not, I do it for him." He couldn't stop himself from uttering that. Of course she had looked up at that, who wouldn't? He must sound extremely blunt in her opinion. "I am protective exactly because he has such a beautiful soul. He learned to be arrogant and mean to keep others off but that is not him. I like it when he acts like himself and trusts me to keep others from thinking him weak because of that."

"I thought a lot about what a friend of my son might be like. I always guessed it would be someone he could open up to, someone reliable and deeply caring. I guess I was right." She put the melon on a plate. "I just did not think he would be able to find such a person so early." She turned to him. "It takes a lot of personal growth to forge such a deep bond. Most teenagers would shy from it."

"He is worth overcoming such childish fears for." If he really wanted to have a marriage like bond with Shin-chan one day, this would be the person he had to impress. In such families, women seemed devote but were the ones who influenced their husbands' decision a lot as far as he knew. This might be the deciding moment for their future. She had already told him she expected her son to marry a girl of her choosing. Now it was his turn to show her that might not be the only option. He had an inkling that in the end, Shin-chan would follow his mother's word no matter what. It seemed he was brought up like that. So his only option for keeping Shin-chan was to show his mother that he might be worth consideration.

"I'll show you to his room. He will like the company."

Takao smiled. It might take years to persuade her but he had made a step in the right direction.

"Are you sure you can play?"

"We are playing Seirin, it is not like I could sit this out." Shin-chan sighed. "I trained my endurance for months. A small cold which should be at an end anyway will not keep me from playing."

"I just worry." Takao knelt in front of his boyfriend. "I know we cannot win this without you but I rather lose this tournament than to see you harmed. You know that you can get a heart infection from playing while you are still sick. If you feel dizzy, I want you out, do you hear me? No matter if we lose than. I rather lose a game than you."

"I will look after myself." Shin-chan promised.

Takao played with a strand of green hair in thought. Was it really alright? He knew Shin-chan was stubborn but he could persuade him if he really wanted to. Maybe he should press his point if his boyfriend looked as if he needed a break. Playing Kagami would be hell. He'd give him a nice hot bath tonight.

"I know you are in love and such but could you please be a bit less lovey-dovey? There are people without girlfriends present."

"Go out and have your pick." He gave his captain a certain look. "Easier yet, take one of the lot that is after my boyfriend. You can keep them all."

"You'll have to fend those off for the rest of your life." Kimura smiled. "At least there have been less and less the last few weeks."

"They seem to be finally getting the hint. As if the first fifty weren't a clue he might not be interested in dating." Takao rolled his eyes.

"Well, he was. Just not into girls." Miyagi shrugged. "Every girl thinks she might be special, might be the one. They are not like we guys. We are exchangeable and we know it."

"With the right person you are never exchangeable." Shin-chan said and stunned everyone with that. "Neither boy nor girl. If it is love, you will be special for the other person forever, no matter how ordinary you might be."

"Could you turn for a second and pretend you don't know I am kissing him?" Takao asked his teammates.

Miyagi sighed deeply but turned his back to them to rummage in his bag. He took that as a sign of approval, so he leaned up and pressed his lips against Shin-chan's briefly. They had never actually outed themselves but in the last few months one had to be blind not to see the obvious. They weren't exactly hiding their relationship either. So the others had more or less accepted them.

It was a great feeling to be able to freely love Shin-chan. He hoped they would never have to stop.

"I can't believe this is going to be the first match." Takao shook his head, still in shock even after they had taken their seats and saw the teams bow. "Who starts with Seirin versus Touou as the first match? Are they after the press this match generates?"

"It will certainly be a high-class match and distinguish the Winter Cup from the InterHigh. It is not a bad choice for an opener, people will want to come back after that."

"But I rooted for Kuroko. It is ... I mean, they won't beat Aomine's team, won't they?" He looked to his boyfriend.

"Touou is a team of specialists who play well together. It would give old Teiko a good match if that was possible, at least the team of second grade. Seirin has good teamwork but their individual skill is mostly good at best. Kagami and Kuroko are special, Kiyoshi and Hyuga are exceptional and Izuki is good but their opponents are all exceptional to special. With a lot of luck they may win but only if they found a way to stop Aomine. And I fear to experience what a developed Aomine looks like."

While they talked, the game had already progressed to the second quarter.

"Say, this tension ..." Shin-chan made an appreciative noise when Takao searched for words. "I don't know, doesn't Kagami look extremely on edge? Even more than the normal "I am playing a miracle" tension?"

"I don't think he has taken kindly to Aomine humiliating Kuroko. Here you see two Alphas fighting over an Omega with a basketball." Shin-chan sighed. "This will turn ugly."

"Were Aomine and Kuroko ... an item of some sort?" While Takao asked, their teammates leaned over to hear as well.

"I am sure that Kuroko was infatuated with Aomine at some point. But Aomine behaved like the ass- I mean ... he wasn't very polite."

Takao was already laughing and the others snickering at least.

"Oh, shut up." Shin-chan crossed his arms. "Aomine has a bad personality. I could give you some examples but most of them are highly private. Just believe me when I tell you that you can't imagine how bad he can get. He hurt Kuroko a lot. I was so angry

once I physically attacked him. Sadly he is stronger than me."

"He made you mad enough that you ... what? Punched him?" The blackhaired smiled.

"No, I tried to snap his neck and when he dodged I got his arm and nearly broke it. I was seriously trying to kill or at least physically maim him forever." The tallest one gauged their reactions, seeing them all looking aghast. "I didn't work. He was close to breaking my throwing hand when Akashi stepped in." He held up his taped left hand. "Since then we haven't been on good terms."

"That is the understatement of the year." Takao shook his head. "Do you think Kagami knows? Is that why he is so keen on beating Aomine?"

"If Kagami knew what Aomine did to Kuroko, they would not play basketball over it. If someone did to you what Aomine did to Kuroko, I'd kill him, stronger or not."

"Was it rape?" Miyagi whispered.

"Rape is nothing against it, believe me. And I am not belittling rape with that. It was just that horrible. As I said, you don't want to know because your minds would never come up with it anyway and it should stay like that." The other took a deep breath.

"But I think Kagami can feel that there was something very serious going on between them. It is Kuroko's wish that he beats Aomine and I am sure Kagami will surpass himself to do just that. To Kuroko, this is the most important game they will ever play. They will both give it their all because for Kuroko his sanity might be on the line."

"That serious?" Takao studied the players closer. Kuroko indeed looked extremely unhappy on the bench.

"I am not one for melodramatics." Shin-chan took his hand and interlaced their fingers.

"You know what Kuroko went through to get here. Aomine is the reason he lived through it all."

"He is unbelievably strong."

"Rather he is close to his breaking point. They either win this game or I fear we might lose the Kuroko we know over it. If they lose, he will simply give up." The taller one seemed pensive.

"I direly hope Seirin wins." He leaned nearer and whispered into his boyfriend's ear.

"Will you tell me what Aomine did?"

"No." Shin-chan squeezed his hand. "I won't burden you with that. You would never look at either of them the same."

Well ... seeing as Shin-chan had freely told him about the hunts, the gang-rape and the abortions, maybe he should simply take his word for it. It was true he could not even think up something that would be that horrible in relationship to what the other had already told him. Maybe it was best not to know.

He was sitting in Shin-chan's lap, the other's head buried in his shoulder. He pressed his wet cheek against Shin-chan's and tried to stifle his sobs. Damn it all. Shin-chan had told them so much about Akashi but to see it all in action, used against them, it was just ... it was so horrible. They were an unstoppable might but still it hurt so much.

"I'm so mad right now." Shin-chan tightened his grip.

"You have a shoulder to cry on at least." Miyagi sighed deeply. "If I were to cry like that in front of my girlfriend, she would be deeply disturbed. Most likely she would tell me it was just a game. Women don't understand such things."

"It was just a game to you." The green haired looked up, ignoring the indignant shouts from his teammates. "I know Akashi. He did not even go all out. He used about fifty percent of his strength against us. That is what hurts most. Akashi can take on a team of miracles by himself, I know, but to be shown my place like that ... that ... I hate to

be shown my shortcomings like that."

"For us you are all monsters when it comes to basketball. To know there is one among you that you regard with the same awe and fear ... we never had a chance in the first place but it still frustrates me." Takao leaned back a bit. "Akashi truly is a league of his own."

"Well, at least we made it to the semifinals and were not kicked out of preliminaries like before. That sucked more." Kimura stood. "I can accept a loss against a force like Rakuzan. Your former captain is unbelievable, Midorima."

"My parents won't accept that as a reason." There was something close to a pout on Shin-chan's lips.

"Did they come to watch?" Takao asked smiling. He remembered Shin-chan's mother, she was a nice and kind, even if strict person.

"Yeah, I saw them." The other sighed deeply. "Let's shower, wash our faces and greet them. Hopefully my father won't be too angry. I have most likely hurt his pride by losing."

"Well, he can play Rakuzan himself and look how he fares." Takao snorted. "It was a damn good match, it is not as if we went down without a fight."

"Yeah, Akashi smiled at the end. That is a sign we at least entertained him." Annoyance laced Shin-chan's voice. "I hate to be proud of that but it is something to be proud of."

"Gee, doesn't that make me feel better." The shorter one climbed off the lap. "Let's crush Kaijou tomorrow, I feel like I need a morale boost."

"Not only you." Even Shin-chan managed a grin. "And you seem astonishingly sure about Seirin winning the next game."

He only smiled to that. While they showered, Takao marveled over how expressive his boyfriend had become. He used a lot more facial expressions and gestures now. He intoned his speech, not much, but noticeable. He really did well.

They said their goodbyes to the team that went to sit together to watch the next game. Shin-chan led him to one of the higher ranks where a man and a woman sat in Kimonos at the end of a row. How his boyfriend had spotted them was beyond him but a lot of things he did were that.

"Thank you for coming." Shin-chan bowed in front of them. "I am sorry that I could not show you a better game."

"It seemed a hard one." His mother stood and took her son's hands into hers. "That captain, he was your former captain, wasn't he? The one you used to play Shogi with."

"Akashi Seijuro. Why did you not attend the same school as him? He is a valuable friend." His father simply stood, he did not even greet. That stern expression on his face did not bode well.

"In that case, we would have been unstoppable and lost our reason to strive to new heights." Shin-chan looked his father straight in the eyes. "Being the best always holds the danger of making one lazy."

"I see." The other's expression relaxed. "In that case I am glad to know you will use this as a reason to better yourself." His focus shifted. "Would you introduce us to your companion? I recognize him from the game."

"Takao Kazunari." His boyfriend introduced him while he bowed as perfectly as he could.

"You played exceptionally well together." Misses Midorima praised him. "You must have spent endless hours in training to become that accustomed to each other."

"Thank you for your kind words." He smiled at her.

"I guess you will want to stay for the next game?" Shin-chan nodded to his father. "Then sit with us. We can go to a restaurant afterward. You might not have won but if it makes you stronger still, it was a valuable experience anyway."

"Thank you, father."

Well, that was unexpectedly nice. They exchanged a smile before they sat down, Shin-chan next to his parents with Takao in his other side.

A month went by after the Winter Cup before Takao became frustrated. There simply were no new tricks to learn. His eagle eye saw the whole field, he could pass from every point on the field in every angle, he could shoot threes – not as good as his boyfriend of course but well enough – and had even trained pace changes like Aomine did. He knew what he wanted to learn but hated that it might be impossible for him. Still, one could try, right? So he invited Kuroko and Kagami to a basketball double date.

Playing basketball might not exactly be one's dream date but for Shin-chan and him it was fine. They played the whole afternoon with Shin-chan training Kagami in long-range shooting and Kagami teaching instinctual play while Kuroko explained the basics of misdirection to Takao. He bought ice-cream for them all afterward.

"Thank you, Kuroko. I won't ever be able to do that as good as you know but I can see how incorporating a bit of this can strengthen my play."

"Somehow I am sure we will lose the next time we play you." Kagami sighed deeply. "If you really learn more formless shots, Midorima, I don't know how anyone will ever stop you except for triple-teaming."

"It will be hard for me." Shin-chan pushed up his glasses. "I rather stick to traditional techniques and perfect them. Learning unconventional plays is not my forte." Still he smiled. "Next time I won't play you when I am still sick."

"You what?" The red haired turned with a shocked expression. "You were sick? I didn't even notice."

"I had a cold two weeks before our game and were still under the weather." The other smirked. "You won't get off as easy the next time."

"Man, you are unbelievable. I can't believe how horrible it must have been for people to play Teiko. No wonder everyone seems broken when they talk about losing to you in middle school. Akashi alone was horrible enough."

"Akashi is special." Kuroko agreed. "With teamwork, we would have overtaken the JBL."

"We could still do that." The green haired smiled. "Do you want to issue a challenge to them in our name?"

"I would like to relax for a bit more first." Even Kuroko smiled, a lazy and content expression. "Winning against you all has been my focus and reason for a long time. Now I have to sort through my priorities."

"Will you be alright?" Shin-chan turned serious in an instant.

"Thank you for asking." Kuroko's smile turned to a slightly melancholic one. "I was able to close the chapter called Aomine. I am not too sure about the other one right now. It will take more time I think."

Kagami who stood next to Kuroko looked quite confused. It seemed his most-likely-soon-to-be mate had not told him about his past. Takao felt bad for him and intrusive at the same time. Shin-chan had told him a lot of personal stuff about Kuroko.

"I would like to close my own." Shin-chan took a deep breath. "Would you help me one last time?"

"Of course." Kuroko looked up curiously. "What is it?"

"As you know I hate that I couldn't control my Alpha instincts. I have trained that as well. For months now I have not been influenced by people's scents anymore. I could even pass by Omegas without a reaction. I have not tested myself on a full blast of Omega pheromones though. Would you loosen the control on your scent for me to test myself?"

Takao sharply drew in his breath. Oh damn. This was Shin-chan's ultimate horror. If he could not stop himself he might even rape Kuroko again. He would never forgive himself. He himself certainly would not be able to stop his boyfriend, he remembered his helplessness when that Omega girl tried her pheromones on Shin-chan.

"Sure." Kuroko nodded without any hesitation. "Kagami, if Midorima attacks me, please try not to kill or maim him. You are strong enough to simply hold him until I rein in my pheromones again."

"Err ... okay?" Kagami scratched his neck. "You are an Omega?"

"You did not notice that until now?" Takao exclaimed in shock. "How oblivious can you be?"

"I never thought about it. It is not exactly important, is it? Kuroko is still Kuroko."

"Kagami is thick enough that he did not even notice his brother being an Omega. Himuro tried to distance himself from Kagami after his heats began and that one never made a connection."

"Oi, how should I notice my own brother suddenly ... well." Kagami became as red as a tomato. "I mean you don't expect your brother to develop such feelings."

"Himuro is with Mukisabara now, right?" Takao remembered the feminine looking star player of Yosen.

"Yes, after Kagami still did not notice a thing, even after meeting again, Himuro mated with our old friend." Kuroko smiled. "Mukisabara isn't exactly intelligent but he is reliable when you tell him it is important. He is certainly not the worst choice as a partner."

"I do question your taste. Though it is not as if your own choice was a fine example of brain power." Shin-chan snorted. "Why you two who could have everyone chose nothing but muscle is beyond me."

"It is about taking responsibility." Kuroko smiled slightly. "That has become more and more important the older I got."

"True." Shin-chan looked to Kagami. "In that case I understand completely."

"What are they talking about?" The redhead asked Takao. "I don't understand."

"That might be because you never put a thought into mating." Takao shook his head. Really, that was one oblivious Alpha. He had two male Omegas on a plate and didn't even notice. Good thing Kuroko did the planning for them.

Suddenly Kagami went still and growled lowly. Takao was the only one who noticed, Shin-chan was still talking with Kuroko and stood with his side to them. He tipped the taller one on his shoulder but did not get a reaction. Kagami's eyes were trained on Kuroko.

"Err, Kuroko? Kagami looks strange."

While he was still on the last word, all seemed to happen at once. With a jump even more impressive than anything before Kagami was lunging for Kuroko. Shin-chan jumped in between, stopping the bull-rush and being knocked at least two meters backwards for his effort. Kuroko turned and ran at a speed Takao had never seen before as well. His body reacted on instinct, running as well and grappling Kagami as good as he could. He only seemed a slight hindrance, Kagami sprinted after Kuroko

anyway, simply dragging Takao along. They were at a park, so they had a lot of free space. Kuroko run for the fountain, jumped in but found it turned off due to it being Winter. So he rushed for the next lake. Takao, his arms slung around Kagami's waist, held on for his dear life. If he let go, Kagami would be on Kuroko in an instant. Kuroko might want to mate with the redhead but not like that. Not with a rape. He finally understood the terror of those hunts Shin-chan had told him about.

Kuroko was the running rabbit.

Kagami was the wild cat intent on devouring his prey.

And right now he was the only one stopping that from happening. He tightened his grip as much as possible, duck his feet into the ground and slowed Kagami down as much as he could. He would not let him hurt Kuroko. He would not let Shin-chan see what he had bad dreams about for years. He would protect his friends.

Kagami gave the scream of an enraged animal, grabbed Takao's hair, pulled his head back and went for his throat with his other hand. He saw it coming, knowing in the same moment Kagami would crush his windpipe without a second thought. In dread he let go and fell back. The hand in his hair was off in a millisecond, Kagami turned and dashed off.

"Run, Kuroko!" Takao managed to scream in absolute horror.

This could not be happening. Please don't let it happen. He saw Kagami shorten the distance in too short a time. Kuroko jumped into the lake, Kagami on him right that instant, falling into the water with him. He got up and ran after them. He saw both bodies trashing, water flying, ripped clothes floating on the surface before they sunk. "Stop, Kagami! Stop it!" He stumbled forwards, everything hurting from that short fight.

A taller stature passed by him, jumping for Kagami and pulling them both under water with the force. A shirtless Kuroko gasped for breath, using the moment of freedom to dive away from the fighting Alphas.

"Wake up, Kagami!" Shin-chan screamed at the other as soon as they broke the water's surface again. He was punched for his efforts but his opposition slowed after that.

Kagami blinked in confusion, finally stopping and helping Shin-chan up after a moment. He looked around and spotted a drenched Kuroko who looked back with only his eyes above the water's surface.

"Oh God." Kagami began to tremble. "I ... I am so sorry, I ... Kuroko."

"Your control is splendid, Midorima." The Omega stood. "Thank you for protecting me twice. Thank you as well, Takao." He actually bowed to him. "Are you hurt?"

"Just a bit bruised." He looked to his boyfriend. "Are you okay, Shin-chan?"

That one seemed annoyed at best, a bit grumpy, a bit mad at himself, but mostly okay. He took in his surroundings and then himself. "I want dry clothes." The green haired stepped out of the water. "We will catch a cold if we stay like this."

"Quite right." Kuroko followed him, beginning to shiver before he even left the water.

"Is anyone living nearby?"

"I do." Takao nodded. "I'll run and get our bags. Shin-chan, take them straight to my flat."

"I will."

"Kagami?" Kuroko turned to the now silently crying boy still standing in the water.

"Would you please carry me? I feel cold like this and you are naturally hot-blooded."

Takao who had already turned to make a run for their bags stopped in his tracks. Kuroko was unbelievable. Did he just forgive Kagami like that? Even if he did, was he

not afraid at all? Hell, he was afraid and Kagami hadn't been after him. He looked at him for a moment, seeing a lost, guilty puppy looking at them with fear of rejection in his eyes. He remembered the guilt and shame with which Shin-chan had talked about raping Kuroko. He had done so much worse than Kagami did because no one had stopped him. It should not be like that. No one should have such instincts.

"Come out, Kagami, before you get a cold." He called out to him.

"Idiots don't get colds." Kuroko deadpanned.

"True enough." Shin-chan nodded. "You'll carry Kuroko the whole way as punishment. Now come out before he loses the rest of his clothes from shivering."

Kagami jumped into action at that, enveloping Kuroko with his arms like a fragile doll and holding him up to press their upper bodies together. With a smile Takao turned and went to get their bags. Shin-chan strode forward in direction of the flat with Kagami following him, carrying Kuroko like instructed. Takao caught up with them on the stairs up to his flat. He immediately went to get big towels for Shin-chan and Kagami. Kuroko got the bathroom without anyone even saying anything. While they heard the shower running, the Alphas stepped out of their clothes except for their underwear and began drying off.

"I'll get two sets of your clothes, okay, Shin-chan?" Takao asked from the bedroom. He took out underwear as well, laying both sets on the bed. "Okay, first one can change." He stepped out while Shin-chan went in instead.

So he stood in his kitchen, dining and living room all in one with a nearly naked Kagami who only had a towel around his hips. Reality seemed to have caught up with him again, he looked down, close to tears again.

"Would you like something to drink? Coffee, tea, chocolate?"

"Kuroko likes hot chocolate." Kagami whispered.

"Then I'll make some tea and hot chocolate." Takao entered his kitchen that was open to the rest of the room. He took out a pot and began heating the milk. Should he say anything? Was there anything he could say? While the chocolate was melting in the hot milk, Kuroko called for him. He went to the bathroom from which Kuroko stuck out his head.

"Could you lend me some clothes, please?"

"Of course! Sorry, I didn't think." Takao could have hit himself.

"Do not worry. And please tell Midorima to take a shower next. He might rebel, so insist." Kuroko instructed.

"Err, okay. I will." He went into the bedroom where a fully clothed Shin-chan stood motionless in front of the mirror. "Kuroko says you are to shower next, no protest accepted."

The other stayed silent while Takao got the clothes but left the room after him. With a motion of his hand, he indicated Kagami he should change next and went to shower after Kuroko stepped out. Takao served him hot chocolate which he was deeply thankful for, just like Kagami had thought. He concentrated on the tea when Kagami came out of the bedroom again. Somehow his mind wanted to shut out the confrontation that was to take place behind his back.

How did you overcome something like that? Sure, his boyfriend had attacked him once as well but they had known it would most likely not happen again. But to know how violently you would react if your boyfriend ever relaxed around you ... no wonder Kuroko kept such a tight leash on his emotions. He most likely needed that to keep his scent under control as well.

When he turned to serve the tea, he nearly let the tray fall in surprise. He had

expected Kagami to stand somewhere in silence and guilt. He had not expected him to sit at Kuroko's feet, his head in Kuroko's lap, having his hair stroked. Really, Kuroko was amazing. He knew exactly what Kagami was going through and seemed to accept it all without a blink. There was not the slightest blame, the tiniest caution in his posture.

"Please have some tea, Kagami." He placed the tray on the table. "It is not as good as Shin-chan's but I learned a thing or two from him. Would you like another hot chocolate, Kuroko?"

"Yes, please." The other poked the head he had just petted. "Get up, Kagami."

The redhead did as he was told. It seemed guilty Alphas had a thing or two in common. Shin-chan got obedient when he was unsure too. Speaking of the devil, he came out of the bathroom and took a place as well.

"Would you like to shower too, Kagami?"

"No, I'm fine, thanks." He rather seemed to want to stay close to Kuroko. "Idiots don't catch colds after all."

"What about you, Takao?" The Omega asked him.

"What?" He blinked in confusion. "I wasn't dragged underwater."

"I wanted to ask how you were. I was quite occupied running but I understood you fought a hunting Alpha. Most people who try that end up dead or badly hurt." Kuroko gave him a once-over.

"Err, yeah. Kagami aimed for my throat, so I let go. I was too afraid of being hurt. Sorry." He looked down in shame. Really, without Shin-chan, he would have been no help at all.

"I am glad you did. You were in more danger than I ever was." Kuroko calmly stated.

"Alphas normally don't kill Omegas but interfering Betas ... well."

"Yeah." He stroked his unblemished throat. "I just got dragged around a bit, so I am okay." He sat next to his boyfriend. "What about you, Shin-chan? He knocked you down pretty hard and punched you." He gently touched the beginning swelling on the other's cheek.

"It will bruise but that is all. I am though."

"You certainly are." Kuroko focused on him. "Since when have you been unaffected by smells?"

"I am not too sure. Somewhere before the Winter Cup. Why?" The tallest drank a bit of tea, smiling at Takao for the well-made beverage.

"While I was turning to run, I noticed how you wrapped your arms around your abdomen before you landed. I know those symptoms."

"Symptoms?" Shin-chan questioned.

"Not emitting a scent, being unaffected by other scents, easily catching colds, feeling weaker, less endurance and protecting your body like that." Kuroko watched the other for a reaction. "Maybe even a slight nausea and sometimes dizziness? I know those well."

"I couldn't be ... could I?" Shin-chan averted his gaze.

"I can't follow." Takao exclaimed. "What are you talking about?"

"Pregnancy." Kuroko answered.

Kapitel 4: Getting a future

"You were pregnant before?" Kagami asked in surprise.

"Yes." Kuroko finally looked away from Shin-chan. "But I was much too young at the time."

"You mean you were raped." The redhead gently stroked Kuroko's neck who seemed to like the attention. "You were too unfazed for someone surviving a hunt for the first time."

"It was your first though, wasn't it?" Still, not even a slice of blame in the shorter one's voice.

"Shin-chan?" Takao asked his boyfriend who had gone very still. Could Alpha males get pregnant? He had never heard of that before. It couldn't be, right?

"How does one determine if he is pregnant or not?" He had no intonation at all.

"Just a second." Kuroko stood and went over to his bag to take out his wallet. "There is a clinic specializing in male pregnancies without judgment. It is where I went to in middle school."

"You still have their card?" Kagami asked.

"You never know when you might need help as an Omega."

Shin-chan accepted the card, Takao reading the data over his shoulder. With a look at the clock he said: "They are still open. Do you want to go? We could still make it."

"They have an emergency service for these kind of situations." Kuroko drank the rest of his hot chocolate without sitting down again. "I can accompany you if you like."

The green haired simply looked at Takao who could read his expression without needing a verbal answer: "Yes, let's go."

"I need a new recipe anyway, I would have dropped by this week. Is your hair dry, Kagami?"

"Dry enough." The redhead still looked at Midorima. "Can Alpha males really get pregnant?"

"The chance of a bottoming Alpha to get pregnant is one in ten thousand. It is therefore quite rare but possible." Kuroko answered.

"You bottom?" Kagami asked as if just realizing it. "Sorry, forget I asked. That was stupid and I don't want to know anyway." He stood and went over to get his and Kuroko's bag.

Takao took Shin-chan's and his wallets out of their bags, as well as his keys. Whatever the result, he wanted his boyfriend here afterward. The other did not complain about only being given his wallet, so he seemed to think the same. If he was able to think anyway. Right now, Shin-chan looked lost. So Takao took his hand and simply dragged him with them.

"This day is full of surprises." Kagami sighed, draping an arm over Kuroko's shoulders.

"Though you still shocked me more than this."

"How so? Being an Omega? Having you react to me?" The shorter one asked.

"I have to mull over the second thing. That was quite a strong reaction."

"Except for Akashi, nobody has ever been able to withstand my pheromones. It is why I keep them reined in so tightly." Kuroko leaned into the touch, obviously happy with having Kagami to himself.

"What is there that this Akashi guy cannot do?" He asked annoyed.

"Multiply himself." Kuroko smiled. "Though I only assume that he is single and does

not have kids yet."

"He is betrothed to an Alpha women of another distinguished family. They will marry after he finishes school." Shin-chan said, openly relieved about not being the center of attention still.

"I am not surprised. Of course they take pride in their Alpha heritage."

That shut Shin-chan up for good. He came from an Alpha family as well. What would it mean for them if he really was pregnant?

"How long until the results are ready?" Shin-chan asked the doctor impatiently.

"Tomorrow morning." The older male took out the needle and pressed gauze to the wound. "Please press for two minutes." He threw away the needle and stuck a bar code label to the blood tube. "I will call you with the results. Before I let you go, I would like to know what a pregnancy would mean for you. You are underage after all and here without parental supervision."

"Will you have to call his parents with the results?" Takao asked taking Shin-chan's free hand into his.

"No, you seem mature enough to me. At least if you can give me a straight answer to this." The doctor did seem nonjudgmental just like Kuroko had said.

"Shin-chan?" He turned to his boyfriend, fearing he would still be stunned.

But the other seemed rather pensive when he said: "We will have to tell my parents. There is the possibility that they might disown me."

"I don't think so, your mother loves you more than anything." Silly Shin-chan.

"She does but my father won't take kindly to it. If he forbids her from seeing me, she will obey."

"They are conservative like that, true." Takao sighed. "Well, anyway, I have a flat and enough money to care for you and the child. I might have to take on a part-time job for the more expensive stuff but we can manage. If worst comes to worst, you can count on me."

"I don't want to completely rely on you." The taller one said stubbornly.

"Shin-chan." Takao kissed his cheek, forgetting about the doctor for a second. "You are responsible for two lives. Let me be responsible for your well-being at least."

It made his boyfriend shut up and even slightly smile. He himself could not get the grin off his face. Shin-chan might really be pregnant. That meant he might come to live with him.

"You do not consider abortion an option at all?" The doctor asked.

"No!" Takao forcefully answered while his boyfriend's arm immediately dropped to his abdomen to protect it.

"I only wanted to ask your reasons." The doctor calmly stated.

He looked at his side, reading Shin-chan like an open book and answered: "I am sorry but those are private. We would simply never consider it. We might be young but we are able to care for a child."

"Yes, I see that. You are both mature beyond your years." The older man nodded. "I have a list of the things you should not eat or do." He gave a piece of paper to the taller boy. "Also, here is another list of the tests and consultations you should have if you are pregnant." They got another. "You might want to read through those tonight. There is something though that is not on this because those lists are designed for Omega male pregnancies."

"Which is?" Shin-chan looked up, aware of his surroundings and fully in reality again.

"Alpha males are muscular and well-toned. While they are bigger and therefore have a

lot more abdominal space, their bellies just do not give. You need to immediately stop every kind of sport or training you do or you won't be able to carry the child to term." He simply swallowed, looked to Takao for assurance and nodded before deciding: "I will."

"Kagami will have to wait another half year for his rematch. He will survive, don't worry." He nudged the other, trying to lighten the mood.

"At least I can still use my brain in the mean-time." Shin-chan sighed, suddenly pouty. "I'll be so bored."

"I'll find you something to spend your time on." Takao stood and helped his boyfriend up. "Now let's go. Does your list say you can eat Okonomiyaki?"

"Looks like I have to watch out with some fillings." The other answered while reading the first page.

"Thank you, doctor. We'll be awaiting your call." Takao bowed. "Let's go out with Kuroko and Kagami."

Kuroko had simply smiled when he saw them come out. Kagami had actually looked disappointed when they told him they had to wait for the results. He had not exactly counted them as friends before but they were the most supportive people he ever met. It was nice to be around them, they made the whole strange happenings today seem completely normal and alright.

On the way to the restaurant, Shin-chan was hanging back a bit, finally asking: "How did you know I never considered abortion? We haven't talked about this, have we?"

"That's easy, Shin-chan. First of all, I met your parents. You are a traditionalist just like them. Family is sacred, abortion is thereby never an option." He smiled at his boyfriend to show him that was alright. "Secondly you told me about Kuroko's abortions. Your voice was broken. You would have wanted those kids if he had decided to have them. Just knowing they might be yours would have been enough, you would have raised them as yours. You simply don't ask if you want them or not, they are a given for you. Just by existing your kids are your everything. It's in how you talk about them."

"You really know me well." The taller one smiled. "But what do you want?"

"I want to support you in everything you do." He answered with a grin. "I am long past the point of asking if I want that or not, it is a given for me. Because you are my everything. You want our kid, so I will do my utmost to make it possible."

Shin-chan mouthed to him that he loved him. He sometimes did that because he was too embarrassed to say it out loud. He was cute like that. He turned serious afterward and said: "You know that might mean you have to raise our child because I suck at that?"

"You won't. You do everything you do perfectly. I know you will study books on child rearing until they come out of your ears again."

"It is not as if one can train that skill." Shin-chan looked aside.

"You could always help out in a kindergarten." Takao grinned, imagining that.

"Actually that would be hilarious, I wanna watch."

"Stay serious, Kazu."

"Always am." He still chuckled to himself. "If your parents throw you out, I will have to do the rearing anyway. You are the genius here, so you stay on in school and study afterward. I can always drop out and take on a job. What do you think would suit me?"

"You would do that?" Those beautiful green eyes widened.

"Well, you won't be allowed to go to school with a baby. So either your mother helps

out or I drop out. It is not as if we have other options."

"You really have thought this through."

It was so damn cute when he astonished his boyfriend. Of course he had thought it through. Since the moment a pregnancy became a possibility, he had counted his money in his head, coming out with only one conclusion. If Shin-chan's parents did not support them financially and with child-rearing, he would have to drop out anyway. Nappies, formula, toys, clothes, all those things were expensive. His father send enough money for him to eat and pay the bills but not more. If you calculated closely, he could feed his boyfriend and have him live in his flat. But he had no money at all to support a child as well. There way no way he was staying in school. That carefree lifestyle of barely managing their academically focused classes and playing basketball was at an end now. If he wanted his family with him, he would have to work.

This restaurant visit might be the last for a very long time.

"Kazu?" Shin-chan asked, his head lying on Takao's chest. For once they had simply switched off the light to cuddle. That warm closeness was something they both seemed to crave right know. "I have to admit that I am scared."

"Of what?" He laid one hand on Shin-chan's head, scratching it comfortingly.

"Telling people." The other took a deep breath. "Somehow, as long as you are here, I am sure everything will work out. Even if my parents disowned me, school suspended me and I got complications, you would be here and make it alright." Well, good if one of them was so sure. Takao hadn't even thought about the fact that Alpha pregnancies were dangerous and they might have complications. "But what will our teammates say? I will let them down. What about the teachers? What about our friends?"

"Kuroko supports us, that means Kagami supports us. Who else matters? Those two are important. Our teammates will be sad not to have you for a season but they will also be happy for us. They have been supportive of our relationship for months now. They won't suddenly let us down. If they do, I'll lecture Otsubo again. Or rather Miyagi, our new captain"

"True." Shin-chan relaxed against him. "I always thought you were mad to tell the others. Now I am glad you did."

Takao kissed the green hair in response.

"What if I am not pregnant?" The other asked into the darkness.

"We keep trying for a child. One in ten thousand doesn't sound too hard, does it?"

Takao grinned. "We'll simply have lots of sex."

"Good plan." He could hear from Shin-chan's voice that he smiled. "Now every outcome is favorable."

Somehow sleep overtook them, even though both had been sure to lay awake until morning. It was a Saturday, one where they did not have to attend school. So it was Takao's mobile phone that woke them by ringing.

"Good morning." He blinked the sleep from his eyes, holding a sleepy Shin-chan with one arm. "This is Takao Kazunari speaking."

"Good morning, I am sorry to have woken you." He immediately recognized the voice, it was the doctor from yesterday. "Is your boyfriend with you? Are you ready to hear the results?"

"Please wait a moment, I will put you on speaker." He did so and lay the phone next to their heads. "We are listening."

"Just as your friend guessed, the results are positive. Congratulations on your

pregnancy." They exchanged a lazy smile and kissed. "I would like you to make an appointment here at the clinic for an extensive checkup. We can determine how far along you are. Please bring all medical documents you have about yourself, Midorima."

"I will. Thank you, doctor." He answered from Takao's chest which he was pressed against in a hug right now.

"Good, I'll see you then. Have a nice weekend."

"Same to you. Goodbye." Takao said before hanging up.

"We're going to have a kid, Kazu." There was a happy smile nearly reaching the edges of Shin-chan's face. He had never seen him this expressive.

"We are." He kissed the other. "What should we name him or her?"

"If it's a girl, I want to name her Kikyo." The taller one lay on his chest, not exactly being light there. "My grandmother was called Kikyo. I really liked her."

"Kay ... you are kinda heavy."

"What? I haven't even started showing." There was a playful glint in Shin-chan's eyes, also something he had not seen before. He rolled off anyway. "If it's a boy we need a strong warrior name."

"Not Shinichi?" Takao turned to lay on his side. "I would have two Shin-chans."

"I don't want to share that name." There it was again, that cute pouting face.

"Something along the line of Masaru."

"We can have the others make suggestions and choose from them. Thereby they will feel included."

"Whatever is best." The other drew him into a kiss. "You know, that list said gentle sex is alright. How about it?"

"I would never say no to that." Takao grinned. "I love you, Shin-chan."

"Me too." His cheeks reddened. Oh, their kid would be a cuteness overload.

"What was your guess how far along you are?" The doctor asked while holding an ultrasonic device to Shin-chan's lower abdomen.

"Third month?" Takao guessed. "You said that you felt different three to four weeks before the Winter Cup preliminaries."

"Well, if you ever feel different in the future again, you have already been pregnant for a while." The doctor typed something on the device and lay aside the device's head. "So this is your child. Head, back, arms, legs." He pointed to the different parts on the device's monitor. "In reality it is about this big." He showed them a length of a bit under twenty centimeters between his hands. "At that stage it is easy to pinpoint the exact pregnancy time. That baby is most likely nineteen weeks old."

"That's ... fifth month?" Takao estimated. "That's right after our summer camp."

"It also means we have less than five months until birth." Shin-chan said from his lying position. "I guess I should be showing already?"

"Yes, you should." The doctor sighed and poked his stomach. "But not with those muscles. Even if you stop all activities right now, your muscles won't loosen enough. There is a high possibility we'll have to do a Cesium in about two or three months."

"Doesn't that mean the baby will be at least two months early?" He squeezed his boyfriend's hand.

"Yes, it will. It will have some immune and breathing problems in the beginning but that is preferably to the deformities if we leave it in. You are a bit late in recognizing your pregnancy." Shin-chan squeezed back at the doctor's words. "To be honest it is a wonder you did not have a miscarriage with all that activity. I looked you both up, high-

school national basketball champions, right?"

"Yeah." Takao sighed and kissed his boyfriend's forehead. "We'll have a baby in two months."

"Do you want to know the gender?" The older man asked.

"Yes!" He looked at Shin-chan for assurance. "Let's see if it is a little Kikyo."

The doctor changed pictures on the monitor with some clicks and said: "As you see here, there is no penis, so yes, it is a Kikyo."

"Great." Though Takao did all the talking, his boyfriend smiled here and there. "She'll one day be a JBL player for the womens' team."

"I am happy if she is healthy after being born two months early." Shin-chan took a towel from the doctor to clean himself. "How long does a Cesarian need to heal?"

"If you are asking how long until you can play again, you should wait two months for training and three months for actual games."

"So I can play the InterHigh if you get the team through the preliminaries. I somehow don't see that happening, we are still in the same bracket as Seirin. You'll have to play them without me." The taller one lowered his pullover. Since they heard about the pregnancy last Saturday, Shin-chan had only worn at least two layers of warm clothes.

"You won't play at all the next InterHigh. You will do your best to relax, so that the baby can be born as late as possible." He sneaked a warm hand under the other's clothes. "Is there something we can do to relax those muscles?"

"Simply don't let him do anything. Not carrying any groceries, not hanging clothes, have him laze around as much as possible."

"Great, I can pamper you on doctor's orders." Takao grinned. "I can finally state a reason for driving you around in a rickshaw."

At least Shin-chan had the decency to look a bit uneasy about that. Even after they became actual friends, Takao hadn't stopped the subservient attitude. He still ran to the conbini at least twice a day. Now that he knew why, he had had no problem the last few days to run four times. Because Shin-chan allowed it now, the hunger had caught up with him, so he had been ravenous for days.

"I had the blood rechecked for our usual tests. You are quite the healthy individual. That also poses some problems. There are diseases you can only get once but if you get them while pregnant, they damage the child. So here is another list of things to avoid."

Shin-chan took it and asked after a few lines: "Kissing strangers? Why would I do that?"

"Look, you aren't allowed to cuddle with baby kittens. That's harsh." Takao pointed to another one.

"I don't like animals anyway. They are unhygienic."

"Anyway, the next checkup is in a month, please register an appointment at the reception. If anything happens in between, come here night or day. Abdominal pain, bleeding, vomiting, diarrhea, all those are very serious symptoms and require an immediate checkup."

They nodded, thanked the doctor and went to make a new appointment at the front desk. Afterward they left for Takao's flat. They had stayed there for the last half week, telling Shin-chan's parents as well as the team that he had a slight cold and Takao was caring for him.

"So, we'll have to tell the team and my parents next ... who should we start with?"

"Your parents." He answered immediately. "Their reaction decides a lot about our future. The team will want to know when and how we will come back. While you can

continue to play, my future is undecided. If I have to take up work, I won't return to basketball."

"Never?" His boyfriend looked slightly upset about that.

"Most likely never." Takao kept up his smile. It was no use to cry over spilled beans.

"When do you want to tell them?"

"On Saturday." The taller one took a deep breath. "If it doesn't go well, we have two days to move me out."

"I have." Takao poked him in the side. "You aren't even allowed to pack."

That had Shin-chan roll his eyes in annoyance.

Takao had dressed in his best jeans, a button-down shirt and dress shoes instead of sneakers. He used his father's aftershave instead of his normal stuff and even visited a barber a day before. Shin-chan told him he looked fine but he could not deny being nervous as hell.

His boyfriend was unbelievable calm in comparison. He looked the same as ever, wearing a much too wide pullover that made him look a bit smaller than he actually was. They still took the rickshaw, knowing they might need the space on the way back. Shin-chan had stuffed it out with two cushions. They parked in his parent's front yard and entered the house while Shin-chan shouted a greeting.

"You're back!" His mother greeted them with a smile and hugged her son. "Ah, don't you look handsome today, Takao." He was surprised to receive a hug as well. "Your father has cancelled his appointments for today as you requested, Shin-chan. He is most interested in what you will tell him." She looked to Takao. "Should I expect my husband to get angry about it?"

"Uhm ... most likely." He admitted.

"I feared that. I prepared some lavender tea, hopefully that will calm him a bit. Try your best to solve this peacefully." She instructed her son.

"Yes, mother, I'll try my best." They followed her to a banquet room that was most likely used for tea ceremonies. It was formal, carefully and expensively decorated with a low table in the middle. They sat while the mother went to get her husband.

"Does she know what we are here for?" Takao asked the other.

"No, but I think she can guess. I have been staying at your place too often for simple friends." Shin-chan took a deep breath. "That is a good thing. If she knows, my father knows as well. As they haven't forbidden me from seeing you, they might be okay with this."

That were indeed good news. Things seemed to be looking up. At least they did until Shin-chan's father entered, a stern and forbidding expression on his face.

"Good morning, father." The tall boy bowed while sitting, Takao following his example and greeting the other as well.

"Good morning, son. I see you have brought your friend." The parents sat on the other side of the table, the mother immediately beginning to prepare the tea. "Are you feeling better? I gathered you haven't been well these last few days."

"I was physically alright but I needed time to think." The other hesitated a moment.

"How have you been?"

"The same. I used the time to think as well." The older man folded his hands and laid them on the table. "Your mother and I have discussed our expectations for you these last few days."

"What are those?" Shin-chan shrunk a bit into himself. Takao wanted to reach over and squeeze his hand in support but that might be a disastrous move right now.

"As you might know, your mother is unable to have more children. Your little sister is a good girl and will make a fine wife some day but she is not able to function as a head of house. So you are our only heir. We want you to inherit this house, our trade and to father the next generation of Midorimas. Whatever you are going to propose, we want you to incorporate those expectations into your plans."

Oh hell. That sounded exactly like he had feared. They wanted their son to marry. Of course they wouldn't say yes.

"That sounds reasonable and possible." Shin-chan nodded, leaving Takao to blink in confusion. "Though not in a traditional sense and I want to apologize for being unable to keep the expectations you had before." His father simply nodded. "As you might already have deduced, I want to stay with Takao. As by our current law, I am unable to marry him, so our children will be born out of wedlock. I plan to keep all other expectations though."

"How do you plan on having children?" His father bluntly asked.

"I am pregnant in my fifth month."

His mother looked up sharply, speechless but not aghast. That expression changed in a matter of milliseconds to utter bliss. She forgot about decorum and the tea she was brewing to run around the table and pull her son into a fierce hug.

"Miyako." Her husband chided her for a moment but there wasn't much force behind it.

"We're having a grandchild!" She exclaimed in joy. "Finally I can cuddle a baby again."

The older man simply sighed and uttered: "Oh well ..."

"Be still, that is a women's joy." She chided him in turn. "Boy or girl?"

"Her name will be Kikyo." Shin-chan answered with a smile. Takao simply relaxed in relief, letting go of all the built up tension.

"My mother would have been happy to hear." She gave her son another kiss. "I can't believe this is happening. I expected you to fight your father on the issue of children. For you to be pregnant ... what a joyous occasion! We have to celebrate."

"Miyako, there are still quite a few things that need to be discussed." Her husband said.

"Don't be so cold, this isn't a business meeting. Can't you at least tell you are happy we are expecting a grandchild?" She did not hold back her anger on her son's behalf. If she hadn't been very sympathetic before, Takao would have liked her from here on.

"Not yet, no."

Shin-chan froze up, making Takao alert in a second. He sat closer to his boyfriend and said in his stead: "Please ask your question. We are not here to antagonize you."

The older man focused on him after a moment and seemed to accept that he took over for the other: "As I said before, I want my son as head of this family. If you want to stay with him, I'll require you to move in here, lay down your own name for ours and contribute to this family."

"Hiroto!" Shin-chan's mother exclaimed appalled.

"If that is what it takes to stay with my boyfriend and daughter, I will do so without hesitation."

"Have you ever learned tea ceremony? Have you learned old etiquette? Do you have any skills useful for our business?" The older man still sounded quite stern.

"None at all." Takao answered with a clear voice. "I am a Beta male, a half-breed not even fully Japanese. My parents are divorced, my father hasn't shown his face for over a year. I know that I am the least likely candidate you would want for your son. The only thing I can say in my favor is that I love Shin-chan more than my own life and I am

willing to do everything you ask of me to stay by his side."

"That is a bold exclamation." The other did not seem to believe him.

"It is true though. He offered me his home and decided to quit school and basketball to support our family if you were to disown me. He means what he says." Shin-chan finally seemed able to talk again.

"Saying so and doing so are two different matters. I believe in actions, not words. If you stay true to what you said, I will accept you." The father said without even blinking, thereby menacingly staring at Takao.

"I will not disappoint Shin-chan. That includes doing my best to appease you." He bowed as low as he could with a table in front of him. "Thank you for giving me a chance."

"It seems you found a finer husband than I have." Shin-chan's mother exclaimed, still openly hostile. "Let me show you your new home then, Takao. I hope I'll be able to make you feel welcome."

"Thank you, Misses Midorima." Even though that talk right now felt hurtful and humiliating he couldn't help grinning. He could stay with his boyfriend. He could even live with his boyfriend. This was more than alright.

"Please call me Miyako or mother. You are my son in law after all." And she definitely sounded welcoming. He had never experienced what living with a loving mother felt like, he had always been jealous of all other kids instead.

"Thank you, Miyako. My given name is Kazunari, Shin-chan calls me Kazu. The name Takao seems unfitting after this decision." After all, he would be a Midorima now. Even though they could not marry, he would be Midorima Kazunari in his heart from now on. That seemed alright.

"Why do you all insist on calling him Shin-chan?" The father said slightly annoyed.

"Because he is cute." Miyako and Kazu answered in chorus before smiling at each other.

The older man simply sighed.

Kapitel 5: Getting a home

The decision to move was an immediate one that Miyako and Kazu discussed in detail with Shin-chan only occasionally giving an opinion. They decided on a big room next to Shin-chan's old room they would move into. Kazu called Kagami, asking him for help with the moving, after explaining to Miyako that Shin-chan wasn't allowed to lift more than a book. He found himself opening his door to Kagami, Aomine and Kise the next morning. Shin-chan's mother stood right beside them and told him she had persuaded her husband to get a transporter from a friend and drive them. She had also organized twenty cardboard boxes which she sent the boys to get from the transporter. Kazu simply asked in surprise why Shin-chan hadn't inherited those very useful practical life-skills to which she smiled apologetically. So Kazu stayed in his flat packing boxes, she organized the boys to take apart and carry the furniture and Shin-chan oversaw the reconstruction in their new room.

It was late evening when they were all sitting on Shin-chan's veranda drinking soda that Kagami had gotten from the next conbini that Aomine asked: "So why did we do all that? Why are you moving in with Midorima, Takao?"

"Yeah, what does it mean, Midorimacchi? Normally you move out instead of in with your parents."

"I happen to be pregnant, so it was a practical decision." Shin-chan answered in his usual bluntness.

"What?" Kise nearly screamed while Aomine looked at his old teammate with wide eyes and down-turned lips. "That's not a joke?"

"I don't see anything funny about lying." Shin-chan had tensed up considerably.

"I knocked him up accidentally, so I am moving in here to live with him and our daughter. That way we can continue to go to school and might even be able to continue basketball."

"Good thing your parents are that supportive, Mido-chin." Aomine said, his eyes turned down, his body seemingly relaxed but he gave off a high-tension feeling as well.

"If they weren't, Kazu would still have taken responsibility. He is a fine man after all." Shin-chan's voice had a cutting edge.

"I am sorry for what I did, alright?" Aomine exploded. "I talked it through with Tetsu, he forgave me. Shouldn't that be enough for you?"

Kise who sat between them looked miserable. Kazu wanted them to stop as well but this might actually be very important and it wasn't his place to interfere. If he had to, he would jump in to protect his boyfriend, even if Aomine looked close to murder right now.

But it was Kagami who grabbed Aomine's shirt, pulling him close in an instant until there were only centimeters between their faces and said lowly: "You do know you are talking about raping my mate in front of me?"

Well, that made Aomine cower instantly. When it came to Alpha presence, Kagami surpassed even Akashi by now. If there was one guy nobody would mess with, it was Kagami. Kuroko had made a good choice with him.

"Sorry." Aomine said again, this time in a much different tone.

"I am sorry as well." Kise added. "I don't know how much he told you and I know he wouldn't classify what we had as rape but I still slept with him. I doesn't seem right in

hindsight."

"It was a hunt and it was rape, no matter you gentle you were and even if he forgave you. I can understand Kagami's anger." Shin-chan said. "It doesn't matter that Kuroko gave his permission beforehand and afterward, it still wasn't right. And no, Aomine, I will never forgive you. If Kuroko forgave you, I will not openly antagonize you but what you did is and will always be despicable in my opinion. So no, it is not alright with me just because the injured party forgave you. No matter your reasons, it was horrible."

"What did you do?" Kagami asked, not relaxing his grip on Aomine's shirt one bit.

"Please don't make me tell you." The other one actually begged.

Whatever it was it must have been really, really ugly if the proud Aomine begged like that. Kise had averted his gaze again, as if trying to be somewhere else. Shin-chan sat rigid, his gaze intent on Kagami. He wanted Aomine punished, that much was clear. Kazu didn't know what to think about that. Should he intervene?

"Midorima tried to kill me for it and he wasn't even Tetsu's mate. I know that what I did is unforgivable but I still don't want you to kill me. Even Tetsu would not want that. Please, Kagami, don't make me tell you." Bit by bit, Aomine was panicking.

"Kagami?" Kazu finally intervened. "I don't know what happened but I know it was something so horrible I couldn't even imagine it. I know you want to protect your mate but Kuroko said he closed the chapter on Aomine. If you hurt him now, it will only hurt your mate as well because it will bring back the memories. So please let him go."

Kagami did so, though he kept his gaze on Aomine. By now tears of pure terror were running down the other's face. Kazu had never seen anyone so broken. It seemed Kuroko was not the only one hurt by what happened which was most likely why Kuroko wanted to let this go.

"Shin-chan, I want you to apologize. I know that your reaction is most likely warranted but setting Aomine up so that Kagami hurts him without Kuroko here to intervene, that is cruel. I know you are angry but this isn't the right way to deal with it." Kazu told his boyfriend.

Shin-chan simply got up and left. Kazu made a mental note to talk this through with Kuroko. They had something to do about this. All Teiko members were still scarred from their experiences.

"He won't think so for the next few days but you are good for him." Kise said, a slight smile grazing his lips again. "He is asking too much of himself in his need to be perfect and he is asking too much of others." He lay a hand on Aomine's shoulder. "What this guy did was horrible but he wasn't thinking straight in that moment. Sometimes you do things on impulse that you regret afterward. That is a concept Midorimacchi is unable to comprehend."

"I do a lot of dumb things on impulse too." Kagami sighed and relaxed. "I am thankful for Tetsu that he keeps me from making too much damage." He took a handkerchief from his pocket and held it out to Aomine. "Here, take it. Thank you for being the Tetsu-like voice of reason in this, Takao."

"It's what friends are for." Kazu took a deep breath. "Thank you all for helping with the move. Sorry we got into this kind of situation in the end. I fear Shin-chan might be a bit more moody than before due to the pregnancy."

"When is he due?" Kise asked.

"Most likely in two months. He ignored his condition a bit too long." Kazu shrugged.

"What? Wait, doesn't that mean he was pregnant in the Winter Cup?"

"Yes, he was. He plans on beating you full strength in the next Winter Cup. So go train."

"Takao." Aomine looked up, having dried his tears. "Do you think there is a way to make him less angry with me?"

"I'll talk with Kuroko, we'll come up with something. It is his wish to free you all of your middle school traumata after all. Beating you all was only the first step." Kazu smiled. "Again, thank you for helping us move. You did come because Shin-chan called you, didn't you?" The other nodded. "The fact that he called you makes me hopeful. He'll get around some day."

"I hope so." Aomine stood. "I haven't been able to smile without immediately thinking back ever since. I wish I could erase it all."

"Kuroko knows and he is still the most important one here." Kise followed. "Come on, Kagami, let's leave the lovebirds to their quarrel."

The redhead nodded to Kazu and followed the others.

Shin-chan did not talk to him. What a great way to start living together. Well, it was better than being screamed at. At least he still came into their bed and even cuddled up to him. It was better than nothing after all.

"I am still angry." Shin-chan suddenly said into the darkness. "But not at you. You were right to call me out like that."

"I am glad you can be this mature about it." He kissed the green hair. "Just imagine what would have happened if I hadn't stopped it. Would you have been happy if Kagami hurt Aomine?"

"No." The arm around his chest tightened. "I'm sorry. I just get angry whenever I see him."

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

The other only shook his head. It seemed to be really horrible if Kise and even Aomine said the same. Would it hurt Kuroko to ask him about it? Most likely but ... oh well, thankfully Kuroko was quite the strong character. He would call him tomorrow.

Said and done, he did so right the next day at lunch break. He warned him that he wanted to talk about something hard and waited for Kuroko to allow him to. Then he related everything what happened the day before. The other told him he had already heard most of it from Kagami and that he was glad Kazu had phoned him. The other asked him to bring Shin-chan to a specific place in the afternoon which he promised to do. So later that day he drove the rickshaw to a temple, happy that Kuroko seemed to have some kind of solution ready. He only got uneasy when he noticed it was a temple dedicated to Jizo, god of the unborn children. They were a bit early, so they decided to pray for their own child first. Kuroko arrived at the time Kazu was buying a talisman for the health of their child.

"Good afternoon." Kuroko smiled, bowing in front of them. "And congratulations on your pregnancy."

"Thank you for noticing." Shin-chan smiled back. "It was still a bit too late. The doctor said they would have to do a Cæsarian in the seventh month."

"A good reason for praying. I am sorry to hear but hopefully it will turn out alright."

"Thank you." The taller one nodded. "Kazu told me you wanted to show us something. I feel a bit surprised that we meet up here."

"It was the nearest location that was easily identifiable. What I wanted to show you is over there." Kuroko pointed to a wooden wall that divided the temple from what lay behind. They left the place and found themselves in front of a wooden entrance.

"A graveyard?" Shin-chan asked the most likely possibility, tensing up completely.

"Yes. I wanted to show you a grave. Several in fact." Kuroko stopped at the entrance, waiting for them to follow.

The green haired stood rooted to the spot. Kazu couldn't really get himself to push the other either. A graveyard next to a Jizo temple had exactly one reason of existence: It was dedicated to children who died before their birth. Several graves meant that Kuroko had made graves for every child he had aborted. Even Kazu couldn't bring himself to face that. But when Shin-chan stepped forward he immediately followed. If his boyfriend would face that, he would as well.

Kuroko took a bamboo bucket and filled it with water, Shin-chan doing the same right after. Kazu simply followed them, feeling a bit like he was intruding on something sacred. They went to a burial spot with a Jizo and six engraved rocks in front of it. Kuroko carefully put a spoon of water on every one of them before he watered the Jizo too. It was only then that Kazu noticed that there was a name engraved on the Jizo as well. Shin-chan did the same afterward while Kuroko started to talk.

"Akashi changed in our second year. He came up with the idea of hunts and I stupidly agreed to it, thinking it would only be training as well. When I was pregnant right after the first hunt, I was scared but told no one about it. I forged my parent's signature for the abortion and went through with it. I was conflicted about continuing but somehow I thought I could control what would happen, now that I knew what to expect. Of course I couldn't. So I aborted again and went to Akashi to tell him I wanted to stop. First he seemed to agree but then he mentioned it would have been Aomine this time. I was ... I loved Aomine back then. So I told Akashi I wanted to continue. I can't really say what I thought at that time but I was losing him back then, he was losing himself and somehow I thought I could make it alright. When I found out I was pregnant, I was actually happy about it. I went to Aomine and told him I wanted to keep our child, that I wanted to quit basketball and be with him. Somehow I thought he would smile as he used to and be happy."

Shin-chan had finished watering the six stones. He seemed to pray for a moment before he continued with the Jizo and started praying afterward.

"Instead he completely lost it. He took a right hook to my stomach that ended the pregnancy right there and told me to get back to practice." Kuroko took a deep breath. "Midorima attacked him, Akashi stopped them both from taking out each other and finally Midorima took me to the nearest hospital. I was bleeding profusely and had to get a blood transfusion in the end."

Kazu couldn't breath. He couldn't think. He could simply stare at Kuroko in horror. He had thought it was bad? Try worse. Dear gods, this really was more than he could ever have imagined. How could Kuroko stand to look at Aomine?

"After that I simply did not care anymore. I let them rape me, aborted children, I felt dead inside. I finally ended it all by quitting the team. Even after that it took me half a year to piece myself back together enough that I could go on living." Kuroko took a deep breath. "After I met Kagami, I began to return to the living. He gave me hope, he helped me find a reason to keep on living and without even knowing, he helped me heal. I asked him for money to buy this graveyard spot and the stones and he gave it to me without even asking why."

"Aoki." Shin-chan read the name on the Jizo. "You named it after him even though he did that to you?"

"Love is a strange thing." Kuroko knelled next to him. "Has Akashi ever told you how he came up with the idea for the hunts?" The other shook his head, so he continued.

"On that one day I ever skipped practice, I went to talk with Aomine. I know he had lost his spirit, lost his motivation. I had pep-talked him so often, I thought I could do it again but I couldn't. So I went to Akashi to ask him what to do. Akashi told me we should give up on Aomine." Shin-chan's eyes widened at that. "He told me a plate was still usable if it had cracks as long as it wasn't broken."

"I am beginning to think Akashi was worse than Aomine could ever be." There was bitterness in his voice.

"Yes, the other Akashi was a cruel being." Kuroko nodded. "He then suggested the hunts as a way to motivate Aomine and thereby chain him to the team."

"He used your feelings." Shin-chan balled his hands, barely keeping in his anger.

"He did. It may have been the right thing though." The other took one of those hands, enveloping it his own smaller ones. "You remember that day Aomine ran out of practice and our coach decided he did not have to come anymore?" Shin-chan nodded. "I found Aomine afterward, trying to kill himself. That was a month before the whole hunting idea came up."

"Aomine was suicidal from our second year onwards?" Shin-chan seemed stunned.

"Yes. Of course I was horrified, angry and disappointed about what he had done. But I also could not forget how close he was to killing himself. Aomine was very sick and not in his right mind when he attacked me."

Shin-chan hung his head, understanding dawning on his face.

"It does not excuse him. I may have forgiven him but I will never forget. Even though he is stable now I will never trust him again. And I am happy I fell in love with Kagami who is much more reliable than Aomine, even though they are similar in other ways."

"Kagami is a stable personality." Shin-chan stood and helped Kuroko up. "It seems what happened back then hurt all of us. It might have been better if we never went to the same middle school."

"If anything changed, we wouldn't be here now, would we?" Kuroko smiled. "You might be without Takao. You might be without your child. Even though we experienced something that hurt us, we all found happiness, did we not?"

Shin-chan blinked in honest surprise. Kazu simply shook his head in amazement. If the Generation of Miracles were monsters, Kuroko was the most monstrous of them all, basketballwise and emotionally. He did not think he could have gotten over that. And here Kuroko was excusing Aomine who got suicidal over losing his love for basketball. Kuroko's reason for being suicidal sounded a lot more convincing. But he had experienced Aomine's pain firsthand and he could not forget about his broken voice.

"Have you told Kagami about this?" Kazu asked.

"No. I wanted him to stay as carefree as he was. But he pieced everything together himself anyway." Kuroko touched his neck where the redhead must have bitten him.

"He is normally slow but he can be sharp when it is about me. That is an annoying habit."

"He wants you to tell him." Shin-chan said in a surprisingly small voice. "Even though he might know everything by now, he wants to hear it from you. He is hurt that he has to find out from others."

"I fear you are right." Kuroko took a deep breath. "I'll jump over my shadow and tell him. What about you?"

"Me?" The other inclined his head.

"Can you let go of your anger now?"

Shin-chan seemed stunned for a moment before he nodded. Kuroko merely smiled. They left the graveyard in silence, saying their goodbye in front of it.

Shin-chan had silently cried for hours. It hurt so damn much and at times, Kazu had simply cried with him. Just imagining what Kuroko must have gone through, how he must have felt ... it was too much. For a tiny moment he just wanted to believe that all Omegas were sluts and enjoyed Alphas preying on them. It would be so much easier if that were the case. But they hurt just like everyone else, being victims to their own nature.

Still, how could Aomine do that? Even being broken and suicidal, how ... there was a blockade in his head, stopping him from even trying to imagine what that guy could have thought in that moment. He didn't want to. He wanted it to be simple, to hate Aomine for what he had done. Shin-chan had wanted it simple, he had been angry with Aomine, not even trying to understand. Kazu was just like that right now, he did not want to understand. But he couldn't forget the pain and regret that had oozed out of the blue-haired boy. There was no question that if he could turn back time, Aomine would. He had a sudden urge to call Aomine, just to hear his voice and know that he was alive. That conflicted a lot with his anger.

It must have been even worse for Shin-chan who had lived through it all. He must have been there the whole time, hearing that the baby was dead, Kuroko was dying, that he needed a blood transfusion, all because of Aomine. He was unable to imagine that despair, it was ... he kissed his boyfriend, internally thanking him from trying to keep him from all that. Shin-chan had tried to protect him from that knowledge and he had been right in doing so. Because naturally he imagined that situation with Shin-chan, having him lying in his blood, losing their baby – he tightened his hug. Shin-chan simply cried through it all, not responding and just holding him close. Neither of them slept that night.

Kazu suggested they stay home for a day but his boyfriend refused. For one he needed his external structure (something he knew well, Shin-chan got lost without rules) and also, he wanted to tell the team. Kazu hinted that they might not be in the best condition to do so and was shocked by the reaction he got for it. Shin-chan actually swore. In all their time, all moments of anger he had never heard anything remotely vulgar from his boyfriend but today seemed to be an exception. Shin-chan told him that today was the perfect day because he would not take shit from no one about his pregnancy and only return to be being his pristine self tomorrow. Kazu nodded in astonishment and followed him out to drive the other to school.

In the afternoon Shin-chan had mellowed down a bit, looking as exhausted as Kazu felt. He still wanted to get it over with, so Kazu agreed to talk to the team today. When they entered the gym, Miyagi immediately jogged over, stopping in front of them with wide eyes and asking: "Should you already be here again? You look exhausted."

"It wasn't the best of nights." Kazu smiled tiredly. "We have something important we need to tell you. Could you get the coach and the team together? Just the regulars though."

"Even the coach?" Their captain – an exact image of his older brother, just not so strict – asked but went anyway. Not that he had far to go, the coach was already coming over, having sensed that something was amiss.

"You look horrible." He said in an unusually blunt way for him. "Is it something serious?"

"Well." Kazu took a deep breath. "We would like to tell you and the team together." The blood seemed to drain from his face. No wonder, they were the only ones used to

playing on the main team. Losing them both would finally break the neck for them. The others gathered, the coach gave some orders to the rest of the students and they left for a conference room next to the gym. It was where they normally watched other teams on videos and discussed strategies.

"Good afternoon everyone. Please excuse us for interrupting practice like this." Kazu bowed to them while Shin-chan took a seat at his side. They should really have stayed at home, his boyfriend was close to collapsing. "As you have been informed, we were unable to come to practice due to a medical condition. Well ... I don't know how to say this, so I'll be blunt. As you know Shin-chan was not at his best the whole Winter Cup. That was due to the fact that he is pregnant. We found out last week and the planning and organizing have been quite hectic." He debated waiting for their questions but decided against it. Everyone looking at him seemed disbelieving to stunned anyway. "Shin-chan is not allowed any sports until birth. That will most likely be two months from now as he will not be able to carry the child to term. After that he will need another two months of healing and a third one until he is allowed to play again. So we have to count him out for at least five months, seven at the maximum."

Everyone was silent. They all simply stared before looking first at Miyagi, then at the coach to see what their reaction should be.

"That is a surprise." The coach finally said, composing himself. "While it is very unfortunate for the team, congratulations on your pregnancy, Midorima." He turned to the team. "I know that as staff I should not encourage students to get pregnant, so please note that as an official I am hereby scolding those two heavily. Well ... that said, how are you, Midorima?"

Kazu had to keep himself from grinning like a fool. That was the most interesting "scolding" he ever had. Shin-chan seemed too exhausted to laugh though and answered honestly: "Tired."

"You look like it." The coach nodded. "You are of course excused from practice. If you want to watch, you are welcome to but you do not have to force yourself. If you are interested though, you can always act as my assistant coach."

Shin-chan gave an unintelligible noise which his boyfriend translated to: "He thanks you very much and will think about it as soon as he is awake again."

Even the coach had to smile at that, the others snickering.

"As you are not pregnant as far as I heard, I expect you back to practice tomorrow." He said to Kazu. "I do understand that you might not be in the right mindset to play at the InterHigh but as none of us can see what the future holds it is always best to be prepared."

"Of course, coach." Kazu bowed. "Thank you very much."

The others still looked at Miyagi to see if his reaction would differ from the coach but after scratching his head he said: "Well, if players are injured, they need half a year of rehab as well. This isn't so different I guess. Seirin played the InterHigh without Kiyoshi Teppei and they still won the WinterCup. If all goes well and we magically beat Seirin at the InterHigh preliminaries, Midorima might be back with us for the Nationals."

"Actually, Kiyoshi Teppei needs a surgery and will not join the Seirin team at the InterHigh games at all. It is not impossible to win the preliminaries." Kazu said.

"I'll cheer you on when you go against Aomine." Shin-chan mumbled from behind, his voice heavy with sarcasm. "Kimura's younger brother can face both him and Kagami. Best of luck."

That one went white as a wall.

"You are in a foul mood." Kazu chided the other. "Keep silent if you can't say nice things."

The others grinned at their antics, by now quite used to them. Only Kimura the younger – a first year with a lot of potential – still blanched. The coach told them to go back to practice. Miyagi, the younger as well as their old teammate had already graduated, came over and congratulated him in the name of the team before he left with the others. He only told Kazu though with a slightly scared look to Midorima who gave off an uninviting aura.

Kazu decided not to comment that and said instead: "Let's go back home."

"That went surprisingly well today." Shin-chan mumbled while Kazu held him in the bath so he would not drown in case he fell asleep.

"Much too smoothly. I'll find out what their real reaction is tomorrow."

"I hope I'll be better then. I want to take coach Nakatani up on his offer."

"It is quite the honour, you know?" Kazu smiled, kissing the head lying on his shoulder.

"That wasn't a request just because he did not know what to do with you, he meant that. If you can't play, he wants your input."

"I was surprised about that as well. I remember that he did not like me much in the beginning." Shin-chan continued to speak lowly and slowly due to exhaustion.

"Well, you were a little shit in the beginning. You made so many socially inept comments that he kept you to three selfish requests a day. How long has it been since you needed them? You have adapted yourself to social rules well."

"You have adapted me to it." He blinked, looking up at Kazu with those beautiful green eyes. He hoped their daughter would have those eyes. "Without you no one would want me around except for basketball games. In the beginning, I had a lot of arguments at Teiko but we somehow got along. In the end, we hated each other and my only pastime was playing Shogi with Akashi. Here it just continued, everyone could barely stand me. How long has it been since I counted steps, jumped over lines or touched strange places on walls? I mean, I still want my lucky item and my rules but I think my behaviour is acceptable. Strange maybe, but okay, right?"

"Of course. You're doing great." He held up his hand, watching some droplets fall to Shin-chan's chest and running back into the bathing water. "All the new first years will think you act strange on hormones and get horrified later when they see you are normally like that." He grinned playfully to show his boyfriend he wasn't serious.

"Idiot." Shin-chan turned to lay on his side, sinking deeper into the water. "Love you."

"You too." He smiled happily. "Shin-chan? Um, Shin-chan? Hey, don't go to sleep on me! You're too heavy to carry out of here!"

"Welcome back." Miyagi greeted him with a smile in the locker room. "Where have you left your better half?"

"He went directly to the coach. I am expecting the hardest training session we have ever seen. Shin-chan is merciless." Kazu still grinned. "But this way he can work through his hormones' crankyness by driving us all nuts instead of just me."

"My brother told me that an unfiltered Midorima is a nightmare and to always keep you by his side. He actually told me I should not let him play if you weren't there." Their captain looked insecure, lowering his voice. "Is he really that bad?"

"Somehow it is nice to have a new generation to play with." Kazu smiled while pulling of his shirt. "You mostly don't know that nightmare version of Shin-chan that your brother told you about." He threw the shirt into his drawer, happy not to have to fold

it as his boyfriend wasn't around to scold him. "He is better now. He is a fast learner as you know. He is learning social interaction by observing me. The Shin-chan you know has one year experience on the one your brother knew."

"I'm sorry but I think I am unable to even imagine that." Miyagi the younger was a second year and had joined their training as a first string member last summer. He had not have much contact with Shin-chan though because he had not gone with them to the summer camp.

"It is better not to know." One of their bench players who was a third year said. "He wasn't exactly bearable."

"He was lovely for a social bulldozer." Kazu grinned. "I liked him though. He had his cute moments."

"I don't think I'll understand what you find cute about him either." Miyagi had finished changing and came to stand next to him. "When you came out to everyone, my brother was very disturbed and kept muttering to himself the whole evening."

"If you understood I'd have even more rivals. So I'm totally okay with you not seeing Shin-chan's beauty."

"Beauty?" Miyagi blinked in confusion. "I'd understand handsome, he is an Alpha after all ... girls are beautiful, how can guys be beautiful? Does one have to be gay to understand that?"

"No, one has to look for beauty in a soul instead of a face." Kazu finished as well. Most others had also done so but stayed behind to listen. "You'll understand if you are ever in love."

"Oi! I have a girlfriend!" The other argued.

"Yeah." Kazu turned to face him. "I had some of those as well. It is not the same."

"I really don't understand you." Miyagi sighed.

"As long as you can still like and play with me, that is fine."

"Yeah, well ... I don't get the why or how but I have eyes. You love each other. And now your boyfriend is pregnant ... that does sound strange, not even counting the fact we are talking about Midorima. I didn't know males other than Omegas could get pregnant."

"We didn't as well." Kazu shrugged. "I don't regret it but if we could have planned we would have had kids later I think. We only turned seventeen after all."

"Yeah ... strange that." Their captain still turned and walked towards their training ground, all the others following. "Can you even marry?"

"That's not allowed in this country. I'm not even sure I can legally be a father to the child if the mother isn't an Omega or a woman." Kazu's mood turned sour but he reminded himself to brighten up. "Well, anyway, what have you done the last two weeks? Anything special?"

"Nah, mostly basics. Coach was especially into passing exercises. He said he wanted us to make you proud by the time you came back with how good we could pass balls. I'm not too sure how he came up with that but that is what he said."

"Last summer I complained about Shutoku's abysmal passing skills. Even though the old team practised like crazy their passes were still ... well. It is good coach focussed on that. New players, new luck, maybe one of you becomes decent at passing."

"What's wrong with our passes?" The other complained.

"You remember the Rakuzan game and how I passed into Shin-chan's hands when he was already jumping?" Some nodded. "I expected everyone from the old team to pass like that."

Miyagi spluttered and said: "Y- you- wha- are ... are you serious?"

"Yes." Kazu grinned. "And remember: I'm the lenient one compared to Shin-chan. Let's enjoy the next months with him as our coach!"

The astonishment on their faces slowly turned to dread.

"He's the devil incarnate." One of their bench players said between two deep breaths. "If you can still talk, you haven't trained enough." Shin-chan admonished him. "Five laps around the hall."

Two others silently mouthed the question "How could he have heard that?". Kazu only grinned. Shin-chan was extremely sharp, it was why crowds bothered him so much. He heard everything at a much higher volume. Mostly that was a curse instead of something useful.

„Just why did you have to knock him up?" Miyagi asked when they were safely out of earshot. "Have you seen that smug expression on the coach's face? He knew Midorima would grill us."

"That training regime is what Shin-chan asks of himself. He's not so good because of magical abilities, he is so good because he trains like crazy. Just like he had me do this last year."

Some others looked at him with fearful eyes, one of them saying: "You must really love him if you accept such a training regimen from him."

"I don't do it because I love him, I do it because it works. Even Akashi from Rakuzan told me he was impressed with my skills. I have Shin-chan to thank for that. So if you want to win against Seirin at the InterHigh, don't grumble, listen to him. Shin-chan knows what he is doing. And I promise it gets easier after a month or two."

"Sure he wasn't impressed by how you handle your boyfriend?" Miyagi said while slumping onto a bank in the locker room.

"Not likely, you saw how Akashi has enough charisma to handle the whole Generation of Miracles. Shin-chan is definitely enough for me. Though when we were at a party together, he told me that the whole Miracle group was nerve-wrecking and handling Rakuzan was much easier by comparison."

"I guess one has to be a Miracle's boyfriend to casually meet people like Akashi at parties." Their captain shook his head and sighed in exasperation.

"Actually, I was invited because I delivered someone to the host's house who then invited me to help with the decoration. It's not like Shin-chan would ever come up with the idea that I'd like to come along to such events. I had to sneak in on my own."

"I think I would develop a complex if my girlfriend was that important." Kimura the younger said. "Doesn't it hurt your manly pride?"

"Nah ... it would if I was with someone like Akashi. That guy is good in everything. But Shin-chan has strengths and weaknesses just like everyone else. His strengths are outstanding, but his weaknesses are as well. I am able to compensate some of those weaknesses and that makes me feel strong." He began changing. "And just because someone is very good at something doesn't mean you are bad just because you can't do the same. I don't need to see others do worse than me to feel proud of myself – especially not my boyfriend."

"Sometimes it is very annoying how mature you are." Miyagi had crossed his arms, still simply sitting, too exhausted to even change. "I can't see Midorima raising a child ... I mean, at all. It is simply impossible to even imagine. But I have no problem picturing you with a kid."

Some of the others nodded.

"Well, Shin-chan is the one giving birth." His smile dimmed a bit. "You are right that

he's most likely not good being a mother though. But I am sure he can be a decent father. It just means I have to fill a motherly role. I'll do my best."

"Honestly ... doesn't that annoy you?" Their captain had a serious expression on his face. "Your boyfriend is socially inept, so you spend all your time with him alone, not meeting your friends anymore. You are the one who has to be the diplomat all the time, so people get along with Midorima. Now he is pregnant which means that you have to raise the child. Have you even planned how you'll go to school like that? Even if, are you able to continue with basketball? I mean ... I can't imagine you don't have any hobbies that you would like to do sometimes. Your whole life revolves around your boyfriend. Sorry if that is too personal but ... I couldn't imagine that pressure for myself."

"Thank you for caring, captain." He actually wasn't sure if he should be relieved or annoyed. "But I am happy with the way I live my life. You'll most likely live like that as well in ten or fifteen years. I am just starting a settled family life earlier. It doesn't mean I am unsatisfied."

Miyagi looked like he wanted to ask further but at the same time he seemed to accept those words. Kazu was thankful their captain had an older brother who he had been friends with for a year. It gave the impression as if he was some kind of an older brother figure as well and one tended to think of those as stronger, more mature personalities.

When he stopped out of the changing room, he found his boyfriend leaning on the wall next to the door. Of course he had heard everything, Kazu should have known. He silently took the other's hand and turned to go. His boyfriend followed him without another word.

Shin-chan was silent on their way back. Kazu knew it was because Miyagi's words had hurt and disturbed him. His boyfriend was a worry-wart anyway and hearing that everyone thought Kazu crazy for being with him would only set off his fears. Normally the blackhaired boy would drive to the next basketball field now but that was out due to the pregnancy. What to do? What made Shin-chan relax except for basketball and sex? A bath? Yeah, he could draw a bath for his boyfriend, give him a massage and kiss him senseless. That might assure him.

"Welcome back, boys." Miyako greeted them.

"We are back home." Kazu greeted back. "Do we have enough time for a bath before dinner?"

"Of course, dear, I hadn't started yet." She smiled.

"Thank you very much." He bowed. "I'll go and prepare the bath, Shin-chan."

"Yes." The other answered.

He had just adjusted the temperature when Miyako ambushed him in the bathroom, asking: "What happened? I haven't seen him look so dejected for a year."

"He overheard a conversation." Kazu got closer, knowing of his boyfriend's habit to hear every-thing. "Our captain told me he would not give up his youth for a partner or a family and could not understand why I would do that. Especially with someone like your son. I made it clear that I thought differently but ... well, Shin-chan is still unsure now."

"What an idiot." Miyako proclaimed, making Kazu wide-eyed. "You gave up your home and came to live with him, threw away your career thoughts for him and he does not trust you? I have to have a stern word with him."

"I am sure he trusts me." He had to smile, seeing a normally serene woman so furious.

"I fear he does not trust himself enough."

"Kazunari." She took his face in her hands. "You are the son every mother would want, the man every woman with a shred of common sense would marry and I am happy that you decided our son was your one true love. I want you to stay with us, just like Shin-chan wants. Don't let his doubts and fears get to you."

"I won't." He had to keep himself from crying. "Thank you, mother. Err, I mean, Miyako."

"Mother is alright, I told you so." She had a big smile plastered on her face. "I am sorry your own mother died. How long has she been gone?"

"I don't really remember her. I was still very little. We had some neighbors then where I was allowed to play, the woman there was like a mother to me. I can't remember her face though. We moved a lot."

"What about your father?" She asked while he turned off the water that was slowly filling the bath-room with steam. They stepped into the anteroom.

"He kept moving. I refused to come with him at the age of ten, so he left me the flat. I have to contact him to cancel it."

"He doesn't know you have moved in with us?" She seemed mildly shocked.

"We don't really keep in contact. I haven't seen him for a year." He contemplated telling her a bit more and decided to do so in the end. She was a kind soul and would not reject him for it. "My parents had me because it would have been strange in our family-oriented society if they did not have children. But they never wanted me and caring for me always seemed too much for both of them. So I wasn't really sad about either my mother nor my father leaving. We just never made a connection." Her eyes were suddenly teary which instantly made him feel bad. "There were other people I liked like neighbors or my friends' parents. They showed me what family meant and I was okay with that. They gave me enough love to make up for my parents, don't worry."

"I see ... so that is why you love Shin-chan so much." She smiled even though tears had begun to roll down her cheeks. "He has a beautiful, passionate soul that is full of love. If he gives it, it is an unconditional gift and he doesn't hold back."

"Exactly." He grinned. "The others will never understand because he does not show them that side of him. So I don't really care about their opinions. Is that clear, Shin-chan?"

There was some kind of indefinable noise from next to the open door. Of course his boyfriend was eavesdropping again. Miyako chuckled, dried her tears and stepped out to talk to her son: "I'll leave you to your bath then. Enjoy!"

"Thank you, mother." He passed her and entered, his cheeks still slightly reddened. He lay some clothes on the washing machine. "I brought a yukata for you. For ... after the bath."

"Thank you." Kazu leaned forward and kissed him. And again. And ... oh well, he had planned on kissing him senseless after all, right?

Kapitel 6: Getting moody

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Kapitel 7: Getting wounded

"So this is only for pregnant people? Not even for birth? Why is it so big? How many check-ups does one need?" Chiyo fired one question after the next. They had allowed her to come with them to Shin-chan's six month's ultrasound.

"There are pamphlets answering all those questions in the waiting room. Wait for us there." Shin-chan told her, sighing slightly when she was out of earshot. "She has barely talked for six years. You show up and make her transform into a verbal waterfall."

"Do you remember how you started to ask me about fun activities and shopping one day? It's just a phase, you went through it as well."

"That doesn't mean I have to like it." They went up to the reception and gave their data. "I forgot how annoying it was to have a little sister."

"You do know that kids are even worse than siblings? You are fully responsible for them and have to live with their tempers." He grinned. "At least I would guess so, I had neither siblings nor kids yet. It's just what I get from observing."

"Siblings are worse if you ask me." The receptionist said who had listened to their bickering. "Parents tend to tell their kids to play with each other and always blame the oldest for wrongdoings. So it is easier to be a parent than an older sibling."

"So the solution is to have more than one kid." Shin-chan smiled maliciously at him. "Do your best."

"You'll first have to birth this one before we can talk about more of them." They went to the waiting room and sat next to Chiyo who read through everything she could find. "Found anything interesting?"

"You are not allowed to eat clams." The girl informed her brother. "Or sushi."

"And a lot of other things, I got a list. It's good that Kazu loves okonomiyaki best, so he has dragged me to safe restaurants even before we knew about the pregnancy."

They continued to talk about pregnancy related topics until they were called. The doctor was surprised to see a young girl resembling Shin-chan, so they explained her presence immediately. While Kazu joked with the doctor how he had gotten Shin-chan to resort to laziness, that one lay down next to the ultrasound machine. Chiyo stared at his stomach as if something would happen if she looked away. Kazu took a seat next to Shin-chan's shoulder, enveloping his hand in his like the last time. The doctor started the machine and adjusted the device.

"Here she is." He said after a bit. "Her head is on your right, the bottom on the left. Can you feel her movements?" On the picture she adjusted her legs.

"Not really." Shin-chan admitted.

"Well, she is small and your muscles are not exactly lax." The doctor typed a bit, measuring something.

"How big is she?" Chiyo asked.

"Patience, I am getting to that." He clicked some more. "I can't exactly have her stretch, so I have to guess. She seems to be around twenty-five centimeters if I got that correctly."

Chiyo hurried to grab a ruler from her bag and studied the length before asking: "How long will she get before she is born?"

"That depends on when she is born. Normally she should be fifty-two to fifty-six centimeters. I think she'll be able to reach around forty-five before we have to get her

out."

"Twenty centimeters to go, Kikyo." Kazu said to the early flat stomach.

"Until her seventh month she'll get longer, after that she'll gain weight and her organs mature. As long as she moves and your water doesn't break, she can stay in. Once she reaches forty centimeter, I'd like to see you every week for check-up, Midorima-san."

"That sounds resonable. How long will she need to gain those twenty centimeters?" Though his voice held no intonation, his eyes were glued to the screen.

"Normally around eight to ten weeks. As soon as she is that big, I will give you a medication that makes her lungs mature sooner. It will give her a better chance to stay healthy when she is taken out before she is due." He clicked some more, printing out a photo for them. "Please do your best to relax as much as possible in that time. If she can stay just a few days more, it will have a tremendous effect."

"So it might be only two more months?" Chiyo stared at the small creature who looked like someone had stuck two balls together and glued four sticks to it.

"Believe it or not, right this week she passed the date where she might be able to survive outside. If she were to be born now, her survival rate would be about thirty percent. In two weeks, it is sixty percent."

"It's hard to believe." She inclined her head. "Do you have a picture how she would look if she were to be born now?"

"Of course." He shut down the machine and took out a book from his shelf. "The kids in this chapter are as old as that."

She began flipping the pages, Kazu taking a look over her shoulder while Shin-chan stayed back. He cleaned his stomach and took the picture from the doctor, exchanging a few questions and answers.

The babies looked beautiful, even if they were a bit out of shape. All of them seemed peaceful, some peachy, some with nearly translucent skin. Chiyo asked: "Shin-chan, don't you want a look?"

"I know the book." He answered. "All those babies are dead. I find that a bit depressing."

Well ... no wonder they looked peaceful and had smooth skin. Most likely living ones would be uglier but at least they would move. Chiyo closed the book with a thud and gave it back. They thanked the doctor and left. Shin-chan got an appointment at the desk in a month while Kazu stayed silent, sending Chiyo concerned gazes. She seemed dreamy, somewhere far away but it did not look like it was a good place. Her glazed over eyes seemed teary.

"You still give your heart easily." Shin-chan told her once they had stepped out.

"I was happy they were alive", she whispered.

"I am sorry. Those ethereal beauties were not real. Real prematurely born babies are fighting for survival and looking like that too." He explained. "I looked it all up as soon as I got home the last time."

"I'd have a permanent headache if I was thinking that much. Can't you be happy Kikyo is well and has a lot more time to grow?" Kazu had so shake his head. Really, those two could be difficult.

"But what if something happened today and she had to be born early? I'd have a panic attack if I did not know her survival chances and what her health problems would be. I can't just be happy and then fall into shock if I had complications."

"I don't think I would be able to leave home. What if something happened on the road? It's hard to step outside even if you are not pregnant. To know what could happen to your child if you went out..." Chiyo bit her lower lip.

"Bad things do happen. You can't stop living simply because you are afraid. Yes, something sad might happen if you go out. But it could also be something happy. It is something happy much more often than not." Kazu took one hand each. "You are both so afraid and want to control everything to feel a bit safer. But you will never be able to control everything. You can either despair or you can accept that fact. Stop trying so hard. It is okay to be human."

"I could never forgive myself if something were to happen to our daughter." Shin-chan's voice seemed strained, his eyes full of fear. Chiyo looked at her brother with much the same gaze.

"But it might." Kazu took a deep breath. "She might not live, she might be disabled. She might be completely healthy but have an accident one day. You cannot save her from everything. What is important for me is that I don't lose you as well. And I fear that I will if you keep taking responsibility and blame to that extent."

"But ... I ... I can't." Shin-chan seemed close to panic. "I can't, Kazu, that's just ... I'm afraid."

"I know. I am not asking you to do it here and now. Work toward it." He smiled, stepped nearer and shushed the other a bit. "Now relax, please. I did not want to upset you like that."

"What if she climbed a tree and fell? What if she throws a hairdryer in her bath? What if she tipped a cup of boiling hot water?" Chiyo looked at Kazu aghast. "So many things could happen if you aren't careful enough."

"There is a fine line between not caring enough and being overprotective. You both would be overprotective. It is important to care but you'll dig your own grave if you overdo it. Children won't become independent if you don't let them experience danger."

"They'll become as afraid of the world as we are, huh?" Chiyo leaned into her brother.

"We grew up far from people and danger."

"You grew up sheltered away. I had it hard as a child but that makes navigating in this world easier now." Kazu took Shin-chan's other hand and had them move to the next train station. "If I were to be homeless tomorrow, I'd know how to get a roof, a job and food by then. It is sad how I came to know that but it serves me well. I'd like our daughter to learn that as well, just without the pain. There are less radical ways than having nothing but a key and a weekly stipend from the age of eight."

"Let's concentrate on bringing her into this world first." Shin-chan decided. "We can quarrel about how to bring her up afterwards."

"Good idea." Kazu said smiling.

It was in the middle of mathematics when Shin-chan spaced out before frantically grabbing Kazu's hand and pulling it to him. With a careful look to their teacher who was writing something on the board, Kazu moved his stool and came nearer. He wanted to ask what this was about but stayed silent when Shin-chan tucked out his shirt and laid Kazu's hand on his bare skin.

Beneath it he could feel a faint movement, not exactly a kick but something like a very tiny foot rebelling against his muscle cage by pressing outward. He looked up to see Shin-chan not only smiling but grinning. He answered with the same expression. Kikyo lived and she was well and moved just like she should. Right this moment all was well. "Takao, Midorima, what are you doing over there?" The teacher, Ikeyama-sensei, asked them.

"Sorry, Sir." Kazu reluctantly let go of his boyfriend and righted his stool.

"Answer the question." Ikeyama, a man of about fifty years, went to where they said. "It looked quite indecent from where I stood."

"Not at all, Sir." Kazu smiled winningly. "Our daughter just kicked for the first time, so we were a bit preoccupied."

"Your ... what nonsense is this?" The man seemed to grow angry.

"I am pregnant." Shin-chan decided to cut in. "Weren't you informed about that?"

"Are you joking with me? You are much too young to have a child." Ikeyama looked aghast. "Kids like you should have the responsibility and decency not to let it come to that. Didn't your parents teach you better?"

Kazu blinked in surprise before he felt the hurt. Well, there was a damn lot he could say to that. Most of all that this man had no clue at all about their situation and should not judge like that. Before he could formulate an answer though, Shin-chan seemed to have decided to solve a social situation himself: "I would kindly ask you to direct those questions to the director or our coach. Lessons should not be wasted for such discussions."

Well, yay for people who could keep their emotions in check. He would have to kiss his boyfriend later for that answer. It was a good reminder and would have most people back off.

Not Ikedaya though.

"What insolence! Don't you have any shame? Openly advertising such a disgrace and showing no regret at all. You should lower your head and ask society for forgiveness for impending on them with such a despicable example." The standing man lectured.

"I won't apologize for loving and protecting a child. I won't raise our daughter in shame. I cannot accept your opinion." Shin-chan stayed as objective as possible but Kazu could hear his anger.

"Don't you have any humility? I cannot believe you were not suspended yet. The director will hear about this!"

"He knows." Kazu intervened. "Like we said before, other people have already talked this through with us. Please talk it out with them." He saw how Shin-chan's hand was shaking in silent anger, his own not much better off. Gods, he wanted to tell this man to shut his mouth.

"Do you have to hide behind people too good-natured to tell their mind? Do you need other people to apologize for you? Do you think everything may be bettered by having your parents lower themselves for your wrongdoings?"

"I have no problem to stand up to you myself and protect the people I love from your callousness." Which Kazu promptly did, standing up to the same height as their teacher. "If you have no intention to solve this without impending on all others here, I am not one to stand down. Teacher or not, you have no right to dishonour my lover or daughter."

"Are you openly stating your sickness and not even ashamed? What has this world come to if boys think they do not have to abide by society's rules any longer? If you had a shred of honour and love for that child, you would give her up for adoption, so that she won't have to live with the stigma of having under-age, male, unmarried parents. What do you think her life will be like with that story? Other mothers will forbid their children from playing with her, rightly so because if she inherits your rebellious nature, nothing good can come from a child like that."

Kazu wanted to answer but his throat would not let out sound, his lips would not open. His body failed him while his mind screamed at him to do something. Was this how he intended to protect Shin-chan? To stay silent when his boyfriend needed him

most?

"You are right." Said boyfriend answered, standing closely behind Kazu. "As long as there are narrow-minded people like you in this world, people like us and our children will suffer. We made our choices but our children did not. They do not deserve your hatred or prejudice, they are innocents. But you shun them on principle. I pity all children who already had to suffer through your self-righteous morale." Shin-chan spoke over his head, having twenty centimeters on Kazu and their teacher. "I refuse to be treated like this because of your hateful view on the world." He lay a hand on Kazu's right upper arm. "Let us go, Kazu. I am sure this lesson is cancelled for today." "What! What insolence!" Ikedaya stuttered. "Stay right here! I am not finished with you two."

"We may solve this with the director present but not like this. You refuse to listen anyway." Shin-chan seemed completely calm and collected, taking his own bag and shortly packing Kazu's. "This way the class might get the lesson they deserve at least."

"I will have you suspended from school for this!" The man tried to intimidate them.

"Other schools will take us with open arms. We are both top students, Shin-chan is the number two elite student in the whole country and Todai-hopeful. We are also basketball geniuses on the national level. You might want to think your threads through." Suddenly it all seemed very easy. Shin-chan intervention had broken him from his stupor. He took his bag and his boyfriend's hand. "We expect an apology for this."

They left. They also tried to ignore the cursewords their teacher yelled at them. The last part was hard because some of them were nasty, unimaginable from the lips of a teacher. They exchanged a look of fear, finally running out of bravado. Even against all his intentions, tears started to spill from Kazu's eyes. His boyfriend wrapped his arms around him, holding onto him like onto a life-line.

Shit. They might just have destroyed their high-school career. Kazu could only hope that someone might jump over his shadow and either stop the suspension or take them into a new school instead.

The door of their classroom opened which made at least Kazu flinch. But instead of their teacher, the class president stepped out, followed by a pretty, normally giggly girl in their class. Kazu and Shin-chan parted while the first wiped his eyes.

"I am not sure which side is right but Ikedaya went too far." The class president said, the girl beside him nodding. Before he finished the sentence, other classmates followed. They could hear their teacher completely losing it in the classroom.

"Thank you, everyone." Kazu whispered, unable to believe what he saw. "Should we go ask the director for help?"

"That is a wise decision." Their class president answered. "Mi-chi, would you run and get the student council president from his class?"

"Of course, Ida-kun." The girl who had stepped out with him answered. "Let's meet in front of the director's office."

"By the way, you guys could have said something about the pregnancy, you know? Or am I the only one who did not know?" Ida looked over his shoulder but most others shook their heads. "I mean, you are open with your relationship but that ..." He looked at Shin-chan's stomach insecurely.

"We were sure this would go around in school like wildfire." Kazu scratched his head.

"Sorry, we just assumed you heard. Shin-chan is in his sixth month after all."

Some girls gasped, others began whispering. Most simply looked at them in stupor.

"Get back into this classroom this instant!" Ikedaya screamed at them from the door.

"No, sir, we'll go bring this before the director." Ida answered calmly. "Let's go."

"You don't look pregnant at all." A girl said while they walked, staring at Shin-chan's stomach in adoration. "How can you be so lean in sixth month?"

"I am an athlete. I have well-toned muscles." Shin-chan answered them, a bit out of sorts with their sudden interest. "I am also a lot taller than most women."

"How does it feel?" Another asked. "You said she kicked, right?"

"She's still doing that." Something like a smile took over his lips. "It's like a baby kitten that wants milk or cuddles. It's hard to feel at all."

Some girls cooed and ahhed at that. Kazu had to think of their last ultrasound. Kikyo did not look much different from a newborn kitten so the image wasn't too strange.

"Can we feel it?" One of them asked.

Kazu made a quick calculation from the green twitching eyebrow and answered: "Shin-chan is not exactly touchy-feely, you know? That is too forward."

"Oh, sorry, I forgot myself." The girl blushed. "I was just so excited. A real baby! That's our first class baby. Miyako from Class C already had one and some of our third-years also have kids."

Miyako? Shit, he had slept with her. Had their condom broke? No, that couldn't be. She would have told him if she had a child by him, right? Well, now was not the moment to think about that. He would inquire later.

"I also want to marry and have children." The girl's eyes turned dreamy. "Babies are so cute."

"You may see Kikyo when she is born." Kazu told her. "Though I can't promise that my possessive boyfriend won't try to hide her."

They continued to talk about boys versus girls, little cousins and lastly that Miyako had married the father of her child which made Kazu able to relax. So it wasn't his. Hopefully. The timing was still uncomfortably close. She must have slept with that new boyfriend two or three weeks afterwards if she had it nine months later. At least that boyfriend wasn't from this school. If he hadn't showed up to punch Kazu yet, he was most likely in the clear.

They reached the director's office, having met Mi-chi and the student council's president on the way. Ikedaya had followed them, silently fuming. They knocked on the director's door and Ida – taking the lead – ushered in Shin-chan, Kazu, Mi-chi, the president, Ikedaya and himself, telling the others to wait.

"Well, good morning to all of you." The director greeted which they all responded to.

"I am a bit surprised about this gathering. Have I missed some appointment? Mito-kun, what is the matter?"

Their student council president answered that he was just as confused but seemed to have grasped the situation enough to give the word to Ida. He also explained that Ida was a valuable junior member of the student council just like Mi-chi and that they were class president and vice. Ida explained the incident in detail, not allowing Ikedaya to get a word in. He made sure to mention that Kazu and Shin-chan had asked their teacher to stop and discuss the matter with the director three times, never raising their voices.

The director nodded, turning to their teacher and asked him: "Is that account correct in your opinion, Ikedaya-san?"

"Not at all, Himeya-sensei. Those two have defied me multiple times, neither asking for forgiveness for their rudeness nor explaining themselves like I asked them too. They have undermined me in front of the whole class, inciting them to collectively walk out in defiance to the rules."

"Midorima-kun?" Their director had no intonation, much like the one he was talking to now.

"Ikedaya-sensei told us we should be ashamed for our daughter and give her up for adoption if we valued her at all. Kazunari repeatedly asked him to stop and discuss it elsewhere. When Ikedaya-sensei turned to insults, we left. I do not want to repeat what he called us."

"Don't you see that this is for your best? Students should focus on studying, not spending their time indecently, especially not with having kids. Every kid will need a stable family or it will turn out like this boy." Ikedaya pointed at Kazu. "Don't you see that not having responsible parents will only end in failed existences like that boy who carelessly brought you into this situation?"

Kazu's voice failed him for the third time today. Gods, he wanted to scream. He wanted to cry and hide. Anything but this. Please, why couldn't he be stronger?

"This is it." Midorima's face changed at once, turning ferocious. In an instant the room was filled with the terrifying scent of an Alpha who would fight for his mate.

"Don't!" That gave Kazu the push he needed, jumping in front of Shin-chan. "Babe, you're pregnant, this isn't good for your body. Please calm down. I am angry as well but this is dangerous for Kikyo. Please calm yourself."

His boyfriend took a deep breath but the scent only weakened slightly. At least his body did not look like a wild cat ready to pounce. His eyes stayed on Ikedaya though, daring the man to say another word.

"Thank you, Takao. As always your quick thinking is invaluable." The director nodded to him. "You are all allowed to return to your lessons. Ida-kun, please have everyone do homework until the next hour. I will talk it through with Ikedaya-sensei. My deepest apologies, Midorima-kun, this happened due to my negligence of not informing the whole staff."

Kazu saw the director bow his head in front of his boyfriend, unable to really comprehend that. What was happening here? No director ever bowed before a student. Midorima bowed just as deeply, thanking the other and turning to leave. All others followed him, mostly even more confused than Kazu. Their class greeted them back, looking from one to another for an explanation.

"What just happened in there?" Their student council president finally asked.

"My parents and the director discussed the situation extensively, securing his support. Ikedaya stepped out of line and will be punished accordingly." Shin-chan nodded to Ida. "Let's go back to the class. We are to do homework for the rest of this lesson."

He then walked forward as if nothing out of the ordinary had just happened. Kazu followed him, widening his eyes when he saw the dark smirk on his boyfriend's lips. He had known this would happen. This was why he had been so calm. What a deal had his parents made with their director?

Shin-chan seemed to have noticed his questioning gaze and answered lowly: "I had Akashi talk with our director once. They paid a lot of money to get me to attend this school. They would be mad to suspend me after paying that much."

Oh gods, even Shin-chan had a dark side. He enjoyed the thought of what would happen to Ikedaya. But somehow Kazu couldn't really blame him. It might not be good and nice but revenge was indeed sweet.

Ikedaya ignored them afterwards. They did not raise their hands, he did not ask them to read out answers or do exercises on the board. While they did not get their apology, this was better than nothing.

They continued training, Kazu hilarious about seeing the others under Shin-chan's regime and that one fully enjoying giving instructions. Their coach simply watched them and let his assistant handle them. After two more weeks, Shin-chan started showing, even if it was only millimeters. Kazu did his best to massage him every night, trying to loosen the taught muscles.

It took seven weeks until Kikyo got to the point where they needed to attend appointments weekly. Kazu played at his best, rushing through the ranks in the InterHigh preliminaries. His boyfriend sat out the games, cheering from the ranks – mostly coordinating their cheers, so that their morale support was stronger than ever. Kazu was sure to win until they had to face Seirin again. Shin-chan had drilled them, giving their fast forward about a thousand pointers how to counter Kagami. He was still nervous when they went up against them. Right until warm up at least when he went over to Kagami to ask: "Has Kuroko learnt an unbelievable trick or is it normal that I can't see him?"

"Morning, Takao." Kagami scratched his head, his grin off a bit. "Well, he is sitting next to your boyfriend."

He looked up, indeed seeing Kuroko right next to the mass of orange shirts. It seemed like Shin-chan and him were deep in discussion.

"The plan is to destroy your moral support by getting Midorima completely wrapped up in talk about nappies, room colour schemes and whatnot." That seemed to be Kagami's try at being sarcastic. He looked down, a bit embarrassed.

"Wait a minute. Is he pregnant as well?" Kazu asked in surprise.

"Damn smart people." The redhead sighed. "It was kind of an accident, you know? Those heat circles are really something." The last was more of a grumble. "And even though he doesn't have to, he decided to sit this out as well. He even said it is okay if we lose. Sometimes I don't get him."

Kagami really was dumb sometimes. Even if it was no great risk, Kuroko would not take the slightest of risks. That one look was enough to see the boy with the biggest of smiles Kazu had ever seen him with. He was not in the slightest bit unhappy about being pregnant, for once by a man he wanted to have kids with. He had always wanted them, this time allowing himself to. He was healing in his own way.

"Well, just stay how you are, that is how he loves you. Even if you do not understand him." Kazu grinned.

"You know what he thinks, huh? I hate to always be the last to know when it comes to my mate." The other pouted, not really looking angry or sour. "At least Aomine is even thicker than me, that makes me feel a bit better."

"You're still friends?" Kazu asked cautiously.

"Sure, playing him is fun. And what can I say when my mate forbids me from being angry on his account? Life goes on, I guess. We all make mistakes, some worse than others. Sometimes it is best not to think too much."

Huh. He had always thought Kuroko loved his mate despite being dumb but it seemed being an easy-going guy came along with that. That was a strength in it's own way. Shin-chan might be a genius but that came with so many downs ... Kuroko seemed to like it easy. That might not be a bad choice when all you wanted was a family without too many complications. Shin-chan and family spelled trouble in itself. That was most likely the reason Kuroko had passed on him even though he was very reliable. That explained why he refused Shin-chan back then. His boyfriend might not have noticed but Kazu knew that he had silently offered marriage to Kuroko in middle school. He had always been thankful that the Aomine trauma did not make Kuroko run to the

one offering comfort and safety. If he had, Kazu would not have a boyfriend today. Now he could conclude that Shin-chan had never even remotely been Kuroko's type.

"You still here?" Kagami asked with a hand on his shoulder.

"Sorry, just thinking."

"I noticed. That makes me feel down after I just told you I tend not to do that." He lowered his hand. "At least we can play a bit of basketball."

"A bit ... it's the preliminaries' pre-final, Bakagami. And we plan on winning – no Kiyoshi, no Kuroko, this might actually work." Kazu grinned. "If not, we'll face you with full strength in winter. You'll still be without Kuroko then, right?"

"And without Kiyoshi." The redhead let out a big sigh. "This season is cursed."

"Let's make the best of it!" They shook hands before beginning their warm-ups.

Kapitel 8: Getting her

"I think this is as far as you'll get." The doctor mused, studying the screen intently. "She has changed position which is good. She is about forty-eight centimeters now, tall for her age. Thirty-four weeks is a good age to be born. Just for comparison if you weren't this muscled, your stomach should be about this big right now." He indicated a roundness that was at least thrice of what Shin-chan showed. Kazu wasn't surprised – before she turned, he had been able to feel her head when he massaged his boyfriend. "I already noticed the hospital last week that this might be the deciding week. They gave me an appointment for Friday." He clicked to print out the photos before turning to Shin-chan. "The most sensible would be to take that appointment. Are you ready to be parents the day after tomorrow?"

Kazu took a deep breath. Well, he had known it was soon but this was ... sudden. He squeezed the hand he held, feeling it tremble slightly.

"When will I have to check into the hospital?" Shin-chan asked, always the responsible one.

"Tomorrow afternoon. I would guess it is best to go to school, inform everyone there and go afterward. Plan for a week or two in hospital for yourself. Depending on her weight and her breathing Kikyo might leave with you or stay a bit longer. Early-born babies normally receive intensive care for a few weeks." The doctor explained.

"Will I be able to see her after birth?" Even Shin-chan's voice had begun to tremble. Kazu helped him clean himself and sit up.

"With males, a Cæsarian is always best. So you might choose between anaesthesia by having narcotics inserted in your lower spine or your blood system. The first leaves you awake which means you'll see her as soon as the paediatricians have examined her and you are sewed up again. If you want a full narcosis, you may visit her when you are awake and well enough."

"I read about spinal blocks and prefer that."

What the heck were they talking about? He would have to ask his boyfriend to explain later. But as far as he understood this, he was sure Shin-chan would take the option where he stayed conscious. Even if that meant he would be awake when they operated out their daughter ... ugh, good that Shin-chan was the pregnant one. Kazu felt squeamish just thinking about it.

"I'll make the call then. You will need one of your parents to sign the papers tomorrow, alright?" They both nodded. "The procedure will need an hour or two in which you will need to wait outside." The doctor said to Kazu while he already dialed. He began talking to some kind of secretary next.

They waited while holding hands. Kazu put his head on Shin-chan's shoulder which the other allowed. They only separated when the doctor finished the call.

"They would like you to check in at two o'clock, so they can tell you about the operation and your options. One of your parents needs to attend that. You'll stay in the hospital and will not be allowed to eat or drink after tomorrow evening. Your boyfriend is not allowed to stay with you but he may return the next morning if the school allows that. Your operation is scheduled for somewhere around noon. Here is a flyer where to go to and what to pack." He handed over a pamphlet. "Do you have any questions?"

"Do you have pediatricians in this clinic? Can we come here with Kikyo?" Shin-chan

asked and continued when the other nodded. "Shall we already make an appointment? At what time should we come?"

"Four weeks after birth if she does not need to stay in the intensive care unit. Please give us a call after you know when she will be discharged." The older man smiled. "You were really pleasant kids. I am sorry to see you go. Would you send me a picture of Kikyo?"

"Sure." Kazu answered. "Thank you for treating us so kindly. We'll be back if we are ever lucky enough to have another baby."

"Please come earlier next time."

"I know what to watch out for now." Shin-chan answered. "Thank you for explaining in detail."

Yeah, the doctor had been cool like that. He was very specific without prompting, even Kazu found that reassuring. When it came to Shin-chan's pregnancy, he felt nearly as neurotic as his boyfriend was in everyday situations. For Kazu it was the first time he ever felt so scared.

Sometimes he was reminded of the hate and prejudice he had expected to experience everyday. Somehow – most likely because he encountered it so rarely – it cut deeply. Like how the doctor only talked to Miyako, explaining options and risks to her as if it wasn't Shin-chan who was pregnant and had to make decisions. She was the only thing that kept them from exploding by silently refusing to do anything but give her signature. Shin-chan filled out all forms, asked all questions himself and made himself a general nuisance by wanting details the doctor was unable to give (e.g. which narcotics would be used).

When Kazu was refused entrance to the station because he was neither married nor related to his boyfriend, Miyako simply took his hand and dragged him with her. When the nurse protested, she was told that while Kazu might not be related to Shin-chan, he was related to Kikyo and thereby family. That shut the annoying women up for good.

Shin-chan of course was a nervous wreck. He felt like everyone was watching him (which was not exactly wrong) and paced the room. When a young medical student came in to take some blood, Shin-chan had him running away just by looking at him. A female doctor came next and Kazu was able to calm his boyfriend enough so that she could draw blood. He painstakingly fed him dinner before he left very reluctantly. Apparently mobile phones were not allowed because they could disturb machines, so Kazu couldn't even promise he would write or phone.

It was the worst night of his entire life.

When he was allowed back in – this time without any bitching nurses – he looked pale and had dark circles under his eyes. While Shin-chan wasn't off much better, he had at least calmed a bit. They decided to sleep until it was time for surgery, so they spent the next four hours curled up on Shin-chan's bed.

What followed was even worse than the night. Miyako joined him in waiting in front of the surgical unit until they were allowed into a room in which Shin-chan lay on a bed – as white as the blanket around him – and a bundle of white tissues lay under a warming light three meters away. They were told to wait here, left completely alone. While Miyako went over to Shin-chan, Kazu had followed his gaze to the white bundle. Had they simply left his daughter lying there? Had no one cared enough to bring her over to his boyfriend?

He told his anger to calm and inspected the bundle. In that big, fluffy bundle was a

tiny face, crunched together, bloody and partly covered in a cheesy substance. He took a tissue of the many she was wrapped in and began cleaning her tenderly. She didn't really seem to care. He checked her breathing for assurance – it was faint but there.

"A doctor said she is healthy for her age. He said they would connect her to some monitor to check her vitals. But then they all left and no one came back with any monitor. Is she still okay?" Shin-chan's voice was faint, weak and very concerned.

"Her breathing is just fine. She is tired though. I'll clean her a bit, okay? There is a lot of ... stuff on her. How are you?"

Miyako had already asked that but Shin-chan had not reacted to her.

"They told me I have lost a lot of blood. Apparently I won't need a transfusion but they will check my vitals as well. They went to get another infusion but ... well, same thing. They seem to be very busy."

"I'll inquire about your infusion and her monitor. Is there anything else you need?" Miyako asked which her son denied. She left immediately, a frown on her face. It was good Shin-chan had such a caring, genuinely fierce mother.

"Is she really okay?" The other asked again. "All toes, all fingers, no deformities?"

"Haven't you seen her yet?" Kazu asked shocked.

"No ... when they wheeled me in, a doctor had a look at her, then a nurse bundled her up. She's been over there since then. I thought it must have some reason." Shin-chan sounded unsure, nearly scared.

"It is okay to ask, babe." He stopped the cleaning, bundling her up again and taking her into his arms. "The lamp over there also heats her but I am sure she'll be fine if I hold her close." Tiny thing, so very, very tiny. "Don't move, you might open your wounds." He went over, sat next to Shin-chan's head and held her next to him. "I am sure she is beautiful without the grime."

"Idiot." The other sighed in relief, something like a smile on his lips. "She is beautiful even with all that grime. You may continue cleaning her though."

"Yes, princess." Smiling Kazu continued to do just that. "Five fingers on the right."

"It makes me gag to think what must be left inside me for her to look that filthy." At least it came out stronger, Shin-chan seemed to gain back strength, even if not color.

"What's with the cute names though? You have called me babe before but princess?"

Kazu leaned down to kiss his boyfriend. Silly thing. Good that that always shut him up. He informed him afterward that she had five fingers on the left as well. Getting that grime off was a pain but they had time. Every time she crunched her nose, he held her close to him, worrying about her temperature. She seemed pleased enough about that and always quieted down. He was down to cleaning her feet when a nurse rushed in.

"Ah, hello, young man. Where is- ah, there. You could have turned off the warming light." She rushed over to do just that before she went over to the bed with a bag of fluids in hand. "Your mother is a real pain, boy. I am going to change your IV now. They are getting a monitor from the ICU, that will take some time." She hooked up the bag and roughly inserted some cable-like device that went straight to Shin-chan's arm. "Be sure to keep her warm, babies that small can't hold their temperature. I'll get a warming bed in here. You can bath her in the sink over there, just always hold up her head and check the water temperature carefully, she has much thinner skin than other babies. It needs to feel luke-warm for you."

Well, the woman was a bit rude due to being overworked but that were some nice instructions. He thanked her and asked for towels.

"Oh, somewhere in those cupboards, just search them all. And remember to warm the towels under the warming light before you use them. I'll come back as soon as I can, it's just- there's so many people right now, somehow a group of women with problems just came in, I don't know where to put them. It's suddenly such a mess here, sorry."

"As long as Shin-chan and Kikyo are fine, we're good." Kazu said and put his daughter next to his boyfriend for heating. "If I can be of help, please tell me."

"Bathing her would be really helpful. I'll bring some clothes for her with the warming bed. Thanks a lot!" With that she left again.

He began searching the cupboards, finding some more tissues but also real towels in plastic wrappers. He asked Shin-chan if he thought they might use those and if they should get the wrappers off before heating them but the other had no real opinion, so Kazu just went ahead and heated them with wrappers while drawing a bath in the sink. It seemed that sink was actually made for bathing babies, it was wider and deeper than normal sinks.

"Have you ever bathed a baby?" Shin-chan asked.

"Not really. I just watched while some of my friends' mothers bathed theirs. But I am sure I can prevent her from drowning."

"Oh, no, sorry, it's just- you are so calm, I was wondering ... it would be afraid to drop her or overheat her or something. She is so tiny and fragile."

"She is, huh?" Kazu leaned over them. "She is early after all. I am amazed she fitted into you, I expected her to be even smaller. On the other hand she is tiny. It's hard to imagine she'll most likely grow taller than me."

"Are you okay?" A woman asked from the direction of the door.

"Welcome back, Miyako." He smiled at her. "Thank you for hounding the nurse, she was already in. Can you help me bath Kikyo?" She most likely knew well how to bath babies, he'd feel immensely safer with her.

"Oh, sure!" Her face lighted up and she looked around. "Here?" She checked the temperature. "A bit colder than that, I'll mix in some more water. Is there any baby shampoo?" She began searching the cupboards herself.

Yeah, shampoo ... that was a great idea for getting the grime off. He felt like smacking himself for idiocy. Oh well, he would have to learn. He was deeply thankful his boyfriend had such great, astonishingly open-minded parents.

Kikyo seemed happy in her self-warming bed, unconcerned by the cables connected to her. Despite the nurse's initial reluctance to be nice to the underage, same-sex parents in room number 523, it took only half a day for them to coo over Kazu carrying his daughter around. It helped that as always he was as charismatic as his boyfriend was grumpy. Luckily Shin-chan was to stay in bed, only allowed to move on the ergotherapist's orders, and Kazu brought him everything he wanted. So the nurses had minimal contact with his less sociable half.

Or third. Kikyo seemed to have his bubbly personality, being interested in about everything the few moments she opened her eyes. Mostly she just snuggled comfortably in his arm until the nurses reminded him she had all those cables for her vital checks – her monitor was static next to her bed though. So he put her back and waited for Shin-chan to wake again. That one had lost a bit more than two liters of blood, so he slept most of the time.

Two sleeping princesses. He asked his favorite nurse if there was some way he could stay with them, like a chair he could sleep in. Of course there was, partners were

always allowed to stay with their spouses ... great. Gods, every day he hated the fact more that they were unable to marry. He would make an effort in pleading with Shin-chan's father to be adopted.

"Kazu?" His boyfriend seemed to have woken. There was a bit more color in his cheeks.

"Yeah?" He knelt next to the bed and smiled.

"Can I have a kiss?" Idiotic question, of course he could. Every time. Everywhere for all he cared. "Is it okay if you take Kikyō to sit with us?"

"Sure. She has been stable for nearly twenty-four hours now. It is because it is Saturday that she will be monitored until Monday. Only a pediatrician may decide she doesn't need it anymore and the next doctor visit is on Monday." He stood and went over to her bed. "She already charmed the nurses. I got approval to stay with you overnight." And an explanation how turn the monitoring device on and off, so he had no problem disconnecting Kikyō and bringing her over. "Do you want to hold her?"

Shin-chan's eyes widened in something like panic.

"She won't bite." Kazu smiled, laying her down next to the green-haired head. "She was two thousand and six hundred gram at birth. That was a hundred gram over the weight for which she would have needed to stay in intensive care."

"Has she opened her eyes yet?" The other whispered.

"She is exactly how you wanted her. Black hair, green eyes, outgoing personality and a winning smile." Kazu grinned.

"I have yet to realize we are really having a daughter. It's only been three months. Now there is some kind of mini-me lying next to me. Or rather a mini-you."

"Let's say mini-us. After all she has traits from both of us." He took Shin-chan's hand, laying his pinky finger into her hand that immediately closed around it.

"She's moving." Shin-chan's eyes were wide.

"She can cry too. Vehemently. She's hungry every two to three hours right now. I fed her twice since I came this morning."

"She spent the night with the nurses as I am unable to move right now. It was really lonely in here." His eyes seemed teary.

"Don't worry, I'll stay here, so will she. That's the last night you spent alone."

"Thank you." Yeah, there were tears rolling down his face now. "Sorry, I- I don't know-"

"Shh, that's okay." Kazu took out a tissue to wipe them off. "You can cry as much as you like. You have been through a lot these past few days."

"Can you bring her back to her bed, please?" The other took the tissue from Kazu who complied immediately. Afterward he went back and lay down beside the other, smuggling an arm under his head. Shin-chan had a crying fit, something he had never seen before. "I'm sorry, I ..."

"It's okay. Cry a bit, dry your tears and then we can talk. Crying and talking at the same time is contraproductive. I don't want you choke."

"Idiot." The other smiled lightly, even though he cried. "I can cry and breath and the same time."

"Really? You're not very used to crying as far as I know. After our lost matches, breathing did not seem so easy for you." Kazu smiled, even if the memory came with the hurt of losing.

"Okay, better." Shin-chan dried his face and cleaned his nose. "Promise not to hate me?"

"That's an easy promise. I might get angry but I cannot stop loving you. So tell me what you are crying about."

"It's ... it sounds mad. I want to give her back. Take her back. I want her back in my womb and have more time to prepare. I want her, I just don't know if I want her now. That is mad, I know, it is just ... I feel scared. It is very hard to define all those feelings, you know?" Shin-chan slumped against him. "I feel like I'll explode. It's just too much. How am I supposed to care for her? They told us that teenage parents are no good. What if they are right?"

"What if they are not?" Kazu couldn't help but ask. He hadn't really thought about those questions much. Most likely Shin-chan had a point. His mouth was just faster than his brain. "Right now, she wants sleep and food, an occasional bath and a bit of cuddling. That is not exactly hard, right?"

"It is! She can't talk. What if she wants a bath and I don't understand her and try feeding her again and again? I am not good at reading people. What if I am unable to read her? I'd do unimaginable damage."

"Well, you can use that unimaginable brain function you have or simply ask someone else. If you try to feed her and she turns her head away, I am sure you will grasp the notion that she wants something else. And if you feel frustrated, just ask me. If we both are unsure what to do, we'll ask your mother. Do you think your own father felt any more sure than you now when he had you?"

Shin-chan blinked in surprise which was unbelievably cute. Kazu kissed his nose for that.

"You really meant that, right? I don't have to be a mother. You don't expect me to have some kind of instinct when it comes to raising her." The other let go of a big sigh.

"Because I don't have that. I see her and I want to run. When I touch her I fear that I'll break her."

"I felt the same." Kazu told him. "It lessened after carrying her around for an hour. Here, dry your tears and then we'll hold her together for a bit. I assure you, you'll feel better afterward."

Shin-chan immediately paled, but nodded and cleaned himself. When Kazu brought Kikyo over, his breath was going much too fast, so he kissed him until his labored breathing calmed. They ended up with Kikyo sleeping on her stomach on Shin-chan's breast because he was not allowed to sit up. She seemed pleased enough about that, drooling on his post-operation shirt. Kazu spent his time snapping pictures of them both, grinning like a fool. Especially when Shin-chan started petting her like a baby kitten. She grabbed his finger, drew it to her lips and nuzzled it. His two beloved ones were simply adorable. And when she began sucking on the finger, even Shin-chan guessed correctly that she might be getting hungry. So Kazu went to get a bottle, able to trust his boyfriend not to have a panic attack in the meantime.

Their days were filled with visitors. On Sunday Kuroko and Kagami came in, the first interested in the whole hospital story to prepare for his own upcoming birth. The other stared at Kikyo, paling and stuttering when Kazu asked if he would like to hold the baby. After a few minutes he was persuaded, only to nearly have a panic attack just like Shin-chan had. He quickly gave her back, refusing from then on. Kuroko patiently shook his head.

On Monday their class president and his girlfriend visited them with well-wishes from their class, followed by their teammates after practice. Their coach came as well, the only one of all of them who they allowed to hold their daughter. He did so expertly, used to babies after all. Kazu saw a smile tucking at Shin-chan's lips, the first expression of genuine happiness without any apprehension mixed in it.

Shin-chan calmed down somewhere on Wednesday. By now he was allowed to sit up, hold their daughter and feed her himself. Miyako had bought clothes for her as well as a sleeping bag, so she did not need her warming bed anymore. The paediatrician had deemed her healthy, so the cables were off as well. Kazu had learned to expertly change nappies and bath her in a mixture of water and oil. She looked a bit like a snake growing out of her skin but they were assured that was normal. The female gynaecologist was charmed by Shin-chan's pheromones and overlooked his grumpy attitude, so they were mostly fine.

In the afternoon, Shin-chan's father visited, bringing along Miyako's father, husband to the late Kikyo. While the oldest joyfully played with the baby – not disturbed by Shin-chan's shouts of "Watch out!" and "Please don't throw her around like that." – the father was reluctant to even hold her. Just like Kazu had predicted, he seemed uneasy around babies. It made Shin-chan feel a lot better afterward when he held Kikyo and searched for broken bones from the rough treatment. Of course she had none and had enjoyed being playfully handled like that. Kazu itched to play airplane with her himself but he did not have the heart to tell his boyfriend to be a bit less angsty after such a day.

On Saturday they were surprised to see Kise and Momoi who dragged a reluctant Aomine with them. She cooed over Kikyo, Kise looked for parental features and finally told them that she had Shin-chan's nose and Kazu's lips. Aomine simply seemed bewildered by it all, afraid to even come near. Kise finally asked him if he had something against babies in general to which he only nodded. Shin-chan who was already seething at that point asked him what the hell was wrong with him. Momoi sighed which told Kazu that Aomine would most likely storm off but to everyone's surprise he decided to reluctantly answer the question: "I had a brother once ... ten years younger. My parents aren't really good with kids. They slapped him a lot and I did not have the courage to stand up for him. So I submerged myself in playing basketball. He broke his arm when he was two and I prayed they would find the other fractures because I was too afraid to speak up. But they didn't. When he was three he fell from a tree or something, I never exactly asked, and broke his hip. They had him in a coma but he never woke up again. I don't know if he really fell from somewhere or if it weren't my parents ... well. Anyway, babies remind me of him. And that I never ever want kids because I'll be worse than they were. No one should live like my brother."

A silence followed that explanation in which Aomine suddenly left after all, cursing when he shut the door. Momoi followed him, excusing them both. Kise slumped against a wall, rearranging his hair with one hand and said: "Oh man..."

"I didn't expect that." Kazu said truthfully.

"I knew his parents were shit, I get that from his attitude. But that? Damn, that was unexpected. I always knew his home life was bad but ... what do you think, Midorimacchi?"

Shin-chan stayed silent, mulling over the question without giving a premature answer. Kazu had to smile in spite of the situation, he had not waited for an answer like that in a long time. Kise seemed to know the other on that account because he patiently waited as well. It took a bit over a minute for Shin-chan to say: "Do you think Kuroko knows that?"

"Of course Kurokocchi knows. How would he be able to stay calm after what Aominecchi did otherwise?" Kise shrugged his shoulders. "If he doesn't know details, he knows the rough outline at least. Basketball was Aominecchi's getaway from reality. Those two trained for hours after school, right until they were thrown out."

Kurokocchi wanted to get better, Aominecchi simply wanted to stay away from home."

"How do you know all that? You only joined us in second year." Shin-chan's voice was laced with suspicion.

"And here I wanted to say that you are just inattentive ... well, I had a crush on Aominecchi then and tried to find out everything I could about him." Kise sighed.

"Thankfully that cured me. Aomine is an asshole, but a honest one. No one would and should stand him as a partner. At least he knows that too."

"I don't understand how any of you could have feelings for him." It was a simple statement, no harm intended. Kazu still got ready to jump in in case Kise took that the wrong way. As always his boyfriend simply said what he thought.

"Can you remember how he was when he loved basketball more than anything? When he smiled and laughed, exuberant in his joy to play with us? When basketball was paradise for him, a world without pain or remorse? Akashi dubbed him correctly as the light that shone most brightly. He was always fun, motivating all of us to stay longer, learn more, he was ... he was a light for Kuroko who hated his body. He was a light for me, I was bored enough to think about dying as a fun activity. He wasn't a star, he was a sun."

"Rather a supernova." Shin-chan shook his head. "He burned out and is nothing but ashes now. First day I met him, I knew he would spiral out of control. It's good he took only people with him who were able to recover. Momoi is independent and strong, Kuroko has healed. But I don't see Aomine getting out of this."

"Well, I like to stay optimistic." Kise grinned. "I never expected you to get pregnant either and here we are. I guess anything can happen."

Shin-chan looked bewildered at that, which made Kazu break out in giggles. He was damn cute looking like that.

Shin-chan got discharged on Monday, a week and a half after birth. Takao and Miyako had shopped a baby carrier that could be clipped onto wheels. In that they drove her home, taking the subway as none of them had a driving license. In a beautiful April afternoon Kazu carried his daughter over the threshold, slightly annoyed that he was unable to carry his boyfriend as well. They settled Shin-chan in their bedroom to redecorate (they had bought a crib but both knew that Shin-chan would want to decide where to put it) and assembled in the kitchen.

"So, that's it." Miyako served Kazu a cup of tea.

"I guess it is." He leaned back on his stool. "Shin-chan is allowed to go back to school tomorrow. I just realized that in all the trouble we never actually asked if you would care for Kikyo during school."

"That is a given of course." The older woman smiled kindly. "I love babies, especially Kikyo. She is such a happy baby. Shin-chan and Chiyo looked suspiciously at the world even as babies. All that laughter and interaction, Kikyo is a marvel."

"I like her too." Kazu sighed. "I feel bad going to school without her. I fear it will be worse for Shin-chan. He finally connected with her. I don't want to separate them so soon."

"Yes, they would be better off if Shin-chan had more time with her ... we'll just have to give her to him as soon as you get home. Will you both go to training?"

"I have to and Shin-chan most likely wants to ... do you think you could visit the training with Kikyo?" Kazu looked up. "He acts as assistant trainer, so he does nothing but order everyone around. I am sure he can do so with a baby in his arms."

"While the idea is good, it might be harmful for babies to be exposed to other people so soon, they do not have a working immune system yet. When she is two months old, it is possible, but until then it is better to keep her mostly away from crowds."

"Oh, okay." He lowered his head again. "I didn't know that."

"Don't worry, she will be alright. You can spend your evenings and weekends with her, she won't love you less for it." Miyako laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Will she? Because we have homework and training and the games and ... wouldn't it be better if I at least quit basketball? I am also trying to learn tea ceremony. I don't know how to do all of that at the same time." He felt tears well up in his eyes. "I don't want to be another parent who's never there."

She took a seat right next to him, pulling him to lean on her, his head on her shoulder. She simply held him for a moment before she replied: "I know you most likely don't want to hear this but you are still a child, Kazu. Your top priority must be school because what you learn there will help you provide for your family for the rest of your life. In your case family comes after, not because they count less but because you have enough support to concentrate on school. But even more important than both of them is your own well-being. Your career and your family will crumble if you do not care for yourself. Kazu, you are a very giving person, you care for Shin-chan and Kikyo and both will take a lot of your time. But you need to care for yourself as well. If basketball keeps you stable and happy, if it gives you enough energy to do all those other things well, then please continue to play. I don't want you to hate yourself because you allow yourself to have needs as well. To sacrifice oneself for his family is noble but will lead to misery in the end. Care for yourself first and foremost, then care for Shin-chan and only then for Kikyo. Because she is provided for while Shin-chan needs you. I fear I can be a better grandmother than I ever was as a mother and while I feel bad for asking you to fix my shortcomings, I can offer myself to fully care for your daughter. She will not know loneliness like you did."

He could not stop his tears from falling, it was just too much. All that pain he had bottled up decided to crash into him right this moment, bringing up every fear he ever had. What if he wasn't good enough? What if he failed Shin-chan, if he failed his daughter? How would he ever atone for that?

Those two needed him and even if they had all the help they could have, they were still his responsibility. How could he live up to that?

"You know, you are not alone in this." Another voice added. He immediately knew it was his boy-friend. "You two talk about me as if I was another child you had to look after. I have my shortcomings, I know, but ... it's not like I am unable to take responsibility. I can learn and teach at the same time. If you feel overwhelmed, I am here as well. I can support you just like you support me. We're both her parents and just because I fail at human interaction doesn't mean you have to be perfect to make up for it."

But he was something like her mother. He was the one that was supposed to care for her. Shin-chan would never have a bond as deep as he could form with their daughter. Who was he to leave her to others so much? He already felt like he was failing just by leaving her with Shin-chan's mother. How could he also leave her for work? How could he leave her for things as unimportant as basketball?

"I appreciate all that." He stood and went over to Shin-chan, still crying silently. "But I don't want to be away so much. I understand about school, I'll finish that, but I won't go back to basketball. I couldn't concentrate on that for a month now, I didn't play any of those games seriously. My thoughts were with you two all the time. If I go back to

training or games, I would just constantly think about how much I am missing with Kikyo. I don't want that."

"You got our team into the InterHigh finals. Don't you want to win?" There was no accusation in Shin-chan's voice, only curiosity.

"We would play them without you. I fear that for a year now, basketball has been more about you for me than anything else. So no, I don't care. I would like to play another WinterCup with you but that is not important enough for me to spend so much time away from home."

The other looked down before his gaze came to rest on Kikyo. She contently slept in Shin-chan's arms, dressed in a body suit with a hood. It was a fluffy, warm thing with a panda printed on the front.

"For me, basketball is more about you as well." He admitted. "It's why I don't want you to leave. It would not be the same without you. If you quit, I know I will quit as well. That also means we will lose our teammates, maybe even our friends. We'll have each other, mother and Kikyo. That is cosy but also lonely. You are a much more social person than I am, so I fear the same as mother. I don't want you to isolate yourself with Kikyo, only living for duty instead of what you want for yourself."

"Shin-chan, all I ever wanted was a family. I became social, so that people and their families would like me. I began to play basketball to keep myself from going insane from loneliness. I don't have any aspirations for my career, I only wanted to be able to support my family. That is not duty, that is my dream. I don't want friends and teammates and whatnot, I want you and Kikyo. I never thought I'd become a housewife but if I could, I would love to do just that. Don't call it a duty when it is something I want with all my heart." He held his boyfriend's surprised eyes, silently imploring him to understand. If they would allow him to stay with Kikyo full-time, he would grasp the chance immediately. Years ago, he had thought that as a basketball star he would find a girl he could marry. Now he knew that he never wanted a girl, he wanted a husband. He wanted someone as responsible as Shin-chan who could hold him at night and catch him if he fell.

"I don't think I can fully grasp that concept yet but I'll give my best to try to understand. I do know what a housewife is and does, even if I have problems to apply that to you ... so you want to have a role like my mother? That would mean you care for everything and the only thing I do is earning money." The green-haired seemed to envision that because he looked thoughtful. "I don't like to have such an unequal relationship. I want to learn to care for Kikyo as well and I want to support you a lot more than my father supports my mother."

"I love you." Kazu said and pecked his boyfriend's cheek. "That's exactly what I wished for."

Shin-chan still seemed unsure what to do, so he batted his eyelashes cutely. He kissed him again for that.

When Kazu entered their bedroom later, Shin-chan went in circles rocking a Kikyo who grumpily protested against sleep. The floor looked as if this had been going on for a bit, but the green-haired still smiled. He was patient when it came to their daughter, able to stand her crying for hours if need be. Her digestive system seemed not to be working well, so they had to calm her abdominal spasms with medication and massages. Kazu had gone right from massaging his boyfriend's belly to his daughter's. "Can you try your magic hands?" Shin-chan asked, a slimmer of exasperation evident. "I can try." He took her from his boyfriend, lay her down in her crib and began giving

her a massage.

"She'll continue to cry every two to three hours from hunger and in between from stomach pains." Something like a sigh was included in that statement. The other stood right behind him, a leg pressed to his.

"How are we supposed to stay awake in class?" Kazu still sent a smile over his shoulder.

His boyfriend took his chin in hand and kissed him. For a moment they kissed, ignoring their daughter's insistent crying. When they parted, they looked upon her with a sigh. Right that moment she quieted, deepened her breath and was suddenly fast asleep.

"Now what did we do correctly?" The green-haired seemed bewildered.

"Maybe she wanted to be left alone?" Kazu grinned. "You always want to get away from people as well."

"Not you." They embraced. "Come to bed?"

"Let me brush my teeth first." He left for the bathroom, followed by his boyfriend who brushed his teeth as well. They continued on to bed, both exhausted just from changing location back to their house.

"How is your stomach?" Kazu asked.

"Healing. It itches when I move too much but mostly it is okay." They shared a moment of silence. "Did you ask for a specific reason?"

"Well, we haven't exactly celebrated Kikyo's birth yet." He robbed near in bed, slinging an arm and leg over Shin-chan.

"By doing what?" There was a teasing aspect to his voice.

"Giving her a sibling?" Kazu grinned.

"I knew that would be your answer." The other rolled them, leaning over the shorter one and kissing him. Kazu rolled them back, minding his boyfriend's sensitive stomach. The scar wasn't exactly small. He kissed his way down, pushing the other's nightshirt up to continue on his chest. "Not the scar, please."

"Sure." Kazu jumped from the navel right down to where the other loved him most.

"Oh gods, yes." Shin-chan began to breath deeply. "Just basic moves, okay? I can't keep my voice down when you really mean it."

Kazu simply complied. He blindly reached upward and felt a bottle pushed into his hands. Well, that was what you called teamwork. Even disregarding their whole evolution, they were damn good at teamwork.

Epilog: And they lived happily ever after - or something like that

Shin-chan went over his notes one last time before beginning to pack his bag. Even if they only offered about ten percent of what he had to learn, it was important to keep them in order. Sometimes people asked for them, knowing he never slept in lectures. Even his study group members who took this as seriously as him weren't always able to stay awake or be present for every lecture.

One of them, Ayako, who sat next to him, had already finished packing and asked: „So what will we do until Hen-Su's lecture?“

„How about something to eat?“ Yuichi offered, who stood right beside her.

„If you pay.“ Tsubaki interjected from the row behind them. „I already ate what I took with me today.“ She stretched before yawning. „Maybe I should just go home. Hen-Su's lectures are so hard to understand, I'll drift off anyway. Who let's a foreigner speak at five in the afternoon?“

„Be happy that he tries to speak Japanese. When we had that professor who only spoke English, I didn't get anything. Molecular genetics is hard to learn by itself, it's worse in another language.“ Yuichi answered her.

„Where was he from again? Russia?“

„Taiwan.“ Shin-chan recalled. „His English was abysmal.“

„Right you are. So what do we do?“ Ayako repeated her initial question.

„First, we'll leave this room.“ Tsubaki decided and was the first to leave.

The others followed her. Right when they stepped out of the building, Shin-chan's phone rang. As only Kazu called him at this time, he took the call with a smile.

„Daddy? Can you hear me?“

„Of course, princess. I can understand you perfectly.“ His smile deepened, not dampened by her squealing that followed. „Are you on your way home?“

„No, I am in the rickshaw.“ Which Kazu still drove around, transporting their daughter wherever she wanted to go.

„Where to?“ Maybe she had decided to see the zoo or aquarium or something. His husband spoiled her too much in his opinion but she obviously liked to be spoiled. And it wasn't like he was able to withstand her pouting. Kazu said she got that from him.

„To you!“ She exclaimed happily.

„To me? But I still have work to do.“ He took a look at his watch. He had thirty minutes until his next lecture started. „How long until you get here?“

„Uhm ... I don't know.“ Of course she wouldn't, she was only four years old after all.

„Can you ask your mother?“ Which she did. Loudly. He held the phone away from his ear for a moment. He saw his friends grin while watching him. She continued in normal volume, so he listened again. They seemed to be five minutes away. „Okay. Please tell him to come to the statue of the dolphin.“ He preemptively held the phone away which seemed to have been a great idea. „See you soon, princess.“ He ended the call.

„So you won't join us for the next lecture?“ Tsubaki asked grinning.

„Of course I will, I never skip lectures. I'll just meet them in between. Please excuse me.“ He took a step away from them but the women latched onto his arm. „What is it?“

„Can we come too?“ She grinned and had some kind of maniac glint in her eyes. „I never met your wife or daughter. Please?“

„Why would you want to meet them?“ Most likely that was a stupid question but he honestly didn't know why she would want to do that. He saw Ayako sigh and Yuichi grin.

„We are curious who would marry you, man.“ The latter answered in a tone he recognized as cocky, whoever came up with that adjective.

„Don't be so rude. Midorima is a great catch for every women.“ Ayako scolded him.

„In a few years, true. He'll make good money. But she has been with him for how long now? Five years? How old were you when you became a couple?“

„Sixteen.“ Which normally meant people were long parted again, he knew that much. They must be curious what kind of person decided on his life partner at sixteen.

„Is she like you? All straight forward, everything planned out?“ Tsubaki let go of his arm, obviously not leaving his side though. He began to walk in the right direction with the other following him. „Or wait – is she an Omega? I mean, who decides to get pregnant at sixteen?“

He had a sudden urge to just slam the truth in their face. Kazu had warned him off, but they were to meet him anyway, so why not? If they decided to not associate with him anymore, at least he had their stunned faces to be amused about. So he said: „I got pregnant. I am Kikyo's mother. My husband just decided that I wasn't great mother material, so we changed parenting roles.“

Tsubaki stopped, so he turned around after two more steps. Yuichi had walked right into her while Ayako watched them with the same interest he had in the spectacle.

„Now, wait a minute ...“ The other man helped Tsubaki up after nearly running her over. „You gave birth to a child at sixteen? Were you drunk? High?“

„Do I look like someone who would do that?“ He felt his eyebrow twitching. What did people come up with sometimes?

„Did you actually plan that?“ The other looked lost.

„No, we conceived her on accident because we did not know I could get pregnant. But we had her because we wanted to. And for the records, I was seventeen when I gave birth.“ Kazu had also warned him off not to go into too much detail. But this was important, right? He wanted them to accept this after all. Even though a picture of Tsubaki's face right now would be great.

Ayako seemed to think the same, because she took one with her mobile phone.

„What the- are you crazy?“ The other woman asked her.

„Your face was hilarious, I had to save this. I'll send it to Midorima now.“ His own phone beeped with a confirmation. He took a sudden liking to Ayako. „This will be priceless pressure material for the future.“

„You are such a cold-hearted bitch sometimes.“ Somehow – while very rude – Tsubaki managed not to sound too offending. „Did you know?“

„Not at all.“ She smiled mysteriously. „But I did see the scar when we had that training in sports medicine.“

„Yeah, right, I saw that too.“ Yuichi recalled. „That is from birth?“

„Yes.“ Shin-chan affirmed. „She was taken out two months early because my stomach did not give due to my taught musculature.“

„Oh, damn. Is she alright or did she have problems?“ Tsubaki asked, seemingly having forgotten about her shock and the picture.

„Her immune system wasn't good, she had a lot of infections. She also has a bit of asthma.“

„That isn't so bad.“ Yuichi scratched his head. „Wait, so you don't have a wife? You have a husband that tops a guy like you? I'm imagining a muscled gorilla where

everyone trembles whenever your girl says 'mommy'."

„Kazu is pretty normal and an easy-going, likable guy. He is a social character, brings up Kikyo and earns our money. I never met a person that doesn't like him." Shin-chan summed up. Whenever he did that, he was reminded what a failure he was compared to his husband. Well, in a few years he would earn their money, that was a bit of contribution. „Do you still want to meet them?"

„Hell yeah!" Tsubaki decided, making a jump to stand beside him. „Lead the way to your sweetheart."

„Alpha male pregnancies are unbelievably rare, right?" Yuichi sped up to walk beside them. „I want to know all about it!"

„I'll tell you another time." Shin-chan said. He noticed Ayako followed him as well, so it seemed to be alright. If they came with him, that meant they accepted this, right? Somehow it seemed too easy. He still remembered their math teacher who had openly tried to humiliate them. „Look for a bike with a rickshaw next to the dolphin's statue."

„A rickshaw?" Tsubaki asked confusedly.

„Yeah, my husband drove me around when I was pregnant and somehow he never stopped. Now he drives our daughter." Even though by now that simple cart had become an actual rickshaw. It was a gift from their father to Kazu's maturity. They still hadn't decided if it was meant as a joke or not. But it was equipped with security belts, so most likely it was actually meant in earnest.

„You know, do you mind sharing? A guy good in bed, caring for kids, earning money and treating you like a princess sounds like a fairy-tale prince."

„He's mine." His voice held a slight dark tremble, something dangerous. He didn't know he could sound like that.

„Yeah, sure, sorry. That was a joke. He's yours, I got that." Tsubaki held up her hands.

„You can be quite territorial."

"Would you ask me for my only can of red bean soup?" She shook her head with vigor, knowing his fondness for the rare drink. "Then why would you ask for my husband?"

"I see." She looked around, already focussing on another topic. "There is a rickshaw! Oh, is that her? It must be, those green eyes are beautiful."

He looked where Tsubaki pointed at and saw his daughter already running in his direction. He knelt down to embrace her, nearly toppling over from the vigor she jumped with. He stood with her in his arms, saying: "Did you miss me this much? What did you do today?"

"We made gifts for mother's day! Is there a father's day? I want to make a gift for you too." Of course she didn't stop there, rambling on so that he had to interrupt her after a bit to introduce her to everyone present.

Just like with Kazu, she dazzled everyone with her open smile in a second. Tsubaki and even Yuichi began to ask her question while Ayako silently turned to the man standing next to her. They shook hands, quietly exchanging their names before the others noticed Kazu.

"Hello!" He greeted simply, broad smile in place.

"Woah, okay ... neither wife nor gorilla. I'm Yuichi." They shook hands as well while Kazu cooked an eyebrow. "Well, Midorima never said his wife was actually a husband until today. So while we discussed what a guy you could be, my guess was a muscled athlete."

"Shin-chan and I were athletes, we played basketball at a national level in middle- and high-school. I still have enough muscles to drive him around in that." He pointed at the

rickshaw behind which had already gathered some onlookers.

"You don't really look like it." Tsubaki pointed out before actually noticing what she had said. "Oh, sorry, I didn't mean anything bad by that. I was just surprised. I am Tsubaki."

"Kazu Midorima." He nodded. "And I don't take offense from something that small. I see what a perfect physique looks like every night, so I know I am quite average."

"I know, it's a very rude question but ... I like Midorima as a friend, but how do you stand his personality as a partner? I can't get my head around that." Yuichi asked. "I just- I've been wondering ever since I knew he is married. Now even more than before, because really, sometimes women are just weird but you aren't a women, so ... can you explain?"

Ayako sighed and rolled her eyes.

"Why are you with a woman who only has one arm?" Kazu asked back, taking the other serious instead of blowing up.

"Huh?" Yuichi blinked. "My girlfriend has both arms."

"It was an example. Your girlfriend isn't perfect, maybe she is naggy or chaotic or has an awful sense of style, I don't know. But you love her anyway, at least I hope you do. Everyone has flaws and strengths, all more or less obvious. If you can stand them or not is quite individual. I am happy that a lot of people can't stand Shin-chan's flaws because otherwise I'd have even more contenders. Those I have are already enough." He looked away to Tsubaki who was staring at his husband in turn. "Are you one of them?"

"What?" She looked up. "Oh, no, don't worry, I'll- I mean, well, I ... that would be hopeless anyway, Midorima has never shown interest in anyone. He can walk past Omegas in heat without even blinking."

"He had to train that because Omegas kept pouncing on him." Oh, what horrible time to remember. "Remember that one girl who released all her pheromones after you rejected her?"

"That was awful." Had he understood correctly that Tsubaki had thought about dating him once? "I don't understand why girls try again and again when they were already rejected."

"Being persistent can be successful." Kazu replied with a smirk.

"What is 'persistent'?" Kikyo asked who everyone seemed to have forgotten about.

"Something that happens again and again, mostly someone trying for a different outcome by doing the same thing over and over." Shin-chan explained.

"That sounds dumb." She judged.

"When you have no better idea, it is better than not doing anything. Sometimes it helps to try again, even if you fail a second or third time." Kazu said, exchanging places with Tsubaki. "I talked to your daddy again and again until he gave me an answer. If I had not been so persistent, we would not be married today."

"Karen-nee tells me to shut up when I ask why again and again. People get annoyed when you are persistent." She replied with new-found wisdom.

"Yes, I get annoyed when you ask for sweets incessantly. So you have that persistence from your mother, I finally made the connection." Shin-chan said which made his husband stick out his tongue. "Don't do that, it makes me want to kiss you."

"Aren't you a master in setting undesirable consequences?" Kazu mocked him. "Now say goodbye if you want to get to your lecture on time."

"No!" Kikyo hugged her father tighter.

"Kikyo, I told you not make a fuss and you promised you can do that. If you can't we

will not be able to visit your daddy in the future." Kazu admonished her. She looked back tearily, just like Shin-chan who did not want to part from her. "Really, both of you, you'll see each other in two hours, you'll survive."

That's what Kazu thought. Shin-chan direly wanted to tell them something and he would have to wait another two hours to do that. Should he really part from them? He could just skip the lecture, Hen-Su really never said anything relevant anyway, the others could take notes for once. It must be fate that they decided today was the perfect day for their first visit to university.

The university Kazu gave up on to raise their daughter.

And son. In five months at least.

Shin-chan sighed deeply, said goodbye to Kikyo and pecked Kazu's cheek which he had never dared to do before since that dilemma back in basketball training. Kazu looked surprised, then happy and somehow suspicious when they said goodbye. Shin-chan would tell them tonight. He simply had to get through that boring lecture beforehand and learn to skip things in the future.

It turned out that he did not listen anyway because Tsubaki, Yuichi and even Ayako discussed that they wanted husbands and wives exactly like Kazu the whole lecture. Damn, he would have to look after him. Good thing he was pregnant again, hopefully that would keep Kazu occupied. The older they got, the more rivals Shin-chan would have.

But Oha-Asa monthly still said that Scorpio was most compatible with Cancer, so they should be fine.