

Wounds

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Prolog: Annoying questions

„How do you feel about marriage?“

Marriage? Really now? Aomine rolled his eyes. The airhead on the other side of the table had some pretty strange ideas sometimes. He bit into his burger, drawing up a blue-haired eyebrow.

“Come on!” Satsuki whined. “It’s not like you’ll ever marry anyone else.”

“What kind of a reason is that?” The young man scoffed. “If you want a platinum credit card for yourself, there are easier ways than marrying me. It’s enough to ask.”

“Daiki!” It was the annoying way she said his name, pronouncing his first syllable instead of the second, that told him his answer wasn’t satisfactory. She was sure to tell him in a second what she didn’t like – most likely the fact that the answer was no.

“Marriage isn’t about money, it’s about feelings.”

“Uh-huh.” Sure. Pigs could fly. Marriage was for people like Akashi who needed some kind of status symbol to make business deals or romantics like Kuroko who might actually be able to love another human being. Marriage wasn’t for people like him whose best try at a relationship had been nearly killing the only person who had actual feelings for him.

“I like you, you like me. Why shouldn’t we marry?” His childhood friend insisted.

No. Just no. Why should he even explain why? It was wrong on so many levels. Satsuki was his friend, not some ... whatever. Most likely her help-syndrome acted up or something. Pictures of babies, whelps and kittens tended to do that to her, she was female after all. They all got a bit crazy whenever cute things were involved. Why the ever loving fuck that made them turn to male adult assholes was beyond him but he knew if ever needed to get laid, it was enough to walk into an animal shelter. And don’t think he hadn’t already done that, it was a sure way to bang women. Take the animal shelter as your date trip, you’d get every last one of them into bed.

“I’d give you a reason to hit me for all the women I sleep with” He answered in a bored tone. It had always been his best decoy whenever he tended to get agitated. This topic was damn agitating, thank you very much. How did she come up with those stupid ideas?

“Huh ... yeah, good point.” She sipped her drink, a chocolate frappé because she hated the fake strawberry milk they sold in this shop. “How come you never sleep with me?”

Oh, for the ever loving crap, what had gotten into her? His eyelids narrowed, his jaw clenched. The burger in his hand began to leak fluids onto the table.

“Daiki!” Good, he hated this tone of voice. “Watch out. The burger is not responsible for your anger. Just forget I asked, okay?” She groaned while she mopped up his mess before looking out of the window, watching passing people instead. Not looking at him was her way of saying “You fucked up”.

Thanks. He knew. Damn her for springing such a topic on him. Couldn’t she like, well, warn him or something? You had to prepare a man before such an emo-trip. What brought this up anyway? Was there some kind of scandalous article about him again?

“Tetsuya called.” Oh, yeah. So that was the reason. “He shared some happy news and asked me to pass them on. I didn’t ask why he doesn’t tell you himself but I guess he doesn’t want to sour his mood. You can really drag someone down, you know?” Her voice held no accuse but it stung anyway.

"Which means it's something to do with Kagami. Seeing as they are married now, news must be he's pregnant again. That was fast." A month. They moved to America, married and now Kuroko was pregnant again. All within one fucking month. Maybe that was like removing a band-aid, you had to do it in one go to make it bearable, even if it fucking hurt like hell. Lucky bastard. Kagami must be ecstatic.

"Are you okay?" Satsuki watched his reactions.

"It was to be expected." Aomine sank deeper into his seat and refused to say anything else. What did she want from him? Did she expect him to burst into tears or something? He wasn't a teenager anymore. Well, technically he was, he was nineteen after all but he felt like an adult. He made tons of money and played as a starter for their national team, that was pretty adult, right? He even went to practice.

"Daiki?" Her voice was small, something quite rare and normally saved for really emotional situations. What the hell would she spring on him now? "Do you think you can ... let go now?"

Shit. He was up in an instant, only noticing his surroundings when the summer air hit him with its humidity. He patted his back pockets, feeling his wallet and phone in them before taking off. Satsuki could outrun him but not in a skirt. He strode down the street, glaring at anyone in his way which made people jump out of the way. He was an Alpha, a Southerner, wore leather and looked scary, that always cleared his path. He could hear Satsuki's shouting and was relieved how far behind him it was. He had listened to enough of her crap today, he was going home. God, he wished he were already twenty and able to legally buy alcohol. His secret stash of bottles he got from friends was empty and he knew it. Who invented this crappy law that stopped people from having a break once in a while? Assholes, all of them.

He needed a break from his ex-boyfriend's perfect romance.

His boss got his ass up by calling thrice before threatening to call Satsuki to get him. No thanks. She would break into his apartment and start asking questions. He hated those damn questions, hated what they did to him, hated the fact he did not have answers to most of them because fuck, he did not want to think about that stuff. Thinking only made him remember his last fuck-up of a relationship and he liked to keep his sanity, thank you very much.

So training it was. He did his best to exhaust himself, making his coach scream at him over and over again but he was used to that crap, so whatever. It wasn't like they would fire him, he was their ace. New team, same old story. The others simply ignored him, only Kasamatsu sent him disgusted looks sometimes. Might be that had nothing to do with his attitude though, he had banged his boyfriend after all. He would be angry as well if he was in their point guard's shoes. Though luck they made the same team.

"Mine-chi ... my ears ring" Murasakibara complained. "Stop making coach angry."

"Go suck your boyfriend" He answered easily, same old story between them too.

"I don't get sex if I leave training early." Oh, that was rich. And new. So that was how Murasakibara made it to training everyday. Kuroko would do the same if ... if they were still together. Which they were not. For five damn years, he should really get over this.

"You're whipped" He countered to keep his mind quiet. Banter with their center was always low-key, he was an idiot after all. Nice thing was you did not have to think much.

"Tatsu is worth it."

Good god, damn them all, that sounded just like Kagami when it came to cuddling Kuroko's baby and being all lovey-dovey over him. Just "Tetsu" instead of "Tatsu" but just the same intonation. Damn people in love and happily bonded to their Omegas. He got a ball and began to dribble loops around the court at full speed. "Oh, what now? Murasakibara!" The coach yelled.

Kapitel 1: Overdoing it

So yeah, maybe he should get over Kuroko. He knew that. He did not like to think about it but he knew that's what everyone wanted. They just did not know what that meant for him. Hell, he did not know what that would mean just ... a lot of pain. He was sure about that. Was it so wrong he did not want to face that? Who would actually invite in his own nightmares with nothing but the small hope that his life might be better afterwards? It might also be worse. He had enough nightmares as it was, thank you very much.

Getting over Kuroko would mean therapy. It would mean talking. That would immediately lead to talking about his family, his childhood ... he could really do without that. Sure, he wanted to be better. It would be nice to not always be the asshole who let everyone down. If he went into therapy, Satsuki would be ecstatic. Even Kuroko might call to congratulate him. He did know that he had problems but ... he had no hope that therapy would change anything. Hell, he had no idea where to start if he did go into therapy. He knew they would ask for a concrete goal – he got that from the first hundred times Satsuki had talked about therapy – and he had none but something vague like "I wanna be less of an asshole". Which was shit anyway because what should he be instead? Some lovey-dovey guy like Kagami? Kuroko was taken, there was no one to change for.

He wished Satsuki had never asked him about marriage. Was she really interested in him that way? If she was, why the heck should he change? Because it was right and good and because he would never let himself marry her with his current attitude? Really, if he wasn't himself, he would beat up the guy that thought about marrying his best friend with that kind of shitty behavior. He would not marry her because he would not treat her right. Hah, he had an actual answer! That even sounded like shit good guys like Kagami would say. Not that he would have to say it, he wasn't an asshole, but the point still stood. If she ever asked again, that would be his answer.

No, it wouldn't. She would follow up with the possibility of changing. That was not a good lane to go down. She would talk him into getting therapy, he just knew it. She would guilt-trip him until he went and then he would be forced to talk and he did not want to. He could not even answer their introductory question. What did he want to change? He wanted to change the past. He wanted to be a better brother, he wanted his baby brother alive, he wanted his baby-

No. He was not going down memory lane. He was not going to therapy. He would never think about that baby he had killed with his own hands or he would be severely tempted to hack them off or shit like that. Not gonna happen. He turned up his music, trying to hammer those thoughts out of his mind. It never worked. Oh well, sometimes it did. But not when he got this low, that's when he needed alcohol. Wasn't there anything left? Maybe he could go out, find some homeless person and pay them or something. Or he could go to a bar, pick up some woman, have her order some drinks and shit or get smashed at her place.

Sounded like a great plan. He got up, grabbed his jacket and some condoms and left.

Okay, maybe they all were on to something. Maybe Kuroko had not told him himself because he knew he would need someone in the aftermath. At the wedding, it had been Kuroko himself. This time it should have been Satsuki but Aomine had destroyed

that possibility all by himself.

So here he was. Satsuki was crying her eyes out, his coach looked close to exploding and the nine-month-pregnant Himuro Tatsuya of all people was standing in the back of the room. What the ever loving fuck. The room but more importantly the intravenous needle told him that he was in a hospital. Seeing as he did not remember much after the second bottle of whiskey and that brunet women- oh no, actually, he remembered her husband showing up but he did not remember getting hit. Lucky him. It did nothing to alleviate the pain in his jaw and ribs now. Unlucky him.

"Aomine Daiki! Do you know what scandal you caused with this trip?" His coach yelled. The blue-haired just winced and scrunched his eyes shut again. Why had he woken up again? Maybe he should just stay asleep for the rest of his miserable life. But no, Satsuki would cry next to his bed every day, just like she did now. He turned his head to look at her, knowing she was the only one in the room that actually counted. The coach continued to scream but it was her silent "Why?" that got him to say: "I'm sorry for worrying you."

That got the coach to shut up, staring at him in pure astonishment. He never said sorry, he knew that. He just behaved like shit and hoped people would forgive him and know he was sorry without having to say it ... saying it would mean people could actually remind him that he sometimes did shit and knew so. It came down to that therapy thing again. Saying sorry never made it better, so he had long stopped trying. But bringing himself into a hospital, that was a new level of foolishness and Satsuki had a right to remind him of this fuck-up. Banging a married women in her own house, getting smashed with her husband's booze – that was low, even for him. He hoped that was all that had happened.

"What do you remember?" She asked in a small voice, knowing he must have a splitting headache.

"I had a shitty day, so I went out to pick up some woman. We got drunk at her place, had sex, drank more ... she suddenly said something about having a husband and that one came in seconds after. I don't remember anything after that."

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. It was her way of holding back from screaming, he knew. It also meant she was too angry to simply scream at him. Leaving the room would have been worse but this was bad as well. She finally nodded and said: "He assaulted you. Your nose and two ribs are broken. You are to remain in hospital for a week. You will not be allowed to play basketball for three months."

"Three months?" He shouted, only to cough and cringe at the pain that shot through him. Ough, shit ... broken ribs. Damn fucking ribs. "I played with broken ribs before, I'm good after a month."

"You will do no such thing. You will stay at home, your lady here will look after you and you will start therapy next week. This is a requirement for being allowed to play again. This is not negotiable" His coach informed him.

"Like fuck I will"

"Daiki!" Satsuki stood, suddenly an imposing threat by his bedside. "Be happy they don't fire you for this. This is your second chance. Do not fuck this up."

Ugh, yeah ... she did have that side. Girls did not swear but Satsuki did when she was really, really angry. It silenced his coach who stared at her with a hanging jaw. That Himuro guy in the background just smiled, seemingly amused.

Well ... therapy. No one could make him talk, right? He had to attend, okay, but he would definitely not talk. So he snorted and turned his head. His coach and Satsuki shared some silent communication before the man took his leave, telling him to "get

well soon". Asshole. His whole life was fucked up, there was neither "get well" nor "soon" in sight. Himuro took this as an opportunity to step near.

"How long until birth?" Aomine asked to divert the topic, trying to be nice for a second instead of asking "What the fuck do you do here?".

"With the length of contractions, it will be tomorrow or the day after." The guy sat on a stool as if he hadn't just said his body had already began to push out a baby. Ugh. Omegas had nerves of steel. "Kagami called me. I am to look after you as long as I can because Tetsu is crying his eyes out."

Ough. Shit. Aomine's stomach sank. Kuroko ... he would be blaming himself. Damn, he had not thought about that. He had not thought, that was the fucking problem all the time.

"Daiki, please go to the therapy. If not for me, then for him." Satsuki looked at her lap, wringing a handkerchief in her hands. "You are hurting your friends with your behavior."

What had he said about guilt-tripping him into therapy? Damn her. He had just given her fuel. He turned back to Himuro and said: "I am not going to storm out of the hospital to do shit. Look after yourself."

"It's nice to have someone to distract me from the pain." The man smiled, then grinned. "Was that women worth the pain?"

"Huh?" The fuck? "No."

"Was the booze worth the pain?"

What exactly was wrong with this guy? He said instead: "Not exactly."

"Was being able to forget for a while worth all this?" Himuro made a round-about motion with his hand, indicating he meant the hospital.

Blew, therapy talk. He hated that crap. So he groaned and closed his eyes. Let them talk to his unresponsive self. Satsuki cried though, a deeply pained noise before getting up and saying: "Sorry, I can't take this now."

Good god, women. Why were they always so emotional? It were just two rips and a nose, nothing the get this flustered about. Everyone fucked up once in a while. He was just unlucky this time. She should not take it to heart like this. Still, he felt unable to joke about it. This Himuro guy did not look like he would share his humor about the situation.

"I could feel this one kick for over four months now." The guy stroked his impossibly round stomach. "Because of the contractions, he's unable to kick. It's only when something isn't there anymore that you notice you miss it. You have to lose things to be able to miss it."

"I'm not gonna miss her nagging." Aomine snorted.

"You'll miss her smiles, her optimism, her laughter." Himuro looked at him, not accusing, just ... nothing. Like he didn't care. He most likely did not, they only met a few times. "And then you won't drink to forget Tetsu, you'll drink to forget her."

"I'm not drinking to forget." If he had been able to do so, he would have crossed his arms.

"Everyone drinks to forget. It just doesn't work." Himuro leaned back, pressing his thumbs into his back. "Have you read the book "The little prince"?"

"I don't read."

The other man snorted but smiled before he continued: "I guessed not. The little prince is living on a lonely planet, so he travels to other planets to meet people. One day he travels to a tavern and finds a man who downs one drink after the next."

Great. A pregnant man was telling him bedtime stories about drunks. What had his life

come to? Was this really the only person willing to stay in his presence without crying? Fucking hell.

"So he asks him why he drinks and the man answers that he wants to forget." So that was his great psychology resource? A children's book? "The prince asks the man what he wants to forget and after a long moment, the man says that he wants to forget how ashamed he is."

Shit. Aomine redirected his gaze. There must be something interesting in this room. His IV drip? Damn, it was already through. Where was his phone? He was bored, damn it all. He did not want to listen to shitty stories.

"So the prince asks the man what he is ashamed about." Himuro steadily looked at him. "What do you think was his answer?"

"Some sob story, whatever. We all have one. Tough luck." He would have shrugged his shoulders if he could.

"He answered that he was ashamed about his drinking and took another drink because of that."

"That's some really bad story." He shook his head. "No fairies saving the poor old drunk."

"No. The prince thought the same and left. That's the story."

"That story is shit."

"It's true though. Nothing the prince could have said would have saved the man. That's because he did not want to be saved. If someone wants to drown himself in alcohol, there's nothing you can do. You can only wait for him to decide he wasted his life long enough and do something else."

He knew. His parents were both drunks and nothing he ever did had changed anything about that fact. His mother hadn't even stopped drinking while pregnant. Maybe it wasn't so bad his brother was dead, he already showed signs of being mentally crippled with his three years. Or maybe that had to do with all those brain injuries he had, mostly bleedings from being shaken. They found a lot of them when his brother was autopsied. No wonder his own thinking capacity was limited, killing a few more of his brain cells would not make much of a difference.

"It's the same with whatever you drown yourself in. Alcohol, self-pity, self-harm, shopping, food, whatever. And one day you get stuck and your comfort will turn into something to be ashamed about. Addiction is always about forgetting your shame, your guilt and insecurities."

"You went to some kind of those AA meetings in America, didn't you?" He had looked those up when he had thought about helping his parents. But there had only been one group half an hour away and he knew he would never be able to get his parents to go there.

"There are special groups for friends and family of people with drinking problems. I think I'll refer Momoi to one of those, maybe Tetsu as well. Those in America are quite professional, he'll certainly go."

"I'm not a fucking drunk!" Aomine sat up suddenly, only to be stopped by his pain and a glare promising death if he moved another inch. Murasakibara was standing in the doorway, keeping watch over his Omega. Shit. How had he overlooked an over-two-meters-giant? He breathed through the pain – not exactly helpful when he had two broken ribs – and said calmly: "I do not drink that much."

"You picked up a married women to get more booze." Himuro arched an eyebrow. "That does seem like something a drunk would do."

"I picked her up and got smashed because my ex-boyfriend is pregnant with someone

else's kid, asshole. It's not like that's a daily occurrence." He tenderly leaned back against his pillow because sitting up hurt like hell. Lying down too, but less so at least. "Kuro-chi is not your ex-boyfriend" The giant drawled. "He asked you out but you hurt him. That's not what boyfriends do. You're not his boyfriend. Never been."

"Shut the fuck up, you dim-wit." He had more brain cells than that one, thank god.

"Call him whatever you want but he's a much better boyfriend than you are."

Himuro's eyes had turned to slits. "He knows how to treat other humans with respect, that's a skill you lack."

"Aren't you here to cheer me up or something?" He glared at the pregnant man.

"No, I came because Kagami asked me to. Tetsu and him are worried. I don't know what for, it's not like you don't like your nest of self-pity." The other stood and turned to leave. "Go rot in it for all I care, just stop taking people down with you."

Asshole. Aomine wished he could get up and hit him. Getting that smashed had been a shitty idea, if only for the fact that he was unable to polish the floor with that haughty bastard. He had no right to say that. If Satsuki and Tetsu decided to be his friends, who was he to meddle? Asshole. If they were unhappy, they could say that on their own. They did not need some fancy queen bee speaking for them. It was childish but he flicked his middle finger when they left. Good riddance.

He fucked up once. They were really exaggerating. Okay, it was bad that he couldn't play for three months, that was shitty for a professional player. He could not do this again, he got that. But forcing him into therapy? That really was a bit much. He did not have a drinking problem, he did not regularly get into fights, nothing. He only had one shitty day that turned out worse than he had anticipated. Not that he had exactly thought ahead much, he had only wanted some wet pussy and booze. That problem would solve itself when he turned twenty, he would be able to buy his own booze. Maybe he should even buy pussy, that would save him from all that emotional entanglement women always liked to get into.

He spotted his mobile phone next to some flowers – most likely brought by either Satsuki or his nightly conquest – and grabbed it to scroll through his timeline.

Kapitel 2: First therapy

Doctor Hasawa had her office in the same hospital he was staying in. Satsuki had lost no time in finding him a psychologist, one of the best of course. Or so she told him. A very nice, patient woman. One who would be able to suffer his silences if he decided to be stubborn. His childhood friend really knew him too well. She even told him she expected better of him than to stay silent out of spite. That girl knew how to twist his sense of honor. She only left when this doctor came in.

Doctor Hasawa was a small, petite woman. A mousy beta, someone far from intimidating or interesting. A person you would normally only perceive as background noise in a sea of faces. She introduced herself, explained a bit about her person and what she did. Behavioral therapy, whatever that was. It did sound like reeducating him in proper manners or something.

"I understand you were forced into this which is always a very bad thing. You have known for a bit of time this would come though. Did you come up with any ideas what you would like to change?"

Uuh, magic. He had been able to see the future. Wow. He answered, deciding to humor her a bit: "I decided to pay prostitutes instead of picking up random women, so that I do not run into this problem anymore."

"So you already thought about what went wrong and how to change that, splendid. Could you tell me a bit about that process?" He only raised an eyebrow to that which prompted her to elaborate. "Please tell me exactly what you think went wrong and how you came up with this decision."

"I did not ask her if she had a husband, boyfriend, aggressive dog, whatever, I just went with her. It's too much of a hassle to ask random women about every kind of risk they have. So I decided to hire prostitutes because with them, such questions are settled beforehand. It's not like I don't have the money."

"I see." Doctor Hasawa nodded. "Why is the solution prostitutes and not a girlfriend for example?"

"I don't do girlfriends." He rolled his eyes. Why did everyone always think girlfriends were a solution to anything? They made life more complicated, not better.

"How come?"

"Because they are annoying, demand things and are always nagging." Actually, why wasn't Satsuki his girlfriend or wife? She was totally right, she behaved like one and he let her. "It makes them unattractive, I am not interested in sex with the same women all the time. Especially when she comes up with demanding me to change or buy her things or whatever for sex. I don't see any sense in monogamy."

"Have you ever experienced the trust, love and contentment that comes with giving yourself to one person only?"

Kuroko. He remembered that smile. Those baby-blue eyes filled with happiness just from seeing him. Those butterfly kisses when he cried on Kuroko's shoulder. He remembered being his sun, being able to make everything all right just by being in the same room. Kuroko never asked for anything but to be allowed to stay by his side. Everything was easy with him. Kuroko wanted to be kissed, caressed, loved and Aomine had been content to do that. He never expected anything he did not want to give.

"I see you know what I am talking about. What happened with that person?" Doctor

Hasawa asked with a smile.

He got pregnant. Suddenly he wanted Aomine to be his boyfriend, to care for a baby, to ... he did not even know what else. He asked so much more than Aomine could ever give. It made him panic. He did not want to lose Kuroko, his love, their easy camaraderie – and did the worst he could have done. He closed his eyes. No, he did not want to think about this again. So he answered: “He married someone else.”

“When was that?”

“A month ago.” One fucking month and already Kuroko was pregnant again. They certainly did not wait. And why should they? It’s not like he had any claim on his ex. One who might not even think himself his ex because face it – Murasakibara was on to something. He knew about those hunts. He had played boyfriend while Kuroko got raped and impregnated by his teammates. He was no boyfriend, he was shit. It had felt like too much of a hassle to ask Kuroko what the fuck he was doing and why. He had enjoyed his friend’s company but he had not cared for him. Boyfriends cared for each other and he had been the only one cared for. It was his own fault Kuroko had left one day, only to be seen again in the arms of another man. He had not even looked for him when the Omega left.

“This seems to make you sad.”

“No shit.” Aomine scoffed. “Is that a disease now? Being sad?”

“There is a condition called extended grieve-”

“If you lost the only person you ever loved, would you not grieve? A damn month isn’t long for that. I am not letting anyone tell me mourning has anything to do with time. It fucking hurts and that doesn’t stop just because a week or a month or a year has gone by.” He glared at the women.

She blinked, opened her mouth but closed it again. It took a few moments before she answered: “I understand that it hurts. But if that grieve makes you do things that can cost you your job, your friendships and health, that grieve is too much. It won’t simply stop, that is right, but grieve should not make you unable to function in normal life.” She had a look of pity on her face. “One failed relationship should not stop you from becoming happy with someone else.”

“You don’t have a clue what you are talking about, bitch.” His lids contracted. “You have no idea what this person meant to me and what it does to me that I lost him. You don’t know what I did to lose him, so don’t tell me my grieve is not appropriate. Stop it with your shitty flower-filled world where everyone is nice to the other, so feelings are just some minor inconvenience.”

She had flinched back, stared at him, the door and back to him before deciding to try again: “Your tone seems quite aggressive to me and I have to admit it makes me afraid of you. If you think I do not understand, could you explain it to me, so that I do?”

“Oh?” She wanted to? Okay. Not like he had anything better to do. She had already forced him to revisit that chapter. “I won’t tell you his name because I don’t trust you not to run to the papers with the story. If you dare to, I promise to ruin you. If you think I am a threat when I am lying in a hospital bed, you don’t want to see me up. And that is already about what happened as well. I am a menace to people and that is all I ever was, so he was right to leave me. He was an Omega, a plaything to me and some of my Alpha friends. Every heat we hunted him down, raped him and had him abort the children afterwards. Even if he was pregnant, we raped him anyway, because why not? Still, he was in love with me. When he was pregnant with my son, he asked me to stop it all, to be mine exclusively, to be allowed to have my baby. I punched that baby out of him on the spot. He lost so much blood he nearly died. Know what I did when

he crawled back from the hospital? I raped and impregnated him. Again, again and again. Until he learned not to come back to me anymore." He smirked at the look of utter disgust on doctor Hasawa's face. "Now, we were talking about extended grieve or some other shit?"

"You're sick." She stood, her eyes glistening with tears. "Dear god, you ... I won't hear this." She shook her head and took a step back.

"Really? Sorry for destroying that happy world of bunnies and sunny days. This is life. Now run along, little girl and cry your eyes out before seeing your very normal, nice patients again."

She did. She ran. He scoffed and shook his head. Yeah, right. So this was therapy? That was for nice people with whom talking might help. She was right. He was far from the point where talking could help with anything.

"Daiki!" Satsuki screamed from the door that doctor Hasawa left open. And here she went again.

He was allowed to go on Friday. Or maybe he had annoyed the nurses enough that they decided they did not want him here on the weekend. Whatever it was, he showered, put on his clothes and followed Satsuki out of the hospital on Friday afternoon. She told him she would move in with him for some weeks because the coach had asked her to do that. One had to control that he did his breathing exercises and rested. She was also to support him in looking for a new therapist, knowing he would never do it himself. Her monologue kept on and on without him having to add anything to the conversation. She told him to unpack his hospital stuff, she would go grocery shopping because his fridge was empty – not that it had ever been filled with anything but beer.

He enjoyed the quiet, knowing it would not last long. More than any therapy, having Satsuki around 24/7 was enough punishment his coach could be sure he would not do something that stupid again. How was he to survive her constant chatter for a month or three? Both seemed equally impossible. He liked her, yeah, but in doses. She had too much energy, was speaking enough for ten people and always wanted to do this or that. It was just annoying as hell.

She came back an hour later with two full bags, filling his cupboards with all kinds of things. She took out pans and a pot when he told her in all seriousness that he would not eat anything she cooked, her meals were a disaster after all. It made her struck his cheek before stomping off to his second bedroom. He sighed deeply – which hurt, yeah, thank you for noticing – and looked at the things she bought before deciding on katsudon. He was not much of a cook but he had been able to save their grades in home economics.

When he called her for dinner, she came out and sat with him while they finished their food in silence. He had taken out a box of ice-cream when she began to speak with a serious tone: "I know you do not want me here. But I will stay and you will have to accept that if you want to keep your job. So I do not want you to treat me like an enemy, we are both in this together. Let's make the best of it."

"I do not want you to cook." What else? "You won't enter my room without knocking. You don't touch my porn, you don't rearrange the flat. This is my home, you are a guest. Understood?"

She smiled at him, something like pride in her eyes. Yeah, he could do adult. The coach wasn't wrong that he needed a chaperone, as much as he hated the fact. He did want to keep his job.

"Next topic: Therapy. It won't do if I keep searching for therapists that you insult or scare off. If you think about a person that might be acceptable, what should I look for?"

Urgh. He did not want to adult anymore. Therapy was shit. Therapists lived in some happy-go-lucky-world where problems were solvable and talking made people happy. Though luck, it did not. Not everything could be fixed.

"Dai-chan, I know you don't want to talk to someone. It's okay to be afraid. But not talking about anything only seems to make it worse. I feel like I am slowly losing you. You need help and I am not enough for that. I need your input here. Otherwise I'll have to send you to people where what happened with doctor Hasawa will happen over and over again. I don't want that for you. You hurt and scared her but I know that means she hurt and scared you first. You only retaliate, you do not look for fights."

Not really. He let out his anger on people unable to defend themselves. He had thought about Kuroko often enough to know that now. Satsuki was his best friend because she did not take his shit. He was able to be friends with Kuroko because Kagami would beat him up if he ever fucked up again. He needed threats to make relationships work. Therapists were just ... too nice. Too much of a victim. They weren't hard enough.

"I need someone I can fight with. Someone who does not back down, someone who can listen to anything and still keep their head. Someone who can defend him- or herself if needed. Someone who knows what to do with people who fly off their handle. Someone who has seen every kind of shit, murder, sexual assault, anything. Someone who is not shocked by depravity."

"Daiki, you aren't that ba-"

"Stop!" He threw the ice-cream box onto the table. "Just ... stop. Stop making excuses for me. You and Tetsu both, you always think it's not that bad. Know what? It is. Your words are nice but I know deep down that the shit I do is wrong. I need someone who still talks to me while being able to accept that I should be in prison for all the shit I did."

Satsuki closed her eyes, tears running down her cheeks. After a moment, she simply nodded and stood. With a whispered "I'll find that someone", she returned to her room.

Somehow that silence was worse than everything she could have said.

Kapitel 3: Second therapy

Somehow, he expected the world to look better after that outburst. Guess what? It did not. Apparently accepting that you had a problem was a shitty thing because after that, everything and everyone seemed to remind you what a failure you were. Thanks a lot. And Satsuki did not let him near any alcohol. Even worse, whenever he thought about drinking, his head reminded him of Himuro's shitty little story. He did not drink to forget. He drank to ... have some quiet sometimes. From life.

So he started excessively playing on his console. Killing zombies and saving the world was a hell lot better than sitting around moping or – god forbid – thinking. His head, the stupid bitch, told him he was running away. Thanks a lot. Not helpful. Satsuki would look for a therapists and then he would wait, wait, wait until someone deemed him worthy talking to.

He should not have underestimated his childhood friend like that though. Right that evening, she told him he had an appointment the day after tomorrow with a forensic psychiatrist specialized in perpetrators of adult and youth sexual assault. Well ... he had asked for it, hadn't he? Of course Satsuki would find someone like that. He did not dare to ask how much money it cost to hire someone like that but he had the feeling his coach gave her free reign. Most likely it would be taken from his pay ... if they even paid him at all for being sick three months because of his stupidity.

Satsuki drove them out into the country two days after. His new therapists seemed to be working in a jail and forensic psychiatry out of ways. No small wonder with that job description. How Satsuki got an appointment with her was really beyond him. On the way, she told him about some information she read up. Apparently in a lot of countries, doctors had to break their oath of silence if they were told about something conflicting with the law, especially the rape of minors. In their own country, he did not have to fear actions against him if he did not tell her about crimes he was still planning. What was done was done, so to speak. Actually, he had never wondered about that and called himself an idiot in his own head. Who knew that if they lived in America, doctor Hasawa could have sold him out to the police with that kind of information? He had thought about a media scandal but never about actually going to prison for what he did.

This appointment made shit real. They had to be scanned, searched, their belongings x-rayed – it was worse than at an airport. They crossed a yard and every danger sense he had was screaming at him for the way some inmates, patients, prisoners – whatever – were looking at Satsuki. He was a strong Alpha, she was as well – that did not help them here. A lot of these people were Alphas, some of them much stronger than him. He walked closer to her and was happy when they entered a building which did not smell of aggression.

"I still don't think you belong here" Satsuki whispered, thereby reminding him that this had been his request.

He simply scoffed but kept silent. He bitterly hoped the same. Maybe he had been a bit hard on himself. This place was damn scary. Their way took them to the second floor where they knocked on an office door. Or Satsuki knocked, he simply stood back. He just wished he could take back his words, take back that outbursts, tell Satsuki that this really was too much, that this was not him.

But it was. This was where he would have been if Kuroko had not kept silent.

A secretary opened the door, animatedly talking with Satsuki before taking them down the hall to another door. It was a vacant therapy room with some strange seats. One was a padded chair you could sink into, one a bouncy ball, one a couch, some forms of pillows on the ground and some normal seats. He took one of those while Satsuki tried the one you could sink into. It seemed to be comfortable, she dared him to try but he kept sitting on his slightly uncomfortable, barely cushioned one.

Satsuki had just sat down next to him on another one of those with a pout when an Alpha woman entered the room. She had short blond hair, tattoos, wrinkles and an air of "Fuck with me, I'll fuck you twice over". So ... this one was one of the higher up doctors in this institute. Nice. If Aomine was honest, this woman was intimidating.

"Good morning. I am doctor Enjoji." She mustered both of them. "Ladies first I guess." She shook Satsuki's hand who had immediately stood.

He had as well. Messing with this women instinctively felt wrong.

They sat again, the doctor taking the bouncy ball before asking: "So how are you related and who is my patient?"

Satsuki looked at him for a second before answering: "Daiki is my childhood friend, we know each other from elementary school. I followed him from school to school and now his job because ... well, because I worry. He is a professional basketball player now. He got suspended for three months after an incident and one of the conditions for being allowed to play again is psychotherapy. The last therapist left crying after about twenty minutes. So I asked him what kind of therapist he might try therapy with and he described someone like you, so ... thank you for seeing him."

"Oh." The doctor smiled at him. "So she did not completely drag you here?"

He did not exactly know how to answer, so he simply looked at Satsuki and back to her.

The doctor did not seem to mind his silence and asked: "So should we speak without your friend or shall I start by asking her some questions?"

He nodded to Satsuki, glad to be out of the spotlight. He never met a woman who gave him the feeling of being able to crush him if she wanted. Satsuki did not seem intimidated at all though and she was a perfect judge of character.

"Okay, if you don't want her to answer something or if she goes too far in your opinion, are you able to tell her to stop?" She smiled at his cautious nod. "Miss Momoi, what kind of boy was your friend when you met him in elementary school?"

Satsuki shortly looked at him before answering: "He was an outgoing loudmouth who constantly talked about basketball, how much he loved it and how good he was. I dared him to proof it and we played. He really was good, so mostly I accompanied him to games against older boys. I enjoyed watching him and learned to love the sport as well. I found him likable but most other kids our age were afraid of him because he was very energetic. He was loud and forceful and always on his feet. Most others could not keep up."

"Were you his only friend?"

"I think so, yes." Satsuki sent him a questioning gaze, so he nodded. "In middle school he entered the basketball team and found some friends there. But this was also where ... the incident happened."

"The incident for which you decided on a forensic psychiatrist with my specialty?" The doctor looked at him, so he felt compelled to nod. "Okay, let's talk about that one without your friend later. But I have some other questions first. Miss Momoi, were you in any way involved in this incident?"

She shook her head and also said: "No, I did not even know it happened. I knew

everyone involved and I noticed that on some days something was off, but I did not know what or why. Even today I don't think I actually know what happened, I only have some pointers."

"So your friend here never told you what happened?"

"No. I gathered that he raped someone and I know that someone and one time Daiki muttered that he was a murderer. I am not sure what that was about and that's the extent I know."

"If you know the victim, how do you feel about the facts you already know?"

Urgh. He felt nauseous just listening to them. He felt guilty enough, thank you very much. Was this a torture session or something? He balled his fists.

Satsuki looked at him, his face, his hands, then his eyes again. She stayed silent.

"You are very good at reading him" The doctor praised her. "But he said he would tell you to stop and as long as he does not verbally say it, I would like you to answer my questions."

"I am not sure he can" Satsuki admitted.

"He seems to be able to take a bit more. It's no use cottoning this up if we are going to talk about this. As far as I understood, this has been cottoned up until now and his guilt is the thing punishing him the most."

He had an urge to growl at her in defense but even he knew that was because he did not like the truth. He felt guilty. Had been for years and nothing had been able to make that go away. Some days he wished for the cops to come knocking on his door, just to be able to end this.

"Okay ... I know the other boy pretty well, I was smitten with him at that time. But he was in love with Daiki, a blind man could see that. They had some strange relationship which seemed bad for both of them. Daiki seemed ... strange, depressed even. It got worse and worse. And the other boy was the same, he got sadder and quieter and stopped smiling. One day he vanished. He did not come to school anymore, only for exams. That was in our third year, the second half. When we went to high school, he went to another school. When we saw him again, he seemed to be better. He was with another men who he later had a child with and married. So to me, it ended well. I am not angry or something like that. I only want Daiki to get better."

"In your opinion, did they hurt each other? Or was there another reason for your friend to be unhappy?"

Interesting question. How much did Satsuki actually know? Her answer had really surprised him, he had thought she only held back her anger out of pity. But her answer had sounded pretty honest. If someone had hurt the person he loved, he would be furious.

"I think Daiki was unhappy for other reasons, though I can only guess at them. But ... I think the other was unhappy because of him." She cautiously looked at him, her eyes turning sad. "Watching someone you love destroy himself always hurts."

"Do you have the feeling that your friend here is destroying himself right now?"

Satsuki only nodded, tears streaming down her face.

Aomine felt his stomach sink. Oh shit. Was he doing the same with her like what he did with Kuroko? He had not thought she would ... no, again, he had not thought. Of course she cared. Of course she hurt. She only hit her pain well.

"If you could change one thing about him, what would that be? What's the most important?"

"Letting go." She tried to wipe her tears but they would not stop coming. "The other boy, no, man now, he ... he forgave him long ago. We are still friends. But Daiki thinks

he belongs here, as if ... I don't know what he did but I can't imagine it being this bad. But he hates himself for so many things, he feels guilty, he ... I want him to forgive himself. I want him to enjoy life because he hasn't done so for six years at least."

"Since that incident?"

"No, before. Somewhere in our first year of middle school, something changed. In our second year, he was really down and then he got even worse. Since then it is like ... like caring for someone who has long stopped caring himself. Daiki lives and breaths and even works, it just ... it doesn't feel like he is still alive."

"How many years has that been?" The doctor seemed more mellow, actually being careful around Satsuki. That was something Aomine never got right.

"Four years, nearly five." Satsuki seemed to have stopped caring about her tears, she just let them run. "He got a bit better after he was forgiven for whatever happened but it has not changed much. Daiki rarely laughs. He meets no one but me. He does not care for most other humans. When his coach screams at him, he ignores it. I am not even sure what would happen if he did lose his job. Maybe he would just survive until his money ran out, drinking himself to oblivion."

"Do you think he has an alcohol problem?"

Satsuki only nodded. Aomine sighed. He did not have an alcohol problem, why did everyone think that? He did no- okay, he had done some drunken shit, but only once. It would not happen again.

"Did he drink any alcohol before coming here?"

"No, I am staying with him right now. It is another condition for keeping his job. He has some fractures which still heal from his last stunt. He got smashed, slept with a married woman and got beaten up by her husband." Satsuki sounded bitter. Angry even. More angry than about the whole rape thing.

"Why do you think he did that?"

"To forget about something. Said other man married last month and is now pregnant. I told Daiki a day before that event happened." She took a deep lungful of air. "Do you think it was my fault that he did that?"

"Did you or did he drink himself to oblivion?" The doctor raised her eyebrows. "But it is an interesting question anyway. Why do you want to take the blame for how he behaves?"

Satsuki just blinked. Her confusion made Aomine smirk. It was rare to see her flustered.

"Taking blame or feeling guilty about something gives you the impression that something that happened was in your control. It is easier. If you were to blame, then something you can do can change the same situation in the future. It gives you control." The doctor let her words sink in for a moment. "That might answer your question why your friend here has been feeling guilty, even if he was forgiven. If you feel guilty, it lets you feel in control."

Hm. Okay. Her words did not really feel like one of those stomach-churning revelations he sometimes had to face. The situation had been completely in his control, he knew that. You don't rape people because you don't know better. He had known exactly what he ... well. It had felt like something he could not control though. When Kuroko came back from the hospital, he ... he certainly had not planned on raping him. He had not wanted to. And then he had not been able to stop. But that had been in his control, right? He did not know what exactly had ridden him but that had been all him. No one had forced him to rape Kuroko. Even that hunt thing, their first time. You could blame it on hormones but he had not said no to hunting his

friend, right? He was guilty. Damn, this was giving him a headache.

Kapitel 4: Alone with a nightmare

"Mister Aomine, would you like to say anything before I ask your friend to leave us, so I can ask you some questions?" The doctor asked.

He just shook his head, too tired for anything else. He just wanted this to end. That already was enough soul-searching for one day. As soon as Satsuki had left, he asked: "How long until I can go?"

Her smile faltered and she sighed before saying: "And here I thought you had some motivation yourself. You're paying me, you know? If you want to go, go."

"Sorry." He ducked his head. "It's just ... hard stuff to remember."

"I gathered." The doctor nodded. "She knows next to nothing, doesn't she?"

"Yeah." Aomine relaxed into the seat with a deep sigh.

"Would you lose her as a friend if she knew?"

"Definitely." He let his head roll back, looking at the ceiling. "She might kill me herself."

"What is worse: Your guilt regarding the victim or your fear of having her find out?" The doctor's voice had got a lot harder than when she talked to Satsuki. Not so emotional, not emphatic. More like she was asking for facts.

"Guilt." That was an easy answer. He knew enough about himself to tell that. "I love him, still do. The more I get close to someone, the more I seem to hurt them."

"That sounds a lot like regret. Do you regret what you did?" Huh? What kind of strange question was that? Of course he did. She seemed to give some other meaning to his furrowed brows though. "There is a difference, you know? Guilt and regret. Guilt is just feeling that you did something wrong. Regret is knowing that you did damage to someone else. It is a emphatic response while guilt is not necessarily emphatic."

Urgh, okay. Did he have an emphatic response? That meant feeling for someone else, accepting their pain was caused by him, right? He said: "I don't know. I know with my head that I hurt this other person. I did irreparable damage. I will never be forgiven because what I did, it cannot be forgiven. I know this person must have hurt deeply but ... I try not to think about it because I fear I would kill myself and he would blame himself for that."

"I see. We will not talk about this incident today. Talking about your feelings regarding it is still further down the road. But if you do get suicidal on the way, it is extremely important you are taken to the next psychiatric hospital for stabilization. Can I count on you to speak with your friend or even call an ambulance yourself before doing something stupid?" She asked quite matter-of-factly.

"Yeah. I would hurt those two too much if I were to kill myself."

"Good. Before I start asking you some general questions, I have one left regarding the incident though." She waited for his nod before she continued. "Your friend said you felt like this would have been a fitting place for you. So if a judge were to look at what happened, what criminal charges would he find you guilty of? Just so I have an impression what we'll be dealing with."

"Rape. Murder, I guess. Attempted murder. Ritualized rape if that is a thing, we had organized gang rapes. A lot of violence. Is there another name for rapes where you force someone into pregnancy?" He run his hands through his hair. "I never looked this shit up but I know I'd be locked away for a long time. Oh, and he was a minor. The

murder was on a baby, that most likely makes it worse as well.”

“I am happy to hear you seem to have a good grasp on what you did and are not trying to deny anything. Murdering a baby is hardcore, even with the prisoners of this place. The rest is stuff I deal with everyday.” She did not seem upset though. “Except for the people involved, does anyone know about what happened?”

“His husband.” Aomine fidgeted. “Somehow the ... the victim convinced him not to kill me for what happened. If I had been him, I’d have killed me. And he could, he’s an extremely capable Alpha. But I am safe as long as I never hurt the victim again.”

“You know you can say his name, right? I am not allowed to tell anyone anyway.”

“Tetsu.” Well, there he went and did it. If she wanted to sell this to the press, he was fucked. Kuroko would hate him. Kagami would kill him. But this women did not exactly seem interested in idle gossip.

“Okay, let’s call him Tetsu from now on. This is an introductory session to see if you’d like to work with me and if I’d like to work with you. In my opinion, you are right, you fit right in with my usual patients. You are a bit better, you know you did something wrong, you seem to have a bit of empathy and you have at least something to live for. That’s enough for me for now. Can you imagine talking with me again?”

“Guess so.” He shrugged his shoulders.

“Good. Now, there is a certain order for what we are about to do. First I’ll check off a lot of things, most of them questions about sexuality, but also about your past and future. Those about sexuality can be embarrassing, those about the past are normally anathema and those about the future often require a lot of thinking, so might be you can’t answer a lot of them right now. A lot of those questions will make you uneasy at least, possibly even suicidal at the worst. If you get suicidal, you need to get to a hospital. If you feel like hurting someone, you need to get away from people. So you need to talk to your friend out there who seems to live with you right now and invent some kind of sign or gestures which tells her to leave immediately. Destroying furniture can happen, hurting people cannot. If you do, talking about it afterwards takes highest priority and if this therapy makes you a danger to people, we will stop. You can drink, of course, I can’t stop that. But if you come into therapy drunk, I’ll send you away again. All of those rules clear?”

He nodded. A clear set of rules helped. It made things easier. He liked breaking them, but he also liked knowing what they were. Rules made things easier. He sometimes wished people came along with a set of rules or an instruction manual.

“Same goes for drugs of course. Also, if you ever hurt me, this is over. You can get mad, you can scream and curse at me but you cannot physically attack me. Any kind of hold is not allowed as well. If I feel that it is better for me to leave the room, you will let me go.”

So she came with a set of rules. Good. He nodded.

“Last thing: You were forced into this, I know that. But I will not treat anyone that is forced into therapy. Every prisoner, every forensic patient has the choice to be treated or not. You are the same to me. You are here because you want to get better, no matter the circumstances that brought you here. Clear?”

Yeah. He had chosen this. He knew. Wasn’t like he regretted it every minute since his outburst.

“Good. I’ll give you an appointment next week, then we will start with the questions. Most likely they won’t be about the incident or your past, don’t worry. That will take time. Do you have any questions?”

“Why haven’t you asked me about my goals yet?” He drew up an eyebrow. “I thought

every therapy started with that.”

“Do you already know what you want?” She tilted her head. A feminine gesture but out of place with her.

“No clue.” He scoffed. “I don’t want to feel like a monster. I don’t want to feel like I’m always on the edge of destroying people’s life. I don’t want to be a constant disappointment.” He shook his head. “Shit, I’m not good with this soul searching stuff.”

“Actually, that was pretty good for a first session. Normally my patients tell me that they can do no wrong, it’s just that nobody understands them, nobody really bothers to treat them right, they are victims themselves and only react to what others do to them.”

“Tetsu never did anything.” Aomine closed his eyes. “He wanted to save me, to love me, to give me something to live for. I took his happiness, his innocence, I fucking killed his baby. Why the fuck did I do that?” He buried his face in his hands. “For five years I’ve been asking myself the same fucking thing every night. Why? Why wasn’t I stronger? Why has no one killed me yet? Because I fucking deserve that.”

“I am not here to blame you.” She leaned forward as well. “Maybe we’ll find an answer in therapy. Maybe not. Maybe you’re just asking yourself the wrong question. We will see.”

“Wrong question?” He looked up.

“If this Tetsu seems to have forgiven you and his mate has decided not to kill you, why do you hang onto that guilt? What do you need it for?”

“To never do something like that again” He answered immediately.

“Or to never love and be hurt again.” She leaned back. “We will see. I look forward to seeing you next week.”

Huh. That was his cue to go. Hadn’t he wanted to go? Right now he did not. He wanted to know. He wanted to end this. He wanted to be done with all that pain, the questions, all of it. He wanted it out and dealt with.

She held out her hand, so he stood and shook it. It was over. He could go. She held the door open for him. Nice of her. He felt weak, standing next to her, a tall woman with short-cropped blond hair and a straight spine. She wasn’t beautiful but she was haunting. Rough edges on a lovely body. That strange combination of strong and fragile was a scary thing.

“Daiki?” Satsuki looked at him with big, round, pink eyes. She was all curves, puffy cheeks, no edges at all. She was lovely and nice. She was home.

He pulled her into a hug.

First thing he did was throw out his whole pornographic collection. All videos, all his digital data and links, even his magazines. He couldn’t exactly say why, just that those bothered him. They weren’t about love, they were simply about dominating people with or without their consent. He was a bit shocked how much stuff that was. His apartment looked nearly empty without it.

He needed a hobby, something to relax that had nothing to do with abusing people. Something not porn, not whoring around, best something without alcohol. Reading wasn’t his thing, he could not play an instrument, his art was shit and more sports were just not possible. He tried video games but shooting people as a way to unwind did seem as wrong as watching people fuck each other’s brains out. It did not give off the right feeling.

So he got over himself and did the only thing sensible: He asked Satsuki. Of course she

was ecstatic. He regretted asking the second she smiled. And she did exactly what he had feared most. She set him up with the most horrible thing he could think of. She enlisted him with the Hello Kitty Knitting Club.

He really didn't know why he always got himself into shitty situations. Why did he never think things through? When you sleep with an Omega without condoms, they get pregnant. When you rape someone over and over again, they run. When you ask your sugary-pink-best friend about her idea of fun, she drags you to a pink place full of sugary nice women. So he sat between eight women ranging from thirteen to seventy-five and had knitting tools shoved into his hands. A fifty-something-year old explained basic knitting to him while trying to rub up to him.

Urgh.

Yeah, Satsuki had fun. At his expense. Why did he listen to her? He was so close to taking someone's eye out with those damn knitting needles, preferably the women next to him. Thankfully even Satsuki seemed to notice him reaching his limits, so she came over, chatted nicely with the women until she changed seats and sat next to him herself to do her knitting. He silently did some rows until they were allowed to go. All women gushed over him, how nice he was, what a wonderful young man, so handsome, if he would come again, he was such a pleasure to look at.

He shuddered on the way home and said: "I'll never go there again."

"Okay." Satsuki just smiled. "We can go to a spa next and try some cucumber masks."

Oh god, no. No other woman crap. He needed a manly hobby. Something that kept him away from her antics, something like ... riding a bike. Yeah, he could get a license. Biking sounded good, he liked leather. He was just a tad too young. So he could do that next year. This year ... what could he do? What went well with bikes? Rock'n'roll? Oh, good idea! "I'll take guitar lessons and learn to play one."

"Oh, guitar is nice." She smiled up at him. "That was surprisingly fast, I thought I'd get to painting your nails pink before you'd make a decision."

"I can live without that." He rolled his eyes.

"You could have spared yourself the knitting if you were better at listening to your heart." She smirked up at him. "Just know, if you do sink into depression again and forget about your hobby, I'll drag you back there. Those women are great therapy."

"They are a menace."

"That as well." She grinned. "I'll look forward to hearing you play the guitar."

"You are a menace as well." He nudged her with an elbow.

"That's my job." She got onto her tiptoes and kissed his cheek. "It's what managers are for."

Or wives. Damn. Maybe he should marry her. She was sure to make his life a living hell. He shuddered. He was so whipped.

Kapitel 5: Questioning

Doctor Enjoji started with quite normal questions. Where he lived, what he did for a living, what his hobbies were. Normal stuff. It soon turned into questions about hearing voices, seeing something in shadows and if he sometimes thought his body did not belong to him. If he had the feeling that eyes followed him in public places – yeah, well, they just did – and in private – who the fuck should look at him when he was alone? Were there any situations, objects, animals or people that made him want to run in fear – hell yes, therapy for example. Every time anyone wanted to talk about feelings which had been much too often this month. That turned into questions about dislike of taking up the phone, eating in front of others and such. No, he did not have social anxiety. He just disliked deep conversation. Why? Because he did not like the inside of his head. It was stressful to think about thinking.

The doctor smiled and said it got easier with practice. He had an urge to flick a middle finger at her but suppressed the impulse. She asked him about activities, his daily schedule, friends and other social contacts. His sleeping patterns, his nightmares, his eating habits. She proclaimed there was a high chance of him slipping into depression. Well, no shit. Without his daily sport, he had no idea how to spend his day. He had no school, so he had no rooftop to sleep on. He did not even need more sleep because his nights weren't filled with his parents' drunken screaming. He found himself telling her about his plan to learn guitar and get a biking license. He even told her about throwing out all his porn, though he really did not know why he told her that.

"Sexuality would have been the next topic anyway. Talking about pornography, when did you see your first pornographic movie or clip?" So, here goes. Some questions beforehand had been aggravating but she had said before that rather than lying, he could simply say that he did not know. She did not chide him for that, just asked something else. It was okay, she didn't judge.

"Before I can remember. Something was always on in the living room."

"Your parents had pornography running in the living room?" She raised her eyebrows. Okay, she wasn't completely without judgment but she was as close as possible.

"Yeah, every evening. I remember that as a kid I found it disgusting and mostly played by myself with my back turned to the screen."

"When did it begin to interest you?"

"Dunno ... seven or eight. It was still disgusting but I was getting that it was grown-up stuff and most other kids had no idea about it. There was a passage on sex in our biology book, not that we ever got there in elementary school. But some kids talked about it in hushed voices, giggling. I knew about that stuff. I'd seen it all on TV and my parents often forgot that I was in the room. They fucked like rabbits."

"What's your parents' second gender?"

"Both are Alpha."

"So were you an only child?" She looked up, saw his eyes and answered. "Okay, I'll ask that later. Let's stay with sexuality. So you knew the mechanics early on and were confronted with pornography at a much too young age. What kind of pornography was that and how brutal was it?"

"It was heterosexual ... mostly either Alpha pairs or Alphas with Omegas or Omega-gang-rapes. Especially the last one was really brutal. My parents sometimes watched BDSM. They even had some really crazy shit like sodomy with horses and snuff. They

never watched those in front of me but I did see some of that stuff when I was alone at home and bored.”

“Your parents owned snuff movies?” The doctor closed her eyes for a second. “Letting your toddler watch porn is bad but snuff is hardcore shit. Talking about your childhood will really not be a piece of cake, I can tell. How old were you?”

“Eleven.” He lowered his head.

“You can never unsee those pictures, that is the problem. So you grew up surrounded by sexuality, often sexual violence and most likely a lot of neglect on your parents’ side.” That summed it up, yes. “When did you first have sex?”

He sighed deeply. They had to do this, right?

“The incident?”

He nodded.

“Okay, you don’t have to elaborate right now. So in short it was you raping someone?”

She waited for his nod. “How old were you?”

“Fourteen.”

“And when did you hit puberty? When did you have your first erections?”

“Uhm ... I always had them. I know that’s strange but I often had erections as a kid. I remember having one with five. They got less over the years but they never stopped. I hit puberty with eleven and had my first ejaculation with twelve.” Good thing he wasn’t ashamed about that stuff. It was early, he knew that, but weren’t Alphas often like that?

“You had constant sexual contact, so your own mind most likely protected you by not having you go into a latency phase. It happens, especially with sexual abuse victims. Being forced to watch porn is a kind of sexual abuse.”

Really? That was abuse? There were so many worse things his parents did, he never thought that the porn-thing was really wrong. Sure, he didn’t like it, but it fit right in with the rest. And he remembered feeling strong and superior for knowing and watching such scary stuff as a kid. He never saw himself as a sexual abuse victim, it wasn’t like they touched him.

“After your first ejaculation, how come you were able not to have sex right away but wait until fourteen? That’s two years. With your history, that’s actually amazing.”

“I went to middle school. We had a rigorous training menu in the basketball club which powered me out. And I stayed afterwards to train and because I did not want to go home. So I often trained until ten o’clock, that means at least six hours daily. We had matches on the weekend and if we did not, I was out training at public courts.”

“So all your energy went into training, that’s a good coping strategy. What changed?”

“I became so good that we won our matches by at least tripling the other team’s points. Basketball became boring. The more I trained, the better I was and the better I was, the less I liked the sport. So I stopped training.”

“Which made you lash out sexually. That makes sense.” She nodded. “How would you define your own sexuality? What do you like?”

“Like?” He raised an eyebrow.

“When you masturbate, what are your fantasies? Gender, age, position and so on.” She asked quite matter-of-factly. It would have been embarrassing even for him otherwise.

“Slender women with big tits. They are around twenty, mostly dog-style. Often in a shower, sometimes on a basketball court, sometimes in the lockers. It’s mostly fucking a gorgeous women after a basketball match thing.”

“Alpha, Beta, Omega?” She seemed to make a list while he spoke.

"Alpha."

"Consensual or not? Does pain feature into it?"

"Consensual, no pain, a lot of moans." Shit, he was getting hard. He really liked the view.

"Any toys? More participants than you two? Any BDSM?"

"Nope, plain old sex."

"Animals, bodily fluids other than the normal, any objects?"

"No, really, just normal sex." His erection was wilting. Those questions really put a damper on his mood. Who came up with that stuff?

"That is a surprisingly normal sexual fantasy. So how did you end up with a male Omega and not consensual sex? That is the polar opposite of what you like."

Huh ... good question. It was. Tetsu was completely out of his range of interest. He shrugged his shoulders and said: "He was there, I guess. I needed an outlet and he made a good target. And he wasn't the only one, I also fucked another male Alpha team member. I often got violent and Omegas are just fragile, so ... I let out those urges with him."

"If you rate all of that energy you had to let out with a hundred percent, how much do you still need to let out and how do you do it?"

"Huh ... it got better in our first year of high-school. I was trashed in basketball. So I began training again. I moved out which was really important. So ... maybe sixty percent?"

"How do you let it out right now?"

Yeah. Well. He balled his fists. How did he let it out? "I have three months of basically bed rest. Satsuki is watching me 24/7 that I do not do sports and do not drink."

"And as you are not sleeping with each other, that means you are a ticking bomb right now?"

He only nodded.

"How do we remedy that situation? I do not want to work with a bomb." She mustered him. "Why the bed rest?"

"Broken rib."

"Have you consulted a sport specialist what you may still do with a broken rib?" He looked up in surprise at her words. "Well, you need sport. You have no other outlet than sport and sex right now, except for dampening yourself with alcohol and narcotics. If a doctor allows you to do something, maybe jogging or so, even your coach and your friend can't say no, right?"

"That's pretty smart" He replied and nodded. "I'll do that."

"Do you currently have any sex partners or relationships?"

"Nope." A steady sex partner, he had had none since Kise. That was actually a good idea as well. "I'll go look for a sex partner as well."

"You certainly have the looks and are famous enough to find one. It might be a good idea to warn your friend though. She seemed to me like she might want to be that partner. By the way, she does fit your profile perfectly. How come you are not interested in her?"

He looked at the wall. Yeah, why wasn't he interested in her? She asked him the same thing. Hell, he asked himself the same thing. Why? "I don't know. She's ... I don't want to hurt her. I wanna treat her right if I were her boyfriend and I couldn't. She deserves better."

"But she wants you."

"She also wants me to get better, stop drinking, stop whoring around, take my job

seriously, forget about my feelings for Tetsu, treat people more nicely, stop hating my parents, blaming myself – sometimes I think she wants a completely different person in my body.”

“So you don’t think she wants you.”

Yeah, that was it. She wanted a version of him he just wasn’t, might not even ever be. That was it. Damn right, he finally had something he could tell her when she asked again. Neat.

“Do you think you can talk to her about that?”

“Yeah. That’s a kinda unresolved issue and whenever we talk about it, I hurt her. I always say she deserves better and she gets angry that I do not let her make her own decisions and then we fight. It would be great to finally solve that, she really gets on my nerves with that. She wants us to marry and I just want her to back off.”

“Shall we call her in right now?” Doctor Enjoji asked.

Right now? Here? No! He wasn’t ready, he was ... but maybe it was a good idea to have the therapists as a moderator in case it got sour again. Might not be the worst idea. “I don’t suppose you have something to drink here?”

“Water.” She smiled with one of those smiles Satsuki always had on, those that were both understanding and pitying. Course she knew he did not mean water.

“Good enough I guess.” Maybe if he tried hard enough, he could tell himself it was wodka or something. She gave him a glass and he took a mouthful. “I’m afraid she won’t want to stay around if I tell her that.”

“How many years has she been your friend?”

“Thirteen.”

“Then it’s quite unlikely.” The woman still stood. “If I were to tell her she could go date someone else, would you be jealous or relieved?”

“Fuck if I know.” He put his hands in his hair. “I want her happy. She should go date someone else. She’s not mine after all.”

“Tetsu isn’t yours as well but it seemed to hurt you deeply that he married someone else.”

Did it? He searched his heart. Somehow, two weeks ago, it really hurt. Right now, it didn’t. Why had he made such a fuzz about the wedding and the pregnancy? It was all bound to happen. It was right that it happened. Kagami deserved Kuroko and Kuroko deserved him. They were perfect for each other. All he had done was bitching that he wasn’t happy and nearly destroyed his friend’s wedding with that. He had really behaved abysmally. Again. So no, no bitching about Satsuki’s dating.

“I might need some adjustment time, but it’s okay. It’s how it should be.”

“Good, then I’ll get her.” She went to the door and called for his friend.

Here goes nothing.

Kapitel 6: Talking relationships

Satsuki sat down, her eyes on him. He had slumped in his seat, staring at the floor and counting the different patterns in the carpet. Just something that had nothing to do with anything. Just why had he said yes? He could have had the argument somewhere else, best somewhere where he did not have to drive back with Satsuki for an hour.

"I asked your friend about your relationship. He told me that you would like to marry him and that he has never been able to make you understand why he thinks that is a bad idea. We sorted that out and he agreed to tell you now ... while I can help a bit."

Satsuki balled her fists, looked down but finally turned to him with a small sigh. Her eyes told him she felt ready to be hurt. Ready to face rejection head-on. Gods, he already felt horrible again.

"Uhm ... well. I have the feeling you don't want to marry me. Like the me me. How I am. Gods, I am bad at this."

"I can assure you, this will only be the first of many hard talks. You can do it. Elaborate a bit." Doctor Enjoji intervened.

"You know ... you deserve better. I really mean that. And I think you want someone better than me as well. A me that is ... better somehow. No guilt, no hard feelings, no old ties, no disappointment, no depression, just ... a me that is better than the me I currently am."

Satsuki nodded. Her expression showed something like pleasantly surprised. When she answered, she even smiled: "That is exactly right. I want a better version of you."

"Then don't say you want to marry me now. I doesn't make me wanna change. It just depresses me because I think you're insane."

Doctor Enjoji smiled, trying to hide a laugh.

"But if I were to say I'll only marry you if you'll change ... I don't think I could call that love. It is selfish." He lowered her gaze. "So I try to tell myself it's alright. Because it somehow is. It's not good but ... okay."

There was a long pause in which the doctor spoke after a few moments: "Someone once said that love is selfless. What this someone wanted to say is that love knows no value. It is not about giving and receiving the same amount. You simply give and trust that you will also get. But that also implies that love is about trust. If you cannot trust the other, you cannot love. "Through good and bad times" is true with love but it also implies that bad times end. That is also a question of trust. If you don't know if someone will get better, it is no use to love and a marriage would be more an act of desperation than of love."

"Yeah." Aomine made a hand gesture in the direction of the therapist. "That's what ... I meant."

"So I should only ask if I felt like I was able to trust that you would care for me?" Satsuki looked torn. "It sounds so ... uncaring."

"How should I care for someone who doesn't care for himself?" He looked up, meeting her gaze head-on. "Satsuki, I do shit. I hurt people. I need someone who doesn't cower. You scream at me for shit but even you don't do it often enough."

She blinked, her eyes widening. After a moment she whispered: "I never thought I'd ever hear you say that."

"Mister Aomine, it is not your wife's job to get you in line. That is your own responsibility." His therapists said.

"I know!" He growled. "I just ... there needs to be someone to remind me. Look, Satsuki, I know you would be my perfect match. But I'm not yours and I hate the fact. But if you reject me, I don't need to feel like shit for that. So please reject me and go date someone else."

Again she blinked. Another moment of recollection passed before she said: "That's pretty twisted. Do you want us to be lovers or not?"

"Not with how I am now." He sighed. His brain stung. Gods, he wanted this to end.

"So you might consider it after getting better?" She waited for a bit, observing him.

"Okay. Aomine Daiki, when I begin to see you as a man instead of as a child I have to care for, you may be allowed to date me. Until then, I will stay your friend."

Ugh ... that kinda hurt. More than he expected. A child she had to care for? Hell, was it that bad? Okay, it was but ... oh man, damn it. She was right. He behaved like a spoiled, petulant child most of the time. He had the emotional maturity of a two-year-old. So if he got better, she might deem him worthy of dating?

He nodded.

"So, how was that?" The doctor asked him. "Better, worse or as you expected?"

"T'was good." He drew a deep lungful of air. "My head is killing me."

"I also think that was pretty good. And it's enough for one day. We'll see each other again next week and continue with the questions. You can decide until next week if you'd rather answer questions about the incident or about your family." She stood and shook Satsuki's hand. "Thank you for being a good first person to try talking feelings with."

"Thank you for getting him there. I don't think you can imagine how happy I am right now. For years I thought it was my fault, that I wasn't good enough or ugly or ... I don't even know. I thought his rejection meant I was undesirable."

"Are you mad?" He looked up in confusion. "You're fucking gorgeous and you should know that."

"It's not like you ever said so." Her eyes filled with sadness. "That's why it is so important to talk about feelings. All I ever hear from you is that you don't want to see my ugly face when you are mad. And you are mad at me quite often."

"Shit. I'm sorry." He stood and grabbed her arm. "I thought you know I don't mean that."

"It gets a bit hard to tell myself when I hear you say it for the twentieth time." She dried her tears with a hand gesture. "Thank you for saying it now."

Damn. What else had he said that she had taken to heart? He had screamed at her so often, mostly for looking out for him when he wanted to destroy himself. He should really think about that once his head did not feel the size of an elephant.

"Do you have anything for pain on you?"

"Oh, sure." She opened her handbag and got out some medication.

He downed it with the rest of his water.

The next morning he wasn't exactly sure what it was he wanted to do. He knew it had been something important, something to do with thinking but hell if he could remember. At least his head was better. So, what could it be? He had talked out marriage with Satsuki, he remembered that. But then ... white haze. Damn it. Well, he would remember. Someday.

So, what to do? He should organize that guitar teacher. He was pretty sure he had told Satsuki his request to get him a sports doctor. What else? He had too much energy. Maybe he should cook up some breakfast, he was tired of combini food and his fridge

was still filled with the things Satsuki had bought. Yeah, breakfast it was.

When he went into the kitchen, Satsuki stared at him from the couch. He enthusiastically greeted her while she sat with her mouth open. It took another few seconds before she said: "Am I hallucinating? It is a quarter past seven. You never get up before eleven if you don't have to."

"I am awake, why should I stay in bed?" He grinned and got out a pan.

"Are you cooking?" She sat her laptop aside and came over. "I have never seen you cooking except for the day I came here ... have you ever used this kitchen before?"

"Nope." He searched his cabinets. "Some women I took here cooked. But I bought stuff for if I wanted to cook. I should have everything ... I bought it on a good day. Then I could not get my ass up, the steak went bad and I never found the energy again."

"You were depressed" She calmly stated.

"Well ... yeah." He finally found the oil. "I still am. But I'm feeling better. Slowly." He stared into space for a moment. "Listen, if I want to quit this therapy after next time because it gets hard ... stop me. I don't know how but do it. I'm so sick of being ... well, sick."

"Will do." She smiled at him blindingly.

"Can you cook rice or do you ruin even that?" He drew up an eyebrow.

"I can!" She pouted.

He pointed at the rice cooker while he began to split egg whites and egg yolks. After finishing the task, he looked over his shoulder to say: "You know you have to wash the rice before filling the cooker?"

Kuroku Tetsuya.

He stared at his phone, thumb hovering over the green button. Had Satsuki told him that Aomine was in therapy? Would he ask about it? Could he face questions about it? Argh, damn it all, he wasn't a coward. He pressed down.

"Yo, Tetsu? How are you?"

"Hello to you, Aomine. I'm fine, thank you. How are you?" His friend spoke in his usual politeness.

"Well ... okay, I guess. I'm bored out of my skull though. I have an appointment with a sports doctor tomorrow, he'll tell me what I am allowed to do with the rip."

"What do you do to pass the time?"

Good thing he had an answer that was not sex or alcohol: "I booked a private tutor for guitar lessons. Next time you're in Japan, I'll play you something."

"Guitar?" Kuroko sounded stunned, even being silent for a moment. "I didn't know you were interested in that."

"Well, I have to do something, right?" And he did not want to be forced into another pink room. "Guitars are cool, don't ya think so?"

"Yes, guitars are very cool." There was an undeniable smile to hear in his voice. "I am looking forward to hearing you play."

"Yeah, I'll learn some rock'n'roll and maybe a bit of country. I really like American songs. Can you get me a good country CD and sent it over? Japanese country is shit, it's all Enka."

"I like Enka. Have you ever heard Midorima sing? He has a beautiful voice, I never knew until I heard."

"Pff. He's such a dry guy, whoever would have expected that?" Maybe he should learn to sing to. He had never tried. "Hey, do you think I could learn to sing?"

"You'd have a great country voice. I'll get you some records to try singing to. It's a great plan."

"Maybe I can learn a lullaby to sooth your baby when it starts kicking." Yeah, he totally owned that to Kuroko. "Sorry for being such a mess at your wedding. You certainly could have spent your time better than with listening to my bitching."

"It was quite alright, I wasn't late." There was a slight pause. "Thank you for saying so anyway. So it is true you are in therapy?"

"Err ... yeah." He swallowed. Shit. He did not want to talk about that.

"I am very glad to hear. Momoi cried in joy when she told me. I hope you can keep up the good work. It is very brave that you do this. I am proud of you."

Oh. God. Aomine grabbed his pillow and pressed it against his chest. Hearing that was making him feel ... queezy. Strange. He didn't like it. So he kept quiet.

"Momoi said you have energy again. You do sound better, I think. Please try your best to get better. I ... I still blame myself that nothing I did could make anything better for you. To hear you actually want to get better, that ... it means very much to me."

No. No, he wasn't. He was not getting better, he was ... well, okay, he wanted to get better but nobody said he could. If they thought anything was better, it was wishful thinking. It was not. He still did not know what to do with himself, how to keep from going crazy, how to fucking stay away from those memories that were on repeat in his head. He wasn't made for all this sociable crap. His side in life was the one with all of those failed existences living on the edge of society.

"Aomine?"

He pressed the red button.

"Daiki? Where are you going?" Satsuki asked from the kitchen.

"Out." He took his shoes and jacket.

He felt her presence next to him. It made him want to lash out but he stopped himself there. She was there, yeah, but she was not his punching back. He wasn't mad at her. He was ... he didn't know. He needed air.

"You look like you are about to do something stupid" She said with a sad voice. Her body was shivering, her eyes tearing up.

He took his keys and left, throwing the door.

Kapitel 7: Incidents

"Miss Momoji told me you got dead drunk last week. Was it something going on in your head or did something happen to trigger that?" Doctor Enjoji asked.

He shrugged a shoulder, tracing the carpet pattern with his eyes.

"Shame is a curious thing. Do you have any idea why shame is a useful emotion?" She looked at him for a moment. "Actually, you already answered it the first time around. It keeps you from doing something that would hurt or offend others. While fear keeps us from doing something in the future, shame keeps us from repeating mistakes. Your behavior indicates shame to me. I actually like that because a lot of my patients need to learn shame as one of the first steps. Most come into therapy lacking empathy and complex emotions like shame. I am happy to see you have that. Now we have to work with it. What are you ashamed about?"

Behaving like an idiot over nothing. Why had he run out? Why had he just disconnected Kuroko? He didn't know. He really didn't know, he just looked at the mess in hindsight and told himself that blaming others did not solve it. Kuroko had said nothing offensive. Satsuki had not pushed or held him back.

"May I remind you that you are doing this therapy for yourself, not because I want to torture you?"

"I am ashamed I lost control." He mumbled.

"Was it only drinking or did you lose control in another way?"

He shook his head.

"Okay, drinking. What emotion drove you to drink?" Her voice still held sharp edges but it was soothing all the same. She never judged, just asked.

"Anger."

"What were you angry about?"

"I don't have a fucking clue." He closed his eyes. "I never do. I just get angry and lose my cool and do stupid shit."

"What happened right before you got angry?"

"I was on the phone with Tetsu. He told me how proud he was I was attending therapy and getting better." He sighed and looked at the wall.

"Why should you not get angry about that?"

"Excuse me?" He blinked and stared at his therapists. "That's a compliment, in case you didn't notice."

"Compliments can hurt. When you are trying to gain or lose weight and someone tells you how good you look, it's annoying. When you have a good grade in school but wanted a better one and everyone congratulates you, that can be really annoying. When you try to be less intimidating and someone tells you how strong and manly you are, it hurts. It heightens the feeling of failure without giving a way to retaliate because the person earnestly meant it nicely. So why could it be hurtful to be praised on getting better?"

"Because I am not! I'm not better, I'm the same as before, they just want to see things. They want me better, so they have illusions I already am!" He spat.

"And why is that a bad thing?"

"Because then they have expectations and I ... can't meet them." His gaze sank to the floor again.

"What expectations?"

"I don't know."

"Then you should ask. Shall we call Satsuki in and ask her?"

"No." He deflated, sinking into his seat. "I know hers. She wants me to be reliable, to go to training and matches by myself, look after myself and care for her."

"Is that your idea of getting better as well?"

"Hm ... guess so." He crossed his arms.

"So what are Tetsu's expectations?" She saw him shrug as an answer. "What do you expect them to be?"

"To stop bothering him." He took a deep breath. "He knows my life is all about him, what I did to him, how I still long for him ... he would want me to put an end to that."

"He is married with a child on the way. I would understand that wish. Do you understand why he would wish for that as well?" Doctor Enjoji – who sat on a cushion this time – folded her legs.

"Yeah ... I nearly ruined his wedding. Sometimes I think they went to America to get away from me. That's bullshit, I know, his husband has a job over there but still ... he could have taken the job here. Then we would see each other every day."

"Well, if I had an rapist ex-boyfriend who I would see everyday, I would chose the option of going away as well."

"But he says he likes me and wants to stay friends!"

"You can be friends even when there is an ocean between you. It's harder to be lovers with an ocean between you. Are you angry that he chose his husband over you?"

Yeah. He was. His smile was sour. He damn well was.

"In what way are you better than his current husband?"

It took a moment until he admitted: "None."

"Then why should he chose you over him?"

"I was there first."

"True. He might even be with you if you hadn't raped him and killed his baby." Her voice was merciless.

He winced.

"It happened. You lost him with those actions. You say yourself they are unforgivable. So why do you expect him to forgive you?"

"Because he forgave everyone else."

"Gang-rapes, right? Is his husband someone who raped him?" She saw him shook his head. "Then what makes you think he forgave them any more than you?"

Huh. Well ... yeah. Right. He was friends with every one of them, just like he was friends with him. But none had a right to touch him. He wasn't special in that way. They had all fucked up by fucking Kuroko.

"He did not, huh?" She mustered him. "Does it make this easier?"

"Yeah." He looked up. "You're right. We all fucked up." He took a deep breath. "We were five Alphas, none of us had anyone but unimportant flings. Our captain made us compete for Tetsu. Being better, learning faster, scoring more ... two others had a go at him before me. I was burning with jealousy. He was my best friend, I had wanted him first. He got pregnant two times from other Alphas than me. I was so ... it's not only anger, it was so much more. All my instincts were screaming at me to bite him, to take him away, to mess up those fuckers that laid their hands on him. He was mine. He wanted to be mine. I knew that. When I got the okay to have him, I ... I really messed him up. He was black and blue, bloody and splattered in come. I felt so bad looking at what I did to him. All that anger at the situation, the others, I let it out on him. I had wanted to love him, to be different than those who raped him and I became the worst

of all." He felt tears on his cheeks. "I only ever wanted to be the one who protected him."

"Let's see how exactly you got into that situation ... how were you five Alphas connected? Why did you compete for one Omega?"

"We were the best of the best basketball players of our generation. Successive national champions and that crap. Tetsu was our sixth man, our support player. He was – is – a really impressive Omega. I was the only one who loved him, the other four just liked him more or less. But having no opponents at all, our captain made us fight each other to keep us motivated. It started with things like who scores the most, who gets the most passes, normal betting stuff. When we grew bored of that, he came up with a complex system which gave the best of us five the chance to hunt Tetsu while he was in heat. So once a month, one of us was allowed to rape him. Tetsu agreed to that." He saw his therapist scowl. "Yeah, he was most likely pressured into it. I am not sure with what. But as it happened right about the time I was acting out, upsetting the whole team with my moods and getting suicidal, I fear Tetsu agreed out of love for me. To somehow keep me in line."

"Your captain made an Omega agree to be raped in the most horrible imaginable way by claiming he could save you with it?" His therapist looked sceptical.

"It's what I guess. I never asked." He let out a deep sigh. "Sick thing, it worked. It got me in line. I haven't been well but I have not been suicidal since then."

"Okay, let us just let it stand like that. It is only speculation, we will have to ask another time. So another person was chosen first and Tetsu got pregnant. What happened to the baby?"

"He aborted it. Same with the next. Then I hunted him, he got pregnant and did not abort it."

"What happened the next month? Was he hunted even though he was pregnant?"

"Yeah." He looked away again, clenching his fists. "By the last one who had not slept with him before. I was told he was all gentle and nice ... no wonder when Tetsu wasn't even in heat."

"Were you told he was better than you?"

"No. But with how angry I was at myself, that's what I made out of it at that time. When he was hunted again, I was so filled with ... I loathed myself. I loved him, I wanted him to be mine and I let those fuckers have him. I did not protect him, did not protect the baby they endangered, I ... I hated myself so fucking much. But still I wasn't good enough, didn't get to be the one to hunt him, did not take him away from everything, I-"

"Why did you not run away with him?" Again, her voice was blameless. How could she not blame him? Why did she not blame him?

"Be- because ... we were fourteen." He felt his nails split the skin of his palms. "I was scared."

"So you wanted to get him away from all that but you did not know how?"

"Yeah." He took a deep breath, tried to relax, to let out the tension, to not further the bleeding wounds. "We were in our second year of middle school. He had no money, I had no money. We would be found and brought back and ... I was not sure I would survive if my parents got wind of what happened."

"Why did you not alert anyone of the situation? A teacher, the police, anyone?"

"You would not ask if you knew who those people were. We're talking about someone worse than the Yakuza here." Akashi. No one would ever go against Akashi. That guy was scary. "I tried. I begged him to stop the competition, to give Tetsu a rest,

he was pregnant for god's sake but he would not relent. He told me Tetsu was his to decide over and no failure in life had any right to question his decisions. If I wanted to spare Tetsu, I should win those competitions. So I tried my damn best."

"You felt helpless?"

"I was so fucking furious with how much of a failure I was." He nearly choked on his tears. Shit. He hated crying. It never solved anything, it just made others call him a crybaby. Tears were a sign of weakness.

"Here." She stood and gave him a tissue. "Blow your nose. We'll continue but with another setting. This is getting a bit much for you and I don't want you to go home as a wreck." She pulled two sitting cushions and a small table over. "Sit down and place your hands on the table."

He blew his nose, dried his tears and did what she said. She sat on the other side of the table and laid her hands on his, beginning to tap the backs of his hands. Left, right, left, right, quite fast.

"It's a technique that keeps your emotions in check. I have others if this proves to be not effective enough." She continued her tapping. "So you felt helpless and you were angry at yourself for that and for how you treated Tetsu on the hunt."

"Yeah." He watched her tapping. "And I was jealous."

"How did you cope with all of those emotions?"

"I bottled them up."

"When did they explode?"

"When Tetsu told me he wanted to have the baby and end the hunts."

The tapping stopped for a second before continuing. Doctor Enjoji said: "I am surprised about that. Wasn't that what you wished for?"

"One part of me. The other was scared shitless. Our captain, the Yakuza guy, would take it as defiance. I was an angel against him, the guy could murder in cold blood, no joke. And I would have to tell my parents, they would have thrown me out. I could not support a mate and a child. Hell, I wasn't sure I would live. So ... I killed the baby."

"How?" Her voice was subdued. So it did get to her.

"I hit Tetsu in the stomach with all my might. I knew that could kill. My mom had lost three babies that way." A sharp pain jolted through his chest. "I ... I was so sorry. The same moment I punched him, I wanted to fall to my knees and apologize. I never, ever wanted to do that, I just ... my whole world went black and the next instant, Tetsu was on the floor and bleeding out. I am so sorry." Tears ran down his face, sobs choking him.

"Did you ever tell him so?" She kept tapping.

"Two years later." His hands had balled into fists. "He said ... he would never forgive me. Not in anger, just ... he said we could be friends and he wasn't angry anymore but he would never forgive me. He would never allow anything more than friendship again."

"What do you think about that reaction?" Her voice was steady again.

"It would have been easier if he had been mad. He had every right to. I would have felt better if he screamed at me or hit me or ... anything. He never did that. When he left, it was without a word. When I told him I was sorry, he was so fucking calm. It feels like it's still hanging over me. Every time we talk or skype or meet, I expect him to finally scream at me."

"Maybe he did. But it's much safer to scream at someone you take as an image in therapy than at the real person. Because the real rapist might hurt you again."

"I-" Would never hurt him? What a joke. He even told Kuroko that he needed Kagami

as a threat to keep from hurting him. No wonder the other never dared to scream at him. He was scared shitless, even when he joked around with him. How fucked up was that? Did Kuroko not notice how fucked up that was? "I don't think he ever screamed at someone. He is still bottling it up, thinking that having everything nice and harmonic will make the past alright."

"Deciding not to confront your anger is a possibility as well. He was severely traumatized after all. Some people need ten, twenty, even thirty years until they confront traumata. Some never do." She stopped tapping and leaned back.

"So it might be that it's not my fault he hasn't screamed at me yet?" Aomine blinked for a moment, finally getting out the tissue again and drying his cheeks.

"Before he confronts his anger, he needs to be stable enough to live through it. If he needs harmony, give him harmony. But harmony doesn't mean you have to feel guilty forever."

"I'm not sure we'll still have harmony if I don't feel guilty anymore."

"What do you mean?" She tilted her head.

"I mean, won't he be mad if I don't feel guilty anymore?"

"Why should he be?"

"Well ... as long as I am down, he knows someone is taking this serious, right?" Aomine fidgeted in his seat. Did this sound as idiotic as it did to him?

"So as long as you feel guilty, he doesn't have to confront this himself? As people rarely are noble, I'd say you fear you will lose your friend if you stop feeling guilty." Damn, she was sharp. Yeah. "If I say it aloud like that, how likely does it sound?"

"Quite unlikely."

"Right. He will confront it when the time is right for him. He might get angry, he might decide he does not want to continue being your friend but your own actions won't change much about all of that. Feeling guilty or not, suffering for years or not, the only thing you can do is apologize. After five years of hating yourself, he should know you mean it. You don't have to beat yourself up about it forever."

"That sounds nice and all, doc ... but I killed our child." Aoki. Kuroko had named him. He remembered that gravestone in the graveyard of water children. "How can I not feel bad about that? I understand about Tetsu but ... I can't forgive myself for killing Aoki."

"Have you buried him?" Her voice was laced with sadness.

"Tetsu did. Two years after. It's where I apologized to him." He felt tears in his eyes again. Why was he always crying? God, he knew this would happen. It was why he never wanted therapy.

"I'll repeat the question: have you buried him? Tetsu did, dealing with his loss and sadness. But he did it without you, didn't he? Have you ever stood in front of that grave and allowed yourself to grieve?"

He shook his head, trying his hardest not to sob. She gave him another tissue and he tried his best to dry his tears before he asked: "Shouldn't you do that tapping thing again?"

"Self-loathing, hate and fear can be destructive but this is sadness. Sadness in terms of grieving is a healing emotion, freeing us from pain. Mourning a child is quite natural, no matter how it died."

"How the fuck should I mourn someone I killed myself? That's wrong!" He sobbed. Shit, he was breaking. Fuck. He didn't want this.

"It's not. Killing is wrong. Being sad about death is natural and right. You are allowed to mourn someone you killed." Instead of tapping, she held his fist in a hand.

He simply cried. Damn, it hurt so much. He had never wanted to see another child die and then he went and killed his own. It was the most despicable thing on the planet. All his life he told himself he didn't want to become a monster like his parents were and then he did exactly that. Fuck. Killing children was the worst.

He was brought back into his current situation by the tapping on his hands. He stared at them for a long moment before looking up to see his therapist. Her gaze was concerned, her eyes intently trained on him. She stopped after a few more taps.

"Shouldn't I grieve?" He asked slowly.

"Grieving and losing yourself in your world of self-loathing are two different things. You started doing the latter."

"How did you notice?"

"Apathetically staring into space and tensing up is no reaction associated with grieve."

"Oh." He tried to take a deep breath but his nose was snotty. So he took some more tissues and freshened up while breathing through his mouth.

"I'd like to ask yourself about that self-loathing but we are out of time. So I'll ask next time. Please try to remember what you just thought about when you lost yourself, so we can talk about it next time." She mustered his face again. "For now, I am proud of you. Today was heavy but you did well."

He simply nodded, suddenly too tired to care either way. He was unable to feel good about her praise right now. Sleep was in order. His mind was blessedly blank for once.

"See you next week." She accompanied him out, telling Satsuki outside that she should get him into bed. Good woman.

Satsuki did without any further questions.

Kapitel 8: Grieve

For the first time since this whole debacle started, he was happy to know Satsuki stayed with him full-time. Instead of studying like she had planned at first, she had followed him again and became an assistant manager for the team he played with. So when coach decided he needed a babysitter, he was actually allowed to tell her to stay with him instead of going to work.

He needed her mindless chatter where he did not have to give answers or opinions, just had to nod sometimes to indicate he was still listening. Satsuki often made it seem as if he had actually asked a question, asking herself and then supplying the answer. That way he was able to learn what he could have asked or replied, simply learning how to make conversation by listening to her prattle on and on. By now he was actually able to hold a conversation. Right now though, he wasn't up to it, so she went back to supplying herself with questions and other reactions. It was a soothing routine whenever he felt like absolute shit.

Like today.

After half an hour of staring at his breakfast, poking it with his chopsticks, she asked if he had any plans for today. He simply shook his head. Of course, that meant they would go shopping. She wasn't one to stay at home and he knew he needed activity to keep his mind from thinking. Most likely she knew that as well. So shopping it was. He was used to this routine as well. She went from window to window, from shop to shop, commenting on stuff and trying things on while he silently stood beside her, occasionally giving comments but mostly just carrying bags. Not that she actually bought much. She didn't need more clothes. Something had to be exceptional for her to actually buy it. Her shopping sprees normally ended up with one or two new items, so it wasn't much he had to carry. But it could keep them occupied for hours.

Today was a bit different though because she noticed him glancing down one of the streets a few times, so she asked: "What is down there?"

"Huh? Nothing." He felt her unrelenting stare. "There ... is a graveyard."

"Whose grave is there?" Her voice was cautious.

Aokis. Maybe he should go. Doctor Enjoji ... was it really alright to grieve for someone you killed? He looked down, suddenly hearing his own voice: "Question. Imagine someone killed you. Would you allow that person to mourn you or tell him to fuck off?"

She was silent for a moment before asking: "Did that person love me?"

"Yeah."

"Then of course. I'd be sad if that person didn't mourn me."

"Even after killing you?" He looked into her eyes.

"Especially after killing me." She sighed and took a step near. "I can't imagine you killing in cold blood. You would kill in a fit of rage or hurt and direly regret it afterwards. If you were to kill me, I would be deeply affronted if you didn't mourn me."

"Kay." He took off into the direction of the graveyard.

"May I accompany you?"

"If you can stand to see me cry."

"I'll supply you with tissues." She fell in line beside him and stayed silent from then on.

She had not asked. She had cried, seeing him helplessly crying in front of seven gravestones. Really, he had no idea what she thought now. He didn't dare ask. Knowing Satsuki, she would begin to ask questions when she felt ready. Or rather, when she felt like he was able to answer them. She was always looking out for him like that.

That was all he was able to think about before his mind turned absolutely blank. It was a strange feeling. Or more a feeling of not feeling. There was nothing, no thoughts, no emotions. His body moved by itself, eating, bathing, going to sleep. The next morning, it was the same. He opened his eyes, stood and went to wash himself. He cooked, he ate with Satsuki and ... well, and? He just stopped in the middle of the room after washing the dishes.

Satsuki stared at him with worry clearly visible on her face. Except for a greeting, she hadn't said anything until now. Even now she seemed to be at a total loss. So she asked: "What should I do with you?"

He stared right through her.

"Maybe basketball?" She got her phone and looked something up. "Kise is on a shoot today, Akashi is in Kyoto, Midorima ... Midorima is free. Shall I call him?"

"Visit" His lips said to her.

"Visit? You want to visit Midorima?" Her gaze pierced him but he could not feel his facial muscles move. "Alright. I hope that will help." She turned and walked to the window while calling. "Good morning! How are you, Mido-chan? ... Fine, thank you. Are you home today? ... Well, I have this ... situation on hand. I am staying with Daiki right now, he had some ... accident and was hospitalized. He's out now but he is not allowed to play for three months. He is using the time to work through some ... stuff that happened back in middle school. Anyway, he had some kind of breakdown yesterday and has been out of it since then. He's not reacting to anything anymore, kinda like a robot. He just said the first thing since yesterday and that was that he would like to visit you. Could we come by? ... I know you aren't the best of friends but I am desperate over here. Pretty please? ... You're a life-saver! Thank you so much. We'll be at your house in an hour, alright? See you!" She pocketed her phone and told him with a smile: "It's alright, we can visit. Go take on your shoes and jacket."

He did like she said. Like a robot, huh? Yeah, he felt like a robot. He felt nothing. They left a few minutes later.

Of course Satsuki had Midorima's address but it seemed like she had never actually been there. She stared at the old samurai mansion with an open mouth, eyes wide like a child in a candy shop. In the entrance was a bell which she rang while taking off her shoes.

It took a minute until Midorima came down the hall, looking regal in his kimono. It was a beautiful silk one with azaleas and wave-like patterns in blue. With his green hair and eyes, he looked like a beautiful sea creature. He formally greeted them: "Good morning."

"Morning, Mido-chan. Thank you for having us."

"Thank you for your visit. We are entertaining two groups of clients today, so Kazu and my parents are at work. I might be called in to help, so I hope you have time on your hands."

"Of course." Satsuki sent a look over her shoulder. "Are you able to greet Mido-chan?" Aomine bowed, something he had never done before. Greetings this formal had never

been something he did. But bending his back seemed easier than moving his lips. Midorima bowed in return, though he had a look of bewilderment on his face.

"Follow me." He went down the hallway, bringing them to a sitting room facing the garden in the back of the first house. "Kikyo, come and greet our guests."

A three-year-old with black hair and beautiful green eyes came in from the garden, rubbing down her legs with a towel before stepping inside with her house shoes. She came to stand beside her father, bowing perfectly and saying with a slight lisp: "Good morning. My name is Midorima Kikyo."

"Oh, she is so cute!" Satsuki sloppily bowed. "I am Momoi Satsuki. I am a friend of your father."

Aomine simply bowed again.

"Well ... this silent fellow is Aomine Daiki. He is also a friend. He is not feeling well today." Satsuki introduced.

Kikyo stepped nearer, looking up into his face. Seeing how she had to crane her neck, he sat down right on the floor, though he still towered over her even in that position.

"Does your throat hurt?" She asked.

He nodded. It was as good an explanation as any.

"Can I touch your face?" A very polite three-year-old but still a little kid. Her eyes shone with curiosity.

"Kikyo, that is uncalled for-" Midorima stopped when he saw Aomine nod. Kikyo looked up to her father. "Well ... if he allows it." He sent a death glare his way.

Kikyo took a step nearer, her hand out but still cautious. Like with a wild animal, she looked at his eyes, his fists and his face in rapid succession. Finally she poked his cheek with a finger before rubbing his face with a thumb.

"It's not dirt." He told her. "I was born with this skin color."

Satsuki let out a sigh of relief. Even Midorima relaxed visibly. Well, no wonder that one did not trust him around a small child. Kikyo was his only daughter and he had watched Aomine kill Aoki. It was a miracle he let his daughter get close to him.

"Why?" She asked. So the little kitten was a bit fast in her development. No wonder with Midorima as a parent. Though her social reactions and open curiosity were Kazu's. Even though she was a girl, it was easy to see her parents in her. Genetics were a wonder.

What would Aoki have looked like? Blue hair, sure, but light or dark? Would his eyes have matched his hair? Would he have been fair skinned, dark or a caramel color? He would have been direly cute, no question. Maybe he would have had Kuroko's big blue eyes. With Kagami's genes, none of their kids would get blue eyes. What a shame. Blue-eyed babies were cute.

Kikyo's green eyes were beautiful, a shade darker than Midorima's. Even though she had a lot of baby fat with her three years, you could already see the high cheekbones lurking beneath. She would be a stunning beauty one day, you could already see that. And her curiosity was really a thing to behold. She had stopped with his face and taken his hand instead, turning it around and around, wondering why one side was dark, the other light. Actually, why were the palms of his hands lighter than the rest of him? He had no clue.

Midorima explained to her that his dark skin was something his ancestors got for working in the sun for thousands of years but that his hands were fairer because his ancestor's hands had held farming tools or weapons and so they weren't in contact with the sun. He continued to tell her that his feet were fair as well, same with his teeth. Which of course made the girl ask if she could see his teeth. Well, if his role was

to be a circus animal, why not? He didn't care anyway right now. So he obliged and let her see his teeth while Midorima told her that his ancestors had eaten fruits while their own had mostly eaten meat, so their teeth were not as white. She asked why his ancestors had been different from hers and was told that his came from an island in the south where they had more sun. She seemed happy with that answer, pleased to have solved her riddle.

So she asked him to go play with her.

He stared at her for a moment before cautiously looking up to Midorima. Who wasn't happy. Not even in the slightest. It prompted him to say: "I promise to behave."

There was a whole war visible on Midorima's face before he grudgingly said: "You two stay in my sight."

Kikyo whispered in his ear: "Have you angered daddy?"

He just nodded.

"Then we have to play quietly." She took his hand to sneak him outside under her father's watchful eyes. "Come, I'll show you my dolls."

So he went to have a fake tea party with dolls while Satsuki sat with Midorima and had real tea. He didn't mind. Kikyo told him what she expected him to do. It was rather like being with Satsuki, the little one was just as bossy.

They were playing hide-and-seek with Kikyo mostly covering her eyes whenever she had to hide when Midorima called them inside for lunch. Kikyo's dress was immaculate while Aomine's trousers were covered in dirt. The green-haired scoffed as he mustered him, so he tried his best to dust them off and put on his socks over his dirty feed. Playing with Kikyo had been worth it though. Slivers of feelings had returned, mostly fun. She was a positive person, a smiling ball of energy. Her behavior seemed to come straight from her second father.

Kazu was still in a decorative kimono while he laid out the tableware in the dining room. Satsuki enthusiastically greeted him – she was most likely very happy to have someone to talk to after two hours of trying to communicate with Midorima. By now Aomine had enough voice to greet him as well. The other seemed a bit surprised over the fact that his daughter seemed to blabber in the blue-haired's ear without stop. She also had a mind about sitting next to him, so she could continue her tale about a movie with a fairy princess who had to save her people.

Kapitel 9: The wisdom of a child

Aomine enjoyed her chatter all through lunch, occasionally giving a comment or question, just like he did with Satsuki. In the end, all women seemed to be the same, no matter how old. They seemed to love their own voices, prattling on and on about some nonsense or other. Instead of annoying, it was kind of soothing. Except for a greeting, he did not have to talk with Midorima's parents. His mother seemed nice but his father gave off a strange aura that made Aomine cautious. Older Alpha men were not his thing, even sober.

Kikyo was a delight though. He hadn't even realized how much he missed talking to a small child until now. Since his brother's death, there had been no children at all. While it made him realize what he missed out on by killing Aoki, it also made him happy to interact with her. She was easy. She liked having an adult to command around, he liked to oblige. Maybe he should ask Satsuki to go all domina on him, she might like the experience.

"So Kamen Raider was like boom and he went bang. The robber was flying and flying. Justice was victorious!" She held up her arms.

"It always is." He tickled the skin under her arm which made her squeal with laughter.

"Bad guys get punished."

"Yay, no bad guys!" She grinned up at him which made his stomach drop a bit. She was so innocent and naive. Still thought that life was fair, that everyone got saved, that bad people got arrested. "Papa is learning to save people, you know?"

"Your papa is very good at saving people." He did not dare look up. He could feel Midorima's gaze boring into him. "He will be a good doctor."

"Like Kamen Raider!"

"But Kamen Raider is a hero, not a doctor."

"Really?" She scrunched her eyes. "Then what does a doctor do?"

"Uh ... they help people that are sick or injured." Or bleeding out after losing their child. Was he the reason Midorima had decided on becoming a doctor? "Actually, what kind of doctor do you wanna be, Midorima?"

"Gynaecologist" The man answered.

"Eww ... kay." Aomine shuddered. "So your father will help people have healthy babies."

"Can we have a new baby then?" She asked her father with obvious delight.

"Eh?" A faint blush spread on the green-haired's cheeks before he glanced at his boyfriend/mate/husband, whatever they were exactly.

"We'll have another baby if the gods bless us with another baby. It's why we go to temples and pray" Kazu explained his daughter. It was strange saying his first name but as they were both called Midorima now – and Aomine would never use Midorima's first name – he had become Kazu to him.

"I miss Shiro." She laid down her chopsticks on her barely touched food. "I want a baby brother."

"I am sure Kuroko and Shiro will visit soon." Kazu ruffled her head. "Now eat up or you won't grow strong enough to hold a little brother."

"Kay." She immediately took her chopsticks again – Aomine was still amazed she could handle them – and began eating.

"Did the two have play-dates?" He asked Kazu who was a lot easier to talk to than

Midorima.

"Yes, Kuroko often came over. We sometimes babysat when he went out on a date." The Beta watched his reaction. "Have you ever met Shiro?"

"Only at larger gatherings where he stayed on Kagami's arm. Tetsu wouldn't trust me around his kid." He saw Midorima opening his mouth for a cutting remark. "It's better that way."

"I think that's a shame." Kazu completely overrun his mate with that. "You are good with kids. Where did you learn that?"

Urgh. He glanced down at Kikyo who seemed oblivious to the tension, happily eating. He tried his best not to choke on his words when he said: "My brother."

"I remember you saying you would be horrible with children." Despite Midorimas not so subtle signaling for Kazu to stop, he continued the conversation. "Kikyo seems to enjoy your company."

"She's a nice girl." He looked away and concentrated on his breathing. He had made too many mistakes in his life by lashing out in anger after bottling things up. Now wasn't the time to explode. "It's easy to like her."

"She's easy to like because she knows she is loved. And she has great genes too." Kazu winked at his mate. "You seem able to love children."

"I do." It was true, he did. Kikyo reminded him that he liked kids. He had really loved his brother, no matter how annoying he was at times. "I just fail at the genes part. My family is full of-" He glanced at Kikyo. "Er, unpleasant people with anger issues."

"And you think that is genetic?" Kazu raised an eyebrow.

"At least it is a recognizable trait all of us have." He smirked at a sudden memory that came up. "My brother could bring down the roof on us with his screaming." At least until his parents hit him into oblivion.

"So you don't think that having anger issues is something you can change about yourself?"

"Huh?" Well ... yes? Wait, no. He wanted to change. He wanted to be able to live his life without emotional explosions that made him dangerous. So his anger issues had to be treatable. They couldn't be genetic or at least, even if they were, they needed to be changeable. "Well, no, it must be something ... it should be able to get changed."

"So one day we might see you with a child by your side? Because you are a much more likable human being next to a child." Kazu smiled mischievously.

"Uhm ... I am not sure that is a compliment." He remembered his therapy. In the right context, this was most likely a compliment. Why did it annoy him right now? Because he did not have children and would not have them in the near future. "I thought people had children to care for, not get them to care for them. That sounds like the wrong order."

"It is good to hear that you know that." Midorima glared at his mate. "I would advise against you raising a child."

Asshole. Aomine looked up and said: "Well, I guess it depends on who you raise them with. It's amazing how one good parent can make child-rearing successful, even if the other is a disaster as a parent."

That glare turned on him, about a hundred times more venomous.

"Mo~! Do you always have to be at each other's throat?" Satsuki rolled her eyes.

"Really now, this is ridiculous."

"And you are always starting it" Kazu told his mate. "Though I have to admit that your comments never make it any better." With that he looked at Aomine.

"I did not flip out" He drawled while leaning back. "He makes me work on my anger issues and my answers get less aggressive every time, don't they?"

Kazu blinked in surprise before he had to admit: "That's true."

So he turned to Midorima with a self-satisfied smirk. Beat that, bastard. Sadly he did. The green-haired sighed and said: "I am sorry for antagonizing you."

"Well ... okay." It was his turn, huh? Damn it. "Sorry for insulting you."

"Don't be sad" Kikyo said and laid a hand on his arm. "Mommy always makes me apologize too."

Aomine scratched his head, a mixture of a smirk and exasperation on his face as he said: "I guess I should know better by now. I am as old as your father."

"Age is no excuse!" She said loudly. "It's what Mommy always says."

"You have a good mommy" He had to admit. It was true, Kazu was pretty cool as a parent. Most likely he had learned some kind of inner peace after three years of living with Midorima. Whatever the hell he got out of that except for this cute bundle.

"The best!" She nodded vigorously.

"I wish you luck in getting that baby brother. I'll help with the prayers." He promised her.

"Yay!" She turned around. "Mommy, can Mine and I go play?"

Kazu really had to control his facial muscles to not burst out in laughter at the nickname. After hiding his smile behind his hand and trying his best to look like he was thinking about it, he told her: "If he wants to continue playing, you may. Have you asked him?"

She simply looked over her shoulder, turning back to her mother with a pleased smile after seeing Aomine nod his consent without having to ask.

"Do not spoil her so much, it was her job to ask." Kazu warned him but waved them off.

He had the sudden urge to nicely say "Thank you, Mommy" but he was able to curb the impulse. The guy was as old as him, no matter how motherly he acted. But he did give off that nice feeling of home and peace.

He wasn't here for Midorima, that guy could really just vanish in his opinion. But Kikyo and Kazu were nice people. He liked that feeling of family. And damn, he knew his bad opinion of his former teammate had a lot to do with jealousy. He had that much self-reflection. Antagonizing him was a bad idea because he was the one allowing him to come over or not.

Though shit when he was the only one of his friends around with a child. Maybe he should sign himself up as a helper with the local orphanage or something. Being around children was good for him, he knew that. After Hiro's death he just hadn't been able to look at a child without remembering. Especially after Aoki ... well, it was time to get back on track.

He saw Momo and Kazu sitting on the veranda, watching them play. He called over: "Hey, Satsuki! Are you up for another stop today?"

"Sure, where?" He called back with a smile.

Another graveyard. Not something for Kikyo to hear. So he said: "I'll tell you later."

First he had to finish a round of tea with a bunny, a panda and a doll.

"So, do we have every graveyard that is important for you? Or are there more?" Satsuki asked at dinner.

"Nah, that's all. No more deaths on my account." He slurped his ramen.

"You weren't guilty of your brother's death" She chided him.

"Was too." He looked her straight in the eyes. "I could have gotten him out before they killed him. I just didn't do it because I was too afraid what they would do to me then. It never occurred to me I could get myself out as well."

"You were thirteen" She tried to argue.

"That was one year before I would have been a father myself." No, that wasn't exactly an argument. "In both cases, I should have been more of an adult. Come on, today a three-year-old lectured me on proper behavior because I behaved like a kid. Behaving impulsively, running away from responsibility, I've been doing that shit for years."

"Well ... yes. But taking responsibility for your own life and that of others are two different things. You said so today yourself. You are not adult enough to care for a child. Why do you expect your younger self to be that?"

"Being a parent and telling on people that are killing a child are two different things, no matter if those people are your parents. It would have been the right thing to do."

"Then shall I start blaming myself?" Her eyes shone with tears. "You told me what they did. I never came up with the idea of going to the police either. So is your brother's death on my conscience too? They weren't even my parents. I would not have suffered punishment or even death. By your definition, that makes me even guiltier than you are."

"No!" His eyes were wide. "You didn't really know, I ... never told you all." He hung his head. "Gods, I never told anyone."

"By your logic, even heavier than your brother's death would be my responsibility not to have gone to the police on your behalf. No matter how often you told me not to because you were afraid, it would have been the right thing to get you out of there." She averted her gaze, longingly looking at the window as if she could fly away. "So am I guilty for what happened to you too?" She searched his face for an answer. "How about blaming those that actually hurt you both?"

After a moment of watching the glistening of her tears that had not fallen yet, he slowly nodded. She was right. He would never, ever blame her for what happened to him or his brother. She had been as much a child as he had been. If he gave her the right to be insecure and afraid, maybe he should grant himself the same right.

But with Aoki, he was clearly to blame. He was the one who had killed his child. There was simply no excuse. All that pain, guilt and self-hate had broken out of him and been unleashed on the two most helpless beings that had been in his life: Kuroko and Aoki. He had killed one and nearly killed the other.

"Will you tell me about Aoki?" Satsuki asked very quietly.

He shook his head.

Kapitel 10: Motivation

"Did anything noteworthy happen between the last session and this?" Doctor Enjoji asked.

"Nah ... I visited some graves and played with a three-year-old that lectured me on good behavior." He snorted. "Found out I really like children because I am still one up here." He pointed at his head. "Maybe I need some reeducation or something."

"That is the program of our facility. We have prisoners and patients with disorders that can be alleviated by reeducation. The setting allows us a right to punish ... as needed." She was silent for a moment. "But from what I observe here in therapy, I do not think you need that. You need therapy, not control. I think you are able to take responsibility."

He laughed dryly and said: "Responsibility? I'm shit with that."

"Have you gotten drunk this week?"

"Err ... no."

"Then you are a lot more responsible than the week before. Have you been to see a sports doctor?"

"Yeah, I'm allowed some footwork and jogging." He grinned.

"That is taking responsibility. Before, you would have suffered through it all, blamed others or even broken the rules because you would not have been able to stand your inner tension."

"Uh ... guess so." He scratched his head.

"You got yourself a hobby, did reconciliation work and straightened your priorities without me ever needing to tell you to. You seem quite ready to start taking responsibility for yourself. You only need to be nudged in the right direction."

"But what if this therapy ends?" He bit his lip. "What if I return to how I was before?"

"Your therapy doesn't end now and we will have a lot of time to talk about that. For now, we will look at the past instead of the future. Do you want to freely talk or shall I ask questions?" She got out her clipboard to start writing.

"Please ask." He had taken the fluffy all-around chair into which you could sink today. It felt a bit childish but it was comforting to be engulfed in plush.

"Who are your parents? How did they meet, how were you conceived? What happened before you were born?"

Okay. That was a bit earlier than expected. What did he know? "They were both Alphas. My mother was 25, my father 41. I think he was her boss. They had both studied law and she came to work for him. He was struggling, she tried to support him and married him ... I don't really know why. Anyway, when she got pregnant with me, he started to drink. Soon after birth, she started drinking as well. They always fought, sometimes hitting each other, mostly just screaming and smashing bottles. They only turned on me after I entered elementary school. My father beat me up, my mother beat him up for it. When he wasn't around, she sometimes beat me. I am not exactly sure why. I started doing shit because then, I at least knew what I was beaten up for. It wasn't so random. Sports became the only thing I was good at. I didn't do homework, sometimes I didn't go to school, I bit a teacher once. I really was a problem child."

"You said yourself why you did it. If they hit you for something you did, it was more controllable. That makes sense to me. It is not a good solution but it works. So you made them hit you to control your own punishments."

"The more they hit me, the more I did shit, the more they hit me." He sighed. "It wasn't so intelligent after all, it got worse and worse."

"Maybe it would have gotten worse anyway. Drinking tends to get worse and so does violence."

"Yeah, true." His drinking definitely got worse, even though his violence got less. "I got a little brother when I was ten. I really loved him to bits. He looked a bit strange, maybe from all that alcohol mother had drunk and he was a slow learner growing up but I spent all my free minutes with him. He was exploring the world at nine months old and was walking with one and a half years. I was having screaming fits on the days we were to go to the doctor with him, so that I could stay out of school and come with him. The doctor always gave tips on what to do with him and I did that. But my brother was often out of it and not reacting for days. I learned that sometimes, when he screamed, my parents hit him until he stopped. Sometimes he had fractures but because he was really clumsy, the doctor always believed my mother that he had fallen down the stairs or something. I never dared to tell what really happened because often, I didn't know. But sometimes I did. I patched him up as well as possible, even went to the emergency unit once. But I always repeated what I was told, he fell down the stairs, he ran into a door, whatever." He looked into her eyes, knowing she knew what was coming. "One day he was dead. He died at three years, two months, seven days old. Something or someone had broken his hip and he bleed out internally. My parents didn't notice until it was too late. Or maybe they did, who knows. I was in school at the time."

"That is really horrible." The doctor took a deep breath. "I am very sorry about your loss."

"My world ended that day." He looked down. "I stayed out until late at night, only coming home for sleep and food. I often stole money to eat outside. My parents didn't notice anymore. My mother drunk herself to oblivion, my father just beat me up when he saw me but ... he mostly wasn't home anyway. In summer, I often slept outside." He slumped into his chair. "Basketball was my only joy. I trained day and night. At least until I got better than anyone and lost all motivation. Then ... the rest happened."

"Your home life erases all my questions about why you were suicidal, why you felt helpless and bottled things up and why they exploded out of you one day." She tilted her head. "Hearing yourself summarizing your story like this, can you really still blame yourself?"

"Yeah." He snorted in disgust. "A shitty home life does not entitle me to wreck someone else's life."

"That is true." She nodded. "Do you feel guilty about your brother's death?"

He started to nod but finally shook his head. Satsuki was right. His parents killed his brother. He could have saved him but he was a scared child at the time. He hadn't dared.

"Do you feel guilty about not freeing Tetsu from the hunts?"

No again. No one went against Akashi. He should have talked with Kuroko but he had been scared. Again. He really was a coward.

"Do you feel guilty about not saying no when you were told to hunt him?"

More no than yes. Again, that would have meant standing up to Akashi. Except for Kagami, about everyone else would understand his point of view. Gods, he wished he was as brave as Kagami.

"Do you feel guilty about what happened during the hunt?"

"Yeah, I was too rough. I shouldn't have been that hard on Tetsu."

"Have you apologized to him about that?"

"Not exactly." He squirmed in his seat.

"Then you should. Do you feel guilty about your reaction when he said he was pregnant?"

"Hell yes."

"We will work with that again. Right now I definitely understand why you feel guilty. Did anything else happen you feel guilty about?"

"A lot." He clicked his tongue and looked at her. "Tetsu nearly bled out. He needed a blood transfusion. He came back a week later. He was afraid of me, no wonder, but he asked if we could talk. Again I had bottled up everything, now including more guilt and more self-loathing. So before he was able to say anything, I raped him. I did so again and again, everyday, to keep him quiet. I couldn't face his accusations, so I hurt him over and over in fear. It made me hate myself and fear him more. He aborted four more children before he just ... never showed up again. For the last half a year of middle school, I did not see him again." He closed his eyes. "One of our teammates found me out, so I offered Tetsu to him and slept with said teammate as well."

She lent back and sighed. It took her a moment to say: "Well, yes, that is a lot more than you initially said. You talked about gang-rapes. Was that with your teammate?"

"With all of them. When Tetsu became able to mask his scent enough to throw off one of us, the captain set more of us on him. The last four or five hunts, I think, all of us participated. He was never able to escape five Alphas."

"I get a much clearer impression of why you fear his wrath. By all accounts, he should be furious enough to kill you. Being your best friend is indeed rather strange. It is very probable that he bottled it all up and has not let it out ever since." She leaned back.

"What surprises me more is that you know that. You seem to have a pretty good empathy for your victim, that is extremely rare in the people I work with. How were you able to rape him with this empathy?"

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. Yeah, why? Why the ever loving fuck? "I ... didn't have it. Back then. I think. I knew it was wrong and I knew I had hurt Tetsu. I mean, I could see it. He stopped smiling, later he had no facial expressions at all anymore. At first he still looked at me. Sometimes he moaned, sometimes he cried. In the end he was like a dead fish. His eyes were empty. It became easy because there was nothing to feel anymore. What empathy I had before ... I lost it on the way."

"Then how did you get it back?" She leaned forwards.

"Well ... I lost to him in basketball. Him and his mate. It woke me up. I still wanted Tetsu as my own and I watched what his mate did and ... I realized I could never do that."

"What did he do?"

"I don't really know but he always noticed Tetsu's moods before anyone else. I said something, that mate said something else or hugged Tetsu and only by thinking about it later, I noticed how I always hurt Tetsu with small things and his mate just reacted immediately. I simply never got it. Satsuki had always said that, that I was thick like a wall and didn't notice I hurt people until they cried or ran away. I had this teammate who always said sorry when he got insecure and as soon as I showed up, he nearly fell on his knees with apologies. So I trained with him. I learned that I had to respect boundaries and be more respectful of opinions and all that shit."

"I think that is very commendable but why did you learn that? It's really hard to learn."

"Well ... because I wanted people to like me too. Even that damn autistic who was my

teammate ended up with a mate and a family. I really wanted that for myself too, so I wanted to learn ... I'm still shit though." He scoffed. "I mean, I could beat you down and not feel a thing. If I tried my best to think about it afterwards, I know it must have hurt and that you would be angry and felt let down. But I have to consciously think about it, I don't feel that stuff."

"So you thought a lot about what happened?" There was a smile on her lips.

"I wanted to know if there was something I could do to get Tetsu back."

"Did you find something?"

"Nah, I did too much shit. I can be happy he is still friends with me." He scratched his head. "Whenever I try to think about how he feels, I get a headache from all that anger."

"Would you like to feel what other people feel? Right that moment, without having to think about it later?" Her arm supported her head. She looked intrigued but also a bit tired.

Did he want that? "I ... don't know. Maybe a bit?"

"How much?"

"Enough that I stop hurting everyone I am talking too. I don't want everyone to ask Satsuki and Tetsu why they are friends with me. People look at me as if I am a monster. Hell, a lot of people call me a monster. I want them to stop. When someone meets me, I want them to think "He's an okay guy". Just normal, you know? But all women just want to bang me and guys hate me. I'm never just normal."

"Being a professional basketball player doesn't make that easier, I guess."

"Yeah, but Tetsu's mate is one as well, so it's not impossible. I want to learn that shit. I know I won't get Tetsu back but maybe ... I don't know. Maybe someone else will like me one day?"

"Satsuki does" Doctor Enjoji argued.

"Nah, she doesn't. She liked who I was before my brother died. Since then, it's mostly pity I guess. Or habit. Her only purpose in life is worrying about me, that's not exactly a life."

"What would you like her to do?" She smiled at him with something like pride.

"Well ... I think she wanted to study. So she should. Why is she hanging around me? She needs something better to do than mothering me all the time. She is a perfect manager but she could be so much more. She should be. I'm only holding her back."

"Are you even aware how brave it is what you say? You are basically giving her free to leave you."

Urgh. Yeah. It kinda was. Somehow. Damn, could he really do that? What if she really left? What if Kuroko became angry and left him too? He would be completely alone.

"I ... think I would like to learn that emotion...y thing before I tell her that. I don't wanna end up lonely."

"I fear you already are. You are aware your friends don't stay with you because of your charming personality. I would wager a guess that you feel pretty lonely right now."

With a sigh he looked to the side. She wasn't wrong. This whole dilemma, having Satsuki stay with him on coach's orders ... he had realized she wasn't doing this out of sympathy. He could see the exact same thing in her that raged in his soul: guilt. Deep inside her Satsuki was feeling guilty too, knowing she had a part in his current situation. That guilt should not stop her from living though. Her sins were nothing against his.

"Say, doc ... does this have a name? Some fancy thing doctors use, to say their patient

can't feel shit?"

"With how deep this runs, it's dissocial personality disorder." She leaned back. "That is not the same as psychopathy, that is a word made in Hollywood. People with a personality disorder are frequent but only those that want to change from how they are get the diagnosis. You are special because you already forced yourself into therapy for years. Intellectually trying someone else's perspective, especially the pain they felt by your hands, that is part of the therapy. It normally takes at least half a year, more often more than one year, to reach the point where you already are."

"Are all people here like me?" He remembered their faces, some curious, some angry, some just blank.

"Not at all. Sexually abusing someone can have a lot of reasons. Having a dysfunctional empathy does not necessarily mean that someone will rape another person. But those that do sometimes have next to no empathy though only a few want to have it. What those people have done does not pain them, at most they are annoyed by the consequences."

"What do you do with those?" He tilted his head.

"They usually get a prison sentence. Only those who judges still have hope for get offered therapy. Though we try with prisoners as well. While they mostly never reach the point of developing a conscience, at least we can work on how to reduce crime. Only a quarter of the people who leave this place continue to make offenses ... that is a very good rate."

"Are there people who never leave this place?" He sunk into his chair.

"Yes, there are. We offer them jobs in places where making new offenses is nearly impossible. A lot of people call that cruel but when something happens, we are always blamed for releasing them ... being a judge is not an easy thing and in this institution we are judges as well as therapists."

"And you judge that I have hope?" He looked up into her eyes.

"Did you make offenses after Tetsu vanished?"

He shook his head.

"Then yes. If you work on making your life better, so you don't get suicidal again and are less depressive, you can. As you noticed yourself that most likely involves learning better social interactions and trying your best to recognize feelings better. Are you motivated to do that?"

He sighed deeply but nodded.

Kapitel 11: Changing perspective

"Momoi tells me you are exhausted these days" Kuroko said right after greeting him without even asking how he was.

"Therapy is fucking exhausting." He groaned and laid back on his bed. This would most likely be a longer conversation. "Last week I visited one grave after the next, this week I have a list of things to write down. Like who I am talking with, how long and if I offend that person. I even have to ask if I offended the person. So if I offend you, tell me right away."

"And who have you been talking to this week?"

"Satsuki, you and a conbini worker. Asking him if I had offended him was damn embarrassing. I'll never go there again. I hope that coach doesn't call, I really don't want to ask him if I offended him. He'll never stop his rant."

Kuroko laughed and asked: "How often have you offended Satsuki?"

"Err ... wait, I wrote it down." He grabbed the paper he had used for this exercise. "Twenty-seven times since Tuesday."

"That ... is a lot." Kuroko sounded a bit put out. "I don't think you offend me that often."

"Well, I think you are just used to me being an asshole." He flopped down again. "I wasn't even aware how wrong people can take what I say. Satsuki isn't exactly a delicate flower, I know she only calls me out on real shit."

"I think I would really like to see how your conversations work that way."

"That's the worst, you know? I thought I said offensive things but eighteen times she found my body language rude, not what I said. I never thought sitting could be offensive, you know?"

"You know ... she is right, your body language is often offensive. Mostly that you look like you don't care when someone is telling you something important or you get into people's space or how you steal things without caring or just shrug your shoulders when your input is needed. Actually, yes, you are very rude most of the time."

Great. There went his hope that Kuroko might say that Satsuki was too sensitive. So she really called him out correctly. He found everything Kuroko had just said on his list. He asked: "So why are you my friend again?"

"I learned not to care about your body language and your tone when speaking. Which – by the way – is inappropriate as well. If one only listens to your words, it doesn't sound too bad most of the time."

"Great ... so, give me some pointers what I need to change?" He got a pen to write down what Kuroko told him.

A few minutes later, he needed a second page. Urgh. Kuroko only told him about their last three meetings and that was enough to fill all these? Shit. He really needed to change. He hated the fact that he had some kind of homework this time but damn, he never knew how much of an asshole he was in daily life. Those were his friends for fuck's sake – how horrible must he be to strangers?

"I feel like shit right now" Aomine admitted.

"I feel better." There was a smile in Kuroko's voice. "You know, before you went into therapy, I was never able to even hint at those things, you got either angry or laughed things off or simply shrugged it off as if you didn't care. When someone said things about you that might be a critic, you always let them feel like shit for it. It's really nice

to be able to talk with you without being afraid to be hurt for it.”

Yeah ... he wanted to lash out. He wanted to rage, to scream, to laugh at the other. He wanted to undo this words so damn much but that said a whole damn lot more about him than about Kuroko. He was the one who could not take these words, who did not want to face the shame they brought upon him. How could he call people his friends when they were afraid to speak their mind around him?

“I’ll get better, I promise” He said in a small voice, hoping the other wouldn’t hear while knowing he would.

“I am really, really proud of you.” Kuroko sounded completely sincere.

“Say, Tetsu ... what about some therapy for yourself?” He tried.

“Me?” The other sounded surprised. “I don’t know ... I am not exactly sure what for. I don’t think back often and if I do, it doesn’t pain me too much. It is just something that happened. I even told my mother about it eventually, that had been ... I had been afraid of her reaction for years. I talked with Akashi and Midorima and you and I talked it through with Taiga more times than I can count. When I had Shiro, I had some counseling with a specialist but after that, I was all good. I don’t think I need any more therapy.”

“I didn’t know you got counseling.” He hadn’t been told, even though they already were friends again at that point in time.

“Well ... you would have asked what for. Remember my dog Nigou?”

“Uh-hum.” A small, fluffy thing with big blue eyes that accompanied Seirin to matches, even though dogs weren’t allowed in the buildings. He remembered the uproar.

“When I found him, I always saw Aoki when I looked into his eyes.” Aomine’s stomach dropped at those words. “I felt guilty and ashamed and longing and sad and ... a great many things. Sometimes I cuddled him, sometimes I shunned him, sometimes I couldn’t look at him. I liked the dog but my memories-” His voice broke off. Kuroko took a deep breath. “Anyway, I was only one of many who cared for him, so it wasn’t too bad. But I knew if I cared for him by myself, my behavior would have hurt the dog. I only took him in after my feelings had settled. But I was afraid the same would happen when I had Shiro. What if I subconsciously shunned or hurt him because things overlapped in my head?”

Overlap. Oh god. Aomine said: “That’s what happened.”

“What do you mean?” Kuroko heard that his tone was off.

“An overlap. That’s why I hit you.” He stared at the wall, seeing something completely different in front of him. Kuroko’s smile, his reddened cheeks, that sparkle in his eyes.

“My father used to hit my mother, sometimes she asked him to. When she was pregnant, she wanted the kid gone, so she asked him to hit her to abort the child. I don’t know why they decided to have my brother but I knew about the abortions. When I understood what happened, it made me terribly sad. But after losing my brother, when I saw my father punch her again, I only thought “It’s better that way”. I never wanted to hurt that much again, so ... in that moment, I thought it’s better to have never met than losing someone later.”

There was a long silence on the other end before Kuroko said: “I guess you only knew she was pregnant because she asked for the violence?”

“Yeah” His own voice sounded rough.

“I see.” Another bout of silence. “Well, I knew about Aoki for three months. He wasn’t some unknown possibility, he was real to me. After he was gone, I ... every child I saw, a blue-eyed, blue-haired kid was staring back at me. Right up to that day we met in front of Aoki’s graveyard, I was haunted by accusing baby eyes.”

"I am so sorry." He felt tears run down his cheeks. Gods, he wanted to undo this. He wanted to turn back time and hold himself back from doing the worst mistake of his life. He wanted to explain what happened, how unbelievably sorry he was but no words were coming out of his mouth.

He could hear Kuroko crying at the other end of the line. After a few moments, he whispered "Thank you" and the line went dead.

Aomine grabbed a pillow, buried his face in it and screamed.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Satsuki asked at dinner, sending him worried looks.

He shook his head.

"Well ... should I tell you about the TV show I watched this afternoon?"

Yeah, mindless chatter wasn't too bad. He could drown himself in her voice. He nodded.

She began to ramble about this and that, TV, shows, stars, movies, music. He began to warm up to it, even throwing in responses and questions at some point. Satsuki liked to push sometimes but she also knew when to hold back. Sometimes it made him feel like he didn't deserve her, sometimes it made him curse her for not pushing harder. Then he had to remind himself that he wasn't her responsibility, no matter how much she liked to take it on. He wished he understood why people like to give away their freedom so easily. Could he ask that? It most likely sounded stupid. But she had never laughed at him, so why not?

"Oi, Satsuki." She stopped mid-sentence, going from sugar-high to serious in a millisecond. "That stuff with marriage and kids and that ... aren't you afraid of that?"

"Eh?" She blinked. "Why should I be afraid of that?"

"I don't know, I just ... well, I am. Husband or father, those are difficult roles, you know? They come with expectations and stuff. I would have to give up so much for that. I don't wanna talk about me right now but you – why would you want those roles?"

"Why?" She shook her head for a moment. "I don't think I really understand your question. What would I have to give up for marriage?"

"Well ... sleeping with other guys, living independently, maybe even your job and future. Women aren't exactly encouraged to work once they are married. I don't know, I don't live in your head. Aren't there any dreams or habits you would have to give up?"

"I don't think so." She tilted her head. "I live with you, I go out with you, your friends are my friends, my job is related to your job." She counted that with her finger. "The only independent thing is that I sometimes go out with my female friends and do some hobbies on my own. But I don't think you would want me to give those up, do you?" Negative. "So there is not a single thing I would do differently than I do them now. I would sleep in your bed but that is not negative."

That sure made it easy.

"Rather than asking myself what I need to give up is what I gain. Even if I liked sleeping around, I would gladly give that up for you. Knowing you would faithfully stay with me, why would I want anyone else?"

"Because the same person all the time is boring?" Shit. While he said that, he already knew he had done that to hurt her. He had slept with Kuroko for one and a half years and he had not grown tired of that. He had slept with Kise for nearly three years and not grown tired of that. When you slept with someone often enough, you learned their likes and dislikes. New partners were the boring thing, they always did annoying

stuff, touching in ways he didn't like. Sex with one partner wasn't boring, it got better the more you had sex with them. He knew that, he had had enough sex to know. So why was he saying this shit to hurt her? The only thing that was lost was the thrill of having someone new – a thrill that wore off once you had enough of them.

"I wouldn't know." She had lowered her eyes. "For me, there has only ever been you." She stood to put away the dishes.

Why the fuck had he agreed to therapy? Actually noticing how much he hurt others and allowing himself to feel their pain really brought home how much of an asshole he was. It had been easier to not let himself feel their pain. Gods, did he really want this? It was so much easier not to have empathy. If you did not have it, you did not fret or worry or feel fucking guilty like that all the time.

He should say sorry. She had put up with his shit for over a decade, faithfully waiting by his side. He should have the guts to say yes or tell her to go live her own life. He had tried that, damn it. But they both knew he didn't mean it. Couldn't he just take a leap for once and apologize for hurting her at least?

But no. He stayed silent. He stood, took his jacket and went out. He knew the only reason she did not cry was because it would hurt him more than he had already hurt himself with this. Not showing how much he got to her was her way of being considerate.

Or protecting herself. If she cried, he would only hurt her more.

"I don't think I like having empathy" Aomine said right after greeting doctor Enjoji.

"Oh? How come?" She sat and made herself comfortable.

"It sucks." He took the bouncy ball she had taken at the first session and began to roll for- and backward. "I'm actually noticing how much I hurt people now. I mean, I knew before but then I didn't have to feel it."

"It's good to hear, you seem to have empathy as well. How long have you denied yourself the ability to feel what others feel?"

"Can't remember. Too long." He sighed and buried his face in his hands. "But it fucking hurts. I don't wanna feel all this negative shit."

"Then the next step would be to change how you act towards other people."

"Somehow I knew you would say that." He rolled his eyes. "You know, by now I can already guess what my next appointment will be. Stop myself when I notice I hurt others. Apologize when I hurt people. Try my best to hurt people less. All in all, be a lot less of an asshole."

"That pretty much sums it up, yes." She smiled. "I'm proud you got to this point by yourself."

"I talked with Tetsu." He tried to lean back before he remembered he was sitting on the bouncy ball. He looked around for something like a cushy chair or maybe even a couch. His eyes fell on the chair that nearly embraced you which Satsuki had tried out while they waited for the doctor in here. He got up and changed into it. "He told me what he suffered after losing our kid. Like how he saw baby eyes everywhere following him and how he couldn't look at his dog whose eyes looked like his own. I never tried to imagine what losing the kid must have done to him. I always thought about my own pain and fear, I never acknowledged his. I told him about what I was thinking at the time and apologized."

"That is huge." Doctor Enjoji blinked in surprise. "What did you tell him?"

"How my father always punched kids out of my mom and how I stopped caring after losing my brother, wanting them gone as well because I could not imagine hurting like

that again. I was afraid what losing our kid would do to me ... so I ended it before I had the chance to get attached."

"That sounds like you did a lot of self-reflecting."

"It's what this therapy is for, right? Getting me to stop running from my own mistakes and face them instead. Taking responsibility and such ... things."

"Did you just stop yourself from swearing?"

"I guess that's not very mature as well, huh?" He crossed his arms.

"It is. Well done." She praised him.

Somehow he felt petted on the head, even though she sat more than two meters away from him. Her voice had a lot more modulation now than when he started therapy. Maybe he had been dangerous for her too. Seems like now he wasn't anymore. Next he should stop being an emotional danger to Satsuki. Maybe he should even pay his teammates a visit, go out with them or something. Might make his coach a lot less angry at him which was good in the long run.

No other way than simply meeting challenges head on instead of ducking away. Really, when had he started being such a chicken? He was a popular guy in elementary school. At least until he stopped caring about anything than basketball and Satsuki ... which was pretty much in elementary school. Oh well. After his brother was born, he became defensive, reclusive and stopped caring about himself. Until his death, his brother got a central position in his life. After he was gone ... Aomine drew in on himself, lashing out at others, so people would not hurt him again.

He had made Kuroko his punching bag to let out his anger, frustration and fear.

"Hey, doc. How does one get happy? What does a human need to be happy?"

"His basic needs need to be satisfied, I can explain that to you with a diagram made by Maslow." She mustered him while she spoke. "But more than that, one needs to want to be happy."

"Who wouldn't want to be happy?"

"People that are afraid of changing. Getting happy often implies a lot of changes and not all will be positive. Sometimes you run into the wrong direction. Sometimes you hurt. A lot of people like their own personal hell more than a paradise they do not know yet. Nearly everyone wants to be happy but only a few decide to go look for happiness instead of sitting around and waiting for happiness to come knock on their door and say "Here I am, will you let me in?". Getting happy doesn't work like that."

"So I need this empathy thing and changing my behavior because otherwise I don't have a chance to get happy?"

"That sums it up, yes." She smiled.

"Yeah, okay." He sighed deeply. "Let's do this." He grabbed some papers from his jacket. "Here. I wrote down what I did wrong the last week. Tetsu gave me some pointers what I did wrong when we met. It's a damn long list. Shit, I just swore. Sh- ... man, this will be hard."

"Yes, it will." She took the list and skimmed it. "So, do you see any patterns in this? Like always reacting negatively when someone brings up a certain topic or says something in a way that rubs you wrongly? Or maybe that you lash out when you feel certain feelings?"

"I have no fuc- err, clue."

"Tell me, in what context did you lash out?" She gave the list back.

He took it and tried to remember. In what situations did those happen? Most of them weren't him lashing out but seeming disinterested. He finally concluded: "Talking. When someone talks to me, I look bored. When someone asks me something I don't

want to answer, I ridicule them. When people have expectations, I disappoint some of them."

"What good does it do?"

"Good?" He raised a blue eyebrow. "Well ... then they don't talk to me and don't want me to do things."

"It keeps them distant."

"Yeah." He hung his head. "People aren't my thing."

"But you want more contact?"

"Yeah, I think so." He looked up. "But what do I do if they begin to expect things I can't do?"

"Like what?" She wrote something down.

"Like ... I don't know. Marriage. Kids. Being nice. I don't know. Normal people stuff."

"Then you either say no or you learn it." She smiled. "If you can learn to be less of an asshole, you can learn to be a decent human being too. It's actually the same thing."

"Not really. One is stopping to say shit, the other is saying nice things. The second is a lot harder."

"Do you know any mute persons?"

"No." He crunched his eyebrows. "Yeah, actually, I do. I knew one. He played on another team the last three years. I don't exactly know him but we met a few times."

"Was he a nice person?"

"I guess so. His teammates seemed to like him." Actually, how did that work? Did he give them anything for it?

"Do you think you could contact him and learn to be nice from him? Because one can be nice without saying anything. That's a question of body language."

"You want me to learn body language from a mute man I never talked to?" He crossed his arms. "How do I even contact him? It's not like I could phone him. I guess I could find out his number and write him ... well, it's possible."

"The question is: Do you want to learn?"

Yeah. Yes, damn it, he did. He wanted to know what it was like to ... just be a part of a group. It was better than facing his teammates without any kind of training. But asking a mute man was kinda strange. Though it was easier than trying to come up with something nice to say, that sounded impossible.

"I want you to try and write down what you learned. That will be very difficult but it will make you more conscious of what you do." One of her fingers pointed at the list in his hand. "And if you need a reminder of why you are doing all that, pin that in front of your face."

He sighed and looked at the thing himself. How about burning it and forgetting all about changing himself? Tempting. Oh so tempting. The list went to the inner pocket of his jacket, safe against his breast. Temptation seemed to be his eternal vice. Alcohol, women, running – temptation was strong. But he was also proud. He would not run from a challenge. Never.

Kapitel 12: Wisdom of the mute

He got Mitobe's number from Kuroko. After hearing what his current task was, he happily supplied it after asking the man. Mitobe seemed to study at a lesser university in Tokio and had agreed to meet him after what Kuroko told him. Hopefully they would be able to communicate somehow. He got a message with a meeting place for Sunday afternoon.

He didn't expect to find a basketball court but he should have known. They were all basketball geeks after all. So he wasn't surprised to recognize the former Seirin starters, the cat-like reserve player and a few current Seirin members who still went to school. He didn't expect to find the Midorima family with them.

"Hey, Aomine!" Kazu waved his hand before concentrating on the current game. For some reason he was point guard for the team playing against Midorima who was lead by Seirin's former point guard.

The blue-haired sat down next to Kikyo who enthusiastically greeted him. She continued to tell him what the score was, which round and some basic basketball rules. Honestly he was impressed by the three-year-old. She was beyond smart.

Without question, Midorima ruled the court. Aomine itched to go up against him but the dull throb of his rib reminded him how bad an idea that was. Though Junpei wasn't half-bad himself, he ran a surprisingly good defense against the miracle shooter. So most plays were on the inside with Teppei and Mitobe facing each other as centers. Teppei was clearly better but Mitobe did not let that get to him. His hook shoots often made Teppei unable to reach and his defense was superb. The power forwards were both younger players – not bad but nowhere near good either. The other two players were that catlike reserve – Aomine couldn't remember his name – and someone from Kuroko's year who he had not seen playing before.

After a few minutes they seemed to reach half-time – Kikyo had a time stopper with her that rang after ten minutes – so the players relaxed and began talking. Midorima greeted him with a nod, Kazu came over and cuddled his daughter who reacted with "Ihh! You're sweaty!".

Mitobe and the cat-like guy approached him, so he stood. Mitobe smiled but stopped after a moment. The other guy looked at him and suddenly said: "He asks if you really are here to learn something about body language and being nice without talking."

Aomine blinked. It took him a moment before he asked: "How the hell did you get that?"

"It's obvious to me." He shrugged. "I've known Mitobe for years."

"Okay ... I have seen nothing but him looking at you and raising an eyebrow."

"That's enough to know what he thinks." The guy smiled cat-like.

"Well ... yeah, I'd like to learn. I'm shit with words, so my first task is to be nice with my body."

Mitobe looked at him, pointed at his mouth and smiled.

"He says you should smile back when someone smiles at you." The other translated.

"I kinda got that myself." He sighed deeply and got out a notebook Satsuki had gotten him. "I am tasked with writing everything down that I should learn."

Mitobe nodded at the other guy, pointing at Aomine, himself, the court and then turning his hand. Aomine really had no idea at all what that could mean, so he looked at the shorter guy.

"He thinks it will be easier for you to learn when it pertains to basketball. So he will show one behavior on the court and then change it. He wants you to observe the differences and how they change the flow of the game."

"Is that a game?" Kikyo cut in.

"Yeah, sounds fun." Kazu smiled. "Kikyo, I want you to help uncle Aomine and tell him when you notice a change in Mitobe's behavior."

"I will do my best!" She grinned in excitement, coming to stand beside him. "Can we start the game?"

"Give us a moment to recharge, princess. Half-time is ten minutes." Kazu took two plastic bottles out of his back and threw one at Midorima who caught it in flight without even looking while talking to Junpei. Damn, those two were still amazing.

Mitobe got a plastic bowl from his back, supplying the others with honeyed lemons. So he did win their favor with something. Aomine wanted to snatch one but most likely that wasn't nice. So he asked instead and immediately got one. Huh. That was easy. Easier still when after supplying everyone Mitobe offered him another without him having to ask. Sweet.

Kazu programmed the time stopper, giving it back to Kikyo. She pressed the starting button when Teppei threw the ball before becoming one of the players again. Aomine settled down next to her and started staring at the hook shooter.

"He's only staring at the ball." Kikyo mentioned after a few plays.

Aomine had noticed the same. The only time he did not look at the ball was when the point guard caught it and was searching for someone to pass to. Somehow he was still able to keep up with Teppei's movements but somehow it all seemed ... off. Seirin focused on teamwork. Mitobe's behavior clearly destabilized them. It got worse and worse. They passed less, their passes got sloppy. They fell back and not even Midorima's genius seemed able to save them. Inside play changed to outside play, getting two of the other team's players to focus on the miracle shooter. It was amazing how much Mitobe's behavior changed their play. When they were ten points behind – in six minutes! – Mitobe made a complete behavioral turn.

"He's looking at the others again!" Kikyo mentioned excitedly. "Look, he observes the whole court."

"You're right." His eyes were glued on Mitobe. It wasn't only where he was looking. Instead of staring at the ball, he looked others in the eye. Sometimes he even communicated with his eyes. When the point guard looked at him, he sometimes leaned left or right, running there after a slight nod back. He exchanged whole strategies with his point guard in silence.

Aomine got his pen and began to write down what he saw. Kikyo supplied him with things to write like saying "He's screening" or "He passed". Mitobe had changed from a complete shut-off to 100% team-player, communicating with his eyes and hand movements. The blue-haired didn't even dare to ask how a three-year-old knew how screening worked but he already concluded that Kikyo was very far from any normal three-year-old. Kazu was raising a little Midorima genius.

Mitobe's team reduced their point difference to two points that way when the timer went off. Amazing. Aomine knew how Kuroko could turn a whole game around, he just never focused on the how. With Mitobe, he learned how offensive team-play worked. When the guy held out his hand, he handed over the notebook without words. Mitobe nodded after reading it, pointing at him, then Izuki and Takao, then waving an arc with his hand.

Aomine looked at the cat-like guy who translated: "He wants you to observe the point-

guards now and play as a point guard yourself in the next game.”

“What?” His eyes widened. “Point-guard? I never played anything else than power forward.”

There was another silent communication in which Mitobe only nodded before the other said: “He wants you to try your best to incorporate what you watched.”

“I should do all this myself as a point-guard? He wants me to play 100% support?”

“Yes. It is needed for what he wants to explain afterwards.” Another silent communication. “He wishes you good luck and cheers you on to do your best.”

“Glorious!” Kazu, who stood beside them again, grinned. “You get my place in the next game. I’ll give you pointers how to advance your play.”

Aomine scoffed and mumbled: “I don’t need pointers, I can do it.”

“No pressing forward, always passing the ball, next to never making a play yourself?”

Kazu smirked. “I doubt you can overcome your instincts that easily. Harder than that will be keeping the overview, planning out plays beforehand and acting accordingly. I don’t think I ever saw you screen someone.”

Aomine’s corner of the mouth twitched. Yeah. This would be completely different. He even got what Mitobe wanted to tell him without saying so: By always playing selfishly and ignoring everyone else, he had learned to do the same outside of the basketball court as well. So first he had to learn to play team basketball before he was able to apply the same to normal life. That was surprisingly accurate and helpful. Now he only had to do it ... no matter his bravado, it would be hard. He observed both Kazu and Izuki, knowing he would suck next to them. They had a great overview, not only knowing where everyone was but also where everyone would be in a second. It sounded as impossible as copying Akashi but Kise had done it, so somehow this must be doable. The game ended with Kazu’s team winning by two points which made Midorima grumpy. Little Kikyo patted his head when her other father held her up which was unbelievably cute.

“Great game, everyone!” Teppei grinned, getting everyone’s attention with his overpowering voice. “So I heard we’re doing a switch-up now? Aomine as a point guard?” His grin enlarged. “How about having everyone switch positions? I haven’t played point guard in a while.”

Mitobe raised his arm in a shooting motion which had him immediately appointed as shooting guard. Midorima nodded and said “Center” which led to one of their former power forwards lowering his arm immediately. With a grin, Junpei said: “Then I’ll play center against you, you really got me riled up this game.”

“Riled up and filed away-”

“Shut up, Izuki!” The former shooter shouted.

“But that way one of us will be power forward again if Kazu doesn’t play” One of the younger ones said.

“I don’t think I can be a good power forward” The cat-like boy admitted.

“Come on, Koganei, let’s face each other as power forwards.” Kazu stood again. “Is it okay if one of you is a referee?”

“I’ll do it. My distance shooting is horrible.” A younger member went over to Kikyo.

“Will you be my assistant?”

“I will.” She smiled up at him and gave over the timer. “You program it.”

“Okay, let’s split up. As Aomine is the only fresh one here, I choose first. Junpei, you’re with me.” Teppei decided.

“Really? You don’t want Midorima?” The former captain blinked. “I hope you know he’s better than me.” His old teammate only smiled to that.

So Midorima was on his team. Sweet. A reliable center was a good thing. So next he needed a shooter. Mitobe or the young guy? "Mitobe is with me."

"Kazu with me" Teppei said.

"I'm doomed to never play with my beloved husband again" That one said theatrically. "Izuki with me." He was the only one Aomine knew the name of and he did not want to make a fool out of himself. So he had Midorima as center, cat-guy as power forward, Mitobe as a shooter and Izuki as ... maybe a small power forward? He wasn't exactly sure. With this team, he should focus on outside plays.

The other team formed a circle and began to make plans. When his own group looked at him, he nearly choked on his spit before saying: "Sorry if I blow this. Holding back and supporting is not my thing."

"The plan will be to have Koganei and Izuki make mixed outside and inside plays. Mitobe should stay strictly outside but his inside is a lot better, so if you see a chance, go for it. Don't fear to shoot, I'll get your rebounds" Midorima planned for them, showing that his strategic mind was applicable to basketball. "Aomine, get the ball to one of those three. Only shoot if you are wide open and then only from outside. Do not make inside plays. I know you could but you are a point-guard this game. If no one is free, I'll run free so that you can pass to me." Oh, he hated to be commandeered by the loony-boon but he wanted to win this, no matter if that wasn't the reason they were doing it. "Don't forget that Teppei is larger than you and can make outside shoots very accurately. He will use that to his advantage."

"I'm good at jumping."

"Yeah, but he is good at faking. He'll make you jump and will pass while you are still in the air. If Teppei attempts to shoot, everyone should be on their guard and closely follow their mark. Therefore I think man-to-man-defense is the best."

They all nodded, hearing the others make a battle-cry. With a look at themselves, they just nodded, thinking the situation too awkward for their own one. Midorima moved into starting position and Aomine let him, though it felt strange. He stood to his right, knowing that the guy was left-handed. Their referee threw the ball and the game begun.

They lost and he had no one but himself to account for it. Still no one blamed him. Every break Izuki and Kazu – even though that one was in the other team – gave him tips and he had slowly improved. But the basics were what almost did him in. Observing others, reading their movements, keeping an overview, silently communicating with others, planning out their movements and strategy, passing, staying in the shadow, all this coordination, he felt like getting a headache.

When he saw Mitobe approaching with another box of honeyed lemons, he gratefully took one, said thanks and looked him in the eye while doing so. The other nodded with a smile and gave him a thumbs-up. He did not really need Koganei's translation: "He says you did well and that you learned enough for one day."

"Yeah, thanks." He scratched his head. "I guess there is more to learn? You said this was preparation for a lecture."

Mitobe nodded, making an arc with his hand.

"Is next time next Sunday?" Somehow he had gotten a knack for the gestures, most were quite easy.

"Same place, two o'clock" Koganei informed him.

"Okay." He slumped a bit, hanging his head. "Thanks again ... for doing this. I know you are only doing this because Kuroko asked."

There was a moment silence before a hand raised his chin and another patted his shoulder. Koganei ran a translation again, though he did not look happy while doing so: "Mitobe hates violent Alphas, so he is actually doing it for you. He likes the fact that you want to change and is proud of you for doing this. He also says you should be proud as well."

"O... kay. Is there a specific reason you do not like violent Alphas?"

Mitobe pointed at his throat while his friend explained: "His father beat his mother up and he tried to protect her. His father choked him, nearly killing him and taking his voice in the process."

"I am so sorry." Aomine found he actually meant that. God, he knew how it was to be nearly killed by his own bastard of a father. His instincts told him to avert his gaze but he didn't. He wanted Mitobe to get that he understood. He was sorry for so much.

The other smiled sadly and shook his head. Koganei stayed silent.

"I'll learn this, so I don't do more shit" Aomine promised. It was the only thing he could do: Not repeat his father's mistake and live the way of violence.

Kapitel 13: Farewell to an old friend

"How did it go?" Doctor Enjoji asked.

Aomine wordlessly handed over his book and spoke while she read: "This is the basis, we meet up next Sunday to learn more."

"You have really good friends, you know that?" She smiled proudly. "Often people like you surround themselves with others who have the same problems. They spent their time drinking, making stupid jokes, watching or doing sports. Not that doing sports is a bad thing but if you have nothing else in your life, it is something to immerse oneself in to connive at the fact that you would not know what to say or do otherwise."

"Yeah, I simply sit there and listen to others, not exactly knowing what to say most of the time."

"But your friends are really good people, they know and they accept that you often don't. You seem to have strengths that overpower your flaws. Or at least they did for a long time. With age, people gain social competence, so what was accepted in youth will not be acceptable behavior forever."

He just nodded.

"So you will continue to learn emphatic behavior?" She waited for another nod.

"Explain to me in your own words, why you are doing this, what you will gain from it."

"Others like me more, they invite me because they like me, not to gain something from me. Tetsu and Satsuki will be proud of me and not leave me, Satsuki might even start her own life instead of being held back by me. And ... I think I'll be proud of myself."

"That sounds nice. So what will be the drawbacks?" She noticed his confused blinking.

"Everything comes with a price. What will you lose when you train empathy?"

"Well ... the ability to hurt others."

"What is that good for?"

"Err ... that others stay with me because I am pathetic and need help?" He averted his gaze. "I might lose Satsuki. But I'll do that anyway when I tell her what really happened." He saw the doctor open her mouth but he remembered something else. "I'll lose a lot of freedom."

"Freedom?" She sounded surprised.

"The ability to leave without looking back. To let others down without caring. I feel ... domesticated. Empathy puts chains on my behavior."

"That is true." Her smile had dimmed. "A lone wolf is not an emphatic being. Is returning to the pack worth giving up that freedom?"

"I am not sure." Kuroko and Mitobe flashed up before his eyes. "As long as I am to live in company, I guess it is better that way. The other way would be to live by myself, so I don't hurt others."

"In the end, this is the question of making a decision. Forgetting about what others want for you or expect of you or what might be good for you in the eyes of society, do you want to learn this? To be one of the pack, so to speak?"

Well, did he want that? He didn't want to hurt others again. But wasn't there a way to keep his freedom and not hurt others? It's not like everyone had to like him. Maybe he could be a bit more emphatic and stop with that? Oh, he didn't know.

"That's not exactly an answer. Training won't help if you don't want to learn."

"I just don't know. If I learn this, am I really the same person? This is teaching me team-play. What if I lose the edge loneliness gave me?"

Doctor Enjoji nodded and said in a grave voice: "That is the price to pay, yes. A lot of artists lose the capturing feelings they express in their art when they become one of the normal people. Gaining happiness by becoming part of the normal population might mean losing the skills exile gave them. You would not be a professional basketball player if you did not have such a shitty childhood. You might even lose some of your more daring skills."

"But I'll gain team-play. It will give me a set of new skills." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath before looking the psychiatrist in the eye. "I'll do it. I'll learn empathy."

Mitobe wrote him a letter, detailing what kind of body language showed what, even drawing some of the explained postures. Midorima read it over his shoulder, finally asking if he might get a copy of that. Aomine felt cocky enough to say: "Make two and give one to Akashi."

"He doesn't need it. He knows what his body language says. If he looks bored, you can be absolutely sure that he wants to look bored."

"So if he behaves like a lunatic, he actually wants to do that?" Aomine raised an eyebrow. "He's been nicer since Kuroko whipped his ass but he's still an asshole with a stick up his behind. You are even more so but you have an excuse. You just took his though."

"What you call a stick up someplace not to be mentioned is seen as etiquette by others. Just because you come from a place where farting in public is hilarious instead of disgusting, does not mean that all of us are raised on that level. If you want to be less obnoxious to people around you, I would advise on basic hygiene and hygienic behavior first."

"You are a clean-freak, Midorima--"

"Guys, really, you are getting out of hand" Kazu stopped them, having his hands on his daughter's ears who looked like she was close to tears. "In different groups of people, different behavior is seen as fitting. Good behavior therefore means being able to adjust to the people around you and you are both bad at that. Aomine tried his best when he visited us and he mostly adapted just fine." His gaze turned to him. "My husband was able to let go of a lot of his quirks and it would be nice of you to acknowledge that."

"Yeah, fine" He grumbled. "You aren't as bad as in middle school."

"Well, you are still better than Murasakibara." Midorima heard the small cough Kazu made. "And you behaved well when you visited us."

"My husband learned to have a more open body language in our first year of high-school. He can teach you a lot about etiquette if you would like to learn. Though his kind is so unbelievably nice and attentive that normal behavior looks rude afterwards."

"Midorima and attentive?" Aomine tried his best not to make a very rude gesture. "That seems far-fetched to me."

"It does make sense that when you learn to be very attentive and everyone's behavior seems rude to you, you tend to get rude as a reaction. It is not a good way to react but when you don't know better, it makes sense. Just like you think he is rude to you, he thinks you are rude to him. That way you will never understand one another."

"Then why do I have to go cross that bridge?" He whined.

"To show you are the bigger person" Kazu said without mercy for his own husband

who winced slightly.

Aomine blinked and whispered to him: "You are so whipped."

"I asked for it. Nobody else tells me about the mistakes I make."

"Well, I can give you a lis-"

"Nobody that I trust." The other looked him straight in the eye. "He is someone I can learn from. You are someone who could actually learn from me at this point because I have been doing this for four years."

Damn, that hurt. He wished he had an excuse but no, that green-haired idiot was actually right. He had friends. Aomine had no real ones. He had a husband and a family. Aomine had none of those. He clenched his jaw before puffing up his chest and saying: "You just look, I'll learn this faster than you and then you are the one without a clue again!"

"Social competence is not a competitive-"

"I don't care." He looked at the list. "So first of all, I'll do something nice by scanning this list and sending it to you. Give me your e-mail address."

"Please" Midorima mumbled.

"Oh, shut up, I'm still learning. No, wait: Shut up, please." He smirked and held out his phone.

"Somehow, I fear you'll be obnoxious by choice next." The other shook his head. He still typed in his e-mail address.

"Aomine Daiki!"

The screeching, definitely unamused voice made him cringe. Not good. How had Satsuki found him? She wasn't supposed to be able to find him. Did she track his phone or something?

"Daiki, you are banned from doing any sports. So why are you here playing basketball?"

"Sorry, everyone." He passed the ball to one of his teammates. "I was found out."

"You do not sound sorry at all!" She came to stand beside the court, stemming her hands into her hips. "You should know yourself that you are on leave to rest and heal, not sneak out to play basketball."

"I'm on leave because I am an insufferable prat and coach does not want me back until I learned to be nicer to people. So I am learning to be nicer while playing basketball."

"You have a broken rip, you idiot!" She screeched.

He went over, clapped of one of the players on the sideline and sat beside Kikyō who kindly told him: "Yoshi is always reprimanded as well."

"Who's Yoshi?"

"A friend from kindergarden."

Well, thanks. That lifted his spirit. So he really was as bad as a three-year-old. He pouted for a bit, feeling Satsuki's angry stare in his side. After a minute or so, she decided that the game was more interesting than him and asked: "So why is everyone playing different positions?"

"The guys agreed to do a mix-up, so I could learn support play as a point guard. They told me I get nicer when I learn to look out for my teammates." He didn't look up to see her reaction. Stupid Satsuki could think whatever she wanted, it wasn't like he cared.

"That is a marvelous idea." She actually sounded pleased. "But not before your rip is healed."

"It's only a broken rip. It's been over a month, so it is stable again. Now I just have to breath through the pain. I wouldn't be able to do a whole training menu but one or two friendly games where I stay in the back aren't that bad."

"I'll ask the sports doctor again, okay? If he says yes, I will not stop you."

He looked up in surprise. Had she really just relented? He couldn't remember when they ever had an argument that did not end with him giving in or her being unable to threaten him further. This was an actual compromise, right? They never had one before. She was stubborn as a mule, just like he was. This communication thing was actually working.

"Do you have an achy-achy?" Kikyo asked.

"Yeah, someone hit me really hard" He explained. "But I'll be as good as new in a month or two."

"If my tummy hurts, I have to stay in bed. It's really boring."

"I'm bored as well."

"You could come over and play with me!" She invited him.

"We'll have to ask your mommy first." Maybe if she asked, Kazu would actually say yes. Not that he had ever said no – he seemed to be one of the very few who did not fear him – but Aomine did not want to overstay his welcome. A lot of people here seemed to have bad experiences with Alphas and all knew that he wasn't the nice kind of Alpha. It was like running around with a sign saying "dangerous animal". A lone wolf was free but by now he wasn't so sure that freedom meant contentment.

"...and so Midorima said I was allowed to come play with his daughter. I never thought he would let me anywhere near his child! That's awesome."

"Like you said last week, emphatic behavior will get you invitations you would not get otherwise. Only people that aren't dangerous are allowed around children."

"Yeah" He grinned. "I think Midorima is the most suspicious a guy can get, so it's really huge that he allowed me to come play with his daughter. I mean, he was ... uhm, he was there when I killed Aoki. He attacked me and tried to snap my neck."

"What stopped him?" She cocked her head.

"I did. I'm stronger. I nearly broke his hand – his hands are extremely important for his work – but our captain stepped in and reigned me in."

"Where there any other people present?"

"Nah, Tetsu, me, Midorima and captain. It's really strange to say captain ... his name is Akashi. You might have heard of the Akashi group."

"The president just died." She nodded.

"Oh ... did he?" So Akashi had finally killed off his dad. "I guess I should do a courtesy call and congratulate him on a job well done. He's been trying to kill off his father for years. That was an open secret. So he's been looking for a way not to leave evidence."

"The papers said it was a stroke."

"Rather a stroke of genius to make it look like one." Aomine shook his head. "Akashi is really, really screwed up. I'm a cute kitten against him. I'm not a doctor but I'm sure he is what they call a psychopath."

"And he stopped you when you tried to break this Midorima's hand?" He answered with a nod. "Did he look like he was trying to stop you when you attacked Tetsu?"

He shook his head. Akashi had not moved an inch. Not even after the thing. He had simply watched when Midorima tried to kill him.

"Was he with you when you raped Tetsu for the first time?"

"Yeah." Aomine looked aside. "He had promised Tetsu to stop me if I overdid it. Even

though Tetsu screamed, cried and bled, he did not do anything.”

“Was he with you when you raped Tetsu again when that one tried to make up with you?”

“No, I was alone with Tetsu. The others often left us alone. I think they knew what I did, at least Akashi did. Midorima and Murasakibara listened to Akashi, so they left when he told them to go. They were both unhappy about that but none of them ever confronted me. I’m sure Akashi told them not to.”

“Why would Akashi do that? It sounds like he purposefully wanted you to hurt Tetsu.”

“I think he got off on that. As far as I know, he never raped Tetsu himself but he had everyone of us rape Tetsu. He stood right beside us when we raped Tetsu in the hunts. Sometimes he stayed back and watched me rape Tetsu in the locker or the showers. He never openly jerked himself off but he was aroused every time. In my opinion, that sick sadistic bastard just loved using us like puppets without getting his hands dirty.”

“With what you just told me, it would not be a problem to jail him.” She leaned back on her chair.

“On what charges? Tetsu agreed to the hunts. We agreed to the rapes. We were all fourteen and fifteen, no one more than two years apart. Except for the psychological one, no one had lasting damage. We were all consenting. One might argue that we were all consenting because he used emotional abuse on everyone of us but who would believe that a fourteen-year-old got four Alphas and an Omega to agree to gang-rapes? He always stepped in when anyone was in danger of doing lasting damage except that one time when I killed Aoki and then, he had Midorima call an ambulance. You can’t even get him for this not-helping-someone-in-need shit.”

“Have you ever confronted him about that?”

“Hell no!” He jumped from his chair. “I’m not suicidal anymore, you know? If I tell him what I think of him and he thinks that might be a threat, I’m dead in a second. When my suicidal behavior threatened the team, he told me to go die. When someone cockily challenged him, he attacked the guy with scissors to his face. When he doesn’t like people’s attitude, he has them kneel before him. That guy is really, really screwed up.” Calm down. Lower your voice. Control your breathing. He sat down again. “I mean it, that guy is dangerous. I won’t ever tell him what I think of him.”

“Have you broken contact with him?”

He shook his head again but spoke before his therapist could: “I tried. But Satsuki often calls him, he’s a charming, handsome friend for her. He never let her see his ugly side. I tried to ask her to break off contact but she asked why and I couldn’t tell her. And he’s still friends with Tetsu ... as I said, Tetsu can’t get angry, so they’re still friends.”

“I fear for the one you call Tetsu. Does he know what you think of Akashi?” Doctor Enjoji’s eyebrows were tightly knit together.

“He says that is his decision and he does not have to run them by me. He says he can look after himself and that I should concentrate on my problems with Akashi and talk them through with him.”

“That sounds like he did talk about it all with Akashi and that they made up.”

“Yeah, I’m sure Akashi had some very nice words for his behavior. Then he scratched Tetsu’s dog’s ears, smiled charmingly and let out a bit of his pheromones because he is the strongest Alpha I ever met. The guy could crush me with one hand. He always holds back but those few times I did annoy him, he made me run in fear.”

“You don’t have to like him. If Tetsu knows everything and still decides to be friends

with him, that is his decision and he is right to tell you that you should mind your own matters. There is one person that should be warned though.”

“Satsuki.”

Doctor Enjoji nodded and said: “But first you have to tell her about your assaults.”

Kapitel 14: Hurt

Aomine scratched his skin to get out his nervous energy. Tell Satsuki. Oh dear gods, he could not do that. He just couldn't. It was his absolute horror. Even talking with Kuroko about his assaults would be easier. Satsuki would hate him.

"He looks like a wreck" He heard her say. Always thinking about him. It might be the last time.

"He's very afraid of your reaction to what he is about to tell you" The doctor explained. "We talked about the set-up and how to do this best. I would like you to sit behind him, so that he does not see you. I will have him tell you about his first assault. I will question him, you will only be allowed to ask questions afterwards. You will most likely feel a lot of things while listening to him. I want you to write them down, as well as any questions you might have." She gave Satsuki a writing pad, some paper and a pencil. "Do you think you can do this?"

She only nodded before turning to him and stating: "Knowing is easier than guessing, no matter what you tell me. My mind comes up with unimaginable horrors when I lie awake at night. So please tell me the whole truth, so that I can stop thinking about what might have happened."

He looked up, just watching her for a moment. Her eyes had filled with tears, her lip quivered. She should not have to do this. She was only nineteen, she should not have to listen to someone she knew her whole life telling her about rapes and abortions and murder. He should tell her, so that she could put an end to this and go on with her life. She should.

He owed her this. Just like doctor Enjoji had explained when they talked about what and how to tell her. He waited for Satsuki to sit before nodding to his therapist. She had said the same after all. Knowing was better than guessing. Even though he was sure that Satsuki did not guess at something that bad.

Satsuki cried.

Doctor Enjoji had explained to him how healing worked. First you couldn't believe something, then you got angry, finally it made you sad and then you somehow worked it into your world-view. So he wished Satsuki's tears would indicate sadness but deep down he knew they rather meant shock.

"You may ask me questions now. Not him, only me. I'll answer for him" Doctor Enjoji told her.

He leaned back into his cushioned chair with a sigh of relief. He had done his part, the rest was hers. Man, this felt ... good. Yeah, it actually felt good. No more hiding, lying, running. It was out. Now Satsuki would leave him and then he could work on his forgiveness. Just like always. Even though he wasn't sure this time that he could win her back.

"Why?" She pressed out.

"Why what exactly?"

"Why did he ... oh god, I know why." She shook her head. "Just why Tetsu? He was the most defenseless of us all ... okay, that's why, but still ... I don't want to believe this." Something seemed to click in her head, changing tears to stoic resolve. "I'm sorry, I just can't face this right now. Emotionally. If I promise not to make this a topic, may I ask my questions next time?"

"Are you sure you can do this? Act normally, even though you have burning questions?" Doctor Enjoji seemed doubtful.

"I have been doing that for more than five years. I can wait." She nodded. "Right now, I'd like to ask some more rational questions."

"Like what?"

"Will this have consequences for him?"

He closed his eyes. This might be it. She had just cut him off emotionally. It was the beginning of the end. It was still the right thing to do.

"Only if Tetsu does decide to go to the police with this."

"So I have to ask him once I ... calmed down again." She looked sad, not teary but somehow more beaten down or even broken. "You said this was his first assault. So there is still more?"

"Yes. Some are even worse. If you want to do this, there are two others we should talk about. But only after you have worked through this one."

"Why not do this altogether?"

"I normally do that but this one already brought you to your limits. Aomine fears that you will decide not to have anything further to do with him and I admit that it is not completely unlikely. I would like you to come back tomorrow if are willing to stay in contact with him. I very much hope so."

"Another appointment tomorrow?" She looked at him for the first time. "Well ... okay. I'll write down my questions. You may read them if you like." She stared into space for a moment. "If I promise to pick you up tomorrow but go to my own place until then, can I trust you to be in a conscious, undrunk, un-high state tomorrow?"

"I promise." Anything to keep her. Anything to make her give him a chance.

"Please do not let me down this time. I don't think I could forgive that." She nodded.

"When shall we be here?"

"Eleven o'clock."

Satsuki stood and told him: "Let's go. And please do not talk to me, I fear I will scream at you for that."

Well. So this was what an angry Satsuki looked like.

Shit.

It was one of the hardest nights of his life. He wanted to drink. At least a bit, just something to pass the time, just a beer, something light. But he knew he would not be able to stop. So he refrained from leaving his flat. He killed zombies with his controller, drank sports drinks and ate lots of greasy pizza. Around four in the morning, he finally lost consciousness. He woke to the ringing of his phone which was of course a call from Satsuki.

"Daiki! Where are you?" She was furious but the normal kind of furious, not that cold, controlled talk-to-me-and-I-kill-you-kind of furious.

"Home. Undrunk and un-high as promised. Do I have time to take a shower?" He groggily asked.

"You have ten minutes, I'm waiting out front."

Okay, speed-showering, he could do that. He jumped out of his clothes, got in and out of the shower in under five minutes and dressed in something that looked agreeable and did not smell. Mobile phones, keys, wallet, okay, ready. He left the flat.

"Then let's go. Be happy I was early. Why didn't you set an alarm?" She nagged.

"Forgot it. Or overslept it, I'm not sure." He got out his phone. "Nah, forgot it. Sorry."

"You'd be useless without me. Are you planning on growing up anytime soon?"

Wow, that stung. He was unreliable, yeah, but ... oh well, she was right. He countered: "If you continue with those lectures, I might just do it."

"I dare you." But she didn't look at him.

They reached the station and took the first train. This one would take them out of Tokio before they would change the line to the one that stopped in the town near the forensic psychiatry and prison. Satsuki waited until they were in the second train before asking: "Do you want to read my questions?"

He simply nodded.

She took a folded paper from her purse and held it out to him. He took it but waited for a moment before unfolding it. His hand was shaking. God damn it, was he really afraid of her questions? She was here. It had been her decision to stay. Her questions meant that she wanted to understand, she wanted ... she didn't want to leave him. This was his chance. He would answer her questions later, tell her more, answer some other questions and even though she might never be the same, she would not leave him. Hopefully. It was what he wanted, right? He wished he knew such things.

He so wished he knew what he wanted sometimes.

He began reading her questions. She had structured them, one part for clarification of what happened. One, a lot harder part, was clarification about his and Kuroko's feelings. The other's reactions and how he had noticed them. What her questions surmounted to was the question if he had known in that moment how much he hurt the other, how wrong it was what he did and how much control he still had. It was the friendly way of asking how much pain he fully consciously had put Kuroko through.

She was asking how much of a sadist he actually was – or if he had any excuse for what he had done. He wished he could give her one. Because really, that's what he asked himself sometimes. How much of what he put others through was him being a social cripple and how much was him being an asshole? When you stripped away his bad childhood, his fears and his lacking social skills, how much was left of someone who simply enjoyed other's pain?

Because he had that side. Most people had that side, he knew. Some just had a much bigger one than others. Akashi's sadistic side was a whole lot bigger and creepier than his – he had enjoyed seeing Kuroko suffer, he was very sure about that – and this one uncrowned king guy was also a sadistic creep. It was sad to know that's where the list ended.

So how could he answer her? Yes, he enjoyed other's pain. It didn't mean he liked making others suffer. Did that make sense? He liked to see others in pain but he didn't want to cause it most of the time? That sounded like a shitty excuse. Because just as often as he hurt people he didn't want to hurt, he hurt others and liked to see their reaction. A face twisted in pain, in anger, in fear, he liked that feeling of superiority it gave him.

If he were to tell Satsuki that, she would rightly slap his face and walk out on him. She did not share his sentiments, like, at all – same with Kuroko. They both hated to see people in pain, they craved harmony. He was their worst match-up and knew so. But if they found that out, they would certainly leave him. So should he lie? Omit the truth? Try to play out that role of someone who just couldn't help himself? Both liked to care but both did not like needy, whiny, helpless people.

Did they stay because they could not figure out if he was an asshole by choice or not? Like those women in dramas who thought they could heal their men with their love? Oh god, they did. Both had even told him so, he just never thought it through. Kuroko had openly said to him that back then, he had tried to save him, to stop him from

suicide with his love and his family sense. Same with Satsuki, she had taught him social interactions for years, made his excuses, helped him along and been there for him. That was worse than pity.

He crumbled up the paper in his hands and tossed it at her before closing his eyes and sinking into his seat. He did not want to look at her ugly face.

"I think you just destroyed your most important friendship" Doctor Enjoji said.

He snorted.

"What does that do to you?"

"T'was bound to happen." He shrugged his shoulders.

"So you hurt her and chased her away before she could reject you?"

"Nah, I did the sensible thing. She's right, I like hurting people. She doesn't. Wrong philosophy."

"So did you enjoy hurting her?" The doctor's voice held no reproach, just as always.

"Yeah." He grinned. That grin hurt.

"So you're proud of yourself now? Happy? Floating on positive energy?"

No, it fucking hurt. Burning bridges left ashes. He felt filled up with ash, just as burned out and destroyed as those post-nuclear-war sights. Hurting her had felt right and good for a second, no, a milli-, a nanosecond. Then it tasted of defeat.

"If you want to run after her and say sorry, you have about half a minute left before she will be gone too far" His doctor informed him. "After that, I fear it will be over. You did a great job of emotionally punching her guts out."

"It's better that way." He stood and looked out of the window. It overlooked the inner yard. Satsuki was heading to the exit, her step strict, filled with anger and hurt. He knew she was openly crying, he did not have to see her face for that. "She's too good for me anyway."

"That are the words of a coward." God, that tone. She didn't scold him. She simply stated the glaring truth. "Every step she takes will make it harder for you to ever get her back. Go, Aomine. Make yourself proud for once. She won't come back by herself this time."

He felt tears blurring his vision. Regret. Dear god, he had decidedly not missed that feeling. That morning when he kissed his brother for the last time before going to school, that last smile, the last words they would ever say to each other. Everyone had always come back, everyone except for his brother. That one he had lost forever and there wasn't a single moment in those three years of his life not tinged with regret and sorrow.

Damn, he really wasn't good at this stuff. Most likely people were supposed to say anything in such moments but words were decidedly not his thing. So he held Satsuki back by tightly embracing her and not letting her go. She felt like a stone statue in his arms, unmoving and cold. He wished he was able to mumble sorry at least – he wasn't. Right this moment, he was glad she didn't decide to pull a punch.

Actually, she did nothing at all. She had simply stopped, motionless in his arms, her body tightly strung like a bow. When he opened his arms a bit, she turned to the side and simply looked at him. Right up to this moment, he had thought Akashi's gaze was the scariest of them all. He should have known that women, especially Satsuki, could be much more scary. He should have told her back then what happened. It would only have needed one of those looks for him to go up to Akashi, punch him in the face and bring Kuroko to safety.

"I am sorry for hurting you."

"Are you now?" Her voice was cold like ice.

Damn. He was used to her meeting him half-way at least. Or just forgiving him without him having to do anything. Actually, he was used to not having any consequences at all. His arms fell from her, his hands turning to fists, desperately saying: "I'm sorry."

"What for?" Her eyelids narrowed even further. "You wanted to hurt me, you did. You fully intended to. Why should you be sorry?"

"I didn't want to-"

"Don't you dare lie to me."

Shit. Fuck. Why had he run after her? Doctor Enjoji was right, he had just given her an emotional beating. Maybe he should have let her cool off first? No. She didn't look like she planned on forgiving him.

Ever.

"Excuse me." He turned away from her.

Tried to. She had grabbed his arm, her grip as hard as steel. Her eyes – not an inviting pink, more of a disturbingly dangerous pink – bore into him. She said: "What are you sorry for?"

He stayed silent. There was so much he could say, it felt like it was on the tip of his tongue but he stayed silent. Just like always. Once he thought silence was a way to protect himself. Now he knew that silence was speaking as well. Staying silent was as much a statement as saying something.

She nodded, let go of his arm and left.

He watched her go.

Kapitel 15: Regret

"Hey."

"Hey." Kuroko was silent for a moment. "Momoi wrote me a message not to contact her for now. Are you two fighting?"

"Yeah." He sighed. He really didn't want to tell but he had to. If Satsuki got to Kuroko first, he would lose them both. "I did something very stupid."

"You normally do" The other man replied without mercy. "What was it this time?"

"Well ... as part of the therapy, I had to tell her about what happened. A bit. I told her about Akashi's idea with the hunts and that I participated in them."

He heard something like an angry puff of air which was followed by: "Did you have the thought that it might be a good idea to tell me that beforehand?"

"Ugh ... no?" Okay, that was unexpected. "Why?"

"Because you just told one of my best friends that I was systematically pressured into rapes and later gang-rapes and abortions? I know you are in therapy but did you spare a thought what it might do to me if you told Momoi something like that?"

"Uhm ... no." No, he hadn't. "I'm sorry. I really did not think about that."

Kuroko sighed again and asked: "How did she take it?"

"Uh ... good. I guess. She was shocked, sure, but mostly about me. She slept somewhere else and today she was supposed to ask me questions about ... that. Like feelings and stuff." And now the hardest part. He had wrote it down to get his point across. "She wanted to know how much was me being ... well, disturbed because of stuff and how much was me being an asshole."

"So she wanted to know what to expect when you get out of therapy. Something like the best you can get and what she will just have to live with."

"Really?" That sounded much too positive.

"That's what I would like to know as well." There was a moment of silent. "What did you expect why she wanted to know that?"

"Well ... more like if any of that was me being an asshole because she would not want to stay around if any of that was me ... if it was something I might have liked."

"If you might have liked raping me?" Another moment of stunned silence. "Does liking to be an asshole mean that you like to rape people?"

"Well, hurt them at least."

"Being an asshole is a way to protect oneself from hurt, it does not necessarily have to mean that you enjoy hurting people." Kuroko's tone was monotonous.

"You're still making excuses for me." Aomine sighed. He would destroy another friendship today, huh? "A part of being an asshole is fear, yes. That is treatable. But a part is enjoying to hurt others because it feels good, it makes you feel mighty and superior to the people you hurt. At least as long as you don't feel their pain."

After another long moment of silence came the question: "So did you enjoy hurting me?"

"I don't think so." He breathed through that black hole that had opened up in his chest. "Maybe while I did it but one look at you and I felt like the biggest piece of trash on earth."

"That is reassuring to hear." There seemed to be a smile in Kuroko's voice. "It should have reassured Momoi."

"Yeah, well ... that's the thing." Just why did he always do this shit? "I told her I fully

enjoyed it and felt no remorse. Or at least something that sounded like it.”

“That was a very stupid thing to do.”

“Yeah, I know.” He sighed in defeat. “I hurt her on purpose. I thought she would leave me, so ... I hurt her first. My therapist already scolded me for that. It was stupid and I know that. I ran after her and tried to apologize but she wouldn’t listen. I really don’t know what to do now.”

“First of all, you go to bed because it is in the middle of the night where you live” Kuroko scolded him. “Next you write down what you just told me in a letter and throw it into her mailbox. Then you sent me a message and I’ll talk to her. Afterwards I’ll tell you what to do from there.”

“Would you do that?” Aomine asked slightly stunned. Kuroko was not angry with him?

“As long as you just told me the truth, yes. So long as it is just another stupid thing you did because you can’t help yourself, I’ll help. If I find out that what you told Momoi is true and you are manipulating me because you don’t like the truth and it’s consequences, I can assure you that we are through, Aomine.”

Ouch. Well. He kinda guessed that already. His two friends stayed with him because they always told themselves that the shit he did was him doing stuff he would not do if he was sane. If sadism was part of his sanity, they would leave. No pressure, huh? He answered: “I promise that what I just told you is true.”

And if it was not, he would have to make it true.

His apology and explanation was exactly half a page. He wanted to rip it or burn it but he knew his brain wouldn’t give him a better one. A bad one was still better than no one, right? He had to trust in Kuroko. So he went to Momoi’s place and threw the letter in her mailbox. She was an orderly person, so he knew that she checked her mail every day. For a moment, he thought about leaving a present in her mailbox as well but this was one issue where he was sure buying her affection would not work, not even in combination with an apology. Maybe if she decided to meet him, then it might help. When he was in deep shit, she expected jewelry, so maybe he should look for a nice necklace or something. With that plan in mind, he set off to the next jewelry store. Buying her things had become a lot easier since he had a job.

Yeah, job ... he had planned on meeting and going out with the guys from his team. Maybe he should do that today. Momoi would most likely not call today, so maybe that would be a good way to spend his time. And if she did decide on never seeing him again and quit her job, it was a great idea to show his face, so that they did not fire him as soon as they saw her resignation letter. Because they were likely to do that if he was honest with himself.

So, necklace ... of course the first jeweler he had to come across was one specializing in wedding rings. No, he would not ask her to marry him. Right now he was even farther from ever being someone she could respect as a man than ever before. So he asked for their necklace collection and was shown a lot of sparkly stuff. Well. This definitely wasn’t his forte. The clerks-woman asked if he’d like input before letting him describe Momoi. Was she a lover or a friend? Why did he want to give his friend a gift? Was it an earnest apology or something to surprise her into accepting the apology? He blinked owlshly at the question, so the woman explained to him that apology gifts should suit the recipient but might not be accepted while gifts more expensive than what suited them often moved people to accepting an apology, even though they did not mean it.

Wow, that was twisted. While he had the money, it was an earnest apology, so he

opted for something suiting her. He was advised to buy a fragile looking golden necklace with a floral pattern and some tiny gems in the color of her eyes and hair. It was cute, she would like it. He thanked the young woman – who was strangely professional for a Beta woman dealing with an Alpha JBL player – and left for the next train station.

So, next stop was his training gym. By now it was afternoon, so training went for another one or two hours depending on the coach's mood. It was a good time to show up. He left his shoes outside and went in on socks because he did not have any basketball shoes on him. Those that saw him only muttered, no one seemed to want to greet him. Damn. Touou had worked out better, even though he had been more of an asshole then.

"Mine-chi." Murasakibara took two strides to stand next to him. "Are you coming back?"

"Nah, I'm banned for another one-and-a-half months. I just wanted to see how you were doing."

"We're getting better while you get floppy." The big man poked his arm. "No muscles."

"I'm allowed strength work that doesn't include my rib cage, so those are fine, you oaf." He huffed and crossed his arms. "How's your baby?"

Ah, that blending smile again. His old comrade was happy, no doubt about that one. So their little one was most likely fine. He still got an answer: "Hana-chan is doing well."

"Great." He was able to smile at that. "I wanna see a photo later, alright?"

"Sure." Murasakibara nodded. "Maybe Tatsu will bring her when I get off."

"That would be great." His smile actually turned into a grin. He was a sucker for kids, okay? They were alright. As long as they weren't his responsibility, he could enjoy the sight.

"Hello there, stranger." His coach said who had finally noticed him and came over.

"Good afternoon, coach Saito." He bowed to the man.

"Oh? What's this? Have you done something stupid again or have you finally learned some manners?" The gruff man asked.

"Well ... both?" His corner of the mouth twitched. "I pissed off Satsuki, so she moved out for now. I tried to apologize but she is too mad right now. So ... I wanted to apologize to a few more people. Like you. I'm sorry that I often behave like an insensitive asshole and don't listen to rules or reason or ... anything really. I'm trying to get better now."

His coach blinked for a long moment before he said in a much more malleable voice: "If that is the effect of therapy, all players are getting one."

"Only those who want to change."

"I don't remember you wanting to change."

"I ... did. Secretly. I just didn't trust therapists" He admitted. "Forcing me into this was ... well, not nice but okay. I needed a kick in the ass."

"Well, thank you." His coach nodded. "I'm looking forward to having you back now. Do make up with Momoi, will ya? That girl is much too good for you but for some strange reason, she likes you very much. Don't disappoint her, she's the best thing that ever happened to you."

Yeah, he knew that. He didn't need people telling him so. What he said was something else though: "I've kept myself aloof from the others and I regret that now. Is there a party coming up where I might be allowed to join?"

"Sure thing, wait a minute." He got out his time planner and thumbed through it. "We're playing the Nara Elks next Saturday, how about coming to the game and afterparty?"

"Sounds great." He nodded. "Thanks, coach!" He looked at his training team members. "May I stay and watch training?"

"Yeah, sure, just sit down there." He pointed at a bench. "You're always welcome with this attitude."

Well, might he come back earlier? Most likely not. But maybe he would get to do some light training in the last month or so. He could ask the coach at the party.

Hana was a beautiful baby with a shock of orange hair. He really had to hold back not to tease Himuro if he might have taken the wrong baby home. Especially since he knew that Kuroko's son had purple hair and Kagami's mother was orange. He had already teased his best friend mercilessly about that, even though he knew the guy was faithful beyond doubt.

But that orange hair and baby-blue eyes were a sight to behold. Just like redheads with green eyes, it was such a stark contrast. Hana would be a beauty once she was grown up – no wonder with those parents – one could see that at six weeks old. Most likely her problem would be that she towered over everyone.

"Any idea what her second gender will be? Until now we only have Alpha babies" He asked Himuro.

"She is an easy baby, so who knows? She could be everything" That proud mother smiled at his daughter. "I'm glad she's not fuzzy."

"No temper tantrums, no Alpha." Aomine lightly poked her chubby cheek. "Good choice, little lady. Alphas are all a bit strange if you ask me."

Himuro only smiled at that, especially when Hana grabbed the finger and tried to suck it. "To be honest, I don't care. My parents raised me with the knowledge that everyone can do whatever they want. Of course Alphas have more muscles and are therefore better athletes but did you know that Omegas are more intelligent in average?"

"Really?" He looked at Murasakibara. "Well, with you next to us two, that is believable."

"Oh?" The beautiful man tilted his head. "Don't you normally use my mate to tell others you are better than some?"

"Yeah ... sorry about that. I'll try not to do it anymore. That was mean." His words changed nothing in the other's visage.

Until he smirked and said: "I know I'm dumb, Mine-chi. I don't care about that. I can do other things."

"Really?" He blinked. "I know you never got angry about being called an idiot but I always expected that you just tried to stay calm."

"We're not that different." The giant knelt down as well and took his daughter into his arms. "I was a complete failure. My father hated me. He gave me to a boarding school when I was nine. He did not want anything to do with his dumb son."

Really? He never knew. Had he been hit too? Most likely ... Alphas were that way. They both stood while Aomine asked: "Did you ever see him again?"

"No." The man still smiled. "My mother decided to divorce him and got me back. If I wasn't this dumb, she would never have made the decision. I'd be some average student and my father would still hate me for not being enough." He kissed Hana. "This way I have a nice mother who doesn't care that I won't be a professor. I like her."

She's a good mother when she doesn't have to care about my father's opinion."

"I wish I had someone like that." He sighed. "My mother hates me just as much as my father does. If they even remember me. Maybe they already drank away their consciousness, who knows ... I can't imagine having kids, even though I like them. My parents were a horror."

"That's sad." He scratched his daughter's tummy. "They're cute."

"So ... if you have no problem with being dumb, what are you proud about? Because it never looked like basketball made you proud."

"You'd be surprised." Himuro smiled. "Atsushi is a great confectioner and baker. Combined with my cooking skills, I think we're a perfect match."

"I won my mate. I'm proud every time I see him."

That made said one blush while Aomine rolled his eyes. Damn lovey-dovey people. Though the guy was right, Himuro was an unbelievably beautiful Omega, he would be everyone's pride and joy.

"And I made this little angel. That makes me proud." He kissed little Hana and cooed her back to sleep.

Aomine's chest ached. Good, he wished he had anything he could say for himself. What was he proud about? Basketball? Murasakibara had more to be proud of than he had. Basketball was really the only thing that came to mind. Maybe once he was better at playing the guitar or ... when he was able to finish this therapy and find friends.

"You got a lot better since we last met. You're much less aggressive and tensed up." Himuro told him out of the blue.

"Really?" He blinked. "Are you just saying that or can you actually feel it?"

"You smell less hostile." Murasakibara added for his mate who only nodded.

"I smelled hostile?" He sniffed himself. "How do people smell hostile?"

"It's when your protective instincts trigger."

Well, yeah, that was an explanation he could understand. They triggered every time he saw Akashi. That guy did not smell hostile on a conscious level but his instincts always screamed at him. He asked Murasakibara: "Is the reason that you always do what Akashi says because he smells hostile?"

"Yeah." The man tensed up. "He is a bad person."

"I think the same but nobody believes me. Satsuki and Tetsu both, they say I'm just needlessly hostile. They never listen to my warnings."

"He made Tetsu kill my baby." Murasakibara's eyes narrowed.

"He made us rape Tetsu, that's worse in my opinion. I don't understand why Tetsu protects him. But when I ask him, he tells me I should mind my own business. It makes me so mad."

"I want to forget about that time." The other cuddled his baby daughter. "I'm happy now. Tetsu is happy. It's over."

"I wish I could let it go." Aomine let out a shaky breath. "I just can't. I'm so fucking mad at so many people."

"It's nice you stopped trying to make yourself forget." Himuro smiled. "Next will be to accept a lot of things that went wrong."

"Doesn't seem like your mate accepts it either."

"Then be an example. Because just like you sometimes used him as an excuse, he does use you as his own sometimes too."

"You are?" He looked up.

"You behave much worse than I do." Murasakibara looked aside. "It's mean if you stop

doing that.”

“You´ll take away some of his excuses.” Himuro grinned. “I´d like that.”

His mate just grumbled.

Aomine grinned and said: “Sorry, dude, I plan on getting better and better.”

Kapitel 16: A way to mend a broken heart

"Momoi agreed to talk to me," Kuroko informed him.

"When?" Aomine grabbed his pillow and pressed it against his chest. The hole that had been there since Momoi walked out on him pained whenever he thought about her.

"Later today. I'll call later to tell you about it." The other breathed out and in again.

"How are you holding up?"

"Well ... not too bad, I guess. I spoke with Murasakibara and Himuro yesterday and met their daughter Hana-chan. Did you know she has orange hair?"

"Yeah, they sent me a photo. She is very cute."

"Why do you get photos? I want photos too."

"Then maybe you should be nicer to Murasakibara," Kuroko chided him.

"I know. I apologized to him yesterday for always joking about him and calling him an idiot. He didn't really care, said he never actually took it as an insult."

"I think he did. At least back in middle school, he did. Maybe he stopped caring in between but back then, he got pissed every time you joked about him. It was quite mean."

"Yeah, I know ... I'm really thankful he forgave me. It's kinda amazing what some people forgive. You too. You're pretty amazing for still talking to me."

There was a moment of stunned silence before he got an answer: "Thank you."

"Yeah, it's amazing how often I just say negative stuff. My therapist called me out on that too. I'm trying to be more positive." He sighed. "It feels like getting a complete make-over."

"The core is still you. Before your brother died, you were ... you were really great. I loved you so much. That positive, optimistic boy full of energy, I loved him so very much. It's him I suffered for. He is still in you, somewhere buried beneath all that abuse you put yourself through."

Babump. Gods, that sounded ... he wanted to be that person. He wanted to return to being someone others looked up to, loved for who he was. He had knew how to do that once. Back when his all and everything had been basketball, when he had had dreams and hope. When his days had been filled with things he had loved because he had spent his time outside to follow his dreams. Once upon a time when he had still believed in the good in life.

"I hang on to you because sometimes you remind me that this person is still inside you. When I can talk to him, I feel like all the bad things in life aren't so bad after all. When I think about what happened, I always hope that I was able to save that goodness inside of you instead of just adding to the hurt you heaved on him."

"The hurt I heaved on him?" He snorted. "It wasn't exactly my decision."

"It was. You are the one who decides if you are a victim or if you suffered through it for a reason. You decide if you want to be a victim or not. I refuse to be one. I chose my suffering. I don't know if the result was worth the price, but I learned from it."

"So it was your decision to lose Aoki?" Damn it. He had just said that to hurt Kuroko. Was he an idiot or what? He wanted to keep their friendship, damn it.

"No. But it was my decision to risk him by telling you what I did. I put you, put an "us" above the safety of our child. To be honest, I never expected you to react like that but it was still my decision. I lost something very precious but gained knowledge that helped me in finding the perfect mate."

So that was how Kuroko lived through all that. He took all the blame. Or didn't he?
"But you don't forgive me?"

"Hurting me like that was your decision. I don't appreciate it, even though I learned from it. I certainly won't thank you for nearly driving me to suicide."

"What?" Aomine blinked in shock.

"Aomine, I birthed seven dead babies. Five of them were recognizable as humans. You raped me, beat me up, offered me as a sexual toy to Kise and humiliated me more often than I want to remember. When my suicidal thoughts got out of control, I gave up on you. I did it all for you – though I know you never asked for it – and in the end, I failed. Still, it was my decision to try. Just like it was your decision to sink into your world of suffering." The last sentence was said in an annoyed tone. "Don't make it out to be something that inevitably happened. Staying positive is hard, but it's the only way if you want to live happily. I learned to do that. Therapy will help you get there but only if you want it to. If you continue to decide that your childhood was shit and you'll be doomed forever, no one will get you out of that role of a victim. It is your decision."

His decision. A decision to be a victim or a perpetrator. Offended or offender. Did he want to be a product of his parent's hate and negligence or someone who rose from the ashes? Did he want to be someone who couldn't help but rape his best friend or someone who made an mistake he atoned for? Kuroko was right in a way. Other people lost their baby brothers too, they didn't go and nearly kill others for it. In a way, that had been his decision.

That was a damn hard pill to swallow.

"I'll think about that," he promised before canceling the call.

The ringing of his phone woke him up. He blinked confusedly before slowly putting one and one together and grabbing his phone. Kuroko again.

"Good evening, Aomine. Were you asleep?"

"Ugh, yeah, I ... I thought about your words but I got a headache, so I went to sleep."

He shook his head to wake him. "Sorry, I'm awake now."

"I spoke with Momoi."

Oh gods. This would hurt. Did he really want to hear? Maybe he should just give up, spare himself the pain. There was no way she would ever forgive him, was there? He closed his eyes again and concentrated on his breathing, just like he had learned in training. Controlled breathing helped to control pain. Even emotional one.

"She says she took your advise and resigned from the team."

Yeah. He had expected that. It still hurt. So this was what it felt like to be left.

"She applied for the K-Tokio university and will take entrance exams in two months. She decided on sports medicine." Kuroko took a small pause. "She also decided on sending you a letter with her questions. She wants you to answer them honestly and will decide how to proceed from there."

"Thank god." Aomine sighed deeply. "You actually talked her into giving me a chance?"

"I won't lie, it took a lot of convincing."

"I'm sure it did. Thank you, Tetsu. Really. I know I really fucked up."

"You did. She told me what you said to her. Don't ever do that to me. Momoi is a very strong woman, you should appreciate her more."

"I know." And wasn't that what everyone told him? Coach, his therapist, his best friend. His conscience. "It's just so hard sometimes. I'm scared of how much she means to me."

"I wish you would tell her that. Knowing it by trying to interpret your actions or by hearing it are very different. Especially when you are hurting, the second is lot more important." There was a bit of childish laughter on the line. "Shiro, I am on the phone, please play a bit quieter."

"Nah, it's nice to hear. It reminds me that the world keeps on spinning and my problems are just small compared to what happens on this planet." Aomine rolled on his back. "If I write her, what do you think will happen?"

"Either she continues writing or she will want more questions answered in person. She did hint that you only told her about the hunts and not the rest. She explicitly asked me not to tell her, but she knows the rest will be worse. Before talking to you again in person, she wants to know everything, I'm sure."

"Are you okay with me telling her?" This time he at least remembered to ask.

"Frankly, no, I'm not. But it can't be stopped now. I'll expect questions from her as well. You did rip it all open with this." Kuroko sighed deeply. "It can't be helped. For once, I am happy to be on the other side of earth, but it also feels strangely detached. I wish you'd done this while I was still in Japan."

"Will you be okay?" Again, he had not thought his actions through, had not considered what he might do to other people with the stuff he did. It disgusted him how self-centered his mind worked sometimes.

Kuroko was silent for quite a while. Aomine gave him space. Sometimes answers were hard, he knew. Learning to endure silence was something he had learned from Mitobe. After about half a minute, the other answered: "You know, I always think "This is the last time". I worked through this with every one of you, with Taiga, with my mother, my counselor – every time I told myself that this was the last time. Now I'll go through it with Satsuki, it's the same thing over and over, and I'm just so tired of talking it over again and again."

"Then don't." Aomine drew his eyebrows together. "Tell her you don't want to talk this through again and to go give her questions to me. It's only fair, I dragged this up again."

"While it sounds marvelous in theory, you do tend to make things more complicated. I am sorry to say, but I do not trust you to steer her in the right direction with your answers."

"What direction?"

"To regard it as a thing of the past that is not important to me anymore." Kuroko sighed. "It happened. I learned from it. It is over. It does not impact my life anymore. It made me who I am and I like who I am. I don't want to be treated like an egg that could break."

"But you didn't want me to tell her." In the same moment he said it, he knew it had been a dumb idea.

"Because I hate what it does to people knowing this about me! Some treat me like glass, some with disdain, some like you seem to think it is okay to treat me like an object or at least something they can do whatever they want with. It's subtle changes that I just can't stand sometimes. It's bad enough to be an Omega, people treat you as subhuman, but an Omega slut?"

He should keep silent. He should just shut his fucking mouth and not aggravate Kuroko further. He shouldn't say what was on the tip of his tongue: "Isn't that how you treat yourself?"

"What?" That exclamation was full of viciousness, of unbridled anger.

"You just said I treat you like an object, not a person. I hurt you. Often even, but until

last week you never said a word. Why do you let yourself be treated like that if you resent it so much?" It was the same as with Momoi. She also did not want to be treated like that, but she let him because she knew he could be even harsher than that. It wasn't like that was okay though. It was why he wanted to change after all.

"But ... I ... what-" Kuroko drew a sharp breath. "Aomine?"

"Don't let people treat you that way. It's not okay. Just because a lot of others don't defend themselves, it's not okay to treat you like that as well. Don't let people hurt you. Call them out on their bullshit, call me out on my bullshit. Hell, call Akashi out on his, and don't tell me it's okay how he treats you. Turn around, look at your baby boy and remind yourself what you don't want him to learn or to be. If you can't defend yourself for your own peace of mind, do it for his. He should not learn that it is okay to be an asshole." He huffed. "You're much too nice and forgiving. It's good for me but it's bad for you. And one day, when I can treat you right, it will be bad for me as well, because I'll watch you forgive horrible people and that will hurt much more than it already does."

He could hear quiet sobs on the other end. Gods, it hurt his soul. Just why, why did he always hurt people, even when he tried to do good? After a deep draw of breath Kuroko said: "I'll call back tomorrow."

Momoi's letter was in his mailbox the next morning. Postal stamp and everything, so she didn't come to his house. She even wrote it on computer and printed it out, as formal as could be. He really must have hurt her deeply. He would write back by hand and bring the letter to her mailbox in person. Most of the questions were those he knew, those she had written down. She had added some about his behavior, why he had lied to her, what had made him so afraid. He answered all of them as honestly as possible.

Doctor Enjoji was right, practice made perfect. He wrote the whole letter in one go instead of throwing away draft after draft. Honesty was something instinctive, something that just was and got only worse by thinking about it. So he wrote down exactly what came to mind, only slightly adjusted in choice of words. It would take a while for all those curses to leave his thoughts.

The rest of the day was spent with sports. He was allowed to train until his ribs hurt, so he did that, showered, then trained some more. It made him pleasantly worn out when he checked his phone in wait for Kuroko's call. Same thing here actually – just some weeks ago he would have dreaded the fallout of his words last night. This time he knew they would work it out. So he was a bit surprised to find an e-mail from Kuroko:

*Dear Aomine,
you really surprised me yesterday, so I needed a bit of time to think things through. Actually, I still need more time, so I won't call today. But I wanted to thank you for your words. They really moved me in a positive way. You are right, I let people treat me horribly. It's less than before, but I still do. I need to work on that. When we meet again, I want to be someone that can get angry when mistreated. And you taught me something else I need to change. I debated with myself and with Taiga over telling you about it and he is not happy that I decided on being honest. When you told me those things yesterday, I wanted to sleep with you. I am very happy I am on the other side of the planet right now, because I fear I would do something very stupid if I was in Japan. When praised I react with sexual offers. I didn't want that to be true, but you are right, I behave like a*

*slut. It happened with you; it happened with Akashi. I am endangering my marriage with my behavior. I know this is a hard thing to ask because you like me (and thought of me as something like your partner for quite some time), but if I ever offer myself to you refuse me. Even more, call **me** out on that as my kind of bullshit, if I may use your words. I don't want to be that way. I want to be able to accept praise without feeling like I need to give something back. Especially not my body. Please protect me from myself; just like I will do my utmost to learn how to protect you from your more nasty side.*

Your best friend, Tetsu

Kapitel 17: Building bridges

His teammates played a glorious game on Saturday. Coach even allowed him to sit on the bench, talking with him while they watched the game. Due to his new view on teamwork, he was able to point out some things where they needed more training. Though it was a sad fact, his Sunday basketball group had better teamwork than their national team. He explained his current training as a point guard which their coach regarded with absolute astonishment.

"How could it be that amateur players are better trained than professionals?"

"Well, Seirin was trained by Aida Rika. She is one of the best coaches I know, no offense to you. And some of those amateurs are on our professional level, they just decided to do something else with their life. Also that ban on players that might get pregnant costs this team a lot of good players. Midorima Shintaro – as much as I hate the guy – is without question one of the best shooters in the world. He just had a daughter when he was seventeen."

"I read about him. Shame that." Coach shook his head. "But that ban is in place for a good reason."

"A fallout with Aida Riko's father who refused to abort her." He shook his head. "That cost this team a star player and a star coach. She won't ever work for us."

"Oh." Coach Saito blinked. "That legendary high-school coach is his daughter?"

"Same one." Aomine grinned. "I wouldn't be surprised if she decided on training a pure Omega team to beat us, just because."

"Omegas aren't very athletic."

"You'd be surprised." He nodded in Murasakibara's direction. "His mate is on par with most of our players and better than our current power forward." Said man played his own position right now. "My old teammate Kuroko Tetsuya helped Teiko in two of our three consecutive national championships and Seirin in their two national championships. The legendary phantom player."

"Now you're kidding me."

"Nope. Most Omegas aren't athletic, true, but those that play often have better technique and team-play than our Alphas. One or two on a team don't hurt." He grinned again, struck by sudden inspiration. "Actually, why not take our team down a notch to give them some incentive? Let me ask them to play us. Midorima, Kazu, Junpei, Teppei and Tatsu against our team. That would be one Alpha who had a child, three Betas and one Omega who recently had a child against our national team."

"And you think they might win?" The coach looked skeptical.

"Murasakibara is their only real challenge, but with two shooters they won't have a problem to work around him. Kasamatsu will probably tell you the same, he knows them."

"And you think that will motivate everyone to put more work into team-play?"

"At least it's how I learned that I really suck."

"Says the most arrogant guy I ever met." Saito nodded slowly. "Well, I wouldn't mind a bit of motivation on that account. The team is good but yes, they could be better. Everyone plays their own style. All are good but they don't really work together."

"I'll ask them tomorrow if they would play us."

Now, was drinking at a party okay or not? Was he able to stop after a few beers? His

head said yes, but could he trust his inner voice? Alcohol was his vice, he knew. Maybe he should install some precautions.

"Hey, Reo." He poked the slim man.

"What is it, handsome?" He was met with an amused smile.

"Could you go into mother-hen mode for me? If I drink too much, cut me off."

"And you'll listen?" His smile was amused, he clearly didn't believe him.

"If not, you may tell Murasakibara to make me listen to you."

"I can see you trashing the place, to be honest." Reo mustered him. "Just remember you asked me. I don't want to hear complaints in the morning."

"Scout's honor."

"You never were a scout, you bad boy." The other shook his head. "I'll give you a chance though. Atsu-chan said you became much nicer through therapy."

"It's true." Man, had he really been so bad that his teammates expected him to lash out at them for something he asked them to do? He felt like getting angry, but maybe they hadn't been so far off. He had been a jerk to them – though to his defense, some weren't exactly better on that account.

"So what exactly happened?" Reo leaned in and whispered. "Coach only told us you were hospitalized and couldn't play due to a broken rib. And suddenly Atsu-chan says something about you seeing a shrink."

"Both are true." Did he really want to tell? Damn, he had not thought about this beforehand. "I partied a bit too hard and a guy beat me up. Coach was furious and made me see a shrink, otherwise he'd throw me off the team."

"Oh." Reo's mouth turned down. "I had hoped it was something more spectacular than that. So forcing you to see a shrink actually made you more mature?"

"Well, he thought about sending all of you to see a shrink," Aomine answered with a slightly sadistic smirk.

"You're kidding!" The long-lashed lids widened. Really, how could an Omega be a problem but this guy was okay? He behaved like a walking man-trap.

"Not at all." He took a swig of his beer.

"I have seen enough shrinks for the rest of my life." Reo shook his head.

"You have?" Instead of just blurting that out, he actually tried to ask carefully. Most people were ashamed about seeing therapists after all.

"My parents weren't happy about my "shameful conduct", the feminine player spat those words out. "My father tried beating it out of me, my mother tried tears and blame, and finally they decided that only a professional could convert me."

"Conversion therapy?" He had heard about that. Alphas who wanted to abstain from male Omegas, all Omegas actually, or other sexual or gender abnormalities. As if reacting to an Omega (or any kind of human actually) was unnatural or something.

"Akashi saved me from that shit. He told me it was alright to be who and how I wanted to be, so I was able to fight my parents. They finally left the issue alone. I really don't need people to tell me I need to change, just because they can't deal with their own prejudice."

"Akashi did that?" He asked full of surprise.

"He is far from the bigoted, sheltered kid stuffed full of hate for everyone else that you would expect. But who am I telling this? You know him after all." Reo smiled indulgently.

"I know a madman that had his team members break the law to pressure them into obeying him."

"What?" Big black eyes stared at him in disbelief. "He ... no, he was nice to us. He ...

well, sometimes he threatened us with something, once he trashed us on the court to show his superiority. But he never used violence or anything that was ... well, telling us he would carve his eyes out if we didn't get our shit together was a bit over the top, but all in all he was alright."

Should he tell? No, Akashi might hear he hinted at something. They were all in this together, they would all hold their tongue. So he smiled and said: "No offense, but maybe you were easier to handle than the generation of miracles."

"Most certainly! Two of you are bad enough, four would be a horror." The other man rolled his eyes. "What's Kise doing these days?"

"Why don't you ask his best friend?" Aomine couldn't help the ironic undertone when he pointed at Kasamatsu. Best friend indeed. Kasamatsu hated his guts, had been since the day he found him fucking Kise after a game in Kaido's locker room. He could talk about honor, fraternizing and self-respect as much as he wanted, Aomine knew that look. It had been pure envy.

"And Midorima? He somehow married Takao, didn't he?" Always the gossip.

"Kazunari was adopted into their family as an equivalent of marriage. Their daughter Kikyo is well."

"I wish I had a family who'd accept my choice of partners." Reo sighed, suddenly sad.

"They are disgusted with me."

"You like men, right?" He thought so at least. Most days he tried not to think about the fact that for getting pregnant, Midorima was the one ... no, not thinking about it. It was strange. Very strange. Thinking about Reo like that was easier. "Actually, if you like that kind of thing ... how come they allowed you on the team?"

The other bit his lower lip, just realizing what he had admitted. He looked around in fear, but no one seemed to pay them any mind, before leaning in and whispering again: "I lied about that when they asked me."

"You wouldn't be the first, I bet." No, Kasamatsu must have lied as well. Except if he fucked Kise exclusively, but that would surprise him. Kise liked both active and passive sex after all.

Momoi's next letter was ten pages long, handwritten this time. She told him what she felt hearing and reading it all, her fears and wishes. Her anger, her disappointment, her sadness, shame and guilt. It was so open and emotional, it was heart-breaking. Gods, why had he hurt her like that? He cried, read that letter again and again, and cried some more.

No, she wasn't in danger. Tetsu wasn't in danger. No one was in danger, he never wanted to hurt anyone like that ever again. How could he make her believe in him? How could he make her trust him again? Even if he knew, did he deserve that trust? He wasn't sure. Gods, he wasn't sure about any of this. What was he even doing? Telling his friends that he was an asshole, that their most horrible fears had come true, and that he wanted them to stay with him anyway? In Kuroko's case he at least knew that he had already done worse.

This was about the worst thing he would ever do to Momoi. So he took a pen and began to write down a written confession, detailing anything he ever did to hurt others. The murder, the consecutive rapes, gang-rapes, offering Kuroko to Kise ... God forgive him. No human could. Seeing it blue on white like that, there were only few worse things he could do to other humans. He was despicable.

He still loved Momoi though.

"You look like a wreck," Doctor Enjoji stated. "Tell me about your week."

"Satsuki left her job and applied to university. Tetsu persuaded her to stay in mail contact with me. I apologized and she sent me her questions which I answered honestly this time. She sent me another letter, telling me about her feelings and what I did to her with ... what I did. I sent her a full account of my offenses."

"Everything? How you made Tetsu lose the child, started raping him apart from the hunts and what you did with Kise?" She seemed suspicious.

"Yes, everything. Even how I changed from wanting to protect my mother to telling myself she didn't deserve better and internally thanking my father every time he made her lose another child. That was wrong as well. It was how I started going bad and thinking that lashing out in anger and hurt was somehow okay."

"You learned a lot in such a short span of time." There was something like pride in her voice.

"Yeah, I ... I had a lot of help. I was able to tell Tetsu what I think. I mean, that he needs to treat himself better and start to get angry when people hurt him. He wrote back an e-mail and-" Could he really do that? Would it be alright? "I'd like to show it to you and ask your opinion."

"Okay." She nodded and took his phone when he offered it to her. It took a minute for her to read it. "You seem to have finally gotten through to him."

"Yeah." He smiled. "I feel good about that."

"He says in here that he reacts with sexual offers when he is thankful, and that he is unable to get angry when people mistreat him. Would you say that are his two main problems?"

"Second one more than the first, really. I have never actually seen him offer himself to anyone but me and Kagami. That's his husband, by the way."

"Does his husband treat him well in your opinion?"

"Definitely." He nodded. From all he had ever observed, Kagami was his support, his pillow, his friend and lover, his guardian as well as someone trusted Kuroko with his life. He was a true partner.

"If he never gets angry and tends to offer his body for anything positive, how can you be sure?"

"Well ... he might not get angry but he does get annoyed sometimes. Or hurt. He shows his feelings to his husband and that one is very sensitive. At least with Tetsu." Aomine hung his head. He got where she was heading. "I was sensitive once, it's why he fell in love with me. Then I closed myself off and hurt him. He stopped showing his emotions because I ignored them anyway. I taught him that screaming and crying was no use." He let out his breath. "I am the reason he does not get angry anymore. I taught him that his body is the only good thing about him and that his feelings don't matter."

"That is the bottom line, yes." His therapist nodded.

"Is there a way I can make it up to him again?" Because he wanted to, damn, he really did. Just thinking about this filled him with burning shame. How could he have been angry with Kuroko when all he was angry about were things he had caused himself? Was that why he was angry about them? This was so twisted.

"You can teach him differently. Your words and actions matter most when it comes to this. When you show him that his anger has consequences for you, that you like him for more than his body and that his feelings matter, that is atonement."

"How do I do that?"

"You stop disregarding him and start taking him seriously. He needs space now? Give

him space. He wants to talk with you about it? Invite him to do so and watch out for those small reactions you know he has instead of bulldozing over them. Search for all those destructive opinions in your head like "Omegas are whiny and needy" or "Omegas can't understand what Alphas need" or "Alphas are better than Omegas" or "Omegas love nothing but cocks" and squash them. Disrespecting Omegas, women, children, animals, that is part of our culture but that does not make it right. Especially when they are made into nothing but sexual prey for the amusement of some people that feel superior due to physical strength." She took a deep breath. "In the end it is your decision if the feeling of superiority that hurting others gives you is worth the pain you cause with it."

"I feel like shit when I hurt others." He hung his head and whispered those words.

"So you don't feel superior anymore when you see others in pain?" There was a smile on her face.

He shook his head.

"Then you learned what you had to. Well done."

"Do I have to stop this therapy now?" He straightened in shock.

"No, no. You'll most likely need some support to follow through with those convictions. But I want you to decide when you want to talk to me instead of having me decide what is good for you."

"Oh, okay." When did he want to talk to her again? "Can we continue with every week? I am sure I'll have another letter from Satsuki by next week and maybe Tetsu will call. Also I wanted to ask the coach if I might start light training with the team next week. I met up with them and some talked to me again. One guy who hated me for years actually said he liked how I was now. I apologized to him too."

"Do you think you could become friends now?" Doctor Enjoji smiled at him.

Murasakibara and him? "Maybe? He has this cute baby daughter and he invited me for dinner and cake next week. I didn't know he could bake. I am starting to like him."

They continued to talk about some team members as well as the coach and his Sunday basketball group. Had he really come this far? His therapist made him realize that he had made some friends, all by himself. Wow. For the first time he left therapy with a smile on his face.

Kapitel 18: Forgiveness

"Hey."

"Hey." Aomine smiled. That word was something Kuroko only said to him, a word he would not use with any other person. "How are you?"

"Hm ... better. Or worse. I don't know."

"You don't know?" His eyebrows drew together. "How can you not know?"

"Well, I started to get angry when people ridicule or hurt me, but that means I get angry everyday. It's exhausting. It was easier not to care."

"It was easier for me not to care about my loneliness or your pain but it wasn't good in the long run," he reminded his friend. By now, he had first-hand experience how hard changing was.

"You know, I thought America would be different. Everyone always says it's the land of freedom, but instead of just being mean, people are openly hostile. The other mothers in kindergarden don't want to talk to me and some tell their kids not to play with Shiro. He gets sick often because this is another country but the kindergardeners make it out to be my fault. If he just sneezes, they immediately send him home and tell me how irresponsible I am for bringing him in the first place, even if he was completely fine in the morning. When I go to fetch Kagami from training, his teammates openly start talking about my lack of presence and if that might be positive or negative in bed. Some call me fuckable, others think I am too plain and no one cares that I can hear them all, even worse, that Shiro can hear them all. Taiga tells them off but they don't stop. They just laugh at him. Some days I don't want to leave the house at all. I thought about keeping Shiro at home but I know kindergarden is important. But every day that goes by, convincing myself gets harder and harder."

"You are unhappy," Aomine concluded.

"Now that I allow myself to feel that, yes, I am. Maybe it is just hormones though. Pregnancy does make people emotional and needy, maybe I am just too sensitive." He did not sound like he really believed that.

"Which week are you now?"

"Thirteen, I passed the safe mark on Saturday." At least he was happy about that.

"Congratulations. So what do you think? Boy or girl?" Some other topic than unhappiness or sex was most likely safe.

"I am not sure, like I was last time, but I would prefer a girl. Kikyo and Hana are both great, I want one like them. Shiro is a lot like Taiga, I want one that is similar to me. But Alpha genes seem to be really strong, I mean, Kikyo is like Midorima and Hana is like Murasakibara."

"I think Kikyo is a great mix of Midorima and Kazu. She is intelligent and well-mannered like her father but open-minded and sympathetic like her other father. Hana is ... well, lazy in her reactions, cuddly and likes to eat, yeah, she is a lot like Murasakibara." He couldn't exactly refute that.

"Shiro is loud, full of energy and never gives up. It feels like raising Taiga all over. I want a nice, shy baby next. Though I fear it will be another loudmouth." His voice was tinted in annoyance but it was good-natured.

"Tetsu, you like your men optimistic, loud and energetic. Of course your children turn out like that. A shy one would be a wonder. Kagami might even question if it was his."

"Oh, don't you start! Your teasing about Shiro was bad enough."

Aomine just grinned but sobered up after a moment of silence to say: "Listen, if that place makes you unhappy, you are always welcome back here. I'll even accept Kagami on my team instead of mercilessly teasing him and getting on his nerve. Try your best to make that place a home, but if it doesn't work out, it's okay to come back. That's no failure."

"I'll see how this will work out. Right now I want to smash a basketball in some player's faces."

"Me too." He grinned again. "I told our coach about our Sunday matches and how great some of the players are. I got a bit angry about him saying that banning people who can get pregnant was a sensible thing. So I issued a challenge from Team Pregnant to the JBL. I wish you were here. Like this, they only have Kazu, Midorima and Himuro. Teppei and Junpei will help but having you here would secure their victory. I really want to see some of those arrogant JBL players bend a bit."

"If I wasn't pregnant right this moment, I would take the next airplane. That burning wish to throw your arrogance back into your face was what kept me alive at the beginning of high-school. Victory is indeed sweet when you triumph over arrogance. Please film that match and the reactions for me, that's exactly what I need right now."

"Will do. If you need more help, I'll even ask Midorima myself to head over to your place to beat the NBA."

Kuroko laughed and really, that was all that mattered. That laugh. Kuroko's smile had died with Aomine's depression and had only come back due to Kagami and the championship. Three years of suffering, seven deaths and all of it more or less because of him. If someone had told him how much pain he was about to cause, he would have changed so much. But he never stopped to think about the consequences, he had only been able to see himself.

"Thank you," his best friend said, "for always being there for me. And for becoming someone that I can rely on again. I missed that side of you."

"Thank you for sticking with me." He wished he was able to say something equally moving and deep, but words were not his forte. At least he seemed to be good enough now.

Dear Aomine,

thank you for your honest letter. It shocked me and to be honest, I am still shocked. I sent a few questions again, you can find them on the second page. By now, I don't wonder about the state you were in, I simply ask you to never go there again. I just wonder how Tetsu survived all that. I don't know if I would have been able to. Most of all, I feel filthy. All this time your abuse went on, I was completely oblivious. I asked you two out for ice-cream and movies and everything, and you just never told me. What was I to you? I feel betrayed. Am I that untrustworthy that neither you nor him told me anything? I can't be angry with Tetsu, he suffer enough, but I am damn angry with you. Why didn't you seek help to stop yourself? How can I trust you to tell me before anything happens again?

Dear Satsuki,

I tried to answer all your questions to the best of my ability. Regarding Tetsu's survival, he decided to answer your questions himself, though I wished he would spare himself the pain of going through it all again. I won't disrespect him ever again, so please ask him. You asked what you were to us and I can only answer for myself: an angel. You were the only thing still good in my life, someone not tainted by my parents or myself. I never told you because I would have destroyed the last thing holy to me. With therapy, I decided I

had to tell you. It was one of many reasons why I shied away from therapy, I didn't want to lose you. You are not untrustworthy, you are just the best thing that ever happened to me. Now that you know everything, I can tell you whenever I feel down again. If you ever find it in your heart to forgive me, I promise I will tell you everything from then on. I don't want to lose you. I love you. Even if I might never be able to bring myself to say that out loud, it is still true.

"Good evening, Aomine." Himuro smiled and let him in. "I hope you brought hunger with you, I fear I cooked for at least two people with the appetite of my mate."

"No problem, I could eat a horse." Due to the fact that he had neither cooked himself nor ordered much since Momoi left. Now that he was asked, he was starving.

"Great, come in. Watch out for the door frames, they are low."

He could see that. Murasakibara and him lived in one of Tokio's outer regions in a Japanese house, a fifty-square-meter building with two stories and a small fenced garden. Linens were hanging from the balcony of the upper story. It was a domestic dream for any Japanese but seemed like a shed for someone Murasakibara's size. Himuro had no problem walking around but Aomine had to lower his head for every door frame.

"Look who's here, Hana, it's your favorite mean uncle," Himuro told the baby girl who was lying on a thick blanket next to the table.

"Can you really see here from over there?" Aomine kneeled next to her, making faces at her and scratching her tummy.

"She takes things slow, so the most she does is rolling onto her side. She can't change positions yet, so it's not like I need to watch her much. It's enough to return the thrown away toys into grasping reach."

"Toys?" He eyed the plastic wrappings, wooden and plastic pieces and cloth. A lot of them weren't exactly baby toys. There was even a metal spoon and a leather bracelet. "She's learning form and textures, so I supplied her with a variety of that. I find that better than simple rubber or plastic stuff, though she likes her sparkly chew-toy." Which was filled with plastic balls that made sounds when you moved it. "I love my mate but I'd like her to build up a bit of intellect."

"Why? She might become a basketball genius just like us. It's what you call dedication." Aomine grinned and took one of the seats to see Hana and Himuro simultaneously.

"I like that word," Murasakibara supplied after suddenly turning up in the room. How had he moved that massive body so silently? "Shall I set out the dishes?"

"Please do so." Himuro turned, received a kiss and continued his cooking.

Bah, people in love. Aomine watched Hana instead who chewed on a pack of tissues. Mostly he still felt like a kid, spending his time at parties playing with other kids or babies while the icky adults did their boring talks. Just that he was supposedly an adult now and the kids he played with were his friends' kids. Reality was strange sometimes.

"Have you asked yet, Mine-chi?" Murasakibara drawled while he brought out the dishes and some things out of the refrigerator.

"Asked what? Oh, you mean the challenge? No, I haven't." He turned to Himuro. "Can you think and answer while cooking or do you need to concentrate or something?"

"No, I'm all ears." The Omega smirked over his shoulder with an haughty expression that screamed "despite you".

"I issued a challenge to my own team ... from you."

"What?" The man actually turned and let the pots be.

"Yeah, you see, the coach was speaking lowly of Omegas and people who get pregnant and it made me angry, so I told him some of you were better than our players and he should shove his prejudice ... well, I was nice, I guess. So would you play on an amateur team with Midorima, Kazunari and maybe Teppei and Junpei? Or if you know other great basketball players who have kids or are Omegas or something, them too?"

"You want us to play against our national basketball team?" Himuro asked in shock.

"Against my mate?"

"Well ... yeah." Was that mate thing a problem?

"Have you ever faced a full blast of Omega pheromones?" The other man raised his eyebrows. "If you have, can you imagine what it would be like to face a bunch of sweating Alphas, one of them your mate?"

"The sweating Alphas weren't a problem before, were they?" At least Kuroko never seemed like he had problems.

"If it's only Alphas, it's a question of concentration. But a sweating mate is hard. We noticed that after we bonded, playing together somehow worked but against each other was impossible. Whenever we got competitive, we let out pheromones that completely wrecked the other." Himuro shook his head. "I'll play, but not against my mate. He needs to stay off the team."

"I'll watch Hana-chan," said man decided.

"Then you'll win without doubt." Aomine nodded. "Murasakibara will watch Hana, I'll film the match with Kikyō and you go teach our coach a lesson."

"Thank you for your trust but I am not as sure as you." Himuro smiled though. "The Midorimas are good and both Junpei and Teppei are skilled, but we are amateurs now. I haven't touched a basketball in more than a year."

"Your technique is perfect, I can't imagine you getting worse."

"It's a skill you dislearn with time." He pointed his cooking sticks at Murasakibara.

"You'll train with me. When is the match?"

"Next week?" Aomine scratched his head.

"What!" Himuro looked aghast. "I need to retrain my skills and get the feel for four new players. How shall I do that in one week?"

"Well ..." Maybe he had been a bit rash? "As you said, I fully trust you. You're a genius after all ... in spite of us."

Murasakibara grinned. Himuro looked at them and let out a deep sigh.

Of course they won.

Aomine couldn't stop grinning. He always enjoyed the faces of those seeing Midorima shoot for the first time, followed up by Himuro feigning his opponents, Kazunari throwing balls behind his back to players he didn't even look at, as well as Teppei and Junpei breaking their enemies' spirit by run-and-gun interchanging inside- and outside-play. Especially when they began to rapidly change formations, making Teppei point-guard, Midorima a center and Kazunari a phantom player who used misdirection – not as good as Tetsu but good enough.

They crushed the JBL with 87 versus 65. That was a sound defeat. He jumped up and down in delight, camera in one hand, Kikyō in his other arm who cheered along with him, happy to be allowed to make a lot of noise. Kasamatsu shook Kazunari's hand, Reo made a comment that had Junpei blush furiously but the other three players just stared at the board in disbelief. Just like the rest of their players except for those

young enough to have actually seen the last three high-school championships in person.

"So, coach, what do you say?" Aomine turned the camcorder to the older man.

"Err, well ... that was ... I don't know what to say." He shook his head and went over to the make-up team. "I am deeply impressed. Thank you very much for coming. Would you care to explain what ... why you ... well?"

"One can train even with a baby. A pregnancy doesn't leave a huge gap, as long as the training afterwards is specific for building up muscle and skills again," Midorima stated nonchalantly, picking up his daughter who had run over. "I may have never won a championship, but we got third place in the Winter Cup even when I was four months pregnant."

"Forth place in the next one after half a year of training again, second place in our last Winter Cup," Kazu completed and leaned against his husband. "If it weren't for Akashi and Reo here, we would have won that one."

"Hah! If it weren't for Akashi, I would have won that. Kagami looked like he wanted all of us dead after I won," Aomine gloated.

"He might have-" Midorima's comment was stopped by Kazu's elbow in his ribs.

"We beat you in second year," Murasakibara said instead.

"And lost in our third because you got me pregnant," Himuro added. "It's true that losing key players right before important games is a hassle. But like with Kise who never recovered from his knee and foot injury, players might be unable to play due to various reasons. You can't hire players that never get ill or injured, so why exclude pregnancy? Teppei here spend a year on rehab and then won a championship, then spend another nine months in rehab and won a second championship. That's longer than any of our pregnancies."

"So that's why you were included in this team?" The coach looked at the broad-shouldered Beta.

"I was simply an asset." Teppei laughed kindly. "My knee has worsened again, so I quit professional basketball after that second championship. Since then, I have only been playing on Sundays."

"Why didn't you become a professional player, Junpei-chan?" Reo asked with a pout.

"It pains me to admit it but you are much better than me." The shooter distanced himself from the overly affectionate Alpha. "I became a barber."

"Have you lost your mind?" Kasamatsu exclaimed in shock. "You have nerves of steel, are a horrifyingly good clutch shooter and were a great team captain. Why shouldn't you play on this team?"

Junpei chanced a glance at the coach before answering: "Because I was told a Beta had no right to play an Alpha's sport."

"Did you really tell him that?" Their point-guard turned on his coach.

"Yeah, well, we had some try-outs and various other tests-"

"I can't imagine he failed them."

"The only thing I ever failed at was math." Junpei said while laying a hand on Kasamatsu's shoulder. "Thank you, but what is done is done. I like my shop. Being a barber isn't bad."

"Are you still filming this?" Kazu whispered next to Aomine.

"Yeah, why?"

"I'd like a copy. Your coach looks like he might pass out any second now." They shared a knowing grin. "Defeated by a barber and some moms."

Epilog: Epilogue

It was like an instinct. Maybe it was the smell. Maybe it was some kind of greater power or a hunch or whatever you'd like to call it. Anyway, the second Kagami walked into their gym, Aomine ran across the room, barely stopped in front of him and loudly demanded: "I want an one-on-one!"

"Hello to you too." The redhead blinked in surprise. "Would you let me warm up first?" "Get to it."

"Aomine Daiki!" Their coach seemed to fume while he was slow in catching up. "Give the guy a breather, won't you?"

"No, this is personal." He grinned. "Coach Saito, this is Kagami Taiga. He's exactly as good as me if he hasn't got better training at the NBA, so I demand a match for the power forward position."

"You know you'll win that, Aomine" Kagami grumbled.

"Maybe I will, maybe I won't."

"Stop right this second, I haven't approved of any matches about positions, I am the one that decides--"

"You won't be able to stop them," Kasamatsu interrupted their coach, "it's like trying to jump between beasts out for blood, you'll only get hurt. Let them fight it out. They've been starving for each other for a year."

"Ouh, that sounds scandalous," Reo piped in.

"Where's Kuro-chi?" Murasakibara asked, being the slowest to come over.

"Minding the kids." Kagami grinned, still doing stretches. "Relaxing after that horrible flight, Tsuki cried for fourteen hours. It was exhausting."

"But you're up for this?" Aomine asked impatiently.

"I play best when I haven't slept."

"Idiots, both of them." Kasamatsu shook his head.

Some other players had come over and asked their coach about the newcomer, excited about hearing there would be a trial match right away. So even though their coach was still reluctant, the other players cleared one court. Everyone abandoned their training, not heeding their coach's yelling until he gave up.

"A five point game?" Aomine asked when they finally headed onto the court.

"Who starts?"

"Ladies first." He threw the ball to Kagami.

Yes, this was it. This was life. He had energy, he had friends, he might have a girlfriend in a few weeks and his rival was back. Life was good.