

Split soul

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Kapitel 1: Prologue

In terms of strategy, having an evil alter-ego was not bad at all. People feared him. People obeyed him, afraid of his wrath if they did not. Whenever he needed a break, he could let out someone even more driven and ruthless than himself, knowing his work would be done perfectly, once he decided to go back to it. It was soothing to know you had someone at your beck and call that was even better than you when it came to emotionless execution of tasks. Or people, whatever was needed.

What it did not help with was dating. When it came to social contacts, especially romance, being a ruthless workaholic was not helpful. Even less helpful was having an even more ruthless, psychopathic alter ego. So one would be allowed to say that romance was Akashi Seijouro's underdeveloped trait. He might even be inclined to let you unscathed for saying so, seeing as it was glaringly obvious.

At least he thought so himself. The rest of the world did not seem to share his opinion. Despite not being an actor, model, singer or whatever star like Kise, the Japanese Gentlemen's Quarterly just chose him as the most wanted bachelor in Tokio (with Kise in second place). That was followed by a near impossible number of female gossip magazines writing articles about him and flooding his PR section with requests for interviews. He told his PR manager to refuse all of them but was urged to accept one as a sign of good will and a PR stunt. So his manager scheduled an appointment with the Japanese Vogue.

To be honest, this was a task that would normally go to his alter ego. But seeing as a charming, nice personality was needed that could make women swoon, he chose to do it himself. That was a decision he would later remember as the worst one since losing control to his alter ego in middle-school. Maybe his best friend Shintarou was right and there was something like karma.

Kapitel 2: Karma

Akashi held the red-haired little bundle he used to call princess, trying to suppress the urge to fling her from him. The smell was awful, no, horrifying. This was no princess, it was a monster.

»Told you so. You are the one intent on having off-spawn.« The voice in his head supplied unhelpfully.

»Do you want to be settled with this job?«

»As if you would ever give your precious little not-daughter into my hands.«

»You do not need to remind me every second of the day about my failures in regards to Kuroko.«

»It is fun to rile you up and I have nothing better to do anyway.«

Great. He was important enough that no one dared to talk back to him, so his own mind supplied the feedback. Just wonderful. »Are you at least listening to the explanation on how to change nappies? You might have to be the one to do that some day,« Akashi asked his other half.

»Forget about that. I won't even touch such an unhygienic creature. I was born to intimidate people, lead groups and generally do things you are too weak to do on your own. Changing nappies is not on my list of duties. You are the one with the lovey-dovey-touchy-feelings.«

"And you attach these again. Done. Not so bad, is it?" Kuroko smiled at him.

"The technical aspect seems simple enough."

"The first few times are icky, I admit." He received a smile. "Don't worry, you'll grow into it."

»I direly hope not.«

"Thank you for the explanation." He took over to close the myriads of buttons on Tsuki's baby suit. "How often do you have to change her?"

"Every two to three hours. That's why the powder is so important. Sometimes we leave her without a diaper for a few minutes, but really only a few. Babies get infections so easily."

"Is she sick often?" He drew his red eyebrows together in concern.

»You can't protect her from bacteria. When have you become such a worrywart?«

»How can you look at her and not worry?«

»I am a heartless bastard, you build me that way.«

"She had a cold three weeks ago. I was so worried, she was still so small back then. I wish I could lactate to give her some immunity." Kuroko picked her up and held her close to his chest.

»That's a view I'd admire. I would lick his chest if he could lactate. Better yet, I'd massage it while he sucks our cock.«

»Shut your mouth.«

»I don't exactly have one. I exist in your mind, if I may kindly remind you.«

"I know it's actually good for her to have some disease early in life but I wish I could take them from her. She's still so small." He kissed her red hair. It was much too easy to imagine that she was his. She had exactly his pinkish red color.

»Why are you telling me to shut up when you are the one thinking about ravaging him for another baby? It would be easy to get between his legs. It's easy to smell he is ready for another pregnancy. Just as easy to notice as your readiness for fucking him

senseless.«

"So, what partner do you think would suit me? What should I look for?" He asked instead, taking a step away from the Omega.

"Well, you are a nice gentleman, so I think your type would be an Omega girl you can protect but also parade around. I don't think she should be too shy, you need a strong partner. Maybe a cocky girl or boy with a good control over his or her hormonal reactions. Though I think you will choose a girl rather than a boy."

»If you ask me, being a nice gentleman is a facade you keep. If you want to be happy in a relationship, you need to be honest. You like your partners in pain. You like the feeling of might when they cry and beg during sex. You like them completely enthralled with you, telling you that their most fervent dream is to die with your cock inside of them.«

He should not like that image. He really should not. But he could feel himself shudder in anticipation, wishing he could split not only his soul but his body to penetrate someone from both ends with both parts of his soul. Someone bound up, covered with welts and gagged with his cock. He often dreamed about that, sometimes taking one-night-stands pressed against a mirror to feel as if his other half was with him and not only in his head. He hated and feared his fantasies, but his more honest self was right, it would be a bad idea to deny himself his own urges.

"I can only see you with someone standing on her own two feet, firm in life and in her wishes and preferences. Maybe someone a bit older than you." Kuroko smiled coyly. "I can even imagine you ending up with a cougar."

"And you think that would suit my image?" Akashi smiled back, letting out a hint of pheromones as a warning.

»Even your little maiden recognizes that you need someone who tolerates your sexual kinks.« Somehow his alter ego sounded smug. »He might not exactly know why but his estimate is correct. If you could triple yourself, you'd stuff all her holes.«

»I did not need that visual, thank you very much.«

»Aren't you past the point of youthful erections in public places?«

»This is my own manor.«

»With your beloved right in front of you that stars in about eighty percent of your fantasies. You could simply take him, you know?«

»I would never.«

»That's what makes you a pussy. Your father is dead. There is nothing to hold you back.«

»He has a mate I would need to kill.«

»I don't see the problem.«

They went back to the lounge room Kuroko had made into his kids' current playground. Kagami was already back, zipping through the television. He smiled at seeing his mate, taking Tsuki into his arms and playing with her while she squealed in joy.

»I would kill Tetsu with that.«

»Just fill him up with our sperm, he'll soon forget about that oaf.«

»The answer is no. I do have a concept of morality.«

»And that is why I was born. You can't survive in our world with morality.«

»That's why you still exist and haven't become a part of me.« Well, that would shut him up for a bit. Akashi enjoyed the few seconds of silence in his own head.

"When are you due to meet your new team?" He sat down to make a bit of small-talk with Kuroko and his mate.

"Tomorrow." Kagami grinned. "I can't wait to play Aomine again."

»Will he ever grow up?«

»Happy men don't grow up. It's why CEOs are never happy.« He was inclined to agree with his more sarcastic self. How was Kuroko able to stand that radiantly shining smile?

»Will we merge if we ever grow happy?«

What an uncharacteristic comment for his alter ego. He even sounded slightly thoughtful. »I thought you were sure we lost that ability.«

»Merging or being happy? Merging should not be too hard, though you would have to face your memories from an emotional perspective. Being happy seems harder, I do notice your struggles.«

»That does sound disturbingly empathic coming from you.« While he held the conversation with his alter ego, he sat down on the sofa and watched the happy couple play with their baby.

»I do not have empathy. To me, you look like a floundering child and I cannot comprehend why you would wish to have emotions. But I do know intellectually that I am a deficient split soul and complete human souls cannot function like I do. I just miss having regular sex.«

»I miss a bit more than that.« A relationship. A family. Friends. Any kind of positive social interaction really. What he watched was beautiful as well as painful. It was better than being alone, but watching happy people was lonely when you missed so much.

"Airplane!" Kagami held up his daughter who laughed loudly, steering her through the air towards her godfather. "Airplane coming in at Tokio airport."

"Landing cleared," Akashi replied and held out his arms for her. Playing. When was the last time he had played? Was he even able to?

But his little princess was yawning hugely, so he cooed her to sleep. He leaned back to lay her on his chest. It was a bit less lonely, but not enough. He wanted a partner, not a child, an equal, not only someone to care for. He needed someone to care for him. Simply owning an Omega would not be enough.

»I really won't get you to kill off Kagami, will I?«

»No, I refuse. We lost our chance with Tetsu.«

»But you do agree we'll look for a mate tomorrow? I liked Tetsu's idea to raid the kindergarten for a suitable Omega.«

»It's not a raid or a hunt, I want a mate able to care for me. I never met anyone except for Tetsu that suited those criteria.« His head answered with something like an annoyed huff. »We are looking for someone that cares for me and likes your sadism, it's not that-«

»Our sadism. Don't try to make yourself innocent. You don't like them bleeding but you like them begging and crying. Just because I am worse than you does not make you into a saint.«

The corner of his mouth twitched. Well, that was honesty. He couldn't run from the truth, from his alter ego, his own head. He would have never pressured Tetsu into oral sex himself, but yes, he liked the memories very much.

»You do know I can hear your thoughts?«

»Then I'll think about changing nappies now.<<

Kapitel 3: The first visit to a kindergarten

Akashi left the conference after refusing an invitation to lunch with a practiced smile, giving his intention to inspect the kindergarten as a reason. He had already noticed that some single men would be teased for saying so, but nobody seemed to think that he had any other intention than to appraise the value of his latest investment. He had placed the kindergarten on the fourth floor after remodeling the second and third to a spa and fitness area. Of course he had opened the kindergarten in front of cameras as a PR stunt but he had never seen it used until now.

He immediately noticed the different smell after stepping out of the elevator. The kids smelled similar to milk, some kindergarten teachers smelled pregnant, some like taken mates. None had the smell of awakening passion, not that he had imagined he would find an unbound Omega. Luckily that did not decimate his pick, he could unbound nearly all of them if he so desired. As different as the smell was the reception he got. Wherever he went, people would immediately flock to him, trying to suck up to him. Here he received a greeting and a wave from a young woman that looked up but no one really cared about him. He wasn't sure that any one of them even knew who he was.

The clock struck twelve which seemed like a magical spell. All children immediately left their play and ran in his direction which had him panicked for a second. But they steered off and went to get their lunch bags while the kindergarten teachers put the tables in the middle of the room. He went over to help but they did it with practiced ease, so he could only help with the chairs.

"Thank you very much," a very small Omega woman in her late thirties said, "will you stay for lunch?"

"Sure." He decided on the spot. Seemed like he had come at a bad time. Of course the children would have lunch now.

The horde of little feet came back, every child unpacking in well-known order. Everyone had a table set, a napkin, two other little towels, a toothbrush, toothpaste and a lunch box. The teachers oversaw the procedure, helping the smallest of them who seemed to be barely two years old. Akashi looked for a safe place and decided to stand next to the piano, wondering why the kindergarten had one. He was soon enlightened when the petite woman stepped behind it to play a short melody that silenced the children and had them look in her direction.

"Thank you for assembling so orderly, children. Today, we have a guest. This gentleman will stay for lunch. May I ask your name?" She turned to him.

"Akashi Seijuro."

She only faltered for a second, staring at him with wide eyes before turning back to the children: "Mister Akashi is a very important man, he is your parents' boss. It is due to him that we have this beautiful kindergarten. Let us all thank him."

"Thank you!" The children said in practiced unison, some of the younger ones a bit out of tune or just mouthing words.

The woman played another melody which had all the children lay down their heads on their lunch boxes. It looked like they were asleep in an instant though some seemed to fake sleep, just staring into space in boredom. The nice woman mentioned him to follow her to the windows that were a few meters farther.

"Thank you very much for visiting us, Mister Akashi. It is a honor to have you here. My

name is Kuroko Miyako. I think you are acquainted with my son." Oh, this was his mother? She was barely one and a half meters tall and had normal black hair. She was even plainer and less notable than her son, though she seemed filled with a happy spirit.

"Indeed I am. Tetsu is a good friend of mine. I am honored to meet the woman who brought up such a delightful young man." He bowed to her which made her bow deeper in return. "So how does the lunch ritual work?" He had never been to a kindergarten himself after all.

"The children now sleep for twenty minutes before we eat. After that they brush their teeth and return to play. We always have some extra lunches because sometimes the parents forget to prepare one, so if you like we can provide you with a bento."

"That would be appreciated." His eyes went to the piano. "So you use songs to structure the day?"

"And for singing and dancing together which we do daily." She looked at him with curiosity in her eyes. "Do you play?"

"Yes, I learned to play the violin and the piano." He sometimes played them to relax.

"Would you like to play a bit after lunch? I fear we aren't exactly well-taught, we just recently learned some basic songs. When it comes to classical music, we still have to rely on prerecorded music. If you have the time, of course."

"I do." He nodded with a smile. "I think this is much better than just listening to statistics and surveys on how well this new project works."

"You are a kind and graceful man, just like my son told me." Her smile was genuine, full of outright happiness. "We all read your interview and were impressed by it."

Oh. That interview. The PR gag with Vogue. The most disgustingly romantic crap he had ever read, making him out to be a gentleman looking for true love, interpreting his hints of having specific standards to be good breed and etiquette while he was simply talking about masochistic sexual kinks.

»An older women who is able to stand up to you. Have you ever thought about fucking Tetsu's mom instead of him?«

»You are disgusting.«

»Just asking.«

"They were very kind and made me out to be a much better man than I am."

"You are so modest." She pointed at the whole floor. "To give such a gift to Alphas and Omegas alike, to strengthen our future generation like this takes extraordinary dedication. You are an example for other leaders."

He had heard praise all his life but this was so honest that he felt like blushing. So this was where Kuroko got his positive attitude from. He should have known that someone as special as him would come from a special person.

»Sure about not fucking her?«

Akashi decided to ignore his alter ego and focused on Misses Kuroko instead. He asked her about the rooms, if they were missing anything, the kids and the teachers. She praised him on allowing the teachers to bring their own children and described how they had developed a system that rotated them to have another teacher than their own mother. She also described how the children lived with other mothers when their own were in heat and how they were coping with the three-week-schedule. All of it seemed well-thought through and had worked splendidly until now. A lot of teachers working here had been able to stabilize their lives. Misses Kuroko never mentioned prostitution but it seemed like some of them had been working unsafe jobs before.

After twenty minutes they went back over to the children who awoke to a song played by Misses Kuroko. One of the tables had two extra sets of which one was offered to him. His host took the other. They both sat in seiza as the tables were seized for the small children sitting on stools. They all said "Itadaikimasu" before opening their boxes. The four children at his table all seemed to have their own boxes filled with onigiris in cat or bunny form, octopus sausages, cut wraps and apples, one even had a daifuku while another held a small toy next to the food. His own box contained rice with a bear face cut out of algae, some meatballs and cherry tomatoes. Cute.

"What is that?" Misses Kuroko asked a little girl.

"A lion," she answered. Her small rice ball had a lion face made of mango and a mane made of grated carrots. It was artistic. She looked at it for a second before biting into it.

"Do you like lions?"

"I saw one at the zoo. It was really big," she said after swallowing her food. Good girl. She had perfect manners for a four-year-old.

"Did you know that our kindergarten logo is a lion? I think it was Mister Akashi's favorite animal."

"It is," he confirmed. "Lions are strong animals full of grace and beauty." It was one of those things asked in his interview. He had stated that he wanted a partner as strong as a lion and compassionate as an elephant. His alter ego had commented that he forgot to say he or she also needed to be a rabbit in bed. His reply had been that lions copulated twenty times a day and that was more than enough.

"I like wolfs." One of the boys said.

"Tigers are better!" Another one replied.

"I like cheetahs," said the girl who was eating her lion onigiri. For a four-year-old, she knew some interesting things. "They are the fastest animals on earth."

"My daddy's car is faster," the first boy said.

"What animal do you like?" Akashi asked the little girl seated to his left.

"Bunnies." She seemed to be very shy. Maybe a little Omega between all those Alpha children. Her bento box held three little bunny onigiris. She seemed reluctant to eat them but did after Misses Kuroko told her to.

The two boys were discussing cars – or rather, telling the other that their respective father had the better car without ever telling which one it was, most likely they didn't even know – and the first girl pouted for an unfathomable reason. She interrupted them both by asking him what car he had and he astounded them all by telling them that he was too young to have a driving license. Of course he owned some cars but he still had half a year before he turned twenty.

His own meal was alright. The rice was a bit dry, the meat balls were cold of course, but all in all it was not bad. Some of the teachers must be making those every morning and he could appreciate the work that went into them. It was lovely to have some hand-made lunches for kids who had none instead of buying some in the cafeteria. Just by listening to Misses Kuroko talk to the children, he could feel something inside him mending. It filled him with unbelievable sadness all the same.

"Do you not like your lunch?" The four-year-old asked him who seemed to have noticed his changing mood.

"Huh? Oh no, my lunch is great. I just thought of something complicated." He smiled at her. "Thank you for asking."

"Natsue is a delight." Misses Kuroko stroked her head. "She is Ayako's daughter. Her

mother has her week off right now.”

“Really?” He nodded. “So with whom are you living right now?” The system of placing their children in other houses while the mother was in heat was uncommon, he liked to know how well it worked.

“With Miss Teimei.” She turned and pointed at a woman one table over.

“We do not point, Natsue.” Misses Kuroko grabbed her hand and lowered it. “Those are bad manners.”

“I’m sorry, Misses Kuroko.”

“Do you always live with Miss Teimei when your mother has her week off?”

“Yes, I do.” She nodded which made all her hair fall into her face, so she had to brush it back when her head went up again. “Then I get to play with Ryou and Shinta.”

“So you like staying over at Miss Teimei’s?”

“Yes, it is fun.” She held up her hands. “Ryou is so big that he can pick me up. We went to the park and I could go sliding.” It seemed like she saw it as something like vacation. He only vaguely remembered his own mother but he did not think he would have been able to part from her at so young an age.

“I also know a Ryou that is bigger than me. He works as a model and singer.”

“Ryou’s singing is horrible. He tried to sing a lullaby once. He was bad.” She mercilessly told him.

Well, he couldn’t really say that Ryou had a good voice, he was simply popular. But he shouldn’t openly say that. So he asked instead: “Can you sing?”

“I always sing with my mama.” She had a big smile. “My mama is a good singer.”

Hm, what to say? He opted for: “Misses Kuroko asked me to play the piano. Do you like piano music?”

“Yes!” She nearly jumped from her stool in joy. “Play kuckaku!”

“The song is called cockatoo, Natsue.” Misses Kuroko shook her head but had to smile.

“Mister Akashi will play some of the music that we sometimes play on the recorder. Adult music.”

“That is boring.” Her lips turned down.

“We’ll see about that.” Challenge accepted. He would find a song she liked.

»Are you wooing four-year-olds now? You have some strange tastes.«

»Shut up.«

»I just wanted to remind you that we are here for finding a mate and not for playing with these little monsters.«

»They are cute.«

»They are unnecessary for our quest.«

»Some of them are children of the Omegas working here. If I take a mate here, I’ll also get at least one child that way. I need to like both.«

»Again: You are not fucking the child.«

»Not everything is about sex, we talked about that.«

»I hate it when we are not productive.«

»Then go to sleep.«

Misses Kuroko had begun to play a song that was for brushing teeth. They had four little sinks. Two teachers oversaw the process while the song was played four times until every child had clean teeth. The children cleaned up their utensils while the teachers brushed their teeth (Akashi had to promise the children he would brush his teeth later as he had no toothbrush on him). It was followed by another song that had every child get a cushion while the teachers cleared away the tables and stools. They sat down on the cushions where the tables had been before.

"Today, Mister Akashi will play a few songs for us. Say thank you."

"Thank you!" They said again, this time a bit more in unison.

Oh well, this was it. Let's see what he remembered. He liked Chopin, Vivaldi, Bach and Mozart as well as Beethoven. Bach was a bit dry for children but the others would do. Or maybe even an Eastern classical like Dvóřak or Tschaikowski. While he still thought, his fingers already played "Für Elise" as every child knew it. Playing piano was something that happened completely on auto-pilot. He noticed that two keys were slightly out of tune, he would need to send a tuner. When the song ended, his trance was broken by some furious clapping. His little audience seemed impressed, they didn't even need to be told to clap, they did so on their own. He felt his cheeks redden. He had completely forgotten about the children.

"Wow." Misses Kuroko and the other teachers clapped as well. "My son told me you are very talented."

"Thank you very much." He lowered his head, looking at the kids. "So what would you like next? Something as lively or something a bit slower?"

"Lively!" Natsue answered, not star-struck like a lot of the others. "That song was like a flock of birds."

He had to smile. So another bird song. He would take Tschaikowski.

Kapitel 4: Love of his life

Well, he had certainly wooed some three- and four-year-olds, but his alter ego was right, that hadn't been his goal. There were three other Omega mothers beside Misses Kuroko, two of them young mothers recently left by their Alphas who had not really lived through hardship. They did not feel like they had hidden depths. The last was nearly forty years old and while he could see himself dating an older woman, that was too old. He did promise to visit again though. They had three other kindergarten teachers on staff, two having their heat right now and one on vacation. Maybe they were some better mating material.

He enjoyed having Kuroko at his mansion and loved to come home to him. He could even ignore his obnoxious husband, though it was hard to ignore the fact that Kuroko slept in his bed. So it was mostly a feeling of sadness when they left for their now home after their furniture had finally arrived and been installed by Kagami (which had left Kuroko alone at his mansion for three whole days). On the other hand, he would not miss his alter egos comments about all the ways he could mess Kuroko up. He hated the fact that his own head had produced such a sick creature, but it served him well when there was no Omega around.

»No pity for your intended? It will most likely be an Omega I can boss around.«

»I don't think I want you out around her.«

»But you so enjoy the memories I create.«

»If it weren't for you, I might still have a chance with Kuroko.«

»If you would let me out, you would not only have a chance, you would have him for yourself.«

»That's not how humans function.«

»That is exactly how humans function, Seijuro.«

»Don't say my name with his voice.«

»Oh? You don't like the fact that your father is living in your own head?«

»Do you like the fact that I hate you from the bottom of my heart?«

»Seijuro, you need to be much more honest with yourself. You don't hate me. You simply hate yourself. I am you. You are me. You are nothing more than your father with some flaws he could not beat out of you.«

»I am more than that.«

»Yes, of course, that's why you have more friends and better relationships than your father. Everyone knows you are a much better human.« The voice was dripping with sarcasm.

»They shun me because they fear you.« He felt his own voice growing weak.

»I am you. You are me. We are one soul. They fear us. It's only right that they do because we are absolute.«

»We aren't absolute, we are batshit crazy.«

»Yes, but they don't know that. Even Kuroko would leave you if he knew. You need a mate that can live with both of us. You need someone that's even further broken than you are.«

»No, I need someone that loves me. I don't want someone that stays because they are scared or forced.«

»You won't ever be able to keep someone like that. You said it yourself, we are batshit crazy. Who would ever want to stay with something like you?«

»I can be a gentleman,« he replied weakly.

»Yes, you can lie to them. Lie to make them love you. Live a lie, see if that makes you happy. And when you snap again because you don't want this life anymore, I'll be there and get us Kuroko.«

He felt like crying. He drank instead. Good thing his father had left him his extensive wine cellar. He drank to the whisper in his own head telling him that he was weak. Nothing but a flawed copy.

"It's so nice to have you again, sir." Misses Kuroko curtsied, smiling at him as openly as a schoolgirl would. He remembered Kuroko telling him that he had grown up without a father but there was a ring on her finger. Was she married now? Did she find a good mate?

»Maybe she'll have other children. You could raise your perfect partner. It would explain why you are wooing four-year-olds, practicing for fucking up Kuroko's younger siblings.« Just ignore it. The whole search for a partner was a disaster with this bastard in his head. »Bastard? You bore me. What does that make you?« It just never shut up. Why would he never shut up? Since killing their father, his alter ego had started to torment him. »Someone needs to keep you in line. I killed your keeper, so I guess I have to take the job now.«

»I do not need a copy of my father in my head.«

»Yes, you did. Without me, this body would have died at five years old. Remember being beaten and caged up like an animal? Without me, you never would have gotten out of there.«

»I would have followed mom and my baby brother. Maybe that would have been better than this life.«

»He would have taken a new wife and sired more children. Having this body alive was the only way to protect others. You sacrificed yourself to save others from him, gave this body to me to make us survive. You have no one but yourself to blame.«

»I do not need you to remind me.«

»I do. If you didn't hate me, we might merge. That would turn you into him instead of keeping him caged up as me. Isn't that the purpose of keeping me alive?«

Yes, it was. If he were to merge, what would be the outcome? Someone who might enslave Kuroko. He could never stop hating his alter ego, hate himself. His alter ego knew that. Imitating his father was the best way to remind him, but it was damn hard. "-and the piano was tuned, thank you very much for sending someone. I tried to learn some songs but they still aren't fluent. Would you mind playing a bit more today? The children have been looking forward to your visit."

"Of course I will. I love to play. Did the children have any wishes for songs they wanted to hear?"

"I think, they ... Ayako, may I introduce Akashi Seijuro?" Misses Kuroko had turned to an older woman that had stepped up to them.

"It is an honor to meet you." She bent down low, a very formal greeting he only used to see in people raised in families like Shintarou's. On second look, she wasn't exactly old, maybe thirty, but she had older looking eyes, her face lined with wrinkles speaking of worry and hardship. The eyes were beautiful though, steely gray with a tinge of blue. Her hair was black though. An average Omega, not premium ware like Kuroko.

"A pleasure." He bowed as well.

"Mister Akashi asked if the kids had some request for songs to play. If I remember

correctly, Natsue had some ideas?" Misses Kuroko asked her colleague.

"She has been enchanted by Mozart, so I think she would be happy to hear it. She makes me sing *Lacrimosa* to her every evening."

He blinked in surprise, unable to hide his reaction. Not only was it very difficult to sing, it was part of the *Requiem*, a song Mozart had written for the funeral of his father. He liked it very much, but it seemed strange to sing it to a child.

"Would you sing for us, Ayako? You have a beautiful voice." Misses Kuroko smiled broadly. Most likely she had no idea what she was asking.

"It's a very sad song, I don't know if it is a good idea to sing that. It might scare some of the children," Ayako argued.

"I'd like to hear your singing though." Did he really just say that? True, it had been years since he had heard the song live, but he should have himself better in check. This was a kindergarten, not his playground.

»Why not? You build it. You employ everyone here. It's a beautiful song, even if it has some creepy passages. We listened to it endlessly while you cried your eyes out in our head.«

"Oh, well." Her cheeks sported a faint blush. "I guess we can try?"

"Great! I'll gather the children." Misses Kuroko clapped her hands.

"Wait, I need to warm up my voice!" Ayako held the other woman back.

Akashi smirked. So she was the real deal. The song was difficult, it wasn't something you just sang on the spot. He was really, really looking forward to this. Misses Kuroko introduced him to the other two kindergarten teachers he hadn't met before. One seemed to be the mother of three kids, thrown away by her Alpha because she became too expensive, the other one another ex-prostitute who seemed to be the only one here without children. Or maybe she had some but had not been able to keep them, he wasn't about to ask.

Ayako came back from the staff room if he remembered the outline of this floor correctly. Her cheeks were slightly reddened, making her look a lot younger. Excited, that was most likely the word. Misses Kuroko had the children get their cushions and gather before the piano. Natsue was jumping up and down, seemingly being able to recognize her mother's posture as something that she would like.

"Children, do you remember Mister Akashi? He has come to visit again. He will give another of his great performances. Let's all thank him." He got a chorus again. "Ayako-sensei has given her consent to sing to his playing. Let's thank her as well."

The chorus made the Omega woman smile. She wasn't shy by any means, but she seemed unused to praise. He didn't know what to make of her yet. How had she survived until this day? How come she only had a four-year-old daughter when he was already around thirty? Omega tended to have at least four kids around that age.

He looked up at her, waited for her nod – it seemed she wasn't unused to these kind of performances – and began to play. First the introductory passage before tuning down, giving her a signal to get ready. Except for breathing in, she breathed out, changing her stance. She was a professional, he was sure. Why was a professional singer working as a kindergarten teacher?

The first note hit him full force. A deep, full-bodied voice, weaving notes into melodies, changing from Alt to Soprano. She was good, really good. The first passage was the hardest but she mastered it, making him shudder when she dropped for the "us" of "reus".

»Lacrima dies illa qua resurget ex favilla iudicandus homo reus. Full of tears shall be the day where the dead shall rise from the ashes to be judged for their lives and judge

the living. The Last Judgment.«

»It still makes me shiver, no matter how often I hear it sung.« He got lost in the music, his fingers dancing over the keys. He wished he could sing. He wished he had his violin. This song was much more beautiful played on a violin.

Ayako finished with a full-blown Amen, a beautiful sound. It was quiet after that, everyone wide-eyed and stunned. Natsue was the first to clap. No wonder, she heard this every night, just like her mother had just told him.

For a moment, he was envious of that four-year-old. His hands hit the keys to make him fall back into music, make him forget. After a moment, he recognized the music as Beethoven's moonlight sonata. A slow, but moving piece, carefully crafted and able to calm about anyone down.

Ayako sat with her daughter, taking her into her arms. She closed her eyes to enjoy the music more. She was raised with classical music and singing, that was clear. How had she ended up here? He wanted to know. She was neither beautiful nor extraordinary, but when had that ever stopped him? Kuroko had been a nobody before they met as well. He knew how to recognize shining talent and she had it. He wanted her to stand in an opera hall, bringing the roof down with that voice. He wanted to sit next to her, play the tune she sang to.

Gods, this was more of a calling than even basketball. Playing instruments had been beaten into him but he had never needed the incentive. After losing his mother, his brother, his basketball, music had been his only harbor. How had he forgotten while he played basketball again? He played Chopin's nocturnes next, a song both quiet and uplifting. He saw some of the children drift off to sleep but that was alright. He could wake them up with the next. Both this and the last song had been about the beauty of the night after all.

»You are happy when you play.«

»I can even make you shut up when I play.«

»When you play, the world is alright. I like being a boss, but wouldn't it be more helpful if you were able to spend your time like this?«

»I can't live off this.«

»I am pretty sure you can. If not, I can make us enough money in a day to last us a month.«

»What kind of CEO just decides to quit and become a professional pianist?«

»One who knows what's good for him.« There was something like a smile in his alter ego's voice. »Or I could be a CEO part-time and you play in the evenings. It's not like this company is hard to manage. We could cut some of those stupid meetings out of our schedule.«

»Sounds marvelous.« For once, he liked what his alter ego was suggesting. »I can't believe how much I missed this.«

»Drowning yourself in something that isn't harmful? Drugs and alcohol make us lose control, food would ruin our body in the long run.«

»I don't think I am able to enjoy food. I eat because I must. It is a necessity.«

»You are sounding like me right now.« His alter ego seemed smug about that.

He simply changed the nice and lulling song to Vivaldi's "La Stravaganza", the second part, waking everyone in the process and wishing again that he had his violin on hand. Some songs just needed the gentle touch of a string instrument. He was also a lot faster, keeping up on piano was damn hard. It shut his alter ego right up. Coordinating his hands took up his whole mind.

His applause was thunderous. As thunderous as small children could clap, he guessed.

So he wasn't boring after all. Great. He turned on his audience with a smile and asked if anyone had a wish. It was Ayako who held up her hand after no child seemed to know the name of the song they wanted.

Was he to act like a teacher now? He did, so she spoke: "Can you play Fantasie Impromptu by Chopin?"

"Yes, that was one of my favorites when I was small." When his hands had not been large enough to play it himself. He had listened to his mother playing him the song, it had been beautiful. Gods, he missed her, even now. He turned back to the keys and played.

Kapitel 5: Having a date

Her name was Chiho. If he had been able to smile smugly at his alter ego, he would have done so. A young, single Omega without children, a history of prostitution, what could be more fitting? And best above all, he did not have to woo her, she came to him to compliment his playing and openly asked him for a date. There had never been anyone courageous enough to ask him out, not even in middle or high-school. Even that social oaf Shintarou had been asked out but girls had never dared when it came to him. They seemed to know that he was not allowed to date. Or maybe they really did not think him worth their while, who knew.

Now he had an actual, real date! It was sad to note that it was the first one in his life. What did you do on a date? He knew that young people liked to go to the cinema or eat ice-cream. He had never been to a cinema before. Or were they too old for that? He knew that older people went out to dinner or had tea. Did he have to choose something? Or would she? She had asked him out after all.

»She had you stammer like a fool in surprise.«

»It wasn't that bad!«

»Don't worry, she most likely thinks it's cute. You are an innocent fairy-tale prince after all, a rich, beautiful young man playing fancy music. A dreamer who does not know the ways of love.«

»Are you quoting that horrifying interview?«

»It was amusing to read.«

Did women actually believe such crap? Would she expect him to show up with a bouquet of roses? He could do that. It would be romantic and very fairy-tale-style. But was that the image he wanted to project? He was far from a prince. It felt like being torn asunder. Who should he be? What should he be? He sat down at his piano to play some Bach, that always helped him to find an answer to difficult questions. Piano Tiles G Minor flowed from his fingers while he thought. A song about strive, insecurity and searching.

Who did he want to be? A fairy-tale prince? A sex-crazed monster who got off on hurting his partners? A closet-pervert behind a pretty smile? A lunatic? He was all of them at once. How much should he tell? How much could he tell? Every word he said could be turned against him. This was an actual date. People knew that meant something. It wasn't like one of his one-night-stands where no one cared what his partner said afterwards. If anyone found out about this, she might be hunted down by the press, asked about every small detail. What persona should he chose? What would be honest enough without endangering him?

»How much of a lie can you live before you get disgusted with yourself?«

»A damn lot, I live with you in my head. You disgust me.«

»Always such a charmer.«

How could he find an answer?

Be yourself. Thank you very much, internet, that was the most unhelpful advice one could get. His sense of self seemed rather distorted if he might say so himself. The most truest was how he interacted with Kuroko and to be honest, that was a pretty facade rather than his self. Maybe his truest was actually how he interacted with Aomine. He could barely stand the guy, not only due to Kuroko's feelings for him.

What made perfectly good men like Kuroko fall for assholes like Aomine? Should he behave like him to find someone like Kuroko? Because sometimes he saw himself in the tanned man. The desire to just say "Fuck you all", not to care about life, that was something he craved for whenever everyone wanted him for themselves. But Aomine had something he never would have: a brilliant smile.

His own core was pure darkness. A foul, slimy thing he had created, a persona of hate and ridicule. He was Aomine's opposite. While the other was darkness wrapped around light, he himself was light wrapped around darkness. He had a pleasant outer self but behind and beyond was a scary being. Was that his true self? In that case, should he hide it or let it run wild for a bit? Would it be right to show his date a pleasant facade while he hid behind pretty words and romantic gestures?

When it came to roses, he thought about their stems wrapped around slim, white arms and legs, burying their thorns in unmarked skin. He would love to run his finger down a beautifully painted cheek, erasing the make-up that hid the purple bruises he had left on it before. He wanted to fuck someone from behind and adore the mess he had made out of the skin on their backs. He wanted to carve his initials in one ass cheek, opening their behind like a ripe peach.

Love was pain. He remembered those lessons all too well. Pride would get you killed, humility was weakness. A touch could never be earned, any good words would only spoil. The only way to know he was loved was to feel the cramps in his fingers, the burn of his eyes and the inviting blankness when his body gave up on him. He wasn't worthy of any other kind of love. His alter ego was right, who was he kidding? He was a faulty product, unable to love in any other way than by pain. His partner should know, should be allowed a chance to leave. When his mother had died, he had sworn to himself to never force anyone in a relationship. His alter ego had broken that promise, had used force on Kuroko, no matter how well it was packed into pretty words. He did not want to be like that.

»You'd rather openly and honestly rape someone?«

»I find that less despicable than letting someone think it was their own choice, having no one but themselves to blame. You messed Kuroko up pretty badly. He still thinks that all of it was his own choice.«

»So you'll tell your date about your split soul, your history of sexual abuse and all those crimes you haven't been apprehended for yet?«

No, he could not. He could never tell that. He would ... if he ever told, it would be to the police. Let someone else be a judge of his character, let them lock him in. Forever, most likely. Were dissociative personality disordered humans able to answer for their crimes? His alter ego had committed all of them but he had born him, so who was to blame? Was it even a question? In the end, they were both one human. »I wish I could clean my plate and start anew.«

»You'll never erase your history. It's in your genes, in these walls, in your blood. Your family has killed for a hundred years and build this legacy on corpses. The blood of your aunts and uncles, greataunts and greatuncles, of your mother and brother stain these walls and halls. You could always end it all, burn this house of sin and your body, rotten soul and all.«

»You would never let me.«

»I would let you burn yourself and live on.«

»There is no living on once this body is dead.«

»I'd let you burn your soul, not this body.«

Akashi shook his head. No tune could represent the agony he felt sometimes. There

was no way he could ever be honest, could ever show someone the monster that he was. He had no other choice but to lie to his date. If he did, he could go full force anyway.

He would be her prince. He would get her roses.

»I never met a women as superficial and shallow-brained as her.«

»Then how about shutting up and letting me talk to her?«

Sometimes it was strange when you only heard but could not see someone to know exactly what that person was doing in that moment. His alter ego rolled his eyes and shook his head. It was a gesture he would never show when he was in charge of their body but he did it in their head. He also only said about five percent of the things he thought which made him a frighteningly silent character.

Akashi was charming. He knew how to smile, how to speak, how to compliment to make women swoon. It was how he had gotten sweets, toys, free time, anything he wanted for himself. He was the persona needed in all things that had nothing to do with his father. Work was the only thing that needed both of them. But to be honest, his alter ego's running commentary was more enjoyable than his date. Chiho was boring as hell, there seemed to be nothing but make-up, clothes and social status on her mind. In the end it became a classical dinner date, even though he already knew he would have to pay.

»She asked you out because you're filthy rich. Ask her about classical music, she'll tell you that she likes Shakespeare best.«

"You said you liked my playing. Which song did you like the most?"

"Oh, erm ... that last one. The others were so melancholic but the last one was fun." She smiled broadly.

"You do dislike melancholic things?" He tried his best to smile back but his facial muscles seemed overused at this point. She had such a big, fake smile.

"No, those things make me depressed. I like light and funny things. Do you like comedies?" She only gave him a second to think about a possible answer. "I like those new series, they're called "Emily and Clarke", do you know them?"

"I don't watch television, I mostly work." Well, wasn't he the boring one? At least she had hobbies.

"So what do you do in your spare time?"

He talked with his alter ego and lamented his life. Well. He opted for another answer:

"I play basketball with my friends."

"You were quite known, right? Captain of the Generation of Miracles, I read about that in a magazine. So it's true you are friends with Kise Ryouta?" God, there she went again. Of course she would like the fact that he knew celebrities.

»Please tell her he likes it up the ass.«

"Ryouta is a friend of mine, yes. He quit basketball after his injury, so I haven't seen him for ... actually, we last saw each other at a friend's wedding. I wouldn't say we are close."

»Face it, you don't have any close friends. I find it questionable to say you have friends other than Shintarou.«

»Kuroko is a friend.«

»Kuroko is someone you would like to fuck, that's not a definition of friendship. You humor him because you desire him and feel guilty.«

"I've been a fan of him for years!" Oh yes, he was talking to Chiho. It was too easy to tune her out. "He's playing in "Sky of love", I love those series. His singing and acting

is superb. Have you ever been to a set with him?"

"I don't really have an interest in those things", he said while thinking: »It's more than that. I won't deny I would like to have him as a mate but that's because of his character. I like him as a person. The fact that I find him very fuckable is an added bonus.«

"I would love to see him live one day. But who am I to gush about other guys when I am here with you? I must be boring you. Is there any actress or singer you like?"

"I liked Ayako's singing. She has a good voice."

»That was mean. Do you want to make her cry? I am the mean one here, don't take my place.«

"Well, yes, it's nice." Chiho did not really seem enthusiastic. "But she doesn't do anything with it. She could be an opera singer, it's a shame."

"Maybe she'll be one someday. What did you want to do with your life?" Maybe she would finally open up to him.

"Oh, I'm perfectly happy with my job. Being a kindergarten teacher is nice."

"What do you like about it?" Please, could she give him anything to work with?

"Everything really. The other women are nice, the kids are cute and the rooms are gorgeous. The color scheme is pleasant to look at."

»Especially the way her bright pink nail polish reflects the lightning.« Sarcasm, his alter ego's eternal vice.

"So you like children? How come you don't have any?" Was there anything else than her perfect, flawless persona full of smiles and laughter? She had been a prostitute for ten years.

»That's one flawless fake persona saying to another.«

"Oh, I think it's too early for children. I think children need two stable parents and I haven't found an Alpha I am able to trust in that role yet. Just look at all my co-workers! All of them were left by their Alphas. It's a shame really. The world needs more gentlemen like you." She leaned forward, maybe she wanted to force intimacy on him. Or maybe she thought she was giving him a compliment.

»Because the world clearly needs more of us.« An astute observation.

"You think too highly of me", Akashi told her as well.

"Oh, you are too polite. A woman would be mad not to want to be your mate, I can't believe you are still single." She giggled in that high-pitched way girls liked to use to give off a younger feeling. Maybe she thought it was cute.

»Maybe she thinks the reason you don't have a partner is because you are a pedophile.«

"I haven't met the right one yet", he said instead.

"Yes, you said so in your interview. I found that endearing, it's just what I thought. Everyone seems to mate in high-school these days. I think it's worthwhile to look for the right partner, one you can spend your whole life with." She had a dreamy voice.

»One who won't grow bored of feeding a leech.«

"What do you like in a partner?" Akashi asked instead of just assuming.

"Well, trust, as I said. I need to be able to rely on my partner, to know we are the ones for each other. Class is another thing I like, someone who knows how to dress, how to express himself, someone aware of his social standing."

»She has some nice words for it, I admit. She knows how to compliment men of high social standing.« His alter ego noted.

»I think she should have stayed a prostitute. I am beginning to understand why she became a kindergarten teacher. She wanted to use her job as a dating tool to marry

someone as high up in the company as possible.«

»She got you, that´s quite a catch. I guess you should be wary of women approaching you on their own, they seem to be into money.«

»Should we end this?«

»That´s the spirit.«

They had that conversation in lieu of a waiter approaching them while Chiho prattled on about her likes and dislikes. He was asked if they would like dessert, to which he asked for the bill before the woman opposite him could come up with other wishes or idea.

“You do not have a sweet tooth?” She asked him after the waiter had left.

»Only a woman as insipid as her would not come up with the idea that it might have something to do with her.«

“I try to stay in shape.”

“That is commendable.” She inclined her head. “With such delicacies at your disposal I imagine it ain´t always easy.”

“There is always exercise, I own more than one fitness studio after all.”

“I like men with high expectations for themselves.” Her eyes followed his hand handing a black credit card to their waiter who had returned. “It is the way to success.”

»Did she learn that from her clients? She sounds like a business class prostitute, a private one, not one of those business party bitches.«

“What do you like?” Oh, she actually faked an interest in him. Until now she had mostly talked about herself.

“I like humble Omegas. Innocent ones that sometimes blush and can be flustered, ones whose innocence is unbroken by the blows they have been dealt in life. Naughty in bed, but demure in life. Omegas with unused talents and hidden depths.”

“Was that an invitation, Mister Akashi?” She sent him a coy smile.

»It is a mystery to me how she got that from your words. You need to be less subtle in refusing her.«

»Should I refuse the sex?«

»She could be a clingy mess if you take her. Give her to me, I´ll make sure she doesn´t give us trouble afterwards. You may see that as compensation to me for the time we wasted here.«

»Done.<<

Kapitel 6: The lioness

Chiho did not look at him when he visited the kindergarten a week later. The children seemed happy to see him though, slowly getting used to having him visit. Natsue asked to be picked up which he gladly did. The little lion – he had dubbed her so himself – told him about the new musicians she had listened to with her mother, having developed a fondness of Chopin after his last little concert. Coming from her it was alright to hear she liked Fantasia impromptu best, she was a ball of sunshine after all, not fake like Chiho. She also expressed a interest in learning the piano, so he sat down with her and began to explain some basics and taught her the first notes of Flohwalzer. Her hands were not large enough to manage the keys they needed, so she played the left hand with both of hers while he played the right. They actually got what would have been the first page until lunch. She wanted him to sit with her again, so he did that. As Misses Kuroko had her week off, they sat with one of the teachers he hadn't talked to before. She sent him some not very subtle glances somewhere between interested and fearful.

So Chiho had talked. Or they had seen the marks left on her. He had expected her to stay silent, but she wasn't one to be ashamed, so he should have expected it. Well, it wasn't a surprise but it sure was a nuisance. It would be harder to court another kindergarten teachers, though if one agreed to be courted, at least they knew a bit better what they were getting into.

A boy called Shinosuke told the other how his father had brought back a Carrera track from his latest business trip, how fast the cars were but how sometimes they were so fast that they flew off the track. Especially the last part seemed to be fun for him, he had tried it out again and again to see how far he could let the cars fly. The other kids listened silently while the teacher asked question and scolded the boy when his accounts became a bit too violent.

What had he played with when he was four years old? He remembered his violin lessons, they had started at three years old, as well as his English, Spanish and French lessons. He had mastered three languages before he learned to write at five years old. Piano started at seven, as well as Mandarin. It was also the year he got Yukimaru and began to ride. After that his hobbies had been basketball, Shogi and riding. But what he done before that? He did not have other pets, he could not remember a favorite board game and while he had been playing basketball since he was five years old, it had been a scary experience when the ball still so big compared to him. So what had he done before his seventh birthday? He remembered doing puzzles and Sudoku and a lot of those toys build to make your toddler smarter. He did not remember something he actually liked. But he remembered wanting to have a cat after he had found one in the garden once. He never saw it again. He asked the children if they had pets to which two told him about theirs.

Of course Natsue wanted to have a cheetah. It seemed her mother had told her cheetahs were big animals, so she needed to be big as well if she wanted one. Smart woman. Maybe he should get himself a real lion, he was big after all. And he had enough land for a pack of lions, hunting ground inclusive. It would be fun to train them. Natsue was just telling him how she often dreamed about curling up next to a cheetah and being warmed by it in winter.

When lunch neared it's end, she was the one asking if he would play again, so he

asked her for her new favorites. Instead of Chopin, she asked if he knew the music to "O mio babbino caro". He had to admit that while he knew the song, he could not play it by heart. He could however try to download the sheet music on his smartphone and have it run in time to the song. It only made her say: "Oh, then that one and the other one mama always sings. Mama?"

Ayako turned around at the other table and nodded at her.

"What is that other song you always sing? That English one?"

"It's called "A mother's prayer", dear. Were you talking about songs?"

"I was telling Mister Akashi about my song wishes."

"You want me to sing today?" Her mother seemed a bit taken aback.

"Yes, please?" Natsue smiled up at her.

"Well ... I guess I'll warm up my voice after lunch then."

While they talked, Akashi had downloaded and scrolled through the sheet music, noting that it would sound a lot better played on violin. Good thing he brought his Stradivari today. He would need to tune it before he played it though.

"Mister Akashi, you don't happen to be able to sing as well?", Ayako asked him suddenly.

"Err, well, I took some singing lessons as a child, yes." He wasn't an Opera singer but he was alright as far as he was concerned.

"The second song Natsue asked for is actually a duet, I would be honored if you sang it with me."

"Well ... in that case, I would like to join your vocal warm-up. I haven't sang since my voice broke, I leave it to your ears to tell me if I should try myself at singing." He could possibly make a fool of himself. "I'd also like to listen to a recorded version first. You sing some pretty hard songs, so I don't know if I am able to keep up."

She nodded and turned back to her table which seemed to conclude the conversation. The children began to brush their teeth (he had even remembered to bring a toothbrush, so that Natsue wouldn't nag at him again) and clean up their tables. Misses Teimei played the teeth brushing song to order them. He really liked those rituals by now, even found himself humming the simple melody sometimes. After rearranging the tables, he followed Ayako to a separate room that he remembered as a staff room in the construction plans.

With the closing of the door, the atmosphere changed, her whole body becoming high-strung. He turned around, silently regarding her until she said: "As head of this kindergarten, the other teachers wanted me to ask you some questions."

"Then please do so." He kept his voice free of emotion, making it a cold and calculated one that was a warning in itself.

She did not seem to like her position, fidgeting and avoiding his eyes. Still she took a deep breath and said: "The teachers would like to know why you continue to come to this kindergarten. It is not as if you are unwelcome, you own it after all, but seeing the marks on Chiho, they ... we began questioning your motives."

»That was rather straightforward for an Omega. What about her? Isn't she the type you like?«

»You want me to answer this question with asking her out? Do you have any social tact?«

»No, I think we established that already.«

He said instead: "There are various reasons why I come here, it's not one alone. One reason is that I wanted to know how this idea worked out and I did not trust anyone to give me a fitting impression because that person would either be on the side of

people despising Omegas or one that liked the idea of this kindergarten for one reason or another, either way contorting their opinion. Another reason is that I am very lonely because there is nothing but work in my life, so my good friend Kuroko Tetsuya advised me to visit his mother and ask her for advice. The third reason is that I found I rather like playing instruments for the children."

"Well ..." Ayako looked rather surprised, searching his face for the truth. "Then why did you hurt Chiho like that?"

"Look, I don't know what she told you exactly. She asked me out for a date, I consented. I found that I had no romantic interest in her and told her so. She wanted to sleep with me anyway. I told her what she would have to expect from that and she consented again. All without any kinds of persuasion or pheromones, I hope you noticed that I completely tone them down here. If she told you I forced her in any way, then I have to admit I would not know when or how." He sighed with a sliver of annoyance. "I would normally tell you to mind your own business but I am rather fond of this place, so I'd like to clear this up. What are the other teachers afraid of?"

Ayako looked down but balled her fists. He knew that gesture from Kuroko, it was when one's protective instincts warred with their submissive instincts. His alter ego would have used pheromones or intimidation now. He decided to take a seat instead. It made Ayako look up in surprise before a slight smile graced her lips.

"They were afraid you would use this place as your hunting ground, like some other Alphas have. We just want to have a safe place to work. It's actually a problem that any Alpha can just strut in here and throw their pheromones around. I mean no offense, you never did that, but others aren't as courteous. If you as our employer proved to be someone who did that, we would completely lose trust in this place, so ... we wanted to believe in you. We want to keep believing in you."

»She sure knows how to stroke someone's ego.«

»Not mine. I think that's very sad.«

»Sob.«

"I opened this place because the public opinion of Omegas is grotesque."

»Just like your own«, his alter ego calmly reminded him.

"I found that a lot of Omegas are not what public opinion makes them out to be, but rather have unique talents that should be shared. Especially when it comes to child-rearing, having two Alpha parents seems to be a disadvantage. It was part of my calculation that some Alphas, as well as some Omegas, would use this place as dating grounds. If that endangers people in any way, I would like us to develop restrictions that ensure the safety of everyone involved."

"Thank you." Ayako closed her eyes, her voice full of emotion. It seemed like she was close to tearing up.

»I have to admit, you are smooth when it comes to women«, his alter ego complimented him.

She finally sat down opposite him and took a few deep breaths to get herself under control. It seemed like she did not want to cry in front of him, something he would appreciate as well. It had been years since he ever saw anyone crying and he did not have the slightest idea how to console someone.

"I'll ask the others to come up with some ideas for that discussion", she finally said after half a minute. "I am sorry to have confronted you like that, I just noticed that I asked my employer about his sexual preferences and suspected him of preying on his employees. I am terribly sorry for my rudeness. I am prepared to face consequences for that." She lowered her head, a picture of demureness.

"Lionesses protect their cups, I get that principle. I am not offended. I just hope this is hereby cleared and I won't have to face any further suspicions on that ground." Maybe he should try dating her. His alter ego was right, she wasn't too bad a choice. Definitely more than a bit older and by now she knew a bit of what he was into.

"No, don't worry. I'll also speak with Chiho. I had a feeling her account wasn't truthful and I am inclined to believe you more than her. I am just not sure why she omitted or lied about things." Her dark eyes sent him an imploring look.

"Well, my impression is that she took this job exactly to look for a mate. She was rather obvious about the fact that she wanted an Alpha that would faithfully support her, caring more about his status and money than his character. That was the reason why I ended that date before we even got to dessert."

"Oh." Ayako's face fell. "Yes, that actually explains a lot. She gave off a strange feeling from the start, so that was the reason ... thank you for sharing that, I know I am asking some rather personal questions."

"Say, did I personally name you head of this kindergarten? You seem to be quite a good choice." He smiled full of pride.

»You know you did, you abysmal liar.«

»I did not lie and if I do, I am not abysmal.«

»Arrogant prick.«

»You're worse.«

»Always.« His alter ego actually sounded smug.

During that slight interaction, Ayako was blushing furiously, stammered something nonsensical and finally thanked him. It was kind of cute. After a moment, she tried to change the topic by talking about singing and warming up voices and if he had any specific techniques he liked best or if he wanted to share in hers or warm up by himself or- he had to interrupt her or she would have continued to blabber on. First of all, he still had to decide if he really wanted to do this, so he got out his phone.

Had he actually agreed to sing? Well, the hard part was hers, certainly, but could he time his voice without any preparation beforehand after only hearing the song twice? She would sing the part sung by both alone, but it would still leave him with some lines at the beginning and in the reprise. In the reprise he would just have to repeat her lines but in the beginning, he would have to give hers. She wrote them down for him, promising to give him cues when to start. And all that while he played a song he had never played before. So much for relaxed playing.

They started with that, so he would get it over with, everything afterwards would be a piece of cake. So he played violin to the sheet music scrolling in his phone by itself, singing at her cues, trying not to make a complete fool of himself. It wasn't exactly perfect, but hopefully good enough. Natsue liked it alright, loudly applauding her mother who smiled sheepishly and thanked him deeply. She sang "O mio babbino caro" next as by her daughter's request while he played piano. His only regret was that he could not play piano and violin at the same time, her voice required the whole set of instruments. She was magnificent, even better than last time.

To be honest, he was truly envious of Natsue by now, he wanted to hear that singing every night as well. It was Ayako this time that asked the kids for songs they wanted to hear. Natsue had some more songs that seemed to be in her mother's repertoire, other kids wanted some children's songs. He held up his hands as well which made Natsue point at him. Her mother chided her for that before asking him if he had any wishes. He asked her for "Nessun dorma", an aria from Puccini's opera Turandot. She

simply nodded, took his phone to get the lyrics right and waited for him to ready his violin, fully trusting him to know the music by heart. He did of course, it was one of his favorite songs.

»Do you try to make her understand you by the songs you make her sing? This one is about a man who wins a cruel princess by solving her riddles and gives her false hope of not having to marry him if the king can find out his name until dawn. The king and princess order the whole city to stay awake and find out the name, otherwise they will kill them all come morning. So not only does the man get his princess, he also breaks her pride and has the previous monarch kill his subjects, so that those will see their new ruler as benevolent. It's the story of Rumpelstiltskin, just a hundred times worse.«

»This Rumpelstiltskin is intelligent – so he wins.«

»You are as repugnant as that creature.«

»Just as prince Kalaf. His aria is beautiful though. She sings it with so much passion.«

»You should play the Devil's Trill Sonata next. It's a beautiful song as well – first played by the devil himself to charm a mortal into submission.«

»You have some great ideas sometimes.«

So he did. His audience was bewitched.

Kapitel 7: How to score a date

How do you ask out a woman? Of course, he could simply ask her in front of everyone but that might be compromising her position and force her into an answer she might not choose otherwise. So maybe he should ask her after work? But she would leave with the other teachers and honestly, he did have to work sometimes. Would it be alright to write her a letter? He was her employer, he knew her address. Was that using exclusive information for personal gain? Maybe he should just give her the letter. Or smuggle it into her purse. Or give it to Natsue to give to her mother.

Yeah, maybe that was the most appropriate. He could tell Natsue about a secret letter in her lunch bag to give to her mother after work. We would write one and smuggle it into Natsue's bag the next time he visited the kindergarten. Now he would only need to write a letter that expressed his interest, did not sound too formal or forceful and made it clear that whatever happened would not change anything between them on a professional level. How did you write such a letter?

The internet was no help this time. Shintaro would also not be helpful, he did not even need to call for that. Maybe he should ask Kuroko. He might actually be helpful in this kind of situation. But did he want Kuroko to know about this? Would it be strange to ask someone you were in love with how to woo another? Most likely it was, but Kuroko had been the one to suggest something like this. He should just do it and stop overthinking.

"Akashi, what a pleasure." It actually sounded sincere. "How are you?"

"Fine, well, normal rather. Thank you for asking. How is your new home?" Had it only been three weeks since they left his place? Even now, he sometimes thought he heard Tsuki gurgle or laugh or cry.

"Infinitely better than what we had in America. I am so glad to be back home. I actually befriended Himuro; Hana and Tsuki like each other." Kuroko was nearly bubbling in happiness, an very unknown state. He had always been shy and silent, nothing but a shadow, but this man sounded positively gleaming.

"I am glad to hear. Are people in general treating you better?"

"Not those on the street, but the team is nice and it's so good to see all my friends again." It sounded carefree, so it was most likely alright. "And why is everything normal with you? My mom told me that you visited the kindergarten twice. She was gushing about how handsome you are and how well you play the piano."

"Yes, she is a very nice person." So Kuroko also knew about the date. "A teacher asked me out but she seemed to be after my money, so we did not meet again."

"I am sad to hear so. There are Omegas like that, it's a shame." His friend did not seem surprised. "Just how some Alphas aren't exactly gentleman." Was he insinuating something?

"She accused me of that, yes. She even tried to make this into a sexual harassment case. Her immediate supervisor had a word with her, it seems it can be solved without having to fire her." Akashi did not even give an edge. Did Kuroko believe he would abuse people?

>He would be right in that assumption.< His alter ego supplied.

>You did that to her.<

>You let me. You enjoyed watching me.<

"Really? I can't imagine anyone would believe her." Kuroko's voice held more ice than

pity. So he did not believe him.

"The press would. They would love a scandal such as this." Which was why he had people working for him in most of their offices since that Vogue incident. He would not ever let them write something like that about him again.

"That is true." The other's voice lost its edge. So maybe he finally believed him. Kuroko had grown cheeky with the years, a real handful for an Omega. Oh, he would love to break that defiant spirit, like reigning in a stubborn horse.

"So I thought about asking this supervisor out for dinner. I do not want to sound too forceful, I want her to know rejecting the offer is completely alright. So do you have any idea how, when and where I should ask her out? I thought about a letter to give to her daughter that would later give it to her."

"How old is said daughter?" Yes, Kuroko was convinced, he seemed to be fully concentrating on this.

"She is four years old."

"I fear she won't be able to hold on to something this important longer than a few seconds. So if you don't want to ask her out publicly, that way most likely won't work."

"Really? She seemed like she had a rather well-developed self-control."

"She is still four years old, Akashi. She was not raised like you. That's not how normal four-year-olds work." He could imagine the other man shaking his head in exasperation. "A letter might be a good idea though. You don't want her to say yes due to your pheromones and even suppressed as they are, they are formidable."

"Oh?" What was this now?

"You are growing older, so your pheromones grow more potent. At some point you won't need movement to bring people to their knees, your body alone will be enough. Right now it's a subtle influence but your aura and your pheromones make people want to kneel before you. I always wanted to but recently even Kagami has been affected as well."

>So he wants to kneel before us? That can certainly be arranged.< The visual his alter ego sent him nearly made Akashi groan. Damn it. That was not what he needed right now.

"You could do something romantic like sending her a bouquet of flowers with your letter in it."

"Do you think it would be presumptuous to send it to her home? I know her address but that is because I am her employer. I did not want to remind her of that."

"It still seems like the best solution to me." There was something like a smile accompanying Kuroko's voice, a slight tilt to his voice. "Do you need help writing such a letter?"

"That would be appreciated. Can I send you a draft via mail?"

"Of course. But don't forget to write it by hand when you sent it to her. Hand-written letters have a lot more impact and you have a beautiful handwriting."

He knew. He regularly won calligraphy competitions after all. Except for that one basketball game, there was nothing he ever lost at. Be it piano, violin, calligraphy, shogi or riding. Just like his alter ego never made a wrong investment, having even the risky ones pay out in the end. Excellence in all. It was branded into his brain, his skin, his bones. He would not choose an excellent mate though. He wanted someone with flaws just like him, someone alive and full of cheek. A free, untamed spirit that could not be beaten down.

>Someone you can beat down as often as you like.<

>Someone who will stand up again and not take my shit.<

>Your mother got killed for that.<

>I don't plan on killing my mate.<

>We'll see about that.<

"I am so glad to hear you having an interest in someone. Dating will do you a lot of good, you always seem so lonely. I can't imagine living in that mansion all by myself. It would feel haunted to me." The other man's voice was full of fondness though.

>It is haunted. The monster is all too real though.< His alter ego let out a chilling laugh.

"It is time, I guess. You seem happy in your marriage, so it is time to set my sights on someone else", Akashi said instead.

Kuroko softly laughed and said: "As if you would have waited for me when there are millions of Omegas vying for you."

"Yes, I was joking, of course." Not at all, but who cared about that? "You were right, older women seem to be my type."

"I would not have been the right one for you. I was too young and no one would ever accept a male by your side."

"I would have made them accept it." He nearly growled. He shouldn't. Calm, Akashi. Kuroko would not be his. "Anyway, they will now have to accept a woman over ten years my senior and a child not by my blood. Natsue is bright, you know? Maybe she'll be interested in this company. I don't plan to force my children into this like I was forced to, but I can imagine her to be interested."

"Do you like her or her mother best?" Kuroko joked.

>Who knows. We'll find out once she is twelve or so. If there is one vice we truly do not have, it is a pedophilic interest. I questioned you often enough on that, nothing came up. If after all this time no dot connected, we don't seem to have it.<

>I could have told you that beforehand.<

>I don't trust you on that, you lie to yourself too often.<

"Natsue is a curious, bright child. Her mother is a soft-spoken woman with an iron will and a still untrained talent for leadership. With a bit more self-confidence, she'll be an unstoppable force. She is fierce, protective and oh so talented."

"I never imagined you able to swoon over someone like that." Kuroko gave a soft laugh. "I wish Kagami had the ability to talk about me like that. She is a lucky woman."

>You could have had that, you unthankful vixen.< His alter ego spat.

>You were the one to mess him up. If not for you, this might have taken another turn.<

>If not for me, we would have not made it this long.<

>That as well. It is not like I don't acknowledge it. Still, having him as a secret lover would have been a better way than to call hunts on him.<

>Everyone would have smelled us on him.<

>And why not? How often have you lied father in the face? I might not be able to but you would have been able to tell him that Kuroko was nothing but a toy to unleash our stress onto. With how you treated him, he was anyway.<

>But he smelled of Aomine. That guy was a perfect scapegoat. So easy to break, easy to manipulate. He still thinks it was him that nearly broke Kuroko.<

>He got more violent than even you anticipated.<

>I fully expected him to choke Kuroko to death at some point. I wanted him to. If anything, he wasn't violent enough. My plan needed him to fully lose it, so Kuroko would completely be ours. His misguided love for that fool was annoying. Even that

killing move on the baby was not enough to break Kuroko off his infatuation.<
>Intervening before the hit connected might have been a better idea at that point.<
>Sometimes you know better afterwards. It is no use regretting it now. You will only win Kuroko with a lot of deceit now, might not even then. Let us concentrate on your singing bird.<

All the while he exchanged some further pleasantries with Kuroko before ending the call. He had a letter to write. One Omega might have escaped him, yes. He would not let the new one go as easily. He was in full control after all. With his alter ego and him interacting, he was finally absolute after all.

He trusted Ayako's integrity enough to write his personal phone number into the letter. So he was not surprised to receive a call two days later from an unknown number. Expecting a flustered woman on the other end, he greeted: "Good evening, this is Akashi Seijuro."

"Ah, good evening." Yes, his estimation was correct, she spoke with a shy, insecure voice. "Erm, this is Ayako, I hope I am not disturbing?"

"Not at all, I hoped you would call." He lowered his voice a bit. Slightly, not too obviously seductive. It sounded intimate without being immediately noticed.

"Oh." He could imagine the blush spreading on her cheeks. A lovely view. "Well, here I am, I guess ... thank you for the lovely flowers."

"I thought an amaryllis would suit you." It meant beauty and elegance after all.

"Thank you for the compliment then. I wondered if you knew ... well, I should not have, I guess. A lot of men would not have bothered to actually think about the meaning." She seemed pleased, he could hear that.

"I am not most men."

"Certainly not." She giggled lightly. "Why me? Of all the women in this world, why me?" Her voice sounded baffled.

"Dignity, elegance, a modest spirit, an unknown strength hidden inside you, a character with deep, meaningful emotions, beauty, a fair mind, the ability to raise a lovely daughter and that's only from the top of my head. I am sure there are a lot more if you give me a moment to prepare an answer." Not that he had not prepared. He knew she would ask. It was part of her character to ask, to be skeptic.

"Every woman would love to hear those words." She sighed. "I was betrayed by them once though, so please excuse my distrust."

"If I wanted a woman that would fall for me from a bit of poetry, I would have chosen someone my own age or younger. It's not as if it would be hard for me to seduce someone. The standards I have do minimize my choices though. Honestly, you are only the second person I have ever been interested in."

"And the first one rejected you?" She sounded astonished.

"Yes." Not that he should go into any detail. "One of the standards is that I want my partner to be an equal. So the possibility of being rejected is not even small."

"I am not your equal in any way." She actually laughed about that.

"Mentally. I don't need someone leading a multi-billion yen company, I want someone that could." And he fully trusted his eyes to judge people in that regard.

"I could never-"

"You just don't know it yet." He smiled coldly. "Please believe me when I say you could."

"Oh." She was silent for a long moment. "This is not a prank?"

"Who do you see me making bets with?" Shintaro? Good joke.

"Sorry, that was stupid, I just ... I am very surprised about all of this. If you really mean this, I fear you are grossly overestimating me. I am going to disappoint you at some point." She already sounded sorry about that.

"If that happens, I only have myself to blame. Don't worry. At this point, I am asking you for a date, not to elope with me."

She laughed freely, finally letting a bit of her anxiety go and asking: "I am getting rather ahead of myself, am I not?"

"Would you accompany me to dinner?" It seemed a good point for that question.

"Yeah, sure, I'd love to. So when do you have time?"

"I'll make time if I do not have it." Why did people always believe him unable to? "How about Saturday?"

"I'll ask Misses Kuroko to look after Natsue. Where and when?" She finally sounded a bit excited.

"Well, is there a place you always wanted to go?" She might have some ideas after all and he was actually interested in them.

"Uhm ... yeah ... well, there was ... uhm, I mean, just if you like to-"

"Spill it, I want to know." He had to smile over her stumbling words.

"I was working as a singer for some time, mostly for hotels. There was this one which had a great view over Tokio-"

"Teppanyaki Akasaka in Minato?" He liked them and the view was indeed great. Or maybe she meant Kozue in Shinjuku, that was good as well.

"Oh, no, the Brise Verte in Minato. I thought you might like French food." It sounded like she was biting her lip. "I heard about that other one but I've never been there. They are obviously out of my league."

"The Brise Verte has a nice view but their food is actually not that great. I'll take you though, it's nice to have dreams." He tried not to sound condescending. "If you do allows me a second date, we can go to my favorite French cuisine restaurant, so you'll taste the difference."

"It sounds like a plan." It was no problem to hear the broad smile she must be wearing right now. "If you do not get a table, we can go to another place though. They are normally booked tightly, as far as I know."

"It might sound pretty arrogant but I always get a table, no matter where I want to go. Shall I pick you up somewhere? It is a place to wear a dress to after all."

"You plan on doing that whole rich-gentleman-with-limousine-routine, right?" She asked cockily.

"I could take a helicopter if you liked that better." He joked back.

"Somehow I do not doubt you at all." Again she let out a melodic laugh. "Please don't take a helicopter, you would disturb my neighbors. As you seem to already know my address, it would be very nice to pick me up from here."

"How about seven?"

"Sounds lovely." She bit her lip again. "Thank you so much for this. I haven't been on a date for ... I don't think I have ever been on a date, actually." What a shame. Her Alpha must have been an idiot.

"I should have told Chiho no, then you would have been my first date as well. I was simply interested in how dating works. In hindsight that was a very shallow reason to go on a date."

"You obviously learned your lesson." She let out a slightly shaky breath. "See you on Saturday?"

"Thank you for indulging me."

“Thank you for being the perfect gentleman.” She ended the call.

A gentleman? He thought he had been rather ... well, un-gentlemanly. She brought out a very honest side of him. Had he just made jokes about being a rich asshole? The lack of a pleasant persona surprised him. Was that what it meant to find a real partner? Someone you could be honest with?

Kapitel 8: Honesty

>Are you planning on telling her about us?,< his alter ego asked in alarm.

>Maybe. Not on the first date, but who knows? I don't think I want to lie to her.<

>And you think she won't run in fear? You are a lunatic, barely keeping it together. Is that really what you plan on telling her?<

>Maybe not with those exact words.< Maybe something a bit less offensive or scary or ... maybe not at all. It might come up, it might not. If it fit the conversation, he might mention it.

>How does "By the way, I am a complete mental fuck-up" fit into any conversation?< Did his alter ego have to be so graphic?

>There are worse kinds of insanity than only arguing with a psychopathic killer with the voice of your father in your head.< Did that sound as bad as he thought? Maybe he should rephrase that.

>Do you sometimes listen to your own thoughts? Because I have to and I can tell you, some of them are very crazy.< His alter ego seemed to think the same about his choice of words. >You are a nice mask made up of hot air. You change depending on the moment, the mood and the requirements.<

>Am not. I am the core personality-<

>That's what you tell yourself. As always, I don't believe you.< Sometimes it was exasperating to talk to his alter ego who degraded about everything he said.

>Well, do you hear any other voices than ours in this head?< He asked acidly.

>No. But I haven't heard yours for more than two years at a time once. So I know that other personalities can decide to stay silent.< There was an ominous moment of silence. >We might not be the only ones in this head.< His alter ego wasn't serious, was he?

>Are you doing this to rile me up? Because this isn't funny in any way-<

>Akashi or whatever you like to call yourself, think for a second. Compare the memories that you have with those that I have. What is missing?< His alter ego was surprisingly serious about this, even changing his voice to something that did not resemble their father that much.

Their memories? His alter ego stored about anything to do with their father, all the business parts, his second half of middle-school and his first year of high-school while he himself remembered all social interactions. There were the maids and servants, debate club, his friendship with Shintaro, his school time except for the part that his alter ego held-

>Yes, yes. What are we missing?< His alter ego asked impatiently.

>I don't know, are we missing something?<

>How about everything before our eighth birthday? We know we learned languages, played instruments, had a mother and a brother and learned to hate our father. But do you have any of those memories?<

>Well, no. But isn't that normal?<

>My detailed memories begin at age five. Yours begin at age eight. Maybe it's normal not to remember what happened before the fifth year of life, but who holds the memories of the time I wasn't outside and you weren't there yet? Sorry to disillusion you but I do remember your birth, this body was eight at the time. So you aren't the core.<

Akashi stared at the wall, seeing something else entirely. He saw all those children greeting him, smiling happily, asking him to play with them. He remembered as if it was yesterday. Could it be that those were really his first memories? >Then who am I?<

>Our social face. The one charming other people, interacting with the outside world as long as it is not business-related. That's my part. I am also the one who had those long dinners with our father, who discussed investments and future ventures. But who took over when those dinners ended? Do you remember even one evening after a dinner with father?<

>Well ... no?< Could it be? Could there be someone else? >What would that person remember?<

>Whatever split us in the first place. We read those books together. Split personalities-<

>Are a result of extreme stress, mostly abuse, mostly sexual abuse-<

>Before the age of five.< His alter ego ended his sentence after being interrupted.

>Neither you nor I remember any abuse.<

>So you think there is a third personality?< He began to tremble. He did not want that to be true.

>Every time I answer that question, you forget this conversation seconds later. I want you to remember this. I am tired of telling you this over and over again.<

"Sir? Someone from the company called." A butler told him from the door, holding a mobile phone in one hand.

Everything got dark, sinking into the nothingness, sinking into the deep well of his head. He was unneeded. He went to sleep.

He opened his eyes to Ayako's blinding smile. She wore a beautiful light pink dress and had done up her hair. He smiled in response, sure that he had just jumped to Saturday and had come to get her from her apartment. He checked his watch to be sure.

"I seem to be on time." Double-checking was always better.

"Of course you are. Now lend me an arm, so I don't break my feet on these." She put on her beige high-heels adorned with bows made of glass crystals. Wow. It weren't exactly glass shoes but something pretty close.

"You look stunning." Which was honest again, she did. He said that sentence often enough without actually thinking so, but this time he meant it. He offered his arm while she concentrated on walking.

So he had missed five days. It had been a while since he had lost that much time. He had done so for a few business trips but it had always been willingly. Had his alter ego taken control from him? He had not thought that possible. Might there actually be someone who decided whom of them was outside? Was there a core personality managing both of them while he was nothing but an alter ego himself?

"That's a nice car." Ayako offered at the sight of his limousine. "I must sound really silly to you."

"Not at all. I like seeing your pleased expression."

"Try delighted. It's not an everyday occurrence that a man like you asks someone out. Especially me. Do you drive in that car everyday?" She got in while he held the door open.

"Not at all. This is for official business and guests. I have some more modest cars. They were my father's. I plan on buying myself one when I get my license." Maybe a Smart

or Mini or something like it. Or a sports car, maybe a Cabrio.

"So, is this like one from the movies? Does it have mini-bar and such?"

With a chuckle, he began to show her some of the car's extras which included a mini-bar. It held some soft-drinks as well as champagne in a can which she wanted to try. It reddened her cheeks and made her giggle. It was cute, though he made a mental note to watch out for her. She seemed to have a rather low tolerance for alcohol.

They arrived at the restaurant while she was telling a story about getting drunk with a colleague at a hotel bar once which got her fired. It seemed to be the only time she wasn't fired for being an Omega. Strangely, that seemed to make it into a fond memory. He wasn't sure he understood but he could relate to the frustration of getting fired for something you had no control over.

Their waitress recognized her, greeting her like an old friend. They chatted all the way to their table. Ayako inquired after a cook and another waiter she knew and was pleased to hear that the cook was still working here and on shift tonight. She immediately ordered a steak, telling him how great that man was when it came to grilling or cooking meat. He decided to trust her judgment and let her order for him as well, so he ended up with honeyed filet baked with plums. He inquired after some dry red wine and was immediately interrupted by his date: "You're only nineteen!"

Well ... there were many answers to choose from. Should he ascertain dominance or allow her interference? Should he laugh and take it as a joke? Should he thank her for her concern? He felt his mouth move while he was still unsure what would come out of it: "I still have a higher alcohol tolerance than you do. You're not getting any more alcohol tonight."

Oh, well ... so he could be childish. That was new.

"And you haven't reached legal drinking age. It's juice for both of us." She decided with a stern voice.

"As my diva commands." He rolled his eyes. Okay. So where exactly did his smooth gentleman facade go? He would like to order it back. "So what am I to order? Plum juice?"

She had the gall to poke out her tongue at him.

"It might also go well with the bitterness of a Ginger Ale or a Tonic Water. What would your Sommelière advise on?" He smirked up at their waiter.

"Err ... should I get him?" The poor girl asked with something akin to fear on her face.

"He is joking with you, Anzu, relax." Ayako sent her a reassuring smile. How was it that she was not afraid of him? Any other women would have already given in and apologized. No one angered an Akashi, everybody knew that. Everyone except for this cheeky thing in front of him that seemed to know when to stay her ground and when to humbly accept his direction. "We'll take a bottle of still water. Or do you like sparkling more?"

"Still water is fine. I'll also take a freshly pressed orange juice." He loved juice after all. He knew that Ayako knew because whenever they had leftover apple juice packages at the kindergarten, he drank them.

Their waitress took an unsure step back from their table before scurrying off.

"I think we scared her away." Akashi said with amusement in his voice.

"She is an archetypal Omega, always obedient and nice, taking abuse without complaint. The reason why she is still employed here is that she sleeps with the manager. I refused to, it's why I was fired."

"Isn't it painful to be reminded of such things?" His eyebrows drew together.

"Not really, it's more like an everyday occurrence. You get work until an Alpha or Beta

wants to sleep with you, you refuse, then you either get fired immediately or you quit because everyone starts treating you like dirt once the rumor gets out that you got the job by sleeping with someone. Because why else would an Omega be able to get a job? The most steady job I ever had was half a year as a cleaning lady at night, because I was alone in the building. At least until my boss wanted to check on my work one evening and I called the police on him."

"I guess his definition of "checking" did not fit yours."

"Not when he wants to check if my underwear suits my cleaning rag." She snorted. "It actually reassured me that you did not fire Chiho, even though she made quite a mess. I get now how she had to resort to prostitution with her attitude."

"She shouldn't have to. Let's imagine for a second that I had actually sexually abused her. To be honest, it was what one of my best friends believed immediately after I told him about it all. I still don't know what to think of that. Is it abuse when you tell someone what you want to do and they say yes, believing that you made a joke or something?"

"It's only a crime when you don't stop when they finally say no, I think."

"She never did, she only said afterwards that it was against her will. To you, not to me, mind you." He leaned back and crossed his arms. "I had my lawyer look into this. It seems that when someone is young and you are their employer or some other authoritative figure, keeping silent is enough to count it as rape. But she specifically said yes. And of course it only counts for Alphas and Betas, Omegas are free for the hunt, as always." He scoffed at that. "I still find it morally wrong. But when she said yes and never indicated she might not like it?"

"Forget it. You seem to be more decent than most Alphas I have met. If she does not believe you, it's her own fault in my opinion. We are living in a world where Alphas are legally allowed to rape Omegas to some degree and as far as I understood the situation, you were far from that line."

>I always stay on this side of the line. What we did with Kuroko was legal as well.<

>Still wrong.<

>You get off on what you call wrong quite often.<

Ayako sighed. He tried to concentrate on her but for once, it seemed hard. His alter ego assaulted him with pictures of him fucking Chiho, alternated with some of Kuroko. He really couldn't say what his face must have looked like but he was sure he wasn't smiling reassuringly like he wanted to.

"Okay, this is a horrible topic for a first date, but you look like hell." Ayako leaned forwards. "What did you do to her?"

"I tied her up." Some. It had only been leather handcuffs. "I did handle her a bit roughly but she said she liked that. It's why she had some handprints on her." Whenever he changed her position, he just drew her there or picked her up or rolled her around. "I slapped her, mostly her ass, never her face. She moaned in pleasure, so I thought she liked that." Had he been too hard? I did leave marks. "We did it multiple times, anal, vaginal, oral, all of them. I asked between every one of them if she wanted another round." One time she had gotten him off encased by her breasts, that had been hot. It had been before he had used the handcuffs. "I may have had a bit of a bad attitude, sometimes I say some nasty things in bed." His alter ego had called her a sperm-loving cunt, that might have been a bit much. "Honestly, I think the worst might have been when I slapped her with my cock once, but she only looked at me with blown pupils. I never expected her to say something like this afterwards."

"It might just have been a bit too many abnormal tastes at once." Ayako waited for a

moment while their waitress brought some bread and their water before continuing. "Maybe everything by itself was okay, the package was just overwhelming." She looked at her glass of water for a moment. "Did you really explain all of that beforehand?"

"I might have skipped the dirty talk and the cock-slapping. I told her about the rest though. I did not even seriously tie her up, it was just some handcuffs."

"What kind of sex are you used to if all of that is just some child's play to you?" Her eyebrows drew together.

"Uhm ..." If he wanted to insert the "By the way, I am a mental fuck-up", this might have been the right moment. "I was involved in some Omega hunts in my youth. I did not participate but I watched them."

"Those Alpha-gang-rape-hunts with Omegas in heat?" She drew herself up, taking a deep breath.

"Yeah, some of those." He hung his head. "I should have stopped them, I know that now." Rather, he should never have started them. He had gotten off on the thought and the visual though.

"But a crying and screaming Omega still stimulates you?" Her voice was like ice.

"Well ... I like consensual sex more. Consensual crying is okay. I do not want to rape someone." He wasn't his father. He wasn't his grandfather. He did not want to be another Akashi people had to fear. "I am an Alpha. I get off on crying and begging like any other Alpha. But I find the thought of rape very off-putting."

"Then why did you not stop those hunts?" Her voice was full of mistrust.

"Because the Omega said he wanted it." Because his alter ego had made him want it. He had messed so much with his head that he actually believed it had been his own choice. "I did not label it as rape back then. I know better now. The boy was under-aged and easily swayed."

"Was he pressured into it by an Alpha?"

"Yes." Him. Using Aomine as bait.

"That's despicable." She shook her head. "I hope someone ended it."

"The Omega himself." By leaving school and looking for a mate. He should have saved him before Kuroko had to do something like that. He should have put a stop to it when Aomine went out of control. "I should have done it."

"Yes, you should have. How old were you?" She still looked at him through narrowed eye-lids.

"Fifteen." He sighed. "But age isn't an excuse."

"Well, it explains why your sense of "normal" is messed up." A big sigh left her lips.

"Normal is when you woo someone with a few dates, kiss them tenderly and have your first time in the dark while giggling about your awkwardness."

"Somehow, I can't imagine your first time to be that way. I also never had sex that way." He replied mildly annoyed. That did not sound normal to him, it sounded like a kitsch-romance.

"Well, true, most Omegas don't have a first time like that." She took a sip of water and looked away. "My first time was rape as well."

"I'm sorry." He lowered his voice. "I should not have brought that up." He was an idiot. If her first time had been full of happiness, he would not have been interested in her. But that was no reason to remind her like that.

"It was a typical case of an Omega going into heat in the middle of nowhere. My later husband found and raped me. He did take responsibility afterwards though."

"You were married?" He looked at her hands but could not find a ring. Not even the

signs of wearing a ring for a long time. Was he Natsue's father? If he was, they must have been married longer than ten years.

"Yes." She twitched in her seat, clearly uncomfortable. "I divorced him four years ago."

"Before Natsue's birth?" Had she known that she was pregnant? Why was Natsue her only child? Maybe her husband had been infertile and she had had an affair?

"Yes." She drew in a deep breath, finally deciding to tell him the truth. "When I found out that my daughter was pregnant with Natsue after my husband raped her."

Kapitel 9: Trust

Akashi blinked in stunned silence. Well. Yes. So he had known that Ayako might not have had the best life, she gave off that vibe. She seemed strong, unconventional, but still easily breakable. She looked like someone who stood again after being hurt deeply. Finding out that your husband had raped and impregnated your daughter might do that to you. So Natsue was actually her granddaughter. Ayako was thirty years old. She had been at a marriageable age when she presented as an Omega, so she must have been sixteen. Natsue was four years old. So her daughter had been ... ten?

"I hope he is in prison for that."

Ayako let out a dry laugh, her voice full of bitterness when she said: "The judge said getting half of his money and aliments was more than I should expect. The fact that he had raped our daughter was only enough to allow me to divorce him at all."

"You´re not serious." Akashi could not decide on an emotion to inject his voice with, so he stayed with monotonous.

"He actually challenged me to parental rights over Natsue after our daughter killed herself." Ayako´s voice broke at the end of the sentence. "Claiming that it was my fault that Mitsuki jumped from a bridge."

"He did not get any rights, did he?" And here he thought that nothing could shock him anymore. He really was a fool. This was a world where Omega rights were spare.

"No, he did not." Ayako had closed her eyes, breathing deeply in and out to keep her emotions in check. "But he stopped paying aliments. I have been working odd jobs since then. Singing, cleaning, washing dishes, whatever I could get."

"Mitsuki was your only child?" Akashi took her hand, unsure if he was welcome to.

"You really know how to poke a wound." She shook her head, her voice sounding teary. "They removed my womb after having Mitsuki because I was losing too much blood."

Oh. Not good. So she was sterile. That must have been one hell of a blow to an Omega women, no matter how her child came to be. It was cruel. So her only child committed suicide at the age of ten or eleven because her husband raped her. That was ... he could not even imagine. He just knew he wanted to kill the guy.

>I agree. But don´t tell her, we would be traceable.<

"I am so sorry." Well, that sounded like a platitude. "I don´t even know where to start ... I am happy that you have a stable job now. Are you and Natsue safe or has the guy bothered you in any way?"

"He tried to gain access to our flat a few times but I called the police on him. He hasn´t tried for half a year, so maybe it´s finally over." A small smile entered her lips.

"It had something good though. I never felt safe inside, so I´ve always been out with Natsue where there were people. She´s unbelievable smart, maybe it had something to do with all that fresh air and the museums we spend hours in."

"Most likely. She is a great girl." He had to smile as well. "And before that question ever comes up, I am not saying that as a pedophile, I really have no interest at all in children that way. I like older women, as you might have guessed already."

"That´s actually very reassuring. It´s another point where I appreciated you having a date with Chiho, she does not have children after all."

>She´s smart as well. I´d never thought about the value of such a move if we were

actually a pedophile. She seems to have already checked us out that way. On the other hand, she overlooked her husband raping their daughter; her senses might not be the best.< His alter ego mused.

"Though it saddens me to hear you cannot have any more children."

"Yes." She lowered her head. "I thought that would most likely be the point where you decided that dating me is not worth it, but I wanted to be honest and not string you along."

Of course, fate wasn't always on his side, so they were interrupted by their waitress before he could react. She served their meals and took the white bread with her that none of them had touched. Both their main courses looked delicious but he did not feel like eating.

"Ayako." He could not get her to look up, so he took her hand again. "I can't exactly say that does not bother me at all, but it won't make me run from this restaurant, okay? The people I tend to like do not come unattached or free of burdens, so don't worry about it now, okay?"

She squeezed his hand lightly, forcing herself to smile slightly, still unable to straighten herself. It did not seem to be enough of a reassurance. What could he say? "It's not like I come free of burdens as well. I am not a prince on a white horse." He suddenly smirked. "Though I do own a white horse if you do want me to do something very cliché."

Thankfully that finally made her smile. She peeked a cautious gaze at him before nodding and finally looking at her plate and saying: "Well, this looks good, doesn't it? I hope you'll like it."

"I hope so too. I do not want you to be disappointed with your little adventure." He cut into his honeyed steak, unsure if he was supposed to eat the plums in which it had been baked and which were laying in a circle around the meat. Maybe he should first try a bite without them. So ... wow. This was good. Better than the last two times he had been here. Better than his father's French cook had been. "I take everything back, this is great."

"It is, isn't it? Yoshi is the only cook this good with meat that I know. It's not like I often go out to dine in restaurants, but when I was still working as a singer, I sometimes got left-overs at the end of the night. His were really tasty." Her face lightened up with a smile. "The only one that beat him was a Kobe steak restaurant." "Nothing can beat premium Kobe meat." Though this was pretty close. "So how long did you work as a singer?"

"How long?" She paused with the steak in front of her mouth before eating it and looking outside lost in thought for a moment. "A few months, I would say four. It really liked it but no one wanted to look after Natsue that late. The payment for babysitters was so high that I did not have enough money, even though singing makes good money."

"Did you not have friends that could help?" He scrunched his eyebrows. She was a sociable and likable women after all, she should have had some.

"No ... after that scandal, no one wanted anything to do with me. The one or two that tried were threatened by my ex-husband. He wanted me to come back to him, so he tried his best to make my life hell. And no matter how much we stick together, Omegas can easily get threatened by an Alpha." She sighed, looking tired. "I am so happy he has given up."

>I am not. It would have been fun to hunt him done and scare him into leaving her alone.<

"If he ever bothers you again, please call me. Even if we might not end up as a couple, it's a basic human need to help you out in such a situation. You really need some Alpha friends to help you out."

"An Alpha being friends with an Omega?" She looked at him in silence for a moment. "You did mention being friends with an Omega before."

"His name is Kuroko Tetsuya. We have been friends since middle school." He could already see her eyebrows raise in doubt. "He met his mate in high school, they have two children. I am godfather to their daughter. I'll show you a picture, she's really cute." He took out his phone and activated it, having Kuroko with Tsuki as his background picture. "She's half a year old right now."

"You look really happy when you talk about her," she mentioned with a smile.

"Doesn't she look just like me?" He grinned. "She's so small and cute. I never thought I would like babies that much."

"You love them when they are yours." A wistful smile spread on her lips.

"Well, she's not mine technically but I love being her godfather. She'll be my little princess. I'd even let her ride my horse and that's an extremely special privilege." He tipped something on his phone. "Look, this is from right after her birth. Doesn't she have a beautiful smile? Just like her mother."

"Say, that other person you were in love with is Kuroko Tetsuya, isn't he?" Her smile had turned playful. She did not seem to be offended.

"Well, yes ... I'm not making a secret out of that. Though his mate is too thick to actually notice it." He realized there was something like a pout on his lips. "I lost fair and square though. I was afraid about my reputation, the repercussions of mating an Omega in a job such as mine, especially a male one." He pocketed his phone again. "His mate never did that. He is a professional basketball player and recently decided to quit the NBA, just because his mate did not like America. Honestly, I don't think I could be that devoted."

"So if you had become a professional basketball player, you would not give up your NBA job?" She seemed to know what she was talking about, maybe she had read up about him a bit.

>She most likely read that gross interview, just like about every other woman in this country.<

He only sighed and took a look at the night skyline before answering after a bit: "I won't quit being a CEO either. I work a damn lot, I can see that becoming an issue in a relationship. I can arrange my schedule to fit vacations, important dates and such, but I am not material for a stay-at-home-dad or such. I am also unable to spend my nights running to and from the convenience store for food cravings. Kuroko's mate really does everything that's asked of him, I find that admirable in it's own way. I don't think I could put my career on such a backseat."

"Honestly, I can't even imagine such an Alpha to exist." She dead-panned. "I can only imagine all of his Alpha friends telling him how whipped he is."

"They do." Akashi grinned. "They are all whipped though, our whole circle of friends only consists of Alpha-Omega or Alpha-Alpha pairs, all of them quite devoted. Except for our oddball Shintarou, but my best friend has always been defying norms, he's always the exception to the rule."

"He is not devoted?" She asked between bites of her steak.

"He is the most devoted of us all, there is no question in that. He came from a family even more traditional and strict than my own and not only did he chose a male partner, he chose a Beta male partner. I still don't know how he did it but not only

was he allowed to stay with him, his partner got adopted into the family. They're enjoying married life with their kids."

"Kids? A male Alpha and Beta? Are they natural?" She blinked in shock.

"Oh yes, they are. It's why I say he defies norms. He's pregnant with their second child." He smirked at her facial expression. "I didn't know that was possible but apparently it is."

"I don't think I ever heard about such a couple." She shook her head. "And here I thought being asked out by an Alpha like you was beyond expectations. You have some interesting friends."

"I was taught it was a one in a ten thousand chance. That was more information about my best friend's sex life than I ever wanted." He shook his head. "So do you have any friends after your ex-husband drove them all away?"

"I'd say I am friends with Misses Kuroko. Wait a moment, is she related to your-" She stopped at seeing his nod. "Her oldest son, I guess? So you are godfather to her granddaughter? The world is a small place."

"Not really. Kuroko recommended her when I opened the kindergartens and when he saw how lonely I was, he told me to visit the kindergarten and have a look around." He offered a slight smile. "We are friends, we look out for each other. I have a big company and money, Tetsu has a loving mother. Both are resources that can be more or less helpful depending on the situation. Despite common opinion, money doesn't solve all problems."

"I am still surprised how you are single with all those friends. I am sure you have parties where you can meet nice people."

"Nice Alphas and Betas." He raised an eyebrow. "There aren't many Omega athletes in professional basketball and my friends are all professional or former basketball players. I am surprised that I know two Omegas that way and both are happily mated and have devoted their life to their children."

"Well, yes, in that case you do not meet a lot of Omegas ... why does it have to be an Omega, though?" She leaned forward, her eyes sparkling with interest. "We are seen as unsavory fucktoys by most people, nice for an affair but not worthy as partners. Everyone would expect you to pick a premium Alpha."

"I don't want someone that looks good, is independent and self-confident but unable to love me or our children. Alphas tend to focus on career and status rather than love and family. I want a partner that devotes herself to our children and me. I have seen Omegas form a much more meaning bond than any Alpha ever could. I want to be loved, not valued for my money and image." He wasn't sure if what and how he said this would actually be able to express what he wanted, what he craved. "Those two Omegas I know, they are athletes, they are able to go head-to-head with Alphas. They rejected one Alpha after the next, sometimes leaving them heartbroken in their wake." Kuroko would never know the extent of his feelings for him. "They knew their worth and had the best of the best court them, only then committing themselves fully to a relationship after testing their chosen's devotion. That's what being an Omega means to me. Not a cheap whore but someone who knows that it's Alphas that should have to fight for them."

Ayako took a deep breath, sinking back into her seat. She opened her mouth but closed it again before suddenly she had tears running down her face.

Akashi blinked in surprise, leaning forward and asking: "I am sorry, have I offended you somehow?"

She shook her head, grabbing her purse to get a cleenex to dry her tears. Though her

efforts were valiant, she seemed to have a crying fit, so it was no use. Akashi put his seat next to her, lowly asking her if there was anything he could do. She shook her head, stood and left him sitting there without another word.

>Well, great social expert, what just happened?< His alter ego leered at him.

>If only I knew.< He shook his head disbelievingly, deciding to right his seat and wait if she decided to come back. >Do you think I insulted her?<

>Well, if she wants to take it that way, she might now define herself as a cheap whore.<

>I wouldn't go out with her if I thought that.<

>You went on a date with Chiho and let's be real, she was a cheap whore.< Well, yes. That was true. >I don't think she can stand up to an Alpha yet.<

>She already did last week.< He reminded his alter ego.

>Do you think she saw that the same way? She said something to defend someone, you corrected her, she caved in. I don't think that is standing up.<

>She has potential.< Akashi argued.

>She needs training before she might reach that point.<

>I can provide her with training. I can show her what I mean. I am sure she can do it.<

>You have a better eye than I when it comes to human resources. What is your plan?<

>I want to introduce her to our friends.<

>Your friends. I find them annoying. But if you must then by all means provide her with training. As soon as she is ready for sexual training I'll gladly take over.<

>I won't let you corrupt another possible relationship. You literally fucked up Tetsu.<

>Well, yes, he was delicious.< His alter ego chuckled. >If you want her to be Akashi Seijuro's partner, kindly remember that you aren't the only one in this head.<

>I know. I will let her know at some point. But not today and not in the near future. I want this to work, I don't want you to destroy this chance for us.<

>You were let out instead of having me go to a business dinner that was planned at the same time, weren't you? Quit bugging me, you got your chance.<

>Yes, what was up with that? Why was I- no, let's discuss that later.< He just saw Ayako coming back his way. >I need my concentration for this, don't disturb me.<

>Sure thing, you self-blown prick.<

He stood, studying her face while she passed by other tables. She thinly smiled at him, not in anger, more in apology, so he stepped up to her seat and held it out for her. She sat with a thankful smile and a nod. He noticed that she must have freshened up her make-up. For some unknown reason, he resented that fact. Internally shaking his head about himself he sat down again.

"I am very sorry about that." She smiled at him sheepishly, an extremely cute sight in his opinion. "I was very touched by your words."

"So I really didn't insult you?" He slightly tilted his head, remembering how he adored it when Tetsu did it.

"Actually, I think you did." She scoffed and smiled though. "But I am not angry."

"Honestly, I don't think I really get that." He admitted.

"Well, you aren't an Omega. I think I would worry if you understood." She smiled thinly, her face saddened by something that seemed to be in her head. "I guess I underestimated you after all."

"Really?" Somehow he felt like a child, amazed by the trick he just did.

"Yes." She seemed to collect herself for a moment. "Would you show me your world? Would you want to see mine?"

"Very much," he admitted.

She nodded before longingly gazing into the room. After a moment she asked: "For today though, would you care to play that piano? I direly want to sing."
He smiled invitingly and teased: "Whatever my diva commands."

Kapitel 10: Embarking on a space cruise

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Here." Kuroko pointed at a small shop behind him which overflowed with clothes. "This is a second-hand-shop."

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

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

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

"They have all been washed."

"They have been washed at least ten times."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Size?" He looked questioningly at his friend.

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

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

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

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

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

"Akashi looks quite dashing in his new clothes."

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

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

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

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

Akashi nodded wordlessly.

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

"Your sports trousers."

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

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

"So he would not rip more of my clothes. Beside that t-shirt I wore I only owned one from my mom and a pullover." Blue eyes looked up. "It's when you decide not to fight in a rape situation because you can't afford to have your clothes torn that you know what it's like to be an Omega."

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

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

"Is there somewhere you would like to go?"

"Over there." Kuroko looked at a place on the other side of the street. From the looks,

it was a fast-food-chain or maybe a family-restaurant. Another one of those cheap places.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This time he actually took a look at the neighborhood before he rung the bell at Ayako's place. She lived in a 4.5 Tatami apartment in a building which housed a

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kapitel 11: Being alien to normalcy

Ayako seemed to have promised the kids they would visit the park together. On the way she told him some stories about places they went by, the people that lived there or which she had met. There was an old lady living alone, a young woman recently left by her husband, a pachinko parlor run by the local yakuza, her favorite combini, an alley that was especially dark at night and should be avoided. She painted him a picture of what life in this neighborhood was like. Even the kids seemed to enjoy her stories, most of them innocent, some not so much. Of course both kids were intrigued by everything that sounded dangerous (Natsue more than Ryou), listening to Ayako's advice but not so secretly sneaking glances at the places. Akashi felt compelled to give his input once or twice to make sure they really would not go that way.

They arrived at a beautiful park half an hour later. Akashi had held himself back from asking if he should get his car, getting the feeling that the walk was part of the experience. The children looked for sticks, suddenly becoming pirates hunting for a treasure. While he and Ayako simply walked, both children ran around wildly, occasionally being called back by Ayako not to go too far. The baby had been awake for a while, cooing at leaves, the clouds and about every dog they met. For someone so small, it was amazing what he could see. Ayako played a game of look-and-peek with him, pointing at large things, waiting for Shinta to see them and give a reaction. After a few minutes he became sleepy though, so Ayako settled him against her chest.

"Doesn't he get heavy? Should I take him?" He asked her – not for the first time.

"Oh, yeah, he'll sleep for half an hour and will get fuzzy then." She passed him the baby. "I wish I could have at least one more child. I'd really like a boy. I love girls but boys are special too."

"You could adopt one, right?" A lot of couples adopted children, right? It were often children who could not be raised by their single Omega parents or which were abandoned due to being conceived by rape.

"Only married couples can adopt. I am not married anymore." Her smile was rather sad. "I often have Ryou and Shinta over though. A week a month I can feel like having three children."

None of them her own. He cautiously grabbed her hand, gauging her reaction before actually holding it in his. She allowed the touch, linking her fingers with his.

"It looks quite domestic, doesn't it? Couples, mothers with their children, families. All those smiling faces. Sometimes I ask myself how many people come here for the exact same reason I do. I don't have money for a lot of toys, so I spent all my time with Natsue outside on walks or at parks or in museums with free entrance. It is a nice place but my smile is still forced when I think that I have to be here because I can't afford the alternatives."

He looked around, watching the other people with different eyes.

"All those mothers, how many of them are here because they need to escape an abusive husband? All those young couples, how many of them are Omegas who try to make the best of a situation they have been forced into? When I ask myself those questions, I feel powerless with rage."

The kids chose that moment to interrupt by excitedly asking them to come look at something. Akashi actually felt a bit thankful. How should he have reacted to something like that? He had never thought about it. He had never met a person

suffering domestic abuse except for Aomine and that one did not hold back on showing others what that had led to personality-wise. In his eyes the guy was a criminal with nothing but basketball skills as a redeeming quality.

Had Ayako been abused by her husband? How had she spent time with her first daughter? Her only daughter, he corrected. An Alpha man, an Omega women and three children – none of them their own. Would that be his life? He hadn't really pondered the fact that she was sterile. Should he end this? She could not give him heirs. But wouldn't it be better than creating another child with his twisted blood? Everyone could fill his role and lead his company. He could just adopt the next heir or heiress. Really, would he have a problem with Natsue? No. No, it didn't matter if he never had children by his own blood. It might actually be best not to be born with all those expectations heaped upon you.

They settled on a blanket Ayako took from the backpack he had carried for her. As she had predicted Shinta began to fuzz shortly after, so she feed him mashed vegetables she had prepared beforehand. Like most babies he was a messy eater, so she spent most of the time trying to keep the food from escaping. He watched the other two playing catch and practicing handstand, getting up after a few minutes to help them with their training.

It made both kids ravenous after some time but of course Ayako had prepared food for them as well. Akashi offered to get them drinks and both children tagged along. As the next vending machine was at the park's entrance, it took them at least a quarter of an hour. He got how one could spend an afternoon and evening in a park this way. It tired out the children, you only needed to prepare some food and it was healthy because of the sun and fresh air. It was a nice way to spend your time, just like going for a ride or playing basketball on an outside court.

When they came back, two other women were sitting on their blanket talking with Ayako. They cooed and shyly made eyes at him when he came over, excitedly chattering with Ayako – most likely about him. Omegas really were like hens flocking together. Natsue and Ryou did not look put out at all, so either they knew them or it was normal to come back to their mothers talking with people they had never seen before.

"Good evening," he greeted the young women.

One was pregnant, the other was holding a toddler just like Ayako. Both didn't seem older than twenty at most. The pregnant one looking even younger on second thought – maybe fifteen – just giggled, the other one demurely greeted him in a low voice. Yes, young Omega women. Too young for him.

"This is Kaname and Yue. They came over when they saw me being harassed by a young man," Ayako explained.

"Who?" He immediately checked the surroundings. Who dared to approach his woman?

"He is gone, don't worry." She took a drink from Natsue, thanking her for getting her favorite. Natsue did not look worried at all. Was it also normal to be harassed as a single woman?

"We need to help each other out." The one called Yue said and gathered up her toddler. "Well, now that your mate is back, we shall take our leave."

"I would like to thank you on my behalf as well." He turned to them and bowed.

"Thank you for looking after Ayako."

The younger one giggled again, shyly hiding behind her older friend who blushed as well. They took their leave, sending him furtive glances over their shoulders and

obviously talking about him after they were out of hearing reach.

"Should I be jealous?" Ayako looked at him with an amused smile. "Alphas normally only bow to Omegas they are courting. Most Alphas think others aren't worthy of their attention."

"I am not most Alphas." He sat and took his drink from Ryou who had carried it. The boy looked at him with big eyes, obviously stunned into silence.

"When I'll become an Alpha, I'll be nice as well," Natsue decided.

"I'm sure you will." He petted her head, making her smile.

Ayako shifted on the blanket, sitting next to him and lay her head on his shoulder. With a satisfied smile he looped his arm around her shoulders. She offered a sandwich from her unending food supply to him. Yeah, life was good.

He had invited his friends to a basketball match the next Saturday. He had added to some of the invitations that he planned to bring his girlfriend, knowing that would make everyone show up without a doubt. Now that everyone was living in Tokio, meeting got a lot easier than back when he was still living in Kyoto and Murasakibara in Akita. Most answered with an affirmation, only Kuroko congratulated him on having a girlfriend now. Well, okay, Kise asked for a picture of his girlfriend but he decided to simply ignore the text. Most texts sent by Kise better went ignored.

So he got Ayako and Natsue – Ryou and Shinta were back with their mother – from their flat in sports clothes, deciding to look up the metro lines to their destination. He got a smile from Ayako for that. She had a backpack with her again which he offered to carry for her. It felt just like last time, so she most likely had packed a blanket and food again.

They arrived at the court a bit early but as always, some of his friends had been earlier. Kagami and Aomine were already having a fierce one on one while Kuroko and Momoi sat on a blanket outside the fenced court, so they would not be hit by stray basketballs. Kuroko was wearing a wide shirt which he could still wear with Tsuki under it. It seemed he was breastfeeding her right now, judging from her position under said shirt. Momoi and Shiro were playing a clapping game. They stopped when they noticed the new-comers and Momoi waived them over. She stood and took Shiro's hand to meet them halfway.

"Good morning, Akashi." She proudly smiled at him while mostly looking at Ayako.

"Good morning, Momoi. Ayako, this was our team manager, Momoi Satsuki. Momoi, this is Teppan Ayako."

"I'll be in your care. Please call me Ayako." She bowed deeply to the Alpha woman.

"Call me Satsuki then." His friend bowed as well. "And who are you, little Miss?"

"My name is Teppan Natsue. I am four years old." She bowed as well but for a lot shorter time. "Is this your son?"

"Ah, no, this is Kagami Shiro. He's my godson. The one over there is his mother and the red-haired guy on the court is his father." She pushed the boy in front of her.

"Greet them, Shiro."

The normally not very shy boy looked at the slightly older girl and squeaked.

Natsue grinned at that and offered a hand to him saying: "Would you like to play with me?"

He slowly sported a grin but waited for Momoi's nod before he took her hand.

"Don't forget to stay in sight," Ayako reminded her daughter before they were off.

"Sometimes I don't know from where she gets her openness and bravery. Mitsuki was such a shy girl in comparison."

"She gets her bravery from you." Akashi shortly squeezed Ayako's hand that he was holding.

"Charmer." She shook her head at him. "She's a lot braver than I'll ever be."

"I think every one of us will tell you that being with our dear friend Akashi is showing a lot of bravery." Momoi said without any malice. "Shall I introduce the others to you?" Ayako nodded and followed her, mostly just guiding Akashi along who was satisfied to follow her lead. Kuroko seemed to have finished breast-feeding in the meantime, patting Tsuki for her burp. He stood to greet them, sharing something like a secret smile with Ayako. Of course both immediately sat next to each other and began to chat about Tsuki. Ayako told him about how Akashi had shown her the picture and what a beautiful baby Tsuki was.

He internally nodded along. For a person knowing that her boyfriend had been in love with the one she was sitting next to, she was surprisingly open and friendly. Somehow he had expected her to be wary. Momoi watched the two men on the court and blew her whistle after Aomine secured a basket.

"Boys! Come and greet Ayako," she ordered them and both immediately went over. She still had them well-trained it seemed.

Ayako seemed to have not spared them a look before, even though both Alphas reeked with sweat. Now she was watching them like a mesmerized rabbit. Akashi held back from clicking his tongue in disapproval. Okay, both were taller and broader than him but it wasn't like he looked bad. He could still beat both as long as they weren't in the zone.

"Ayako, this is my fiancée Aomine Daiki and this other tall fellow is Kagami Taiga, Tetsu's husband. Boys, this is Teppan Ayako, Akashi's girlfriend. Her daughter Natsue is running around with Shiro over there."

"Oh?" Kagami looked for his son before nodding in approval. "It's good to have more friends his age. Nice to meet ya, Miss Teppan."

"Please call me Ayako." She bowed to both of them. Like she had said before, none of them bowed back. Akashi glared at them which made at least Aomine bow and greet her properly.

"It seems I have some manners to teach." Akashi decided and stood.

Aomine went to open the court's door for him and surrendered the basketball without another word. At least one of them knew their place. He saw the boy flinch while Akashi surrendered his place to his alter ego.

"Akashi?" Kuroko stood right in front of him. "Thank you for coming back. I think Taiga learned his lesson."

Said man was lying on his back, taking deep breaths, looking completely drained. Akashi's body felt pleasantly numb. He asked: "How long has it been?"

"About half an hour in the zone for both of you. It really is enough now. You are giving Aomine an unfair advantage."

He simply nodded and returned to the spread blankets, handing Aomine the ball on the way. Everyone checked his eyes when he walked by. All Alphas except for Momoi were a bit wary of him. Those now counted Kise, Kasamatsu and Shintaro. Kazunari checked his eyes as well but mostly seemed in good spirits – actually he was always in good spirits, so no surprise there. Natsue was still playing with Shiro, now joined by Kikyo who might have given her a challenge but she was dressed in a yukata. Shintaro was wearing one as well, he would not play while being pregnant of course. Murasakibara and his mate were running late as always. He sat next to Ayako on the

blanket who still looked at him with disturbing interest.

"Is something the matter?" Had she noticed his different eye color on the court?

"Tetsu told me that you have two different personalities. I was curious about that. Is it true that your eyes can change color?" She asked in naive interest.

Wait, what?

Kapitel 12: Uncomfortable truths

"You did what?" He looked at Kuroko completely aghast. Why had ... why would ...

>How about revenge? It's a way to hurt you.< His alter ego suggested.

>I can't believe he would do that. Tetsu has always supported us.<

>Then maybe he thought it was in our best interest?<

"It is a very important fact about you. You should tell your girlfriend about something like that." The other man answered in his monotonous voice and sat on Ayako's other side.

"Well, yes, I was going to. Don't you think this is a rather personal thing to tell someone? It's not like I go around telling your secrets to everyone I just met." Akashi slowly shook his head. "I had more trust in you."

"You just changed into your cruel personality to punish my husband right in front of her. You might not want to do that if you don't want others to know." Kuroko showed no remorse at all, simply grabbing a snack from the middle of the blanket.

>I would say it was revenge. He most likely did not like the fact that I just trashed his mate.<

>Were you unfair?< He would not have expected him to.

>It's in the eye of the beholder.< His alter ego smirked. >As you know, we do not like Kagami.<

"I am sorry you had to learn it this way." He turned to Ayako. "I wanted to tell you in private."

"Are you ashamed of it?" She whispered cautiously.

"No, I am not." He sent Kuroko a warning glance. "But if my other personality is unsupervised for some time, he tends to do some rather questionable things which I am not proud of."

"So you have something like an evil twin?" Thankfully she seemed rather curious instead of disgusted or scared. "What kind of things does he do?"

"Well." How to explain this? He did not want her to run. "Chiho?"

"Oh." She took a bit of distance and lowered her head. "I see ... that actually explains a lot." She seemed to collect her thoughts for a moment before she looked up again.

"How bad does he get?"

"He organized Omega hunts on me," Kuroko told her.

Akashi felt himself getting shoved back, too stunned to actually put up a fight against his alter ego. Instead of being submerged in his unconscious though, it was more like he simply took a step back, seeing a screen to the outside world. He felt his mouth move, heard the words he spoke but knew it was his alter ego instead of him: "You seem to try your best to alienate her from me. Is that what jealousy looks like on you? May I kindly remind you that you have a husband and it's not me?"

Kuroko flinched back as if he had been hit.

"Akashi!" Momoi screeched and put herself between them.

"I just asked myself the same question." Shintaro calmly said. "Kuroko, what is the meaning of your behavior?"

Momoi's lip was quivering for a moment before she slowly looked over her shoulder for an answer. So even she found his behavior strange.

"I am sorry, Akashi." Kuroko had lowered his head. "I'll go for a walk." With a sharp turn he stalked off, immediately followed by his husband who got up from the ground

and ran from the court, sensing his mate's dismay.

"That was unsightly." Shintaro judged after a moment of silence.

With a sigh Akashi went to the forefront again while his alter ego stepped back without resistance. They had never changed this smoothly. It was actually nice to know they could do this. His best friend looked at him and simply nodded before relaxing slightly. Akashi decided to address him: "Thank you, Shintaro. Your intervention helped me stay in control."

"You are also getting better. That transition was well-timed."

"I guess it helps that we talk a lot." He let go of his breath before cautiously turning to Ayako. "I am sorry, this meeting is not going like I had planned."

She simply nodded, still a bit stunned. Her gaze was resting on Kuroko's retreating back.

"It looks like your other personality is well-controlled now, isn't he?" Momoi asked him in a small voice.

"More or less, yes. I don't think you have to fear erratic actions from me again as long as my alter ego isn't out for more than a week. I am still sorry about what happened in middle-school. But since then I have not had a problem with control."

"That does sound rather promising." Momoi smiled at him. "I am sure Tetsu and Taiga will work this out. It's not like Tetsu is known for staying mad at people."

"He just gave a different impression." Akashi told himself to relax his muscles. "I wonder if my alter ego is right and he really was being jealous. I wouldn't understand why though."

Much to his surprise it was Aomine that answered: "As long as you're still angry at people or have some other strong emotion, you feel like you still have some kind of claim on them." Deep blue eyes watched him intently while the man himself stood a bit out of the way. "I learned that in therapy. My self-pity was a way to chain him to me. I gave that up. You seem to have given up as well. We both got girlfriends." He did some tricks with the ball to get out his nervous energy. "Might be it pisses him off we're over him."

>I think those are the first sensible words that ever came out of his mouth.< His alter ego spoke into the stunned silence in his head.

"You really seem to have learned a lot in therapy." Akashi slowly nodded. "You might be right."

"Uhm ... may I ask what you are talking about?" Ayako asked, obviously not intimidated by Aomine as most people were on first sight.

It was true that his aggressive aura had been reduced significantly. Therapy seemed to be doing him a lot of good. Maybe Akashi should think about therapy for himself? He had read some self-help books about DID, learning that talking with your alter egos in a friendly manner helped a lot. It seemed true, he had never been able to stay awake while his alter ego was out until now. If his alter ego's words were to be believed he had also never been able to remember conversations about other alter egos before. Maybe he was slowly healing now that his father was dead. And all of that had been happening in only two months, that was rather impressive.

"I got therapy for ... well ... being less abusive?" Aomine looked away. "I was a kinda shitty person before."

"You were depressed and let it out on others." Momoi smiled at her fiancée. "I am proud that you got better."

"Well, that's a rather nice way of putting it." He raised his eyebrows at her. "But yeah, I am proud of myself too." He turned back to Ayako. "I've been a real asshole for

about five years and nearly got fired because of drinking problems and aggressive behavior. I got over it."

"That's rather admirable." She smiled at Akashi. "Your friends really are impressive."

"In all kinds of ways." Kazunari added with a wistful smile. "So who's up for a bit of basketball?"

"That sounds marvelous." Kasamatsu stood a bit away, trying not to get involved in any kind of conflict. "Ryouta, join us."

"I'll play you." Aomine smiled at the blond.

"I'll sit out for a bit." Akashi told them when they looked at him. His legs felt rather weak. He was sure it wasn't due to his match with Kagami before. Or maybe it was and he was getting out of shape. He also saw Murasakibara and Himuro approaching them in the distance. What captured his attention though was Tsuki's unhappy grumble. He followed the sound and found the baby lying on another blanket next to Shintaro.

"Has Tetsu really just left her?" Akashi stroked her cheek. It seemed a bit cold. Maybe she was feeling chilly? He took her into his arms, gently rocking her in both of his arms. She really felt a bit cold. She happily quieted down, snuggling against his chest.

"It's easier for her when you hold her more vertically." Shintaro helped him to adjust her position. "Now lean back a bit, you'll keep her warm and comfortable like that."

"The weather seems a bit too chilly for her to lie all by herself." He did as his friend told him. Tsuki looked content to drool on his shoulder.

"Yes, she needs a hat. Momoi, would you please have a look if Kuroko brought a hat for her?" Shintaro asked the women who still looked a bit lost.

"Of course." She turned to his bag to have a look. When she found one and held it out to them she looked at Akashi for a moment. "I am sorry, Akashi. You are right, Tetsu should not have told Ayako something like that without your consent. I am sorry I didn't stop him. I was unsure about what to do."

He nodded and said: "I wanted to tell her anyway, so no harm done, I guess. Though I expect you to do that if the situation ever repeats itself. I trust all of you with my secrets but I won't if some have no qualms to spread them."

"Have people reacted negatively before?" Ayako looked at him with concern.

"I think everyone here was creeped out at some point." He looked at Shintaro who smiled wryly. Everyone except for Shintaro. Even though his autistic best friend was a peculiar person himself, he had known years before the others. He was the only one who knew him this well and who had accepted his alter ego without complaint. "What bothers me more is what it tells people about me. It's a disorder by the name of dissociative identity disorder, DID in short, and stems from severe childhood abuse."

"Oh." Her eyes widened. One of her hands touched her lips, the other drawn in front of her breast.

"My father is dead now, so I can speak a bit more freely about it. But it's not exactly a topic I enjoy." He stroked Tsuki's back. Her weight reminded him that there were good things in this world.

"Would you like to play for a bit? I can keep Tsuki warm in the meantime," Shintaro offered. He had gotten better at recognizing other's emotional state. Actually, by now he was able to recognize more subtle gestures than about anyone else. Seemed like the tightening of Akashi's fist was enough for him to intervene. Shintaro had often been able to curb his more violent urges.

"Thank you, I'll take you up on that offer." They gently transferred Tsuki to his friend's breast who did not forget to protect his yukata with a baby cloth from her

drooling.

"All of them have learned to work through their respective trauma with basketball," Momoi explained to Ayako. "All of them are scarred in one way or another. We mostly don't talk about it but we all know."

Akashi nodded to them before entering the court. Everyone turned to him, looking at his eyes before settling into fighting stances. Kazunari and Kasamatsu oriented themselves at Aomine and Kise who had a better read on him.

"What shall it be, Akashichi? Two on three?" Kise challenged him.

"More like four on one." He received the ball from Aomine and went to stand under one hoop. "Give me a challenge."

Aomine was the first to stand in his way lunging for the ball. Akashi rolled around him, leaving him to chase him. Kise was next, a bit too excited in his eyes. So their copycat wanted to try a copy of himself on him? Good luck. Akashi did a move he only sparsely used: dribbling the ball between Kise's legs while he sidestepped. He rolled again, speeding up when he saw Aomine lunge for the ball from Kise's other side. He needed to jump to make up for Aomine's larger frame and superior speed. He really should have ankle-broken him. He rolled in the air and passed by Kasamatsu who had jumped in case he would try a three-pointer. He prepared the dribble for when he would land, knowing Aomine would be stopped enough by Kasamatsu landing in front of him to be able to reach him. It only left Kazunari in his way. Ankle-breaking him would take too much time, he would need to roll again. From the distance it looked like he would be able to jump from the roll, performing Murasakibara's Thor's hammer move. It seemed rather fitting.

The ball landed with a loud sound due to the immense pressure the move created. Akashi turned without looking back. Stopping an Aomine-Kise-combi without the zone wasn't an easy move, he should get a reading on them before engaging them. Kazunari took the ball, passed to Kasamatsu who passed to Kise. Kise looked like he would have a go at him but the air about him wasn't aggressive enough. Akashi was sure he would pass to Aomine who came from the other side, so he waited. Yes, there was the pass. Akashi sprinted to Aomine and used the millisecond it took to receive the pass to smash it out of his hands. This time he properly ankle-broke him before passing him by to be confronted by Kasamatsu and Kazunari. They tried Kuroko's quasi-emperor-eye move by standing behind each other, so Akashi flanked them and ankle-broke them both as well. It left him with Kise who had returned to the net. A three-pointer? A lay-up? No, he was feeling like doing another dunk. He charged Kise in a way that the blond would have to jump from his bad foot and simply jumped above him. He tackled the other with that but it was the no-foul-zone, so who cared? Kise landed on his ass, Akashi dunked the ball and with the power of an arm against the board changed his course so that he would land behind Kise instead of on top of him.

When he surveyed the field Aomine was the only one standing again. He nodded at him and said to the group at large: "A bit more of a challenge, please."

>And you tell me I am too arrogant?<

>It's surprisingly nice to let off steam.<

"Go, Akashi, go!" Momoi cheered him on while he jogged back to his own hoop. Ayako beside her looked a bit stunned.

"I'll give you a challenge, Aka-chin," Murasakibara said while he entered the court to stand on the side.

"Okay, everyone, we got this," Kasamatsu organized them, "Atsushi under the hoop,

Aomine as PF, Kise is SF. Kazu, you take PG, I'll be our outside shooter." He passed the ball to Kise. "Let's take one back."

"Come at me." Internally he clasped hands with his alter ego.

>Let's see how they fare against two personalities working together.< His other half said.

Kapitel 13: Absolute

"With a 10 to 9 basket count, Akashi wins the game!" Momoi proclaimed.

He supported himself on his knees, breathing heavily. Damn, this had been hard. But it had been damn good. He smiled at Kazunari who came to shake his hand, similarly out of breath. He really should train more, his body was getting soft.

"That was one hell of a game." They shook and Kazunari grinned. "You still rule the court."

"Thank you for the game." He righted himself. "I feel a lot better now."

"I'm glad to hear." Kazunari opened the court's door for him. "For my part, I really need a break."

"I don't guess there is a shower around?" He hadn't planned on playing this rigorously.

"Aomine's flat is the next one from here." Kazunari looked at Momoi. "Do you think we could use his shower?"

"Sure." She turned to the court. "Daiki! Can the guys take a shower at your place?"

"Yeah, sure." The man just waived them off. "Hey, Kagami, wanna go another round?"

"Aren't you tired, man?" The redhead who must have come back without Akashi noticing stood leaning against the fence. "That game was brutal."

"I'm warmed up now," Aomine just answered.

"Basketball-junkie." It didn't stop Kagami from joining him on the court.

Kasamatsu and Kise had left with them, taking their bags to join them for a shower. Murasakibara hadn't exactly exhausted himself, so he just toweled off. Akashi looked for Kuroko who should be back if Kagami was. He found the blue-haired boy sitting next to Himuro with Tsuki in his arms. Both men seemed to be talking about their babies. Akashi checked on Ayako but she seemed to be talking to Shintaro. He took his bag and told her: "We'll be back in a few minutes."

"Sure." She looked up. "That was a great game!"

"Thank you." He smiled proudly. Showing off hadn't been the purpose but he was glad anyway.

"Can you get some drinks on the way back? Natsue direly wants peach juice."

"Sure thing." He looked for the whirlwind. By now she was climbing trees.

While they talked Kazunari had bent down to kiss Shintaro's green hair who only waived him off, telling him he smelled. Kise chuckled about that. They were good to go after that. Momoi tagged along with her key, letting them in and giving them towels and other things they might need. She seemed completely at home here, though she still had her own flat. One look into the bathroom told them she basically lived here though. Everyone let Akashi go first, after which he sat with Momoi drinking tea. Kazunari came out in a yukata, looking just as natural as Shintaro in one by now. His job had taught him to move with grace and though he did not interest Akashi at all, he could appreciate the beauty of Kazunari's movements. Kise followed Kasamatsu into the shower after a warning from Akashi that they would not wait if both decided to make out with each other. Whatever they did they were quick about it, so they left half an hour later in their normal clothes. No more basketball for today. They bought drinks for everyone at the conbini before returning to the park. Now that he looked at it, Ayako and him spent their time pretty similarly. When they had free time, they went to the park or museums. That wasn't so different. When they

came back, the children cheered and ran to them asking for drinks. Natsue got her peach juice and tried some of his pear juice which she liked even more. Good thing he had bought two of them. Ayako took sour cherry and Kazunari handed Shintaro his red bean soup. Akashi held out some Pocari Sweat to Kuroko who took it with evident surprise before lowly thanking him. So he was feeling sorry. Good to know.

"So what did you talk about?" he asked Ayako who still sat next to Shintaro.

"Midorima told me about your childhood adventures. The story about how you two decided to go to a public middle-school really had me laugh." She smiled at him.

"I don't know why though," Midorima admitted.

"We were a bit peculiar as children. Both of us." Akashi toasted with Shintaro. "We still are, I guess. It's not as bad as back then though."

"He also told me you were only allowed to join the basketball team if you made captain and won the national championship ... that sounded pretty harsh." Her eyebrows were drawn together.

"Excellence in all." He took a sip from his juice. "It's the Akashi family motto. Nothing less than perfection is to be expected. If I decided to do something, I would only be allowed to if I practiced it to perfection."

"So you really won five out of six national championships?" She leaned nearer. "Well, I can believe it after I just saw you play, but ... that is completely off the charts."

"Losing that one time was a deep blow to my ego. A good one thankfully." He glanced at Kuroko. "I had lost control over my alter ego and that loss brought me back. I had been asleep in my own head for two and half years, so losing was a helpful experience." Losing Kuroko had hurt more though. "It was a bit confusing to suddenly find myself in a body more than fifteen centimeters taller. My limbs weren't exactly reacting as I was used to."

"So everyone is cautious around you because they are afraid of what your alter ego is capable of?" She looked at Midorima for confirmation. "Because he did some bad things in those two and a half years?"

"That's it in a nutshell." Akashi nodded. She was taking this rather calmly. "I wasn't nice, I played people against each other, I got violent when I was displeased. I used my skills to humiliate people that got on my nerves."

"So ... did you get therapy?" She glanced at Aomine still on the court.

"Not as in seeing a psychologist. My father would never have allowed that. Now that he is dead, I thought about it but by now my alter ego and I work well together, so I don't see the necessity. I read a lot of books about it. Some people try to reintegrate their personalities but often it is impossible anyway, so the best way is to strive to have all personalities work together."

"So if your alter ego decided to get too violent now, you would be able to intervene?" She looked at Momoi for a moment who sat next to Akashi but a bit behind.

"Mostly, yes. It still needs some fine-tuning. I don't attack people weaker than me but I am not holding back in settings where others can defend themselves. I have no problem to trash Alphas on the court. I can still use cutting words if others don't behave appropriately. I just don't go around making people kneel before me anymore if I find them too cocky."

"Momoi, Kuroko or me don't fear him at all. He would never go against a women, an Omega or a pregnant person," Shintaro explained with a calm voice. "It's different for Alpha men. We don't call him the emperor without reason."

"That doesn't sound too bad. So your alter ego is not dangerous to me?" She asked that rather seriously. So behind the naive cheer, her sharp mind was still mulling over

everything she heard.

"Not as you long as you say what you want. If you say yes but mean no, don't expect him to notice. If you don't want something, tell him. He won't stop otherwise." He pointed at his left eye. "If this one is golden, I stop being able to understand implications. I come up with things that are morally questionable and need a direct no to not go through with them. Others call that cruel, I call that practical. It's what I often need as head of my company."

"So your alter ego is the cold-blooded company boss version of yourself?"

"Pretty much." He nodded. "Successful business often means stepping on other's dreams and hopes. I don't enjoy that at all. He does. What should not have been was that he was the one to deal with my friends. That I am sorry about. I am happy they forgave me."

"That's a given." Momoji smiled at him. "Everyone does things in their youth they aren't proud of. What's important is that we learn from them."

"Your alter ego learned to listen to others, that was the most important thing." Shintaro added.

"I am sorry I tried to badmouth you," Kuroko added from the other blanket. It seemed like Himuro and him had stopped talking to listen in for a bit.

They all turned to him. Akashi debated asking him what his behavior had been about but Kuroko continued by himself: "I was angry about how you made Taiga look bad. To me, he is my most important person, so ... I got really angry."

"He treated Ayako disrespectfully. I couldn't let it stand like that." He scanned the memories provided by his alter ego. "I might have gone a bit too far though."

Kuroko just nodded and accepted his apology as well.

"I didn't feel like being treated disrespectfully," Ayako added cautiously.

"He didn't bow to you." Akashi inclined his head to her. "Those were bad manners."

"Well ... you are nineteen-year-olds playing basketball in a park. I don't expect such manners in such a situation."

"I do," Akashi simply told her. "All of my friends know I do."

"It is only proper," Shintaro supported him. "Bad behavior begins in your daily bearing."

"Those two are old blood and drilled Shin behavior into us. I think everyone is used to being scolded once or twice by one of them." Kazunari added who had stood with their back to them watching the playing children. "Shin-chan and Akashi are all about discipline."

"As a team captain I can only support such an attitude," Kasamatsu added with an angry glare at his partner who was obliviously typing on his phone. "I spent every day with those two hot-heads at work and that one after work." He first pointed at the two on the court and then at Kise.

"Yeah, you really got it worst." Kazunari grinned at him.

"Try getting Atsushi to even attend work every day." Himuro added with a roll of his eyes.

"You only need to get him there, I need to get him to actually work out," Kasamatsu replied.

"And that is why I did not want your job." Akashi smiled at the raven-haired man. "I had it for three years after all. Training miracles is like keeping a sack of fleas."

"What are your jobs?" Ayako asked the group.

"Akashi didn't tell you?" Kasamatsu began pointing at the people he mentioned. "I am captain of our national basketball team. Aomine is our small forward, Kagami our

power forward. Atsushi is center, all of us are starters.”

“Wait, you are professional players?” She looked at Akashi. “Did you really just beat five of them at the same time?”

“I was their captain for three years, that was long enough.” He opened his hand in Kasamatsu’s direction. “This one is fit for the job.”

“Most days I don’t think I am.” The man shook his head. “Ryouta decided to retire due to his bad foot, so now he is working as a model, actor and singer.”

“I got it right that he is Kise Ryouta, right? The one who got second place as the most wanted bachelor in Japan after you?” She asked Akashi.

“He is not a bachelor though – but for the public he is.” He nodded at Shintaro. “My best friend here retired from basketball as well, even though he is well-missed.”

“I study medicine.” Shintaro told her but the hand on his lower belly spoke of the real reason. The smile he exchanged with Kazunari was also telling. “And my husband keeps the house and works as a tea master. It’s our family trade.”

“We are the typical stay-at-home-Omegas,” Himuro continued with a look at Kuroko.

“I’d like to become a kindergarten teacher one day,” the other man added.

“Really?” Himuro blinked in surprise. “I’d like to open a small cafe one day. Atsushi is a great baker and I am a great cook. I think we would make a good team when he gets too old to play basketball.”

“That’s some long-term plans.” Momoi smiled at him. “I study sports medicine to get better at being the national team’s manager and assistant coach.”

“Secretly it’s not me or Shintaro bossing everyone around, it is her,” Akashi fake-whispered to Ayako.

“That’s true.” Kasamatsu smiled at her. “We really need you back, coach has trouble keeping both Aomine and Kagami under control at the same time.”

“I fear, even with therapy, Daiki can never completely be kept under control.” She smiled at her fiancée. “You can keep the animal out of the wild, but not the wild out of the animal.”

“Both of them are similar in that regard,” Kuroko agreed with her while looking at the court.

“They do give off the vibe of two animals fighting,” Ayako said as well. “Their stamina is impressive as well. I would not have thought it possible they could stay play this long and intensive after Akashi beat both of them.”

“Yes, we should stop them soon. Otherwise both will play until they lose consciousness and have to be carried home.” Momoi nodded to herself and got out her whistle.

“Both of them are heavy,” Kuroko added.

The Alpha woman stood, whistled and began to shout at both of them. Half a minute later both of them trotted off the court with a pout. They got drinks from their respective partners and an order to go shower and come back in street clothes. They kicked rocks on their way with a sullen look on their faces.

“I can’t believe it’s the same every day.” Momoi shook her head. “Those two never stop.”

“It’s like having three children.” Kuroko nodded. “It’s cute and annoying at the same time. At least they make money by bickering like small kids every day.”

“It’s nice to be paid for that,” Murasakibara said before sitting on the grass next to the blanket. “Tatsu, my snacks are empty~.”

“Should we get something to eat when those two are back?” The beautiful Omega looked into the round.

"I'll look for a restaurant that can fit all of us," Akashi offered and got out his phone. "I'd like ramen." - "Okonomiyaki!" - "Some people here are pregnant, remember that." - "Okonomiyaki fits everyone." - "Ramen does as well." - "I want some salad." - "Why would you need salad? You are leaner than everyone else." - "Everyone else plays basketball!" - "Yeah, we need to think about monsters like Kagami who eat ten times our portions." - "How about Sukiya?" - "I am not going to such a low class establishment." - "You're a snob, Midorimacchi!" - "Can we get cake?" - "Only after dinner, Atsushi."

"I reserved a private table at a Chinese restaurant," Akashi told them without listening to their argument. Ayako was lightly snickering at his side. "Remember that we have children and babies with us. That level of noise some of them produce is not allowed in most places."

"I have to tell you that Kikyo is well-beha-," Midorima started in the mode of an affronted parent.

"I wasn't talking about our actual children," Akashi reassured him. "They are better behaved than some others who call themselves their parents."

"Is this a jab against Taiga again?" Kuroko narrowed his eyes at him.

"Would you mind if it was?" He raised a red eye-brow.

The Omega was silent for a moment before he said: "While you are right, only I feel entitled to say such things about him."

"As you wish." Akashi nodded. "So are all babies and actual kids accounted for?" He looked for Natsue. He panicked for a second when he could not immediately find them.

"Kazu accompanied them to the playing ground." Shintaro pointed to the right. "He wanted to power them out as well, so they'll be able to play quietly in the restaurant." "Good thinking." Akashi smiled at his best friend. He liked how everyone knew their place here.

Kapitel 14: Visiting a castle

He had brought Ayako and Natsue home after dinner. The little girl had slept most of the way, so he had carried the backpack and her. While Ayako had sometimes asked him before if the things he carried were too heavy, she had stopped with such questions completely after seeing him play today. When they reached her home, she asked him to come in and help her settle Natsue into bed.

It really was only one room. Ayako removed the table in the middle and laid out the futon instead. He put their princess down before unpacking the bag with his back to both women, so Ayako could get her daughter into sleeping cloths. As it wasn't much, he finished before her and decided to make some tea for both of them in a kitchen that didn't even measure a meter. She took the cup with a thankful smile and nodded to the door. They changed into their shoes again and went to drink their tea outside the apartment.

"I am sorry my place is so small." She leaned against the open reeling in front of her place.

"I am sure you are providing Natsue with the best you can."

"Yeah." She sighed. "It was a wonderful day. Your friends are really great. I would ask you to stay, but, well, I don't even have enough place for you as well."

"Thank you for the sentiment." He smiled at her. "May I ask you over to my place? With a sleep-over if you would like." He hoped he had not misunderstood her. "Next weekend for example."

"I'd like that." She looked up at him with a blinding smile. So yes, she really wanted to spend a night with him. "Say ..." She sobered up again. "Could you lend me a good book about this personality thing? I'd like to know a bit more, so I don't step on your toes unintentionally."

"I'll bring you one tomorrow," he promised. After a moment he leaned over and kissed her cheek. "Feel free to ask me some questions next weekend. I don't want you to stumble into a relationship you regret afterwards. I never planned on keeping this from you."

"I never thought so." She stood and stepped onto her toes to kiss him on the mouth. She tasted like duck and green tea. "Sometimes it makes me afraid how easy it is to trust you."

"I'll try my best not to betray your trust." He took her hand and kissed her knuckles. "I hope you'll sleep well."

"You too." She smiled at him and took the empty cup from his hands.

He took his bag and nodded at her before leaving. His driver – who had sent a text to while cooking tea – waited downstairs. He couldn't help but smile on the way back, even his driver finally asked him about his day. He told him with a wink that a gentleman keeps his silence.

Most of his books had been in English, so choosing one hadn't been difficult. He only owned three in Japanese, one from a professional perspective, two from the eyes of people having DID. He chose one he liked more than the other and the professional one and briefly visited the kindergarten to give them to Ayako. The kids tried to get him to stay but he had a meeting. Their pouts were adorable but work took first priority. His alter ego was adamant about that, though they did argue for a moment.

He couldn't wait for the weekend. He really hoped Ayako would decide to stay. Gods, had he ever felt this nervous? He found himself spacing out thinking about her, much to his alter ego's dismay. He was finally offered to just go to sleep until Saturday and let the other handle everything until then. He thought about it and took the offer. Having DID was kind of nice sometimes. He woke on Saturday, excited like a kid on his birthday and immediately checked his phone. His alter ego had exchanged some texts with Ayako. She planned to take the train at nine, arriving at the station near his place a quarter to eleven. As his body was working like a clockwork, he had woken at six, just like every day. Hm, what to do ... a morning jog would do nicely. He should also check on Yukimaru on the way, he definitely wanted them to meet his horse. How about a brunch?

>Already ordered one.< His alter ego informed him.

>You're the best.< With a smile Akashi changed into his work-out clothes and left the house after greeting his butler. After jogging, showering, dressing, a snack and playing a bit of piano, it was still only eight o'clock. Well. How did you prepare for a date? He didn't want to ask Kuroko, he was still a bit cross with him and Shintaro was out for obvious reasons. Should he ask Momoi? She was female after all. From all other available people she would also be the only one awake on a Saturday morning. He decided to text her, he had nothing to lose after all.

It only took a few seconds for his phone to ring.

"Mochi-mochi?" Momoi asked excitedly. "I am so glad you wrote me! Good morning."

"Good morning, Momoi," he greeted her a bit more moderate.

"So Ayako is visiting for the first time?" Always the gossipmonger. "Does she know what to expect? You have quite a mansion, you know."

"Does that change anything?" His voice was doubtful.

"Well, yes, she won't be speechless and intimidated. Tell her when you get her from the station." That was good advice. "Is she bringing her daughter?"

"Yes, Natsue will come too."

"Have you prepared something for her? Kids get easily bored. Do you have some paper and pencils ready? Some games? Maybe a video if you'd like some time with Ayako?"

"I think we get about every channel available to earth here. When Kuroko zapped through my programs, I saw him watching Kazakh TV." He lay down on his bed. "I am not too sure about games but I have stables, a pool and an outside court. More than one actually. I also have a music room and a game room with pool and cards. I have a butler, a cook, a gardener and two maids available if she is still bored."

"So you can do everything from baking cake to riding on a beach, okay, I get it. Do you have some idea what you would like to do?" Had she just made fun of him?

"I? Err ... no, I have no idea. I'd like to show them around and introduce them to my horse. Oh, I also planned some brunch."

"Very good, that will take a few hours with the size of your place. Until then they'll most likely have an idea what they'd like to do. If not, baking a cake is often a good idea. It's fun, easy to do and the result is tasty."

"Do you think I should look up a recipe beforehand?" He had never baked, had he?

"No, looking for one is fun too. And you most likely have everything at your place anyway, so don't sweat it. Are you wearing decent clothes?"

"I think so. I am wearing what I normally have on in my spare time."

"Yes, you always dress well, no worries there. You are also someone that doesn't need to be reminded to shower, brush their teeth and comb their hair." She made a

humming sound for a moment. "I think with you the best advice is not to overdo it. So much things are normal for you that are special for other people, it's easy to overwhelm others. Don't take her flying or hunting or whatever you think may be special. Just show her what is normal for you."

"I've never been hunting." Except for Kuroko. "I don't hurt animals."

"But you know what I mean, right?" She sometimes added strange endings to words to make them sound cuter and while he normally didn't mind he found it annoying after some time.

"I guess so." But what was normal? He was mostly never home. If he was, he was jogging in the garden, taking a swim or playing piano. Riding was his only passion. But going for a ride would be overdoing it if he had understood correctly. This conversation was giving him more questions than answers.

They exchanged some pleasantries but ended the conversation a bit later. Eight thirty. Whatever should he do?

At ten he had given up and called his driver to get Ayako and Natsue from the station. It had him standing on a desolate platform fifteen minutes early but it was easier than sitting around at home. He watched the train's progress on his app until it finally pulled into the station. He pocketed his phone and watched the passing doors for Ayako. This was quite a bit out of the way, so the train was nearly empty. He had no problem to spot them as they were the only ones getting off here. He approached them with a smile.

"Akashi!" Natsue ran up to him to get a hug.

He lifted her from the ground, spun her around and settled her on his hip before asking: "Did you have a good ride?"

"We counted rivers!" She checked her hands. "There were ... mama, how many were there?"

"Eighteen rivers." Ayako kissed his cheek. "This really is out of the way."

"It gives me time to check my e-mails every morning and sign my documents every evening." He took her hand and led them from the station. "My house is even farther off, so we'll take the car."

"Cool!" Natsue fidgeted to get down. "I've never driven a car!"

"Really?" He looked at her in astonishment.

"We don't own one and we don't have friends that own one." Ayako smiled at him.

"Don't be surprised if that will be her highlight of the day."

"Well, maybe the day will have many highlights." He held open the door for them, only then noticing that he had not planned a security seat for children. He was therefore surprised to see one in the back of his car.

>Some of us thankfully aren't love-struck fools.< His alter ego told him arrogantly.

Ayako knew how to secure her daughter in one, so she did not seem to be a stranger to cars. She sat beside her while he took a seat opposite them. His car had two rows divided by a small table on which he normally spread his documents. The windows were tinted, so it was hard to see the outside. Maybe he should have taken a car from which one could see a bit more.

"I hope you won't get sick. Driving for the first time can be confusing," he told Natsue.

"It's best to look outside, so that your eyes know you are moving."

They started driving and Natsue let out an excited squeal. It seemed no problem for her to stare outside, she was watching the houses fly by and shouted: "We are so fast! Like a train."

"We can hear you, honey." Ayako held her hand and smiled at her indulgently. "You don't need to shout."

"Look, there was a dog!" She pointed outside.

"We are out of the city. There are a lot more and bigger dogs out here." Ayako took her pointing finger. "And even if people can't see us, we still don't point at them."

"There are a lot less houses here. They are also smaller." She noticed.

"Out here families can afford a house all for themselves. Even I could afford a bigger flat. But it's a long way from the city and it's expensive to drive those long ways every day."

"Actually, about that," he interrupted them. "I was told to warn you that my house is rather big."

"I had guessed that." Ayako smiled at him broadly.

"I was told that people underestimate my definition of big." He intently watched her face. "It's big as in having a park, a pool and some outside courts as well as stables, tea houses and greenhouses."

Her eyes widened. She blinked before asking: "You mean big as in big as a castle?"

"Are we going to a castle?" Natsue asked completely focused on their conversation for once.

"Well, no, I mean, yes ... to be honest, it's even bigger than your average castle. It's bigger than our emperor's castle."

"Are you joking?" Ayako mustered him for a second. "You aren't, are you? Just for the record, are you related to our emperor?"

"I am his nephew, yes." Was that important? "I am not in the throne's inheritance line if that is your question. My mother was the emperor's sister."

>Our father was an idiot to kill her.<

>He thought she sullied his reputation. To him, she was better off dead after bearing him one acceptable heir.< He replied with spite in his voice.

"Oh gods, I am dating the emperor's nephew." She hid her face in her hands. "Are you a minister as well?"

"No, not yet. I haven't reached the minimum age for that." He leaned forward to take her hands. "Is it so bad to live a life others have thought up for you? I have always just accepted this as the role I was born into."

"I was born to be a spurned wife, not a fairy-tale princess." She grabbed his hands. "This feels a lot like entering a fairy-tale."

"The books you read are still true," he reminded her. "The fairy-tale is just what people painted on the outside."

Ayako watched him for a moment before taking a deep breath and nodding. He let her hands go, so she could sit comfortably again. To be honest he would have felt better to continue to hold them. Momoi had been right, his life was rather overwhelming for other people.

"So ..." Natsue watched them just as intently. "Are we going to a castle or not?"

Kapitel 15: Difficult questions

After brunch and showing them around Natsue could barely keep her eyes open. Akashi offered to show them her room if they decided to stay the night. She just nodded along, only waking when he opened the door for her. She simply stopped after taking two steps and stared.

"Is ... everything alright?" He asked after a few seconds.

She looked around and asked: "Where is the futon?"

"It's a house with beds, honey." Ayako pointed at the bed. "That is the bed."

"We don't need to lay it out?" She asked in confusion.

"No, it's always there. Take off the house-shoes and try it."

Still staring Natsue took some steps and looked under the covers. She poked the mattress, still not trusting the thing. Finally she took off her shoes and climbed on top. "Mama! It's soft!"

Ayako laughed lowly and petted her head. "It's nice, isn't it? It's all for you."

"I can really sleep here?" She first looked at her mother, then at him for confirmation.

"I own this castle, so yes, you can sleep here." After hearing her chatter about his castle for hours, he had begun to call it a castle as well. "When you wake up, you pull this cord." He pointed at the cord next to her bed. "Then you need to wait a bit and someone will come to bring you to us. If no one comes, pull it again."

"Who will come?" She asked in awe.

"The butler or one of the maids. Or maybe one of us, it depends on who hears it first. The cord is ringing a bell downstairs, so you won't hear it, don't worry about that."

"We'll wake you for dinner if you oversleep," Ayako added. "Now get under the covers. You're nearly dropping where you stand."

"Okay." She buried herself under the blanket and sunk her head into the pillow. "It's really soft."

"I know, my dear." Ayako stroked her cheek. "Enjoy the bed and have some nice dreams." She bowed to kiss Natsue's temple. When she straightened the girl was already deeply asleep. Ayako watched her for a moment before signaling him they should leave.

After a few steps from the door she said: "Just seeing your house was a bit much."

"I gathered. I am sorry, I don't often have guests here. If I have they normally come from similar houses." He mentally thanked Momi for her advice. "Would you like a nap as well? As you can see I have a lot of free rooms available."

She laughed and shook her head before saying: "No, thank you. I'd like a nice and quiet room to sit though, maybe some tea and a moment to recharge."

"There is a lounge overlooking the gardens right here." He opened a door to their left.

"This way we'll hear Natsue if she wakes up."

"I don't expect her to wake up anytime soon." Ayako fell into one of the cushioned chairs. "She's right, everything is very soft here."

"It was my mother's lounge. I often laid around on one of these sofas while she read me stories." He sat on one. "You have chosen her chair with uncanny ability."

"Oh." She immediately stood. "I am sorry, I'll-"

"Please sit again. It's the nicest chair around here. I have some fond memories regarding that chair." He invited her to sit with a hand gesture.

She looked at it but chose to sit in another saying: "I wanted to ask you some

questions and if I upset you I don't want to spoil your memories. I can imagine you don't have many positive ones."

He kept quiet. She was right. It was one of his alter ego's memories, the only one he had of his mother except for the pictures around the house. This room was the only one he felt safe in. A lot of places around the house gave him the chills, even though he did not know why. This room was good. Maybe they should have the conversation in another room? Or maybe this was the perfect one. He nodded to her.

She opened her purse and took out a small list explaining: "I wrote them down so I wouldn't forget one. Thank you for the books. They were very helpful."

"It's helping me in the end if you were to decide to give this relationship a try." He didn't know what to do with his hands. All of his poses were made for self-assured men. He wasn't feeling sure of himself right now. He copied one of Kuroko's by pressing his hands between his thighs.

"So how long did you know that you have DID?"

"Since I went to sleep with fourteen and woke up with sixteen."

"Do you know how many personalities you have?"

"I only know of myself and one alter ego. But he says he thinks we might have more because his memories begin at five years old and mine begin at eight years old." He had tried asking his head if there was someone else but no one had answered.

"How much time of your daily life do you two have covered? Are you missing some time?" So she had read both books.

"Not anymore." He glanced at her. "When father was still alive, we were missing time. We are sure that he abused us until his death but we don't know what he did."

"You had no marks on your body?" She looked up in anguish. It seemed like both of them knew what that meant. "I am so sorry. Since when have you known?"

"I read those books with sixteen, so ... since then. I thought about confronting him or going to the police or ... but what should I have said? Dear officer, I don't remember anything but I am sure that my father is sexually abusing me? I just hoped he would die after I graduated. Whoever was responsible for that, he did exactly as I wanted him to."

"I can't really find any fault in thinking like that, even if we are talking about the death of a human. The gods know how often I wished my ex-husband would just die." She took a deep breath. "I don't have enough pity in my heart to feel for men that abuse children."

"The evening after our first date I was so glad to know that - no matter what - you would believe me. The gods know how often I thought no one ever would."

"Your friends know, don't they?" She looked at him in pity but it did not seem like she was looking down on him. Rather it felt like she knew exactly what he was going through. Hell, of course she knew. She had lost a daughter to this.

"Shintaro knows. He read the same books. It's his way of caring. I don't know about the others but Momoi is a data gathering specialist so I expect here to have looked it up too. If the others know they never let it on."

"I can't imagine how you survived that, knowing what he did to you and still returning to this house. No matter how pretty it is, I-"

"I went to a boarding school in high-school to escape from here. Or rather my alter ego did. I could never say no to father but he was able to stand up to him. He fought for our freedom and got it. Before our father died of a stroke, he had a heart attack. At the time my alter ego was arranging a flat in Tokio. After that heart attack, we knew the end was near, so our escape plans were laid to rest." He sat a bit more

comfortably. "It was only three months between the heart attack and his stroke. He was also quite weak at the time and I spent my time taking over the company."

"I see ... say, do you just say alter ego or do you have actual names? It is confusing like this."

"I guess it would be easiest to call me Seijuro and him Akashi. He is handling the business side after all. So if it would be alright for you, please call me Seijuro."

"Gladly." She smiled at him. "Do you have any idea what I should do if an unknown alter ego shows up? Is there a safe way to bring you back?"

"I never encountered the situation, so I don't know. Whoever showed up for the abuse is clearly linked to it, so I don't expect that personality to show up."

She nodded and pondered her questions for a moment. She seemed to have already asked all that she had written down. After a moment she said: "Your third personality is an unknown factor that worries me. It is someone linked to sexual abuse. Just for Natsue's safety, I don't think I want to leave you alone with her for a longer span of time. It's not that I don't trust you, I just don't trust that personality."

"Don't worry, I understand. It would make me feel safer as well. I don't ever want to hurt her." Did that mean that Ayako would stay?

"Alright." She smiled at him. "I think those were all of my questions for now."

He let go of his breath and sunk into the couch. It really was soft. He just let his mind float for a moment before he suddenly sat again and said: "Tea! I completely forgot you wanted tea."

"Do you think we could have that tea on your patio? It looks really nice outside."

"Of course." He stood and held out a hand for her. "We could open up one of the tea houses, they have a beautiful view on the lake."

"Of course you would have a lake." She rolled her eyes indulgently. "I guess we will ask your butler for the tea?"

"We are modern enough that I call him if I want something." He got out his phone and called his butler, telling him about the sleeping princess and their wish to open the rose tea pavilion. He led Ayako outside while he did so. "This will take a moment. Is there anything you'd like to see in the meantime?"

"We could take a stroll around the lake."

So they did. She asked him about some flower's names and though he wasn't aware he had ever studied them he knew their names. As his alter ego was not aware of this as well, it must have been knowledge from their third personality that was shared. Maybe their mother had taught him? She had loved flowers, it was a story his butler had told him. He didn't talk to his staff often, knowing that they most likely knew what had occurred in this house and never bothered to help. It wasn't enough to fire them all but enough to resent them.

When they reached the pavilion the doors had been opened. He invited her to sit. She complimented the beauty and simply watched the trees and the fishes in the water – not real kois but similar looking carps. The kois were kept in a separate pool. The butler brought a tea set and asked if they would like him to perform a tea ceremony. Seijuro just shook his head and thanked him for the tea. He continued to do the tea ceremony himself.

He had learned it from Shintaro. His best friend loved everything to do with rituals, so of course he loved tea ceremony. It was one of the oldest traditions still allowed in modern times and also his family trade. His best friend was better than him at this but he was good enough to serve Ayako some matcha tea.

"Thank you." She accepted a cup from him. "It seems unthinkable what depraved

humans live in this beautiful world.”

“I am sure some people would count me as one of them.” He made a cup for himself and cleaned his tools before taking a sip. “My alter ego did organize Omega hunts on Tetsu. When you disregard morals, it was a good idea for the situation he found himself in. He asked Tetsu for consent and used a bit of manipulation to get him to say yes. My alter ego actually thought he was behaving quite admirably, controlling those hunts enough that Tetsu did not get permanently hurt or maimed. Except for some bruises and cuts Tetsu was safe. Of course my alter ego completely disregarded what rape would do to a human soul. He just thought that with damage control and abortion, Tetsu would get out of this only slightly worse for the wear. My alter ego has next to no emotions, so he is unable to understand shame, humiliation and self-hate. He also could not fathom that one might grieve for a child they had to abort.”

“But you understand it?” She did not look at him, just watched the slight ripples on the lake.

“Not in detail, no. I know those feelings, yes, not the grieve, but the rest. I just think that until I remember my own memories, I can’t say I fully understand it.” He hung his head. “I understand enough though to know how deeply my alter ego’s actions have wronged Tetsu.”

“You don’t sound like you will ever be able to integrate your personalities.”

“I don’t think so, no. I have my alter ego’s memories. I know what he did. Some days his personality is useful. But sometimes I find him repulsive. Sometimes I fear that by talking to him I’ll become just as repulsive. The worst is when he shows me memories of how he abused people and they arouse me. I do know self-hate very well.”

“Do you know that being aroused is a protective mechanism of the body? When you get raped it’s better to be aroused because then your body takes less damage. Every situation we associate with sex will arouse us, even if we find them repulsive. It really needs a lot of disgust to kill any kind of arousal. When you see someone raping another person, you’ll feel aroused, even if you know it’s wrong. It’s how our body works. Rather, it is a true show of character that you feel disgust, even if you are aroused.”

He stared at her for a moment, dumbly asking: “Really?”

“I tried to help my daughter with therapy. It was shame and self-hate that led her to suicide. Even though I told her those words over and over again, she hated herself so much she killed herself in the end. Your DID keeps you from doing that, so I am rather thankful to your alter ego, no matter how repulsive his actions are. What’s important to me is that they are in the past.”

“They are.” He still stared at her. “I explained to him why it was bad what he did. He understands rationally.” So it was normal that he felt aroused when his alter ego showed him things he secretly found disgusting? Because when he thought of Tetsu’s pain he found those memories with him disgusting. Arousing, yes, but also disgusting.

“Have my words reached you at least?” She watched him with a smile.

“My alter ego always told me I was just as depraved as him because I found the memories arousing. I also found them disgusting, he called me weak for that.”

“Tell him it’s just a bodily reaction. Because it is. Don’t beat yourself up over it. If you ever remember your abuse, it will be arousing as well. You might even have enjoyed it. Don’t worry about that. It doesn’t say anything about you, even if your alter ego gets the idea of calling you a slut.” She sighed. “My ex-husband called Mitsuki a slut a lot in bed. Whenever she had flashbacks she would hurt and scream at herself, degrading herself. It was a horror to watch. She cut the word slut in bold letters into her own

body.”

He closed his eyes and stayed silent for a moment. He could not even fathom that. It was unthinkable. If Natsue or Tsuki would ever do that to herself ... “I hope I won’t ever make you go through that again.”

“At least I am prepared this time.” She drank a bit more tea. “Though I will think of Natsue first.”

“I would not want it any other way. Children always take top priority.” If he had just been a bit older, his brother and mother might have lived. If only he had been a bit older, a bit less naive, he would have seen the signs. His alter ego would have taken action. “Would you like another cup of tea?”

“Yes, please.” She watched him prepare it, enjoying the view. “If I understood you correctly, your alter ego might try some of those practices that repulse you with me.”

“It’s highly possible, yes. I taught him to explain and ask beforehand.” He presented her a fresh cup and made one for himself. “Chiho was a living example how even that can still go wrong.”

“After talking with you, it’s hard to switch to talking to a person that has no understanding of emotions.” She blew her tea and sipped from it. “I am forewarned now.”

“I don’t want to lose you because of his actions.”

“Does he listen to our conversations?”

“Yes.” He looked at the green, creamy mix in his cup. He had always associated tea with cleaning your inner self. It’s why he loved tea. “He knows everything I do. I am learning to stay awake when he is out.”

“So he is learning from watching you?”

“If he wants to.” He sent a mental stab to his alter ego. “Often he doesn’t want to learn. He looks down on me for having emotions.”

“He sounds a lot like I would imagine your father to be.”

“He speaks with my father’s voice,” he admitted.

“So your head invented a personality in image of your abuser.” She pondered that for a moment. “I guess for one he is a really good businessmen. He might also have the quest of abusing you whenever you feel a bit better, so you might not start to integrate other personality parts. If he didn’t insult you, you might get strong enough to actually decide on therapy. It would completely destroy the equilibrium you are living in right now.”

>She’s pretty sharp. I approve of her,< his alter ego said out of the blue.

>You what?< He looked startled. >I thought you would be mortally affronted by her.<

>I don’t have feelings, remember? It’s hard to hurt someone’s feelings if that person doesn’t have them.< His alter ego leered at him, making him feel stupid again. >She might be our undoing though. If she continues like this, she might destroy the equilibrium. Our mental wounds are too fresh to heal.<

>When if not now?<

>I can’t say. I just have the feeling it is not time yet.<

>I thought you have no feelings.<

>Call it a hunch then.<

“So what does he say?” She asked, obviously fully knowing they were talking at the same time.

“He says you are right. He likes you. He also thinks you are dangerous because you have a good influence on me. He says it’s too early to face my memories and you are making the process go faster.”

“Oh ... okay. Then I guess we should talk about something else. When did you learn tea ceremony?” She seemed content to simply drop the topic. They began to discuss tea, Shin and samurai honor.

Kapitel 16: A rude awakening

Natsue looked a bit groggy at dinner, so they played a bit of cards before getting her into bed again. She spent most of the time telling them how a great a bed was and that they should try it too. They assured her they would with an amused smile. Ayako told her a bedtime story while he simply sat beside them and listened. Both adults weren't sure Natsue heard the end but it was more important that she slept.

In front of the door, Seijuro had a moment of panic. Was this just a sleep-over or would Ayako want to sleep at his side? How to ask in a round-about way? "So, this is the Mistress tract. In my grandfather's time the wife would sleep here while the husband slept on the other side of the house. My father slept over there, so ... my room is over here." He pointed at the door at the end of the hall. "All these doors are bedrooms, so you can decide where you would like to sleep."

She took his hand to stop his babbling and said: "I'd like some sleep."

"Oh, okay. Where would you like to sleep?" No sex tonight then.

"Would it be very forward to ask to sleep in your arms?" She smiled at him.

"No, not at all. Of course you may. I mean, I would love to." Damn, he knew he was smoother normally. "May I show you my room?"

"I would love to see it." Her smirk said she knew how nervous he was. But there was a slight blush on her cheeks, so maybe she was nervous as well. He would be nervous in her place. She was an Omega and he was a heavily muscled Alpha. She also knew he was only one of at least three personalities of which two were either sexually abusive or abused. If he lost control, she might get raped and she knew that. He thought she was very brave.

"This was my mother's bedroom before I moved in here after her death." He let her into the beautiful room. All of it was in pastel colors, a light purple, baby blue, a beige carpet and violet curtains. It was obviously a woman's room but he still liked it a lot. "Just as the lounge, this is a sanctuary. I don't think something bad ever happened to me in this room."

"So you were allowed to sleep peacefully." She looked around the room, her gaze settling on the beauty table filled with cosmetics. "Are these yours or did your mother own them?"

"They belonged to my mother. I often thought about removing them, but I like the sight so I kept it like this."

Ayako studied a lipstick, uncapping it and smelling it before asking: "When did your mother die exactly?"

"Fourteen years ago."

"They must have been very expensive to still be this fresh." She held a pot of powder next to his face. "She looked a lot like you, didn't she? This is exactly your skin color."

"I guess?" He shrugged his shoulders. "There are paintings of her. I owned a photography once, but some day it just vanished. So I am not exactly sure about the details."

She nodded and investigated the rest of the room. Before opening any doors she asked for permission. She fondly shook her head about a row of suits. When she stepped up to a wardrobe a bit off, he informed her it had been his mother's. It was another thing he hadn't removed. The room was big enough anyway. She took a dress and held it to her body.

"I think she was a lot taller than me, right?" She twirled around. "She must have been beautiful."

"She was." He smiled. "The paintings don't show her height but the dresses suggest she was about as tall as I am now."

Ayako put the dress back and closed the wardrobe. She went back to the door to get the bag she had left there and asked: "Where can I change?"

He showed her the bathroom and went to change into his nightclothes as well. He went in after her to brush his teeth and found her lying in his bed when he came back. That was certainly a sight he could get used to. She was wearing a red nightgown that fit his bedding. When he got in, she turned with a lazy smile to kiss him and settle at his sight. He put an arm around her and couldn't help but smile. This would work out, he would make it work. He closed his eyes in happiness.

He came to standing in his bedroom wearing a robe over his nightclothes. What time was it? It was light outside and Ayako wasn't in bed anymore. He looked around for his phone and found it on his nightstand. It seemed to be a quarter to eight in the morning. What had happened? He asked his alter ego: >Did you get up?<

>No, I didn't. My last memory is the same as yours.<

>That doesn't sound good.< He knocked at the bathroom, shouting Ayako's name and looked inside to find it empty. >I agree that we have a third personality.<

>Hopefully she wasn't hurt. Go look in Natsue's room.<

>Good idea.< He tried not to run, so he wouldn't scare anyone in case something really had happened. >Maybe she just woke up before us.<

>It doesn't explain why you were standing around in your mother's robe.<

>It is?< He looked down at himself. Yes, it was. He got out of it while he walked. He cautiously knocked at Natsue's door. "Ayako? Natsue?" He listened at the door but could not hear anything.

"Seijuro?" So Ayako was in. Her voice sounded scared.

Shit. He dropped the robe beside the door. Had he hurt her? His knuckles didn't sting. He opened the door slightly and said: "Yes, it is me."

Ayako was kneeling in front of a very sleepy looking Natsue that was nearly completely dressed. She scanned his eyes and face before sighing and visibly relaxing.

"Thank the gods, you're back."

"Can I go back to sleep then?" Natsue grumbled in obvious distaste at already being awake.

"Yes, sweetie, of course. I am sorry I woke you." Ayako kissed her head and undressed her again. "Please come in, Seijuro."

"Okay." He did and closed the door behind him. "I am very sorry for your rude awakening." Whatever actually happened. "I just came to."

"Just do your best to stay." She was sending him inquisitive glances, checking his face every few seconds. So he had definitely changed into a third personality. Why now? He had slept with women beside him before. Was it the room? He had never invited someone there before, preferring to have his one-night-stands in hotel rooms.

He studied the carpet to give both women a bit of privacy while staying in Ayako's line of sight. He tried to shout into his head, asking for answers, for memories, for a sign from their third personality. As always there was no answer.

>Ayako will most likely be able to provide some answers about what happened. Do you want to face her or should I? You may get emotional.<

>I want to know what is going on and it's not guaranteed that I can when you are out.

I'll stay so we'll both know.< He glanced at Ayako who had just kissed Natsue after settling her into bed again. >I hope we didn't hurt her.<

She grabbed his arm and pulled him outside before just standing still after she had closed the door.

"Err ... should we sit in the lounge?" He asked cautiously.

She rigorously shook her head and mustered him, finally noticing the robe lying next to the door. While looking at it, she thought for a moment and said: "I'll take the robe. Do not open your mother's wardrobe. Please get dressed in a suit."

"A suit?" He just nodded at the unusual request. "As you wish."

They went back to his room where he undressed with his back to her. He heard her open and close his mother's wardrobe. After that she went over to the beauty table and put away the make-up into the table's drawer. He just let her do as she pleased. She would most likely explain later.

Dressed in one of his suits he cleared his throat to get her attention. She closed the drawer and opened the door for him to leave while watching him. After she had closed the door behind him, she asked: "Is there a business room with which you do not associate bad memories?"

"Hm ... there is a waiting room for guests that might suit the purpose." Why was she so fixated on business?

>Because she knows that is most likely something far from our third personality. Business is my area. A suit puts me to the forefront of our mind.<

>It's good to see she is able to make those rational decisions. Maybe we just scared her a bit.<

>In this one case my estimation might be better than yours. To me she looks like a soldier that will do her duty before breaking down. I think she's doing her best while disallowing herself to feel her terror.<

He mustered her and had to admit his alter ego wasn't wrong. Her face was lined and drawn, her jaws pressed against each other tightly. But she hadn't run and she had sent Natsue back to bed. Was she just this strong or did his other personality not seem threatening to the girl? They reached the waiting room and sat. She put a table between them.

She was obviously apprehensive. So maybe his third personality wasn't dangerous but still scary? Her hands were shaking, so he kneeled and held one with a table between them. He asked: "Should I call my butler? Would that make you feel safer?"

"Not really." She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Your staff must know. I am sure they know your third personality. They might be a trigger rather than help."

"How so?" Gods, what the heck had his brain bred out?

"She said she were the mistress of this mansion."

"My third personality is my mother?" He drew his eyebrows together.

"What was your mother's name?" Ayako looked him in the eyes.

"Akashi Shiori."

"Then no, she called herself Akashi Sei." She returned the pressure of their still clasped hands. "She was clearly a pure-bred Alpha women full of loathing for everything beneath her."

"So she wasn't happy she found an Omega women in her room?" That wasn't good but there were worse things. So maybe he really hadn't hurt Ayako. He could imagine a screeching woman using his father's superiority complex.

"She insulted me a lot." Ayako didn't seem too hurt though. "She knew about you two. She knew you were controlling everything outside of the house like your job and

school and that you were sleeping around. At least it's what she called it. What she was unhappy about was that you invited Omega filth to your ancestral home, calling you a classless traitor."

"I am sorry you were treated like that." Yes, that sounded a lot like his father. So his third personality seemed to be into Alpha-superiority. "So she ordered you to leave?" "Well ... yes. She wasn't violent, just extremely arrogant. She interrogated me for a bit and was happy to hear that your toy would not sully your bloodline." Ayako was still shaking and a tear was running down her face. "She is your total opposite. She behaved like she was royalty."

He took a deep breath and nodded. >What do you think?<

>It could have been worse. A spoiled princess with a superiority complex is bothersome but she seems to keep to the house like a good trophy wife. That is manageable.<

"I am sorry you had to go through this." He stood, went around the table and sat next to her to give her a hug. "For now, I'll just get a flat in Tokio, so you won't meet her again. I'll figure out how to deal with her."

"Okay." Ayako let herself sink into his arms. "You know ... I would have expected a personality who holds your trauma. I thought it would be a scared child or even a whole pack of children. This was unexpected."

"I am surprised as well." Should he tell her? "At least it's not a violent character. I was really scared if I might have hurt you."

"She is pretty spiteful." Ayako scoffed. "I don't think I ever heard such a hate-speech against Omegas."

"To my father Omegas were animals to be put down. He killed my mother and my newborn brother because he was born an Omega and she refused to let my father drown the baby." He put his nose into her hair, breathing in her scent. It was milky and sweet like honeyed tea.

Ayako looked at him in horror.

"My father was really sick in the head." He sighed. "All of my family were. They have been killing Omegas for generations. So I am not surprised about this Sei."

"It's a wonder you turned out like this." She kissed him. "So there is a copy of your father's personality and of your father's attitude in your head."

"I just wonder why she is a female ... is it just to give her a better reason why she only comes out in the house?" He puckered his lips in thought.

"She is a woman without a doubt. She moved like one, she spoke like one. I am sure that wardrobe and the beauty table might have been your mother's once but they are hers now. I had my doubts yesterday but the make-up is too fresh to be fourteen years old. None of that stuff is your mother's. If you were to try one of the dresses, I am sure they would fit."

"So I have spend my time running around in this house in a dress and make-up?" He let his gaze wander. "No wonder you suspected my staff to know. They must know if I really did that." He tried to imagine ... just why were this people still working for him? Did they think he had eccentric hobbies?

>Your butler worked for your grandfather and your father. You might seem quite tame if the only strange thing you do is wearing dresses and playing the house mistress,< his alter ego calmly suggested.

"What bothers me more is that it means she knows what we are doing and can put both of us to sleep. She uses her time in the house, then dresses up like a man again and gives back control to us. Seeing as we never noticed we lost time, she must be

quite adept at this. I often wondered how exactly I spend my time here and except for riding, playing piano and reading, I couldn't remember what I did. Every time I had those thoughts, something else came up and I stopped thinking about it. Does that mean she can control my thoughts?," he wondered aloud.

>I knew we were often losing time but whenever I told you, you would forget afterwards.<

Ayako just kept silent, her face full of worry.

"Akashi says he knew we were losing time. It was only me that was oblivious. I don't understand how all of this works." He combed back his hair with one hand. "Why could I not remember?"

"If I understood it correctly, it's because you are the everyday personality, so it's your job to be functional and forget inconsistencies. Like in that book where the persona had no memories of eating, going to sleep or doing the house-work and was simply happy she did not have to bother with mundane things. If you kept on worrying, you would not be the everyday persona."

"So I am really not the core." He sighed deeply. He had known that. He had always hoped he was but deep inside he had known he wasn't. "Neither is Akashi. Neither is Sei I'd wager. So there are still more."

"Most likely." Ayako leaned on his shoulder. "It is not my place to say but I fear you do need therapy for this."

"You are right in that. I'll look for one tomorrow." He kissed her hair. "I am sorry I am a lot less stable than I thought I was."

"At least you warned me beforehand." She smiled thinly. "Oh, now that I think about it, there was one thing I didn't understand. When she told me to get my spawn and leave, she told me to bury my sweven of ever having that vixen take the rightful heir's place. What did she mean by that?"

He scrunched his eyebrows. Sweven?

>It means dream. That is pretty old word.<

Suddenly Ayako's face distanced itself from him. One moment she was there, then he saw her through a screen, then he was falling. The screen was getting smaller and smaller, only a light until suddenly the darkness engulfed him.

Kapitel 17: Flashback

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Kapitel 18: Unwanted memories and consequences

>I concur that I do have feelings. I feel disgusted.< His alter ego coldly informed him. Seijuro looked up and found himself in front of the screen. It showed a shogi board and Shintaro opposite him. Where was he? What time was it?

>Sunday afternoon,< his alter ego answered. >I took over the body when you vanished. You gave Ayako quite a fright. As I couldn't reach you, we decided to go to a safe place and wait. I passed the time with some shogi.<

>Where is Ayako?< Seijuro felt numb. He felt this new memory lurking in his head but he didn't want to think about it. It felt like death wrapped in decay. He could smell it, taste it, he just didn't want to.

>She is chatting with Kazunari. Natsue and Kikyo are playing in the garden.<

Seijuro just stared at the screen. He suggested a move and his alter ego explained why that would be a bad idea and what he wanted to do instead. They continued to play for a few minutes. It made Seijuro feel a bit more like himself again. Shogi was his thing. It was a social activity he shared with Shintaro.

>Do you want the body back?< His alter ego asked him.

>I don't know. I think I just want to keep sitting here.<

>Okay.< Akashi was unusually agreeable. >Well, I am still waiting for your break-down.<

>Break-down?<

>You do remember Sei's memory, right?<

>Yes.< No. He did but he didn't want to. He vehemently refused to remember. >I don't want to face it.<

>It does bring some consequences with it.<

>You deal with them.< He knew he sounded like a petulant child but he just didn't want to do this anymore. Living was just not worth it. Too much pain, too much sadness. He didn't want to return.

>As you wish.<

"Shintaro," Akashi addressed the man opposite him. "How did you find out you were pregnant?"

The man looked up and kept silent for a minute. They were used to that. He often thought about his answers to phrase them correctly. Sometimes that took a bit of time. Finally he said: "Kuroko told me. He noticed that when I was pushed I instinctively protected my abdomen when I fell. We went to a clinic, I got tested and was informed of my pregnancy."

"What kind of test was it?"

"A blood test. Though an ultrasound would have made more sense but it did not want anything foreign in my ass back then. You need to wait one day for the diagnosis with only the blood test." Shintaro watched him. "I hope I am not presuming too much but do you think Ayako could be pregnant? The procedure is different for women, they can take an urine test."

"So it is more difficult for men." Akashi nodded and placed his chariot. "I think this is my win again."

Shintaro looked at the board and sighed after a moment. "So it seems."

"Which clinic did you go to?" He began to put away their game.

"It is actually a clinic for Omegas but they know more about male pregnancies than

normal gynecologists. I am going there again for this pregnancy. They also provide an emergency appointment system which normal clinics do not have."

"So it is possible to go there at the weekend?"

"Yes, they are open until six o'clock today for example. They also have doctors on call for rape situations at night." Shintaro stroked his belly. "I feel well-cared for there."

"Is it far from here?" If their responsible personality did not feel up to this, it would fall to him as always. A blood test wasn't bad. He wasn't sure about the ultrasound though. But with those new memories it was to be expected that Seijuro would be squeamish anyway. If an anal ultrasound needed to be done, he would get it done. He wasn't held up by petty emotions after all.

"It is about half an hour by train."

"I'd rather take my car." Akashi stood and stretched. "Will you accompany me?"

Shintaro froze staring at him. The redhead was used to it, so he simply waited for his friend's gears to turn. As he didn't understand implications, he wouldn't have thought about the reason of being asked all those questions. So the following question wasn't unexpected: "Why would you want to go there?"

"To check if I might be pregnant."

"Why would you need to check that?" Shintaro's voice sounded emotionless, his default program when he was unsure what to do.

"Because I was raped. It seems a sensible thing to do in this situation." Akashi held out a hand to help his friend up. "Will you accompany me or not?"

"Of course I will." Shintaro kept hold of his hand, even after he stood. "Who, Akashi?"

"Who do you think?" The redhead smiled wryly. "There is only one with enough control over me."

"He is dead."

"He died inside of me." Akashi snorted. "If it wasn't so disgusting, I'd say it was a fitting end. I always wanted to be the death of him."

"Akashi ..." Shintaro's voice actually sounded anguished.

"You have become too compassionate, my old friend. I need you functioning for this. If you hinder me because you suddenly developed feelings I don't think I need your help." He knew his words were cutting. He could hear Seijuro wince in his head. Pathetic humans.

"I'm sorry." Shintaro schooled his features. "Does anyone else know about this?"

"No. I plan to keep it that way for now. Go tell your husband you want to go for a check-up and I will accompany you. Think up some believable lie," he ordered the other.

"Yes, Akashi." The other man nodded.

"And you were right, here it is." The doctor smiled at him and turned the monitor. "Congratulations, you are pregnant."

If the man expected some positive reaction, he would be disappointed. Akashi watched the monitor with clinical interest. There was a head and a body. The arms and legs were curled and not easy to see. Around it was a black orb. So he did have a womb. And a child. That was unfortunate. He asked: "How old is it?"

"Let's see." The man tipped something into the machine, clicking here and there to measure the thing. "It's about as big as a strawberry, so you are ten weeks pregnant." Ten weeks. So he had already been pregnant when his father died, even if it had only been a few days. Sei must be ecstatic. She was able to overthrow him, so abortion was most likely not an option. He would have to plan for the disruption this would bring to

their business.

"Can we get any more information from this scan?"

"No, that's it." The smiling doctor removed the ultrasound head. "You bore this really well. But somehow that child got inside you, right? It gets less uncomfortable with time."

Akashi made a noncommittal sound. Shintaro was handing him some wipes which he used before dressing himself again. What a bother. With this Seijuro would definitely not come back for some time. He would need to balance work and this pregnancy. What was he supposed to do about his relationship? He was fond of Ayako but relationships took work and he wasn't keen on handling it on top of the rest. And who could he trust enough to handle his company?

"At which time will this pregnancy be visible? When will it be born? And when can I return to work?" He fired his questions at the doctor.

"One thing after another, young man. First things first. Let me ask you some questions about your symptoms--"

"I don't have any," Akashi replied in annoyance. "Listen, I am not an Omega. I am not exactly interested in this, I just want to be done with it. I won't be allowed to abort it, even though I'd like to. So please give me a short version."

"Oh." The doctor blinked at him while his face fell. "I am sorry. You could have mentioned this wasn't voluntary."

"Why can't you abort it?" Shintaro asked him.

"That's a long story I don't like to divulge right now. I just know I won't be able to. Accept that." He sent the other man a scathing look.

"I'm sorry." The green-haired man lowered his head. They went back to the seats in the room. Shintaro stroked his abdomen in deep thought.

"Alright." The doctor sat, his face a lot more serious and a lot less smiles. "For now I need a blood test. There are different diseases you need to be tested for. Until then, here is a set of rules you need to adhere to if you want this pregnancy to work."

Akashi stared at the pages provided him before picking them up in obvious distaste. Great. More obstructions. He offered his arm for the doctor to draw blood which he did in silence. That was a lot more bearable than his innate chatter before. He scanned the list while the doctor worked.

No coffee.

He already hated this. It would lower his effectiveness to a near unbearable level. How should he fit eight hours of sleep into his schedule? He would need to cut back on the expansion of his empire. No basketball. That was no problem if Seijuro stayed down. He disliked having no work-outs but it's not like they were possible with this kind of restrictions anyway.

"Alphas often keep from showing due to their strong muscles. It is also the reason why a lot of babies born from Alpha males are born prematurely. It can lead to disfigurements as well as lung and immune system problems. Therefore it is of utmost importance that you stop any kind of strenuous activity immediately. Even carrying a bag is too much. You need to do your best to make your muscles go lax to provide your child with the best prerequisites." The doctor scanned his face, most likely for discomfort. It's not like he would see anything.

"When did you start showing?" Akashi asked Shintaro, expecting a more helpful answer from him.

"In my sixth month. I got a Cesarean in my seventh. I was showing for about six weeks but no one would have seen if I wore a cardigan."

"Good. It means I can work right until birth." That was good news. "So you need to cut it out in about four to five months?"

"There might be all kinds of complications. There could be bleeding in which case you would need to stay in bed. Stress is not good for your baby. Alpha male pregnancies are notoriously difficult."

"I would not be saddened to lose it," he coldly informed the doctor. "I need to plan preemptive measures in case I am not that lucky. My company doesn't run itself."

Shintaro closed his eyes beside him. He could hear crying in his head. Really, he would never understand why people liked to have emotions. They were such a bother.

"How long will I need to heal after a Cesarean?"

"The wounds will stab over in about two weeks, after that they will need a month to close completely." The doctor's voice had lost all intonation.

"So I need to plan for about two to three weeks of absence. How soon will you be able to give me an approximation on when that will be?"

"A rough estimate about two weeks in advance, an exact date in the same week, a week before at max." The man looked a lot older now that he did not smile anymore.

"What will you do with the child?" Shintaro asked him.

"If Ayako wants to stay around, she can have it. If she doesn't, Tetsu already offered to take any child I might ever have." Oh yes, that reminded him: "They can be fed formula from day one, can't they?"

"It's not good for them but possible." The doctor looked at the table. "Your child will stay in the intensive care ward after birth anyway."

"Even better. I don't want the thing." He folded the papers given to him. "Is there anything else we need to do now?"

"I could tell you about your child and it's development in the next weeks," the doctor offered.

"It doesn't interest me as long as it does not pertain me."

"You might get morning sickness. You might also get lower back pain. You might have mood swings and rectal discharge." The older man was talking to his pen most of all.

"Is there anything I can do about it?" This was such a bother.

"You can wear pads for the rectal discharge. They can be bought from maternity shops, supermarkets and online. For the rest there is a list of medication you are able to take safely. To keep harm from the child, you should not take any medication not on that list."

"I do not own medication and have never taken any." He took the list anyway. It was always good to be prepared. "Anything else?"

"No, that's it for now. I'll call you with your blood results."

"If possible, don't call in my work-time. That is from eight in the morning to nine in the evening if I have to follow this regime." He was giving the papers a bad look. "There is a window of time not filled with meetings between five and a half past six, that might be best."

"I'll note it down."

"I'll have to rearrange my whole schedule for this." He turned to Shintaro. "How do you stand this?"

"I am looking forward to having my baby," his friend said in a small voice.

"So I'll just have to deal with it. Like always." He bowed to the doctor. "Thank you for your time. I want to kindly remind you that any word breathed to the newspapers will result in the end of your career at least."

The doctor neither bowed nor answered.

“Though I do reward loyalty. Don´t disappoint me.”

Kapitel 19: Nervousness

Akashi wasn't keen on telling Ayako about this. For one because he knew he would blow it. This was Seijuro's area, not his. He wasn't good with feelings. This would need delicacy and compassion and ... well, a lot of things he did not have.

>Could you at least give me some pointers on how to do this best?< He asked Seijuro but the crying had stopped and the other had fallen silent. He was most likely asleep, like back then when everything had become too much for him. So every time compassion would hinder his survival, the stage was his.

He was slightly surprised how annoyed that made him. It was so much easier to just do his job and leave everything else to Seijuro. It did impinge on his time but he disliked social events and gatherings while his alter ego thrived in them. He always came out with a lot of new ideas and offers.

He did not want to be alone again. Alone with this thing inside of him. He always thought sharing your head with at least two other personalities was an invasion but this felt much more wrong than what he had to live with before. Should he try to abort it? But if that triggered Sei to come out and keep control of the body for the whole pregnancy, deciding her child was worth more than their company, it would be a disaster. This would be so much easier if he could talk to her.

He sighed in annoyance. Maybe Ayako could help. Sei had talked to her once, maybe she would do so again. But he needed to keep Ayako by his side for that. He could mark her forcefully but for once he knew even without Seijuro's complaints that such a move wouldn't help. Rationally there was no reason for her to stay. She liked Seijuro and that one might not come out again for months, maybe years. It wasn't like she knew or liked him as Akashi in any way.

Maybe it would be easier to simply break up with her and spare himself the trouble. It might also be dangerous to give her even more information if the end of a relationship was inevitable. Some women got unpredictable after break-ups. She already knew so much about him it might even be advisable to kill her. Should he tell her more? Should he just tell her to go and that it wasn't her fault? Should he break up with her and make her feel responsible to control her with guilt? Or should he find a way to wipe her memory?

"What is your guess on how Ayako will take this?," he asked Shintaro during the car ride.

"She'll be devastated." Wow, that did not even take a second. What a surprisingly fast answer for his best friend. "Other than that I can't say. I don't know her well and I am not a good judge of character." The man looked at him with his green eyes. "I advise you to tell Kazu before telling her. He might give you some pointers what to say and what not and how to phrase it. He can also tell you what her reaction will be."

"I don't think I want to involve any unnecessary persons." He also thought that while his best friend's beloved was an outgoing person, his character judgment was rather strange. Said man had decided to marry Shintaro after all.

"If you want me to cover your visits and help out with your company, you will need to involve him. I refuse to lie to my husband for you." That was rather forceful for him.

"You just did," Akashi reminded him.

"I am pretty sure he noticed, I am the worst liar in the world." Shintaro seemed to have gained a backbone. That was unfortunate.

It did have some merit to involve him. He would make Shintaro more compliable, he might help out with Ayako, he might even help out if all of this went to hell. If Sei did take over his body, Shintaro was the only one capable to saving his empire and – want it or not – Kazunari was his driving force. While he was sociable, he wasn't known to be a gossip. He seemed able to keep a secret. He also had enough money to not be swayed by it. Akashi did wonder about his integrity – he was a half-blood Beta low-life after all, no more than a street mix – but he never had reason to question him. He also knew how to care for a cranky pregnant Alpha. It reminded him that Shintaro was pregnant as well, so he asked: "When are you due?"

"Two months at worst, three at best."

"So you'll be healed up by the time I might have to restructure?" It was the nicest word he could think of for this disaster.

"Yes." A heated gaze drilled holes into the side of his face. "Will you tell Kazu?"

"Yes, I will." And he would ask how to best tell Ayako. Then he would do that and then he would go to sleep and hope to awake from this nightmare. He scoffed at himself. That was such a Seijuro thing to do. He was the one that never hid. He knew the image of a man soldiering on, he did it often enough. For once he wished he didn't have to. But the alternative was giving this body to Sei and that would be far worse. "I have to tell you something beforehand."

Shintaro looked up at the serious tone. They had just left the car, so they took a detour to a bank under a tree off to the side instead of entering the house.

Akashi lowered his voice anyway: "The one raped was our third personality."

"A third one?" The green eyes stared at him without blinking.

"She is called Sei. She must have been raped from before our mother died, so she is pretty screwed in the head. She loves our father, she thinks himself his mistress, she is personalized Alpha superiority and she wants this child to survive even at the cost of the whole company. If she thinks that I endanger the child, she will take over and shut herself in the mansion. She is a real trophy wife, she has no idea of what she would do with her actions. All her thinking is limited to having a child with father to keep the line pure and raise it in his image. It's her sole purpose."

"That is extremely bothersome." Shintaro thought for a moment. "She won't let neither Kuroko nor Ayako in."

"Exactly." He straightened his suit jacket. "And she will let the company go to ruin over this."

"I see why you need my help. If you lose control, this will be on me. I am the only one able to manage your empire and the only one with enough pedigree that she would talk to me."

It was reassuring as well as unsettling that he understood. Akashi did not really want to admit but this might be out of his hands sooner than he thought. The words he spoke felt like ash on his tongue: "I'll give you full consent to manage my company and estate in case I am mentally unable to do so."

"Does this include getting you tested as officially insane if Sei stays, so your child's parental rights fall to me?" Shintaro asked without a shred of pity. It was what Akashi had asked for after all.

He slowly nodded his head.

"I'll need that written and signed."

"I know." Akashi sighed. "That will most likely be the point where I'll lose control of this body. I'd like to talk to Ayako first."

"Then I'll ready the papers in the meantime. Do you have your signet stamp with

you?"

Akashi nodded. He would sign control over his whole company, his estate, his person and his child away. Gods, he wished this wasn't happening. He hadn't liked the fact that he had to deal with Seijuro but the man had been bearable. This was unbearable. This was worse than everything he had imagined when he thought about their possible other personalities. He had thought the others came out when triggered. He never thought there would be someone with full control over him. Sei wasn't able to change his memories but she was able to completely separate him from their consciousness. He would need to trust in Shintaro.

His friend stood and put a hand on his shoulder before saying: "For what it's worth: I am sorry."

Akashi brushed his hand away and stood as well. He looked at his friend for a moment before saying: "Write it so that whenever Seijuro or I are out, we do have full rights. Everything should only be stripped from us as long as Sei or another personality is out."

"The law only recognizes insanity or none. You will have to trust me to give rights to you two if you are out. In all other cases, all rights will stay with me until a psychiatrist states that you are healed."

"This disorder can't be healed." His friend was right. He would sign away all rights forever. It would be Shintaro's decision to give him any rights back when he saw fit. He balled his fists and went to the house's entrance.

Shintaro stayed silent while he followed him.

They had dinner with the kids. He told Natsue he wasn't feeling well and that she should stay away, so she wouldn't get any germs. It kept both girls from him like he had planned. After dinner Shintaro proposed Ayako and him would get their children ready. She looked from him to Kazunari, noticing the surprise on his face, but acquiesced after Akashi's nod.

It left him with Kazunari who turned to him with evident surprise. After he had stayed silent for half a minute the other suggested they could do the dishes. He just nodded and began bringing them into the kitchen where Kazunari washed them off. He even took a towel to dry them.

"So what is going on here?" The shorter man asked him but he stayed silent. "Okay ... should I guess?"

He nodded. He had no idea how to talk to people like this, he was completely out of his element. Maybe Kazunari could give him something to work with. Knowing what he knew would help not to offend him.

"Shin-chan is a terrible liar, so I know you went to the clinic for yourself. So you fear you might be pregnant."

"I am," he injected.

"So you are. As you aren't known for sleeping around and are much too proud to let anyone top you voluntarily, I'd guess you were raped."

"That is correct."

"I am sorry to hear." Kazunari sighed and looked at him for a moment. "Shin-chan hasn't told me much, but from what I know I guess it was your father?"

He just nodded. This man was sharp as well. It was to be expected from someone Shintaro chose as a partner. The whole overly social facade had always made it seem different, but he should have known.

"Which week are you in?"

"Ten." He put away some cups. The monotonous work helped.

"You are the personality's rational part. The fact that you are talking to me about this means that you either can't decide about abortion or are unable to go through with it."

"It's the second one. Our third personality won't let me. Seijuro has completely shut himself down again, just like in middle-school."

Kazunari was taking this surprisingly calmly in his opinion. Even Shintaro had been more emotional than him. How did he do it? "A third?" Kazunari blinked at him for a moment. "How long did you know about that?"

"Since this afternoon."

"Shit." The man shook his head. "So you just learned that you are pregnant and it's because of a third personality you didn't know about?" He didn't even wait for confirmation. "Is he even more dangerous than you?"

"It depends on how you look at it." He dried some plates. "She isn't dangerous in a violent or cruel way like I am. She just wants this baby and she'll do everything to keep it. That might include shutting me down just like Seijuro and taking over this body."

"For ... how long?" Kazunari looked at him but seemed like he didn't need an answer.

"What would she do exactly?"

"She would shut herself in the mansion and raise this child. She wouldn't let us out to manage the company." He hated that. The company was his. He had trained all his life to manage it, to make it stronger and bigger.

"Would she be dangerous to the child?" Of course Kazunari did not care much about that.

"That depends. If you think raising someone to be just like me as a whole personality is a dangerous thing, then yes, she'll be dangerous."

"No offense, but yes, that is dangerous in my opinion." They stayed silent for a minute. "Do you have a plan what to do now?"

"I'll sign over all my rights to Shintaro. He'll gain full control over my company, my estate and my person." He nearly ripped the towel. "If Sei takes over, he'll find someone to manage the company. I instructed him to take that child from me as soon as it's born. If I get dangerous to myself or others, he is allowed to place me in a psychiatric institute."

Kazunari took a cautious step away from him.

Akashi told himself to calm down. He hated this. He hated it so much. But lashing out at others would not solve anything, it would only make it worse. He continued: "I know this is a heavy burden. Shintaro will ask you for help, so he told me to explain this to you as well."

"I see." The man slowly nodded. "My first priority will be Shin-chan. If you keep changing back and forth, making him miserable with being sound of mind or insane in the course of hours, I will tell him to shut off his phone and treat you as insane until you are stable enough to be yourself for a few days at least. Everything else will break him down."

Akashi took a deep breath and nodded.

"My second priority will be your child because the poor thing doesn't need to suffer your insanity."

He just nodded.

"Your company is important to you and we will do our best to be responsible in your ... absence. But between Shin-chan, your child and even yourself, it's not high on my

priority list. I won't let Shin-chan screw his career and life to keep your company running for whenever you might be back. I'll have him look for a suitable manager. I know he'll supervise that person but there might not be a job for you to return to if or when you do."

He wasn't known for bursts of aggression but for once he simply wanted to trash the table and kitchen and whatever else might get in his hands. He hated this. He hated being this helpless. Seijuro was the one dealing with helplessness. He couldn't do this. "As long as you are still in control, you might look for suitable managers and train them," Kazunari suggested.

He looked up and stared at the other man in silence for a moment. Train someone? He would not find someone as adept as himself but yes, he might find substitutes. Maybe a team of substitutes. That was actually a good idea. He nodded and said: "That is a good idea."

"Is there anything else I can help with?" A small smile entered Kazunari's lips and he relaxed visibly.

"I'd like to explain all this to Ayako."

Kapitel 20: A sordid tale

Akashi had underestimated Kazunari. Not even slightly but by leagues. The man was more intelligent, more stable and even more compassionate and sensitive than he had ever imagined. Honestly, he might be someone Akashi would consider as his own partner if he hadn't been male and already married. And a top – they would definitely not be compatible in bed. But he began to understand why a proud man like Shintaro would agree to being this man's bottom.

Kazunari helped him to tell Ayako. More than that, he was like the perfect mediator, serving tea, introducing him, explaining when he didn't know what to say, smoothing his words to give them less of a sting. It was nearly midnight when they had explained everything to Ayako. She had stayed silent for all of it. Before she could even formulate her questions, Kazunari knew what she would ask and answered. He might even be more of a genius than Seijuro when it came to diplomacy.

She still looked devastated and whispered: "Thank you for telling me all of this."

"Seijuro would have wanted me to." It sounded like his alter ego was dead. "I don't know if ... when he'll be back. It might be days. It might be years. It might never happen." He might not even exist anymore but he knew it would be wrong to say that. "You will sign those documents tonight?" She looked him in the eyes. "So even you might be gone afterwards?"

He simply nodded.

"Am I allowed to visit if you or Seijuro are present again?" Her voice nearly broke.

"Of course. I am sure he would love that." He wasn't sure what he himself thought. She would only look for Seijuro in him, wouldn't she?

She just nodded and finally broke down in tears. He simply watched as Kazunari hugged her and let her cry on his shoulder. As always it moved nothing in him. He simply felt a slight annoyance at having to wait until she finished her crying fit. He looked at Shintaro who had been standing in the back of the room for about half an hour. He had the papers with him.

The green-haired man came over and sat next to him. Akashi took the documents from him and began to read them over. As expected they were worded perfectly, a lawyer couldn't have written them better. They included the exact legal texts under which what kind of rights would be extracted from him, why and for how long. In essence it said that until he was aware of all of his personalities and could make decisions for all of them, he would only have the rights Shintaro saw fit to give him. It would make Shintaro his legal guardian in all aspects. It would give the man the right to lock him up, sedate him with medication and take all of his possessions from him.

He got out his stamp and signed it both ways. Shintaro did the same. Kazunari agreed to be their witness. Shintaro had already brought his husband's stamp, trusting them both to work this out. Ayako kept crying while she watched them do this.

"I'll keep this in the safe until we give this to our lawyer. Your lawyer, you and us will get a copy of this," Shintaro said before he left.

Akashi just buried his head in his hands. He knew that was neither manly nor his normal behavior but for once he was just tired of everything. He would go to sleep soon and he knew he might never wake up again. In a sense it was like dying. Ayako knew that, he knew that. Shintaro and Kazunari were aware of this. Shintaro returned and sat with them. He served himself a cup of tea. Ayako cried silently while Kazunari

gave her tissues.

"Is there a room you can lock me up in? I don't know who I'll be when I wake," Akashi asked them.

"As you know we have prison rooms. They would not stop you but if Sei is not violent they might stop her." Shintaro drank his cup in one go and stood. "Please follow me." Kazunari stood as well and said: "I'll get you a futon."

Ayako just stared at him looking defeated and worn out. He felt a twinge of pain seeing her like that. Could he just leave like that? Seijuro would cling to her, would kiss her senseless and beg her to stay with him. Even if it took years, he would want her to wait for him. Akashi wouldn't ask that of her.

He turned and left.

He awoke in the same room he had gone to sleep in. His phone was lying in the same place he had put it down in. He took it and checked the date and time.

It was the morning after, exactly six o'clock. He relaxed and closed his eyes for a moment. So Sei had not decided to come out yet. Maybe she really thought he was no danger to the child. Or maybe she knew he had signed those papers and coming out would not get her where she desired to be.

Or maybe she only had more power as long as their father was still alive. Maybe he could try to abort the child. Should he? He might wake her but what if he didn't? He did not want this child. It would inconvenience ... well, it would not make him take two weeks off. On the other hand, he might hate their father but he did see the merit in having a blood-child. Seijuro might not care about inheritance but this was a company owned by the emperor's nephew. Even if Seijuro did not care about blood, others would. Having this child might prove useful. The fact that he didn't want to be pregnant might be more insignificant than the merit this child held.

It was Seijuro that wanted to spare someone his fate. Akashi did not care about that much. They had survived, this child would survive. He didn't plan on raping it, so it might even be more stable than them. It had been his initial urge to purge himself but was this actually rational? A child would solve some problems even born out of wedlock. No matter how cruel their father was – he was a premium Alpha. Their child would have quite a good set of genes if the incest didn't leave too much damage. If it was some ugly, mangled thing he could kill it afterwards just as well.

>The more you look out for it, the stronger it will be,< a female voice whispered. Urgh. So this was where his thoughts were coming from. Seemed like she was able to talk to him all along.

>Are you injecting me with your will to have this child?<

>You want the company to survive, I want this child healthy and strong. We don't have to battle.<

>Did you put Seijuro to sleep to persuade me?< His voice was full of loathing.

>He is an emotional wimp. You are still weak but a lot more bearable. You know this deal makes sense.< She chuckled. >We are a failure. How about raising a child without this pathetic side we have to endure?<

Well, yes, Seijuro was a wimp. He had always thought so. Their alter ego spent too much time on dallying with unimportant characters, precious time they could use for more important things. Why had he been on Seijuro's side? There was nothing they needed emotions for.

>I knew you would understand. Let's raise a child in our image. You'll be a splendid father figure.<

>I have no interest in a child.< He stood and called Shintaro with his phone. He might not be able to run from his head but he could get help. >I don't want to be a father.<
>Would you not like to give something of yourself before you die?< Her voice turned sharp. >Do you think anyone will remember you? You're a pathetic alter ego of a personality that will never be remembered. You're nothing.<

>Shame to you. I have no emotions, I don't need recognition. You're barking at the wrong tree. I don't care about my worth.< He heard the other side pick up. "Shintaro? This is Akashi. Sei is trying to take over, could you come over and help? It's hard to keep her at bay." It was hard to speak over her hysterical laughter.

>You sad creature. What are you even living for? I thought you might be a role model but you are nothing. You are just as pathetic as Seijuro. None of you is worthy of this body, this title and lineage. You are playing with things you can't appreciate. Go to sleep.<

His legs shook, his hands trembled. His vision was getting hazy.

No, this wouldn't happen. There was no need for her. Their father was dead. She wasn't needed anymore. He was their master now. He ran the company, he was the one in control.

His vision turned white. He could hear his blood run in his ears, feel his heart furiously pumping.

No! He didn't want this!

>Stop this, I agree!<

>Oh?< She made a humming sound. >You'll do your very best to bear this child to full term?<

>As long as possible. I promise. Just let me stay in control and run the company.< His vision slowly returned. >I won't train, I'll stick to the rules. If the company is ruined, what should that child inherit?<

>You are beginning to see my point.< Her voice was turning to that of a young, mannered woman. >It is so nice to strike a deal with you.< It turned dark again. >I am watching you. Don't underestimate me.< He recognized this chuckle. It was his own, just with her voice. >Don't disappoint me.<

For the first time in his life he felt terror.

Shintaro had found him lying on the ground waking from unconsciousness. He had been told to take deep breaths, to calm, to stop shaking. It hadn't stopped the panic attack he evidently had. His friend had called for his husband who had gotten a trash sack to hold in front of his face. Only then was he able to calm down. Kazunari cautiously lowered the sack after a few more breaths.

Akashi coughed and took two deep lungfuls of air.

"So ... she lost?," Shintaro asked.

The redhead just shook his head and slowly got up. His legs shook, his hands were trembling. This was bad, so bad. He had never been afraid. Anxiety was Seijuro's part, wasn't it? He leaned on his best friend and answered: "She's stronger."

"That's bad news." Kazunari took a step back. "So why are you still here?"

"I ... I promised ... I would keep the child." He closed his eyes. Shit. He had been in panic. He would have done anything. Why did he make such a promise? "She nearly had me."

"But if you keep the child, she doesn't have enough leverage?" Shintaro steadied him.

"I thought about abortion ... it woke her. She's really strong. She can mess with my mind, she can put me to sleep. I never felt so-" Helpless. He couldn't say it. Why did he

have feelings? Where did they come from? Were they Seijuro's? Wasn't he completely asleep? Was their bond enough to triumph over her? It had been hard for her to put him down. Seijuro and him had merged slightly. If they did more than that, maybe they might get stronger than her?

That must be why she immediately put Seijuro down like a unwanted animal. It wasn't for his own good, he was a danger to her. Every one on their own made her the strongest but if they worked together, they might get more powerful than her. So he needed to find a way to wake Seijuro. If he was able to feel a bit, that might be their link. If he explored those feelings he might get his alter ego back.

"For now I seem to be in control of this body." He righted himself. "I'd like to take a shower and go to work. I will return to my mansion tonight."

"Is that advisable? She is stronger there," Shintaro argued.

"I couldn't possibly inconvenience you like this any longer."

"Stop spouting nonsense, you're a family friend." Kazunari smiled at him. "We are honor-bound to help you."

"You are easier to check on if you stay," the green-haired man added.

"As you wish." He inclined his head. "I'll have my driver bring some clothes." A text would suffice, so he typed one. "I hope I haven't rudely awakened you."

"We were prepared for a rough night." Kazunari nodded to his husband. "Would you give our guest some towels and spare clothes? I'll prepare breakfast."

"I was looking into renting an apartment before. I'll take up my search again." Why was he so keen on getting away? There was some feeling in him. What was that? It felt strange, something like a slow burn in his chest that spread over his body. It was definitely unsettling.

"It is alright to accept help, Akashi." Shintaro nodded to him. "No one will think less of you for that."

"I don't care about other people's opini-"

"You don't have to feel like a lesser man for that." The other man walked in front.

"Asking for help shows true strength of character."

"It shows weakness."

"Those are the words of someone who never had to ask." Shintaro handed him a towel, a yukata and an obi. "Asking is easy as long as you could do without help. Asking when you are in a pinch needs bravery. It took me years to learn." He led him to bathroom. "I am proud of you that you came to us yesterday. Don't back away from it now."

Akashi snorted in disdain. That was only one way to look at it. He closed the door in Shintaro's face and locked it. So this was ... annoyance. He didn't like to be lectured. He sighed in defeat.

Life had been so much easier without emotions.

Kapitel 21: Exploring feelings

Ayako greeted him with a hug. It should have been nice or maybe annoying or simply just warm – but it actually hurt. It hurt to know that she was hugging Seijuro's shadow and not him. Why would anyone wish such a curse upon them? Emotions were nothing but trouble.

"How are you?" she asked him.

Fine. Was he fine? It was such a standard answer. He didn't know. Was he normal? He suddenly had feelings, that was disconcerting. It was far from fine. He had just battled Sei and lost. Seijuro was asleep but Akashi had his feelings. All of that was quite confusing. And on top of that he was pregnant.

"I honestly don't know." He looked at Ayako. Did he have feelings for her? He wasn't sure. Just looking at her he did not feel different. Was that normal or not? "I agree that Sei is a vicious bitch."

"Oh. So you ... met her?" Ayako seemed unsure about what to say.

"She tried to take over the body and change my thinking." Could he say more? Should he say more? He did not want to look weak in Ayako's eyes. "She scared me. I had to promise her to keep the child."

The Omega lowered her gaze and took his hand. She held it in both of hers. After a moment she squeezed it and looked up again to say: "No matter it's history, it is your baby. It might not feel like it now but if you can't change anything anyway, please don't grow to hate it. You would only hate a part of yourself."

"The ones I hate are my father and Sei. They are the parents. I can't help but resent this thing." Yes, disgust. He knew that feeling. It was a deeply rooted thing that had always been inside him. Resentment, hate, disgust – those had always been his.

"Sei is a part of your soul. Your father is part of your history. This child will be your future. With all of that hate, you'll hate yourself the most." Ayako was pleading, looking at him with eyes full of fear. It was like Seijuro was talking to him, telling him that she must be remembering her own daughter.

He could tell her that her desperate pleas drove her daughter to suicide. That would shut her up.

"I don't feel unsettled by hating others. I lack too much empathy to even apply it to myself as well." He let go of her hands. "I am like a machine, I can't feel pain."

"But Seijuro can." She stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "He feels your pain and hate."

Wrong. This hurt. This hurt a damn lot. Was this jealousy? This white, hot, burning rage, was this envy? She loved Seijuro, she cared for him with every cell of her being. Were did that leave him? He scoffed and said: "I don't care about him either."

"You are scaring her," Kazunari reprimanded him.

"I don't really care about that either. She's Seijuro's girlfriend, not mine."

They all looked at him for a moment, some in surprise, some in shock. Natsue broke into the silence by grabbing his leg and shouting: "Good morning, Mister Akashi!"

He had a sudden urge to kick her but he didn't go through with it. She had nothing to do with all of this. He wasn't a man that looked for easy outlets for his anger. He might scare and shock people but he wasn't known for physical abuse. Except for a few cases that needed rough handling to accept his dominance over them. Oh well, maybe he could be called physically abusive. He didn't need to hurt Natsue though.

He answered with a low voice: "Good morning, Natsue."

"Are you still sick?"

He sat on his heels and told her: "Look, it's really easy to see. When I have two red eyes, I am in a good mood and like to play with you. When I have one red and one golden eye, I am in a bad mood and might be dangerous. Can you see the difference?"

"Yeah." She took a step back while looking at him. "Can I make it better?"

"No, it's not your fault, kid. You don't have anything to do with my moods." He remembered a time when he still thought the occasional violence their father put them through was his fault. By now he felt ashamed of himself for ever thinking he might have any power over that monster. "There's nothing you can do to change it. Just keep your distance when I have a golden eye, I don't want to hurt you. You don't deserve that, you haven't done anything wrong."

"Okay." She smiled thinly. "Mama tells me that some people hurt others because they are in a bad mood, not because you have done anything wrong."

"Yes, I might do that. It's a bad thing to do and I know that." He just didn't care most of the time.

"Sometimes I do bad things too. Then mama scolds me," she wisely answered.

"It's so that you grow up to be a good woman who doesn't hurt innocent people in anger." He patted her head and stood. "How about some breakfast?"

She nodded and sat so he could sit beside her. He exchanged a glance with Ayako, so they could change their seating order. She understood immediately and sat down beside her daughter. Such a good woman. Such a shame she loved Seijuro and not him.

They ate mostly in silence. Natsue and Kikyō chattered a bit – of course Natsue told her friend about his moods and eye colors – with an occasional comment from an adult but all in all the atmosphere was heavy. He should not have cared and enjoyed the silence, but he knew it was his fault. Why did he care about that? Why did he suddenly care what others thought of him? If this was how Seijuro felt all the time, he didn't want to be like that.

But he needed Seijuro against Sei. Could he have his powers without having to feel all this? He didn't want to feel. It was like gaining a consciousness all at once. He didn't want to feel bad for doing bad things. How should he lead a company like this? It was his job not to feel bad about all those people he fired or found better substitutes for. He nearly stabbed his eel. It was delicious and at the same time it felt like sand paper on his tongue.

"You are abnormally bad-tempered today," Shintaro dared to say.

"Oh really? Some bi-, I mean, nasty women just tried to take over my mind and erase me. How would you feel about having your personality disintegrate?"

"Is that possible?" The green eyes stared at him. "I thought she would put you to sleep. Can she actually erase you?"

"She is able to manipulate my thoughts and change Seijuro's memories, what do you think?" His whole body felt like a string ready to snap. "Honestly, I don't know if Seijuro is asleep. I can suddenly feel things, I could never do that before. Those are his feelings. What the hell should I think about that? I don't know if your best friend is still alive." He groaned. "I don't want to be afraid of my own head."

"You think she might have forcefully merged you both to make you weaker?" Shintaro seemed to have shut off his emotions again, his voice was simply monotonous.

"Seijuro is easier to manipulate, so yes." It hurt. Why did it hurt so much? It felt like a knife in his heart.

"Mama, why are you crying?" Natsue asked in fright.

"I'm sorry." Ayako stood and turned to leave. Akashi was able to glimpse tears running down her face on both sides. Had it been his fault? Had he made her cry? He groaned and buried his head in his hands. With a voice filled with exhaustion, he said: "I'm sorry. I don't know what's happening. I've never been so out of control."

"What's going on with mama?" Natsue demanded to know. "Have you made her cry?" Her black eyes turned on him.

"No, little Natsue, both Mister Akashi and your mom are sad about the same thing. But it's hard to understand, even for me. We'll just have to wait and be there for them," Kazunari explained. "Have you finished your breakfast? We can help them by getting you ready, so your mom doesn't have to worry. Kikyō, you too, get your kindergarten bag after doing the dishes."

Well trained both girls began to bring the dishes into the sink. Akashi took up his chopsticks with a sigh and finished his rice. Shintaro served him another cup of tea before Kazunari took the teapot as well. Both men stayed seated in silence.

Their silence was interrupted by an older woman entering the kitchen with a greeting and a bow. Shintaro stood to bow to her as well. Akashi simply was too drained to care about social niceties. He recognized her by her voice as Shintaro's mother who informed them that his butler had arrived with some clothes. Akashi mumbled a tired thanks before rising. Shintaro immediately grabbed his arm to stabilize him and asked: "Are you sure you should go to work in this state?"

"It may distract me a bit." He bowed to Misses Midorima. "I am sorry you have to see me in such a pitiful state."

"You look like you need rest, Mister Akashi." She nodded to acknowledge his belated greeting. "How about a relaxing visit to an Onsen?"

He shook his head and straightened before he said: "Thank you for your concern."

"Where should I send your butler?" She got his subtle hint.

"Please send him to the guest room opposite our southern bathroom," Shintaro answered for him. So he didn't want to tell his mother he had locked up their guest. Smart move. Not only would she scold him, she would demand an answer why he did such a thing. "Let us do the dishes, Akashi."

"Of course." He nodded to Misses Midorima and went over to the sink. Doing some dishes was much more favorable than being the focus of her scrutiny. His friend joined him, so they spent their time with silent washing and drying.

"Are you sure it's a good idea to go to work?," the other man asked after some time.

"What else am I supposed to do?" Akashi sent him an annoyed glance. "Rest?"

"Well ... no. Just don't overdo it, okay? Don't stress yourself out."

That wasn't what Shintaro wanted to say. He was right about being a very bad liar. But Akashi knew him enough to know what wasn't said: It's not good for the baby. Even his best friend knew better not to utter that out loud. If it was up to the redhead, he would overwork himself as much as possible. But he had promised to keep a low profile. He shouldn't endanger that parasite inside him.

He hated it.

He hated all of it.

He didn't want to be forced against his will. This was neither persuasion nor manipulation, this was brute force against his mind, his very being. So this was how it felt to be held down and threatened with death. This was how it felt to be in a forced pregnancy. This was exactly how he never wanted to feel, what he never wanted to experience.

It had felt good to be on the other side of this. It had felt so damn good to force Tetsu down, play with his mind, make him long for his cock while he knew it was all his doing. Tetsu never wanted any of it, so it made it all the sweeter to see him shyly ask to be raped.

It had felt so unbelievably good not to be a victim but the rapist. All that hatred, all that burning longing, his nearly sickening wish for vengeance – it had felt so good to let it all out on Tetsu. And now here he was, a broken thing, beaten down, accepting everything he hated for the sake of survival.

His hands balled into fists. He wanted to beat something, someone down, to cut someone down with his words, to stop to feel so unbelievably helpless. Longingly he looked at the knife he was cleaning. He could stab someone and enjoy their blood on his hands. He could threaten someone and drink their terror.

“Please come find me when you have calmed down,” Shintaro said, put down the plate he was drying and retreated from the room. He closed the door behind him.

Akashi’s gaze stayed on the knife.

Killing wouldn’t help. He might feel mighty for a second, but it wouldn’t change anything about the fact that he was helpless. He would not get out of this. He could give up his body to Sei, he could do her bidding or he could kill himself. Those were limited options. He held the knife to his stomach, imaging how it would feel to carve that monstrosity out of his womb. There would be blood, a lot of blood. Was he able to be faster than Sei? She hadn’t been able to take him over immediately. Maybe he had enough control to go through with this.

>Don’t.<

>Seijuro?< Akashi immediately pulled the knife back.

>Yeah ... I am here.< He sounded weak. He sounded exhausted. But he was alive.

>Do you know where you have been?<

>I saw some of Sei’s memories.<

>I am sorry to hear.<

>No ... it’s okay. I think I understand her better.<

>I really don’t want to understand her.< Akashi knew his voice was full of disgust.

>It’s the only way.< Seijuro’s voice gained strength and confidence. >She’s a part of us, one of us. If we don’t talk to her, we’ll always be afraid of her.<

>You do that then. You try to gain her confidence. Just get her off my back.< He put the knife down and took up the towel to dry the rest of the dishes.

>I’ll try.< Seijuro seemed to be getting weaker again. >Just go along with her a bit, okay? Don’t do things to endanger us or her child.<

>I don’t want it.<

>I know.< It sounded like his alter ego had a weak smile on his face. There was something like indulgence in his voice. >I don’t even know if she really wants it. But it doesn’t hurt to do your best until I can clear the situation, right?<

Akashi sighed and nodded, even though his alter ego was in his head, not in the room.

>Thank you.< Seijuro’s voice was getting farther and farther away. >Give Ayako a kiss, okay?<

>I will,< Akashi promised. He wanted to call after the other but refrained from it. It would do no good, it would only sound pathetic.

Seijuro’s presence faded again. So ... he was alive. Maybe. Or maybe it was just a replica that Sei presented him to manipulate him into not aborting this child. Akashi closed his eyes. What should he believe in? Was Sei stronger? Was she able to control their mind? Could she fake a convincing Seijuro? Honestly, he wanted to believe that

Seijuro was alright. He wanted him to live. Even if they merged at some point, he wanted to know that his alter ego was a part of him. He wanted to feel him. Had he really missed the guy? And why did he have feelings if Seijuro was still alright? He wanted to understand this.

"Shintaro?" He opened the kitchen door and look down the hallway.

A moment later his friend looked out from a room he recognized as the bathroom and asked: "Have you calmed down?"

"Yes, I am. I am sorry that I made you anxious." He went over.

"Are you really Akashi? It's normally your alter ego that apologizes."

"I know. He just gave me a lecture, I think. I hope it was him and not some fake sent by Sei to keep me in line."

"You are ... a bit paranoid, don't you think?" Shintaro's eyebrow twitched.

"One can never be cautious enough. But I'll feel better if I trust that voice, even if that might be my downfall." He snorted. "I hate to follow such logic but due to my inability to gain more information, I'll work with what I have for now."

"Yes, that sounds more like you." Shintaro came out of the bathroom and walked him to a sliding door down the hallway. "This is the room my mother will direct your butler to. Please stay here."

"Thank you. Could you look for Ayako and tell her I'd like to apologize for my careless words?"

"You ... as you wish." The other man nodded and closed the door behind him. Was it that much of a surprise if he apologized? It was true, he had never done so when he had been out for over two years. He had not known that any of his actions might be worth apologizing for. He hadn't even known what pain felt like. Now he felt like he might be able to understand.

His butler appeared and presented him with three different suits and a collection of shoes. He thanked him and choose a cashmere shawl to go with his suit. It was one of Seijuro's favorite items, but he felt like wearing it for once. He informed his butler of his plans to stay here for a week or two and asked him to organize clothes and other essentials accordingly. When he saw Ayako standing in the doorway, he asked his butler to find Shintaro to inquire about a suitable room to store his clothing. The man left while Ayako stepped in and closed the door behind her.

"Thank you for coming. I have been on edge this morning and wanted to apologize for my callous behavior. I had not thought on how I might hurt you with my words." He looked into her eyes and hoped his new won feelings might come with some facial recognition skills. He could discern that she was nervous. "Seijuro seems to be alive. I had contact for a short moment."

She visibly relaxed and even smiled at him.

At his body. He knew her smile was directed at Seijuro, not at him. It gave him the sudden urge to hurt her again, so he said: "He is gone again. I also seem to have some of his skills, so maybe we merged in some way. I don't know if he'll be the same. He said he is looking at Sei's memories and tries to talk to her, so ... who knows what will come out of it in the end."

"I see." Ayako hung her head but looked mostly resigned. "Do you think I am guilty this happened? You said I accelerated the process and that Seijuro wasn't ready for that."

Urgh, guilt. That was something he had never understood. Why did people feel guilty? One couldn't change the past, it made no sense at all. He tried not to sound annoyed: "In the end the guilty one is our father. None of this would have happened if not for

him. It's him I hate, you are merely ... someone caught in the crossfire." She looked so small and fragile, his heart ached anyway. What should he do about that? "Seijuro asked me to give you a kiss from him before his voice faded again. I don't think he sees you as someone to blame."

"Really?" She smiled in relief. That smile seemed to melt away all of the tension that held her up before. "Thank you so much. I felt so bad, you even warned me-"

"It's not your fault." His heart beat faster, he felt like sweating. "Would you like to have your kiss?"

"Err, well ... how about a date instead?" Ayako's smile turned unsure but she stepped nearer. "I'd like to get to know you as well. In the end, I'll live with all of you if this ever works out."

"You want to get to know me?" Akashi blinked once.

"You are an important personality, aren't you?" She smiled up at him, a bit more honestly this time. "I asked Kazunari if I might sleep here again as well. He said it's okay. So we could have dinner together if you'd like."

"I would like that very much." He tried a smile but feared it might be mangled.

No matter how it looked, her answering smile seemed sincere.

Kapitel 22: Seduction

His day had been stressful. And that was a very nice way of putting it. Between his usual appointments, he designed an advert for a mysterious high level position in his company and some tests to put people through. The first would be an intelligence test, followed by a strategic test and finally a test about difficult decisions to look at people's morals. Hopefully he would still have some people left after that.

In the middle of his planning, he got a call from his doctor telling him about his blood results. It would add some more restrictions to his regime and lessen some others. He asked to be sent an updated version via mail. He was also asked again if he really wanted to keep the baby. He simply growled and put down the receiver.

Of course he didn't. But if even Seijuro wanted him to keep it – if only until he persuaded Sei otherwise – who was he to argue? He got time to run his company out of the deal. He should see this rationally, it was a good compromise. He still hated the fact that he had to make a deal at all. So he simply ignored the fact that there was a parasite inside of him and focused on work.

Ultimately he wasn't in the best of moods when he had to cut his work short to meet with Ayako for dinner. Why did he have to be the one to keep Seijuro's woman around? What did he get out of that? It wasn't like she ... well, maybe he could get her to sleep with him. Just because Seijuro was a romantic wimp, it wasn't like he had to go slow. She knew he wasn't his alter ego. That might actually come with some merit for once. If he could not get her to love him, maybe he could make her desire him? He should be able to, even if Seijuro did not want him to use his pheromones or bite her. Suddenly dinner did not sound so bad. They had arranged a time where the kids would already be in bed, so he did not have to think about that nuisance. At Shintaro's he found a perfectly looking dining room with an inside grill on top of the wooden table but no Ayako. After a bit of searching he found Shintaro reading some papers who told him that Ayako was still with her daughter. So he decided to head back to the dining room and work on his own papers until she showed up. He was in the middle of contract about a coup he had prepared long before this disaster happened. She began to ready their dinner while he finished reading it.

"Good evening." He placed the papers back into his leather bag.

"Thank you for coming." She smiled at him and started the grill. "I hope you like meat?"

"Like any man of my position." A smirk found the way onto his lips until it soured. "I am not allowed raw or undercooked meat though."

"It's good you remember." She actually looked proud at him. Did it turn her on that he stuck to the rules of this pregnancy? "So I prepared Yakiniku."

"Great thinking." And it was one of his favorite dishes aside from tofu soup and Unaridon. "Did you get some beef?"

"And pork and chicken and blood-sausage and some kidney and tongue." She pointed at the different plates before explaining all sauces to him. "Your friend Midorima gave me a lot of money to buy dinner. It was the least I could do for their hospitality. Your friends are very good people."

"Yes, even I am rather fond of Shintaro and Kazunari." Should he say more? "I don't exactly understand the notion of friends but they are useful acquaintances. There are only a handful of people I would give favors to without asking anything in return."

"You really are all about business, aren't you?" She did not seem saddened by that.

"So why did you agree to have dinner with me?"

"I hurt you with an emotional outburst." And didn't that make him feel bad? Damn, he had really lost control this morning. "That is very unlike me. I'd like to rectify that impression."

"And what would you like me to see you as?" She poured him a drink.

Should he be honest? Yes, he should: "A desirable man."

"Oh." A faint blush entered her cheeks. "Well, yes, you are. Among other things."

"I'd like you to not concentrate on the other things so much."

She smiled and coyly looked up to him before saying: "You know ... this is exactly how I imagined Akashi Seijuro to be. Can you imagine how surprised I was to meet your alter ego instead?"

Yes. Bad thing that Seijuro's natural act was oddly charming. But he most likely shouldn't insult her beloved in front of her. He asked instead: "So you actually wanted to go on a date with me that first time?"

"That sounds like a trick question." She began to put meat on the grill. "What am I supposed to answer?"

Nicely evaded. He began to take some meat from the plates. As she had not been disappointed by her first date, the answer was most likely no. It seemed like she was gracious enough not to tell it to his face.

"I would have expected a one-night-stand or some pretty kinky ideas for sex from someone like you. Meeting Seijuro was like finding a treasure when you expected to be hunting game instead. I thought I would be used and exploited and was cherished instead. It doesn't mean I wouldn't have liked to go on a date with you but Seijuro was just more than I ever thought possible."

Honesty was a good trait as well. Normally he would have taken it in stride. But right now he just felt unbelievably jealous. What had Seijuro done to make her feel like this? It had not been anything extraordinary, right? He had watched it all, it had simply looked normal, not goal-oriented, just ... what most people did. It was what most people did, right?

"Why was what he did so special?" Akashi asked rather sour.

"For most people Omegas are sex objects. They aren't human, they are things to be used, they are meant for gratification. We are reduced to nothing but our bodies. I wouldn't say that Seijuro was uninterested in my body but for him it was just a part of who I am. I always felt that I was more to him, that my personality and my skills and knowledge, that all of that mattered. When Seijuro told me about you, you sounded like someone that categorized people in usefulness. An Omega's usefulness is pretty clear. But I'd like to know you before I pass on such judgment."

He looked down onto the grill and flipped some of his pieces. It gave him a moment to think about this. She was honest and except for manipulation, he did not know many other ways than being honest himself. But was it a good idea? He said: "You are right that I categorize people into their usefulness. But you are more than just a body. You are very intelligent and you helped with Sei before and you seem to be a very loving mother which is good for children I guess. I didn't understand why Seijuro wanted a relationship because I thought picking up women and fucking them is a lot easier than limiting yourself to one that might even say no but your relationship taught me the importance of having someone like you. Seeing you with Seijuro showed me that relationships are about more than just sex."

"So would you like to have a relationship?" She took a rather tasty looking beef piece

and ate it with barbecue sauce. She looked a lot less nervous than he felt, how was that even possible?

"Now that I have emotions ... I guess so. Before I got them a relationship sounded like a hassle. It takes time and money, you get less sex and instead you have claims and expectations and rules. But talking with you isn't bad and looking at how you interact with Natsue feels ... good somehow. I am suddenly feeling lonely and insecure and overwhelmed and a lot more I never had to deal with before. Right now a relationship sounds just great."

She blinked in surprise before giving him a once-over and saying: "Since when do you have emotions? You look extremely unhappy with them."

"Since Sei tried to take over. I think Seijuro merged with me a bit to oppose her. But now I am feeling all of this crap I never felt before. There's anxiety and helplessness and jealousy and ... I am jealous of Seijuro because you like him so much, that's just plain stupid. We are the same person, just different aspects." He hung his head. "I am so tired of all of this. I know I am the one that deals with everything others can't handle but how do they expect me to do that after giving me feelings?"

He heard the clicking of chopsticks before Ayako asked him: "Can I kiss you?"

He looked up and saw some strange kind of smile on her face. Was that ... pride? Love? She seemed happy. Why was she happy about the fact that his world was crushing down around him? No, this couldn't be. Maybe she was happy about the fact he told her that? He knew that partners were people you trusted to support you instead of exploiting your weaknesses. So maybe she was happy he told her about his worries? Was she offering comfort? Rationally a kiss wouldn't help anything, but his feelings were telling him that kissing was a great idea. Gods, this was confusing. Anyway, a kiss wouldn't be bad, so he nodded.

While she came around the table, he noticed she had taken the meat of the grill, so it wouldn't burn. It wasn't exactly romantic to think of that before kissing him but it was endearing all the same. Being interrupted from kissing by the smell of burned flesh wasn't exactly appealing. He decided he liked her thinking. He especially liked the fact that she sat down on his thighs, straddling his lap and showed no hesitation at all in kissing him. This wasn't nice, sweet and innocent like that kiss she had shared with Seijuro. This was one of those I'll-suck-your-soul-out-kisses that had a bit of brute force and a lot of claiming built into them. She had grabbed both sides of his face and had no problem to invite him in to lick her barbecue-flavored tongue.

Nice. So this was what it felt like to be claimed by an Omega. He rather liked this scenario of being both in and out of control. And damn if this didn't feel spectacular. Seijuro was right, doing this with feelings involved was a hell lot better than without them. He put his arms around her, one hand on her ass, one under her shoulder and pulled her onto his crotch. He really wanted to take this farther, like right now but ... was that okay? Wouldn't he hurt Seijuro if he fucked his girlfriend without him?

He slowly ended the kiss and actually simply hugged Ayako without further sexual innuendo. There was no voice, no presence, no nothing that indicated he might be able to reach Seijuro. He did remember how shocked, disbelieving and finally how immensely angry his alter ego had been when he had viewed those memories of him violating Kuroko. He knew that deep in his heart, Seijuro had not forgiven him for that, not one bit. No matter how much he mocked and laughed at his alter ego for that, he knew that he had done wrong in the eyes of his other personality. Fucking Ayako would be the exact same thing again. If he was jealous of Seijuro for having a good relationship with her, how jealous would his alter ego be for sleeping with his

girlfriend while he was unavailable? Gods, why did he suddenly have to have empathy? Ayako hugged him back and hummed a soft tune. The more he was able to feel, the more he understood why Seijuro felt like this woman was perfect. She simply accepted him, them, everything. What kind of women accepted a complete fuck-up like him? She was precious. Why couldn't she be his girlfriend? Was it possible for her to be both of their girlfriends? He wished he could discuss this with Seijuro. He didn't want to hurt his alter ego, but damn did he want to fuck this woman. He craved that feeling of being accepted like this. Since when had he ever wanted to be accepted by someone?

"Does this make you feel better in any way?," she asked after leaning back a bit.

"While it does, I'd still rather not have emotions." He shifted her on his lap, so that he could hold her with one arm. With his other he took his chopsticks to get some half-grilled meat and dipped it into the barbecue sauce to offer it to Ayako. "I like women that taste of barbecue sauce."

She laughed at that, ate the meat from his chopsticks and kissed him again after swallowing.

"We should really stop or we'll never finish dinner," he mumbled against her lips after the kiss.

"Is that a bad thing?," she asked playfully.

"I fear it is, I have a strict plan to adhere to." Which added another problem. Would Sei even allow him to have sex or might that endanger their child? "Let's stick to conversations, alright?"

"As you wish." She moved over to her side of the table again. "I am surprised at myself how attracted I am to you. Are you using your pheromones?"

"No, it's my natural charm." He smiled roguishly. "I admit that I don't adore you like Seijuro does but I am able to appreciate you. That might have a more physical side to it."

"You are the horrible combination of dangerous, desirable and detached. Now that you added a bit of cuteness to that, you trigger every Omega instinct I have. That's really not fair, even when you hold back on the pheromones." She placed the meat back on the grill, giving him some pieces that were well-done by now.

"Then it's good I am still able to make rational decisions. I think you would regret sleeping with me."

"Would I?" She looked up in surprise. "Why do you think so?"

"Because I am not Seijuro." Those words stung. Admitting out loud that you were second best was a lot more hurtful than just thinking so. He wished they had talked about this before.

"I know that. Why is that a problem?" She tilted her head.

"Why?" He blinked. "Well, you would be basically betraying your boyfriend, wouldn't you?"

She stared at him for a moment before sobering and asking with a hint of anger: "You have one body, you are one soul. Even if you never merge, you are still one person, aren't you? Or did you plan to get yourself a different girlfriend because I belong to Seijuro?"

"Well, no, I ... I didn't ... I mean-" He scrunched his eyebrows. What should he say to that? "I just think we should talk this through with him before we hurt him, you know? He's asleep. Or something else, I don't know, I can't talk to him. You know ... I raped his last lover. We don't have the best of histories when it comes to relationships. I hurt him because I didn't know better, I didn't understand anything about him or his

feelings. If I were him I would have no problem about me sleeping with you but I am not sure Seijuro thinks like me. I don't want to destroy what you two have in thoughtlessness."

She looked at him for a long moment before asking: "Why?"

"Why what?" He looked at her questioningly.

"Why do you care about his feelings?" Her expression was dark like she was angered.

"Well, he's my ... Ayako, are you feeling alright? It's not like you to ask such a question. You sound like you want me to hurt his feelings." Which was rather strange. He was sure she loved his alter ego. She had also never offered herself like she did earlier. Now that he thought about that, it was strange as well. She detested being seen like a sexual object but she behaved a bit like she wanted to be treated that way.

"When is your heat due?"

"It's still two days off." She put her arms around herself. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Because you are acting strangely. You sound callous and I know you aren't. It might be subconscious but you are trying to get me to sleep with you and while I'd love to, it's contrary to how you acted up to now." Damn did that make him sound like a good guy. This was so unlike him. Having emotions did strange things to his character.

"But I-," she stopped herself and blinked. After a moment she lowered her gaze and shook her head. "You are right, I really want to sleep with you and it's strange because that wasn't in any way what I was planning before. This is very unlike me."

"Maybe this pregnancy is messing with my pheromones and it's so slight I am not even noticing it myself. I really don't want to force you into sleeping with me and I did that with Kuroko. I don't want to do this to Seijuro twice. I didn't rape Kuroko because I like rape, I did it because I thought it was alright what I did. I fear I am somehow manipulating you into wanting to sleep with me. I did the same with Kuroko and didn't even notice back then."

Ayako nodded and sighed. Her voice was low when she said: "Thank you for stopping me."

"I did listen to Seijuro when he explained my wrongdoings, even if I mocked him." And now that he suddenly had emotions he was thankful he had. Just thinking about hurting his alter ego pained him like if he had actually done something to him. So this was what people called a moral compass. No wonder Seijuro had been angry with him. How did you explain not having any inner voice at all to someone whose empathy felt as natural as breathing?

"You're not so bad, you know?" She smiled at him.

"That's because I am partly merged with Seijuro, believe me. Now that I can feel a sliver of what he feels, a lot of things suddenly seem clearer. It's an interesting experience but not exactly useful in my overall situation." He stopped in his motion for a second. "Maybe he gave me a part of himself so I would not fuck up his relationship while he was away?"

Ayako smiled wryly at that.

"It actually makes sense." Akashi sighed. "Oh well. I hope he shows up again so I can ask him if sleeping with you is okay if you actually want it. And I best ask you that via mail, so I don't influence your decision too much."

"And then you'll schedule a meeting?" Her voice was mocking.

He lifted one corner of his mouth as well as one eyebrow which made her laugh.

"Sounds like a plan." She winked at him.

Kapitel 23: A voice from far beyond

Akashi did not believe in waiting. So he rented an apartment next to his company and had his butler move some of his stuff there. He also hired his cook to come by every evening to make him a meal in his new ... basis. He was loath to call it home but for now it would do. He made a deal with Shintaro to call every morning and evening for report and to make a visit once a week. Some of those would be doctor appointments, so for now that was alright. His lawyer had called him in shock if he had really signed everything off to his best friend which he just confirmed without further comment. For now all of this was rather normal. He did wake with food cravings sometimes, but as he had a conbini just an elevator ride away those weren't too much of a hassle. Ayako sent him a text after her heat ended where she thanked him again. By now she was sure it had been some kind of weird pheromone reaction because while she found him attractive she also wanted to hear Seijuro's opinion first. They decided to write texts instead of meeting up, so he sometimes got photos of Natsue or the kindergarten or Ayako in different places. One of them was pretty cute: she and Natsue were waving into the camera. He installed it as his screen saver.

He was in the middle of a pretty boring meeting two weeks later when all of a sudden he was able to feel a presence in the back of his mind. He asked: >Who's there?<

>It's me.< It sounded male, so it was most likely Seijuro.

>I am so glad to hear from you.< And wouldn't that be a surprise to his alter ego?

>Have you been able to talk with Sei?<

>Yeah, I ... had to look at some more of her memories. It's bad, Akashi. It's really bad.<

>Tell me that after watching my memories with our father.< He scoffed. >I wasn't the first split but I do remember the exact moment I awoke.<

>He raped her so often, so violently, so ... I wish I could forget again.< Seijuro sounded like he was in pain.

>Don't. You know as well as I that if we ever want all our personalities to work together, we need to at least know about our life. So tell me what you saw.< He wanted to know, even if he did not want to see.

>It began when our mother was pregnant with our brother. She seemed to have been traveling a lot before. Now she was at home and began to question father's methods of raising us. At that time it was about the amount of schoolwork and violin lessons. They fought a lot and our father let it out on us. I don't know why I know that because those weren't Sei's memories. Someone else supplied them, I don't know who. There is someone older than all three of us. At first it was physical violence. It seemed to arouse him, so he raped us when we were four years old. That made Sei and she has been the one to live through every rape this body ever went through. There were so many, so ... I can't even describe it. I wouldn't have survived that. She survived because she told herself that she is an object, nothing but a vessel for our father's lust.<

>Have you been able to explain that to her?<

>No, she completely shut me out when I tried. Right now she doesn't want to talk to me any more and her memories are closed off.<

>I think I told you about our possible third alter ego seven times. It takes patience.< And he was so glad he didn't have to be the one to look at all that.

>You aren't surprised at all,< Seijuro stated with a bit of suspicion.

>I was very sure we were raped before I was created. I never told you about that, did I?< He gave an answer about possible market values and his input on their PR strategy for their new product, rattling down a speech he had already prepared this morning.

>I awoke to being drowned. I was drawn from a bath tube and pushed in again over and over while being told I had failed. I lost consciousness and gained it again to coughing my lungs out and blood running down my thighs. Father told me not to make a mistake ever again.<

>Sei had a memory of being raised out of the water and fucked over the edge of a bath tube before losing consciousness. Father told her she was such a good body if only she weren't so dumb.<

>Yeah, I guess she and me share a few more.< He gave a rather cutting comment to one of his employees making a stupid proposal. >Most likely I will have to talk to her and give some of her memories a bit of context. I am not looking forward to that.<

>How did you ever ... why hasn't one of you tried to kill us?< Seijuro sounded like he was crying again.

>Because she was an object and I was a robot. You can't hurt things that do not feel.< Which reminded him: >Did you give me a part of your emotions? I am suddenly able to feel, that is very inconvenient.<

>You can?< There was a moment of silence. >If I did that wasn't consciously.<

>Well, at least it made Ayako like me a bit. Are you back for good or are you going to go away again?< Please let him stay, he did not want to do this alone. Feeling was a scary thing and he had no one who could relate to the situation he found himself in.

>I want to try talking with Sei again. I can't do that from up here. How are you holding up?<

>Not so well since I have emotions. I signed away all of our rights to Shintaro, I live in a new apartment and I do nothing but work. I can't stand myself. This is damn lonely but I don't dare to meet anyone, I'll hurt them with how I am now.<

>Wow ... you sound completely different. Before, you would have jumped at the opportunity.<

>Now I would not, I hate it. When will you be back?< His mood soured which made the other members at the meeting twitch in their seats. Maybe it would make this drag move along faster.

>How long have I been gone?<

>Two weeks.<

>So long? Oh ... well, I need a few more I think.<

Great. Splendid. How fortunate. Akashi tried not to shout in his own head: >I am in my forth month pregnant, trying to manage this company and preparing it for my absence by training a management team in just one month time, all while I am trying not to fuck up your relationship. I am handling both Sei's and your mess you left me with. You are our main personality, be responsible for once!<

>You're cranky.<

>Oh really?,< he spat at his alter ego. >I am sick of this job.<

>You really do have emotions now.< Great deduction, Sherlock.

>Whoever saddled me with them can go to hell in my opinion.<

>I could take over and you deal with Sei instead of me,< Seijuro offered.

>No, thank you. I want neither.<

>You were kind enough to remind me that one of us has to.<

>Go fuck an egg.<

His alter ego dared to chuckle at that.

>Hurry back.< He sighed in his head. >Also Ayako and I were unsure if we were allowed to date while you are away. Would you see it as a betrayal if me and her did romantic stuff?<

>Mine or your definition of romantic?< Seijuro did sound as positive as before, that was a good sign, right?

>Romantic as in sleeping with her when she agrees to it versus fucking her brains out.<

>If you dare to hurt her-<

>I told her what I did to Kuroko and how I got him to do as I say and warned her to only make decisions regarding me out of reach and after talking it over with someone. I am really trying my best not to hurt her, I promise.< What else could he say? >I also have empathy since I have emotions, it makes hurting people a lot harder than before.<

There was a moment of silence. Seijuro answered after nearly half a minute: >I'll look at your memories when I come back. Don't make me apologize to her for your behavior.<

>So if she agrees without me pressuring her, it's okay to sleep with her?<

>Lovingly. No bondage, no toys, no sadism, no slave-plays, not even humiliating her. If you make her feel like anything less than the great person that she is, we'll have a problem with each other. I was confused about Kuroko, I listened to and even believed some of your rationalism. I am not as naive as I was back then. I learned a hell lot about rape those last two weeks.<

>Yeah ... I am sorry about that.< Looking back at his memories with the emotions he had now, he felt nothing but shame. >I thought about apologizing to Kuroko but I first want all of this settled and my emotions to stabilize. If I apologize to him without your conversation skills and your much finer eye for social detail it will go horribly wrong and I owe him more than that.<

>You do.< There was another silence filled with anger. >Let Ayako choose a safe-word, even if you do things you deem normal.<

He sighed – aloud this time as the meeting was adjourned and everyone was shuffling out – and promised Seijuro to do that.

>For what it's worth, I like the person I am talking to now. You are a lot more approachable now. I don't mind sharing with you if you are like this.< Seijuro told him.

>Tell Ayako that I love her, will you?<

>I will.< He slowly gathered up his papers, not intent on talking to anyone right now.

>Take care and come back the same as before.<

>I can't really promise that.< His voice was dark. >Knowing and seeing it for myself are two diametrically different things.<

>I know.< His own voice was no more than a whisper. He knew so well. He remembered all those moments he frantically told himself his father must have whipped him to have his backside hurt that much. He still hadn't told Seijuro about that operation he had when they were fifteen to take out a part of their spine tail that had been deformed due to the repeated rapes they had to suffer. He had always had a hunch of what was really going on with them since he knew why his memories were so fragmentary most of the time. By the gods, he knew so well.

He put a hand on his stomach. He would never allow that to happen to anyone else. Seijuro's presence had long faded again.

A week later he had four most peculiar persons standing in front of him. Or at least two of them were a bit unexpected. The two normal ones were male students, one a business student, the other a law student. The first unexpected one was a young, sloppily dressed man who had apparently been unemployed before and told him he was intrigued by mysteries. The other was a young girl of sixteen who said her reason for taking his tests had been boredom.

"Well, I bid you welcome. You must have been guessing about the job you are employing for and I will begin this with lifting the mystery: It's my own job."

There was a moment of silence before the law student asked: "You mean to say you are looking for someone to work as the CEO of the whole Akashi group?"

"One or a group, yes. None of my employees is capable of doing my job, not even a team of them. You are the only ones who were able to fulfill the requirements of being seen by me. The next part will be to undergo training by accompanying me if you feel up to it. If I have the impression that one or more of you might be able to do my job, I'll ask you if you'd like to have it. Until then you should have an impression what this will mean for you."

"Cool." The girl grinned. "What do you think how long that will take? My parents will go berserk if I miss too much school. They won't understand how much better this is."

"I'll call your school and make them give you time off for this. They can count it as job orientation or internship time or something like that. I can be quite persuasive."

"Thanks, Mister Akashi." She just nodded and waited for more to come.

"So I guess everyone is still in? This will be an unpaid internship which might end somewhere between today and in about two to three months for you."

"Do we get a reference for the internship?," the business student asked.

"Sure, why not?" He could care less, he only needed minutes to write one and it might mean the world for everyone of them.

"I don't know how to phrase my question." The unemployed man scratched his head which did not look like he had showered in the last few days. "How legal is your job?" Akashi smiled cruelly. Having emotions did not hinder him in putting them off sometimes.

"Can we go to jail for the things we see?," the girl asked after a moment.

"Not at all, this business is absolutely legal." Or at least the illegal parts were not so obvious that he or others might get in trouble for it. Informed stock sales, stolen inventions, framing heads of other companies – none of that was more than underhanded, so he never got in trouble with the police.

"May we ask what your reason for stepping down is?," the law student wanted to know.

"I'd like to go on vacation. I won't step down, I just don't want to work myself into an early grave. But my workload is high and my current staff is not able to handle it, so I'd like to train a team of experts."

"So is this a long-term job if we are hired or not?" His eyebrows were drawn together.

"That depends on you." He leaned back and smirked. "Until today, I have only known one person able to take work off my hands and he is not interested. Maybe one of you is capable, maybe none of you is. We will see." He regarded them for a moment. "If there are no more questions, you will now have to sign this internship contract. It basically says that you are not allowed to talk, write or whatever else about the things you see here, so other companies can't use your information. If you decide to sell information, you can be sure you will find yourself in prison for that. And you can then be happy you'll be safe in there." He looked at the formerly unemployed man. He did

give off the vibe of a criminal. His aura was similar to Haizaki.

"Do we have a specific work time or do we begin and end work with you?", the girl asked.

"I start at eight and stop at eight due to my doctor's orders. That seems not too much of a burden to me. I might give you work that will keep you longer but I guess that depends on you."

"My curfew is ten o'clock", the girl said and smiled, "so I guess I'll just work hard."

He had to admit that he liked her. She was obviously sixteen but she had a sharp mind. She was a highly intelligent, bubble-gum chewing make-up doll who checked her glaringly painted nails every few minutes. Her name was Seika.

He answered some questions regarding the contracts before taking the four to his meeting room and explaining the company's structure to them. The law and business students seemed to be the only ones who had informed themselves about the company before they applied and could ask some specific questions. He told them about various projects he was working on before giving them a tour of one of his experimental labs which was located in their main building. This division was mainly working with robotics, so he could show them some pretty cool gadgets he was thinking about mass-producing. The formerly unemployed man seemed to have a lot of experience with programming. He was constantly asking questions and Akashi was not able to answer all of them. One of his technicians was more than glad to, so they started an animated discussion and were soon analyzing programming codes. In the meantime, Akashi was talking with the business student about marketing, sellers and prices. All three got wide eyes upon hearing how much it cost to invent and produce just one of these things. Seika enthusiastically asked about other robotic fields like medical uses, starships and children's toys. She was pleased to hear that he had been the one to invent robotic cats and immediately asked to see one.

He shouted for LinLin which prompted his sleek, completely metal Bengal cat to come running to rub her head against his shin. He smiled at Seika and said: "Isn't she cute?"

"Yeah ... but she does not have fur."

"She's anti-allergic."

"But then it's no fun to cuddle her." She sat down anyway and offered her hand for sniffing. LinLin immediately came forward and begin to rub herself against the hand.

"She does behave very typically."

"We sold her with different fur options but the one for the lab was kept without fur. We can't have real pets in here and giving her fur would defeat the purpose. LinLin is allowed in here because we programmed her not to do some things like jump onto the control panel."

"That's intelligent." LinLin was lying on the ground in front of Seika, paws drawn heavenwards and rolling around. Seika was stroking her smooth metal stomach. LinLin was purring happily. "Doesn't she keep some people from working?"

"It's called taking constructive working pauses. I don't work my employees to the bone. We have a spa, training rooms and a kindergarten. The roof has a big garden for relaxation installed on it. People gladly work overtime here."

"Oh, do we have a lunch break?" She smiled at him.

"Most of the time it's lunch with clients or meetings with food but yes, you won't starve here."

"Do I need to ask my mom for lunch money?"

Cute. He imagined her running this company in two months, making millions of yen per month. It was an amusing thought. He said: "If we need to pay, I'll do that. It's the

least for having you work for free.”

“It’s not for free if I get food. Free lunch sounds great. So if we go to meetings, do I need to wear a suit every day?” LinLin had climbed into her arms and seemed content snuggled on her arm and below her breasts.

“You need formal wear, yes. Do you have that or do you need clothing money?”

“I need to go shopping.” She did not look unhappy about that. “Is it okay to ask for clothing money?”

“Remind me before you go.”

“Cool.” She got out her phone and texted a friend. “Shopping tour tonight”, she singsang, “Say, what does such a cat with fur cost?”

“Seven-hundred thousand yen.”

“How long does she live?”

“You have to load her batteries every week and replace them every three years. Until now we only had defects from mishandling. LinLin is seven years old.”

“Then it’s completely alright as a price. I’ll ask for one for my birthday. Am I allowed to take a photo of LinLin?” Who had by now climbed her shoulder and lay like a scarf around her neck.

“As long as you can’t see anything in the background.”

She held up her phone and turned a bit. She showed him the picture and he nodded it off. This one had an okay behavior for a sixteen-year-old. He just felt like giving a classroom a tour. Mister law student looked bored out of his skull while the business student listened to the two men discussing programming. He went over and asked: “We will continue on, please finish the discussion.”

“Oh, sorry, Mister Akashi”, his researcher had flinched and turned. “Mister Nakatani had some great ideas regarding the balancing of our magnetic bicycle.”

So number four was good at physics and programming. Good to know. He nodded and waited for the second that the man was typing out code and saying: “This should do it. You just need to test what happens with larger obstacles like stairs.”

“Why should anyone drive a bike down some stairs?”, the researcher asked in surprise. Nakatani drew up his shoulders. Akashi remembered Aomine doing such stunts. He made a note that he needed more men with practical experience as product testers. He continued to tour the building.

Kapitel 24: A second date

Ayako smiled upon opening the door. She was wearing a stark white dress and some modern glass jewelry. Her hair was done up, her make-up exquisite. It would be a pleasure to mess her up. He could imagine how debauched her red lipstick would look on her chin, her mascara on her cheeks from tears running down her face, her hair in his grasp. Maybe he would get away with ripping her dress, blood and semen running down her ties and staining the whiteness.

His mind was getting ahead of him. He had promised Seijuro he would not hurt her. She wasn't one of his conquest, she was a person to be cherished and respected. That thought made him sigh internally – but he had promised. He kept his promises, even if no one ever kept promises to him.

"Don't you like the dress? Or have I overdone my make-up?" She looked up with unsure eyes.

"No, you're perfect. I just remembered something." He smiled at her. "Are you hungry? I did not reserve at a restaurant. I thought you might like a bar more but I am open to suggestions."

"I haven't been to an Izakaya in years." Her lips curved joyfully. "So I look well enough?"

"You are beautiful no matter what you wear." It was one of the smooth lines he had stolen from Seijuro.

"You flirt! I'll get my purse." She turned, put on her shoes and grabbed something he would label as a bag rather than a purse. But who was he to judge women's accessories? "How was your day?"

"Exhausting. I have a leech that demands food every few hours. I need my own caterer by now." He was fourteen weeks pregnant by now and his stomach suddenly demanded food like crazy. "My team of incompetent teenagers is happy about that, they love to eat. Especially that sixteen-year-old, she is insatiable. How can petite girls eat that much?"

"I guess she is a growing Alpha. Isn't she?"

"Yeah ... though she should be done growing into anything but circumference."

"How is training them working out?"

He just groaned. Honestly, they were a pain. Most of them. But in combination they were just too much. He said: "Law is trying to take out everyone else. Instead of bringing in any results he focuses on destroying everyone else's work. But he's fucking good at paperwork, so I haven't fired him yet. Economy is average at about everything and if he doesn't shape up soon, he'll be gone before Law. On the other hand he is the most normal of them all and makes a good face for official events. Jobless is a genius with computers but he tends to be a better spy than someone able to get work done. He is unable to do any repetitive jobs like filling papers or writing contracts. Seika is the one best suited to my job but she is only sixteen. She can neither represent nor sign anything nor will anyone take her seriously. She is also immature as hell. I really don't know what to do with those people."

"Well, it sounds solvable. Economy gets to be the face, Law the one doing the work, Seika the brain. And you hire Jobless for every underhanded task and make him an advisor. I imagine him to be ruthless and nearly as able to find loopholes as you." She seemed proud about her advice.

"It sounds great in theory but I would need them to work together for that." He shook his head in exasperation. "Jobless doesn't care for anything but playing around on computers and Seika is caught up in nailcare. Economy and Law try to scratch out each other's eyes. I don't know if I shouldn't just start again with different tests."

"How likely is it that the next team is going to be better? Sometimes you have to work with the people you get. All of them are highly intelligent and capable of running the company instead of running away in fear. You have a multi-billion-yen empire, it's not an easy task to manage that." She placed her hands on his arm and leaned a bit against him while they walked. "Just the thought terrifies me. If you told me to sit in your seat I would have a panic attack."

True, none of them had panicked yet. All of them were eager, all of them seemed to have fun with the work he threw at them as long as it suited their interest. He was unlikely to find better people who would do his job without trying to take him out. He wasn't too sure about Law in the long run but for now he was manageable.

"You are right. My standards are just too high. I am my father's son after all."

Her smile vanished. Shit, had he hurt her? How? Was it bad to mention his father? Seijuro always had strange reactions as well.

"It sounds like praise for your father," she whispered faintly.

"Well, yes ... I hate him with all my heart but I am able to see that he was a driven man with unbelievably high standards. It was what broke us. No one could live up to his expectations."

"No one could live up to his abuse. He raped you. That has nothing to do with expectations." Her voice was strong and soft at the same time.

"I am pretty sure we would have broken anyway, even if he had not raped us. Just his work ethics and standards were too much for any child. With the growth of our company, the prerequisites for managing it grew unbelievably high. If I tasked myself with raising a child that could manage the future company all by itself I would have no idea how to go about it. I would need to clone the child."

"So you know you need a team of people." Ayako smiled at him.

"Yeah, I do ... you mean to say I need all four?"

"That's right." She nodded.

"Okay." He sighed. "You are most likely right anyway. I'll try my best to get them to work as a team instead of enemies." They had entered an entertainment district.

"Which one do you like?"

She pointed at one a bit off which seemed cozy instead of modern and not highly frequented. He followed her wish and steered them inside. After she drew in a deep breath as if the place had any kind of special smell, she suddenly turned and said: "Isn't this a bad idea? I mean, you are ... it's not like you can drink anything."

"I can order milk." He smirked which made her laugh.

They sat down at an unoccupied table. Ayako flipped through the card for a bit before smiling secretly at him. A waiter asked for their orders to which she answered: "We'll take Edamame, Wasabi nuts, a virgin Mojito and a glass of milk."

The man blinked in silence before he seemed to catch himself: "Warm or cold milk?"

"Cold. You may add ice and fresh mango," Akashi answered.

After watching their waiter leave Ayako asked: "So, are you used to ordering milk?"

"May I remind you that I am nineteen? Of course I normally order alcohol-free cocktails at meetings but I don't like them. They are too sweet. So yes, I order milk when I can get away with it."

"Oh gods." She groaned and put a hand on her head. "I mostly forget how young you

are. I feel like a cougar.”

“I don’t think that description suits our situation.” Though he was amused by her reaching that conclusion as well. He remembered how he had taunted Seijuro about this. “Have you ordered your drink out of pity or do you prefer non-alcoholic beverages?”

“I like to keep my head.” She looked away and grinned sheepishly. “Though with what the evening might lead to maybe I should drink up some courage.”

“You do not need alcohol for courage. If you think you need bravery for saying no alcohol will not give you that. It makes you stupidly say yes even when everything inside you is screaming no.” He knew too well. Those were memories shared with Sei. She had always drank while he screamed at her to stop. Alcohol, drugs, whatever their father wanted to try out, she had gulped it down.

She smiled at him sadly but kept to a nod before changing the topic: “So do you like classical music as well?”

“I hate it with a vengeance.” Hopefully that did not affront her. “Not because it really is bad but because of the memories I link to it. I like metal opera best.”

“Metal opera?” She raised an eyebrow.

“When the growling death metal singers suddenly spring a ballad on you, that’s what I like best.” He gave her a rogue smile. “Scary guys with a soft spot are my thing, you know?”

She blushed furiously at that and said: “You make everything into a flirt, aren’t you?”

“Aside from intimidation that’s my only social skill.” The rest had gone to Seijuro. The one who had actually visited a debate club for five years. Akashi was so happy he had been able to skip having to have boring talks about politics and science with brainless rich kids. Meeting Shintaro had been the only good thing about that club.

“So let’s cut to the heart of things, Mister businessmen. You want to sleep with me?” She leaned nearer.

“Very much so. What are your thoughts on that?”

Before she could answer they were interrupted by their waiter bringing their drinks, announcing Akashi’s an iced mango lassi. Just as well, he liked lassi. It went well with the edamame of which he took one. Nice. They said their “Kanpai!” before trying their drinks. Akashi was surprised to taste freshly made lassi instead of premade stuff.

“Nice. My drink is good.” She smiled at him before lowering her gaze in a flight of shyness. “So ... I would like to know what to expect. Seijuro warned me off of you, you know?”

“Not one of his smart moves.” Akashi’s pupils contracted. “Just because I am not as lovey-dovey as him doesn’t mean I am a horrible creature.”

“I saw Chiho, remember? I know what you can do to a women.”

“I can do a lot more than that.” He had lowered his voice and reminded himself he did not want to intimidate her. “But that was what she was comfortable with. At least she told me that. If she lied to me about her boundaries, I fail to see how that is my fault.”

“It’s not lying when you don’t know!” Ayako’s eyes sparkled with anger. “Gods, that’s ... ugh! I don’t even know where to begin. Just because someone doesn’t say no does not mean he or she says yes. There are a lot of things you endure for someone else, especially if that someone is important to you. If you asked me for anal I would not say no but I would not enjoy it. I would do it for you because you want it.”

“That’s plain stupid.” He blinked at her. “Why would you do something you don’t enjoy? Do you really think “I’m doing it for you” would make your partner happy? The only thing you get for that is having your partner feel like shit for exploiting you.”

Ayako looked at him with wide eyes. Was that really such a far-fetched concept that it was making her speechless? Wasn't it just common sense to only agree to things you actually wanted? He enjoyed his work. He enjoyed sex. Hell, he even enjoyed some conversations with this women, even though he abhorred the idea of dating. What he did not enjoy was walking around with a leech inside of him but he could endure that. It didn't mean he had to like it.

"My husband was happy every time I put out, even if I did not want to." Her voice was no more than a whisper, her tone next to dead.

"Your husband was a rapist who enjoyed seeing people in pain."

"And you don't?" Her eyes narrowed. "Do you seriously want to tell me you don't like your partner crying and begging you to stop?"

"I do like that. But only after they have consented that they want that as well. Good, my means of getting consent have been questionable before, I give you that, but I learned since then. I want you to go into this fully consenting."

"Because Seijuro would not forgive you otherwise?" Her voice was as cold as his drink.

"Because you would be gone sooner than later if I raped you. No matter my tastes I like to realize them with one partner and one partner only. I am not interested in fucking one boring one-night-stand after the next." Wasn't that logical? Having one steady sex partner was the easiest and most satisfying. He was still unsure about the relationship business attached to it but Seijuro had made him curious.

"Huh ... I think I begin to see where you're coming from. It is radical but logical. It is just detached from all feelings." She shuddered. "I understand why you are like that but it leaves me freezing inside."

"My partners normally say that sex with me is incredibly hot." If they said anything afterwards and did not run in fear from him. Now that he thought back on it he was able to feel regret. It was strange to look at his own memories with the ability to feel. "I'm sorry, I take that back. It was very insensitive. You are right. Up to now I have never had sex with the ability to feel. This is new for me too."

"What does it change?" By now she looked rather put out.

"Well ... I don't know yet. But I care more. I never wanted my partners afraid of me, especially those that mattered to me. Tetsu ... is it okay to talk about Tetsu?" She nodded so he continued. "I knew deep inside that Tetsu did not want what I did to him. Even then. I just knew that I could manipulate him into wanting me ... or at least believing he wanted me. Once you are used to your own lies you start to believe them. And he was a believer in the end. He really thought he wanted me. And then I got impatient and pushed too hard too fast and lost him." He had been an idiot. "I wanted him dependent on me because I wanted full control over him. I know now that that was ... idiotic at best. It's not what I really want in a partner. I want trust instead of control. I just did not know how to do that back then. Honestly I don't know how to do that now. That's Seijuro's specialty. He's the one that's all about trust while I am ... a control freak. Shit." He closed his eyes and sank back into his seat. "I need a lot of control. Relationships are something that's way over my head. Sex is okay but only if I'm in control. I need to feel safe. And I do understand that my partner wants to feel safe as well. It's why I ask. I don't do anything without asking first. I did that in the past, yes – until I understood how much I hurt others with it. I am past the point where my desires overrule my partner's desires. Yes, I'm still pushy but I want a partner that I can respect as my equal. I need someone for that that makes me feel safe because she is able to set clear boundaries. I don't want to be hurt and I don't want to hurt others, no matter the sexual practice we do."

Gods, had he really just held such a monologue? Worst of all a monologue over his feelings? She would laugh. Of course she would, he most likely sounded ridiculous. He sounded ridiculous to himself. Just why had he told her? It was a mistake to give her this much and he never-

Why was she smiling? Was she laughing at him? He growled at her lowly and got a waft of her pheromones for it. It made everyone in the Izakaya turn their heads to them. He threw some money on the table – enough for their drinks, the food and whatever else they might be charged with – before standing and leaving. She wordlessly took her purse and ran after him.

It was her hand on his that made him stop. Barely. He wanted to rip his hand away and go. Her voice was only a whisper but he heard it even though they stood on a road in the middle of Shinjuku: "This is trust. Telling me all that is letting go of control and trusting instead. It's taking a leap even if you fear to be hurt for it."

It was weakness. Weakness. Foolishness. Hurt. Pain. He knew all about pain. Pain was his world, had been his world forever. He could only trust in himself. Why should he offer up a part of himself to another human? Why should he enable her to hurt him? He turned and looked her in the eyes: "I don't know if I want that."

"I think your heart already made the decision for you." She smiled at him, a blinding, terrifyingly beautiful smile. "Do you want to sleep with me? Even knowing that I might hurt you?"

He shook his head.

"Call me if you want to try." She let go of his hand.

He looked at her for another moment before turning and walking away without another word.

Kapitel 25: Lone warrior

Akashi put all his energy into work. After all that's what he did best. He threatened Law into working with the others by telling him that teamwork was one of the elements he was evaluated on. He shipped off Economy into his PR team for a short internship. He wrote some contracts with Seika and Jobless, making Seika the one to write them and Jobless the one to correct them.

Seika asked in one of those small gatherings: "Mister Akashi? Do you already know when you plan your vacation? And will we continue to work after you are back?"

"I think another three months of training should be suitable. I will also have to decide if I keep all of you as a management team. But even if I don't, I know some good positions for every one of you. So whoever likes to work can stay. I just have to decide on which contract to hire you. Obviously it will be high-class positions for all of you."

"Cool!" She smiled. "So I don't have to go back to school?"

"Well, a high-school diploma still makes a lot of sense. Do you think you can handle this work and learn for your tests beside it? That way you can finish school and work full-time."

"So much work." She sighed. "Yeah, sure. It's just another two years after all. Maybe I can go to school two days a week and come to work three days a week? Then I have time on the weekends to learn what I missed."

"Seiko, part-time manager of Akashi Corporate. As long as you come everyday when I am not here, we can certainly talk about it."

"Any plans on how long your vacation will be?"

"I don't have a clue. Knowing me I won't be able to stay away from work even for a week. But a few weeks would be nice. I've never had a vacation in my whole life."

"Never?" She spat it out in shock. "What did you do in elementary school?"

"I worked here." He gently petted the printed out contract. "This is my life. But I don't want an early death like my father had. I don't plan on working myself into the grave. So I know I have to start learning to let go and ... trust in others." It all came down to it, didn't it?

"Huh." She curled a strand of her hair around her finger. "I'm not good in that trusting business either. But Kei is doing a rather fine job, isn't he? I never saw anyone so adept in paperwork. And Hatani is pretty good meeting with those important people. I think I would piss them off if I was on my own."

"Yeah, you are still a bit young. But you are a good coordinator. Knowing what work to give to whom is an important skill," he praised her.

"Looks like I am pretty useless," Jobless said with a sigh.

"No way!" Seika looked at him. "You're just ... hard to motivate. When you do stuff, you really do it well. I think you are best suited for this job in terms of brains. But you are lazy as fuck and can't concentrate for more than a few minutes. If you could overcome that, you'd make a great support."

Akashi just smiled. It seemed like he had nothing much to do here. Seika had an eye for people that rivaled Seijuro's.

"And here I thought I would not need to return to my medication." Jobless leaned back in his stool. "Damn, I hate that I only function with psychotropics."

"Well, it depends on the job you want to do. Free-lance artist is doable with how you are."

"It's what I did before. That didn't work out well, I could never keep my deadlines." He shook his head sadly.

"Then yes, you might want to go back on medication," Akashi advised. "One of my friends needed ten years to get off his and could only do it because he found a partner that supported him everyday and spent three years on explaining how this world and people worked."

"Sounds like an Asperger."

"He is one." He nodded. "Another one has been depressed for five years now. He just recently went into therapy and is making great progress. Taking medication and going to therapy is not a weakness in my eyes." Way to talk. How about some for himself? "I'm rather impressed by people that openly face their demons."

"I would never have expected that." Jobless looked at him for a long moment. "So you're friends with a few nutcases?"

"My friends are either Alphas raised by Alphas or Omegas who had to live through all the discrimination heaped upon them. I found that both are damaged in some way. Only the Betas I know seem rather normal." It didn't help that those two beside him were both Alphas. Or it did. They most likely knew what he was talking about. "I mean, you not only found but replied to some kind of mystery position advert that required a shitload of mental tests. Not everyone would do that."

The two looked at each other before nodding. Seika asked: "So you expected some ... strange individuals?"

"Takes one to know one." Akashi smiled at her. "I mean, seriously, what kind of people would like to do this job? I guess one has to be a bit nuts to do this."

Both others just grinned and nodded again, this time a bit more vigorously. Jobless pulled out his phone and said: "I'll write myself a reminder to take my medication again."

"And I want food. We are still growing after all." She winked at Akashi. So that was their explanation why they ate three times a day on the job. Fair enough, he was nineteen after all. He might even grow a bit more, who knew. Him and that damn leech.

Akashi had looked at his phone for at least thirty minutes now. It was getting kind of ridiculous. He had a woman wanting to have sex with him that only waited for his call and he chickened out? Just because she was able to move him? That was really pathetic. He could just invite her over, treat her to a nice (ordered) dinner and spent a glorious night with her.

If only he wasn't scared of what that might do to him. Maybe he would open up to feelings, ripping up his personalities' concept and completely destroying his inner equilibrium. Or maybe he would just make himself a bit vulnerable and enjoy a bout of sex. Fear wasn't a good companion. Since when did he fear stuff? He had never feared anything, no pain, no abuse, no ... joy? Living as an automaton had his up-sides. It also meant to be unable to have any positive feelings. He had never enjoyed winning, he had simply done it. Like breathing.

Sex would be nice. Sex would also mean to open up a bit and either be crushed with disappointment or elated with pride or both at the same time. All those possibilities sounded scary. How did one deal with disappointment? For that matter, how did one deal with joy? It was such a foreign concept. He was able to fusion cross-country industrial empires and cut their costs, making them thrice as effective as before and was still unable to have sex with someone that actually meant something to him.

Boo him.

He might go on another date with Ayako. Maybe it would be less aggravating after talking to her ... no, actually, it would only make it worse. The more he liked her, the more intimidating it got. Was that how other people had sex? Had some of his partners felt this way about him? He hoped not. If Ayako were to be as callous to him as he had been- oh. So that was what she had talked about. That he was rational and disregarded the other person's feelings. He had ... he hadn't even known that humans could feel like this. Just why would anyone want all these annoying hormone reactions?

He shook his head and rolled his eyes. Time to call. Now or never. Every other minute would only make it worse.

Tut.

Tut.

Tut.

Why wasn't she picking up her phone? Had she got tired of waiting for his call? Was she angry with him? Maybe she-

"Hi, this is Ayako." Oh, thank everyone. "Please leave your message after the beep."
No!

"Err, well, this is Akashi. I wanted to ... invite you over to dinner." Smooth, very smooth. Maybe he should take lessons from Natsue, even she was a better conversationalist than him right now. "Err ... could you please call back once you get the message? Bye." He immediately ended the call.

He was such a coward. Really, this was pitiful. He was a nineteen-year-old multimillionaire, he did not have to cower before one woman. Or maybe he could ... how about an Ayako domina version? She was right, he liked tears and cries and pain. Maybe they should start with her doling out punishments. Maybe he could overwrite some of his memories that way. It made all of this less likely to go to hell because he would not be in a position able to hurt her.

She did not seem the type to like that though. She was gentle and caring. Maybe she had a hidden side? What seemed peaceful on the outside did not have to be on the inside. She had been abused, so he would be surprised if she liked S/M-plays with her as the target. On the other hand if he could not trust her with his feelings, could he trust her with his feelings, body and freedom on the line? Somehow it sounded easier. S/M followed patterns. He knew those. Free romantic cuddly sex on the other hand ... he would leave that to Seijuro. It wasn't his thing. He was like an animal, dominating or being dominated but never to be tamed.

He did not want feelings. Not as much as Seijuro would give her. A bit maybe, but no more than what he was comfortable with. He would never trust anyone with his heart.

Ayako sent a text on the next day that stated "Heat time. I'll call next week."

He groaned at having forgotten her cycle. On evening of prowling the apartment like a tiger and all for naught. She had not taken his call because she had been delirious due to her heat. How exhausting. Relationships were too much of an emotional turmoil.

He gave in to being moody at work, screaming at all team members – except for Seika – for being slow, making mistakes and annoying him in general. He only reigned himself in after finding Seika's phone (which she always left lying around somewhere) with an open chat where she told a friend that her boss was on his period. It reminded him that later that day he had another appointment for his pregnancy check-up.

Oh joy.

Another meeting where Shintaro would stare at him for hours to see if he had gone round the bend and enduring a stick in his ass. Though he had been promised that they would use an abdominal scan this time. It only made the disaster he had to endure minimally less disastrous. He was showing. Showing! Okay, he was nearing the end of his fifth month, any non-Alpha would already have quite the round belly – but still. He had to wear polo shirts under his suit because his belt wasn't straight anymore. People could see when he removed his jacket.

He told Shintaro his dilemma who proposed to have his team begin to handle meetings and not wear a suit to work. Akashi just growled in annoyance. It seemed the best idea though. Just how should he explain wearing wide shirts? It was summer. He wouldn't get away with wearing a pullover like Shintaro had done. It was when he heard the most ridiculous idea ever: "What about traditional male Japanese clothing? You could allow kimonos and hakamas as equal to suits to promote national values. Everyone would expect you to act as a role model and come to work in a kimono every morning."

"You can't be serious." What a meaningless thing to say. His friend was one of the most traditional people still alive. He always wore Japanese clothing at home and to every kind of event where he wasn't required to move fast. He had worn kimonos in the last month of his own pregnancy whenever he wasn't going to school. He was wearing one now, seeing as he was one month ahead of him. "Sei is the only one of us owning kimonos. Female kimonos. I know what she used them for."

"I admit that it's a rather bad association." His best friend looked at him for a long moment. "I remember running around with Seijuro in the gardens, both of us wearing boys' yukatas. Whenever you came to visit us, my mother would dress us up and we would play lords or samurai. Seijuro loved wearing those clothes."

"Then he can bring this damn pregnancy to an end and give birth to his hell spawn." He shut up only because the door opened and their doctor stepped in. They had been allowed to wait in a separate room since Akashi had offered them money to not be made to sit in a waiting room with Omegas.

The usual smile which always fell sooner rather than later was already gone from his doctor's face upon hearing his words. For some reason he was always appalled whenever he heard how much Akashi hated his pregnancy. Why would that man even bother to always work up hope that something might have changed in the meantime? He said: "Good evening, Mister Akashi and Mister Midorima. How are you both?"

"I am fine and happy, thank you," his friend answered. That genuine smile annoyed him to no end.

"I have not taken an axe to my stomach," Akashi said in a fit of grumpiness.

"Have you already made plans who will take your child? It might be no more than another month," the doctor asked him.

True enough. He would have to ask Ayako. No, no, he would ask Tetsu. Ayako was nice but they were at the point where they thought about sleeping with on another, not where you shoved unwanted kids onto the other. So he answered: "I decided on asking one of our friends who has two children of his own and has already offered to take mine."

"Kuroko?" Shintaro just looked at him with one of those gazes that offered no information about what he was feeling.

Akashi just nodded.

"Kuroko Tetsuya?" The doctor slowly nodded. "I know him. He's a good man. I'll hope

he can raise your child with love.”

“He raises any child with love. It’s what kids deserve.” Akashi looked away, suddenly gripped by an unwanted bout of sadness. He had only known hate, anger and vicious cruelty from his own father. Whatever this child meant to him, he did not want to be the same kind of monster. “I wouldn’t be able to do that.”

The doctor just nodded and said: “Good. Have you faced any complications?”

“I have been feeling kicks. It’s annoying. I want to rub the places but I can’t. It distracts me from work.” Actually, he was able to rub them now, right? He placed his hand on his own stomach. “He’s kicking now.”

“He?” Shintaro raised an eyebrow at him. “You were the one who did not want to know your child’s gender.”

“Fate has been kicking me in the face for longer than I can remember. Of course it’s a boy. It’s what my rapist wanted after all: To get me pregnant with his heir before being put six feet under. Anything else might actually good be good news for once and my life has been devoid of good news for longer than I care to remember.”

The doctor just looked at him for a long moment before closing his eyes with a sigh. It’s how he knew. It was a boy. Of course he was carrying his heir.

“I’ll get this done with and then I’ll start building a life I might actually want for myself. One without being raped, beaten and forced into pregnancy. Excuse me all for kicking out that leech that is nothing but a reminder of my worst nightmares.”

Shintaro nodded and replied: “It’s for the best. Kuroko is a great parent and his husband will support all of his decisions. I can’t see him making differences between his own and other kids. He plays with Hana as if she was one of his.”

“I might hate him but even I know that he is a father every child should have.” Akashi continued to rub his stomach. “I also hate being pregnant but I only want the best for this baby. None of my issues should have any influence on him.”

“That might be the most positive thing I ever heard of you.” The doctor looked at him with a strange kind of scrutiny. “So have you looked after yourself?”

“Lots of good food, avoiding stress, soothing baths and no poisons of any kind. Except for ignoring him most of the time I’ve been a model baby hotel.” He opened his shirt a bit and stood. “I’ve begun to show. That should be the best indicator I’ve been taking this serious.”

“That’s very good to see!” The doctor actually smiled again. That had never happened before.

“May I feel his kicks?” Shintaro asked him. After a bland look from Akashi he slowly raised his hand and placed it on the now nude stomach. “Hello there.”

“He seems to like kicking your hand,” Akashi noted.

“Babies like getting a response. He’s bored inside of you. You could talk to him or pet him once in a while. Play him some music or have Ayako sing. He can hear you, you know?” Shintaro looked up at him. “It’s not an inanimate object inside of you, it’s a fully functioning human being.”

Objectively he knew that. Subjectively it made him want to puke it out. It was a baby, it deserved love and attention. For him it was a parasite crawling through his abdomen and making itself known with kicking and scratching him. It felt like having a massive bug inside of you that just wouldn’t die.

“Just be happy I never spared a thought for suicide because I want to throw myself out of the window when you say that.” Akashi took a step back. “Can we please get this over with?”

Both looked at him for a moment before they nodded. He even got his abdominal

scan instead of a rectal one. The doctor showed them all kinds of angles, explained the current development, even showed them the gender. Of course it was a boy. It gave Akashi the morbid thought if it was possible to feel raped by an unborn baby. The most disconcerting thing was Seijuro's voice that answered: >Well, you just made Sei run away again.<

It made him aware that the strange feeling which he had those last few minutes might have been both Seijuro's and Sei's presence in the back of his mind. Now they were gone again.

Kapitel 26: Talking feelings

Ayako called back a few days later to thank him for his invitation and to apologize for not being able to get the phone. He simply told her it was no problem and that the invitation was still open, just that she should not expect sex because it was about the furthest thing from his mind right now. She sounded a bit unsure when she agreed to coming over that evening.

He ordered them sushi with two rolls of fried sushi for himself. They had a rather nice meal drinking peach juice and talking about Natsue and the kindergarten. He had not ordered a piano but he had brought his violin, so they also talked great violin songs. Ayako asked if he played but he had to negate that. Seijuro played. He himself could bring out some notes but his play sounded dull. She asked him to play anyway, wanting to know if having feelings might have changed how he played. He decided on "My Immortal" which actually sounded quite good until his E-string decided to give him a scratch on his face.

"Oh no! Are you alright? Did it hit your eye?" Ayako inspected the small cut immediately. "Do you have a first-aid kit?"

"Behind the mirror in the bathroom," he instructed before putting down the violin and his bow. Seijuro had been told by one of his more mellow teachers that the strings linked to his heart. If they were floppy their sound would be off. If they were strung too tight they would break.

Was he close to breaking point? Ayako cleaned his cheek of blood and put a band-aid on him. He simply looked ahead, lost in his own thoughts. What did other people do when they felt like this? How did one get less tense? He had always used sex to unwind but now this was no way to relax. Even sex was now linked to expectations. He put his arms around Ayako and breathed in her scent. Was that relaxing? Was it making him feel better? He didn't know.

"Why don't you share your burden? Tell me what ails you," Ayako prompted him.

"I am not able to relax."

"And why is that?"

He snorted and said: "If only I knew."

She sat him down and sat herself in his lap. With a few kisses to his jawline and her nails scratching his scalp he closed his eyes and she lay her head upon his shoulder. There was something itching inside his head, so he opened his mouth to let it out: "I am six months pregnant now. That something inside of me is as long as my hand. It's kicking and punching me and every time I feel that I am filled with an unbearable rage. My whole personality concept made me a soul able to endure. I never had feelings, I just accepted everything that happened to me. I was beaten and whipped and drowned and so many other things and I just accepted it as the way things had to be." Ayako continued to stroke his cheek and scalp.

"Why did they give me feelings? Why did they give me the ability to reflect what happened? I don't want to think about it. It makes me sick to think about what was done to me, what I allowed to happen. It makes me so angry that I want to make everyone suffer for it. And at the same time I don't want to hurt others again because the easiest target would be that poor soul inside of me." He lay a hand on his stomach. "So while he kicks me, I think about kicking him and enjoying his pain and I realize I am in no way better than the man who did all that to me."

"You are much better than that. Or have you done anything to hurt your baby?" She put her hand on his.

"Not that I know of. I just ignore it most of the time. Shintaro tells me I should interact with it but ... I fear I would only rage and scream. It takes all of me to ignore this thing until it can safely get away from me."

"What will happen to it once it's born?" Ayako looked at him with dull eyes.

"Tetsuya offered to take him. I still have to finalize the details but I am sure he will look after him with loving care. The doctor told me the baby will have to stay in the intensive care unit anyway, so I'll ask Tetsuya to visit him there to form a bond."

"It's a boy?," Ayako whispered.

"Of course it is. The fourth single child in line, all of them males." He closed his eyes.

"All others have been killed for being born as Omegas."

"How did they even know? You cannot be sure of one's second gender until they hit puberty." Ayako looked up with anger burning in her eyes.

"It's the smell. All of us have stronger pheromones than the average human. So a few days after birth we know the second gender. Even the mates were chosen for their strong pheromones. It's a bit like exotic breeding, crossing strong Alphas with each other for more superior genes."

"That's sick." Ayako shuddered.

"You know what father told us when he raped us? He wanted us pregnant with the perfect Alpha male, someone not as faulty and weak as we were. While pounding into us all he ever talked about was the children we would have. Children untainted by inferior blood, children as pure as him, not some dirty half-blood like me. He told us that all those punishments were meant to beat the bad blood out of us to make us into an acceptable broodmare." A dry laugh bubbled out of him. "Now I am pregnant with his son. The irony of that ... I hope it will be an Omega, that would serve him right."

"You'll never be able to see that child apart from him, right?" Ayako's eyes were filled with unshed tears.

"No. I am sorry about it too because I know the child doesn't deserve that but for me it's the epitome of why I spent my life as a bloody racket covered in come. This child should not meet me until he is at least sixteen years old. Maybe ever. Best he'll be spared of his own history. Kagami's hair and eye color aren't so different from mine and Tetsuya's and my built is similar. They'll be able to pass him off as theirs."

"Is that fair to him?" Ayako sighed lowly.

"Well, do you plan on telling Natsue her story?"

"No." She looked up at him. "I told her that her father is dead. One day I'll have to tell her that he is still up and about but that he is a very bad man and if he ever tries to contact her she should stay clear of him."

"So if you raised my son, what would you tell him? His father is dead. His mother couldn't stand the sight of him. Said mother might be living happily with his own family, maybe even raising a daughter four years older than him. What kind of story is that? Your only living parent is a good man, he just hated your guts? That's a good story for one's ego." Akashi rolled his eyes.

"I wish you were able to see him as your son instead of that man's son."

"That would not help. Because I am that man's son as well. Seijuro might be able to do it but I am not. I remember the abuse, I remember the rape. All of those memories pool inside of me and I can't do anything but hate myself for what I am."

"Why?" Ayako's eyes glistened. "Why do you need to hate yourself for it? He was the

one who did that to you.”

“And I was the one who begged him!” He stood after shoving her off him. “I moaned under him and begged him to mess me up. I asked him to impregnate me, to make me bath in his come. So he took me to the bathroom and made me suck his cock under water until I fainted from drowning. He fucked me until he came and only then did he turn me upside down, so that I would be able to spit out the water. And I thanked him on my knees and kissed his feet for saving me and choosing me to carry his child.” He felt tears prick his eyes. Tears! He had never cried before. “I knew that I did it to survive. I knew that one wrong move would make him reconsider if I was really worth his time or if he would rather buy some high pedigree slut from somewhere else to choose as his broodmare. I just wish I had not been that pitiful creature and died instead.” He choked on his tears, on his memories of being strangled, being drowned, being choked by his father’s hands, a foot on his throat-

“Akashi!” Ayako slapped him.

It didn’t even hurt. It made him blink in surprise. It also made him stop breathing which stopped the spinning of his vision. Oh ... he must have panicked and hyperventilated.

“Sorry.” He took one deep breath, controlling his urge to take more. “I am such a mess.”

“I don’t understand...” She shook her head in bewilderment. “Why do you remember all that? I thought Sei held those memories.”

“I guess Seijuro is feeding those memories to me.” He got a tissue from the kitchen and cleaned off the unwanted wetness upon it. “Exactly like he fed me emotions. I just don’t know what for. I certainly don’t want them. I have to live through this pregnancy, why are they throwing more and more shit at me? I don’t want those memories. I don’t want emotions. The more I get, the more I want to be done with all of this.”

“Maybe ... maybe you should think about going to a hospital.” Ayako looked conflicted about saying that. “You get more suicidal every time I see you. I don’t want to lose you. I saw the same happen to my daughter and I was too late in making the decision. I thought I could wait until she had the child and then she would get better. She didn’t. She just waited until Natsue was safe and then she killed herself. Two days after birthing her she jumped from that bridge. I don’t want the same happening to you. Please get help.”

He shook his head. It was more of a reflex. He could not talk about this with anyone. He would not ... it was unthinkable. He could not tell anyone such dangerous information. If this was to reach the ears of any other CEO he would be done for. This could never become public knowledge. So he could not tell anyone. Why had he even told Ayako? She had gone through this before, he should not burden her with this again. But he seemed not to be able to keep this in.

Maybe he should look for professional help. Maybe there were people he could trust enough not to sell this to the papers. Aomine had been able to find a therapist that helped him. Akashi neither believed in therapy nor that any therapist was trustworthy but hadn’t Aomine been the same? He looked at Ayako who just looked at him with tears running down her cheeks.

With a deep sigh he got his phone and dialed Satsuki’s number. Now or never, right? She greeted him as cheerful as ever before he said: “Satsuki, I need your help.”

“Oh.” Her voice immediately got serious. “Of course, what may I do for you?”

“I think I need a therapist.” He took a moment to breath. “Can you refer me to one?”

"What specialties do you need?" He heard her rummage a bit, she most likely got pencil and paper.

"Erm ... what kind of therapist was your boyfriend's therapist?" Aomine wasn't so different from him after all.

"He wanted to work through his guilt regarding your middle-school time, so he got a psychiatrist working with sexual offenders." She took a short break. "Would you happen to want to work on the same topic?"

"Not really." Sadly he had far more important topics than what he might have done six years ago. "I need a trauma therapist, one who can work with dissociative identity disorder and its causes. There are therapist who have worked with victims of ritualized sexual abuse, I need one of those."

"I am sure I can find those but I don't know how soon they have free spots. I can call tomorrow or the day after at the latest to tell you what I found," she promised.

"Just look for someone we can trust. The last thing I need is having any of this splattered onto the gossip pages." He walked up to Ayako who had dried her tears and put one arm around her. "If that would not have worked with your boyfriend I wouldn't consider this. But if even he was able to get better ... I guess I should at least try."

"Should I give him the phone?" There seemed to be a smile on her lips.

"Please spare me." He snorted. "Thank you, Satsuki."

"I love helping my friends. I'll find you the best one available!"

He just ended the call. There were new tears on his cheeks and he did not seem able to stop them. Ayako held him through it all.

He introduced the new traditional clothing rule to his management board the next day. The reactions ranged from surprised to perplex but no one really saw any harm in it. It was posted on the internal company page that afternoon and Seika was ecstatic. So he asked her out to go shopping with him which they did after their afternoon meeting. She got three kimonos for herself while he got five different hakamas as well as seven kimonos. Shintaro would be proud of him. He even let Seika take a picture, so he could send his best friend one. After a moment he also sent it to Ayako. Maybe she liked him in that outfit.

She sent back a drawn picture of a cat with sparkly eyes while Shintaro sent a text saying "The colors complement your natural looks". Even his own secretary gushed over him. So he felt rather good when he came home that evening. According to his comfort-oriented schedule he was to take a bath next, order some food from his cook and spent the evening reading a book. Law was taking care of today's contracts, so he really had nothing better to do. Maybe he should find something to do in his spare time. Books were alright but he owned only those he had already read. His musings were interrupted by the ringing of his phone.

"Good evening, Akashi!" Satsuki's much too positive voice came out of the speaker.

"A good evening to you too, Satsuki. How was your day?"

"Exciting! I love research projects." Which was why he always wondered about her job choice, he would have expected her to become a historian or something similar. "So I looked around a bit and found out that there is a national society registering certified trauma specialists. Only a few specialize in ritual abuse, most recommend to have a face-to-face talk to plan such a therapy. It seems that often parts of it need to be done in a hospital setting while others can be done ambulatory. Normally the wait time for such a therapy is one year at the least and can be up to three years but" - she

interrupted herself to continue triumphantly - "I found you one that is a mother and wants to work part-time again, so she only has a few patients and is able to take on more. If you need immediate help, she can even give you more than one session a week. The only draw-back is that she might get pregnant again and then she would have to refer you elsewhere."

"Do you know if she is Omega, Beta or Alpha?"

"Alpha."

"Then it's unlikely she'll get pregnant again soon. I'll take the chance." He got a pen and paper to write down the important facts. "And you think that she is trustworthy?"

"She's married to some highly important doctor, they have more money than anyone in their right mind needs. I found her sympathetic and would trust her."

"You are a good judge of character and I trust you, so I'll give it a try. What's her name and how can I reach her?" He wrote down the things she told him. "When should I call her?"

"Tomorrow between nine and ten o'clock in the morning. She'll invite you to her house. It's in a suburb, you'll need about half an hour with your car, maybe a bit more depending on the traffic. She doesn't bill you for the planning session, only if you decide on therapy with her." Satsuki sounded proud of herself. "I hope you'll like her. I learned from that time with Daiki how important it is that a therapist is tough rather than nice. She needs to be able to listen to whatever happened to you without breaking down in tears. It seems that most therapists aren't able to do that. So I specifically looked for someone able to withstand anything you tell her. So I already asked her how she thinks about sexual offenders and she was the only one that did not give me a hate tirade for it."

"I would imagine that most people working with victims of sexual abuse aren't keen on talking to offenders." Satsuki was right, he was one of them. He had not thought about that problem beforehand. He wasn't some innocent flower tossed around in a cruel world. He was a shark just as much as his father had been. Satsuki had saved him from a possible landmine. "Thank you for thinking about such potential hazards."

"Thankfully I already have some experience by now. I had to search for therapists for some other players and friends as well. I have a list of specifics needed in therapy by now and some experience who might be matched up with whom. Did you know that most people need to meet with eight therapists in average until they find one that can help them?"

"I don't think I'd be able to meet so many people and tell them about my mind." At least one of them would sell that story to the papers, he was sure about that. He would also distrust therapists in general if he was to tell one about him and that person told him he or she couldn't help.

"Yeah, right? So I try to give everyone a good match-up. I had a really good quota up to now, everyone liked their first or second therapist, no one needed to meet three yet. Maybe I should work as a professional matchmaker or something." As always she was really hyper.

"Well, you are a good doctor as well, you can do your matchmaking from there. One day you'll treat every athlete in this country." He had started the water while he talked to her and went to stop the water now. "Thank you for helping me. I'll tell you how it was and if you got another perfect match."

"Great!" She squealed in joy. "Oh, and Akashi? Good luck for the therapy. It's good you're doing this. I don't know what prompted you to try but it really helped all of the people I referred. So don't give up and try your best to reach that goal you set for

yourself, whatever it is.”

Surviving. Somehow becoming able to live without killing himself. Right now that was all he really wanted. He would hurt his friends and Ayako and he wanted to avoid that.

Kapitel 27: Baby steps

Akashi sent Ayako a text that he would meet up with a therapist on Friday. He sent the same to Satsuki and Shintaro. He knew that all three of them were already alarmed – Satsuki less than the other two – and sent him daily messages to know he was still breathing. He could understand the fuzz to some extent but he knew he would not kill himself. Not yet anyway. This child was innocent and would not be able to live without him. No matter how much he hated it he would not endanger this baby in any way. It was what he would have wanted for himself, so he would be damned before he did not offer the same to his own child.

By now he wasn't sure what he wanted for himself. Did he even want to live? Would it make any sense to continue living? His mother might have loved him, he didn't remember. His father only wanted him as a broodmare. Would he have any reason to live after birthing this child? His purpose was done then. On the other hand he would be free. No expectations, no bonds. Just him and a whole world for him to explore. He had more money than most other people in this country had. He could do whatever he wanted. Seijuro could play piano or violin. He ... well, he could continue to be a CEO. He didn't have to. Did he like his job? He didn't even know.

He sank into the tube and enjoyed the warm water on his skin. Ayako had gifted him with aromatic oil, Shintaro had gotten him some skin care products. He felt a bit effeminate lying in scented water and preparing the creams and lotions he would apply later but he had to admit that all of this did lower his tension a bit. It also made him feel better in his skin. Caring for his body did make him resent himself less. Maybe he should be thankful for being pregnant. He would not have had enough incentive to look after himself this much without it.

The kick against his rib brought back the usual sickness. He rubbed the spot, only to have it kicked again. He moved his hand down, hoping his skin would be kicked instead because his ribs really hurt. He was rewarded with a kick against his hand and sank into the tube with a smile. So he could control the little pest a bit. That thought brought him a kick against his kidney which hurt like hell.

"Hey, hell spawn, stay on the hand!" He poked his own abdomen. "Yeah, there. That's the spirit. Don't always aim for the ribs or kidneys, I know you're there. Don't worry, I'm not about to forget." He poked two areas at once. "So what will you do now?"

He got a kick and something not as forceful. Might that have been a hand? Interesting. He tried a few other areas but it seemed like his baby wasn't able to register more than one poke if they were too far from one another. They would have to train that. If he was meant to see this baby as his son, he needed to be intelligent at least.

What had Shintaro said? Talk with him, sing and play him some music? Classic music was meant to make babies smart, right? He had ignored his baby long enough, it was bound to get stupid if he continued this behavior. So classic music ... maybe he should try playing a bit. He did have his violin and he knew how to restring it. He had enough time on his hands to play a bit. He got out of the bath, applied the lotions and creams and clothed himself in fluffy bathrobe. He found his repair kit and restrung his violin. His baby's kicks continued to aim for his abdomen which led him to pat it before he begun to play. He had not really thought about what to play but recognized the song as "Memories" after a bit.

The kicks stopped coming. Even his baby seemed content to listen. So music was able

to calm babies, that was good to know. And his playing really got better from having emotions. It also calmed him which it had never done before. This was really nice. He smiled and ended the song before beginning with "Ombra Mai Fu". He wished Ayako was here to sing. Maybe he should learn some songs to which he could sing? He took his phone after the song and texted Ayako: "What songs would you like me to learn to sing?"

He first had to go to work on Friday, so he debated with himself if he should change clothes at work before going to the therapist or if she would not bat an eyelash at a man wearing a hakama. He decided to keep his new clothes on. If she really looked down upon his clothes he would not even tell her about himself. So he got out of his limosine and told his driver to grab a coffee somewhere until he called him back, giving him a time frame of about an hour.

His new therapist lived in a house with a garden. He could see a tea parlor and a winter garden behind some bushes and trees while going in. Most of the house was artfully hidden from sight. It was a modern, western house with some Japanese aspects, a perfect blend of tradition and modernism. He had learned from the call to make an appointment that his new therapist was French and that her Japanese was rusty at best. She spoke French and English fluently, so he decided on French. He had no problem with any of the languages she spoke but he guessed she would be most comfortable in her own.

She greeted him at the door before he even had to ring the bell. After a bow – one could see that she learned those manners late in life – she showed him to the winter garden which he could reach without having to see more of her home than a staircase. He simply chose to walk around in his tabis which seemed alright with her. He analyzed the setting from the winter garden and chose a seat with its back to the garden entrance. If any paparazzi tried to sneak in here she would see them first and they would not be able to snap a picture of him.

"Thank you for agreeing to speak with me in French. My language skills are a big barrier in treating my patients." She sat in a seat opposite him.

"It's no problem at all. I speak a lot of languages. It's a requirement for my job."

"I got from being called by some kind of headhunter and seeing you arrive in a black limousine that you are most likely some very important person. Should I recognize your name?" She seemed a bit wary. Did she think he was a yakuza boss or something like that?

"You may. Akashi Corporation is one of the biggest companies in this country. Your TV over there was produced by one of my subcompanies. It's why I searched for someone who I could trust not to sell me out to the papers."

"Oh, so you are a celebrity." She looked relieved and smiled at him. "You know, I only know Japan by watching movies and listening to my husband tell me about his country, so I expected you to tell me you are working some shady business or something." So she did expect him to be a yakuza.

He smiled at that and said: "No, I am working a legal business. The reason why I try to stay out of sight is that my uncle is the Emperor."

"Oh. This country's monarch is your uncle? You are royalty?"

"Yes, I am eighth in line for the throne. Does that explain the get-up?" He smiled at her in amusement.

"Oh yes, sure. So normal therapists and clinics are out for you, I guess?" She waited for his nod. "If you were to need a clinic in the course of this therapy, is it possible to refer

you to a clinic abroad or are there special clinics you trust?"

"I never needed a clinic before and I hope to avoid one." He would need one for the birth though. He had not even thought about that. "But if it is not otherwise possible, I am open to suggestions. I just need all of this not to get public. I need your signature on it before I tell you anything to be precise."

"I have contracts of confidentiality right here. I seem to get a lot of known patients these days, so I keep them ready." She walked over to a sideboard and opened a drawer to take out some papers. "Please give them a quick read."

He scanned the two pages and found them agreeable. He signed with his personal pen before giving them to her, she signed and gave one back to him. After folding up their respective confidentiality agreements she asked: "Is whatever you are about to tell me a state secret that might put me at risk?"

"No. The involved parties are all dead. I would not dare to talk to anyone if that was still the case." She only nodded, so he continued. "I have a split personality. Right now I know three different personalities. That system has been stable until our abuser – our father – died and I found out that he left me pregnant. I am in my sixth month right now."

"I am sure you have mixed feelings about that." Good, she did not seem shocked at all. "At first I hated it. But one of the other personalities threatened me that she would take over if I endangered the child, so I have been on my best behavior. Somewhere between relaxing baths, skin care and food supplements I think I accepted this a bit. I still call him hell spawn but I began to talk to him and play him some music and other things my minders tell me to do."

"Who are those minders?" She took a notebook and a pen and began to write down some facts.

"My best friend who is my legal guardian right now. Because I am not stable, I signed all my rights over to him. He is allowed to admit me to psychiatric hospitals and other institutes however he sees fit. He accompanies me to my visits with my gynecologist who advises me on what to do or not to do regarding this pregnancy. Those are the minders."

"And how much time do you personally spend aware right now? Do you have a specific name in your system?" So she knew how dissociative personalities worked. Good.

"I am called Akashi and for the last four months I had complete control over this body. It seems I was chosen to be responsible for this pregnancy. Before, my main job was managing tough situations that required emotional distance." He made a hand gesture over his stomach. "This seems to count as an emotionally taxing situation."

She allowed a small smile to enter her lips. Her green eyes – she was auburn hair and green eyes – sparkled with mirth when she said: "You seem to be quite sarcastic."

"Most people find that to be rather off-putting." He shook his head. "Shintaro is my only friend, we have known each other since we were eight. Seijuro had a lot of friends. He is my main personality and would normally be the one managing our everyday life. We do change frequently depending on the situation. As CEO of Akashi Corporation both a charming and calculating personality are required."

"So you are managing the whole company on top of being pregnant and recuperating from ... how many years of abuse?" She looked up.

"Fifteen." She just nodded, so he continued. "The third personality I know is called Sei. She was the one suffering the sexual abuse. I was the one who suffered the physical abuse. Sei is the oldest of us, so we should have a core personality somewhere. I never met him or her though. Right now Seijuro spends his time in our head talking to Sei to

get her to work together with us. The last time I talked to her she tried to erase my personality and put me to sleep. So it's safe to say she's rather hostile to the rest of our known personality."

"Since when have you known about your disorder?" Misses Hashiko still seemed rather unperturbed. So she definitely knew about this topic and was comfortable with it. It was reassuring.

"Seijuro was our main personality since the time we were eight. He encountered a situation he couldn't deal with at fourteen and I became our main personality. Then I encountered a situation I could not deal with at sixteen and he came back. He became aware of me with that and thought of our situation as ... time worthy to investigate. We read some books about it. After reading the passage about sexual abuse someone or something started to draw thoughts and memories from him. I wasn't able to talk freely because he would forget key information which might have led him to explore our system further. I wasn't interested in exploring anyway, so the topic became mood. It came up again because after our father's death Seijuro decided that he wanted a girlfriend. He found a good woman and told her about our disorder. The night after, Sei showed up and began to bitch around, trying to drive our girlfriend off. She bombarded us with a few memories and well ... since then we have an outline of what happened to us. As the pragmatic one, I went to a clinic to do a pregnancy check and have been in charge ever since."

"You have an incredible awareness of yourself. But if you have been in charge for four months, why did you label yourself as unstable?" Her eyebrows were drawn together like she had a complex riddle before her.

"Sei can overthrow me. She is stronger than both Seijuro and me. I do not know how far he is in making her aware of the system and asking for cooperation. If she were to take over she would move back into the mansion and shut herself in. No one would manage the company, none of our friends would be able to reach us. I am only in charge because I promised not to harm the baby in any way."

"She wants to have the baby?" The therapist sent a short gaze to his stomach.

"She is nothing but a high pedigree broodmare. Her whole purpose in life was getting fucked to get pregnant. I don't think she even knows what having a baby means, she only knows what she has been told every minute of her awareness. She has to have a baby or she has no worth." He sighed deeply. "We decided to give the baby to a couple we are friends with and have them adopt it. The husband is an Alpha of our caliber, so if Sei decided to pull some stupid stunt he would be able to stop us."

"So a royal prince will be raised as a commoner. I wager the royal family has something to say about that?" Smart women.

"No one of them knows of my pregnancy. Again, this has to stay secret."

"I see." She nodded. "I guess that's why I am the perfect therapist, I do not have any loyalty conflicts."

That was another hazard he had not even thought about. He was planning on cutting off a royal prince, one could count that as high treason. Thankfully he was only eighth in line, no one really cared about him. No one expected him to inherit, he certainly never expected that. He had more issues than any man should have.

"So what made you look for a therapist now?" She leaned back in her chair and studied him.

"Well ... I have always served as the crisis persona. I have been detached from my emotions to withstand torture, near-death-experiences and threats of all kinds. After Seijuro left to speak with Sei, the first thing that happened was that I experienced ...

feelings. I never even knew anger beforehand. But I suddenly felt anger, regret, shame, fear ... all of those very useless feelings. I craved trust, intimacy, love, joy ... I never had to deal with longing before. All of those memories of abuse suddenly presented themselves in a new light and I began to ... hate. Yes, hate. I wanted to destroy, to make people suffer, to rage and scream. But I kept it all in, I don't want to lose control. Those last few days though I began to see Sei's memories. My memory is connecting the dots, bringing up what she had to face. I know what happened after and before I lost consciousness, the scenes are getting whole. I am ... deeply ashamed of what I did to survive. When I started talking about suicide, my girlfriend told me I had to go seek help."

Misses Hashiko nodded and asked: "Do you just remember or do those memories overwhelm you?"

"I had one panic attack, so they might get overwhelming the more I remember."

"I see." She nodded again and wrote something down. "What is happening right now is that Sei is being merged into your consciousness to some degree and most likely you into hers. That way she'll gain a perspective on her memories and become more mature because she can see more of the world than just her rape. There also seems to be a merge between you and Seijuro which gave you feelings. It broadens everyone's view and will hopefully help you work together. Working together is – as you most likely know – the main goal for a therapy of a DID patient. It means to destabilize you to make you more stable in the long run. Does that make sense?"

"Of course." If Sei wasn't their enemy, they would make a strong front. Right now she was a threat but with her on their side, they would be strong.

"What I can help you with is to give you an outside perspective on what is happening and to teach you some techniques to deal with memories, so that they do not overwhelm you. Integrating those memories into a whole self can be something we do here but only if you want to. I can mediate talks between your personalities and give you some techniques how to reach compromise. Once your main personalities work together we can do trauma therapy if you like but we do not have do."

"What good does trauma therapy do?" The rest sounded good but he had no clue what this might be about.

"It means facing some of your worst memories, reliving the emotions and integrating them into an adult self. Without trauma therapy you may always walk into psychological landmines that have memories flood you. One way is to avoid every trigger for those memories, the other is trauma therapy. Most DID patients aren't able to form stable relationships without trauma therapy."

"Like Sei happened upon us when Seijuro cuddled with his girlfriend?" Or how he had completely spaced out in his memories of drowning while Ayako was crying in front of him helplessly.

"For example. You don't have to decide now. Right now we can schedule some dates for the stabilization part and once you are stable, you can decide on trauma therapy." Well, that was doable. Misses Hashiko seemed alright for a therapist and he felt able to tell her everything. She also seemed to know what she was doing and it was the same he had read in some of the books about DID. So he answered: "I'd like to schedule some meetings for stabilizing. Can we do two per week? I'll most likely have the child in four or five weeks and I'd like to have something on hand for that time."

"We can do three if you are up for it. Two would be the minimum in my opinion." She had picked up a calendar. "Please inform me when you know your due date. I think it might become important for you to have someone with you after the birth. You'll be

the most instable then.”

He just nodded. He had already guessed that from Ayako’s story about her own daughter. With how he had been this week, he might throw himself out of the hospital window.

“Do I discuss payment with that women that called me? If so, I need her number again.”

“No, you just sent me a bill. If I die, sent it to my best friend. I’ll give you his contact dates. If you want to imprison me in a psychiatry, please tell me before you tell him. I’d like to at least be prepared.”

“I am not here to traumatize you.” Her gaze was full of pity mixed with resignation.

“You’ll need to be hospitalized if you cannot control your actions anymore. If you reach that stage, we’ll talk about that. I hope we don’t reach that point but you know as well as I that it cannot be guaranteed.”

He sighed and nodded.

Kapitel 28: Proposal

Akashi called Kuroko that weekend to invite himself over for dinner. He explicitly mentioned he would come as Akashi, not as Seijuro and explained what that meant. Kuroko agreed anyway but asked if they should find a babysitter. He told him it was alright if he came after Shiro's bedtime. He did not want to scare the boy with being someone else than he had been before.

So when he knocked on their apartment door on Saturday evening, he was unsurprised to be greeted by a deeply suspicious, high-strung Alpha. After a few sniffs though Kagami backed off with evident confusion. Akashi just rolled his eyes while stepping out of his getas – he had honestly become quite attached to wearing hakamas, it was very comfortable.

"I made some steaks and potato mash. Thought you'd like that," Kagami said gruffly. "It sounds marvelous." Akashi followed him to the dining room which doubled as a kitchen. "Good evening, Tetsuya."

"Good evening." The other stayed seated behind the table.

Akashi couldn't fault him for being cautious. He sat down opposite the Omega and said: "Thank you for having me here."

"How long have you been in control?" Kuroko got straight to the heart of the matter.

"About four months." He took some bread and butter with seasalt. Kagami knew how to prepare a meal, he had to give him that. "A lot of things happened. I'd like to explain some of them, so you know why Seijuro has not been in contact with you."

"I had wondered but I guessed he has been busy." Kuroko mustered him. "How is Ayako?"

"She was fine last time I saw her. She has been taking the multiple personality thing rather well."

At least the Omega had the decency to lower his head a bit.

"Yes, thankfully your little stunt did not alienate her. Seijuro planned on telling her anyway, it just speed up the process. For some inexplicable reason she likes even me to some degree." He took a bite from his bread. "Did you make this yourself, Kagami? It's really good."

"Thank you." The other said from the kitchen where he readied the steaks. "So you are here for some kind of explanation and apology? I find that hard to believe."

"Yes, that would be wasted time, I could do that in a phone call." He was served a steak and took some potato mash that was placed in front of him. "I have something to ask of you but you will need some background story for it."

"It's reassuring you don't plan to command us. But having you talk for too long never went well for me either." Kuroko looked openly hostile.

"If I could summon Seijuro for this, I gladly would. I don't like my role. But I am the only one able to move this body around right now, so sadly you'll need to put up with me." He took a bite of his steak and nearly moaned. "This is great, by the way."

"Thank you. I am all ears. Just don't play any mind games and we're cool," Kagami informed him.

"As you both know, I have a disorder called dissociative personality disorder. I have more than one personality in my head." Both nodded in acknowledgment. "Such a disorder normally stems from being raped or tortured before the age of five."

Kagami's knife slipped from his hand and hit the plate with a loud sound. Kuroko

shushed him as if he could do anything about that sound now and reminded him: "Don't wake the kids!"

"So I have been continually raped from the age of four until my father's sudden demise due to ... reasons." He continued to eat some of his potato mash which was superb as well. "You really are a great cook, Kagami. If you ever quit basketball, you might make this your career. Anyway, we found out that despite our best efforts in killing off that nightmare, we weren't free yet. I am six months pregnant. It's what you smelled on me, Kagami."

That one just blinked looking exactly like the dumb oaf he was. Kuroko had put down his knife and fork unable to eat. He would not look at Akashi.

"I was threatened by an unknown before personality into keeping the child, so it will be taken out in about a month or so. Naturally I don't plan on keeping it." He took another bite of his steak which gave him a few more seconds to think about his next words. His audience seemed rather stunned, so maybe he should go a bit slower? "Still, this baby is the Akashi heir. He's about to inherit my whole fortune but more importantly, it makes him the ninth in line for the throne. It's not like I can give this baby to just anyone."

"You want us to raise your son?" Kagami concluded rather fast.

"That's the idea, yes. You and Tetsuya are the best parents I can think of. If this child is not taken from me after birth, I am sure I'll kill it the span of days. I have been getting more and more unstable these last month and I can't even guarantee you that I won't kill myself right after birth. I need to know that this child is safe from me. There aren't many Alphas able to stop me, Kagami. It's why I am here to ask ... rather to beg you ... to take this child and raise it as your own."

"My own?" Kagami looked at Kuroko for a second and seemed to decide to keep talking. "You would want us to adopt your son, raising him as a Kagami instead of an Akashi?"

"I don't think any child should be raised as an Akashi," he replied rather monotonously.

"Damn straight." Kagami nodded. "Why aren't you asking Midorima or Murasakibara?" "Shintaro is weaker than I am. If I lost my sanity completely he would not be able to stop me. Atsushi might but he is too easy to manipulate. If I put my mind to it I could work around him. You aren't the smartest but it would be hard to get at either Tetsuya or the baby."

"You would really harm your own child?" Kagami looked pained by that.

"I killed my father. What do you think I'll do to that hell spawn he forced inside of me?" Akashi snarled back at him.

"Okay, okay, sorry." Kagami put up his hands. "I can't believe I forgot just how crazy you were." He looked at his husband who was still silent. "Tetsu, do you have any questions about the proposal?"

Kuroko shook his head while still looking at his plate rather than at Akashi.

"We'll consider this and talk this over, alright? This is a lot to spring on someone so suddenly." Kagami glared at him.

"Of course." He finished his steak and ate the rest of his potato mash. "I guess that is my cue to leave?"

"Please do." Kagami had put his seat directly next to his mate that was still rather unresponsive.

"Thank you for the food." He stood and went to leave. "I'll see myself out."

All in all this went rather well, didn't it?

He informed his management team that they would stay exactly that: a team. Law looked unhappy about that but the other three seemed glad about the decision. He gave them exact job descriptions and contracts to fit their new job description. Law did look a bit more happy after reading his. After all of them had signed, he told them that he would take some mornings a week off until he went on vacation in about a month or so, the dates weren't set yet. His team seemed excited about being handed more responsibility while still having him around to run their decisions by him.

So he spent three weeks going to therapy thrice a week and having less and less work. He got a simple message from Kagami telling him they would take the child. He went to get ultrasounds once a week until his doctor told him that the time was near and that he should check into a hospital soon. They had already made preparations that he would be treated under a false name there. His dates with Shintaro had been put off due to the fact that his friend had had his son two weeks before him. He had been the one to inquire about the paperwork needed to have the Kagamis adopt the newborn. The best way seemed to be to register him as his son and then give over parental rights to Kagami, seeing as Omegas were not allowed to adopt children by themselves and male mating bonds (or marriages in foreign countries) were not recognized by the state.

He had not gotten an answer to the question what he should name the child. On the day he checked into the hospital, a sullen looking Kagami came to visit and was the first to get a view of his clearly visible pregnant stomach. He had given those last few weeks, just not enough. Now that he had a private room, he had put off the hakamas and only wore loose sports clothing. His t-shirts were enough to contain his belly but not enough to hide it.

"Yo there." Kagami greeted him but could not really look up from the stomach.

"Good evening, Kagami. I know it's a strange sight but my eyes are up here."

"Sorry." The other looked up. "I still haven't completely realized all of this."

"Is that why you haven't answered my question? I need a name to fill the forms needed." He only needed it on the day of the birth but it was still good to have it as soon as possible.

"Yeah, Tetsu and I discussed it ... are you sure you don't want to chose your child's name?" Kagami looked pained again. Why did people care about names so much?

"Do you want to raise a child called Enma? Luzifer might also work. I call it hell spawn." He snorted. "If I give him a name, it will be filled with all the hate I hold inside of me. That's not fair to an unborn."

"Is it alright if we call him Kibo?" Kagami cautiously asked.

"Whatever." Akashi looked at his stomach. "Kibo then. Kagami Kibo, are you sure about that?" He looked up again.

"After a long discussion, yes, we are. Shiro, Tsuki, Kibo, he fits right in." Kagami sat down beside him.

"I hope he'll be healthy." The pregnant man looked away. "It's a male Alpha pregnancy, he'll be born early and he has highly incestuous genes. I don't want to burden you with a cripple."

"Let's not think of the worst possible outcome." Kagami watched him for a moment.

"How are you, Akashi? Like ... really?"

"My therapist will come by tomorrow, I'll tell her then. I'll have the operation tomorrow evening and will wake the day after tomorrow. The days after ... Shintaro will stay with me. They hired a suicide watch for the nights." And that was all he

wanted to tell that man. It was more than he wanted to say but he owned him for taking the child. "You'll be able to visit your new child the day after tomorrow. You and Tetsuya are both registered as people allowed to visit the intensive care unit."

"Akashi-

"Don't. Just don't. Don't offer sympathy or condolences or whatever it is you want to say. Go and leave me alone. Right now I can barely keep myself together. Go before I hurt you."

Kagami stayed seated though. After a moment of silence he asked: "Is anyone watching you tonight?"

He blandly shook his head.

"Then I guess I am your best shot at survival right now." The redhead pulled out his phone. "I'll send Tetsu a message that I can't come home tonight. Do you know when your therapist will show up?"

"Somewhere around ten in the morning." Did Kagami really plan on staying? That nuisance? Okay, he might feel like complete shit right now but having that oaf here would-

The red eyes bore themselves into him.

A blast of pheromones.

He decided to obey.

It was like being watched by a tiger. A ferocious beast waiting between the leaves of a bush, invisible except for its burning eyes boring into you. It was disconcerting at the best. Somehow he found comfort in the kicks aimed at his ribs, lung and kidneys. Kibo seemed unhappy about his lack of response. Maybe the little hell spawn knew how much it hurt. He did not give a reaction though, just somehow ... enjoyed the pain. It would be gone come tomorrow. His body would finally belong to himself again.

Him and at least two others. Why had he ever felt invaded by a baby? There were personalities trying to take over his mind, that was far more annoying than some parasite kicking his intestines. He found sleep once Kibo had exhausted himself.

He awoke to an immovable tiger's visage. Kagami's eyes bore into him exactly the same way they had done the night before. He stared back before gazing away and sat up in his bed. Well, if he had Kagami as his watch, he would certainly be unable to kill himself. The other took this seriously, no question about that.

"That's some intense focus you have," Akashi mentioned while looking at the tablet with food on his nightstand. He must have slept through the staff coming in. Suddenly he was actually glad that Kagami was here with him and that he wasn't unprotected. Not that he really had anything to fear here.

"When Tetsu was pregnant with Shiro, he would wake up two or three times a night because of his kicks. He would nag at me for getting him pregnant but all in all he would smile. What really got to him was whenever those kicks stopped. After aborting six kids and losing one he had a crippling fear of losing Shiro. So whenever our son actually went to sleep, Tetsu would panic. He needed me to hold him, to cry on, to tell him that everything was okay."

Akashi took the cup of tea from his breakfast tray and found it not only cold but also overcooked. He would need to ask Shintaro to bring a tea set and a shogi board with him.

Kagami watched him for another long moment before he asked: "Why do you want to kill yourself?"

"I mostly don't." Akashi tried some of the – cold – miso soup and decided to skip this

meal. He knew it would be his last this day due the narcosis in the evening but he would rather starve than eat this horrible stuff. "Sometimes I get overwhelmed by memories. Then I feel shame so powerful that ... well." He looked at Kagami and saw no sympathy. "It's new for me. I never had to deal with shame or regret before."

"You do not feel ashamed about what you did to Tetsu, do you?" Kagami's voice barely contained his anger.

"Not yet, no. If I can ever work through those feelings that are more powerful than what the memories regarding Tetsuya do to me, maybe I will. For now, I sadly have bigger problems."

Kapitel 29: Come morning

Akashi saw the other man clench his fists. Of course, for Kagami his mate was the most important. Akashi understood that much. For him his life right now was made up of overlapping images of rape and torture. Kagami's face exchanged with his father's and changed position from the end of the room to right in front of him. It wasn't something he wanted to share.

"You damn asshole-" The redhead was interrupted by the opening door.

"Oh, good morning." Misses Hashiko looked at the enraged Alpha.

"Your therapist?" Kagami took a deep breath and turned to her with a calmer aura.

"Good morning. My name is Kagami Taiga, I watched him this night." He took his light jacket and went to the door before deciding on saying something. "I do hate you, Akashi. I guess it's mutual. But you do have friends and they would be devastated if you killed yourself. So please don't do it."

"I do not share the sentiment but thank you for trying." Akashi scoffed. "You'll still see me for the signatures, don't worry."

Kagami just nodded and left. Misses Hashiko took a seat to sit beside his bed but Akashi stood and began to pace the room while saying: "I am not an invalid, you know?"

"I guess that hurt just now."

"Not at all, it's just Kagami." Akashi sent the door a hateful look. "He's married to the Omega that was my first love. We have disliked each other from the start."

"But he spent the night here?" Her voice sounded doubtful.

"He's all honor and doing the right thing and being a hero and whatnot. He's the incarnation of a good guy. He's stupid and can't do anything but basketball but he seems to be every Omega's dream, the perfect husband and father and the epitome of goodness and gallantry."

"You sound jealous," Misses Hashiko informed him.

"It's the kind of guy Seijuro always wanted to be. Good and nice and oh so lovable." Akashi stopped pacing. "Those kind of people make me want to retch."

"Why is that?" Misses Hashiko asked without judgment.

"It's so easy to manipulate them. Then they screw up and get tangled in their oh so high morals and in the end, they get crushed like insects. They are weak." He shook his head.

"You might have thanked him," she offered.

Akashi deigned that comment with silence.

"So what do you feel right now?" She smiled at him.

"Anger at that obtuse idiot." He finally sat down again. "They advised me on getting a PDA but I decided on a full narcosis."

"Are you nervous?"

"I guess I am used to losing consciousness." He did not look at her. "Shintaro will be on the anaesthesia side with me. He'll accompany the doctor. So if anything happens, he'll be there."

"Do you expect anything to happen?" Misses Hashiko seemed comfortable in her seat.

"I read that some DID patients awoke during anaesthesia because personalities with a higher tolerance for those substances were put in charge. Those operations got ... messy. If they overdose me, they might kill the child. So I hope he'll be able to

mediate whatever happens.”

“You do not trust in doctors at all, do you?”

“I trust Shintaro. He studies at Todai and is top of his class. I know that he diligently read into procedures on DID patients and is prepared for every situation.” No, he did not trust doctors. At all. He trusted no one but himself and maybe Shintaro for a bit. He might end never waking up again after all. If he decided to kill himself, he wanted to be in charge of the decision, not some ill-fated medical mistake.

“When will they come to give you pre-narcotics?” Misses Hashiko had lost her slight smile.

“Somewhere between two and three o’clock.” He looked at his Rolex. “Shintaro promised me to come after lunch. I want to shower beforehand.” He stood up again. “I wished I had some contracts to pass the time.”

“You could read a book,” his therapist suggested.

“I’ve read every damn book I own those last few months.” He stopped pacing to look out of the window. “I wish I were allowed to play my violin.”

“Do you want to take a walk?”

“I am not supposed to leave the room. Someone could see me.” He watched the few people walking in the little park beside the hospital.

“So, tomorrow you’ll be able to put this behind you. What do you plan to do then?” Her heard a smile in her voice. What made her smile? He had nothing to smile about. He had certainly not done anything worth smiling over.

“I have no plans at all.”

“That is pretty dangerous.” She was silent for a moment. “What do you want to do with your freedom?”

“I will ... go to Vienna.” He blinked at his own words. Where had that come from? Was that him talking? Was someone talking through him? “I announced a vacation, so I’ll be going on vacation. I’ll visit a few concerts and tour the city. And then I’ll decide where to go next. I’ll send you a postcard from every place I visit.”

“That sounds marvelous. How about a phone call twice a week?”

“No, that’s too stressful.” He actually had to smile at that. “Shintaro will have me call every day, so you don’t have to worry.”

“While I like the plan, are you sure that you are stable enough? Your perception of reality is ... off.” She looked at him doubtfully.

“I know. I hear my father’s voice and see his face every minute of the day. It’s enough to drive everyone nuts and going to another country will not change anything.” He turned and looked at her. “But music does. Vienna is full of music. Maybe I’ll just stay there and go study at the conservatory. I mean, why should I come back?”

“Your friends?” Misses Hashiko looked a bit alarmed.

“Shintaro is my only friend and I’ll have him on the phone every day anyway.”

“Your girlfriend?”

“She should find a better boyfriend.” He shook his head. “If she doesn’t want to, she can come too. She has a beautiful voice. I am sure she can find a job where she is able to sing.”

“What about her child?” His therapist blinked by now. “A daughter in kindergarden age, right?”

“Natsue is alright. I stabilize every time I see her. I don’t want to leave a bad impression on her, so I am at my most stable when she is around.”

“You do know that you need more therapy?” She seemed to get that he actually meant this.

"Do you know someone in Vienna? I speak German, how bad can Austrian be? Or I'll ask my headhunter friend who found you. I'm sure she'll find a fitting therapist in Vienna."

"What about your son?" There was hurt in her voice by now. Why was he getting to her?

"His adoption papers are in that desk right beside you. You just met his new father. Believe me, I won't be able to come near that child in years."

She shook her head in distraught.

He simply smiled at her silent misery and said: "You are right. Come morning, I'll be free."

He had some short moments of consciousness. Once during the operation where Shintaro talked to him but he could not hear any words, once in a stark white room and finally one in his own room. He awoke at night and found the hired suicide watch sleeping. He was wide awake though. So he filled the paperwork regarding Kibo and tested the limits of his new wound. It stung but that was it. He had expected a bit more from basically being ripped open.

So he freshened up a bit and put on some clothes without waking his watch. He continued to look for the nurses' station and found it right down the hall. One of the nurses blinked in surprise and asked: "Oh, good evening. Are you room 506?"

"Well, I am not a room itself but it is where my bed is located, so yes. Good evening." He nodded at the other nurse in the room. "Could you tell me about my operation today?"

"Sorry, you'll have to wait for the doctor tomo-"

"I'd like to know what happened to my child. Is he alive?" He gave up the pretense of politeness.

"Oh." Both of them looked at each other. "Yeah, sorry, uhm, I'll look it up." She turned to her computer. "You had an operation earlier this evening, right?"

"A cesarean." He leaned against the door frame.

"It went well, it says. You lost one and a half liters of blood and your child – it's a son – was brought to the intensive care ward. I'll give them a call, okay?" She only looked at him shortly before taking up the phone. "Hi, Karin, it's Tema. You had a newborn boy brought in at around seven. The mother just woke up and asked after him." There was a short pause where she listened to said Karin. "Okay, thank you." She put the phone down and turned to him. "Your son is basically alright. He's intubated but he's already trying to get rid of the breathing machine. They sedated him a bit because the lung problems normally occur after three days, so it's mostly a security measure. You can visit tomorrow if the doctor allows it."

"Thank you." He nodded at her. "Have a good evening."

He left and went back to his room. So his son was alright. He could move. He had only lost a third of his blood. He looked around for a moment.

Should he just go? He wasn't needed anymore. He had filled the paperwork, his son was stable. They did not need him anymore. He certainly did not need them. It might be in internal wound but he was able to care for his wounds himself. Why not leave now? He could go home, pack and take the first flight to Vienna.

Or he could stay and control that the paperwork went smoothly. Maybe something was missing, maybe he had made a mistake. He wanted to know that Kibo was legally Kagami's before he left. Kagami Kibo.

Akashi smiled. He would survive a night in here.

>Is anyone left in there?< He asked after a few hours of lying awake.
>All of us, don't worry.< Seijuro answered.
>I wish I could say that I never worry but thanks to your intervention I do now.<
His alter ego had the gall to chuckle.
>So what's the plan, captain?<
>Sei went on a long journey through our memories and will sent us some from time to time.<
>Wonderful.< His voice was filled with sarcasm. >And you?<
>I'll stay to give you some positive feedback and nice commentary.<
>You want me to stay in charge and take my role of the evil sarcastic voice laughing at my attempts to survive?<
>You need a more positive attitude,< Seijuro cheerfully informed him.
>I hate you. I hate you so damn much.<
>You can thank me later.<
Smug bastard. He wished he could punch other personalities in his head. Sadly he was only one of the lot and the order was to work together.
>Was Vienna your idea?<
>Great, don't you think? Shintaro will blow a fuse.<
>When did you get so childish?<
>I think I might have integrated some child personalities on the way. There are still more of them. Maybe I'll get the core one day.<
>You just want to boss me around.<
>Exactly!< Seijuro sounded gleeful.
>I don't think I like your new personality.<
>You'll love me. Natsue will love me.<
>Ayako will love me though.<
>Let's see about that. I am still a better pianist.<
Akashi fondly shook his head. Smiling gently, he went to sleep. Tomorrow would be the beginning of a brand new life.