

Wounds

A perpetrator's perspective

Von Gepo

Kapitel 18: Forgiveness

"Hey."

"Hey." Aomine smiled. That word was something Kuroko only said to him, a word he would not use with any other person. "How are you?"

"Hm ... better. Or worse. I don't know."

"You don't know?" His eyebrows drew together. "How can you not know?"

"Well, I started to get angry when people ridicule or hurt me, but that means I get angry everyday. It's exhausting. It was easier not to care."

"It was easier for me not to care about my loneliness or your pain but it wasn't good in the long run," he reminded his friend. By now, he had first-hand experience how hard changing was.

"You know, I thought America would be different. Everyone always says it's the land of freedom, but instead of just being mean, people are openly hostile. The other mothers in kindergarden don't want to talk to me and some tell their kids not to play with Shiro. He gets sick often because this is another country but the kindergardeners make it out to be my fault. If he just sneezes, they immediately send him home and tell me how irresponsible I am for bringing him in the first place, even if he was completely fine in the morning. When I go to fetch Kagami from training, his teammates openly start talking about my lack of presence and if that might be positive or negative in bed. Some call me fuckable, others think I am too plain and no one cares that I can hear them all, even worse, that Shiro can hear them all. Taiga tells them off but they don't stop. They just laugh at him. Some days I don't want to leave the house at all. I thought about keeping Shiro at home but I know kindergarden is important. But every day that goes by, convincing myself gets harder and harder."

"You are unhappy," Aomine concluded.

"Now that I allow myself to feel that, yes, I am. Maybe it is just hormones though. Pregnancy does make people emotional and needy, maybe I am just too sensitive." He did not sound like he really believed that.

"Which week are you now?"

"Thirteen, I passed the safe mark on Saturday." At least he was happy about that.

"Congratulations. So what do you think? Boy or girl?" Some other topic than unhappiness or sex was most likely safe.

"I am not sure, like I was last time, but I would prefer a girl. Kikyo and Hana are both great, I want one like them. Shiro is a lot like Taiga, I want one that is similar to me. But Alpha genes seem to be really strong, I mean, Kikyo is like Midorima and Hana is

like Murasakibara."

"I think Kikyo is a great mix of Midorima and Kazu. She is intelligent and well-mannered like her father but open-minded and sympathetic like her other father. Hana is ... well, lazy in her reactions, cuddly and likes to eat, yeah, she is a lot like Murasakibara." He couldn't exactly refute that.

"Shiro is loud, full of energy and never gives up. It feels like raising Taiga all over. I want a nice, shy baby next. Though I fear it will be another loudmouth." His voice was tinted in annoyance but it was good-natured.

"Tetsu, you like your men optimistic, loud and energetic. Of course your children turn out like that. A shy one would be a wonder. Kagami might even question if it was his."

"Oh, don't you start! Your teasing about Shiro was bad enough."

Aomine just grinned but sobered up after a moment of silence to say: "Listen, if that place makes you unhappy, you are always welcome back here. I'll even accept Kagami on my team instead of mercilessly teasing him and getting on his nerve. Try your best to make that place a home, but if it doesn't work out, it's okay to come back. That's no failure."

"I'll see how this will work out. Right now I want to smash a basketball in some player's faces."

"Me too." He grinned again. "I told our coach about our Sunday matches and how great some of the players are. I got a bit angry about him saying that banning people who can get pregnant was a sensible thing. So I issued a challenge from Team Pregnant to the JBL. I wish you were here. Like this, they only have Kazu, Midorima and Himuro. Teppei and Junpei will help but having you here would secure their victory. I really want to see some of those arrogant JBL players bend a bit."

"If I wasn't pregnant right this moment, I would take the next airplane. That burning wish to throw your arrogance back into your face was what kept me alive at the beginning of high-school. Victory is indeed sweet when you triumph over arrogance. Please film that match and the reactions for me, that's exactly what I need right now."

"Will do. If you need more help, I'll even ask Midorima myself to head over to your place to beat the NBA."

Kuroko laughed and really, that was all that mattered. That laugh. Kuroko's smile had died with Aomine's depression and had only come back due to Kagami and the championship. Three years of suffering, seven deaths and all of it more or less because of him. If someone had told him how much pain he was about to cause, he would have changed so much. But he never stopped to think about the consequences, he had only been able to see himself.

"Thank you," his best friend said, "for always being there for me. And for becoming someone that I can rely on again. I missed that side of you."

"Thank you for sticking with me." He wished he was able to say something equally moving and deep, but words were not his forte. At least he seemed to be good enough now.

Dear Aomine,

thank you for your honest letter. It shocked me and to be honest, I am still shocked. I sent a few questions again, you can find them on the second page. By now, I don't wonder about the state you were in, I simply ask you to never go there again. I just wonder how Tetsu survived all that. I don't know if I would have been able to. Most of all, I feel filthy. All this time your abuse went on, I was completely oblivious. I asked you two out for ice-cream and movies and everything, and you just never told me. What was I to you? I feel

betrayed. Am I that untrustworthy that neither you nor him told me anything? I can't be angry with Tetsu, he suffer enough, but I am damn angry with you. Why didn't you seek help to stop yourself? How can I trust you to tell me before anything happens again?

Dear Satsuki,

I tried to answer all your questions to the best of my ability. Regarding Tetsu's survival, he decided to answer your questions himself, though I wished he would spare himself the pain of going through it all again. I won't disrespect him ever again, so please ask him. You asked what you were to us and I can only answer for myself: an angel. You were the only thing still good in my life, someone not tainted by my parents or myself. I never told you because I would have destroyed the last thing holy to me. With therapy, I decided I had to tell you. It was one of many reasons why I shied away from therapy, I didn't want to lose you. You are not untrustworthy, you are just the best thing that ever happened to me. Now that you know everything, I can tell you whenever I feel down again. If you ever find it in your heart to forgive me, I promise I will tell you everything from then on. I don't want to lose you. I love you. Even if I might never be able to bring myself to say that out loud, it is still true.

"Good evening, Aomine." Himuro smiled and let him in. "I hope you brought hunger with you, I fear I cooked for at least two people with the appetite of my mate."

"No problem, I could eat a horse." Due to the fact that he had neither cooked himself nor ordered much since Momoi left. Now that he was asked, he was starving.

"Great, come in. Watch out for the door frames, they are low."

He could see that. Murasakibara and him lived in one of Tokio's outer regions in a Japanese house, a fifty-square-meter building with two stories and a small fenced garden. Linens were hanging from the balcony of the upper story. It was a domestic dream for any Japanese but seemed like a shed for someone Murasakibara's size. Himuro had no problem walking around but Aomine had to lower his head for every door frame.

"Look who's here, Hana, it's your favorite mean uncle," Himuro told the baby girl who was lying on a thick blanket next to the table.

"Can you really see here from over there?" Aomine kneeled next to her, making faces at her and scratching her tummy.

"She takes things slow, so the most she does is rolling onto her side. She can't change positions yet, so it's not like I need to watch her much. It's enough to return the thrown away toys into grasping reach."

"Toys?" He eyed the plastic wrappings, wooden and plastic pieces and cloth. A lot of them weren't exactly baby toys. There was even a metal spoon and a leather bracelet. "She's learning form and textures, so I supplied her with a variety of that. I find that better than simple rubber or plastic stuff, though she likes her sparkly chew-toy." Which was filled with plastic balls that made sounds when you moved it. "I love my mate but I'd like her to build up a bit of intellect."

"Why? She might become a basketball genius just like us. It's what you call dedication." Aomine grinned and took one of the seats to see Hana and Himuro simultaneously.

"I like that word," Murasakibara supplied after suddenly turning up in the room. How had he moved that massive body so silently? "Shall I set out the dishes?"

"Please do so." Himuro turned, received a kiss and continued his cooking.

Bah, people in love. Aomine watched Hana instead who chewed on a pack of tissues.

Mostly he still felt like a kid, spending his time at parties playing with other kids or babies while the icky adults did their boring talks. Just that he was supposedly an adult now and the kids he played with were his friends' kids. Reality was strange sometimes.

"Have you asked yet, Mine-chi?" Murasakibara drawled while he brought out the dishes and some things out of the refrigerator.

"Asked what? Oh, you mean the challenge? No, I haven't." He turned to Himuro. "Can you think and answer while cooking or do you need to concentrate or something?"

"No, I'm all ears." The Omega smirked over his shoulder with an haughty expression that screamed "despite you".

"I issued a challenge to my own team ... from you."

"What?" The man actually turned and let the pots be.

"Yeah, you see, the coach was speaking lowly of Omegas and people who get pregnant and it made me angry, so I told him some of you were better than our players and he should shove his prejudice ... well, I was nice, I guess. So would you play on an amateur team with Midorima, Kazunari and maybe Teppei and Junpei? Or if you know other great basketball players who have kids or are Omegas or something, them too?"

"You want us to play against our national basketball team?" Himuro asked in shock.

"Against my mate?"

"Well ... yeah." Was that mate thing a problem?

"Have you ever faced a full blast of Omega pheromones?" The other man raised his eyebrows. "If you have, can you imagine what it would be like to face a bunch of sweating Alphas, one of them your mate?"

"The sweating Alphas weren't a problem before, were they?" At least Kuroko never seemed like he had problems.

"If it's only Alphas, it's a question of concentration. But a sweating mate is hard. We noticed that after we bonded, playing together somehow worked but against each other was impossible. Whenever we got competitive, we let out pheromones that completely wrecked the other." Himuro shook his head. "I'll play, but not against my mate. He needs to stay off the team."

"I'll watch Hana-chan," said man decided.

"Then you'll win without doubt." Aomine nodded. "Murasakibara will watch Hana, I'll film the match with Kikyo and you go teach our coach a lesson."

"Thank you for your trust but I am not as sure as you." Himuro smiled though. "The Midorimas are good and both Junpei and Teppei are skilled, but we are amateurs now. I haven't touched a basketball in more than a year."

"Your technique is perfect, I can't imagine you getting worse."

"It's a skill you dislearn with time." He pointed his cooking sticks at Murasakibara.

"You'll train with me. When is the match?"

"Next week?" Aomine scratched his head.

"What!" Himuro looked aghast. "I need to retrain my skills and get the feel for four new players. How shall I do that in one week?"

"Well ..." Maybe he had been a bit rash? "As you said, I fully trust you. You're a genius after all ... in spite of us."

Murasakibara grinned. Himuro looked at them and let out a deep sigh.

Of course they won.

Aomine couldn't stop grinning. He always enjoyed the faces of those seeing Midorima

shoot for the first time, followed up by Himuro feigning his opponents, Kazunari throwing balls behind his back to players he didn't even look at, as well as Teppei and Junpei breaking their enemies' spirit by run-and-gun interchanging inside- and outside-play. Especially when they began to rapidly change formations, making Teppei point-guard, Midorima a center and Kazunari a phantom player who used misdirection – not as good as Tetsu but good enough.

They crushed the JBL with 87 versus 65. That was a sound defeat. He jumped up and down in delight, camera in one hand, Kikyo in his other arm who cheered along with him, happy to be allowed to make a lot of noise. Kasamatsu shook Kazunari's hand, Reo made a comment that had Junpei blush furiously but the other three players just stared at the board in disbelief. Just like the rest of their players except for those young enough to have actually seen the last three high-school championships in person.

"So, coach, what do you say?" Aomine turned the camcorder to the older man.

"Err, well ... that was ... I don't know what to say." He shook his head and went over to the make-up team. "I am deeply impressed. Thank you very much for coming. Would you care to explain what ... why you ... well?"

"One can train even with a baby. A pregnancy doesn't leave a huge gap, as long as the training afterwards is specific for building up muscle and skills again," Midorima stated nonchalantly, picking up his daughter who had run over. "I may have never won a championship, but we got third place in the Winter Cup even when I was four months pregnant."

"Forth place in the next one after half a year of training again, second place in our last Winter Cup," Kazu completed and leaned against his husband. "If it weren't for Akashi and Reo here, we would have won that one."

"Hah! If it weren't for Akashi, I would have won that. Kagami looked like he wanted all of us dead after I won," Aomine gloated.

"He might have-" Midorima's comment was stopped by Kazu's elbow in his ribs.

"We beat you in second year," Murasakibara said instead.

"And lost in our third because you got me pregnant," Himuro added. "It's true that losing key players right before important games is a hassle. But like with Kise who never recovered from his knee and foot injury, players might be unable to play due to various reasons. You can't hire players that never get ill or injured, so why exclude pregnancy? Teppei here spend a year on rehab and then won a championship, then spend another nine months in rehab and won a second championship. That's longer than any of our pregnancies."

"So that's why you were included in this team?" The coach looked at the broad-shouldered Beta.

"I was simply an asset." Teppei laughed kindly. "My knee has worsened again, so I quit professional basketball after that second championship. Since then, I have only been playing on Sundays."

"Why didn't you become a professional player, Junpei-chan?" Reo asked with a pout.

"It pains me to admit it but you are much better than me." The shooter distanced himself from the overly affectionate Alpha. "I became a barber."

"Have you lost your mind?" Kasamatsu exclaimed in shock. "You have nerves of steel, are a horrifyingly good clutch shooter and were a great team captain. Why shouldn't you play on this team?"

Junpei chanced a glance at the coach before answering: "Because I was told a Beta had no right to play an Alpha's sport."

"Did you really tell him that?" Their point-guard turned on his coach.

"Yeah, well, we had some try-outs and various other tests-"

"I can't imagine he failed them."

"The only thing I ever failed at was math." Junpei said while laying a hand on Kasamatsu's shoulder. "Thank you, but what is done is done. I like my shop. Being a barber isn't bad."

"Are you still filming this?" Kazu whispered next to Aomine.

"Yeah, why?"

"I'd like a copy. Your coach looks like he might pass out any second now." They shared a knowing grin. "Defeated by a barber and some moms."