

Comfort

Twin-story to "Hurt"

Von Gepo

Kapitel 21: Empty words aren't apologies

"Tetsuya?" Akashi said in the lobby of the clinic after suddenly stopping in his tracks.

"Hm?" He turned and blinked in question.

"Would you please hit me? Not that barely stinging slap from before but a fully meant fist to my face."

"What?" Kuroko closed his eyes, opening them again to the same scene as before. Akashi was standing before him, hands turned to fists, his eyes downcast. Had he really just asked that? "Are you serious?"

"I am dead serious. Please hit me. I want to remember this, so I never do something as awful again." The Alpha took a deep breath. "I knew that what I was doing was wrong, I just never realized how wrong it was until now. What I did was unforgivable."

"But I already forgave you." Kuroko tilted his head. "And I already slapped you."

"Really?" Kagami whispered astonished.

"That didn't hurt enough" Akashi responded slowly.

"His fist doesn't hurt much as well but I'll gladly trash you in his stead-"

"Taiga, we spoke about this" Kuroko reprimanded his mate. "I don't want you to hit anyone."

"Come on, he's asking for it. Just once. Please?" The tallest begged with a childish grin.

"Even you aren't angry at him anymore." The Omega shook his head. "Physical violence solves nothing, it only makes things more complicated. I don't want you to fight. More than that, I don't want you to lessen his guilt."

Akashi looked up at that, a stricken look in his eyes.

"Make no mistake" Kuroko warned him upon seeing that. "I am not forgiving you for your sake but for mine. I am tired of being angry, sad or mournful. I don't want to feel responsible for your guilt, lust or misery. You've got to deal with that yourself. So no, I will not hit you, so that you can feel better. I want you to work through this, yes, but you need to learn from your mistakes by yourself. I won't take that burden from you and give you an easy way out."

The other looked stunned, unable to give a response. Kagami gave one by gathering Kuroko into his arms and kissing him before saying: "That's my mate. Damn, your words can be a lot harsher than my fists. Sorry I did not trust you to be able to be this cutting in your remarks."

"Is that supposed to be a compliment?" He asked doubtful.

"It sure is. Were you this hard on Aomine as well?" Kagami grinned, delighted by ...

something, Kuroko could not exactly say what. Had his words been hard on the other? "I guess so." Well, no, actually. He had been mindful of Aomine's state and he had not been angry at him. Not in front of him at least.

"I really am sorry" Akashi interrupted them with a small voice. "I am not sure how to voice those words to make them believable. I feel like crying but I have been unable to do that since I was five years old. I just want you to know that whenever you need me, I'll do my utmost to help you. I owe you for what I did and what you taught me about it."

Kuroko just nodded before actually thinking about what the other had said. It was good to be able to be owed a favor by Akashi – he was a powerful man after all – but there was something he could do. So he ordered his thoughts before saying: "I want you to remember this day. What your father is doing is only an outspoken version of what most people are thinking. Omegas are trash to most people. It's nice to be a national basketball champion but where does that get me? No team will ever let me play for them. I am mated and living with my mate, so everyone can guess that I will have other pregnancies after this. No one will hire me, even if I promised my mate and I were safe, no one would trust us. Even if someone hired me, I have a child to think about. I have heats which means I am unable to work one week out of four. No employer in their right mind hires Omegas. There are ways around that of course, some kindergardens are run by Omegas only who integrate their heats into their working schedule but that is too bothersome for most people. So I can choose between being a stay-at-home-mother and some low-income-jobs. Being a national basketball champion helps me in no way at all. It is alright with me, I have my mate and he will most likely make a ton of money because I am sure he'll join the JBL or NBA. But a lot of other Omegas aren't that lucky. The man you looked down upon for being envious of me, he's working as a prostitute to support his kids because his Alpha left him and there is no job for him that makes enough money otherwise. The Japanese government only supports single mothers, not single fathers. Omegas count as fathers in this matter, even if they birth the children. He has no other choice if he wants to keep his children. If he wasn't a prostitute, he would have to give them into government custody."

Akashi lowered his head and said: "I have been arrogant and insensitive again, haven't I?"

Kuroko nodded. He had been able to smell that on the other Omega, so Akashi must have too. It hadn't clicked in that moment but now that he thought about it, it made him angry, so he said: "Even though you resent your father's ways, you look down on others just as he does. You do understand nothing of the circumstances most Omegas live in. We are allowed heat medication but it does not work well, it only curbs the excess. We aren't allowed birth control. Alphas can be prosecuted for rape but often enough, the charges are dismissed because of course it is impossible for Alphas to control themselves when they smell an Omega. It's always the Omega's fault. If an Omega is impregnated, they are only allowed to get child support from the Alpha if they were married before – so male Omegas will never get anything because a mating bond is not acknowledged as marriage. For all the emphasis our government puts on family, they only give a shit about kids who grow up with two married parents. I spent my whole life with my Omega mother in a thirty square-meter flat, watching her work at least two jobs at the same time because she continually lost one because of heats, me being sick or refusing to sleep with her employer. There were weeks we had no water, no electricity and no food because my mother got sick from being overworked

and lost all her jobs in the process. I remember being laughed at while I dug through trash for food, the neighbors openly saying that my mother and I were a disgrace to society, that all Omegas should be euthanized for our own sake. When I got older, they kindly told me that I should look forward to my first heat because then I would at least be provided for – if I was lucky to have it at home of course, otherwise I would just end up like my mother. Even other Omegas told me that the best that could happen to me was that my mom signed me up on one of those Alpha-wants-Omega sites, so I could be mated off to some rich Alpha who would pay a nice sum for me. It would secure my survival and that of my mother. I would most likely be a sex-toy on the side for my Alpha but at least I would have food, a nice home and might be able to care for my children without prostituting myself to more than one man. A lot of Omegas are sold at the age of thirteen or fourteen.”

Akashi’s face showed pure horror. Kagami was white as a wall.

“If you really want to atone for behaving just like those people, thinking that hunting, raping and nearly killing Omegas is somehow alright, then do something to make our lives better. You are in the position to actually make a difference. Taking responsibility means realizing your possibilities and acting on them.” Kuroko took a deep breath – he wasn’t sure he had ever talked as much as he just did. “Just thinking something is wrong but not acting on it is not enough.”

His words were followed by a moment of tense silence. Akashi seemed to be at a loss for words, not even trying to open his mouth, simply staring at Kuroko. Kagami was the first to move, enveloping his mate in a hug and whispering: “I never knew.”

“What?” Kuroko hugged him back.

“How some of you had to live.” The other kissed his blue hair. “The only other Omega I know is Tatsuya and his parents are nice, supportive people who always told him he could be anything he wanted. So he trained to be a basketball champion, never doubting he could become one.”

“Kuroko is right, he won’t be hired. Atsushi will have to support him. No team will ever take him on” Akashi said in a strange tone of voice. It wasn’t exactly monotonous but it seemed hollow somehow. “You gave me a lot to think about. May I take my leave for today?”

“Sure.” Kuroko nodded at him. “Thank you for meeting me today.”

“No, thank you.” The other deliberately breathed in and out to snap out of the mood that had come over him. “You turned my world upside down, just like you tend to do. It’s why I am happy to have you as my friend.” In spite of his words Akashi seemed rooted to the spot. “You were also right this morning. I will tell my fiancée she is vain and superficial and not mature enough to be associated with my family. I also need to have a word with my father, he treated you abysmally.” This time it was more of a sigh than just breathing. “First of all I need to apologize to the man in the waiting room. Please excuse me.” This time he turned and went to walk back into the heart of the clinic.

Kagami and he stared after him until he had rounded a corner. They stood still for a second longer before the redhead said: “I am very happy you are my mate, Tetsu. For one because I love you. But on the other hand I never want to be of the receiving end of a lecture by you.”

“Have I been too harsh?” And if he was – with what? He had only stated some facts.

“Well ... you made Akashi Seijuro cower and nearly break out in tears. That’s quite a feat.” Kagami shook his head in disbelief. “Damn, even I feel like tearing up. You have a way with words sometimes. Know what, you can invite Aomine whenever you like. If

you talk to him like that, I really don't have to be afraid. And if you ever need me to hit someone, just say the word."

"I ... don't think I can be this honest with him. I don't think he'd hurt me but he's not exactly stable" Kuroko admitted.

"You're afraid he'll break? Aomine?" Kagami raised a red eyebrow. "Has he ever actually hurt himself?"

"I once bullrushed him before he could jump off a bridge." He looked up to his mate.

"So yes, I do believe he could get suicidal again."

"But if you dance around him like he was an egg, he'll be stuck in depression forever. Being all nice and cuddly hasn't really helped, has it?" At Kagami's words the other lowered his head. "If I promise not to hit him, would you allow me to give him a piece of my mind about this?"

"No, really, Kagami, he's had it so hard-

"I don't care if they killed his pet goldfish, it does not give you the right to treat someone else like shit-

"His parents killed his brother" Kuroko admitted, no longer able to keep that in.

"Shit." Kagami went silent for a second. "It still doesn't give him the right to lash out at you. Worse, he most likely thinks of himself as a monster, no better than his own parents."

Well, yes, that was it in a nutshell. It summed it up quite nicely, so he nodded.

"I guess his brother was helpless and couldn't fight back?" The redhead waited for his answer. "Then what do you think it does to him that you aren't angry at him? You don't fight back as well. By not telling him he's an asshole, he can only conclude that he is just like his parents. It might be a lot kinder if you screamed and kicked."

Huh. He had never seen it like that. He blinked in confusion.

"Being angry at someone gives them the right to acknowledge that another being is angry at them. It means they don't have to be angry with themselves. You can apologize to someone else but apologizing to yourself is hard."

Oh yes, he knew that. He knew that so well. His babies had been unable to accuse him, so he had accused himself for so long. How often had he named himself a murderer? How often had he imagined Aoki's eyes, looking at him angrily or sadly? He had bought that grave and the tombstones to be able to apologize to them.

He had done the same thing to Aomine.

"I am not sure I can be angry at him but I want to try." Kuroko took his mate's hand.

"Will you help me?"

"Yeah." The redhead had a blinding smile full of pride.