

Hurt

A realistic Omegaverse

Von Gepo

Kapitel 8: Getting her

"I think this is as far as you'll get." The doctor mused, studying the screen intently. "She has changed position which is good. She is about forty-eight centimeters now, tall for her age. Thirty-four weeks is a good age to be born. Just for comparison if you weren't this muscled, your stomach should be about this big right now." He indicated a roundness that was at least thrice of what Shin-chan showed. Kazu wasn't surprised – before she turned, he had been able to feel her head when he massaged his boyfriend. "I already noticed the hospital last week that this might be the deciding week. They gave me an appointment for Friday." He clicked to print out the photos before turning to Shin-chan. "The most sensible would be to take that appointment. Are you ready to be parents the day after tomorrow?"

Kazu took a deep breath. Well, he had known it was soon but this was ... sudden. He squeezed the hand he held, feeling it tremble slightly.

"When will I have to check into the hospital?" Shin-chan asked, always the responsible one.

"Tomorrow afternoon. I would guess it is best to go to school, inform everyone there and go afterward. Plan for a week or two in hospital for yourself. Depending on her weight and her breathing Kikyō might leave with you or stay a bit longer. Early-born babies normally receive intensive care for a few weeks." The doctor explained.

"Will I be able to see her after birth?" Even Shin-chan's voice had begun to tremble. Kazu helped him clean himself and sit up.

"With males, a Caesarian is always best. So you might choose between anaesthesia by having narcotics inserted in your lower spine or your blood system. The first leaves you awake which means you'll see her as soon as the paediatricians have examined her and you are sewed up again. If you want a full narcosis, you may visit her when you are awake and well enough."

"I read about spinal blocks and prefer that."

What the heck were they talking about? He would have to ask his boyfriend to explain later. But as far as he understood this, he was sure Shin-chan would take the option where he stayed conscious. Even if that meant he would be awake when they operated out their daughter ... ugh, good that Shin-chan was the pregnant one. Kazu felt squeamish just thinking about it.

"I'll make the call then. You will need one of your parents to sign the papers tomorrow, alright?" They both nodded. "The procedure will need an hour or two in which you will need to wait outside." The doctor said to Kazu while he already dialed.

He began talking to some kind of secretary next.

They waited while holding hands. Kazu put his head on Shin-chan's shoulder which the other allowed. They only separated when the doctor finished the call.

"They would like you to check in at two o'clock, so they can tell you about the operation and your options. One of your parents needs to attend that. You'll stay in the hospital and will not be allowed to eat or drink after tomorrow evening. Your boyfriend is not allowed to stay with you but he may return the next morning if the school allows that. Your operation is scheduled for somewhere around noon. Here is a flyer where to go to and what to pack." He handed over a pamphlet. "Do you have any questions?"

"Do you have pediatricians in this clinic? Can we come here with Kikyo?" Shin-chan asked and continued when the other nodded. "Shall we already make an appointment? At what time should we come?"

"Four weeks after birth if she does not need to stay in the intensive care unit. Please give us a call after you know when she will be discharged." The older man smiled. "You were really pleasant kids. I am sorry to see you go. Would you send me a picture of Kikyo?"

"Sure." Kazu answered. "Thank you for treating us so kindly. We'll be back if we are ever lucky enough to have another baby."

"Please come earlier next time."

"I know what to watch out for now." Shin-chan answered. "Thank you for explaining in detail."

Yeah, the doctor had been cool like that. He was very specific without prompting, even Kazu found that reassuring. When it came to Shin-chan's pregnancy, he felt nearly as neurotic as his boyfriend was in everyday situations. For Kazu it was the first time he ever felt so scared.

Sometimes he was reminded of the hate and prejudice he had expected to experience everyday. Somehow – most likely because he encountered it so rarely – it cut deeply. Like how the doctor only talked to Miyako, explaining options and risks to her as if it wasn't Shin-chan who was pregnant and had to make decisions. She was the only thing that kept them from exploding by silently refusing to do anything but give her signature. Shin-chan filled out all forms, asked all questions himself and made himself a general nuisance by wanting details the doctor was unable to give (e.g. which narcotics would be used).

When Kazu was refused entrance to the station because he was neither married nor related to his boyfriend, Miyako simply took his hand and dragged him with her. When the nurse protested, she was told that while Kazu might not be related to Shin-chan, he was related to Kikyo and thereby family. That shut the annoying women up for good.

Shin-chan of course was a nervous wreck. He felt like everyone was watching him (which was not exactly wrong) and paced the room. When a young medical student came in to take some blood, Shin-chan had him running away just by looking at him. A female doctor came next and Kazu was able to calm his boyfriend enough so that she could draw blood. He painstakingly fed him dinner before he left very reluctantly. Apparently mobile phones were not allowed because they could disturb machines, so Kazu couldn't even promise he would write or phone.

It was the worst night of his entire life.

When he was allowed back in – this time without any bitching nurses – he looked pale

and had dark circles under his eyes. While Shin-chan wasn't off much better, he had at least calmed a bit. They decided to sleep until it was time for surgery, so they spent the next four hours curled up on Shin-chan's bed.

What followed was even worse than the night. Miyako joined him in waiting in front of the surgical unit until they were allowed into a room in which Shin-chan lay on a bed – as white as the blanket around him – and a bundle of white tissues lay under a warming light three meters away. They were told to wait here, left completely alone. While Miyako went over to Shin-chan, Kazu had followed his gaze to the white bundle. Had they simply left his daughter lying there? Had no one cared enough to bring her over to his boyfriend?

He told his anger to calm and inspected the bundle. In that big, fluffy bundle was a tiny face, crunched together, bloody and partly covered in a cheesy substance. He took a tissue of the many she was wrapped in and began cleaning her tenderly. She didn't really seem to care. He checked her breathing for assurance – it was faint but there.

"A doctor said she is healthy for her age. He said they would connect her to some monitor to check her vitals. But then they all left and no one came back with any monitor. Is she still okay?" Shin-chan's voice was faint, weak and very concerned.

"Her breathing is just fine. She is tired though. I'll clean her a bit, okay? There is a lot of ... stuff on her. How are you?"

Miyako had already asked that but Shin-chan had not reacted to her.

"They told me I have lost a lot of blood. Apparently I won't need a transfusion but they will check my vitals as well. They went to get another infusion but ... well, same thing. They seem to be very busy."

"I'll inquire about your infusion and her monitor. Is there anything else you need?" Miyako asked which her son denied. She left immediately, a frown on her face. It was good Shin-chan had such a caring, genuinely fierce mother.

"Is she really okay?" The other asked again. "All toes, all fingers, no deformities?"

"Haven't you seen her yet?" Kazu asked shocked.

"No ... when they wheeled me in, a doctor had a look at her, then a nurse bundled her up. She's been over there since then. I thought it must have some reason." Shin-chan sounded unsure, nearly scared.

"It is okay to ask, babe." He stopped the cleaning, bundling her up again and taking her into his arms. "The lamp over there also heats her but I am sure she'll be fine if I hold her close." Tiny thing, so very, very tiny. "Don't move, you might open your wounds." He went over, sat next to Shin-chan's head and held her next to him. "I am sure she is beautiful without the grime."

"Idiot." The other sighed in relief, something like a smile on his lips. "She is beautiful even with all that grime. You may continue cleaning her though."

"Yes, princess." Smiling Kazu continued to do just that. "Five fingers on the right."

"It makes me gag to think what must be left inside me for her to look that filthy." At least it came out stronger, Shin-chan seemed to gain back strength, even if not color.

"What's with the cute names though? You have called me babe before but princess?"

Kazu leaned down to kiss his boyfriend. Silly thing. Good that that always shut him up. He informed him afterward that she had five fingers on the left as well. Getting that grime off was a pain but they had time. Every time she crunched her nose, he held her close to him, worrying about her temperature. She seemed pleased enough about that and always quieted down. He was down to cleaning her feet when a nurse rushed in.

"Ah, hello, young man. Where is- ah, there. You could have turned off the warming light." She rushed over to do just that before she went over to the bed with a bag of fluids in hand. "Your mother is a real pain, boy. I am going to change your IV now. They are getting a monitor from the ICU, that will take some time." She hooked up the bag and roughly inserted some cable-like device that went straight to Shin-chan's arm. "Be sure to keep her warm, babies that small can't hold their temperature. I'll get a warming bed in here. You can bath her in the sink over there, just always hold up her head and check the water temperature carefully, she has much thinner skin than other babies. It needs to feel luke-warm for you."

Well, the woman was a bit rude due to being overworked but that were some nice instructions. He thanked her and asked for towels.

"Oh, somewhere in those cupboards, just search them all. And remember to warm the towels under the warming light before you use them. I'll come back as soon as I can, it's just- there's so many people right now, somehow a group of women with problems just came in, I don't know where to put them. It's suddenly such a mess here, sorry."

"As long as Shin-chan and Kikyo are fine, we're good." Kazu said and put his daughter next to his boyfriend for heating. "If I can be of help, please tell me."

"Bathing her would be really helpful. I'll bring some clothes for her with the warming bed. Thanks a lot!" With that she left again.

He began searching the cupboards, finding some more tissues but also real towels in plastic wrappers. He asked Shin-chan if he thought they might use those and if they should get the wrappers off before heating them but the other had no real opinion, so Kazu just went ahead and heated them with wrappers while drawing a bath in the sink. It seemed that sink was actually made for bathing babies, it was wider and deeper than normal sinks.

"Have you ever bathed a baby?" Shin-chan asked.

"Not really. I just watched while some of my friends' mothers bathed theirs. But I am sure I can prevent her from drowning."

"Oh, no, sorry, it's just- you are so calm, I was wondering ... it would be afraid to drop her or overheat her or something. She is so tiny and fragile."

"She is, huh?" Kazu leaned over them. "She is early after all. I am amazed she fitted into you, I expected her to be even smaller. On the other hand she is tiny. It's hard to imagine she'll most likely grow taller than me."

"Are you okay?" A woman asked from the direction of the door.

"Welcome back, Miyako." He smiled at her. "Thank you for hounding the nurse, she was already in. Can you help me bath Kikyo?" She most likely knew well how to bath babies, he'd feel immensely safer with her.

"Oh, sure!" Her face lighted up and she looked around. "Here?" She checked the temperature. "A bit colder than that, I'll mix in some more water. Is there any baby shampoo?" She began searching the cupboards herself.

Yeah, shampoo ... that was a great idea for getting the grime off. He felt like smacking himself for idiocy. Oh well, he would have to learn. He was deeply thankful his boyfriend had such great, astonishingly open-minded parents.

Kikyo seemed happy in her self-warming bed, unconcerned by the cables connected to her. Despite the nurse's initial reluctance to be nice to the underage, same-sex parents in room number 523, it took only half a day for them to coo over Kazu carrying his daughter around. It helped that as always he was as charismatic as his

boyfriend was grumpy. Luckily Shin-chan was to stay in bed, only allowed to move on the ergotherapist's orders, and Kazu brought him everything he wanted. So the nurses had minimal contact with his less sociable half.

Or third. Kikyō seemed to have his bubbly personality, being interested in about everything the few moments she opened her eyes. Mostly she just snuggled comfortably in his arm until the nurses reminded him she had all those cables for her vital checks – her monitor was static next to her bed though. So he put her back and waited for Shin-chan to wake again. That one had lost a bit more than two liters of blood, so he slept most of the time.

Two sleeping princesses. He asked his favorite nurse if there was some way he could stay with them, like a chair he could sleep in. Of course there was, partners were always allowed to stay with their spouses ... great. Gods, every day he hated the fact more that they were unable to marry. He would make an effort in pleading with Shin-chan's father to be adopted.

"Kazu?" His boyfriend seemed to have woken. There was a bit more color in his cheeks.

"Yeah?" He kneeled next to the bed and smiled.

"Can I have a kiss?" Idiotic question, of course he could. Every time. Everywhere for all he cared. "Is it okay if you take Kikyō to sit with us?"

"Sure. She has been stable for nearly twenty-four hours now. It is because it is Saturday that she will be monitored until Monday. Only a pediatrician may decide she doesn't need it anymore and the next doctor visit is on Monday." He stood and went over to her bed. "She already charmed the nurses. I got approval to stay with you overnight." And an explanation how turn the monitoring device on and off, so he had no problem disconnecting Kikyō and bringing her over. "Do you want to hold her?"

Shin-chan's eyes widened in something like panic.

"She won't bite." Kazu smiled, laying her down next to the green-haired head. "She was two thousand and six hundred gram at birth. That was a hundred gram over the weight for which she would have needed to stay in intensive care."

"Has she opened her eyes yet?" The other whispered.

"She is exactly how you wanted her. Black hair, green eyes, outgoing personality and a winning smile." Kazu grinned.

"I have yet to realize we are really having a daughter. It's only been three months. Now there is some kind of mini-me lying next to me. Or rather a mini-you."

"Let's say mini-us. After all she has traits from both of us." He took Shin-chan's hand, laying his pinky finger into her hand that immediately closed around it.

"She's moving." Shin-chan's eyes were wide.

"She can cry too. Vehemently. She's hungry every two to three hours right now. I fed her twice since I came this morning."

"She spent the night with the nurses as I am unable to move right now. It was really lonely in here." His eyes seemed teary.

"Don't worry, I'll stay here, so will she. That's the last night you spent alone."

"Thank you." Yeah, there were tears rolling down his face now. "Sorry, I- I don't know-"

"Shh, that's okay." Kazu took out a tissue to wipe them off. "You can cry as much as you like. You have been through a lot these past few days."

"Can you bring her back to her bed, please?" The other took the tissue from Kazu who complied immediately. Afterward he went back and lay down beside the other, smuggling an arm under his head. Shin-chan had a crying fit, something he had never seen before. "I'm sorry, I ..."

"It's okay. Cry a bit, dry your tears and then we can talk. Crying and talking at the same time is contraproductive. I don't want you choke."

"Idiot." The other smiled lightly, even though he cried. "I can cry and breath and the same time."

"Really? You're not very used to crying as far as I know. After our lost matches, breathing did not seem so easy for you." Kazu smiled, even if the memory came with the hurt of losing.

"Okay, better." Shin-chan dried his face and cleaned his nose. "Promise not to hate me?"

"That's an easy promise. I might get angry but I cannot stop loving you. So tell me what you are crying about."

"It's ... it sounds mad. I want to give her back. Take her back. I want her back in my womb and have more time to prepare. I want her, I just don't know if I want her now. That is mad, I know, it is just ... I feel scared. It is very hard to define all those feelings, you know?" Shin-chan slumped against him. "I feel like I'll explode. It's just too much. How am I supposed to care for her? They told us that teenage parents are no good. What if they are right?"

"What if they are not?" Kazu couldn't help but ask. He hadn't really thought about those questions much. Most likely Shin-chan had a point. His mouth was just faster than his brain. "Right now, she wants sleep and food, an occasional bath and a bit of cuddling. That is not exactly hard, right?"

"It is! She can't talk. What if she wants a bath and I don't understand her and try feeding her again and again? I am not good at reading people. What if I am unable to read her? I'd do unimaginable damage."

"Well, you can use that unimaginable brain function you have or simply ask someone else. If you try to feed her and she turns her head away, I am sure you will grasp the notion that she wants something else. And if you feel frustrated, just ask me. If we both are unsure what to do, we'll ask your mother. Do you think your own father felt any more sure than you now when he had you?"

Shin-chan blinked in surprise which was unbelievably cute. Kazu kissed his nose for that.

"You really meant that, right? I don't have to be a mother. You don't expect me to have some kind of instinct when it comes to raising her." The other let go of a big sigh. "Because I don't have that. I see her and I want to run. When I touch her I fear that I'll break her."

"I felt the same." Kazu told him. "It lessened after carrying her around for an hour. Here, dry your tears and then we'll hold her together for a bit. I assure you, you'll feel better afterward."

Shin-chan immediately paled, but nodded and cleaned himself. When Kazu brought Kikyo over, his breath was going much too fast, so he kissed him until his labored breathing calmed. They ended up with Kikyo sleeping on her stomach on Shin-chan's breast because he was not allowed to sit up. She seemed pleased enough about that, drooling on his post-operation shirt. Kazu spent his time snapping pictures of them both, grinning like a fool. Especially when Shin-chan started petting her like a baby kitten. She grabbed his finger, drew it to her lips and nuzzled it. His two beloved ones were simply adorable. And when she began sucking on the finger, even Shin-chan guessed correctly that she might be getting hungry. So Kazu went to get a bottle, able to trust his boyfriend not to have a panic attack in the meantime.

Their days were filled with visitors. On Sunday Kuroko and Kagami came in, the first interested in the whole hospital story to prepare for his own upcoming birth. The other stared at Kikyo, paling and stuttering when Kazu asked if he would like to hold the baby. After a few minutes he was persuaded, only to nearly have a panic attack just like Shin-chan had. He quickly gave her back, refusing from then on. Kuroko patiently shook his head.

On Monday their class president and his girlfriend visited them with well-wishes from their class, followed by their teammates after practice. Their coach came as well, the only one of all of them who they allowed to hold their daughter. He did so expertly, used to babies after all. Kazu saw a smile tucking at Shin-chan's lips, the first expression of genuine happiness without any apprehension mixed in it.

Shin-chan calmed down somewhere on Wednesday. By now he was allowed to sit up, hold their daughter and feed her himself. Miyako had bought clothes for her as well as a sleeping bag, so she did not need her warming bed anymore. The paediatrician had deemed her healthy, so the cables were off as well. Kazu had learned to expertly change nappies and bath her in a mixture of water and oil. She looked a bit like a snake growing out of her skin but they were assured that was normal. The female gynaecologist was charmed by Shin-chan's pheromones and overlooked his grumpy attitude, so they were mostly fine.

In the afternoon, Shin-chan's father visited, bringing along Miyako's father, husband to the late Kikyo. While the oldest joyfully played with the baby – not disturbed by Shin-chan's shouts of "Watch out!" and "Please don't throw her around like that." – the father was reluctant to even hold her. Just like Kazu had predicted, he seemed uneasy around babies. It made Shin-chan feel a lot better afterward when he held Kikyo and searched for broken bones from the rough treatment. Of course she had none and had enjoyed being playfully handled like that. Kazu itched to play airplane with her himself but he did not have the heart to tell his boyfriend to be a bit less angsty after such a day.

On Saturday they were surprised to see Kise and Momoi who dragged a reluctant Aomine with them. She cooed over Kikyo, Kise looked for parental features and finally told them that she had Shin-chan's nose and Kazu's lips. Aomine simply seemed bewildered by it all, afraid to even come near. Kise finally asked him if he had something against babies in general to which he only nodded. Shin-chan who was already seething at that point asked him what the hell was wrong with him. Momoi sighed which told Kazu that Aomine would most likely storm off but to everyone's surprise he decided to reluctantly answer the question: "I had a brother once ... ten years younger. My parents aren't really good with kids. They slapped him a lot and I did not have the courage to stand up for him. So I submerged myself in playing basketball. He broke his arm when he was two and I prayed they would find the other fractures because I was too afraid to speak up. But they didn't. When he was three he fell from a tree or something, I never exactly asked, and broke his hip. They had him in a coma but he never woke up again. I don't know if he really fell from somewhere or if it weren't my parents ... well. Anyway, babies remind me of him. And that I never ever want kids because I'll be worse than they were. No one should live like my brother."

A silence followed that explanation in which Aomine suddenly left after all, cursing when he shut the door. Momoi followed him, excusing them both. Kise slumped against a wall, rearranging his hair with one hand and said: "Oh man..."

"I didn't expect that." Kazu said truthfully.

"I knew his parents were shit, I get that from his attitude. But that? Damn, that was

unexpected. I always knew his home life was bad but ... what do you think, Midorimacchi?"

Shin-chan stayed silent, mulling over the question without giving a premature answer. Kazu had to smile in spite of the situation, he had not waited for an answer like that in a long time. Kise seemed to know the other on that account because he patiently waited as well. It took a bit over a minute for Shin-chan to say: "Do you think Kuroko knows that?"

"Of course Kurokocchi knows. How would he be able to stay calm after what Aominecchi did otherwise?" Kise shrugged his shoulders. "If he doesn't know details, he knows the rough outline at least. Basketball was Aominecchi's getaway from reality. Those two trained for hours after school, right until they were thrown out. Kurokocchi wanted to get better, Aominecchi simply wanted to stay away from home."

"How do you know all that? You only joined us in second year." Shin-chan's voice was laced with suspicion.

"And here I wanted to say that you are just inattentive ... well, I had a crush on Aominecchi then and tried to find out everything I could about him." Kise sighed. "Thankfully that cured me. Aomine is an asshole, but a honest one. No one would and should stand him as a partner. At least he knows that too."

"I don't understand how any of you could have feelings for him." It was a simple statement, no harm intended. Kazu still got ready to jump in in case Kise took that the wrong way. As always his boyfriend simply said what he thought.

"Can you remember how he was when he loved basketball more than anything? When he smiled and laughed, exuberant in his joy to play with us? When basketball was paradise for him, a world without pain or remorse? Akashi dubbed him correctly as the light that shone most brightly. He was always fun, motivating all of us to stay longer, learn more, he was ... he was a light for Kuroko who hated his body. He was a light for me, I was bored enough to think about dying as a fun activity. He wasn't a star, he was a sun."

"Rather a supernova." Shin-chan shook his head. "He burned out and is nothing but ashes now. First day I met him, I knew he would spiral out of control. It's good he took only people with him who were able to recover. Momoi is independent and strong, Kuroko has healed. But I don't see Aomine getting out of this."

"Well, I like to stay optimistic." Kise grinned. "I never expected you to get pregnant either and here we are. I guess anything can happen."

Shin-chan looked bewildered at that, which made Kazu break out in giggles. He was damn cute looking like that.

Shin-chan got discharged on Monday, a week and a half after birth. Takao and Miyako had shopped a baby carrier that could be clipped onto wheels. In that they drove her home, taking the subway as none of them had a driving license. In a beautiful April afternoon Kazu carried his daughter over the threshold, slightly annoyed that he was unable to carry his boyfriend as well. They settled Shin-chan in their bedroom to redecorate (they had bought a crib but both knew that Shin-chan would want to decide where to put it) and assembled in the kitchen.

"So, that's it." Miyako served Kazu a cup of tea.

"I guess it is." He leaned back on his stool. "Shin-chan is allowed to go back to school tomorrow. I just realized that in all the trouble we never actually asked if you would care for Kikyo during school."

"That is a given of course." The older woman smiled kindly. "I love babies, especially Kikyo. She is such a happy baby. Shin-chan and Chiyo looked suspiciously at the world even as babies. All that laughter and interaction, Kikyo is a marvel."

"I like her too." Kazu sighed. "I feel bad going to school without her. I fear it will be worse for Shin-chan. He finally connected with her. I don't want to separate them so soon."

"Yes, they would be better off if Shin-chan had more time with her ... we'll just have to give her to him as soon as you get home. Will you both go to training?"

"I have to and Shin-chan most likely wants to ... do you think you could visit the training with Kikyo?" Kazu looked up. "He acts as assistant trainer, so he does nothing but order everyone around. I am sure he can do so with a baby in his arms."

"While the idea is good, it might be harmful for babies to be exposed to other people so soon, they do not have a working immune system yet. When she is two months old, it is possible, but until then it is better to keep her mostly away from crowds."

"Oh, okay." He lowered his head again. "I didn't know that."

"Don't worry, she will be alright. You can spend your evenings and weekends with her, she won't love you less for it." Miyako laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Will she? Because we have homework and training and the games and ... wouldn't it be better if I at least quit basketball? I am also trying to learn tea ceremony. I don't know how to do all of that at the same time." He felt tears well up in his eyes. "I don't want to be another parent who's never there."

She took a seat right next to him, pulling him to lean on her, his head on her shoulder. She simply held him for a moment before she replied: "I know you most likely don't want to hear this but you are still a child, Kazu. Your top priority must be school because what you learn there will help you provide for your family for the rest of your life. In your case family comes after, not because they count less but because you have enough support to concentrate on school. But even more important than both of them is your own well-being. Your career and your family will crumble if you do not care for yourself. Kazu, you are a very giving person, you care for Shin-chan and Kikyo and both will take a lot of your time. But you need to care for yourself as well. If basketball keeps you stable and happy, if it gives you enough energy to do all those other things well, then please continue to play. I don't want you to hate yourself because you allow yourself to have needs as well. To sacrifice oneself for his family is noble but will lead to misery in the end. Care for yourself first and foremost, then care for Shin-chan and only then for Kikyo. Because she is provided for while Shin-chan needs you. I fear I can be a better grandmother than I ever was as a mother and while I feel bad for asking you to fix my shortcomings, I can offer myself to fully care for your daughter. She will not know loneliness like you did."

He could not stop his tears from falling, it was just too much. All that pain he had bottled up decided to crash into him right this moment, bringing up every fear he ever had. What if he wasn't good enough? What if he failed Shin-chan, if he failed his daughter? How would he ever atone for that?

Those two needed him and even if they had all the help they could have, they were still his responsibility. How could he live up to that?

"You know, you are not alone in this." Another voice added. He immediately knew it was his boy-friend. "You two talk about me as if I was another child you had to look after. I have my shortcomings, I know, but ... it's not like I am unable to take responsibility. I can learn and teach at the same time. If you feel overwhelmed, I am here as well. I can support you just like you support me. We're both her parents and

just because I fail at human interaction doesn't mean you have to be perfect to make up for it."

But he was something like her mother. He was the one that was supposed to care for her. Shin-chan would never have a bond as deep as he could form with their daughter. Who was he to leave her to others so much? He already felt like he was failing just by leaving her with Shin-chan's mother. How could he also leave her for work? How could he leave her for things as unimportant as basketball?

"I appreciate all that." He stood and went over to Shin-chan, still crying silently. "But I don't want to be away so much. I understand about school, I'll finish that, but I won't go back to basketball. I couldn't concentrate on that for a month now, I didn't play any of those games seriously. My thoughts were with you two all the time. If I go back to training or games, I would just constantly think about how much I am missing with Kikyo. I don't want that."

"You got our team into the InterHigh finals. Don't you want to win?" There was no accusation in Shin-chan's voice, only curiosity.

"We would play them without you. I fear that for a year now, basketball has been more about you for me than anything else. So no, I don't care. I would like to play another WinterCup with you but that is not important enough for me to spend so much time away from home."

The other looked down before his gaze came to rest on Kikyo. She contently slept in Shin-chan's arms, dressed in a body suit with a hood. It was a fluffy, warm thing with a panda printed on the front.

"For me, basketball is more about you as well." He admitted. "It's why I don't want you to leave. It would not be the same without you. If you quit, I know I will quit as well. That also means we will lose our teammates, maybe even our friends. We'll have each other, mother and Kikyo. That is cosy but also lonely. You are a much more social person than I am, so I fear the same as mother. I don't want you to isolate yourself with Kikyo, only living for duty instead of what you want for yourself."

"Shin-chan, all I ever wanted was a family. I became social, so that people and their families would like me. I began to play basketball to keep myself from going insane from loneliness. I don't have any aspirations for my career, I only wanted to be able to support my family. That is not duty, that is my dream. I don't want friends and teammates and whatnot, I want you and Kikyo. I never thought I'd become a housewife but if I could, I would love to do just that. Don't call it a duty when it is something I want with all my heart." He held his boyfriend's surprised eyes, silently imploring him to understand. If they would allow him to stay with Kikyo full-time, he would grasp the chance immediately. Years ago, he had thought that as a basketball star he would find a girl he could marry. Now he knew that he never wanted a girl, he wanted a husband. He wanted someone as responsible as Shin-chan who could hold him at night and catch him if he fell.

"I don't think I can fully grasp that concept yet but I'll give my best to try to understand. I do know what a housewife is and does, even if I have problems to apply that to you ... so you want to have a role like my mother? That would mean you care for everything and the only thing I do is earning money." The green-haired seemed to envision that because he looked thoughtful. "I don't like to have such an unequal relationship. I want to learn to care for Kikyo as well and I want to support you a lot more than my father supports my mother."

"I love you." Kazu said and pecked his boyfriend's cheek. "That's exactly what I wished for."

Shin-chan still seemed unsure what to do, so he batted his eyelashes cutely. He kissed him again for that.

When Kazu entered their bedroom later, Shin-chan went in circles rocking a Kikyo who grumpily protested against sleep. The floor looked as if this had been going on for a bit, but the green-haired still smiled. He was patient when it came to their daughter, able to stand her crying for hours if need be. Her digestive system seemed not to be working well, so they had to calm her abdominal spasms with medication and massages. Kazu had gone right from massaging his boyfriend's belly to his daughter's. "Can you try your magic hands?" Shin-chan asked, a slimmer of exasperation evident. "I can try." He took her from his boyfriend, lay her down in her crib and began giving her a massage.

"She'll continue to cry every two to three hours from hunger and in between from stomach pains." Something like a sigh was included in that statement. The other stood right behind him, a leg pressed to his.

"How are we supposed to stay awake in class?" Kazu still sent a smile over his shoulder.

His boyfriend took his chin in hand and kissed him. For a moment they kissed, ignoring their daughter's insistent crying. When they parted, they looked upon her with a sigh. Right that moment she quieted, deepened her breath and was suddenly fast asleep.

"Now what did we do correctly?" The green-haired seemed bewildered.

"Maybe she wanted to be left alone?" Kazu grinned. "You always want to get away from people as well."

"Not you." They embraced. "Come to bed?"

"Let me brush my teeth first." He left for the bathroom, followed by his boyfriend who brushed his teeth as well. They continued on to bed, both exhausted just from changing location back to their house.

"How is your stomach?" Kazu asked.

"Healing. It itches when I move too much but mostly it is okay." They shared a moment of silence. "Did you ask for a specific reason?"

"Well, we haven't exactly celebrated Kikyo's birth yet." He robbed near in bed, slinging an arm and leg over Shin-chan.

"By doing what?" There was a teasing aspect to his voice.

"Giving her a sibling?" Kazu grinned.

"I knew that would be your answer." The other rolled them, leaning over the shorter one and kissing him. Kazu rolled them back, minding his boyfriend's sensitive stomach. The scar wasn't exactly small. He kissed his way down, pushing the other's nightshirt up to continue on his chest. "Not the scar, please."

"Sure." Kazu jumped from the navel right down to where the other loved him most.

"Oh gods, yes." Shin-chan began to breath deeply. "Just basic moves, okay? I can't keep my voice down when you really mean it."

Kazu simply complied. He blindly reached upward and felt a bottle pushed into his hands. Well, that was what you called teamwork. Even disregarding their whole evolution, they were damn good at teamwork.