

Hurt

A realistic Omegaverse

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Kapitel 1: Getting to know one another

The absolute worst was being a male Beta. You were on the very bottom of the food chain. Male Omegas and female Alphas were by definition unattainable for you. If a male Alpha could not have an Omega, he would chose a female Beta for reproductive purposes. So the most unwanted caste was the male Beta.

Being a completely undistinguished Japanese male of average stature with black hair and eyes, the best he could hope for was finding a Beta woman too ugly to interest the Alphas. If he were not that lucky, it would have to be a Beta male, no matter that he wasn't particularly interested in guys. It was simply better than being lonely. His friends' older brother had shown him what dreaming of something more could do to you. That poor guy had run after an Omega female for years, only to be left for a random Alpha. That was just how it was. No one was interested in you, ever.

He had faced that in middle school, attending a school with an athletic focus. It had been full of Alphas, and the girls there would not look twice at him. So he did his best, became a brain, and went to a high school with an academic focus. He could count the Alphas at this school on one hand. He had thought everything would get better – but of course, it handn't. The girls here were even more crazy, bullying the few Omegas to have a chance of catching some Alpha's interest.

The absolute worst of the alphas was Midorima Shintarou. The guy was simply nuts. He wrapped and manicured his fingers daily. He came to school carrying lucky items, no matter how embarrassing they looked. He always spoke in a monotonous voice and had no facial expressions or gestures whatsoever. If he spoke – which he rarely did – it was only to tell you that you were an idiot, to obey his commands, or else to die. He had a male human shape, alright, but that was the only thing even remotely human about him. There was something severely wrong with his brain. He could not stand touching people, he sanitized his desk daily, and he repeated some strange gestures every few minutes.

Still, he was an Alpha, so the girls were all over him. Even though he told them he would not eat lunch prepared by their unclean hands, would not take their offerings of chocolate because it was not part of a healthy diet, and would not go home with them because it was too much bother. He was all high and mighty in his glorious, sick as fuck mindset. Takao secretly suspected the guy couldn't even tie his own shoes, but that kind of fuck-up still had women fawning all over him, while he – a completely good-natured, easy-going guy – was still alone.

It was just so damn unfair. He wanted to hit the guy, but of course he was a huge mass

of toned muscle, no matter how fucked up his head was. Typical Alpha. No brains, all brawl. That was what he thought until he saw him on the basketball court for the first time. In his short basketball career, he had seen one Alpha after the next dunking balls from all over the court, while an adoring crowd cheered them on for jumping higher, longer, and better than any Beta ever could. Midorima was different. Like an artist, he threw the ball with such a gentleness and finesse that any women would have longed for his touch. For those long seconds while the ball was in flight, Takao understood everything about an Alpha's charm.

With the sound of the ball landing that feeling was gone. What was left was a burning hatred and envy. If one was born with a great physique, good looks, and even intelligence, how fair was it to have pheromones on top of all that? Who needed Alphas anyway? Even if that guy had had no hormones on his side, he would still have been a magnet for the girls. Not even his completely fucked up behavior scared off girls in search of good genes. Behavior could always be modified, the important thing was genetics. And Midorima had genetics on his side.

It was during one practice, when the guy was acting even worse than usual (socially, never anything else), that Takao had an epiphany. There was a whole pack of girls chasing after the big idiot, and if Takao was sure about one thing, it was that Midorima would never chose any of them as a mate. Really, he would be stunned if that guy even knew how to get himself off. So every week, he left one, two, or even three broken hearts in his wake. And there was no one around to patch those broken hearts back together, was there? So he swallowed his anger, went up to Midorima after practice and asked him right out if they could be friends. No matter what that would lead to, at least he could honestly say he was the first one ever to leave Midorima speechless. And not only for just a moment. The silence went on for over a minute. Hell, he knew the guy was awkward but this? This was stretching it. Finally he was asked: "Why?"

"I want to get to know you better."

Another long silence followed until the other one spoke up again: "Are you asking that as a potential partner?"

"Hell no!" Takao retreated a step. "Only as a friend! I want to get to know you as a friend. Not everyone is into you that way, you know?"

"What, other than my cock, could interest you?" Ugh. Talk about awkward. And he thought those long pauses were strange. The guy really had no tact at all.

"Why are you carrying around a pink llama plushie for example? What are you aiming at? Do you have siblings? I want to know those kinds of things."

"Why?" No suspicion at all in his voice. Was that because he never had any intonation or did he really not understand any of this?

"Because I want to know you better."

"But why?" His eyelids narrowed. Maybe that was how he showed distrust.

"I just wanna. You never talk about yourself. I am curious."

"Do you have a bike?" Wait, what? A bike? What the hell?

"Yeah ... what is it to you?" Takao inclined his head.

"You may drive me to school with it tomorrow. Be at my house at seven." With that he took his things and left. It must have seemed a logical end to the conversation to him. Takao simply asked himself – and not for the first time – "What the fuck did I get myself into?". Still, he drove to Midorima's house the next day, finding himself in front of a very old Japanese mansion. Everything about this guy had to be strange, huh?

Up close, Midorima was even worse. He answered questions – if he wanted to – but never asked any himself. Not even an innocent “And you?”, no, nothing. Whenever they had a lull in conversation – or rather a stop in Takao's monologue – Midorima would simply stare into space, as if he were in a completely different world. Sometimes he would not react when Takao picked up the conversation again. Then he would startle, focus on him, and stare as if he were an alien. After just two days Takao decided on simply keeping up a continuous monologue or stay silent. It seemed to be the same to Midorima, so whatever.

Really, some days Takao wasn't sure Midorima wasn't batshit crazy. His multiple quirks – checking everything exactly four times, not stepping on lines, taking stairs two steps at a time, retreating and doing it over again if the stairs did not add up to an even number – were more obvious the more time he spent with the guy. He once asked what would happen to Midorima if he didn't follow his obscure rules and the answer was that then he would not have luck on his side and he would fail. He never got an answer to the question of what he would fail at.

Still, nearly every day he was propositioned by another girl. Fairly soon, Midorima left all those situations to Takao. He told the girls no for Midorima and asked them out himself. One out of five actually agreed. Half those girls gave up on Takao as soon as they realized that sleeping with him would not get them any closer to their hearts' desire. But that still meant that he scored every other week. Yay for great ideas! For all that sex he was willing to put up with whatever shit Midorima could throw at him. And it was a lot of shit. Midorima found his bike too uncomfortable, so soon he was driving the guy around in a rickshaw. While he had a standing deal with the team to limit himself to three selfish requests a day, he used Takao without limit. Everyday he had to run to the nearest convenience store for red bean soup, fresh seaweed salad, and a can of sparkling Calpis because the vending machines on the way only had bottles. Midorima would not let him go until he finished practice himself – which sometimes lasted two hours longer than the rest of the team.

After three months, Takao had to admit that so much strenuous physical activity wasn't all bad. While he had mostly sat on the bench before, he now ranked as a starter. Not only that: His coach continually praised him for being the only one Midorima would work with. In his opinion he raised Midorima's effectiveness by at least 30%. It did not sound like much, but since the other three players on the court were completely useless on the attack, he was proud to matter so much.

And after three months, he mostly knew what to expect. Midorima was a creature of habit, so he had to do the same chores everyday. The guy never came up with new ones. Once you had trained yourself to ignore all the strange things the guy did, he was actually nice to be around. You did not have to talk, he was happy with silence. They had developed a simple routine, and could relax around one another. Actually it was the first time he'd ever seen Midorima relaxed.

It was early spring, still some weeks before Sakura bloom when they stopped at an ice-cream parlor. Takao got straciatella, Midorima matcha soft-serve. Cones in hand, they were standing in front of an antique store from which Midorima sometimes got his lucky items.

“Shin-chan.”

Midorima looked up with a slight widening of his lids. That was another thing, after all this time Takao knew his facial expressions. The other one had them, they were just

very subtle. After a moment of silence he asked: "What did you just call me?"

"Shin-chan. It sounds cute." Takao smiled. "You know, if I think of you as cute it is much easier to overlook all your crazy stunts. So as long as I call you Shin-chan, you know that you haven't overdone it."

As expected it took about two minutes of silent staring before Midorima reacted: "Suit yourself."

Still, he relaxed visibly after that. Visibly for Takao at least.

Somehow that initiated a turn in their relationship. Midorima began asking questions, suddenly interested in the world around him. Some of them simply showed his complete lack of basic human needs like "Why do people have girlfriends?", some were just plain strange like "Why do people wear different clothes everyday?". In only two weeks, he even asked why people got angry or frustrated with him, sometimes right in front of them. It felt a bit like explaining human interactions to an alien.

Shin-chan was a good learner though. After Takao pointed out his much too subtle facial expressions, the other trained things like smiling. It looked loop-sided and wrong but somehow it made Takao proud every time he saw that mangled curving of lips.

To his own astonishment it began to feel better than banging girls who only had eyes for the social cripple at his side. He had not expected that, even though he should have known. But number ten finally convinced him that even though one-night-stands were nice, they were not what he was looking for. Only one of the girls had taken any real interest in him, and even that had only lasted for a week or so. So while he still told the girls 'no' for Shin-chan, he stopped asking them out himself. He still stuck to Shin-chan though.

He did not exactly know why, but somehow he had got used to hanging out with him. It wasn't hard, so why not? Shin-chan had money, a hobby he shared, had him exercising daily, and never asked for anything unexpected. Being around him was easy. You did not have to give him anything, not even extra time, but he was always there whenever you needed someone to talk to. Or someone to tell things to, since a conversation with Shin-chan was never really a conversation. Mostly it was like talking to a wall, but it was a living and breathing wall, so he did not feel lonely.

So it came as an extraordinary surprise when Shin-chan asked him – again while eating an ice-cream, that seemed to be a recurring theme – why he still bothered with him.

"What do you mean?" Takao leaned back on his stool. This time they actually sat outside the ice-cream parlor.

"You became my friend to sleep with all those girls I said 'no' to. But you aren't doing that anymore. So why are you still hanging around?"

"You noticed?" With any other person Takao would have felt ashamed to be found out like that. But Shin-chan never got angry anyway, so why bother with shame? "Well, I like you, I guess. We are friends, aren't we? Friends hang out with each other."

"What do you like about me?" Shin-chan seemed openly curious. It seemed to be another of those "Why does the world turn?" questions he sometimes came up with. He never got the obvious when it came to social interactions.

"You like basketball. You come to every game with me that I wanna see. You are never boring. You're a great listener even though you don't react much. You never get jealous. And you never discriminate against me."

"Why would anyone discriminate against you?" Again with those big, asking eyes.

"Erm ... I am half-Korean. My mom married into money. I am simply the result of that

decision. She took the money and left, my dad went back to work, and I have been living alone for four years now. I have money and an apartment of my own. Some people get jealous of all that, others tell me that no one wants a half-breed like me. You never even asked. Most people think it is horrifying how honest you are but I find it endearing. You do not care about a person's circumstances, they don't interest you at all. You see a person and judge them for who they are, not for their parents or their history. I know that you see me as I really am. I never have to pretend."

"Pretend to be happy even though you are lonely?"

Takao flinched and averted his gaze. Shit. And here he thought Shin-chan mostly hadn't been listening to his monologues. Seems that he had been listening pretty closely.

"You are always laughing, always in the middle of everything, but you never get close to anyone." Shin-chan ate a bit of his matcha sorbet.

"You noticed?" Takao whispered.

"I have eyes." Pretty ones at that. But the scary thing was that Shin-chan did not blink when he talked to you. He simply stared until the conversation ended. "Why am I an exception?"

"Huh?" An exception to what? Not getting close to people? Takao nearly laughed.

"You are impossible to get close to. We could spend twenty years like this and we still would not cry when we said goodbye. I know you are not a robot but you have the emotional depth of a puddle."

"And that is why you like me? Because I am unable to express my feelings?"

"You express them alright by now." Takao leaned forward and smiled. "I know you can feel. Just not very much."

Shin-chan seemed to think again. He still did that sometimes when he did not know what to say. Sometimes he continued conversations days later. By now Takao was used to it so he did not expect a reaction so soon. "I wonder why. Why does everyone else feel so much more than I do? Even my mother does. Why am I so different?"

"I don't know. Have you checked with a doctor?"

"Yes, my parents have. They were told I have an autism spectrum disorder. This seems to be one of the symptoms." Shin-chan had finished with his sorbet and arranged his spoon on his plate. "I never missed having feelings until now."

"Until now?" Takao inclined his head. Why was that? Why was Shin-chan suddenly unhappy to have so few feelings?

"I have fun being with you." Wow. Really? "I think. But I do not know how to express myself. I am afraid you will get bored with me. But now I'm used to you, so I do not want you to leave."

Takao could only grin. Really, that was kinda like a love confession in awkward Shin-chan-style. He was cute like that. If only he could blush. But alas, he most likely lacked the emotions of shyness and insecurity.

"Don't worry, I like you. I'll warn you if that starts to change, Shin-chan. I know you are no good with changes."

"Thank you." He righted his glasses. "I do not want to be cast aside simply because I no longer provide you with interesting female company."

"That was a cute comment bordering on frustrating."

"You want me to trust in my own charm to keep you with me?" Sarcasm seemed to be something he could express really well.

"Yep." Takao simply grinned.

Autism spectrum disorder. Of course Takao had googled it right away. He had heard the term before. He had had a real bookworm in his class in primary school. That boy may have been a bit strange, okay, but compared to him Shin-chan took the cake. He was extreme in everything, even in having a mental illness. At least he now knew what to call all the strange things Shin-chan did.

It was good to know that the more secure Shin-chan felt, the less strange he would become. They had been friends for more than four months now and Shin-chan had already let go of some of his stranger quirks. He could walk stairs normally now. Sometimes he checked things only once or twice. And Takao realized with pride that those improvements were all due to him and his friendship, because he had read that without intervention the symptoms of autism only grew worse. He really was important for Shin-chan.

He tried not to feel smug. He did not let that knowledge fill him with pride because that would have meant acknowledging how important Shin-chan had become for him. It took something else to get him to admit that to himself.

The coach had given them the InterHigh league schedule. Like every team, they watched old videos of their upcoming rivals. When it came to Seirin, there were no good videos so they went to see one of their games. They planned to at least, but as soon as Shin-chan saw them he turned and left. Takao ran after him before the coach could remind him that he had now used up one selfish request for today. He found Shin-chan outside, looking around in confusion as if he had just come to. When Takao called him, he blinked owlshly but waited for Takao to reach him.

"Why did you leave?"

"I ... can't tell." Shin-chan averted his gaze. What the hell? Shin-chan averted his eyes? Was the world coming to an end or what?

Takao grabbed his arm and they walked to the park next to the stadium. He sat him down on a park bench and kneeled in front of him to ask: "What just happened?"

Of course it took Shin-chan more than a minute to answer: "There is someone on Seirin's team I went to middle school with. He reminds me of things I want to forget."

"Seirin has someone from the generation of miracles?" He would have remembered if the coach had told them that, so he was sure it wasn't the case.

"No, Kuroko was a starter but no one ever called him a miracle. People just never noticed we were six instead of five."

"How can someone forget a miracle?" Takao furrowed his brows. "Was it the red haired guy? He looked like a miracle. His Alpha scent was so strong I could smell him from afar."

"Kuroko is an Omega." Shin-chan's voice got smaller. "He was the blue-haired one next to that Alpha."

"An Omega athlete?" There were things like that? "Shouldn't he be mated and pregnant by now?"

Shin-chan turned his head as if Takao had punched him in the face. It was too obvious a reaction. Whatever he had said, it must have had a real impact.

"Was he ... did you lose a fight over him?" Takao guessed.

"No." Shin-chan looked down as if in shame. It gave Takao a queasy feeling. He had never seen the other look defeated. Something was very wrong here.

He stood and sat next to the other to ask: "Why does this hurt you so much?"

"It reminds me of my failures."

"Failures?" He nearly laid a hand on Shin-chan's shoulder but remembered just in time that autists found no comfort in being touched.

"You are jealous that I am an Alpha, right?" Midorima sounded broken, so it was hard to think about his own envy right now. Of course he wanted to be an Alpha. But not Shin-chan, the guy had too many issues. Being an Alpha was not enough to make up for them all. "I wish we could trade. I would give anything to be a Beta."

"Why?" His voice was surprisingly calm. He would have expected that to come out with the shock he actually felt.

"Because Alphas are beasts when they are in rut. I hate losing control like that."

"I can imagine." He actually could. Shin-chan was the most controlled person he had ever met. Of course he would be loath to lose control instead of riding the hormonal high that came with fucking in rut.

"I don't think you can imagine." Shin-chan's voice sounded grave. "Have you ever seen an Alpha fuck an Omega?"

"Woah ... I didn't know you had that word in your vocabulary." Takao shakily drew breath. "I watch porn, you know? Alphas and Omegas are really good for making porn."

"How violent do they get? Do a lot of Omegas die?"

"What?" He leaned forward to look at Shin-chan's face. If someone said he had an empty face, he must never have seen Shin-chan like this. He looked ... broken. "Does that ... have you ... what do you mean?"

"They don't seem to show the cruel stuff. I guessed so." The green-haired guy slowly raised his head. "I choked an Omega once. Akashi was the one who revived him. After that he punched me in the face. Akashi, I mean. The Omega never dared."

Takao was silent for once, taking a minute to compose himself before he asked: "Kuroko?"

"Yes." Shin-chan closed his eyes. "He was the only one ever to make me lose control. I hope that Alpha claimed him. He seems strong enough to protect Kuroko from me."

Trauma. He remembered reading about trauma when he had researched autism. Autists mostly had no psychological mechanisms to overcome trauma. They were simply broken down little by little by the traumas they experienced. Seems that hurting someone was just as bad as being hurt.

"Have I finally driven you away?"

"I am still here, am I not?" Even if it did not help Shin-chan, he had to hug him. It was what he himself needed at least. "I am sorry that happened to you."

"It is just so unfair. Omegas have inhibitors, so they can live a normal life. All I can do is chop off my cock and hope that's enough." Shin-chan sounded close to tears. No wonder he was so neurotic when he knew how he got when he lost control. Suddenly a lot of his strange behaviour made sense.

"Please don't do that. As long as you do not go near an Omega in heat, you should be okay." He hoped. He did not want to lose Shin-chan to an Omega. "So now you are afraid to meet Kuroko?"

"Not really." Shin-chan sat up, thereby drawing Takao closer, since he still had an arm around his shoulders. "Kuroko is fine. He wasn't even angry. I just don't want to go near him when he is in heat. I hope that Alpha claimed him."

"Actually ... why didn't you claim him? Isn't that kind of an instinct?" Hopefully he did not make Shin-chan sad again.

"He wore a collar. He did not wear one today, that makes me hopeful."

"So he was okay with sex but not with mating?" Omegas were strange like that. It was what made them so hot.

"No, I raped him. I was thankful he wore that collar."

"You ... what?" Takao looked up, direly confused by now. "Just by scenting him, you lost so much control that you raped and nearly killed him?"

"Yes." The other sighed. "I hate being an Alpha."

"I ... see." Actually, he did. He had never thought about it that way. Maybe it was okay to be a Beta after all. Neither Alphas nor Omegas sounded good right now. "Was he the only one? Or were there others?"

"He was the only one but it happened ... eight times I think." Shin-chan finally looked at him again. "He had seven abortions."

"I'm sorry." Damn. And here he thought Midorima was pure as snow. He would never have expected something like this. "Is there no way to protect yourself?"

"No, except to run away very fast." He averted his gaze again. "Akashi wanted us all to become the best we could be. He set nearly unreachable goals. The one who came closest to reaching his goal was the one allowed to chase Kuroko that month. Kuroko's goal was to mask his scent, so that he would not be found. His motivation was clear, I guess. And when he had finally learned to mask his scent even in heat, Akashi set more of us after him. The last year of middle school was one gang rape after the next. Even if I weren't in rut myself, I could not resist Kuroko's allure. I could control myself not to rape him when he was out of heat, but as soon as he went into it, I went wild."

"That is sick." Takao felt bile in his throat.

"It was why I chose a high school none of the others would go to. Akashi is quite smart but the others are dumb as bread. And I knew where Akashi would go. I just wanted to get away from all of them. Kuroko did the same, he went to a completely new school none of us would go to. He isn't angry with any of us, he said, but still ... I know I am the worst." A silence followed but Takao did not know how to fill it. "Being an Alpha is about being strong to protect your mate. But how can you protect someone when the beast is you yourself?"

"You are still scarred, I see", said a third voice.

Takao nearly screamed. Where the heck did that guy come from? Wasn't he the Omega they had been talking about all the while? He had not seen him coming and he was known for noticing everything! How come he did not notice him before?

"Adept as ever." Shin-chan looked up. "As sick as it all was, it did teach you what it was supposed to. You are invisible to my senses."

"I could stand here in the peak of heat and you would not smell me." Just like Shin-chan, Kuroko's voice had no intonation at all. Takao did not know if he was an autistic too or if all the abuse he had suffered had stolen his emotions. "I am still not angry. But none of you seems able to forgive yourself."

"Most days I think about killing myself." Shit. Takao strengthened his grip. How could he not have seen that in all those months? Had he really been so oblivious?

"I want you to let go of your hurt. I want you to continue living. I want you to forgive yourself." Kuroko's voice was full of determination. "So I will win our match to show you that I am not helpless. I could have put a stop to all that we did at any time. It was my own choice not to. So you have no reason to blame yourself."

"You want to beat me with that new Alpha you got?" Shin-chan's voice sounded dead, as if all hope was lost.

"No. I'll beat you myself." With that Kuroko turned and left.

And he really did. He made good on his word.

Takao could not help grinning when Kuroko knocked the ball out of Shin-chan's hands. It was their ultimate loss and still he felt elated. Kuroko had beaten them, he had shown that big green-haired idiot his power. Damn, he really was good.

He grabbed Shin-chan's shoulder to get him to move to midfield to thank their opponents. As always he functioned perfectly, even if his head seemed far, far away. Hopefully the world had finally righted itself and his friend could now forgive himself. It had been only two days since Kuroko's bold challenge but sleeping over his words even once was enough to make Takao hope they would actually lose this game.

He wanted Shin-chan to forgive himself.

He didn't know if this plan of the blue-haired Omega would work but he certainly hoped so. He did not want Shin-chan to die and two days ago he had sounded like he wanted to give up. It scared Takao. Honestly, Shin-chan was his only real friend. As a rule he did not let people get under his skin but Shin-chan was different. Little by little he had earned Takao's trust. When he was fourteen and his father had left him forever, he was sure he would never, ever put his trust in anyone again.

Except for Shin-chan. Shin-Chan was more reliable than a clock, the rain in April, and the phases of the moon put together. He a constant in Takao's life that he wanted to keep forever. Just like he was Shin-chan's only friend, the guy was the only one for him as well. He wanted him to be strong, not to falter on his way, and to bury the pain that plagued him. He wanted a healthy Shin-chan at his side.

"Dude, he looks crushed. Haven't you ever lost, Midorima?", someone from the team asked in the locker.

"Shut up!" Takao admonished him. "This was about more than a game and you don't have the faintest clue, so leave him alone."

"Woah, woah, Takao ... calm down. I didn't mean anything mean by it. I just wondered." The other guys exchanged some silent communication. "Should we leave you alone?"

Takao looked to Shin-chan who was nearly completely changed after showering and answered: "Nah, we'll go. But thanks. Sorry for blowing up at you. It's just ... please let it go."

He changed at high-speed and went after Shin-chan who was already leaving. He still hadn't said a word. Takao decided on simply following. They ended up in the park next to the stadium, exactly where they had sat down two days before. Shin-chan stared at the bench instead of sitting down. After he hadn't moved for more than five minutes, the Beta tried to draw out his thoughts. Two more minutes of silence followed his tentative request before the other answered: "I don't know what to think."

"How about not thinking then?" Takao took Shin-chan's hand and tucked it into his jacket pocket. "He beat you. He showed you that he is stronger now. For him it was training and you were one of his training partners. You didn't do anything wrong in his eyes. Let that sink into your head without overthinking it."

"How?" Shin-chan looked so lost, so dejected.

"What would you like to eat? Or shall we go watch a movie? Something that does not have to do with any of this. What would be a good distraction for you?"

"Distraction." The other looked at him as if he had grown two heads. "We could ... do you have movies at your place?"

"Sure have. You've never been to my place in all this time, have you?" Takao grinned.

"Can we go to your place, watch a movie and order food? I heard that's the best way to relax. I never tried it." For the first time in ... ever actually ... Shin-chan really did

look cute. Like a lost puppy.

It tore at Takao's heartstrings. Cute Shin-chan was the best. He took the giant with him, holding his hand in his pocket the whole way.

Takao watched the Alpha next to his bed. He had gotten his spare futon out for him (it had been his Dad's once) and the other had spent the night after they had watched movies until early morning. Even though Shin-chan had been nearly unable to fall asleep, he had been awake when Takao awakened. But he did creepy things again and stared at the ceiling without saying a word.

"Any conclusion to your thoughts?" Takao asked after half an hour of watching the unmoving figure. He had learned to be patient with Shin-chan.

"I believe that Kuroko is not angry. He does not blame me. That means no one blames me for what happened in middle school ... except for myself."

"Why do you still blame yourself?" Takao took the blanket, wrapped himself in it, and sat down next to the futon.

As always it took a few minutes for Shin-chan to answer. No one could rush him, it seemed. He said: "You are right, I do not blame myself. It happened, I can't change it now. I can only do my best for it to not happen again."

"I hope this speech does not end with you chopping off your cock."

"No ... there are better ways. I could neuter myself by removing my balls. It would keep my sexuality intact but erase the Alpha urges." He seemed to spot Takao's disapproving stare. "I don't ever want to rape someone again. What else should I do?"

"Stay realistic. Of course your hormones went wild in middle school. That phase typically ends after high school, or after university at the worst. You'll simply have to steer clear of Omegas until then. After that you'll have enough control over yourself. You don't need to cripple yourself."

"Hm ... are you sure?"

"Positive." Takao leaned forward to Shin-chan's ear. "You'll need those appendages again."

"Are you sure you do not have an interest in them yourself?"

Damn. Takao blushed. Typical Shin-chan to ask such questions out of nowhere. What an idiot.

"Is that a yes?" The other smiled and sat up.

"Are you flirting with me, Shin-chan?"

"No, I am completely inept at that." True, he was trying his best to vary the tone of his voice but he could have been speaking about dissecting corpses. "I only wanted to communicate that if you ever feel an interest in me, you are free to act on it in my opinion."

"Because you do not want an Omega and I am the only Beta around you that you can stand?" His black eyes were trained on his hands. Anything that could made him forget that Shin-chan was only centimeters away.

"Is it an insult to say yes?" The other sounded actually curious.

"It is." Takao smiled, looked up and pecked Shin-chan's cheek. "I am happy you learned that."

"I am happy you can stand me." There was a real, open smile on Shin-chan's lips. It was simply not fair. Somehow he had got the hang of being cute since yesterday.

"I can wait for you." He put two fingertips on Shin-chan's chest, right over his heart. "Someday you will be able to feel what love feels like. I hope to see that day."

The other took his hands, raised it to his lips and actually kissed his knuckles. Wow.

That was very ... romantic. Who had Shin-chan copied that from? Had he planned this in any way? He said: "I want to let go of my hurt. I want to start trusting in myself again. I need you for that."

And he thought he had blushed before? Try tomato now. Takao actually stuttered: "Th- that is n- not very like you. To say. I mean, I know, but for you to actually say it ... that's unexpected."

"I thought about what I want for three days straight. I didn't even sleep."

"Wait a minute, you haven't slept for three whole days? How did you play so good a game?"

"I didn't. I made a lot of mistakes." Shin-chan actually grinned. "Next time we'll crush Kuroko."

"Err ... okay." Takao smiled. "As long as we do it together, I am with you."