

Comfort

Twin-story to "Hurt"

Von Gepo

Kapitel 15: Prayer, a light in the dark

Kuroko took a bamboo bucket and filled it with water. Midorima mimicked his motions while Takao simply followed them. He went to the burial spot he had bought. The Jizo and the six stones were in perfect condition. Kuroko carefully put a spoon of water on every one of them before he watered the Jizo too. While he knelt to pray, Midorima did the same and knelt down next to him.

Traditions and rites. It was a way to work through your feelings when they seemed unbearable. It was a way Midorima must be familiar with. Unborn and stillborn children were "water-children" which Jizo helped to cross the river of death into afterlife. He prayed for all seven that they had found their way.

So ... where to start? It helped when you were able to make sense of something. So he started: "Akashi changed in our second year. He came up with the idea of hunts and I stupidly agreed to it, thinking it would only be training as well. When I was pregnant right after the first hunt, I was scared but told no one about it." - that had been Midorima's child - "I forged my parent's signature for the abortion and went through with it. I was conflicted about continuing but somehow I thought I could control what would happen, now that I knew what to expect. Of course I couldn't. So I aborted again and went to Akashi to tell him I wanted to stop." - that had been Murasakibara's - "First he seemed to agree but then he mentioned it would have been Aomine this time. I was ... I loved Aomine back then. So I told Akashi I wanted to continue. I can't really say what I thought at that time but I was losing him back then, he was losing himself and somehow I thought I could make it alright. When I found out I was pregnant, I was actually happy about it. I went to Aomine and told him I wanted to keep our child, that I wanted to quit basketball and be with him. Somehow I thought he would smile as he used to and be happy."

He had been so stupid back then. He believed you could save someone with your love. You could not. Not if you thought it, not even if the other thought so. People could only save themselves, you could only help. But Aomine had been lost, unable to find his way, unwilling to fight for himself.

Midorima clapped his hands to begin a prayer while Kuroko continued: "Instead he completely lost it. He took a right hook to my stomach that ended the pregnancy right there and told me to get back to practice. Midorima attacked him, Akashi stopped them both from taking out each other and finally Midorima took me to the nearest hospital. I was bleeding profusely and had to get a blood transfusion in the end."

Takao was still as a stone, listening to him talk about it all as if Midorima wasn't

kneeling right next to him. He stood only a foot away though.

"After that I simply did not care anymore. I let them rape me, aborted children, I felt dead inside. I finally ended it all by quitting the team. Even after that it took me half a year to piece myself back together enough that I could go on living." That had been hell. Deciding that the pain wasn't worth it, that he could not save Aomine, that everything had been in vain, it had been horrible. It should have been an easy decision but it had been the hardest one he ever had to take. "After I met Kagami, I began to return to the living. He gave me hope, he helped me find a reason to keep on living and without even knowing, he helped me heal. I asked him for money to buy this graveyard spot and the stones and he gave it to me without even asking why."

Yes, Kagami had been there for him. He had always been there. He had protected Kuroko all this time. How could he have gotten angry at his mate for continuing to watch out for him? He had had a horrible reaction yesterday.

"Aoki." Midorima read the name on the Jizo. "You named it after him even though he did that to you?"

"Love is a strange thing." Kuroko looked at the other for a long moment. Had it even been love? He wasn't so sure now. What he had with Kagami was love. But with Aomine ... he had thought it had been love but now it did not feel like it. "Has Akashi ever told you how he came up with the idea of the hunts?" The other shook his head, so he continued. "On that one day I ever skipped practice, I went to talk with Aomine. I know he had lost his spirit, lost his motivation. I had pep-talked him so often, I thought I could do it again but I couldn't. So I went to Akashi to ask him what to do. Akashi told me we should give up on Aomine." Midorima looked shocked at that. "He told me a plate was still usable if it had cracks as long as it wasn't broken."

"I am beginning to think Akashi was worse than Aomine could ever be." There was bitterness in his voice.

"Yes, the other Akashi was a cruel being." Kuroko nodded. He felt uneasy just remembering that golden eyed monstrous version of his friend. "He then suggested the hunts as a way to motivate Aomine and thereby chain him to the team."

"He used your feelings." Midorima balled his hands in anger. He had become quite expressive.

"He did. It may have been the right thing though." The other took one of those hands, enveloping it his own smaller ones. There was a reason it was hard to be angry with Akashi, even though his idea had been horrible. "You remember that day Aomine ran out of practice and our coach decided he did not have to come anymore?" Midorima nodded. "I found Aomine afterward, trying to kill himself. That was a month before the whole hunting idea came up."

"Aomine was suicidal from our second year onwards?" The other seemed stunned.

"Yes. Of course I was horrified, angry and disappointed about what he had done. But I also could not forget how close he was to killing himself. Aomine was very sick and not in his right mind when he attacked me."

It was more than that. There was always more. Seeing his friend so down, losing his joy in the only thing that was still good in his life ... Kuroko knew about Aomine's home life. He had abusive parents, his younger brother had died from their horrible treatment of their children. Basketball had been his only reprise from pain, both physical and emotional. When he lost basketball, he lost everything he held dear. Kuroko had thought he would be able to become Aomine's reason to live. That had worked for some time – until the abuse Aomine showered on him became too much. Seeing Aomine trying to kill himself had triggered an intense urge in Kuroko to

protect and save his friend, to free him from his abyss of pain. How naive he had been. "It does not excuse him. I may have forgiven him but I will never forget. Even though he is stable now I will never trust him again. And I am happy I fell in love with Kagami who is much more reliable than Aomine, even though they are similar in other ways." There was a long moment of silence.

"Kagami is a stable personality." Midorima stood and helped Kuroko up. "It seems what happened back then hurt all of us. It might have been better if we never went to the same middle school."

"If anything changed, we wouldn't be here now, would we?" He smiled. Sure, he had lost Aoki and that had hurt unbearably. But living without him ever existing? That sounded more cruel. It had been a short moment but Kuroko had been happy back then, dreaming of his life with Aomine. "You might be without Takao. You might be without your child. Even though we experienced something that hurt us, we all found happiness, did we not?"

The other blinked in honest surprise. His boyfriend shook his head with a smile on his face before he asked: "Have you told Kagami about this?"

"No. I wanted him to stay as carefree as he was. But he pieced everything together himself anyway." Kuroko touched his neck. Kagami was his mate. He deserved the truth. He would tell his mate what he told these two. "He is normally slow but he can be sharp when it is about me. That is an annoying habit."

"He wants you to tell him." Midorima said in a surprisingly small voice. "Even though he might know everything by now, he wants to hear it from you. He is hurt that he has to find out from others."

"I fear you are right." Kuroko took a deep breath. "I'll jump over my shadow and tell him. What about you?"

"Me?" The other inclined his head.

"Can you let go of your anger now?"

Midorima froze for a second before he finally nodded. So, this worked. Honesty was able to overcome pain, anger and hurt. He would be honest with Kagami and hope for the best.

"I'm home!" He shouted, a bit surprised not to hear Kagami when he opened the door. He went further in, noticing that the lights were off. Maybe Kagami had gone out to eat with the others after training. He switched on the lights in the living room – and nearly screamed.

"Oh. Evening." Kagami looked up from the couch on which he lay. Had he been asleep?

"What have you been doing in the dark?"

"Thinking."

"Oh." That did not sound good. Not good at all. "I've been thinking as well."

Kagami sat up, silently watching him with a careful gaze.

"I ... overreacted yesterday. I am sorry. I spoke to Takao today. He said you helped him keep Aomine and Midorima from fighting ... I had pictured you picking a fight with Aomine and had been irritated about that."

"Oh." Kagami grinned. "Yeah, I see. No, I didn't. Takao reminded me that you would be angry with me if I picked a fight, so I was able to stay calm."

"Yes, so ... I am sorry." Kuroko came over and sat down next to his mate. "Of course I want you to protect me. I just don't want you to pick fights I am fighting on my own. That feels like you don't trust me to care for myself."

"That was how you felt?" Kagami's eyes widened. He leaned over and gathered Kuroko in his arms. "I know you are strong. You don't need me to fight for you. I only want to support you."

"Yeah ... sorry." Kuroko kissed his mate. "I told Midorima about what exactly happened with Aomine back then. He won't try to aggravate him again."

"Hm." Kagami nodded but looked away.

Kuroko laid a hand on his arm, waiting until the other looked at him and said: "You can ask, you know. I see that it bothers you."

His mate looked at him for a long moment before he said: "I want to know what happened with Aomine. My head comes up with so much, it makes me feel nauseous but also insanely jealous because I don't know how much you still feel for him, even if you say you don't love him. I just can't imagine how you let all of that happen because of him and not ... love him."

"I see." He had expected as much. "Do you think you will be able to hold me while we talk?"

Kagami looked at him for a long moment before he sat Kuroko on his lap and leaned back against their new couch's backrest.

"I met Aomine in our first year of middle-school. Like I told you before, I was training hard to meet my friend who went to another middle-school. Aomine was a star, he was an idol and when he asked me to train with him, I felt honored. He complimented me so much, believed in me, he quickly became my everything because he supported me more than anyone before in my life. I loved that Aomine, that is true." Kagami tensed but was able to breath through it. "He confided in me. I can't tell you what he told me, I will not dishonor my promise not to tell anyone but I can tell you: His life was a mess. Really, everything but basketball was very bad. The only good thing was basketball, it kept him alive. So when he lost his drive, when basketball became nothing but a disappointment for him, he tried to kill himself."

Kagami's eyes flew open, horrified by this revelation. "Aomine? That arrogant bastard?"

"He had already become arrogant, so yes, exactly that one." Kuroko smiled. "I found him nearly unbearable with his bad attitude but when he was suicidal, I remembered that very nice boy that he had been, the one I had been in love with. I wanted to bring back that boy. I would never have forgiven myself if he had killed himself."

"I kinda understand." Kagami nodded slowly. "Even I would try my hardest if Aomine became suicidal now and I knew. I don't even like him. But I know how it ripped my heart that one day I thought you might do something to yourself."

"I asked Akashi for a way to save Aomine because talking didn't help. That was how he came up with the hunts. It was a cruel, horrible idea but it was efficient. That was what the other Akashi was all about – being efficient and winning. I don't know what exactly happened to Akashi that somewhere along the way he split his soul but I imagine it must be something worse than what I lived through."

"Really?" Kagami lifted an eyebrow.

"Well, my soul isn't split." He corrected his position to lay more comfortably on Kagami's breast. "So I guess."

"So that was why you said yes. You wanted to save Aomine."

"Yes." Kuroko looked at his mate. "I thought I loved him. But even at that time I already loved a memory, not the person he was then." He saw Kagami nod slowly and relaxed, seeing that his mate understood. "When Aomine was my hunter, I did not run. I embraced him. I wanted him to trust me, to fall in love with me. I thought giving him

my body would mean he would give me his heart."

Kagami kissed the top of his head, replying with nothing but: "I love you."

"Yes, you did not abuse my trust. He did though. But I did not want to see that, I dreamed about him falling in love with me, becoming my mate and raising our child."

"It still hurts to know you wanted him to be who I am today" Kagami admitted.

"I know. I am sorry. It was my fairytale prince who you are and he could never be."

"Yeah ... that sounds better." His mate smiled. "You wanted to have what we have today, you just chose the wrong person."

"I went to him full of dreams to tell him I was pregnant and to ask him to become my mate. I never got to the second part. When I told him I was pregnant and wanted to keep the child, he looked at me in horror before punching me in the stomach with full force."

"What?" Kagami sat up, clutching Kuroko in his arms to keep him safe. "That bastard!"

"He killed our child, I fully meant that." He took a deep breath. "Don't worry, I won't ever forgive him for that. I am not angry anymore but I was, make no mistake about that."

"How can you even stand to look at him? I'd want to kill him every time I- hell, I want to kill him right now. For real. Isn't that murder?"

"I did not go to the police. Midorima was there, he tried to kill Aomine by snapping his neck. But Aomine was stronger, he nearly broke Midorima's left hand before Akashi stepped in. He punched Aomine in the face, threw him out and sent Midorima to my help while he called an ambulance. It was touch-and-go for a few hours, I lost a lot of blood and nearly died myself."

Kagami held him tight, his nose buried in Kuroko's hair. Smelling his hair seemed to be some kind of calming method for his mate. Maybe smelling himself and their baby on Kuroko was enough to keep him sane.

"After that ... I wasn't the same. I could not think of revenge, I was ... nothing but a ghost really. I became a shadow, not feeling, not being, becoming nothing at all." Kuroko remembered the black hole his heart had been back then, sucking in every emotion. "Aomine started to rape me and I simply was unable to care."

"I fucking hate him" His mate growled.

"In hindsight, I understand that feeling." Yes, had he ever actually been angry? He could remember resentment but actual anger? He knew it was somewhere but it had not returned yet. "Right now, it is mostly sorrow. I was able to accept losing Aoki. I was able to accept losing myself ... you were right, I was unable to make any decisions at that time, I simply survived somehow. I let them mistreat me." He dug his fingers into his mate's shirt, feeling tears welling up. "I felt helpless at first." He sobbed. "Then I wanted to die, so I did not fight them."

Kagami simply held him, rocking them forward and back, making some nonsense-noises.

At once all those tears turned to anger and made him spat: "Aomine raped me one day after I returned from the hospital. He did not use a condom, nothing. He simply smirked when I cried. It just hurt so much. I thought we could talk it over or something, that maybe it had just been some fit of rage, I don't know, something ... but he raped me."

"Please, please let me trash him" Kagami begged, his voice sounding beastly.

Kuroko just cried, unable to answer. Really, why hadn't he been angry? Aomine had been horrible to him. Why should he protect him? Why not let Kagami let out his anger on him? He deserved it, he so deserved it. But then he remembered the young

boy crying at his brother's grave. He hated who Aomine had become but how could he disregard who he had been? But that wasn't an excuse. It wasn't okay, not in the slightest. Maybe he should let Kagami hurt him. Gods, yes, he wanted to. He wanted Aomine to feel what it meant to lose everything he had ever wanted.

But he had.

Aomine knew exactly what it felt like to lose the only thing that kept you alive – he knew how it was to live without hope. He had pulled through, just like Kuroko. Kuroko had only stood in the cross-fire in that process, sharing the pain that ravaged his friend. He did not want to forgive, did not want to forget but it was so hard to stay angry at Aomine.

"He would welcome that." Kuroko looked up after a few minutes of crying into Kagami's shirt. "It might alleviate his guilt a bit."

"I rather want him to suffer" His mate admitted.

"Then don't hurt him." He sighed and relaxed into the embrace. "It hurts him more if you don't hit him."

"Well ... okay." Kagami scoffed. "Though he was afraid of me hitting him for what he did."

"I also fear you might kill him if you meant it" Kuroko admitted but still smiled a bit.

"Yeah, I ... okay, I should not hit him." The other grumbled. "I still hate him."

"That's okay." Kuroko followed the line of one of Kagami's biceps with his index finger. "You never met a likable side of him after all."

"Don't invite him again. If he comes to a party, I'll throw him out."

Kuroko just nodded. That sounded reasonable.

Kagami lay his head on his and continued to grumble unintelligently.