

Not good enough

Von Gepo

Kapitel 24: New Year

Misses Murasakibara was a short woman. It was hard to imagine how such a giant had come out of so petite a woman. She wasn't exactly tiny, she was more than average for a Japanese woman. But Atsushi was big even for Dutch measures. So it was surprising to see that she was smaller than Tatsuya. Her late husband must have been a giant as well.

Tatsuya hadn't exactly known what to expect. Atsushi breaking into tears? Not likely. His mother breaking into tears? Very likely. He had expected hugging, maybe even desperate clinging to one another. He had not expected them to simply stare at one another. Atsushi had his hands in his coat's pockets, his mother clutched her own as if in prayer.

She was the first to react. With wide eyes and an unblinking stare upwards she said: "You've grown."

Atsushi simply nodded once and stretched out a hand to lay it on her head while saying: "You're tiny."

"Silly boy." She smiled up at him and took a step forward to hug him. "It's been too long."

"I've missed you, mom." He hugged her back, being mindful not to crush her.

Tatsuya had to smile at hearing that. When he had told his boyfriend that he had invited his mother, that one had only given him a blank stare. It had taken half a minute for Atsushi to ask if she really wanted to see him because while she had said so again and again, she had never done it. What followed had surprised Tatsuya because his boyfriend had become angry and irritable for two days. He had said again and again that she did not need to come, he did not need her. Only then had he broken down and cried and told Tatsuya how much he had missed her. It had been an eventful week.

"I've missed you too." Oh, there it was: she sobbed.

Atsushi strengthened his hug and Tatsuya decided to step in to gently chide his boyfriend not to overdo it. Often the young man had no idea about his power. Atsushi looked at him for a moment, then to his mom, before loosening the hug and saying: "Mom, this is my boyfriend."

She blinked away tears, looked at him and smiled crookedly. Becoming aware of her appearance, she wiped her cheeks with her cuffs before bowing slightly and saying: "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"It's my pleasure. My name is Himuro Tatsuya. How do you do?"

"Murasakibara Honoka. How do you do?" She bowed even lower.

"I am fine, thank you." He bowed as well.

"My name is Tsueda. I am Atsushi's teacher." That one introduced himself as well. "Thank you for visiting us today. Atsushi was eager to meet you."

After his initial reluctance at least. After all was said and done, Tatsuya knew where Atsushi was coming from. In his eyes, his mother had abandoned him. Had he even known that Akashi had forbidden her to come? Tatsuya had not dared to tell him. He didn't know what to think about it all. But he was happy that they were able to reunite.

"Are we going to watch TV and go to a shrine?", Atsushi asked his mother.

Misses Murasakibara looked at Tatsuya and Tsueda for a second in question.

"We are going to a restaurant and at sunrise, we will go to a shrine, yes," Tatsuya decided for them. The dinner was planned and he had wanted to go to a shrine. He did not want to spend the night watching TV though.

"No TV?" Atsushi pouted. Of course that was the only thing he heard.

"Was it traditional that you watched something together?" Tatsuya turned to his future in-law.

"We have watched Kohaku Uta Gassen every year. Music always calmed Atsushi a bit, so we watched it together," she explained.

"Then we went to get food and I got to play in the park all by myself and then we went to a shrine." It was the longest sentence Tatsuya had ever heard from his boyfriend.

Tatsuya shared a look with their teacher and thought he saw the same conclusion on his face. Keeping Atsushi up the whole night did not sound like a good idea. He turned and said so: "We will sleep between dinner and going to the shrine. Depending on your behavior, maybe we can watch a bit of it later before going to sleep."

"But I want to see it!" Atsushi shouted in the direction of his mother.

Tatsuya was beginning to see why Akashi cut their contact. Atsushi reverted back to his poorly raised self in front of his mother. Thankfully it was Tsueda who stepped in: "Atsushi, moderate your tone. Tatsuya promised a bit of TV if you behave and right now, you are not doing so. Your mother is a guest. Her words do not overrule ours, so don't even try."

There seemed to be a war going on on Atsushi's face. His old self warring with the new one. Tatsuya took his hand and squeezed, trying to remind him that there was merit in growing up. Atsushi looked at him and seemed to calm a bit. After a moment he squeezed back and nodded. Tatsuya smiled at that, straightened and kissed his boyfriend's cheek.

"That was amazing." Misses Murasakibara looked from Tsueda to him and back. "How do you do that? Normally, Atsushi would have started to kick things or me by now."

Tatsuya sent his boyfriend a chiding look and asked: "You kicked your mother?"

Atsushi flushed in shame.

"I guess that you gave in and promised him TV if he calmed then?" Tsueda looked slightly exasperated.

"Uhm ... yes." She lowered her head. "I guess I shouldn't have done that?"

"I taught him that kicking his mother is a good way to get his will." The teacher turned to Atsushi. "It's good that you learned what a bad thing that was."

"Just for the record, if you ever kick or hit me, I am out of your life," Tatsuya warned his boyfriend.

"I know," Atsushi mumbled. "Violence is bad. Mido-chin said that Aka-chin would be a very good boy if ... err, he was bad and made us do bad things to Kuro-chin." Sentences with if-clauses were still a bit hard for him.

"Sadly, yes. If not for that and his callous words sometimes, he would be good." Though it was hard to say because Tatsuya hated everything about him except for his money. What was harder was how casually Atsushi brought this up. He had to teach his boyfriend that talking about their rapes in public was a bad thing and hurt Kuroko. "Don't ever do something as bad to me."

"Mister Akashi did something bad?" Misses Murasakibara sounded confused.

Oh no. And here they had the exact problem he had wanted to avoid. Tatsuya sent a searching gaze to Tsueda, only to find him looking at him questioningly as well.

"You don't know?," he asked their teacher in something akin to shock. He was met by a blank stare. It actually made him turn to Atsushi for a moment and say: "I'd like to avoid talking about this in the future. If possible, please only talk to those about Kuroko that were involved in what happened."

"Wasn't Kuroko the boy that was raped?" Tsueda looked at Misses Murasakibara who closed her eyes in pain.

"Yes, it was. Atsushi raped him after being told by Akashi to do so." Tatsuya clenched his fists and looked down. "Akashi seems to have been a good teacher and educator for Atsushi but due to certain reasons, he changed in their second year of middle-school. You might say he snapped. He made various boys, including Atsushi, rape that Omega boy. It was hushed up and Midorima took over Atsushi's care because Akashi was clearly unfit to continue doing so."

"Oh god." Misses Murasakibara put her hands over her mouth. "I didn't know that."

Tsueda only blanched and looked at Tatsuya with wide eyes.

He looked at his boyfriend and found him not perturbed by any of this. It was the story how he knew it. Akashi had been someone he trusted and he had turned bad and made him do a bad thing. He had been scolded heavily for it and for years he had thought that Akashi turning bad was his fault. By now Tatsuya wasn't sure if Atsushi still believed that or if he had gotten through to him that none of this was his fault. Except for listening to Akashi when his heart told him that he had gotten a bad order. But Tatsuya did not expect his mentally deficient boyfriend to stand up to his parental figure at fourteen years old. He didn't even stand up to him now. Everyone taught Atsushi that following social rules and parental advice was rewarded, he wasn't taught to question the rules given to him. No one could expect him to go against what his minders told him. Atsushi was exactly as good as the people looking after him. It did not reflect on him, it reflected on them. One day it would reflect on Tatsuya.

"I see why you were so enraged when I said I wanted to confer with Akashi over Atsushi's future." Tsueda had finally found his voice again. "That he pays for Atsushi's education ... is that hush money?"

"Someone like Akashi does not need hush money." At least of this Tatsuya was pretty sure. No one would believe a mentally deficient boy and not even Kuroko himself seemed inclined to report his former team captain. Top national student, student council president of the most prestigious school in the country, captain of a top achiever sport's team, sole heir to the leading national firm, most likely he even was royalty or something. "He pays because at least before he turned bad, he genuinely cared for Atsushi. He respects him for his athletic abilities."

Most likely it had something to do with Midorima. Tatsuya did not claim to understand the whole dynamic but from what he got, Midorima seemed to be something like the right-hand man cleaning up Akashi's mess and keeping everything from blowing up. He had even taken over Atsushi's care for one and a half years even though he didn't even like Atsushi and was deeply annoyed by how much attention Atsushi needed.

Tsueda looked at Atsushi with doubt before he very cautiously asked: "Has Akashi ever done anything sexual to you?"

"Nah, he likes male Omegas." Atsushi scratched his ear, uninterested in the topic. "Can we go to dinner now? I'm hungry."

Tatsuya squeezed his boyfriend's hand and smiled up at him. He gently chided: "First of all, we need to show your mother her room. You could offer to take her luggage there if you want this to go faster."

"Mom, shall I take your bag?" He held out his hand.

She handed it over, still stunned into silence. Her eyes were full of unshed tears. Tatsuya couldn't stop the vicious thought that she should have looked for suitable care for her son instead of keeping him clutched to her until giving him to a mentally unstable thirteen-year-old and even listening to him breaking off their contact. But it was no use. What was done was done. It didn't help to hold it over her. Akashi paid and Midorima had looked for a suitable school. No matter how much damage they had wrought, both of them had done more for Atsushi than anyone else before.

More than all of that, it scared him that he began to sympathize with an Omega-rapist. It scared him how his expanding reluctance to interact with Atsushi's mom was something he had in common with Akashi.

By the time they went to dinner, they had found new topics to talk about. Tsueda and Misses Murasakibara shared a liking to some singers and Atsushi even knew some of them. It was heart-warming to see him share in a normal conversation. Normally, when anyone talked, Atsushi would simply keep silent. Often he would even zoom out after some time because just following the conversation was too much for him. It wasn't much that he said but he was making a real effort to join in the conversation. Whenever he saw his boyfriend getting tired of concentrating this much, he would kiss him and tell him what a good boy he was and how well he was behaving. So when they parted after dinner and decided on a time and place to meet for going to the shrine to watch the sunrise, Tatsuya had no problem to follow Atsushi to his dorm room and stream a bit of the annual singing show over his phone before they went to sleep.

Getting up at five o'clock in the morning was a real pain. Not for Tatsuya – but waking up Atsushi and getting him to do his morning routines was a hassle. Even today, everything had to follow the normal course, so Atsushi needed one hour in the bath. Tatsuya had forgotten to have him lay out his clothing for today yesterday, so he did it himself to avoid a crisis. Routines should not be disturbed. He reminded Atsushi that he would get him at a quarter to six before running over to his own dorm and freshening himself up.

By some miracle, Atsushi had not gone back to sleep and not cut on his hygiene. Tatsuya controlled his teeth and clothes, giving him perfect marks on his morning plan before they set off. Misses Murasakibara and teacher Tsueda were both already waiting for them, but they weren't late. Tatsuya was rather proud of Atsushi for being able to do so.

They set off to go to the shrine. Tsueda carried a flashlight to guide them safely through the masses of snow that piled two meters high on the side of the road. The poor people freeing the roads must have been up all night. Tatsuya certainly didn't envy them. Thanks to their work, they reached the shrine safely. It seemed like Northerners were either a very religious lot or already immune to the cold and darkness – the shrine was packed with people. Tatsuya took Atsushi's hand, so he

wouldn't get lost. They went up to the box in front of the altar where he gave his boyfriend some coins. Together they threw them in, clapped twice and prayed. Or whatever Atsushi did, either way he was standing still while Tatsuya prayed. Tsueda and Misses Murasakibara prayed beside them. Afterwards, they looked for a good place to watch the sunrise.

All the good spots were already gone of course. They had to stand a bit further back. By now, Tatsuya had also calmed down a bit. Here in Akita, even if Atsushi got lost, he would always find his boyfriend again. With his height and his purple hair, he stood out. It wasn't the same as in Tokio where everything was big and colorful. This easy, normal world suited Atsushi a lot more. If a basketball career or a restaurant did not work out, they could simply work some fields here. Anyone could use a farmer with Atsushi's build.

With a smile on his lips he put his arms around his boyfriend and leaned against him. Atsushi reacted in kind and slung an arm around his shoulders. It was pleasantly warm. Now that Atsushi had not only gained more muscle but also a bit of fat, he felt good to hold. One could not see his spine as much as before, even though you could still count his ribs. Hopefully his boyfriend would fill out over the next few months. Maybe some of his muscles would buff out as well, that would be nice to touch. Right now, he felt as strung as a cat, just without the fur.

They watched the sunrise in silence. Tatsuya got a bit sleepy, enjoying the warmth of Atsushi's body and his scent. At some point Atsushi seemed to decide to simply pick him up and carry him. Tatsuya fell asleep on his shoulder.