

Not good enough

Von Gepo

Kapitel 12: Bubble distortions

Tsueda had called him out to come to him at lunch. The teacher only needed one look to smile and say: "You're glowing, you know?"

"I know." Tatsuya came to stand in front of him with a smile. "So what do you need me for?"

"I called Murasakibara's mother about the trip and she wanted to talk to you. She knows that you are her son's boyfriend and that you have been very good for him. Do you have time to talk to her now?"

"Of course!" He was let into the teacher's lounge and brought to one of the many compartmentalized desks here. Tsueda typed a number and exchanged greetings before giving him the phone. Well, here they go. "Good morning?"

"Good morning. This is Murasakibara Aiko."

"Hello, Misses Murasakibara. This is Himuro Tatsuya. How are you doing?" Polite was always best. She sounded a bit fragile, unsure about herself, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Oh, thank you, I am fine. How are you?"

"Perfect right now. I am very happy with your son. You raised a good boy." Good thing that Alex had taught Taiga and him some manners in young years.

"Thank you very much." She sounded embarrassed though. "I don't think I had much to do with it. He had had good teachers."

"That he has. Teacher Tsueda is really looking out for the boys." What else could he say? "Atsushi is a sensitive boy that looks out for others. I am sure that this comes from you." It wasn't hard to guess with how shy she sounded.

"Oh, yes, that may be ... it is new though. Until now he mostly looked out for himself. Not that that is bad thing."

"He looks out for me and he cares a lot. He notices a lot more than I would have thought. He surprises me positively." True again, he had expected worse last night. Atsushi had been really, really good. On the trip as well, he had always checked his scent.

"I am happy to hear that. I feared you might be ... well. A lot of people pity him once they get to know him."

"Atsushi doesn't need pity. I am very proud of what he can accomplish despite his limitations. He really tries his best everyday." None of what he said was a lie. Why did it feel like he had to persuade this woman of her son's worth?

"Thank you for acknowledging that. My son should be happy to have met someone like you." Her voice was a bit more strong now. "Have you been on a trip with him yet? He needs a lot of special care."

"I am aware. We have been to the InterHigh preliminaries together for a week and I was in charge of his care." The biggest problem had as always been his food budget. "There were some minor problems like trying to omit toothpaste but all in all it worked out."

"That's reassuring. You know, except for basketball camps Atsushi has never been on holiday. We went when he was really small but since the accident ... well, it hasn't been easy. Especially financially. I am so glad I was able to get a stipend for this school. One of his middle-school friends looked after him and helped me so much with him. It's the first school where teachers are looking after him and he is actually learning something. Elementary school was a disaster and when they told he had to go to middle-school, that it was the law ... but he had some really good friends in middle-school that helped him and taught him reading and writing. I am so glad that there are boys like them and you that look after my son." She gave a tone somewhere between smiling and sobbing. "Thank you so much."

"Err ... sure. No problem. So can I go on vacation with Atsushi?" He did not really expect her to say no at this point. It felt too easy though. She didn't even know him. And who were those middle-school friends?

"Of course. America, right? Teacher Tsueda told me. You need to get a pass, correct? I promised Teacher Tsueda that I'll send my consent for him to get a pass. He also needs a visa, right? Do you know how much they cost?" Her voice lowered again. It was shame. She was ashamed of being poor, ashamed of having a son she could show to no one. What a shame – she could not see how perfect Atsushi was.

"Don't worry, I'll pay for those. I want to take him with me after all."

"Oh, thank you. Thank you." It had been a sob, he was sure. She had a nasal voice by now. So she was crying and trying her best not to let him know. "Don't forget his allergy to penicillin. He should not be alone for more than half an hour. And if he cries, give him his stuffed panda. He really loves that panda."

"Sure. I know the one." By now he felt like crying himself. How could one woman sound so helpless and desperate? "He'll have plenty of opportunity to play basketball and my parents will keep him well-fed."

"Yes, that is a hardship. Don't give him too many sweets. He acts out when he is high on sugar."

"Don't worry, I know, I'll keep his quota. He wouldn't remember his hygiene if I were to give him more sweets than allowed." Had others given him sweets out of pity and destroyed his daily routines that way?

"Good, good." She was openly sobbing. "Please bring him back safely."

"I will. I promise." Could they please end this call? "It was nice talking to you."

"Yes, thank you. Goodbye. Thank you."

He put down the phone with a deep sigh and turned to Tsueda. They just looked at each other for a moment before Tatsuya asked: "Is she always like this?"

"If she cried and ended up saying the same again and again, then yes, she is." The teacher slowly nodded. "She is ... overwhelmed with her son's care."

"That is an understatement." He looked around and saw that most other teachers were occupied and did not seem to be listening in. "She said that Atsushi got a stipend for this school. One of his middle-school friends organized that?"

"Murasakibara was very lucky. He went to Teiko middle-school which not only had the highest ranking basketball team through which he got a sports stipend but also hosted the two brightest minds of his generation. That would be Akashi Seijuro and Midorima Shintaro. They always challenge each other for the top spot at national

exams. Both seem to have taken pity on him. They spent their free time teaching the boy, paid his food expenses and found this school for him. Mister Midorima even brought him here because his mother cannot handle him by herself."

He remembered the name Akashi. That was the basketball team's captain, right? So Atsushi knew some pretty important people that had taken him under their wing. If his mother was unable to accompany a train ride, since when had he had structure plans? Had those two middle-schoolers been the ones to keep him in line?

"And now his mother has to pay for food." Tatsuya sighed. "Teacher Tsueda, I know I might be repeating myself but Atsushi still does not get enough food. You can see every rib on him. You can even see his spine. He really, really needs more food."

His teacher just nodded and looked away. After a moment he admitted: "I have already asked the principal. There is no way but to bill his mother. Mister Midorima said that if any problems occurred I should call ... I am still debating if I should. If Mister Akashi still cares about the boy--"

"You want to ask two high-school freshman for money?" Tatsuya raised an eyebrow.

"It's why I haven't done that yet. It sounds ridiculous." Tsueda shook his head. "But those two are rich, so maybe ... it certainly wouldn't hurt them. I looked at my own finances but I don't have enough."

"Two rich, smart kids who conveniently care for a social case?" Tatsuya knew he was unfair and that he should not take this tone with a teacher but he felt more angry than at Taiga's flight. "I can't believe that's the best this country has to offer."

"His stipend is already paid by Akashi!" Tsueda groaned in frustration. "Those aren't normal high-schoolers, okay? Akashi is heir to the Akashi cooperation and Midorima is heir to the Midorima family household, those two are in the most prominent families in the country. Akashi is one of the princes, he's in line for the throne. Those aren't normal boys. For them, raising Murasakibara to what he is today was a pet project. They did that next to running companies and winning three basketball championships in a row. They aren't called miracles for nothing."

"You put a lot on the shoulders of sixteen-year-olds." Himself included. "Then by all means call them. I can't stand seeing my boyfriend starve in front of my eyes."

"I wish the world was different." Teacher Tsueda hung his head. "I wish someone cared for boys like Murasakibara."

"I do." Tatsuya passed the teacher by and left the lounge. It was better than saying something he would regret later. Teacher Tsueda was doing everything he could, the situation was just bad. At least Atsushi was in a good place where people even cared. No one had cared in elementary school.

He only got here because two geniuses had nothing better to do in their spare time. It made Tatsuya so mad, he wanted to punch a wall.

He found Atsushi sitting under their usual tree with empty boxes of food around him. In his lap was one that still held one piece of karaage. When his boyfriend noticed him he shouted: "I saved you some food!"

Tatsuya couldn't help but smile. He really loved that boy to pieces. He greeted him with a kiss before being fed some chicken. That one piece was not exactly enough for lunch but it was better than nothing. The more important thing was that Atsushi had remembered that he might not have enough time to get lunch after being called to the teacher's lounge. And he had really saved him a bit of his own precious food.

"Thank you." Tatsuya cuddled up to him. "It was delicious."

Atsushi beamed a smile. The food container ended up like all others – strewn around

him. Tatsuya would make him tidy up at the end of lunch. But not now. Now he simply wanted to enjoy the arms around his whole torso.

"I talked to your mom."

"Oh?" His boyfriend looked at him in interest.

Should he say something about her total lack of self-confidence? How bad it must have been with a mother that felt overwhelmed and cried every time her son was mentioned? Was Atsushi even aware how wrong that was and how much better he deserved?

"I asked her if we might be allowed to visit my parents in the holidays. She said it's okay. Would you like to go on vacation?" He knew his smile was a bit strained. But no. He would say none of that. Atsushi only had this one mother.

"Will there be food?" He looked excited.

"There will be hamburgers and donuts and pizza and even ice-cream for good boys." Of course that would interest his boyfriend the most. "My parents live in Los Angeles, that is in America."

"We are going to America?" Atsushi grinned.

"We will be going to America for a week, yes. Do you want to?"

"Yes!"

Great. Now he just had to explain to his mother that his boyfriend was more interested in food than nervous about meeting possible in-laws. And really, why should he? Meeting people meant being met by either pity or disdain. It wasn't like meeting people was a good prospect in any way. Of course Atsushi would concentrate on the food. It was so damn sad.

"Atsushi?" He tightened his embrace. "Can you tell me more about middle-school?"

The giant simply nodded and looked at him. Maybe he was supposed to pose a question.

"Akashi and Midorima. Who are they?" Being straight was always the most intelligent with his boyfriend.

"Akashi was my basketball team captain. Midorima was vice-captain."

Well, yes, he had gathered that much. Two geniuses that challenged each other for about anything. How to ask what he really wanted to know? He said: "I heard that they helped you with school stuff."

"Yeah." Atsushi looked deeply annoyed at the memory. "Akashi was really nice. He was good at explaining things. But I made him mad in our second year. Then he never helped me again. Instead Mido-chin taught me. Mido-chin is really strict. He always said I was lazy. But he gave me money when I did my plans right. Akashi made those plans."

"How did you make Akashi mad?" So this Akashi guy was the first one to actually care for Atsushi. Only one year – in one year he made a boy that made his mother cry at every opportunity into someone able to read and write and win basketball matches.

"I was really angry that day. The kids in my class had said really mean things. Mine-chi had not been coming to practice for days and coach said that it was alright. So I said I don't want to go to practice too. Akashi got angry and I said I don't listen to weak people." Atsushi's voice got smaller. So he knew he had been bad that day. "We decided on a match. I nearly beat Akashi but something changed. It was like he became a whole new person. His smell changed and his stance and his eyes. And then he trashed me."

"He beat you?" Tatsuya looked up in alarm.

"He won the match. I had no chance." Atsushi was slightly shivering. "He never turned

back. He stayed that mean, cruel person. He never helped me again. He made us to do bad things."

"Like what?" Tatsuya held him tighter. Why was his boyfriend shivering? Was he so afraid of Akashi? It sounded like some kind of strange split personality thing. Like in the movies where nice people suddenly turned into vicious killers.

"That rape thing. He told me to rape Kuro-chin. He told Mido-chin too and Mido-chin also did because ... fear. Mido-chin was afraid of Akashi. I was afraid of him too. This other Akashi was very mean."

Okay, so this Akashi who was some kind of very important person had a split personality with a nice person and one that pressured his friends into raping other friends. What the fuck? How did no one ... oh, who was he kidding. No one would lock up a royal prince in a psychiatric ward. Princes could do everything. Really, some of the sexual offenders here had some well-known names. They were just let loose on humanity without control.

"I am sorry you had to meet such a scary person." What else could he say?

"It's my fault Akashi got this way. I made him go bad." Atsushi was still shivering. His eyes glistened over slightly.

"No! No, Atsushi, it's not your fault!" Damn, he wished he knew something more about split personalities than just watching some B-rated movies. "You triggered that change, yeah, but those personalities were there before. It's not your fault. It's just how Akashi is."

"You think so?" His boyfriend looked at him thoughtfully. "That would be good. No one blamed me. I thought they were being nice."

Really? Atsushi was able to get the concept that sometimes people thought one thing but said another? Yeah, of course, society ruled that some people would tell him what a nice boy he was, even if he did something bad. So he knew that not every word said was meant like that.

"I really don't think it's your fault." The bell was ringing. "Oh, it's that late? Hurry, we have to tidy up here. Come on, up, we need to pick up all these boxes."

"Such a bother." Atsushi moved like a snail.

"Only good boys get sweets, Atsushi. Good boys tidy up and are punctual."

His boyfriend groaned but began to pick up his trash.