### All You Need Is Love

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**All You Need Is Love**

by **Jmetropolis**

**Summary**

Midorima Shintarō did not have a happy childhood. He didn't expect the rest of his life to turn out much better until fate intervened teaming him up with the most ridiculous (ravishing), infuriating (infatuating), careless (caring) person he'd ever laid eyes on.
A collection of MidoTaka drabbles chronicling their journey from friends to lovers to family.
Midorima Shintarō walked home from school along the path he always took. It wasn’t the most direct route home, but it was the one he was most comfortable with. There was something to be said for continuity. There was safety and familiarity in profoundly ingrained habits and a certain reassurance in retracing one’s well-worn steps.

He walked beneath the shade of the saffron ginkgo trees that lined the wide streets of the quiet residential neighborhood and was careful to avoid stepping on the cracks in the sidewalk. His home was the one at the end of the block. The house itself was deeply ensconced within its large, lush lot and protected from prying eyes by a tall stone wall. Still, the cobalt blue roof tiles of the two-story structure revealed their beauty as they came into view when Shintarō approached the property.

Some of his classmates stopped at the konbini on the way home to share a popsicle, others stayed behind to shoot hoops at the park by school, but Shintarō made sure he headed home straight from practice. It wasn’t like any of the other kids ever asked him to join them. Besides, he was a big brother now. He had a baby sister he wanted to play with before he did his homework and practiced the piano and did everything he needed to do to prepare himself for the next day.

Shintarō had lived in the house with the blue roof all of his life, but he didn’t know any of his neighbors. He often played by himself behind the safety of the large stone wall that hid a sizable koi pond, a small tea house, and a meticulously landscaped, traditional garden.

His was the largest and grandest among a cluster of palatial homes on a quiet side street dotted with the dwellings of other well-to-do inhabitants which included a famous author and the ambassador of a country so large, it was its own continent. His father had traveled there once for a medical conference where he was the keynote speaker. Shintarō’s father was gone often.

Shintarō supposed his mother missed his father an awful lot when he was away on business. She would cry buckets when he wasn’t home. Then again, she did a lot of crying and yelling when he was home. Shintarō didn’t think he ever wanted to be married. He was glad their house was set on such a big lot where no passerbys could hear what went on inside, unlike the smaller homes that were pasted to each other near school.

He had forgotten the key to the front door this morning in his rush to get to school to attend an early morning, optional review class, but he wasn’t worried. There was always someone at home to let him in. He pushed the button on the intercom embedded into the stone wall next to a plaque bearing his family name and gave a small grin for the camera. The metal doors of the gate swung open instantly allowing him inside.
He made his way along the paved walkway and was pleased to find the front door already slightly ajar and waiting for him to push his way through.

There was no one there to greet him when he took his shoes off and left them behind in the genkan, but it didn’t bother Shintarō in the slightest. He knew that the house was teeming with people, they were just trained to remain behind the scenes and make their presence undetectable unless it was absolutely necessary. When he was younger, he used to like to think it was a long-running game of hide-and-seek. He wondered if that funny cyan-haired kid in his class had gone through the same training.

He walked into the large, spacious kitchen and took a bite of a cookie from a pile Nanny had left for him on the counter before reaching for the stainless-steel handle of the double-door refrigerator. There, on the inside of the door, was a row of chilled oshiruko cans for his taking. He allowed himself a single can a day as a reward for his hard work – good nutrition and denying baser impulses was important to Shintarō’s self-disciplined existence – even though he didn’t think there would be anyone to tell him any better if he decided to drink all of them at once. He wasn’t sure who refilled the space the can he took had vacated, but there was always exactly eight of them waiting for him when he got home the next day.

He picked up his school bag off the counter and made his way upstairs. He imposed upon himself a strict after school regimen and homework was always the primary order of business when he got home. Shintarō wanted to become a doctor so he could attend medical conferences and see his father more often.

But first he stopped by the nursery to see his little sister. Unlike the other people who worked at the house, Nanny didn’t play hide-and-seek. She was always visible and always gave Shintarō a big smile when she saw him. People didn’t often smile at Shintarō.

She hadn’t been Shintarō’s nanny. This nanny had come along when his sister was born. Shintarō’s last nanny had gone away after he’d accidentally called her “Mommy.” She must not have liked that very much and Shintarō made sure not to repeat that mistake again.

Nanny was on the floor of the nursery helping Shuzuko play with a set of building blocks. He sat down beside them and the baby climbed onto his lap. She was such a happy little girl and he loved her dearly.

Shintarō had been an only child for 10 years before Shuzuko arrived. When she was born, it was like a ray of sunshine in the house. For a while, his father had been home almost every day to spend time with the new baby and his mother had been so pleased.

He didn’t want to leave the baby, but he couldn’t afford to put off his homework much longer. He still had piano practice and exactly 60 minutes of leisurely reading to do before Nanny called him down to dinner. He picked up his school bag off the floor of the nursery, kissed the top of Shuzuko’s emerald green hair and bade farewell to Nanny who smiled fondly at him.

On the way to his room he saw a suitcase outside his parents’ bedroom and felt a pang of excitement when he realized his father had unexpectedly come home. He hadn’t seen him since summer break and the leaves were already starting to turn colors.

He burst into the large master bedroom only to find his mother there packing her things. She was crying again.

“You’re leaving,” he said stating the obvious, yet not quite believing his eyes.
“Shintarō go to your room,” she ordered not bothering to look at him. It was neither an affirmation nor a denial.

There were three suitcases on the large bed, cracked open and filled with her things.

“Please, don’t leave,” he said dropping his school bag, not caring where it landed or that in its half-open state it spewed its contents onto the floor of his parents’ bedroom, including a soft, green hand puppet.

“You don’t know what you are asking of me.” She told him. “You don’t understand my circumstances.”

In his desperation he threw his arms around her slender waist.

It wasn’t a hug, not really. Hugging was not something they did in their family. His father hardly touched him and at best his mother would pat the top of his head on occasion. What he was trying to accomplish was to anchor her down using all of his weight.

He was tall for his age (taller even than some of his male teachers) and towered considerably over his tiny mother. He couldn’t help but think how very small and fragile she felt. And yet he was terrified of her. Terrified of what she would do to him if she walked out of his life. It was that desperate thought that prompted the normally quite middle schooler to plead with her, “Please don’t do this.”

"I'm not in a good place."

"But this is your home," he begged.

"Shintarō, you are creasing the fabric," she said firmly, as she removed her son’s hands from her silk obi.

"But I did everything I could to prepare myself today.” At least he thought he had, but he must have missed something because she was leaving. “I'll be better, I promise.”

"Shintarō, I don’t know what you’re talking about. You are being a child,” she said to her young son. “You must not cry. You’ll set a bad example for your sister.”

If he couldn’t get her to stay, then at least he could wait for her. “When are you coming back?” he asked.

"Honestly, Shintarō, these questions.” She zipped the last of her suitcases.

“Answer me,” he demanded.

Sazuna sighed in exasperation. “I don’t know.” Slender, freshly manicured hands dried tear-stained cheeks, mindful of the thick, black rimmed glasses that resided there. It was an unguarded moment of tenderness so uncharacteristic of his mother that it made him sob audibly.

She let her hands fall to her sides quickly as if they’d touched something hot and painful. She averted his eyes and turned her back on him. Her obi was tied in a taiko musubi and depicted a lonely embroidered koi struggling to swim beneath a strong and overpowering waterfall.

“Nanny Hamasaki is here, Shintarō,” she reminded him, refusing to turn around. “She’ll cook you breakfast and make your lunch and tuck you in to bed at night the way she always does.”

Her back was still turned to him as he watched her reach for the gold, oyster-shaped clasp of her
South Sea pearl necklace. It had been a present from Shintarō’s father on their first wedding anniversary. Sazuna hardly ever took it off.

She walked over to her vanity. Nestled among her pretty knickknacks was the elegant navy blue velvet box it had come in. She placed the strand inside closed the lid and left them behind.

AN: If you follow me on Tumblr, you'll know I've spent the last six months writing MidoTaka drabbles based on this prompt meme. Now that I'm finally done, I will be updating this story more frequently. If you'd prefer not to wait for the chapter updates and don't mind reading the prompts out of order, you can find them all on my fic page. Though I suspect there will be some changes/edits made to the prompts as I post them here.

Chapter End Notes

Prompts: 3. “Please, don’t leave.” & 33. “Please don’t do this.”
Of course Takao shows up early. It’s like he does it to irk Shintarō or something.

Shintarō made it to the breakfast table at a quarter past seven. Not his usual time, but he’d had difficulty locating his lucky item. He’d eventually found it in his little sister’s room.

“Where’s Mother?” he asked when he sat down and realized he was the first one there.

“She’s still in bed, dear.” Nanny Hamasaki placed a plate of rice, eggs and grilled fish in front of Shintarō. She gave him a small comforting smile. Shintarō knew all too well what that smile meant.

“I’m taking Shuzuko to school later. Do you need a ride?”

Shintarō did not have to be at school until eight thirty.

“No,” he answered. And then, because he thought he might’ve inadvertently sounded cross with Nanny, he added, “There’s someone on their way to pick me up.”

“Oh?” Nanny asked and Shintarō did not like the interested look on her face. “Do you have a friend, dear?” She sounded delighted.

Shintarō felt his cheeks heat up in embarrassment. “He’s not a friend. He’s a nuisance,” he insisted, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

At least he didn’t have to worry about his ride for another fifteen minutes —

Shintarō’s thoughts were rudely interrupted by a persistent doorbell. He didn’t need to guess who it was. Even in pressing a button his classmate got under his skin.

"Don’t trouble yourself, dear,” Nanny said when she saw Shintarō hastily collecting his school things. “Finish your breakfast. I’ll answer the door.”

“No!” Shintarō shouted in alarm, startling Nanny with his unexpected outburst. And then, because he sounded suspicious even to his own ears, he toned it down a bit. “I mean. That’s not necessary. I was just leaving,” he said trying to sound aloof, disinterested and like his heart wasn’t jack hammering away in his ears.

Nanny started to protest, “But you’ve hardly touched your ——”

Shintarō did not wait for her to finish. He already knew she was going to point out that he'd barely eaten any of his breakfast. He had more pressing matters to attend to, namely keeping his worlds from colliding. And he needed to hurry if he wanted to keep Nanny from answering the door. With
his ceramic frog tucked under his arm and his schoolbag hanging off the opposite shoulder, he rushed out of the kitchen.

###

Shintarō took a moment to calm his nerves and peered through the peephole.

Takao was wearing his uniform in *that way*, in that casual disarray of his that infuriated Shintarō. The top button Takao's gakuran was loose which was inexplicable because Shintarō knew for a fact that it had never been put to its intended purpose, it had never been buttoned.

Even though it wasn’t even eight in the morning, Kazunari had already managed to wrinkle his trousers and how the heck was his uniform so faded, they’d barely started their second semester. It was like Takao didn’t buy new ones at the start of each term. *No good could possibly arise*, Shintarō thought, *in keeping company with such a careless man.*

And yet, tell that to his duplicitous heart. It was threatening to beat out of his chest. Reluctantly, Shintarō opened the front door just wide enough that he could squeeze through it.

Upon seeing his classmate, Kazunari's face lit up. *That reaction*, that smile on Takao's playful lips, that fond expression in Takao's sharp eyes that said he was happy to see him, they did unspeakable things to Shintarō’s stomach that had nothing to do with the unconsumed meal he'd left on the kitchen table.

"Nice digs you got here, Shin-chan." Takao wolf-whistled. "Really impressive. Aren't you going to invit – -"  

"Have you lost your damn mind?!" Shintarō snapped at the troublesome boy on his front step. He’d specifically told Takao that under no circumstances was he to set foot inside the gate. In fact, their meeting point wasn’t even supposed to be outside his property. It was *supposed* to be down the street.

"What do you mean, Shin-chan?" Kazunari asked all innocently.

"I’m certain I told you to meet me at the end of the block.” He reminded Takao.

"This is the end of the block.”

"No. This is my door step.”

Takao gave Shintarō a mock salute. “Door-to-door service, Shin-chan, you should be thanking me.”

Midorima could feel a vein throbbing on his forehead. *Thanking Takao, as if. He should be berating him.* The short man had no idea how much trouble he was causing Shintarō. The more he thought of it, the angrier Shintarō got.

Takao could’ve been *seen* and then Shintarō would have had to make introductions and then Nanny Hamasaki would want to invite Takao in for breakfast – - she’d want to feed him and ask him questions and fuss over Shintarō’s new “friend” and that just wouldn’t do. And to make matters worse, Shintarō would eventually have to explain to his nosy acquaintance why there was a woman who wasn’t his mother in his home taking care of him. The last thing Shintarō wanted to explain to anyone was his home life, least of all to Takao.

Shintarō caught Kazunari trying to look past him and peek inside the house. Shintarō quickly closed the front door.
“Aww, c’mon Shin-chan,” Takao protested, as if Midorima had popped his balloon. "We’ve got time. Aren’t you going to give me a tour?"

“No.” This brought up another point. "Who let you in the front gate?” Shintarō asked curtly.

"The guy with the funny hat,” Takao answered, balancing on the balls of his feel because he was a frivolous fool with a fidgeting problem.

"The guy with the –, it’s called a sugegasa,” Shintarō informed his less knowledgeable companion.

“I asked him if he was your dad, he said he wasn’t.” Evidently Takao had struck up a conversation with the gardener, who’d opened the front gate to a chatty stranger and his rickshaw. That much was clear.

Of course, the man in the pointy hat wasn’t Shintarō’s father. In all likelihood, Shintarō’s father wasn’t even in the country at the moment. That was part of the problem. It was the reason the breakfast table had been empty this morning. Which reminded Midorima that he had something to check up on before he went off to school.

Midorima handed Takao his schoolbag and his lucky item. “Wait here,” Shintarō instructed. “And don’t ring the doorbell. There’s no one home,” he lied.

Shintarō took the stairs two at a time. Having Takao outside was like having a ticking time bomb, he was on borrowed time.

He knocked on the door to his parents’ bedroom, when he didn’t hear a response, he slipped inside. His mother still had a sleeping mask over her eyes, but Shintarō knew she was awake. He could tell she’d already been crying this morning from the red, puffy state of her dainty nose and mouth.

She looked so tiny lying there at the center of a very large bed with the covers pulled up to her neck.

"Your father left last night,” she told him. Not bothering to come out from under her mask.

"Yes. I’m aware.” That much was obvious. He’d known that from his mother’s absence at the breakfast table. “Nanny is taking Shuzuko to school,” he informed her.

Not that his mother ever drove either of them to school or that she typically concerned herself with the minutiae of her children’s everyday lives. If it hadn’t been for nannies, Shintarō didn’t know how he or his sister would’ve survived this long.

Shintarō took a seat at the foot of the large bed. He eyed the spacious room anxiously for any clues, any signs that she’d take off again. It had been years since she’d done that, but the fear and uncertainty still dogged him when she got like this.

When he was younger, he’d hide her suitcases. He no longer did that, of course, but the urge to cling to her was still there.

The mornings after his father’s sudden departures were the worst. His mother would be in a slump for hours, sometimes days. She wouldn’t eat, she wouldn’t come out of her room.

Shintarō didn’t have a lot time. If he stayed here too long, Nanny Hamasaki might spot Takao while she was pulling out of the garage and that would not do. That wouldn’t do at all.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out an omamori. He’d purchased the amulet at a shrine a few
days ago as a precaution. His father had been home then and it was only a matter of time before she turned into this. She always turned into this when his father left them.

The amulet was for good luck and to ensure a happy marriage, though even Shintarō had reservations about how much a small prayer card in a brocade bag could accomplish. He placed the amulet on her night table.

He took a moment to gaze at her openly, taking advantage of the fact that her eyes were shielded behind a cashmere strip of cloth. She was small, fragile, so very weak and yet she had the power to wreck his whole world. She’d done it before when she’d left.

He quietly closed the door behind him, before heading down the stairs again to deal with that noisy idiot.

###

Shintarō returned to the front step in record time because he didn’t trust Takao to obey his instructions. He was actually surprised to find the man leaning against the rickshaw, Kerosuke waiting safely for Shintarō in the rear cart.

“Got any brothers or sisters, Shin-chan?” Takao asked as his much taller classmate approached him.

Midorima bristled at what he considered an impertinent question. “That’s none of your business,” he answered dismissively. Honestly, the less his classmate knew about him the better.

In fact, Shintarō had a little sister who’d turned six this year and had started school.

“I’ve got a sister,” Takao unsolicitedly informed him.

“Yes, I’m aware of that.” Shintarō had seen Takao’s sister a few times after school. She wore a middle schooler’s uniform and a red headband. It was clear where Takao was nicking the hair accessories he wore to practice to keep the fringe out of his eyes, not that Shintarō cared enough to keep track of such inconsequential trivialities. Though he’d previously assumed they’d belonged to a girlfriend, not that Takao’s love life was any of his concern.

“Are you ashamed of me Shin-chan?” Takao asked.

“Supremely.”

“Do I embarrass you?”

“All the time,” Midorima assured him.

Kazunari rubbed his chin with his thumb and index finger, a move he was no doubt copying from some trite detective show he’d seen on television. “Nah, that’s not it,” he said waving his hand dismissively. “There’s something else.”

Shintarō shifted uncomfortably under the hawkeye’s penetrating gaze. Nothing good came from an idiot who thought too much.

“You’re afraid to invite me into that fancy house of yours,” Takao announced and Shintarō’s head shot up. Kazunari’s face lit up like a light switch had been flipped inside that empty noggin of his. “Shin-chan, you’re embarrassed about something.”

“Nonsense,” Midorima denied. “What could I possibly have to feel embarrassed about?”
“I don’t know Shin-chan.” Takao threw his hands up in the air in a way that was most definitely not beguiling. “Could be anything. Maybe you collect dolls.”

“Those are ninja action figures,” Shintarō said affronted. They were kept in a glass display case. They were collector’s items. It wasn’t like he played with them or anything, not anymore.

“Stuffed animals?”

“Those are my little sister’s,” Shintarō informed him.

“Aha!” Takao said as if he’d just figured something out. “So you do have a sister.” The hawkeye sounded much too pleased with himself at having gotten this smidgen of personal information out of his tight-lipped teammate.

"It’s gotta be something really shameful," Takao posited. “I mean, I already know about the lucky items, so it’s gotta be something worse than that. Maybe you’ve got a huge porn collection in your room.”

Shintarō willed himself not to blush. He wasn’t Aomine. He most certainly did not have such filthy things in his possession, but sometimes just being teased by Takao was enough for his traitorous body to provide a reaction.

“That’s it! Isn’t it?” Takao laughed.

“Absolutely not,” Midorima said adamantly.

“Then why won’t you let me in?” Takao asked, almost pleadingly and Shintarō began to wonder whether the hawkeye was still talking about gaining admittance into the Midorima family home.

“Fool, we’ll be late for school,” Shintarō insisted because he couldn’t very well say the real reason. He’d had enough of this frivolous banter. He grabbed Kazunari by the strap of his schoolbag and pulled him closer to the rickshaw.

“It’s your parents!” Takao shouted. “You don’t want to introduce me to your parents.”

“Shut up, idiot! Are we going to play jan-ken-pon or will you agree to peddle?”

Takao knew a futile effort when he saw one. After all, he’d yet to beat Shin-chan at this alleged game of chance. How was that even statistically possible? “No need, Shin-chan,” he said defeatedly. “I’ll peddle.”

Takao pulled the rickshaw past the stone gates and onto the wide street lined with ginkgo trees outside the property. At the first traffic light, he stopped and turned back to look at Shintarō. “Someday,” he said grinning widely. “Someday you’ll let me in, Shin-chan. And then you’ll wonder why you didn’t do it sooner,” he cackled.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: 2. “Have you lost your damn mind!??”
Chapter Summary

Shin-chan takes a spill, Kazunari joins him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Baller

Midorima flexed his ankle experimentally as soon as his derriere landed on the threadbare cot in the nurse's office. He moved his foot to the left, then to the right and wiggled his long, slender toes until he was satisfied that each one had retained its full range of motion.

Takao, characteristically aware of what Shin-chan was doing and feeling uncharacteristically weighed down by guilt, tried to lighten the mood with a bit of convivial jocularity.

"You fainted … straight into my arms. You know, if you wanted my attention you didn’t have to go to such extremes," he teased his teammate, taking advantage of the fact that Miyaji wasn’t there. In Miyaji’s absence, the hawkeye could afford to flirt a bit more openly without fear of having to dodge flying tropical fruit.

"I didn’t faint, you idiot." Midorima frowned turning the full force of his fearsome, bespectacled glare at his foolish classmate. "I tripped. And it’s all your fault for not putting your balls away."

The “balls” Shintarō was referring to were the ones Nakatani had asked Kazunari to collect during their mid-afternoon practice.

Takao knew full well what Midorima had meant, of course, but that didn’t stop the hawkeye from snickering like a schoolboy at Shin-chan’s poor choice of words.

If it had been just the two of them, Kazunari would've cheekily commented that as a point guard he had excellent ball handling skills and would've saucily offered to give Midorima a demonstration. Not that stuffy, straightlaced Shintarō would ever take him up on that offer. But getting shot down would've still been worth it to see Shin-chan's face light up in embarrassment as he fumbled through his scandalized refusal.

"And they say you don’t have a sense of humor, Shin-chan," Takao informed him. "You’re the funniest person I know." Takao meant that sincerely. No one made him laugh like Midorima did and it wasn’t even intentional.

"How are we even in the same grade?" Midorima wondered aloud, bemoaning the sad state of affairs. Having a July birthday meant that he was one of the oldest in his year, but it still didn’t explain how incredibly juvenile his classmate was in comparison. The gap between their respective maturity levels was wide enough to comfortably accommodate a herd of elephants.

Ōtsubo laughed at Takao’s off-color joke despite himself, then tried to hide it by pretending to cough. Apparently, Takao’s idiocy had infected the captain too.
The three of them were in the infirmary waiting for the school nurse to materialize. The fact that she was absent from her post wasn't at all shocking. She also happened to be the librarian and one of the lunch ladies. The facilities at Shūtoku weren’t the only thing that had suffered from budget cuts. The staffing levels were pitiable to put it mildly.

Shūtoku’s perennial powerhouse status as a basketball school had resulted in its coach being somewhat spared from the worst of the austerity measures. Nakatani had been lucky in that he'd only been assigned an extra English class to teach – though given that Takao was one of the pupils in that class, the man could quibble with the term “lucky.” English may have been the hawkeye’s best subject, but that wasn’t saying much, all things considered.

Takao had thought that Nakatani was going to make him run laps until he either graduated or died from exhaustion for almost putting their leading scorer in traction.

Whatever punishment Coach ultimately meted out was the least of Kazunari’s preoccupations at the moment. More than anything, he was concerned with Midorima’s well being. The hawkeye knew he had feelings for Midorima. Now that he’d finally gotten his head out of his ass, Kazunari knew he didn’t just view Shin-chan as someone he played ball with. The team was full of those guys and Takao didn't pedal any of them home or go on outrageous scavenger hunts allover the city in search of whatever obscure trinket Oha Asa deemed worthy of magical powers that day for anyone else on the team. Of course, only Shin-chan had such particularly odd needs.

Still, the swiftness with which Kazunari had grown sick with worry when his teammate came crashing down on top of him surprised even the ordinarily cool as a cucumber point guard. It must've been written all over his face, because Nakatani's first instinct was not to punish Takao for his carelessness.

Coach had immediately dispatched Takao to make sure Midorima got his ankle checked out – and to run interference between the scatterbrained and overworked nurse and their short-tempered ace. But Midorima was too heavy for Takao to carry on his own and so their brawny captain had come along acting as a beefy crutch for Shintarō to lean on so he wouldn’t put any weight on that ankle as the three of them made their way to the infirmary.

Takao was secretly relieved Coach had sent him. There was no way he was going to pay attention in class (worse than usual) knowing that Shin-chan was in the infirmary. At least now, he could be at Shin-chan’s side. But not too close to his side. Given the thunderous glare Shin-chan was sporting he was liable to throttle the point guard. Takao was careful not to stand too close to the cot.

“It looks like you’ll be okay. No thanks to jabber jaws here,” Ōtsubo commented, noticing Shintarō's preoccupation with his talus. He tossed the Miracle an instant ice pack he’d found in a first aid kit while rummaging through the nurse’s cupboards.

Coach had tasked Takao with picking up the balls the team’s ace left in his wake of three-pointers. With anyone else, it would've been fine if he dillydallied a bit chatting with Kimura about card trading, but Shin-chan’s range was the entire court.

When Midorima turned around to shoot a three-pointer into the hoop at the opposite end of the court, one of the balls Takao was supposed to be picking up rolled between Midorima's legs bringing the green-haired giant down on top of Kazunari who’d been standing behind him.

Miraculously or maybe not so miraculously, Midorima made his shot, but he didn’t make his landing. Thankfully, Takao had been there to cushion his fall. If anything had happened to Midorima’s shooting hand -- if heaven forbid, he'd landed on it -- Takao wouldn’t have forgiven himself. As it
was, it appeared the ace had rolled his ankle, but hadn’t broken it.

Ōtsubo checked his watch. "Well, I’m off to class kids,” he announced, seeing as there was still no
sign of the nurse and he’d already done his duty of lugging the injured ace to the infirmary. “Try not
to kill our point guard,” he said to Midorima. “Having our top shooter defend murder charges would
put a real dent on our Winter Cup plans.”

“Hey!” Takao protested noticing Ōtsubo had said nothing about what a devastating impact losing
their star passer to an untimely death would have on the team's chances of winning.

Ōtsubo paused to nick a lollypop from the candy jar before heading out the door. He placed the
lollypop on his tongue for a few seconds before removing it. "Apple," he announced sounding
pleased.

Now that it was just the two of them in the infirmary, Takao inched closer to the small cot. Midorima
ignored him, continuing to press the cold compress against his aching ankle.

The hawkeye rubbed the side of his neck. His shoulder was smarting having borne the brunt of the
impact when he collided against the wooden floor of the gymnasium. Shin-chan was not light and
having all 79 kilograms of solid muscle fall on top of him had not been pleasant.

“Are you alright?” Midorima asked, noticing for the first time that Takao was wincing as he tried to
stretch the muscles on his back.

“I’m fine Shin-chan. Just a little sore, that’s all.”

“Do you … well … I mean… I could give you a massage?” Shintarō offered timidly.

Takao knew it wasn’t like Shin-chan to put himself out there and risk rejection.

He smiled at his friend and gladly accepted the kind overture. “Sure thing, Shin-chan. Thanks.”

Conventional wisdom among Shūtoku’s student body dictated that Midorima Shintarō was brash,
selfish, and incredibly rude. Takao knew better than that. Sure, Midorima was some of those things,
but he was also caring and thoughtful and incredibly generous.

Takao also knew that there weren’t a heck of a lot of opportunities for Shintarō to place his hands on
him. Takao knew this because he spent an exorbitant amount of time daydreaming in class, conjuring
fanciful and highly unlikely scenarios where Shin-chan would do just that. So Takao sure as hell
wasn't going to pass up on the opportunity when it had fallen so effortlessly on his lap.

Takao took a seat in front of Shintarō on the cot, mindful not to disturb the ankle resting on the ice
pack.

They were both still overheated from practice and Takao almost apologized for his sweaty state. But
then he felt Shin-chan tug at the hem of his practice jersey and Takao wordlessly complied, quickly
pulling the garment over his head and letting it fall beside him. He would’ve gladly set it on fire if
Shin-chan had asked him to.

Midorima proceeded to place his magic hands on Takao’s smitten shoulders. The hawkeye shivered
for reasons that had nothing to do with his exposed torso or the fact that Midorima’s left hand had
been holding an ice pack moments earlier.

As the shooting guard kneaded Kazunari’s sore back muscles, the hawkeye thought that Shin-chan
could add "purveyor of amazing massages" to his already impressive résumé.
It didn’t escape Takao’s attention that Midorima’s left hand was still bare from basketball practice and in all the commotion, the team’s ace hadn’t had the opportunity to bandage it back up. Takao would go fetch the sports tape from Midorima’s locker just as soon as they were done here. For now, the touch of Midorima’s bare fingers felt so good, a moan escaped from the hawkeye entirely on its own volition. Takao didn’t even realize he’d done it until his on-the-court partner smacked the back of his head.

“If you do that again, idiot, I’ll stop.”

Kazunari bit back the flirty retort that was trying to force its way out of his throat – a lewd, breathy, purposely suggestive No, Shin-chan, please don’t stop -- because the tsundere would make good on his promise and Takao wanted Midorima’s hands on his skin for eternity.

Takao thought that maybe having all 79 kilograms of Midorima Shintarō fall on top of him wasn’t so unpleasant after all. Then he decided to press his luck.

“Hey Shin-chan?”

“Hmmm?”

“You know I fell on my butt too,” he hinted.

Midorima went perfectly still for a moment as if mentally preforming all the risk/reward calculations – temporarily giving Kazunari unexpectedly inflated hopes that maybe he’d get more out of this massage -- before finally providing his response. "I’m afraid I can’t help you with that."

Chapter End Notes

4. “Do you…well…I mean…I could give you a massage?” & 38. “You fainted…straight into my arms. You know, if you wanted my attention you didn’t have to go to such extremes.”
Busted

Chapter Summary

Takao isn’t as slick as he thinks he is; then again Midorima isn’t so astute either.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Busted

“I’ve seen the way you look at me when you think I don’t notice,” Midorima announced to the night's sky, entirely unprompted on his and Takao's way out of the gym.

“Wha-?” Takao croaked, stopping dead in his tracks. He tried to sound shocked — shocked! — at such a baseless and unfounded accusation, but he wasn’t that good an actor. Shit. He’d been caught.

“You heard me,” Midorima doubled down with a calmness that was at odds with Takao’s now rapidly jackhammering heart.

Takao looked up, staring hopelessly at the moonless night. They were just outside the rusty confines of Shūtoku’s shoddy gym on their way to where they’d parked the rickshaw that morning. Though he was not particularly devout, a skeptic if there ever was one, Takao found himself praying for divine intervention.

It was just the two of them now as was their wont, by now they had a tried and true routine. The two of them had become as inseparable as a whisked egg. The upperclassmen had gone home leaving them to their nightly post-practice well, practice. No one else was interested in staying behind while the team's dorky and prickly ace sunk his eleventy-bajillionth three-pointer of the night.

Takao knew damn well how he looked at Midorima and it wasn’t the way one looked at a teammate. Hell, it wasn’t even the way one looked at a friend, even a best friend which undeniably they had become.

Admittedly, Takao hadn’t exactly been subtle about it, if Miyaji’s not-so-empty threats of projectile pineapples were any indication, but he didn’t think aloof, oblivious, painfully imperceptive Shin-chan had noticed. Midorima Shintarō may have been the smartest boy in Kazunari’s year, but he was surprisingly untutored when it came to reading social cues.

All those months of shamelessly flirting with Shin-chan and making passes at him – and not just on the court – had finally come home to roost for Kazunari.

Fuck. Takao couldn’t believe his misfortune. He was so stupid. He couldn’t believe he’d been so careless. He’d let himself get caught staring at Midorima when he could’ve just as easily relied on his expanded field of vision. What good was having a hawk’s eye if he didn't use it to stealthily spy on his teammate. Except, he had to admit, it wasn’t as satisfying using his mind’s eye to stare in awe at the bespectacled, emerald eyecandy that was Midorima Shintarō.

Takao was sweating bullets now. This was it. This was how he was going to ruin the best thing that had ever happened to him. He didn't think he was even mildly exaggerating. Midorima Shintarō had
been one of those unexpected blessings Kazunari had certainly never asked for and hadn't even wanted at first.

Takao swallowed thickly and played dumb. In an attempt to buy himself more time, he said, “And how’s that Shin-chan?” He couldn't help but wince at how wobbly, how thoroughly stripped of its usual confidence, his own voice sounded.

Midorima scoffed, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. “Like you’ve got a problem with me or something,” he responded after what -- to Takao anyway -- felt like an eternity.

“P-problem?” Well, yeah. Being in love with your rival turned best friend would definitely qualify as a problem. Especially given that Shin-chan hadn’t expressed any interest in him outside of the basketball court or any romantic interest in anyone else whatsoever as far as Takao knew, though he did have some suspicions or rather fits of envy whenever Midorima traded texts with a certain ex-captain.

“There’s no need to deny it Takao. I already know what it is.” Midorima declared authoritatively.

“You do?” Takao said cautiously. His stomach dropped to his knees. It was like he was on one of those thrill rides except he only felt terror and none of the promised thrill. “And you’re okay with it?”

“Well, it’s not the healthiest emotion in the world to have. There are certainly more constructive ways to go about it, but I admit, I too have succumbed to human weaknesses from time to time.”

“You have?” This was getting more and more incredible. Takao didn’t think there was anyone on the planet that could capture the methodical, obsessive heart of Midorima Shintarō.

“Don’t act so surprised, Takao. It’s a petty emotion, but even I can admit it’s one I’ve had from time to time.”

Okay, now Takao had to know. There was someone out there who Shin-chan had his eye on and he needed to size up the competition, because there was no way he was giving up his Shin-chan without a fight.

Deep down in the cobwebbed recesses of Takao's treacherous mind thoughts of red hair and shogi and declarations of absoluteness began to stir. “Who is it?” He blurted out before he thought better of it.

“The details are not important, Takao. Suffice it to say, that I too have fallen into the sharp clutches of jealousy.”

“Jealousy?” Okay. Now Takao was thoroughly confused. He’d thought Shin-chan was talking about love.

“There's no need to act daft.”

“Who’s acting?” Takao seriously had no clue what Shin-chan was prattling on about. Usually the shoe was on the other foot.

“You are jealous of me, of course.”

“I am?” At one point in Takao’s short life that had been true. He and his middle school buddies had been supremely jealous of one Midorima Shintarō. They had been envious of all the Miracles, really. But the other Teikō twits had hardly shown up to that one game against Takao’s middle school.
Midorima Shintarō, on the other hand, had run up the score on them. He’d played against them liked he’d played against every other team, decimating the scoreboard and beating them so badly Takao had wanted to quit the sport. He’d been beaten by all the Miracles, but it was Midorima Shintarō he’d set his sights on.

He no longer felt that way about the shooting guard. Not anymore. He couldn’t get enough of the guy. He even found his overbearing personality and eccentricities endearing, or at the very least supremely entertaining. He no longer viewed Midorima as a rival. He was more like a partner and they had a common goal: the Winter Cup. At some point that annoying nickname he’d saddled the green-haired boy with had somehow morphed into a term of endearment.

“You’re jealous of my test score,” Midorima explained with more than a tinge of annoyance as if Takao was purposely forcing him to state the obvious.

“I am?” Takao was surprised and almost giddy with relief that this was what Midorima had been blithering about. “I mean, of course I am, Shin-chan. You caught me.”

Thank you, he silently whispered to the night’s sky. This was it. He’d found his out. Shin-chan you oblivious marshmallow.

“Well, I hope you know that while academic acumen comes naturally to me, I still work hard at it. There’s not a day that goes by when I don’t read at least two chapters ahead of the assigned material. It’s all part of doing everything humanly possible to be prepared,” Midorima said matter-of-factly. “I know you thought stealing that lucky pencil of mine –”

“Borrowing, Shin-chan. I left a note –”

“—was going to help you pass that exam,” Midorima continued as if he hadn’t been rudely interrupted. “But you should know, Takao, that lucky items are no substitute for hard work.”

“Of course not, Shin-chan, I –”

“Now, I’ve tallied up your tests scores and it seems you’re in danger of having to attend compulsory remedial lessons during summer break.”

Shit. That was news to Takao. He hadn’t actually done the math, but if Shin-chan was saying it, it had to be true. If he had to spend his summer break in the classroom, that meant he couldn’t spend his free time playing basketball or hanging out with Shin-chan.

“No need to fear though. I’ve decided to bestow upon you the benefit of my superior intellect.”

“Oh?” That sounded promising.

“I’ve decided to tutor you from now until the next exam.” Midorima did that thing where he pushed his glasses up again. It was too dark for Takao to know for certain, but he could’ve sworn there was a faint blush on the tsundere’s prominent cheekbones. “It’s for the good of the team, of course. If your grades slip any lower, you’ll be unable to play and everyone will suffer.”

Takao smiled. He didn’t particularly enjoy studying, but if Shin-chan was going to be there, it didn’t sound too bad. “Alright Shin-chan. I’ll take you up on that offer. That’s really magnus of you.”

“It’s ‘magnanimous,’ you fool. I see we’ll have to add vocabulary to your lessons.

“Whatever you say Shin-chan.” Takao smiled cheerfully. This conversation had turned out much better than he’d expected.
Chapter End Notes

22. “I’ve seen the way you look at me when you think I don’t notice.”
Behind the Eight Ball

Chapter Summary

Takao has a field day with Shin-chan’s lucky item until he doesn’t.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Behind the Eight Ball

Takao was trying to scarf down what was left of a jar of pickled plums so he could head out the door and over to Midorima’s house and then possibly the toy store on their way to school.

It wasn’t much of a breakfast, but it would have to do. He’d gotten a late start this morning and there was a lucky item to procure.

Takao had already watched the Oha Asa broadcast on his phone and knew what was coming next. Cancer was ranked twelfth today and so naturally an anxious Shin-chan would want to have his lucky item right away.

But the fates had smiled down on Kazunari, at least for the time being, when he got a text from his odd-ball ace on his way out the door. Shin-chan’s text read as follows, Today's lucky item has been secured. See you OUTSIDE the gates soon. Shin-chan was referring to the stone wall that ran the perimeter of his palatial residence.

Takao chuckled at the text from his classmate. He knew Shin-chan could be very unfelicitous and very unwelcoming especially when it came to Takao setting foot inside his enormous house.

The hawkeye was convinced Shin-chan was embarrassed about something. He just wasn’t sure what it could possibly be. He didn't know what elephantine secret Shin-chan was hiding in that museum-sized abode of his, but he was determined to someday find out.

###

They both had English their first period and were making their way toward Nakatani’s classroom on the second floor when Takao inquired about Shin-chan’s lucky item.

“Can I see it?” he asked already reaching for the black, plastic object resting on the palm of Midorima’s taped hand.

Shintarō raised said hand over his verdant head. “You see with your eyes,” he said haughtily, “not with your hands.”

It was the sort of schoolyard retort that passed for wisdom from one generation of children to another, though it never seemed to transcend into adulthood.

Takao pouted and to his surprised delight, Midorima relented. He handed over the plastic sphere that resembled the black-and-white 8 ball from a game of billiards.
It was becoming more and more of a common sight. Proud, stern, strict Midorima Shintarō acquiescing to the shorter boy’s whims and ridiculous wants.

“Careful with it,” Midorima admonished and the uneasy tone in his voice was a testament to how anxious he was that Cancer was down in the dumps as far as today’s rankings were concerned.

Takao heeded Midorima’s instruction. The hawkeye was half-tempted to tease his fellow first-year and pretend to almost drop the mystical object that had purportedly been embedded with magical properties for Cancer today, but Takao too had developed a soft spot for his teammate and didn’t want to cause an already fretful Shin-chan any more worry.

“Where’d you get it?” Takao asked as he carefully examine the object now in his hand.

"Okinawa,” Shintarō answered. “My great aunt gave it to me one year as an omiyage.”

When Takao continued to quietly examine the object, Shintarō pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. “It’s a common child’s novelty toy,” Shintarō added matter-of-factly.

The supposedly clairvoyant sphere was heftier than Takao had imagined. He’d heard of them of course, but he’d never come across one before.

“How does it work?” he wanted to know.

“Ask it a question, then turn it over,” Midorima explained. “The answer will appear on the window at the bottom of the ball.”

The hawkeye nodded in agreement.

“Magic 8 Ball,” he said. “When’s Nakatani going to give us our next pop quiz?” The hawkeye made sure he had a firm grip on the ball before shaking it vigorously.

“Don’t shake it, fool. You’re going to give it air pockets,” Midorima scolded.

Takao ignored Shin-chan’s warning in favor of reading the oracle. He flipped the ball over.

"Cannot predict now?!” the hawkeye said, sounding annoyed and unimpressed as he read the answer that had appeared on the window at the bottom of the ball.

“It doesn’t work that way, idiot,” Shintarō explained. “You have to ask it a question that can be responded to with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.”

“Alright,” Takao said, already sounding skeptical, but willing to give it another go.

“Magic 8 Ball,” he tried again. “Will Coach Nakatani give us a pop quiz in English class?”

Yes, definitely, the answer window stated.

"Well, that’s not helpful,” Takao groused. It was the start of the new term, Nakatani was bound to give them a quiz at some point. “Will it be today?”

Takao shook the ball, then turned it over.

Reply hazy try again, it read.

Takao frowned. “Shin-chan, this stupid thing’s obviously broken,” he complained, handing the cheap trinket back to its owner.
"Let me try," Midorima said. "Magic 8 Ball, will we have a quiz in English today?"

*It is certain.*

"See," Shintarō said smugly, handing the ball back to Takao, "it works."

Takao took the object Midorima was offering to him. He gazed up at his classmate and smiled impishly, before turning his full attention to the ball in his hands.

"Magic 8 Ball," Takao paused for effect, waiting until the moment was just right, before asking his question, "is there someone that Shin-chan likes?"

Midorima’s already perfect posture stiffened further as his brain registered what Takao had just asked and more importantly, the answer the round talisman would likely reveal.

The shooting guard launched himself at the point guard and tried to take the ball back, but the hawkeye had been fully expecting that reaction from his teammate.

Takao had timed his question so that they were passing the staircase when he’d asked it.

Instead of running forward as Midorima had anticipated, the point guard cut to the left and up the flight of stairs.

The fake out had been enough to buy the hawkeye a smidgen of a head start, which he would desperately need considering his pursuer had long, shapely legs that went on and on and seemed perfectly designed for a steeplechase.

###

Takao took the steps two at a time and when he got to the rooftop, he slammed the weathered door shut.

Cultural cleanliness rules about footwear be damned, he was going to know the answer to this burning question.

Breathing heavily, he flipped the ball over moments before Midorima would catch up to him.

**Without a doubt**, the answer read.

"Is it someone I know?" Takao asked quickly shaking the ball because he knew he was running out of time.

*Yes, definitely*, the answer read.

The door to the rooftop swung open as Takao asked one last question, "Is it me?"

But by then a panting Shin-chan had made it to the roof.

Midorima reached for the ball and Takao tried to evade him in hopes of catching that last glimpse into the future.

But Cancer was ranked twelfth today and in an effort to grab the ball from Takao’s hand, Shintarō accidentally knocked it loose.

They both watched in stunned horror as the prognosticator came tumbling down, cracking wide open on the hard surface beneath their feet, revealing a 20-sided die and splattering blue ink over two pairs
of formerly white and once pristine uwabaki.

And then the bell rang.

“Shit,” Takao exclaimed. They were going to be late for Nakatani’s class.

Shūtoku’s facilities were falling apart and so naturally, the rusty knob of the door to the rooftop came off when ranked-dead-last Shintarō pulled on it.

“Shit.” Takao said again. He walked over to the railing and looked down below. There was not one person left outside to call out to for help. As expected once the bell rang, not a single soul was to be found on the outdoor perimeter of the campus.

Both of them had shed their schoolbags (and incidentally left their phones behind) at the foot of the stairs in an attempt to gain speed and lessen their climbing load.

It was while he was leaning over the railing that the hawkeye unhappily remembered the pop quiz that had been forecasted for Nakatani’s class today.

He tilted his head to the side to gaze at an inexplicably red-faced Shintarō and stated the obvious, “Looks like we’ll be trapped for a while…”

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**AN1:** This prompt was written for sleepyshark who “thought shin-chan consulting an 8-ball would be hilarious xDDD” I hope you like it Sleepy and I hope you don’t mind that it turned out to be Kazu who did most of the consulting. If anyone knows of any other magic 8-ball Shin-chan fics, please let me know.

**AN2:** Are these chapters okay or does the story seem choppy? These all started out as individual drabbles so I hope they’re okay strung together like this.

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**Chapter End Notes**

17. “Looks like we’ll be trapped for a while…”
Chapter Summary

There's a lot Takao doesn't know about his Shūtoku teammate. Then again, maybe he knows more than he should.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Waterworks

There was a lime green Italian sports car outside Midorima Shintarō’s home when Takao pulled the rickshaw through the metal gates. The kind one would expect to see on a poster taped to the wall of a teenage boy’s room. Except it was here, parked out front like it owned the place with shiny rims, a sexy contour, and a vanity license plate that bore the name “Heart Doctor.”

Takao was not a car enthusiast, he preferred coveting things he could actually afford like trading cards, but anyone could appreciate a thing of beauty, a mobile work of art suspended on four wheels.

The property where Midorima lived was surrounded by a tall stone wall so that only the blue roof tiles of the large, two-story stately home could be seen from the street.

As usual, the man Takao came to learn was the head gardener (and not Shin-chan’s dad) had opened the gates for Kazunari to pedal through. He was a pleasant man. Silent, but always tugged on his sugegasa (Takao knew that word now) as a means of greeting Kazunari on his way in.

Takao rang the doorbell and moments later a haggard Shin-chan appeared at the front door.

“You need to not be here right now,” Midorima said hurriedly and Takao was taken aback by the intensity of his teammate’s vehemence.

He knew that Shin-chan preferred for Takao to wait for him at the end of the block, or at the very least, outside the stone wall, but that never stopped Kazunari from trespassing. If he were lucky, someone would even invite him in to wait for Midorima inside. This always put Shin-chan in a foul mood which Kazunari found equal parts amusing and adorable.

Takao opted to lighten his teammate’s mood with a bit of idle chit chatter, “Hey, Shin-chan. Nice wheels. Whose --”

“You need to leave right now,” Midorima repeated. He was out of breath like he'd run from the opposite end of the house just to get to the front door before Takao rang the doorbell a second time. Kazunari was known to do that, but only because it annoyed Shin-chan and usually got him inside the house which also annoyed Shin-chan. From the hawkeye’s perspective it was a win-win situation.

But today was different. Shin-chan's face was pale. Or rather, paler than usual. There was more than annoyance on Midorima's attractive visage. The look on Shin-chan’s face reminded Takao of a wounded animal – scared, cornered, and ready to lash out.
"You need to leave, now."

"What? Why?" Takao tripped over his words, he didn't know where to start. It had been Shin-chan's idea that they meet up today in the first place. They had even traded texts last night which had solidified today's plans.

Midorima turned pleading eyes on Takao and there was an urgency to his silent petition. Kazunari couldn't turn the request down. Not when Midorima was like this.

"Alright," Takao replied, confused, dejected, and crestfallen. He'd been looking forward to spending idle time with Shin-chan, he realized.

"I'll see you at school," Midorima said.

“But it's only Saturday,” Takao started to protest. Surely whatever was preoccupying Shin-chan's time at the moment wouldn't take up the whole weekend.

Midorima didn’t even respond. He closed the door on the hawkeye’s bewildered face.

Takao had no choice but to pedal home, alone.

This was strange behavior even for an odd bird like Shin-chan. After all, he’d been the one to insist that Takao pick him up to go to school in the mornings. It had turned into a routine and somehow Takao had turned into Midorima Shintarō’s personal chauffer. Even more bizarre, Takao had discovered he didn't even mind carting Princess Shin-chan around.

But the hawkeye had thought of himself as more than a means of transportation. He had thought of himself as Shin-chan’s friend.

Suddenly, Takao was made painfully aware that he didn't know Midorima as well as he liked to think. And that he wasn’t getting the full picture where his teammate was concerned. It made his heart hurt for some reason.

Playing basketball with Shin-chan at Shūtoku, taking the rickshaw to and from school, and staying after practice together to shoot hoops had created a sense of companionship and intimacy in Takao’s mind. But maybe he’d imagined it, this friendship, this kinship, this sense of closeness, this longing to simply be by Midorima’s side.

After all they'd only just started playing together on the same team this school year. While Takao had known of Midorima Shintarō (and all of the Miracles, really) for a very long time and knew a bit of trivia about everyone especially the shooting guard from those Basketball Monthly interviews, he'd only just met the guy, truthfully.

They had started playing together last term. The third-years had saddled Takao (the only other first year on the team) with the seemingly undesirable task of playing fairy godmother to their prima donna ace.

After that, Takao had started helping Shin-chan hunt down lucky items and he wasn't sure how it happened, but sometime thereafter he found himself pedaling a rickshaw to Princess Shin-chan's house every morning and dropping him off in the evenings after their post-practice practice (the second round of practice, the one where it was just him and Shin-chan in an empty gym after all the other players had gone home). Takao had started to look forward to their time together in the evenings when it was just the two of them.

That had been the straw that broke Maki-chan’s back. She'd started dating the ikemen because he
was one of two freshmen to star on the basketball team. She had seemed to have had her heart set on
dating a basketball player and since none of the upperclassmen on the team paid her any heed, it was
either the point guard or the shooting guard. It was laughable to think how little of a chance she’d
had in winning over the latter.

Shin-chan was just too Shin-chan -- abrasive, hoity-toity, rude, and a consummate snob. Takao
didn’t know why the heck he was smiling as he was mentally compiling a growing list of Shin-
chan’s “bad” traits. This was leaving aside the enormous stuffed elephant the man was toting around
the day Maki-chan had gathered the courage to approach the both of them at the shoe lockers and
confessed. Logically, she’d gone after Takao instead. Or maybe the so-called HSK had been her first
choice. Kazunari would never know, she wasn't speaking to him at the moment and he couldn't say
he missed her.

Takao had told himself that she was too big a distraction. That this early in his high school career he
needed to focus on basketball and on school work. Though admittedly, school was a lowly second
on his list of priorities.

That's because you lack discipline, Shin-chan had chided him on multiple occasions in that huffy
know-it-all tone of his that Takao had grown to find endearing. But Takao knew that wasn't true. He
was disciplined enough to wake up extra early just so he could cart around a 79 kilogram tsundere
and disciplined enough to stay behind at the gym after practice until the team's prima donna ace sunk
his eleventy-bajillionth three-point shot.

Takao didn’t lack discipline. What he lacked was interest in his school work. Whereas when it came
to interest in basketball and more specifically in his teammate, he didn't seem to have a lack of
interest when it came to those things.

Maybe his distraction had never been Maki-chan. Maybe his biggest distraction was a 195
centimeter, verdant-haired, scowly-faced Cancer.

There were a lot of things Takao Kazunari did not understand about his Shutoku teammate. Chief
among those things was Midorima's obsession with horoscopes. Second was Shin-chan's initial
reluctance to invite Takao over to his gigantic house.

As usual, Takao had to whittled down Shin-chan's defenses until the tsundere had finally given in.
He'd even presented Takao to his mother when they happened to have come across her on their way
to Shin-chan's room one day.

Takao had even managed to weasel himself an invitation to dine at their dinner table. The hawkeye
couldn’t believe his good luck when Shin-chan’s family happened to have been serving kimchi that
night. Shin-chan’s family must’ve really liked kimchi because they would serve it every time
thereafter whenever Takao stayed for dinner.

###

Naturally, Takao’s mother was surprised to see her son back so early.

“I thought you were spending the day with Midorima-kun,” she said, mixing a bowl of cookie
dough.

Takao’s mother worked long hours during the week and she wasn’t the kind to spend a lot of time
tolling away in the kitchen, but every once in a while she’d bake a nice treat for her kids on her day
off.
Today she was making ginger snaps.

Takao tried to swipe a bit of raw cookie dough with his finger and she lightly rapped his knuckles with the clean end of her spatula.

“Did you and Midorima-kun have a fight?” She seemed concerned. It was no secret how fond her son was of his new friend.

“No. Shin-chan’s just acting weird.”

She raised a teasing eyebrow.

“Weirder than usual,” Takao conceded. He grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl on his way out of the kitchen and headed up the stairs to his room to pass the time playing video games.

He didn’t know how this had come to be, but life seemed so dull without Shin-chan by his side to entertain him with all his quirks.

###

That Monday, Takao did not go to pick up Shin-chan at home. After all, Midorima had said he’d see him at school and even the hawkeye had pride.

It was a shame they hadn’t come to school together because today’s lucky item had been a tanuki statue and judging by how low Shin-chan was carrying it, it looked heavy -- like it was made of iron.

Takao could hear some of his classmates snickering at the oddball giant and he fisted his hands in annoyance. Kazunari was an easy going guy. He was a live-and-let-live kind of person, but something about Shin-chan triggered a protective instinct in the hawkeye. He couldn’t tolerate people making fun of his friend.

Kazunari turned around and glared daggers at the uncouth crowd who seemed to quietly disburse under his disapproving glare. Takao supposed he was being a hypocrite. After all, he himself teased Shin-chan all the time. But he was convinced it wasn’t the same thing. His good-natured teasing of Shin-chan came from a different place, it came from his heart.

Shin-chan pretended everything was normal between them when he took his usual seat next to Takao in Coach Nakatani’s English class. Takao followed his friend’s cue.

They practiced together that night and by the time Tuesday rolled around, they were back to normal.

###

"Who was that?” Midorima asked when he had returned from the men’s room at the mall food court and Takao knew the Miracle must've been dying to know because usually the boy feigned disinterest in Takao’s friends.

"Just a classmate from middle school,” Takao said. And then because he felt like Midorima deserved an explanation, he added, “I'd introduce you, but that guy's a dick.”

“I see,” Midorima responded. “That's what you said about the last one too.”

Not too long ago they had run into Sasaya Akio at an arcade. Takao had anyway. Shin-chan had been busy at the UFO machine trying to catch a goat herder plush doll that happened to be Cancer's lucky item that day.
Takao had not been happy to see Akio. Of all the guys on his middle school basketball team, Akio had been the one to commiserate with Takao the most over their loss to the kiseki no sedai.

The hawkeye did not like to be reminded of those days. He felt guilty about having been one of those people who had dismissed Midorima as a freak before, a preternaturally talented one, but still a freak.

###

When Takao went to Shin-chan’s house the following Saturday, the lady of the residence answered the door.

Shin-chan’s mom was young and tiny and extremely pretty.

He’d met her before, of course, but he was always taken by surprise when he saw her. He had expected Shin-chan’s mom to be an older version of Shin-chan -- tall and broad shouldered and stern.

Takao laughed at the image of Shin-chan in hair rollers and a matronly apron, the kind the hawkeye’s mother would wear when she was baking cookies.

Midorima Sazuna did not wear aprons, as far as Takao could tell. She wore exquisitely embroidered kimonos and her thick black hair was expertly coiffed in a complicated bun even when she seemed to be spending a leisurely day at home.

Kazunari excused his intrusion and after exchanging pleasantries with her, he made his way upstairs to Shin-chan’s room.

"Wow, Shin-chan. Your mom's really hot," he said closing the door behind him.

"Shut up you idiot. Do you think I want to hear that?" Midorima didn’t even bother to look up from his book to acknowledge his friend’s presence.

The curious hawkeye caught a glimpse of the thick spine on the heavy tome. It was an unabridged history of the Battle of Shigisan.

Takao rolled his pretty eyes. He should’ve known. Even Shin-chan’s leisurely reading was dull and educational.

Takao smiled caddishly because he loved nothing more than to distract Shin-chan from whatever it was he happened to be doing when he wasn’t paying attention to Kazunari.

"Shin-chan looks nothing like his mother," he observed casually. "Shin-chan must get his dashing good looks from his father." Takao knew from Shin-chan that the man traveled a lot for work, but he was still surprised that he'd yet to see him given how often Kazunari was at Midorima's house these days.

Shintarō paid Takao no heed. The last thing he needed was to start getting all worked up over the implication that his teammate deemed him good looking.

"Why are you still blathering on, idiot. Don't you have studying to do?"

Takao had invited himself over to Shintarō's house, as was his wont these days, ostensibly on the excuse that he needed tutoring.
The odd incident the preceding Saturday notwithstanding, the dark haired idiot and his on the court partner, seemed attached at the hip of late. At least that’s what Myaji-senpai had intimated at practice yesterday afternoon when he’d threatened to violently separate the both of them with a pineapple.

"Whaaa!” Takao squawked and Shintarō nearly jumped out of his skin at the sudden noise. Green eyes narrowed disapprovingly at the loud point guard. As usual, Takao was undeterred.

"Is that why you didn't want me to meet your parents at first?” It had taken a lot of metaphorical arm twisting for Takao to finally be allowed inside the Midorima residence. They had crossed that lovely threshold months ago. “You're afraid your mother will fall madly in love with me?"

"Now you're just sprouting nonsense," Shintarō said.

"What time does your dad usually come home anyway?” Takao had met Shin-chan’s mother and his little sister, and the nice older lady they referred to as Nanny, but he had yet to meet the patriarch of the Midorima clan.

Shintarō stiffened at Kazunari’s question. He set his book down at his desk and shifted uncomfortably.

Kazunari had expected Shintarō to look at his watch. Instead, his green-haired classmate took out a small, leather bound pocketbook calendar from the middle drawer of his desk. He counted the weeks on the calendar with the eraser-end of his lucky pencil.

"Three weeks," Shintarō replied.

"Eh? That long?” Takao said surprised. “But Shin-chan don’t you miss him?"

“I'm used to it,” he said. Shintarō shrugged his shoulders before turning his attention to his book again. “Besides he was just here last week.”

Takao let that sink in for a moment and then he continued with his teasing, "You worried Shin-chan?"

"About what?"

"That I'll whisk your mother away with my considerable charm and boyish good looks."

Shintarō scoffed at the ridiculousness of Kazunari’s statement.

"Don't worry Shin-chan. I won't make you call me Papa."

Midorima rolled his eyes.

"I'm teasing you Shin-chan," Takao said with an impish smile. “You're the Midorima I want. I'll take no substitutes."

And then Shintarō was suddenly red-faced. "I-idiot,” he stammered. “Don't say such stupid things so lightly."

###

Several weeks later Takao saw the lime green sports car parked outside Shin-chan’s house again.

This time Midorima was waiting for him outside the front steps. It was late afternoon and the anxious look on Shin-chan’s face made Takao's stomach flip flop unpleasantly.
“Hey,” he said. “You alright, Shin-chan?” he asked. He’d expected Shin-chan to deny that anything was wrong, to call him an idiot and say he was imagining things.

“Can we go somewhere?” Midorima asked and something about his plea made him seem painfully young to Kazunari.

“Sure thing, Shin-chan,” Takao replied trying to sound cheerful, trying to keep the gnawing concern at bay. “Where do you wanna go?”

“I don’t care,” the tsundere answered. “Anywhere but here.”

Truthfully, the hawkeye was willing to pedal to the moon if it would take that hurt look off Midorima’s face.

Takao didn’t know when it had happened, but at some point his happiness had become tied to Midorima’s happiness.

Takao decided to take Shin-chan to a hotel he knew about, not that he could afford a room there or anything -- he was just a dumb high school kid -- but because he thought they could spend the afternoon on the property’s impressive 400-year-old garden.

Forget about whisking Shin-chan’s mother, Takao wished he could whisk Shin-chan away from whatever it was that was making him seem so uncharacteristically vulnerable.

The hawkeye parked the rickshaw a block away at a bike rack because he didn’t have money for valet parking and he didn’t think the hotel attendants would let him park it there anyway.

“Where are we going?” Shin-chan naturally wanted to know.

“A hotel.” Takao answered without thinking. He noticed Shintarō stiffened.

“It’s not that kind of hotel,” he quickly added. Geez, he was surprised Midorima’s mind would even jump to that conclusion and the hawkeye tried not to think of the implications.

“Whenever my grandfather would come and stay with us,” Takao explained. “My family and I would come here for Sunday brunch.” Takao’s mother would make everyone dress up nicely. He and his sister hated that part, but the food was good and he loved the architecture especially the outdoor landscaping at the back of the property that he and his sister would explore together. He thought Shin-chan might like it too.

Kazunari had not expected an explanation from Shin-chan. He didn’t need one. He wasn’t even going to ask. All he wanted was for his friend to return to his prickly self, but Midorima was not being himself today.

“It’s my parents,” the tsundere said apropos of nothing as they walked together on the sidewalk. “They fight a lot.”

Takao did not need further elaboration. He’d always been good at observing people and when it came to Shin-chan his senses were magnified, like he was honed in on him, like Midorima was the person that mattered most to him.

By now, Takao was so trained on keeping tabs on Shin-chan that he’d do it automatically without even realizing it. If Midorima was in range, Takao’s hawkeye was on him. He blamed Miyaji for saddling him with Shin-chan in the first place. Though truthfully, he couldn’t even bring himself to resent it. Not anymore. Not when Shin-chan meant so much to him.
In any event, it didn’t take a genius to figure out that his classmate did not have a happy home life. He didn’t come to school bruised or scraped up, it wasn’t like that. But even if there weren’t any outwards signs, he could tell his friend’s situation at home was unusual. “You worried they’ll get divorced, Shin-chan?”

Midorima shook his head. “No,” he said. “I used to. When I was a kid. It would keep me up at night sometimes. Especially when they had a big fight and I’d overhear them. But now I know that’ll never happen.”

The thought of a tiny Shin-chan huddled up under the covers in his room made Kazunari’s heart hurt. Takao wasn’t going to ask about it initially, but it seemed Shin-chan wanted to talk about it. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“They can’t get divorced. My father is on the board of trustees at the university hospital. It wouldn't look good. And my mother,” he sighed. “She’d be disgraced in front of all her society friends. That’s very important to her. So she'd never do it. Besides. I think she's still in love with him. I mean why else would she put up with --”

Midorima didn’t finish that thought, but Takao didn’t need him to either. He’d seen enough of Shin-chan’s home life to know his father was rarely home and traveled a lot. It wasn’t too difficult to piece together what was really going on.

Still, he had to ask the obvious question. “Do you think he’s got another family?”

Midorima blanched, but he answered anyway, ”No. When I was in middle school. A woman, his former secretary, threatened to sue him for child support. It was this big secret nobody could find out about. It would've been a huge scandal if the hospital got wind of it. His lawyers even met with her and they were prepared to make it all go away with a substantial settlement. But the paternity test came back negative, it wasn't his.

“My mother was furious, of course. But she stayed with him. That's when I knew she'd never leave him. And he knew it to. And so, he didn't stop. He got a vasectomy afterwards, but that didn't end things. After that, he’s continued to stray.”

“Why do you think he does it?” Takao asked.

Shintarō blushed.

Realizing his inquiry had been misinterpreted as a question about why people engage in carnal pleasure, Takao clarified, “The affairs, I mean. Why does he --”

“I don't know. Maybe he doesn't want to be tied down. Maybe he needs the validation. Who knows why. I don't think they mean anything to him.” Midorima shrugged. “He just does it.”

Takao wished it wasn't as late in the day as it was. He wished he could stay with Midorima. He didn’t want to take Shin-chan home to that unhappy house.

"I'm never getting married,” Shintarō said miserably.

"Never say never, Shin-chan,” Takao retorted and after a moment of silence between them, the hawkeye turned serious. "Are you alright?” he asked.

Midorima shrugged. “I'm used to it,” he said. “It's Shuzuko, I worry about.”

Takao could see his friend was putting on a brave front. While the hawkeye had no doubts that Shin-
chan was genuinely concerned over his little sister, it was obvious Midorima wasn’t as unscathed about the whole sordid thing as he let on. After all, he’d gone to great lengths to keep Takao out of his house while his father was home.

It was obvious Midorima was embarrassed. He hadn’t wanted the hawkeye to find out about it. It was understandable, who would want that kind of dirty laundry aired out in front of their classmates.


“He’s flying out in the morning.”

Takao knew there was a risk of rejection, but it was worth a shot. “You wanna spend the night at my house?”

Shintarō nodded in assent. Takao noticed his friends shoulders started to relax. The tension was starting to uncoil.

He wanted to tell Midorima that he could count on him. That they were friends now and that Takao would be there for him. Always. And no matter what the situation was at home, that he could come to him and they’d figure things out together.

Of course, he knew that he’d probably embarrass the tsundere by saying any of these things aloud. But he was also certain, by the way Shin-chan seemed better -- not all better, but somewhat better -- that perhaps his teammate knew some of these things without Takao having to say them.

“What’s so great about this hotel anyway?” Midorima asked as they walked together through the glass revolving doors of the modernist lobby and Takao could tell his friend was trying to change the subject.

“So, I found this waterfall…” Takao trailed off leading Midorima toward truly impressive gardens, a slice of heaven on earth, a happier place.

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AN1: When I saw this prompt, I thought, how the heck am I going to turn this into a fic? It's more appropriate for MakoHaru than MidoTaka. But then I did write it and I was surprised by how lengthy it turned out. Apparently I had a lot to say in this one. This was written for meishao55 who asked for a continuation of this chapter.

AN2: This hotel was referenced in Dreamers too. It is an actual hotel in Tokyo where they filmed cool movies and lots of US presidents stayed there and it’s got a 400 year old garden with an impressive waterfall. Sadly, most of it got torn down last year in an effort to modernize the facilities for the 2020 Olympics.

Chapter End Notes

15. “So, I found this waterfall…”
Hey Four Eyes

Chapter Summary

Studying hadn’t always been this difficult for Midorima Shintarō.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hey Four Eyes

Takao was lying on his bed casually reading one of his sister’s girly magazines.

Shintarō was sitting at the low table in Takao's room because unlike that frivolous partner of his, he wanted to get into the top university in the country like his father had, which meant he had to do exceedingly well in school. It meant he had to do his homework and turn in all extra credit assignments and prepare for the entrance exam, even if he was still only a first year and said entrance exam was still a long time from now.

Midorima had been trying to concentrate on his studies. But he'd been reading the same paragraph on peptides for the last ten minutes.

He was pointedly trying to ignore how distracting Takao could be when he was lying about doing nothing but tempting Midorima Shintarō. The tsundere refused to acknowledge the fact that Takao’s fitted t-shirt rode up his toned abdomen with every turn of the page.

It was inexplicable to Shintarō how someone could be so distracting when they were doing absolutely nothing of interest.

"Hey, Shin-chan," the hawkeye said because of course Shintarō could never surreptitiously gaze at the point guard without getting caught. "It says here that when a man is in love he releases this hormone that makes him less likely to find people other than his partner sexually attractive."

Takao put the magazine down for a moment and peered at Midorima. “It makes him only have eyes for the one he loves, isn’t that wild?”

The hawkeye’s tone was as relaxed as his posture. He even briefly scratched his navel as if he were completely unaware of Shintarō’s misery.

“I wasn’t aware that such a reputable publication as Teen Girls Monthly was publishing medical studies,” Shintarō said dryly.

The tsundere tried to ignore the fact that he himself was being stared at by a pair of attractive blue eyes. “It sounds like a dubious conclusion, at best,” he added, trying to block Takao’s view of his reddening face with his thick biology textbook and scooted lostlower torso as close as possible to the low table. Thankful as always that Takao had not been bestowed with the gift of x-ray vision, or more likely, x-rated vision.

Shintarō was hoping that if he didn’t further engage Takao, the infuriating short man would go back to reading his preposterous article and let him be.
"It’s called oxytocin," Takao added. “And the article nicknames it the monogamy hormone." He put the magazine down again and peered at Midorima.

Shintarō thought wryly that perhaps his father could use an extra potent shot of that.

It was the hormone responsible for feelings of love and trust and sexual arousal. They had covered oxytocin in biology class last month, though it didn’t surprise Shintarō that Takao was pronouncing it like it was a new word. Takao was a mediocre student at best.

Shintarō knew all about oxytocin because he personally experienced a high whenever he and Takao touched.

The tsundere swore that there were times when it felt like Takao was staring into his very soul. It was unnerving and annoying to say the least. Takao continued to stare at Midorima openly.

"Stop it," Shintarō protested when Kazunari leaned over the bed and towards the tsundere, invading Midorima's personal space like he owned it.

Takao had a habit of doing that. Standing closer to Midorima than was strictly necessary, always finding reasons to brush up against him. With anyone else, Midorima would've balked, bristled, and barked at them to go away. But with Takao, he put up with it for some reason, leaned into their shared space or found ways to prolong their touch.

Like when he'd been going over those math differentials earlier. There had been no reason to share the text book of which they both owned a copy or for Shintaro to sit so close to Takao he could feel the point guard's body heat radiating from his neck.

Taking advantage of the fact that the shooting guard was sitting down and therefore height was not an issue, the hawkeye pulled Shintarō’s glasses from his face.

“What are you doing, idiot? Give those back.”

As usual, Takao ignored him.

"Hey Shin-chan," he said examining the dark framed spectacles with the thick lenses. "How nearsighted are you?"

"Very." Shintarō responded trying to ignore Kazunari by pretending to go back to reading his textbook, but of course without his glasses he had difficulty discerning the characters.

“Can you see me?” Takao asked. Midorima was tempted to lie and say he could. Unfortunately, the next words out of Kazunari’s mouth were, “How many fingers do I have up?”

Shintarō could think of one finger, he’d like to give Kazunari.

“I don’t know,” he was forced to admit.

“Your eyes are so pretty, Shin-chan,” Kazunari said peering into them and moving closer.

“If you come any closer,” Shintarō warned him, “you’re going to fall off the bed.”

As it was, half of Takao’s body was hanging off of it -- he’d been supporting some of his weight with one hand on the floor -- and only the bottom half of his body still remained on the bed.

“Can you see my fingers now, Shin-chan?” Takao asked, ignoring the tsundere’s warning about falling over.
“No,” Shintarō grunted, before closing the textbook. It was evident he wasn’t going to get much more studying done today. Not when Kazunari was being a pest.

“How about now?” he asked. "Can you see them now?"

"Not yet."

Kazunari climbed off his bed entirely, leaving the glasses behind and moving into the shooting guard’s personal space.

“How about now, Shin-chan?”

“I told you already, I can’t see that far.”

“Interesting,” Kazunari said.

“And just what’s so interesting about that?” an irritated Shintarō demanded.

“You have really pretty eyelashes too,” the hawkeye informed him.

Shintarō huffed. He could feel his cheeks starting to heat. “Give me back my glasses idiot. I’m not playing around.”

Takao closed the distance between them. "And now? Can you see me now?" he asked, brushing the question against Shintarō’s lips.

Kissing was a thing now. It was something new that happened between them sometimes. And for the tsundere, kissing was accompanied by many of the symptoms commonly associated with a myocardial infarction.

It was a serious medical malady leading to increased heart rate, a spike in blood pressure, an elevated pulse, sweaty palms, a swarm of butterflies in his stomach, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, swollen lips, and if he wasn’t careful, if he kissed Kazunari for too long -- swollen other parts too. He pressed his stomach against the low table.

It wasn’t as if Shintarō did not want to do this. Shintarō wanted to do things to Kazunari. He wanted to kiss him and he wanted to do other things to him as well. Unspeakable things, untoward things, unseemly things that would get him disowned if his parents found out.

Shintarō stood up abruptly, putting himself safely out of the zone of danger, effectively putting his lips out of Kazunari’s reach.

"Whaaaa!” the hawkeye exclaimed in response to the loss of their proximity. “Shin-chan, you're too tall,” he whined.

"Well no one told you to remain so short," Shintarō retorted.

"I'm not short, Shin-chan. I'm taller than average. You’re the mutant.” Takao threw his arms around Midorima’s broad shoulders hoping to bring the tsundere within kissing distance again.

Takao was standing on his tipped toes and it still wasn’t enough to reach his very tall boyfriend’s lips. “I can’t reach you if you’re standing up. Stoop down for me a little. C’mon meet me half way.”

“I refuse,” Shintarō told him. Now that the shooting guard had stood up, Kazunari didn’t have a prayer of reaching anything higher than the tsundere’s chin.
Unless, he stood on the table. *He wouldn’t. He would.*

“Step off of there, idiot. You’re going to fall and break your neck.”

Shintarō did not wait to see if the table would support Kazunari’s weight, he pulled the hawkeye off of it, setting Takao’s socked feet down on the floor again where it was safe.

"But seriously, Shin-chan," Takao whined. “You're going to have to sit down, or better yet, lay down. This is hurting my neck."

"Why should I?" the tsundere asked.

"Because I know you like it. And I’m good at it," Takao said confidently. “I know how you like to be kissed and how much pressure to apply and when to use my tongue."

A red faced Shintarō swallowed thickly.

“It's called being intimate,” Kazunari said breezily as if he were talking about a new dance craze.

Shintarō’s pretty green eyes narrowed. "You do this on purpose, don’t you," he correctly deduced. "You do this to get a rise out of me."

Kazunari pressed a hand against his own mouth to stifle his laughter. "I can't help it, Shin-chan,” he said smiling up at his tsundere. “You're so cute when you’re embarrassed and you're so easily embarrassed."

"Tch," Shintarō said, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "You're just toying with me."

"I am not Shin-chan. When it comes to you, Shin-chan, I'm dead serious."

Takao tugged on Midorima’s forearms. “C’mon,” he said. “Come down from that high pedestal of yours. Come sit on my bed so I can kiss you.”

It was an offer even a tsundere couldn’t refuse.

Shintarō felt it the moment his butt touched Takao’s bedspread and then he heard a loud crack. “Did I just break my glasses?”

“Oops.” Kazunari said. “I swear it was an accident.”

Chapter End Notes

42. “I swear it was an accident.”
Shintarō knows nothing good can come from spending time with a Takao.

The Red Scare

“Kazu–chan!”

Shintarō bristled as he heard the call. It was so loud that it carried across the schoolyard. It was high pitched and feminine and supremely annoying.

“Kazu–chan!” He began to walk briskly in the opposite direction when it became clear that the loud first-year was headed his way. “Kazu–chan!” She continued to call out.

His second year at Shūtoku had brought the unfortunate addition of another Takao to the student body. In Shintarō’s estimation one had been more than enough, thank you very much.

She was vexing, loud, spectacularly foolish, and laughed at anything and everything. She was essentially Takao Kazunari in a skirt.

Shintarō’s treacherous, overworked brain unexpectedly betrayed him as it conjured up an image of the sharp-eyed point guard in an actual skirt, entirely unbidden. The tsundere could feel his face heating up in embarrassment because to his horror it was not an un-pleasant picture.

He filed it away for later, deciding it would be best to revisit that mental image of Takao at another time -- examine it more closely, in painstaking detail -- when he was at home, alone, in his bedroom with the door locked and the window shades drawn tightly.

Kazumi seemed none the wiser to Shintarō’s less than honorable, self-indulgent contemplations about her brother as she finally caught up to his long strides, pulling the strap of Shintarō’s school bag and nearly choking him in the process.

He wasn’t sure why she was following him in the first place. It wasn’t like Takao was with him.

“Kazu-cha --,” she started to say and suddenly stopped herself when she realized her brother was not where she supposed him to be.

Kazumi brushed the sweat off her brow with the already wrinkled sleeve of her uniform. Shintarō crinkled his nose at the less than dainty motion. His mother and sister would never behave so appallingly.

She was huffing like a choo-choo train because, of course, she’d had to run across the schoolyard in order to catch up to Shintarō’s long legs and naturally, the second-year had not slowed down when he saw her coming, but rather sped up.
“I’m looking for my brother,” she announced when she caught her breath. Her eyes were wide and questioning as she put her hands behind her back and balanced her weight from side to side. It was an idle gesture Shintarō had seen her brother make many times. She looked at Shintarō expectantly, like the tsundere could conjure the point guard out of thin air or something. This irked Midorima, of course, like all things Kazumi irked him. It’s not like he was a magician who could pull Takao out of a hat.

“Tch,” Shintarō exclaimed in annoyance. “Can’t you see he’s not here?” He snapped, irritated by the implication that she would instinctively assume her brother would be by his side. "Now go away."

As usual, he fell back on his prickly exterior. While Kazumi was new to the student body this school year, she was not new to Shintarō. He’d already had the displeasure of her not-so-pleasant company on his many visits to the Takao residence. He had learned from his past dealings with Kazumi that it was best to shoo her away, make her go on her merry way lest she stick around and make pointless chit-chatter. He did not know what it was about this particular set of siblings, but they had an irrepressible need to talk about non-stop nonsense.

“Oh,” she said. Her mouth remained shaped like a donut even after she’d uttered the interjection and she raised her thin brows in surprise. It was a facial expression Shintarō was not unfamiliar with though the face he usually saw it on was decidedly more masculine and undeniably attractive. Seriously, what was wrong with him today?

Shintarō could feel his face heating up again, mortified by the sordid direction his thoughts were headed, and pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. Not for the first time, he was supremely grateful that while the Takao family may have the hawkeye, they had not exhibited any mindreading abilities -- a truly terrifying thought.

“Oh, don’t look so surprised,” he snapped at her, already exasperated by their exchange no matter how brief. “It’s not like we’re attached at the hip,” he told her.

Her eyes naturally fell on Shintarō’s hips as if she expected her brother to magically appear out of thin air and Shintarō shifted uncomfortably under her gaze. She had the nerve to give Shintarō a cheeky grin. “Are you sure about that?” she teased.

Shintarō sputtered. “Don’t be ridiculous,” he snapped.

Kazumi was fourteen months younger than her big brother and while this was the freshman’s first year at Shūtoku, this was not Shintarō’s first dealing with her. Oh no, he’d had to endure her presence when he was forced to go to Kazunari’s house for sleepovers and family dinners and even outside the house for the occasional family outing. Needless to say he was quite familiar with the unfortunate fact that Kazumi loved to tease him.

Shintarō was not fooled by her doe-eyed, innocent expression. He knew from past experiences that if given enough time, Kazumi would invariably make fun of him. It was quite irritating. And so Shintarō tried to make himself unpleasant, tried to make himself mean and intimidating to rid himself of this gabby gadfly.

Kazumi was unfazed by the grumpy giant. He’d even heard from Takao’s own mouth that she’d developed a crush on Midorima -- the horror.

Shintarō had done nothing to encourage her affections. He was nothing but rude to her.

Of course, this worked about as well as it did on her older brother, which was to say not at all.
“Well then, where is he?” she asked on a more serious note.

The question rubbed Shintarō the wrong way, not because he didn’t know where her brother was, but because Kazumi so easily assumed that he would know the answer. “How the hell should I know,” he said. “It’s not like I’m your brother’s keeper.”

In truth, Shintarō knew exactly where to find Takao. They were both in Coach Nakatani’s English class. The hawkeye had been trying to pass a note to Shintarō while the tsundere pointedly ignored him. Coach had intercepted the little love missive which, in addition to having the point guard asking the shooting guard for a date to the movies on Saturday, had the misfortune of also containing a crude drawing of Nakatani riding a broomstick and wearing a witch’s hat. The hawkeye was not known for his artistic abilities and needless to say it was not a flattering representation of a member of the faculty. Unsurprisingly, Coach had asked Takao to remain after class.

Annoyed that she was still standing there, looking up at him expectantly, Shintarō tried to get rid of her.

“Obviously, he isn’t here,” he snapped, making sure his tone was curt and biting. Honestly, he thought irritably, Takao was 176 centimeters tall, it wasn’t like Shintarō could hide him in his uniform pants.

He felt a sudden panic when the wayward thought of Takao in his pants caused a stirring in said uniform pants. What in heavens was wrong with him today?

He shifted so that his lucky item of the day, an inflatable pool toy in the shape of a turtle conveniently covered the front of him. He hugged that lucky item the way a frightened child would hug a favorite teddy bear or blanket. Cancer had been ranked last today which didn’t surprise him in the least given this unhappy little reunion.

He needed to leave. He was in grave danger of being made fun of and so he took swift action.

“Go away,” he told her, raising his head haughtily and when she didn’t budge he started walking away from her as quickly as possible.

“Wait!” Kazumi called after him.

Shintarō did no such thing. He picked up the pace, but of course she still followed him. “Midorima wait, watch out for the —”

In his haste to escape Kazumi, Shintarō did not notice the flagpole until it was too late. He walked right into it without slowing down. He bumped his nose and the impact was enough to crack his glasses, but that was only a minor inconvenience. He was always prepared for such misfortunes and so naturally he had an extra pair in his locker. Nevermind that the ones he was currently wearing were a replacement for the pair he’d broken at Takao’s house, and on his bed to be precise, last school year.

Already, he started to hear the familiar peals of laughter behind him. So much for not making a fool of himself.

Shintarō turned to yell at his tormentor, but when she saw him she quieted down. For a moment, Shintarō thought he’d finally succeeded in intimidating Kazumi into behaving like a proper human being. But she didn’t look scared. On the contrary, her face lit up like a Christmas tree.

The blessed respite from her laughter lasted mere seconds before she started chortling again. This time, it was even louder.
Shintarō knew that they were making a scene. He could feel the curious gazes of the handful of students who were out in the schoolyard, but he refused to acknowledge their presence. What good would it do? Shintarō had learned long ago that it was best to pretend there was nothing out of the ordinary when people stared at him, which they often did.

Of course, that was easier to do when he did not have a laughing hyena in his midst.

“Don’t you ever do that again!” Shintarō yelled at her as if she’d been the one he’d collided with instead of the pole. He laid the blame for his throbbing nose and his cracked glasses entirely at her sneakered feet. But that was nothing compared to the enormous bruise he’d just given to his ego.

Kazumi was looking at Shintarō with a curious, owlish expression in a pair of eyes identical to her brother’s. Shintarō swallowed thickly. He knew this didn’t bode well for him.

“I didn’t know Mido-chan was a pervert,” she boldly declared before dissolving into more fits of laughter.

“What –” Shintarō’s stomach fell down to his polished, school-sanctioned leather penny loafers and for a moment he thought that she had figured him out. For a moment, he thought that if there were such astounding things as hawkeyes in this world, then yes, Kazumi might also be a mindreader.

His own mind began to race, quickly assembling a mounting tally of all the impure thoughts he’d had starring one Takao Kazunari and those were only from this morning. There were many more that preceded them. Shintarō felt like he was about to faint.

Kazumi reigned-in her merriment enough to fish two cylindrical tubes of tightly packed cotton out of her overstuffed book bag and handed them to her brother’s friend.

Shintarō knew they were, of course. He may not have had any personal use for them, but Oha Asa made him question his devotion to horoscopes that one time when Cancer’s lucky item of the day happened to have been a feminine hygiene product.

"Why are you giving these to me?” he asked, too bewildered to put on airs of superiority.

"They’re tamp --,” she started to say before Shintarō quickly and deliberately jumped in.

"I know what they are, idiot!” he yelled. "Why the hell are you handing them to me?"

“You’re bleeding,” she said.

“I’m what?” Shintarō sputtered.

Kazumi swiped the side of her index finger against her own nose and Shintarō subconsciously mimicked the gesture. It was only then that he felt the wet patch that had collected on his philtrum. He looked at his hand and sure enough, the collision with the pole had given him a nosebleed.

"They’re for your nostrils," she said gesturing for him to stuff them in there.

It was not a great fit and Shintarō felt a bit like a walrus as he made his way to the nurse’s station. Of course, Kazumi followed him, laughing every step of the way. Evidently, having already forgotten whatever it was that she needed her brother for.

“Like I said,” there was undisguised glee in her voice, “Mido-chan’s a pervert!”
AN: Nosebleed jokes are my favorite anime jokes. I love writing Kazumi almost as much as I love embarrassing Shin-chan. And then I thought, why not have both?

Chapter End Notes

9. “Don’t you ever do that again!”
Nakatani Masaaki was not an art lover, Takao had concluded.

Earlier in the week, the hawkeye had drawn a picture of his esteemed coach during a particularly dull stretch of English class on a torn off piece of lined paper.

He'd been caught passing the note to Shin-chan and it was evident Nakatani had not found the portrait of himself on a witch's broom wearing a pointy hat very flattering.

Nakatani had asked his errant pupil to stay behind after class and said that since Takao had exhibited a previously unexpressed artistic flair, Takao wouldn't mind coming to school on Sunday and whitewashing some of the exterior walls.

“The paint’s supposed to go where?” Kazunari asked.

###

On Sunday morning, Kazunari had gotten up early and dutifully reported to school.

A few hours later, Nakatani came outside to where Takao was painting the walls near the lockers.

“I just posted the class rankings,” he told his point guard. “They're in front of the door to the auditorium.

Takao smiled knowingly.

Come Monday morning, the crowds would gather in front of that all important piece of parchment. The overachievers would invariably be disappointed at not having come in first.

Evidently, the rumor mill that had been churning vigorously among the student body since the start of the term had not spared the faculty.

They both knew the hawkeye was a mediocre student at best. He'd be lucky to be in the top half. That wasn't why Nakatani was telling him about the list.

“Oh?” Takao asked with a feigned, disinterested casualness that fooled no one.

"Shintarō ranked first,” Nakatani cut to the chase, having no patience for Takao's practiced coyness, "again." It was evident Nakatani took great enjoyment in delivering the happy news.

A wide grin spread across Takao's lips. He couldn't help it. He knew how hard Midorima worked.
He knew how important this was to the second year student. He couldn’t think of anyone who deserved the academic distinction more than Shin-chan.

At Teiko, Midorima never came in first. He'd always lost to that point guard prick. Those were Takao's words, not Midorima's. Shin-chan always spoke of Akashi in respectful terms. Takao did not. He hated that pompous little shit. He couldn't wait until their payback game against Rakuzan.

There was a fond, fatherly smile on Nakatani’s face that put a halt to all of Takao's vengeful thoughts.

"He's a good boy,” Nakatani said with affection and Takao's heart swelled with inexplicable pride. It wasn't as if the hawkeye had any hand in raising Shintarō or could claim any stake in the considerable accomplishment. To the contrary, Takao was Shin-chan’s biggest distraction from school work.

"His parents will be so proud,” the middle-aged man concluded. Nakatani's kindly words cut right through the point guard. Takao’s heart plummeted. It suddenly ached for his teammate.

He wondered if anyone would even bother to inform Midorima's father. He knew the man was overseas in Australia. He'd been invited to speak to the Queensland College of Cardiologists. And there was no telling where he’d go from there.

Takao wondered if Midorima's mother would even grasp what an accomplishment this was. That out of their entire class, her son had worked the hardest, he'd beat everyone else for the coveted spot of being first.

Somehow Midorima was able to do that. He was able to find the time to study without missing a single practice and staying behind every night to shoot his three-pointers.

Shintarō was poised to become class valedictorian when they graduated next year. Not only that, but he was the school’s singularly most talented athlete.

Midorima Shintarō was a rare combination of brains and impressive athletic ability. And he was a musical prodigy to boot. Takao wasn’t sure anyone in Midorima’s household understood what a truly remarkable person Shintarō was.

Takao had once won a special services award. He and a few of his middle school classmates had been bussed over to a nursing home to build a butterfly garden for the elderly residents there.

Honestly, he'd volunteered because it was an excused absence that had gotten him out of all his classes for a day and he'd forgotten to study for a math quiz.

He’d received a certificate for his efforts. Takao's parents had been so proud of their son they'd taped the paper to the door of the fridge and taken him out for ice cream.

Takao didn't think Midorima's parents had ever taken their son out for ice cream. He didn't think anyone in Midorima's life ever had.

"That's enough for the day,” Nakatani told him. "I'm sure you'll want to go home to wash up.”

Naturally, Nakatani had assumed Midorima's family would be going somewhere today to celebrate. Unexpectedly, he'd also assumed Takao would be invited.

The hawkeye smiled at his coach. He may have run a killer training schedule that had had a first year Takao puking in the trash cans behind the gym most nights, but he was a good man.
Takao wiped the sweat off his brow with his forearm, careful not to get any more paint on his face.

The second year put his brush down on the nearly empty paint tray, gathered the rags and the bucket and everything else he'd used that day and headed to the janitor’s closet to put them away.

He found Midorima waiting for him out front next to the rickshaw.

Takao had been the one serving the punishment, but Midorima had made up an excuse about needing a book from his gym locker and accompanied Kazunari to school that morning on their day off.

It wasn't like Midorima to toot his own horn, but Takao knew the tsundere had to have passed the auditorium on his way out here.

For all his confidence and bravado on the basketball court, Midorima was surprisingly understated about his classroom achievements.

It was disheartening to Takao that Midorima had no one to share the happy news with. No one to pat him on the back and tell him he'd done well. He could not imagine Shintarō calling any of his middle school teammates to relay the announcement. Or any of them caring.

“Hey Shin-chan,” Takao said as he approached his teammate. “Let's stop for some ice cream on the way home. My treat.”

**AN1:** Of course Shin-chan will get azuki bean flavored ice cream.

**AN2:** I almost went with the obvious choice for this prompt, edible body paint, but there haven't been any visits to poundtown at this point in their courtship.

Chapter End Notes

19. “The paint’s supposed to go where?”
Roses are Red, Tsunderes are Idiots

Chapter Summary

Shintarō unexpectedly finds a love letter in his shoe locker and reluctantly confronts Takao.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Roses are Red, Tsunderes are Idiots

Shintarō opened his shoe locker and frowned when he saw that there was a folded piece of paper inside. He did not like surprises. He’d learned from past experiences that surprises were, more often than not, unpleasant.

Midorimacchi, we all drew straws and you’ll be sitting next to meeee on the bus when we play that school in Kagoshima. Shintarō shuddered at the unhappy middle school memory. It had been the worst 15-hour bus ride of his life.

He put his hand in the pocket of his uniform pants so that he could rub his lucky item of the day, an omamori he’d picked up from a shrine with Takao on their way to school this morning.

The only sign ranked lower than Cancer today was Capricorn.

He knew, like pulling off a band aid, it was best to simply confront life’s misfortunes.

He took out the piece of paper that had hurriedly been stuffed through one of the slits on the metal door of his locker, if the creases were anything to go by.

It was a quarter fold, Shintarō noted, and he couldn’t help but be irked by the way it had been imperfectly folded and then refolded when the ends didn’t line up. Careless idiot, he thought.

He read its sparse words, then skewed his eyes shut. The structure was short, the imagery was terrible. The rhyme was ridiculous and he didn’t even want to get started on the rhythm. Everything about it was awful.

But more importantly, he knew what it meant. He knew what he had to do next and he knew it would be extremely unpleasant.

Shintarō sighed heavily. He would almost trade this for another 15-hour bus ride sitting beside Kise’s incessant, cheery chatter. Almost.

He was going to have to reject someone today and it wasn’t going to be easy.

###

“Takao,” Shintarō said sternly.

“What’s up, Shin-chan?” The hawkeye asked with wide innocent eyes as the tsundere walked
They did not have practice today and the point guard was standing beside the rickshaw patiently waiting to go home with the shooting guard.

They seldom played janken pon anymore because Takao almost always ended up losing regardless of Cancer’s ranking. Neither of them saw the point of going through the fruitless exercise.

Shintarō’s insides were filled with dread, but there was no sense in beating around the bush. The tsundere got straight to the point, “I think we need to talk.”

He took out the note he’d been carrying with him all day and handed it to his point guard. Its contents had weighed heavily on the tsundere, like he’d been carrying an anchor in the front pocket of his pants, instead of a single sheet of genkō yōshi writing paper. “I found this in my locker earlier.”

It was written in the same manner all great love sonnets were written, in purple glitter pen. Takao read it:

_Giraffes are tall, frogs are green._

_I think you’re cute, even though you are mean._

It was signed “Takao” and next to the aspiring poet’s name was a poorly drawn, grumpy little green frog wearing spectacles. He was sitting on a lily pad and looked profoundly displeased by all the tiny pink hearts floating above his head like flies.

“Well?” Shintarō barked impatiently, because surely it shouldn’t take Takao this long to read the short stanza. “What do you have to say about this?” He spoke in a disapproving tone.

“Shin-chan,” Takao began. “You don’t think I wrote this, do you?”

“Of course not you idiot.” Shintarō knew Takao well enough to recognize that while the handwriting was abominable, it wasn’t his. “I know who the author is. It’s signed, isn’t it?”

“I think it’s cute,” Takao proclaimed grinning brightly. Shintarō’s heart sped up the way it often did when clear, sharp eyes were smiling up at him.

He quickly looked away, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. Meeting Kazunari’s gaze sometimes reminded Shintarō of staring up at the sun. If he stared at either of them long enough, his face would turn red.

“Well I think it’s appalling,” Shintarō informed him.

“Shin-chan,” Takao said, his voice soft, the look in his eyes even softer. “You’re concerned.”

“I am not,” Shintarō insisted.

“You care about her,” Takao said, looking adoringly up at Shintarō like he was carrying a basket of puppies.

“Don’t be preposterous,” Shintarō retorted. There was only one Takao his heart carried a flame for and it was not Kazumi.

“No,” Kazunari clarified. “What I meant is, you don’t want to hurt her feelings,” he said gazing fondly at the tall second year.

“Stop looking at me like that,” Shintarō snapped.
Of course he didn’t want to hurt her feelings. He wasn’t a monster. Takao’s little sister may have been supremely annoying, but she didn’t deserve to have her heart trampled on.

And given the circumstances, it was inevitable that she would be turned down.

“What should I do?” Shintarō asked. He was out of his depth. It was a testament to how vacant his brain was of any ideas on how to handle the delicate situation that he was going to Takao for advice.

“I think you need to talk to her,” Takao said and the concern in his voice did not escape Shintarō’s attention.

“Do I need to tell her?” he asked, searching Takao’s face for any clues.

“If you think it’ll help,” the hawkeye responded. “But that’s entirely up to you.”

Shintarō nodded in agreement. There was no getting around it. He was going to have to do it. He was going to have to go talk to her.

Having resigned himself to his fate, Shintarō sighed heavily. He placed his schoolbag in the rear car. “I’ll be back,” he told Takao.

“Hey Shin-chan,” Takao said and Shintarō hated the look of worry on Kazunari’s handsome face. “She may like to joke a lot, but she really likes you.”

That’s what Shintarō had been afraid of.

“Let her down gently, okay?”

He scoffed at the needless request. It wasn’t as if he’d been planning to do anything else.

###

Shintarō found the talentless troubadour surrounded by a gaggle of first year girls who blushed and giggled as they saw him approaching.

One of the girls turned Takao’s little sister around and pushed her out of the circle so that she was facing the tsundere.

Clearly, she’d told her friends. They’d probably helped her compose the pitiful poetry.

He was nervous. His heart was pumping in his ears so loudly, he could barely hear himself speak.

“I need to talk to you,” he told Kazumi and all the other girls smiled up at him expectantly.

“What about it?” Kazumi gave him a shit eating grin which irritated the tsundere because they both knew why he was here.

Shintarō was sorely tempted to scowl at her in response, except he’d promised her brother he’d take
It wouldn’t do to have an audience and so he grabbed Kazumi’s thin wrist and pulled her along. He ignored the teasing chorus of “oohs” and catcalls from the rest of the girls as they left them behind.

He turned the corner and when satisfied that he’d found an empty hallway, let go of her arm.

“Is this a joke?” he asked, pulling the folded little love missive out of his pocket and confronting her with it. As much as he hated being teased, he was actually praying, hoping, begging it was all a prank.

The playful smile fell from Kazumi’s lips, she became uncharacteristically bashful. There was a rosy hue on her cheeks. She turned her head to the side so she wouldn’t have to look at him. “I like you,” she said quietly.

Shintarō stuffed the troublesome paper back into his pocket. *Shit.* That’s what he’d been afraid of.

In a way, this was entirely his fault. While he’d never done anything to cultivate Kazumi’s affections, he was the reason Takao hadn’t told her yet.

It was like pulling off a band aid, it would hurt less if he just did it quickly.

“I’m afraid I can’t return them,” he said, “your feelings.”

Shintarō’s heart sank when she started to cry in front of him.

He hesitated, plunged his hands deep into his pockets, so he wouldn't be expected to pat her on the shoulder or worse, reach out and hug her. He didn’t know what else to do. He knew how close Takao and his sister were and he hated the fact that he’d unintentionally come between them.

“I’ve already given my heart to someone,” he blurted out.

Kazumi wiped the snot from her nose with the sleeve of her uniform. “What?” she croaked as if she’d expected him to say *anything* but that.

“There’s someone I’m seeing,” he told her. And after a moment of stunned silence on her part, he added, “It’s your brother.”

“Oh,” she said. There was shock written all over her face. “He didn’t tell me anything.”

Shintarō knew why Takao hadn’t told his little sister. It had been a few months since they’d first kissed in the locker room, since their friendship had taken a romantic route and while the point guard would’ve loved to have shouted it from the school rooftop, the shooting guard was more reserved. Shintarō valued his privacy and telling Kazumi was like telling the town crier. He supposed the news of it would get out now.

“Would you like your poem back?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “You can keep it.”

“Are you alright?” Shintarō did not bother to mask the concern in his voice because while he couldn’t return her feelings, he *did* care about her, just not in the same way he cared about her brother.

Kazumi nodded. “I’m happy I lost to him,” she said, even as tears continued to run down her cheeks.
Shintarō supposed it would take her some time to get over the sting of rejection, but he had no doubt as to the sincerity of her words.

“Can we go back to pretending it was all a joke?” she asked after she’d wiped her face with her uniform sleeve again.

“If that’s what you want,” Shintarō responded.

Kazumi nodded.

“Hey, Mido-chan,” she said and Shintarō hated that nickname as much as he hated the one her brother had saddled him with.

There was a look of concern on her face that reminded him so much of Kazunari. “He may like to joke a lot, but he really likes you,” she said with a look of fierce loyalty and protectiveness towards her brother.

In many ways, the Takao siblings were a lot alike.

“Take good care of him, okay?” she said.

Shintarō gave her a small smile before walking away.

He scoffed at her needless request. It wasn’t as if he’d been planning to do anything else.

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**AN:** And that concludes our Kazumi Arc of the story. Don’t worry she’ll make a few more guest appearances in later chapters. Hope you enjoyed it. Would love to hear your thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

12. “I think we need to talk.”
Contretemps and Good Clean Fun

Chapter Summary

It was a truth universally acknowledged that something horribly, awkwardly, embarrassingly wrong would invariably happen at training camp.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Contretemps and Good Clean Fun

Shin-chan was indisposed. Barring exigent circumstances, he was not to be disturbed. At least that’s what he’d told Takao when he’d given his point guard and most trusted confidant strict instructions to stand guard outside the bathhouse and not let anyone in.

And of course by anyone, Shin-chan must’ve meant Takao. Because, to be honest, Shin-chan wasn’t the most popular guy on the team. Hell, he wouldn’t have even been voted their favorite bespectacled shooting guard in a two-man race. That distinction would’ve gone to Kawase-kun who’d have won by a landslide despite missing most of the term thanks to a particularly persistent strain of virulent skin rash. Odds were Kawase-kun’s rash would’ve come in second place and Shin-chan a distant third.

It wasn’t like there was a merry throng of cohorts just itching to spend more time with the tsundere. Considering the wide berth Midorima had been given on the bus, Takao didn’t think there was anyone else on the team who wanted to share a bath in the hot spring waters of the onsen with the crankypants shooting guard. Anyone else, but Takao, that was.

The altitudinous teen had already made quite the unforgettable (and regrettable) and much gossiped about first impression with the staff at the inn when the team had checked-in the night before. After a long and arduous bus ride, Midorima had gotten off the chartered motorcoach, marched straight to the front desk and proceeded to inquire of the beleaguered clerk where the concierge’s desk was because he was in need of proper toiletries and a quality futon to ensure optimum performance. Shin-chan had even had to raise his voice over the not so silent snickers of Takao and everyone else on this purportedly team building excursion who’d unfortunately already formed a line behind Shintarō and were well within earshot.

And really, Takao should’ve known it would only get worse for him from there. Nakatani – whether he was motivated by pragmatism or whether he was exhausted and underpaid and in search of the path of least resistance when it came to his most promising and most peculiar pupil – had seen to it that the team’s prima donna ace got his thrice daily selfish requests even during training camps. No matter how ridiculous. And the path of least resistance (for Nakatani, at least) usually meant placing Takao in charge of Shin-chan’s whims.

Midorima Shintarō was presently taking his herbal bath in the large tub in the communal bath of the ryokan which he’d commandeered all to himself because (why else?) Oha Asa had said so. Cancer’s lucky item of the day was a warm herbal soak.

For all of Takao’s snorts and giggles during check-in the night before, Shin-chan had gotten the last
laugh. In the end, Midorima had gotten even with his sharp-eyed, risible friend because it had been Takao and not Shin-chan who’d gone out on a fool’s errand early that chilly morning immediately following the Oha Asa broadcast. It was Takao who’d left the heated confines of the ryokan tucked away in the mountains in search of triple milled soap infused with lavender and chamomile extracts because Shin-chan couldn’t possibly go outside without first washing up and because apparently the sky would fall if he didn’t have his lucky item which today of all days (when they were far away from the city and far away from Shin-chan’s enormous en suite bathroom with its bounty of expensive beauty products) consisted of a luxurious bath.

In the end, it was left to Kazunari to trek out into the great outdoors. The crisp alpine air burned his lungs by the time he made it halfway around the sizable lake to the barely stocked and rustic general store where the closest thing he got to the requested triple-milled, fragrant suds was a run-of-the-mill yellow bar of soap and a box of no-name tea that at least “smelled” of chamomile and lavender.

And what had Kazunari gotten for all the trouble he’d gone through for being a high spec kareshi and having hoofed it half way around a very large lake and gotten laughed at by the elderly clerk? Midorima’s eternal gratitude? A warm smile? A quick smooch on the lips? It was none of those things. A closed door and strict instructions to be left alone.

“Pfft.” As if. Shin-chan was adorable all the time, but in Kazunari’s enamored estimation the man was most adorable when he thought he could draw lines in the sand.

Besides, it wouldn’t be the first time they’d bathed together. They’d done that at last year’s training camp without a second thought, though admittedly a lot had happened since then.

Things between them were not what they had been a year ago. Things had taken a dramatic turn since then and had acquired romantic undertones along the way.

And yet here they were, Midorima temptingly naked and sopping wet and Takao standing guard outside the door and bone dry.

Takao decided to throw caution (and Shin-chan’s strict instructions) to the wind. He decided to turn the doorknob and join Shin-chan in his bubble bath. If Shin-chan really and truly didn’t want him to walk in, then he should’ve locked the door. A mistake Takao did not repeat when he pressed the lock on the door, ensuring there would be no interruptions.

He wasn’t expecting to get lucky. The hawkeye was not delusional. He knew Shin-chan was a delicate flower whose petals would unfold slowly in his own time and on his own terms. But Takao was a patient man and he was in it for the long haul.

Still, it wouldn’t hurt to share a bath and while he wasn’t expecting to get lucky per se, who knew, maybe some of Shin-chan’s luck would rub off on him. After all, Scorpio’s lucky item of the day was a rubber duckie.

And oh. Takao realized his mistake the moment he opened the door and was hit with a thick plume of herbal-infused steam that filled his lungs and made him cough.

Things had changed between them, indeed. There was a charge in the atmosphere that hadn’t been there the year before. One that had been either absent or too low for either of them to notice because neither one of them had thought anything of sharing a bath last year. Now, that electrical charge crackled and sizzled when he caught sight of the tsundere. It made Takao feel all tingly in the best of ways.

Expectedly, Midorima frowned at Takao for having barged in despite the sourpuss’s detailed
instructions to be left alone, but he didn’t bark orders for Takao to get out either. Instead, Midorima pulled long, alabaster legs up (covering all the important bits in the process) and resting his chin on his bony knees. It was almost an invitation for Takao to get in.

There was a dewy sheen to Shin-chan’s soap-glistened skin, all warm and supple and pink from the bathwater that softened the edges of a would-be scowl on his lips and made Takao want to kiss him.

Shintarō’s eyes were a sight to behold. Naked and vulnerable without their usual dark frames and thick polycarbonate to hide behind. Droplets of water had moistened Midorima’s gorgeous long lashes segregating them into triangular-shaped points. Kazunari wanted to observe each warring faction up close. And if he stole a kiss from his boyfriend in the process, he could hardly be blamed for it.

Takao dropped to his knees without a second thought. He didn’t care that the tile on the floor was cold or that there was nowhere else for him to go. He was already pressed up against the edge of the ceramic tub. It was an odd angle, unforgiving on his knees, but he didn’t care because Shin-chan’s lips tasted like bathwater and his skin was warm and wet and his fingers – the ones gripping Takao’s shirt and pulling him closer – were causing a trail of water to run down the back of Takao’s t-shirt. None of that mattered because Shintarō was kissing back. He buried his fingers in Kazunari’s hair and emitted the tiniest of muffled moans. A sound that lit up Takao’s body like a pinball machine.

Midorima dug his fingers against Kazunari’s scalp and Takao did not need to be reminded that Midorima’s long and elegant fingers had turned wrinkled and pruney in the bath or that his left hand (like everything else about him) was bereft of its usual cover. Midorima Shintarō was naked and there was nothing between them but the cold ceramic wall of the tub.

Takao sometimes liked to say things that he knew Midorima was thinking, but the tsundere was incapable of saying aloud. He’d say them under the guise that he was teasing prissy Shin-chan who was overly sensitive and prone to flustering. But he also said them because they were true.

How’d we get so lucky? the hawkeye thought, knowing it was a sentiment his partner shared, but had never actually voiced. It was nothing short of a miracle that they had found each other.

Takao had gotten quite proficient at reading Midorima’s mind, the incalculable number of times he’d lost at janken notwithstanding. It was a skill that was born out of spending so much time together. Time in each other’s company that was first justified by needing to practice on the court after everyone had gone home so they could synchronize their play and then there were the lucky item scavenger hunts (for the good of the team), that continued unnoticed and unabated well after basketball season was over and could very easily be reclassified as dates.

What had once been a childish nickname – Shin-chan – deployed to tease such a serious, snobby, stuck-up square had turned into a pet name, a term of endearment dripping with affections and admirations Takao could not possibly have imagined at the start of his high school career.

And so, for quite some time now when Takao referred to Midorima as “Shin-chan,” it came from a different place than it used to.

And indeed. How did we get so lucky?

Takao had dated other people in the past. His winning personality and easy-on-the-eyes good looks had assured him no shortage of friends and admirers, but he’d never had a connection like the one he felt with the person he was currently locking lips with. And it had happened all on its own, so effortlessly that neither one of them had noticed it at first.
So much so that Takao had managed to surprise himself, shock their senpais, and stun Midorima into a state of stupefied silence at last year’s training camp when the hawkeye had inadvertently blurted out that he considered the shooting guard indispensable in his life, someone he couldn’t live without.

And once the azuki beans had been spilled there was no putting them back. Once that admission was out there. Once that obstinate bell had been rung, it couldn’t be unrung. Nor did Takao want to undo any of it.

Things had progressed from there. And happily so. He was properly dating Midorima now.

Takao felt a gentle push on his bottom lip. And oh, was Shin-chan trying to slip him his tongue? Yeah, things were definitely not like they had been last year.

They were infinitely better.

Takao smiled as he gladly opened his mouth to receive it. Greeted Shin-chan’s tongue with his own which only serve to tighten Midorima’s grip on Kazunari’s hair. Takao didn’t know how much longer he could stay on the outside of the tub.

Nevermind that his knees were falling asleep, that electric current that was in the atmosphere when he entered the room was starting to feel like someone had pitched a toaster into the bathtub. An overcharged Kazunari felt like he was going to blow a fuze.

And then they quickly broke apart.

The cloud of pleasure, the escalating pleasant tension between them was quickly dispelled by the loud chatter of noisy first-years overly excited about their first training camp marching down the hallway just outside the bathhouse as discretely as a herd of elephants.

Midorima sunk lower in the tub, until he was up to his neck in soap suds.

“This is your fault,” Shintarō groused at Takao who after all had abandoned his post to come in here. “Take responsibility for it.”

Takao froze because while things between them had been progressing, Shin-chan had yet to ask for his readily available services. Up until this point, it had been a long and drawn out process and Takao did not presume he’d be given such sudden responsibility over Shin-chan’s equipment. But who was Kazunari to stand in the way of progress.

“Alright, Shin-chan,” he said, already starting to pull his t-shirt over his head and more than up for the task.

Midorima crossed his legs. “What are you doing, idiot?” he asked, more than a little alarmed.

“I’m taking responsibility for it, Shin-chan. Like you said.”

Shintarō pointed in the general direction of the suds floating in the water over his lap. “Not this,” he said blushing brightly. “That,” he said pointing to the door.

Takao followed Shin-chan’s index finger with his gaze and shrugged. “Relax, Shin-chan,” he said, not bothering to get up from the floor and trying to coax Shin-chan back into their former positions. “I locked the –” He started to say.

“Shit,” Takao exclaimed, but it was too late.
“... hold up, I really gotta take a piss - oh?” said the first wide-eyed first year who'd walked in on them and then one by one – like a herd of pachyderms walking in a straight line – the rest of them quickly piled in.

And of course, Shin-chan looked to Takao for an explanation.

“I locked the door,” Takao assured him because he had.

Midorima frowned at him. “So had I,” he said. “But that didn’t stop you from barging in,” he added pointing an accusatory pruny finger into Takao’s chest.

“Oh,” the hawkeye responded quietly because he hadn’t considered the possibility of a faulty lock.

“Oh...” said one of the gaggle of awkward first years who for inexplicable reasons were still in the room. “So, I guess I’ll just relieve myself in the bushes then?”

“Yeah, you do that, Kawase-kun,” Takao called out a bit too sternly, not bothering to look back over his shirtless shoulder at the first years behind him because he didn’t want to show his reddening face.

###

“It could be worse,” Takao said to a grim looking Shin-chan that night after dinner when they were back at the scene of the crime – standing side-by-side in front of the mirror in the communal bathroom brushing their teeth.

“How?” an irate Midorima snapped. “How could it possibly be worse?”

“They could’ve walked in on us a few minutes later.”

AN1: This takes place during their second year of training camp. It’s a running gag in my ‘verse that training camp is humiliation camp for our favorite light and shadow duo, see Year 1 and Year 3. The first part of this fic is loosely inspired by one of my favorite filthy midotaka bath fics ever, Water Gets in Your Eyes in which Takao is a delightful pest. Please give WGiYE kudos and comments because it deserves love by the bucketloads.

AN2: At this point in their relationship our boys haven't gotten very far in the amorous conquests department. Takao's ready to round the bases (to use a baseball analogy), but Shin-chan's still in the bullpen, so to speak. That being said, in a few more chapters I'm going to have to up the rating to M. I thought I'd give you fair warning. Thanks for reading!

Chapter End Notes

16. “It could be worse.”
Kazunari and Ryōta want to attend a rock concert. Against his better judgment, Shintarō decides to join them.

Catty Rhythm

Midorima was speechless. He’d heard some harebrained schemes in his day. Considering the company he kept, he’d heard a lot of harebrained schemes, but this one took the cake. This took the whole damn bakery.

“You’re planning to break into the Budōkan,” he said incredulously, because he still couldn’t believe it. Suddenly losing his appetite, he pushed his plastic food tray away.

Seizing the opportunity of Shin-chan being momentarily distracted and having already polished off his meal, Kazunari’s hand snuck onto the tsundere’s tray and stole a French fry, “We’re not breaking-in, Shin-chan. Kise has connections.”


“Midorimacchi,” Kise chimed in. “It’s okay. I’m with the band.”

“You are not with the band, idiot. You know someone who sets up and takes down the band’s equipment.”

“Exactly, and he said he can get us in,” that blond, bubble-headed idiot responded. "It’s a sold out performance, it’s our only chance.”

“No, if you had told me ahead of time I could’ve gotten you tickets,” Shintarō retorted, though he was mostly referring to Takao. Ryōta could sod off and get his own damn tickets.

Midorima’s parents had the sort of by-invitation-only credit cards that catered to high-net-worth clientele and provided access to precisely these types of exclusive performances. Shintarō huffed, annoyed that Takao hadn’t told him about wanting to attend this concert sooner, annoyed that he’d been deprived of the opportunity to surprise his boyfriend with a really great early birthday present, without that blond squeaky third wheel.

Mistaking the reason for his boyfriend’s sudden sulk for worry, Takao tugged on Midorima’s arm to get his attention. “Relax Shin-chan. We’re not planning a bank heist. It’s the Budōkan,” the hawkeye said as if that mitigated everything.

“Yes, I’m familiar with the Budōkan. It’s a 14,000 seat venue and why, pray tell, were neither of you able to procure a single one of those 14,000 seats?”
“The tickets went on sale during English,” Kazunari explained, while unwrapping what was formerly Shin-chan’s cheeseburger. “You know Coach would hunt me down and kill me if I skipped another one of his classes. I can’t take that kind of risk, Shin-chan. The end of the term is right around the corner,” he said with his mouth full. “Geez, aren’t you the one who’s always telling me to be more responsible?”

Midorima rolled his eyes. Takao’s logic was impossible to follow. “Yes and by being ‘more responsible,’ you mean breaking and entering into an arena to attend a musical performance,” he pointed out.

“It’s a rock concert, Shin-chan,” Takao protested. ”Don’t make it sound like it’s a boring piano recital.” He frowned at the empty ketchup packets in front of him. “There’s nothing to worry about,” he added. “We’ve got this all thought out.”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I’m worried about,” Midorima responded. Nothing good could possibly come from two idiots brainstorming together.

“Well, what do you say Midorimacchi?” Kise asked in between sips of his mineral water. “Are you in or out?” he asked, imitating a certain German former supermodel. Midorima humphed. Ryōta watched entirely too much reality television.

Shintarō pinched the bridge of his nose. He was feeling a massive headache coming on and worried about the long-term effects of prolonged exposure to this kind of stupidity. Really and truly, all Shintarō wanted out of life was to not end up on the six o’clock news. His boyfriend and their idiot friend seemed hell bent on putting him there.

Midorima mulled things over. He knew from experience that when Tweedledee and Tweedledum got together, things never boded well for him. On the other hand he couldn’t in good conscious let his shadow -- and to a lesser extent that idiot he went to middle school with and for reasons still unknown to him he couldn’t shake off -- go on their own.

Midorima reached into his fry carton only to realize they’d all been gobbled up. And not by him.

“This is without a doubt the stupidest plan you’ve ever had,” he announced. ”Of course I’m in.” *Someone* had to keep watch over Kazunari.

Takao reached for Midorima’s neglected fountain drink. The tsundere intercepted it, “Give me that. Don’t they feed you at home?”

###

They’d agreed to meet up at Midorima’s house at eight o’clock and head over to the arena together. Ten minutes before the appointed time, Shintarō waited for his cohorts outside the front gates of the manse, not wanting to rouse the attention of his mother who was still awake and milling about inside. He was fortunate that today’s lucky item was a Buddhist prayer card and thus, easily concealed in his back pocket.

Of course the dynamic duo arrived late. *Idiots, the pair of them.*

“How come you’re wearing a skully cap, Shin-chan?” Takao asked his boyfriend.

“I would like to remain inconspicuous,” he responded, annoyed at having to state the obvious.

A lot of preparation had gone into Midorima’s ensemble. From his turtleneck to his slim trousers and designer leather soft-sole shoes, he was dressed from head to toe in black. He’d even borrowed a pair
of leather driving gloves he’d found in his father’s closet so as to avoid leaving any fingerprints. His 
hairstyle was the loudest thing about him, hence the ski cap left over from last year’s compulsory 
family vacation to Hokkaido. Admittedly, Midorima had taken his fashion cues for this evening from 
a cat burglar movie he’d seen on TV once. Not that the other two had gotten the memo.

“Why’d you pick that garish shirt?” he asked Takao.

“It’s a concert tee, Shin-chan. It’s what people wear to concerts.”

“Yes, well,” Midorima muttered pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. Truthfully, he’d never 
been to a concert, at least not one without a composer or a full-scale classical orchestra. The tsundere 
usually wore coattails to such events.

As they headed down the block, his thoughts were interrupted by an irritating, rhythmic scritch. 
Turning around abruptly, he snapped at Ryōta. “Stop it.”

“Stop what?”

“Stop that squeaking. It’s obnoxious.”

“I can’t help it, Midorimacchi,” Ryōta cried out. "It’s these snakeskin brogues.”

“Honestly,” Shintarō said, already exhausted with this evening and they’d barely left his house. 
“Why the hell would you wear your loudest footwear when you know we’re trying not to attract 
attention?!”

At Midorima’s pronouncement, several bystanders stopped to stare at the trio.

“They’re new,” Ryōta protested. “I had no idea.”

“Idiot,” Midorima said, muttering something under his breath about how Kise’s brain was entirely 
bereft of ideas. The noise continued to follow them every step of the way.

When they were about a block away from the arena, the tsundere turned to Ryōta and simply said, 
“Off.”

“What?”

"Off with your shoes."

"What?! But it's October. My toes will be cold."

"So help me, Ryōta. If you take another noisy step, I’m going to three-point those brogues into that 
overgrown birdbath," he said, gesturing to the decorative fountain across the street from them.

Knowing his friend would make good on his promise, Ryōta had no choice but to succumb to 
Midorima's demands. "My toes better not fall off from frostbite, Midorimacchi. I need them for the 
catwalk,” he grumbled as he carefully stuffed the expensive Oxfords into a nearby bush.

Shintarō was not cut out for a life of crime. Being a look out made him extra skittish. "Hurry up, you 
idiot. We're going to get caught,” he whispered to Ryōta, even more impatiently than normal.

"These better still be here when we get back Midorimacchi," the copycat whined. “I had to work two 
modeling sessions to pay for them.”

There was a crowd of hundreds already lining up at the entrance of the venue. Takao hadn't been
kidding about the event being at capacity. Well, at capacity plus three.

Midorima tried not to look guilty as they passed what he could only assume were legitimate, ticket purchasing concert goers.

Kazunari was approached by a man in a long coat who had all the telltale signs of a scalper, or an undercover police officer on a sting operation.

Midorima quickly grabbed Kazunari's arm pulling him away from the man who bore all the telltale signs of trouble. "Let's go, you idiot," he told Takao. Honestly, how these two had made it this far in life without an arrest record was beyond him.

Now that they were walking away from the main entrance, the crowd noise was beginning to subside revealing other noises.

"Ryōta, stop sniffling, for crying out loud," Midorima hissed.

"But Midorimacchi," Ryōta whined. "I'm going to wear a hole in my dress socks and the ground is cold."

"Well you should've thought of that before you decided to festoon your feet with the shoe-world equivalent of heralding trumpets announcing our arrival."

Shintarō could hear Takao snickering behind him.

“Want some?” Kazunari offered his Kaijō friend, trying to cheer him up. The hawkeye was munching on wasabi-flavored fried wontons he’d purchased from a vending machine on their way out of the subway station.

How Takao could eat at a time like this was beyond the pale. The tsundere’s own stomach was doing somersaults like an Olympic gymnast during a floor exercise.

“No thanks,” Ryōta responded. “I’ve gotta watch my boyish figure,” he said gesturing to his admittedly impressive physique.

Midorima’s patience for his friend was wearing thin and it had never been particularly robust to begin with. “Boyish figure? What boyish figure? You’re seventeen for crying out loud.”

“I’ll have you know, Midorimacchi, I’m still the face of Zunon Boy.”

“Yes and how long are they going to keep prancing you around in those ridiculous too-young for you outfits? It’s unseemly.”

Midorima took a deep breath because he wasn't done issuing rants.

“And you,” he said, turning to Takao. “If you don’t stop chomping those things so loudly, I’m going to shove them down your gullet, wrapper included.”

They couldn't enter through the front of the arena like normal people. Oh no, they were relegated to the margins of society, like, like rascallions and scoundrels. They had to go around the wide perimeter of the property, climb over a fence, and then go in search of some mythical side entrance used by delivery trucks.

Kazunari jumped over the chain-link fence first, followed by Midorima.

Then it was Kise's turn. "Midorimacchi! I'm stuck," the man cried out as if it was Shintarō's problem.
"Shut up, idiot," Midorima said through gritted teeth. Honestly, it was like Kise wanted to get caught.

Shintarō extended a hand to help his friend who was literally on the fence only to hear the distinctive sound of tearing fabric moments later.

After they'd detached Ryōta from his steely captor, they assessed the damage.

"Well, how am I looking?"

"Like you split the seat of your pants in half," Takao cackled.

"More importantly, why aren't you wearing undergarments," Midorima asked exasperated. Honestly, Kise was a walking wardrobe malfunction.

"Oh that," Ryōta said, finally turning around and facing his friends. "I don't want any VPNs."

"You don't wear panties, idiot."

"Exactly." Ryōta grinned like he was oh so very clever.

Midorima rolled his eyes at the man. He just about had it with this night. "Takao, give me your shirt," he demanded, stretching his hand out and fully expecting Kazunari to comply.

"What? Why?"

"Because your idiot friend here can't go walking around like he's wearing a pair of assless chaps."

While Takao did as he was told, Midorima counted the spots of gum covering the asphalt. Kazunari had pulled the tee over his head, revealing a snug fitting, ribbed tank top underneath. Midorima absolutely, positively did not notice that the undershirt covered a defined and very athletic upper-body.

Takao watched with profound sadness as Kise tucked the hawkeye's favorite concert tee into the waistband of his torn pants successfully covering his exposed, pert derrière.

Kazunari felt a deep sense of loss over the beloved garment. It was like losing an old friend. But alas, there was no going back. The shirt was irretrievably lost now that it had come in contact with Kise's bare backside. "Um, you can keep that shirt, you know," he said mournfully to the model.

"Gee, thanks! Takaocchi," Ryōta chirped happily, as if Takao had meant it as a gift.

"Yeah, don't mention it," Takao said wryly.

The side door where they were supposed to meet Kise’s "friend" was illuminated by a single, flickering light.

Ryōta rapped on the hollow metal surface.

For a moment everything was quiet. For a moment no one came to the door and Midorima felt a deep sense of relief that this ill-conceived night was over. They'd have no choice but to head back home now. Oh well, they did their best but alas it couldn't be help --

Then suddenly the door jerked open abruptly startling the three of them.

A man who was as tall as Murasakibara and as wide as the door frame answered it.
"Ah, thanks for letting us in, Kawa-san," Kise said as he tried to walk through. The man did not budge. "You got my money?" he asked.

"Money?" Kise parroted back as if he were unfamiliar with the word. "But you said you'd hook me up."

"Yes, I said that, now where's my money?"

Midorima sighed, Ryōta's naiveté knew no bounds.

"But I thought we were fri-"

Midorima felt immense satisfaction placing a taped hand over Ryōta's mouth. He'd wanted to do that all night. "How much do we owe you for the tickets?" the tsundere asked knowing full well that there were no actual tickets and they were merely paying for the privilege of sneaking in.

"Seventy-two thousand yen."

"Seventy-two thousand," Midorima balked, then glared at Kise to pony up the funds. Ryōta gave him a blank stare. Apparently, Kise had spent all his money on squeaky, poorly constructed shoes.

He then turned to Takao for assistance.

The point guard turned his pockets inside out revealing all he had on him was a balled up wonton wrapper. Not surprisingly, Takao didn't have any money either because the hawkeye always spent his pittance of an allowance immediately upon receipt and in fact had had to borrow money from Midorima to buy those infernal wonton crisps.

"All I've got to give you is my virtue, Shin-chan," Kazunari said with a saucy wink.

"Shut up you idiot. You don't even have that." Shintarō groused, evidently still upset about the previous notches on his boyfriend's bedpost.

Takao snickered.

That left one other dope. Midorima sighed, reaching for the alligator wallet in his back pocket. There seemed to be no foreseeable end to the joviality of this outing.

Shintarō did not have 70,000 yen, at least not on his person. He was a high school student, after all. He did have 60,000 yen to contribute towards this exercise in extortion.

He now regretted making his idiot friend take off his shoes earlier, they could have added it to the offerings they were stockpiling to appease the angry concert god.

After some "shrewd" negotiating on Shintarō's part, the man magnanimously agreed to accept all of Midorima's money, a 90,000 yen alligator skin wallet, what was left of the wonton crisps, three prepaid subway cards, and one Buddhist prayer card. That was all they had. Tomorrow's lucky item better come from a gumball machine or he was going to kill Ryōta.

The subway cards were of negligible value since none of them used public transportation much. Midorima had Takao to cart him around and Ryōta's stalkers, er fans, made it impossible for the model to adopt discernible commuting patterns.

Midorima had no idea how they were getting home, but he could only solve one problem at a time. He supposed at the end of the concert they could draw straws (or better yet, play jan ken pon) to see
which one of their parents they would be rousing out of bed in the wee hours to come pick them up.

The man counted his ill-gotten gains in front of them. "Why is your buddy dressed in a ninja costume," he asked Ryōta.

Incensed at having his wardrobe choices questioned by a man wearing a shirt with sweat-stained armpits, Midorima felt the strong urge to defend himself against this, this boorish, uncultured lout. *These were designer slacks and a cashmere turtleneck for crying out loud.*

"This is not a ninja suit. It's a cat burg-" Midorima quickly clammed up. On second thought, it might be better just to leave the man to his unschooled assumptions. He could already hear Takao tittering in the background.

"Wait here," the man said and slammed the door in their faces.

"Is he coming back?" Takao asked the question that was on everybody's mind. They'd been out there in the loading area waiting for twenty minutes.

Having been unburdened of his money and his wallet, Shintarō couldn't help but feel he'd been taken to the cleaners.

"Clearly he's absconded with our property," Midorima began lecturing. "We should all learn a valuable lesson from this. It doesn't pay to -"

Just then, the door opened, interrupting Midorima's disquisition on crime and karma.

"Here you go," the man said handing Kise three lanyards attached to laminated concert tickets.

"Thanks!" Kise said, sounding astounded at the man's return.

In the end, it turned out they had front row tickets, *sort of*. They couldn't actually see the stage or the band thanks to the giant speaker blocking their view, but there was no one in front of them. And they could hear the music loud and clear, a little *too* loud and clear. Shintarō began to question whether that ringing in his ear would be permanent.

Midorima found himself swaying to the rhythm despite his more refined tastes in music. It wasn't his cup of tea, but the band was not bad at all. Perhaps he had spent too much time listening to Kazunari singing these same tunes because he'd swear the lead singer sounded exactly like his boyfriend.

He turned his eyes on the boy beside him. Takao was laughing, pumping his fist and moving his body in time with the music. It was hot in the sold-out venue and Kazunari's sweat-damp skin was starting to gleam under the multi-colored concert lights. Takao's ribbed undershirt had turned translucent and was sticking to him like a second skin. Midorima felt the sudden urge to taste salt on his tongue.

The hawkeye smiled at his boyfriend when he noticed his tsundere openly gazing at him. He pulled on Midorima’s arm and Shintarō bent down considerably so Kazunari could shout in his ear. “Hey Shin-chan,” Takao yelled. Shintarō could barely hear him over the loudspeakers in front of them. “Wanna dance?”

Midorima shrugged. *Why not? It had been one hellish night already.* The tsundere proceeded to cut a very stiff and self-conscious rug while his partner looked adoringly at him and tried not to openly snicker.
AN1: The title of the fic was inspired by that song we all know and love and which Takao's seiyuu sings. You'll just have to imagine Catal Rhythm playing at the end.

AN2: I love when Kise, Takao and Shin-chan get together. It's always a recipe for disaster for our tsundere. My favorite fic of this trio in the series is this one. I hope you enjoyed the update. Would love to hear your thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

18. “This is without a doubt the stupidest plan you’ve ever had. Of course I’m in.” & 37. “Wanna dance?”
Snow Bunnies

Chapter Summary

Takao joins the Midorima family on their annual ski vacation to Hokkaido.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Warning:** M for I should be a-sha-M-ed of myself. Also, Takao is a dirty bird. The rating on this story has changed.

Snow Bunnies

Two days into their week-long ski vacation, the family's patriarch returned to Tokyo on "urgent business," or at least that was what Shintarō was told. Nanny Hamasaki had the annoying habit of sugarcoating disappointing news when delivering them to the children. And yes, Nanny Hamasaki still considered Shintarō one of the children even though she'd never been his nanny and he now towered over the tiny caretaker by almost fifty centimeters.

This course of action was appropriate where Shintarō's little sister was concerned, of course. Shuzuko was only seven, after all, and she should be protected from the sordid details of their parents' sham of a marriage, but Shintarō would be turning eighteen in the coming year. He was hardly a child. He was tall like his father. Sinewy muscles had filled out what had once been a lanky frame. And his voice had long since settled into a dark, rich baritone. Not that it mattered one whit. As far as Nanny Hamasaki was concerned, Shintarō was still a child no matter how many growth spurts she witnessed.

Shintarō supposed his mother was an absolute wreck at the moment, the way she always was in the aftermath of his father's sudden "work" related departures. But she had checked herself into the resort's 24-hour alpine spa, thus relieving her son of any obligation of actually having to deal with her. No doubt at the moment, she was swathed up to her axillae in seaweed wrap, had cucumber slices covering her red, puffy eyes, and was slathered in ginger root extract like something you'd find on a sushi boat.

He hadn't seen her in days and it was quite blissful, actually. As much as he liked to complain that Kazunari annoyed him to no end, his mother had clinched that title long before the hawkeye had matriculated at Shūtoku and their paths had crossed. She was clingy, needy, and unbelievably manipulative. It was a breath of fresh mountain air having her occupied elsewhere. She was someone else's problem at the moment.

It wasn't that Shintarō was uncaring or unsympathetic to his mother's plight. It was that over the years, he'd grown numb and desensitized to his parents' dysfunctional song and dance. They'd go through this unhappy routine like a well choreographed performance. His parents would reconcile. His father would come home, for a time. Then there would be the expected blowup. The family's jeweler inadvertently complementing Sazuna on an expensive bauble her husband had apparently purchased for someone other than herself. A late night text message. A furtive phone
call. A receipt for a romantic dinner for two found in her husband's overcoat. Any number of things could set off a powder keg of emotions, slights, and years of resentment. His parents would have a huge fight and then his father would leave. Only to repeat the whole distasteful rigmarole all over again months later when they'd inevitably reconciled. Shintarō knew why she didn't leave him. But that didn't mean he could agree with her actions. He failed to comprehend why she didn't just get a divorce and end everyone's misery.

The upside was that at least now, both his parents were in their respective camps, no doubt recharging their batteries for the next confrontation. Not having to worry about his mother and father fighting in front of Kazunari or upsetting Shuzuko lifted a huge weight off of Shintarō’s broad shoulders. He couldn't remember the last family vacation where he had been this unburdened by his parents. Although, this wasn’t to say that he didn’t have other, pressing concerns.

The Midorimas, who every year rented a three-bedroom, mountain-view, executive suite in Niseko during winter break, were supposed to have a four-bedroom suite this year to account for their additional guest. However, the booked-to-capacity hotel had screwed up their luxury accommodations spectacularly and instead had placed the six of them (now down to five) in a two-bedroom, first-floor unit overlooking the parking lot.

As a result, Shintarō’s parents (and now just his mother) had the master bedroom, Shizuko and Nanny had the second bedroom with the bunk beds, and Shintarō and Kazunari were sharing the pullout couch in the living room.

The metal bar that ran horizontally across the width of the frame of the sofa was doing a number on Shintarō’s lumbar spine and Kazunari was astoundingly clingy in his sleep, so much so that Shintarō worried he'd wake up one morning to his family openly gaping at him and his supposed classmate, with Takao wrapped around Shintarō’s torso like an amorous boa constrictor.

Sleeping beside Kazunari every night was its own slow form of torment for other reasons as well. Shintarō was only human and being in such close proximity to his Shadow was doing unspeakable things to his psyche.

He was frustrated, incredibly wound up, and liable to blow his top at any moment. He'd been coiled up so tight for days with all this pent-up, held-in-check, repressed “energy” -- that was what he was going to insist on calling it, dammit, even to himself -- and no relief in sight.

Shintarō found himself lying in bed staring at the wood-beam ceiling at night reciting the names of all the emperors in chronological order and in reverse chronological order as an alternative, more socially acceptable means of keeping his head on straight.

And when even that wasn’t cooling his scorching mind, he tried other strenuous forms of physical activity.

Shin-chan, you're going running, again? Takao had asked from his seat at the breakfast table over a mouthful of cereal when he saw Midorima donning his winter running gear anew. Didn't you go for a run last night too? Kazunari was not wrong. Shintarō had been doing a lot of running this week.

Unlike Shintarō, the hawkeye seemed unperturbed by their sleeping arrangements. Shintarō could only imagine how Kazunari could remain so calm under the amped up, pressure-cooker circumstances of the pull-out couch from hell and then his lecherous, overheated brain did imagine it and suddenly he was pulling his running shorts over his compression pants, then bolting to the genkan to put on his cross-trainers and the traction device for his shoes so he could head out the door as quickly as possible.
It was Shintarō’s version of hell freezing over -- a veritable winter wonderland, a veritable torture chamber.

###

Shintarō returned from his mid-afternoon run only to find Kazunari and Shuzuko building what was admittedly quite an elaborate snow fort outside their ski lodge. They must’ve been at it for an exorbitant amount of time.

As Midorima approached them, Takao quickly ducked behind it, but Shuzuko remained standing in front of it.

"Oniichan!" she called out to him, waiving a mitten-covered hand to her big brother.

When Shintarō stopped to admire their work, she beckoned him. “Come closer," she said sweetly.

Her voice was brimming with mirth. It made Shintarō’s heart soar to see Shuzuko smiling again. She had been upset when their father had left. There had been no tears this time, but she'd been noticeably quiet, withdrawn for the past few days. This was the first time he'd seen her outside since then, and a genuine smile graced Shintarō’s frost-chapped lips.

"You're too far, Oniichan,” she giggled. Come closer.

He knew she was up to something, he just didn't know what. One thing was certain though, whatever it was, it was Kazunari's doing.

She looked back, toward the fort, no doubt taking instructions from Kazunari who was still crouched down behind the retaining wall of snow.

"More to the left," she said and Shintarō complied because there was nothing he wouldn't do to make this little girl smile.

"Perfect," she grinned. "Now don't move, Oniichan."

Midorima realized he'd walked into a trap when Kazunari quickly got up, holding a perfectly round snowball in one hand and several more in the crook of his opposing elbow.

He’d been lured into a clearing, Midorima realized. There was nowhere for Shintarō to take cover, so he decided to threaten Kazunari instead. “Don’t you dare throw that snowba-, goddammit!”

Takao had hit his glasses. No doubt the glasses had been his target, because as Shintarō was wiping the snow off his plastic frames he was hit with another and then another. There seemed to be no end to this barrage of slush colliding with his visage. He could hear his little sister's giggles. Apparently they hadn't just been building a fort, they'd also been amassing an impressive amount of ammunition which they'd hidden behind a wall of snow.

Shintarō should’ve been upset. He'd been ganged up on and ambushed by the two people he cared most about. But instead, he only felt happiness because Shuzuko was laughing and Kazunari was certainly having a grand old time even though the hawkeye would pay for it later.

Having no place to hide and no time to build his own snowy armament, Shintarō did the only thing he could think of. He died a slow, overdramatic death, making sure to fall on top of their snow fort.

He reached over the now crushed fort and began pelting Kazunari with the remaining ammo. Although Takao had had an accomplice, it was an unspoken rule that Shuzuko was off limits.
Instead, the teammates focused on assailing each other as the little girl looked on, emitting peals of laughter.

"Really, Takao," he said, panting from the thin air and from all the exertion. "You of all people should know better than to pick a snowball fight with me." Like his three-point shots, Shintarō's snowballs were high-arched. "My shots never miss," he reminded the hawkeye and as if proving his point he hit his target.

The point guard fought back, but with the both of them throwing snowballs at each other, their dwindling stockpile was quickly reduced to just one. They both dove for the same snowball, easily crushing it to powder with their combined weight.

They got carried away in the snow, in the merriment, and in the playful back and forth struggle. "Shin-chan, you have slush on your eyelashes," Kazunari informed him.

The hawkeye pulled his hand out of his glove and wiped an icy thumb under Midorima’s lower lashes. Their faces were mere centimeters apart now. The tsundere could see and feel the condensation from the hawkeye’s hot, damp breath on his face. Steel-blue eyes had gotten half-lidded and were starting to close. Shintarō came to his senses at the last possible second.

If his little sister hadn't been there, he most certainly would've closed the distance. Instead, Shintarō diffused the tension between them by directing his attentions to the little turncoat.

Kazunari let his head fall back on the snow as he caught his breath, evidently taking advantage of the distraction Shintarō was providing.

"Shuzuko," Shintarō said. "I'm surprised at you," he teased, poking her sides and making her giggle. Really and truly, present circumstances excepted, the child was an angel.

"It was Kazu-nii's idea," she told her big brother.

"I have no doubt about that," Shintarō responded.

"Hey!" Takao interjected, from his snowy pillow, not bothering to lift his head. "You were supposed to be on my side," he reminded her.

"I'm back on Oniichan's side now," she giggled. "Oniichan's the best."

"He sure is." Takao wholeheartedly agreed.

The three of them continued playing in the snow until it was getting dark and Nanny Hamasaki came to collect Shuzuko. It was time for hot cocoa and a warm bath.

Still rattled by their close encounter, Shintarō went for another run.

###

That night and after a hasty shower, Shintarō returned to that dastardly couch.

He woke up hours later to a sticky situation. Oh fuck, who was he kidding, it was an absolute nightmare. All the recitation and running in the world couldn't help him now. And to make matters infinitely worse, his pajamas weren't the only thing caught in the line of fire. Fuck, fuck, fuck. Damn Takao and his close sleeping predilections.

Shintarō sighed. It couldn't be helped. He was going to have to die of
"Takao," he mumbled. His voice was deep and rumbly with sleep.

Kazunari didn't even stir. The man slept like a log. Like a warped, excessively clingy, log.

Shintarō proceeded to shove him a bit, but all that got him was a barely coherent half-mumbled, grunt. "Watch out for the pineapples, Shin-chan," was the idiot's nonsensical warning.

"Takao," he said sternly. "If you don't wake up this minute, I'm going to smother you with your pillow." It was a tempting thought. It was one way to get out of this mess.

That got Takao's attention. "What time is it Shin-chan?" he asked unleashing a yawn that could've swallowed the tsundere whole.

"It's four."

"Four in the morning?"

"No. Four in the afternoon, the sun didn't come out today," Shintarō said dryly.

"What?"

Takao was too stupid with sleep for Shintarō's sarcasm. "Of course, it's four in the morning, you idiot."

"Why are we up so early?" Kazunari asked, turning his back to Shintarō and burrowing into the blankets. Shintarō cringed as Takao's sweatpants came in contact with the bedsheets. He was going to have to wash those too now.

Midorima didn't get to ponder what to do next because Kazunari slowly regained consciousness. "Why is my pant leg all wet?" He yawned, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"Shut up you idiot. You're going to wake everyone up," Shintarō said hurriedly.

Suddenly Kazunari was wide awake and sitting straight up, "Oh, shit did I --" Taped fingers and a large palm covered Kazunari's big mouth.

A huge part of Shintarō was sorely tempted to let his teammate take the fall. It would be so much easier to yell at Kazunari for getting his genetic material on the both of them and the bedclothes, than to admit that this was his sordid doing.

"It wasn't you," Midorima begrudgingly admitted.

"Y-you did this? All of this is yours?" The way Takao said it, you'd think he were sitting in the middle of a mill pond.

Shintarō refused to look at him.

"Holy fuck, Shin-chan. When was the last time you cleaned your pipes?"

Shintarō had not "cleaned his pipes" all week. He'd been running and reciting emperors instead.

"Will you please shut up," he snapped. "And get off the bed already."
Takao snickered. "Looks like you got off already, huh, Shin-chan?" he said gleefully. The hawkeye could be unbelievably infantile when he was so inclined.

Shintarō rolled his eyes. It was easier to feign supreme annoyance than admit profound mortification.

###

Shintarō had been coming to this ski resort with his family since he was a child on the bunny slope. Up until this unhappy morning he had no idea there was a coin laundry on the ground floor of the property. He'd had no reason to know this. Like the spa, it too was conveniently open 24 hours.

"They were out of oshiruko," Takao said handing Shintarō a sports drink he'd purchased from the vending machine across the hall. He stuffed the loose change into the front pocket of his jeans. "Drink up, Shin-chan," he said. "I'm sure you're dehydrated," he teased biting his lip coyly.

"I see you're enjoying yourself," Shintarō snapped at him.

Kazunari's grin widened. "Shouldn't you be feeling more relaxed, Shin-chan? You know, on account of --"

"Not another word from you," Shintarō warned.

Midorima unscrewed the cap of his drink.

Kazunari cracked a playful smile, "Try not to spill any on my pants this time," he teased.

Shintarō, who'd been avoiding Kazunari's eyes since he woke up to this whole mess, said nothing. Instead, he'd turned a shade of aubergine and carefully studied the label on the bottle in his hand.

Kazunari pouted. He'd expected some brash outcry brimming with manufactured outrage, something along the lines of, 'Shut up, you fool.'

Instead, he had made someone he cared deeply about feel even more embarrassed over something that wasn't even a big deal to him, really.

Kazunari sat himself atop the room's only folding table.

"Hey," he said quietly reaching for Shintarō's taped fingers and when his partner wouldn't give them to him, he just took them. "I was only teasing you."

Takao rubbed his thumb over the back of Midorima's hand. "I don't mind at all if you spill things on me. All kinds of things," he added.

They'd come a long way since the days when Midorima had never heard of him and Takao would throw darts at a picture of that bespectacled face, torn off from one of the centerfolds that came with his subscription to Basketball Monthly.

Kazunari rubbed his freehand over the top of his own head trying to get his bedhead under control. He noticed Shin-chan wasn't suffering from the same malady -- the tsundere didn't have a hair out of place -- maybe there was something to be said for wearing a sleeping cap every night.

"That thing that happened earlier," Takao continued. Midorima cringed. He tried to pull his hand back, but Kazunari held his grip. "I don't mind that at all," he said.

When Shintarō finally, finally, looked at him with those beautiful green eyes of his, Kazunari made sure to give him a genuine smile. "Actually," Takao said, "I would encourage it."
Shintarō looked like he'd misplaced his tongue, so Takao continued talking. "If it's Shin-chan’s," he said, blushing furiously, "then it's okay, right?"

Because really and truly Takao was fine with it. "In fact, it's more than okay. There’s only one person I want to swap bodily fluids with," he informed Shintarō. "And that person happens to be you. I propose next time we leave our pajamas out of it altogether. Just you and me. What do you say, Shin-chan?"

Midorima didn't respond with words, but he did reward Kazunari with a small, self-conscious smile for his efforts. He couldn't help himself. There was a heck of a lot Kazunari was indelicately saying in those not so eloquent words.

"Have I entered an alternate universe or did you really just crack a smile for me?" Kazunari teased.

"Perhaps we should pencil it in after practice," the tsundere said awkwardly, his face aflame with embarrassment. He pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

Kazunari grinned widely. "Oh. And you’re cracking jokes now too?" The hawkeye pretended to look around him. "Where exactly is this magic portal I seem to have stumbled upon?"

"Are you looking for a way out?"

"Nah, Shin-chan. It's nice," Takao said, spreading his legs apart to make room for his tsundere. Shintarō took him up on the clear invitation and stepped into the space between Kazunari’s knees.

Midorima finally got his kiss. It wasn’t their first kiss. That awkward fumbling moment would forever belong to Shūtoku’s musty locker room.

This one was a kiss brimming with promise. It wasn’t atop the snowy remnants of a ruined fort. It was in a humid laundry room scented with powdered detergent purchased from a machine, accompanied by the hum of the dryer, under the harsh glare of florescent overhead lights in the wee morning hours, next to a plastic folding table, but it was nonetheless perfect in its own way.

"Hey, Shin-chan," Takao said, his voice low and throaty. "Maybe, next time I’ll show you how to make a snowball."

Shintarō scoffed. "Idiot. I know how to make a snowball," he said, recalling the ones he had besieged Kazunari with yesterday.

Kazunari’s grin widened. "I don’t think you do." He smiled sexily and Shintarō felt the temperature of the room skyrocket for reasons that had nothing to do with the dryer cycle.

Shintarō had no idea what his partner was grinning about, but something about those half-lidded steel-blue eyes made his face burn brighter than that time he mistook his great aunt’s glass of sherry for mulled punch.

Kazunari popped the hood of Shintarō’s borrowed sweatshirt over his head. He laughed as he pulled the tsundere close, griping the waistband of his sweatpants. "We could go snowballing," he whispered conspiratorially.

Shintarō looked at him, furrowed brows in confusion.

“Here,” Takao said. “I’ll give you a taste.” He took the plastic bottle from Shintarō’s hand and took a sip. He pressed his lips against Shintarō’s, opened his mouth, and pushed the liquid onto the tsundere’s mouth with his tongue. To Midorima’s credit he didn’t choke and as soon as that kiss
ended Kazunari rewarded him with another.

**AN:** Shin-chan's as pure as the driven snow. Takao is going to take good care of him.

Chapter End Notes

# 40 “Have I entered an alternate universe or did you really just crack a smile for me?”
& #11. “Don’t you dare throw that snowba-, goddammit!”
Real Boys

Chapter Summary

Takao is a high-spec big brother. Midorima embarrasses easily.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Real Boys

Shintarō was studying at Kazunari's house. Or rather, he had been studying. At the moment he had his tongue down his boyfriend's throat and the only thing he was learning was that there was a direct causal link between the tiny whimpers Kazunari was emitting like sparks and the need for Shintarō to surreptitiously readjust his pants.

Things had started to heat up between them since that Hokkaido trip over winter break that had nothing to do with the thawing temperatures outside and the expected arrival of spring. Earlier it had been Shintarō's untaped left index finger in that guttural position and Kazunari had promisingly shown no signs of a gag reflex. This was a fascinating discovery.

Kazunari's hands had now migrated to Shintarō's tenting lap as was their wont these days whenever their lips locked for any period of time longer than the span of a single kiss. The encouraging addition of Takao's smaller, nimble fingers made Shintarō want to make out with his boyfriend until they were both panting for breath.

It was this intoxicated handsy state of mindless bliss that explained why they were both caught unawares when Kazumi ran up the stairs with all the stealth and grace of a stampeding herd of elephants, threw her heavy school bag with a loud thump on the floor at the landing, and flung the door to her brother's room wide open.

Midorima squeaked like a startled mouse. "It's not what it looks like . . . ." he blurted out to no one in particular as if that would quell any suspicions. Never mind that it was exactly what it looked like.

Kazumi paid Shintarō no heed. "Kazu," she said to her brother, taking a huge gulp of air, having apparently run all the way home. "Tachibana Mei is a skank and I hate her," she sobbed. Evidently the girls had had a big fight.

Shintarō thanked the heavens for the invention of the kotatsu and scooted closer to the one he and Takao had been sitting under. He hoped in the ongoing commotion no one noticed the sound of him zipping his uniform pants back up.

Kazumi was supposed to be studying at her friend's house today. Kazunari had casually dropped that promising tidbit of information when he'd invited Shintarō over to his house that afternoon purportedly so they could study. The prospect of privacy was a motivating factor in Midorima readily agreeing to this alleged study session. Kazumi was not supposed to be here, in her brother's room, at the moment wailing like a jilted bride.

Shintarō felt sudden and intense hatred towards this Tachibana Mei who'd been responsible for this
abrupt, unexpected interruption of his own "study" time. Shintarō took this new form of study time with Kazunari very seriously. He was ready to wholeheartedly agree with Kazumi that this Tachibana Mei really was a skank, whatever that meant.

Takao, who knew Tachibana Mei a lot better than his boyfriend did, was not so quick to pass judgment. "What happened?" he asked his sister who was wiping snot on the sleeve of her uniform shirt.

Midorima crinkled his nose in distaste. Kazumi was not one of those girls who could cry daintily, Shintarō decided. Suspecting that his "study" time with Kazunari had come to its premature conclusion, Shintarō took out his lucky pencil and began doing his math homework. No sense putting it off now that he had no pleasant distractions.

"She's the worst human being on the planet and an even worse best friend," Kazumi proclaimed in between sobs.

"It's awful," Kazumi assured him. "It's the worst possible thing you could imagine."

Shintarō was imagining dragons setting fire to whole villages and crocodile infested moats (he'd read his little sister a bedtime story last night after his parents had had a loud fight) when Kazumi's high pitched wails interrupted his thoughts.

"She said I stuff my braaaaaa," Kazumi bemoaned, turning on the waterworks to full blast.

Unconcerned with Kazumi's plight, Shintarō moved his homework out of the splash zone and continued onto the next problem.

Kazunari frowned. "That's the biggest most ridiculous lie I've ever heard!" he denounced and Shintarō gawked at him.

"I know!" Kazumi agreed.

An incredulous Shintarō set his lucky pencil down on the table. Unable to concentrate on his homework in the face of the absurdity that had cropped up in front of him, he turned his scrutinizing gaze to Kazumi and then to her brother. The Takao siblings had clearly lost their minds because it was obvious to the casual observer (of which Shintarō was one) that Kazumi took liberties with the tissue box. In fact, she needn't have bothered wiping her nose on her sleeve when she could've just reached down her shirt.

"You know what, Kazu-chan?" This was Takao's pet name for his little sister (incidentally, it was also Kazumi's pet name for her brother which made things confusing at times for Shintarō). "She's just jealous cause you're buxom and she's not."

Shintarō openly gaped at his boyfriend. He was either frighteningly good at bald-face lying or frighteningly delirious.

"She is?" Kazumi sounded hopeful.

"Of course, she is," Kazunari responded as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "You're
hot. Shin-chan would date you, wouldn't you Shin-chan?"

"You would?" she asked meekly.

"... um," was Shintarō's eloquent response. He was reluctant to revisit the can of worms that had opened months earlier when Kazumi had stuffed a love poem in his locker. He could understand Kazumi's hopeful cluelessness, but not Kazunari's. Shintarō would've thought that having the hawkeye's hands down Shintarō's temporarily snug pants would've told Kazunari everything he needed to know about where his boyfriend's baser interests lay. Shintarō pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

Sensing he wasn't going to get a better response from the tsundere, Takao answered for him, "See? He'd totally date you, Kazu-chan. That is, if he weren't already madly in love with me."

A red-faced, nervous Shintarō pushed his glasses all the way up the top of his head and nearly knocked them off his face. Takao had clearly lost his mind.

"Besides what's the big deal with boobs anyway?" Kazunari continued with his bizarre pep talk. "Any guy worth dating doesn't care about stuff like that."

"They don't?" Kazumi sniffed, sounding skeptical.

"Noooo," Kazunari assured her. "Shin-chan doesn't care about boobs, do you Shin-chan?"

"... um, no." Shintarō answered truthfully. He most certainly didn't care about boobs.


"... um." Shintarō didn't know what the universe was waiting for. He'd like the floor to open up and swallow him whole now, please.

"See?" Kazunari said confidently to Kazumi as if Shintarō had emphatically approved.

"Woah," she said sounding impressed and nodding in agreement.

Kazumi was staring at Shintarō with open-mouthed awe as if she'd just heard some grand secret.

What was wrong with these two idiots? Shintarō silently wondered. He'd barely uttered a syllable. And then he touched his face and realized it was hot, very, very hot and he was no doubt blushing like a bride on her wedding night.

"Now go call Mei-kun and tell her, real boys don't care about boobs and real friends don't either," Takao said with conviction, like he was going to turn that into a slogan and print it on t-shirts.

Kazumi pitched herself at her big brother, giving him a tight hug. "Thanks Kazu-nii. You're the best onii-chan a girl could ask for."

"Don't mention it," Takao said, patting her on her back.

Kazumi walked towards the door and they were almost rid of her when she turned around and said cheekily, "Don't worry, Kazu. I won't tell mom what you were doing in here with your boyfriend."

Shintarō choked on air.

Kazumi smirked knowingly at the both of them before politely closing the door behind her.
Chapter End Notes

30. “It’s not what it looks like…”
Bed Buddies

Chapter Summary

Takao sneaks off to his boyfriend’s room during training camp.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bed Buddies

Takao Kazunari was beat. He’d never known third-years had it so rough at these retreats. Keeping these underclassmen brats in line was a full time job. No wonder Myaji-senpai had been so irritated all the time back when Takao and Shin-chan had been first years. The only thing that kept Takao going was that he had every intention of slinking off into his boyfriend's room after everyone else had gone to bed. Takao blew his whistle to signify the end of the practice drills. They were going to run a mile on the sand next, before hitting the showers and congregating over what was surely going to be a disorderly dinner.

It was finally lights out and there was a mad rush to bed, but not because anyone was particularly sleepy. Physically tired yes, but not drowsy. Shūtoku was not one of those fancy schools like Rakuzan or Kajō that could afford to rent more than a few rooms for their basketball team's summer training camp.

Consequently, there was an unspoken rule that the last person to bed would have to sleep in the hallway. There was only so much space in the room for so many futons. Takao made sure he was one of the first to claim his. He needed a choice spot near the door. He had plans for the last night of training camp.

Of course, Shin-chan, being Shin-chan, got his own private room while Takao and everyone else on the team had to slum it, sleeping ass-to-elbow on the floor of the ryokan.

Once the locker room banter had died down in a room full of male teenagers with raging hormones, all Kazunari could hear were the crickets outside, the not-so-soft snores of Fujimori beside him and the occasional breaking of wind heralding the remnant wafts of tonight's stuffed cabbage dinner -- Takao buried his nose in his buckwheat pillow at the stench, guys were so disgusting. After sufficient time had passed, the hawkeye quietly crept from his bed and tiptoed out of the room. He was careful to sidestep Kawase-kun out in the hallway, who'd apparently been the last dope to come to bed tonight.

Kazunari knew Shin-chan would be all scandalized when Takao presented himself uninvited in his room with amorous intentions. The tsundere would probably kick him out of his futon, but that was what made his Shin-chan so unbearably cute. The challenge was part of the fun. And of course Kazunari knew in the end Shin-chan would relent to Kazunari’s alluring charms and irresistible wiles. The tsundere always did.

Shin-chan liked to put up a good show and play the part of the offended fair maiden, but Kazunari knew for a fact it was all an act. While Shin-chan was certainly still ghostly pallid, he could no longer claim maidenhood, at least not truthfully, a thought that made Kazunari brim with self-
congratulatory smugness.

When the hawkeye reached his destination, he gently pushed the sliding shōji doors that led to Shin-chan’s room with the stealth of a ninja, careful not to make a sound. He was intent on surprising his tsundere.

He needn’t have bothered. When he slipped in, he was surprised to find that the room was empty. He supposed his boyfriend could’ve gotten up to use the communal bathroom down the hall or maybe walked to the vending machines in the lobby for a drink.

In any event, an unexpected, golden opportunity presented itself to Kazunari and he was not one to look a gift horse in the mouth. He decided to shock a prim and proper Shin-chan by divesting himself of his pajamas and greeting his boyfriend in his birthday suit. He did just that and snuck under the covers quietly snickering to himself as he imagined how the scene would unfold.

Moments later, Kazunari got out of Shin-chan’s bed because Shin-chan being Shin-chan would probably complain about Kazunari’s clothes being on the floor, instead of appreciating the tantalizing, fleshy view that would be on display all for him, like most people would. Takao quickly folded his pjs and stuffed them behind the futon. He rubbed his hands together roguishly. This was even better than his original plan of simply sneaking into his boyfriend’s room. He couldn’t wait to see the expression on Shin-chan’s face.

###

It was days like these that Nakatani Masaaki contemplated early retirement. Training camps were always brutal on coaches.

For one thing, he had to be on the job the entire week. There was no going home at the end of a long day, heating up a bowl of egg tofu in the microwave, resting his tired feet on the ottoman, and watching his favorite cop show in his undershirt and underwear until he fell asleep in his favorite chair in the living room.

*Nope.* There was no doing any of that during training camp. Here, he had to be on high alert at all times. He had to officiate over petty squabbles (and there were plenty to go around among this crop) and soothe teary bouts of homesickness from the younger athletes. It was like playing mother and father to an entire squadron of unruly children.

Today had been an especially trying day. His prima donna ace had exceeded his three selfish requests and then some, insisting that there was a draft in his room and fully expecting the coach to do something about it. Only Shintarō would complain of a draft in the middle of summer. If only Nakatani could control the weather. He could barely control a retreat full of rowdy boys.

Masaaki was of the opinion that they did not pay teachers nearly enough, to deal with this crap.

To make matters worse, he’d gotten an angry call from his downstairs neighbor. It seemed the air conditioner in Nakatani’s modest apartment was busted again and had leaked through to the unit below. He’d need to get all that repaired when he got home tomorrow. So much for thoughts of early retirement. The last time this had happened, it had cost him a bundle.

For now, all he wanted to do was enjoy a nice scalding hot bath in the quiet, deserted onsen so he could soak his tired, aging, sagging muscles before heading off to bed.

###

Long after his already wrinkled skin had turned prune-like, Nakatani Masaaki decided it was time to
 WELL, I survived today, he thought to himself, now that the noisy brats were all tucked away and he'd enjoyed his all too rare moment of blessed solitude, he might as well get out of the bath and head to his drafty room.

A weary Nakatani yawned as he walked down the corridor wearing the thread-bare complimentary robe the budget-friendly ryokan provided for its guests. On the way to his room, he stepped over a snoozing Kawase-kun in the hallway.

When the tired coach turned the corner he saw his ace coming back from the vending machines in the lobby carrying a bottled sports drink in his taped left hand. The tall shooting guard bowed respectfully to his coach in acknowledgement as they passed each other in the hallway. They were both eager to hit the hay and so neither one of them extended the greeting for longer than strictly necessary.

Midorima Shintarō, Nakatani thought as he shook his head with an exasperated, though fond fatherly smile, was an enigma. The boy was simultaneously the rudest and most well-mannered player on his team.

Nakatani left his slippers outside as he slid open the door to his room. As he closed the door, effectively cutting off the light from the hallway, the room plunged into darkness. It made no difference to him. The layout of the rooms were all the same and after a week of accommodations at the seaside inn, he knew where everything was.

He placed his robe on the hook on the wall, toweled himself off thoroughly, and pulled the ryokan-issued yukata pajamas from the top shallow drawer of his dresser.

He put on his night clothes, emitted another yawn, and then pulled the covers off his futon.

What he felt as he kneeled on the futon was a warm lump on his bed. What he saw when he stood up to flip the light switch was a very naked point guard who was wearing nothing but a suggestive smile which quickly fell from his lips like an anvil. What Nakatani heard when their eyes met was a blood-curdling scream that could’ve woken the dead. It certainly woke up the entire team who, along with the team’s ace, all rushed to the rescue piling into Coach’s room.

“Is there a reason you’re naked in my bed?” Nakatani asked with a calmness that was in stark contrast to the point guard’s startled state.

“Shin-chan – ” Takao began to stammer under the scrutiny of every gawking eye in the room and a pair of bespectacled ones that silently promised bloody murder.

Seeing as Kazunari was having trouble speaking, Nakatani decided to finish the sentence and clue him in in the process, “-- switched rooms with me earlier this evening because his was too drafty.”

From the horrified shriek Kazunari had emitted moments ago upon being discovered, you would’ve thought that he was being killed. Of course, that was premature. Clairvoyant, but definitely premature.

AN: I couldn't resist giving Nakatani the line from the prompt. I hope you're enjoying these.
Chapter End Notes

6. “Is there a reason you’re naked in my bed?”
Suited to a Tea

Chapter Summary

It hits Shintarō like a ton of bricks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Suited to a Tea

Shintarō met up with his friend at a teahouse near Tokyo Station. When Akashi had called Midorima from the bullet train early that morning to announce his visit, he was already well on his way.

Midorima knew why he had purposely sidestepped the question of where he was going when he’d spoken to Takao on the phone afterward.

The hawkeye had naturally wanted to know what Shintarō was up to today because more often than not, it was what Takao would be doing that day as well. These days, they spent so much time together that it was almost a given that you’d find one where you found the other.

And when Takao had pressed him for an answer, Midorima made up an excuse. He felt guilty about lying to Takao, but he knew it couldn't be helped.

Takao was not especially fond of Midorima's childhood friend, to put it mildly. The heartbreaking loss against Rakuzan had been gut wrenching. Akashi’s petty refusal to shake Midorima’s hand afterward had been a slap on the face. Things between Midorima and Akashi had always been complicated and to a large extent still were. But he and Akashi were on the mend now.

Midorima was ready to move on. But Takao, even though it hadn’t been his hand, even though years had passed, was not willing to forget and he certainly wasn’t willing to forgive the slight. He was deeply insulted on Midorima’s behalf and grew tense at even the mention of the Rakuzan captain’s name.

As far as Takao was concerned, it was not water under the bridge.

Sitting across the small, wooden table from his former captain reminded Shintarō of when he and Akashi use to square off playing shogi together at Teikō. Shintarō never won a single game against Akashi, but he had relished the alone time, use to bask in the other boy's brilliance, use to soak up the undivided attention he would receive from the boy who once, perhaps all too knowingly, had held Midorima’s heart in his hand.

They were very different people now. The both of them.

Akashi hadn’t known defeat back then. He’d learned the meaning of the word since, though it had not been Shintarō’s team who had meted the painful lesson.

Midorima was not the same either. The candle he’d carried for his then captain, the unwavering admiration he’d felt, the flickering inklings of a boyhood first crush had been extinguished. Not even the tendrils of smoke remained.
He still cared for Akashi, of course. There were not, and would never be, hard feelings between them as far as Shintarō was concerned. No matter what had transpired between them, he would always care for Akashi. But what he’d felt for a babyfaced-Akashi was not what he felt for the third-year sitting across the table from him in a crowded teahouse near Tokyo Station.

And it certainly had never been what he felt now for Takao. There was a blazing inferno in Shintarō’s heart where there had once been a flickering candle and it burned constant and bright for Kazunari the way it had never done before. What Shintarō felt for Kazunari, the ardor and intensity of his feelings, had only ever been directed at Takao. He felt about the hawkeye, what he’d never felt for anyone.

Of course, Shintarō didn’t know how to put those feelings into words he could express aloud and so Takao remained in the dark. The hawkeye grew uncharacteristically prickly and cold-shouldered whenever Midorima received a text from Akashi or an electronic nudge that it was Midorima’s turn to put down a tile from the Shogi with Friends application on his phone.

The conversation with Akashi escalated rapidly. It quickly went from exchanging pleasantries to what was apparently the uncomfortable order of business today, what had apparently been the purpose of Akashi’s sudden and unexpected visit from Kyoto.

It wasn’t as if they had made some sort of formal announcement or any announcement at all, really. But by now, everyone they could loosely label a peer knew they were dating and it didn't surprise Midorima that Akashi, of all people, would know about their relationship. He'd probably seen it on the court, in the way Takao passed the ball to Midorima, in the way Midorima had absolute trust in his new point guard. The one who had replaced Akashi in more ways than one.

Even so, Midorima had not expected Akashi to broach the subject so openly and so freely. Yet here they were. “The situation is unsustainable, Shintarō.”

“I know,” Midorima responded, studying his poorly prepared matcha as if he were divining tea leaves.

Akashi smiled, almost pleased with Midorima’s quick concession. “Forget about him being the wrong gender,” he added, "he’s not of your social standing.”

None of this was news to Midorima. He knew his parents would deem Takao unsuitable for a whole host of reasons, but the thing was, none of it mattered. Not anymore.

Takao had sort of insinuated himself into Midorima’s heart unbeknownst to Shintarō and entirely unbidden and by the time Midorima noticed it, it was too late. The boy was deeply entrenched there.

“I don’t care,” Shintarō said defiantly. He didn’t feel nearly as brave as those words implied. He was terrified of his parents, especially his imposing father, finding out about his relationship with his teammate.

“You don’t care?” Akashi sounded surprised.

“I don’t care about any of that,” Shintarō retorted, feeling like the room was starting to spin, feeling like there was something stronger than sugar spiked in his matcha.

“You might not care, but your parents will,” Akashi reminded him. "And sooner or later you’ve got your future to contend with.”

“We still have time –"
That’s what he’d told himself. That given enough time, he and Takao would figure things out, they would sort through this mess, find a solution they could both live with.

“This will not end well, Shintarō,” Akashi warned.

“You can’t possibly know that,” Midorima countered stubbornly.

Akashi had his Emperor Eye. He had the ability to predict the movements of his opponents, but he couldn’t tell the future, not on something like this. Not something so far in advance.

“I don’t need my Emperor Eye,” Akashi responded as if reading Shintarō’s rapidly fraying mind. “The unfavorable outcome is a foregone conclusion. It’s obvious. I’m surprised you haven’t considered it.”

Akashi took a sip of his oolong and then continued his sack of Midorima’s heart. “Your parents would never allow it. You might as well spare both your feelings now.”

“But, I care for him.” Shintarō sounded desperate, like he was pleading for mercy.

Damn it. As soon as the words left his mouth, Shintarō was furious with himself. He hadn’t even said them to Kazunari, not yet, and he’d just blurted them out to Akashi.

“Yes,” Akashi nodded as if he’d gotten out of Shintarō exactly what he come for and Shintarō felt like he’d been played. Like he was several moves behind Akashi in shogi again.

The redhead drained his tea and set the empty cup on the wooden table with a resounding thud.

“A pity,” he said. “Well, I’d better leave now. I’ve got a train to catch.” He gathered his umbrella and the rest of his things.

Shintarō couldn’t help himself, he stood up as soon as Akashi did, showing the kind of respect one would show a departing dignitary.

So annoying, Midorima thought and he wasn’t sure if he was referring to himself or Akashi.

“Why did you summon me here?” he asked because from his vantage point the meeting had seemed fruitless. It had ended abruptly almost as soon as it had started.

The enigmatic smile on Akashi’s lips was inscrutable. “We both needed to hear you say those words aloud,” he said.

With that, he bid farewell to his middle school vice captain.

“It’s been,” Akashi paused at the door, gazed into Shintarō’s eyes as if he were gazing into his very soul, “illuminating,” he concluded and left.

###

His clandestine meeting with Akashi had put Shintarō in a foul mood.

All his innermost turmoil had been dredged up from the pit of his soul and brought to the surface. It was ugly to look at. It was unsettling to say the least and to make matters worse he couldn’t tell Takao about it. Too many questions.

He’d have to explain why he had lied about his whereabouts in the first place and he’d have to tell Takao what he’d told Akashi.
To make matters worse, he’d been caught in a sudden shower. The cheap umbrella he’d purchased at
the konbini after leaving the teahouse had been no match for the wind gusts.

It was a dreary, rainy afternoon in Tokyo. It was almost the end of the school year and small buds
had started to sprout on the branches of the sakura trees that grew on either side of the walkway.

Midorima Shintarō’s faithful, long legs carried him to where he wanted to be, an obedient dog
returning to its master.

“Shin-chan,” Takao said sounding surprised to see Shintarō at his doorstep.

“Pardon the intrusion,” Midorima said by way of formal greeting. He was trembling for reasons other
than the awful weather.

They had snuck up on him, the early spring rainstorm and the unanticipated conversation.

“What are you doing out here?” Takao asked as if the last thing he’d expected to find was a
downtrodden, drenched Midorima at his doorstep, but before Shintarō could come up with a
plausible excuse Takao pulled him inside.

“Come in,” he said. “You’ll catch a cold standing out there.”

Even as he crossed the threshold of Takao’s home, Midorima protested. “Idiot,” he said. “That’s not
how colds come about.”

The heater was on and the house and – like its inhabitants – it was warm and inviting.

Though he’d never admit it, Midorima liked Takao’s house an awful lot. He liked the way it felt
cozy and looked lived in and did not resemble the sterile, wide corridors of a museum. He liked that
Takao’s mother always used lemon scented floor cleaner and that part of the pleasant smell of the
house always clung to Kazunari, even when they were at school.

“Yeah, yeah.” Takao said dismissively. “That’s why you’ll be a big fancy doctor one day Shin-chan
and I’ll be –“ Takao paused. He didn’t know what he wanted to be. ”Not that,” he finished lamely.

Taking the clear plastic umbrella from the tsundere’s tight grip, he shook off the droplets of rainwater
over a large potted plant his mother kept in the genkan. He leaned the now folded umbrella against
the wall beside it.

And then Takao turned his full attention to Midorima. Takao appraised Shintarō the way a jealous
pet might study its returning owner.

The thought was ridiculous. Shintarō knew that. It wasn’t as if Takao could smell Akashi on him. He
and Akashi hadn’t even touched. They’d bowed and kept a respectable distance at the teahouse.

Still, when Takao turned his sharp eyes on Shintarō, Midorima couldn’t help but squirm under the
intensity of his scrutinizing gaze.

“You’re done early,” the hawkeye observed as he stepped up to the main part of the house, pausing
to stuff his feet into still-warm orange slippers.

It was evident the hawkeye was home alone. Takao’s house was not usually this quiet. His parents
and his sister must’ve gone out somewhere and been caught in the rain because the only sound
coming from inside the house was from a game show playing on the television in the living room.
“They uh,” Shintarō stumbled over his words, “didn’t have the one I was looking for,” he said, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

Midorima had told Takao over the phone that morning that he was going to look for a new figurine to add to his ceramic frog collection. There had been an awkward pause when Takao responded that he’d bring the rickshaw and pick Shintarō up.

The tsundere had then told Takao that it was probably not a good idea since it would probably take all day. Never mind that they sometimes spent hours together hunting down lucky items.

The joviality with which Kazunari had been speaking to Shintarō was perceptively gone, but Takao didn’t press the issue further and Shintarō was gnawed at by guilt ever since.

The look on Takao’s face now was weary, guarded.

Midorima tried to stuff his boat-sized feet into one of the pairs of slippers the Takao family kept for guests.

Ordinarily, the hawkeye would find it hilarious when Shintarō’s heel and half of his high arch would stick out onto the floor, but Kazunari was pensive now. He seemed distracted.

Shintarō did not like a quiet, subdued Kazunari. He’d do anything to make him lighthearted again including telling him the truth.

What was the point of keeping it a secret, when he’d already admitted it to Akashi. The other boy hadn’t even seemed at all surprised when Shintarō had fessed up to it at the teahouse. Shouldn’t Kazunari know as well?

Midorima followed Takao up the stairs.

“What’s the matter Shin-chan?” Takao asked noticing his light had grown quiet.

“I think I’m in love with you and I’m terrified,” an unnerved Shintarō told Kazunari.

Takao smiled and it was blinding. Although his heart was soaring, the hawkeye knew Midorima well enough not to make a big deal out of the tender admission he’d just heard.

“Oh,” he said casually. “Is that all?” he asked as if Midorima had said nothing out of the ordinary, as if he’d said something as unremarkable as, I left my umbrella at home today and got soaked.

Takao handed Midorima a clean towel from the linen closet to dry off. It smelled like laundry detergent and the dryer sheets Takao’s mom always bought. Like the house, it was a scent Shintarō found familiar and comforting.

“What do you mean ‘is that all’?” Midorima protested following Takao into his room. It was enough, it was everything. It would ruin him. It would ruin the both of them.

“I love you too, Shin-chan. That’s not something to be afraid of.”

Midorima was too preoccupied fretting about the future to realize the gravity of what had just transpired between them. And while Takao was acutely aware, he knew Shin-chan would be easily flustered if he pointed it out. It was damn near impossible for Takao to keep the smile off his face.

The hawkeye searched his dresser until he found what he was looking for. He gave Shintarō back the red, “glasses boy” t-shirt he had nicked from Shintarō’s house months ago and had steadfastly
“forgotten” to return.

“I don’t think you’re taking into account –”

"You worry too much, Shin-chan.”

“And you don’t worry enough, idiot.”

Kazunari turned around to face Shintarō. The hawkeye smiled a lopsided grin, “That’s because I have Shin-chan who takes very good care of me.”

Midorima removed the wet button down he was wearing and replaced it with the shirt Takao had given him, but there was nothing that could be done about his damp pants. It wasn’t as if he could borrow a pair from Takao or Takao’s father, they weren’t the same size.

Shintarō wanted to point out to his idiot friend that he wouldn’t always be there to save him. But, he honestly couldn’t imagine his life without Kazunari in it. Not anymore. He couldn’t bring himself to say it. He didn’t want it to be true.

So instead, he merely replied with an uncommunicative, “Humph.”

Kazunari silenced his boyfriend with a brief kiss on his lips. And then he walked out of his bedroom and headed back downstairs to the living room.

Midorima followed the hawkeye like a lost puppy.

“But my parents –”

Takao interrupted the worrywart who seemed determined to speak truthfully to him.

“Aliens or Zombies,” the hawkeye asked holding two DVD cases for Shintarō’s inspection.

It was as if Takao didn’t want to hear what Midorima had to say.

“Zombies,” Midorima replied, eager to get back to the serious conversation he was trying to have.

“My parents –”

Takao fed the chosen disc into the DVD player and then plopped down on the L-shaped sectional. He patted the seat cushion beside him gesturing for Midorima to come sit.

As soon as Shintarō had settled down beside him, Takao leaned back to rest on Shintarō’s torso. It was their default movie watching position, one they had both grown accustomed to.

Midorima wrapped an arm around Takao.

“I know, Shin-chan. I know,” he said, planting a placating kiss on Midorima’s chin.

And really he did. Takao knew all about the implausibility of their relationship. But he didn’t want to hear it.

Not today. Maybe not ever.
32. “I think I’m in love with you and I’m terrified.”
Playing House

Chapter Summary

Midorima and Takao move in together for college.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Playing House

Now that Midorima and Takao would be moving in together, ostensibly to pursue a college education (and not a carnal one), they were in dire need of some home furnishings. Shin-chan’s mother had offered her help (i.e., her wallet) and by that, she’d offered the services of her professional decorator to fill their apartment with absolutely everything two university students could possibly want and then some. The soon-to-be inhabitants of the coveted two-bedroom apartment across from the medical campus had turned her down so fast one would think she had offered to paint their walls with lead and fill the bathtub with baby alligators.

What Midorima and Takao had instantly realized was that Sazuna would insist on supervising the work herself and then they’d never get rid of her. Because Midorima’s mother had a sixth-sense about where she wasn’t wanted and certainly not needed. In those instances, she would stubbornly pry herself into the situation on purpose. It was one of her many “charming” qualities. It was also a byproduct of Sazuna having way too much time on her hands of late. She and Shin-chan's father were in a bit of a spat at the moment. A fact that wasn't disclosed to the boys so much as made painfully obvious from the number of times she'd called Shin-chan's phone this week.

Of course, it didn't help that Shin-chan had ignored his mother's phone calls until she suddenly appeared on their doorstep this morning unannounced. Takao had barely had enough time to remember to fetch his clothes off the floor of the master bedroom where he’d left them the night before and sprint down the hall to toss them into what was supposed to be his bedroom.

Refusing Sazuna's help had left them in a bit of a decorative predicament because without Shin-chan’s mother’s sizeable purse strings the new-to-them apartment had a bare-quality to it, a minimalist look that was a bit too minimal.

Although, they had one thing going for them. They had been able to obtain a couch for their living room, gratis. Midorima’s great aunt had lent her only-and-therefore-by-default-favorite grandnephew a family heirloom, a priceless antique that was both a furniture showpiece and in museum-like quality. The red velvet couch that had been in the Midorima family for ages was on loan to Shintarō with the proviso that it be returned to the monied old-bat upon the completion of his studies in the same pristine condition as it was lent.

Shin-chan’s parents had ponied up the money for their son’s top-of-the-line, ergonomic sleep-station (i.e., bed). An item that had been acquired during a shopping excursion that had erupted in an argument between the unhappily married couple when an overly solicitous young sales clerk had batted her eyelashes at Midorima's handsome father, evidently seeking to score more than a sale. Needless to say it had been an awkward car ride home.
Takao had “contributed” (more or less dragged) a springy hand-me-down, slope-running-down-the-middle mattress he’d arm-wrestled off of a not-even-trying-to-win Kimura, for the second bedroom which was alleged-but-not-really “his” bedroom.

The bedraggled thing was in such poor condition one would think Kimura had either a surprisingly active love life or it had been used by elephants to practice somersaults and swan dives. Of course, the dilapidated mattress did not concern the hawkeye because he knew damn well he wasn’t going to be spending any nights sleeping on it anyway.

By the end of one very eventful week, the boys had officially moved in, though admittedly they still had a lot of unpacking to do, especially given Midorima's penchant for lucky items.

###

They decided to start with the kitchen. Midorima took it upon himself to take inventory of their shared possessions, jotting down notes as he went along.

Not surprisingly, neither one of them had much in the cookware department. Takao’s mother had sent her son off with some of the family's not so gently used pots and pans and a wok that had a loose handle but was otherwise functional. At least, that's what the hawkeye had assured Shintarō, when the tsundere had taken the wobbly thing out of the cardboard moving box it had been residing in and eyed it warily.

After a moment of contemplation, Shintarō shrugged. The tsundere had no way of verifying that statement, he wasn't one for cooking.

Still it seemed obvious, even to Midorima Shintarō whose forte was not the realm of feelings and emotions, that Takao seemed attached to his old cookware and so the tsundere made a mental resolve. They would keep everything Takao’s mother had packed and they would supplement the hodgepodge stash of culinary implements with new things such as sauce pans and a set of steak knives.

"What the heck?" Takao exclaimed when he opened one of Midorima's boxes and carefully pulled out one of many pieces of dinnerware carefully wrapped in linen cloths. "What do we need an urn for?" he turned to Midorima and asked.

"It's a soup tureen," Midorima informed his unrefined roommate.

"Eh?" Takao asked since the response had clarified nothing. He set the tureen aside and continued to pull pieces of fine bone china out of the box.

"Holy shit. There's like," he paused while he counted, "eight place settings in here."

"Twelve," Midorima corrected.

It was much nicer than anything Takao had ever used. Delicate, elegant, traditional, pure white with an intricate design in a vibrant shade of jade along the rim. The fine china suited Midorima perfectly, Kazunari thought as he continued unwrapping it and carefully setting it on the shelf.

Takao cackled as he took in his surroundings. The two of them were encircled by moving boxes, filling their cupboards with the kind of porcelain you'd find in a dream registry. "It feels like we're newlyweds, Shin-chan."

Midorima nearly dropped his pen, suddenly turning scarlet in response to the stray remark.
"Shit, this looks expensive," Takao continued prattling on, oblivious to his roommates embarrassment.

"It should be," Midorima responded once the heat from his cheeks had subsided. "It's my parents' wedding china."

"What the heck?" Takao glared at the plate in his hand, fingers tightening their grip because he suddenly felt afraid he'd accidentally drop it. "Shit. She must be really pissed at your dad."

Shintarō shrugged and continued adding things to his shopping list.

In the end, thanks to Midorima's magpie-like collection of lucky items, they'd had almost everything they needed for their new kitchen. Who knew Oha Asa had been so domestic. Over the years, Shintarō had accumulated three frilly aprons (Takao had yet to get him to put one on and model it for him, but that was what life goals were made for), countless spatulas, a kotatsu and a set of crepe pans.

The next box Takao opened contained crystal stemware. He didn't think a couple of university students were in need of champagne flutes, but then again, he did feel overcome with the urge to celebrate.

###

They spent the first Saturday of their cohabitation at a Scandinavian build-at-home furniture retailer looking for some knickknacks to outfit their shared apartment.

There was a restaurant and a showroom on the top floor and a marketplace for small, household goods and a self-service warehouse on the floor below.

After they had scarfed down more Swedish meatballs than would be advisable, they made their way through the decorative showrooms brimming with modern style Scandinavian furniture and accessories.

Shin-chan had taken one of those tiny golf pencils the store provided as a courtesy to its customers and written the product number of a coffee table they both liked on a sheet of preprinted paper. He’d even used that free, tear-off strip of measuring tape to ensure the dimensions were appropriate, while Takao looked on adoringly at his uncharacteristically manly new roommate.

They would pick up the larger furniture pieces at the ground floor warehouse in flat boxes on their way to the cash registers.

“How about this for the coffee table, Shin-chan?” Takao placed a lotus shaped candle into the crinkly blue shopping bag hanging from Midorima’s shoulder.

“Knock it off, idiot,” Midorima groused, but he didn’t remove the lotus candle from the bag, evidently it was coming home with them along with the other eleventy-bajillion tschotskes Takao had placed into the increasingly weighty blue bag.

By this point, Midorima was regretting the decision not to get a shopping cart at the front of the store next to the stacks of catalogs, almost as much as he was regretting eating all those meatballs.

“We’re supposed to be looking for a bookshelf,” the tsundere reminded his easily distracted roommate.

Midorima Shintarō, bless his soul, was the owner of a ceramic frog figurine collection and Takao
was hard-pressed to find *anything* more precious than his Shin-chan. They were going to display all those cute, little green amphibians on a bookshelf in their new living room.

Takao couldn’t be more pleased. They’d finally done it. They’d shacked up. They’d taken the huge step of moving in together. Takao turned besotted schoolgirl eyes at his tall, handsome boyfriend.

A red-faced Shintarō sputtered. “Stop looking at me like that, you idiot. It’s embarrassing.”

Forty minutes, several showcases and one sore shoulder later, Shintarō finally broke down and got them a shopping cart, but insisted that Takao push it.

"Should we get this incense burner for our apartment, Shin-chan?"

Based on the crimson hue that sprouted on Midorima’s cheeks, you’d think Takao had offered to go down on him right then and there between the Stockholm rug and the säng comforter.

"I s-supposed," Shintarō responded awkwardly. There had been a whole lot of eyeglass adjustment on the tsundere’s part on this shopping excursion.

It was like Shin-chan thought the idea of anyone overhearing that they were living together sounded scandalous, even though he’d been the one to propose it.

Takao laughed. Part of him was doing it on purpose to get a rise out of Shin-chan. The other part of him was absolutely delighted that there existed in this seemingly big and beautiful world such a wondrous place as their apartment.

"It's like were furnishing our little love nest," Takao teased and moments later laughed in earnest when Shin-chan started sputtering. And then, because Kazunari was incorrigible, he added, "We could put it in our bedroom," he purred.

"Will you shut up already?" Midorima erupted. Evidently the tsundere had reached his limit. Takao sighed contently as if his mission had been to annoy Midorima till he reached his boiling point all along. Or maybe he was just happy that they had actually moved in together.

He put the incense burner in their bright blue shopping bag and continued pushing the cart, smiling like the love-struck dope he was.

"What are you so happy about, idiot? You're getting ahead of yourself," Midorima snapped.

Loath he was to admit it, but his boyfriend had a point, Takao conceded. Though it felt like a dream, a wonderful, life-affirming dream, moving in together was not the end goal. They were living together now, but they also had a lot of years of hard work ahead (especially Shin-chan) in order to get their degrees and become productive members of society.

Still, Takao would allow himself a moment to enjoy the little things, like buying a 100-yen incense burner to decorate their home. Something all their own to set on the bookshelf whose item number Midorima had dutifully written down with one of those little golf pencils.

###

Social decorum and Takao Kazunari dictated that they *had* to throw a housewarming party at their apartment and invite all their friends.

Of course, when their friends included Aomine Daiki and Kagami Taiga that was an ill-advised plan
to say the least. The two power forwards, ever the over-competitive idiots, got into a pissing match of sorts over who could beat the other at beer pong. The match ended early in the night when Kagami placed his red plastic cup on the newly purchased bookshelf the hosts had hastily slapped together that afternoon before the party using only an allen key and hard-to-follow instructions and all of it came crashing down.

Thank goodness the frog figurines had not been unpacked yet because they would all be the consistency of panko breadcrumbs by now.

Shintarō was playing his own game of keepaway with Nigō. Trying to keep that mongrel off his great aunt’s couch. It was bad enough he’d had to displace Takao’s tootsies from there earlier. Shintarō was determined to return the couch to his great aunt in exactly the same condition as it had been entrusted to him. Seeing as how Nigō was nuzzling against the armrest and getting his black and white fur all over the velvet upholstery at the moment, it was evident that the canine had won this round. Though to be fair, it was unclear whether Shintarō had taken a temporary break from their game.

Midorima was otherwise engaged at the moment trying to put out a small kitchen fire thanks to Murasakibara’s Bananas Foster. The flambé had been set ablaze. Evidently, Himuro had taken the “Kiss the Cook” suggestion printed on Atsushi’s borrowed-from-Shin-chan-apron (a gag gift from Kazunari) to heart distracting the purple-haired giant just long enough to set off the smoke detectors and set an alarmed Shintarō running towards the fire.

Satsuki and Riko had each contributed to the desserts table and really they shouldn’t have. Given that their culinary reputations preceded them, the now-charred, rum-saturated bananas were being consumed quicker than either Momoi’s lemon tart or Aida’s lemon merengue. In fact, by the end of the night, both dishes had remained untouched and the unhappy amateur-chefs had had to take them home in the same condition as they had been brought.

Takao had appointed himself in charge of music and board games (because if Shin-chan was in charge of either it would’ve been a snoozefest) but he didn’t have to try very hard because there was more than enough entertainment to go around.

“Teach me how to play?” an already hiccupping Ryōta pushed a rectangular box into the hawkeye’s hands. It was one of Shin-chan’s boyhood board games. Takao pulled out the instructions because he’d never played it himself.

Ryōta took hold of the plastic tweezers and tried to remove the funny bone only to have the buzzer sound almost instantaneously. The startled blond started laughing so hard, he sloshed some of the piña colada Miyaji had made for him over the playing surface. Unsurprisingly, aspiring physician Midorima Shintarō won every round and Takao and Kise quickly lost interest in the game.

And then something occurred to Kazunari. He grinned smugly, like the cat who’d eaten the canary. “Don’t feel bad that no one wants to play Operation with you Shin-chan, your left hand is too steady,” he said and then saucily whispered, “But I’ll play doctor with you later.” A scandalized Midorima got up and left.

And it wouldn’t have been a party without everyone forgetting about Kuroko. The Sixth Man had gone down to the konbini to get more ice for the ever-popular piña coladas only to find himself locked out of the apartment and unable to get back inside because no matter how many times he rung the doorbell, the loud music Takao was playing drowned it out.

It was only when Kagami went to take Number Two for a number two (because Midorima would’ve had an aneurysm if Nigō had had an “accident” in the apartment) that he found Kuroko in the
hallway holding a now empty plastic bag and standing in a puddle of cold water.

###

It was three, possibly four in the morning. Takao wasn’t sure, he was too lazy to push the t-shirt out of the way. The shirt had been so hurriedly removed and cast off his person, it had landed atop their alarm clock.

It was early in the morning. He knew for certain. The last of their friends had finally left an hour ago. Takao had had to beg and barter and bribe Kuroko to take a drunk Kise home with him and Kagami.

Their apartment was a wreck and they would have to deal with that later that morning, or at least Takao would. Shin-chan did not do well with messes and it would probably be easier if Takao sent his boyfriend off his merry way to study in the school library or something than to have a cleaning-newbie like Midorima Shintarō helping him scrub down the apartment.

Takao was laying on Midorima’s stomach gazing up at his boyfriend. “This is nice,” he mused sleepily, reaching up to where Shin-chan’s hand lay on the mattress so he could intertwine their fingers.

“What is?” Midorima asked, rubbing his thumb over Takao’s knuckle.

“This,” Takao said, resting his cheek against Midorima’s warm stomach hearing it gurgle and glub and make the silliest noises.

The hawkeye smiled and then he planted a kiss on a naked Midorima’s navel. “Knowing that I can fall asleep right now and that you’ll be in my bed when I wake up later. That it’ll be like this tomorrow and the day after that, and a week later, a month, this time next year,” he explained.

Midorima gave Takao one of his rare sentimental smiles as he gazed down the expanse of his bare torso at his boyfriend who seemed happily nestled around his lower abdomen.

He pulled Kazunari up to kiss him and then as things so often and so effortlessly did between them, their kisses went from sweet to heated, and down right needy in a matter of seconds.

“Shintarō,” Kazunari moaned into Midorima’s mouth and then he felt a twitch in his hand.

Realization dawned on the hawkeye’s features, “Oh my goodness,” he said, his voice laden with awe. “You like that –”

“No I don’t.” Midorima was quick to deny it.

“Yes, you do,” Kazunari insisted. “You like when I call you by your first name.”

“Don’t be preposterous,” Midorima started to say, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

“Shintarō,” Takao said as if speaking into a microphone instead of his boyfriend’s crotch. “There it is again!” he said excitedly when he got the same favorable reaction.

“Shut up!” A mortified Midorima snapped.

“Shin-chan!” Takao said like he’d just discovered a new continent or cured all illnesses. “It’s like a lie detector,” he said referring to the part of Midorima that was still safely in the hawkeye’s hand. “It
tells me when you like something.”

This was too much for an easily embarrassed Midorima to take.

“Wait Shin-chan! Come back!” Takao called after him. “We haven’t even gotten started on round two. You got me all worked up.” Takao yelled as he quickly crawled out of bed. “It’s going to hurt.”

“You should’ve thought of that before you started being an idiot.” Midorima called out through the now locked door that separated the master bedroom from the master bathroom.

Takao had an idea on how to get a scaredy-Shin-chan down from that metaphorical tree. “Shin-chan,” he said. “Do you reeeeeeally want to leave me like this out here all alone? I mean, I’ll just have to come up with some way to alleviate my situation all by myself.”

To his surprise, Midorima unlocked the bathroom door and let him in.

The hawkeye globbed onto Midorima’s waist being a complete hinderance and a distraction as was his wont while the taller man pretended to ignore him. Midorima brushed his teeth, spit, rinsed, flossed between each pearly white and used the tongue scraper.

Suddenly Takao found himself in the mood for a bit of honesty too.

They had just embarked on their college years together and there was a lot of anxiety and uncertainty and unknowables about the future, but there was one thing Takao knew without a doubt. “I love you, Midorima Shintarō. I have for a long time now. And I always will.”

And then Takao felt a familiar reaction against the open palm of his hand.

“Oh my goodness, Shin-chan,” he said delightedly. “You twitched.”

“I did not.”

“Yes, you did.” Takao laughed. “You totally did. I felt it.”

And then moments later, Kazunari learned the error of his ways when he was carried out of the bedroom and put out for the night like a cat.


Takao continued to pound on the locked bedroom door.

“C’mon. Don’t be like that Shin-chan. I was only teasing. Where am I going to sleep?”

“You can sleep on Kimura’s ratty old bed for all I care.”

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**AN1:** If you're wondering how Midorima and Takao decided to shack up together, that takes place [here](#).

**AN2:** This fic was inspired by the immortal words of the incomparable Beach Boys. Also, it’s a running gag in my series that all MidoTaka parties lead to small fires, some sort of pissing contest between Kagami and Aomine, and Kuroko locked out. Shin-chan’s childhood board game is [this one](#). The part where they go to Ikea is, of course, inspired by the unbelievably talented Gusari who made me ship the rare pair of [hayamiya with this amazing dj](#).
AN3: I hope I’ve whetted your appetite for a uni fic with our two favorite boys. I'm writing a MidoTaka college AU for this 'verse, atm. Please go read it!

Chapter End Notes

10. “Teach me how to play?”
Lost & Found

Chapter Summary

Takao is missing an article of clothing. And then he discovers a new one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lost & Found

Takao had looked everywhere for that navy blue yukata his mother had given him. He’d already checked all the obvious places: their bedroom, the guest room, the hall closet. He even went so far as to check the laundry hamper even though he knew he hadn’t worn it in ages.

He preferred western clothes and was of the firm opinion that traditional garb was stiff, uncomfortable, and impractical. But they were going to a summer festival and he figured he’d at least make the effort to dress up since Shin-chan was going to wear one anyway and Takao was already looking forward to helping Midorima out of his yukata afterwards. More opportunities to help Shin-chan undress was one of the many perks of moving in together.

Takao ran out of places to look in the apartment he shared with Midorima and so he headed back to the bedroom to ask Shin-chan if maybe he knew what had happened to it. “Hey, have you seen the . . . ? Oh.”

There, before his own two eyes was his 195 centimeter boyfriend tucking in the loose ends of a forest green fabric that barely covered the lower part of his toned torso. Takao swallowed thickly. It was like someone had lit a match in the room and sucked out all the oxygen.

Takao instantly forgot what he’d been looking for in the first place because standing in front of a full length mirror was Midorima Shintarō in a loin cloth. A loin cloth and nothing else.

The man in question looked over his shoulder when he noticed his idiot boyfriend gaping slack-jawed at him in the reflection. Shintarō met Takao's eyes and frowned.

“What are you staring at? Haven’t you ever worn a fundoshi before?”

Takao shook his head in response. He’d been struck dumb. For once in his life he was speechless.

“Well, what do you wear under your yukatas?”

Boxers, briefs, boxer-briefs, nothing at all, Takao thought. Anything but this.

Takao had seen fundoshis before, of course he had. Images of going to the beach with his grandfather when he was a boy came to mind. But it had always been the geezers who steadfastly wore the ugly, old fashioned, fallen-out-of-favor dual purpose swimwear/undergarments while the youngsters snickered at them. It had never been guys his own age. And it certainly hadn’t been guys with the depilatory habits of someone as fastidious as Shin-chan. His nails weren’t the only thing that he kept properly trimmed and well-manicured.
Grandpa Ji certainly never looked *this* good in his fundoshi. For as long as Takao could remember, the man had been old and saggy, and wrinkly like a bag of pickled prunes. Grandpa had liked to wear his fundoshi modestly, with a panel covering the front, not the way Midorima was wearing his. Shin-chan’s didn’t have a panel. It fit snug in the front and hung low on his narrow hips drawing Kazunari’s eyes like a moth to the flame. It drew Takao's eyes to the prominent “v” on Shin-chan’s well-defined abdomen like an arrow pointed in a singular direction. *Downward.* Takao swallowed thickly.

At some point Kazunari had learned the proper moniker for that enticing part of the male anatomy. It was named after some Greek god or something. *Hell* he even knew the medical term for it since his smarty-pants boyfriend was studying to be a doctor and liked to use Takao's more than willing body to go over that sort of thing before exams, but the hawkeye’s brain had sort of frazzled when he’d come into the bedroom and he couldn’t bring himself to care less. Not when Shin-chan was right there, wearing that, that *thing*.

And he hadn’t even gotten started on the twists of cloth that parted the man’s pale white cheeks. The word delectable came to Takao's quickly short-circuiting brain. *Holy hell,* it was hot.

Who cared about summer festivals when his boyfriend was wearing what for all intents and purposes was a thong, a *thong.* And he hadn’t even had to beg Shin-chan for months until he finally relented like that one time he’d gotten the tsundere to wear those silky black thigh-highs with the line down the back that made the med student’s legs look like they were a mile long.

Takao was not one to squander lovely gifts, particularly ones that had been dropped from the heavens without him so much as having asked for them. He hadn’t even imagined that such wondrous things as Midorima Shintarō in a fundoshi existed in this great, big, beautiful world of his. It wasn’t every day one came across a kink one didn’t even know one had.

“Well don’t just stand there like an idiot. Go get dressed,” an impatient Midorima ordered. “We’re going to be late for the festival.”

Takao couldn't stop grinning if he tried. And he really wasn't trying. “Right,” he said, having decided how he’d like to spend the next forty or so minutes. "I’m going to text Kise and let him know we’re going to be late.”

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**AN:** If Takao ever does find his yukata, they'll end up something like [this](#) (nsfw-ish). Poor Kise will probably end up watching the fireworks all by himself. *So mean!*

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46. “Hey, have you seen the..? Oh.”
**De-feet**

Chapter Summary

Midorima tries to instill law and order in the apartment. Takao has other ideas.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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**De-Feet**

Midorima Shintarō and Takao Kazunari had been cohabiting for over a month now. You'd think having been high school sweethearts and having spent so much time together during their three years as Shūtoku's shadow and light would've made moving in together a cakewalk. You would think.

If you asked Shintarō, Kazunari was not an easy person to live with. The hawkeye was loud and messy and left a trail of his things wherever he went. If you asked Kazunari, living with his boyfriend was like living with a cleanliness obsessed dictator. He wasn't allowed to be comfortable in his own home.

*Feet off the furniture*, Shintarō would tell him when he came home from class at night and Takao was laying on their deep-burgundy, velvet couch watching television, the hawkeye’s bare tootsies resting comfortably on what was supposed to be the armrest.

Takao grew up in a lax household. It wasn't that his mother didn't tell her kids what to do. She did. He and Kazumi each had chores to do after school. It was just that after coming home in the evenings after a long day at the bank there were more pressing priorities than the banishment of toes from the sensibly priced and mass-produced seat cushions.

Midorima, on the other hand, came from a household where such a misuse of furniture was unthinkable. It would've never occurred to anyone with the surname Midorima to put anything other than their poshly-clad derrières on the pricey, overstuffed upholstery.

"Kazunari," Shintarō sighed in exasperation when he walked through their front door only to come upon a far too familiar tableau. "How many times do I have to tell you, take your feet off the furniture."

"You know most lovers say 'hello' to their beaus first when they've been apart all day," Takao informed him, keeping his feet comfortably in place.

"Well most lovers don't --" Shintarō stopped himself, but not before he caught Kazunari's eyes dancing with mirth at having gotten the tsundere to effectively admit that they were lovers. Shintarō was well aware of the carnal nature of their relationship, after all he was more than a willing participant. But he steadfastly refused to use sappy, distasteful, cringe-inducing labels like "lovers."

He pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose, willed his traitorous pale cheeks not to blush, and focused on the matter at hand, er foot.

Like many oppressed peasants before him, Kazunari decided he had had enough of the tyrannical, overbearing overlord and he was going to have to take a stand. Well, a stand lying down, because if he actually got up that would automatically defeat his purpose of firming maintaining both feet planted on the armrest.

"Come over here and make me," Takao taunted.

"Don't think I won't," Shintarō threatened, removing one of his leather driving loafers, before moving on to the other one.

"Oh yeah? I'd like to see you try," Takao threw down the gauntlet.

His boyfriend showed no signs of backing down. "Oh I can and I will," Midorima said, but not before he set down the stuffed spotted owl that had been today's lucky item, hung up his coat, emptied the contents of his pockets onto the credenza, and put his loafers away in their designated shoe cubby. Unlike Kazunari, Shintarō wasn't a slob.

Midorima marched towards the sofa and came so close to Kazunari's head that the hawkeye had to crane his neck back just to maintain eye contact.

"I'm giving you one final opportunity to comply," he said.

"Duly noted, Shin-chan." Kazunari curled his toes, gripping the armrest in an act of defiance.

Shintarō frowned. Damn Takao and his prehensile feet. Midorima had no intention of backing down. He walked to the opposite end of the sofa where the law breaking paws had staked out their territory.

He placed one formerly taped index finger on top of Kazunari's big toe and looked pointedly at its owner. Kazunari met his gaze dead on, but kept his poker face.

They both knew what would happen next. Midorima was about to call Takao's bluff. Even though Kazunari knew what was coming, he kept his feet firmly in place.

With the speed of a striking serpent, the tsundere began tickling the plant of Takao's foot. Kazunari started cackling immediately and ten little piggies quickly retreated from the armrest territory they'd been squatting on.

Kazunari was laughing so hard there were tears streaming down his face.

Midorima smirked victoriously. Though by now, he really should have known Kazunari didn't play fair.

The hawkeye wrapped his legs around his unsuspecting boyfriend's hips and brought down all 195 centimeters onto the couch in front of him.

Midorima tumbled helplessly, like a decaying tree falling on the O horizon. Though not completely. Midorima's quick reflexes and long torso allowed him to brace himself on the opposing armrest.

Damn Shin-chan and his hyperactive growth spurts. If his boyfriend got any taller Takao was going to have to start wearing shoe lifts just so he could continue to reach frowny-faced lips when he stepped on tipped toes.

Their lips weren't exactly lined up. Takao's face was at Midorima’s chest, but that could and was
easily remedied by the hawkeye shimmying up the couch until he could meet his boyfriend's lips with his own.

The exchange of kisses were playful at first, but quickly grew heated as Midorima allowed more of his weight to sink down onto Kazunari, press down against him and mold himself around the body below.

Shintarō felt heavy on top of Takao, but not unpleasant, not unpleasant at all.

Kazunari continued kissing his tsundere, running his nimble fingers through verdant locks. Shintarō's own hands did their own exploration following all too familiar trails.

When Takao had just about reached his boiling point, he flipped over so he could lie on his stomach.

"Take me to pound town, Shin-chan," he called out from over his shoulder with a cheeky grin.

"Must you always be so vulgar?" Shintarō complained.

The hawkeye laughed. "It's part of my charm."

Despite his verbal protestations, Midorima was loosening his tie, his lower body already starting to react to Takao wriggling beneath him. The accouterments of lovemaking conveniently stashed away between the seat cushions. Shintarō raised an eyebrow when Takao handed him a small plastic bottle that just so happened to have been tucked away within arm's reach, but didn't otherwise question it.

They proceeded to most certainly misuse the sofa for a purpose other than sitting on it, Midorima having long forgotten his gripe about appropriate and inappropriate body parts on the sofa.

Chapter End Notes

1. "Come over here and make me.”
Hey Shin-chan. The last century called, they want their technology back.

But it's soooooo old fashioned, Takao had bellyached a week ago when the technician had paid a scheduled visit to their apartment. It's like we're in the Stone Age, he'd whined.

And then moments later he’d had to dial down the histrionics a notch because it wasn't just the two of them in the apartment. Uh, no offense, he’d added when the machinist had given him an annoyed frown.

What if there's an emergency? Shintarō, ever the pragmatist, had reasonably suggested.

But it's such a waste of moneeeeey, Takao had countered.

The technician’s slamming of their front door on his way out may or may not have been in response to Kazunari’s disparaging comment.

Despite his loud protestations about Shin-chan insisting on having a landline installed when they’d moved in together, it sure hadn't stopped the hawkeye from gabbing away on it like a chatty hyena.

Kazunari was talking up a storm in the living room while Shintarō was trying to study -- trying, being the operative word. Even with the bedroom door closed, Shintarō could still hear that idiot cachinnating down the hall. It never ceased to amaze him how Kazunari could talk so much and never run out of things to say.

Shintarō prayed for patience. And more importantly, silence. When his supplications fell on deaf ears, he got up from his desk, tucked away in the corner of the bedroom, and stomped over to the living room. As expected, Kazunari was lying on the couch, his feet comfortably situated on the armrest of Shintarō’s great aunt’s velvet couch. Shintarō’s eyes bulged out of their sockets in annoyance at the placement of Kazunari’s bare feet, but that was a fight for another day.

Takao was chatting away like the town gossip, completely oblivious to the annoyed glares of his irritated roommate. "No way," he said into the receiver. "Did Izuki really say that?" He chortled. "Oh man, that guy’s a riot." He snorted. "And then what happened?"

Seeing as his presence wasn't even registering on the hawkeye's radar, Shintarō politely let it be known that he was standing right in front of the bothersome man. "TAKAO KAZUNARI, WILL YOU PLEASE KEEP IT DOWN OUT HERE!"

Takao nearly jumped out of his skin at the loud supplication. "Geez Shin-chan, you don't have to yell," Takao said, rubbing the ear that wasn’t glued to the handset.
The word “infuriating” did not begin to encapsulate Midorima's assessment of his boyfriend at the moment. "I am trying to concentrate, but all I hear is your incessant chatter," the tsundere said with practiced restraint.

“If you don’t pipe down,” he took a few steps forward so he could fix his gaze to Kazunari’s, “I’m going to take a certain pair of red scissors and cut that phone cord.” With taped fingers, Midorima mimicked the gesture.

Takao gasped, steel-blue eyes flew wide open. “Shin-chan, you wouldn’t,” Takao said in a scandalized whisper. He cradled the handset protectively against his body as if it were a newborn babe. It was a dramatic performance worthy of a bespectacled eye roll.

“How is it that I ended up with someone so noisy?” Midorima grumbled.

Kazunari covered the transmitter and called out to his boyfriend, "There's a lid for every pot, Shin-chan."

"Yes well, I'd like to put a lid on you," Midorima retorted before slamming the bedroom door. "Shin-chan's so mean," Kazunari pouted, sounding like a certain hyperactive, easily-excitable model.

Suddenly the bedroom door swung back open. "And tell that idiot Ryōta to stop rubbing off on you," Midorima yelled because who else but that bubblehead blond had the time to cavort on the telephone for hours on end with Kazunari. Honestly, the last thing Shintarō needed was for his boyfriend to start picking up mannerisms from Kise Ryōta, of all people.

Kazunari snickered. "Do you wanna rub off on me instead, Shin-chan?" He waggled his eyebrows suggestively at the tsundere.

Midorima did not want to rise to the bait. He refused to be provoked by Takao’s boorish, locker room humor.

Despite his mental resolve not to stoop to Takao's level, Midorima’s normally pale face still looked like it had collided with a cloud of rouge.

The tsundere attempted a scowl, but it was too late. Kazunari started laughing hysterically and Shintarō slammed the bedroom door in defeat. Despite being a university student, Takao could be such a child sometimes -- a trying, immature child.

Shintarō was striving to memorize solubility rules for his chemistry class but all he could hear was his roommate’s damnable laugh.

He sighed as he put his notecards down, stood up from his ergonomic swivel chair, and walked out to the living room, again.

"Takao," Shintarō said at his wit's end and with a calmness he did not feel, "If you make me come out here one more time," He waved his fist menacingly, "I'm going to give you a pounding," he threatened.

Kazunari's face lit up with glee like it was his birthday and all the major gift giving holidays rolled
into one. "I gotta go Ryōta," he said quickly into the receiver, as if Midorima's threat was a proposition. "I'm urgently needed in the bedroom."

Chapter End Notes

8. “Wanna bet?”
Unwanted Guests

Chapter Summary

Takao tries to help out a fellow student.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Unwanted Guests

Midorima Shintarō came home to find, of all things, a study group in his apartment. This wasn't to say that there had never been study groups in the abode he shared with his high school basketball partner turned best friend turned sweetheart. But those study groups had been reluctantly chaired by Midorima and its membership had been exclusively open to medical students only. No one would describe Shintarō as gregarious, not even charitably, but occasional group projects couldn't be avoided. They were a fact of life, even at venerated schools with the very best academic reputation.

He hardly ever saw Takao studying and it was even odder to see him studying in a pack. A very small pack. A packed made up of a round and suspicious number of two, to be precise.

If Midorima were a petty man -- which he was most decidedly not -- he might even say this looked like a study date. The very thought made him feel queasy.

"Shin-chan, this is my classmate, Tsubaki Nagi." Takao innocuously introduced the intruder when he looked up and saw a stunned Midorima standing stupidly in the genkan. "Nagi, this is my roommate Shin-, I mean Midorima Shintarō."

Midorima bristled at Takao's overly familiar use of the girl's first name, but Takao had always been irreverent and lacking in the social graces.

More importantly, Midorima bristled at the hawkeye's use of the "r" word, even though it was in conformance with their agreement.

The tsundere had not explained to his very traditional, conservative parents the nature of his attachment to Kazunari. Consequently, he and the hawkeye were purposely discrete about their relationship. Only Takao's family, Coach Nakatani, their Shūtoku senpais, the Kiseki no Sedai, Momoi, some of the former Seirin players, and a few others knew they were actually a couple. Admittedly, this list had grown considerably over the years and there was always the danger that anyone who spent any amount of time with the both of them could easily piece it together, honestly. Still, certain protective measures remained in place. Although he doubted anyone from Takao's school would know who he was or know his parents, it was prudent to keep these types of things on a need to know basis.

"It's a pleasure," Midorima said to the interloper through gritted teeth because even after all those years had gone by, he could still recite rote pleasantries from Miss Kiki's Etiquette Class for the Socially Awkward. Damn his mother and her stubborn belief that every perceived personality defect in her firstborn could be fixed through private tutelage fees.
The girl smiled at him briefly, before returning her undivided attention to the boy sitting next to her. *His* boy.

Midorima headed to the sanctity of his bedroom, there he could have a proper hissy fit behind closed doors, like a dignified adult. He shut the door loudly, muttering a slew of curses under his breath. Most of them he'd learned from Kazunari. No one in *his* parents’ home ever spoke that way.

Carelessly, he dumped his school bag onto the desk in the corner, causing a ruckus when the satchel knocked over an anatomically correct, five-piece model of the nucleus amygdalæ.

Shintarō couldn't believe the nerve of that woman. He never wanted to see her deceivingly doe-eyed face again. He had every intention of hiding out in here until that horrible harpy finally went away. And he did just that, for a little bit, until he soon came to realize the error of his chosen course of action. He'd made a grave miscalculation. He'd left them alone, in the living room, susceptible to any manner of ignoble temptations and weaknesses of the flesh. He intended to remedy the situation immediately.

He approached the pair and asked them if they were hungry, offering to whip something up for them in the kitchen. Kazunari nearly fell out of the red velvet couch, staring at him blankly because they both knew Shin-chan couldn't cook to stave off starvation much less make anything suitable for company. No one took Midorima up on his hospitable offer.

Undeterred, he popped in a few minutes later, inquiring whether they'd like a drink. Then, he disrupted their studies to ask Takao if anything had come for him in the mail today.

Ten minutes later, Midorima returned to the scene of the crime. He had needed help yanking the push button off his mechanical pencil so he could refill it with lead. Takao unhelpfully pointed out that someone had poured glue in the eraser holder and that was the reason it was stuck. Shintarō surreptitiously wiped the white paste from his perfectly manicured fingertips.

A short while later, Midorima cut in to ask if anyone had the time, never mind that there was a perfectly functional alarm clock in the bedroom.

When six o'clock finally (finally) rolled around, Shintarō plopped himself on the velvet couch between the studious pair.

"Uh, Shin-chan?" Takao asked, scooting over a bit because the med student had practically sat on his lap.

"Don't mind me. I'm just tuning in for the evening news," he informed them as he picked up the remote off the coffee table.

Takao raised a skeptical eyebrow. Shin-chan *hated* the news. It was chock full of the special interest stories he derided as being inane, entirely free of substance, and an indictment on the falling standards of journalistic integrity.

Admittedly, it was a little snug, with the three of them sitting dab smack in the center of the old-fashioned sofa.

"Hey Shin-chan," Takao said trying to maneuver enough space between himself and the man in question, freeing up his elbow so he could write. "Do you think you could maybe get us something to drink? Tsubaki what would you like?"

Tsubaki politely declined a beverage which was just as well because Shintarō had every intention of throwing it at her. As it was, the minute he reluctantly vacated his seat, she moved into his territory,
effectively eliminating the gap between herself and Kazunari.

Midorima marched into the kitchen, ostensibly to get Takao a drink. He wanted to pour it over the stupid, short man's head. He had had every intention of serving as a 195 centimeter human buffer between the pair, before his plan had been foiled by his too dense boyfriend. He had no choice but to take his grievances out on the glassware.

"Everything okay in there, Shin-chan?" Takao called out from the living room after hearing the commotion his boyfriend was making in the kitchen.

"Splendid," Midorima responded tersely.

Takao put his pencil down, because he knew better. "Excuse me for a minute," he said to Tsubaki and went into the kitchen to check on his boyfriend. "What's wrong?"

"What do you mean?" Midorima asked as if he couldn't possibly imagine what Takao was yammering about.

"You've interrupted us seven times, you've slammed the bedroom door and now you're assaulting the cupboards."

"I've done no such thing," he denied.

He totally had, Takao had counted. "Wait a minute. Are you jealous?"


"Of Tsubaki," Takao responded simply.

Shintarō huffed haughtily as he slammed the cupboard door. "Now you're just talking nonsense."

"It wasn't my idea, you know. She invited herself over."

"She did wha-t?!"

"Yup. She asked me to tutor her in math."

Midorima had never heard a more transparent excuse. No one, absolutely, positively no one, in their right mind would legitimately ask Takao -- of all people -- to help them study for any subject, ever.

He marched into the living room to confront that, that home-wrecking hussy. "Thank you for your interest in my roommate, but I'm afraid Kazunari is in a relationship."

Understandably, girl widened her eyes in surprise at such a forward comment from a man she'd just met. She looked at Takao for confirmation.

"It's true," the hawkeye affirmed. "As Shin-chan mentioned, he and I are having relations."

"I said you were in a relationship, you idiot."

"Yes, that too," Kazunari agreed.
5. “Wait a minute. Are you jealous?”
Go Fish

Chapter Summary

Takao and Shin-chan beat the heat and head to the beach.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Go Fish

It was sweltering hot and miserable in Tokyo, so much so that the dress slacks Midorima customarily wore to class were sticking to his long legs these days. It was bothersome, to be sure. But one of the best things about living in the megalopolis was that it was relatively easy to get out of it.

A relatively short train ride away and they were surrounded by open skies, salty air, and the boisterous cries of majestic black kites flying overhead and occasionally swooping in to steal scraps of food from unattended bentos. They reminded Shintarō of his own snack-thieving, noisy little hawk who was busy clicking away trying to capture it all through his lens.

Kazunari, being the incorrigible social butterfly that he was, never passed up an opportunity to invite other people to join their adventures. That was how Shintarō found himself in Enoshima with his boyfriend, two of his middle school teammates, and that idiot redhead who used to play for Seirin back when they were all in high school.

Takao Kazunari, Midorima realized far too late to save himself, had the power to talk him into almost anything. This didn’t mean he never said “no” to the man. He said “no” to the man all the time. What he meant by this was that when Kazu (his Kazu) reeeeally wanted something from Shintarō and he set his devious, scheming mind to it, well, there was no saving the tsundere.

If only Kazunari could be persuaded to use his powers for good and not evil, Shintarō lamented.

Takao was playing (or rather tormenting Midorima) with his new underwater camera, periodically popping up for air.

So far, the memory stick that had come with the infernal contraption was storing such supremely important and monuments events as Midorima eating his breakfast, Midorima yelling at Takao for filming him eating his breakfast, Midorima brushing his teeth, Midorima yelling at Takao for filming him brushing his teeth, a stray cat trying fit itself into a too-small-for-it empty popsicle box someone had thoughtfully discarded outside their apartment building, the tsundere’s tepid greeting to their friends at Shinogawa station where they had changed train lines, and so on and so forth.

There was also a series of photographic stills of Midorima asleep on Kazunari’s shoulder in the passenger car heading south. Strangely, the hawkeye had had the same smitten look he’d had when he was taking the video of the cat. Midorima suspected from the angle that Kazunari had enlisted the help of an accomplice for the stills. Shintarō narrowed suspicious green eyes at Kuroko whose studious focus on the printed subway map above to train doors spoke volumes.

These were all the photographs and videos Takao had felt the irrepressible need to share with him.
There would've been more, but Kazunari had just gotten the camera which had come in the post this morning. Shintarō was certain by now there were hundreds of beach shots added to the growing stockpile of digitally preserved inanities.

“Stop photographing me!!!” Midorima calmly requested.

“Geez, Shin-chan. There’s no need to yell,” Takao said, momentarily lowering his lens and simultaneously lifting Shintarō’s hopes for a peaceful and tranquil outing. “If the camera bothers you so much, why’d you buy it for me?”

“Why, indeed,” was all the Midorima could think to say to that question because it wasn’t that Kazunari had recently expressed an interest in photography which the tsundere had felt compelled to nurture and it most certainly wasn’t because he liked seeing Kazu smile when he was surprised, or that a small part of him wanted to occasionally spoil his boyfriend a little bit. It was none of those things, at all.

“Stop it!” Midorima hissed, splashing briny water on Takao for emphasis.

“But Shin-chan, these shots are amazing.”

“Yes,” Midorima said in a tone that espoused long suffering. “And exactly how many shots of my crotch will you be taking?”

Takao snickered. “No, Shin-chan. I’m saving those for when we’re alone later,” he said off-handedly in a way that made Shintarō worry about whether to take his boyfriend seriously or not.

Midorima curled his toes in the sand, anchoring himself. The waves were getting choppy, making them both sway back and forth.

In actuality, it was his mint green swim trunks the hawkeye was photographing. It had been by happenstance at first. Shin-chan’s board shorts had photobombed a picture Takao had been taking of a school of brightly-colored fish swimming near the med student’s legs. When he’d shown Shin-chan the photos he took, the tsundere had dryly remarked that most of them included his groin region in some way or other. And well, Takao needed no encouragement when it came to employing newly discovered ways of harassing his boyfriend.

“Put. That. DAMNED. Thing. Away already!”

“Alright, Shin-chan,” he said sweetly, surprising the tsundere. “I’ll put the camera away.”

“You will?” Shintarō could hardly believe his ears. He hadn’t anticipated his demand to be accepted so easily. It wasn’t like Takao to do things without being told fifty thousand times first, which was why their genkan at home was a shoe-cluttered disgrace and their red velvet couch practically had imprints of Takao’s bare feet.

“Sure,” the hawkeye said, tucking his camera into the pocket of his swim trunks as a show of good faith. “I’ll need my hands free for when we play kibasen.”

Ah, there it was. He knew there had to a catch.

Midorima had a horrifying flashback to that Sports Day at Teikō when Murasakibara decided to -- --, well never mind that, no sense recounting it. He still had the scar, after all.

“We don’t have enough people,” Shintarō pointed out. There, there, the matter was settled. Kazunari would just have to make do without -- -
Takao waived at Kagami who were sitting on a mound of sand surrounded by balled up hamburger wrappers. Kuroko was sitting beside him slurping a small vanilla milkshake he’d purchased from the scraggly seaside shack nearby.

Having seen his boyfriend instantly double the amount of participants, Midorima raised another impediment to this ill-advised game.

“Well I’m not carrying you on my shoulders,” Midorima said with an air of finality. The tsundere crossed his arms in front of his chest. *Hmph*, Shintarō protested. It wouldn’t do to indulge Takao’s whims too often.

“That’s okay, Shin-chan.”

“It is?” Well that was unprecedented, Shintarō thought. Over the years, the two of them had established a certain modus operandi. Shintarō had fully expected his boyfriend to badger him until he lost his patience. He was beginning to like this new docile, compliant Kazunari.

“I figured you wouldn’t want to engage in such ‘childish tomfoolery, nanodayo,’” Takao said pushing imaginary glasses up the bridge of his nose.

“Stop imitating me, idiot,” Midorima warned.

As usual, Takao paid him no heed. “I know you won’t agree to it.”

“That’s right.” Midorima affirmed.

“There’s really no point in begging you.”

"None at all," Shintarō agreed. “You might as well save your breath,” he added.

“You’re just going to get shouty.”

“That’s right . . . Hey! I do not get ‘shouty!’“ Midorima yelled.

"So I’m just gonna give it a rest.”

“That’s very adult of you, Takao,” Midorima commended, glad to see his boyfriend, for once, was exhibiting good sense and maturity.

“And ask Ryōta instead,” Takao supplied casually.

Ryōta was on the shore under a massive beach umbrella, twenty towels and even more layers of SPF 80+ sunscreen.

*Midorimacchi, I’ve got to protect my assets-ssu. I’ve got a career to think of,* he’d said when Midorima had asked the man what the HELL he thought he was doing.

Ryōta was also desperate to be liked and included which was why Midorima knew that if Takao asked the model to carry him on his shoulders, Ryōta would do it in an enthusiastic, excessively-cheerful heartbeat.

"Unless of course . . .” Takao drawled. “you would want to do it.”

“Fine,” Midorima capitulated.

“I can’t believe you talked me into this,” he muttered as he got into position. He was dating an evil
genius. At some point in their relationship he’d turned into a fiddle and Takao was an expert at playing him.

Shūtoku’s shadow and light proceeded to battle Seirin’s shadow and light. And while the former had a slight height advantage, the latter was putting up a good fight.

It was unclear who was winning the matchup because the waves kept knocking over both teams, but the clear loser was Shintarō’s bare back which Kazunari’s claws were scratching on the way up and on the way down the tsundere’s shoulders. He was certain by now it resembled an abstract painting, angry red marks scrawled across a pale canvass.

Sadly or mercifully, depending on which person you’d ask, their game of kibasen was short-lived.

“Bakagami! Didn’t your mother ever tell you to wait at least an hour after you’ve gorged yourself on 20 hamburgers?” asked the person whose own mother had never imparted on him such sage advice, but Nanny had and Shintarō could fake normalcy when needed.

Midorima continued to yell at the idiot redhead, while Kuroko helped his hunched-over-with-muscle-cramps boyfriend to shore.

The game having been forfeited by idiocy, Midorima went to dislodge Kazunari from his tired and abused shoulders. His actions were met with resistance.

“Get off me, you idiot,” he said when he noticed Kazunari had redoubled his efforts to keep his limbs clamped down around the tsundere like a lamprey.

“I can’t,” Kazunari said, securing his vice-like grip.

“What do you mean you can’t? Just do it!”

There had been a lot of jostling and horseplay in their friendly game of kibasen.

Suddenly, Midorima noticed someone else had joined the gaiety. “Takao Kazunari, that better be your videocam in your pocket,” he warned fiercely.

“Um … yes and no? I mean, that’s part of it, but also I’ve got a raging –”

The universe granted Midorima’s wishes to get this monkey off his back when a large wave knocked them both over, effectively dislodging the hawkeye from his boyfriend’s shoulders.

Midorima experienced a brief, anxious moment before Kazunari nabbed the prescription sunglasses floating on the water’s surface and handed them back to their nearsighted owner.

As if his eyesight were connected to his mouth, Midorima resumed his rant the minute his glasses were repositioned on his face.

“That’s disgusting!” he proclaimed, exhibiting all the scandalized outrage of a very young maiden or a very old maid.

“I couldn’t help it, Shin-chan. All that friction woke up Kazu-chi –”

“Don’t you dare finish that sentence,” Midorima warned.

Takao started to laugh. “What’s the big deal? It’s nothing you haven’t seen before,” he was wiping tears of mirth from his eyes.
“The big deal, you degenerate louse, is that we’re in public.”

"It’s not like anyone can see anything, Shin-chan. The water’s making my swim trunks puff out."

Midorima sputtered.

"Relax, Shin-chan. It’s starting to go away already, see?"

“Idiot!” Shintarō said, panicked. “Don’t stand up."

"Shin-chan, you’re overreacting."

“Overreacting?! Overreacting?! I’ll have you know –”

Shintarō was hit by a rogue wave again and this time Kazunari took his time “finding” his boyfriend’s prescription sunglasses.

AN1: Special thanks to Sleepy who was kind enough to lend me her head canon that Kazu would want his boyfriend to carry him on his shoulders, that Shin-chan would be jealous of Kise, and that Kazu has a “GoPro” in his pocket (also for supplying the Japanese word “kibasen.” I would’ve wandered around the internet all day trying to figure out what the hell that game is called). Comments would be lovely.

AN2: I really am trying to buckle down and add another chapter to that Midotaka college au.

Chapter End Notes

25. “I can’t believe you talked me into this.”
The Great Outdoors

Chapter Summary

Camping with Kuroko, Kagami and the hound from hell

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Warnings:** T for tent-tation.

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**The Great Outdoors**

Midorima Shintarō was not a survivalist. In the unlikely event that the zombie apocalypse were to befall their beloved city the way it always did in those inane, futuristic horror films his idiot roommate loved to watch, the med student had no illusions as to which one of the two of them would make it to the relative safety of the green zones.

This was not to say that the tsundere did not begrudgingly watch those poorly produced, hastily plotted B-movie flops with said roommate because, well, whatever Shintarō’s outward displays of disapproval and deep displeasure, inwardly, he very much felt that sitting at home, alone beside Takao Kazunari was not unpleasant. Shintarō could think of worse ways to spend one's evening than sharing the woolen afghan with his roommate while sitting in close proximity to each other on their plush velvet couch. Especially given that nine-times-out-of-ten (oh, who was he kidding? ten-out-of-ten), he and his roommate would end up horizontal before the ending credits in a completely compromising position and a scandalous misuse of loaned heirloom furniture.

Hmm. Unless they miraculously got ahold of some firepower and then maybe they'd both make it to safety thanks to the accuracy of Shintarō’s shots. At the very least Kazunari would survive, because there's no way Shintarō would let anything happen to the hawkeye, not on Shintarō's watch.

Kazunari's idiocy must've been contagious if Shintarō's mind was devoting any amount of brain power to conjuring up contingency plans for these ridiculous, fanciful doomsday scenarios. Especially when he had more pressing, present day matters to attend to in the form of weekend plans.

Midorima Shintarō was nothing if not prepared. And so, he had spent the better part of the week at the sporting goods store near his university. He’d spent the better part of the week before that trying to talk Takao out of this stupid idea. But Takao was a wily man who could be very persuasive when he put his devious mind (and hands and mouth, and tongue, and other things) to it. And heaven help Shintarō when the hawkeye turned his cunning eyes and unleashed his slick and seductive mouth promising to do (and then actually doing) all manner of unspeakable things to the unarmed tsundere. Under the influence of a heady plume of endorphins, Shintarō would agree to almost anything, even a camping trip with Kuroko, Kagami and the hound from hell.

*Takao Kazunari was a silver tongued devil,* Shintarō had concluded once he’d come down from lusty heights and was under the calming spray of a warm shower. Of course, it was hard to focus when said devil was standing in there with him groping and tugging and soon it was on to round
two. In the end, Midorima Shintarō did not have a prayer. He capitulated to Kazunari's demands. He always did.

Of the four of them, he was the only one with a motorized mode of transportation. This was because Midorima Shintarō's parents had generously bestowed upon their son a stylish European import upon his admission to medical school. That being said, the tsundere had decided to rent a rugged, though still luxurious -- no sense skimping on comfort -- sports utility vehicle for the occasion, because the last thing Shintarō wanted was to enhance his new car smell with eau de ratty dog.

And so having fallen prey to Kazunari’s charms, er schemes, Shintarō had resigned himself to his fate. He had had no choice, but to do the responsible thing and consult an expert -- the man at the sporting goods store -- about this upcoming ordeal.

Midorima Shintarō was a creature of comfort and had been his entire, comfortable life. As so his idea of roughing it was when the hotel clerk in Hokkaido had lost his parents' long-standing reservations for the executive suite and he and Kazunari had had to spend the week-long family ski vacation sharing a pull-out couch in a two-bedroom unit overlooking the parking lot.

Having a substandard roof over his head had been traumatic enough, but for reasons that seemed incomprehensible to Shintarō, Kazunari and his two cohorts (Kuroko and Kagami) had decided it would be fun to spend the weekend outside, in the wilderness, with no roof over their heads, like animals. This harebrained idea made the Hokkaido two-bedroom, glorified broom closet seem like five-star accommodations by comparison. Kazunari might as well have said, Hey Shin-chan, let’s pretend to be hobos this weekend.

And to make matters worse Kuroko and Kagami were bringing their own animal, that four-legged fleabag the Sixth Man was so fond of toting around. It was all the proof Shintarō needed that a man in love was a ridiculous thing to watch. Once upon a time, Kagami Taiga had the only sensible reaction to Kuroko’s furry doppleganger, crossing the street to avoid crossing its odious path. But somewhere along the lines Seirin’s ace had clearly lost his marble (he had only the one) because Midorima Shintarō had personally witnessed (on more than one occasion) Kagami walk right up to the tail-wagging fluffball, pick it up, coo at it, and cradle it like an infant, Who’s a good dog? You are. Yes, yes you are. Shintarō shuddered at the memory. It hadn’t taken long before that idiot redhead had the look of a lovesick dope whenever Kuroko referred to that short-haired interloper as their “baby.”

The man at the sporting goods store had been an angel of mercy, a godsend. He’d assured his anxious and fat-walletted new customer that as long as Shintarō purchased every item on the man’s quickly compiled and lengthy list, Shintarō and his friends would be guaranteed a safe and comfortable outing. It was needless to say that the idea of purchasing items in order to increase the favorable outcome of one’s endeavor made perfect sense to Shintarō. After all, he’d been a devout follower of Oha Asa for most of his life.

Midorima Shintarō was a natural born shopper. He was not a bargain shopper, but he was a shopper nonetheless. It was perhaps the one trait that had been passed down from his strong-willed, yet weak-gened mother. He’d inherited all of his looks, his formidable intelligence and his admirable work ethic from his father. But the deep-seated, firmly-rooted desire to acquire things was definitely from Sazuna. And so he’d come home with a trunk and backseat and front passenger seat full of camping supplies and equipment.

Shintarō made himself some expertly prepared green tea to calm his frayed nerves while Kazunari made multiple trips between Shintarō’s rental car and their apartment to unload all of Shintarō’s purchases. Shintarō hadn't the foggiest idea why Kazunari was looking at his roommate like he
wanted to murder him. After all, Shintarō had offered Kazunari some of his tea. Who knew what had ticked Kazunari off as he grumbled under his breath carrying heavy load after heavy load of new purchases into their apartment all by himself. The hawkeye was an enigma sometimes, Shintarō thought as he sipped his tea perched comfortably on their red velvet couch.

Takao wore the same pissed off face when Shintarō woke him up on Saturday morning before sunrise to load the rental car while Shintarō helpfully instructed him on where all the equipment should go and in precisely what order. Perhaps Kazunari wasn’t fond of getting an early start.

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Being the cautious creature that he was, Shintarō had triple checked the first aid kit, he’d checked the provisions in the cooler, he’d even double checked that the instructions were included with the tent because otherwise Kazunari was going to have a difficult time assembling it all by his lonesome.

Shintarō fully expected that Takao would be setting up their shelter tonight. Because Midorima Shintarō’s skilled hands knew how to do a great many things, but pitching a tent was beyond his considerable dexterity. The one thing Shintarō didn’t check was the weather report. Monsoon was not an adequate enough word to describe the torrential deluge that doused them later that night.

The evening had come to a sopping wet end, shortly after they’d set up camp. When the rain came, they quickly dispersed, each couple seeking shelter in their own tent. As if the late summer downpour hadn’t been enough, there was an electric light show above their heads, occasionally illuminating the night sky followed by the ominous clap of thunder.

The man at the sporting goods store had told Shintarō that he was purchasing a spacious, state-of-the-art, four-person tent. The man at the sporting goods store was a liar. Kazunari’s bony knees were practically touching Shintarō’s as they both sat cross-legged, facing each other on top of their respective sleeping bags. Between the two of them and their camping equipment, Shintarō didn’t know where the additional two fictitious persons were supposed to fit in this alleged-four-person tarp.

To make already close quarters even more cramped, they were forced to congregate at the center of the tent to avoid touching the corners because that, Shintarō had quickly discovered let the rain in that was coming down in rivulets on their polyester roof.

“I thought tents were supposed to be waterproof,” Shintarō grumbled to his tent mate. And then the tsundere felt something poking his side. It was a bottle of polyurethane coating. Damn it, they were supposed to have sprayed their tent with this stuff to keep the water out.

They had been in their polyester cell for the better part of an hour and there were just so many times a person could say "Go fish," without going insane.

Shintarō was either selectively lucky tonight or Kazunari was as good at card games as he was at janken-pon. Shintarō didn’t know how that was even possible considering the man’s considerable field of vision. It was obvious Kazunari was bored. He’d been looking forward to spending time with their friends around the campfire telling ghost stories and roasting marshmallows on a stick. Although there was no cabin in sight, it was clear that the hawkeye was suffering from cabin-fever.

After enough time had passed that they’d both forgotten whose turn it was in the interminable card game, Kazunari broke the silence. "Let's go outside, Shin-chan.”

“Humph. It's wet outside,” Shintarō pointed out sensibly and then decided it was his turn to put down a “wildcard” and a stack of sevens.
Kazunari looked at his handful of cards and even though he had in his mitts most of the deck, he still had to “go fish” for more cards to add to his growing collection. “C’mon. Shin-chan. It’ll be fun.”

Clearly, the water droplets slipping through the roof of their tent had short-circuited Kazunari’s mind. At this rate, the hawkeye would be entirely overlooked by the brain-eating reanimated corpses in a zombie apocalypse. “We’re in the middle of a thunderstorm and you wanna stop and feel the rain?” Shintarō asked incredulously.

“Let’s go explooring,” Takao responded sounding like a little kid. And then, with a decidedly adult glint in his silvery eyes he added, “We could go skinny dipping in the lake.”

“Absolutely not. You’ll catch a parasite. And more importantly, you’ll get electrocuted.”

“C’mon Shin-chan,” the hawkeye said. “Where’s your sense of adventure.”

“I must’ve left it at home. Apparently, I took leave of all my senses when I decided to accompany you on this soggy trip.” The only thing dry right now was Midorima’s delivery. To think he could’ve been home in his warm comfortable bed reading a book right now instead of roughing it in this hot, damp tent.

Of course, not everyone was having difficulty figuring out how to spend the rest of their evening. In Shintarō’s opinion, Kuroko and Kagami’s tent had been pitched far too close to his and Kazunari’s tent.

Every once in a while the lightning came down and illuminated everything around them. It was like someone had flipped the switch and turned on the lights for a matter of seconds. That was the worst part, Shintarō thought. Not because he was worried lightning would strike them down, though the welcomed thought was there, in the back recesses of Shintarō’s mind, but because the brief, nighttime illuminations allowed them to see the shadows in the tent not nearly far away from theirs. Shintarō saw some truly horrifying things outlined on the other tent.

No imagination was needed to figure out how Kuroko and Kagami had decided to bide their time in the thunderstorm. Every bolt of lightning brought some truly filthy shadow puppets.

It didn’t matter that their friends were keeping their voices down to hushed murmurs, there was no hiding the rhythmic squelching sound that carried over to their tent even in the heavy rain. Takao heard it too. Shintarō knew this. He could practically see the perverted wheels turning in his tentmate’s noggin.

Shintarō shoved the wandering hawkeye off his sleeping bag. "Oh come on, Shin-chan," he whined.

"I’m hot and sticky," Shintarō protested.

"I can make you hotter and stickier," Kazunari offered in a curiously saucy tone.

"Why the hell would I want you to make it worse." Shintarō groused because he didn’t have the patience for Takao’s idiotic banter at the moment.

"Not worse Shin-chan, better," Kazunari said with an up-to-no-good lilt that made Shintarō inexplicably want to unbutton the collar of his flannel pajamas to vent some of the steam he was feeling. And then Kazunari’s hand started to wander onto Shintarō’s thigh again.

“Shin-chan,” he purred. “What’s this?” he asked with pretend-innocence. “You told me you didn’t know how to pitch a tent,” he teased, shamelessly pawing at his boyfriend’s very interested lap.
They were on the precipice of a familiar song-and-dance. It was a well-practiced routine for both of them. Kazunari would make his caddish overtures and Shintarō would deflect them, pretending to be all scandalized until he finally, inevitably relented. Soon there’d be kissing and touching and grinding leading up to the toe-curling build-up culminating in fireworks, because with Kazunari there were always fireworks. And it would’ve all gone according to plan if it hadn’t been for that pesky pup.

Before Shintarō could decide how long propriety dictated that he don the role of offended fair maiden batting down Kazunari’s rapscallion advances only to willingly succumb to baser instincts in the end (after all, Midorima did have a prominent "tent" as Takao had euphemistically referred to which desperately needed tending), before Shintarō could lay Takao flat on his back and give the hawkeye exactly what he was asking for, that tail-wagging varlet made his appearance known.

Shintarō tried to ignore it as long as he could, but there was a familiar ball of fur whining on the other side of the polyester flap that served as the entrance to their tent. For once, Takao (who by now had his hand firmly down the front of Shintarō’s pants) did not look eager for a visit from the damnable pooch. It made Shintarō want to smile, seeing Kazunari get a taste of his own medicine, making Kazunari feel the dread Shintarō always felt at the first sign of the four-legged intruder. Except at the moment Takao had a firm grip and Shintarō felt hot and bothered and was not looking for an interruption to what would surely be a enjoyable time.

But Kazunari’s good sense was a fleeting thing and much too soon compassion took over. His hand was no longer occupying the snug confines of Shintarō’s pajama pants, but rather it was reaching for the zipper of their tent.

“S-stop it right there.” Shintarō said sternly, even as he adjusted himself. "Just what do you think you're doing, idiot?"

“Aww, c’mon Shin-chan. It’s raining.”

“So?”

“He must be cold.”

“Not my problem. He should’ve thought of that before he decided to escape that den of sin,” Shintarō said, referring to Kuroko and Kagami’s love nest. Being otherwise preoccupied with each other, it was no wonder they hadn’t noticed their dog was missing.

“But, Shin-chan --”

"You want to let that wild beast into our tent?” Shintarō asked in a tone that could easily be used for phrases such as, *have you lost your damn mind?!!*

“We can’t just leave him out there?”

“Why not?”

“It’s raining,” Kazunari insisted.

“Yes, and not ten minutes ago, you wanted to go out in that rain.” A large hand fell on top of a smaller one. “You are not letting that thing inside --”

“I’m letting him in.” Kazunari had made up his mind and Shintarō might as well have saved his breath.

“Look Shin-chan,” Takao cooed when Nigō sat his furry rump at the entrance of their tent panting,
“he just wants to say hello.” The pup gazed expectantly at the tent’s inhabitants with familiar big, blue eyes.

"Takao,” Shintarō ordered, “pat that thing on its head or he'll never stop staring at us."

“Geez, Shin-chan. Make up your mind,” Kazunari complained. “First you don’t want me to let him in, now you want me to pet him?”

But Kazunari had already started making googly eyes at the mutt. The hawkeye couldn’t resist those puppy eyes.

He crawled over to the pooch and picked him up resuming their usual, mutual love affair.

Soon Kazunari was scratching the back of the dog’s ear and Nigō was licking Kazunari’s face, his jaw, his chin, his lips (all the places on his boyfriend Midorima had been hoping to kiss).

It made Shintarō’s stomach turn. The tsundere was going to make Kazunari douse his face in rubbing alcohol before he’d agree to go anywhere near his boyfriend’s dog-slobbered visage.

Shintarō had fully expected to send Nigō off his merry way, but soon after that shadowy figure had appeared at their doorstep, the rain started coming down even harder.

An impatient Shintarō waited mere moments. Well, they’d waited long enough. “Out you go,” he said.

“Shin-chan,” Kazunari scolded when Shintarō went to unzip the flap. “You can’t turn the poor little guy out right now.”

“And why the hell not?” Shintarō asked because that was exactly what he had in mind.

“Because it’s still raining outside.”

“He came in from the rain, didn’t he? He can certainly go out in it.” Shintarō pointed out.

*Out, out from whence he came.* “Besides, it’s just a light drizzle,” he said. *It really wasn’t.* Shintarō held his hand out and felt the prickly pecks of rainfall against his open palm. He quickly put his hand back inside when a bolt of lightning appeared threatening to strike him.

“Well, at least wait till it lets up,” Takao suggested, already lifting the corner of his sleeping bag beckoning the dog to come inside it. Nigō did not need to be asked twice, he quickly made himself at home in the warmth of Kazunari’s side. Shintarō knew that warmth. That was his warmth and he did not appreciate the furry usurper taking what was supposed to be Shintarō’s rightful place. Never mind that Shintarō had scoffed when the hawkeye had suggested they engage in a bit of canoodling. But that was just their modus operandi, a bit of foreplay before things turned amorous between them. If Nigō had not turned up, that could’ve been Shintarō sharing a sleeping bag with Kazunari.

But of course the rain did not let up. It got worse and worse and worse, making Shintarō wonder if he should’ve purchased an inflatable raft in addition to their tent.

Shintarō woke up hours later to the far too familiar press of fur and a cold, wet nose. Shintarō growled in annoyance. The stupid canine had certainly made himself comfortable in Shintarō’s sleeping bag. He tried pushing it out, but the damn thing burrowed down even deeper. He was now snuggled up against Shintarō’s left thigh.

Damn mutt. As annoying as its owner. Shintarō sighed. Kuroko really needed to clip his dog’s nails,
they were getting long *and* sharp.

Shintarō was *not* content to let sleeping dogs lie. There was only one thing left to do. Wake up that idiot who’d let the stupid mongrel in their tent in the first place.

“Takao,” Shintarō said in a strained tone of feigned patience.

And when he didn’t get a response from his tentmate, all traces of even fake patience were gone, “Ta-kao! *Oi*!”

“Mmm. Shin-chan,” the other man whined. “Five more minutes,” he said.

“Wake up, idiot. We’re not at home.”

“Eh?” Clearly Kazunari was out of it. Anyway, Shintarō got right down to business. “If you don’t remove this hound from my sleeping bag this instant,” he said of the dog who’d made himself quite at home in Shintarō’s personal space, “I am going to use him to practice my three-point shots.”

“Shin-chan?” Kazunari said still sounding confused, no doubt his brain was still sleep-addled. “What are you talking about?” he yawned.

“I’m talking about this dog, you idiot, who’s digging its nails into my thigh.”

“Eh? Nigō?”

“Yes, Nigō,” Shintarō snapped impatiently. *Who else would it be? Honestly.* How long did it take for Kazunari’s brain to warm up?

“Shin-chan,” Kazunari said slowly. “What are you talking about? Nigō is here with me. He’s in my sleeping bag.”

As if to backup Kazunari’s statement, there was a familiar, short yip emitted from Kazunari’s direction. It was *not* coming from Shintaro’s sleeping bag. The sound was definitely *not* coming from that thing burrowed against Shintarō’s leg.

“. . .EEEEHHHHHHHH??! *Then who the hell is this?!*

There was a loud ruckus. Shintarō managed to kick himself out of his sleeping bag. At the same time Kazunari had fumbled for the flashlight.

Suddenly there was light in their tent and Shintarō used that opportunity to quickly locate his glasses. When the hawkeye shone the lantern in the direction of Shin-chan’s crumpled up sleeping bag, it wasn’t a black and white dog crawling out of there, it was a pair of beady eyes reflecting back at them. “

*AHHHHHHHHH!!!* In all the upheaval, Kazunari dropped the flashlight, plunging them into darkness again with that thing, *that thing* hissing at them.

There was a *lot* of commotion coming from the Midorima-Takao tent between two screaming voices, a barking dog, and a low growly hiss.

Nigō, who had better survival instincts than anyone else in the tent, instantly crawled up Kazunari’s t-shirt and stayed put.

Shintarō, whose first noble instinct was to push his boyfriend out the door to safety, was not being as helpful as he thought he was.
"What are you doing Shin-chan?"

"Fool, I'm getting you to the safety of the green zones."

"Wha-t?"

“Never mind that. Get out already.”

“Stop pushing me,” the hawkeye complained. “I need to find the zipper first,” he said feeling around for it blindly in the dark.

"Hurry up and unzip that door, idiot."

"I'm trying, Shin-chan, I'm trying." Of course, the rumpus was too much for the waterlogged and poorly assembled tent. It collapsed around them before any of the unhappy inhabitants could get out.

In the end, it was Taiga, flashlight in hand, who came to their rescue. The traitorous Nigō, fled Kazunari’s chest and ran immediately to his own.

That other four-legged thing scurried off into the woods, leaving Shintarō and Kazunari in a tangle of limbs and tent poles on the ground.

“Hey, keep it down you two,” Kagami scolded his friends. “What’s with all the noise? Huh? Some of us are trying to sleep.”

Shintarō nearly burst a blood vessel at the falsity of that statement. "Trying to sleep?" he repeated, "trying to sleep?"

The tsundere must've had a deranged look on his face because Taiga started to back away and Kazunari had purposely walked between the two aces. "Calm down, Shin-chan," he said cautiously, "your eyes are starting to bulge out --"

But Shintarō ignored his shadow because that blatant lie could not go unanswered. "I have been subjected to the not so soft sounds of the two of you fornicating, forced to share a tent with your wet dog and, and," Shintarō was stuttering now as it was all coming back to him, "for the better part of an hour, I've been unwittingly canoodling with whatever the hell that was --"

"It was a --"

"-- don't say it," he warned that idiot redhead. "Don't you dare say it. It doesn't matter. The point is at no time in this hellish night were the two of you," he pointed an accusing finger at Kuroko who’d probably been standing there the whole time, except Shintarō had only just noticed him, "asleep!"

Shintarō was not bothering to keep his voice down. In fact, it was only getting louder. "I have done everything to prepare myself for this garish trip and it has gone spectacularly to hell in the most unbelievable fashion."

Despite having worked himself up, eventually, notwithstanding his best efforts, he ran out of steam. He ran out of audience long before that.

“Hey Shin-chan,” Takao said, poking his head out of the tent, “How long are you going to be standing out there? Are you coming in?"

Kuroko and Kagami had their own camping equipment. This wasn't the first time the couple had gone frolicking in the woods. Shintarō did not know who sold the tent they were in to Kuroko, but it
must've been a store clerk similar to the one Shintarō had encountered because there was no way in hell this was a four-person tent.

Predictably, it smelled like a brothel in there. Nigō was burrowed against Kuroko and Shintarō was ass to elbow with Kagami on one side and to his left, he had Kazunari draped over him like an afghan blanket. Shintarō didn't mind the left side so much. And if he pressed his lips against the forehead of his slumbering afghan, well it wasn't a kiss, not really.

Between the dog and Kagami there was a disjointed chorus of snores.

“Night Shin-chan,” Kazunari muttered sleepily against Shintarō’s collarbone, having already created a puddle of drool there.

“Good night, Kazu,” Shintarō whispered and this time it truly was a kiss.

Despite Shintarō’s meticulous preparations, he had not foreseen the need to purchase extra sleeping bags and so they'd unzipped Kuroko and Kagami’s bedrolls and had been forced to share those as well.

The one advantage this tent had over Shintarō’s recently purchased, recently ruined "old” tent was that it was at least dry. Unlike the pile of polyester and aluminum poles that now lay in a heap at their campsite, this one had been pre-treated with waterproofing solution.

###

One night in the same tent was plenty for everyone, thank you very much. And in the light of day, they packed what was left of their things and headed in search of the nearest roadside ryokan with a vacancy sign.

Although the three other occupants of the rented SUV were all snickering, it was Kazunari’s chortles, Shintarō heard loudest as they recounted last night’s misadventure. The animal Shintarō had mistaken for Nigō (and had unknowingly been snuggling with) was a raccoon dog.

“Oh stop mincing words, Takao,” Shintarō said to the man in the front passenger seat as they traveled along strips of wide open road. “It was a tanuki.”

Chapter End Notes

21. “We’re in the middle of a thunderstorm and you wanna stop and feel the rain?”
The Interview

Chapter Summary

Takao Kazunari has a job interview. Midorima Shintarō proceeds to be as sweet and supportive as his tsundere heart permits him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Interview

Shin-chan’s parents paid for their living expenses. Well, they paid for their son’s living expenses, but Takao just so happened to be living with Shin-chan so they indirectly paid for his rent too.

The arrangement sounded great in theory, but Takao was all too aware of the precariousness of their situation. They were much too financially dependent on Shin-chan’s parents. The same parents who would most assuredly have a melt down of volcanic proportions if they found out their son’s roommate also happened to be their son’s boyfriend and had been for a long time.

It was lucky for the both of them that Shin-chan’s parents were not the most perceptive people to have walked this earth. Far from it, they were so wrapped up in each other’s lives (and not in a good way) that it was a wonder to Kazunari that they even remembered they had a son in med school and a still minor daughter at home. And so the fact that neither one had apparently noticed their son was practically attached-at-the-hip to his non-platonic male roommate (and had been since high school) wasn’t all that surprising.

So when the job interview unexpectedly fell on Takao’s lap it seemed like a missive from heaven. It was for a paid internship, in his field of interest, in one of the fancy publications. It was for a position that could potentially turn into a job offer if he wowed them and Kazunari was determined to swoop them off their feet. He wanted this so badly, he could smell the desperation coming off of him in whiffs.

It wasn’t Basketball Monthly because even Takao was not so delusional to think he could get an interview with Basketball Monthly. They had never been interested in him as a player and they certainly wouldn’t be interested in him as a writer. But the interview was still with one of the “good” publications, the ones that had scores of subscribers and people actually heard of them.

It was their ticket to getting out from under Midorima’s parents’ hefty fiscal thumb. In a few years, Shin-chan would still be in med school, but Takao would be out in the workforce and if this internship turned into a salaried position they would no longer need to rely on Shin-chan’s parents provided they were willing to move to a less desirable location and cut down on their monthly expenses considerably and maybe eat a lot of ramen because even a steady paycheck was not enough to cover the rent at their well-appointed, unbelievably situated apartment in Bunkyō across from the medical campus. But still, it would mean Takao would no longer have to worry about Midorima’s parents finding out about them.

###
“If you were an animal what would you be?” Midorima asked his boyfriend who was seated beside him on the red velvet couch in their living room.

“That’s easy, Shin-chan,” Takao said, placing his hands behind his head and propping his socked feet up on the coffee table, before they migrated to the seat cushion. “A hawk,” he answered readily.

“And why’s that?” Shintarō asked.

“I don’t know, Shin-chan. Cause hawks are cool and I’ve got the hawkeye.”

The tsundere raised an annoyed eyebrow at the frivolous man next to him. “Idiot, your response needs to be tailored to a job trait. Something the interviewer wants to hear,” Midorima said.

“For instance, you could say that hawks have a wide field of vision and that your articles will focus on the big picture.”

“That’s lame, Shin-chan,” Takao complained twiddling one of his roommates lucky pencils between his fingers.

They had been at this for hours and Takao was beyond bored at the moment.

Midorima gave Takao an annoyed glare. “You’re not taking this seriously. Your interview is tomorrow morning and you’re not doing everything you can to prepare yourself.”

“Sure I am Shin-chan,” Takao countered. “But what are the odds any of these stupid questions are going to be in my interview? Where did you get these anyway?” Takao asked of the stacks of notecards bearing handwritten questions in his boyfriend’s perfect penmanship.

“The internet,” Shintarō responded as he shuffled through his deck. “How about this one. ‘How much would you charge to wash all the windows on the SkyTree?’”

“What?!” Takao said dramatically letting his head fall against the backrest of the red velvet couch as he pushed his palms against his tired eyes. “You’ve got to be shitting me? No one’s going to ask that.”

“It’s a serious question,” Midorima insisted. “All of these questions came from actual interviews at top companies,” he informed his roommate.

“I wouldn’t want to work for a company that comes up with such stupid questions,” Takao retorted.

Midorima had apparently reached the limits of his dwindling patience. “Well they wouldn’t hire you anyway if you can’t bother to answer their questions,” he said.

“And get your feet off the furniture, idiot,” he added, knocking over Kazunari’s tootsies from the seat cushion with the swat of one very long arm.

“Ah, c’mon, Shin-chan. What’s the big deal?” Takao complained.

Living with Shin-chan was worse than when Takao’s parents would take him and Kazumi to visit their grandparents. Well, at least Shin-chan hadn’t covered all the upholstery in protective plastic, though Takao supposed he shouldn’t rule out the possibility that one day he’d come home from class and find all the cushions had been shrinkwrapped.

“Knock it off idiot, we’re not kids anymore. Don’t put your feet wherever you feel like.” Shintarō scolded. And then, because he was not known for patience, he said, “Answer the question already.”
“Shin-chan,” Takao whined. He was beat and wanted to get his mind off this stupid interview already. “No one is going to ask me that.”

“They could.” Shintarō placed the note card at the bottom of the stack and shuffled the deck like he were a dealer at a poker table.

“You never know. You should have an answer prepared in case someone does,” he said. And then he got up from the couch he and Kazunari had been sharing.

###

“Kazu,” Shintarō said later that night when they were in bed together. “They’re going to be so impressed by you tomorrow, they won’t know how they managed without you,” he said before turning off the table lamp on the nightstand.

Takao smiled at his unbelievably sweet and incredibly supportive boyfriend. “Shin-chan,” he said getting all teary-eyed. “You’re the best boyfriend anyone could have,” Takao declared. And then he threw his arms over his tsundere and nearly knocked the both of them out of their bed.

Takao Kazunari had an interview for a dream internship. He was so excited, he could hardly sleep. And so he tried to put off the sandman for just a little while longer.

“Shin-chan,” he beckoned and his tone said it all.

Midorima was unexpectedly indulgent. “Well, if you think it’ll help your pre-interview jitters.”

“I do,” Kazunari assured him.

###

The following morning Takao woke up to the grating sound of three alarms. The one on Shin-chan’s night table and the ones on each of their phones.

My boyfriend’s ridiculously paranoid, was Takao’s first thought as he rolled out of bed to answer the call of nature.

They were brushing their teeth in the en suite in front of the bathroom mirror – Takao wearing only the black boxer briefs he’d found on the floor moments ago on his side of the bed and Midorima still in his three-piece pajama set – when Shintarō offered to drive Kazunari to the interview.

“What about your study session?” Takao asked.

“It’s been postponed,” Midorima assured him, not meeting his eyes in the mirror in front of them.

“Postponed?” Takao asked because the timing of it sounded suspicious.

“Yes,” Midorima insisted. “Besides, I can study in the car during your interview.”

Sometime later, Takao walked into the kitchen with a damp towel wrapped around his trim waist so he could start the coffeemaker only to discover that his boyfriend had made breakfast for the both of them.

“Shin-chan,” Takao said as he gaped at the food already apportioned onto a pair of plates on the kitchen counter. “You made us breakfast,” he said adoringly.
“Don’t be preposterous, fool,” Shintarō snapped. “I bought this from the konbini down the street while you were in the shower. The last thing you need during your interview is intestinal issues.”

It was true that on very few and very rare occasions Midorima Shintarō had made breakfast for Takao Kazunari. And the hawkeye had gobbled up the food with the same enthusiasm he gobbled up the grand romantic gesture – stray eggshells and all. And then his stomach would proceed to punish him for his bad decision making which in turn would put quite the damper on their lovelife.

“Okay,” the interviewer said. “I’m going to start by asking you a few basic questions.”

Takao nodded because he had expected that. He sat up in his chair, mentally psyching himself up because he and Shin-chan had practiced this at home.

“How much would you charge to wash all the windows on the SkyTree?”

*You’ve got to be shitting me*, Takao thought and then he racked his brain to come up with a response.

The interviewer noticed the lull in the conversation. “We’ll come back to that one later,” he said.

He had Kazunari’s resumé in front of him and had marked it up with notes. Shin-chan had insisted Takao use his fine stationery to print his resumés and the hawkeye was glad he’d listened to his boyfriend.

“It says here you played basketball at Shūtoku,” the man said studying the expensive sheet of heavy cardstock.

Kazunari beamed because being good enough to start all-three years of high school was a source of considerable pride for him.

“Do you know Midorima Shintarō?”

*Intimately*, Kazunari thought wryly. “Actually, he’s my roommate,” he said.

“Yes?” the boss man seemed impressed. “No kidding?”

“Yup. I live with him,” Takao added wondering how impressed the man would be if he knew the true nature of their living arrangement.

The man smiled broadly. “He’ll sell a lot of magazines.”

“What?” Takao asked, puzzled by the stray comment. Midorima had not picked up a basketball in an organized setting since they both had retired from the basketball team their third year.

“What about the other Miracles?” the man asked, leaning over his desk and studying Kazunari with an interested, penetrating gaze. “How many of them do you know?”

“All of them,” Takao answered, growing increasingly confused by the direction of this conversation.

The man’s eyes lit up. “Excellent,” he said. “Well in that case, you’ve got the job. When can you start?”

“What –, I mean that’s it?” a surprised Takao said, not that he wanted to talk the man out of hiring him or anything, but this seemed too easy. “What about the SkyTree question?”
“Doesn’t matter,” the man said setting Takao’s resumé atop a stack of papers. “Anyone with this kind of unfettered access to the Generation of Miracles is a boon around here.”

“O-kay,” Takao said cautiously because he wasn’t sure what “access” to Shin-chan and Shin-chan’s Teikō teammates had to do with the articles he would be working on at the sports publication.

“There are a lot of rumors swirling around the so-called Generation of Miracles,” the man explained. “Our readers will want to hear what happened to these so called basketball prodigies.”

“What does that have to do with –”

“We’ll run a few pieces, starting with your roommate first, then move on to the other Miracles. From what I hear about Kise-kun, a lot of his fan girls are going to be sorely disappointed when they find out he plays for the other team. And that delinquent Aomine wants to become a cop?” The man started to laugh.

“You heard wrong.” Takao was quick to correct the record, even though that stuff about Kise and Aomine was more or less true.

“And Akashi,” the man laughed even harder. “I heard he’s got some serious issues. Starting with threatening someone with a pair of scissors. And things have only gotten stranger since then.”

Takao was momentarily stunned into silence. And then realization hit him like a ton of bricks. He and Akashi were not on the friendliest of terms, but fuck this guy if he thought Takao was going to help him air out Akashi’s dirty laundry or anyone else’s. It suddenly dawned on Kazunari that this man wanted to do a hit piece, on Midorima and their friends.

“Wait a minute? Are you saying you want me to help you write exposés on my roommate and his teammates?”

“That’s right,” the man sneered.

“And what makes you think I’d be interested in that?” Takao asked.

“Resentment. Toiling away unnoticed, overshadowed and overlooked while all that attention and praise was heaped onto your team’s ace,” the man explained. “It’s not uncommon. I see it all the time in the highly competitive sports world. This will be your opportunity to air out your grievances.”

The sad part was that a middle school Kazunari would’ve jumped at the chance to talk shit about the Kiseki no Sedai. Back then, Takao and his buddies did so all the time in the locker room. Of course, no one had been there, practically handing them a soapbox and a microphone.

“Everyone likes a hero,” the man continued. “But nothing sells magazines like a fallen one. Here, we have five of them.”

He looked Takao straight in the eyes, “I hear that roommate of yours wants to become a doctor. I mean who’s gonna want that weirdo laying his hands on –“

Takao got up and left. He was not going to wait around and listen to his friends being insulted. And he especially was not going to stick around and hear this asshole finish that sentence because he was most assuredly going to deck the guy if he heard whatever nasty vile thing he was going to say about Midorima.

###
"How’d it go?” Shintarō asked when Takao abruptly got into the front passenger seat of the car and buckled his seatbelt.

Kazunari looked at Midorima. Sure he’d thought those unkind things about the green haired man at one point. But not anymore. Not in a long time. Not since they started playing basketball together that fateful first-year at Shūtoku.

“Not well,” he responded. It was a tiny white lie. “Anyway. It doesn’t matter. I’m not interested in working for those assholes.” he added.

“I don’t understand,” Shintarō said astonished. “They were your top choice this morning.”

“It’s a shitty publication okay, just drop it,” Takao said a little too loudly. As soon as the words left his mouth, he felt horrible for snapping at Shin-chan. It wasn’t his boyfriend’s fault.

“Look,” he said. “I’m s–” he was about to apologize, but Shintarō did something astounding. He leaned over the center console and pulled his boyfriend into a hug and kissed the shorter man on the forehead.

“Well, it’s their loss,” Shintarō said and truly meant it. “Anyone would be lucky to have you Kazu.” He patted Takao on the shoulder. “You’ll get the job next time.”

And then he pressed the push-start button to turn on the car.

###

Takao was more a coffee drinker than a tea person, but he allowed Shin-chan to make his perfectly prepared matcha for him because he knew it made his boyfriend feel better if he could fuss over the hawkeye a bit.

They were sitting across from each other at the kitchen counter making idle conversation and both pointedly avoiding the subject of Kazunari’s disastrous interview earlier in the day.

And then the doorbell rang. Midorima left to go answer it. He returned with a plastic bag bearing take out containers from Takao’s favorite, delivery-only Korean restaurant.

"Shin-chan,” he said with a wide grin. “You bought me kimchi to cheer me up.”

“Nonsense,” Midorima responded, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "And in any event, don’t make a whole production out of it. There was a coupon stuffed in our mailbox the other day.”

Takao smiled. He had the best boyfriend ever.

###

The following morning, Shintarō was in the living room dusting his ceramic frog collection when the house phone rang. Takao had run down to the konbini to buy a carton of milk for their breakfast.

Midorima did not recognize the number on the caller ID. It was most likely not for him, he concluded.

If it were Takao, the hawkeye would’ve most assuredly called Midorima’s cell first, before trying their landline. They had gotten the landline at Shintarō’s insistence and Takao was still reluctant to
use it claiming it was for fuddy-duddy old people, though that didn’t stop Takao from chatting away with Kise.

Of course, it could be his mother. Shintarō shuddered at the thought. It wasn’t a number he recognized, but he wouldn’t put it past her to call from an unknown number on purpose. She’d done it before, when he’d gone too long without answering her calls.

Shintarō was not in the habit of wasting time gabbing away on the horn like that jabbering idiot Kise or that jabbering idiot he lived with and so he had no qualms letting the caller go away on their own. Shintarō was perfectly content letting the call go to voicemail.

As expected, he heard Takao’s chirpy voice on the answering machine. As far as phone messages went, theirs was mortifying.

*Moshi moshi. You’ve reached the residence of Takao Kazunari and – several seconds ticked by at a snail’s pace before the tsundere’s deep baritone begrudgingly supplied his own name – Midorima Shintarō. Then the hawkeye took over the message again because he’d been lucky to even get that much participation out of his extremely reluctant roommate. We’re not home to take your call or maybe we got busy, he said tongue-in-cheek. So leave us a message.*

Shintarō rolled his eyes. He found that cutesy answering machine message extremely cloying. It was a good thing his father never called the landline because that message left nothing to the imagination. As for his mother, Midorima supposed if she did know, she wasn’t interested enough to bring it to her husband’s attention. Then again Sazuna rarely concerned herself with her children’s lives until she did and then she made them a living hell. Like when she took a sudden interest in Shuzuko’s schooling and refused to allow her daughter to run track.

*Takao-san,* said an unfamiliar male voice and Midorima’s territorial ears instantly perked up at the potential rival. The voice sounded young, possibly attractive. *This is Watanabe-san’s assistant. There was a long pause as if the attractive voice was confused about something. I know you departed from our offices abruptly yesterday. But Watanabe-san asked that I call you to set up another interview with him. He said someone with your connections could really be an asset here. He’d like you to reconsider your decision. He thinks you’d be a good fit and is willing to make it worth your while. Watanabe-san would like you to take the weekend to think it over. Please, give him a call on Monday.*

The caller hung up just as Shintarō heard the familiar jingle jangle of the front door of their apartment. The key would sometimes get stuck in the keyhole and so they both had to jiggle the doorknob a bit to dislodge it.

“You lied to me,” Shintarō said before Kazunari had a chance to retrieve the key out of the keyhole or even announce that he was home.

“What?” Takao asked, holding a plastic bag with a few breakfast staples. The surprised look on his face told Shintarō that was the last thing he expected to come out of Midorima’s mouth.

The hawkeye bristled. Even though Shin-chan had a point, he didn’t like to be called a liar.

“I said, I no longer wanted to work for those assholes.” Which had been true, after his disastrous interview, Takao had wanted nothing more than to punch that punchy-faced weasel Watanabe who’d conducted the interview.

“You lied to me.” Shintarō repeated. “You led me to believe they turned you down when in fact they
made you an offer. Why would you do that?"

Takao did not know what to say to Midorima. He walked past Shintarō into the kitchen to put away the milk. He didn’t bother putting anything else away before returning to the living room.

He did not want to tell Midorima what had happened during his interview, but the hurt look on Shintarō’s face when he returned was too much for Takao to bear.

He sat on the couch and prompted his boyfriend to join him.

He told Midorima *everything* and when he was done, he peeked up at Shin-chan who was sitting beside him with a gaping mouth and a look of shock.

"I don’t know what to say,” the tsundere admitted.

Takao shifted closer to Shin-chan until he could snuggle up against him. There was nothing to say.

He was disappointed, but not because he wouldn’t get to work in a big fancy office for a big fancy publication. Fuck that guy and his stupid publication. He didn’t want to work for that asshole anyway.

Takao was disappointed because without an internship and later a job at one of the top publications, he wouldn’t be able to provide for himself and Shin-chan the way he wanted to. He was disappointed because they would still have to rely on Shin-chan’s parents until Midorima was a full fledged doctor. He swallowed the thick lump in his throat. It tasted bitter. And there, safely ensconced in Shin-chan’s arms, he started to cry.

###

A few weeks later, Takao got an unexpected email. It was an invitation to meet with another publication. One he’d only heard of because he’d sent out his resumé to literally every publication in the business after his unfortunate interview.

This time he didn’t bother to tell Shin-chan about it. He took the metro there by himself.

He took a different approach, decided to lay down all his cards from the get go.

"Alright,” he said before he even sat down. “I’m just going to give it to you straight. I live with Midorima Shintarō. We’re dating. Have been for a long time and *no*, I will not write exposés about him or any of our friends."

The man who would become his editor raised a curious eyebrow. “Okay,” he said, taking a moment to assess the unorthodox young man in front of him.

“We pay peanuts and if you’re willing to work for that, I’ve only got one question for you. When can you start?”

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**AN:** The SkyTree question is based on an actual interview question for Google, except it was the Seattle Space Needle. (˘ ³˘)♥

Chapter End Notes
31. “You lied to me.”
Counterstrike

Chapter Summary

Kazunari’s feeling ignored lately.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Warnings: T for sexy times.

Counterstrike

Dating a med student meant Kazunari had a lot of time on his hands. It also meant he spent a lot of time with his hands.

The fourth year of Shin-chan's medical school education had so far been the worst. Well, maybe the hawkeye was exaggerating a little bit, but not by much.

Takao felt like he was living in a monastery instead of sharing a comfortable-by-Tokyo-standards apartment in Bunkyō with his hot boyfriend. Their little love nest was only a stone’s throw (certainly within Shin-chan’s considerable range) away from the leading medical school on the continent. Which was very convenient given how much time Shin-chan spent at said medical school.

Takao had been flying solo, so to speak, a lot lately. It definitely felt like he’d unknowingly taken an unwanted vow of celibacy broken only by limited intervals when he could persuade his boyfriend to pay attention to something other than his anatomy books.

Pay attention to Kazu’s anatomy, Shin-chan, Takao would whine. To which Shin-chan had responded, Idiot. Stop jumping on the bed, you're disheveling my orderly stack of note cards. Which was kind of true, but Takao had been restless. He’d had all this pent up energy and no suitable outlet to release it. Not a satisfying one, anyway, he'd thought as he'd pointedly stared at his right hand.

When Kazunari was at his absolute limit, he would resort to groveling. Please Shin-chan, I can’t wait any longer. If I don’t get some right this minute, I’ll die. Of course, Midorima would respond with a bespectacled eye-roll at his ridiculous boyfriend and remind Kazunari that no one, absolutely no one -- in the entire history of forever -- had perished from such a sordid malady.

Recently, Kazunari had resorted to seduction. Shin-chan, I’m afraid I’ve misplaced my clothes, he’d said, padding barefoot (and bare everything) into the bedroom. Whoops. I’ve dropped something, he’d said in an overdramatic fashion when he'd had the man’s full attention. I guess I’ll just have to pick it up. He’d turned around and bent over achingly slow, wriggling his derriere. Takao had grinned triumphantly at Shin-chan’s red-faced reaction.

Midorima had yet to find a suitable retort to that one. Kazu was even working on a new one. I seem to have lost my prostate, Midorima-sama. Will you help me find it? He was saving it for when Shin-chan started his proctology rotation in the spring semester.

There were approximately 79 medical schools in the country and Kazunari had the misfortune of
dating a highbrow who'd been admitted to the very best one. To make matters worse, there were certain aggravating factors this year.

As it was, Shin-chan was in his fourth year of medical school and fourth year med students had to do three-month rotations in various departments under the tutelage of practicing professors. Invariably, the curricula were taught by people who knew Shin-chan's family -- close friends of his father who had dined at Shin-chan’s parents’ house or colleagues who were at the very least familiar with the Midorima surname.

Shin-chan had always been obsessed with academic success, but now he had the added pressure of his father’s legacy. It wasn’t uncommon among medical students to have a mother or father who was a physician. Doctors tended to run in families and Shin-chan’s was no exception.

The problem was that Shin-chan’s father was well known in his profession and highly respected among his peers. He published frequently and lectured around the world incessantly. His name was literally printed in some of the assigned textbooks. It was the reason Shin-chan hated the cardiology rotation he’d just been assigned. It was his father's discipline. The pressure on Midorima Shintarō to excel in the cardiology department was astronomical.

Kazunari wasn't looking forward to the big exams at the end of the fourth year or the graduation exams at the end of year six. After that, Shin-chan would have to begin studying for his boards (oh joy), followed by the two-year residency that awaited his boyfriend at the end of this whole ordeal. Takao got a headache just thinking about it and he wasn’t even the one who had to do all the studying.

The hawkeye was supposed to graduate from college at the end of this year, but he was stuck in the I-don't-know-what-the-hell-I-wanna-do-with-my-life limbo that affected many of the upperclassman, especially at his somewhat lackluster university.

Takao's college entrance exam grades hadn’t been as impressive as Shin-chan’s. Coupled with his nothing-to-write-home-about grades at Shūtoku, he had no choice but to resign himself to his fate of not attending the same university as his boyfriend. In the end, he was accepted to a commuter college which had been ranked better than he’d expected and his mother had cried in relief that her eldest child was not going to meander about being a ronin.

As it was, Takao had little direction when it came to his post-secondary studies. He'd dabbled around in so many different subject areas that he didn't have enough credits for a single major. He did have enough for a minor in journalism, maybe. His guidance counselor was supposed to get back to him on that.

About the only thing he did like was his internship at that small sports publication, but they paid peanuts and weren’t looking for new hires at the moment. Though he supposed that was a temporary situation given that most people couldn’t afford to make a living on such a small salary and it was only a matter of time before some of the current employees moved on to greener pastures creating an opening for Kazunari.

He was frankly surprised his boyfriend wasn't more on his case about graduating on time. Even his easygoing mom was starting to worry. He supposed Shin-chan had a lot on his plate at the moment.

The hawkeye’s indecisiveness only applied to his career choices. He knew perfectly well what he wanted for his personal life and that individual was on their bed right now surrounded by notecards studying like a fiend in preparation for tomorrow's cardiology practicum.

Shin-chan had been holed up in the bedroom every day after school the past week like a studious
hermit. It was supposed to be *their* room and for the most part it was, except when Shin-chan misappropriated it and turned it into a haven for anatomy text books, plastic models of various organs Takao could now name in his sleep (and sometimes did), a slew of study aids, and an avalanche of notecards in distinctly perfect, not-doctor-like-at-all handwriting in all the colors of the rainbow or at the very least, Teikō’s starting line-up. When that happened Kazunari was relegated to sleeping all by his lonesome in the seldom-used spare bedroom.

Takao was on the couch -- an old-fashioned, deep burgandy, velvet monstrosity that was a hand-me-down from Shin-chan's great aunt -- mindlessly playing a video game, because how else was he going to occupy his evening, when he unexpectedly heard the bedroom door click open.

"Are you done, Shin-chan?" he asked, getting his hopes up. The master bedroom had an *en suite* bathroom so it wasn't like Shin-chan was just taking a bathroom break.

"Only grabbing a drink," Midorima announced as he passed by.

Takao hit the pause button on his game and followed his boyfriend into the kitchen.

Shin-chan was standing by the refrigerator door already guzzling down a bottle of water when Kazunari walked in.

Takao boosted himself up on the counter top and openly gaped at the way his boyfriend's pronounced Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he swallowed his drink.

Midorima dried his lips on his wrist and threw the now empty plastic container into the recycling bin in an unnecessarily high arc. "Takao. Don't sit on the counter. It's unsanitary," he scolded.

"But Shin-chan . . .," Takao whined, reaching for his boyfriend's arm and pulling him closer. The hawkeye moved his knees further apart so Shin-chan could stand in the space between them. "That makes me the perfect height to do this," he said kissing his boyfriend's disapproving lips.

And it was true, sitting on the kitchen counter eviscerated their considerable height difference and made it one of Takao's favorite makeout spots. Midorima didn't pull away from the kiss, which was very encouraging.

Kazunari sidled up to the edge of the counter, wrapping his legs around his boyfriend's waist. He proceed to take Midorima's bottom lip into his mouth while his paws migrated south creating a space for themselves between Shintarō's warm, flat stomach and his belt buckle.

Suddenly, large hands were plastered over Kazunari's own lips, impeding his progress. "And where exactly do you think this is going?"

Undeterred, Takao tilted his head to the side until he'd managed to put long, slender meticulously manicured fingers into his mouth and sucked. He kept his own hands in place. They were quite comfortable there, in Midorima's pants, *thank you very much*.

"What has gotten into you?" Midorima complained, wiping his salivated left hand on his tailored slacks.

"More like what hasn’t gotten into me." Takao said under his breath.

"What are you talking about?"

"It's been *waaay* too long, Shin-chan," he complained.
"It's been three days," Midorima responded.

"Has it?" Takao.

"Tuesday afternoon," Midorima reminded him. "After I came home from my practicum."

"Huh," Takao could've sworn it had been at least a week.

"I see I've left an indelible impression," Midorima said dryly.

"Don't be upset Shin-chan. It's a compliment."

"How so?"

"It means I can't get enough of you. I'm insatiable," Takao said to his boyfriend.

"Is that so?"

"Yup," Takao affirmed. And then, a little more timidly, he added, "I feel like you haven't been paying attention to me lately."

Shintarō considered the words for a moment, then kissed his boyfriend's forehead. He had to lean up to do it, for a change.

"Idiot, you could've just said something." Notwithstanding, his earlier protestations about the sanctity of kitchen counters, he proceeded to unbutton Takao's shirt. He tossed it over his shoulder. Removed each of the hawkeye's socks, letting them fall where they may. Shimmied Kazunari out of his skinny jeans, before finally, finally, relieving the hawkeye of the oppression of his boxer-briefs.

When he was finished, Shintarō turned the full intensity of his emerald gaze on his boyfriend, admiring his handiwork.

"If you keep looking at me like that we won’t make it to a bed," Takao said.

"Who needs a bed?" Midorima retorted.

"Holy hell, Shin-chan. That's hot. You're going to kill me."

"Perhaps, I should tone it down then?"

"Noooo," Takao insisted, tightening his legs around his boyfriend. "Take me right this very minute."

"Don't be ridiculous. I will do no such thing. We've just gotten started. Without proper groundwork, you could end up with a prolapsed anu --"

Takao put both his hands over his boyfriend's mouth because -- geez, Shin-chan had the worst pillow talk of anyone ever. "Save it for your proctology rotation," he said. "You're killing the mood here, Shin-chan."

"I doubt a vat of ice water would extinguish your excitement," he said, staring pointedly at the impassioned state of Kazunari's lap. Not that Midorima's was faring any better in the tight confines of his tailored slacks.

Well, Shin-chan probably had a point, Takao conceded. "Why are you still talking?" the hawkeye asked, then kissed the man senseless.
Chapter End Notes

34. “If you keep looking at me like that we won’t make it to a bed.”
One Life

Chapter Summary

Midorima Shintarō was summoned to his parents’ house for lunch on a Saturday and then his whole world collapsed around him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Warnings: T for shitty parenting. Seriously, no one should put their kid through this shit.

One Life (Part 1 of 3)

Midorima Shintarō was summoned to his parents’ house for lunch on a Saturday. The med student would've dragged his roommate with him except for the fact that said roommate had a date with the plumber because the garbage disposal was broken yet again. Those sure as hell looked like eggshells when Shintarō had flashed a light down there, just like last time and the time before that, but not like the first time because that had turned out to be a secret decoder ring. Shintarō had been all abashed because that had been his lucky item and Takao had been all smug and vindicated because for once he hadn't broken something in their apartment -- although, he'd more than made up for it since then.

Kazunari's victory lap had been extremely short-lived because moments later he'd tripped over the plush velvet couch and broken the table lamp with his fall. Shintarō had tried to hide his distress over his fallen shadow, masked it with anger over the shattered light source, as he'd checked his roommate for broken bones and glass shards.

Idiot, Shintarō thought when the memory of the raven-haired buffoon he lived with came to his mind entirely unbidden. And because he was alone, he allowed a tiny, fond smile to grace his tightly pressed lips at the thought of Takao Kazunari.

Shintarō pushed the blinker on to signify his turn onto the broad street lined with ginkgo trees. Because Midorima Shintarō obeyed all traffic laws. He still couldn't decide whether Kazunari was being punished by having to waste a Saturday afternoon waiting for the kitchen sink to be unclogged or rewarded by having a legitimate excuse for not attending excruciatingly painful, compulsory meals with Shintarō’s family.

He was pondering that very thought when he arrived at the front entrance of a stately home in a tony neighborhood comprised of large residences tucked behind high fences. Shintarō pressed a button on the car's visor to open the gates that led to the private driveway.

The car itself had been a generous acquisition. It had been a medical school admission present from his parents, though it was hardly a necessity. Living a stone’s throw away from campus meant he only ever used it to visit his parents or whenever he couldn't talk Kazunari out of a joyride (Let's go see the ice sculptures in Sapporo. C'mon Shin-chan. It'll be fiuuuuu. Fifteen and half hours later, they'd hit a snowbank and Shintarō was lecturing Takao on the dangers of hypothermia).

There was a stone wall surrounding Midorima Shintarō’s childhood home, but there might as well
have also been a moat given the palatial proportions of the property and it's fairy tail like-facade. And it was just that. A facade. Behind an idyllic exterior was an abode filled with unhappy memories. Shintarō's ease in leaving it behind was only tempered by the fact that his little sister still lived there.

He’d been avoiding his mother’s calls all week, but when his father called him, Shintarō had dropped everything (Ouch, Shin-chan. That hurt! You could've at least waited till I finished. I was so close.) and answered his phone on the first ring.

Shinzo was not the kind of parent who called his children, not even on their birthdays or any of the major holidays. In fact, several months had passed since Shintarō had spoken to him.

Midorima Shintarō had spent much of his childhood concocting ways to meet up with his distant father. He’d once snuck into the man's office at the hospital where he worked and scared the hell out of the new secretary, who'd apparently worked very late hours.

His father had driven him home that night. Shinzo scolded him the entire drive home, but he didn’t get out of the car and drove off just as soon as a teary-eyed Shintarō had opened the front door.

The heart surgeon had been furious with his young son and had punished him severely. And while Shinzo hadn't been around to enforce the month-long sentence he'd meted, Shintarō faithfully adhered to it, even though Nanny had told him it was alright if he wanted to go out and play.

Midorima Shinzo was a detached authority figure whose comings and goings had been a mystery for most of Shintarō’s childhood. On occasions when his father was home, when -- for reasons unknown to Shintarō -- he decided to gift his family with his presence, the man was stiff, formal, and unapproachable.

On those rare occasions, tensions ran high in the Midorima household. His mother was a nervous wreck, fussing over her appearance and that of the children, making sure everything was perfect. The house was even more spotless than usual and the anxious staff seemed to have been instructed to keep the children out from under Doctor Midorima’s well-heeled feet. It was like his mother was preparing for a visit from a foreign dignitary and not a family member, let alone a spouse.

Invariably, the children always failed the inspection because Shinzo never stayed. There was always some pressing matter often far away from home that warranted his immediate attention. That was when Shintarō's mother was the most unbearable. The days following his father’s departures were the gloomiest. Sometimes, he’d come home from school and she’d still be in bed.

His parents’ marriage had always been a complicated thing fraught with conflict, heated arguments and flaring tempers. While his mother, for appearances’ sake, was the very picture of a prim and proper housewife, behind closed doors it was a different story.

He wished he could say he didn’t know what the front lawn looked like with his father’s bespoke suits and dress shirts strewn about the meticulously landscaped round green shrubs. Or what his mother looked like at her breaking point. When she'd packed her bags and all but said to hell with all of you.

As Shintarō grew older, the fog of mystique that surrounded his father’s business affairs dissipated revealing less than honorable circumstances. Every ruined family dinner, every vacation cut short had been about the same reason. Sure, the women were different, but the reason was always the same.

He wished he could say his parents got along better now that he was older, but the truth was that he
just wasn’t there to witness it anymore. He felt bad for his little sister who was still a minor and had to live under that strife-ridden roof until she too could flee, like Shintarō had, to the protective walls of higher education.

After the family had finished their meals, they had dispersed. Sazuna had taken Shuzuko to the music conservatory for her private violin lessons and Shinzo had invited his son to join him in his study.

As a child, Shintarō had never been allowed to play in here. This richly appointed room had always been off-limits and to this day, it still retained its forbidden aura. It made Shintarō uneasy.

“Sit down, Shintarō,” his father told him and Shintarō complied.

He’d expected his father to ask him how school was going. It was the one topic they spoke about since Shintarō had been accepted to Shinzo’s alma matter. Father and son had several ancient professors in common and many of Shintarō’s instructors were part of Shinzo’s circle of friends. Colleagues of his father, Shintarō had seen in this home from time-to-time growing up.

Father and son sat across from each other — the width of a highly polished mahogany desk between them -- but the distance seemed much greater than that. They hardly talked. He didn’t know this man, not really.

As a child, Shintarō couldn’t have even imagined his father inviting him to his study for a one-on-one conversation. Growing up all he had ever wanted was his father’s attention. And it wasn’t just him, his mother, his sister, all anyone in this family ever wanted was Shinzo’s acknowledgment.

His father pulled out a leather-bound portfolio from one of the drawers and placed it on the desk in front of his son.

It was nondescript. It could’ve been anything, yet somehow Shintarō knew.

His heart sped up. His normally steady hands began to shake. He body was in flight-or-fight mode. Every instinct told him he was in mortal danger. Not in any physical danger, but life-threatening peril nonetheless.

“Open it,” his father said sternly, because time and space had stood still and so had every one of Shintarō’s muscles.

Shintarō shifted in his seat uncomfortably. The thought of anyone else, anyone but Kazunari was repugnant to him. They had something. They had built something together, he and his best friend, something precious, something rare and beautiful, something that had to be protected at all costs. Something he couldn't possibly put into words.

Shintarō didn’t move. He sat there dumbstruck as he envisioned all he stood to lose by opening that flap.

“Alright,” his father said tightly. “Since you seem to have lost the ability to follow simple directions, I’ll do it for you.” He flipped the front cover.

“There,” he said to his son. “That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

Shintarō averted his eyes. This wasn’t happening. He wanted no part of this.

“Come on, Shintarō.” The man laughed. It was humorless. Ugly. There was mischief, no careless, frivolous joy in it. It wasn’t the kind of laughter Shintarō had grown accustomed to living with, had grown addicted to hearing in the small apartment he shared with his roommate.
“There’s nothing to be afraid of,” Shinzo said as he turned the portfolio to face his son and removed the letter sized, glossy photograph. “She’s quite lovely actually. Like a flower.”

He pushed the photograph in front of Shintarō.

Midorima tasted bile. He didn’t even want to look at her.

“You’ve already met her parents,” Shinzo informed him. “Her father is a friend of mine. We play golf together.” He relaxed, sat back in his leather chair, crossed his long trouser-clad legs.

While Shintarō willed himself not to tremble, Shinzo seemed completely at ease with the situation. “I’d like you to ask her out,” he said, turning a blind eye to his son’s obvious discomfort.

“I can’t,” Shintarō responded, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

“She’ll say yes, Shintarō,” he assured his socially-awkward son, as if that were the concern. “Everything’s been worked out with her father. At this point, it’s merely a formality.”

Shintarō had always been prideful, but for this, he was prepared to grovel. “Please,” he begged. “I can’t. Please,” he repeated, desperately hoping that he could convey with his face, with his eyes, with his anguished expression what every pass caught, what every laugh shared, what every private moment meant to him. He couldn’t lose that. He just could.

His father smiled. It was deadly, venomous, nothing like the smiles Shintarō was used to. “Of course you can. And you will.”

“I won’t,” he said. Shintarō had his heart in his mouth. He was shaking with fear.

“Why not?”

Shintarō swallowing thickly as mucous collected in his throat, “There’s someone else.” He kept his answers deliberately short, his voice was unsteady.

They’d been living on borrowed time. He and Kazunari had been. He knew that. He’d always known that. Yet a part of him had always thought that they’d figure a way out. That as long as they were together, nothing else was real. Not family obligations, not societal expectations. *Nothing.*

"Ah. Another girl --"

"No."

“I see.” Shinzo said, taken back. Shinzo peered at his son with new eyes, like he was a curiosity, something to be examined, a slide under a microscope, something he’d never considered. He rested his index finger against his lips in contemplation.

Shinzo uncrossed his legs and sat upright. “Shintarō,” he said, tapping the leather blotter on his desk with long, manicured fingers. “We’re both adults here. I’m not asking you to give up your . . . preferences. I’m asking you to take on a wife.”

Shintarō choked back tears. Before him was a deeply flawed man. One whose love he’d been chasing after for most of his life. At home, in a small apartment in Bunkyō, was a man who loved him back. “No,” he said simply.

There was a flash of anger in his father’s green eyes. It disappeared as quickly as it had materialized.

“If you don’t do as I say Shintarō,” he said very calmly, “I’m cutting you off.”
It was like his entire world was crumbling to pieces. His father had given him an ultimatum, but really there was no other alternative. “I won’t do it. I won’t do as you say.”

Angered by his son's disobedience, Shinzo said to Shintarō, “You disgust me.” The words hurt, he might as well have slapped Shintarō in the face. Shinzo's face grew red with anger. “Your actions are vile. You bring dishonor to this family and I will not tolerate it. Let me be clear, if you disobey me, there’s no place for you in this family.”

His father had been unfaithful to his mother for as long as Shintarō could remember. Sure, there was a time he didn’t know what “unfaithful” meant, but as he grew older and lost the blinders of childhood, shed his innocence, he recognized what all those late nights at the office and faraway medical conferences had really been about.

Shintarō found himself shaking with unexpressed rage. How dare this man say these cruel things to him when all he’d ever wanted was his love and approval.

“I wish I could hate you,” he said to his father. He’d never voiced those words before, but he’d thought them many, many times. It killed Shintarō to say them now, but his father didn't even flinch.

He became stone-faced, betrayed no emotion. Shinzo stood up and Shintarō followed suit. “Are you willing to throw your life away for him?”

There was really only one answer to that question, “I am.”

“Then I have nothing further to say to you.”

Shintarō choked back a sob. His father’s words stung. They wounded him deeply.

For all of Shintarō's turmoil, Shinzo quickly regained his composed. He became the cold, distant father he'd always. Except now, he wasn’t even that to him. The elder Midorima walked to the door of his study and opened it.

"You've disappointed me, Shintarō,” he said. “Please see yourself out.”

AN: Rip my heart, why don't you. This is related to two other prompts which I will post later. All of them are based on events from NTMTBDLT. All three are inspired by U2’s One, which is a damn good song, imo. I hope you're not getting tired of this story, we still have a shit ton of 13 chapters to go.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: 36. “I wish I could hate you.”
One Love

Chapter Summary

Midorima adjusts to the new normal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Warnings:** T for aftermath of shitty parenting & allusions to pound town. Also, there's feels. lots and lots of feels.

One Love (Part 2 of 3)

It had been a tense couple of months in their apartment. The first few days, the numbing shock of having been shunned by his father had made Shintarō feel like none of it had actually happened.

He felt like he was in a dream, an awful, dreadful dream that made the contents of his stomach churn every time he thought back to that horrid conversation he’d had with his father, thought back to those ugly, bitter words that were said to him -- words that stung still very tender wounds.

Then suddenly, entirely unbidden and seemingly out of the blue, reality stuck on Shintarō’s way to class.

*No, he didn’t hate him.* He could never hate him. He loved him. He always would. He didn’t know how else to feel about him. He’d loved him all his life and even now, after all that had happened between them, he still loved him, Shintarō knew. He didn’t know what it was his father felt towards him in return, but evidently it was easily severable, cast aside, expelled like a wayward son.

And then, the contents of his stomach weren’t merely churning, but making a hasty exit onto the narrow strip of asphalt between the sidewalk and a rack of bikes at school.

The taste of bile burned his throat, tears stung his eyes as passersby gave him wide berth to avoid getting caught in the splash zone.

Midorima wiped his mouth with a handkerchief, deposited the soiled cloth in the nearest trash receptacle, and proceeded to class.

Despite the feeling of being completely lost, his feet somehow found the strength to carry him to his destination, because he’d given his word to the person who mattered most in his life -- *You have to promise me, Shin-chan. You cannot quit school. You have to finish this. No matter what happens. If you don’t, I’ll never forgive myself* -- even though childhood dreams, goals, and aspirations seemed to bear so little weight at the moment they could easily float away, beyond the considerable reach of his long arms, beyond his grasp.

In the days that followed, they had occupied their time by packing their things into boxes. Shintarō’s parents paid for the apartment and all of Shintarō’s living expenses, and there was no telling when those payments would stop. Kazunari had done the bulk of the work, of course. Because even though life as he’d known it had fallen apart, Shintarō was still a busy med student.
His universe had imploded and yet the world continued to turn unaffected. Even though it felt like time should have assuredly stopped, the sun still came up, his alarm clock still went off, the birds continued to chirp outside his bedroom window, people still went on about their day like normal, and Shintarō was still expected to attend classes as if he wasn’t falling to pieces. He had to continue to face his professors -- all those friends and colleagues of his father -- as if nothing had happened.

They’d gotten rid of a lot of things. Most of them had been Shintarō’s. Most of them at some point or other had been lucky items. *We need the money Shin-chan.* There were a few, however, that Shintarō had decided were indispensable. Kerosuke was one of them (Shintarō had had him for so long, he’d grown attached to the frog, though of course he wouldn’t admit it and perhaps Takao had taken compassion on his boyfriend’s already ravaged heart when he didn’t ask why they were keeping a ceramic frog of all things). And whether it was whim or insanity, he held onto a cheap pair of bunny rabbit hair clips. They were so inexpensive, it was hardly worth trying to sell them.

Every day more and more things started to disappear from the apartment until the vast majority of his possessions were gone. The more valuable stuff went to the pawn shops or the antique dealer from whence they came, and Kazunari had been able to sell the rest online. He’d even managed to sell the tanuki statue to a guy he knew at his uni who, oddly enough, collected those kinds of kitschy pieces.

The items they were not getting rid of (mostly clothes and household goods) were put away in cardboard boxes they’d gotten from the Kimura family grocery store. Their former teammate also offered his truck and moving services for when that indeterminate day came.

It was Shintarō’s mother who paid his bills, or at the very least she was the one who directed the family accountant where to send the checks. Shintarō’s father did not involve himself with such trivialities. Shintarō wasn’t even sure the man knew where he lived. He didn’t know how his mother felt about the whole ordeal. He’d left the house before she and Shuzuko had returned from Shuzuko’s violin lesson. Shintarō hadn’t been permitted to say goodbye to his little sister.

Shintarō and Kazunari had a very understanding landlady. They’d explained the situation and she’d agreed to apply what was left of their dwindling security deposit as a final rent payment once she received the last check from Shintarō’s family. During their tenure as tenants, she’d already had to use some of that security deposit to replace the carpet in the bedroom when Kazunari, in a fit of romance, had decided to light candles and more recently, she’d had to replace the garbage disposal.

When they’d told her, she’d started to cry, confiding in them that when she was a young girl, her older brother had been ousted by her family under similar circumstances. Shintarō thought of Shuzuko and how he didn’t know when he’d see her again. Their landlady told them she had lost touch with her brother and years later, when she tried to reconnect with him again, she’d learned that things had ended tragically for him. It was clearly something that was still very painful for her.

Kazunari had held onto Shintarō extra tightly that night. *Just, please don’t leave me, okay Shin-chan? Anything but that.*

After everything had been sold or packed up, there came a lull. An awful, dreadful lull where there was nothing else for them to do but wait. That was the second worst part of this whole exercise – the uncertainty. Every night Shintarō would come home from school and he’d see the cardboard boxes stacked up in the living room behind his great aunt’s velvet couch. He wasn’t sure what to do about that either -- whether they were expected to leave the heirloom furniture piece or give it back to the family.

“*You took the photographs down?”* Shintarō noted when he walked into the now sparse bedroom.

“I sold them,” Kazunari said.
“You sold them?”

“Not all of them. Not yet, anyway,” he said. There was a detachment in Kazunari’s voice that was incongruous with the subject matter. “But I found a buyer who was willing to take six of them. No sense keeping the rest up.”

"You loved those photographs," Shintarō said as if Kazunari needed the reminder.

Takao just shrugged. In the past, he’d sold others. "I can always take more," he said, smiling tightly.

They both knew that was beside the point. Those twenty-three aerial photographs meant a heck of a lot to Kazunari. He’d taken thousands of snapshots on his airborne trips with Kise. It was his hobby, but he’d always held on to those twenty-three. As far as Shintarō knew, the hawkeye had never even considered selling them to anyone before.

“But why?”

“We need the money,” he said simply. Kazunari didn’t want to cry, so he smiled instead.

Shintarō felt his heart sink into the pit of his stomach. He was on scholarship, so at least they didn’t have the daunting task of coming up with tuition money, but his scholarship only went so far. It wasn’t enough the cover the incidental costs like lab fees and text books and it certainly didn’t cover living expenses. It wasn’t like Shintarō could get a job either. Being a full-time med student occupied most of his time as it was. And while Kazunari had a job at a small sports publication, it wasn’t going to be enough.

Shintarō swallowed thickly. He could feel the guilt gnawing at his already fragile state of emotions. Kazunari had parted with something that was so dear to him, that had meant so much to him and it was entirely his fault.

“You did all of this for me?” Shintarō asked. And then he choked back tears.

“I’d do anything for you, Shin-chan,” Kazunari said like it was the most natural thing in the world. Suddenly the distance between them was unbearable and Kazunari was pulled into a tight embraced. The hawkeye buried his face into the warmth of a familiar chest. Just, please don’t leave me, okay Shin-chan? Anything but that.

###

An hour later, maybe more, they were lying in bed together, not because it was bedtime – it was much too early for that, but because Shintarō wanted to be as close as possible to Kazunari. The feeling was evidently mutual and had manifested itself in every kiss and caress and stroke.

Kazunari was content to drape himself over Shintarō afterward and the tsundere had taken to drawing indeterminate lines and boxes on Kazunari’s back.

Calligraphy, Kazunari thought. Music notes, song lyrics, love versus, poems, he had no idea what his boyfriend was penning, but the rhythmic pressure of Shintarō’s index finger against his bare back felt pleasant, almost relaxing, a respite from the worry-filled environment they’d both been living under.

Even if Kazunari couldn’t make out the words Shintarō was inscribing, the sentiment behind them was easy to decipher. It was the sort of comfortable intimacy that had settled between them after years of being together, years of being each other’s most important person.

“Mmm, feels nice, Shin-chan,” Takao purred, briefly peeking up at his boyfriend with enamored,
half-lidded eyes, before resting his head back down over Shintarō’s heart.

Midorima did not respond though, to Kazunari’s content, he continued writing. The tsundere stared out the window through the small slit between the curtains where spring had clearly given way to summer.

“It’s going to be strange this year,” he said, after so much time had passed that Kazunari had almost fallen asleep. Shintarō could feel Takao starting to drool on his chest and couldn’t bring himself to fuss about it, couldn’t bring himself to care.

“Not seeing my family on Tanabata,” he added. What he really meant was his birthday. Most years the Star Festival fell on the day of his birth. Shintarō wasn’t referring to his parents either. Shinzo hardly ever came home for minor holidays and not dealing with Sazuna would actually feel like a reprieve. Who Shintarō really meant was his little sister.

He missed Shuzuko dearly. Despite their age difference, they were very close. Shintarō used to talk to her almost every day. At a minimum, they used to exchange text messages. She’d complain about how their mother wouldn’t let her try out for track or tell him about school and he’d let her know what he and Takao were up to because she always thought Kazu-nii was hilarious.

Takao had tried to get Shintarō to call her when they knew she would be alone, but Shintarō had resisted, not wanting to get her in trouble with their parents. Still, he didn’t know how much longer he could hold out. He definitely planned to call her on her birthday. And then he thought of all the other holidays he would be missing.

“I hadn’t even thought about Obon,” he said weighed down by the sudden realization. “What will I do about my ancestors?” Are they still mine?

Kazunari rolled to his side, propped his head up on the palm of his hand, and said, “Fuck him.” Because he hated his boyfriend’s parents for putting their son through this. He couldn’t think of anyone less deserving of this bullshit than Shintarō who was a good son, who worked harder than anyone to become a doctor, to earn his father’s approval.

“He can’t do that to you, Shin-chan,” he said. Despite the nickname, Takao's tone was biting, his voice bearing none of its usual playfulness.

“He can disinherit you and whatever, but your ancestors are your ancestors. He can’t break that link. We’ll honor them together. We’ll go to my parents’ house and leave offerings for them there,” he said, seeking out Shintarō’s gaze.

And then, because he felt no inclination for holding his tongue, because he was seething with anger, he added, “As for your father. I’d say ‘fuck you.’ I’d say ‘thanks for your stellar contribution to my genes,” because really and truly Shintarō got his beauty and brains from that dickhead, ”but, ‘fuck you for everything else.’”

Shintarō said nothing. He eyes returned to the small gap between the curtains, his thoughts crowded by Kazunari’s words.

Shintarō wasn't the only one lost in thought. “You know,” Takao said quietly, his heart in his throat, “this could all go away.” And for all of Takao’s tough talk about telling Shinzo to go to hell just now, the hawkeye knew Shintarō was hurting over having been cast out of his family. He also knew there was an easy, though admittedly painful remedy to that.

Takao was referring to the fact that Shintarō’s father had given his son an out. Shintarō could come
back into the fold, back into Shinzo's good graces so long as Shintarō agreed to date and eventually marry someone his father had chosen for him. Someone decidedly female and of exceptional pedigree, someone not Kazunari.

Takao let the thought linger in the space he’d now created between them. And even though he had put the idea out there, he lay on pins and needles awaiting the other man’s response. Please don’t leave me, okay Shin-chan? Anything but that.

Shintarō shook his head. “No,” he said simply, pulling his boyfriend towards him and Kazunari was grateful to be back in his arms, grateful for the lips that pressed against his own. He knew from the certainty in Shintarō’s voice, in his touch, that that would be last time they broached that subject. He was so relieved, he could cry. He was so relieved, he did cry.

And while they still hadn't solved anything, they would still be moving into Kagami and Kuroko's spare bedroom when the time came, Takao felt less burdened because as long as they stayed together, he could deal with everything else came their way. It all seemed trivial in comparison.

“Tell me a secret,” Kazunari said when their kiss ended, his eyes fixed on the man he wasn’t ready to give up (on the man who wasn’t giving him up either). He settled back, made himself comfortable, resting his chin on his hands folded neatly one on top of the other on Shintarō's bare chest.

Midorima pondered the words. He thought of all their years together, of the past few months, of the enormous sacrifice his boyfriend had just made for him by selling some of his photographs, and thought not for the first time that he was not worthy of this man, lying naked and peering openly at him.

Disgusting, his father had called it, but that was the furthest thing from the truth.

Shintarō’s fingers pushed the dark fringe off Kazunari’s forehead, gazed upon adoring eyes. “I love you,” he said openly, unguarded, honestly.

Kazunari smiled. “That’s not a secret,” he said, though the sparkle in those familiar, teasing blue eyes said he was delighted to hear it nonetheless. “You’ve said that to me before.”

And while Shintarō was not one to shout it from the rooftops, he was also not one to deprive Kazunari of hearing those words simply because talking about such things made Midorima uncomfortable. Especially when Shintarō knew what they did to him when he heard Kazunari say them. As so, of course, Kazunari was right. Shintarō had on a few, choice occasions gathered up his courage and said those very weighty words, heavily laden with tenderness and meaning and things he couldn't even begin to describe.

“Yes, but,” Shintarō said, carding his fingers through dark hair. “I don’t think you realize how much.”

Because if Kazunari thought for one minute Shintarō would’ve entertained the idea of accepting his father’s terms, Kazunari clearly didn't understand the depths of Shintarō's love for him. Shintarō wasn’t sure when it happened -- when he became Kazunari’s and Kazunari became his -- but they’d become one.


AN1: Like the prior prompt, this one is based on events from NTMTBDLT. Also, this whole
chapter is a puddle of sap that I may or may not have made myself emotional over. The third and final installment of this arc comes in a few more chapters. Plotty stuff has to happen between now and then.

**AN2:** I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that Kazunari's aerial photography hobby came out of left field, but it's in the other stories, *I swear.* I'm just an idiot who forgot to mention it sooner in this one. I hope you're enjoying the story, despite my continued hiccups with the timeline. See you next water time.

Chapter End Notes

45. “Tell me a secret.” & 41. “You did all of this for me?”
One Night

Chapter Summary

Midorima gets an unexpected, late night phone call.

**Warnings:** More feels, references to shitty parenting.

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**One Night (Part 3 of 3)**

The first time the screen on Shintarō’s phone lit up displaying his parents’ home phone number, Shintarō manifested all the classic symptoms of a myocardial infarction.

He felt immense pressure, tightness and crippling pain in his chest, a sharp, tingling sensation of pins and needles running up his arms, overpowering nausea, indigestion, heartburn and abdominal pain, shortness of breath, a cold sweat and an overwhelming dizziness that did nothing to quell the mutiny churning in the pit of his stomach.

He also experienced a few new signs which were not mentioned in his medical textbooks: a pounding headache, a paralyzing fear, a loud ringing in his ear, difficulty swallowing, a sudden swelling of his tongue, the taste of bile licking flames at the back of his throat, a nervous twitch in his eyeball. It was like he’d unwittingly ingested dimethyltryptamine and was suddenly feeling its powerful psychotropic effects.

The room was spinning and all Shintarō wanted to do was get off this trippy ride.

Instinctively, as someone who suffered from what felt like a lifelong affliction of myopia -- even though the problem had first presented itself in elementary school, Shintarō reached for his glasses.

Having regained one of his five senses, Shintarō steeled himself for dealing with his other lifelong affliction, his parents.

He picked up his angrily buzzing cell where it had previously lain attached to a charging cord, instantly cutting off its loud rattle against the wooden surface of the night table.

He stared at the glowing device in his hand like he'd never seen such technology before. He stared at his mobile in abject fear, the way one would gaze in terror at a hissing cobra or a live wire -- with an immutable sense of impending doom and imminent danger.

He looked back, directing his gaze for a moment to the lump of blankets resting behind him. There, on the opposite side of the bed -- a bundled up, still dozing Kazunari lay on his side. The quiet breaths expressed in the rhythmic rise and fall of a high-thread count duvet conveying a blissfully ignorant calm Shintarō sorely envied.

Meanwhile, the phone in his hand continued its vibrating protestations, renewing its demands for his attention even after the first and second call had gone to voicemail.

Shintarō padded softly out of the bedroom, quietly closing the door behind him before traversing into the living room where the light on his phone faded, drowned out by the competing street lights.
flooding into the apartment through long, open drapes.

Not so long ago his mother had been in that room, an array of neutral color swatches in hand, demanding he measure the windows for custom drapery and having a passionate debate with herself over whether opaque Belgian linen or silk damask would best suit the room. It felt like a lifetime ago. It felt like mere window dressing.

Their relationship had never been good. Not after she’d left him and his sister, however temporary, when Shuzuko was a baby and Shintarō was in elementary school. He never fully trusted her after that, he never completely forgave her for that transgression. And in many ways he was still punishing her for it because she’d made him question something so fundamental as maternal love. But it still pained him to learn how fragile his bond with her really was that it would snap over something like this.

He allowed his body to drop, like a heavy sack of rice onto the soft cushions of the red velvet couch. He was sick to his stomach and he honestly didn’t know how much longer he could remain upright given the severe assault to his senses he was presently experiencing.

The things his father had said to him had been so ugly, he did not want to relive them though there wasn't a single moment of his life now where he could forget them.

Even now. Months later. The memory was quite vivid. The pain palpably sharp.

Still, Shintarō wasn’t one to ignore his father's phone calls even under such strained circumstances. He took a deep breath, gathered his courage, and answered his phone.

"Aniki?"

He’d expected to hear one of his parents on the other end of the line.

His sister's voice nearly broke him. She sounded so worried, so scared and so young, even beyond her tender years.

"Shuzuko,” he said, willing his voice to remain steady even as his heart ached with longing. “It's three in the morning. What are you doing up? Don't you have school later today?"

He didn't want to rush her off the phone. The last thing he wanted to do was end that call. But he didn't want for her to get in trouble. He had, after all, been banished from the family. He was certain that included contact with his sister.

"Aniki,” she sobbed.

"There, there,” he said gently. It was all he could do to comfort her. “There's no need to cry,” he told her, even though he himself felt like crying.

“I miss you so much,” she said in between sobs.

"I miss you too,” Shintarō responded honestly. Oh how he missed her. Not seeing his parents was one thing, but being cut off from his little sister was almost unbearable.

Shuzuko had always been a ray of sunshine in Shintarō’s otherwise miserable homelife. He’d been so excited to become a big brother and he was so proud of Shuzuko. Not being able to see her now, to share in her life was physically painful.
“Father says you’re being obstinate,” she informed him.

Shintarō would argue it was their father who was the obstinate one.

He was about to defend himself, but before he had a chance to respond, Shuzuko added, “Nanny said that Father doesn’t want you to be friends with Kazu-nii anymore, but that Kazu-nii is a very important person to you.”

“He is,” Shintarō wholeheartedly agreed. He took some comfort in the fact that Shuzuko could still confide in Nanny Hamasaki in what was surely a very confusing time for a nine-year-old.

He was grateful that Shuzuko had at least one person at home who had the capacity to explain a very difficult situation to her with tact and sensitivity.

Heaven only knew how his parents had explained the situation to Shuzuko.

As far as Shintarō’s father was concerned, Shintarō’s current living arrangement was an act of defiance and of wilful disobedience -- the man wouldn’t know love if he got shot in the ass with Cupid’s arrow. As far as their father was concerned, Shintarō was not allowed back into the fold until he cleansed himself of this abhorrent malady.

“. . . Aniki,” Shuzuko started to say and then she hesitated.

“You know you can talk to me about anything, right?” Shintarō gently nudged her. ”I won’t get mad.”

He didn’t know when he’d get the opportunity to speak with her again and he wanted to answer any and every question she might have.

"Do you love him? Do you love . . . Kazu-nii? Like love him, love him?"

Shintarō was not one to speak openly about his feelings, even to the target of his immense affection. But for Shuzuko’s sake he’d do it. “I do.”

“And Kazu-nii loves you back?”

“He does.” There was no doubt in Shintarō's mind.

Shuzuko was not an outspoken child. For the most part, she was quiet and reserved and Shintarō could tell she was having some difficulty talking about this subject.

“Do you love each other the way Mother and Father love each other?”

Shintarō did all he could not to scoff. He was painfully aware of the shortcomings of his parents marriage and had been for some time. The whole unhappy union could charitably be described as a farce.

But Shuzuko was still very young and didn't need to know all the sordid details. Shuzuko would eventually figure it out on her own when she was older, the way Shintarō had. There was no need to enlighten her on the matter now.

As it was, Shintarō couldn’t protect her from everything. He couldn’t protect her from the shouting matches their parents would all too often engage in when their father came home late or not at all, when he failed to scrub the lingering scent of foreign perfume off his person or showed up with the smudge of red lipstick on the collar of his shirt.
Shintarō had no desire to physically touch anyone else the way he so often touched Kazunari. Shintarō wouldn’t even entertain the idea of opening himself up to anyone the way he did for Kazunari. There wasn’t even a remote possibility that he would be willing to share that level of intimacy with anyone other than Kazunari.

Shintarō would never do anything to violate the trust and faith they both stockpiled into their relationship. So no, in that sense, Shintarō did not love Takao the way his father tolerated his mother.

But for now, it was important to put things in simple terms Shuzuko would understand.

And so Shintarō answered her in that manner. “I love him in the same way Mother and Father love each other. If I could, I’d marry him.”

Shintarō had not expressed that last thought to anyone before. He and Takao didn’t speak of marriage because what was the point? For them, this was the end-goal. This was all they could be to each other. It was everything and not enough at the same time.

“Does that mean you’re not coming home?” her voice was shaky, it was barely above a whisper.

It was a question that had haunted Shintarō since the start of this whole horrible ordeal.

“I don’t know,” he answered truthfully. He didn’t know if he’d ever be allowed back.

Their father had made it clear that Shintarō could come back anytime he wanted, provided Shintarō met one important criteria. The terms were simple. They were also something Shintarō could never agree to.

After he hung up with Shuzuko, Shintarō walked to the kitchen to take an analgesic for his pounding headache. He wished he had something stronger than the over-the-counter-medicine they kept in one of the cabinets. It would pass, he told himself. The headache, like the hurt in his heart would not last forever.

He quietly walked back into the bedroom, plugging the phone into its charger.

The light emitting from the newly tethered phone gave Shintarō just enough visibility to see that what had once been a bundle of blankets, now had a shock of black, messy hair peeking out from the top. Takao had shifted in his sleep. He’d encroached on Midorima’s side of the bed, as was his wont.

Takao Kazunari was not the easiest person to share a bed with. For one thing, he was a notorious blanket hog. He also had a penchant for moving around a lot and would occasionally kick Shintarō in his sleep.

The smaller man was now laying almost diagonally across the bed. He had misappropriated Midorima’s pillow and decorated it with a large dark circular spot, a healthy pool of drool.

Shintarō unraveled the tangle of sheets Takao had somehow managed to weave into a ball around his torso like a straightjacket. He wrestled the pillow away from the sleeping man and flipped it over to its dry side.

A sleepy Kazunari mumbled unintelligible protests, before leaning back against the surface of Shintarō’s chest and promptly falling back asleep.

Kazunari was warm and sleep rumbled and even in his unconscious state did wonders for soothing Shintarō’s wrecked nerves.
Tomorrow he would talk to Takao about the fact that he’d finally been able to speak to his little sister. For now, it was enough for Shintarō to be able to hold Kazunari in his arms.

Shintarō tightened his embrace and smiled fondly, burying his face into the back of Takao’s head and taking in the scent of musty bedhead and waning hair product.

He loved him. *Oh, how he loved him*. And even knowing the painful aftermath of that love, the inevitable fallout with his family, he’d do it all over again.

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In the weeks that followed, Shintarō continued to take Shuzuko’s phone calls whenever they came in.

When she could manage it, she’d call him from school and sometimes in between her violin lessons when an unattended phone and the opportunity to be alone would present itself.

Their conversations were always rushed. But it was enough to know that he would regularly hear from her, that, as expected, she was doing well in school and that even though she could not participate in track, she was still happily cheering her friends at the meets.

And then one night, his phone rang. He was expecting Shuzuko and it was his mother on the line. Shintarō’s stomach dropped at the thought that his selfish desire to stay connected to his little sister had gotten Shuzuko in serious trouble with their parents.

However, Sazuna had called to invite him home for Shuzuko’s birthday.

The invitation was singular at first. And however much Shintarō wanted to see his little sister again, he couldn’t accept it.

His parents had a gift for acting perfectly normal while everything around them was falling apart. They had done it for as long as Shintarō could remember -- ignoring the unfaithful elephant in the room.

It was not what Shintarō wanted for his own life.

In many ways, this horrible fall out with his parents had given Shintarō unexpected freedoms. Now that he knew his world could come crashing down and he’d survive it -- he could live without his parents’ approval -- he was in a position to state his own terms. And though they had yet to make good on their threat of cutting off purse strings, Shintarō knew he could survive that as well.

He made it clear to his mother that Kazunari was part of the package. As much as Shintarō wanted to go home, he wasn’t going to do it if it meant that Kazunari would have to remain in the shadows.

Takao was not some mistress who everyone knew about, disapproved of, but never mentioned.

Now that his parents knew about his relationship, he wasn’t going to hide it anymore. He was going to live his life openly because he had nothing to be ashamed of, because that was who he was and how he chose to live.

And so he and Takao returned to Shintarō’s childhood home for dinner on Shuzuko’s tenth birthday. And then his father had unanticipatedly shown up.

Shintarō had expected the man to blow up. He’d expected to be shown the door the way he’d been thrown out before. But instead, it was as if the past three months had not taken place. As if there had been a glitch in time and space, the man chose to ask Shintarō about medical school.
It wasn’t something Shintarō ever discussed with his parents even after they’d somewhat reconciled - - that miserable period in their lives when Shintarō had not been permitted to return home, when he’d been shunned and cast out for the grave offense of loving who he loved.

It was something that had happened to him, something that he still grappled with understanding. But more importantly, it was something that was in the past.

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AN1: Like all the stories in this series, AYNIL contains references to past events. You can read more about Shuzuko's birthday dinner here.

AN2: Sorry for the long delay in updating this fic. Part of the problem was that I had to unstick this story and it took me a while to figure out how to do it. AYNIL is based on prompts I wrote on Tumblr. I don't have a prompt for this chapter, because I wrote it after the fact. I felt there was a huge chunk missing between Part 2 and what was supposed to be Part 3, titled "One Need." This chapter was my attempt at filling in that gap. I will eventually post "One Need" as a future update to this story. For now, I am done writing the "One" story arc, so expect future updates to be on the lighter side.

AN3: I hope you're still enjoying this fic and that you're not disappointed with this chapter. I have a tumblr. It's been momentarily taken over by yoi, but MidoTaka will always be my heart's favorite.
Sleep was not the only bedtime activity missing from newly minted medical resident Midorima Shintarō’s life.

Takao Kazunari had been the loudest, proudest voice in the sizable crowd gathered that frigid spring morning in Bunkyō. He'd made an absolute spectacle of himself at Midorima Shintarō’s medical school graduation ceremony.

It was as if Takao was trying to make up for support he deemed lacking in other areas of Midorima’s life.

By the time Shintarō had finished med school, his parents had resigned themselves to the fact that Takao Kazunari was going to be a permanent fixture in their son's life and by extension, in their lives. They'd had no choice but to come to grips with the fact that their son was hopelessly and irrevocably in love with his decidedly not-platonic roommate, that this love was very much requited by said roommate, and that Takao Kazunari was not going anywhere.

Tickets to the graduation ceremony had been strictly limited to a few per graduate. As it was, Shintarō had only been allotted four - just enough for his parents, sister, and boyfriend to attend -- much to the dismay of a teary-eyed Ryōta whom they'd left behind all-dressed-up-and-nowhere-to-go on their driveway.

The hawkeye had whooped and cheered and hollered when they had called out his boyfriend’s name to the podium so Midorima could collect his hard earned and richly deserved diploma. Kazunari had even rolled the program he’d been handed, turning it into a paper megaphone so he could amplify his voice even more, much to the delighted giggles of Shintarō’s little sister and horrified glares of Shintarō’s parents.

On this most important occasion, Takao had donned his best suit and a silk tie he'd snagged from Shintarō’s side of the closet.

Takao had always made it a point to make a huge deal out of Midorima’s many formidable accomplishments. From the boisterous approbations of a certain someone in the audience, you would think Midorima Shintarō had also won the Nobel Prize or invented a new vaccine. As it was, Shintarō had merely graduated first in his class from the top medical school in the country and possibly the continent. And unlike his classmates, Shintarō had not needed to repeat a single course as a bursting-with-pride Kazunari eagerly pointed out to anyone and everyone who would listen.

Kazunari was certain this was just the very first, impressive step in a path that would surely be laden with professional accolades and he had every intention of being there to celebrate every lofty future accomplishment in what was already promising to be an illustrious medical career.
Afterward, Shintarō’s parents had hosted a small, quiet reception at their not-so-small home so that Midorima's extended family could also share in Shintarō’s impressive achievement.

Small by Sazuna's standards, anyway. Kazunari had been to very few weddings that were as nice as this intimate family gathering. Takao had counted nearly a dozen hot and cold food stations, not including the raw bar, and an army of uniformed wait staff carrying trays heavily laden with all manner of puffed pastry appetizers. There was even a caduceus ice sculpture and Takao was certain the bevy of listless swans huddled together at the edge of the koi pond hadn't been there the last time he and Shin-chan had visited Shintarō’s parents.

No, please. By all means, continue embracing me out here in the open, an irritated Shintarō had said to his clingy boyfriend, I don’t think enough of my relatives are staring at us yet. The two of them had been standing close together on the manicured lawns of what had once been Shintarō’s home. It was a crisp April and those heat lamps Midorima’s mother had rented from the caterers for the swanky soiree weren’t doing a damn thing to keep Kazunari from chattering his teeth. Any minute now, Kazunari expected the string quartet behind them -- fittingly enough playing Spring from Vivaldi’s Four Seasons -- to revolt in protest at the shivery working conditions.

Despite Shintarō’s grumblings, Kazunari had no intention of letting go of his boyfriend's arm. Their relationship was no longer a secret. Shintarō’s parents had come to grips with it as best they could. Now that there was nothing to hide, the hawkeye had no intention of toning down the PDAs in this chilly weather especially for the benefit of Shin-chan's judgy, distant, green-haired relations whom Kazunari only ever saw at funerals, weddings, and evidently medical school graduation parties.

Kazunari had no intention of letting go of Shintarō’s arm, that was until Shuzuko -- ever the angel -- brought them a plate brimming with coconut prawns commandeered from one of the many trays of passed hors d’oeuvres.

###

In the weeks following Shintarō’s passing of his Boards, Kazunari had been so proud of his tsundere that he’d taken to calling him his “doctor boyfriend.” It was humiliating to say the least as Shintarō’s frequently ruddy cheeks could attest.

Now that all that studying was finally behind Shintarō and Takao’s euphoria at having "officially landed himself a hot doctor" had given way to Shintarō working endless weeks on the graveyard shift as a lowly resident at the prestigious teaching hospital adjacent to his alma mater, Kazunari reserved using that preposterous moniker -- and other mortifying variations of it -- for more private occasions.

Kazunari startled awake at the sensation of having the mattress shift beneath him. He wasn't ordinarily a light sleeper but with Midorima working all hours it had thrown Kazunari's own circadian rhythm for a loop. It was difficult trying to adjust to falling asleep alone again after having spent the past six years with a bed partner.

"Shin-chan?" Kazunari called out into the darkness.

Shintarō answered after a moment of silence, almost as if he expected Takao not to be fully awake when he'd spoken. "Go back to sleep," he said in hushed tones when he finally responded.

Kazunari felt familiar fingers run briefly through his fringe pushing the strands of stubborn hair there off his forehead. Midorima's hands smelled like the soap they used at the hospital. In the past few months, Kazunari had become well-acquainted with the scent. It wasn't unpleasant, so much as it
was strong, utilitarian, almost spartan. It was an industrial-strength, no-frills cleanser that got the job done. It was certainly a far cry from the bar of soap Midorima kept in their bathroom -- triple milled, infused with essential oils and stamped with the logo from that specialty soap shop in Ginza. Kazunari had taken to using that fancy soap of late because he could catch a whiff of "Shin-chan" in the middle of the day while he worked on the next issue of the sports publication he helped write. Perhaps he should be taking the hospital-grade soap with him to his cubicle in midtown instead.

He leaned into Shintarō’s touch because it had been far too long since he last felt Shintarō’s fingers on any part of his person.

"What time is it?" he croaked. His voice was rough with sleep, but he himself was feeling more and more conscious by the minute as Midorima’s physical presence began trickling in, filling up all his senses. All is senses, that is -- except for sight. He may have been blessed with hawkeyes, but they did have some limitations -- unfortunately night vision was not a feature. Their bedroom was pitch black thanks to highly effective blackout curtains Kazunari imagined all people who worked nights knew about.

"It's a quarter till one," Shintarō informed him. "Now go back to sleep," he added more forcefully.

Shintarō’s words had the opposite effect on Kazunari. The sound of Shintarō’s voice, deep and commanding and close enough to Kazunari that he could feel the reverberations was firing up all his receptors. Now that he’d happily awoken at the same time that Shintarō was coming in from his shift, Kazunari was starting to perk up considerably. This was not like all those other times when Kazunari woke up to find a slumbering lump in a matching three-piece pajama set or worse yet, an empty space on the made-up left side of the bed.

Kazunari shifted to his side so he could face Shintarō even if the gesture was meaningless. It wasn't like he could see anything.

Shintarō had just come off a 16-hour shift in what was shaping up to be yet another 100-hour workweek. Takao knew this. He knew his boyfriend was understandably dead tired. Which was why he limited his request to a reasonable one, "Alright, Shin-chan. How about a good night kiss first?"

Kazunari had expected a brief peck on the lips. Which is why he was completely taken aback to find himself suddenly laying flat on his back with Shintarō on top of him, stock still as if waiting for permission from Kazunari before he would permit himself to continue.

The action may have taken Kazunari by surprise, but that didn't mean it wasn't welcomed. Takao shuddered with anticipation. His body ached with impatience. It had been weeks since they'd been together like this. He was discovering just how badly he'd missed his boyfriend's touches.

Kazunari bucked his hips to let the overly mannered prig above him know he could absolutely start kissing him now and it would be more than okay with Kazunari.

Takao was just about to remind Shintarō that, for crying out loud they had been dating for eight years and counting. It was perfectly acceptable -- in fact it was emphatically encouraged -- if Shintarō so happened to want to have his way with Kazunari. But Takao didn't get to say any of this because the next words out of his mouth were a breathy, "Oh Shin-chan."

His boyfriend was all kinds of unfair. Shintarō had the uncanny ability of going from shy gentleman caller all but asking for permission to lighting all of Kazunari's pleasure receptors like a pinball machine once he got the assent.
Kazunari caught more of that hospital soap scent when his nose got pressed up against his boyfriend's collarbone -- it was called necking for a reason. As a medical resident, it was not unusual for Shintarō to shower at the hospital after a shift before coming home. Medicine, despite it's lofty associations, was a messy profession.

"Rough day at the office?" Takao asked as he pressed his lips to that juncture where Shintarō's neck met his jawline.

Shintarō nodded before helpfully turning his head to the side giving Kazunari easier access to that spot the hawkeye was intent on nibbling.

"There's a particularly virulent strand of the stomach flu going around," Shintarō explained. "I had to shower twice during my shift and then once more at the end of it."

Kazunari was about to crinkle his nose in distaste at the thought of his boyfriend being covered in other people's bodily fluids, but then Shintarō took hold of him and Kazunari wasn't thinking of anything except how good that felt.

It felt good. Really good. And then it felt too good. Weeks of not knowing the touch of his boyfriend had left Takao sensitive. Really sensitive, like feather-touch, hair-trigger explosives sensitive. One more stroke from Shintarō and he was liable to blow his top.

"Ah, Shin-chan," Kazunari sucked air through his teeth. "If you keep doing that, I'm not going to last."

Shintarō continued kissing Kazunari, but he did heed his boyfriend's warning and took his hand away, moving it to the relatively innocuous-by-comparison resting spot of Kazunari's bare hip.

Kazunari wasn't sure how Shintarō managed to do this. How he managed to keep his head on straight while Takao was ready to blow.

Three weeks. Takao did the math in his head. It had been three weeks since they --

"I want to fellate you."

What? Takao's brain fizzled. Why can't he just say he wants to suck me off? His legs however, had no objection, falling on either side of the mattress on their own accord.

"Will you let me?" Shintarō asked in between urgent, needy kisses. "Perform fellatio on you."

It wasn't a question of letting, the answer to that question -- as long as the person asking it was Midorima Shintarō -- was always a loud and resounding yes.

"Shin-chan," Takao said, responding to Midorima's question with hungry kisses of his own. "I am so turned on right now," he paused for more kisses, "I'm not even going to tell you how unsexy," and more still more kisses "that word is." It was almost as if Kazunari was trying to bide his time. Trying to cool off a little from that heated encounter moments earlier with Shintarō's gifted left hand.

Shintarō slowly moved down his boyfriend's torso, leaving a trail of kisses and a quaking, shivering Kazunari in his wake.

He settled himself between Kazunari's legs and Kazunari was grateful for the blackout curtains. They'd been together eight years, so it wasn't like he couldn't conjure up the not so uncommon sight of Shintarō's head between his thighs from memory. But if he were able to see it now, he probably would've embarrassed himself already.
He wasn't sure what Shintarō was waiting for until he heard the unclasping of a metal watchband. It was a sound Takao had become intimately familiar with. The watch had been in Shintarō's possession long enough for Takao to know there were only a few instances when his boyfriend took off the wristwatch. Work was one of them. This was the other. \textit{Oh. I'll be lucky to last all of two seconds.}

Kazunari heard Shintarō set the heavy gold watch on his bedside table. The watch was a med school graduation present from Shintarō’s father. It was engraved, decidedly masculine, elegant and Swiss-made. Kazunari didn't need to see the receipt to know it must've cost gobs of money. He also knew that whatever its considerable material value was, it held even more importance to Shintarō because it was given to him by his father. Takao may have formed distinctively negative opinions of Shintarō’s father, but he also knew his boyfriend didn't share in them. Despite the man's glaring shortcomings, Shintarō held him up on a pedestal.

Takao knew it was pointless to broach the subject though he was happy to discover that thanks to this mental foray, he was starting to flag a little. He was beginning to feel hopeful that he'd last more than two seconds until he heard another familiar sound - the plastic cap being popped off a bottle of lube -- and remembered that Shin-chan was planning to use his fingers.

Takao had never been good at withstanding the combination of Shintarō’s hot mouth wrapped tightly around him and Shintarō’s fingers expertly prying him open. And after this three-week forced hiatus, Takao didn't have a prayer.

"Mmm, Shin-chan. Feels good. So good." Takao resigned himself to his fate. He wasn't going to last, but he was appeased by the fact that they were just getting started. Midorima's fingers were working him open, promising that this would be the appetizer and not the main course. Takao let out a long drawn out moan as his back arched off the mattress in pleasure. "Yeah. Just like that. Don't stop."

"I'm close." Takao warned as his backside hit the mattress again. "I'm so close."

Shintarō’s head was resting on the inside of Kazunari's thigh. And then Shintarō’s head got heavier.

"Shin-chan?"

###

Midorima Shintarō was in the first few months of his medical residency or as it was colloquially referred to, state-sanctioned hazing. Like all first-years, he was often assigned grueling 80 to 100-hour workweeks and shifts that sometimes lasted up to 30 hours. The fact that his father was on the hospital board of trustees granted Midorima no special favors.

The one bright spot was that he didn't need to waste precious time on a long commute. The hospital and the medical school were adjacent to each other which meant they were both a short walk from the apartment he shared with Takao. Although at the moment, it felt like he was living at the hospital instead of with his boyfriend.

These days, breakfast, lunch, and dinner consisted of hospital food. He was sleep deprived and starved of other things as well which was the only reasonable explanation for what Shintarō agreed to do next. That, and the gnawing guilt he felt as he quickly pushed the events of last night to the back of his mind.

He often took his breaks lying down (preferably in a bed, but an empty cot in the hallway would do). He was a newly converted devotee of something called “strategic napping.”
These days Shintarō was so spent and so frayed at the edges he felt like he could doze standing up. And so he blamed chronic sleep deprivation, fatigue and the general stress of the job for his considerable lapse in judgment.

“Dr. Shin-chan!” Takao hollered from down the hall.

Shintarō didn't look up from the medical chart he was quickly filling up with his perfect penmanship. He merely rolled his eyes at Takao having added that embarrassing title to the growing list of ridiculous nicknames and continued jotting down the treatment plan for the cantankerous patient in room 221B.

“Paging Dr. Shin-chan!” Takao hollered again. This time, Takao's voice sounded like it was coming from the hall near the nurses' station. Shintarō did not want Takao chatting up all the nurses like he usually did, detracting them from their work and making Shintarō more than a little jealous.

“I’m in here, idiot,” Shintarō snapped from his perch in an empty hospital room. The tsundere responded because he, unfortunately, knew from experience that if he didn’t answer, Takao would not shut up.

Temptation came dressed in a hoodie, sneakers, and a pair of sinfully-tight jeans. The incubus took the fine form of one Takao Kazunari. Shintarō was convinced of that.

His boyfriend came bearing gifts. A brown paper bag of oshiruko flavored pastries a hungry Shintarō was all too eager to accept and voraciously consume.

Takao may as well have been bearing the forbidden fruit. He may as well have been offering Shintarō an apple plucked from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"Watcha doin' in here?" Takao asked as he plopped himself on one of the hospital beds.

Shintarō had returned his attention to the patient chart. Both because he needed to fill in the record and because he knew if he thought about last night, his face might burst into flames. "I needed someplace to complete my paperwork. This room was available."

"Aren't you on break soon?" Takao asked as if that were the question he'd come to ask and he wasn't really paying attention to Shintarō's earlier response. "Let's find a nice quiet spot, shall we?"

Shintarō did not have shoulder devils. Oh no. He didn’t need them. He had Takao to tempt him and the man more than made up for it.

"C'mon Shin-chan," Takao enticed. “You’ll be on break in a few minutes. No one will notice you’re gone.”

“I don’t know,” Shintarō vacillated, not entirely convinced this was a good idea.

“What’s the hang-up?” Kazunari asked.

Shintarō could rattle off a dozen "hang ups." For starters, the thought of engaging in a tryst at work was . . . exhilarating. An alarmed Shintarō quickly snuffed that flame. Instead, he remarked, “It’s tasteless.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that.” Kazunari shrugged. “It’s a little salty, I guess. But I wouldn’t call it tasteless,” he said with a devilish grin. "You weren’t complaining about it last night, Shin-chan. I believe your exact words were, you wanted to fellat--"
His prim and proper boyfriend sputtered. Takao cackled loudly.

“It’ll be fine, Shin-chan,” he said and really Midorima had been with Takao long enough to have known that upon hearing such assurances from Takao he should’ve run the other way.

“I’ll be quick,” Takao said. He had to be, Shintarō’s break only lasted fifteen minutes. “You’ll be in and out,” he beckoned, with a smile that could only be described as wicked.

“No one needs to know,” he gave his boyfriend his best come hither gaze, “you’re gone.” Takao Kazunari could give the Sirens of Greek mythology lessons in seduction.

He was on break. It was the dead of night. The hospital was operating at minimal staff levels. What could possibly go wrong?

Besides, he sort of owed it to Takao after last night. He remembered where he was when he’d fallen asleep. But he’d woken up fully dressed, on his own side of the bed with his head resting against his pillow, not resting against firm, shapely thighs.

Shintarō allowed himself to be led astray. The road to hell was paved with Kazunari’s promises.

Takao turned around and smiled at Shintarō, who was trailing behind him. “That a boy, Shin-chan,” he said encouragingly. “Now let’s go find a nice quiet place to rub bellies.”

Midorima squawked at his boyfriend’s indelicate phraseology and Takao laughed.

Their sordid sojourn led them to an unattended broom closet on another floor.

“What did you have in mind?” Shintarō asked when they were alone in the room because with Kazunari it was best to just get these things out in the open.

“Behind. On top of. Underneath,” the hawkeye responded casually as if he were discussing positions to play in an outfield. “I’m not particular,” he shrugged.

In the interest of time, Takao had done most of the prep work at home before walking over to the hospital. "Just don't fall asleep with your fingers in my ass again," he teased.

Midorima was bare-assed with his back to the door and his hospital scrubs pooled at his ankles.

Shintarō whimpered as he teetered on the edge, trying his um, hardest, to hold on.

And then he heard the door handle jiggle and to his horror Midorima’s haggard, sleep-deprived mind could not recall whether he had locked it or not.

The startled shout that came seconds later from the stunned janitor told him he had not. And then the custodian quickly shut the door.

Predictably, Takao started to laugh. “Well this is awkward…,” he said.

"Hey Shin-chan," Takao said, fluffing his own pillow before laying his head back down.

“Hmm,” Midorima replied, not bothering to open his eyes. He didn't want to move a muscle. As far as he could tell everything ached.

"It's nice that we both got this unexpected time off," Takao observed. “I mean, I can't remember the
last time we just laid in bed all day together like this. No place to go. Nothing but time."

Takao reached across the bed for his boyfriend's hand and laced their fingers together. "This is nice," he said.

Midorima frowned, but he didn’t take his hand back immediately. "It would be nicer," he said. "If you didn't miss the bucket this time."

"That was really good thinking, bringing those IVs home," Takao said. "I'd have a hard time keeping things down if I actually had to swallow it."

"I've noticed," Shintarō said, then he himself started dry heaving. Thankfully it was a false alarm. This time.

Takao gingerly lifted his head off the pillow and looked over to his boyfriend. "You okay, Shin-chan?" he asked with concern.

“Splendid,” Shintarō said sarcastically.

“How long is this stomach flu supposed to last?” Takao asked.

"Twenty-four hours," Shintarō grimaced. He was well acquainted with the symptoms, he’d been treating patients with it all week. “The vomiting should subside in twenty-four hours. That's when the loose stools will set in.”

Shintarō was in a world of hurt and it didn't help that Kazunari was being so chatty.

"Still," Takao said. “It's nice that we can be together." The sun was peeking through the large window in their bedroom, but neither one of them had the energy to get up and shut the curtains.

Shintarō gave up on laying perfectly still and through heroic efforts managed to turn his head to the side so he could glare at his inexplicably cheery boyfriend.

He’d ask if Kazunari was really sick, but the answer was obvious. Takao looked extremely pallid, his lips were chapped, the skin under his eyes a purple hue, a testament to the fact that they’d both spent the night vomiting violently. Still, there was a small, contented smile on Kazunari's lips.

Shintarō thought that Takao was unseemingly chipper for someone with the stomach flu. Certainly none of the patients he’d treated in the past week for this precise illness had been this happy to see him.

Any normal person would’ve regretted visiting Shintarō at the hospital and contracting an illness. But Takao seemed genuinely happy to be spending some unexpected time with his boyfriend, never mind the circumstances.

"But still," Takao said. “it's nice we could both take off a few days in the middle of the week."

"Idiot," Shintarō said, but he didn't have the energy to scold the man beside him. Instead, he reached for Takao's hand -- mindful not to tangle the IVs they were both sporting -- and gave it an affectionate squeeze.

AN: I don't foresee Shin-chan making it through his medical residency without falling asleep on Takao at least once. :P I hope I interjected a little levity after several heavy chapters.
Chapter End Notes

47. “No one needs to know.” & 49. “Well this is awkward…”
Hey Baby, What's Your Sign

Chapter Summary

Takao knows exactly what he wants for his birthday.

Chapter Notes

To understand this fic you'll need to recall the astrological symbol for Cancer which looks like this “♋” and which to Takao’s dirty mind looks like this “69” -- Shin-chan of course is far too innocent to piece it together. Also, as much as we all love the height difference between them, it can pose a logistical challenge at times. Not that Kazunari has ever backed down from a challenge.

**Warnings:** Rated M for Pound Town.

Hey Baby, What's Your Sign?

“Sounds cheap.” Shintarō proclaimed, wearing his customary, disapproving frown.

Kazunari responded as if his boyfriend were concerned about the cost. “That’s right, Shin-chan,” he said agreeably. “Won’t cost you a thing.”

“Except my dignity,” the tsundere muttered under his breath, taking his glasses off for a moment to rub his sleep deprived eyes.

Takao’s birthday was coming up and Midorima had made the grave mistake of actually asking the hawkeye what he wanted by way of a present.

“What I meant,” Shintarō clarified, “is that it sounds contrite, cliché, kitschy.” Shintarō spoke to a grinning Kazunari, all with increasing degrees of disgust on his stern, yet handsome face.

The hawkeye smiled widely like these were all excellent attributes his boyfriend had just listed and then he’d started to laugh at the funny, frowny faces Shintarō was making.

Shintarō patiently waited for Kazunari to simmer down and when all of his patience had waned and Kazunari was still cackling away, he smacked his idiot boyfriend upside the head.

It didn't hurt Kazunari and it wasn't meant to either. Shintarō was a newbie neurosurgeon, after all. He knew all too well the importance of avoiding head trauma.

He'd done it as a sort of invisible reset button, to get Kazunari to stop laughing at him. But what he saw when Kazunari had stopped chuckling, the hawkeye's face coming into view again after wiping tears of merriment from his eyes with the corner of his sleeve, was much, much worse.

"What I meant was, it sounds tawdry -- " Shintarō had started to explain himself, but then he stopped
because Takao had that look on his face.

Shintarō knew Takao well enough by now to be wary of those troublemaker smiles. Shintarō's tongue suddenly felt heavy and too large for his mouth. He could blame it on sleep deprivation after another grueling shift at the hospital, but he knew better. As was often the case when he felt himself being admired by a pair of mischievous, slate-blue eyes, he began to stammer, "T-that's not what I meant, I -" "Oh I know, Shin-chan," the hawkeye said excitedly as if that was the best part. Kazunari leaned over to reach for the coffee maker to pour himself another cup.

Shintarō had come home from work just as Kazunari was getting ready to leave soon for his. They'd greeted each other in their kitchen, canoodled for a bit, but now Kazunari was going to have to hustle if he was going to make it to Midtown in time.

A younger, hormone addled Takao had fantasized about the day when his boyfriend would finally graduate from medical school. He had daydreamed of playing doctor and demanded very thorough prostate examinations.

The reality was much less sexy. It was almost comical how wrong he'd been. In fact, just being able to lay down beside his exhausted and overworked boyfriend -- let alone engage in any funny business -- was a luxury these days. He couldn't remember when they last went to bed together at the same time.

Takao was sorely tempted to call his editor, to call in a favor -- a sick day -- even knowing full well that Shintarō would sleep for the next eight to twelve hours, if the dark circles under his bleary eyes were any indication. But Takao was interviewing someone today, a high school kid they were featuring in next month's issue and he knew how important that interview was to the rising athlete.

Takao's next cup of coffee would need to be poured into one of those travel-safe mugs. There were plenty of those in the cupboard, purchased out of convenience and on the go from a variety of coffee shops they each patronized separately -- those that were scattered inside and near the hospital and those that were near the sports publication where Takao worked. Neither of them had set out to do so, but their travel mug collection had now grown considerably during Shintarō's residency, taking up two shelves instead of just the one they'd used during uni.

In many ways things had been easier when Shintarō was studying for his boards. Then, he'd been practically a hermit, holed up in their apartment and surrounded by prep books. When Takao came home from work, he knew not to interrupt Shintarō. But that didn't mean Takao wouldn't occasionally steal kisses and bring his boyfriend snacks and drive Shintarō to distraction when he felt it was absolutely necessary.

Now, it sometimes felt like they were living apart even through they still shared this apartment. Sometimes it felt like they were two ships passing in the night. The fact that Takao didn't recognize some of the names of the coffee shops emblazoned on the plastic or metal tumblers his boyfriend would sometimes bring home with him, made the hawkeye feel a little isolated from Shintarō's daily existence, a little jealous of Shintarō's new life without Kazunari.

So in many ways, Takao felt like he'd stumbled upon an unexpected treat that morning. When Shintarō had walked through the front door, Takao had been frying eggs, standing in front of the stove and wearing one of Shintarō's old, university sweatshirts which was long enough to fit the shorter Kazunari like a frock -- Takao was all for sleeping in the altogether, but he knew better than to do so where hot, splattering grease was involved.
And then, as if it were Christmas and Valentine’s Day and White Day all rolled into one, Shintarō had asked Kazunari what he'd wanted for his birthday. By then they were both a little breathless, but it wasn't enough to catch up, they both knew they didn't have that kind of time.

"That's the biggest part of the appeal," Takao explained, minding the time, but not wanting to end this titillating conversation prematurely. "It's the reason cheerleading skirts," Takao paused to catch his breath, but also to wink at a blushing Shin-chan because there was a history behind that one, "and nurses' uniforms and naughty librarians make their way into all those AVs."

Takao had watched plenty of them and come across many a questionable reading material. He’d borrowed a lot of them from Aomine back when they were still in high school and these transactions occurred through the exchange of brown paper bags. "Sure, it's all been done before," Takao continued, "but that doesn’t make it any less enticing. It's the plot of many novels."

“I don’t know what novels you read," Shintarō responded hotly, "but I can assure you. I’ve never come across that plot in any of my reading materials.”

Takao snickered at his boyfriend, almost choking on his coffee in the process. “That’s because all you read are boring medical journals and before that it was textbooks.” And Shintarō still read up on stuff even though he’d already graduated from medical school. Sheesh. “You should try reading for fun sometime, Shin-chan.”

Kazunari was not dissuaded by Shintarō’s less than enthused reception. The hawkeye was not one to be so easily discouraged. After all, they’d still be on a strictly hand-holding basis if Kazunari hadn’t been the one to get the ball rolling in the bedroom. He knew his boyfriend just needed a little encouragement and he knew just how to supply it.

"And,” he said making sure he was close enough to his boyfriend that he could purr in the tsundere’s ear. “It's a birthday present only you can give me. If that's not sexy, I don't know what is.”

Shintarō nearly dropped his jaw onto the kitchen counter. He shivered in response to Kazunari’s words. He hoped he could pass it off as revulsion, but Takao was too sharp-eyed to be fooled so easily. Shintarō swallowed his considerable pride and washed it down with a gulp of Takao's coffee. “What is it you want me to do exactly?” he asked, throat suddenly feeling very dry.

Takao smiled like a man who knew he was getting exactly what he’d wanted. “Your ears are turning red, Shin-chan,” he pointed out in a teasing, sing-songy voice.

“Shut-up, idiot. No one wants to hear that. Now hurry up and spit it out before I change my mind and buy you a pair of cashmere socks instead.”

Takao gasped in mock horror and when he'd recovered, he said, “I’ll do you one better Shin-chan, I’ll draw you a pretty picture.”

Takao was really cutting it close with time, so he took out a permanent marker from the junk drawer in their kitchen and tore off a paper towel from the roll.

He drew something quickly on the paper and when he was done, he pushed it across the counter to where Shintarō was sitting.

Shintarō stared at the picture. He turned it to one side and then the other. He knew what it was. Of course he did. It just didn’t make any sense in this context.

“That’s the astrological sign for Cancer,” he said matter-of-factly.
Takao looked around his tall boyfriend at the picture he’d drawn. “Huh,” he said surprised. “So it is.”

Then he drew eyes inside the circles and a mouth and then at the tail he drew a large, 45 degree angle —

“Thhhhhhat’s not possible,” a scandalized Midorima assured him.

“Sure it is Shin-chan. You’ll put your head at one end of the bed and I’ll lay my head at the other and then we —”

“I mean, I’m a lot taller than you are idiot.”

“No worries, Shin-chan. If Kuroko and Kagami can --”

“Sttopp it right there!” Midorima said and really and truly he did not have a speech impediment, it was just that Kazunari seemed to have a knack at getting him tongue-tied.

“I don’t want to hear anything else that lewd man has told you about his, his sex-capades with that idiot-redhead.” Shintarō already knew from Kazunari that that moron firefighter owned a tiger-print thong. The tsundere shuddered at the revolting image that cropped up in his head.

And really, how many times did he need to remind Kazunari that he did not want to hear about that or any other sordid details and then he started wondering what Kazunari was telling Kuroko about the stuff they did. Shintarō gave Kazunari an accusatory glare.

Unperturbed, Takao pointed at his dirty picture, at what he wanted as his birthday present from Shintarō. “Well,” he said. “What do you say Shin-chan?”

“I say my boyfriend is a pervert,” Midorima responded.

“Aww Shin-chan,” Takao cooed ”you called me your boyfriend.” Kazunari was only teasing, they’d crossed that milestone many, many years ago -- of course Midorima referred to him as his boyfriend from time to time.

“More importantly,” Midorima interjected ”I called you a pervert. And this is what you’re choosing to focus on?”

Takao shrugged smiling all coy at Midorima. He really did have to go, but flirting with Shin-chan was so much fun. “I guess I’m just a glass half-full kind of guy,” he said.

“You’re a head half-empty kind of guy,” the tsundere retorted.

Shintarō buried his face in his hands for a moment. No sense arguing with an idiot. He might as well use the precious time he had left before the 21st to sully his internet search history with much needed research. He already knew how to do the most important part of this endeavor -- he’d had plenty of practice with that -- but it was the simultaneous nature of the act that made him a little nervous.

Shintarō opened his eyes and noticed Takao’s little drawing staring back at him. The tsundere balled up the paper treating it like it was a soiled diaper and made a clean shot across the room into the trash bin.

Although he’d thrown away the drawing, to his surprise, he hadn’t gotten rid of the image. Unfortunately, the marker had bled through the paper towel and left a naughty hieroglyphic on their kitchen counter. "Takao!" he growled.
“Oops,” Kazunari said to his irritated boyfriend, looking very much like he was holding in a laugh.

*We’re never getting that security deposit back,* Shintarō thought with annoyance.

“Are you sure this is what you want for your birthday?” Shintarō queried, because with Kazunari it didn’t hurt to ask. “You sure about this?”

“Completely, Shin-chan,” the hawkeye said with absolute confidence. “You’re the only one I trust to do this.”

Shintarō narrowed his pretty green eyes at his boyfriend. “I better be the only one you do this with,” he grumbled.

Kazunari laughed at the ridiculousness of that statement. “Only you, my ace-sama,” he said sincerely, planting a placating kiss on Shintarō’s heated cheek.

He grabbed his messenger bag off the kitchen counter and headed out the door. He’d already missed his train, but there would be another one when he got to the station.

*It had been a good morning,* Takao thought as he took the stairs in lieu of the elevator, basking in the glow of having seen his boyfriend even if it was for a little while. And he had his birthday present to look forward to.

###

The twenty-first of November fell on a Thursday that year. When the weekend rolled around, they would celebrate with their friends -- go out for drinks. Today, they would celebrate in private. It would be just the two of them.

Midorima had worked a slew of shifts in the weeks leading up to Takao’s birthday just so he could be free by mid-afternoon and have the following day off.

He picked up a few things before heading to the apartment he shared with the birthday boy.

He brought home Korean takeout and a double order of kimchi along with a chocolate cake he’d ordered weeks in advance from a reputable bakery.

Kazunari nearly knocked his tall boyfriend over when the man announced he was home. The hawkeye pounced on him as soon as Shintarō had closed the front door.

Takao took the packages and hurriedly stuffed them in the fridge. “Later,” he said. “I want dessert first,” he proclaimed, smiling caddishly at Shintarō, never mind that he’d just put away a box of cake.

Kazunari’s barely contained excitement could be forgiven, they rarely had time alone together these days.

He took Midorima by the wrist and pulled him along to their bedroom.

Shintarō didn’t know why the *hell* he was so nervous about this. Long gone were the days when he would have to silently recite the periodic table in his head forwards and backwards to keep from ruining his pants, to keep from embarrassing himself with his inexperienced eagerness at touching his boyfriend. *How the heck do you have so much stamina?* Kazunari would complain, reaching for the box of tissue on the night table to clean himself up *again.* It hadn’t been as effortless as Shintarō had made it seem. It was that, or reciting the names of the emperors in order. Shintarō would compile lots of lists in his overheated head in those days.
More importantly, this wasn’t the first time that Kazunari had taken him aside and blown his um... mind – Shintarō was going to leave it at that because he couldn’t afford to dwell too much on the specifics right now. And it certainly wasn’t the first time the tsundere had gotten down on his knees and reciprocated. Though the simultaneous nature of this activity would certainly be a new sensation, would certainly pose a challenge.

Even the concept was nothing new to them. Kazunari would herald the coming of “birthday sex” as early as June in anticipation of the tsundere’s own birthday. In fact, Kazunari was so enamored with the concept that Shintarō would sometimes get his birthday “present” early and often in the weeks leading up to the seventh of July, and in some years even well into August.

What was really getting under the tsundere’s ordinarily calm demeanor was that Takao had asked him to give him this kind of present. He was worried he’s screw this up somehow. And he could think of a myriad of things that could go wrong when they got in bed together. In fact, he didn’t have to think that hard.

Their own first time experience had been a comedy of errors or maybe a tragedy depending on which one of them you’d ask. But it had also been perfect and Shintarō had never regretted it. He treasured the memory and he even still had that tiny scar on the inside of his bottom lip as a memento, not that he’d ever forget anything so important as the first time he took Kazunari to bed.

While Takao had asked him to perform the “astrological sign for Cancer” on the hawkeye’s birthday – Shintarō found the alternative, numerical nickname distasteful – they both knew their evening wouldn’t end at that. And so it helped to get everything they would need now because nothing ruined the continuity of the mood like ransacking a messy drawer.

They were out of the regular stuff they used. They both knew they’d pick up a bottle of it next time they went to the supermarket. Shintarō, practical to a fault, had already added it (in his perfect penmanship) to the grocery list they kept pinned to the fridge with a former-lucky-item turned magnet. Kazunari was quickly rummaging the bottom drawer of the nightstand on Shintarō’s side of the bed until he found what he was looking for.

“Watermelon-flavored?” Shintarō asked, inspecting the small plastic bottle Kazunari had set aside for later next to the digital alarm clock.

There was a picture of a cartoon watermelon on the bottle. It was wearing shades and reclining back on a towel, one stick-figured leg over its stick-figured knee. It looked like it was sunning itself on the beach. Shintarō had no idea what that had to do with the actual product.

The hawkeye shrugged. "I bought it over the summer," he said. Backup lube. Takao knew from firsthand experience that they always had to have a backup. Because there was nothing more sorrowful than running out of lube when they were both all revved up and ready to blow. One time had been too many, thank you very much. And Takao knew better than to repeat that grievous mistake.

Midorima had been right about their height difference posing a hurdle, though thankfully it was not insurmountable. Shintarō had to curve his spine quite a bit, while Takao had to remember to keep his straight. Rather than mimicking any numerical formation, Shintarō thought back to his English classes and opined that their configuration mostly resembled the letter “p.”

The angle was different from what Shintarō was used to, everything was upside down. Shintarō knew to expect this, of course. But one thing was expectation and quite another thing was reality. He’d never approached Kazunari like this before where the frenulum brushed up against Shintarō’s palate, instead of resting on the papillae of Midorima’s tongue the way it ordinarily did when he
wrapped his lips around is boyfriend.

And then Takao took Shintarō into his mouth and oh fuck, Midorima was back to reciting atoms again like he used to do when they were new at this.

Shintarō reached for the bottle with a cartoon watermelon on it, so he could coat his fingers. After all, this was Takao and though the tsundere hadn’t started out that way, after years of practice and hands-on experience, he had become an expert in knowing what the hawkeye liked.

It was different from the way they normally did this and Shintarō would prefer to concentrate on one thing or the other instead of having his attention pulled every which way. It wasn’t what they usually did, but it wasn’t unpleasant and Shintarō was not opposed to doing it again and then Takao did that thing that Shintarō had only recently learned was the not-so-innocent definition of the innocuous word “tea bag” and damn Kazunari and his distracting tongue.

The elements, the periodic table, the names of all the emperors flew out the window and Shintarō had to apologize profusely to his coughing boyfriend for having failed to issue a warning.

He hadn’t meant to go first, but now that Shintarō had gotten that part out of the way, he could concentrate and devote all his attention to bringing the birthday boy a very happy ending.

He cuddled with Kazunari afterward. It was, after all, the hawkeye’s special day, and who was the tsundere to protest when he secretly enjoyed this part of being a couple just as much as Takao did. Midorima was just not as vocal about it as Takao was.

“Happy Birthday, Kazu,” he said kissing the top of his boyfriend’s sweat drenched head. Takao looked up at him and smiled beautifully.

“Kimchi?” he asked and Shintarō indulged him.

Ordinarily, he’d balk at the idea of eating in bed, but it was a special occasion and neither one of them felt like getting dressed just yet.

Shintarō walked over to their fridge wearing absolutely nothing and came back to bed with the packages he’d brought home. He didn’t even bother bringing plates.

Sitting cross-legged, naked on their bed, they ate out of the takeout cartons dipping their chopsticks into each other’s food and occasionally feeding each other.

They talked about nonsense and every so often, Kazunari’s loud laughter filled the room.

It was a simple way to celebrate the birth of the most important person in Midorima Shintarō’s life. But they had a history together and they certainly had a future and Shintarō couldn’t possibly be more content.

AN1: 24. “You’re the only one I trust to do this.” Sorry for this mess of a chapter. I’m not very good at writing smut and we’ve got a few more chapters of that coming up ■ ■

AN2: I really wish I could have ended this fic with the “ten years later” part of this fic, Act III. But alas, I keep screwing up the timeline. Oh well. I should plan these stories out better. Ha! Ha! Thanks for reading.

AN3: someone informed me that November 22 (the day after Kazu’s b-day) is Good Married Couple Day in Japan. I thought that was cute <3
Chapter Summary

Takao gets a go sometimes too.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Warnings:** M for poundtown, midotaka & takamido, copious amounts of sap, references to Alice in Wonderland

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**Cat & Mouse**

Midorima Shintarō’s spring awakening, so to speak, had come (cough, cough) in the late fall of his third year at Shūtoku when the ginkgo leaves on the trees that grew outside his lovely home had turned goldenrod.

Takao Kazunari couldn’t have been more pleased with the latest (though admittedly belated) development in their courtship. Takao could have spent hours pressed between Shintarō and the mattress. He could have willingly spent days, weeks, years, decades beneath the tsundere. The hawkeye could’ve died happy in his lover’s arms. But since he was young and in excellent health and had a good, strong heart, he’d have to settle for the little deaths, the ones Shintarō gave him over and over again with toe-curling consistency until Kazunari was a boneless, incoherent mess.

This was not to say that an 18-year-old Midorima was adept and skillful or even confident in his burgeoning abilities. Not at first. That would come later. No, at first he was, like most other people who tried to do something they’d never done before, less than spectacular at it. For all his demonstrable talent in other areas, Shintarō was painfully average in this one.

Midorima Shintarō was not a natural. He was not a sex god. Not at first. *Heavens no.* Back in those days, he was a pile of nervousness, a ball of awkward, and a whole heap of clumsy. And, indeed, he’d tried to push his glasses up the bridge of his nose, even when he wasn’t wearing them.

None of that mattered, of course, because his partner was young and equally fumbling and head over heels in love with him, but most importantly and above all else, easy to please. Like all good point guards, Takao Kazunari had a quick release which inured to Shintarō’s benefit both in and outside the court.

But all that was years behind them.

###

Takao Kazunari was glad when his boyfriend finally (finally!) got over his embarrassed maiden phase.

For one thing, the hawkeye didn’t know how many times he could have been shoved off the bed
(and one time the couch), before he actually broke something.

For another, his Shin-chan would turn a lovely shade of crimson and get all scandalized and catch the vapors whenever his sharp-eyed suitor so much as suggested they take things lying down, so to speak.

And when they finally got down to business --

*Shin-chan, you don’t have to take out the whole box. We just need one.*

*But the instructions are in the box, Takao.*

*Pfft!* Kazunari had looked adoringly at his wet-behind-the-ears boyfriend. *Shin-chan you need to stop being so cute. My poor heart can’t take it. Besides, we don’t need the instructions. I can put it on for you.*

Shintarō had narrowed his pretty green eyes at his louse of a boyfriend. *Wait. How do you know how to put one on?* he’d demanded to know.

*Pfft!* Takao had cackled. *Seriously, Shin-chan. You’re going to give me a heart attack with all this dere dere stuff. I can’t take all this cuteness.*

*Shut up, idiot. And you didn’t answer my question!*

*That’s it. That’s more like it, Shin-chan. Bring out the tsun-tsun –*  

*Answer me!*  

*I had a girlfriend, before you. You know that. And with her. She and I. We did stuff like this,* the hawkeye had started to explained. *Don’t look like you’re going to cry, Shin-chan. My heart can’t take that either.* Kazunari had said years back, when they were both so very new to being with each other.

*And besides, you have nothing to be sad about.* He’d added, gently pushing a strand of verdant hair behind his lover’s ear. *You’re not my first, but this is by far the most important relationship I’ve ever had. I’m dead serious when I tell you I love you, Shin-chan. She never heard that from me. Only you.*

Kazunari had meant every word. The feeling of ease and contentment, of bubbling over happiness he felt when he was with his light, he felt with no one else. Only Shin-chan. Always Shin-chan.

And even though he hasn’t said so in so many words, Takao knew even back then, that he’d die a happy man if he could just somehow find a way to spend the rest of his life in Shintarō’s company.

###

What came after the embarrassed maiden phase was hard to contain. An assertive, supremely self-possessed Shintarō could very well be the death of Kazunari.

Nowadays when Dr. Shin-chan had a day off from work, there was a monster in their bed and Kazunari was ready to roll out the welcome mat and throw it a ticker-tape parade.

Shin-chan’s graveyard shifts at the hospital had proven murderous on their love life. They were brutal. If Kazunari had felt sex-starved during the med school years (and he very much had), Shintarō’s residency was a famine. The years at uni had been a damn feast in comparison only
Kazunari hadn't know it until it was too late and he'd had no other recourse but to get reacquainted with his own left hand. A piss poor substitute for Midorima's magic touch.

Shintarō and Kazunari had been together for years, but it had always been that way. In that order. It was the natural sequence of things as far as the tsundere was concerned.

But the hawkeye had other ideas. As far as Kazunari was concerned, variety was the spice of life.

“Off,” Shintarō said when he walked through the front door of the Bunkyō apartment he shared with his boyfriend.

“Wha-t?” a confused Kazunari responded letting the video game controller he’d been holding fall to his lap and quickly taking his bare feet off the red velvet couch, a common bone of contention where his finicky beau was concerned.

Seeing that Kazunari had misunderstood the meaning behind his verbal command, Shintarō amended his statement.

“Off with your clothes,” he said the way a red queen would shout to her subjects, off with their heads – with boldness and absolute certainty that his words would be obeyed.

“Shin-chan?” Takao squeaked, instantly losing interest in the video game he’d merely paused, carelessly allowing the controller to fall to the floor with a loud thump, already forgotten as he eagerly got up off the couch.

Kazunari sprouted a Cheshire cat’s grin that was as wide as it was mischievous. He wasn’t sure what had gotten into his boyfriend, but whatever it was Kazunari was going to send it a thank you note and flowers.

He supposed he shouldn’t be all that surprised. After all, Shintarō had been working back-to-back sixteen hour shifts at the hospital and when he would come home in the mornings, he’d sleep all day while Kazunari went to toil away the hours at the small sports publication where he worked.

Takao was being a tad melodramatic. He really did like his job, He couldn’t imagine ever leaving it. But he did hate leaving a sleeping, post-work Shintarō in their bed in the mornings. He wanted nothing more than to be there when Shintarō woke up.

Their schedules had been topsy turvy ever since the start of Midorima’s residency. Takao considered counting down the days. After all, this hectic period in every young doctor's life didn't last forever. But he also knew Shin-chan wanted to specialize in neurology which entailed even more training once he completed his residency. Consequently, even though they lived together in theory -- shared an apartment -- they were often apart for days.

Their bed was now like a timeshare, they were each taking turns sleeping on it. Kazunari at night and Shintarō during the day. Their sheets had grown cold and so when Shin-chan finally, finally got a break from his insane schedule – when he finally came home at 6 p.m., not 6 a.m. – it wasn’t hard to figure out what his first order of business was.

They both knew what they were going to do with the unexpected synchronization of their free time.


Kazunari had once found a blushing, flustered, younger Midorima adorable, but, this older, experienced, assertive, sexy-as-hell Shintarō promised to wreck him.
“Takao,” he said from his perch on their bed, staring at Kazunari like he was dinner, staring at him like he was the cat ready to devour the canary. “They say starving beasts are dangerous.”

“Fuck,” the hawkeye said going all slack jaw. “Shin-chan, you need to not say things like that or I’m going to embarrass myself in my pants.”

“Then. Take. Them. Off.” The tsundere ordered in his sinful, deep baritone and Kazunari nearly tripped over himself (over pants now in the vicinity of his ankles) in his eagerness to obey.

“You heard me. Take. It. Off,” Shintarō repeated, his voice dropping down to a purr, as he hooked a thumb into the elastic band of his boyfriend’s boxer briefs and peeled them off of Takao.

Shin-chan usually showered at work. He didn’t like to bring the grime home with him and Kazunari could smell the generic, hospital-grade soap on his boyfriend’s skin.

These days -- with time spent with Shintarō being so rare -- it was an aphrodisiac.

###

Takao would talk to his closest friends – mostly Kise and Kuroko – about anything and everything. And sometimes they would even talk about sex. It was an important part of their lives and that subject would occasionally pop up in not-so-polite conversation.

Usually these indelicate and often rowdy chats involved alcohol. They would take place outside of Shin-chan’s presence because everyone could spot a seemingly pearl-clutching prude when they saw one.

Shin-chan was easily embarrassed and would light up like Omotesando Hills at Christmastime when the issue was broached in mixed company.

While Kazunari would talk to his friends about any number of titillating topics, he didn’t reveal everything.

There were some things Kazunari would never dream of sharing with anyone but his soulmate. Shintarō’s rocky relationship with his parents, for instance, was no one’s business but their own. And the way Shintarō could be so unbelievably tender with him in the privacy of their bedroom was another jealously guarded secret, protected and nestled close in the hawkeye’s heart.

Takao knew his tsundere would find it supremely embarrassing if any of their friends knew that he practically worshiped Kazunari in bed, touched him like he was the most precious thing in the world to him. To the point where Takao would beg him to stop circling the metaphorical drain and take the plunge already. Kazunari may have liked to tease his Shin-chan about any number of things, but he would never, ever, betray the man’s trust.

For another thing, Kazunari didn’t want to let anyone in on this delicious little secret. There’s was a world built for two. When they were in it, nothing else seemed to matter. Everyone and everything ceased to exist, seemed to fizzle out at the edges except for the two of them.

They were not always like this, of course.

Sometimes, like tonight, they would both get a bit worked up.

Sometimes their movements were frantic and desperate. They couldn’t get enough of each other and Shintarō was not as careful as he ordinarily was under the circumstances. "Don't touch me there too much, Shin-chan. I'm close."
If Kazunari had a favorite mien, it was when his boyfriend lost the reins on his tightly-held self-control. It was during those times that Kazunari was reminded that they were not equals.

He was reminded that Shintarō was and had always been, for as long as they’d known each other, broader, stronger, heavier – indomitable. The hawkeye would be lying if he said he didn’t relish it, didn’t crave it – even if Kazunari had never felt anything but safe in Shintarō’s capable hands.

Kazunari could tell Shintarō felt guilty about it afterwards. The remorse and the guilt were evident in the way Shintarō held Kazunari like he was going to lose him, kissed him like he was asking for forgiveness for taking something without asking first. This, of course, was completely ridiculous. As far as Kazunari was concerned, he was there for Shintarō’s taking. Kazunari wanted this, his poorly restrained monster in his bed. He wanted this so badly.

###

Takao woke up a few hours later to find the savage beast had not been placated. The hunger had not been dissipated despite the banquet.

Takao woke up to find that he was the one who still yearned for more.

Midorima Shintarō was in their bed asleep beside him, naked as the day he was born.

“Shin-chan,” he said, nudging the larger man awake because it was barely 9 o’clock now and if they continued dozing they’d have a hard time sleeping through the night.

There were convenience store rice balls in the fridge and Kazunari heated up a pot of miso he’d made earlier.

Cleaning his plate had done nothing to quell Kazunari’s appetite.

There were certain positions Midorima Shintarō did not play. That had been true at one point. But now, the more accurate summation would have been that there were certain positions Midorima Shintarō did not play, often.

If Shin-chan was so fastidious about brushing his teeth, well right now he was spotless. He was always so fussy when it came to be his turn to open wide.

Kazunari had fallen asleep again just waiting for his boyfriend to come out of the shower, but Shintarō woke him up with a minty kiss and then another and soon the hawkeye was gazing up at Shin-chan with half-lidded, bedroom eyes.

Midorima Shintarō no longer smelled of hospital wash. He smelled of triple milled soap infused with cardamon, rosemary, and cumin seed.

The tsundere assumed position, flat on his back, his rump resting against the tops of Takao’s thighs and pressing his long legs against Kazunari’s bare torso, ankles and large bony feet near the hawkeye’s ears.

“Relax, Shin-chan,” Takao told him, kissing Shintarō’s calf and running a reassuring hand down a well-defined thigh, before reaching over to the bottle of lubricant which was still on the bed from where they’d left it earlier.

“There’s nothing to worry about,” Takao said as he lovingly, gently used his fingers to loosen tight muscles. He knew Midorima was not really worried about pain or discomfort. He knew Shintarō was tough and he’d seen him play injured.
For Shintarō, it was more about letting go of some of that tightly held self-control. It was about allowing himself to be vulnerable. And even with Kazunari, whom he loved and trusted immensely, more than he ever thought possible, it was still difficult to hand over the reins.

Takao concentrated on the task at hand. Biting his lip as he took his time because he wanted to get this right. All his carefree, easy-breezy personality went out the window when it came to Shintarō. He didn’t want to hurt him.

“There,” he said when he was all finished. “Ready for me, Shin-chan?”

Takao was pleased to see that Shintarō looked a bit desperate when he gave Takao the nod. Shin-chan was not as unaffected by his lover’s touch as he’d like Takao to believe.

The tsundere’s breaths were coming in labored and he looked about ready to stuff his own fist into his mouth to silence any unbidden vocal affirmations of just how good it felt to have Takao where he was.

It was a snug fit. It always was. And Takao bit back the obvious quip about Shin-chan being a tightass. Though he didn’t say it aloud, the hawkeye couldn’t quite stop himself from laughing at his own joke.

“Shin-chan,” Takao cooed at his boyfriend in a tone dripping with affection. There was amazement and there was merriment in his voice. He caressed Shintarō’s arm reassuringly and laced his fingers with Shintarō’s larger ones. "Look at me."

“Are you blushing?” an amused Takao asked because even though it didn’t happen often, this wasn’t the first time they’d done it this way. This wasn’t the first time Shintarō’s ankles were resting comfortably on Kazunari’s shoulders, the backs of his thighs quivering against Takao’s warm bare chest.

Takao giggled and Midorima stiffened.

Shintarō looked every which way but at the man who was above him right now. “When you laugh,” he answered. “I can feel it.”

Shintarō did not say the words “inside me,” but he didn’t need to. They were connected at the moment and it was implied.

Takao laughed even louder and then he bent down, nearly bent Midorima in half at the waist as he leaned down to kiss him. Takao struggled to keep the smile off his face just long enough to kiss his darling, tomato-faced tsundere.

And then Takao decided they’d both waited long enough and started to move.

**AN:** Title comes from the Japanese slang for neko.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Kuroko and Kagami go on vacation. Takao volunteers to babysit Nigō.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Doggie Daycare

Doctor Midorima came home to a whole lot of whining and begging coming from inside his apartment. And no, for once he was not referring to his live-in boyfriend.

He sighed, debating whether he even wanted to open the front door or flee the scene and check into a five-star hotel.

"What is that thing doing here?" Shintarō asked by way of greeting.

"He's visiting." Takao responded looking very much like a man hiding a secret.

Midorima put his briefcase down, gazed up at the ceiling and begged the universe for patience.
"Where is its master?" he inquired after peering around Kazunari and determining no one else was in the apartment.

"Not here."

"Well call him up and tell him to come pick up his flea bag," Shintarō said sternly. Nigō howled at the insult.

Of course Kazunari bent down to scoop him up.

The pup was a lot larger and a lot heavier than when they’d first made his acquaintance. Still, Kazunari gazed lovingly at it and petted its head. “Good dog,” he said.

Shintarō rolled his eyes in response to the unnecessary coddling.

"I can't," Kazunari said, rubbing the back of the intruder's ears.

"Why not?" Shintarō demanded.

Kazunari had moved on to scratching a white, furry belly. The belly's owner was barking and panting delightedly.

Shintarō was half tempted to tell the both of them to get a room. Instead, he narrowed his eyes at the canine as if to say, Takao's mine. Don't get used to it.

Kazunari shrugged his shoulders. "You can't get phone service on a plane," he said matter-of-factly. He silently counted backwards from ten as he waited for the entirely predictable eruption to occur. He made it to the number eight.
"On a plane?!" Midorima shouted.

The hawkeye responded casually as if they were having the most mundane of discourses, as if Shintarō had just commented on the unseasonably warm weather. "Yup, it baffles me too, Shin-chan," he said in a conversational tone. "On the one hand, you can get WiFi in the cabin, right? So why not incoming calls ~" 

Shintarō, who most certainly did not have time for this, interrupted. "That's not what I meant, idiot."

Kazunari snickered because of course he knew what Shin-chan had meant, he just loved messing with the guy. Shin-chan’s feathers were so easily ruffled, it was impossible for Kazunari to resist.

Somewhere in the back recesses of Shintarō’s overworked mind, he recalled a conversation he’d had about Kuroko and Kagami visiting Kagami’s mother in L.A.

Kagami and his father were on the outs at the moment. The knuckle-dragger was of the opinion that his son should not have a boyfriend even though he was on his second wife. Kuroko and Kagami, however, were most welcome at Kagami’s mother’s house.

"What happened to the kennel?" Midorima demanded, trying very hard and almost succeeding in not raising his voice. The tsundere was ready to drive Nigō there himself.

Kazunari squirmed. "There was a miscommunication," he said.

"At the kennel?" Shintarō asked because with Kazunari it was important not to overlook the details.

"At the Kagami-Kuroko household," he said and then added very quickly. "Kuroko-thought-that-Kagami-had-booked-the-kennel-and-Kagami-thought-Kuroko-had-done-it," he said all in one breath. In reality, neither one of their friends had called the kennel and didn’t realize their mistake until they went to drop off Nigō. *I thought you were going to do it. No, I told you to call.* In the end, there was no room at the inn, *so to speak.*

"Idiots!" Midorima concluded. "Why is this my problem?"

Kazunari shifted uncomfortably, smiled guilty. "Because I told them he could stay with us for the next two weeks."

"YOU DID WHAT?!"

Takao shrugged as if to say, *it can't be helped.* What was Kazunari supposed to say? Their friends would’ve missed their flight.

"Fine," Shintarō said.

"Fine?" Kazunari asked because he wasn't expecting it to be this easy.

"You're walking it."

"Yup."

"And feeding it."

"Sure thing, Shin-chan."

"And cleaning up after it."
"It's a done deal."

"And keeping it in your room."

"My wha--, you mean our room?"

Shintarō pointed in the direction of the guestroom. "I mean your room," he said.


###

Two days later, Kazunari had been let back into the master bedroom. Shintarō hadn't counted on the fact that he himself needed to be properly "exercised" on a regular basis.

Nigō, however, remained shut out. He was yelping and yipping and sniffing and scratching the bottom of the closed bedroom door.

Evidently, Nigō was used to sleeping with Kagami and Kuroko in their bed, something that hadn't come to light until now because Nigō had been sleeping with Kazunari in the spare room for the past two nights.

Shintarō shoved his bedmate.

"Hmm," Takao grunted into his pillow.

"Wake up you idiot. Your charge needs attention."

Kazunari rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. "Again?" he yawned. Kazunari's breath at the moment could wake the dead and Shintarō recoiled as he took it in. "Alright, Shin-chan," he said sleepily, “but I'm only giving you a blo--"

A scandalized Shintarō interjected. "Not me, you idiot. That vicious beast on the other side of the door."

You'd think Shintarō was referring to Cerberus.

Reluctantly, with heavy feet and even heavier bags under his eyes, Kazunari got out of his comfortable bed.

He picked Nigō on his way to the plush velvet couch. "Don't mind Shin-chan," he told Number Two. The now happy pooch was wagging his tail energetically at having gotten what he'd wanted, a bit of cuddling and a warm body to sleep beside.

Kazunari removed the cashmere afghan from the back of the sofa (Shin-chan had such prissy taste) and wrapped the throw around the both of them.

"Don't take it personal," he explained to the pup who huffed at Kazunari’s truly abominable breath. "He's just a tsundere. He can't admit when he likes someone."

It was true. Shintarō had taken an embarrassingly long period of time to admit that he loved Kazunari.

Just as he was heading off to dreamland, Kazunari’s phone buzzed.

Thanks to the sixteen-hour time difference, Takao was getting texts from Kuroko at odd times.
These texts were a series of pictures from their visit to the Chinese Theater. In the first one, Kuroko lined his hand up against the imprint of a certain action hero turned two-term governor of the state. In the next one, a disgusted Kagami was wiping gum off his own massive palm after he'd tried to imitate Kuroko and gotten more than he'd bargain for when he’d tried to place his hand over his favorite martial arts movie star.

Takao chuckled. he showed Nigō the pictures his dads had sent, before setting the phone aside on the coffee table.

###

Kuroko Nigō had not ingratiated himself to Midorima Shintarō ever since, as a young pup, the former had committed the unpardonable sin of relieving himself on the latter's primary mode of transportation.

Even though it had been Takao who'd had to clean up the rickshaw, it had been Midorima who'd taken it to heart. To say that they'd gotten off on the wrong foot would be an understatement.

And it was said foot that Midorima was waving around at the moment.

That morning, Nigō had left a “present” for Shintarō in his shoe.

"KAZUNARI!" The tsundere yelled for Takao. “I thought you said this thing was housebroken,” Midorima said waving around an expensive, thoroughly soaked Italian driving loafer.

Takao picked up the startled pup and cuddled him. "Be quiet Shin-chan,” he said. “You're being too noisy."

"I don't want to hear that coming from you," Midorima snapped.

In the midst of Shin-chan's rant, Kazunari received a text from Kuroko.

His friend had included a snapshot of himself and Kagami eating burgers from a food truck on Sunset Boulevard.

A few minutes later, Kazunari got another text. This time, the photograph was of the redhead hunched over behind a bush tossing his cookies. The caption read, Not like Maji Burger.

###

Later that week, Kazunari was heading a staff meeting at the sports publication where he worked and would be coming home past dinner time.

In light of this fact, Midorima was almost afraid to open the front door of his apartment and sure enough the Hound from Hell did not disappoint.

The living room was covered in down feathers. It looked like a goose had swallowed a grenade and exploded.

Cujo had managed to chew up every throw pillow in the living room.

Shintarō was convinced he was cohabiting with the spawn of Satan and for once he wasn’t referring to Kazunari, although he supposed there could be more than one spawn.

The mongrel was seated on Shintarō’s great aunt’s red velvet couch gutting the stuffing from a flanged pillow.
Shintarō quietly closed the front door and decided to pay his sister a visit.

Across town, Takao was sitting at a conference table when he got a text from Kuroko. This one included a picture of Kuroko standing in front of a beautiful rose garden. An unhappy Kagami was standing beside him looking like he’d gotten punched in eye.

*What happened to Kagami?* Kazunari texted from under the table.

*Bees*, came the quick response.

###

That weekend, Shintarō was sitting on the sofa trying to concentrate on a patient case file. He knew he was being stared at. “Shoo,” he said waving his left hand dismissively before flipping the chart. His command fell on deaf ears.

Minutes later, he said “Go away.”

That didn’t work either. Having those baby blues peering at him was unnerving. Shintarō got up to go read in the dining room. Nigō contently followed behind him. The distress call came minutes later, “Kazunari! Make it stop!”

Kazunari scooped the pup up from under a chair. “Aww, Shin-chan. He just wants to spend time with you. He obviously likes you.”

“He obviously likes to annoy me,” Midorima corrected.

“C’mon,” Kazunari said to the tail-wagger. He walked to the genkan and reached for the leash. “Let’s go for a walk and leave grumpy pants alone.”

“I heard that,” Midorima said from the dining room.

As he was heading to the dog park, Kazunari got a text from his friend.

*Midorima-kun and Takao-kun. Greetings from the Hoover Dam,* it said.

Attached to the text was a selfie of Kuroko in front of a massive manmade waterfall. *Kagami-kun was not available to take a photo,* he added. *He’s currently looking for the men’s room.*

An hour later, Kazunari was walking home with Nigō when he got another text. This time it was a picture of Kagami standing on a desert road carrying a red plastic can with a nozzle. *Out of gas,* Kuroko texted.

###

A fortnight flew by (for one of them) and Kuroko and Kagami would be home tomorrow.

The last text Takao received from Kuroko was from the Vegas strip. It was a photograph of a hotel bed covered in red rose petals with the caption, *Taming my tiger (¬‿¬).*

Kazunari laughed and texted back, *Enjoy.*

He included a selfie of himself hugging Nigō on the couch. *We miss you,* he wrote.

Then he photographed a grumpy-faced Shin-chan sitting on a chair all by his lonesome and as far away from Takao and the dog as possible. He was reading the morning paper.
The hawkeye sent it to Kuroko and texted, *Shin-chan can't wait till you get back. It's all he's been talking about*, which was more or less true.

**AN1:** This fic was inspired in part by *A ball of fur and terror*, a hilarious tale about Kazunari bringing home a kitteh written by liamatsuoka. Please go read it and let liamatsuoka know how much you love it by leaving a comment.

**AN2:** Just a quick, silly little vignette in which I torture grumpy-pants Shintarō. We will return to your regularly scheduled feels next chapter.

Chapter End Notes

43. “YOU DID WHAT?!”
Chapter Summary

Midorima gets tied up at the hospital where he works, but that just makes coming home to Takao so much sweeter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Warnings: vague references to misuse of living room furniture for amorous purposes; Shin-chan feels.

---

Don't Wait Up

Shintarō opened the front door to his apartment only to find the idiot he lived with asleep on his great aunt's red velvet couch. The hawkeye was sprawled out accentuating one of the embroidered silk throw pillows with his drool.

*It's just as well*, Shintarō thought wryly. They had already had to flip the center seat cushion because Kazunari had “accentuated” that with other fluids within the first week they'd brought the drasted thing home from Shintarō’s parents’ house.

The family heirloom was a bit of a thorn on Shintarō's side. He knew that propriety required that he return the overstuffed piece of furniture at some point, probably when they were ready to move out of the apartment they'd been sharing since the first day of uni. But the sofa wasn't in the best condition. It had enough of Kazunari’s DNA, in particular, to satisfy a crime lab.

He and Kazunari had moved in together after high school. They'd attended different universities and Shintarō had gone on to medical school while Kazunari had pursued a career as a sportswriter.

It was a career that was very important to the hawkeye and so Shintarō naturally paid attention. He read the columns. Of course he did. Sometimes Kazu even gave him sneak previews before they were published.

Shintarō read his boyfriend's columns religiously, the way he used to follow Oha Asa.

They'd also watch the game footage together because they both still shared a mutual and deeply abiding love of basketball. But he would read the words on the computer screen because he loved the man behind them.

He read Kazunari’s articles not just for their content, but for their thought process. They were witty and insightful just like the man on the byline.

Now that he'd finished the hellish experiment in sleep deprivation that had been his medical residency and had finally entered his chosen specialty, life had gotten significantly better for the both of them. Their schedules had become somewhat manageable and Shintarō made it home for dinner more times than not.
Of course there was no accounting for emergencies and today had been one of those days. He had texted Kazunari to let him know. To tell him not to wait up because Shintarō was and had always been a considerate boyfriend and did not want the hawkeye to needlessly worry about him.

He’d come home well into the wee hours of the morning. The streets had been practically empty on the short drive to the apartment he shared with Kazunari in Bunkyo.

Shintarō had arrived to find the hawkeye curled up on the couch, toes tucked into the gap between the seat cushion and the armrest.

Shintarō had lost count of the number of times he’d yelled at Takao to keep his feet off the furniture. Never mind that he should've also told him to keep other body parts off of it as well.

Of course, those incidents hadn't been solo acts. Shintarō had literally been right behind Kazunari in the heady back and forth, as the hawkeye had pressed the side of his face into the seat cushions, gripped the armrest for purchase and cried out for more.

Kazunari had had an accomplice and Shintarō supposed it was as much his fault for letting kisses turn heated and once that happened, neither one of them had the will to stop. Shintarō knew he was the one who should've insisted they take it to the bedroom before things got out of hand, or rather in hand.

If Shintarō were truly being honest with himself, he'd also admit that it had not only been Kazunari who'd enjoyed the couch. Shintarō had sat on that center seat cushion with Kazunari kneeling between his legs more often than he’d ever admit. It was an image that Shintarō would at times conjure up in more private moments.

The tsundere walked over to the television to turn it off. Kazunari had obviously fallen asleep watching game footage because the DVD player was still on and the screen had gone black.

_Idiot_, Shintarō thought with a swell of fondness that still took him by surprise at times.

Like this, blessedly silent and in a deep sleep, Kazunari was bewitching. Calm, peaceful, and with a contented little smile on lips Shintarō kissed often and yet somehow not enough.

He wanted. He wanted and he wanted and he wanted so many things from this man, so many things with this man. Deep and meaningful things.

His boyfriend was a handsome devil. Shintarō knew that of course. He was well aware of Kazunari’s obvious charms. He just didn't think it would do to acknowledge them openly, to sing Takao’s praises aloud. For one thing, it was not in Shintarō’s nature to be so vocal. For another, Kazunari teased Shintarō enough as it was, the tsundere didn't need to add to the pile, to supply the hawkeye with even more material.

Things were going well for them. Notwithstanding Kazunari’s apparently permanent stunted state of immaturity, they were no longer snot nosed brats. They were no longer dependent on Shintarō's parents to pay the lion’s share of the household expenses.

Midorima had become a full-fledged doctor now. He was earning very good money as a specialist at a prestigious teaching hospital and this was only the beginning of his career.

He could afford to take care of the both of them now, though Kazunari had his sportswriting career and also earned a salary.

This wasn't like when his parents didn't know about their relationship. Everything was out in the
open now. And Shinzo and Sazuna had begrudgingly resigned themselves to the fact that if they were to ask their son to choose, he would pick Kazunari and wouldn't even bother giving them a second glance.

He could provide for Takao now and really that had been the only thing holding him back from doing this sooner. Providing for Kazunari was important to Shintarō. After that horrible experience in med school when Shintarō’s parents threatened to cut him off, he never again wanted to experience the fear and insecurity of not knowing where they'd live next. He wanted to protect the hawkeye, he wanted to take care of him. *Always.*

He liked coming home to Kazunari, Shintarō knew. He liked knowing that this man was in his bed, waiting for him to come home at night or if Takao had gone out, Shintarō liked knowing when he fell asleep that he’d wake up to him the next morning. He guessed what he was trying to say was that he liked living with this man. That he wanted to live with this man always.

Shintarō knew what he needed to do now, what he *wanted* to do. He was going to make an honest man out of Kazunari. He was going to propose to his boyfriend. After so many years of cohabitation, he was going to propose marriage to his best friend, his roommate, his lover, his on the court partner, his shadow.

He'd done the research, compiled a list of countries where -- if they chose to do so -- could make this legal.

He'd already picked out a ring. He'd used his father's jeweler in Ginza.

Shintarō kept the precious band at the office. He didn't want to chance it. Kazunari was too much of a snoop to leave it in the apartment where the hawkeye could accidentally find it in Shintarō’s underwear drawer or inside a sock. Takao did do their laundry after all.

He'd do it soon. He'd pop the question. He was merely waiting for that perfect the moment to arise.

"Get up idiot. It's time for bed.” Shintarō commanded in a deep booming voice that could easily carry across the room. He had no trouble getting anyone else's attention -- the nurses, the orderlies, the jittery newbie residents all perked up when he spoke. Yet the person who heard it most often, the person he lived with had somehow grown immune to Shintarō's harsh barks.

Kazunari had a habit of doing this, falling asleep with the television on waiting for Shintarō to come home at night. The tsundere felt a pang of guilt at coming across the familiar tableau now that medical school and medical residency were behind him.

Seeing that Takao wouldn’t respond to verbal stimuli, he shook the hawkeye’s shoulder. “Come on,” he said. “It’s time for bed.”

As expected, Kazunari burrowed himself against the backrest, but Shintarō knew his boyfriend was awake now. He’d seen a flash of steel-blue eyes.

“Just once,” he said sighing in frustration, “I’d like to see you using our furniture like it was intended.” He shook Takao again, this time more gently. “You can resume sleeping when you’re in our bed.”

“Carry me Shin-chan,” a sleepy Takao whined.

Shintarō sighed once again, but he leaned down to scoop up the younger man. “Oh, alright,” he said. “But don’t get used to it,” he told the hawkeye as he carried him bridal style into their bedroom.
AN: We are almost done with this story. Only seven more prompts to go. Hope you're still enjoying the story.

Chapter End Notes

23. “Just once.”
One Need

Chapter Summary

Gay Paree

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Warnings: T for inferred multiple visitations to pound town. Also fluff and horrible pillow talk nonsense.

One Need (Part 4 of 4)

There was a guidebook on the nightstand, beside Shintarō’s wristwatch and his shiny new wedding ring. The thing about being a southpaw was that he’d have to take his ring off if he wanted to use his dominant hand. Otherwise, it could slip off his finger, get caught inside, and things could get really awkward.

The spine of the guidebook was cracked, some of its pages were tabbed with notes in Kazunari’s scrawly handwriting and, towards the end of the book, they had been dog-eared when the hawkeye had run out of those colorful, sticky paper flags.

“What’s on your mind?” Kazunari asked, catching a respite. Refractory periods, after all, were a fact of life. They had been passing the time in between in each other’s arms. Kazunari looked quite comfortable where he lay, resting on his side, sharing not only a bed, but also a pillow.

Shintarō gazed openly at him, at his now husband, ran long, elegant fingers through the short, dark raven strands at the back of Kazunari’s head – his occipital bone. He’d gotten a hair cut. They both had. A week ago. For their formal portraits in traditional garb posing in the garden at Midorima’s childhood home. The two of them together. Both sets of parents, their sisters, their newly combined family.

Shintarō pondered the man’s question. After a few moments, he answered honestly, "It doesn’t feel real yet."

“What doesn’t?”

“This,” Shintarō replied. “Us. You.” What he’d meant to say was, Our marriage.

“I don’t feel real?” Kazunari chuckled in surprise. “I didn't expect you to say that.”

He kissed his tsundere, his husband. “I mean, I feel real,” the Kazunari said, still shortling from Shintarō’s unanticipated response. “I feel very real,” he proclaimed as he shifted to stretch his legs out a bit. "I feel great right now." Alive. And never better.

He leaned in again and kissed Shintarō on the mouth. He couldn’t help himself. He couldn’t get enough of this man. “I feel better than great, I feel amazing,” Kazunari declared against Shintarō’s lips. “And real, so very real.”
Shintarō took his glasses off and used a corner of the pillow case to clean off the smudges Kazunari had carelessly left behind with his effusive affections. The tsundere had been doing that a lot since they’d checked-in earlier because the hawkeye couldn’t stop kissing him.

"Hey, Shin-chan," Kazunari said.

"Hmm." Midorima responded, putting his glasses back into place.

"I can't believe you let me do that," Kazunari said, waggling his eyes brows suggestively.

The tiniest of coy smiles spread across Shintarō’s lips as his pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose in embarrassment. "It's not the first time we've done it done that way," he said.

The lovely blush that spread over Shintarō's cheeks as he spoke caused Kazunari to lean in to kiss him again and again until the hawkeye started to snicker.

"And just what's so funny?" Shintarō asked somewhat petulantly.

"You know I find you irresistible when you pout like that," Kazunari said, leaning in to kiss Shintarō again, this time bypassing his husband's lips entirely in favor of Shintarō's long, lovely neck where it was soft and warm and smelled so much like Shintarō.

"Will you stop snickering," Shintarō demanded as he pushed Kazunari away, not because he didn't welcome the intimate touch, but because it was ticklish, "and answer me."

Shintarō had a hand on each bare shoulder, when Kazunari leaned down to rub his cheek against Shintarō's left hand. "It's nothing Shin-chan. I just think it's cute that you wanted to be taken like a fair maiden on her wedding night. That's all," Kazunari chuckled.

If Shintarō's blush had been prominent before, it was downright alarming now.

"Ahh, come on, Shin-chan. Don't be embarrassed," Kazunari cooed, bringing his head down again to rest against Shintarō’s bare shoulder, "I think it's adorable. Besides, it's not like you didn't get your turn before," Kazunari shifted against Shintarō's side, hips undulating a way that said their time together was far from over. "And after."

They were on their honeymoon. Kazunari had shouldered the bulk of the wedding planning, but Shintarō had insisted on being in charge of the honeymoon, or at least the honeymoon accommodations. It was a given that Kazunari would pretty much monopolize the day-to-day tourisy stuff and Shintarō didn’t really care what they did so long as his husband (he could legally call him that now) had that goofy, childlike grin on his handsome face.

Shintarō had traveled here before with his family on one of his father’s many medical conferences so the city wasn’t new to him the way it was to Kazunari. The Opera House, that was the extent of the places Shintarō wanted to revisit. But Kazunari wanted to take in the art museums and get matching berets and eat crepes and buy a lock and write their names on it and leave it behind on one of the many bridges because it was something he’d read about in one of his guidebooks.

There would be time for all that, but right now, everything Shintarō wanted to see and do was right here in this room, right here in his arms.

Kazunari yawned and Shintarō couldn’t help but kiss his forehead.

Planning a wedding ten thousand miles away from home and in another language had not been easy. But all that was behind them now. They’d exchanged their vows on a vineyard in Bordeaux
days ago. Their gaggle of guests had gone home. Friends and family and several cases of pricey
cabernet sauvignon had flown east and they had taken the train north, to the City of Lights.

The honeymoon suite was everything it purported to be on the hotel website. They even had a
spectacular view of a certain iron lattice tower, though the windows and the French double doors to
their balcony had remained shuttered behind thick curtains for most of the day, or night. Shintarō had
no idea what time it was. Nor did he care. He was exactly where he wanted to be, holed up in a
magnificent hotel room with his newly minted spouse.

_Shin-chan, this is incredible_, Kazunari had squawked when they had first arrived at their home away
from home for the next two weeks. Peering into the room from the hallway, Kazunari had looked as
if he were afraid to cross into it lest it vanish into thin air.

Being the romantic fool that he was, Kazunari had jumped on Shintarō fully expecting his Light to
not only catch him, but carry him over the threshold. Midorima wasn’t ready for him of course and
they had both toppled over, spilling into the room instead. The bellhop had had to do a quick sidestep
to avoid being brought down along with the two idiot newlyweds.

The man had pretended to examine his polished shoes, his lips pressed tightly together in an effort
not to laugh. He succeeded, _mostly_. The generous tip Shintarō had given him was to get him out of
the room faster, not because the tsundere particularly appreciated being the source of merriment.

Several, toe-curling hours later, Kazunari was using Shintarō as a chin rest, an armrest and an
everything else rest considering he was treating his husband as his own, personal full-body pillow
and memory foam mattress.

The tsundere couldn’t bring himself to complain. He felt no annoyance at having Kazunari draped
over him like a noisy, giggly blanket, their actual bed linens — a tangle of formerly crisp white
bedsheets — lay at their feet.

In fact, far from annoyance Shintarō was feeling good, _too good_.

Kazunari giggled some more. “Shin-chan, you’re beginning to show interest again,” he teased,
pushing his thigh between Shintarō’s legs.

_Damn Kazunari and his unnecessary frankness_. Shintarō ran the numbers in his head. Four times in
one day would be downright obscene, he concluded before shoving the hawkeye off of his
person exposing himself in the process, not that the tsundere cared about his modesty at the moment,
though he did miss his warm, cover of flesh.

_There_, Shintarō thought. _That should take care of it_.

But Kazunari was undeterred. He moved down on the bed and his gaze went south. _Way_ south.

“Does Shin-chan's chin-chin want some attention?” he asked, lying on his stomach and pointedly not
speaking to his lover’s face.

“Idiot! Don’t talk to it like it’s another person.”

“I can’t help it Shin-chan. He’s so cute. I mean just look at him,” Kazunari said as if he were
admiring a Shar Pei on the street. And then he began petting it.

“D-don’t call it cute!” Shintarō exclaimed, voice a bit strained at the moment given
Kazunari's amorous strokes.
“Does Shin-chin want to play with Kazu-chin?” he asked resuming his one-sided conversation with not Shintarō.

“And don’t call them that, either.” He’d discovered that Kazunari had given them nicknames years ago.

“Geez, Shin-chan. You don’t have to get so grumpy about it. Most guys would be happy to have their –”

“S-shut up!” Honestly, if anyone else heard the ridiculous bedroom banter he was subjected to on an almost nightly basis, he’d die of humiliation.

“Fine,” Kazunari pouted. “If you don’t want me to pay attention to yours, I’ll pay attention to mine.” Kazunari remained pensive for a few moments, not because he needed time to think of something to say, but because torturing Shin-chan with embarrassment was all about timing and delivery.

Kazunari got up from his formerly prone position and with this movement, exposed a good deal of skin. Shintarō tried not to look - the operative word being “tried.”

Sitting in seiza, Kazunari revealed that, Yes. Kazu-chin most definitely wanted to play with Shin-chin.

Shintarō had never been good at ignoring Takao and, at the moment, it was damn near impossible. Despite his best efforts, Shintarō gave in. He gazed at his new husband hungrily, appreciatively.


“Hmm?”

“Do you think Kazu-chin will like his new last name.” He observed closely as Shintarō’s face gradually turned an alarming shade of crimson. It was like watching droplets of red food coloring fall into a short glass of water.

“Idiot!” Right on cue, Mount Midorima erupted. Kazunari was supremely satisfied with his handiwork.

Shintarō began to rant. “For the last time, it does not have a first name and it most definitely does not have a last name.”

Kazunari snickered. “You don’t have to get so worked up about it Shin-chan,” he said with feigned innocence. “Is the name change making Shin-chan’s chin-chin feel left out? He can become a Takao-chin if he likes.”

“Don’t be an idiot,” the tsundere admonished. Not for the first time Shintarō was glad he had no family history of high blood pressure. Kazunari was capable of sending a meditating monk into a hypertensive emergency.

Midorima ran his hand down his face, a universal sign of supreme frustration. Clearly, he’d proposed marriage to the devil and said devil had gone ahead and accepted it.

But just as easily as he could provoke him, Kazunari knew how to soothe the savage beast.

Kazunari reached for him, Shintarō did not pull away.

Maybe four times in one day was not so obscene, Shintarō thought. After, all who knew what time it was. It could very well be the next day for all he knew.
“Mon mari,” the hawkeye whispered sometime later as he lay on top of the tsundere’s chest — breathy, sweaty and thoroughly sated.

It was one of the phrases in the back of his guidebook.

“What does that mean?” Shintarō asked.

“It means husband in French,” Kazunari answered, toying with Shintarō’s bed tousled hair. “It means my husband,” he added moving his hand down so he could trace an index finger over Shintarō’s rapidly beating heart.

Kazunari was so giddy, Shintarō began to wonder if the man had had any champagne, but the bottle of bubbly they’d ordered hours ago remained corked and in its highly-polished metal ice bucket. Kazunari placed a kiss on Shintarō’s bare chest. “That’s you,” he giggled.

Shintarō smiled despite himself, his brain drowning in endorphins. They were alone in their hotel room, the dinner they’d ordered from room service lay long forgotten, untouched under silver domes on a lonely service cart near the entrance of their suite because who needed food when you could subsist on love, when Kazunari was whispering sweet nothings in his ear in poorly constructed French.

“What else do you know how to say?” Shintarō asked because, he was punch drunk in love with this man, his husband.

For once in his life, Kazunari had been studious. He’d even enrolled in a six-week language school course back home.

“Il ya un monstre dans mon lit,” Kazunari said.

“What does that mean?”

“There’s a monster in my bed,” the hawkeye snickered.

The tips of Shintarō’s ears went pink. “Did you actually ask your language school teacher how to say that?”

Kazunari grinned widely. “Nope,” he said. “I figured it out all by myself.”

Shintarō had no idea if the hawkeye had said it correctly or if he’d just sprouted a bunch of nonsense — it wouldn’t be the first time — but for his linguistic efforts, Kazunari was rewarded with a tiny smile from his tsundere and then a very French kiss.

“How do you say family?” Shintarō asked.

“Famille,” Kazunari responded.

Shintarō repeated the word, sounded out the foreign syllables in his mouth. “Famille.” “That’s you, now,” he said taking Kazunari’s hand, tracing the wedding band on Kazunari’s finger. Kazunari smiled as his eyes followed his husband’s very tender actions. “I mean, you have been that, to me. For a very long time. But now it’s official,” Shintarō said placing a kiss at the center of his husband’s open palm.

Takao whined, hiding his blush by burying his face in Shintarō’s chest. “Aww, c’mon Shin-chan, that’s embarrassing.”
Shintarō gave his spouse a small smirk. “I don’t want to hear that coming from you.”

“Kiss me,” Kazunari said and Shintarō obliged.

“Fool,” the tsundere called him, his tone almost teasing, his kisses red hot as he flipped Kazunari onto his back.

What he really meant to say was I love you. He kissed Kazunari’s lips. I want you. He kissed the side of Kazunari’s neck. I need you. He kissed Kazunari’s heart and really it was his heart. It belonged to Shintarō. It was his and no one else’s.

Shintarō took Kazunari in his arms and showed him these three simple truths.

AN1: Here. Have some otp shmoop.

AN2: This prompt was part of the "One" story arch, the other three prompts are (Part I; Part II; Part III). It was originally a three part arch, but it felt like a huge chunk was missing between Midorima’s fall out with his father and his honeymoon with Takao, so I ended up making it a four-part arch. All of them are based on events from NTMTLT. All four of them are inspired by U2’s One, which is a damn good song, IMO.

AN3: One day I'll write their wedding. It's exactly what you'd expect when all of the Miracles get together in one place -- calamity and hilarity to ensue.

Chapter End Notes

**Baby Blues**

**Chapter Summary**

A sudden family emergency has Kazunari contemplating his future.

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Warnings:** Rated M! There's pound town in this one. Also, ALL THE FEEEEELS! No MPREG in this 'verse, any references to the contrary are just Kazunari teasing his husband.

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**Baby Blues**

Midorima Shintarō’s father had had a heart attack. It had been a pretty bad one. It had effectively ended his illustrious career as a prominent heart surgeon, though presumably he could still continue his lectures. It was too soon to know for certain the extent to which Midorima Shinzo would be able to resume his old life. The delicate prognosis was being evaluated on a day-to-day basis by experts in the field, many of which happened to be acquaintances and colleagues.

A once strong heart had left the prideful man weak and irritable and in need of at-home care. He couldn't feed himself, he couldn't dress himself, he couldn't get out of bed. He required round-the-clock nursing assistance.

Midorima's mother was beside herself, alternating between frenzied activity and bouts of melancholy. *Will you please leave the room so the nurses can get to work, you're in the way.* Her husband shooed her out, like she was some dumb, loyal dog who kept getting herself underfoot.

Still, even in her state of panicked anguish, it hadn't escaped Sazuna's attention that for the first time in their marriage, she had the upper hand. Her husband’s heart attack had left Sazuna in the unique position of being in complete control over her husband’s affairs. For once in their marriage, he was physically incapable of leaving her.

For the time being, Shinzo was bedridden. In a few weeks, he was expected to be strong enough to begin the long and arduous process of physical therapy. But for now, while he lay in bed regaining his strength, he was under Sazuna's care whether he liked it or not and it was that one detail, that one unexpected perk that kept Sazuna from falling apart during this horrible ordeal.

Shinzo was too weak to climb steps. His second story bedroom was inaccessible to him for the time being. Upon his release from the cardiac care unit, Shinzo had settled into his study, which his family had moved mountains to convert into a makeshift hospital room complete with a large, adjustable bed. Sazuna had placed one of the tall, winged-back dining room chairs just outside the door for instances when she was asked to leave the room, which was quite often. Sazuna would sit and sulk in that chair with some frequency.

In the days following Shinzo’s release from the hospital, Shintarō was at his father's bedside every opportunity he got.
Unlike Sazuna, who was ordered to leave the room on an almost daily basis, Shintarō was permitted to remain a quiet fixture by his father's side.

Kazunari soon caught on and stopped making dinner for his husband. What was the point? Shintarō kept coming home later and later. Kazunari knew how to pick his battles. Shortly thereafter, the both of them were at Shin-chan's parents’ house on an almost nightly basis.

Kazunari was not thrilled with the arrangement, but he wasn’t going to begrudge his husband’s understandable need to be at his father’s beck and call at such a delicate time as this and so Kazunari grinned and bared it. Because he loved Shintarō. Because he’d do anything for that man. Because Shintarō loved him back.

The hawkeye didn’t have the closest relationship with his father-in-law. After all, this was the same man who’d opposed his son dating Kazunari in the first place because he was of the “wrong” gender and in the second place because he wasn’t someone of similar stature. And no, the man had not been referring to height. Not that Shinzo would’ve been willing to overlook the first objection even if Kazunari had come from a family as prosperous as Akashi’s.

Kazunari had learned all this through Shin-chan because it wasn’t as if Midorima’s father was going to say it to Kazunari’s face.

Of course, Shin-chan’s dad ended up having to stuff it because Shin-chan chose Kazunari to be his lawfully-via-legal-loophole wedded husband and even though Kazunari hadn’t wanted to leave the Takao family registry, he did gain a small modicum of satisfaction in the form of giving a symbolic middle finger to the family’s bigoted patriarch by joining the Midorima family registry.

In theory, this was all water under the bridge because Kazunari had in fact married into the family and that was all there was to it.

He had his own issues with his mother-in-law, though Sazuna was easier to get along with because she’d been raised to be gregarious and polite to a fault, at least on the surface. Her husband on the other hand was about as welcoming and territorial as a junkyard dog. It was evident that Shin-chan got his social graces from his father.

Kazunari knew he wasn't the first newlywed to have in-law issues and he wouldn't be the last. And things had certainly improved leaps and bounds since Shin-chan got temporarily cast out of the family during his first year of med school. They had made progress since then, to the point where Kazunari was comfortable in saying that like any other family they had their disagreements, but all things considered they were a family -- a highly dysfunctional family, but still a family.

In his weakened condition, Shinzo had refused many visitors, though he did accept the company of his devoted son, his distraught daughter, and only rarely his wife. In a twisted way, the hawkeye could see the man’s reasoning. Shinzo had been a very powerful, very capable man who ruled his family and his hospital subordinates with an iron fist. At least for now, that fist couldn't even hold a pair of chopsticks.

Besides, this worked very well for Kazunari because he was in no hurry to see the man's handsome (okay, he was like an older version of Shintarō, he couldn't very well call him hideous), yet deplorable face. He didn't feel the least bit insulted that he'd been left out the inner circle.

The woman tearfully sitting beside him had a different take.

Sazuna was daintily drying the corners of her eyes with an exquisitely embroidered silk handkerchief. Today was one of those days when Shinzo couldn't stand the sight of his own very
beautiful wife. He'd shouted insults at her until she finally left the room that had been temporarily set up for him on the ground floor of his palatial abode.

While Shin-chan remained cloistered in that room continuing his visit with his temperamental father, Kazunari patiently waited for him outside. Taking a second winged-back chair from the dining room to sit beside a recently exiled Sazuna, who was licking her wounds, metaphorically speaking.

Kazunari knew every marriage was a private universe unto its own. But he'd never for the life of him figure out why this woman stayed married to this man.

It wasn't the money. He knew that much. There wasn't a court in the country that wouldn't be sympathetic towards this woman. She'd been married to this man for over three decades. She'd bore him two beautiful children. She'd even remained by his side through countless infidelities.

Besides, Sazuna was wealthy in her own right. Her father had been a prominent textile merchant in Kyoto. Though even that was still not enough to confer upon her a favorable standing in the eyes of the older, more-moneyed Midorima family, it had been enough to secure her this unhappy union.

There was, of course, a prenup. Marital unions at this level of the social stratosphere always came with one Kazunari had learned. Kazunari had his own prenuptial agreement with Shintarō, though in their case it was to ensure that Kazunari would be protected should the courts take the view that no union was formed in the first place in their highly unusual situation. Their marriage was legal as far as they knew, though there was no predicting what the courts would do should it ever be contested. Their prenup was a fall back plan.

Kazunari had no idea what the terms of Shinzo and Sazuna's prenup were, but it couldn't have gone through too many rounds of negotiations between the engaged parties given the speed with which the marriage ceremony took place and the promptness of Shin-chan's own blessed arrival.

The hawkeye liked to tease Shin-chan that five kilograms was an unusually hefty birth weight for a purported preemie. He'd also like to add that that must've been one hell of a delivery given that the tiny woman sitting beside him had refused a C-section for both of her oversized babies because she didn't want a scar.

Sazuna began to weep in earnest. And since it was just the two of them, it fell on Kazunari's shoulders to console. He tried, anyway.

"He's doing much better, today," he told her. The man's grizzly bear personality was certainly back. Kazunari was unsure of what appropriate amount of physical contact was called for in this situation. Should he pat his mother-in-law on the back? Hug her? Shin-chan's family wasn't big on affection. They were so weird. If this were his mom or sister, he'd know what to do. He'd crack a joke and they would smile. They'd certainly hug it out. Then again, if that were his father in there recovering from a heart attack, having almost died, he'd be crying too.

Suddenly, Kazunari started tearing up too.

"Life is so fragile," Sazuna told her son-in-law somberly. "In the blink of an eye this will all be over. In the end, all that matters are the people you leave behind. All that matter are your children."

Kazunari was surprised by that sentiment. Sazuna was not one for deep philosophical thoughts about mankind’s fleeting mortality or the frailty of the human experience. It wasn’t like her to ponder the meaning of life or the importance of raising a family given that she’d delegated that task to the various nannies she’d employed over the years.
Still, she'd inadvertently planted a kernel in Kazunari's mind.

###

"Why does she do it, Shin-chan?" Kazunari asked that night on their drive home. Kazunari had seen Sazuna biding her time outside her husband's study in hopes he'd summon her in. Shinzo never did.

Shintarō kept his eyes on the road. "I don't think she has anything better to do." There was only so much retail therapy a bored housewife could engage in before it got tedious. All of the reputable shopkeepers in the high-end streets of Ginza knew her by name.

"No. I mean why does your mom stay with him?" Surely Shin-chan had pondered this question before. It was obvious to even a casual observer that Shinzo could not abide his wife. Her mere presence irked him. And in the few moments he allowed her to remain in his study, he was sour-pussed and put upon.

Shintarō sighed in a manner that suggested to Kazunari that he either didn't know or he was too mentality exhausted for this conversation. Shintarō's breath was visible in the cold, dark cabin of the automobile and Kazunari leaned forward to turn up the thermostat. Kazunari had to admit that the dual climate control and heated seats were a nice touch.

Midorima drove a luxury sedan which was quite comfortable, even if it screamed rich grandpa. Kazunari still had his beat up old hatchback from college. The car was on its last leg and Shin-chan wouldn't be caught dead in it now (I am a reputable neurosurgeon with a thriving practice. What would my patients say if they saw me in this . . . this . . . hunchback?), but Kazunari had formed an attachment to the dented piece of metal.

It wasn't about the money. Kazunari could certainly afford to buy a new car. His personal net worth had skyrocketed since he'd vowed to love Shin-chan for richer or poorer and all that jazz. But Kazunari still clung to his clunker.

For starters, he'd bought it himself, with his own money, that he'd saved up from his work at the sports publication. He and Shin-chan had had a lot of good times in that car even if Shin-chan now liked to pretend otherwise. Kazunari knew eventually he'd have to succumb to the pressure from his spouse to buy a new car, but for now he had no immediate plans to replace his jalopy.

Sure, his little hatchback was falling apart -- downright useless in the winter without a working heater and sweltering hot in the summer given that the air conditioner was busted, but Kazunari took public transportation to work anyway. It was more convenient, given the notorious Tokyo gridlock.

"You're in my spot." Midorima griped when they pulled into the residential parking garage of their Minato-ku high-rise.

###

Shintarō buried his face in the space between Kazunari's neck and shoulder trying to muffle a moan that threatened to tear through him. Taking advantage of his husband's proximity, Kazunari pressed his lips against Shintarō's ear, supplying filthy verbal encouragement. Hard, rhythmic thrusts had Kazunari singing Midorima's praises.

Forget classical music, this was Shintarō's favorite soundtrack, the pleasured moans of his very vocal husband, the sounds of a wrecked Kazunari at his mercy.

Kazunari's speech devolved from actual words to more primitive sounds. This, along with the tight, searing heat of Kazunari did things to Shintarō. As Midorima's once measured, controlled pace grew...
frantic, he planted a firm hand on Kazunari’s hip to keep the smaller man in place. The hawkeye’s own hands were gripping Shintarō’s ass tightly, his toes tucked under Midorima’s cheeks, every part of Kazunari urging his husband, begging him to keep going. "Mmnf. Right there, Shin-chan. That’s perfect. D-don’t st-aahhh-p!"

Shintarō was unrelenting as he reached down between them, as the noisy hawkeye unraveled under his firm, capable grasp. He continued to thrust into him even as he felt the man spill warm over his hand, coating his long, elegant musician’s fingers. Midorima momentarily pulled back, wanting to see. It was fuzzy without his glasses, but it still has the same effect. *Fuck*, he groaned at the wet, titillating sight.

He sunk back down into Kazunari. It was too much for Shintarō to bear. It was too much for him to keep his composure. The lewd vocalizations, the heady scent of Kazunari’s neck pressed against his nose, the salty taste of sweat on the Kazunari’s damp skin, the sticky glaze that now coated Shintarō’s left hand. It was an assault on all of his senses. A few sharp snaps of Shintarō’s hips and the tsundere was falling over the edge, spilling into his husband. Shintarō closed his eyes, pressed his lips against the column of Kazunari’s pale, beautiful throat. *I love you*, he thought.

They were both panting for breath as Midorima's lips traveled up the side of Kazunari's handsome face. He pressed lazy kisses to the side of Kazunari’s sweat-plastered hair. He adored this man. His love. His heart. His life. His husband.

For his part, Kazunari did not seem to want to let him go. The hawkeye tightened his legs around Shintarō's backside. After exchanging several clumsy, openmouthed kisses with his delirious, sex-addled spouse, a softening Shintarō carefully pulled out, trying not to spill any of it on the bed.

He stood first and offered a hand to his still recovering spouse. Usually, they showered together afterward. They'd change the sheets and cuddle a bit before falling asleep.

Instead of taking Shintarō’s open palm, Kazunari kept his back pressed against the mattress. He pulled his legs towards his ears until his toes touched the upholstered headboard in a provocative display of just how flexible the hawkeye still remained.

Naturally, Shintarō’s eyes nearly fell out of their sockets in response to the blatant and unabashed display of his husband’s wares. *Fuck*. Shintarō’s mind reeled, he immediately began a countdown of his blessedly short refractory period.

The hawkeye laughed adoringly at his bewildered, openly gaping husband, “I’m trying to keep all of you in me, Shin-chan,” he explained grinning widely. “I don’t want to spill any of it. I want to have Shin-chan’s baby.”

The transformation of Shintarō’s face was sudden and drastic. He went from fond exasperation to derisive contempt in a matter of seconds.

Kazunari often teased his husband about a multitude of things. He hadn’t expected such a swift and harsh reproach over something as silly as this.

"Shin-chan, what I meant was --” Kazunari started to explain, as he lowered his legs and got out of his contortionist position.

Shintarō abruptly walked off, slamming the door shut to their *en suite* bathroom. Moments later the hawkeye heard the water running in their walk-through shower.

In retrospect, it probably wasn't the best way for Kazunari to spring the news to his husband that he
wanted to have a child with him. Kazunari could see that now. It may not have been the best way to approach the subject, he conceded, but he was determined to have this conversation.

Shintarō had run off before Kazunari could properly express his thoughts. Undeterred, the hawkeye grabbed the t-shirt he’d been wearing off the bedroom floor, balled it up so he wouldn’t make a mess on the way to the bathroom and went to go talk to his irate husband.

Their shower had been custom built with the both of them in mind. There was plenty of room for two people to move around. There was even a built-in bench presumably so they could . . . take a break? Kazunari wasn’t sure what the stated purpose of the bench was -- it wasn’t as though either of them shaved their legs -- though he certainly knew what they actually used it for.

In addition to the rainfall showerhead, there were jets on the walls. He and Shin-chan had been measured and their contractor had installed the water jets on opposite walls of the shower with their respective heights in mind. Naturally, the ones on Shin-chan’s wall had been set a lot higher than the ones on Kazunari’s side.

Shintarō hadn’t bothered to turn on Kazunari’s jets and he had his back turned to the hawkeye. It wasn’t exactly an open invitation to join him in the shower, but the brunette did anyway.

It wasn’t Shin-chan’s shower, it was their shower and Kazunari needed to get cleaned up more than Shin-chan did anyway.

"You don't have to get so upset, Shin-chan. It was a joke. I thought we could talk about it. You know. Having a --"

Shintarō looked back, raised his emerald green gaze at Kazunari with an accusatory glare. “We have nothing to discuss,” he snarled.

The tsundere’s reaction was so hostile that Kazunari literally took a step back.

The hawkeye had no idea where all this anger was coming from. One would've thought that Kazunari had just confessed to an extramarital affair or had suggested they go to a swingers’ club when he'd done nothing of the sort.

He'd merely tried to broach the subject of children with his spouse in what he thought would be a humorous manner. "Shin-chan, I --"

“We had an understanding,” Shintarō shouted accusingly through the sound of the jets as he washed his hair. "You knew what you were getting into when you agreed to marry me."

Kazunari turned on the jets on his side, grabbed his loofah, and started working up a lather. This wasn’t the way things usually went when they were in here together. Usually, there was a lot of touching and kissing and groping and oftentimes there was shower sex, at the very least a hand or blow job. He looked at the bench longingly. “I don’t get why you’re so bent out of shape. I thought we could talk about it before you stormed off and --"

“Did I stutter?” Shintarō asked harshly. “I told you there's nothing to discuss.”

Kazunari was starting to feel his own anger gathering in the pit of his stomach. “What the fuck, Shintarō --”

“If you wanted a child, you should’ve married a woman,” Shintarō snapped harshly as he took his frustrations out on the poor helpless pump on the bottle of their conditioner. He’d taken way too much conditioner out, but he was too prideful to admit that he was distracted and he certainly wasn’t
going to offer any to his husband and so he plopped all of that conditioner on the top of his head.

Kazunari was taken aback by the sting in those words. “What?” he asked incredulously. “That’s not what I’m saying at all.”

Shintarō rinsed most of the conditioner out of his hair and walked off.

The hawkeye had a bit more cleaning to do before he could follow suit. He reached for the wash cloth and cleaned up the remnants of their lovemaking as quickly as possible. He turned off the water taps for the both of them before hastily toweling off, but by the time he walked back into the adjoining master bedroom he was alone.

Kazunari was surprised. This wasn’t like them. They fought all the time over stupid stuff, like whose turn it was to unload the dishwasher, but they didn’t have fights like this. And they certainly didn’t sleep apart.

Fuck. They had way too many damn empty guestrooms to begin with.

###

The next morning Kazunari got out of bed at the same ungodly hour he knew Shintarō would be getting ready for work. It wasn’t as if he’d been able to sleep a wink anyway.

He’d forgotten how difficult it was to fall asleep without Shin-chan by his side. It reminded him of when Shin-chan would study all night for a med school exam, or when he was preparing to take his boards, or when he was working round-the-clock as a lowly resident at the bottom of the hospital totem pole.

They’d had it good for the past couple of years. Now that Shin-chan had established his own practice and hardly ever worked nights, they had more free time to spend together as a couple and they almost always slept in the same bed. Last night had been an anomaly, something Kazunari did not want to see repeated.

He found the man standing in their kitchen making matcha in a pair of scrubs he’d evidently fished out of their dryer judging from their rumpled state. Shin-chan had already showered in the guest bathroom and evidently had no intention of going into their bedroom to pick out his work clothes. Although Shintarō was a surgeon, he didn’t usually wear scrubs outside the operating room. Ordinarily, he wore a suit to work.

“Morning,” Kazunari said, his voice groggy and raw. He would have to subsist on vats of coffee for the rest of the day.

Fuck. He remembered he was up against a deadline on his column and he had a meeting with his editor in the afternoon.

They needed to hash this out now. Kazunari did not need this hanging over his head for the rest of the day.

“Shin-chan,” he said and he noticed Shintarō’s back stiffened. Kazunari didn’t falter; they needed to talk this through. “Shin-chan. I love you. You know that,” he continued. “I don’t understand. This isn’t like us. We don’t have fights like this. We don’t sleep apart unless it can’t be helped. I don’t get why you’re so angry about this.”

Shintarō stirred his tea, but he didn’t drink it. “I can’t do this, Kazu.”
“Why not? Because we’re both men? That’s not a very good excuse, Shin-chan. There’s no reason we couldn’t do this. I mean, as long as you’re willing, we could have a child together.”

Shintarō sighed quietly. He picked up his tea only to set it down on the counter again in frustration.

Kazunari took a risk. He hugged his husband from behind, resting his cheek in the space between Shin-chan’s sharp shoulder blades. “Just promise me you’ll think about it, okay?” Kazunari placed a kiss at the center of Shintarō’s back.

###

It had been several weeks since they had their talk in the kitchen, but Shin-chan still seemed evasive whenever Kazunari tried to broach the subject.

The hawkeye was starting to suspect that Shin-chan was hoping Kazunari would forget about the whole thing. And maybe that would end up being the case. Kazunari was not going to force fatherhood on an unwilling husband. But they hadn’t really talked about it yet. And Kazunari refused to give up on this idea before they even had a serious conversation.

He needed a way to get Shin-chan to open up to him about it and sitting on the couch in the living room an idea occurred to Kazunari.

Shin-chan came home from work late that evening. He’d called beforehand and told his husband to go ahead and eat without him. He’d pick something up at the hospital cafeteria before continuing his rounds.

They had made up from their fight. Shintarō coming home late tonight had nothing to do with that. It wasn’t unusual. This would happen from time to time. It was the nature of Shin-chan’s business. Things would come up and he’d be delayed, though his schedule was nowhere near as hectic as it had been during his residency when Kazunari barely saw the man he ostensibly shared a bed with.

“I’m home,” Shintarō announced as he placed his alligator briefcase on the credenza in the genkan. He rifled through the mail Kazunari had picked up earlier from the mailroom in their lobby and left for him there. The bills no longer came to their home. Not anymore. Not since Kazunari forgot to pay the light company that one time before Shin-chan’s very important presentation back when they were still living in their old apartment in Bunkyō. Instead, the invoices were sent directly to their accountant who made sure they got paid on time and sent the spouses quarterly statements. It was the way Shin-chan’s parents’ household had always been run. Midorima’s mother didn’t sit around at the kitchen table with a calculator, a stack of bills, and a roll of stamps.

The accountant was a different person from their financial adviser and their stockbroker and all the other people who managed their assets. Kazunari didn’t question the practice though he found it a bit odd. It was better than either of them having to balance a checkbook. Shintarō didn’t have that kind of time and Kazunari had already proven it wasn’t his forte.

Shintarō sorted through that day's correspondence. At their penthouse address they received thick stacks of posh catalogues thanks to the Midorima family’s multigenerational, longtime patronage of the high-end department stores in Ginza, the alumni magazine for Shin-chan’s prestigious alma mater, the alumni magazine for Kazunari’s lesser known university, and the random social invitation (Miyaji-senpai was having a barbecue on the twelfth).

Shintarō also subscribed to a multitude of medical journals. Kazunari still rage-subscribed to Basketball Monthly, though at least now it would technically qualify as a business expense given the hawkeye’s career as a sportswriter.
“Welcome back,” Kazunari shouted over his shoulder, when Midorima finished going through their mail. The hawkeye was sitting on the couch in the living room reviewing some game footage on his laptop for an article he was working on.

When he saw Shin-chan walking towards him, he quickly set the laptop aside, grabbed the nearest throw pillow, and set his plan in motion.

Shintarō came up behind Kazunari, leaned over the back of the leather sofa, and planted a kiss hello on top of dark, raven locks.

He walked several steps over to the floor lamp beside his favorite chair and turned on the light, before leaving his new copy of *Neuroscience Today* on the seat of his favorite chair.

Shin-chan was a creature of habit and Kazunari knew his husband was going to go change into something more comfortable before returning to that seat to thumb through the wordy publication. Midorima had gotten home far too late for any in-depth reading. It would have to wait until his day off.

He passed Kazunari on the sofa on his way to the master bedroom and did a double take.

“What’s this?” he asked, referring to the rectangular bulge under the hawkeye’s t-shirt.

“I’m pregnant,” Kazunari announced teasingly when Shin-chan paused in front of him. “I hope our baby has Shin-chan’s beautiful eyes.”

Shintarō narrowed said eyes. “Don’t be an idiot,” he scathed, before storming off.

*Oh no. Not this fight again.* Kazunari took the throw pillow out from under his t-shirt and tossed it on his husband’s seat, before following an irritated Shin-chan into their bedroom.

Kazunari found his husband divesting himself of his three-piece suit in their walk-in-closet.

Shintarō had already removed his worsted wool jacket and placed it on a wooden hanger next to all the other bespoke suits he owned, organized by shade and ranging from charcoal grey to midnight black.

Shintarō was so annoyed by his husband’s idiotic prank that he refused to look at Kazunari standing at the door frame of their sizable shared closet.

Kazunari spoke as Shintarō fiddled with his cufflinks. “There’s something you’re not telling me, Shin-chan.”

“You’re being unreasonable,” Shintarō said, setting one of the cufflinks down on a silver tray atop the large island dresser at the center of the room.

“How? How am I being unreasonable?” Kazunari asked. “You’re the one who doesn’t even want to talk about it.”

“I’m not good with kids. I mean Kuroko brings Nigō over and I --”

“Nigō is a dog.”

“Yes, but --” Part of Shintarō desperately wanted to revisit that college-era conversation again, because getting a dog -- or even a cat, as much as he hated cats -- was a lot less scary than what Kazunari was proposing now.
"I’m not asking to get a pet, Shintarō.” The hawkeye had long ago given up on the idea of a four-legged companion.

Kazunari was getting pissed and Shintarō was acutely aware of it. The tsundere was treading lightly.

Then again, Shintarō felt his own temper flare up. This wasn’t the arrangement. Kazunari was changing the terms of their marriage.

"You know we can't have a child,” he shouted. “That was the deal. That's what you got when you married me instead of --"

"Instead of who? A woman?"

And once the words were out there, Kazunari couldn’t take them back.

“I knew you’d regret it,” Shintarō said, his voice pained and raw. “You're not like me. You can go and be in a --” he refused to use the word ‘normal,’ because there was nothing in the least bit abnormal or wrong with what they had. “You can be in a different type of relationship and you can have your children. I can’t give you that.”

Midorima's statement was preposterous -- to say the least -- and a bit hurtful, but Kazunari wasn’t going to dwell on that. Okay. So this was about the fact that Kazunari was bisexual and Shintarō was not.

“I don’t know where you got the impression that I want anyone else but you.” Kazunari approached Shintarō the way one would approach a wounded animal slowly, reassuringly, and with a great deal of caution. "I don't want to have a child with someone else. I want to have a child with you, Shin-chan."

Despite all the shouting they’d done, Kazunari’s voice was back to normal now. His tone was gentle, almost tender.

Kazunari pulled his husband into a hug even if the tsundere was resisting, even if it was one-sided. “I didn’t mean to imply that I wanted anyone else but you. I don’t,” he said with absolute conviction. “I love you and I chose to marry you because I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you. And I will never regret that decision. Look, I know we never discussed children before. I just assumed we wouldn’t have any. But maybe we could have this too. You and me together.”

“Kazu,” Shintarō said soberly. “I don’t know if I can do this. I’m not good with --”

This was the part that was most difficult for Shintarō to admit. He didn’t have a happy childhood. He didn’t have the closest relationship with his father, though he was trying to repair that now. The truth was that he was broken. That he was ill-equipped to be a good father. He had no idea how to be one. And that wasn’t fair to Kazunari and it wasn’t fair to any child they brought into this relationship.

“My father is very dear to me.” Shintarō said and it was true even with the man’s considerable short fallings. “But even I can see he made a lot of mistakes. I didn’t have a very good example. I don't know how to be one. A good father. I --”

“Shin-chan,” Takao interrupted. “All that means is that you had a shitty father. That doesn’t prove you’ll be one too. That's not us. You're not your father, Shintarō. And we're not like them. We're not your parents. I wouldn’t be asking you to consider this -- and that’s all I’m asking -- if I didn’t have absolute faith in you being an amazing dad to our kid.”

Kazunari hugged his silly husband and Shintarō hugged him back.
“Look,” the hawkeye said. “We don’t have to decide anything right now. All I’m asking is that you think about it. And that you don’t decide both of our lives — yours and mine together — based on a knee jerk reaction. Based on some unfounded fear that you wouldn’t make a good father.”

“What did you have in mind? In terms of the process?” Midorima asked. It wasn’t much of an opening, but it was something.

“Honestly, I haven’t really thought that far ahead. We could go the surrogate route, get an egg donor,” Kazunari said.

“What which one of us would provide the other specimen?”

Kazunari shrugged. “You or me. It’s no big deal.” He really didn’t care. He knew he’d love their baby regardless of whose genetic material they used. He’d love their baby because it was their baby. And once he realized that it didn’t matter to him one whit, he realized something else. “Actually,” he said. “I think I’d prefer to adopt.”

###

Weeks later, Shintarō tossed a nondescript thick, padded envelope on the bed. It landed near Kazunari's socked feet.

"What's this?” the hawkeye asked, taking an ear bud out of his right ear so he could hear the response. He’d been listening to music while typing up his column. He knew Shin-chan didn’t like it when he played rock music too loudly. And rather than hear the tsundere complain about it, he’d used the earbuds.

"It's a brochure,” Shintarō explained.

“A brochure for what?” Kazunari asked even as he opened the front flap and took out the stack of glossy sheets inside it.

“I've looked into it and this is the best adoption agency I could find. They are reputable, open-minded, and willing to work with our circumstances.”

Kazunari slowly set the laptop on the night table. He was speechless. He knew he’d married a stubborn man and he’d been mentally preparing himself for a long battle. He hadn’t expected Shintarō to reconsider his stance on the issue so soon. "Shin-chan, I don't know what to say. Are you sure about this?”

“"We don’t have to choose this agency, we can look into it together and select one we’re both comfortable working with. I just wanted you to know that I’m committed to this.”

Kazunari stood up on their bed and threw his arms around his tsundere husband. Midorima’s hands automatically rested at Kazunari's waist, holding the smaller man in place. Like this, Shintarō had to look up at his ordinarily shorter spouse.

“Shin-chan,” the hawkeye said. “I need you to be honest about this. You’re not going to lose me over this. You’re never going to lose me. I love you and whether we have a kid together or not, that’s not going to change the way I feel about you. So don’t feel like you have to go along with it. This needs to be something that you want too.”

Shintarō met Kazunari’s gaze head on because it was important to him to convey the sincerity of his words. “You want a child and the truth is, I want one too. I want a child with you. I mean I did not want one initially. But after we talked about it, I thought about what you said. And you’re right. I
was against the idea, but for all the wrong reasons.”

It wasn’t that Shintarō did not want to become a father. It was that he was afraid he would turn out like his own father and that wasn’t a very good reason to say no. Kazunari had faith in him and he needed to have faith in himself. “I want this,” Midorima said honestly. “I want this if it’s with you.”

Kazunari beamed at this brave, beautiful man he’d married. “I’m so happy I could cry, Shin-chan.”

“Don’t get started on that just yet. I don’t want you to get your hopes up,” he said to Kazunari and maybe he was saying it to himself as well. “It’s a long process. It can take over a year, sometimes longer. And even knowing our circumstances, they might still reject us for other reasons.”

They were going to do it. They were going to try to bring a baby into their home, into their lives. Kazunari couldn’t wait to get started.

The hawkeye loosened Shintarō’s necktie, placed a kiss at the base of the man’s throat after he’d unbuttoned that first button.

“Shin-chan,” he said with a devilish glint, allowing his hands to roam freely over strong back muscles and feeling a pang of disappointment when he realized that standing up like this on the bed meant for once, his arms were not long enough to grab Shintarō’s firm ass.

“Hmm?”

“Just because we can’t make a baby, doesn’t mean we can’t practice,” the hawkeye teased.

Unlike Kazunari, Shintarō’s hands could certainly reach everywhere he needed to reach. He unbuckled Kazunari’s belt, stripped him of his jeans and boxer briefs with practiced efficiency, made quick work of the man’s t-shirt and wasted no time ensuring Kazunari’s back was pushed against the mattress.

“Shin-chan,” Kazunari protested. “Wait,” he said, kissing Shintarō’s pouty lips. He gathered the papers that had come in the envelope, placed them carefully on the night stand beside the laptop. “Now,” he said. “Where were we?”

###

They continued their frequent visits to Midorima's father who was still convalescing in his study. They decided to keep their adoption plans between the two of them for the time being. It wasn’t certain that they would succeed and they didn't want to jinx anything.

Shinzo had grown strong enough to do physical therapy once a week and the study now housed a mat and parallel bars to help Shinzo practice walking. They were surprised when they walked in the room and found Midorima’s mother helping her husband with his exercises. The spouses were working together in an eerily companionable manner.

The scene was so bizarre that Kazunari had to resist the urge to shout, who are you people and what have you done with my in-laws?

A terrifying thought suddenly occurred to Kazunari on their drive home that night. "Oh no, Shin-chan. Do you think they're doing it?" He cringed.

Midorima's response was surprisingly nonchalant. "Of course not, he's abstaining. For now."

"How can you be so sure?"
"I go over his medical records," Shintarō responded.

"Geez," Kazunari said. "Doctors sure get into the nitty gritty, don’t they? I had no idea those records would be so thorough." The last time Kazunari recalled a healthcare professional asking him about his sex life was back in college, when he’d thought he’d save himself and Shin-chan a few yen by getting free condoms from the school clinic.

"Idiot." Shintarō chided. "No one asked him that. All I'm saying is he would need medical clearance before engaging in any strenuous, physical activity. Ergo --"

"Ergo he's not banging your mom."

"Must you be so vulgar?"

"Hey. Talking about your parents' doing the hanky-panky's no picnic for me either."

"Then why the hell are you bringing it up?"

"I don't know. Your mom's been in a pretty good mood lately. That's all."

"I suppose that she has been," Midorima commented. Truthfully, he hadn't seen his parents getting along this well since ever.

Kazunari gasped unexpectedly, as he was hit with another stray thought. A startled Shintarō nearly drove into the curb. "Idiot. Will you knock it off with the outbursts," he demanded.

"Shin-chan. What if your parents start doing it and your mom gets pregnant. You and Shuzuko will have a little brother or sister. Oh fuck."

"My mother's well past childbearing age!" A horrified Midorima retorted. He sure as hell hoped she was, anyway.

"Hardly, Shin-chan, she's still hot."

"Are we finished with this highly inappropriate conversation?"

"If you insist," Kazunari said, sinking back into the overstuffed leather seat. "You don't have to get so testy, Shin-chan."

"We're talking about my parents having sex!" Midorima protested. Surely, if any conversation called for getting testy, it was this one.

"But seriously Shin-chan. Another mini-you. That would be so cute."

Shintarō muttered obscenities under his breath.

"Oh," Kazunari gasped again, failing to heed Midorima's warning. "They could be the same age! Our baby and your little brother. We'd be one of those families on TV where the uncle is the same age as the nephew --"

"Will you stop babbling. My parents are not having another baby," Midorima insisted with a tone of finality, "the next baby in our family will be our baby."

At Midorima's pronouncement, Kazunari felt a warmth that had nothing to do with the superb
climate control of Midorima's luxury sedan.

**AN:** This prompt posed a bit of a challenge for me. If you've read my series, you'll know that the children are adopted, so I had to work around the prompt. The kiddos make their debut next chapter and their fathers will never be the same. Thank you for reading my fic, please consider leaving a comment :-D

Chapter End Notes

27. “I’m pregnant.”
Casting Asparagus

Chapter Summary

Kazunari and Shintarō are new to this whole fatherhood thing. And it shows.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

 Casting Aspersions Asparagus

"And that's how daddy ended up wearing okonomiyaki on his head like a hat." Kazunari snickered as he recounted the story. Kazunari was a man in love with his husband. How could he not be? “I mean, he very nearly pulled off the look too,” he said to a more or less disinterested audience.

“Daddy was soooo angry at Papa. I can still picture his face.” Kazunari cackled as he recalled that memorable night. "Of course, Papa was already very smitten with Daddy by then. And Daddy had ditched Papa to go with sit with Uncle Tetsuya, Uncle Taiga, and Uncle Ryōta. Papa had very unorthodox ideas on how to get Daddy to notice him. Papa may or may not have flipped the okonomiyaki on Daddy's head on purpose." Kazunari winked, letting his son in on a long held secret.

With his free hand, Kazunari reached for his phone on the table next to him and scrolled through it. "Here. I've still got a picture," he said as he displayed the photo of an irate looking Midorima yelling at Kazunari. "Have you ever seen anything more adorable?"

Whether or not the baby agreed with his father's sentiment was hard to say. Midorima Kichiro was staring distractedly at the ceiling fan in his nursery. The baby was fascinated by it to say the least. He watched with rapt, undivided attention as the blades went round and round seemingly to no end. He was so enthralled by this display of motorized wonderment that he stopped sucking his bottle.

Kazunari was sitting on the glider in the nursery feeding the baby. Or at least, he had been trying to. Kichi-chan had other ideas.

Papa wiggled the medical-grade silicone nipple in the baby’s mouth a bit to redirect his little tyke’s attention. Kichiro was not enticed. He sucked on it twice more before unhelpfully pushing it out of his mouth altogether with his tiny tongue. And then he yawned.

Okay, maybe their children were giving Shin-chan a run for his money in the adorableness department, Kazunari thought. It was a good thing he had his phone handy because how could he not take even more pictures of his charming little tot?

He set the bottle down for a moment and snapped a few pics of the babe in his arms, adding to his rapidly filling memory card.

Kazunari placed a burp cloth over his left shoulder and then held the baby upright against his chest, letting Kichi-chan’s chin rest on his shoulder. He patted the baby’s back with the required amount of firmness to get some of the air bubbles out.

He'd picked up the technique from one of those childcare and safety courses Shin-chan made them
both take before the adoption papers had even been finalized.

He kissed the side of Kichi-chan’s bald little noggin. It reminded him of a monk’s head. And so he’d taken to calling the baby his little monk.

Kazunari closed his eyes as he breathed the baby in and took in his scent. He was so warm and so solid and a lot more wriggly than Kazunari had imagined. Kazunari tightened his grip on Kichiro to make sure he didn’t fall.

The baby was fussy and he cried inconsolably at times and Kazunari had already had to change dozens of diapers, but Kichi-chan was perfect. He was absolutely perfect.

He was here. He was his. And he was real.

The dream in his head. The one he’d hoped and longed for was finally here. They were both here. And who knew he could love so deeply. It was instantaneous, this love he felt the moment he laid eyes on his children.

“Daddy and I waited a long time for you and your sister,” he told his son planting another kiss on the baby as Kichi-chan let out a loud burp.

And it was true. First he’d had to convince Shin-chan that there was nothing to be afraid of if they started a family. That Shintarō would be a wonderful father if they had children and that the shortcomings of his childhood had no bearing on the father he would be to their own little sprouts.

And even after Shin-chan was onboard, there were still so many obstacles they had to overcome. They had to find a suitable adoption agency, one with a stellar reputation and also one that was willing to work with their uncommon set of circumstances.

They had to open financial records to inspection and their health records to scrutiny. They had to open their hearts to a wish that might not come to fruition.

There had been reams of paperwork to fill out and a multitude of lawyers. And even then, after they’d gotten all their ducks in a row, there had been a wait. A very long one. The waiting time had been absolutely the worst part of the whole process. But Kazunari could say with unparalleled certainty that it was worth it because he was gazing lovingly at his three-month old son and he was so elated he could scarcely believe it.

There was a nursery where there had once been a spare bedroom. And what had been a physician’s richly appointed home office had just gotten a fresh coat of pale pink paint. There was a four poster bed with a tulle canopy and a playhouse where there had been a hefty, dark wood desk. The room was now dainty and ladylike and fit for a tiny princess. Their tiny princess.

“Daddy and I are so happy you and your sister are finally here,” he told his groggy son.

After he’d gotten a few more burps out of the baby, he laid Kichi-chan down, supported the baby’s head with the crook of his arm and tried to feed him again. Papa was even less successful in his endeavor this time around.

Kazunari took the bottle from the baby’s mouth, held it upright to measure the liquid that remained using the lines that had been etched on its glass surface. Shin-chan had read something or other about plastic baby bottles and then they’d had to get rid of all of theirs.

He tried to wedge it back in between Kichi-chan’s bow-shaped lips. The baby started to pout and then he started to cry letting Papa know he was most unhappy.
Kichiro was fussy today despite Papa’s best efforts to calm him down. Kazunari got up from the glider with the baby in his arms and walked over to the dresser. He placed the now wailing infant on the baby scale – because of course the home of a neurosurgeon was going to be equipped with such nursery "essentials" as a baby scale, a stethoscope and three thermometers, to name a few things.

Kichi-chan had lost a small amount of weight and a concerned Kazunari frowned. He dutifully wrote down the number on the log next to the changing table because Shin-chan insisted on keeping meticulous records.

Papa placed the baby against his chest again. “It’s okay,” he said to the infant, making shushing sounds. And when that wasn’t working, he started pacing around the nursery, gently bouncing the baby.

And when Kichiro would not stop fussing, a concerned Kazunari carried the baby out of the room.

###

“Hey Shin-chan,” Kazunari said over what had turned into full blown infant wails. “Something’s wrong with the baby.” Kazunari was still doing the bouncy thing as he held the baby, but it was having no effect in calming Kichi-chan.

Shintarō was in their formal dining room seated at the head of a very long, brightly polished, mahogany table and facing their daughter who was in her high chair. The both of them were covered in pureed asparagus.

Keiko-chan was all of 17 months and like most 17-month-olds she was a messy eater. Everything within the strike zone -- Shintarō, the taffeta wingback chair he was sitting in, and the Mulberry drapes -- was splattered in green. Perhaps silk was not the best choice when it came to upholstery.

Shintarō took a handkerchief from his trousers and wiped the puree off his glasses. He stood up and then stooped down to press his nose to the baby’s diapered bottom. It was a move Kazunari had only ever seen parents do and up until now he’d recoiled in horror at the action. But now that they were fathers, he’d done it too.

“He’s not dirty,” he told Shintarō, speaking loudly so he could be heard over the baby. “I changed him, before I started feeding him.” I know I'm new at this, but I'm not a complete idiot, he wanted to add.

Shintarō took the wailing baby from Kazunari’s arms and started trying to soothe him, but he wasn’t faring any better than his hapless husband had. Kichiro’s little face was scrunched up. He was crying so hard, he’d turned red.

Midorima was gently bouncing the baby as he held him against his chest, trying to calm him down.

Kazunari slipped the bottle into Kichi-chan’s mouth taking advantage of the fact that the baby’s howling mouth was wide open. But the infant wouldn’t have it.

While her parents were momentarily distracted attending to her little brother, Miss Keiko decided to try her hand at finger painting. She dipped her little fist into the child-sized porcelain bowl and proceeded to slather green mush all over her tray table. She squealed delightedly at the mess she'd made, before touching the top of her head, covering herself in asparagus up to the roots of her short toddler hair in the process.

“Shin-chan,” Kazunari said, momentarily giving up on feeding Kichi-chan and moving the bottle away from their crying infant. “This isn’t going to work. He doesn’t like it.”
Shintarō had certain ideas about how to ensure their children received the very best nutrition. One of those ideas was that their infant drink only breast milk. There was a service. It was carefully screened and very pricey. From the invoice, you’d think they were delivering Beluga caviar twice daily to the penthouse instead of milk.

Shintarō took the bottle from his husband, held it upright at eye level. “Is this all he’s taken in?”

Kazunari nodded somberly. It was all he could get the baby to drink despite his best efforts to feed him.

“Then he must still be hungry,” Shintarō concluded.

“He’s used to formula. I don’t think he’s going to drink this stuff,” Kazunari advised his husband even as he was once again trying to coax the bottle back into his infant’s pouty mouth.

Shintarō glared at Kazunari as if he’d been the one responsible for Kichi-chan’s fussing. “Don’t be preposterous. He’s three months old. He doesn’t get a say in what he will or will not eat. It’s for his own good.”

Kazunari understood what Shintarō was saying. And it was all great *in theory*, but in practice, it just wasn’t going to work. Kichi-chan had lost a small amount of weight.

Kazunari nodded. “I’ll be back,” he said with resolve.

“Where are you going?” Shintarō called out to his husband as the man was leaving the room. The tsundere sounded panic stricken at the thought of being left alone for any amount of time with both their children.

Kazunari walked back into the dining room wearing a fleece jacket and holding his phone and a pair of car keys in his hand.

“I’m going to call and ask them what brand of formula they’ve been feeding him,” he said. “And then, I’m going to go down to the Family Mart and buy as much of it as they are willing to sell me.”

He kissed the top of their daughter’s head, wiped the asparagus from his lips -- "You've got green hair like Daddy now, Keiko-chan" -- before smooching the cheek of the baby Shintarō was holding, and gave his husband a quick peck on the lips. "D-don't leave me alone with them," Shintarō pleaded.

“You’ll be fine,” Kazunari said. “I won’t be long.”

###

“Nom, nom, nom,” Kazunari said to their giggling daughter in her high chair. “I’m gonna eat you,” he told her. Using his lips to cover his teeth, he pretended to nosh on her bare little feet as she chortled with glee. Apparently, Papa was the height of hilarity as far as Keiko-chan was concerned.

For his efforts Papa was rewarded with riotous peals of laughter and an accidental kick to the face.

Shintarō rolled his eyes at his ridiculous husband. “You’re going to confuse her,” he told Kazunari who had returned from the konbini.

The tsundere was standing behind his husband, feeding a now happy Kichi-chan his bottle of formula. His hungry infant couldn’t suck the milk down fast enough. He’d pull on the nipple so hard it would collapse, requiring Shintarō to periodically remove it from the baby’s protesting mouth so
that it could pop back into shape. The brief mealtime interruptions were not appreciated by a famished infant who howled loudly at Daddy.

“Do you hear that, Keiko-chan?” Kazunari laughed. “Daddy’s worried you’ll turn into a little cannibal,” he told his pipit, holding one of her feet against his mouth and blowing a raspberry.

A startled Keiko-chan started to cry.

“What is wrong with you, idiot?” an irritated Shintarō yelled at his husband and then leaned over to console their toddler. “There, there. Pay Papa no mind,” he told her. “He can be so troublesome at times.”

Kazunari placed a placating smooch on the heel of Keiko-chan’s foot. It was enough to appease his daughter who began happily tapping her spoon against the plastic tray of her high chair and splattering Papa with pureed asparagus.

It had been exactly three days since she and her little brother came home to their parents. Bringing with them all the joy and all the worry of fatherhood.

Shintarō had taken a two-week paternity leave from the hospital so they could bond with their children. Kazunari would not be returning to work. He and his editor were still hammering out the details, but the hawkeye would be writing his sports column from home from now on and had cut down his hours to the bare minimum.

Their decorator, who had done Kichi-chan’s nursery first and later Keiko-chan’s room, had also created a home office for Kazunari in what had been the smallest of the guest bedrooms.

They would be introducing the children to the rest of their relatives this weekend. Shintarō’s parents and his sister would meet the newest members of their family on Saturday and the Takao clan would gather together at the penthouse on Sunday.

They would introduce Keiko-chan and Kichi-chan to their friends -- a multitude of honorary uncles and two aunts -- after that. Uncle Tetsuya and Uncle Taiga first and then Uncle Ryōta when he flew in from Hong Kong though Shintarō would probably want to quarantine Kise first. And then the rest of the gang little by little.

Of course, none of that stopped Kazunari, proud newly-minted papa that he was, from sending group texts with pictures of their adorable tots on an almost hourly basis. Needless to say, Kazunari and Shintarō’s phones had been blowing up with well wishes and happy, cooing responses.

The congratulatory bouquets of flowers and baby gifts had also started pouring in. The largest of which, so far, had been from Akashi who had delivered to the penthouse a bassinet filled with high-end baby products and toys from Kyoto.

They had purposely staggered the introductions because they didn’t want to overwhelm the children and because they wanted their first few days together as a family to be just the four of them.

And then a thought occurred to Kazunari.

“Hey Shin-chan,” he said to his husband. “We’ll need imperial court dolls to display for Hinamatsuri.”

“That’s all the way in March,” Midorima piped up. It was only September.

Kazunari ignored his wet blanket husband, he dipped the plastic baby spoon into the goopy green
puree and offered it to his daughter. Keiko-chan made a face.

Kazunari dabbed a bit of it on his tongue. It wasn’t too bad, as far as baby food went.

Organic, homemade baby food was all the rage and so earlier that day Kazunari had steamed the veggies and ran them through the food processor until they were the consistency of soggy bread.

“Shin-chan, you still have your samurai dolls don’t you?” Kazunari had had a field day when they were high school first-years and he’d found out his odd-ball teammate had a doll collection.

“For the last time,” Shintarō grumbled, “they’re not dolls, they’re action figures.”

Kazunari fed Keiko-chan another spoonful. She pushed most of it out of her mouth with her tongue. Papa playfully stuck his tongue out at her and she giggled cutely.

“Do you still have them Shin-chan?” he asked, using the bib around his daughter’s neck to wipe her mouth.

“Yes,” Shintarō responded. “I suppose my mother has them in the house somewhere. Why?”

“For Children’s Day,” Kazunari responded as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. And then he returned his attention to his daughter.

“We’ll decorate the penthouse with armor and samurai figurines,” he told her in cooing tones. “And fly koinobori out on the terrace.”

Kazunari took hold of his daughter’s foot. “One for Keiko-chan and one for Kichi-chan and one for Daddy and one for Papa,” he said as he began counting tiny toes causing the little girl to giggle.

Happy squeaks and squeals now graced the formal dining room in the penthouse.

“Kazunari,” Shintarō protested “that’s eight months away.”

The tsundere had to struggle to take the bottle out of his son’s unyielding mouth. He set the bottle down on the mahogany dining table, placed the fussy infant against his shoulder and began patting the baby on his back trying to coax a burp.

Kazunari focused his hawkeye on his husband, taking pointers. He didn’t think they taught burping infants in medical school, but his husband was surprisingly adept at getting burps out of Kichi-chan.

He smiled as he caught a glimpse of his husband sweetly kissing the side of their baby’s head, much like Kazunari had done earlier.

“Yes,” he agreed, Children’s Day was still many, many months away. “But we’ll be able to fly the carp windsocks out on the terrace nonetheless.”

Shintarō handed the now tuckered out, full-bellied baby to his husband. A pair of sleepy, kitten-gray eyes gazed up at Papa.

They were a family where once they had been a couple. And there was a nursery in their penthouse where once there was none. There was the novel sound of a food-covered toddler giggling in her high chair and a drowsy baby fussing in his father’s lap and everything was so very new and so very precious.

Shintarō picked up the porcelain bowl of pureed asparagus from the tray of Keiko-chan’s high chair
and headed toward the kitchen.

Kazunari called out after him, “Hey! I was gonna eat that!”

**AN:** So on Children’s Day, families with little kids fly carp-shaped windsocks called “koinobori” and decorate their homes with samurai armor and helmets. This prompt was inspired in part by this song. The title is another play on words.

Chapter End Notes

39. “Hey! I was gonna eat that!”
Visiting Hours are Over(rated)

Chapter Summary

Midorima bumps his noggin. Kazunari's there to soothe him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The prelude to this is Duck, Duck Goose Egg (which is my favorite chapter in the entire series bc it was so much fun to write)

Visiting Hours are Over(rated)

Dr. Yamaguchi had assured Kazunari over the phone that everything was going to be fine. That his husband was in the best of hands and that the results of the MRI they’d done were entirely unremarkable (which sounded horrible, but was apparently a good thing in medical-speak). Still, Shintarō had knocked himself out cold and there was no way in hell Kazunari was going to feel at ease until he spoke with Shin-chan himself.

A few hours ago, Kazunari was at home with his children enjoying a perfectly ordinary afternoon of tantrums, teething, and misplaced storybooks -- in that order. And then he’d gotten what was -- without a doubt -- the scariest phone call of his life.

Given his husband's employment, Kazunari knew not to be alarmed when the caller ID on the house phone registered a phone call from the hospital. Shin-chan was probably in between patients and was calling to inquire about something or other.

Kazunari’s tsundere husband never called home just because he missed the sound of Kazunari’s voice. If he did, Shintarō would most certainly never own up to it. As a matter of character, Shintarō always made sure he had a reason for calling, even if that reason was a thinly veiled excuse to hear Kazunari's voice.

Kazunari had been mistaken about the identity of the caller or the nature of the phone call. After Kazunari had gotten off the phone with the doctors, he frantically called his mother. He was so rattled, he misdialed her number twice. On the third try, he was able to reach her.

She had been at work, but dropped everything to meet Kazunari at the penthouse so she could stay with her grandchildren.

While he waited for her, Kazunari hastily packed an overnight bag. He grabbed the nearest bag, an empty gym duffle, and stuffed it with shorts, a hoodie, a couple of v-necks, extra socks, underwear, and toiletries for himself and Shintarō. He made sure to include an extra set of clothes for his husband to wear when they released him from the hospital. He hoped he wasn’t being too optimistic in thinking he’d be able to take Shin-chan home the next day.

Not trusting himself to drive there, he took the train to Bunkyō exiting at Nezu Station and walking the rest of the way to his husband’s place of business. Kazunari knew the route by heart. He often
walked there when their were still living in their college apartment.

Shin-chan’s car was parked in its reserved spot at the hospital and Takao could always drive the both of them home after his husband was discharged.

The prestigious teaching hospital was on the same grounds as Shin-chan’s alma mater tucked away on the north side of the campus and adjacent to the medical school where Takao had spent many afternoons waiting for his then boyfriend to finish with his labs.

Kazunari found Shintarō resting comfortably in a spacious suite on the same floor where the neurosurgeon worked. He had traded his surgical scrubs for a hospital gown and the employee ID he normally wore clipped to his pristine, white lab coat had been swapped for a plastic wristband curled around his left hand indicating that he was married, that he had “no known allergies,” and that he had been admitted today as a patient.

Judging from the extravagant bouquet of purple and white calla lilies on the bedside table, Sazuna had gotten the frantic message Kazunari had left her. He was grateful his mother-in-law had either been there and left before he’d arrived or opted not to come to the hospital herself. He wanted to give Shintarō his undivided attention.

Kazunari took Shintarō’s left hand between his own. Whoever had admitted him, had left his wedding ring on and with his thumb Kazunari traced the simple band that meant so much to the both of them.

Kazunari gently moved the emerald fringe off of Shintarō’s bandaged forehead and gingerly placed a kiss there. "Shin-chan," he whispered and for the first time throughout this harrowing ordeal his voice cracked. “You need to wake up because I can’t do this without you.”

Midorima stirred into consciousness. He’d merely been sleeping. Kazunari explained to his husband that he’d knocked himself out in a work related mishap that may have had something to do with Kazunari talking his ear off on the phone while Midorima was supposed to watch where he was going.

The hawkeye then proceeded to annoy his husband by making him count to ten backwards, and tell him what day it was, and sing the national anthem (that part was just cause Kazunari liked to hear Shin-chan sing and was of the firm opinion he didn’t do it often enough), and all the other stuff he saw on those Korean dramas he liked to watch (invariably, one of the characters caught amnesia at least once a season).

Because Kazunari had no formal medical training whatsoever – as Shin-chan was so apt to point out – he gave up on divining a prognosis and proceeded to make sure his husband was as comfortable as possible.

“Are you alright, Shin-chan?”

“I’m fine,” Midorima insisted despite the pounding headache.

“Here, I’ll fluff your pillow.”

“I don’t need fluffing.”

Takao snickered at the unfortunate turn of phrase because apparently he’d yet to outgrow his juvenile sense of humor. Midorima rolled his eyes at him but stopped when he realized it hurt his head.

“At least let me help you sit up.”
“No. Stop it. Ouch.”

In the ensuing struggle, Midorima’s bed shot up so that he was suddenly sitting at a 90 degree angle and then his legs promptly joined the rest of him effectively introducing his ears to his shins.

“Stop it, you idiot. What are you doing?”

“Sorry about that Shin-chan, let me fix that for you.” Takao pushed another button on the automated bed and the overhead reading light turned on.

“Whoops. I meant to hit this one.” Suddenly the television hanging off the wall in the corner of the room was blaring some music video at full blast flashing images of scantily clad young women gyrating their hips to the tune of some J-Pop chart topper Kazunari was no doubt familiar with.

“Idiot, stop messing with the remote.“

“What? I can’t hear you, Shin-chan.”

“Give me that,” Midorima barked as he shut the television off. Sure enough just as soon as Midorima had the remote securely in his hand, the nurse came to the door. He noticed too late that the call-light button was on.

“Is everything alright in here, Midorima-sama?” she asked.

Shintarō was sorely tempted to have Kazunari kicked out of the room. “Everything’s fine Nurse Yamanote,” he politely responded, plastering a smile on his face. “Sorry to have summoned you unnecessarily.”

“Are you thirsty, Shin-chan?” Kazunari continued pestering him after the nurse was gone.

“No.”

“Here, let me get some water for you.” Kazunari walked over to the nightstand to grab the standard issue pink plastic pitcher of ice water.

Midorima stretched his arm out. “I said I’m not thirsty.”

“Alright, Shin-chan.” Kazunari went to put the pitcher back on the table, except he tripped on his gym bag and knocked the vase of calla lilies onto Shintarō’s lap.

“Idiot!” Midorima protested from his soggy hospital gown.

“Whoops, sorry Shin-chan. I’ll get you cleaned up.” Kazunari found extra hospital gowns in the armoire where the pillows and blankets were stored. He supposed he’d be using those later tonight when he tried to camp out on the not-fully reclineable vinyl visitor’s chair.

“Hey Shin-chan,” Kazunari said to Midorima as he helped him maneuver the plastic tube of the I.V. through the large armholes of the replacement gown. “Do you think they’ll let you take one of these home with you?”

“I suppose, why do you ask?”

“Well, it’s just that we’ve never played this before,” he said biting his lip and tracing the hem of the gown suggestively.

“Yes we have, Fool. And thanks to you I can never show my face again on the third floor janitor’s
lounge.” Midorima was referring to an unfortunate incident back when he had been a resident and they would sneak off into an unattended broom closet during his interminable night shifts. Due to his larger size, it had been Midorima who’d been caught in the more compromising position, essentially obscuring Kazunari from view. It had been Midorima’s pale derriere who’d bore the brunt of the discomfiture. Now, the janitor not only knew Midorima’s face, but also his ass.

Kazunari had meant they’d never played that game with an actual patient gown. They’d played doctor plenty of times without one (or without much in the way of clothes, for that matter). In fact, the last time they’d played, Midorima had worn nothing but his glasses and a stethoscope around his neck.

“Your butt looks really cute in this Shin-chan,” Kazunari teased as he reached around his husband deliberately taking his time fastening the sparse buttons in the back.

“Stop ogling me, you lecherous man. Are you done with the snaps?” The only one snapping was Shin-chan.

Kazunari ran an experimental hand down Midorima’s exposed vertebrae and Shintarō sucked in a breath. Suddenly the air in the room was charged with electricity. As he pulled back, Kazunari rubbed his cheek against the side of Midorima’s face and found his husband’s receptive lips with practiced ease.

Somewhere behind Kazunari someone was clearing her throat.

“You two lovebirds okay?”

“We’re fine, Nurse Yamanote. Sorry to disturb you, again.” Shintarō answered for the both of them.

She shook her head at the two of them and Midorima smacked his husband upside the head just as soon as she left the room, closing the door behind her.

“Hey, what was that for?” Kazunari complained, running his fingers through his hair.

“Quit hitting the nurse call button, you idiot.”

Takao sidled up to his husband on the hospital bed. “You can’t scare me like that again, okay Shin-chan?” He said, suddenly turning serious.

Despite Midorima’s gruff protestations, he opened his arms up to his spouse and made room for him on the mattress. “Kazu’s poor little heart can’t take it,” the hawkeye continued prattling on, mindful of his husband’s I.V.

“I’m serious, Shin-chan. If you die, I’m gonna kill you.”

“I’m not even going to dignify that idiotic statement with a response.”

Kazunari tucked his head underneath Shintarō’s chin resting his cheek on protruding collarbones. Once he’d settled in, Midorima wrapped his arms around his husband and kissed the top of his head.

“I apologize for making you worry, Kazu,” he mumbled quietly into soft raven locks, pulling Takao flush against his chest.

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**AN**: Three more chapters to go! Is everyone as excited as I am to finish this story? When I started writing the prompts I had no idea it would be so long.
Chapter End Notes

20. “You need to wake up because I can’t do this without you.” & 44. “If you die, I’m gonna kill you.”
Paradise Lost (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Shin-chan and Kazu try to embark on a romantic couples’ getaway

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Paradise Lost (Part 1)

After a seven-hour-and-forty-minute flight from Tokyo, a three-hour layover in Singapore, and a four-and-a-half hour flight from Singapore to Malé, Midorima Shintarō had had it with air travel, but apparently air travel wasn’t done with him yet.

Shintarō wasn’t sure if it was the almost sixteen-hour commute to get to this tiny island in the middle of nowhere or the four-hour time difference that had his already sour mood turning even more rancid at the airport airline counter upon arrival.

“I’m sorry, Sir. You’ve missed the speedboat to your resort,” said the cheery voice on the phone.

“We just cleared Customs,” Shintarō explained. Or rather, Customs had just cleared them.

The officious airport inspectors had found contraband in one Takao Kazunari’s equipage. Apparently, bringing alcoholic beverages into the country was prohibited. The culprit – a miniature bottle of top shelf liquor – had been supplied freely by the airline to all its first class passengers. Shintarō, mindful of the obvious connection between alcohol and dehydration, had wisely declined to imbibe, knowing how parched he would get in the dry recycled air of the aircraft cabin. His husband had done the opposite.

And so the attentive (and very attractive) flight attendants kept the drinks flowing to the sharp-eyed, dark-haired passenger in seat 3A in first class. The green-haired passenger in seat 3B looked crabbier and crabbier with every new beverage he was asked by the flight attendant to hand down to his travel companion sitting in the window seat (Kazunari preferred the window seat and Shintarō always indulged the man).

In all honesty, Shintarō had already been miffed with his spouse before they’d even left Tokyo. They’d been married five years now and Kazunari still hadn’t changed his family name on his passport. A fact Shintarō didn’t learn until they were already at the ticket counter in Narita and then it had been a mad scramble because the plane ticket Shintarō had purchased ages ago for one “Midorima Kazunari’’ did not match the name on the passport of one “Takao Kazunari” even though they were in fact one and the same. Needless to say, it had been a quiet first leg of the trip with Shintarō silently fuming at having almost missed their flight waiting for the airline to re-issue Kazunari’s ticket.

That had not been the only hiccup on this ill-fated trip. Oh no. The even bigger fuck up had come a week earlier courtesy of the imbeciles at the government passport office who hadn’t known what to do with adoption papers bearing the names of two fathers. Here’s a novel idea, just issue the damn passports, an exasperated Shintarō had shouted. Consequently, their children hadn’t been issued
passports and Shintarō and Kazunari had had to leave their toddler and their infant behind in Tokyo with Grandma and Grandpa Takao for the week. In the meantime, their lawyers were busy straightening out the mess at the passport office and some low-level government employee had gotten an earful from Midorima Shintarō.

Kazunari, who hated long flights ever since their destination wedding, had decided to take his courage in liquid form this time instead of a prescription tablet. He’d apparently also decided to take one for the road because Customs had found a miniature bottle of complementary liquor in his carry-on and proceeded to search all of their baggage right down to Shintarō’s last sock for any more illicit items. Of course, there weren’t any more, but that didn’t stop them from rifling through all of their belongings including a red-capped bottle of Pepee-brand lotion stuffed in Midorima’s leather travel kit.

By the time Shintarō re-packed everything and zipped up their suitcases again (with minimal help from a woozy Kazunari), they were the last passengers to leave the restricted zone.

“Yes, well you’ve just missed it,” said the apologetic voice on the other end of the line.

Shintarō glanced back at his idiot husband who was having a hard time sitting up at the end of a long row of attached vinyl chairs at the gate. Kazunari was looking a bit peaky, Shintarō noted. He would have to wait until the hawkeye was feeling better before berating the man who’d literally made them miss the boat.

Shintarō sighed in frustration and then he spoke into his cellphone. “Ask her what time the next one arrives.”

He was on the phone with the credit card company who, among many other services, provided a complimentary translator to their elite, by-invitation-only, black card holders of which Shintarō was one and had been for many years thanks to affluent parents and his penchant for lucky item purchases.

Shintarō was no longer on his parents’ dole having graduated from medical school several years back and established his own household with Kazunari. He was also no longer obsessed with Oha Asa the way he’d once been, but he’d still retained his appetite for the finer things in life and could afford to do so thanks to a booming medical practice and a healthy investment portfolio. It also didn’t hurt that Shintarō’s parents had given him and his sister a head start in life. Most people weren’t born with trust funds that had vested on their twenty-sixth birthday.

Apparently, the staff employed by the credit card company was diverse enough to include someone who spoke both Dhivehi and Japanese, but not diverse enough to employ someone who could tell time because why the hell would they book Shintarō and Kazunari on a flight that arrived just thirty minutes before the boat transfer that was supposed to take them to their luxury resort in Kuda Huraa.

He handed the phone to the woman at the airline counter. She exchanged words with the person on the line employed by the credit card company who’d apparently said something funny and made her laugh. She looked at her screen, looked wearily at Shintarō who was staring her down and then proceeded to speak into the phone, before handing it back to its owner.

Shintarō did not speak a lick of Dhivehi, but even he could tell the news wasn’t good.

“Midorima-sama. It seems that was the last boat for the day. The next one arrives at 7:30 tomorrow morning. Shall I book the tickets for you and your spouse? You’ll also need lodging for tonight.”

Shintarō was livid. It was four a.m. at home, midnight here and he had no intentions of spending the
night in some dinky hotel near the airport when he had five-star accommodations a mere boat ride away.

###

Shintarō handed Kazunari a plastic sports drink bottle. “Here,” he said. “It’s strawberry-flavored. It’s all they had.” There weren’t many stores to choose from at the tiny airport and at this hour very few of them were open. “Drink it,” Shintarō said sharply when Kazunari made a face in disgust.

“When’s the boat getting here, Shin-chan?” Kazunari asked in between gulps, noticing that all of the other passengers from their flight had left before they’d even made it to the airport lounge.

“It’s not. We missed it. We’re taking a seaplane instead.” Not wanting to wait any longer in this wretched airport, Shintarō had gotten the credit card concierge to charter a seaplane for them which sounded luxurious, but really wasn’t. Air taxi was a common form of travel on atolls as spread out as the ones that made up the Maldives.

“What time—” Kazunari dry heaved. He dropped the plastic bottle on the carpeted floor and made a mad dash for the men’s room. Shintarō supposed he should be grateful this happened now and not on his lap while en route to the resort.

Shintarō gathered up their belongings and pushed the luggage cart as far as it would go into the men’s room so he could check on Kazunari.

“Feeling better?” he asked handing a wet paper towel to Kazunari, before flushing the toilet for the hawkeye. The doctor in him noted there was no evidence that Kazunari had touched his in-flight meal. No wonder he was in such bad shape.

A red-eyed Kazunari nodded. He always felt better after throwing up. Shintarō washed his own hands before fishing a travel toothbrush and a small tube of toothpaste out of Kazunari’s toiletry kit. He handed it to the hawkeye, who dutifully brushed his teeth.

When he was finished, Kazunari started to apologize to his bleary-eyed husband.

Shintarō stopped him. “Not necessary,” he said. He’d taken care of worse things than a vomiting patient. Of course he’d take care of his own husband.

“Here,” he said, handing Kazunari a clean shirt to change into, before putting the toothbrush and toothpaste away. He looked at his wristwatch, he didn’t think the seaplane that had been chartered just for them would leave without its two passengers. “I’ll get you more sports drink and see if I can find some saltines to settle your stomach.”

By the time they boarded the seaplane that would be taking them to their resort, Kazunari had sobered up considerably. Still, Shintarō wanted to keep a close eye on his husband. There were twenty passenger empty seats in the DHC-6 Twin Otter seaplane and Shintarō made sure to take the seat beside Kazunari, pushing fluids and crackers on the man.

Shintarō knew it was probably overkill, but he couldn’t help himself. He would always be overprotective when it came to his spouse and children. If they had been home, he would’ve started an I.V. by now.

###

Shintarō no longer believed in Oha Asa, but maybe this ill-timed trip was meant to be the way they went out, together.
This trip was supposed to be a five-year wedding anniversary present from Shintarō to his spouse. Shintarō had purchased the tickets as a surprise for Kazunari, but their wedding anniversary came and went without Shintarō being able to cobble together so much as five or six consecutive vacation days.

By the time autumn rolled around and he’d told Kazunari of their travel plans, their romantic holiday for two had turned into a family getaway for four with Shintarō purchasing two additional airline tickets for the children and changing their secluded bungalow honeymoon suite over the lagoon into a more family-friendly two-bedroom suite on dry land with an ocean view and a roll away crib. Neither father had been too keen on leaving the tots behind even if that had been Shintarō’s original intention when he’d devised the trip with the travel agent.

Now, it was just the two of them and they asked to be bumped back up to the honeymoon suite again. Shintarō was going to try and make the most of it. He already missed the children terribly, but he’d call them just as soon as it was morning in Tokyo and every day after that (twice a day if need be) and he knew with Kazunari’s parents, the children were in the best possible care.

Kazunari’s head was resting on Shintarō’s shoulder and the tsundere allowed it. They were both exhausted from a long day of travel and there was no one else in the main cabin with them. The pilot and the first officer were behind the closed door of the cockpit and there were no other passengers and so if Kazunari wanted to lean on him, Shintarō didn’t mind it.

Shintarō loved the idiot, after all, even if Kazunari hadn’t bothered to change his name on his passport and made them miss their boat to the resort trying to sneak alcohol in like he was still in college.

Shintarō wished it was daylight out so they could see the cluster of islands below. His travel agent had emailed him pictures of the resort and he knew they were missing quite the view below.

Shintarō pushed the arm rest out of the way and shifted so he could rest his arm around Kazunari’s shoulder. When Shintarō pulled Kazunari closer against his torso, he was pleased to see the second bottle of strawberry-flavored sports drink he’d given the hawkeye was almost all gone.

He was not mad at Kazunari. Not anymore. And truth be told, he was looking forward to some much needed couple time with his husband. Shintarō kept long hours at work and when he got home, they spent time together with the children. He truly missed being together like this as a couple.

Shintarō buried his nose into his husband’s dark hair, pressing a kiss into his scalp. The man felt warm, but he wasn’t sweating. He was clearly still recuperating from all those drinks he had earlier.

It was a short plane ride to the resort, they’d be there in no time and if Kazunari was still not feeling better, Shintarō would take him to the infirmary and have them run an I.V.

Kazunari laced his fingers in between Shintarō’s and seemed ready to take a short nap when they felt the first rather violent bump.

The seat belt sign turned on immediately and what was either the captain or the first officer made an announcement which neither one of them understood because it was in Dhivehi.

After the second bump, he and Kazunari looked out the window in a fruitless effort. It was pitch black outside and they couldn’t see a damn thing. Even if they could, neither one of them was an aviator. They had no idea if they’d just hit an air pocket or if there was some sort of emergency going on.
After what felt like a drastic drop in altitude, the plane stabilized itself again, but by then there was a frantic tone to the voice on the intercom and Shintarō and Kazunari were looking for floatation devices beneath their seats.

Shintarō had just helped Kazunari into his when the first officer came out of the cockpit and started yelling something at them. The man walked over to the side door and to their horror opened it. It wasn’t like in the movies where everything got sucked out of the airplane. They were either going too slow or were too low for that to happen. The first officer started throwing their baggage out of the aircraft.

The look on the man’s face confirmed that yes, they were indeed in the midst of an air emergency.

“Take off your seatbelt,” Shintarō yelled at his husband.

"What?"

“Take off –” Shintarō didn’t know how much time they had so instead of repeating himself, he attacked Kazunari’s seatbelt, before undoing his own.

“What are you doing?” Kazunari argued with him.

“We’re about to make a hard landing into the ocean, I think he wants us to jump,” Shintarō said of the man gripping a handrail near the doorway and beckoning them to come forward.

Damn it. The last fight they’d had was over Kazunari dragging his feet and not having changed his name on his passport which seemed so inconsequential now.

It was still pitch black and they still couldn’t see how far below they were jumping, but it was clear they were going to have to jump out of the aircraft.

“Kazu,” Shintarō said hurriedly because he didn’t know how much time they had. He may be a tsundere and he now had an audience but he was not going to let what may very well be his last moments on earth with this man pass him by. “Kazu,” he repeated, turning his husband around to face him because it was now or never. “You’re the love of my life and I am so very thankful for every day I had with you. I am so grateful for this beautiful life you shared with me. I love you,” he said. “Words cannot express the depths with which my heart has loved you.” And then he kissed his husband's strawberry-flavored lips for what could possibly be the very last time. “I will always love you.”

They’d built so much together. They’d built a home. They’d started a family and oh the children. It killed Shintarō to think how much he was going to miss out on if they didn’t make it out alive.

He and Kazunari had such a beautiful life together. And damn it, he thought of their children. He thought about how he and Kazunari wouldn’t see them grow up, but that their children were in the best possible care because Kazunari’s parents were amazing and they loved their grandchildren so much and were going to take such good care of them and Shintarō had made sure to put all their affairs in order because he was always prepared. And then he started crying because even though all of that was true, they were his children and he wanted to be the one who had the privilege of raising them and they were such beautiful children and he was going to miss out on so much.

And then he saw the pilot exit the cockpit and then there was no time left.

"I love you too, Shin-chan,” Kazunari said frantically reaching out for Shintarō’s hand, but they’d run out of time.
The voices of the pilot and co-pilot were getting louder, shouting at them even though they had no hope of understanding them.

Kazunari was pushed out of the aircraft first, because if anyone was going to survive this Shintarō wanted it to be his husband.

The last thing Shintarō did was stuff his glasses into the zip up pocket of his lightweight jacket because if he survived the jump, he was going to need his eyesight.

The last thing he heard was Kazunari frantically screaming for him below which was both comforting and terrifying because he didn’t know if Kazunari was hurt.

###

With his first breath upon surfacing, Kazunari screamed for his husband. “SHIN-CHAN!!!!”

When he didn’t hear a response, he continued screaming and crying. He heard voices. There were lights, a rescue boat up ahead, but none of that mattered. Nothing mattered until he could assure himself that Shintarō was safe.

“SHIN-CHAN!”

It took a moment for Kazunari to realize that one of the blinking lights was coming from his own life preserver which had inflated upon hitting the water and was giving off a beacon.

The voices were getting closer. They were definitely rescue workers. The pilot must have radioed ahead.

But rather than feel relief, Kazunari felt panic because there was no way he was leaving the water – the vast, bottomless ocean – without Shintarō.

"SHIN-CHAN!” He started kicking and thrashing and only then did he realize he wasn’t out of danger yet. It was windy. Oh so windy and the water was choppy and the waves were swelling all around him.

And then he was underwater a second time.

“SHIN-CHAN!” He cried out just as soon as he surfaced again. And damn it. It was pitch black. What good were his hawkeyes if they couldn’t see in the dark. If only it were daylight, if only he could see around him.

And then he heard it, through the wind and the waves, he heard his name. And it was beautiful. It was Shintarō’s voice. It was unmistakably Shintarō. And Kazunari felt like he could breathe again. He felt like his life had been restored to him because in a way it had been.

"Shin-”

“I’m here, Kazu. Just stay put. We’re coming. The light from the rescue boat was getting closer and then someone was pulling the back of his life vest and pulling him onto the boat and then he was in Shintarō’s arms again and it was an awkward embrace because Shintarō did not wait for Kazunari to turn around and they were both wearing their inflated life preservers between them. And then he heard his husband say, “I almost lost you.” And Shintarō’s voice was so broken, so raw, so pained that Kazunari started to cry.

They’d been together for fifteen years. They had shared a lot of heartfelt moments together and they
had known pain and sorrow, but never once had Kazunari heard Shintarō’s voice so completely and utterly destroyed with grief.

"Kazu–" Shintarō began to say and Kazunari was somehow able to escape the vice-like hold the taller man had on him. He was somehow able to turn around and hug Shintarō. He kissed him and Shin-chan tasted salty. Kazunari wasn’t sure if it was seawater or tears or a mixture of both. And he couldn’t possibly care. They were reunited and that was all that mattered.

Kazunari cupped his husband’s face. He kissed Shintarō’s lips again. “Hey, I’m with you, okay? Always,” he said.

[tbc]

AN: This is the Maldives arc that has been alluded to in other parts of the series. This is probably the most emotional chapter in the whole series. I originally posted it on tumblr, but it was always supposed to be part of this story. Only two more chapters to go. I can’t believe how wordy this story has turned out. Thank you for reading, please let me know what you think.

Chapter End Notes

Paradise Lost (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Nothing like a near-death experience to cast aside one’s inhibitions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Warnings:** Rated M. Survival smut with feelings is what I’m going for here. Also angst, as you can tell from the prompt. The smexy parts were heavily influenced by this gorgeous piece of nsfw fan art.

Paradise Lost (Part 2)

It was later that they learned the mechanics of their near death experience. They’d crash landed in the Indian Ocean near their resort in Kuda Huraa at approximately 1:26 in the morning on their very short flight from the airport in Malé.

The small aircraft had departed from the seaplane base shortly after one in the morning. Fifteen minutes later they were treading water in the inky black sea.

The pilot had radioed ahead when it became clear they weren’t going to land safely. They’d had engine trouble, the seas were rough and something as simple as strong winds had proved an insurmountable hurdle for the small chartered aircraft.

Their plane crash landed just a few miles from their hotel, a sizeable chunk of the wing was torn apart upon hitting the water. The two passengers and two crew members exited moments before the impact. Everyone had survived unharmed.

That was all that mattered really. Yet Shintarō’s mind was plagued with what-could-have-beens.

They were picked up by the rescue boat. Shintarō first, the pilot second and then the first officer. Still, it had been a harrowing half-hour before they’d picked up Kazunari.

It wasn’t a matter of locating him. Thank heaven the flotation devices they’d been wearing emitted a blinking beacon. They could see where the second passenger was.

It was a matter of contending with the heavy showers that caused the wind to pick up rapidly and made the seas rough. The same conditions that had caused the accident were overwhelming the rescue vessel.

It wasn’t until Kazunari was in Shintarō’s arms that the tsundere allowed himself to be pulled by an undertow of emotions. He’d almost lost him. He’d almost lost his husband, his best friend, his partner, his lover, the father of his children. The thought alone was too much to bear.

They were given shock blankets and a change of clothes at the coast guard station. That was where they were taken when they reached the shore.
Shintarō was a medical professional. He was well acquainted with these blankets. Back when he was doing his residency and had been assigned to the E.R. rotation, he often saw paramedics bring patients in with these blankets. What he hadn’t expected to see was his own husband wrapped in one.

And for all of Shintarō’s fussing over Kazunari’s earlier state of inebriation, it was clear the hawkeye had sobered up. They were both given cursory medical check-ups and to Shintarō’s relief Kazunari was given a precautionary I.V.

Shintarō still did not speak a word of Dhivehi, though thankfully the coast guard employed someone who spoke Japanese, badly. It was a testament to the frazzled state of his mind that Shintarō did not even bother correcting the man’s obvious verbal blunders.

They were asked about the accident and asked to sign a written statement for the investigation, but Shintarō was barely paying attention to what the man was saying.

Instead, he kept looking over to Kazunari who was huddled under his fuzzy orange blanket. It was all Shintarō cared about. He refused to let the man leave his sight. When the hawkeye got up to use the restroom, Shintarō went with him.

###

It was nearly four in the morning when they checked into their hotel.

Shintarō found the misplaced cheerfulness of the clerk at the counter in the lobby especially grating. No, they did not need help with their luggage. They no longer had any. They were wearing what looked like one-size fits all brown prison garbs and shock blankets. Of course they had nothing else to wear. Wasn’t it obvious?

The first thing they did when they got to their sunrise water-view suite was call Kazunari’s parents using the phone in the living room. The couples’ mobiles along with all their possessions were sitting somewhere at the bottom of the Indian Ocean or floating among the plane debris that hadn’t been towed to shore.

Thankfully, the hotel had Shintarō’s credit card on file and the couple would be able to charge meals, drinks, and everything else they needed to their room.

There was a welcome basket of fruit on the coffee table which Kazunari nearly knocked over in his zeal to get to the phone. Neither one of them had much of an appetite even if Kazunari, at least, had an empty stomach having already thrown everything up in the men’s room at the airport.

It was eight in the morning in Tokyo and the children were up and wide awake. Kazunari could hear them being noisy in the background.

“Mama,” he said. “Shintarō and I are both fine. But there was an accident --”

“WHAT?” Kazunari’s mother yelled into the receiver causing the startled baby to cry.

“We’re fine,” Kazunari assured her even as his voice was starting to shake. “Could you please put the kids on the phone, Shin-chan and I want to talk to them.”

“Kichi-tan,” Kazunari cooed at their son. He wanted to be with both children so badly it hurt. “How’s my little monk?” he asked, trying to keep his voice as close to normal as possible.

It had been almost a year since he’d called Kichiro by that affectionate nickname. When he and
Shintarō had first brought their children home, Kichiro had been all of three months old. He couldn’t sit up or roll over yet and he’d had a round bald head like a monk’s and so Kazunari had taken to calling their son by that term of endearment.

"Are you behaving for grandma?"

Now, Kichiro’s dark hair had grown in in wisps and he could talk and walk and he was the proud bearer of four teeth which he displayed widely and often because he was such a happy little tot who giggled easily and smiled often. And Kazunari loved his little boy so much and to think he’d almost missed out on all of that.

“Can you put your sister on the phone too?” he asked. “Daddy and Papa miss you,” he told both children. He couldn’t get the words out before his voice cracked.

That was when Shintarō took over the conversation while Kazunari tried to keep it together. Kazunari did not want to scare the children. He’d already frightened his mother.

“As soon as we’re able to –. Yes, I’ll call the embassy when they open at nine.” Kazunari overheard Shintarō say to his mother, no doubt responding to the obvious question of when they were coming home.

Under ordinary circumstances, they’d be high-tailing it back to Tokyo on the next available flight. They certainly had the means to do so and if they lost money on their weeklong prepaid vacation, so be it. But there was the minor detail of having involuntarily parted ways with their passports. It was going to take a few days to get that bit sorted out and only then would they be able to fly home.

Under ordinary circumstances, Kazunari would’ve laughed at their predicament. He’d gotten yelled at by Shin-chan for not having his married name on his passport and now neither one of them had travel documents.

Shintarō placed a hand on Kazunari’s shoulder. The hawkeye dried his eyes and gave his husband a small, reassuring nod letting Shintarō know that he’d regained his composure enough as he took the phone back.

“Keiko-chan,” he said, forcing himself to sound cheery for the sake of their toddler. “Are you being a good girl for Grandma and Grampa? If you behave, Daddy and I will bring you back a dolly.”

Of course they were going to bring the children back toys either way. Neither he nor Shintarō were very disciplined when it came to doting on their children.

“We love you and your brother so very much,” he said. “You understand that right? Daddy and I are coming back as soon as we can, okay?”

After too brief a time, the children lost interest in the conversation and went back to playing. Kazunari ended up having to reassure his still hysterical mother. He stayed on the phone with her until his father and sister got home.

The two of them had gone down to the convenience store to buy milk and eggs for breakfast and when they learned from his mother what had happened, Kazunari had had to calm them down too.

“Why are you crying, idiot?” he asked his sister even as he was teary-eyed himself. “I told you if anything happened to me you could have my CD collection, right?”

Kazumi sniffed into the receiver, “I know. I’m crying cause I came so very close to getting them,” she teased. “I guess I’ll just have to outlive you, old man.” Kazunari and his sister had an odd way of
joking with each other, but it was obvious they both loved each other and that Kazumi was very relieved to still have a brother.

“What are you going to leave me if you go first?” he asked.

“My most prized possession,” she said. “You can have my designer shoe collection.”

“Eh?! What the hell am I going to do with those? Some of them aren’t even paid for yet.” Kazumi was not very good at managing her money. In fact, in her late twenties, she’d had to move back in with their parents.

“I told you they’re an investment,” she said with mock seriousness. “In just twelve monthly installments, I’ll be the proud owner if a new pair of stiletto heels.”

“Yeah, yeah. Fat lot of good that’ll do me,” Kazunari protested.

He noticed Shintarō had grown quiet. The tsundere had turned on the flat screen in the living room and was watching the news. Not that either of them understood the language.

“Hey listen, sis,” Kazunari said. “I’ve got to go. Make sure you spoil your niece and nephew rotten until we get back, okay?”

In the background, he could hear his parents trying to coax Keiko-chan to eat her omelet and he could hear the baby making cheery little squeals, the kind of happy noises he always made when he was being fed. Kazunari couldn’t wait to get home to them.

“Hey Kazumi,” he said. “I love you.” This wasn’t the type of thing he ordinarily said to his sister, but having a near death experience had evidently loosened his tongue.

“Ew,” she teased. “Stop being all lovey-dovey with me and go find that tsundere husband of yours,” she said. And after a short pause, she added “I love you too, Kazu-chan,” before hanging up the phone.

After speaking to their children, Shintarō had become withdrawn. Kazunari had experience with Shintarō in this state of catastrophic shock before. When Shintarō’s father had had his heart attack a few years back, his husband had gone into nearly the same unresponsive state he was in now.

It was pointless to try to get Shin-chan to talk about his feelings, but maybe they would both feel better after getting some rest.

“Hey Shin-chan,” he said. “Let’s wash up and go to bed.” They were still in the clothes they’d been given by the coast guard and they both still had dried sea salt on their skin.

###

When Kazunari opened the door to their bedroom he saw that there were red rose petals on their bed in the shape of a heart. This was supposed to be a romantic couples’ getaway, after all. He turned around to give his very tall husband a kiss on the chin.

“You are so thoughtful,” he told him. And really he was. For all of Shintarō’s tsundere nature, he was the one who planned things like anniversary trips and made sure to ask the hotel staff to include little details like a bottle of chilled champagne and chocolates in their room.

And then Kazunari saw the bouquet of pale pink peonies on the dresser and it was enough to make him choke up because throughout their marriage Shintarō always made sure to give Kazunari
“Come on,” the hawkeye said pulling a very docile Shintarō along. “After we wash up, we’ll head to bed.”

Kazunari placed Shintarō’s glasses safely on the nightstand where the tsundere could find them afterwards. They’d only get fogged up in the bath.

Shintarō had booked the honeymoon suite. There was a living room and a dining room and a single, well-appointed bedroom. There was also a wooden deck outside that ran along all three of the rooms and separated the thatched-roof bungalow from the crystal clear waters of the Indian Ocean.

The bungalow wasn’t as large as their actual honeymoon suite. The one they’d huddled up in after their destination nuptials. The richly appointed hotel room in a major European capital had been large enough to accommodate a baby grand for Shintarō to entertain his delighted new husband. Five years and some months later they were in a bungalow on stilts in a very different, yet no less beautiful setting.

The suite they were in now did not come equipped with a piano, but who needed a large, cumbersome instrument when they had their own private dipping pool, a rectangular glass cube sitting right on the water and steps from their large bed.

It was a shame really, Kazunari would have loved to have gone skinny dipping and to have tempted his buttoned-up, conservative husband to join him, but neither one of them would be up for that now.

Tauntingly, all three rooms in the bungalow had a view of the ocean or at least that would be the case when the sun came up shortly. Right now, it was pitch black outside, but soon they’d be able to see the ocean. The same ocean that had almost killed them. Kazunari laughed humorlessly. Killer view, he thought wryly.

Their bathroom came equipped with a private outdoor shower, Kazunari discovered. There was also an indoor tub.

The hawkeye opted for the tub because he thought a bath would be more soothing for the both of them. There were more rose petals in a glass bowl in the bathroom, a trail of them led to the bathtub which had a tray with travel size toiletries -- shampoo, conditioner, a bar of soap, body wash, and conveniently enough a bottle of coconut massage oil. The massage oil would’ve surely been put to good use, but for their harrowing experience hours earlier.

The tub was a snug fit given Shintarō’s tall frame. It was a far cry from the spacious whirlpool tub they had at home, but they made it work. They quickly discovered that it would be easier if Kazunari sat between Shintarō’s long legs rather than facing each other like they did at home.

After he’d filled the tub with warm water, Kazunari leaned back and rested his head on Shintarō’s chest. He reached for the tsundere’s long fingers and wrapped Shintarō’s arms around himself.

“You alright, Shin-chan?” he asked.

“I’ve been better.”

“Yeah, me too,” Kazunari admitted.

“How is it that you’re holding it together?” Shintarō asked after a time.

Kazunari smiled ruefully. “We can’t both fall apart, Shin-chan. We’re going to have to take turns.”
Kazunari had broken down on the phone when they’d called his family and spoken to the kids. Shintarō had decompensated later, while Kazunari had been talking to Kazumi.

Kazunari suspected it would like this for a while, until they got home and returned to the normalcy of their lives, to chores and laundry and work and childcare.

The bath products were lavender scented Kazunari learned upon removing the little foil off the shampoo bottle. He washed his own hair and would’ve helped Shintarō with his but for the fact that they weren’t facing each other.

“Shin-chan,” he said, handing a soapy wash cloth to his husband. “Will you wash my back?”

Shintarō took the wash cloth from Kazunari’s hand and proceeded to do just that. Having his husband’s hands on him was so very comforting to Kazunari. He hadn’t realized how much he’d needed the reassurance of strong, slender fingers.

The hawkeye was still so shaken up about the whole ordeal. They both were.

He’d envisioned a quick bath, but neither one of them seemed eager to leave the tub and so after his back had been washed and his hair was clean, Kazunari simply allowed himself to soak in the warm, lavender-scented water. He leaned back and rested his head on his husband’s chest again. This time, the tsundere interlaced his now pruney fingers with Kazunari’s and their intertwined hands were resting on Kazunari’s solar plexus.

He examined Shintarō’s fingernails. They were blunt and trim and fastidiously well-manicured. They always had been.

Kazunari brought those very important digits to his lips. “I love you,” he said and then he kissed them. Each one of them.

He hadn’t meant to initiate anything, but then he felt Shintarō’s lips on the side of his neck and it made the fine hairs there stand on end.

And then Shintarō’s hands started to wander and Kazunari hadn’t thought that either of them would be interested in this. And Kazunari quickly realized how very wrong he’d been about that because he could feel Shin-chan’s interest poking him on his lower back and Kazunari was certainly starting to show interest as well.

And then Shin-chan suddenly tensed. “Is this alright?” he asked sounding hesitant.

Kazunari smiled because how could it possibly not be. “Of course, Shin-chan,” he said. *Always.* “But I think we should probably take this to the bedroom.” There wasn’t a whole lot of room for movement in the small tub.

Kazunari got out of the tub first and thanks to his hawkeye he didn’t even need to look back to see the tantalizing picture of a very naked, very interested Shintarō. *Damn,* he thought. He couldn’t get to bed fast enough.

Almost as an afterthought he remembered the coconut oil and swiped it from the bath caddy. It wasn’t their usual stuff, but it would have to do. The travel sized bottle of the brand they usually used was sitting at the bottom of the ocean.

Once his back hit the mattress, Kazunari had forgotten all about the both of them almost dying. Shintarō’s feverishly hot lips were all he needed to forget everything. How could he concentrate on anything else when those hands, the ones Kazunari was a tad obsessed with, were roaming his body.
Shintarō paused only to take the cap off the small plastic bottle Kazunari had brought with him from the bathroom.

And oh, Kazunari suddenly discovered the wonders of coconut oil. For starters it smelled heavenly. It felt amazing, though it always felt amazing when Shintarō was stroking him like this. Moments later, when Shintarō’s long fingers had migrated close enough to Kazunari’s mouth, the hawkeye licked them and sure enough, they tasted great.

“Do you want to just do it like this?” Shintarō asked, having resumed taking Kazunari in hand, because Shintarō always needlessly asked for permission.

Kazunari shook his head. “No,” he said, his voice already breathy and they’d only just started. “I want you,” he said simply and really he did. He wanted to feel Shintarō inside him. He wanted to be as close to this man as possible.

Shintarō reached for the bottle of coconut oil again. And seriously, this was a truly magical substance and why hadn’t they thought of using this stuff before?

“Do you want to start off on top?” Shintarō asked. He wasn’t asking if Kazunari wanted to top him. He was asking if Kazunari wanted to sit on top of him.

There was a certain order of things when it came to the physical aspects of their relationship and they were both quite comfortable with the way things were.

It wasn’t as if they’d never switched roles. A few times -- very few times -- Shintarō had acquiesced to playing “catcher” so to speak and every one of those times, he’d done it to appease Kazunari because Shintarō didn’t particularly care for the sensation of being breached and Kazunari, truth be told, liked it. He liked it a whole lot, actually. He liked it so much that even those few times when it had been his “turn,” he had still wanted to feel Shintarō’s fingers inside of him.

The hawkeye shook his head again because he was quite comfortable where he lay and so Shintarō took one of the many pillows on their bed and used it to prop up Kazunari’s bottom.

And then he lavished his husband with kisses and caresses and even though Kazunari was used to it, even enjoyed it, that didn’t mean that there wasn’t some discomfort in that initial push. But Shintarō was so very good at this and knew exactly what he was doing and soon enough Kazunari was only feeling pleasure. He was whimpering and begging for more.

Kazunari’s back was flat against the mattress. His head was leaning over the edge at the foot of the bed. His cheeks were red from exertion and he was looking up at a sweaty, flush-faced Shintarō. He adored this view, the one he often saw of Shintarō moving above him. Shintarō’s eyes closed, his handsome face scrunched up in concentration.

Shintarō’s eyeglasses had remained on the nightstand where Kazunari had left them earlier.

It was easier for Shintarō to keep his glasses on when lying down and looking up at Kazunari. It was impossible for him to do so when he was like this, when he had the hawkeye below him and so Kazunari had noted that Shin-chan gave in to his poor eyesight and simply closed those gorgeous green eyes of his, and sometimes he buried his face in Kazunari’s hair when they were like this which was a shame because Kazunari loved staring up at this man’s beautiful face.

Though Shintarō would never admit it, the desire to look was evidently mutual given that the tsundere would wear his glasses whenever he could keep them on when they were in bed like this and when he did so, he also couldn’t keep his eyes off of Kazunari.
Kazunari had expected to be all shook up. He was all for enthusiastic, vigorous lovemaking which was a more polite way of saying the hawkeye liked it rough. And Shintarō was more than capable of rocking his world.

Instead, in the quiet early morning hours, in their rented bungalow, Shintarō was slow and intimate and loving and it was exactly what they both needed right now, to be together like this.

Kazunari broke first over the constant, steady rhythm that slowly built momentum until they were both panting and their movements were frantic.

Shintarō soon followed. He moaned somewhere above Kazunari and the hawkeye pulled him in even closer, needing to be bare-chest-to-bare-chest.

Even though they’d both finished, Kazunari wrapped his legs around Shintarō’s waist holding the man in place. He didn’t want his husband to pull back just yet.

“I thought you were dead,” Kazunari admitted to the quiet, dark room afterward. Not immediately. Not at first, but after he’d screamed out Shintarō’s name for what seemed like an eternity and had gotten no response. The wind was howling, his voice didn’t carry over. He knew that now. But then, then he had been desperate and terrified beyond belief not knowing where his husband was or whether he’d made it out of the plane.

Kazunari brought his forearm over his eyes and started to cry. Shintarō shushed him. “I’m here,” he said, his voice achingly tender. “There’s no need to cry, Kazu. We’re both here,” he reminded his grief stricken husband.

He flipped them over so that Kazunari was laying on top of him now. Shintarō kissed Kazunari’s forehead, his wet cheeks, his puffy lips as he gently stroked the back of Kazunari’s head. “Shush now,” he said. “It’s alright. Everything’s alright. We both made it.”

The last thing Kazunari remembered was Shintarō getting up to close the window treatments so the sun, which was already starting to peak in the horizon, wouldn’t bother waking them.

He got back into bed, gathered Kazunari in his arms and the hawkeye fell asleep like this with his face buried in the crook of Shintarō’s neck, he fell asleep to the sound of the waves crashing outside, to the musky scent of sex and coconut oil.

###

Hours later they lay on top of the king-sized bed. Neither one of them had bothered to pull the bedcovers back.

Kazunari had had a shallow, restless sleep.

“Are you alright?” Shintarō asked when it became obvious they were both awake.

Kazunari didn’t answer verbally. Instead, he reached across the bed for Shintarō’s hand. Shintarō still had his wedding ring. They both did. They had lost everything else, but they still had their wedding rings and knowing that that piece of precious metal was still around his husband’s finger was so comforting to Kazunari right now.

Oddly enough, for all the elaborate, expensive romantic getaways and couples’ retreats and anniversaries and special occasions they had celebrated during their many years together, their engagement had been quite simple.
Shintarō had been the one who’d proposed marriage to Kazunari in a small family-style restaurant where they’d had their first date. Aside from the food borne illness that followed, it had been the world’s most perfect proposal, in Kazunari’s mind. It had been perfect in its simplicity and so heartfelt and such an incredible show of affection for someone as reticent as Midorima Shintarō.

In truth, the thought of marriage had never crossed Kazunari’s mind up until that point. Not because he wasn’t head-over-heels in love with this man. Kazunari had known early on in their relationship that this was the person he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. As far as he was concerned, there was no one else he wanted to be with than Midorima Shintarō. It had been the practical limitations of their situation that had convinced Kazunari that being in a committed, life-long relationship with this man was all they could ever be to each other.

It had been Shintarō who’d said, “Marry me?” And it had been Shintarō who’d found a way to make it happen notwithstanding the legal hurdles.

Now, five years and some months later, Kazunari couldn’t imagine their relationship any other way. This was his husband and he’d nearly become a widow.

But he didn’t want to dwell on that now. He craved a distraction. He decided to do something he’d always wanted to try.

Kazunari turned to lie on his side, facing Shintarō.

“Do you trust me, Shin-chan?”

Shintarō scoffed. “What kind of a stupid question is that?” he asked.

Kazunari shrugged and decided this was as much affirmation as he was going to get from the tsundere. The hawkeye crawled over to his husband.

Shintarō’s long legs were lying flat on the bed. Kazunari picked them up, bent them at the knee, and pushed them back against Shintarō’s torso.

“What are you doing --” Shintarō started to complain.

Kazunari gave his husband a quick reassuring kiss on his inner thigh. “Relax, Shin-chan. I’m trying something new,” he said as if those words would do anything else but tense Shintarō up even more.

Kazunari knew he needed to strike while the iron was hot. He bypassed his usual target which despite its owner’s verbal protestations was already eager, at attention, and waiting for Kazunari’s affections. Instead, he placed a hand on each of Shintarō’s cheeks, he lifted, separated, and took a swipe with his tongue.

Shintarō nearly jumped off the bed. “H-have you lost your damn mind, idiot?”

Shin-chan had a tendency to trip over his words when he was shocked and Kazunari took pride in the fact that he was very good at keeping his husband on his toes.

Undeterred, Kazunari went to have another go.

"Sstop!” the tsundere stammered. Putting one large palm to Kazunari’s face. “Tha-t,” Shintarō said,
his face red and scandalized and his free hand pointing in the general direction of his exposed derrière, “is UN-sanitary,” he sputtered.

"Aww c’mon Shin-chan. Sex is unsanitary."

"That," Shintarō insisted, "is esssspecially unsanitary."

“Why?” Kazunari asked innocently as he sat back in seiza. Well, a lewd version of seiza, given his state of undress and that his knees were purposely spread widely apart so that Shintarō’s gaze would follow. Kazunari didn’t always play fair.

The hawkeye was ready to point out that they had bathed together not that long ago and that if anyone was meticulous about cleanliness, it was Shintarō. One only needed to look at the man’s fingernails to make an accurate assessment about the rest of him.

At the moment, his husband was so squeaky clean Kazunari could eat off of him and that was exactly what the hawkeye had intended to do.

Shintarō gave him an incredulous, withering look. Kazunari was not intimidated. He blew the man a kiss and gave him a saucy wink.

The tsundere got out of bed and stomped over to the en suite bathroom. “Don't decide these things on your own,” he yelled before slamming the door shut.

Kazunari was about to knock on the door and utter an apology when he heard the faucet running.

Sometime later Shintarō walked back into the room with a towel wrapped around his nether regions. Kazunari caught the clean whiff of lavender.

The towel came off when Shintarō flopped on the bed, arms spread apart. For a brief moment, Kazunari hesitated. “Is this really okay, Shin-chan?”

“Do as you like, idiot,” he said. Shintarō sounded bashful about it and Kazunari thought it was adorable that Shin-chan could still find things to be embarrassed about given everything they’d done together.

“How do you want me?” he asked looking anywhere but at Kazunari.

“It’s probably better if you lay on your stomach,” Kazunari suggested.

Shintarō flopped over. It was an almost petulant flop as he sighed into the mattress.

Kazunari paid him no heed. He knew if Shin-chan didn’t want to do something, he wouldn’t agree to it so easily. The fact that Kazunari had his husband lying in bed naked right now, waiting for the hawkeye to proceed, meant he’d at least piqued the tsundere’s interest with a single swipe of his tongue.

The hawkeye knew he’d be pressing his luck if he asked Shin-chan to do something as undignified as propping his butt in the air and spreading his own cheeks. So instead, Kazunari piled as many pillows under Shintarō’s nether region as he could so that the effect would be more or less the same.

And then, Kazunari resumed his attentions. He used both hands to spread Shin-chan apart and his tongue to pleasure his husband.

At first, Shintarō was stubbornly insisting on showing no reaction to his husband’s affections, but
Kazunari was undeterred. He continued his ministrations determined to get a rise out of the tsundere. He licked and kissed and sucked and when Kazunari pressed his tongue against his husband, Shintarō unexpectedly pushed back against Kazunari’s face.


“Shut up, idiot.”

Kazunari laughed and continued to persistently push his tongue against that same spot which earned him a pleasured groan for his troubles.

He reached for the coconut oil on the nightstand and Shintarō suddenly tensed up.

“Relax, Shin-chan,” he said placing a kiss on Shintarō’s bare heinie. “I’m not going to do that.” They had an implicit understanding that it was only on very rare and very special occasions that Kazunari could do that to Shintarō. “I just thought that maybe you’d like me to touch you here,” he said, reaching between Shintarō and the pillows to grope his very hot, very interested husband.

“That’s all.”

Shintarō relaxed under Kazunari’s assurances and true to his word, Kazunari began to stroke Shintarō the way he knew Shintarō liked to be stroked.

The new position presented a bit of a challenge for Kazunari because he now only had one free hand to keep Shintarō’s cheeks spread open. But all of his efforts were rewarded when his husband fell apart by his touch.

“There,” Kazunari said, kissing his husband’s bottom one last time. “That wasn’t so bad was it?” he asked as he climbed back up to cuddle with Shintarō.

“Stop it right there!” the tsundere said putting a hand over Kazunari’s mouth. “Just what do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m giving you a kiss, Shin-chan,” the hawkeye responded matter-of-factly because post-coital cuddling was about the only time Kazunari could count on a lovey-dovey Shin-chan.

“Not with that mouth, you’re not.”

Kazunari’s face fell. “Way to kill the mood, Shin-chan,” he grumbled as he reluctantly climbed off the mattress and headed to the bathroom to brush his teeth.

“And use the mouthwash,” Shintarō shouted from their bed.

Kazunari smiled. Somehow that mundane banter was the reassurance he’d been craving, he knew that things between them had shifted back to normal. Somehow he knew they were going to be alright.

He came back into the room wearing a plush bathrobe, the ones issued to all the guests with the hotel’s tree-shaped logo.

He climbed back on the bed, onto Shintarō’s very naked lap and kissed him with newly minty breath. “Is this better, princess?” he teased.

Shintarō grumbled, but he kissed him back.

“C’mon,” Kazunari said sitting up. “We need to order room service and call the embassy and when
the gift shop opens we need to buy clothes to wear and souvenirs for the children.”

“Kazu,” Shintarō said pulling Kazunari back for one last kiss. “Those things I said to you when the plane was going down. I meant all of it. I’m grateful for every day I have with you,” he said.


**AN1:** Ah, the romantic getaway from hell continues. If you’ve read *Dreamers*, this is the part where Kazu does that thing that Shin-chan refuses to admit he likes (even though they both know he does). So the first part was very angsty and terrifying. I am hoping I can turn the mood around and make it into something like sexy hurt/comfort. Cracked 100K words for this fic, that’s a personal best. One more chapter to go, thanks for reading this far!

**AN2:** The resort mentioned in this fic is this one: bedroom; deck; bathtub. Your humble author would like to vacation there someday.

Chapter End Notes

28 “Marry me?” & 29. “I thought you were dead.”
A Day in the Life

Chapter Summary

There’s no place like home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Warnings:** T for allusions to poundtown. Tooth-rotting family fluff.

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**A Day in the Life**

The days when Shin-chan would come home from the hospital at all hours of the night were thankfully behind them. Shin-chan had an established medical practice now and kept respectable hours, for the most part. But the neurosurgeon still worked *way* more than his stay-mostly-at-home husband would like.

Thanks to a harrowing single-engine aircraft accident which Kazunari was *not* going to think about, they had come home early from paradise and Shintarō had three vacation days left before he had to return to his practice.

They had arrived at Narita late last night, but neither one of them could bear to be apart from their children much longer. And so they had taken a cab to Kazunari’s parents’ house to pick up Keiko-chan and Kichi-chan on their way home instead of waiting until the following morning. It had been the right decision.

The children had squealed with happiness upon being awoken and seeing that their fathers had returned. It was a tearful family reunion. Kazunari and Shintarō had missed Keiko and Kichirō dearly, of course, but they didn’t know just how *badly* they needed to hold their young children again until the children were in their arms.

Kazunari’s parents and his sister had been overjoyed to welcome them back. It hadn’t been easy on them either knowing that their son and son-in-law and brother and brother-in-law had almost not made it back from what was by all accounts supposed to be a second honeymoon.

Shintarō’s car had been sitting in the carport at Kazunari’s parents’ house where they had left it (along with the children) on their way to what Kazunari now humorlessly dubbed the vacation from hell.

Expectedly, the children fell asleep in their carseats almost as soon as Shintarō pulled the luxury sedan out of Grandma and Grandpa’s driveway, but that didn’t stop Kazunari from looking back at the children from time to time. He was so happy to finally be reunited with their tots, he could scarcely believe it. It made the hawkeye want to eschew anymore couple’s retreats until Keiko and Kichiro were *at least* in high school. He may feel different about that later, but at the moment he wanted nothing more than to go home with his husband and children.

Kazunari had expected Shin-chan to announce that he would be returning to work the following day,
but to Kazunari’s surprise Shin-chan was still in bed with him when the sun came up.

Damn it, Kazunari grumbled as he reached for a spare pillow to cover his eyes with. They’d forgotten to pull the motorized blinds down on the floor-to-ceiling, east-facing windows of the master bedroom.

The morning light had not woken up Shintarō, Kazunari noticed, because the tsundere had fallen asleep wearing his cashmere eye mask. Well, his new cashmere eye mask. The old one was probably sitting on a bed of coral somewhere in the Indian Ocean. Shin-chan had purchased the replacement eye mask where they had purchased everything else they’d used in the past few days – new suitcases, all of their clothes, toys for the children and souvenirs for both sets of parents and both of their sisters – at the gift shop in the hotel lobby.

On weekdays, Shintarō was dressed and out the door before the crack of dawn. The kids would wake up Kazunari some time later. Usually, it was Keiko-chan crawling into bed with Papa, but sometimes it was Kichi-chan who serenaded his slumbering father with the impatient wails of a hungry infant over the baby monitor that sat on the night table on Kazunari’s side of the bed.

Kazunari inched toward his husband and tucked his head beneath Shintarō’s chin.

Shin-chan owned more pajamas than anyone else the hawkeye knew well enough to divulge that type of information. Almost all of them had matching nightcaps and they came in all sorts of patterns and materials. The ones Shintarō was wearing this morning were silk and Kazunari loved the way the soft fabric felt against his cheek. The fact that it smelled so much like Midorima made the hawkeye want to bury his nose in Midorima’s chest. And he did just that. He was in no state of mind to deny himself such indulgences when they were so readily available to him.

“Morning,” Shintarō croaked. He didn’t even sound annoyed at the fact that Kazunari’s aggressive nuzzling had woken him up. To the contrary, he wrapped his arms around the hawkeye and brought him in even closer against his chest.

“How’d you sleep?” the hawkeye asked, feasting his eyes on how adorably sleep rumpled Shintarō looked at the moment.

“Like the dead,” Midorima responded, reaching for his nightstand where he kept his glasses. Kazunari smiled at his tsundere. “Me too,” he disclosed. “It’s like we have the most comfortable bed in the world.” Shintarō had certainly researched the hell out of high-end mattresses before they’d purchased the one that became their marital bed.

“Indeed,” Shintarō muttered affirmatively into Kazunari’s hair.

It wasn’t that the hotel bed at their five star island resort had been shabby, but there was something to be said for being back in one’s natural surroundings. And the saying that there was no place like home rang especially true this morning.

Midorima was much too fussy about morning breath for even closed-mouth kisses, but that didn’t stop the tsundere from kissing Kazunari’s shoulder and clavicle and each of his pecks. And it certainly didn’t stop the hawkeye from running his hands in Shintarō’s hair and down his strong, muscled back.

They had done a lot of this lately. There had been a lot of relationship-affirming caresses in their bungalow suite. In fact, Kazunari had woken up to this every morning in Kuda Huraa and fallen asleep in a tangle of limbs every night, but they were in Tokyo now.
Shintarō’s left hand was now sliding against Kazunari’s abs and into the elastic waistband of his shorts.

“Uh, Shin-chan,” the hawkeye said, tapping Midorima on the shoulder. “I’d love to see where this is headed, but your daughter is going to walk in here any moment now,” Kazunari reminded him.

Kazunari brought up a good point.

Shintarō kissed Kazunari on his solar plexus before getting up to empty his bladder, brush his teeth and take a cold shower.

Keiko-chan walked in a few minutes after her father had vacated the bed with an endearing case of bedhead. She was carrying a teddy bear under her arm, one of the many presents Daddy and Papa had brought back for her from the Maldives. Kazunari pulled her up on the bed with him and tried to cuddle with her, but she insisted that Papa get her a sippy cup of milk first.

Kazunari realized they were out of milk and out of most everything else when he opened the glass door to their refrigerator and the light came on illuminating pristine, though empty shelves. He went to the cupboard where they kept the powdered milk, checked the expiration date first, then mixed it with water. He wasn’t sure his little pipit would accept this lowly substitute, but it was worth a shot. If not, he’d give her dry rice cereal to snack on (they always had plenty of that) while he did the grocery shopping.

He returned to the master bedroom sometime later with her sippy cup in hand. Shintarō had taken the baby out of his crib and Kichi-chan was happily chewing on a plastic building block while sitting on Daddy’s lap. Shintarō and both children were in bed together reading their mangled, but much beloved copy of *Three Billy Goats Gruff*.

It was enough to make Kazunari’s heart burst.

He took a seat on his side of the bed next to Keiko-chan. Evidently she’d forgotten all about the sippy cup she’d wanted in the first place. She was busy helpfully turning the pages for Daddy and neither tot noticed Papa was getting teary-eyed.

Shintarō noticed of course.

“Everything’s fine,” he assured him quietly. “We’re all here,” he said, even as he reached behind the children to squeeze Kazunari’s hand.

Then, Kichi-chan, who was used to Papa catering to his every need, crawled over to Kazunari and starting whining for his bottle.

Kazunari smiled as he picked up his infant. He planted a kiss on the top of his no-longer-bald Little Buddha’s head before heading back to the kitchen to fetch his son a bottle of formula. Unlike milk which was perishable, the formula was purchased in bulk. Ever since that misguided breastmilk experiment, both fathers were apprehensive about running low on formula.

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Bathing the children was a lot easier with an extra pair of hands.

Usually, bathtime took place in the tub in Kichiro’s nursery, but with Shin-chan increasing the adult-to-child ratio to one-to-one, they could bathe in the whirlpool tub in the master bedroom.

Shin-chan was shampooing Keiko-chan’s hair using the cheap plastic visor he’d ordered a while
back off the internet because, they knew from experience, they’d never hear the end of it if Keiko-chan got suds in her kitten-gray eyes even if Daddy was using Tokyo Baby Cafe tear-free shampoo.

Meanwhile, Kazunari was lathering up Kichi-chan with a sponge shaped like a frog as they played a little game. The hawkeye covered his own face with a washcloth.

“Peek-a,” Kazunari paused so he could build up the suspense and then he removed the small cloth. “Boo!” he said to his giggling infant.

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Although Kazunari had offered use of the penthouse to his parents in case they wanted to babysit the children here, it’s location in front of the bay was not at all convenient for Kazunari’s father who hadn’t retired yet and worked near the Takao family home. Kazunari’s mother also worked, but she’d taken the week off to care for her grandbabies.

He and Shin-chan were *supposed* to be on a week-long romantic couple’s retreat and the children were *supposed* to be at Grandma and Grandpa Takao’s house for the week. Needless to say, no one was supposed to be in the penthouse today.

They were running low on perishables. There was plenty of baby formula in the pantry (and diapers in the nursery) because Shintarō stocked up on that kind of stuff like it was the doomsday apocalypse – and in the land where earthquakes were such a common occurrence, it wasn’t such a bad practice – but as far as the things that needed to be refrigerated went, they didn’t have a whole lot of that stuff. They had either eaten it beforehand or taken it to Kazunari’s parents when they dropped off the kids, expecting not to be back home until the beginning of the following week.

At least that had been the plan until it all went to shit and now that Kazunari and Shintarō had reunited with their children and were back in their penthouse apartment, neither one of them wanted to leave.

The four of them were a bit clingy at the moment. The children were because it was the first time their parents had gone away for a few days and not taken them. The children’s fathers couldn’t get enough of them and each other because they’d gone through a very nerve-wracking experience which had almost catastrophic consequences.

But alas, *someone* had to do the hunting and gathering for the Midorima family and Shintarō was barely qualified to hold a shopping list, let alone be entrusted unsupervised in a grocery store.

While Shin-chan was well-practiced in the art of making special gourmet requests (*I did ask for the mustard seeds from the Rhine River Valley but I wanted the one with the blue label, this one has a red twist off top; this is most certainly not champagne, it’s not from Champagne; and who could forget the classic, I wanted macaroons, not macarons*), he knew his way around a supermarket about as well as he knew his way around a home improvement store which was to say not at all.

There was a pouty pretty princess in Kazunari’s life, and *no*, it was not his daughter.

###

There was no shortage of specialty shops in their posh Minato neighborhood, but there was only one gourmet grocery store Shin-chan *liked*. Kazunari was there on an almost daily basis. For one thing it got him and the kids out of the penthouse and for another there was always something or other that Shin-chan “needed” him to pick up and so Kazunari made it a point to just pop in there almost once a day.
It wasn’t always food, it was sometimes the cobbler (even a well-heeled man occasionally needed his designer horsebit loafers resoled), the dry cleaners (one set of bedsheets and nearly every garment Shintarō owned needed professional attention), or the car dealership (for those phantom noises emitted by Shin-chan’s luxury sedan that no one else seemed to hear).

For the most part, Kazunari did not mind. It was a deeply ingrained habit left over from the days when Shintarō would entrust him with picking up dehydrated mushrooms because Oha Asa had said so.

Today, Shin-chan was home with the children while Kazunari purchased their household’s bare essentials including organic milk, foie gras, raclette, truffles and of course *macaroons, not macarons*.

Kazunari was surprised at how quickly he was crossing off the items on his grocery list when he wasn’t pushing an infant and a toddler around in one of those double shopping carts that had four leg holes, instead of two.

Grocery shopping took twice as long with the kids because inevitably there was something they wanted and shouldn’t have (like that Ketty-chan mylar balloon at the cash register that ended up flying away in the short distance to the car before Papa could even buckle the kids into their carseats). It was a fact of life. Balloons invariably ended in tears, whether Kazunari bought them or not (and of course more often than not he was the sucker who bought them).

It was an unholy (yet common) combination of adorable tots and an overindulgent father. Though to be fair to the hawkeye, Shin-chan was even more of a pushover than Kazunari when it came to their children.

While Kazunari was in the cheese aisle trying to decide between the Swiss raclette and the French one, a woman he was sure he’d never seen before came up to him and made an odd remark. “I see you didn’t bring the kids with you today.”

The comment had been so far out in left field that Kazunari wasn’t even sure how to respond, except for a startled, “Excuse me?”

He was beginning to think he misheard her, but then she repeated the statement.

“I’m sorry. It’s just that I see you in here a lot with your children.”

Kazunari smiled politely. He had no idea what to say to that. “Uh …”

“Oh dear, I realize this may sound very strange to you,” she said suddenly looking self-conscious. “It’s just that, well a man with two small children doing the grocery shopping during the midmorning is not a common sight,” she explained.

Kazunari continued to smile politely at her as he looked for possible paths for making a quick exit. He mentally began to compile a list of other gourmet grocery stores in the area. He really didn’t want to start patronizing a different one, but this woman was starting to freak him out.

“I’m making it worse,” she tittered. “You must think I’m a deranged stalker.”

“No, no.” Kazunari’s weak protests sounded hollow to his own ears. She’d read his mind.

“It’s just that when my husband was laid off from his company last year, he was so depressed he would not get out of bed for days.”

She started fidgeting with her sizeable wedding ring as if retelling the story made her uncomfortable.
“I mean, it was dreadful,” she added. “And then I see you in here all the time doting on your happy children and helping out at home by doing the groceries. I can’t help but envy your wife.”

Kazunari started to laugh. So that was what this was about. “I think there’s been a misunderstanding. I’m not laid off. I just cut back on my work hours to raise our family.”

“Well that’s even more remarkable,” the woman smiled.

“And I don’t have a wife. It’s my husband who you should envy.”

In the end, she’d turned out to be harmless and they both had a nice laugh about how wildly inaccurate her assumptions had been.

“You know what they say about people who make assumptions, right?”

“No, what?” she asked with a smile. Clearly she wasn’t familiar with the quip.

In the end, Kazunari didn’t have the heart to finish the line, he didn’t have the nerve to call her an ass. And so instead, he finished lamely, “They are sometimes wrong.”

“Well that’s not much of an observation, is it?” she said sounding disappointed in the conclusion.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” he agreed. He tipped his beanie at her and headed to the beverage aisle to pick up a 12-pack of oshiruko.

###

Kazunari was telling Shin-chan about his encounter with the crazy lady (who’d turned out to be nice) at the store while they both put away the groceries.

The children were in their high chairs where their fathers could keep an eye on them. Keiko-chan was pushing around bits of puffed rice that Daddy had placed in front of her on her beloved melanin Ketty-chan plate in the vain hope that she’d actually eat them and not play with her food, while Kichi-chan was banging his plastic spoon against the empty tray of his high chair making a racket until Papa gave him more rice.

His husband wasn’t usually home for the part of Kazunari’s day when he unpacked his purchases and so it was helpful to have an extra pair of hands connected to very long arms that could reach in very tall kitchen cabinets without having to resort to the footstool.

“I got you a present,” Kazunari said in a sing-songy tone as he pushed the last of the reusable canvas shopping bags on the island countertop towards his husband for the tsundere to put away.

Shintarō pulled out a jar of coconut oil from the bag and gave Kazunari a very tiny, yet saucy little smile.

The hawkeye bit his lip and gave Shintarō bedroom eyes.

“I saw it in the aisle where they keep all the exotic cooking oils,” Kazunari explained. “It worked so well for us at the resort. I just couldn’t pass it up.”

The tsundere pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. He set the coconut oil aside on the marble island as he continued to put away the rest of the items from the bag.

“I guess we’ll have to wait till naptime to try it out,” Midorima responded in his deep baritone.
Kazunari glanced eagerly at the clock on the microwave. *Damn,* he thought. Naptime couldn’t come fast enough.

The hawkeye turned on the stove and got started on lunch for his family and when he was done, he and Shintarō fed a demanding pair of hungry little birds waiting none too patiently in their high chairs.

Of course the children made a mess, but at least they didn’t get food in their hair. It was nothing a few wet wipes and a quick change of clothes couldn’t fix.

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Kazunari walked into Keiko-chan’s bedroom with his arms full. He handed his son a warm bottle of formula, he handed his daughter a sippy cup (now filled with proper milk and none of the powdered stuff) and for his husband, he brought a chilled can of oshiruko.

It was not often that Shin-chan was home during the children’s naptime, at least not during the workweek.

Ordinarily, Kazunari would set Keiko-chan and Kichi-chan down for their naps on his and Shin-chan’s bed. He could work from his laptop in there and it was easier to keep an eye on both children when they were in one place.

If he couldn’t work from his bedroom for some reason – if there was game footage he needed to watch, if he needed to conduct an interview online or if there was a staff meeting that absolutely required his virtual presence – he’d plop a row of pillows on Kichi-chan’s side to make sure the baby didn’t accidentally roll off the bed, he’d switch on the baby monitor and would head down the hall to his home office.

*Ordinarily,* Kazunari would put the children down for their mid-afternoon siesta in the master bedroom. But, well, it wasn’t often Shin-chan was home during the children’s naptime.

Keiko-chan’s pretty princess four-poster bed was large enough to fit her and Daddy and Papa and Kichi-chan.

Two readings of *Three Billy Goats Gruff* later and the children were down for the count.

Shintarō took the slumbering baby with him so that he could place Kichiro in his crib in the nursery for what would hopefully be a very long nap.

Kazunari stayed behind for a moment making sure the little girl sound asleep at the center of her very large bed had everything she needed for her trip to the Land of Nod.

He pulled the soft, pink blanket up to Keiko-chan’s shoulders, tucked her Ketty-chan doll in the crook of her arm and placed a sweet dreams kiss from Papa on her forehead.

He turned on the baby monitor that rested on the night table, but before he turned off the lights on his way out of the room, he paused for a moment to take it all in.

He loved his life. He loved his children and he loved his husband. Kazunari felt incredibly blessed to still have all three of them because it almost wasn’t the case. A bit of engine trouble could have been the end of him, or Shintarō, or the both of them.

He wasn’t over it yet. He realized feeling his hand tremble as he flipped the light switch and quietly left the room.
Shintarō’s hands were hot on Kazunari’s bare skin, gripping the hawkeye’s narrow hips and holding him in place. His mouth was even hotter as he pushed a searing tongue in Kazunari’s mouth.

They were behind the closed and locked double doors of the master bedroom. They’d only just gotten started, but Kazunari was already well on his way to needing that jar of coconut oil that lay beside them on the bed.

“I’m sorry,” the hawkeye said, panting for breath.

He uttered a mournful whine as he climbed off of the confused tsundere. He was loath to interrupt when he finally (finally!) got his husband all to himself, but some things needed to be redressed.

Keiko-chan had left behind a plushie when she and her brother were playing in here earlier.

“I can’t do this with him in here,” Takao said pulling the voyeuristic teddy from its hiding spot behind one of the pillows Shintarō was reclining against.

Ordinarily, he’d take the peeping Teddy to his daughter’s room. Papa spent a great deal of time putting away the toys his children constantly scattered about in the many nooks and crannies of the penthouse. But he was not about to put on a robe and make the trek over to his daughter’s room. He was not going to risk waking up Keiko-chan, because then Daddy and Papa’s fun time would really be over.

Instead, the hawkeye settled for padding barefoot (and bare-assed) to the walk-in-closet and tossing the scopophiliac teddy onto the center island there. He closed the closet door for good measure before eagerly returning to his husband.

Kazunari was not one to make Shintarō wait, especially when the tsundere was naked and in their bed.

“Nuh-uh,” Kazunari tutted when he returned. “Put that away. No patients. We’re still on vacation,” he reminded his husband.

Shintarō kept a tablet in a childproof case on his night table where he could easily access medical charts should he get an emergency call in the middle of the night from the hospital or from a patient recovering at home. Kazunari had to sometimes remind his husband to put it away.

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“Now,” he said straddling the tsundere and making himself very comfortable on Shin-chan’s lap.

“Where were we?”

Midorima leaned forward and kissed his husband’s lips. It sent a shiver down Kazunari’s spine.

Yes, that was exactly where they had left off.

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**AN:** This fic is a continuation of the Maldives story arc. It takes place just before the start of *Dreamers*. That’s it for AYNIL. It started as tumblr prompts back in 2015 and it only took me till 2018 to rearrange and edit them into this fic. Thank you for reading it! I hope you enjoyed it.
Chapter End Notes


Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!