Nine Months

by WhyTheHandbasket

Summary

The trials and travails of pregnancy on the Miyuki-Sawamura household. What color's the nursery, and do we want to know the gender?

Important questions.
Domestic Fluff.
Lots of fluff.
MPREG, though it's very much a handwavey 'men can get pregnant' thing, not a science thing. At all.

Notes

Art is coming:)
I know some people don't like mpreg.
I honestly never thought I would write mpreg, until I realized the fandom was missing one particular kind of mpreg.
No secrets.
Adults.
Committed relationship.
Just domestic partners being domestic.

I hope you enjoy this.

See the end of the work for more notes.
In The Beginning

Zero Weeks

“Hey, Ei?” Kazuya buttoned up his shirt as he headed back into the bedroom, “Have you seen my —” His voice stuttered to a halt as his synapses imploded. “cufflinks…?”

Eijun continued to adjust his jacket, smoothing the lapels and making sure his tie was neatly tied, as he met Kazuya’s eyes in the mirror. He smiled, slow and knowing, at the man frozen in the doorway. “I put them on the dresser, Kaz.”

Done with his reflection, Eijun turned and stepped closer to Kazuya, reaching over to grab the requested item. Reaching out his hand, he pulled Kazuya out of the doorway, dropped the cufflinks in his hand and whispered in his ear in passing. “I’ll be in the living room. Don’t make me wait too long, ok?”

Kazuya’s hand closed around the jewelry. They’d been together for years, but Eijun still had the ability to floor him. He knew, the brat knew, exactly what he was doing. It wasn’t often Eijun went all out, but when he did, Kazuya was always taken by surprise.

Charcoal gray suit. White shirt, and a tie that was just a shade lighter than his golden eyes. Golden eyes that were currently made bigger, brighter, more, with the judicious application of eyeliner. Kazuya alternatively blessed and cursed the day Chris sat Eijun down in front of that makeup mirror. He also knew he had to step up his game.

Taking off the suit pants he’d been planning to wear, he pulled a suit out of the back of the closet. Kazuya didn’t know if Eijun even knew he had this, he hadn't the chance to wear it yet.

Kazuya was willing to admit that his fashion sense in high school had been tragic (what was even with that purple cap?), but he’d learned. Over the last year, as he’d transitioned into the front office and coaching, he’d found he had to dress in more than sweats all the time. The club had a consultant who came around every month to give advice, and everyone on staff had to see him at least once a quarter—Kazuya saw him every time. On his last visit, he had suggested Kazuya try a new style of suit, one that wouldn’t have been a good choice for him a year ago, but since he’d stopped playing he’d lost a decent bit of his leg muscles. Taking the advice, he’d ordered this suit, which was the first one Kazuya ever had bespoke; there was no way he could get the recommended fit off the rack.

It was a subtle pinstripe, midnight blue. The pants were cut slim, and the jacket much more fitted than anything he’d ever worn. He paired it with a light gray shirt and a tie in a slightly darker shade. Heading into the bathroom, he traded his glasses for contacts, and his hand hovered over the eyeliner. He left it alone and went for the styling products, spending a few minutes wrestling his hair into shape, and stepped back to see the results. Reconsidering, he reached into the drawer and took out some mascara, giving his lashes a quick swipe. Sliding blue topaz studs in his ears, he was ready.

Eijun was leaning against the bar when Kazuya came down the stairs, and he was glad he had something at his back to hold him up. Dear god, he was gorgeous.

“You look amazing, Kaz. That suit...where’d you get that suit? I know I haven’t seen it before.” Eijun stepped up close and slid a soft hand along Kazuya’s side. “And your eyes. I still haven’t decided if you should even be allowed out of the house without glasses covering them. I don’t want
to have to beat people off of you all night.”

“Same here. Didn’t we have that same discussion about you in eyeliner?” Kazuya cupped Eijun’s cheek, rubbing his thumb across his cheekbone. “You’re gorgeous, Eijun, and I don’t want to share you with anyone tonight. Maybe we should just stay in?” He asked, hopefully.

Eijun laughed. “Kazuya, you and I both know you want to show me off. And I want to show you off too, make all those people jealous because you’re mine.” He kissed Kazuya on the tip of the nose. Sobering, he straightened up and met Kazuya’s eyes. “Happy Anniversary, Kaz. We’ve been married five years. I can’t imagine my life with anyone else; you bring me so much love and joy. Thank you.”

“Hey, don’t cry, you’ll mess up your eyeliner, and that would be a shame,” Kazuya said gently. “I adore you, Eijun. You’re the thing I never knew I was missing, and every day with you is a gift. You are truly my light in this world, and I don’t know if I would have survived without you. Happy Fifth Anniversary. I hope there are many, many more.”

Kazuya leaned in, and their lips met in a brief kiss, affection and love and knowledge being communicated with one touch.

Eijun stepped back, and grinned, sunshine bright. “Come on, then. Let’s go out to dinner and have some fun. After that, well, you never know. You might just get lucky, Miyuki Kazuya!”

“I already am, Ei. The luckiest man alive.”

“How can you even say something like that with a straight face?”

“Because it’s true...”

“Miyuki Kazuya!”

They headed out the door and into the night, bickering and snarking and deeply in love.

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**Seven Weeks**

Kazuya stared in shock at the test stick as the second blue line darkened, forming a cross. Sitting down heavily on the toilet seat, he looked up at his partner standing in the doorway, who didn’t seem at all surprised.

“I...I’m pregnant?” he managed to stutter out, thoughts flitting through his head so fast he wasn’t able to grab ahold of any of them.

Eijun sighed, running a hand through his hair. “It appears so.” He valiantly (and wisely) refrained from following that up with ‘I told you so.’

“That’s impossible, Eijun! We’re both on the pill.” Kazuya shook his head in denial. Neither of them were ready to be parents, they were both still building their careers. “I can’t be pregnant.”

“The pill is only 90% effective in men, remember? That means it doesn’t always work.” Eijun explained carefully, trying to calm his nearly hysterical husband.
Kazuya shook his head vehemently, “But we both take it! And use condoms!”

Eijun stepped into the bathroom and squatted in front of him. “It only works to prevent pregnancy; it doesn’t do anything to sperm. And there have been a few times we didn’t use condoms.” He allowed a small smile to play on his face as he met Kazuya’s eyes, knowing they were both remembering one particularly memorable night about two months ago.

“I guess it could have been either one of us.” He pulled Kazuya to his feet and into his arms. “But it’s well known that the Sawamura sperm is beyond compare in terms of fertility and power!”

Kazuya pinched his side. “Oh my god, are you being serious right now?” He realized that Eijun’s idiocy had worked to break through the spiral of his thoughts and allow his mind to clear a little. Burying a smile of thanks in Eijun’s neck, he rubbed his side in apology.

Stepping away from Eijun, Kazuya threw the used test in the trash. “I guess we probably should talk about this.”

“We should, yes. But Kaz, you just found out. Maybe you need to take some time to think about things, think about your options.” Eijun took his hand and led him out of the bathroom.

Kazuya followed, shaking his head. “I’m...I mean...it’s not that big of a surprise, is it? I was hoping I wouldn’t be, this is a complication we hadn’t planned for, but there’s a reason I was willing to take the test.” He headed into the kitchen and grabbed a can of coffee. “If I hadn’t thought it might be true, I wouldn’t have peed on the stick, no matter how many tests you bought me.”

“That’s not how you were acting in the bathroom.” Eijun poured himself some water and joined Kazuya at the table.

“Well, just because it’s not a huge surprise doesn’t mean it’s not a shock, you know? All conversations we’ve had about kids have always been predicated on ‘sometime in the future.’ I guess the future’s here.” Kazuya chuckled wryly, trying to wrap his brain around what was going on. “I’d like to talk to you about it now. I think it would help me to get my thoughts in order. I’m also interested in what you have to say, you are the father.”

Eijun reached over and covered Kazuya’s still shaking hand. “Kaz. I’ll be happy to talk to you about whatever you’d like, but before we do that, let me make sure you understand this. Your body is your own. Whatever you decide, even if it’s different than what I say I want, is fine.” He squeezed once and sat back in his seat. “Now that’s out of the way, go ahead.”

Kazuya shot him a small smile. “Thanks, Ei. I...I don’t know how I feel, to be honest. I just. I know one thing, and that’s if I am pregnant—and I know the tests are usually accurate, but we should confirm—anyway, if I am pregnant, I want to keep the baby. I’m not sure what you think about being a parent right now, but I know myself enough to know I do want this child.” When Kazuya thought about the last week or so, he realized that as much as he’d been resistant to the idea of being pregnant, he had felt a niggling of anticipation that he’d done his best to ignore. “The timing might not be the best, and we don’t have a plan at this point, but I still want it.”

Eijun was unsurprised to find himself crying, he tended to leak whenever he got emotional. “You mean it? You sure you don’t need some time to think about it? I mean, I’d love to be a father and raise a child with you, I’d love you to keep the baby, but it’s a lot, Kaz. Putting your career on hold, plus it’s a huge responsibility. We can afford it, of course, but it’s going to throw a wrench in your trajectory.”

“I’m sure. We’ve dealt with other things we didn’t expect, gotten through hard times together. This is
going to be difficult, but it’s worth it, Ei. A baby. Our child.” Kazuya laid a hand over his still flat stomach, feeling oddly protective. “I can still work; I should be able to do so until the end.” He smirked. “Never thought I’d be glad to have my knees give and force me into coaching, but it’s going to make this much easier.”

Eijun got up from his chair and knelt in front of Kazuya. Sliding his arms around his neck, Eijun leaned in and touched their foreheads together. “Miyuki Kazuya, you are a wonder. I love you, you know that?”

“I love you too, Sawamura Eijun. We can do this together. Partners, right?”

“Partners to the end.” Eijun agreed.

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**Eight Weeks**

“Congratulations, you’re going to be parents.” Kanemaru entered the examining room as he flipped through a clipboard. “Looks like you’re about eight weeks along, according to your hormone levels, but we need to do an ultrasound to pin that down.” He sat in his chair and slid it over to face the couple. Kanemaru was their regular doctor; he specialized in Sports Medicine, and could see to most of their needs. “We can do the ultrasound here and figure out some of the details, but you’re going to have to go to an OB; I can only help you so much.”

“Yeah, we thought as much, but wanted to confirm the pregnancy before consulting one.” Kazuya slid onto the examining table as indicated. “We’re going to see if Haruichi will take me. I’m not high-risk, and I know that’s his specialty, but I’m hoping he has room.” Kanemaru just looked at Kazuya, deadpan.

“You really think he won’t have room for you?” He shook his head. “Idiot. Are the pregnancy hormones rotting your brain already?” He poked and prodded and took a few notes before he sent them down the hallway for the ultrasound.

Kazuya lay on the table, shirt off, sweatpants pulled down to expose his abdomen. The ultrasound tech was chatty and excited; she didn’t have many chances to do this kind of reading in a sports-based practice. She took her time and took lots of pictures and measurements, grinning the whole time. When she was done, she shooed them back down the hall to ‘Kanemaru-sensei’s’ office, where they sat in comfortable chairs facing his desk.

“After this, let’s go eat.” Kazuya suggested. “I want some pizza.”

Eijun slotted their fingers together. “Of course. Are you sure you want pizza? Last time—”

“Yes, I know! But that’s what I want.” Kazuya insisted, squeezing Eijun’s hand.

Eijun just gave him a look, and turned towards Kanemaru, who was seating himself at the desk.

“So, it looks like the original estimate is correct, and you’re about eight weeks along. This places your due date in mid-November. November 13th, to be precise, which puts the date of conception in mid-February. Probably between the 17th and the 21st.” Kanemaru smirked at them. “I know what
you two were up to on your anniversary.”

Kazuya grinned and Eijun groaned. “You’re an evil doctor; I don’t know why anyone even goes to you.”

“Sometimes, Eijun, it takes years to get payback. But then it’s so sweet.” He snorted as he returned to his paperwork. “Anyway, that’s the way it stands. You seem to be a perfectly healthy 29 year old, otherwise. I’ll send the files over to whoever you get for an OB, although I’d expect it to be Haruichi.” He stood, and so did they, shaking hands in farewell.

“Oh, wait!” He handed them a couple of photos. “Here’s a picture of the baby, it’s the best we got. There are several copies for your use. Also, Eijun.” Eijun came to a stop, quivering. He’d never gotten over his instinctive fear of Kanemaru and his brain. “I need to see you soon. Your shoulder needs to be run through some testing, I’m worried about it. We may have to discuss options soon. Make an appointment for next month on your way out, ok?”

“Yes, Kanemaru-sensei!” Eijun nearly stood at attention as Kazuya snorted and smacked him on the back of his head.

“Let’s go, idiot.” Kazuya guided Eijun out of the office with a hand in the small of his back.

Eijun pulled to a stop in front of their favorite Italian restaurant. “You’re sure this is what you want?” He asked dubiously.

“Yes! How many times do I have to say it? Yes. I. Want. Pizza.” Kazuya climbed out of the car, slammed the door and headed towards the restaurant, barely stopping to wait for Eijun to catch up.

Eijun opened the door for his husband, and Kazuya stepped through, into the smell of tomato sauce and cheese. Joining him, Eijun laid a hand on his arm.

“Are you ok?”

“Yes! I’m fine.” Kazuya jerked away from his touch and took a step forward. Taking a breath of the aroma, he turned back towards the door. “No, I’m not. Can we get out of here?” Eijun nodded and led Kazuya outside into the fresh air, where he watched carefully as the color returned to his face.

“I want some pizza, but I just can’t handle the smell.” He glared at Eijun. “I hate this. I really hate my life right now.” Turning away, he stomped back to the car, climbing in and slamming the door. Again.

Eijun was smart enough not to mention the time earlier that week this exact thing had happened, but he was not willing to be a doormat for Kazuya’s hormones.

“How about Shino’s? They were fine last week.” He asked evenly as he pulled out of the parking lot.

“Whatever.” Miyuki pouted, clearly still upset about the pizza. “But nothing from there sounds good.” He stared out the window of the car, disconsolate.

“I understand, really. Your hormones are doing crazy things, and I get it. But seriously, if you keep acting like a hormonal teenager, I will treat you like one. I love you, and I want you to be happy and comfortable, and will do whatever I can to ensure this. But I won’t be your punching bag, Kaz.”
“I know! I’m sorry, but I ache and I’m always tired and I’m sick of throwing up Every. Single. Morning. And having no control over my emotions.” Kazuya wiped at his eyes. “Why am I even crying right now? All I want is some pizza. I can’t even have that.” He crossed his arms as the tears rolled down his cheeks.

Eijun’s heart melted and he pulled over into the nearest parking lot. Reaching across the seat, he pulled Kazuya into his arms, resting his husband’s head on his shoulder. “I know.” He rubbed comforting circles on his back. “It will be alright. I’m sorry about the pizza. Things should get better soon, though. Once you hit your second trimester, the hormones will even out. I’m sorry for getting upset with you.”

“No, no.” Kazuya sniffled into his shoulder. “You’re right. I am acting like a brat, and I’m sorry. I don’t know what to do to stop it, though.”

“We just have to ride it out, Kaz. I’ll be here for you, I promise. I’m not going anywhere. Together we can do this. Right, partner?” Eijun planted a kiss in Kazuya’s forehead.

Kazuya chucked wetly. “Right. Partners to the end. Or until you drown me in frustration.”

“Never...no, probably not going to happen!” Eijun smiled back at him. “Is Shino’s ok? Or do you want to go somewhere else?”

“Shino’s is fine.” Kazuya sat up and wiped his face, smiling a genuine smile. “We have some things to talk about.”

“We do.” Eijun agreed as he pulled the car out into traffic.

Seated at their usual table at Shino’s, Kazuya and Eijun ordered dinner. Kazuya had pretty much figured out what he could and couldn’t eat by this point, although for him, it was more about smells than the actual food. He couldn’t handle strong smells without getting nauseous. After ordering, Eijun pulled the photos they’d gotten out of his bag.

“Ok, I think he said this peanut looking thing is the baby.” Eijun scooted over closer to Kazuya so they could look at them together.

“It’s so tiny.” Kazuya was awed by the image. “That’s our baby?” He felt his eyes well up as Eijun handed him a tissue.

“You’re getting as bad as me.” Eijun laughed, teary eyed. “Yeah, it’s our baby.”

“Ok, so this is really happening. Your parents—”

“My parents are going to be thrilled, Kaz. You know how they are. And Gramps will be as well, you know how he’s always hinting about great grandkids before he’s too senile to hold them.” Eijun buttered a cracker and handed it to Kazuya to nibble. “When should we tell them?”

“Well, the season’s just started, so we can’t get away for too long.” Kazuya shot Eijun a smile of thanks.

Eijun pulled out his phone. “We have games pretty much straight through the next few weeks, and I don’t want them learning about it from someone other than us.”

“Why don’t we invite them all to visit? Opening day is Sunday. Ask them to come for that.” Kazuya
ate the cracker slowly, settling his stomach.

“Good idea. There’s nothing going on at the farm, they should be able to get away for the long weekend. Let me text them now.” Eijun typed quickly, sending the message on its way.

“What about your father?” Eijun selected another cracker, and handed it to Kazuya.

Kazuya nibbled at the cracker. “He’ll be happy, I think. It’s hard to tell with him, sometimes.”

“We should take them all out to dinner to tell them.”

“That’s not a bad idea. I’d suggest that I could cook for us all, but…” Kazuya waved his hand at the pictures.

Eijun’s phone dinged. “Mom said they’d come down Friday. Can you see if your dad is available Friday or Saturday night? Friday, if possible. I don’t know if we can hide it from my mom for that long.”

Kazuya grimaced and pulled out his phone. He dialed a number and waited for an answer. “Hi Dad…”

Eijun responded to his parents as Kazuya spoke with his father.

“He’s free Friday evening. Where should we take them?”

“Where have we been that you’re ok? Maybe we should just bring them here. They’ll be fine with that.” Eijun noticed Kazuya looked a little uncomfortable, so he opened another package of crackers, handing one to him.

“That’s a good idea.” Kazuya took a bite of cracker.

Their food came, and they began to eat, still talking.

“Do you want to know the sex? If I’m remembering the things I read correctly, it’s during the fourth month that you can tell, so we have some time to decide.” Kazuya ate slowly, making sure the food agreed with him. “I’ll probably change my mind several times, but right now, I don’t want to know.”

“I’m fine with whichever, really.” Eijun said. “I can see arguments for both sides. Do you have a gender preference?”

“I’d love to have a girl, I think.” Kazuya smiled at the ultrasound pictures. “But a boy would be nice too, we could teach him baseball.”

“Girls can play too, Miyuki Kazuya. Don’t let Wakana hear you suggesting we only teach it if it’s a boy, she’ll kick your ass.”

“You’re right. I apologize, Peanut. You can play baseball whichever sex you are.” He patted his belly, still amazed that another person was growing inside him.

“Oh, man.” Eijun sighed. “We have to think of names. And make a nursery. And figure out how to change a diaper. And how to make a bottle. So much to learn, Kaz. How are we going to…?” Eijun banged his head on the table.

Kazuya laughed, and ran his fingers through Eijun’s hair. “Now you freak out on me, when it’s too late. We’ll figure it out. Together. I’m sure we’ll have plenty of help, maybe too much.”
Eijun sat up and looked, really looked, at Kazuya. “Are you still okay with all of this? It’s not too late to—”

“Yes.” Kazuya cut him off. “I’m happy about this. Some of the side effects suck, but overall, I’m glad. Please don’t worry about it, Ei.”

“Ok.” Eijun eyed him closely. “If you change your mind—”

“If I change my mind, you’ll be the first to know. I mean that literally, you’ll probably know before I do.” Kazuya laid a comforting hand on Eijun’s arm. “Really, though. I’m good. I love you for worrying, but you don’t have to.”

“Then there’s just one more thing to take care of.” Eijun took a picture of the ultrasound, and attached it to a text that said, “Do you have room for one more?”

“You think he’s going to know what you’re asking?”

“Haruichi? He’s going to know exactly what I’m asking. I’ll bet a week’s worth of dishes his first question is going to be ‘Which one of you?’”

“You’re on. I don’t think he’ll know what he’s looking at, that picture you took was teeny.”

Eijun’s phone rang, and he answered it on speaker.

“Good evening, Haruichi! You’re on speaker; both Kaz and I are here.”

Ever polite, Haruichi responded. “Good evening. It seems congratulations are in order. Which one of you is pregnant?”

“I am.” Kazuya spoke into the phone, glaring at his husband, who was sticking out his tongue and mouthing ‘toldja so, toldja so!’ “Very nice, Eijun. Are you five?”

“Congratulations, both of you. You’ll be wonderful parents.” They could hear him move away a little. “Looking at this picture, you’re about eight weeks, is that correct?”

“Yes, that’s what Kanemaru said. And it fits the timeline.”

“Good. You’re not far along. I’ll want to see you sometime this week, though, to get a baseline. Then once a month, provided all is well, until you’re seven months. After that, we’ll increase the frequency of your visits as you approach your due date. Pardon me for a second.” His voice was muffled as he spoke to someone in the background. “Ok, back. Sorry about that.”

“So you’ll be able to take me?” Kazuya asked.

They could hear both a smile and an edge to Haruichi’s voice as he replied. “Was there ever any doubt? I’d be quite...put out if you’d gone elsewhere.” They shivered, both of them glad that Haruichi used his powers for good.

“Thanks Haruichi.” Eijun said warmly. “We just didn’t want to impose; Kazuya’s not your usual high-risk patient.”

“You’re not imposing. I’m glad to do it.” The edge was gone, now all they could hear was the smile. “On a personal note, who knows about this?”

“Only Kanemaru and us, and now you. We’re telling the parents on Friday, and probably everyone else the week after, we’ve not discussed it.”
“Ok. I won’t tell anyone until you give me permission. I’ll see you later this week, Kazuya. My receptionist will be waiting for your call.”

“Thank you again, Haruichi.” Kazuya said.

“Not at all. My pleasure.” Haruichi hung up the phone.

Eijun put his phone away and slid his hand over to Kazuya’s. “Well that’s settled. You can call them in the morning and set up an appointment.”

Kazuya nodded as he leaned back, allowing the wait staff to clear the table. “I will. Do you want to come?”

“Of course I do, Kaz. Why wouldn’t I? You’re doing all the work, but Peanut’s mine too.” He smiled at the photo on the table, amused that they’d already given the baby a nickname. “Do you want dessert?”

“I do, but it’s probably not a good idea.” Kazuya pouted, just a little.

“If you’d like, we can stop at the store on the way home, pick up some ice cream. And pickles. Isn’t that what pregnant people crave?” Eijun signed the check and offered Kazuya his hand.

“Don’t start.” Kazuya took it and held on for a minute, he tended to get lightheaded when he stood up. “We can stop for ice cream, though. That sounds good.”

Eijun grinned and led him out of the restaurant.

The next day, after practice, Eijun poked his head into their bedroom, where Kazuya was reading some playbooks while he relaxed. “Hey! I’m going to run some errands and I’m stopping at the store. Do you want anything?”

“No, thanks, I think I’m good. We still have ice cream, right?” Eijun nodded. “Then I’m fine. I still need to call Haruichi’s office, I should do that now.”

“I would if I were you. Don’t want to delay; you might bring down the wrath of the Kominatos.” Eijun’s eyes went distant and dark for just a second before he regained his usual smile. “I’m off. I have my phone, call me if you need me or think of anything!”

“I will. Be careful!”

Hearing the door slam, Kazuya reached for his phone and called the doctor’s office.

“This is the Kominato Clinic, how may I help you?” The polite voice on the other end of the line answered.

“Hello. My name is Miyuki Kazuya and—”

“Oh, yes, we’ve been expecting your call, Miyuki-san. Kominato-sensei would like to see you this week. When are you available?”

“I can be there just about any time, when is he free? I know he’s busy.”

“He’s instructed me to put you in whenever you’re available. When would be the best time for you?”
“How about Friday morning? Does he have any time then? Without having to move anyone around? I don’t want to disrupt anyone’s schedule.”

“He does have an opening at 10:30. Would that work for you?”

“Yes, that’s fine.”

“Ok, we’ll see you then, Miyuki-san. Have a great day.” Kazuya hung up the phone and looked at it, surprised by the VIP treatment. Mentally shrugging, he put down his phone and returned to his playbooks until he drifted off.

He awoke to the feeling of fingers carding through his hair. Humming softly, he burrowed his head into Eijun’s hand, opening his eyes to see his husband kneeling beside the bed, watching him with a gentle smile.

“Hey, you.” Eijun eyed him closely. “How are you feeling? Hungry?”

“I am.” Kazuya yawned. “But if you’re cooking…”

“Hahaha.” Eijun deadpanned. “Come on. I have a surprise for you.” He stood as Kazuya sat up, offering him a hand. “I never thought I’d see the day the mighty Miyuki Kazuya would be taking naps. Peanut’s wearing you out, huh?”

“I guess? It’s strange, because it’s so tiny still.” Kazuya pulled himself upright and followed Eijun into the living room and to the sliding glass doors that led to the deck, where Eijun stopped.

“I was thinking.” Eijun gave Kazuya a warning glance, and he shut his mouth around his automatic response. Eijun resumed. “I was thinking. You’re having issues with smells, and I know you’ve been wanting pizza. It’s not the freshest way to have it, but maybe you could handle it outside, where the smell would be dispersed?” He slid open the door and stepped outside. “So I bought a pizza, thought we could try it.”

Kazuya followed him out the door and saw Eijun had set up the patio set they had stored away for the winter. On the table was a large pizza box, a couple of plates and glasses, and a dozen daffodils in a makeshift vase. “This looks...Eijun, thank you.” He turned to face his husband and pulled him into a hug. “Seriously, thank you. I know this is hard on you too. You’ve been amazing.”

Eijun pulled back a bit to look at Kazuya’s face. “You’re kidding, right? I’m not doing anything more than take care of you. You’d do the same for me. You’re carrying our child; you’re the one doing all the work. I’m just here to try to make it as easy as possible. Thank you, Miyuki Kazuya, for being willing to see this through.” He smiled a bit to lighten things up. “I’m just glad we found out what the mood swings and such were about. I was tempted to call in an exorcist. Or call Mei, make sure whatever bratty demon was inhabiting him was still in there.”

“Me too, Ei. I was as confused by them as you were.” Kazuya laughed as he sat down at the table. “I thought I had a brain tumor or something. Good thing it’s just Peanut.”

“You’re not wrong.” Eijun joined him, and opened the box. “It’s mild sausage and mushroom. I know you love the spicier stuff, but I thought it might be good to start a little tamer.”

“That actually sounds good right now.” Kazuya took a piece of pizza and sat there for a minute, getting his bearings. “I think...I think this will work. I don’t feel sick, the smell isn’t too strong.”

“Good.” Eijun sighed, relieved. “I didn’t want you to have to do without; I know those cravings are bad. I’m sorry we can’t eat it fresh and stringy from the restaurant, though.”
“I know, that’s the best.” Kazuya smiled, “And you know I don’t like delivery, we had too much of it during college. But if this is the only way, I’m in.” He picked up the piece and took a bite, Eijun watching him carefully. He swallowed and met Eijun’s gaze. “This is so good. Thank you.”

“I’m glad. Just take it easy, though. If you start to feel sick you should stop.”

“I know. I’ll stop after this piece and give things a chance to settle.” Kazuya continued to eat. In between bites, he told Eijun about the phone call with Haruichi’s office, and that reminded Eijun of their bet.

“You can’t hold me to that. I’m pregnant!” Kazuya protested.

“Pregnant isn’t crippled, as you keep telling me. You have dishes all week, Miyuki Kazuya.” Eijun crowed.

Kazuya shrugged, caught. “You’re right, it’s not.” He poked at the last bit of crust on his plate. “I do feel bad about the way I’ve been acting. I don’t realize it until afterwards, though; I’m not doing it on purpose.”

“I know, Kaz, and it’s ok.” Eijun soothed, “short of changing your name to Mei, what can we do?”

“I think...I think that might be a good idea.” Eijun shot him an incredulous look and he clarified, “Not changing my name, but you calling me Mei whenever I start to get unreasonable. It would be like a safe word? I know what it means, and it should help me think about whether what I’m doing is justified or not.”

“That’s fine with me, Kaz, but I don’t think you’re that bad. I’ll use it if I think you need it, though.”

“Good.” Kazuya took Eijun’s plate and stacked it with his, closing the pizza box. “This was a great idea, Ei. I wonder if I could eat it inside.”

“I think you may be ok, I just didn’t want to try it there first, in case it did bother you, because then you’d have no place to go to get away. We can try it later. You’ll be hungry again soon.”

“This is true; Peanut’s turned me into a ravenous beast.”

“Don’t blame the baby if you get fat.” Eijun teased, glad to see him feeling well.

“Eating for two here, remember?”

“Peanut’s the size of a...peanut, Kaz. How much food does it need?”

Kazuya looked chagrined. “Well, maybe, but my body’s doing other stuff it doesn’t—”

“I’m teasing.” Eijun said, laughing. “I don’t care if you get fat, you eat whatever you want.” He stood up and collected the pizza and the plates. “We should head in, it’s getting chilly out here, and you have dishes to wash.”
Friday morning, they headed to Haruichi’s office together. They hadn’t yet told management what was going on, but they knew they’d have to soon. Eijun was thinking about the amount of time he could take when the baby was born, when realization struck.

“Hey, Kaz? I just thought of something.”

“Yeah? What’s that?”

“Peanut’s going to be born in the offseason. I’ll be able to be home with you both for months!”

Kazuya looked at his husband in disbelief. “You just now thought about that?”

“Well, yes?” Eijun puffed out his cheeks with a huff. “Don’t tell me, you already had it all plotted out?”

“Of course I did. You don’t have to be back for training until February, so that’s three months or so. I need to be back earlier, so you may be on Peanut duty.”

“You can’t leave me home alone with an infant, Kaz! What if I break it? Remember the goldfish?”

Eijun protested, panicking as Kazuya cracked up.

“A baby isn’t a goldfish, Eijun; you won’t be able to kill it by not changing its water.” Kazuya got himself under control, still chuckling. “Plus, by that time you’ll have plenty of experience, you’ll be fine.”

Eijun was not convinced. “We’ll see. Maybe.” He pulled the car into the clinic parking lot. “Let’s go see Kominato-sensei.” Climbing out of the car, they went into the building.

Haruichi had followed his brother into medicine, but like in baseball, when it came to specialization,
he followed a slightly different path. They were both obstetricians, but Ryou focused on fertility. He’d gone into private practice when he finished school, and Haruichi had joined him as soon as he could. Many of their circle was surprised when Ryou invited Haruichi to join, they remembered his resentment when he followed him to Seido, but Eijun had predicted it. Kazuya had learned long ago that Eijun was oddly brilliant when reading motivations and predicting actions, so he quietly took the ‘join’ side of the betting pool, and won them several hundred dollars. All of which he’d promptly given to the charity Haruichi donated time to, without saying a word to the newly minted doctor.

“What are the odds we’ll see Ryou?” Eijun whispered as they entered the clinic, as if he was afraid that uttering the name would summon him.

Kazuya laughed at his idiot. “He’s probably seeing his own patients or in his office. He’s not going to be—” He trailed off as he reached the receptionist desk and saw Ryou leaning over the shoulder of one of the techs, looking at a computer screen.

Stepping up to the receptionist who was watching him curiously, Kazuya signed the log-in sheet. “Good Morning. We have a 10:30 appointment with Haruichi-sensei.”

Eijun had been watching Ryou closely, and knew he was aware they were there. He decided to make things as easy as possible and get the ball rolling. “Hello, Oniisan-sensei.” He saw the corners of Ryou’s mouth twitch up as he turned, and relaxed. Everything was going to be fine.

“Eijun, Kazuya. It’s good to see you. You’re here to see Haruichi? I assume congratulations are in order.” He stepped up to the counter and looked them over. “How are you feeling so far, Eijun?”

“I’m fine, a little nervous, but fine.” Beside him, Kazuya started to laugh.

“You might want to ask me that question.”

Ryou turned his gaze to Kazuya, consideringly. “Unexpected. How are you feeling, Kazuya?”

“Moody, nauseous, tired all the time.”

“Nothing unusual, good.” He collected the printouts he’d clearly been waiting for. “Well, I’ve got some things to take care of, so I’ll see you later. Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone.” Ryou waved over his shoulder as he walked out of the office.

“Please take a seat, Kominato-sensei will be with you in a few minutes.”

They moved to the waiting room and sat, thumbing through magazines while they waited, until a nurse called them to the back. He led them into an examining room and took the usual measurements before leaving them there with a “Please remove your shirt, and put this robe on. Kominato-sensei will be right here with you.” He left, shutting the door behind himself.

Kazuya stripped and put on the robe, climbing onto the table.

“You doing ok?” Eijun moved to the chair closest to Kazuya, placing his hand on his knee.

“I’m good.” Kazuya laced their fingers together. “I was just thinking about when to tell the others. We’ll need to speak to management soon, but also the Seido bunch. If they don’t find out from us, we’ll never hear the end of it.”

“You’re not wrong. God, they’ll make us miserable. The next OB meeting is next Friday; do you want to go to that? Make an announcement there?” The Seido alumni got together once a month for a night of drinking and general idiocy, and pretty much everyone in the area went if they could. The
nights were predictable. Drink and eat and brag, until someone inevitably challenged someone else, and a game of drunken baseball would happen. The teams were never the same, and it was always hilarious.

Nabe recorded them, claiming they’d come in handy one day. Eijun had his suspicions confirmed about that when there’d been an interesting, and admittedly amusing, video played during their wedding reception. Nabe didn’t use them maliciously, and it was fun to have records of the idiocy. Occasionally, one of them would find their way onto the internet, and that was the most fun of all. Several of the participants were pro players, and most of the rest had gone on to play college ball at least, so the public was always interested and they stalked Nabe’s channel for updates. He did a good job of blurring out the background, so no one could tell where they were, and they’d managed to keep them private, although they’d had a few close calls, moving locations as necessary.

“Good idea. I was thinking about skipping it, I can’t drink, and I don’t imagine watching a bunch of drunk idiots running around the baseball field would be amusing, but we should go.”

“You might be surprised at how much fun it can be.” Eijun laughed. He was frequently the designated driver; he didn’t much care for alcohol, so he made it his job to make sure everyone got home safely.

Haruichi walked in at that, and smiled at his friends. “Good Morning, Eijun, Kazuya. Glad to see you.”

“Hi, Haruichi.” Eijun greeted him, “How are you?”

“I’m well, thanks. Aniki said he saw you up front, you told him?”

“He assumed.” Kazuya chuckled. “He had the situation correct, but the...vessel wrong? He thought Eijun was pregnant.”

“Oh, yes. I can see why he might think that.”

“Wait.” Eijun said, confused. “Why would he think that?”

Haruichi avoided the question by moving over to Kazuya. “Lie down, please, let me check you out.” Kazuya did so, and Haruichi measured, prodded and nodded to himself. He moved away to take notes and Kazuya sat up.

“Ok, let’s see. Your measurements are where they should be for eight weeks along, and I’ve checked out the ultrasounds Kanemaru sent over, so we don’t need to repeat that. Did you say you know the date of conception?”

“Yes.” Kazuya smirked. “February 18.”

Haruichi hid his smile as he turned to note that down, “Good to know. How are you feeling, having any problems?”

“Morning sickness, mood swings and tired all the time. And my back hurts. But other than that, nothing.”

“Ok, those things are all perfectly normal. Are you nauseous all day? Eating alright?”

“I can’t handle strong smells, they make me sick. Other than that, I only get nauseous when I haven’t eaten for a while. And I’m eating plenty, trust me.”
Eijun nodded emphatically. “He is. He really is.”

Kazuya rolled his eyes and smacked him.

Haruichi chucked at Eijun’s offended yelp, and continued. “The mood swings should even out in a month or so, you’ll still be more emotional, but it won’t be all over the place. You also should be getting plenty of rest, try to get completely off your feet for a half hour in the early afternoon, you should find that makes a world of difference.”

He pulled a printout off his clipboard and handed it to Kazuya. “Here are some books which might be helpful, and I suggest you sign up for a parenting class. They usually last three months, meeting weekly, so you’d want to start it sometime in your fifth month. You two also need to make some decisions, and they’re on that paper as well.” Haruichi rolled his chair a little closer. “I’m sure, Kazuya, that you’ve looked into all of your alternatives for childbirth, and it’s your decision on how you want to handle it, but you may want to discuss that with Eijun. The process is going to be the same, we have to do a C-section, but the methodology differs. None of this needs to be decided now, of course, but you should at least be aware of it, so you can revisit when you need to.”

He closed his notebook and stood up. “Overall, I think you have very little to worry about, and expect this to be a fairly typical pregnancy and delivery. If you have any questions or problems, please call me at any time. Kazuya, I’m going to send over a prescription for pregnancy vitamins, and some anti-nausea medication you can take if you need it.”

“Thank you, Haruichi-sensei.” Eijun stood as well, and Kazuya slipped his shirt back on.

“Not at all, it’s my pleasure. I’m glad you trust me to do this for you. As your doctor, I suggest the pair of you take the rest of the afternoon to think about the fun parts of this adventure you’re starting. Go shopping, look at cribs and clothes and strollers and all the neat baby stuff, enjoy the time with each other and the beginning of this journey. You’ll both be better for it. Try not to lose sight of that, of each other and the reason for all of this, while you’re making the more stressful decisions.” He opened the door, preparing to leave. “I’ll see you back here in a month. Are you going to the OB meeting Friday?”

“We’re planning to.” Kazuya stood up, sliding an arm around Eijun. “We thought that would be a good place to tell the team about Peanut.”

“Peanut?” Haruichi chuckled. “I’ve heard worse. You’re right, though, that’s a good idea. Get it out there all at once.”

“We’re going to have to tell some people first. Mochi will kill us if he doesn’t know ahead of time, especially because Ryou knows. Chris. Mei, because I don’t want to have to deal with his pouty face if we don’t tell him.” Kazuya ticked them off his fingers.

“Satoru, if he ever picks up his phone.” Eijun took over. “Wakana, I don’t think we could go back to Nagano if we didn’t tell her. I think that may be it?”

“Looks like you have your work cut out for you.” Haruichi opened the door, escorting them out. “Congratulations again, and good luck with the announcements. I’ll see you Friday.”

They said their goodbyes, made a follow-up appointment, and stepped out into the warm midday sun.

Eijun checked his watch. “It’s 11:30, the ‘rents are in at 4:00. Do you want to grab some lunch and follow the doctor’s orders?”
“I could eat,” Kazuya admitted with a grin, “and one should always follow the doctor’s orders, don’t you think? Although I’m sure we’ll be confused by so many of the things, since neither of us know anything about babies, it will be fun to look at toys and cribs and such. Maybe we can drag your mom out while she’s here, have her explain things to us.” He climbed into the car.

“You think we’ll have to drag her? Have you met my mother, you know, the one who likes you more than she likes me?” Eijun started the car and pulled into traffic. “She’ll be dragging us shopping. I’ll be surprised if she’s not sitting on the porch waiting for us to get home after practice tomorrow, dressed and ready to go.”

Kazuya agreed, “Mmmm. You’re right.” Kazuya turned in his seat to face Eijun. “On to the important question of the day. Are you ever going to let me drive again?”

“Yes. When things even out for you, ok? You scared me last time, Kaz, you almost passed out behind the wheel, and lied to me about how bad you were feeling.”

“That was before we knew I was—”

“No.” Eijun cut him off. “I need you to be safe, and I know you’re still not there yet. Plus, there’s the whole ‘lied to me’ bit.” Eijun fumed a little, still upset about what could have happened. “If I hadn’t come with you and seen what was happening, you could have gotten badly hurt, Kaz. I know you underplay how you’re feeling, and you have the tendency to minimize your pain, but I thought we’d gotten past the point of actively lying to me about it.” He was surprised he was still hurt by the lie, but they hadn’t talked about it.

“In my defense—” Kazuya started, and then deflated. “I don’t have a defense. I’m sorry, Eijun. I really didn’t think I felt that bad. It didn’t make any sense to me, so I dismissed it, and lied to you about it. I’m sorry. I never wanted to hurt you, I never meant to lie, I didn’t think it was important.”

“I understand. But Kaz, what would you do if the situation was reversed?” Eijun turned it back onto Kazuya.

“I...I’d be fine after I heard—” Kazuya broke off at Eijun’s glare. He chuckled sheepishly and admitted, “I’d probably be worse than you, and insist on driving everywhere until after you had the baby.”

“Then you understand my dilemma.” Eijun parked the car. “I want to be able to trust you, but you’re so bad about taking care of yourself that I don’t know if I can.”

“How about this. I promise to be as honest as I can about how I’m feeling.” Eijun shot him a glare, but Kazuya held up a hand and continued. “I know there’s wiggle room there, but I’m just not good at admitting to that kind of thing. There is a secondary condition. You get the final say. If you don’t believe me, or think I’m downplaying, you can override me. I won’t argue. Well, I’ll try not to argue too much. Fair?”

“Fair enough.” Eijun opened the car door. “Stay there; it’s been a while since you ate. I don’t want you to get dizzy.” He walked around to Kazuya’s side and opened the door for him, bowing deeply and offering his hand. “Allow me, Kazuya-sama. Your table awaits.”

Kazuya laughed, but took his hand and allowed him to help him out of the car.

Their trip to the baby store started out uneventfully.
The first department they came to was clothing, where Eijun picked up a dress off the rack. “Look at this. Kaz, would you look at how cute this is?”

“It’s so small, though. Maybe it’s for a preemie?” Kazuya looked at the tag. “12-18 months? Old? That’s not even for newborns?”

“Newborns are tiny, remember? They only weigh like…I dunno, five or six kg?”

“I know, it’s just weird to see how wee they are.” Kazuya wandered over to the next rack, where he found a sleeper. “Look at this, Ei. It has bears playing baseball all over it. It looks like pj’s, but again, so small.” Eijun came up behind him and rested his chin on Kazuya’s shoulder, wrapping his arms around his waist.

“We should get it.” Eijun suggested. “It’s a 3 month size, so it should fit Peanut at some point, right?”

“Yeah, let’s get it. The first thing we buy for the baby.” Kazuya agreed. He looked through the rack of sleepers. “There are too many. How do we even figure out which to get? One in each size?”

“I don’t know, Kaz. Let’s remember these questions to ask Mom tomorrow. She’ll know.”

“She’s going to hate all these questions.”

“You really think so?”

Kazuya had the grace to look sheepish. “No. She’s going to eat this up, isn’t she?”

“You know she is.” Eijun pulled him out of the clothes and to the furniture section. “Let’s look around here. We only need a crib, right? And a dresser?” He stopped as they entered the department. Kazuya gaped as he took in the rows of cribs. “Why are there so many?”

“I guess so people can get the style they want. And look, some of the cribs are the same, they just have different bedding.” Eijun pointed out. “That’s on display here as well, so people can see what it looks like.”

“Oh! Well, let’s look around.” That’s what they did, pointing out to each other cribs they liked, bedding they thought was cute. Until Eijun came to a dead stop and gripped Kazuya’s arm. “Look, Kaz. That bed set. It’s baseball. It has an animal baseball team. We have to get it. It’s perfect.”

Kazuya laughed at the awed look on his husband’s face. “Eijun, this is for Peanut, not for you. I don’t want everything to be baseball. What if it prefers ballet, or volleyball? Are you going to force Peanut to play baseball?”

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“Of course not, Miyuki Kazuya. But think about it. The crib stuff and everything before they can actually tell us what they like is for us.” He sighed. “But I do agree we should expose Peanut to a lot of things, so they can figure out what it is they like.” He clutched the sleeper to his chest. “But I’m still getting this.”

“Yes, yes. We’re still getting that.” Kazuya agreed.

The next section they wandered into was the diapers. Seeing all the varieties, sizes and types, they just looked at each other, shook their heads, and headed to whatever was next.

Which was bottles.
“Why are there so many nipples?” Kazuya asked in a whisper. “Don’t they all just need the same kind? I don’t get it.”

“Me either.” Eijun said, and pulled his bewildered husband down the next aisle.

This was the worst one yet. There were things that looked like they’d double as waterboarding devices, and other things which looked like miniature turkey basters. There was something called ‘Butt Paste’ and what looked like tiny torture devices. When they came to the leashes, they moved out of that section as quickly as they could, horrified looks on their faces.

“We’re not using any of that stuff on Peanut.” Kazuya laid a protective hand on his stomach.

Eijun nodded emphatically. “Don’t worry, Peanut.” He said to Kazuya’s belly, “We won’t let any of that hurt you.”

Moving a little quicker, they weren’t terribly surprised to see things that resembled nothing more than baby jails, and what they supposed were strollers and car seats that looked like you needed an engineering degree to operate. Finally coming to the toys, they let out a sigh of relief.

The first aisle was stuffed animals. Eijun pulled one off the shelf and stuck it in Kazuya’s face. “Look! It’s a tanuki! We need to get this, Kaz, it’s perfect.”

Kazuya pulled it out of his hands and stuck it back on the shelf. “That’s a raccoon, Eijun. Not a tanuki. And I can’t believe you remember, you haven’t called me that since high school.”

“The Sawamura family is known for its great memory! I have near-perfect recall of everything!”

“Oh, really? We should tell Kanemaru, I’m sure he’d be happy to hear you were faking the whole way through high school.”

“Miyuki Kazuya, you wouldn’t dare.” Kazuya just raised an eyebrow at him. “Ok, well, you would dare, but you better not. Remember, I know where you sleep.”

Kazuya shrugged, chuckling. “Fair enough.” He picked up a large teddy bear, and looked at the label. “This one says it’s safe for all ages.”

Eijun ran a hand through its fur. “It’s soft. Peanut will love it.”

“Sold, then.” Kazuya tucked it under his arm, and slid his other hand into Eijun’s. Together, they wandered the rest of the toy section, amazed at and amused by the variety of toys available. They avoided any aisles that appeared to be in any way problematic, and swung by the book section to find the books Haruichi had recommended. Here they ran into trouble again, but this time it was in a good way.

There were so many kids’ books. Kazuya wanted every single one of them. He moved from one to the next, running a gentle finger over this spine, paging through another, smiling softly all the while.

Eijun was entranced; he’d never seen him like this before. He was sure it was partially the pregnancy, hormones allowing Kazuya to show something he normally kept hidden, but he was so glad to see it. Any lingering doubts he had about whether or not Kazuya wanted this, was ready to be a parent, melted away, and Eijun felt tears well up in his eyes. He stepped up behind Kazuya and wrapped his arms around his waist, leaning his head on Kazuya’s. “I love you so much right now, Kaz.”

Kazuya leaned back into the hug, pulling Eijun’s arms tight around him. Eyes shining, never looking
away from the books, he whispered, “I want them all. Can we get them all?”

Eijun chuckled softly, “Not yet. We’ll get a few today, and more later, ok?”

“I don’t know if I ever told you, Ei.” Kazuya laced his fingers with Eijun’s, holding them tightly to him, “But when I was young, books, more than baseball even, were my world. I could read and forget about my mom being sick, about the crap at school, about everything except for the adventure I was currently immersed in. I think I was three when I learned to read. There’s a picture somewhere of me on my third birthday, and all my gifts were books, including a dictionary.”

Eijun buried his face in Kazuya’s shoulder, blinking back the tears for the lonely little boy. “I didn’t know that, Kaz. I’m sorry; it had to be so hard for you.”

“That’s what I don’t think you understand.” Kazuya turned to face him, speaking earnestly, “It wasn’t hard, because I read. Books were my friends when I didn’t have anything else, they never let me down, never walked away, were never mean or cruel. They stayed the same, I could revisit the same world over and over, and they’d still be there for me.”

Kazuya blinked back the threatening tears. “Ugh, I hate this crying stuff. How do you deal with it?”

“I think I’m just used to it.” Eijun slid a comforting thumb along Kazuya’s cheekbone. “I can’t say that I totally understand; I didn’t have the same experience when I was a kid. But I can say that I’m glad you had something that helped you when you needed it.” He smiled softly and continued, “But there was a time I desperately needed something like that, something that stayed, that wasn’t cruel even though many others were, someone who was there for me. And I found that in you. You’ll never know in how many ways you’ve saved me, Miyuki Kazuya, but I do, and I love you for each and every one of them.”

Eijun met Kazuya’s wondering gaze straight on, meaning every word. He, for once, didn’t tear up; he just spoke his truth clearly. Kazuya felt the tears running down his cheeks and ignored them, cupping Eijun’s cheek with his hand. “Oh, Ei. Haven’t you noticed? I don’t read much anymore. I don’t need to, I have you. I love you.” He leaned their foreheads together and chuckled wetly. “I can’t believe we’re doing this in the book aisle.”

Laughing along with Kazuya, Eijun gave him a short, soft kiss. “I can. It makes perfect sense to me.” He stepped back and gestured. “Which of these do you want to take home today?”

Kazuya stepped up and took a copy of ‘One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish’ and ‘The Very Hungry Caterpillar’ from the shelf. “These two, for starters.”

“Oh, cool.” Eijun looked through them curiously. “I remember these. I love Dr. Seuss.” He took Kazuya’s hand and they moved over to the adult books, picking out the recommended books. As they checked the list, Eijun got Kazuya’s attention. “Kaz.” He looked up inquiringly. “Peanut will never feel like that, like books are their only friends. I won’t allow it, I promise.” Eijun vowed.

“I know. I won’t either.”

They headed for the checkout line and then home, Kazuya to nap and Eijun to clean before his parents arrived.

Kazuya was still sleeping when Eijun’s phone dinged, telling him his parents were just a few minutes away. Looking at the clock, he saw it was 4:15; they’d made decent time. Heading to their bedroom, he knelt down beside the bed, watching Kazuya sleep. It was so odd to see him napping on purpose,
not because they’d played a hard game or were watching something boring on TV.

Eijun felt his heart swell with affection for this man, this person who he’d been in love with, been with for years. He also felt an unusual amount of joy, the prospect of them being parents thrilled him to his core. There was, however, a small bit of darkness he was going to have to deal with. He’d been as supportive as he could when speaking to Kazuya, and he knew it wasn’t his decision, but he also knew he’d have been devastated if Kazuya had decided not to carry the baby. He could never tell him, though, could never have put that pressure on Kazuya, but he honestly didn’t know how to deal with it by himself. He felt both guilty and confused by his reaction. He sighed deeply and swallowed it down, knowing he’d have to figure some way to come to terms with it, but right now, there were more important things to worry about.

He ran a gentle finger down Kazuya’s cheek, “Kaz.” Kazuya’s eyelids fluttered open, and Eijun watched his brain come on board. “My parents are only about ten minutes out.” Kazuya nodded and sat up, yawning sleepily.

“Ok, let me hop in the shower. Dinner’s at six, right?”

“Yes, thank goodness. I don’t know how long we’re going to be able to hide any of this from Mom.”

“You’re not wrong there, that woman’s scarily perceptive sometimes.” Kazuya pulled some clothes out of the dresser and headed towards the bathroom. “We may need to go clothes shopping soon. I can just wear sweats much of the time, but I should have some presentable clothing for work and such. My pants are getting a little tight already. Not too bad, it’s not uncomfortable yet, it’s just noticeable.”

“Sure, maybe we can go one day next week.” Eijun straightened the bed, neatening up the room. “I’ll go wait for the ’rents. Take your time.”

“Ok, I won’t be long.” Kazuya closed the door and Eijun heard the shower start.

He pattered around the living room, straightening up, when he realized they’d left the bag from the store in the front hallway. He ran to retrieve it when the doorbell rang. Panicking a bit, he shoved it into the front closet, making a mental note to tell Kazuya to be careful about opening it.

Eijun took a deep breath and opened the door, stepping back as his parents and grandfather entered. “Mom, Dad, Gramps. Welcome, it’s wonderful to see you.”

Sawamura Chika, Eijun’s mother, stepped forward and pulled him into a tight hug. “Eijun, you look good. It’s been too long, you need to visit more.”

“You’re right, Mom. We’ll try.” Eijun returned her hug, resting his head on hers. She was only as tall as his chin, but she was fierce and could keep all the Sawamura men in line with a look. Eijun moved over to his father and hugged him as well. Sawamura Eidan was a kind man, gruff and loving. “Hi, Dad. I missed you.”

“You’re right, Mom. We’ll try.” Eijun returned her hug, resting his head on hers. She was only as tall as his chin, but she was fierce and could keep all the Sawamura men in line with a look.

Eijun moved over to his father and hugged him as well. Sawamura Eidan was a kind man, gruff and loving. “Hi, Dad. I missed you.”

“Me too, Eijun. Me too. You ready for Sunday?” Eijun blanked for a second, and then remembered.

“Oh, yeah. Opening day. Yes, I’m as ready as I’m going to get.”

“My turn at the idiot!” Eijun’s grandfather exclaimed, pulling Eijun into a hug and squeezing hard. “I can’t believe you forgot about Opening day. Idiot.” Sawamura Eitkou had not lost his touch, physically or mentally, and he gave his grandson a cuff to the ear to remind him.
“Good to see you too, Gramps.” Eijun laughed as he ducked away.

“Where’s that handsome husband of yours?” Chika looked around the room, surprised Kazuya didn’t meet them at the door as well.

“He’s in the shower; he’ll be out in a minute. I hope you’re hungry, we have dinner reservations at six. Shino’s.”

“We’re starving. Don’t you remember? You told us about it a few days ago. First Opening day, now dinner. Eijun, is your memory going?” Chika teased.

“It can’t possibly be that, he was just bragging earlier that the Sawamuras were known for their excellent memory.” Kazuya snarked as he walked into the living room, straight into Chika’s arms. “Hi, Mom. Welcome, it’s lovely to see you.” He kissed her on the cheek and stepped back.

Chika laughed. “Hello, gorgeous. It’s great to see you too.” She smiled as Kazuya greeted the others, receiving the appropriate hugs and smacks for the occasion.

Formalities done, they helped them get their luggage in and into the guest rooms, where they left them to destress from the trip.

Closing the door to his grandfather’s room, Eijun whispered to Kazuya. “The bag of stuff we bought is in the front closet. Do you think we should move it?”

“I think it should be fine, we’re leaving in what, half an hour?”

“Yeah, ok. I’ll leave it then.” They moved down the hallway to the living room and sat on the couch.

“More importantly, Ei. Did you forget Opening day? Really?”

“Maybe.” Eijun answered petulantly. “Ok, yes. But there’s been something much more important occupying my mind, Kaz. You know that.”

“I know, I know.” Kazuya soothed. “I’m teasing; I just never thought anything would take your mind off of baseball for that long.”

“Is it any different for you?” Eijun wondered. “I mean, your brain’s always full of plays and stats. Haven’t you found that to be no longer the case?”

“You’re right, but it’s a little different for me, it’s happening to me.”

“That’s not entirely fair, Kaz. I may not be the one carrying the baby, but I’m as responsible as you are. It’s as big of a change for me as it is for you.”

“True, but still—” Kazuya deflated. “Nothing. This is a stupid argument. You’re right, Eijun. It has as much impact on you as it does me, and I should be glad you’re thinking about it, rather than just leaving it all for me to handle.” He turned towards Eijun and grabbed his hands. “Also. I need to say something right now. I might say it again, later, but I need to let you know now. Thank you. I appreciate all the things you’re doing for me. Not just the big things—the small things, things nobody else would notice. That I think you didn’t realize I noticed. The crackers when you think I’m nauseous, the steady hand when you know I’m dizzy, the fact that there’s always ice cream in the freezer, no matter how much of it I eat. I don’t always say something, but I always appreciate it. I love you, Eijun. Thank you, again.” He kissed Eijun’s cheek.

“I’m glad to do it, Kaz. It’s you that has to do the hard part, and I feel so bad for you sometimes, I
want to do *something* to help.” Eijun laid a gentle hand on Kazuya’s cheek. “I love you, Miyuki Kazuya, you’re the amazing one.”

They kissed, and the world fell back into order for them both.

They jumped apart when they heard the bedroom door close, and a few seconds later Chika emerged. “Don’t stop on my account, boys. I’ve seen you two in much more compromising positions.” She perched in the armchair near where Eijun was sitting.

“Oh my god, Mom!” Eijun turned red, while Kazuya just grinned, unrepentant. “What is it with people lately? First Kanemaru, now you.” Kazuya laughed at him, amused at how very embarrassed he could get, when he was *anything but* in private.

She turned to Kazuya, “So how’s my favorite son?” Ignoring Eijun’s protest, she continued, “We haven’t spoken much recently, you’ve been busy acclimating to the front office? How’s it going?”

“It’s fine, really. I’m mostly coaching, which is what I prefer. I’m not much of a front office person; I do my best work on the field. Luckily, my knees seem to be healing, so I shouldn’t have to have either of them replaced for a while. I may even be able to play to some extent. Never professionally, of course, but for teaching or coaching, I should be able to handle that amount of stress on them without further damage.”

“That’s great, good news all around. What about you, Eijun? You all right, ready for another season? How’s your shoulder, you mentioned Kanemaru-sensei, is everything alright?”

Eijun flailed for a second, and recovered. “I’m good, ready for the new year, yes. My contract’s up at the end of the season, so I’m getting my signing bonus this year. Kanemaru’s worried about my shoulder, it’s fine, but I don’t know if it’s well. It’s felt off for a while, and didn’t seem to heal right after the last injury.”

“Well, be careful, darling.” She patted his hand affectionately. “Don’t hurt yourself permanently; listen to your doctor, ok? I worry about you, you’re so focused on this game, I’m afraid you’ll do yourself damage if you’re not careful.”

Eijun met her worried gaze and smiled. He knew, for all the posturing about her favorite son, that she loved them both equally, and he adored her for it. She’d seen right through Kazuya’s mask the first time she met him, understood this teen who seemed to carry the weight of the team so effortlessly, and stepped up to give him the unconditional love and affection he’d been so desperately missing. Kazuya was *hers*, and he would stay that way no matter how he and Eijun ended up.

“I’ll be fine, Mom. I promise. I’m not going to do anything stupid.” Kazuya snickered and Eijun smacked his shoulder. “You know what I mean, Miyuki Kazuya.”

Chika laughed and rose to her feet. “It’s good to see some things never change.” She headed down the hallway, speaking over her shoulder, “I’ll roust your dad and grandpa, you two go on ahead, we’ll be right behind you.”

“Ok, we’ll see you there.” Kazuya agreed, as Eijun grabbed the keys and they headed out the door.

Eijun pulled into a spot at Shino’s a few minutes before six. Kazuya noticed his father’s car was already in the lot, and took a calming breath.

Turning the car off, Eijun sat for a minute, staring at the restaurant. He couldn’t believe how nervous he was about this, and he knew Kazuya had to be much worse. Eijun had no doubts at all about his parent’s reaction, but Kazuya’s father was harder to read. He hadn’t been happy when Kazuya
brought Eijun home, and although he seemed resigned to the situation and was unfailingly polite, he was always distant. Kazuya said that was the way he’d been for a very long time, and Eijun had no reason to doubt him, but sometimes he wondered if the man wouldn’t have been more accepting of someone else, someone female.

“You ready for this?” Eijun asked, squeezing Kazuya’s hand.

“As ready as I can be.” Kazuya responded, returning the squeeze. “When should we tell them?”

“They’re going to know something’s up, we haven’t had them together for dinner that wasn’t a holiday since we got married.” Eijun unbuckled his seatbelt. “I think we should get it done as soon as we’ve all got drinks.”

“Good plan. I’m so freaking nervous about this, I couldn’t possibly eat anyway. I wish Grandfather was here, he knew how to deal with Father.” Kazuya laughed bleakly. “Why do I even care what he thinks? He’s never cared about me.”

“I don’t think that’s completely true, Kaz. But I understand, and I’m just as nervous. I was just wondering if he’d have been happier if I was a girl.” Eijun brought Kazuya’s hand up and kissed the back of it. “But you know what? Fuck him if he can’t be happy for us, at least, even if he’s not happy for himself.”

“I, for one, am glad you’re a man, and I couldn’t love you more.” Kazuya let go of Eijun’s hand and swiped an affectionate finger over his jawline. “I can’t imagine my life being any other way. Let’s get this party started, shall we?”

They were escorted by the host to the table they’d reserved, where Kazuya’s father sat. Miyuki Norio was a less muscular version of Kazuya, with darker hair and eyes. He’d inherited his coloring and his myopia from his mom, but everything else was pure Miyuki. Kazuya held out his hand as they approached, and his father stood.

“Hello, Father. It’s great to see you, you look well.”

“Son. It’s nice of you to invite me out. Thank you.”

Kazuya moved around the table and sat opposite the position his father took. Eijun offered his hand as well, and Norio took it. “It’s wonderful to see you again, Miyuki-san. Thank you for accepting our invitation.” He bowed his head a little, politely.

“Sawamura-san. Thank you for inviting me.” Norio returned to his seat, and Eijun sat beside Kazuya, leaving room for his parents between Kazuya and his father, and his grandfather beside himself. “Are we expecting someone to join us? This table seems rather large.”

“Yes, Eijun’s parents and grandfather will be joining us as well. They’re up for Opening day, spending a long weekend before things get busy on the farm.” Kazuya ordered water for the table, needing something to drink. “Would you like to go to the game? I can get you good seats if you would.”

“No, thank you. I haven’t been to a game in years, and you’re not playing anymore, so I don’t know why that would change.” Norio poured himself a glass of water. “I suppose you’re still playing, Sawamura?”

“Yes, sir.” Eijun answered politely. “I am still the starting pitcher.”
“Well that’s good, what are you going to do when your shoulder goes, like Kazuya’s knees did? Do you have a plan?” He asked brusquely.

Eijun was amazed; this was the most the man had ever willingly spoken to him. “I don’t, yet. But I have some time, and some money saved so we’ll be fine if that happens.”

“Kazuya, what about—” Norio turned his attention to Kazuya just as the Sawamuras arrived, and the question was lost in the general greetings. They all got settled, with Norio surrounded by Sawamura male elders, and Chika next to Kazuya. Drink orders were placed, and the conversation was general and genial. Chika had never approved of the way Norio deserted Kazuya when he needed him most, but the men were good deflectors of her contempt.

Eventually, the drinks were on the table, and Kazuya grabbed Eijun’s hand and squeezed. It was time.

“Hey, everyone?” Eijun started. “We have something we need to tell you.”

All eyes were on the pair, curious and calculating. Kazuya took a deep breath and continued.

“We’re pregnant.”

Chapter End Notes

Well?
Comments and critiques welcome:)  
Let me know what you think!
"We’re pregnant."

There was a second of silence while the occupants of the table processed what Kazuya had just said, and then the Sawamuras gained their voices back.

"Congratulations, you two!" Eitkou smacked his grandson on the back.

He got a horrified look on his face and his son exclaimed, "Dad, don’t hit the pregnant person!” as they both turned to Chika, expecting her to give them hell.

Instead, she looked at the two sitting beside her and laughed. “I don’t think it matters if you hit Eijun, Gramps. He’s not the one that’s pregnant.”

The three men at the table looked at Kazuya in disbelief, as he sat, gripping Eijun’s hand, suddenly self-conscious. “She’s right. I’m pregnant.”

“Now, before we get any details—and believe me, you two, we’re going to want those details—I do believe there’s a matter of a debt to settle? You all need to pay up.” Chika smirked at those at the table as all three men reached for their wallets, each of them handing over a decent pile of money.

“I can’t believe you remembered that.” Norio grumbled as Kazuya watched his father, wide-eyed. “We were all drunk.”

“I wasn’t drunk at the time, you guys were.” Chika laughed at the disgruntled look on all the men’s faces. “You should know better than to bet against me.”

“Wait. Mom. You bet on which one of us would get pregnant first?” Eijun was shocked. “You all did?” He glanced at his grandfather, who managed to look both ashamed and irritated.
“Yes, we did. And it was only that wicked woman your father married who thought Kazuya would be first. We all thought it would be you.” Eitkou frowned.

“But why…” Eijun trailed off as he met Kazuya’s eyes, eyes that had something dancing behind them that generally spelled trouble for Eijun.

“Congratulations to you both.” Norio said somberly. “I’m sure you’ll both be wonderful parents.”

“Thank you, Dad.” Kazuya said to his father, barely able to believe he’d unbent that much.

Chika, who’d been busy counting, and then putting away her stash, turned to the boys. “So, details. When are you due, Kazuya?”

“Mid-November, I’m about eight weeks along.”

“And have you seen the doctor?” The interrogation continued until their dinners came.

Over food, their conversation became more general, and Eijun finally asked the question he’d been sitting on. “When did you guys bet on this? You haven’t been together except for holidays, and the only time I’ve seen any of you drunk at the same place was…our wedding reception? You bet on which of us was going to have a baby at the wedding reception? Really?” His voice rose a little as he became more agitated, and Kazuya laid a comforting hand on his arm. “I’m not even sure I know you people. Seriously. Give people a chance to live together before you start foisting babies onto them.”

“In our defense, Sawamura, you and Kazuya had been living together for years before you got married, and you’ve been married for five. So it’s not like we were betting on a short term thing.” Norio chimed in, the beer he’d been drinking making him garrulous.

“Plus, it’s not like we actually won any money.” Eitkou grumbled into his beer. “But it is about damn time you two had kids, I’m not getting any younger, you know? I want to hold my grandbabies while I still have sense to realize who they are.”

Eijun’s father broke out in a laugh. “So that’s why you forgot opening day. You’ve had other things on your mind. Not much of one for multi-tasking, huh?”

“I remember how you were when I got pregnant, Eidan.” Chika started sweetly.

“Hush, woman!” Eidan tried to stop her, to no avail.

Chika just laughed, “You went to work in your house slippers, if I recall correctly. And salted your coffee.”

“That could happen to anyone!”

“Three days in a row?” Eidan clapped his mouth shut, having no further argument to offer.

Point made, she turned to Kazuya and started talking to him about morning sickness and ginger tea, leaving Eijun to entertain the men.

“So, what do you think of your team’s chances this year?” Eidan asked Eijun, and the conversation moved on, Kazuya joining in for the analysis as they all relaxed and enjoyed themselves.

As dinner wound down, they started to talk about desserts, and Norio made his excuses and rose to leave. “Here, Kazuya.” He passed over some cash. “Take this for dinner.”
“No, Dad. It’s on us, we invited you.” Kazuya refused the money. “Are you sure you don’t want another drink or some dessert? We can make sure you get home fine if you’re not ok to drive.”

“No, no thanks. I have an early morning tomorrow, and I need to get to bed at a decent hour, or I would.” Norio stood to go. “Sawamura, can I speak to you for a minute?” He asked Eijun, who exchanged confused glances with Kazuya.

“Oh, of course.” Eijun stood and followed him out of the restaurant. “What can I do for you?”

“I’ve been thinking a lot recently.” He started, looking over the parking lot. “Ever since my father passed away, I’ve been thinking about a lot of things. I realize there are things I’ve done I now regret, but I can’t take them back. But maybe I can fix them, I’m not sure.” He turned to face Eijun directly. “But I need to try.”

Eijun’s eyes widened as he considered the implications of what he was hearing. “Most things can be fixed with some effort.” He encouraged.

“I hope that’s true.” He continued. “Some things have always been hard for me. I’ve never been an easy man to get along with, and I’ve allowed the past to make me harder. I know I’ve been less than welcoming to you, and that is one of the things I regret.” Eijun started and stared at him. “I can see, have known for years how happy you make my son, and for that I am grateful. I’d like, if you’d allow me, to call you Eijun and claim you as a son.”

Eijun didn’t answer for a second, processing what Norio had just said. “Yes. Of course, yes. I’d like that very much, Miyuki-san.” He said, bowing his head and smiling at the older man.

“That means you should call me Dad as well, Sa...Eijun.” Norio smiled briefly, a sharp upturn of the corners of his mouth that reminded Eijun very much of Kazuya.

“Yes, Dad.” Eijun repeated, with a smile.

“I should probably be going.” Norio turned towards his car. “Please tell Kazuya I’ll talk to him soon, and that I’m very proud of him. I’ve always been proud of him.”

Eijun considered the best answer to this man who seemed to be trying to fix things, stopping himself from his knee jerk ‘that’s a few decades late, don’t you think?’ reaction. “I will, but you should tell him yourself. He needs to hear it from you.”

“I know. I just thought it was easier to start small, and I know how big your heart is.” Norio waved as he walked away. “Take care of my future grandbaby as well as you take care of my son, and you’ll be a fantastic parent, Eijun.”

Eijun stood and watched him walk away, shock and happiness warring for dominance in his mind. He shook his head and went back to the table, where everyone looked at him questioningly.

“Are you ok?” Kazuya asked. “What did he do to you?”

“No, nothing. I’m fine, I’ll tell you later, ok?” Eijun smiled at Kazuya, trying to reassure him. “It wasn’t anything bad at all, I promise.”

Kazuya gave him a searching glance and nodded, turning back to the dessert conversation.

After dinner, they headed out, and Eijun had barely pulled out of the parking lot before Kazuya
turned to him. “So, what did Dad want?”

“I think we should talk about it at home, Kaz. It’s not bad, but I don’t want to talk about it while driving, ok?” Eijun reached for his hand, and laced their fingers together. “I need to keep my attention on the road.”

“Now you have me curious.” Kazuya watched the streetlights wash over the car as they drove, “Not even a hint?”

“I...I’m still processing some of it, Kaz. I’ll talk to you about it after we get home, I promise.”

Eijun was trying to figure out how to talk to Kazuya about it. He’d never known Norio to say anything like he had, and he was cautiously optimistic, willing to give him a chance. Thinking about Kazuya’s past, though, Eijun felt an unexpected surge of protectiveness; he did not want Kazuya damaged by his father any more than he already had been. If he didn’t know how important it was to Kazuya to have a good relationship with Norio, Eijun would cut him off without a second thought. Eijun was willing to stand back and let the situation play out only as long as it seemed to benefit Kazuya. That was his primary concern.

Once they arrived back at their house, Kazuya headed into the bedroom to change while Eijun made some tea. His mother was in the kitchen, and she held out her arms to him as soon as he walked in.

“Come here, baby.” She pulled him close. “Are you alright? You look stressed.” He nodded as he rested his head on her shoulder.

“I...I need to talk to Kazuya about his father, and I don’t quite know how to do it. It’s not bad, it’s possibly incredibly good, but I don’t want him doing Kaz any more damage.”

“Sawamura Eijun.” Chika pulled back and looked at him fiercely. “That’s not your call, now, is it? You want to protect that boy, but you need to trust him. The only thing you can do is tell him exactly what happened, and if he asks you for your opinion, give it to him. Let him do what he thinks is necessary, you just sit back and be there for him however you can.”

Eijun sighed. “Thanks, mom. I know that, I do, but it’s hard. He’s so vulnerable right now; his emotions are all over the place.”

“This may be true, but it doesn’t mean he’s lost his ability to think rationally. Would you have trusted him to be able to handle it if he wasn’t pregnant?”

“Maybe? It’s hard to say, I had never considered it before.”

“Just be careful, please. Follow his lead, and trust him to figure things out.”

“I will. Thank you for the reminder.” Eijun gave her a kiss on the cheek, and she took her cup of tea and went to join his father in the living room, where he was watching television. Eijun knew they wouldn’t be up much longer, they’d been traveling and were tired; his grandfather had already gone to bed.

Kazuya came into the kitchen just as the tea was done and Eijun handed him a mug, “Want to go sit outside? It’s a nice night.”

“Yeah, that sounds good.” Kazuya took his tea and they went outside to curl up together on the porch swing, with Eijun sitting sideways, Kazuya nestled against him, knees bent and feet resting on the swing. Eijun pushed off with his foot, and they swung gently as they sipped their tea.
“Let me know if the movement starts getting to you, and we’ll stop, ok?” Eijun ran his hand down Kazuya’s arm, lacing their fingers together.

“I will, thank you.” Kazuya smiled into his tea, “It is a great night to be outside. I’m glad you thought of it.”

“It’s nice to just sit for a bit, I think. We’ve been running and doing a lot recently with all the Peanut stuff.”

“I know.” Kazuya sighed, “And we’re not done. Mochi tomorrow?” They had a standing coffee/breakfast date with Mochi and Ryou every other Saturday morning.

“Yes. He’s the biggest one. Most of the others will be fine with a phone call or email, maybe. But Mochi, yeah, he needs to hear it from us.”

“The dinner went well.” Kazuya offered an opening. “I was floored by the bet, though. Who’d have thought my dad had that in him.”

“I know, right? You’d expect it from my family, but not from him. Tonight was a night of unexpected things.” Eijun walked through the offered door, bolstered by the talk with his mother. He sighed a little, playing with Kazuya’s fingers.

“So, my dad…” Kazuya prompted.

“I’m getting there.” Eijun scolded lightly. “Don’t nag. So, your father wanted to talk to me about some things.” He started and then stopped. “Before I tell you this, I need to tell you something else. I’m going to tell you exactly what was said, and you can do with the knowledge what you will. Whatever you decide, I’m behind you all the way in whatever way you want me to be.” He dropped a kiss in Kazuya’s hair and sighed a little.

“Ok, so. Your father said he’d been thinking a lot since your grandfather passed, and he realized he had some regrets. And he wanted to try to fix that.” Kazuya got still at the words, listening intently. “He said he’d always been a hard man, and things had made him harder, but he was hoping he could change.

“He then went on to tell me he regretted never being welcoming to me, and that he could see how happy I made you, and then he asked if he could call me Eijun and consider me his son.” Kazuya sat up at that and turned around to face Eijun, disbelief warring with hope in his eyes.

“I told him of course he could, and he told me to call him Dad. After that, he asked me to tell you he’s be contacting you soon and that he’s be a fantastic parent, Eijun.” Kazuya was stunned, and didn’t know how to react. He’d never known his father to open up at all, and for him to do this was almost impossible to believe.

“I don’t know what to say, Ei. I mean, it’s hard for me to imagine him saying that. If it wasn’t you, I probably wouldn’t believe it.” Kazuya shook his head, still not able to process the information. If this was true, if his father did care, had always cared, it would change so many things.

“Get back over here, and let’s talk.” Eijun plucked the cup out of Kazuya’s hand, laid them both on the porch, and pulled Kazuya back into his former position, leaning against him. He wrapped his
arms around him and snuggled in, resting his head on Kazuya’s. “Better. Now you just say what you’re thinking, whatever it is, and we’ll figure this out. You have the right to feel whatever it is you are feeling, and take whatever time you need.”

“Thank you.” Kazuya lifted one of Eijun’s hands and laid a kiss on it. “I appreciate you helping me work through this. I guess my feelings are mixed. I’m happy he’s actually reached out, and I never ever thought I’d hear him say he’s proud of me, nor that he considers you a son. But I’m also upset and hurt. Why didn’t he say something sooner? Why wasn’t I good enough at the time I needed him to be proud of me?” Eijun stroked his hair, soothing him. “I don’t know, Ei. I’ve always said you’re enough, and it’s true, but some part of me would like to have a good relationship with my dad. I still remember how it was between us before mom died, and I… I kinda want that back? Maybe I want it too much, though, and am not seeing clearly, maybe he just… had too much to drink and let the emotions of the evening get to him? I don’t know, Ei. I just don’t know. What do you think?”

“I think,” Eijun tightened his arms on Kazuya, feeling suddenly protective, “You should take a little time to work through it, maybe see if he makes an overture? I don’t want you to think things are going to be instantly changed and great, but I also don’t want you to wall yourself off from getting what you want. Cautiously optimistic? How about that?” He paused and gathered his thoughts, trying to make sure what he said helped and didn’t hurt. “Just remember, I’m here for you. I don’t want to see that man do any more damage to you. I do trust you to know how to take care of yourself, but it’s going to be hard to stand back and watch. Please forgive me if I overstep. It’s not because I don’t think you can handle it, it’s because I don’t think you should have to handle it alone.”

“I know I don’t.” Kazuya turned his head and smiled at Eijun. “There are lots of things I’m not sure of, but that is one I am. I know I don’t have to handle it alone. You’re always there for me, and I love you for it. Thank you.”

“That’s both my job and my joy, Kaz.” Eijun said gravely, resting his head on the back of the swing, foot still pushing them as they gently rocked.

Eijun yawned as he made his way out of the bedroom, still a little sleepy. Wandering into the kitchen, he found Kazuya and his mom sitting at the table chatting over a cup of tea.


He groaned in acknowledgement and walked over to the pot, listening to the conversation behind him with half an ear.

“How’s that tea? Is it helping?”

“Yes, my stomach’s not nearly as queasy. Thank you, Mom.”

Coffee made, Eijun sat down at the table. Taking a sip, he sighed and relaxed, opening his eyes all the way. “What tea is that?”

“It’s ginger; she told me about it at dinner last night, and they stopped on their way home to pick it up.”

“It was the only thing that helped me with my morning sickness when I was pregnant with you.”
Chika sipped at her own cup, “I thought it might help him as well.”

“That’s great! Thank you. Getting his stomach to settle enough for him to eat something when it’s upset because he hasn’t eaten anything for a while has been difficult.” Eijun slid his hand over Kazuya’s, lacing their fingers together.

“So, boys,” Chika queried, ‘What are your plans for the day?”

“I have practice, and before that we’re meeting Mochi for breakfast.” Eijun replied. “We can skip the breakfast if you want to do something.”

“No, no.” Chika waved him off. “We can entertain ourselves. Does he know about the baby?”

“Not yet, we’re planning on telling him this morning. We wanted to tell you first.” Kazuya admitted.

“I did want to see if you wanted to do something later.” Eijun stood up and took his, and Kazuya’s, mugs to the sink. “We went to the baby store yesterday and were really confused by some of the stuff we saw.” Chika laughed at the look on their faces. Eijun protested, “There are scary things there, Mom!”

She continued to chuckle, “I’m sure it looks that way to you. Neither of you have any experience with babies, right?”

“No, we’ve seen them, of course, and held a few.” Kazuya snorted as Eijun turned his glare onto his husband, “Ok, Kazuya’s held a few. I’m always afraid I’ll break them.”

“Good thing I came into a pile of money last night, since it looks like a trip to the baby store is in order. I can explain things, but you should probably read a book or two as well.”

“Oh! The bag!” Eijun remembered and went to retrieve it.

“We did buy a few things yesterday.” Kazuya explained, “Including the books Haruichi suggested.”

Eijun laid the bag on the table. “There were some things that caught our eye, that we knew we could use for Peanut.”

He pulled out the teddy bear, and handed it to his mom. “It said it was good for all ages. Are there stuffed animals that aren’t?”

“Yes, you generally want to make sure there’s nothing the baby can chew off and choke on, like buttons. At some point, babies stick everything in their mouths. Toy ratings tend to be conservative, so you can trust them. They’re always safety based, but there’s also an age-appropriateness factor built in as well. A game that would be technically safe for a baby wouldn’t be rated for the baby, because they wouldn’t understand.” Kazuya nodded, and Eijun looked thoughtful.

“That makes sense. That’s smart.” Eijun pulled out the sleeper. “This says three months. We figured it was an age thing and Peanut would fit it eventually.”

Chika took one look at it and smiled gently. “You boys and your baseball. Just couldn’t resist, huh? I can’t blame you, it’s darling.” She took it from him and looked it over closely. “Now this is a perfect piece of clothing for a baby. It has snaps up the front and the legs, so you can get to the diaper easily, and it just goes down to the ankles. Some of these have the feet covered, which isn’t bad, but it limits how long the baby can be and still fit. You just need to put socks on Peanut’s feet if it’s cold. I used to do that even when the pj’s had feet, because some of those feet things are itchy.” She folded it up and laid it on the table.
“Now about the size. That’s based mostly on weight, and babies aren’t uniform, so you can have some kids wearing a three months when they’re just a week or so old, and some when they’re four months.”

“How do we know what to get? We don’t know how big Peanut’s going to be.” Kazuya leaned forward, glad to able to speak to someone who would answer him without making him feel stupid.

“You just do you best. Few newborns are not going to fit into newborn size, at least at first.”


“No, no.” Chika chuckled. “Well, very few do; they’re generally somewhere between three and four.”


“Babies are surprisingly resilient.” Chika assured him, “You have to be careful, of course, but you’ll be fine.”

“We also got these.” Eijun pulled the pile of books out of the bag. “Haruichi recommended the adult ones, and Kazuya decided we’re starting Peanut’s library right away.”

“One Fish, Two Fish...Eijun, that was one of your favorite books when you were small, do you remember?”

“I remember liking it, but not really anything about it.”

“Oh, man. You used to make me read it to you all the time.” She caressed the front of the book. “Perfect choice, Kazuya.”

Kazuya smiled at her, “Thanks, I remember loving it as well.”

“Oh! I have an idea—would you like to have Eijun’s old books?” Chika offered. “I think they’re still packed away, I kept some of his things thinking I’d give them to someone who could use them, but forgot. I kept the books he didn’t destroy, and some of his clothes.”

Kazuya exchanged glances with Eijun, “We’d love that.”

“That’s great; I’ll get them together and send them to you.” Chika rose and went over to the sink to start on the dishes. “It’s nearly 9:00, what time are you meeting Mochi?”

“About 9:30, we should get going.” Eijun hugged his mother on the way out of the room. “Give me a few, Kaz, I’ll be right there.”

“Take your time, Ei, we’re fine.”

“Kazuya?” Chika turned to him, drying her hands on a towel. “I just want to say again how thrilled I am that you’re pregnant.” She sat back down in her chair and met his eyes. “I think a baby will be good for you, and you’re going to be a wonderful father. You have so much to give a child, and although the same would be true if Eijun was pregnant, for you to carry Peanut is going to make a world of difference for you. This is truly your child, and I think it’s going to expand the way you think about your family and your place in it.” Chika squeezed his hand. “You should know by now that we consider you our child, outside of any relationship you have with Eijun. If you need anything, please let us know. Even if you just need someone to talk to, feel free to call me.”
“Thanks, Mom. I will.” Kazuya continued, “I...this last week has been so busy, ever since we found out I was pregnant it seems like we haven’t had a chance to process anything. Plus it’s Opening Week and things are crazy with the team, and it’s just overwhelming. Things should die down after Sunday, though. At least I hope so.”

“It will; pregnancy is a bit of a rollercoaster as far as timing goes. You find out you’re pregnant, and suddenly you have a ton of things you have to do right now, find a doctor, tell people, figure out the nursery, pick a name, buy everything the baby’s ever going to need, and so on. But then you figure out you have half a year to do most of this and you relax, and the rest of the pregnancy is minor bumps rather than huge hills, time marked by milestones.” Chika smiled softly at the memory. “Until you realize you’re in your eighth month, and the nursery isn’t painted and the crib’s not put together, and you panic for a minute. When that happens, and it always happens that you panic about something in your eighth month, stop, grab Eijun, and drag him to whatever needs to be fixed and tell him to do so. It will give him something to do and keep him from hovering too much, and let you not worry about something that’s been bothering you.”

“That’s good advice. I’ll remember that.” Kazuya stood to join Eijun who was waiting in the doorway, dropping a kiss on Chika’s cheek as he passed. “Thank you.”

“Conspiring against me?” Eijun inquired as he kissed his mom as well.

“Always.” She said, reaching up to pat his cheek.

Eijun pulled into a space in front of the diner where they normally met Mochi and parked the car.

“You ready for this?” Eijun asked.

“This?” Kazuya unbuckled his seatbelt and opened his door, “This is going to be easy. I’m not looking forward to talking to management, that’s going to be tough.”

“If you say so, Kaz.” Eijun climbed out of the car and followed him to the door, Kazuya holding it open for him.

Once inside, they headed towards the corner table where Mochi and Ryou waited. Eijun and Kazuya slid into the booth across from Mochi and Ryou, as Eijun apologized.

“I’m sorry if you’ve been waiting long, my parents are in town for the season opener, and we got involved with talking to them.”

“It’s fine, how are they doing?” Ryou asked archly. “Are they happy and healthy?” Kazuya sighed internally, he knew Ryou was going to needle them until they said something, and decided to head him off at the pass.

The waiter approached the table before either of them could answer, and they ordered their usual breakfast.

“Yes, they’re fine; I would even say they’re overjoyed. There was something else we needed to talk to them about.” Kazuya said, feeling Eijun grab his hand under the table. “We’re pregnant.”

Mochi looked between them in shock, and a huge smile crossed his face. “Kyahahahaha! Congratulations, you idiots. Eijun, how are you feeling?”

Eijun rolled his eyes and looked at Kazuya who’d started to laugh. “This is going to be a thing, isn’t
“It.” he asked, irritated.

“I guess so.” Kazuya agreed, chortling at Eijun’s disgruntlement. Turning to a very confused Mochi and amused Ryou, he sobered enough to say, “You may want to ask me that question.”

“You? Why would I ask...oh!” Mochi stumbled to a stop. “Wait a minute. You’re the one who’s pregnant?”

“I don’t understand why everyone is so shocked by that?” Eijun pouted. “Why does everyone assume it’s me that’s pregnant?”

Mochi got over his shock long enough to give Eijun a pitying gaze. “Really? You don’t know?”

“No, I have no idea.”

“I don’t either, to be honest.” Kazuya agreed, “But it’s funny as hell. I hope it keeps happening, just to see Eijun’s face.” He laughed as Eijun elbowed him.

“I’m going to get you a t-shirt that says ‘It’s not him, it’s me’.” Eijun threatened.

Kazuya just laughed harder.

“And there you have it.” Mochi said. “He’s too big of a jerk to get pregnant.”

“How does that even make sense?” Eijun protested. “I’ve been thinking about this for days, and I can’t believe people are that superficial. Don’t any of you actually know him?”

Mochi leaned back in his seat and grinned. “This should be good. Please enlighten us, Eijun.”

Eijun looked at Kazuya, who’d stopped laughing and now had a soft smile on his face. He nodded, curious as well.

“Well, the first thing I thought of was that you assumed Kaz always topped. But that couldn’t be, you two of all people should understand that switching is a thing. So it wouldn’t be that.” Mochi nodded and Eijun continued. “So, then I thought it might be our ages. But there’s only six months between us, and it’s just luck of the calendar we were in different grades.” Mochi looked a little more interested, like this wasn’t something he’d have considered.

“Ok, fair enough. What else did you come up with?”

“The other thing was you thought Kaz was too big of a jerk to be the one to get pregnant, that you didn’t think he’d want to carry a baby, he wouldn’t want to put himself through that. Which is ridiculous.” Mochi’s eyes widened a little and he sat up, paying careful attention. “Kazuya’s more parental than I’ve ever been. Don’t you remember the way he took care of the pitchers at Seido? Satoru’s hands, my yips, Nori’s confidence? Or how he used to walk the first years to the bathroom to make sure they got there and back to the bus all right? He hid his injury from us all in order not to worry us. How is that not the most selfless thing? He still does that stuff. All the time. Sure he can be a sarcastic bastard, but that’s not what he is, that’s how he acts.” Eijun concluded, glaring at Mochi, daring him to disagree. Mochi just held up his hands in surrender, he knew he was beaten.

“And you wonder why I love him.” Kazuya smiled gently at Eijun and slipped their hands together. “To answer your question from earlier, Mochi. As I told Ryou yesterday, I’m sick in the morning, exhausted by mid-afternoon, my back aches and I’m prone to mood swings that make me look like I’m impersonating Mei.”
“Ok, that sounds...wait.” Mochi turned to glare at Ryou. “You knew?”

“What do you think Haruichi would do to them if they went to someone else? Of course I knew.” Ryou smiled briefly and Eijun grabbed Kazuya’s arm, quailing a bit. “But they wanted to tell you themselves, so I kept their secret. I only found out yesterday because I was in the reception area when they came in.”

“Oh, ok then.” Mochi subsided.

Their food came and everyone began eating, discussing the pregnancy and the upcoming season, exchanging news and gossip, falling back into the routine these mornings normally followed. Soon enough, they were all done eating and they realized practice was beginning soon. As they walked out of the restaurant together, Mochi stopped them.

“Hang on a second. I need to tell you something.” They turned to face him, curious. “I apologize for my earlier assumption, you're absolutely right, Eijun. There's no reason to think Kaz wouldn't be pregnant, other than a knee-jerk reaction based on preconceived notions. You two are going to be fabulous parents, and I’m happy for you. I can’t wait to be Uncle Mochi, and meet Peanut. Take care of yourselves, ok?”

“Thanks. Mochi.” Kazuya said as he dragged a slightly overwhelmed Eijun away and to the car.

They had practice, the last one before the season opener, and they shouldn’t be late.

Chapter End Notes

I'm probably going to get the next chapter done this week, but I'm unsure, I have company.
And I'm going away Saturday for some days, so I don't know what's exactly going to be posted when.

Let me know what you think! Do you think Eijun's right about Kazuya?
Eijun was still brooding after practice.

“It’s so ridiculous, I can’t even understand it.” He fumed as he drove, Kazuya quietly laughing in his seat. “Seriously. I’m not even sure if I’m more offended for me or for you. I guess I can understand people who don’t know us and make snap judgements, but not our friends.”

“You’re not wrong,” Kazuya agreed, “but instead of getting upset, why don’t we have some fun with it?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well...next time, you be the one to say ‘We’re pregnant’, and see if they think it’s me.”

Eijun thought about it. “You’re right; it’s always been you that’s said it.”

“Yeah. And if they think it’s you, you can act as confused as you used to, but this time force them to explain themselves.”

“Ohhh, yeah. Embarrass the hell out of them,” Eijun grinned. “Good plan!”

“I'll make it as tough as I can as well for them. Idiots. It'll be awesome.” The two snickered in unison, some things having not changed since their days at Seido. They still loved to conspire together against whomever they felt needed it.

“If the parents did it,” Eijun began, “do you think the team did too? Bet on which of us would get pregnant?” He didn’t have to define ‘team’, to them, that would always be Seido.

“I don’t doubt it.”
“Who do you think is going to win?”

“Let me think.” Kazuya tapped his fingers against his chin. “Haruichi, but I’d guess he didn’t bet. Nabe? Yeah, he’d take the bet. Chris would probably abstain, but I don’t know which way he’d fall. Rei, if they included her.”

“I think Satoru as well.” Eijun added, to Kazuya’s surprise.

“Really? Why?”

“He’s observant, he knows a lot of things that go on, he just doesn’t care enough to speak about them, especially if they don’t have to do with baseball.” Eijun turned onto their street. “He and Haruichi wouldn’t have made it as long as they did if he wasn’t a lot deeper than he looks.”

Kazuya considered. “That’s true; I don’t even quite know why they broke up. It seemed like they had a good thing going.”

“They did, and although they aren’t seeing each other much, they haven’t really broken up, more like they’ve put it on the back burner until they both get to the point that they can dedicate the time to a relationship. Neither of them is seeing anyone else.” Eijun pulled into their driveway and laughed. “I told you she’d be waiting.”

Kazuya looked over to see Chika sitting on the porch swing, fully dressed and ready to go. “She’s something else,” he sighed, “I do adore that woman.”

“Me too, Kaz. Me too.”

As the boys reached the porch, she stood up. “How was practice? It was a little short today?”

“Yeah, the coach just mainly wanted to go over the lineup for tomorrow, and run through a few things,” Eijun agreed, opening the door and setting his gear in the genkan.

“Where are the others?” Kazuya asked, noticing how silent the house was.

“They heard us talking about a baby store and hightailed it out as soon as they could, muttering something about chainsaws or some such.” Chika laughed. “I don’t know if they were more afraid of having to come with us or having to come with us and watch us spend the money they lost.”

“Let us dump our stuff and change, and we’ll be right with you, Mom.” Eijun headed back to the bedroom.

“Do you need to eat first, Kazuya?” Chika opened the refrigerator.

Kazuya smiled as he followed his husband down the hall. “No, thanks, we ate with Kuramochi, and I stole one of Raichi’s bananas at practice, so I should be good for a bit.”

Eijun poked his head out of the bedroom, “You stole one of Raichi’s bananas? Brave man.”

“Hey, pregnant person here. He’ll probably not notice, I’ll bring him some more tomorrow.” Kazuya laughed as he headed into the bathroom.

Shortly thereafter, they joined Chika and headed to the baby store. She grilled them on the way about what they’d seen the day before, and what they thought they had been looking at. She was amused at the idea of miniature instruments of torture, and wondered aloud if they really thought anyone wanted to torture their babies.
“Of course not, Mom,” Kazuya responded, “we’re just a little overwhelmed.”

“I’m sure you are, it’s fine. This should be fun.” She climbed out of the car and waited for her two boys to join her. “Now remember, you do have plenty of time. We don’t have to get everything you need now; it’s more a scouting trip. Consider it gathering information so you can make informed choices.”

“That makes sense. Lead on, Boss lady.”

Together they entered the store, following the path they’d followed the day before, and started in the clothing.

“Ok, so you have to understand. The cute and impractical stuff is usually up front here. I mean, look at how cute these dresses are. Are you going to find out the gender?” Chika asked.

“We hadn’t planned to,” Eijun offered, “we kind of want it to be a surprise.”

“At least for now,” Kazuya said, “We might change our minds, we have a few months.”

“That makes sense, I didn’t want to know when I was pregnant with Eijun, either,” Chika agreed. “Ok, let’s go back in here. Here is the more useful stuff, things you’ll have the baby wearing every day. In the winter it will be lots of sleepers, while when it’s warmer, there are onesies. So, you’ll probably be going through several of these a day, at least. It depends on how often you want to do laundry, but I’d plan on doing it twice a week, and have at least a dozen of the onesies, and close to that many sleepers and socks. Other than that, you’re good. Any cute clothes you have will be nice, and outerwear for when you take Peanut outside. Try to realize that you don’t have to bundle the baby up all the time, take your cues from how you’re feeling. Sometimes people put so many clothes on babies, sweaters and such that are unnecessary, that the babies look miserable. Any questions?”

Do we need a dozen of each size?” Kazuya picked up a package, squinting at the printing on the package.

“Not now, you don’t. Some babies don’t fit newborn size for more than a few weeks, while others take their time. I’d suggest if you want to get something today, you start with a couple more sleepers you like, and then wait a bit. You’ll want to go through what I send you before doing anything else, at least.” She moved them back towards the racks of pajamas. “You can get whatever you’d like, of course, but there’s really no rush. You have plenty of time.”

“We don’t even know where Peanuts going to sleep, so I think some of this should wait.” Eijun thumbed through the hangers. “But look at this one, Kaz. We should get this one.” He held up a sleeper that was covered in polar bears. “Isn’t it cute?”

“Are you planning to only dress Peanut in things that remind you of baseball?” Kazuya snarked, as he dropped the sleeper into the cart.

Eijun glared. “No, but it’s cute and you know it.”

“Never said it wasn’t.” Kazuya grinned, “Just asking about your future plans is all.”

“It’s our future plans, Miyuki Kazuya, and don’t forget it.” Eijun reminded him.

Kazuya bumped Eijun’s shoulder lightly. “I never have, Ei. I never will.” Eijun melted, leaning into Kazuya, who slid his arm around Eijun’s waist and pulled him closer.

“Ok, you two, you’re cute and all, but are you ready to move on?” Chika interrupted. The pair broke
apart, Eijun looking embarrassed, Kazuya unrepentant.

"Of course, Mom. Where next?" Kazuya turned the cart to follow her.

"Furniture." She led the way to that section, with the boys following her obediently.

"If you notice, all the cribs are basically the same, with differences in the aesthetic design. So, choose which you like. When you were babies one of the sides would drop for easy access, but that was a safety hazard, babies were getting stuck and hurt, so they changed the regulations. Many of these can be turned into toddler and full sized beds as the babies grow, which is nice. You don’t need a lot more than this. A dresser for their clothes, maybe a changing table. A rocking chair is nice as well. Other than that, not much as far as furniture goes." She led them through the department, pointing out the differences in the various pieces.

"So, the only thing you really need to decide is which style suits you best.” She moved through the department. “And bedding, after you figure out what you’re doing with the room. Of course, you could fall in love with a crib set and build your room decor around that.” She stopped by the crib with the baseball set they’d seen the day before. “This is darling. Did you see this?”

“We did, but we thought Peanut needed to be exposed to more than just baseball. Also, if Peanut’s a girl, this set may be a little too boyish, maybe.” Eijun stepped up beside her, smiling at the set.

Chika glared at him. “Sawamura Eijun, are you saying that if it’s a girl you’re not going to teach it to play baseball? Do I need to get Wakana involved?”

Kazuya laughed, “No, no. He threatened me with her the other day for the same thing. What he’s saying is that we don’t want to force Peanut into anything, and wouldn’t want to limit their experiences. We don’t care if they want to do ballet or paint or play football, they can follow their own path. We want them to be exposed to as much as they can.”

“Well, that’s admirable,” Chika commented, “but in reality, a crib set is most likely not going to be remembered. Offer Peanut all the experiences you can when they’re a little older, and you’ll see that they will find their own way. You both did.”

“That’s what I said!” Eijun smiled at Kazuya who rolled his eyes.

“I’m sure you’re right, but I don’t know that I want everything to be baseball.”

“That’s fine.” Eijun slid his hand into Kazuya’s. “We can do whatever you’d like.”

Kazuya stopped, pulling Eijun to a stop as well. “That one.” He pointed at a crib. “That’s the one I want. It’s perfect.”

Eijun looked where Kazuya indicated, and walked over to the crib to look at the details. There were animals and polka dots, but it was somehow not too busy, not overwhelming. “This one?” Eijun looked at Kazuya, who nodded. “That’s fine with me, it’s really cute.”

Kazuya let out a noise that sounded suspiciously like a squeal, and Eijun whipped his head around to see his husband schooling his face into a frown. “What?” Kazuya asked innocently. Eijun just smiled and shook his head, piling the bedding into the cart.

Chika looked over the set. “This is darling. Now all you have to do is figure out which crib you want, and what color to paint the room.”
They both looked closely at the quilt, and pointed at the same time. Eijun chose the baby blue, while Kazuya pointed at the light green. They looked at each other and glared a second, before they both laughed.

“We’ll figure that out later,” Kazuya said, and Eijun agreed.

“Ok, then. On to the section with the instruments of torture,” Chika chuckled, remembering how outraged they’d been. “I think I know what you’re talking about, but let’s see.”

They passed the diapers first. “Ok, here’s what you need to know right now about diapers. There are two kinds, disposable, and cloth. Cloth are nice because they can be easier on the baby’s bottom, and they are more eco-friendly. You can get a service, who will deliver diapers and take away the dirty ones as well. Disposable are good if you’re worried about leakage, cloth doesn’t hold as much, and if you’re on the go, so you don’t have to tote around dirty diapers. If you decide to go with cloth, I would suggest you look into a diaper service and make sure you have disposables for when you travel. You just look at the boxes for weight and age, and pick the one that matches.” She pointed out where the measurements were. “If you go with disposable, just be careful. Some babies have a reaction to certain ones, I know Eijun did.”

“Ok, well, that makes sense.” Kazuya glanced at his husband, who still looked puzzled. “What’s the matter, Ei?”

“Mom?” Eijun asked, “How do you hold the cloth diapers on?”

“When you were a baby, it was diaper pins, which are large safety pins,” she responded, “but now they have several different choices, and you don’t have to worry about sticking a pin into your fingers anymore.” If you decide on cloth diapers, you should look into your options.”

“Thanks, that’s what I wanted to know.” Eijun turned the cart down the next aisle, “Now what about bottles?”

Chika explained to them the different types of nipples, and how some babies did better with certain feeding systems. She recommended that they read their books and speak to whomever they choose for a pediatrician before deciding on which to use. “You’ll want to choose a pediatrician well before the baby is born. I’m sure your OB can recommend one. You’re seeing Haruichi, right?”

“Yes. I think he’d have killed us if we went anywhere else,” Kazuya replied.

“Literally.” Eijun shivered.

“Good, I’m sure he’s a great one. He’ll probably have a list of pediatricians you can pick from.”

“I think—” Kazuya started and then looked at Eijun who nodded. “—yes, we know who we’re going to ask.”

“Already? One of the Seido boys?” Eijun nodded again.

“Do I know him?”

Kazuya took this one, “I don’t think so. But I think he’s a good one.”

“That’s good, I’m glad.”
The next aisle was the beginning of the scary stuff.

“So, what did you see that you were curious about?”

Kazuya pointed to the things that they thought looked like waterboarding equipment.

“This?” She pulled one from the shelf. “This is a bathtub. You can’t just drop a baby into the tub, they can’t sit up and it’s too far for a person to bend over to be able to handle them safely. This you can set on the counter or a table and use. You can also use your kitchen sink if you want, you just have to keep a tight hold on Peanut. I know some parents also take the babies into the shower with them.”

“I never thought about bathing babies.” Kazuya inspected the selection closely. “So these all are for bath time?”

“Yes, they have a few different features; you’ll have to figure out which you want. Most of these are good for infants, when the baby can sit up you can use the regular tub as long as you’re careful.”

She walked further down the aisle and pulled something off its peg. “You were asking about these, right?”

“Yeah, they look like baby basters; do you put baby oil in them?”

Chika laughed, “No, no. They’re called nasal aspirators, and you use them when a baby gets a cold. They don’t know how to blow their nose yet, right? So you have to clean them out for them, you use this to suck out the mucus. Oh, don’t look so disgusted, when Peanut has a cold and is having a hard time breathing, you’ll be glad to have one of these.” She put it down and walked by the skeptical duo.

Eijun followed her and grabbed the next thing they thought was scary. “What’s this, then? It looks like a pastel colored instrument of torture.”

“Oh, now you’re just being silly. It looks exactly like what it is, a pair of nail clippers. Babies have teeny fingers, remember? So they need tiny clippers. You can’t cut a baby’s nails with regular clippers.”

Kazuya had the decency to look chagrined. “Of course that’s what that is. I think we were just overwhelmed by this time and unable to think rationally, or something. And I suppose ‘Butt Paste’ is something for the baby’s butt?”

“I’ve heard of it but it came out after my time,” Chika responded, “I do believe it’s for diaper rash.”

“That makes perfect sense.” Eijun took the next thing, the thing that sent them hurrying out of the aisle and into the toys. “And I suppose this isn’t a leash, either?”

“No, you’re right,” Chika told them, “That’s a leash. It’s for a child.”

“Wait.” Kazuya looked dismayed. “Why would we put Peanut on a leash?”

“Probably not for the reason you’re thinking,” Chika explained, “When kids hit about three or so, they like to take off. If you’re somewhere there are dangerous conditions or too many people, these can come in handy. Toddlers are fast, they can be gone before you know it.” She walked over and picked up a cute backpack shaped like a monkey. “This is better, I think. A backpack Peanut can put
toys in, but that has a leash so you can keep hold of them. And a front buckle so they can’t slip out.”

“That makes sense, I think? Although I’m not sure about putting a baby on a leash.” Eijun inspected the bag closely before he returned it to the shelf.

“Some people like them, some don’t. It all depends on if your kid’s a runner, too. Some stick close to their parents, others like to explore. You were a runner, Eijun, given the chance, you were gone. You also figured out how to get out of the stroller by yourself, so we gave that up and got one of these backpacks instead. Best thing ever, after having to chase you down one too many times.”

Kazuya laughed, “So you’ve always been a runner, huh?” He bumped shoulders with Eijun as his husband just shrugged. “Thank you for explaining this stuff, we couldn’t figure it out.”

“You’re welcome. We’ll figure out car seats and playpens later, I don’t want overload you with too much information.” Chika said as they entered the toy aisle.

They were looking at stuffed animals when Kazuya heard someone call his name. Looking up, he saw a familiar head of blonde hair, and nudged Eijun. “Looks like there’s another one we’re going to be able to mark off our list.”

Eijun looked up and saw Mei walking towards them, his habitual smirk on his face. Eijun exchanged glances with Kazuya, “Ready for this?”

“You know the plan,” Kazuya shot Eijun a grin. “Let’s have some fun.”

“Mei!” Kazuya stepped forward and held out his hand. “How are you?”

“I’m fine, Kazuya.” He looked at Eijun. “How are you, Eijun?”

“Good, thanks.” Eijun smiled, “Mei, this is my mom, Sawamura Chika. Mom, this is Narumiya Mei. I’m sure you’ve heard us mention him.”

Chika bowed her head. “Of course I have, it’s a pleasure to meet you Narumiya-san.”

“I think we may have met at their wedding, but it’s lovely to see you again. Please call me Mei. Everyone does.” Mei gave her his best ‘prince of Tokyo’ smile. He’d grown out of much of his bad behavior in high school, but he still was himself, and although they were good friends, he did cause both Kazuya and Eijun to roll their eyes with regularity.

“This isn’t a place we’d expect to see you, Mei,” Kazuya commented. “What brings you to the baby store?”

“My sister. You remember her? She’s having her third child, and Uncle Mei is expected to step up for her.” He rolled his eyes. “You know how it is with siblings...wait. You don’t have any sibs, neither of you. What are you doing here?”

Eijun and Kazuya shared a glance, and then Eijun faced Mei. “We’re pregnant.”

Mei let out a short bark of laughter, and looked at Kazuya, who just stared back at him. “Hang on. You’re serious?”

Kazuya nodded.

“Congratulations!” Mei smiled at them. “I’m going to be an uncle again!”
Kazuya snorted out a laugh, “Well, that’s one way to look at it.”

“Hey,” Mei’s eyes turned calculating as he looked at the pair. “So are you not playing at all this season, Eijun? Because that would make my life easier.”

“Me? As much as I live to smooth your way, I plan to play all the way through the season. Why shouldn’t I?” Eijun inquired with a grin.

Mei sputtered, “You are? Aren’t you worried about the baby? You could do some damage out there.”

“I’m sure Peanut will be fine, I don’t think I’ll be worrying about the baby when we’re playing.”

“You won’t?” Mei looked outraged, and turned to Kazuya, who was having a hard time keeping a straight face. “You’re just going to let him play? In his condition?”

“Well, it is his body.” Kazuya deadpanned.

“But you’re the father!”

“Technically, we’re both the father, but I see what you mean. Honestly, I’m not at all worried about the baby being harmed because Eijun continues to play.”

Mei continued to glare at them, dumfounded. “You do realize how hard you can get—wait a second.” His forehead creased as he thought. “You’re pregnant, and neither of you is worried about Eijun playing the whole—”

“No way.” He looked at Kazuya, pointing a finger at him. “No freaking way. You’re pregnant, Kazuya?”

“Guilty as charged.” Kazuya nodded, smirking.

“And you just let me assume…” Mei glared at both of them.

Kazuya laughed, “Well, why would you assume?”

“I don’t know, it just seems like you’re the dominant one of you two?” Mei started, and then stumbled to a stop, blushing. “And I don’t mean it like that; I just mean...you’re the one who runs the show on the field and stuff.”

“He’s got you pegged there, Kaz,” Eijun agreed, “You are very dictatorial on the field. Your team, your diamond.” Eijun turned to face Mei, “And there, it’s totally fine, I have no problems with it. But outside of that, we’re partners, equals.”

“He’s right.” Kazuya slid his hand over Eijun’s where it was resting against the shopping cart. “We are. But Mei, you’re not the only one who’s jumping to the conclusion that Ei’s the pregnant one, so we’ve been trying to figure out why that is.” He slanted a smirk to Eijun, who responded in kind. “And if we can have a little fun in the process, all the better.”

“Although I have to say you came up with one of the best reasons yet,” Eijun noted. “One that actually made sense.”

Mei preened a little at Eijun’s praise, and they both rolled their eyes. “Of course I did. I’m smarter than most, don’t you know?”

“Yes, yes,” Kazuya responded wryly, “you’ve told us that before.”
“I should be going; I need to get to my sister’s.” Mei bowed to Chika, “It was wonderful to see you again, Sawamura-san.”

“Thank you, Mei, you should come by next time I’m down,” Chika responded.

“I will. Kazuya, Eijun, congrats again. You’ll be great parents.” He patted them both on the shoulder and turned away, “And what child wouldn’t want an Uncle Mei?” He waved over his shoulder and walked down the aisle.

“Well, that just happened,” Kazuya said, laughing.

Eijun joined him. “Yes, yes it did. At least our list is getting shorter.”

“You’re not wrong; we only have Chris and Wakana left, right?”

“And Satoru. We can call him and Wakana tonight and tell them. We should see if CJT are free tomorrow after the game. We can get dinner or something,” Eijun suggested. Turning to his mom, he queried, “Mom? How long are you guys staying? You’re welcome as long as you’d like, of course.”

“Thank you, dear. We’re leaving as soon as the game is over, we’ll pack the car before we go to the stadium. We’ve got to get back to the farm, and we don’t want to be driving too late.” Chika stepped between them and wrapped an arm around each of their shoulders. “So, boys, had enough? We should probably head home soon. I’ll cook, Kazuya, so you can rest for a bit.”

“Yeah, I think that’s enough drama for one day,” Eijun started to push the cart towards the checkout, leaving Kazuya with Chika’s arm around his shoulders. “What do you want to make, Mom? Do we need to stop at the store?”

“Nope, I checked your kitchen earlier, you have everything I need. I thought about making a curry, a light one that shouldn’t upset your stomach too much, Kazuya. Would that be alright?”

Kazuya wrapped his arm around her waist. “That sounds good, Mom. I should be fine if it’s not too strong. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Anything for my grandbaby.”

“I can see how this is going to go.” Eijun groaned. “He’s already your favorite, and you’re just going to get worse, aren’t you.”

“Don’t be a hater, Sawamura Eijun,” Chika said as Kazuya laughed.

“Really, Mom?” Eijun rolled his eyes.

“And don’t do that, they’ll get stuck.”

“You’re not going to say anything?” Eijun glared at Kazuya, who held up his hands in surrender.

“What do you want me to do?” Kazuya chortled, “She’s your mother.”

“And yours too, Miyuki Kazuya,” Chika proclaimed, “Don’t ever forget that.”

They’d gotten to the checkout by this time, and Eijun began to unload the cart.

“I’m paying for this.” Chika was adamant, “The winnings from my bet should do nicely.”

Kazuya protested, “Mom, we can afford—”
“Oh, I know you fancy-dancy professional baseball players are raking in the bucks, but that’s not the point. I won this from your fathers and gramps, and I’m using it for the baby. That’s all there is to it.” She moved Eijun out of the way and did exactly as she said.

Neither one of them dared argue.

Later that evening, after Kazuya had a nap and they’d all eaten a dinner of curry with no complaints from Peanut, Eijun and Kazuya retreated to the porch to make some phone calls.

“First, Wakana. She’ll kill us if she finds out from anyone but us.” Eijun shivered at the thought.

“The wrath of Wakana, huh?” Kazuya asked. “Sounds like a horror movie.”

“You say that, but you don’t know,” Eijun found her number and dialed. “She’s not quite Kominato level, but close.” He turned on the speaker and waited for her to answer. After a few rings, she picked up.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Wakana! How are you?”

“Eijun! Hi! I’m well, thank you. Are we on speaker?”

“Yeah, Kazuya’s here as well.”

“Hi, Wakana, it’s good to hear your voice.” Kazuya greeted her.

“Hi, Kazuya! Nice to hear from you too.”

Eijun took a breath and took the plunge. “We called you because we have something to tell you.”

“Oohhh...is it good?”

“I think so. We’re pregnant.”

“Oh my god. That’s awesome!” They could hear her squeal through the phone. “Details, please. First of all, which of you is pregnant?”

“I am,” Kazuya spoke up. “Peanut’s due in mid-November.”

“Congratulations, Kazuya. You too, Ei! You’ll be great parents.”

“Thank you, ‘Kana. We’re happy about it.” Eijun leaned back on the swing and relaxed.

“Oh, that’s right; your parents came down this weekend. Did you tell them yet?”

Eijun grimaced, “Yeah, and we knew we’d better tell you before they got back…”

“You’re not wrong, Ei. If I’d heard it from them, it might have been ok, but I’d much rather hear it from you.” Eijun mouthed ‘See, I told you!’ to Kazuya who rolled his eyes and continued the conversation.

“So how are things in Nagano?”
The second phone call was a little different.

“Ok, Satoru next.” Eijun dialed, and the phone rang for a bit before he picked up.

“Hello, Eijun. How are you?”

“How did you...oh! Caller ID. Ok. Hi, Satoru. You’re on speaker, Kazuya’s here with me.”

“Hello, Miyuki-senpai.”

“Satoru, I’ve told you a million times to call me Kazuya.”

“Yes, Miyuki-senpai.”

“Really?” Kazuya huffed in frustration. “Anyway. We have something to tell you. We’re expecting a baby.”

“A baby? Miyuki-senpai, you’re pregnant?”

“Yes, he is.” Eijun stepped in for his husband. “Due in November.”

“That’s good. Congratulations, it will be a good thing for you both.”

“Thank you, Satoru. So what’s up in Hokkaido? When’s opening day for you?”

The last bit of business they had to attend to was done via text, and Chris confirmed that they were all free the following evening, and would love to join them for dinner after the game.

Their list taken care of, they were finally able to relax, curling up together in the swing like they had the night before. They snuggled together, Eijun gently rocking them with his foot, and just allowed themselves to be, no need to talk, just being together was what, was all they needed.

Eventually, though, Kazuya broke the silence. “We haven’t even spoken about the game tomorrow.”

“I know, it’s crazy. Normally, we’d both have analyzed it to death. It’s the first opening day without you, and I don’t...I miss having you at home plate. I know you’d be playing if you could, and I don’t want you to injure yourself anymore, but I miss you. We were a battery for so long, Kazuya.”

“We still are, Ei. Partners, remember? It doesn’t matter if I’m crouching behind the plate; I’m still with you every step of the way. No matter what the world throws at us, we can handle it together.”

“You’re right. Ok, catcher of mine, what do you have to say about tomorrow’s game?”

“Don’t fuck it up.”

“Thanks, jerk.”

“You’re welcome, always glad to be of service.”

“Ugh, why do I even...”

“Because you love me.”
“I can’t argue with that. Indeed I do.”

“That’s fortunate; coincidentally, I love you.”

“Well played, Kaz.”

“I do try. Anyway, about tomorrow…”

They talked into the night, covering plays and possibilities, snarking and laughing and loving.

Chapter End Notes

As always, let me know what you think!

I do have the crib set picked out, so if you want to see it, let me know:)
Nine Weeks

Eijun woke slowly, feeling someone watching him. He blinked his eyes open and saw Kazuya lying on his side, looking at him as he woke up, eyes soft.

“Morning, Ei.”

Eijun closed his eyes again and snuggled into Kazuya, burrowing his head into his chest. “Mmmm... comfy. Donwanna get up. Sleepy. You sleep too, Peanut’s still tired.”

Kazuya chuckled and wrapped Eijun in his arms, pulling him closer. “Peanut’s quiet this morning, thank goodness. Come here; let’s snuggle for a while. We have plenty of time.”

“Not sick this morning? I’m glad.” Eijun sleepily felt around behind himself, picking up the pack of crackers off the nightstand. He clumsily wacked Kazuya’s side with them, “Here, have some, just in case.”

“Don’t assault me with them, idiot.” Kazuya laughed as Eijun frowned up at him. “I’m fine. More importantly, it’s Opening Day.”

Eijun’s eyes widened in surprise, and he was suddenly awake. “It is, I’d forgotten.” He ran a finger up Kazuya’s side, causing him to shiver. “Wait. You’re pregnant, we can’t—”

“We don’t know what we can and can’t do,” Kazuya interrupted him, “But I’m sure some things are still allowed.” He brought his head down and whispered as he slotted their mouths together. “It’s tradition, right? We can’t skip out on tradition.”

They kissed, fires that were barely banked stirring back to life. Eijun moaned into Kazuya’s mouth, running his hands along his back, as Kazuya returned the favor. Breaking the kiss, Kazuya straddled Eijun. “Besides which, you’re the only one playing, so just let me...” He smirked as he nibbled his way lower, eliciting gasps and moans, moving down, down…

Toweling his hair as he left the bathroom, Kazuya strolled into the kitchen and sat at the table. He smiled at Eijun as he set a cup of ginger tea and some toast in front of him. “Thank you.” Kazuya grabbed his hand and pulled him down for a kiss. “Good Morning,” He murmured against his lips. “Ready for this?”
Eijun returned the kiss, “Always.” He stood up, walked over to the counter to grab his coffee, and joined Kazuya at the table, where Chika and Eidan were watching them with indulgent smiles.

“It’s going to be a great day for baseball.” Eidan said, looking out the window at the blue sky. “I don’t think it’s going to get very warm, but that’s good.”

Eijun heard his phone ring in the other room and left the table. “I’ll be right back.”

Picking up his phone, he answered. “Hello?”

“Eijun?” He heard the voice on the other end, surprised when he realized who it was.

“Yes, Miy...Dad?”

“I just called to wish you good luck today,” Norio said.

“Thank you, I appreciate it.”

Norio hesitated before he continued, “I was wondering...I know I turned you down the other day, but would it be possible for me to get a ticket? It doesn’t have to be anywhere special, and I don’t want to put you out, but I think...I think I’d like to attend the game.”

Eijun’s eyes widened as he processed what Norio was saying, and thought furiously. “Let me think for a second.” He remembered something they’d not had the heart to do, and spoke. “Of course there is. Your father’s seat is still in his name, we’ve never taken him off the list. It’s right next to my parents, too. You’re welcome to it; I’ll call the club and tell them you’re coming.”

Norio let out the breath he’d been holding. “Thank you, Eijun. I really appreciate it. I have one more favor to ask. Please don’t tell Kazuya I’m coming.” Eijun sucked in a breath, surprised. “I know it’s a lot to ask, and I promise I’m not going to duck out before I speak to him, I just...I want to talk to him directly.”

“I don’t like keeping things from him,” Eijun responded, not quite sure he could trust Norio to do as he’d said he would.

“I know, and I don’t like asking you this. Tell you what, you tell him if you feel like you should, but I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t. I’ll admit that you know him better, and you have his best interests at heart. I do too, but I don’t blame you if you’re leery, I haven’t been much of a father for him.”

“Alright. I’ll see, and if I think he needs to know, I’ll tell him. Otherwise you can contact him however you’d like.” Eijun ran a hand through his hair and plunged on, saying what he felt like he needed to. “With all due respect, my priority is Kazuya. He’s the most important thing in my life. I’m willing to let him take the lead in this, but if you hurt him, if it seems like you’re doing more damage than you did before, I will do everything in my power to ensure you will never get the chance again. You will not hurt my family, I won’t allow it.”

There was silence on the other end of the line, followed by a short chuckle. “I knew you were perfect for my son. Good for you, Eijun. Thank you for standing up for him, someone needs to.”

“I’m serious,” Eijun stressed. “He’s not going to be hurt again. If you can’t follow through with this thing, if you don’t think you’ll be able to become the father to him he’s been missing for so long, stop now. Do us all a favor, and just stop.”

“I get it. I don’t think you understand one thing, though, Eijun. Kazuya got his stubbornness from me. If I decide to do something, I do it. I know I let him down in many ways, but it wasn’t because I
didn’t care about him, no matter how it may have looked. I will change that, I’m determined to. Please continue to watch over him, though, he’s lucky to have you.”

“You have it backwards, I’m lucky to have him.”

“Maybe I do. Either way, I’m glad you found each other. I’m going to get off here; I’ll see you at the game. See you later, Eijun.”

“Bye, Dad. I hope to see you this afternoon.”

“You will.” With that, Norio hung up the phone, leaving Eijun staring at it, trying to figure out how to deal with what just happened. He knew he had to tell Kazuya something, but he did want to give Norio a chance to come through.

He walked back into the kitchen, where the others were all sitting around the table, chatting. Kazuya looked up and shot Eijun a look of inquiry. “Who was that?”

“You father.” Kazuya’s head swung around as he shot Eijun a look of disbelief. “I know, right? He just wanted to wish me luck in the game today.”

“You’re kidding,” Kazuya deadpanned.

Eijun grinned. “No, I’m not. Do you want me to show you the caller ID?”

“You’re not kidding.”

“I’m not.”

“That’s strange.” Kazuya shook his head. “Not bad, just strange.” He stood and carried his cup and plate to the sink. “I’m going to go get dressed. Eijun, we should leave in the next half hour or so.” He walked out of the kitchen, looking a little dazed.

“What’s going on with Norio?” Eidan asked, and Eijun told them all what had happened after the dinner, and the conversation he’d just had.

“I may have overstepped a bit, but I can’t allow him to hurt Kaz any more than he’s done already,” Eijun declared.

Chika smiled at him fondly. “I’m glad you said something. Norio needs to know there’s someone looking out for Kazuya, and that he needs to take this seriously.”

“I agree.” Eijun stepped away from the counter he was leaning on. “I’d better get ready, we should leave soon.” He headed out of the kitchen to change.

In the car on the way to the stadium, Eijun felt his nerves kick in.

“I can’t believe I’m nervous, Kaz. This is what? Our ninth year? Something like that. I haven’t been nervous about a normal game for a long time.” Eijun tapped his fingers against the steering wheel as he drove.

Kazuya frowned at him. “Are you going to be ok? What’s bothering you?”

“I’m sure I’ll be fine, it’ll disappear once I hit the field. I’m just a little shaky, and kinda nauseous.” Eijun laughed. “Oh. I know what it probably is—I didn’t eat this morning, I got distracted. I’ll grab
“Eijun,” Kazuya scolded, “you have to take better care of yourself. You made food for me, and didn’t eat yourself? What am I going to do with you?”

“Love me.” Eijun said as he slid his hand off the steering wheel and onto Kazuya’s thigh.

Kazuya slipped his hand in Eijun’s and squeezed. “Always.”

They changed for the game, and warm up began. As expected, Eijun’s nerves steadied as he went through the stretching and warm up routine, pitching to Kazuya’s replacement and running a few laps. Soon it was time for the game to begin, and Eijun ran to the locker room for the last minute briefing from the coaches. Kazuya was speaking quietly to the starting catcher, and he waved Eijun over when he saw him come in. “How are you feeling? Better?” Eijun nodded. Kazuya turned to the catcher. “How did he look, did you see any problems?”

“No, Miyuki, he looked good.” Takahashi affirmed.

“Ok, you two know this team, you’ve played them before. I’ll let you know if I see anything you don’t already know, but I think you’ll be fine.” Kazuya encouraged, trying hard to hide the twinge of jealousy that he wasn’t the one buckling on gear to go play. He laid a hand on his belly, and reminded himself that he wouldn’t have been able to play even if his knees were still good. Eijun read his thoughts in his face, and reached over to give his hand a quick squeeze in support and sympathy.

“We’re going to be fine, coach. Don’t worry about us; you need to worry about the rest of the bullpen.” Eijun laughed as he and Takahashi walked out of the room to join the lineup.

The game went as expected and they won easily. They were far ahead when Eijun was pulled out of the game at the end of the fourth inning, letting some of the less experienced pitchers play. He had been able to see his family in the stands from the mound, and somewhat to his surprise, next to them was Norio. He was glad he’d come, and was hopeful he’d say something to Kazuya after the game.

The last innings of the game saw Eijun in the dugout with his shoulder iced, sitting on the back bench beside Kazuya, who was watching the battery on the field carefully. He’d speak to them between innings with advice and information, and once or twice, he sent a runner in to tell them something he felt they needed to know during the inning. Being on the bench had tamped down his autocratic tendencies a bit, but he still considered the field his fiefdom, only now the catchers were also his agents, not just the pitchers. The bullpen both loved him and hated him for that, and he was totally fine with it.

During the eighth inning, the score was getting close, and Kazuya went out to the mound to speak to the pitcher. After he was done, he reflexively looked at the stands where his grandfather would have been sitting and was surprised to see his father looking at him, watching the game. Norio nodded to Kazuya, who nodded back, shocked.

Eijun watched Kazuya from the bench, saw exactly when he noticed his father, and watched him closely as he came back to the bench. Kazuya sought out Eijun, meeting his eyes as he sat next to his boy, reaching out to take the hand that laid between them, feeling the need for grounding.

“Eijun,” Kazuya sounded like he was in shock. “My father’s in the stands. Sitting in Grandfather’s seat.”
“I know.”

“Wait. What? You knew he was coming?”

“That was part of what he wanted to talk to me about this morning. He asked if I could get him a seat, and I remembered that Grandfather’s seat was still available, so I changed the name on the list.”

Eijun kept his fingers twined with Kazuya’s refusing to let go, waiting for Kazuya’s judgement.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“He asked me not to, but that’s not the main reason.” Eijun sighed as he watched the team play. “I didn’t tell you because I didn’t know if he would come, and I didn’t want you to get your hopes up or get hurt if he didn’t show.”

Kazuya huffed out the breath he’d been holding. “Well, damn. How am I supposed to get mad at you for that? Thank you for looking out for me.” He squeezed Eijun’s hand. “Now tell me everything you talked about.”

“I don’t know…” Eijun started, but was met by Kazuya’s glower. “Ok, ok. But try not to get too upset with me. Basically, I told him you were the most important person in my life, and if it looked like he hurt you again, I was going to do my damndest to make sure he never got near any of my family again. Oh, and if he wasn’t going to stick to what he said, to just stop now, rather than drag it out.”

Kazuya stared at him, processing the fact Eijun said something like that to his father; that wasn’t his usual behavior; he wasn’t one to be aggressive anywhere but on the diamond. Thinking about it, Kazuya realized it wasn’t aggression, Eijun was being protective. Which was exactly like him. He’d stood up to the senpai when they were giving Kazuya a hard time about dating Eijun, and he’d almost had to pull Eijun off of Mei after what he said during the game they played against Inashiro in Kazuya’s third year. Not to mention the way he lit into Mochi the other morning, and he was one of Eijun’s best friends.

“I love you, Sawamura Eijun.” Kazuya swiped his thumb over Eijun’s knuckles. “I’m so blessed to have you in my life. You’re amazing.”

“I beg to differ, as I told your father. I’m the lucky one. I’m just glad no one else realized how great you were and snapped you up before I could get to you.”

“I’d never been interested in anyone until you came along, Ei. I haven’t been interested in anyone else since, either. Odd, that.”

“We are literally sitting in the dugout in the view of multiple thousands of people, Kazuya. Don’t you dare make me cry.”

“As you wish.” Kazuya leaned over and kissed him on the cheek, in full view of the television cameras.

Eijun glared and turned bright red, doing a good impression of a teapot on the boil as he resisted smacking the chortling idiot sitting beside him. “Jerk,” he said as he leaned over and quickly returned the kiss.

“Sap.” Kazuya affirmed, bumping their shoulders together.
After the game, there were showers and interviews, as usual, and then they escaped the clubroom, headed towards the spot they’d normally meet up with their family, away from the crowds. As they walked around the corner, Eijun was glad to see Norio waiting with his family, chatting. Kazuya slotted his fingers with Eijun’s and squeezed a little, just enough to let Eijun know how unsure he was about all of this. Eijun squeezed back reassuringly, and shot him a quick smile.

“Good game!” Chika moved forward and hugged them both. “You played well, Eijun.”

“Yeah, not too many wild pitches,” Eitoku snarked. “Good thing you’ve got those under control.”

“Thanks, Gramps! It’s been a while since I’ve thrown one, though. Are you getting senile?” Eijun shot back, and ducked the slap he knew was coming.

“Eijun!” Eidan hid a laugh behind his hand. “Show some respect.”

Eijun grinned and bowed to his grandfather. “Sorry, Gramps.” Eitoku reached out his hand and ruffled Eijun’s hair.

“It’s ok, I deserved it.” He lightly smacked his son’s arm. “Don’t stop the boy from defending himself, idiot.”

“You played well, Eijun.” Norio stepped forward and joined the conversation. Kazuya’s eyes misted over a bit, that was the first time he’d heard his father call his husband by name.

“Thanks!” Eijun responded with a bow. “Thank you for coming.”

“Kazuya,” Norio turned to face his son. “I see you’re still running the field, even if you’re in the dugout. You have those catchers doing what you want as well, don’t you? They play like you would.”

“I...well. Yes.” Kazuya agreed, “But how do you know how I played? You’ve never been to any of my games.”

“Maybe not.” Norio shot his son a smirk. “That doesn’t mean I didn’t watch every one I could get my hands on.”

Kazuya blinked at his father in shock. His grandfather had always told him his father cared about him a lot more than Kazuya knew, but he’d always dismissed it as wishful thinking. Maybe he’d been right.

Norio broke the stunned silence, “Listen, I need to go soon. Kazuya, can I speak to you for a bit?”

Kazuya nodded, and followed his dad to one side of the hallway. Eijun stepped to follow, but his mom grabbed his arm and stopped him, shaking her head. “You have to let him handle it.”

“I know, but I don’t want to.” Eijun groused.

“I get that, but you need to.” Chika sympathized.

Eijun sighed. “You’re right. I’ve just got to be there to pick up whatever pieces he’s left in.”

“Don’t be so pessimistic. I spoke with him during the game; I think he means it.” Chika patted Eijun’s arm. “We should leave soon; when they’re done we’re going to head home.”
“Kazuya, thank you for being willing to talk to me,” Norio started. “There’s a lot I need to say to you, but we don’t have time to speak right now, and I’m…well, to be honest, some of it is hard for me to talk about. I want to, and I will, it’s just difficult.”

“I understand, Dad.” Kazuya was amazed he was speaking to him in anything other than an interrogatory tone, so that it was going to take a while to get it all out was fine. “I’m honestly just glad you’re speaking to me at all.”

Norio sighed. “I know I’ve been less than a father to you, and I’m truly sorry. But talk can be cheap, so I know I’m going to have to prove to you that I want to change things. Let’s just start with this, something Eijun told me I should tell you directly. Kazuya, I’m proud of you. I’ve always been proud of you, even when it didn’t seem like I cared. I do, and I have. You’ve grown into an amazing man, and you’re going to be a wonderful father.” He reached over and laid a hand on Kazuya’s shoulder, “Your mother would be so proud as well. I know she’d love Eijun too, he reminds me of her.”

“Thanks, Dad,” was all Kazuya was able to choke out; he was so floored.

“It’s all true, but I do need to go. I’ll call you later this week, ok?” Norio smiled as he turned away, stopping at the others on his way to his car.

“Eijun, really. Wonderful game. Thanks for the tickets. Can I pay you for them? I’d like to have them for the season, if possible.”

“No, no. The club provides them; you’re welcome to the seat for as long as you want it.”

“Ok, thank you.” He shook the elder Sawamura’s hands, clapped Eijun on the shoulder, and walked down the tunnel towards his car.

Kazuya rejoined them, and Chika hugged him. “We have to go, but I had a wonderful time. Congratulations again, and take care, ok? I’ll send that box soon.” Kazuya returned the hug, a little tighter than normal.

“Yeah, you two take care.” Eidan echoed his wife. “And take care of Peanut, too.” He hugged both of the boys.

Eitoku reached up and ruffled their hair. “Behave, boys. We’ll see you again soon.”

“Thank you for coming, be careful driving home!” Eijun told them as they, too, headed out the tunnel and to their car.

Eijun took one look at Kazuya and opened his arms. “Come here, Kaz.” He enfolded Kazuya, hugging him tightly as he snuggled his head into Eijun’s neck. Eijun felt the tears on his skin and rubbed his boy’s back as he got his emotions under control. “It’s alright, go ahead and cry. I know it’s overwhelming, don’t worry about it,” he encouraged Kazuya. “Wait a sec. He didn’t upset you, did he?” Kazuya shook his head and Eijun let out a sigh of relief. “Good, I didn’t think so, but I needed to make sure.”

Kazuya sniffed a few times and lifted his head. “No, it was good, it was just…nothing I’d ever expected to hear from him, and I don’t even know how to react.”

“Don’t try to hold it in, that’s not healthy,” Eijun suggested.

Kazuya chuckled. “How would you know? You’re not exactly the poster child for stoicism.”
“Pfffft. I am not.” Eijun agreed with a laugh. “But it can’t be good for you.” He rifled through his duffel bag and pulled out a tissue, handing it to Kazuya.

“Thanks.” Kazuya mopped up his face and smiled at Eijun, one of his honest smiles that always stole Eijun’s breath. “I’m so glad you’ve got my back. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“Backwards again, but we’ve already been over that once today. Do you want to talk about what your father told you?” Eijun queried softly, running a hand up Kazuya’s arm.

“I do,” Kazuya sighed. “He told me he was going to fix things, and then…” Kazuya caught his breath; still not quite sure he believed the turns his life had taken in the last month. “Then he told me he was proud of me, had always been proud of me. And my mom would have been proud, too.” His eyes welled up as Eijun rubbed his back, soothing him.

“Oh, wow. I know she would have, you’re amazing, Kazuya. Any mom would be proud of you.” Eijun continued to rub Kazuya’s back, waiting for whatever else he felt like sharing.

“He told me he knew he’d been a crappy dad, and wanted to stop. I...it wasn’t that I thought you were lying the other day, but I did wonder if maybe you were overly optimistic or had misinterpreted what he said. But I think he means it. He’s never said anything like that to me before.”

“I know he hasn’t. It’s about time, if you ask me.”

“He also...Ei, that’s the first time I remember him touching me since I was a kid. He laid his hand on my shoulder, and that was the first time. Since my mom died.”

“Wow, really?”

“Yeah, I didn’t realize it until he did it. And he’s watched all my games? I didn’t think he cared at all, Eijun, and now it turns out he does. I’m still a little stunned.”

“I can’t blame you; you’ve had an interesting couple of weeks, huh?” Eijun threw both of their bags across his shoulder and took Kazuya’s hand as they started to walk out of the stadium.

Kazuya sighed. “We both have, yeah. And we’re supposed to be meeting CJT in a half hour.”

“Do you still want to go? I can postpone if you’re not up to it.”

“No, no. I want something that’s going to go as I expect it for once.”

Slinging both his and Kazuya’s bags into the trunk, Eijun laughed. “We’re telling them about the baby. Which time that we told anyone else did it go as expected?”

“Haruichi went like you thought. I can prove it, I still have dishes.”

Eijun unlocked the car and climbed in. “Well, yeah, but that’s different. He’s an OB.”

“True.” Kazuya put on his seatbelt as Eijun started the car.

They were halfway to Shino’s when Kazuya remembered. “Oh, Ei? One more thing my father said. He said my mom would have loved you, you remind him a lot of her.” He slipped his fingers through Eijun’s. “I don’t remember much about her, I wish I did.”

“Me too, Kaz, I do too.”
Eijun pulled in to the lot and parked. He made Kazuya stay in the car until he could get around to
him, it had been a while since he’d eaten and his blood sugar tended to bomb, leaving him dizzy
when he stood up.

“I see Jun’s car, I guess they’re here.” Eijun commented as he opened Kazuya’s door.

Kazuya grinned. “They should be, we’re a few minutes late, and you know Chris.” Kazuya took the
proffered hand and stood, looking at the restaurant. “Maybe we should just rent a booth here; we’ve
been here so much recently.”

“You’re not wrong, Kaz.” Eijun chuckled, holding Kazuya’s elbow. He steadied him, and then
slipped his hand into Kazuya’s as they walked into the restaurant together.

Looking around, they saw Chris and Jun at a table and walked over. Chris saw them first and stood,
smiling.

“Chris!” Eijun smiled and hugged him, he was always so glad to see his former mentor. When
Kazuya and Eijun were in college, Eijun’s affection for Chris caused Kazuya some jealousy, but he
quickly realized he had nothing to fear, Eijun loved a lot of people, but he only loved Kazuya.

“Eijun, you’re looking well.” Chris returned his hug, and stepped back to greet Kazuya with a hug as
well. “Kazuya, you too. Good to see you.”

“What about me?” Jun grumbled, standing up and glowering at the pair.

“Jun! I haven’t seen you in a while.” Eijun went around the table and hugged him too.

“I missed you too, brat.” Jun ruffled his hair affectionately, and then turned to greet Kazuya.

“Where’s Tetsu?” Eijun asked after they’d all sat down opposite each other.

Chris looked out the window at the parking lot. “He had to work; he’ll be here as soon as he can.”

Tetsu was a bodyguard; he’d parlayed his experience herding a team and his physical capabilities
into a job where he protected those who needed it. He worked for an agency and was assigned
everyone from JPop Idols to people testifying against the Yakuza. It was a challenge, he enjoyed
some clients more than others, of course, but he didn’t regret taking the job.

They ordered drinks, and the conversation turned to the day’s game. “You looked good out there,
Eijun,” Chris said, “I’m glad. How’s your shoulder? I know you were having problems with it.”

“It’s...it’s ok,” Eijun sighed. “It’s not good, and Kanemaru-sensei wants me to get some tests run. I’m
honestly not sure how much more time I have.”

“Don’t let yourself be permanently injured for a game, idiot,” Jun spoke up. “You should quit before
it gets bad.”

“I will,” Eijun promised. “Thank you for your concern, I’m just waiting for advice from Shinji. If he
tells me to quit, I will.”

“Yes, he will.” Kazuya interjected. “I’ll be sure of it.”

“How are the knees, Kazuya?” Chris inquired. “I can see your influence in the bullpen already, by
the way. Now you’re ordering the catchers and the pitchers around?”

“Yes, he is. They don’t know if they want to nominate him for knighthood or strangle him in his
sleep. It’s fun to watch.”

“I think everyone who was at Seido with you can sympathize.” A voice spoke from beside the table. Looking up, they saw Tetsu dressed in a black suit, white shirt, and sunglasses. Sliding off his sunglasses, he slid into a chair at the end of the table and scooted his chair closer to Chris. “Eijun, Kazuya. Good to see you both.”

“You too, Tetsu.” Eijun spoke up. “You look very intimidating today, who was on the agenda?”

“Oh, just some popstar with more hair than brains. He wanted to go somewhere, but was afraid that he wouldn’t be noticed, so he hired us to stand around and look scary.” Tetsu snorted. “Idiot.”

Chris smiled and touched Tetsu’s shoulder lightly. “That idiot helps pay our bills, so be nice.” He turned back to Eijun. “So how are you two doing?”

Eijun looked at Kazuya, who nodded. “We’re good. Better than expected, surprisingly. One of the reasons we wanted to have dinner with you is because we have news we wanted to share.” He squeezed Kazuya’s hand; this announcement stuff wasn’t getting any easier. “We’re pregnant.”

The trio stopped and stared at them, and the table got silent.

The first one to recover was Tetsu. “Well congratulations! How are you feeling, Eijun?”

Right on the heels of that was Jun, “Good for you! How’s it so far, Kazuya?”

Everyone turned their eyes on Chris, who sat silently in his chair, observing both of them. “Hmm. Stereotypically, I’d expect it to be Eijun, but you two are anything but a stereotype. So it could easily be Kazuya.” He turned to Tetsu. “Why do you think it’s Eijun?”

Tetsu shrugged. “He seems like the one who’d get pregnant? He’s the more emotional of the two, and he seems like he’d love to have kids.”

“So you went with the stereotypical. Unlike you, Tetsu.” Chris turned to Jun. “How about you? Why do you think it’s Kazuya?”

“I don’t know? He just kinda looks pregnant, if you look at them both. Plus, if Eijun is pregnant, then he probably wouldn’t have been playing today. Baseball can be rough.”

Chris smiled at Jun. “That’s a really good reason. It has to be Kazuya, neither of you would endanger the health of your baby for a game.”

“Guilty as charged.” Kazuya smirked. “I’m about eight...no I guess it’s nine weeks along.”

“Congratulations, you’re both going to be great parents,” Tetsu said, “who else knows? Are we keeping it a secret?”

“Kinda?” Eijun answered. “Our families know, and Mochi, Mei and Satoru. Oh, Haruichi, of course, he’s our doctor, and Shinji. And Ryou. That’s it. We’ll tell the club this week, and we thought we’d let the team know on Friday.”

“I guess it’s a blessing in disguise that you’re coaching.” Chris took up the thread of inquiry. “You don’t expect it to interfere with that, do you?”

“I don’t think so,” Kazuya responded. “I should be able to work until close to when Peanut’s born, which will be during the off season when work should be slow anyway.”
“Good timing.” Jun nodded. “Haruichi took you? He’s high-risk only, isn’t he?”

“We didn’t have a lot of choice. He can be worse than Ryou sometimes, and he was less than pleased when we suggested we might not fit his practice.” Eijun shivered.

“What are you going to do about—” Jun started, but Chris cut him off.

“It’s too early for them to be worrying about it, Jun. Give them a chance to get used to the idea of a baby.”

“Actually,” Kazuya glanced at Eijun, who nodded. “We wanted to ask you about that. Jun, do you have any openings? Would you be Peanut’s pediatrician?”

“I’d be honored.” Jun had, surprising to those who couldn’t see past his gruff manner and goatee, decided he wanted to go into children’s medicine, and with the support of his boyfriends, that’s exactly what he did. He was in high demand, his gruffness and honesty won the hearts of his little patients, and his genuine caring and gentleness won the hearts of their parents.

“Thank you, we’re going to be those annoying first-time parents who don’t know what they’re doing and ask a billion questions and think the baby’s dying when they’re only doing some normal baby thing, so we apologize in advance.” Eijun bowed his head and Jun let out a quick laugh.

“That’s half of my patients, Eijun, you guys are fine. I’d rather you asked me too many questions than not enough.” He rubbed his head. “And besides which, I’m pretty sure you’ll actually listen to me.”

“Of course we will. Who’d go to a doctor and then decide they weren’t going to do as he suggested?” Eijun was aghast.

“You’d be surprised at what some parents will do,” Jun responded. “But you’ll be fine, I know where you live, I can always make sure you’re taking good care of that baby.”

“Peanut’s going to be so spoiled, so many uncles.” Kazuya laughed. “You lot are going to be wrapped around its little finger.”

“You know who you need to look out for?” Chris whispered behind his hand. “Tetsu. He’s like putty in any child’s hand.”

“In my defense, I made a baby cry once. It was traumatizing. I never want to do that again,” Tetsu explained.

The server came to the table to collect their orders, and the talk became more general.

The rest of their evening, to Kazuya’s relief, went exactly as he’d expected it to.

Chapter End Notes
What can I say? I swear to Jesus Chris, my tombstone is going to say "It was only supposed to be a drabble."

Comments are always welcome!
Something you don't like? Tell me!
Something you like? Please tell me!
Something you'd like to see? Let me know, I'll see what I can do.
Monday morning, Kazuya woke before Eijun, stomach queasy. He ate a couple of semi-broken crackers from the sleeve on the dresser and laid back down, hoping for things to settle. They’d slept in, it was almost nine, but they didn’t have to be into work until noon so they had plenty of time to laze about.

Snuggling back into Eijun, he let his mind drift over everything that had happened in the last week or so. They’d been so busy that he hadn’t had time to process anything, so he took the time to think through things. He rolled onto his back and laid his hand over the slight rise of his belly. A baby. They were going to have a baby, be parents. Peanut was a real thing, a responsibility and a joy. Allowing the thoughts to sink in, register and resonate, he considered the future. He and Eijun had had it so easy in many ways, so many things had fallen into place for them, but he knew that didn’t mean they weren’t strong, they were. They’d weathered plenty of tough times as well, times they were apart, times one or the other one was broken. He suspected the reason he thought they had it so easy was because Eijun was at his side, and he couldn’t imagine what his life would have been if he’d never met him.

But a baby? He knew Eijun would be a great father, he had so much love and affection for anyone who wandered into his sphere of influence, but he wasn’t sure about himself. He didn’t want to be the distant father, didn’t want to be his father, yet he wasn’t sure how to prevent it, that was all he’d had experience with. Eijun was scared of physical things, scared of somehow injuring Peanut. That wasn’t something Kazuya was concerned about; he knew he could read books and ask for advice, but nurturing a baby? Loving a baby, at least in a way that it understood it was loved? He wasn’t sure how to do that. He looked over at his husband sleeping next to him and smiled softly. Eijun knew. He understood what people needed, he was patient and kind and pretty much the opposite of Kazuya. He decided he would watch Eijun, learn how to be what Peanut needed. Their baby would never doubt its place in their world.

Feeling more settled than he had since he found out about the pregnancy, Kazuya realized his stomach was settled as well, so he got out of bed to use the bathroom. The baby was literally the size of a peanut, why did he have to pee so much? It made no sense.

He went into the kitchen and heated water for tea. Brewing a pot of coffee for Eijun, he waited for the coffee alarm to work, and sure enough, he’d just sat down at the table with his ginger tea when Eijun stumbled in and grabbed a cup of coffee. He plopped into the chair opposite Kazuya and took a sip of coffee. Kazuya watched him carefully, seeing his brain come onboard after about a half cup.
“Morning, Kaz.” Eijun mumbled. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine, I had a few crackers.” Kazuya responded. “We were tired, we really needed the sleep.”

“We did, we’ve been going so hard the last few days. We haven’t even had much of a chance to talk.”

“This is true, I was just thinking about that. Are you ok, Ei?”

“Me? Yeah, I’m...I’m...I’m good? A little worried, I want you and Peanut to be safe, and I’m not sure how to dad, but other than that, I’m fine. Excited? But somewhat trepidatious. How about you?”

“I’m about where you are. I’m not so worried about Peanut being healthy; I know we can take good care of a baby. I’m just...I don’t want to be my dad. I don’t know how to be a good father, and it scares me.”

Eijun reached a hand across the table and covered Kazuya’s. “I know. But I also know you’re not your father, you’ll never treat your child the way he treated you. We’ll figure it out together, like we always do.”

“You’re right. We always do.”

“We still have to tell the boss. When do you want to do that?”

Kazuya thought for a second. “Both the GM and the head coach are in today, so maybe we can meet with them this afternoon.”

“That works, good idea.” Eijun refilled his coffee cup and sat back down. “Which room do you want to put Peanut in? Do you think we should move to someplace bigger?”

“I think we have plenty of room here, don’t you? Do you want to move?”

“No, not really. I like this house a lot. But I didn’t know if you thought it was big enough, like there was some minimum recommended square footage or something.”

Kazuya chuckled. “I don’t think there’s anything like that, Ei. Peanut’s not a plant. I do like this place and there’s a decent sized back yard, so we have some grass Peanut can play in. I think we’d be fine here, but if we aren’t we can always move when we need more room.”

“Good, ok. So which room is going to be the nursery? Do we use the guest room or the office?”

“I think we should use the guest room, it’s bigger, and the closet’s bigger too. We can just set the office up as a guest room. What do you think?”

“I don’t know, the guest room is a little larger, but the office is closer to our room and in the back of the house, so the windows are looking out at the backyard. It’s quieter in there, which might be good for a sleeping baby.”

“You’re right, I never even thought about street noise. The distance isn’t a big deal, we can get a baby monitor if we need one, but sound is.” Kazuya took his cup to the sink. “Let’s go look. I know we live here, but we’ve never considered which to use for a nursery.” He held his hand out to Eijun, who stood and took it. Hand in hand, they walked down the hallway. The master bedroom sat off a short hallway to the one side of the living room, while the other two rooms were on either side of the hallway on the other side of the living room, with a bathroom at the end of that hall.
Eijun compared the two rooms, glancing into the guest room and walking into the office. “You’re right, the guest room is bigger, but I think the closet in this room is larger.” He opened the closet door. “It’s a walk-in, remember?”

Kazuya peeked his head into the closet. “Oh, yeah.”

“Oh, yeah? Really, Kaz? We’ve been living here for years, and you didn’t remember?”

“Honestly, when was the last time you looked in this closet? What even is all this stuff, Ei?”

“I’m not sure, but at least I know where all the stuff I don’t recognize is stored.”

“How does that even make sense?” Kazuya doubled over, laughing.

Eijun grinned ruefully. “It doesn’t. But neither does not knowing there’s a walk in closet in one of your spare bedrooms.” He pushed some of the boxes around. “We’ll have to clean this out if we use this room.”

Closing the closet, Eijun turned to Kazuya. “What do you think?”

“I think you’re ridiculous. But, you’re also right. This should be Peanut’s room.”

“Great! Now all we need to do is agree on a color and get some furniture.”

“And clothes. And decide about diapers and bottles. And—”

Eijun cut him off with a hand across his mouth. “Hush, you. Let me feel accomplished for a few seconds, wouldja?”

Kazuya grinned and licked Eijun’s hand. “Oh, gross. Are you five, Kaz?”

“I’ve licked you in worse places. In fact, I think that may be one of the reasons we’re here, trying to figure out where to put Peanut.”

Eijun rolled his eyes. “Well, at least we got one thing decided before we descended into the gutter.”

“You know you love me.”

“That has nothing to do with anything.”

Kazuya tugged Eijun into his arms. “You know I love you.” Eijun sighed and relaxed into the hug.

“I do, and yes, you know that I do too.” Eijun rested his head on Kazuya’s shoulder, soaking up the love and support he was offering. “I’m trying not to let this stress me out. I know we’ll be fine, and Peanut’s not going to be living out of a box with some strange baby disease, but I feel so useless, I don’t know how to help.”

“You are helping,” Kazuya insisted. “Every time you get me tea, give me a hug, make sure I’m comfortable, you’re helping. What might help you is to start reading one of those books Haruichi told us about. That would give you confidence and familiarize you with what’s coming.” Kazuya ran a comforting hand through Eijun’s hair. “We’ll be fine. Babies are surprisingly resilient, and they know when they’re loved. Peanut’s going to be incredibly happy with you as its father.”

Eijun just sighed. “I hope so, Kaz, I really do.” He stepped away from Kazuya turned towards the door to leave. Kazuya reached out and grabbed his arm, pulling him back.
“Woah, wait up. What’s really wrong?” He cupped Eijun’s cheek, meeting his eyes. “Talk to me, Ei.”

“I don’t know, Kaz. I mean, it’s all a little overwhelming, isn’t it? I guess it’s just hitting me, finally sinking in. We’re going to have a baby. A child is going to be looking to us for love and guidance, and I’m not quite sure what to do with that. I wouldn’t change anything, but still.”

“I know,” Kazuya agreed. “I had the same freak-out this morning while you were still asleep.” He rubbed a gentle thumb along Eijun’s cheekbone. “It’s going to be different, and it might get hard, but it’s going to be worth it. We’ve weathered so many things together, we can do this too.” He planted a soft kiss on Eijun’s lips. “Partners.”

“Partners.” Eijun affirmed, deepening the kiss.

Kazuya walked into the head coach’s office as soon as they arrived at the practice field. Knocking on the open door as he stepped in, he waited for the coach to acknowledge him.

“Miyuki! Come on in. What can I do for you?”

“Are you and the GM available sometime this afternoon? We need to speak with you.”

Coach Sato slung his legs off the desk and sat up straight. “I’m sure he’s free right now, let me check.” He picked up his phone and dialed, waiting for an answer. “Hello, Ito-san. Are you busy? Ok, a couple of the players want to talk to us; I’ll bring them right up. Yes? Oh, Miyuki and Sawamura. Ok, see you in a few minutes.” He hung up the phone. “Alright, let’s go find Sawamura and head to his office.”

Eijun was sitting in the meeting room with the rest of the team when Kazuya found him, waving him out of the room. He bowed to Coach Sato, and looked inquiringly at Kazuya.

“We’re going to talk to Ito-san right now, come on.” Kazuya urged Eijun on.

“Oh! Good. That’s good.” Eijun stumbled a bit and then recovered.

Coach Sato led them up to the top floor and down the hallway. Eijun wasn’t up here often; he was called up when he was signed, and when they’d had an especially good season or he’d played really well. At the end of the hallway, the coach knocked on the door. Waiting until he heard “Enter” from the occupant, he opened the door and escorted the pair in.

The General Manager stood behind his desk, smiling at the pair of slightly nervous players. “Come in, come in, boys. You played a heck of a game yesterday, Sawamura, congratulations. And you, Miyuki, I had some doubts about how well you’d switch to coaching, but you have them all doing exactly what you want. Good for you. Keep those pitchers winning like that, and you’re golden.”

They both bowed and thanked the GM for his kind words, and he invited them all to sit.

Coach Sato spoke, “You boys wanted to talk to us? I hope it’s not bad news, the season’s just started.”
“Yes, we have some news you need to know,” Kazuya started. “I’m not sure how you’d like to deal with it, but I know how we’d like you to handle it.” That got him the attention of both the coach and the GM.

Ito looked concerned. “Don’t tell me the golden couple’s breaking up? You guys are so good together.”

“No, no.” Kazuya laughed. “Just the opposite, actually. I’m pregnant.”

The room got silent for a few seconds, then Ito smiled and Coach Seto laughed. “Congratulations! You scared us.”

“Yes, congratulations, you two. When are you due, Miyuki?”

“Mid November, so well after the season. I plan to work as long as I can.” Kazuya told them.

“Good, good.” Ito said. “Do you plan on telling the team?”

“At some point it’s going to be obvious. Until then, I don’t know, I suppose I’ll tell the bullpen, they need to know. Other than that, I’ll let them figure it out.” Kazuya answered.

“Are you going to make a formal announcement to the press?” Ito asked.

Eijun and Kazuya exchanged a glance. “We hadn’t planned to.” Eijun said. “Why should we?”

“Are you kidding me? That would be such great publicity. People love you two, and add a baby?”

“We hadn’t even considered it,” Kazuya said. “This is our baby, not some publicity stunt.”

“I understand, truly.” Ito said. “It would probably be better if the public figured it out gradually, anyway. More buzz.”

Kazuya looked at Eijun, and they both stood. “Thank you for your time, Ito-san, Coach Seto. We just thought we should keep you apprised of the situation. Let us know if you have any questions, ok?”

“We will, see you downstairs.” Coach Seto told them, and they bowed their way out of the room, heading for the stairs.

They ducked into the stairwell, and as soon as the door closed behind them, they stopped and looked at each other, speaking at the same time.

“There’s no way…”

“Peanut’s not going to…”

“Good.” Kazuya said. “Glad we talked that out.”

Eijun laughed. “You’re such an idiot.”

“I think we just left the real idiot in the room back there.”

“True. I hope they don’t try anything. Remember when we got married?”
“Oh, god. Eijun, they’d better not. We’re smarter now; we know what to look for. Plus, I’m not playing, there’s no way we can be as popular as we were.”

“I’m not sure, Kaz. We’ll see. We just need to be careful.”

“Yeah. We’ll do that.”

Coming together for a short hug and kiss, they headed down to the meeting room.

That Friday, they played their third game of the preseason, and lost. Kazuya was furious at the bullpen, insisting it was their fault and generally giving all of them hell. Eijun was the designated sacrifice; they assumed (wrongly) that Kazuya wouldn’t give his husband too hard of a time, so they had him sit at the front of the room while Kazuya gave the rundown. He was brutal in his assessment, overly so if you asked Eijun, who had no qualms about saying as much.

“I may have not played my best game, Miyuki, but it wasn’t just me out there. There are more people on the team.”

“True, but if you start thinking like that, you’re abdicating all responsibility for your actions. Is that the way you want to be?”

“I’m not, none of us are. None of us deny that we didn’t play the best game ever, we just...it wasn’t completely our fault.”

Kazuya was having none of it, and he sent them all home with an earful. He and Eijun climbed into the car in silence, and Eijun drove to the restaurant where the monthly meeting was being held.

Along the way, Kazuya turned to Eijun. “You’re really mad, huh?”

“Yup.”

“Eijun, you know you played a crap game.”

“Kazuya, you know I wasn’t the only one.” Eijun parroted back.

“That’s not the point.”

“That is exactly the point.” Eijun said as he pulled into the parking lot and stepped out of the car. “Wait for me, you need to eat.” He went around the car and helped Kazuya out, steadying him when he swayed. “You’re going to have to start keeping a granola bar in your pocket or something. You need to eat every couple of hours.”

“Thanks, Ei.”

“I’m still pissed as hell at you though.”

“I’m sure you are.” Kazuya suppressed the smile that was threatening. It was so typical of Eijun to be concerned about him, even when he was furious.

Together, they walked into the bar, but split when they hit the main room. Eijun made a beeline for the bar, climbed onto a stool, and ordered a pitcher of beer and a glass. He’d just taken his first drink
when he heard someone slide onto the stool beside him. Slanting his gaze that way, he saw Kuramochi.

“Rough day at the office?” Mochi asked for a second glass and helped himself to some beer.

Eijun glared without much heat at his friend. “Buy your own beer, beer thief.” He took another big drink. “Yeah. It was. You know we lost today?” Mochi nodded. “I admit I played a bad game, but it wasn’t all my fault.” Eijun didn’t realize his volume had risen. “He’s impossible. Then there’s the other thing, Mochi. We only have six months to get everything settled.” A hush had settled over the bar and between that and Eijun’s raised voice, everyone heard the last few sentences. Talk resumed immediately, but the damage had been done and the gossip mill started churning.

“Six months?”

“Are they breaking up?”

“It sounded to me more like someone’s sick.”

“Who’s dying?”

“I think Sawamura only has six months.”

“Really? That’s not what I heard. I heard they were breaking up after the season was over.”

“They’ve been together forever, though.”

“I know, right? I thought they’d be together forever. But if Miyuki’s sick, there’s not a lot they can do about that.”

“Wait, Miyuki’s sick? I thought they were getting a divorce?”

“I heard it was Sawamura who’s sick.”

“Wait, what...?”

Kazuya, who’d gone into the dining area of the restaurant, didn’t hear Eijun, nor was he paying attention to the gossip flying around him. He’d slid into a booth with Chris, and was currently contemplating his fate in a glass of club soda as he waited for his food to arrive.

“Tough game today. Are you alright?” Chris inquired.

Kazuya sighed. “I’m fine. Eijun’s mad at me, but that’s not unexpected. I really laid into them all after the game. They played horribly.”

“It was not his best showing, I’ll admit,” Chris agreed, “But I’d be surprised if he didn’t acknowledge it as well.”

“Oh, he did. But he tried to defend the bullpen by pulling the ‘there are other people on the field, it wasn’t just me’ bullshit.”

“That’s not bullshit, Kazuya. You know it’s true. I can’t imagine Eijun would ever try to push the
“blame if he really felt something was his fault, can you?”

“No.” Kazuya felt his righteous anger deflate with that one question. “I know he wouldn’t.”

“So maybe you should go into the bar and drag him and his pitcher of beer over here.” Chris suggested with a smile.

Kazuya stood. “That’s a very good idea. Watch my drink, and don’t let Nori roofie me, please.” Nori, who was sitting at the booth across the aisle chatting with Nabe, looked up at his name, and realizing who was casting aspersions, he rolled his eyes, and went back to his conversation.

Chris just laughed. “I won’t, just go.”

Kazuya stood and walked into the bar, stepping up behind his husband. He slid his arms around Eijun’s waist and rested his chin on his shoulder.

“Go away. I’m married to some asshole already, not interested.”

Kazuya chuckled; he could tell Eijun was halfway over it already. “I’m sorry, Ei. I know you wouldn’t try to avoid taking responsibility for your bad play. I was wrong to be so hard on you.”

“I’m not listening to you right now, go bug someone else.”

“Oh, you need the big guns? Ok, here. Have this.” Kazuya lowered his voice to a whisper. “I’m scared. This is my first season as the head coach for the bullpen, and I don’t want to fuck it up. I know there are lots of people who think I’m too young for this, and it feels like everyone’s watching me, waiting for me to mess up. I took it out on you, and I’m sorry.” Eijun pulled Kazuya’s arms tighter and leaned back into him. He turned his head and kissed Kazuya on the cheek.

“I...that makes sense, Kaz. I didn’t even think about that.” He stood and grabbed what was left of his beer. “Where are you sitting? I’m not sure I want to stay at the bar anyway, someone keeps stealing my beer.” He glared at Mochi, who looked mildly offended.

“Hey, I was just doing my best friend duty and looking out for you. You looked sad over here all by yourself nursing a pitcher of beer.”

Kazuya laughed, “We’re in the dining room, I’m sitting near Chris, but I think the team is close to the whole ‘push the tables together’ thing. Wanna join us, Mochi?”

“I’m waiting for Ryou; I’ll join you when he gets here.”

“Ok, we’ll see you then. Bring more beer, though.” Eijun followed Kazuya into the other room, and slid in the booth with him.

“I guess they’re not divorcing?”

“Ohhh...then Sawamura’s sick?”

“Or is it Miyuki?”

“He’s not drinking, and Sawamura is. Isn’t that strange?”

“Poor Miyuki.”
“Poor Sawamura, you mean. He’s the one who’ll have to deal with everything.”

“Yeah, but he’s not dying in six months.”

“True.”

Chris smiled at Eijun as he sat down. “Hey, Eijun. How are you?”

“Better, now that I’m not being falsely accused by my husband, thank you. How are you?” Kazuya rolled his eyes and took a drink of his non-roofied soda.

“I’m well, thanks.”

“Where are the others?”

“Jun’s finishing up his rounds, and Yuuki’s coming by later, he’s on duty until seven tonight. How are you feeling, Kazuya?”

“Better. But things are going to get better for a while, I think, and then it’s going to get tough.”

“Did you eat yet?” Eijun asked. “You need to eat something, Kaz. You’ll get sick if you don’t.”

“I ordered, they haven’t brought it out yet,” Kazuya replied.

“Oh, good. Ohh! Here, I almost forgot. Take this.” Eijun dug into his pocket and pulled out a plastic bag with pills in it. “I bet you forgot earlier, and you need to take it with food.” He handed over the vitamin.

“I did forget.” Kazuya smiled his thanks. “It’s hard to remember, sometimes.”

“I know, but you were on the pill for years, Kaz. Just take this at the same time instead.”

“I...I never thought about it that way before. Good idea.”

“So it’s Miyuki?”

“Looks like it.”

“Sawamura doesn’t look too upset, though.”

“You’d think he’d be sadder.”

“He cries at the drop of a hat, what’s wrong with him?”

“Maybe he’s numb?”

“Maybe he’s had time to come to terms with it. Clearly Mochi knows what’s going on.”

“Well, duh. I think if Mochi hadn’t gotten with Ryou, they may have been KuraMiyuSawa instead of MiyuSawa.”

“Wait, really, dude? That’s just...never mind, actually that kinda makes sense.”
“I know, right?”

“What makes sense?”

“Mochi’s cheating on Ryou with Miyu Sawa. But Miyuki’s dying, only has six months left.”

“Poor Ryou.”

Kazuya’s food came, and Eijun ordered as well. They spoke to Chris while they waited, and eventually Mochi and Ryou made their way to the table.

“Hi, Ryou!” Eijun smiled and waved. “Nice to see you. Did you make the beer stealer bring me more?”

Mochi plonked the pitcher in front of Eijun. “Here you go, idiot. I didn’t steal your beer, shut up.”

“I think I believe Eijun,” Ryou stated mildly. “You’re a notorious beer thief.”

“See? I told you.”

“Shut it, Bakamura. I can still take you.”

“Maybe, but you’d have to go through Kaz, and you don’t want to hurt him, do you?”

“Hey! Don’t bring me into this.” Kazuya laughed. “I can move if you’d like.”

“Don’t you dare, Miyuki Kazuya. Stay right where you are.”

Ryou laughed, and turned the conversation. “Chris, how are you? We’ve not spoken for a while, how’s teaching, how’s the team?” Chris was teaching—English and literature—at a local high school, where he was also the assistant coach for the baseball team. They weren’t a powerhouse baseball school, but they were on their way. He was determined to get them there.

“Teaching is a challenge, but I love it,” Chris responded. “And the team’s coming along. That reminds me, if any of you have some free time to come by and teach the boys, I’d appreciate it. They could use some positional coaching.”

Eijun glanced at Kazuya, who met his gaze and nodded. “We’d both be happy to. When would be a good time?”

“Thanks! Any afternoon you’re free, just let me know a day or so ahead, so I can schedule it, all right?”

“Yeah, no problem. We can come buy a couple of times this season, if you think that would help.” Eijun offered.

“That would be great.” Chris smiled.

“We can come by too, if you’d like. Whip your infield into shape. I’m more available than Ryou, but maybe on a Saturday when he doesn’t have office hours,” Mochi chimed in.

“Saturdays are fine as well. These boys don’t have the setup and funds Seido does, and they can use whatever help they can get. I appreciate it.”
Jun took that opportunity to slide in next to his boyfriend, and wrap an arm around his shoulders. “Hey, guys, how’s it going?” He kissed Chris’s cheek and glared around the table. “You would not believe the rumors that are going around right now. Supposedly, Mochi, you’re cheating on Ryou with these two.” He gestured at Kazuya and Eijun and Ryou cocked an eyebrow in interest. “And Kazuya, you’re dying. You only have six months to live. Eijun’s calm about it because he’s numb and in denial, and everyone feels sorry for Ryou.” He grabbed an empty glass and poured himself some beer. “At first, I think they thought you two were divorcing after the season was over. That’s still making the rounds as well.”

Kazuya and Mochi were laughing their heads off, while Eijun looked confused. Ryou looked both intrigued and amused, never a good sign.

“Wait. Where did all of that come from?” Eijun asked.

Mochi sobered enough to respond. “It probably started when you shouted at the bar, idiot. *He’s impossible! And we only have six months to get stuff together!* or whatever you said.”

Kazuya laughed harder. “Don’t...don’t make me laugh so hard, this can’t be good for Peanut. You said all that?” He gained control while Eijun glared, trying his best to stifle his chuckles. “And then we made up, so the divorce was off the table, so one of us must be dying. You gave me the vitamin, so it has to be me. But where Mochi and Ryou came into this, I have no idea.” He smiled into his dinner.

“For the record, we’re not cheating with Mochi, Ryou.” Eijun assured him.


“Ryou, stop intimidating Eijun.” Chris chided. “I don’t know when you were planning on announcing this to the team, but you may want to do so sooner than later, before things get too out of hand.”

“You’re right, as usual, Chris.” Kazuya slid out of the booth, pulling Eijun with him. They moved to where they could see the whole room, still holding hands.

“Hey, everyone?” Kazuya said, trying to get their attention, failing until Mochi put his fingers in his mouth and let out a loud whistle.

“Oi, you lot. Miyuki’s trying to say something, so shut it, wouldja?” Jun growled.

All conversation ceased, and all eyes turned to Kazuya.

“We have something to tell everyone. We’re...I’m pregnant.” Kazuya finished simply. “Due in November.”

The room erupted in conversation and applause. Shouts of ‘congratulations’ and ‘I’m glad you’re not dying’ were heard, as well as ‘toldja they weren’t getting divorced!’ Eijun was glad Jun had clued them in; otherwise, he’d have been so confused at the reaction.

They headed back to the booth, stopping to be congratulated and hands shaken as they walked through the room. After a while, Eijun noticed that although most people seemed happy for them, they were also...disappointed? After a few minutes, it hit him. They’d probably bet Eijun would be the one pregnant. “Kaz, we need to figure out who’s administering that bet. I want to know who won.”
“Me too.”

They slid back into their seats, and Kazuya looked at Mochi, deadpan. “Spill.”

“Spill what?” Mochi evaded.

“Who’s running the bet?”

“What bet?”

“Seriously, Mochi? The bet about which one of us would get pregnant.”

“Oh, that.” He ran a hand along the back of his neck. “What makes you think—?”

“Even our parents had one. We know you lot did too,” Eijun chimed in.

“They did? Who—” Mochi stopped himself. “Your mom, right?”

“Yes, yes.” Kazuya said. “No surprise there. Now, back to the matter at hand.”

“Look, Kaz—”

“Cut the crap, Mochi. Who is it?”

“Kanemaru.”

“Shinji?” Eijun couldn’t believe it.

“Yes, Shinji.” Chris corroborated. “He said he was your doctor, so he couldn’t be involved. To be fair, the bet wasn’t his idea.”

“Whose was it?”

“Mine.” Ryou interjected, sliding a glance over at Mochi, grinning slightly.

Kazuya glared at Mochi. “I can’t believe you would do that to us, Mochi. I’ll remember this, trust me.” Mochi didn’t respond, his face growing red.

Eijun was still confused, but he figured he’d ask Kazuya later. Looking around, he saw Kanemaru sitting at a table with a few other players, and he prodded at Kazuya until he stopped glaring at Mochi and paid attention to Eijun.

“Let’s go examine Kanemaru-sensei, shall we?” Eijun suggested.

Kazuya snorted. “That’s terrible.” He scooted out of the booth, and they headed to the table. Kazuya cleared the seats with a look, the other occupants had been underclassmen when Kazuya was captain, and they hadn’t forgotten what his wrath looked like. Sitting in the newly vacated chairs on either side of Kanemaru, they both smiled.

“Oh, god. You two in synch is still so creepy. Stop that.” Kanemaru complained.

“We will.” Kazuya said.

“As soon as you tell us who won.” Eijun finished.

Kanemaru sighed. “As long as you don’t want a list of the losers, that’d take forever.”
“Naw, we figure pretty much anyone who was at the wedding is in on it, we don’t need that list.” Kazuya rapped his fingers on the table impatiently. “Who won?”

“Nabe, Nori, Rei and...get this, Raichi.”

“Raichi? Really?” Kazuya laughed. “Huh. I didn’t expect that.” Eijun and Raichi had been good friends for a long time. Kazuya had had some jealousy issues early on in the relationship, but after Eijun correctly pointed out that at least Raichi wasn’t his ideal catcher, unlike Shunshin, who was both Kazuya’s ideal pitcher as well as a good friend, he’d gotten over it. Now they were on the same team, and Kazuya stole his bananas with regularity.

“That reminds me, Ei. We need to bring him some bananas tomorrow. Maybe take him his winnings.” Kazuya looked pointedly at Kanemaru, who quickly wrote a check, passing it over to Kazuya. “I don’t have that much cash on me.” He explained, while Kazuya’s mind reeled at the amount.

“Thanks. I’ll get this to him.” He passed the check to Eijun, who blanched.

“And this is a fourth of it?” Eijun queried. “Do these people have nothing better to spend their money on?”

“To be fair, there’s some interest in there too. But yeah, the pot was big.”

The pair stood up. “Thanks, Shinji. We’ll see you later.”

“Sure thing. I’ll see you in a few weeks, Eijun.” Eijun waved as they walked away.

“Did he have to remind me?” Eijun whined as they walked away, while Kazuya snickered.

Sunday was their next game. On the way to the stadium, Eijun stopped at the store and bought a bag full of bananas for Raichi. They walked into the locker room, looking for their teammate, whose car was already in the lot. Raichi was sitting in front of his locker eating a banana, reading, when the pair walked up. Kazuya held out the bag.

“Raichi, how’s it going?”

“I’m good, Miyuki. How are you?”

“Well, thanks. Here, I owe you a few bananas. I’ve been eating them when I needed them.”

“You’ve been eating my bananas?” Raichi looked confused. “I don’t mind, but why do you need them?”

Before Kazuya could answer, Eijun spoke up. “We also need to give you this. It’s from Kanemaru-sensei. It might explain the banana situation.”

Raichi looked the check over carefully, eyes widening at the amount. “Why would Kanemaru...ohhhh!” He stared at Kazuya for a second, and then looked at Eijun. “Really? Congratulations! You can have all of my bananas you want! Here...want one now? Do you need to
sit, should you even be on your feet?” Raichi tried to push Kazuya gently towards a seat, while Eijun laughed at his chagrined husband.

“No, Raichi. I’m fine; I’m pregnant, not an invalid.” Kazuya insisted. “I just get lightheaded if I don’t eat regularly, and sometimes I forget to bring a snack. I’m trying to remember, but I might forget, so thank you in advance for sharing.”

“No, no! You’re welcome to them.” Raichi smiled. “A baby? That’s so cool. You’re going to have so much fun. Can I be Uncle Raichi?”

“Of course!” Eijun grinned. “Peanut’s going to have more uncles than they know what to do with.”

“But I’ll be the favorite!”

“I wouldn’t doubt it.” Eijun agreed. “We’d better get ready for the game.”

“Ok, see you out there!” Raichi darted back to his locker and started to dress, the others following his lead.

Eijun was determined to play well this game, he’d been thinking about it all weekend. He didn’t want to give Kazuya any reason to stress; he knew he could carry the team if he tried hard enough. He started the game, as usual, and everything was going as planned.

Until the third inning, when the first baseman went after a ball, and Eijun ran to cover first base. The runner plowed into him, sending them both down into a pile. The runner got up, Eijun didn’t. He’d been knocked unconscious.

Kazuya ran onto the field while the medics came and tried to revive him. The ambulance rolled onto the field and they loaded the still unconscious man into the back. Kazuya looked at the head coach for permission, and he waved Kazuya onto the ambulance. “Go; let us know what’s going on, ok? We can handle it from here.”

“Thank you, coach.”

“No worries, just bring us good news about our starter.”

“I’ll do my best.” Kazuya gave some last second instructions to the catchers as he climbed in.

“Don’t worry about us.” Takahashi said. “Take care of him, we’ll be fine.”

Kazuya watched the field recede through the back windows of the ambulance as they drove off to the hospital. Trying to stay out of the paramedic’s way, he watched them take Eijun’s vitals and check for any damage. He didn’t look bad, just like he was asleep.

Arriving at the hospital, he watched helplessly as they wheeled Eijun into the back.

“Miyuki-san, I need you to fill out some paperwork, and we’ll get you word as soon as we know anything.” Kazuya took the forms and started to write, not processing what was happening, not noticing the tears that streamed down his cheeks. He didn’t notice the person sit in the seat next to him either, until he laid a comforting hand on his arm.

“Man, I hate these places,” Miyuki Norio said. “So many bad memories. But he’ll be fine, Kazuya. Eijun’s strong.”

“Dad?” Kazuya was stunned. “What are you doing here? How did you know about Ei?”
“I was at the game, I saw it happen.” He explained. “I got here as soon as I could.”

Kazuya stared at his father, trying to think.

“You should finish those forms.” Norio suggested. “They’ll need them.”

Kazuya looked down and realized he was only half done. He quickly filled out the rest, and started to get up.

“No, let me.” Norio took the clipboard. “I’ll turn them in, see if there’s any word.”

He disappeared into the crowd and came back with a nurse. “She says the sensei would like to speak with you.”

Kazuya got up and followed the nurse to a separate waiting room. “I’ll get sensei for you.”

They thanked her and she walked off. Kazuya tried to think of something to say, but his mind was a mess, he couldn’t make sense of anything.

“Dad. What if—”

“No, Kazuya. He’ll be fine.” Norio stepped closer and tentatively wrapped an arm around Kazuya. “Come here. I know I’m not really good at this, but I’m here for you.” Kazuya froze for a second, and then slumped into his father’s arms, taking what comfort he could while he fought back the tears and panic. After a few minutes, he straightened and stepped back.

“Thank you, dad. I’m glad you’re here.” A surprised look flitted across his face, and his father interpreted it correctly.

“Bet you never thought you’d be saying those two sentences to me.” Norio smirked, and Kazuya realized exactly where his came from. “That’s ok. I understand. I wouldn’t have believed it either a year ago.”

The doctor walked in, stopping Kazuya from replying. “Miyuki-san?”

“That’s me.” Kazuya stepped closer.

“Oh, we’ve done some preliminary testing; your husband should be fine.” Kazuya let out the breath he’d been holding. “It looks like he received a concussion, so we want to keep him overnight for observation. There is some bad news, though.” The doctor looked at his notes and took a deep breath, and Kazuya braced himself.

“Unfortunately, we weren’t able to save the baby.”
Aftermath

Chapter Summary

Pretty much exactly what you expect.

Chapter Notes

It's a little early, but hey! It's probably Saturday somewhere, right? I should be working on my Bang fics, but this one wouldn't leave me alone, so I got this part done early.

Enjoy?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Unfortunately, we weren’t able to save the baby.”

Kazuya reflexively laid his hand on his stomach, and blinked, uncomprehendingly, at the doctor.

“The baby?”

“Yes. Sawamura-san was pregnant. You didn’t know?”

Kazuya reeled and heard roaring in his ears. He felt a hand under his elbow, guiding him to a chair, and heard the doctor continue to speak to his father, but he didn’t understand a word of what was being said.

Eijun was pregnant. No. Eijun had been pregnant, but had lost the baby.

Eijun was going to be devastated. He was devastated.

He needed to see Eijun now; he couldn’t leave him alone with this.

Kazuya looked at the doctor, who was watching him with concern. “Is he awake?”

“Yes, he woke up shortly after arrival.”

“Does he know about the baby?” Kazuya ran a nervous hand through his hair.

“He does.”

“Was it the fall that caused the miscarriage?” The doctor checked his notes.

“It’s hard to say. Plenty of people fall when they’re pregnant and are fine, and something over 20% of pregnancies self-terminate in the first trimester.”
Feeling his ire rising at the clinical answers, Kazuya stood up. “Where is he? I need to see him.”

“He’s being moved to a private room right now, as soon as he’s settled, you can go up.”

“I need to see him now.” Kazuya stepped closer to the doctor. “Where is he?”

The doctor clutched his clipboard to his chest. “Miyuki-san, you need to calm down.”

Kazuya tried to speak calmly, rationally. “Listen, sensei. My husband just found out that he’s had a miscarriage that may be his fault. I need to see him; he can’t be alone with this.”

“I understand.” The doctor’s mouth moved into something approximating a sympathetic smile. “But hospital protocol dictates—” At those words, Kazuya lost all ability to be rational.

“Fuck protocol! Where’s Eijun?” He advanced on the doctor, until he felt a restraining hand on his elbow.

“Kazuya, sit. Please.” Norio guided him back to his seat.

“No, Dad. I need to see him; Eijun’s going to be—”

“I know, I know. But yelling isn’t going to get you anywhere. Let me handle this, please.” Norio turned to the doctor. “Can you at least tell us what room he’s being assigned to, so we can be waiting when he’s ready?”

“I don’t know,” the doctor hedged, eyeing Kazuya, who was glaring at him.

“Please, Sensei. We’ll wait quietly in the corridor; we just want to be as close as possible.” Norio bowed his head.

Sighing, he acquiesced. “He’s going to be in room 415, fourth floor west wing.”

“Thank you, Sensei.” Norio bowed again as the doctor left, and grabbed Kazuya before he could dart out the door. “No, wait, Kazuya. It’s going to take some time to get him settled. You need to spend it calming yourself and figuring out what you’re going to do.”

“What do you mean? I’m going to go up there and be with him. He’s got to be shattered right now.”

“Of course he is, you both are. All I’m trying to say is that as much as he needs you, you need him. You have to let him comfort you too; you can’t just be the stoic rock of support. That will break both of you. Trust me, I’ve been there. If I had only...never mind, that’s not important.” Norio ran a hand over his face in an uncharacteristic show of distress. “It may not be today, I don’t know exactly when, but he’s going to need to understand that you feel as culpable and devastated as he does, and that you need his forgiveness and support as much as he needs yours. Because you do, and you will.”

“I need to be strong for him.” Kazuya insisted.

“Yes, you do. And forgive me if I overstep here, but you also need to let him be strong for you, he’s going to need that as well. It’s not an easy thing, but necessary. I never knew how important it was, but it cost me everything in the end.” He stepped up to Kazuya and laid a hand on his shoulder. “I know I may not have the right to tell you any of this, I haven’t been much of a role model when it comes to these things, but please don’t make the same mistakes I did. At least think about it, okay?”

“Ok, Dad.” Kazuya promised, “I will.”
Eijun lay in his bed, IV’s in his arms, and just stared at the ceiling, head aching and mind a mess.

Pregnant.

He’d been pregnant and hadn’t known.

How could he not know?

He’d been pregnant and hadn’t known and played baseball.

Why didn’t he take a test when he insisted Kazuya do so?

He’d been pregnant and hadn’t known and played baseball and killed the baby.

His rational mind shut off, grief and guilt raging through his brain. How could he have not known? How could he do that to their child? He’d known he was feeling off, but he’d put it down to all the stuff going on in their lives. But did he really? Maybe he knew, somewhere, deep down, that he was pregnant, but was selfish enough to put baseball ahead of the baby. And Kazuya knew that, too.

Kazuya was going to hate him. It was all his fault. He’d killed their baby, he’d destroyed a life, a life they had created together, and he didn’t even ask Kaz about it. He’d been so hung up over his own issues about Peanut and Kazuya’s right to decide, and he’d completely stolen Kazuya’s right to an opinion about the baby he’d been carrying. The one he killed. The one he was pregnant with when he played baseball, and now it was dead. Because he killed it. Kazuya should hate him. He deserved it. No wonder Kaz hadn’t shown up yet, he was probably not going to show up at all. And Eijun didn’t blame him.

His mind spiraled down, down, down, thoughts piling and leading one to another, until he was so buried under the weight that he didn’t see anything around him. Somewhere under the darkness, he realized he was losing control, spiraling himself and making things worse, but he was unable to stop, the sedative and the mild narcotic they gave him keeping his mind dull, unable to divert itself from the cycle.

Eijun curled up into a ball, facing the wall, eyes open but seeing nothing.

Kazuya waited in the hallway outside the door to room 415. He could hear voices inside, hushed voices exchanging information, but he didn’t hear Eijun at all. Pacing, thinking. Knowing what was going on in Eijun’s head, knowing how much of the world his boy took on his shoulders, how much he felt responsible for things that weren’t his fault, he paced.

His mind went back, to the dark time in high school, when he was afraid he was going to lose Eijun to the yips, to his guilt over one bad play in a game of many. That time he couldn’t do much, had to just stand back and let Eijun work through it. He had sent whatever help he could think of his way, but having to just watch was a bitter pill to swallow. That wasn’t going to be the case this time.

Eventually, the nurses came out of the room, holding the door open for Kazuya.

“I’m going to go find some coffee or something. Do you need me to contact anyone for you?” Norio asked right before Kazuya walked in.

“Yes, please. My phone’s on vibrate, but it’s been going crazy. Can you look at the caller id and call
back anyone who's in my contacts? Any of our friends who were watching will probably be trying to reach me. And his parents, they're bound to be worried to death. Also, I need to tell the team.” He handed over the phone. “Please let them all know he has a mild concussion and they’re keeping him overnight. I’ll update them when I know more.”

“All right. I’ll be back in an hour or so, see if you need anything.”

“Thanks, Dad. I really appreciate it.”

“I’m just glad I could be here.”

Kazuya walked into the room and all thoughts of his father immediately fled. Eijun was curled up in a ball, back to the door, and Kazuya could see his shoulders shaking. Eyes flooding, heart breaking, Kazuya did the only thing he knew to do. He took off his shoes and climbed into bed behind his lost boy, wrapping him in his arms as tightly as he could.

Eijun felt familiar arms engulf and hold him, and he was surprised enough that he was able to break out of the thoughts for a bit. He unconsciously leaned back into the comfort Kazuya was providing, before he remembered, and tried to pull away.

“No, Ei. I’m not letting go.”

“You don’t want to be here, Kaz. You don’t know. You don’t know what I did.” Eijun managed to say through the meds and the thoughts and the pain.

Kazuya pulled him tighter, laying his head on Eijun’s and whispering in his ear. “You didn’t do anything wrong, Eijun. Nothing.”

“No true,” Eijun whispered back. “I killed our baby.” And saying those words, saying them out loud to the one person who had every reason to hate him, to blame him, was like the shattering of a dam, and Eijun broke.

He broke into a million pieces, and all Kazuya could do was hold on, hold him. Talk to him in soothing tones, nonsense and love songs, gossip and poetry, grounding Eijun with his voice. Soothing, loving, painstakingly taping the pieces back together so nothing was lost, Kazuya held on. It was all he could do. It was all he needed to do.

After a while, Kazuya felt Eijun start to withdraw, cutting the tears and pulling away, donning the mask he’d worn before, one composed of fake smiles and false cheer, one designed to ease the minds of those around him, and Kazuya was having none of it. “No, Eijun. Please don’t try to hide from me, ever. I won’t let you. Pretend all you want in public, but not with me. I’m here for you, I love you, I will never stop loving you.”

“But Kaz,” Eijun protested weakly, “I don’t deserve to be loved, you know I’m right. I stole your child from you. You and Peanut should go far away, where you’ll be safe and happy.”

“Eijun, listen to me. Better yet, roll over here and look at me, please?” Eijun shook his head; he couldn’t bear to look in those eyes. “Alright then, listen carefully. You are worthy of love. You didn’t kill our baby, you didn’t know, neither of us—”

“But maybe I did? Maybe I was wondering in the back of my mind why I was feeling like that? But I put it down to the things that were happening and ignored it. And now our baby’s gone.”

“Oh, Ei. If you did, I did too. I noticed you were tired and shaky, but thought it was nerves from the season starting and Peanut. I’m so sorry I failed you both so badly.” Kazuya felt the tears running
down, dripping onto Eijun’s cheek, but couldn’t be bothered to move, didn’t want to hide anything. “I’m sorry I was so focused on Peanut and coaching that I didn’t pay attention to you.”

“Wait, no. Kazuya, this isn’t your fault,” Eijun rolled over and Kazuya sent up a mental prayer of thanks. “Nonono. You didn’t know. You couldn’t have.” He laid a hand on Kazuya’s cheek, stroking softly with his thumb.

“Neither could you.” Kazuya voice was thick from crying. “Neither of us knew, or we would have done things differently. I feel so guilty, Ei, like it’s all my fault. Do you think you can ever forgive me?” Kazuya continued to let the tears fall, as Eijun stared into his eyes, shaking his head.

“There’s nothing to forgive, you didn’t do anything wrong. I’m the guilty one; you did nothing to feel bad about.”

“That’s not true. I’m supposed to be the observant one, and I missed it completely.”

“I did too, and it was me that was pregnant. It’s my fault, and I’m so very sorry.” Eijun continued to weep, guilt and grief racking him as he buried his face in Kazuya’s chest, body shaking.

“Let me ask you something, Eijun.” Kazuya slid a hand under Eijun’s chin and forced him to meet his eyes. “Can you honestly say that if you’d known you were pregnant, you would have endangered the baby?”

Eijun shook his head. “Nono, I’d never do anything to hurt our child. But I still did. I killed it, Kaz.”

“We don’t know that.” Eijun’s eyes widened a bit. “He didn’t tell you?” He shook his head. “Damn that doctor. Listen to me, please, and understand this. There’s no way to know that the fall is what caused the miscarriage. Something like twenty percent of known pregnancies miscarry in the first trimester, and lots of people have fallen worse than you did and not miscarried.” Eijun was watching him carefully, paying close attention to him, waiting for him to get to the twist. “There’s no possible way of knowing. If you’d miscarried and not fallen, we’d have never known you were pregnant. Odds are that it wasn’t because of the fall.”

“But Kaz, I’m still—”

“I know, I know. So am I. We both feel so guilty, so sad.” Kazuya opened his arms to Eijun. “Come here. We’ve lost a baby, our baby. We’re allowed to be sad, to mourn. Let me hold you, ok? And you can hold me; I really need you to hold me right now.”

Eijun scooted forward, into Kazuya’s arms, wrapping his own arms tightly around him. He snuggled his face into Kazuya’s neck, and felt Kazuya do the same. Together, they broke.

This breaking, though, was sadness and sorrow and mourning, not guilt and recrimination. They held each other, held on to each other, and allowed themselves to grieve. Together, they laid in the hospital bed, mourning a child they would never know.

Kazuya knew this wasn’t going to be the end of it, they still had things they’d have to deal with, forgiving oneself was always harder than forgiving others, and he expected they’d both be working on that for a while. But he also knew this was a good start, together they could both get through this.

After a while, the tears slowed, and Kazuya realized Eijun had fallen asleep. He shifted around a bit on the bed, getting comfortable with Eijun’s head on his shoulder, snuggled up to him. He’d considered getting up, but when he tried to move, Eijun’s grip tightened, so he stayed. He ran comforting fingers through Eijun’s hair, lost in thought, exhausted and heart sore, until he joined Eijun in sleep.
Eijun woke first; his mind slowly piecing together everything, eyes closed, remembering. He felt the prickle of tears, but he didn’t cry, just let things sink in for a few seconds. He realized he was wrapped around Kazuya, and opened his eyes. They were cuddled up on his hospital bed, and Eijun looked over to see Norio sitting in a chair on the other side of the room. Eijun gently disentangled himself from Kazuya, and climbed out of bed. He was halfway across the room when Norio realized he was up and looked up from his book, laying it on the windowsill by his chair and jumping up to help. Eijun waved him back, making his way toward the couch beside the chair. He’d not gotten there when Norio got up again, this time with a bag in his hand.

“Here—I brought you some sweats to change into. I know you’re not comfortable in that.” He nodded at the hospital gown, and Eijun took the bag, murmuring his thanks. He went into the bathroom and changed, taking an inventory of himself while he was in private. His head ached, and his eyes were itchy from crying. Other than the fact that he was wrecked, he didn’t feel too bad, physically. Grimacing at his reflection, tamping down the emotions that he wanted to let spill all over the floor in a big, messy pile, he left the bathroom, working to don his game face.

Sitting on the couch, he didn’t quite know what to say to Kazuya’s father, so he said nothing and let Norio start the conversation.

“How are you—I’m sorry, that’s a stupid question.” Norio stumbled. “Can I get you anything? Are you thirsty?”

“No, thank you.” Eijun responded politely, still not sure why Norio was there.

“I was at the game, and saw you get hit, so I came as quickly as I could.” Norio explained. “I was waiting with Kazuya, but when they let him in, I went to get some food and make some calls for him. I just came back by to drop off the clothes and Kazuya’s phone.” He pulled it out of his pocket and laid it on the windowsill. “I’ll leave you two alone, but call me if you need anything at all.” Gathering up his stuff, he prepared to stand before he shook his head and sank back down in the chair, while Eijun watched, feeling oddly detached.

“No, I said I wasn’t going to run away anymore.” Norio looked at Eijun and sighed. “Eijun, I’m sorry. I know it’s rough, and I know how much you’re hurting right now. If there is anything I can do, anything you need, please let me know.”

Eijun looked at Kazuya’s father and smiled, softly, sadly. “Thank you, Dad. I appreciate you being here for us, and I’m sure Kazuya does too. I don’t know if there’s anything anyone can do, but if we need anything, you will be the first to know.”

“That’s fair, that’s good. I hope you take me up on it, I really do.” Norio continued. “I don’t know if I even have the right to say this to you, but it will get better. It’s cliché and overused, but it’s also true.” He bit his lip like he was struggling with something, and then continued. “Kazuya doesn’t know—he wasn’t old enough when his mother died to understand and I never told him—but he had a younger sister.” Eijun’s head shot up at this, and he felt moisture prickle his eyes. “We lost her when Akemi was six months along, Kazuya was just two. I know how it feels to lose a child, Eijun, it’s one of the most heart wrenching things that could happen.”
Clinging hard to his carefully constructed facade, Eijun spoke. “That had to be hard.”

Norio huffed out a breath and ran a tired hand over his face. “It was, incredibly difficult. And I made it worse by trying to be stoic and strong; I didn’t allow myself to grieve. I thought that was my responsibility, that was what Akemi needed, but I was wrong, so wrong.” He spoke haltingly, like this was something he had never said out loud before. “Instead, it created a distance between us that never healed, and that same sense of duty is the reason Kazuya and I became estranged.” He looked up and met Eijun’s eyes, “Please don’t let Kazuya wall himself off like that. That’s all he knows, and he may think that’s what he needs to do, but you can’t let him. Please don’t try to take this all on yourself, either. You have each other, take comfort in that, and allow the other to be your strength.” He looked over at the sleeping Kazuya, and smiled softly. “He loves you, you know? And I know you love him. That’s all you need to get through this.”

“Thank you.” Eijun said, mind still reeling at the revelations. “I’ll do my best to remember, and I won’t tell Kazuya what you told me.”

“I don’t mind if you do. If you think it will help, feel free.” Norio turned his smile onto Eijun. “I plan to tell him, I just haven’t had the chance, and I didn’t want to try to tell him when he was so worried about you; he didn’t need anything else to think about.” Norio let out a brief chuckle. “You should have seen him; I thought he was going to kill the doctor that wouldn’t let him see you. I got them to tell us your room number so we could wait outside, but he wanted so badly to be here with you.”

Kazuya woke slowly, hearing soft voices nearby. The events of the day returned in a rush, and his eyes immediately sought out Eijun. He found him sitting on the couch, talking to his father. The late afternoon sun shone through the nearby window, highlighting the vulnerability evident in his face, and Kazuya felt a rush of love and protectiveness for this boy who had become his everything and who was so clearly suffering.

He climbed off the bed and started over towards the pair. Eijun saw him move, and looked up, meeting his eyes with a sorrowful smile. Kazuya sat next to him and wrapped an arm around his shoulder, and Eijun leaned into him.

“Hey, you.” Kazuya kissed him on the temple, pulling him close. “Sorry about stealing your bed. You should lay down, you look exhausted, and I’ll bet your head’s pounding.”

“It’s fine; you needed a nap, too.” Eijun snuggled into his arms. “Can I stay here for a bit? I promise to lay down in a little while.”

“Sure, but how’s your head? Do you need some medicine?” Kazuya asked.

“It hurts,” Eijun admitted, “But I don’t want to take that medicine any more, I don’t like the way it makes me feel.”

“Maybe we can get them to give you something that’s not narcotic.” Kazuya suggested, gently rubbing Eijun’s head. “You should take something.” Eijun bunted his head against Kazuya’s hand in an unspoken demand for him to continue. “I’ll be here; I’m not leaving you alone with this.”

Eijun hummed happily as Kazuya continued to rub his head. “You need to sleep, though, Kaz. And eat?”

“I can order pizza in, I’ll bet. Or have someone bring us something if you don’t mind.”

Norio spoke up. “I can get you whatever you need, if you want me to.”
“No, Dad,” Kazuya said. “You’ve done so much already. Thank you for all your help, I really don’t know if that doctor would have survived if you’d not been there.”

“You don’t know how glad I am that I was able to be here. I think I will go, though, I just wanted to speak to Eijun a bit and tell you goodnight. Also, I called your parents, Eijun, as well as returned calls from ‘Moochi’, ‘Whiny Brat’, ‘Monster-chan’ and ‘Senpai’; I think that was it. They all sounded concerned and asked that you call them when you have the chance, I just told them about the concussion, nothing else.” Norio got up to go, and Kazuya rose as well, Eijun following.

“Thank you again, Dad.” Kazuya stepped forward and hugged him. Norio stiffened for a second, and then relaxed, wrapping his arms around Kazuya and returning the hug. Stepping apart, Norio’s eyes were suspiciously moist, and he smiled shakily.

“Take care, son.”

Norio stepped back, and Eijun stepped up, and hugged him as well. “Thank you.” Norio hugged him back. Eijun let go, and moved away.

“You take care too, other son.” Norio slanted a slight smirk at him. “Call me in the morning before you go home, ok? Let me know how you’re doing.”

“We will, Dad.” Kazuya said. “Drive safely.”

Norio left, closing the door quietly behind him.

“Come on, Ei; let’s get you back in bed.” Kazuya guided him, sliding back the blankets and making him comfortable. “I’ll ring the nurse and get you something that will help that headache. It’s got to be near dinner, are you hungry?”

“I’m not, but you probably need to eat. It’s been a while, I can’t believe you’re not dizzy,” Eijun commented.

Kazuya sighed. “I am a little, but I need to take care of you. I’ll be fine.”

“No, Kaz, you should sit down.” Eijun frowned. “I’ll make you a deal. I’ll stay in bed and take some medicine if you promise to sit down and eat something.”

“I don’t want to leave you to get food. I can’t leave you.” Kazuya protested.

“In that case, there are two choices. You can order pizza, or you can call Mochi and have him bring you some food.” Eijun crossed his arms and looked at Kazuya pointedly. He wasn’t going to let Kazuya sacrifice his health for him. “So what’s it going to be?”

“I...yeah, I’ll call Mochi. You call the nurse, right now.” Kazuya conceded, pulling up a chair to sit next to the bed.

“Good.” Eijun reached for the call button, and Kazuya pulled out his phone.

While they were waiting for Mochi and the drugs to kick in, Kazuya asked. “What are we telling
Mochi? Just that you have a concussion?” He carded his fingers through Eijun’s hair, soothing the headache.

Eijun blinked at Kazuya, clearly riding the edge of control. “I don’t think I could handle telling anyone right now, Kaz. Let’s just wait and decide if we’re going to tell later, ok?”

“That’s what I thought too,” Kazuya agreed. “I don’t know that I’d be able to talk about it either.”

They sat quietly for a few minutes before Eijun thought to ask, “Hey Kaz? How’s Peanut? Are you feeling all right?”

“I’m fine,” Kazuya replied.

“And Peanut? Peanut’s okay?” Eijun repeated.

Kazuya’s eyebrows furrowed. “Yes, as far as I can tell. What’s going on in your head?”

“I just...let’s be careful with this one, ok? I don’t want to lose another baby.” Eijun’s eyes were half glazed, the drugs kicking in and stripping some of his filters.

Kazuya rested his head on the pillow beside Eijun, and whispered his uncertainty, “I didn’t know if you still wanted Peanut after this.”

“Wait, why wouldn’t I?” Eijun was close enough that Kazuya could feel his breath. “I love Peanut; it has nothing to do with this. Peanut’s our baby, and we love it, right?”

“Right.” Kazuya could only agree, blinking back the threatening tears. “We love it.”

There was a knock on the door, and Mochi came strolling in carrying a McDonald’s bag.

“Hey you, stop laz—” he cut off what he was saying when he saw Eijun’s face. “God, Eijun, are you ok? I thought it was just a concussion?”

“You mean loopier, right?” Mochi sighed in relief as he came further into the room, delivering the bag to Kazuya. “Here you go, a Big Mac meal for you, and one for Peanut.”

“Thanks, Mochi, what do I owe you?” Kazuya dug a fry out of the bag and started to munch. Smelling the fries, he realized he was starving.

“Nada, it’s fine. Just making sure Peanut’s ok, and if that means I have to feed your ratty ass, so be it.” Mochi joked.

“Oh!” Eijun exclaimed suddenly. “Mochi, what happened with the game?”

Kazuya lifted up his head in surprise. “I can’t believe I completely forgot about it.”

“Kyhahaha! Really? Well, your team stepped up. They won, they were all so mad about you getting hurt, Eijun, that they didn’t allow any runs. The dude that hit you got ejected, and is gone for 5 games.” Mochi leaned on the foot of Eijun’s bed. “They reviewed the footage, and it looks like he hit you on purpose. He’s fighting it, of course, but it’s not looking good. No one hurts one of ‘Baseball’s Golden Couple’ or whatever the fuck they’re calling you these days, and gets away with it. The press was sniffing around downstairs earlier, I’d be careful when you come and go.”

“Thanks, Mochi. I appreciate you coming by.” Eijun said blearily, he was still awake, but everything
seemed a little fuzzy.

“Glad to do it, Eijun. Ryou was going to come, but he’s still on rounds.” He stood up, and walked over to Kazuya, squeezing his shoulder. “I’m going to go, see if I can catch him before he leaves. Take care of yourselves, both of you, and call me if you need anything, ok?”

“We will. Mochi. Thanks again,” Kazuya said as Mochi walked out the door, waving.

Kazuya ate his dinner, making Eijun sit up and eat some too. “I know you don’t feel like it, but your body needs it. Please try, Ei.” Eijun found, like Kazuya did, that he was starving once he ate a french fry, and he ate every bit of the meal Mochi had dubbed Peanut’s. They had just finished and Kazuya was throwing away the trash when there was a knock on the door and a doctor strode in.

It was Kanemaru.

“Good evening, Eijun, Kazuya.” He walked over to the foot of the bed and looked over Eijun’s chart. “I’m sorry it took so long for me to get here, the hospital didn’t tell me you were here until just a bit ago, and I wanted to wait for some test results and confer with an expert before I came to see you.”

“Thank you for coming by, Kanemaru-sensei.” Eijun smiled wearily. “You didn’t have to come by, though. It’s only a concussion.”

“Yes I did, you’re my patient. And you’re also my friend, as much as it pains me to admit it.” Kanemaru inspected Eijun as he spoke. “But the concussion isn’t why I came to speak to you two, nor is it the reason for the test results I was waiting on.”

Kazuya came to attention, and even Eijun’s eyes sharpened. Kanemaru pulled another chair close to the bed.

“I’m not sure if anyone told you, or if you were even awake for it, but they did a body scan to see if you were injured anywhere other than your head, and that’s how they discovered you’d been pregnant. I looked at your test results and the body scan they sent over with the notice you’d been admitted. I saw something I wanted clarification for, so I sent them on to an expert who I trust implicitly, and he confirmed my suspicions.

“Eijun, your baby miscarried a week or so ago. There’s no way, based on your hormone levels and the date we all know you got pregnant, as well as the results we could see on the scan, that you were pregnant today when you got hit.” Eijun looked befuddled, the drugs not allowing him to understand what it was Kanemaru was saying.

“Wait a second.” Kazuya leaned forward in his seat. “What you’re saying is that it wasn’t the fall?”

“Exactly. If you’d not gotten knocked out, you’d never have known you got knocked up.”

Eijun stared at Kanemaru. “Oh my god, I must really be dying. Shinji made a joke.”

“Shut up, Eijun, you’re high. And well you should be, with the drugs they’re pumping into you.” Kanemaru handed Kazuya an envelope. “Two things you should know. The expert I consulted was Haruichi. I didn’t use your names, but he’s smart, he’s probably figured it out. If you don’t want him to acknowledge it, just don’t say anything to him and he’ll keep it secret. Second, in that envelope is the gender of the child. It’s part of the test results. It’s yours to do with as you two wish.”

Kanemaru got out of his chair and prepared to leave. “I’ll be back to check on you in the morning, and discharge you. You should probably arrange someone to pick you up somewhere other than the
main entrance; it’s being watched by the press. Kazuya, I’ll tell the nurses to bring you a cot so you can stay with Eijun. Get some rest, both of you.” He clasped Kazuya on the shoulder and walked out.

Almost immediately, the nurses came in to take Eijun’s last vital sign reading of the night and to deliver the cot for Kazuya. They set it up and left, and Kazuya dragged it over to beside Eijun’s bed, so they could sleep as close together as possible. Kazuya laid down and lifted a hand to Eijun’s face, cupping his cheek.

Eijun looked as dazed as Kazuya felt. “Ei. Did you understand what he said?”

“That he’s coming back tomorrow? And that I’m not pregnant? Or something about tests?” Eijun fumbled for coherence.

Kazuya almost laughed, Eijun looked so cute and cuddly. “Listen to me, Eijun. He said that the fall didn’t cause the miscarriage. You’d already miscarried before the game.”

Eijun frowned, pouting. “I didn’t kill the baby by playing baseball?”

“No, you didn’t.”

“Then how did I kill it?” Eijun was confused.

Kazuya reached for patience, “You didn’t kill the baby, sometimes babies just miscarry.”

“It wasn’t my fault?”

“Nope, not at all.”

Eijun’s forehead creased as he thought about it. “How do you know, Kaz?”

“Kanemaru and Haruichi said so,” Kazuya explained, running his hand through Eijun’s hair.

“Kanemaru and Haruichi? They were here?”

“Kanemaru was, don’t you remember?”

Eijun’s eyes cleared for a second. “Oh, yeah. He made a joke.”

“Yes, he did. He said it wasn’t you, and Haruichi agreed. Haruichi’s a pregnancy doctor, remember? He would know.” Kazuya moved his hand down, ran a soft finger over Eijun’s cheek.

“I didn’t kill the baby?” Eijun said, hopefully.

Kazuya sighed in relief. “No, you didn’t kill the baby.”

“I didn’t kill the baby.” Eijun breathed.

“That’s right, Ei. You didn’t kill the baby.” Kazuya was nearly chuckling at this point.

Eijun opened his eyes wide, and gazed into Kazuya’s, fighting for a moment of clarity. “If what they say is true, Miyuki Kazuya, you didn’t kill it either.” He lost his fight with consciousness and fell asleep.

Kazuya let the words sink into his mind as he watched Eijun sleep, tears streamed down his cheeks, until exhaustion got the better of him.
Fingers intertwined, they slept.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry.

Feel free to yell at me below.
Moving Along

Chapter Summary

More talking.
Less crying.
Decisions.

Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be the last chapter of the first trimester, but well, reasons.
I hope you like it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ten Weeks

Eijun woke slowly, burying his head in his pillow and trying for more sleep. It took him a second to notice that he wasn’t in his own bed, and then it all started coming back. The game, the fall, the concussion.

The baby.

He realized a couple of things. One, his head no longer pounded, it had subsided to a slight headache. Two, although he was heartbroken about the baby, he didn’t feel the guilt that had destroyed him the day before. He wasn’t quite sure why.

Then snippets of conversation came to him, through the haze of his clouded memories.

‘Eijun, your baby miscarried a week or so ago.’ Had that been Kanemaru?

‘You didn’t kill the baby, sometimes they just miscarry.’ Kazuya.

‘If you hadn’t gotten knocked out you would have never known you were knocked up.’ Kanemaru again.

‘Kanemaru and Haruichi said so.’ Kazuya.

‘If what they say is true, Miyuki Kazuya, you didn’t kill it either.’ He remembered saying that, seeing the tears on Kazuya’s cheeks.

He opened his eyes and looked at Kazuya, still asleep on the cot beside him, hand resting on Eijun’s bed, just waiting for Eijun to need it. He felt such a rush of affection for this man who’d stuck by him through everything life threw at them, who supported and argued and snarked, who loved. He remembered how Kazuya had held him, cried with him, comforted him. He thought about the ache in his voice when he’d whispered, ‘I didn’t know if you still wanted Peanut after this,’ and his heart
broke again; he knew Kazuya was feeling so guilty for still being pregnant, even though none of it was his fault.

Thinking about that guilt, lying in the bed waiting for Kazuya to wake up, he realized he did need to figure out a way to talk to Kazuya about his own feelings of culpability. It was the first thing he thought about when he’d heard about the baby; somehow, he’d cursed it by thinking that way about Peanut. He needed to speak to Kazuya about it, get some clarity, maybe even some forgiveness. Although it was a vast relief to discover he hadn’t done something to cause the miscarriage, he still felt like it was some kind of punishment for his thoughts.

He watched Kazuya, mind drifting as he just rested, not thinking about anything concrete, willing to let his thoughts go where they would. Kazuya looked so soft, so vulnerable when he was asleep, and Eijun loved to watch him wake up, watch him go from relaxed to alert. It wasn’t long before he saw Kazuya stir, saw his eyes blink open and his gaze sharpen. “Good morning, beautiful.” Eijun smiled at his husband.

“Good morning, Ei.” Kazuya returned the smile and reached his hand up to rub Eijun’s cheek. “How are you feeling this morning?”

“I’m alright.” Eijun laid his hand on Kazuya’s and brought it to his lips, laying a kiss in his palm. “My headache is nearly gone. And...I think I remember what Shinji said last night. He said that I miscarried earlier, last week sometime?”

“Yes, he did. He even confirmed it with Haruichi. It just happens. The first trimester is when most miscarriages take place.” Kazuya smiled at him softly, twining their fingers together.

Eijun sighed and relaxed. “Oh, ok. That’s good to know.” He lay there for a second, letting it soak in, until he suddenly shot upright. “Wait! What about Peanut?”

“Peanut’s fine, Ei.” Kazuya soothed, sitting up.

Eijun was having none of it. “How do you know? We don’t know!”

“Eijun.” Kazuya stood up and pushed the cot to one side, sitting on the bed. “Peanut’s fine.”

“But we don’t know, Kaz. We don’t!” Eijun couldn’t stop the tears from falling. “We didn’t know about the other one at all.”

Kazuya melted, dragging Eijun into his arms. “We didn’t, and I’m so sorry about that. So sorry it happened, but Eijun, we have to trust Peanut will be alright.” He blinked back his own tears and worries, concentrating on Eijun. “If it would help you feel better, do you want me to call Haruichi and see if we can schedule an ultrasound? Then you’ll know.”

Eijun sat up slowly, rubbing his eyes. “Do you think he would?”

“I’m sure he knows it was you Kanemaru was asking about, and I’d imagine he’d be expecting it. He knows you, after all.”

Eijun chuckled wetly. “He does. Yes, please call him. But not for a bit.” Eijun looked at the window. “I don’t think it’s even seven yet.”

“You’re right. That’s ok; there are a few things I’d like to talk to you about.”

“Me too, Kaz. I have some things I want to speak with you about, too.”
“Good thing we have time, then.” Kazuya said. “We should get comfortable, though. All of this talking might take a while.” He moved to the couch and sat sideways, with his back against the armrest and a leg along the back, and patted the cushion in front of him. “Come here, let’s snuggle for a bit.”

Eijun slid into the spot indicated, and Kazuya wrapped his arms around him. “Too bad we don’t have a swing.” Eijun commented, and Kazuya huffed out an agreement.

“What did you want to talk about, Ei?” Kazuya asked gently.

Eijun fiddled, playing with Kazuya’s fingers. “I’m trying to figure out how to talk about it. I’ve never been good about working things out on my own anyway, so I’m just going to say what I have to say, and we can work it out together. You’re always good at knowing what I mean.”

“First of all. Kazuya.” Eijun turned sideways so he could look him in the eyes. “Don’t you dare ever feel guilty for being pregnant, for still carrying Peanut. You didn’t do anything wrong, and god knows I don’t want to lose you or the baby. You’re amazing and wonderful and you’ve been so good to me. It’s not your fault, neither of you have done anything to feel guilty about. I love you both, and I always will.” He lifted his hand to Kazuya’s cheek, swiping a thumb along his cheekbone. “I love you. Peanut is ours, Kaz, and we love it. They’re both ours, and we love them.”

Kazuya looked at him in wonder, eyes watering. “Oh, god. Eijun. You’re right. They’re both ours. I have the right to mourn for the lost one, and you can be excited about Peanut. Thank you for remembering that, for reminding me about that. I’m sorry, my brain got tangled up in this thing and I couldn’t think straight.” He leaned over Eijun and kissed him.

Until their lips met, neither of them realized that they hadn’t kissed since before the game the day before. Eijun wrapped his hand around the back of Kazuya’s head, leaning up as much as he could to ease Kazuya’s neck. Kazuya pulled Eijun to himself, wrapping him tightly in his arms. They kissed, and found comfort and love and everything they needed right then, together. They were in this together.

Eventually, they pulled apart, and Kazuya rested his forehead on Eijun’s. “I love you so much right now.”

“I feel the same, Kaz.” Eijun smiled softly at him. “You’ve been amazing through this. Thank you.”

“We’re in this together, remember? We support each other. That’s what we do.”

“You’re right, of course. I have one other thing I want to talk to you about, but let’s talk about whatever it is you wanted to first.”

Kazuya sighed, and reached over to the side table, picking up the envelope Shinji had left.

“Shinji left this with us; you were so out of it, I doubt you noticed.” He looked inquiringly at Eijun, who shook his head. “I didn’t think so. Part of the blood work they did on you identified the sex of the baby. It’s in here, if you want to know.”

Eijun sat up a bit and turned to face Kazuya. “If we want to know.” He corrected.

“You’re right. If we want to know.”

“What do you think, Kaz?”

“I think, if it’s ok with you, that I’d like to know.” He laced his fingers in Eijun’s. “It would be good
to not have to call the baby ‘it’.”

“I agree.” Eijun squeezed Kazuya’s hand. “I think we should know.”

Kazuya handed him the envelope, “You open it, you should know first.”

“No, Kaz. We’re doing this together.” Eijun loosened the flap, and pulled out the sheet of paper, leaving it folded. He turned back around and snuggled into Kazuya, holding the paper in front of both of them.

“Ready?”

“Yeah.”

Eijun unfolded the paper, and they read the one word on it in silence.

He felt the tears on his cheeks, and Kazuya’s damp cheek slide against his, his low whisper.

“It was a girl. We’ve lost our baby girl.”

“We did. Oh, Kaz. We did.” Eijun turned enough so he could wrap his arms around Kazuya, and buried his face in his neck. They snuggled like that, tears falling, sad but not bereft. “I’m glad we know, even if it makes it sadder for us.”

“Me too, Ei. I’d rather know.” Kazuya shifted a little, rubbing Eijun’s arm gently. “What do you think about giving her a name?” Eijun’s head popped up, and he looked at Kazuya, blinking. “And I think we should add her to the shrine, with my mom and your grandma. They’ll look after her.”

Kazuya ran a gentle finger along Eijun’s cheekbone, and Eijun smiled at him, eyes still streaming, but clearer than they’d been since he’d been hurt.

“I didn’t think I could love you any more than I did, but I was wrong. I adore you, Miyuki Kazuya.” Eijun declared. “That’s perfect, what a wonderful idea.” He leaned up and gave Kazuya a soft kiss.

“What should we name her?”

They sat in silence for a few minutes, thinking about names and lost little girls.

Kazuya spoke first, “I’m not sure...something that means what she is to us. How about Kiku?”

“Chrysanthemum? It’s maybe too sad? I don’t want her to only be remembered for mourning.” Eijun sat for a few minutes, running through names in his head. “What do you think of Hotoru?”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Kazuya nodded. “Fireflies are beautiful and fleeting, and that’s what she was. Maybe Haruko?”

“Haruko? Spring child?” Eijun sat up and faced Kazuya, not smiling, but looking content. “That’s perfect, Kaz. She was with us and left us in the spring.”

“Haruko it is, then.” Kazuya pulled Eijun close, and they rested together, emotionally exhausted.

“I suppose at some point my eyes will stop leaking.” Kazuya whined.

Eijun snorted a laugh, startling himself. “You know what gramps always told me. ‘The more you cry, the less you pee.’”

“Oh, god. I wish. Peanut has me peeing all day long. I think I know where every bathroom in every place we go is.” Kazuya grinned wryly.
“Ok, last thing, Kaz. Get all this emotional stuff done at once,” Eijun turned back around, and leaned into Kazuya, wrapping his arms around himself. He slipped their fingers together, and gathered his thoughts. “This is hard for me. I feel so guilty for feeling like this; I never wanted to be that person.”

“What’s going on, Ei? Can you start from the beginning?” Kazuya queried softly, trying to help Eijun order his thoughts.

“The beginning. Okay, I can do that. Here’s what happened. You are pregnant, and I was...I know that it’s your body, your decision. But I can’t help thinking about what I would have felt if you’d not wanted Peanut.” Eijun played with Kazuya’s fingers, trying to get his thoughts in order. “I don’t know what I would have done. I don’t want to be that person who says the right stuff, but doesn’t believe it. That’s not me; I know it’s not. But I...I don’t know how I would have acted if you didn’t want the baby. I know I would have been heartbroken, but I don’t have any right to feel that way. I’ve been feeling so guilty over this, Kaz. Like I would somehow force you to keep it, and I couldn’t figure out how to talk to you about it. And then Haruko happened, and I can’t help think it’s what I get for being selfish.”

Kazuya tightened his arms around Eijun, resting his chin on his shoulder. “Oh, wow. I didn’t know you were upset about that, I knew you had something on your mind, but not that. So let me tell you what I think, and we’ll work it out together.” Eijun nodded, snuggling into Kazuya.

“First of all and most importantly. What happened with Haruko is in no way, shape, or form your fault. Absolutely not. You didn’t think her into miscarriage, and it wasn’t some divine punishment for being selfish. Which you’re categorically not being, anyway.

“Second. The idea of it being ‘my body, my choice’ is a noble one, and at the most basic, it’s true. But there are so many factors involved. This is your baby too, as you just reminded me. You should have some say in its future. If two people care about each other, care about their relationship, they probably know how the other feels about children before the issue even arises. If they’re on opposite sides, then they have to figure out a way to work it out. Me saying ‘It’s my body, I’ll do as I like’ is as selfish as you somehow forcing me to carry it, even though it’s technically true.” Kazuya shifted Eijun around so he could look him in the eyes.

“Eijun. Look at me, please.” Eijun reluctantly lifted his eyes. “If, for some reason, I decided to not keep the baby, you would have every right to be heartbroken. Even if I’m the one carrying it, it’s still your baby. I’m heartbroken over Haruko, and I don’t think anyone would tell me that I don’t have the right to be. If you’d aborted her, I’d be devastated.” He gave Eijun a quick kiss.

“That’s the problem with those kinds of sayings. They’re generally true, but they’re vastly simplified. Life is rarely compressed into a slogan that fits on a sign.” He sighed. “It’s a tough thing, and you are right to struggle with it. But don’t feel guilty, you did nothing wrong. If you really didn’t care what happened with Peanut, that’s when I’d worry.” He tucked Eijun’s head under his chin, rubbing his arms. “I love you, Ei. We’re in this together, and we’ll get through all of this together. Please don’t ever feel like you can’t talk to me about something, even if it concerns me, or a situation like this. Sometimes it’s hard to see the truth from the inside of the dilemma.”

“Thank you, Kaz.” Eijun mumbled into his shirt. “I knew you’d be able to help me, but I didn’t want to put any pressure on you, in case you were wavering about Peanut.”

“I love you for worrying, but I don’t want you to stew on stuff, you tend to make it harder on yourself. I’m here for you, whenever and however you need me to be.” Kazuya sighed. “Is there any other heart wrenching thing we need to discuss? If not, we should go pick out paint colors or something, do something fun. We deserve it.”
“It has been a rough twenty-four hours, hasn’t it? I’m sorry; I could have handled it better.” Eijun apologized.

“You handled it fine,” Kazuya asserted. “It was tough, and the worst is over, but I think we’ll be sad about her for a long time. And that’s okay, that’s normal.”

“Shinji’s coming by this morning, right? To discharge me.”

“Yeah, he wants to look you over when you’re lucid, and tell you how long you’re out for.”

“Oh, man. I don’t want to have to sit out.”

“You know the rule; you’re going to be out for at least a week. Concussions are serious.”

Eijun pouted. “I don’t wanna.”

“Are you four, Ei? Don’t take any chances with yourself, Peanut’s going to need both of us.”

“That’s not playing fair, Miyuki Kazuya.”

“One works with what one has.” Kazuya smirked. “However, you do bring up a good question. Two of them, really.” Eijun sat up completely and faced Kazuya, curious. “Firstly, how are we going to get our car? And second, who are we telling about Haruko?”

“We’re going to have to call someone. We can call your dad, if you want. Or Mochi.” Eijun thought for a minute. “We should tell my parents. And Mochi, since he’s our best friend, and Ryou may know or find out. Haruichi won’t gossip, but they work together.”

“Oh, how about this, then. We call Mochi to come get us, and tell him then.” Kazuya said. “Now let me up, Peanut’s dancing on my bladder.” Eijun stood and offered Kazuya his hand. “Thanks.”

While Kazuya was in the bathroom, the nurses came in to take vital signs and drop off breakfast. Eijun sweet-talked them into leaving a second one for Kazuya, so when he returned, he had breakfast waiting.

“It’s not much, just eggs and miso; I hope it’s alright with Peanut.” Eijun said as Kazuya came back into the room.

“I’m starving, Ei. I’m sure it will be fine.” He sat at the other side of the rollout table, and they ate their breakfast.

“The nurses said Shinji is usually here around 8:30, so after he’s done, we’ll call Mochi to come get us. I think we can call Haruichi about the same time, see what he says.” Eijun suggested.

Kazuya nodded. “That’s a good plan. I should call my dad, he asked us to. And he’ll be glad to hear the update, I’m sure.” Kazuya put his spoon down, and stared into his bowl. “I don’t quite know what to think, Ei. My dad was amazing yesterday; he couldn’t have been any more helpful. I’m grateful, of course, but I can’t help wondering how long it will last.”

“I know. I’m thinking the same thing, but Kaz? What if it never changes? Are you going to spend the rest of your life waiting for him to let you down?” Eijun met Kazuya’s troubled gaze. “I don’t mean you have to act like everything’s perfect and he’s never had problems, just maybe give him a little benefit of the doubt? He’s trying, you know that. And he’s bound to make mistakes, slip back. We all do. I just don’t want you to point at the inevitable slip up as a reason to start acting like he’s the same as before.”
I’m afraid I’ll want it too much, so much that I’ll either make excuses when he acts like he used to, or be devastated when he does. I’m not sure which is more likely.

“I can help, maybe?” Eijun offered. “I’ll watch out for you, I told him I wasn’t going to let him do any more damage, and I meant it. Kazuya, you and Peanut are the most important things in my world right now. I will protect you with everything I have.”

“I...thank you, Ei. I don’t want you to go that far, but just watching out for me would be great. Again, in the middle it’s hard to see the truth of things.” He reached over and squeezed Eijun’s hand. “So, I should probably call him?”

“Yes, please do. You should.” Eijun agreed. “Give him an update, ask him if he wants to meet for dinner or come over later this week.”

“Good idea, I’ll do that.” Kazuya made the call, while Eijun turned on the television that was in the corner, looking for the sports channel. He’d caught the beginning of the news cycle, when he realized they were talking about him. They showed the footage of his fall, and he realized he’d been hit much worse than that and not been hurt—he must have hit his head just right. Next they showed the outside of the hospital where the press was gathered. Highlights of the game were shown, and Eijun was amazed at how the team rallied, not allowing any runs and scoring run after run. After every good play the crowd roared ‘Osh, Osh, Osh’, and Eijun found himself in tears.

“Oi, brat. You’re not crying again, are you?” Kazuya raised an eyebrow.

Eijun sniffed. “Go away, Miyuki Kazuya. Let me enjoy the crowd that loves me.”

“Of course they love you, idiot. You have those big shoujo eyes and that stupid sunshine grin, and that crazy pitch. Good thing pitchers aren’t supposed to be good hitters, though, because you kinda suck at that part.” Kazuya stepped up beside Eijun and rubbed his head as Eijun squirmed.

“That’s not true; I’m a good...well, better than I was!”

“You’re right, you are.” Kazuya agreed, and sat beside him. “Dad said he would come by on Friday to see us, and that he was glad to hear about Haruko. He also said something about reminding you to tell me something I should know. What was that, Ei?”

Eijun thought back to their conversation while Kazuya slept. “Oh! He wants me to tell you?”

“That’s what he said.”

“Ok, it’s not my story, but I’ll tell you. He said you’d had a little sister. When you were two, your mom got pregnant again. You were too young to remember it, but she miscarried in her sixth month, and she never got pregnant again.”

Kazuya looked at Eijun, surprised. “Wait. I had a little sister? Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

“He said you were still too young to understand when your mother died, and he...well, you know how he was. He told me that to tell me two things.” Eijun turned towards Kazuya and laid his hand on Kazuya’s leg. “First of all, that he’d lost a child, knew what it felt like, and it would get better, with time. Secondly, that he wanted me to make sure you didn’t do what he did, try to act all stoic and not grieve, thinking somehow that’s what I needed. That’s how he reacted, he said it drove a wedge between him and your mother, and laid the groundwork for how he treated you after she died.”

“So that’s why...” Kazuya trailed off. “He tried to tell me the same thing yesterday. I’m not him, of
course, but it’s nice to know he is looking out for us. I need to let this stew for a while; we’ll discuss it later, okay?” Eijun nodded.

Kazuya looked at the television and saw they’d cycled back around to Eijun. “Good timing, I wanted to see this.” He watched as they showed the hit, and looked at Eijun with curious eyes.

“I know, I’ve taken much worse hits than that and not even been hurt. My head must have hit the ground at just the right angle.”

“I could have sworn your head was much harder than that.” Kanemaru walked into the room, smiling at his patient. “How are you feeling this morning, Eijun?”

“I’ve still got a little headache, but other than that, I feel fine.” Kanemaru performed a few tests on him, checking his eyes and his motor functions. “Shinji, thank you for finding the results of those additional tests, and for checking with Haruichi. I can’t tell you how much better that makes me feel. It still hurts, but it’s good to know it wasn’t my fault.”

Kanemaru shook his head. “Not at all. As I said last night, you’re my patient. And my friend, despite all appearances to the contrary. I wanted to make sure there wasn’t something else going on as well, some issue with you. As far as we could determine, there’s nothing preventing you from getting pregnant in the future and carrying it to term.”

“Really?” Eijun smiled. “I’m glad to hear that.”

“Anyway, concussion means you’re on the DL for a week, so you can play again next Sunday. Rest up, and let yourself heal. You may not have any major physical injuries, but both the head and the body need some time.” Kanemaru wrote something in his notes. “I’ll have you discharged in the next few minutes; you can go home whenever you’re ready. There are still reporters hanging around, you may want to try to go out another way. Remember, I need to see you Friday in my office. Also, I’m leaving you a prescription, which they’ll fill for you at the desk. It will help your head. Take it.” He headed for the door, stopping with his hand on the handle. “One more thing. Haruichi told me last night to tell you when you were lucid that Kazuya can come by the clinic any time for an ultrasound. You don’t even have to make an appointment.” He closed the door gently behind himself.

Eijun looked at Kazuya, who chuckled. “You were right. Haruichi does know you.”

“I know, he’s great.” Eijun said. “You want to call Mochi?”

“I already did, he’s on his way.”

“Wow, efficient. Do you do windows?” Eijun grinned.

Kazuya smirked. “Nope, but I’ll do you.”

“You’re hired. You can start right away.” Kazuya busted out a laugh, and cupped Eijun’s cheek.

“I adore you, Sawamura Eijun, you know that?”

“Oh, god. Some things I can’t unsee, would you like me to come back another time?” Kuramochi strolled into the room with an unimpressed look on his face.

“Hi, Mochi! How are you?” Eijun smiled at his friend, while Kazuya smirked, unrepentant. “Thank you for coming to get us. Shinji said there are press outside, is that true?”

“Just a couple of reporters, they’ll probably not bother you. None of them are the obnoxious ones.”
“Ok, good. Listen, we have something we need to tell you.” Eijun started, and Kuramochi groaned.

“No. Don’t tell me. You’re pregnant too; you idiots finally figured out that you could both be pregnant.”

Eijun blinked rapidly. “No, not exactly. I was pregnant. I miscarried.”

Mochi paled, and stepped up to hug Eijun. “God, I’m an idiot. I’m so sorry, Eijun, that has to be terribly painful for you. I...fuck. I’m sorry.” He blinked back tears.

“It’s...you couldn’t have known, Mochi. It’s ok, really.” Eijun returned the hug.

“Was it the hit you took?” Mochi looked even more pained.

Kazuya answered. “No, thank god. Haruichi says he’d miscarried sometime last week. It was just one of those things. According to Shinji, if Eijun hadn’t gotten knocked down, we never would have known he was knocked up.” Eijun snorted out a laugh.

“Yeah, a lot of pregnancies terminate early; at least that’s what Ryou says.” Kuramochi rubbed his head. “Are you telling everyone?”

“No, we wanted you to know, but we’re not telling anyone else but our parents,” Kazuya explained. “Shinji and Haruichi know, but that’s it. If you want to tell Ryou, that’s fine as well.”

“All right, I’ll keep it to myself. Again, I’m sorry, I know it’s hard.”

“Yes, it’s surprisingly painful.” Kazuya admitted. “I can’t help but wonder if we couldn’t have done something differently, if Haruko wouldn’t still be around if we had.”

“No, don’t think like that.” Kuramochi said. “I’ve heard enough from Ryou to know that these things just happen, and no amount of trying will save the baby. Haruko? It was a girl?”

“Yeah, Shinji had them run the tests.”

“Well, that’s a beautiful name. And perfect.” Kuramochi blinked again, tears in his eyes. “I can’t believe how teary this is making me. Come on, you two; let’s head out before we all start bawling again. Where do you need me to take you?”

“We need to go to the club, our car’s there, and we need to give them an update. Ei had a concussion, so he’s on the DL for a week.”

“Do you need to do anything before we leave? Stop at the desk?”

“I have some medicine to grab, so yeah.” Eijun agreed.

“Ok, let’s get going.” Kuramochi walked out of the room, followed closely by the other two, hand in hand.

They stopped for the prescription, and headed for the front doors. Kuramochi had been right, there were a few reporters out there, but no one that was intrusive, so their trip to the car was uneventful.

They didn’t talk about much on the way to the club; Eijun was still pretty tired and headachy. Kazuya monitored him carefully from the front seat while chatting about nothing of any import with Kuramochi. Pulling into the parking lot, Kuramochi drove up to the front door and dropped them off.

“Hey, you and Ryou should come by this week. I’ll cook.” Kazuya offered.
Kuramochi grinned. “You’re cooking again? Awesome, we’ll be there. Let me get with Ryou and see when he’s free.”

“Yeah, you do that, let me know. We’ll see you then, Mochi. Thanks for the ride.” Kazuya climbed out of the car.

“No problem. Take care, and call me if you need anything,” Kuramochi responded. “Oi, idiot!” Eijun stopped sliding out of the back seat and looked at him. “Take care of yourself, ok? Rest up and feel better. Don’t make me come over and sit on your ass.” He cackled.

“I won’t, Mochi.” Eijun smiled at him affectionately. “Thank you for everything.”

“You’re welcome, Ei. Anytime. Seriously.”

Eijun closed the door, and he drove away.

The team was in a post-game meeting when they entered the building, so they slipped into the back of the room to hear the rest of the breakdown. The head coach saw them back there and gave a nod, continuing his analysis and description of future training. Finishing up, he dismissed the team to practice, and they all detoured to speak to Eijun quickly before heading out. The only ones who lingered were Takahashi and Ikeda, the first baseman.

“How are you feeling, Sawamura?” Takahashi asked, as the crowd left. “You’re out for a week?”

“Yeah, concussion means DL for a week.” Eijun agreed, frowning. “It sucks, but I’ll survive. I’ve had worse; I’m just a little headachy and tired.”

“Good, I’m glad. We’re going to miss you.”

“I’m going to miss playing. Poor Miyuki, I’ll probably drive him nuts.”

Kazuya chuckled. “Nothing new there.”

“Oi, jerk. Injured person here, you should be nicer.”

“Then you’d think you were losing your mind on top of the concussion. That’s not good.” Takahashi snarked, comforted by the normality of their exchange.

Ikeda stepped up, “Sawamura, I’m so sorry about that.” He glanced nervously at Kazuya, who was eyeing him narrowly.

“Why?” Eijun was genuinely puzzled. “It wasn’t your fault, you were making the play. I was covering like I was supposed to. The only one who is to blame is the asshole who ran into me. And he did it on purpose? That’s the one who should be apologizing.” Eijun elbowed Kazuya in the side. “Stop glaring, you’re scaring him. You know it’s not his fault.”

“Sorry.” Kazuya said, unrepentant. “It wasn’t you, Ikeda. I was imagining what I want to do to that guy.”

Ikeda bowed, proffered his wishes for Eijun’s speedy recovery, and left them for the field.


“I’m trying, Eijun. But I saw you fall, it was horrifying.”
“I know, I was there when you got hurt, remember?” Eijun was on the mound when Kazuya destroyed his knee, and he still felt the heartrending fear of that moment. “But it’s still not his fault.”

“Ugh.” Kazuya ran a hand through his hair, and turned to Takahashi, who was watching them with a smile on his face. “Listen, there’s something we need to tell the bullpen. Can you gather them and bring them in here?”

“Of course!” He left to find the rest of the pitchers and catchers, leaving Eijun and Kazuya standing in the meeting room.

“You want to tell them about Peanut now?” Eijun asked.

Kazuya shrugged. “It’s as good of a time as any, and with you being out for the week, it might give the gossip time to die down before you get back. It seems like a good idea.”

“But you’re going to have to work, so you’ll have to deal with it.” Eijun protested.

“Me? I’ll just glare at anyone who questions me. I’ll be fine, you know I will.” Kazuya smirked. “It’s you they’ll corner and interrogate.”

“You’re not wrong, Kaz.”

The pitchers and catchers started straggling in, gathering in a loose circle around Kazuya. Takahashi wandered back in, giving Kazuya a thumbs-up.

“Everyone here? Ok, good. I’m going to make this short, I just wanted to let you guys know about something. Only one other player knows, and you are the only group we’re telling directly, although soon everyone will figure it out.” Kazuya took a deep breath and stepped in front of Eijun.

“We’re pregnant.” He heard the collective intake of breath, and all eyes went to Eijun. “More specifically, I’m pregnant. I’m not due until November, so I expect to coach until the end.”

Takahashi laughed and walked forward, hand outstretched. “Congratulations, you two. You’re going to be great parents. And I’m glad we’re not losing our starting pitcher for the season.”

“Thanks.” Kazuya shook his hand, and he moved on to Eijun. The other players followed suit, making snarky and inappropriate comments, predictions of gender and offering name suggestions. None of which was a surprise, and all of it comforting.

“The tabloids are going to love this.” Takahashi smirked. “The Golden Couple are laying a Golden Egg’ or some shit.” The gathered players laughed. “I’m surprised management hasn’t got you having a press conference and making some formal announcement.”

“They tried.” Eijun said, and his eyes hardened. “We refused. This is a baby, our baby, not some publicity stunt.” The team nodded, agreeing. “They’ll figure it out eventually, of course, and we aren’t going to lie about it, we just don’t want to broadcast it. Your discretion is appreciated.”

“No worries, we all understand what it means to be a team. We won’t go running to the tabloids.” One of the players offered.

“Unless they offer a shitton of money. Forget this whole ‘team’ thing.” Another snarked.

Eijun laughed. “If they offer you a ton of money, go for it. But I expect a commission.” They all laughed, and the players left the room for practice.
“That went well.” Eijun said, sliding his hand into Kazuya’s.

Kazuya smiled. “It did. Now we have to go talk to the coach.” Eijun groaned.

“I don’t want to be on the DL. I want to play.” Eijun pouted.

“Oh god, are you going to whine all week about this? Because if so, I’m going to work overtime.”

“You’re the worst, Kaz. Have some sympathy here.” Kazuya stopped and turned to face Eijun.

“Eijun. Do you really think I don’t sympathize with someone who can’t play when they want to? You only have to deal with it for a week. That’s not that long.” Eijun deflated and met Kazuya’s eyes, regret etched into his face.

“Oh no. I’m such an asshole. I’m so, so sorry, Kaz, god. I don’t even...I’m such an idiot. I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking.” Eijun cupped Kazuya’s face in his hands. “I’m so stupid, selfish. What a horrible thing for me to say. I love you, and I’m sorry.”

“It’s ok.” Kazuya pressed soft kisses in the palms of each of Eijun’s hands, pulling him close into a hug. “I understand how you’re feeling, but sometimes it’s still hard for me to know that I can never play again.”

“I know, Kaz. You’re so good about it that sometimes I forget, and that’s on me. I know how hard it is for you, I’m just...sometimes I just don’t think.” Eijun apologized again, sinking deeper into the hug.

“It’s fine.” Kazuya stepped back and slotted their fingers together. “Let’s go talk to management, get this done so we can take care of the important stuff.”

“Sounds like a plan to me.” Eijun squeezed his hand, and side by side, they walked down the hallway.

Chapter End Notes

Comment away, please.

Next week we should descend back into all fluff, most of the time. There are still some sads, of course. That's going to take some time.
Their talk with the management ending with Eijun officially on the DL until Sunday, they left the clubhouse and headed for their car. Eijun dug in his bag for the keys and Kazuya held his hand out.

“I should drive.”

“I’m fine.” Eijun insisted. “I can drive.”

“Eijun.” Kazuya stared at him. “You have a concussion. I should drive.”

“How are you feeling, Kaz? Please don’t lie.” Eijun hedged.

“I’m fine. A little hungry, but I’ll be ok until we get home.” Eijun eyed him doubtfully. “Seriously, I wouldn’t lie about this, not now. Do you really think I’d endanger you or Peanut?”

Sighing, Eijun handed over the keys to Kazuya. “No, I know you wouldn’t. But if you start to feeling bad, please pull over, ok? We can stop for food if you need to.”

“Getting home and showering is all I want to do,” Kazuya said with a smirk, and Eijun agreed.

“Home sounds good. We should clean up and eat, and then see how you’re feeling, decide if you need a nap before we go to see Haruichi.”

“You may need one too, Ei. You also need to take your pills.” Kazuya climbed into the front seat, and Eijun slid into the passenger side.

“I may,” Eijun admitted. “I’m still tired, and my head is starting to hurt again.”
“Ok, when we get home, take some medicine. Haruichi’s in until five and it’s only just noon,” Kazuya informed him, reaching his hand across the console to hold Eijun’s. Kazuya pulled out into traffic and they drove in silence for a while, just allowing peace to seep into their bones.

Eijun laced their fingers together, and squeezed. “You’ve been so amazing, Kaz. I would never have made it through this without you. Thank you.”

“You’d do the same for me. You are doing the same for me. It’s what we do, right?” Kazuya smiled, “We take care of each other.” He turned onto their street and sighed. “We’ve been partners for a long time, Ei. I can’t imagine what life would be without you here. Taking care of you is a joy and a privilege. I’m glad you allow me to do it.”

“I feel the same, Kaz. I love that you allow me in, allow me to take care of you, to see the parts you keep hidden. You’re amazing, and my life would be so empty without you.” Eijun sniffed. “Partners, Kazuya. You were prophetic that day.”

“I was, but I had no idea how happy the word, the fact, would make me.” Kazuya pulled into the driveway and parked. Eijun climbed out of the car, and Kazuya followed him up the stairs.

Once inside, Eijun collapsed on the couch, and waved Kazuya to the shower first. He leaned his head back against the cushions and exhaled. Dragging himself into the kitchen, he grabbed a glass of water and swallowed the pills, heading back into the living room, where he switched on the television. It was set to the sports channel, and he was halfway paying attention, almost drifting off, when he heard his name. Opening his eyes, he saw himself and Kazuya leaving the hospital with Mochi, and he was shocked at how ragged they both looked. He hoped his parents weren’t watching. He needed to talk to them, but he didn’t think he could handle it alone.

He pushed himself off the couch and went into the bedroom, where he grabbed sweats and t-shirts for both of them. Walking into the bathroom, he laid the clothes on the sink, undressed, and climbed into the shower behind Kazuya. Wrapping his hands around Kazuya’s waist, he leaned his forehead on the middle of his back. Kazuya laced their fingers together and hummed in inquiry.

“Nothing important. I just...I saw us on TV, and we both look like crap. I hope the ‘rents don’t see it. Will you call them with me after we eat?”

“Of course. Why would you even feel the need to ask me?” Kazuya knew it was a rhetorical question, Eijun never assumed anything about him, and he was both appreciative and annoyed by the fact. Sometimes he wished Eijun would expect some things from him.

“Thank you.” Eijun kissed the back of Kazuya’s neck, and his hands splayed across Kazuya’s stomach. “Oh, you’re getting a little baby bump. That’s awesome.” Kazuya turned around and wrapped his arms around Eijun’s neck, smiling gently.

“You look exhausted, Ei. Are the drugs kicking in at all?”

“Yeah, but the more the headache recedes, the more tired I get.” Eijun kissed Kazuya’s cheek, resting his head on his shoulder. “You feel so good, though. If I wasn’t achy and beat, I’d be all over you.”

“Are you sure? Even with the baby bump?” Kazuya asked, expressing something that had been worrying him for a while.

Eijun lifted his head and met his eyes. “Are you kidding me? You’re you, and I’ll always want you.
Even if you got as fat as Zono. It’s not a lack of desire, Kaz; it’s a lack of ability.” He laid his head back on Kazuya’s shoulder, realizing this was going to be an issue for the whole pregnancy and making a mental note to watch out for it. “Now scooch around so I can get clean too, you water hog.”

Kazuya laughed. “You invaded my shower.”

“I know, but still…”


“Sounds great. Easy to chew, no energy required.” Eijun smiled at him blearily.

Kazuya got out of the shower and got dressed, sticking his head back in to give Eijun another kiss in thanks for the clothes, and left the bathroom to cook. Eijun turned the water as cold as he could stand it, trying to wake up, wanting to clear his head so he could speak to his parents. It wouldn’t be easy, and there would probably be more crying, but that was fine, that was normal. He washed himself and shut off the water, toweling himself off and getting dressed.

Walking towards the kitchen, Eijun plopped into a chair at the table. He watched appreciatively as Kazuya cooked, moving gracefully around the kitchen. It was one of his favorite things to do, observing Kazuya. Especially when he cooked, it always felt like home. He slid his arm across the table and laid his head on it, keeping his eyes on his boy.

“How are you feeling?” Kazuya looked up from where he was stirring the eggs.

Eijun frowned. “My head doesn’t hurt, and I think the shower woke me up some. But I’m still tired.”

“At least the headache’s gone, that’s good.” He expertly flipped the omurice onto a plate and cut it in half, sliding it onto another plate before placing it in front of Eijun. Grabbing some chopsticks from the drawer, he handed Eijun a pair. “Eat.”

Eijun sat up, and ate, watching Kazuya closely to make sure he was feeling all right. “How are you feeling, Kaz? It’s been a rough couple of days, you have to be exhausted.”

“I am,” Kazuya agreed. “But Peanut’s been quiet, I may be moving away from being so sick all the time.”

“That’s good. I hope so; the sickness seems to be the worst part.” Eijun finished his portion, and stood to take the dishes.

“I’ve got them, Ei. You sit,” Kazuya insisted.

Eijun shook his head. “We’re both so tired. Let’s just leave them, we can get them later.”

“That’s...yeah, that’s a good idea.” Kazuya stood and reached out his hand for Eijun. “Come on, let’s go lay down and call home.”

Kazuya leaned against the head of the bed, with Eijun snuggled back into him, between his legs. He rested his head on Eijun’s shoulder and watched him call his parents, Eijun hitting the speaker button before they answered.
“Hello?”

“Hi, Mom.”

“Oh, Eijun. It’s so good to hear from you, we were so worried. Are you okay?”

“I’m...I’ll be fine, Mom. I only have a concussion.”

“Hang on a sec and let me get your father, no need to repeat yourself.” They heard her calling him, and then the sound of both voices was clear. “Ok, we’re both here, you’re on speaker.”

“So are you.” Kazuya said. “Hi Mom, Dad.”

“Hello Kazuya,” Chika said. “I’m glad you’re there too.”

“So what happened, Eijun?” Eidan asked.

“You saw what happened, I’m sure,” Eijun began. “It was strange, because I’ve been hit much harder than that and been fine. I will be fine; I just have a small concussion. I’ll be out for the week.”

“Well that’s good, but what else is going on?” Chika asked. “You both looked horrible this morning, and although I know a night at the hospital is rough, that was worse than expected. Between that and both of you being on the phone…”

Eijun heard Kazuya whisper in his ear, “Scary…” and he nodded emphatically.

“Yeah, there’s something else they found when they ran tests on me.” Eijun took a breath, trying to keep the tears from his voice. Kazuya squeezed his arm in question, and Eijun shook his head. “I was pregnant.”

“What? You were pregnant? Oh, baby, I’m so sorry. I know how much that hurts. Do you want me to come up? I can be there in a few hours,” Chika fussed, clearly overwhelmed.

“No, no,” Eijun said. “Mom, we’re fine. I’m tired, but it’s because of the pills, not the baby.”

“Do you want to talk about what happened?” Eidan asked, voice rough with emotion.

Kazuya spoke. “No one knows. We know it wasn’t the hit, he’d miscarried before then.”

“That happens with sad regularity, I’m afraid,” Chika said. “I miscarried early a couple of times before Eijun was conceived.”

“I didn’t know that. Why didn’t I know that?” Eijun wondered.

Chika chuckled. “You don’t have to know everything, Ei. It just never came up, that’s all. Did you never wonder about the pressed flowers on the altar?”

“I don’t think I ever did. They were always there; I thought you liked them or something.” Eijun rubbed his face. “I’m sorry, Mom, Dad. I know how hard that had to be.”

“It was, at the time. But it’s gotten better. Things usually do,” Eidan spoke up.

“Thanks for telling us,” Kazuya said. “It’s a tough thing to talk about.”

“It can be, that’s for sure,” Chika said. “Are you...do you need anything? Anything at all?”
“No, Mom. Thank you, we’re fine. There was something else we found out,” Eijun started. “There’s a test they can do now from the parent’s blood, even early in the pregnancy, that determines the sex of the baby,” He paused.

“So you know what it was?” Chika asked. “If you do, please let us know. I always regretted not being able to know what the two we lost were.”

“It was a girl. We named her Haruko.” Eijun couldn’t stop the tears from falling down his face. Kazuya nuzzled his neck and drew him close, soothing him.

Chika sighed. “Haruko. Spring Child. That’s perfect.” She took a breath, steadying herself. “I’m glad to know the name of our eldest grandchild. Thank you, both of you. You both sound exhausted, and you looked terrible. We’ll let you sleep. Take care of each other and of Peanut, and we’ll see you soon, ok?”

“All right, Mom. Love you.”

“We love you too, boys.” Chika hung up the phone, and Eijun tossed his on the end table.

Kazuya slid down into the bed and held out his arms for Eijun. “Come here, let’s sleep.” Eijun slid into his arms with a sigh, resting his head on Kazuya’s shoulder.

“I love you, Eijun,” Kazuya kissed him on the forehead. “You’re so tired, get some sleep.”

Eijun blinked at him sleepily. “You too, Kaz. I love you too. You need to sleep, rest. It’s good for the baby.” He snuggled into Kazuya’s side and closed his eyes, sleeping almost immediately.

Kazuya laid awake for a little while longer, watching Eijun sleep. He didn’t often get to, and Eijun was so still when he slept, so peaceful. Kazuya felt sleep tugging him down, and he fought it for a minute, but he was dragged under before he knew it.

Eijun woke first. He snuggled into Kazuya’s back, pulling him close. Slowly, his eyes opened and he realized it was later than they’d wanted to sleep. Grabbing the phone off the bedside table, he saw it was only 3:30, but they did have to get going if they were going to make it to Haruichi’s by 4:30.

He snuggled back in, but laid his head on Kazuya’s, whispering in his ear. “Kaz, it’s time to wake up.”

Kazuya struggled back and whined. Eijun chuckled a little, and rubbed his cheek. “So cute.”

“Peanut wants to sleep,” He mumbled, rolling over.

Eijun snuggled up to him. “Peanut wants to get their picture taken.”

Kazuya opened one eye and squinted at Eijun. “Timesit?”

“3:30”

“Oh. Well then,” He rolled over and pulled Eijun into his arms. “We have a few minutes to snuggle.” He eyed Eijun closely. “How are you feeling?”

Eijun smiled. “Actually, much better. My head doesn’t hurt, and I got some rest. How are you?”

I’m...” He stopped to assess how he felt. “I’m good. And I’m glad you feel okay. You look tons
Eijun leaned into Kazuya and kissed him. “You always look amazing.”

“Flattery will get you anywhere.” Kazuya smirked.

Eijun smiled. “Hey, guess what? I’m not tired and my head doesn’t hurt.” He ran a soft hand under Kazuya’s shirt, across his chest.

“I don’t object to the direction your thoughts are going, but we have to get Peanut’s picture taken, remember? Let’s get that taken care of, and then we can continue this...discussion.” Kazuya kissed Eijun on the nose and climbed out of the bed.

Eijun fell on his back with a groan. ‘Damn. You’re right, we need to do this.” He followed Kazuya out of bed and threw on some jeans and a fresh shirt. He ran his hands through his hair in an attempt to make it behave, and called it good. Kazuya was still in his sweats; he was having a hard time wearing jeans, they’d gotten a wee bit snug. They’d still not found time to go clothes shopping, but Eijun decided it would happen that week.

Together they walked out the door and climbed into the car, Eijun driving. On the way, they held hands and spoke of unimportant things, each of them worried about what the ultrasound would show.

At the Kominato Clinic, they were immediately shown to the ultrasound room, where the technician was waiting. He instructed Kazuya to lie on the bed, expertly starting the machine. Once he had everything online, he spread the gel on Kazuya’s belly while Eijun watched with interest.

“What’s that stuff? The belly jelly?” Eijun finally asked.

The ultrasound tech laughed. “I wish they did call it Belly Jelly, that would be great. It’s ultrasound gel, but it’s basically just lube. It makes the picture clearer and more accurate.”

“Wait.” Eijun got a confused look on his face, and Kazuya was preparing to laugh, he knew he was going to come out with something outrageous. “You can buy lube in big containers? Where?”

Kazuya’s tried not to laugh while the tech was trying to finding Peanut. He managed to keep it together until he saw the tech’s shoulders shaking, and then he lost it and started to guffaw.

Eijun did his best Mei impression and looked at both of them down his nose. “I don’t know what’s so funny. We run out all. the. time. You know it would be nice to have buckets of the stuff around.”

“We can just buy more, Ei, no need to tempt the ultrasound gods with off-label use of their gel.” Kazuya sobered enough to lay still, and took Eijun’s hand, drawing him near. “Look. There’s Peanut.”

Just then, Haruichi walked into the room and greeted the tech before turning to the couple. “Eijun, Kazuya. I hoped I would see you today. Let’s see what Peanut’s up to, shall we?” He turned to the display, where the baby was clearly visible.

“Look at this number.” Haruichi indicated some measurement the tech had made. “Peanut’s already grown, they’re twice the size they were before, and consistent with your progression.” He turned the sound up on the monitor. “Get in closer, let’s see if we can...” there was a whooshing noise coming out of the speakers, nice and fast. Eijun squeezed Kazuya’s hand, and he looked up to see tears in his
eyes.

“Yes, that’s the heartbeat. We can watch for a few minutes, see if Peanut moves, but they’re pretty hard to catch.” He let the technician take over and went to stand by Eijun. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m...I’m ok. I will be fine; it’s just going to take some time. My headache’s gone, but just knowing it wasn’t something I did was the biggest thing. I can never thank you enough for that.”

“It was nothing more than the truth, and the doctor who saw you should have caught it. I’m glad it helped, Kanemaru was worried about you.” Haruichi smiled softly. “I was too. I knew how upset you’d be, and wanted to make sure you understand it wasn’t your fault.”

Haruichi’s eyes sharpened. “Peanut’s moving.” They all looked at the ultrasound, watching while the baby shifted position. This time, Kazuya grabbed Eijun’s hand and squeezed. “Everything looks good, Kaz. I do want to speak to you in my office, though, when you’re dressed.” He waved at the tech and walked back through the door.

Kazuya wiped off his stomach and donned his shirt. Together, they entered Haruichi’s office, where he was waiting for them behind his desk. “Sit, please. It’s not bad; I just wanted to go over a few things with you in private.” They sat, hand in hand.

“First of all, Kazuya, I want to tell you how sorry I am about the baby. I know it’s hard, especially in your condition. If either of you is ever worried about Peanut, please come and see us, we’ll run an ultrasound. No need for an appointment.” Kazuya nodded his thanks. “Eijun, did you decide to look in that envelope?”

“We did.” Eijun answered. “We didn’t want to keep calling her ‘it’. We named her Haruko, and we’re going to add her to our shrine.”

Haruichi smiled. “I’m glad.” He passed them over a business card. “This is a calligraphy artist who I’ve worked with for a while. She’s lost several children, and understands the pain and the need to both mourn and celebrate the life. Look at her website, and if you like what you see, consider commissioning her to make a picture for Haruko, since you don’t have a photograph.”

Kazuya slid the card in his pocket with a nod of thanks. “We will.”

“One last thing. I meant to tell you this the last time you were here and forgot. It’s about sex, and having lived around you two at Seido, I’m sure that’s something on both of your minds.” Eijun flushed in embarrassment, while Kazuya looked intrigued, leaning back in his chair. “I know you’re both careful and don’t want to hurt Peanut, but you don’t have to worry. Unless you’re doing things with cattle prods and knives, you’re not going to hurt Peanut when you have sex. When you get bigger, Kazuya, you may have to work out which positions are comfortable, but you don’t have to stop doing anything.”

Kazuya noticed at how red Eijun had gotten and laughed. “How is it you were just nagging the poor ultrasound person about gallon sized containers of lube, and now, when there’s an entirely appropriate conversation about sex, you turn bright red?”

“Miyuki Kazuya, that wasn’t about sex, that was about supplies.” Eijun turned his back on him. “You do know the difference, right?”

“Why were you...?” Haruichi started. “No, never mind. I don’t want to know.” He looked at Kazuya and shrugged. “Anyway. Peanut looks fine; you don’t have anything to worry about there. Growing like crazy, as expected.”
“Thank you again, Haruichi. I appreciate your time,” Kazuya said as he rose, prodding Eijun to do the same.

“No problem, Kazuya. I’m glad to do it.”

Eijun stood as well. “Thank you, Haruichi. I’m so glad to have a friend like you, you’ve been amazingly helpful.” He walked around the desk and gave him a hug. Haruichi returned it, face turning red.

“I’m glad I could help, and I’m sorry about Haruko. Please let me know if you need anything.”

“We will, thanks.” Kazuya rested his hand on the small of Eijun’s back, and guided him out of the room.

They climbed into the car, and Eijun looked at Kazuya. “I’ll bet you’re hungry.”

“Starved,” Kazuya admitted.

“Me too.” Eijun smiled wide and bright, the smile that simultaneously sends warning flags flying in Kazuya’s brain and shivers of anticipation down his spine. “But let’s get you fed first, Kazuya-senpai.”

Kazuya’s brain stuttered to a halt, and he realized he was probably in for an interesting evening. Not that he minded, it had been awhile. He knew he was going to have to meet fire with fire, and he grinned at Eijun. “Yeah, I should eat. It’s going to be busy night, I think.” He dropped his voice, “Good idea, Eijun.” He was gratified to see Eijun’s eyes glaze for a second and a shudder pass down his spine.

Eijun blinked and glared. “I have to drive, jerk. Stop that.”

“I have to eat, Eijun. You stop,” Kazuya responded mildly.

Eijun shrugged. “Fair enough.” He started the car, and headed for the street. “Where do you want to eat?”

“I really want a cheeseburger and fries.”

“You don’t like cheeseburgers,” Eijun protested.

Kazuya shrugged. “Peanut must, then. Because that’s what I want.”

“Oh! So our baby’s going to have good taste, huh?” Eijun laughed. He loved cheeseburgers, but could rarely persuade Kazuya to eat them with him.

“If this is any indication, then no,” Kazuya snarked back.

“Maybe not, but it’ll be two against one, so you should work on your cheeseburger appreciation skills,” Eijun suggested as they pulled into the diner where Eijun knew they served good American food.

“I’m not going to dignify that. I’ll teach Peanut, it’s wee and doesn’t know better.”

“Good luck with that.” Eijun exited the car and opened Kazuya’s door. “Kazuya-sama, welcome. Your cheeseburger awaits.” He bowed as he offered Kazuya his assistance. Kazuya smacked him on
the head, grinning.

They ate cheeseburgers and fries and drank chocolate malts, talking about nothing of importance, just enjoying each other’s company.

If Eijun was a little enthusiastic about licking the ketchup off his fingers, Kazuya kept it to himself.
If Kazuya dropped his fork and accidentally rubbed against Eijun’s crotch, Eijun didn’t say a thing.
If their conversation was liberally laced with praise and ‘senpai’, neither commented.
Finally, the last of the fries was gone, and Kazuya drank the rest of his shake as Eijun paid the bill.

“Ready to go?”

“Oh, yeah.”

Eijun slid into the seat, and Kazuya’s hand slid onto his leg. Slanting his husband a smirk, Eijun slotted his hand with Kazuya’s and set them on the console. “Safety first, senpai. I need to get you home safely.”

Kazuya grinned. “You’re right. Good call, Ei. You take such good care of me.”

Rolling his eyes, Eijun pulled out of the parking lot, and they drove home in relative silence.

Eijun opened the door, waving Kazuya in first. He took off his shoes and turned, seeing Eijun straightening up from doing the exact thing. Their eyes met and they sighed, stepping into the circle of the other’s arms, heads burying in necks.

“I love you, Eijun.” Kazuya whispered.

Eijun kissed his neck. “And I love you, too.”

They lifted their heads, and Eijun cradled Kazuya’s face in his hands, rubbing his thumbs under his eyes. “I want you so much right now.” He breathed, before lowering his mouth to Kazuya’s.

Their mouths met in a kiss that started out as tender and sweet, until Eijun slid his hands into Kazuya’s hair and tightened his grip, deepening the contact, desperate to feel everything his boy had to offer. Kazuya met him head on, matching desperation with lust.

Hands slid under shirts and mapped familiar curves; pulling the other ever closer, they moved together until Eijun whispered in Kazuya’s ear, “Bed. Please. Tonight you’re all mine.”

Kazuya met Eijun’s eyes and laid a soft hand on his cheek. “Bed is good, but Eijun, I’m always yours.”

Eijun’s eyes darkened with lust when he heard those words, and he stepped away from Kazuya with a hand outstretched. “Then come with me, senpai.” Kazuya couldn’t have resisted that look and those words if his life depended on it, and he stepped forward, placing his hand in Eijun’s.

He led them into the bedroom, and Eijun stopped. “I’m going to undress you, Kaz. If I do anything you don’t want, we have a safe word. Use it. Otherwise, I’ll assume you’re good.”

“I have no objections so far. Do continue.” Kazuya smirked, and Eijun growled.
He pulled Kazuya’s shirt off and sat on the edge of the bed, drawing him into his arms. Looking up at his husband, he smiled and then he nuzzled his face into Kazuya’s belly, kissing and touching. “Peanut’s getting so big, Kaz. It’s amazing.” Eijun ran his hands down, hooking his fingers in Kazuya’s sweatpants and underwear, exposing his hardening length to Eijun’s view. He grinned and ran a soft finger along it, eliciting an intake of breath from Kazuya. “Mine.” He leaned in and swiped a lick along his cock, and leaned back. Kazuya looked at him, slightly dazed.

“Are you going to have any problems with me being in control? If so, we can always take care of the issue.” Eijun raised an eyebrow. Kazuya fought back the haze of lust enough to allow himself to think, and he realized he needed this, needed to turn control over to Eijun, but he didn’t need it to be taken from him, he had to do it purposefully. Too much had been forced on him recently.

“Not at all, Ei.” Kazuya met his eyes, showing him his truth. They’d been doing this for a dozen years or more, but he knew Eijun still needed permission before he would act; even though he had never said no, he was not going to deny him his opportunity to do so. “I need this, no restraint is necessary.”

Eijun let out a breath. “Good, we’re on the same page. Lay down, on your back.” Kazuya complied, but not before catching Eijun’s mouth in a hot, deep kiss, one that spoke of love and lust and trust, allowing Eijun to take control. Kazuya knew what Eijun’s opening gambit would be, and he readied himself as he laid down, but it never came. Looking at his boy, he saw him sitting on the edge of the bed, considering.

“Can’t remember what to do?” Kazuya snarked, and once again, Eijun growled.

“Hush, you.” He stood up and stripped off his clothes and Eijun climbed onto the bed, crawling over to Kazuya. He sat back on his knees, and just sat there looking. Then he started talking. “Senpai, you’re gorgeous. I can’t decide what I want to do first, but I do know what I want to do last. I want to ride you; I want you inside me, fucking me, loving me.” Kazuya felt his eyes cross as the words made their way into his head. Eijun knew his kinks, and he played to them expertly.

“I want that, Ei. I want you, I want to fuck you. I want that pretty mouth of yours wrapped around my cock, I want to suck you until you come. I want it all, everything you’re willing to give me.” Kazuya gave back to Eijun exactly what he’d received, and the shudder that ran down Eijun’s back let him know it worked.

Eijun’s head spun and he narrowed his eyes. “I guess I need to get busy, then.” He rustled around in the dresser, pulling out what he was going to need. He then straddled Kazuya, lying on his body, touching as much skin as he could. Kazuya let out a breath of relief. This was what he expected, this was what he wanted. The way Eijun tried to touch him as much as possible, the relief of skinship and love and adoration he felt whenever Eijun did this was his life, his anchor. His world. It reinforced for him how very much his husband loved him; he soothed and filled every corner of his soul even as he touched every inch of his body.

Lips slotted together, tongues dancing, they kissed; Eijun took his time, enjoying himself. Soon he broke the kiss and began to work his way down Kazuya’s body, still touching as much of him as he could. He nibbled his way down his neck, nipped at his collarbones, and sucked a mark right above his heart. Using both fingers and mouth, he teased at Kazuya’s nipples, bringing them taut, laving and sucking until he felt his husband squirm, heard him whine. He licked them one more time, soothed them with a soft kiss, and continued his way down. Eijun was delighted to see that Kazuya’s bump didn’t go away when he’d laid down, and spent some time licking, kissing, rubbing. He gnawed on hipbones, worshiping the dips that ran from Kazuya’s hips to his groin. He adored Kazuya’s front, and the addition of the baby made it even more attractive to him.
Lifting his head, resting it on a bent arm, he met Kazuya’s gaze. “Still with me? I want to…” Kazuya couldn’t parse what he’d said; he was lost in a daze of love and lust, head swimming and mind blown. He watched, eyes wide, as Eijun licked a stripe up his leaking cock. Eijun wrapped his lips around the head, and Kazuya was gone again, along for the ride as his boy did as he wished. Eijun sucked and pulled, licked and nibbled, hands moving, never still, always touching, loving, feeling; Eijun indulged.

Eijun was not lost in the feeling; he registered everything, enjoyed every caress, every kiss, every lick. He sucked and kissed, laved and loved, until he felt a tug at his hair. Surprised, he raised his head. Kazuya ran a finger down Eijun’s cheek. “It’s my turn,” he claimed, and Eijun found he was okay with allowing Kazuya to run the endgame. Smiling softly, he worked his way back up to Kazuya’s mouth, tongues and teeth and lips welcoming him back.

Kazuya flipped them over, raising himself over Eijun, and rather than taking his time, he moved down to Eijun’s leaking cock, taking it into his mouth, sucking his way along it, making his boy groan, watching him writhe. He kept working Eijun while he expertly coated his fingers in lube, and began to prep him. Going carefully, never removing his mouth from Eijun’s cock, he stretched him, crooking his fingers to hit his prostate, sending out waves of pleasure. He felt Eijun growing closer to coming, and pulled off, rising on his knees to look at him. “How do you want to do this?”

Eijun sat up and kissed him, rolling on the condom. “I want to ride you. Whatever position you want to get it in is fine, but I want to be on top.”

Kazuya moved to the head of the bed, pushing all the pillows to the floor, and stretched out his legs; Eijun straddled him. “Perfect.” Slicking the condom with lube, Eijun descended, seating himself in one slow slide. He sucked in a breath, riding the edge of pain, enjoying the stretch, wanting to be filled as quickly as possible.

“You feel amazing Kaz.” Eijun started to move, and Kazuya met his rhythm.

“You too, Ei. I adore you, you know that?” Kazuya brushed Eijun’s hair back, and pulled him down for a kiss. Their mouths met, more a meeting of open mouths and tongues than a proper kiss.

Resting his hands on Kazuya’s thighs, Eijun leaned back a little, seeking the angle needed to reach his prostate while Kazuya stroked his cock in time with their movement. Together they soared, stroking, moving, loving, reaching for that peak. Eijun came first, and Kazuya followed right after, thrown over the edge by the sound and the sight and the pull of his lover’s orgasm.

Eijun collapsed against him, forehead resting on his shoulder. Kazuya wrapped him in his arms and snuggled him in. “That was incredible. You’re incredible.”

“You’re not so bad yourself,” Eijun chuckled. “I don’t know how long I’ll be able to do that, though. At some point Peanut’s going to be too big for me to be laying on top of you.”

“I’ll miss that more than you’ll know,” Kazuya said. “I love it when you do that.”

Eijun drew circles on Kazuya’s chest, comforting and loving. “I know; I’ll miss it too. I never want you to think I don’t adore every inch of you. I’ll just have to think of something else.”

“I’m sure you will,” Kazuya chuckled. “You can be surprisingly...innovative.” He rubbed a comforting hand along his side, resting his head on Eijun’s. “I have to admit that I’m glad Peanut’s fine.”

“Me too, Kaz. It was great to see it, and the heartbeat was fascinating.” Eijun sat up, and rested his
forehead on Kazuya’s. “I love you; you’ve been wonderful over the last couple of days. I wouldn’t have gotten through it without you.”

“You wouldn’t have had to go through it if I wasn’t here,” Kazuya noted. “Haruko is my baby too, and you’re the most important person in my life, so please don’t say that, don’t thank me for doing what I should do.”

“I understand, but Kaz, the same goes with the things I do for you, especially when it has to do with Peanut and your pregnancy,” Eijun countered.

“You’re absolutely right,” Kazuya agreed, tapping Eijun on the side. “Let’s hop in the shower and clean up, I’m exhausted and I’m sure you are too.”

Eijun groaned and climbed off Kazuya, sighing as he felt him slide out. “I always feel just a bit more alone when you pull out, Kaz.”

“I get that, I feel the same. But neither one of us is alone, never has to be alone.” Kazuya soothed him, stepping up behind him and wrapping his arms around him.

Eijun spun, wrapping his arms around Kazuya’s neck. “You’re right.” He kissed Kazuya on the nose. “Come on; let’s get clean so we can go to bed.” Eijun looked at the bed and saw it was still clean. “Good job moving the pillows, that never ends well.”

Kazuya laughed. “Yeah, it only took a couple times, huh?”

“Proof that we can be taught!” Eijun joined him in laughter, and together they stepped into the shower.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, stones, ideas on how to improve my porn game, whatever, welcome below.

If I have to kill someone to get comments, well, it's on your head if this turns into 'mpreg written by GRRM'.

J/k. Maybe.
Fun with Kinks and Paint

Chapter Summary

Kazuya craves.
Eijun snarks.
And they're both oddly hooked on Ranch Dressing.

Chapter Notes

First of all, an apology.
This chapter is shorter than others, I just couldn't seem to get my brain into 'fluffy mpreg' mode today.
Some fandom?Fanfic? stuff happened, and it's got me in a bit of a mood.

Long story short, (from me? Ha!) someone took my Pranks for the Memories story and changed the names and situations to be HQ!, and posted it Here. And is now trying to get commissions for her work. Based on this story.
I know that there are lots of prank fics, but if you look at the first chapter, it's right there.
The same words, used the same way.

Update: Both her work and her profile were deleted. Be careful, watch your stuff people:)  
Anyway, my head's been messed up, but I wanted to give you what I had.
Hopefully later this week, I'll be in a better place and can finish this chapter.
Love you all, please don't steal from people. It hurts the fandom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

10 weeks

Kazuya kissed Eijun’s forehead as he left the bedroom, heading to work. It was Tuesday, the first day of leaving Eijun home alone, and Kazuya needed to get into the office and figure out the strategy for the game the next day without Eijun. He was also hoping to be done with that by the time that practice was over, so he didn’t have to stay away too long.

Eijun woke slowly, vaguely remembering the kiss and Kazuya’s murmured whispers and goodbyes. He reached over to the side table, feeling around for his phone. Grabbing it, he brought it close to his face and opened his eyes, checking for messages. Sure enough, there was one from Kazuya.

Kaz: Morning! I got to work fine, Peanut and I are good. The team says to hurry up and get your cute ass back to practice. Except the cute ass part, that’s all me. Love you, see you soon. Text me if
you need anything.

Me: You’re the one with the cute ass. Take care of yourself and Peanut, don’t forget to eat. And don’t worry, they’ll do fine without me. Take your vitamins.

Kaz: You’d better hope they don’t do fine without you, idiot. I already took my pill, have you? How’s your head?

Me: *swallows* Yup! And it’s fine, just a little sore.

Kaz: Ok, good. Take it easy. Love you.

Me: Love you more.

Kaz: *rolls eyes*

Me: You know you loooove me.

Kaz: Bye, Eijun.

Me: Have fun, Kaz.

Smiling after the exchange, Eijun climbed out of bed and headed out to the kitchen to make coffee, only to discover that Kazuya had already made a pot. He poured himself a cup, took his medicine, and curled up on the couch to watch the sports news. That kept him busy for half an hour, and then he was bored.

Was it too soon to bother Kazuya? Yeah, it was. He tapped his fingers on the end of the couch, and looked around the room. Hanging around on the couch wasn’t something he was used to, at least not alone. He was bored. Bored bored bored. He looked at his phone, and pointedly looked away. No, he could do this. He could. His eyes roamed around the room, he saw something that caught his attention, and he smiled. This was perfect.

Kazuya checked his phone again before he left for the day, he hadn’t heard from Eijun all day, and he was a little concerned. He’d expected to be barraged with texts from Eijun at regular intervals, he knew he didn’t do well on his own, he got bored. Maybe he was sleeping; if he’d taken the pills as he’d said, they may have made him drowsy, and Kazuya didn’t want to wake him. It was puzzling, but he wasn’t terribly worried since he was heading home.

Unlocking the door, entering the house as quietly as he could, Kazuya stopped in the genkan to drop his bag. He slipped off his shoes and stepped into the house, padding softly down the hall towards the living room. Peeking around the corner, he froze and his heart melted. Eijun was curled up on the couch, propped up on pillows, reading ‘What to Expect When You’re Expecting’. He was wearing his reading glasses, and his eyebrows were scrunched together in concentration, lips moving as he read. So cute… Kazuya got out his phone and took a quick picture to send to the parents later, and stepped into the living room, smiling at his boy.

Eijun looked up when he saw movement at the doorway; Kazuya was home. He smiled, and started to put down the book.

“No, no.” Kazuya walked across the room and dropped down in front of him, kneeling on the floor. “You don’t have to stop.” He ran his hand through Eijun’s hair. “Have I ever told you that those glasses look hot on you?”
Eijun shot Kazuya a sardonic glance over the top of the glasses. “I remember when I got them, Kaz. Very clearly.” Kazuya smiled, unrepentant.

“You’re still hot, though.” Kazuya pecked him on the nose. “How’s the head?”

“It’s not bothering me, I took my medicine,” Eijun smiled and swiped a finger along his jaw. “How was practice?”

“It was fine, I missed you,” Kazuya sat back on his heels. “Want me to cook some dinner?”

“That sounds good, but come sit with me for a bit first?” Eijun scooted up, making room for Kazuya, who plopped onto the couch beside him, and leaned into Eijun.

“How’s the book?” Kazuya asked.

“Good, it’s really interesting. These are all about pregnancy and getting ready for the baby, so I texted Jun for a list of ‘Infants for dummies’ books. I’ve ordered them, they’ll be here tomorrow.”

“Great, I’m glad you found something to do. I thought I’d be inundated with ‘I’m bored, Miyuki Kazuya!’ texts today.”

“I can entertain myself, thank you very much!” Eijun proclaimed. “I’m glad you’re home, though. How are you feeling? How’s Peanut?”

“We’re both fine. A little worried about the game tomorrow, I wish you could be there.”

“I know,” Eijun sighed. “But I’m not allowed to sit on the bench, and it’s not on TV. I’ll just wait for you to get home; it will be fine. And I’m sure the team will play well, Takahashi will help keep the pitchers in line.”

“True. He’s been great.” Kazuya played with Eijun’s fingers, thinking. “Hey, Ei? If you’re feeling up to it, do you want to pick out paint today? I was serious yesterday about us doing something fun.” Eijun raised an eyebrow and smirked. “I mean something that’s for Peanut, idiot.”

“Sure! I feel fine, Kaz.” Eijun slid off the glasses and Kazuya made a sound of protest. “You and your kinks. First it was practice goggles at Seido, now my reading glasses.” He gave Kazuya a judging look.

“Should we compare, Ei-chan?” Kazuya snarked. “Praise kink a mile wide, maybe?”

“What about you and eyeliner?” Eijun retorted.

Kazuya grinned, and purred, “Yeah, that’s a good one.” He ran a hand up Eijun’s side. “What about how often you didn’t let me get out of uniform after a game?”

“That wasn’t a kink. That was you looking so fucking hot behind the plate, with those eyes and that smirk and those thighs,” Eijun’s eyes glazed over.

“Ok, I’ll give you that one,” Kazuya nodded. “Remind me again, which of us was first the one to buy the other lingerie?”

“You like that too, jerk. More than I do, even.” Eijun rolled his eyes. “I dunno, but we should probably stop this if we actually want to leave the house this afternoon, Senpai.” Eijun fired his closing salvo, and Kazuya couldn’t stop himself from groaning. Just a little.

“You’re right.” Kazuya agreed, leaning over for a kiss. “Do you need a shower? I can cook while
“Naw, I took one already.” Eijun said, straightening up. “What do you feel like eating? We can go out if you’re craving something.”

Kazuya looked chagrined. “I am, but I don’t want to be.”

“Cheeseburgers again?” Eijun chuckled and rubbed his back as Kazuya nodded. “That’s fine, I’m good with it. Let’s go get some.”

“Are you sure? We can—”

“No, no. It’s fine. Whatever you’re craving is fine with me, I’m starved.” Eijun cut him off, kissing his cheek. “Let me change and I’ll be right with you.” He got off the couch, and Kazuya followed, heading into the office where they’d stuck the baby stuff. He riffled through the comforter set and found something he couldn’t identify that was small and had all the colors from the set on it, so they would have a reference for the paint. Shoving it into his pocket, he went back into the living room and sat back down on the couch; leaning his head back, he promptly fell asleep.

He woke to the feeling of fingers running through his hair, his head on Eijun’s lap. Opening his eyes, he saw the cover of the book right above his head, Eijun reading as he napped. “Timeisit?”

Eijun put down the book. “Hey, you.” He smiled and continued to rub his head. “Sleep well?”

“Yeah, I can’t believe I just zonked like that.”

“Peanut growing takes a lot of energy. It’s only five or so, do you still want to go get a cheeseburger?”

Kazuya’s stomach was in agreement with this plan, so he nodded. “Yes, please.” He sat up, stretching.

Placing the book and his glasses on the end table, Eijun stood, offering a hand to Kazuya. “Come on, then. Let’s go feed you two before you wither away into nothing.”

Eijun, after some glaring and a little bickering, drove. They went back to the diner they’d eaten at before, but this time they weren’t in quite so much of a hurry, so they relaxed.

“Oh! Look, Kaz, they have fried pickles.”

“What? Why would they fry pickles? And what kind of pickles do they fry?”

“I have no idea. We should get some, though. Pregnant people like pickles, right?”

“Shut it, you.”

“I still think we should try them.”

Kazuya shrugged. “Go ahead, then.”

“Ok, these are pretty good.”

“Peanut likes them?”

“Shut up and pass them back over here.”
“Don’t bogart the fried pickles, dude. Seriously, who does that?”

“Do you think they’ll bring us some more of this nasty dip?”

“Should we order a second batch?”

“Naw, I need to eat the cheeseburger. I wonder how this dip...is it ranch dressing? Would taste on french fries.”

Eijun made a face and laughed, and Kazuya chuckled as well. It was ridiculous. “But seriously. This on french fries. I need to try it.”

“Go for it.” Eijun was still looking at the menu, even though they’d ordered. “They also have french fries with cheese and bacon on them, with ranch dip on the side. When we come back here tomorrow you might want to try that,” he snarked.

“They do? I will.” Kazuya answered, deadly serious.

Eijun started to laugh. “Should we just rent out a booth for the duration of your pregnancy?”

“Hahahaha.” Kazuya deadpanned. “I’m sure we’ll be back here at some time.”

Eijun stuck a fry in the ranch dressing and then ate it. He grimaced, but dipped it again.

“You’re right, we will.”

“So where to after this?” Eijun asked Kazuya as they finished their meals.

“Paint, right?”

“Yeah. What color are we getting? Did we ever decide?”

“We haven’t.” Kazuya responded, pulling the cloth out of his pocket. “But I brought this so we could.”

Eijun grinned. “Good thinking. Which do you like?”

They both looked at the fabric closely. It was polka dotted, with a brown background. The dots were various shades of green, blue, brown and orange. Eijun pointed to the lighter green and Kazuya to the lighter blue.

“Seriously?” Kazuya and Eijun looked at each other and grinned. “Let the debate begin.”

“Naw,” Eijun said, looking at the fabric. “If you really want the blue, I’m fine with it. You’re the one that’s pregnant.”

Kazuya frowned. “Eijun.” Eijun’s head popped up and Kazuya met his eyes. “This is our baby. It’s what we decide. It’s not my baby alone, and these choices are not mine to make.” He took Eijun’s hand. “Peanut is as much yours as it is mine, I’m just the container.”

“I know, I really do.” Eijun sighed, laying his forehead on their joined hands. “I just don’t feel like debating this with you, I don’t have the energy.”

“That’s fine. Let’s do this, then. What would be your second choice?”
They both pointed, looked at each other, and smiled. “Orange it is, then.”

Eijun drove them to the nearest paint store; they knew a little bit, but not enough to trust themselves to get the right stuff. When they first moved into their current place, they’d painted it—correction—they’d had it painted. But they had picked out the colors and bought the paint.

Eijun had experience painting from when he was younger, and Kazuya had none, but they decided without even speaking about it that they were doing this themselves. This was their baby, and they wanted to do as much as they could to make it know it was loved, even if it was by slapping paint on the walls by hand.

As they drove, they considered contrasting trim and wall decorations, throw rugs and the possibility of installing carpet. The last idea was quickly discarded, they knew enough to know that babies mean messes, and messes are much easier to clean when on hardwood and throw rugs.

“I have an idea, Kaz.”

“You do? That’s unusual. Let’s hear it.”

“God. Do you have to always be like that?” Eijun fumed.

Kazuya chuckled. “I think so? You’re the one that married me.”

“I did.” Eijun sighed, and laced their fingers together. “I don’t regret it.”

“Neither do I.” Kazuya squeezed Eijun’s hand. “So what was your idea?”

“I think that maybe we should hire Mochi to paint Peanut’s walls. Like…a mural, or just a few things. Whatever he feels like,” Eijun suggested. Mochi was a free-lance graphic artist. His work was in demand, but he could always use more commissions.

Kazuya blinked. “I never even thought about that.” He grinned at Eijun. “That’s a great idea. We most definitely should do that.” He got out his phone to make the call.

“Hey, Moch! You got a few minutes? Ok, cool. I’mma put you on speaker.”

“Hi, Moch!” Eijun said, still driving carefully.

“Hey, Eijun. How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine; head’s a little sore but not bad. How are you?”

“Good, good. How’s Peanut?”

“They’re good. We saw it move yesterday, heard the heartbeat. Peanut’s no longer the size of a peanut. They doubled in size in the last few weeks,” Kazuya answered.

“That’s amazing. I’m glad to hear that.”

“Peanut’s actually what we wanted to talk to you about,” Kazuya started. “We’d like to hire you to decorate the walls of the nursery. We’re going to paint it, but we’d love for you to make it look amazing.”

“Wait. You want me to what? Paint the nursery?” Mochi asked, confused.
“No, idiot.” Eijun took over. “We want you to art on the walls. A mural, some random stuff, whatever it is you wanted to do. You’d have free reign, you could make Peanut’s room look however you want. We’ll pay you for it, of course.”

“Oh! Oh. Kyhahahaha! Of course I’ll do it, I’d be honored,” Mochi responded. “Is there anything in particular you want?”

“Not really.” Kazuya explained, “The only thing we have is the crib set, so we want those colors, or ones that complement them. We’re on the way to the paint store now to pick up the wall paint. Eijun and I are going to do that part.”

“Where are you going? The Tokyu Hands by your house?”

“That was the plan,” Eijun said. “We need all the help we can get, and they’ll tell us what to do.”

“I’ll meet you there. I can help you get what you need, and see the colors. Talk to you a bit and get ideas.”

That would be awesome, Mochi! Thank you!”

“Don’t thank me yet, Eijun. I’m pickier than those worker bees. I promise you.” Kuramochi laughed. “I’ll see you there.”

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so. You know the drill. Comment or I'll kick a puppy or something. And in the mood I'm in it just might happen.
Kazuya sat, drumming his fingers against his leg, watching the buildings go by, thinking.

“Hey, Ei?”

“Yes?”

“I was thinking about something. This is going to sound silly, but I’m tired of calling Peanut ‘it’. Or ‘they’ or ‘them’. What do you think about switching things around?”

Eijun shot Kazuya a quick look, eyebrows knit in confusion. “What do you mean? Do you want to do one of those tests like they did for Haruko, find out the sex? It’s too early for an ultrasound to show that.”

“No, no,” Kazuya shook his head. “I just think we could switch off somehow? Maybe call Peanut ‘he’ sometimes and ‘she’ others?”

“You want to call it ‘she’ even if it’s a boy? Or ‘he’ if it’s a girl?” Eijun frowned.

Kazuya laughed. “Eijun. We aren’t going to misgender a fetus, seriously. Peanut won’t care what we call it until it’s a lot older.”

“Humph.” Eijun blew at his bangs, thinking. “I guess you’re right. ‘Them’ and ‘they’ are kind of unwieldy, and ‘it’ sounds clinical. And we can’t just call Peanut ‘Peanut’ all the time. So what do you want to do?”

“I don’t know, exactly. We could switch off?” Kazuya suggested.
“You mean ‘she’ one time and ‘he’ the next? That’s going to get confusing, I think.” Eijun turned into the parking lot. “What about doing it by days? Like, Peanut’s a girl on odd days, and a boy on evens?”

“That’s perfect, Ei.” Kazuya leaned over and kissed his cheek. “I knew you’d think of something. We’ll confuse the hell out of people as well, and that will be so much fun.”

Eijun chuckled. “Good to know that the pregnancy hormones haven’t hit your evil streak yet.”

“I know, right?”

“Shut up and get out of the car, preggo. The paint ain’t going to buy itself.”

Kazuya chortled as he climbed out, aided by Eijun’s always outstretched hand.

They entered the store and were promptly joined by a laughing Mochi, pushing a cart. “What took you so long? Stop to do something nauseating?”

“We were just having a spirited discussion about gender issues,” Kazuya said mildly.

“Really? That’s ni...wait. Is that some code for something that I don’t want to know about?” Mochi asked suspiciously.

“No, no,” Eijun answered. “We really were. It was just a normal conversation about Peanut.”

“Oh! Okay. I get it. Baby stuff.” Mochi shivered. “I’m not sure I could handle that, I have nothing but admiration for you two, seriously. I don’t know if Ryou’s going to want kids, and I can’t say I don’t, I’m just not ready right now. Being Uncle Mochi is all I’m ready for, and I’m looking forward to meeting Peanut.”

“I get that,” Kazuya said. “We didn’t plan for this. Although we’re happy about it, the timing is not perfect. But who knows, it may never have been.”

Mochi nodded. “True enough.” He started pushing the cart towards the back of the store. “Now to business. What color are you painting the room?”

Kazuya pulled the cloth out of his pocket. “This is from the set we got. I wanted blue, Ei picked green, so we compromised with orange.”

Mochi picked it up and inspected the colors. “That’s perfect. Is there any other decorations on the blankets?”

“Animals.” Eijun chimed in. “Lions and monkeys, elephants and giraffes, I think?”

“Okay. Did you have anything in mind, what you’d like there?”

“Not at all, we thought you might like free rein for once. We know how demanding your clients can be.”

Mochi smiled and shook his head. “You’re right, but total freedom is almost as bad. Let’s do this. Let me think about it and draw up some general ideas, and then we can discuss them. That way you have some input, and I have some guidance.”

“Good idea.” Kazuya nodded.
“Let’s go grab some paint, I’ll show you what you need for the orange, and after we decide what to do on the walls, we’ll come back for what I need.” Mochi led them back into the store, to the paint.

“You’re going to want semi-gloss for the walls,” he explained. “Flat will get dirty quickly and is harder to clean, while hi-gloss is too shiny, it’s best for bathrooms and kitchens where you have to deal with moisture and airborne things like grease or germs.”

He stopped in front of the paint chips, and they started to compare the colors, finally finding the orange that was closest to the one in the fabric. “The darker one matches, but I’d suggest you go one or even two lighter. That dark of walls are hard to paint on, you’re limited in which colors you can use. Also, it will make the room look darker, and you probably don’t want that for Peanut.”

Eijun looked at the colors closely. “We don’t want to go so light it looks like yellow, I don’t think.”

“No, no. Stay near the original, just a little lighter.” Mochi agreed.

“That one, then.” Kazuya pointed to one of the chips, and Eijun nodded.

“Yup. That will be Peanut’s wall color. She’ll love it.”

“Wait. She?” Mochi asked. “You know the gender?”

“Nope,” Kazuya smirked. “We just got tired of calling her ‘it’, so we’re switching off. Odd days, Peanut’s a girl, even a boy.”

“That’s great. You’ll even confuse people, especially anyone who’s eavesdropping.”

“That’s one benefit, but I really hate calling my child ‘it’,” Kazuya explained. “Eijun was worried about misgendering her, but I don’t think we can at this point. She’ll never remember.”

“As expected from our resident idiot.” Kazuya and Mochi snickered while Eijun not so silently fumed.

“Just because I’m concerned about Peanut’s psyche doesn’t mean I’m an idiot.” Eijun declared. Kazuya sobered. “You’re right, but at this point, she doesn’t even have one.”

“You don’t know, Miyuki Kazuya!”

“I don’t think she can hear us speaking, or understand what we say, Eijun.”

Eijun opened his mouth to comment, and closed it quickly, looking chagrined. Kazuya took that opportunity to wrap his arm around Eijun’s shoulders and pull him close.

“Let’s finish getting this stuff, okay? It’s getting late, I’m tired.”

“Sure, Kaz.” Eijun turned towards Mochi. “How much of this will we need? And what else?”

Mochi looked at both of them. “You’re really doing this yourself?”

“Yes, we are.”

“Have you ever painted a room before?”

“I have.” Eijun volunteered. “But it’s been a while.”
Mochi sighed. “Alright, here’s what we’re going to do. We’ll get what you need, and then whenever
you decide to paint, let me know. I’ll come and help, show you the basics. You need to clear the
room out, first, though. And Kaz, you can’t help.”

Kazuya glared and looked at Eijun, who was glaring right back at him. Remembering what his
husband had just been through, he relented with good grace. “You’re right, I can’t. We’ll have to get
some of the guys over, offer them pizza and beer and move the furniture out. We should also have
them clear out that closet, Ei, so we can sort through those boxes.”

“Good idea, we should do that sometime soon. After we get in the swing of the season, maybe?”

“Yeah, best to wait a bit.” Kazuya agreed.

“Okay, so that’s settled, let’s get what you’re going to need.” Mochi first took them to the paint
mixer, and had her make them three gallons of paint. “That might be more than you need, but it’s
always better to have too much than too little. You’ll need to make touchups eventually.” Putting the
paint in the cart, he led them to the other aisles. “Drop cloths, get thick plastic. The thin ones tear
easily. Rollers and roller covers and paint trays. A few brushes for edging, these ones are good.
Some painters tape so you can tape off the baseboards and other trim.” He dropped things into the
cart as they passed, and stopped when they hit the end of the aisle.

“That’s about it. You should have everything you need to paint the room. You do still need to make
a few decisions, though. Do you want to paint the ceiling, or leave it white? What about the trim, is it
staying white as well?”

Kazuya and Eijun exchanged a look before Kazuya spoke, “We’re using the study, not the guest
room, and it’s painted a pale blue right now. So, we’re going to have to paint the ceiling either way.
What do you suggest?”

“I’d say we should decide later. Maybe grab a gallon of white so we can paint it if you decided to do
so. As long as it’s not opened, we can return it later.” Mochi suggested.

Eijun nodded and headed back to the paint aisle, returning with a gallon of white paint.

“Oh, I think that’s it. You guys go ahead and check out, and I’ll head home.” Mochi held up the
fabric. “Can I take this with me for a reference? And can you please take a few pictures of the
comforter and such so I can see the animals?”

“Of course, and thank you so much for doing this.”

“Not a problem, anything for Peanut.” Mochi waved at them as he walked out of the store.

“Peanut’s so going to have him wrapped around her little finger.” Eijun snarked.

“You’re not wrong there, Ei. This is the first kid in our group of close friends. They’re all going to be
in trouble.” Kazuya agreed.

“As are we, if we’re not careful.” Eijun warned.

Kazuya sighed and slid his fingers between Eijun’s, lacing their hands together. “You’re not wrong
about that, either.”

They turned towards the cashiers, paying for their purchases before heading home.
The following morning, Eijun kissed Kazuya goodbye as he left for the stadium a couple of hours before the game was due to start.

“Be careful, Kaz. Drive safely, and text me when you get there, okay?”

“I will. Are you sure you’re going to be okay alone?”

“Pffft. Of course I am, I have things read and there’s always tv. I’ll be fine.”

“Alright. Just...take your pills if your head starts to hurt. I don’t want you to be in pain.”

“I will, don’t worry. Go, you’re going to be late.”

“Love you, Ei. I’ll see you soon.”

“Have fun, Kaz. I love you too.”

Kazuya shut the door behind himself and Eijun waited to hear the car pull out before he grabbed his cellphone and made a call, one that a month ago would have been inconceivable.

“Hello, Eijun.” Norio answered with a smile in his voice.

Eijun relaxed and replied, “Hi, Dad. How are you?”

“I’m well, how’s the head?”

“It’s much better, thank you for asking.”

“You’re on the DL for the week?”

“Yup. Can’t play, can’t practice,” Eijun sighed. “And that’s why I called you. Are you going to the game today?”

“I was planning to, yes.”

“Can I hitch a ride? I want to watch, but I can’t sit on the bench.”

“Of course. Does Kazuya know?” Norio asked.

“Nope, I’m going to surprise him.”

“Okay, sure. I’ll be by about an hour before game time.”

Eijun smiled. “Thank you so much, I appreciate it!”

“Bye, Eijun. I’ll see you soon.” Norio hung up, and Eijun put his phone down. Checking the clock, he realized he had an hour before being picked up, so he started getting ready. His text message chimed as he was gathering his clothes.

Kaz: Here safe. Hate to have you miss this, everyone says hi! Peanut’s good. I’ll have my phone, text me if you need me.
Me: I will, have a good game! I love you, both of you. Take your vitamin.

Kaz: Yes, mom. Love you too!

Eijun smiled at the phone as he put it down and continued to prepare for the game. He showered, ate, and was reading more of the book he’d started the night before when the doorbell rang. Glancing at his watch, he realized it had to be Norio, and went to answer the door.

“Come on in, I’ll be just a second, let me grab my stuff.”

“No hurry, we have plenty of time.” Norio stood in the genkan and slipped off his shoes. “Pardon the intrusion.” He stepped into the hallway.

“Okay, can I get you something to drink?” Eijun asked, poking his head out of the kitchen.

“No, I’m fine, thanks.”

Eijun smiled and moved down the hallway to his room. “Alright, I’ll be right back. Feel free to poke around, of course.”

Norio returned the smile, and sat on the couch to wait. A few minutes later, Eijun returned, tucking his phone into a pocket.

“I’m ready.” He saw Norio was looking through the pregnancy books on the end table. “Our doctor recommended them to us, and I decided I’m going to read them this week while I’m off.”

“That’s a good idea, give you something to do.”

“Exactly.” Eijun laughed. “Keeps me from bothering Kaz all day as well.”

Norio smirked, once again reminding Eijun exactly where Kazuya got that particular expression. “That’s probably a good thing.”

Eijun agreed as he followed Norio out the door. “You’re right about that.”

“How’s he feeling? Everything alright with Peanut?” He asked as they climbed into the car.

Eijun buckled his seatbelt. “They’re both fine. They had an ultrasound on Monday, and everything was good. Heard his heartbeat, which was great, and found out he’s doubled in size. He’s no longer a Peanut.” Eijun laughed.

“He?” Norio inquired. “Kazuya told me that the lost one was a girl, but I didn’t know you’d found out what sex Peanut was.”

“Oh, no, I’m sorry. I forgot you didn’t know,” Eijun explained. “We got tired of calling Peanut ‘it’, so we’re switching off. Even days, a boy, odds a girl. So today, it’s a boy.”

“That makes sense, alright.” Norio nodded. “Kazuya said you’d named the baby Haruko? Is that correct?”

Eijun smiled sadly. “Yeah, we did. We wanted her to have a name, add her to our shrine where our families can look out for her.”

“That’s wonderful, Eijun.” Norio patted his hand tentatively. “I’m glad you are doing that, that you two seem to be handling it together. I’m proud of both of you.”
“Thank you, we’re trying. I’ve kept your advice in mind, but I don’t think it will be an issue,” Eijun reassured him.

Norio smiled. “Good. If it would be alright with you two, I’d like to add Haruko to my shrine as well; Kazuya’s mother would love to watch over her.”

“Of course, yes.” Eijun said, blinking back the tears in his eyes.

“Thank you.” Norio turned into the stadium parking lot. “When you decide on her symbol, let me know, and I’ll add her.”

“We will.” Eijun waved at the guard as they drove into the VIP lot. “We haven’t discussed it yet.”

“I’m sure; it’s going to take some time. If there’s anything I can do, please let me know.” He pulled into a spot and stepped out of the car.

“We will.” Eijun joined him on the tarmac, and they headed into the stadium. He’d brought his parent’s season pass, which they left in Tokyo for use when they couldn’t attend.

They made their way to the seats, stopping to get a drink, and got settled.

“Eijun.” Norio said, grabbing his attention from the team warming up on the field.

“Yes?” Eijun looked at him.

“Thank you. I know you could throw up so many roadblocks in my attempts to repair my relationship with Kazuya, but you haven’t. I knew you had a big heart, and I’m glad it’s stretched enough to accommodate me, even if just a little.” Norio smiled as Eijun opened his mouth to speak.

“You don’t have to tell me, I know you’re doing it for Kazuya, and that’s good, he needs someone like you by his side. I still appreciate it. I know how hard it is to stand by and watch when you want to be acting.”

“I told you the other day how I felt about it, and I still do. You were a tremendous help at the hospital, and I’m glad you were there for Kazuya when he needed you.” Eijun met Norio’s eyes, willing him to understand what he was about to say. “But that doesn’t excuse the years when he really needed a father and you couldn’t be bothered. You know what his biggest fear about Peanut is? That he’d be like you were, treat him like he was treated. I think we both know that won’t happen—he’s not you—but nonetheless, that’s pretty sad. I’m not sure you understand the damage you did, but I hope you can understand that we’re both justifiably cautious. It’s going to take time, and effort, before he’s ever going to believe you’ll be there for him when he needs you.”

Norio sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “I know. I wasn’t totally oblivious, I just didn’t see how to reach him, couldn’t get past my own walls. My father’s passing made me realize that I had to figure out a way to do so, or my son would be both my greatest joy and my biggest regret. I don’t expect anything from either of you, I just want to be part of your lives, and hopefully, at some point, someone you can depend on. That’s all.”

“Well, you’ve made a good start,” Eijun admitted. “Now to see if you can keep it up.”

“That’s the plan,” Norio responded. “Now tell me—with you out, what’s the plan for the pitchers?”

Eijun answered, and they chatted about baseball until the game started.
During the first inning, Kazuya watched the pitcher’s first few pitches carefully. Ikeda was decent, and Takahashi had him under control. He was heading back to the bench to watch from there when he heard his phone text notification. Heading to his bag, he pulled it out and opened it.

_Ei: Did you know that at 10 weeks, Peanut already has fingernails and toenails?_

Kazuya smiled at the phone and put a hand on his belly. Eijun knew what time the game started, so it was clear he was trying to get Kazuya to relax. It worked.

_Me: I did not. But it’s a good thing we can get baby nail clippers if they’re growing for 7 months, huh?_

_Ei: You’re right. Maybe we should call him Dragon Baby. Kazuya snorted a laugh at that._

_Me: Nah, Peanut’s good. Got to get back to the game. Thanks for the text, love you._

_Ei: Love you too! Talk to Takahashi, I’ll bet he’s not happy with Ikeda. Kazuya’s brows knit in confusion. Why would Eijun say that? He shrugged, knowing that sometimes Eijun just knew things, and when the defense came into the dugout, he pulled Takahashi to one side._

“Yes, coach?”

Kazuya held his gaze. “Hey, are you alright? Something going on with Ikeda?”

“No, no,” Takahashi said, and then he deflated a little. “Well, yes. He’s not pitching as well as he could, and he’s shaking off a lot of my signs. I don’t know what’s up with that.”

“I’ll speak to him, at least about the shake offs. If he doesn’t have a good reason, I’ll put Akoi in.”

“Thanks, coach.” Takahashi sat on the bench and watched the game progress, while Kazuya called Ikeda over.

“You wanted to talk to me?” Ikeda asked, brusquely.

Kazuya bristled a little, but let it go. “Yes, I was wondering why you shook off so many of Takahashi’s calls.”

“I don’t know; I just wasn’t feeling those pitches.” He answered with a smirk, and Kazuya was instantly pissed.

“Is there some reason you think you own that mound, think you can do whatever you want out there?” Kazuya demanded. “If you think for one minute that because Sawamura’s out you can showboat and do whatever it is you please out there, you’ve got another think coming. I will pull you off the mound so fast your head will spin.” His voice rose a notch, he didn’t care who heard. “While you’re in my bullpen, you’d play by my rules, do you understand?”

“Yes, coach,” Ikeda replied sullenly.

“I’ll be watching. If I see you shake off a sign that doesn’t absolutely make sense to me, you’re out. And you won’t be starting in any games for a very long time. Have I made myself clear?”

“Yes, coach.”
“Ok, you’re back on after the next out. I’ll be watching.” Kazuya glared.

Ikeda headed back to the bench, whispering frantically to the other pitchers. *I need to watch that, I’m not sure what’s up with them.* Kazuya wasn’t worried, if they thought either Eijun being gone or him being pregnant would change the way he coached, he was more than willing to disabuse them of that notion.

Gameplay continued, and Kazuya kept a close eye on the pitchers. There were no other issues that he saw, and Ikeda settled down. In the fifth inning, he was switched out for Aoki. They were down by a couple of points, and Eijun’s absence was being felt—this was where his unbounded optimism was most needed.

In the middle of the sixth inning, Kazuya’s phone buzzed again.

*Ei:* Takahashi is about to talk to you about Aoki. I think he’s hurt and hiding it.

*Me:* How would you know that?

*Ei:* Just a feeling, he’s been favoring that elbow for the last week or so.

*Me:* How do you even know what’s going on, this isn’t on tv?

*Ei:* Ever heard of the radio?

Kazuya looked up to see Takahashi call a timeout, and beckoned Kazuya out. “I think Aoki’s done.”

“He’s hurt, right? His elbow?”

“I think so.”

Kazuya waved Aoki over. “You’re favoring your elbow, and you have been for the last week or so. Has it gotten worse?”

“I can play, coach.” Aoki answered.

“That wasn’t what I asked.”

“It hurts, but I’m alright.”

“You need to come out, Aoki. I know about playing injured, and you’ll make this so much worse if you do.” Kazuya insisted.

Aoki put up an argument. “Who are you going to pull in? Hara’s not up to scratch yet.”

“We’re going to have to muddle through.” Kazuya responded. “Takahashi can nurse him along; we’re just going to have to trust the rest of the team to pull the game out. One game is not important enough to risk you permanently damaging your elbow.”

Aoki sighed. “Yes, coach.” He started to walk off the field, and Kazuya waved Hara out of the bullpen.

“Do your best with him.” Kazuya instructed Takahashi. “He’s young; let’s try not to scar him too badly.”

“Yes, coach. He’s tough, he’ll be fine.”
Hara jogged up to Kazuya. “Yes, coach?”

“Aoki’s hurt, so you’re in. You’ll be fine, just follow Takahashi’s lead.”

Hara grinned. “Yes, coach!”

“Don’t get cocky, just do what Takahashi says. Got it?”

“Yes.”

“Alright, I’m leaving this to you.” Kazuya tapped Hara on the chest and walked back to the dugout as the battery began to warm up. He was just turning back towards the field when Aoki nudged him.

“Why aren’t you in the medic’s room?”

“I’m going, but look!” He pointed to the scoreboard, where crowd shots were displayed.

‘Come back soon!’ was the animation that blew up across the screen, followed by a crowd shot that zoomed in on...Eijun? sitting in the stands next to his father. He looked in the camera and waved, and the crowd cheered. The camera switched to a view of the dugout, and zoomed in on Kazuya, who glared. The crowd groaned, and the camera switched back to Eijun who shrugged and grinned, while the announcer commented, “Looks like someone’s in trou-ble.” Kazuya shook his head and turned his attention back to the field, where the battery was just finishing their warmup.

Me: Why didn’t you tell me you were here?

Ei: Surprise?

Me: Jerk. You should be home resting.

Ei: I wanted to be here for you. I’ve helped, right? I mean you’d have never known about Peanut’s fingernails without me.

Me: Not really the point.

Ei: I did want to be here for you, in case you needed me. Your dad’s watching me like a hawk, he won’t let me do anything stupid.

Me: You should have told me you were coming.

Ei: Would you have let me?

Me: Again, not the point.

Ei: You’d better pay attention. Hara’s actually doing well.

Me: …..

Me: I’ll see you after the game.

Surprisingly enough, Hara was playing well, and he managed not to allow any runs for the rest of the game. Unfortunately, their opponents were able to do the same, and they lost the game, 4-2. Kazuya knew that the only person who’d not played their best was Ikeda, and they were going to have a discussion the following day, so he dismissed the bullpen immediately after the game.
Kazuya changed out of his uniform and headed out of the locker room, looking for Eijun. He found him at the end of the hallway, talking to fans. Eijun saw him coming, and smiled widely. “Excuse me; I have to go talk to my husband.” He sotto whispered, “I might be in trouble, I was supposed to stay home and rest.”

They parted for him, laughing, and he walked over to Kazuya. “Heya, Kaz.”

“Don’t ‘Heya, Kaz’ me, Sawamura Eijun.” Kazuya glared, and then laughed. “Hi, Ei.” He pulled him into a hug. “We do need to talk about you staying where I put you.”

“I’m not a toy, Kaz.”

“This is true, but I do like to play with you.” Kazuya smirked.

Eijun groaned. “Oh, no you did not go there.”

Kazuya laced their fingers together. “So where’s dad?”

“He’s waiting where we usually meet the ‘rents.”

“Ok, let’s go.” Kazuya waved at the crowd and Eijun smiled at them over his shoulder.

“I’m only out until Sunday!” he yelled, and they cheered. “See you then!” He slid his arm around Kazuya’s waist, and together they walked around the corner to find Norio.

Chapter End Notes

Comments, of course.
A Certain Darkness

Chapter Summary

Things are not as they seem.
Eijun hides.
Kazuya uncovers.

Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be about clothes shopping and maybe a few other things, I think. I don't remember.

But it turned into this.
I think it's necessary, as did they.
Clearly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week 11

Eijun was sitting on the bench in the locker room, putting on his shoes, when Kazuya walked around the corner, a frown on his face.

“What’s the matter Kaz?”

Kazuya looked up, and saw Eijun. Walking over, he asked. “Have you seen Peanut?”

“Peanut? No?”

Kazuya sat down heavily and sighed. “I wasn’t paying attention, and now he’s gone.”

“Peanut’s gone?” Eijun was confused; he didn’t know how that could happen.

Kazuya nodded. “Yes, I don’t know where he is, but he’s not where he’s supposed to be.”

“We need to go find him!” Eijun jumped up.

“It’s too late, we lost him. He’s gone,” Kazuya said sadly. “We’ll never find him now.”

Eijun protested, “But Kaz, we can’t just lose our baby! We need to go look for him.”

“We weren’t paying attention, and he left. Why weren’t you paying attention, Ei?”
“I don’t know? I was paying attention!” Eijun started to cry. “I don’t want to lose Peanut.”

“Well we did, and it’s all your fault. Just like it’s your fault we lost Haruko. You weren’t paying attention then either. When are you going to learn?”

“It’s all your fault.”

Eijun sat up, gasping for breath. He looked around wildly, and realized he was in his bed, Kazuya stirring beside him. It was only a dream. Peanut’s fine, Kazuya doesn’t blame me. Peanut’s fine. It wasn’t my fault. There was nothing I could have done. Peanut’s fine. He repeated the mantra that he’d composed to fight these thoughts; this wasn’t the first time he’d had some variety of this dream and he was sure it wasn’t the last.

“You okay?” Kazuya opened one eye and peered at him.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Go to sleep, Kaz, it’s early.” Eijun lied, as he had every night for the last week. He climbed out of bed and looked at the clock. Three am. Well, I guess I’ll get some more of those books read. I’m close to being done; I’ll have to think of something else soon. Walking into the kitchen, he grabbed a can of coffee from the fridge and settled at the end of the couch, picking up the book and his glasses, finding his place. He’d barely gotten started when he heard the bedroom door shut and Kazuya padding down the hallway.

Kazuya blinked in the light as he entered the living room, collapsing on the couch beside Eijun, who looked surprised to see him. Curling up beside him, he leaned into Eijun and yawned.

“Go back to bed. It’s too early for you to be up, you need to sleep,” Eijun said softly, putting the book and his glasses to one side.

“Nope,” Kazuya replied, snuggling into his side.

Eijun ran his fingers through Kazuya’s hair. “Why are you up, Kaz? You should be in bed asleep.”

“So should you.” Kazuya hummed happily at the feeling of his fingers. “I’m not sleeping if you’re not.”

“Kaz, you need your rest. Peanut’s hard on you.” Eijun insisted.

Kazuya frowned at him. “Eijun. You need your rest. You look like hell, I know you’re not sleeping; you haven’t for days. What’s going on?”

“I’m fi—”

“Don’t.” Kazuya said flatly, as he sat up, looking him in the face. “Don’t lie to me. You’re not fine, you’re not. I thought we were partners, why are you lying?”

“I...I will be fine.” Eijun sighed. “I will. I just keep having nightmares, and I can’t get back to sleep afterwards.”

“What are they about? Want to talk about it?” Kazuya ran a soothing hand down Eijun’s arm, tangling their fingers together.

Eijun teared up, looking at their linked hands. “I don’t know what to say, it’s...it’s the same thing
every time. Well, kinda. It’s always my fault.” He shifted on the couch, pulling into himself a little.

Kazuya wasn’t going to let him isolate himself. He thought he knew what was going on, but he needed Eijun to say it before they could talk about it. “What’s your fault? What did you dream?”

“It’s never the same, but it’s always the same.” Eijun looked at him, tears in his eyes. “I was in the locker room, putting on my shoes, when you came in and asked me if I’d seen Peanut. I didn’t understand, because she’s with you? But you said she was gone, because we weren’t paying attention. And that we’d lost her, and it was all my fault. Just like we lost Haruko, and that was all my fault, too.” He pulled up his knees and wrapped his arms around them, burying his face as he wept. “It’s all my fault, you blame me for it all, and I know it’s not true when I wake up, but if I know it, why does it feel so real?”

Kazuya wrapped his arms around his crying husband, and pulled him into his chest. “Oh, Ei.” He felt himself tear up, feeling so badly for him, upset with himself for not confronting him before now. “I am so sorry you’re going through this. It’s hard to make your subconscious believe things sometimes, and I know I’ve told you, but I’ll keep it up until these stop. It’s not your fault, no one is blaming you, and Peanut is fine.”

“I know, it’s so stupid. I know. That’s why I didn’t want to bother you about it; you have so much more to worry about.” Eijun scrubbed at his eyes. “I just can’t sleep afterwards, so I come out here to read. I don’t want to disturb you.”

“You don’t think it disturbs me to wake up knowing you’re not there, and haven’t been for hours?” Kazuya rubbed soothing circles on Eijun’s back. “You need to sleep too, this isn’t good.”

“What can I do, though?” Eijun asked, lost. “I don’t know how to stop dreams, do you?”

“No, but you can let me be there for you when you have one. I’m sure they’ll fade in time. Plus you’ve not been playing, so you’re not as physically tired when you go to bed, and you’ve been reading about babies and how to take care of them, those things are all sure to be contributing to this,” Kazuya reasoned. “Do you think you need to talk to someone?”

“Therapy?” Eijun asked, considering. “I thought about that, but I’m not sure this is going to last. If I can’t shake them, then yes, I may need that. But right now, I don’t think so.”

“Okay, if you change your mind, we’ll find someone. I’m sure Haruichi knows some that are familiar with what you’ve been through,” Kazuya said. “So let’s try a few things. When you have another one, wake me up, and let me hold you until we both sleep. Can you do that?”

“I think so. I just hate waking you up.”

“It’s fine, I’d rather have you wake me than get up in the morning and see you looking so bad.” Kazuya said, running his fingers through Eijun’s hair. “Also, today’s your first day back, but we don’t have to be in until 11:00. We should stop by the clinic and check on Peanut. That should help.” Eijun sat up.

“Would you mind?” Eijun said, turning to face him. “Really?”

“Of course I don’t mind, Ei. I told you, we can go whenever you need to.” Kazuya pushed Eijun’s hair back out of his face, and wiped at the tears. “When are we going to speak to Ohno-san?”

“This afternoon, at four.” Eijun said. Ohno Mai was the artist/calligrapher that Haruichi recommended, and they’d looked at her work online. She did delicate, gorgeous calligraphy with an image woven around the name, and they’d fallen in love with the idea of having her do something
for Haruko. Eijun had contacted her, and set up an appointment to speak with her about the design.

“Okay, we may have to leave practice early, but that shouldn’t be a problem.” Kazuya yawned and pulled Eijun closer. “We should go back to bed.”

“I can’t sleep,” Eijun confessed. “I’m afraid to close my eyes.”

“Come to bed, Ei. If you can’t sleep, turn on the little light and read. I can use my eye mask.”

“You hate using that when we’re together.” Eijun smirked. “At least when you’re sleeping.”

Kazuya grinned. “You’re not wrong, and we may have to revisit that soon. But as much as I hate sleeping with it on, I hate the idea of you not being in bed with me more.”

“Alright, but you have to tell me if I’m bothering you.” Eijun acquiesced.

“I will, I promise.” Kazuya stood and held out his hand for Eijun’s.

Together they went back to bed, Eijun lying curled into Kazuya, with Kazuya holding him tightly.

They both slept.

Eijun blinked his eyes open, feeling warm and rested for the first time in days. His head was resting on Kazuya’s shoulder, and he was sprawled out, arm across his torso, legs intertwined. He moved and felt Kazuya’s arm tighten around him. Looking up, he saw Kazuya watching him, a soft smile on his face.

“Good morning, gorgeous,” Kazuya whispered, bringing his other arm up to push Eijun’s hair out of his eyes. “Any bad dreams?”

“None at all,” Eijun whispered back. “Thanks to you.”

“Good.” Kazuya tightened his arms and snuggled Eijun closer. “It’s still early; you can sleep more if you want.”

“Naw, I’m awake. Did you sleep?”

“Seriously?” Kazuya asked. “If you get me prone for more than a few minutes, I’m out. Peanut’s kicking my ass.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m not. I don’t mind at all. The morning sickness seems to be gone, for the most part. The mood swings are still there, but I think they’re getting better, you haven’t called me Mei for days. The only thing I’m still dealing with is my blood sugar bombing when I don’t eat.” He rolled over to kiss Eijun, and then sat up. “And the fact that I have to pee. All. The. Time.” He walked out of the room, headed for the bathroom.

Eijun got out of bed and went to make coffee and ginger tea for Kazuya, who joined him in the kitchen. Walking up behind Eijun, he wrapped his arms around his waist, resting his chin on Eijun’s shoulder. “Thank you.” He kissed him on the cheek and sat down at the table.

“Do you feel like toast this morning, Kaz? Or something more substantial?”
“I’ll cook, I don’t mind. But sit with me for a bit first and let’s talk, ok?”

“Alright.” Eijun poured his coffee and brought both mugs to the table. “Here you go.”

“Thanks, Ei.” Kazuya sipped at his tea. “I might just keep drinking this after I don’t need it any more. It’s good.”

Eijun smiled into his mug. “I’m glad you like it.”

“Me too.” Kazuya looked at Eijun. “I wanted to talk to you about some things, make sure you understand.”

“Okay? I think I understand, though, I really do. It’s just sometimes my brain takes a while to get on board. Remember the yips? I knew in my head that losing wasn’t my fault, but I couldn’t convince my body. I think this is the same thing.” Eijun reached over and rubbed his forefinger over Kazuya’s knuckles. “But this time it’s not nearly as bad, I have you. And if I’d had you back then, I would have been fine as well.”

“You did have me, Ei. I remember wracking my brain trying to find a way to help you. I asked Chris to help you; I hated that. I had no idea why, because at the time I didn’t understand how I felt about you, I put it down to wanting to be the one who helped my pitchers.” Kazuya smiled at the memory, and Eijun’s eyes widened.

“You sent Chris?” Eijun was surprised. “Why didn’t I know this?”

Kazuya fiddled with his mug. “Well, it wasn’t my finest hour, was it? I’m still upset that I didn’t think to do what he did, that I needed to ask for help. I should have known how to fix you.”

“Why? Kaz, you fixed me. Chris may have told me what to do, but if you hadn’t said something he never would have come around. It was all you.” Eijun squeezed his hand. “If I didn’t love you to distraction already, I would do so now. I was so lost, and all I could think to do was follow your lead, you had never steered me wrong.”

Kazuya let out a short, bitter laugh. “Yeah, except the whole reason you got them in the first place was my fault.”

“No, not it wasn’t.”

“It was. I was so focused on beating Inashiro that I didn’t pay attention to you, your stress. I should have helped you, talked to you, done something. But I didn’t. I failed to notice you, my pitcher, instead of worrying about unimportant things, and I pushed you beyond what you could handle.” Kazuya looked at Eijun, meeting his eyes, showing him all the regret and sincerity he felt. “I didn’t do my fucking job, and you paid for it. I’ve never regretted anything more than that.”

“Kaz. You were what, sixteen? You were just a kid, we both were.”

“No an excuse.”

“No, not an excuse. A reason.” Eijun reflected back at him all the trust and love he felt. “I never blamed you, I still don’t blame you. If there’s anyone to blame, it’s the system that puts that kind of pressure on kids, but even that’s a stretch. The yips happen at every level.”

“How did we ever get on this, anyway?” Kazuya swiped at his eyes. “I just wanted to make sure you knew I was fine with you waking me if you need me.”
“It’s my fault, but I’m not sorry. I didn’t know you felt that way, but I’m not surprised. You’ve always been super protective of your pitchers—mix in emotional stuff, and things get to be a mess. But Kazuya,” Eijun reached over to reclaim Kazuya’s hands, “You’ve never let me down, you’ve never steered me wrong. You’ve been my north star for as long as I can remember, and that’s never going to change. I trust you.”

“And I feel the same.” Kazuya ran his thumb over Eijun’s knuckles. “Which is why I want you to come to me if you’re troubled. I’m here for you whenever you need me. Remember that.”

“I will.”

“Good.” Kazuya nodded decisively. “Have you thought about what you want for Haruko’s picture? I know she’s working up some ideas, but I wanted to know if you had any of your own.”

“I don’t, really? Do you?”

“It’s your decision, isn’t it?” Kazuya replied. “I haven’t thought about it.”

“What do you mean, you haven’t thought about it? It’s our decision, Kaz. Haruko is our child. You have as much say in this as I do.” Eijun glared. “I thought we’d settled this at the hospital. How is it just up to me? I thought we were in this together, I guess I thought wrong.” His eyes teared up. “Do you really consider Haruko mine and Peanut yours? Maybe my subconscious knows more than I do.” Eijun stood up and headed out of the room.

“No, wait.” Kazuya got up and rushed over to stop him. “Eijun, stop. Please.” Eijun stood in the living room, looking out the window, tears streaming down his face.

“I’m sorry, I’m so very sorry.” He stopped behind him, tears in his eyes. “I didn’t mean it like that, I really didn’t. Peanut and Haruko are both ours, they are. I believe that with all my heart. It’s just...it’s harder on you than it is on me; the loss was yours, more than mine. It doesn’t mean I don’t hurt, I ache every time I think of her. But you don’t ever get away from it, you’re the one who’s been hurt the most.” He stepped forward and laid his hand on Eijun’s back. “You have nightmares, and I know you’re doing everything you can not to hover and be super protective of me, and you’re the one who has to live with the fear and the sorrow. I would give anything to take that from you, but I can’t. And I...I feel so fucking guilty sometimes for still being pregnant. I’m so sorry, Ei, that we lost Haruko. And I’m sorry that I can’t help you, that you’re suffering so much,” He choked out, sobbing for the first time since that first, horrible day.

“Haruko was our little girl, and she’s gone, and that’s hard. But she’s somehow more abstract than reality; seeing you so destroyed is what’s killing me. I’d do anything to help you, anything. I can’t help but wonder how long it’s going to be before you start to resent me, resent Peanut, and I’m terrified. I’ve considered abortion, considered doing something risky, just so I’d lose her as well, so we’d be even. I’m sorry, Eijun. So sorry that I’m still pregnant. I feel so fucking guilty for everything, for being excited about Peanut, for even talking about her.” Kazuya’s hand fell away, and he turned, ready to leave Eijun alone. “I’m so scared you’re going to hate me, or hate our baby. I don’t know what I’d do if that happened. I don’t.”

“I could never hate you.” Eijun started, slowly, voice hoarse from tears. “I know that as surely as I know my name. I also could never hate Peanut. She’s innocent of anything, and she’s my baby.” Kazuya stopped, and turned to face Eijun’s back, listening. “I would never want you to give up Peanut, and if you lost her it would be devastating, I don’t know what I would do. I just...sometimes it’s hard, you know? Sometimes I get so mad at you, at the world, at myself. I hate myself for feeling this way. And yes, I do occasionally wonder why it happened to me and not you, and resent you. And I hate myself for that.”
He turned around and met Kazuya’s gaze, tears on his cheeks and eyes open and honest. “Basically, I’m just a ball of self-hate and pain held together by the hope that you’ll stick around and help me stay in one piece so that someday I can become someone you want to be with again. I’m trying to be strong, Kaz, but sometimes it’s so hard and when you say things like that, it makes this whole thing collapse. It’s not fair, how much I’m leaning on you, and I hate myself for it. But I don’t know what else to do. What else can I do?”

Kazuya stepped close, and cupped Eijun’s face in his hand. “You don’t need to do anything else. Lean on me, that’s what I’m here for. I love you so damned much, Eijun. You’re everything to me, and I don’t know how I would function without you. I’m never going to leave you; you’re stuck with us. And if I have to tell you that every day for the rest of my life, I will. I’ll keep telling you this, too: You’ve done nothing wrong. It’s not your fault; none of this is your fault. It’s ok to have feelings, it’s ok to resent me, it’s ok to be mad at the world. It’s not your fault. I love you. I’m here for you. You’ve done nothing wrong.” Kazuya was crying again, the tears steady as he tried, with everything he had, to get through to Eijun. “Can you forgive me for still being pregnant? I’m so sorry, Ei.”

“I...Kaz, yes, of course, if you need my forgiveness, you have it.” Eijun wrapped his arms around himself, unable to allow himself to take the comfort Kazuya was offering. He knew he didn’t deserve it. “You haven’t done anything wrong, nothing to feel guilty for. I’m the guilty one; it’s all my fault. I should be better already, this wasn’t even a real baby. I’m making things so hard for you, and I’m sorry. I don’t know how to be better.”

“No. No, no,” Kazuya wrapped his arms around Eijun, refusing to let him withdraw any further. “Listen to me, Sawamura Eijun. Haruko was a real baby, she was our baby, and she’s gone. Even if we never were able to hold her or tell her how much she was loved, she was still our real child. That loss is tough, you have every right to mourn, every right not to be okay with things, to take it as it comes. There’s no timetable for grief, and no one has the right to say when you should get better, whatever that’s supposed to mean. Your sadness is valid for as long as you feel it. I don’t want you acting like you’re better; I want you to be better. However long that takes is how long it takes. In public, put up any front you want, but not here, not with me.”

That validation brought down every one of Eijun’s defensive walls and he broke, clinging to Kazuya as he sobbed, mourning the child, the loss of possibility, allowing himself to feel everything he’d locked away over the last week. “I’m so sorry, Kaz, that I lost our baby. I love you, please don’t hate me, please don’t leave. I...please don’t hurt yourself or Peanut, you’re both my world.” He rambled, not really sure what he was saying, but feeling Kazuya shake, tears soaking his shirt as Kazuya’s hands tightened on him.

Kazuya listened carefully, storing away all of Eijun’s fear and pain so he could remember, could use them to help him negotiate this grief. “I don’t want to resent you, I don’t want to be jealous that you’re still pregnant, and I’m not, but I am sometimes, please don’t hate me for it. I don’t understand why I’m like this. I never want anything to happen to you or Peanut, so what’s wrong with me? I don’t know, Kaz, but it hurts so much and I don’t want to tell you because you already feel guilty and what kind of partner am I if I make you feel worse? I’m so lost, Kaz, and I don’t know what to do to make it better. Please don’t hate me.”

“I will never hate you,” Kazuya soothed, running his hand along Eijun’s spine. “I won’t, I couldn’t. You’re hurting, Ei, you lost something that can’t be replaced, and you look at me and you see that I still have mine, so you’re bound to be jealous, to ask why, to be resentful. That’s normal, that’s okay. I do feel guilty, and if the roles were reversed, you would too. And that’s normal, too, what kind of partner would I be if I didn’t? I know you don’t want anything to happen to either of us, I know you love us, and I know it’s tough to balance the two extremes.” Eijun had stopped sobbing, and Kazuya
knew he was listening intently.

“You’re mourning, Ei, we both are, and it doesn’t matter if the baby was ten weeks old or ten years old, loss is still loss. It’s all right to cry, to question, to be angry. It’s important, that’s all part of getting to acceptance. It’s never going to be okay, we’re never going to have a day where we think about Haruko without sadness. I don’t ever want us to not care. But it won’t be as hard, it won’t be questions and anger, it will be the occasional twinge of ‘I wish’ or ‘too bad’. I will never turn you away, I’ll never get tired of listening, I won’t expect you to be better before you actually are. If you feel like you should talk to a professional, we’ll figure that out too. But Ei, it’s only been a week. Allow yourself the time you need, you’re on no one’s timetable.” Eijun lifted his head from Kazuya’s shoulder and stepped back, leaving his hands resting on his waist.

“How do you know all this?” He asked, wonder in his voice and a hint of relief in his eyes.

Kazuya smiled softly, and pushed Eijun’s hair off his forehead, running a soothing hand through his hair. “My mom. When she died, my dad...well, you know what happened with him. But the school knew, and they made me visit the counselor there. She helped me work through it; I don’t know what I would have done without help. Probably been even more messed up than I was, that’s for sure. Anyway, she gave me some books to read about grief, and I read them so many times, even after we stopped meeting. They helped me understand, helped me realize that I wasn’t different, that I was normal, okay.”

Eijun lifted his hand to cup Kazuya’s cheek, rubbing his thumb along his cheekbone. “I’m sorry you had to go through that, Kaz. I know it was so hard.” EIjun’s brow creased, “Wait, is that what you were reading after you found out about your knees?”

“Yes,” Kazuya said, leaning his head into Eijun’s hand. “Loss is loss, and I’d just lost much of my identity, or at least that’s how I felt at the time.”

“I didn’t...I mean, I knew you were having a rough time, but I didn’t make it worse, did I? If I did, I’m so sorry, I had no intention—” Kazuya cut him off by placing a finger gently on his lips.

“Hush. No, you didn’t do anything but help. You listened to me rant, you helped me realize that I was more than just a catcher, that I had more to offer the world. You were my rock, and I don’t know what I would have done without you,” Kazuya reassured him. “All I want is to do the same for you. There are some parallels. I remember being so resentful, so jealous that you were still playing. I never wanted you injured, and I didn’t really want you to stop, I just felt the same anger you are now. But I knew it was normal, so I was able to work through it. This is where I think I failed you, I didn’t talk to you about this before, and I should have. For that, I’m sorry. I forgot that you didn’t have the same knowledge or experience as I do.”

“You’ve been nothing but wonderful, Kaz. I just...I never understood why I was feeling like this, and I hated it, hated myself. I thought I should be over it, it should be better. After all, it’s only a fetus, right?”

“No, Ei. Haruko was much more than a fetus, she was a possibility. She may have discovered the cure for cancer or written the world’s best music, been an amazing mother or just brought joy into the lives of everyone she touched. We’ll never know, and that loss is great, and deep.” Kazuya smiled sadly. “It’s alright, it’s fine. I’ll find those books for you, and you can read them. I don’t know if they’ll help how you’re feeling, but at least they’ll help you understand what you’re feeling is normal.”

Eijun hugged Kazuya, burying his face in Kazuya’s neck. “Thank you. I mean it. Thank. You. You have no idea how much your words mean to me, how much I need you, needed to hear that.” He
kissed Kazuya’s neck, and snuggled in closer.

“It’s my job and my joy, Ei. I want nothing more than to be what you need, to help you any way I can. Feel free, in fact, please, please, please talk to me about anything, rant, yell, cry. I’m here. I’ll always be here. There’s nothing you can say that will drive me away.” Kazuya pulled back a little, turning Eijun’s head, so he could look him in the eyes. “Nothing. You have the right to feel what you feel.”

Lowering his head, Eijun kissed him, gratitude and love and desperation, pain and relief, all mingling together. Kazuya wrapped his arms around his neck, and pulled him close, tangling his fingers in Eijun’s hair, returning every emotion with love and support and understanding. Kazuya wasn’t surprised to feel the wetness of Eijun’s tears on his cheeks, mingling with the traces of his own. I can’t believe I didn’t see how badly he was hurting. I have so much to make up for, he’s in so much pain. I guess I never thought he’d hide it from me, which is stupid of me. I know he hates to make me worry, hates to cause me any problems.

Eijun broke the kiss and stepped back, allowing all his masks to drop, and Kazuya almost started crying again, he looked so lost, so broken. “I’m so sorry you felt like you needed to hide from me, Ei. Please don’t. I don’t ever want you to feel like you’re alone, like nobody’s there for you. I am, always.” He took Eijun’s hand, deliberately lacing their fingers together. “How can I help you right now?”

“It’s...I don’t know?”

“Do you want to skip practice? We can just spend the day home if you want.”

“No, no. I think I need to move, it’s been hard sitting so much.” Eijun shook his head. “I think we should just do what we’d planned, if that’s alright? Stop at Haruichi’s on the way to practice, and see Ohno-san at four.”

“Okay, if that’s what you want,” Kazuya agreed.

“Yes, as normal as possible would be good, I think.” Eijun said. “I think there’s been enough emotion and tears this morning. You have to be starving. Can I make you something?”

“No, I’ll cook. But Eijun, please don’t feel guilty or self-conscious about what you’re feeling. It’s fine, and if you want spend the day emotional and crying, I don’t mind. Hell, with Peanut, I’ll probably be right there with you,” Kazuya joked, and Eijun chuckled wetly.

“Welcome to the ‘Crying at the Drop of a Hat Club’, Kazuya. Your welcome gift is a package of tissues and some Visine.” Eijun stepped back into Kazuya’s arms, this time deliberately taking all the comfort he could, allowing himself for the first time in days to feel, guilt-free, the love and support he was being offered. “I love you, Miyuki Kazuya. Please don’t ever stop loving me.”

“I can’t imagine ever not loving you, Sawamura Eijun. I’ve loved you for so long, and you’ve always been everything to me.” Kazuya tightened his arms around Eijun, snuggling them closer, gaining his own comfort from their connection. “Whatever happens, we’re partners, right?”

“Partners to the end.” Eijun agreed. “Or until you strangle me for eating the last of the ice cream.”

Kazuya chuckled, “That won’t...no, wait. That might actually happen.”

“Duly noted.”

Kazuya stepped away and took Eijun’s hand. “Come keep me company while I cook?”
“Always.”

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, this whole chapter had me weeping.
I've never had that happen, so I hope it's not a overwrought mess.

Please let me know, I'd hate to be the only one.
Kazuya rooted around in the fridge, finally emerging with bacon and the carton of eggs.

"You’re ok with bacon?" Eijun asked, knowing that was one of the smells he’d been having problems with.

Kazuya shot him a smile. "I think so. If I can handle the cheeseburgers and fried pickles, I should be fine with this."

"Okay, if you say so," Eijun was dubious. "I'll never turn down bacon, but we can just have the usual, it’s fine."

"I know, thanks." Kazuya responded appreciatively. "Do you want more coffee?"

Eijun sighed. "I...it’s going to be a long day, I probably should have some more."

Kazuya poured him a fresh cup and brought it over to the table. "Here," He dropped a kiss Eijun’s forehead before going back to cooking. Putting the bacon in the oven, he grabbed his own cup and sat at the table, beside Eijun, linking their hands. "I do really want to know what you’ve thought about for Haruko. You should have the final say, and it’s not because of any of those things you were thinking, but because...well. Look at it this way. You’ve been giving me, or offering me, final say in Peanut related things. It’s normal, it makes sense."

"I know, and I’m sorry about that." Eijun smiled sadly at Kazuya. "I’ve just been so carefully not allowing myself to think about things that it all exploded at once."

"Don’t apologize," Kazuya said, fiercely. "You didn’t do anything wrong. I’m sorry for not seeing how badly off you are. Now I do, now we know, and we can work from there, okay? I do want to
make one thing clear to you, though. Don’t stop yourself from hovering, being protective. I understand the need, and I’m the last one who wants you not to be. If it get irritating, I’ll say something, I promise.”

“Alright. I’ll remember, thanks.” Eijun leaned his head on his other hand. “I’ll try to keep it manageable.”

“No, don’t worry about that; just do what you need to.” Kazuya insisted, squeezing his hand. “It’s fine.”

Eijun nodded, acquiescing. “Okay. But about Haruko’s memorial. I don’t want it to be just me; I want it to be us. I don’t want to pick something you don’t like, because you think I should have the last say, I don’t. She’s ours, and she deserves our best.”

“You’re right, she does, and it’s not fair that should all be on you. I promise I’ll tell you what I like. I just...it’s important, right? And you should have the final say, but we should pick together, you’re right about that.”

“Do you have any ideas, Kaz? At all?”

“I did think a little about it, but nothing in depth? I just...I was thinking about spring, and something that symbolized that?”

“I was thinking the same thing,” Eijun started, hesitantly. “What do you think about cherry blossoms? I know it’s kinda overdone, but they’re delicate and pretty and so temporary.”

“I think that’s perfect, Ei.” Kazuya’s eyes welled up. “It fits; I don’t care how cliché it is.”

Eijun sat up straight. “You think so? Really?” He blinked back his own tears. “I didn’t know if you’d like it, because it’s not original.”

“It’s cliché for a reason,” Kazuya said. “It’s beautiful. I don’t like things because others like them, but I don’t care how overused they are—if I like it, it’s fine. We should ask her about that, but I’d be surprised if she didn’t already work up something with that theme.” He got up to check the bacon, and put the skillet on to heat up. “Two or three eggs?”

“Two, please. I’m not that hungry.” Eijun responded.

“No problem.” He expertly fried the eggs, added some bacon to the plate and slid it in front of Eijun. “Here you go, eat up.”

“I’ll wait for you.”

“It’ll only be a second; I just have to cook my own eggs.” Kazuya plated his food, and joined Eijun at the table, watching him to make sure he ate. “I’m so glad to be getting my body back, at least to some extent.” Kazuya enjoyed every bite of the bacon on his plate, and was gratified to see that Eijun ate all of his food as well.

“I’ll get dishes, Kaz, you go ahead and take a shower.” Eijun stood and gathered the plates, heading to the sink. He stopped and kissed Kazuya on the cheek. “Thank you for breakfast, it was great.”

“I’m glad you liked it.” Kazuya wrapped him in a hug. “I wish...I wish there was some way to protect you, shield you from all the bad stuff. I can’t, though, but I’m here for you, whenever. However you need me. Lean on me, please.”
“I will, I am, Kaz. I don’t know where I’d be without you, you’re my rock.” Eijun rested his head on Kazuya’s shoulder. “I know that as long as I have you, I’ll be okay; it’s just going to take some time. I really want to read those books, I believe you when you say the way I’m feeling is normal, but reading it would be helpful, I think.”

“It will be. You’ll see, there’s nothing wrong with those feelings. As long as we keep talking and honest, we’ll get through this. Together.” Kazuya ran his hand through Eijun’s hair, holding him tightly. “Forgive me if I’m overly hovery; I’m worried about you and am going to be checking on you all the time.”

Eijun snorted. “Between you checking on me, and me being overly protective of you and Peanut, we’re going to be a mess.”

“Honestly, we already are.” Kazuya laid a kiss on his temple. “We’ll be fine, we’ll work it out.”

Eijun nodded agreement. “We will.” He stepped back and shooed Kazuya out of the kitchen. “Now go get ready, we’ve got to get out of here soon.”

“Yes, yes,” Kazuya grinned. “I’m going.”

Kazuya stepped up to the receptionist’s desk, and she smiled.

“Good Morning, Miyuki-san. You can go on back, it’s fine.”

“Are you sure? We can wait.”

“No, please. Head on back, there’s no one back there, and Kominato-sensei says we’re to send you back whenever you come in.”

“Ok, thank you.” Kazuya headed through the door to the examination rooms, followed closely by Eijun. “That’s Haruichi for you. He’s got you pegged.”

“He does,” Eijun grinned. “He knows me better than anyone not named Miyuki Kazuya does.”

They sat in the chairs outside of the ultrasound room, waiting for the ultrasound technician to be ready for them. After a few minutes, she peeked around the edge of her door.

“Hello! You’re here for an ultrasound?”

“We are.”

“Hmmm... I don’t have anyone on my list. Can I get your name, please?”

“Miyuki Kazuya.” The technician stepped back into the room and checked her computer, before motioning them in.

“Oh, yes. Come on in.” She closed the door and indicated the bed. “Hop on up, you know the drill. I wasn’t working when you were here before, but I’m glad to meet you.”

“Thanks.” Kazuya said as he climbed up onto the examining table.
“You’re about eleven weeks, correct?” She asked as she expertly readied the machine and applied gel to the wand.

“Yes,” Kazuya confirmed, as he and Eijun watched the display on the monitor closely.

She slid the wand around until she found the baby, and then started taking measurements. She’d finished with them, and was just pointing out Peanut’s head, when Haruichi walked in.

“Good Morning Kazuya, Eijun. I’m glad to see you, although I thought it might have been before now.” Haruichi commented, looking sharply at Eijun.

“We should have come earlier,” Kazuya informed him. “Someone’s being more stoic than they need to.”

Haruichi’s eyes narrowed. “Ahhh, I suspected that might happen. After this, Eijun, I’d like to see you in my office, okay?”

“Yes, Haruichi.” Eijun couldn’t do anything but agree. He did not want to provoke him; Eijun knew Haruichi had the capability to be worse than his brother, although he rarely showed it.

“Good.” Haruichi walked over to take a closer look at the monitor. “Peanut looks fine, everything seems normal.” He turned to the tech. “Can you see if we can hear?” She turned up the volume and adjusted the wand, and the whooshing that was Peanut’s heartbeat filled the room. Peanut, still clearly visible on the monitor, seemingly didn’t like the prodding, and turned over.

“She flipped?” Eijun asked, blinking at the screen, grabbing Kazuya’s hand.

“She did.” Haruichi confirmed.

“That’s amazing.” Kazuya said, squeezing Eijun’s hand.

“For now it is,” Haruichi chuckled. “But when Peanut’s doing that night and day, and you feel it every time, it will get old.”

“I’m sure it will,” Kazuya agreed.

“Ohhh, you’re in trouble….” Kazuya teased as he wiped the goo off and sat up. “Sensei’s going to yell at you.” He grinned as he sat up.

Eijun looked at him, unimpressed. “Really, Kaz? Are you four?”

“Maybe. I’m not sure, but I do know I’m not the one Haruichi wants to yell at, so I’ll take it,” he snarked, standing up. “Thank you for your time.” He bowed to the tech.

“You’re welcome. I’ll see you again, probably.”

“Looking forward to it.” Kazuya followed Eijun out of the room.

They walked down to Haruichi’s office together, and peeked into the room. He was seated behind his desk and he waved them in. “Come on in, have a seat. Both of you.”

Doing as suggested, they headed towards their usual seats in front of his desk.
“How are you feeling, Kazuya? Anything off, new or strange?”

“How are you feeling, Kazuya? Anything off, new or strange?”

“Not really. The morning sickness is almost gone, and smells don’t bother me so much. I’m still peeing all the time, and my back aches. A little bit of heartburn, too.”

“Good. Those are all good, and normal. Peanut looked fine on the ultrasound, and I’m sure that will continue.”

“I’m glad she’s doing well.” Kazuya responded.

“She?” Haruichi queried. “How do you know the gender?”

Eijun spoke up, the first thing he’d said since they entered the room. “We don’t. We just got tired of calling her ‘it’ or ‘they’ so we’re switching days. ‘She’ one day, and ‘he’ the next. Today’s a ‘she’ day.”

“That’s an interesting method; I’ve not known anyone to do that. If you change your mind about finding out the gender, let me know. It’s not difficult.” Haruichi offered.

“We will, for sure.” Kazuya responded.

“Good.” Haruichi moved his gaze to Eijun. “I want to talk to you. Kazuya can stay or not, it’s up to you.”

“I’d rather stay, if that’s alright with you, Ei.”

“Yeah, he’s fine, he can stay.” Eijun nodded.

“Okay.” Haruichi’s eyes narrowed. “Eijun, you look terrible. Have you not been sleeping?”

“...I have, but I have nightmares, and I can’t go back to sleep.” Eijun confessed. “I’m not getting a lot of sleep, but I’m sleeping.” Haruichi looked at Kazuya for confirmation.

“It’s true.” Kazuya frowned. “I actually finally spoke to him about it last night. He gets up and stays up.”

“That’s not uncommon, it should pass in time. Eijun, I’m going to send over a prescription for a sleeping aid. I know you don’t want to take it, but you do need your rest.”

“I know I do.” Eijun agreed. “I’m back at practice this week, so that should help.”

“That should help, but if you have a bad night, please take one the following evening to help you sleep. You shouldn’t take these unless you have seven or eight hours to sleep, so if you think it’s going to be a rough night, take one.” Haruichi instructed.

“I will.”

“And I’ll make sure of it.” Kazuya chimed in.

Haruichi smiled at Kazuya briefly. “Thank you, Kazuya.” Turning back to Eijun, he continued, “And how are you doing with the loss of Haruko? I haven’t seen your eyes this dark since the yips.”

“I...if you’d have asked me yesterday how I was doing, I would have said I was fine.” Eijun responded. “I thought I was. I figured I was over it, she wasn’t a real baby and I couldn’t have done anything to prevent it anyway, so there was nothing to be upset about.” Haruichi met Kazuya’s eyes, who nodded at him solemnly.
Eijun sighed and his shoulders slumped. “But I found out this morning that I was wrong. I’ve just been ignoring it, and I’m not okay, nowhere near it. I will be, eventually, but for now I’m just...not.” He felt himself tear up, and Kazuya laid a hand on his shoulder in comfort. “I still feel like I should be, though. I do. I know I need time, and to process stuff, but it’s hard to get that inside my brain. Kazuya has some books he thinks will help.”

“I’m glad,” Haruichi said simply. “Not because you’re hurting and sad, but because you’ve acknowledged it and are not ignoring it, and you understand that you shouldn’t be dismissive, even though you feel like you should be better. None of this is uncommon in people in your position, and the well-meaning family and friends who try to help you by telling you it wasn’t really a baby, and it’s good thing it happened early, so you can get over it faster are wrong.” Haruichi leaned forward, intent. “Eijun. You’re going to heal at your own rate, don’t try to be better before you are. It looks like Kazuya understands that, so allow him to help you. If you need outside help, someone to talk to who’s not involved, I can recommend some good people.”

“Thank you, I will if I need it. Right now, I think we’ll be okay.” Eijun said gratefully.

Haruichi nodded. “That’s fine. Just—you’re in an uncommon situation, since Kazuya is still pregnant. If that makes it hard for you to talk to him, please let me know. It’s not a reflection on you, Kazuya, it might be hard for him to voice everything he’s feeling to you, because he’s insanely protective of you and doesn’t want to hurt or alienate you.”

“I understand, but I don’t think that will be a problem.” Kazuya smiled. “If it is, I’ll be the first one to suggest a professional.”

Haruichi smiled back. “Sometimes I forget that you’re every bit as concerned about him as he is of you. That’s good; I think you two will be fine.”

Eijun stood and offered his hand to Kazuya. “Thank you, Haruichi, for your time and your advice. You’re a great friend and I—no, we—are lucky to have you.”

“We are,” Kazuya concurred. “And now we’ll get out of your way and stop taking any more of your time. Thank you again, Haruichi. I appreciate it.”

“Any time. And I mean that, anytime you need me, feel free to call or come on by.” Haruichi smiled, sharp and fierce, and Kazuya was forcibly reminded that Haruichi was also intensively protective of those he loved, and Eijun fell dead in the center of that category.

“I will, Haruichi, I promise.” Eijun said solemnly, and stepped around the desk to hug his friend. “Thank you again.”

“You’re welcome. Take care of yourself, okay? And let Kazuya help you, that’s what he’s there for.” Haruichi patted Eijun’s back awkwardly, and Eijun stepped away.

Kazuya set his hand in the small of Eijun’s back, and together they left the office.

Eijun drove them to work; he preferred to do so even though Kazuya hadn’t been having nearly as many dizzy spells. He had decided to take Kazuya at his word and hover as much as he wanted to, and this was one of the ways. Kazuya just smiled and shrugged when Eijun demanded the keys that morning, recognizing it wasn’t a judgment of him or his abilities.
“I think,” Eijun began, as they made their way through the city. “I think I’m glad that this morning happened before we went to see Haruichi.”

“You are?” Kazuya replied, turning his attention to his husband. He still looked broken, and his eyes were dark, but he didn’t look quite as lost, like he’d seen some end to what it was that was bogging him down.

“I am. If I’d gone in to see him the way I had been, things would have gotten ugly. He cares about me, but unlike you, he wouldn’t hesitate to force me to acknowledge what’s going on, wouldn’t hesitate to force the issue. He’s quite ruthless, in his own way. I wouldn’t have stood a chance; the truth would have come out. And I’m afraid it would have been devastating for us both.” Eijun grasped at Kazuya’s hand, pulling it into his lap. “This morning was painful, and I never want to feel like that again, but it was necessary, and I think it strengthened us. If he’d precipitated it, it would have been twice as painful and half as helpful. Especially since you didn’t realize how badly I felt.”

Kazuya’s eyes widened as he considered the implications. “You’re absolutely right. He would have dragged it out of you, not really caring about the damage, figuring that could be addressed later. And he wouldn’t have been wrong, but damn, that would have been so rough.” He ran his thumb over the back of Eijun’s hand, thinking. “I still feel guilty that I didn’t see how badly you were hurting, Eijun.”

“It’s fine, I didn’t want to you know. I didn’t even allow myself to know, really, except in spurts, when I couldn’t help it.” Eijun soothed him, not wanting him to carry any guilt around; he hadn’t done anything wrong.

“But still, I wish I had.”

“Yeah, I get that. I wish I’d known what to expect. Hospitals, doctors, most things you read, tend to treat early term miscarriages like cuts or bruises, not like loss, like Haruichi said. And that may be the way it is for some people, and that’s fine, that’s one way of coping. But that’s not the way it is for me, and I wish I’d known it was a possibility.” Eijun turned into the parking lot and pulled into their usual spot.

“Me too.” Kazuya said, opening his door.

“Wait.” Eijun glared and went around the car, helping him out. He reached into the back seat and grabbed both of their bags and slung them over his shoulder. “Let’s go to practice, Kaz. What’s on your agenda today?”

“There’s a coaches meeting first, and Shimizu’s going to be in today, so I want to talk to him about clothes I should wear, and where to get them. I should be out by your break, about 1:00, and we’ll have bullpen practice after that.” Kazuya twined their hands together as they walked. “You have to see the doctor this morning, and then practice. Take it easy, Ei, please. I know you’re ok, but I worry about you.”

“I won’t push it, I promise,” Eijun agreed. “I don’t think I should have lost much in the week off, but I’ll be extra careful. Alright?”

“Thanks. We have a game Wednesday, and I think you should be fine to start,” Kazuya said. “But that’s not my call to make. Hara’s coming along nicely, and after I put the fear of God into Ikeda, he’s been behaving. I’m still not sure what that was about.”

“I don’t know either, Kaz. If I hear anything, I’ll let you know. They may not talk to me about it, though, since I’m kinda sorta sleeping with the enemy.”
Kazuya laughed, genuinely amused for the first time that morning. “You are, aren’t you?” He reached for his bag, taking it from Eijun as they separated for the morning. “You know where I am if you need me.”

They hugged, and Eijun whispered in his ear. “I love you; take care of yourself and Peanut, okay?”

“You too, Ei. You too.”

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Kazuya was sitting at his desk, making plans for this week’s games, when his phone buzzed.

Ei: Hey, did you know at eleven weeks, Peanut’s fingers and toes have separated? They are no longer webbed.

Me: I did not.

Ei: The more you know, right?

Me: Right. How are you?

Ei: Fine, I’m taking it easy, you can ask Hara. Also eavesdropping.

Me: I will! Anything good?

Ei: Maybe. I’ll let you know later. How are you?

Me: We’re good, Shimizu’s made me a list.

Ei: Awesome, so shopping soon?

Me: Yeah, things are getting tight.

Ei: Sounds good. Ok, back to the salt mines. My bullpen coach is a slave driver.

Me: So I’ve heard, you’d better be on your toes or that cushy starter position might be gone.

Ei: Naw, he wouldn’t do that. I know where he sleeps.

Me: I love you, idiot.

Ei: Love you too, asshole.

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Kazuya walked into the team’s lunchroom looking for Eijun. He found him sitting at a table in the corner with Takahashi and Hara opposite. Grabbing a tray of food, he made his way over and slid into the seat beside him. He greeted the players, and turned his attention to Eijun.

“Hey, how are you feeling?”
“I’m good, things are fine,” Eijun said. “I’ve been taking it easy.”

“He has,” Takahashi agreed. “He really has.”

“Good.”

“How are you feeling, Miyuki?” Takahashi queried.

“Better. No more morning sickness.” Kazuya grinned. “And Peanut’s finally letting me eat what I want.”

“That’s good. No cravings? My sister was wicked with her cravings.”

“Oh, well, yeah. Ice cream and the occasional cheeseburger. Which would be fine, but I’ve never liked cheeseburgers.” Kazuya chuckled self-consciously.

“You know what they make, though?” Eijun chimed in. “At the American Diner? They make fried pickles. They’re surprisingly good.”

Takahashi shook his head. “You’ve got to be kidding me. That sounds disgusting.”

“No, trust me. They’re good.” Kazuya echoed Eijun. “And there’s this strange sauce they serve that’s oddly addictive. I think they call it ranch? Anyway. They’re good.”

Still not convinced, Takahashi pointed at Kazuya, “You’re pregnant; you don’t know what you’re saying.” He pointed at Eijun, “And you’re a bit of an idiot, I don’t trust you.”

Eijun puffed out his cheeks, and growled. “Fine, you don’t believe us, let’s all go.”

“Sure, when?”

“Later this week, maybe? How about after the game Wednesday?”

“Works for me. You in, Hara?”

“Sure.” Hara looked happy to be invited; as a rookie, he’d not been involved in many social activities outside the team-mandated ones.

“Tell you what; if I like them, I’ll even pay for your dinners.” Takahashi offered.

“Bring plenty of money, then.” Eijun gibed, and then changed the subject. “I got the information you were looking for, Kaz. Actually, Hara has it.”

Takahashi looked irritated. “I wish they’d brought that shit to me, I’d have let them have it.”

“And that’s why they didn’t,” Eijun said. “It’s fine, Kaz just needs to know so he can deal with it.”

“What’s going on?” Kazuya asked, eyeing the trio. “Hara?”

Hara jumped a little and fiddled with his napkin. “Well, coach...I...”

“Don’t glare, you’re scaring him.” Eijun elbowed Kazuya. “It’s okay, Hara. Just tell him what you told me, he won’t be mad at you.”

“I won’t.” Kazuya affirmed. “I’m not. I just need to know what’s going on in my bullpen.”

“Okay.” Hara took a deep breath. “Basically, Ikeda is complaining about favoritism. He thinks that
the only reason Sawamura is the ace is because you’re the bullpen coach.”

Kazuya stared at him. “He does realize he’s been the ace for far longer than I’ve been coaching, right?”

“Yes, but he said that after his last injury, his shoulder’s not as good, and he should have been stepped down.” Hara gained confidence as Kazuya didn’t react harshly.

“He’s not completely wrong, Kaz,” Eijun pointed out. “It did take a while to heal, and I’m still nursing it somewhat.”

“Yes, but even with that, you can pitch circles around him on your worst day,” Takahashi chimed in. “He’s just bitter and instead of working harder, he complains.”

“It’s still spreading discord in my bullpen,” Kazuya fumed. “I’ll talk to him.”

“As much as I agree with you that he’s wrong, Miyuki, that’s not the best way to go about it,” Takahashi pointed out. “If you do that, it will just give him more ammunition. What we have to do is settle it in a way he’ll be forced to accept.”

Eijun nodded. “He’s right. I never want to be that person who claims their position because they’ve always had it; I don’t mind having to fight for it. It’s good for me, keeps me sharp.”

“But you shouldn’t have to,” Kazuya argued. “You all know that I’d never put my personal feelings ahead of the team, right?”

“Those of us who’ve been paying attention, and who’ve been around do,” Takahashi said. “I remember how shocked we all were the first time you gave him hell for something, we honestly thought you would pull your punches. We were even more surprised that he took it, and worked to fix the issue. It’s never seemed to cause an issue between you two.”

“That’s something we had to work out at Seido,” Eijun explained. “The difference between on the field and off. We played together for much of a year before we started dating, so it wasn’t such a hard thing for me to tell the difference between ‘Miyuki the Captain’ and ‘Kazuya my boyfriend’, but Kaz had some difficulties being as critical of me as he had been. It took me some time to convince him that I needed the criticism, and that I wasn’t going to break up with him because I screwed up and he called me on it.” Eijun laughed, remembering. “In fact, not telling me I sucked caused more issues than him saying something.”

Kazuya chuckled. “You’re not wrong. I was worried about it for a bit, but I’ve gotten over that.”

“Clearly,” Eijun rolled his eyes. “Does Ikeda not remember the reaming he gave me over that game a few weeks ago?”

“Apparently not,” Takahashi said. “So how do you feel about some kind of tryout? Pitch off? I don’t know, but we should have something that inarguably puts both of you in your rightful places.”

“I don’t mind, and if he can beat me, more power to him,” Eijun said, truthfully. “I don’t want a position I don’t deserve.”

“Ok, let me bring this to the head coach, and we’ll figure out the best way to handle it,” Kazuya suggested. “Whatever we decide, we’ll set something up for later in the week. Give Eijun a chance to recuperate from his time off.”

“Yeah, you’ll need it, after lazing around for a week,” Takahashi agreed. “You’d better bring it in
the bullpen this afternoon.”

“Oh, I will,” Eijun said, eyes flashing. “I have my position to defend, right? Ikeda’s got no idea what he’s got coming.”

Afternoon practice went well, Takahashi ran Eijun through his pitches, seeing where he was and what he’d lost being down. Kazuya was missing for much of the practice; he teamed up the batteries at the beginning and gave them instructions before heading back to the head coach’s office.

Eijun was having fun. He’d missed pitching, missed being able to move and stretch himself. Sitting for a week had been difficult, even if he hadn’t had the emotional issues involved. He’d never been good at working things out when he was still, his body would get in the way. His best thinking and processing were always accomplished while moving, preferably running. He was hopeful just being able to move again would help him processes the grief, work through the pain.

And then there was Ikeda. He was almost grateful for the diversion, the challenge. Baseball had gotten routine, and as much as he loved it, would always love it, he didn’t want it to get boring, didn’t want to take it for granted. He realized he’d been close to doing just that, but this was pulling him back, away from that edge, as well as giving him something other than the loss of Haruko to concentrate on.

So he pitched. He worked to make his pitches sing, to make them sound perfect when they hit Takahashi’s mitt. They went precisely where they were meant to be, speed exactly as requested. Takahashi took him through his entire pitching repertoire, checking every possible iteration of every pitch, and Eijun compiled, carefully pitching exactly what was called. At the end of the ninety minutes they had for practice, Eijun was tired, mentally and physically, but that was good, that felt good.

What he failed to see, although Takahashi did, is Ikeda’s ever widening eyes as he watched Eijun be put through his paces. He also missed the looks the other pitchers shot Ikeda as the practice continued.

That’s one way to deal with it. Takahashi mused. Now all they needed was one more thing to put the nail in the coffin, and he figured Miyuki would come up with something.

Kazuya met Eijun in the locker room; he walked in as Eijun was changing, towel around his shoulders catching the drips from his hair.

“Hey, you.” Kazuya stepped up behind him, wrapping his arms around his waist, dropping a soft kiss on his bare shoulder. “You’re kinda hot, want to come home with me?”

“You know, I haven’t had a better offer all day. But you’ll need to clear it with my husband, he might not like me wandering off with strange men too much.” Eijun leaned back into the hug.

Kazuya smiled into his shoulder. “I’m pretty sure he’ll be alright with it. I’ll bring you back
tomorrow, I just need you tonight.” He nibbled on Eijun’s neck, and Eijun moaned a little.

“It’s been a while since I’ve been assaulted in the locker room,” Eijun sighed. “How very high school of you.”

“Oh, man. It has been a while,” Kazuya chuckled, face still buried in Eijun’s neck. “I can’t believe some of the stuff we did at Seido. It’s a miracle no one ever walked in on us; we would have gotten in so much trouble if we had been caught.”

“Not so much of a miracle.” Eijun smirked at Kazuya as he turned in his arms, stepping away to get dressed. “I bribed Seto to stand outside the locker room and keep watch, and before he came, Mochi did it.”

“Wait, what?” Kazuya was shocked. “Why didn’t I know this? Mochi watched out for us?”

“Yeah, I didn’t know either until Ryou dropped a huge hint. Apparently, he was not excited about his boyfriend playing guard. When I found that out, I recruited Seto and he was fine with it,” Eijun explained. “I kinda thought you’d asked Mochi, and that’s why I never said anything to you.”

“Okay, well. That makes some things he’s said to me make much more sense,” Kazuya laughed. “I hope you didn’t have to pay Seto too much.”

“Naw, it was only a few times. We were much busier in the equipment shed,” Eijun reminded him, donning his shoes.

“You’re not wrong.” Kazuya bent to pick up their bags when Eijun growled at him.

“Let me,” Eijun insisted, and Kazuya stepped out of the way, both hands raised in surrender. Eijun picked them up and threw them over his shoulder. “You shouldn’t be carrying things.”

“It’s fine for me to pick stuff up,” Kazuya replied mildly. “I’m pregnant, not crippled.”

Eijun sighed as he led the way out of the locker room. “I know, but still. I want you to be careful, and when I’m around there’s no need for you to do so.”

“Fine, but if you get me too used to it, I might not start up again even after Peanut’s born,” Kazuya threatened, opening the door into the parking lot for Eijun.

“That’s a chance I’m willing to take.”

“Ok, then. It’s on your head if I turn into a spoiled princess.”

Eijun snorted a laugh. “I’ll buy you a tiara.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments, puppies, GRRM, etc.
Let me know what you think:)
To See the Stars

Chapter Summary

Haruko Talk.
Kazuya feeds Peanut.
Eijun Grows Up.
And there's a discussion about Family.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the delay, I was hung up on boys in tuxes, and well...that's my excuse. Pretty boys in tuxes.

If you're reading Fly Away Home, you may recognize someone in this chapter. If you're not, why aren't you? I kid, but it's around somewhere if you're interested. And that one, unlike this, is almost complete.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eijun drove and Kazuya navigated as they headed over to Ohno-san’s studio.

They didn’t speak much, they were each lost in thought, both of them a little apprehensive about the meeting. Neither of them expected a repeat of the morning, but they both thought it would be an emotionally draining experience. Clasping their hands firmly together, they took comfort in their connection, gaining strength from each other.

Ohno-san worked out of her house, and they pulled into her driveway at four o’clock precisely. Eijun turned off the engine and turned to Kazuya.

“You ready for this?”

“It’s not me I’m worried about.” Kazuya brushed Eijun’s hair out of his eyes. “You okay?”

Eijun took a deep breath and blew it out, relaxing. “I am. I want to get things moving, now that I know what’s going on.” He unbuckled his seatbelt, preparing to exit the car.

“Eijun.” Kazuya stopped him. “Listen to me. You can’t make things move any faster than they’re going to. Try not to get too impatient with yourself. It’s going to take time and you can’t hurry it along.”

“I know.” He sighed. “I do know. I’m going to try, but I’m not certain I’ll succeed. You may have to remind me a few times.”
“I can do that.” Kazuya touched his shoulder, gently. “I will do that.”

“Great. Now sit there and let me get your door.” Eijun commanded.

Kazuya sat, biting back his automatic protest. He knew Eijun needed to hover, and he was willing to accommodate him until he gained his equilibrium. Kazuya had no intention of letting things stay the same, though—he knew when to push, and he was both willing and able to do so. Eijun opened the door and offered his hand; he took it, lacing their fingers together as they walked to the front door.

Eijun knocked and it was answered almost immediately.

“Good afternoon, we’re here to speak to Ohno-san? I’m Miyuki Kazuya, and this is my husband, Sawamura Eijun.” Miyuki bowed politely to the motherly figure in the doorway.

“I’ve been expecting you. Please, come in.” She stepped back and they entered, removing their shoes and excusing themselves, slipping their feet into the guesthouse slippers she indicated.

“Thank you for seeing us, Ohno-san. We really appreciate it,” Eijun said as she led them into what was clearly her workspace.

“Not at all, I’m always happy to work with one of Kominato-sensei’s patients. Please, do call me Mai, though, and do have a seat.” She indicated a low table in the middle of the room, with cushions around it, one side full of ink and paper.

They sat as requested, and she excused herself.

“This is a nice room.” Eijun said, looking around. The decor was very traditional, with one wall sliding back to open the room to the garden. It was a nice day, so she had the doors open, and the garden added to the soothing atmosphere. Tatami mats, ochre walls, light wood. A water fountain sat right outside and enhanced the calmness of the room.

Kazuya squeezed Eijun’s hand. “It is. Except that fountain’s going to make me have to pee.” He snickered and Eijun elbowed him, knocking him over as he chuckled.

Mai came back into the room, carrying a tray with tea and cookies on it. She set it on the table and joined them, pouring them each a cup before getting one for herself.

She took a sip of tea and set down her cup, turning her attention to the boys sitting across from her.

“All right, I know a little bit about what you’re looking for, but we should discuss it in depth. I have a few questions I ask for starters and then we’ll go from there, does that work for you?”

“Sure.” Eijun smiled at her. “Ask away.”

“Okay, which one of you was pregnant? And what details do you know; can you tell me the story? Just whatever makes you comfortable.”

“It was me,” Eijun began. “I was pregnant. We had no idea, until I got hurt and they did a body scan to see if there was any hidden damage, because I’d been knocked out in the fall. I was probably 9 weeks along.” His voice cracked a little, and Kazuya grabbed his hand. Eijun steadied himself and continued. “I...we didn’t know at first if it was something I did, the injury or the fall, but my doctor called Kominato-sensei, and he looked at the test results and determined I’d miscarried earlier. We found out it was a girl, and we named her Haruko.”

“That’s a lovely name.” Mai looked up from where she’d been taking notes. “Have you thought at
Kazuya glanced at Eijun, who nodded, so he spoke, “We thought about cherry blossoms, for our spring child. We had her for nine weeks, about the same amount of time it takes them to bud and bloom.”

“That’s...what a lovely idea. Okay, that’s a good start.” she said, putting down her pen to speak to them. “Let me explain what my work is. I know you’ve seen examples on my webpage, but there’s a few things I like to do. I don’t want this to be something solely about mourning, or just to remembering loss, but also to remembering what else was going on at the time, memorializing the good things as well as the bad. There’s so much to a life that’s important and that’s what I try to celebrate in these pictures. So tell me a little bit about yourselves, and what else is going on in your life, and I’ll use that information to fill out the rest of the drawing.”

“Alright, well. We’re both professional...I mean, Eijun’s a professional baseball player and I was one until I blew out my knee a year ago, I’m now coaching. We’ve been married five years, and the only thing that’s different or unusual is that I’m also pregnant,” Kazuya explained. “We’ve known about Peanut for the last month or so, but we didn’t have any idea Eijun was pregnant as well.”

“That’s...oh, you poor boys. That has to be so tough for both of you. I’m so sorry.” Mai reached over the table and squeezed both of their hands. “I can’t imagine how hard that is.”

“Thank you, it’s been a little rough,” Eijun responded. “But we’ll get through it. We’ve been through worse together.”

“I can tell, but I’m still sorry you’re dealing with it,” Mai said. “It’s a tough time for you, but there’s something to look forward to, right? You’re going to be parents.”

“Yes, and we’re happy about that,” Kazuya said. “We just...never even considered that Eijun would be pregnant as well. It’s one of the things I regret the most. Peanut, though is a blessing.”

“That’s true, and although it’s hard losing Haruko, the thought of Peanut is so helpful, knowing that she’s on the way.” Eijun smiled. “I mean, it’s still hard, but if we’d not been expecting already, it would have been much harder.”

“You know you’re having a girl?” Mai asked Kazuya, who laughed and explained their gender assigning scheme; she chuckled. “Oh, that’s wonderful.”

“Thanks, it’s working for us.”

She turned her attention back to her list. “So, for Haruko. I love the idea of cherry blossoms, and I can think of a few different flowers that blend well with them that I think match your life right now. I believe I have what I need from you both. Give me a week or so, and I’ll email you some samples. You can look them over and let me know if you like any of them, or if you want something changed, something completely different. Don’t be upset or ashamed to tell me if you do, we want this to be perfect, and I’m willing to work with you until it is.”

“We will, thank you,” Kazuya said, with a bow of the head.

“Okay, with that done,” Mai said with a twinkle, “will you stay and chat with an old woman for a while?”

“Of course,” Eijun smiled. “Where is she?”

Mai laughed and patted his hand. “You’re sweet. So how’s Kominato-sensei? I haven’t spoken to
him for a while. You said your doctor called him?’”

“He did, but he’s actually my ob.” Kazuya explained. “We all went to high school together.”

“Really? That’s so nice that you were able to go to someone you know. So you know his older brother, as well?”

“Yeah, Ryou was a third year when I entered Seido, and Kazuya was second. Haruichi and I were in the same class.”

“That’s so great. Seido, you said? Did they play baseball too?”

“They did,” Kazuya answered. “They were both second basemen. Two of the best I ever saw.”

“And your positions? I apologize, I don’t follow baseball. I recognize your faces, but I...wait. You were married a few years back? And they showed a bunch of it on TV, right?”

Eijun frowned. “They did, the team management did. I...we had no idea they’d do that. We know better now, and we’re not letting them turn Peanut into a spectacle.”

“Good for you. I understand your irritation.” She smiled at them. “I remember seeing that, you both looked lovely, so happy.”

“We were.” Kazuya returned the smile, and took Eijun’s hand. “We are. We let it slide for a couple of reasons. Technically, we had given them permission to film the ceremony. And they didn’t show anything live, or broadcast the whole ceremony. But, like he said, we know better, and there is no way they’re using our child for publicity.”

“No one should do that, I agree,” She said as they finished their tea. “Thank you for indulging an old woman’s curiosity. I appreciate your time.”

They stood and bowed to her, thanking her for everything. “It was our pleasure, Mai. We had a great time,” Eijun said, offering her a hand up. “Can we help you with the dishes?”

“Oh, no. That’s my job, I’ve got them.” She waved him off, and patted Kazuya’s arm. “It’s down the hall, dear, second door on the right.”

“Thank you!” He said, relieved, and headed off to the bathroom.

“Poor thing. Baby killing his bladder, and I’m cruel enough to have a fountain running. I can’t believe he made it this long.”

Eijun chuckled. “I don’t think he does, either. He’s not used to it yet.”

“You never get used to it,” she asserted. “You just learn to deal with it.”

“I get that.” Eijun sympathized.

Kazuya came back into the room, and bowed his head to Mai again. “Thank you again for your hospitality. I appreciate the tea and the conversation.”

“Yes, thank you.” Eijun bowed to her as well. “I’m happy to leave Haruko’s memorial in your hands, and glad that Haruichi recommended you.”

“You boys are wonderful, and I’m so happy you stopped by. I’m honored to be able to do this for you and Haruko.” Mai walked them to the genkan, where they switched shoes. “I’ll get with you as
soon as I have a few things worked up, and we can go from there. Be careful going home.”

“We will, thank you again.” They walked out the door, and headed to their car.

Eijun pulled out of the driveway, headed towards their part of town. “Are you hungry? It’s close to dinner time.”

“Getting there.” Kazuya reached over and twined their fingers together. “You think we could try pizza again?”

“You’re feeling adventurous, huh?” Eijun slanted him a grin. “Bacon this morning, now pizza.”

“Yeah, I’d like to try, if you don’t mind.”

“I have no problems with that. If you can’t handle it, we can always order it to go and eat at the park or something.”

“That...that sounds like a good plan,” Kazuya agreed. “I don’t get to say that often.”


“Awww, you know you love me.”

“Not the point.”

“True, true. Do you want to talk about Mai now, or later?”

“Let’s wait a bit? Talk over dinner?” Eijun suggested.

Kazuya squeezed his hand. “Okay, let’s do that.”

Eijun grinned his thanks, and they chatted until they got to the restaurant.

Getting out of the car, Eijun opened Kazuya’s door and helped him to his feet. “I know you’re not nearly as dizzy as you were, and I think you’ve been careful to eat regularly, but I still want to do this for you, okay? I need to make sure you’re all right. If anything were to happen to you or Peanut, especially if I could have done something to prevent it, I don’t know what I’d do.” Eijun clung to his hand, feeling both pathetic and needy, but wanting Kazuya to understand. He felt a hand in his hair, smoothing it back, tugging his head up to meet Kazuya’s eyes.

“Eijun, it’s fine,” he soothed. “I understand, really. You don’t need to feel bad, or explain yourself. I love you for caring so much and I appreciate all that you do. Thank you for watching over us.” He kissed Eijun on the cheek and pulled on his hand. “Come on; let’s go see if this pizza thing will work. Peanut’s hungry.”

Eijun followed him through the doors and they stood right inside for a few seconds, waiting for Kazuya to react to the aroma. After thirty seconds or so, Kazuya looked at Eijun with a grin. “I think I’m all right. It’s not perfect, my stomach’s a little queasy, but I think I’m ok.”

“Good!” Eijun beamed at him. “Let’s go sit, and if it gets too much, let me know, okay? We can always take it to go.”
Of course, I’ll let you know.”

They were seated, drinks delivered and pizza ordered, when they finally started to talk.

“How are you feeling?” Kazuya asked, opening the conversation.

Eijun sighed and took stock. “I’m…I’m ok. I’m still sad, of course, but it doesn’t feel like it did this morning. Like this hopeless bottomless pit I couldn’t see my way out of. Now it’s more like everything’s a little dimmer, a little grayer.” He slipped his hand across the table and gently touched the back of Kazuya’s. “But I know that it will get better. I believe that. I’ll probably slip back sometimes, please try to be patient about it.”

“Eijun, you don’t even have to ask. I know you’ll have down times, that’s normal. But eventually the down times will get fewer and easier, until one day you’ll realize it’s been a while since you had one. I know this to be true. I’m glad you’re feeling better right now, we’ll just take it as it comes, okay?” Kazuya flipped his hand and laced their fingers together. “I love you, we’ve got this.”

“I love you too, and I would never have made it through this without you.” Eijun’s smile was still sad, but not the defeated thing it had been before. “How are you feeling, though? Peanut ok with being here?”

“Yeah, I think so. I don’t feel queasy any more, I must have gotten used to it.” He smiled, relieved. “I’m okay. Good pizza returns to my life!”

“You know, it’s literally been like…only a month, right?” Eijun snarked.

“I know that, but when you want it and can’t have it…”


“Mai? She’s a trip. I loved her, and I think she’s going to do a great job for Haruko. Why?”

“I was just wondering, wanted to make sure you were alright with her. I thought she was great, too. I’m impressed with her work, and I loved the idea of representing more than just loss, representing the moment, memorializing what we were at the time.”

“Yes! I think that’s a great idea.” Kazuya agreed. “It makes things more hopeful, more about our family than about our loss.” Eijun blinked at him, eyes tearing. “Wait, what did I say? What’s wrong?”

“No, nothing’s wrong.” Eijun swiped at his eyes, irritated by the wetness. “Stupid things, always leaking.” He leaned forward, squeezing Kazuya’s hand, eyes intent. “Do you know that’s the first time I’ve ever heard you call us a family?”

“No way. That’s not—” Kazuya’s instinctive denial died on his tongue. “You know what, I think you’re right. I just… I always thought of our extended families when I say ‘family’. We were just us, a couple, the kids, that kind of stuff. I guess Peanut’s changed that for me—we’re responsible for her, so we’re the family unit. I don’t think anything’s changed, as far as our relationship goes, it’s just been redefined a bit in my mind. I mean, you’ve been my everything for years, and I don’t see that changing. Ever. We’re just expanding the definition of ‘us’ and it now includes Peanut. And Haruko. A family.”

Eijun squeezed Kazuya’s hand. “It’s fine, I understand. I do, really. Because the same thing happened to me, but a while ago, when I was talking to your father on opening day. I told him that if he hurt you, I’d do my damnedest to keep him from ever being in the position to hurt my family
again. And after I hung up, I realized what I said and what I meant. You. You and Peanut. That’s what I meant by family, and I think that was the first time I’d ever unconsciously not meant everyone. It’s interesting how perspective shifts.”

“You did? I knew you’d told him something like that, but I didn’t know what, exactly.” Kazuya found himself once again overwhelmed with affection for him. “I…thank you. Again, I know you’re always looking out for me, but sometimes it hits me how protective you are. And tied in with that is that I know how hard you try not to overstep. You allow me to do things that you aren’t sure are the safest or best; you make sure I know you’re there if I need you, and then step back. I’m not nearly as good about that, and I love you so much for giving me the leeway I need.”

Eijun smiled and opened his mouth, but before he could respond, the pizza arrived. The server set it in the middle of the table, steam rising from the tray, cheese melted and stringy. He handed each of them a plate, bowed, and left them to eat.

“Go ahead, Kaz. Eat.” Eijun watched Kazuya serve himself a slice, enjoying the way he smiled in anticipation when the cheese stringed all over the place. Kazuya took a bite, and grinned at Eijun.

“This is perfect.”

“I’m glad you like it.” Eijun said, sliding a piece onto his own plate.

“You have no idea. I’ve been craving this so bad, I didn’t know when I’d get to eat it again.”

“A bit melodramatic, Mei.” Eijun laughed.

Kazuya pouted. “At least that’s what it felt like to me.”

“Ahh, poor baby. If you stick your bottom lip out any further, a bird’s going to poop on it.”

“Ok, that’s just gross.”


“I’ll do that; I’ll just add it to the list.” Kazuya snarked.

Eijun smirked. “I want to be there when you actually tell her about that list.”

Kazuya snorted into his pizza. “I’m sure you do. Don’t be surprised when she just laughs and pats my cheek, turning all the blame on you.”

“She will, too. I can’t believe you subverted my own mother.” Eijun glared and then grinned. Laughing, they turned their attention back to the pizza, eating in a companionable silence.

Kazuya sat back, stomach full. “That was so good, I’m stuffed.”

“Me too.” Eijun agreed. “Do you want to take the leftovers?”

“I don’t think so, unless you want them for later.”

“Naw, I’ve had enough. Are you ready? We’re going shopping, right?”

“Yeah, I spoke to Shimizu. He said that any pregnancy store would have clothes for every day, sweats and t-shirts and such, but that I should go see a tailor for whatever dress clothes I need.”
“Did he give you a name?”

“He did, a name and address. He’s got a shop not too far from here; it’s the same tailor I went to for the blue suit.” Kazuya explained. “He’s open until seven. I called them this afternoon, and he’s expecting us.”

“Oh, him? After the way you looked in that suit, I might just have him see what he can do for me.” Eijun dropped money on the table and offered Kazuya his hand. “It was amazing.”

Kazuya took it and stood. “I don’t know. I really don’t want to have to beat people off of you.”

“Ohhhh…flattery will get you anywhere, sailor.” Eijun batted his eyelashes.

Kazuya sputtered. “Okay, that’s bad.”

“I know, but I bet you liked it.”

“Not the point,” Kazuya argued.

Eijun smirked. “Exactly the point…but we’ll address it later, shall we?”

“Yes, please.” Kazuya’s grin turned feral.

“As you wish, senpai.” Eijun intertwined their hands, and they walked out of the restaurant.

Kazuya drove, since he knew where the store was, and Eijun watched intently as the streets passed, paying attention to the route. They sat quietly, hands intertwined, speaking desultorily, comfortable.

Pulling up to the curb, Eijun felt his eyes widen. “Wow. That’s some storefront.” The display was a range of suits, all styles and colors, most of which would never actually be seen on a person.

“I know, right?” Kazuya chuckled. “Shimizu warned me before I came here the first time. Honestly, Sano’s amazing; he did wonders with the suit I got from him.”

“Okay, then, let’s go.” Eijun climbed out of the car and went around to help Kazuya.

Holding open the front door, Eijun followed him into the store. He looked around curiously; the inside was completely the opposite of the outside. It was tidy and neat, with bolts of fabric piled in cubbyholes, notions stored neatly in clear plastic boxes, all behind a long counter that looked like it did double duty a cutting table, too. The other side of the shop held premade clothing, ready to be sold as is or tailored, as well as at least one of every accessory that could possibly be needed.

The bell over the door jangled when they entered, and a voice rang out from behind a curtain in the back. “I’ll be out in a second, darling, feel free to look around.”

Eijun looked at Kazuya and mouthed, “Darling?”

Kazuya smiled, and answered, sotto voice, “You’ll see.”

The curtains pulled back and a man bustled out and beamed at Kazuya. “Miyuki, it’s wonderful to see you again.” He hurried over to them, and gave him a quick hug. “I’m so glad you stopped by,
sugar!” Glancing over at Eijun, he did a double take. “And you brought this gorgeous specimen with you? What a wonderful treat!”

Kazuya laughed. “Sano, meet Sawamura Eijun, my husband. Eijun, this is Sano, who’s going to help us both, I think.”

Sano took Eijun’s outstretched hand. “Oh, honey. He’s even better in person, and he’s been on my ‘tbd’ list for quite a while. You’ve just moved to the top, Sawamura.”

“Thank you.” Eijun couldn’t help but smile at his infectious personality. “Tbd list? To be done?”

“Oh, yeah.” He stalked around Eijun, while Kazuya watched with a small smile. “Well, no. I understand you and Miyuki have something of a…thing. And I never want to get in the way of that, sugar, I’m no homewrecker. Tbd. To be dressed. I’ve always wanted to have my way with you. Sartorially, that is.”

“You’re welcome to, that’s one of the reasons we’re here. I loved what you did with Kazuya’s suit.”

“Oh, it worked for you?” Sano turned to Kazuya, eyebrow raised.

“Oh, yeah.” Kazuya answered. “Perfectly. Maybe a little too well.”

Eijun laughed, “He’s not wrong.”

Sano pouted a bit, not understanding. “I don’t get it.”

“It worked so well that I’m going to have to get some completely new clothing made.” Kazuya continued to beat around the bush, enjoying Sano’s confusion. Eijun took pity on him, glaring a little at Kazuya.

“Enough to last the next seven months or so.”

“Oh? Ohhhhh! Congratulations! A baby! How wonderful for you!” Sano beamed at them both.

“When are you due?”

“Mid-November.”

Sano’s eyebrows creased, and he started thinking aloud. “So you need to get through summer and early fall. It shouldn’t be too cold, and pregnancy always makes you feel warmer, darling. Okay. You’re still coaching, right?”

“Yes, and I intend to until the end.”

“You’ll wear sweats and t-shirts for the actual coaching, honey? You just need some clothes for meetings and such?”

“You’re right. I need things for a couple of times a week. Like, three pair of pants and a half dozen shirts, I think,” Kazuya said.

Sano grabbed a notebook. “Okay, let me get this down. You need dress pants and shirts, right? Do you know how you want them to fit?”

“I don’t understand, what do you mean?” Kazuya asked.

“Oh, well, let me explain.” Sano motioned to the group of stools at the end of the cutting table. “Let’s sit, please, and I’ll tell you all about it, sugar.” They did as requested, and he pulled a book out
from under the counter. “Here you go, there are several ways we can accommodate the baby and your belly, each of which has pros and cons. The first thing you need to decide is how much coverage you need. Some people are comfortable with these larger panels which cover the whole belly, while others prefer the ones that cut underneath the belly, like these ones.” He showed them pictures of the various options.

“I’m not sure which would work best for me.” Kazuya said. “I don’t know.”

“It’s not that big of a deal, to be honest. Why don’t you let me make you one of each? If you decide you like one better, we’ll go from there. Basically, the pants are going to be the same from about halfway down the bottom slope of your belly, like these.” Sano pointed out the section of the pants. “The panel or the wide band is added to the top. I can always switch out the panel if you decide you like one more than the other. I suspect that you’ll like the lower ones in the summer, since pregnancy in the summer can be miserable.”

“Ok, that sounds like a good idea. What about shirts?”

“You’re going to have to start wearing dress shirts untucked; we’ll just make them with room in the belly. I’d suggest we start out with ones you can grow into, but not ones that will last the whole pregnancy. You don’t want to look like you’re wearing a tent.” Sano pointed out some dress shirts, and explained how they fit.

Eijun was fascinated with the information, he had no idea so much thought went into it. He was also amused at how Sano’s demeanor changed when he was seriously working; it spoke loads about his work ethic.

“I’m putting myself in your hands, Sano,” Kazuya conceded. “I trust you. Whatever you think is best.”

Sano grinned. “Let’s pick some material, shall we?” He pulled out some chino, and pointed out a selection of shirting fabrics. “What do you think of navy blue, khaki, olive, and black for pants, and some combination of shirts? Which of these fabrics do you like? Most of these will work with any of the pants.”

“I like that idea, give me a few and I’ll pick some of these out.” Kazuya moved over to the fabrics, and Sano turned to Eijun.

“And what can I do for you, darling?” Sano asked.

Eijun spread his hands. “I…I’m not sure, I loved what you did with Kazuya’s suit, and I figured I’d throw myself on your mercy.”

Sano squealed. “Really? You’re going to let me do what I want?”

“Well, within reason, yes.” Eijun equivocated.

“Oh, you don’t trust me, sugar?” Sano raised an eyebrow.

Eijun pointed to the front. “I’ve seen your front window.”

Sano grinned and shrugged. ”Fair enough. I wouldn’t do that to you, though.”

“Okay, then. What do we do?”

“Come with me.” Sano led him through the curtain to the back room, and indicated the platform in
the corner. “Strip and climb up there, honey.”

Eijun peeled off his shoes, jeans and shirt, and climbed onto the dais. Sano walked around him, making appreciative and thoughtful humming noises as he looked him over.

“Your legs are incredible, and your shoulders are wider than I thought.” Sano pulled out a tape measure, and started taking measurements, noting down the numbers and making notes. “Have you ever considered purple?”

“Purple?” Eijun was confused.

“Yes, with those eyes, purple would look amazing. I don’t mean violet, although that would look good, but maybe eggplant, or royal? A dark purple, maybe with a brown or blue suit or pants.” Sano suggested.

“I don’t know, honestly. I know what you did for Kazuya, and I’m willing to try anything.”

“Ok, let me try this, honey. Let’s look at some samples, and we’ll pick out something that we both like for you.” Sano led him back to the front, and pulled out a sample book. Opening it to the page of jewel tones, he paged through a few pages and put in a marker. “From this page back to where the marker is are colors I think would look amazing on you. Let me know which you like, I’m going to go check on Miyuki.” Eijun nodded and started to look through the book, while Sano headed over to Kazuya.

“How’s it going, sugar?”

“I’m fine, there are a lot of choices, but I like these ones the most.” Kazuya passed over a half dozen bolts.

“Great, I’ll work on these. Can you come back so I can check a few things? I want to confirm your sizing.” Sano led him back and had him climb onto the platform. “You don’t have to strip, you’re fine.” He ran through some measurements, and then let him back down. “How far along are you?”

“Eleven weeks. Things are getting a little snug, they’re a little too tight.”

“Ok, it will take a week or so to get these pants done. I have a pair off the rack that I can hem for you, so you can have something to wear for now. You should be fine with your regular dress shirts; you just need to wear them untucked. Hang on a minute, sugar, and I’ll get them for you.” Sano hurried through the curtain, bustling back through with a pair of khakis draped over his arm. “These are going to sit right at your belly button, although they’ll move down as you get bigger. There’s a panel on each side, see?” He stretched one of the side panels out. “They’re not great for later on, but until you’re much bigger, I think they’re fine. Slip them on and let me mark them, I can hem them so you can take them with you.”

Kazuya slipped them on and stood on the platform; Sano marked them before taking them over to the sewing machine. “You can go help your hubby, I’m sure he’s confused by all the colors. I’ll be out in just a few.”

Eijun was still looking through the pages, a slight frown on his face, when Kazuya came back through the curtain. “Don’t look so serious, it’s not that important, Eijun.” Kazuya slid onto the stool next to him. “He’s just trying to find out which colors you like, pick as many as you like.”

“I know that,” Eijun agreed. “But I’m just...he was saying something about my eyes and I don’t know what he’s looking for.”
“Do you trust me?” Kazuya asked.

Eijun slanted him an eyebrow. “With my life. But I’m not sure if I do with my clothing. Remember that purple hat? Or the mustard yellow hoodie you loved so much?”

“That hurts, but fair enough.” Kazuya smirked. “You can trust me, though, I wouldn’t steer you wrong. I want to see you looking amazing, make everyone jealous of me.”

Eijun laughed. “Ok, then, I’ll trust you. What colors do you like for me?”

They put their heads together, and by the time Sano emerged with the hemmed pants, they had a list of half a dozen colors they both liked.

“Any luck, darlings?” Sano asked, handing the pants over to Kazuya.

“We made a list of the colors we agreed on.” Eijun handed over the slip of paper.

“Let me see. Forest green, royal blue, dark gold, burnt orange, peacock, and dark chartreuse. Those are perfect, I can work with that.” He grinned as he slipped the paper into his notebook. “Do you want a suit, or are you looking for pants and shirt?”

“I’d like a suit, I think. And a couple of pairs of pants, along with several dress shirts. If you can make them mix and match, that would be wonderful,” Eijun said. “There’s no hurry, deal with Kazuya’s stuff before mine, I just need to start dressing like a grownup.”

“Alright, are there any traditional suit colors or patterns you don’t like?”

“I don’t really like super obvious pin striping, like white on black, and I’m not fond of cream colored things, or of white, except for a shirt. Nothing too light, please.”

“No, no. That won’t be a problem, sugar,” Sano told him. “Okay, darlings, I have enough for now. Let me ring up these pants for you, and I’ll get the rest of your things done in a couple of weeks, Miyuki. I’ll work on the pants first, and I’ll email when they’re ready. You can both come by to pick them up, and by that time, I’ll also have some ideas and fabrics picked out for you, Sawamura, so we can finalize your clothing. Does that sound agreeable?”

“That sounds perfect.” Eijun handed over his credit card to pay for the pants. “Just let us know, and we’ll swing back by.”

“Ok. Good.” Sano said, as he bagged up the khakis and handed the credit card back to Eijun. “It was great seeing you again, Miyuki, and a pleasure to meet you, Sawamura. Congratulations on the pregnancy, and I’m looking forward to your return.”

“Thank you again, Sano. You’ve been a tremendous help.” Kazuya laid his hand on the small of Eijun’s back, and guided him out of the store and towards the car.

“I’ll drive.” Eijun put his hand out for the keys, and Kazuya handed them over with a sigh.

“I can drive.” He said mildly. “It’s not late, and I’m not tired.”

“It’s been a long day, Kazuya,” Eijun answered in the same tone. “Once you sit for a few, you’re going to find out that you’re exhausted.”

“You could be right.” Kazuya capitulated. “You’re okay, though?”

“I am, a little tired, but I should be fine. I think I’ll sleep well tonight, practice wore me out.” Eijun
answered with a smile.

Kazuya slid their fingers together as they headed down the road towards home. “I’ll help make sure of it; we do have a conversation to finish, don’t we?”

“All if you’re up for it.”

“Believe me, Sawamura Eijun, love of my life and keeper of my heart, I’m always up for it.”

That night, Eijun slept deep and nightmare-free, waking the next morning rested for the first time in a week.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts, comments, puppies, random jokes?

I think things are going to start moving a little faster after this.
I can't imagine they'd be any slower.

Love you all, really I do:)
Week Twelve

Wednesday morning, Eijun was reading a baby book when Kazuya came into the living room, ready for work. Eijun looked up and smiled. “You look good, are those the pants from Sano?”

“Yeah, they’re the ones he hemmed for me; I haven’t had to dress since last week, but today’s nothing but meetings,” Kazuya answered. “Do they look alright?” He smoothed down the front of his button down shirt.

Eijun stood and walked over to his husband, running his hands softly up his sides. “You look gorgeous, of course. I can’t tell those aren’t regular khakis, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“You can’t? Good.” Kazuya wrapped his arms around Eijun’s neck and pulled him in for a quick kiss. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine.” Eijun took mental inventory; they’d fallen into a pattern of Kazuya checking on him a couple of times a day. Sometimes it was tough for him to be honest. He didn’t like to worry Kazuya and he felt stupid sometimes, but he did his best and told Kazuya everything he was feeling when he asked. “I really am. I’m not great, I’m still sad about Haruko, of course. But I’m so glad you gave me those books, they’ve helped me a lot. And I love you for caring about me. You’ve helped even more.” He kissed him on the nose, making his eyes cross. “How are you feeling? How’s Peanut?”

“I’m fine, and he is as well. Glad we got the formal doctor visit done yesterday; it’s good to know that things are going like they’re supposed to.” Kazuya rubbed Eijun’s back, soothing himself a little, too. “I’m nervous about going into work like this, though. I hope it’s not too obvious why.”
“Wait, what?” Eijun tucked his fingers under Kazuya’s chin, meeting his eyes. “What do you mean? You don’t want anyone to know you’re pregnant?”

“I don’t know, Ei. I’m just...I’m afraid they won’t take me seriously,” Kazuya confessed, shrugging helplessly. “I know it’s stupid, but pregnancy is associated with femininity, that I think it might be an issue.”

“Are you…” Eijun eyed him closely. “No, you’re serious. Ok, listen. First of all, who are you talking about? The bullpen? Because the only issue I see there is Ikeda, and that’s not you, that’s me, and it’s been brewing for a while. The other coaches? Coach Sato and the GM know, so fuck them. The rest of the front office? The girls up there are all in love with you, and will be irritatingly sweet about the whole thing; I’m going to have to stay away before I do something stupidly possessive to mark my territory.”

Kazuya laughed. “Are you going to pee on me?”

“I just might,” Eijun smirked. “And not in a fun way.” He sobered and rubbed at Kazuya’s jawline. “Seriously, though. If you feel like you need to get more hard-nosed, until people start seeing you and not Peanut, do it. I don’t think it will be an issue, but I’m just a dumb jock, I don’t play office politics.”

“You’re not dumb,” Kazuya objected. “And you’re probably right, I’m overthinking this. I’ll just watch and see.”

“I doubt anyone’s going to notice anything, at least not yet. You’ve got a little bit of a bump, but nothing major. And I don’t imagine anyone’s watching for you to get pregnant, so they’re not going to notice.”

“True, except for them.”

“Yeah, but they’ve been circulating rumors for years, it’s fine. They’re not going to do anything.” They’d garnered a bit of a fan base, people who loved the idea of them together, loved the fact they were so clearly partners, on and off the field. They’d learned long ago to just let them do their thing, as long as they didn’t intrude on their lives. There had been a few incidents with overzealous fans in the past, but generally, they stayed in their own chat rooms and message boards. Eijun would occasionally browse them, amused at the speculation, but Kazuya stayed away, having been scarred by his only experience with them. He should have listened to Eijun when he told him to stay out of the ‘nsfw fanwank’ section.

“Although they might send us things for Peanut.” Eijun continued. “And we should decide what we want to do about that. I mean, I’m sure they’d all be given with the best motives, but I don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings or cause any issues.”

Kazuya winced. “You’re right; we don’t want a repeat of the wedding debacle. We need to think about how to deal with this before it’s a problem.”

“We could make some kind of announcement when things get obvious. Honestly, I’m not sure how much longer it will be secret, we told the bullpen, and some of them are going to chatter to wives or girlfriends. I have contact with some of the administrators of the boards, and I can ask them to spread the word,” Eijun offered. “They don’t know it’s me, of course, although I think they suspect. I told them I’m our PR person.”

“We don’t have a PR person.”
“We do now.” Eijun grinned. “And it’s me. Otherwise we can have the club issue a statement.”

“No, no. That’s not happening. I’ll...ok, you talk to them when they’ve figured it out.” Kazuya conceded.

Eijun nodded. “I will. I’ll just ask them to donate to a children’s charity in our or Peanut’s name, and tell them that as much as we love their support, anything they send to us will be donated as well.”

“I think that’s a good idea, and if we make it early enough, it should cut much of the problems off. There will be people who don’t listen, of course, but that’s why we’re donating the stuff to charity. Great idea.”

“Yeah, I think that should work. It’s just a matter of letting them know.” Eijun smiled. “We do need to get going, but for the record, I love that you’re pregnant, and I’d never confuse that with weakness.”

“Thank you, Ei.” Kazuya said softly. “I love that I’m pregnant too, I’m a little trepidatious, but I think I’ll be fine.”

“You will, I know you will,” Eijun said. “I have faith in you and your glare of doom.”

Kazuya laughed as he headed to pick up his bag. “Glare of doom?”

“Yes.” Eijun relieved him of it, and slung his own over his other shoulder. “Like what you’re giving me now. You’d think you’d be used to me carrying your stuff by now.”

“You’d think.” Kazuya followed him out the front door.

Kazuya was clearing his desk before the team meeting that afternoon when his phone chimed, and he unlocked it to see what was going on.

_Ei:_ Peanut’s the size of a lime! And at twelve weeks, babies start to have reflexive movements, they’re eyes twitch and their fingers and toes clench.

_Me:_ Really? I didn’t know any of that, thank you! How are you doing?

_Ei:_ Fine, fine. Takahashi kicked my ass during the scrimmage, but that’s a good thing. Just got out of the shower. Meeting in 10, right?

_Me:_ Yeah. Good for Takahashi, you need it.

_Ei:_ He’s turning into a mini-you. I don’t know if I’m scared or turned on, tbh.

_Me:_…..I don’t know how to respond to that.

_Ei:_ Be flattered.

_Me:_ You’re an idiot.

_Ei:_ And you’re an asshole.
Me: I adore you, you know that?

Ei: Me too. I adore you too. See you soon.

Me: Soon.

Kazuya entered the meeting room and headed towards the front, where the coaching staff was congregated. He greeted his fellow coaches, and they took their seats behind the long table as they waited for the rest of the team to stream in and sit down. He smiled as he watched Eijun walk in with the rest of the bullpen, talking animatedly with Hara, gesticulating about something or another. He was so proud of his boy, his partner. Eijun had worked so hard, gone through so much to get where he was, and yet he’d never lost his joy, never gotten cynical or bitter. He was always willing to help, to teach, to share what he knew, and also willing to listen to others and learn new things. Kazuya knew he had a besotted grin on his face, but he couldn’t help it. Sometimes it just hit him how amazing Eijun was, and he had learned long ago that he was helpless to resist that tug.

Eijun looked at the coaches’ table and met Kazuya’s eyes, raising an eyebrow in question. Kazuya just shrugged and watched, amused, as he blew out a breath of exasperation and smiled back, heart in his eyes, until Hara tapped his shoulder and indicated they should sit. Nodding, he found a seat with the rest of the bullpen, and turned back to his conversation with the rookie. Kazuya watched as Ikeda came into the room and sat as far away from Eijun as he could while still being seated with the bullpen. He narrowed his eyes, not happy that the situation hadn’t been resolved.

Coach Sato chose that moment to stroll in, closing the door behind him. Anyone who entered late would have to walk the gauntlet, and he wasn’t known for being kind about tardiness. His discipline was a hefty dose of biting sarcasm combined with laps around the field, and no one could agree on which was worse.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen.” He started the meeting immediately, reviewing their future games and giving a summation of their week of training and changes he wanted them to make. It was routine, until he got to the place the meeting would normally end.

“I have one other thing I want to discuss with the team. It’s been brought to my attention that some of you are not happy with your place in the rotation, that you think you should be higher, maybe even replacing the regular starter. I like that. I like that you’ve got self-confidence and drive, and you want to further yourself.” He stepped away from the whiteboard he’d been leaning on, and faced them squarely, eyes hard.

“But you have to understand one thing. I will not tolerate unrest and backbiting on my team. If you have questions, problems, or issues with your place, take it to your coaches. They’ll tell you what you need to do and how to get where you want to go. If for some reason you can’t go to your coach, come to me. I’ll be happy to educate you.

“Know this, though.” Coach Sato paused, and looked over the team, face set. “You will never get there by complaining. Work is the only way to get where you want to go. Hard work and self-discipline. Take a good look at that person you’re bitching about, and you’ll see what I mean. Every starter on this team works as hard as or harder than the non-starters. Every one of them sacrifices their body daily to get better, to gain that one centimeter of reach, that extra second off their time. They don’t whine and complain, they just do what they have to do. You can learn something from
that. Do what you have to do to improve yourself, and you’ll be in contention.” He started pacing again.

“Every starter on this team is chosen by myself, the positional coach, and my assistant coach. We reassess them all the time, as situations change. I’ve been told that some of you want some kind of tryouts, some kind of contest for ranking. This isn’t fucking high school, things don’t work that way. There’s no test, no benchmark. There’s only us, the coaches, who watch you even when you don’t realize it and see how hard you work and who of you is too busy bitching to get anything done. We pick who’s best for the team; this isn’t some popularity contest where if you can get enough people to agree with you we’ll change our minds.”

Coach Sato stopped in the middle of the room and stared down the whole team. “So, if you think you should be in a different position, prove to me on the field, in practice, why that is. If you think, for one second, that someone is starting for any reason other than being better than you, you’re mistaken. And finally, to remove any thought that I’m not talking about you, that I don’t know what you’ve been doing, let me get a little bit more specific and address the elephant in the room. Sawamura is the starting pitcher, and it has absolutely nothing to do with his relationship with Miyuki. If any of you think that’s the case, please come speak to me. Or to anyone else on the coaching staff. Or just watch him when he doesn’t think Sawamura’s playing well. If you have half a brain, you’ll see what I mean. You’re dismissed and don’t be late for the bus tomorrow, or we’ll leave your asses behind.”

The team stood, and Kazuya was gratified to see Ikeda looking cowed and heading for the exit without stopping to speak to anyone. He didn’t know if that would end the talking forever, but it was a good start. Stepping out from behind the table, he joined the rest of the bullpen, Eijun smiling at him as he did so.

“Listen, guys. I didn’t know—” Kazuya started, before he was cut off.

“It’s fine, he’s right,” Kondo, a reserve pitcher, said. “There has been some talk and I, for one, am sorry for even listening to it. I’ve been around here long enough to see the truth.”

“Yeah,” Nakagawa, Takahashi’s backup, agreed. “He’s an idiot and doesn’t remember anything. Don’t worry about it, Miyuki; we’ll take care of it.”

“Ok, thanks. I really don’t want to get into the middle of it; he’s not going to believe me no matter what I do.” Kazuya said, nodding to them.

“No worries, we’ll see you tomorrow!” Kondo said, and he and Nakagawa left, leaving Eijun, Hara and Takahashi staring at each other.

“Well, that happened.” Takahashi said, and Eijun laughed.

“It did,” Eijun agreed. “I don’t think it could have worked any better.”

“You’re not wrong.” Takahashi said. “How are you feeling, Miyuki? I think this is the first time I’ve seen you in something other than sweats since we found out about Peanut.”

“I’m fine, we have to make some accommodations, but we’re good.” Kazuya responded.

“Glad to hear it,” Hara chimed in. He’d become a bit of a fixture in their group, and Kazuya was glad for it; he wanted him to find his place on the team, he was a good kid with a lot of potential.

“Wanna grab some dinner?” Eijun asked the group.
Takahashi nodded. “Yes, I’m starved.”

“Yes, let’s.” Kazuya said. “I know what I want to eat, too.”

“Cheeseburgers?” Eijun queried, and Kazuya nodded.

“The diner?” Takahashi groaned. “Oh, god. I’m in; I want some more of those pickles. That ranch dip is gross; do you think we can get extra? But I’m not buying.”

“Yeah, we’ll get them to give us extra.” Kazuya said. “It’s so bad.”

“It really is.” Eijun said as they headed out of the room.

“I wonder how long I’m going to crave those things.” Kazuya muttered as they pulled into their driveway.

Eijun laughed. ‘Hopefully long enough to get an appreciation. I can’t say I’m upset about this consequence of Peanut.”

“You’re the worst, getting joy out of my torment.” Kazuya whined as he climbed the porch stairs. “Did you order something?” He stopped to inspect the box sitting in their doorway.

“I didn’t.”

“Oh, it’s from Mom.” Kazuya reached down and Eijun grabbed his arm.

“Let me, it’s probably heavy.” Eijun said, picking up the box. “It’s clothes and stuff, you shouldn’t be lifting if you don’t have to.”

Kazuya sighed and unlocked the door, holding it open. “Yeah, I know. But I wish you’d let me do stuff. I don’t like feeling helpless.”

“You’re not helpless, Kaz. You’re pregnant.” Eijun carried the box into the kitchen and set it on the table. “I know you could do any of this stuff, but you don’t need to since I’m around.” He turned to face Kazuya, who was digging the scissors out of a drawer. “That’s a pretty big box. I can’t believe she had that much stuff of mine left. Bet you that she went shopping for Peanut.”

“I’m not taking that bet, I’d lose for sure.” Kazuya walked over and put the scissors on the box. “Why don’t we change, it’s going to take a while to get through this box. It’s huge.”

“Good idea.” Eijun followed Kazuya to their room, and they switched their clothes for lounge pants and t-shirts. “Have you heard from Sano yet?”

“Nope, not yet. He’ll probably call me in a few days. If I haven’t heard by Friday. I’ll give him a buzz.”

“Ok. We still need to hit up the pregger store; your sweats aren’t going to fit for long.”

“Yeah, those have some give, so they’ll be alright for a while. I’m going to need some shirts soon, too. I don’t want to wear tight t-shirts, either.” Kazuya explained.
Eijun slid up behind him as he stood shirtless and wrapped his arms around Kazuya’s waist, pressing soft kisses into his shoulder. “You look so good, you know that? I mean, you’ve always been hot, but recently...I don’t know. Maybe it’s true that pregnancy makes you glow, because damn, you’re gorgeous.” He ran his hand over Kazuya’s stomach, down to the slight bump of his belly. “And this? Our baby, the proof that you’re willing to carry our child, bring a wee one into our lives and make this a family, is amazing. You’re amazing, and I need to make sure you know it.”

Kazuya reached his arm around Eijun’s head and pulled him closer, nuzzling his cheek. “You’re the amazing one, and I’m—we’re—lucky to have you. I never thought I wanted children, didn’t think I’d ever want to raise any, let alone carry one, and I can’t imagine having them without you around. I wouldn’t want them if I didn’t have you to raise them with me, if they weren’t yours. You are the only person I trust to have children with, and you’re going to be such an amazing dad. It’s not going to be easy, but I’m so glad we have Peanut, so proud to be carrying your baby.”

Eijun tightened his arm around Kazuya, burying his head in his neck. “I adore you, Miyuki Kazuya. I think I always have.” He laid his hand over Kazuya’s bump gently. “And I love you, Peanut. I have since the moment I found out about you.” Kazuya laid his hand over Eijun’s and leaned into him.

“We love you too, Sawamura Eijun.” Kazuya whispered, fighting back tears. They stayed that way, just resting in each other, gaining strength and love. This was something that’s they’d just started recently, since they lost Haruko. This time they would spend not talking, just holding on, supporting each other. It helped them both to realize they weren’t alone in this, even if they were dealing with the issues individually.

“You ready to open the box?” Eijun whispered in Kazuya’s ear, and he nodded. “You’d better put a shirt on; otherwise I may be forced to assault you in the kitchen.”

“Oh, no. However shall I survive?” Kazuya snarked as he stepped away.

Eijun laughed. “I know how you are about your kitchen. You don’t want me to do anything there; you’ll be cleaning for days. And you can’t use bleach, you’re pregnant.”

“I think that’s an old wives tale, Eijun.” Kazuya snorted as he slipped on his shirt. “But better safe than sorry, right?”

“Right.” Eijun said as he slotted his fingers in Kazuya’s and led him back down the hallway.

Kazuya picked up the scissors and cut the tape as Eijun retrieved a couple of bottles of water out of the fridge, and handed one to Kazuya. He picked up the bottle and sighed. “I miss coffee.”

“I know you do, and you can have a little, you know that. Have some if you want it.”

“No, no. I don’t want to do anything that might hurt Peanut. I can survive without the coffee, I don’t know what I’d do if we lost him.”

Eijun stepped closer and rubbed his back. “I know, but he’ll be fine.”

“I know, I believe that with all my heart.” Kazuya smiled, laying a hand on his belly. “But I just want to be careful. Does that make sense?”

“Have you not been rolling your eyes at me every five minutes for the last few weeks? Of course it makes sense, it’s why I’m being so hovery. I want you to be safe. Both of you.”

“I know.” Kazuya said, cutting the last bit of tape. “You ready for this?”
“I hope she didn’t send anything too embarrassing.” Eijun huffed.

“Have you met your mother?” Kazuya snickered. “If she didn’t, I’m going to be really disappointed.”

Eijun just sighed and pulled the box open. On the top was a wrapped box with a card. He pulled it out and handed it to Kazuya, who laid it on the table and removed the card.

“Open it, Kaz. It’s going to be for Peanut, I’m sure.”

Kazuya opened the envelope and pulled out the card. He stared at it blankly for a few seconds, and Eijun was getting concerned, when he started to laugh. He handed the card to Eijun, still laughing.

There was a heart in the middle of the card, and Eijun read:

_Congratulations on your pregnancy_  
_Sympathies to the loss of bladder control_  
_Do try not to sneeze_

Eijun was amused, not as much as Kazuya, but that wasn’t surprising, he wasn’t the one living it.

He opened the card, and read the inside out loud.

---

_Dear Boys-

We’re so proud of you, and excited about Peanut.

I hope there’s some things in here you can use. Anything you don’t want or need, please donate.

This gift is something I think you need now and later, and we’re hopeful you’ll like it.

Enjoy it will all our love, knowing that we love all three of you.

Mom, Dad, and Grandpa._

---

Eijun gestured to the box. “Go ahead.”

Kazuya slid his fingers under the tape, carefully removing the paper from the box. He set the paper aside, and lifted the lid. Inside was something protected by tissue. Pushing it back, he realized it was another box. He lifted it out, and saw it was the storage box for whatever was inside. Eijun made a noise of recognition, as he lifted the box lid.

“I know what that is. I can’t believe she found the same one.” Eijun breathed, as they looked inside.

It was a book, and it looked like a photo album. Kazuya was a little confused. “A photo album?”

“Not exactly, kinda.” Eijun explained, turning the pages, “It’s a baby book, you keep track of Peanut’s milestones. My mom has this exact one from when she was pregnant with me; this one has
a whole section about the pregnancy itself, which is a little unusual. We can just fill it out as things happen, and then we don’t have to remember when you felt Peanut kick, or what his first food is, it will all be here.”

“That’s a great idea. And you say yours was exactly the same?” Kazuya asked.

“Yeah, exactly. We’ll have to look at it the next time we’re down there.”

“Yes, let’s do that.” Kazuya turned some more pages, and Eijun moved back to the box.

“What else is in he…?” Eijun stopped. “Oh, god, that woman.” He chuckled, and pulled out another box, one that matched the container for Peanut’s baby book. On the front was a sticky note.

_I’m lending this to you so you can see it. I want it back. -Mom_

He held it up for Kazuya to see. “We don’t have to wait until we go visit. She sent it.”

“I love that woman. If we ever divorce, I get your mom.”

“She might be okay with that, as long as I get visitation rights.” Eijun snorted. “Damn mother stealing tanuki.”

Kazuya laughed and pulled Eijun into his lap. “But you love me.”

“Absolutely not the point.”

“Maybe not, but germane to the argument.” Kazuya pointed out.

Eijun snorted. “Ok, jerk. You want me to stay here and unpack the box, or stand up?”

“Stay here.” Kazuya wrapped him tightly. “I won’t be able to hold you like this for much longer.”

Eijun kissed him on the cheek, acquiescing. “That’s fine, let’s see what she sent.” He pulled out a stack of clothing. “These look like onesies. I think we’ll need all these we can get.”

“You would know, you’ve been reading the books and making the lists.”

Eijun had found himself trying to compile a list of what they’d need, based on the information he’d read in the various baby books. They all had slightly different suggestions, so he was making two lists: One with things every book had, and one that only some books had. Onesies were on the ‘every book’ list.

“Yeah, I have. You should read them too, they’re interesting.”

“I’ll read the ones about newborns; I don’t want to read the pregnancy ones. I’d rather get my pregnancy facts from you.” Kazuya hugged him tight for a second. “Now, what’s next?”

Eijun reached in the box and pulled out another pile of clothing. “These are sleepers.” He rooted through them, checking their sizes. “We’re going to need bunches of these, too.”
“Good, we’ll add them to the pile and be able to cross some stuff off the list.”

“Right. Next?” Eijun dug around and smiled at Kazuya. “You’ll like this.”

He pulled out a tote bag full of books.

Kazuya’s eyes lit up, and he smiled, wide and bright. “Show me them, Ei,” he asked.

Eijun couldn’t resist his smile or the look of delight on his face, so that’s what he did. He took the books out of the bag one at a time and they looked at them.

“Hop on Pop.”

“Dr. Seuss. We’re getting all his books.”

“Yes, we are.”

“Miss Suzy.”

“I don’t remember this one; I don’t think I read it.”

“We’ll read it together, then.”

“Cars and Trucks and Things that Go.”

“Oh, man. I loved this book.”

“Me too! I loved looking for goldbug.”

“Green Eggs and Ham.”

“Yay for more Dr. Seuss!”

“I can’t imagine green eggs taste good, though.”

“The Little Engine that Could.”
“I love these Little Golden Books.”

“I remember this! When I used to walk home from school, I always had to go to the bathroom right before I got home, and I’d say ‘I think I can’ to myself over and over until I made it home.”

“Oh my god, I think that’s the cutest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Shut it, you. You don’t get to comment, mom thief.”

And so it went, until there was a dozen books piled on the table, and Kazuya was smiling softly, Eijun entranced by the contentment he radiated. After a bit, Kazuya roused himself. “What’s next?”

Eijun looked in the box and pulled out a blanket. Hand knit, it was soft to the touch, thick and warm. There was a note pinned to it. “My first project for Peanut. I hope it fits in the room.” They realized she’d knit it in shades of pale green and blue, with orange and brown woven in, exactly like the bed set they’d bought.

“Clever woman,” Kazuya commented.

Eijun shivered. “You said scary wrong.”

Kazuya laughed, but agreed, “You’re right, I did.”

“Let me see...nope, that’s all of it.”

“Ok, we’ll put everything back in the box except the baby books, how’s that? And keep this in Peanut’s room.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Eijun said, stacking the clothes and blankets back in the box. “I’m going to put the bag of books on top, so you can get to them when you want.”

“Thanks, Ei.” Kazuya patted his back as he got up and grabbed the box to take to Peanut’s room. “Do you want to look through this in bed? It’s getting late.”

“Sure, why don’t you take it with you, and I’ll join you as soon as I put these in the bedroom.”

“Ok, cool.” Kazuya made his way down the hallway to their room, turning on the bedside lights and climbing in, adjusting the pillows so they could sit comfortably. He’d only been there a few minutes when Eijun joined him, climbing under the covers and snuggling up beside him.

“Is this ok? Are you comfortable?” Eijun asked.

“Not as comfortable as I could be.” Kazuya responded as he crawled into Eijun’s lap. “Let me lean against you, so we can look at it together?”

“Of course.” Eijun spread his legs and Kazuya tucked himself against him, using him for a backrest. Eijun propped his head on Kazuya’s shoulder, and looked at the book in Kazuya’s lap. “You tired, Kaz? I know it’s been a long day.”

“I’m fine, why?”

Eijun lowered his voice to a purr, sending shivers down Kazuya’s spine. “I was just thinking that after we looked through my baby book, we should do a little reenactment. To help you remember
how you got pregnant, it’s been a while and you may have forgotten. For posterity.” He nibbled on Kazuya’s neck, causing him to moan.

“That’s absolutely the worst line I’ve ever heard you use.” Kazuya laughed breathlessly.

“Maybe, but you liked it.” Eijun ran his hand down Kazuya’s chest, and up under his t-shirt, seeking skin.

Kazuya groaned, turning his head to nibble on Eijun’s jaw. “That’s not really...actually, I guess it is the point. Yes, I did like it.” He reached over and gently set the book on the bedside table. “I don’t think we’re going to be getting to this tonight.” He turned back to Eijun and climbed into his lap.

“Let me see if I can jog your memory…”

Chapter End Notes

Comments, thoughts, ideas?
Cats and puppies, GRRM. All that.
:
Smooches to you all.
Time in a Bottle

Chapter Summary

Kazuya remembers and schemes.
Eijun decides and cleans
Norio helps.

Chapter Notes

This section should be done in the next chapter.
I couldn't do the last part justice in that short of a time.
But at least no one's having a breakdown, so yay?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Thirteen

From: Ohno Mai (Ohnocalligraphy@gmail.com)
To: Sawamura Eijun (seijun@gmail.com); Miyuki Kazuya (miyukik@gmail.com)

Good Morning-

I hope this finds you well, all three of you.

Attached please find three different ideas I had for Haruko’s memorial.

Please look them over and let me know if you like any of them, if you’d like me to make edits, adjustments, etc.

I used the following flowers; if you want something else, please let me know:

Cherry Blossom-Gentle
Eijun headed down the hall to their office looking for Kazuya. He knew he was trying to figure out some plays for their next game, and that was where he went when he wanted to concentrate. Normally, Eijun wouldn’t disturb him, he knew how hard he was working to make sure the bullpen was everything it needed to be, but this was important. He stepped into the room and up to where Kazuya had his head bent over a playbook, sliding his arms around his waist. “You know, we’re going to have to find you a new place to hang out soon.”

Kazuya put his pen down and leaned back into the hug. “I know. I thought we could set up the guest room as an office, if you don’t mind. I just need the desk in there; I think I can manage with that.”

“Of course, I just don’t want Peanut to disturb you.” Eijun kissed his cheek. “And I’m sorry for disturbing you, but we got an email, and I wanted to look at it with you.”

“Mai?”

“Yeah.” Eijun stepped back and grabbed the other chair, pulling it up to the desk as Kazuya signed into his email.

“Did you open them?”

“No yet, I wanted us to check them out together.”

Kazuya reached over and grabbed his hand, giving it a squeeze. “Are you okay?”

“I’m good.” Eijun smiled. “Really good. This is important, and I want us to do this last bit for Haruko. She’s gone and we’re always going to miss her, and that’s all right, we should. But adding her to the shrine, letting our families watch over her, that’s the best thing we can do for her, and for us.”

“I’m glad, so glad. I was worried for a bit, and I didn’t know how I could help. There’s no worse feeling than seeing someone you care about hurting and not being able to do anything.” Kazuya confessed.

Eijun looked at him in surprise. “What do you mean? I would never have made it through without you. You were more help than I could ask for, you’re everything, and I can’t imagine how bad I’d be without you.” He turned his attention to the monitor. “Don’t discount yourself, please.”

“I’ll try, okay? But you need to tell me if you start feeling bad again.”
“I will, promise.” Eijun clicked open the email and downloaded the images. “What do you think about these?”

He opened them all and placed them side by side, so they could compare them with each other. Kazuya studied them closely, while Eijun decided much more quickly, leaning back in his chair as he waited. He didn’t mind, the fact Kazuya was looking so intently meant he was taking this seriously and wanted the best for Haruko. Finally, Kazuya looked away and met Eijun’s eyes.

“None of these are perfect,” Kazuya said. “I mean, some of them are alright, and I like elements of all of them, but none are perfect.”

Eijun let out a sigh of relief. “You’re right, that’s what I thought. We could...maybe we should decide which we like the most, and then tell her what we want changed.”

“That would work. Which is your favorite?”

“I like number two the best, but that one doesn’t have her name on it. I want her name to be there, it’s the only thing we were able to give her.”

“I agree, I love the arrangement of the flowers there, and the colors are gorgeous. So what should we ask her to change?” Kazuya wanted to guide him through the editing process; he cared, of course, but wanted this to be perfect for Eijun. He felt like this was the closure Eijun needed, the thing that would help him put the sadness behind him.

“I think...see how in the first one, her name is woven into the flowers? It’s not obvious, like number three, but it’s there? I think I’d like that.”

“That would look lovely, anything else?”

“The colors are great, she chose pink and purple and white, but I’d like it on a different background, maybe?” Eijun glanced at him. “What do you think?”

“Something not so harsh? Like pale pink, pale purple? Or a warmer shade of white?” Kazuya asked.

“Yes, exactly. I don’t like the white. Do you have anything you’d like changed?”

“Other than what you suggested? Only one thing. I’d like to add a few more irises, and less chrysanthemums, if you don’t mind,” Kazuya suggested tentatively. “But you get the final say, so whatever you want is fine with me.”

“You’re good, don’t worry about it,” Eijun assured him. “I agree; I want this to be less about mourning, and more about celebrating. Okay. Anything else?”

“I think that’s enough, unless there’s something else you can think of.”

“Not really,” Eijun said as he stood and slid the chair back into place. “I’ll email her and ask her for these changes. I hope she doesn’t think we’re too demanding.”

“She shouldn’t, she’s the one who said we should,” Kazuya reminded him. “And it’s important it be right for Haruko, and for us. We don’t want to have something we don’t think is perfect for our baby girl. I think she understands that.”

Eijun leaned down and kissed him as he prepared to leave the room. “I hope so. I’ll leave you to what you were doing. We should head to practice in about an hour. Do you want something to eat before we go?”
“No thanks. I’m still full from breakfast, and I have some snack bars in my bag if I need them at work. Call me in forty-five, wouldja?” Kazuya turned back to his scorebook as Eijun gave his assent, leaving the room.

Kazuya stared blindly at the scorebook in front of himself. He was feeling a little lost, actually a lot lost. It was Monday, Eijun’s birthday was Wednesday, and he didn’t know what he was going to do for it. That day they had a game, so there would be celebrating and singing during the game and cake afterwards, but he wanted to do something special. He knew that this year there was nothing specific Eijun wanted, and he hadn’t been able to think of anything to get him that would be any kind of surprise. Sighing, he doodled a cake on the corner of his page and thought about what he’d done for him previous years. Sometimes it was nothing more than a quiet dinner and some time together, other times it was something extravagant and expensive. It depended on what was going on in their lives and what he thought Eijun needed at the time, and his boy always seemed appreciative. He knew he’d be happy with whatever Kazuya thought to do, but that wasn’t good enough. Each one had been memorable for one reason or another. This year needed to be too. It had to be special.

He sighed again as he turned the page in his scorebook, still preoccupied with birthday gifts and what he’d done in the past. He remembered the times when they had no money, while they were in college and birthday celebrations meant a homemade cake and cooking Eijun’s favorite meal, a homemade card and, if they could spare it, a small gift. Nothing expensive, but something Eijun wanted, that he’d convinced himself they couldn’t afford. Wait a second...didn’t I...yes, I did. Ten years ago, exactly. Eijun was turning nineteen, and he was in his first year of college. They were at Hosei, and broke as fuck, moving in expenses had tapped what little reserves they’d had, and living only on scholarships was hard, but they were determined to make it through together. They didn’t have the energy to spare a part time job, not if they wanted to actually pass their classes and play well, so they’d decided they’d just stick it out. Eijun’s family had helped where they could, and Kazuya’s father, too, had given them furniture and the occasional check. But the first couple of months of that first year were tough. It was lucky for them that their scholarships included meals, or it would have been all ramen all the time.

That year, they couldn’t afford anything but dreams, so that’s what Kazuya did. He made a card for Eijun, outlining exactly what he’d have done for him if they’d had the money. Looking back, if he remembered correctly, they’d done much more exotic and expensive things since, but that old dream had snagged his attention. They’d never actually done the things on that card, at least not for Eijun’s birthday, not as a means of celebration. He knew Eijun had saved the cards, he saved everything that was sentimental, and it was just a matter of getting to them without him knowing. He thought for a bit, trying to recall exactly what he’d written. Breakfast in bed, a trip to Tokyo Skytree, sunset cruise of Tokyo Bay, and dinner at the American steakhouse they’d walked past every day on the way to and from school. Dancing at the best nightclub he knew about at the time and a night at the hotel it was attached to. That’s what he thought he’d written, and if so, he could totally pull all that off. Now, to get to that card.

He pulled the door to the closet open as silently as he could, and considered the boxes in front of him. There was no way he was going to try to lift many of these, some of them held books and were heavy. If he did anything to injure Peanut, he’d never forgive himself, so he ran his eyes over the contents of the closet. Eijun kept all his mementos in a clear plastic box covered in stickers, so it wasn’t any of the...there it was. On the shelf, not buried in a pile, and Kazuya let out a sigh of relief. Keeping one ear out for the sounds of Eijun heading back this way, he pulled the box off the shelf
and laid it on top of the pile of boxes, that way he could just close the door if he had to, with Eijun none the wiser. He thumbed through the contents, doing his best not to be distracted by the memories the box held, looking for that particular card. He found it near the bottom of the box and took it out, closing and returning the rest to the shelf. Closing the closet, he sat back down at the desk and laid the card on his open scorebook. He ran his finger over the drawing on the front, one of them standing under the Seido Spirit Dorms sign, arms around each other, wearing Hosei’s jersey. It had been a long time since Kazuya had drawn anything for Eijun, practice and school and work and life were just so busy, he’d gradually fallen out of the habit. But now he thought that maybe he needed to find time to revisit it.

Opening the card, reading the planned agenda, he saw that he’d actually cut it short when he wrote it up, he’d modified it to accommodate practice and school. So, basically, it was a four-step celebration. Cruise on the bay, dinner, dancing, and a stay at a swank hotel. He knew he could easily arrange all of that, even on short notice. He didn’t use his name or position often, but in this case, he’d take every inch of pull he could get. There were just two things he had to decide. Where were they going, and what was he going to wear.

If he was taking Eijun out dining and dancing, he wanted to do it in style. Tuxedo? That was his first thought, and they both had good ones, but he knew his wouldn’t fit. He sighed, at a loss, and made a phone call.

“Sano? This is Miyuki.”

“Hello! I was just going to call you. Your shirts and Sawamura’s suit and shirt are ready for a final fitting.”

“That’s good, great. We’ll be by this afternoon, then, after practice. One other thing. I need some advice.” He explained the situation to Sato, who chuckled.

“We can always put a side panel in your tux pants, if you want. Your jacket is fine, right? Plenty loose? If I put the panels in, I can do it so that they can be removed later, and hidden under your vest if you take off your jacket. Which you shouldn’t do anyway, but it happens. Would that work for you?”

“That would be perfect. I’ll bring them in when we come by, and get them to you on the sly, if you can have them done by Wednesday.”

“Of course, that’s no problem. They’ll be done by Wednesday morning, is that alright?”

“Perfect. Thank you, Sano.”

“No worries, have a good day, Miyuki.”

Kazuya hung up and pressed a number on his speed dial. He froze for a second, a little surprised his first thought was to call his father for help, but he inwardly shrugged and brought the phone to his ear.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Dad, it’s Kazuya.”

“Hey, Kazuya, how’s it going? Are you alright?” He sounded worried, and Kazuya couldn’t blame him. He still wasn’t used to speaking to him when there wasn’t something urgent going on.

“Yeah, it’s good, we’re all fine. How are you doing?”
“I’m well, thanks. The anniversary of your grandfather’s passing is this weekend, and I was going to call and ask if you three wanted to join me in visiting him?” Kazuya smiled at the inclusion of Peanut, his father was as excited about the baby as Eijun’s family was.

“Yeah, sure. We’d like that. We’re off Sunday, if that day’s okay. We can find time Saturday as well, if you’d rather.”

“No, no. Sunday is fine. Where would you like to meet?”

“Why don’t you come by here? We can go together.” Kazuya suggested.

Norio paused. “If you don’t mind, that would be great.”

“Of course we don’t mind. What time were you thinking?”

“I was thinking the morning, that way it wouldn’t cut into your day, and it would still be cool out.”

“That’d be fine. You want to come by for breakfast first? We’d love to have you; we haven’t had a chance to talk for a while.”

“I don’t want to put you out, why don’t I buy you breakfast? We’ll all just go out somewhere.” Norio countered.

“That’s fine, although you know I like to cook. Whatever you’d rather.” Kazuya agreed.

“Okay, then, I’ll be by about nine on Sunday, if that’s alright.”

“Perfect, we’ll be ready.”

“Thanks! That’s not what you called for, though. How can I help you?”

Kazuya took a deep breath and dove in. “I do need your help. Eijun’s birthday is Wednesday, and I thought…” He explained the situation to his father, and what he needed from him. “But I know it’s midweek, you may have to work. I forgot about that, I’m sorry. I’ll just call Mochi.”

“No, no.” Norio said. “Don’t call him. Please. I can take the day off, what’s the point in being the boss if I can’t take a day off, right?” His voice sounded a little choked up. “Thanks for calling me. This is the first time you’ve called me for help, and I’m not going to let you down.”

“Dad, it’s not life or death, It’s fine if you can’t do it.” Kazuya felt badly, he hadn’t planned to put his father’s resolve to the test; he’d just automatically dialed him. And that fact called for further examination, but later.

Norio cleared his throat. “Seriously, that’s why it’s important. I know you wouldn’t hesitate to call if it was an emergency, or something urgent. But this isn’t, and you still called me. Thank you, Kazuya. So what exactly do you need for me to do?”

Kazuya took a steadying breath, and told him.

“I can do that, it shouldn’t be a problem. Can you have everything together so I can just grab it and go?”

“Of course, I’ll pack an overnight bag with everything we need, and put it in the guest room closet with the tuxedos. They’ll be in a garment bag, so you shouldn’t have any problems getting them. You still have the spare key, right?” Norio hummed agreement. “Alright, then. I’ll need you to pick up my tuxedo pants at the tailor’s; I’ll tell him you’re coming. I’ll text you the address. That should
be about it. I’ll let you know if I think of anything else, alright?"

“Sure.” Norio agreed. “That shouldn’t take too long; I’ll probably still make the game.”

“Thanks, Dad.” Kazuya looked up as Eijun walked into the room. “Eijun just came in; it’s time for
us to go to practice. I’ll see you Sunday morning, unless you make it to the game Wednesday.”

“Bye, son. I love you. My love to Eijun, and take care of Peanut.”

“Love you too, Dad. See you soon.” Kazuya hung up the phone and met Eijun’s inquiring gaze.

“Dad called?”

“He wanted to know if we would go with him to see Grandfather this weekend. It’s been a year.” Kazuya
dodged a little, but Eijun didn’t see it.

Eijun stepped up to him, watching Kazuya closely. “What did you tell him?”

“I told him we would. If you don’t want to go, I can—” Eijun stopped him.

“No, no. I’d like that, I just wanted to make sure you’re okay with it,” Eijun explained.

“I’m fine, I’d like to go,” Kazuya answered honestly. “I invited him for breakfast, but he wants us to
go out with him. I told him that was fine too.” Kazuya stepped up and wrapped his arms around
Eijun’s waist. “I think...Eijun, I think he means what he said. I know it’s only been a month or so,
but he still seems so sincere.” He rested his head in the crook of Eijun’s neck, as his boy’s arms
twined around him, gathering him close. “I...I don’t want this to be me being overly optimistic
because I want it so badly, I don’t know what else to do, though.”

“You’re doing it exactly right, Kaz.” Eijun soothed him, rubbing circles into his back. “Being
optimistic is not a bad thing, and at this point it’s not unwarranted. He has been so much more open
with you, it’s impossible for you not to believe him. And that’s okay. You’re still cautious, you’re
not completely trusting. But you’re not closing yourself off, either. I have to say I’m proud of the
way you’re handling things. I was afraid you were going to just shut down, but you haven’t.”

Kazuya chuckled, and Eijun could hear the tears he’d swallowed. “I blame you for that. You’ve
made me softer than I ever thought possible, more open to people and things. Your heart has healed
so much of mine that I can’t help but be willing to open it to others. I also know you’ve got my back,
that if I reach and fall, that’s all right. I won’t fall forever, you’re there to catch me and patch me up.”
Kazuya kissed Eijun on the neck. “With you to heal me, why wouldn’t I open up? I trust you. I
know you, and I love you.”

“Wow, those pregnancy hormones are getting to you, aren’t they?” Eijun chuckled, and then yelped
when Kazuya pinched him in the side. “Really, though, thank you. You’ve done more for me than I
can say. I’ve always said we rescue each other, and it’s true. There’s no need to thank me, we’re
partners, and that’s what partners do.”

“That’s what we do.” Kazuya clarified. Standing up, he stepped back. “We’d better get going, don’t
want to be late.”

Eijun nodded and rested his hand in the small of Kazuya’s back. “Lead the way, Kazuya-Kantoku.”
Eijun drove them to the club, as usual. They’d only been in the car for a few minutes when Kazuya realized he needed to lay some groundwork.

“Your birthday is Wednesday. What do you want?”

“It is? Oh, yeah, it is. I forgot. I’ve been so wrapped up in Peanut and Haruko and baseball, I forgot.” Eijun laughed at himself. “Man, I’m going to be twenty-nine. We’re getting old, Kaz.”

“We are, and we’ve got the creaks and groans to prove it.” Kazuya agreed. “So, what do you think?”

“I don’t know. I can’t think of anything I want except for you and Peanut to be healthy and safe.”

“Do you want to do something? Go somewhere? We could carve out a few days of vacation if you wanted to take a trip.”

“No, not really. We have a lot going on here, and I don’t want you to be far from Haruichi. I know you’re fine, and I’m being overprotective, but you did ask.”

“No, no. Don’t worry about it. I just thought I’d offer. Maybe we can do something on Sunday afternoon. We’re meeting Dad in the morning, but we should be free after that.”

“That’s good, sounds like a plan. You don’t have to do anything extravagant; I don’t want you wearing yourself out.”

“I’ll be alright; I won’t wear myself out Sunday. I promise.” Again, Kazuya hedged, but this time Eijun caught him.

“I don’t want you wearing yourself out at all, Miyuki Kazuya. Not just on Sunday.”


“Kazuya.” Eijun said, lowly. “Please. Take care of yourself, be safe.”

“I am, I will. I promise you that. I would never do anything to endanger Peanut.”

“Idiot, I’m not worried about Peanut. I’m worried about you. If we lost Peanut, it would be terrible and devastating, and I don’t know how we’d survive it, but I do know we would survive it. If I lost you, though, I don’t know what I’d do. I’d be so lost, I’m not sure I would ever recover.”

“I don’t know what I’d do without you, so I get that. But I will be careful, I promise.”

“Okay, thanks.” Eijun shot him a soft smile. “That’s all I can ask.”

Wednesday dawned clear, blue spring sky with a few puffy clouds floating across it. Kazuya had been watching the weather forecast religiously, the chance of rain was negligible, and he was hoping things would stay that way. Their game was at 1:00, and they should be done with everything by 4:00. Sunset was at 6:40, and their boat had been chartered for six. That should give him enough time to get Eijun to their destination, changed, and to the ship. He’d managed to shop on the sly, sending things to the office, recruiting the office staff to help him, and his father had come through,
agreeing to take care of everything Kazuya couldn’t get to.

Kazuya waited until Eijun went in the bathroom to take his shower and hastily packed the overnight bag, putting in everything they’d need for their tuxedos and for the next day. He stuck it in the guestroom closet, below the garment bag that held their tuxedos and shirts. After Eijun was done, Kazuya went to take his shower. After getting clean, he dug out their travel kit and stuffed their necessary toiletries in the bag, as well as a few things he knew they’d need for both before, and after, the evening’s festivities. Sighing, knowing he loved as much as hated it, he tossed Eijun’s eyeliner into the bag and zipped it up. He stepped out of the bathroom and headed down the hallway, holding the bag in his off hand as he passed the kitchen where Eijun was cleaning up the breakfast dishes. Shoving the bag into their overnight bag, he returned to the kitchen to yell at Eijun.

“I should be doing that. It’s your birthday.” He hip checked him out from in front of the sink, and Eijun stumbled to the side, laughing.

“I can do the dishes, jerk.” Eijun stepped back up and returned the favor, but Kazuya was ready for it and he didn’t move.

Kazuya smirked, and Eijun stepped behind him to wrap his arms around his waist. “How are you feeling, Kaz?” He ran his hands over the bump that was Peanut. “And how’s Peanut?”

“We’re both fine, thanks.” Kazuya snuggled back into his arms. “And how are you? Ready for the game?”

“I am. It should be fun. It looks like a great day for baseball, and we’re all in good shape. Even Ikeda’s shaped up after last week.”

“He has, hasn’t he?” Kazuya chuckled, hands in the dishwasher as he washed the last of the pans. “I think Kondo and Nakagawa must have put him straight, I can’t imagine the coach’s speech even registered.”

“Maybe? I honestly don’t care, as long as he’s not making your life harder than it has to be.” Eijun nuzzled Kazuya’s neck, and he tilted his head to give him better access. “You’re the important one.”

“I love you, you know that?” Kazuya turned and draped his hands across Eijun’s shoulders, soapy water dripping off them. “But we should get to the clubhouse.” He dropped a kiss on Eijun’s nose and stepped away to grab a towel. Drying off his hands, he swatted at Eijun with it. “Go, get the bags, you lazy servant. Carry my bag to the car, immediately!”

“As you wish.” Eijun bowed his way out of the room, leaving a guffawing Kazuya behind.

The game went as expected, including the seventh inning stretch, which was the whole stadium singing Happy Birthday to Eijun. Kazuya was grinning like a loon, while Eijun blushed and waved. The team gathered around to shake his hand and congratulate him, and he was forced out of the dugout to take a lap of the fence, waving and greeting the fans as he did so. When he arrived back at the dugout, Kazuya met him with a kiss on his cheek, and that set the stands cheering.

“I’m going to get you for this, jerk.” Eijun whispered, face red. “Just wait.”

“You’re welcome to try. My birthday isn’t until November, after the season is over.” Kazuya
smirked, amused at his reaction.

Eijun smirked back. “This is true. It is, isn’t it?” He walked away, and Kazuya watched his back, eyes narrowed.

The game ended with a win, and the team congregated in the clubroom for cake, happy for the victory. They ate and laughed, gossiped and reviewed the game, until Kazuya nudge Eijun. “You ready to go?”

“Yeah, you ok?”

“I’m fine; I’m just ready to leave.”

“Ok, then, let’s go.” Eijun grabbed their bags and headed out the door, down the corridor towards their car. Kazuya surreptitiously grabbed another slice of cake, and followed.

They came around a turn and found Kazuya’s dad waiting for them in the usual place. Eijun hurried his steps. “Dad? I’m sorry; I didn’t know you’d be waiting out here. We should have been out earlier.”

“No, no.” Norio stepped into the hug Eijun was offering. “It’s fine, I was busy until just a few minutes ago, anyway. I just wanted to wish you a Happy Birthday in person. Happy Birthday, son. I hope you have many more.” He released Eijun, who stepped back.

“Thank you! If I’d known, I would have brought you a piece of—” Eijun stopped talking as Kazuya passed a plate with cake and a fork over to his father. “How did you know he was going to be here?”

“I wasn’t sure, but that’s good cake. I figured one of us would eat it if he wasn’t here to claim it.” Kazuya hugged his father, who returned it one-handedly. “Hi, Dad. I’m glad you could make it.”

“Hello, Kazuya.” Norio said in his measured tones, although Kazuya could hear the affection in them. “I’m glad to see you and Peanut are well.”

“Yes, she’s been quiet recently. My only complaints are my back and the peeing all the time. We’re almost in the second trimester; I’ll be three months along in a few days.”

“That’s wonderful. You’re almost at the point that you could find out the gender. Are you going to?”

“No, I don’t think so. I think we want it to be a surprise.” Kazuya responded.

Norio smiled. “That’s good, so much is lost when you know exactly what to expect.”

“There’s a lot of stuff we weren’t expecting, but we’re good with it.” Eijun laughed.

Kazuya nodded emphatically. “He’s not wrong. We were lost there for a while.”

“I’m glad to see it; you boys both look good and happy,” Norio patted Eijun on the shoulder. “I’m going to take off, Eijun, enjoy the rest of your birthday, and thanks for the cake.” Kazuya stepped up to hug him again.

“Thanks for everything, Dad. I love you.”

“Love you too, Kazuya.” He stepped back and blinked a little at the moisture in his eyes. “Love you both. Take good care of Peanut, boys, and I’ll see you Sunday morning.” He turned and walked away, leaving Eijun and Kazuya watching him, surprised.
“I did not expect that.” Eijun said, and Kazuya was equally stunned.

“I know, right? I mean, he said it on the phone the other day, but it’s so casual for him now, like it’s just a thing. That’s kind of amazing.”

“You’re not wrong.” Eijun agreed. “But it’s good, so we’ll just accept it and go on, okay?” He slung the bags back over his shoulder, took Kazuya’s hand and continued on the way to where they were parked. They came out of the stadium into the team parking lot, and Eijun stared. There was a black limo idling at the curb.

“Hey, Kaz. Did you see any VIPs in the stands?”

“I didn’t. They’d be gone by now, anyway, the game’s been over for a while.”

“Huh. I wonder who he’s waiting for.”

As soon as they stepped into the light, the driver climbed out of the car and held the rear door open. “Sawamura-san?”

“That’s me, but I didn’t order a limo.”

“My name is Ichido, and I’ll be your driver for the rest of the evening. Please, step in and make yourself comfortable.”

Chapter End Notes

Ok, next chapter is going to be date-y.
There may be smut, depending.

Comment away, my pretties!
I need to know what you’re thinking.
Yay or nay to more smut?
Many Happy Returns

Chapter Summary

Kazuya surprises.
Eijun improvises.
You can get anything delivered if you are in the penthouse.

Chapter Notes

*sigh*
I'm sorry I've been gone for so long.
Life and life and then life has gotten to me the last few weeks.

I hope this meets your approval.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eijun looked at the driver, confused. “I didn’t order a limo,” he repeated.

“Just get in, Ei. Don’t look a gift limo in the mouth.” Kazuya snarked. “It’s your birthday, remember?”

“I know, but what does that—” He cut off as Kazuya shoved him towards the car.

“Just get in.”

“But what if—”

“Oh dear god.” Kazuya sighed in exasperation, and started to climb in. “Are you going to make me get in here by myself?”

Eijun scrambled after him. “Kaz, what are you doing? We don’t know where this came from.” He climbed into the back seat of the limo, and Ichido shut the door behind him. “Why did you get in?”

“Look, there’s a card for you.” Kazuya handed him the envelope, neatly sidestepping the question.

“That’s not...I don’t know what’s going on.” Eijun blustered.

“Maybe you should open the envelope.” Kazuya suggested. “It probably has some answers in it.”

“Oh.” Eijun looked at the card, confused. “You’re right.”

He opened the flap and pulled out the card. The cover was a drawing of them, standing under the Seido Spirit Dorm sign, arms around each other, but as they are now, with Eijun in his uniform, and Kazuya in khakis and a button down shirt, untucked, the hint of a belly showing.
Eijun blinked at it a few times, recognizing the artist and remembering the first iteration of this particular piece. He looked at Kazuya, questions in his eyes.


“This is gorgeous, Kaz, but I thought we were doing something on Sunday?”

“Surprise?” Kazuya responded. “Read the card.”

Eijun opened it and read.

Happy Birthday, Eijun.

Ten years ago, I promised you the best birthday celebration I could imagine;

I never gave that to you.

That was at the beginning of our journey together.

It hasn’t ended,

two will become three

and the journey will change.

Today is a day to celebrate the two

That are soon going to be three

But have always been one

I love you, Eijun.

Forever.

Yours.

-K

Eijun beamed at Kazuya, eyes alight. “God, Kaz. I love you, you know that? This is amazing.”

“I love you, too.” Kazuya smiled back, affectionately.

“So what are we doing?” Eijun queried.


“Let me think.”

“Don’t hurt yourself.”

“Shut it, you.” Eijun squinted at him. “Cruise on the bay, dinner at that one steakhouse we thought was the ultimate in fine dining, and dancing with the night spent at a hotel.”
“You remember?”

“Of course I remember. That was one of my favorite birthdays.” Eijun smiled softly at his husband. “We were so broke, I think we ate ramen. But the drawing you made me, and the thought you put into it was so special. It was the first time I really knew we were going to be forever, we’d made it through the year of being apart, and come out even stronger than we had been.”

“We did, didn’t we?” Kazuya returned the smile. “It was so hard for me, for us, but we did it. I think it took me a little longer to be sure, I had a harder time trusting.”

Eijun rolled his eyes. “And, the award for understatement of the year goes to…..”

“Hush.” Kazuya slid over to him, twining their fingers together. “You know I always trusted you, I did. I just...I didn’t believe something so good, so right, could ever happen to me. I think it finally settled for me completely when we had that monster fight. Remember?”

“Oh, god. Yes. I wasn’t sure what we were going to end up doing. I don’t remember how it started, but it blew up quickly, until we were both just pulling out whatever we could think of.”

“We were both so stressed, with school and me getting ready to graduate. We didn’t know if I was going to be able to stay in Tokyo or what was going to happen. It was bad, but I just remember at one point we were screaming at each other and you yelled something stupid, and I answered with something even more stupid, and we both stopped screaming and started laughing. I remember thinking, ‘This is forever. This boy is what I want forever, and I’m going to do everything I can to make sure of it.’”

Eijun felt the tears flood his eyes. “And you have. You have me forever. I’m sorry it took you so long to feel like that, and I wish I—” Kazuya kissed him, cutting him off.

“No, no. You did everything right. It was just me, just the way I was at the time. I had to take the time to adjust, had to figure it out on my own.” Kazuya glanced out the window. “Hey, we’re getting close. We have some time before the first part of our evening—do you want to dress now, or just wander the waterfront and dress before dinner?”

“We’re dressing up? Are you wearing the blue suit again?” Eijun’s eyes sparkled.

“I can’t fit into it right now, remember?” Kazuya smirked as Eijun’s face fell. “And whose fault is that, I wonder?”

“Peanut. I blame Peanut.” Eijun proclaimed stoutly.

“You’re going to blame a fetus? You’re not going to take any responsibility?” Kazuya laughed.

Eijun chuckled. “Technically, it is her fault. I understand, I don’t want you to be uncomfortable—what are we wearing, then?”

“Sur-prise,” Kazuya singsonged. “So what do you want to do? Dress before or after the cruise?”

“How long do we have?”

Kazuya looked at his watch, and thought about the ride from the hotel to the dock. “About an hour, if we want to change. More than that if we dress afterwards.”

“Let’s go change, then. You planned for us to do so, right?”
“Yeah, but if you want to wait, that’s fine.”

“Nope, this is your plan, I’m happy to go wherever you lead me. As always.”

Kazuya leaned over and kissed Eijun’s cheek. “We lead each other, idiot. Always have, always will.”

“You’re right.” Eijun grinned, glancing out the window when something outside caught his eye. “We’re not going home to change?”

“Nope. Everything’s at the hotel already.”

“How did you…?” Eijun thought for a second and then his face cleared. “Your dad?”

“Yeah, my dad. Can you believe it? I...I found myself calling him for help when I was planning this. I didn’t do it consciously, I just found myself dialing his number. He was so glad to do it, though, Ei.” Kazuya frowned a little, letting his conflicting emotions show. “He said, and he was right, that it was the first time I’d asked him for something that wasn’t an emergency or urgent, that someone else could do.”

“That’s good, Kaz.” Eijun tightened his grip on Kazuya’s hand, turning to face him. “That’s really good. I mean, for both of you. If you did it subconsciously, you’re willing to let him in and give him a chance. The fact that he jumped on the idea means that he still wants to fix your relationship. I’d imagine that he had to go a good bit out of his way, miss work and stuff, right?”

“He did, and I forgot he had to work. I offered to call Mochi, but he insisted he wanted to do it.”

“Well, there you go. We can’t be sure that he’s never going to let you down again, but for now, I think he really means it. This was much more than showing up for an emergency or a game; this was effort he had to put forth with no reward except for your gratitude.”

“You could be right, Ei.” Kazuya said. “I think that’s why I’m still conflicted about him—for so long he...well, you know how he was. And now he’s not, and as much as I want this, want to have a great relationship with him, I’m still wary.”

“That’s fine, that’s expected. I’m sure he knows that, too. Remember, I’m here for you, and whatever you need I’ll do. I’ll do anything I can to keep you from getting hurt.”

“I know you will.” Kazuya smiled. “You’re the only reason I’m even able to consider opening up to him, I know you’re there to catch me if I fall, to support me and keep me safe. Without you, I’d never be able to do this; you’re my rock, Eijun, and I love you so much for it.”

“And you’re mine, Kaz. You’ve always been mine.” Eijun kissed his cheek.

The limo pulled up to the curb, and Eijun bent his head to look out the window. “The Imperial? Really? I don’t think that was on our original itinerary.”

“I don’t think we knew it existed then.” Kazuya chuckled. “There have been a few revisions to the plan.”

Ichido opened the door and bowed them out. Eijun climbed out first, thanked him for the smooth trip and offered Kazuya his hand, which he gladly accepted.

“Thanks, Eijun.” He turned to the driver. “We’ll probably need you about 5:15, but I’ll give you a call.”
“Yes, sir.” Ichido bowed and closed the door, returning to the driver’s seat and pulling back out into traffic.

Kazuya pulled on Eijun’s hand, regaining his attention. “Shall we go?”

“Sure, lead the way, Kazuya-senpai.”

“Don’t start that, brat, or we’ll never get out of here.”

“Spend my birthday in bed with you? I can’t think of much I’d like better.”

“Too bad, we’ve got plans.”

“Awww.” Eijun pouted for a second, and then shrugged. “Oh, well. It’s not like I don’t know where you live.”

Kazuya sputtered. “That sounds creepy, but it is true.” He indicated the doorway. “Shall we go in? We’re in the penthouse.” They walked into the lobby, and Kazuya steered them towards the elevators.

“Really? Wow. You must have been planning this forever.” Eijun gushed.

Kazuya blushed a little. “Actually, I just started Monday, when I remembered that other birthday.”

Eijun realized what he wasn’t saying. He knew how much Kazuya despised the spotlight, and how little he liked to use his position or reputation for any reason. “Thank you, then. This is amazing, and I know I’m going to love everything about today.” He linked his arm through Kazuya’s. “Don’t you need to check in?”

“Dad already did it for us.”

“But you don’t have the...never mind, he passed the key to you at the game, right?”

“Yeah, he did.” Kazuya pulled it out of his pocket as he stepped up to the elevator and held it up to the sensor that would give them access to the thirty-first floor’s private car. “That’s why I grabbed the cake—I knew he would meet us after the game.”

“Sneaky, sneaky.” Eijun laughed. “I don’t know how I’ll survive if there are two Miyukis conspiring against me.”

“Soon there will be three.” Kazuya reminded him.

Eijun sighed. “Good thing I love them all, then.”

“And they all love you, too.”

The doors opened, and Kazuya bowed. “Welcome to your suite, Sawamura-sama.”

Eijun chuckled as he stepped past Kazuya into the main room. The room was opulent, as expected, with lots of gilt and satin, armchairs that looked both magnificent and uncomfortable and a view that was stunning. He walked over to the window that was the length of the room and looked out, astounded by what he could see. “This is gorgeous, Kaz. Come and look.”

“I’m looking, and you’re right, it’s gorgeous.” Kazuya said softly, watching the way the sun lit the
expressions dancing across Eijun’s face.

“Such a sap.” Eijun sighed, eyes alight as he looked across the room at his husband.

“Guilty as charged.” Kazuya answered with a grin. “Dad said your stuff was in the bedroom and the master bath. Mine is in the other bedroom, and there’s a second bathroom, so we don’t have to take turns. Do you want to grab a drink or something before we get ready?”

“It’s what, 4:30? We only have about forty-five minutes to get ready, then. We can grab a drink after, if we have time.”

“Oh, that makes sense. We’ll just meet out here after we’re done.”

“Gotcha. See you in a bit, Kaz.” Eijun closed the bedroom door behind himself, and looked around quickly. More brocade, more gilt, but this time the bed looked comfortable, at least. He spotted the garment bag hanging in the closet, and went over to check it out. Unzipping it, he grinned at the tuxedo hanging there. “Going all out, are we? Well, let’s see what you gave me to work with.”

He unpacked the suit, hanging it in the closet neatly to await his return, and went into the bathroom. “I wonder if he…” Eijun rooted through the toiletries bag, unpacking his usual grooming products. He grinned when he found the eyeliner at the bottom of the bag, sitting next to a wrapped box. Pulling it out, he opened the note attached to the top.

Ei-

Happy Birthday, again.

I saw these and thought of you.

Always yours,

-Kaz

Eijun unwrapped the box carefully, wondering what it was that Kazuya would have gotten him. His boy was brilliant at surprising him with the most unexpected things, always something he loved but never thought to get for himself. Pulling open the box, his eyes widened. Inside the box were three smaller jewelry boxes and he put the whole thing on the counter, pulling out the first box. Opening it, he found it contained a new set of studs for his tuxedo. Amber set in silver, they reflected the light beautifully. The second box held, as he expected, matching cufflinks, although these were engraved with a Latin ‘E’. He stared at the third box for a few minutes, trying to figure out what else Kazuya would have gotten for him, but came up blank, so he picked it up and opened it. Amber studs for his ears, ones that matched the others. Eijun didn’t wear earrings much—although his ears were pierced, they tended to be hidden in his hair and snag on his curls, so he generally didn’t bother. But a few months ago, right after they found out Kazuya was pregnant, he’d gotten his hair cut shorter than he usually kept it, so he thought he could probably wear these with no issues.

Me: Did you know Peanut has fingerprints now? And she weighs about an ounce. She’s also 3 inches long, and starting to look like a real baby.

Kaz: Fingerprints, huh? Now we can find her if she gets lost.
Me: Or figure out it’s her when she steals our stuff. Like my new amber earrings. Thanks for them, and the studs and cufflinks. They’re gorgeous, and I’ll thank you for them in person later.

Kaz: Glad you like them, I wasn’t sure if you wanted to wear earrings again, but your hair’s shorter now. They reminded me of your eyes.

Me: I love them, you sappy sap.

Me: But I love you more.

Kaz: Pot, meet kettle.

Me: *shrug* it’s the truth. I do.

Kaz: Same here.

Me: See you soon, gorgeous.

Kaz: Yeah, soon, beautiful.

Kazuya put his phone down on the side table, smiling from the exchange. He loved getting the ‘this week in Peanut-ville’ texts from Eijun; it helped him know he was just as involved and excited about her as Kazuya was. He’d expected one on Monday, but maybe that’s why Eijun waited, he always tried to make them come at an unexpected moment. Or maybe, with practice and the Haruko memorial, it had slipped his mind. Shrugging as he stepped into the shower, he decided it didn’t matter.

Clean and dry, he pulled on his boxers and stepped up to the mirror. It wasn’t even an option for him to not go all out tonight, this was Eijun’s night, and he was determined that he’d do everything he could to make it perfect. Starting with the contacts—he put on a new pair Eijun hadn’t seen. They were a translucent green, and gave his eyes a hint of chartreuse, brightening the color and the intensity. He didn’t want to change his eye color too much, just give it a hint of ‘different’, and these did just that. He slicked back his hair a little, not Mochi proportions, but enough to get it off his face completely, and applied some mascara. His earrings were the same green as his eyes, peridot studs that gleamed in the light. Satisfied, he headed back into the bedroom to get dressed.

Eijun knew what the tuxedos meant, and he knew Kazuya was going to look amazing. He didn’t quite know how he was even going to fit his tuxedo, but he assumed his boy had thought about that, so he didn’t worry about it too much. He stood at the mirror and considered what he was going to do to knock Kazuya’s socks off. His hair was too short to pull back, and so he just put some gel on it to give it some control, and let it do what it would. Eyeliner, yes, but he looked at the earrings, and made a decision. He was going to do something he’d only done a few times, and never on a date. He wasn’t sure Kazuya had even seen him do it before. He headed back into the bedroom, and called the front desk—he knew there were stores downstairs that would have exactly what he needed, so he charged it to the room, adding a generous tip to the total. They promised delivery in ten minutes. He started to get dressed, one ear listening for the door. As he slipped the last cufflink in his sleeve, there was a knock at the door across from the elevator.

“It’s for me, Kaz. You stay in there.” Eijun called out as he crossed the room. Opening the door, he saw there was a bellhop with a cart containing a small bag and a large bouquet of flowers at the door.

“Thank you for bringing those up.” Eijun started, indicating the bag. “Here.” He held out his hand for the bag, passing the boy a tip.
“These are both for you, Sawamura-san.” The boy stated, holding out the flowers as well. “They were delivered just a few minutes ago, so I brought them up with your order.”

Eijun grabbed the vase from the bellhop, and thanked him again. With a bow, the boy turned and left, leaving Eijun holding an enormous vase and a tiny bag. He put the vase of flowers on the low table between the couches, looking for a card. Pulling it off, he read.

Happy birthday, Eijun. I hope it’s a great one.

-Norio

Surprised, he looked over the bouquet. Sunflowers, Gerbera daisies and iris, all in full bloom and all beautiful. It was the kind of bouquet he’d expect from Kazuya, who knew his propensity for color and love for Gerbera daisies. “I tell you, these Miyukis are going to be the death of me.” He smiled softly as he picked up his bag of goodies.

Heading back into the bathroom, he pulled the contents of the bag out, checking the tags. Perfect, exactly what he wanted. Opening the containers, he got to work.

Kazuya was just pulling on his pants when he heard the knock at the door, and Eijun’s comments. He shrugged, wondering what his boy could be doing that he needed something...room service? Maybe he was thirsty. Turning his attention back to getting dressed, he figured he’d know soon enough. Slipping the rest of the way into his pants, he admired the way Sano had fixed them; it was subtle but very comfortable. He knew that when he had on the vest and jacket, it would be invisible. Peanut, and his stomach, was growing apace, and although he was glad to be nearly out of the dreaded first trimester, he knew they wouldn’t be able to keep it secret for much longer. They had less than a month before the speculation would get serious, by his calculations. Possibly two, if their fans didn’t catch wind of something and start watching closely. Finished dressing, he checked himself in the mirror and went back out into the sitting room to wait for Eijun.

He saw the flowers on the table, and wondered if those were what Eijun was expecting, but that didn’t make any sense...walking over, he picked up the card, read it and smiled. He looked at the flowers and realized they were pretty much exactly what he’d have sent over. He always gave Eijun sunflowers, those were the first flowers he’d ever given him and they reminded Kazuya strongly of his boy. Over time, he’d learned Gerbera daisies were his favorite, and that wasn’t surprising, the colorful flowers from the same family as sunflowers were brilliant and bright. The irises were not what he’d have picked, but the rest, yeah, was spot on. He wondered how his father knew, how much he’d observed over the years without saying anything, and felt conflicted again. Deliberately, he pushed it to the back of his mind and sat on the couch facing the bedroom door so he could see Eijun when he came out.

Eijun finished getting ready and looked himself over in the full-length mirror. He was as good as he was going to get, and he really hoped Kazuya would like it. If he were being totally honest with himself, he knew Kazuya would love it, they’d been together long enough for Eijun to understand all his buttons, and this pressed every single one of them. He grinned at himself wryly and stepped away, heading into the main room to see if Kazuya was ready.
He was. Kazuya heard the door opening, and looked up from his phone. He fumbled it, closing it without looking away from his husband. Finding himself on his feet with no memory of standing, he let his eyes run over Eijun. “You look. Wow. What did you do?”

“You too, you’re gorgeous. Stay there and let me look at you.” Kazuya was wearing his tuxedo, but Eijun had expected that. It was expertly tailored, and he looked great in it, but that wasn’t what caught his eye. His face...there was something different about his eyes. His hair was back, and he wasn’t wearing glasses, but although that was hot as hell, it wasn’t new. Eyes narrowed, he stepped closer. “Something’s different, what did you do?”

“I could ask you the same thing.” Kazuya responded, running his eyes over Eijun’s face.

Eijun looked at him closely, and his attention was snagged by the peridot earrings. He realized they matched Kazuya’s eyes, and he stared. “Colored contacts? But I thought you hated them. Those ones just make your eyes a little green, though, they don’t completely change them.” The green tint caused Kazuya’s eyes to look even more feral than usual, more predatory. “They look amazing, you’re gorgeous.”

“So are you.” Kazuya stepped up to him. “The earrings suit you, match your eyes perfectly. But what did you do differently? Your eyes...what did you do? Are you wearing eyeshadow?” Kazuya’s eyes widened as he realized what Eijun had done. His eyes were shaded in browns and beiges, all close to his skin tone, but carefully applied so as to enhance, not stand out. The eyeliner he wore wasn’t his usual black; it was a lighter brown, one that complemented the shadow and his eyes. The effect was more subtle than what Kazuya was used to, but also more striking. “You’re stunning. It’s not obvious at all, but your eyes look bigger, brighter.” He slid his hand up Eijun’s side. “Are you sure you want to go out? We could just stay in, have a private celebration.”

“I offered to do that earlier, and you turned me down. Too late, we’re going out.” Eijun smirked. “I want to see everything you have planned. Later,” Eijun wrapped his arms around Kazuya’s neck, “much later, we’re going to have a very private celebration.” He pulled Kazuya closer, and kissed him. Kazuya’s arms wrapped around his waist, and he returned the kiss willingly, gladly. They kissed, love and affection, knowledge and a hint of lust, letting the other know they were loved, appreciated, desired. Pulling apart, Eijun slid his hand in Kazuya’s.

“Ready to go, Kaz?”

“Yeah. I called Ichido right before you came out, he should be waiting for us.” He opened the door to their elevator. “After you, gorgeous.”

“Thank you, Kaz.” Eijun smiled at his antics, stepping onto the elevator.

Kazuya joined him in the car. “It’s only the truth, Eijun. You’re beautiful. Where did you learn how to do that? I think it may be more devastating than just the eyeliner.”

“Chris.”

“Of course, it’s always Chris. If I didn’t know a whole lot better, I’d be really jealous.”

“I was jealous, for quite a while. I never saw you ever get mad at anyone the way you got mad at me for what I said about him. I thought you liked him, and I didn’t know for quite a while that you weren’t together.” Eijun chuckled, self-consciously. “To be honest, I’m still a little jealous.”

“Well, yeah. And so am I, it’s so clear you look up to him.”

“I do, but I look up to a lot of people. I love you, and I know I’ve never felt about anyone the way I
feel about you. I just...sometimes, I wonder. If he’d been free and if he’d been whole, if you
wouldn’t have preferred him.”

“I...honestly, I can’t imagine it.” Kazuya thought about it, trying to remember his time before Eijun
was such a part of his life. “I always looked to him, but as someone to learn from, someone to beat.
You, on the other hand, were someone I considered my equal, my partner, even when we weren’t
together. I don’t think it was what you said about Chris that got me upset as much as the fact that it
was you who said it. I’d heard much worse from others.”

“Really? I never thought about it that way.” Eijun bumped into Kazuya’s side. “For the record, any
relationship I may have had with Chris would have been a disaster. He needed people who saw him
as just Chris, just a teenaged boy, and I most definitely did not. I don’t remember ever thinking that
way about him romantically, though, I always thought of him as a mentor, a teacher. After I met you,
you were the only one I wanted; even though it took me a bit to realize exactly what it was I wanted
from you.”

“I was the same, but you got there first. It took me being jealous of Chris for helping you with the
yips for me to take a minute to figure out why I felt that way. And it really only took a minute, once I
started thinking.” He chuckled. “It was obvious once I started thinking about it. I didn’t know why I
never considered it.”

“Me either. If you had said something, I would have been over the moon. I knew I was crushing on
you after that first catcher and pitcher meeting, when you tapped me on the chest. That’s when
everything fell into place, and I understood what I felt, or at least started to.”

“Why didn’t you say something?”

“Chris, remember? I thought you were taken and far out of my league even if you were single. I
never thought you might like me too.”

“Good thing I got my head out of my ass, then.” Kazuya slipped an arm around Eijun’s shoulders.
“Or we’d both be in a world of hurt.”

“Well, I’d like to think I’d have said something.”

“Oh, god. It would have been one of those shoujo manga graduation confessions, right? Cherry
blossoms and diplomas and the whole lot?”

Eijun elbowed Kazuya in the ribs. “Hush, you. You know your mushy heart would have eaten that
up.”

The elevator dinged and the door opened before Kazuya could muddle his way through an objection.
He guided Eijun off of the elevator, through the lobby and out through the door. Ichido stepped out
of the limo, opening the back door with a bow.

“Thank you.” Eijun smiled at him as he climbed into the backseat. Kazuya stopped to say something
to the driver before joining Eijun. Closing the door, Ichido walked around the car and slid back in,
starting the car and pulling smoothly out into traffic.

“Where did you get the eyeshadow? Was that what you had delivered?” Kazuya asked.

Eijun smirked. “Part of it, yeah. I knew there were stores below, so I charged it to the room.”

“What do you mean, part of it? You had some stuff with you?”
“No, the opposite. I had something else delivered.”

“What was that?”

Eijun slanted an eyebrow. “It’s supposed to be a surprise.”

“I...ok. But can you give me a hint?”

“You sure you want one?”

“Yes. I’m sure.”

Eijun leaned over and whispered in Kazuya’s ear. “They’re purple.”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think.
The next chapter should be the rest of the date.
Unless...well. You know.

Talk to me, dammit.
Kazuya surprised.
Eijun knows memes.
And there is discussion of limo sex.

Hihi!
*sigh* I don't even have words to apologize for the lateness of EVERYTHING in my life right now.

I'm hoping, in a week or so, to get this back on track.
I edited this, but there may still be mistakes- I'll look it over when I can and fix them.

Enjoy!

Kazuya’s eyes widened. His imagination roared to life and the picture his brain supplied caused him to groan, short-circuiting everything as he looked at his husband. “We should go back. Right now.”

“Nope, no way.” Eijun said, “That was a one-time offer, you turned it down. I spent too long and you look too damned good for us to go back.” Eijun turned to face Kazuya, smiling a little at the chagrined look on his face. He bent his knee, tucking it under his other leg, sliding his arm across the back of the seat. “I wanted to talk to you about something.”

Kazuya’s eyes sharpened, “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just...that card, what you wrote, got me thinking. I don’t know how to say this eloquently; it may not even make sense, but please try to understand.” Kazuya nodded in agreement, listening closely. He knew Eijun couldn’t always express himself well, but he also knew he had the ability to understand interpersonal things better than Kazuya could ever hope to. “I know you love me, and I love you, and that’s good. But we’ve been so busy with Peanut and baseball and Haruko and your dad and just life, that we haven’t done us for a while. I mean, we’re together a lot, and we talk and everything, but it’s been a while since we’ve focused on each other.” Eijun ran a hand through his hair, a little frustrated at his inability to say what he wanted to. “I give up, I can’t think of a better way to say this. I want to seduce you, to charm you, to intrigue you. I want you to do the same to me. We’ve fallen into a bit of a routine, and that’s not a bad thing, but I…” He trailed off, unsure of himself.

“I get it,” Kazuya took up the thread. “And it sounds perfect. I think what you’re saying is that we shouldn’t take the other for granted; we should work at it, at us. I agree, and you’re right. With all the
other things going on, something had to be...not neglected, I don’t think either of us is feeling
neglected, just...put away for a bit. I think that may be why I chose the tuxes and this memory. At
that time, it was the most romantic, wonderful date I could think of, and I wanted so badly to give it
to you.” He slid a soft thumb across the back of Eijun’s hand. “I still want to give it to you. I’ve just
changed a few details. You’re my world, Eijun. Everything else—baseball and the babies and Dad
and all that other stuff—is just details. None of it is unimportant, it’s just not vital. You’re vital. If that
other stuff disappeared for some reason, it would be sad and tough and hard, but if I have you, I’d
make it through.”

Eijun’s eyes widened a fraction and glistened in the evening light. Turning over his hand, he
threaded their fingers together. “We’d make it through,” he corrected. “You, me, we’re not in this
alone.”

“Partners.” Kazuya affirmed.

“Until the end.” Eijun supplied.

“Or until you kill me with your teasing.”

“You’ll be fine, I have faith in you.”

Kazuya chuckled. “I’ve had to wait longer, and successfully not combusted.” He sighed, looking out

“The same could be said about those contacts, Kaz. They look amazing, and you’re even more
gorgeous than usual.” Eijun used a gentle finger to turn his face, to allow himself to look at those
eyes again. “Your eyes are stunning like that.”

“We can discuss your penchant for eye makeup and the devastating results, if you’d like, but I think
we’re at our destination.” Kazuya smirked, and Eijun turned to look out the window.

They’d driven up to the waterfront, and Ichido pulled smoothly into a reserved spot near the wharf.
He climbed out of the car and opened the passenger door, and Kazuya stepped out before turning to
offer Eijun his hand. “Sawamura-sama, your ship awaits.”

Eijun took his hand with a snort of laughter followed by a glare. “That’s my job, dammit.”

“I’m not an invalid, remember?” He reminded Eijun mildly. Turning to Ichido, he smiled. “Thank
you for another smooth ride. We’ll be back at about 7:15 or so, so please be here by then. This spot
is reserved for us so if you want to stay, that’s fine as well.”

“Yes, sir.” Ichido said as he closed the door, bowing and then moving back to the driver’s seat.

“Ready?” Kazuya asked, extending his arm.

“Always.” Eijun responded, taking the proffered arm, and pulling Kazuya close. “Lead on, Kazuya-
senpai.”

Kazuya leaned his head briefly on Eijun’s arm before stepping onto the stairs to the dock. “This way,
then.”

They strolled along the wharf, passing boats on their jetties, until they came to the dock Kazuya had
been told to look for. “This is it.”

Eijun took in the boat they were getting ready to board. It was more a yacht than a tour boat, and it
was beautiful, sleekly gleaming white in the sun, teakwood polished and brass shining, named ‘The Spirit of Tokyo’. They climbed the waiting gangplank and were warmly welcomed. After boarding, the captain introduced himself and the crew, and explained that since they were the only passengers for this sailing, they would get underway immediately. He had the steward take them upstairs, above the cabin, where the view of the harbor was completely unimpeded. There was bench seating and a table, a bottle of champagne and one of sparkling juice on ice, as well as champagne flutes and a few plate of appetizers.

Thanking the steward, they sat down on the padded bench seats, automatically sliding together on the same side, facing the bow of the boat.

“This is amazing, Kaz, thank you.” Eijun smiled and poured them each a drink. “Are you sure you don’t want some Champagne? A little won’t hurt Peanut.”

“I know, but I still don’t want to take the chance. If something should happen to her, I don’t want anything I did to possibly be the cause of it.”

“I understand, and I’d probably be the same way.” Eijun agreed gently as he handed over a glass of juice.

Kazuya took it, and held it out for a toast. Eijun lifted his, and Kazuya touched them together lightly. “To you, Eijun. Happy Birthday, and may you have many more.”

“Thank you.” Eijun took a sip of his drink. “As long as they’re with you.”

“That’s the plan.” Kazuya sipped at his glass.

“Are you hungry? I don’t think you’ve eaten since the cake.” Eijun pulled the plate of nibbles closer. “I don’t see any ranch dip here, though. Will you be alright?”

“Shut it, you.” Kazuya elbowed his laughing husband. “You’re as bad about it as I am, and you don’t have Peanut as an excuse.”

“True that. But I am an idiot, as you are so fond of reminding me.”

“You are.” Kazuya agreed, munching on a shrimp. “That’s reason enough, I guess.”

Eijun elbowed him in the side, “Jerk.”

“Who’s the one elbowing the pregnant person, huh?” Kazuya snarked.

“Oh, yeah. Sorry Peanut!” Eijun crooned to his belly as Kazuya laughed.

Eijun puffed out his cheeks and turned pointedly away from Kazuya, who sobered and pulled something out of his inside pocket. He poked Eijun in the arm with the pointy corner of it. Repeatedly.

Eijun finally relented and sighed, turning back towards his husband. “What?”

“Happy Birthday.” He held out the envelope he’d pulled out of his pocket.

Eijun just looked at him. “You couldn’t have just handed it to me, could you?” He said, flatly.

“Where would the fun be in that?”

“Of course, I forgot who I was talking to for a second.”
“Don’t be mad, Ei. I was just teasing.” Kazuya rubbed his arm soothingly.

Eijun sighed. “I’m not. Sorry about that. Sometimes everything just hits me, you know? And then it takes me a second to get settled again.”

“I know, and I’m sorry if I set you off.”

“No, no. Don’t be, you didn’t do anything wrong. I love you, Kaz, and I wouldn’t have you any other way.” Eijun huffed out a laugh. “I think I’d suspect you of having a fatal disease or something if you failed to walk through the openings I give you.”

“I’ll remember that.” Kazuya grinned. “Open your present.”

“I don’t suppose it would do any good for me to remind you that you don’t have to get me anything, just doing this is enough?”

“Nope.” Kazuya said, popping the ‘p’ sound, trying to achieve maximum irritation levels.

Eijun sighed. “You’re going to be the death of me, you know that?”

“I don’t know about that, but I do know you’ve become my life.”

“So sappy.” Eijun said with a smile. “And gorgeous, too.”

“Would you please just open it?” Kazuya poked Eijun with the envelope again.

“Owww! Okay, okay. You don’t have to injure me with it.”

Eijun unstuck the flap, and pulled out a card, one with yet another drawing on it. It was them, again, but this time they were on the field at Seido. Eijun recognized Azuma at bat, and knew this was their first meeting. But there was one thing present he didn’t remember seeing at that first meeting, although in retrospect, he knew that it was there. Tied to his left ring finger was a red string, the only color on the page, which flowed across the field and attached itself to Kazuya’s left hand. He smiled softly and looked at Kazuya, who was watching him with the gentle smile Eijun knew the world rarely saw. “This is beautiful, Kaz.”

“Open it, Ei.” Kazuya urged, still smiling.

Eijun opened it, and a slip of folded paper fell out. He grabbed it before it fell on the ground, and read the inscription in the card.

Eijun-

Happy Birthday.

They say things happen for a reason.

I’m not sure that’s true, but things do happen.

And you stumbling, forcing, your way into my life

Is the best thing that ever happened to me.

I truly believe we were meant to be,
Beyond any question or doubt.

I was always meant for you,

And you meant for me.

Forever yours.

Kazuya.

Eijun blinked back the moisture in his eyes and unfolded the paper. He looked up at Kazuya in confusion. “This looks like a bunch of exercises?”

“It is.” Kazuya explained, tentatively. He wasn’t sure this was a present, per se, but he thought Eijun would appreciate it. “It’s my new physical therapy routine. Kanemaru-sensei says if I follow it, by the time Peanut is born, I’ll be able to catch again. Not professionally, but I’ll be able to catch for you again. I’ve missed it so much.”

“You’ll be able to catch?” Eijun’s eyes shimmered. “For me, pitching normally?”

“Yes, yes. That’s what he thinks. He actually thinks being pregnant will help with balance, and Peanut’s gradual gain in weight and size will make it easier for me to learn the new squat I’m going to have to use. It’s modified so it will be easier on my knee.”

“That’s amazing! I’ve missed pitching to you so much. Thank you!”

“It’s not much of a present, rea—” Eijun covered his mouth with a hand.

“Miyuki Kazuya,” he said with an air of long suffering patience. “If someone asked me what one thing I would want in the whole world, if anything was possible, I’d want you to be able to catch. You love it so much, and I’m so sad you were hurt. So don’t tell me this isn’t a present. It’s incredible; I never thought you’d be able to catch for me again.”

Kazuya dropped a kiss in the palm covering his mouth, and gently pulled it down. “Seriously? That’s what you’d chose, over all the other things you could pick? Haruko?” He kept ahold of his hand, twining their fingers together.

Eijun met his eyes, dead on. “Seriously. I told you before, losing her was tough, and sad, but you being hurt, being denied the one thing that brought you joy, the thing that you used to define yourself, was worse. She was a possibility, but you’re my reality. You’re my world, and nothing, I mean nothing, is more vital to me than your health and happiness.” He picked up their joined hands and kissed the back of Kazuya’s. “So, yes. This is a perfect gift, and it makes me extremely happy.”

“Me too.” Kazuya scooted over on the bench and pulled Eijun into a hug. “Happy Birthday, brat. I love you.”

“And I love you.” Eijun replied, cupping Kazuya’s face with his hands, and leaning in to kiss him. Kazuya pulled him closer, and Eijun’s arms went around his shoulders, carding through the hair at the nape of his neck. They kissed for a while, gently, softly, a touch of lips, hands caressing, moving. Neither one deepened it, they were both content to just spend some time kissing in the gentle light of sunset, the boat’s engines providing a steady hum as they moved towards their stopping point.

Kazuya broke the kiss when he heard the engines cut off, and he raised his head. “Eijun, look.”
Eijun complied, eyes blinking open to take in the sight of the sun setting over Tokyo; the buildings shaded brilliant colors, and felt his breath catch. He looked over at Kazuya, whose face was bathed in orange and reds, wide eyed and relaxed, open with wonder, and found that to be infinitely more spectacular than the sunset.

“Gorgeous. Absolutely the most gorgeous thing I’ve ever seen,” he said, seriously.

Glancing at him, Kazuya saw his attention wasn’t on the sunset and felt a blush rise. “Idiot. Look at the sunset, not me.”

“I don’t want to,” Eijun said, simply. “I’d rather look at you.”

“Sap.”

“Guilty as charged.”

Kazuya grinned and wrapped his arm around Eijun’s shoulders, bringing him close. Eijun rested his head on his shoulder, snuggling up against his side, and together they watched the sunset, holding hands, not speaking at all until the engines started up again and they headed back into the harbor.

Eijun sighed as they turned. “That was lovely, Kaz. Thank you for bringing me.”

“It was, wasn’t it,” he agreed. “I’m glad we got to see it.” Eijun stayed curled up next to him as they headed back into the bay, passing the Rainbow Bridge just as it lit up.

“Where to next?” Eijun asked.

“Not telling. It’s a surpriiise.” Kazuya sing-songed.

Eijun shrugged, good-naturedly. “Fair enough.”

Kazuya nudged him. “Come on, let’s go.”

Eijun whined in protest, but stood anyway. Offering Kazuya his hand, he bowed. “Please allow me to escort you to your vehicle, Miyuki-sama. Your chariot awaits.”

Laughing, Kazuya took his hand. “You’re such a goofball.”

“I know.” Eijun agreed, straight faced, “But you love me anyway.”

“I do, indeed.”

Hand in hand, they thanked the crew for the lovely trip, and strolled back to the car.

Kazuya glanced at his watch as they walked under a light by the pathway. “It’s almost 7:30, good timing. Our reservation is for eight.”

“Still not telling me anything, huh?”

“Nope, it’s a surprise.”

“Figures.” Eijun squeezed his hand as they approached the limo.

Ichido emerged, smiling. “Did you enjoy your cruise?”

“We did, thank you.” Eijun said as he handed Kazuya into the car. “You know where we’re going
“I do, but I’m not at liberty to say.” Ichido replied apologetically.

“That’s fine; I didn’t expect you would be.” Eijun gave him a wry smile. “He thinks of everything.” Climbing into the back of the car, he shot his grinning husband a glare. “Can’t blame me for trying.”

“I would have been disappointed if you hadn’t.”

“Well, I’d hate for you to be disappointed in anything.” Eijun deadpanned, while Kazuya laughed.

Eijun grinned back, and they sat in silence for a few minutes, watching the city go by.

“Hey, Kaz?” Eijun asked, remembering something he’d been meaning to find out. “How are you feeling? Are your tuxedo pants too tight? I figured Peanut might be causing issues, but you don’t seem to be uncomfortable.”

“I’m fine.” Kazuya assured him. “I snuck them to Sato when we visited last week, and Dad picked them up today and brought them with the rest of the stuff. He put stretch panels in the sides, near the pockets, and they’re perfect. The vest and jacket cover them so you can’t see them.”

“Oh! That’s good, I was a little worried about you. I figured you’d worked something out, but I thought I’d ask. I wouldn’t want you to be uncomfortable.”

“Thanks, Ei.” Kazuya squeezed his hand as they continued on their way, lights from the cars and buildings flashing through the windows.

“You know.” Eijun started, after a few more minutes of silence. “We’re in a limo.”

Kazuya smirked at him. “Yes, yes we are. But we don’t have time for limo sex. Besides which, its only real appeal is novelty—it’s always rushed and awkward. I’m more interested in slowly stripping off every inch of your clothes, and doing so in the comfort of a bed.”

“Oh, really? Please, do go on.”

“Nope. As you literary types like to say, I’ll leave the rest of that as an exercise for the reader.”

Eijun snorted. “Literary types, Kaz? I have yet to use my degree for anything.”

“Doesn’t change the fact that you’re a book nerd.” Kazuya riposted. Eijun had graduated Hosei with a degree in Literature, and had taken enough classes to be close to being certified to teach as a fallback. Kazuya’s degree was in Math, and although he hadn’t had a career path in mind, he was sure he’d have been able to use it for something. Fortunately, neither of them had needed them, but neither of them regretted having done the work.

Eijun ignored his sally and looked out the window as the car slowed, trying to figure out where they were going. “Eidos?” He asked as he eyed the front of the building. It was black and white marble, art deco in design, with blue neon letters. Their limo was in a line of cars waiting to drop off passengers, most of whom were in formal dress, the women in flowing gowns that wouldn’t have been out of place in the 30’s and 40’s. As each party stepped out of their car, camera bulbs flashed.

“Mochi recommended it. He said we’d find it amusing and intriguing, and that we’d have no problems feeling comfortable here.” Kazuya answered his unspoken question.

They were married, legally, but they knew there were many people who had issues with same-sex
partnerships of any kind. Their reputations saved them from much of the backlash, and they’d come out long before they were famous, so there hadn’t been any speculation or announcements to make, but they were still cognizant of other people’s feelings. Eijun, to the surprise of many, was the most aware; he preferred not to indulge in any sort of PDA outside of handholding and the occasional chaste kiss. Kazuya was much more shameless and when the mood struck, would challenge himself to make Eijun as flustered and blushing as he could.

They attended galas and benefits together, dancing with each other and a few of the other guests—friends and acquaintances—but when they were going out together, for an intimate evening out, they had a hard time finding someplace they could dance and romance comfortably. Most openly gay clubs were either meat markets or bars, and neither of those were what they were looking for on occasions such as this. When Kazuya was discussing the specifics of this date with Mochi, he’d told him about this place. He wasn’t forthcoming with details, but he did say they’d love it.

“I think I’ve heard of it, somewhere.” Eijun said, brow wrinkling while he thought.

“Maybe? It’s gotten to be pretty popular. It’s a supper club, so we’ll eat and dance. I’m curious to see what it’s like inside, it looks interesting.”

“Indeed it does.”

They didn’t have time for any further conversation; it was their turn to disembark. Ichido opened the door for them, and Eijun stepped out, turning to offer Kazuya his hand. “Miyuki-sama, would you kindly accompany your unworthy servant?”

Kazuya chuckled and took the outstretched hand. “I’d gladly go with you anywhere.” He stepped out of the car and gave Eijun a quick kiss on the cheek, flashbulbs momentarily blinding.

“You’re impossible.” Eijun blustered.

“Thank you, Ei-chan.” Kazuya smirked, threading his arm through Eijun’s.

Side by side, they walked up the red carpet, ignoring the photographers and yelled questions. Two men in royal blue and gold livery stood on either side of the double doors, and as they approached, they opened the doors for them, bowing the couple through with a ‘Welcome to Eidos.’ Stepping through the door, they found themselves in a well-appointed lobby. Black and white checkerboard tiles made up the flooring, with black marble walls. A few seating areas were in various nooks, royal blue velvet covered armchairs and loveseats arranged artfully for waiting guests. Right inside the door, there was a woman waiting for them. Dressed in full traditional garb that matched the room, she was beautifully made up, white skin and red lips, shocking green eyes expertly lined, hair piled traditionally on her head. She bowed as they entered the room, the long bells of her sleeves brushing the floor.

“Miyuki-san, Sawamura-san. Welcome to Eidos. We are honored by your presence. Sawamura-san, please allow me to express our felicitations on your birthday.” She bowed again to Eijun, and then motioned to one of the tuxedoed men standing against the wall. “Please follow Ito; he will take you to your table.”

“Thank you.” Kazuya responded with a bow of his head, and they followed the tuxedo-clad host through the blue velvet draped doorway.

“How did she know it was us?” Eijun whispered.

“I think they know everyone who comes in, I heard her address the people behind us just now.”
“Wow. That’s...could you imagine memorizing everyone coming in? That would be impossible.”

“Maybe for you, you’d probably have a stroke or something.” Kazuya snickered and Eijun elbowed him with a glare.

They stepped into the main dining area, and paused to get a look at their surroundings. The room was large, with three tiers of booths facing what was clearly a dance floor, where freestanding small tables were arranged around the edge. The semi-circular booths were made of white leather, which contrasted nicely with the dark blue walls. The art deco theme had been carried over into here as well; whorls and curves echoed the concept without being obvious. Ito led them to the middle of the top tier, and indicated they were to take a seat. He offered them menus, bowed, and left them with a quiet wish for a good evening.

“This is gorgeous.” Eijun looked around in approval, taking in all the details. Their booth faced the dance floor, behind which appeared to be a stage of some sort, if the blue velvet curtain was any indication. To the left side of the generous dance floor was a gorgeous white baby grand, with seats and music stands around it. Currently, there was music being piped in, but Eijun figured that would change.

“It is.” Kazuya agreed. “Like something out of one of those black and white American movies. I half expect Humphrey Bogart to walk in.”

“I know, right?” Eijun grinned at him as he opened his menu. “What do you feel like eating? I don’t see any cheeseburgers on this menu.”

Kazuya groaned. “You’re not going to let that go, are you?”

“Nope. Why should I? I need all the ammo I can get to keep up with you.”

“Idiot.” Kazuya opened his menu as well.

“Thank you.”

“Oh my god, you did not just…”

“I think I did. Yes, I actually think I did.”

“Well done.” Kazuya grinned and turned his attention to his own menu.

Their waiter appeared, dressed as the host had been, and took their drink order: club soda with lemon for Kazuya, and the same, plus vodka, for Eijun. They looked over the menu, which was full things they’d never tried, and debated the merits of escargot or clams casino, wedge salad or waldorf salad.

“Look, they do have steak. Cut it up finely and you might think it’s a cheeseburger.”

“Shut it. I’ll tolerate no commentary on my eating habits from you.”

Eijun chuckled, and returned to the menu. “Kaz? Have you ever had lamb?”

“I haven’t.”

“Okay, that’s what I’m getting. Rack of lamb. You can try it if you’d like.”

“I’d like that. And I’ll get the prime rib, so if you hate it you’ll have something you’ll enjoy.”

The waiter returned with their drinks and they gave their order (escargot and waldorf salad), settling
in to eat and chat. Eijun slid closer to Kazuya, linking their hands.

“This is great, Kaz. I don’t just mean this place, but this whole afternoon has been amazing.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it.” Kazuya snuggled into him a little. “Happy birthday.”


“And I love you.”

The appetizers came and they laughed their way through eating the escargot, Eijun starting with “Snello! I’m snarving,” and from there it descended into a snail-meme contest, until all the snails were consumed and the boys were both having a bit of a problem catching their breath.

Eijun looked at Kazuya who was still wheezing a little, and felt himself sober instantly. “God, I love you. I mean, I really, really love you.”

Kazuya met his eyes, wonder and love shining in their depths. “And I adore you, Sawamura Eijun. More than I can ever say.” He laced their fingers together, and kissed the back of Eijun’s hand. “I find myself loving you more and more as time goes by.”

“Good. Because I feel the same.”

In perfect accord, they turned their attention to the salad.

Right after their entrees came; a man sat down at the piano and started to play. Kazuya smiled at the sound, he’d always loved the piano, and Eijun grinned back.

“I’m sold on the lamb,” Eijun said. “Want to try it?”

“Sure, you want some of this prime rib? It’s nice and rare.”

“Yes, please.”

So they exchanged food, ate, talked and laughed. Nothing serious, just enjoying themselves and the company. When they were nearly done, a voice came over the loudspeaker.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Eidos. Thank you for joining us. In a few minutes, the house lights will dim in preparation for the show. Please continue to enjoy your dinner; our servers are well used to being left in the dark. If you need to move around, please step carefully, and note that there are lights along the edges of the runners to guide you. After you are finished with the main course, the waiters will bring around an assortment of dessert choices and coffee, and will make themselves available for drink orders throughout the evening as well. Thank you for your attention, and we hope you enjoy your stay at Eidos.”

Eijun watched with interest as the orchestra shuffled out and took their seats, softly tuning and adjusting their instruments, spotlight shining on the area. “They’re sticking to the 1940’s big band stuff, right? I don’t see any strings other than the bass and piano.”

“How do you even know big band music?”

“Grandad. He brought it back home with him from the war.”

“Oh, really? That makes sense.”
The band began to play ‘String of Pearls’, not much louder than the piano had been.

“I grew up listening to this stuff. I still like it a lot.” Eijun smiled softly as the house lights dimmed and the brass lights on each of the tables lit up, just enough for them to see what they were eating. “This is great, Kaz. I’m glad you brought me.”

“I’m glad we came.” Kazuya returned the smile, gentle and loving. “Thank you for being born, Eijun.”

“I think you should be thanking Mom for that.”

“I did already. Sent her flowers.” Kazuya smirked at the surprised look on Eijun’s face.

“You sent Mom flowers? For my birthday?”

“I did. I always do, she’s never mentioned it?”

Eijun glared. “No, she hasn’t. No wonder she likes you more than me.” His eyes softened and he huffed, “That’s amazingly sweet of you, Kaz. I’m sure she appreciates it.”

Kazuya opened his mouth to reply when Eijun squeezed his hand, attention on the front of the room. The band shifted into a new song, and Kazuya saw a spotlight go up on a singer to the right of the stage, opposite the band. She was beautifully dressed in a red satin gown, makeup perfect, pale skin, black eyeliner and lipstick the exact shade of her dress. Blond hair curled simply down her back and a string of pearls hung around her neck. Stepping up to the silver-plated microphone, she closed her eyes and began to sing.

Don’t know why

there’s no sun up in the sky

Stormy weather…

Kazuya’s eyes widened at the soft tenor of her voice, the modulations clean and clear as she deftly wove her way through the torch song. Leaning over to Eijun, he whispered, “Is that—” before being cut off by Eijun.

“I’m not sure?” Eijun answered, turning back to watch, “but does it matter?”

Kazuya shrugged and wrapped his arm around Eijun’s shoulder, pulling him close. “No, it really doesn’t.”

They snuggled together and enjoyed the song, her interpretation of the emotions of the song were spot on and Kazuya was not surprised to see Eijun wiping away a tear. He didn’t comment on it, just pulled his husband closer.

As she finished, the spotlight on her faded, and one came up to light the person who’d just stepped out onto the floor, mic in her hand. Dressed in a black suit with a white shirt, short black hair in pin curls and waves, the only thing she was missing was a long cigarette holder.

“Let’s hear it for my baby, Juli! Isn’t she sweet?” She wrapped an arm around the singer, and pulled her in for a quick hug. “She’s kinda new here, but she has one fabulous voice, don’t you agree?” The audience clapped and cheered. “You run on backstage, hon, you have to get ready for the rest of the show.” She let go of Juli, who smiled and bowed before exiting through the door she’d come out of.
“Welcome to Eidos!” She said as she walked into the middle of the dance floor, and the house lights came up just a bit, enough so she could see everyone. “Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Georgie, but you—” she pointed to a young man in the front row of booths, “—honey, you can call me whatever you want.” She blew him a kiss as he reddened, and started to move around the floor as she talked.

“First things first, and so we can clear up any confusion and get to the good parts. Yes. I am in drag. We are all drag queens on this stage, darling. If that’s problem for you, don’t you dare take it out on my girls. The only taking you should do is to take yourself right out the doors, and we’ll be happy to refund your money, and honestly, sugar, much happier without your presence.”

She shook herself, letting out a huff of air. “Woosh, glad we got the boring stuff over.” Georgie walked back into the middle of the floor looking over the audience. “Some of you lovely people have been here before, right?” There was a smattering of applause. “I thought I recognized your beautiful faces. And the rest of you are newbies? Fresh meat? Oh, darlings, that makes me so excited. I love me some virgins.”

She headed over towards the band, and slid onto the bench beside the piano player, who was still softly playing. “Let me tell you how this is going to go. This wonderful band, led by the ever talented, ever beautiful Daichi, here, is going to play for you.” She rested her head on his shoulder. “Isn’t he gorgeous? You know, he’s single. Have at it, girls. Or is it guys? Whichever, you never know.” She kissed him on the cheek as he shook his head, rolling his eyes. She grinned at him and stood, moving back towards the booths.

“We’re going to put on a show for you; there will be singing and some dancing, magic tricks and a joke or two. After that, the floor will be open for dancing, with the band playing as long as you darling people still want to dance. My girls and I will be out to dance with those who’d like to, and even some who don’t.” She looked over the audience. “I’m going to have to call dibs on some of you gorgeous people. I’m dancing with her, and him,” she pointed to people at different tables, and then at the table Kazuya and Eijun occupied. “Everyone at that table, so get ready, darlings. And you in the front, yes you.” She indicated an elderly man who looked overjoyed at the attention.

“One last thing I need to let you know, and those are the rules of the house. Be polite. You don’t have to be nice, because we all like a little naughty sometimes, but don’t be rude. There are people here you may recognize. Don’t bother them, they’re here to relax and have fun too, bothering them would be rude. Y’all know how to behave, I know you do. I have faith in you, so don’t let me down.” She moved back into the middle of the floor.

“So without further ado,” she said with a bow, “welcome to the show.”

Chapter End Notes

So...what did you think?
Let me know!

See anything you recognize?
The Way You Look Tonight

Chapter Summary

Eidos.
Floor Show.
One Last Gift.
And Dancing. Lots of Dancing.

Chapter Notes

*falls over*
Here's the next installment, I'm sorry it's been so long.

I'm hopeful with all the bang stuff out of the way, and Fly Away Home finally finished, to get back on track.

It would have been done earlier, but I came down with the flu and spent four days glaring at my computer from my bed, unable to form a coherent sentence.
Hope you enjoy this!
PS: There's a bit of a spoiler for something in this, if you look carefully.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Kazuya slid his hand into Eijun’s as the house lights went down and the curtain went up. As the acts went by, they were both amused and enthralled. This wasn’t high theater; this was bawdy, raucous comedy and magic acts that failed half the time—to the amusement of the audience and Georgie, who was watching, commenting, and hosting at the same time. Dancing that was more burlesque than Broadway, singing that traveled the gauntlet between risqué and heart wrenching. They laughed until they cried, cried a little until they laughed again.

Georgie managed the whole thing, expertly shepherding the acts on and off stage, offering praise and criticism with an equal hand, the lynchpin on whom the whole show depended. They watched with admiration as she expertly shut down hecklers, grabbed escaping bunnies and scooped up forgotten props, all of it with the air of being exactly what was meant to happen.

At the end of the show, Juli was back onstage singing “Dream a Little Dream,” and Kazuya leaned over to whisper in Eijun’s ear. “You know, I could totally see you doing that. Spotlight trained on you, long silk gown, perfect makeup, red, red lips. You’d be gorgeous. And really good at it.”

Eijun chuckled lowly. “I was kinda thinking the same thing; I think I would enjoy doing something like that. What about you, though? What would you want to do if we were involved in this?”

“Hmmm.” Kazuya thought for a minute, mulling over his choices. “Georgie. I think I would want to do Georgie’s job and run the show. Or at least some of it.”

“You wanting to get your control freak on? Well, color me surprised. That never happens.” Eijun
smirked at him. “Seriously, though, that would so work for you. You could rock the androgyny thing, you’d look amazing.”

“It seems like it would be fun, doesn’t it?”

“It does.”

They turned their attention back to the stage as she finished singing, enjoying the rest of the performance. As the curtain fell to loud applause, Georgie took the microphone once more.

“And that, ladies and gentlemen, is our show. We hope you enjoyed it, darlings, and we do hope you come to see it again...there’s always something new and interesting happening, you’re guaranteed to not see the same show twice!” She walked to one side of the stage and descended the stairs, assisted by one of the trumpet players. “Thank you Shiro, sugar.” She kissed his cheek, and he blushed, waving her away. “He’s a keeper, right? Single, too. Seems like I’m pimping out the whole orchestra tonight, am I right? I should get a commission, don’t you agree? Matchmaker’s fee.” She grinned as she made her way back to the center of the dance floor.

“Okay, so here’s what’s happening next, the night is still young, darlings, and we have miles to go before we sleep. The girls are all backstage, slipping into something a little more comfortable, and when they’re done with that we’ll all be back out here for some introductions and dancing. Again, I have dibs on some of you for a dance or three, and honey, I do hope you know how to tango. So chat amongst yourselves for a bit, have another drink and keep those waiters busy, and we’ll be back soon. Behave while I’m gone, you hear me?” She returned the microphone to its stand and headed back through the doors, and the band began to play softly.

Eijun was watching the band when he felt something jabbing him in his arm. Looking over, he saw Kazuya holding an envelope. He glared a bit at his husband, who laughed at the look on his face.

“What is it with you and poking me?” Eijun muttered, and then groaned when he realized what he said.

Kazuya snickered. “I’m...I’m not even going to walk through that wide open door you left for me, Ei.” He slid the envelope in front of him. “Here. Happy Birthday.”

“So mature. I’m not sure which is worse—you saying something or you saying you’re not saying something.” Eijun picked up the envelope. “You know, Kaz, you—”

Kazuya interrupted him. “I know I don’t have to, I want to. You mean the world to me, Sawamura Eijun, and I need you to know that.”

“I already do, Kaz.” Eijun’s voice gentled as he stroked his thumb across the back of his hand. “You have never shown me anything but how very much you love me. I have no doubts at all, ever. And I feel exactly the same way. Thank you for the wonderful birthday, it’s been amazing so far.”

“Open the envelope.” Kazuya urged him, squeezing his hand.

Eijun slid open the flap and pulled out another card, similar to the others. This one was another drawing, but it wasn’t of a memory. It was of them, standing together. Kazuya had his arm around Eijun’s waist, and Eijun was holding a baby wrapped in blankets. They were both looking at the child, soft smiles and happiness plainly written on their faces.

“This is beautiful,” Eijun, breathed, eyes filling. He met Kazuya’s gaze, and saw the same emotions
in his eyes. “I...god. I love you so much right now.”

“I love you too, Ei.” Kazuya leaned in and kissed him. “Don’t cry, you’ll smudge your makeup.”

“I don’t care.” Eijun dutifully blinked back the tears and opened the card. He set the papers inside to the side for later, and read the writing.

Eijun-

Happy Birthday.

I hope this year is the best that you’ve ever seen, that it’s full of love and laughter and joy, that all your hopes and dreams come true. I wish you the very best, very happiest birthday ever.

You’re my joy and my life, my hope and my help. You make every day worth living. I don’t know what I would have done this last year without you, I don’t know how I would have made it through if I hadn’t had you by my side supporting me, believing in me, every step of the way.

I hear your voice in my head as I write this, “But Kaz, we rescue each other, that’s what we do.”

We do.

But this is about you.

With you, I know I can do anything.

Thank you for that.

-Kazuya

Eijun sighed and looked at Kazuya. “God. I got nothing, you win. I can’t possibly match any of this, so next birthday you’re getting natto and a new toothbrush.”

Kazuya laughed, “Oi, idiot. This isn’t a contest.”

As he unfolded the papers, Eijun answered, “I know, but this has all been so wonderful—” He stared at the documents. “Kaz, why does this say that you bought me a house?”

“Well, I didn’t buy it yet, not really. And it’s for us.” Eijun looked at him in confusion. “Here’s what I was thinking, and if you hate the idea, that’s fine, we can forget it. I was thinking about the future, about our family and I thought that maybe, when we were done with pro ball, we’d want to raise Peanut outside of the city.” Eijun’s face cleared and he started to grin, looking at the paperwork again.

“And I figured that the place we’d want to move would probably be Nagano, closer to your ‘rents. I did some searching online and found this place. I had Mom check it out for us; she said it’s definitely a fixer upper but that it had good bones. We won’t need it for a while, so we have time to make it exactly what we want it. It’s not far outside the city, we can commute in if we want to work, and it’s only about five minutes from your parents.”
Eijun held up a hand. “Hang on a sec. You bought a house, sight unseen, so we can fix it up and move to Nagano?”

“Well, yeah. But if you don’t want to do it, it’s fine,” Kazuya reiterated.

“You, the lover of all things citified, would agree to move to the country? Live in the country?”

“I would. I don’t hate the country, I just didn’t grow up there and I’m not used to it. It’s not like we’d be stuck there, we can always go into the city or come to Tokyo for a weekend if we want.”

“Look at me, Kaz.” Eijun met his eyes. “Are you doing this for me, or is this something you really want to do?”

Kazuya gazed back, eyes steady, hiding nothing. “Both? I know how much you love the country, and I really do love the idea of raising Peanut somewhere that she can play outside and hunt beetles and catch lightning bugs and stuff, the things I never experienced. I know she can do all those things at the ‘rents, but there’s something appealing to me about watching the seasons change the world around you and having a garden and living where you don’t have to worry about your neighbors peeping in your bedroom.”

“Okay. Why didn’t you talk to me about this before?”

“I...honestly? It didn’t occur to me until this week, when I was thinking about your birthday and about our family and where I saw us in the future. I realized that as much as I love our house, love the city, I didn’t want to live there forever. I thought that maybe you felt the same way and when I saw this place and had it looked at, it seemed too good to pass up.”

“How am I supposed to not cry when you’re doing stuff like this?” Eijun said, letting Kazuya see how happy he was about the idea. “Yes, I would love to move back to Nagano. It would be wonderful to give Peanut the same childhood I had. What were you thinking about timing, though?”

“Well, that’s up to us. I would like to be out there by the time she’s five, before she starts school. Your shoulder’s not going to last for a lot longer, if Shinji’s right, and I think you know he is.”

“Yeah, I think it’s about blown. I’m...I don’t know if I want to give up baseball, though. And what about you? You’ve just started coaching; you want to keep doing that, right?”

“I did. I do. But you know, I think it’s the actual coaching part I like.” Kazuya turned to face Eijun, taking his hand and intertwining their fingers. “When we went to Chris’s school and helped them out, that was the best coaching experience I’ve ever had. I was working with players who needed my help, that listened and took advice. Coaching the team now isn’t anything like that. Most of the players are stuck in their ways and I have to bully them to get them to change, and they resent me for it even when it improves their game. I know that Chris’s kids were probably on their best behavior, but I think I’d rather coach at a lower level, really help someone, rather than fight to change one stubborn player.”

“I get that. I’ve not thought about what I’m going to do after baseball. I’m not sure I’d be a great coach, although I do like working with kids.”

“You don’t have to know, Ei. If you don’t even want to work again, you wouldn’t have to. We have plenty of money, and your signing bonus comes in after next season, so there’s that as well. If you’d want to be home, work in the garden and stuff, that would be fine, whatever you want. I think you’d be a great coach for young kids, your enthusiasm is the thing they need most.”

“Maybe? I’ll have to think about it. But anyway, we’ve veered off topic a bit. Tell me what you
know about the house and your thoughts about what you want to do.”

“It’s an old farmhouse, and it’s sitting on about six acres of land. The original owners sold off a bunch of the land around it to other farmers as they got older. Mom says it has four bedrooms upstairs, and a porch that goes around the whole downstairs. It needs work, the kitchen is old and the walls are in bad shape, but she thinks it’s mostly cosmetic. There’s a garden in the back, and lots of old trees in the yard. I guess we should go see it, decide what to do about it. I didn’t buy it; I put down a deposit, so if you don’t want it we can look for something else. It just sounded good to me.”

“It sounds perfect.” Eijun agreed. “How long do you have to make a decision?”

“A couple of weeks.”

“We can drive down on our next days off, if you want to.”

“It’s a date. Oh, wait,” Kazuya thought about something for a minute “One more thing Mom said. She told me to tell you that it’s the old Kurosawa place, that you’d know where that was.”

Eijun’s eyes widened. “The Kurosawa farm? I...I know that house, Kaz. I used to help them with chores sometimes; Kurosawa-san was a killer baker, I’d do almost anything for one of her cupcakes. I’d heard they’d sold of much of the land and moved in with their children, but I didn’t know they were getting rid of the house itself. If that’s the house you bought, then yes, it is perfect. We should go see it, but I think you’ll love it.”

“Then for sure we need to go. Maybe this weekend? We don’t have a game and there’s only an after-game meeting on Saturday morning, we can hit the road right after?”

“Sure, why not? I’ll text the ’rents tomorrow, let them know we’re coming.” Eijun leaned in and kissed Kazuya’s cheek. “I really need to carry around a thesaurus, I need some new words. How many times can I say this is amazing, wonderful, extraordinary? You’re all of those and more, Miyuki Kazuya, and I can’t tell you enough how important you are to me, how much I love you. I love you. I really do.”

“That’s good, because I feel exactly the same way about you.” The house lights flickered and Kazuya looked to the front. “Here they come, Ei. Pick your poison.” The girls were walking out of the back, and lining up by the stage.

“All I know is I want to dance with you, Kaz. As long as that happens, I’m good.”

“Oh, it’s going to happen, trust me.”

Georgie stepped up and took the microphone. “I’m back, did y’all behave yourselves?” She looked at the waiters, who all nodded. “It looks like you did, pumpkins, so good job. Ok, for those of you who weren’t paying attention, these are my girls, and they love to dance. So y’all need to be nice and dance with them, okay? We want to see all your gorgeous faces on the floor. Of course, you can always dance with who brung ya, but where’s the fun in that?” She walked up the stairs and onto the highest tier, stopping near the middle.

“Juli, darling, come up here right quick.” She motioned and Juli moved to her side. “Y’all know Juli’s my baby, right? I’m still steering her in the right direction and giving her the best advice I can. It’s almost time to partner up, my beauties, so start looking around.”

Georgie slid into the booth beside Kazuya, and waved Juli into the other side. “It’s not that I’m
taking advantage of my position or anything, but I am claiming first dibs on this handsome thing, and Juli, you take his gorgeous partner.” She slid out of the booth with a grinning Kazuya sliding out behind her. “We have our first picks, go ahead and grab yours. See you on the dance floor.”

She led him down the stairs, Juli following with Eijun on her arm. As she passed a waiter, she handed him the mic and linked her arm through Kazuya’s. “There. Now we have some privacy, darling. I hope you don’t mind us singling you out, I figured you were used to the spotlight so you wouldn’t fluster too much.”

“You’re right about that.” Kazuya said with a grin. “I’m happy to be of service.”

“Aren’t you the sweetest thing? I hope you don’t mind that the first dance is a tango.”

“Not at all, I love to tango.”

“You want to lead, I suppose?” They’d descended the stairs and joined the crowd on the floor, giving themselves plenty of space.

“I can. Eijun usually does, but I can.”

Georgie cocked one perfect eyebrow. “I took you to be the one always running the show.”

Kazuya chuckled. “That’s on the field. Off the field, not so much.”

“Oh, nice control of your autocratic tendencies, sugar.” She ran her hands up over his shoulders as they prepared to dance. “How much housebreaking did that take?”

“Surprisingly little, to tell you the truth.” He put a hand on her waist and one on her shoulder, waiting for the cue to start. He spotted Eijun on the other side of the floor, grinning at Juli as they got into place. “He’s...we’ve always been partners, even on the field. He trusts me to do my job and I trust him to do his. It’s not that complicated.”

“That’s great; I’ve known far too many controlling people who can’t let it go, ever.” Georgie commented with a frown. “But anyway, you ready?”

“Ready as I’m going to be.” Kazuya said as the opening chords were played. She grinned and he smirked, and they were off, in perfect accord.

Eijun was having just as much fun on the other side of the room; Juli was a delightfully friendly partner. “You’re good at this.” Eijun commented, as they stepped through the dance.

“Thank you.” Juli said with a twinkle. “I’d have to be, or Georgie wouldn’t let me on the floor. You’re not so bad yourself. Where did you learn?”

“Kazuya and I took lessons in college.” He chuckled. “Our baseball coach made us; he thought it would help with balance and timing issues. I’m not sure it did, but we had a blast, so we kept going even after we no longer had to. We dance whenever we can, but it’s not often we get the chance. This place is great.”

“We’re glad you’re here, then.” Juli expertly followed his lead into a tricky step, and when they were back in position, continued the conversation. “I’m loving what you did with your eyes...can you tell me how to do that?”
“Sure.” Eijun replied, and proceeded to do so.

Kazuya led Georgie into a sweep, and she ran her hand down his torso for balance. As she stood back up, she smirked. “I know you’re celebrating a birthday...are you perhaps celebrating something else as well, sugar?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Kazuya deadpanned.

“Mmmhhhm.” She hummed and then laughed. “Rumors are flying, you know. But then again, darling, there are always rumors flying about you two. It’s not usually you that’s the subject of this particular rumor, though. This is unexpected. No worries, your secret is safe with me.”

Kazuya lifted an eyebrow. “And what secret would that be?”

“One that you wouldn’t still be getting away with if it was that gorgeous pitcher over there; everyone’s watching him and no one is paying any attention to you, honey.”

“Hey, now. It’s not that obvious.”

“As much as they watch you two, sugar, it’s a miracle nobody’s caught on. Like I said, if it had been Goldeyes over there, the cat would be well and truly out of the bag. Congratulations and I do wish you both the best.” Georgie said as they dipped into the last notes of the song, arms linked around his neck.

“Thank you.” Kazuya said, with a wry grin. “We are keeping it private while we still can, so we value your discretion.”

“I can’t blame you, darling, I remember your wedding.” Georgie patted his cheek as she stepped away, dance over. “Thank you for a lovely tango, and if you would be so kind, sweetheart, would you escort me to my next victim? Goldeyes looks so good this evening.” She took his arm and they made their way over to Juli and Eijun.

“Juli, you look lovely this evening.” Kazuya said with a smile. “Would you care to dance?”

“Oh, sugar, like you ever had a choice. But I do thank you for your courtesy.” Georgie said, taking Eijun’s outstretched arm and grinning as he swept her into a foxtrot at the opening notes of ‘Blue Skies’.

“The honor is all mine, ma’am.” Eijun bowed his head.

She swatted at him. “Oh, you’re a sweet talker, aren’t you?”

“Not really, I just call them as I see them.”

“See? There you go. That husband of yours never had a chance, sugar.”

Eijun laughed. “You don’t know what I was like in high school. Whatever the opposite of smooth talker is, that was me.”

“I find that hard to believe.” She laughed with him and then shrugged. “Ahh, but I bet you were
gorgeous then, all flashy gold eyes and fire.”

“I was a loud, obnoxious kid, but thanks for the compliment.” Eijun said with a grin. “I still don’t know what he saw in me, but I’m glad that he did.”

“You two are good together.” She agreed. “I do want to talk to you about something, darling. During the tango, I inadvertently stumbled across the thing you two are keeping private.” Eijun stiffened and narrowed his eyes. “Don’t get riled, sugar, I’m not going to tell anyone. In this business, you need to know how to keep a secret.”

She spun away from him and back in, and their dance resumed. “I wanted you to know that I knew, and that I won’t say a word. You won’t be able to keep it a secret for much longer, Goldeyes, there’s not a lot of padding there to hide anything. In fact, I am a little surprised there’s no chatter at all about it. If it was you, everyone would already know.”

“Me? Oh, yeah. Pretty much everyone we’ve told has assumed the same thing. I don’t get it, but there it is.”

“That’s because they see your relationship from the outside, darling, and don’t see that he relies on you as much as you follow him. People like to force others into little boxes, bless their hearts.” Georgie smiled a little sadly. “We just need to keep living our lives as best we can, right?”

“You’re absolutely right.”

“I usually am.”

Kazuya led Juli through the dance floor, expertly avoiding the other dancers, some of whom were not quite as practiced as they were.

“You boys sure know how to dance.” Juli said, smiling cheerily at Kazuya.

“Thank you, but that’s probably more you than us.”

“Oh, nice one. Your husband told me you learned in college?”

“Yeah, we did. It was something we could do together outside of baseball with the added incentive of being fun, and free. Which was really important at the time.” Kazuya laughed.

“Well, I’m glad to be reaping the benefit of those lessons. It’s nice to have uncrushed toes for at least a little while.”

“I live to serve.”

She giggled and they kept dancing.

The song ended, and the two couples met on the edge of the dance floor.

“Thank you boys for indulging us.” Georgie said. “It was lovely to dance with you, and the conversation was truly enjoyable. I do appreciate it.”

“Thank you, Georgie.” Eijun bowed his head. “It was wonderful to dance with you as well.” He turned to Juli. “You’re one of the best tango partners I’ve had, thank you, Juli.”
“Oh, the pleasure was all mine.” She grinned at him. “The tango can be a chore, but you made it fun.”

Kazuya patted Juli’s hand, which was still resting on his arm. “Thank you for the dance, Juli. You’re a joy to lead around the floor.”

“Oh, you’re as bad as that one, with the smooth talking.” Juli laughed. “Thank you kindly, though, and I hope we get another chance to dance.”

“I imagine we will, if not tonight, I’m sure we’ll be back.” Kazuya grinned at her, and turned to Georgie. “Thank you again for the tango, Georgie.”

“Oh, sugar, you are so welcome, it was my pleasure. Best dance I’ve had all month, honestly.” She smiled. “Now, we need to go mingle with some of the wallflowers, and you two want to be alone, I’m sure. Happy Birthday, Goldeyes. Hope you enjoy the rest of your evening, and I hope to see you two gorgeous creatures again. Come along, Juli.” She headed back towards the tables, Juli trailing after.

Eijun stepped over to Kazuya’s side, laying a hand on his arm. “Well, that happened.”

Kazuya snorted. “Yep, sure did.” He turned to face him. “Hey, Ei? Georgie—”

“I know.” Eijun cut him off. “It’s fine, I believe her when she said she wouldn’t tell. But she’s right about one thing, I don’t know how much longer we can keep it a secret.”

“I’m actually a little surprised it hasn’t gotten out yet; there are a lot of people who know.”

“Right.” Eijun cocked his head at the first notes of the next song. “We’ll talk about that later, okay? I want to dance with you. This song is perfect.” He held out his hand and Kazuya took it, more than willing to put that particular discussion aside.

Eijun pulled him into his arms and Kazuya slid into place—into his place—easily. Hands rested on hips, rested on shoulders, secure and safe. “This is one of my favorite songs.” Eijun explained.

“What is it?” Kazuya asked, not really invested in the answer, but curious nonetheless.

Just then, the vocalist began to sing.

_Some day, when I'm awfully low_  
_When the world is cold_  
_I will feel a glow just thinking of you_  
_And the way you look tonight_

“You’re gorgeous, Kaz. And you’re everything I’ve ever wanted, and more.” Eijun spoke into his ear, and Kazuya could hear the emotion that Eijun was trying to control.
With each word your tenderness grows
Tearin' my fear apart
And that laugh, wrinkles your nose
Touches my foolish heart

“And you’re the same to me, Ei. You don’t know how much you are to me.” Kazuya matched his emotion with his own; spilling it out to the one person he could trust never to use it against him. “I used to be so afraid to love, to care, but you showed me that it’s okay to love, to trust. You’re my heart, and I can’t imagine how dark my life would have been if you hadn’t come into it.” He blinked, trying to keep the tears at bay.

Eijun pulled back his head and met Kazuya’s eyes. “Don’t cry, please? That’s my job; I didn’t mean to make you cry.” He kissed Kazuya softly, aware of his surroundings. “I love you, Kaz, and this song has always gotten to me. Before now, I hadn’t ever put the two together.”

“I love you too, Ei.” Kazuya swiped a soft thumb along his jawline. “I do.”

“Of all the things I know, that’s the one thing I’m most sure of.” Eijun said, pressing a kiss into the palm of Kazuya’s hand.

“Good.” Kazuya said, and pulled Eijun closer as they continued to move to the music.

They spent the rest of the evening dancing, sitting out occasionally to drink and rest a bit, but never were far apart, never danced with anyone else. They laughed and argued and flirted and snarked, enjoying each other and the feeling that they were, despite the full house, the only people in the world. The only ones that mattered, anyway.

They were sitting at one of the small tables off the floor, resting after having made it through—with much laughing and a little fumbling—a quickstep.

“We’re out of practice on that one.” Eijun chuckled.

Kazuya smirked. “You’re not wrong about that. It’s never been my favorite step, but I didn’t think it would be that brutal.”

“I know, right? We either need to practice that one more, or never try it again.”

“Let’s mark it off our list for now. Maybe later, we can revisit.”

“Done.” Eijun grinned. “This has been so much fun, Kaz. We have to come back.”

“We do. We will. We may even have to make a habit of it.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Eijun sipped at his drink, listening to the band play.

“How long do you want to stay?” Kazuya asked.

“Not much longer. But the night’s not nearly over yet.” Eijun said, sliding his hand under the table and along Kazuya’s thigh. “We still have a lot of celebrating to do.” He stood as the notes of a
familiar song started to play. “I think this will be the last dance.”

“This is perfect.” Kazuya agreed, as they came together, gliding onto the dance floor.

*At last, my love has come along*

*My lonely days are over and life is like a song*

“Our first dance together, remember?” Kazuya said, pulling Eijun as close as he could.

Eijun snorted. “Like I’d forget *anything* about our wedding? It was the most important day of my life.”

“Even bigger than being signed?” Kazuya teased. Eijun reared back to glare at him.

“Don’t even go there, idiot. You know it was.”

“I know,” Kazuya soothed. “It was for me too, you know that.” He pulled Eijun back in close, resting his head on his shoulder. “Sometimes I deflect, and I’m sorry. I don’t mean to make you think it’s any less important to me.”

“You do, and normally it’s fine. I’m just feeling a little sentimental, that’s all.” Eijun sighed and snuggled closer. “It was a beautiful wedding.”

“It was. But the wedding wasn’t as important as the end result. I wanted you to know, I wanted the world to know that you’re it for me, you’re the one I want to spend the rest of my life with. I know that it was just words and that we can get divorced, but after we were married, there was a weight, a substantialness to us that I hadn’t expected to feel. I hadn’t expected anything to change, really.”

“Same here, I didn’t anticipate that at all.” Eijun responded, and they continued to glide around the floor, hands and hearts intertwined.

The song finally ended, and they stepped apart, hands still joined. “Ready?” Kazuya asked.

“Yeah, let’s go back.” Eijun agreed with a smile. “This whole evening has been incredible, thank you.” He squeezed Kazuya’s hand. “But I’m ready to go.”

“Okay, let me text Ichido.” Kazuya pulled out his phone and sent off a text that was immediately answered. “He says five minutes; he’ll text us when he’s outside and almost at the front of the line.”

“Alright, great. That gives us a few to thank the hostess, if she’s not otherwise occupied.”

“She’s over by the bar, talking to the bartender.” Kazuya put a hand in the small of Eijun’s back and steered him over towards her.

She saw them coming and put her drink down, turning to face them. “You’re leaving?”

“Yeah, we’ve had a marvelous time, but it’s time to go.” Eijun told her.

“Well thank you for coming, I really do hope you come again. I’d love to dance with you both again, maybe try out Goldeyes’ tango.” She smiled at them both, “You take care of each other, you understand me? I don’t want to hear any unseemly gossip about you two darlings.”
“We will.” Kazuya said. “And we’ll be back.”

“Good, I’m glad to hear it. I’ll looking forward to seeing you.” She grinned. “All of you.”

Kazuya rolled his eyes at her. “Ahh, Georgie, look at you being all sly.”

“I do try, sugar.”

Kazuya felt his phone vibrate. “That’s our car; we do have to go, but thank you again.”

“Have a good night!” She waved and turned back to the bar.

Kazuya slid his arm around Eijun’s waist. “Let’s go.”

Eijun nodded, and they walked out together into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be shorter, probably, unless I can mush up sexy times enough to make it 5k long.

Comments, statements, questions?
Love you all, thanks for reading.
At Last

Chapter Summary

Smut.
Sex.
Mush w/dicks.
How ever you slice it, it comes up porn.

Chapter Notes

This is really not much more than smut.
If that's not your thing, you might want to scroll to the end, where there's an amazing illustration by Daiya No Ace Fanworks.

Check her out, she's amazing.

No one saw the spoiler in the last chapter, huh?
It's for something else I have going, you may not have read it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kazuya guided Eijun to the waiting limo, stopping to talk to Ichido. “We’re done; can you please take us back to the hotel?”

“Of course, Miyuki-san.” Ichido replied, closing the door behind them and taking the driver’s seat.

Eijun turned to Kazuya, lacing their fingers together. “Kaz, this has been the most amazing night. I say that every year, I know, but you always give me the best birthdays. I don’t know how you know what to do, they’re always perfect.”

“I don’t know if I agree with that, but I’m glad you like them. I love you and want to give you the world, Sawamura Eijun.” Kazuya ran his thumb over the back of Eijun’s hand, caressing him.

“You are my world, Miyuki Kazuya. You and Peanut. I don’t need or want anything else.”

“I feel the same, Ei. I really do.”

“Good. Glad we talked that out.” Eijun smirked at him.

Kazuya laughed. “You’re such a goof.”

“But you love me anyway.”

“Yes, yes I do.” Kazuya sighed. “For my sins, I do.”

Eijun laughed, “Poor baby, so abused.”
“I am.” Kazuya agreed. “That was fun, though. We should do it again.”

“We should.” Eijun concurred, and they fell into conversation while the limo drove them through the late night streets of Tokyo.

After a while, they pulled up in front of the Imperial and Ichiro came around to let them out.

“Thank you for the ride, Ichiro, you’ve been great.” Kazuya said, passing him a large tip.

“It’s been my pleasure, Miyuki-san.” He responded, bowing.

Eijun climbed out of the car and smiled at the driver. “Yes, thank you, Ichido. You’ve been a wonderful driver.”

“Not at all, Sawamura-san. It was a privilege to drive you.”

They wished him a good night, heading into the building and to their elevator. Stepping inside when it came, Kazuya waited until the door closed and slid in close to Eijun, unbuttoning his jacket and wrapping his arms around his waist.

“Hey, you.” Eijun said, grinning at his boy.

Kazuya smiled back. “Hi, gorgeous.” He angled in for a kiss. “I’ve wanted to kiss you all night. You’re so damned beautiful.”

Eijun met him halfway, whispering, “You know I had such a hard time keeping my hands to myself. I want to touch you so much.” Their lips met, slotted together, and Eijun’s arms wrapped around Kazuya. He had just deepened the kiss, pulling Kazuya in close, when the elevator doors opened; they arrived at their suite.

Kazuya stepped back, breaking the kiss. “Hold that thought.” He slipped his hand in Eijun’s, and pulled him into the sitting room, over to the champagne bucket that was clearly recently delivered. “I’ll get the bucket, can you grab the glasses?” Kazuya didn’t want to release Eijun’s hand, he felt like he needed to be touching him, felt like he wouldn’t be able to function if they weren’t in constant contact.

“Yeah, I’ve—but Kaz, you can’t drink this?”

“It’s non-alcoholic champagne.” Kazuya smirked and Eijun grinned.

“Wait? They make such a thing? That’s awesome.” Eijun grabbed the glasses and tightened his grip on Kazuya’s hand. “Where are we going?” He asked as Kazuya lead him into the master bedroom.

“You didn’t notice this?” Kazuya asked, heading towards the wall of windows. He stopped at the curtains on the one side and pushed them back, revealing a door to the outside balcony.

“No, I didn’t—but I was mostly worried about getting ready, I didn’t look around much. This is cool, though.”

They stepped through the door onto the balcony, and Kazuya set the champagne bucket down on the small table that was there. He let go of Eijun so that he could open the bottle, and Eijun wandered over to the railing, leaning on it and looking out over the city. “Gorgeous view, Kaz.”

“It is.” Kazuya brought over two glasses, handing one to Eijun. “To you, Ei. May all your dreams
Eijun tapped his glass to Kazuya’s. “To us, because without you, none of my dreams will come true, life would be a nightmare.”

“To us, then.” Kazuya said with a soft smile. “Because you’re right.”

They drank, standing side by side at the railing, admiring the view. “This is a great view.” Kazuya said, setting his glass on the railing. He put his arm around Eijun, and pulled him towards him a little. “But I can think of a better one.” He laid a soft hand on Eijun’s cheek and turned him. “That’s better.” He said as he tilted his head and leaned in to kiss the boy. “That’s perfect.” He whispered as their lips slotted together.

Eijun melted into the kiss, lips parting and mouth moving, and they both groaned, stepping closer and deepening the kiss, love and lust and commitment, care and desire flowing between them. Eijun set his glass on the railing, and turned fully to Kazuya, sliding his arms under inside his jacket and vest, resting his hands on the tops of Kazuya’s hipbones. Kaz sighed at the familiar feeling, and splayed his hands across Eijun’s back, trying to convey through his touch how much he adored everything about his husband.

Breaking the kiss to nibble on his jaw, Kazuya whispered, “Let’s go in. I told you I want to strip off your clothes on a comfortable bed, and I meant it. I want to kiss every inch of you, watch you squirm, make you moan, make you forget your name.”

“That sounds...ohgod, yes.” Eijun felt his eyes cross as his brain kicked into overdrive. “Yes.”

He felt the corners of Kazuya’s mouth turn up in a smirk where he was kissing his neck, and couldn’t even find the willpower to be irritated by his smugness.

“And maybe you can show me whatever it is that’s purple? My mind’s been going crazy all evening. I’d love to see it; love to see you in it.” Kazuya continued ministering to Eijun’s neck. He was incredibly turned on and yet his mind was surprisingly clear. He wanted to do this, wanted to make Eijun feel everything, wanted to touch every bit of him, wanted everything he had to give. He also knew that this was going to be one of the times when he was in complete control of himself, where he’d have not only the luxury of indulging himself in every inch of his boy, but he’d remember every bit, every detail, with clarity. This didn’t happen often; Kazuya had the tendency to lose himself, but not tonight.

“What’s it going to be, Kaz? Stripping me or me stripping for you?” Eijun panted out, hands moving over his sides and back, neck bent so Kazuya could have easier access.

Kazuya smirked into his neck. “Both.” He nipped at the bottom of his jawbone, and stepped back. Taking Eijun’s hand, he steered him back into the bedroom. Stopping in the middle of the room, Kazuya reached for Eijun’s bowtie, tugging on the end, slowly untying it. He pulled it off and ran it through his fingers, considering. “Do you think we need this?”

“No, I don’t think I do. It was just a suggestion, but I don’t think either of us is into that right now. Later, though. We’ve not done that for a while.”

“Why would we? I don’t think so? Unless you want me to tie you up. Which I’m more than willing to do.” Eijun reciprocated his move, removing Kazuya’s tie.

Kazuya thought for a minute. “No, I don’t think I do. It was just a suggestion, but I don’t think either of us is into that right now. Later, though. We’ve not done that for a while.”

“We haven’t, have we? I’d be a little worried about Peanut; we’ll just have to be careful.” Eijun stepped close to Kazuya, and licked at his jaw, whispering in his ear, “Unless I was the one who was
tied up, Kazuya-senpai.” Kazuya shuddered, Eijun’s voice further inflaming his already aroused nerve endings. Kazuya pulled back far enough to claim Eijun’s mouth, kiss rough with desire and unbridled lust. Eijun moaned at the assault, but returned everything Kazuya sent, returning love for desire, commitment for lust, banking things back a little so they could enjoy it longer.

“You’re still dressed; you need to stop distracting me.” Kazuya said, stepping back so he could get to Eijun’s shirt. He pulled the studs off gently, removing his cuff links, and set them all on the dresser beside the ties.

“I still haven’t thanked you properly for those.” Eijun said. “I think I should fix that.” He stepped up and unbuttoned Kazuya’s vest, stripping him down to his shirt. Taking care of Kazuya’s studs and cufflinks, Eijun stripped off his shirt, leaving Kazuya in an undershirt. He stopped his ministrations for a second to inspect his pants. “This is clever, Kaz. I hope they stay comfortable for a while.”

“They should.” Kazuya said, pulling Eijun back upright. “Eijun, stay still, okay? I want to do this for you; your turn will come later.”

“But it’s my birthday?” Eijun complained. “I should be able to do what I want.”

“You can. Later. Right now, I want this.” Kazuya met Eijun’s gaze, allowing him to see the desire and love he had for him. “Will you let me? Please?”

Eijun was powerless against the emotions Kazuya was showing him, it was rare for his boy to be this insistent—the only place he was really dictatorial was on the playing field. “Of course, Kaz. If that’s what you really want.”

“It is.” Kazuya affirmed, and continued his ministrations. He pulled Eijun’s shirt off, draping it across the back of a chair. Pulling the bottom of his undershirt out of his pants, he stripped that off as well, tossing it to join the shirt. He ran his hands over Eijun’s chest and stomach, lips and tongue following, kissing, laving, sucking. Eijun stood as still as he could, honoring Kazuya’s wishes. He couldn’t remain perfectly still, though, his hand carded through Kazuya’s hair, the other one rubbing his back, his shoulders, whatever he could reach.

Kazuya pushed Eijun back onto the bed. “Feet.” He said, and Eijun let him take off his shoes and socks, placing them to one side. Stepping up to Eijun, legs on either side of his thighs, Kazuya slid into his lap, arms wrapping around his neck. “You’re mine, Sawamura Eijun. Every last gorgeous inch of you.”

Eijun grinned, feral and bright. “And you’re mine, too. Don’t forget that.”

“I never do.” Kazuya said, as he dropped a quick, hard kiss on Eijun’s mouth before he stood up. He quickly shed his own shoes and socks, undershirt and pants, before he stepped back over to the bed and pulled Eijun to his feet. “Okay, now it’s your turn. Show me.” He commanded, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Eijun nodded. “As you wish.” Unhooking his pants, he stopped and smirked at Kazuya. “Are you sure you want me to do this?”

“God, yes.” Kazuya said, eyes bright and gleaming.

Eijun raked his eyes down Kazuya’s body, seeing the clear evidence of his desire, and the smirk fell away into a softer smile. “Anything for you, Kaz.” He unzipped his pants and let them fall to the ground, stepping out of them.

Kazuya’s eyes widened and he felt his breath catch. “Purple suits you,” he manage to choke out,
feeling all the blood rushing out of his brain. Eijun was wearing—as he had expected—purple panties. But they were not the satin he was expecting; these were all lace boy shorts. There was no lining, nothing hiding, and Kazuya could see everything. He could see that Eijun’s cock was hard, straining against the lace, that his head was engorged and leaking. He’d worn, and seen worn, enough lingerie to know that one of the appeals was the contrast between the masculine and the feminine, but in this case, that wasn’t even there. The cut and the fit of the underwear and Eijun’s broad shoulders and defined stomach all just somehow went together, combining to make this irresistible, lovely, dead sexy picture. His mouth went dry and he couldn’t say anything else.

Eijun saw Kazuya’s eyes widen, and grinned as the silence stretched on. He was glad that they’d been together for as long as they had, that he knew every nuance of Kazuya’s expression, or he’d have been feeling pretty self-conscious by now—but he knew he’d just gained the upper hand, and he was more than willing to take advantage of it. He strolled across the floor, and slid onto Kazuya’s lap, exactly as his husband had done earlier. Laying his arms on Kazuya’s shoulders, he grinned at his still stunned boy.

“Now what, Kazuya-senpai?” He asked, teasingly. “Do you want to take them off of me?”

Kazuya’s hands ran up his sides, over the lace, teasing at the elastic band. “Not yet. Later, maybe.” He smoothed over the lace, slipping a finger inside one of the leg bands. “These are amazing, Ei. We need to get you a bunch of these; they look so damned good on you.”

“They’re surprisingly comfortable. Do you think I should wear them in a game? If I got white ones, no one would know. Except you, of course.” Eijun’s lips tilted in a wicked grin.

Kazuya groaned. “You wouldn’t.” He glared.

“Oh, really?”

“You would. I know you would, you wicked creature. You have so many people fooled; they all think you’re just sweet and slightly stupid Sawamura.”

“Thank you.”

Kazuya groaned and fell back onto the bed, bringing Eijun with him. “There’s got to be a rule or something about stealing a guy’s lines while you’re wearing panties and looking like sin. There has to be.”

Eijun cackled from atop him. “I don’t think that’s a thing, Kaz. But you can try, write the Diet and complain. I’m sure they’ll get right on that.”

Laughing, Kazuya dug his fingers into Eijun’s sides, making him squirm and roll off him. Taking advantage, he climbed on top and lay down. Hard.

“Ooof! You’re heavy, Kaz.” Eijun laughed, running his hands up Kazuya’s sides.

“Am I?” Kaz started to move. “I’m sorry, I didn’t realize…” He was suddenly self-conscious of himself, Peanut was growing and he’d gained some weight. Haruichi had told him it was normal, but he wasn’t sure.

“Wait, no.” Eijun tightened his arms around him. “Don’t go, I was just teasing. You’re fine, you’re perfect, you’re gorgeous.”

“I’m not, though. I’m gaining weight, there’s no way the baby weighs ten pounds already.” Kazuya argued.
“Hang on a second, are you being serious?” Eijun searched his face. “You are. Okay, first of all. You do realize that I’m hard as a rock, leaking all over the place, right? And I’m not some teenager whose hormones aren’t under control. You’ve had me switched on all night.” He thrust up; rubbing his crotch against Kazuya’s to underscore the point.

“Secondly. You’re pregnant. With our baby.” He brought his hands up to cup Kazuya’s face. “You’re carrying our child. And those pounds are going to extra blood and tissue and things that Peanut needs to live. There’s no way that would make you any less attractive, any less gorgeous to me. You’re devastating, Miyuki Kazuya. I don’t know how else to say it, you’re it for me. You gain all the weight you and Peanut need to be healthy, alright? You will never be anything less than my perfect ideal, even when you’re big as a house. That’s the baby, our baby, and I can’t imagine how that would make you anything but even more appealing.” He still saw the flash of doubt in Kazuya’s eyes, and made a decision.

“Okay, it’s my turn.” He pushed him back over onto his back. “I’m going to have to show you, right?” Eijun climbed on top of Kazuya. “If this is uncomfortable for you, let me know.” He lowered himself to cover Kazuya, skinship and worship rolled into one.

“You don’t have to do this, Ei.” Kaz said, voice a little broken. “I’m sorry, I don’t know why I think this way, I know you love me.”

Eijun pushed up, climbing off him and sitting on his knees. “I don’t either, Kaz. You’re my everything, you and Peanut.” He ran a soothing hand over Kazuya’s baby bump. “You’re gorgeous, and I’ll do anything to make sure you know it. How would you have felt if Haruko was still with us? Do you think you would have found me less than attractive?”

“No.” Kazuya said, emphatically. “You’d be beautiful pregnant, all big belly and golden eyes. I don’t know, Ei. I just...I think it’s tied up in baseball and us and...sometimes I get stuck in my head. I know that me not playing doesn’t make you love me less, doesn’t make us not work, that my worth isn’t defined by my catching stats. I think it’s the same thing here, I just have to get my brain to cooperate.”

“Okay, I can see that.” Eijun frowned. “I remember what a hard time you had with that before. I’m just going to have to remind you how gorgeous you are at every opportunity.” He bent over and kissed Kazuya’s belly. “Starting now.”

“No, no.” Kazuya pulled Eijun to him. “I want to do this, okay?”

“Sure, Kaz.” Eijun smiled at him softly. “Whatever you want. Where do you want me?”

“Eventually, I want you inside me. I want you deep inside me, where I can feel every inch of you.”

“It’s my birthday! Don’t I get some say in this?”

“Okay, what do you want?” Kazuya queried, hand running up Eijun’s side.

“I want to top.” Eijun said with a grin.

Kazuya snorted. “You’re ridiculous, you know that?”

“Yeah, I do.” Eijun said. “But I love you.”

“And I love you.” Kazuya responded. “Here, lay back please?”

“As you wish.” Eijun grinned and laid down.
“Thank you.” Kazuya straddled him, bending down to catch his lips. He kissed him softly, tentatively. Eijun refused to have that; he pulled him down to meet him more fully, bringing tongue and teeth into play. Kazuya moaned into Eijun’s mouth, and Eijun’s hands roamed, feeling back and sides, tracing bones and muscles. Kazuya steadied, lowering himself onto his elbows, kissing Eijun deeply. After a few minutes of indulging himself, Kazuya broke the kiss and began to indulge himself in other ways. Starting at the top, he worked his way down Eijun, laving, touching, kissing, tweaking. He knew exactly where to touch to make him moan, how hard to bite to make him whimper, and when to stop before it got uncomfortable.

Riding the knife's edge of ‘too much’, Eijun allowed himself to get lost in the feelings, let the sensations roll over him in waves. He trusted Kazuya to recognize when it got too overwhelming, and to bring them back from the brink. His hands roamed, fingers tangling in hair, mapping bone, familiar and much loved skin under his fingertips. He knew he was talking, too, imprecations and praises falling from his lips, moaned out of his throat, all aimed at the boy who was slowly, methodically, taking him apart.

Kazuya loved doing this, loved every sound that came out of Eijun’s mouth, every twitch, every moan. He worked him over as if it was his avocation, worshipping his body as if it was his last hope of seeing heaven. He worked his way down, down, until he got to the panties. Running a gentle thumb over the waistband, he stopped and considered his next move.

“You look so amazing right now, Eijun. You’re so fucking hard; your cock is leaking all over the place.” He said as he thought, and Eijun answered with a moan and an almost incoherent whine of ‘Want you so bad’.

“I know, I know.” Kazuya soothed, as he ran a finger down the hardness that he could see through the lace. Eijun whined, thrusting up into his finger, begging for more. Bending close, Kazuya blew on his cock, watching him twitch.


Kazuya answered in kind. “I love you too, Eijun.” He got tired of teasing, and pulled down the panties, watching with fascination as his cock sprang up, imprints of the lace on the bottom side. “God, you’re gorgeous. Look at you, all spread out for me.” Kazuya bent in and licked at him, licking up the leaking fluid. “So fucking beautiful. And all mine.” He bent down and took Eijun into his hand, engulfing the head with his mouth. Eijun keened, loud and long, hips moving and hands seeking purchase, tangling in Kazuya’s hair.

Mouth moving, hands reaching what he couldn’t swallow, Kazuya worked him over, sucking and licking, tonguing and laving, soaking up every moan and word that Eijun said, using them as his defense against the voices in his head. He continued until he felt Eijun stutter underneath him, knew he was close to coming. Pulling off, he made his way back up Eijun, kissing and sucking and loving, until he reached his mouth, where he indulged himself some more, allowing all his fears and doubts to be melted away by the heat of the boy spread beneath him.

He sat up and reached into the bag he’d left on the side table, pulling out the bottle of lube. Eijun’s eyes cleared a little and he sat up as well, reaching for the bottle.

“Let me, Kaz.” Eijun said. “I want to do something.”

“Sure.” Kazuya handed over the lube and rose onto his knees a little, just enough to give Eijun access to his ass.

“You’ve not let me touch you at all, Kaz. Can’t I do something for you?”
“You can prep me, I want to feel you, I want you to fuck me.” Kazuya said with a smirk. “Other than that, nope. I’m good, I really am.”

“If you’re sure.” Eijun said as he slipped his first finger in, gnawing on Kazuya’s shoulder as he did so. “I love to touch you, you know.” He worked him slowly, giving him time to adjust.

“More.” Kazuya demanded, and Eijun snorted.

“And you call me impatient.” Eijun said, but he gingerly slid in a second finger, stopping when he felt Kazuya stiffen. He stayed that way until he relaxed again, and then continued.

“More.” Kazuya insisted after a few minutes.

“Seriously, you don’t get to call me greedy any more. New rule.” Eijun lifted his head from his rather thorough exploration of Kazuya’s collarbones to make the proclamation.

“Write the DIet, Ei. See if that works.” Kazuya snarked and gasped when Eijun crooked his fingers and hit his prostate.

“Smartass.”

“Hey, you’re the one with the fingers in it.”

Eijun laughed, he couldn’t help it. “God, I love you, you know that?”

“I hope so, seeing as you have your fingers in my ass and your baby in my belly.”

“I take it back, I fucking adore you.” Eijun muttered, concentrating on what he was doing.

“That’s good enough, Ei. I’m good.”

“You sure?”

“Yup.” Kazuya took some of the lube and spread it on Eijun.

“Wait, what about a condom?”

“I can’t get pregnant, remember?” Kazuya snarked.

“Yeah, but you don’t like dealing with the mess.” Eijun pointed out.

“Generally, you’re right. But tonight I don’t mind. Now, can we please fuck?” He raised up on his knees to get in position.

“Well, when you put it that way, how can I resist—” Eijun broke off with a moan as Kazuya lowered himself in one smooth slide, he could feel that he wasn’t quite stretched enough, but Kazuya always did like riding the edge of pain, making himself feel just a little more than maybe he should.

“Oh, god. So good. You feel amazing.” Eijun babbled, losing himself in the sensation.

Kazuya moaned, leaning back on his hands to get the angle he needed. “You too, god. I could do this forever.”

“That’s it, you’re staying pregnant.” Eijun groaned.

“You want us to raise our own baseball team just so you don’t have to wear a condom?” Kazuya
huffed out, still moving. “You’re insane.”

“We could take turns?” Eijun ran his hand down Kazuya’s front, running teasing fingers along his heretofore-neglected cock.

Kazuya whined at the teasing, “Not the point, but there’s something else you might not remember.” He tightened down on Eijun, causing him involuntarily to tighten his grip. “That’s better.”

“What’s that?” Eijun deliberately loosened his hold, fingers skimming lightly down Kazuya’s stomach.

“We’ll talk about it when you’re not balls deep in my ass, okay?” Kazuya grated out. “Touch me, dammit, don’t make me do all the work.”

Eijun grinned and wrapped his hand around Kazuya. “As you wish, Kazuya-senpai.” His grin turned into a full-blown smile as Kazuya simultaneously tightened around him and glared.

“You’re so good, Ei. God, you’re amazing.” Eijun’s hand stuttered to a halt, brain frying at the overload of feeling and praise. “Now, do you want to do this or do you just want to keep throwing kinks at each other?”

Eijun laughed, he couldn’t help it. “God, I adore you. You’re perfect.”

“Yeah, well, I guess you’re alright too.” Kazuya sat up a bit, and Eijun leaned in, resting his head on Kazuya’s shoulder. Kazuya’s hands came up and rested on Eijun’s sides, anchoring himself while they moved. Eijun stroked in time with Kazuya’s movements, his other hand around his back, rubbing and supporting him.

Together, they moved, they flew, they loved.

“You feel amazing, so good.”

“I love you so much.”

“I love you too, can you move a little faster?”

“Harder, please.”

“That’s perfect…”

“Oh, god, I’m so close.”

“Good, come for me, Ei.”

And so he did, trusting Kazuya to catch him as he always did. Kazuya followed shortly, reveling in the feeling, enjoying the sensation of being filled by this man he loved so dearly.

Slowly, softly, they came down, wrapped in each other’s arms and lodged firmly in each other’s hearts. Kazuya moved and Eijun made a sound of protest. “Stay for a minute, okay?”

“Sure, as long as I’m not too heavy.” Kazuya agreed.

Eijun snorted. “You’re not. Never. You’re amazing and gorgeous and sexy and hot as hell.” His arms tightened. “I’m stupidly in love with you, Kazuya. And I always will be.”

“That’s quite a happy coincidence.” Kazuya chuckled fondly. “Because I feel exactly the same
Eijun dropped a soft kiss on his cheek. “Are you alright? Your knees hurting? You should move if they are.”

“No, I’m alright for now, but I can’t stay like this long.” Kazuya shifted, and Eijun started to slide out. “I’d better get up, deal with the mess.”

“I’ll help.” Eijun said. “We probably both could do with a shower before bed, and I’m sure you want to take out those contacts. They look amazing, but your eyes are going to dry out.”

“That’s a good idea. Let’s do that.” Kazuya stood, and Eijun joined him, pulling the panties off completely before standing. “Put those somewhere so we can take them home. You’re keeping them.” He demanded, smirking.

Eijun smiled back, mildly. “You’re right, I am. And getting some more, they’re oddly comfortable.”

“And you’re going to make me crazy with them, aren’t you?”

“You know me so well.” Eijun said, crossing over to him and wrapping an arm around him. “Let’s go shower.”

Later, much later, Eijun woke up to a hand rubbing his side and Kazuya moving restlessly behind him. He started to roll over, but Kazuya’s hand tightened, holding him in place.

“So, Ei-chan.” Kazuya purred in his ear. “Why don’t you reach over to the nightstand and hand me those ties, like the good boy I know you are.”

Eijun shuddered in anticipation and did exactly as he was asked. “Here you go, Kazuya-senpai.”

Kazuya slid out of bed and headed into the sitting room, leaving a sleeping Eijun behind. He pulled a throw off the back of one of the chairs and stepped through the door onto the balcony, wrapping the blanket around himself to ward off the early morning chill.

Stepping to the railing, he watched as the sun rose over the buildings of Tokyo, peaceful and serene. His mind drifted to the events of the previous day and night, and he smiled at the memories. Another successful birthday for his boy, another wonderful day of memories for them both. He knew their lives were changing, that the baby was moving them in a completely unexpected and uncharted direction, but he felt at peace with that, he knew they’d be all right.

Laying his hand on his stomach, he felt the tug of affection, of love and protection, for the catalyst of all the change. Their child, this child.
“Good morning, Peanut.”
Is anyone even interested in this anymore?
I know I neglected it for a while, but I'm planning on getting back on track.

I thought the last chapter was full of goodies—first dance at the wedding, house in Nagano—but no one seemed that enthused.
If this is getting boring, please let me know, okay? I don't want to make this a slog for anyone.

Thanks!
Everybody Talks

Chapter Summary

Mochi Talks.
Eijun drives.
Kazuya negotiates.
And there's a return of the ranch dressing, plus decisions are made.

Chapter Notes

Good Morning!
Here's this, I had it done last night but couldn't edit it.
I've done a quick edit, I'll check for more mistakes later.

Hope you enjoy, this is just the boys doing what my boys do best. Talking about things.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Thirteen (but officially past the first trimester)

Eijun wrapped his arm around Kazuya’s waist after helping him from the car. It was Friday, and they were meeting Mochi (and Ryou) for dinner at the American Diner. Kazuya was still having his cheeseburger cravings and Mochi had some preliminary sketches to show them, so they had agreed to meet here and kill two birds with one stone. They hadn’t had a chance to see either of the pair much since Eijun was in the hospital and they wanted to catch up.

“I don’t see either of their cars; they must be running a little late.” Kazuya looked around the parking lot, eyes squinted against the sunset.

“Me either. Let’s go ahead in and grab a seat. I’m tired.” Eijun said, guiding him towards the restaurant. “That game was longer than it needed to be. Those guys were tough!”

“It’s good for you, you needed it. You’ve been slacking recently.” Kazuya smirked.

Eijun squawked out a protest, to Kazuya’s never ending amusement. “Miyuki Kazuya, you take that back! You know I haven’t been slacking.”

“Yes, yes. The great Sawamura puts forth maximum effort in all things.” Kazuya said with a grin, opening the door for them.

“Smartass,” Eijun said without heat, chuckling. “I think you’re grumpy and tired so you’re happy that we all are too.”

“Would I ever do such a thing? How you wound me.”
“I can’t wait until August, then.” Eijun rolled his eyes. “When Peanut’s big and you’re hot all the
time.”

“What? It shouldn’t be *that* bad.”

“Famous last words, Miyuki Kazuya.”

They followed the server to their booth, and slid into one side.

“We might as well order some pickles, if you want them.” Kazuya suggested.

Eijun laughed. “If I want them? If we didn’t order them you’d be grumpier than you already are.” He
smiled at their server as she approached the table.

“You’re not wrong.” Kazuya admitted, ordering his drink and the fried pickles.

“Can we have extra ranch, please?” Eijun asked to the glare of his husband. “What? You always run out.”

“You’re not wrong, but still,” Kazuya said. “You shouldn’t indulge me like that. That crap can’t be
good for me.”

“I think you’re fine, and whatever you want, I’m going to do my best to give it to you. A little extra ranch isn’t going to hurt anyone, and that way you’ll have plenty.” He smirked, “And you’ll stop glaring at me when I take some too.”

“I don’t...well, okay. I do.” Kazuya admitted. “I don’t even know why I like it so much.”

“Me either, it is kinda gross.” Eijun agreed. “We haven’t introduced Mochi to it yet, this is going to be great!”

“What about Ryou?”

“He probably will refuse to try it.” Eijun answered. “And I’m not sure I want to be held responsible if he does and likes it. God knows what he’ll do.”

“True enough.” They glanced up as Mochi slid into the booth, placing a folder on the table.

“Sorry I’m late.”

“No, you’re fine.” Eijun responded. “How are you doing?”

“I’m good.” Mochi said with a smirk. “You know me.”

“Where’s Ryou?”

“He’s still at work.” Mochi sighed. “He’s going to be late. Again.”

Eijun looked at Kazuya, who raised an eyebrow.

“I’m going to ask again, and this time don’t lie. How are you doing, Mochi?” Eijun insisted.

Mochi ran his hand through his hair. “I said I was...I don’t know. I’m not sure.”

“What’s going on, Mochi-senpai?” Eijun said softly, watching his face.

“That’s the problem, I don’t know. I don’t want to bug you two with my problems, though, you have
enough to deal with. How’s Peanut?” Mochi diverted.

“She’s fine.” Kazuya said shortly and then his voice gentled. “You helped us more times than I can
count, Moch, let us help you, okay? Even if we can’t do anything, at least we can listen.”

“Oh, yeah.” Mochi capitulated. “It’s Ryou. I…I know he has to work long hours, I do. I mean,
he’s on call every other week, and I know that’s part of the practice, part of his job.” Mochi fiddled
with his straw wrapper, distracting himself. “It just seems like he’s gone more than he used to be, like
he doesn’t have time for me.”

“Have you spoken to him about this?” Eijun asked.

“I haven’t. I can’t. How do you say ‘hey, you know the job you love? I need you to not do it so
much.’ He loves what he does, and it’s a lot of work to run your own practice, I know this. I just…I
miss him.” Mochi finished, simply.

“You know you need to talk to him.” Kazuya told Mochi. “He’s not stupid, he probably knows
you’re miserable, he doesn’t know why. I’m sure if you speak with him about it, you two can work it
out. I don’t know how many times you told me to talk to Eijun about what was bothering me; I think
it’s time you took your own advice.”

“I know, I do.” Mochi agreed. “But, here’s the thing. I know he feels badly because Haruichi gave
up Satoru to concentrate on the practice, but he didn’t break up with me. I’m scared if I say anything,
he’s going to take it as a sign we should break up, and I don’t want that. I just want to figure out a
way to make all of this work.” He ran his hands through his hair.

“Then you have to lead with that, let him know you don’t want to break up, you want to make it
work. Ask him how you can help, maybe there’s something he’s doing you can do for him? The
books, some kind of paperwork? Or just…I don’t know; start bringing him lunch to the office, so you
can eat together? It may be on you to make some extra effort. I know you’re flexible and you do
understand, but it’s eating at you and you need to say something.” Eijun chimed in. “You two have
been together for longer than Kaz and I, you have something special. Don’t let a little talking get in
your way.”

“You’re absolutely right, Ei. And I will, I’m sure we’ll figure this out.” Mochi smiled, a little sad, a
little wearily, but it was a smile. At that point, the server brought them out the fried pickles, and
Mochi took the opportunity to change the subject. “What are these?”

“Fried pickles.” Eijun said, grinning.

Kazuya continued. “Don’t ask, just eat them. Dip them in the white stuff first. It’s kinda disgusting,
but also really good.”

Mochi made a face at them. “I don’t know if I trust you two.”

“What? We eat them every time we come here.” Kazuya said.

Eijun chimed in, “And we have to order extra dip, Kaz likes it so much.”

“Which reminds me.” Mochi shot Kazuya a glare. “Since when did you like cheeseburgers? Or any
kind of burger?”

“I don’t, but Peanut does. Cheeseburgers are the only thing I’ve been craving. It’s weird, because I
don’t like them generally. But yeah. Blame Peanut.”
“Hey, I don’t mind. I love them. Thanks, Peanut!” Mochi smirked and picked up a pickle, eyeing it dubiously. “Okay, I’m going to try this. If it’s gross, Eijun, be ready for death.”

“Wait, why me? Kazuya’s the one who loves them!” Eijun objected.

Mochi smirked. “He’s pregnant, and I don’t want to hurt Peanut.”

“Fair enough.” Eijun shrugged and watched with interest as Mochi dipped, and then ate, a fried pickle.

“This is disgusting.” Mochi said, reaching in the basket for another one. “It can’t possibly be good for you. Is this even food?” He asked as he dipped the new pickle.

“Glad you like it.” Kazuya snarked.

Mochi nodded. “It’s terrible. Do you think we should order another basket? I bet Ryou would hate these.”

“If we want more after this is done, sure.” Kazuya said.

“Cool.” Mochi slid the folder across the table. “While we’re waiting for Ryou, maybe we should go over these.”

“Ohhh!” Eijun said. “Peanut’s room?”

“Yeah, I drew a few ideas, we can start from there.” Mochi said, flipping open the folder. He pulled out a stack of papers. “Basically, I came up with three ideas for you to look at, and together we can figure out what you want to do.”

“These are all neat. You do such good work.” Kazuya picked up the first one, eyeing it closely. It was an image of a mural along one long wall of the room. The jungle animals from the comforter were all there, playing in the trees and hiding in the grass. It ran the length of the wall and the other walls were left plain, with the emphasis being on the mural.

Eijun picked up another one; this was a parade of animals, about four feet or so off the floor. They were lined up around the room, with stripes of color above and below. Mochi had added little things to differentiate the animals, one tiger was yawning while another was laying down, one of the monkeys had a banana and another was swinging by his tail, etc. “So cool.” Eijun said, passing it to Kazuya. “This is so well done.”

He looked at the third drawing. This was much simpler, just a stripe of colors around the room. It wasn’t straight, though, it curved and turned, following the walls and some pattern known only to Mochi, it zigzagged up one wall and cascaded down the next, abstract and interesting to look at. Eijun handed it to Kazuya. “This is so well done.”

Kazuya took it and looked it over. “Me too.” He examined it closely, examined all three of them closely, and looked over at Eijun. “Which do you like the best?”

“That’s not my call, remember? I’m the final voice in the Haruko stuff; you are when it comes to Peanut. I really like all of these, so whatever you pick is fine with me.”

“Remember, this is just a starting point.” Mochi interjected. “We can change things around if you want.”

Kazuya nodded. “Okay, I think I might like a little of all of them? I don’t want you to do a full wall
mural, that’s too much effort. I love the striped one, that’s my favorite, but could you add in some animals there? Not everywhere, just in a few places. Like some sliding down the slide, or hiding behind the stripes or something?”

“Let me look at that.” Mochi took the drawing back and squinted. “Okay, I can see what you’re saying and yeah, I think I can make that work. Like maybe a hippo lying in that dip, stuff like that?”


“Well, that was my favorite too; I think that’s a good idea.” Eijun grinned.

“Okay.” Mochi made some notes on the drawing. “I’ll get this worked up. When are you free to work on the room, Eijun? We should paint it soon so I have time to get this done.”

“We’re off, well, I’m off on Tuesday, we have a game Monday and Wednesday, so it’s a rest day for me. Kaz has a meeting that morning, but we don’t need him, we can start without him. I’ll see if I can get some of those boxes moved out before then, but we can do it if not.”

“Tuesday it is, then. We don’t need any more than two people, anyway.” Mochi agreed.

“Great, we’ll get it then.”

“Have you made any progress on Haruko’s memorial? I heard you mention it, and I’d love to see what you’re doing with it.” Mochi asked tentatively. “If you don’t want to talk about it, that’s fine too, I totally understand.”

“No, you’re fine.” Eijun said with a soft smile. “It was unexpectedly rough for a while, but I’m better now. We got the proof a few days ago, after a little back and forth. I think it’s perfect. Do you want to—?”

“What’s perfect?” Ryou inquired, sliding in beside Mochi. “Hi, You.” He squeezed his hand. “Sorry I’m late; one of my patients went into early labor. Technically, she’s Haruichi’s now, but she wanted me there.”

“Is everything alright?” Mochi asked, glancing at Kazuya.

“Yeah, she’s fine. The baby’s fine. It’s not difficult to stop early labor if we catch it soon enough.” He glanced at Kazuya. “Don’t worry; you and Peanut are going to be just fine.”

“I know, I really do.” Kazuya said with a grin. “She’s going to be great.”

“Good. Now, what is it you were discussing when I walked up?” Ryou inquired, one eyebrow raising sharply.

“Haruko’s memorial. We got the final proof a few days ago; I was offering to show Mochi. Would you like to see it?” Eijun asked, pulling out his phone.

“Yes, I’d love to.” Ryou said. “I didn’t know you’d named her. Haruko is a beautiful name.”

“Thanks” Kazuya said, while Eijun scrolled through his inbox. “We thought it was fitting.”

Eijun found the picture and opened it, passing it over the table. “There’s irises and asters, chrysanthemums and cherry blossoms in it. Mai does wonderful work, she really does.”

“I’ve never known anyone to be dissatisfied with her.” Ryou agreed. “I think it’s perfectly lovely. Is this the final version?” He passed the phone to Mochi.
“Yeah.” Eijun answered. “She made all the edits we asked for, and that’s perfect as it is, I think.”

“It’s beautiful, you’re right, Ei.” Mochi said quietly, passing the phone back over. “I’m glad.”

Eijun smiled at his friend. “Me too.” He closed the phone and put it away.

Mochi grinned at his boyfriend. “So, Ryou...have you ever had fried pickles?”

The following morning, Eijun put their bag in the trunk. They were coming back that evening, since the following day they were going to visit the grave of Kazuya’s grandfather with his dad, but they had a few things they needed to bring. He poked his head in the house to see where Kazuya was, and heard the bathroom door open. “You okay?”

“Yeah, just the usual. I hope you don’t mind making plenty of stops, I don’t know how well Peanut’s going to travel.”

“No worries, we’re not in any hurry.” Eijun stepped outside, followed by his husband. “We can stop whenever.”

“Thanks, and thanks again for stopping back at home so I could change. As comfortable as those clothes Sano made are, I much prefer sweats. Or those cotton lounge pants. I don’t know what I’m going to do in the summer when it gets real hot.” Kazuya wondered.

“No worries, Kaz, you and Peanut need to be comfortable. I have an idea for the summer, at least at home, but I need to look into it.” Eijun said as he closed Kazuya’s door. “Buckle up.”

“Yes, Dad.” Kazuya snarked, watching Eijun climb into his seat. “What would I do without you?”

“Who knows, you might be better off. Women hanging off of each arm, the world at your feet.” Eijun answered lightly.

“I wouldn’t want the world if you weren’t there.” Kazuya said. “You know that.”

“I do, I was just messing around.” Eijun said with a grin. “You started it, though.”

“Fair enough.” Kazuya said.

“We do have some things we should hash out, though. This may be a good time?”

“You’re right; there are some things I want to talk to you about.” Kazuya said. “What’s on your mind?”

“A few things, but they can wait until we’re out of the city. You go ahead.”

“Alright. First of all, how are you? I haven’t had a chance to check with you since we got the memorial art.”

“I’m fine, actually. Good. It’s great to have that done for her, feels like closure, you know? I mean, I’m still sad; we probably will be for a while. But I’m all right with it. We can give your dad his copy
tomorrow when we meet up with him.”

“We can do that.” Kazuya agreed. “And it still floors me when we talk about him like this, knowing we’re meeting with him for breakfast and to visit Grandfather. It’s so weird. I’m glad you’re feeling fine, though. If you start to feel badly, please let me know.”

“I will, I promise.” Eijun slipped his hand into Kazuya’s. “I never want to feel that alone again, and I know I don’t have to with you around.”

“That’s right.”

“What else, Kaz?”

“I was thinking that we probably need to get a new car.”

“We can fit a car seat in the back of this; it’s not a sports car. What are your thoughts?”

“Well, we’re used to going places together, and that’s fine, generally. But sometimes we may need to separate, pick up Peanut at the babysitter, take him to the doctor, make an emergency stop at the grocery store while the baby’s asleep, things like that. Also, my hours are different from yours and I know you don’t mind waiting around, but I don’t want to leave Peanut with sitters any more than I have to. With a second car, we could get to work when we need to and leave promptly. Also, remember, you’re off for a few months after I go back, so you’re going to be watching him. You need your own car for that.” Kazuya laid out his arguments. “Last, but not least, as much as I love this car, it doesn’t have much in trunk space. If we’re going to go to the ‘rents, we need room to tote Peanut’s stuff.”

“Okay, yeah. I can see that. What do you want, a minivan?” Eijun grinned. “Want to be a soccer mom?”

“You know, there’s another reason, something else I wanted to talk to you about. Now, this is totally a decision we should make together, and if you don’t want to do it, we can discuss it and figure it out.” Kazuya started, a little wary of bringing up something this important, but knowing it should be discussed.

Eijun’s brow wrinkled in confusion. “Okay. It’s fine, Kaz. We can talk about whatever.”

“Alright. Well. I’ve been thinking about things, and I don’t think I want Peanut to be an only child. I know my life would have been a lot different if I had a sibling, someone I could talk to. We’re both only children. Did you like it?” Kazuya stopped himself, not willing to try to convince Eijun of anything, wanting him to make his own decisions.

Eijun took a breath, ordering his thoughts while Kazuya waited patiently. He knew Eijun had learned to think things through and answer when he knew what he wanted to say. They’d worked together on that in college after Eijun came home upset one day after he botched an interview. He decided, in the stubborn way he had, to figure out how to control how he expressed his thoughts, and he had. He didn’t do it often around Kazuya, but he did whenever there was an unexpectedly big decision to make. He knew Eijun was considering it seriously, and was content to wait.

“Yes.” Eijun sighed out. “I do want to have more kids; I hated being an only child. All my friends with siblings envied me, but I envied them. I didn’t like not having someone I could talk to, someone who had the same story I did. I had ‘Kana, and she was wonderful, but it wasn’t the same.” Kazuya tightened his grip on Eijun’s hand, smiling widely. “How many were you thinking? I know I was joking about us staying pregnant the other night, but I’m not sure I want to have a baseball team’s
“I don’t know, I don’t have any numbers in my head. I just know more than one, can we say that? We’ll have at least one more, and then decide. Unless you have a number?”

“Naw, I hadn’t even gotten around to thinking about this yet. I’m good with playing it by ear.”

“Okay, good. But if either of us decide against more, we’ll revisit.”

“Of course.” Eijun smiled, squeezing his hand. “But we still haven’t decided on the car question.”

“I don’t know either.” Kaz admitted. “But we could ask Dad. He doesn’t work with them, but he’s always been interested. He’d probably know.”

“That sounds like a plan, we’ll do that.” Eijun agreed, and their conversation became general as Eijun dealt with traffic leaving Tokyo.

They’d just left the city limits when Kazuya asked Eijun to stop at the next gas station, Peanut was making himself known. They did so, and Eijun filled up the tank and grabbed them some cold drinks while Kazuya was occupied. They met back at the car and Eijun handed Kazuya his water.

“Thanks.”

“Not a problem.” Eijun started the car and merged back onto the highway, heading northwest.

“Now it’s your turn, we’re out of Tokyo.” Kazuya reminded him.

“For what? Oh, yeah.” Eijun laughed at himself. “Okay, there’s a couple of things. First of all the easy one. I’m not currently...what was it? ‘Balls deep in your ass’, I think. What did I forget?”

“Oh, that.” Kazuya chuckled. “I’m surprised you don’t remember from all of your reading, but maybe it didn’t come up? Anyway, after a man has a baby, his hormones adjust, or something, and he gets cyclic, more like the female fertility cycle. You know you’re basically fertile all the time, that there’s a fifty percent chance you’d get pregnant if you’re unprotected and off the pill, right? Well, afterwards, you’re predictable, and you know when you’re likely to get pregnant. And the cycle’s longer for guys; it’s every two months and lasts about a week. So the other seven weeks the pill is enough, you won’t need a condom.”

“Seriously? I know I didn’t read that. I would have remembered, for sure.” Eijun grinned. “That’s awesome. How do they know when?”

“You have to run a blood test every few days, it measures hormones. Like the one they use for diabetics, prick your finger and test. It takes a few cycles to get an idea of how you’re running, but you should have a good baseline by the third one.” Kazuya explained.

“Wow, that...that’s nice.”

“That doesn’t mean you get to top more, Eijun.”

“But Kaz….”

“No. Well, maybe. It’s just a little something different for us, so it’s good, right?”

“You’re right, it’s good. We’ll do what we always do, and work it out together. Speaking of which, there’s a couple more things for us to figure out, and it might take a bit. But we need to do it soon; now, I think. We have an hour or so to hash it out, and I think we’ll need it.”
“What’s that, Ei?” Kazuya wondered, turning to look at him. He couldn’t think of anything they hadn’t figured out.

“Well, it’s a couple of things about Peanut.” Eijun said. “Do you want easy or do you want hard?”

“Easy first, I think.”

“Okay. Have you thought about names yet?” Eijun inquired.

Kazuya knit his forehead. ‘A little, but not much. Have you?’

“Yes, and I think I know what I want to name Peanut, but I thought we could talk about it.”

“Sure, we have plenty of time, but we can start now. We don’t have to make a decision, though.”

“I know. But I thought it would be good if Peanut’s a girl to name her Akemi. If it’s a boy, Isamu.” Eijun waited for Kazuya to respond, he wasn’t quite sure how he’d react to the suggestion to name Peanut after his mother or grandfather.

“I...Eijun.” Kazuya’s voice broke. “You can’t spring something like this on me while we’re driving. You’d seriously be willing to name Peanut after my mom? Grandfather?”

“Yes, of course. Your mom was special, and I think it would be good to honor her memory. Same with your grandfather. I loved him and miss him terribly. I know you do too.”

“I do. And I’d love to name the babies after them; I love you so much. I didn’t even think about that, honestly. I just...you’re amazing. And you’re making me cry, dammit.” Kazuya reached into the glove box and grabbed a tissue to wipe at his eyes. “How do you know exactly what to do, what to say? You’re amazing, really you are. That’s perfect, thank you.”

Eijun smiled tearily. “Don’t cry, you’ll make me cry.” He intertwined their fingers. “It seemed obvious to me when I thought about it. I want to honor you, honor where you came from, and this seems like a perfect way to do it.”

“Again, I love you.” Kazuya squeezed his hand. “And it’s a wonderful way of honoring them. Do you want to tell the family?”

“That’s up to you, of course.” Eijun said. “It doesn’t matter to me.”

“Okay, well. If the timing seems right, we can tell them today. I do want to tell Dad tomorrow, I think it might help some.” Kazuya sniffed one more time, getting himself under control. “If that was the easy thing, I’m scared to ask what the hard thing is.”

“Oh. Well.” Eijun dithered a bit and then firmed his resolve. “We need to figure out how we’re going to announce Peanut. You’re starting to show and I think Georgie was right. If it were me, there’d already be rumors and chatter. You’re not the one they’re expecting to be expecting, so not many are watching you. I spent some time on the message boards the other day, and there’s a little bit of speculation. Not much, just some, mostly because of your untucked shirts and someone swearing they saw a baby bump when the wind blew your shirt.”

“Do we have to announce anything?” Kazuya whined. “Can’t they just mind their own business?”

Eijun laughed. “Have you seen the message boards? They’re unstoppable. Actually, they’re pretty good, they don’t bug us or anything, just stay in their sandbox and play.” He switched lanes and turned off the freeway, onto the country highway that led to their town.
“I’ll have to trust your word for that, I don’t go over there. Although I do admit they do seem to be better behaved than some fans.” Kazuya admitted. “I don’t know why we have to say anything.”

“We don’t.” Eijun said. “We can let them speculate until things are completely obvious, that would work. But if we say something first, we control the flow of information. If we leave it, there’s always the chance the management will let something slip as well.”

“True, true. They’re not ones to let any chance slip by them.” Kazuya agreed. “So what do you suggest? You know the fans best.”

“I think we should do something that will let them know, but nothing like a formal announcement.” Eijun said, low grin spreading as he considered their options. “Maybe something during a game? Do you trust me?”

Kazuya side-eyed him. “With my life, yes. In this, I’m not so sure. Actually, I do. I think you’re in the best position to make whatever gesture you think is necessary.”

“Alrighty, then. I’ll do my best to not embarrass you.” Eijun paused. “Too much.”

“Brat.”

“Thank you.”

Kazuya snorted. “I never did hear back from the Diet about that. Maybe I need to give them some more time.”

Eijun laughed. “Yeah, you do that. See what they say.”

“Was that it? Or is there something else we need to figure out?”

“I don’t think so, Kaz. We do need to do some serious shopping for baby stuff, and I think I have a handle on that, all those lists I had, I’ve whittled down. We should be good if we get that stuff, at least in the beginning.”

“Okay, good.” Kazuya smiled at him. “Have I told you lately how much I appreciate all that you do to make me comfortable, to make sure Peanut’s alright?”

“Have I told you lately how much I love you for being willing to carry our child? It’s amazing to me, and I’ll do anything I can to help.” Eijun smiled back and turned down a road Kazuya didn’t recognize.

“Where are we—” He stopped as Eijun turned into a driveway and pulled up to a house.

Eijun turned off the car and grinned at Kazuya.

“Welcome home.”

Chapter End Notes

*hugs*
Thank you for reading and spending your time with this fic.

I adore the lot of you, you know that?

If you feel like it, leave a message for me, let me know what you want to see or what you're tired of.

Thanks!
Kazuya turned to Eijun, confused. “What...is this the—?”

“Yeah. I had Mom come by and unlock it; I wanted to look it over with just you, if that’s all right. I figured we could be more...honest, I guess, if we didn’t have the realtor or the ‘rents looking over our shoulder,” Eijun explained. “Maybe I should have talked to you about it first, I’m sor—”

“No, no!” Kazuya broke in. “You’re right, this is a good idea. I feel like I’m going to have a ton of questions, but they’re things we need to discuss together, not things for the realtor. If you can’t answer them, we’ll ask Mom, okay?”

“Sounds like a plan. Stay there, let me help you, you’ve been sitting for a while.” Eijun climbed out of the car and walked around to open Kazuya’s door. Kazuya took his hand and stood, smiling his thanks.

“I’m fine, not dizzy.”

“Good. So, before we go any further, what do you think?”

Kazuya looked around, noting the good-sized patch of lawn in front of the wraparound porch, the neglected, but clearly visible flowerbeds that ran along the pathway and the front of the building. There were plenty of trees as well; it looked like the clearing the house sat in had been carved out of the forest over years.

“The land backs up into a national park, so there shouldn’t be any development or deforestation back there.” Eijun explained. “Most of the farmland they sold was behind where we’re standing, in front of the house. There’s also a decent sized clearing in back, this house has been here for decades.”

The house itself reflected the state of the flowerbeds, neglected but not destroyed, the echo of what it could be clear. Paint was peeling off the siding and there were tiles missing from the roof, but nothing looked like it was sagging or decaying.

“That’s going to need some work.” Eijun said, looking at the house. “It doesn’t look too bad structurally, at least from out here, and you said they’d had it inspected?”

“Yeah, it had a few issues, but nothing major. Mostly cosmetic.”

“Glad to hear that. If it was pristine inside we might feel badly about changing it, but now it’s all ours to play with.”
“That’s one way to look at it.” Kazuya grinned.

“What do you think about the house itself? Minus the cosmetic details?”

“I love the porch; does it go all the way around?”

“It does, and in the back where it connects to the kitchen is screened in. So we can still sit outside when there’s too many bugs and maybe put a table out there, even eat outside sometimes.” Eijun scratched his head. “We’ll check it out, it was like that before. It would be easy to fix if it’s not, or if we want that part to be bigger.”

“The porch is the best part. I mean, I like the way the house looks, but I don’t really have much of an opinion, to be honest. I do love the front yard, though. You would have plenty of beds for your babies.” Their house in Tokyo had a bit of a backyard, which was Eijun’s domain. He liked gardening, had always found working in the dirt to be relaxing, tending plants and flowers was a form of therapy for him and Kazuya knew he’d been in heaven if he had this much room to play. “Do you want to go in, or around the back?”

“Let’s go check out the back.” Eijun offered his hand to Kazuya and he slotted their fingers together with a squeeze.

“I do like it so far, Eijun.” Kazuya explained. “I don’t have much experience looking at houses, it’s never occurred to me.”

“I get that, I’m there with you. They’re just places people live. But this one I’ve always liked, maybe because of the people who lived here.”

They walked around the side of the house to see the backyard, hands still linked. Kazuya came to a sudden halt, Eijun by his side.

“Eijun, this view…” The mountains looked almost close enough to touch; the land sloped up behind the flat part of the yard, trees gradually closer together until it was full forest. “It’s gorgeous back here.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Eijun answered. “I don’t ever remember noticing this, but I grew up here. You don’t pay attention to what you think is normal until you leave, sometimes.”

“Can you imagine waking up to that view every day?” Kazuya was still gazing at the mountains in wonder. “I mean, I know your parents’ place is close, but this is much closer.”

“It is; you’re right. Also, if I remember correctly, the master bedroom is in the back of the house, so we would wake up to this view.”

“Can we—?” Kazuya turned to Eijun, “Even if the house is unlivable, can we buy the land anyway and build? I’d love to see that view every day.”

“Of course, Kaz.” Eijun smiled at him, laying a hand on his cheek. “You know, I really like this part of you that Peanut’s brought out. You’ve never been good at telling me what you want, softening up enough to let me into your thoughts. I hope it stays around.”

Kazuya chuckled. “I always...well, I never thought it was important, I guess? I had you, had baseball, all the major things, so I didn’t allow myself to worry about the details.”

“That’s...I get that? But we’ve been together forever; you know I want to understand what you want. You do let me know sometimes; I’ve learned to read you, but the outright expressing of the more...I
don’t even know how to say it. Softer side?” Eijun struggled to find the words. “The more vulnerable you, I guess you might say. The books, the crib set, this land. Much of it is related to Peanut, but it’s still you. I like that and hope you let it stick around.”

“I don’t know, Eijun.” Kazuya leaned into Eijun’s hand. “You’re right that it’s something I’ve never said, I’ve never been able to say. I’ve lost some of my filters and it’s kinda uncomfortable. I know you won’t judge me or make fun, but still. It’s strange for me.”

“You do whatever makes you comfortable, of course. But if you feel about things like you do, I wish you’d say something. You’ve never made me feel anything less than loved, you’re amazingly good at communicating your feelings to me, this is just another thing, right? It was hard for you at first to open up to me, remember?”

“I do. You were, and still are, amazingly patient with me.” Kazuya admitted, lacing their fingers back together. “I can’t imagine how I’d be if you weren’t around. I’ll tell you what; I’ll try to be more demanding, how’s that?”

Eijun grinned and poked him in the belly. “You do that.” He turned to look at the yard again. “Other than the view, what do you think about the yard?”

Kazuya ran his eyes over more neglected flowerbeds and what was clearly an empty garden in the corner. There was a larger swathe of lawn back here, with a few scattered trees that had been left to provide shade and the place to hang a tire swing. “This is great, there’s lots more room for you to putter around.” He waved at the outbuildings lined up on one side of the grass. “What are those?”

“If I had to guess, I’d say storage shed, chicken coop, and a pen for goats.” Eijun pointed to each building. “We don’t have to do any of that, of course, but a few different outbuildings might be nice. We could have one for gardening stuff, a larger workshop, and maybe make one into a playhouse for the kids.”

“We could probably put some toys for the kids out here too, right? A swing set maybe?” Kazuya suggested.

Eijun agreed instantly. “Of course! And something to climb on. Build a treehouse, too. Whatever we want.”

“Alright, I’m sold. I don’t even care what the house looks like.” Kazuya grinned at Eijun.

“Idiot.” Eijun grinned back. “Let’s go in.” He turned them to face the back of the house. “See, screened in porch.” The screened part ran the length of the back, large enough for a table and some lounging seating.

“What a good idea.” Kazuya said. “Why don’t your parents have this?”

“My mom’s been trying to get my dad to do it forever.” Eijun laughed. “He keeps promising to, but never does.”

“We should do it for them, then.” Kazuya suggested.

Eijun rolled his eyes. “Good luck with that.” He swung open the door to the porch and ushered Kazuya up. “I offered to do it a long time ago. She wouldn’t let me. Although if it comes from you, she may.” He turned to face the back wall of the house. “If I remember correctly...yes. There are two doors to out here. The one in front of us goes to the kitchen, and the other is the living room.” He opened the kitchen door and stepped inside, closely followed by Kazuya.
“What you need to know about this house, Kaz, is a couple of things. First of all, this property was a much larger farm than my family’s and they had to hire workers to come in. Secondly, this house is older as well, so there’s some differences. It’s probably a lot more traditional, even though there’s been some modernization. That doesn’t mean we can’t do what we want, of course, but I think I’d like to keep some of the traditional elements.”

Kazuya nodded. “You’re right; it would be a shame to lose all sense of the past. You know what I really liked? I liked Mai’s room, the one we had tea in? It was traditional, but comfortable. I loved that it opened into the garden.”

“We may be able to do something like that, Kaz, we’ll have to see. I’m not sure where we’d put a garden, but more plants are never a bad idea. This was very much a working farm, so there aren’t a lot of unnecessary things.”

“If we can’t, that’s fine. I mostly like the idea of having a traditional room, quiet, somewhere we can talk, somewhere to put the shrine. Tatami and shoji, the whole works.”

“I’d love that. We’ll figure it out.” Eijun gestured around him. “What do you think about the kitchen?”

“It’s huge,” Kazuya answered. “But that’s because they were feeding so many, right?”

“Yeah.”

“I love it. I want a large kitchen, seriously. We can put a table in here to eat on, and lots of counters and other seating.” Kazuya walked around, inspecting the setup. “I’d imagine this needs a complete overhaul, but maybe we can leave some of the traditional decorative things in place.”

“We’ll hire a designer or architect, someone who specializes in incorporating the traditional with the new. I don’t want some new traditional additions, but if they make sense contextually, were original with the house, that would be marvelous.”

“Exactly.” Kazuya enthused. “That’s it exactly.” He headed through the doorway into the next room.

“Dining room?”

“Of sorts, this was where they’d have formal meals. So, formal dining room.” They wandered through the rest of the floor, inspecting the rooms, talking about the potential for all of them.

“I think we don’t need so many rooms on this floor.” Kazuya said. “Maybe we can remove a wall or two?”

“Or put up fusuma, so we can divide them if we need to. I love the idea of all of this being more open, but I think we may, especially in winter, want to be able to partition off rooms.”

“What do you think about doing that for only one half of the house? Making that one big room that can be partitioned, and leaving the other half as actual rooms? I don’t know how many rooms are upstairs, but we’re going to need an office and maybe another room or two.”

“That’s a good idea. I think that if we want to take down the walls, we should do the rooms on the side that doesn’t have the kitchen. So from the other door to the back porch to the front of the house be open.” Eijun suggested.

“Brilliant.” Kazuya smiled, slipping his arms around Eijun. “This...I think this could be home.”
“I agree, Kaz.” Eijun ran his hand through Kazuya’s hair. “It could be. You, me, Peanut and whatever other nuts we’re blessed with.” He wrapped his arms around Kazuya’s neck. “Together, we could make this home.”

Kazuya kissed him, fighting back the emotions those words brought, the images in his head of their future, of his family.

_Their family._

Eijun returned the kiss, feeling the same promise, the same weight Kazuya did. He poured his heart into it, into letting him know that he was on the same page, their vision was the same. Kazuya broke the kiss and laid a gentle hand on Eijun’s cheek, watching his eyes open, seeing the love and emotion that matched his own.

“Let’s go look upstairs.” Kazuya suggested and Eijun grinned, taking his hand.

“Yes, let’s.”

Upstairs were five bedrooms, three of them large. The biggest, clearly the master, overlooked the back of the house, running the entire length.

“This is huge!” Eijun exclaimed. “Why would we need this much room?”

“I don’t know, let’s see what else there is up here.” Kazuya answered, poking his head in the next room.

“Another room, much smaller.”

They walked around the landing to the front of the house. “These two are much larger, still half the size of the master, though.”

“So I’ll guess this one is like the other across the hall.” Kazuya peeked in. “Yup.” He turned to Eijun. “You know what’s not here? A bathroom. We should turn one of these small rooms into a bathroom.”

“Good idea. We might want to think about putting a smaller one in the master bedroom as well. Just a western style one, it won’t take up too much room.”


“Outside.” Eijun grinned. “Old school, fire heated and everything.”

“That’s one tradition I don’t think we’ll be following,” Kazuya chuckled.

“Indoor plumbing is definitely on the list.”

Kazuya headed back into the master bedroom, standing at the window to look out over the mountains. “This view, Eijun. I can’t get over this view.”

Eijun walked up behind him and wrapped his arms around Kazuya’s waist. He propped his head on Kazuya’s shoulder, looking out the window as well. “It’s pretty great, huh.”

“It is.” Kazuya laid his hands on Eijun’s and leaned back into him. “Can we have it?”
Eijun chuckled lowly. “Since you’ve already bought it, I’d say yes.” He kissed Kazuya’s cheek, holding him tightly. “This was such a good idea, Kazuya. You have no idea how much I love you.”

“It can’t be any more than I love you, I don’t think that’s possible.”

“I’m sure it is, and I’m sure I do.”

Kazuya turned in his arms. “I doubt it.” He kissed Eijun on the nose before stepping away. “Is there anything else you want to look at?”

“Nope, ready to head to the ‘rents?” Eijun asked.

Kazuya nodded. “Yeah, I’m ready. I want to talk to mom about this place.”

“Have I created a monster?”

“Maybe.” Kazuya smirked. “When you’re buried in swatches and paint chips, you’ll know.”

“Oddly enough, I think I’m good with that.” Eijun smiled back, and they headed out of the house.

Eijun pulled out of the driveway and Kazuya glanced at his watch, but didn’t speak, he was content to let his thoughts flow and watch the scenery. A soft grin in place, Eijun checked on him every few minutes but left him to his thoughts.

Pulling into his parent’s driveway (12 minutes later, per Kazuya’s watch), they got out and headed into the house.

“We’re home!” Eijun called out as they slipped off their shoes. Chika stepped out of the kitchen to greet them.

“Hello, boys. Come on in, dinner’s in thirty. How was the house?”

Kazuya grinned and stepped into the hallway. He hugged her and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Hi, Mom! The house is great.”

“Hey, you.” Eijun hugged her as well. “How are you?”

“I’m well.” She hugged him back. “Your father and grandfather should be back any minute.”

“Okay, good. How can we help?” Kazuya asked, walking into the kitchen.

Chika patted his back. “You can sit down and tell me about the house and how you are. How’s Peanut?”

“Peanut’s good.” Kazuya sat as instructed. “Haruichi says she’s exactly where she needs to be. And I’m officially out of the first trimester.”

“That’s great news,” Chika said. “How are you feeling?”

“So much better. No more nausea, the moods are stable. I still have the backache and have to pee all the time, but that’s not going anywhere anytime soon.”

“Good.” She turned to Eijun. “How are you, other son?”
“I’m good.”

“What did the doctor say about your shoulder?”

Eijun sighed. “He said that I’ve got another year, maybe two, if I don’t want to have major issues with it. My contract is up in two years, I think I’ll be done then at the latest.”

“I’m watching him,” Kazuya said with a smirk. “I’ll make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid.”

“I trust you, Kazuya. Eijun, not so much.” She smirked at her son. “He’s a bigger idiot than you are.”

“Thanks, Mom.” Eijun groused, glaring at the world in general.

“So tell me,” Chika started. “What did you think—” The front door opened and the missing men strolled in, talking loudly.

There was a round of greetings as dinner was finished and placed on the table.

“So boys,” Chika was determined to get her question answered. “What did you think of the house?”

“You know I’ve always liked that house.” Eijun started. ‘And it didn’t look to be in as bad of condition as I expected.’

“No, they’ve had a caretaker make sure it wasn’t getting too bad.” Eidan said. “He didn’t worry about the cosmetics as much, just the building.”

“The view is stunning,” Kazuya said. “The mountains are right there.”

“It looks like it, doesn’t it?” Eitoku chuckled. “But you’d have to go five miles or so before you’d actually hit anything like a mountain.”

“Really? They’re huge.”

“City boy.” Eidan chuckled. “But yeah, the view from that property is amazing.”

“We’re buying it, there’s so much we can do with it,” Eijun said. “We think it could be perfect for all of us.”

“What were you thinking of doing?”

“We were thinking of trying to keep as many traditional decorative elements as we could, while adapting it to what we want. You know the layout?” Kazuya asked.

“Yes, we know it well,” Chika answered. “They were good friends of ours.”

“We’re thinking of opening up the whole one side of the downstairs, but putting in fusuma so we can partition it off if we need to,” Eijun explained. “Keep the half that has the kitchen in it as rooms—we may need an office and Kazuya wants a traditional Japanese room for the family shrine and such.”

“Upstairs we’re going to put in a full bathroom in one of the small bedrooms, as well as a western one in the master bedroom. We can use the other small bedroom as a nursery; it’s close to the master. The two in the front will be for the kids.” Kazuya finished the explanation.

“Kids?” Chika said, and suddenly all eyes were on them.
“Yeah,” Eijun slipped his hand in Kazuya’s. “Barring anything unforeseen, we don’t want Peanut to be an only child. We don’t know how many we want, we’re playing that by ear.”

Chika smiled at them, “That’s wonderful.”

Eidan grinned. “Good for you. We wanted more, but that wasn’t in the cards for us.”

“That’s good, fill up that big house,” Eitoku said. “Bring ‘em around here and we’ll take good care of them.”

“Thanks, Gramps,” Eijun said with a grimace. “I’m sure they’ll appreciate that.”

“Do you know anyone local who would be interested in helping us?” Kazuya questioned.

“What are you looking for?” Chika responded.

“We’re going to need an architect, someone who’s familiar with traditional Nagano houses,” Eijun began. “And maybe an interior designer. We’re not going to be able to watch everything, so do you mind being our eyes and ears?”

“Of course not, I already told Kazuya I’d be happy to be your agent in this,” Chika said.

“Awesome, thanks Mom. You’re the best.”

As dinner drew to a close, Eijun gathered the plates and took them into the kitchen, asking everyone to stay seated. He heard them questioning Kazuya as he left, but his husband was good at keeping secrets, so he was able to deflect.

Eijun came back into the room with a shirt-sized box and returned to the table, setting it in front of his mother.

“Here you are,” he said, a little nervously. He didn’t know why he was nervous about this, but he was. Kazuya squeezed his leg in support.

“What’s thi—?” Chika gasped as she pulled back the tissue. Her eyes flooded and she looked at the boys, at her sons, across the table. “It’s gorgeous. It’s perfect.” She handed it to Eidan and got up from her seat, walking around the table to Eijun, who stood.

She pulled him into the kitchen and into a hug, weeping; this was the first time she’d seen them since they lost Haruko and they’d both just realized it. “I’m so sorry, baby.”

He wrapped his arms around her, collapsing into her and taking comfort from the familiar arms, tears streaming. Together they mourned the loss of Haruko, sharing the sadness and pain they both knew intimately from having lost children they’d been carrying. “I’d have done anything to spare you that,” she said softly.

“It’s not okay, but it’s getting better,” Eijun said, sniffing. “Kazuya’s been amazing; it had to be so hard for him. Dealing with the loss while he’s still pregnant was tough on him, he felt so guilty. I felt so guilty, like I’d somehow done something wrong. He convinced me and I convinced him, and together we’re getting through this.”

“That’s good, I’m so glad you boys are working things out. I’ve seen this kind of thing tear families apart,” Chika said as Kazuya poked his head into the kitchen. “Come here, you.” She gestured and
he walked into her arms, hugging both of them. “I know how hard this has been on you, Kazuya, and I’m so proud of you.”

“It was worse for Eijun, I was glad to be able to be here for him,” Kazuya objected.

Chika frowned at him. “Don’t discount yourself, Kazuya. You’re important too.”

“Yeah, Kazuya. Listen to her,” Eijun snarked at him.

“Yes, ma’am,” Kazuya agreed with a sheepish smile.

Chika took both of their hands. “Boys, that picture is gorgeous, it’s perfect. I’ll be so proud to have it in our shrine where your grandmothers can watch over Haruko. Thank you.”

“We’re glad to have done it,” Kazuya said. “We wanted to do it.”

“The artist did a marvelous job.”

“We think so, too,” Eijun agreed.

Chika pulled out a tray for the coffee and dessert. “We’d probably better get back, they’re going to worry that we’re never coming back if we don’t. Eijun, would you grab the coffee pot? Kazuya, the cream and sugar? I have the cake.”

“You baked a cake?” Eijun asked, eyes widening.

“It was your birthday this week, so yes. Strawberry. Your favorite.” Chika answered.

Eijun elbowed Kazuya. “We’re having caaakkke.”

Kazuya snorted. “Are you four, Eijun?”

“I am when it comes to cake.”

They returned to the dining room and sat back down. Eijun saw that Haruko’s picture had already been added to the shrine and smiled softly.

“Happy birthday, boy,” Eitoku said. “I hope it was a good one.”

“Thanks, Gramps. It was wonderful.” He told them some of what happened, amusing them with stories from their trip to Eidos. In the middle of the story, he suddenly remembered something he’d wanted to ask. “Mom? Did Kaz send you flowers?”

“Yes, dear.” She looked surprised that he’d ask. “He does every year on your birthday.”

“He never told me.” Eijun eyed his husband.

Kazuya shrugged. “It honestly never occurred to me that I hadn’t.”

“It’s fine, I was just surprised I didn’t know,” Eijun said.

Eidan changed the subject. “So why aren’t you staying the night?”

“We’re meeting Dad for breakfast and then going to visit Grandfather together. It’s been a year.” Kazuya reminded him.

“You and your father are going together?” Chika queried. “That’s wonderful. I’m glad you two are
getting close.”

“Me too,” Kazuya agreed. “I hope it lasts.”

“I’m sure it will, he seems serious,” Eidan said. “And he’s excited about Peanut.”

“He is,” Kazuya said. “And he’s going to be even more…” He trailed off and looked at Eijun.

“Go ahead.” Eijun urged. “Tell them if you want.”

Kazuya smiled his thanks at his boy and turned to the rest of the table. “We’ve picked out names.”

“You have?” Chika said with a wide grin that reminded Kazuya sharply of Eijun. “Already? No arguing?”

“Nope, Eijun suggested them and I…well, I couldn’t say no.” Kazuya admitted.

“Well go on, what are they?” Eitoku blustered. “You going to make us wait until Peanut gets here?”

“No, no,” Kazuya laughed. “If it’s a girl, we’re naming her Akemi. If it’s a boy, he’s going to be Isamu.”

“After your mother and grandfather?” Chika asked. “And it was Eijun’s idea?”

“It was, I hadn’t even considered it yet, names weren’t on my radar.” Kazuya explained.

Chika beamed at Eijun. “That’s a lovely thing to do, Eijun.” She looked at Kazuya. “Those are great names. I’m sure your father will be happy about that.”

“I hope so,” Kazuya said. “I mean, I can’t imagine he won’t, but I don’t want to speak for him.”

“We understand,” Chika rose to collect the plates. “You two should probably head home soon; you have a good drive ahead of you.”

“We should,” Eijun agreed. “Can we wash the dishes before we go?”

“No, no. We’ve got them.” She glared at the men still sitting at the table. “They’re more than happy to help.”

Eidan sighed and got to his feet, ready to say goodbye to the boys and then help out in the kitchen.

Eitoku sat and grumbled. “Why do I have to help? You’re the one who married her and brought her into this house.” Kazuya looked at Eijun, who was watching his mother, shoulders shaking.

As expected, she came bustling back through the doorway. “Sawamura Eitoku. Do you not eat the food I make?” She advanced on him. “Do you not enjoy eating the food I make? Unless you want to eat your own cooking, you’ll help clean up what you ate.” She loomed over where he sat, glaring at him. He gave in with ill grace.

“Oh, threatening an old man, are you? What would your mother make of that, I wonder?”

“If she knew it was you, she’d probably give me a medal.” She growled. “She knew you, remember?” Turning to the amused boys, she smiled sweetly. “Do you want to take some of the cake home? It’s yours if you want it.”

“Don’t be giving away my cake.” Eitoku complained in the background, subsiding when she turned
her gaze back on him.

“Can we have a couple of slices, please? We can leave the rest for you later.” Eijun requested.

“Certainly.” She agreed. “Say your goodbyes, boys, while I get this packaged up.”

There was a flurry of hugs and kisses, words of advice and a few whispers of love and encouragement, and then Kazuya and Eijun found themselves in the car, pulling out of the driveway.

Eijun honked once, and they were off.

Driving home from Nagano.

They were about halfway out when Kazuya stirred. He’d fallen asleep as soon as they hit the highway, and Eijun was content to let him nap, he knew he had to be exhausted. They’d been going all day, and Peanut was still taking it out of him.

“Sorry,” Kazuya said, sitting up and rubbing his face.

Eijun slipped their hands together. ‘No, it’s fine. You need your rest. Sleep more if you’d like.”

“Naw, I’m awake. I wanted to ask you something, though,” Kazuya started tentatively. “I was thinking about something, but it’s something we’d both have to be fine with. If you have any objections, we’ll forget about it.”

“Okay, that’s fair,” Eijun agreed. “What is it?”

“I was thinking about the house, and us moving to Nagano. I love the idea and if we’d been considering this a few months ago there wouldn’t be any hesitation at all, but…” Kazuya trailed off, not sure how to phrase what he needed to say.

Eijun finished for him. “You’re worried about your dad.”

“Yeah,” Kazuya admitted. “I’m worried about my dad.”

“Well, there are a few things,” Eijun said. “First of all, Nagano’s not that far, we can always drive in for the weekend or something.”

“True enough,” Kazuya agreed.

“But. If he wants to be closer—and I’d love for him to be, especially as he gets older—we can always build him his own house on the land, somewhere he could be independent but still be close to us, we can keep an eye on him. Or he could buy his own place, of course, but I’d rather him be near.” Eijun suggested.

“You wouldn’t mind?”

“Why would I mind? I like your father, now that I’m actually getting to know him. He reminds me of you, a lot. Being surrounded by Miyukis may not be the best for my mental health, but I’ll deal.”
“God, I adore you, Sawamura Eijun. I don’t know what I did to deserve you, but it must have been something big.” Kazuya squeezed his hand. “I don’t know what he’s going to say or anything, but here’s what I think the best way to approach this is…”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so.
I've been thinking about this story a lot the last couple of weeks.
Kinda agonizing about it, if the truth were known.
You all know I've been worried it's getting boring, nothing dramatic has happened for a while, and I spent some time plotting out something.
But it felt contrived, and I just couldn't get my head around it.
So, I scrapped that idea and thought some more.
I finally came to a conclusion that I'm happy with, and I'm putting it here to let you know, but also as a reminder for myself.
This isn't a dramatic story.
Nobody's going to get in a car accident, fall in a puddle and go back in time(LOL, what even are k-dramas?), I'm not going to kill anyone(else).
No cheating.

This is a simple story.
It's about two boys who love each other and find out that they're going to have a baby.
There's no questions about commitment or their future together.

There's going to be normal things, arguments about cribs or who finished the ice cream.
Fights when someone gets stressed to the point that they're unreasonable.
Little, real life things. Things that happen to everyone.
Domestic family things.

So, if you've committed the time to reading this far and this somehow disappoints you, I apologize, and thank you for reading to this point.

I'm also deciding not to try to rush this. Not that I've really been to date, but you know. I get impatient sometimes.
So, if it takes three chapters for them to put the crib together, so be it.
I'm not apologizing for it, it's what happens.

This may end up as long as War and Peace, I have no earthly idea.

I'll make you all a deal.
I'll write and you tell me what you think.
If it's taking too long, feel free to give me your best Monty Python "GET ON WITH IT" impression.

I love you all, honestly I do.
*hugs*
Give a Little Bit

Chapter Summary

Eijun dreams.
Norio tells.
Kazuya is surprised.
And there's talk of a marching band.

Chapter Notes

Here you go!
Week fourteen! Now we're really on the way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Fourteen

Kazuya woke to the feeling of arms holding him tightly and Eijun spooning into his back, shaking. He opened his eyes—still dark. He wasn’t sure if Eijun was having a bad dream or was awake but trying to both keep his promise and still not wake him up, so he listened to see what he could hear.

“I’m sorry, so sorry.” Eijun was repeating. “I didn’t mean to, I didn’t know you were there.”

Awake then, Kazuya figured. He wasn’t terribly surprised that the nightmares had resurfaced; the visit with Eijun’s parents had stirred things up. He rolled over and wrapped Eijun in his arms.

“Come here, Ei.” Kazuya laid on his back and pulled Eijun up onto his shoulder. “I told you to wake me up when you have a nightmare.”

“I know, but you’re so tired and I should be—”

Kazuya cut him off. “No you shouldn’t. It’s not been that long, not even a month. After the visit to your ‘rents we should have seen this coming. I’m sorry I didn’t suggest you take a pill.”

“I wouldn’t have,” Eijun said. “I wouldn’t have thought I was going to need it.”

“Yeah, I get that.” Kazuya rubbed his back, soothing him. “Want to talk about it?”

“Not really, it was the same thing as always.”

Kazuya kissed his forehead and ran his finger down Eijun’s cheek. “I’m so sorry. I hate that you’re going through this.”

“I’m sorry I woke you, I feel like such a wimp.” Eijun admitted.

“I’m glad you did, thank you for keeping your word.” Kazuya said. “Or at least part of it. Thank you for not leaving the bed, going off to the living room. You’re not a wimp, Eijun, you’re mourning. If I
have to remind you of this every day, I will. You’re not weak. You’re not a failure or a wimp or a crybaby. You’re hurting.”

“When will it stop?” Eijun whispered achingly. “I don’t like feeling like this.”

“Oh, Ei.” Kazuya felt the tears well in his eyes, heart hurting. “I don’t know, but I do know this. Whenever it gets too much, whenever you need me, I’ll be here. You’re not alone in this, you’re not, I promise. I’m here for you, wherever, whenever, whatever you need me to be.”

“Thank you.” Eijun snuggled up tighter, resting his hand on Peanut’s baby bump. “I love you both, you know that?”

“We love you too.”

“You should get some more sleep, Kaz. You need it.” Eijun closed his eyes, trying to project a calm he wasn’t quite feeling.

Kazuya wasn’t fooled. “You do too.” He continued to rub Eijun’s head. “Please try to get some rest, okay? Stay here with me. I’ll be here if you need me.”

“I’ll try.”

“That’s all I can ask.”

They spent a little time whispering affection and warmth before dropping back to sleep, Kazuya first, with Eijun following shortly afterwards.

Kazuya woke for the second time that morning, but it was full light. He lifted his head and looked at the clock on the bedside table; it was already 8:30. Norio was due at 9. Climbing gingerly out of bed, he did his best not to disturb Eijun, he was sure his boy had been awake long after he’d dropped off. He grabbed some clothes out of the drawer and went into the bathroom, getting dressed and prepped for the day, before heading out to the kitchen to make some tea and start a pot of coffee. He’d just finished pouring hot water into his mug when the doorbell rang.

“Hi, Dad!” Kazuya said as he opened the door wide for Norio to enter. “How are you?”

Norio shed his shoes and coat before stepping into Kazuya’s hug. “I’m well, thanks. How are you feeling? How’s Peanut?”

“We’re both good,” Kazuya said, leading the way into the kitchen. “We’re officially out of the first trimester, so there’s that. Do you want some coffee?”

“Yes, that would be nice. I can get it, though.” Norio took a mug out of the cupboard and poured himself some of the fresh brew.

“We’re running a little late today, I’m sorry,” Kazuya apologized. “Eijun had a rough night, he’s still asleep.”

“It’s fine, we’re not in any hurry.” Norio sat at the table, joining Kazuya. “What’s going on, is he alright?”

“He’s...well, he will be. We went to Nagano yesterday. It was the first time he’d seen his parents since we lost Haruko, and things got a little emotional. I think that stirred up the nightmares he’d
been having right after it happened. Neither one of us thought it would, it’s been a week or so since he had one. I should have known, though.” Kazuya sighed, stirring his tea.

“You couldn’t have known.” Eijun said, walking into the kitchen. “It’s not your fault my brain’s doing stupid things.” He stopped by Kazuya’s chair to drop a kiss on his forehead and nodded at Norio. “Hi, Dad. I’m glad to see you; sorry to make you wait. Let me get dressed and we can go.”

“No, no. It’s no big deal; we’re not in any hurry. Have a cup of coffee, relax for a bit,” Norio responded. “Please.”

Eijun joined them at the table, coffee in hand. “Thank you. And thanks for what you did for my birthday. The flowers were lovely.”

“You’re welcome. You had a good time?”

“We did.” Kazuya stood up. “Hang on a sec, let me get my phone.”

“Oh, yeah. There are pictures of us at Eidos.” Eijun chuckled. “They’re good; they have professional photographers wandering the floor, like in supper clubs in the 1940’s.”

Kazuya sat back down with his phone. “Here, they emailed them to us.” He found the pics and handed his dad the phone.

“These are nice.” Norio agreed. “The tux pants worked for you? You can only see a hint of Peanut, and that’s if you know what to look for.” He scrolled through and stopped at one. “Can I get a copy of this one? I’d like to print it, if you don’t mind. Put it on our family wall.”

He handed the phone back to Kazuya, who laughed. “This one? Are you sure?”

“Positive. It’s perfect.”

“Let me see.” Eijun demanded, and Kazuya handed over the phone. He laughed as well when he realized what he was looking at, it was the picture taken when they stepped out of the car. Kazuya was giving him a kiss on the cheek and Eijun was grinning. “Not terribly dignified. We do have better ones.”

“I know, but that one’s you.” Norio said with a chortle. “Can I have it?”

“Of course.” Kazuya said. “Let me get you a print of it.”

“You can just send me the file; I’ll take care of it.”

“Okay, I’ll do that.” Kazuya sent the email while Eijun finished his coffee.

“Give me a minute, I’ll be right out,” he said, heading back to his room to get ready.

“Do we need to stop anywhere?” Kazuya asked. “I’d like to pick up some flowers before we go see Grandfather.”

“Yes, of course.” Norio agreed. “There’s a flower shop right outside the gates.”

“Oh, okay.”

“You said you went to Nagano yesterday? How is Eijun’s family doing?”

“We did.” Kazuya got up to clean the coffee cups. “They’re good. We went to look at the property.”
“What property?”

“Oh, wait. I haven’t had the chance to tell you about it.” Kazuya responded as Eijun strolled into the kitchen, ready to go. “I’ll tell you at breakfast. Are we ready?”

“Yeah, let’s go.” Eijun said, escorting them out of the house.

“You want to ride with us?” Kazuya offered, glancing at his father.

“Sure, why not?”

Kazuya grinned and unlocked the door before glowering at Eijun, who had his hand out for the keys. “I’m driving.”

“But, Kaz,” Eijun started.


Eijun held up his hands in surrender. “Yes, sir.”

They kept the conversation casual in the car, waiting to talk about the important things when they got to the restaurant. After they were seated and orders were taken, Kazuya began.

“I’m glad we got to see you today, we do have some things we wanted to talk to you about.”

“Alright.” Norio agreed, a little confused. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing bad, I promise.” Kazuya reassured him. “We’ve just made some decisions we wanted to tell you about and we have a present for you.”

“A present?”

“Kinda? Something we wanted to give to you.” Eijun said, handing over the shirt-sized box.

“What’s this for?” Norio looked at them both curiously.

“Open it, you’ll see.” Kazuya urged him, and he did so.

Pulling back the tissue, he exposed the framed print and sucked in a breath. “This is beautiful.” Kazuya let out the breath he’d been holding. “I’m glad you like it.”

“It’s perfect, thank you.” He reached across the table and grabbed Eijun’s hand. “Thank you for sharing her with me.”

“She’s your granddaughter, too.” Eijun said shakily.

“I...yes, she is.” Norio said. “I know I haven’t deserved the kindness you’ve shown me, Eijun. Or the forgiveness Kazuya’s shown me. I want you both to know I appreciate it.”

“That’s...we’re family, right?” Kazuya said. “And that’s what family should do. I’ve never not wanted a good relationship with you, Dad; I just didn’t know how to reach you.”

“You couldn’t. That was all on me.” Norio asserted. “I was the one who had to see what I was doing, what I was doing wrong. I’m just sorry it took your grandfather’s passing to do so.” He
changed the subject, knowing there wasn’t much else to say. “You said you made some decisions? And were looking at property?”

“Yes.” Kazuya started, thinking about what they’d discussed in the car the day before. “We...I’ve been thinking a lot about Peanut, about what kind of life I want him to have. I like the idea of him growing up in the country, and the idea of us living in the country. So, for Eijun’s birthday, I put a down payment on a house and land in Nagano, not too far from his parent’s farm.”

“You’re planning to move to Nagano? When?”

“Not for a while.” Eijun took up the story. “The house is an older farmhouse; it’s going to need a lot of work. And I have until the end of next season on my contract, provided my shoulder cooperates. Shinji’s not sure it will, and neither am I.”

“What about coaching, Kazuya?” Norio asked, still a little shell-shocked over the news.

“I can do it there.’ Kazuya explained, “I’ve been doing some volunteer coaching, for some of our friends’ high school teams, and I’ve discovered I like it much better than coaching at the professional level. With high school, it seems like I’m actually helping someone.”

Norio nodded, “I get that, okay. That makes sense. So what’s your timetable?”

“We don’t have one.” Eijun responded. “We want to be there before Peanut starts school, but that’s all we know. Mom’s looking for an architect who can help us remodel the house and add a few outbuildings, including a guest house.”

“Yeah.” Kazuya agreed. “We were thinking. We’re going to build a small house out back, and we’d love for you to stay there whenever you’d like. If you want to move in there, we’d be happy. We’d love to have you close to us.”

“He’s not wrong.” Eijun chimed in. “You being here in Tokyo is the only thing we’re worried about leaving. You are, of course, welcome to stay in the house, but I’d imagine you’d rather have your own place where you could retreat from the insanity.”

“I...I’ve never even considered leaving Tokyo. My work is here, my job. I’ve never lived anywhere else.” Norio said, still trying to wrap his head around the direction this conversation had taken.

“That’s fine.” Kazuya said. “Like we said, it’s going to be a while. We’re building a place for you, though. Even if you only come stay every once in a while, there will always be a place for you with us.”

“Thank you, both of you. It’s going to take some getting used to, but I think this is a good thing.” Norio said. “At the very least, I will come to visit. It’s not that long of a drive.”

“Good.” Kazuya said, nodding. He knew that was all they’d get from him. In fact, it was more of a concession than he thought he’d get, he expected some argument about leaving or about them building him a house.

“We also made a few other decisions we felt we wanted you to know.” Kazuya changed the subject, waiting as the server set their plates in front of them. “First of all, we don’t want Peanut to be an only child; we’re planning on having at least one more.”

“Really? That’s wonderful, I’m glad. I wish you hadn’t been an only, Kazuya, I think things would have been much easier for you.”
“You may be right, I don’t know. But we’re both only children, and neither of us want that for Peanut.” Kazuya admitted.

“Thank you for letting me know; I’m looking forward to all the grandbabies. I’ll take as many as you want to give to me.”

Eijun grinned. “I told Kazuya not long ago that we should field a baseball team.”

“Seriously?” Norio asked.

Kazuya laughed. “No, he was just joking around. We don’t know how many we’ll end up with; we just know we want more than one.”

“Okay, gotcha.”

“And there’s one more thing.” Kazuya said nervously. He’d been serious when he told Eijun’s family that he didn’t know how his dad would react. He looked at Eijun, who took up the conversation.

“I was thinking about something the other day, and when I mentioned it to Kazuya yesterday in the car, we agreed. We’ve decided on names for Peanut.”

“Already?” Norio asked. “It took Kazuya’s mom and me months to agree.”

“Well, he didn’t give me much choice.” Kazuya chuckled. “I couldn’t say no.”

“What? Why not?”

“We should just tell you. If you have any problems with this, please let us know, okay?”

“Okay…”

Eijun took Kazuya’s hand. “If it’s a girl, we’d like to name her Akemi. If Peanut’s a boy, we want to name him Isamu.”

Norio’s eyes widened. “You want to name Peanut after your mother? Or my father?” His eyes welled up, and Kazuya stared, this was something he’d never seen before. “Why would you think I had any problems with that? I...I don’t know what to say. This was your idea, Eijun?” Eijun nodded in affirmation.

“Yeah, I...I know Kazuya misses his mom and his grandfather, and I thought this would be a good way to honor them. They’re both people who have been incredibly important to him, they deserve to be remembered. That’s the best way I know to do so.”

“I can’t imagine any names that would make me happier, prouder, Kazuya. Eijun.” Norio blinked back the moisture in his eyes. “You boys make me so proud, I love you both. I need you to know that. I know I haven’t always shown it, but it’s always been true. You’ve both made me incredibly proud.”

Norio paused to consider something, and then continued. “I’m not sure you know this, but when you two started dating, your grandfather told me about it well before you did. I’m still not sure if he saw something, if you told him, or what happened, but he told me about it. I recognized your name, Eijun, so started watching you as well. That was about the beginning of the fall tournament in your first year, if I’m not mistaken. You were struggling, I didn’t know what, but I could see it in your pitching. I was so proud of you, watching you work out your problems. I later found out you’d
had the yips, and that was even more extraordinary. I’ve watched both of you, separately and
together, and have always, always thought you were good for each other and it’s been a joy to see
you grow together, grow closer, learning to lean and to love. I know I was a lousy role model for
you, Kazuya; I’ve been such a distant parent. I offer no excuse, I was wrong. I’m so thankful you
found someone who would love you, who gave you what you need. I should have said this years
ago, and I’m sorry it took so long.”

Kazuya felt his eyes flood at the words, and his hand tightened on Eijun’s. “You’ve watched us the
whole time?”

“I did. I have. I wanted to know what kind of boy had caught your eye; you’d never shown any
interest before then. At first, I was confused; I wasn’t sure why you liked him. I mean, he was cute
enough and those eyes could inspire poetry, but still, I didn’t get it. Remember, I first saw him when
he was in the middle of dealing with the yips. After that, though, I began to see what you do. I saw
his fight and determination, how hard he fought and how brightly he shone. Of course, I didn’t know
anything about him other than what I could see on the field, but that was enough to give me the
beginning of an idea. After meeting him a few times, I realized you’d never had much of a chance
against him; he was so much like your mother. He’s full of compassion and so very affectionate, so
loving.” Norio smiled, brief and sharp. “For all my sins, there’s one thing I never did, so I never have
to regret it. I never questioned your orientation or choice of partners, Kazuya, and I’m glad of that. I
never even considered it once I met Eijun. I knew he’d be perfect for you.”

“Thank you for that.’ Eijun tried to keep the tears out of his eyes, with minimal luck.

“Don’t thank me.” Norio said sharply. ‘I should have said all that years ago, it’s nothing but the truth.
I just...I know sometimes you probably think I wish things were different, that Kazuya could have
seen his way to fall for a female, but that’s not true. Absolutely never true.”

Kazuya felt the tears on his cheeks and couldn’t bring himself to care. He clung to Eijun’s hand and
kept his eyes on his father, listening intently, letting the words begin healing places he didn’t even
realize were still injured.

“I wondered about that.” Eijun said, voicing the thing he’s spoken to Kazuya about just a few weeks
ago. “Whether you’d have been more comfortable, happier, if I had been a woman.”

“Categorically not.” Norio asserted. “You two are perfect for each other, and I wouldn’t want it any
other way. I guess what I’m saying, what I should have said years ago, is that you two have my
blessing, for what it’s worth. Kazuya could have
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other way. I guess what I’m saying, what I should have said years ago, is that you two have my
blessing, for what it’s worth. You don’t need it, I know. But you have it. You’ve always had it; I
was too stuck in my own head to say anything.

“I’m sorry for springing this on you like this. I just wanted—”

“No, Dad.” Kazuya said. “No. It’s fine. This is good to know, really. I think it’s things I need to
hear.”

“You do.” Norio said. “And I’ll tell you more, tell you again. I just...over breakfast in a crowded
restaurant may not have been the best place for this. But the names and the day and Haruko all kinda
combined and brought it out. I’m not sorry I told you any of this. It’s all true, and again, I should
have said something years ago. It boils down to this. I love you, love you both. I’m incredibly proud
of the life you’ve built for yourselves. I think you’re amazing together. And that’s the truth.”

“Thank you for that, really. It is important, and it is good to know.” Kazuya wiped at his eyes, tears
drying. “If it wasn’t, Eijun wouldn’t have been worried about it right before we told you about
Peanut. To be fair, you were never mean or abusive, you were distant, detached. I honestly thought
you didn’t care anything about me. Grandfather insisted you did, but I never believed him.”

“Why should you have?” Norio asked. “There was no way of you knowing at all. Kazuya, look at me, please?”

Kazuya met his father’s eyes, questions in the depths. “I need you to look at me when I tell you this, so I can be sure you believe me.” He took a deep breath before speaking. “You did nothing wrong. Nothing. Anything that was damaged in our relationship was absolutely my fault. You were a good kid and you’ve grown into a great adult, and I am, again, so very proud of you.”

Kazuya couldn’t do anything but believe what his father said; the sincerity in his voice and the sorrow in his eyes convinced him more than any words would. “I believe you; you don’t give me any choice.” His voice was steady, eyes dry, as he felt the rightness sink into his bones. “I love you, Dad. I always have.”

“You know, your grandfather would be overjoyed to hear this. I’m sorry he’s not around to do so.” Norio said. “He always said I’d figure it out eventually. I’m glad I didn’t leave it too late.”

“We all are.” Eijun agreed, flagging down the server for the check.

Norio dug out his wallet, but Kazuya objected. “No, Dad. We’ve got this.”

“I asked you out.” Norio argued.

“It’s on Peanut.” Kazuya insisted. “He insists.”

Eijun laughed and threw down enough money to cover the breakfast. “Let’s go, Miyuki crew.” He offered his hand to Kazuya, who took it and held on, even after he was standing. “I’m driving.”

“Do you even know where you’re going?” Kazuya snarked.

“Seriously? We go visit your mom once a month, remember?” Eijun reminded him, while Norio chuckled in the background.

Kazuya looked chagrined. “Oh, yeah,” he said, climbing into the front seat without any further argument.

Norio grinned as he got into the back seat, Eijun slid behind the wheel.

Together, as a family, they drove out of the parking lot.

Later, much later, Kazuya closed the door behind his father and looked at his husband. Eijun looked as drained as he felt and he offered him a weary smile. “You good?”

“Yeah, I’m fine.” Eijun said as he moved to the fridge to grab a couple of bottles of water. “Swing?”

“Yes, please. Let me go throw on some sweats and I’ll be right out.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

A few minutes later, Kazuya joined Eijun on the swing, sliding into place against him.

“Hell of a day, huh?”
“You’re not kidding.” Kazuya opened his water to take a big drink.

Eijun laid his hand gently on Peanut’s bump. “Want to talk about it?”

“I don’t know that there’s much to talk about, you were there.”

“Fine with me, but I’m here if you want to.” Eijun kissed Kazuya’s temple.

Kazuya pulled Eijun’s arms tighter around his torso. “I’m counting on it.”

Silence fell, punctuated only by the creak of the swing chains and the occasional soft murmur and response.

Monday afternoon. The first game of the regular season.

Eighth inning, and they were down by two points.

Eijun had pitched a good game, he’d not made any mistakes, but their opponents were good—they had been at the top of the league for the last few years, and were expected to dominate this one as well.

Kazuya was not upset with the way his bullpen was playing, they’d done what they could to keep the game close—in fact, it was because of them the score was as close as it was.

It was Eijun’s at bat, one out, there was a man on first and second, and Kazuya was...well, he wasn’t hopeful. Eijun had gotten much better at batting than he had been at Seido, but he still had problems with most pitches. The only thing he could hit reliably were fastballs; he’d worked so much with Furuya and Haruichi that he’d learned how to deal with those. And he could bunt. He could still bunt like a dream.

They’d played this team often enough that each side knew the other’s weaknesses and strengths; it was more a game of chess than a game of force at this point. And that was why it was a surprise to Kazuya when he saw the pitcher pitch a straight fastball to Eijun.

Maybe they’d thought he would bunt and were trying to make it as hard as they could for him?

Kazuya would never know, but he did know that the pitch was thrown right to Eijun’s sweet spot, and he took full advantage. He dug in, hit the ball hard and long and Kazuya watched in amazement as it flew over the wall and into the bleachers. Eijun dropped the bat, grinned at Kazuya, and trotted around the bases to the roaring of the crowd.

The dugout was up and yelling, spilling out onto the field a little, but they all backed off when Eijun came around home plate and approached Kazuya. Eijun was still grinning, but it had morphed into the grin Kazuya recognized to mean trouble, usually at his expense. “What are you up to?” He mouthed, unable to be heard above the crowd noise.

“I love you.” Eijun mouthed back, before he stepped up close to him and deliberately laid a hand on his baby bump, bending over to give him a kiss on the cheek. “And Peanut,” he said in Kazuya’s ear.
“You did that on purpose.” Kazuya said.

“What?” Eijun asked, as the crowd roared louder and someone nudged Kazuya, pointing at the Jumbotron.

The screen was replaying the footage of Eijun laying his hand on Kazuya’s belly, alternating with scrolling ‘Oh, baby, baby!’ while the opening bars of ‘Push It’ started to play.

Kazuya glared at Eijun. “You...you said it wouldn’t be embarrassing.” He had to yell it close to Eijun’s ear; the crowd was still going crazy.

“It wasn’t.” Eijun said by his ear. “At least not as much as it could have been. Plus, I owed you one for my birthday, remember?”

Kazuya laughed. “Oh, yeah. That was awesome.”

Eijun nodded decisively as they headed back into the dugout to allow the game to continue. “So there you go. It’s out there, and we announced it our way.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“Of course I am.”

“I can’t believe you hit one out of the park.”

“I know, right? I was waiting for something to happen that I could use to announce Peanut and that was the best thing ever.”

“Well, you’d better get your head back in the game, you’re up. Let’s see if you can defend that lead.”

“Yes, sir, Miyuki-Kantoku.” Eijun saluted him.

“Get out of here, you goof!” Kazuya laughed, shooing him out of the dugout.

Eijun ran the gauntlet of handshakes and pats on the back as he made his way back onto the field.

“You’re going to be alright?” Takahashi asked him with a smirk.

Eijun laughed. “Well, for the rest of the game I will be. I can’t guarantee anything once he gets me alone. But I doubt he’ll want to leave Peanut without a parent, so I may be fine.”

“Good, I’d hate to lose you just when the season’s heating up.”

“Agreed.” Eijun responded, heading to the mound.

He had no problems holding off the rest of the batters, three up, three down, and the game was set.

In the dressing room after the game, there was a round of congratulations, snarking and catcalling and commentary about sexual exploits and birth control, but it was all good-natured fun. Takahashi stopped by Kazuya. “Hey, I don’t know if you’re really upset with Eijun, but I think he did it in the best way possible. The rumor mill was just starting to grind, and you managed to let the world know before management did something you wouldn’t like—you know it was only a matter of time until they did.”

“True. I’m not mad at him at all. We agreed it was time to announce it, and he told me he had an idea. I was as surprised as you were with his methodology,” Kazuya chuckled. “It’s good, really. I’m
“You’re not wrong, like I said; I’d heard things from other players who were wondering. And if I’d heard it, others had too.” Takahashi patted him on the shoulder. “You’ll be fine, but I’ll bet you two servings of fried pickles that the GM’s going to feed you two to the after game press conference.”

“I will not be taking that bet,” Kazuya said with a smirk. “I have no doubt whatsoever he will.”

And so it proved to be—shortly after the team began to change, the GM and the head coach entered the locker room.

“Good game, you lot. It was great to beat the team everyone thinks is going to be on top this season. Great hit, Sawamura, good pitching, too.” The coach started. “We could have done with a little less drama during the seventh inning, but now that’s out of the way, we can stop speculating and gossiping like high schoolers and get our heads back in the game. For those of you who missed the memo, Miyuki’s pregnant and due in November. Which means he’s not going anywhere for the rest of the season. You think he’s evil now, wait until he’s six months along in the middle of August. You’re all going to be begging him to take some time off.” He glared. “Mark my words. Anyway, there’s only one thing the press is going to want to talk about, so you two idiots are on ‘feed the reporters’ duty. Get dressed and get out there.”

“Yes, coach,” they agreed before changing into street clothes and heading towards the conference room.

“Eijun, wait.” Kazuya stopped him outside the doors of the conference room. “I want to make sure you know I’m not upset at all at you, okay?” He pulled Eijun close, holding him tight. “You were awesome out there, that was an amazing hit.”

Eijun wrapped Kazuya in his arms. “Good. I thought you’d be alright with it, and it wasn’t as bad as some of my ideas.” Eijun grinned into his hair. “Although I did think the marching band playing ‘Having My Baby’ would have been great.”

“Ohmygod.” Kazuya guffawed. “You did not.”

“I considered it.” Eijun laughed. “Not really, but I thought of it.”

Kazuya wiped the tears from his eyes as he got himself under control. “God. That would have been spectacular. And excruciating.”

“Yeah, it would have,” Eijun said with a grin. ”We’d better go, though. Don’t want to keep Peanut’s press waiting.”

“True.” Kazuya agreed and hand in hand, they entered the conference room.

“Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming…”

Chapter End Notes

You know what I want.
Give it to me:)

Thank you for reading, thank you for putting up with my irregular posting schedule.
OH! I almost forgot. I made a playlist for this, if you want to check it out. It's love songs; some are resigned, some are amused, some are emotional, but they all fit this iteration of the idiots. Check it out if you're so inclined. Nine Months Playlist
Make Way for Peanut!

Chapter Summary

Eijun laughs.
Mochi teaches.
Kazuya worries.
And there's fandom meltdowns. And paint.

Chapter Notes

I apologize in advance for the crappy formatting.
I giggled my way through the first part of this, though.
I hope you do too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Fourteen

There are 4 people in the chat room, max hosted was 897 on February 18, 2011.

Currently signed in: Sawa4life, IHeartMiyuki, BaseballIdiots, MiyuSawaIsLife

Sawa4life: they’re not playing so well, I hope they can pull this one out.
IHeartMiyuki: I’m sure Miyuki is going to give them hell afterwards.
Sawa4life: Why? ‘Mura seems to be playing well. It’s not his fault if the rest of the team doesn’t.
IHeartMiyuki: you’re right, I just hate to see them lose.
BaseballIdiots: I know, right? they’re such sweethearts, I can’t handle the sad faces
Sawa4life: tell me about it. i’m dying over here
MiyuSawaIsLife: they’ve had worse and gotten through, they’ll be fine.
Sawa4life: hang on, mura’s up to bat.
Sawa4life: He did it11!
IHeartMiyuki: out of the park!
BaseballIdiots: Yay11!
BaseballIdiots: Holy crap
Sawa4life: did he just?
MiyuSawaIsLife: Did that just say?
IHeartMiyuki: Ohmygoddohmygodohmygod
MiyuSawaIsLife: ;weiweurjkbfrfdsoi
Sawa4life: Miyuki’s pregnant?
BaseballIdiots: they’re going to have a baby?
.......... 

There are currently 957 people in the chatroom, max hosted was 957 on May 20, 2016.

TOPIC: MIYUKI IS PREGNANT, THIS IS NOT A DRILL

MiyuSawaIsLife

I’m so excited! they’re going to have a baby. Wonder if it’s a girl or a boy? Either way it’s going to have wonderful parents, lucky thing.

Miyuki'sThighs

I don’t know, I’m having a hard time wrapping my head around Miyuki being the one that’s pregnant. It’s MiyuSawa, not SawaMiyu.

EijunisaGod

Well, I don’t see a baby bump. Maybe they’re using a surrogate?

SawaMiyuIsEverything

Come on, they SAID they were pregnant at the press conference, were you not paying attention? And that Miyuki was the one that was pregnant. Denial is more than a river in Egypt.
Miyuki'sThighs

I still don’t believe that Miyuki would get pregnant. He’s not a bottom, have you seen the way he runs the game?

SawaMiyuIsEverything

That doesn’t mean anything, just because he’s aggressive on the field doesn’t mean he always tops in the bedroom.

BOARD ADMIN

Before you two get started down this road again, I’m going to cut you off. This is not the thread to debate this subject in, and if you start, I’ll block both of you. You know I will.

SawaMiyuIsEverything

Sorry, boss. I’m really excited about this, I can’t stop smiling.

BaseballIdiots

IKR? I couldn’t believe it when I saw it. they’re going to be wonderful parents.

EijunisaGod

I still don’t see a baby bump, I won’t believe it until I see it.

Sawa4Life

You probably won’t believe it even when you see the bump, EIG.

EijunisaGod

I bet Eijun wants a divorce and Miyuki got pregnant to tie him down.

IHeartMiyuki

You’re kidding, right? They’ve been together forever, and nobody’s ever seen any sign that either of them isn’t happy.
EijunisaGod

I wonder if it’s even Eijun’s. remember we had those pics of Miyuki with that other man, right before their anniversary.

Sawa4Life

that was Mochi, remember? He’s not cheating on Mura with Mochi.

EijunisaGod

How would you know? It’s impossible to prove.

IHeartMiyuki

Either way is impossible to prove.

EijunisaGod

I still don’t know if I believe any of it.

Eijun’sEyes

I knew I saw a bump the other day, I knew it! I told you!

---

Eijun laughed aloud at the conversation he was reading. It was Monday night, and they’d finally finished responding to the various texts and emails they’d received after their announcement. Fortunately, they hadn’t neglected to tell the most important people, although there had been a slightly pained conversation with their agent. They’d honestly not even thought about telling him, it seemed like such a personal thing. After much apologizing, they had placated him, but that was the only difficulty they’d run into.

Or at least the only one they hadn’t anticipated.

Coming out of the press conference, there was a crowd of fans hanging around, wanting to talk to
them and get any information they were willing to give. They were strangely reticent, though, as if they knew this was not really any of their business, although they were still interested. Eijun and Kazuya stopped just long enough to confirm the story and tell them when Peanut was expected before thanking them for their interest and making their way down the corridor. They found Norio where they’d expected him and he pulled Kazuya into a hug as soon as he was close enough.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, I am. I was just surprised.” Norio shot a glance at Eijun and Kazuya read it correctly. “I knew he was going to announce it at some time, but he didn’t really tell me the plan or give me any warning. It’s fine, though. I wanted us to do something before the management did.”

“I remember your wedding fiasco, I understand completely,” Norio agreed. “Sorry, Eijun, for jumping to conclusions. I should have—I mean I know that you wouldn’t do something like that without Kazuya knowing about it.”

“That’s fine,” Eijun said. “I wasn’t sure when it was going to happen either; I was waiting for a time when I knew the cameras would be on me for a bit. I’d clued the Jumbotron folks in, of course, but no one else knew it was coming.”

“It was a surprise, that’s for sure. You should have seen how shocked everyone around me was. They didn’t get it at first, but when they did, it was crazy.” Norio grinned. “You’d think they were finding out that they were going to be grandparents or something. They were all so excited.”

“Our fans can get a little proprietary, that’s true. Remember how they got when they found out how upset we were about our wedding, Kaz? We got letters and flowers and the management was flooded with mail protesting what they did.”

Kazuya chuckled, stepping back from his father. “They did,” he agreed. “You’d think management would have learned, but they wanted to do the same thing with Peanut; they wanted to have a press conference and make a formal announcement. We told them no, but they’re not ones to listen very well sometimes.”

“That’s why we did it that way. Plus we had it on good authority that Kazuya wasn’t going to be able to hide it much longer and that if it had been me, the rumors would already have been flying.”

“You are getting a bump, Kaz,” Norio commented. “It’s not big, but it’s there if you know to look.”

“I know.” Kazuya laid a protective hand on Peanut. “It’s fine, it just means she’s growing nicely.”

“That’s a good thing,” Norio agreed. He stepped over to Eijun and gave him a hug as well. “Good job with that home run, and the announcement. Very clever, very nice.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Eijun returned the hug and stepped back.

“You boys take care, and I’ll talk to you later, okay? I’ll see you next game for sure,” Norio said, nodding at them. “Love all three of you.” He waved and walked away.

They’d headed out to their own car after that, meeting up with the rest of the bullpen for a post-game dinner that was now almost a tradition—burgers, fries and fried pickles. This time with a side of extra ribbing from their teammates, none of which was out of the loop, just amused at the method Eijun had chosen to tell the world.

Now they were home and after changing and getting some tea, Eijun was perusing the message boards while Kazuya had just turned on the television. It was the top of the hour and he wanted to
see what the reports would say, figuring it would be discussed in the ‘fluff’ section of the cycle.

The broadcast went as expected; it was the first week of regular season, so there were games to discuss and predictions to be made. When he heard his name, Eijun looked at the television, distracted from his reading.

“...Sawamura managed to not only hit a home run to put the team in the lead, he also announced that the rumors were true—the Golden Battery is expecting an addition, Miyuki is pregnant and due in November. Congratulations to them both, and our best wishes for a healthy baby and an easy pregnancy.” The anchor said, as the footage from the game played.

His co-anchor continued, “You know that whole bullpen is praying for an easy pregnancy,” He laughed. “Miyuki is tough enough when he’s not dealing with the hormonal shifts pregnancy brings.”

“Oh, wow, they’ve got you pegged,” Eijun laughed.

Kazuya frowned. “I’m not that bad.”

“Define ‘that bad’,” Eijun responded. “You’re still a dictator on the field, Kaz. You know this is true.”

“But I’m not the worst one out there!” He protested.

“No, you’re not. I never said you were. But you still very much run the diamond. Nobody expects differently, why does that bother you?”

“I don’t know,” Kazuya answered, thinking about it.

Eijun put his laptop on the table and turned towards Kazuya, linking their fingers. “What’s going on? Want to talk about it?”

“I’m okay, really. I think it’s all bound up in the pregnancy thing,” Kazuya sighed. “I mean, I never ever regret being pregnant, I just don’t want to have to deal with some of the stigma associated with it. I don’t want people to think I’m being a hardass because I’m pregnant and moody, or that I’m being too easy for the same reasons.”

“Kaz, you be whatever you feel like you need to be. If I think you’re acting out of character or unreasonably, I’ll let you know. I’m sure the others will talk to me about it if they think you are as well. Please don’t stress about it. It’ll only make it harder for you if you’re self-conscious about the way you’re acting.”

“You’re right.” Kazuya flipped his hand over and squeezed. “I can only do the best I know to do and if people want to blame it on the pregnancy, there’s nothing I can do to stop it.”

“True enough.”

“What are you seeing online?”

“Oh, nothing unexpected. People excited, people who don’t believe it for various reasons, people who think it’s not mine.”

“Wait, what?” Kazuya stared at him.

“It’s no big deal, there’s always something. Some people think I don’t top, ever. Some think you’re
cheating on me with Mochi. Some think you got pregnant to tie me to you. None of it matters, really. Most of them are harmless and happy to stay in their own sandbox, you know that.”

“I know, but I can’t believe they think any of those things. Why would they make things up like that?”

“The best way to think about it is that it’s not really us they’re talking about. They don’t know us; they have no idea of what our relationship is like. It’s all made up and not meant maliciously, so it really doesn’t affect the real us. In fact, I’d bet that if they knew we ever looked at it they’d be embarrassed. At the end of the day, it’s not meant for our consumption.”

“That makes sense. There’s not much we can do to set them straight, is there?”

“Nope. And we shouldn’t want to anyway; they’re over there having fun, why ruin it for them? I do need to let them know what we decided about the gifts, but I’m going to wait a bit to contact them.”

Kazuya nodded his understanding, turning his attention back to the television. Eijun scooted up next to him, snuggling in under his arm. Pulling him closer, Kazuya dropped a kiss on his temple before returning his attention to the television.

_Ei:_ At 14 weeks, Peanut is sucking his thumb. And peeing.

_Me:_ That’s good? I guess? Where does it go?

_Ei:_ Into the amniotic fluid, and flushed out through your kidneys.

_Me:_ I’m glad to hear it, I don’t want him floating in a puddle of pee.

_Ei:_ Yeah, that wouldn’t be good. He’s also able to grasp things. And frown.

_Me:_ Wow, that’s a lot of things. He’s really growing, huh?

_Ei:_ Yes, as we all can see clearly.

_Me:_ Hush you, I’ll have you know that several people today told me they couldn’t tell I was pregnant.

_Ei:_ I can, though. And that’s all that matters. You’re gorgeous, Kaz. I love you and your Peanut bump. Take care of yourself, okay? Be careful driving home.

_Me:_ I will. Is Mochi there yet?

_Ei:_ He just walked in, so time to get to work.

_Me:_ Me too. I’ll see you in a bit.

_Ei:_ Okay, see you soon. Love you.

_Me:_ Yeah, you too.

Eijun walked into the kitchen, where Mochi was pouring himself some coffee. “Hey, how are you doing?”
Mochi stirred his coffee as he sat at the table, and Eijun joined him. “I’m good, thanks.”

“Really?” Eijun looked him over closely, knowing how he didn’t like to trouble others.

“Yes, mom, really,” Mochi rolled his eyes and then grinned. “Really really. Ryou and I talked, and it turned out he was having some of the same feelings, he thought I was getting tired of his long hours and heavy schedule and that I wanted out. After I told him that wasn’t the case, that I just missed him, how it seemed like he was working more than he used to but I was afraid to say something because he’d take it to mean I wanted to break up, we talked for a long time. Worked out a few things, working on a few others. Basically, we’re both working harder to carve out the time we need. If we both decide this should happen, it will.”

“I’m glad,” Eijun returned the smile. “I never want to live in the same world as an upset Oniisan. He’s terrifying enough when he’s calm.”

“You crack me up. He’s not nearly...well, let me rephrase. He is as bad as you think, but he has a good heart and he cares a lot about his people. One of which is you, I hope you know.”

“I know, and I’m not really as afraid of him as I was, some of it is reflex. He can be terrifying, you know?”

“I do, but he’s only that way to those he thinks deserve it. A lot of it is just reflex, he’s amused by your reactions and I don’t think he always does it purposefully. I think he’d be really hurt if he thought you were actually scared of him.”

Eijun laughed as he stood, carrying his coffee cup to the sink. “That’s part of the fun, right?”

“Right,” Mochi agreed, draining his. “You ready for this?”

“Yeah. We put all the painting supplies in the future nursery, but first we need to move everything out. We can put it all in the guest room, Kaz and I will figure out how to arrange it later.”

“Plus the closet, right?”

“That too,” Eijun agreed, walking into the room. “But that can come last. It’s just boxes and we can pile those in the living room; Kaz and I really should go through them. I unhooked the computer; we should just be able to move everything over.”

“Gotcha,” Mochi said, grabbing the monitor. Eijun picked up the tower and followed him into the other room.

They moved everything into the guest room, piling everything that wasn’t furniture on the bed for later sorting, and wrangling the bigger stuff into the empty space between the bed and the door.

“What are you going to do with all of this?”

“There’s actually not that much—we’ll set up the desk and computer, leave the bed and the dresser. That should give us an office and a guest room when we need one.”

“What about the rest of the stuff in here?”

Eijun shrugged. “We can donate it if we don’t need it. None of it’s in bad condition.”

“Good idea,” They went out to the kitchen to grab water. “Ready for the hard stuff?”

“Bring it on,” Eijun grinned. “Remember, other than baseball, I did grow up on a farm. I think I can
handle some manual labor.”

“We’ll see,” Mochi grinned, tipping his water bottle in Eijun’s direction as they headed back into the room. “I think we should paint the ceiling orange, it would work well. It’s not so dark that it will make the room look smaller, it will just look cozier.”

“Whatever you say, boss,” Eijun snarked.

“You’re not such a big shot that I can’t still get you in a chokehold,” Mochi glared at him, taking a step forward.

“I know, I know!” Eijun raised his hands in surrender. “You’re the expert, I was just deferring to you!”

“Okay, if you say so,” Mochi backed off, cracking his knuckles. “I do need you guys to figure a few things out for me. Where are you putting the crib, what other furniture are you planning, and where? The wall art you want is very much dependent on that information.”

“I...that makes perfect sense. I’ll talk to Kaz about it; we’ll figure it out and let you know as soon as we work something out. Maybe we’ll go hit the baby store and make a few concrete furniture decisions, I’ve read enough that I think I know what we may need.”

“Good enough just let me know the dimensions and placement when you know it, please.” Mochi sorted through the bag of supplies in the corner, pulling out the drop cloth and rolls of tape. “Since we’re doing the ceiling in orange, there’s not as much taping to do. If you decide you want to change it to white, it shouldn’t be too hard to cover, that orange isn’t too dark. I think it’ll be fine, but it’s up to you two either way.”

“Alright, I’ll let Kaz know. What do we have to do now?”

“First we tape. Since we mainly are protecting the floor and the baseboards, we can do both at the same time. Watch this, and you’ll get it. You’re just putting the tape as close to the edge of the baseboard as you can, and catching the plastic tarp as well, to keep the paint off the floor. Do you have a tool kit?”

“We do, I’ll get it,” Eijun opened the closet. “We forgot something.”

“Dammit,” Mochi looked over his shoulder. “What is all of this?”

Eijun shrugged. “Hell if I know, we haven’t unpacked any of this since we moved in.”

“Well, it’s a problem for later, I guess. We need to move this too.” He grabbed a box. “Living room, right?”

“Yeah.” Eijun took a couple as well and followed him out. The closet was cleaned out rapidly, and Eijun found the toolbox, bringing it back into the room with him.

“You needed this?”

“Yeah, we need to take the light and socket covers off. It might make it easier if we took the closet door off, too, so we don’t have to worry about getting paint on it. We’ll still have to tape around it and the actual sockets and switches, but taking what we can off will make things easier.”

“The sockets and stuff won’t be dangerous when they’re opened?”
“Naw. You’d have to mess with the actual sockets and switches to get into any trouble. These are just covers. As a matter of fact, you might want to look and see if you can find different light switch covers you like, they come in a lot of patterns and designs that would go well with the room.”

“Great, more things to figure out,” Eijun whined theatrically.

Mochi laughed. “Just have fun with it, Ei. You’ll figure it out.”

“I know, I do,” Eijun sighed. “It’s just sometimes overwhelming, and Kazuya has so much to deal with that I don’t even know how he’s handling it.”

“Don’t tell me. You don’t want to bother him with your issues; he has too much on his plate already?” Mochi guessed.

“Kinda? I know he’d listen and try to help, but I don’t want him to have any more pressure.”

“Where have I heard this before?” Mochi rolled his eyes. “Eijun. How many times do we have go through this? It’s the same thing that happened at Seido. You can’t not talk to him. It doesn’t work out well for you two. You know this, why are you letting it happen again?”

“I don’t mean to, honestly. It’s just he looks so tired sometimes, so stressed about being the bullpen coach and dealing with Peanut and the prejudices that he faces because he’s pregnant. I know it’s wearing on him and I don’t want to make it worse for him by telling him my petty concerns. They’re not important. His health and wellbeing is what’s important.”

“You need to tell him. He needs to know what you’re worried about and how you’re feeling. You know that he’s going to be both hurt and upset if he finds out you’re holding back on him. He’s probably feeling vulnerable and scared himself, this is a big change and a big deal. It’s important for him to know that you’re in the same place, that you’re not sure about things too. I’m sure he’s still worried about you and Haruko, too. Probably still feels guilty about Peanut. You know him, Eijun, what makes you think he doesn’t need to know all of this?”

Eijun sighed again. “I know, Moch, I know. I’ll talk to him today, okay? I just don’t want to be a burden, you know that.”

“And you’re not. You know he doesn’t think of you that way.”

“Yes, but I do.”

“Isn’t that his decision?”

“Kinda? It’s just...nothing. You’re right. I need to tell him what’s bugging me and we’ll work through it. Maybe he has things he wants to talk about as well. We’ve made a lot of important decisions recently, but we haven’t spoken about how we feel about what’s happening.”

“Here,” Mochi handed Eijun the covers. “Put them somewhere you won’t lose them.”

Eijun stuck them in the drawer of the dresser in the other room, returning to see Mochi working to remove the door to the closet. “Here, grab this, wouldja? It’s almost off and I don’t want it to fall.”

Eijun stepped over quickly and took the door from Mochi. “I’ll take it into the hallway, okay?”

“Hang on a sec.” Mochi put the hinge pins into the hinges on the door. “We don’t want to lose those.”
“Good idea.” Eijun carried the door into the hallway, leaning it against the wall.

“Now, let me show you how to tape and you can take care of the other half of the room while I work this way.” Mochi unfolded one of the drop cloths and laid it flat on the floor. “This flooring is nice, if we do drip it’s not hard to clean up, but I’d rather not have to.”

Eijun watched closely as Mochi started to tape along the baseboards, seeing exactly what he was doing. “Gotcha. I’ll start this way. What do we do about the doorways?”

“We go around them like we do the floor, just without the plastic.”

“Okay.” Eijun started taping as well. Once he got the hang of it, it went quickly and he started to talk, telling Mochi about the house in Nagano and what they were naming Peanut.

“Wow. You weren’t kidding that you’ve made a lot of decisions in the last few days. Throw in the display yesterday, and you have a world of stressors. Whose idea was that, anyway?”

“Mine. When we went to Eidos, Georgie noticed Peanut and told us that if it had been me, the cat would have already been out of the bag.” Eijun glared at the tape he was applying to the doorframe. “I still don’t get it, Moch. Why am I the only one who sees what a wonderful parent he’s going to be?”

“Too many people judge on appearances, Ei,” Mochi sighed. “I was as guilty as people who don’t know you all. I know how equal you two are when you’re off the field; I just made the easy assumption that since you’re the younger, more emotional one that you’d be the one pregnant. I’m not proud of that, at all. If I’m jumping to those conclusions, you can bet others who don’t know anything more about your dynamic than what they see on the field is going to be thinking the same. It’s not fair or right, but there it is.”

“I guess? I mean, I get it, but it still bugs that so many people misjudge him. It’s got to be so hard for him to deal with. I don’t know how to fix that, though.” Eijun continued to tape the walls, irritation clear. “Last night, we were watching the news and they said something about how the bullpen must be praying for an easy pregnancy, since he was bad enough without the hormones.”

“They didn’t.”

“They did. They laughed like it was a joke, but I know it bothered him and there’s nothing he can do about it. It has to be so frustrating. If he cracks down on the bullpen, will it all be laughed off as hormones? What if it’s important, something that needs to be addressed?” Eijun sat down on the floor, tape in hand. “I just don’t know how to help him.”

“I don’t know either, but I’m sure you keeping things from him isn’t the best way to do it.”

“Yes, you’re right. I need to get out of my own head.”

“I think you two are strong enough to deal with this together. You’re having a baby, which is amazing. You’re going to be parents. The pregnancy stuff will resolve itself, it’s temporary, your family is permanent, and that’s what you have to concern yourself with.” Mochi stood, throwing his roll of tape in the bag. “And that’s the taping. You got the windows? Good job.”

Eijun stuck his roll in the bag as well, joining Mochi. “What’s next?”

“Painting. First we’ll trim and then roll.” He picked up the bag of brushes and dug out two along with two small empty containers. “We’ll pour paint in these; it’s easier than the rolling tray. Once we get one wall trimmed, I’ll show you how to roll the paint on. That way you and Kaz can do it.
yourselves, I know you both wanted to work on this.”

“Thanks again, I do really appreciate the help.”

“No problems. Now here’s what you do.” Mochi demonstrated how to trim the walls with Eijun watching closely. After the first wall was trimmed, he pulled out the roller pan.

“Painting the walls is easy and quick. You pour in the paint, roll the roller in the paint and then roll it on the walls. It shouldn’t be too bad. The only thing you need to check is the paint color—you may need a few coats to cover the blue. Just let the first coat dry and check it, so you can make the decision.” He let Eijun roll the paint on a section and then put a cover on the roller pan. “Keep this covered, so the paint doesn’t dry out. You only need to cover it when you’re not rolling, it doesn’t dry that quickly.”

Eijun nodded and they went back to trimming and talking. “I’ve been thinking about it, Mochi, and I think most of my concerns are centered on Kaz. I’m not worried about taking care of a baby, I’ve read enough to know when and what to do, and Jun’s an awesome doctor. I know we’ll be good parents; we’re going to love Peanut and talk good care of him. It’s all Kaz. I need to talk to him, make sure he’s all right. He’s not been talking either, there have been a couple of times recently I’ve thought he needed to but he didn’t say anything when I asked.”

“You may have to force the issue.”

“I might, but Kaz is stubborn. Sometimes I have to go around the back way before he’ll admit to feeling anything that he doesn’t think is appropriate. I’ll think about it.”

“Stubborn’s one word for it,” Mochi grinned. “Remember how he got the first year of Uni? He didn’t want to bother you and it took me almost pinning him down to get him to admit to how badly he was feeling.”

Eijun shook his head. “Yeah, it was tough. We were both in a bad way and Haruichi did almost the same thing to me. Less wrestling and more…intimidation, though. I didn’t want him to worry about me; I knew he had so much pressure already.”

“Idiots, the both of you.”

“We’ve learned, we really have.” Eijun applied the paint carefully along the tape. “We’ll be fine, I just…maybe I’ll lead with what few things that are bothering me that don’t have anything to do with him, and then he’ll open up. It’s worked before.”

“You do that, I’m sure you’ll figure it out.” Mochi stood and looked around. “Let me think…a few more things you need to know. When you do the ceiling, there’s an extender in one of the bags that screws into the roller, so you don’t need a chair. You’ll need to stand on something to get the top of the wall; you’ll need to use a brush for it and the corners. Also, the light needs to be taped and painted around like the baseboards. You’ll need to stand on something for that, too. Other than that, you should be good. Just remember to let one coat dry before adding more, and when you take the tape down go slow and careful so you don’t pull off the paint.”

“You’re leaving?” Eijun frowned at him.

Mochi grinned sheepishly. “Yeah, I’m going to surprise Ryou with lunch.”

“Are you?” Eijun grinned back. “Good for you!”

“Thanks. I hope he likes it.”
“He’s going to love it, you know that.”

Following him into the kitchen, Eijun watched as Mochi scrubbed his hands and explained. “This paint is latex based, so you can wash it off with soap and water. When you’re done, you can clean out the brushes, but throw away the roller covers, they’re disposable. Save the roller part, though, you may need them again.”

“Thanks again, Moch. I really appreciate you showing me what to do.”

“Of course, I’ll do anything for Peanut,” he smirked. “Remember that I need to know about furniture placement and size as soon as you figure it out.”

“Yes, I’ll get with Kaz about that as soon as we can.”

“Okay, great. I’ll see you later, Eijun. Take care, alright?” Mochi headed for the door.

Eijun grinned at him. “You too. Tell Ryou we said hello.”

“Sure will, see ya!” Mochi waved as he closed the door behind himself.

Me: You still in meetings?

Kaz: Nope, just leaving the building. How’s it going? Need me to stop for pizza or something?

Me: If you want to, it’s just me. Mochi just left for lunch with Ryou.

Kaz: Got a lot left to do?

Me: Yeah, we do. But I know how, it’s not hard.

Me: We still have stirfry in the fridge. I’ll make some rice, just come home and we’ll eat before we tackle the rest of this.

Kaz: Sure thing. Home soon.

Me: Drive safely, I’ll see you soon!

Chapter End Notes

I love you all for sticking with this, I really, truly do.
*hugs*

Thoughts?
Do you want to read about Eijun getting Kazuya to talk?
I mean, seriously.
Do you?
Nesting, Part One

Chapter Summary

Painting
Shopping
Talking.
And a discussion about diapers.

Chapter Notes

Look at me, making my weekend deadline.

I do hope you enjoy this pile of fluffy fluff, I truly do.
I was asked in the nicest way possible to 'Get On With It' and so I am.
There's talking but hopefully not too much rehashing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kazuya washed the lunch dishes while Eijun put everything away, a dance they’d done so many times over the years that it was routine. Lunch had been uneventful, conversation general. Eijun told him about Mochi and Ryou and explained the painting routine, while Kazuya talked about his meetings.

“Ready to get to work?” Eijun put the last dish away and folded up the dishtowel.

Kazuya turned and rested his hands on Eijun’s hips, pulling him close. “You think we can do this?”

“Yeah, it’s not hard.” Eijun eyed him closely. “Are you okay? I feel like there’s something bothering you.”

“You would know,” Kazuya grinned sheepishly. “I’m fine, really. It’s the same old stuff. Maybe we can talk and paint at the same time? It’s nothing new or earth-shattering, I’m just still bugged about things and I think you can help me gain some perspective.”

“Gotcha. That sounds like a plan.” Eijun stepped back, leading the way back to the nursery. He’d explained everything during lunch, but he knew things would make more sense when they actually started.

“Wow, this is a bigger room than I remember.” Kazuya looked around.

“You should see the guest room. It’s packed. We’re going to have to donate some of that stuff.”

Kazuya nodded, “And go through those boxes. I know.”

“Also, Mochi wants us to tell him where and what we’re going to have in here. I think he’s planning to decorate around the furniture.”
“Maybe we should go shopping tonight, after we’re done. You’ve done a wonderful job with those lists of things we need. We don’t have to buy all of it now, of course, but we at least know what we’re buying and what we need.”

“True. We haven’t been in the baby store since we told the ‘rents. That feels like an eternity, so much has happened since then.”

Kazuya chuckled. “You’re not wrong.” He moved into the room, looking at the setup. “This actually makes sense, what you’ve done here. Okay, so what’s first?”

“We can both trim, get that done, and then roll.”

“Lead on, boss.”

Eijun grinned and showed Kazuya what to do, pouring him a cup of paint to start with. “I’ll get a stool so I can do the ceiling, you can start with the baseboards.”

“I can stand on a chair, Ei.”

“Not when I’m around you aren’t,” Eijun avowed. “And if I’m not available, you can wait until I am or ask someone else. There’s no reason whatsoever for you to jeopardize yourself.”

“I’m pregnant, not crippled. We’ll be fine.”

“Your center of balance is out of whack. Isn’t that the reason Shinji thinks those exercises will help? If you got wobbly while you were perched on a chair, you could really hurt yourself.”

“You’re...you’re not wrong,” Kazuya sighed, sitting on the floor to start trimming. Eijun went to fetch the chair, setting it in the middle of the room. “I hate this, Ei. I hate that people treat me differently because I’m pregnant.”

“I know, and I’m sorry.” Eijun dug in the bag to get the tape out and climbed on the chair to tape the light. “Put yourself in my shoes, though. How protective would you be if I still had Haruko?”

“If we were both pregnant, I think we’d still be staring at each other in shock. And neither of us would be on that chair.” Kazuya laughed.

“You’re not wrong about the first bit, that’s for sure. But now, imagine you’d lost Peanut and I was still pregnant. How much more protective would you be?”

“You would probably not be able to do anything without me glued to your side, I know that,” Kazuya acknowledged and kept painting. “I just want to be treated like I’m the same person, you know? I’m not weak or handicapped.”

“But you’re not the same.” Eijun finished taping and climbed down from the chair to grab a cup of paint. “You’re still you, yes, but you’re more.” He climbed back on the chair and to paint around the light fixture, getting started before continuing. “You’re not broken, you’re not weak, you’re vulnerable. You’re carrying a baby and that makes you someone people want to protect. It’s really has nothing to do with you or your abilities. It’s human nature to want to care for the pregnant; it’s no reflection on what anyone thinks of you. If they do think you’re somehow lesser for being pregnant, well, fuck ‘em.” Moving to the windows, he started painting the parts that needed the chair. “Anyone who thinks pregnancy is for the weak hasn’t been paying attention. You’re strong, Kazuya, one of the strongest people I know.”

Kazuya painted for a while, taking the time to think about what Eijun had said before responding. “I
“Guess I can see where you’re coming from,” he conceded. “I’ve never liked being pitied or treated like I was somehow broken. People did that after my mom died and I hated it. Peanut is important, yes, he is. And I get the whole protection thing.” He sighed again, wiping the extra paint off his brush. “I guess I’m just going to have to ride it out.”

“You know, Mochi said something really smart while he was here. We were talking about some of this same stuff—I’ve been worried about you, but I didn’t want to bother you with it. He said that we’re building a family: pregnancy is temporary, but family is permanent. That’s the important part, that’s what we need to concern ourselves with.” Eijun climbed down to move the chair over to the other window. “It’s not that what you’re feeling is unimportant, I don’t mean that at all. It’s just that it’s sometimes hard to see the forest for the trees.”

“You’re not wrong, that’s something I haven’t really thought about. I mean, I know I’m only going to be pregnant for six more months, but it doesn’t feel temporary right now.”

“I understand. But Kaz, remember when you blew out your knees and people treated you differently? It took them a bit to settle and realize you were still you; this is the same thing. You’re fine; it’s them that are being strange. They’ll get over it. Anyone who can’t see past the baby is not worth consideration.”

“Huh. You’re not wrong.” He moved to the doorway, continuing to edge. “I need to rethink this.”

“That’s all anyone can ask. As long as you’re thinking, we’re good.”

Kazuya looked at Eijun and started to laugh. “You know you have paint on your cheek?”

“I do. It dripped when I was painting around the light fixture.” He grinned. “You have it in your hair already. You must have run your hand through it without realizing it.”

“How does it look? Should I get some orange streaks put in?”

Eijun chuckled. “Don’t make me laugh; I’ll fall off the chair.”

“Maybe I should be doing that, then.” Kazuya suggested.

“No way, I’m about done anyway. We’ll need it again if we have to touch up the corners and such. We’ll see.” Eijun moved the chair out of the room and into the hallway. Coming back in, he looked around. “What do you still have to do?”

“The rest of this wall and around the windows.”

“I’ll work on the windows, then.” Eijun did just that, painting around them as Mochi had showed him.

“Hey, Ei?”

“Yeah?”

“Did you realize that this is the first thing we’ve done for Peanut?” Kazuya asked, a dawning wonder in his voice.

“It is, isn’t it?” Eijun agreed, feeling his eyes mist over. “First of many, I’m sure.”

“You’re right about that.” Kazuya’s voice was husky with emotion. “You know, for all that I’m living with him in my body, every once in a while it hits me we’re going to be parents. You and me,
responsible for the life of a child. It’s both amazing and terrifying, and I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

Eijun met his eyes, the love he felt reflected back to him from Kazuya. “You’re going to be a wonderful father.”

“So are you. Peanut’s going to be lucky to have you,” Kazuya replied, eyes shining. Eijun walked over to where he was sitting on the floor and bent down, kissing him hard.

“We’re going to be parents, Kaz,” Eijun said, straightening up. “I’m incredibly happy to be having a child with you.”

“Yeah.” Kazuya snagged his hand and squeezed. “Me too.”

Eijun grinned. “Partners, right?”

“Yup, partners until the end. Unless you drop the blow-dryer in my bathtub for stealing all the blankets again.” Kazuya laughed.

“Not going to happen. I’ll put my cold feet on you, then you’ll share,” Eijun retorted.

“You’re welcome to try, it hasn’t worked yet,” Kazuya snarked, turning back to his painting.

Eijun grinned as he went back to work. “One of us needs to be an optimist, don’tcha think?”

“That would be your job, you are correct.”

“Thought so.” Eijun nodded decisively.

“Done with this,” Kazuya said some time later, looking around the room. “I think we’ve got all the edges trimmed.”

“On to the next, then.” Eijun took the brushes and put them in a plastic bag. “We’ll leave them in here so they don’t dry out and if we need them they’ll still be useable.” He took the cover off the roller tray and pulled the rollers out. “This is exactly what it looks like. We’re rolling the paint onto the walls. It may take more than one coat to cover the blue, but let’s get one done and then figure it out.”

“Sounds good.” Kazuya took the offered roller. “Show me?”

Eijun did, demonstrating how to load the roller and apply the paint. Together they started to paint, each of them taking their own wall.

“We have to let this dry before we can put another coat on, that should take a bit. Do you want to get this first coat done and then go to the store, grab some dinner?”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Kazuya agreed. “We can shower and go.”

“Yeah, I’m actually kinda looking forward to it now I know so much more about what we’re looking at.”

“Agreed.”
“Hey, Kaz? Maybe we should figure out what we want to put in here before we go.”

“That’s a good idea. What are you thinking? I mean, cribs are pretty standard size, right?”

“They are, as far as I can tell. But where do you think we should put it? Do we want it away from the windows?” Eijun gestured to the two walls that had windows—the one facing the backyard had two, while the wall on the side of the house was shorter and only had one.

“I’d actually...I don’t know. What have you read in your books?”

“They don’t really say. I mean, clearly we don’t want Peanut to get cold, but fresh air’s not a bad idea.” Eijun pondered for a minute. “I don’t want him on the side of the house, though. What if we put the crib between the windows? That way he’ll be near enough to get some fresh air, but still away from the actual window.”

“That’s a good idea; let’s do that if the crib will fit.” Kazuya nodded decisively. “What else do you think we need in here?” He deferred to Eijun’s expertise.

“A dresser, for sure. We should get one with a changing table on top, so there’s a safe place to change Peanut.”

“On the short wall, maybe? The one away from the windows?”

“Yeah. That keeps the naked butt out of the breeze.” Eijun finished his roll of paint and refilled. “You know, I didn’t even feel the usual panic when I thought about changing Peanut. I think all the stuff I read is finally sinking in, thank goodness.”

“That’s really great.”

We haven’t gone to the baby store yet, we’ll see after that.” Eijun laughed as he started on the second wall.

“We should get a bookcase,” Kazuya commented. “Something to hold lots of books.”

“Yes! And a toy box, too.” Eijun agreed.

“Of course, you know the grands are going to spoil him rotten. Not to mention the team.”

“You’re not wrong there,” Eijun sighed. “We’re going to have to be really careful about that, you know?”

“We will. We can always ask them to not get him anything.”

“We could, but that’s not really feasible. They’d just ignore us.”

“True enough. We’ll just watch it, all right? We can always rotate through toys, and we’ll have to make sure he doesn’t grow up too spoiled. Indulged is one thing, spoiled’s another.”

“I think I’d have to drown him if he turned out like Mei.”

“If he turns out like Mei, I’ll join you.” Kazuya laughed.
Kazuya straightened up and looked around the room. “This looks good. We’re going to need another coat, though.”

“Yeah,” Eijun said, putting the rollers into the bag with the paintbrushes and covering the pan. “We’ll get it when we get back. The rolling part didn’t take too long, and it should be a little easier now we know what we’re doing.”

“We do?” Kazuya looked at his paint covered hands. “I don’t know about that.”

“Just because we’re not experienced doesn’t mean we don’t know,” Eijun argued. “True enough.”

“Anyway, you go ahead and get in the shower. I’ll finish straightening up in here while you do. We should be able to finish this in a few hours, I’d think.”

Kazuya gave Eijun a quick kiss. “You’ve got it. I’ll see you in a bit.” He strolled out of the room, and Eijun closed the paint containers and cleaned up what he could, knowing they were going to be back at it again after dinner.

The room clean, Eijun went into the adjoining bathroom and washed the paint off his hands. Heading back into the bedroom, he found clothes for both himself and Kazuya, who had gone directly to the shower. He stepped into the bathroom, setting Kazuya’s clothes down on the countertop. “Here are some clothes for you.”

“Thanks, Ei.” Kazuya peered around the shower curtain.

Eijun grinned at him. “No problem. I’m going to hop into the other shower, it shouldn’t take long.”

“Okay.” Kazuya ducked back under the shower before the soap ran into his eyes.

By the time Eijun walked out of the bathroom, Kazuya was dressed and standing in the nursery, looking at the walls. Eijun stepped up behind him and slid his arms around his waist, laying his hands on the baby bump. Kazuya leaned back into the hug, snuggling up against him and laying his hands on top of Eijun’s.

“I really like this,” Kazuya said softly. “I think this is perfect for this room.”

Eijun buried his head in Kazuya’s neck, leaving a kiss there before answering. “I agree; it’s going to be great for Peanut.” He stood there for a minute, enjoying holding Kazuya in his arms. “How are you feeling?”

Kazuya thought for a minute before answering, taking mental stock. “I’m good, really. I’m still a little irritated about what we talked about, but you’re right. This is our baby, our family, our life. Nobody’s business but our own.”

“You’re absolutely right,” Eijun agreed. “All that out there, none of it’s important, not as important as us, as this.”

Kazuya kissed Eijun’s cheek and continued their routine of checking on each other. “And you? How are you?”

“I’m fine,” he reassured Kazuya. “Seriously. The nightmare the other night threw me for a bit, but I
know it’s going to take some time. I’m more worried about you than anything, honestly.”

“Don’t,” Kazuya said and then quickly amended. “Actually, do. I’d be miserable if I didn’t think you cared. But don’t let it get to you too much. I’ll be fine, we’ll all be brilliant.”

Eijun tightened his grip on Kazuya. “You’re right, we will. We’re finally growing up, huh?”

Kazuya laughed. “Building our family, making decisions, buying houses and planning for the future together? I guess we are.”

“I really like that word.”

“Which one?”

“Together.”

Kazuya pulled Eijun’s hands tighter. “Yeah, me too.”

Eijun followed Kazuya out of the door, heading to their car. Narrowing his eyes at his husband, he held out his hand for the keys.

“I’m fine to drive, Ei. I do it every day.” Kazuya protested.

Eijun continued to hold out his hand. “You do. But not when I can. Please Kaz, let me drive.”

“Sure,” Kazuya capitulated with good grace, knowing this was one of those things Eijun needed. He didn’t mind, really, but he also felt like he needed to assert his independence or Eijun would walk all over him.

“Thanks.” Eijun snagged the keys and opened the door for Kazuya. “Enter, please. Your faithful driver is here to take you wherever you’d like.”

Kazuya kissed him on the cheek as he entered the car. “Thank you, Kato.”

Eijun laughed and walked around to the driver’s seat. “When did The Black Beauty get painted blue?”

“It’s in disguise.” Kazuya answered with a grin.

“Does that make you Britt Reid?”

“I guess so.”

“Well, at least I’m the cool sidekick rather than a lame one.” Eijun started the car, pulling out of the lot and into traffic.

“True enough.” Kazuya agreed, sliding his hand across the console to twine their fingers together.

“Did you remember the list?”

“Of course, it’s in my pocket. And I emailed myself a copy, so it’s on my phone as well.”

“Great. Do you want to look for other baby things than furniture?”
“Yes, I really do.” Eijun signaled for a turn, merging into the next lane. “Now that we actually know what things are and what we need them for, I’d like to get some of the things on the list.”

“You might have to explain some of it to me. I’m not as far as you are in the books.”

“That’s fine; none of it is too scary any more. I don’t think we want to get anything like bottles and stuff until we’ve had a chance to talk to Jun about it, but I do think I’d like to use cloth diapers, if you don’t mind.”

“I don’t think I know enough to have an opinion. I know cloth is better for the environment, but why do you want to use them?”

“The environmental impact is part of it. But they’re also not much more work than disposables—you have to wash them, of course, but that’s about it. You can buy flushable liners you put in them to catch any baby poo, so there’s not much fuss that way. They’re cuter than disposables; the covers of them come in all kinds of patterns and colors. Also, they have a bunch of snaps or Velcro on the front; Peanut may be able to wear the same ones until he’s potty trained.”

“Wow, I didn’t know any of that. It’s fine, if that’s what you want to do. What’s the downside?”

“Well, they’re not cheap to start with, but you don’t need to buy tons of them. Just enough for a few days. We’ll have to wash them, keep a diaper pail with them in it. If we get the stuffable ones we’ll have to stuff them after they’re washed, and we’ll have to lug home wet or dirty diapers when we’re out.”

“Stuffable ones?”

“Yeah, some of them have a pocket inside them—you put a regular cloth diaper inside. The part that touches the baby is water wicking, so his butt’s not wet, and the diaper part sits inside. You have to take them apart when you wash them, and then put the diaper back. They’re nice because you can add more filling if you need it—for instance, overnight. The ones that are one piece are more convenient, but they don’t have the ability to adjust the capacity.”

“Well, then. Maybe we should do some kind of hybrid thing? I mean, we can do the one-piece ones for everyday, buy some of the stuffable ones for overnight? Whoever we get to babysit will probably be able to handle the cloth ones, but when we go on trips or something we may want to use disposables.”

“That’s brilliant.” Eijun shot Kazuya a grin. “I hadn’t even thought about using a combination, I’d been debating between the two. Nice going.”

“Glad I could help, honestly. I feel so lost with so much of this still.”

“I know, and we’ll take our time. I’m not an expert by any means, I just have a list and some ideas of what things are for.” Eijun pulled into the parking lot. “We’ll start with the furniture and get that out of the way first, okay? Then we’ll look at other stuff.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“Let me get your door.” Eijun climbed out of the car, coming around.

“Eijun, I—”

“I know. You’re fine. You’re not dizzy any more. You don’t need to be pampered. I get it.” Eijun sighed as he offered Kazuya his hand.
“No.” Kazuya stood, keeping Eijun’s hand. “I was going to say that I appreciate how you’re taking care of me. All that stuff I was worried about from others? I don’t mind any of it from you, if it’s you it’s fine. I love the way you think about me and Peanut, how much you worry about us and I hope you never stop.”

Eijun looked at Kazuya, meeting his eyes. “Do you mean that? You’re not just saying it to make me feel better?”

“I’m not, I promise.” Kazuya let his sincerity show. “I don’t say it enough, but you’re the one I’m depending on to help me get through this. You’re the one I need to take care of me, you’re my rock.”

“I love you, you know that? I know you don’t like to ask, but if you need anything from me at all, please do. I don’t always know what you want.”

“I’ll try, but Eijun, so far you’re doing amazingly well.” Kazuya gestured at the store. “Shall we?”

“Yes, let’s.”

They walked to the store, hand in hand. Once inside, Eijun looked at the carts. “Should we grab one?”

“We’re going to need it, aren’t we?”

“We should, but maybe we should wait until after we’re done with the cribs. That way we won’t have to deal with an empty cart before we really need it.”

“Fine with me. We’ll just get one when we’re done with this part.”

Eijun started down the main aisle. “Heading back to the furniture first?”

“Yes.”

They made their way back to the row of cribs. “What do you think, Kaz? They’re all basically the same; it’s just a matter of style and color.”

“We don’t want anything too flashy, the walls are going to be enough, I think. Something plain and classic, maybe?”

“You’re not wrong. What do you think will look good with the orange?”

“What are our choices?” Kazuya eyed the cribs on display. “White, light brown, medium brown, dark brown, black, and gray?”

“Pretty much, if you’re only interested in neutrals.” Eijun agreed.

“Okay, the floor’s natural bamboo, so I don’t want to go with light brown. I really like the idea of dark brown or black, those would both go well with the walls and floors.”

“Brown’s better, I think.” Eijun said. “Let’s see what we can find. Remember, a lot of these come in different finishes, so if we see something we love, we should ask.”

“Gotcha.”

They started their trek through the furniture department. They were about halfway through when Eijun pulled Kazuya to a stop. “I love that dresser.” He pointed to a dark brown dresser with curved steel handles. “The drawer pulls are different, I like the deco touch.”
“That’s nice, and it’s the right color. I wonder if there’s a crib that matches?” Kazuya walked over to it to look it over. “Maybe the company makes cribs in the same color, or it’s part of a collection.”

“Good afternoon, can I help you find something?” Eijun heard the voice behind him and spun around. A salesperson was standing behind him, watching with a friendly smile on her face. She stepped closer and held out her hand. “My name is Keiko, and you two look like you could use some assistance.”

Eijun shook her hand. “Sawamura Eijun, and we’d love some help.”

Kazuya stepped up beside him as he spoke, smiling at Keiko. “Yes, please.”

She laughed at their expressions. “Of course. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Sawamura-san, Miyuki-san. What are you looking for?”

“All we want is a crib, a dresser, and a bookshelf,” Kazuya told her. “Does it have any matching pieces?”

Eijun looked them over carefully, knowing Kazuya was doing the same. He knew Kaz was going to sit back a bit on this; he generally did when it came to furnishings unless he had a strong opinion. “These convert to full beds, right?”

“Please.” Kazuya agreed and she led them down the row, Keiko stopping to point to a pair of cribs. “These both are the same color as the dresser; do you like either of them?”

Eijun looked them over carefully, knowing Kazuya was doing the same. He knew Kaz was going to sit back a bit on this; he generally did when it came to furnishings unless he had a strong opinion. “These convert to full beds, right?”

“Yes, as needed. When the baby’s old enough to need a toddler bed, you can take one side off and put up a rail to keep them from rolling out of bed and the mattress can be lowered so they can get out without hurting themselves. You can take the railing off later for a daybed. When they’re old enough, you can use these as the head and foot boards of a full sized bed.”

“Really?” Kazuya was surprised. “So the baby can use the same bed until they’re an adult.”

“Yes, that’s the idea.”

“Wow.” Kazuya looked duly impressed.

“Mom told us this before, Kaz. Don’t you remember?”

“I don’t. That visit was a bit of a blur.”

“Fair enough. I do really like this one, though.” It was the less elaborate of the two, with a traditional, simple frame. “The legs match the ones on that dresser.”

Kazuya looked over at the dresser and then turned back to the crib. “They sure do. Good eye.”

“Okay, so do you want these or would you prefer to look some more?” Keiko asked Kazuya.
Kazuya gestured to Eijun. “Ask him, he’s the one who makes these kinds of decisions.”

“I’m good, I like these. Do you have a bookcase that would go?” Eijun asked as she pulled purchasing tags out of the two display models.

“We do, let me show you.” She led them to the back of the department, where bookcases were lined up against the wall. “This is the closest, I think, but it may be too big.”

“It won’t be,” Kazuya said with a soft smile. “You can never have too many books, it’s perfect.” He turned to Eijun who was watching him carefully. “It even has the same legs.”

“You’re right, it does,” Eijun agreed. “We’ll take that, too.”

“Great, anything else?” Keiko asked. “Have you considered a rocking chair?”

“No, but that’s really not a bad idea,” Eijun said to Kazuya. “When Peanut’s fussy, we can rock him to sleep.”

“Where would we put it, though?”

“In the corner, the one between the windows. That way we’ll get the light and view and fresh air if it’s nice. We should also get a side table, maybe a lamp.”

“If you want a side table, there’s one from the same line as the dresser,” Keiko informed them.

“Show us, please,” Eijun said and she set out, followed by the pair.

“Right here.” She gestured. “Same finish, same line.”

“Perfect,” Eijun said, and she added that to their pile of items. “Now, rockers?”

“Right over there.” She pointed out the row of chairs and let them walk ahead of her so they could see them all and figure out what they wanted.

“I don’t think I want a wooden one, they don’t seem like you could easily sit in them for a long time.” Kazuya said.

“Do you want one like these? I think they’re called gliders, not rockers.”

Kazuya sat in one, tried it, and got up. “That was nice, but not really what I want. If we can’t find a rocker, just a chair would be all right, I think. I want something super comfortable.”

“I get what you mean. You want something like—like that.” Eijun pointed to a rocker up the row a bit.

“Exactly.” Kazuya bypassed all the other chairs to sit down in it. He smiled. “This one. I want this one.”

“What colors does this come in?” Eijun turned to Keiko.

“Let me see.” She pulled the tag over the chair to hang in the front. “Here are samples of each of the fabrics.”

“Hmmm…” Eijun thumbed through them. “This is hard, I like a few of them but I don’t know that they’ll go with the crib set.”
“Did you get it here?”

“Yeah, we did.”

“We may still have it in stock—do you want to go see if you can find it?”

“Great idea, I’ll be right back.” Eijun went back to the crib aisle, looking for their set. He saw it and grabbed what he now knew was a receiving blanket for comparison. Hurrying back to where Kazuya waited, he laid it over the back of the chair while they all looked at the choices.

Finally, Kazuya spoke up. “I think the blue is the closest.”

“I like the orange a lot, but it’s off just enough to make me nervous, since the walls are orange too.”

“You’re right, plus there might be such a thing as too much orange?”

“Maybe,” Eijun agreed. “What about the green?”

“That would work too, that or the blue. I prefer the blue but it really doesn’t matter much.”

“Alright, the blue it is,” Eijun said, turning to Keiko. “Blue, please.”

“Perfect, that color we have available right away.” They started back towards the cribs so they could return the borrowed blanket.

“Thanks.” Eijun said, and then turned back to Kazuya. “Was there anything else?”

“One thing. I had a question about the dressers.” Kazuya started. “Does the dresser we want come with the baby changing top, like some of the other ones do?”

“No, it doesn’t,” Keiko said with a smile. “But neither do these others, at least not how you’re thinking of them. You can buy a changing tabletop; it’s a tray that attaches to the dresser for use as a changing table. When the baby’s older, you can take it off so the dresser has a normal top.”

“Okay, that makes sense,” Kazuya said. “Do you have one that fits our dresser?”

“I do, over here.” She led them over to the dressers. “These ones are the same color as your dresser. Which do you prefer? They’re all the same, basically, there’s a large spot for the baby and one or more smaller spots for supplies.”

“Which is the one that fits the dresser the best?”

“This one is the same size as the top.”

“Then we’ll take that one. What else do we need?”

“For the nursery setup?” Keiko tapped her chin thoughtfully. “You’ll need a mattress, a changing pad to put in here for the baby to lay on. A lamp for the table. A diaper pail.” She thought some more. “That’s all I can think you’ll need. There’s always the fun stuff.”

“Okay, can you show us the mattresses?” Eijun asked. “The rest we can pick out ourselves, I think.”

“Sure thing, over this way.” She led them to where there were a half dozen or so different mattresses lined up. “There are a variety of prices, but to tell you the truth, I’m not sure there’s a ton of difference. If I were you, I’d buy a mid-range mattress. You don’t want the cheapest, but the expensive ones aren’t worth it either, as far as I’ve seen.”
They took her advice—they picked one in the upper middle price range, one that was from a brand they both recognized.

“Is there anything else I can help you find?”

“No, thanks. I think that’s all we need right now.” Kazuya said with a smile. “Thank you for your help.”

“No worries. If you’ll just take this,” she handed them the pile of tags and her sheet of paper, “to the customer service desk, they’ll check you out and arrange for the furniture to be delivered.”

“Will do, thank you again, Keiko.” Eijun said, shaking her hand.

“My pleasure, Sawamura-san. If you ever need help again, please ask for me. I’m more than happy to assist you.”

“We will.” Kazuya agreed and took Eijun’s hand as they turned away to walk to the front of the store.

“That...that was both a little tougher and took a little longer than I thought it would.” Eijun said with a chuckle.

Kazuya nodded in agreement. “It was. I have a feeling we may be saying that a lot in the next few years.”

“You could be—in fact, you’re probably absolutely correct.” Eijun said. “But we’ve never been ones to take the easy road.”

“True enough.” Kazuya agreed as they approached the customer service desk. “Where’s the fun in that?”

Chapter End Notes

So, fluffy enough?

This should (I have a feeling I’m going to regret saying this) but it SHOULD move a little more quickly now. At least that’s the working theory. But what do I know, i just wrote 5.5k words about painting a room and shopping for a crib. I have no perspective.
Chapter Summary

Shopping, baseball, doctors...all in all a couple of normal weeks.

Or are they?

Chapter Notes

I'm still alive!

Sorry it took so long to update, but this is my baby and it will never die!

Thank you for your patience, and I hope you enjoy this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Week Fifteen**

Sitting at his desk, working on the strategy for the three-game series they had coming up against the leader in their division, Kazuya heard his phone buzz. He’d been waiting to hear from Eijun who was at the doctor’s office getting his shoulder checked; he pulled it out to check the messages.

_Ei: At fifteen weeks, Peanut has taste buds._

_Me: Good, maybe this awful cheeseburger craving will stop and we can go somewhere other than the diner._

_Ei: If we stop going there, no more fried pickles._

_Me: Let’s not be too hasty. I’m sure I can find something else on the menu._

_Ei: Good. She’s also about 70 grams._

_Me: That’s so tiny._

_Ei: I know. But she’ll grow._

_Me: Yes, she will. Almost done?_  

_Ei: Yeah, want to go get something to eat?_  

_Me: Sure._

_Ei: Cheeseburgers good?_
Me: yes, dammit.

Me: Our evening's clear, should we make another try at the baby store?

Ei: Good idea!

Ei: see you soon.

Eijun smiled at the server who’d stopped by to take their order. “I’ll have the turkey club, please. With fries.”

“Cheeseburger with everything and fries,” Kazuya told her. “And some fried pickles, please. Extra ranch.”

“Not a problem, I’ll get this right in,” she said with a smile, turning towards the kitchen.

Kazuya eyed Eijun. “Are you getting tired of this place? If you are, it’s fine. I can live without cheeseburgers.”

“No, no,” Eijun said. “I just wanted to try something different; I’m not the one with a ravening beast demanding culinary sacrifices in their body. I like this place, really.”

“If you’re sure.”

“I am.”

“Okay, good.” Kazuya looked at him, eyes narrowing. “Now that we’ve got the preliminaries out of the way, what did Shinji have to say?”

Eijun stalled, unrolling his silverware, lining the knife and fork up precisely. “Nothing new, really.”

“Eijun.”

“Really,” Eijun sighed. “He didn’t say much we didn’t already know. It’s just a little...hard to admit.”

Kazuya covered Eijun’s hand with his, giving it a squeeze. “How long?”

“I’ll be fine, don’t worry about me.”

“Eijun.”

Eijun capitulated, reluctantly. “The end of next season if I’m careful.”

“What did he recommend?”

“That I be careful.”

“Seriously, Ei.”

Eijun sighed again, knowing Kazuya wasn’t going to let him worm out of telling him everything.

“He said there was no reason for me to quit before next season and to play it by ear. Just be careful. Unless something catastrophic happens, I shouldn’t be so badly banged up that I have any real issues later.”

“Are you telling me the truth?”
“Yes, I am. I wouldn’t lie to you about this; I know you’ll just ask him if you think I am. Really.”

“Okay,” Kazuya’s tone softened, understanding underlying every word. “I believe you. Are you alright?”

“No,” Eijun said flatly. “But I will be. It’s just hard, hearing that you have an expiry date, you know? I mean, it’s not unexpected, it’s just...unexpectedly difficult.”

“I get that.” Kazuya laced their hands together. “I really do. Do you want to talk about it? Feel free to rant at me all you’d like, I understand and am more than happy to listen.”

Eijun smiled softly at him. “No, that’s okay. I may want to later, but not right now. Thank you for being willing to listen, I love you for that. I know you didn’t actually get any lead time to work through things when you were hurt and I feel like such a crybaby about it.”

“You’re not,” Kazuya said emphatically. “Loss is loss, and if it’s quick or if it’s over time, it still hurts.”

They sat back as the server brought their food and Eijun changed the subject as they started to eat.

“So, what did I miss? Any big plans for the series?”

“Not really.” Kazuya ate a pickle. “Just the usual. Try to win.”

“You think we can?”

Kazuya thought about it for a minute before answering. “Honestly? I do. It’s just a matter of everyone doing their job. I think we’ve been underestimated this season; Hara’s really come along quicker than I thought he would. We’re only a couple of games out of first, we could do it. I don’t know that we will, there are a lot of variables, but I do believe we can.”

“That’s...wow. You’re not usually so optimistic.”

“Well, yeah. I mean, there’s only so much the bullpen can do, but we do have some decent hitters. I don’t know, I just think we could take it this year.”

Eijun grinned. “I don’t want to be that person, but maybe it’s hormones.”

“Then what’s your excuse? You’re stupidly optimistic all the time.”

“True.” Eijun frowned in thought. “But that’s normal for me.”

“Are you saying your hormone levels are high all the time?” Kazuya snarked.

“Maybe? I don’t know!” Eijun huffed out a breath before his voice softened. “But I do have to admit, I love the more vulnerable you. I know it’s hard for you, you don’t really have the control you’re used to, but I love the way you’re able to tell me what you want, what you’re thinking. It’s amazing and precious to me.”

Kazuya’s smirk softened to a smile, one that few people other than Eijun ever saw. “I’ve actually gotten kind of used to it. I don’t know if I’ll go back to the way I was once all of this is over, I can’t say for sure, but I’d like to still be more open. At least to you and Peanut. You both deserve it, and I can’t say I mind it so much.”

“I’m glad,” Eijun said, matching his smile with a loving one of his own before bringing the conversation more general.
They ate, talking about everything and nothing in particular. Eijun paid the bill and they left, hand in hand. “We’ll see you later, thank you for stopping by,” The host said on their way out, with a big smile.

“We’ll be back,” Eijun answered with a smirk at Kazuya. “At least for the next couple of months.”

Kazuya elbowed him and chuckled, not even able to muster any indignation. “You have no chill, you know that?”

“Hush, you. I still remember the purple hat.”

“That hat was awesome,” Kazuya laughed. “No, I lied. I can’t even say that with a straight face. But it’s been years, I’ve learned.”

Eijun nodded fervently in agreement. “You couldn’t have gotten much worse.” He opened the door for Kazuya, bowing him in. “Your coach, Miyuki-sama.”

Kazuya snorted, climbing in. “You’re ridiculous, you know that?”

“You love it,” Eijun said as he closed the door.

“I love you.” Kazuya clarified just as the door closed.

Pulling back into the familiar parking lot, Eijun glanced over at Kazuya. “Once more into the breach?”

“I’m not sure that shopping for Peanut is quite as important as the Hundred Year’s War was, Eijun.” Kazuya chuckled as he opened his door to climb out. Eijun stepped around the car and offered him his hand, linking their fingers.

“Maybe not quite so desperate, but the idea’s the same.”

“Fair enough.” Kazuya followed him through the door and grabbed a cart. “Lead on, Henry.”

“Of course, Catherine.” Eijun laughed and reached into his pocket for the list.

“So I have this in department order, from what I could remember of the store’s layout. Some of these things are items for the room that Mochi suggested, I think they may have them here.”

“Okay, we’re starting with clothes?”

“Yeah.” Eijun led him through the department. “We’ll skip this front part unless you see something ungendered that you like. When Peanut’s a baby, she won’t be able to tell us what she wants to wear for the first year or two, so it’s up to us.”

“What about something like this?” Kazuya pulled a pair of overalls off the rack and held them up. “They’re red, so unisex. There are snaps in the legs, so easy diaper access, and they’re adorable.”

“Exactly. Those are perfect. We should maybe stick to things that are smaller, and worry about the larger ones later. What size is that?”

“The tag says 12 months.”

“That’s good, that means it’s infant size. If it has a T after it, like 2T, that means toddler. It’s too big;
they don’t get small enough for a newborn. I think we should focus on 3 months and 6 months, with only a few newborn things. Babies grow fast.”

“Okay, let’s get 6 months, it has straps. We can shorten them for her or let them out, and roll up the legs if it’s needed. That way she can wear it for a long time.”

“Good thinking, let’s do. The other good thing is we don’t have to buy a shirt for it, she can wear a onesie underneath and be fine.” Eijun dropped it in the cart. They added a pair of jeans (‘look at those little pockets!’) and a t-shirt with a catcher’s mitt (‘Catch me if you can? Sold!’) before they got through to the sleepers.

“We’re looking for footless and snaps, right?” Kazuya remembered what Chika had told them earlier.

“Well, kinda? Footed are fine, they just won’t fit quite as long. Whatever we see we like. Peanut’s going to be born in late fall, so she’ll be wee during the winter. I think we should get plenty of 3-month size warm sleepers and onesies so we can layer, depending on the weather. And then just a few of the 6-month size sleepers and lots of onesies for later. If she grows fast, we may need more sleepers, but that’s not really a big deal.” Eijun indicated the racks. “It looks like the heavier ones are hanging; the lighter ones are in packages.”

“Okay, so how many do we need?”

“We do laundry twice a week, right? Let’s say she uses three a day—one for the day, one for the night and one in case of accidents. That’s a dozen. But we’re not going to want to dress her the same all the time and there may be times we can’t do laundry as often.”

“True, but we can probably build into the total what we’re going to get as gifts, plus we have what Mom sent down,” Kazuya said.

“You’re right. We’ll get a dozen of these in 3 months and six 6 months, as well as a dozen of onesies in each size. That should be plenty.”

“Wait, Ei. Let’s only get about half of that. We may want to get more after she’s born, ones in pink or blue or something.”

“You’re...yeah. We should. Plus we may see something that we like later, we have lots of time.”

“Okay, let’s see what we can find.” A few minutes later, they’d dropped seven sleepers in the cart. Kazuya couldn’t decide between the sheep and the cows, so Eijun unceremoniously dumped both of them in the cart.

“Onesies. Now here we have a few different things going on.” Eijun explained, pulling out a hanger. “You can have them like this, with the snaps on the shoulder, but there are others that just pull over the head. These are a little thicker, more like what you’d pair with the overalls. The ones in the packages are thinner, better for layering. There’s different sleeve length, of course, but you really only want long sleeves on the ones that are visible. So, we should pick up a couple of these, but several packages of the thinner ones. The ones that don’t have snaps are easier to get on and off, you can do it from either direction. So if there’s a leak, you don’t have to pull the nasty diaper over her head.” Eijun blinked and Kazuya laughed.

“You totally didn’t even pause saying that.”

“I know, right?” Eijun grinned. “So, pick out a couple of these, and we’ll go get some packages of onesies over there.” Kazuya made short work of it and they moved on.
Socks and soft shoes followed afterward. (‘You don’t put shoes on a baby!’ ‘Why not?’ ‘They don’t walk!’ ‘But look how cute they are.’ ‘Okay, fine. But only one pair.’)

Next up, diapers. They’d spoken about them previously, so it was only a matter of deciding on the covers. They got a couple of dozen of the one-piece diapers in various prints, and a dozen stuffables, as well as two dozen cloth diapers. (‘Why so many cloth diapers?’ ‘Mom says they’re good for lots of things, you can never have too many.’)

“You okay, Kaz?” Eijun eyed him closely, noting his tired eyes and sloped shoulders. “You look tired. Want to go home, call it good? We can always do the rest of this later.”

Kazuya shrugged. “You’re not wrong, I’m beat. We were going all day with practice and strategy meetings about the games this week, and I didn’t get a break.”

“What, no nap on the couch?” Eijun stepped closer and ran his hand down Kazuya’s arm. “I’m sorry; you’ve got to be exhausted. We’ll just go.”

“Not yet, okay? I’d like to get the rest of the stuff for the room. Like the lamp and the light switch cover? The stuff we don’t have yet.”

“Okay, that shouldn’t take too long, we’ll do that.” Eijun led the way back towards the furniture department, turning down the aisle that held decorative items. The lamps were in a row on a few shelves and they made their way down the aisle, looking them over.

“Look, this one’s the same as the comforter set,” Kazuya said, pointing to one with a base that had an elephant and monkey painted on it.

Eijun slid an arm around his waist. “I...that’s nice, but I’m not sure—” he stopped and walked over to a lamp just a little ways down. “This one, Kaz. Please?”

Kazuya pushed the cart down the aisle to see what it was he was looking at. When it registered, he started to laugh. “That one, really?”

“Yes! It’s darling and perfect.” Eijun picked it up, running a thumb over the carved figure that was sitting on the base of the lamp.

“You do know that’s a raccoon, right? It’s not a tanuki.”

“Of course! It’s close enough, though.” Eijun looked at him with a plea in his eyes.

Kazuya sighed, knowing he’d never been able to deny him something he really wanted. “It’s good. Put it in the cart.”

“Thank you!” he beamed, setting it gently among the clothing.

They continued to the end of the aisle, where they found a selection of switch plates. Kazuya found one and pulled it off the hook. “This one? Or is there some other high school nickname you want to reference?” he snarked.

“I don’t think they have a sarcastic asshole light switch cover, so this is fine.” Eijun grinned and dropped it in the cart. “Anything else?”

“Books. We need some more books.”

“Sure, Kaz. Whatever you’d like.”
Strolling down the main aisle, they were passing the stuffed animals when Kazuya pulled the cart to a halt. “Okay, if we’re getting the lamp, we’re getting this.” He pulled something off the shelf and showed Eijun.

“Seriously?” Eijun grinned. “I never understood that, but if you want it, that’s fine.”

Kazuya smiled back and set the stuffed Shiba Inu in the cart. “He’s cute, look at that bandana.”

“Yes, he is.” Eijun’s eyes were caught by another toy. “Look, Kaz!” he picked it up and tossed it to him and Kazuya caught it automatically.

“Okay, yes.” Kazuya tossed the soft item into the cart, writing side up. It read, ‘My 1st Baseball’.

“Anything else?”

“Books.”

“Yeah.” Eijun pushed the cart in that direction. “Let’s go see what we can find.”

When they arrived at the aisle, Kazuya started at one end and worked his way down, smiling at titles like he was greeting old friends. Eijun decided that was, in fact, what he was doing. Watching his husband reconnect with the things that had meant so much to him when he was young made Eijun’s heart melt and he was sure he was sporting a sappy smile. Not that he minded, seeing this side of Kazuya always made him happy. And sentimental. He blinked back the moisture that gathered in his eye and stepped up to his side, placing a soft hand on Kazuya’s waist.

“Which ones this time?” Eijun asked, rubbing Kazuya’s back.

“I think...these ones.” He pulled half a dozen books off the shelf. “What do you think?”

Eijun looked at the titles. “Where the Wild Things Are, Goodnight Moon, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Are You My Mother, Mother Goose, Where the Sidewalk Ends. I remember these.” He took them out of Kazuya’s hands and placed them in the cart. “Can I pick a few?”

“Of course, these are for our kids, why shouldn’t you?” Kazuya smiled at him. “Did you read a lot when you were young? All I remember you reading at Seido were manga.”

“There’s a reason I got a lit. degree, remember? I did, just not for the same reasons you did. I did it when there were quiet times, when I should be sleeping or everyone was napping, when it was too hot or cold to be outside for long. I read a lot and not all of it was manga.” He took a couple of steps past the picture books and picked up a box. “Starting with this.” He added it to the growing pile in the cart.

“Harry Potter? That’s a little advanced for Peanut, isn’t it?”

“Right now? Yes, but she’ll grow into it. We can read it to her, too.” Eijun looked at him a little uncertainly.

Kazuya wasn’t sure where that was coming from, but he knew he didn’t want his boy digging himself into a hole, so he asked. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m...am I intruding? Did you have some plan of when you wanted to get the books, or an order or
something?”

“Wait, are you—” Kazuya stepped closer, taking his hand. “Eijun, listen. How would you even be intruding? That’s the farthest thought from my mind. This is our baby, and we’re taking care of her and getting her things. You’re her father; you get to do this too.”

Eijun exhaled, relaxing. “I know, I’m sorry. I don’t know why I keep thinking that way.”

“It’s fine, I know the brain gets crazy sometimes.” Kazuya rubbed the back of his hand. “Try to remember that we’re in this together, okay? And even if you think that I’m claiming something like this for myself, I’m really not. Ask me, please. Don’t let it get in your head.”

“I will, I do.” Eijun leaned his head on his shoulder. “Thanks.”

“Always, Ei.” He smoothed down Eijun’s hair. “You want anything else?”

Eijun stood up, dropping a kiss on Kazuya’s cheek. “No, this is good. We should get you home, you need some more rest.”

“Yes, please.” Kazuya took control of the cart and they made their way back to the front of the store and out into the night.

Three days later, they found themselves in the bullpen awaiting the start of the first game of their series. Their opponent was starting out with all of their best players on the field so they could take a rest the following day, be ready for the third game.

Kazuya was beside Eijun and Takahashi, giving them last minute notes. “Eijun, remember, their third batter is good at hitting your changeup, you need to watch it. Takahashi, watch him, he’s going to try to overdo it. Let me know the second his shoulder looks off, okay?”

Rolling his eyes, Eijun glared. “We know what we’re doing, Miyuki-Kantoku.”

“Yes, I know you think you do, but the last time we went against these guys we got beaten.”

“Can I talk to you for a second?” Eijun pulled Kazuya to one corner of the bullpen away from the rest of the players warming up.

“Okay, what’s eating you?” Eijun eyed Kazuya carefully.

“Honestly? I have a bad feeling about this game.” Kazuya rubbed the back of his neck. “This whole series has me on edge.”

“Why? Is there something specific?” Eijun knew what was bugging him, but wasn’t sure that Kazuya had put it together.

“Not really, if I knew, I’d tell you.”

“Is it because we haven’t played these guys since the game you wrecked your knee?”

“We haven’t?” Kazuya wracked his brain, trying to remember. “You’re right, we haven’t.”

“It’s been a hard road for you and you went through so much. I’m so proud of what you’ve done, Kaz.” Eijun touched his shoulder lightly; they tried to keep physical affection out of the bullpen. “But we’ll be fine. Really.”
“I know, I do. I just hadn’t realized that it was them, but my brain apparently did.”

“I was wondering, you hadn’t mentioned it. I wasn’t going to bring it up if you’d completely forgotten, but it’s clear you didn’t.”

“Nope, but thanks for reminding me, now I know what it is I can deal with it.”

“Well,” Eijun murmured. “I thought we could...change our memories of this team.”

Kazuya’s head came up and he met Eijun’s eyes. He saw a hint of something in them that warmed his blood and melted his bones. “What do you mean?”

Eijun leaned closer and whispered in his ear. “This time they’re white.”

Kazuya’s eyes widened and his mind stuttered to a halt. “You didn’t.”

“I did,” Eijun smirked and turned to walk away. “Let’s all do our best out there, Miyuki-Kantoku. It’s going to be a hell of a game.”

Kazuya stood there and watched him move away, mind racing.

For the rest of the day, he didn’t even think about the game that cost him his career.

They won.

All three games.

Week Sixteen

Me: Don’t forget we have the doctor’s appt this afternoon. We should leave @ 2.

Ei: Aye, aye, captain!


Ei: But you looovveee me.

Me: And?

Ei: At 16 weeks, Peanut has eyebrows and eyelashes.

Ei: And is about 12cm long.

Ei: And can hear.

Ei: Maybe we should read to him.

Me: You’re adorable, you know that. Even if you are a nerd.

Ei: Love you too, asshole.

Eijun strolled into Kazuya’s office ten minutes early and found him lying down on his couch, feet up and tablet in his hand as he reviewed some footage from their next opponent. Kazuya grinned and
lifted his feet, and Eijun slid onto the end, pulling his legs into his lap.

“Hey, you. How are you feeling?”

“I’m good. You ready?” Kazuya closed the program and put down the tablet.

‘Whenever you are. I left Hara with Takahashi to finish up. Practice is winding down anyway.’

“Good.” Kazuya sat up, swinging his legs off the couch. “How did things look after I left?”

“Fine, it’s getting a little warm out there, but it’s fine.” Eijun stood and offered Kazuya his hand.

“How’s Peanut?”

“He’s good.” Kazuya rubbed his bump that seemed to get a little bigger every day. He could no longer wear any of his old clothes that weren’t sweats, and Peanut was definitely making his presence known.

Eijun reached out and laid his hand on Kazuya’s stomach. “Hi, baby. I love you, grow well.”

Kazuya grinned. “Nerd.”

“Hey, you never know. It can’t hurt, right?” Eijun looked a little hurt and Kazuya felt like an idiot.

“No, no. Hey.” He reached out and pulled Eijun close. “I’m sorry, you’re right. It’s good to talk to him. And the idea of reading to our baby is amazing; I’d love for us to start doing that.”

Eijun rested his head on Kazuya’s shoulder. “You mean it? You’re not just humoring me?”

“No!” Kazuya kissed his temple. “When you first mentioned it I was a little surprised, I’d never heard of such a thing. But thinking about it, it’s a great idea. We can start tonight, want to trade off?”

“Sure, switching is one thing we do well,” Eijun said, meeting Kazuya’s gaze.

“Okay, well,” Kazuya smirked. “It didn’t take long for that conversation to descend to the gutter.”

Eijun laughed. “We’re good like that.” He stepped away and offered Kazuya his hand. “Ready to go? Your chariot awaits!”

“And yet I repeat. Nerd.”

Eijun drove, as usual, and Kazuya was looking out the window, hand rubbing his stomach.

“You okay, Kaz? Stomach upset?”

“Not really, it feels a little rumbly, but not sick or anything. I don’t know if it’s gas, I guess I’ll ask Haruichi about it.”

“Really?” Eijun started to pull over into a parking lot.

“It’s not a big deal, you don’t have to stop, I’ll be fine.” Kazuya insisted.

“No, I really do.” Eijun stopped the car and turned to him, looking at him intently. “What does it feel like?”

“Like I said, bubbles or gas or something. It happens for a few minutes then stops.”
“How long has this been happening?”

“For a few days. It’s no big deal, Ei. We should go; we’re going to be late.”

“And it’s always in or near the same spot?”

“Yes.” Kazuya was thoroughly confused but willing to go with it. He figured Eijun would get to the point eventually.

“How often do you feel it?”

“A couple of times a day, mostly when I’m lying down or resting.”

Eijun’s eyes were sparkling, a wide smile beaming at Kazuya. “That’s not gas, Kaz. It’s Peanut.”


“You’re sixteen weeks, right? Almost four months, almost halfway done. It’s a little on the early end, but you’re an athlete. You’re in tune with your body; you know what’s normal and what’s not. Plus guys tend to feel kicking a little earlier anyway. But yeah, I think that’s Peanut.”

It was Kazuya’s turn to get teary. “Are you sure? I mean, I know he’s growing and fine, but this...Eijun, this is our baby.”

“I know.” Eijun smiled at him, eyes glittering. “You’re carrying our baby, and I couldn’t love you any more than I already do.”

“You really think it’s Peanut?”

“I do. We’ll ask Haruichi, but I think he’s kicking around in there.” Eijun reached out and laid his hand on Kazuya’s cheek. “You’re amazing, you know that?”

“I wouldn’t even consider doing this without you.” Kazuya took his hand and dropped a kiss into it. “Do you think you can feel him too?”

“I doubt it. It usually takes a few weeks before he’ll be strong enough for people to feel him kick.” Eijun started the car and headed back down the road. “But I will, soon.”

The Kominato clinic was busy, the waiting room crowded. When they checked in with the receptionist, they learned that Haruichi was called into an emergency delivery and hadn’t yet returned. They’re given the option of seeing his assistant, waiting, or rescheduling—they decide to see his assistant, this visit isn’t an important one and there wasn’t really anything wrong, so no need to reschedule. After just a few minutes of waiting, Kazuya was called back. Eijun was surprised at the speed, but he knew they were going to want to take an ultrasound, so he figured they’d do that and send them back out to wait for the doctor.

After Kazuya’s usual weight and urine check, they were waved into the ultrasound room and Kazuya got on the table, pulling up his shirt. The ultrasound tech was one they were familiar with, and she greeted them with a smile as she completed her paperwork. Spreading the gel on Kazuya’s stomach, she went through the routine of taking pictures and measurements, while they watched, still fascinated.

“He’s so much bigger,” Kazuya said, wonder in his voice.
“You’re right, he is,” A familiar voice said, and Ryou strolled into the room.

“Oniisan-sensei!” Eijun said, stiffening up.

Kazuya swatted at him, trying not to laugh so he didn’t disturb the ultrasound. “Idiot, why are you getting all tense? We had them over for dinner last weekend.”

Eijun huffed out a breath. “Miyuki Kazuya, that was dinner, this is doctoring.”

“Your ability to compartmentalize never ceases to amaze me,” Kazuya chuckled. “Hello, Ryou, how are you?”

“Amused,” Ryou answered, walking over to the tech and looking at the measurements. “Peanut looks good; these numbers are perfect for sixteen weeks. You said you don’t want to know the gender. Are you sure?”

Kazuya looked at Eijun, who nodded. “Yeah, we’re sure.”

“Okay, if you change your mind, let me know.” Ryou looked at the screen again and turned back to Kazuya. “Haruichi texted me and asked if I could fit you in today, so let’s go to my exam room, shall we?”

Kazuya wiped his belly and adjusted his clothing before climbing down from the table. He and Eijun followed Ryou down the hallway to his exam room, which, to Eijun’s evident relief and Kazuya’s amusement, looked exactly like Haruichi’s exam rooms. Kazuya climbed on the exam table while Eijun perched in his usual seat.

“So, anything unusual?” Ryou asked, guiding Kazuya to lie down so he could take some measurements and feel the baby’s positioning.

“Not really, there’s only one thing.” Kazuya sat up as Ryou went to the desk to take note of his observations. “I’ve been getting a bubbly feeling, kinda like gas, maybe? In my stomach.”

“It could be the baby. Sixteen weeks is about right, and you’ve not got a lot of extra fat to cushion you from feeling Peanut move. I wouldn’t worry about it. If it’s the baby, it’s going to keep happening and get stronger. If it isn’t, it will be soon. Peanut looks completely normal, growing at the correct speed, maybe even a little faster than most.” He finished writing and turned back to them.

“You’re looking good, Kazuya, everything looks fine. Haruichi’s going to want to see you again in four weeks, but if you have any questions or issues, please come by.” He stood and ushered them out.

“Tell Mochi we said hello, wouldja?” Kazuya said as they moved away.

“Of course,” Ryou agreed, smiling faintly, watching them walk hand in hand down the hallway.

They made their next appointment and walked out of the clinic into the heat of the June afternoon.

“Hungry?” Kazuya asked.

“I could eat. You?”

“Yep.”

“Do I even need to ask?”
“I hate you.”

“Cheeseburgers it is, then.”

Chapter End Notes

Questions comments?
I got through 2 weeks, so yay!

Hopefully, things will move along apace, with the occasional longer day/chapters. Let me know, of course, what you're thinking!
You Needed Me

Chapter Summary

Eijun pampers Kazuya.
That's pretty much it.

Chapter Notes

Hi! I hope you are all doing well.
Life's a bit of a challenge, but there you go!
Please enjoy this wee bit of fluff

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Week Seventeen

Eijun: How’s it going?

Me: It's getting harder. Peanut’s getting bigger and my center of gravity is really moved.

Eijun: Do they think it's going to work?

Me: Yeah. This isn’t the first time they’ve done something like this, just not for the same reason.

Eijun: good, good. I really hope it helps.

Me: It will.

Eijun: go, Mr. Sunshine!

Me: I don’t want to hear that from you.

Eijun: Okay, how about this.

Eijun: At seventeen weeks, Peanut weighs 141 grams.

Me: That’s twice what she was a few weeks ago, right?

Eijun: Yup. And her bones are hardening.

Me: I guess I need to up the calcium, then.

Eijun: not a bad plan. I’m cooking tonight.

Me: I’ll order in.

Eijun: Jerk.
Me: I love you.

Eijun: Yeah, sure you do. She also is developing sweat glands.

Me: Poor baby, it’s getting so hot.

Eijun: It’s not, really? I think it’s being pregnant, that seems to be an issue sometimes.

Me: Maybe. I’ve got to get back to work, see you at home?

Eijun: Yeah, I’ll catch the train. Have fun!

Kazuya dropped his phone back into his bag, smiling softly. He still loved the Peanut updates, they made his day, and he knew Eijun tried to schedule them at times he didn’t expect them. It was nice, a source of connection and reassurance that he was as involved with the process as Kazuya. Sighing, he ran a shaky hand through his hair. These exercises were more exhausting than he wanted to admit and the heat wasn’t helping. He could feel some small improvements and the therapists had warned him that he probably wouldn’t see much change until the baby grew, so he wasn’t at all discouraged, just tired. And hot. And doing his best not to show it to Eijun, who would worry.

He knew it wasn’t the smartest thing to do, but he really didn’t want to bother him about something that couldn’t be helped.

Eijun sighed and threw his phone into his bag, zipping it closed before slinging it over his shoulder. He knew Kazuya wasn’t telling him everything, he could see how worn out he was after physical therapy, but he wanted to let him have his...pride? privacy? something. He knew him well enough to trust that he’d come to him with it if things got too bad, so he let him get away with it, monitoring him and doing what he could to help without saying anything.

Walking through the door of the locker room, he waved at Hara and headed to the train station. He liked taking public transportation when he could and did so whenever Kazuya needed the car; allowing someone else to drive was soothing, allowing him to decompress from the day. It also, conveniently, stopped near a shopping district he wanted to visit. Hopping out of the train at the correct stop, he headed for the first store that might have what he was looking for.

They did. He bought what he needed and hopped back on the train, hoping to beat Kazuya home. He knew he’d had another hour of PT and then a meeting to finalize the details for the next week; the team was on the road for a series of away games starting the following morning. They were going to be gone for two weeks, and management was reviewing the last of the arrangements.

Eijun was a little apprehensive about them being away from Tokyo for that long, but Haruichi hadn’t seemed to think it was any big deal, although he did provide them with names and numbers for doctors that he trusted in each city they were visiting, just in case. He’d read enough to know that there really wasn’t anything to worry about, but he wasn’t able to shake it. Even though he knew that his concern was a direct result of Haruko and not founded on anything realistic, he still worried.

The absence of their car in the driveway was a relief—he wanted to get dinner done before Kazuya came home, he’d planned an evening of pampering and rest; the time they spent on the road was tiring under the best of circumstances, he knew Kazuya would be exhausted before they were anywhere near done. He didn’t normally cook often, but he did know how to make Kazuya’s favorite curry and he’d stopped at the store on his way home for both ingredients and ice cream for
dessert. Stepping through the door, he dropped the grocery bags in the kitchen and took the rest into the bedroom. While he was there, he changed into jersey shorts and a tank top before turning the aircon on and beginning to work on dinner.

Running through his plans in his mind, he smiled, knowing that as much as Kazuya wanted to tough it out, he would appreciate what Eijun was doing. Even if he didn’t, Eijun was going to make sure he rested in spite of himself. He snorted, imagining the look on Kazuya’s face if he tried to force him to relax. Sighing over the stubbornness of his husband, he stirred the curry and considered how he was going to get him to admit what he needed. There really wasn’t any other way to deal with him when he got bullheaded, he would just have to plunge in headfirst and hope for the best.

Kazuya stepped inside the house and closed the door behind himself with a grateful sigh. The air was blessedly cool and he felt himself relax at the feeling of being home. Temperatures were higher than normal, but not so much that he would feel this hot in a regular summer. He hadn’t expected the heat to bother him like it did, he’d spent so much of his summers outside that he figured he’d have some immunity to the heat. That wasn’t the case.

He slipped off his shoes and dropped his bag by the door, not wanting to do anything but collapse on the couch in a puddle of melted goo. Stepping out of the entranceway, he registered what he’d smelled. Curry. Eijun had cooked his favorite curry. A wry grin crossed his face as he realized what that meant; his husband wasn’t going to let him get away with toughing it out. Not that Kazuya had any plans to make it easy for him. At all. He headed towards the kitchen, leaning in the doorway, watching Eijun cook.

“I don’t know if I can handle a case of food poisoning in this heat,” Kazuya snarked. Eijun glared at him over his shoulder, busily stirring the curry.

“If I was going to poison you, I’d put it in your tea, not something I was planning to eat with you,” Eijun snarked back, glare melting into a smile. “Hi, Kaz. Welcome home. How are you feeling?” He gave the curry a final stir before lowering the heat and putting a lid on it.

Kazuya stepped further into the kitchen, into Eijun’s waiting arms. “I’m fine. It’s hot as hell out there, though. Thank you for turning on the air.”

“I’m glad it cooled down in here before you got home,” Eijun said, dropping a gentle kiss on Kazuya’s lips. “Dinner’s going to be about a half hour, why don’t you get a cool shower while you wait? I’ll bring you some clothes.”

“That sounds like a great idea.” Kazuya returned the kiss, lingering for a second before withdrawing. “I’ll do that.” He stepped away and down the hallway to the bathroom. Eijun turned on the rice cooker before following him, stopping in the bedroom for one of the items he’d purchased earlier. Joining Kazuya in the bathroom, he sat down on the closed toilet to talk to him.

“I talked to mom today,” Eijun said, taking the tags off the clothes he’d brought in.

“Yeah? What about?”

“I was wondering about how she handled the heat when she was pregnant. I forgot that I was born in May, and she wasn’t really pregnant during the summer.”

“You would forget something like that.”

“Hush. I...she’s the only one I know who I could ask, okay?” Eijun pouted.
Kazuya chuckled, rinsing his hair. “I know, I understand. Thank you for trying to help me.”

“Well, she did give me one idea. The thing she swears by in the summer, she suggested maybe you should try it.”

“What is it?” Kazuya asked, turning off the water and sliding back the curtain. Eijun handed him a towel so he could dry off, grinning at the ever growing baby bump. Peanut was to the point that Kazuya couldn’t wear any of his clothes that were tight fitting at all, he’d moved exclusively to prenatal wear. The only things that still fit were some sweats, and it was too hot for those.

“It’s called a ‘swing dress’,” Eijun explained. “It’s a dress, but it’s not fitted, the fabric flares and helps keep you cool, creating a breeze when you walk. At least that’s the idea. I thought you could try it, wear them around the house if they work for you. Hell, I don’t care if you wear them in public, as long as you're comfortable.”

“A dress.” Kazuya deadpanned.

“Yes. A dress.” Eijun agreed. “Try it. If you hate it, that’s fine, you don’t have to wear it. But give it a chance, it might be really comfortable.” He held the garment out to Kazuya. He’d picked darker solids and stripes, nothing feminine. The one he currently held was a dark khaki.

Kazuya looked at the dress dubiously but acquiesced. “Okay, I’ll try it. I can’t imagine it would be any better than my normal clothes.” He slid it on and smoothed it down. The jersey fabric skimmed his shape, draping over his bump and flaring to right above his knees.

“It’s light and not tight, I’ll admit that. Pretty comfortable.” He still wasn’t convinced, but Eijun was hopeful.

“Wear it for a bit, see what you think,” he suggested, tugging on the hem. “I think it looks good on you. If it’s really cool, I might wear one as well.”

“Maybe we could start a new fashion,” Kazuya smirked.

“Guys have been wearing dresses forever, Kaz. What’s a kimono?”

“True enough, but what do I wear underneath it?”

“Whatever you want. Go commando, if you’d like.” Eijun grinned. “I wouldn’t mind.”

“I’m sure you wouldn’t, you perv,” Kazuya said, slipping on a pair of boxers to his husband’s displeasure.

“Spoilsport.” Eijun stood and grabbed the towel from Kazuya’s hands, laying it on his head and rubbing, drying his hair. “Let me do this for you.”

“You don’t have to, the wetter my hair the cooler my head feels,” Kazuya objected.

“True enough, but the aircon is going and I don’t want you to catch a chill.” Eijun smiled at him, kissing his cheek. “Are you going to argue with me about everything this evening?”

“Maybe,” Kazuya said with a smirk.

Eijun sighed. “Listen. I know you worry about things, about being pregnant and weakness and people’s perceptions. But you know I’m not like that.” He slipped his arms around Kazuya’s neck, pulling him close enough for their foreheads to touch. “You asked something of me a few weeks
ago, something that was hard at first but necessary, so I’m asking you for the same thing. I don’t care
what you do out there, how you act. But at home, with me? Please don’t hide. I know you’re
exhausted and hurting, and I know you don’t want to look weak, but Kazuya, please let me help
you. I want to take care of you.”

“You already do,” Kazuya started looking into his eyes, but then capitulated. “You’re...not wrong. I
know you want to help; I just don’t like worrying you about things that can’t be changed. I just have
to get through this.”

“You don’t have to do it alone.”

“I’m not,” Kazuya replied. “I wouldn’t be able to. Wouldn’t want to. But Eijun, I don’t want to be a
burden.”

“You aren’t, you never would be. Taking care of you is something I want to do, something I will do,
no matter how much you argue with me. But it would be better if you’d just let me, lean on me. Just
remember that you’re not alone, that there’s someone who wants to take care of you, who cares. You
have me.”

“I could never forget that. Never.” Kazuya tilted his head and slotted their lips together, kissing him
softly before pulling away with a sigh. “I’ll try, okay? You may have to remind me, but with you, I
don’t mind so much.”

“Good.” Eijun ran his hand through Kazuya’s still damp hair before stepping back. “Dinner’s done,
ready to eat?”

“Starving.” Kazuya agreed, following Eijun out of the bathroom.

Dinner passed in conversation about the upcoming trip and the coaches’ plans for the upcoming
games. They had three series of three games to play, with travel days in between. Nothing unusual,
they had a few of these things throughout the season, but this was the first one for this year. Eijun
was curious about any accommodations they had planned for Kazuya, but he didn’t seem to think he
needed them, so he let it go. He knew Kazuya was going to need some extra time and attention on
the trip and he knew he was going to have to step in when necessary. That was fine. His husband
had been warned; it wasn’t going to be any kind of a surprise.

“That was good,” Kazuya said, pushing his plate away. “Thanks, Ei.”

“You have enough? There’s plenty more.”

“I’m full, seriously.”

“Room for dessert?”

Kazuya arched his eyebrow. “Ice cream?”

“Why, yes. Brilliant deduction.” Eijun stood and gathered the plates. Setting them in the sink, he
pulled the ice cream out of the freezer and dished it up, placing a bowl in front of Kazuya and
handing him a spoon.

“Thanks!”

“Of course.” Eijun grinned at him. “There’s more if you or Peanut want it.”
“I think this will be plenty,” Kazuya said. “Thank you again for everything.”

“Verdict on the dress?”

“Jury’s still out on that. It’s really comfortable, I’ll admit that much, but I’m going to have to wear it for a bit before I can say it’s better than shorts and a t-shirt.”

“That makes perfect sense; let me know when you make up your mind.” Eijun started on his ice cream. Figuring he’d given Kazuya enough time to come to grips with what he’d said in the bathroom, he asked, “So, what’s bothering you? How are you feeling?”

“I’m—” Kazuya stopped, cut off by a glare from his husband. “Okay, okay. I’m not fine, I’m tired and my back aches and my thighs and calves are killing me. I haven’t done that much squatting for a year and it’s bad. Plus it’s different, so it’s even more difficult, I have to be mindful of my positioning and not just do what I’ve always done. It’s harder than I thought it would be.” He ate some more ice cream, thinking, figuring that since he’d committed to this road, he might as well come clean. “And I’m worried about this trip. I know Peanut will be fine, but these things are exhausting at the best of times.”

“I know, I am too.” Eijun touched the back of Kazuya’s hand. “I have a list of doctors and their info from Haruichi, and instructions—well, more like orders—for what you’re supposed to do. None of them are unusual, but I know you. When things like this are going on, you don’t take the rest you need, so I’m going to be that person who forces you to do so. I’ll do my best to keep it between us, but if you give me a hard time, I will recruit helpers. You know Takahashi and Hara would be happy to help me make sure you’re getting the rest you need.”

Kazuya frowned. “You wouldn’t.”

Eijun just arched an eyebrow at him.

“Okay, yes. You would. I would prefer you didn’t.”

“Act like a responsible human being and I won’t.”


“I idiot. I’m not worried about Peanut; I’m worried about you. Peanut will be fine, babies are excellent parasites, they get what they need whatever the cost to the host.” He stood and took their dishes over to the sink, running water to start washing. Kazuya got up to help and Eijun glared him back into his seat. “You sit there. Rest. I’m capable of doing this.”

Kazuya lifted his hands in surrender. “I can sit here and watch you do all the work, that’s not a problem.” He smirked as Eijun wiped down the counter. “You missed a spot.”

Eijun huffed out a breath of exasperation and glared. “Hush, you. Just sit there and behave.”

“I’m not a dog,” he responded mildly.

“No, you’re not.” Eijun sighed, throwing the sponge into the sink tiredly. “Is it too much to ask that you just let me take care of you?”

Kazuya was instantly apologetic; he knew he’d pushed too far. “I’m sorry, Eijun.” He got up from his seat and walked over to his husband, wrapping his arms around him. “I’m an asshole. I know you’re helping me and I know I need it. I’m tired and grumpy and sore and don’t deserve you.”
“You’re right, you don’t, but sit back down anyway and let me finish up here.” Eijun hugged him quickly and stepped back. “Tell me about your therapy while I clean.”

Kazuya sat down and did as requested, explaining the exercises and some of the theory behind them. Much of it Eijun knew, but he was happy to review whatever Kazuya wanted to tell him, now that he’d had some experience with the exercises. Finishing the last of the dishes, he dried his hands and walked back over to the table.

“Is your back bothering you?”

Kazuya frowned but didn’t evade. “Yeah, it’s sore. It seems to always be sore.”

“You may have ‘back labor’ if you ever get that far, at least that’s what I’ve read. We haven’t really discussed your delivery options, but we should at some time. Later, though.” Eijun held out his hand and Kazuya took it, standing. “Is Peanut big enough to make laying on your stomach uncomfortable?”

“Yeah, she’s getting there.” Kazuya ran his hand over the baby bump.

“That’s good.” Eijun guided Kazuya to sit backward on a chair. “Let me go get a few things, you stay there.” He headed into their room for a pillow, grabbing the bottle of massage oil he’d bought out of the bag as well. Back in the kitchen, he tucked the pillow between Kazuya and the back of the chair, cushioning his belly and the baby.

“Let me know if you need another pillow,” Eijun said, setting the oil on the counter and moving a chair behind Kazuya. “I can get more.”

“This is good, I’m fine.”

“Great.” Eijun pulled the dress up from the back. “Off?”

“Sure.” Kazuya slipped it over his head.

“Okay, tell me if any of this doesn’t feel good. I’m not going to try to dig too hard—you really shouldn’t when you’re pregnant—I’m just going to try to relax you. When we’re done with your back, we’ll move to the bed and I’ll work on your legs, I know they’re sore too.”

“Eijun, I have stuff to do tonight, I can’t go to bed early.”

“Just relax for now, okay? We’ll figure it out.” Eijun poured a little bit of oil in his hand, warming it. Starting at the top of Kazuya’s back, he swept his hands down in long strokes, helping Kazuya to relax before beginning to massage in earnest. Paying heed to the things he’d read, he didn’t dig too deeply, he just worked the muscles that felt tense, paying special attention to the areas in his lower back and shoulder blades. Kazuya didn’t say anything, but Eijun could feel him relax and breathe easier, and he allowed himself a small smile. Continuing the massage, he paid attention to his partner’s breathing and posture, moving on to another spot when things seemed to be getting a little uncomfortable.
After a few minutes, Eijun started to talk, keeping his voice modulated and calm. He didn’t say anything of any great import, talking about his day and reporting any observations he’d made about the bullpen during practice. As he got close to finishing, he remembered something he wanted to ask Kazuya.

“Hey, you still with me?”

Kazuya grunted a reply.

“I was wondering.” Eijun rubbed gently at his back as he finished up. “Something Ryou said when we were at the doctor’s office last week. Do you think he knows Peanut’s gender?”

“Yup.” Kazuya bent and stretched, appreciating the lack of pain in his lower back. “I’m sure of it.”

“You think he’ll tell?”

“Haruichi, maybe. Possibly Mochi, but I doubt it.” Kazuya thought about it for a minute. “Maybe he would, though, since Mochi’s designing the nursery stuff. But even if he did, Mochi would be subtle about it. I don’t honestly care if he does, as long as it’s a surprise for us.”

“Yeah, that’s true. It’s just strange, right?”

“If you really want to know, we’ll find out,” Kazuya said, taking Eijun’s hand as he stood. He’d felt like he could have fallen asleep in the chair and was glad that he’d vetoed the bed for the massage.

“No, no. I was just wondering.”

“Okay.” Kazuya stepped closer and rested his head on Eijun’s shoulder. “That felt amazing, by the way. You know you’re going to have to do that again. And again. I think you’ve created a monster.”

“No problems, I’m glad it helps. I’ll do it whenever you want. Or whenever I think you need it.”

“Deal.” Kazuya stood upright as Eijun returned the chairs to their places. Grabbing the pillow and the oil, he gestured down the hallway.

“Now, go lay down.”

“Eijun,” Kazuya whined as he moved to do what he asked. “I don’t want to go to sleep.”

“Then don’t,” Eijun said, showing him no mercy. “But get on the bed.”

“We still have to pack for tomorrow.”

“I can do it. I was planning on doing it for both of us.”

Kazuya shot him a skeptical look.

“What? Just because I don’t like to do something doesn’t mean I can’t. My biggest issue with packing is that it means we’re going on the road, and I don’t like road trips. At least the baseball variety.” As he spoke, he climbed onto the bed and knelt down between Kazuya’s legs.

“This could be interesting...does this massage come with a happy ending?” Kazuya snarked at him.

Eijun tilted one corner of his mouth in a smirk. “Play your cards right, and it just may.”

“I’ll be good.” Kazuya nodded emphatically and Eijun laughed.
“Now who’s the perv?”

“I think that would be you. You’re the one trying to look up my dress.”

“Oh, god,” Eijun groaned. “You did not go there.”

“I think I did, actually. Does that mean no happy ending for me?”

“Maybe. Depends.”

Eijun started with Kazuya’s calves, kneading them much harder than he had his back, knowing that they really needed it. Kazuya groaned, it hurt at first but then felt amazing. Eijun had learned how to massage his legs after he hurt himself and he’d forgotten how good he was at it.

“That feels so good.” Kazuya groaned.

“I’m glad. It’s been a while; I should have been doing this regularly.” Eijun responded, digging into his other calf. “It wouldn’t hurt as much if I had been, I’m sorry.”

“Not your fault, I forgot too,” Kazuya said with a soft smile. “We’ve been a little preoccupied.”

“True enough.” Eijun returned the grin and laid a hand on Kazuya’s stomach, over the baby. “She’s getting so big, it’s amazing.”

“It is. I wish I’d stop gaining so much weight, though. It’s not going to be easy to lose.”

“I could tell you not to worry about it, that you’re gorgeous and sexy and I love you no matter how you look, but you’re going to worry anyway.” Eijun sighed. “All of which is true, by the way. I do, I will adore you no matter how you look. Most of what you’re gaining is for the baby, you know that. You’ve not gained anything outside the norm for pregnancy; you’re actually on the lower end. You know that, too. I don’t know how to help you with this. How can I help you?”

Kazuya thought about it, trying to work through it. “I don’t think you can, any more than you already are. And you are. I just need to work past the idea that my self-worth is tied up in how I look, which is not an easy thing for me to do,” he replied as honestly as he could, knowing that Eijun wouldn’t judge or try to bully him into something he didn’t feel.

“That’s hard, I know,” Eijun said, continuing to knead his thighs. “Especially with baseball and the fans watching and everything. You have a little leeway because you’re pregnant, but afterward…” he trailed off, thinking hard. “You know you may not snap back instantly, right? You’re going to need time to get back where you were.”

“I know, I do. And I know the weight gain is healthy and I would never want to endanger Peanut. It’s all mixed up in my head and I just have to get things straight.”

“You work on that. If you need any help, you know where to find me, I’m always happy to tell you how much I love you.” Eijun finished with his other leg and Kazuya let out a sigh.

“Thank you. For everything, seriously. My legs feel so good, that was amazing.”

“I’m not quite done yet.” Eijun ran his hand softly up Kazuya’s thigh. “You’re not quite as relaxed as I’d like.” He bent over and followed his hand with his mouth, tasting the skin, marking him gently with his teeth.

Kazuya sucked in a breath, feeling himself respond. He was too languid to even think of a smart
comment. “That’s...god.”

Eijun worked his way up his thigh, laving, marking, sucking, taking his time as he paid special attention to those thighs that were so often a focus of his fantasies. And a large part of his reality. “You’re gorgeous, Kazuya,” he sighed as he switched legs.

“Come up here, let me touch you.”

“Nope, this is all for you.” Eijun raised his head enough to meet Kazuya’s eyes. “Let me take care of you, okay?”

“Can I get a kiss, please?”

Eijun raised himself over Kazuya, moving up to his mouth. Leaning down, he slotted their lips together, tongues tangling and heat rising. Kazuya’s hands ran along Eijun’s sides, finding the hem of his tank top and sliding it up, touching skin. Eijun groaned and deepened the kiss before pulling away abruptly. Kazuya whined in disappointment.

“No, this is about you.” Eijun started to slide down Kazuya’s body again, kissing, licking, loving every inch of him.

In an attempt to dissuade him, Kazuya reached for anything he could touch, praise rolling off his tongue, doing everything he could to trigger his kinks. Eijun raised his head and glared.

“Cheater.”

“One works with what one has.”

“Kaz.”

“What? I don’t want to do this alone. Is it so bad that I want to touch you, too?”

Eijun sighed. “This was supposed to be about you.”

“It is. I’d rather have both of us involved. Indulge me, Eijun. Please.” Kazuya pled, voice low and husky. Eijun capitulated with a groan, moving back up to claim Kazuya’s lips.

“Okay, but I’m doing all the work.”

“I can handle that.”

“Good,” Eijun said before diving in for a kiss.

Kazuya met him eagerly, lips parting and hands moving.

Eijun moaned, mentally changing his plans.

Not that he minded in the least.

Eijun slid out of bed, eyeing his husband carefully. “How are you feeling?”

“You’d be well within your rights to shoot me if I said anything other than awesome.”

“Is there anything different you want me to pack?”
“Naw, you know what I need. Throw in a few of these dresses, will you? They’re comfy.”

“Good! What do you want for game wear?”

“Sano sent over those uniform pants he fixed up for me, he put a panel in the front. I think there are three pairs, bring them all.”

“And your shirts?”

“They’re still fine, have some room to grow still.”

“Okay. Sleep, Kaz, I’ll get everything together.”

“I don’t want to sleep, it’s early.”

“Peanut needs her rest. If you want to read or something, that’s fine. I want you to stay in bed.” Eijun walked over and kissed Kazuya softly. “Do you want me to bring you a drink? Or a snack?”

“I’m fine, thanks.” Kazuya gave Eijun’s cheek a quick swipe. “Can you hand me my tablet? I’ve got some stats and stuff to review.”

Eijun handed it over, walked to their closet, and pulled out their suitcases. “If you need anything, let me know, okay?”

“I will,” Kazuya promised.

Eijun began packing, under Kazuya’s watchful eye. They chatted as he did so, reviewing the upcoming games.

“Now that you’re a coach, you think we’ll be in the same room?”

“Of course, they’re not going to try to split us up. Especially with Peanut.”

“Good.” Eijun sighed, looking at the pile of boxers he was holding. “I hate going on the road right now. You’re going to be so exhausted.”

“I know, it’s going to be difficult. But maybe not as bad as we expect and as long as I have you, I’ll be fine.”

“You’re going to have to suck it up a bit and tell me when you’re not feeling as well as you’d like. Hopefully, the hotels won’t be too far from the fields so you can rest.”

“I will.” Kazuya met Eijun’s skeptical gaze. “I really will.”

“I’ll be paying attention.”

“I know you will,” Kazuya smirked at him. “Are you going to stand there all night, or are you going to pack?”

Eijun bowed. “Yes, my master.”

He smiled at Kazuya’s choked snort as he turned back to the packing.
Eijun looked out the window of the bus, glaring at the scenery as it passed. He was bored. This was always the worst part of these trips, the travel days. They’d played two of their scheduled three game series and were driving to the third, about halfway through the trip there. So far, the games had gone well; they had won all but one and were now in contention for first place in their division. Fortunately for all of them, they had the following day to rest—no game and no practice. Eijun intended to force Kazuya to relax and rest. He intended to do the same.

Surprisingly, Kazuya didn’t seem to be suffering much beyond the normal road trip exhaustion. The heat was getting to him more than it normally would, but other than that, he claimed he felt fine and Eijun couldn’t see any indication that he wasn’t being honest. And he was watching. Carefully.

Kazuya had moved to the front of the bus with the other coaches and Eijun watched as they got into a discussion about the upcoming games. These were going to be the toughest of the road games, but if they did well enough they could take over the lead. He grinned and pulled out his phone—now was the perfect time to send the weekly Peanut update.

He’d considered using email or letters, some other form of communicating the information to Kazuya, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it any other way—he enjoyed the conversations they had and he thought that Kazuya did as well.

Me: Hey, you. How are you feeling?

Kazuya heard his phone buzz and reached into his pocket to pull it out. He opened it and saw who was texting him. Shooting a glare at the back of the bus, he responded.

Kaz: What? You can’t live without me for an hour?

Me: How are you feeling?

Kaz: *sigh* I’m fine.

Me: You know at 18 weeks, Peanut can yawn? And hiccup?

Kaz: Hiccup? Really?

Me: Yeah. Mom says they’ll make you crazy, at least when he’s bigger.

Kaz: Yet another thing to look forward to.

Me: He weighs 184 grams.

Me: And is 15 cm long.

Kaz: Growing well, then.

Me: Yes. And his nervous system is working well.

Kaz: What does that mean?

Me: He can hear, see, feel and stuff. Better than he could.

Kaz: Really? That’s amazing. I’m sure he’s enjoying us reading to him.
Me: Let’s just hope he doesn’t remember everything he hears. That would be embarrassing.

Kaz: If he could, everyone would. You don’t remember hearing your parents having sex, do you?

Me: No! That’s...they don’t. I don’t want to think about that. Even though I did walk in on them once.

Kaz: Really? Do tell.

Me: No.

Kaz: C’mon, Ei.

Me: Later, okay? I don’t want to type it out.

“Your phone’s more interesting than the upcoming games?” Eijun heard Coach Sato say and looked up quickly to see Kazuya shove his phone into his pocket.

“No, sir.”

Eijun grinned and his phone buzzed one more time.

Kaz: Brat. You did that on purpose. You’ll pay for that.

Eijun’s forehead creased. How did he type that so fast? With a shrug, he replied.

Me: Looking forward to it.

Chapter End Notes

Two more weeks! At this rate there’s only 12 more chapters.
Hah.
I have no clue.

Let me know what you think!
Lions and Tigers and Tanukis, Oh, My!

Chapter Summary

The end of the road games.
Finally.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Week Nineteen

Eijun sighed as he closed the trunk and walked around the car to climb into the driver’s seat.

“I really hate the road games,” he said. “They’re always so exhausting.”

“I know, I’m beat,” Kazuya agreed. “But we’re done for now, no more long ones this year. The next ones are only a few days each, so that’s not too bad.”

“True enough, and the timing was pretty good for Peanut; the second trimester’s about the best time to travel.”

“I was surprised that I didn’t get more exhausted, but I know a lot of that was you, so thank you for making us rest. I appreciated it and I’m sure Peanut does as well.”

“That’s my job, right?” Eijun joined the lineup of players leaving the stadium parking lot. “And it’s my joy, I love to do it.” He pulled smoothly out into traffic. “Are you hungry? We’ve managed a few cheeseburgers, but no fried pickles for two weeks—I’m sure you’re craving them.”

“I am,” Kazuya sighed. “But I’m tired, too. Let’s just go home; it’s early yet. Unpack, take a shower, maybe have a nap, and then decide what to do.”

“That sounds good,” Eijun agreed. “Home sounds really good right now.”

In companionable silence, they drove home.

Eijun unlocked the door, ushering Kazuya inside. “I’ll get the bags in a bit, there’s no real hurry.”

“Yeah, the laundry can wait.” He slipped off his shoes and sighed. “Mochi left the aircon on, remind me to thank him.”

“And the plants look good, too,” Eijun commented. They stepped inside the house proper, and each of them noticed something different.

“Hey, Ei, did you—?”
“Kaz, what happened to—?”

They stopped and looked where the other was facing.

“Who left the light on in Peanut’s room?”

“I checked all the lights when we left,” Kazuya said.

“Mochi must have turned them on and forgot to flip it off.” Eijun headed down the hallway and stopped at the doorway.

Hey, Kaz?” he said, not looking away from the room. “Can you come here for a second?”

Kazuya headed down the hallway. “What’s going on…?” His voice trailed off as his eyes widened.

“What do you think?” Eijun asked, wrapping a hand around his arm and guiding him into the room.

“It’s...incredible,” Kazuya breathed, tears springing to his eyes.

Mochi had taken advantage of their absence and painted the walls. Stripes of colors waved and soared on the walls, looping around furniture and falling down walls, outlining and accenting the room. On, in, behind, the stripes were animals— a zebra, legs splayed, slid down a sharply slanted stripe, while a monkey with a banana in one hand hung from a loop by its tail. A pair of elephants strode along; the baby’s trunk linked to the parent’s tail, while a hippo in a tutu lay calmly in a dip, polishing her nails. Giraffes wore the stripe like a muffler and a tiger lay on the stripe like a tree branch, tail dangling.

Not only were the walls painted, but all the furniture had been assembled and placed in the locations Eijun had indicated. The crib fit almost perfectly between the two windows, there was a little overlap, but that would give the baby a view of outside. The chair and nightstand were in the one corner, the bookshelf on the wall by the closet. Over the bookshelf was the only part that referenced the furniture near it. There, Mochi had painted a bespectacled raccoon in a rocking chair, reading a book to a collection of animals. The front row was baby raccoons and Shiba-Inus, who were being watched over by a group of adults, including a cheetah, a pair of pink foxes, a polar bear, and a Shiba-Inu.

Eijun felt his own eyes well up and he turned Kazuya to face the painting. “Look, Kaz.”

Kazuya took in the scene and the tears streamed down his face. “It’s perfect,” he breathed around the tears. “Absolutely amazing.”

Eijun slid behind him and wrapped his arms around his waist, hands resting on Peanut. “It is, he did an incredible job. I can’t believe how awesome it turned out.”

Kazuya turned in Eijun’s arms and hid his face in his neck. “I can’t believe I’m crying about this. Why am I even crying about this?”

“It’s kind overwhelming, right? Not in a bad way, it’s just a lot. Kinda brings home the whole ‘having a baby’ thing. Plus you’re exhausted and four months pregnant.” Eijun pulled him closer, rubbing his back. “Let’s get a shower and a nap, and then we can come back in here and really appreciate it. Maybe meet them for dinner, if you feel like it.”

“That...yeah. I’m beyond able to process anything.”

“Come on, then. Let me help you.” Eijun guided him down the hallway and into the bathroom,
turning on the shower and guiding Kazuya underneath. He turned to leave when Kazuya grabbed his arm.

“Join me?”

“Of course.” Eijun stripped and stepped in beside him, reaching for the soap. “Let me wash you up, okay?”

“That’s not why I asked, I just wanted to get through this quickly so we could go to bed sooner.”

“Well, then, let’s get this done.” Kazuya started to wash his hair while Eijun washed his body, and then they switched, both of them too exhausted to do much other than plant a kiss on a baby bump or run an appreciative hand over the slope of an ass. Soon enough, they were both clean, dry, and snuggled up under the covers, sound asleep.

Surprisingly, it was Kazuya who woke up first. Not as much of a surprise, he was woken up by the need to use the bathroom. Peanut was making her presence known, and he wouldn’t be surprised if Eijun’s next update included the fact that she’d figured out how to tap dance. On his bladder.

He stumbled back to bed, lying on his side away from Eijun, who promptly rolled over and threw his arm over Kazuya’s waist, hand splayed across the baby. Kazuya found side sleeping to be the most comfortable, he was more of a stomach sleeper usually, but that option was gone for now, Peanut was too big for it to be comfortable. He lay there quietly, enjoying the feeling of being home and in his own bed, snuggling with his husband. He knew Eijun was waking up, but he suspected he was as content as Kazuya was to lie there, basking in the peace.

After a few minutes, he felt Peanut moving; her movements had gotten stronger and more recognizable in the last few weeks, moving from feeling like bubbling to actually feeling like someone was rolling around. He didn’t know if she’d turned and faced the front or was just getting more active, but it was reassuring to feel her move around, knowing that she was well.

After a few seconds, he felt Eijun’s hand flatten and a whisper in his ear. “Was that her?”

“Yeah, she’s been moving around for a few minutes. You can feel it?”

“I think so. Let me see if I feel her again.”

They lay there in silence, waiting for Peanut to move again.

“I...yes, I felt that!” Eijun said, pressing a kiss into Kazuya’s shoulder. “Kaz, I felt her move. I felt our baby move.”

Kazuya rolled over to face him, unsurprised to see tears on his cheeks. He wiped them away and pressed a soft kiss on his lips. “You did, and I’m so glad that you did.”

“That’s so awesome.” Eijun put his hand back on Kazuya’s belly. “Is she doing that a lot?”

“I think so, it’s usually not that obvious unless I’m lying down or resting. I’m sure that will change as time goes by.”

“Hi, baby,” Eijun cooed at Kazuya’s stomach. “Your daddies love you, and we can’t wait to meet
Kazuya’s eyes welled at the affection and care in Eijun’s voice. “You’re ridiculous, you know that?” He laid a hand on Eijun’s cheek, pressing a soft kiss on his lips. “I love you so much.”

“And I love you,” Eijun whispered back. “Thank you for carrying our baby.”

“I’m glad to do it, it’s fine if it’s with you. Great, even.” Kazuya whispered as well. “If it wasn’t for you, I’d never even have considered it. You’re going to be a wonderful father.”

“As are you, Kaz. Don’t doubt that.” Eijun smiled softly. “You’re going to be great, Peanut’s lucky to have you.”

“No, I’m lucky to have you.”

“Sap.”

“Takes one to know one.”

Eijun snorted out a laugh. “Oh my god, are you five?”

“Sometimes I have to bring myself down to your level, yes.” Kazuya snarked, amused at the face Eijun was making. “Seriously, though. We haven’t talked about what we want our kids to call us.”

“You mean before they’re teens and resent everything about us, right?”

“Right.”

“What are you thinking?” Eijun asked, genuinely curious about where his husband’s thoughts were. “I haven’t really considered it, what are our choices?”

“I don’t know, honestly,” Kazuya replied, lacing their fingers together. “It just occurred to me when you were talking to Peanut. I mean, we don’t want to both be Dad, right? That could be confusing for everyone, at least while they’re little. When they get older, they’ll call us whatever, I’m sure.”

“True enough, but what are our options? Dad, Papa? Father?”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

“I don’t want to be Father, that’s too formal, but other than that I’m good with whichever.”

“Father, yeah. That’s going to be reserved for the teenage disdain, I think.” Kazuya chuckled. “We’ll see how bad it gets; maybe we can ship them off to Mochi and Ryou. They could handle them.”

“Or Chris. One disappointed look and they’ll fall right into line.”

“You’re not wrong there. But anyway, I think I’d like to be Dad, if that’s okay.”

“That’s fine, I’ll be Papa. You’ll be a great Daddy, Kaz. You will.”

“With your help, I’m sure of it.” Kazuya agreed. “Did you get enough sleep? I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“No, no. It’s fine. I’m glad I got to feel her kick, it’s amazing.”

“For now, yes. But when she’s kicking you all night, it might get less so.”
“You’re probably right, but that’s for later. For now, it’s awesome,” Eijun said. “Are you hungry? Do you want to go check out the room?”

“Yes to both, let’s go see what Mochi did, now that we’re both rested enough to appreciate it.” Kazuya rolled over and climbed out of bed, slipping a swing dress over his head. His appreciation for the garment had grown while they were away, the ease and comfort were more than he’d expected. Eijun hadn’t started wearing them yet, but he knew he was considering it. He decided to push things a bit and tossed one of them to Eijun. “Go ahead and try one, you know you want to.”

Eijun grinned and slid it on. “I was just waiting until we got home; I only packed a couple and didn’t want you to go without.”

“Well, that’s nice of you.” Kazuya ran his hand down Eijun’s arm, linking their fingers. “But I wouldn’t have minded sharing.”

“I know,” Eijun answered, tugging him towards the door. “But I would have minded taking it.”

Kazuya followed him and together they walked down the hallway towards the bedroom. “We should see if Ryou and Mochi are free for dinner, meet at the diner,” Kazuya suggested.

“Great idea, Kaz.” Eijun agreed. “I’ll text them in a bit, let’s look at the room first.”

They stepped into the room and Kazuya was as dumbstruck as he had been the first time. “We’re paying him double whatever it is he asks for.”

“You know he’s not going to want any money, he’s going to say it’s for Peanut.”

“Fuck that, he’s going to take the damned money. He can get her a onesie or something.”

Eijun laughed. “We’ll lead with that, then.” He looked around carefully. “Let’s start by the door.”

“Look! He changed the light switch, too.” Kazuya said. “It’s perfect there.”

“The dresser fits on this wall well, too,” Eijun noted. “And look what he did there.” He pointed out the monkeys hanging in a row over the dresser. “It’ll give Peanut something to look at.”

“So great.” Kazuya agreed. “And the crib is great there, the baby can see outside.”

“You’re right! Plus they can get fresh air when it’s nice out.” Eijun added.

“The chair’s in the perfect place as well.”

“Try it out, Kaz. See how it feels,” Eijun urged, and Kazuya sank down into the chair.

“It’s perfect, so comfortable,” he said. “And the side table is the perfect height. I didn’t realize it had drawers in it, that’s convenient.”

Eijun noticed an envelope propped up on the base of the lamp. “What’s that?”

“I don’t...oh! I don’t know,” Kazuya said, picking it up off the lamp. “It’s a card, I think?”

“For whom?”

“Us.”

“Open it, then.”
Kazuya did so, pulling out a card. “It’s a ‘Welcome Baby’ card.” He opened it and started to read.

Congrats on Peanut!
We can’t wait to meet the new baby.
We put together the furniture, but left the fun stuff for you.
Enjoy!
Chris, Jun and Tetsu

ps-All the paperwork and manuals are in an envelope in the top drawer of the nightstand.

pps-Peanut’s future pediatrician approves of the room setup. The crib by the window is a great idea; don’t be afraid of fresh air.

“That’s...wow.” Eijun slumped down onto the floor, at Kazuya’s feet. “I mean, I was fine with Mochi doing it, maybe hiring someone or asking Ryou, but CJT, too? That feels like too much, right? They didn’t have to do all that.”

Kazuya ran his hand through Eijun’s hair, comforting them both. “You know, you’re right. It does feel a little overwhelming. But remember, this is the first baby in our group—yeah, Nabe and Nori have the twins and there are lots of other families, but in our smaller group, we’re the first. So there’s some newness there. It will wear off, but you and I both know Peanut’s going to be one indulged child.”

“That’s true. I don’t know who’s going to be worse—our families or our friends, honestly.” Eijun rested his arms on Kazuya’s knees, looking up at him. “This is both of our parent’s only grandbaby; we’re the only chance they have.”

“We’re just going to have to be careful, right? Draw clear boundaries and such. None of them is going to do anything purposefully; it’s just that they won’t think about the consequences. It’s fine, though. We know it’s going to happen so we can look out for it.”

“That’s a good plan.” Eijun continued to lean on Kazuya’s legs, enjoying the feeling of his fingers running through his hair.

“Hey, Ei?”

“Yeah?”

“What do you think they meant by the ‘fun stuff’? They said they left it all to us.”

“I think they meant all the fun baby stuff. They didn’t make the crib up, the diaper hanger’s not out, and the books aren’t on the shelves. I’ll be all the clothes are still in bags and boxes. The fun baby stuff.”

“Oh, I get it. When should we do that?”
“Whenever we want. Anything new should be washed first, but that’s it. We could start washing things slowly, so we don’t get bogged down by piles of laundry.”

Kazuya smirked. “How much laundry could one baby need? It’s not even that big?”

You have no idea.” Eijun grinned back at him. “There are diapers, and they go through several outfits a day and blankets and receiving blankets and onesies and towels. Babies are messy. They spit up and poop leaks sometimes and they don’t know anything about keeping themselves clean, so that’s our job. And that means lots of laundry.”

“Okay, maybe we need to rethink this.” Kazuya’s eyes widened.

“It’s a little late for that, Kaz.” Eijun laughed at his panic. “I guess we could put Peanut up for adoption if you really wanted to.”

Kazuya laid a protective hand on his stomach. “No, no. Nobody’s taking Peanut away from me. From us. I just hadn’t considered the mess.”

“It’s not forever, you know. And at the end of the day, I think it’s a small price to pay for a baby.”

“If that’s the worst thing, we should be fine.”

“I think the months of middle of the night feedings will be a little harder, but I know how you are, Mr. Clean. You can’t use bleach on any of the baby stuff, you know. Except, maybe a little bit in the diaper pail and when you wash the diapers. But then you need to double rinse them to make sure it’s all out.”

“That’s fine; I just need to figure out what’s safe. It’ll be fine.”

“Alright.” Eijun stood and looked around the room again, smiling softly. “He really did a marvelous job.”

“He did.” Kazuya took his outstretched hand and pulled himself up. “It’s amazing.”

“You hungry?” Eijun ran a hand through Kazuya’s hair, cupping his cheek.

“Getting there.”

“Okay, you call Mochi and I’ll go grab the suitcases and bring them in.”

Eijun headed towards the door and Kazuya asked. “You going outside in that dress?”

“Sure, why not? Nobody’s going to see me, and if the neighbors do, well, what are they going to do?”

“Take your picture and post it online.”

“No, I don’t think they will,” Eijun disagreed. “We’ve done plenty of potentially super-embarrassing things since we’ve been living here, and none of them have made it online. Remember the time we got a little carried away in the swing and it broke?”

“Oh, god. Yes. That would have been bad; we were pretty much naked, weren’t we?”

“Or the time we came home from that alumni meet up and you were so drunk? You were singing ‘Hit Me Baby, One More Time’ at the top of your lungs.”
“I did not.”

“Yes, you did. But you could only remember part of the chorus, so you just kept starting over. Funniest thing I’ve ever seen.”

“Well, Britney’s a classic, but I don’t remember doing any of that.”

“Not surprising, you were blitzed out of your mind. You had a terrible hangover the next day.”

“You don’t happen to have proof, do you?”

“I do. I recorded it. I offered to show it to you, but you didn’t want to see it. That could have been because your head was splitting and you were throwing up, though.”

“You’ll have to show me it sometime, then. I remember the time I had such a bad hangover, but that was years ago.”

“Yup. Not long after we got married. But, my point is that I’m going outside in a dress. If they care, and I don’t think they do, they’re welcome to take all the pictures they want.” Eijun turned and walked out of the room, heading outside to retrieve their suitcases, while Kazuya headed back into their room to make the call.

“Did you know at nineteen weeks, Peanut is close to 16 centimeters long?” Eijun asked, turning out of their driveway and down the street.

Kazuya chuckled. “Not texting this week?”

“Naw, thought I’d change it up, make it a bit of a surprise.”

“Sixteen centimeters? It feels like she’s bigger than that.”

“Well, that’s only from the top of her head to her butt. They don’t count the legs when they measure length in utero.”

“That’s probably a hard thing to measure, with the babies all curled up.”

“I’d think so. She’s also sprouting hair.”

“You know, I’ve heard that if you have a lot of heartburn when you’re pregnant the baby’s going to have a full head of hair.” Kazuya snorted. “If it’s true, we’re having Rapunzel.”

“Now that’s an image.” Eijun laughed.

“I know, right? What else is happening with her?”

“She’s got this coating, I don’t know what it’s called exactly, but it’s protecting her skin so she doesn’t come out looking like she’s been in the bathtub for nine months.”

“Is she going to be born with it?”

“It depends. It usually starts to disappear well before birth, but if she’s early enough she may still have some of it. It’s not a big deal; it just looks all white and waxy.”
“So cool.” Kazuya smiled softly, laying his hand over Peanut. “Have I told you how much I appreciate the updates? I’m always looking forward to them; they’re the best part of my week.”

“I’m glad,” Eijun said. “I love doing them; they make me feel like I’m contributing something to the Peanut project.”

“I’d say you contributed one of the more important parts to this venture,” Kazuya snarked. “In fact, if you hadn’t, we wouldn’t even be having this discussion.”

“I guess you’re right,” Eijun agreed, “but I don’t know if it was as important as much as necessary. I mean, it was needed, but the stuff that happens afterward is much more important. Anyone can be a sperm donor.”

“True enough. All I know is that Peanut and I are both lucky to have you around.”

“I’d say it was the other way, but I don’t think we’ll ever agree on that.” Eijun pulled into the diner parking lot. “And on that note, let’s go feed Peanut some pickles, shall we?”

They walked into the diner and saw their friends were already seated, so they made their way back to the booth. Mochi was sitting opposite Ryou and he got up to free the other bench as they approached. Before he could slide in, he found himself pulled into an unexpected hug from Kazuya. This wasn’t the first time he’d hugged him, but Eijun was always the more affectionate one, the one who handed out hugs and touches to those he cared about without hesitation. Kazuya was much more reserved, at least when it meant anything. He’d tease and poke and prod, swinging an arm around a neck, around the shoulders, but always to get a rise and watch the reaction. Genuine, heartfelt, hugs were rare outside of his immediate family.

“Thank you, it’s perfect,” he whispered in Mochi’s ear before releasing him.

Mochi flustered. “You’re welcome, it’s...well, it’s special, you know? My best friends are having a baby and everything. Peanut needs to have a great place to be a baby.”

“She will, thanks to you,” Eijun said, sliding into the booth. He wasn’t sure Mochi could handle two hugs in a row and Kazuya had spoken well enough for both of them. “You did a marvelous job.”

“Thank you, really.” Mochi blushed a little. “But it’s you guys who have to do the work; I just get the fun stuff.” He looked at Kazuya for the first time and grinned. “You’re getting big.” Lifting a hand, he moved it towards his belly, but stopped. “May I?”

“Of course, she needs to know Uncle Mochi, right?”

“She does.” Mochi laid his hand on the bump and his smile softened. “Hi, Peanut. I can’t wait until you ditch this nerd and come hang out with your cool uncles.” He straightened and slid into the booth, Kazuya sliding in beside Eijun.

“Hi, Ryou,” Kazuya greeted him. “How are you?”

“I’m well, you’re looking good,” Ryou answered. “How far along are you?”

“Nineteen weeks.”

“Oh, so the big appointment is next week,” he noted.

“Big appointment?”
“Yeah,” Eijun chimed in. “It’s your twenty-week appointment, you’re halfway through. Blood work, a comprehensive ultrasound, the whole works.”

“It’s where they do an in-depth check of the baby, make sure she’s developing within the normal spectrum and test to see what’s happening if she’s not. It’s all routine, everyone has one. You’ve had a lot more ultrasounds than most pregnancies, but they’ve generally been quick checks on Peanut. This is not that, this is going to take a bit. But, you’re actually halfway through this week, the normal pregnancy from conception to birth is thirty-eight weeks, there are two weeks added to the beginning since the usual way of calculating due dates is from the first day of your last menstrual period. And, well, for you that’s not a consideration.”

The server appeared, setting a bowl of fried pickles on the table. She took the latecomer’s drink order and left, promising to return soon.

“We ordered these terrible things, thought you might want some, too,” Ryou said with a grimace. “We can order more if we need them. I asked for extra ranch, it went quickly last time.”

“Thanks!” Kazuya said, taking a pickle. “How have you guys been?”

“We’ve been good, things are going well,” Mochi said. “I’ve taken over some of the bookkeeping and paperwork at the clinic, it gives me something structured to do as well as freeing up the doctors for more important things.”

“You like it?” Eijun asked.

“I do, I’m only doing it a couple of days a week, so I still have plenty of time for my design work.”

“Speaking of which,” Kazuya said, elbowing Eijun, who dug in his bag. He brought out an envelope and slid it across the table. “Thank you, the room is perfect. It’s amazing and more than I ever imagined.”

“I did it for Peanut; I don’t want your money.”

“We hired you, so we’re paying,” Eijun insisted. “You can do what you want with it, it’s your money.”

Mochi frowned at them and picked up the envelope. Peeking inside, his eyes widened at the amount. “I can’t take this, it’s way more than what I charge.”

“We didn’t discuss an amount, so we gave you what we think you deserve,” Kazuya said. “Just take the money, Moch. You earned it.”

Ryou plucked the envelope from Mochi’s hands and opened it, one corner of his mouth lifting when he saw the amount. “It’s always good to have one’s work appreciated. You should keep this, Youichi, you earned it.”

“But I didn’t intend—” Mochi flustered.

“Just take the check, you can give it to charity for all we care, it’s your money,” Kazuya said, grinning.

Sighing, Mochi relented. “Okay, alright. But I really did it as a gift for the baby.”

“Give her a sleeper or a onesie or something, not a multiple million yen painting.” Kazuya deadpanned.
The server came by with their drinks and a second order of pickles, took their dinner orders and left, but that effectively changed the subject, to Mochi’s relief and chagrin.

“You don’t look as exhausted as I thought you would be, Kazuya,” Ryou said. “You’ve been on the road for a couple of weeks and I know that’s tiring.”

“We’re both worn out, yes,” Kazuya answered. “But we did have a nap when we got home, so that helped with the immediate exhaustion. Oddly enough, though, I didn’t get as tired as I thought I might. I don’t feel nearly as beat as I did the first three months. It’s almost—not quite, but almost—normal.”

“It’s the second trimester, that’s the best time to do most anything. The baby’s not big enough to be a real drain like they are in the later months, but you’re not dealing with the hormonal stuff of the first trimester. Do you have many more road trips?”

“We have a few more, but none are that long. Most of them are less than a week, those will be fine. I can stay home if I need to, but I don’t think I will. The season doesn’t run much past September, and I’m not due until November.”

“True enough, just talk to Haruichi; he’ll let you know if he thinks you need to stay home.”

“And I’ll make sure he does as he’s told,” Eijun chimed in. “I’m good at that.”

“Yes, you are.” Kazuya conceded.

“Congrats, though. Good job on the wins,” Mochi joined in, having gotten over the shock from earlier. “You guys are in first place now?”

“Yeah, we are.” Kazuya agreed. “It’s a good place to be. I wasn’t sure we could do it, after the mess that was last season.”

“I don’t think anyone other than me appreciated how important you were to the team,” Eijun said. “After you got hurt, it all fell apart. I know I had a hard time recovering, and it showed in my playing.”

“You’re not the only one who knew, Eijun,” Ryou interjected mildly. “Anyone paying attention knew he was integral. You didn’t do as badly as you thought, the season wasn’t completely a wash. It just took a bit to regain your footing.”

Kazuya nodded. “You’re right, Takahashi’s stepped up nicely, and the team rallied. We did finish strong, it was just the first month or so that made it tough.”

“True enough,” Eijun said. “This year, though, we’re in a good spot, I think. We have a ways to go, but we can do it. It’s harder than it was with Kaz, but it’s still doable.”

“Good for you,” Mochi said. “I don’t like to see you lose.” He ate another pickle and turned to Kazuya. “Are you still enjoying coaching?”

“Yes and no.” Kazuya sighed. “I do like to coach, and I appreciate the chance the club took with me, but ever since we went and helped Chris’s team, I realized that I really don’t like coaching the professionals. They either don’t really need help or refuse to believe they do, it’s like pulling teeth. Those kids, though. They were willing, eager to listen to me and worked on doing what I’d suggested. I understand that day-to-day is different, but I think I’d really rather coach somewhere I’m needed, where I can help, rather than making stupid amounts of money to argue with thick-headed idiots.” He shook his head, backtracking. “They’re not all like that, of course, and there are plenty of
players who are willing to listen, but most of them already know what they need and how to get where they want to be.”

“So what are you thinking? Are you going to look for somewhere to coach?” Mochi asked.

Kazuya shrugged. “Not in the near future. I want to stay around until Eijun is done, get some more experience under my belt. Maybe when we move to Nagano, I can find a school that needs a coach.”

“You’d have to teach as well, right?”

“I could if I needed to. My degree is in Maths, it wouldn’t take much to get my certificate.”

Eijun listened with interest, some of this was new to him, he didn’t realize that Kazuya had thought so much about it. He filed it away, making a note to discuss it with him later.

“What about you, Eijun?” Ryou asked. “How’s your shoulder?”

“It’s...well, it’s not good, but it’s alright. Shinji said I should be all right through next season if I’m careful. I hope he’s right, I’d like to get that last signing bonus.”

“What do you want to do after you’re done? Any plans?”

“I don’t know, to be honest. It depends on where we are, I think. I wouldn’t mind coaching, but only kids, I don’t want to deal with adults. If we’re in Nagano, I could see myself taking care of the house and the kids and the garden until I figured out what I want to do.”

Their meals arrived and they concentrated on eating, making small talk as they did so, before Mochi returned to the conversation about their future plans.

“So, tell us about this house you bought,” Mochi said.

“You know what? You’ve seen it, Moch. Remember that time you came home with me during summer break and we went to help that older couple pick peaches? She fed us cupcakes?”

Mochi’s brow wrinkled as he thought about it. “I do, yes. But I don’t remember much about the house.”

“That’s fine; I just wanted you to have some frame of reference. Anyway, it’s...” and Eijun was off, explaining the house, with Kazuya chiming in when he felt like it.

Later that night, lying in bed, Eijun cuddled up to Kazuya’s side and laid his hand on Peanut’s bump. “Is she moving?”

“I don’t feel her.” Kazuya wrapped his arm around Eijun’s shoulders and drew him closer. “How are you doing?”

“I’m good, tired.” Eijun snuggled in. “Comfy. You?”

“About the same.”

“I didn’t know that you had thought so much about what you wanted to do.”
“I haven’t, really. Most of that was on the fly, I don’t really know any more than what we’ve discussed. I didn’t know that you wanted to stay home with the kids.”

“I don’t know that I do, at least not exclusively. I just really love the idea of taking care of our kids and gardening and stuff, but I might still want to work or do something. Maybe coach a kid’s league team, I don’t know.”

“You know what would be great? If we could both coach a high school team. Maybe I could find one that needed a coach, and you could be my assistant? Maybe recruiter, too?”

“Hey, maybe I could be the coach and you could be my assistant. How about that?”

“I’d be fine with that, as long as you listened to me.”

“Yeah, right. I know how that would go.”

“Okay, then. We sell ourselves as a pair, like always. Co-coaches. If you want to coach but don’t want to teach, maybe you can just volunteer or be on half pay or something.”

“I’d love to teach, I just don’t want to leave the kids with a sitter if we don’t have to. I want us to be there for all their moments. Not somebody else.”

“Not even Mom?” Kazuya shifted, wanting to see his face.

“No. She’s probably going to want to babysit, but I don’t want to depend on her. She raised her kid, and shouldn’t be responsible for raising ours. I mean, sure, sometimes we can ask her, I just don’t want her to be our main sitter. Does that make sense?”

“Perfect sense. I could see it if we couldn’t afford a good one, but we can. I’d just rather have her there if we’re gone for any length of time, like if we leave the kids for a weekend.”

Eijun nodded against his shoulder. “Yeah, I can see that. We’ll save her for special occasions and emergencies, how’s that?”

“Sounds good.”

“We can play things by ear, but I really want to be involved with the kids. I don’t want nannies and maids and housekeepers to raise our family. If we need help, that’s fine, we’ll hire what we need, but I want them to be taking care of the other stuff while we deal with the children.”

“Yes. I don’t want them to have to fend for themselves, either. I know my dad was doing the best he could, but it was so hard sometimes. I never want my children to feel like that.” Kazuya rubbed Eijun’s arm. “I want them to be independent and think for themselves and stuff, but I think we can teach that without making them feel like they’re on their own.”

“Definitely. But our kids will never feel like that, I know this to be true.” Eijun rubbed the skin over Peanut, soothing Kazuya. “You’re not your father, Kaz. You never would do that to your child.”

“I know, and now I understand a little bit more about what happened, I’m sure of it. But it doesn’t mean I don’t worry about it, I didn’t have the best example growing up.”

“True, but you did when your mom was around, right? You remember when you and your dad were good. You’ll be fine.”

“I know I will, because I have you.”
Eijun sighed happily, sleep creeping up on him. “And I have you.”

Kazuya felt Peanut flip, as if she was agreeing with everything they’d just said.

He laid his hand on top of Eijun’s and they fell asleep to the comforting feeling of their baby moving, their whole world contained, safe, in this one place.

Together.

Chapter End Notes

*waves*
I hope you are all well, and you're still enjoying this.

Comments are welcome. In fact, they're necessary, I need to know who's still with me.

Thank you for your attention.
Halfway There!

Chapter Summary

Kazuya wonders.
Eijun prevaricates.
Peanut...Peanuts.
And there is some Rocky Road.

Chapter Notes

Hi! Once again, I apologize so hard for neglecting this.
I'm sorry, rl has been so stressful recently, but it's gotten better.
Much better, thank goodness.

I know the chapter's called 'Halfway There', but it's more about the 20th week than this story.
I don't think this is going to be another 29 chapters long.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Twenty

Kazuya frowned, trying to make sense of what he was seeing.

It was the fourth inning, and Eijun was on the mound. He wasn’t playing badly, he was just playing oddly. If Kazuya didn’t know better he’d say he was tired, but although this was the fourth game of a five-game series, Eijun hadn’t pitched since the first game. He continued to watch, trying to figure out what was going on.

Eijun pitched the last out of the inning and his team trotted off the field as the sides changed. He headed to the dugout, dropping onto the bench beside Kazuya while they watched their offense play.

“You alright?” Kazuya asked. “You seem a little off out there.”

“I’m fine,” Eijun said. “I feel fine.”

“Hmmm. Maybe we should put Hara in, give you a break. He’s warmed up and could use the experience.”

“No, I’m fine.” Eijun insisted. “I haven’t played in days, there’s nothing wrong with me.”

Kazuya knit his eyebrows, watching Eijun carefully. He finally sighed, resigned. “If you say you’re fine, I trust you.”

“I am.” Eijun reiterated, standing to join the defense flowing back out onto the field.

Kazuya was still puzzled, still watching Eijun closely. This wasn’t an important game or series, so
his insistence on being on the mound didn’t make any sense, but he trusted Eijun to let him know if he was feeling off.

The bases were loaded when the cleanup came to the plate, and Kazuya stood, walking to the railing to watch the action. Unconsciously, he laid his hand on Peanut, soothing himself. He didn’t know why but he was still concerned about Eijun, despite his previous reassurances.

His eyes widened as Eijun wound up and pitched what should have been a breaking ball to the inside. It was, but a little too far inside. Dead ball.

The batter walked, bringing in the man on third base, and Kazuya continued to watch, eyes narrowed and hand clenched on the railing, as Eijun closed out the inning, allowing another couple of runs before finally getting the third out.

Kazuya sent one of the batboys running to the bullpen to bring Hara to him as Eijun made his way to the dugout.

“I’m sending Hara in,” Kazuya told him as he joined him at the railing. “I’m not sure what’s up with you, but you’re out.”

“I understand,” Eijun said with an unhappy frown. “But really, I’m fine. Must just be having an off day.”

Kazuya’s eyes narrowed as he considered everything that he’d observed, coming to a conclusion that he wasn’t happy about. “It happens,” he answered, looking back at the field while his mind raced.

Hara performed well, and the team was able to scrape out a one-run win, recovering from Eijun’s errors with some effort.

“Where’s the ice cream?” Kazuya poked in the freezer, unsuccessful in his quest to find anything to satisfy his craving.

“Did you eat the last of it? I asked you a few days ago if you needed more and you said no.” Eijun stepped into the kitchen, looking over Kazuya’s shoulder into the freezer.

Kazuya slammed the door shut and huffed out a breath. “Dammit. I want some ice cream.”

“Well, you’re out,” Eijun said, leaning against the counter and crossing his arms. “I had no idea, you didn’t tell me.”

“You should have known I was going to need more,” Kazuya said, glaring at him.

“And how, pray tell, was I supposed to know that? Do you think I’m psychic? Or maybe you want me to dig in the trash to check what it is you’ve emptied.”

“You probably ate the last of it,” Kazuya grumbled, “and don’t want to admit it.”

“Wait.” Eijun stood straight, eyes narrowed. “You really think I would eat the last of your ice cream and not get you more? It’s more likely that you ate it and didn’t tell me that you needed some.”

“I shouldn’t have to tell you.”

“Since when did being pregnant make you unable to communicate? Are you suddenly no longer responsible for yourself?” Eijun’s eyebrows raised in consternation.
“That’s ridiculous.” Kazuya countered. “When did asking a perfectly reasonable question become surrendering all personal agency? I just want some ice cream, and it’s your responsibility to make sure I have it.”

Eijun blinked. “Hang on a sec. First of all, you’re pregnant. As you keep telling me, you haven’t become handicapped or unable to drive. You can take your own damn self to the store to get some if you want it that badly. Second of all. Is this really what you want to fight about? I’m perfectly willing to do so, I’m in a bitch of a mood and not terribly happy with you right now, but I don’t know if ice cream is the subject you really want us to be screaming at each other about.”

“You’re right. It’s not.” Kazuya met Eijun’s gaze, amber eyes burning into gold. “We’ll start with you explaining to me exactly why you lied to me, repeatedly.”

“What? What are you talking about? When?”

“Not denying it, that’s good.” Kazuya stalked forward, stopping halfway across the floor. “You lied to me about your shoulder. All damned day long. It took me a while to realize what was wrong with you, but then it clicked. You weren’t tired, you’re hurting.”

“I said I was fine, and I am,” Eijun insisted. “I didn’t lie about that. I can’t believe you pulled me from the game after one bad pitch!”

“Now you’re lying to yourself as well. Eijun, you were off the whole time you were on the mound, and you know it. Look me in the eye and tell me you weren’t hurting.”

Eijun raised his eyes to Kazuya’s. “I wasn’t hurting that much. Not much more than usual.”

“Now we get to it. You’ve been playing in pain for a while, then?”

“No! No more than normal. I said I was fine and I meant it.”

“That’s interesting, because I heard a different story from Shinji when I spoke to him this afternoon.” Kazuya’s eyes narrowed as Eijun looked away. “Yeah, I thought so. Please explain to me why you lied about what he said about your shoulder the last time you saw him.”

“I didn’t lie!” Eijun said heatedly and then deflated. “Not really. Everything I said was something he told me.”

“But you left out the important bits, right? You know, the part where he said that if you continue to play as you have for the next season, you’re going to lose the use of your shoulder and have to have reconstructive surgery? And that’s if you’re lucky and don’t destroy it completely? And that even playing out this season is risky? That he recommended you taper off your time on the field, with an eye to quitting after this year?” Kazuya stepped forward, into Eijun’s space. “Can you please explain that to me? Why did you lie?”

“I...I was going to get a second opinion. I don’t think Shinji’s the most objective person, he’s always been overly cautious,” Eijun said, still not meeting Kazuya’s eyes.

“That doesn’t answer the question. Why did you lie to me?” Kazuya raised his voice, not yelling, not yet. Eijun lifted his head and glared at him.

“You want to know why I lied to you? I’ll tell you.” Eijun pushed past Kazuya and headed to the other side of the room, turning to face him. “I lied because I had to. You’d have made me quit, and I can’t quit. You can’t make me quit.” He ran a hand over his face, pushing his hair back.
“Eijun, you need to stop while you still have some shoulder left.”

“I don’t want to quit.”

“You need to, though. You’ve got to take care of yourself. Your health is more important than any game.”

“But if I can just power through, I’ll get my signing bonus. You know we can use the money.”

“We have more money than we could possibly need.” Kazuya started towards him, trying to make him see reason. “If we need more, we can always work, that’s why we got our degrees. Either way, we’ll be fine. Your shoulder is more important than any amount of money.”

“I don’t know, Kaz. We’re going to have babies and a family and Peanut and a house, that all takes money.”

“It does, but we have plenty. It’s not like you can’t work, you just have to not do things that will further wreck your shoulder. Trust me; you don’t want to destroy it suddenly in the middle of a game, it’s better to taper off gradually.”

Eijun shook his head, denial written all over his face. “I think Shinji’s wrong, I’m going to—”

“Do you really think he’d make a call like that—end your career—without consulting other doctors? I asked about a second opinion, and he gave me the list of people he spoke with. They’re the best orthopedic and sports doctors around and what he told you was the consensus. The only differing of opinion was whether or not you had to quit immediately.” Kazuya stepped the rest of the way across the room, laying his hand on Eijun’s arm. “I need you to be safe and as healthy as possible. Peanut needs you to be able to pick him up. We both need you around and well.”

Eijun turned his head away, looking out the front window. “I can’t lose baseball. What am I if I don’t have the mound?” His voice was thick with unshed tears. “Kaz, I’m not worth anything if I can’t play, I’m not brilliant like you. I couldn’t even carry a baby to term. I just... don’t know what I’ll do if I lose baseball, too.”

“Oh, Ei.” Kazuya’s heart broke, anger gone. “Without baseball, you’re still the most important person in my life. I’m so sorry you’ve lost so much recently and I’d do anything to fix it for you.” He stepped in front of Eijun, cupping his cheek and turning his head, meeting his teary gaze with his own. “You’re worth so much more than your baseball. You’re brilliant and you shine so brightly sometimes that it’s impossible to look away. You’re my husband, the love of my life, the father of my child, the person I depend upon most in this world. Nothing would work without you. None of that depends on baseball, it all hinges on you. With or without baseball.”

Eijun wrapped his arms around Kazuya, laid his head on his shoulder, and wept, sobbing out his fear and his hurt. “I’m so scared, Kaz. It hurts, I hurt, and I just want it to stop. I’m sorry I lied, I didn’t know what else to do, I didn’t want to burden you with this too, I’m sorry I’m not going to be able to play for long, I don’t know what I’ll do. You’re pregnant and you have enough to deal with, I should be able to handle this on my own. But I don’t know how to, I just started to get my feet back under me about Haruko and now I’m losing something else. I know it’s not the end of the world and I know we’ll get through it together, but right now, I don’t see how. I’m sorry I lied, please don’t hate me. Please don’t leave me, I don’t think I’d survive it, even if I’m useless and washed up, please don’t go.”

Kazuya tightened his arms around him, rubbing his back and making soothing noises, letting him cry himself out. When it seemed like the worst was over, he started talking. “I’m not going anywhere.
Why would I, when everything I want, everything that makes me happy is right here, in my arms? I’m sorry you’re hurting, I know how hard it is to function when things hurt so much, and I want you to lean on me. I’m strong; I can handle it. I want to handle it. Yes, I’m pregnant, but I’m not weak. I can help.” He nudged Eijun, who’d fallen silent, listening. “Look at me, please, Eijun.”

Eijun lifted his head slowly, abashed. “I’m sorry—”

“No.” Kazuya insisted. “Don’t be. Don’t apologize for feeling, never apologize for being hurt or scared. I wish you’d felt like you could come to me with this rather than try to hide it from me, but I understand why you did so. I’ll forgive you for lying to me under one condition: that it stops. You have to be totally honest with me about how you’re feeling and how much you’re hurting. Not just physically, either. In all ways. Can you do that?”

“I...I’ll try,” Eijun said with a nod. “I’ll do my best.”

“You’d better.” Kazuya met his eyes somberly. “I’ll know if you’re lying. You wouldn’t have gotten away with this for so long if I had been looking for it, but I trusted you when you said you were fine. I know to pay attention now, and I will see it if you lie to me.”

“Yeah,” Eijun said, wiping at his eyes. “I know you will. I just hate to burden you; I should be able to deal with this myself.”

“No, you shouldn’t,” Kazuya disagreed. “You’ve had two major losses in a matter of months. It’s never something that’s easy to handle by yourself, and in your case, you don’t have to handle it alone. I want to help, I want to be someone you can lean on, that you can come to. I didn’t get through my knee injury on my own, I leaned so hard on you and you were my rock, you never let me down. I want to be that for you. Can you let me do that for you?”

“Yes, please do,” Eijun said, leaning their foreheads together. “I need you to do that for me, if you would. I’m terrified and hurt and I don’t know what to do. Tell me what to do, Kaz?”

“Lean on me. Cry on me. Tell me how you’re feeling; let me work with you to make a plan. Know that I’m here for you, that I’m always here for you. You can wake me up in the middle of the night, call me out of a meeting, whatever, whenever you need me. I’m here for you. You’re the most important thing in my life, and I wouldn’t function without you.” Kazuya smiled softly at him, showing him the truth of his words. “Remember when I hurt my knees, how much I depended on you? I don’t think you do, I don’t think you know. You were there for me every step of the way with encouragement and love, motivating me to get better, to heal.”

“But I just—” Kazuya kissed him, cutting his words off.

“I know that’s what you think, but it’s not true. You don’t believe you did anything, but in my eyes, you did everything. I remember the post-it notes with reminders on them and the ones that just told me you loved me, the times you soothed me when you were half asleep and the way you looked at me that told me you never, ever considered me to be broken.”

“You weren’t. You were just hurt.”

“In the eyes of a lot of the world, I was. I still am. But you know what? None of that matters, because that’s not the way you see me, and that’s all I care about.” Kazuya laid a hand on Peanut, rubbing softly. “You don’t know the things people say about me being pregnant, especially after being hurt, but again, it doesn’t matter. We’re having a baby, and that’s what I care about. Me and you and now Peanut.”
“So what do I do now?” Eijun queried, and Kazuya’s heart ached to hear how uncertain he was.

“Well, first of all, we should go to the store and get some ice cream. And then we can talk about options and what it was Shinji actually said, after which we’ll figure out what we’re going to do. Together.” Kazuya grinned. “But first, before the big decisions, ice cream.”

Eijun chuckled wetly. “I can’t believe you didn’t say something when you finished the last of it.”

“I forgot, really.”

“I can go if you want to stay home.” Eijun offered. “I don’t mind.”

“Naw, I’ll come. You might bring home something gross, like banana. Or worse, not-chocolate.” Kazuya teased, glad that the storm seemed to have abated, at least temporarily.

“Miyuki Kazuya, you know I'd never do that.”

“I know.” Kazuya wove their fingers together. “I just want to come, is that okay?”

“Always,” Eijun said, opening the door and bowing a laughing Kazuya through it.

An hour later, ice cream (Rocky Road) acquired and comfortable clothing donned, they curled up together on the couch. Peanut had gotten too big for Kazuya to hold Eijun the way he wanted to on the swing, so they’d worked out a compromise involving removing the cushions from the back of the couch and Eijun lying on his side, head resting on Kazuya’s shoulder.

“You know, we could just do this in bed,” Eijun said, snuggling closer.

Kazuya smirked. “Naw, if we were there we’d either get distracted, or I’d fall asleep.” He chuckled. “Maybe both, although hopefully not at the same time.”

“I hope not, I’m not sure my ego would be able to handle you nodding off in the middle of sex.”

“Not possible,” Kazuya said, licking ice cream off his spoon. “Plus, the bedroom’s pretty much a no-food zone.”

“Well, yeah. Except under very specific instances, most of which land in the whole ‘distraction’ category.” Eijun agreed.

“You’re not wrong there.”

Kazuya set the bowl on his belly, the bump just large enough to offer a bit of a level surface. “Soon I’m not even going to need a table; I’ll have my own shelf.”

“He’s getting so big. Appointment Friday, right?”

“Yeah. We’re off, so there shouldn’t be any conflicts. You’re coming?”

“Like you could keep me away.” Eijun snorted. “I’ve been looking forward to this all week.”

Kazuya smiled at his enthusiasm. “Me too,” he agreed, finishing the last of his ice cream and setting the bowl aside. He wrapped an arm around Eijun’s shoulders, snuggling him as closely as he could.

“Now, would you please tell me what Shinji said?”
“I...you know it already.” Eijun buried his face in Kazuya’s shoulder, trying to hide his expression.

“Okay, let’s try it this way. I’ll tell you what he told me and you can fill in the gaps.” Kazuya said gently, rubbing soothing circles on Eijun’s back. “Can you do that?”

Eijun nodded, allowing himself to relax. “I will.”

“Okay, other than what I said earlier, I don’t know much of anything. I told him what you said and his answer was ‘I was afraid he’d interpret it like that’. Apparently, he didn’t use the words ‘if you’re careful’ he used the words ‘if you’re insanely lucky’. He told me that he’d given you some options and set another appointment for Monday. When were you planning to tell me that?”

“I don’t know,” Eijun confessed. “I was kinda hoping it would all be better then, and I wouldn’t have to worry you.”

“Eijun. You know that’s not how these things work.”

“I know,” Eijun said softly, sounding scarily small. “But I was still hoping.”

Kazuya wrapped his other arm around him, pulling him as close as he could, heart bleeding for his boy. “I get that, I do. It seems like the universe should owe you one, right?”

“Yes, it does. But I know that’s just stupid. Things don’t work that way.” Eijun sighed.

“No, they don’t,” Kazuya agreed. “So, what do you want to do?”

“I want to keep playing baseball.”

“Well, that’s always an option,” Kazuya said, running a hand through Eijun’s hair, rubbing his scalp. “You could just play until you broke.”

“You would let me do that?”

“I would,” Kazuya said. “I would hate every minute of it, and I’d hold my breath every time you threw a ball, but if it’s what you really wanted, I’d support you.”

“Maybe nothing bad would happen.”

“You’re right, maybe nothing would. But let me explain to you what would probably happen. You’d be pitching in a game or in practice, and your shoulder would give out. You’d have to quit immediately and have surgery. The first of many, probably. Depending on when it happens, you might miss Peanut’s birth, or not be able to pick him up until you’d healed, if you ever regain use of it. You wouldn’t be able to drive or play, you wouldn’t have a fallback plan, and you’d still lose baseball. But you’d not only lose baseball, you’d lose so much more.”

“I hadn’t really thought about it that way,” Eijun said, consideration clear in his voice. “I don’t want that, I’d hate to be helpless for that long, it wouldn’t be fair to you. Not if I could avoid it.”

“What other options are there, then? What did Shinji recommend?” Kazuya asked gently, knowing that Eijun was really thinking about things, not just reacting. “You know he’s got your best interests at heart and he knows how important baseball is to you. I don’t think he’d ask you to step away if he didn’t really think it was necessary.”

Eijun sighed, running his hands over Peanut as a distraction. “He suggested that I cut back over the next few months, gradually stepping down. And this season should be my last, that I need to be
really careful not to exacerbate the wear. If I make it through the season, he thinks I’ll be able to retain the use of it, with the possibility that I may have to have surgery in a decade or so.”

“What do you think about that plan?”

“I hate it. I hate the idea of giving up baseball.”

“Wait.” Kazuya lifted Eijun’s chin to meet his eyes. “Why do you think you’ll have to give it up? You might have to stop playing professionally, but there are other things you can do.”

“I’m not brilliant like you; nobody’s going to want me to coach.”

“You don’t want to coach pros, trust me. You want to coach kids, and I think you’d be amazing at it. You’re smart and you know the game and you’re enthusiastic and patient. That’s what kids need, not some mega planner who can predict the other team’s moves.”

“Yeah, but who’d hire me? I’ll be just another washed up ex-baseball player.”

“I think you’re underestimating how popular you are. You know, there is a certain amount of brilliance to Shinji’s plan. You have time to make your exit, time to plan what you’re going to do. You could, if you wanted, probably find a team to coach. Or start helping one of the local school leagues. Learning what you don’t already know won’t take much time and I can’t imagine any team turning down a volunteer. Especially you. You also have your degree and the classes required for a teaching certificate, if you wanted to coach High School. You could get some experience coaching for the local league and then move up if that’s something you think you’d like. I wasn’t joking when I said we should sell ourselves as a package deal.”

“That would be great.” Eijun agreed. “I would love to work with you.” He snuggled in, wrapping his arm around Kazuya. “You’d get all bossy and I’d ignore you and we’d argue about it, but in the end, everything would be fantastic.”

Kazuya chuckled. “Ops normal, then?”

“Pretty much.”

“I guess the ‘quit immediately’ option is off the table, then?”

“You’d guess right.” Eijun closed his eyes. “I’m not doing that.”

“I understand, even though part of me wishes you would, wishes you’d be as safe as you can be,” Kazuya admitted. “I guess we’ll see what he says next week and follow Shinji’s plan, then?”

“Yeah.” Eijun sighed again. “It’s the best one, even if I hate it.”

“I hate it too.” Kazuya agreed, and Eijun’s eyes popped open, as he lifted his head to stare at his husband. “What? I want you to be able to play for as long as you want. I hate the fact that you have to quit. But I also want to make sure you stay as healthy as possible.”

“I love you so much right now.” Eijun smiled softly. “You’re amazing, you know that? Thank you.”

Kazuya lifted his hand and stroked Eijun’s cheek. “I think you’re pretty amazing yourself. I know this is going to be hard, but we’ll get through it. We’re partners, remember?”

“Partners until the end.”

“Or until you bash me over the head for the insurance money after I drink straight out of the milk
“Are you still doing that?” Eijun glared.

“In my defense, it’s only in the middle of the night when I have heartburn. That soothes it enough so I can get back to sleep.” Kazuya rested a hand on his belly. “I guess everything being pushed around to make room for Peanut’s done more than make me have to pee all the time.”

“Well, if it’s for Peanut, that’s fine,” Eijun said with an affectionate grin. “Otherwise, we could have issues.”

“Of course.” Kazuya nodded. “You already love him more than you do me.”

“As is natural. He’s not drinking out of the milk carton.”

“Give him time,” Kazuya said with a grin.

“True enough.” Eijun settled back in and they lay there, quiet and together, feeling all the cracks and fissures start to mend.

“Hey, Ei?” Kazuya’s voice came low and quiet. “I was thinking about something.”

“Yeah?” Eijun prompted. “What’s that?”

“If you hate the idea, let me know, but I was thinking about finding out Peanut’s gender.”

“I don’t hate it, at all. What brought that on?”

Kazuya sighed, running his fingers through Eijun’s hair. “I was just thinking things would be easier for everyone. People would know what to get, how to shop. I mean, I love the nursery and wouldn’t want it done any other way, but clothes and such, that’s a different story.”

“Well, it would make Peanut’s pronouns easier.” Eijun sighed, moving his head so Kazuya had easier access. “If you want, I don’t mind. It would be nice to know, but it’s up to you.”

“Tell you what,” Kazuya said. “We’ll do it on a case by case basis...if we want to know for the later kids, we’ll find out. Otherwise, we’ll just wait to see what we get. Just because we learn about Peanut early, it doesn’t mean we have to do it again.”

“True enough, let’s do it. Do you want to have some kind of reveal party? We can shoot guns at a cake that’s dyed blue or pink or something?”

“What? People do that?”

“I need to introduce you to this new thing, Kaz. It’s called YouTube.” Eijun snarked.

Kazuya punched his shoulder. “Asshole.” He covered his mouth, hiding a yawn.

“You’re tired, huh?” Eijun said gently. “It’s been a long day, let’s go to bed.”

“I am,” Kazuya agreed. “So we’ll wait until after we talk to Shinji to figure out what exactly to do, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the best thing I can think to do.” Eijun stood, sighing.

“Good.” Kazuya took his offered hand, standing. “I’m going to take it easy on you until then, okay?
Only play you a few innings, let the others start, only bring you in if we need you.”

“I get it,” Eijun said, wrapping his arms around Kazuya’s waist. “I do. Thank you for looking out for me.”

“Idiot. I love you. What else am I supposed to do?”

The final game of the series. Eijun started, although Kazuya warned him that he was going to take him out of the game by the end of the fourth inning, if not sooner.

“This game is not important in the general scheme of things, not worth risking your shoulder over,” Kazuya said. “If you’re hurting, please tell me and we’ll pull you out earlier.”

“I will.” At Kazuya’s raised brow, Eijun amended. “I’ll try, okay?”

“That’s all I’m ever going to ask.”

He played well, but Kazuya pulled him after the third inning. Eijun opened his mouth to protest, but Kazuya glared and he closed it again with a sigh. He knew Kazuya was right.

Fourth inning, Kazuya’s at the rail watching Ikeda carefully. Like him or not, he was going to have to be the starter when Eijun left—Hara was too green to take on that responsibility, he needed a few more years. He felt Eijun step up beside him, leaning on the rail.

“You know, at twenty weeks, Peanut is almost 300 grams?” Kazuya felt relief flood his veins, he’d been a little worried that Eijun was distancing himself after their confrontation.

“Really? I’m not surprised, as much as it feels like my bladder’s being compressed.”

“Yeah, and he’s starting to make a weird kind of poop, it’s really black and tarry. It’s supposed to be part of his first bowel movement, so we need to remember that and not freak out.” Eijun said, knocking into Kazuya’s side. “I do feel sorry for Jun; we’re going to be such worrywart parents, calling whenever Peanut does anything strange.”

“I don’t think he’s going to mind, really. I’d imagine it’s the parents who don’t call and ignore things that are the bigger worry.”

“You’re probably right.” Eijun turned his attention back to the field. “Ikeda’s going to have to step it up if he’s going to be the starter. Hara’s going to catch him soon.”

“You’re not wrong; I think his assignment is going to end up being more of a placeholder than permanent.”

“That makes sense,” Eijun agreed, and they stayed at the railing watching the rest of the game together, discussing the play and the players.

Kazuya laid down on the ultrasound table, pulling up his shirt and pushing down the top of his shorts, exposing his ever-growing stomach, while the ultrasound tech adjusted the machine, bringing up his stored information and confirming his identity. Eijun stood by his side, watching with interest. They’d done this quite a few times and the procedure was familiar, but this time things were a little
“We’re going to spend some more time with Peanut,” Haruichi informed them. “We’ll be checking everything we can, from organ growth to the size of the brain, making sure it’s all right on track. Since these measurements are based on last menstrual period rather than the date of conception, I’d expect things to be a little ahead of the curve.”

That was the first change, Haruichi generally wasn’t in the room with them when the ultrasound happened, or only came in for a few minutes at the end. This time, they’d done the usual pre-appointment measurements and then been escorted into an examination room, where he’d done a thorough exam before escorting them to the ultrasound room.

“Just to confirm, you don’t want to know the gender, correct?” Haruichi asked.

Kazuya shared a smile with Eijun. “Actually, we’ve changed our minds. We’d like to know.”

“Really?” Haruichi glanced at them for confirmation and then lifted one corner of his mouth in a grin. “I wasn’t expecting that, but I think it makes my life easier. I know that Ryou put a note in your chart after the time he saw you, let me see if I can confirm what he observed.”

“We’re looking for the gender, can you please let us know if the baby’s in the right position to see?” He asked the tech, who had just applied the wand to Kazuya’s belly, moving it around to get the baby into range.

“It looks like it.” She adjusted the view so Haruichi could see. “Let me know if you need me to change the angle.”

Haruichi stepped closer, eyes narrowed. “No, this is good. Ryou was right.” He turned to the pair with a smile.

“Congratulations, it’s a girl.” They turned back to the screen, continuing the exam while affording the couple some privacy.

Kazuya gripped Eijun’s hand, pulling him closer. “We’re having a girl.” He blinked back tears.


“And I you,” Kazuya answered the same way, bringing his free hand up to cup his cheek. “You’re going to be a great father to our daughter.”

“So are you,” Eijun responded. “I’m so glad it’s a girl.”

“You are?” Kazuya asked. “You wouldn’t have preferred a boy?”

“No, why?”

“Well, Haruko…” Kazuya started, not wanting to get him upset, but not wanting any issues to ambush them either.

“No, no.” Eijun shook his head. “I’ll always be a little sad about our lost girl, but this is a completely different one, she’s not a replacement or a substitute. She’s Akemi, and she’s ours.”
“Just when I didn’t think I could love you any more,” Kazuya breathed. “Sawamura Eijun, you’re a wonder to me.”

Eijun rested his forehead on Kazuya’s. “I could say the same.” He smiled, soft and sweet. “We’re having a girl.”

“We are.” Kazuya chuckled, amused by his repetition.

“The ‘rents are going to be over the moon.”

“We’ll Skype with them later, give them the news. That way we can see their reactions.”

“We should visit Dad to tell him.”

“Yes,” Kazuya said. “We should.”

Eijun straightened and looked down the bed, where Haruichi was watching the tech measure and print out copies of pictures.

“How does everything look?” He asked.

“It all looks good so far,” Haruichi said, turning back to face them. “I’ll need to look over the numbers in depth, but right now I don’t see anything troubling.” He stepped away from the machines and walked over towards Eijun. “Did I hear you’ve picked out names already?”

“Yes, her name is Akemi. Miy—” Eijun started before Kazuya cut him off.

“Sawamura,” he said firmly.

”Her name is Sawamura Akemi.”

Chapter End Notes

Surprise?

I was going to leave the gender until the end, but I did a poll, and the reveal won by a landslide.
I do hope you didn't choose to know in fear I was going to not finish this!
I am, I am so in love with this story.

Please, as always, leave a note or something to let me know you're around.
What did you think of this chapter?
“Here you go, these are the best images we took today, I’ll email them to you as well, okay?” Haruichi handed an envelope to Kazuya, smiling at them both over the desk. “As I said earlier, everything seems to be progressing at the correct pace, and she’s exactly where she’s supposed to be.”

“Thank you, Haruichi,” Eijun said as they both stood. “When do you need to see us again?”

“Four weeks,” Haruichi responded. “After that, we’ll see you every two.”

“Okay, great.” Kazuya tugged on Eijun’s hand. “See you then.”

“Thanks again.” Eijun smiled at his friend.

Haruichi smiled back. “No problem, I’ll see you two soon. Congrats again on Akemi.”

“We should call Dad, see if he wants to meet for dinner,” Kazuya said as Eijun climbed into the car, having handed Kazuya in first. “I wonder if he’s ever had fried pickles?”

Eijun stuck the keys in the ignition, turning on the car and starting the air conditioner before blurting out, “Did you mean it?”

“Did I mean what?” Kazuya asked. “Meeting Dad for dinner?”

“No, Kaz. Did you mean it about Peanut? You want her to use Sawamura?” He met Kazuya’s puzzled look, eyes intent.

“Yes,” Kazuya said simply. “I do.”

“But you’re carrying her, and she’s named after your mom. Don’t you want her to be a Miyuki?”

“Not really. I am carrying her and she is being named after my mom, but I still want her to be a Sawamura. She’s as much yours as she is mine, it doesn’t matter which of us is pregnant.”

Eijun’s eyes narrowed. “Are you doing this because you feel sorry for me, because of Haruko and my shoulder?”

“No!” Kazuya met his gaze, honesty showing. “I’ve never felt sorry for you. I hurt for you, but that’s not the same thing. I want her to use Sawamura because she is half yours. I don’t need a copy of my mother; I want our child to be her own person, a blend of you and me. We’re both the last of our lines, so I’m figuring we’ll have a mixed bunch; Sawamura-Miyuki or vice versa is too many
words.” He slipped his hand into Eijun’s and squeezed. “I admit the timing wasn’t perfect, maybe I should have talked to you about it before saying anything, but I felt like it needed to be clear from the beginning. Do you have a problem with it? Should we not use Sawamura?”

“Of course I don’t have a problem with it. I’d love for her to be Sawamura Akemi, I just didn’t want you to do it because you pitied me or as some sort of consolation prize.” Eijun sighed.

“Never. I’m serious, Eijun.” Kazuya turned in his seat and laid his hand on Eijun’s cheek. “I’ve felt bad for you, I’ve ached for you, I’ve worried about you, and I’ve wished I could do something to help you, but I’ve never pitied you. You’re strong and amazing and tenacious and I know that you’ll get through whatever the world throws at you and come out the other side stronger than you were. I believe this with all of my heart. I just want the world to know that Akemi belongs to both of us, that it’s not ‘yours and mine’. We’re both the parents of all of our kids, no matter who carries them.”

“Yes, we are,” Eijun said, turning his head to kiss Kazuya’s hand. “And I love every part of being a parent with you. I’m glad you thought about this, I’m honored you’ve decided you want her to be a Sawamura.”

“Why would you be honored? She’s yours too.” Kazuya frowned at him.

“I’m sorry, I misspoke,” Eijun said quickly. “I don’t mean it that way; maybe I should just say I’m happy? She is mine and I’ll love her forever, even when she drinks out of the milk carton. I’m just still absorbing this a bit, okay?”

“I get that.” Kazuya nodded, face clearing. “I guess I’ve had more time with the idea since I’ve been thinking about it for a while.”

“Fair enough,” Eijun said, beginning the drive home. “Call your dad?”

“Yeah.” Kazuya got out his phone.

“Hey, Kaz. How’d the appointment go?”

“Hi, Dad, it was fine. Peanut’s good. Eijun and I were wondering if you’d like to meet us for dinner?”

“Sure, but is everything alright?” Norio sounded concerned.

“Yes, everything is fine.” Kazuya reassured him. “When are you free?”

“I’m free right now if you’re hungry.”

“That’s great, I’m starving. As usual. Have you ever been to the American Diner?”

“Yes! I love that place.” Norio laughed. “Don’t get me started on how good their fried pickles are.”

“I know already, trust me.” Kazuya sighed. “We’ll meet there, okay?”

“Sure thing, I’ll be there in fifteen.”

“See you then.” Kazuya hung up and chuckled. “Apparently, love of fried pickles runs in my family.”

“He’s had them?”

“Yes, and he loves them. He’s meeting us at the diner in fifteen.”
“Okay, cool. We didn’t get lunch, you have to be hungry.” Eijun switched lanes, turning away from their house.

“Yeah, she’s letting me know it’s time for food,” Kazuya said wryly, sliding his hand over the baby bump. “You’d think a girl would have better manners.”

“Miyuki Kazuya, you’d better not be planning on being one of those ‘girls are this way, boys are that’ parents. She’s a girl, but that doesn’t mean anything about the way she should behave.” Eijun grumped at him.

“You’re right,” Kazuya agreed. “I wasn’t thinking, it was just a joke; I’ll have to remember to be more careful.”

“You’re fine; I know you don’t really believe that, I just feel bad for those who were told those kinds of things. Wakana was an incredible player until she was forced to quit because she was a girl, so I’m a little sensitive about that, she was so sad.” Eijun explained, not wanting Kazuya to feel too badly for something that was really said in jest.

“I understand. Akemi will be able to do whatever makes her happy,” Kazuya said. “I don’t want to limit any of our children.”

“Agreed,” Eijun responded as they pulled into the parking lot. “Looks like we beat Dad. Let’s go in and get a table.”

“And some fried pickles,” Kazuya added with a grin.

“Yes, yes. And some fried pickles.”

They’d just gotten their drinks and placed an order for the pickles when Norio joined them.

“Good afternoon, boys.”

“Hey, Dad!” Kazuya climbed out of the booth and hugged Norio, who returned the hug with a laugh.

“How’s it going?” He stepped back, looking Kazuya over. “Peanut’s growing, huh? I haven’t seen you since before your trip, you’ve gotten much bigger.” He reached out and then stopped.

“Go ahead,” Kazuya said with a grin. “Everyone else does.”

Norio touched his belly gently, smiling softly. “Hello, Peanut. I can’t wait to meet you.” He stood upright and turned to Eijun, who’d stood as they spoke.

“Hi, other son.” Reaching out, he pulled him into a hug.

Eijun hugged him back. “Hi, Dad, glad you came.”

“I love this place; I come here whenever I have the chance.”

“Maybe it’s genetic, then.” Eijun snarked before sliding back onto the bench and out of Kazuya’s range. Kazuya rolled his eyes as he returned to his place and Norio took the bench opposite.

“That’s right. I thought you didn’t like hamburgers, Kazuya.” Norio commented.

Kazuya nodded. “I don’t, but Peanut does, apparently. I’ve been craving cheeseburgers for months. And then we discovered the fried pickles and that weird ranch sauce, and now we’re here all the
“That’s so funny. Your mother didn’t like curry very much, but she craved it when she was pregnant with you.” Norio laughed. “I’d forgotten about that. I remember she was so irritated by the fact that she tried to avoid it, but she had to give in.”

“Ohhh! Maybe it is genetic.” Eijun said.

Kazuya smirked at him. “So, when it’s your turn, you’ll crave natto?”

“Oh dear god, no.” Eijun blanched. “I’m not a Miyuki, so it doesn’t count.”

“But the baby will be.” Norio pointed out.

“Ugh.” Eijun laid his head on the table. “No babies for me, then.”

Kazuya nudged him to sit up, chuckling. “We’ll deal with that when we get to it, shall we?”

“Yeah, I guess.” Eijun brightened up when the server placed the pickles on the table. “We can order more of these if we need them. Mochi and Ryou eat a lot of them.”

“You’ve brought them here?”

“I think we’ve brought everybody,” Kazuya said dryly. “Including the rest of the bullpen.”

“He’s not wrong.” Eijun agreed with a nod.

Norio laughed at Kazuya’s chagrin. “I’m glad you have a good circle of friends.”

“We do, we really do,” Kazuya said. “They’re great. Peanut’s the first baby and they’re all a little freaked out.”

“Except for Haruichi and Ryou, of course, since that’s what they do,” Eijun said. “Even Jun’s a little hovery, and he’s our pediatrician.”

The server arrived with Norio’s drink and took their food orders. As she walked away, Kazuya pulled a picture out of the envelope Haruichi had given him.

“We have something that we wanted to share with you.” He slid the picture across the table to his father. “Meet your granddaughter, Sawamura Akemi.”

Norio blinked in surprise, staring at Kazuya. “Peanut’s a girl?”

“Yes, Peanut’s a girl.” Kazuya affirmed.

“I thought you weren’t going to find out the gender.”

“We weren’t, but then we figured we might as well make things easier for everyone,” Eijun explained.

“So you’re having a girl?” Norio repeated and Eijun nodded. “How sure are they?”

“Both doctors saw the same thing at different times. Pretty sure.” Kazuya answered.

“It’s a girl…” Norio breathed, a smile of wonder spreading across his face. “And you’re using Sawamura? That’s perfect, since she’s both of you, given name from her grandmother and family
one from her father.”

“I thought so,” Kazuya said, eyes soft as he watched his father’s face. “She’s ours, after all.”

“Yes, she is.” Norio agreed. “That’s amazing, I’m so happy for you. A girl. She’s going to be so spoiled.”

“You’re not wrong about that,” Kazuya said with an eye roll. “Between you and Eijun’s parents and our friends, she’s going to have everything she even looks at. We’re going to have to be careful with her.”

“True enough. So many uncles.” Norio commented. “Have you told your parents yet, Eijun?”

“No, we’re skyping with them this evening, we want to see their reactions. They didn’t know we were finding out the gender, either.”

“I’m sure they’ll be thrilled,” Norio said, sitting back as the food was delivered. “Now tell me about the doctor visit. What did he say?”

Conversation flowed as they ate, discussing the baby, the season and Norio’s job, generally catching up. It had been a few weeks since they’d seen each other, and they had plenty to talk about. They described the nursery and all the preparations, inviting Norio over the following week for dinner and to see the room.

And then came the question Eijun was dreading.

“What happened the other day, Eijun? The dead ball? I haven’t seen you throw one for years, were you just having an off day?” He looked concerned, and Eijun didn’t have the heart to prevaricate.

“Not really.” Eijun felt Kazuya lay his hand on his leg, squeezing it supportively. “I’m...well, yes, I was having a bad day. But my shoulder’s going. This is most likely my last season.”

“Oh, god.” Norio reached over and squeezed his hand in sympathy. “I’m so sorry, that’s got to be so hard for you. Have you had other opinions? What are your options?”

“Shinji’s a friend of ours, and I know he wouldn’t end my career without talking to whomever he thought would help. I don’t really have a lot of options, I guess. I can keep playing all out and let it blow itself up one day, lose it for a while to surgery and rehab; I can take it easy for the rest of this season and quit when it’s over, or I can stop now.” Eijun sighed, running his hand over his face. “I don’t want to quit, but I really don’t want to lose my shoulder. Depending on when it went, I wouldn’t be able to pick up Akemi or help Kaz when he needs me. It’s not worth it.”

“Your health is most important,” Kazuya said, lacing their fingers together. “I’m more concerned with you in the future. If you follow Shinji’s suggestions, you’ll probably still be able to pitch and play casually, just not with the intensity you need to play professionally.”

“Yeah.” Eijun agreed sadly. “I just really don’t want to lose pro ball.”

“I don’t blame you,” Norio said. “I hate the idea too. But Kazuya’s right, your health and future is more important than any game. Do you have any idea what you’re going to do, though?”

“Not really, I have my degree and I think I’d like to coach kids, but that’s as far as I’ve gotten,” he admitted.

“We have plenty of time,” Kazuya interjected. “We’ve got more money than we’re ever going to
need. If I’m wrong, we can both find jobs. There’s no hurry to make plans, you can think about it for a while.”

“Yeah...I just. We’ll see,” Eijun said, pasting a smile on his face. “Things will all work out.”

Kazuya tightened his grip, offering him silent support and spoke to Norio, deflecting attention from him. “So, Dad, did you hear that—” he started to tell him the truth behind the latest team gossip, allowing Eijun to gather himself.

As they finished up, Kazuya paying the check, Norio slid the picture back across the table. “Here, don’t forget this.”

“No, it’s yours,” Kazuya said, pushing it back. “You can have it.”

“Really? Thank you, I’d love to have a picture of Akemi. I’ll show the ladies at work, they’ll be ecstatic.”

“I’m sure they will.” Kazuya had memories of the same ladies, older women who loved to pat his hair and pinch his cheeks when he’d been younger and visited the shop.

They all stood and walked out to the parking lot together, stopping by Norio’s car. He reached out and pulled them both into a hug, kissing their cheeks and whispering, “I love you both.”

Stepping back, he opened his car door. “You boys be careful getting home, okay? I’ll see you next week. Drive safely and take care of my granddaughter!”

“We will.” Eijun laughed, waving to him as he closed his door.

Arm in arm, they walked across the parking lot to their car, Kazuya leaning his head on Eijun’s shoulder.

“Are you okay? I know that was rough for you.”

“Yeah, I’m fine. It was...unexpectedly difficult. I don’t know, I guess I haven’t completely processed it yet.” Eijun pulled him closer, wrapping his arm around his waist. “But you know what?”

“What?”

“We’re having a girl,” he said softly, awestruck.

“We are,” Kazuya agreed, equally as wonderingly. “It’s suddenly a little more real, right?”

“You’re right,” Eijun said, opening the door for him. “It is.” He closed the door behind Kazuya and went around the car.

“At some point, I hope I’ll stop feeling like I’m failing you,” Eijun said as he pulled into traffic.

“You will,” Kazuya affirmed. “I did.”

“You never failed me, Kaz,” Eijun said stoutly.

“Nor are you,” Kazuya said just as firmly. “You’re doing exactly what you should be, protecting the future of our family. And believe me when I say that’s the furthest thing from failure.”

“I know, I do. Someday I’ll internalize that knowledge.” Eijun sighed.
“You will,” Kazuya repeated.

“I’m trusting you to be right.”

“And well you should. When did I ever steer you wrong?”

“Well,” Eijun started. “I do remember crouching behind an equipment shed with you. That was pretty wrong.”

Kazuya laughed. “Oh, man. I haven’t thought about that in a long time! That was great. I thought Kataoka was going to kill me. Did I tell you I was late my first day the previous year?”

“Really? No wonder you were willing to take advantage of your poor, lost kouhai. Even if it was a rotten trick.”

“It was, it really was.” Kazuya chuckled at the memory. “But you weren’t a whole lot better. You were a pretty disrespectful kouhai.”

“Only to you.” Eijun pointed out.

“True enough. Why was that? Other than the fact that I was a little shit?”

“I think...honestly, I always thought of you as my partner. The words you said to me that first day stuck with me and I felt like we had something more than a typical senpai-kouhai relationship. Plus, you were a little shit. As was I.”

“You know, for all the bitching I did about it, I didn’t mind, I think I felt the same way. And I still do.”

“I think I’ve loved you since the beginning. You fascinated me at first, but then you went out of your way to help me, to teach me, even when you were snarking and being a teasing asshole. I questioned my sanity a few times when I realized how I felt about you, but when I really thought about it, it made sense. You were there for me every time I needed you. You still are. Is it any wonder I’ve loved you for so long?”

“It is to me,” Kazuya whispered, almost too softly for Eijun to hear. “If you were fascinated by me, I was enthralled by you, I couldn’t look away. You shone so brightly, you still do, that I was amazed that you could see me hiding in the shadows. It hurt me so much to see you broken by the yips and I didn’t know why, except that I couldn’t bear to see that light dimmed. I still don’t understand why you even gave me a chance.”

“I couldn’t do anything else, Kaz. I loved you. I still do.” Eijun pulled into the driveway, parking the car. “We’re sappy tonight, huh?”

“Yeah, but it’s not a bad thing to remember why we’re together.”

“You’re right. Plus we’re having a girl. Akemi’s going to be joining us soon.”

“She is. And I couldn’t be happier.” Kazuya opened his door and Eijun glared. “I’ll wait.”

“You’d better.” He climbed out of the car and went around, offering Kazuya his hand.

“I’m fine, you know. I get out of the car by myself all the time.”

“I know you are. But if I can do anything to prevent something happening, I will. Even if it’s overkill. I need you to be safe.”
“Now you know how I feel,” Kazuya said with a smirk.

“Hush, you. Let’s go call the ‘rents.”

“Change first? You need to check your email, see if Haruichi sent you those pictures.”

“I do.” Eijun opened the door and they stepped inside. “Go get comfortable, I’ll join you in a minute.”

“Works for me.” Kazuya went down the hallway to their room and Eijun stopped in the kitchen to get them each a drink. Placing them on the living room table with his phone, he followed Kazuya down the hallway.

“Hey, Kaz, where’s your—” he stopped, enthralled by the sight before him. Kazuya had removed his shirt and had a hand on his stomach, looking at it with the softest smile Eijun had ever seen. He stepped into the room and to Kazuya, moving behind to slide his arms around him, laying his hands on top of Kazuya’s. “Hi, Akemi,” he said, whispering. “We’re so glad you’re there.”

Kazuya leaned back into him, placing his other hand atop Eijun’s. “We are. We can’t wait to meet you, we’re going to be such good dads to you, we’ll love you forever.” He blinked back the tears that threatened. “Eijun, I honestly am shocked at how much this has changed for me. I mean, I’m the one who feels her move and am dealing with all the pregnancy stuff, but knowing Peanut’s a girl has made everything so much more real, like it’s a real baby. That’s stupid, I know, but there it is.”

“No, no,” Eijun said, pulling him closer but careful not to squish Akemi. “I understand completely. It’s the same with me, kinda like when we got married. It didn’t really change our lives, we were already living together and committed, but it gave everything more weight. Like that.”

“Exactly.” Kazuya smiled and turned his head, kissing Eijun’s cheek. “Now we’d better get going, the ‘rents are expecting us at seven.”

“Yeah.” Eijun let his hands slide down to his sides and Kazuya stepped away, moving to find a swing dress. “I want to use the tablet so we can show them the room. Is it charged?”

“I think so.” Kazuya collected it from the nightstand while Eijun changed into a t-shirt and shorts. “Yeah, it’s fine.”

“Good.”

They returned to the living room and took their places on the couch, propping the tablet on the table so they could both see. Eijun handed Kazuya a bottle of water and was rewarded with a kiss on the cheek. “Thanks, Ei.”

“Of course,” Eijun answered. “Let’s get this party started, shall we?”

“Please do.”

Eijun nodded and connected the call, waiting for his parents to pick up. It only took a few seconds for his mother’s voice to come through the speakers.

“Hi, boys! Let me get this camera turned on, we’re all here!”

They heard rustling around and then the image changed and they were looking at the Nagano family, sitting around the dinner table.
“Hi, Mom, Dad, Gramps!” Eijun said with a wave. “Can you see us okay?”

“Yeah, you look fine. Hi, Kazuya, how are you feeling?” Chika asked.

“I’m fine, I feel great, thanks.”

“And how is that great grandbaby?” Eitoku asked gruffly.

“I see how it is. Are you not even going to ask about me? I know where I rank.” Eijun mock pouted.

“We can see you’re fine. Peanut, we can’t.” Eidan pointed out.

Kazuya laughed. “That’s true enough.” He nudged Eijun. “Did you send it yet?”

“Yeah, while we were connecting,” Eijun answered and then turned to the screen. “I sent you an email, can you open it?”

“Will we lose you?” Chika asked.

“You shouldn’t, we’ll still be here. You just won’t be able to see us until you bring Skype back to the front.” Kazuya explained.

“Okay,” Chika said, and they saw her reach for the laptop mouse, opening her email. “Oh, here it is.”

“Open the attachment, please,” Eijun instructed.

They saw her double click and watched as everyone looked at the image. Chika realized what it was first and they saw her eyes widen and then moisten as she smiled gently. Eitoku pushed his glasses up to peer at it; he recognized it second, nodding his head in satisfaction, while Eidan squinted for a bit before he figured it out and he smiled, wide and bright. Kazuya hadn’t realized until then exactly where Eijun had gotten his smile.

“That’s Peanut?” Chika asked. “When was this taken? It’s gotten so big!”

“Today,” Kazuya explained. “We had our twenty-week check-up today, and that’s how she looks.”

“Oh, it’s she today?” Eidan asked. “I thought it was ‘he’ on odd days.”

“It was,” Kazuya said with a grin. Chika closed the email so she could see their faces.

“Was?” Her eyes narrowed at the response.

“Yeah. Was.” Kazuya replied as Chika’s eyes started to glow. “That’s Sawamura Akemi. We’re having a girl.”

“It’s a girl?” Eidan asked, grin widening.

“It is,” Eijun answered with a matching grin.

“I thought you boys weren’t going to find out the gender?” Eitoku asked, looking confused.

Kazuya took the question. “We weren’t. But then we decided to make it easier on everyone. We may not do it for the next baby, but for this one, it made sense.”

“How are you feeling, Eijun? What do you think about having a girl?”
“I’m great!” He tried to project sincerity through the screen. “I’m glad she’s a girl.”

“Really?” Chika was skeptical.

“Yes. I’ve wanted a girl since I first found out Kaz was pregnant. I’m glad, honestly.”

“And she’s going to use Sawamura?” Eitoku asked. “Did I hear that right?”

“You did.” Kazuya nodded. “It makes sense, she’s both of ours. I wanted to make sure everyone knows it.”

“We’re glad,” Eidan said with a nod. “I’m happy the family name is being passed to another generation.”

“So, tell us about your road trip,” Chika asked. “Was it exhausting?”

“Not too bad, I just—” Kazuya began to tell them about the trip, with Eijun chiming in as he saw fit. They carried the tablet into Akemi’s room to show them the artwork, accompanied by the appropriate amount of enthusiasm from the other end, Eidan being particularly impressed with the monkeys swinging over the dresser and Chika falling instantly in love with the mural over the bookcase.

They were returning to the living room when Chika asked, “How big are you getting, Kazuya?”

Eijun turned the camera on him and panned down as Kazuya put his hand under his belly, showing them the size.

“Oh, you’re getting so big!” Chika said. “We’re going to have to come see you soon.”

“Please do,” Kazuya replied. “We’d love to have you.”

“And you’re wearing the swing dresses?”

“Yes, they’re really comfortable. And cool.” Kazuya said with a nod. “Eijun wears them sometimes as well.”

“I’m glad they’re working out for you both.”

They continued to chat for a while, catching up, until Eidan yawned. “I probably should go to bed, I’ve got to be up early to tend the grapes, they’re almost ready. Between them and the peaches, it’s one of the bad weeks.”

“Oh, man,” Eijun sympathized, “I’m sorry for keeping you up.”

“No, no. I wanted to know about Peanut and talk to you two, it’s fine. It’s just getting late for me.”

“Okay,” Kazuya said. “You go get some rest; we’ll talk to you later.”

“Hang on,” Chika interrupted. “I spoke to an architect who wants to work with you and knows Nagano period buildings. She’s with a firm that’s headquartered in Tokyo; in fact, that’s where she is as well. I’ll send you her information so you can contact her and set up an appointment to meet with her. Out of all the people I spoke to, she’s the one I think is the best fit for you.”

“That’s great!” Eijun said eagerly. “I’m glad you found someone. We’ll contact her immediately and set something up.”
Chika smiled at his enthusiasm. “Please do. I’d like to get at least the plans made before winter, that way we have several months to figure out finishings and such.”

“I hadn’t thought about that, but you’re right, we’ll have time then to worry about those things.” Kazuya nodded. “Thank you again for all your help.”

“I’m glad to do it.” Chika waved off his thanks. “Plus it nets me my grandbabies nearby, so I’m doubly glad to do it.”

“Don’t give away your motivations, woman!” Eitoku growled. “It makes your negotiations weaker.”

“Sawamura Eitoku! Don’t you ‘woman’ me, you old coot. These are our kids, not some adversary, it’s not a negotiation.” Chika scolded him. “It’s time for you to head to bed, and don’t forget your medicine,” she reminded him.

“Don’t nag at me,” he grumbled. “Do you see how she treats me?” He looked at the boys plaintively.

“Yes, yes, you’re so abused,” Eijun said. “Now, go to bed and don’t forget your medicine.”

“You too?” Eitoku glared. “Fine, I’ll remember this when I write my will.”

“You need to remember that we’re picking your old-folks home, too.” Eidan chimed in, to general laughter.

Eitoku rose and headed out of the room, aiming a swat at his son on the way past. “Take good care of my great-granddaughter, she’s the only person in this family worth a damn.”

“Goodnight, Gramps! We’ll see you soon.”

“Don’t forget to take your medicine!” Chika yelled.

They could hear him grumbling something that wasn’t identifiable to the boys, but clearly Chika understood, she smiled in satisfaction.

“Well, boys, it is time for us to all get off of here, we do need to get to bed,” she said, still chuckling. “I’m so glad you called, and it’s lovely news about Akemi.”

“Thanks, Mom. We’ll talk to you later. Love you.”

“Love you three too, take care,” Chika said, disconnecting the chat.

As the screen cleared, Eijun collapsed into Kazuya’s side, letting out a breath of relief.

Kazuya wrapped his arms around him, pulling him close. “What’s that all about?”

“I thought they might ask about the dead ball the other day and I didn’t want to have to tell them that I’m about to be unemployed. They’d worry.” Eijun mumbled into his chest.

“We’re going to have to tell them, Eijun. They can’t learn it from the news.” Kazuya pointed out, running his fingers through his hair.

“I know.” Eijun sighed. “I just don’t want to say anything until I know everything I can. It’s going to be hard enough telling them with all the information.”

“Why?” Kazuya asked, genuinely curious. “What do you think they’re going to do?”
“Nothing bad,” Eijun responded. “I hate that I’m going to be letting them down.”

Kazuya hooked his finger under Eijun’s chin and met his eyes. “Eijun, you do know they’re going to be worried about you, not about your employment, right? They’re not going to care if you’re going to pull down your bonus; they’re going to be worried about your shoulder.”

“I know,” Eijun sighed again. “It’s not them, it’s me. I don’t want to disappoint them.”

“You know the only disappointment they’re going to feel is for you, that you have to stop doing the thing you love.”

“You’re right, of course. But I can’t help it, you know?”

“I do.” Kazuya pulled him close for a hug. “I understand. I’m here for you; however you need me to be. I love you, we all do.”

“And I love you,” Eijun said softly, kissing his cheek. “Are you tired?”

“I am, it’s getting late.”

“It’s not that late, Kaz.”

“Late enough.” He climbed into Eijun’s lap and started nibbling on his collarbone. “We should take a shower and go to bed.”

“Oh, we should, should we?” Eijun arched an eyebrow, running a hand under the hem of his dress and over his back, tilting his head to give Kazuya access. “And what should we do there?”

Kazuya worked his way up Eijun’s jawbone, nibbling on his ear.

“What ever you want.”

Chapter End Notes

Woot! How about that?
We’re still cooking along, I’m hoping to get at least one more chapter out before I go on vacation.

Let me know your thoughts and dreams....
*hugs*
A Plan is Made

Chapter Summary

Eijun thinks.
Kazuya supports.
Akemi...flips around and does baby stuff.

Chapter Notes

Hi!
I hope you are all doing well!
I didn't abandon this, I really didn't!
I was positive I was almost done with Kick, so I thought I'd get the last few chapters done...
13 chapters later, it's still going and I'm back here.
I'm hoping to update this regularly, please be patient with me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Twenty-One

Kazuya pulled into the parking space, turning off the car. He turned to look at Eijun, who’d been steadfastly staring out of the side window the whole way. “We’re here.”

“Donwanna’,” Eijun pouted.

“Eijun, you know we need to do this. It’s important.”

Eijun slumped down into his seat, refusing to answer, still staring out the window.

“While I appreciate getting practice dealing with a recalcitrant toddler, can we save the role-playing for later?”

Eijun sputtered out an unintentional laugh before sighing. “I’m sorry, it’s just—”

“Trust me, I know. But it’s better to get things settled than have them hanging over your head. It’s best to have clarity and a plan, you know that.” Kazuya climbed out of the door and went around to open Eijun’s. “Come on, Ei. Let’s get this over with.”

“I should be doing this for you,” Eijun grumbled. “I’m not the one who’s pregnant.”

“No, but you’re the one who needs all the support right now. I’m fine, you know this. I don’t have nearly the problems I did,” Kazuya said, offering him his hand.
“I’m glad,” Eijun took the offered hand after he stood. “We can switch off, how’s that?” he asked with a grimace.

“We’ve always been good at switching,” Kazuya smirked at him, pulling him close. “You’ve done such a good job of taking care of me; please let me take care of you, okay?”

“I…” Eijun sighed, laying his head on Kazuya’s shoulder. “Yes. You’ve always taken care of me, Kaz. I’m just not used to my body being broken, I don’t want to admit to the fact that I’m done.”

“I guess I’ll have to keep telling you what you’ve told me repeatedly. You’re not broken, you’re not washed up, you’re injured. It happens. Shoulders can’t take the wear caused by pitching as much as you have to do to play professionally forever; they’re not built for it. Neither can knees or elbows—you know this. It may not seem like it at this point, but you’re lucky you’re able to quit on your own terms, you’re not being forced out with no warning.”

“You’re right and I’m such a whiny asshole. You had it so much worse, I’m sorry.”

“No, no!” Kazuya glared, stepping back to meet his eyes. “That’s not what I meant. It’s not a competition, idiot. I’m just telling you the truth. It’s not easy either way and the anticipation of the end can be worse than a sudden loss. It’s painful however it shakes out. Just—” he paused, sighing as he ran his fingers through his hair, “I’m here for you. You’re not alone and I understand better than most what this means for you, how hard it’s going to be for you.”

“Thank you,” Eijun said simply. “But you’re wrong about one thing. You understand me better than anyone, you know me better than anyone.” He smiled tremulously at Kazuya, doing his best to show him that he was going to be okay. “If I have you, there’s nothing else I need. I’m sorry for being a baby about this. You ready?”

“As ready as you are,” Kazuya said, intertwining their fingers and gripping firmly. “Remember, we’ll get through whatever happens and be stronger for it. Together. Partners.”

“Partners to the end,” Eijun said. “Unless you suffocate me with a pillow for leaving the toilet seat up.”

“That’s...yes, I just might. You need to stop, especially with Akemi coming. It’s unsanitary.”

“A dead body in the bed would be even more unsanitary, though,” Eijun noted. Kazuya nodded gravely. “You may be right about that.” He tugged Eijun’s hand, leading him towards the doors. “Come on, Ei. Let’s get this over with.”

“I don’t think I have much choice, you have my hand.”

“I do, don’t I?” Kazuya asked lightly, opening the door and escorting him into the office.

Eijun was called back shortly after they’d sat down and Kazuya got up to follow him down the hallway.

“You don’t have to come,” Eijun said. “I won’t lie to you, I promise.”

“Are you kidding? Together, Eijun. I won’t let you face this alone.”
“I’m glad. I didn’t want to force you to come with me, but I do want you to be there.”

“Good thing we talked that out, then.” Kazuya laid a hand in the small of his back and escorted him down the hallway to the examination room. “I’m with you every step, every one. I’ll do whatever you need, be whatever you need me to be.”

“And you wonder why I love you,” Eijun said, smiling softly at the man walking beside him. “I don’t want you to be anything other than yourself and that will be exactly what I need.”

“I think I can do that,” Kazuya lifted a corner of his mouth in a grin. He gestured to the open door of the exam room. “After you.”

Eijun stepped through the door and perched on the exam table, followed closely by Kazuya who plopped down into the chair, scooting it close enough that he could hold Eijun’s hand. They chatted quietly as they waited for Shinji to come in.

“How’s Peanut this morning?” Eijun asked, sliding his thumb over Kazuya’s knuckles.

“She’s good,” Kazuya said. “Flipping around like she’s practicing somersaults.”

“Is she?” Eijun grinned. “I wish I could see.”

“If she’s still doing it later, I’ll show you, you may be able to see it.”

“It’s a date.”

“Do I need to come back later?” Shinji asked as he stepped through the door. “I can, you know.”

“Naw, we were just waiting for you,” Eijun said with a grin. “Hi, Kanemaru-sensei.”

“Hi, Eijun,” he said with a small eye roll for the honorific. “Kazuya, how are you feeling?”

“I’m good, thanks.”

“How’s the baby? Is it she or he today?” Kazuya raised an eyebrow at Eijun, who nodded. “Peanut’s a she. Every day.”

“You found out it’s a girl?”

“We did.” Kazuya agreed.

“Are you okay, Eijun?” Shinji looked at his friend, knowing that the lost baby was also a girl.

“Of course, why wouldn’t I be?” Eijun said. “Akemi has nothing to do with Haruko.”

“You’re naming her Akemi?”

“Yeah, that was my mother’s name. Sawamura Akemi is going to be her name,” Kazuya answered.

“That’s a beautiful name, congrats to both of you,” Shinji said with a brief smile.

“Thank you,” Kazuya said.

“Eijun, how’s the shoulder?” the doctor changed the subject, getting to the reason they were there. Eijun sighed. “About the same. Anything new from the other tests you ran?”
“Not really, unfortunately.” He walked over to the lighted display and put an x-ray up to view. “I wanted to see you in here so you could see what’s going on, both of you. This isn’t the best way to see it; I can show you the MRI later if you like.” He pulled a pen out of his pocket and indicated what was going on. “When you hurt yourself last time, you tore your rotator cuff, right here,” he pointed at a spot on the film, “and we fixed it, but this time there are a couple of different things that are problems. You’ve developed what’s called a SLAP injury, your tendon on the top of your shoulder is slowly rupturing. To exacerbate it, you’ve developed instability in your shoulder, so your ball and socket are loose. What that means is that your shoulder is partially dislocating every time you pitch. That’s a result of both pitching repeatedly and the injuries you’ve sustained over the years. In addition, your unusual flexibility is also contributing to the instability, since your joints are so loose naturally. We can possibly go in and stitch the ruptured tendon back together—in fact, we should—but it’s going to continue to tear with the continued pressure professional pitching puts on it. The instability is also repairable with surgery, although I’d rather not do that if we can avoid it, I think we can help that by just limiting your movements for a while and watching carefully.”

“So, what’s the worst case?” Eijun asked.

“The tendon tears completely in the middle of a game. You’d have to have surgery immediately and it, combined with the instability, would be career-ending.”

“And the best case?”

“You get through the rest of the season without it tearing, stop pitching and rest for a while, see how much heals and then have surgery. We can probably do it arthroscopically again unless there’s a lot of tearing. That would mean a shorter recovery and less trauma, easier healing. My best case, which I doubt you’ll consider, is that you’d get the surgery now and spend the time on the DL, with retirement at the end of the season after everything’s healed and you find you are still not able to pitch as you used to.”

“What’s the downtime?” Kazuya asked.

“If you do it arthroscopically? About four weeks before you can use the shoulder, then rehab and physio to bring it back to as good as you can get. Even if you do this, Eijun, if you go back to playing, it will tear again. It will. And at some point, you could lose the use of your shoulder for a very long time, or have to have a replacement. I’d prefer for that to not happen.”

“How badly is it damaged?” Eijun asked. “How much do I have left? Would limiting my time playing be enough to nurse it along until the end of the season?”

“Maybe. I’d say you need to cut your practice time and intensity down as well.” Shinji said. “Nothing’s guaranteed, though. It could be that you baby it and it still blows on you, there’s no way to gauge it. I’d say you have about a seventy-five percent chance that it’d go before the season ends.”

“So let me make sure I understand this,” Kazuya said, keeping a firm grip on Eijun’s hand, lending him as much support as he could. “Eijun’s shoulder has two problems, one that you can fix that will reoccur if he continues to play and the other that can’t be repaired and will continue to worsen if he plays. The one you can fix is a tendon tear, one that’s happened gradually rather than suddenly. That would require four weeks of healing followed by rehab. The other problem is repairable and will continue to worsen the longer he plays, but if he stops it’s not going to become unusable so surgery can be avoided.” Kazuya looked at Shinji, who nodded.

“Okay so far. Now, he has two options. Get the surgery immediately and spend time on the DL before retiring at the end of the year, or continuing to play with the chance that he could really blow out his shoulder requiring emergency surgery. Is that correct?”
“Yes,” Shinji said. “One more thing to note. If you decide to continue to play and it does tear all the way, you’re going to be down a lot longer than four weeks, potentially. Dependent on how much damage is done, of course.”

“One more question, then.” Kazuya continued, thinking hard about his boy who was clearly lost in the misery of his situation. “What is the prognosis if he gets the surgery now? Would he be able to play at all? Pick up the baby? Coach a kid’s team?”

“If he did it now, he would be able to do all those things. The only limitations he’d have are intensity and duration. He actually could play in a pro game if he wanted to, it would be the practice that would cause the most damage. The repetitive throwing motion over a long period of time is the thing that’s the most damaging. If he waited and it tore completely, the prognosis would be much more unsure.”

“Thank you. It looks like we have some things to think about,” Kazuya said. “Can you give us a bit to talk it over? We do want to get this figured out today so we can have a plan moving forward.”

“Of course, feel free to use my office, I’ll come and check on you in a bit,” he said, making a note on his chart. “You know where it is, I’ll see you in a while.” He started to walk out and turned.

“Eijun.” He stepped up closer and Eijun lifted his head. “I want you to know that I’m sorry about all this, I wish there was any other option for you. I’ve asked everyone I can think of for alternatives and nobody had anything other than what I’ve told you. This would never be my choice; I would never want to take this away from you. I understand how hard it is, I really do.”

“Thank you for that, Shinji,” Eijun smiled at him, eyes watery. “You’ve always been a good friend to me and I know you wouldn’t tell me this if it wasn’t the absolute truth. I just…well, you know. We need to figure out what would be best to do.”

Shinji gave his shoulder a quick pat. “You do. I’ll leave it to you.” He turned and walked out of the room, off to attend his next patient.

Kazuya eyed Eijun carefully. “You okay?”

“I think I’m probably the furthest thing from okay right now, Kaz,” Eijun said wryly.

“I know, sorry,” Kazuya said, standing. “We should take this to his office, though.”

“Yeah,” Eijun agreed, jumping off the table, Kazuya keeping their hands firmly intertwined.

They made their way to the office, Kazuya closing the door behind himself before he pulled Eijun into his arms, holding him tightly. Eijun laid his head on Kazuya’s shoulder, hands on his hips.

“I’m so sorry, Eijun. I know we knew this was happening, but I know how hard it is, I never wanted you to have to deal with this,” Kazuya said, running his fingers along his spine.

“You know, I’m not as bad as I thought I would be,” Eijun said, sighing as he snuggled into Kazuya. “I mean, it sucks and I hate it. I’ll probably have at least a couple of breakdowns before this whole thing is resolved and I’ll be crying on your shoulder on the regular, but for right now, I’m okay.”

“Sometimes just knowing the whole truth makes things easier, it’s a relief to know everything rather than worrying about possibilities.”

“That could be it and once I fully process this I might be a quivering mess, but for now I think I can talk about it,” Eijun said, kissing Kazuya’s cheek softly before he stepped back. “Thank you for
“being here with me; I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“Where else would I be?” Kazuya asked, sitting in one of the armchairs in front of the desk.

Eijun sank into the other one, “A spa somewhere, getting pampered like you deserve.”

“True enough,” Kazuya said. “You stay here; I’ll be back later…”

“Goof,” Eijun grinned before sobering. “What do you think?”

Kazuya sighed. “I know what I want you to do, but it’s something you have to decide, really. I’m here for whatever you want to do.”

“Can we talk through this?” Eijun asked. “I mean, work through the options and see what we can figure out?”

“Of course, that’s what I’m here for. Where do you want to start?”

“I guess the important part is the impact the various choices would have on our lives and our futures. We need to weigh that against what I want to do, what I can do.”

“True. So, what do you know?”

“If I get the surgery now, I’ll be out for 6 weeks or more, but I might be able to help the team later in the year and I’ll be healed well before Akemi is born, before you really need me to be able to help you. If I wait, I might tear it completely and lose it for longer, lose it when you need me. I know there’s really not a big choice, not when you consider the future and Akemi, but it’s not easy.” Eijun sighed, running a hand through his hair.

Kazuya watched him carefully, worried about his lack of emotion. He knew Eijun had an uncanny ability to shut them down in times of great stress, but he also knew he paid for it later. It was probably a result of his ability to handle the pressure of pitching, not losing focus on the mound; Kazuya had only seen it a few times and only seen the aftermath twice—the other time he’d seen it was when he blew his knee and Eijun didn’t let him see anything for a while, game face showing at all times. “I know. In some ways, it was better for me, the decision was taken away from me. It’s hard to weigh the future and ‘maybe’ against how you define yourself.”

“True enough,” Eijun sighed again. “But maybe it’s time to work to redefine myself. If I was asked what the most important things in my life are, right now, baseball would be a distant number three at the highest, you and Peanut are much more important. So I guess that’s the way we need to go. I hate the idea of giving up the mound—of losing the thing I’ve defined my life by—but it’s not my life anymore, I have so much more.”

“That would be the way I’d prefer you go, although I’m more worried about you, I want you to be as healthy and as pain-free as you can, with as many options as possible,” Kazuya said. “It’s going to be hard, I know it will. I’ll be with you every step of the way, though.”

“Then we’re decided. I’m not sure how long this clarity will last before I turn into a bundle of tears and denial, so maybe we should tell Shinji and then speak to the management this afternoon.”

Kazuya nodded, pulling out his phone, glad to see that Eijun understood what was coming, “If you’re sure, that’s a good idea. We’ll probably need all the documentation he has, as well as the list of people he consulted, so they don’t try to railroad you into doing something that isn’t in your best interest.”
“Yes, that’s what I want to do. It’s what’s best for our future and that’s what matters,” Eijun said decisively, standing. “Go ahead and make the call, I’ll see if Shinji’s around.” He opened the door and looked down the hall, catching the nurse’s attention.

“I’ll tell him,” she said, indicating a closed door.

“No hurry, we’re just ready whenever he’s got a minute,” Eijun said with a smile. He closed the door and returned to his seat, glancing at Kazuya who was just hanging up the phone.

“We’re meeting with them at two,” Kazuya said. “That should give us a chance to get whatever we need together before then.”

“You’ll need lunch when we’re done here,” Eijun said. “We may have time for cheeseburgers.”

“If we don’t, we can just grab something to hold me over and eat a full meal after the meeting,” Kazuya said.

“I might prefer that, I’m not sure I can eat anyway,” Eijun agreed, pushing back the emotions that were already swirling in his head.

Kazuya opened his mouth to answer when the door opened and Shinji stepped in, heading for his desk. “You’ve made a decision?” he asked, sitting in his chair and dropping the folder he was holding on the desktop.

“Yeah,” Eijun said. “I think I just need to go ahead and get the surgery done now, get the issue taken care of. Baseball’s been my life, but I’ve never expected it to last forever. My family, Kazuya and Akemi, those are things that will be with me forever. That’s where my focus should be.”

Shinji eyed him closely, “Are you sure? I mean, I don’t want to dissuade you from doing the smart thing, but you’re awfully calm about this. I expected a little more emotion from you.”

Eijun slanted the corner of his mouth up in a brief, sad, smile. “I’m sure. I’ll be a wreck later, no doubt, but for right now, I’m all right. I won’t change my mind.”

Kazuya slid his hand in Eijun’s, squeezing it in support. “We’ve already set up a meeting with the front office this afternoon, so we’re going to need all the documentation you have, including who you consulted and what they all said. I’m sure they’re going to want their doctors to review it.”

“Yes, I’ve got everything here.” He pushed the folder over the desk toward them. “It has copies of all the tests, there’s a disk of your MRI, as well as all of the consultant’s information. We should meet again next week so I can do all the pre-op testing. This isn’t an emergency like the last time, so we can perform it as outpatient, you won’t have to stay in the hospital. If everything goes well, we can schedule this for late next week, maybe Thursday. Would that be agreeable?”

“That’s fine,” Eijun said. “The sooner the better, if you ask me. I want to get this done.”

“Well, let’s see what your team says, if they get moving quickly we may be able to do it earlier.” Shinji agreed. “When you do this, your shoulder will be in a brace for four weeks, you’re going to have very limited use of it during that time. You’ll also be in rehab for a couple of months after those four weeks. It’ll probably be three months or so before you can throw the ball again.”

“This is early July...so that would mean October?” Eijun asked.

“Yes, something like that. You’ll be able to use it for other things, just not pitching and that kind of overhand motion. It won’t stop you from using that arm.” Shinji explained. “And it should be
completely healed by the time Akemi comes, so you won’t have any issues there.”

“That’s good,” Eijun said, standing. “Okay, then. We’ll go talk to the team and let you know what they say, unless you’d rather speak directly to the team doctor.”

“Yes, have them give me a call. If they say they’re going to call me and don’t, let me know.” Shinji stood as well, Kazuya rising with the help of Eijun’s hand.

“Will do. Thanks again, Shinji. I appreciate it,” Eijun nodded and turned, escorting Kazuya out of the office with a hand in the small of his back.

“Food?” Eijun asked as they pulled out of the parking lot. Kazuya was driving; he really wanted to be in control knowing that his husband’s calm could dissolve at any time.

“I’m a little hungry, but I can wait until after the meeting. We don’t really have time anyway.” Kazuya noted.

“We could just hit a drive-thru; get you something to hold you over.”

“That’s...yeah, let’s do that. McDonald's okay?”

“Gee, I wonder why you want McDonald's?”

“Shut it, you, or no french fries.”

“Consider it shut.” Eijun chuckled as they hit the drive-thru. Kazuya placed their order and they retrieved their food, pulling into a slot to eat before heading to the office.

“How are you feeling?” Kazuya asked as he passed over a drink.

“I’m...okay for now. You know how I can get; this has happened enough that we both know how it’s going to end.”

“Yeah,” Kazuya said, remembering the breakdowns in the past. Nothing as bad as the issues they’d had with Haruko, but still bad. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“I’m just going to need you,” Eijun said. “You’re the only thing I need.”

“That’s easy enough,” Kazuya answered. “You’ve got me. Whatever you need from me, let me know. I’m here for you.”

“Thank you. That’s plenty, then.” Eijun nodded decisively, shoving a french fry in his mouth.

“Hi, we have a two o’clock with Ito-san,” Eijun said to the receptionist.

“Of course, Sawamura-san. Let me see if they’re ready for you,” she picked up the phone and dialed a number, speaking lowly into the phone. Hanging up, she nodded. “Go on back; they’re waiting in his office.”
“Thank you,” Kazuya smiled as they walked by her, through the hallway and down to the general manager’s suite. Stepping through the door, they bowed to the man behind the desk as well as the head coach, who was sitting in a chair to one side.

“Good afternoon,” Eijun said with a smile. “Thank you for agreeing to see us.”

“Of course,” Ito said, motioning to the chairs in front of his desk, “Sit, please.”

They sat, Eijun holding the folder in his lap.

“How can we help you two?”

“We just came from the doctor’s office,” Eijun started, and Ito straightened up.

“Is everything alright with the baby? It’s been such good publicity for us; people are all excited for the golden couple to have a child.”

“The baby’s fine,” Eijun said shortly. “It wasn’t the natal doctor, it was Kanemaru-sensei. And I was the one to see him. I have some news.”

At that, Coach Sato’s eyes narrowed. “What’s wrong?”

“Apparently a lot,” Eijun replied. “I’ve got tears in the upper tendon of my left shoulder as well as instability in the joint. He’s suggesting that I have surgery immediately to repair the tears.”

“And what’s the prognosis after that?” Sato asked.

“I won’t be able to practice as intensely or it will tear again, possibly in a way that is not repairable. It’s not known if I’ll be able to play anymore. I’ll have the full use of it after it heals, it just won’t be strong enough to handle repeated overhand intense motions.”

“And the downtime?”

“Four weeks before I can use it, then several months of therapy.”

“So three months?”

“Yes, pretty much.”

“What are your alternatives?” Ito asked, leaning forward.

“To baby it the rest of the season, limit my playing, and hope it doesn’t blow and take me out completely.”

“What are the odds of that happening?”

“According to Kanemaru-sensei, about seventy-five percent.”

“That you’d make it through?” Ito leaned back, relaxing.

“No, that it would blow,” Eijun replied. “That’s a chance I’m not willing to take, there’s too much riding on this for me to take that kind of risk.”

“What’s the worst case scenario?”

“That I’d play, it would tear completely and do greater damage, causing me to lose the use of it for a
longer period of time, possibly causing me to have to get the whole thing replaced, and stop me from being able to do the things I most need to.”

Kazuya kept quiet, letting Eijun handle this himself, but he watched the other’s reactions carefully, trying to gauge which way they were going to land.

“So you technically can still play,” Ito said. Kazuya’s eyes narrowed, he would step in if he had to. He didn’t trust the GM to have anyone’s best interests at heart.

“He can’t,” Sato said. “I won’t let him. You and I both know that allowing him to play is both irresponsible and unethical. This game is not worth him sacrificing his future for, you know this.”

“You’re right,” Ito said with a small sigh. “I’m assuming that’s the documentation in your lap, Sawamura?”

“It is. Kanemaru-sensei conferred with several experts before making his suggestion. In here are their assessments, the MRI and CAT scan images and video, x-rays and the results of his personal examinations.”

“I’ll take those,” Coach Sato said, shooting a look at Ito. “Let me take them to the team doctor now and we’ll look over them. All of them. If it’s as you say—and I don’t know why you’d lie—we’ll be in contact with you this afternoon. You should get this fixed as soon as you can. For now, though, consider yourself officially on the DL.”

“We’ll chat with you later this week, okay?” Ito said. “Let us have an update as soon as you get one.”

“We will,” Eijun said, standing. “Thank you for your time.”

Kazuya joined him, bowing as well. “Thank you, gentlemen.”

“It’s always good to see you two,” Ito smiled at them. “You’re such a great draw for the team.”

“Thank you, sir,” Eijun said again, bowing and following Kazuya out of the room. Behind him, he heard Ito say, “I’m sure it’s not that—” before the door closed.

Kazuya snagged his hand and they walked down the hallway, past the receptionist and then ducked into the stairway, where he pulled Eijun into his arms.

“That was...Ito’s a piece of work, right?”

“You’re not wrong, Kaz. But Coach seems to be onto him. I think he’ll do the right thing.”

“I hope so,” Kazuya said, rubbing his back. “You did a good job standing up for yourself. Said all the right things. If they didn’t listen, that’s not your fault.”

“Thank you,” Eijun kissed his cheek and stepped back. “We should tell the bullpen the news.”

“They’re probably all in the locker room; let’s see who’s still around,” Kazuya said, tugging his hand as he headed down the stairs.

They walked into the locker room and found several of the pitchers and catchers sitting around chatting.

“Hey, boss! Glad you could join us!” Takahashi snarked. “Everything okay with Peanut?”
“Yeah, she’s fine,” Kazuya answered.

“It’s an odd number, isn’t she a ‘he’ today?” Hara interjected.

“Nope,” Eijun said with a grin, clarifying. “She’s a she every day. We found out she’s a girl.”

‘Really?’ Raichi bounded over from where he had been changing his shoes. “You’re having a girl? That’s so cool!”

“We are,” Kazuya agreed, smiling at the overeager third baseman.

“Do you have a name?” Takahashi asked

“Akemi. She’s going to be Sawamura Akemi.”

“That’s awesome!” Raichi said. “Hi, Akemi,” he cooed at Kazuya’s baby bump, “I’m so happy to meet you. Grow well, little one, and we’ll see you soon.”

Kazuya couldn’t help but be charmed by his innocent joy in things, it was so different from what he was used to. “The next time she’s jumping around in there, I’ll let you feel it,” he offered.

Raichi looked at him, eyes shining, “You will? Really?”

“Yes, I will. I promise,” Kazuya nodded.

“Thank you!” Raichi said, grinning widely. “Are you hungry, do you want a banana?”

“No, thanks, we just ate,” Kazuya said. “We just came from speaking with the coach and the GM, there’s something we—no, Eijun—needs to tell you.”

“I’m on the DL,” Eijun said, to a chorus of questions. “My shoulder’s on the edge of blowing, I need to get it fixed before it goes completely. I was hoping for some different news from the doctor this morning, but I’m not surprised. It’s been going for a while. I was hoping to make it at least to the end of the season, but it’s best if I get it fixed now. If I let it go, wait for it to blow on its own, I may have even more problems with it later, as well as not be able to do things when Akemi gets here.”

“That’s the smart way to think about things,” Takahashi said. “It’s just a game. I mean, we’re all baseball idiots, but at the end of the day, there are other things that are more important. We all understand how hard this is for you, it’s going to happen to all of us at some time, but I applaud your willingness to see the bigger picture and not insist on playing until you can’t.”

“Thank you. I’m probably out for the rest of the season, at least. I’m not sure I’ll ever be back on the mound.” Eijun could feel the emotions try to well up and he pushed them back down, burrying them as deeply as he could. Kazuya stepped up beside him and laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. “But If I can play, I will. I may not be the starter or the ace, but if I can help the team, I’ll be there.”

“You’d better be,” Hara said, frowning. “Even with your arm in a sling, you’re important to the team. Plus, Ito will be twice as hard on us if ‘The Golden Couple’ isn’t in the dugout doing stupidly sappy things that make all the girls swoon.” He interlaced his fingers and put them under his chin, leaning into Takahashi. “Ooohh, look at them, they’re so cute!” he said in a falsetto, “They’re like the perfect couple, I don’t even understand baseball but I’ll be here as long as I can watch them!”

He batted his eyes at Takahashi, who grinned and joined in, “I know, don’t you think Ei-chan’s the most darling thing, with those big shoujo eyes and a smile that could cure cancer? And Miyuki’s such a stud, you wouldn’t think he’d be the one pregnant, but he’s even more gorgeous since he’s
started showing! I wonder if they’re going to announce the gender? I’ll be here for every game in case they do!” he simpered, smiling vacuously at Hara.

Eijun guffawed; he knew they were exaggerating, but not by much.

Kazuya was amused as well, but he frowned, remembering the GM. “You know, he tried to get Eijun to agree to continue playing for the rest of the year, even after he was told that there’s a seventy-five percent chance that his shoulder would give and be even more damaged.”

“I’m not at all surprised,” Ikeda said, stepping up. He’d become much less resentful and more agreeable since the coach cleared the air, and although Kazuya could tell he still wanted the ace position and thought he was good enough for it, he was no longer talking behind their backs and seemed to be willing to work for it. He’d actually joined them a few times at the Diner and become as addicted as the rest of the bullpen was. “He’s all about the money and the butts in seats. Mark my words, even if this does end your career—and I’m sincerely hoping it doesn’t, because that sucks—he’s going to find a way to get you to stick around.”

“As long as he continues to pay me, I don’t mind,” Eijun laughed. “I can deal with seeing you lot if I must.” There were chuckles all around and agreement from the assembled players.

“We didn’t want to keep you guys from leaving, we just wanted to give you an update,” Kazuya said. “We’ll see you tomorrow, okay?”

“Yes, coach!” was the chorus from the bullpen and Eijun waved as they walked away, out and to their car.

They climbed in, Eijun still allowing Kazuya to drive. As they buckled in, Kazuya turned to his husband—he’d seen him blink things back a few times and knew he was getting close to the edge. “Where now? Are you hungry?”

Eijun met his eyes, letting him see a peek of his pain. “Take me home, Kaz. Please.”

“Always,” Kazuya answered, pulling into traffic, hands firmly intertwined.

Later, much later, they found themselves where they’d found themselves frequently recently, curled up together on the couch, Eijun curled up beside Kazuya, head on his shoulder and hand resting on his chest. The storm was over, one that was not nearly as bad as either of them had expected, to Eijun’s relief and Kazuya’s consternation.

“Are you okay?” Kazuya asked, fingers combing through Eijun’s hair.

Eijun sighed, running his hand over his belly, “I am, honestly.”

“That wasn’t as bad as we thought, are you sure? You’re not still hoping to be able to play, are you?”

“Not really. I mean, everyone prays for a miracle, right? But I know I’m done.”

“I’m so sorry, Eijun. You’re making the smart choice.”

“I know,” Eijun agreed. “That’s probably part of the reason things aren’t as bad as I expected, I
know I did the right thing.” He stilled his hand, resting it on Akemi, who he could feel moving around. “And then there’s this. Akemi, you, our family. The house you bought us, the dreams we have of things outside of baseball. When we were kids, we thought we’d play baseball together forever. Now we’re grown, we know that we’ve got so much more, so much outside of baseball. It’s amazing to me.”

“You’re amazing to me,” Kazuya said. “I know how much I resented everything about my injury, about having to quit playing.”

“Well, there’s that too,” Eijun said thoughtfully. “I’m not playing with you anymore. If you were still on the field, I don’t know if I’d be able to give up the mound as easily as I am. It’s still hard, don’t get me wrong, and I’m still going to have a hard time with it, I’m sure, but it’s not as impossible as I expected it to be. If you were still playing, I could see myself continuing. I never wanted to lose being on the field with you.”

Kazuya thought about it for a minute, slotting their fingers together and rubbing his thumb over the back of Eijun’s hand. “You’re probably right. If I’d had the choice, I don’t know if I’d have been able to make the right one, either. I wouldn’t want to leave you on the mound alone; I’d do whatever I could to stay.”

“Guess it worked out for the best, then,” Eijun said, before propping himself up on his hand, looking at Kazuya with eyes narrowed. “Hang on a sec.”

Kazuya met his gaze with a question. “What?”

“Did you know?”

“Know what?”

“That your knee was going?”

Kazuya sighed, moving his gaze to their hands tangled on his belly. “Not officially, no. I knew it had felt off for the last few weeks and was planning to go to the doctor after that series of games. If you remember, we’d been on the road right before then and jumped right into that series. We were near the top of our division and winning those games would have put us up there.” He met Eijun’s watchful eyes. “I promise, I was going to go. I even had an appointment, but I don’t know if you remember that. I regret not going; you have no idea how much. I might have been able to save it if I’d gone, I might still be playing. But I didn’t and I’m not.”

“You were always terrible at taking care of yourself,” Eijun said with a glare before laying back down on his shoulder. “I wish you’d have told me.”

“I wish I had,” Kazuya agreed. “But I can’t say I’m unhappy about what’s going on in my life because of it. If I hadn’t gotten hurt, we probably wouldn’t have Akemi. I love where our lives are taking us right now, I really do. A family, our own kids, our own house.”

“I agree. I think that’s the thought that’s making this whole thing more bearable for me. It’s that we have a future, right? We’ve always thought of our future being baseball, but that’s no longer the case. We have another one. A better one.” Eijun laid his hand flat on Kazuya’s baby bump. “Starting with her. With Peanut. Our child.”

Kazuya laid his hand on top of Eijun’s and smiled softly.

Under their hands, Akemi rolled over, clearly agreeing with every word.
So, yes? No?
Thank you for giving this a chance, please feel free to comment.
Even if it's only an 'about damn time you updated'

Love you all!
Fixing Things

Chapter Summary

Eijun gets fixed.
Kazuya gets fed.
Mochi gets...engaged?

Chapter Notes

HiHi!
I'm glad to see you, glad to bring you yet more of this.

Hope you enjoy- it's basically a brofest down there.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Eijun heard his phone buzz and he sat up, lifting his head from where it had been resting on Kazuya’s shoulder, moving carefully, trying not to disturb his sleeping husband. He stood, grabbing the phone off the low table and heading into the kitchen, away from the couch.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Eijun,” Kanemaru said. “How are you doing?”

“I’m okay,” Eijun sighed, leaning on the sink and looking out the window. “Not good, but okay.”

“Well, that’s better than I expected,” he admitted. “I heard from the team, their doctors agreed with me. Like they had any choice,” he muttered under his breath. “I called the orthopedic surgeon; he has time Thursday morning to do the surgery if you want to get it done soon.”

“Yeah, the sooner the better,” Eijun felt Kazuya’s arms slip around his waist, baby bump pressing into his back, forehead on the back of his neck. He laid his free hand over Kazuya’s, lacing their fingers together.

“I thought that would be the best, so I told him to hold it for you. You’ll have to come in for some tests tomorrow, will that be a problem?”

“No at all,” Eijun said. “What time do you want me?”

“Can you be in at nine? We’ll have to get some bloodwork done before Thursday, so we want to give the lab as much time as we can.”

“Sure, no problem.” Eijun agreed. “Do you need me to not eat?”

“No, it’s not important. I’ll see you in the morning, okay?”

“Yeah, see you then, Shinji.”
“Bye, Eijun.” He hung up the phone and Eijun put his down on the counter, leaning back into Kazuya.

“I didn’t mean to wake you, I’m sorry.”

“No, you didn’t. I wasn’t really sleeping.” Kazuya kissed his neck softly. “What’s going on?”

Eijun sighed, playing with the fingers resting on his stomach. “Surgery Thursday morning. I have to go in tomorrow morning for some tests.”

“The doctors agreed with him? That was quick; they must be hoping they’ll be able to get you back before the end of the season.” Kazuya murmured into his shoulder.

“Probably,” Eijun agreed. “I just want to get it done as soon as I can so I can be there for you when you need me. I hate the idea of being without the use of my left arm for weeks.”

“I get that. But it might not be as long as we think and you will be able to use your hand,” Kazuya pointed out.

“You’re right, but I can’t drive, I can’t lift, I can’t do so many things I’m used to doing.” Eijun sighed. “It’s going to be so frustrating.”

“I know. But you’ll get through it, I’ll help you.”

“You shouldn’t be lifting either,” Eijun said, turning in his arms, sliding his arms around Kazuya’s neck. “You could hurt Akemi.”

“That’s a myth, Eijun,” Kazuya said. “I need to be careful, but I can lift twenty-five pounds or more.”

“Really? Well, I’ll still do what I can. But I hate leaving you in the lurch like this.”

“It’s necessary. I’d hate it more if you were out of commission when Peanut comes.”

“True enough, I’m sorry. I’m just whining.”

“It’s fine, you listened to me enough.” Kazuya kissed his cheek and stepped back. “Akemi’s tap dancing on my bladder, I’ll be right back.”

Eijun grinned as Kazuya walked out of the room, smile softening when he realized that Kazuya’s center of gravity had shifted and he’d started walking a little differently. He couldn’t wait until Akemi was big; Kazuya hugely pregnant was going to be gorgeous.

He’d just heard the bathroom door close when the doorbell rang. They hadn’t been expecting anything or anybody; Eijun answered the door, curious to see who it was.

It was Ryou. And Mochi.

“Hi, guys!” Eijun said, stepping back and waving them in. “Good to see you.”

“Sorry for dropping in without warning,” Mochi frowned at him as he paced into the house. “We heard the news a few minutes ago and since we were near I wanted to come by and check on you. Are you okay? What’s going on?”

“News?”
“You’re on the DL? What’s hurt?” Mochi glared at him.

“Oh! That, well—” he started, but Kazuya walked into the living room and they all turned to him.

“Hi, Kaz...why are you wearing a dress?” Mochi asked, diverted from his interrogation of Eijun.

“Hi, Mochi, Ryou. I’m wearing a dress because it’s cool and not tight. You should try these, they’re really comfortable. Eijun wears them sometimes, too.” Kazuya said.

“Wait, really? You wear them a lot?” Mochi shook his head. “So not what I’m here for. Eijun, what’s going on?”

“My shoulder,” Eijun said simply. “It was either get it fixed now or play until it blows. I didn’t want to take the chance that it goes later and I’d be out of commission when Akemi comes and Kaz needs me the most, so I’m doing it now. I’m probably done playing, but I can’t say for sure yet.”

“Really? Damn, that’s rough.” Mochi sighed, running a hand through his hair. “I’m sorry, I was afraid of that.”

“Thanks.” Eijun smiled at his friend.

“Would you like some coffee or something?” Kazuya asked.

“I’d love some tea,” Ryou said, following him into the kitchen, leaving the other two together to talk.

“What did Kanemaru say?” Mochi asked, joining Eijun on the couch after they’d retrieved the cushions from the floor.

“I’ve got a rupture in the tendon on top of my shoulder as well as looseness in my joint. He’s thinking they need to repair the tendon and hope that the looseness will heal itself given time, or at least not get worse,” Eijun explained, meeting Mochi’s sympathetic gaze. “I’m not going to be able to practice like I did, I don’t know if I’m going to be able to play after at all, other than casually. I know I won’t be able to train as I need to. I explained it to the management, but I don’t think they were listening.”

“Idiots,” Mochi said. “They’ll probably keep you around in some capacity; they don’t want to lose the butts in seats they get for the Golden Couple.”

“Maybe, but how much will they care if neither of us is playing?”

“I don’t know, but never underestimate the spending power of fangirls.”

Eijun sighed. “Well, we’ll see.”

“When are you having surgery?”

“Thursday. It’s outpatient, so no hospital stay.”

“That’s good. How long will you be down?”

“Four weeks or so, depending.”

“Not too bad, Kazuya won’t be that far along.”

“Exactly.”
“Wait a sec,” Kuramochi slanted him a glance. “Who’s Akemi?”

“Oh! Peanut.”

“You know it’s a girl?”

“Yes, we found out Friday.”

“Peanut’s a girl? You’re having a girl?”

“We are,” Eijun said, smiling softly.

“Are you okay? I mean, I know Akemi’s not a replacement for Haruko, but still, it’s hard, right?”

“Not really? Yes, I wish we hadn’t lost Haruko, but Akemi’s a different person, you know? I’m glad it’s a girl, I wanted Peanut to be a girl from the first time I heard about her.”

“You sure?” Mochi eyed him closely. “I know you, Eijun.”

“I’m serious,” Eijun met his gaze openly. “I’m fine.”

“Okay, then.” He looked up at the pair entering the living room, Ryou carrying a tray with cups. “Kazuya, explain to me some more about this dress thing.”

Half an hour later, Kazuya closed the door behind Mochi and turned to face Eijun, who was leaning on the entryway wall. “You okay?”

“Yeah, it’s not going to be as easy as I thought, though,” Eijun said with a small grimace. “I don’t know why I thought it would.”

“Because you don’t ever want to worry anyone,” Kazuya answered, wrapping his arms around Eijun’s waist. “You’re going to hide it and put on a brave face and act like everything’s fine. Which is what you need to do, because that’s what you think you should do. And that’s okay; I’m behind you however you need me to be. But here, with me, you may not hide anything. I want to know what you’re thinking; you don’t need to protect me from anything. I’m here for you, here to support you however I can.”

“I know, I’m not,” Eijun agreed, laying his forehead on Kazuya’s. “You show me and I show you, right?”

“Right.”

Eijun sighed deeply. “We have to tell the ‘rents,” he said, whining a little.

“We do and we should call them before they hear about it on the news,” Kazuya said. “Dad knows, though, so we don’t have to tell him right away. But yours, yeah. We need to call them.”

“Will you talk to them with me?”

“What about ‘we’ don’t you understand?” Kazuya asked, pinching Eijun’s side in retaliation for the slight. “Yes, idiot. I’ll be there right with you. And don’t you dare thank me.”
"Okay, I won’t," Eijun chuckled. "I love you, you know that? You’re perfect.”

"Pffft," Kazuya responded. "Clearly that is not true."

"Okay, then. How about this? You’re perfect for me.”

"Now that, I can get behind."

Eijun nodded, “I thought as much.” He lifted his head and gave Kazuya a soft kiss. “We should do this now, huh?”

“Yeah, it’s late enough that they should all be inside, but the evening news hasn’t started.”

“Okay, yeah.” Eijun headed over to the couch and curled up into one corner and Kazuya felt his heart clench seeing this person who meant so much, who was bright and vibrant, looking so small, so subdued.

He sat beside him and pulled him into his arms, arranging his unresisting limbs until he was snuggled up against his side. “That’s better.” He picked up his phone from the end table and pressed a number, turning on the speaker.

Eijun’s father answered the phone. “Hello Kazuya, how’s my grandbaby?”

“She’s good, thanks. Is Mom free? There’s something we need to talk to you about…”

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Me: At 21 weeks, Peanut is 27cm long. So, the size of a carrot.

Kaz: Really? She’s getting big, then.

Me: Yeah, and she’s got all her eggs already, all our future grandbabies are hanging out already.

Kaz: Grandbabies already? Can we just raise this one first?

Me: *grin* of course. And she’s started swallowing amniotic fluid, just a little. But it tastes like what you’ve eaten, so she’s going to get familiar with what you eat.

Kaz: Don’t tell me. And like what she’s tasted?

Me: That’s what they say.

Kaz: No more cheeseburgers.

Me: What about fried pickles?

Kaz:….

Me: Good. Akemi’s going to love burgers.

Kaz: Dammit. Aren’t you supposed to be having tests run?

Me: Waiting for the vampires.

Kaz: How’s it going?
Me: Fine. I hate this.
Kaz: I know. I love you. I can’t say I’m sorry you’re getting things fixed, but I am sorry about everything.
Me: It’s...well, not fine, but I know it’s necessary.
Kaz: You’re right, it is.
Me: How’re things with you?
Kaz: Good, we’re good. meetings and practice. I’m off at 3, can you come get me?
Me: Naw, you can walk.
Kaz: Okay, then. I’ll get a ride with the new ace, how’s that?
Me: ...
Kaz: You started it.
Me: I didn’t think you’d throw me over so quickly, though.
Kaz: I just don’t want to walk home.
Me: You think I wouldn’t pick you up?
Kaz: You think I’d throw you over for someone else?
Me: 
Kaz: Ei? I was just...*sigh* I’m sorry. Seriously, I was kidding.
Me: I know, I do. I’m just not there yet, I’m sorry.
Kaz: no, don’t apologize. It’s my fault, I should know better. I do know better.
Me: I’ll be there as soon as I’m done here.
Kaz: Okay, no hurry. Be careful, we love you.
Me: Love you too, Kaz. Both of you.

Thursday morning, Kazuya and Eijun were in the car by seven-thirty, heading to the hospital.
“I wish I could have some coffee,” Eijun sighed, looking out the window at the city waking up.
“You will, soon,” Kazuya said. “At least sooner than I am.”
“I’m sorry, I’m whining.”
“No, you’re fine. It’s just early.”
“Kaz?”
“Yeah?”

“If something happens to me, please make sure Akemi knows I love her,” Eijun said, still not looking at his husband.

Kazuya frowned, trying to parse out what Eijun was saying. “What? Eijun, nothing’s going to happen to you, this is a routine shoulder surgery.”

“Please, Kaz? Promise me.”

“Of course, Ei. I promise that Akemi will always know both of her fathers love her. I won’t be my father, I refuse.”

Eijun huffed out a breath of relief, relaxing. “Thank you.”

“But I’m going on record that you’re going to be fine, we’ll be fine.”

“I know, I do. I just…”

“Sometimes you feel your mortality, right? It’s fine, I get it.” Kazuya slid their fingers together, giving his hand a squeeze.

“Yeah, I guess,” Eijun said, rubbing his thumb over Kazuya’s hand. “I’ve never been big on introspection, but the babies and the shoulder and everything’s been weighing on me a bit.”

“I’m sure. But it’s going to be alright, we’ll get through whatever comes at us, we’ve done it before and we’ll do it again.”

“Partners, right?”

Kazuya grinned at him. “Partners for life. Unless you garrote me for not changing the toilet paper roll.”

“Seriously, it’s not that hard to do,” Eijun responded. “Why don’t you?”


“Fair enough.”

“You’ll be fine, trust me.”

“I always do.”

Kazuya kissed Eijun one more time before they wheeled him out of the room, the mild sedative they’d added to his IV already taking effect.

“Love you, see you soon,” Kazuya said softly.

Eijun looked at him blearily. “Promise?”

“Promise.” He let go of his hand and stepped back, watching as they pushed him down the hallway and through the swinging doors at the end.
Kazuya leaned against the wall, putting his head down and trying to stop things from spinning. He hadn’t eaten yet, but he wanted to see Eijun off before he did since his husband was unable to eat before the surgery.

“You okay?” he heard footsteps stop beside him. Turning his head, he saw Mochi looking at him carefully.

He chuckled as he straightened up, “Yeah, I just haven’t eaten yet and I tend to get really dizzy if I don’t do so within about an hour of waking up.”

“That doesn’t sound right,” Mochi said, offering Kazuya his arm for support. “Let’s go get you some food.”

“That was my next stop, they just took Eijun away.”

“I saw, I hitched a ride in with Ryou this morning—I thought you might need some help getting Eijun home.” Mochi led him down the hallway to the elevators, heading to the cafeteria in the basement.

“Thank you, I just may,” Kazuya agreed, standing up a little as he felt his head stabilize a bit. “He’ll probably be fine, but I appreciate the backup.”

They exited the elevator and headed to the cafeteria, ordering breakfast and sitting down before resuming the conversation.

“How long is his surgery?”

“About an hour, give or take.” Kazuya ate with gusto, he was starving.

Mochi nodded. “Are you recording him when he comes out of the anesthesia? That would be great.”

“Naw, I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“Why not? He’s going to be hilarious...don’t you want to get revenge for the Britney thing?”

“Wait, you’ve seen it?”

“Yes, I watch it whenever you piss me off, it’s a great reminder that you’re just a big dork.”

“I haven’t seen it, I didn’t know it existed until a month ago, Eijun was going to show me but we got...distracted.” he grinned into his soup.

“Ugh, see that’s why...” Mochi frowned at him. “Anyway, I have it on my phone if you want to see it.”

“I should, huh?” Kazuya held out his hand.

Mochi found the file and handed over the phone.

Kazuya watched himself in combined horror and amusement as he climbed out of the car and belted out “My loneliness is killing me...I must confess,” and then he stopped, got a confused look on his face, and started again. “My loneliness...”

He could hear Eijun in the background, guffawing, having a hard time keeping his phone steady.

Eijun carried the camera around the car, offering Kazuya a hand before turning off the camera.
“Let’s get you to bed, Brit-Brit.” The video stopped on Eijun’s laugh and the beginning of Kazuya’s singing again. “My loneli—”

Kazuya met Mochi’s laughing gaze, handing him back his phone. “That’s...you know, I don’t even remember any of that.”

“I’m sure; you were drunk off your ass, Kaz. I think it might have been right after your wedding, so people kept giving you drinks. Eijun wasn’t drinking, so you had to drink them all.”

“That could have been it,” Kazuya nodded.

“So, revenge?”

“Not this time.”

“What, why?”

“You know Eijun doesn’t drink much, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you know why?” Kazuya finished his rice and pushed back his plate, meeting Mochi’s gaze.

“Not really, I just figured he didn’t like the way it feels.”

“Partially, yes,” Kazuya nodded. “But mostly, it’s because he’s an apologetic drunk. Anything that he’s feeling the least bit guilty about is something he can’t let go, he has to apologize and agonize over it until you convince him it’s okay. Or he thinks of something else.”

“Really? I don’t think I’ve ever seen him drunk, honestly.”

“He’s only been drunk a few times that I know of and I was there for all of them. It’s generally not terrible, and sometimes it is amusing, you’re right. But.” Kazuya stopped.

Mochi lifted an eyebrow.

“How many things have happened in the last couple of months that he feels guilty for? Between Haruko and his shoulder, the loss of his career? He’s going to be a wreck and I won’t let you use his pain for entertainment.”

“Dude, no,” Mochi sat up and leaned forward. “I would never; I didn’t know that about him. You know I wouldn’t.”

Kazuya nodded, “I know you wouldn’t. But I needed you to understand why.”

“I do, I’m sorry. Do you need me to not be around?”

“No. I might need your help, depending on how out of it he is. I just want you to be prepared.”

“Thanks for that,” Mochi said, a frown forming on his face. “Back to before, you’re getting dizzy in the mornings if you don’t eat?”

“Yeah, but I’m usually okay, it’s just today that I had to leave home without breakfast.”

“I don’t think that’s normal. Does Eijun know?”
“I don’t know? I mentioned it once a few months ago.”

“Does Haruichi?”

“No, I’ve never told him.”

“It sounds like your blood sugar is bombing, that may be normal, but you should tell him.”

“I might, next time I see him.”

“You do it or I will,” Mochi glared at him. “You’re not risking yourself or Akemi for something you don’t think is a big deal, you hear me?”

“Loud and clear,” Kazuya pushed his glasses up his nose.

Mochi rolled his eyes, “Listen, asshole. I know you don’t think you’re important or whatever, but you are. To a lot of people. And not because of ‘kemi, okay? Because of you. I’m never saying this again and if you tell anyone I did, I’ll murderate you, but I love you, you’re like a brother to me and I would hate for anything to happen to you.”

“I know,” Kazuya met his gaze seriously. “I do. And I feel the same way about you. You were my best friend when I didn’t even know I needed one and I appreciate that about you.” He sighed, relaxing his shoulders. “Eijun says that being pregnant has made me more open, maybe that’s true. Maybe it’s my dad. But either way, I’m learning that it’s not bad to tell people what you think or feel, it’s not demeaning or trivial. I always thought that it was enough to have the important stuff, you know, Eijun, baseball, friends, and that the rest was just...not worth it. I’ve started to see that it’s not true.”

“That’s good, I’m glad. Akemi’s going to need that from you and I’m sure Eijun appreciates it,” Mochi said. “I did want to ask you about something if you have time.”

“Of course, we have plenty; he’s going to be in for a while.”

“You can’t tell anyone, okay?” Mochi glared at him.

“Okay, I won’t.”

“Except the idiot. You two are pretty much a single brain anyway.”

Kazuya wasn’t sure if he should be offended by that or not, but he chose to let it go so he could get to whatever Mochi was really wanting to talk about. He did raise an eyebrow in protest, though.

“Anyway, I’ve been thinking. You know that Ryou and I were going through a rough patch, right?”

Kazuya nodded, eyes narrowing as he listened.

“No, no, everything’s fine. In fact, I’m thinking about asking him to go on a trip with me,” Mochi said. “And I want to propose.”

“That’s...that’s great, Moch,” Kazuya said. “I’m sure he’ll say yes.”

“I’m pretty sure I’m going to have a harder time convincing him to take a vacation than get married.”

“You’re probably right.”

“I’ve spoken to Haruichi; he’s fine with covering for him for a week or so.”
“Lead with that, then.”

“I plan to. I bought a ring and made reservations for a trip to Bali for next month, I know he really wouldn’t want to go if you were due, so I thought then would be good.”

“Did you want my blessing?” Kazuya smirked.

“Asshole. I actually need your help.”

Kazuya dropped the smirk and straightened. “What can I do?”

“I want to do the whole shebang, nice dinner, tablecloth, napkins, flowers, everything.” Mochi gestured hopelessly, “But I have no idea how to do any of it. Can you help?”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Well, after what happened the last time, I really don’t want to cook.”

“I don’t imagine Ryou wants you too, either. You want me to come over and help you make dinner? I can help with the setup, too.”

“Would you?” Mochi let out a sigh of relief. “I want it to be perfect.”

“Sure, I’ll give you a list of what you need. When are you planning this?”

“I was thinking next week, I have to leave town the week afterward. When are you free?”

“We have games on Tuesday and Thursday, what about Wednesday? It’ll be a rest day.”

“That’s good, that will work.”

“I’ll have to bring Eijun.”

“Of course.”

“He actually is better at the decorating stuff; I can cook, but he’ll be of more help with the table setting.”

“He’s not going to be able to use his arm, right?”

“True enough, but he’ll be able to tell you what to do.”

“And probably enjoy every minute of it.”

“Of course. Wouldn’t you?”

“Fair point.”

They gathered up their things and made their way back to the waiting room, both hoping for the best but preparing for the worst.

Kazuya ran his hand on Akemi, soothing both of them as she squirmed around. He wondered if she felt his tension, it had been almost two hours since they wheeled Eijun back and no word at all from
“Everything okay in there?” Mochi asked, eyeing his belly.

Kazuya smiled. “Yeah, she’s just moving around a lot.”

“Can I—” Mochi cut off, turning red.

“Of course, come over here.”

Mochi moved down a few seats and looked at Kazuya for instructions.

“Put your hand here,” he said, moving his own hand so Mochi could lay his on top. “You may have to press a little to feel her, she’s not huge yet.”

Mochi pushed down gently, just enough to tighten the surface of Kazuya’s skin. He sat there for a few seconds and felt something move past his palm, a look of wonder dawning on his face. “Hello ‘kemi, I’m glad to meet you,” he said softly, smiling brightly at Kazuya. “That’s so cool, thank you for letting me feel her.”

“Anytime,” Kazuya said. “And if things go the way I expect, you may not have a choice, she’s so active. When I can’t sleep, everyone’s going to know why.”

Mochi laughed. “If that happens, I’ll be glad to be your wingman.”

“Awesome.” Kazuya frowned for a second and then grinned. “It’s pretty great, though, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it really is,” Mochi agreed, smiling at the sight of Kazuya’s honest grin.

Kazuya’s head turned at the sound of someone in the doorway. It was Shinji, who’d come in to observe and assist with the surgery. He rose to his feet, hearing Mochi do the same at his side.

“He’s fine,” Shinji said, waving them back into their chairs. “Sit, please.”

They sat and he claimed the couch in front of them. “It took a little longer than we expected, but we were also able to repair the looseness in his joint. When the surgeon reviewed the scans, he figured he might as well fix both while he was in there, that there was no way it was going to repair itself.”

“So what does that do to his recovery?” Kazuya asked.

Shinji ran a hand through his hair, relaxing his shoulders. “I don’t know. It shouldn’t affect too much, but we’re going to have to adjust his recovery therapy. He should heal in the same amount of time, but his exercises will be a little more complicated. We’ll have to watch his recovery closely; there are more things that can go wrong.”

“The prognosis?”

“Good, better than what we discussed. He’s going to have both of his problems repaired, so he won’t have to deal with any of it later. The long-term prognosis is the same; if he goes back to playing full time, he’s going to hurt it again. He can play if he wants, but I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“Is it the same thing? If he trains intensely, he’ll have issues, but if it’s casual he’ll be fine?”

“Yeah, pretty much,” Shinji nodded. “I’m just afraid that he’s going to hear ‘it’s fixed’ and go back to what he was doing before.”
“He won’t,” Kazuya asserted. “I know him; he’s accepted that he’s pretty much done. He may still play in a few games, but he knows he’s never going to be able to practice at the level he has been.” Kazuya slanted a smirk at Shinji. “And if he does try, I’ll make sure he doesn’t hurt himself.”

“Gotta. Good. I’ll leave that to you, then.” He stood, nodding. “He should be awake in a few minutes; the nurse will come and get you when you can go back there.”

“Okay, thanks.”

Shinji left, leaving Kazuya and Mochi in the room, waiting.

“That’s good, then,” Mochi said.

“It is, I didn’t want him to have to have this done twice.”

“You really think he won’t overdo it?”

“No. I know he will. Or at least he’ll try,” Kazuya smirked. “But he won’t. I’m not above using Peanut to get him to take care of himself.”

“Good.” Mochi matched his grin, they were in perfect accord.

“He’s awake, you can go back now,” the nurse said from the doorway. Kazuya stood and turned to Mochi.

“Can you give us ten minutes? I may need to settle him a bit.”

“Sure, I’ll check in on you then.”

“Thanks, Moch,” Kazuya said, following the nurse back to the recovery room.

He wasn’t sure what he’d expected to see when he walked in, but it wasn’t Eijun sitting up, arm in a sling, tank top on and chatting with the nurses, eyes alight.

He looked up when Kazuya entered and grinned, wide and bright. “Kazuya! Are you okay? Did you eat? I forgot to make sure you ate before we left home.”

“I did, Mochi and I had something in the cafeteria.” Kazuya walked over to his side, touching his right arm gently. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine,” Eijun asserted, grinning. Kazuya could see the pain lurking in his eyes, the mask he felt he had to wear. He wished he’d been there when Eijun woke so he could have dealt with the issues then, but he was more than willing to allow him the masks he felt he needed.

“Good, did you talk to the doctor?”

“I did, Shinji said they fixed both problems?”

“That’s what he told me, too.” Kazuya looked at the nurses. “When can he go?”

“He’s ready; I just need to give you his prescriptions and instructions.” She walked over and handed him a sheet of paper and a bottle of pills. “These are for pain. He needs to take them regularly, not
just when he hurts. If the pain gets too bad, there are these.” She handed him a second bottle of pills. She ran down the instructions, explaining the care he needed and signs to watch for. Kazuya signed the discharge papers, folding them and sticking them in his pocket.

While they’d been talking, Mochi had entered and was standing over by Eijun, talking softly. Kazuya turned back towards them and met Eijun’s eyes. “Ready to go?”

“Yeah, let’s.” Eijun stood, with Mochi supporting his arm. “Is there anything I need to do?”

“No, I’ve got it all.” Kazuya stepped to his side with the sling. “You got it?”

“I’m fine, just a little weak,” Eijun said. “It’ll pass.”

“Any pain?”

“Not yet, but I’m sure it’s waiting for me,” Eijun chuckled. “I’d like to be home before it hits.”

“Of course,” Kazuya said, following them out of the room and down the hallway. He stepped up beside Eijun, resting his hand on the small of his back. “We’re just out here.”

They walked out of the hospital and Mochi helped Eijun into the car. “Do you want me to follow you home?” he asked.

“No, thanks. I think we’ll be fine,” Kazuya said, closing Eijun’s door. He turned and hugged Mochi. “That’s from Eijun. Thanks for everything. I’m sure he’ll be contacting you for more details on what you want to do next week.”

“That would be great. Don’t forget about asking Haruichi about the dizziness,” Mochi reminded him, and Kazuya nodded.

“Yes, yes, don’t nag,” he said, before walking around the car to climb in. “Thanks again, Moch.”

“You’re welcome, Kaz. Take care of you three; I’ll check on you later this evening, see if you need anything.”

“That would be great,” Kazuya agreed, climbing into the car.

Mochi rapped on the back fender before turning back and walking into the hospital.

“How are you feeling?” Kazuya asked, slipping a glance over at Eijun, who’d slumped down into his seat.

“Achy, a little. Tired. Confused about what they did and what it means,” Eijun answered, staring out the window.

“It sounds like they actually fixed both of your shoulder issues,” Kazuya said. “With the caveat that you’re still going to have issues if you play like before.”

“So what was the point?” Eijun sighed. Kazuya was glad for it; he didn’t trust the overly cheerful demeanor he’d seen previously.

“Well, first of all, you won’t have to have surgery to fix the other issue. That’s a good thing, right?”
“Yeah, I guess.” Kazuya could hear the petulance and grinned to himself. There he was.

“Also, it might give you time to say goodbye to baseball on your own terms,” Kazuya said; he’d been mulling over the consequences of the changes since he’d heard about them.

“What do you mean?”

“I think we need to talk about it, but later, after you’ve gotten some sleep and are feeling a little less pain,” Kazuya said. “I’m not trying to put you off; I just want your mind clear when we do.”

“...that makes sense.”

“Also, you know your mom is going to call and offer to come down. Do you want them to?”

“What do you think?”

“It’s not up to me, but if it were, I’d say no. Just because I want you to be able to heal, to think and act like you want to and you’d feel obligated to put on your mask and not actually deal with anything. But, if you want them here, it’s fine with me. I’m always glad to see them; you can just deal with things later.”

“No, you’re right. I love Mom and I know she wouldn’t want me to hide stuff from them, but I just can’t help it, you know? I don’t want them worrying.”

“I know. I’m sure they know it, too,” Kazuya said. “I’ll tell her when she calls.”

“Plus it’s the middle of their busy season, they really can’t spare the time away,” Eijun noted. “I know they could if it was important, but I don’t think it’s necessary right now. Ask them to come down after the harvest is in, it’s not that far off.”

“True enough. Also, we’re supposed to be meeting with the architect tomorrow. Do you think you’ll feel up to it, or should we postpone?”

“No, don’t. I’ll be fine after I get a little rest.”

“Okay, but don’t overdo it. Take your medicine and let me know if you’re really hurting, there’s no need to suffer.”

“I will,” Eijun agreed. They drove in silence for a while and Eijun laid his hand on the center console, palm up. Kazuya slipped his fingers between Eijun’s twining their hands together. Eijun sighed, relaxing into the familiar feeling of comfort.

He remembered what he’d heard through the window. “What did Mochi mean about telling Haruichi? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, he’s just being a worry wart,” Kazuya said.

“What about?”

“That I get dizzy if I wait to eat in the mornings. He thinks it’s low blood sugar.”

“He’s probably right,” Eijun said. “I didn’t know it was still happening.”

“Well, I usually eat, so it’s not an issue.”

“True, but Mochi’s right. You need to talk to Haruichi about it. I think it’s common, but it’s
something he should know.”

“I already told him I would,” Kazuya sighed. “You two gang up on me too much.”

“You said ‘care about’ wrong, Kaz.”

“Well, that too,” Kazuya admitted as he pulled into the driveway. “We’re home; let me get you into bed.”

“One could wish there was a little more eyebrow wiggling with that statement,” Eijun said tiredly as he climbed out of the car with Kazuya’s assistance.

“Unfortunately, we’re going to have to table that for a bit. A pain pill and sleep is what you need.”

“Yes please,” Eijun walked into the house, leaning on Kazuya as little as possible.

Kazuya deposited him on the bed, removing his shoes and shorts. He picked up the water bottle that he’d left on the side table and handed it to Eijun with a pain pill. Eijun swallowed the pill and burrowed under the covers.

Kazuya kissed his forehead and ran a gentle hand through his hair.

“Sleep well, Eijun.”

And he did.

Chapter End Notes

How’s things?
What did you think?

*mushes at all of you*
Eijun woke slowly, eyes blinking open as he realized that he felt rested for the first time since the day before—he hadn’t slept well the night before the surgery. He didn't know what time it was, the light coming into the room seemed to indicate early morning, but he didn’t remember much after climbing into bed after they’d gotten home. He remembered Kazuya coming in and giving him pills and food, watching him carefully as he ate before handing him whatever pain pill he felt Eijun needed. He'd then give Eijun his kindle, prop his shoulder with a pillow and leave him to read until he slept again.

He didn't say much, just soothing words that comforted him, allowed him to return to sleep.

His shoulder was propped on a pillow, and the bed beside him was cold. Eijun was sure Kazuya had been there in the night...he remembered soft hands and softer words, fingers carding through his hair.

As he lay there, gathering his thoughts and trying to remember how to get up without jarring his shoulder, the door opened.

"You're awake," Kazuya said, stepping into the room and sitting on the side of the bed. "How do you feel?"

"Alive," Eijun smiled at him, laying a hand on his arm. "What time is it?"

"About nine."

"Dare I ask what day it is?"

Kazuya chuckled, "You weren't that out of it. It's Friday. You slept the clock around, but you needed it."

"I guess. But you gave me the 'only when it really hurts' drugs, didn't you?"

"I did. And I'd do it again. You needed rest, Eijun, and I know how you are, you'd just keep pushing even when it hurts."
"You're...not wrong, I guess." Eijun frowned briefly. "I suppose that's what I get for being in love with someone who knows me as well as you do."

"That's one way to look at it," Kazuya agreed. "Are you hungry?"

"Starving," Eijun said.

"Let me help you up, then," Kazuya stood, turning in preparation to help him.

"You shouldn't be lifting, Kaz."

"I'm not. We worked this out when you were almost out of it; you wouldn't let me help you too much." Kazuya slid a hand between the pillow and Eijun's shoulder, steadying it. "Now you can sit up, and I'll support you."

Eijun did so, sliding his legs off the bed. He rose, Kazuya beside him as he gained his feet. "Thanks, Kaz," he said.

"No problem. I think you can stay up for a while if you feel like it. But promise me you'll take the drugs that the doctor prescribed. You need to regulate the pain."

"Not the ones that knock me out, though." Eijun objected.

"No, not those. Although I expect you to take them when you need them. If I find out—and I will find out—that you haven't, we're going to have issues."

"Yes, Dad," Eijun said with a grin, bending over to give Kazuya a peck on the cheek. "I need the bathroom; I'll meet you in the kitchen in a few."

"Okay, but if you need me for anything—"

"I'll call. I promise." Eijun headed out and Kazuya followed until they reached the bathroom door, when Eijun pointedly closed and locked the door behind himself.

Kazuya shook his head at the stubbornness and walked down the hallway to the kitchen. Turning the burner back up under the soup, he continued the preparations he'd begun earlier, waiting for Eijun to wake up. He monitored the noises from the bathroom, wanting to make sure Eijun was all right, sighing in relief when the door opened and his husband entered the kitchen, sitting at the table.

“Coffee?” Kazuya asked, motioning to the pot he'd brewed.

“Yes, please,” Eijun said, laying his head on his good arm, stretched out on the table.

Kazuya poured him a cup and doctored it, setting it in front of him, along with a couple of pills. “Take your medicine, breakfast is almost ready.” He ran his fingers through Eijun’s hair, ruffling the short hairs at the nape of his neck.

“Thanks, Kaz, you’re the best,” Eijun said, sitting up and doing as instructed.

Kazuya dropped a kiss on the top of his head. “Anytime, Ei,” he said, moving back to the stove to plate breakfast. He brought the plates to the table, joining Eijun. They ate in relative silence, each chasing their own thoughts.

Eijun set his chopsticks down, and Kazuya looked up at him. “Do you want more?”

“No, I’m full. Thanks for that.”
“How are you feeling?”

“Better, thanks. The drugs are kicking in. What’s the plan for today?”

“We’re supposed to go see Suzuki-san this afternoon if you feel like it. We can put it off if you’re not up to it.”

“No, no,” Eijun objected, reaching over to take Kazuya’s hand. “I need to do something for us; it’ll help with all this other crap. Moving forward, you know?”

“Yeah, I get it. But if you start feeling bad, let me know. We can always reschedule.”

“I will, but I should be fine.”

Okay, good,” Kazuya stood to collect the plates, heading to the sink to clean up.

“I think I have so many questions,” Eijun slid his head back on his arm, watching Kazuya. “I know there are things I wanted to ask about, but the one that I really remember is something about Mochi?”

Kazuya answered him as he washed the dishes. “Yeah, he found me dizzy after you went back, since I hadn’t eaten. He threatened to tell Haruichi if I don’t mention it.” He rinsed the last of the dishes and dried his hands, sitting back down at the table.

“I don’t think that’s abnormal, Kaz, but it’s a good thing to tell him.”

“Oh! Also, I didn’t tell you this,” Kazuya said, touching the back of Eijun’s hand. “Mochi’s going to propose to Ryou, and wants our help.”

Eijun sat upright, blinking at Kazuya, “And you didn’t tell me? Wait, what kind of help does he need from us?”

“I didn’t think you were together enough to realize what I was saying,” Kazuya explained. “He wants to give him a nice dinner, all the bells and whistles. He’s got a ring and booked them a trip to Bali for vacation; they haven’t been away for a while.”

“That’s great!” Eijun grinned. “I’ll be more surprised if he gets Ryou to take a vacation than if he says yes.”

“You’re right about that,” Kazuya agreed. “He’s arranged it with Haruichi, and scheduled it well before Akemi is due, but you never know.”

“So what does he want from us?”

“You remember the last time he cooked?”

“Oh, yeah,” Eijun snorted. “That was a disaster. Good thing they had two fire extinguishers.”

“Right. So, he wants me to cook the meal.” Kazuya explained. “And to help with the setup—tablecloth, napkins, flowers, the whole works. I told him that was your forte and volunteered your expertise. I know you won’t be able to actually do the work, but you can boss him around.”

“That sounds fun.”

“I knew you’d like that.”

“And what did you mean when you said I could leave baseball on my own terms?”
“Well, I’ve been thinking about it for a bit, and knowing they fixed both of your issues made the idea a little more possible.”

“What’s that?”

“Just...you don’t have to quit outright. You can’t practice like you did, but you can still play. You’ll lose some of your sharpness if you’re not practicing as hard, but it will take a while.” Kazuya scooted closer to the table, lacing their fingers together. “You can play next season, speak to the coach about limiting your time on the field, and help bring Hara up to snuff so he can be the next ace. Or Ikeda, if he gets his head out of his ass. Either way, you can announce it’s your last season, and dial back slowly. You don’t have to just walk away, Eijun.”

Eijun’s eyes brightened. “You don’t think so? You don’t mind?”

“It’s not really my decision,” Kazuya said. “I’ll support you whatever you decide. But I don’t think you’d considered this option, and I wanted you to. If you manage it carefully and listen to the doctor, I think it would be an acceptable solution. It’s not perfect, and honestly, I’d rather you just quit for safety’s sake, but I understand why you’d rather do this.”

“I...I’d pretty much resigned myself to quitting after this,” Eijun started. “I don’t want to, I’m sure we both know that, but I was ready. Kinda. This would make things so much easier, the idea I didn’t have to just...be done. Thank you for telling me about it, I’m sure it would have been easier in your mind to not.”

“Not really,” Kazuya admitted with a sheepish smile. “Although I would rather you quit outright, I would have felt guilty every time we talked about it. And remembering how I was, we’ll be talking about it a lot. I don’t want to take choices away from you, Eijun, even if they’re not the ones I would have you choose.”

“And you wonder why I love you,” Eijun laid his head back down on the table, squeezing Kazuya’s hand.

Kazuya eyed him carefully. “You should go back to bed.”

“I just got up!”

“You need some more rest, Eijun. It’s only ten; you can sleep for a while before we have to go see Suzuki-san.”

“That’s at three, right?”

“Yeah. I’ll wake you up in time to take a shower and get dressed.”

Eijun held out his hand, flat on the table.

“What?”

“Phone. Give me your phone, please.”

“Why?”

“I need to call the ‘rents let them know I’m alive.”

“I spoke to Mom yesterday,” Kazuya said.

Eijun crooked one corner of his mouth in a grin. “Thank you. But you know she’s going to want to
“You’re...not wrong,” Kazuya said, fishing the phone out of his pocket. “You’ll go right to bed after this?”

“Yes, I will. I promise.”

“Okay,” Kazuya said, laying it on Eijun’s waiting palm.

Eijun sat up. “Thanks,” he said, dialing the number. “Hi, Mom!”

Kazuya walked into the bedroom where Eijun was still asleep. Sitting on the side of the bed, he watched his sleeping husband, taking in the freckles spattered across his nose and cheeks, dark as they usually were in the summer, the eyelashes and slightly chapped lips. He was struck anew at Eijun’s stillness while he slept, all that boundless energy leashed for the time of rest, renewing itself. Eijun was rarely still, even when he was reading or watching television, he always moved or seemed to be on the edge of movement, there was a consistent buzz of energy around him. But when he was asleep, he exuded a sense of calm and ease to Kazuya that he couldn’t imagine finding anywhere else.

Running his fingers softly over Eijun’s cheek, he murmured, “Hey, Ei. It’s time to wake up.”

Eijun blinked, eyes opening slowly as he woke up, brain starting to work. He smiled up at Kazuya, “Hey, you.”

“How are you feeling?” Kazuya asked.

“Sleepy,” Eijun said, closing his eyes and snuggling his face into the hand that was still rubbing his cheek. “You should come lay down, I bet Peanut would love a nap.”

Kazuya chuckled, bending over to drop a kiss on Eijun’s temple. “I don’t doubt it, but we have an appointment in an hour—do you want to skip it, sleep some more?”

“No, no,” Eijun said. “I’m up.”

Kazuya helped him sit up as he had earlier that day, and handed him a bottle of water and a pill. “It’s been four hours, take them.”

“Thanks,” Eijun said, swallowing the pills. “When do we have to leave?”

“In about a half hour, enough time for you to bathe. Let me help you cover your shoulder.” Kazuya stood, offering Eijun his hand to stand. “You should be fine to shower; we just have to cover your shoulder with plastic since they were able to do the surgery with the scope. We still have your old sling for showering from the last time you had surgery. What do you want to wear?”

“I don’t know what I can wear,” Eijun said. “I guess I could slip on another tank top, it’s warm enough. Maybe with a button up over top? Last time it was colder, so that was a little different.”

“That would work, although I think just the tank top would be fine for now.”

“But we’re going into an office; I don’t want to be that informal.”

“Okay, yeah. I get that,” Kazuya said, rifling through the closet. “So how about this.” He pulled out a button up short-sleeved shirt with white and pale green stripes. “A pair of jeans and a white tank
“That’s fine,” Eijun said, gathering the other items from their dresser. “Although I think running around in a swing dress would be a great option right now, for lots of reasons.”

Kazuya chuckled. “You’re right about that. I’m not looking forward to wearing clothes, it’s hot out there.”

Eijun realized something and stopped to look at Kazuya. “How’s Peanut today? I haven’t asked, I’m sorry.”

“She’s good, squirming around and kicking,” Kazuya said, running a hand over his belly. “You don’t need to apologize; you’ve not even been awake enough to think about such things much.”

“But still, she’s our baby and you’re carrying her. I should be thinking about that,” Eijun disagreed.

“Yes, you should. When you’re well and your mind is clear. But right now, it’s okay if you’re not vigilant every second. We’re good. We’ll be fine. We need you to get better and not worry about us right now,” Kazuya said, stepping to his side in case he needed support.

“I still can’t believe I—” Eijun started and Kazuya cut him off.

“I can,” Kazuya said. “It’s fine that you did, honestly. Eijun, I love you for the way you always want to make sure we’re okay, but sometimes you take on too much. You can relax, trust me to tell you if there’s something wrong.”

“I actually do,” Eijun admitted. “I know you’d never ignore something that might be an issue with Akemi. You’d ignore it if it was just you, but you’d never jeopardize the baby. I just...feel like I’m not doing my job or something.”

“What?” Kazuya turned and met his gaze. “Stop. You’re doing everything you need to, more than I could ask for. I wouldn’t be able to do this without you.” He tugged on Eijun’s arm. “But I will be making the architect’s visit without you if you don’t get moving.”

Eijun grinned and headed into the bathroom. “I’m going, I’m going.”

“Wait for me, let me help you,” Kazuya said.

“Of course,” Eijun said, stopping with a frown.

Kazuya moved in front of him. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Eijun said, not meeting his gaze.

“Eijun.”

“What?”

“What’s the matter?”

“Let’s just get this done, okay?”

“Eijun.”

“I just...I hate this. I hate that you have to do this for me when you should be worrying about yourself, that I need this help. That I’m not there for you when you need it because my shoulder’s
stupid and I’m broken. Stupid body,” Eijun grumbled.

Kazuya stifled a grin, glad to see Eijun showing some irritation. He was worried he’d be too much in his head and didn’t want to let him get too tangled in his own thoughts.

“You’re not broken, you’re *injured*. You know this. You’re also not letting either of us down, you’re here, you know this too,” Kazuya said, unwilling to let him get too bogged down. “Now, are you done?”

“You’re not going to let me feel bad at all, are you?” Eijun glared at him.

“Of course I am, when you’ve actually got something to feel bad about,” Kazuya said. “Nothing you’ve said so far is anything that’s true or something worth being upset about. Do I need to start calling you Mei?”

That startled a laugh out of Eijun, “If you need to.” He sighed and continued, “I’m sorry, I’m just...well, you know. Would you please help me with this?”

“Of course, Eijun. Always.” Kazuya reached up and loosened the brace, moving it gently off his shoulder. “We’ve got this.”

“So what do you think she’s going to say?” Eijun asked as they drove down the highway towards their appointment. “What does she know?”

“I’m honestly not sure,” Kazuya said as he shifted lanes. “I don’t know how much Mom told her.”

“I guess we’ll find out.”

“I suppose so,” Kazuya agreed. “We’ll just have to wait and see.”

“Yeah,” Eijun said before changing the subject. “The series next week, what are you thinking?”

“Well, Hara’s coming along, but Ikeda’s been working really hard recently as well. I think we’ll start Ikeda, with Hara subbing in when he’s needed. Takahashi still doesn’t trust him, but I—” Kazuya was off, and they discussed the upcoming games until they arrived at the office building that the architect’s firm was housed in. In the years they’d been together, Kazuya had learned the wisdom of both asking for Eijun’s opinions and brainstorming with him about the game and strategy. Eijun didn’t see the field—or the world, for that matter—the same way he did, and he found himself a better planner, a better player...and probably a better person, if the truth be told, for his input.

Pulling into the parking lot, Kazuya looked at Eijun, checking his condition. “Are you all right? How’s the pain?”

“I’m fine,” Eijun said. “A little achy but nothing I can’t handle.”

“Okay, good. If you get bad, I brought your other pills. You know that if you really need them they won’t make you super sleepy, they’ll just dull the pain.”

“I know, but sometimes they make me feel high, you know I don’t like that feeling.”

“I get that, I do. But if it gets worse, let me know. Kanemaru-sensei said we could cut them in half as well, if you just need a little extra.”

“Really? I might need that, we’ll see after the meeting, okay?”
“Alright. You sit tight; let me get your door.”

“I can—”

“Let me, okay? Please?”

“Okay,” Eijun said, sitting back. “I might get used to it, though,” he warned.

Kazuya smirked at him. “That’s fine. Our tiaras will match.”

Eijun was still laughing when Kazuya opened his door, offering his hand.

Inside the offices of the architecture firm, they were ushered back to Suzuki’s office immediately. She rose to greet them, shaking their hands and escorting them into the conference room beside her office.

“I thought it might be easier to work here, we have room for blueprints and screens on the wall so we can share the view of my computer,” she said, offering them seats at the small table inside the room.

“That’s fine, whatever you think is best,” Kazuya said with a smile. “We’re in your hands.”

She nodded. “Can I get you something to drink? Water? Coffee?”

“Some water would be great, it’s really warm out,” Eijun said.

“It is,” she agreed, stepping over to the refrigerator in the bar area. Opening it, she retrieved a bottle of water for each of them, and one for herself. “Here you go,” she said, setting them on the table in front of each of them before settling into the seat at the end, paperwork and notebook resting beside herself.

“First of all, let me tell you a few things about myself and why I think I would be a good fit for this job,” she started, lacing her fingers together on the table. “First of all, I love Nagano. I spent every school holiday there while I was growing up with my grandparents. My master’s thesis was on the traditional architecture of the region, specifically on what adjustments they made to accommodate the seasons versus those who lived further south. And north.” She took a sip of her water, gathering her thoughts before taking a deep breath. “Full disclosure, I know the house you’re looking to renovate, my grandparents live not too far from there.”

At that revelation, Eijun sucked in a breath, mind racing. “Aki-chan?” he breathed, looking to see the girl he knew in the woman before him.

“Hi, Ei-chan,” she said, with a grin he’d never forgotten. “I didn’t know if you’d remember me.”

“Oh my god,” he said, jumping to his feet and rounding the table to pull her into a hug. “I’d never forget you.” He released her and stepped back, grinning at seeing his old friend again. “You weren’t a Suzuki when I knew you, though. Did you get married?”

“I did,” she said, regaining her seat as Eijun returned to his. “I met Takai in university; we’ve been married for eight years.”

“Oh, yeah! I remember your grandparents talking about that,” Eijun said, finally remembering Kazuya, sitting to one side watching politely. “Oh! Sorry, Kaz. Akiko was my bug-hunting buddy
when I was growing up. Her grandparents’ farm is pretty close to ours and we used to hang out when she’d come down for the breaks. She also had a pretty wicked throwing arm, if I’m remembering correctly.”

“I haven’t played for years,” she admitted. “But I’m glad to see what you’ve accomplished; I always knew you’d get there. Once you went to Seido, I knew you were where you belong.”

“We haven’t seen each other since...middle school, I think?”

“Yeah, I was old enough to stay in town on my breaks, so my parents didn’t send me to the farm after I entered high school.”

“Oh, that makes sense,” Eijun said with a nod.

Kazuya grinned, a smile Eijun knew not to trust. “So, Suzuki-san. You knew Eijun when he was a kid, huh?”

“No, Kaz,” Eijun said, trying to head him off at the pass, knowing he was going to fail.

“I did,” she said, returning his grin.

“You two should talk, later. Reminisce,” Kazuya said.

Eijun huffed out a breath, blowing back his bangs. “She’s not going to tell you every embarrassing thing I did, Kaz.”

“He’s right,” Akiko said. “I don’t remember them all, there were so many.”

“Aki!” Eijun wailed. “He doesn’t need any more ammunition.”

“Later, then,” Kazuya said. “We’ll have dinner or something. How do you feel about fried pickles?”

Eijun gave up, banging his forehead on the table.

“Don’t hurt yourself,” Kazuya said, sliding his hand between Eijun’s head and the tabletop.

“Hoping to knock myself out, thank you very much.”

“Then I’ll make all the decisions about the house,” Kazuya threatened.

Eijun groaned, sitting upright. “Are you ready to actually talk about what it is we came here for?”

Kazuya protested his innocence. “Hey, it’s not my fault! You’re the one who decided it was old home week.”

“You’re...not wrong, but still,” Eijun said. He turned his attention to Akiko. “I’m sorry, please continue. I really do want to hear what you have to say.”

“I...” Akiko gathered her thoughts. “I think that was about it. I love Nagano, grew up there, and know that house.”

“Wait,” Eijun said, raising a hand. “Does my mother know who you are?”

“I didn’t mention it, no,” Akiko said. “I wasn’t really sure who you were until you set the appointment. I thought maybe it was you, but I didn’t want to ask.”
“Okay, good,” Eijun said. “I didn’t think she’d keep something like that from us, but I wanted to be sure.”

“Fair enough. Do you have any other questions before we start?” Akiko asked.

“Not that I’m aware of,” Kazuya said after exchanging a glance with Eijun.

“Alright, then, let’s get started,” she said, turning on the display on her computer. “I had your mom let one of our contractors into the house and he took pictures and measurements for us.” She brought up a 3d drawing of the house, using her mouse to spin the display. “From that, we rendered this model as well as blueprints. We’ll start here; today we can discuss what you’re looking to do. I’ll draw up some plans and we can meet again to discuss them and you can decide if you want to work with me or not.” She pressed a few buttons on her laptop and the walls of the house fell away, leaving them looking at the current state of the first floor. “Now, I know you have some ideas, what are they?”

“We’d like to update it, but we want to keep as many traditional details as we can,” Eijun said. “It’s going to be our home, so it needs to be comfortable and modern. Indoor plumbing and electricity, central air and heating.”

“Okay,” Akiko said, taking notes. “What changes do you envision for the first floor?”

“There were a few things we were thinking about,” Kazuya started. “We like the size of the kitchen, but we need the whole thing updated. There were some details in the room we really liked, some of the carvings and the curved wood in the ceiling we’d like to keep.”

“Yeah, we like the decorations that would have been there, but we don’t want to go overboard,” Eijun interjected. “We don’t want it to look like a temple or something.”

“Got it,” Akiko said. “What else?”

“We were thinking about getting rid of the permanent walls on the side of the stairs opposite the kitchen, making that one long room with fusuma, so we can divide it up if we want to,” Eijun said.

“And keep the other side the way it is, we’ll need one of those rooms for an office, and we want to keep the formal dining room as it is,” Kazuya said.

Eijun took over, “We’d also like to have one of those rooms be a traditional one, with tatami and shoji, opening out into the wrap-around porch and a formal garden on the side of the house. The rest of the house should have permanent walls with windows, but that one room should have some kind of sliding walls to open into the garden.”

“So far, this all sounds doable,” Akiko said, scribbling furiously.

“Also, a bathroom on the first floor, with a shower,” Kazuya added. “And a mudroom or washroom before you enter the kitchen in the back.”

“That’s fine, anything else on the first floor? Or shall we move upstairs?”

“I think that’s it?” Eijun said and Kazuya nodded.

“Upstairs, there are five rooms,” Kazuya said. “The one in the back is the master, and we’d like a small bathroom added in there. No tub, not too large.”

“And make the windows on the back wall bigger,” Eijun added, meeting Kazuya’s glowing eyes.
“Maybe even add a balcony out there, big enough for a table and a few chairs.”

Kazuya had to blink a few times to clear the image of them sitting out there, soaking up the view. “Yes. And the smaller bedrooms on either side—one can be fitted out as a nursery, and the other a full bathroom, shower, soaking tub, smaller tub, the whole works. The two bedrooms at the front of the house will be for the children.”

“Children?” Akiko asked. “You have kids?”

“Only one so far,” Eijun said.

“And she’s not here yet,” Kazuya clarified, laying his hand on the soft rise of his belly. He was showing, anyone who knew him well would see it instantly, but his shirts did a decent job of disguising it.

“Oh, you’re pregnant? That’s wonderful!” Akiko said. “Congratulations!”

“Thank you,” Kazuya said with a chuckle. “It’s nice to know there’s someone who doesn’t already know about her.”

“I’d imagine,” she said sympathetically. “I haven’t been able to watch many games this season, work’s been a little crazy, but I remember how your wedding was. I felt so bad for you two, I’m sorry you had to deal with that. I’m sure a baby is that much worse.”

“In some ways, yes,” Kazuya said. “But we’ve gotten smarter, so in others, it’s better.”

“Plus neither of us are playing right now,” Eijun added.

“What did you do to your shoulder?” Akiko asked, having not wanted to mention it until one of them brought it up, she didn’t want to be seen as snooping.

“Nothing, really,” Eijun said, and she could see the sadness in his smile. “I’ve just...well, been playing full tilt for fifteen years, and shoulders aren’t really designed to work that hard for that long.”

“I’m sorry,” she said, impulsively reaching over to squeeze his hand. “I remember how much you loved to play.”

“I am still as much of a baseball idiot,” Eijun admitted. “It’s fine, it’s the way things happen, you know?”

“Yeah,” she said, sighing in agreement.

“Anyway, there are a couple of other things we wanted to talk to you about,” Eijun said, shifting the subject.

“What else are you thinking about?”

“A couple of things. There are a few outbuildings on the property. If any of them are salvageable, I’d like to have a shed for gardening and a storage shed as well,” Eijun started.

“That’s always possible, if they’re not what you want or need, we can always tear them down and rebuild,” Akiko said.

“I’d rather not, if we have a choice,” Eijun pointed out.

“We’re going to be doing plenty of damage to the land, with the upgrades we want,” Kazuya said.
“Well, maybe?” Eijun said. “But I still don’t want to disrupt any more than we have to. If there’s a way to do something that’s less destructive, I’d prefer that way, even if it’s more costly.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,’ Akiko said. “Can you tell me what your budget is, so I can try to keep costs inside that?”

“We don’t really have one,” Kazuya admitted. “We don’t want to spend a fortune, of course, but…” he trailed off.

“Okay, I’ll work up a couple of options at different price points, we’ll see what works best for you,” she said.

“That sounds good,” Kazuya said. “We don’t mean to leave you hanging, we just don’t really know at this point.”

“It’s fine, really.”

“One more thing we want,” Eijun interjected. “In the back of the backyard, we’d like to build a small home. It’s only for one person, so one bedroom is good, but it should have all the modern amenities.”

“That’s going to add a bit,” Akiko commented.

“We’re sure, but it’s important,” Eijun said. “We could even do without some of our upgrades if we had to, but this one needs to be part of any monetary calculation.”

“Got it,” Akiko agreed, scribbling another note on her pad. “I understand. Is there anything else?”

“I think that’s plenty,” Kazuya said with a wry chuckle. “We appreciate your time.”

Eijun raised an eyebrow at Kazuya, who nodded. “And we don’t really need to see your propositions to know we’re going to hire you,” he said with a smile. “Unless we’ve scared you off with our demands.”

“Oh, no. You haven’t asked for anything that doesn’t make sense,” she said. “I’d love to take the contract, but I do want you to look at what I make for you before you decide.”

“That’s fine, if that’s the way you want it to happen,” Kazuya said. “But we’re good with it now, too.”

“Nope,” Akiko said. “I’d like to wait. Also, I may have to bring in a landscape architect as well, if that’s alright.”

“Whatever it takes, we’re good with,” Eijun said. “I’m sure at some point we’re going to need an interior designer, if only to help us figure out what colors to paint the walls and such.”

“You will, and I have several I can recommend when the time comes,” Akiko said. “Unless you want to do it all yourself.”

“Well, we could do the painting, and we might just decide we want to,” Kazuya said, exchanging glances with Eijun. “But we still need guidance.”

“Fair enough,” Akiko said, shutting off her laptop and the wall screen. “I’ll tell you what. I’ll contact you in the next few weeks when I have something to show you both.”

“That would be great,” Eijun said. “Thanks, Aki.”
“No problem,” she said. “Miyuki-san, it was a pleasure to meet you.” She held out her hand, and Kazuya took it.

“Kazuya, please,” he said. “And I’m so glad to have met another of Eijun’s childhood friends.”

“Of course, Kazuya. Please call me Aki, then.”

“I will.”

She turned to Eijun, “Ei, it was wonderful to see you again, I’m so glad to have found you.”

“Me too, Aki,” he stepped forward and engulfed her in another one-armed hug, one she returned with enthusiasm.

“I’ll talk to you both soon,” she said, stepping back and smiling at them both.

“Looking forward to it,” Kazuya said, laying his hand on the small of Eijun’s back and guiding him out of the room. “Remember, we still have to have dinner and a...chat!” he tossed over his shoulder, and they walked through the doorway to the sounds of Akiko’s laughter.

Eijun pouted all the way out to the car.

“Are you ever going to talk to me again?” Kazuya asked as he pulled into traffic.

Eijun huffed out a breath, blowing his bangs around. “It’s not fair.”

“What’s not fair?”

“You keep...finding people to tell you all the stupid things I did when I was a kid.”

“And why isn’t that fair?”

“Because I don’t know any of your childhood friends!”

“Do you know why that is?”

“Because you’re too big of a jerk to introduce me to any of them,” Eijun said with a pout.

Kazuya laughed softly. “Not really.” He reached over and laid his hand softly on Eijun’s knee. “You haven’t met them because I didn’t have any. Until I went to Seido and met you, I didn’t have any friends.”

“Eijun, what you said that day we told Mochi about the baby...I never even dreamed that anyone would be able—no, be willing—to see that, to say that about me. I didn’t. Until I saw the way you looked at me, understood me and I couldn’t deny it anymore. I knew then that you were someone I could trust to always see me. Even if it had all ended in blood and tears, you knew me. And for that,
I am eternally grateful.”

“I...damn,” Eijun said, eyes teary and hand clasped firmly in Kazuya’s. “I’m sorry, I...sometimes I don’t think. I know what you went through as a kid, and I’m so sorry you did. I believe, though, that you would have opened up to someone, you couldn’t have lived closed off forever.”

“I don’t know. I think I could have. I know I didn’t understand how to change, how to be any different than I was until I met you, until you allowed me a safe place to figure that out. You understand me, even when I don’t understand myself.”

“You’re the same, you know me better than anyone, you see through my masks and call me out on my bullshit,” Eijun said. “You allow me room to be myself, make my own decisions, even when you’d rather I took a safer path. You’ve become my safety net, and if everything fell apart tomorrow, I know I’d be all right because I have you. Your support is what allows me to live, and I will always, always love you for that.”

Kazuya smiled, the soft, private smile Eijun found he loved more than any of them, the smile he was getting used to seeing on his husband’s face. “Partners, right?”

“Right. Partners ‘til the end. Unless you…” Eijun came to a halt. “Damn, my brain’s not working, sorry.”

“Partners to the end is enough, I think,” Kazuya said. “No need for murder this afternoon.”

“Fair enough,” Eijun agreed.

“How’s the shoulder?”

“I think I need all the pills, Kaz,” Eijun said. “It hurts.”

“Let’s get you home, then, Ei-chan.”

“Oh, you asshole, you are not going to let that go, are you?”

“You’d be disappointed if I did.”

“I suppose I would,” Eijun conceded.

“And I never want to let you down.”

Eijun sighed.

Miyuki and Sawamura Spotting!

MiyuSawaIsLife:
Look what I found! They’re going into that office building. I wonder what they’re doing?

SawaMiyuIsEverything:

It looks like there’s a lot of kinds of businesses there.

EijunisaGod:

There’s a genetic counseling center there. I knew there was something fishy, that’s not Eijun’s baby and I’m sure that’s why they’re there. Poor Eijun, first he has to have surgery, now he’s finding out that Kazuya cheated on him.

Sawa4Live:

Way to jump to conclusions, EIG. They could be visiting the tax attorneys.

MiyuSawaIsLife:

They do go to that high-risk OB, that could be what’s going on. There could be problems with the baby.

IHeartMiyuki:

I don’t think so, don’t they go there because he’s a friend of theirs from Seido?

MiyuSawaIsLife:

Maybe he is, but it’s not a reason to go to him. You’d think they’d go to a normal OB if the pregnancy is normal.

EijunisaGod:

I still don’t think it’s Eijun’s. There’s no proof.

SawaMiyuIsEverything:

That baby could come out with gold eyes yelling ‘oshi, oshi, oshi’ and you still wouldn’t think it’s Eijun’s.

EijunisaGod:

Who else would they be visiting? The architects? They have a house already. All Eijun needs is to come to grips with the fact that the baby isn’t his.

MiyuSawaIsLife:

Maybe there’s really something wrong with the baby.

BaseballIdiots:

Don’t hex them like that!

IHeartMiyuki:

Kazuya will be so sad.
Sawa4Life:

So will Eijun.

EijunisaGod:

Maybe it will be a wakeup call for Eijun and he’ll figure out he needs to leave.

BaseballIdiots:

EIG, will you leave it alone? He’s not cheating on him, the baby’s Eijun’s. You know it as well as we all do.

Worry about the important bits. Worry about the baby, who has some genetic defect that may make it ill or cause them to lose it.

Miyuki’sThighs:

This is so sad.

SawaMiyuIsEverything:

I know, right? I’m crying for them.

MiyuSawaIsLife:

My heart is broken, I don’t know what I should do.

BaseballIdiots:

We should form a prayer circle, pray for that baby.

Sawa4Life:

You’re right, we should. They need all our support.

EijunisaGod:

I’m in.

BOARD ADMIN:

…at least you all have stopped fighting.

Chapter End Notes

I’m still in love with this AU, so as long as you're with me, I'll be writing it!

Let me know what you think, what you like and what you love!
How have you all been?

*squishes*
Week twenty-two

Me: You know, at 22 weeks, Akemi’s the size of a coconut?

Kaz: I’m not surprised, she seems to have really grown over the last few weeks.

Me: Yes, it’s great!

Kaz: Tell that to my bladder.

Me: Sorry ‘bout that. But her eyes are fully developed! As is her pancreas.

Kaz: Eyes? That’s awesome.

Me: Yeah. I think so too. How are you feeling?


Me: I’m sorry about a few of those. I can help with at least one of them. I can’t wait to help with one of them. Whenever you’d like me to.

Kaz: Pervert.

Me: What? Because I want to make sure you don’t overheat?

Kaz: ...

Me: *whistles innocently*

Kaz: Such a goof.

Me: But you loooooooowvvvvveeee me.
Kaz: I do, for my sins.

Kaz: How’s the shoulder?

Me: Fine, no worries. Everything’s good. How are things there?

Kaz: We’re good, the pre-game went well.

Me: Awesome. I’m sure you guys will have no problems winning. We’re meeting at the diner, right?

Kaz: Yeah, Mochi’s going to meet us there after the game.

Me: Have you heard anything from him about what happened?

Kaz: Nope, nothing.

Me: Me either. Okay, I’ll see you at the diner.

Kaz: Love you, gotta go.

Me: Have fun!

Eijun smiled at the exchange, glad he’d gotten the weekly Peanut update out of the way. He’d been sitting on it for a few days but hadn’t found the perfect time to send it. He did it now, partially because he loved to talk to Kazuya about the baby, but also to throw his husband off the scent. Closing his phone, he glanced over to Norio, currently driving them to the stadium for the game.

“Thanks again for picking me up, Dad,” Eijun said, smiling at the man who’d been doing everything he could to make up for his previous neglect. It had been months, and nothing had changed. Eijun thought that he really meant it and was overjoyed about it.

“You’re welcome, Eijun,” Norio said. “I suppose you’re not supposed to be here this time, either?”

“No, no. I can be here, Kaz just doesn’t expect me to be,” Eijun said.

Norio grinned at him. “You think he’s going to be surprised?”

“I hope so.”

Entering the stadium, Norio and Eijun headed directly to their seats—the game was starting in a few minutes, and they knew there would be vendors with drinks and snacks roaming the stands for the duration, so there was no hurry, no need to stand in line.

As they made their way across the row, Eijun noticed something white on his seat. Arriving there, he found a box, with an envelope on top, simply labeled, ‘Eijun’.

Exchanging a confused glance with Norio, he sat, putting the box on his lap.

“What’s that?” Norio asked.

“I have no earthly idea,” Eijun said, eyebrows knit. He opened the envelope and pulled out a folded sheet of paper.
Since you refuse to stay where I put you, here are a few things to make you more comfortable.

Tell Dad I said hi!

—Kaz

Eijun chuckled and handed the paper to Norio. “So much for the surprise.”

Norio read it and handed it back to Eijun, chuckling as well. “I think he knows you.”

“Yeah,” Eijun said with a gentle smile. “Better than anyone.”

“What’s in the box?”

Eijun blinked at the box in his lap, he’d forgotten about it. Untaping the flaps, he opened it and started pulling out the contents.

First, a long, thin pillow, with a note pinned to it.

For your armrest—this will help support your arm while you sit, relieve some of the pressure on your neck.

“This is perfect,” Eijun said, tucking the pillow under his injured arm.

Next, he pulled out a small box that had ‘Eat Me’ written on the top of it. Opening it, he found a couple of doses of each of his pain pills, with a note.

I know you didn’t take them. Please do.

Eijun sighed and put them to the side.

“Did you take your meds, Eijun?” Norio asked.

“Of course not,” Eijun said. “He knows me too well.”

“You should.”

“I will.”

Looking in the box, he saw another stuffed something. Pulling it out, he laughed. It was a stuffed peanut.

This is not our child, this is for back support.
Or is it?

Take good care of it, just in case.

“Aww, that’s cute,” Norio said.

Eijun nodded, tucking it into the small of his back. “And comfortable.”

There was just one more thing in the box—a green bag of something or another. Eijun lifted it out, turning it over to examine the contents, which were covered by another note.

I couldn’t get you freshly fried ones, so I thought this would be a good substitute.

Let me know what you think.

Peeling the sticky note off the front of the bag, he read what was in the bag. “Dill pickle cashews? I didn’t even know they made such a thing.”

Norio laughed. “Me either, but apparently they do.”

Eijun opened the bag and shook some out into his hand. Popping them in his mouth, he chewed slowly, thoughtfully. “They’re good! Try some!” he said, holding out the bag to Norio, who shook his head.

“I’ll try them after I’ve acquired drinks for us, just in case,” he said with a grin, flagging down a passing vendor. “You need to take your medicine, anyway.”

“You’re right,” Eijun agreed, taking the water bottle he was handed and swallowing his pills before sharing the cashews with Norio, who hummed appreciatively as he tasted them.

Me: They were good, thanks!

<attached: pic of empty cashew bag, with Norio and Eijun’s grinning faces>

Kaz: I’m glad you liked them. Why aren’t you home resting?

Me: I am resting, I’ve even got my arm pillow and my back peanut pillow and took my pills, too. I’ve saved you a trip, you don’t have to pick me up!

Kaz: Eijun…

Me: I don’t want to stay home, okay? I won’t do anything to endanger myself, I just want to watch. I can help.

Kaz: Alright, but if you start hurting, please have Dad take you home.

Me: I will, I promise.

Kaz: Okay. I love you, brat. Please be careful.
Me: You too. I love you too, both of you, more than I can say.

Kaz: ...sap

Kaz: we love you too.

********************

Kaz: Please watch him, he has a tendency towards overdoing things.

Kaz: and Hi! sorry.

Me: I will. And hello to you, son of mine. I'm used to hard headed people, I can handle him.

Kaz: Thanks, Dad.

Me: It's my pleasure. Love you. Say hi to Akemi for me.

Kaz: Love you too, see you after the game.

Kazuya closed his phone with a soft smile. He was honestly glad that Eijun had come, he didn’t want him moping around the house. And he didn’t need to know that the box had been ready for him last game, too. In the steward’s room, just waiting for word that Eijun had come through the turnstile. He’d known his husband wouldn’t be able to stay away.

During the seventh inning stretch, Kazuya was unsurprised to see Eijun on the Jumbotron. He stepped out of the dugout and looked up into the stands, meeting his husband’s grin with one of his own before returning his attention to the game.

Afterward, Kazuya strolled down the hallway to their normal after-game meeting place. They had lost, and there was a lot of work for the bullpen to do but he wasn’t upset at them, the loss of Eijun had left a huge hole in their defense. Rounding the corner, he saw Eijun chatting with a group of fans and crept up behind him, signaling for the others not to say anything.

Sliding his hands around Eijun’s waist, he pulled him into a hug, whispering, “What did I say about staying where I put you?”

“Miyuki Kazuya!” Eijun squawked, to the amusement of the fans. And Kazuya, who hadn’t managed to get that reaction out of him for years. “I’m not a pet.”

“You’re my pet,” Kazuya answerered, enjoying the red spreading across Eijun’s face.

Eijun groaned and turned back around, clearly trying to think of a response that wouldn’t leave him open for even more teasing. “Honestly, Kazuya. Could you be any more embarrassing?”

“I’m not sure, but I’m willing to try,” Kazuya answered lowly, for Eijun’s ears only.
“No, you won’t!” Eijun turned back to him with a glare.

Kazuya laughed at the look on Eijun’s face, holding his side. “I don’t know if laughing this hard is good for the baby,” he said, trying his best to bring it back to a chortle.

“It’s also not good for your marriage,” Eijun said with a glare.

“Aw, Ei,” Kazuya said, sliding his hand into his husbands, “Don’t be like that.”

“You’re still the worst, and I don’t even know why…,” he muttered, looking away.

“I don’t either, but I pray you never stop,” Kazuya said, softly, privately.

Eijun elbowed him, giving him a totally unconvincing glare. “You don’t fight fair.”

“One uses what one must,” Kazuya said, kissing his cheek. “Now, say goodbye to your adoring fans, we should be going. We’re going to be late.”

Eijun nodded, smiling at the crowd. “We have an appointment, so we have to get going. Thank you for your support, I hope to see you all again soon.”

The fans nodded and waved as Kazuya and Eijun turned, heading down the hallway to the parking lot.

“Where’s Dad?” Kazuya asked, finally noticing he was missing.

“He had to leave during the seventh; he had a meeting this afternoon.”

“Oh, okay. He doesn’t have to come to every game if he’s busy, I hope he knows this,” Kazuya said, frowning a little.

“He knows,” Eijun said. “He wants to be there. He wasn’t there Tuesday, right? He misses when he has to. He just likes to watch, support you.”

Kazuya sighed. “I know, it’s just still a little odd, you know? I hope he’s not going to burn himself out or isn’t forcing himself to attend.”

“I don’t think he is,” Eijun commented. “He always seems into the games when I’m with him, and when we talk to him he knows what’s going on with the team.”

“It’s true he’s always been a baseball fan,” Kazuya agreed. “I just didn’t know he was a fan of us.”

“Well, now you do,” Eijun said, lacing their fingers together. “Don’t worry too much about it, okay? If it bothers you, you should talk to him.”

“I…,” Kazuya stopped, a strange look crossing his face. “I can, can’t I? I hadn’t even considered the possibility.”

Eijun smiled at him, “It’s all still really new, huh? But a good new.”

“Yes, absolutely,” Kazuya agreed. “A good new.”

Pulling into the diner parking lot, Eijun spotted Kuramochi’s car. “He’s here,” he said.
“I hope everything went alright.” Kazuya parked their car, pointing a finger at Eijun. “Stay.”

“Not a dog, Kaz.”

“I know. But please let me get your door.”

Eijun sighed, surrendering. “Yes, of course.” His gaze sharpened. “But just until I’m out of this sling, okay? Then it’s back to me opening yours.”

“After you’re able to drive,” Kazuya asserted. “Until then, let me take care of you.”

“Fair enough,” Eijun said. “I hate being dependent.”

“I know you do,” Kazuya said, coming around the car and opening his door. “But it’s only for a little while.”

“I know, and I don’t mind so much if it’s you, it’s just...I think I should be supporting you right now, and I’m not.”

“You are, Ei,” Kazuya argued. “The whole reason for getting your shoulder repaired now was for me. And Akemi. You’re doing everything you need to be doing. It’s okay to lean on me, too. I want to take care of you as well.”

“You do. You are. And I’m more grateful for it than I can say.”

“Then we’re even because I feel exactly the same way,” Kazuya said as he opened the door, ushering Eijun inside. “Let’s go see what Mochi has to say, shall we?”

They caught sight of his hair over the back of a booth and made their way through the restaurant, sliding into the bench opposite.

“Hey, guys!” Kuramochi said with a grin.

“Hi, Mochi,” Eijun said, eyes narrowed. The smile they’d received looked a little forced to him. “How are you?”

“I’m...I’m good.” He sighed, fiddling with his straw wrapping.

“What’s up?” Kazuya asked, not pressing for details since their server appeared at the table. After they’d ordered drinks (and fried pickles), he returned his attention to his friend. “Didn’t it go well?”

Kuramochi startled, looking up at them both. “Oh! No, no. It went well, he said yes, we’re getting married and going away for our honeymoon, everything was perfect.”

“Then why do you look like you lost your best friend?” Eijun asked him.

“I’m thinking, okay? I have to make a decision about something and I can’t decide which to do.”

“Can we help?”

Kuramochi snorted. “What the hell. Maybe? Listen, if you had to choose between two options, each of which you really wanted, both of which are good, what would you do?”

“You mean like having to decide what you want for dessert?” Eijun asked.

“Yup, something like that.”
“I’d say choose both.”

“Both?”

“Yeah, if I can’t decide, I choose both. That way I have what I want. It’s not that big of a deal.”

“Both?” Kuramochi looked at Eijun like he’d never even considered the notion. “I never even thought about that. Can I do that?”

“I don’t know why not,” Kazuya said with a chuckle. “You just have to be selfish enough to say you want it.”

“I do,” Kuramochi said, face clearing. “I will.”

“Good,” Eijun said as their fried pickles arrived. They made their dinner orders—cheeseburgers all around—and the couple turned their attention back to their friend.

“So, give us the details. How did it go, what did you guys decide?” Eijun asked.

“Before I get into that, I need to ask you something,” Kuramochi said, taking a deep breath. “I need to ask you both something.”

“What’s that?” Kazuya asked.

“Well,” he started. “Eijun, you’re like the little brother I never had, annoying and awesome at the same time and Kazuya, you’ve been my best friend forever, stood by me when I didn’t know if I could stand by myself...and I’m just...I can’t make up my mind, so I’m taking your advice. Will you—both of you—be my best men? I...you’re kinda a matched set, anyway, right?” Kuramochi said with a tentative grin.

Eijun was the first to recover. “Mochi, you don’t have to worry about hurting my—”

“No!” Kuramochi said sharply, cutting him off. “Sorry, but no. That’s not what I’m worried about at all. I seriously want you both, you’re both important to me and I can’t...not choose either one of you.”

“If you’re sure, I’d be honored,” Eijun said.

“Me too,” Kazuya added. “If you need to pick just one, though, that’s fine.”

“Would you stop? I seriously want you both,” Kuramochi said, running a hand through his hair in frustration.

“Will Ryou be okay with it, though?” Eijun asked.

Kuramochi chuckled. “I have no idea. Let me ask him.” He picked up his phone and sent a text. “It might take him a bit to get back to me.”

“Now will you tell us how it went?” Kazuya dipped another pickle into the ranch dip and ate it, wincing as he did so. He really hoped it was a product of his pregnancy, this love of these things, but he suspected he was probably hoping in vain. The cheeseburger craving might fade, but he didn’t really think the fried pickle thing would.

“Fine, pretty much just like I planned it,” Kuramochi said. “The food was great; he was really impressed with all of it, especially when he found out that it was from you, thus not burnt. As expected, it was harder to get him to agree to go away than it was to agree to marry me, which is, I
think, better than the other way around. So we’re going to use the trip for our honeymoon.”

“Really? That’s great!” Eijun said. “Congrats! Did you set the date?”

“Is it next April or June?” Kazuya asked with a smirk.

“What? No!” Kuramochi said with a frown. “We’re not sappy saps like you two. We’re getting married in October. October the tenth, to be exact.”

“Really?” Eijun teased him. “Not June fourth? April sixth?”

“No, no. Is it so hard to believe that we picked a normal day?”

“You? Yeah, you’re as sentimental as they come,” Kazuya said, eyes narrowed as he watched Kuramochi color and try not to squirm.

“We’re nothing like you.” Kuramochi bit into his hamburger, resolutely avoiding his best friend’s eyes.

Kazuya started to laugh, elbowing Eijun. “He’s so full of crap.”

“Wait, why?” Eijun asked.

“Nothing, nothing,” Kuramochi said. “Eat your food before it gets cold.”

Kazuya tutted. “Now, Mochi. We need to clue the rest of the class in.” He looked at Eijun, smiling widely. “They’re getting married on October tenth. That’s 10/10. Ten. 4+6=10.”

Eijun’s eyes widened and he joined Kazuya in laughing. “That’s awesome; you gave us such a hard time about our date!”

“It’s not that, it’s just conven—”

Kazuya pulled out his phone, opening the calendar. “A Wednesday? Is convenient? Why not the thirteenth, Saturday, then?”

“I hate you both,” Kuramochi said, viciously dipping his french fry into the ranch dressing. “I take it back; I don’t want either of you in my wedding.”

“Too late,” Eijun said. “No take backs.”

“Are you five, Eijun?” Kuramochi asked, opening his mouth to continue his tirade when his phone text notification went off. Opening it, he colored even more, if possible.

“What did Ryou say?” Kazuya asked.

“None of your business, since you’re not in the wedding anyway.”

“Payback’s a bitch, right?” Kazuya noted. “You were merciless.”

“No I was—” Kuramochi stopped. “I can’t even front, I was. But still.”

“Still what?” Eijun raised an eyebrow.

Kuramochi sighed. “Never mind, you’re fine. Ryou said, and I quote, ‘I figured that was always the plan, why are you worried about it?’ So, that’s that. Although, Kaz, if you’re too uncomfortable by
that time, you can sit it out.”

“I’ll still have at least a month to go, I should be fine,” Kazuya said. “But I will if I need to.”

“Okay,” Kuramochi said. “You’d better be honest. I don’t want to have to rush you to the hospital.”

After dinner, they were standing in the parking lot, saying their goodbyes.

“Hey, guys?” Kuramochi said after they’d turned away to head to their car.

They both stopped and turned.

“Thanks. For everything,” Kuramochi met their gazes head on. “You’ve both been amazing friends and support, and I really appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome,” Eijun said with a wide smile. “You’re our best friend; we’re just doing our best to keep up.” He waved, sliding his hand through Kazuya’s arm, who’d been willing to let Eijun handle the answer—he was always better at expressing himself than Kazuya was, and usually spoke for both of them in these situations. “We’ll see you soon, Mochi.”

“Night, you two. Three, actually,” Kuramochi said with a soft chuckle. “Be safe.”

Week Twenty-three

Kazuya kept glancing at his phone as the team meeting dragged on; he was waiting for a text from Eijun about his doctor’s appointment that afternoon. It had been two weeks since the surgery and if things were going well, Eijun’s brace would be changed to a simple sling, something that would make everything much easier for him and facilitate the start of his physical therapy. He had wanted to go to the appointment, but he had to be at this meeting. Eijun had practically pushed him out of the house that morning, handing him his bag and closing the door firmly behind him.

“I’ll be fine, Dad’s coming to get me. Go to work, Kaz, and stop hovering. I’ll let you know what they say as soon as I’m done, I promise.”

“Are you sure? I could just be gone long enough—”

“No, go,” Eijun insisted. “It’s important you go to this, seriously. Go.”

“Text me as soon as you know anything.”

“I will, I promise.” Eijun kissed his cheek, laying an affectionate hand on his baby bump. “You and Akemi have fun, okay? I love you both.”

“I...okay,” Kazuya sighed, pulling him into a hug, resting his forehead on Eijun’s. “Just take care, and let me know. I worry.”

“I know, and I love you for it.” Eijun kissed him, before stepping back. “See you soon, Kaz.”

“We love you, Ei. I’ll be waiting to hear from you.”
“Go to work, Kaz,” Eijun said, opening the front door.

Kazuya did as he was told, so now he sat, willing his phone to buzz. Looking at the clock, he realized that Eijun’s appointment hadn’t even started yet and pulled his attention back to the meeting.

An hour later, as he was at his desk formulating a game plan for the upcoming series, his phone finally rang.

_Ei:_ At 23 weeks, Akemi weighs more than half a kilo.

_Me:_ How are you? And I believe it, the butterball.

_Ei:_ She’s going to double in the next four weeks.

_Me:_ Okay, I don’t know how much bigger she can get—there’s not much room left in there. What did the doctor say?

_Ei:_ You’re officially 5 months along, too.

_Me:_...

_Me:_ Eijun.

_Me:_ What did the doctor say?

_Ei:_ Oh! Nothing, really. Just this.

<download pic>

Kazuya grinned when he realized what he was looking at.

_Me:_ So you got the new sling, huh? That’s good. When do you start physio?

_Ei:_ Next week. Not looking forward to it.

_Me:_ I know, but it’s what you need.

_Ei:_ Yeah.

_Me:_ So. 5 months, huh?

_Ei:_ NOW you want to talk about the baby.

_Me:_ Your shoulder was more important.

_Ei:_ Not more important than Akemi, no way.

_Me:_ Sorry, I misspoke. More immediate, then?
Ei: Fine, okay.
Me: What else is going on with her?
Ei: She can hear, really well.
Me: I’m glad we started reading to her.
Ei: Me too.
Me: Where are you?
Ei: Dad’s driving me home.
Me: Okay, good. I’ll see you there?
Ei: Yeah, soon. Be careful, I love you.
Me: Love you too.

Week Twenty-Four

“Eijun?” Kazuya called from the bathroom, where he was dressing after his shower.

“Yeah?”

“Could you come here for a minute?”

“What’s up?” Eijun asked, leaning on the doorframe. Kazuya had a strange tone to his voice, not panic, but something close.

“What are these?” he pointed to the underside of his belly, below his belly button, where the swell of the baby began.

Eijun stepped into the bathroom to look more closely, although he knew what he was pointing at. He’d been thinking about how to deal with this since he’d first noticed them a few days ago. Kazuya had already expressed insecurity about his changing body; this was not going to help.

He figured he’d better start with honesty, and see where they went from there.

“You mean the stretch marks?” Eijun asked, running a soft hand over the bump.

“I have stretch marks?” Kazuya said, voice rising.

“You’re pregnant, Kaz,” Eijun said, still running his hand over Akemi. “Your skin doesn’t stretch as quickly as the baby grows.”

“But, Eijun. I don’t want stretch marks,” Kazuya complained.

“I know, but it’s what your body needs for Akemi to grow the way she should.” Eijun sighed, knowing this was going to become a bit of a thing. “They’re not bad, you only have a couple.”
“But I have a long way to go, this might not be all of them,” Kazuya argued.

“This is true,” Eijun said, meeting Kazuya’s eyes and projecting as much sincerity as he could. “Kazuya, you’re beautiful, you know that? Stretch marks and outie and all, it’s part of bringing a baby—our baby—into the world. Is this enough to make you change your mind about her?”

“No, never,” Kazuya shook his head. “I know it’s normal, I just...never mind. I’m being stupid.”

“No, you’re not,” Eijun objected. “You’re fine. You’re gorgeous; I can hardly keep my hands off you.”

“Why are you, then?” Kazuya looked at him from under his lashes. “You haven’t...is it because I’m...,” he trailed off.

“Because you’re what, Kaz? Pregnant? Fat? Unattractive?” Eijun snorted. “In order, no, no and no fucking way. You’re beautiful, you’re everything I ever wanted, you’ve been my wet dream since I was fifteen. You’re dead sexy, and being pregnant hasn’t changed that one iota.”

“Then why?” Kazuya asked, and Eijun was thrown by his lack of confidence.

“I don’t have use of my shoulder, Kaz. I can’t touch you and do what I want to you, I don’t want you to have to do all the work. And you haven’t seemed to be into it, either, so I didn’t want to press.” Eijun spoke the truth as plainly as he could, not willing to let the misunderstanding stand. “I want you, though. So, so much.”

“You do?” Kazuya met his gaze, searching for some sign that he was lying and finding none.

“I do,” Eijun said. “I’m half hard just touching your belly, looking at you.” He stepped closer, bringing up his hand to touch Kazuya’s cheek. “I’m sorry if you believed for a second that I didn’t want you, it’s the furthest thing from the truth.”

Kazuya slid his arms around Eijun’s neck. “I don’t mind doing the work,” he said, playing with the short hairs at the back of his neck. “Take me to bed?”

“How about we take each other?” Eijun said, bending down to kiss his husband deeply.

“Best idea I’ve heard all day.”

“You sure you don’t want me to stay?” Eijun asked Kazuya, standing outside the door to Haruichi’s office.

“Yeah, you go to physio, you’ll be done about the time I’m finished,” Kazuya said.

Eijun’s physical therapist was in the same medical complex as the Kominato clinic, and he’d set his appointment to be the hour before Kazuya’s checkup, but he’d forgotten that Kazuya had to be in an hour early for a glucose test. He was glad it worked out this way so he could be in the car with him, since Kazuya couldn’t eat before the test, but still. He felt bad for leaving him.

“You alright?”

“I’m hungry, and a little lightheaded, but I’ll be fine, Eijun. Go. Shoo,” he flapped his hand at Eijun. “You’re going to be late. I’ll see you back here when you’re done.”

“You’ve got it,” Eijun said, pulling Kazuya close. He dropped a kiss on his nose, and then claimed
his lips in a quick, but thorough, kiss. “Be good, take care of Akemi.”

“That’s the plan,” Kazuya said, grinning at him as he turned away to jog across the parking lot.

Kazuya watched him until he turned the corner and then went into the clinic himself, checking in at the desk. They confirmed his fasting status before giving him a cup of something bubbly and sweet, instructing him to drink it quickly and sit in the waiting room until called.

He did as instructed, pulling out the book he’d brought to occupy his time, but he didn’t open it at first. He couldn’t stop thinking about the conversation they’d had in the bathroom the other day. Not one to consider himself vain, he didn’t understand why he was so worried about Eijun not wanting him. He knew his husband did, knew the baby and the associated changes in his body were normal, natural, and that if it were Eijun who was pregnant, he’d find him incredibly attractive. Sighing, he ran his hand over his bump, knowing he’d go through a lot more to carry this baby to term, that he wasn’t thinking rationally. He also saw the way Eijun was doing his best to make sure he knew how desired he was, how much he loved him and wanted him. It helped, it really did, but he didn’t quite know how to get rid of the feelings.

Deciding to let it lie for now, he cracked open his book, only to hear his phone chime.

Ei: Akemi’s lungs are developed enough that if something happened and she was born early, she could live.

Me: Really? Maybe that’s something we should talk to Haruichi about..an August birthday?

Ei: …

Me: I’m sorry, I don’t want her to be early, I’m joking.

Ei: The longer you carry, the better for her.

Me: I know. I do. I’m just…

Ei: I get it, it’s a bit of a slog sometimes. But you’re doing great!

Me: What else is going on with her?

Ei: She’s getting thicker skin, fat deposits. She’s gained like 100gm this week.

Me: No wonder I’m getting stretch marks, she’s getting so big.

Ei: That she is. She’s also getting familiar with our voices, so when she’s born, she’ll recognize them.

Me: That’s…kind of amazing, Ei.

Ei: I know, right?

Me: Thank you. I don’t say it enough, but thank you for everything you do.

Ei: Kaz? What’s going on, you alright?

Me: I’m fine, just thinking too much.
Ei: That can’t be good for the baby.

Me: You don’t get to lecture me about the perils of thinking too much.

Ei: Pffft.

Me: Shouldn’t you be getting contorted or something? Slacker.

Ei: I’m on the machine. How are you feeling?

Me: Fine, but it’s only been like 10 minutes.

Ei: Good. I gotta go, they’re coming for me. See you soon!

Me: Have fun!

Kazuya checked his emails and then closed the phone, opening his book. This time he wasn’t interrupted until Eijun slid into the seat beside him.

“How are you feeling?”

“Fine, a little dizzy, but it’s fine. How was physio?”

“Ugh. It seems like a waste of time. I know it’s not, but it’s hard to sit there. They won’t let me do anything yet, it’s just light stretches and hooking to the machine.”

“When they do let you, though, you’re going to be complaining about how hard they work you, you know that, right?”

“Yeah,” Eijun said with a grin. “But that’s why I saved some of the good drugs back. In case I need them.”

“Good call,” Kazuya said. He laced his fingers with Eijun’s and started to speak. “Eijun, I’m sorry I’m being so weird about things. I know you love me, I do. And that if it was you pregnant, I would find you amazingly gorgeous. I have no reason to think your feel otherwise.”

“It’s fine, Kaz. I know, you’re fine. I’ll tell you—or show you—how much I want you as often as you need. Maybe more. I don’t want you doubting me at all.”

“I don’t, not really,” Kazuya said, smiling at him gently. “It’s just—”

“I know,” Eijun interrupted him. “It’s—”

Before he could say anything else, Kazuya’s name was called. They rose and followed the nurse down the hallway into the lab room, where Kazuya sat while they drew a small vial of blood from his arm. “Kominato-sensei will see you in room two,” the lab assistant told them when he was done, and they headed that way, familiar enough with the layout to get there without any difficulties.

Kazuya climbed onto the table, with Eijun in the seat beside him, hands still linked.

“Do you want to see her?” Eijun asked.

“You mean an ultrasound? I’m fine, I feel her moving around plenty,” Kazuya said. “Unless you’re worried about her?”
“Not really, not since we’ve been able to feel her,” Eijun said. “If she ever went still for a long time, then yes. Is she moving now?”

Kazuya took the hand he held and pressed it on his stomach. “Feel her? She’s been super active the last fifteen minutes or so, I wonder if the sugar’s getting to her.”

“Does that happen?” Eijun asked. “I’m not sure that can cross the placenta boundary.”

“I don’t know, but feel? She’s flipping around like crazy.”

Eijun smiled and spoke to his belly. “Hey, there, Akemi. Grow well; I can’t wait to meet you.”

Kazuya sighed and ran his fingers through Eijun’s hair. “And you wonder why I love you.”

“I want her to know my voice, Kaz. She needs to recognize her papa,” Eijun asserted.

Kazuya smirked. “I think you’re fine, she’s going to be very familiar with your voice.”

“Wait, what?” Eijun looked at him, eyes squinted. “Are you calling me loud?”

Kazuya chortled. “Well...if the shoe fits,” he finally choked out, descending into another laughing fit at the look of outrage on Eijun’s face.

Haruichi entered the room, taking one look at his friends and sighing, not needing anything like details to figure out exactly what was going on. He spoke brightly, ignoring the atmosphere.

“So, Kazuya, how are you feeling?” He stepped over to the table, indicating that he should lie down.

“Hungry,” Kazuya said. “But other than that, not too bad. Backaches and it’s too hot.”

“All normal,” Haruichi said, taking a measurement of the baby and making a note on his clipboard. “Anything else?”

“One other thing, I don’t know if it’s a big deal. But if I don’t eat within an hour of getting up in the morning, I get really dizzy,” Kazuya said, knowing Eijun would say something if he didn’t.

“That’s fairly normal; your blood sugar is low. You just need to make sure to eat early. If it gets too bad, leave a granola bar or something by your bed and eat it before you get up,” he helped Kazuya sit up.

“Okay, good. Eijun said he thought it might be normal, but I promised Mochi I’d ask.”

“Good thing you did, it’s important to ask about anything unusual,” Haruichi murmured, sitting at his computer to enter the measurements he’d taken. “Everything looks good, let me just check…” he tapered off, looking at another tab.

Turning in his chair, he looked at Kazuya. “What do you know about your family’s history with diabetes?”

Kazuya sat up straight and gripped Eijun’s hand hard, startling him.

“Diabetes killed my mother.”
Chapter End Notes

Comments?
Complaints?
Let me know what you think.
Thank you for reading, I adore every last one of you.
Chapter Summary

Answers.
And questions, too.
Kazuya gets to chat.
And Eijun gets to scheme.
Akemi- well, she gets to flop around and be a baby.

Chapter Notes

It's alive!
Sorry about the delay, but please believe that I'd never abandon this story, I love it too much.
Hope you enjoy this next chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Week twenty-four

“I thought she died of kidney failure?” Eijun asked, forehead creased.

Haruichi had turned away from his computer, looking at Kazuya with narrowed eyes. “I don’t think you can—” he started.

“No, no. Sorry, I misspoke. My mother died of complications of diabetes. Her kidneys were damaged and eventually stopped working altogether,” Kazuya explained. “She had type 1 and wasn’t diagnosed until she was a teenager, so it was a little later than usual and she’d already done some damage to them.”

“That makes perfect sense,” Haruichi said. “And I don’t think you need to worry about that in this case. It looks like you have gestational diabetes, which is a different thing. It’s not as damaging, nor is it permanent.”

“Really?” Kazuya said, placing his hand over Akemi.

“Really,” Haruichi agreed with a nod. “I have had quite a few type 1 diabetics as patients, since that’s considered a high-risk pregnancy, and they’re a completely different proposition. You have to be careful about how many carbs you eat in comparison to proteins and fats, and try to eat unprocessed carbs as much you can, but that’s it. After Akemi, it should disappear.”

“But isn’t that bad for the baby?”

“It can be if we’re not careful, but it shouldn’t be. We just have to watch you a little more closely.”
“Will Akemi be likely to be diabetic? I remember my parents monitoring me when I was young to make sure I didn’t have it,” Kazuya asked.

“She may,” Haruichi said. “There is a genetic component, but that’s not the whole story. It’s hard to predict who will get it, and knowing your family history helps us to know to check her for it. I wouldn’t worry about it, honestly. There’s not much you can do to prevent it, make sure she eats healthy food and gets plenty of exercise, and if she develops it, we’ll deal with it then.”

“Okay, that makes sense,” Eijun said, letting out a relieved breath. “So Kazuya’s not got anything to worry about?”

“Not a lot, just a matter of being careful himself with what he eats. Again, it’s not that big of a deal in most pregnancies, although it can cause issues for some. I’ll give you a sheet you can take home so you can know what to look for. If you have any questions about it, I expect you to call me,” Haruichi met Eijun’s—and then Kazuya’s—eyes, waiting for them to nod their understanding.

“Okay, great,” he continued. “Are you feeling her kick much?”

“All the time,” Kazuya said with a sigh. “I can see that this will get old after a while, especially when I get much bigger.”

“Yes, it will,” Haruichi said. “But you’re on the back end of this thing, you’re doing great.”

“Thanks,” Kazuya said. “Is there anything else we should know? Or should be doing?”

“Yeah. Did you sign up for the childcare classes I told you about?”

“I...I don’t think we did,” Eijun said. “I forgot about that, with the other stuff that’s been going on.”

“That’s okay, I’m sure they’ll fit you in,” Haruichi said. “You should start next week if you can. It’s going to cover some aspects of childbirth that don’t pertain to you, but you might find some parts of it informative.”

“Okay, yeah. We’ll get signed up right away.”

“You definitely should,” Haruichi said. “They’ll be very helpful in getting you prepared to have the baby.”

“Thanks, Haruichi,” Eijun said with a smile. “You’re the best.”

“I’m glad you’re finally recognizing the truth,” Haruichi grinned back, glad to see them both looking more settled than they had in a while.

“I think we’ve always known,” Kazuya said. “It’s never been much of a secret.”

Settling his hand in the small of Eijun’s back, he guided him out of the office and to their car.

“So, tell me about the PT,” Kazuya said as he pulled out of the parking lot.

“Not much to tell yet, they only did a few assessments of my range of motion and gave me some things I can do at home. I’m there twice a week for the next six weeks, and then we’ll reassess.”
“That’s good,” Kazuya said. “It sounds like a good start.”

“True enough,” Eijun agreed. He tapped his fingers on his leg, thinking about something. Kazuya waited, knowing he’d spit it out when he couldn’t hold it any longer.

Which was clearly not that long. “Why didn’t I know about your mom?” Eijun asked. “Not that you have to tell me everything, I just...I thought I knew what happened, but I didn’t.”

“I’m sorry, Ei,” Kazuya said. “I think I told you about her when we were at Seido, and we’ve never discussed it since. I didn’t want to get into it then, I was trying to be a ‘normal’ kid.”

“I understand, I do. I just wish I’d known. I can’t imagine it would have changed anything, but I might have been watching more carefully for the gestational diabetes issue.”

“Is there something you would have seen that could have been a sign?”

“I honestly don’t think so, but I—I don’t know why that threw me for a loop, but it did.” Eijun squirmed in his seat, not happy with the way he was feeling.

“It makes sense,” Kazuya said. “So much is out of control and you thought that I was one thing you understood completely. Again, I’m sorry. I never meant to broadside you like that.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong, Kaz,” Eijun said, reaching over to take his hand. “I’m sorry it’s got me in such an uproar.”

“No, really. It’s fine. I get it,” Kazuya squeezed his hand.

“Okay, thanks,” Eijun said, settling into his seat. “Are you hungry?”

“Are you kidding? Starved.”

“Burgers?” Eijun asked with a smirk.

“Asshole,” Kazuya said without heat. “But I’d better go to Shino’s, eat healthier.”

“You can still eat a burger; just maybe get a salad instead of french fries?” Eijun suggested.

Kazuya turned the car in the direction of the diner. “It’s on you, enabler. When Haruichi yells at me, I’m going to blame you.”

“Good luck with that,” Eijun snarked.

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**Week twenty-five**

“Ready for this?” Eijun asked, looking over at Kazuya in the driver’s seat.

“A room full of pregnant women?” Kazuya said. “All of them as hormonal as I am? What could possibly go wrong?”

Eijun grinned, squeezing his hand. “Buck up, buttercup. It’ll be fun.”
“I’ll remind you of those words later,” Kazuya said, unsure if that was a promise or a threat.

Eijun opened the door to the clinic and escorted Kazuya inside. They’d been admitted to the class without any problems and were told to show up wearing comfortable clothes and to bring any questions they may have. Following him up to the reception desk, he watched with amusement when the receptionist’s face went from shock to all smiles when she recognized Kazuya.

“Hello, how may I help you?” she asked, eyes gleaming.

“Hi, there,” Kazuya said, leaning on the counter. “We’ve signed up for the child care class this afternoon; can you tell me if we’re in the right place?”

She passed over a clipboard. “Yes, you are, and you’re right on time. If you’ll put your name on that sign-in sheet, you can go on back. They’re due to start in ten minutes or so.”

“Thank you,” Kazuya answered, picking up a pen from the cup and filling in both of their names. He dropped the pen back into its place and stepped away from the desk.

“You’re all set,” she said, indicating the doorway to their right. “Head on down the hallway, it’s the third door on the right, the big room. There should be several couples there already.”

“Thanks again,” Eijun said, giving her a sunny grin and making a mental note to check the message boards that evening to see if the news of this visit had made it there.

Following Kazuya, they headed down the tiled hallway, past a few offices, stopping in the doorway to the room they’d been directed to. It was bright, with windows lining one of the walls, carpeted, stools and pillows for sitting placed in a loose circle. The fabrics and walls were done in soothing tones of green and blue—not matching, but comfortable. There were half a dozen couples in the room already, spread out on pillows and stools. The lone standing person turned and smiled at them. “Welcome, come on in,” she said, indicating the circle. “Pick whatever you’re most comfortable sitting on.”

Eijun motioned for Kazuya to lead. “Your choice.”

“Out of the direct sun, I think,” Kazuya said, heading over to a stool on one side of the room. Eijun folded himself onto the pillow at his feet, and Kazuya reached down and ran a hand through his hair when he leaned back on his legs.

“Comfortable?” Eijun asked.

“Very,” Kazuya agreed. “You okay down there with your arm?”

“Yeah, it’s fine. I can still use it to stabilize myself,” Eijun said, looking around curiously. The other couples in the room all appeared to be about as far along as Kazuya and most of them were heterosexual couples, although there was one pair of women.

The leader consulted a list and took a head count. “We should have one more couple show up, but we’re going to get started on time, so if they’re not here by then we’ll start.”

Kazuya bent down and whispered into Eijun’s ear. “You think we’ll have to play show and tell?”

“You show me yours and I’ll show you mine,” he whispered back, causing his husband to choke out a laugh.

“I think that’s probably what got us into this situation,” Kazuya noted.
Eijun chuckled, “You’re not wrong about that.”

Just then, the last couple came into the room, apologizing for their lateness.

“You’re fine, we were just getting ready to start,” the leader said, before turning to address the class. “First of all, welcome. My name is Nakahara Hikari, and I’ll be leading this class. This is a basic childbirth and childcare combined class, which will run for six weeks. After that, if you feel you need more information or want more training, please feel free to sign up for either of the advanced classes we offer, one in childbirth and the other in childcare.

“Over the next weeks, we’re going to be talking about the various stages of labor and delivery, delivery options, and caring for a newborn. Some of this won’t apply to all of you, but that’s okay, it might be helpful anyway. Today, though, I want us to get to know each other and answer any questions you might have. I’ll start, and we can go around the room. Introduce yourselves, tell us a little something about your lives and the baby, whatever you’d like to mention.

“As I said, my name is Nakahara Hikari, and I’m a licensed midwife. I’ve been one for the last decade, and have aided with more births than I care to think about. I’ve been teaching this class for the last four years, and I teach the childbirth advanced class as well, if you decide you’d like to attend that. I have two children of my own, aged 5 and 11, and I love what I do.” She finished speaking and turned to the couple nearest herself. “Welcome, please introduce yourselves.”

Eijun listened attentively as the couples listed names and due dates, occupations and trivia. He discovered that the same sex pairing was actually a girl with her best friend, who was having the baby on her own. As their turn approached, Eijun worried about how much Kazuya wanted to reveal, but decided to do what he always did, follow his lead.

Eventually, the people next to them finished and it was their turn. “My name is Miyuki Kazuya, and this is my husband, Sawamura Eijun. I’m due sometime in mid-November; I think the last date we were given was November 11. We’ve been married for five years, and we’re both baseball players.”

The other parents nodded politely and murmured some variation of ‘happy to meet you’ and the conversational ball passed to the next person, Eijun relaxing a little when he realized that people were going to treat them like everyone else—even though he did catch several fond glances at Kazuya from the other mothers, they were more doting than anything.

After the introductions, the questions began. Most of them were things that they already knew, that either Eijun had read or that Haruichi had told them about, and both Eijun and Kazuya was able to contribute to the conversation with information and further questions. By the time Hikari called time, the group had become comfortable around each other, chattering amongst themselves and answering questions without prompting.

“I think that’s enough for today, we had a good exchange of information and you are all much more relaxed than you were when we started. I am going to lead you through a series of stretches that you can do to help with the back pain you may be experiencing,” she said, instructing them on some basic stretches as well as giving suggestions about ways their partners could assist in relieving stress and tension.

“Okay, folks. Thank you for coming. There are snacks and juice in the back of the room, please help yourselves. Stick around and chat for a while. It’s always good to talk to someone who’s going through what you are, so why not take advantage of the opportunity? I’ll be around if you have any questions for me you don’t feel comfortable asking in front of the class.” She dismissed them, moving to the back to be accessible and to encourage them to join her.
“Want to stick around?” Eijun asked, climbing to his feet. He offered his good hand to Kazuya, who took it and stood.

“I think I would like to,” Kazuya said. “She’s right; it would be good to talk to someone going through this, even if they aren’t the same gender. I’m sure there are plenty of similarities.”

“Then we stay,” Eijun agreed, and they strolled over to the snacks table, where Kazuya was quickly hijacked by a pair of the mothers.

“I’m not sure if they want to talk about the baby or the team,” a voice behind him chuckled. Eijun turned to see one of the other fathers, the spouse of one of the women currently with Kazuya, standing behind him watching the gathering fondly. “She’s a huge fan of the team and was so excited when she found out that he was due about the same time she is. I thought she was going to faint when you guys walked in, I’d been teasing her about you joining this class.”

Eijun laughed, watching Kazuya interact with the rapidly growing group of expectant mothers. “He’s hoping to talk to someone about pregnancy; it’s good for him to have someone who’s experiencing it to speak with. I’d imagine he’ll track the conversation to what he wants to discuss, he’s pretty good at that.”

“I wish him luck with that lot,” another father said, joining them. “They’re going to be hard to divert.”

“We do have experience dealing with the press,” Eijun said. “But then again, they are all pregnant, so who knows. Hopefully, he can talk about something other than baseball.”

He watched for a few seconds and saw Kazuya’s face relax, his smile turn soft and his shoulders lose some of their stiffness and grinned at the men around him. “He’s fine; they’re going to be there for a while. So what’s going on with you?” He went into friendly chat mode, prepared to answer any and all questions to keep them occupied, buying Kazuya as much time as he wanted to talk to the women.

“Enjoy yourself?” Eijun asked as they pulled out of the parking lot.

“Very much so,” Kazuya agreed. “It was great to talk to other pregnant people. We have so much happening that’s the same.”

“The guys were convinced that you’d be sucked into baseball talk exclusively. I had faith you’d be able to divert them to what you wanted to talk about.”

Kazuya laughed. “They tried. I did talk about the team a little, but mostly it was baby talk. Got a few numbers and emails, so we can chat with each other if we need some support. I’m glad we went, and thank you for spending so much time with the others. I’m sure they had tons of questions.”

“They did, but it was fine. I liked them, they were nice guys, didn’t pry too much,” Eijun said. “I was happy that you found someone to talk to, it’s hard being the only one with the experience.”

“I didn’t realize how much I needed to commiserate with someone who understands,” Kazuya admitted.

“Neither did I until I saw your face while you were talking to them.” Eijun linked their fingers. “I would do anything I needed to keep that look on your face.”
“And you wonder why I love you.”

“Not really, I’m pretty awesome,” Eijun said with a cackle.

“You’re right, you are,” Kazuya agreed, squeezing his hand.

Eijun flustered for a second, looking out the window with his face reddening.

Kazuya smiled softly and continued to drive them home.

——

Ei: You know Akemi can tell up from down?

Me: Really? Already?

Ei: Yeah. She’s the size of a head of cauliflower, too. Her body is filling out.

Me: Fat baby.

Ei: And her lungs are almost ready to breathe on their own.

Ei: She still needs time to bake, though

Me: I know, I know.

Ei: How’s the game?

Me: We’re up by two. Bottom of the seventh. Should be more, no thanks to the bullpen.

Ei: Oh, man. I guess I’m glad I’m not there.

Me: I wish you were.

Ei: Me too. Soon.

Me: Home in a few days.

Ei: Yes. I miss you.

Me: Me too. Let me know what the doctor says

Ei: I will, promise.

Ei: Love you both, take care of yourselves.

Me: Love you too, see you soon.

Kazuya closed his phone and turned his attention back to the game unfolding in front of him, crossing his arms as his eyebrows creased.
Takahashi: Save us. <pic attached>

Eijun opened the text to see a picture of the bullpen seated in a meeting room, Kazuya in front, clearly furious with the lot of them.

Me: Better you than me.

Takahashi: Bastard

Me: Hey, there has to be some silver lining to being on the DL.

Takahashi: We won, though? Why is he like this?

Me: But did you play well? Or was it the batting and defense that won?

Takahashi: Yeah, yeah. Take care, okay? When are you back?

Me: Dunno. Hopefully for the last bit of the season, early october.

Takahashi: He’s only going to get worse, isn’t he?

Me: Play better and he won’t

Takahashi: again I say bastard

Me: Have fun!

Eijun dropped his phone onto the couch beside himself, leaning back and putting his arm over his eyes. He was exhausted, he’d been to physical therapy and pushed himself as hard as he dared, wanting to get better as quickly as possible. Kazuya was away for a few days for a series of games, and although Eijun could have gone, he’d decided to stay home. He had his four-week checkup scheduled for the next day and was hopeful he could lose his sling and brace, giving him full use of his shoulder.

He hadn’t anticipated how much he was going to miss Kazuya.

They’d been apart before, but it had been a while. He’d forgotten how it felt to be alone.

“This is ridiculous,” he said to nobody in particular. “Quit pouting.”

Sitting up, he looked around the living room, trying to think of something to distract himself. He was considering finding something to watch on television when there was a knock on the door. Curious, herose and padded over, opening it to see Mochi standing on the doorstep.

“Hey, Moch, how’s it going?” He asked, stepping back to let him inside.

“I’m good, how are you? Actually, I know how you are. Kaz is away, right?”

Eijun closed the door behind him. “Yeah, on the road for a few games. Why?”

“It’s a good time to kidnap you, then,” Mochi said, not leaving the foyer.
“Wait, what? Why?”

“You’re clearly sitting around moping; I have something better for you to do. Get your shoes on, we’re leaving.”

Eijun shrugged and complied, knowing he’d find out what was going on eventually. Following him out to the car, he climbed into the passenger’s seat.

“Where are we going?”

“Dinner,” Mochi said, pulling out and heading towards the main road.

“Just us?”

“No, we’re meeting Nabe and Chris,” Mochi answered. “Ryou is working late, or he’d be there too.”

“And? Why are we doing this?”

“First of all, Kaz is gone and you’re lonely and moping,” he said with a smirk. “And second, Kaz is gone, so it’s a great time to plan his baby shower.”

Eijun whipped his head around to look at him. “Wait, what?”

“You didn’t think we were going to have a baby shower?”

“I didn’t know? I figured you might get Peanut a sleeper or something and call it a day,” Eijun said.

“Kyahahaha! When have you ever known Seido to pass up an excuse to party?”

“Well, when you put it like that...I just didn’t think you lot would be interested in a party for a baby.”

“She’s not just any baby; she’s our baby, too. She’s the captain of the team’s baby, and that means something to those who played with and under him,” Mochi said. “You know that, you know how important he is to us.”

“I do,” Eijun said, looking out the window and blinking back tears at the unusually straightforward words from his friend. “He may not understand his value, but I do.”

“And that’s why we’re planning his shower.”

Eijun nodded and leaned back, watching the houses pass by. “Better than moping around the house, I guess.”

“You got that right,” Mochi said. “We’re going to have good food, and plot this thing. It’s going to be the best damned baby shower in history.”

Eijun laughed. “I’m sure it is. But where are we going?”

“The diner. Chris has never had fried pickles,” Mochi said with a smirk. “I don't think Nabe has, either. We’re going to initiate them.”

“Oh, great. You’d better hope they like them, I’d never want them to gang up on us. They’d be able to wreak more havoc than either of us could handle.”

“You’re right about that,” Mochi shrugged fatalistically. “Ah, well. If we’re dead, I’m sure Kazuya will take good care of Akemi.”
Eijun followed Kuramochi into the diner, looking for their friends. Seeing Chris’s hair over the back of a booth, he tapped Kuramochi’s shoulder. “They’re over there.”

“Great,” he said, turning in that direction.

“Hey, guys!” Eijun said, sliding into the booth beside Nabe. “How’s everything?”

“We’re good, how’s the shoulder?” Chris asked, eyes on his sling.

“It’s good, going to the doctor tomorrow. It’s been four weeks, I’m hoping to get out of this contraption, gain the use of my shoulder again.” Eijun explained.

“That’s great, I hope it goes well.”

“Nabe, what’s up?” Kuramochi asked, taking his place beside Chris.

“Nothing much, how about you?”

“Moch, do they know?” Eijun asked.

“We told everyone at the last get-together,” Mochi said. “The one you guys missed.”

“Oh, good.”

“What’s been going on with you guys?” Eijun asked Chris, and the table caught up with each other’s lives while they ordered food and drinks and waited for them to arrive.

“Have you ever tried fried pickles, Chris?” Eijun asked after they were delivered and the server had left their table.

“I have,” he said. “I like them.”

“Oh, good. How about you, Nabe?”

“I’m not familiar with them,” Nabe admitted. “But I like pickles, so I think I might like them.”

“I hope so! Kazuya and I discovered them a few months ago when I ordered them as a joke, since he was pregnant. The joke’s on me, apparently, because I love the things.” Eijun grinned and took one, dipping it in the ranch dressing. “This ranch stuff is strange, but it works with them, give it a chance.”

“They got Ryou and me hooked, too,” Kuramochi said.

“We’ve been eating here a lot, Akemi loves cheeseburgers,” Eijun said. “Which is a little hard on Kazuya, since he doesn’t care much for them. But he’s managing.”

“Akemi?” Nabe asked. “Is that the baby’s name?”

“Yeah, it’s a girl,” Eijun said. “I figured everyone had heard, sorry. We haven’t been keeping it a secret from our friends, even though we have been trying to keep it private, you know?”

“I get that,” Nabe said with a nod. “People can get weird.”

“True enough. But we also don’t want any extra attention,” Eijun explained.
Kuramochi choked on his soda. “Wait, what? Your life together has been nothing but attention-seeking.”

“That’s not true, Mochi. We’ve just never felt the need to hide who we are.”

“Fair assessment. But if you don’t think Kazuya did everything in his power to get the country to look at you two and fall in love with both of you, you’re sadly underestimating your husband.”

“You’re...not wrong. At least at first. He thought it was the best way to get us accepted for who we are, to be seen as partners both on and off the field. But we’ve never dragged people into our personal lives, at least not knowingly.” He ate another pickle, trying to get his argument cohesive. “Most of the things you consider us showboating were instigated either by management or as an attempt to avoid management doing the same thing, only worse.”

“Yeah, your wedding thing was not your idea. You’re right, I see where you’re coming from,” Mochi said agreeably, and they all continued to eat.

“What are your ideas for a baby shower, Eijun?” Chris asked.

“Me? I didn’t even think we were having one, I haven’t even thought about it, to be honest,” Eijun said. “I don’t even know what happens at one.”

“I’ve been to a few, I have a lot of family,” Nabe offered. “There’s usually games and presents and food. Prizes for the winners of the games, which are all silly party games. Usually baby themed, like ‘guess the baby food’. And that’s about it, so we can use that idea? Adjust them to Seido, but games and food, with presents and baby stuff?”

“Before we do that, maybe we should start with the basics,” Chris said, setting down the cheeseburger he was eating. Eijun was momentarily taken aback by his familiarity with dealing with the food, but remembered that Chris spent many years with his dad in the US. “Where, when, all that. I assume this is going to be a surprise?”

“That was the plan,” Mochi said. “I don’t know if he wants one, but that’s not the point, you know? It’s not only about him, but it’s also about the future, about honoring a person important to all of us,” he stuck another fry in his mouth. “And if it wipes that perpetual smirk off his face, more power to us. I’m going to have my camera ready to document it.”

Eijun choked on his sip of water. “That’s one way to look at it,” he said after recovering.

“So, surprise, yes,” Chris said. “When? How are we going to pull it off?”

“At the next Seido gathering?” Nabe suggested.

“That would work, but I’m not sure it’d be a good idea to hijack the whole evening for one baby, you know?” Eijun said.

Chris chuckled lowly, still so amused by how little Eijun had changed since Seido. He still undervalued himself, sometimes as much as Kazuya, just in a different way. “Eijun, you really think anyone’s going to mind? Like Mochi said, this is the first ‘Seido’ baby, and we’re all invested in her.”

“Oh, okay, you win,” Eijun surrendered. “If you don’t want him to get suspicious, you should probably do it at a regular meeting, rather than something planned separately.”

“That’s what we’ll do then. He’s due in November, right?” Nabe asked.
“Yup, the eleventh, according to the latest estimate,” Eijun agreed.

“It’s August, so we should plan to do it in September, I think,” Chris said. “October is when you’re getting married, Mochi, so we will probably turn that into some kind of party for you two.”

“Unless you think we could pull it together in a week, September makes the most sense,” Nabe said.

“We could, but I think I’d rather wait,” Chris responded. “More time to plan.”

“Plus I’m not sure we’d been planning to go to the next gathering,” Eijun said. “If he’s still miserable, we may skip.”

“You didn’t come last month, either,” Nabe noted.

“True enough. If we don’t go, that’ll be the way I’ll be able to get him to go to the shower. But even so, if I want to attend, he’ll come with me.”

“Okay, September it is,” Mochi said. “Where?”

“The usual?” Eijun asked.

“You want to hold a baby shower in a bar?” Chris looked shocked.

Eijun shrugged. “It’s a Seido baby, right? Where else would you suggest?” He dipped a french fry in what was left of the ranch dressing. “Remember, you want to surprise Kaz.”

“You’re not wrong,” Mochi conceded. “But, we could always say we needed to change the venue because your idiot fans found us or it’s not available or something.”

“Why, though? Seriously? You think we’re going to stop coming after she’s born? She’s going to be there regularly, may as well start as we mean to go on.”

“Okay, then,” Nabe said. “The regular place it is, easy enough.”

“What about games?” Mochi said. “I can look into those if you’d like.”

“Sure, that would be great,” Nabe said. “Let me know what you chose.”

“Nothing too embarrassing, Mochi,” Chris said gently.

Mochi whined, “Come on, Chris! That’s the point.”

“That as may be, but I don’t want them to be too bad, can you do that?”

“I’ll try,” Mochi agreed reluctantly.

“Okay, that’s games. And we’ll probably all be out on the field at some time, so that’ll entertain us too,” Nabe made a few more notes. “Food? I bet the restaurant would cater it, I’ll check on that.”

“You know, we could do one thing,” Eijun said. “It would be more like a contest, I guess. Some kind of challenge, a hitting challenge or something baseball related. Hit so many balls or you have to...I don’t know. Something to do with Akemi.”

“What if we had to pay for every strike? Like, donate to her college fund or something?” Mochi said. “Or they have a choice—donate or take a forfeit. Pull one from a bucket. Hmmm...that could work and be amusing, let me think about it.”
“I understand why you want to do this,” Eijun started. “But I know that we would never want it to become some kind of gift grab. We honestly have plenty and don’t want anyone to go out of their comfort zone or to spend much, if anything. Please make sure that anything you do keeps that in mind. In fact, I wish you’d put a spending limit on gifts, we don’t want or need anything extravagant.”

“Maybe make that a contest, too?” Chris suggested. “Who can pick out the cutest outfit or something? That would put a limit on spending, without actually limiting things too much.”

“That could be fun,” Mochi nodded. “I can see the arguments already, yeah.”

“Or books. Books are always good,” Eijun said. Nabe made another note.

“Okay, I think we’ve got a good start,” Chris said. “Eijun, let me know if you want anyone invited, we can do that.”

“Maybe our parents,” Eijun said. “If they’re free.”

“Okay, cool, just let me know and I’ll take care of it.”

“Great, thanks!”

“Glad to do it.”

“So I was watching the game this afternoon…” Nabe started, and Eijun groaned.

“Kazuya is not happy,” he said, pulling out his phone.

Mochi frowned. “But you won?”

“Not the point, according to him,” Eijun explained, pulling up Takahashi’s text.

“The bullpen was off its game,” Nabe agreed.

Chris nodded. “I’d be mad, too.”

Mochi banged his head on the table. “I do not understand you bullpen types. A win is a win, dammit.”

“Hey, don’t lump me with them,” Eijun protested. “I’m with you on that. I don’t get it either.” He opened the photo he’d been sent. “Takahashi sent me this.” Passing it around, the occupants of the table found themselves reacting like Eijun had—both wincing in sympathy and nodding in agreement.

“When are they back?” Chris asked.

“Day after tomorrow. I didn’t want to put off the appointment, so I didn’t go.”

“They’re playing in Kyoto, right?”

“Yeah, games tomorrow and Saturday, then home that evening.”

Chris looked back at the picture. “He already looks exhausted, how long have they been gone?”

“Since Wednesday, they left early in the morning. Knowing him, he was up late last night going over plans and didn’t sleep much. He really does need a keeper,” Eijun said, smiling softly at the picture.
of Kazuya, eyes alight and belly showing.

“It’s been hot this week, too. That has to be worse for him.” Nabe noted.

“Oh, yeah. The heat’s killing him,” Eijun agreed. “He’s miserable out in it.”

“Probably making everyone else miserable, too,” Mochi snarked.

“You know it.” Eijun said. “He was worried that people wouldn’t take him seriously when they found out he was pregnant. I think he’s over that,” Eijun stared pensively at the photo. “I hope he’s over that.”

“It doesn’t matter, does it?” Chris said gently. “He’s going to do his job no matter what people think, he always has.”

“True enough, he’ll be fine. I’m just…”

“Worried about your pregnant spouse who’s away on a stressful business trip? Not a surprise to anyone, nor is it unusual.”

“You’re right. I’m just going to have to make sure he’s well taken care of when he does come home.” Eijun said, and Mochi cut in before he could continue.

“Cutting that off at the pass, let’s talk about literally anything other than that,” Mochi said, and with laughter, the conversation turned general.

Eijun walked through the door after watching Mochi drive off, and pulled out his phone. Dialing a number, he waited for the other party to pick up.

“Eijun? How are you?”

“Hi, Dad. I hope I didn’t wake you,” Eijun said.

“No, not at all. Is everything okay?”

“Yes, it’s fine. I just wanted to ask you about something.”

“Shoot.”

“Well, after the doctor’s appointment tomorrow morning…would you like to go on a road trip?”

Chapter End Notes

So, thoughts?

How are you all?
Hope there’s someone still into this!

*hugs*
“Hi Eijun, how did it go?” Kazuya asked, answering the phone on the first ring.

“Fine, it went well. I’m free!”

“Well, let me rephrase that. I’m mostly free. I still have to wear the sling some of the time and he wants me to be really careful about what I do with it for a while.” Eijun gave a self-conscious chuckle. “I think Shinji warned him about me.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Kazuya said. “He’s known you long enough to understand what you’re going to do.”

“Yeah, I know. But it’s off, and that’s the important part. He said it looked good,” Eijun told him, and Kazuya heard the hesitation in his voice.

“But what?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know. Spill, Ei. What else did he say?”

Eijun sighed, loudly. “A guy can’t have any secrets with you around, can he? Okay. He said that it looked a little more swollen than it should and that I need to not push it so hard, to not overdo it.”

“Eijun…”

“I know, I know. But you’re gone and Akemi’s gone and there’s nothing for me to do but sit and wait for you to come home. I’m lonely and I just...wanted to feel like I was accomplishing
“Eijun,” Kazuya sighed, not really surprised by any of this. “We talked about overdoing it, remember? Please take care of yourself, we need you to be healthy.”

“It was just a few times, and I really didn’t mean to. I just got into the groove, it won’t happen again.”

“Better not,” Kazuya threatened, before changing the subject. “Where are you? I was getting concerned when you didn’t call.”

“The doctor’s office was busy, it took a while. I’m in the car with Dad, we just left the office.”

“Oh! Tell him I said hi, okay?”

“I will. Listen, I know you need to go roust the troops, I’ll let you be. Call me after the game tonight?”

“Yes, of course. We have a 5:00 start time, so I’ll probably be free by 9-ish.”

“Perfect. I’ll talk to you then.”

“I love you, Eijun.”

“Love you too, Kaz. Take care.”

“You too,” he said and hung up the phone, rubbing at the ache in his back. It was only a little after 10:00 and he was already sore…it was going to be a long day.

Eijun closed his phone and tossed it into the console of the car. “Thanks for reminding me! I would have forgotten and he would have really been suspicious.”

“You think he was?” Norio asked, scooting into the fast lane and settling in for the four hours they had left in their drive.

“I don’t think so,” Eijun said slowly, remembering the conversation. “But I was just telling the guys last night that if they wanted to surprise him they’d have to be really careful, and the first thing I do it forget something like that.”

“Last night? Why are they going to surprise him?”

“Oh! I haven’t told you about that,” Eijun said. “Well, I was at home last night when Mochi came by…,” he started, telling Norio about the plans for the Seido shower.

“We hadn’t even considered that anyone would want to give her a shower, it’s a little disconcerting,” he concluded.

“Why so? They’re excited for the baby and want to celebrate her?”

“We don’t need anything, though? We have means to get everything we need, there’s no reason for it.”
Norio hummed, thinking. “I see. What about this, then? I know you were saying that people would have to pay a forfeit or something if they goofed up, what if the forfeit was a donation to a charity? Or what if you asked people to bring a box of diapers that you were going to donate to a children’s charity? Something like that?”

“That’s...that’s a great idea. Hang on, let me text Mochi about it.” He pulled out his phone and started typing, closing it after he’d sent it. “That way I won’t forget. I’d feel much better about it if we were doing something like that. I’m pretty sure Kaz feels the same. I mean, an outfit for Akemi? That’s fine, I think that’s a great idea. But any more than that, and it’s too much.”

He shifted in his seat, turning a little to face Norio. “Thank you for thinking of that. We’ve already told the fans that anything they send us will be donated, we just can’t use all the things they’d send otherwise. We also asked that donations be made in lieu of gifts, if they feel like they really need to do something.”

“I was wondering what you were going to do about that,” Norio said. “I think I remember you having an issue after your wedding?”

“Yeah, we did. We didn’t think anyone but us and our friends and family cared about us getting married. Boy were we wrong,” Eijun shook his head, chuckling. “It took forever to sort through all the stuff they gave us, and I’m not sure there isn’t a box or two lurking in a closet somewhere.”

“I’m glad you worked it out this time, then,” Norio said.

“Yeah, we talked about that early on. That’s the reason I announced it the way I did, too. We did not want to leave it up to management.”

“I don’t blame you, not after what happened with your wedding.”

“Exactly,” Eijun agreed. “Anyway, you’re invited to the shower if you want to come. We’d love to have you.”

“I just may, I haven’t had a chance to watch the Seido boys at one of these. I’ve seen some of the videos, but being there has to be much more fun.”

“You’re not wrong. They’re always amusing, especially when everyone except you is drunk.”

“I’m sure,” Norio said. “This time there will be two of you sober, though. Unless you’re drinking because Kazuya can’t.”

“No, I...I don’t like how I get when I’m drunk, I prefer to remain sober, thank you very much,” Eijun laughed. “I am also the designated driver, and I should be able to do that by then.”

“When is it?”

“September. I don’t know the exact date, but as soon as I do, I’ll let you know.”

“Great,” Norio said. “So, what’s your plan for today? Go to the game and wait for the cameras to find you?”

“I think I’ve done that enough, don’t you?” Eijun asked. “I was thinking about getting Takahashi to let me in, I know that Kaz likes to go off for a while before the game starts, to review his notes and stuff.”

“Should we go by the hotel first?”
“If we have time, get you settled. Then we can go grab the tickets and I can find Kaz,” Eijun said.
“On the way back, if you don’t mind, I thought we could take a bit of a detour, stop in Nagano for
the night and see my parents.”

“That’s fine with me, do you think they’ll mind that I’m there?”

“No, not at all. They have plenty of room. While we’re there, we can show you the house and show
my parents the plans that the architect sent over a few days ago.”

“You have plans already?”

“We do. Actually, we have three sets, all of them with different price ranges. They were sent over on
Tuesday, we didn’t have much chance to look them over before Kazuya had to leave.” Eijun said.

“Sounds like a plan, then,” Norio said. “Let me ask you something. Why are we going down now?
Why didn’t you wait?”

“I...Takahashi sent me a picture of him yesterday. He looks terrible, Dad. He hasn’t been sleeping
and he looks so stressed. I mean, the picture was taken when he was lecturing them, but still, he’s not
taking care of himself,” Eijun sighed, watching the scenery go by. “I know he’s not. He’s never done
well on the road, but this is worse than usual.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, hang on,” Eijun dug out his phone and found the picture he was sent. “Here, check this out.”
He handed the phone to Norio, who glanced at it before returning his attention to the road.

“You’re right, he looks exhausted,” Norio said. “I haven’t seen him looking that bad before.”

“He’s not been sleeping, and I bet he’s not resting in the afternoons, either. This is the start of his
third trimester, and it’s going to get harder from here on out.” Eijun looked at the photo and sighed,
running a finger over Kazuya’s face. “I just...need to make sure he’s okay.”

“I’m sure he is, but I’m glad you’re looking out for him,” Norio said. “I don’t know if I’ve told you
that enough times, but I’m really glad you two found each other. I know how rough things were for
him and I think you’re the main reason he’s turned out to be so healthy and happy. I appreciate that
more than you know.”

“I was—am—glad to do it,” Eijun said. “As you know, we never expected anything from you.”
Eijun shook his head, continuing quickly. “Not in a bad way, seriously. I didn’t mean any offense.”

Norio responded quickly, “None taken. There was no reason for you to expect anything from me
and I regret that. I will always regret that. I’m glad I finally got my head straight, and I’m overjoyed
that Kazuya—and you—were willing to give me a chance to fix things.”

“I just followed his lead, to be honest,” Eijun answered. “If he hadn’t wanted anything to do with
you, I’d have been there with him too. I’m glad he did decide to give you the chance, I think he
would have regretted it later if he hadn’t. But it was all up to him.”

“You could have easily convinced him otherwise,” Norio said. “I know you could have.”

Eijun nodded, tapping his fingers on his leg. “You’re not wrong. I could have. And I would have if
I’d thought that you were leading him on or somehow damaging him. I was serious when I said I
would protect my family.”
“I know you were, and you are. I’m going to do my best to not do anything to hurt any of you, although I might mess up.”

“And if you continue the way you’re going, even if you do mess up, we’re willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. Just be careful, okay? Things are still very delicate.”

“You’re right, and I am. I will. I do want this to work, I do.”

“I believe you. We both do.”

“Good. We’ll just keep going as we are, then.” Norio said, turning his full attention back to the road. Eijun leaned against the window and watched the scenery go by.

They pulled into the parking lot of the hotel the team was staying at with a couple of hours to spare.

“It’s only 2:30,” Eijun said. “We made good time. We should check in and then find something to eat.”

“This is where the team is staying?”

“Yeah,” Eijun answered.

“Do they have rooms free? That’s a lot of people,” Norio asked, dubious.

“They do. I already reserved you one last night, it’s paid for and everything,” Eijun said. “I think Kaz has his own room, I’ll probably stay with him.”

“How much did it cost? Let me pay you back,” Norio said as he popped open the trunk so they could grab their bags.

“No, no. This was my idea, I should pay for it,” Eijun argued. “You drove, that’s enough.”

“I can afford it, you don’t have to pay my way,” Norio responded. “I don’t want you to have to do that, you’re going to need as much as you can get if you’re rebuilding the house and stuff.”

Eijun chuckled. “We’re fine, honestly. We haven’t spent much money in the last ten years, we’ve only really bought the townhouse and the car. The vast majority of our earnings went into savings, we’ve got plenty. We can afford to pay for this trip. I want to pay for this trip.”

“Okay, I’ll tell you what. I’ll let you pay for the hotel, but I’m going to pay half of everything else. Deal?”

“That’s fine,” Eijun said, opening the door to the lobby for Norio. “I can live with that.”

“Good, because that’s what’s going to happen,” Norio snarked, waiting for him to catch up. Together, they walked up to the desk.

“Welcome to the Kyoto Ritz-Carlton, how may I help you?” the desk clerk asked as they approached.

“I’m here to check in, my name is Sawamura Eijun,” Eijun said. “I have a room for two nights?”

“Yes, sir,” she said, referring to her computer. “You have the Minami suite, with a connecting room, is that correct?”
“Yes, that’s right.”

“The connecting room is a garden suite, is that suitable? They’re smaller than the Minami.”

“That’s fine, I’m aware,” Eijun confirmed, holding out his ID and credit card. “I think payment has already been made, here’s the credit card.”

“Thank you, sir.” She took the cards and checked his ID. Returning it to him, she swiped his credit card. “There is a 50,000 yen deposit per night, which will be returned to you upon completion of your visit.”

“I understand,” he said, tucking the returned card and ID into his wallet.

“Who will be in the rooms, so we can replace the cards as needed?”

“Miyuki Norio will be in the Minami suite, and myself and Miyuki Kazuya in the other,” Eijun said, ignoring Norio’s sound of protest.

“Okay, thank you,” she said, generating key cards for them and tucking them into folders. “You’re on the third floor, rooms 318 and 320 and the connecting door is unlocked. Please let us know if you need anything, and I hope you enjoy your stay.”

“I’m sure we will. Thank you!” Eijun said, turning to Norio and handing him his keycard.

Stepping onto the elevator, Norio waited for the door to close before turning to Eijun.

“You got me a suite?” He asked with a frown. “Two suites? Why did you get the second one?”

“Yes, I got you a suite. You deserve it,” Eijun said. “You’ve been going all day, you deserve a comfortable place to rest. And yes, I got a second one. I’m not sure Kaz has his own room, and even if he does, the team is leaving tomorrow after the game and I was planning on spending another night here. We don’t need to be back in town until later in the week, so I wanted him to get some rest.”

The doors opened and they stepped out onto their floor. “I’m sorry, I didn’t think—do you need to be back soon? We can always take the train if you do, don’t worry about us.”

“I hadn’t planned on being gone past tomorrow, but I really don’t have to be anywhere until Wednesday. I have a meeting with my staff and I don’t want to miss that.”

“No, you shouldn’t,” Eijun said. “I don’t think we’d plan to stay in Nagano for more than a day or two, but if you need to leave, please go. You shouldn’t neglect your life for us.”

“It’s fine,” Norio said, stopping outside his door. “If I need to go, I will. Right now, I think it’s not a problem.” He opened the door and stepped inside, coming to a dead halt. “Eijun…”

“What?” Eijun stepped in behind him, closing the door and dumping his bag in the entryway.

“This is…this is,” Norio said, gesturing at the room. “I can’t stay here. It’s too much.”

“What? You don’t like the decor?”

“No, no! It’s beautiful. But it’s so big and…hotel rooms aren’t supposed to look like this.”

“Welcome to the Ritz-Carlton, Dad,” Eijun teased gently. “They do here.”

“But this isn’t normal, it’s huge! I’ve seen…hell, I’ve lived in apartments that are half this size.”
“So have we, remember that apartment we shared when we were in college? It was dinky,” Eijun laughed. “But neither of us need to live like that anymore, and we think you deserve it, so here we are. In fact, I might drag Kaz down here even if he does have his own room. Ours is sure to have a better bath, and a decent place to relax.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Norio said. “But I want to pay for part of this, it’s too much.”

“Nope, we made a deal. No take backs,” he declared.

“Are you seven?”

“Sometimes?”

Norio sighed. “Fine, but nothing more, you hear me?”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” Eijun said with a smirk.

“You’ve been around my son for too long.”

“Thank you,” Eijun said with a chuckle.

“Oh dear god,” Norio tried to glare but laughed. “Moving rapidly along.”

“Do you want to unpack? Relax for a while? I can take a cab over if you want to chill for a while, it was a long drive.”

“No, I’m fine. Let me drop this on my bed and we can go,” he said, walking into his bedroom. “This is worse than the living room!” he yelled, and Eijun heard him open and close the bathroom door.

“Now this is ridiculous,” Norio said when he re-entered the living room. “That bathroom is insane. The tub is huge!”

“Good!” Eijun walked across the room and opened the connecting door. “Let’s go check mine out.” He stepped in and looked around. “Not as big as yours, but we have a nice balcony out there.”

“You do. We should switch, this is plenty of room for me and there are two of you.”

“No way. You get the big one, that’s yours.” Eijun said. “This is enough room for us.”

“But—”

“Do you really think Kazuya would want the bigger one? As long as this has a decent tub and a nice bed, we’re good.” He stepped into the bedroom and dropped his bag, peeking into the bathroom. “Yup, the tub is great, as is the bed. You’re stuck with the big suite.”

“So be it,” Norio said. “I’ll see if I can get Kazuya on board to switch.”

“Good luck with that,” Eijun laughed. “Ready to eat?”

“Yeah, I thought I saw a diner downstairs.”

“Yup, it’s pretty good.” Eijun opened the door and bowed. “After you, oh aged one.”

Norio choked out a laugh and swatted him on the head. “Damned impertinent kid.”
Me: How is he?

Takahashi: Grumpy. He was in a good mood this morning, but it’s gotten worse as the day’s gone on. Hot as hell.

Takahashi: The bullpen isn’t sure if it should strangle him or knock him out and make him rest.

Me: So, ops normal?

Takahashi: Sorta, but he’s worse than usual. I’m a little worried about him.

Me: Me too. Where is he?

Takahashi: We’re about to have the pre-game meeting, so we’re all in the team room. He’ll be here in a minute.

Me: Will you meet me at the gate?

Takahashi: What? Where are you?

Me: Finishing up lunch at the hotel, we should be there in 45 or so.

Takahashi: Okay, yeah. I can do that.

Me: Don’t say anything to anyone.

Takahashi: Of course not, I know the drill.

Me: Thank you, I’ll text you when we’re there.

Takahashi: I’ll wait for your text.

“So?” Norio asked as Eijun put his phone away.

Eijun quirked one corner of his mouth. “He’s still bad, as expected. Takahashi’s going to meet me at the player gate and sign me in. Kaz is usually off in an office reviewing plans and plays up until the game, so I’ll just track him down.”

“Okay, good. Are you staying in the dugout during the game?”

“No, I can’t. Still on the DL. I’ve got two tickets at will call, we just have to pick them up,” Eijun said, digging into the curry he was eating. “We should pick them up first so you can go sit. I’ll join you as soon as I’m done. Unless you’d rather hang out here for a while and drive over closer to start time. I can take a taxi, that way you don’t have to sit waiting for the game to start.”

“No, it’s fine. I’ll probably hang out in one of the lounges until closer to time. I’ll take my tablet, get some work done and make arrangements to be out early next week.”

“If you’re sure, but I really don’t mind.”

“I know,” Norio said with a smirk. “You’ve made that clear.”

Eijun huffed out a laugh. “I’m being stupid, huh?”

“No, not at all. You just don’t need to be so accommodating, you’re not forcing me to do anything.”
“Okay. I’m just…”

“Not used to being able to ask me these things, yes. I know. And I appreciate you worrying about me, but seriously. Don’t. I wouldn’t volunteer unless I wanted to.”

“Alright,” Eijun said. “I’ll trust you to tell me if you don’t want to do something or change your mind about things.”

“Please do,” Norio said and they turned their attention to their food, chatting as they ate.

“Here you go, I’ll be up in a little while,” Eijun said, passing over Norio’s ticket. “You said you’re going to hang in one of the lounges? Do you want me to call you when I’m done?”

“No need, I’ll just meet you there whenever. Take your time, I’ll be fine,” Norio said. “Enjoy! Give him hell from me, would you?”

“I can do that,” Eijun agreed.

“Do you need to go far? I can drive you if you want,” Norio offered.

“No, thanks, it’s right over there,” Eijun pointed the opposite way of the ticket gate. “I’ll just wait for Takahashi.”

“Okay, I’ll see you inside, then,” Norio said. “Good luck!”

“Thanks!” Eijun said, turning towards the team entrance. “See you in a bit.” He waved and watched as Norio headed into the stadium. Heading over to the gate, he leaned against the wall and sent his text, watching the crowd as he waited for his friend to let him in.

“No sling?” Takahashi asked, and Eijun turned his head to smile at him.

“No as of this morning,” he said, standing upright and walking towards the now open gate. “That’s why I didn’t come along on this trip, I wanted to get it taken care of.”

“That’s great,” Takahashi said, stepping to one side so Eijun could enter. “Back to training soon?”

“Not for another few weeks at least.” Eijun walked a few steps down the hallway and stopped.

“Where is he?”

“In the small coaches’ room, like usual,” Takahashi fell into step beside him. “I hope you can help, I was serious about him needing sleep. Or something.”

“That’s the plan,” Eijun nodded in agreement.

“Good. I know he’s miserable, but he’s making everyone else miserable.”

“I’m sure he is.”

They stopped outside a door and Takahashi gestured at it. “There it is, he’s in there. He’s got to be out on the field in twenty minutes, so you don’t have a ton of time.”

“Thanks, Takahashi,” Eijun said with a grin. “I appreciate it.”
“I appreciate getting my sarcastic but reasonable coach back, so thank you.” Takahashi patted him on the shoulder before heading in the direction of the locker room.

Eijun chuckled and turned the doorknob slowly, trying to make as little noise as possible. Looking through the crack as he opened the door, he saw Kazuya was seated at the desk, his back to him. Actually, his back was to him, but his head was resting on his crossed arms—Kazuya was asleep. Feeling his heart melt at the sight of his exhausted husband, he softly closed the door behind himself and moved quietly across the room. Kazuya was laying on his scorebooks, forehead resting on his hands, and Eijun couldn’t stop himself from reaching out and running his fingers through his hair.

Kazuya sighed softly, pushing his head into Eijun’s hand a little before he stilled, clearly waking up. “We really need to talk about you staying where I leave you,” he said, turning his head sideways and opening one eye to look at Eijun.

“Yeah, sure. Let’s do that. Right after we talk about you taking good care of yourself,” Eijun said with a frown. “You look like shit, Kaz.”

“I admit that this isn’t my finest hour, but—wait! How did you know?” Kazuya sat up, spinning in his chair to face Eijun.

“Oh, Kaz,” Eijun said, moving over to the couch and sitting down, leg across the back. “Come here.” He motioned to the space in front of himself, heart hurting at the sight of his exhausted husband. “We can talk like this, okay?”

Kazuya stood and moved over to the couch, positioning himself between Eijun’s legs, leaning back into him. Eijun’s arms came up and wrapped around him gently, holding him close. He felt Kazuya’s shoulders shake a little and he pulled him tighter, knowing his husband would appreciate the support as much as he didn’t want to admit to needing the comfort Eijun was offering.

But Kazuya surprised him, turning himself so that his face was tucked into Eijun’s neck, where he could feel the dampness on his cheeks.

“Oh, Kaz,” he said again, running his hand through his hair, holding him tightly. “What’s the matter?”

Kazuya kept his head buried in Eijun’s neck, voice muffled. “I don’t know? I’m exhausted, my back hurts and it’s hot. I missed you and I’m just so tired…”

“I know, I’m sorry,” he said, soothing him the best he could. “New rule. No more road trips without me, okay?”

“Fine with me,” Kazuya agreed, relaxing for what felt like the first time in days.

“Tell me what’s been going on. Other than you not sleeping, that is,” Eijun said.

“Nothing unusual.” Kazuya shifted a little so his face wasn’t buried in Eijun’s neck, moving away enough to be able to see his expression. “It’s just harder than I expected. And hot.”

“I’m sorry I haven’t been here to help,” Eijun ran a finger softly over his cheek. “I knew you were going to have a hard time, I just didn’t think it would be this hard on you.”

“Me either.”

“You are almost in your third trimester, so things are getting harder for you.”
“I am?”

“You’re right,” Kazuya said, a soft smile forming on his face. Eijun was glad to see some of the stress lines disappear, even if he did still look exhausted.

“You do need to take better care of yourself, though,” Eijun chided him.

“I know, I do,” Kazuya agreed. “It can’t be good for Peanut.”

Eijun’s eyes narrowed. “What? No! First of all, babies are parasites, she’s going to get everything she needs no matter what damage she does to you. Second, I’ve told you. If we lost her, it would be hard and sad, but if I lost you? I don’t know what I’d do. I don’t think I’d recover.”

Kazuya closed his eyes, leaning into Eijun. “I love you, you know that? I’m...so many people are full of advice and telling me how to deal with the baby and I just feel like nothing more than a baby delivery container, you know? Like my existence is swallowed up by Akemi.”

“I get that,” Eijun said, continuing to rub his husband’s back. “And it will get worse when she’s born, we’ll be her parents, not us. But that’s okay, right? It’s the way things go.”

“You’re not wrong, and normally it’s not a problem, I think I’m just tired and sore.”

“Fair enough. If I’ve done anything to make you feel that way, I’m sorry.”

“You never have,” Kazuya said snuggling a little deeper into Eijun. “You’ve always been perfect.”

“Hardly,” Eijun laughed.

“Perfect for me, then.” Kazuya insisted. “You even...wait.” His eyes opened and he sat up a little, turning to glare at Eijun. “First of all, how did you get here? You didn’t drive, did you? You’re not wearing your sling.”

“I didn’t, I promise.”

“How’d you—” Kazuya eyed him closely. “Dad. You said you were in the car with Dad. He drove you here?”

“Yes, he did.”

“Where is he?”

“In the stands, waiting for the game to start.”

“How long do I get to keep you?”

“Not a stray, Kazuya.”

“You don’t stay where I put you, what else are you?”

Eijun chuckled. “You wouldn’t have stayed away if you were me, either.”

“Why did you come? How did you—oh!” he cut off as Eijun showed him the picture from his phone.
“You think I would have been able to ignore that?”

“I was mad, though.”

“Yes, but disregarding that, you look terrible. I couldn’t stay away,” Eijun cupped his cheek. “I hate to see you like this when I know I can help.”

“You already have,” Kazuya admitted. “But how long do I get to keep you?”

“I booked a couple of suites at the Ritz-Carlton. I didn’t know if you had your own room, but I wanted a suite for you anyway, it has a bigger bathtub and more room for you to relax.” Eijun pulled him back down, turning him so they were back in the original position. “That’s better. I booked us there for two nights, I figured we could stay back when the team leaves, you can use another night of rest.”

“And Dad’s okay with this?”

“He says he is,” Eijun affirmed. “If he needs to leave, we can just take a train home or something.”

“A couple of days in a suite with you sounds amazing.”

“I also thought, if you’re up to it, that we could take a longer route home and go to Nagano for a few days, show Mom the plans and figure out what we want to do. If Dad comes, we can show him the house as well. I think he wants to, he said he needs to be back by Wednesday for a meeting, but other than that, he’s free.”

“Time in Nagano sounds good, too,” Kazuya said. “Aren’t they swamped with harvesting, though?”

“Not quite yet,” Eijun said. “It’s going to be a few weeks before everything’s going, it’s a good time to visit.”

“Okay, then yes. And you can let Mom fuss over you and your shoulder.”

Eijun laughed. “Like she’s going to pay any attention to me when she’s got you in her sights.”

“Again, baby delivery method,” Kazuya said with a sigh.

“I don’t think so, but maybe a little,” Eijun admitted. “It’s her first grandbaby, though, so she can be forgiven, I think.”

“It’s her second,” Kazuya said, linking their hands together and laying them on his belly. “Haruko is her first.”

“You’re right,” Eijun said, feeling the gentle swipe of Akemi moving around. “But you know what I mean.”


Eijun sighed. “It’s like you said, you know? It’s better, I still wonder ‘what if?’ and am sad, but it’s not constant, sometimes I only think about her once a day.”

“Good, I’m glad. I just don’t want you to ever feel like I’m forgetting her in the excitement over Akemi. Haruko will always be in my heart, will always be our lost one.”

“I have never felt that way, Kaz. I know you care about her as much as I do, I really do.”
“That’s right, I do,” Kazuya said, moving their linked hands so that Eijun could feel Akemi kicking harder. “She’s really active right now, I think she’s glad you’re here.”

“I doubt that.”

“Aren’t you the one who said she’d start recognizing voices? She knows you’re her papa, and she’s glad to hear your voice. I’m sure she’s missed it. I know I have.”

“I don’t think that’s how it works, but it’s fun to think that way,” Eijun said wistfully. “I missed you, too. Both of you.”

“You are the exception to that rule, you know? I expect you to worry about her, to ask me about her and treat me like the baby incubator. I know you don’t see me that way, I do. And you’re her father, you have every right to ask about her. In fact, I want you to. I never want you to worry about me thinking you view me that way.”

“I know, I do. I’m worried about you right now, though. I know you wouldn’t do anything to endanger her, but you’re not nearly as careful with yourself.” Eijun turned his head and kissed his temple. “Now, I know you need to be out there soon. Is there anything I can do for you before you have to go?”

“I think you’ve done enough,” Kazuya said, pushing himself upright. “Just one thing. Can you kiss me?”

“Always,” Eijun agreed and complied, wrapping him in his arms as gently as he could, pouring his heart into the embrace and the kiss.

“Thank you,” Kazuya said after they broke apart. “Thank you for coming, thank you for caring. I love you more than I thought I ever could.”

“And I adore you.” Eijun bent over and dropped a quick kiss on Kazuya’s belly. “And you, too, Akemi.”

“I’d better go,” Kazuya said, smoothing his jersey. “Do I look okay?”

“You’re fine, you look better than you did when I came in, that’s for sure.”

“Thanks to you.” Kazuya lifted one corner of his mouth in a smirk. “You’d probably better get out of here before you get in trouble. You are on the DL, right?”

“Like I needed that reminder,” Eijun groused, inwardly glad to see his smirk return. He leaned in and kissed his husband again. “Be nice to the bullpen, they’ve been patient with you.”

“If they play correctly, I’ll be sweet as pie,” Kazuya said.

Eijun rolled his eyes. “Fair enough. Be careful out there, balls are flying.”

“Yeah, that’s kind of the point, right?”

“Go to work, you.”

“Love you too, Eijun. See you soon.”

“Counting on it,” Eijun said with a grin.

Opening the door, he waved Kazuya ahead of himself and headed out of the tunnels and into the
stands to find his father-in-law and watch the game.

When the crowd cheered during the seventh inning stretch and Hara nudged Kazuya, he just glanced at the jumbotron where Eijun was mugging for the camera and sighed before returning his attention to the players gathered around him.

They win, due in a large part to the efforts of the bullpen.

Kazuya dismissed them immediately after the game.

Nobody complained.

Chapter End Notes

You know the drill- comment and commentary welcome.

*hugs*
Thank you for reading!
Kyoto!

Chapter Summary

Eijun and Kazuya go to visit an old friend.
Did you know Norio had a mollusk allergy?
And Eijun comes out of the dark.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 37!
And we're over 200k words, so thank you all for reading this far!

*smooches in your general direction*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Week twenty-five

Eijun leaned against the wall across from the players' entrance, Norio beside him.

"You think he'll hold them?"

"Naw," Eijun said. "They played well, he's going to let them go." He waved at a little girl who walked past, staring at him. She smiled, then turned her attention back to the way they were walking. Eijun hadn't been swarmed like he normally would be at a home game, but there had been a good bit of recognition with a few fans asking after his shoulder. He answered them all with thanks and a general, 'it's up to my doctors', which was the truth of the matter, no matter how much he might have wished for something different.

"How is your shoulder, honestly?" Norio asked, looking at him closely. "You haven't taken any medicine today, and you're not using the sling."

Eijun chuckled. "It's...okay. A little sore, and I should take something for it, but it's not as bad as it has been. I have had that sling on for so long, I'm glad to get out of it."

"I understand that, be careful, okay? I'd hate for you to hurt yourself again, just when things seem to be fixed."

"You're right about that," Eijun said. "I'll take some medicine with dinner."

"I'll be watching you," Norio said, and before Eijun could comment, the door opened and the players streamed out.

As they passed some of them waved and others yelled out commentary—everything from 'stop slacking' to 'get back here soon!'—although most of them walked straight out to the buses without
stopping. The sole exception were the members of the bullpen.

"Hey, Sawamura," Hara said, "How's the shoulder? Good to see it out of the sling."

"It's better to have it out, believe me," Eijun responded. "It's coming along nicely, thanks!" He realized something and turned to Norio. "Norio, this is Hara, the pitcher who played the last few innings. He's a rookie, we haven't broken him yet. Hara, this is Miyuki Norio, Kazuya's father."

Norio held out his hand and Hara took it. "It's nice to meet you. I've been introduced to much of the bullpen already, but it's been a while since I've seen any of them. You played well out there today."

"Not that any of us had a choice, we're all in fear for our lives when it comes to your son. He's a bit of a dictator," Hara said, before blanching a little. "No offense meant, sir."

"None taken," Norio laughed. "I know my son, he's every bit the ruler of his fiefdom."

"Yes, he is," Hara agreed. "I'm glad you're here, Sawamura. He's...I'm worried about him."

"Yeah, I am too," Eijun said. "That's why I came, Takahashi texted me a picture last night."

"Last night was a little rough for us all, I'm not going to lie."
"He pushed his bag up higher on his shoulder. Well, I'm heading out—you have a good night, okay?"

"See you tomorrow, Hara," Eijun said, patting him on the arm. "You played well today."

Eijun and Norio stood in the same place and spoke to the rest of the bullpen as they came out, all of the conversations were variations of the same thing as Hara, they wanted to know when was he coming back and they were all worried about Kazuya.

As Eijun watched Ikeda walk away after having heard the same concerns from him, he grinned at Norio. "That's the biggest surprise, right there."

"What about him?"

"He gave Kaz such a hard time earlier this season. He thought he should be the ace, and that Kaz was playing favorites."

"Well that's bullshit," Norio said, and Eijun looked at him, surprised.

"What? It is. You're clearly the best pitcher on the team, and I'm not saying that because you're my kid. It's the truth, and even when I had my head up my ass, I knew it. And acknowledged it, too."

"Thank you for that," Eijun said. "The coach put the fear of God in him and he's really started trying to be better. Applying himself rather than complaining, trying to get better."

"That's good, I'm sure Kazuya was glad for it."

"We all were." Eijun paused as the door opened and Kazuya stepped out. They moved away from the wall and walked towards him as he changed his trajectory to meet them.

"There you are!" Norio said, hugging him close. "We were wondering."

"Hi, Dad," Kazuya returned the hug. "So now Eijun's dragging you into his shenanigans?"

"I think he's been a willing participant in all of them," Eijun said, deftly taking Kazuya's bag and slinging it over his good shoulder. "Come here, you." He reached out and pulled Kazuya close,
holding him as tightly as he could. "I'm so glad to see you."

"Me too," Kazuya said, returning the hug. "Give me back my bag."

"Nope, I've got it. It's not my bad shoulder, I'm fine," Eijun said. "Are you hungry?"

"Starved," Kazuya answered.

"The usual?"

"If it's okay with Dad."

Eijun turned to Norio. "There's a restaurant we found the first time we played here. It's teppanyaki and really good, it's become something of a tradition. Would you mind going there?"

"Not at all, I'd love to," Norio said.

"If you'd rather go somewhere else, or straight back to the hotel, we can catch a cab," Kazuya offered.

"No, no. Don't you start, too. Eijun's been trying to get me to 'do what I really want' this whole time, and I finally had to tell him to knock it off," Norio said. "If I don't want to do something, I'll tell you. I promise."

"Alright, then," Kazuya said with a smirk. "Off to dinner we go."

They headed out to the parking lot and Eijun slid Kazuya's bag into the back, following it with himself, while his husband sat in front beside his father. Following the directions he was given, Norio drove the short distance to the restaurant.

After they arrived, Eijun stepped out and opened Kazuya's door, earning him a glare and a reluctant smile. "I'm supposed to be doing this for you," Kazuya said with a pout.

"No more sling!" Eijun sing-songed, helping his husband to his feet. "I can even drive now."

"Let's not get hasty," Kazuya objected. "You still have things to do before you can use that shoulder."

"But the doctor said I was clear to drive."

"No, he didn't."

"Yes, he did."

"Really?"

"Yes! He did." Eijun puffed out a breath. "He said I could drive if I didn't do it for too long. I can do almost anything, as long as I'm cautious and don't overdo it."

"I'll ask him, then." Kazuya eyed him suspiciously.

"Please do," Eijun said, opening the door and waving his husband and chuckling father-in-law through.

"Good evening, welcome to Hoen, how many are in your—" the host stopped as someone approached, touching his arm.
"I'll seat them," the woman said.

"Very well," he replied with a bow, stepping back.

"Thank you," she told him before turning to Eijun and Kazuya. "Welcome back, Sawamura-san, Miyuki-san. We saw that you were in town and wondered if you were going to stop by."

"We had to, it wouldn't be a trip to Kyoto without seeing your beautiful face, Nakamura-san," Eijun said with a bow of his head. Nakamura-san bobbed her head, setting her elaborate headpiece moving, and smiled at them both.

"And I'm pleased we are able to tender our felicitations in person," she said, turning her expertly painted face to Kazuya. "Congratulations on the baby, you're sure to have a lovely time."

"Thank you, Nakamura-san," Kazuya said with a smile.

She turned her sharp gaze to Norio. "You've added a third to your party?" Looking him over, she continued. "Perhaps he's your father, Miyuki-san? The resemblance is strong."

"I am," Norio agreed with a formal bow. "Miyuki Norio and I'm pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Nakamura Miyako," she said, also bowing, the long sleeves of her kimono brushing the ground. "You have a wonderful son, Miyuki-san's father."

"Thank you," Norio responded. "I like to think I have two of them." He smiled at the pair waiting patiently beside him.

"You do," she agreed, approval evident in her voice. "They've been coming to see me for a very long time and I can attest to that. Such nice, polite boys."

"Yes, they are."

"And now they're even better, giving you a grandchild."

"Well, I think they're as good as they've ever been. Akemi is an extra blessing, that's all." Norio said, then looked at Kazuya with wide eyes. Kazuya grinned and nodded, and Norio sighed in relief.

"So it's a girl?" Nakamura asked. "That's a lovely name."

"It is," Kazuya replied. "It was my mother's name."

"That makes it even better," she said.

"But the gender and name aren't public knowledge," Eijun said. "Please don't spread it around."

"May I tell my husband?"

"Of course, we don't want you keeping secrets from him," Eijun said.

She grinned and winked. "Oh, I keep plenty of things from him. But this is something he'd like to know. He'll be just as excited when he sees you as I was."

"We're looking forward to eating his cooking," Kazuya said.

"And I'm making you stand here in the entryway," she fussed at herself. "I'm sorry, do you want a
"Private, please," Eijun said. "It's been a long day and we're not feeling social."

"Of course," she said. "Please, follow me." The hem of her sky-blue kimono swept the ground as she turned and made her way through the small restaurant, leading them to a back corner away from the noise of the communal area. "I'll send your server by, but can I get you started with something to drink?"

"I think we could all use some water for now, please—we may want something harder in a bit," Norio said. "It's really warm out today."

"It is, and you were out in it in your condition, Miyuki-san," she sympathized with Kazuya. "That's never easy. I'll have some ice water sent over immediately, and I'll come to check on you after a bit. My husband is finishing up at another table, but I'm sure he'll want to be your cook. Let me check with him and he'll be by shortly as well."

"Thank you, Nakamura-san, but you don't have to go to any trouble," Eijun said. "We trust that any of your chefs are well trained and up to your exacting standards."

"You're right, but you boys are important guests, you have been regulars since we opened," she said. "I know he's going to want to cook for you personally." She bowed and turned away, moving back towards the kitchen, only stopping to speak to one of the servers who nodded and headed to the bar.

"Since they opened?" Norio asked.

Eijun nodded. "Yeah, we found this place after a game the first time we were here, probably seven or eight years ago. They'd just opened and weren't as popular as they are now, they hadn't yet made a splash." He sat back and thanked the waiter who dropped off the water before continuing. "We were some of their first customers and we told everyone on the team to check them out. I think they think it really helped."

"I'm not sure it did, to be honest," Kazuya took up the thread as Eijun turned his attention to the drink options. "But they do, so that's all that matters, I guess."

"It was nice of you two," Norio commented. "I'm sure, even if you didn't make much of a difference, they'd remember you for it."

"We're really glad they made it through those first few years." Eijun closed the menu and glanced at the others. "Do you know what you want?"

"I'm going to have my usual," Kazuya said.


Norio smiled and put down his menu. "I'll have the same, then."

"That's easy enough," Eijun said as the server, who'd clearly been waiting for them to decide, approached.

"Have you figured out what you'd like to eat? Do you have any questions?"

"I think we're ready," Kazuya said. "We're all going to have the tasting menu."

"Very good," the server made a note on his pad. "Do you have any allergies or dislikes?"
"I'm pregnant, so I can't eat raw fish," Kazuya said. "Nor can I eat overly spicy things."

"I don't have any restrictions," Eijun said.

Norio chimed in, "I'm allergic to mollusks."

"That's clams, oysters, and scallops, right?"

"Yes, and mussels," Norio said.

"Very good, I'll let your chef know," he took some notes. "Can I get you something to drink other than water?"

Norio glanced at Eijun. "Do you want anything? Want to share a pitcher of beer?"

"I'd better not, I'm not supposed to with the pain meds."

"Okay, then—I'll have a beer. Ashai, if you have it." Norio said.

"And I'll take a coke, please," Eijun said.

Kazuya smiled at the server, "I'm good with water, but can I please have more?"

"Of course," he said. "I'll bring you a pitcher. And for you gentlemen, I'll have your drinks out momentarily. The chef will be by to discuss the options, based on your restrictions." Bowing briefly, he left to take care of their orders.

"I haven't seen you for a few weeks, Kazuya," Norio said. "Akemi's getting big."

"She is," Kazuya said. "I've run out of room in there."

"What does the doctor say?"

"She's fine," Kazuya said. "As am I. Or at least I will be after she's born."

Eijun looked at Kazuya, "Kaz, I don't think he knows—,"

"Knows what?" Norio asked.

"I had the hour-long blood glucose test done the last time I was in the office, and my levels were high." Kazuya reached under the table for Eijun's hand, clinging a second. "I found out that I have gestational diabetes."

"You have diabetes?" Norio said, eyes darkening.

"Gestational diabetes," Kazuya clarified. "It's temporary, just while I'm pregnant. It will go away after Akemi is born."

"So you'll be okay? It's not going to damage your kidneys or anything?" Norio asked, relief evident in his voice.

"No, it's not. I'll be fine, I have to be a little careful about what I eat, that's all."

Norio nodded, then looked concerned again, "What about Akemi? Will it cause her to have them?"

"Not at all. She may get them because of Mom, and we have to watch for that, but my having them while I'm pregnant doesn't increase the risk."
"Is it because your mom had them? Did that make you at risk?"

"No," Kazuya said emphatically. "That doesn't have anything to do with it. It happens fairly regularly—in about five percent of pregnancies.

"Oh, okay," Norio said. "It's just—after your mother, I worry about that."

"I get it, I freaked out a little too when they told us," Kazuya said. "But Kominato-sensei was quick to explain the realities."

Good, that's good," Norio said. "What can happen? What are the effects?"

"Not a lot, if I'm careful. I have to eat fewer carbs. Be active. And there aren't a lot of permanent effects, it mostly can cause Akemi to be larger than she should when she's born," Kazuya said.

"Okay, that's not too bad, just be careful, okay?"

"I will," Kazuya agreed.

Eijun spoke up. "We are. But it's playing hell with his cheeseburger and fried pickles cravings."

"It's not so bad," Kazuya said. "I've been subbing a salad instead of fries. And cutting down our visits to only a couple of times a week." He sighed, leaning his cheek on his hand. "I wish the cravings would go away, I don't think I'm going to miss cheeseburgers at all."

"Well, I hope it's given you a deeper appreciation, myself," Eijun said with a laugh.

"Doubt it," Kazuya answered as the server walked up to their table and handed them their drinks, closely followed by a man in a white chef's jacket.

"Good evening, it's a pleasure to see you again, Miyuki-san, Sawamura-san. And to meet you, sir. I am Nakamura Shiro," he bowed to Norio. "My wife tells me you're Miyuki-san's father, is that correct?"

"Yes, and it's great to meet you too, Nakamura-san," Norio said.

"Let explain to you what we do here, since this is your first time joining us," Nakamura said, adjusting the dials on the flat griddle before himself. "Basically, we offer you a selection from our menu, with a few seasonal specials thrown in. I'll be cooking, of course, and I'll keep in mind your requirements."

Turning his attention to Kazuya first, he started, "First of all, congratulations on your pregnancy, I'm sure she will bring joy to all of your lives and hearts. So, due to that, you're not eating raw seafood?"

"Correct," Kazuya said. "And I'm not able to eat things that are spicy, my stomach can't handle it."

"Got it," Nakamura turned to Eijun. "And you? Still just natto?"

"Yes, that's it for me."

"You're allergic to mollusks?" he asked Norio.

"Yes."

"Any other seafood allergies? Fish, crustaceans?"
"Nope, just the mollusks. It's not life-threatening, I just get severe stomach ache and nausea."

"That's enough to make you avoid them," Shiro said. "Okay, I've got this, I'll be back soon with your first courses." He bowed and walked away, leaving them to continue their discussion.

Eijun opened the passenger side door of the car, escorting Kazuya in. He opened the back door as well, for Norio, who climbed in under weak protest.

"I'm fine to drive, really I am," he said.

"Are you sure you want to take that risk with Kazuya in the car?" Eijun asked, meeting his eyes.

Norio sighed and donned his seatbelt. "I wouldn't take that risk with you in the car, Eijun."

Eijun smiled at him. "Good call," he said, closing the door.

Walking around the back of the car, he climbed into the driver's seat.

"I can drive," Kazuya said, eyeing Eijun.

Eijun chuckled. "You can barely keep your eyes open, Kaz. I'm fine, it's not far and I know the way."

"You're...not wrong," Kazuya admitted. "I just want to make sure you're okay."

"I am. In fact, I'm in better shape than either of you Miyukis, so sit back and relax."

"So demanding," Kazuya snarked, leaning back into the seat.

"Put on your seat belt," Eijun said, starting the car.

"Yes, boss."

"I know you showered after the game," Eijun said, closing the door to their suite and locking it. "But do you want a long soak? There's a great tub in there," he pointed in the direction of the bathroom.

Kazuya looked at him, seeing the worry that was still etched in his face, the concern in his eyes. "I'd love one, but only if you join me."

"That was always the plan," Eijun admitted, dropping Kazuya's bag beside his. "Do you need me to go get your stuff from your room?"

"We can if you want," Kazuya said, stepping closer and sliding his hands along Eijun's waist. "But I was thinking we might spend our time doing things that we don't need clothes for."

"I do like the way you think," Eijun said, wrapping his arms around Kazuya's shoulders. "Let me draw us a bath and we can discuss that in depth."

Kazuya leaned in as far as he could with Akemi in the way, "Sounds like a plan."
Chuckling softly, Eijun closed the distance, bending in to meet him. Lips met in a soft kiss, love and affection passed between them.

Standing upright, Eijun stepped back. "Let me get the bath started," he said, running a soft hand down Kazuya's cheek. "I want to get you as comfortable as I can."

"I love you," Kazuya said. "I seriously love you. I'm so glad you showed up. I didn't expect it, but I probably should have. You're always there when I need you." He took Eijun's hand and dropped a kiss in the middle of his palm. "Go run the bath, I can't wait to soak with you."

"And I love you, too," Eijun said, sliding his hand from Kazuya's and walking into the bathroom. He started the bath, adjusting the temperature to warm enough for Kazuya to be able to relax. Spying the hotel bag on the counter, he sent up silent thanks to the staff for granting him his request, even though it had been sent via text. Dumping the lavender crystals into the tub, he stirred it around a bit to dissolve them before letting the movement of the running water finish the dispersal, nodding in satisfaction as he watched the water turn purple and smelled the calming scent filling the air.

Heading back into the main room, he found Kazuya sitting on the couch, curled up in the corner with the television on as he watched the nightly sports recap.

"Bath will be ready in a bit," Eijun said, plopping down beside his husband.

Kazuya shot him a smile. "Thanks. Ei. Looks like we made the news," he gestured at the television.

Eijun glanced over to see a glimpse of himself in the stands, followed by a shot of Kazuya on the field talking to Takahashi and Hara. "Must be a slow night," he said.

"Not sure," Kazuya disagreed. "We don't usually watch this channel, we might want to consider switching," he said in disbelief as the words 'Baby Watch: Countdown' flashed on the screen.

Eijun choked out a laugh as he watched the announcer address the cameras. "We know that Miyuki-san was about three months pregnant when Sawamura-san announced the baby to the world, an act that's sent all the men scrambling for ways to announce their spouses' pregnancy that will measure up. Thank you for that, by the way," he deadpanned before continuing, "That was 11 weeks ago, so he is likely in his twenty-third week. The calculations based on the limited information we have put the due date on or around November 25th. We've asked our pregnancy expert to weigh in on that estimation. Suzuki-sensei, what is your estimation?"

The camera switched to an official looking man, wearing a white coat and sitting in what looked like an examination room. "By the pictures that have emerged from the game today, I think you are close. The baby bump is a little larger than I would expect at this time, but he is an athlete and male, so that may influence how he carries the baby."

"Thank you, sensei." The announcer turned back to the screen. "There you have it, everything looks normal in the Miyuki pregnancy, and we can expect an announcement on or around November 25th. Minami-chan, do you have any updates for us on the baby?" He turned to the lady seated at the desk near his, and she smiled widely.

"I do," she said, looking in the camera. "It's been a couple of weeks since Miyuki-san should have had his mid-pregnancy ultrasound at which they could have discovered the gender of the baby. We all know that there have been stories of people hearing them call the baby 'he' and 'she', as well as the pet name of 'Peanut'. Unfortunately, we don't have any confirmation about the gender from the couple themselves, but word on the street is that it may be a girl. There isn't any one specific thing that points to that, but there's speculation that Peanut, is indeed, a she. If so, we'll have to figure out
what the name is going to be. We don't have concrete confirmation, though, so don't go painting
your house pink yet," she continued. "There isn't anything else to report at this time, we are still
attempting to ascertain the reason they were seen at a clinic different from their regular one last week.
It has been suggested they were there for childcare classes, but that's not confirmed."

"Thank you, Minami-chan." The anchor said. "Here's hoping we get some confirmation soon; tune
in next week at this time for further updates. The word out of the Nagano clubhouse is...," he
continued on to the next story, and Eijun stood, still laughing.

"I need to get the bath, you ready?" he asked Kazuya, who was staring at the television with a frown
on his face.

He startled, and pushed the power button on the remote. "Yes, please," he said, standing and
following Eijun into the bathroom.

Eijun had turned off the tap by the time he'd gotten inside and closed the door, and had started to
strip.

"Let me get in first and help you," he said. "Your center of gravity has shifted and the tub is
slippery."

"Yeah, that's true," Kazuya said, turning away from him to strip off his shirt and pants. Eijun
narrowed his eyes at that behavior, his husband had never been shy about his body, and he was
afraid he was still worried about the stretch marks. Stripping off his underwear, Kazuya turned and
Eijun sucked in a breath, involuntarily.

"I know, they're bad," Kazuya said, covering the lower curve of his belly with his hands.

"What? No!" Eijun was quick to respond. "That's not what was going on there, at all. Just the
opposite, if you must know."

Kazuya looked at him, confused. "Then what was that about?"

"You know how it is when you know something's happening but something happens to make you
realize it all again? And it feels like you're experiencing it for the first time?" Eijun climbed into the
tub and held out his hand. "You're gorgeous and I'm so lucky to have you. And it just struck me
again that we're having a baby and you're allowing her time to grow and be healthy inside of you,
and I'm so happy about it." He blinked back the tears that threatened. "You're everything I've ever
wanted, I never want you to think anything else. Please let me help you into the tub."

Kazuya took the offered hand and let Eijun guide him into the water, sitting down in the tub with a
groan. "This feels so good, Ei. Please, sit down by me," he said, scooting over so there was plenty of
room next to himself.

Eijun lowered himself to sit, moving away to give Kazuya room. "I don't want to squish you," he
said.

Kazuya was having none of it, though. "Get over here, please," he said, tugging on Eijun's arm. "I
want you near me, you can't say something like what you just did and then put distance between us."

Eijun laughed and slid closer.

"Almost," Kazuya said, climbing into Eijun's lap and pushing his legs apart so he was sitting
between them. "There we go. Now I'm comfortable, this is perfect." He leaned back into Eijun with
a sigh.
Eijun’s hands came up around him, linking on the top of his stomach, right before the rise of the baby. "Are you sure? I want you to be able to relax."

"Oh, I'm relaxed," Kazuya said, laying his hands over Eijun's and knitting their fingers together. "Or at least as relaxed as I'm going to get in a bathtub with you, naked, after you said such amazing things to me." He fiddled with Eijun's fingers, working his brain around what he wanted to say. "I know you love me, and I know you don't find my stomach or the stretch marks ugly. I know this. And I know I wouldn't trade Akemi for a smooth stomach, and her health is more important than my vanity. It's hard, sometimes, to get out of my own head."

"I understand," Eijun said, kissing the top of Kazuya's head. "I do. I wish there was something I could do to help you with this, but all I can do is make sure I say it as much as I can, as often as I can. You're absolutely beautiful, and I couldn't imagine wanting you more than I do right now. I'm so in love with you, it's ridiculous. And the sight of you carrying our child melts me in every possible way. I'm just a pile of mush at your feet."

"And you wonder why I love you," Kazuya started, eyes misty. "When you say things like that, I don't have a choice, you know? You're all I ever wanted, the only person who I ever wanted to see me, who I ever wanted to let through the walls and into my heart." Kazuya smiled softly, moving their hands on the mound of Akemi. "And here's another thing. I can't imagine going through this—no, wanting to go through this—with anyone other than you. You're my rock, my love, and my life and I don't ever want anything else."

He turned his head to look at Eijun, and he leaned down and caught his mouth in a kiss, one full of love and want, desire and forever. Breaking the kiss, Kazuya ignored Eijun's protests and turned, climbing into his lap. He slid his arms around Eijun's neck, playing with the short hairs at the base. Eijun sighed and laid his forehead on Kazuya's.

"You are such a joy to me. I hope you never doubt how much I love you, how desirable I find you. I'm sure you've noticed that I'm pretty hard already, and you've just been sitting on my lap. You've been my wet dream since I was fifteen, Kaz. That's never going to change."

The corner of Kazuya's mouth lifted in amusement. "That's an interesting way to put it," he said. "But I get it, I'm right there with you. I've never wanted anyone but you. And if it was you who was pregnant, I'd probably make you walk around the house in your underwear, so I could have access to your belly and your body whenever I wanted."

Eijun laughed. "Noted. Now I'll have to think long and hard about whether or not I want to actually have a kid."

"No you won't," Kazuya said with an answering grin. "You'll have a baby—our baby—when you're ready."

"You're right, I will." Eijun agreed.

"And I'll run you baths and rub your back and tell you how gorgeous you are when you're huge and have stretch marks all over your skin," Kazuya said. "And you will be, it will be amazing."

"It's a deal, then," Eijun said. "But we should get this one born and a little grown before we start on the second one."

"We can practice, though," Kazuya suggested.

"Practice does make permanent, as Kataoka used to say," Eijun agreed.
"You're not bringing the coach into this, are you? That's just wrong," Kazuya laughed.

Eijun grinned. "I can see why you would think that," he said, kissing Kazuya on the nose and laughing when his eyes crossed.

"Okay, enough of that," Kazuya said, leaning in and kissing him deeply, love and heat building between them, the dance familiar as their names, but always new, always different.

Eijun moaned into Kazuya's mouth, moving his hands down his back to flirt with the dips at the base of his back, feeling each knob of his spine. Kazuya arched into his hands, breaking the kiss.

"You can do that for the next three months, please," he said, laying his head on Eijun's shoulder.
"My back hurts so much sometimes."

"I'm sorry," Eijun said, continuing to rub his back. "I'll do it whenever you'd like, I promise."

"That'd be amazing," Kazuya said. "I don't like bothering you, but—" he cut off with a squeak when Eijun poked his side.

"You'd better not mind bothering me," Eijun said. "I want to be bothered. Bother me whenever you want something."

"Well, with your shoulder, you couldn't do things like this."

"Yes, I could. I would have figured it out. It's important, Miyuki Kazuya. Your comfort is important. You're not weak or being overly demanding, or any of those things that you've got running around in that massive brain of yours."

"You know me so well," Kazuya chuckled lowly. "Okay, I'll try."

"There is no try, there is only do," Eijun quoted.

"You are such a nerd, I swear."

"But I'm your nerd."

"Damn skippy," Kazuya said with a happy sigh.

"And I'm going to be the most demanding diva ever when I'm pregnant, so you need to get to work to catch up," Eijun asserted.

"I'm looking forward to it," Kazuya sat up, meeting his eyes. Running a gentle finger down Eijun's cheek, he smiled at him. "You're going to be so beautiful when you're pregnant."

"As you are now," Eijun said with a soft smile.

"Take me to bed?" Kazuya asked. "I've soaked enough. I want you," he said lowly.

"You've already got me," Eijun agreed. "Any way you want me," he said, eyes darkening.

"I like this position," Kazuya said, moving on his lap. "Akemi's getting so big, but this should be fine."

"We may have to keep practicing, trying out new positions, to find what's the most comfortable for you. I'll be happy to be your guinea pig," Eijun said, helping Kazuya to stand so he could get out of the tub.
"Thank you for your sacrifice," Kazuya snarked, taking his hand and stepping to the bathroom floor. "It won't be in vain."

"I'm glad to know that, it will make the torment much more bearable," he said, grabbing a towel and gently drying his husband off. "Is there anything I can do for you right now?"

"Other than perform your marital duties?" Kazuya snarked. "Not a damned thing."

"Well, then," he said, eyes alight. "What are you waiting for? Get your naked ass into my bed."

"So romantic." Kazuya walked out of the bathroom, flipping off the light. "Are you coming?"

"Not yet, but I do have hopes," Eijun laughed, following him out of the dark and into the light of their bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

We're *almost* in week 26, so there's that.
A third of the way through this pregnancy, so hopefully, we may not have a lot to go.
But then again...
this was supposed to be a f*cking drabble.
Seriously.
"Come in," Norio said to the knock on the connecting door. Kazuya poked his head around and peeked in.

"Good morning, Dad. We have coffee and breakfast, if you want to join us. It's a gorgeous day to sit outside; it's not too hot yet."

Norio smiled, setting his book aside. "I'd love to." He stood and followed Kazuya through their sitting room and out the sliding glass doors onto the balcony—almost a rooftop garden—connected to their suite.

"This is nice," he said, joining Eijun at the table. "Good morning Eijun, Kazuya. Thank you for inviting me over."

"You're always welcome," Eijun said. "We were hoping you'd come." He passed over a cup of coffee, putting the cream and sugar within reach. "We ordered breakfast and there's plenty, but if you want something different, feel free to order it too."

"What you've got here is fine," he said. "Although I've never considered bacon to be a part of the traditional Japanese breakfast."

Eijun snorted a laugh. "It isn't. But Kazuya can't deal with fish in the morning, and I love bacon whenever it's offered. So we had them sub it in. And had them scramble some eggs to replace the natto, because that stuff is just nasty."

"I don't have an argument for any of that," Norio said, and Kazuya handed him a plate before they
started to pass the dishes around, each of them serving themselves. They ate in silence for a bit before the conversation resumed.

"You look much better today, Kazuya," Norio said. "I'm assuming Eijun took good care of you last night?"

"Yes, he did," he said, grinning at Eijun. "That bathtub is amazing."

"I'm glad, I was worried about you."

"We all were," Eijun chimed in. "As is the bullpen. They all stopped to say something to me about it after the game yesterday. Even Ikeda stopped by, I was really surprised, especially after what happened earlier this season."

"He did?"

"Yeah, he did," Norio said, agreeing with Eijun's assertion.

"Wow," Kazuya said. "I must have really been bad off."

"You were. And it could happen again very easily," Eijun said. "You have to take care of yourself."

"I know, I will," Kazuya said.

"Yes, you will," Eijun agreed.

Kazuya shot him a glare. "That reminds me. Why were you so amused by the show last night? They're stalking us to get information."

"Wait, what?" Eijun asked. "Oh! The sports program?"

"Yeah. That was really creepy, they know so much about us."

"Not much that isn't public knowledge, though," Eijun said. "They don't know Akemi's a girl, that's just supposition."

"Actually, I think they know," Norio said. "At least, the message board seems to be in agreement about it."

"You know about the message board?" Kazuya said. "Do you read it too?"

"I do, sometimes," Norio said. "I like keeping up with you, any way I can."

"Kazuya read it once, but he didn't listen to me when I told him to stay out of the 'nsfw fanwank' section," Eijun explained. "I think it scarred him, he hasn't looked at it since."

"I don't blame him," Norio said. "I looked in there once and quickly realized that I didn't belong in that section."

"Pretty much my assessment as well," Eijun said. "I didn't know if it would be more embarrassing for me to be there or for them if they knew I'd seen it."

"Exactly," Norio said. "Anyway, it seems like they've figured out she's a girl."

"How?"
"I think they've been paying attention to what you've been saying. Nobody's reported a 'he' in weeks."

"I meant to check the site last week, the person who checked us in for the childcare class seemed a little too enthusiastic," Eijun said. "I forgot, though, and I never got around to it."

"I haven't seen anything about it, but I admit to not reading regularly," Norio said.

"I do when I think about it," Eijun admitted. "I also have messaged the board admin, pretending to be our non-existent PR person."

"You have?" Norio asked.

"Yeah, I do it whenever I find out they're up to something. I've already asked them not to send us anything, that all gifts from people we don't know would be donated to a shelter or orphanage, no matter what it is. And that if they really want to do something, they should make a donation in Peanut's name to a children's charity."

"That's a good idea, what made you think of it?"

"After our wedding, the members of the board were really upset about what the team did to us, so they all sent us presents, more stuff than we could ever use, let alone want. It took us months to sort it all out. By the time we realized what was going on, it was too late to stop them and so we did what we felt like we had to. This time, we figured we'd head them off at the pass."

"They're a headstrong bunch, I'm surprised you were able to get them to back off," Norio said.

"I'm not sure that they will but honestly, I don't care. We said we were going to donate the things, and we will," Eijun said. "But the board admin is always good about conveying our wishes to the rest of the community."

"How closely are they watching to hear what we're saying, though?" Kazuya asked.

"They're not bugging the phone or anything, Kaz," Eijun laughed. "They just are really interested in Akemi, and in us. I'm honestly a little surprised they don't know her name yet. They have spies everywhere."

"That's creepy," Kazuya stated.

"Well, maybe a little? But they stay in their space; they don't intrude into ours, generally. I mean they're talking about sending gifts and such, but they're not intrusive on the main. I don't think they even know we visit the site. If they did, they'd probably be super uncomfortable about it."

"It's...you're right," Norio said. "They're happy playing in their own box, with the occasional updates from your 'publicist.'" He poured himself a cup of coffee. "That brings up another question, though. Do you want to announce the gender and name at some point?"

"We hadn't really even considered it," Kazuya said. "What do you think, Ei?"

"I'm not sure, but it was great to announce the pregnancy on our terms, not waiting for the club to do something we didn't want," Eijun said. "I wouldn't put it past them to try and somehow get at this, too. Do some kind of announcement; make a big deal out of it. I'm kinda surprised they haven't tried to do some 'guess the gender' promotion already."

"You're not wrong about that," Kazuya said. "I really don't know why they haven't yet."
"So what do you think? Where and how would we announce it?" Eijun asked. "I mean, if you want to leave it up to me again, that's fine..."

"No, no. Once was enough from you," Kazuya snarked. "I'm going to have so much fun with it when you're the one who's pregnant."

"But we're not going to be playing then," Eijun said with a grin. "You're not going to have nearly the traction I had."

"Maybe not," Kazuya grinned and Eijun felt his future self shiver. "But I wouldn't put any money on that."

"As amusing as this is going to be to watch," Norio interjected, "we should probably make a decision about the reveal."

Eijun nodded. "You're right. I don't think we should do a big flashy thing like we did with the other announcement. Maybe we should just drop it somewhere and let it spread."

"I know what we should do," Kazuya said. "At the next Seido meetup. We should do it there. We can make sure that Nabe records it and adds it to the channel, too. And see how long it takes to get out."

"That would be fun," Eijun said. "That way we can tell the team, too."

"Right."

"That's a good plan, Kazuya," Norio said. "Get it out there without any fuss, watch the world burn. My idea of a good time."

Eijun laughed, grinning at them both. "That's a very Miyuki thing to say. I don't know if I'm terrified or excited to have a third Miyuki in my life."

"She's going to be a Sawamura. I'm not sure I can deal with two Sawamuras," Kazuya noted. "I have a hard enough time telling you no. I can't imagine trying to tell a female you no. She's going to look at me with those gold eyes and say 'Please, Daddy!' and I'm not going to be able to resist. Warning you now, you're going to have to be the mean dad."

"Thanks, Kaz," Eijun said.

"Again, this is going to be so much fun to watch," Norio said with a sharp grin.

Eijun sighed. "I'm glad someone is entertained." He banged his head on the table a couple of times.

"Don't hurt yourself, idiot," Kazuya stuck his hand under his head. "You might need that one day."

Norio chuckled at their antics before sobering a bit. "What time is the game today?"

"One," Kazuya said. "I need to be there early. I'll just take the team bus at eleven. I should be done by five or so. I'm probably going to hang out with the team until they leave, but after that, I'm free until Wednesday."

"Good," Eijun said. "Want to go out for dinner, or eat in?"

"I think I'd rather just eat at the restaurant downstairs if that's okay with you," Kazuya suggested.

"Fine with me. Dad, you want to join?" Eijun asked his father-in-law.
Norio nodded. "Sure, when?"

"I think we should eat right after we get back," Eijun said. "We're not going to want to hang out too much; I imagine we'll call it an early night."

"That's fine with me," Norio said. "I've got some work to do since I'm not going back in on Monday."

"If you need to—" Kazuya began.

"I know, I know. If I need to go home sooner, you guys can sort things out," Norio said. "I've got it, so stop, please. I'll let you know."

"Yes, sir," Kazuya said, letting it go.

Eijun plopped down into the seat beside Norio. "How's it going?"

"Nothing really, yet," Norio said, taking the drink and tray of yakitori. "Thanks, Eijun."

"No problem," he said, slipping into his seat and opening his bottle of water. It was the first inning and Eijun had gotten stuck in line waiting to get snacks. "It's early yet."

"Yeah," Norio said. "What do you think about the lineup today?"

"It's good. Starting with Ikeda is not a bad idea, he's a solid starter. Following up with Hara is a good choice, he's better at closing. He's also more aggressive than Ikeda, so he's good for times we get in the weeds. He's come a long way in a short time, I'm really proud of him. We didn't expect him to get to the point he's at until next year. I'm glad, though, we need him."

"I'm happy you've got someone who can take up the slack," Norio said. "They can't replace you, you're better than either of them, but they are some approximation."

"True enough."

"What are your plans for after you're healed? Are you retiring?"

"I don't know, honestly. I'm thinking of staying around for the next season; maybe ease the pitchers into their new positions. I will still be able to play some, I just can't practice the way I need to in order to stay at the top of my game. I can still play; I just have to be careful."

"That's not a bad idea," Norio said. "It's good to go out on your own volition."

"I agree."

"So tell me more about Ikeda?" Norio asked, turning his attention back to the game.

"Done?" Eijun asked as Kazuya walked up to him and rested his forehead on his shoulder. He'd come out of the players' door and headed straight to the pair waiting for him.

"Yeah, I'm done."
"Back to the hotel?"

"Yes, please," Kazuya said. "How's it going, Dad?"

"Fine, thanks. Good job out there today," Norio said. "So, have you cemented your playoff position?"

"We have, unless we really blow later games. We just don't know what our position is going to be," Kazuya said. "We'll see."

"Well, congrats! Don't you two want to go celebrate with the team?"

"Naw," Eijun said. "We'll do that when we know what we're playing for in the postseason. That's not for a few weeks, at least."

"Fair enough," Norio said. "Shall we?"

"You know, I was thinking," Kazuya said, walking up behind Eijun, who was standing at the railing of their balcony watching the sunset. He slid his arms around his husband's waist and rested his chin on his shoulder.

"You were?" Eijun said, leaning back into the hug, lacing their fingers together. "That never happens."

"Hush, you," Kazuya bit his shoulder lightly, not wanting to let go of his hands to poke him in the side.

"You were thinking?" Eijun prompted.

"I was." Kazuya smiled into his shoulder. "I'm thinking it's a good time for you to guinea pig."

Eijun squeezed his hands. "I'm always willing to experiment with you, what did you have in mind?"

"I was thinking...well. That we could maybe do some improvisation?"

"You want to top, huh?" Eijun turned to him, a smile growing on his face.

Kazuya sighed. "I do. I really do. But Akemi's big and it's awkward and I don't know—"

Eijun kissed him softly in mid-rant. "It's fine, we'll figure it out. Experimentation is the name of this game."

"You sure? I don't want to make things too crazy; I don't know what I can do."

"It's fine, Kaz," Eijun repeated, running a hand up his side. "We'll figure it out. If you need to move differently or a position doesn't work, that's part of the fun, right?"

"Yeah," Kazuya said reluctantly. "I guess."

"Before we start, though...would you like a backrub? I haven't had a chance to do that for you, I think it would help with your pain."

"I...yes, please."
“Okay, let's get you set in a chair. You're still warm from your bath, so it might be easier.” Eijun led Kazuya back into the sitting room, taking one of the chairs from the table and having him straddle it. “Take off the dress, please, and stay there; I'll be right back,” he said, trotting off to the bedroom for a pillow, a towel, and the bottle of massage oil he'd thrown into his bag the morning before. He tucked the pillow beneath Kazuya's belly and draped the towel over the back of the chair.

"Is that comfortable? I think the couch has throw pillows and they're thinner," Eijun asked.

"It's fine, perfect," he snuggled into it, leaning into his arms that were resting on the back of the chair. "Why the towel?"

"For your arms, sometimes the backs of chairs are hard."

"You think of everything," Kazuya smiled up at him. "Thank you for that."

"No, it's my privilege and my pleasure to take care of you," Eijun said, moving to stand behind him. "Now, I'm going to start slowly, but if I do anything that you don't like or that makes you uncomfortable, let me know. Same if something feels really good."

"I can do that," Kazuya said, resting his forehead on his hands.

Eijun started slowly, warming the oil on his hands before he began rubbing down Kazuya's spine with long strokes, smiling slightly as he heard Kazuya let out a soft moan.

"You can stop doing that in about never," Kazuya joked.

"Okay, cool. You're having issues with your lower back, right?"

"Yes, that's the worst."

"Got it," Eijun said, moving his attention down to the lower part of his back, gradually increasing the pressure, massaging deeper into his muscles. "These are really stiff. I can see why, though. Your center of gravity is shifting and you've got the extra weight in front."

"Gee, really?" Kazuya snarked.

"Hush, you, or I'll stop."

"Hushing, as ordered."

"Good. One thing, though. You might want to think about a bellyband. You can't wear it all the time, but it would be good to have during games or practices where you're on your feet a lot. It supports your belly and removes some of the pressure from your back." Eijun suggested.

"You think so?"

"Yeah, maybe? We can ask Haruichi on Friday."

"Okay, yeah. Let's do that," Kazuya said. "I'm alright usually, but the standing and walking are hard after a while. And she's going to get a lot bigger before she's born."

"You're right about that," Eijun said, moving his ministrations up Kazuya's back. "How's this?"

"It's amazing. I might make you do this every day if you're not careful."

"I don't mind, if it's helping you," Eijun dug into the muscles under his shoulders. "I'll do it whenever
you'd like."

Kazuya sighed. "You're too good to be true, you know that?"

"I'm not the one nurturing our baby, Kaz. I think that's pretty damned special."

"Well, you're the one making it bearable," Kazuya said.

"I'm just glad to help. I know it's not easy."

"It's surprisingly easy, you make it that way."

Eijun stopped and rested his head on the back of Kazuya's. "You shouldn't say that when I can't kiss you silly. I love you."

"Does that mean this massage comes with a happy ending?"

Eijun let out a startled laugh before standing up and resuming rubbing his spine. "That's always a possibility, if you play your cards right."

"Deal me in, then."

Week twenty-six

Eijun slid into the back seat of Norio's car, closing the door and sliding on the seatbelt.

"I don't mind sitting back there," Kazuya said from the front passenger seat.

"I'm fine, you stay where you are. You need the room," Eijun said, getting comfortable for the drive to Nagano.

"Everyone set?" Norio asked, meeting Eijun's gaze in the rearview mirror.

"I'm good," Eijun said, echoed by Kazuya.

Norio started the car and they were off.

Eijun sat back and listened to the two Miyuki men chat as they drove, starting a little stilted but growing warmer as the trip went on. He got a little misty-eyed realizing that Kazuya was getting his father back—really, getting a piece of himself back, one that he thought was lost forever. Enjoying their conversation and banter, he didn't say much of anything, letting it wash over him as the miles flew by.

They were an hour into the drive when Kazuya needed to stop, so they pulled into a gas station and filled up the tank as well as procured some drinks and snacks. As Eijun was pumping the gas, he looked into the store and saw Kazuya and Norio debating what to get, similar heads leaning in, the same expression on their faces, the grown men bonding like they hadn't been able to do before now. As he put the nozzle back in the machine and turned the gas cap, he paused, coming to a realization.

This was the first time they'd actually done anything like this. Eijun had spent more time with Norio
over the last four months than Kazuya had—they'd gone to games and even on a road trip—but he and Kazuya had only spent a little bit of time together, and not without Eijun. Coming to a decision, Eijun hopped back into the back seat and waited for the others to arrive.

Kazuya opened the back door and peeked in. "You want to switch? You have the longer legs; you can't be comfortable back here."

"No, no," Eijun said. "I'm fine. You stay up front with Dad."

Kazuya smiled slowly, eyes knowing. "I love you, you know that?"

"You'd better," Eijun said. "Or we need to talk."

Handing Eijun a bottle of water and a bag of chips, he bent in for a kiss. "I don't think we have anything to talk about."

"Best news I've heard all day," Eijun said, cupping Kazuya's cheek.

"Let me know if you get too uncomfortable, I'll switch," Kazuya said, dropping a kiss in Eijun's hand.

"I will," Eijun agreed, fastening his seatbelt.

"Also, take your medicine, so you don't get sore from sitting for too long."

"Yes, mom."

"You got that right," Kazuya snarked, shutting his door and climbing into the front seat.

Eijun grinned and fished his bottle of pills out of the bag, taking one. "There, drugs consumed. Happy?"

"Ecstatic," Kazuya deadpanned.

Norio exited the station, heading to the car and Kazuya watched him, eyes gentle. "Hey, Ei?" he said softly.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks."

Three hours later, they pulled into the driveway of Eijun's parent's house. As soon as the car came to a standstill, Chika came out onto the porch to greet them, followed by Eidan. They all piled out of the car and into their waiting arms.

"Eijun, you look good," Eidan said. "How's the shoulder?"

"On its way," he said. "It's getting there; I'm out of the brace and can use it some now."

"That's good!"

"Kazuya, honey, how are you feeling?" Chika asked after hugging him and giving him a kiss on the
"I'm fat and hot and tired," Kazuya laughed. "But other than that, we're good."

"Sounds about right," Chika said, looking him over. "You're getting so big!"

"Well, technically, it's Akemi, but yes, she's growing well."

"I'm sure you're tired after the trip, go on in and get settled, and I'll be there in a bit. There's cold ginger tea in the fridge if you want it."

"First I need the bathroom," Kazuya admitted.

"Of course you do, how could I forget?" she laughed. "Go on in, we'll be there in a sec."

Kazuya kissed her cheek and hurried through the screen door.

Chika turned to Norio, who held out his hand. "Thank you for—"

She cut him off and pulled him into a hug. "Come here, Miyuki Norio."

Norio froze for a second before returning the hug.

"Thank you for bringing my boys home," she said.

"Our boys," he corrected.

"You're right," she said. "My apologies. Our boys."

"I was glad to do it. Thank you for letting me stay."

"We're happy to have you," she said. "I hope you enjoy your time in the country and that you come to visit more often."

"Well, if the boys get their way, I may be out here for more than a visit or two," Norio laughed.

Chika grinned at him. "And that would be even better," she said, passing him off to Eidan as she tugged her son into a hug.

"There you are, son of mine," she said, tightening her arms around him.

Eijun sank into the comfort of her familiar embrace, eyes closed against the tears that threatened. "Hi, Mom," he said, resting his head on top of hers.

"How are you?" she asked, pulling back to look at his face.

Eijun blinked to clear the tears and put on his best mask. "I'm alright."

"Sawamura Eijun, don't you dare lie to me." Chika scolded him and then relented. "I'm sorry, baby. We'll talk later, okay?"

"I'd like that," Eijun said, kissing her cheek.

They turned to find Eidan and Norio deep in conversation, talking about the land and the farm.

"Hang on a sec, let me help Eijun bring in the bags," Norio said. They walked back to the car and pulled their bags out of the trunk, hauling them into the house.
"You're in the second room on the right, Norio," Chika said, pointing down the hallway.

"Thanks!" he said, hauling his bag to the room, followed by Eijun who stopped one door before him. "You're in there?"

"Yup, it's been my room for as long as I remember," Eijun said, stepping in and dumping the bags on the floor by the door. He saw a few boxes in the corner and chuckled, knowing exactly what was in them—things for Akemi. Trotting down the hallway through the living room, he headed into the kitchen in the back of the house, where he found Kazuya drinking a glass of iced tea.

"I wonder what could possibly be in the boxes?" He snarked, pouring himself a drink.

"Sawamura Eijun," Chika started, only to be interrupted by the entrance of Norio and Eidan.

"I'm going to give him the tour," Eidan said. "It's the first time he's been out here, and he's curious."

"Don't act too enthusiastic," Eijun warned. "He'll put you to work."

"Well, who else?" Eidan asked. "Kazuya can't with the baby, and you can't with your shoulder."

"I can do some stuff," Eijun argued.

Eidan glared. "You're not doing a thing," he said. "And I think there are plenty here who will agree with me."

Eijun saw nods all around. "Okay, okay," he said, raising his hands. "I'll be good."

Eidan turned to Kazuya. "The same goes for you. I know you boys like to help out when you can, and we appreciate it, but this time you can't. Understand me?"

"Yes, sir," Kazuya agreed, grimacing.

"You've got them well trained," Norio said. "I'm impressed."

"Speaking of trained, where's Gramps?"

"He had to run into town for a few things," Chika explained. "He'll be back soon."

"And we're off on the tour," Eidan interjected, pushing open the back door. "This is the back porch; we like to sit out here in the evenings."

"It would be better if it was screened in!" Chika said loud enough for the men to hear.

"Hush, woman," Eidan said before leading Norio down the steps.

Kazuya looked at Eijun and they both started laughing.

"Mom, we can do that for you if you'd like," Kazuya said. "Screen in the back porch."

"No, no. Eidan's going to do it if it's the last thing he does," she vowed. "And it just might be. But thank you for the offer, Kazuya. I appreciate it."

"If you change your mind, you know—"

"I won't," she said. "Eijun's tried to do it for me several times and I've turned him down every time too. It's your father's job." She stopped at turned to Kazuya, "Oh, I'm sorry, I just meant—"
It was Kazuya's turn to interrupt. "Wait, what? Just because my father's come around doesn't mean I don't still consider you both my parents, too." Kazuya stood and hugged her. "You were the mother to me that mine couldn't be, and the support I needed when I didn't have any. I know that neither myself nor my dad think things between us have changed because we've started to patch things up." He stopped and looked confused for a second. "I don't think that makes a lot of sense, but you know what I mean."

"I do," she said, raising up to drop a kiss on his cheek. "And I also know you're exhausted. Why don't you go take a nap? Dinner won't be for a while, you have plenty of time."

"I think that's a great idea," Kazuya agreed, refilling his glass. "I'm going to do just that," he said, kissing Eijun on the cheek. "I'll see you guys soon."

"Take your time, we're not going anywhere," Eijun said with a wave.

"'night, Kazuya," Chika said as he headed towards the bedroom.

Chika poured herself a glass of tea and joined Eijun at the table. "So, son of mine. Tell me what's been going on."

"Nothing exciting," Eijun said.

Chika raised an eyebrow. "Do you want to do this the hard way, or the easy way?"

Eijun sighed. "Okay, the hard way is never good. What do you want to know?"

"How you're doing. How you're really doing, not the masks and the smiles."

"Honestly? I don't know," Eijun said. "I don't think I'm too bad, but I've never been too good at judging my own mental state."

"Well. You've got to be stressed," she said. "There's no way you're not."

"Maybe? I don't think so; things aren't too much right now."

"Eijun. You've had several super stressful things happen in the last six months. Haruko. Your shoulder. Akemi."

"Akemi's not causing me stress!"

"Not all stress is caused by bad things, and you know it," Chika said firmly.

"You're right," Eijun agreed. "Let's start from the beginning, then. Haruko. I'm still sad about her, but it's not like it was. I know what happened wasn't my fault, and that it's okay to be sad about her. I—no, we—will probably be that way for a long time."

"Okay. What about your shoulder? And leaving baseball?"

"My shoulder is getting better, and it should be good enough to play again in a few weeks."

"You're not going back to the team, are you? I thought you were retiring."

"I am, but not right away. Kazuya had an idea that I think will work for me. I can still play some, I just can't do as much practicing as I did, or I'll have the same problem in a year or so," Eijun explained. "I'm going to play out this season, but only as a relief pitcher, when I can and when they really need me, and then see if I can play one more season as we bring the other pitchers up to
speed."

"And you're okay with that?"

"I actually am," Eijun said. "I don't want to leave baseball, but there are more important things in my life now. My family and our future are what I'm concerned about, and me being the healthiest I can be is my goal." He took a drink of his tea before admitting. "I can't say it's going to be easy, and I know I'll be a wreck about it several times before it's all done, but I know it's for the best."

"I'm glad to hear that you've got a workable plan to make your retirement easier. What does your doctor say?"

"That I need to be seen monthly, at least, during the season. Preferably every two weeks. And if he sees any sign of damage, I'll need to retire immediately."

"Sounds reasonable. And the team is okay with this?"

Eijun chuckled. "I haven't spoken to them about it, but if it's a choice between that and losing me at the end of this season, they'll go for it. They like it that people that come to watch Kaz and me, butts in seats means more revenue. In fact, they'll probably expect us to bring Akemi in, too." He shrugged. "They're more than willing to use us, I see no reason to not return the favor."

"I don't blame you, I still remember what they did to you at your wedding. That was unconscionable."

"Plus I really want to finish out this season, I get my signing bonus at the end of it, and that's a lot of money. I know we have plenty, but if we're going to be fixing the house and want to move out here, I don't want us to struggle to make ends meet."

"It's never a bad idea to have a nest egg," Chika agreed. "So, you're not too upset about the retirement thing, that's good. I was worried your shoulder would throw you into a funk."

"It would have if I'd have had to quit outright," Eijun said. "But I'm pretty sure that I can do this."

"That's good, then. What about Akemi?"

"Akemi? What about her? She's not a stressor on me, that's Kazuya."

"It's also on you, kiddo. You're probably doing everything you can to make sure he's comfortable, as you should, but that's pressure. And add to that your worry about being a dad, taking care of a baby, and you've got to be stressed."

"Maybe? A little. But it's not a bad stress, I don't feel like I'm under the gun or anything, it's more like it's driving me to work to be the best dad I can."

"Alright, then," she sat back and nodded. "I'll accept your 'doing okay' assessment. But I still reserve the right to watch you closely."

"And I would expect nothing less," Eijun said. "And I expect you to call me out if you see anything."

"You know me so well," Chika said.

"So you're leaving Tuesday?" interrogation over, she moved on to other topics and Eijun let out an inaudible sigh of relief.
"Yes, we thought we'd show Norio the house tomorrow morning and then go over the plans with you in the afternoon," Eijun explained. "I want Kazuya to get some rest, too. He's exhausted and overdoing it, that's the main reason I came down to Kyoto."

"I figured as much," she said. "He's not one to take it easy on himself."

"No he is not, and if I hadn't had the doctor's appointment, I would have gone with them. I wish I had, anyway." Eijun looked pensive. "I worry about him."

"He'll be fine, especially with you around to make sure of it," Chika said. "You worry too much."

"Maybe, but it's the first baby and I don't want him—"

"Eijun, look at me." Eijun reluctantly raised his eyes. "People have been having babies since the dawn of time. He's going to be fine."

"I know," he admitted.

"But, I know he appreciates all that you're doing." Chika stood and walked over to the fridge. "Now, I'd appreciate some help with dinner." She plopped a bag of carrots and a peeler in front of Eijun. "Get to it; those carrots aren't going to peel themselves!"

"Yes ma'am," Eijun laughed, picking up the peeler and doing as he was told.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
Please let me know what you think below, commentary is always appreciated.
Kazuya watched with interest as the countryside sped by. He was sitting in the passenger seat of his father's car, Eijun driving. Norio and Chika were in the back seat, the soft murmur of their conversation reaching him occasionally as she pointed out various landmarks and 'places of interest' on their drive over. From the occasional snorts of laughter and the increasing redness of Eijun's ears, he figured most of them were locations of many of his childhood mishaps.

He was not paying attention—even though he usually would be all ears, lapping them up for future teasing material, but the view had him enthralled. Green fields and ripening trees, a dusty haze over everything as the sun filtered through the trees. They had come to visit as often as they could, but March through October were so busy that they never traveled to Nagano, and this was the first time he was seeing the beauty of late summer. He felt Eijun's hand land on his knee and squeeze.

"You okay over there?" Eijun asked. "You're awfully quiet."

Kazuya shot him a smile before turning his attention back to the window. "I'm fine. I don't think I've ever been here in the summer, it's beautiful."

"I have to agree, I grew up here and it's been a while, so I'm seeing that too." Eijun turned down the road leading to their house.

"Or maybe I'm just noticing more, now that I know this place is going to be our home."

"That's probably part of it, but you're not wrong about it all being new, during the season the 'rents come see us when they can."

"I'm just...there's so much green, Eijun. Can you imagine our kids running around in this? Playing in the woods and stuff?"
"Actually, yes," Eijun said with a smirk. "Since that's exactly how I grew up. I have no problems imagining that."

"Jerk," Kazuya said with little heat.

"It's going to be great, right?"

Kazuya sighed. "Yeah, it is," he agreed. "It really is."

"Is that it?" Norio asked, eyes wide as he took in the overgrown front yard and rundown structure.

"Yeah," Kazuya said, climbing out of the car to meet them in the front. "It's pretty great, huh?"

"It looks like it needs a lot of work," Norio said.

Eijun laughed. "It does. But we've had it inspected, and the structure's still in great shape, it's mostly cosmetic and surface issues."

"If you say so," Norio looked dubious.

Kazuya linked his arm through his father's. "Let me show you the best part," he said. "If nothing else was salvageable, this would make it worth tearing down the house and rebuilding." He led him around the back of the house and stopped, turning him towards the mountain view. "Imagine waking up to that every day," he said.

"I can see your point," Norio agreed, eyes wide. "How close is that?"

"Not too far, but not as close as it looks," Chika said. "Distances in this area can be deceiving."

"What about the weather here, Kazuya?" Norio asked. "Are you ready to deal with meters of snow?"

"That's...actually, yes," Kazuya said with a chuckle. "But we probably won't get that much at once. Remember, Dad, I've only been here in the fall and winter—we don't visit during the season, so I'm used to dealing with that here. I've shoveled snow and run the plow and even driven in it. That's not really a problem for me."

Norio nodded. "I never thought of it that way, that makes sense."

"Ready to go inside?" Eijun asked, and they traipsed into the house.

It felt more oppressive to Kazuya than it had the first time they were there, but he realized that it was hot inside; it hadn't been opened for a while. The weather in Nagano was not nearly as hot as Tokyo, but he made a note to ensure there were plenty of ways to ventilate.

"I don't think we'll need aircon, Ei, but we're going to need plenty of windows to open and fans to circulate air," Kazuya said, sliding their hands together.

"We just have to be careful that it's insulated well, the winters are cold," Eijun said. "That's why we're hiring the professionals, right?"

Kazuya nodded and looked over at his father. "What do you think?"

"This kitchen is huge!" he said, walking to inspect some carving beside the fireplace. "What's your
"Well, overall? To keep what architectural details are period and make sense, while making the house a functioning, modern house for our family," Kazuya said. "We'll go over the plans later, but I just wanted to give you a look around and let you get a feel for the place."

"Okay, let me wander, then," Norio said.

"I'll go with you," Chika interjected and they headed out of the kitchen.

"Is there anything you wanted to look at while we're here?" Eijun asked.

Kazuya thought for a second. "You know what? I do want to look at this side of the house. We were talking about a garden and traditional room, right? I'd like to look at where we think that would work."

"Okay, yeah," Eijun agreed. "Why don't we walk along the porch, then?" he suggested, motioning to the back door.

Kazuya nodded, and together they headed around that corner.

"First of all, we're going to have to either get a really good baby gate or put up some railing," Kazuya said as they headed down the porch. It was a wide swath of wooden planks, very traditional, but also high enough off the ground to cause a problem if a child fell off.

"I think it's going to have to be a baby gate. A railing would defeat the purpose, we'd have to put in steps and then the baby would still be able to fall."

"You're right, and I love this wide veranda. Okay, we'll leave this part like it is and screen in the back and part of the side, what do you think?"

"That sounds great." Eijun pulled him down the porch to the place he'd thought they might be able to put a garden. "I think here would work. It's already cleared; I don't know what used to be here."

"Maybe a garden?"

"The vegetable garden was in the back, and I don't think they were the type to grow anything that wasn't functional, they worked too hard at making ends meet," Eijun said. "But I think it will work for us."

"I agree," Kazuya said, looking out over the property. He was struck by a sudden longing, to move here and make this his—no, their—home. "How long before we can move?" he asked, running a hand over his belly, soothing himself.

"You want to be out here soon, huh?" Eijun asked, coming up behind him and wrapping his arms around, laying his hands atop Kazuya's.

"Yes," Kazuya said simply. "I do."

"Well, it's going to take a while to make this livable, and we have to finish our contracts, so..."

"I know, I just—"

"Nesting?"

"Maybe?" Kazuya said, leaning back into him. "I don't know, Ei. I've always defined home to be
wherever you were; you've been my home for as long as I've known you. But we're having a baby, and maybe more, so while my home will always be you, our home—our family's home—is here. And I want us to be home as soon as we can."

Eijun kissed the back of his neck and tightened his arms. "It's different for us now, huh? I'm with you there, I want us to have a home, a place to put down roots. I love you and am happy to be wherever you are, but the idea that we'd have a place...somewhere we can call ours, is something I wanted more than I ever realized. It hadn't even occurred to me."

"When do you think we can move?"

"I don't know. My contract's up this year, but I think I want at least one more year to help the bullpen develop. You're done at the end of next year, too. Right?"

"Yeah," Kazuya agreed. "I don't think we can do anything before then, it's going to take time to get the house fixed anyway." He sighed, eyes distant. "But I want to be here soon."

Eijun nodded. "I get it. We should talk some more before we make any kind of decision."

"You're right, we should make sure everything's where it needs to be. But I'd like to be here before Akemi starts school. You think we can do that?"

"Yeah, I do," Eijun kissed his cheek. "I think we can do that."

"Good," Kazuya said with a soft smile. "Glad we talked that out."

Eijun grinned and dropped a kiss in his hair.

They stood there, just enjoying the peace and each other, until Chika came around the corner with Norio.

"This side has even more porch, it really does wrap ar—" she came to a halt when she saw them. "You boys okay?"

"Of course," Kazuya said. "We were just thinking about the placement of the traditional garden."

"You're going to put one in?" she asked.

"Planning to," Eijun said, stepping away from Kazuya enough to slip their hands together.

"That's good," she said. "I know that Kurosawa-san wanted to put one in, but she never had the chance. She'd be happy to hear you'd done so!"

"Eijun loves to putter in the yard," Kazuya said. "And I loved the traditional room Ohno-san had that overlooked a traditional garden, I'd love to have one here."

"Nagano traditional gardens are a little different, because of the seasonal extremes," she explained. "There's a bit more emphasis on things that look good with snow or when barren."


"Of course you do," Chika grinned.

"Did you see everything, Dad?" Eijun asked.

"I think so, yes," Norio said. "I can't wait to see your ideas, I'm really curious about what you boys
I think we told Mom everything," Kazuya said.

"You told me lots of things, but I don't know what you're planning, to be honest," Chika said.

"All of it," Eijun said and she blinked at him.

"Wait, what?" she asked. "You're not serious."

"Dunno," Kazuya said. "It depends on what you remember. I guess we'll have to wait for the blueprints."

"They're at the house?"

"Technically, they're in our email," Eijun said and Chika swiped at his head.

"You've been unusually snarky today," she said.

"Have I?" he asked with a grin. "It must be Kazuya rubbing off on me, blame him."

Kazuya did his best to look both innocent and hurt at the same time and Chika smiled at him.

"He's carrying my grandbaby, I'm not going to blame him for anything," Chika said with a frown at Eijun. "It's not his fault that you're being a pain."

Kazuya shot Eijun a smirk and he puffed out a breath of air, "As if he wasn't your favorite before Akemi."

"That's not the point," Chika said.

Eijun turned away pointedly, ignoring his husband's chuckling. "Is there anything else you wanted to see?"

"No, I think I'm good," Norio said, stifling his own amusement.

"Okay, shall we go?" Kazuya grinned at the pair.

"Yes, let's," Chika said, and the quartet headed to the front of the house and down the stairs, out to the car.

"Eijun, you think you can work with the flowerbeds out here?" Chika asked.

"Yeah, but I'm not sure what's going to be left after the workers traipse through."

"True, but maybe you can ask them to be careful."

"Maybe? I don't know what the restrictions are," Eijun said, handing Kazuya into the front seat and closing the door. "Let's see what they're suggesting and then we can discuss it, okay?"

"Makes perfect sense," Chika said, climbing into the back seat. "But seriously, you boys haven't even looked at the plans?"

"I don't know about Kaz, but I've only glanced at them, just to make sure they're all there," Eijun said.

Kazuya spoke up. "We agreed we were going to wait until after my road trip."
"I see," Chika said. "I'm glad that you decided to come down, then."

"Us, too," Eijun said.

"So, about these plans," Eidan said.

Eijun stood to collect the rest of the plates and take them into the kitchen after dinner. "What about them?"

"You might want to talk about them before your mother explodes."

"I'm amazed she hasn't been nag—asking about them," Kazuya said. "I figured she'd be on us about them as soon as we walked through the door this afternoon."

"I heard that, Sawamura Eijun," Chika said from the kitchen as Eijun headed in with the dishes.

"That wasn't me, that was Kaz!" they heard him protest, and the occupants at the table chuckled at the ensuing argument.

"I'm surprised she hasn't been after you, too," Eitoku said. "That woman has the patience of a gnat."

Chika entered the room, carrying a cup of coffee and a piece of cake. "I heard that, too, Sawamura Eitoku. Remember, I know where you sleep."

Eitoku shivered. "You won't do anything, you wicked woman. You wouldn't dare."

"Are you sure about that?" Chika said, raising an eyebrow.

"Eidan, control the woman you married," Eitoku said, glaring at her. "And where's my cake?"

"In the kitchen, you can get it your own self," Chika answered, sitting in her chair.

Eitoku grumbled, "What good are you, woman?"

Kazuya laid a hand on Chika's arm, stopping her from responding. "I'll get you a piece," he said, standing. "Eidan? Dad? You want some too?"

"Sit down, Kazuya," Eijun said, walking back into the room with several plates. "I've got pieces for everyone."

"At least my idiot grandsons know how to behave," Eitoku muttered, taking a plate from Eijun.

Kazuya smiled his thanks at Eijun, who glared at him. After a second of confusion, Kazuya smirked.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "In the interests of domestic harmony, I have a confession to make." He turned to Chika, who was watching him closely. "I was the one who said something earlier, it wasn't Eijun."

"I know," Chika said. "But you're carrying my grandbaby, so you get a pass. Eijun can take it."

"How is that even fair?" Eijun whined.

Kazuya smirked. "I don't know, but it sounds like a plan to me."

"Of course it does," Eijun said.
"If you two are done flirting, can we please get to the blueprints?" Eitoku asked.

"Yes." Eijun had plugged in his laptop, using the television as a monitor. "We have three choices. Wait, I don't think we told you." He looked at Kazuya, who shrugged.

"Tell us what?"

"The architect?" Eijun asked. "Did I tell you about her?"

"No?" Eidan said.

"Do you remember Akiko?"

"Aki-chan?" Eidan asked. "She's who you hired?"

"Yeah, I didn’t recognize her name since she's gotten married, but yes."

"I remember Minami-san telling me that she was an architect, I never thought she'd be 
yours, though," Chika said. "I'm glad. She was always a good kid."

"So, anyway, she's given us three options. The first is everything we asked for, the most expensive options available. The second is one in the middle range, things we want without many frills, and the third is a lower budget one, which is things we need without all the things we want." Eijun explained as he opened his email and followed the link she sent. "Now, these are all computer mock-ups, so there's more than just the blueprints."

They waited as the page loaded, where he found three separate links, one for each mock-up. There was also an introduction at the top of the page.

Good day, Sawamura-san and Miyuki-san-

Below please find three links, one for each estimate, as discussed previously. In each page, you will find a video walk through of the room as well as blueprints of the whole property and mock-up images of each room, for more detailed viewing. Please remember that none of the finishings are set in stone, you have the option to change those if you want, we just used some generic ones to give you the idea of how things will look. Also, the video is pausable, so if you want a closer look at something, feel free to pause it.

Attached please also find a cost breakdown for each of the options.

Enjoy, and let me know if you have any questions.

Best Regards-

Suzuki Akiko

"Okay, so. Let's look at the first one of these, and then we can move on," Eijun said. "What do you think? The one with all the bells and whistles or the stripped down one first?"

"The bells and whistles, please," Kazuya said, corner of his mouth lifting in a half smirk. "That way we can see what it is we're thinking of. I don't know that we could have possibly forgotten anything, we asked for so much."
Eijun nodded. "True enough. Well, we'll see, right?" he asked as he selected the link for the video. Sliding his fingers into Kazuya's, he squeezed and grinned at him, seeing the emotion in his husband’s eyes echoing his own.

Their house.

Their *home*.

The video started, showing an opening card before showing the front of the house, porch restored and siding replaced, the windows in the front larger than they currently were. It moved inside and Kazuya felt Eijun inhale in surprise. He felt the same, the hallway and the stairs that climbed to the second floor were repaired and refinished, banister replaced. The camera moved to the right, showing the first room on the right, the study. There were bookcases lining the walls, a display case on one side, and a partner's desk next to one of the large windows.

"This is the front of the house?" Eidan asked.

"Yeah, it's the front room on the right. We want some kind of office space where we can do whatever work we may need to do, something that's private." Eijun said.

Chika nodded. "That makes sense. I love the bigger windows; they let in so much light."

"Is that wise up here, though?" Eitoku interjected. "I mean, with the weather being what it is."

"Oh, yeah, the windows we can get are rated to handle the weather," Kazuya said. "It's just that when the house was built, they didn't have ones that would handle the wind and storms.

"Got it," Eitoku said.

"What's next?" Chika asked.

Eijun pressed play again, and they watched as the camera moved to the next room. It was the traditional room, with rice paper wall coverings and tatami mats, all tans and pale gold. There was a low table in the middle of the room and a shrine on one wall, with the outside wall made to be sliding, one that could be opened to the outside. The wall slid open as they watched, and the traditional garden on the outside was visible beyond the wide veranda. Eijun paused the image, so they could discuss it.

"That's your room," he told Kazuya.

Kazuya grinned at him. "It's my room, but your garden," he said. "You've got the green thumb."

"Fair enough, but you wanted a traditional one," Eijun responded.

"You're right, I did. I do," Kazuya said. "I just feel like we should honor tradition when we can."

"I don't disagree," Eijun said.

"What are you going to do with this?" Eitoku asked. "It's going to be cold in winter, right? And with the kids, I don't know how it's going to work."

"Well, again, technology has moved along enough that we can have those sliding panels be weather resistant," Eijun said. "It won't stop the room from being a little colder than the rest of the house, but not too much worse than a room with windows and doors to the outside."

"I think it's lovely," Chika said. "And a traditional garden is such a nice touch. Do you know what
you want in it?"

"A water feature, for sure," Kazuya said.

"I know that there are things that people put in their gardens here that are different from Tokyo, there are different plants," Eijun said. "Things that are more weather hardy."

"Really?" Kazuya asked. "I didn't know that."

"Yeah, the ones around here tend to have fewer plants, and the ones they have are hardy all-year ones," Chika explained.

"Well, we'll have to see what she has in mind, then," Kazuya said, and Eijun restarted the video.

Next up was the kitchen. It spanned the width of the back of the house, in an 'L' shape on the side with the traditional room. That section had a large dining table and sideboard with hutch in it, clearly a dining space. The rest of the kitchen was remodeled, with modern appliances and a multitude of new storage. There was a closed in section in one corner that Eijun suspected was the downstairs half-bath, with coatracks on the wall and a shoe holder and bench right below them, next to one of the back doors. Next to the closed-off section was a washer and dryer combo and storage for laundry and outside items.

There was a wide island between the two doors, offering a place to work on both cooking and laundry, with storage underneath and stools lining the side nearest the washers. The main cooking area was large, with counters lining the walls and halfway across the entryway to the dining area. There was a small island in the middle with a sink and workspace as well. The cupboards hanging on the wall reached the ceiling and followed the path of the lower cabinets, stopping at the windows, which were larger than the original, as were all the windows. Beams ran the length of the room, carved and decorated as they would have been in the original house, with an echoing pattern carved along the bottoms of the cupboards.

Eijun paused it when it zoomed out, so they could see the whole of the layout. "What do you think, Kaz? It's your kitchen; you can change whatever you'd like."

"I do like it, there are tons of cabinets and counter space, the islands are a plus, and I love the way she's incorporated the dining area, rather than having a formal dining room," Kazuya said.

"I like the laundry and mudroom area," Chika said. "It's nice that it's set off, but not hidden. I mean, there's a clear division there, but it's not hidden somewhere."

"Actually, there's a sliding door we can use to hide that area if we'd like," Eijun said. "It's a hidden wall that can block it off, see the sliders in the ceiling?"

"Oh, yeah!" Eidan said. "How does that work? Where are the walls?"

"They're in the wall that runs down the hallway. There's a latch there that you can pull out the screens from, it's not a thick or soundproof wall, but it's good for when company comes."

"I see," Chika said. "Let's keep going, maybe they'll show it."

Eijun pressed play and they watched as the video did exactly that, showed the door sliding shut and opening.

Next, it headed down the hallway to the big room. First, it showed it open, from the laundry room to the front windows. There were carpets on the floors and a fireplace in the middle section. None of
the outside walls was movable; they appeared to be study, solid walls. As they panned through, there were clear seating areas and multiple places for toys and books. The view started to pull back and as it did so, the walls started to move, closing off the first room and the second room, showing the versatility of the space.

"This is the other side of the stairway," Eijun said as he stopped the video. "We want open space, but we also want it to be traditional. The walls are all paper, there's not going to be a lot of privacy between rooms, but we wanted something that we can use for the family. In the winter, for instance, we can close off the middle section with the fireplace and be cozy, or if we want to contain the children we can cut off the first one, and slide back the wall by the laundry area and see what they're doing while we're in the kitchen."

"That's what we wanted," Kazuya said. "A place for the kids to play that's not shuffling them off to their rooms. Neither of us wants to be hands-off parents. We've discussed it, and although we could afford help, we're only going to get someone to do cleaning and laundry and such, the kids are ours, and our responsibility. Even the babies."

"You know we'll be happy to help out with them," Chika said.

Eitoku spoke up, "Yes, you'd better bring them around, I want to make sure they're raised right!"

Kazuya laughed as Eijun squawked, "What do you mean? We'll be great parents!"

"That's as may be, but I still want to see them. Lots." Eitoku said, crossing his arms.

"You will, we'll bring them by regularly," Eijun said. "But we're not going to ask you to watch them unless we've got to be gone overnight or something big. They're our kids and our responsibility. If we're working or something, we'll hire help to take care of them. You raised your kids; we would never expect you to raise ours."

Kazuya nodded his agreement. "We don't want them to ever be a burden or responsibility. If you ever feel like we're asking too much, let us know. We'll find someone else to watch them. We'd just prefer they overnighted with you, we trust you to take care of them."

"That's very nice of you boys," Chika said. "But we really don't mind watching them."

"We know, and we appreciate it," Kazuya said. "And we'll take you up on that. We just don't want to depend on you, you've got so many other things you could be doing."

"Thank you," Eidan said. "But remember that we'd love to keep them for you."

"As would I," Norio interjected. "I'm not as versed in the baby stuff, but I know a thing or two, and am happy to learn."

Kazuya felt his eyes well a little at those words. "Thanks, Dad. We appreciate that and will ask you, as well, if we need to. We just don't want to impose on your lives, you also raised your kid, you don't have to raise ours."

Eijun agreed. "He's right. We know you all would be great babysitters, we just don't want you to feel obligated. So if you ever are busy or just not feeling it, please let us know. We can always make other arrangements. I'm sure we'll have a list of babysitters at the ready," he said, "Are we ready to continue?" Eijun asked.

"Yeah, let's see what else," Eitoku said. "So far this looks really good, but expensive."
"I like it so far," Kazuya said. "She's done everything we asked for and more. The laundry area is something I don't think we even considered."

"No, we didn't," Eijun said, pressing the play button.

The video continued up the stairs and entered the master suite first. The window facing the mountain had changed into French doors that opened onto a balcony, where there was a small table and a couple of chairs. Large windows flanked the doors, with flowing drapes on either side. To the right of the door was an enclosed space that turned out to be a full bathroom, with a shower but no tub. On the other side of the room, there was another set of doors, and they opened to show a walk-in closet. The rest of the room was fairly plain, with dressers and a large bed in the middle and a wide-open view of the outdoors.

"Oh, that's lovely," Chika said. "I love the balcony, that would be great to just have a place to sit and admire the view."

"Did we ask for that?" Kazuya asked

"No, we didn't," Eijun said. "But the top floor is smaller than the bottom, so it makes sense that one could fit."

"True enough," Kazuya said. "It's a great idea."

"And a bathroom in your room? That's fancy," Eitoku said.

"It is, a little," Eijun said. "But with kids, it will be good to have our own space, you know?"

"And there were no bathrooms in the house at all," Kazuya said. "Indoor plumbing's important."

"She did it in a smart way," Norio said. "All the bathrooms so far are stacked on top of each other. That makes the plumbing easier since they're going to have to install it all. The kitchen's a little trickier, but since it's not bathroom waste it shouldn't be too bad."

"You're right," Eijun said. "I didn't notice that." He nodded. "Indoor plumbing and heating units are the big things we're adding. That's another reason for the dividing rooms; we can heat just the one we're in. The fusuma won't give a ton of insulation, but enough."

"Wall units, then?" Eidan asked.

"Yeah, the ductless ones, they'll be easiest," Kazuya said. "And we're rewiring the house, I don't know if what's there is up to current code, but I do know that there's not nearly enough of it, there are only a few outlets."

"And a generator to keep us going in the winter when the power goes out," Eijun said.

"At least you're not moving in blind," Chika commented. "You know what to expect."

"True enough," Eijun agreed, pressing the button to continue playing.

Next, they saw the main bathroom right next to the master bedroom. It had been a bedroom, so it was large enough for both a shower and a soaking tub, a very traditional Japanese bathroom.

"Good to see you idiots are still Japanese," Eitoku said, before they moved on.

The two bedrooms were exactly mirror images of each other, with built-in closets against the outside wall, and large bay windows with seating in the front.
"Those are dangerous," Eidan said. "Sticking out like that, in high wind."

"I don't think it's as hazardous as it used to be and if you notice, it's positioned over the front of the house where the bottom story protrudes more than the top one, so it's kinda sitting where a balcony should be. So it's supported, not just hanging in the air," Kazuya pointed out.

"Is that the only window in the room? Do they open?" Chika asked.

"There's one by the closets," Eijun said. "And I'm not sure, but I think the lower panels slide open, or the side panels crank open or something. We'll have to ask, they're going to need some kind of cross ventilation."

"Yeah, kids' rooms need to be aired out regularly," Chika agreed.

"Okay, next is the nursery, if I'm remembering correctly," Eijun said, restarting the video.

He was right, and the room was what they'd expected. Large and bright, with several windows along one wall, a large closet on one side with a lot of room for toys and built-in bookshelves. There was a door in the opposite wall, and it opened to show a sink with a large basin, as well as a good-sized counter.

"What's that for?" Eijun asked, confused about the room.

"Oh, that's clever," Chika said. "A water source in the nursery will be invaluable. The sink's big enough to bathe a baby in or to wash up a dirty toddler. And you don't have to run over to the bathroom or downstairs for water or a cleanup site. It's a perfect solution." She sat back with a smile. "It looks like there's a spot for a small fridge so you don't have to go downstairs for a bottle in the middle of the night, and there's a spot for diaper supplies. You probably will still need a changing table somewhere, but having running water close by with a baby is ingenious."

"That makes sense, I never thought about that," Kazuya said. "You're right."

"I think that's the inside of the house. I don't know if this goes outside," Eijun said.

"Well, play it and we'll find out," Eitoku said gruffly.

"Yes, sir," Eijun said, pressing play.

The video switched to outside, where they were shown the porch, the video going around the outside to the rear of the house. The screened in portion ran the length of the back and there were a couple of ceiling fans installed and heating radiators, one in each corner. There were screen doors with removable glass covers on each end as well in the back wall, and the screened in portion along the back had louvered glass windows, with hand cranks to close them if the weather was inclement.

"Don't get any ideas, woman!" Eidan said as Chika turned toward him.

"I'd be happy with screens at this point," she said with a glare.

"I told you I'd do it, dammit. And I will."

"I know you will," she said sweetly. "You wouldn't want to disappoint me, would you?"

All the males at the table shivered a little and found themselves shaking their heads.

"I didn't think so," she said, turning her attention back to Eijun. "Please go on, dear."
Eijun nodded and did as instructed.

The video panned over the backyard. The three outbuildings had been replaced; there was a play area on one side with a swing set and climbing toys, and a treehouse in the big tree. The lawn was green, and in one corner there was a fenced off portion for a garden. In the back of the lawn was another building, this one larger. The camera zoomed in on the first one, a playhouse. It had shutters on the window and flower boxes, inside there was a table and a play kitchen, with room for other toys as well. The next shed was a toolshed, one lined with workbenches and with hooks on the walls for tools and plenty of room for someone to work. The third shed was a garden shed near the back, next to the garden.

In the back of the yard was the small house they'd wanted for Norio, it was small but perfect for one person. The living area was open, with a decent sized kitchen area, a counter dividing that from the main room. The living area was large enough for a seating arrangement with a fireplace in the wall and there was an office nook set off to one side. Behind the couch was a small dining table next to the kitchen. The walls were lined with windows and bookshelf units built in. Moving to the bedroom, the room was large enough to have room for a king sized bed and a reading area in one corner, with windows facing the back, offering a view of the forest and the mountains. The bathroom was off to one side of the main room, with a shower and a soaking tub.

The video ended with an end card, listing the name of the firm, the architect and Eijun and Kazuya, the clients.

"What did you think of your house?" Eijun asked Norio. "We can change it up however you'd like."

"You don't have to," Norio said. "It's nice the way it is. In fact, I think it might be too much."

"No, I don't think that's possible," Kazuya argued.

"How much is this going to cost you? I don't know that I want you spending that much on me," Norio said.

Eitoku chimed in. "How much is this costing overall? Can you afford it? It looks like it's going to be really expensive."

"I think so," Eijun said. "We have plenty of money, and I get my signing bonus at the end of the season."

"Well, I'm glad that you're good with it, but I suggest you be careful," Eidan said. "Things tend to cost more than you think."

"True enough, but we're fine," Kazuya said. "We'll look over the quotes and make some decisions."

"What else do you have there, Eijun?" Chika asked. "The other ones? What are they?"

"Lower cost versions of this one, really. I don't know that we need to go through them all tonight, I think Kaz and I should look through them, look at the estimates, and make a decision." Eijun shut down the site and closed his laptop. "We can adjust the pricing to some extent by choosing lower-priced finishings or by changing some of the rooms. I love this one and I'd love it if we could follow it exactly. Well, except for some of the colors and stuff, I'm sure we'll want to change that. But the general layout is perfect, and all the things she thought of are really helpful."

"Yeah, we really need to talk about this," Kazuya said. "We'll look over the projections and see what we think we can afford and go from there. There are a few decisions we need to make soon, but I can't imagine they'll be able to do much, if anything, with the house before next spring."
"You'd be surprised," Eidan said. "We've been building houses and dealing with the weather for centuries. I don't know about the outside changes, but inside? There's nothing stopping them."

"Well, if that's the case, that's great," Eijun said. "The earlier it's done the better."

"When are you expecting to move? Do you have a timeline?" Eidan asked.

Eijun sighed. "We do, kinda? We want to be in before Akemi starts school. Kaz is under contract until the end of next season, and I may do something similar if they want me to. I haven't spoken to the team yet, but I think I'm going to start winding down, next season will be my last."

"You can still play?" Eitoku asked. "Is that safe?"

"It's not optimal, of course, but it's doable," Kazuya said. "He's going to have to be super careful and go to the doctor regularly. But he can do it if he chooses."

Eijun explained, "I mostly can't practice like I did, nor can I play as much as I have. I'll have to only play a few innings at a time. But it will give me a chance to leave on my own terms and to groom the rest of the bullpen to take over. It might make the transition easier for everyone. I don't imagine they'll want me around past next season, though. It's pretty much up to Kaz. If we stay for a few more years, I would probably see if I could find a job helping out at the high school level. I have my degree and could teach English if that was a requirement."

"If Kazuya decides he's done after the next season?"

"Well, then we'd figure it out. We might be in the position to leave, but we won't know until closer to that time," Kazuya said. "I don't want to have anything set in stone, we'll do what we decide is right at the time. We don't want to rush the house and have people take shortcuts, and we're depending a lot on you, Mom, to make sure that they're doing things correctly."

"I will, trust me. I know almost everyone around here that could possibly be working on the house and their parents. So they'll do what we need, and do it right. I guarantee it," she said with a decisive nod.

"That's great, thank you," Kazuya said. "We appreciate it."

"We do. And I know it's going to be a lot of work," Eijun said. "We'd like to pay you a consulting fee, if you'll let us."

"No," she answered immediately. "I don't want your money."

"But we're taking you away from your life to do things for us. We should pay for that," Kazuya said.

"You're my kids, and you're getting a house ready to bring my grandbabies closer to me. Why would I charge to help with that?"

"We don't feel right about it," Eijun said. "Let us do something for you."

"I don't know," Chika said. "I just—let me think about it, okay?"

"You do that," Kazuya said. "And get back to us."

"Okay, I will."

"And on that note," Eijun stood and held out a hand to Kazuya. "We should go to bed. We've got an early start in the morning."
"We all do," Eidan said, joining them. "Dad and I need to get out and start prepping for the harvest."

"Yeah, the soybeans are almost ready," Eitoku said. "And the orchard needs tending."

Kazuya stood, hand firmly in Eijun's. "Alright then, we'll see you in the morning."

They climbed the stairs, a chorus of 'goodnight's following them to their room.

"So what do you think?" Kazuya asked as soon as the door closed.

"I think you're exhausted and need to sleep," Eijun said, running a soft hand through his hair. "And we can talk about it later. Let's go to bed, shall we?"

"Yes, please," Kazuya said.

And so they did.

Chapter End Notes

Well, what do you think about the house?
Updates should continue regularly, I can't imagine I'll get sucked into another massive fic like that exchange one was.
Other than this one, that is!

Comment, kudo, send up a white flag, whatever.
Let me know you're still around.
Give A Little Bit

Chapter Summary

Three weeks!
Eijun supports, frets and sucks at Dead or Alive
Kazuya whines, encourages and regrets some decisions
Akemi- well, grows. And kicks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Twenty-six weeks

Me: You know, at 26 weeks, Akemi’s opening her eyes?

Kaz: Idiot. You’re literally in the back seat and texting me?

Me: You answered, so who’s the bigger idiot?

“You’re such a goof,” Kazuya laughed as Norio looked over, confused. “Eijun, he’s in the back seat texting me.”

Norio glanced in the rearview mirror and met Eijun’s gleaming eyes. “Private stuff you don’t want to share with the class?”

“Not at all,” Eijun said, explaining. “I text Kazuya ‘what’s happening with Peanut’ facts every week. I figured now would be as good a time as any.”

“That’s a great idea,” Norio said. “But you could have just told him?”

“Honestly, I didn’t think he was going to be checking his phone until later, I didn’t want to interrupt your conversation, sorry.”

“Don’t apologize, but do share,” Norio said. “What’s going on with Peanut this week?”

Eijun laughed and sat forward, sticking his head between the seats. “She’s starting to open her eyes, there’s a chance if you shine a bright light at her that she’ll react.”

“Really? We’ll have to try that,” Kazuya said. “What else?”

“She’s starting to breathe. It’s just amniotic fluid for now, of course, but she’s working on developing her lungs.”

“She wouldn’t be able to survive yet, right?” Kazuya asked.

“Yes, she would probably survive and be fine,” Eijun told him. “It’s not anywhere near optimal, but if something happened that she’d need to be delivered early, she’d be okay. Eventually.”

“Eventually?” Norio said.
Eijun nodded. “Yeah, she’d be in the neonatal unit for a while, her lungs and other things would need to develop before she could go home. She might have other issues too, because she’d be so small. It would be touch and go for a while.”

“You stay where you are,” Kazuya said to Akemi, rubbing his belly softly. “I don’t want you coming out until you’re ready for the world.”

“Yes, please,” Eijun said. “I’m just—it’s a little bit of a relief that she’d be fine if she came early, you know? We probably won’t lose this one.”

Kazuya turned in his seat and met Eijun’s eyes. “You’re right. We won’t lose this one.” He laced their fingers together and squeezed.

Eijun smiled tearily at him before letting out a breath, letting the sadness go. “You wanna know what else? You might have been right, even if you were kidding.”

“What about?”

“Her brain activity. She’s been able to hear noises for a while, right?”

“That’s why we started reading to her, yes.”

“Well, now she’s able to respond to them, her brainwave activity is ramping up.”

Kazuya laughed. “Maybe she did recognize your voice, then.”

“Maybe. Or something else, who knows. But it’s a fun thing to think about.”

“Thanks for the update, Eijun,” Norio said.

“You’re welcome!” Eijun answered, leaning back and turning his attention to the passing scenery.

“We’re going to the thing tonight, right?” Kazuya said, climbing into the passenger seat of the car almost as soon as Eijun had pulled to a halt.

Eijun looked at him in surprise, feeling the irritation flowing off him like waves. “Good afternoon to you, too. I missed you.”

“Sorry,” Kazuya had the grace to look chagrined. “Hi Ei, how was your day?”

“Fine, thank you. Physical therapy went well, the doctors say I’m ahead of their expected recovery, and I’ll be able to go back a few weeks earlier than we’d anticipated.” Eijun said, gauging Kazuya’s level of irritation. “Probably mid- to late-September.”

Kazuya whipped his head around and stared, “Are you serious?”

“Yes.”

“You’re not just saying that to get off the list early, are you?”

Eijun huffed a laugh. “Of course you’d think that. No, I’m not doing anything but telling you exactly what the doctor said.”
“That’s great!” Kazuya said, taking his hand. “I’m glad you’ll be back before the end of the regular season.” He frowned. “You’d better not be lying to me.”

“Why would I do that?” Eijun asked. “I know you’re going to double check, you never believe me.”

“Would you if you were me?”

“Fair point,” Eijun agreed. “Fasten your seatbelt, please,” he said, pulling out into the parking lot.

“Yes, mom.”

“I think that term might fit you better,” Eijun snarked and was greeted with silence. Looking over, he saw Kazuya glaring out the window, his grievance remembered.

“I’m sorry, Kaz,” he said, reaching out and twining their fingers together. “What’s going on?”

Kazuya sighed and shot him a crooked smile. “Don’t be, you’re fine. I’m just...tired, I guess.”

“What’s going on?” Eijun asked again, gently.

Kazuya shrugged, clearly unhappy. “Coach came up to me during practice and said that the front office was talking about some kind of gender and name reveal, but they were leaning towards waiting for you to come back.”

“Bought some time, then.”

“I hate this,” he said, still glaring at the passing streets. “I knew they’d try something, I knew it.”

Eijun ran a soothing thumb over the back of his hand. “Kaz, why’s this got you so upset? We did know it was coming, and it’s not like you’ve ever tried to keep our lives out of the spotlight.”

“You’re not wrong, but that was eight years ago,” Kazuya sighed and leaned his head against the window. “I was terrified that we’d get split up somehow and the only way I could think to prevent that was to make us seen as a unit, get people to care about us together.”

“I know, we talked about it then. I didn’t realize you were afraid, though, I just figured it was all part of your master plan,” Eijun said softly, not wanting to break Kazuya’s chain of thought. He hadn’t opened up about this before, and Eijun was curious to know his thought process.

“I was so scared, Ei,” Kazuya’s hand tightened on his. “I’d seen other couples get farmed out to different teams, their relationship considered to be a distraction or a hindrance or something. We were in the middle of your last year of school and I didn’t want to have to be separated from you for any longer than we had. I knew that Ito-san’s focus was always money, he wanted to get more butts in seats, so I...well, I convinced them to give you a trial, and then when they signed you on, I went all out to make sure that we became a pair in everyone’s eyes and Ito saw us as a money making couple. That’s one of the reasons I proposed the way I did.”

“I’ve always been fine with what you did, Kaz.”

“I know, but I just...I put us in this situation, and now I hate it.”

“It’s not so bad,” Eijun said. “We just have to figure out how to keep them happy with us while still maintaining whatever privacy we can. At least until I get them to sign me for one more year.”

“That’s...yeah. We can do that,” Kazuya agreed.
“What do you think we should do?” Eijun asked. “What can we give them that you’d be comfortable with?”

“I don’t know? I don’t want them running some ‘guess the gender’ contest, that’s for sure,” Kazuya said.

Eijun shuddered. “You’re right about that. Okay, then what else?”

“They didn’t seem to be too upset with the way we announced Peanut, maybe we can do something that would be more subtle?”

“Does it have to be subtle?” Eijun asked.

“What do you have in mind?”

Eijun told him.

“You know, I’m good with that,” Kazuya said. “That’s actually pretty brilliant. And adds the benefit of not having to go to the meetup tonight, I’m beat.”

“It’s been a week, huh?”

“Yeah.” Kazuya continued to look out the window. “Hey, Ei?”

“Yes?”

“Peanut’s a girl.”

“Yes, she is,” Eijun agreed.

“You know what I’d like to do this evening, if you wouldn’t mind?”

“What’s that?”

“Let’s go get some pizza and then go baby girl shopping. We haven’t been since we got the nursery stuff,” Kazuya said. “I feel like we’ve learned a lot since then, right?”

“Well, we’ve learned her gender, that’s for sure,” Eijun joked.

Kazuya elbowed him. “Smartass.”

“You like this ass, smart or not.”

“Correction. I love that ass,” Kazuya said.

Eijun laughed as he turned down the street to Mario’s. “But yes, we’ve learned a good bit about what she’s going to need, plus we know it’s a she, so there could be cute sleepers or a dress or two in her future.”

“And more books.”

“Yes, yes. More books,” Eijun agreed, pulling into the parking lot. “Are you sure you wouldn’t rather have a burger? It’s fine if you’d rather go there.”

“Actually, no. Pizza sounds really good right now,” Kazuya said with a relieved sigh. “Here’s hoping that continues.”
“What?”

“My lack of cheeseburger craving.”

Eijun laughed as he opened Kazuya’s door for him, offering him his hand. “And give up fried pickles? That’s unthinkable!”

“True, true,” Kazuya said, linking their hands. “But maybe I’ll be able to order something different every once in a while.”

“Maybe,” Eijun shrugged. “But I like burgers, so it’s no hardship for me.”

“Of course it isn’t.”

“You think this will work?” Eijun asked, holding up a blue ruffled dress.

Kazuya grinned at him. “I love that. We should limit ourselves, though, she doesn’t need tons of dresses, it’s going to be winter.”

“True, but she will need some. And I think this is one she’s going to need,” Eijun argued.

“Fine, put it in the cart.”

“What size?”

“We haven’t gotten anything six months size, so go with that,” Kazuya said.

Eijun found the right size and they moved on.

“Do you think that idea you had would make the front office happy?” Kazuya asked.

“If we warn them in advance, yes,” Eijun said. “I’ll even be there for it.”

Kazuya pulled a pink sleeper off the rack. “What about this?”

“Look at those little sheep,” Eijun cooed. “Sold.”

Dropping it into the cart, Kazuya grinned, eyeing the pile they’d accumulated. “I think that’s enough, we should go look at books now,” he said.

Eijun shrugged. “Fine with me. But maybe we should go look at dolls and stuffed animals.”

“We’ve got enough...okay,” Kazuya said, unable to resist Eijun’s pleading eyes. “But only one, she’s got some already.”

“Fine,” Eijun agreed, guiding the cart towards the toy section. “I want to look at dolls for newborns, I’d like to get her a baby she can have from early on.”

“Gender stereotyping our child already?” Kazuya snarked.

“No, I don’t think so? I would want to get one for a boy, too. I think it helps them learn to care for others, taking care of a baby doll.” Eijun argued.
Kazuya slid his hand through Eijun’s pulling him to a halt. “You’re right, and I’m sorry for being so snarky, I’m just…”

“Pregnant and tired? I get it, it’s fine.”

“No, it’s not. I shouldn’t take it out on you.”

“I don’t mind, I’m glad to help you however I can.”

Kazuya sighed, tugging at Eijun’s shirt. “I know, and I love you for it. But you shouldn’t put up with it and I shouldn’t take things out on you.”

“Maybe not,” Eijun said, smiling wistfully. “But I’d rather you took it out on me than someone else.”

“I’d rather not take it out on anyone,” Kazuya said, looping his arm through Eijun’s. “Let’s go look at dolls, then I’m picking out six books.”

“Six?”

“Sure, why not? We need something new to read to her.”

“Of course we do.”

Twenty-seven weeks

Me: My back hurts.

Me: and it’s hot

Me: the pitchers aren’t playing well

Me: the catchers won’t listen

Me: nobody’s trying

Ei: Wait, what?

Ei: What game are you watching? This one seems to be going fine

Ei: it’s hot, but that’s all

Ei: I’m sorry that your back hurts, I’ll give you a massage tonight

Me: does that come with a happy ending?

Ei: it just might ;-

Me: is that a winky face? Did you just wink at me?

Ei: goof. Pay attention to the game, the seventh inning stretch is coming up
“Ladies and Gentlemen, your seventh-inning stretch entertainment today will be provided by the bullpen; they’re having a pitching contest. The bullpen coach, Miyuki-san, has created targets for each of them to hit and the first one to hit it squarely will win the contest and a prize, which may or may not include fried pickles?” the announcer sounded confused while the pitchers who had streamed onto the field yelled out their excitement.

“As you can see, the groundskeepers have set up the targets and there’s a basket of balls on the field, so let’s get started, shall we? We’ve been told that it will be obvious who the winner is.”

Kazuya walked onto the field and spoke to the gathered pitchers, giving each of them three balls.

“It looks like they’re limited to that number of balls. Let’s see who wins! Good luck to all of the participants.”

The pitchers lined up in front of their targets, catcalling each other, while Kazuya just watched, arms crossed. As they quieted, in preparation to pitch, he spoke.

“You know what you have to do. Don’t let us down, got it?”

“Yes, sir,” they said in unison, determination in their eyes.

“Okay, then. Let’s see what you’ve got,” he said, watching them closely. “First ball.”

They all threw, all of them hitting the target but none of them hitting it directly.

“Ohhh! So close,” the announcer said over the noise of the audience. “They have two more, though.”

“Again,” Kazuya said, and the balls went flying again. Once more, they hit the target, but none of them triggered the mechanism.

The crowd let out a collective yell of disappointment before they started to cheer on their personal favorites.

“I know there’s someone sitting in the stands who’d have had no problems hitting that target,” the announcer said, while the Jumbotron switched to Eijun, who sat in the stands watching with no expression. “He looks like he wishes he was the one down there.”

Looking up at that, Eijun shot the camera a grin before turning his attention back to the field.

“One more, good luck to all of you.”

Kazuya frowned at them. “Remember what kind of hell the next practice will be if you fail me. I’m hot and pregnant; you do not want to mess with me.”

A collective shiver ran down the spines of all the pitchers and they firmed their grips, resolving to make the target this time.

“Last ball,” Kazuya said, and the balls flew.

Once again, the balls hit the target, but this time they’d all been thrown with a little more force and precision, and all of them hit exactly perfectly.

A hissing noise and then a cloud of pink powder exploded from each of the targets, rising in the air
and blowing around the stadium as the crowd applauded their favorites even as they were unsure of the meaning of the display.

“Looks like they’re all winning the prize!” the announcer said excitedly. “But what does it mean...oh!” he cut off in surprise as the Jumbotron flashed ‘It’s a GIRL’.

The crowds erupted in cheers while the mess was cleaned up and the bullpen took a bow. They all ran back into the dugout, each of them stopping to touch Kazuya’s belly as they passed.

After a few minutes of cleanup, the teams reclaimed the field, with every member of the home team wearing a pink jersey.

---

Me: That went well
Kaz: Yes, it did. Don’t get a big head
Me: I won’t
Me: Did you know Akemi weighs almost a kilo?
Kaz: fat baby
Me: there’s not a lot of new stuff this week, it’s just that everything’s moving along like it should. Her lungs are developing
Kaz: she’s your child, that’s for sure.
Me: are you calling me loud?
Kaz: if the shoe fits...
Me: asshole
Me: she’s developing more nerves in her ears, so her hearing is improving
Me: and her taste buds are developed. So she can taste what you eat, it can flavor the amniotic fluid.
Kaz: that’s why I don’t want cheeseburgers, she’s tired of them
Me: I don’t think that’s how it works. But we’ll see
Me: now pay attention to the game, Hara’s going to need you in a minute.
Kaz: how do you? never mind, he’s coming my way.
Me: have fun at work, play nice with the kiddies.
Kaz: love you, idiot.
“So, Kazuya, any unusual pains?” Haruichi asked, one of the list of questions he regularly ran through.

Kazuya ran a hand over his belly. “I have been having these different pains for the last few weeks.”

Haruichi turned away from his computer to face him. “What kind of pain? Cramping pain or sudden sharp pain?”

“Sudden sharp pain.”

Haruichi slid his chair over and ran his hand along the underside of Kazuya’s belly. “Down here?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, that’s fine, it’s your round ligament stretching. It normally stretches slowly and you can’t feel it, but sometimes, sudden movement strains it, and you get pain. If it was more like cramps we’d maybe have a problem—but those could easily be Braxton-Hicks, which are normal.” Haruichi met Kazuya’s worried gaze. “If you start having a cramping pain that starts to feel organized, like they’re trying to do something rather than just happen, let me know. If you feel like something’s wrong, please let me know. It could be nothing, but I’d rather have a dozen false alarms than miss the one real one.”

“I’ll do that,” Kazuya said. “It didn’t really worry me so much, I just wanted to let you know.” He looked over and saw Eijun glaring at him. “Seriously, Ei, I didn’t think it was a big deal. I would never endanger Akemi.”

“I’m not worried about Akemi,” Eijun growled. “I’m worried about you. And you call me an idiot.” He crossed his arms, grumbling.

Haruichi suppressed a smile before turning back to Kazuya. “So, anything else unusual or do you have any questions for me?”

“He’s having a lot of back pain,” Eijun said, glaring at his husband. “I was wondering if a belly band would be a good idea.”

“It wouldn’t hurt,” Haruichi said. “If you wear it at practice or while you’re on your feet, it may relieve some of the pain, but you can’t wear it too long. No more than four hours a day, max.”

“What kind is best?” Eijun asked.

“I’ll have the nurse give you a handout of the recommended types. It may not help much, Kazuya, so don’t be upset if that’s the case.”

“Gotcha,” Kazuya said.

“Akemi looks good; things seem to be moving along at a nice pace. Did you start your classes?”

“We did, two weeks ago,” Kazuya answered. “They’ve been interesting.”

“Good, I hope you get something out of them.”

“I have been, it’s nice to have someone who’s going through the same thing to talk to.”

“I’m glad, then.”

Eijun nodded, agreeing with Kazuya. “The other couples are really nice and Kazuya’s made some
friends. He’s growing up so fast…” He swiped an imaginary tear from his eye. “I’m so proud.”

“Jerk,” Kazuya said, kicking at him.

Eijun just grinned at him, smile wide.

“Anyway, you’re looking good, Kazuya. I’ll see you in two weeks, okay?”

“Sure thing,” Kazuya said, pulling down his shirt and standing up.

Eijun waved. “Thank you, Haruichi!” he said, guiding Kazuya out of the room with a hand in the small of his back.

“See you soon, Eijun,” Haruichi said, heading out of the examining room and down to his office.

“Come on, idiot,” Eijun said, twining their fingers together. “Let’s get you home, you’re exhausted.”

“I’m fine,” Kazuya protested before yawning.

Eijun took the handout and appointment card from the nurse and pointed Kazuya towards the door. “Come on, your highness, your carriage awaits.”

Twenty-eight weeks

Eijun sat on the couch, playing Dead or Alive, determined to get better. Kuramochi kept dragging him into playing it and kicking his ass, and that was going to have to change. He was tired of listening to him brag every time they played together.

He was trying to master a tricky combination when he felt Kazuya drape himself across his back, head on his good shoulder.

“I’m bored,” Kazuya whined. “Entertain me, Eijun, it’s your job.”

Eijun snorted and shrugged his shoulders, trying unsuccessfully to dislodge the limpet. “Weren’t you looking over plays or something?” He turned his head and glared at the top of Kazuya’s head. It was the middle of a long break for the team—they had three days off, and this was day two.

“I was, but it was boring,” he complained. “I want to do something with you.”

Eijun sighed as his character wailed in death, ‘Game Over’ screen flashing. “Okay, what do you want to do?” he asked. He was honestly charmed by how open Kazuya had become, before now when he was bored and wanted company he’d just show up and irritate him until Eijun figured out what it was he wanted.

“I don’t know,” Kazuya said, standing up and moving around the couch to slide into Eijun’s lap. Or at least to attempt it. He pouted. “I guess that’s out,” he said, starting to stand, before Eijun wrapped his arms around his waist.

“No, you’re fine,” Eijun said, tugging him closer. “There’s a baby in the way, but you still fit.” He wrapped his arms around his waist as Kazuya looped his over his shoulders. “See?”

“I won’t fit for long,” Kazuya said.
“You won’t be pregnant for much longer, either,” Eijun pointed out. “You’re in your third trimester.”

“True enough,” Kazuya agreed, perking up from his pout. “So what’chu wanna do?”

“I wanted to play that damned game,” Eijun said with a smirk. “But clearly that’s not in the cards. What do you want to do?”

“I dunno,” Kazuya said with a little pout that Eijun was unable to resist. “Can you think of something?”

“I can think of lots of things,” Eijun said with a raise of an eyebrow. “Give me a direction to go in.”

“Well, not that one,” Kazuya snarked. “I’m still recovering from last night.”

“Hey! It was your idea to experiment,” Eijun objected, a little worried. “I’m so—”

“No, no,” Kazuya interrupted him. “Don’t apologize, it was amazing and I want to do that again soon. Just not this soon.”

“Okay, then. What kind of thing would you…?” Eijun wracked his brain, trying to think of something to do. “I know!”

“What?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“I don’t want to have to get dressed and stuff, I’m comfy and it’s hot out there.”

“You don’t have to; you just have to get off of me.”

Kazuya eyed him. “You’re not just saying I’m too heavy, are you?”

“What? No, never,” Eijun said with a frown.

“I’m...you’re right,” he said, climbing off, Eijun’s hands on his waist for stability. “Where are we going?”

“You’ll see,” Eijun said, standing up and taking Kazuya’s hand. He led him down the hallway away from their bedroom.

“Akemi’s room?” Kazuya asked as he stepped through the doorway. “What are we doing in here?”

“You’re going to sit in the rocker,” Eijun said, guiding him over. “And I’m going to get the clothes that Mom sent and that we’ve bought, and we’re going to go through them to decide which ones we want to hang up now, and which we want to pack away. That way we can also get an idea of what we may still need. I’d imagine friends are going to give us girly dresses and cute outfits, but we need to make sure we have the right amount of onesies and stuff.” He headed over to the closet and pulled out one of the boxes from his mom, setting it beside Kazuya. “We can start here, you go ahead. I’m going to grab a chair, do you want a drink?”

“Sure, a bottle of water would be great,” Kazuya said. “But you don’t need a chair, just use the ottoman.” He indicated the one that came with his rocker.

“You should put your feet up, I’ll just—”

“Seriously, no. Just sit with me, okay?”
“Alright.” Eijun capitulated. “Give me a minute to get some water, I’ll be right back.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

Eijun came back in, carrying a clothes basket that held a couple of water bottles, a pad of paper, and a pen. He set the bottles on the nightstand beside Kaz and the basket beside his chair after digging out the pad of paper and pen and setting them all on the nightstand.

“I figure we’re going to want to wash whatever’s being hung in the closet,” Eijun said. “So we can drop them in the basket. We need to get one for in here, too. Let’s put that on the list.” He picked up the pad and pen, making a notation. Setting it down beside himself on the stool, he indicated the box of clothing. “Go ahead, Kaz.”

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” Kazuya said, opening the box.

“It’s the ‘fun’ part that Chris mentioned—going through the clothes and figuring out what we can use, packing up things for later and putting anything we don’t think we can use aside to be donated.”

“I don’t want to donate anything your mom sent, that was all your stuff, right?”

“Yeah, but she said she doesn’t want it back, remember? She told us to.”

Kazuya looked doubtful. “I don’t know, it was your baby stuff, we should keep it.” He pulled the box toward himself. “It’s not like they’re going to be aggressively masculine or something, it’s just baby clothes.”

“You’re right,” Eijun agreed. “But we may find it’s something we can’t or don’t want to use, remember I was born in May, so the weather is going to be totally different.”

“True. But I still don’t want to get rid of it. We can keep it for the next one, right?”

Eijun’s heart melted a little more. “Sure, yeah. We can keep it for the next one.”

Me: when do you want to go get the rest of that stuff on the list?

Kaz: Hello to you, too. How’s pt?

Me: seriously? I just saw you like thirty minutes ago

Kaz: Manners are important. It only takes a second to make a good impression.

Me: smartass.

Kaz: and that’s why Mom loves me more.

Me: you’re probably right. But shopping?

Kaz: I dunno, tonight after prenatal class?

Me: that works.

Me: we also need to get diapers
Kaz: bottles?
Me: We should talk to Jun about that
Kaz: when do we go to see him?
Me: We need to set that up. Maybe next week.
Kaz: okay. How’s pt?
Me: fine. I see the doctor next week, maybe he’ll clear me to go back.
Kaz: it’s really early, I thought you said two weeks? don’t push it.
Me: I know, but I can hope. I’ll get there when I get there. Hopefully mid-september.
Kaz: that would be great
Kaz: almost the end of the regular season
Me: yeah.
Me: did you know that Akemi’s starting to dream?
Me: she’s experiencing REM
Kaz: that’s so cool!
Kaz: I wonder what she dreams about
Me: cheeseburgers and fried pickles, probably.
Kaz: shut it, you.
Me: she’s also got eyelashes, and is blinking a lot.
Kaz: practicing for when she’s got you wrapped around her little finger
Me: I think it’s more likely to be you, softie
Kaz: you’re probably right
Kaz: I can’t resist you, how am I going to resist a mini-you?
Me: hah. you do a fine job
Kaz: i just put up a good front
Kaz: maybe i’ll build up an immunity
Me: could be. Hope so or we’re all in trouble
Kaz: she’ll just go bat them at uncle Mochi. or Tetsu.
Me: they’re not going to see it coming. It’s going to be glorious.
Kaz: it is.
**Me:** other than that, she’s just being a baby.

**Me:** growing and getting fatter

**Me:** supposedly i can hear her heartbeat if i put my head on your belly

**Kaz:** we’ll have to try that

**Me:** yes, that would be fun

**Me:** the torturers have called me back

**Me:** i gotta go

**Kaz:** have fun! I love you

**Me:** love you too, both of you

Eijun smiled as he walked out of the physical therapy office, turning his face towards the sun. He’d missed being out on the field, missed the feeling of the sun beating down on his head, the smell of the grass and the sound of a perfectly pitched ball hitting the catcher’s mitt.

He knew he was going back soon, probably in a couple of weeks if the therapist was correct, and he couldn’t wait. His hand itched to hold a ball, to throw and catch.

Pulling out his keys, he headed towards the car and climbed in, dialing his phone as he did so.

Switching to the speaker, he started the car.

“Hey, Eijun, what’s up?”

“Nothing much, how are you guys?”

“We’re fine, same old same old. Everything okay with Kaz and ‘kemi?”

“Oh, yeah. She’s growing like a weed and so is he,” Eijun said. “How’s the wedding planning?”

“What planning?”

“You are having a wedding, right?”

“Well, yeah. But the parents are handling the planning, we just have to show up.”

“Uhh, Moch? You might want to insert yourself in that. Parents, especially moms, can get weird ideas. Trust me, get involved.”

“We told them we wanted something simple, though.”

“And your definition of simple might not be theirs,” Eijun warned.

“You’re...not wrong,” Kuramochi said with a sigh. “Okay, I’ll call them and see what they’re planning.”

“You won’t regret it, I promise. At least not as much as you would if you didn’t step in.”
“I’m sure you’re right.”

Eijun snapped his seatbelt and started to pull out of his spot. “Anyway, I called to check on how the shower planning is going. What’s happening, do you know yet?”

“It’s next Friday, at the usual place. Your parents are joining over Skype, they can’t actually leave the farm right now. Kazuya’s father is going to be there. We need you to bring him around 7:30, everyone else is supposed to be in the place by 7:00.”

“Okay, cool. I did have one idea, if you need some kind of game or icebreaker or something,” Eijun said, this was the reason for the call.

“Sure, what do you have?”

“Well, yesterday we were going through the pile of my old baby clothes that my mom sent. In the middle, there was a onesie that says ‘Daddy’s Little Rockstar’. You know how my dad wanted to be a rockstar, right? Well, I guess he got that for me. We’re putting it on Akemi, of course, but I was thinking—”

“So what do you think?” Kazuya said, dipping a fried pickle in the dressing before eating it.

To his chagrin, the cheeseburger cravings had not gone away, after a few days they’d reappeared. They’d just finished at the baby store, buying most of what they still needed for Akemi and were discussing the thing they’d been trying to figure out for the last few weeks, ever since they’d returned from Nagano.

Eijun sighed into his water. “I don’t know. I mean, I know what I want, but I’m not sure it’s the smartest thing to do.”

“What’s the worst thing that could happen?” Kazuya asked.

“We’d go broke and have to live in the snow.”

“That would never happen, you know that. If the worst thing imaginable happened, we’d still be able to stay with one of our parents.”

“I don’t want to have to do that, though,” Eijun argued.

Kazuya tapped his hand. “Of course not, but that’s the worst case scenario, I think.”

“What do you want?”

“The same thing you do, of course. Everything she suggested.”

“Do you think we can afford it?”

Kazuya hummed. “With your bonus and another year of me coaching, yes, I do.” He ate another pickle. “I mean, even if we add twenty percent to the cost—since things never go to plan—we’ll still have a lot of money left. We can also cut back on some of the finishings, get stuff that’s durable and looks good rather than super high end.”

“True, and I think we can get them to let me sign for one more year, at least.”
“Yes, I’m sure they’ll be happy to have you around as well,” Kazuya agreed. “Also, we both have our degrees, remember? We can work. I don’t know that I want to stay home all the time.”

“You’re right about that, I wouldn’t mind teaching if I had to.”

“At least, you should coach somewhere, keep your hand in,” Kazuya said. “But that’s for later, right now we need to make a decision, Suzuki-san is waiting.”

“Yeah, I know,” Eijun said, resting his head on his hand.

“Why are you so worried about it?” Kazuya asked.

Eijun shrugged. “I don’t know? It’s just a huge amount of money, you know?”

“It is, but we actually have that much money. We’d own the house outright, so we wouldn’t have a mortgage or anything.”

“You’re right. Plus we can sell our place and that will help.”

“Or we can keep it if we want, use it when we come into town,” Kazuya suggested.

Eijun snorted. “I have the feeling that we’re not going to be doing that often enough to make it worth it.” He sighed again, smiling briefly at the server who delivered their food.

They ate in silence, Kazuya allowing Eijun time to work through things—he’d been thinking about it for weeks but the final commitment was always a big step. He knew how frugal Eijun was and how scary this was for him, and refused to push him to do anything except make a decision.

Finally, Eijun pushed his burger away. “Okay, yeah. I’m in. I’d like to see if we can save some by changing the finishings and stuff, but it’s exactly what we want and we’d be stupid to not get it done while we have the chance,” he said, trepidation in every word.

“It’ll be fine, seriously,” Kazuya said. “We’ll be extra careful, okay?”

“Alright,” Eijun said, finally smiling at him. “I’m sorry for being such a drag about this.”

“No, no, you’re fine. You’re right, actually, and it’s important for us to think it through carefully. I wouldn’t want it any other way,” Kazuya assured him.

“I just don’t want us to get into trouble,” Eijun said. “I’d hate to have to start to scrimp or have the kids do without.”

“We won’t,” Kazuya promised. “We can still work after we move, in fact, I plan on ramping up my coaching with Chris so I can get more experience with high school kids. What do you think about doing something like that?”

“I’d love to coach kids,” Eijun said. “But I also don’t want to leave the kids at home with a sitter if we don’t have to.”

“I get that, and we’ll work out something,” Kazuya said with a nod. “I just don’t want you to think we’re wandering off into the wilderness and never working again.”

“I know we aren’t,” Eijun said. “And I’m so—”

Kazuya cut him off. “You have nothing to be sorry about, Ei, you’re fine. It’ll all work out.”
“I’m...yeah, I know. I don’t even handle our finances, I don’t know why I’d even have a say in this.”

“You have a say because it’s your money too,” Kazuya said firmly. “It’s our future, it’s our life, and if you’re not comfortable with that level of remodeling, then we do whatever makes you comfortable.”

“Okay, you know what? I’m in. Seriously. I might fret some, but it’s all good,” Eijun took Kazuya’s hand. “I can’t say I won’t freak out a bit, but it’s not on you, I promise. If things go to crap for some reason, I will never blame you.”

“Partners, huh?”

“Partners until the end,” Eijun agreed.

Kazuya just smiled, not even trying to think of a response.

There are currently 25 people in the chatroom, max hosted was 957 on May 20, 2016.

Welcome EijunisaGod

EijunisaGod: Good Morning *hands out coffee*

EijunisaGod: So many people, what happened?

Miyuki’sThighs: You didn’t notice?

EijunisaGod: I just woke up.

Miyuki’sThighs: Wakachan redecorated

EijunisaGod: Boss did? *blinks* Why does it look like everything’s been dipped in pepto bismol?

Sawa4Life: Uploading confirm.png

EijunisaGod: It’s a girl? That’s it, it’s definitely not Eijun’s.

Sawa4Life: Wait, why?

EijunisaGod: Because he doesn’t have any sisters

EijunisaGod: wait, that sounds stupid

EijunisaGod: i still don’t trust Kazuya with him

Sawa4Life: EiG, you know you’ve never seen him actually do anything wrong, right?

BaseballIdiots: We’re missing the most important thing! What are they going to name her?

Miyuki’sThighs: Boss, can you set up a thread for that?

BoardAdmin: Yes, I was just doing that

BoardAdmin: And please keep the same old arguments out of there, if you don’t mind
Sawa4Life: Thanks, Wakachan!

EijunisaGod: Thanks, Boss!

Miyuki’sThighs: *wanders off and into the new thread*

BaseballIdiots: baby names, little girls with pretty names! Yay!

EijunisaGod: I still don’t think…

BaseballIdiots: I love you to death, eig, but you gotta stop

EijunisaGod: I don’t, actually. But I’ll play nice.

_There are currently 0 people in the chatroom, max hosted was 957 on May 20, 2016._

Chapter End Notes

Three more weeks down! Go me!
So, we have about ten left.
That's...well. We'll see.
It's going to be a while, I'm sure.

Thank you for reading, and if you'd care to leave a note I would appreciate it more than you know.
Chapter Summary

Akemi hiccups.
Eijun gets a date.
And Kazuya is both surprised and overwhelmed.

Chapter Notes

Hihi!
I hope you are all well and excited for the new Daiya stuff!

And I hope you like this chapter, it's. Well.
Sometimes I doubt everything about myself, you know?
Anyway. On with the show.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Twenty-nine

Eijun felt Kazuya turn over for what had to be the fifth time in as many minutes, and he rolled over to see what was going on. His back was facing him, so he snuggled up, wrapping an arm around his waist and laying his head on Kazuya’s.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, she’s just...I don’t know, doing something weird.”

“What’s she doing?”

“It feels like she’s tapping dancing or something rhythmic. It’s strange. And irritating, it’s hard to get comfortable.”

“Can I feel?” Eijun asked, and Kazuya moved his hand to cover his belly.

“Right there, you feel that?”

“That? Yeah,” Eijun said, chuckling.

Kazuya elbowed him. “Why are you laughing?”

“She’s hiccupping,” Eijun said. “It’s normal, she’s fine.”

“She’s supposed to be doing that?”

“Yep. Totally normal.”
“That’s good, but couldn’t she do it when I wasn’t trying to sleep?” Kazuya whined.

Eijun sighed and ran a comforting hand over Akemi. “I know, it sucks. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, but I’m seriously tired.”

“I know,” Eijun said. “You know she’s well over a kilo now?”

Kazuya snuggled back into him, “Really?”

“Yeah. She’s going to double, maybe even triple, before she’s born.”

“In the next ten weeks?”

“I know, right? That’s a short time. She’s also getting the white fat she needs for energy, that’s part of what’s happening to her.”

“What else?” Kazuya asked, voice fading as he relaxed.

“She’s starting to smile,” Eijun said, rubbing his belly gently. “It’s not a real smile, but the muscles are working.”

“That’s nice. Anything else?”

“Yeah, you should start counting kicks,” Eijun said.

“How do I do that?”

“Well, when you take a break, you lie down, preferably on your back, and you count movements. She should move at least ten times in an hour, if she doesn’t, you should eat something sugary and wait a bit before trying again.”

“You expect me to lie down and stay awake for an hour?” Kazuya chuckled sleepily. “Unless she’s hiccupping, that’s probably not happening.”

“Then you need more sleep,” Eijun said. “Either way, it’s a win, right?”

“But what about the count?”

“You can do it whenever, it’s just a way to consciously monitor the baby. She’s probably fine and if you really thought anything was wrong you’d know it even without this, but it’s a nice way to get some breathing room and connect, you know?”

“I could use some more downtime,” Kazuya admitted. “The team’s in the home stretch and it’s hard for me to take a break.”

“I know, but you need it. The baby needs it. Consider it medical permission to be lazy.”

“I can do that,” Kazuya agreed. “But you might have to remind me.”

“And I can do that,” Eijun echoed. “It feels like she’s stopped, you should try to sleep.”

“I can do that,” he said again, barely awake.

Eijun kissed his cheek and pulled him closer, eyes closing as he drifted to sleep, content.
“You ready?”

Kazuya settled into the seat, pulling the seatbelt over the lower part of his stomach. “Yeah, I am. It’s been a while since we went to one of these. It’ll be good to see everybody.”

“And they’ll be happy to see you, too,” Eijun agreed, putting the car into gear and pulling away from the curb.

“Or at least they’ll be happy to see Akemi,” Kazuya noted with a gentle pat to his stomach.

“There is that,” Eijun agreed. “Soon, we’re just going to be known as Akemi’s parents, we won’t
“I think that’s already happening.”

“With my mom, yes. And Gramps.”

“Right you are,” Kazuya said. “How was the doctor?”

“He’s good,” Eijun said, and then yipped a little when Kazuya poked him in the side. “Well, you asked!”

“Don’t tease the pregnant person,” Kazuya said. “What did the doctor say about your shoulder?”

“The eighteenth.”

“You can go back the eighteenth?”

“Yes, to practice and to play,” Eijun said with a grin.

“But not too much or too hard, right?”

“Right. And Shinji wants to see me every week for the rest of the season,” Eijun admitted.

“Well, then. Looks like both of us are going to have weekly appointments for a while.”

“Yeah, but yours don’t start for a bit,” Eijun said.

“Right,” Kazuya agreed. “But still, that’s great that you can come back so soon.”

“I know, I’m excited.”

“But you have to be careful, Eijun. I don’t want you to hurt yourself again.”

“I know, and I’m counting on you to rein me in.”

“You’ve got it. I’m good at that.”

“You are,” he agreed. “So how was practice?”

“Fine, we’re just treading water, waiting for the placements to fall in line,” Kazuya shrugged. “As long as we keep winning, we’ll be in a good place for the playoffs, I think.”

“Can we take the division?”

“If we’re careful. And lucky.”

“So, not likely?”

“No, it’s very doable. We just have to hope that a team or two stumbles, which is likely, while we continue playing consistently well.”

“Okay, good.”

“Plus we’re getting our star pitcher back, even in a limited role, and he’s the mood maker for the team. If anyone can keep them going, it’s him.”

Eijun felt his cheeks warm. “How is it that you can still make me blush after all this time?”
“It’s a gift,” Kazuya said with a grin. “Plus it’s the truth, you know I don’t lie.”

“That’s true, you don’t,” Eijun said as he pulled into a spot in the parking lot.

Kazuya looked at the restaurant in front of them. “Are we going to be bringing Akemi to these?”

“Do you really think we have a choice? That’s adorable,” Eijun snarked, opening his door. “Stay there, let me help you.”

“I’m fine.”

“Center of gravity, Kaz. Let me help.” Eijun closed his door and stepped around to help Kazuya out.

“Thank you,” Kazuya said. “Now can we go in? I don’t know how long I’m going to want to stay, though.”

“That’s fine, we can leave when you’re ready,” Eijun agreed.

“You do take the best care of me.” Kazuya leaned over and kissed his cheek.

Eijun linked their hands. “Ready?”

“Yeah.”

Eijun held the door open for Kazuya, following behind him. They stepped out of the entryway into the restaurant, where they were greeted by a room covered in pink, to a general chorus of “Surprise!”

Kazuya stopped and looked around, taking in the smiling faces and the streamers, the banner that read “Welcome, Akemi” and pink tiered cake beside a pile of presents. He turned to glare at his husband, blinking to remove the moisture.

“Did you know about this?”

“Of course,” Eijun said. “Why wouldn’t I?”

“And you didn’t say anything?”

“Then it wouldn’t have been a surprise,” came from behind him and Kazuya spun to see Kuramochi standing behind him with a wide grin. “Did you really think we wouldn’t do something like this?”

“Yes? You’re a bunch of baseball idiots, what do you know about baby showers?”

“Not a lot, clearly, or it wouldn’t be held in a bar,” Ryousuke snarked, sidling up beside Kuramochi.

“Anyway, here are the opening rules,” Kuramochi said, bringing out two oversized safety pins with pink heads. “These are diaper pins, if you didn’t know. And each person gets one; fasten this on your shirt. If you’re caught saying ‘baby’, the first person who calls you on it gets your pin. The one with the most pins at the end of the night wins.” He handed them over and watched as they fastened the pins to their shirts.

“A couple of other things. Kaz, the chair over there is for you,” he indicated a chair on the dais, which looked exactly like the one they’d gotten for Akemi’s room, but in the orange Kazuya had loved. “I know you have one for the nursery, but we thought it would be nice to have a comfortable
rocker for the living room, too. That’s your throne for the duration of this part of the party.”

“That’s...wow. I can’t believe you guys did this,” he said, still trying to catch up. “Thanks, Moch, Ryou,” he said with a grin.

“You’re welcome. You don’t have to sit in it until after we all eat, though.”

Kazuya walked further in, ascending the steps to the platform and looking out over the assembled crowd. “Thank you all for coming, for doing this for us.” He looked around and saw his father in one corner, sitting with Chris and Jun. “And you even dragged my dad into this?” he said, shocked.

Norio waved and yelled, “I wouldn’t miss it for the world!”

“We’re here too!” Kazuya scanned the crowd for Eijun’s family, catching sight of them on the wall, on the monitor. “We couldn’t leave the farm, it’s harvest time, but we didn’t want to miss this.” Chika waved at him. “Hello, boys.”

“Hi, Mom,” Kazuya said, still reeling a little. “Well, this looks to be a great party; a baby shower in a bar sounds really appropriate for this group. And us. So, thanks again, and I can’t wait to see what Mochi and company have planned for us all.” He stepped off the stage and joined Eijun as Kuramochi took the stage.

“Alright, you lot. Listen up,” he said, getting everyone’s attention. “You all have the onesie cutouts, yeah?”

Everyone held them up.

“Okay, great. And remember to keep trolling for that word that cannot be said, the person with the most safety pins will win a prize! The buffet’s open, so help yourself to food while you work on the onesies, and we’ll start with that in half an hour or so.” He jumped down and turned to Kazuya. “Grab some food and we’ll catch you up, Chris is holding your spot at your dad’s table.”

“Great, but he doesn’t have to move, there’s plenty of room,” Kazuya said, heading over to where his father was sitting at a table with six chairs around it. “Drag one of those tables closer, we can all fit.”

“Pardon me, Nori, but the pregnant one has spoken,” Eijun said to one of the occupants of the table Kazuya wanted to use. “This table has been confiscated by his highness for his own use.”

Nori laughed. “Of course, we can find—”

“No, no. You don’t have to leave, you just have to get up enough so we can push them together,” Eijun said. “I was kidding, please stay.”

“Sure,” Nori agreed. “But if he starts talking about tributes or sacrifices, I’m out of here.”

“I’ll be right behind you,” Eijun laughed.

They pushed the two tables together, and everyone got settled. Norio sat next to Kazuya, who was flanked by Eijun, and the others spread out around, finding spots.

“So, what’s going on?” Kazuya asked, ready for some answers.

“We should eat first, let me get you some food,” Eijun said. “I know you haven’t since lunch.”

“You’re right, okay,” Kazuya said. “But I can get it myself, you know.”
“I know, but let me, alright? I want to.”

“If you insist.”

“I do.” Eijun squeezed his hand and stood, heading for the buffet line.

“We’ll join you,” Kuramochi said. He and Ryou stood and joined Eijun on the way to the buffet table.

Kazuya turned to his father. “How long have you known about this?”

“Hi, Kaz. It’s nice to see you too, I know it’s only been a week or so, but you seem to be getting bigger. How are you feeling?”

Kazuya had the grace to look chagrined. “Sorry, Dad. Hi, I’m glad to see you, really. I can’t believe they dragged you into this.” He waved his hand, taking in the pink streamers and the pile of presents on the table.

“There was no dragging involved; I wanted to come as soon as Eijun told me about it.”

“How long have you known about this?”

“Since last month? When you were in Kyoto. Eijun told me in the car.”

“That long?” Kazuya shook his head in disbelief. “I can’t believe he kept it a secret for so long.”

“You don’t think he can keep a secret?”

“Not from me.”

“Apparently, you thought wrong,” Norio said with a smirk that rivaled the one that normally sat on Kazuya’s face.

“Apparently,” Kazuya agreed. “What do you know about this thing? What are we doing?”

“I’ll tell you what I know, but that’s not much.”

“More than I do,” Kazuya said.

“Okay. Over there, by the cake? There’s a bunch of presents for Akemi, of course, but the larger pile on the other table are all donations for a family shelter.”

“I like that. We don’t need anything, but there are so many others that do.”

“Yeah, it was the price of admission,” Norio said. “I think Eijun suggested it to Mochi.”

“Really?”

“He was uncomfortable with the idea of a shower, knowing that you guys had everything you’d need. I think this and a few other things were how Mochi got around him.”

“He was right, I hate the idea of people spending a lot of money on us when there are so many others who need help,” Kazuya said. “What else, then?”

“There was a price limit on the gift, of course,” Norio explained. “And the best part is later, I don’t know the exact details, but at the game later there are going to be penalties for different things, all of
which is also going to charity.”

Kazuya grinned. “And who’s assessing the penalties?”

“The ruler of the diamond, of course,” Kuramochi said, sliding himself into his seat. “Which is you, tonight.”

“Awesome.”

“Your dinner, your highness,” Eijun said, setting a plate in front of Kazuya, who looked at it and started laughing.

“You can’t be…this is awesome,” he said with a self-deprecating chuckle. “Thank you.”

Eijun set down a bowl of ranch dressing between them. “You’re welcome, but I didn’t arrange the catering, I’d imagine it was that cackling idiot across the table.” He motioned at Kuramochi, who was, indeed, cackling. And putting down his phone after having snapped yet another picture.

“I knew those were yours—or Akemi’s, who’s more important anyway—favorite foods.” He waved at the buffet line. “They were fine with us having this catered as long as we were still drinking from the bar, so we did.”

“Thank you, then,” Kazuya said, picking up his cheeseburger and taking a bite. “This is pretty awesome.”

Eijun looked around, eyeing the people sitting at the other tables. “How’s the diaper pin exchange going?”

“Not too badly,” Ryou said with a brief smile, and Eijun noticed that he had a decent length chain of them.

“You’re planning to win, huh?”

“Why not? I helped pick out the prize.”

“It’s a good one?”

Ryou raised an eyebrow. “Did I mention that I helped pick it out?”

“Gotcha.” Eijun grinned down into his plate.

Kazuya looked around and saw a table filled with unexpected faces. “You got Mei to come? And bring some of the other Inashiro guys?”

“Yeah,” Kuramochi said, popping another fried pickle into his mouth. “I asked him and I knew they’d been dying to come to one of these, so I told him to bring whoever wanted to come.” He shrugged. “They paid the price of admission, so the more the merrier.”

Kazuya glared at the redhead sitting at the table, interrupted by a brief squeeze of his leg.

“You need to let it go, it was over a decade ago,” Eijun said softly.

“Eijun, he almost stole baseball from you,” Kazuya said. “On purpose. As a head game to win a game.”

“I know, but it made me stronger, right?”
“That doesn’t excuse it. I still think he’s a snake and I don’t trust him.”

“That’s fine. I don’t either,” Eijun agreed. “But you shouldn’t sit and glare at him, alright? He’s not worth it.”

“You’re right,” Kazuya said, returning his attention to the members of his table. “So what else do you have planned?” He asked Kuramochi. “I know about the game later and the diaper pins, but what else?”

“So this is how things are going to go,” Kuramochi said, stealing one of Eijun’s fries. “After we eat, you’re going to sit in the chair up there and open presents. Then you’re going to judge the contest.” He stopped, looking at Kazuya expectantly.

Kazuya rolled his eyes and deadpanned, “What contest.”

“The onesie contest!” he crowed, with a wide grin.

“What’s that?”

“It was Eijun’s idea, I’ll let him explain.”

Eijun coughed and choked a little, surprised, before explaining. “It was that t-shirt that Mom sent,” he gestured towards the screen, where Chris was talking to his parents, he’d been watching to make sure they weren’t getting bored and was gratified to see how many of his teammates were taking the time to converse with them. “Remember, the ‘future rock star’ one? I thought it might be fun to see what this lot came up with, so each of them gets to create their own onesie on paper and you get to choose which one you like best.”

“And there’s a prize there, too?”

“Certainly,” Kuramochi said. “All the events have prized for the winner.”

“What other events are there?” Kazuya was wondering how late they expected this to last.

“Oh, just the game,” Kuramochi said. “The diaper pins, the onesies, and then the game.”

“That should be fun, are we bringing Mei and gang?”

“That’s why I let them come,” Kuramochi said. “It should be entertaining if nothing else. We’re down a few positions, so it’s good to have backup.”

Kazuya nodded, conceding the point, returning his attention to his food.

Okay, let’s get this party started,” Kuramochi said, walking to the front of the room. “You all keep eating, but let’s have the fathers come up. Miyuki can sit in his chair and start on this pile of presents.”

Kazuya stood and tugged on Eijun’s hair. “Come on, let’s go.”

“You’re the pregnant one, you go.”

“I need your help, we need to keep track of who bought what,” Kazuya said. “I don’t want to get anything mixed up.”
“Okay, yeah,” Eijun said, standing. “I remember our wedding.”

“That was a mess,” Kazuya agreed, Eijun following him as he wove between the tables. “I do not want that to happen again.”

“Me neither,” Eijun said, snagging a chair from one of the tables and bringing it with him to the dais. Kazuya settled into the chair and smirked at Kuramochi. “Ready when you are,” he said. “Wait.”

Kuramochi turned back to him. “Yes?”

“There was a price limit on the gifts, correct?”

“Yes?”

“Then how did you get me this chair, I know how much—”

“We went in together, idiot,” Kuramochi frowned at him. “Us and CJT, together we had enough.”

Kazuya nodded, still feeling a little off balance over the whole event. “Alright, but I really didn’t want—”

“Listen up,” Kuramochi said, stepping closer. “At some point, this isn’t about you. This is about Akemi and your friends wanting to celebrate a new chapter in all of our lives. Can you please just suck it up for a bit and let them have their fun?”

“I can name half a dozen kids between the team without even trying, though. We didn’t go to these lengths; I don’t even remember having a shower for them.”

“You’re different, jerk,” Kuramochi said with a sigh. “You’re the first one of us to get pregnant, this is really the first Seido baby and we all want to celebrate that, okay?”

Kazuya blinked at him before sighing. “You’re right, I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be an asshole, I’m just…”

“Not used to people doing things for you and pregnant and tired and moody?” Kuramochi asked. “Yeah, we noticed.”

“You do realize me sitting here in front of all these people watching me open presents is not my idea of a good time. Or even of a mediocre one, right?”

“Of course. Why else do you think I planned it that way?” Kuramochi smirked as he turned, motioning for Eijun to take his place beside Kazuya. He stepped off the dais and picked up a pad and pen, handing them to him. “So you can keep track. I’ll bring stuff up.”

“Thanks, Moch,” Eijun said, taking the writing supplies. “For everything.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Kuramochi said, cheeks reddening as he took the top box off the pile.

Kazuya, still feeling vaguely guilty and somewhat uncomfortable with the attention, opened the gifts as Kuramochi handed them to him, with Eijun dutifully recording each gift and its contributor.

There were several sleepers, including an adorable one covered with red hearts from CJT, a half dozen different darling dresses of varying colors and sizes, a variety of other baby things, stuffed
animals and nursery toys as well as a wind up crib mobile in the colors of Akemi’s room from the Sawamuras and a diaper bag embroidered with Akemi’s initials from Norio. Mei and the Inashiro group had chipped in on an activity mat and just as Kazuya thought they’d finally gotten through the pile, Kuramochi pulled one more box from behind the table.

“This one is from me,” he said, laying it on Kazuya’s lap.

“You didn’t…” Kazuya looked at him, feeling overwhelmed by the pile of boxes at Eijun’s side and everything that intimidated.

“I know I didn’t, I wanted to,” he said, a small smile on his face. “You’re my best friend, and you’re going to have a baby. What would you do if you were me?”

“Everything,” Kazuya said, slightly embarrassed, but nonetheless honest—for once.

Kuramochi blinked in shock as Eijun suppressed a smile, Kazuya hadn’t been this open with anyone else, and it was a joy to see. It also helped that he’d managed to dumbfound Kuramochi, thus satisfying his innate need to tease.

“Just open the box, wouldja?” Kuramochi growled.

Kazuya carefully unwrapped the last box, opening the lid slowly. He pushed back the tissue and heard Eijun suck in a breath. “You didn’t,” he said, feeling his eyes prick a little.

“I did,” Kuramochi said.

Kazuya ran a reverent hand over the stitched fabric, smiling at the bright prints and colors. “It’s gorgeous, I can’t believe you did this,” he pulled the quilt out of the box to show Chika, who was demanding to see it.

“Oh, that’s beautiful,” she said. “Mochi, did you make that?”

“I did,” Kuramochi admitted, a little embarrassed.

“That’s incredible, I’m impressed. Can we chat about it later?”

“Of course, but it’s not a big deal.”

Eijun narrowed his eyes at him. “It is, I know how much work goes into one of these. It’s amazing, Moch. Thank you.”

“I was glad to do it. I made it with a higher loft batting so you can put it on the floor and she’ll be comfortable, and it’ll be warm in the colder weather.” Kuramochi explained to Eijun, Kazuya wasn’t listening—he was busy showing the quilt to the small crowd that had gathered to look at it closer.

“That’s great, I’m sure she’s going to be having plenty of floor time,” Eijun said. “It’s perfect for her room, too.”

“Well, yeah. I looked at those colors enough to work that part out.”

“I don’t know what we would have done without you, Moch. You’ve done so much for us, there’s no way we can ever repay you.”

“There’s no need, you two have done every bit as much for me,” Kuramochi said. “It’s what we do, right?”
“You’re right,” Eijun agreed.

“Plus it’s pretty awesome to see him gobsmacked every once in a while.”

“This is also true.”

After a few minutes, the people headed back to their seats and Kuramochi stepped back onto the platform.

“Now onto the next part of this party. Jun and Chris should have gathered up all of the t-shirt cutouts, is there anyone still working on theirs?” He looked around the room and saw a few people handing theirs to Chris. “Okay, so here’s what we’re doing. These are all anonymous, so neither Miyuki nor Sawamura know who did which one. They’re going to read each saying and decide which one is the best. That one will be turned into a onesie for Akemi, and the creator will win a prize. Let’s start, shall we?” He took the pile of cutouts from Chris and handed them to Kazuya. “You two look at them, read them out loud, and then let us know which is your favorite.”

“Got it,” Eijun said, looking curiously at the first one.

Kazuya started reading them aloud, pausing for commentary afterward.

‘Seido’s little princess’

“I thought that was Koshuu!” Came from an anonymous team member.

“Shut up!”

‘Daddy’s little squirt’

“Okay, no. You’re not putting that on my niece.” This was from Jun, to the general amusement of the room.

‘If you think I’m cute, you should see my papa!’

“I love this one,” Kazuya smirked at Eijun, who shook his head.

“No way.”

‘Don’t touch me, Peasant.’

“We all know who wrote that one,” Kanemaru said, as everyone looked at Ryou.

He shrugged. “Where’s the lie?”

‘I’m proof that my daddy doesn’t only think about baseball’

“That’s not news to anyone who walked in on them at Seido.”
“You mean everybody?”

‘Future Ace’

“That’s the winner,” Eijun said, to a collective groan.

‘If my dads say no, Uncle Mochi will say yes’

“Too true,” Ryou said with a nod.

“You could put any of your names on there,” Kuramochi protested, to the general agreement of the room.

They continued until they got to the end of the pile, and Kuramochi spoke up. “Let’s give them some time to figure this out. While we’re waiting, we should have some cake,” he said, indicating the rows of plates the wait staff had laid out after cutting the cake. “Help yourself, and may the odds ever be in your favor!”

He stepped down and brought both Eijun and Kazuya a slice of cake before retrieving his and returning to his seat at the table.

“So, what do you think?” Kazuya asked Eijun as they ate their cake and looked over the cards while the others grabbed some cake and socialized, some people taking advantage of the relaxed atmosphere to gain more diaper pins.

He thought for a second and pointed at one of them. “You?”

Kazuya laughed and pulled another one out of the pile.

“We’re not getting the Papa one, Kaz,” Eijun said, cheeks reddening.

“Nor are we getting the Ace one,” Kazuya countered. “We don’t even know if she’ll like baseball. And she might be a catcher if she does, anyway.”

“This has no bearing on what she does and doesn’t like,” Eijun argued. “But fine, we’ll take the Ace one out if we take the Papa one out.”

“Fair enough. So now what?”

“What’s your second choice?”

“This one, I think,” Kazuya said, pointing to one of the remaining shirts.

Eijun laughed. “Yeah, I like that one, too.” He nodded. “That’s fine.”

Kazuya motioned Kuramochi over. “We’ve picked one.”

“Yeah? Which one.”
Eijun handed it over with a grin. “That one.”

Kuramochi glanced at it and grinned back. “It’s perfect.”

“Of course it is,” Kazuya said, raising his nose in the air. “We picked it.”

“Ugh, whatever,” he said, before standing at the front edge of the stage.

“Can I have your attention please!” he raised his voice to get the chatting crowds to silence.

“The winner of the contest has been chosen. They will get their saying silk screened onto a onesie for Akemi to wear and are the proud owners of one of those prizes on the table over there.” He indicated the small table beside the cake.

“The shirt that’s been chosen is…”

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Chapter End Notes

Reader question: Which is your favorite?
Let me know in the comments, I would love to hear your thoughts!
Best Served

Chapter Summary

Kazuya schemes
Eijun is exasperated
And Haruichi plays one of the worst games of his life.

Chapter Notes

*waves*
Hihi!
Here you go, the rest of the baby shower!
I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Twenty-nine

“The shirt that’s been chosen is…”

Kazuya smirked at the attentive faces, drawing out the moment.

“Let me tell you a little about our process before—” he started, to the general boos from the audience. “Okay, okay,” he said, turning around the chosen shirt. ‘We chose ‘Don’t Touch Me. Peasant.’ because he wouldn’t let me pick ‘If You Think I’m Cute You Should See My Papa’.”

Eijun sighed, rolling his eyes dramatically, but refraining from further comment.

“If you are the one who made that, come see me when you have a chance, I still want one.”

Eijun sighed again, louder.

“Anyway, come on up, Ryou, and I guess you get a prize?” Kazuya looked over at Mochi.

Mochi laughed as he gestured to the table of wrapped prizes. “Pick whichever you’d like.”

Ryousuke did nothing to suppress the slight smile playing across his lips as he walked up and grabbed the thing he knew he’d wanted. “I’ll take this.”

“Unwrap it and show the nice people,” Mochi instructed him.

“Gladly,” he said, turning so everyone could see what he was doing. He pulled off the paper, revealing a mug. Turning it so everyone could see, he read what was painted on it. ‘Akemi’s Favorite Uncle.’ He grinned at them all. “It’s perfect to drink hot tea out of, don’t you think?”

The collective groan caused his smile to widen as he bowed and stepped down from the stage.
“Okay, so here’s what we’re going to do,” Kuramochi said. “Settle your tabs and get ready to head out.”

“What about the diaper pins?” Kazuya asked.

“Oh, right,” Kuramochi said. “Hang on a sec,” he told the room at large. “We have to settle the matter of the diaper pins. Let’s see, who has more than 5?”

Four people raised their hands: Jun, Haruichi, Norio and Nabe.

“Who has more than seven?”

Nabe and Haruichi were the only two.

“How many do you have, Nabe?”

“11”

“Haruichi?”

“10”

“Nabe’s the winner, then,” Kuramochi said. “Not so unexpected, from the king of strategy. Please, come up and pick your prize. The rest of you, settle your tabs and I’ll keep talking.”

Nabe came up and picked a box, from which he drew a “World’s Best Uncle” t-shirt, that he promptly donned.

“As you’ve probably figured out, there’s a bit of a theme to the prizes, but I don’t think any of you lot will complain too much. So, what we’re going to do next.” He stopped for a second to gather his thoughts. “We’re going to play a baseball game, which is what we always do. But here’s the difference. First of all, there will be prizes for a number of things. The most home runs. The most bases stolen.” He smirked.

“That’s hardly fair,” came from the depths of the crowd. Kanemaru, if Eijun had to guess. “What the hell, Kuramochi!”

“Sorry folks, we didn’t want them to be position specific, so most of them are offensive. We’ll be giving a prize to the MVP, as voted by the winning team. The winning team will also get a small prize. There are also penalties. The most strikes. The most balls. The losing team. All of these things will carry a penalty, assessed at the end of the game, and going to charity. If you are assessed a penalty, you may pay what you wish—not everyone is a pro player, right?”

He walked over to the edge of the platform in anticipation of jumping down. “We’re playing at the same field we’ve been using—if you don’t know where it is, please come and see me or Chris for directions. We do have a change or two to our normal game, but we’ll talk about that when we get there. The game starts in thirty, be there or sit on the sidelines.”

Hopping down, he took a step before turning to the others on the stage. “Don’t worry about the gifts; we have someone coming after this to pick them up. They’ll deliver them to your house tomorrow morning; just let me know when you’ll be home.”

“I should be home all morning,” Eijun said, standing and offering Kazuya his hand. “Kaz has practice, though.”
“Okay, good,” Kuramochi said. “We also have someone from the shelter coming to pick up these donations as well.”

“Good,” Kazuya said, stepping down from the stage with Eijun’s help. He laid a hand on Kuramochi’s shoulder. “Thank you, Moch. You’ve really made this everything I could have hoped for, I’m so glad you’ve put so much thought into this. All these donations are great. After this is done, let me give you a check for the shelter, too. We want to help.”

“It’s your shower, Kaz.”

“But we’d still like to help,” Eijun said. “We are the pro players who can afford the high donations, and neither of us is able to play.”

“But—” Kuramochi protested, before subsiding. “Of course, yeah. It’s all in Akemi’s name, anyway.”

“It is, you’re right,” Kazuya said.

“That’s fine, just pass me the check when you think about it,” Kuramochi said. “I’ll make sure it gets where it needs to be.”

“Thanks again, Moch,” Eijun said. “We do appreciate everything.”

“It’s not over yet,” he cackled. “Talk to me when it’s through!”

Eijun slid behind the wheel, eyeing his husband in the passenger seat. “You alright?”

“I’m fine,” Kazuya said, relaxing into his seat. “I’m a little tired, but that’s not a surprise.” He sat for a second, watching as Eijun backed out of the parking spot. “Speaking of surprises, though…”

“I know, but it wasn’t a bad one, was it?” Eijun looked at him quickly as he drove.

Kazuya sighed. “Not at all, honestly.” He slid his hand over Eijun’s lacing their fingers. “I’m sure I have you to thank for all the donations.”

“Yeah,” Eijun agreed. “I knew I couldn’t talk them out of doing something, so I thought the next best was to make it so that it helped someone. They basically kidnapped me while you were gone and told me it was a done deal, I made a few suggestions that they gladly implemented.” He turned down the road to the field.

“I’m glad you did, it makes it all worthwhile,” Kazuya said. “It’s kinda embarrassing, honestly, but it’s also for a good cause.”

“They weren’t going to be dissuaded,” Eijun said. “But I’m not upset that they did this for you. I know you don’t like being the center of attention, but this is important. I heard what Mochi said to you and he’s right. You’ve always undervalued your worth outside of baseball, and this pregnancy is something that’s special to more than just us.”

“You’re not wrong, and neither is he,” Kazuya admitted. “It’s hard for me, you know this.”

“I do, and I’ll keep reminding you. I’ve been doing it for a decade already, it’s ingrained.”
“You do. And I appreciate it more than you’ll ever know.” Kazuya squeezed his hand. “I love you, you know that, right?”

Eijun chuckled, “I actually am aware of that fact. And I adore you.”

“Glad we talked that out, then,” Kazuya said with a smirk.

“You are such a dork.”

“I’m your dork.”

“That is a true fact,” Eijun said, pulling into the parking lot. “How do you think this is going to go?”

“I have no idea; you’re the one that was in on all of the planning.”

“I attended one meeting, Kaz. And talked to Mochi a few times. It wasn’t like I was the president of the planning committee.”

“Fair enough. But still, you know more than I do.”

“Finally, you admit it,” Eijun said with a laugh.

Kazuya scowled. “In this limited situation, Eijun.” He took the hand Eijun offered to stand to his feet. “Although you know I think you’re smart.”

“I know, I’m just giving you a hard time.” Eijun kept their hands intertwined. “I wonder how late this is going to run.”

“Again, no idea.”

“I know, jerk. I was just talking.”

“Oh, well. Chatter away, then.”

Eijun huffed. “Like you could stop me.”

“I never want to,” Kazuya said softly. “You’re my favorite song.”

“So cheesy,” Eijun said, cheeks red.

“But you liked it.”

“Yeah,” he admitted. “I did.”

Walking onto the field, they found the players standing in small groups chatting. Working their way through, stopping to chat a few times themselves, they eventually stopped by Norio, who was talking to Kanemaru and Haruichi.


“We’re good, just waiting for Mochi to show up and boss us all around,” Kanemaru said.
“Dad, what happened to my parents?” Eijun asked.

Kazuya laughed. “You forgot about your family?”

“Well, there were presents and then the contest and I just...forgot,” Eijun admitted.

Haruichi took pity on him. “Chris took care of them. He offered to move them to his iPad so they could come and watch the game, but they said it was no fun if they weren’t there, so they signed off. I think he made a promise to schedule one of these while they are in town so they can watch.”

“Oh, that’s great,” Eijun said. “I’m glad Chris dealt with them. I’ll call tomorrow and grovel like a good son.”

“Don’t bother,” Chris said, walking up to the group. “They said for you to call them when you had the chance, but not to worry about it, they had a great time. And yes, we do have to have a game while they’re here next, please let us know when that’s going to be.”

“Maybe not until Akemi’s born,” Eijun admitted. “They’re busy with the farm until mid-October at least.”

“Well, then. We’ll figure something out.”

Haruichi nodded. “We always do.”

“Oi, you lot!” came from the other side of the crowd. Kuramochi had arrived. He hopped up on one of the bleachers on the side of the field. “Gather ‘round, wouldja?”

The crowd started heading that way, forming a half circle in front of him.

“Kazuya? You and Eijun come up here.” He watched as Eijun carefully handed Kazuya up onto the seat, standing beside him and offering him his shoulder to balance himself. “Okay. So, here’s what we’re going to do. There are new people here who don’t know the rules, and we’re changing a few of them, so try to keep up.” He smirked at the crowd. “First of all, we don’t want to be here too late, people figure out what’s going on when we are. That’s why we’re playing a ninety-minute game, max. Any time after sixty minutes that we come to the end of an inning, we stop. Secondly, substitution rules don’t apply; you can swap players out at will. Thirdly, you’re not picking the teams or coaches. We’re going to let the man of the hour have that privilege.”

Kazuya’s face broke into a wide grin as he looked out over the crowd. “This is going to be so much fun.”

“For you, maybe!” came the anonymous (not really, it was Jun) shout.

“Anyone who isn’t planning to play, come sit in the bleachers over here, so Miyuki can see what he’s working with,” Kuramochi instructed, jumping down from the seat. “Now’s your chance,” he said softly to Kazuya, meeting his eyes. “You get to boss the whole team around. Plus some.”

Kazuya nodded, just as soberly. “I do,” he said, shooting a quick glance at the group.

Eijun had learned quickly how to keep up with their silent conversations since he was often the butt of their jokes. This time he wasn’t the object of their communication, but he knew who was. “Kazuya, don’t,” he said, scanning the available players.

“Don’t what?” Kazuya asked nonchalantly, looking like he was doing nothing more than writing a grocery list. “I’m not doing anything.”
“You know what I mean. Let it go.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Kazuya turned away and called everyone to attention. “Okay, so coaches first. We have a few duplicate positions, so Chris, you’ll be one coach. Ryou, you can be the other.”

“Bullpens next,” he said, running his eyes over the players. “Mei, you’re with Chris. Nori, you and Asada are with Ryou. Itsuki, you go with Ryou, of course, and Okumura is with Chris. That should be fun,” he grinned at the general groans of the crowd. His smile widened when he saw Okumura and Mei eye each other warily.

“Now, to continue the rest. Mochi, you and Seto are on Chris’s team.” Eijun looked at him in surprise, and Kazuya shot him a smirk, which made him narrow his eyes in suspicion. Kuramochi’s eyes widened and he turned his glare on Kazuya, who continued, meeting Kuramochi’s gaze evenly.

“Haruichi, you and Shirakawa are with Ryou.” Kuramochi’s glare melted into a thoughtful gaze, before nodding at Kazuya, face satisfied. Eijun’s thoughtful gaze turned into a glare, a completely opposite reaction. Kazuya ignored it all.

“Tetsu, Ryou. Jun, Chris,” Kazuya continued to assign the players, mixing up the teams as much as possible. There were only four Inashiro players, so Carlos went to Chris—each team had two.

After he’d selected the teams, everyone moved to the side they were supposed to be on.

“Chris, you’re batting first. Ryou’s team, defense,” Kazuya said. “You have five minutes to talk, and then warm up. Who’s the umpire?”

“Maybe we can help?” came from the side of the bleachers as a group of three people rounded the corner. Led by head coach Kataoka, the coaches from Seido came to a stop beside them. “Sorry we’re late; we had to make sure everything was locked down before we came over.”

Kazuya stepped down from the bleacher. “Coach, I’m glad to see you, I know you’re busy preparing for Koshien.” He bowed a little, truly shocked by this development.

Chris stepped forward, smile wide. “We’re all happy you could make it, I didn’t know if you’d be able to get away.”

“We didn’t either, but it’s a quiet night,” Rei said, pushing up her glasses. The staff had expanded since Kazuya graduated, but the same four that had been there before were still coaching. Rei was now the head of recruiting for the school as well as her previous team management duties.

Ochiai was looking over the teams. “This is an interesting distribution. Your work?” he asked Kazuya, who nodded. As the years had passed, he’d lost most of his suspicion of Ochiai, mainly because Eijun had insisted that he’d been a help, especially after Kazuya graduated. Even that wouldn’t have been enough if he had not been able to demonstrate exactly what it was he had done and how it had helped. After that, Kazuya became a little less wary, although he’d never gotten to the place he trusted him completely. “I’m impressed,” he said, stroking his goatee. “It’s exactly how I would have picked them.”

“Thank you, sir,” Kazuya said.

“Congrats, you two,” Rei stepped up beside Eijun as the others sorted out who was doing what. “You look good, Kazuya. How are you feeling?”

“I’m not so bad,” Kazuya said. “It’s getting cooler, so that’s a plus.”
“I’m happy you’re doing so well,” she said. “It’s exciting, right? To be a parent?”

“It is,” Eijun said. “And how are the twins?”

“They’re good,” Rei said. “They’re walking and talking, making Tesshin crazy.”

“I’m sure they are,” Kazuya said. “Congrats on getting so far this year, too.”

“Oh, lord,” Rei said, pushing up her glasses. “The boys this year are a handful. They remind me of your batch, the troublemakers.”

Eijun laughed. “Then they’re good?”

“Yes, they are,” she nodded decisively. “They’ve got the ability to win the whole thing. And not just if others make mistakes, they can do it on their own.”

“That’s awesome,” Eijun said. “Please keep us in the loop; we’d love to know how they’re doing.”

“Will do,” Rei agreed.

They turned their attention back to the teams in front of them as Kataoka spoke up. “Okay, you’re sorted out, go warm up for a bit, and then we’ll start.”

Rei walked over to her husband and Eijun turned his glare on his.

“What?” Kazuya asked.

“I didn’t put him with Mochi, that’s what you wanted, right?”

“Haruichi’s worse,” Eijun said. “You could have put him with Seto.”

“I could have, but why would I?” Kazuya asked. “That would have put Haruichi and Mochi together, which would have hardly been fair,” he explained. “Plus, this is more fun, right?”

Eijun sighed in exasperation. “Kaz, you know that wasn’t your motivation.”

“Maybe not all of my motivation, but a good part of it, yes,” Kazuya argued. “Haruichi with Shirakawa is a bonus, to be honest.”

“It’s no longer an issue, you know that. It might have even made me a better player.”

“You know,” Kazuya said, tone thoughtful and smile mirthless, “Mei told me that he asked him about that one time, he’d always thought Shirakawa went too far and that he shouldn’t have tried to break you like that. You know what he said?” Kazuya looked at him out of the corner of his eye. “He said that he didn’t see anything wrong with it, it was part of the game. And if you were weak enough to break, then you didn’t deserve to play.” He turned to face Eijun, expression hardening. “So, love of my life and father of my child, no. I have no intention of letting it go or forgetting about it until he apologizes. To you. Directly. I refuse.”

Eijun’s eyes widened, he didn’t see Kazuya like this often, he usually expressed his displeasure with snark and biting sarcasm. This wasn’t that, this was tightly leashed rage.

“So don’t ask me to, okay? Never going to happen,” Kazuya said, turning his attention back to the field, where the teams were taking their positions. Kataoka was standing behind the plate, while
Ochiai was off to one side beside Nabe, ready to be the base umpire.

“We will speak about this later,” Eijun said, also looking forward.

“Looking forward to it.”

On the field, Kataoka started the game. “Play ball!”

Eijun ran his eyes over the lineup, impressed once again by his husband. When he and Kazuya played, they were always separated so neither team had the advantage, since they were the only members still playing professionally. But he’d never considered that Kazuya was analyzing the players as well, although to be fair, it could have been inadvertent on his part. However, when he looked over the lineups, he noticed that Kazuya had separated any pairing that worked well together and put together people that tended to not get along as easily. That wasn’t as impressive as the fact that he hadn’t even hesitated, assigning positions and teams so quickly it seemed like he was working randomly. Even with the additions, he was able to slide them neatly into position and create teams that were both created for maximum chaos.

Sometimes the strategic brilliance of his husband was breathtaking.

The game went as Eijun expected; the batteries took some time to get used to working together and the rest of the players did their best to make the necessary adjustments. They were well matched, another thing he hadn’t noticed but that Kazuya had clearly taken into consideration. And then there was the situation with Shirakawa.

Eijun watched with—not admiration, he didn’t want to assign it a positive emotion—but appreciation for Haruichi’s masterful ability to both foul Shirakawa’s plays and flub his own.

During the first inning, while they were on defense, Haruichi leaned forward to catch a throw from Shirakawa and just missed it. “Sorry, my fault,” he called. He went on to explain, “It’s been a while, I’m out of practice.”

“It’s okay,” Shirakawa said, shaking his head as he turned his attention back to the next play.

Ryousuke met his brother’s eyes and nodded, short and sharp and totally in agreement.

Second inning, the score was tied, and once again, Shirakawa was throwing the ball to Haruichi, who stepped off the plate to catch it, allowing Kuramochi to make it to base safely. Shirakawa glared at Haruichi’s apologetic shrug and turned back to pay attention to the current batter. Eijun’s eyes narrowed as he watched Kuramochi and Haruichi chat on second base, glaring when Kuramochi looked over. He just laughed and patted Haruichi on the shoulder, getting ready to react to the next play.

Those were just what he saw...there were clearly other things going on, based on the looks Shirakawa was shooting Haruichi. Nothing as overt as the other two plays, but more subtle jabs. Eijun could only imagine what they were. Sighing, he looked at his watch, hoping they’d end after two innings, but there was plenty of time. There would be a third inning, and he dreaded whatever it was that Haruichi was going to do.

“Call him off,” Eijun said, turning to his husband.

“Who?” Kazuya asked, looking as innocent as he could manage.

“Haruichi. Ask him to stop whatever it is he’s doing. It’s not worth it.”
“You’re worth it,” Kazuya said. “And it’s not my call. I didn’t ask him to do anything; I have no sway over the Kominatos. If anyone could get him to back down, it would be you. But it’s about you, so I don’t think they’ll listen either way.”

Eijun sighed and leaned back, supporting himself with his elbows on the next riser. “You’re not wrong. But still, you can’t be so upset about something that happened a decade ago. I’m stronger than I would have been if it hadn’t happened, it helped me learn new things and made me more than I was.”

“I know it did, and I’m immensely grateful. But Eijun, what if it hadn’t? What then? It still sits in my bones, the anger and fear I have about what happened. There are two people to blame, and I will never forgive either of them.”

“Who else...wait, what?” Eijun sat up and looked at his husband, turning on the bench. “You can’t still be blaming yourself, can you?”

“Of course I can,” Kazuya said. “I almost stole baseball from you.”

“You didn’t do it on purpose, you know it wasn’t deliberate. You can’t blame yourself for something you didn’t mean to do.”

“Yes, I can. And I do. I know you don’t blame me, and I love that about you, but I blame me. I was too focused on winning, I was wrong. And you suffered the consequences.” Kazuya continued to stare out at the field, refusing to look at his husband. “I can’t forgive myself.”

“But you didn’t make me have the yips, it wasn’t your fault.”

“I know. I know whose fault that is,” Kazuya agreed, eyes still on the players on the field. “But I opened the doorway, gave him the chance. I should have known better.”

“Maybe. But I should have called for a time out, something. I could have done that, too.”

“You could have, but you wouldn’t have,” Kazuya argued. “I’m not sure you knew at that time you could, nor have you ever been the best judge of your condition. Besides which, you never wanted to give up the mound and you’d have felt like calling a timeout was a show of weakness. I knew all these things, though. And I should have acted.”

Eijun sighed. “Hindsight is perfect, Kaz. You can’t change things, you just have to know that you did the best that you could at the time and go on. You were just a kid—we were what? Sixteen?”

“Yeah, that’s true. But I will never stop regretting that,” Kazuya said, reaching over to link their fingers. “And I will always enjoy the sight of Shirakawa getting his ass handed to him by Haruichi.”

“We’ll have to agree to disagree on that,” Eijun answered, turning his attention back to the field where Ryou’s team had just gotten their third out—their last time on offense, with the score still tied. Eijun was not at all surprised to see Shirakawa say something to Haruichi, whose reply earned him a glare.

He sighed and prepared for the worst, grimacing a little when he heard Norio, sitting on the other side of Kazuya, ask, “What’s going on with Haruichi? He’s not playing as well as I’ve seen him in the past, at all.” He’d totally forgotten that Kazuya’s father was there and was glad the discussion they’d been having hadn’t been loud enough to hear. He didn’t want to have to explain their history, although he wouldn’t be surprised to know that Norio was aware of everything, anyway.

Turning his attention back to the game with one ear open to Kazuya’s explanation, he watched in
resignation as the pair continued not to connect. And then, with two outs and runners on first and second, Jun hit a line drive to second, which Haruichi caught on one bounce, turning to throw it to third base after tagging second, trying to get Mei out. He threw the ball and Eijun’s exasperation turned to horror as he watched it head right towards Shirakawa, hitting him on the hip before bouncing away. Grabbing his hip, he hobbled after the ball, picking it up and sending it to home, too late to keep Nori from scoring. Game over.

Eijun shot a glare at Kazuya, who was looking smug, and trotted onto the field and over to the injured shortstop. “Are you alright?”

“What do you care?” he asked with a growl. “They were doing what you wanted them to, right?”

“No, I would never ask for anyone to hurt another player, ever,” Eijun said. “Do you need to go to the doctor?”

“No, I’m fine,” Shirakawa said begrudgingly. “It’ll just bruise a little.” He stomped off, brushing by Eijun roughly.

Eijun headed over to where Haruichi and Kuramochi were chatting, laughing together. “Are you two proud of yourselves?”

“What are you talking about?” Haruichi asked.

“How can you even ask that with a straight face? What was going on out there, Haruichi? You’ve never played that badly in your life, let alone hit someone with a ball. You’re lucky he wasn’t badly hurt.”

“Well, Eijun,” Haruichi said with a soft smile. “If he couldn’t handle it, he doesn’t deserve to play the game.”

Eijun groaned and glared at both of them—as well as his husband, who was approaching looking entirely too pleased with himself. “If you lot are just going to stand around congratulating yourself for getting unsolicited revenge for something that was done to me, I’m leaving. I’ll go talk to Chris,” he said and did exactly that, heading across the field to where Chris was chatting to Ryousuke.

“Well, that was quite a game,” Ryousuke said with a small smirk.

“Don’t get me started,” Eijun complained. “I just left the trio of terror back there patting themselves on the back. It’s so stupid.”

“What’s going on?” Chris asked, looking from Ryousuke to Eijun to the other three that he’d just left. “Haruichi looked like he was having a rough day but…,” his face cleared and he met Eijun’s gaze, aghast. “He didn’t.”

“Yes, they did. I can’t even with them right now.”

“Well, I can see how it would have been a huge temptation for Haruichi, to be honest,” Chris admitted. “And I might have been tempted myself.”

“Not you too!” Eijun groaned. “Why am I the only one rational about this?”

“Because you’re the only one who didn’t see how bad off you were,” Ryousuke said. “You lived it, but we lived with it.”

“Please don’t ever do this again,” Eijun asked. “I appreciate you all looking out for me, but
“I didn’t do anything,” Ryousuke said as he walked past on his way to the others. “I just didn’t do anything to stop it.”

Chris stepped up beside Eijun and laid a hand on his shoulder. “Try not to let it get to you; I don’t imagine it’s going to happen again.”

“You’re probably right, Chris,” Eijun agreed with a nod. “Because after that, I can’t imagine Shirakawa is ever going to want to play with us again.”

“And I would be okay with that, all things considered,” Chris said. “Some things are hard to resist. Or forgive.” He headed towards the group. “Come on, they’re getting ready to give out the final prizes and fines.”

Eijun followed him, stopping beside his husband, who was standing to one side of the crowd of players. Kuramochi hopped onto the bottom bleacher so he could speak to them.

“Oi, you lot. Hold it down!” he said, waiting for them to start listening again. “Okay, first of all, Chris’s team won, so go us. As a prize, we all get a tee-shirt.” He held up one that read: Member of Princess Akemi’s Royal Court. “Come see me after this for yours.” He looked at Chris, who was opening folded up papers. “If you haven’t gotten your vote for MVP into Chris, please do.”

“Now for the more concrete prizes. Again, there are a selection of wrapped gifts on the bench behind me, if you win one, please go ahead and claim it. Most stolen bases? We all know the answer to that one, and I’ll get my prize at the end. Most hits? That’s Tetsu, come on up and get your reward.” Tetsu climbed onto the bench and took one of the gifts before returning to the crowd. “Most home runs? That award goes to Mei.” The winner smiled smugly as he climbed to the bench, deliberating before taking one of the packages and heading back into the crowd.

“And now, the moment you’ve all been waiting for,” Kuramochi said with a grin. “The worst of you lot. Again, we are not setting the penalties; you can donate whatever you feel comfortable with. It’s the principle of the thing. So, without further ado.” He mimed opening a scroll.

“The following people are being asked to donate to the shelter: the losing team; the person with the most errors, Haruichi; the person with the most strikes, Jun, and the person with the most outs, Kanemaru!” He finished with a flourish, bowing as the audience catcalled.

“One last thing and then you lot can go home,” he said, taking a piece of paper from Chris. “The MVP of this game—” he opened it and glanced at Chris, who nodded. “Is Haruichi.”

Eijun looked at the faces of the crowd and was unsurprised to see that everyone who’d been at Seido when he had the yips looked satisfied, some even nodding their approval while the younger players looked confused. Shirakawa shook Carlos’s hand off his arm and stalked off, while Mei shrugged.

“Haruichi, come and get your prize,” Kuramochi said, holding up a mug that read ‘Akemi’s Hero.’

Haruichi headed to the front of the crowd and accepted his mug, handing Kuramochi a check he’d filled out for the charity. “This should cover both my losing team and my most errors fines,” he said with a slanted smile. “It’s a good charity, I’m happy to help them out.”

Kuramochi eyed the check and blinked, “Wow, okay,” he said, “I’m sure they’ll appreciate it.”

“Good. I’ll leave you to it, let me know if you need any help with any of the cleanup.”
Nabe walked over to Eijun, who was watching Kazuya rile up Mei on the other side of the group.

“Hi, Eijun, did you enjoy the game?”

Eijun sighed. “It was interesting, at least. Haruichi was—”

“What?” Nabe asked. “He flubbed a few plays, but he didn’t do anything that wasn’t merited.”

“Seriously? I didn’t ask for that, I didn’t want that.”

“It’s fine,” Nabe said, patting Eijun on the shoulder before walking away. “If he couldn’t handle it, he doesn’t deserve to play the game.”

Eijun watched him walk away, the words echoing in his brain.

“Why did everyone know about that but me?”

Chapter End Notes

What 'chu think?
We're still chugging along- you still hanging in there?
Hope you all are enjoying the new season!
In Which Eijun is a Horse Trader

Chapter Summary

Weeks 30 and 31.
Baseball, Akemi, and a visit to a new doctor.
Par for the course, I think.
Oh, and Eijun proves he actually has learned a few things from Kazuya over the years.

Chapter Notes

Hi, y'all!
Glad to see you around, and thank you for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Week Thirty

Monday morning, Eijun pointedly took Kazuya’s bag and draped it over his shoulder. “I’ve got that,” he said, opening the front door for his husband.

“I can carry my own bag,” Kazuya protested mildly—out of habit, not because he actually meant it.

Eijun snorted. “Keep telling yourself that, princess,” he said, opening the passenger door for him. He watched as a chuckling Kazuya took his seat before closing the door and walking around the car. He threw the bag in the back seat and slid behind the wheel, sending him a smirk. “You liked that one, huh?”

“That was a good one,” Kazuya admitted. “I’ll have to remember it when you’re pregnant.”

“Oh. Yeah. Well, with your baby brain, I’m not too worried about it.”

Kazuya sighed. “I don’t think I blame you,” he said. “I’ve started writing down everything I need to remember. I hope this goes away.”

“Now you’re on the level of us normal humans?” Eijun joked. “You didn’t have any issues with assigning the teams at the shower.”

“That was different,” Kazuya said. “I’d thought about something like that a lot, I just had to factor in the Inashiro crew. It was already there, and I don’t seem to be losing that stuff. It’s more like tasks and new things I need to remember.”

“Gotcha. Is there any way I can help?”

“Not really, just try to understand if I forget stuff?”

“That’s fine, I can do that,” Eijun said. “I’m dropping you off this morning, is there anything you need to do later?”
“I have physical therapy this afternoon, so I need you to pick me up at two,” Kazuya said.

“No problem.” Eijun pulled up to the player’s entrance to the stadium, stopping by the door. “Is there anything you want me to do for you today?”

“Not real...oh! Can you make an appointment with Jun? We should meet with him to discuss things, right?”

“Of course, yes. I’ll do that,” Eijun said. “You have a good practice.”

“Have a good day, I’ll see you later.”

“Bye Kaz, love you both,” Eijun answered, pulling sedately away from the curb.

After his morning meetings, Kazuya walked—waddled, actually, he was able to admit that, at least to himself—down the hallway, headed towards the practice field. He popped into his office to grab his clipboard with the day’s training menu on it, with everything written down so he wouldn’t forget it.

Stepping out the door that led into the bullpen, he forgot about everything.

There, throwing a pitch to Takahashi, was Eijun.

He blinked once to make sure he wasn’t seeing things and marched (waddled, his brain told him) over to their lane. “What the hell, Sawamura? You’re not supposed to be here until next week,” he said, glaring at him.

Eijun lifted one corner of his mouth in a lopsided smile and trotted over, as Takahashi walked away to take a water break. “Actually, I’m back to training this week.”

“That’s not what you said,” Kazuya answered, still glaring. “I’m not that forgetful.”

“No, what I said was I was back to ‘practice and play’ next week. This week, I’m back to practice.”

“And you didn’t tell me?”

“I wanted it to be a surprise,” Eijun said, stepping closer to keep the conversation more private. “I know how much you worry, you would have fretted all weekend. Now you don’t have to. You can see where I am, and what I’m doing.”

“Shinji okayed this?”

“He did, with the stipulation that I come in on Thursday for a checkup. And on every Thursday for the rest of the season.”

Kazuya narrowed his eyes at him, looking for the lie. “You know I’m going to call him.”

“I’m expecting you to, yes.”

“And I’m going to watch you closely and make sure you don’t overdo it.”

“I’m trusting you to do that,” Eijun agreed.

“So how long have you been out here?”
“Pitching? Probably ten minutes. Ask Takahashi, he’s been keeping track, I’m sure.”

“Only twenty pitches today,” Kazuya said. “You know that’s plenty.”

“But I—” Eijun subsided at his glare. “You’re right. Twenty.”

“Okay, let me check with Takahashi, but I suspect you might be done for the day.”

“You’re the boss, coach,” Eijun agreed with a grin.

“You’d better believe it,” Kazuya said. “Regardless of anything else, we need to have that chat with the management today. And I’m assuming you checked in with the team doctor?”

“I have,” Eijun said. “Gave him my clearance and instructions and everything.”

“Good,” Kazuya nodded sharply. “I’m going to talk to Takahashi, wait for me until we’re done. And later, we’re going to talk about these surprises you keep springing on me.”

“As long as we get to discuss your inability to let things go and your overprotectiveness, yes.”

“Glad we talked that out, then,” Kazuya said, turning on his heel and heading over to the catcher.

“So, Sawamura, the team doctor tells me that you’re cleared to play,” Ito said, looking up from the folder he had opened in front of himself.

“I’m cleared to practice,” Eijun clarified. “I have to go to the doctor on Thursday to see if I’ll be cleared to play next week, but they expect me to be.”

“Okay, that’s good, that’s great,” he said. “Your shoulder is as good as new, then?”

Eijun shook his head as Coach Sato leaned forward. “Not at all,” Eijun told him. “If you recall, we told you that I wouldn’t be able to return to the same intensity. I’m not going to be able to practice as hard as I have been, and I’m going to have to limit my gameplay, with the idea of retiring at the end of the season.”

Kazuya felt Eijun squeeze his hand and sat back, relaxing. This wasn’t what they’d discussed, but he trusted Eijun to get what was best for them all out of the negotiations.

“That’s...before the baby comes?” Ito said, face falling. “You’re not going to be here after that? That’s not good...,” he said, sitting upright. “Are you sure about this?”

“That’s what the doctors have recommended,” Eijun said, laying a copy of the doctor’s report on the desk.

Coach Sato nodded. “It does say that,” he agreed.

“So, we’re losing you after the playoffs?”


“Are you sure? I mean, did the doctors give you any wiggle room, we’d love for you to continue to play, and with the baby coming, the chance of maybe catching a glance of her is sure to be a big draw.”
"The baby isn’t for display," Kazuya said, the first time he’d said anything in this meeting. He rubbed his belly protectively, frowning at the GM.

"No, of course not," Ito said quickly. “It’s just that if you were both here, you’d bring her around sometimes,” he backpedaled. Kazuya continued to frown, but he stopped glaring at him, so Ito moved on. “What I meant is that we’ve been so happy to watch your family grow, it would be a shame to lose any of you.”

“Well,” Eijun said, reluctantly. “There’s something—”

“Eijun—” Kazuya interrupted him. “No, you know that’s not a good idea.”

Eijun reached over and patted his hand. “It’s fine, Kaz. I’m sure the doctor is being overly cautious.”

“I don’t know about this—” he blustered before subsiding.

“What were you going to say, Sawamura?” Ito prodded him.

Eijun sighed. “I might be able to talk Dr. Kanemaru around to allowing me to play for one more year if I play in a limited capacity. I’m not sure it’s ideal, but I think it’s doable.”

“Really?”

“That would be good if you could,” Sato said. “That way you can help whoever becomes the new ace, helping to bring the bullpen along.”

“And we could see the baby,” Ito said. “Yes, I think I can work with this.”

“I’d like to help the bullpen adjust,” Eijun agreed. “It would be an easier transition for everyone, I think.”

“I’ll work up something with the others, and get back to you,” Ito said. “But I’m glad to have you for at least one more year, Sawamura.”

“Thank you, sir,” Eijun stood and offered Kazuya a hand to help him to his feet.

“She’s really growing,” Ito said, eyeing Kazuya’s belly. “How far along are you now?”

“Thirty weeks,” Kazuya answered.

“What about names? Have you picked one yet?” he asked.

“We’re still weighing options,” Eijun said mildly, gamely maintaining a straight face as Kazuya squeezed his hand.

“Okay, that’s good. You’ll have to let us know when you’ve figured it out; we can do some kind of big reveal.”

“When we have something we’re willing to put out there you’ll know, Ito-san,” Kazuya said with a smile.

Ito smiled at them genially. “That’s great! And I’ll run this contract idea past the board. I don’t think they want to lose you, either of you.”

“That’s good to know,” Eijun said, bowing slightly. “Thank you so much for your time, sir.”
“No problem,” Ito said. “And I’m glad to have you back, even if it’s in a reduced capacity.”

“It’s good to be back,” Eijun agreed, and with a hand resting on the middle of Kazuya’s back, they left the office.

Kazuya shot him a look. “Do we need to?”

Eijun snorted. “Nope, we don’t. Same as before, Akemi’s not for display.”

“Good.”

“How are you feeling? Too tired to go to Chris’s?”

“Not at all,” Kazuya said. “I’ve been looking forward to it.”

“Okay, good,” Eijun said. “I want to talk to him about something.”

“Sounds ominous.”

“Hush, you.” Eijun elbowed him. Gently. “I just...we’ll talk about it in the car, okay?”

“Good plan,” Kazuya said. “I’ll drive.”

Eijun handed over the keys with a grin. “Then I’ll call Jun and set up an appointment.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Kazuya said, walking through the door Eijun held open for him.

“So, Chris?” Kazuya prompted as they headed down the road towards the school where he taught. They’d gotten into the habit of visiting and helping as often as they could, usually once a week or so. As time passed, the boys became used to their presence and lost a good bit of their awe at being taught by such well-known players, with a coincidental uptick in a return to normal teenage behavior. This was actually a bit of a relief for them both; it allowed them to actually connect to the players and see if they were being effective.

“Yes, Chris,” Eijun said. “I’m going to see if he could use me on a more regular basis next year. If I’m ramping down the playing, I do want to get as much experience coaching as I can. And I think he’d be a great teacher for me, someone who I could learn a lot from.”

“You want to make this more of a formal thing?”

Eijun nodded. “Yes, I do. I’ve been thinking about it, and I don’t have the experience you do, not with coaching. I mean, even when you started doing it for the team, you had experience from high school and college. Not as a formal coach, but from the bullpen and as a catcher. I don’t even have that, let alone the ability to help anyone in the outfield.”

“That’s a great idea,” Kazuya said. “I think it would be really helpful for you. And it looks like you’re going to get the extra year you wanted, too. Good call on playing it that way, I hope I showed the proper level of misgiving.”

“You were perfect, I couldn’t have asked for anything more. I’m glad you saw where I was going.”

“I was a little surprised, if I’m honest.”
“Why?” Eijun glared at him. “If you don’t think I’ve learned a thing or two from you in the past decade, you—”

“You have, and I couldn’t be prouder.” Kazuya grinned at his glare. “Seriously, that was some grade A manipulation. If I hadn’t known better, I’d have thought the idea hadn’t even crossed your mind.”

“I’m not a bad liar; I just don’t do it often. I have a hard time keeping things straight.”

“Fair enough,” Kazuya said. “Call Jun?”

“Oh, yeah.” Eijun pulled out his phone and dialed a number he had stored.

“Tokyo Pediatric Clinic, how may I help you?”

“Hi, my name is Sawamura Eijun, and my husband and I are expecting our first child. We’d like her to be Isashiki-sensei’s patient.”

“Isashiki-sensei is not currently taking new patients, would you like to be put on his waiting list?”

“I’m sorry, he said he had a slot for us,” Eijun said. “Could you check with his assistant?”

“Yes, of course. What did you say your name was?”

“Sawamura Eijun. My husband is Miyuki Kazuya.”

“Please hold.”

“Of course.”

Eijun grinned at Kazuya, who squeezed his hand.

“Clearly, Jun-sensei is in demand.”

“Kids love him,” Eijun agreed. “You’d never have thought it at Seido, huh?”

“Yeah, of them all, his is the most surprising career path.”

The phone clicked over. “Sawamura-san?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you for holding, I apologize for the delay. Please allow me to transfer you to Isashiki-sensei’s assistant, who can help you in whatever way you need.”

“Thank you.”

“Good afternoon, Sawamura-san,” a new voice came over the line. “I’m Yamamoto Tomiko, Isashiki-sensei’s assistant. How can we be of service?”

“Good afternoon, Yamamoto-san. Am I correct in my information, that Isashiki-sensei has a slot for our child?”

“Yes, sir, that is correct,” he said. “Sawamura Akemi, correct? Due in mid-November.”

“That’s right.”

“Great. How can we help you, Sawamura-san?”
“We’d like to make an appointment to speak to Isashiki-sensei soon, so we can get his advice on some choices we have to make.”

“Of course, when would you like to come in?”

“Does he have any availability next week? Maybe on Thursday afternoon?”

“How about 2:30? Would that work for you?”

“That’s perfect, thank you.”

“We’re always happy to help. We’ll see you then, Sawamura-san.”

“Have a good day,” Eijun said, disconnecting the call. “2:30 on Thursday.”

“That’s fine,” Kazuya said, “We have games on Monday and Tuesday, but Thursday’s free.”

“Yeah.” Eijun slid his phone into his pocket. “We should also call Kiko soon; she’s going to want to know if we’re good with the adjustments she made to the plans.”

“I think we are, right? She’s using a little more economical finishings, so things are much more manageable.”

“True enough, I’m good with it. I’d made my peace with the higher cost, so it’s fine.”

“Alright, then. We’ll call her later, let her know?”

“Yeah, let’s.”

Kazuya laced their fingers together. “Our house, Eijun.”

“I can’t wait to raise our kids there with you.” Eijun lifted Kazuya’s hand to his mouth, dropping a kiss on the back of it.

“Right there with you, Ei. Right there with you.”

Eijun looked over at his husband who had stopped behind him, watching him as he warmed up.

“Got any complaints?”

“Nope, was just wondering,” he said, stepping up close. “No updates this week?”

Eijun huffed out a breath, laughing lightly. “I thought you wanted to talk about baseball. It’s only Friday, the week is over tomorrow.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, I am. Remember, our anniversary was on Saturday this year, Kazuya-Kantoku,” Eijun said in a low voice, watching as a shiver ran down his back.

Kazuya frowned at him. “I remember, you just usually say something before now.”

“I was going to tell you this evening if I couldn’t find a better time, but now is good,” Eijun said, pitching the ball in his hand to the net.

“Watch your follow through, you need to extend all the way,” Kazuya said, eyeing his form.
“I will,” Eijun said, being careful with his next try. He was pitching much slower and with much less force than usual, being very deliberate. “At thirty weeks, she’s over a kilo, about three pounds. And forty centimeters.” He picked up another ball and tossed it in his hand.

“She’s getting big,” Kazuya said, running his hand over the bump.

“She is, but she’s going to more than double before she’s born,” Eijun said. “Although she won’t get a whole lot longer.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, about fifty centimeters is normal length. She’s also developing wrinkles in her brain, to accommodate more brain cells, and her bone marrow is starting to produce red blood cells.” Eijun pitched the ball at the net and rotated his shoulder, feeling for anything that was off.

“So she’s getting ready to be a person?”

“She already is,” Eijun said. “If she was born today, she’d be fine. She’d have to spend some time in the hospital, but she’d most likely be okay.”

“That’s alright,” Kazuya said, running a soothing hand over the baby. “You stay in there and grow, you hear me?”

Eijun smiled at the sight, feeling his heart melt. “She’s going to do just that. She’s adding fat cells to protect herself, that’s part of the weight gain.”

“Well, that’s alright, then,” Kazuya said. “I do wish she would get off my bladder, though.”

“That’s not going to happen any time soon,” Eijun said, throwing another pitch.

Kazuya frowned. “You’re not wrong. And you’re done for the day.” He stepped back, motioning Eijun towards the locker room.

“I just started!” he protested, dropping the ball he’d picked up back into the crate.

Kazuya crossed his arms and just stared at Eijun, who deflated. “Yes, sir,” he said, turning towards the building.

“You’re on the edge of overdoing it, Ei,” Kazuya said softly. “I don’t want you to get hurt again.”

“I know, and you may be right,” Eijun conceded. “I’m probably not the best person to judge.”

“Thank you,” Kazuya offered. “We’ll be done here soon, meet you in the team room?”

Eijun started across the bullpen. “Of course,” he said over his shoulder.

Kazuya sighed, watching his back and feeling slightly guilty. “I know, baby, but we have to take care of Papa,” he said to Akemi, “He’s not always good at taking care of himself.”

Week Thirty-one

Me: You know that after week 31, Akemi’s not going to grow much longer?

Me: She’s just going to get fatter?
Kaz: You do realize that I’m not putting you in any earlier, right?
Kaz: No matter how many updates you send?
Me: As if! You think I’d use our child like that?
Kaz: In a heartbeat.
Me: Speaking of heartbeats, she’s starting to sleep for longer periods.
Kaz: What does that have to do with heartbeats?
Me: And she’s got all five senses working
Kaz: Really?
Me: Yeah. And she could be sucking her thumb. And can see light from dark.
Kaz: You win.
Kaz: You’re in next inning.
Me: Yes, coach!
Eijun grinned at Takahashi, who was sitting beside him on the bench. “I’m in next inning.”
“You’re kidding.”
“Nope,” Eijun said, showing him his phone.
Takahashi glared at Kazuya, who was standing on the other side of the dugout paying no attention whatsoever.
“I can’t believe it. Maybe the baby has made him soft.”
Eijun scoffed. “Don’t let him hear you say that,” he said. “That’s been his one worry.”
“If anyone truly believes that, they’re idiots,” Takahashi said. “He’s just a softy for you.”
“That might be true,” Eijun said. “But my money is on the ‘he was going to put me in anyway’ slot. He’s tricky like that, thinks he’s going to get a favor from me or something for this.”
“Please,” Takahashi said, shaking his head. “Don’t tell me about your weird sex stuff.”
“Pffftttt,” Eijun said. “If I have to listen to you lot talk in the dressing room, you can hear one minorly suggestive statement. Besides which, that’s not what I meant. He’s going to make me do something I don’t want to do, and I’m always happy to do whatever he wants in bed.” Eijun grinned, tapping a disgruntled looking Takahashi on the head. “We’re up.”
Takahashi followed him out of the dugout, still shaking his head, still slightly disturbed.

“Welcome,” Jun said, waving to the seats in front of his desk. “Have a seat, let’s talk.”
“Hi, Jun-sensei,” Eijun said, plopping down in one of the seats, Kazuya sitting in the other. “How are you?”

“I’m good, thank you for asking. How are you two doing? Akemi’s growing apace?”

“She certainly is,” Kazuya said wearily, running his hand over his belly. They’d had a full practice that morning and he was exhausted. It was still hot and Akemi was making everything worse, his back ached and he just wanted a massage and his bed. In that order.

“Can I get you some water?” Jun asked, watching him carefully, face concerned.

“That would be great,” Kazuya said, and the doctor reached into the refrigerator behind his desk and pulled out three bottles, handing two across the desk. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Jun said gravely, in his oddly endearing serious tone. “So. I am serious, I do want to know what’s been going on with you two, whatever you can tell me will inform my care of Akemi, and then I’ll answer whatever questions you may have and we can discuss future steps. Does that make sense?”

“Absolutely,” Eijun said. “What are you looking to find out? We’ll tell you whatever you want to know.”

“Okay, well. First of all, I understand you had a chat with Chris the other day. He didn’t tell me what it was about; he said it wasn’t his secret to tell. Is there anything you can tell me about that?”

“Jun-sensei,” Kazuya asked with a smirk. “Are you sure you don’t just want the gossip?”

Jun’s face reddened a little and he blustered before settling. “Well, yes. But anything I know might be able to help to frame your family.”

Eijun grinned. “I’ll satisfy your curiosity,” he said. “You know about my shoulder, right?”

“Yeah, you just had surgery. You played Monday, how’s it feel?”

“Right now, it’s fine,” Eijun said. “But it’s not good, not really. Kanemaru-sensei wants me to retire at the end of this season, but I think I’m going to play for one more, more as a mentor and the occasional sub-in rather than the ace.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Jun said. “Although having a chance for one last season’s nice.”

Eijun nodded. “It is. As for what Chris has to do with any of this, I’m making my casual coaching arrangement more formal. I’ll still be a volunteer, but it’ll be noted by the school and count as time and experience towards coaching my own team one day.”

“That’s what you want to do?”

“I do. I think we both would like to do that on the high school level at some point.”

Kazuya nodded. “We would.”

“You’d be good at it,” Jun said. “What else?”

“We bought a house,” Kazuya said.

“You’re moving? Where to?”
“Nagano,” Eijun said. “But not for a while.”

“How long?” Jun asked.

“Sometime in the next two to five years,” Eijun said. “The house basically needs a gut-renovation, and we’re not in any hurry. Before Akemi goes to kindergarten is our goal, we just don’t know when.”

“We’re both under contract for next season,” Kazuya chimed in. “Nothing before that following spring.”

“Okay, good. I’ll be able to keep an eye on Akemi for a few years, at least,” Jun said. “Anything else you think would be important for me to know?”

“Well...Akemi’s not going to be an only child?”


“Oh!” Eijun laughed. “No, no. What he means is that we want more kids. I’m not pregnant right now.”

“Oh, wow. That would have been a bit of a mess if you were, right?”

Eijun sighed and Kazuya took his hand before answering. “You’re not wrong, it would have been a bit much, but we would have handled it,” he said, to Jun’s confusion. “We haven’t really told many people, but Eijun had a miscarriage. In early April.”

“I am so sorry,” Jun said contritely. “I had no idea. Are you—never mind. Of course, you’re not.”

“I think I am, actually,” Eijun said. “Okay, that is. We didn’t know I was pregnant, and it was one of those first-trimester spontaneous miscarriages. If I hadn’t gotten knocked out during a game, we would have never known.”

“But still, that’s so hard,” Jun sympathized. “You said it was spontaneous? Are you planning on getting pregnant in the future?”

“Yes, I am. Haruichi said that it shouldn’t affect my chances of carrying a baby to term.”

“That’s good, I’m sure he’s right,” Jun said. “Not that that’s not enough, but is there anything else?”

Eijun and Kazuya both shook their heads at the same time.

Jun nodded before continuing. “I have a few more questions for you. Does either of you have a family history of any disease? Especially genetic ones?”

“My mom,” Kazuya offered. “She had diabetes. Type 1.”

“And you don’t?”

“Nope, I have gestational, but that’s not the same according to Haruichi-sensei,” Kazuya said.

“He’s right,” Jun said, making a note. “We’ll watch her for that, but if you don’t have it, she’s probably fine. Anything else you know about?”

Eijun shook his head. “That’s it, I think.”
“Okay, then. Let me get you to sign a few things in order to give consent for me to see your records, Kazuya, and to let the Kominato Clinic know to call me when Akemi comes, so they know that I’m the pediatrician of record.” He passed over the forms and both men signed them before passing them back to him. “Thank you. Now, do you have any questions for me?”

“I do,” Eijun said, pulling out his phone. “Apologies in advance, I wanted to write them down so I wouldn’t forget them.”

“That’s fine, the more you know, the easier my job will be.”

“Okay, then. To start. What’s with all the different kinds of bottles and nipples?”

Jun laughed. “Right to the hard parts, huh? Well, different babies tolerate different things,” he started. “There are quite a few different feeding systems, some that are more successful than others. I’ve found that most babies are fine with whatever you’re comfortable with, and since you won’t be nursing, there’s no pumping to consider.”

“True enough,” Kazuya said. “But even if I could nurse, I’m not sure I would. I think the idea of switching off nights is a brilliant one. There’s no reason for only one of us to be sleep deprived.”

“Fair,” Jun said. “And you will both be feeling it the first few months, that’s for sure.”

“We do have the time off, though,” Eijun said. “Kazuya will have to go back early, but I won’t have to report until pitchers and catchers day.”

“That’s good, you’ll both have plenty of time to bond with her,” Jun said.

“That’s the plan,” Kazuya agreed, shifting in his seat, trying to get more comfortable.

“Back to the bottle situation,” Jun said, “I’d consider using glass ones for the first several months until she starts holding them herself. Then switch to plastic, so she’ll be able to hold them more easily and the ones she throws on the floor won’t break.”

“Why glass?” Eijun asked. “I didn’t see much about that anywhere.”

“Glass is better than plastic in almost every aspect, it’s natural and easier to clean. If formula spoils in plastic, you often have to throw the bottle away, milk spoils quickly in it, but glass isn’t like that, it’s easily cleaned. Just tuck them away for the next baby when she’s done with them, they don’t degrade, either. Buy plastic ones when she’s ready to hold the bottle herself, they’re lighter and safer.”

“Got it,” Eijun said.

“If she needs it, you can experiment with what nipples to use, but babies aren’t usually picky,” Jun explained. “You don’t need to sterilize anything, bottles, nipples, nothing. Just make sure it’s clean and you’re fine. Also, she can drink formula cold, it shouldn’t be a problem. If you want to warm it a little, mix it up fresh. Microwaving can cause issues, since it heats unevenly. I’d only give her warm milk if it’s late in the evening and you think it might help her sleep or in the middle of the night. Otherwise, cold is fine.”

“You don’t have to sterilize anything?” Kazuya asked.

“No, a little bit of dirt is good for her. Just clean her bottles like you do your dishes, and she’ll be fine. She has your immunities, at least for the first few months, and when they wear off, she’ll have built some of her own. Exposure to everyday life and germs will help with that.”
Kazuya stared at him until a chuckling Eijun elbowed him in the side. “Kaz, are you still alive in there?”

“Are you sure?” Kazuya said to Jun, watching him carefully.

“Absolutely,” Jun said.

“Sorry, Jun-sensei, you’ve just triggered his inner germaphobe,” Eijun said. “He’ll be back to normal in a minute.”

Jun laughed and changed the subject, “I get that regularly. Some things people did in the past aren’t necessary, but it’s hard to change your mindset about them. What are you planning to do about diapers?”

“That was going to be my next question. We’re going to be using cloth ones for home and with us, disposable for the babysitter and traveling,” Eijun said. “We bought a few dozen of the premade covers and a dozen of the stuffable ones for when she starts sleeping overnight.”

“That’s a good plan,” Jun nodded. “I’d suggest you get at least one more dozen of the premade ones, newborns go through a lot of diapers. And make sure you have plenty of the cloth diapers around, they come in handy for so many things.”

“Since we’re doing laundry anyway, we’re going to use cloth wipes rather than regular wipes and wash them with the diapers,” Kazuya added.

“Good,” Jun said. “Just make sure you wash everything at least once before the baby comes. Use detergent that’s gentle, either the stuff made for babies or one of the hypoallergenic detergents. When you do laundry, if you use bleach, make sure you double rinse the diapers. Same thing if you’re using fabric softener, rinse twice to get any excess out. At least at first, when she’s newborn. Every few months you can stop double rinsing and check to see if she’s sensitive, you’ll figure it out. But the bleach, especially on diapers, always needs to be double rinsed. You don’t want to burn her skin, and that’s what’ll happen.”

“Should we even use bleach?” Eijun asked. “If it’s that harsh, maybe we shouldn’t.”

“You don’t usually need to. Only when the diapers don’t seem to be getting clean, even when washed in hot water, or after she’s been sick. As long as you’re doing laundry every few days, it should be fine without bleach. If you have the chance to hang them outside in the sun, that’s an excellent way to sanitize them as well. Do that whenever you can, but she’s coming in November, so you might not have the chance. It’s fine if you need to use bleach, don’t be afraid of it, just be cautious about the way you handle it.”

“Got it,” Kazuya said, laying a hand on his stomach. “We’ll be careful.”

“I know you will,” Jun said. “Speaking of careful, car seat? You only have one car, right?”

“Right now, yes,” Kazuya said. “But we’re getting another one; it’s just a matter of finding the time to go shopping. We’re going to need something larger than ours.”

“Okay, and I assume you’re both going to be driving around with her? You’ll need car seats in both cars.”

“We will, we haven’t gotten those yet. I wanted your opinion,” Eijun said.

Jun grinned. “We’re off to a great start, I’m so glad you came to me with these questions rather than
listening to your aunties or some online advice column.”

“You’re the expert, why wouldn’t we ask?” Eijun was confused.

“You’d be surprised,” Jun said with a sigh before returning to the subject at hand. “Car seats. The ones sold at a reputable store are all fine. Don’t buy used if you don’t have to, sometimes they’re no longer compliant with safety regulations or have been through a crash. If you get into an accident, you should replace your car seat. I don’t mean a fender bender, but anything serious.”

Eijun nodded soberly. “Yes, that makes sense.”

“Also, with two cars, there is an alternative to moving the whole car seat between the cars or buying two car seats,” Jun said. “You can also get a car seat with a detachable base, which is nice for a couple of reasons. First of all, you can just buy a second base and install it permanently in your second car. Also, a lot of them have carrying handles, so when she’s asleep you don’t have to wake her to get inside; you just bring the whole seat with you. They usually don’t work much past toddler age, so you’ll have to get a booster seat, but they make things so much easier when they’re infants and sleep a lot.”

“Are they hard to find?” Eijun asked. “I don’t remember seeing them when we were looking, but I admit to being a little overwhelmed.”

“I can see why,” Jun said. “That section can get a little crazy. Between car seats and strollers and playpens, it’s a lot. But no, they’re not so hard to find. If you get confused, you can always ask for help, the staff at those places are trained to deal with the lost.”


“Thank you for asking, and for listening,” Jun said. “We’re happy to do so,” Eijun said. “It’s so helpful.”

“I have these,” Jun said, passing over a couple of sheets of paper. “They’re just suggestions, brands and models I know are decent. There are lots of others, but if you have any questions, please ask, I’m always available.”

“Thank you again,” Eijun said, taking the papers from him. “We appreciate you giving us your time.”

“No problem, like I said before. I’m happy to help, that’s my job.” Jun looked at Eijun thoughtfully. “Listen, Eijun.”

“Yes?”

“About the baby. It does get better. Really, it does,” Jun said.

Eijun smiled at him a little sadly. “I know, thank you for being so supportive.”

“I’m not just being supportive, I know,” Jun hesitated before continuing. “Nobody knows this but Chris and Tetsu, but I had a miscarriage a year ago, in July.”

“I’m so sorry,” Eijun said, tears springing to his eyes. “I know that was rough.”

“It was, we found out about him and were just waiting until the three month period was up to we told our families and friends. I miscarried at ten weeks, for no apparent reason, it just happened,” Jun said.
sadly, eyes dark. “I know how hard it can be.”

“You lost a boy?” Eijun asked gently. “Ours was a girl, we named her Haruko.”

“We named him Takara,” Jun said, gesturing to the frame sitting on his sideboard, the artwork inside looking very much like the work sitting in their shrine.

“It’s beautiful. Ohno-san?” Eijun asked, pulling out his phone.

“Yes, you know her?”

“We do,” Eijun replied, opening Haruko’s image. He handed it over to Jun. “That’s Haruko’s.”

Jun took the phone and looked at the picture intently. Eijun saw the tears in his eyes when they met his prickly ones soberly. “It’s beautiful. I’m so sorry for your loss.”

“You too,” Eijun said, taking back the offered phone. “I know it was hard on you all.”

“It was, but it was a bit of a surprise, as well.”

“As was Akemi,” Eijun said. “But not an unwelcome one.”

“Yes,” Jun agreed. “Not unwelcome. We’re going to try again soon. Don’t tell anyone I told you, please. We’re still hashing out some of the logistics, but yeah. Soon.”

“That’s good,” Eijun said. “You will be wonderful parents, I’m sure of it. Akemi needs lots of cousins, and since neither of us has any sibs, our best friends are going to have to provide them.”

Jun laughed. “You’ll be in the wilds of Nagano by then.”

“It’s really not that far, a couple of hours of driving,” Eijun said. “Three on the train, maybe. Nagano is a half-hour or more past our town. No excuses, except for winter. It can be brutal then.”

“It’s a plan, then,” Jun said. “I’ll tell the others that you’ve offered to take the kids off our hands for the summer, shall I?”

Eijun grinned, “Fine with me. You have any problems with that, Kaz?”

“Not that I’m aware of,” Kazuya said. “By that time we’ll probably be overrun with our own, so what’s a few more?” He asked. “Maybe we’ll have enough to form a team.”

“That would be fun,” Eijun said. “Teach ‘em all.”

Jun looked a little dazed before laughing. “That didn’t go quite the way I imagined,” he said, chagrined.

“This has been very educational, but we’ve taken enough of your time. Let us get out of your hair,” Eijun said with a grin, standing and offering Kazuya a hand.

“Thank you for coming,” Jun rose to escort them out, and Eijun went around the desk to hug him.

“Thank you for helping us,” Eijun said. “I’m really so sorry about your loss,” he whispered, and Jun hugged him a little tighter.

“I’m sorry about Haruko,” Jun said, before stepping back. “If either of you needs anything, please call. As I said, I’m always available.”
“We will,” Kazuya said with an abbreviated bow. “I’m sure Eijun will have lots of questions,” he said before sailing out the door.

“Wait, what are you saying?” Eijun sputtered, following him down the hallway fuming.

“Nothing, just that you are an inquisitive sort,” Kazuya sing-songoed.

Eijun huffed, opening the car door for his husband. “That’s not what you were saying,” Eijun said. “You were calling me an idiot. Again.” He shut the door on his protests, halfway around the car before he realized what Kazuya had done.

He’d managed to defuse the emotionally charged room with one well-placed barb. The bastard. Eijun grinned sheepishly and shook his head, schooling his expression as he climbed back into the car. Kazuya didn’t need to know he’d figured it out.

“Now, what were you saying about me being stupid?”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed it!
I’d love to hear your thoughts, they’re music to my eyeballs.
You're all amazing, thank you for being that way.
Time is On My Side

Chapter Summary

Kazuya frets and hides
Eijun supports and soothes
And this time, they're red.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to yet another chapter!
Be warned, there's some mediocre porn and lots of talking ahead!
So, a regular Thursday around here, right?
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week thirty-two

Eijun came trotting toward the dugout, sweat dripping and mouth split in a wide grin. He'd just pitched the final out of the regular season, holding on to a one-run lead for the last four innings. This game had clinched their lead in their division, allowing them to have a bye until the semi-finals of the championship round. Kazuya had been hesitant to send him in for that long, it was really more than he should be playing, but there were two considerations: one, the team they were playing was the leader of their division for the last several years, and that had not been expected to change, and two, they had at least a week before the next game, and since they'd won, they actually had almost two.

The fact that Mei was the pitcher was just icing on the cake, as far as Kazuya was concerned.

"We did it, Kaz!" Eijun said, picking him up and spinning him around.

"Oi, you idiot! I'm heavy, you'll hurt yourself!" Kazuya said, surprised and slightly embarrassed by the handling.

"You're not that bad," Eijun argued, setting him down gently. He put a hand on Kazuya's belly. "Did you hear that? Your dads won the division!" he said softly. "I can't wait to teach you all about it, we're going to have so much fun!" he added. Only Kazuya heard him, the sounds of the team celebrating around them drowned out all but the loudest conversation.

"How's your shoulder?" Kazuya asked, one eyebrow raised. "Really."

"It's sore," Eijun said. "I'm not going to lie, I think I might need a stronger pain killer than just ice."

"Did you mess—"

"No, no," Eijun was hasty to reassure him. "I just overdid it, I promise. I'm not reinjured, and I know I'm on no pitching rest for the rest of the week."
"Okay, but if it doesn't feel better in the next couple of days, we need to call the doctor," Kazuya said sternly.

Eijun nodded. "Yes, and I'll tell you," he said. "I promise."

"Alright then," Kazuya said before letting his lips widen in a smile. "You played well out there, the best I've ever seen," he complimented his husband. "Well, strike that. The best I've ever seen when I wasn't catching."

"Fair enough," Eijun laughed. "My pitches are always the best when it's you catching."

"I can't believe it," they heard from behind them, and Eijun spun to see Mei walking up. "I can't believe you beat us, but congrats, I guess."

"Gracious as always," Kazuya said. "Well played, Mei. You guys had a great season."

"Not as good as yours," Mei groused. "You got both the division and a baby? I don't know if that's fair."

"We've had our fair share of losses," Kazuya said, squeezing Eijun's hand.

"Oh, yeah," Mei turned to Eijun with an apologetic smile. He was a brat, but he understood losing baseball. "How is your shoulder? I haven't seen you throw that well for a few seasons."

"It hurts," Eijun admitted. "I shouldn't have played that long and I'd imagine Kanemaru-sensei is going to yell at both of us, but we needed it to beat you guys."

Mei nodded. "We are that good," he agreed. "I'm glad to see you looking so good, Kazuya. How's Akemi?"

"She's fine, but we haven't told management her name yet—we don't want them making another huge fuss," Kazuya said.

"Oh! Sorry about that, I get it, though. They're relentless, I know my front office is always after me to model and do product endorsement, but this pretty face doesn't come cheap, you know?"

"I'm glad you understand our struggle," Eijun said, trying to keep a straight face. Mei was amusing in smaller doses, but too much was...too much.

"Anyway, good game, I'd better get back," Mei said, frowning again. "Next year it won't be so easy for you."

"This year it wasn't easy," Eijun said, giving him a grin. "You guys are demons out there."

"Thanks," Mei said, turning and trotting back to his dugout.

Eijun looked at Kazuya, and they both blinked a few times before laughing.

"Wow," Takahashi said, moving up next to Eijun and tossing his arm over the pitcher's shoulder. "Narumiya is a bit of an ego, right?"

"You think?" Kazuya asked, supporting his stomach while he chortled some more. "Mei's always been that way, though."

"When we told him Kazuya was pregnant," Eijun said, calming down, "his first comment was 'who wouldn't want an Uncle Mei?'."
Takahashi chuckled. "More importantly, we won, right?"

"Yes, we did," Kazuya agreed. "The playoffs are in less than two weeks, but even with the rest, I don't think we can play Eijun for that long again."

"I agree, but the other teams shouldn't be as rough for us. We've beaten most of them this season, at least once."

"True, but still, we need to make preparations," Kazuya warned him.

"Yes, yes. But for today, we should celebrate, right?" Takahashi said. "We won!"

"We did," Kazuya said, hand on his belly. Eijun watched as a shadow flitted across his face, and resolved to get to the bottom of that as soon as possible.

"You guys are coming out with us, right?"

"We are," Eijun said. "For a little while."

"Good," Takahashi said before running off to talk to someone else, congratulations and back pats flying.

Eijun stepped closer, taking Kazuya's hand. "You don't look happy," he said.

"I am! I just wish..." Kazuya sighed. "You know, you could pretend to be a little less perceptive."

"I could, but what would be the point?" Eijun asked. "You wish you'd been the one playing?"

"I do. I know it's stupid, I was instrumental in the win and even if my knees were perfect, I'd never sacrifice Akemi for a game, but still."

"I get it," Eijun said. "It's only natural to regret and wish for a different result, even when the one you have is pretty great in most ways."

"You're right, it is," Kazuya said, shooting him a smile. "Let's go celebrate with our team, shall we?"

"Yeah, let's," Eijun said, taking Kazuya's hand.

"Akemi is no longer see-through," Eijun whispered in Kazuya's ear as they sat at a table, watching the rest of the team drink themselves under the said table in the name of celebration.

"I didn't think she was before?" Kazuya asked.

"Well, her skin was. She's got fat deposits and they're making it opaque."

"I see," he said, pushing the pitcher of beer down towards the other end of the table where the outfield was trying to remember the lyrics to 'Take Me out to the Ballgame' in English.

"Also, all her organs are fully developed except for her lungs, they still need a bit to cook," Eijun explained, taking out his camera to film the performance for posterity.

"Really? So she's ready to go?"
"Almost. She needs to finish lung development and gain a few more pounds, but yes. She's almost there," Eijun said. "Only eight more weeks! Or in your case, probably seven."

"Yeah, she's a little ahead of the curve, I think," Kazuya said.

"She is, a week or so," Eijun agreed. "That's about it, as she gets closer she's not doing a lot more than getting ready to come out. Soon she'll rotate head down, and you'll feel her in your pelvis. And the bigger you get, the thinner the organs stretch, the more light she can see. There's also going to be more baby than amniotic fluid soon if there isn't already."

"Really?" Kazuya asked, running his hand over Akemi. "You're in there, baby, you just keep growing, okay?"

Eijun stopped the recording after the left fielder poured his beer over the center fielder, insisting it was 'pecans' not 'peanuts'.

"And, that's enough of that," he said, moving the beer back away as some of the members of the infield intervened to stop the argument before it got too crazy.

Kazuya laid a hand on Eijun's. "You want to get out of here? I thought we could maybe have a more...private celebration."

Eijun grinned. "I was hoping you'd ask," he said. "I can't think of anything—or anyone—I'd rather do."

"Why are we still here, then?" Kazuya asked. "Give me your hand, let's go."

"So demanding," Eijun said, although he'd already offered his hand and pulled Kazuya to his feet. Holding out his arm, he offered it to his husband. "Ready, Kaz?"

"As always," Kazuya agreed and they walked arm-in-arm out of the bar and into the cool of the evening.

Eijun followed Kazuya inside, taking off his shoes and dropping their bags in the laundry area for later sorting. He turned around and found his husband standing there. Kazuya hooked his fingers into the hem of Eijun's shirt and tugged, pulling him along.

"You know I'll follow you anywhere," Eijun said. "You don't really have to drag me."

"I want to," Kazuya said simply, and for Eijun, that was enough.

Reaching the bedroom door, Kazuya turned and looked at him, amber eyes flashing. "Tonight, I'm in charge. Is that alright?"

Eijun couldn't stop the shudder running down his spine. "I'm all yours," he said, spreading his arms.

"Yes, you are," Kazuya agreed, pulling him through the doors, not letting go of his shirt. He pulled Eijun close, dropping the hem only to slide his hands under his polo. Eijun sighed at the feeling of hands on his skin, stepping close and resting his forehead on Kazuya's.

"I'm good with whatever you want," he said, meeting Kazuya's gaze. "Just...don't do anything that's not comfortable, I know Akemi's a lot right now."

"I'm not worried about it," Kazuya said, running his hands along Eijun's sides. "We'll figure it out,
we always do. I just want you naked on the bed, the sooner the better."

Eijun grinned, anticipation running through his veins, Kazuya had the glint in his eyes that warned him that this was going to be one of those nights, and Eijun wasn't going to be able to do much but hold on for dear life. "I can do that, but you might change your mind," Eijun said with a smirk.

"Why? What did you do?"

"It's not...well. Let me show you," Eijun said, stripping off his shirt. He unhooked the button of his jeans and slowly slid down the zipper, showing Kazuya a flash of red. "I thought we'd have our own celebration, and I wanted to be ready," he explained as Kazuya's eyes widened.

"Yesss..." he breathed, not taking his eyes off of Eijun or the red lace boyshorts he was wearing. "How many of those do you have? This is not a complaint, it's more like...I need to prepare myself," Kazuya said.

"Not telling," Eijun said, stepping out of his pants and socks. "Where do you want me?"

Kazuya eyed him and one corner of his mouth lifted in a smirk. "Where don't I want you is probably an easier question," he said. "But for now, on the bed, on your back."

Eijun complied, watching Kazuya carefully, feeling some odd combination of horribly turned on and concerned. "Don't hurt yourself, seriously."

"Eijun, hush," Kazuya said. "Do I need to make you be quiet? It would be a pity, I love the way you sound when I wreck you, but it could be accomplished."

"No, no, not tonight," Eijun said. "I'm sorry, I'm just—"

"Remember? Pregnant, vulnerable, but not crippled. I love you for worrying, but it's fine," Kazuya said, sitting beside Eijun on the bed, running his fingers up his chest. "I want to...well, everything," he said with a self-deprecating chuckle. "But I'm not sure what I can do, so we'll play it by ear. Just don't worry, okay? I know my limits."

"Okay, then. I'll leave it to you," Eijun said with a soft smile, running a finger up Kazuya's arm. "I'm feeling a little underdressed, though."

"I know, I like it," Kazuya said. "It's like my own personal playground, and I can't wait." He bent over and kissed Eijun gently on the lips.

"Rules?"

"Yeah," Kazuya moved around, sitting up on his knees. "No touching below the...well, Akemi, until I tell you that you can."

"That's not fair, Kaz. I want to touch you, too."

"You can, just not there," Kazuya said, running his finger over Eijun's half-hard cock.

"Will you at least undress for me?"

"After a bit," Kazuya looked away, and Eijun realized that it had been a few weeks since he'd seen Kazuya naked. They'd made love regularly, but it was always with the light off, and Kazuya was so good at making that seem like a natural thing that Eijun hadn't even thought about it. Now he was. His hand stilled on Kazuya's arm, and his mind raced. Deciding that this wasn't something that was
going to be resolved immediately or with another talk, he pushed it to the back of his brain, allowing his subconscious to work on the problem and figure out a solution.

"You're the boss," Eijun agreed lightly, smiling at him.

Kazuya knew that look and tone, Eijun was choosing to let things lie, but he was not going to forget them. They were going to have to deal with the way he felt eventually, but not right now. "Yes, I am," he said, with his best smirk. "And I'm going to do exactly what I want to you."

Eijun spread his arms, mimicking Kazuya's 'give me your best' sign from behind the plate. "Looking forward to it."

Kazuya chuckled. "Stealing my signs, now, are you?" he asked, hand smoothing over Eijun's chest, fingers tangling in the hair right above the elastic band of the panties.

Eijun slid a hand under the hem of Kazuya's t-shirt, sliding his hand over his belly. "I love you, you know that?"

"I hope so," Kazuya said with a chuckle.

"No," Eijun said, eyes serious. "I love you."

Kazuya sobered and met his gaze. "I know you do, and I love you too," he responded, leaning in and giving him a quick peck on the lips. "Let me show you how much."

Eijun grinned. "I have absolutely no arguments with that plan," he said, relaxing into the mattress.

"I'll do that," Eijun said, breathless, mind fuzzy with lust as Kazuya picked up the tube of lube. "Let me help, please?"

Kazuya smiled at him, enthralled by the sight of his husband spread out before him, eyes blown and cock leaking, red underwear somewhere across the room. "You just lay there, remember? I'm doing all the work."

"Kazzzz," Eijun whined. "I want to touch you, can I please touch you?"

Kazuya met his golden gaze, eyes blazing, and surrendered to what he knew was inevitable. "Yes," he said, handing over the tube, "but not too much, I'm...you're so gorgeous, I'm on the edge."

"Me too," Eijun said, tugging on Kazuya's underwear. "Off."

"Yeah, yeah," Kazuya complied, pulling them off and tossing them over near where he could see the red panties bunched up.

"Shirt?" Eijun asked, meeting Kazuya's gaze steadily.

Kazuya sighed and gave in to the inevitable. "If you must," he said, pulling the garment over his head.

Eijun's feral gaze softened as he looked at Kazuya's stomach. "God, you're beautiful," he said, laying a gentle hand on the top of Akemi. Turning on his side, he pulled Kazuya down to lay facing him. "I think this would probably be more comfortable for you, right?"

Kazuya kept his eyes on Eijun's shoulder, not meeting his gaze. "It's fine, whatever you..."
"Kazuya," Eijun said firmly. "Please look at me."

He gingerly raised his eyes to meet Eijun's. Seeing nothing but affection and understanding, tinged with lust, he let out the breath he'd been holding.

"I know you think you're not attractive, but I think you're stunning like this," Eijun said. "And I know sometimes it's hard to internalize things. I'm honestly, truly, deeply in love with you and the sight of you carrying our baby is one of the best things I've ever seen. You're gorgeous, Kazuya, and I love every inch of you."

Kazuya blinked back the tears that threatened at the emotion he heard in Eijun's voice. "I know that,' he said shakily. "I really do. I just...I have stretch marks and an outie and I've gotten so fat, she doesn't weigh twenty-five pounds. There's no way you could possibly find me—"

Eijun interrupted him. "Sexy? Attractive? The most stunning thing I've ever seen? You're all of that to me, Kaz. I love you. I want you. Desperately." he ran his fingers gently down Kazuya's arm. "You're the father of my child and there's no one in this world I desire more."

"I adore you, Eijun," Kazuya said. "Thank you, although I'm not sure it's going to stick."

"I know it won't," Eijun said. "I'll keep reassuring you, though. At some point, it will." He reached down and tugged up Kazuya's leg, laying it on top of his hip. "Until then, prepare for lots of touches and love," he said, sliding his hand up Kazuya's thigh and over his ass. "I thought this might be more comfortable?"

"It is," Kazuya agreed. "But I still want to be on top." He moaned a little at Eijun's touch, moving to accommodate him.

"Of course you do," Eijun said, gently working him open. "And you will, as long as you're comfortable."

"I'll be more comfortable if you'd move," Kazuya snarked, glad to be back on familiar ground. "You're not going to break me, Eijun."

"Don't be in such a hurry," Eijun said. "I haven't had a chance to properly touch you and I want to take my time, do it right."

"Eijun..." Kazuya gasped as his husband crooked his finger and rubbed his prostate. "Please don't do that again, I won't last much longer if you do."

Eijun backed off, knowing by the tone of Kazuya's voice that he was telling the truth. "Okay, okay," he said, inserting a third finger and moving a little bit faster. "You're almost ready."

"I am ready," Kazuya asserted, pushing Eijun back onto his back.

"You sure?" Eijun asked, running his hand along Kazuya's side as he started to climb over him. "Hang on, then. Let me help you," he said, holding on to Kazuya's hips to help balance him as he straddled Eijun.

"I'm good," Kazuya said with a grin, rising up as Eijun held his cock so Kazuya could sink down, which is exactly what he did, in one long, slow stroke. They moaned at the same time, eyes meeting and fingers twining together.

"You okay?" Eijun asked and Kazuya pinched his side.
"Stop asking me that, I'm not broken."

"No, you're not. You're amazing and the most magnificent creature I've seen," Eijun started to ramble and Kazuya knew he was on borrowed time.

"Touch me, Eijun," he demanded and Eijun gladly complied. Kazuya moved and Eijun stroked, falling into a rhythm that was a little short of what they really needed, trying to make things last for a bit longer.

"Faster, Kaz, please?" Eijun said. "I'm... I need you to go faster."

Kazuya sped up, Eijun pushing up to meet him as he continued to stroke, bringing the speed up to match.

"Eijun, I..."

"Come, Kaz, I'm right here with you," Eijun said.

"God, I love you," Kazuya said, meeting his eyes as he felt himself go over.

Eijun brought his free hand up to stroke Kazuya's face as he came, urged on by the contractions of Kazuya's orgasm. "You're mine, Kaz. You're my everything," he said, voice gentle, as they slowly came to a halt.

Kazuya started to move, to get off Eijun, and Eijun steadied him as he did so, guiding him to lay on his side beside him.

"That was fantastic, Kaz," Eijun said. "Thank you."

"No, thank you," Kazuya answered. "Thank you for putting up with my bullshit, for helping me with everything. I don't say it enough, but I appreciate it all."

"That's my job, idiot," Eijun said, running his hand through Kazuya's hair. "We're partners, right? You'd do the same for me."

"Gladly," Kazuya agreed. "But you'd be better about acknowledging it."

"I don't do it for the thanks, Kaz. I do it because I love you."

"I know, but I still should be more grateful."

"I don't agree, but you know what we do need? A shower," Eijun said. "Together? Is that okay?"

"Very much so," Kazuya said, rolling over so he could get up. "I'd love to shower with you."

"Good."

"Sorry I've gotten so weird about things. I don't know why I'm like this."

"It's normal," Eijun said. "Your body doesn't look like you're used to. Akemi's changing things, and while I know you'd never want anything different, you're not sure what you're going to look like after the birth. That's fine, that's normal." Eijun started the shower, putting his hand under the water to check the temperature. "I'm just going to tell you here and now, I think you're dead sexy. Just like you are right now. And I expect the same later."

"If you say so," Kazuya said, doubt evident in his voice.
"You're having a hard time believing me," Eijun said. "That's okay, I'll show you. If I could, I'd have you topless while you're home, so I could reach out and touch your belly whenever I wanted to."

"I don't know about topless," Kazuya said, stepping under the spray in front of Eijun. "But you can touch us whenever you'd like. I wish you would, to be honest."

"I can do that," Eijun said, sliding his hands around Kazuya and pulling him back, touching his belly. "I love doing that."

Kazuya melted into him, lolling his head back onto his shoulder. "Don't be surprised if I stand like this a lot over the next few weeks. It feels so good."

"You're welcome whenever you want," Eijun said. "But we should wash up and get to bed, you have to be exhausted."

"I kinda am," Kazuya said, not moving from where he was. "But I don't want to move."

Eijun picked up the bar of soap. "That's fine, I'll wash you. You just stand there," he said.

"But if you move, I'll need to move, too. We move together."

"That's not what I—just stand still for a minute, okay?"

"'kay," Kazuya said. He'd been visibly fading since they stepped into the shower, and now he was close to being asleep. Eijun washed them both quickly and ran a towel over their bodies.

Damp, sated, and happy, they climbed into bed and fell asleep.

**Week thirty-three**

"Yes sir, let me get with Kazuya and I'll let you know," Eijun said into the phone as he walked into the front room, and Kazuya perked up, hearing his name.

"I know, we'll have an answer within a few days, okay? By Wednesday, for sure."

"Okay, yes. Thank you and I'll speak with you soon," he said, hanging up the phone.

"Who was that?" Kazuya asked as he folded yet another diaper for Akemi.

"That was Kondo-san," Eijun said, flopping down next to Kazuya and grabbing a pile of diapers out of the basket, beginning to fold them.

"Our agent? Is there something wrong with your new contract?"

"Not at all—in fact, it's better than we asked. They added a second year, with a healthy signing bonus if I stay as a coach and occasional player."

"Really? Do you want to do that?" Kazuya asked, pausing his folding to pay attention to Eijun.

Eijun frowned. "I'm not sure, but it's an option I have at the end of next year, I don't have to decide now."

"Oh, okay," Kazuya said. "That works. We'll see then, I guess."
"Yeah. But if I do this you'll have to extend, too," Eijun pointed out. "We should get our signing dates in sync, this is a pain."

Kazuya resumed folding. "We should," he said. "You're right. Is that it?"

Eijun took a breath. "No. He was approached by the League headquarters. They want you in the calendar."

Kazuya gaped at him, shocked. "They want me? You've got to be kidding."

"Well, they want us, but I figured you were the one who was going to need convincing. We've done this lots of times."

"I know, but I figured this year they'd only want you, for obvious reasons."

"Nope, they want us both."

Kazuya shook his head. "They do realize I'm pregnant? There's no way people want to look at me."

"I'm sure they do, Kaz. And clearly, they must. It's not often you see a pregnant athlete."

"I'm not even playing anymore, are they just interested in me because I'm pregnant? I don't want to be trotted out on display."

"We did this last year, too. And you weren't playing then, either."

"I had been, though," Kazuya argued.

"They've had coaching staff before, you know that. It's not that unusual," Eijun pointed out.

"You're...not wrong. But this feels pandering, like they want a poster child for male pregnancy."

"What would be wrong with that?" Eijun asked. "I mean, we both know the numbers and the stigma—why not show that it's bullshit? You can be strong and still be pregnant?"

"I don't know, Eijun," Kazuya said, putting his hand protectively on his stomach. "Our baby's not for public consumption, right?"

"That's not what this is, Kaz. We've done this before, and it's for a good cause." Eijun turned on the couch to face him. "What's this really about?"

"I don't know if I should be on display," Kazuya said. "I'm so big and...maybe after Akemi is born."

"They want to do it before then, the shoot's Thursday." Eijun snorted softly. "No practice that day, so you don't have that excuse, either."

"But, I'm huge, Eijun? And posing naked is not something I think I should be doing," Kazuya said, frowning at the pile of diapers awaiting folding.

Eijun smiled and reached out for his hand. "I think it'll be gorgeous," Eijun said. "I think you're gorgeous, but you know that. They said to make sure that you know you don't have to do anything you're uncomfortable with, and you'll have final approval of any images you're in."

"That's new, we never knew what was going to show up before," Kazuya said.

Eijun nodded. "Yeah, I know. They must really want you," he said. "I think it would be a good
"Why?" Kazuya met his eyes, showing his befuddlement. "Why do you think it's a good idea?"

"Several reasons," Eijun said. "First of all, you're stunning and I think you'd be a great addition to the calendar. Second, even if it wasn't the point or even a consideration, you are breaking with the norm. Showing yourself to be pregnant, male and proud of both of those things, not the normal meek and weak stereotype is going to be helpful for a lot of people. Third, there's no reason not to, this isn't exploitative, it's for a charity we both support, and you know who's producing it, so you can be sure that the photos won't find themselves distributed where you don't want them."

"I'm not sure, Eijun. It's—"

"If you weren't pregnant, we wouldn't be having this conversation, would we?"

"No, but—"

"And if it was me who was pregnant, would you think this was a bad idea?"

"No, but—"

"Then we've got it settled," Eijun said.

"But I have stretch marks and I'm not—"

"Kazuya," Eijun said firmly, stopping him from going down the same path they'd been down before. "You know they Photoshop the hell out of everyone's skin, right? They don’t change the body, but they do erase imperfections."

"You're right; they got rid of the scar on my knee last year."

"They did, and they'll do the same for you this year as well."

"You really think this is a good idea?"

"I do."

"Okay, I'll do it," Kazuya agreed.

"We'll do it," Eijun said. "Together."

"Of course," Kazuya said. "I wouldn't even consider it otherwise."

"You know, at thirty-three weeks, Akemi's almost two kilos?" Eijun asked as they stood to one side of the clearing the producers had chosen for the photoshoot.

Kazuya pulled the edges of his robe tighter and chuckled. "Doing this now, Ei?"

"Why not?" Eijun, also wearing a thin white robe, asked. "There's also definitely more baby than amniotic fluid now."

"Yeah?" Kazuya asked, diverted from his fussing with the robe.

Eijun sighed, relieved. "And she's keeping her eyes open when she's awake, and drinking almost a
half-liter of amniotic fluid a day."

"Thirsty baby," Kazuya noted, attention fully engaged.

"She is, and her immune system's developing, she's getting antibodies from you," Eijun said, watching as the photographers changed the set around, getting ready to call the group up.

"Good, those will last a while, right?"

"About three months, time for her to develop her own," Eijun agreed.

Kazuya nodded. "Anything else?"

"Not really, she's getting more brain, but that's going to go for a while," he said. Looking over at the set, he nodded. "I think it's time, though."

Kazuya looked at his husband and smiled softly. "Thank you," he said, fully cognizant of the reason for his sudden information dump.

Eijun tilted his head and grinned. "You're welcome, did it help?"

"It did," Kazuya said, untying and dropping his robe on a bench they'd set up off set. Eijun's joined it, and together they joined the rest of the players who were being included in the annual 'Boys of Summer' calendar.

The photographer stepped forward. "Good afternoon, thank you all for coming," he started. "I've worked on this calendar for several years and many of you are familiar, but for those of you who are new, I'm Takeda Souma. We're going to do a bunch of shots, here and through the trees, where there's a baseball field. If you're wondering or are unfamiliar with the process, we have a few things we want to do. We're creating the calendar, yes, but some of the images will be sold as prints as well as grouped for download. Of course, we'll make sure everything's tasteful and no body parts are showing that shouldn't be, but all the images are going to be nude. I'm also very glad Miyuki agreed to participate again this year; I think he's going to add a dimension to this calendar that'll make it be even better than usual. Miyuki, if you need anything, let us know, okay? You know we're used to pushing you guys. If you need a break, speak up." Kazuya nodded.

Takeda continued. "With that being said, we're planning on taking pictures of groups and singles or smaller groups. There's a table of food and drinks over there," he gestured to the side of the set, "so take advantage of it while you have downtime. There are also plenty of seats, no need to stand around. We'll call you when you're needed. Any questions?" He paused, but nobody raised their hands. "Okay, let's get started. Group shots first, since you're all here and ready," he said. "If you two would move—" and he was off, instructing, moving people around physically if they needed to be adjusted, taking pictures and making sure they were what he wanted before moving on.

He finished with the big group and his eyes landed on Kazuya. "Miyuki, I want to do some with you as the center," he said, moving forward. "Sawamura, stay. We'll start with you two and add as we go."

Kazuya sighed as Eijun made his way over to him. He felt his nerves kick in, as he was left standing and waiting alone. Most of the group shots had either been from the rear or with Kazuya just one of the crowd, and this new batch was going to be focused on him. Eijun stepped close beside him, touching him lightly on the wrist, and he found himself relaxing instantly, to his mingled chagrin and relief.

"You two were our biggest poster sale last year," Takeda noted. "I expect you to do even better this
year." He looked them over, eyes narrowed. "We don't want to do just the usual soft pregnancy picture, although I do want at least one of those, I'm sure that would be amazing. Actually," he said. "Let's start with that, and go from there. Sawamura, stand behind him and put your hands...yes, like that. Miyuki, you...yes. That's perfect, stay like that," he said, snapping several images of them from varying heights and at different angles. "Okay, now. Let's reverse that a little, Miyuki, move behind and to one side of Sawamura, come up closer, rest your head on his shoulder. Yes, perfect," he said and continued to walk them through several more poses, before bringing others in to do some of the more general shots.

"Water?" Eijun asked, holding the bottle out to Kazuya.

"Thanks," Kazuya said, taking a big drink. They were on a break, the photographer having moved on to other singles and groups, back in their robes. Kazuya expected them to be done, at least until they moved to the baseball field, so he was relaxed, sitting in a seat.

"How are you doing?" Eijun asked, searching his face.

Kazuya slanted him a smile. "You're asking now?" he joked. "I'm actually good; it just took me a bit to settle. They've always paired us off, though, haven't they? There's not much different this year."

"There isn't," Eijun said. "I do hope they send us copies of the pics, I'm sure some of them are stunning. I might even have to frame one for our room," he said.

"You're going to ask me to come up and see your etchings, Eijun?"

"What? No, idiot," he said to Kazuya's laughter.

"I do want to see them first," Kazuya said. "But I think at least one of them will be stunning."

"I agree," Eijun said. "You're stunning, there's no way they won't be."

"I'm thinking it's going to be you," Kazuya argued.

"It's going to be us," Eijun asserted.

Kazuya smiled softly, lacing their hands together. "You're right. It's going to be us."

Saturday morning, Eijun walked into the bedroom where Kazuya was putting on a t-shirt.

"Where are we meeting Dad?" Eijun asked, stepping up behind him and sliding his hands around his waist, under his shirt, rubbing his belly.

Kazuya laid his hands on top of Eijun's, leaning back into the embrace. "At the dealership," he said. "His friend is a salesman there, so we should get a good price."

"Ready to become owners of a minivan, Kaz?" Eijun asked, smirk hidden but still evident in his voice.

Kazuya pinched his hand. "We're getting an SUV," he said. "Not a minivan. But, if that were what we needed, I wouldn't mind. Not if it means we have a family."

"You're right," Eijun said. "This is another step, right? Another part of being an adult, of starting our
own family."

"Yes, and I can't wait until it all comes together," Kazuya said, turning and sliding his hands around Eijun's neck. "Have I told you lately that I adore you, Sawamura Eijun?"

"Not for a very long time," Eijun said mournfully. "I was beginning to doubt."

"Idiot," Kazuya said with a snort, leaning in to nibble a little at his jaw. "I love you, you should never doubt that."

Eijun sighed, tilting his head to give Kazuya better access. "I love you too, Miyuki Kazuya. You're everything to me, everything I want."

"Thank you," Kazuya said, raising his head and stopping his exploration, to Eijun's dismay. He met Eijun's gaze, eyes serious. "I mean it, thank you. You've been behind me all this time, and you're still supporting me. I appreciate it more than you know, and I hope you don't stop. Please don't stop, I couldn't do this by myself."

"I won't," Eijun promised. "You're not alone, you don't have to do any of this by yourself."

"I'll remember—oohh!" Kazuya's hands dropped to his belly, and he met Eijun's gaze, eyes confused. "That's...odd."

"What's going on, Kaz?" Eijun asked, eyebrows knit.

"My stomach got really hard, and it hurt a little? But then it stopped."

"Braxton-Hicks," Eijun said. "Those are false contractions, kind of like a warm-up to labor," he explained.

"I'm not going into labor," Kazuya said. "I'm having a C-section."

"I know that, but your body doesn't. It's getting ready. It's getting ready." Eijun laid a hand on Akemi. "They're harmless, they might get a little irritating, but that's it."

"You sure that's normal?"

"Yeah, it is," Eijun reassured him. "We'll talk to Haruichi about them next week, okay? But you're fine. If they get painful, or you get a lot of them, let me know. There are ways to stop them, relax you."

"You do know how to relax me," Kazuya purred at him, hands flirting with his belt loops.

"Mind out of the gutter, Kaz," Eijun said with a grin. "It'll take a little different kind of relaxing."

"If I must," he pouted.

Eijun thought he looked adorable, but wisely didn't say anything. "Just for now," he said. "Rain check?"

"Works for me," Kazuya said. "But also, can I have a backrub later? My back is killing me."

"Of course, back rub to relax, and then more relaxing?" Eijun suggested.

"Sounds like a great plan," Kazuya said, kissing his cheek. "But first, an SUV."
"Yes, first an SUV," Eijun said. "We should get a blue one."

"We already have a blue car," Kazuya said, heading to the front door. "What about black?"

"Ugh," Eijun said. "Everyone has black. What about red?"

"A dark red might be all right, we don't want to look like a fire hydrant," he teased.

"Those are usually yellow," Eijun noted.

"Just not white," Kazuya said. "That's my biggest no."

"Okay, something other than black or white," Eijun said.

"Or blue," Kazuya added, sliding into the front seat of their car. Eijun leaned in for a kiss. "Or blue," he agreed, closing the door.

Climbing into the driver's seat, Eijun started the car.

"Not pink, either," Kazuya said as Eijun pulled out of the driveway.

"How do you feel about purple?"

Chapter End Notes

Week 33! We're getting near the end!
I'd tell you how many chapters I expect things to take, but that would be cursing myself, so I'll just pretend what it takes is what I expected.
I will say this won't be longer than Kick.
But that's not saying a lot.

Anyway, how are you, what did you think?
Any guesses on which color they're going to pick?
Week thirty-four

"So, weekly, now," Haruichi said, strolling into the room with a chart open.

"Yup, every Tuesday morning, first thing," Kazuya agreed from his perch on the table.

"No ultrasound?"

"Do you think I need one? She's kicking around in there as we speak," Kazuya said. "We just followed the nurse back to this room, should we have gone back and got one done first? Do you think we should have one every week?"

"Not really, not unless you think there are problems," Haruichi said, motioning Kazuya to lie down. "I think we should do them every other week, so we can monitor her growth."

"She's getting big, I can tell you that," Kazuya said.

Eijun grinned. "She is. She's kicking me around at night, it's kinda funny."

"Not if you're the real punching bag," Kazuya said. "I wish there was a way to calm her down so I can sleep."

"You can try a couple of things," Haruichi told him as he took notes about his observations. "You can rub your belly, which will soothe both of you, that's likely to help some. Try rolling over; sometimes a change of position can help. You can also try walking, but move from side to side, so you're essentially rocking her. A rocking chair might work, too. Basically, anything that you think might comfort her, things that will calm her and help her sleep so you can." He put down his notes and looked at Kazuya. "Also, you should try to relax, too. If you're stressed, she's going to feel it. I know Eijun's been giving you massages, keep that up, those will help."
"Got it," Kazuya said. "Anything else?"

"Be patient, you're down to the home stretch. Six weeks to go, probably less," Haruichi said. "Are you having any contractions?"

"Yes, sometimes. They come and go, nothing timed or regular," Kazuya said.

"Good, that's a good thing," Haruichi told him. "That means Akemi's getting ready. You're going to have a cesarean, of course, but the contractions tell us when she's ready to be born."

"I see," Kazuya said. "I have the list of signs, and Eijun memorized them as well, I'm sure."

Eijun nodded, "I have and I'm watching."

"Good. Well, you both look fine. If you don't have any other questions, I'll see you next week."

"Thanks, Haruichi," Kazuya said. "We'll see you then."

"Good luck with the game today," Haruichi told them. "You've got this."

"Thank you," Eijun said. "We hope so."

"Welcome to the fourth game in this year's Central League Climax Series, where our own Swallows are ahead, two games to one. Remember, folks, this is the best of six, and we do have an extra game, so the Swallows are actually two games ahead. The Giants have put up a good fight this week, but our boys are more than up for the challenge. Now, about the information you've all been waiting for. No, Coach Miyuki hasn't had the baby yet. Kidding, kidding, we know that information would be everywhere if it happened. No, the starting pitcher for this game will be Hara-san. We know you'd rather have Sawamura, but our ace is taking it easy so he can be ready for when we really need him. And possibly keeping Miyuki from killing the bullpen, if the rumors of his disappointment in their last few games are true. Anyway, here's the lineup...."

It was a brilliant day for baseball, and the stands were packed with swaths of fans in blue and red, with large groups of orange and black for contrast. The fall day was crisp, the sun bright but the temperature hovering at a pleasant 24°. Both teams were playing well—going into the eighth inning, the score was tied. Hara had pitched his best game yet, but the Giants knew that this was their last chance so they were playing better than they had all series, making him work for every out. He'd been pulled at the beginning of the sixth, replaced by Ikeda, who'd been pitching a cautious game. One bad ball was thrown and one well-aimed hit was made, and the Giants were back in the lead. Ikeda managed to end their at-bat without any further damage, but it was a close thing.

Closing out the inning, the Swallows were unable to get on base, all the momentum had swung the way of the Giants.

Until.

Top of the ninth, and the crowd started chanting, "Oshi, oshi, oshi, oshi!" each iteration louder than the next, feet pounding and shaking the stands. This continued until a lone player in the Swallows uniform jogged out onto the field, stopping on the mound and the crowds roared to see their ace enter the fray.

As almost an afterthought, the announcer said, "You asked for it, you got it. In for Ikeda is Sawamura. It's the top of the Giant's lineup. Can he stop their momentum and give the Swallows a
chance to win?"

Eijun stood on the mound, tossing the rosin bag into the air with his left hand, grinning slightly at the cheers from the crowds. Glancing at the dugout, he saw Kazuya standing with arms crossed, eyes narrowed. He'd resisted putting Eijun in the game, wanting to save his arm after the hard time he'd had in the second game of the series, but the coach—and Eijun—had convinced him otherwise. Or at least had gotten him to concede defeat, which was something Eijun was sure he'd pay for later, but this was important. They needed to win, needed to finish the series.

Takahashi trotted out to him, holding his mask in his hand. "He's pissed, right?"

"Yeah, but he'll get over it," Eijun said. "He's worried about my shoulder."

"With good reason, you probably shouldn't be out here," the catcher said. "You were really hurting a few days ago."

Eijun sighed, "I'm fine, it's only for one inning."

"Only if we can get some runs, it's likely we'll just tie it up," Takahashi said.

"Well, all we can do is our job, right?" Eijun said. "Get the outs, get our chance."

"True. What condition are you in? What can I call?"

"Whatever you, or the coach, call," Eijun said. "I'm fine to play, I told you."

"Okay, then. One out at a time, right?"

"Right," Eijun said, tapping their gloves together, and Takahashi returned to the plate, donning his mask as he went.

Eijun turned to the outfield, where the team had taken up their positions as he and Takahashi had been speaking.

"Balls will come flying, thank you for your support," he yelled, lifting his arms in the air.

"Yeah, yeah, just turn around and pitch already," came from the third baseman.

"Let's get this inning started!" yelled the shortstop, full of energy even at this late in the game.

Eijun smiled at the banter and turned, ready to face the first batter.

"I knew this would happen," Kazuya said, glaring at Eijun.

"What? We're not out of it yet," he said. "We're tied."

"True, but you're up," Kazuya snarked, "And we have two outs."

Eijun just grinned at him as he climbed out of the dugout. "Have some faith, Kaz."

"In your batting?" Kazuya asked, incredulously, and Eijun laughed.

"In your team," he said, turning and trotting out to the home plate.
The stadium was loud, with the fans yelling or jeering, the air thick with tension. Everyone was on their feet, knowing that this at-bat could decide the game.

As Eijun stepped up to the plate, he took a deep breath. Looking around, he let it out, feeling himself relax into his stance. Watching the pitcher, he ran through what he knew about this battery from Kazuya and how they reacted under stress, trying to figure out what they were likely to pitch. *Outside, to the corner,* he decided. *They don't think I'll hit, so they're going to be a little more aggressive.*

*Outside, to the lower corner,* Kazuya thought, hoping Eijun remembered what they'd spoken about. *You can do this, Ei.* His hand came down reflexively to run soothingly over Akemi as he watched anxiously.

The whole stadium watched in an uproar, Giants fans yelling to try to distract the batter, while the Swallows fans were quiet, watching carefully.

Eijun watched the pitch, low and outside, as he thought. A little bit more outside than the pitcher had intended. Ball one.

Second pitch, another to the outside. Eijun swung and missed. Strike one.

Kazuya leaned forward, holding his breath as Eijun retook his stance. *Outside, but high, I'd bet. You can hit that.*

*This is it.* Eijun thought. *High and outside this time.* He knew he couldn't bunt, and he had to get on base. The top of the lineup began after him, which the Giants were trying desperately to avoid. The high and outside was the one pitch he could hit reliably with some distance, and he hoped that the battery didn't know that.

They didn't.

High and outside, just like he wanted it to be. He swung and hit—a line drive between second base and shortstop, nothing hard enough to get him past first, but plenty to land him there with room to spare. He grinned and hunkered down, watching for the steal.

The crowd got louder, which Eijun hadn't thought possible. Yelling and screaming and a chorus of "Oshi! Oshi! Oshi! Oshi!" as he made it to base. He kept his eyes on the batter, after getting instructions from the base coach to steal only if he knew he'd make it.

The batter swung on the first pitch, hitting it high and to the outfield, where the ball was caught. Side out, and the game was headed into overtime.

Eijun trotted back into the dugout, to his frowning bullpen coach.

"I know you've got to go back out there," Kazuya said. "But I'm not happy about it."

"What else do you propose?" Eijun asked. "I don't think we have any other options."

"I know, but that doesn't mean I have to like it."

"I tried to end it," Eijun protested.

"You did, and I'm very happy with the way you read that battery," Kazuya unbent enough to tell him. "But still. I don't want you to get re-injured, I'm afraid we're overworking you."
"Tell you what, I'll go see Shinji tomorrow and let him look me over."

"Like you think I'll give you a choice about that?" Kazuya snarked, one eyebrow raised. "I'm not kidding, Eijun. If he says you're out for the rest of the games, I don't give a fuck what kind of bind we're in, you're out. Got it?"

"Yes, sir," Eijun said, saluting like he would have when he was younger.

Kazuya stifled a laugh and smacked him. "Get out there and get them out. No more than a dozen pitches, you hear me?"

"You're not giving me much to work with, but I'll do my best," Eijun said with a grin.

"You'd better. Twelve, Eijun. I mean it."

And so he did. Striking out the first two at-bats with three pitches each, he struggled with the third batter, allowing him a base hit after two pitches. He only had three pitches left for the cleanup. He fouled tipped the first pitch, sending it right into Takahashi's glove. Out came the Giant's defense, and off the field went Eijun.

"You're lucky," Kazuya said when he plopped down beside him on the bench, handing his husband a bottle of water.

"Hey, I still had two pitches, I would have made it."

Kazuya snorted. "Against Higachi? I don't think so."

"You don't know that, Kaz," Eijun argued.

"How many times have we played them? Your record against him isn't anything to brag about."

"Maybe, but the only thing that counts is what happened today."

"True," Kazuya conceded gracefully. "But my point stands."

"Hey, I pitched less than twelve, why are you giving me a hard time."

"Pay attention, we're up," Kazuya said, ignoring the question.

Eijun snorted in reply, turning his attention to the field, where their first batter was just striking out.

"You've got this, Takahashi!" Eijun stood and yelled at the man on deck, who turned and waved.

Kazuya joined him leaning on the railing, watching the field closely. "He's going to make it on base, they all think they know what he'll swing on," he said. "Here's hoping Otani can work his magic and bring him in."

Eijun nodded. "You're right. He has been working on his batting. We'll—Go! Run! Oshi! Oshi! Oshi!" Eijun shouted, watching as Takahashi sprinted to first, rounding the base and heading to second. He stuck there, barely beating the thrown ball.

Kazuya nodded, satisfied with the play. "That was a good one. He's gotten better."

"He has," Eijun said. "Otani's good, too."

"He's the fourth batter, he'd better be," Kazuya snarked.
"Not as good as you were, though," Eijun said, bumping his husband lightly.

Kazuya felt his cheeks color as he continued to watch the game. "How do you even say things like that?"

"It's true? I don't have problems stating the facts," he said. "Like that Akemi weighs nearly two and a half kilos right now."

"Really?"

"Yeah, and she may nearly double that before she's born."

"There's nowhere to fit double the baby," Kazuya said, touching his hard belly.

Eijun shrugged. "Maybe she'll only gain another kilo or so. I think three and a half is normal."

"That's still a lot."

"Yeah, it is," Eijun said. "But she's closing her eyes when she sleeps and keeping them open when she's awake."

"Good to know," Kazuya said with a grin. "She's getting ready to join us."

"She is," Eijun agreed, turning his attention back to the field.

They continued to watch as Otani was deliberately walked, not even given the chance to swing. The crowd boomed and jeered, getting even louder.

"That was stupid," Eijun said.

Kazuya snorted. "You're right, it was. I guess they think he'll be easier to strike out."

"He may be, but under pressure, there's nobody better. And he's gotten a read on this pitcher."

"Right," Kazuya agreed, grinning as he watched Raichi walk out onto the field.

As he did so, the stands started singing along with the opening strains of the Banana Boat Song. 'Day-o! Daaayyy-o' rang out from the crowd, to Raichi's utter delight. He laughed as he took his place at home plate.

"Why isn't he the fourth hole again?"

Kazuya shrugged. "I think Sato thinks he's better without so much pressure on him. I don't pretend to understand their logic about it."

Eijun nodded. "Who knows, right?"

"Right."

They watched, standing side by side with Eijun humming along to the song, as Raichi swung and missed the first pitch. He repositioned himself, and took a deep breath, settling into his place.

The pitch, a fastball to the inside, was exactly what he was looking for. He swung and hit, the ball going out over the right field, and into the crowd.

They'd won their division.
The Swallows were in the Japan Series.

Eijun climbed into the passenger seat of their new SUV, settling into the black leather seat. They were going out shopping for car seats and a few other bulky items, so they decided to take the new car. The one they’d agreed on was a darker red Toyota, one that could seat eight, if needed.

"So, what did he say?" Kazuya asked as he pulled away from the curb.

Eijun shrugged. "Not much. Just that I’d not done any damage, but that I needed to be careful. And that he wanted me to rest for the next week, no practice at all. Just running and stuff, nothing that would work my shoulder."

"And what did he say about you playing during the series?"

"That doesn't start for two weeks, I'm going back next Monday to confirm, but he thinks I should be fine. In a limited capacity, of course."

"Of course," Kazuya said. "As limited as I can get away with."

"I understand, but I'm really fine," Eijun said.

"Eijun," Kazuya started. "Akemi's coming soon. She's due in just over a month, and if you injure your shoulder..."

"I know, I do," Eijun said. "I worry about that, too. But I'm being careful, honestly."

"I know you are, and I appreciate that. But what if careful isn't enough?"

Eijun shrugged helplessly. "I don't know, Kaz. We just have to do the best we can and hope everything works out. Do you want me to just sit out?"

"I wish you could, Ei, but I know that's not possible. Not if we want to win. But I will use you as little as I can."

"That's the plan," Eijun said, linking their fingers as they each settled, worrying the problem in their own way.

Week thirty-five

"She's gotten so big," Eijun said, staring at the image of Akemi on the screen.

"She has," Haruichi agreed, walking into the room. "How big do you estimate?" he asked the ultrasound tech.

"Somewhere close to three kilos," he said. "Maybe a little less."

"A bit ahead of the curve, then," Haruichi said. "As she's been since the beginning."

"How much bigger is she going to get?" Kazuya asked.

"I'd expect her to top out at four, maybe four and a half kilos," Haruichi said. "But she's probably going to be a little less than four."
I don't think there's any more room in there."

Haruichi laughed. "You'd be surprised," he said. Looking at her, he continued. "She's head down, so that's good. Everything looks just fine. Finish up here and meet me in my office, okay?"

"Be right there," Eijun said.

Kazuya lay still as the technician wiped his belly, accepting Eijun's help to sit up. "His office, huh?"

"I guess there's no need to dirty an exam room," Eijun said. "Ready?" he asked as Kazuya stood, pulling down his t-shirt.

"Lead on," Kazuya said, following Eijun out the door and to the office.

"So, first of all," Haruichi said as he sat behind his desk, "congratulations on going to the Japan Series."

"Thank you," Eijun said.

"You played well, Eijun. How's your shoulder?"

Eijun winced. "It's okay, Shinji's making me sit out of training this week, I have to go back on Monday. I'm sure it'll be fine when we need it."

"Which won't be much, if I have anything to say about it," Kazuya said.

Haruichi nodded approvingly. "I agree."

"As do I," Eijun said. "If I could sit the whole thing out, I...well, I'd want to be playing. But I would, because it's better to not take unnecessary risks."

"I'm glad we're all on the same page," Haruichi said. "I don't want all your suffering earlier to be for nothing."

"Believe me," Eijun said, sincerity dripping from every syllable, "neither do I, Haruichi, neither do I."

"Did you order something?" Eijun asked, eyeing the box that was leaning against their front door when they pulled up to their house after practice. A practice that saw Eijun only doing strengthening exercises and running.

Kazuya shook his head. "I don't think so? Are we expecting something from the architects? I know Akiko mentioned something about them the last time we spoke with her."

"Maybe? I didn't think they were going to be ready for a few weeks, though," Eijun said, unbuckling his seatbelt and opening his door. "Stay, please."

"Not a pet," Kazuya muttered, but did as Eijun requested, waiting for him to open his door and help him out of the car. It was true his center of gravity had shifted and he was a little off-kilter, but he didn't like to have help. Or admit he needed it, either.

Reaching the door, Eijun bent down to retrieve the box, letting Kazuya open the door.

"It's from Mom," Eijun said.
"What would she have sent? I thought she'd cleaned out every baby store in Nagano already."

"Maybe they got in a new shipment," Eijun laughed. "I have no idea what it could be."

"Me either," Kazuya said, toeing off his shoes. Eijun bent to untie his own, lining up both of their pairs neatly since Kazuya couldn't bend over comfortably.

Eijun laid the package on the counter and headed towards their bedroom. "Well, I'm pretty sure it's something for Akemi," he said, dropping their bags by the washer and heading on back.

"I'm pretty sure you're right," Kazuya said, following him back. He shed his clothes and dropped them in the hamper, donning a swing dress. "I'm going to miss these after I have her," he said.

"Why? You can still wear them," Eijun said. "I don't think there's an expiration date. I will if you do."

"Next summer, then," Kazuya agreed.

"Works for me," Eijun said, sliding on a dress to match Kazuya's. "We won't be able to wear them much longer, it's getting cooler."

"Right."

Eijun stepped up to him and slid his hands along his belly. "How are you feeling?"

"Other than carrying a three-kilo weight in my abdomen, I'm good," Kazuya snarked.

"Want a back rub later?"

"Oh god, yes," Kazuya agreed. "Please."

"Okay, yeah. Later this evening, alright?"

"That's fine with me," Kazuya said. "But can it be sooner than that?"

"Sure," Eijun laughed.

"After we look at what Mom sent," Kazuya proclaimed, and they went to the kitchen to do just that.

Kazuya found a pair of scissors, and carefully cut the tape, the box didn't weigh much so they figured it was some piece of clothing.

They weren't wrong, not exactly.

"It's beautiful," Kazuya breathed, running his fingers over the closely-knit threads. "Do you think she made this?"

"I do," Eijun said, peeking over his shoulder at the contents. "What is it?"

"I don't know," Kazuya said, picking it up to inspect it. "It's something for the baby, though."

Eijun picked up the paper that had fallen to the bottom of the box. "She said it's a baby bunting, and it's for her to wear when it's chilly but not so cold that she needs a snowsuit."

"It's like a big bag, with a hood and sleeves," Kazuya said. "We could put her in anything under there and she'd be warm."
"She would," Eijun agreed.

"You know, we've been trying to figure out what to bring her home in. I think we have a winner," Kazuya said.

Eijun looked at him. "You wouldn't mind?"

"Why would I? She's my mom, too. I even have it on good authority that she likes me the best."

"That's actually quite true," Eijun agreed. "Okay, she's going to love that. One thing, though, we might want to consider. It's white. We could use it for all of our kids."

"Like a family tradition? That would be lovely," Kazuya said.

"Then that's what we'll do," Eijun said decisively.

"Backrub now?"

"Of course, let me get the stuff," Eijun said.

"Kaz? I did want to talk to you about something," Eijun said after they finished the backrub, settling on the couch where Kazuya flopped with his head in Eijun's lap, boneless.

"That sounds ominous," Kazuya said. "I just got relaxed, don't ruin it, please."

Eijun smiled softly down at him, running his fingers through his hair. "It's not going to, and if it does, I'll find some other way to relax you."

"Tempted to become tense, then," Kazuya said with a matching grin.

"I was talking about a hot bath, but you had to go there," Eijun snarked. "That's always on the table, you know that. Except not on the table, because it's your kitchen and I don't want you scrubbing for days."

Kazuya glared at him weakly, he really was relaxed. "We eat in there, Eijun. It needs to be clean."

"I know, I know," Eijun said. "So anyway. I wanted to talk to you about something."

"What's that?"

"I was thinking," Eijun continued to finger-comb his hair, rubbing circles in his scalp.

"I'm rewarding good behavior by avoiding the obvious response," Kazuya said. "What were you thinking?"

Eijun flicked his forehead. Gently. "I was thinking that maybe we'd want to reveal Akemi's name."

"Why? I thought we were going to wait."

"Well, I just...there are a lot of people wondering and I don't want it to get out accidentally. All our friends know, so they may be overheard. Remember Mei a few weeks ago?"

"True, but it hasn't happened yet. Is there speculation about her name?"

"Where? On the board? Yes, of course. Akemi has come up, because it was your mom's name. My
grandma's name's come up as a possibility as well. They don't know anything for sure."

Kazuya sighed. "Why do people even care?"

"We're popular, Kaz. It's the downside of your forcing us to be seen as a couple."

"I know, and I don't regret doing that," Kazuya said. "But people are so intrusive, right?"

"They care about us, we forced them to be invested in us, remember? They're not really bad, I've seen much worse."

"That's also true. But still, sometimes it gets a little much."

"We don't have to say anything," Eijun said. "We have the Japan series starting next week, so we can just focus on that if you want."

"We do," Kazuya agreed. "It's going to be hard to win."

"We're going to have to play our best, that's for sure," Eijun said. "And I really think I'm going to have to play, even though I know you don't like the idea."

"I know," Kazuya said, reaching up and tangling their fingers together. "I don't like it, but I can't see us winning without you."

"Hara needs another year to come into his own," Eijun said. "But he's getting there."

"It'll be a good experience for him, playing in the Japan Series," Kazuya said.

Eijun nodded. "He's getting better under pressure," he said. "But back to the subject. Akemi."

Kazuya looked up at him thoughtfully, "I know. Bring me the Japan Series championship without injuring your shoulder, and we'll tell the world."

"Deal," Eijun said with a smirk.

"Now, about the non-table relaxation technique..." Kazuya said. "What did you have in mind?"

Eijun's smirk widened into a grin. "Well, it would start with a warm soak," he said. "You want one? I think it would help."

"Join me?"

"Try to keep me out."

Kazuya showered while Eijun ran the bath. As soon as the water was at the right temperature, he stripped quickly and hopped in behind his husband, sliding his hands along his sides. Kazuya leaned back into him and sighed, head back against his shoulder.

"You alright?"

"I'm fine, just a little worn out," Kazuya admitted.

Eijun hummed in acknowledgment. "I'm sure," he said. Looking down Kazuya's body, he forgot to breathe for a second as he saw something...a hand? A foot? go across the top of his stomach. "I just
"Probably her foot, since she's head down," Kazuya said. "But yeah, she's a little bit active right now. She likes the warm water, it calms her but she seems to fight going to sleep. Or she just is trying to get comfortable, I don't know."

"That's amazing. You're amazing, I can't believe you're doing this, bringing our baby into the world," Eijun laid his hands gently on Kazuya's stomach. "Thank you. I don't know if I've thanked you enough for this, so thank you again. I'm so lucky to have you. I love you so much," he said, eyes filling.

"And I love you," Kazuya said. "I can't imagine a world where I'd have a baby without you as the father. Without you, my life would have been so much uglier, you have no idea. I would have just withdrawn more and more, become worse and worse."

"I don't think so," Eijun argued. "I think you'd have found someone who'd be there for you, who'd help."

"We'll never know, will we?" Kazuya asked. "I'm just glad it's you. I'm going to get out and get in the tub, come as soon as you're clean."

"I'll be right behind you," Eijun agreed, steadying Kazuya as he stepped out of the shower. "Be careful, okay?"

"Okay." Kazuya moved carefully across the floor. "We're good," he said, sinking into the tub with a sigh. "I'm getting used to the lavender. Spoiled, even."

"That's fine, we can keep using it whenever you'd like," Eijun said. "I love the way it smells."

"It is really relaxing," Kazuya agreed.

Eijun finished washing and stepped out of the shower. "Scooch up," he said. "Let me in."

Kazuya slid forward in the tub, turning off the tap and allowing Eijun to slide behind him, legs fitting nicely on either side. He scooted back, leaning back against him. "Why don't we do this more often?"

"I don't know," Eijun said. "We're usually in a bit more of a hurry and don't take time for a soak."

"True, but we should."

"You're not wrong," Eijun said, hands rested gently on Kazuya's stomach. "Now would be a perfect time for baby facts, huh?"

"Any time is the perfect time for baby facts," Kazuya agreed, tangling his fingers with Eijun's, as they sat perfectly still and watched Akemi's movements rippling the water.

"There's not much more to say," Eijun told him. "She's just finishing up the extra things she needs, getting fatter and ready to be born. If she were born today, she's close enough to her due date to be considered 'early term', and fine. She'd need a little watching the first few hours, but that would probably be the extent of it."

"That's good to know, but you stay in there, Akemi, okay? Until you're completely ready."

"Or at least until the Japan Series is over," Eijun cooed. "We need your daddy's big brain to win."
"That's...well, yes. That too, Peanut. Wait until after then, okay?"

Akemi kicked around, but didn't answer.

Chapter End Notes

This is getting close to the end, and I'm getting a little emotional about it. I do hope you liked this chapter, please let me know what you think.

I love you all.
Thank you.
Be Prepared

Chapter Summary

Kazuya's nesting.
Eijun's remembering.
and Akemi is growing.

Chapter Notes

This is week 36 of this story-
It was supposed to be 36&37, but things got a little out of hand, as they often do.
So, instead of gifting you a 20k chapter, I cut it in half.
The second half is written and will be up relatively soon.
But in the meantime, please enjoy this one.
Thank you for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week thirty-six

Eijun walked down the hallway, looking for Kazuya. He'd been outside tending their small garden, preparing it for wintering over and the plants were all taken care of, so he'd cleaned up and gone hunting his husband. Their first game in the playoffs was the next day, and he expected to find him in the spare room, seated at the desk and reviewing the other team and making more plans. He rarely interrupted his planning sessions, but it was lunchtime and he wanted to make sure he ate. As the baby grew, Kazuya's appetite had shrunk, so Eijun found himself working to make sure that he had adequate nutrition. Eijun didn't think that the lack of eating had anything to do with his self-image, but he wasn't sure. The extra weight thing was still bothering Kazuya, and Eijun didn't know what else he could do other than what he already was, trying to do his best to help Kazuya internalize how attractive he still was.

"Kaz, we should—" Eijun cut off as he walked through the door of the room, not seeing his husband where he'd expected him to be, he wasn't in the spare bedroom. He'd just come from their bedroom, so there was only one other place he could be and Eijun stepped across the hallway to Akemi's room. Kazuya wasn't visible, but the closet door was open.

"What's going on?" Eijun asked, leaning on the doorjamb as he watched his husband counting diapers.

Kazuya looked at him, a hint of panic in his eyes. "I was checking on Peanut's things, do you think we have enough? I don't know if we have enough for her. What if we run out?"

Eijun stood still, mind working on how to best answer his clearly distraught husband. "If we run out, we'll get some more," Eijun said. "What specifically are you worried about?" he asked, stepping fully into the orange and white closet, stocking feet quiet on the bamboo floor.
"Her stuff. We don't have that many diapers, and I know we wanted to get a spare car seat and I—"
Kazuya cut off as Eijun took his hands, stopping his frenetic actions.

"Hey, don't hurt yourself," Eijun said gently. "Let's get some lunch and we can talk, okay?"

"I'm not that hungry," Kazuya said. "I probably shouldn't eat."

"Kaz, you haven't eaten since breakfast, and it's almost 2:00. What about a cheeseburger and some fried pickles?" Eijun wasn't above bribing him with his favorite things. He knew Kazuya had been hyper-focused on the upcoming games for the last few days, and now this...was he nesting? Whatever it was he was doing, Eijun wanted to support him but also help him get through it. Thus, the fried pickles offer.

Kazuya chuckled and ran a hand through his hair. "You know, someday that's not going to work on me."

"But today is not that day," Eijun grinned at him. "You wanna?"

"Of course," Kazuya answered. "I need to change first. I can't go out like this." He waved, indicating the blue and white striped swing dress he was wearing.

"You could," Eijun said. "And it would be fine."

"Let me rephrase then, smartass. I don't want to go out like this."

Eijun shrugged. "Fair enough. Go change, and I'll run a quick inventory in here and we can talk over the food, okay? I don't think we're missing anything, but if you do, we'll fix it. We can always go shopping, I'm sure you could use a couple of hours away from the scorebooks."

"Off I go, then," Kazuya said. "Or I would, if you weren't in the way," he snarked, poking Eijun in the side.

"Well excuse me, your majesty," Eijun said, stepping out of the closet and taking the deepest bow he could imagine. Kazuya walked by him and flicked him on the top of his head.

"Turn off the lights, plebe," he said and sauntered out of the room.

Eijun laughed and did as he was told, turning off the light and closing the closet door before leaving Akemi's room, taking a moment to look around and admire the setup.

"Soon, baby girl, you'll be here soon," he whispered to the room, feeling a small pang that he wasn't saying that to two girls. He laid a soft hand on his lower abdomen. "Miss you, other baby girl," he said, walking out of the room, leaving the door open.

"I'm ready," Kazuya said, stepping out of the hallway to their bedroom and into the living room. He stopped, eyes narrowing as he took in the sight of Eijun, quickly stepping away from their family shrine, eyes dark and slightly wet. Choosing to leave it for now, he pretended not to notice and smiled at his husband. "I was promised fried pickles?"

"Of course, your majesty," Eijun said, grinning widely. "If you would deign to join me in my humble conveyance, I would be happy to take you to the shrine of the fried pickle." Eijun stepped from behind their couch and met Kazuya near the entryway.
"At last I get the recognition I deserve," Kazuya said, sitting on the stool they'd placed against the wall so he could put on his shoes, bending over had gotten nearly impossible in the last few months.

Eijun nodded, "Indeed," he said, waiting for Kazuya to finish. "Would you prefer the royal blue chariot or the burgundy red carriage for today's outing?"

"Red, I do believe," Kazuya said primly, smothering a smile. "If we're going to see the tradesmen, it has more room to hold my packages."

"I'll be more than happy to hold your...package," Eijun commented.

Kazuya worked hard not to burst out in a laugh. "Well, then," he sputtered out. "Feel free to do so whenever you think you can fit it in."

Eijun did laugh, clear and loud, and Kazuya was glad to see the dimness fade from his eyes completely. "Oh, I'm sure it will come up sooner or later," Eijun said. "Are you ready?"

"Always," Kazuya said, taking the hand Eijun had outstretched.

Eijun guided Kazuya through the bustling restaurant, hand at the small of his back, following the hostess. She led them to a booth in the quieter section in the back, and Eijun smiled his thanks. Laying the laminated menus on the table, she left with a promise that their server would be with them soon, and they slid onto the red vinyl benches. Eijun pulled the table closer to himself so Kazuya could fit comfortably. After he'd slid in, Kazuya pulled the table back towards himself so he would be able to eat comfortably.

Eijun glanced at the menu, knowing that he didn't really need to read it over.

"It's been a while since we've been here," Kazuya said.

"Two weeks, Kaz," Eijun deadpanned.

"It's been longer than that," he insisted.

"Nope, it was right after our first weekly appointment," Eijun said. "It was even a Tuesday."

"Okay, fine," Kazuya capitulated with poor grace. "It feels like it's been forever."

"Poor pickle deprived baby," Eijun cooed, and Kazuya swatted him with his menu.

The server stopped at their table and dropped off two glasses of water. "Hi, boys, it's been a while," she said, and Kazuya grinned triumphantly at Eijun.

"How sad is it that two weeks seems like a while?" Eijun asked her.

"Well, I don't think it's the time," she said, tapping her pen on her ordering pad. "As much as the events. You haven't been in since you made the Japan Series, and I've wanted to congratulate you."

"Thank you," Kazuya told her. "We appreciate it."

"I'm glad I can brag that you're my regular customers," she said with a sunny grin. "Not that I would, but that I could," she amended.

"I don't know for how much longer we'll be coming back," Kazuya said, running a hand over the
baby. "I never really cared for burgers before I got pregnant with her."

"Maybe your tastes are changing," she suggested. "Or you could be hooked on the fried pickles. People come here for the burgers, but keep coming back for the pickles."

"It must be something in the ranch dressing," Eijun suggested.

"That very well could be," she agreed with a giggle. "What can I get for you? The usual?"

"Yes for me," Kazuya said. "Side salad instead of fries, please."

"I'd like a club sandwich, please," Eijun said.

"Fries okay with yours?"

"Yes, please. And extra ranch," he said.

"As always," she said, scribbling a note on the pad. "Anything to drink for you boys?"

"Water's good," Eijun said.

She smiled at them both as she gathered up the menus. "Thank you, as always, and your food will be out soon. I think they saw you come in, so your pickles might be here sooner than you think."

"Thank you," Eijun said and she winked at him before walking away to put their order in.

"So—" they both said at the same time and laughed.

"You go first," Kazuya said.

"Alright. What's going on in your head about Akemi?" Eijun asked. "What are you fretting about?"

Kazuya sighed and started to fiddle with a straw wrapper. "I just...I worry we don't have enough of what she needs."

"Okay, can you be a little more specific? What do you think we're short on?"

"I'm not sure," Kazuya said.

"That's fine, let's try this. I'll name something and you tell me if you think we don't have enough."

"Sure, we can try."

"Diapers?"

"Definitely short."

"Onesies?"

"We're fine."

"Bottles?"

"Short."

"Sleepers?"
"Fine."
"Towels?"
"Short."
"Dresses?"
"Fine."
"Sheets?"
"Short."

Eijun stopped as the server came to their table with the basket of pickles. "See? I told you they'd be out soon," she trilled, putting them and two cups of ranch dressing on the table.

"So you did," Kazuya said. "Thanks for that."

"No problems, be back with your sandwiches in a bit," she said. She retrieved a pitcher of water from a nearby serving station and refilled their glasses before moving off to attend her other customers.

"I think I know what's going on," Eijun said. "Or at least what you're worried about."

"What's that?" Kazuya asked.

"You're not worried about clothing her, you're more concerned about taking care of her. Diapers, sheets, towels. All the things we need to take good care of her."

"Right," Kazuya said. "Isn't that what I said?"

"No?" Eijun thought back over the conversation. "I guess maybe it was. I didn't understand what you were saying."

Kazuya took some pickles from the basket and put them on one of the white stoneware plates their server had left on the table, sliding a bowl of ranch closer to himself. "Okay, so now what?"

Eijun helped himself as well and started eating. "Now, we eat lunch and talk, but afterward, we're going shopping. We'll get whatever you need to make you feel secure."

"You're not going to tell me that we have plenty of everything? Because I know we do, but I have a feeling we don't. Which makes no sense at all." Kazuya glared at his fried pickles as if they held the answers to all of his dilemmas.

"It doesn't matter if I think we have enough, it matters that you do," Eijun said. "I know there are other things we've talked about buying as well, so we should maybe pick them up, too."

"Like what?" Kazuya asked.

"A spare car seat, in case we need it for someone else's car," Eijun started listing things. "A stroller. A bouncy chair so she can be with us in the kitchen and living room without being flat on her back. A portable playpen."

"Baby medicines and formula," Kazuya added. "The first aid kit and grooming stuff."
"Yes, all of that, too. Whatever we haven't gotten yet, we should buy. Maybe then you'll feel better," Eijun said.

"What will make you feel better?" Kazuya asked, figuring it was as good of a time as any to bring up the issue.

"What do you mean?" Eijun responded.

"I saw you, Eijun. Over by the shrine, your eyes cloudy," Kazuya said, reaching out and touching his husband's hand softly. "Talk to me, please?"

Eijun sighed. "I don't want to—"

"If the next two words out of your mouth are 'bother you', I'm going to bean you in the head with this plate," Kazuya threatened.

"Why? Kaz, I'd just bribed you to eat after I found you fretting—and you never fret—in the closet about taking care of our little girl who's going to be born in a few weeks. You expected me to come to you and say what? That I was still upset about something that happened over six months ago and could I please cry on you a bit? That's...no, I can't do that. You've got too much on your plate already." Eijun shook his head in refusal.

"Idiot," Kazuya said, "You promised, remember?"

"But Kaz—"

"But Kaz nothing," Kazuya said heatedly. "Lie to the world, but don't hide from me, Ei. Don't. You think I don't know you've been having nightmares again?"

Eijun's eyes widened in surprise. "How did you...?"

"Again, I say idiot. I'm pregnant, not stupid," Kazuya said. "I know what you're going to say, that they're not as bad as they were before, but you've been hiding them from me. Or trying to, at least."

"You too," Eijun said. "If you want me to tell you everything, you need to stop hiding from me, too."

"What are you talking about?"

"Kaz, you're not eating. I have to force you, or bribe you, to eat."

"I'm not hungry," Kazuya said.

Eijun met Kazuya's eyes steadily. "That's bullshit and you know it. Your stomach's being smashed and you can't eat as much as you used to, but you're still hungry. You're hoping that skipping meals will make you lose some of that non-existent extra weight you've been carrying," he said. "This stage of pregnancy takes a lot of energy, and you're refusing to eat as much as you should. You know it won't hurt Akemi, she's a parasite and will take what she needs."

"Do you really believe I would do that?" Kazuya asked.

"With the way you've been about your body recently? In a heartbeat. We're athletes, we've starved ourselves and have eaten special diets, just to eke out that much more power or speed. We're used to it, it's not hard for us to do. But you could be doing yourself some real harm."

"I can stand to lose a few pounds," Kazuya scoffed.
Eijun just looked at him. "Not even going to deny it?" he said. "That's...god. Kaz. Please don't do this to yourself. It's not healthy."

"And hiding things from me is?" Kazuya asked. "It's not, Eijun. You're not going to feel better because you pretended it was 'something that happened six months ago'. We lost a baby, and no matter how many others we have, we'll never have another like her. You're allowed to feel bad. You should feel bad. I do."

Eijun felt his eyes well up and glared at Kazuya. "Did we have to do this here?" he asked, wiping at them with his napkin.

"Yes, because I'd been waiting for you to come to me with it. I got tired of waiting," Kazuya said. "Let me ask you this. If I wasn't pregnant—no, if I wasn't in my thirty-sixth week—would you come to me with this?"

"Probably," Eijun admitted with a sigh. "I just don't want to add to your worries. You have the baby and the series to worry about."

"So do you," Kazuya said. "And you worry about me, so that's more stress for you. Tell you what. I'll make you a deal."

Eijun eyed him warily, pretty sure what he was going to ask. "What's that?"

"I'll eat whenever and whatever you'd like, within reason and the capacity of my stomach, of course, and you talk to me. Let me know what you're thinking, wake me up if you have a nightmare," Kazuya said.

"So, you're going to behave like a responsible adult if and only if I spill my guts to you? Is that it?"

Kazuya smirked. "If you want to look at it that way, yes."

"You've got it," Eijun said, nodding his agreement. He smiled as he watched their server bring over their sandwiches. "Eat up, Kaz," he snarked.

"Of course," Kazuya said, smiling his thanks at the server. "And you can talk while we eat." He eyed his sandwich. "I don't know if I can eat this whole thing, though."

"That's fine," Eijun said. "Eat what you can, and we'll go from there."

Kazuya nodded, "Fair enough." He picked up his hamburger and looked at Eijun. "So tell me, any idea why the nightmares started again?"

Eijun opened the glass door for his husband, following him into the children's store. "Where to first?" he asked, pulling a cart out of the line of ones waiting for customers.

"I don't know," Kazuya said. "How about we go through the whole store?" he suggested.

"Sounds like a plan," Eijun said, and he started pushing the cart towards the clothing, which was at the front of the store. "Wanna look at dresses?"

"Yes," Kazuya said. "I don't think we need any, but—" he stopped and pulled a purple-flowered dress off a rack. "I want this for her."

Eijun grinned. "Okay, sure," he said. "It's pretty. When do you want her to be able to wear it?"
"The spring, I think," Kazuya said.

"Okay, I think we should get a nine-month size," Eijun said. "That way it should be fine for late spring or summer."

Kazuya looked through the rack and pulled out the right size, putting it in the cart.

"Anything else here?" Eijun asked.

"Are you going to tell me no about anything?" Kazuya answered.

Eijun shrugged. "Not really, we've got the room and I want to make sure we have everything you think we need. It's not like it's going to go to waste, we'll save things for the next baby."

"That's true enough," Kazuya agreed. He slipped his hand through Eijun's elbow and leaned on him a little. "Thank you for indulging me. I love you, you know that?"

"I do," Eijun said, leaning back into him. "And I love you back."

Kazuya smiled at him, a soft thing that he'd been showing more since he'd gotten pregnant. "Thank you for that, too."

"Don't thank me, I love you, remember?"

"I couldn't forget," Kazuya said. "Even if you don't say it, you remind me of it all the time."

Eijun kissed his cheek. "Good, I never want you to doubt me."

"There's no way I could," Kazuya said. "We're partners, right?"

"Partners until the end," Eijun confirmed. "Unless you kill me for waking you up in the middle of the night."

"Not going to happen," Kazuya said. "We have to get used to it, anyway."

"This is true," Eijun agreed. "Akemi's going to be a bit of work."

"I know, right?" Kazuya said. "But worth it."

"So worth it," Eijun said, pushing the cart down the aisle, past the racks of clothing. Kazuya didn't seem to want to stop for anything else, so they headed to the back of the store. "It's funny, how things are."

"What do you mean?" Kazuya asked.

"We know how much work Akemi's going to be, right?"

"Yeah?"

Eijun stopped walking as the cart left the carpeted clothing area, rolling onto the linoleum of the main part of the store, and he turned to look at Kazuya. "As much as I'm sad about Haruko, I can't imagine how hard it would be to actually have two infants at the same time."

"That would be difficult, but we'd have figured it out," Kazuya said, laying his hand over Eijun's, resting on the handle of the cart.
"Yeah, we would have," Eijun slanted a look at Kazuya, eyes teary but clear. "But it's kind of a blessing, right?"

Kazuya glared at him. "No, it's not. It wasn't. It never will be. It was a tragedy, Eijun. Don't ever talk yourself into believing that, don't you dare."

Eijun shrugged. "I guess," he said.

"No, it's the truth, no guesses about it," Kazuya told him.

"Alright, yeah," Eijun said with a small nod, willing him to drop it. "Let's figure out what the one we have will need, okay?"

"Fine for now," Kazuya said, allowing the subject change and looking at the items in the aisle they were currently standing in. "Okay, diapers," he said. "I think we need another dozen covers and a dozen cloth diapers."

"Okay," Eijun said, putting the cloth diapers in the cart. "You pick out the covers," he said.

Kazuya spent the next few minutes sorting through the covers available and putting the ones he wanted in the cart, and Eijun spent the time watching him, enjoying the sight of his husband picking out things he wanted rather than worrying about if it was actually needed.

They continued through the store, stopping in the aisles as Kazuya found and picked out the things he felt like he needed for Akemi.

"What about a seat like this?" Eijun asked, pointing out the baby bouncers that were lined up on the top shelf for display. "That way we can have her near without having to carry her or lay her flat, she can see what's going on around her."

Kazuya nodded, reaching over to set one of them moving. "I'm sure the bouncing part helps, too, we can rock her."

"Or she can rock herself," Eijun said. "When she squirms, she'll rock."

"This one, then," Kazuya said, pointing to the one he wanted.

"Sticking with the theme, are we?" Eijun snarked, looking for the box that corresponded to the bouncer with the jungle theme. He found it and slid the box into the cart, pushing the cart into the next aisle. "What else?" He realized that Kazuya hadn't followed him and turned to look, finding him staring at the playpens lined up against the wall.

"One of these," Kazuya said. "We need one of these."

Eijun nodded. "You're right, we do. Which do you think you'd like?"

"Hello, there," came a voice from the other side of the playpens. "Haven't seen you for a while, is there something I can help you with?" They looked up to see a familiar face.

"Keiko, right?" Eijun asked and she bowed her head with a grin.

"Yes, I'm glad you remembered me," she said.

"We wouldn't have survived if you hadn't come along," Kazuya said dramatically.

She laughed, shaking her head. "You would have been fine," she said. "But I'm glad you seem to be
"We are," Eijun said. "We're looking for a few things, maybe you can help us."

"I'd love to. What do you need?"


"Well, since we're near the playpens, let's talk about them first," she said. "What do you plan to use it for?"


"Hey!" he protested before turning to Keiko. "Ignore him. We need one for traveling, for when we go to visit my parents or are on the road for some reason."

"Okay," she said, smothering her laughter behind a hand and trying to look professional. "This half of the playpens are what you're talking about, they're portable and easily carried around. If you'll notice, there's also a kind of basket in these that's removable for infants, so they can sleep without you having to lean way down in to get them. It's easier on your back."

"That's nice," Kazuya said, resting a hand on his lower back that was a constant ache. "What's the difference in the different models?"

"Some have a raised bed that detaches, and some come with toys for the top. Others have a little changing station at the side. Whatever details you think are important for you should be the things that drive which you pick."

"I don't think we need much," Eijun said. "The top sleeping thing is a good idea, but that's about it."

"Yeah, I agree. I don't see us using this too often, but enough that we'll be glad we have it."

"Of course," she said. "So, look at the available choices and pick the one that works best for you."

Eijun grinned at Kazuya. "Go for it, Kaz. Which do you want?"

"We can both pick," Kazuya said.

"If you pick something I don't like, I'll say so," Eijun said, having already placed a mental bet as to which he was going to want.

"This one," Kazuya said, stopping in front of one that was not the safari print that Eijun thought he'd pick. It was in the same colors as the bedroom, but it was stripes and polka dots, not an animal in sight. Eijun smiled at his choice, glad he was willing to show his preferences so decisively.

"Sure thing, Kaz," Eijun said, stepping up beside him. "I like it."

"I do too," he said simply.

Eijun was versed in the routine from their previous visits, so he slid one of the paper tags out of the clear envelope on the front of the playpen and handed it to Keiko. "This one."

"Okay, great," she said. "What else? You mentioned a stroller?"

"Yes, I want a good stroller for her," Kazuya said. "We're going to want to take plenty of walks and
go lots of places."

"Alright, let me ask you a few questions so we can figure out what it is you're going to need it for. Are you looking for something light and smaller, easily maneuverable, the kind of thing you'd want for the train or shopping? Or are you looking for something larger, that you use for destinations, like to take to the park or to a festival? Something that can hold a good few supplies and keep her comfortable for much of the day?"

"Probably the latter," Eijun said. "We're not going to take her on the subway or out shopping too much."

"Got it," she said. "Then if you'll follow me." She led them across the back of the store, stopping at the mattresses. "I do want to mention something to you. The mattress you got was not plastic covered, so you should buy a few mattress protectors. They're made of vinyl, but the tops have a layer of nubby fabric on top of the plastic, so they don't feel like you're sleeping on anything but the fabric mattress."

"Why would we need those?" Kazuya asked.

"Diapers leak," she said. "Babies have accidents, they throw up, any one of a number of reasons you'll be changing her sheets on a regular basis. When you do that, change the under sheet as well. Read the cleaning instructions carefully, I'm not sure you can dry them like you would cloth."

"We hadn't thought about that," Eijun said. "Thank you for bringing that to our attention, we'll take care of that today."

"Good, I'd hate for you to ruin that mattress the first week home and have to change it. If you think there's still not enough padding between her and the plastic, you can put a receiving blanket or a towel on top of the protector before you put the sheet on," she instructed them.

"Thank you, Keiko," Kazuya said.

"No problem," she answered, and then turned her attention to the strollers, which were on the other side of the mattresses, lined up against the back wall of the store. There were ones of every size and color, and Eijun was a little overwhelmed.

"Basically, there are a couple of types of strollers, and I think I know which I'd chose if I were you, but let me tell you a little bit about the types. First of all, there's your basic stroller, the big tanks that you remember. They fold down, but they're still pretty large, and they take up a good bit of room. Second, there are umbrella type strollers, that fold really small and don't take up hardly any room. They're lightweight and don't have much of a footprint, but you shouldn't put infants in them. There are also jogging strollers, they have three wheels to give the stroller stability, so the parent can jog with it if they want to take a kid out for a ride. These, again, are not great for infants, at least not if you want them reclining. Lastly, we have a more compact version of the basic, original stroller, and what I think would work for you, the compact stroller. It has the options of the bigger strollers but isn't as large, has a lighter frame and smaller footprint."

"I don't think I'll be running with her," Eijun said. "Although if I decide I want to, we can get a jogging stroller later."

"Yeah," Kazuya said. "Show us what you mean by a compact stroller."

"Okay, here are a few," she said, pointing to a group of strollers in one section. "They're various prices and from different companies, with features that range from simple to complex."
"I know we want something that lies flat, for the baby to sleep in," Eijun said. "And I'd like a parent facing option as well—do any of these do that?"

"This one does," she said, indicating a stroller with a teal blue geometric design.

"That looks like it's a regular stroller," Eijun said.

Keiko grinned at him. "Watch this." She pressed a lever and leveled the seat flat, reaching underneath to unfasten a couple of buckles and pressing the bottom down and flat, turning it into a bassinet. She then lifted the seat off the frame completely, turning it around and refastening the buckles, pressing the lever to restore the seat to vertical. "There you go. Bassinet and parent facing."

"Sold," Kazuya said. "I think it's perfect."

"Agreed," Eijun said. "We'll take it." He pulled the card out of the plastic envelope and handed it to Keiko.

"Great," she said. "And if you have any issues with how to do anything with it, there's a great YouTube video, you can look it up."

"We will," Eijun agreed.

"Is there anything else?" she asked.

"Car seats," Eijun said. "We have the snap-in bases for our cars, but if someone else takes her, we want something they can use."

"Why not just get a third base, then?" she asked, giggling after she realized what she said.

"Third bases can come in handy," Kazuya agreed.

"They can," she said and then hesitated, clearly unsure about what she was going to say next. "I'm sure it's not very professional of me, but good luck with the Japan series, I'll be rooting for you."

"Thank you," Eijun said with a soft grin. "I don't think it's unprofessional of you at all."

"I agree," Kazuya said. "So, about the third base? Our car seat system is a Graco. We bought it here, I can show you which one."

"Of course, right this way," she said, leading them past the strollers to the section with the car seat lined shelves. "I wasn't sure I was supposed to let you know that I recognized you."

"You're fine," Eijun said. "We're not surprised, honestly. We're just grateful for your discretion."

"You don't have to worry about that," she giggled again. "I wouldn't tell anyone."

"Thank you," Kazuya said. They reached the seat that they'd purchased and stopped. "This one."

"That's not a problem," she said. "We have them in stock, just let me get the—thanks!" she said to Eijun, who'd handed her the tag. "Anything else?"

"I think that's it from you," Eijun said. "We're still shopping, but nothing that we can't put into our cart."

"Okay, then. Do you need these items delivered?"
"No, we'll put them in the car," Kazuya said.

"I'll get them from the back, then, and have them waiting at the front for you. Sawamura, correct?"

"That's probably the safest bet," Kazuya said.

Keiko smiled. "I wouldn't worry about anyone here, they're all fans," she said.

"That's sometimes the problem," Kazuya snarked and she laughed.

"You could be right about that," she agreed. "Anyway, they'll be waiting for you when you're done. Enjoy the rest of your shopping, good luck tomorrow, and best wishes for the baby girl."

"Akemi," Kazuya said.

"What?" she asked.

"Sawamura Akemi," Kazuya elaborated. "Her name is Sawamura Akemi."

Keiko smiled widely, bowing. "Thank you for sharing that with me. I won't tell anyone."

"We appreciate that," Eijun said. "Thank you for all your help."

"You're more than welcome," she said. Still flustered, she turned and headed to the front of the store.

"Getting soft in your old age, Kaz?" Eijun asked turning to him. He saw the frown on Kazuya's face and his hand rubbing his stomach. "How long?"

"Just started," Kazuya said, and Eijun looked at his watch, noting the time.

"Let me know when it's done," he said.

"Done," Kazuya said a few seconds later. "That wasn't a long one, but it was pretty hard."

"Have you had any others today?"

"One this morning," Kazuya said. "I'm fine, it just takes a second."

"I know," Eijun touched his hand, sliding their fingers together. "You alright? Want to keep going, or should we leave?"

"I'm fine," Kazuya repeated. "We still need to get some more sheets. And mattress covers, apparently."

"That we do," Eijun said. "And I'm sure you'd like to take a trip down the book aisle, too, right?"

"Well, since we're already here..." Kazuya said.

Eijun just grinned at him and pushed the cart.

Eijun turned down the tree-lined road to their house, slowing as he approached the driveway. He passed slowly, stopping right at the other side, backing into the driveway carefully. He stopped as he approached the house, putting the SUV into park and turning it off. "Let me help you out," he said.
"I'm fine," Kazuya said with a sigh.

"I know, but indulge me?" Eijun asked.

"Always," Kazuya said, sitting back and waiting for Eijun to come around and offer him a hand out.

"Thank you," Eijun said, holding on as he helped Kazuya step out of the car.

Kazuya gained his feet and kissed Eijun on the cheek. "No, thank you," he said. "You take such good care of me, I love you for it."

"What else am I supposed to do?" Eijun asked. "It's my privilege to watch over you and I take it very seriously."

"And it's mine to watch over you," Kazuya replied. "Which is why I'm not playing you tomorrow. Or the day after."

Eijun frowned. "But Kaz, I'm good to go in."

"You're okay to play, yes," Kazuya agreed, closing the door to the SUV and following Eijun around to the hatch. "But we can afford to lose one or two, and I don't want the team thinking they can't win without you. I'm willing to lose the first game, it'll give nerves the chance to settle." He reached into the car for some of the bags of baby stuff they'd bought, and Eijun slapped his hands away.

"You can carry these," Eijun said, handing him the bag with the dress in it, and one with the first aid stuff in it. "I'll get the rest."

"I can carry things, Eijun," Kazuya said.

Eijun slanted him a look and smirked. "You're okay to carry, yes," he snarked. "But there's no reason for you to, because I'm here."

"It's not the same situation at all," Kazuya said. "But okay, I'll meet you inside."

"Good, and while you're in there, get a better reason to not play me in the second game because the reason for the first one is kinda lame," Eijun said.

Kazuya just looked at him. "You know, I don't even need a reason," he said, turning away and climbing the wooden steps to their porch, where he emptied the mailbox before unlocking the door and going inside.

Eijun watched him go in, rolling his eyes a little at the melodrama of it all, before grabbing the handles of the bags of things they'd bought and carrying them onto the porch. He did the same with the boxes: the bouncer, the car seat base, the stroller, and the playpen. Pressing the button that closed the back hatch, he locked the car before going inside, taking off his shoes and leaving them in the entryway. He brought the bags and the boxes in, closing the door against the fall chill, before taking them all back to Akemi's room and going in search of his husband.

He found him in the kitchen sitting at the table with tears on his cheeks, looking down at something that had clearly just come in the mail.

"Kaz? What's the matter?" Eijun asked, a little panicked. "Are you okay?"

Kazuya looked up at him and gave him a shaky smile. "I think so?"

Eijun sighed in relief and sank down into the seat. "What's going on?"
"We got these," he answered, passing Eijun the sheet he'd been reading when he walked in.

It was clearly a printout of an email.

Dear Miyuki-san,

I wanted to write to tell you that your images from the Boys of Summer calendar were stunning. I'm so happy to see someone of your caliber both pregnant and proud of it. I'd love to have children of my own one day, but I've always been worried about the stigma. I'm happy to say that you've helped immensely with that. Thank you for all you've done and best of luck with your new baby girl.

Sada Akio

Kazuya handed him another letter.

Miyuki-san-

I was overjoyed to see your pictures with your husband, both of you so proud and pleased to be having a baby. I'm glad that one of the most respected names in Japanese professional baseball was willing to stand up and let the country know that he's not embarrassed to be carrying a child. We almost lost our son when he got pregnant in high school, his fear was so great that he did things to disguise the pregnancy that nearly cost him and our grandson their lives. Fortunately for us, there was someone in his life who noticed what was happening and told us so we could get him the help he needed to be okay, but that's not often the case.

I think if there had been someone like you back then for him to look up to, he wouldn't have had as hard of a time.

As I sit here watching my now six-year-old grandson play, I say a prayer for others in his situation and hope they find comfort knowing that you're out there, doing what you do.

Nakamoto Sora

Eijun put the paper down and looked at Kazuya, who was looking at him, tears still flowing and felt his own eyes well up. "This is...well," he said. "It's amazing, right?"

Kazuya blinked at him, clearly overwhelmed. "There's a whole stack of them, letters from mothers and fathers of gay kids, kids that are worried about their reputations, men who are pregnant," he said, paging through the stack of letters. "The league headquarters sent a packet with them to us. With everything else going on, I'd forgotten about the photoshoot after we approved the images Takeda sent over."

"Me too," Eijun said. "I'm not surprised, though, that you'd get this kind of response. I know you just want to have Akemi and be a coach and father, and that you didn't sign up to be a role model. But
look at this. We need this."

"I'm not a role model, Eijun. I didn't get pregnant to get this kind of attention."

Eijun scooted his chair closer, linking his fingers with Kazuya's. "I know. If you did, you wouldn't
be a role model, you'd be something else. A mentor or a spokesperson or something. Role models
rarely set out to become that, they're normal, ordinary people living their lives and doing what's right
for them, when something happens that makes others look at them, watch them. That's been you, this
whole pregnancy." He met Kazuya's eyes, wanting to make sure he understood and believed what
he was saying. "You know there's been commentary this entire pregnancy, I've heard it as well as
you have, about you being pregnant and working and about you being weak or feminine or
somehow less than competent because of Akemi. Right?"

"How did you...?" Kazuya started, interrupted by Eijun.

"How did I know? I'm not deaf, Kaz, and I'm online more than you are. I saw the articles and
opinion pieces, the comments made by little minds hiding behind the anonymity. I'm here to support
you, and I thought you'd come to me if it got overwhelming. I didn't see it taking any toll on you, but
I must have missed it, because these letters wouldn't have affected you as much as they are," Eijun
linked their hands together. "I'm sorry, I know the stretch marks and the weight are bothering you, I
didn't know this was an issue, too."

"Neither did I," Kazuya said, sniffing a little. "I mean, I heard what they said but I didn't think any
of it got into my head, you know? I was pretty sure I'd shaken it off, but now I'm not. It's. Well, it's
sad, is what it is. That the idea that being pregnant is thought to be so demeaning, so weak. It's not
and I don't care what any man says. Until he's been pregnant, he has no idea how hard it is. Women
are not weak, they're stronger than most men I know." He shook his head, eyes still red and clearly
droopy from the long day and worrying about the game coming up. "Anyway, I was not expecting
this, in fact, I was expecting the opposite," he said.

"You think Takeda would let them send you the bad ones?"

"No, he wouldn't," Kazuya said. "He hasn't in the past, either, and I'm sure there's plenty of
criticism."

"Always," Eijun agreed. "You look exhausted, let me feed you something and then you should go to
bed."

"I'm not hun—" Kazuya stopped at Eijun's raised eyebrow. "Okay, but not much, alright? And can I
please have a back rub before bed?"

"Of course," Eijun said. "I'll put that leftover tomato soup you made a few days ago on the stove to
heat up. Why don't you change into comfortable clothes while I do so, and I'll give you one after we
eat? How does that sound?"

"Soup sounds good," Kazuya said. "A massage even better." He smiled tiredly at Eijun. "I can't even
joke about looking forward to a happy ending, I'm so exhausted." He walked slowly down the
hallway, heading to their bedroom and clothing that didn't constrict his movement.

Eijun pulled the container of soup from the fridge and dumped it into a pot before putting it on the
stove to reheat. He popped some bread in the toaster for Kazuya, knowing he liked buttered toast
with his tomato soup, and took a sleeve of crackers out of the cupboard for himself. Opening the
cupboard beside the sink, he grabbed a couple of soup bowls and set them on the counter, with soup
spoons beside them. As he heard Kazuya coming back towards the kitchen, he retrieved two bottles
of water from the fridge and set them on their kitchen table, one in front of his husband, who had just sat down.

"Soup's going to be a few," Eijun said. "Did you have a chance to read all of those?" he asked, indicating the letters in the pile.

Kazuya shook his head. "I didn't get past the first few," he admitted. "The one about the son who was pregnant was heartbreaking, Eijun. I don't ever want anyone to feel that way about carrying a child. It's not easy, it's probably one of the most difficult things I've done."

"I get that," Eijun said. "I don't think it's as much the physical strain, we've put our bodies through worse, as much as it is the relentlessness of it. You don't get a break, you can't take the day off, it never stops. For nine months. And that's so taxing."

Kazuya let out a soft huff of agreement. "It is. It really is," he said. "I'm not sure what I can do, though. I don't think there's anything I possibly can do."

Eijun set the other letters in front of him and lifted his hand to run it gently through Kazuya's hair. "There's always something you can do," he said. "I'm sure you'll think of it soon enough, I have faith in you."

"Glad one of us does," Kazuya said, looking at the pile in front of him.

"I always did," Eijun agreed. "You go ahead and read through the rest while I get dinner together. It's not a problem that's developed overnight and I'm sure it's not going to have an easy or quick solution. Let your massive brain work on ways you can help and relax a little if you can. You have enough on your plate with the series starting tomorrow."

"Yeah, it's going to be a tough game."

Eijun sighed as he ladled soup into their ceramic bowls. "It wouldn't have to be if you'd let me play."

"No," Kazuya said. "It would be worse."

Eijun walked over and set the soup on the table before returning to butter the toast and put it on a plate. He grabbed the soup spoons and joined Kazuya at the table, sitting down and working the problem before he asked what, to him, was the obvious question. "Why don't you want me to play?"

"Because we're going to lose the first game and I don't want to waste your shoulder on it," Kazuya said bluntly.

"Wait, what?" Eijun laid his spoon down and looked at Kazuya curiously. "How do you know?"

Kazuya started listing things, ticking off his fingers as he did so. "We're not home for the first two games, so they have the advantage there and the opening game crowd is going to be insane. Our players are too pumped and they're going to make stupid mistakes. The nerves are going to kick in and then they'll make more stupid mistakes." Kazuya took a bite of soup. "And they'll expect you to come in and fix everything. You might be able to, I've seen you do more unlikely things, but then they might get it in their heads that they can't win without you, and that would be worse than losing the first game of a seven-game series."

Eijun resumed eating his own soup. "Okay, I can see your reasoning, I don't agree with it all, I do think we can win, but I understand why you're not putting me in then."
"Oh, I know we can win, too," Kazuya said. "We should win. But we won't, and that's what's driving the rest of my reasoning."

"So why not game two?" Eijun asked.

"The same reason as game one, I don't want anyone to start thinking that we can't win if you're not playing," Kazuya said, munching on his toast. "If we lose the day before and you play the next day and we win, people are going to give you the credit, even if it was because the team had settled down and started playing ball as they normally do. And I don't want it getting in any of the team's heads that we can't win without you, that would be bad because you can't play all the games. You can't. Mind you, I expect us to win that second game. There will be hell to pay if we don't."

"And the third game?" Eijun scooped some more soup, finding that he agreed with Kazuya's reasoning. Not that he was terribly keen to tell him that unless he felt he needed the boost.

"I expect you to play, for several reasons," and Kazuya enumerated them for him. "First of all, I think you'd divorce me if I left it too long. Or hit me over the head and go out anyway," he snarked. "Secondly, we'll be at home. It'll be our home opener, and the crowd will expect to see you. They love you, for some reason. Thirdly, although I don't think we're going to have any problems winning this game because it's the first home game of the series, I don't want the team thinking that they don't need you either."

"Gotcha," Eijun said.

"And the rest of the games we'll be playing by ear," Kazuya finished. "I'm not planning to play you, but I'm not planning to not play you, either. It's going to be a decision based on your condition and our needs."

"You know," Eijun said, laying his spoon down in his empty bowl, the stainless clinking against the ceramic, "I've said it before, but I'll say it again. I think you're a genius, and as much as I give you a hard time about not letting me play as much as I'd like, you do a brilliant job of using me when you need to, and getting the most out of what limited time I can play."

Kazuya pushed his bowl away, still a quarter full of soup, and met his husband's gaze with his own troubled one. "I know how much you want to play, Eijun, you have to trust that I do. But I also want you to be able to play for a very long time, even if it's not professionally. You know that, right?"

"I do," Eijun said. "That's what I'm trying to tell you, badly, apparently. I do. And I love you for it. And appreciate the hell out of it, at least when I'm not whining about pitching more."

Eijun stacked their bowls, giving Kazuya a look when he saw it wasn't empty. Kazuya pointed at his empty toast plate. "I ate all my toast, I'm just not that hungry."

"Fair enough," Eijun said, standing. He kissed the top of Kazuya's head as he walked by to put the dirty dishes in the sink. "Let me get the massage stuff, I'll be right back, you get comfortable."

Kazuya did as he'd been asked, turning his chair around and slipping out of the swing dress he'd been wearing. They'd found that Eijun's massages worked better when there wasn't a layer of cloth in the way, so he sat down on the chair backwards, waiting for his husband. Eijun wasn't gone long, months ago they'd started putting all the massage supplies in one bag for easy access, all he needed was that bag and a towel for the back of the chair.

Bringing them into the kitchen, he set the bag down and draped the towel over the back of the chair. "At least we don't have to travel tonight, Chiba's not too far."
"But we're staying there tomorrow night," Kazuya said, putting his head down on his crossed hands that were lying on the back of the chair.

Eijun nodded, even though Kazuya couldn't see him. "Mmhmm, you're right," he said, oiling his hands and starting at the top of Kazuya's back. "But I got us a suite with a big soaking tub," he said. "So you should be alright for the next day."

"You take such good care of us," Kazuya said, relaxing under Eijun's skillful hands. "Is it any wonder I'm in love with you?"

"I think so, but you know that," Eijun said, digging in where he felt the most tension. "You're going to have to tell me what feels good and if I should stop."

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you, I was asleep because I was feeling so good," Kazuya said and Eijun heard the smirk in his voice.

"Smartass," Eijun said, falling quiet as he finished the massage. "You go to bed, okay? I'll finish up in here and be there in a bit," he told Kazuya.

Standing, Kazuya tossed the swing dress over his head, doing what he was told for once. "'kay. Love you, Ei. Don't be up late, wake me up if you have a nightmare." he murmured sleepily as he shuffled out of the kitchen and headed to bed.

To Eijun's chagrin and Kazuya's quiet satisfaction, the Swallows lost their first game to the Marines. Eijun did not play. Despite prodding from the management, Head Coach Sato didn’t force the issue, having discussed the reasoning with Kazuya in depth.

The second game also went as Kazuya predicted. The mistakes from the first game were rectified and the team settled back into being a well-oiled machine, rather than the disjointed mess it had been. Eijun still did not play, and Kazuya watched as he paced and yelled and did what he could to support his team. He never once gave any indication that he was dying to play, even though Kazuya could tell that he was, as they carved out a narrow lead. The Swallows held on and won, tying up the series and sending it back home to their stadium for games three through five of the best of seven series.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!
Please, let me know what you think, I'm always open for commentary.

Love you all, I really do.
*hugs*
A Game, Of Sorts

Chapter Summary

The Japan Series continues.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Week thirty-seven

Game three was played on Monday, after a two-day rest period. It was also the first of the home games for the Swallows and Eijun played, as promised by Kazuya. He only came in for the eighth and ninth innings and really wasn't needed at all, but that was the agreement made with both the head coach—and thus management—as well as with Eijun. As expected, the Swallows were energized and grounded by having the home field advantage and their fans at their backs, so they won rather convincingly. They were overjoyed to be up in the series, ahead by one game, and the bullpen swore to do everything they could to hold onto that lead.

During game four, the wheels nearly came off Kazuya's well thought out plan—that is, the one where Eijun didn't play. The Swallows were in a difficult place, but they managed to hold onto a two-run lead for four innings, and the fourth game was won. The Swallows were up by two, but more importantly, they were one game away from winning the Japan Series.

The morning of the fifth game, which was the final game being played at the Swallows home field, the last where they'd have their home field advantage, Kazuya woke up to a contraction. He laid there, in the early morning dimness, to see if anything else would happen. Nothing did, at least not for the period of time he was able to lay there before getting up to head to the bathroom. Taking care of his small bladder, he crawled back in bed, still tired. It was still early. He drifted back to sleep, only waking when he was hit with another contraction, two hours later.

This time, he laid there for another half hour, curled into Eijun's back, reviewing the day's game, when he gave up and climbed out of bed. Walking across the carpet, feet silent, he'd reached the door when he grabbed the doorframe to steady himself.

Contraction.

"This is ridiculous," he muttered to himself as he headed into the kitchen to make himself a cup of his ginger tea. As it steeped, he started a pot of coffee and waited, sitting at the table and drinking his tea. He reviewed the bullpen strategy for the day, which was to start with Hara, switch in Ikeda when he was flagging, and keeping Eijun in the wings for when he was needed, but not so early that he'd hurt himself. It was the fifth game, and if they could win, it would be the last. If not, they'd need Eijun later, so he didn't want to chance him getting seriously hurt.

After a half hour, when it was clear the coffee alarm wasn't going to work, Kazuya decided to get started on breakfast. He didn't want to wake Eijun, he wanted him to sleep as much as he could, but he also knew they needed to head to the stadium for their afternoon game in just a few hours. Eijun had had another nightmare the night before, and Kazuya wanted with all his heart to be awake with him the whole time he was unable to sleep, but his body wouldn't allow it. No matter how hard he
tried, he fell back to sleep shortly after Eijun woke him. And his husband would never expect—or even want—him to force himself. He was only waking Kazuya up because he'd promised, not because he thought he should.

Kazuya got out of the chair and headed towards the fridge, pulling out bacon and eggs, nearly dropping the eggs when another contraction hit. Now that he was more awake and aware, he realized that these weren't very hard, certainly manageable, at least at this point. He'd need to keep track to see if they continued to hit every half hour. Or whenever he got up to walk, which was what he suspected was the case. Setting the breakfast makings on the counter by the stove, he rubbed a hand over his stomach. "You okay in there?"

Akemi answered by digging something—a knee or a foot—into his ribs. He pushed on the place where it was hurting and felt her shift around, easing the pressure and stopping the pain. "I guess you are," he said, bending to get the sheet pan out of the cupboard beside the stove. He started the bacon in the oven, setting the timer, before going back into their bedroom and collecting his clothes for the day and hopping into the shower. He'd just started washing up when he felt the curtain slide back and Eijun stepped in behind him, sliding his hands around his waist. Kazuya leaned back into his husband and felt him lay his head on his shoulder with a groan.

"Rough night?" Kazuya asked.

Eijun ran his hand over Kazuya's stomach and shook his head. "Not really, it's been worse. I'm just still a little tired."

"I'm sorry I've been falling asleep on you when you're awake," Kazuya said.

"No, don't you dare apologize, you've done nothing wrong," Eijun said, still rubbing Kazuya's stomach. "Hang on, wait."

"What?" Kazuya asked.

Eijun turned him around, looking at Akemi. "She's dropped even more."

"There's nowhere for her to drop, though?" Kazuya said.

Eijun just looked at him. "You know what I mean. She's much lower than she was, lower even than she was when we went to the doctor's on Monday."

"You think so?" Kazuya said, turning around to continue washing, making the decision not to tell Eijun that he was having contractions that morning. If they were labor, there was nothing Eijun could do but worry, he wouldn't be able to change things.

"Yeah," Eijun said. "I didn't notice the last time, because I think it happened slowly, but I know this belly and this baby, I know how it feels. It feels different today. You feeling alright?"

"I'm fine," Kazuya told him, rationalizing that it wasn't a lie. He was fine, and if this went away as all the other contractions had, he'd congratulate himself on a decision well made.

"Did I smell bacon?"

"You did, let me get out of here and I'll finish breakfast," Kazuya said.

Eijun released his hold and Kazuya stepped out of the shower onto the throw rug in front of the sink. "You think we should get a cool rug for Akemi's room?"
"If you want," Eijun said, washing and waking up under the stream of warm water. "We can get one with animals, if you'd like, or maybe something like a map of the world or something."

"I don't know, we won't need it until she's crawling around, I'd imagine."

"True," Eijun agreed, turning off the water and pushing back the shower curtain. "We might want to also look for something totally washable, I'd hate to find one we loved and have her get a mess we couldn't clean on it and stain it up."

"Also true," Kazuya said, heading for the door. "Breakfast soon."

"I'll be out there as soon as I get dressed," Eijun said.

"You don't have to dress," Kazuya leered at him and Eijun laughed, grabbing a towel to dry himself.

"We're full of true facts today," he said. "But we'd get distracted and we really need to be at the stadium on time. I don't know what time it is, but I suspect you didn't set the bacon alarm until you knew you had to."

"Fair enough," Kazuya said. "See you soon, clothing, as usual, optional."

The sound of Eijun's laughter followed him down the hall, distracting him from the contraction he had about halfway down. They were coming every forty minutes or so, but nothing he couldn't handle.

Nothing he needed to tell Eijun about.

Breakfast went smoothly, and Kazuya managed to stay seated until after Eijun had left the room to get their bags together. He rose to gather all the dishes and everything he'd used during cooking, getting the expected contraction as he moved around the floor. Washing the dishes and thinking about the ramifications—and complications—of him going into labor at this point in the series, he mentally shrugged, knowing that there wasn't a lot he could do, and for once, deciding there wasn't much he could do to change the outcome. He only knew two things. He didn't want to miss today's game, and he was thankful they'd put his hospital bag in the car last week when they'd gone to Chiba. That was one less thing he'd need to sneak by his overly observant and hyper-vigilant husband.

"Welcome to the fifth game in the Japan series, ladies and gentlemen. Your Swallows are ahead in this series, three to one, and we can take the championship if we win this one. Now, we're starting Hara today, the young cub is coming along nicely and in a year or so, I'm sure he's going to be an even greater asset than he already is. No word on Sawamura today, we don't know if everyone's favorite father-to-be is going to be on the field. I'd expect not, he's probably going to be saved for—excuse me just a moment...okay, yes. It's been brought to my attention that Sawamura is not everyone's favorite father-to-be, apologies, Coach Miyuki. Which brings us to the three questions on every fan's mind. Number one: Is this the last game of the Japan Series? Number two: Is the baby coming soon? And number three: What's her name? All of these questions are valid, and the answer to every one of them is the same. We have no idea. We'll just have to wait and see, I guess. But, from what we've seen, Coach Miyuki is carrying on like a trouper, I saw him yelling—I mean, instructing the bullpen earlier. Even with the victory they've been enjoying, he's still expecting more. And who can blame him, right? He has an amazing set of pitchers and catchers to play with, he expects them to be their best. Anyway, folks, we'll be here for whatever our team brings us on this not-really-sunny day. The clouds are present, but there's no rain in the forecast, it's great weather to be playing. Please
The game started with Hara, as Kazuya had planned. What he had not planned for was Hara's implosion during the third inning. Kazuya was disappointed—but not terribly surprised—by it. The pitcher had been in most games so far and was running on the knife's edge of nerves, so one misstep brought the whole house tumbling down around him. Takahashi managed to get him through the inning somehow, but by the time they were done, the Swallows were down by five. Ikeda went in to pitch, and it was during their defense in the fifth inning that Kazuya forgot he was supposed to be careful, and Eijun saw what he'd been hiding.

"How far apart are they?" Eijun asked directly, joining Kazuya as he leaned against the railing between the field and the dugout. He wasn't about to give Kazuya any chance to skirt around the issue.

"What?" Kazuya asked, looking away from the field where Ikeda was having a rough time, the Marines emboldened by the previous innings and the subsequent turn in momentum.

"How far apart are the contractions you're trying to hide?" Eijun said again, slower and more clearly, voice pitched low enough as to not draw the attention of anyone else in the dugout.

Kazuya sighed, mentally calculated his odds of playing it off as a non-issue, and capitulated. "About fifteen minutes," he admitted.

"And how bad are they?"

"Not so bad I can't handle them," Kazuya said.

"Why didn't you tell me when they started?"

"Would you have even let me come to the game?" Kazuya asked, eyebrow raised. He watched as Eijun's face shuttered. "I thought not. With that being said, do you really need to ask me that question?"

"You still should have told me."

"I can see why you'd think that," Kazuya pointed out mildly. "I did plan to if and or when they got too bad."

"If?" Eijun asked.

"Yes, I wasn't sure I was really in labor," Kazuya said, placing a hand on his stomach. "I'm still not completely convinced, but the contractions have been pretty steady since we left home, so I think it may be."

"Kazuya, that was five hours ago," Eijun said.

"You think I don't know that?" Kazuya said.

"Akemi could be in trouble, we need to get you checked," Eijun panicked a little, pulling on Kazuya's arm.

"She's fine, she's kicking when I'm not having contractions," Kazuya said.

Eijun frowned, "You don't know that, she could be having issues and we're here at a stupid game," he said hotly.
Kazuya turned to him fully, eyes narrowed. "Do you really think I would endanger our child for a game?"

"No, not really," Eijun subsided with a shrug. "But Kaz, you lied to me, how am I supposed to be alright with that?"

"I didn't lie," Kazuya said, holding up his hand when Eijun opened his mouth. "I didn't," he insisted. "I was fine when you asked, I still am."

"Then you lied by omission. You should have told me."

"I don't agree," Kazuya said. "I understand why you would think I should have, but I don't agree."

Eijun turned his face back to face the field, still leaning on the bar. "So this is how it's going to be," he started.

Kazuya blinked. "I'm listening," he said, shocked that Eijun wasn't carting him off to the hospital directly.

"You're putting me in the game next inning," Eijun said.

Kazuya shook his head. "I'm what? Why?" he asked.

"We need to win this game," Eijun said. "Neither of us is going to be available for the rest of them. And I'm still the best closing pitcher we have, no matter what my shoulder's like."

"You could play in the last two games if you wanted, you'll have two days off before the first one," Kazuya said.

Eijun frowned. "Do you really think I'm going to play while my husband and newborn are still in the hospital? Fuck that."

"Well, it's an option," Kazuya said. "We hadn't spoken about it."

"Because there's nothing to speak about," Eijun said. "So, about me going in next inning?"

Kazuya looked at him. "If I said no?"

"I'd say we needed to leave the game now, and I'd make sure that everyone knew about it and why," Eijun said. "Have management make a monster spectacle of it."

"You wouldn't," Kazuya said, before thinking about it. "No, you would. But I wish you wouldn't."

"I won't, as long as you make a deal with me."

"Of course," Kazuya said heavily. "You haven't given me much of a choice."

"And you would, given the situation?" Eijun said.

Kazuya shrugged. "You know the answer to that," he said. "Okay, so what's your deal?"

"I go in next inning, you tell me if it gets unbearable, and we win this game, finish the series."

"That actually...well. Yes, I can do that," Kazuya said. "That sounds like a plan."

"Okay, I'm going to tell people that need to know what's happening," Eijun said.
Kazuya stiffened. "I don't think we should tell anyone, Ei."

"If we don't, we won't win," Eijun said. "We can't win on our own, Kaz."

Kazuya sighed, surrendering to the inevitable. "Fine, but be careful."

"I will," Eijun said. "You'll have to trust me on this."

"I do," Kazuya said, sighing as the team on the field got the last out, having given up two more runs. "Finally. You have a seven run deficit to make up for, you think you can do it?"

Eijun grinned. "We'll do the best we can," he said, running his hand gently over Kazuya's shoulders. "I love you, you know that?"

"You're an extortionist, you know that?" Kazuya shot back.

"I learned from the best," he said with a smirk. "I'll do what I have to do to keep you two safe. You can't tell me you wouldn't do the same." He paused, eyeing Kazuya. "In fact, if was me, you'd probably have me halfway to the hospital already."

Kazuya smirked back at him. "You know me so well," he said. "Anyway, the contractions are running twelve to fifteen minutes apart, but they're not so strong that I can't do other things while they're happening."

"Good to know, let me know if they get too hard or closer than about seven minutes, please? If they do, we'll have to leave early and go to the hospital."

"I'm having a C-section regardless, Eijun," Kazuya said. "I can wait until the game's done."

"Why do you think I want you to be in pain longer than you have to?" Eijun asked. "The only reason we're still here at all is because you asked me to let you stay. If I think you're in any danger, that will change. And if you allow yourself to go into the transition phase, you could hurt both yourself and Akemi. I don't want that, so we compromise."

"Okay, fine," Kazuya capitulated with ill grace. "I'd better go talk to Ikeda, tell him he's being subbed out, and tell the coach. It won't be too much of a surprise, even if it's a little earlier than we'd planned."

"I'll go talk to the others and make sure management stays in the dark," Eijun said. He waved a little as he turned, climbing between the rows of benches and splatting down next to Takahashi, who was preparing for his at bat. "How's it going out there?"

"Rough," he said. "Ikeda's doing his best, but we're barely holding it down."

"Good thing I'm going in, then," Eijun said and Takahashi lifted his head, looking to Eijun to see if he was lying.

"You know, it's not that big of a deal, you don't have to go in this early. We have more games, it might make sense to wait."

"You have more games, yes," Eijun said. "But we don't."

"What do you...wait," Takahashi looked over at Kazuya, who was talking to Ikeda, running a hand over his stomach. "He's in labor?"

Eijun nodded.
"Isn't it too early?" he asked.

"Not really, she's technically got another couple of weeks, but the doctor told us she could come at
any time," Eijun said.

Takahashi rubbed his face. "What are you still doing here? Shouldn't you be on the way to the
hospital?"

"Do you think staying here is my decision?" Eijun asked. "He wants to be here to finish this game at
least, so we made a deal. The terms included me going into the game the next inning."

"You think we can win this?"

"We can if the offense gets its act together. I'll keep them from scoring any more, we just need to
play like we know we can. No panic, you do have two more games," Eijun noted. "I just want to do
everything I can to bring him this title."

"I get that," Takahashi said, nodding. "I'll do what I can offensively," he said, standing to take his at
bat. "You speak to the others."

"I will," Eijun agreed. "We also need to keep it under the radar, I'd hate for management to get wind
of this."

Takahashi fastened his gloves, squinting out at the clear blue of the sky. "You're right. That would
be bad."

"It would," Eijun agreed, watching as he ran up the three stairs to the field. He stood up from where
he was sitting and moved over to Ikeda. "Hey. Good job out there."

"Clearly not, or I would still be playing."

"Not really," Eijun said. "It's not your fault, I made him put me in."

"Why would you do that? I mean, I know I'm not playing well, but I thought you needed at least one
more inning before you went in. I can manage that."

Eijun laughed and ran his hand through his hair. "You could, but I really want to win this game."

"Why? There are two more."

"I know, I just really want to win this one," Eijun said, looking at Kazuya. Ikeda followed his gaze
and saw Kazuya stiffen a little, hand pressing on his stomach.

"Is he in labor?" Ikeda asked. "It's early yet."

"Tell that to Akemi," Eijun said. "If it was up to me, we'd be at the hospital already. But he wants to
be here for this, so I told him that he needed to put me in. If this is the last game of the season for the
two of us, I want to win it for him."

Ikeda nodded. "Yeah," he agreed. "He's had a hell of a year, he deserves this. But we do still have
two games, you know."

"I do, and if we can't pull this out, I expect you to win one of the others. But I want to win this one,
and I'm going to do my damnedest to do so."

"That's fair. You think we can?"
"I do," Eijun said. "I'm going to do what I can, which means playing the best I'm capable of—there won't be any more runs scored."

"You think so?"

"Yeah, I can do that, at least. Now I need to get the offense to play as hard as they can."

"You going to tell them what's going on?"

"I am. All we have to do is keep it from the management, and we'll be fine."

"That's...well, yeah. You telling Coach Sato?"

Eijun shrugged. "If we have to," he said. "I'd rather not, but only because I think he may feel like he needs to tell the management."

"Fair enough. How can I help? What do you need me to do? I'm not in the game anymore."

Eijun winced, "Sorry about that, I wasn't trying—"

"No, it's fine," Ikeda said. "I wasn't playing well, I think both Hara and I are tired."

"That's fine, just relax," Eijun said. "Rest up in case we can't pull this one out, we'll be depending on you to win."

"Thanks, I'll do that."

"If you could do me one favor, though—watch Kazuya for me? I know you saw him react to his last contraction. Time them, please? And let me know if he seems to be having a hard time? He's going to hide it from me if he can. I need your help."

"Okay, yeah. I can do that," Ikeda agreed.

"Can you enlist Hara, too? If Kaz figures out you're watching, he'll try to hide it from you, too. He's tricky like that," Eijun said.

Ikeda shuffled his feet, rubbing his hands together. "Of course," he said. "What are you going to do?"

Eijun looked out at the field as the crowd groaned and slanted him a grin. "Looks like I'm going to try to win this game," he said, standing and patting Ikeda's shoulder.

He headed down to the front of the dugout, stopping by Kazuya to get some last minute instructions, "Don't get hurt, if you can't use your shoulder I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive you," and then he was on the steps, pausing to let the announcer say, "There's a player substitution. Coming in for Ikeda-san will be Sawamura-san, I repeat, pitching will be Sawamura-san." before trotting out onto the field to the sound of 'osh! osh! osh!' He raised both hands in greeting and stood on the mound, waiting for the rest of the team.

Takahashi came out onto the field and headed straight for him. "Are you even warmed up?" he snarked, clearly not sure that Eijun should be in.

"Yes, I am," Eijun said. "Well, kinda," he hedged. "I did stretch before the game."

"So you haven't pitched at all today," Takahashi asked, voice flat.
Eijun gave him a wide grin. "Nope. But that just means my shoulder's fresher, I'll be able to get more pitches from it."

Takahashi just looked at him. "I can't believe coach let you come out without being warmed up."

"Honestly, I didn't give him much of a chance," Eijun said. "And I'm not sure he thought about it. At least not until just now, since I think he's glaring at me."

Takahashi turned and looked at Kazuya, who was, indeed, glaring at Eijun. "Yup. You're going to pay for this, aren't you?"

" Probably," Eijun said cheerfully, grinning at his frowning husband. "It's okay, though. As long as he's healthy and happy, I can deal."

"That's...that makes a lot of sense," Takahashi said. "Back to the game, I'm going to use the full contingent of a dozen pitches for your warm up, unless I think you're good enough."

"That sounds good to me," Eijun said.

Takahashi nodded. "We're going to keep this inning under twelve pitches, got it?"

"Got it," Eijun agreed with a nod. He shuffled his toe along the ground, spreading the dirt evenly. "I have always loved battling the batters, and pitch to contact is my favorite."

"Good thing, because your shoulder can't handle four innings of protracted duels," Takahashi said. "One at a time, as always," he lifted his mitt and Eijun tapped it with his glove.

"One at a time," Eijun agreed. Takahashi ran back to home and squatted down. He signed and punched his glove, ready to run Eijun through his paces.

After eight pitches, Takahashi called a halt and signed for the rest of the team to join them on the field. The defenders came running out, patting the catcher on the shoulder before running out towards their position. Eijun shook his shoulders, trying to get rid of some of his nervous tension.

"You okay, Eijun?" Raichi asked, stopping by the mound on his way to third base. "It's a little early for you, right?"

"A little," Eijun admitted. "But I think we need to win this one."

"Why...ohhh...," Raichi said, reaching out and patting his arm. "Are you okay? I think I'd be freaked out."

"I'm...yeah, a little bit," Eijun admitted. "If I let myself stop long enough to think about things, I would be. But we need to win this, so I'm not thinking about it. Not at all."

"Got it," Raichi said. "So who are you telling?"

"Anyone who won't tell management," Eijun said.

"I'll tell Tamaki," Raichi said. "He's not going to say anything and he'll want to help."


Raichi grinned and patted his shoulder again. "Okay, then. Let's win this thing."

Eijun turned to face the outfield, who'd taken their places behind him. "Balls will be flying your way,
thank you in advance for your hard work!

Kazuya watched Eijun warm up, vaguely irritated that he'd called him out and that he'd put him on
the spot. He recognized and appreciated the chance to stay for the game and he was unsure why he
was aggrivated. He'd known Eijun would see what was going on; he just didn't want him to do so
before the game was over. Or something. Thinking about Eijun not noticing was even more
irritating, so he was well on the way to filing it all as random pregnancy and labor idiocy when
Coach Sato stepped up to the rails beside him, watching the field and Eijun warm up.

"Isn't it rather early for him to be in?" he asked.

"A little," Kazuya admitted, frown deepening when Takahashi called the players out before the full
count of warmup pitches, even though he could see that Eijun was ready to go.

"Why's he out there, then? Ikeda could have handled another inning, and we do have two more
games to put this away. I don't know if we should be wasting him for this game," Sato said. "I think
he could have been saved for a later game where the win is more vital."

"I would usually agree with you," Kazuya said, making a quick decision. "But, in this case, he
insisted."

"I thought you were the coach here?"

"I am, but he's...got a good reason to want to win this game," Kazuya said, wanting to keep the
coach in the loop without saying anything that would make him feel obligated to tell management."

Coach Sato looked at him closely. "Does he, now?" he asked, nodding. "Well, I'm not going to tell
you he's wrong, or how to run your bullpen. I can say that if we win this, things are going to get
crazy in the stadium. Are you going to be able to handle that?"

"I'm going to have to," Kazuya said. "I don't know how long he'll be willing to stick around for
interviews, though."

"Fair enough," Sato agreed. "But I will say that if he manages to pull this out, he's probably going to
be in the running for the series MVP, at least."

Kazuya let a grin tilt the corner of his mouth, meeting Sato's gaze for the first time that day. "That
would be a great way to end his last full year, don't you think?"

Sato nodded, "I do. And I think he'd deserve it, too."

"I happen to agree," Kazuya said. "Even though there may be some who don't."

"You're...not wrong about that," Sato said, standing up from where he was leaning on the railing,
watching the defense pass around the ball in preparation for play. "But we've never worried too
much about that kind of thing, anyway." He walked away, leaving Kazuya to watch as Eijun
performed exactly as requested, shutting down the offense with three strikeouts in a row.

The team ran by Eijun, some of them stopping to chat with him as they walked towards the dugout.
As the players came off the field, heading into the dugout in a steady stream, each of them touched
Kazuya as they passed—either gripping his shoulder or touching his arm. None of them stopped long
enough for anyone to really notice, but he still took comfort in their unspoken—and unwavering—
support.
Eijun was the last one off the field, the "Oshi, oshi, oshi, oshi!" of the crowd following him into the dugout. He stopped by Kazuya, standing beside him to get input and instruction.

"Good job out there," Kazuya said, not looking at him but watching the Marines get their defense ready. "Don't get cocky, though. You still have three innings to go, and if they can't score, we're not going to win."

"You're absolutely right," Eijun said, watching Otani, who was up next, stop beside them on his way to the field.

"We've been playing it safe, figuring we still have two games," he said. "But they haven't. It's time for us to change the way we think as well." He grinned at them, heading up the stairs. "Thanks for reminding us of that fact."

Eijun nodded, leaning into Kazuya. "Give 'em hell," he said, watching as Otani headed out to the on deck circle to wait for the Marines to be ready to play. "Hey, Kaz? You'll never guess who I saw in the audience."

"Who?"

"My family," Eijun said. "Did you know they were coming?"

Kazuya shook his head. "I didn't, they didn't say anything to me. They didn't tell you?"

"Nope. I just saw them up there by your dad," he said. "I wonder if they're staying somewhere."

"I have no idea. They could have stayed with us," Kazuya said.

"Maybe they didn't want to bother us, with Akemi coming and the Japan Series," Eijun suggested.

"Maybe," Kazuya agreed, hand on his stomach as he leaned on the railing. "I wonder why they chose today, though."

"I'm not sure, but it makes things a little easier," Eijun said, watching Otani as he took his stance.

"You really think you guys can win?" Kazuya asked. "The Marines are really hungry for this."

"And so are we," Eijun said. "We just needed the reminder that every game could be the last, rather than thinking that we still have two to go."

On the field, Otani swung and missed, bringing his count to 2-2.

"You've got this, Otani!" Eijun shouted, and they watched as he squared his shoulders and swung at the next pitch. Line drive down the right side, easily getting himself to first, where he gave himself a nice leadoff.

Raichi was up next, and he didn't say anything to them as he passed, only giving Kazuya a gentle pat on the shoulder before he climbed the stairs. He laughed as he headed to the plate, before setting into his stance, quietly intense.

"He's sure settled since high school," Kazuya noted.

"I think we all have," Eijun said. "But to your point, yes. He has. He's so much more focused than he was. I know Sanada helped him with that, in college. They've been together nearly as long as we have," he noted. On the field, Raichi had just watched a ball go by, cackling as usual at the fun of trying to outwit the pitcher. "I know you had issues with him before, but he's always been a good
friend, ever since we first played Yakushi at Seido."

"I know, and that's what I had issues with," Kazuya admitted. "He was your friend and I was jealous."

"Really? You're friends with Shunshin, and he's your perfect pitcher. Should I have been jealous of him?" Eijun asked, eyebrow raised.

Kazuya shook his head. "I see your point, and I got over it pretty quickly once I got to know him, but no. I wouldn't be jealous of him. Or anyone, I've never wanted anyone other than you." He nodded at the field. "You might want to pay attention, he's cornered."


Kazuya didn't say anything, just watched as Raichi hit it long, behind the center fielder. The ball didn't hit the back fence, it was a solid double, advancing them both, Otani to third and Raichi to second.

"He does," Kazuya said. "Now let's see what they do with that."

They watched as the next two batters struck out, leaving the two runners stuck on base. The next batter headed out after stopping by Kazuya. "We've got this, we're winning this game," he said, before trotting up the stairs.

Eijun laughed and elbowed his husband. "See? We're doing our best."

"And you weren't before?" Kazuya asked, one eyebrow raised as he shifted, leaning more on the railing than he had been earlier.

"You should sit, Kaz," Eijun said. "If things are too hard, we can leave."

"No, I'm fine. If it gets too bad, I will let you know. I promise."

Eijun glared at him, but relented. "Okay, I'm trusting you. But to your point, I think Otani had it right. They were all thinking that they had plenty of time, that today didn't matter as much. But you've changed that attitude."

"Akemi has, actually," Kazuya said, rubbing his belly and looking out over the playing field, where the current batter had made it to first, filling the bases. "Hey, you're up."

"It's been a while since I had a good hit," Eijun said, looking at the people on base.

"You think you're going to hit one out of the park?" Kazuya laughed. "Good luck with that."

"Oh ye of little faith," Eijun said with a grin as he donned his hat and trotted up the stairs to approach home plate. He'd never been able to hit off this pitcher, so he was hoping that he'd get careless about his pitches.

He did.

The third pitch he threw was almost straight down the middle, a meatball that Eijun was well capable of hitting out of the park.

"And that's over the fence, ladies and gentlemen, bringing the Swallows to within three, thanks to our ace, Sawamura. Can we get a round of 'Osh!'es for him? If not the vote for MVP, am I right?"
The crowd erupted in yet another round of "Osh!Osh!Osh!" as Eijun's foot landed on home plate and the Swallows pulled closer to the win.

"You were saying?" Eijun asked Kazuya after the uproar had settled and he was standing in the dugout beside his husband.

"Don't get cocky," Kazuya glared at him and then relaxed, corner of his mouth lifting in a smirk. He reached out and touched the back of Eijun's hand. "I can't be mad at you, you're doing this for me."

Eijun grinned at him. "For us," he corrected, before turning his attention to the field where the first batter in the lineup was paying the price for the pitcher's previous inattention. Batter out, sides change. "You can feel it, though, can't you?"

"Feel what?"

"The momentum...it's shifting," Eijun said.

Kazuya shot him a smirk. "As I said before. Don't get cocky."

"Is it cocky if it's true?" Eijun asked as he headed up the stairs and back out onto the field, Kazuya's laugh following him and the "Osh!Osh!Osh!" of the crowd greeting him. He smiled and waved at the crowd as the outfielders ran past him, patting him on the back or swatting him on the shoulder, whichever their disposition. He took the mound, ready to shut down the Marines.

He wasn't entirely successful; the second batter hit a fly to the shortstop, causing the whole of the outfield to start commenting. Everything from "You remembered we're out here? Guys! He remembered we're out here!" to "Can someone pass me the book Otani's hiding in his glove? I'm bored."

Eijun turned to the outfield and grinned at them before turning his attention back to the catcher.

He struck out the next two batters, side retired. Heading into the dugout, he shook his head ruefully at the disappointed look Kazuya was giving him. "Sorry, Kaz."

"You just had to let him hit, didn't you?"

"Did you hear the outfielders? They were plotting a rebellion. Or playing poker, I'm not sure which," Eijun said. "Anyway, we got them out, right?"

"Right," Kazuya said. "Seventh inning stretch, I'm sure you're going to be needed for the—"

He cut off as the coach yelled, "Sawamura, get over here!"

Kazuya smirked at him, "Yeah, that."

Eijun nodded and trotted over to the other side of the bullpen, where the rest of the currently playing team members were grouped around Coach Sato. "Thank you for joining us," he snarked, and Eijun shrugged apologetically.

"Sorry, Coach," he said.

"I have a few things to say, it shouldn't take too long." Sato said. "And then you can get back to ogling the cheerleaders." The teams didn't have cheerleaders as such, but the dance squads from local colleges were invited to games in order to entertain during the seventh inning stretch, to the appreciation of both teams.
"First of all, thank you for finally sending home the high school player version of yourselves. Actually, no. I've seen high school teams that played better than you were. Most of you played better in high school than you were out there, if I'm honest. I don't know what you think you were doing out there, but it sucked."

"Coach," Otani spoke up. "I think we were just—"

"I know what you were doing," Sato said to him, silencing him with a glare. "I've been around the block a time or two. You lot were thinking that you didn't have to expend yourselves too much, that you still had two more games left, right?"

Otani nodded. "I don't think any of us were doing it deliberately, though," he said.

"I know that, or we'd be having a very different conversation and there would be a very different team on that field. Well, now that you've come out of your stupor thanks to Sawamura and Miyuki, maybe we can play to win?" Sato asked and was rewarded with nods of agreement. "Also, if any of you don't know, Baby Miyuki is planning on making her appearance today. Yes, Sawamura?" He asked at Eijun's raised hand.

"Her name is Akemi. Sawamura Akemi," he said. "I wanted to let the team know before anyone else. Also, please keep all of this on the down low, we really don't want it to become any more of a spectacle."

"That's right," Sato said. "You have a game to win, right? One more thing. Sawamura? Remember, you're not alone out there, so stop playing like you're the only one who wants to win. We're all backing you, so trust your teammates to do their jobs, okay?"

"Yes, coach," Eijun said. "I do apologize for my behavior, I had no intention of showboating."

"You haven't been, yet. Just don't, all right? We all know what's going on, and we all want to win." Sato told him. "Don't forget. I will pull you out if I have to," he said.

"I know you will," Eijun said. "I understand."

"Good," Sato said, before looking at the group. "That goes for all of you. No showboating, remember that you have teammates, trust them to do their job as much as they trust you, and let's win this thing."

"Yes, coach!" came chorusing from the gathered players, timing it perfectly with the end of the stretch.

"So, it's time for play to resume here at the fifth game of the Japan Series. The Swallows are on offense, and are also three points down, with three offensive chances left. The team seems to have woken up a bit when Sawamura took the field, I wonder if it's just because he's loud enough to wake anyone up? Anyway, let's watch and see what they're able to accomplish this inning."

The team moved back through the dugout, as the first batter prepared to head onto the field. Eijun started to follow the others when he felt a hand on his arm. Looking over, he saw Raichi holding on, but watching Kazuya.

"What's going on?"

"He's lying to you," Raichi said in a low voice. "He's in a lot of pain, and they're coming every five
minutes, at most. I've been watching him while we stood here. He watched you join the group and
then stopped trying to hide things as much, and I saw."

Eijun glanced over at Kazuya, who was running his hand over his stomach, soothing himself.
"Really?" Eijun asked. "Thanks, Raichi. I'll take care of it."

Eijun walked over to the coach, who'd apparently been watching as well. "Go, get out of here," he
said. "Trust us to finish what you've started."

"Okay, thanks," Eijun said. "I'll get him and go, then."

He walked across the dugout and stopped by Kazuya. "Let's go."

"Where?" Kazuya asked with a frown.

"To the hospital. You've been lying to me, the contractions are worse and coming more frequently,"
Eijun said, glaring back at him.

Kazuya shook his head. "No, we're not done here," he said.

Eijun cut him off before he could continue. "You are," he said. "As am I. Now, are we going to do
this the easy way, or shall I make a spectacle? I'm good at getting attention, and I'll be happy to use
that to the fullest of my abilities."

"That's not fair, Ei," Kazuya argued. "I said I wasn't hurting that badly."

"How far apart are your contractions?" Eijun asked.

Kazuya shrugged. "I don't really know. But they're not that bad."

"I do, they're about five minutes," Eijun said. "And yes, they're that bad. Let's go, Kaz."

"Fine," Kazuya said, standing with a huff. "Let me go speak to the coach first."

"No need, he already knows," Coach Sato said, appearing behind Kazuya. "Get out of here before
the front office hears about this and decides to make a stink."

"Coach, it's not as bad—"

Sato cut him off. "Miyuki, the only reason I let you stay after I found out what was going on was
because I knew Sawamura would be watching you. Don't make me regret that decision."

"Yes, Coach," Kazuya said, deflating with yet another glare at Eijun. "But I think—"

"Take it as read, Miyuki. We've heard your objections and don't agree," Sato said. "Now, get out of
here before you draw too much attention to yourself and people figure out what's going on."

"Yes, Coach," Eijun said, offering Kazuya his arm. He turned pointedly away and started to walk on
his own, only getting a few steps before he had a contraction and had to stop and breathe through it.

Eijun stepped up beside him and wrapped an arm around his waist. "Can you please not be stoic?
For once? Lean on me, Kaz."

"I do," Kazuya said, straightening up as the contraction eased. "But I need—"

Eijun sighed and dropped his arm. "Okay," he said gently. "But I'll be here for you, okay? Be as
stoic as you want in front of others, but lean on me when we're alone, please?"

"I plan to," he said, giving him a soft smile, "Thanks, Ei."

"Of course," Eijun said. "Let's get out of here before the next contraction hits. How do you want to do this?"

"Just walk side by side, okay? Don't make a big fuss," Kazuya said.

"Alright, let's go," Eijun agreed, following Kazuya to the stairs out of the dugout.

"Hang on a sec, I know you don't want the attention, but we need to do at least this," Coach Sato said, moving to the top of the stairs where the batter was just stepping up to the plate. "Time out, please!" he yelled, and the umpire called it.

All eyes went to the dugout, where Kazuya stepped out, followed closely by Eijun, who stepped up to his side as they started walking towards the exit from the field.

"And, it looks like Coach Miyuki is leaving the field with Sawamura, could it be time to meet the newest member of the Swallows?" the announcer asked. "If so, we wish both parents well and want them to know we can't wait to meet her. Was this the reason Sawamura lit such a fire under the other players? Let's hope they can keep it up while he's gone. Knowing Coach Miyuki, she must be close, he wouldn't leave the field unless he had to. Good luck, you two, we hope everything works out well."

Kazuya grimaced as they walked, "Why doesn't he just shut up?"

"It's okay, Kaz. We'll be out of here before anyone can corner us," Eijun said. "I just need to grab our stuff and we can go."

Kazuya started to answer but before he could say anything, they heard the sound of clapping from behind themselves. They stopped and turned, only to see the whole team lined up outside the dugout, clapping. The team on the field started clapping, too, and the Marines exited their dugout and joined in. By the time they were almost to the exit, the whole stadium of fans was on their feet and applauding, yelling 'Osh!Osh!Osh!' and cheering them on. Right outside the exit, Kazuya stopped and turned, waving at everyone and Eijun did as well, mouthing "Thank you!" to the crowds through the camera that was trained on them. They turned and headed down the hallway to the locker room, with Kazuya grabbing Eijun's arm for support just a few steps past where the cameras were watching.

"You alright?" Eijun asked.

"I'm the furthest thing from alright," Kazuya snarked, trying to breathe through the pain. "This hurts."

"I'm sorry, I know," Eijun said. "Do you want me to call you an ambulance?"

"No, let's just get you changed and you can drive me," Kazuya said. "That'll be fine."

"I'm not changing, we need to get you to the hospital, now."

"Eijun, Peanut's not coming out until they cut her out," Kazuya said. "You have time to shower and get comfortable."

"Fuck that," Eijun said. "Sideways, even. I told you, I don't want you to be in any more pain than
necessary."

"But...well, thank you. At least change, then. We have time for that. There's no need for you to be driving in your uniform."

"Okay, but I'm not showering."

"Yes, yes. You don't have to shower," Kazuya said. "It won't be my fault if you drive off half the nursing staff."

"I'm not that sweaty," Eijun objected, perfectly willing to engage in banter with Kazuya if that helped him. "I was only in for two innings."

"If you say so," Kazuya said doubtfully. "But you do you, I guess."

They'd arrived at the door to the locker room, and Eijun opened it for Kazuya, who settled heavily on the nearest bench after entering.

"I'll only be a minute," Eijun promised, and Kazuya waved at him.

"Take your time," he said, running a hand over his stomach. "We'll be here."

Eijun jogged over to their lockers, opening his to change clothes. He'd just pulled off his cleats and pants when he heard his phone vibrating from inside his locker. He took it out and answered it. "Hi, Mochi!"

"Hey, Eijun. Is he in labor?"

"Yeah. I'm changing clothes and then we'll be on the way to the hospital. In fact, I'd better get off here and call Haruichi."

"No need, he's standing in front of me, I'm working in the office today." Eijun heard some shuffling around before Mochi's voice returned. "You're on speaker."

"Hi, Eijun, it's Haruichi. How far apart are his contractions?" Eijun heard him ask.

"About five minutes," Eijun said. "And he's got to stop to handle them, they're pretty hard."

"Okay, that's good. Listen, I'm leaving now, I'll meet you at the hospital."

"Should I call an ambulance for him?"

"No need, you're not too far away. He's not showing any other signs of distress, is he? He looked okay to me earlier."

"No, he's not. He's just in a lot of pain."

"Okay, then no. Just get here as soon and as safely as you can. They'll be fine, just remain calm."

"Alright," Eijun said.

"Let me get off here, give Mochi a call when you're close, okay? We'll tell you where to go."

"Okay, will do. Thanks, Haruichi."

"You're welcome. We're all glad to welcome her into the world," he said before hanging up the
Eijun put his phone into his bag, not wanting to lay it down and forget it, and put on his jeans and the tee shirt he'd worn in that morning. Sliding his feet into his topsiders, he plopped his bag onto the bench and opened Kazuya's locker. There, he pulled out and packed up his husband's bag, slinging that over his shoulder as well as his own bag. He headed back towards where he'd left Kazuya, holding out his hand to help him to his feet.

"Spoke to Haruichi, he's on his way to the hospital," Eijun said. "They're going to meet us there."

"Okay," Kazuya said, taking a few steps before being hit with another contraction. "These are so much worse when I walk," he said.

"Do you want me to find a wheelchair?"

"No," Kazuya said sharply. "I was just commenting. I'm fine."

"Okay," Eijun said, backing off a little.

"Sorry, Ei," Kazuya said, running his hand down his husband's arm. "I'm just... in a lot of pain when the contractions hit. I'll be fine, but I want to walk."

Eijun tucked Kazuya's hand firmly in his. "It's alright, I get it. I'm sorry, I just don't like to see you hurting."

"Thank you, I do appreciate you trying to make me feel better, but don't, okay? Trust me to ask if I need help."

Eijun slanted him a dubious look as they left the quiet of the locker room and entered the stadium, where the sound of the game echoed through the concrete hallways. He was glad to see there were several security people outside, keeping the line of reporters back from bothering them. He wasn't one to be rude to the press, but he was more concerned with getting Kazuya to the hospital.

He was ignoring the sound of the flashing cameras and the shouted questions, trying to make sure Kazuya was all right without appearing to hover when one of the questions caught his attention.

"Sawamura-san. Why did you leave the game when there were three innings left? It's not like he's really in danger of having the baby. He's not in real labor."

Eijun froze, and blinked once, twice, before turning around to face the reporter. "I'm sorry; did you just say he wasn't really in labor?"

"Yes, sir," the reporter replied. "Men don't have real labor, so he can't be in that much pain."

"Are you serious right now? You have no idea how much pain he's in. Are you married?"

"Engaged," the reporter said.

"I pity your fiancée if you think that labor's not painful. Or that someone should just continue being in pain because it's not life threatening," Eijun stepped closer. "What if I broke your finger? You'd be in pain, but you could still work, right?"

The reporter stepped back a pace, eyes wide. "Are you threatening me?"

"Of course not," Eijun scoffed. "I was just rephrasing your question in a way that would apply to you. In case you didn't understand what's going on here, let me explain. Yes, he's in labor. Yes, he's
in pain. Yes, male pregnancy is real and it's not for sissies, ask anyone who's had a child. Childbirth
is painful, no matter how the baby is delivered. If you don't believe me, get pregnant." He looked
over the contingent of reporters. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to take my laboring husband to
the hospital, where our daughter, Sawamura Akemi, will be born. Please enjoy the rest of your day
and thank you for your support." He nodded to the group and turned, joining Kazuya, who'd stopped
when he stepped away, leaning on a wall.

"You done yelling at the ignorant?" Kazuya asked, slanting him a smile. "I don't need to be
defended, you know."

Eijun had the grace to look abashed. "I do," he said. "But he pissed me off."

"I could tell," Kazuya said, lacing their hands together with a squeeze before pushing off the wall
and continuing their walk to the car. "I do feel for his fiancée, though. He does seem to be quite
sexist."

"Or prejudiced," Eijun agreed. "Anyway, I hope nobody asks me that question again, I'm not sure I'll
be any calmer if they do."

Kazuya nodded. "I wish you would try, though. I'm not sure getting mad is helpful."

"Fair enough. I'm going to spend some time figuring out exactly what to say to them," Eijun said. "I
know, I'll just channel you. We've been together long enough, that shouldn't be too difficult."

"True, true," Kazuya said as they approached their car. "So, you ready to go get this parasite
removed?"

"Probably not as much as you are," Eijun said, unlocking and opening the door for him. "Glad we
didn't bring the SUV, that would have been harder for you to climb into."

"And we'd have to go home to get my bag," Kazuya noted, fastening his seatbelt as Eijun closed the
door.

"You're right about that," Eijun said after he'd opened his door and tossed their bags into the back
seat, slipping his cell phone into the cup holder between their seats. He climbed in and put the keys
into the ignition, starting the car, before shooting Kazuya a suspicious glance. "You suggested we
bring this car. Dammit, Kaz. I wish you would have told me you were in labor."

"I know, but I wasn't wrong for keeping it to myself," Kazuya said. "I just wanted to be there for the
game."

"I understand," Eijun said, putting the car into gear and pulling out of the parking spot. "Hey, guess
what?"

"What?"

"We're going to have a spooky baby," Eijun said.

"A what?" Kazuya asked, confusion clear on his face.

"You must really be hurting, for that to be confusing. I'm sorry," Eijun ran his thumb over the back
of Kazuya's hand, soothing him. "It's Halloween. October thirty-first. I guess she didn't want to be a
November baby."

"Oh! I didn't even think about that," Kazuya said. "She is, isn't she?"
"Yep," Eijun said. "But this early will still make her a Scorpio, like you."

"So, no baby growth update this week? We're on to the horoscope?"

"Yup. And it's the Year of the Monkey, so there's that."

"I like that idea," Kazuya said.

Eijun continued talking, just keeping Kazuya entertained until they arrived. "I need to call Haruichi," Eijun said, picking up his phone.

"Let me," Kazuya held out his hand. "You're driving."

"That's fine," Eijun handed him the phone and listened as Kazuya dialed Haruichi, putting the phone on speaker as soon as it started to ring.

"Hello? Eijun?"

"Yeah, it's us. We're here, where do you want us to go?"

"Head on back to the Urgent Care entrance. Someone will meet you there with a wheelchair for Kazuya. You park the car and come on up to the tenth floor, we'll be getting things ready before you get there. Don't worry, you won't miss anything."

"Okay," Eijun said. "We'll be back there in a few minutes."

"Good, see you soon," Haruichi said, hanging up.

"Why do I have to ride in a wheelchair?" Kazuya complained. "I can walk."

"You can, but it's hospital policy, remember? They made me ride in one when I got knocked out, even though I was fine to walk," Eijun did his best not to let the memories of the thing he'd found out that time cloud his mind, but Kazuya, even in pain, could read his silences. He reached over and laid his hand on Eijun's.

"I miss her too," Kazuya said. "We'll always miss her, you know? Don't ever feel bad about being sad."

"Thanks, Kaz," Eijun said, flipping his hand and lacing their fingers, giving them a squeeze. "I'm glad the reason we're visiting the hospital this time is so much happier."

"Me too," Kazuya agreed.

Eijun turned the corner and laughed as he caught sight of the person waiting outside. "Well, at least you'll get a friendly orderly," he said.

"Yeah, right. You don't think he's going to give me hell for being at the game today?" Kazuya asked.

"Oh, no. I'm sure he will," Eijun said. "I'm only sad I'm going to miss it." He pulled up to the curb and Mochi opened the car door.

"Akemi's ready to meet her cool uncles, huh?" he said. "I'm here to give you a ride."

"And a lecture?" Eijun asked hopefully.
"And a lecture," Mochi agreed. "Why did you think it was okay to go to the game today?" he fussed, as he helped Kazuya out of the car and into the wheelchair. He closed the door and Eijun drove away, glad that Kazuya was in friendly, even if they weren't exactly sympathetic, hands.

The door of the elevator dinged as it opened onto the tenth floor, and Eijun stepped off into chaos. Organized chaos, but still chaos. Following the signs to the labor and delivery department, Eijun stopped at the front desk, doing his best to be patient until someone had a chance to speak to him.

"How can I help you?" A young lady with a volunteer nametag asked him.

"My husband, Miyuki Kazuya, was brought up here, he's in labor. My name is Sawamura Eijun."

"Okay, give me a second to look him up—"

"That won't be necessary," came from beside him, and Eijun jumped a little and turned to find Ryousuke standing at the other side of the desk. "I know where he is."

"Yes, Kominato-sensei," she said, and Eijun walked over to him.

"How is he?"

"About the same way you left him ten minutes ago," Ryousuke snarked, stepping away from the counter and motioning Eijun to join him. "They're making him comfortable and prepping him for the surgery."

"Can I see him?" Eijun asked.

"After you're prepped, yes," Ryousuke said. "We'll get you changed into scrubs and then you can sit with him through the birth," he explained.

"I can watch her be born?" Eijun asked, eyes wide.

"If you want. It's not as exciting as a female vaginal birth, but it's pretty fascinating," Ryousuke told him. "I think he was glad to get up here, if only to get away from Youichi."

"He wasn't happy with him," Eijun said. "But I wasn't either," he admitted.

"What did you want him to do? Honestly, I think he was smart. He didn't jump to conclusions that he was in labor, and he waited until the contractions were close before he told you he needed to leave."

Eijun laughed. "You think he told me anything? Kazuya? He didn't say anything. I noticed he was having contractions during the fifth inning, which is why I went in—it was that or leave immediately. And it was Raichi, who I'd asked to watch Kazuya because I knew he'd...not lie, but not admit anything, either...who figured out they were so close and we needed to leave. If those things hadn't happened, we'd still be at the game."

"Oh," Ryousuke said, forehead creasing. "That does sound a lot more like Kazuya, doesn't it? I was being overly optimistic, I suppose. Well, then. I rescind my approval, even though I do think going to the game was a good thing, it got his mind off it and let his body settle. That can help contractions become more organized and regular, so the labor can continue apace." He stopped outside a room marked 'Dressing Room' and opened the door. "In here there are scrubs, change into a pair. Grab a hair cover, shoe covers, and a facemask on your way out. You'll need them during the surgery, put them on when they take him in. There are lockers on the wall for your use, just take the key with you.
when you are done. I'll be out here waiting for you."

"Okay. Thanks, Ryou," Eijun said, stepping inside and doing what Ryousuke had instructed. He locked his clothes in the locker, grabbing the covers he'd been told to bring, and exited. Ryousuke pocketed his phone, looking Eijun up and down before nodding and stepping away from the wall.

"Shall we?" Ryousuke asked, gesturing down the hallway. Eijun stepped up next to him, forcing himself to keep the same pace. "They're in the operating prep room," he said, indicating a door. "I'm off on my rounds, is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, I don't think so," Eijun said. "Thank you for all your help, Ryou."

"Don't mention it," he said, waving languidly as he strolled off. "We're all excited to meet Akemi, and I'm glad to be of whatever assistance I can."

Eijun watched him walk away, hands tucked into his pockets, and marveled once again how this man of small stature could be so intimidating, before collecting himself and pushing open the stainless steel door he was facing. Inside, Kazuya was laying on a hospital bed that had the head raised, IV running into his arm.

"Hey, you," Eijun said softly, walking over to his side.

"Hey," Kazuya answered, looking at him, face relaxed and eyes looking less sharp than normal.

"They've got you drugged up, huh?" Eijun asked.

"We do," Haruichi said as he stepped into the room, clipboard in his hand. "He's currently got a decent dosage of pain meds, and will be getting a spinal block in a few minutes, so he can be awake for the cesarean section. We've looked at Akemi and everything is fine with her, she's not under any stress not associated with labor. He also seems fine, outside of the labor. We have a handle on the contractions and are just waiting for the anesthesiologist. She's on her way, so I'd expect us to be done in a few hours, at the most. As we discussed, the actual surgery will only take a few minutes, it's the pre and post that's time-consuming." He walked over to Kazuya, checking the drip on his IV line. "How are you feeling?"

"Good," Kazuya said. "How's Peanut?"

"She's fine," Haruichi said. "Ready to come into the world, it seems. A little earlier than expected, but she's fully developed, so there shouldn't be any problems."

"Good," Kazuya repeated, and Haruichi patted his hand.

"He told us that your family and his dad were all at the game, right?"

"Right," Eijun said. "I'd forgotten about that, in the rush to get him here."

"That's fine, I sent Mochi down to watch for them. He has Norio's number, as well as your mom's, I think."

"Why does he...oh! Quilting!" Eijun said. "Alright, then. I didn't bring my phone in, anyway."

"You can go get it if you'd like. We don't mind, you might want pictures."

"Really?" Eijun asked. "That would be great!"

"None of me," Kazuya demanded petulantly. "Just Akemi."
"You are so vain," Eijun said, bending over and kissing his forehead. "I'll be right back, okay?"

"Okay," Kazuya said agreeably, and Eijun laughed.

"I like this Kaz, can we keep him?" he asked Haruichi, who chuckled.

"You wouldn't after a day or two," he said wisely. "You'd miss him."

"True enough, alas," Eijun agreed. "Okay, be right back."

Eijun pushed through the door, shoes squeaking on the linoleum as he made the turns to get to the dressing room and back as quickly as he possibly could. Heading back through the door, he saw that the situation had changed, Kazuya's bed was now flat, and he was laying on his side while someone worked on his back.

"Ahh, Eijun," Haruichi said. "Dr. Hashimoto came in right after you left, she's the anesthesiologist. She's currently putting the spinal block into place. If you'd like to pull up a chair, you can sit by Kazuya and keep him company. He has to lay still, since she's working with his spine."

Eijun pulled the indicated chair over and sat, looking at his half-asleep husband. He pulled out his phone and took a picture, with Kazuya waking up when he heard the shutter sound. He glared at Eijun, unable to move and grab the phone like he wanted to. "I said no photos," he slurred, and Eijun took another one of him glaring at him with all the ferocity of a kitten.

"Sorry, that's the last one," Eijun said, putting the phone down. He ran his fingers through Kazuya's hair, combing it back off his face. "How are you doing?"

"I'm okay," Kazuya said, butting his head up into his hand, like the aforementioned kitten. "As long as people stop taking pictures of me. That's rude."

"Fair enough," Eijun said. "I'm sorry, we'll look at them and delete them later, okay?"

"'kay," Kazuya said. "Don't stop rubbing my head, though."

"Yes, sir," Eijun said softly, watching his husband drift off while the anesthesiologist did her job.

After a bit, she straightened, working the kinks out of her back from bending over. "We're done, it's time to give him some medicine. Can you wake him up, please?"

Eijun reached over and shook Kazuya's shoulder. "Hey, Kaz. You need to wake up, the anesthesiologist wants to speak to you."

Kazuya's eyes blinked open and he squinted at Eijun. "I'm awake."

The doctor asked him questions about what he could feel, adjusting the amount of medicine being put into his spinal cord accordingly. "Okay, we're good here," she said, helping Kazuya lay back flat and stepping back from the bed.

"Vitals look good," Haruichi said, walking to the head of the bed and releasing the brake. "Let's go deliver this baby, shall we?"

Eijun nodded, donning his protective gear and following the doctors and nurses—and his husband—through the swinging doors into the operating room.

Akemi was almost here.
I'm not sure that anyone noticed, but there's been a total number of chapters up there since the last update.
Next chapter is the last one- I'm thankful that you all have made it this far, and I hope you've enjoyed the ride.
Love you all. Truly.
*bows deeply*
Thank you.
Eijun sat down on the stool that had been placed by Kazuya's head. "Hey, you. How are you feeling?"

"Better than I have for a while," Kazuya said. "I don't hurt."

"That's good," Eijun said. "I'm sorry you were hurting, though."

"I'm not, it was fine. I knew it would be temporary, but worth Akemi," Kazuya slurred, somewhat disjointedly. Eijun understood what he meant, because he felt the same way.

"Yeah," Eijun said, running a finger over Kazuya's cheek, the beeping of the monitors and the soft voices of the operating team in the background. He'd had to stop rubbing Kazuya's head when they entered the operating room. The nurse had put a scrub cap on him as they went down the hall, removing his glasses and handing them to Eijun.

"I wonder how the game turned out," Kazuya said, eyes blinking up at Eijun, who let out a soft snort.

"I have no idea. And I'm not sure I really care at this point."

"True." Kazuya's eyes closed. Eijun didn't want to disturb his sleep, so he turned his attention to Haruichi, trying to figure out where they were in the process. He couldn't see much, there was a drape across Kazuya's chest hiding the surgery, although he knew if he stood up that he would be able to see everything.

"You sure you don't want to watch, Eijun?" Haruichi asked. "We'll be extracting her soon."

"No, that's okay," he said. "I don't think you want to have me pass out, and I'm not sure I could handle seeing Kazuya cut open. Or anyone, for that matter. I can't even watch operations on television."
"That's surprisingly common," Haruichi said. "I understand. Do you want to watch her be born?"

"Yes," Eijun said. "That, I do want to see."

"Okay, that's about five minutes away."

"Thanks, Haruichi," Eijun said. He'd kept his eyes on Kazuya this whole time and grinned at him as his eyes fluttered open. "Welcome back."

"I wasn't asleep," Kazuya said. "Did I hear him say five minutes?"

"He did," Eijun said.

"Okay, good," Kazuya said. "Did you talk to any of the 'rents?"

"I didn't," Eijun said. "Why don't you close your eyes and get some rest and I'll text them. I'll wake you up when there's a baby."

"'kay," Kazuya agreed and closed his eyes as instructed.

Eijun pulled out his phone.

Me: We're in the OR, Akemi's coming soon.

Me: Everything's fine.

Norio: How's Kazuya?

Me: He's good, drugged and sleeping a little

Mom: How are you?

Me: Fine, fine.

Mom: And Akemi?

Me: She's good, too.

Me: I just wanted to let you know that things are going well, and she'll be here soon.

Norio: Thanks for the update.

Me: I'll let you know when she's here, and where we end up so you can visit.

Mom: Good! See you all soon.

Me: Yes, you will.

"It's time," Haruichi said from behind the curtain. "Just stand up and you'll see her being born."

Eijun did so, looking at the scene behind the drape, thankful that there wasn't much, if any, blood. He really couldn't see much, there were green sheets across Kazuya's torso, with the only skin showing being the place where they'd put the incision. The cut wasn't bleeding, it all looked very clean, and Eijun did his best to not think too much about what, exactly, he was looking at. Haruichi had one of his hands under the side nearest Kazuya's groin, clearly holding something, and when he saw Eijun was watching, he started to pull it out. When he did so, Eijun saw he was holding the back of Akemi's head as he pulled her out slowly, cradling her body as she emerged, covered in amniotic
fluid. Eijun quickly opened the camera on his phone and snapped a photo of Haruichi holding her up. He watched as the doctor gently turned her over and gave her back a few taps to get her to cry, clearing her airways, and then handed her to a nurse, who carried her over to one side of the room to run a few diagnostics on her.

"You may want to sit back down," Haruichi said. "I'm going to start stitching him up. The nurse will bring her to you in just a minute, they need to weigh and measure her."

"Good idea," Eijun said, returning to his seat on the stool. He sent the picture to the parents and waited for the nurses to bring Akemi over.

"Where is she?" Kazuya asked, eyes open and clouded. "I thought I heard her cry."

Eijun nodded, taking his hand. "She did. She's fine, the nurses have her and are going to bring her over in a minute," he said.

"Did you see?"

"I watched her being born, yes."

"How does she look?"

"Well, she looked wet and a little bloody, but she cried when Haruichi patted her back, and they seem to think she's fine."

"She is fine," the nurse said as she walked up to them. "A healthy baby girl. She weighs just under three and a half kilos and had an Apgar score of 9." She handed the bundle to Eijun. "Here you go, dad. We'll need her back in a few minutes to clean her up and do a better assessment, but you do have time to say hello." She smiled and nodded before rejoining Haruichi behind the drape doing something Eijun thought he was better off not knowing.

Eijun looked down at the baby who was swaddled up tightly and sleeping in his arms. "Hi, Akemi, I'm so happy to see you," he said, smiling softly at her. "We're glad you're here."

Kazuya watched, mind hazy, as Eijun talked to the baby, and felt a twinge in the back of his brain. Eijun was clear-eyed as he greeted their child for the first time, and he knew that was bad, although he wasn't sure exactly why that was. Hoping his brain would work it out before it became an issue, he realized that Eijun was moving the baby close to him to let him see.

"I'm going to lay her on your chest," Eijun said, doing as he said, and Kazuya's arms came up to hold her in place. "I think they're coming for her in a minute, though."

Kazuya blinked at the baby sleeping on him and smiled at the sight. "She's beautiful," he said, looking at Eijun, who was helping support her on his chest.

"She is," Eijun said.

"Hi, Akemi," Kazuya cooed. "I'm glad you're out here, now, rather than inside, kicking up a fuss."

"She's going to be so loved," Eijun said.

"She already is," Kazuya noted, and Eijun nodded.

"You're right."

"I'm sorry, but we need to take Akemi now," the nurse said, rolling up a bassinet for her as Eijun
lifted her gently and kissed her forehead.

"Be good for the nurses, baby girl, and we'll see you soon," he told her.

The nurse smiled at them both, setting her in the bed. "She will, I'm sure of it. We'll take her to the nursery and have her checked out and bathed, and when you're settled in your room, we'll bring her by." She picked up a strip of something plastic, pulling the rectangle into three parts. "Before we go, let me put these on you both. They're what you'll need to take her, and the nurses will check them every time they give her to either of you. Don't take them off, please."

"Thank you, we won't," Eijun said, watching her closely as she latched them around each of their wrists in turn, running a scanner over the bar code and checking to make sure it uploaded. She tucked Akemi's arm back into the blanket and wheeled her out of the room.

He turned back to his husband. "You did it."

"We did it," Kazuya said. "I never would have done it without you."

"Partners, huh?"

"Yup, partners until you poison me for bringing Akemi to bed."

"That might just be me that's poisoned instead," Eijun said. "I'm sure poisoning is not going to happen, because then I would have to get up with her every night."

"True enough," Kazuya said, eyes drifting closed again.

Eijun looked up to see the anesthesiologist injecting something into his IV. "Is everything alright?"

"It's fine," she said. "We're almost done here, so I've given him a dose of pain medication since the anesthesia will wear off soon. He should wake up in an hour or so, after we've taken him to his room."

"Okay," Eijun said. "I'll stay with him, if that's all right."

"That's fine," she said. "If you'd rather, you can just meet him in his room. You might want to get some food and get out of those scrubs."

"That's a good idea," he agreed. "I'll stay with him until you take him to the recovery room, then."

She looked over at what was going on with the surgery. "He's closing up the last incision, so it should be in the next few minutes," she said. "I'll have a nurse find out where he's headed, and let you know."

"Thank you." She nodded and headed back to the foot of the bed. Eijun sat, watching Kazuya sleep, and waited for the information he needed.

"Excuse me, Sawamura-san?"

Eijun turned his head to see one of the nurses standing beside the drape apparatus, lifting the drape part in anticipation of rolling it off the bed. "Yes?"

"We're going to take Miyuki-san to the recovery room. He should be in his room in about an hour."

"Thank you. Do you know what room that is?"
"Yes, he'll be in room 1802."

"Great, thanks," Eijun said, standing so they could put the stool back. The other nurse was tucking a blanket up and around Kazuya, and Haruichi was standing to one side, watching the proceedings.

"I'll come by and speak to you after he's in his room," Haruichi said after lowering his face mask. "You should change and visit your parents, let them know everything's alright. They're in the labor and delivery waiting room."

"I'm going to," Eijun said. "Is there something wrong?"

"No, not at all," Haruichi said. "We just need to talk about a few things."

"Okay." Eijun smiled at his friend. "Thank you for everything, Haruichi. We couldn't have done it without you."

"You could have," Haruichi argued, grin shifting into something sharp. "But it wouldn't have been wise." He turned and motioned to the nurses, who started to wheel Kazuya out. "See you soon, Eijun."

Eijun shivered and followed them out into the hall, using the directions given by a passing orderly to get to the changing room. He changed into his street clothes and stuffed his used scrubs into the waiting basket, leaving the key in the lock he'd used. Once he was back in the corridor, there were clearly marked directional signs leading to the waiting room, so he walked that way, stopping at the doorway to blink at the sheer volume of people inhabiting the room. Most, if not all, waiting for news of Akemi.

He saw Chris chatting with Mei and Takahashi, his mom talking to Kuramochi, and his father and grandfather in one corner, deep in conversation with Kanemaru and...Satoru? Eijun blinked at the sight. There were people from Seido, and what looked like the whole of the Swallow's bullpen, all waiting for news. He wished Kazuya could see the gathering, but he was pretty sure his husband would write it off as people gathered there for Akemi, or Eijun—not himself. Eijun knew better and resolved to use this as ammo in his ever-continuous quest to convince Kazuya that people did care about him.

He stood upright and stepped into the room. Nabe saw him first and nudged Norio, who looked up and smiled, rising to his feet. "How's Kazuya? And Akemi?" he asked, garnering the attention of everyone in the room.

"They're good," Eijun said. "I just left Kazuya in the recovery room and Akemi's in the nursery being bathed and checked out. He should be awake in an hour or so, everything went well."

"How big is she?" Chika asked.

"Just under three and a half kilos."

Chika nodded. "At thirty-eight weeks? She's a big baby."

"She was ready," Eijun said as his mother wove her way through the crowd, pulling him into a hug. The general chat resumed, now that everyone was informed of Kazuya's status. "What are you guys doing in Tokyo?"

"We came for the game, we knew you guys could win it with this one, so we wanted to be there for it."
"Why didn't you say something?"

Chika shrugged. "We didn't want to bother you. You had both the game and your shoulder to contend with, and Kazuya was miserable, I know. We didn't want you to have to put on your masks and entertain us, we just wanted to watch you play."

"Where are you staying? You can stay at our place if you'd like."

"We stayed with Norio last night," she explained. "I might stay in town a little longer, if you think you could use some help when Kazuya comes home."

"Yes, please," Eijun said. "I'm sure we can use all the help we can get."

"Okay, then. You ask Kazuya, and if he says yes, then I'll stay," she agreed. "But don't let him know you said yes, I want him to make a decision himself. I don't want him to feel obligated."

"I'll do that. Thanks, Mom."

"I'm happy to do it," she said. "Now, when can I meet that grandbaby of mine?"

"It shouldn't be too long? I don't know, I'm sure you can go by the nursery and see her if you're impatient."

"It's fine, we'll hang out here until we can get up there," she said. "I'm sure there are others who want to talk to you, I'll go tell the men what you said."

"Okay, Mom," Eijun said, watching her wend her way across the room. He'd just sat down when Takahashi plopped into the chair beside him, handing him a bottle of water.

"You look thirsty," he said.

Eijun smiled at him. "Thank you, I am." He twisted off the lid and took a big drink. "Thank you for coming."

"We had to make sure our coach is alright," Takahashi said. "We'll be heading out in a few, get out of your hair. We were just here until we heard from you."

"That was nice of you," Eijun said. "So, are you the sacrifice that was sent to tell me what happened out there?"

Takahashi laughed. "That was something else, let me tell you," he said.

"Who won?" Eijun asked.

"Before I get to that, let me explain what happened immediately after you left. We were down by three, remember? Bottom of the seventh."

"Right."

"Well, we were all shaken by you leaving, our bullpen has a few more pitchers, but none of them are you, they're all pretty new without a lot of experience."

"Yeah, but that doesn't mean they can't play," Eijun argued.

"True enough," Takahashi said, stretching a little. "Anyway, Raichi stepped up and took up the job of trying to motivate us—he said he didn't want to let you down. And we tried, we really did, but we
only managed to get one run that inning, with a totally untested rookie coming in for you. In the potentially winning game of the Japan Series."

"Poor Kansai," Eijun said. "Unless Sato went with someone else?"

"No, it was Kansai. He started warming up as soon as you left, and we could all see the boy's nerves kick in hard."

"Ugh."

"Yeah, we had pretty much resigned ourselves to losing, to be honest. But then, you had that...exchange with the reporter?"

"How do you know about that?"

"It was between innings, and the stadium's news crew was in that crowd and caught it. They were streaming live as the sides changed, since you guys came out of the locker room right then. Or maybe they'd recorded it before and waited to play it. Either way, we saw it, and he pissed us right off."

"Me too," Eijun shook his head, a little chagrined. "I shouldn't have let him get to me like that."

"We could tell. But other than the absolute idiocy of his views on childbirth, his implication that we couldn't win without you two was the motivation we needed. We decided, then and there, that we would do everything we could to win. That we could win, which was the more important part. And so, we did."

"You won? The Japan Series?" Eijun asked, voice rising.

"We won," Takahashi said. "You were as instrumental in our win as anyone on that field, maybe even more so than most."

"That's amazing, good job!" Eijun said. "I'm so proud of you all." He looked around and met the smiles of his teammates around the room. "Wait, why are you here? Shouldn't you be out partying or something?"

"We will, after this," Takahashi said. "We really wanted to know that everything was all right."

"Thank you for worrying, we're all fine," Eijun said, standing. "You guys should go, seriously. You just won the Japan Series, go celebrate!"

"There's one more thing," Takahashi said, laying a hand on Eijun's arm. He turned his attention to his teammate, a little worried.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing really, but I thought I should tell you that you didn't win MVP."

Eijun snorted. "I didn't deserve to win MVP," he said. "I should hope it went to someone more vital to the win."

"You know it's a ballot given to the people who attended the game, right? With a list of potential winners as suggested by the sports press?"

"Yeah?"
"Did you know there's a write-in field?"

"In case someone unexpected plays really well, yes," Eijun said, confusion clear on his face.

"Yeah, well. There was a write-in, and they won."

"Really? Kansai? Congratulations!" he said to the other man, who was one of the team members who had drifted over while they were talking. "Good job out there."

"It wasn't me, Sawamura-san," Kansai said with a grin.

Eijun took in the grins of everyone around him and came to another conclusion. "Miyuki?"

"Nope," Takahashi said. "Let us know when you give up."

"Okay, I give up," Eijun said, having absolutely no idea.

"You're not going to believe this," Takahashi said. "But the MVP, with over half the vote, was Sawamura Akemi."

Eijun felt his eyes widen and his mouth fall open. "Akemi? What?"

The team members gathered around him all broke out in gales of laughter.

"But she's not on the team!" Eijun sputtered.

Takahashi shook his head. "It doesn't matter. If the management of the winning team confirms the win, it's valid. Congratulations, Eijun. You don't have a Japan Series MVP award, but your hour-old daughter does. How does that make you feel?"

"The management certified the results?"

"Of course they did. You know how much publicity they're going to get out of this. And, they've banned that reporter from their stadium for life, or until he carries his first child, whichever comes first."

"That's amazing," Eijun said. "Not the part about them trying, again, to use our child for publicity, but the reporter bit. Which is also a publicity stunt, but that's okay."

"Don't forget that there's a sizable cash prize along with that trophy."

"College fund, here we come," Eijun said.

"Good plan," Takahashi patted him on the shoulder. "Anyway, we're out of here. We just came by to make sure everything was okay and to give you that bit of information, and now we'll get out of the way. Parties to go to, celebrity to bask in, you know how it is."

"Go, all of you," Eijun said, looking over the gathered players. "Thank you for coming, we appreciate it. And thank you for winning, and congratulations again."

"Would you stop acting like it wasn't your win, too?" Ikeda asked. "For your information, you came in second in the voting—I think the Mariners' fans were just happy to be able to vote for someone who didn't play."

"That makes sense," Eijun said. "Okay, you guys have fun—I'll let Kazuya know you were by, he'll be glad."
"You two get some rest, and congrats on Akemi," Hara said as he followed the group heading for the exit. "We were planning a baby shower but put it off until after the season. I guess she had a different idea, so we'll just plan something else."

"You don't have—"

"Yeah, yeah, we know," Hara patted his shoulder. "But we'll do it anyway." He waved as he joined the exodus. "Enjoy and tell Akemi we said good job on the MVP thing."

"Be safe, we'll talk later," Eijun said.

"Yes, we will," Takahashi said as he brought up the rear. "Have fun."

"You, too!"

Eijun drained the bottle of water and checked his watch, a half-hour to go. He stood and walked across the carpeted floor of the waiting room to throw it away. He'd just dropped it in when he heard a voice behind himself. "Congratulations and all that."

Turning, he smiled wryly at Mei. "Thanks, Mei."

"Everything's okay, I assume, or you wouldn't be nearly so calm," Mei observed. "I'm going to go, I just wanted to make sure my newest niece is good."

"She is," Eijun agreed. "Thank you for coming."

"As if I'd stay away," Mei said. "I'm happy for you two, you're going to be great parents."

"Thank you. Kazuya will be happy you stopped by," Eijun said.

"I'm sure he will. I'll call you next week to set up a time for me to come by and see Akemi." He turned away, waving over his shoulder. "Great name, by the way. I loved Kazuya's mother, she was a wonderful woman."

"I know," Eijun said. "Great to see you, Mei. Hope to hear from you soon."

"I'll call you," Mei said. "See you!"

"He hasn't changed since he was a kid," Norio said, stepping to Eijun's side. "How are you, son of mine?" he asked, hugging him tightly.

"I'm okay," Eijun said with an exhale, relaxing a little in his embrace. "A little overwhelmed at all the people here, but okay."

Norio stepped back and looked at him critically. "You look tired, have you eaten?"

"Not since lunch, I was going to try and get something after I got Kazuya settled."

"You need to eat, the worst of it is over," Norio said before chuckling. "Actually, I lied, it's just beginning, but it's also amazing."

"Yeah," Eijun said, a smile lighting up his face. "I think it will be."

"So, we can see them in a bit?"

"I think so, yes. I'm going up in a little while, and then we'll talk to Haruichi. I'm sure it will be
shortly after that."

"Okay, great," Norio said. "I'm glad we were able to be here. Thank you again for all you've done to help Kazuya and me. I can't wait to meet Akemi."

"I was glad to do it, you know that," Eijun said. "I'm just glad you've kept your word so far, please don't let them down."

"I won't," Norio said. "I still can't believe you're naming her after her grandmother. And that it was your idea."

"I know how much Kazuya misses his mother, I would have done the same even if things hadn't changed," Eijun said. "It didn't have anything to do with you, honestly."

Norio nodded. "That's fair. Actually, I'm glad that you said that, I don't want you making decisions based on something other than your own wishes." He paused for a second before meeting Eijun's gaze. "It doesn't make me any less happy, though."

"Two birds with one stone, then," Eijun said with a grin.

"I'm going back to my seat, I just wanted to check in on you," Norio said. "I'm glad everything's working out well, and I'll see you up there in a bit."

"See you soon," Eijun said, heading back across the room towards Satoru, who was chatting with Chris.

"Hey, Chris," he greeted his friend. "Satoru! I didn't know you were coming in! It's good to see you!" He clapped a hand on his old rival's shoulder, sitting in the seat beside him.

"I came to visit Haruichi," Satoru said in measured tones. "He had to be here, so I came with him. I'm glad I'm here for the baby, though."

"Did you see her picture?" Eijun asked, pulling out his phone. He opened it up and showed him the one he'd taken right after she was born. "She was thirty seconds old."

"She's tiny," Satoru said. "Is that normal?"

"She's actually on the bigger end of normal, just over three and a half kilos," Eijun explained. "But she looks so small, huh? Did you see any recent pictures of Kazuya?"

"I saw him this afternoon, I was watching the game in his office with Kuramochi."

"I'm not sure you could see much there." Eijun scrolled through his camera roll until he found the latest picture he had taken, snuck during the fourth game of the Japan Series. Kazuya had his hand on his stomach and was standing at the railing of the dugout, looking over the field. His eyes were narrowed as he watched, and the dichotomy between the look of concentration and focus and the softness of his hand was striking.

"He looks like she should have been bigger," Satoru said.

"Well, she's not that small," Eijun started. "And he still needed room for his organs, so there's that."

"That's true," Satoru agreed.

"How long are you here for?"
"A few weeks, I wanted to visit my grandfather while I was here, and stick around for a while to make sure he's okay."

"Great, you'll have to come by!" Eijun said, before turning to Chris, who had been watching the exchange with a soft smile. "Sorry, Chris, I haven't seen him for a while, I didn't know he was coming in."

"It's fine, Eijun," Chris said. "I understand."

"I'm surprised to see you here, don't you have school?" Eijun asked.

"You do realize it's seven?" Chris asked.

"I meant practice," Eijun corrected.

Chris laughed and shook his head. "No, we're done. We aren't as intense as Seido, we don't have that kind of budget or resources. We might go to seven when the days are longer, but it's already dark. And that's not considering that we were watching the game when you left and the kids almost pushed me out the door as soon as it was over. Congratulations, by the way. On the Series win and the baby."

"And the MVP, apparently," Eijun said with a slanted grin.

"You're the MVP? That's great!"

Eijun laughed. "No, actually, that's Akemi."

"What?" Satoru said, looking as confused as Eijun had ever seen him. "How?"

"The MVP is voted on by the people in the stands, remember? And they have a write-in vote. I guess, after they showed that footage of me on the screen, everyone heard her name and decided to write her in."

"Don't they have to limit it to players on your team?" Chris said.

"I guess if the team's management certifies the result then it stands," Eijun said. "And I know our management. They're all about the publicity, and that's going to get them a lot of it."

"Are you upset about it?"

"Honestly? After the wedding crap they pulled, I'm not," Eijun threaded his fingers through his hair. "I might be later, when I'm not so preoccupied with Kaz and the baby, but right now, I'm okay." He felt his phone vibrate and looked at the screen. Opening his texts, he read the one from Haruichi before standing.

"Kazuya's going to be in his room in a minute, I'm going to head up."

"Yes, go," Chris said, standing as well. "I'll hang out and wait for Jun, he's my ride."

"He's here?"

"Yeah, doing his rounds. I wanted to stop by and make sure everything was okay. My kids think Akemi belongs to them, since you two have been helping them so much, and they're going to want a full report tomorrow."

Eijun grinned. "They're going to see even more of me soon," he said. "I'll send a better picture to you
this evening, so you can show them."

"Thank you, I'm sure they'll love it. They don't know about you yet, we'll just introduce you in the spring," Chris said. "Go, now. You don't want to be late."

"Yeah," Eijun said, turning to Satoru. "You're waiting for Haruichi, right?"

He nodded. "Or Kuramochi-senpai. He can drop me at Haruichi's."

"That's good," Eijun said. "I'll be expecting to see you soon."

"You will," Satoru confirmed.

Eijun nodded. "Good," he said, heading to the doorway. As he walked across the room, he stopped by Chika. "I'm headed up, I'll let you know when you can come up."

She patted him on the shoulder. "Okay, dear, we'll see you soon. Tell Kazuya we're proud of him."

"I will," he said, continuing on his way out the door.

Walking into a still-empty room 1802, he noticed that Kazuya's bag was sitting on the couch, so he opened it and unpacked what he thought they'd need soon. He set the tablet and Kazuya's phone on the side table, plugging them in so they'd be fully charged when he looked for them. He unpacked some comfortable pajamas for his husband to change into, and hung a robe in the closet, setting the bag in the bottom for future access. Pulling out his own phone, he settled in an armchair beside the window, looking out over the dark city, letting himself relax for the first time since he'd first noticed Kazuya was in labor. He breathed in, taking in the slightly antiseptic smell of the hospital, listening to the bustle of the hospital around him, grounding himself in the feeling of the vinyl of the chair under his arms and the ache in his bones, as well as the little extra twinge his shoulder gave in reaction to everything he'd done that day. He was tired, more than he'd usually be that early in the evening, but it had been a stress-filled day. Good, but still stressful. He continued to sit, taking the time to let his brain work in the quiet, until he heard a stretcher rolling down the hallway and looked up to see orderlies rolling his husband in, closely followed by Haruichi.

Standing, he did his best to stay out of their way while still watching what was going on. Kazuya had his eyes closed, and Eijun turned to Haruichi. "How is he?"

"He's fine, I expect he'll wake within the half-hour," Haruichi said, looking at Kazuya's vitals after the bed was situated. "I have a few patients to look in on, I'll be back in forty-five minutes or so." He looked up at the doorway, where one of the nurses was wheeling in a bassinet. "Perfect timing. You can get acquainted with Akemi, and I'll be back in a bit to talk to you."

"Sounds like a plan. Thanks, Haruichi."

"No problem."

Eijun watched him go and then turned his attention to the nurse, who was standing by Akemi.

"Hello Sawamura-san, I've brought you Akemi," she said. "If you would just show me your band, so I can verify that she can be left with you."

"Of course," Eijun said, showing her his arm. She compared the numbers to the ones on his wrist and nodded.
"She's yours," she said.

"No scanner?"

"No, we don't have them all the time," she said, continuing to explain, "just when we first put them on and whenever you take her directly from the nursery. Otherwise, we'll just compare numbers."

"Good to know," Eijun said. "Thank you."

"Of course," she said. "She's been fed, and the pediatrician looked her over and said she was totally healthy. She should be good for a while, but if you have any problems or questions, please call us." She pulled open a drawer underneath the bed. "There are diapers and wipes in here, as well as extra gowns and receiving blankets, in case you need to change her. If you don't feel comfortable doing so, let us know and we'll walk you through it a few times."

"Thank you," Eijun said. "We probably will need help. We took the classes and read the books, but still..."

"We understand, truly. I'll go and let you spend some time with her, but we are here if you need us." She exited the room, leaving him with the sleeping members of his newly extended family.

"It's just you and me, baby girl," Eijun said, picking her up gently and cradling her.

Kazuya felt like he was swimming up through a fog, his mind gradually clearing as he realized what he was hearing—the sound of Eijun sniffling. With his brain working more than it had been, he quickly realized the significance of Eijun's previously dry eyes and forced himself to wake up more fully.

"Ei?"

Eijun's head popped up and he stepped closer to Kazuya's bed. "Kaz? You're awake?"

"Yeah," Kazuya said, blinking his eyes and trying to focus. "Put her down and come here, please."

"What? You don't want to see the baby?" Eijun was confused, this was not the reaction he'd expected.

Kazuya shook his head, starting to turn onto one side. "I do, I'm excited about her, of course, but I'm more worried about you."

"Don't try to turn, you have an incision," Eijun said, stepping closer to the bed. "And what do you mean, you're worried about me?"

Kazuya stopped struggling to reposition himself. "You need to come here, let me hold you so you can get it out of your system."

"I'm fine, Kaz," Eijun said firmly.

"No, you're not. You didn't even cry when you held Akemi for the first time, you're holding back," Kazuya insisted.

"What do you—?" Eijun asked before realization hit. "Oh, no! I'm good, really," he said. "Look, I'm not hiding anything." He met Kazuya's unsteady gaze evenly before he realized something. "Hang on a sec," he said, setting Akemi down in her bed and reaching into his pocket. He walked over to the bed and handed Kazuya his glasses. "Now look."
Kazuya studied him intently, fighting through the fog to think clearly. "Okay, then why?"

"Because there were too many people there, and I knew we weren't going to be able to keep her long," Eijun explained. "I didn't want to cry until we could really meet her, together."

"Bring her over here, then. Let's meet our daughter," Kazuya said, finally satisfied with his explanation. He slid over a little in his bed and fumbled for the controls. Eijun stepped over and found them for him, raising his head until he was high enough to hold Akemi comfortably.

"You okay?" Eijun asked.

"Yeah, bring her over, there's room for you here," Kazuya said.

Eijun nodded and picked up the still sleeping baby, laying her gently into Kazuya's arms. He slipped off his topsiders and climbed in next to him, rolling on his side. "Is this alright, are you comfortable?"

"Yes, of course," Kazuya said. "Can you see all right?"

"Yeah," Eijun said, voice already a little clogged up with emotion. "I can see. You're holding our baby, Kaz."

"I know," Kazuya said, wonder evident in his voice. "She's beautiful." He adjusted her so she was crosswise on his chest. "I want to see her; can we take her out of the blanket?"

"We can," Eijun said. "We should practice, anyway. Lots of babies like to be swaddled up like that."

Kazuya nodded, and using his free hand, he removed the receiving blanket enough that they could really see her. She had on a hat and a gown, and Kazuya pulled off one of her socks. "Look at these tiny feet," he said, smiling at the way she pulled away when he ran his finger over the bottom of one.

Eijun hummed in agreement, touching her toes. "Hard to believe that those tiny things were what kept you up all the time."

"I know, right?" Kazuya said. He pulled up her gown a little and saw the umbilical cord tied off. "Is that normal?"

"I think so," Eijun said. "We can ask Jun when he stops by in a bit."

"Jun's here? For Akemi?"

"Well, he's here checking patients, according to Chris. And I would be shocked if she wasn't one of the ones he was checking on," Eijun said. "Chris is downstairs in the waiting room, I talked to him when I went there to tell the 'rents what was going on."

"Okay, wait," Kazuya said. "Chris is here? Why?"

Eijun looked at him impassively. "What do you think? You and Akemi. He's here because his team was watching the game and saw us leave, almost pushing him out the door to find out what was going on, so he hitched a ride with Jun. Satoru is here because he was visiting Haruichi and wanted to know what was going on. The whole Swallows bullpen is here, too. Most of Seido is here. Even Mei is here. They're here because they care about you, you know this."

Kazuya busied himself trying to tuck Akemi back into her cocoon, with limited success, to hide his emotions. "They're all here?"
"Well, they were, most of them left after I let them know that you were fine," Eijun said. "The families are really the only ones who stuck around to see her, the rest will be by after we get home."

"Good, I'm not sure I'm up to having a lot of visitors tonight," Kazuya said.

"I think they knew that," Eijun said. "They just wanted to make sure that you were alright."

"You said the Swallows bullpen came? Who won the game?"

Eijun chuckled. "We did. Someone recorded that exchange I had with the reporter and they played it between the seventh and eighth. It pissed the team off, both at the things he said about you and that he was implying they couldn't win without us. So, they rallied and pulled it off."

"So, we have a Japan Series championship, huh?" Kazuya said. "I'm glad, I'm sure the team is ecstatic."

"They are! But that's not the only thing," Eijun said. "You're not going to believe who the MVP is."

"Who? You?"

Eijun snorted. "No. And I'm glad, I didn't play enough to deserve it. It was a write-in," Eijun said.

"A write-in? Doesn't the management have to certify the win?"

"Yes, and they did."

"Who was it?"


"Wait, what?"

"Apparently she was the write-in, and the management approved it," Eijun said.

"Of course they did, imagine the publicity," Kazuya noted. "I don't know if I want them using her like that."

"I don't think it's that big of a deal, honestly," Eijun said. "We'll just do what we feel comfortable with."

"Sounds like a plan," Kazuya agreed.

Akemi, as if she was tired of being ignored, yawned widely, squirming a little. The corner of her mouth turned up and Eijun laughed. "Well, we know she's a Miyuki. She's got the smirk down already, and look at those eyebrows," he said, running his finger over her brow. "They're just like yours."

Her face scrunched up and her eyes blinked, opening as she looked at them.

Kazuya smiled. "And there's the proof she's yours, look at those golden eyes."

"Well, that puts those rumors to bed," Eijun said, eyes welling a little as Akemi looked at him. "She's mine."

"Was there any doubt?" Kazuya asked.
"Nope," Eijun said, pulling his phone out of his pocket and snapping a few pictures of her.

"You do realize the trouble I'm in, right?"

"No, why?"

"I have a hard enough time resisting those eyes on you. I don't know how I'm going to say no to a little girl with them," he said.

Eijun nodded. "I'll have to be the bad guy, huh?"

"Probably," Kazuya said. "Just be prepared."

"Will do," Eijun said. He smiled at the baby, who was blinking up at him. "Hi, Akemi, I'm your Papa," he said. "We've been waiting for you, for a long time."

"I'm your Daddy," Kazuya said. "I'm so happy to finally meet you, we're glad you're here. We love you so, so much, and we'll tell you that every day of your life."

He leaned into Eijun, who wrapped an arm around his shoulders and pulled him closer.

Together, they cuddled up on the bed, their baby between them.

Two were now three.

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Week Zero

Chapter End Notes

That's it.
Thank you for coming with me on this journey, those of you who've been with me since the beginning, over three years ago, and those who joined later.
I love and appreciate you all, you make me happier than I can say.

If you'd like to leave a comment, even if—especially if—you hadn't before, I will be ecstatic.
Let me know what you hated and loved about this story, what made you cry, what you think I can do to improve my writing...anything you'd like to say, I'd love to hear.

Thank you for loving these idiots as much as I do.

End Notes
Clearly this isn't the end of this, but I figured I'd post a chapter before things got too long. I'mma stick to a posting schedule- every Saturday is going to be my goal for new chapters.

Let me know what you think below, please. Is this your cuppa? Boring? Too domestic?

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!