

Not good enough

Von Gepo

Kapitel 5: The InterHigh preliminaries

"Gather around!," Coach Araki yelled.

The team followed that call, a few of them excited about the paper she had in her hands. This could only be one thing: The Interhigh match-ups. How many schools would they have to play? Where were the other good schools placed? Yosen had won their region's preliminaries for six years straight, but it wasn't like their victory was a given. Though Tatsuya had to be honest, he didn't know how they could lose with Murasakibara on their side. Their training matches had been deeply impressive.

All his life he had played streetball as well as official games and faced a lot of good players. Taiga had been his rival, always an worthy opponent. But Tatsuya was sure that even Taiga would lose in an one-on-one with Murasakibara. He himself had played some one-on-ones against him and lost all of them. That young man that could not even get three plus three right was a genius on the court. Admittedly his fine movements were rather awkward. But who needed fine tuning when you could just grab the ball out of it's flight? Or punch it down like a skilled volleyball spiker? Tatsuya had learned that Murasakibara had been a volleyball player in elementary school which had taught him his current ball control. All his brain power went into moving with the speed of a hurricane.

When he wanted to. Most days his friend was lazy and would only train to get his candy quota. He had a competitive spirit, so when you wanted to rile him up it was always effortless. But everyday training was something he found annoying and tried his best to wriggle out of. His best meant pouting, sighing and being a general nuisance to be around. Tatsuya found it hard not to smirk every time he saw that. In his opinion it was damn cute. His heart throbbed every time Murasakibara pouted like a child.

The other place that throbbed was a bit more disconcerting. Tatsuya was used to be around Taiga while his body screamed at him to release all pheromones, lie down and spread his legs. So it wasn't hard to feel the same for Murasakibara but not act on it. Still it wasn't like he had perfect control over his Omega instincts. He always sat next to the giant. He often touched his shoulders or arms. He stood next to him in the shower instead of using the shower stall he was meant to use. Thankfully Murasakibara was perfectly in control of himself. He never took the initiative to touch Tatsuya. He did growl at everyone that entered Tatsuya's personal space and always minded it himself. Sometimes he sniffed Tatsuya when he was sad, angry or excited and seemed to act based on instinct to match the Omega. So Tatsuya was free to cuddle up to or dance around Murasakibara freely without being bothered with unwanted advances for it.

He felt safe with Murasakibara. That thought was strange because he had never felt particularly unsafe. He was the only child of two Alpha parents who had always fiercely protected him without restraining him in any way. He had parents that gave him wings while making sure he did not fall. So feeling this safe was something new. Even Taiga had never given him such a feeling. He did not understand the difference. Why was it better with Murasakibara?

He was still contemplating this while he listened to Coach Araki explain the preliminaries. There would be 66 schools competing to be allowed to join the Interhigh quarterfinals. They were not allowed to lose even one game. There were seven serious contenders in their block and a few other schools seemed to have added foreign students which might prove difficult. The games would be held in Sapporo and the first string would get a week without school to play those games. If they won they would get a long weekend for the finals.

Sweet! One week without school sounded mightily fine. As expected Murasakibara and him were starters, so they would get the whole trip for free. While they others went back to their training Coach Araki called for him. He went over and greeted her with a wide grin.

"You seem excited about the Interhigh," she said with a indulgent smile.

"I sure am! Our team is strong, we can take on anyone."

"We'll see about that. Himuro-kun, you know that the school pays for this trip, right?" He nodded.

"Normally this is a trip for about fifteen Alphas and myself. I never had an Omega in the team before. So the school pays my room and group rooms for the team. I don't think it a good idea to let you room with the boys, so I am at a loss what to do. I asked the principal and he gave me special allowance for one double-room. Now the question is if that is possible or if I should put more pressure on the principal."

"I'm okay with rooming with Murasakibara. He knows how to keep his hands to himself," Tatsuya said full of conviction.

"Are you sure? He seems to listen to you without fault but our boys ... well, sometimes they do unexpected things. He is an Alpha after all. And I don't think any of us could stop him if he put his head into doing something. We have some Betas on this team, don't you thin-"

"No, thank you. I feel safe with Murasakibara. You don't have to worry about me."

Coach Araki looked at him for a few seconds before she nodded and said: "I'll inform your parents about your decision. They have to give their consent as well."

"I'll talk to my mom about it," Tatsuya promised.

"Then I'll call her tomorrow." She looked at the training players. "Five more laps." He took that as his cue to leave.

"Hey, mom."

"Tatsuya-darling!" His mother sounded enthusiastic. "Has the world come to an end? Or what makes you call in the middle of the week?"

"I wanted to tell you that my coach will call you tomorrow about the trip to the Interhigh preliminaries."

"Of course you can go. But you know that already, don't you? Were will you go and when?" As always she fully supported his basketball career.

"We'll go to Sapporo for a week the one after next. If we win there, we'll go to the Interhigh finals."

"Splendid. Keep me informed how you do. I wish you the best of luck. Is that one

player coming with you that you told me about?"

"Yeah, Murasakibara is coming too. We are both starters. He's our center, I'm the shooting guard now. Coach Araki is going to call you about him. It was decided that I am going to room with him," he explained to his mother.

"Don't worry, dear, we can pay a bit extra for a single room, don't worry-"

"No, mom, you don't need to. I'm fine with rooming with him."

There was a moment of silence before his mother asked in a suspicious tone: "Is there something I should know, Tatsuya?"

"Not at all, mom. He's a decent guy. I like being around him and he makes me feel safe. He would never force me or anything. So I have no problem to room in with him."

"But he is an Alpha, isn't he?" His mother did not sound convinced.

"Yeah, he is. Nearly everyone is, you know that. The whole school is full of Alphas. I'll wear a collar if it makes you feel safe," he promised.

"It's not my safety I'm worried about, you know? I am the last to say that every Alpha is a beast but he's sixteen, right? Sixteen-year-olds aren't known for their perfect control over their hormones. I don't want you to accidentally end up with someone and regret it later."

"Same here, mom. I'll wear a collar, don't worry." He rolled his eyes.

"And take a package of condoms with you."

"I'm not going to sleep with him!," he shouted before looking around that no one had heard him. How embarrassing! Good thing that there was no one around.

"You can never be sure about that, believe me. Just pack some, okay? I do know you aren't a virgin, don't even try to lie to me," his mother scolded him gently, "you are really too damn attractive for your own good."

"If you know that much, you should know I am capable of protecting myself," Tatsuya sullenly answered. But maybe it wasn't such a bad idea. While he wouldn't sleep with Murasakibara, they were going to a tournament full of muscled Alphas. Who knew who he might meet there. "You're so embarrassing, mom."

"I only want your best. Now what shall I tell your coach?"

"That it's okay that I am rooming in with an Alpha and can take responsibility for myself."

"We'll see about that. If you're pregnant, don't be afraid to call me. Youthful bravado would be unnecessary in such a situation. Don't even dare to start forging my signature."

"So, so embarrassing!" He shook his head. He took everything back, his mom was a demon.

"I love you too!" She blew him a kiss over the phone.

He simply ended the call.

Tatsuya was given the message that teacher Tsueda wanted to speak to him, so he went to the teacher's lounge three days before their trip to Sapporo. The teacher asked him if he felt up to taking some responsibility for Murasakibara and managing his spending money for sweets, so that he could have some everyday. He would normally ask their coach but if Tatsuya spend every free minute with him, it made more sense to give him the responsibility. Of course he agreed. By know he knew how to speak with Murasakibara. They had made countless trips to supermarkets and confectioneries where he had to talk his friend out of trying to buy more than he had the money for. These last few weeks he had even been able to explain a bit about saving up money to get things he would not be able to buy with his daily allowance.

Murasakibara had been very proud of his strawberry cake which he had needed to save up for for three days. The sweetest moment had been when the normally very greedy giant had offered him a spoonful of cake.

So he got seven days worth of daily allowances for sweets (their teacher was entrusted with the general food money) and a thumbs-up from teacher Tsueda. He helped Murasakibara with the packing and thereby found out that his friend lived in a dorm with supervisors. The young man had to prepare his clothes for the next day every evening. There was a daily plan that included brushing their teeth twice a day and showering once every morning. Murasakibara had his own personal plan in which he noted down the fulfilled tasks (which were written down with pictures beside them). Those plans were controlled every evening and if the boys did not fulfill their plans their allowances were cut. Tatsuya packed seven copies of the plan and told Murasakibara that he would control them and give him his allowance depending on how well he did. Murasakibara pouted about that. Later he asked the dorm supervisor about Murasakibara's quirks and was told that his friend often forgot toothpaste when he brushed his teeth. So the supervisor controlled his breath.

Well, teacher Tsueda had told him that his friend was still a four-year-old in his head. Of course he tried to weasel out of brushing his teeth and putting his room into order. He was unable to see the bigger picture. So Tatsuya was not surprised that Murasakibara had problems with following basic hygienic rules. He was rather surprised about the competence with which the dorms handled that. He would not have thought of controlling someone's breath or making a picture plan. Because Murasakibara had some of those: One picture plan how to correctly brush his teeth (laminated of course), one how to shower (laminated as well), one how to dress at which temperature (he would have to guess every morning, he did not have a thermometer on him). Tatsuya promised to return on the morning of their departure to pack those as well. When the supervisor happened to walk by, he even told Tatsuya to let Murasakibara pack for their way back and only supervise his packing. The giant grumbled about that and got scolded for letting his friend pack in the first place.

So they started well equipped into their trip. Tatsuya was sure that he had packed everything Murasakibara would need (including a plush panda for homesickness), even if that meant that his friend was carrying a bag twice as large as everyone else's. As expected that did not hinder him at all. Tatsuya had to hold back from asking if his friend would not only carry his bag but himself as well. Most likely he could. But he knew it was his Omega side speaking. Of course he would not ask his giant friend to carry him around. But it was tempting. No, Murasakibara was not boyfriend material, he should refrain from thinking about him like this. He was happy to look out of the window on the train and he followed Tatsuya step by step wherever he went, trusting him to lead the correct way. The Omega allowed him to buy some snacks at the train station for that. From there they took a bus to their hotel and finally arrived after some hours. Tatsuya felt bored out of his skull while Murasakibara seemed completely content with being dragged around the country. Gone was the dull laziness, there was a spark in his gaze. He seemed to enjoy traveling. Maybe. The spark was actually rather recent.

"Tatsuya, you and Murasakibara have room four," Coach Araki told them.

"Huh?," Fukui asked, their rather punk-looking point-guard. He was the only third-year Alpha who wasn't mentally disabled. Aside from holding inspirational speeches he was more of a captain than Omura but their power forward fit the needed image more. "You're rooming together?"

"I need someone to protect me." Tatsuya winked at Fukui, knowing he would get the hint about who was looking after whom here.

"Oh, yeah, sure." The other nodded and looked at Murasakibara. "It's your responsibility that our princess stays unharmed."

Tatsuya would have punched him if he had not used the address Ohime-sama. Like this it sounded like a compliment instead of an insult. It made the rest of their team nod in understanding. Only those intelligent enough to notice that their exchange made no sense furrowed their brows – the nerd first-year and a surprisingly normal looking second year who were on the bench.

Tatsuya turned to his charge and found that one looking at him with surprisingly serious eyes. He swallowed his laugh and asked in a slightly cautious tone: "Shall we look for our room?"

Murasakibara just nodded but seemed to continue to study him. Or maybe he thought really hard. He sometimes looked like this when he couldn't decide which snacks to choose. He followed his friend up the stairs to a room that contained ... a bunk bed.

Tatsuya stared at the ugly thing right out of a school nightmare. Of course their school would not pay a first-class hotel but a youth hostel with bunk beds? Really? They were the reigning regional champions, did that count for nothing? He checked the bathroom and found a tube of sixty by sixty centimeters. Was this a joke?

"You smell unhappy," Murasakibara remarked. "Why?"

"The room is so cheap." Tatsuya sighed. "I was expecting two single beds and a proper tube, not this ... well, it's tiny. You won't even fit in the bed."

His friend just shrugged his shoulders and said: "It's always like that. Everything is too small."

"Well, this is too small even for me." He looked at the bunk bed. "I guess you want the lower one?"

"I crashed one when I was twelve. I am not allowed on the top bed," Murasakibara explained to him.

"I'd rather not have you crushing me, yes." Tatsuya looked up at the higher bed. "No other choice, I guess."

"I could sleep on the floor." The other man offered.

"Nah, you would wake with kinks in your back. We need you on the court. I'll survive." He hung his jacket and opened his bag to begin unpacking. "Let's begin with doing the beds."

Murasakibara nodded and got out the linen. Tatsuya proudly watched him from the corner of his eye doing all those mundane tasks. Someone must have spent a great deal of time teaching all those everyday tasks to his friend. Was it his mother? Or had he been sent to special institutes and schools all his life? When had been the last time he lived at home? Teiko and Yosen were both boarding schools. Had his elementary school been one as well? How did his mother cope with her son being like this? Was she able to show love or could she only show regret?

Somehow he did not dare to ask.