

# Ocean Avenue

Von Makikolgami

## Inhaltsverzeichnis

<b>Kapitel 1: Back Home</b>	2
<b>Kapitel 2: Kids</b>	7
<b>Kapitel 3: Anywhere But Here</b>	13
<b>Kapitel 4: One Year, Six Months</b>	19
<b>Kapitel 5: Rough Landing, Holly</b>	24
<b>Kapitel 6: Words, Hands, Hearts</b>	29
<b>Kapitel 7: Light Up The Sky</b>	36
<b>Kapitel 8: Sorry, Try Again</b>	42
<b>Kapitel 9: Twentythree</b>	49
<b>Kapitel 10: Drifting</b>	54
<b>Kapitel 11: Space Travel</b>	59
<b>Kapitel 12: Waiting Game</b>	65
<b>Kapitel 13: Something of Value</b>	72
<b>Kapitel 14: Grey</b>	73
<b>Kapitel 15: Sureshot</b>	79
<b>Kapitel 16: Only One</b>	84
<b>Kapitel 17: Inside Out</b>	90
<b>Kapitel 18: Way Out</b>	95
<b>Kapitel 19: How I Go</b>	96

## Kapitel 1: Back Home

It had been almost exactly 20 years that Youichi Hiruma had last set a foot into Narita airport. He stretched and yawned, feeling his joints crack from sleeping much too long – over 6 hours, longer than he usually slept – in a position that was not exactly healthy, although those seats in the first class were definitely better than anything business class could offer. Sometimes it came in handy that he did not have to concern himself with financial matters.

Shouldering his bag that hardly passed as hand luggage, he made his way down the stairs that led him to the passport control, frowning as he read the sign above. "Welcome home!" was written in big Hiragana letters, obviously directed at all Japanese citizens who returned to their home country after a long and tedious travel to the rest of the world. Somehow, the English "Welcome to Japan!" did not sound as warm as the native version.

Hiruma ignored the sign though, wondering what had led him back to his home country when all it held for him were memories, most of them tinted in a painful emotion called regret and envy. Not that he would ever admit he felt something like envy to the ones he envied, but it was true that he felt it nevertheless.

Checking his watch, he readjusted it to Japanese Standard time, and walked into the queue of the passport control. As expected, it went quicker than that of the foreigners, still Hiruma knew that it would take a little longer with him.

"Your passport please," the officer said mechanically, glancing quickly into it, staring at the picture for a heartbeat longer than he did with the person before he looked up, the frown prominent on his forehead. Hiruma gave him the most innocent look he could muster, blowing a bubble that popped just when the officer closed his passport and handed it back to him.

'Must have been the eyebrows,' Hiruma pondered, 'or the hair? Well, it could also have been the ears...'

"Please renew your passport as soon as you can. It's been expired for over ten years..."

For a moment, Hiruma was caught off-guard, but it only took him half a heartbeat to cover it up. "I will see to it as soon as possible."

"Very well," the officer said and handed him back his passport. "You may pass. Welcome home."

Hiruma snorted, already too far away to really shout back an answer. As fast as he could he went to the vast place where one could reclaim his luggage. As soon as his other bag arrived, he shouldered it on his other shoulder and made his way over to the customs, where he first wanted to take the green route – meaning, he had

nothing declare – but as he saw a vaguely familiar face waiting at an empty queue, he changed his plans quickly.

"Do you have anything to declare?" the man asked as he put down his back with a considerable clunking sound.

Hiruma grinned. Of course the officer would not care to look up at him, none of these idiots ever did. Why should they? They would never see the person again afterwards, so why over-exercise their brains by memorizing the face in front of them?

"I have weapons of mass destruction," he admitted openly, sounding like an average person.

"I see," the man mumbled and opened the zipper of the blond's bag. Then he frowned, obviously recognizing something about the other's voice, just to look up with wide eyes into an even wider grin.

"Hi-Hiruma-san?" the officer gasped, making the blond laugh throatily.

"Yeah, it's me," he grinned. "Don't look all surprised, even I have to go through customs."

"Yes, well, but... You see... I thought..." Tatsuo Ishimaru stammered, making Hiruma's ears twitch in curiosity.

"What did you think?" he asked, content with seeing the other twitch.

"Well, when you... when you disappeared, we thought... well, we didn't think you went abroad..."

Hiruma shrugged, looking away with a poker face. "I never disappeared. I just went to study abroad."

"But, you never told anyone, not even-"

"Not even who?"

"Well, you know... We've all been worried that something might have happened to you. But when we didn't hear anything about your whereabouts we just-"

"-assumed I was alright? 'che, it's funny how easy to predict all of you are," Hiruma snorted. "So, do I have to declare anything now or what?"

"Ah, um," Ishimaru said, looking down at the numerous rifles and guns inside the smaller bag, "well, in a case like this I, um, have to call my superior, but well..."

"Well...?" Hiruma repeated, his eyebrows rising up high.

Resolutely, Ishimaru closed the bag and handed it back to the former Quarterback

with a crooked smile. "Welcome home."

Taking the bag from the other's hands, Hiruma smiled back. "Thank you."

~\*~

The first thing he did after he bought his tickets for the express train was to sit down and check his stuff on his laptop. His eyes flickered over an old folder that had made it onto each and every computer he had used over the past twenty years, a folder filled with old memories, memories that would trigger emotions he would rather not feel, so he left it where it was and skimmed through his messages.

He wrote a few short messages afterwards, slightly bored because nothing had really happened. He didn't bother changing the system time, he just looked at the date.

April first.

He grinned.

Nobody would believe Ishimaru if he told anybody that he had met somebody from the past. All of them though think that it was just an April Fool's joke.

On the other hand, it meant that it was *his* birthday the next day. No matter how much he tried to forget it, he always remembered *his* birthday, even in the last minute. He ground his teeth because he remembered it again this year, but did what he always did when he remembered this particular day: He opened that folder filled with emotions.

While the previews loaded though, he decided that he did not need pictures and videos anymore. He shut down his laptop without taking the time to close that folder again and decided to take a slightly different route than he had initially planned. So, he did not change trains in Tokyo Main Station, but got off a few stations before and changed trains so that he was taken to a place that he had loved 25 years ago and hoped that it still existed.

Maybe he could get over what had happened 20 years there, too...

~\*~FLASHBACK~\*~

"...Why Anezaki?" Hiruma asked, his mask so thick that Musashi knew he was pouting.

Snorting in mild amusement, the older looking young man tried to explain it the best way he knew. "Well, it did not work out between the two of you, you know? She said you just... didn't match."

"Yeah sure, it doesn't look good on her reputation that she dated the guy she loathed most during her first two High School years in her last year and when she entered university," the blond muttered bitterly, still nursing his hurt pride for being dumped by that girl all these years ago.

"That and... you know. You two are just too different," Musashi added, wishing he had not said that when an ice-cold digger hit him through Hiruma's eyes.

"But you two match? Is that what you want to say?"

"Well, um, that is what she says..." Musashi admitted sheepishly. He was still puzzled himself that this thing he and Mamori had went so well, even over years now.

"You know, when I first heard you were dating her, I shot the person and told them that it was a bad idea lying to me, but he claimed to be telling the truth..."

Musashi sighed. The time Hiruma had found out about that was worse when he had left High School to help out in his father's business. They had not talked for months, let alone looked at each other until he had finally enough and punched Hiruma in the face. The fact that Mamori had yelled at him for letting his best friend become a complete wreck had helped a lot to harden his resolve and his fist. Afterwards, there had been this silent hostility from the blond to the girl, but things had gotten back to a relative normality.

Until today.

When Hiruma learned that Musashi would be marrying Anezaki in June.

As soon as those words had left the carpenter's mouth, Hiruma had put on a poker face so indistinguishable that he thought that not even a hammer with a diamond tip would be able to get through.

"And now you're telling me you're going to marry her?" Hiruma snorted. "Tell me it's an early April Fool's day joke."

"I hardly ever tell jokes around you. You don't like if somebody makes a joke on your costs, remember?"

There was the pout again.

"Besides, it's not like I could have you the way you want it-"

"Bullshit!" Hiruma burst out, "You could have had me all the way you wanted if you really and truly *wanted* me."

Musashi sighed. He had expected that outburst. But he also knew that Hiruma knew that this was not true. "You know it's not like that. I have plans for my father's business and you know-"

"Fuck it, you're sprouting so much bullshit these days," Hiruma laughed and – most surprisingly – it did not sound cold or harsh, but warm and gentle, like he was talking to a child that did not understand the ways of grown-ups. "It's not your father's business anymore; it's your fucking business now. And it's been like that for the past

fucking 3 years, ever since you father died."

Musashi stiffened. Hiruma had always been good at pointing out the obvious. Nevertheless, it stung.

"And it could be so much *more* already, if you just-

"What?" Musashi interrupted, his own voice stern, reprimanding Hiruma like he always did when he thought that the blond went to far. "Are you telling me what could have been if you helped me? I'm doing a fine job myself, I think, thank you very much."

Hiruma stared at him, eyes shooting daggers at the carpenter. Reading between the lines, he knew that Musashi told him not to press farther, he had done that before and he had not moved either. His will was just as strong as that of the blond and when he said something could not be done, the blond had to live with it. That was his power over the blond.

"...Fine," Hiruma said, taking a sip from his coffee.

Musashi sighed, glad that the discussion seemed to have ended with that. It still felt a bit strange that Hiruma gave in so quickly, so he tried to clear things up a bit more.

"You... know how I feel. About you," he said, not able to say the words he wanted to say though, "it's just that the society we live in, that I want to be successful in, is not ready... to acknowledge what you want."

Hiruma snorted, setting his mug down so loudly that he broke off the handle as he pushed himself up to a stand. "Too bad for you."

With no further word, he left the table and the café, not caring that Musashi had to pick up the tab for him, too. That bastard deserved it, for being an insensitive ass.

~\*~END FLASHBACK~\*~

The blond remembered the conversation with a frown, getting off the train at Deimon Station, where he did not take the familiar steps towards his old High School, but into the other direction. His steps led him quickly to that old café where almost all his most sacred memories came from, where everything had happened that had been a milestone in his life. The only place where they brewed coffee that he liked.

Almost fondly he looked out at the old, worn-out sign that said: "Ocean Avenue."

Time to start things over.

## Kapitel 2: Kids

The alarm went off at exactly 7:00, but when Takekura Gen awoke, he was alone in his bed. To make things worse, he had a hard-on so bad that he was wondering what he had dreamt before. He remembered only holding somebody in his dreams, sleeping peacefully in a too small bed, nothing like the queen-size bed that he shared with his wife.

Groggily he sat up, rubbed over his face and decided to take a really cold shower. Maybe that would help him both to wake up and get rid of his problem south. Feet searching for slippers, he padded over to the bathroom and shed his pajamas, dropping them somewhere on the floor. He could take care of them later. Raking a hand through his tousled black hair, he stepped into the shower and let the icy water rain down on him. As soon as he was able to open his eyes without difficulties, he heated up the water and started to wash his hair and body. He continued to ignore his slowly dying hard-on until it was completely back to normal just to get out of the shower as soon as he was done with his washing.

Towelng his hair, he went back to the sleeping room and went to look for some boxers. When he did not find the ones he was looking for, he gave up and resorted to being a typical husband: Clad only with the towel around his waist, he yelled down towards the kitchen: "Honey! Where are my favorite boxer shorts?"

"They're on your dressing chair, honey! With your favorite dress shirt, suit and tie!" a female voice yelled upstairs, while the smell of freshly brewed coffee slowly made its way to the man's nose.

He inhaled deeply, thanking the gods for such a considerate wife and went to the chair standing at the foot end of his side of the bed, where he found the items she mentioned. Smiling as he saw the little red bats on the otherwise black boxer shorts, he thanked the gods that he had not gained much weight over the years, else than other people he knew that were of his age. Of course, he had grown a bit more stomach compared to the time when he was twenty years younger, but not too much. Also, he was still able to lift the same weights as twenty years ago, which came in handy when he decided to help out on one site or the other.

Those occasions became less and less though and nowadays he visited the sites that Takekura Constructions was working on only seldom. He saw that as a sign of success, that this expansion from the rather small business his father had built to a big corporate group with other small businesses – the one that Tamahachi had built up, for example – had been the best idea he had ever had. It also meant that the money his family had spent on his studies had not been in vain, even though he had told them he would take over the business as soon as he was done with High School. But everybody had pursued him to study, saying that "it would be a waste of his intelligence", if he did not go. Thus he enrolled at the Tokyo University together with his now wife and... Hiruma.

Gen stopped moving, right in the middle of tying his tie, remembering what he had dreamt of.

~\*~FLASHBACK~\*~

It were the days after he had come back to High School in his second year. After he had left for over a year and half, giving up everything personal to help out in his father's business. He knew that the one that had been hurt most thanks to his betrayal was not he himself, not matter how much he wanted to believe it, but Hiruma.

While trying not to let it show outwardly, one look to the blond's eyes told Musashi everything that he needed to know then. Hiruma missed him, thus avoided him and thus missed him even more. And Musashi let him, because in his self-torture he had thought that it would be best for him and the blond if they did not see each other anymore. He despised that Hiruma seemed to seek solace somewhere else, but he did not say a word. In fact, he ignored it the best way he could and that was by working hard.

But then, quicker than he thought he would, he was kicking balls again, thanks to that monkey-ish boy and the one with the fast legs. Still, he tried not to think about American Football anymore but failed miserably. In the end, he admitted that he missed Football and Hiruma more than anything in his life and came running back to both.

It was hard not to pull Hiruma into his arms on the field, right in the middle of the match against the Seibu Wild Gunmen. He rectified that after the match though, and Hiruma being Hiruma was not happy with it until they had made up properly in the shower afterwards. And in the locker room. And the toilet... and his room, his bed, his bathroom and almost everywhere in his flat. In the end, they had fallen into an almost comatose sleep, the blond holding onto him like his life depended on it – and it probably did.

Musashi on the other hand was happy to hold the other tight the entire night, waking up with him in his arms afterwards. And Hiruma sleeping soundly in his arms was a memory he would never forget, no matter how many other happy memories he had made over the years.

~\*~END FLASHBACK~\*~

Takekura Gen cursed his affection to that memory. The moment he had recalled it, he felt his hard-on growing again and even though he was able to will it away, his skin kept tingling as if he was still a High School boy madly in love.

It also was not so much the memory of having sex with Hiruma that had turned him on, but more the fact how it felt, sleeping with the blond in his arms, the trust and gratitude he was rewarded with by the blond still being with him in the morning. Not even the memory of holding his first-born child managed to take that away. It came in the spot, but he did not cherish it more than that memory, for what reasons ever.

Sighing deeply, Gen finished tying his tie and put on the jacket of his suit and went back into the bathroom, where he brushed his hair out of his face, fixing it with some gel. He had shaved the evening before, so that he was now sporting his characteristic stubble again, as he would for the rest of the day. After all, it was his birthday, and what would he do, looking any different than any other day?

Finally done with his morning ritual, he went downstairs, just to be greeted by his wife and the youngest of his children.

"Mmmm, that's yummy, isn't it, Sachiko-chan? Yes, it is," Mamori chanted as she fed the little girl some pulp. The baby girl giggled, laughed and clapped her little hands together, obviously happy with whatever her mother was giving to her.

Gen smiled, helping himself to a mug of steaming black coffee as he ruffled the little girl's ginger curls.

"Good morning, you two. Have you slept well?" he asked.

"Oh, / did," Mamori answered, a little sourly maybe, "until this little lady here decided that I had to change her diapers about 2 hours ago. Isn't it so, you dirty little girl?"

As an answer, Sachiko only giggled and wrapped her little hands around the plastic spoon Mamori was holding. The woman shook her head with a smile and continued to feed her.

Gen snorted softly, now knowing why he woke up alone this morning. Also, he knew why he dreamt of Hiruma so suddenly, because he only seemed to do that when Mamori was not sleeping next to him.

"Oh! I almost forgot about it!" Mamori suddenly said and handed Sachiko the spoon, who tried to eat the pulp herself, but rather smeared it all over her face than put it into her mouth. Watching her from a safe distance, Gen shook his head with an amused smile and wondered why all of his children rather wanted to play with their food than eat. Or maybe all children did it? He did not quite know.

"Hey, I dreamt of Hiruma just before I woke up," Gen said while his wife checked the refrigerator.

"Oh, really? What was it about?" she asked, putting something big onto the counter next to her, kicking the door of the fridge shut.

"Good ol' times," Gen answered, finally taking the spoon from Sachiko's hands to feed her properly. "I'd give you details, but we have children in the room."

Mamori laughed as she lit a match. "As if Sachiko would understand what you said."

"Who knows? Don't want to spoil her such a young age, huh?" Gen said, cleaning her mouth with the spoon as well as he could.

"Well, maybe it's a sign or something? You don't dream very often of him, do you? And every time you do, something happens," Mamori suggested, just before turning around to her husband with a large cake in her arms. "Happy Birthday!"

Gen's eyes turned big like saucers. "Did you make that for me?"

"Yes, I did bake it yesterday and put some icing on it while you were in the bathroom last night... It's not completely dried yet though, I think," she said, looking unhappy about that.

Putting the spoon down, the man stood up and kissed his wife on the cheek. "Thank you very much. I bet it's tasty."

"It better is! I put a lot of effort into it... and it's your favorite!"

"Hm, Chocolate Cake..."

"Did I hear the word 'cake'?" a cheeky voice said from the entrance.

"Youichi!" Mamori greeted her oldest son, "Good morning!"

"Good morning, mom," the blond young man said, kissing her on the other cheek. "Is that Dad's cake? It looks perfect!"

"Yes, it's mine, and nobody will get a piece of it, unless they ask me nicely, understood, young man?" Gen grinned.

"Hey! I always ask nicely, dad," Youichi protested. "Happy 45th Birthday, by the way."

"Don't remind me how old I am, please?" his father winced. "It's bad enough that I will hear it for the rest of the day."

"What should I say? I'll be turning 20 in a month, I'll be old then! Not a Teen anymore, you know?" the young man protested, receiving nothing but uncomprehending looks from his parents. "Don't look at me like that! That's... that's bad, you know?"

"...says the one, who's practically the second in command of Takekura constructions," Gen chuckled, patting his son's shoulder. "Don't forget your studies though, okay?"

"Of course I won't," Youichi pouted. "I only have lectures this afternoon though and thought I'd do something for *my* business until then. I'd not be missing much anyways if I didn't go."

"I know," Gen sighed. "Better than you think I do. But do that for your mother and me, please? It'll make the future easier for you."

"I don't know what this has got to do with anything, but I'll go anyways. This way I'll get to see my friends," Youichi said as he helped himself to his own mug of coffee,

putting some whitener into it.

"...good morning," another voice said, followed by the sound of feet shuffling on the kitchen floor. A tired lump fell down onto the chair next to Youichi, just to let his head fall down on the table.

Mamori sighed. "Takeshi, if you did not play video games until late at night you would not be this tired every morning."

"Ye~s," the ten-year-old boy mumbled, barely able to lift up his head again.

"...Why do I even bother? You won't stop playing anyways," Mamori sighed as she placed a bowl of cereals in front of him. "...Haven't you forgotten anything?"

"Hm? Oh," Takeshi mumbled and tried to sit up, but he only managed to roll his head around so that he was looking at his father, who sat down on the other side of the table, snatching a toast from the basket in the middle of the table. "Happy Birthday, dad. Hope you have a nice day and such..."

"Please, cover your mouth, I don't think your dad wants to see what you ate last night," Mamori reprimanded the boy, making Gen chuckle softly.

"You don't need to make him say that. Let him wake up a little first," he said, suddenly noticing the missing set on the table. "Where is Ken?"

"Already at school, you know how devoted he is to his training," Mamori explained. "He left about 5 minutes to 7."

"Just before I woke up," Gen snorted bemusedly. "Well, I'll see him tonight, right?"

"Yes! Our little family party tonight! I already prepared the meat," Mamori beamed. "Just the best! Oh, and for dessert there will be creampuffs from Kariya, you know, they still make the best in town and-"

"I know you'll do your best to make it a night to remember," Gen smiled as he finished his toast and his coffee. "I'll miss my secretary today."

"Aw, I'll be back tomorrow," Mamori smiled fondly. "But you understand that I need this day off-"

"Of course I do. I just said that I'll be a little lonely, answering all these calls on my own."

"You'll survive it, I'm sure," his wife winked. "But you better get going now, or you'll be late."

"Hm? Oh, you're right," Gen mumbled after he glanced at the clock. "Well, I'll be going now. I'll see you later. Youichi, work hard for your studies, understood?"

"Yes, dad!" the blond mumbled, chewing on his second toast. "I always do, you know that."

"Of course I do," his father said as he grabbed his briefcase. On his way out he ruffled Takeshi's hair. "And you young man, do what your mother says. Sitting in front of the computer for a long time is not good for your eyes, understood?"

"Yes, dad," the little, black-haired boy mumbled, his face half-hidden by the bowl of cereals.

His wife kissed him good-bye on the cheek. "Have a nice day, honey."

"I hope it will be full of surprises," Gen said, his eyes twinkling slightly with mischief, making his wife shake his head. "See you tonight."

"Be careful!"

"I will!"

Takekura Gen did not know which surprises the day held for him. It would be the biggest surprise of his life.

## Kapitel 3: Anywhere But Here

Youichi Hiruma ordered his sixth coffee in a row, typing away on his laptop, too busy to notice the world around him. If he would though, he might have noticed the pair of big brown eyes from the new-arrival that stared at him in utter disbelief from the entrance of the café.

Soon, he felt the little hairs on the back of his neck stand on edge though and, disturbed by that, he looked up with a frown, just to meet these two incredulous eyes. As a result, his own two eyes became big as saucers.

It was the one person he least wanted to see from all the people in Japan at that very moment.

~\*~

Gen Takekura tried to go through his day with the same patience as every day, but with all the calls of people that wished him a Happy Birthday, the myriads of presents that arrived at his office and the various invitations to go out and eat with business partners, it was near impossible. At 14:00, he decided that he would get nothing done and devoted himself completely to answering the phone that would not stop ringing.

Around half an hour later, when even his mother had called him at work even though he had told her that she should call him in the evening, when he was home again, he decided to call it a day.

To celebrate his birthday though, he decided to reward himself with a coffee and a snack before he went home to his family. Sometimes, he needed a break from all of them, no matter how much he loved them all. They, and especially his oldest son, reminded him just how different his life would have been had he listened to his heart over 20 years ago. It would have been a lot more difficult than it had been the way he chose in the end.

Maybe he was a masochist, but he returned at least once a week to the place where his life had a crucial turning point. He always told himself that it was just for the coffee, but that was not completely true. The real reason why he returned to the café that he used to go to during his School time thanks to Hiruma, were the memories that seemed to get alive at this place. But they still made the best coffee Gen had ever tasted, even after so many years, therefore that was also a reason.

Thus, after a rather long ride with a few public trains, Gen stood in front of the café that held almost as much memories for him as the twenty years of living with his family did. For a moment, he hesitated to step inside, having a funny feeling in his stomach, but then he shrugged it off and opened the door, looking around the familiar furniture and decoration, just to let his eyes fall upon a too familiar mop of

spiky blond hair...

For a moment, he thought that he was imagining things. However, the picture stayed the same, even when he blinked. Then he tried to think that it was just some weird cosplayer, who dressed up as one of these Visual-K-musicians that all looked the same to him. Some of them even more, but when that person looked up from his laptop, he was sure that he did not imagine things.

"Hiruma," he breathed as he saw the other's shocked expression. Obviously, the blond had recognized him as well.

Slowly, as if in slow motion, he walked over to the blond's table where he asked if he could take a seat.

"It's not like I can stop if you do," Hiruma grumbled, taking off a delicate looking pair of glasses. Obviously, he needed them when he worked on the computer for a longer time, because now seemed to be shutting his laptop down. From close on, Gen was able to see that Hiruma did not change much. His hair was still blond, maybe a little shorter than he remembered it, but it stood up anyways, his eyes were still green, even though he suspected him to be wearing contacts most of the time. The ears were still big and pointed, two loops in each of them and his mouth was still as big as it used to be. Hiruma looked matured though, older, but what else would you expect from somebody who was Gen's age? He had some wrinkles in the middle of his brows, around his mouth and mostly on his forehead.

Still, it was unmistakably the Hiruma Gen knew since his Junior High School days in all his glory grumpiness. The man's heart skipped at least a beat or two.

"It's been a very long time," he said softly, ignoring the hostility he felt from Hiruma.

"Obviously not long enough for I still remember your face," the blond grumbled, looking outside a nearby window and thus avoiding Gen's eyes.

The man snorted. "Well, it's a good thing then that your face will always stick out in the crowd. Makes it easier for me to find you."

"Hey, you were the one who broke up, now *don't* try any of this romantic shit, understood? It won't work with me."

But Gen knew that it did. Hiruma was talking in more than one sentence to him, which was a good start. He should play Hiruma's game though to regain a bit of their old trust.

"I know," he mumbled with a smile, pausing as the waitress put down his order in front of him. "How long has it been now?"

~\*~FLASHBACK~\*~

"We're going to marry."

"What? Because she's pregnant? You know how easy it is to get rid of the child-"

"We're too old for that. Besides, it doesn't make a lot of a difference. I just... I don't want the child to be born without their parents being married."

"Che. You're a hopeless romantic. Ever was, ever be."

"You never complained before."

~\*~END FLASHBACK~\*~

"It's been 19 years, 363 days, 23 hours and-" Hiruma said in a bored tone after he took a look at his watch.

Gen frowned. He did not keep track of the dates just like Hiruma did, but he remembered that day as clearly as if it had been yesterday. And something about the blond's calculation was a little off.

"Wait, what day do you think we have today?" he asked, receiving a lifted eyebrow.

"What's so important about it? It's not like today's a special day or something-"

"No, it is important. Because we've seen each other-"

"-on your 25th birthday. Yeah," Hiruma finished the sentence for him. "And your birthday is tomorrow. So, nothing special, unless you think that April Fools' is a special day... What?"

"You're wrong... it's not the first today. It's already the second," Gen explained.

"...Wait, that would mean that..."

"Yes, it's my birthday today."

"..."

"..."

"That's a joke, right?"

Gen shook his head, "I wish it was, but, no. It's the truth. April Fools' was yesterday."

Hiruma suddenly looked like he wanted to bang his head against the table. "Shit."

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The moment Musashi had entered the café, Hiruma knew exactly what he wanted to do, but he was more than sure that the other man would not agree to "Hey, let's skip the entire talking and just go to the next love hotel, if you know what I mean." Unfortunately.

Contrary to what he had said, it had been such a long time that he had forgotten the effect Musashi had on him. First there came this hunger, where he wanted to tip off the clothes of the stronger-looking man and then there was the calm. Not that he was not calm before on the outside, it was just that Musashi's proximity seemed to give him an inner calm that he was never able to get when he was alone. Primarily, his hunger had to be satisfied and when he was denied that little bit, he could never reach the calm.

The fact that he had lost an entire day by crossing the International Date Line without him noticing made things even worse. Because now he had to deal with Musashi on his freaking birthday and while he did not care about these kinds of days at all, it meant that it had been indeed exactly 20 years since they last saw each other.

Hiruma gritted his teeth and suppressed a sigh. Really, it would be so much easier to just leave this place without saying another word and go to the nearest love hotel. However, from the look on Musashi's face that was really no option. The man looked like he was bursting with things he wanted to tell him, all the stuff that had happened during the past 20 years. And those were the last things Hiruma wanted to hear.

He suppressed another sigh and forced out a "Happy Birthday, then," taking a moment to take in the other's features. Surprisingly, Musashi had not changed much over the years; he still looked like the old man he looked like when he was 17. A few more wrinkles maybe, mostly around his eyes and mouth, indicating that he smiled a lot, but also a few on his forehead, meaning that he had to deal with a lot of crap that gave him a headache or two on an almost regular basis. His hair was still black, although a few grey hairs were showing now that Hiruma looked closer. Nothing like Musashi's father though, who had been completely white at 45.

"Thank you," Musashi smiled as he took a sip from his coffee.

Inwardly Hiruma calculated how fast he could leave the café if he really wanted to.

"So, how have you been? I didn't hear you take over the world so I guessed that something was not happening the way you wanted it to be."

At least two minutes. Too long to make it without any explanation. But the way this conversation was leading made a quick departure necessary.

"Look, I have to check into my hotel until 17:00 and that's in less than an hour and I have to go through half of Tokyo to-" Hiruma explained lazily, not in the mood to make up a better excuse. Musashi would have been able to look through it anyways.

"You didn't look like you wanted to leave soon when I came here," the man said matter-of-factly as he took a bite from his sandwich.

"...So what? I looked at the clock now and-"

"But if you booked your room from the first, and you didn't come yesterday, they have probably given away your room to somebody else," Musashi argued, looking like he had a plan.

Hiruma frowned and shot a glare into his direction. Why did he have to make this mistake in the first place?

"That's none of your concern," he growled. "I can find a room anywhere if I want to."

"So you still have no problem getting money? That's nice to hear," Musashi said softly, before he looked up from his plate. "Look, we have a guest room at our house and I know that Mamori would love to see you and-"

"So, you two are still married?" Hiruma interrupted him, wanting to confirm that fact.

Musashi blinked, slightly taken aback by the suddenness of these words. Then he nodded. "Yes, we still are. Somehow we... we seem to work well."

"So you don't love her?" Hiruma prodded further, his eyes cold as ice.

"...It's not like that," Musashi mumbled, staring down at his half-finished sandwich. Why did he have such problems explaining his relationship to Hiruma? To everybody else he knew it was easy, he loved his wife and his children and that was it. Deep in his heart though, he knew that he could never love anybody as much as he loved Hiruma. "You should know that love is not that easily explained-"

"Kekeke, you're still sprouting as much bullshit as you did 20 years ago," Hiruma cackled, feeling his mood rising somehow at these words. He could not quite explain it, but somehow the option of dragging Musashi to the next love hotel did not seem as unlikely as it did before. In addition, he was glad that his long absence had not been in vain. "It's an easy yes or no question; even a fucking old man like you should be able to answer that."

Musashi frowned. Somehow, he had not expected to hear that nickname ever again. "Well, I love her. I love my kids, my family, if that's what you want to hear. I love my job too, I love-"

"It's alright, it's alright, you don't need to tell me your favorite color," Hiruma cackled some more. "Fine, I'll come home with you for the evening, but if I don't want to stay the night you help me find a hotel and carry all my luggage for me, understood?"

Musashi snorted. "Fine with me."

"Are you really sure? You don't know how heavy my stuff is," Hiruma teased, snatching

a stripe of ham from the other's plate.

"If you can carry it, I can carry it, too," Musashi smirked. "Don't forget that I'm still a carpenter, no matter the suit."

"But you have gotten old, fucking geezer," Hiruma grinned. "Be careful not to break your bones."

"Well, you're not 17 anymore as well. And what do you say about wine? The older the better, right?" the other man shot back, suddenly looking at least 10 years younger with that certain twinkle in his eyes. Somehow, it felt as if nothing had happened all these years ago, but Hiruma reminded him that it was otherwise.

Else, Musashi would not be taking him home to his wife and kids.

## Kapitel 4: One Year, Six Months

"I really don't know how you put up with him," Mamori sighed as she dropped down on the grass next to Musashi. "Every time I see what he does, I just want to yell at him and tell him that it's not right... But he always ignores me."

The older looking one snorted with amusement, knowing many things that he could say to that, but he knew that the girl only wanted to vent some anger.

"I don't know what I saw in him," she sighed, looking up at the sky as if it could tell her the secrets of life. "It's been... one year and six months? Has it really been that long? That we've been together?"

"At least that's what I know," Musashi nodded, trying to read his book though. It was one of the most boring books that he had ever read but he had to read it because it was the main source for the questions of the next test. At least that was what the upper classmen had said.

"I really don't know how he managed to convince me," the girl sighed again. "I don't know... he seemed like a totally different person then..."

Musashi kept silent, knowing that it was because Hiruma actually had put some effort in convincing her. Right now, he was more on the defiant side, hurt by the fact that she had dumped him because she could not cope with who he was.

"He was so nice, so... much like a gentleman, you know, if you don't count the weapons of mass destruction or whatever they are," she rambled on and Musashi knew that she would tell him a story he knew like the back of his hand, from both her point of view and Hiruma's.

"I don't know... maybe it was because I was young, innocent and wanted to do something wild then," she shrugged, unpacking her lunchbox. "Yes, I guess it's because I wanted to do something wild then. And boy, *wild* it was."

Musashi grinned to himself as he saw her blush deeply. It must have really been something, because she always blushed like that when she talked about her time together with Hiruma. On the other hand, Musashi knew exactly what Hiruma was capable to do when he wanted something. And from a lover, he mostly wanted sex, dirty, wild and hot.

Musashi knew that, because he was the one to provide that to the blond before he finally managed to get together with Mamori, and only the gods knew for how long Hiruma had had a crush on her. He did a good job hiding it from the world though, but who really knew was not surprised to find out on New Year's Day after the Christmas Bowl they played in that he was going out with the Devil Bats' manager. Musashi felt a little left out that day, but as he watched the pair pray, bicker and mainly the girl helping Hiruma do all the things he could not because of his broken arm, he thought

they were a wonderful pair and gave them his blessing.

For the next one and a half year, he did nothing else but to study and pass the tests for the Tokyo University, so that he could study there with Hiruma, Mamori, Yukimitsu and everybody else from Deimon. Kurita had chosen to become a disciple at his father's shrine, so he did not have to study that hard, now that his dream of the Christmas Bowl was fulfilled. He did his best to cheer on his comrades though, providing them with rooms when they needed it and everything they needed. It was very convenient.

It was funny though, how Musashi knew that whenever Hiruma and Mamori disappeared together, arrived a little later than planned or were away for a little longer than normal errands too, that they were having sex. Mamori's flushed cheeks did not help one bit either. He had tried to smile at them, tried to pretend that he did not know what they did, but he did not quite succeed.

He felt a little guilty, but when Hiruma and Mamori started arguing more and more during their last days of High School, he prayed inwardly that they would break up. Why, he did not know. They were both his friends, very good friends, too, but somehow they were too similar and too different at the same time that they could really work out. Hiruma needed somebody he could rely on, who stood behind him in whatever he did – not necessarily to support him, but he did not want somebody who criticized his every move – and who did not care that he was a crazy genius. Mamori on the other hand wanted somebody she could support, whom she could pamper and mother, somebody with whom she felt safe and who supported her.

In addition, she seemed like the kind of girl who wanted a family and was willing to give up a successful career for that if necessary. Moreover, Hiruma did not want family. He had too many issues with his own that he could even start to think about raising kids himself. Somehow, thanks to Hiruma's needs and playfulness, they had gotten a little careless about protection though and Mamori had become pregnant during their second year together. Just after Hiruma had found out about it, he had dragged her to the next abortion clinic and convinced her that it was the best for her if she got rid of the fetus.

At that time, Musashi had not known what had happened, but all of a sudden, the atmosphere around the pair had gone from steamy to icy. When Hiruma came to him one night though, with black shadows under his eyes and with such a foul mood that the sex was more like a fight to death and they were bleeding all over the sheets afterwards, he found out the whole story. Mamori was giving him the cold shoulder, she did not answer his calls and did not come to any classes they had together and avoided him where she could. Consequently, Hiruma had gotten frustrated with her. Thus, he went to the only source of solace and trust that he still had, and that was Musashi. Being the person that he was though, he first needed to vent his anger via sex, before he was able to form any coherent words about his personal problems.

Musashi had listened without saying anything at first, treating both their wounds with band-aids, but inwardly he had shook his head and wondered, what a big idiot Hiruma was. He was not surprised by Mamori's actions anymore; had he been a girl he would

have done the same exact thing. Moreover, the poor girl must have been completely traumatized by what Hiruma did to her.

When the blond was finished and looked up at him for any kind of advice, Musashi had hit him square over the head and told him in non-too-nice words what he thought of him. Then he told him he should give Mamori an honest, heart-felt apology along with a few presents at least. After that, the blond had thanked him and left without another word.

He seemed to have followed his advice, because after that, he and Mamori seemed to get along better again, but something was broken between them. The girl started to notice all the little things that she had ignored willingly before, Hiruma's antics, the way he did things with blackmail, suggestions and everything that she despised and about half a year later, when they entered university together, they went separate ways.

Somehow, Musashi had ended up taking half of the lectures that Mamori also attended and since they knew nobody else there and had gotten along quite well before, they became really close friends. So close that Musashi soon knew details of her relationship with Hiruma. It was somewhat funny picking apart the opinions that he got to put them back together to facts, but it also made him feel awkward to stand right in the middle of these two hot-heads. Thus, he did the best that he could: he listened to what they both had to say, but he refused to ever take a standpoint again.

These days, Mamori started to rant about Hiruma and his way to do things whenever she caught him doing *something*. It was hard for Musashi not to roll his eyes at her, but he did the best that he could, listening to her patiently.

Luckily, Hiruma's ways of coping with the situation were the same as usual: Either he schemed something or he came to Musashi, looking for sex.

Today, while he was listening to Mamori's endless rant, he wondered though why he let him. Was he just some sex toy to him? Why did he not just close the door in front of him when he saw that hunger in his eyes? Why was he not able to deny him what he wanted? Did he have to make up for the year and a half that they did not see each other that much? For the time they did not have sex?

Musashi knew that had it been any other person, he would have kicked them so hard that they were not able to sit down for the rest of their life, but with Hiruma, it was different. The blond just had to be there and Musashi's mind went blank. He had tried dating other people, had tried to have sex with somebody else, but in the end it just came back to him that he only wanted Hiruma.

The worst thing about it was though, that he knew that he could never have him. His father would be against it, his mother might understand, but she would be against it, too and all of his coworkers would also be against it, even Tamahachi, who knew him better than anybody else. Still, he could not stop thinking about Hiruma. He even went so far as to imagine what life would be like with him in twenty years, but what he imagined was not what he wanted, what he was supposed to be. Should he really

confess that he was in love with a man and try to lead a successful business... He would have to do many illegal things and that was nothing that he could do. Also, he knew that the only assignments that he would get then were the ones that Hiruma got him through blackmail. And he wanted that even less than a happy life. Still, he kept thinking about only Hiruma like a stupid teenager. Well, maybe he was just the biggest masochist on earth.

On the other hand, his father kept prodding him when he would find a girlfriend that he could marry so that he could produce a Gen Takekura junior to ensure the continuation of the Takekura bloodline. He kept telling him that he was too young for that and that he wanted to complete his studies first, but his father's condition was worrying him. It got worse and worse with every passing day and the doctor did not give him much more time to live. So he needed to find a woman to marry soon, so that he was still able to introduce her to him.

"Ah, if only I could fall in love with somebody like you," he heard Mamori sigh suddenly and he looked up at her in surprise.

"What?"

"Do you realize that you're everything a woman could wish for? You're tall, intelligent, patient and by the way, you also look good with all these natural muscles... I bet you like kids, too," she laughed, actually managing to make him blush and look back down onto his book. "Really, you and Hiruma, you are like two opposite poles, just how do you get along at all?"

"Well, you know about opposites being drawn towards each other? I guess that explains it pretty well," he mumbled.

"But, I must admit that you are really brave, too," she continued as if she did not listen to him, "I mean, I know about some sex relationships from a few of Suzuna-chan's manga, but it's not easy to do that in reality, is it? I mean... don't you get looked on funnily? Like, when you two are on a date or something?"

Musashi snorted. "It's as easy as that: we don't 'date'. We have sex, that's about it. And while we're not having sex, we get along pretty well, too."

"So, it's not about love?" Mamori asked, curiosity peaked.

"...Not... exactly," the young man answered with a frown. "It's never been about love between us, it's more like... a mutual need of the other. I... can't explain it well, you know? I've never been good with words."

"That's not important," Mamori smiled openly at him. "I've never seen Hiruma trust anybody as much as he trusts you – maybe Kurita or Sena – so your actions must be worth more than any words anybody can say to him. I don't think that he ever trusted me as much as he trusts you."

Musashi wanted to protest, wanted to say that he did not do much, that he let Hiruma

down so many times, he did not think that he blond trusted him all that much, but on the other hand, what she said had some reason behind. Still, it irked him that he was unable to quit Hiruma when there seemed to be no emotion behind the things they did.

Rationally regarded.

## Kapitel 5: Rough Landing, Holly

The ride from the café Ocean Avenue to the Takekura's residence a little outside the city was long, but not as bad as Hiruma had feared. It was surprisingly easy for him to go back to the usual bantering with his friend, teasing him about his age, his looks and everything that he could think of. He tried to tease him about his company, that he was still running his father's stupid construction company, but everything that came out of his mouth was simple praise for getting it as far as Musashi had gotten it. Takekura Constructions placed third in the ranking of numbers of buildings they built in Tokyo, and fifth in all of Japan, closing in on the next higher ranked one these days. A few more new contracts and Takekura Constructions would be ranked second in Tokyo, which was a lot more than Hiruma had expected the other to do when they had parted.

"You underestimated me," Musashi smirked. "You didn't think I'd get that far without you."

"Of course not," Hiruma snorted. "You're too soft, it's an entire surprise that you managed all of this."

"Well, I have to admit, it was not my doing alone," the older looking one admitted shyly. "If it weren't for Mamori by my side, I'd-"

Hiruma started laughing loudly, scaring away a few people around them. "How did I know she played a major role in this? You obviously didn't marry her for her good looks, did you?"

"No... not... not really," Musashi sighed. "I managed to build up a lot of valuable relationships with architects and other companies thanks to her. If she hadn't talked to other wives at certain social gatherings of Tokyo's upper class, I would have never talked to their husbands and well... Takekura Constructions wouldn't be where it is now. Also, it helps to have friends in politics."

"Mhm, I heard that Juumonji will be a candidate for the prime minister in the next elections," Hiruma said, having kept track of all of his ex-teammates from abroad.

Musashi nodded, "he and Haruto have been very good friends of us during all this time-"

"Haruto? Sakuraba Haruto?" Hiruma interrupted him suddenly. "Since when are the two of you friends? You never talked to each other the entire time I knew you."

"Well, um," Musashi mumbled, feeling his cheeks heat up a little and hoped that it did not show, "we knew each other since High School, right? One day we just met behind the scenes of some TV production and started talking. Then we had some coffee, I invited him over and he brought Ichiro along-"

"So the rumors are really true then? I mean, a lot of things come over to the US, especially if there's a cute gay guy on a popular TV-show in Japan, but most of the time it's just some kind of fake. You have absolutely NO idea how wild some those women abroad get if they see some guys kissing," Hiruma shook his head, grinning to himself though.

"Well, it *did* make a lot of waves when he announced publicly that he was dating a very attractive and skilled doctor. He almost had a nervous breakdown before and broke down crying afterwards when he only received positive reactions to his outing," Musashi explained with an almost fatherly smile on his lips. "I'm happy for him. He doesn't realize yet just how much he achieved through his outing, though. Thanks to Juumonji-kun politics are seeing the matters a bit more liberal now and they are really loosening up."

"A lot has changed, huh?" Hiruma asked quietly, feeling a little empty inside. Had things been like they were today...

"Not really," Musashi sighed. "It's only been ten years since Haruto's public outing; society needs a lot longer to cope with a shock like that."

"From what I know, they're doing a pretty good job," Hiruma said flatly, arms crossed in front of his chest.

"On the outside, yes," Musashi agreed. "But, well, many companies have stopped hiring Haruto since his outing. Still, he gets enough screen time to be popular. Ichiro has lost a few patients, too. Some even went as far as to insult him right in his face..."

"People are stupid," Hiruma concluded with a low growl and Musashi happened to agree.

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"Honey! I'm home!" Musashi yelled through the house after he had closed the door behind him and Hiruma. He took off his shoes before he stepped inside, hearing a "Welcome back, honey!" from the kitchen. He smiled to himself as he smelled his favorite food – steak with baked potatoes.

"I'll show you around in a second," he said to Hiruma, who just shrugged and tried not to look uncomfortable, before he snuck over to the kitchen and kissed his wife hello.

"How was your day?" she asked as she turned back around from the stove and smiled at him. "Did you have a nice birthday?"

"Oh, it was okay. I got nothing done at work, you know?" he said lightly. "My mom called me, along with the rest of the city."

"Ah, so, the same as every year," Mamori chuckled.

"No, it was worse this time," Musashi grinned. "It seemed like everybody wanted a piece of me today."

"Well, it's your 45th birthday, that's something to celebrate," she said and turned back around to check the steaks.

"Yeah, unfortunately," Musashi sighed as he went over to the table and glanced at the bag from Kariya's. Then his face lightened up. "You won't believe what happened then. Come with me for a moment, could you?"

"In a moment, can't you see I'm cooking? They're almost done..."

"No, it really can't wait," Musashi insisted, having a goofy grin on his face. "You need to come with me now. Close your eyes," he instructed as she gave in with a sigh and he took her hands.

Carefully he directed her a few steps into the hallway, where Hiruma stood, looking slightly nervous, even for his standards.

"What is it? Did you get something nice as a present that you can't show me later?" she said, sounding annoyed in a very amused way.

Hiruma found himself staring at her though. She had not changed at all over the year. In his eyes, she was still beautiful, the lines around her eyes enhancing her features instead of making her ugly. Her hair was up at the back of her head so that they did not fall into her face. It still had the same color he remembered. A pair of simple, but expensive looking earrings underlined her graceful neck along with a simple golden necklace. Right then, she was wearing a pink Rocket Bear apron over a kneelong skirt and a white t-shirt. His lips curled up into a smile at her affection towards that old mascot, that had obviously not changed over the years.

One look told her that she was happy now and that was all he needed to know about her right then. It lifted a heavy weight from his chest.

"Look what I found," Musashi mumbled as he gestured for his wife to open her eyes again. Hiruma made a conscious effort to hide the smile on his face, giving her a bored look.

"Did you bring home another pet..." she started, her eyes still focusing on the tall figure in front of her. Her eyes became as wide as saucers and she clapped her hands over her mouth as she gasped in surprise.

"H-Hiruma..." she breathed, her eyes watering.

Despite feeling nervous because of her reactions, Hiruma managed to grin and taunt her. "What, are you going to cry, fucking mother hen?"

"Hiruma!" she cried and ran towards him, wrapping her arms around him in a tight

embrace while tears started to run over her cheeks. "Welcome back!"

The blond felt uncomfortable with the weight that was suddenly clinging to him, but before he realized what he was doing, he had his arms wrapped around her and smiled once more. "Thank you," he breathed.

He felt Musashi's eyes on him and as he looked up over the mop of Mamori's hair, he could see him smiling softly. For a moment, he wished things would stay like this, but then he was shoved away by the woman.

"You! You stupid idiot!" she yelled at him, tears still streaming down her smiling face. "What did you think when you disappeared like that? Twenty years ago? Did you think nobody would miss you or what?"

"Kekeke, I had my reasons and you know it," he chuckled, patting her head. "Stop crying, will you? It'll only mess up your make up."

"Don't tell me what to do!" Mamori protested, but it sounded more like a laugh. "When did you come back?"

"Today," Hiruma answered curtly. "Your fucking husband over there picked me up by chance and dragged me here."

"I met him at the café," Musashi explained sheepishly. Her eyes narrowed and she pointed her index finger at him.

"I *told* you I'd make dinner tonight and you still go there to get something to eat? You're not getting anything today! And I don't care if it's your birthday!"

"Aw, honey, I just went there for the coffee... Besides, if I hadn't gone there, I would not have met Hiruma," Musashi said defensively, raising his arms.

Her anger seemed to cool down at that, and she sighed. "You're right. Hiruma, please, you must be tired. Why don't you go get a shower? I'll prepare the guest room for you after dinner."

"How can I deny such an offer?" the blond grinned.

"Honey, you show him around, okay?"

"Alright," Musashi smiled. "By the way, where are the kids?"

"They're not yet home from school and work respectively. You're a little early, you know? Sachiko and Takeshi are in their rooms though," Mamori explained, already on her way back to the kitchen.

"Okay," the man nodded before he turned back to Hiruma. "I'll show you around. Give me some of your luggage, please."

Wordlessly, Hiruma let him carry the heavier bag as Musashi led them into the living room where he dropped off the bag in a corner. It looked exactly like one of those living rooms from those movies, with cozy looking sofas, a huge TV set and a mantle piece, with a dining area at the backside of the house with a door to the gardens. They were small and the next house was just a few meters away, but it still let in some light from outside. The table was already set for five people, with a children's chair next to one chair.

"Four kids, huh? And a very young one, too?" Hiruma said after he observed the situation.

"Yeah," Musashi chuckled. "I know what you want to say, we've been very productive, I know. The youngest one is Sachiko, she is two years old and a latecomer. Her next brother is ten years old."

"What, so Sachiko's been an accident?" Hiruma started to tease him.

"Somewhat," Musashi admitted with a sheepish smile. "We had not wanted to get anymore children, but somehow... it just happened. And it's not like it's a bad thing. She's a lovely little girl."

"Well, I hope she doesn't call me 'Elf' or something equal stupid. I've met enough children in my life that thought my ears were funny," Hiruma snorted as he opened his bag to get some fresh clothes out of it.

Musashi simply shrugged. "I don't know... she doesn't seem prone to calling people funny names."

"I take your word for granted," Hiruma said, then smirked. "Care to join me for a shower?"

The other grinned back. "I'm sorry, not with the kids awake in the house."

"Oh, so later? When they're asleep?" Hiruma joked, his ears twitching slightly.

Musashi simply laughed and exited the room. "The guest bathroom is here," he said as he opened another door. "The bedrooms and our bathroom are upstairs, I'll be showing you that later, now go take a shower. I bet you must be looking forward to one after that long flight from America."

"I'm craving one, actually," Hiruma admitted. "Sure you do not want to join?"

Musashi shook his head with a smile. "See you in the living room later."

Hiruma grinned to himself as he closed the bathroom door behind him. It would have been too easy like that anyways.

## Kapitel 6: Words, Hands, Hearts

As Musashi went upstairs and redressed, he realized with shock just how close he had been to give in to Hiruma's offer. Even though he had just seen how happy the blond was to see Mamori again, and even though he knew that his youngest children would be hearing everything they did as their rooms were just above the bathroom and adjacent to the kitchen...

He suppressed a shudder and closed his eyes to focus, calming himself with a few deep breaths.

But who could have known that Hiruma was even sexier now than he had been twenty years ago? Whoever wanted to tempt him with his reappearance, they were doing a pretty good job. He somehow wished that he had not invited Hiruma over; it was only worsening his temptation. If nothing happened, he knew that he would use the first opportunity to bend the other over and have his way with him.

After he had thought that thought, Musashi froze in his movements and realized what had just crossed his mind. His face heated up and he covered it in shame.

After all, he was really just a perverted old man.

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Mamori had been right, Hiruma needed that shower. It relaxed a few muscles that he thought were not tense to begin with, but obviously they had been. Still, he cleaned himself quickly, washing his hair that felt as if it was covered with a thick layer of grease although he had just washed it the day before he took that flight back to Japan. He sighed as his hands reeked through the soft tresses without resistance, rinsing for a long time.

Stepping out of the shower, he took the towel closest to the shower stall and quickly dried himself before he put on his fresh clothes. Just as quickly, he dried his hair, after he found a hairdryer and some hair gel, which he used to make his hair stand up again in its characteristic way. As he was finished with his work, he looked into the mirror, regarding himself with no small amount of satisfaction. He knew that Musashi had been hesitating when he offered him to join him in the shower. It was only a matter of time until things were back to where they had been 20 years ago between them, but Hiruma had to be patient. He knew that Musashi would come back to him out of his own free will some day, so he just had to wait until then. If he rushed anything, it would only narrow his chances of getting back together.

Hiruma was fully aware of how unfair this all sounded, but he had his reasons. One of them was a certain event twenty years ago and another was the way Musashi hesitated to answer the question if he loved Mamori. Oh yes, this personal little

scheme would make things all the better for Hiruma. But first, he had to go through the hell of one happy family celebration.

He made a bored face and stuck out his tongue at himself in the mirror, when he heard Mamori shouting loudly, "Youichi? Could you please help me get the plates into the living room when you're finished with your shower?"

Hiruma frowned at her loudness since he was only in the adjacent room and then wondered when she remembered that she had started to call him Youichi at some point and not Hiruma anymore, just to do the latter a few moments ago. He gathered his dirty clothes and exited the bathroom, walking over to the kitchen.

"Sure I can help you, but can I have a plastic bag for my stuff first?" he said calmly, but somehow he managed to startle her so much that she jumped up a few centimeters.

"Y-you! Don't scare me like that!" she reprimanded him and looked at him nervously.

Hiruma frowned. "What?"

"N-nothing," Mamori said a little too quickly maybe as she started to rummage one of the cupboards for a plastic bag. "There you are... If you got more though, you can give it to me and I'll wash them for you."

"That'd be too nice," Hiruma nodded as he put his stuff into the bag without much love. Just as he opened his mouth to say something else, he heard somebody else enter the kitchen.

"You yelled for me, mum?" a tall, slender and lithe boy said, and if Hiruma had not known any better, he would have said that his younger self was standing in the doorway. Of course, he did not have pointed ears, his hair was not standing up as much as his did, but his hair was blond and he could not determine whether or not it was natural, but he probably bleached it just a little bit. The youth's eyes were narrow with dark lashes, even the shape of his eyebrows was similar. Hiruma's eyebrows crinkled up into a deep frown and he stared unconcealed at the one that was obviously the Takekura's oldest son.

"Who's that?" the boy asked after he looked just as incredulously at the other blond in the room.

Mamori, who was suddenly very, very nervous, laughed sheepishly and had no other choice but to introduce the two. "Um, Youichi, this is Hiruma, you know, a very good, old friend of your dad and me. Hiruma, this... this is Youichi. Our oldest son."

The words sunk heavily into Hiruma's consciousness as he was not able to stop staring. Then, he blinked, and stared down at the woman, who was still looking very nervous. "You named your oldest son after me?!"

"Well, um, yes?" The woman laughed sheepishly.

"What the fuck?!" Hiruma growled and grabbed her shoulders, just about to shake her, when a strong hand grabbed his wrist and pried it away from the woman's body.

"Hey, don't treat her like that!" Youichi stepped in, glaring at the older man hostilely.

"You don't tell me anything, fucking... fucking boy!" Hiruma snapped back, pulled his wrist out of his grip and glared at the boy.

Mamori sighed and stepped between the two hotheads. Somehow she had expected something like that to happen.

"Hiruma, Youichi, both of you, please calm down. I promise I'll explain everything later, but first, please help me carry these into the living room, okay?" she said and handed each of them a plate with baked potatoes.

The two blonds glared at each other for another second for good measure before Youichi snorted and turned around to walk into the living room. Hiruma just shook his head and followed him.

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"Dad, please, ask Kurita-san or Kobayakawa-san to teach our team!" Ken begged his father, who sighed, because they had had this discussion endless times.

"You know my answer to that. They are all busy men, working hard. I already asked them before and everybody said that they're not fit to teach anybody anything. Yukimitsu said that he would, but he's so busy with his job as a lawyer, he really doesn't have the time," Musashi sighed and lifted Sachiko up into her chair.

"You know, I'd ask mom to train us, but I fear that the other guys don't want her to," Ken argued. "I know she'd be more than able to chase us around, but-"

"You do know how busy the both of us are. That's why we're glad you spend so much time at school, really," Musashi sighed and put a hand upon the shoulder of his second oldest son.

"But, *dad*. We really want to go to the Christmas Bowl this year, you know? It's our last chance, too. Deimon doesn't allow their third years any club activities," Ken kept on begging.

Musashi sighed. He probably knew best, because he had went through all of this himself when he was 17, just a few months older than his son now. And with the minor change that he did not go to High School because of his father.

Besides his looks, his second son had inherited his kicking abilities, but was not only limited to that. In fact, he was also a decent runner, which made him the ace of the

team. In fact, he was the team, as nobody else seemed to be interested in American Football these days. He had two good friends that helped him keep the club alive, but other than that... They were off pretty bad. Unfortunately – or fortunately – Ken did not have Hiruma's attitude to blackmail other clubs' members into helping them out, therefore they had yet to play in one tournament.

It was not as if Musashi did not understand his son, no, he probably knew exactly how he felt, and he had really asked everybody that he could think of, even Seijuro Shin, but all of them had to refuse due to the lack of time and interest. Shin had been a special case; Musashi had been sure he would have agreed to train a High School Football team, but even he had to refuse, because he had already been hired as Japan's National trainer *and* for a High School team in America. Musashi had not had the heart to tell his son the entire truth, so he had kept the High School part to himself as he had told him about it.

"I know, son," he sighed. "But there's nothing I can do about, sorry. Hey, Takeshi! Stop playing and sit down at the table."

"In a moment, dad, I'm just about to win this game," the youngest son mumbled.

"You said that the last time I asked you. Just save the game and come to the table, understood?" Musashi said sternly.

"Yes, dad," Takeshi sighed and did as he was told.

"Oh, by the way, we have a guest tonight," Musashi said suddenly. "You don't know him, so try to behave... and do not stare too much, okay?"

"Why, who is it, dad?" Ken asked, brow furrowed.

At that very moment, Youichi came in through the door, followed closely by Hiruma and Mamori.

"It's him," Musashi mumbled as he watched how his sons' eyes became as big as saucers.

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Thanks to Mamori's iron discipline, they managed to sit down at the table and started to eat before any vital questions could be asked. Hiruma was still a little irritated by Youichi and kept glancing over to him with a frown, but he was even more irritated by the looks he got from the other two sons. It seemed like his fears that the youngest, Sachiko – who was a spitting image of her mother by the way – would be his biggest problem were absolutely without reason.

"Alright, fucking kids, stop staring right now," he said after a while, putting down his knife and fork rather forcibly. "Yes, the ears are real. Is that why you were staring?"

Yes? Then you know it now, so stop it already."

He looked at the big eyes that were still looking at him. "...What?"

"I know you," the youngest boy suddenly said. "Yes, I know you! You're that demon-guy from that old game that also has dad in it!"

"What are you talking about?" Hiruma asked with a frown, too irritated to remember his own schemes from over 25 years ago.

"You know... that game... that you blackmailed some people to make... about the Deimon Devil Bats," Mamori said lowly. "We... have a copy here. And well, it's Takeshi's favorite game."

"Second-" the boy tried to say, but was interrupted by his older brother.

"Please! I'm begging you! Train our team so that we can go to the Christmas Bowl this year!" Ken said suddenly after he had jumped up to bow low in front of Hiruma. The blond just looked at him with a surprised look, then snorted.

"Fucking old man, fucking mother hen, could you *please* tell me what's going on here?" he growled, not caring one bit about the glare that Youichi shot him. "I get the part about the game, but what does *he* want?" Hiruma pointed at Ken, who still bowed low in front of him. "And why the fuck does he", he pointed to Youichi, "look like me when you named him after me? Am I responsible for his existence or what?! Was I the one who knocked you up 20 years ago?!" Hiruma was yelling by now and glared at Mamori, feeling somewhat betrayed by the only two people he had ever let very close to him.

"Calm down, will you? I'll explain it," Musashi mumbled, looking decidedly uncomfortable.

"Make it quick, my patience is running low," Hiruma grumbled as he leaned back in his seat and crossed his arms over his chest.

Musashi sighed, exchanged a look with his wife and shot his oldest son an apologetic look. Then he took a deep breath, before he started to explain. "Youichi was born about one month after we married... After you disappeared."

"But you're not my dad!" Youichi chimed in, obviously pissed off by the pure thought of it. Hiruma opened his mouth to say something in return, but Musashi continued to talk.

"We, Mamori and I, we missed you and we both... like you very much, you should know that. And we wanted to thank you in some kind of way, too-"

"Stop being so mushy, I think I get it. You named him after me as some kind of tribute, right?" Hiruma snorted, still not happy with the whole situation, but highly amused by it.

"Right," Musashi nodded. "At first, we did not think much of it when he got his first blond hair... and then the next and so on, but when they still didn't get darker when he reached puberty, we... made a paternity test. Secretly."

"What?!" Youichi gasped, his anger now directed at his father. "Why didn't you tell me about it? That kind of stuff is important to me, too, you know?"

"Calm down," Musashi sighed, "the results of the test confirmed unmistakably that I am your biological father."

"It seems like Gen has some European genes in him, too, from his great-great-grandfather," Mamori chimed in. "It seems like it was something the Takekura family tried to forget over the years. But it explains why Gen's beard started growing so early... and other things."

Hiruma grinned at her blush, knowing exactly what she meant. "You mean the size of his-

"Anyways," Musashi interrupted quickly, before Hiruma was able to finish his sentence. "It's a strange coincidence that Youichi is the spitting image of you... Minus a few features."

Hiruma snorted, still grinning broadly because he was amused of something. "I'd say it's a cruel joke of nature. At least your other kids look like yourself. That doesn't explain though, why he," he pointed down, "is still down on his knees there."

"Ken, get up!" Mamori said quickly. "Ask properly and explain yourself before you do."

Reluctantly the boy stood up again and sat back down at the table. Then he sighed and looked at Hiruma with big pleading eyes. "Please, you have to be the trainer of my team. You're the best football strategist that I ever heard of and we really need some drastic measures. See, it's only me and two friends who keep the Amefuto-Club at Deimon alive and we really, really want to go to the Christmas Bowl this year. It would be an honor for us if you trained-

"Not interested," Hiruma said flat out, resuming eating.

"What?! Why?! But we *need* you!!" Ken protested.

"Ask somebody else. I stopped playing football when your father did and that was 27 years ago."

"But-

"Didn't you hear me, fucking wimp? I said, I'm not going to train you and that's it! Stop begging like a spineless idiot!"

"Hiruma..."

The teenager's eyes narrowed as they started to water with anger and frustration. At the same time, his brows furrowed and he started to pout. "...Fine. I won't ask you again. If it's that what you want, I will make you beg to train our team!"

## Kapitel 7: Light Up The Sky

After dinner and watching Gen unpack his presents from his family - with Hiruma sitting in a corner, cackling to himself – Mamori dedicated herself to the dishes, while the rest of the family split up. Youichi went to his room to call his girlfriend, Ken mumbled something about homework, Takeshi resumed his game and Sachiko was allowed to play with her father's beard until Mamori was done with her chores.

The dishwasher was running when she went upstairs and passed Youichi's room, hearing him talk heatedly on the phone. She smiled to herself, secretly wishing for a wedding and some grandchildren soon, although she had enough to do with Sachiko. Walking on, she got to the room of her second son and knocked.

"I'm coming in~!" she chanted before she opened the door. She saw her son sitting at his desk, glaring at some books with mathematical formulas. He was tapping his pencil so hard that he kept breaking the tip of it. Mamori chuckled softly, because she knew just how hard Ken was taking the flat-out refusal.

"Still sulking?" she asked gently, putting her hands on his shoulders.

"Is he still laughing?" Ken asked back, grudgingly.

"I fear so," Mamori admitted sheepishly, remembering how Hiruma had cackled under his breath as she had collected the last dishes.

"God damn, I can't believe that you and dad think so highly of him, mom," he growled. "I can't believe I thought he would just train our team because he liked to play football. Now I understand why You-nii was ticked off that easily."

Mamori smiled her best motherly smile as she remembered Hiruma during his High School days. "It's... complicated. He achieved what he wanted; he has no more goals with American Football nowadays so he's not interested in it anymore. Just like... your dad."

"Yeah, but dad's working hard for another dream," Ken argued. "I have not heard with what this guy is earns his money."

"Believe me, you don't want to know that," Mamori laughed sheepishly. "It's probably something hardly legal, but he'll be good at it."

"Hardly legal?" Ken frowned.

"Something like... gambling. The last time I saw him, he was an expert at any card game, but mostly Black Jack," Mamori explained. "It's an easy game for somebody with photographic memory and profound statistic knowledge."

Ken nodded. "Tamura does the same, he's just... very lazy about it. He would be so

much better in school if he actually paid some thought to what he *should* do than what he *wants* to do. Ah, I just wish he is going to be more of help recruiting other members than the last time we tried..."

"He is very direct, isn't he?" Mamori asked, listening to her son's worries.

"Too direct for his own good," Ken sighed. "The last time he admitted something, he was rewarded with a week detention because he called his sports' teacher a 'lazy ass' – although it's the truth. I hope he doesn't scare away anybody by telling them that we never played in an actual game... It sounds better when I say that we never lost any game. Ah, what would I give if we had a famous coach like Hiruma-san."

Mamori patted her son's back as he plopped his head down on the table in an exasperated motion. "Well, just make it clear to him that he loves the game. Then you'll be able to convince him to train you."

"Yeah, but how can I do that? I tried my best during dinner, but he just kept laughing," Ken pouted, thick brows knitted tightly.

"Just... do what you can do best," Mamori advised. "If you manage to recruit some people for your team tomorrow, he may see that you're serious about this matter and he might reconsider what you said... Do you know what? I'm making him get you from school tomorrow. I'll send him in a little earlier so that he can see how good you are doing."

"But, mom! We don't have practice tomorrow!" Ken protested.

"Well then, you better have, because it may be your only chance to leave some impression," Mamori grinned and patted her pouting son's shoulder again. "Make up a good training plan for tomorrow, I'm going to see Sachiko to bed."

Before Ken was able to voice any protest, his mother had left the room, content with herself.

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"Daddy, why is You-ji still laughing?" Sachiko, who sat in her father's lap, asked innocently as she pulled on her father's new tie. Musashi chuckled, glad that she pulled on the end that would not choke him to death.

"I don't know, love," the man sighed and shot the blond a glare. "Maybe he remembers a really funny joke that somebody told him?"

"Oh!" the girl clapped into her hands happily. "Can he tell us that joke? I want to hear a good joke, too!"

"Kekeke, fucking princess, you wouldn't understand it anyways," Hiruma cackled,

already holding his stomach from laughing so much.

"But You-ji," the girl said sternly with a look that resembled one of her mother's, "it's not nice to laugh without telling the others why you're doing so."

"She's right," Musashi chimed in, looking expectantly at the blond. "So either you stop laughing right now on behalf of my son or-"

"He got both your and his mother's stupidity," Hiruma said quickly. "And you, fucking princess, I thought you weren't prone to making up names for people."

"I'm not making up a name for you," Sachiko pouted. "Uncle Hiruma is just too long to say-"

"And it makes me sound like an old pervert," the blond stated, a fleeting wave of shock washing over his face.

"You are an old pervert," Musashi mumbled, not loud enough for his daughter to hear though. Hiruma on the other hand – being blessed with superhuman hearing – heard it well and grinned broadly.

"And You-ji is a lot more easier to say," Sachiko concluded, fully ignoring what the men were bantering about.

For a moment Hiruma looked at her as if he was going to bite her head off. She never backed up though and held his gaze defiantly, her arms crossed over her chest. Musashi watched the silent battle and shook his head in semi-amusement. Really, if he needed another confirmation that his daughter was just exactly like her mother, it was this staring-contest with Hiruma. Just the same as back then. They used to argue about everything as well and it always ended exactly the same way.

Hiruma started to grin and then chuckled again, patting the girl's head. "Fine, I like your guts. You can call me You-ji."

"Yay!" the girl cheered, jumping up from Musashi's lap just to hug Hiruma quickly, before he could back off, around his neck. Overwhelmed like that, Hiruma had no other choice but to wrap his arms around the little body and before he knew it, he had his arms full of her and lifted her up.

Musashi's smile grew and decided that Hiruma needed to spend more times with kids. His kids especially, since he needed to warm up to them, if he wanted to spend more time at his house.

The man frowned, wondering what he was thinking about now when suddenly, he heard Mamori enter the room.

"Alright, little lady, it's time for you to go to bed now!" Mamori said loudly, announcing her presence. A loud protesting sound followed this and Sachiko pressed her face against Hiruma's shoulder, hiding her face so that he mother would not see

her. All three adults' eyes widened in surprise, and Hiruma looked down at her head in surprise.

"You don't want to go to bed?"

Sachiko shook her head, still hiding her face against his shirt.

"Oh, well, I don't like to sleep either," Hiruma admitted, grinning down at her when she looked up at him in surprise.

"You don't?" she asked, sounding hopeful that he would help her in her quest to prolong sleeping time successfully this time.

"Hiruma..." Mamori warned, her voice warning him not to tell her anything stupid.

"No, I can't sleep well," the blond admitted. "I have so many things to do, so much stuff to take care off that I don't want to sleep."

"Yes! So much to do!" Sachiko nodded seriously. "I have to finish that puzzle that I got for my birthday! It's *really* important!"

"Oh really?" Hiruma said. "You know, your father once told me that he needs his sleep, more than anything. I told him he was stupid for that, but he said, he would not be able to think, walk or talk straight if he was sleepy. I brushed it off, but I knew that he was right."

"Really?" The girl's big round eyes looked up at him and he had to suppress a toothy grin, but only managed half-heartedly.

Hiruma nodded. "I brushed it off, but I soon drifted off to sleep in the most ridiculous places... it almost bordered on narcolepsy."

"Narco...?" Sachiko repeated, her brow furrowing.

"It's a *really* bad sickness," Mamori chimed in. "Do you want to get sick?"

The girl shook her head viciously.

"Well, then I'll get you upstairs and get you to bed, okay?"

"No!" Sachiko shook her head again. "I want You-ji to carry me to bed tonight!"

"But-" Mamori tried, but Hiruma shook it off with a laugh.

"It's fine. I haven't told her the whole story yet and she deserves it."

"If you just leave out the... adult parts," Mamori mumbled, giving him a dark, warning look.

The blond grinned. "Don't worry, I won't. I don't want to have both your wraths directed at me for corrupting your youngest offspring."

"Ne, ne! Tell me! What happened then?" Sachiko bounced up and down in his arms, giving him a hard time to hold her.

"I tell you once you're in your bed, okay?"

"Okay!"

Musashi watched in disbelief as Hiruma followed Mamori out of the living room, the child securely holding onto as if her life depended on it. And he did not look unhappy about it, too. Maybe things had changed more than he had thought at first.

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After a tour through the rooms upstairs – led by Sachiko herself, who eagerly explained every detail to her new uncle – Hiruma had carried her from the upper bathroom to her bed.

"You know, the only one who can make me sleep soundly is your father," he said silently, so that nobody else in the girl's room could hear it. "But it's a secret that I never told anyone, okay? So you have to keep it to yourself, understood?"

"Yes! I won't tell anybody! I will take it to the grave!" she said cheerily. "How does he do it?"

Hiruma chuckled. Of course she wanted to know. "I can't tell you yet. Your mother would kill me if she knew that I did..."

"Aww..." Sachiko pouted, making Hiruma grin.

"Well, you can say he gives me a special goodnight kiss," the blond explained, watching with amusement how the girl's eyes grew in surprise.

"Really? Mommy gives me a special goodnight kiss, too! She does it every night," she said, nodding wildly, "it makes me feel good! First she kissed my forehead, then my left cheek, then my right cheek and then kisses my nose! It tickles a bit, but it cheers me up every time!"

Hiruma laughed softly. "Yeah, something like that. Come on, I'll get her for you so that you can sleep-"

"No! No!" Sachiko interrupted him. "I want *you* to kiss me goodnight today!"

Too surprised to say anything, Hiruma's eyes widened considerably and he almost forgot to breathe so that he did not break out into laughter. Instead, he managed to

only snort, but shook his head.

"I'm sorry, I can't do that. I'm not your mother or your father-

"But you're uncle You-ji!" Sachiko reasoned. "You can kiss me goodnight because I said so!"

"Maybe another day," Hiruma mumbled as he turned away from the bed. "Sleep well."

"Aww... Okay! Sleep well, too! Bye-bye!" Sachiko waved at him. "But tomorrow you'll kiss me goodnight, okay?"

But Hiruma had already left the room. Mamori smiled wryly as he stepped closer to the bed and delivered the goodnight kiss to her daughter. "Don't bother him too much... he's not a family person."

"I think he was doing pretty well," Musashi said softly as he put a hand on her shoulder. "His only problem is with getting close to somebody..."

"I know," the woman sighed, patting her husband's hand. "Come on, go after him. I'll say goodnight to the boys and then go to bed myself... I bet you two have a lot to talk about, don't you?"

Musashi did not know what to say to that, but he nodded anyways and followed his wife's advice.

## Kapitel 8: Sorry, Try Again

Musashi found Hiruma sitting on the couch in the living room, doing nothing else but staring at the photos on the mantelpiece. All of them showed a happy family, the kids that grew over the years and their parents that aged slowly, but steadily.

The blond's gaze seemed to flicker towards one picture in particular though, one that showed the Takekuras at the beginning of their marriage, a one or two-year-old Youichi on his proud father's arms, holding a football in his too small hands. The boy's hair already stood up into all possible directions and he looked very much like his namesake. The fact that his ears seemed to be a little larger than normal did not help matters much.

Hiruma snorted, and turned his head to look at Musashi. "You do remember that I'm not a natural blond, don't you?"

The other man shrugged, smiling enigmatically as he sat down in the armchair next to the couch. "I do. And Mamori does, too. But I also remember that you promised to kill both of us should we ever tell anybody about it."

"Che, yeah, I did say that, didn't I?" Hiruma snorted, continuing to stare at the pictures. The second son, Ken, was a spitting image of his father at that age, minus the beard and the prominent cheekbones. He still looked like a normal teenager and not like some old man who had lost his way into a high school. Involuntarily, Hiruma started to wonder what his kids would look like had he ever produced any.

"You did," Musashi smiled. "Also, Youichi would not have believed the story otherwise. He needs proof for everything that creates a doubt inside his mind."

"So that paternity test was a blatant lie?" Hiruma asked, snorting as Musashi gave him a crooked grin. "Fucking old man, you've come a long way to your own downfall."

"Sometimes a lie is better than the truth if it gets you what you want, wasn't that your motto?" Musashi pointed out, suddenly remembering one of their first encounters during junior high school. "I still have no idea what your parents are doing, by the way."

"They're dead," Hiruma dead-panned, without any emotion in his voice.

The other's eyes widened at that, this time knowing that it was not a lie, or at least the closest to the truth that Hiruma would tell. "I'm sorry."

Shrugging, the blond replied, "Don't be. I hardly knew them anyways anymore. And don't try to tell me that they were my parents and all, because, really, I don't care about those fuckers at all."

For a moment, Musashi stayed completely silent, just watching his friend's face. Then

he snorted.

"What?" Hiruma asked, suspecting something.

"You were doing a pretty good job with Sachiko," the other pointed out. "I never thought that you'd be good with kids."

"It's nothing else than taking care of a bunch of football-kids," Hiruma shrugged again, glad that Musashi decided to change the subject. "You know, like back then, during high school."

"I know," the man chuckled, "I always thought of you as the mother of the team. And Mamori as the super nanny."

"What the fuck?!" Hiruma glared, sitting up straight at once. "You *dare* to... What the fuck?!"

"Aw, come on, don't tell me you didn't know about that," Musashi laughed. "Everybody thought of you as the center of the team and since we were practically your family with you in charge of everything... Sena also called you the mother of the team when he held the speech on the tenth anniversary of us winning the Christmas Bowl."

"Che. The fucking shrimp is stupid. How the hell can I be called a mother figure?" Hiruma mumbled, looking away in embarrassment.

"I don't know, but everybody wholeheartedly agreed on what he said and congratulated him on his speech. You can imagine how uncomfortably he felt afterwards," Musashi told him with a fond smile. "All he could say was 'I'm glad that Hiruma-san isn't here... he would have killed me straight on the spot.'"

"Damn right, I would have!" Hiruma growled. Then he started to chuckle. "Did he call you the father of the team, too? Because that's what you were-"

"Heh, I remember we had a talk about that, once, too," Musashi interrupted him. "That time? In the toilet on Mamori's birthday? When we were playing that video game?"

"Kekeke, yes, I remember. Everybody was scared shitless that I took a fucking *princess*," Hiruma cackled, remembering happier times. "You know what? I haven't given you a present for *your* birthday."

Smiling, Musashi waved it off. "You don't have to. You coming back to Japan is the best present I've had in years."

The blond blinked, surprised by that sudden confession. "What? Not even the tie your daughter made for you this year was better than this? It's a real piece of art, too," Hiruma cackled, holding up the multicolored piece of cloth.

Musashi chuckled sheepishly. "I get these every year... You should have seen Youichi's

first tie... It was so brightly colored that you could only look at it with sunglasses."

"That kid knows how to use colors? And here I thought he must have inherited his artistic skills from his mother," Hiruma grinned, standing up and straddling Musashi's waist without any prior warning. "Now, could you please stop talking about them? It annoys me when I wanted to give you my present..."

Almost involuntarily, Musashi's hands found their way to the blond's narrow hips, holding him securely in place even though it was the last thing that he wanted to do. "I've already got you, what else can you give me?" he mumbled, knowing exactly what he was provoking the other to say and do.

Long, slender and pale arms hooked up behind his neck, long-fingered hands threading through his hair, gently massaging his scalp as Hiruma leaned in close to his ear. Close enough that he felt every breath but too far away to touch. "You know exactly what I have to give to you. And I know you want it, badly," the blond husked, thrusting his groin against the other's. "I bet you didn't have a decent fucking in all these years that I left you... I know I didn't."

Musashi chuckled, his cheeks turning a little pink at the prospect of having Hiruma for himself again, but his responsible self made him hold back. "Oh, you know best how Mamori can be in bed, if stimulated in the right way..."

"And you're the best to stimulate anybody in bed, huh?"

"Besides you, that is," Musashi grinned back, realizing that his hands had been sliding up and down the blond's sides all the time. This whole situation was making him hard, harder than he had been in years. It must be something that Hiruma emitted, some pheromones that just screamed: "You know you want to fuck me!" And Musashi was an easy prey to those.

He inhaled deeply, reveling in the feeling of Hiruma's muscles under his hands, a feeling that he had missed for twenty years. The little hairs on his back stood on edge and a shudder ran down his spine and all he wanted to do was rip the clothes off that delicious body to try and see if they still fit as well as they did all these years ago.

"Oh, I don't deserve that praise," Hiruma mumbled, leaning in for a kiss, when all of a sudden they heard the door open.

"I'm going to bed now, honey! Don't take too long, you know you have to get up early!" Mamori said from the entrance to the living room. "Oh, and don't forget to show Hiruma the guestroom, okay?"

"Alright, honey!" Musashi managed to answer, even though he was completely red in the face, but Mamori was not able to see that because Hiruma's back was covering her view.

"See you later," she smiled and waved at them before she left. "Have a good night, Hiruma!"

"Thank you," the blond mumbled, all of his mood gone suddenly. "You, too," he sighed as he climbed off Musashi's lap reluctantly, sagging down onto the couch. "Fuck, talk about a mood killer."

Musashi sighed deeply, once more willing away a raging hard-on and glad that his wife knew about how he felt towards that blond demon. He figured that he would be sleeping on the couch tonight if she were the jealous type... And he knew that if he had been condemned to sleep on the couch, he would find his way to Hiruma's bed quicker than anybody could say "American Football." This would be the beginning of the end.

But damn, he wanted it so much, every cell in his body was drawn towards Hiruma so badly that it almost hurt. He tried to breathe it away, but the feeling was still there and he had to force himself to stay seated.

"...You should go to sleep," Hiruma said suddenly, sounding just as emotionless as he did when he was talking about his parents earlier.

"...You're right," Musashi sighed and finally pushed himself up to a stand. "Come, I'll show you the guest room."

"I'm fine with the couch," Hiruma tried to protest, but the other would not let him.

"Come on, you need a bed to sleep in and we happen to have a spare one," Musashi argued, pinching the bridge of his nose. His headache from earlier was back, full force. He really needed some sleep soon, or he would not be able to do anything at all.

"I slept during the flight. A full 8 hours," Hiruma said in a flat tone.

"...Wow. That long?" Musashi asked, truly astounded.

Hiruma snorted. "Yeah, that long. Don't act that surprised, despite what I told your daughter, I am able to sleep on my own."

"How long do you usually sleep?" Musashi asked, ignoring the last stab.

"That's none of your business anymore," Hiruma said, glaring at him. "But if you insist, show me that fucking guest room of yours."

Musashi shook his head with a small sigh, smiling wryly. Obviously, Hiruma had not changed his habits at all. Then, he stood up and waited for the blond to do the same, watching him gather his bag and stuff before he led him upstairs into the one empty room that Sachiko had not shown him earlier. On the way upstairs they met Yoichi though.

"Where are you going, young man?" Musashi stopped his son mid-step.

"Out," was the short answer. Hiruma raised an eyebrow, watching the scene curiously.

"At this time?"

Youichi shrugged, not looking into his father's eyes. "Yeah, why not? It's not like I am not allowed to, am I?"

"Well, I can't stop you, that's right, but-"

"Look, dad, I'll be back around midnight, and I'll be up before you tomorrow morning, too. I don't need as much sleep as you do," Youichi shrugged.

"You're not meeting Emi, are you?" Musashi said sternly, making Hiruma wonder who this Emi-person was.

"Dad, you know she has school tomorrow. Do you think I'd be so irresponsible and meet her that late at night? 'Ch, you know that both Mom and Suzuna-ba-san<sup>1</sup> would kill me if I did," Youichi shrugged. "I'm meeting a few friends from university. We're going to a Karaoke-bar, nothing serious."

Musashi looked at his son over for a few moments and Hiruma had to hold back a chuckle as he could see the boy quiver slightly under that stern gaze.

"Alright, but if I'm up earlier than you tomorrow, I will have a word or two with you," he said.

"Whatever you say, dad," Youichi grinned and sprinted down the stairs, grabbing his keys and his jacket. "Good night!"

"Yeah, yeah, good night! And try to have not too much fun, okay?"

But Youichi was already out of the door.

"You know that he was lying, right?" Hiruma asked quietly.

Musashi shrugged. "I know. He's probably seeing Emi no matter what, but well, it's not like I can stop him. I just have to listen to Suzuna complain about her little girl's grades dropping every Sunday," he sighed. "But really, they have not gotten any worse since they have gotten together. On the contrary, I think that Youichi has been helping her with some of her not-so-favorite subjects."

Hiruma cackled slightly and decided to wait until Sunday to find out if he assumed correctly about the girl's father.

~\*~

Musashi was in a surprising hurry to show Hiruma the guest room and then excuse himself to go to bed.

"Meet me for lunch at Ocean Avenue tomorrow. I want to show you something," he said before he closed the door behind him, not leaving Hiruma any chance to confirm or refuse the offer. But the blond just shrugged. He did not have anything better to do tomorrow either, so why not meet the other for lunch again?

~\*~

"Did Youichi go out again?" Mamori asked as Gen entered the bedroom.

"Mhm," her husband hummed, slowly undressing himself.

"That boy... when will he learn that Emi needs to sleep more than he does?" The woman sighed, putting the book that she had been reading onto the nightstand.

"He said he's going to meet a few friends for Karaoke," Gen said, pulling out his pajamas from his side of the bed.

"And you believed him? Gen, Gen, when do you learn-"

"No, I didn't. Hiruma did neither," the man grinned, looking like a teenager himself. "But he's young and I said it's alright if he gets up earlier than me tomorrow morning."

"Honestly?"

"Mhm."

Mamori laughed gently. "You guys, you're all the same. You only think with your brain down there."

"That's not true, and you know it," Gen said as he climbed into the bed next to her.

"Oh, really? That looked a little different just a while ago," Mamori chuckled. "When Hiruma was all over you."

"Please..."

"No, it's alright," she said, smiling gently. "I know what he means to you. And I also know what you mean to him. You two share a bond that we were never able to build, I know that, despite all the years that we've been together."

Musashi blinked, slightly surprised by his wife's insight.

"He's your first love... and you're... you're probably the only one he loved completely unconditionally, because you never questioned his ways... that's something... something I was never able to do," she mumbled sadly, staring down at her hands.

Gen looked at her for a few moments, at the same time incredibly happy that she was his wife and just as sad that they were not the perfect couple that people saw in them, that there was Hiruma between them. Gently, he put a hand on her cheek, making her turn her face towards him.

"...I'm sorry... would you... would you rather have him make advances towards you?" he asked, genuinely curious.

She looked at him wide eyes before she started laughing. "Hell, no! I've been over that for over twenty years. You can do anything you want, you hear? Anything. You two can... have your way like you did during High School and university... I just... I just don't want all of *this* to crumble and fall into pieces... We put so much effort in building up this life for the both of us and our children... Don't throw it away for a dream that cannot come true. You're not a teenager anymore."

Musashi chuckled wryly. "I know... I know. Although sometimes I wish I still was 17." He leaned forward and kissed her softly. "You're too kind for me. Sometimes I don't think that I deserve you."

"Oh, you don't," Mamori answered quickly, grinning back at him. "But you're the best father figure I've ever encountered, that's why I have you where you are now."

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[sup]1[/sup]ba-san – aunt

## Kapitel 9: Twentythree

Mamori stared at the man sleeping soundly beside her and shuddered, pulling the blanket closer around her naked body. For a heartbeat she wondered how things had come to this, but then again, it had been a sequence of logical events.

The evening had started with her and Musashi studying together at his place for a test, the last test of the semester. They had taken up a habit to study together because they had taken mostly the same courses. Hiruma sometimes joined them in, when he felt like it, but most of the time it was just the two of them. The girl had never thought anything of it, it was just her and a good friend studying. Of course she had admired Musashi for his looks, his personality and friendliness, but it was nothing than a deep friendship to her. Of course she had played his girlfriend once when he was visiting his fatally ill father to give an old man the illusion that his son had found a woman to produce the next heir, but in her mind he was off-limits.

Then, a few hours prior, Musashi's telephone had rung. He had answered it and while he did, all the color slowly vanished from his face. Worried, Mamori walked over silently, putting a gentle hand onto his shoulder, but he did not seem to notice here, just talked mechanically into the phone. From what she heard though, she gathered that his father had died. It was a relief really, because of his long sickness, his weakened bones and all, but still it seemed to be a shock to this otherwise so calm person.

Gently she had rubbed his back, soothingly, when he had ended the phone call, his face as white as chalk, his hands shaking and cold as he hugged her close and started to cry. It was both a terrifying and heart-rending scene to see Gen Takekura cry over the loss of a close family member. It was even more terrifying because he was literally soaking her blouse.

She had tried to calm him down, she had done her best, really, but he kept shaking and crying until Mamori had no idea anymore what to do and started to kiss away his tears. Alas, this did not have the wanted effect and instead of calming Musashi down, he kissed her. On the mouth. Deeply, so that she had to gasp and give way to her mouth.

Overwhelmed, she realized what Musashi was up to as he made quick work of her blouse and was surprised to find that she did not mind. She knew that this had probably no meaning the next morning, but it was not like she was averse to having sex with him at that moment, if it helped to calm him down...

Maybe her wild side had not really died down after her relationship with Hiruma that had ended with a disaster. Luckily though, they had started talking again and while Musashi was around, they could be described as good friends, too. Still, things were a little chilly between them and they ensured to keep a safe distance from each other most of the time.

So, being touched and loved by Musashi the way he did right when he led her to his bed, felt a little blasphemous to her, but it was more than just easy to ignore it while it lasted. Now, that the waves had calmed down though and she was alone with her thoughts, all that she could think of was, "Oh my god! Hiruma is going to kill me!"

It was like an unwritten rule; nobody who was in his right mind laid a finger on anything that was precious to Hiruma. The only exception was Musashi, who was allowed to do a few more things than an average person could. For a few months, Mamori had been in that favorable position, too, but after that, Musashi had moved up in that list again, just above her.

Therefore, she had done the unthinkable; she had slept with the only person that Hiruma still loved. She felt somehow blasphemous, dirty and as if she had just defiled the purity Musashi meant to her, namely that Hiruma was the one and only for him and she was only the coverage.

But wait, it had been him that had attacked her. She had tried to convince him otherwise, even if it had been – admittedly – a little half-heartedly, but he had not stopped. So, her conscience supplied, it was not her fault at all, it was entirely Musashi's.

Next to her, the young man stirred, rolling from his front to his back as he sleepily rubbed his eyes. "What'cha doin' there... Get back t'sleep," he mumbled, making a lazy movement with his arm to signal her to lie down on his chest.

She blushed again, but no reason to refuse the offer came to her mind. Thus, with a deep sigh, she crawled back under the covers and rested her head on his broad chest, listening to his strong and steady heartbeat, that soothed away her fears and worries until she finally fell asleep.

~\*~

The next day he asked her with a cute little blush to accompany him to the hospital and the necessary places to take care of his father's funeral. Being as faithful and nice as she was, she did all these things with a smile, even as her worries because of Hiruma grew. However, these days they were so busy that she was not even able to look back on everything herself, and when she was finally able to breathe again, she realized that a whole year had passed and that there was only one semester of university left for her, Gen and Hiruma.

Naturally, she indulged herself into studying more, along with Gen and also Hiruma, who seemed to take this thing that was going on between her and Gen easier than she had expected, he even encouraged them once to hold hands in public to keep the picture. With no sadistic stab behind it, like he usually like to include. Mamori suspected that it had something to do with the fact that the two have them had just spent the better of a weekend together.

Gen was always better at explaining things to Hiruma than she had been, mostly because Hiruma actually bothered to listen to his words whenever he said something, unlike to her. Sure, they talked, he reacted to what she said, but he never *listened* to her. Over the time she realized that it had always been like that and that – despite everything that had happened – this was the *real* reason, why she had broken up with him. He was all right as a friend, very loyal, too, but the fact that he knew everything *better* than she did got so much on the nerves that it became unbearable to her.

She still wondered where Gen took all his patience from concerning Hiruma. However, she understood better and better each day why these two felt drawn so much towards each other. It was as if they were two opposite sides of a magnet. The other could not live without the other, but there was just too much in this world that stopped them from being together.

One, Gen thought it was impossible to be successful in this world if you were openly gay, even though there were a few examples from other countries. Two, Hiruma did not want to be open. He wanted to be together with Musashi, but nothing steady, just some simple kiss-and-run relationship that went so much deeper than he let on. Mamori honestly thought that it was sad that they happened to agree that their relationship had no future when it was all that they wanted.

~\*~

“Maybe we should just marry,” Gen said during a vacation – courtesy of a company that was impressed by Takekura Constructions’ good work and its CEO – with his ‘fiancée’ on Hawaii.

Mamori looked at him with wide eyes. “Is that a proposal?” she asked, incredulously.

The other just shrugged. “A suggestion, maybe. To be honest, I... have to marry soon. Somehow, my life has already attracted too much public interest as it is, everything else... Everything else I could do from now on would just harm the success we both have worked for so hard. And... it’s not like I have the time or energy to look for another woman to share my life with.”

She looked at him for a long time, sea-gulls shrieking in the air above them. The sea washed against the shore in soothing movements, the sky was blue, but Mamori’s mind was on only one thing. Or rather person.

“What about-”

“You know about... him,” Gen interrupted her rudely. “It’s not like I could marry him. Unless he was a woman, would not run around with his weapons as he loves to and would not do all the things that he does because he can’t change who he is.”

“...I understand.”

Gen looked up at her from behind his shades and sat up straight, apologetically caressing her cheek. "...I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound so harsh."

She shook her head, smiling wryly. "No, no, you're right. It would be easy for you to marry Hiruma... if he was not what he was... the demon we both like so much."

Gen smiled back at her just as wryly. "I just... want to assure you that I don't see you as a substitute for him."

Laughing out loudly, she patted his arm. "I'd never thought you'd do that, really. Hiruma and I are just too different to serve as some kind of substitute for the other."

"Oh, there *are* some similarities, really," Gen chuckled. "You're both very motherly."

Her laughter increased. "Oh, oh! I just had the greatest picture in my head: Hiruma in a pink apron in front of the oven with kids hanging at his arms while he desperately tried to prepare something to eat. And-" she laughed harder, "he's wearing make-up!"

Gen chuckled slightly, agreeing on the fact that the sight would be very funny. "Add a skirt and he would have a very happy husband," he mumbled lowly, just so that she could hear it.

Her laughter bubbled away to something softer, but her eyes showed a deviousness that could rival Hiruma's. "Oh, so that's your secret fetish? ...Wait! Is that the reason why you 'borrowed' my uniform during High School before that one Halloween?"

As the man did not answer, but bit his lip sheepishly, a little blush gracing his cheeks, she hit him playfully. "How many times did you two do it that night?"

"...You don't want to know," Gen mumbled as he recalled the angry look she had given them when they arrived at the Deimon's Halloween party. He also felt as if he was suffering a heatstroke as he recalled just how irresistible Hiruma looked when he was wearing a skirt...

He looked down onto the sand and hoped that no blood was dripping from his nose.

"Is... is that a nosebleed?" Mamori asked, sounding incredulously amused. "You're not bleeding from your nose, are you? Yes, you are!"

She could not stop her laughter after that anymore, and she laughed so hard, that Gen had to shut her up in the most elegant way that he knew.

~\*~

One month after that vacation, Mamori stood in front of Gen's door, looking not very happy. He let her in, worried about what was wrong and promptly asked her. He was never one to waste much time with pretty words and she respected that. So she

simply said those three little words.

"I am pregnant."

"..." Gen stared at her with wide eyes.

"..." Mamori did not dare to look up, remembering the last time she had said these words.

"Really?"

She nodded feebly.

"Well, then, we've got no other choice," Gen sighed and took out his cell phone.

"...What are you doing?"

He just grinned enigmatically and kissed her forehead. "Stupid. We are going to marry."

"...Really?" She thought that she was dreaming.

"Remember what I said to you on Hawaii? I meant it," Gen said, "and now that you're... that you're carrying our child it's even more important. I can't let my child grow up without a family."

Mamori just stared at him, totally baffled. "But... but... What about-?"

"That's not important right now. Right now, everything that matters are you and the child," Gen said.

The young woman still stared at him, her mouth hanging slightly open. Once again, it showed that Gen and Hiruma were just the complete opposite. She was moved so much that she did not notice how a tear ran down her cheek.

"So, what's your answer?"

"Huh?"

"Will you marry me?"

One year later, Takekura Constructions' rise to one of Tokyo's biggest constructions companies started.

## Kapitel 10: Drifting

The night had been surprisingly eventful for Hiruma. He had heard Youichi return home around one o'clock, but around two he heard some noise from Ken's room, as if the younger Takekura-son had some late night visit or had sneaked out. For a moment, he looked up from his laptop, frowning at the noise, as he had not thought the boy was prone to such activities. About an hour later, he heard another noise, again from Ken's room, as if somebody was leaving this time, but he still shrugged it off as nothing.

Three hours later, he had finished off everything he needed to take care off and shut down his laptop. He had managed to arrange for a new hotel room starting later that day, and he planned to reduce the rent by telling the hotel owner he knew what he had done 22 years ago. Nothing important, just his usual way on bargaining for something fair instead of the horrendous prices normal people had to pay.

While he still wondered if he should take a nap or so to bridge the time gap until the rest of the family was awake, he heard little feet running through the hall outside. Curiosity peaked, he stuck his head outside to see if somebody was already awake and if he could go down and make himself some coffee.

"Good morning, You-ji!" Sachiko greeted him cheerfully, bouncing up and down on the balls of her feet in front of him. "Let's have breakfast together!"

He raised an eyebrow and knelt down in front of her, just to be hugged tightly. Thus, he had no other choice but to pick her up as he straightened up into a stand. "I think your mother should-"

"Good morning, Hiruma," Mamori greeted him as she suddenly appeared from her and Musashi's bedroom.

"...Morning," the blond mumbled, slightly annoyed by the over-excited child that clung to him. "Good morning, mum!"

"Good morning Sachiko," Mamori smiled, leaning up a bit on her toes to kiss her daughter's cheek. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yes! I did!" Sachiko cheered, starting to tell her mother about her dream in vivid colors. Hiruma rolled his eyes, sighed again and wondered if he would ever be able to get rid for good of that bundle in his arms. Suddenly the door to Ken's room opened and a very sleepy looking bed-head moved out of it.

"...Oh. Everyone's awake already," the teenager mumbled. "'m gonna take a shower quick... Mom, where is my-"

"I put your training clothes back in your bag," Mamori answered his unfinished question as she pressed a kiss to his cheek as well. Suddenly Hiruma was glad that she

had not kissed him as a greeting. "Aren't you a little late? Usually you're already down in the kitchen around this time..."

"Yeah, I know. I kinda... overslept. But it's not like I'll miss anything. Tamura and Ohkawa won't be at the field until half past eight... Lazy asses," he added as an afterthought, glancing over to Hiruma who was still dressed in the same clothes as last night.

The blond tried not to grin too much, suddenly realizing what kind of noises he had heard last night from the boy's room. He did not know if his parents knew that he had a nightly visitor, but he thought nothing of it. He was 16 years old, he was allowed to have some fun at night. Hiruma knew that the boy's father had not been any better at his age, with the only difference that Musashi had been working instead of going to school.

Ken's gaze wavered a little under his grin and the blond was sure to spot a little blush on the teenager's cheeks, but neither of them dared to say anything and the boy quickly fled into the bathroom for his shower.

Hiruma intended to hand Sachiko over to Mamori, but somehow the woman managed to talk him into taking care of the girl by changing her diapers, helping her dress and braiding her hair into pigtails. He was surprised by the lack of resistance he put up, but – save for the part with the diapers – it had not been that bad. The diapers though... that was a completely different story. Hiruma simply decided that he would never ever again change any diapers in his whole life. It just was not worth the nerves he had lost. At least his flamethrower had been useful as he got rid of the offensive stink bomb.

Physically and mentally exhausted, he carried Sachiko down into the kitchen, put her down in her chair and plopped down on one himself. About a moment later, a mug full of steaming hot coffee appeared almost magically in front of him. He looked at it curiously and sipped at the black liquid, just to raise his eyebrows in surprise.

"...You have gotten better at this," he mumbled, seeing her blush slightly under his praise.

"I had twenty years of practice," she said. "I hope you didn't have too many problems changing Sachiko's diapers."

Snorting, Hiruma took another gulp of the coffee and waved it off. "It wasn't the worst thing I have ever done in my life... but I won't do it again. Ever. Don't bother asking."

Mamori chuckled softly as she took the empty plate from Ken who had just finished his breakfast, already standing up to get ready to leave for school. "Those were exactly my thoughts when I first changed Youichi's diapers. Really, that smell is ungodly."

Hiruma snorted again and shook his head, watching how Mamori prepared Sachiko's

food. The girl had gotten uncharacteristically silent, only clapping into her little hands as she saw how her bowl of pulp was placed in front of her. As Mamori started to feed her though, he looked away, involuntarily wondering what it would have been like if *he* had married her and they had had children. Would they have lived in a house like this with lots of kids? Or what would have been?

He quickly closed his eyes and shook his head slightly, because this thinking would get him nowhere. He knew that he was no family guy, that he would have been a horrendous father and that he did not really like all this family stuff at all. Sure, it felt nice to be pampered by a mother like Mamori once in a while, but after a few weeks it would drive him insane. It almost did 25 years ago, so he had spent most of the time with her with fucking her senseless to make her stop worrying about him.

Frowning deeply, he almost did not notice how Youichi entered the room. "Good morning!"

"Good morning, Youichi," his mother greeted him, smiling a smile that just screamed danger. Hiruma grinned to himself. No, he really did not like the idea of a family. You just had to explain yourself too much to the mother. "I heard that you went out again last night."

"Oh, um, yes I did. I went to karaoke with some friends," the younger blond said quickly. From sitting right next to him, Hiruma could see that the younger blond had a piercing in his ear, just where his started to get pointy. He chuckled and watched the scene unfold itself in front of him.

"Karaoke, yes? I hope it was really just karaoke. I hope you didn't do elsewhere with Emi, hm?" the woman asked, feeding Sachiko her pulp as if she was not threatening her oldest son between the lines.

"Yup, just karaoke with some friends from university. You can ask them if you want to," Youichi said, chewing away on his slice of toast as he studied the newspaper.

"Oh, it's not that important. If I recall correctly you had an arrangement with your father that you can do everything as you wish as long as you're up earlier than he is. And you are, so there should be no problem for you," Mamori answered and the "but" at the end of the last sentence was so clearly audible that even Hiruma felt a little guilty himself even though he was the one that had done the least wrong.

"...But?" Youichi asked as the silence became unbearable to him.

"Oh, if I hear any complaints from Suzuna-chan, you know what expects you," Mamori said almost cheerfully, and all Hiruma wanted to do was break out laughing loudly, but he just leaned back with a snicker.

The other blond rolled his eyes though and shook his head. "One month of housework, I know. Geez, don't get so worked up over it. It's not like I'm making her skip school or anything. We're just... having fun, just like normal teenagers do, alright? I'm even helping her with school when she has problems. Honestly. It would be too

great if you and Suzuna-ba-chan would stop pestering me about it. I'm no bad guy, okay?"

"Oh, it's fine," Mamori said, putting down Sachiko's spoon for a moment. "I trust you that you know what you're doing, just do it well. You don't know when something's going to happen that will change your life."

"...Whatever you say, mom," Youichi mumbled with a frown. He turned back to his breakfast, just when Musashi walked through the kitchen door.

"Good morning, everyone," he greeted his family and Hiruma, sitting down next to his son, since Hiruma had claimed his seat unknowingly. "I see you're up early, son. That's good."

"Please, dad, mom just gave me the lecture before you came in. No need to do it again," the younger blond rolled his eyes.

"Oh, nothing like that had been on my mind, really," Musashi said, feigning innocence, but Hiruma could see a little twinkle in his eyes. "I just hope you had fun last night."

"Yeah, it was quite alright," Youichi grinned. "I'll tell you details later, if you want to, but now I'm off for university. I'll be late today, because I'm needed at that site in Yokohama, so don't wait up for me. I'll eat out, so you don't have to leave me dinner either."

Hiruma finished his coffee as Mamori tried to make her son admit that he just wanted to meet Emi after school instead of working, but he insisted on it until he left. Musashi just finished his breakfast, too, when the blond stood up to pack up his things.

"I found a new hotel to stay at, so don't count me in for dinner tonight either," he said as he left the kitchen.

"That's too sad... I really wanted to make your favorite food," Mamori said, but just saw him shrug as an answer. She sighed deeply. "And here I thought that he could be a part of our family, too."

Musashi smiled sympathetically. "You know that this is not his cup of tea. Give him some time, maybe I can convince him to come over for dinner."

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Around noon, Hiruma left the house of the Takekuras with his bags that he wanted to place at the hotel, but he ended up at Ocean Avenue Café to wait for Musashi instead, just like the old man had asked him to. If the old man wanted to meet him that badly, he could carry his stuff, too. That was the least that he could do to make up for the fact that he had to change some kid's diapers, among other things.

Just before she had left, Mamori had tried to convince him to go and see Ken's after school training, but he had told her directly that he had other plans. In the end, even she had to give in and let him be. She just took out her phone and wrote a quick message to somebody, probably to tell Ken that Hiruma would *not* come to get him later that day. As if he cared that much. He just wanted to get out of this family, because he had gotten in too deep already anyways. The only thing he really wanted to do now was to spend some time alone with Musashi.

At around 2p.m. the old man finally arrived at the café, but he did not sit down to drink some coffee with him. He just ordered two sandwiches and two cups of coffee to go before he led Hiruma outside to his car.

"Wow, where are we going?" Hiruma asked as he sat down in the left seat in the front.

"You'll see," Musashi smiled as he sat down in the driver's seat after securing the food in the back.

"Hey, how far back can you put these seats?" Hiruma asked, looking for the handle to try it out.

Musashi grinned. "All the way. But that's not what I wanted to show you."

Hiruma looked at him with a raised eyebrow where he lay on the now lowered seat next to him. "Well then, what is it?"

"Just wait and you will see," Musashi said as he backed out and drove off towards the south of the city.

## Kapitel 11: Space Travel

After twenty minutes of driving, Hiruma peeked one eye open from his relaxed state in the passenger's seat. Musashi still did not look like they would arrive at their destination soon, so he dared to ask, "How long?"

"Not that long," Musashi said, still having this goofy grin on his face. Hiruma frowned, slightly irritated by that grin, but chose not to prod further, closed his eyes again and lay back in the front seat again. It was easy for him to relax completely in the given situation so that he almost drifted off to sleep, thanks to spending the last night awake.

Just when he finally dozed off, Musashi stopped the engine and shook him awake. "Hey, we're there, stop sleeping," the older man said, made sure that Hiruma opened his eyes and then left the car. While the blond stretched and yawned, Musashi went and got his baggage from the trunk.

Hiruma got out of the car and looked around. They stood in front of an entrance to an underground automatic parking lot, the car waiting to be put in there by a very serious looking young man.

"Welcome back, sir," he greeted Musashi and took the keys to the car from him. "I saw you brought a guest? That's rare."

"Yes, I did, Tetsuma-san," Musashi nodded. Hiruma raised an eyebrow as he heard the name. "A very old friend of mine."

"Very well," Tetsuma said and nodded. "The same place as usual?"

"Yes, please. I will be leaving around 7," Musashi said and closed the trunk as he handed the keys to the young man.

"Understood. Well then, enjoy your stay as usual," Tetsuma said just before he sat down in the car and drove it into the elevator. Hiruma did not see the rest of the procedure as Musashi had already led him towards the nearest elevator. Inside it, he fumbled a key out of his pants' pocket and pushed it into the hole on the panel with a lot of buttons to all the floors of what seemed to be a very high building.

Hiruma frowned when the elevator started to move, not to slow, too. "Alright, stop the secrecy. Where are we? What kind of building is this?"

"If you hadn't slept through the last part of the drive you would have seen it," Musashi said, a small smile playing around his lips. "Now you have to wait until we're upstairs."

"Upstairs means what?" Hiruma said, glaring at the doors in front of him as glaring at Musashi would not get him anywhere. He wished for a bubble gum so that his ears would not hurt from the quickness that took them upwards, but for now, he had to

relax his eardrum otherwise.

"Upstairs means upstairs, until the top," Musashi said, leaning back against the wall of the elevator.

Hiruma rolled his eyes and wondered when the other had started to become so secretive, but then again, Musashi had never told him everything, so why should he start now.

"Until the top?" he repeated and looked at the buttons to the floors again. The last one that he saw was a 110. That was over 100 floors smaller than that one hotel Hiruma had once visited in Dubai, but something about the number struck him. While he wondered if it really meant what he thought it meant, he quickly changed the subject.

"Tetsuma-san isn't Tetsuma's son, is he?" Hiruma asked. "He's too old to be his son."

"Yes, he isn't his son," Musashi confirmed with a nod. "He's his younger cousin. Tetsuma is still working for Kid... they're inseparable."

"They've always been," Hiruma snorted. "They were even worse than Sakuraba and Shin."

"Or Sakuraba and Takami," Musashi added.

"Or those fucking three brothers," Hiruma ranted on. "Damn, this elevator's taking really long. You could have sex and reach orgasm before you get to the top at this snail pace."

Musashi snorted bemusedly. "If you say so."

"Kekeke, did you ever try it?" Hiruma asked. "I'm sure you come here often for some 'alone time' with the fucking mother-"

"No, never," Musashi interrupted before the blond could even finish the sentence. "Mamori doesn't know about this place – Ah, we're there."

The elevator was in fact slowing down and the doors opened before Hiruma was able to ask his next question. "She doesn't know? Why?"

"Just because," Musashi said as he put the key back into his pocket, took Hiruma's baggage and stepped out into a small hallway. He kicked off his shoes with practiced ease, not caring where they fell as he moved on into the next room that already promised to have the most amazing view outside from the place where Hiruma stood now, too surprised to take off his shoes.

Right then, he was looking straight at the sky, with a hint of the city and the ocean underneath. The sun was very low already and you could see that there was going to be a beautiful red afterglow of the sunset. The view was only perturbed by a few

potted plants outside on the roof of the building and the glass front that separated the living room from the roof.

"...What is this place?" Hiruma asked as he finally managed to take off his shoes and walk inside, seeing that it was not just a living room but an open room that included a dining table and a kitchen on the right as well as the aforementioned living room in front of him and a little to the right with a big cozy couch. Behind the couch were a king-size, soft-looking bed and a wardrobe at the wall to the hallway. From each spot of this little luxury place you had the same breathtaking view onto the city and the ocean.

"This is my little refuge," Musashi smiled, putting the luggage down next to smaller sofa. "I built most of the things here myself in what little free time I have. It took about two years to get everything done."

Hiruma stared disbelievingly at the perfectly crafted wooden furniture. "...You made all of this yourself?"

"I just told you so," Musashi said and opened the door outside onto the terrace.

Hiruma snorted as he watched the older one water the plants. "You are the strangest person I've ever met."

Musashi smiled as he said, "I'm giving back that compliment to you."

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About an hour later, Hiruma sat on the couch, their coffee drunk and their sandwiches eaten, and they were talking about old times, new times and what had happened in between. So far, Hiruma had found out that Musashi had been allowed to keep the rooftop of this building as it was the highest one that both Takekura Constructions and their client, Mushanokoji industries – hence they had a Tetsuma working for them there – so as a personal little celebration that they were able to finish this project within less than a year, TC was given a rather generous reward.

Musashi, being the good guy that he was, gave his money to his workers and asked – in a very nice way that he had learned from Hiruma – for this little gem. Originally, Mushanokoji senior had wanted this place to be his son's hideaway with his girlfriend, but since Kid was not going to get himself a girlfriend soon, Mushanokoji junior had agreed happily to leave this place into Musashi's hands. It was not like he was going to use it anyway and his father had agreed, because Kid did a good job as it was and he could not risk that anybody would tell the press that his son was gay.

Hiruma sighed. In other places of the earth it was possible to become a renowned governing mayor when you were a homosexual, but in Japan – despite Sakuraba's open campaign – it was still impossible to be famous and famed if you were gay.

"So, why are you showing me all this?" he asked suddenly, interrupting Musashi's never-ending stories of his kids. "I mean, it's not like we're going to have sex now, since this was the longest time that we've been together in one room and talked. Just *talked*. Like this."

The other blinked, then chuckled softly. "Right, I'm not showing you this to have sex with you. I knew for a fact that you would have found out about it, no matter what. So, I thought that maybe you would like to stay here..."

"...Me? Stay here?" Hiruma asked, one eyebrow raised questioningly.

"Sure, why not," Musashi shrugged. "It's not like I have a lot of free time to appreciate this place, now that I'm done with it."

"...That's a really inviting offer," Hiruma said and sat his bottle of water down on the table. Slowly, almost tantalizing, he walked over to Musashi and flopped down across his lap, just like he had done the night before. "I bet you want me to do something for you in return."

"We never really talked, did we?" Musashi asked suddenly, surprise written visibly over his face.

"What has that got to do with anything?" Hiruma frowned, puzzled; leaning a bit back to have a better look at the other's face.

"I just... noticed," Musashi smiled wryly. "We just... understood each other without words until-"

"Until you decided that it was more important for you to become a valid member of community instead of staying an individual," Hiruma said coldly.

"That's not true," Musashi gave back, his voice just as icy as Hiruma's. "You know it isn't."

Hiruma shook his head. "No, I don't know anything about you anymore. 20 years are a very long time, even for me. I cannot forget what happened. I cannot ignore the life you live, with the fucking mother hen at your side and your fucking kids."

Sighing, Musashi put a hand onto Hiruma's cheek, gently caressing it with his thumb. He was surprised that the blond did not push him away. "Neither can I. Sometimes, I wonder what would have been if-"

"You know that'll get you nowhere," Hiruma interrupted, finally pushing his arm away, just to lean in closely, so close that their noses were almost touching. "There's not 'what if' there's only the here and now."

"...You're right." Musashi sighed, but his eyes showed no regret when he looked back into Hiruma's eyes. "That was the same conclusion that I came to."

"So why are you telling me about this then?" Hiruma asked, starting to get annoyed, but he still looked very comfortable in Musashi's lap.

"Because during these 20 years there was not a singly day or night that I did not dream of you," Musashi said honestly, earnestly and openly.

Hiruma blinked, too surprised for a few heartbeats to say anything in return. Instead, his heart missed a beat and he suddenly had a hard time breathing. He tried to cover his sudden insecurity with a snort and a shrug. "So what? We went through a lot together, during school and university, it's nothing extraordinary."

"Tell me that you weren't thinking about me everyday," Musashi suddenly demanded, obviously seeing through Hiruma's façade. The blond felt himself blush and he tried in vain to stop it. Of course, his thoughts had always been with Musashi in Japan, he had not been able to think of anything else but to get him back, just as he had during High School. Back then, it had been for a reason, but this time it was purely personal. But it was not something that he could admit right into the other's face, not at this time.

"...I'm sorry, you don't need to answer," Musashi sighed, shaking his head. "My mouth got away with me again."

Hiruma snorted and was glad that the other changed the subject. "Yeah, that's one of your virtues. How did you manage to become this influential?"

"Mamori gave me a kick to the shin every time I said something stupid," Musashi admitted, chuckling sheepishly. "Simple, but effective."

"I bet," Hiruma snorted. "So, what do I have to do for staying here?"

Musashi looked at him sternly, large hands on the blond's lithe shoulders. "Just... stay here. Don't leave, not without telling me where you're going. Never again, understood?"

"... I can't promise that," Hiruma said just as earnestly. "If it's not enough for me, I can't just *stay* here. I have to move on if I have to."

The older man looked at him for a long while, then nodded in understanding. "Fine. Then I hope you don't mind if I ask you to baby-sit my kids from time to time. Oh, and I hope you will come to my birthday party on Saturday."

Hiruma's eyes narrowed and he glared down at the other. "That's your punishment, right?"

Musashi smiled, "'Punishment' is such a harsh word... I'd say it's some 'special persuasion'. Many people that you know will come, too, and I bet you're dying to know what they're doing right now... of those who haven't become famous."

The blond's glare intensified, but then he sighed in defeat. "Fine, you won. I expect you to pick me up though. On time, that goes without saying."

"Of course," Musashi nodded. "But I have to leave you now. Dinner's server at 7p.m. and I need to drive through-"

"Yeah, yeah, understood, just get going," Hiruma replied, getting off of the other's lap with a fluid movement. "I'll make myself a home while you're gone."

"I'll pay you a visit tomorrow," Musashi promised as he went to get his jacket. "Oh, and please *try* to keep this place tidy... Don't throw your guns around like a three-year-old."

"Yes, daddy," Hiruma mock-saluted, but was already sitting in front of his laptop, deeply indulged in some tables and charts that Musashi was unable to read.

The older one shook his head in amusement. "I'll leave the keys on the counter. If you need something, ask Tetsuma-san. He will help you."

"Thanks, but I'm not planning on leaving this place. Unless I run out of gum," Hiruma said, popping one of those into his mouth.

Musashi smiled almost fondly at him. "Old habits never die, do they?"

"Obviously, not."

"Well, then, I'll leave the keys on the counter. I have spare ones in my office. See you tomorrow."

"Mhm," Hiruma mumbled, already too focused on his computer.

When Musashi arrived back home, he had to explain Mamori why he had not brought Hiruma with him again and told her that he had been tired and decided to stay at his hotel. He interrupted her when she looked at him with her special mixture of sadness and anger to tell her that he had managed to make him come to their wedding anniversary party. The look of surprise on her face was priceless.

## Kapitel 12: Waiting Game

It was Saturday and Hiruma had almost forgotten what Musashi had said about his birthday party. So, when the door opened and he heard Musashi enter the room, he rushed over to the door and threw his arms around the other's neck.

"Welcome home, honey! How was work today?" he chirped falsely, grinning his toothy grin as Musashi stared at him in pure disbelief.

"...Who are you and what happened to Hiruma?" the older looking man asked, glaring down the blond as he tried to cover up the fact that he wanted to throw up.

"What? Wasn't that what you were thinking of when you showed me your other bedroom?" Hiruma asked, a grin so bittersweet and false on his lips that Musashi wanted to vomit.

"In fact, no," he ground out between clenched teeth, pushing Hiruma away from himself. "I was just thinking that I finally wanted to have a place to call home. I'd even give up what little of my own time and space I had for that."

Hiruma snorted, crossing his arms in front of his chest before he looked up levelly at the other. "You can tell that to yourself, I'm not buying that."

Gen rolled his eyes as he took off his shoes and coat. "Listen, you are the first person I ever showed this place and I didn't lie when I told you that not even Mamori has been here. No one had been here, just Tamahachi, Youichi and the plumber and electrician. Because, no, I'm a carpenter and I can't do anything on my own, either."

"That still doesn't mean that-"

"I was not done yet!" Gen bellowed, blinking slightly in surprise when Hiruma's eyes widened with a hint of fear. "Sorry, I didn't", Musashi started, then shook his head, and his look was as firm as before. "Look, through all the years, I've been faithful and believe me, it wasn't easy. Only now, that you're back..."

He stopped right there, staring down at the ground while his cheeks turned beet-red like he was still a teenager. "Forget what I said. Let me get a few things and then we should get going."

Still having to work through what Musashi had just told him, Hiruma frowned and decided to slip the first bunch of questions that came to his mind that had to do only with the two of them in favor for the one that was most important right then. "Go where?"

"Odaiba," Musashi said on his way to the kitchen to get something out of a drawer. "Remember? I asked you to come to my birthday party to meet some old friends-"

"Wait, Odaiba? Why don't you celebrate your birthday at home?" Hiruma's frown deepened.

"Because Mamori would kill me if she had to cook and do the dishes for a good 50 persons," Musashi elaborated, putting the object that looked like a little present to Hiruma into his pocket.

"What?! Why do you invite so many people to your birthday?" Hiruma glared. "I thought you didn't like that many people in one place either."

"Well, I know a lot of people and – you know how that works – you have to invite the right people at the right time and do nice things to them to get the things you want, right?" Musashi now smirked, obviously done with what he wanted to do as he returned to the entrance and started to put his shoes back on.

"Right..." Hiruma mumbled, not looking happy at all. "Well, then, you have to go alone, because I don't have anything to wear that matches your suit. I don't have any clothes for a funeral."

With a shrug he returned to his laptop on the couch, fully expecting Musashi to let him have his peace and leave. He did not have such luck though.

"What do you think you're doing? You're worse than Mamori when she's on PMS. You're coming with me and if I have to drag you out by your collar or something!" the man ordered, making Hiruma feel like a schoolboy. His eyes narrowed and he glared full force at the other.

"Who do you think you're talking to? One of your sons?" he asked in an icy tone.

Musashi rolled his eyes. "Look, I don't have time for any of these games, I promise we can talk about it later, but now, please put on something or come as you are or whatever just..."

"...You're late," Hiruma pointed out, finally recognizing the reason behind Musashi's harshness with a knowing grin.

"...Yes, I am," Musashi sighed, "now, please, don't make it harder than it already is."

"...Fine, but only because it's you."

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About an hour later, after Hiruma had taken a very quick shower, redressed in something more presentable than black pants and a short-sleeved turtleneck, he and Musashi arrived at the hotel on Odaiba where the party took place.

Hiruma frowned when he read the text on the signs on their hurried way inside. He

did not read much of a birthday party, more of a wedding anniversary. But Musashi was so fast that even he had a hard time keeping up with him, especially since the older looking man had his wrist in a vice-like hold.

Music was coming from the room they were going to, rather loud, too. Wincing, Hiruma returned to glaring at Musashi, but the other did not notice, because he was not even looking at him. Instead, he made his way straight to the door.

As he opened it, they were greeted by a loud and cheery "Happy Anniversary!" which was followed by a few very loud gasps and Hiruma rolled his eyes.

"Hi-Hiruma-san... Is that you?" a man in his forties – like most of the people here – stepped forward, large eyes staring at him in disbelief.

"Che, fucking shrimp, you had twenty years to get a new haircut and you still look the same?" Hiruma snorted, trying to ignore the warm and fuzzy feeling in his chest.

A blond man in the corner snorted and said to his two friends: "Heh, it's really the same old-"

"HIRUMA~~~~~!!!"

Every muscle in Hiruma's body was suddenly alerted to jump when he heard a too familiar loud and a very happy cry. He could not yet make out where it came from, but by the way it had suddenly gotten darker, he knew that Kurita's approach was close. Musashi's catlike reflexes were the ones that saved him from being crushed though.

"Aw, Musashi, why don't you let me hug Hiruma? It's been such a long time that we saw him," Kurita pouted, still the same round person that he was during school. Somehow it felt nice that nothing had changed at all, Hiruma noticed with more fondness than he would ever admit.

"The last time you hugged somebody, Takami had to do some immediate surgery to get their bones back in place and you know you crushed a car in your hug once, remember?" Musashi reprimanded him with a fatherly and fond smile. Hiruma remembered his little comparison from earlier and shook his head. Seems like he took his father role a little too seriously.

"It's alright, fucking fatty, if you're careful. Like Daddy here said, don't crush you friends in your bear hugs- huff!"

Hiruma was not able to say more as he had already been lifted off the ground by Kurita, who had him tightly in his arms. It felt a bit bone crushing, but not too much. In fact, the only other time that Kurita had actually hugged him like this was when they had won the game before the Christmas Bowl and that was nothing compared to this hug. Hiruma winced at the memory of his broken arm then, but then used his legs to kick the other as hard as he could into his big round belly.

"That's okay! Stop it! Ugh!" The blond struggled until he was put back down safely on

the ground, just to take a deep breath. Taking a good look at his oldest friend, he shook his head with a grin. "Damn, you really haven't changed one bit. You still the same old fatty you were in Junior High... minus the beard."

"Huh? What? Oh! You mean this," Kurita said with a sheepish laugh, running his hand through the beard around his mouth. "I've had it for so long that I don't remember that I have it."

"Hiruma-san, it has been a really long time," the man with the large eyes from before stepped in, smiling genuinely at him. It took Hiruma a heartbeat to transform this face back into that of a young man in his early twenties and then he was able to tell who it was that he was talking to.

"It has, fucking shrimp," he grinned fondly down at the one who moved passed each and every obstacle on the football field back during their days in High School together. "You've grown a lot since then... And your forehead, too."

The younger laughed sheepishly. "Yeah, I fear that I've inherited this from my father. But it's okay, I'm not-"

"He doesn't need to look good," a woman with dark bluish black hair about the same age as the man in front of him said, "he's got me for that."

"I see you haven't changed at all, either," Hiruma grinned down at Suzuna and Sena. "And I see that you did marry in the end."

"Yes!" Suzuna cheered. "But it took him 3 years to finally come up with the courage to ask me. You know how shy he is."

"Suzuna!" Sena protested in a high-pitched voice, sounding just like he did back during High School.

Hiruma grinned. "At least he grew a few centimeters."

"Oh yes! Doesn't he look good now? So manly, but not too much, not like Shin-san, but," she started and purred, making Sena blush completely.

"Suzuna! Would you please stop that?! You know there are minors around..." Sena protested, glancing towards the girl that was holding hands with Youichi right now, watching the scene with a cute little blush on her cheeks.

"Oh, believe me, Emi knows what she wants," Suzuna grinned.

Still grinning, Hiruma watched the pair banter about raising kids, when their daughter eyed him just as suspiciously as her boyfriend did. He walked away from his friends and towards the younger pair, offering his hand to the girl. "You must be Emi. I already heard of you... from your future parents-in-law."

"Um, yes, I am.... Nice... Nice to meet you," she mumbled, taking his hand and shaking

it with a side-glance to Youichi, who still glared at him. "And you are?"

"I'm Hiruma Youichi, the role-model for your boyfriend here," the older blond introduced himself with a grin. Youichi's glared intensified and he took a half-step forward, raising his fist in warning.

"Really? But I never heard him mention you... But my dad said you were a great person, even though Takekura-kun tries to tell me differently..." she mumbled with another side-glance to her boyfriend.

"Oh, that's because his parents decided for him," Hiruma cackled and patted her head. "But don't worry, I bet he's a really nice guy underneath all his glaring at me." With a grin he leaned in so that he could whisper in her ear, "And I bet he's a real bomb in bed if he's anything like, his father or his mother..."

"What are you whispering to her?" Youichi demanded as Emi turned beet-red, trying to get images out of her head that she never wanted to have there in the first place. "What did you tell her? How dare you to embarrass her like that? Get your fucking filthy hands off her, she's mine, understood? Nobody touches her but me! And you won't touch her most of all people!"

Hiruma laughed loudly at that, and patted his shoulder as he walked. "Despite what you think of me, boy, I like you. And not only because you remind me of myself at your age. You irritate the hell out of me, but I like you. Keep that in mind when you plan to kill me."

"What the-?! Why should I?" Youichi mumbled as he stared at the blond's back, who walked away towards the buffet, but he was not able to make even two steps without being stopped by people that knew him and that wanted to talk to him. Of course he did not want to, but most of these people were people he had once cared about so he was just not able to brush them off like any other stranger and answered their questions with as much patience as he could gather.

When he had finally reached the buffet, he filled his plate with things that looked as un-sweet as they could and snuck out of the room as soon as he got the chance to. Unfortunately this was the moment that Musashi held his thank-you-speech and wanted to propose a toast to his sake.

~\*~

"Here you are."

Hiruma looked up from the skyline of Tokyo where he was leaning on the rail outside of the hotel. He acknowledged Musashi's presence with one look before he turned back around.

"I thought you had vanished again."

Snorting, the blond shook his head. "Not that soon. I was just tired of all the questions."

He half-expected Musashi to tell him that those were his friends, that they had a right to ask so many questions after twenty years, but the other just snorted. "I know how you feel. It's okay that you fled here."

"...What? No reprimanding from Daddy this time? Guess I must be lucky then," Hiruma chuckled.

"Maybe you are," Musashi said silently, sighing himself. "I've been on so many meetings that I just wanted to hide from because people kept asking me questions I didn't want to answer... But I never did it. Guess that makes me a stupid person."

"Perhaps," Hiruma mumbled. "Perhaps I'm the stupid one for running away like that. Perhaps I should have stayed and faced my problems like a man..."

"It's okay," Musashi shook his head. "You did what you did, then and now, it's not as if you could change it now."

"No, I can't change it," the blond sighed, turning to face the other. "But I can regret it now... At least a part of me."

"Since when did you ever feel regret?" his best and closest friend asked with a soft chuckle. "That's the first time I heard you say that."

"I regret a lot of things, but one thing more than all the others," Hiruma said. "Do you remember the day before your wedding or rather the night?"

Musashi frowned. "Why are you asking me that now?"

"Doesn't matter, just... tell me, what do you remember?"

"I just..." Musashi started, frowning as he tried to recall the day 20 years ago, but everything was clouded by the fog of one big hangover. "Not much, really. Just that... it was my bachelor's party, I was... kind of missing you, but suddenly you were there, but I don't remember what happened then."

"You don't remember anything from that night, do you?" Hiruma asked with a snort, shaking his head as if he had expected such an answer.

"The only thing I remember that I asked the hooker somebody booked for me to go home and keep the money she got," Musashi admitted. "I didn't want this complete stranger to-"

"It's a pity you don't remember, but I do," Hiruma interrupted him before he could finish his story. "It's a good thing that you don't remember what you said to me then."

"What do you mean?" Musashi asked with a frown.

## Kapitel 13: Something of Value

*[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]*

## Kapitel 14: Grey

Hiruma stared at Musashi in the moonlight, memories coming back to his mind, unbidden. Yes, he recalled every little detail of the last night that he had spent in Japan, the last night that he had spent together with the other man. His plan had been to reveal everything to him now, to force him thinking about what they had done and what he had *said*... Those dreadful three words that he had said unconsciously, words that were never needed between them. But as he looked into his eyes, those deep dark brown eyes filled with confusion, he knew that he would never be able to use anything he knew to his advantage towards this man.

Therefore, he just snorted and tore his gaze away and looked down on the ground.

"Well, you said you'd miss me." At least that much was true.

For a moment, Musashi looked as if he had expected something else, as if he had hoped that Hiruma would say something else. The blond smirked to himself. So he did remember a bit more than just that fucking hooker.

"I don't remember that you were there..."

"I wasn't. At the party that is," Hiruma explained, deciding that he would tell him a little bit more of the truth.

"...Oh god," Musashi groaned, looking as flabbergasted as one would who had just found out that he had an evil twin. He staggered forward to the rail and buried his face into his palms as he leaned on it with his elbows. "Don't tell me you wore a wedding gown that night..."

Hiruma smirked openly, so that Musashi could see his amusement over him remembering correctly.

"Oh shit," the older man cursed, rubbing his hands over his face, before he laughed bitterly at himself. "And I wondered why I had a feeling of *déjà-vu* on our honeymoon a month later..."

"Spare me the details," Hiruma said, his laughter having died on his tongue.

"Sorry," Musashi sighed, staring down over the rail that he leant heavily on, trying to come up with the right words to resolve the tension between them. He really wanted to be things as they were twenty-five years ago; he wanted the friendship that he and Hiruma had back.

"I did miss you though," he mumbled, trying to get back to the subject that Hiruma had started.

Hiruma chose to say nothing, because everything that he could have said would have

sounded false and kitschy and nothing like him, so he stayed silent. He did not need to say that he missed Musashi, too. If he had not missed him, he would not be standing there with him.

"You may not believe it – I know it's difficult, because you only saw me with my family – but there has not been a night that I have not dreamt about you." The words kept bubbling out of him, unstoppable. He did not want to say them, but on the other hand he knew that Hiruma had the right to know the truth, since he was the only person that he had ever been truly honest to, except for the truth about his feelings. "I... I thought that my mind was so sick to replace Mamori's face with yours in that wedding gown, but now... now I... I don't know what is real anymore."

"Sheesh, don't freak like that, old man," Hiruma said with a soft snort, turning around so that he leaned with his back against the rail, not looking at Musashi's face. "Both are real. Mamori and I. But it's nice to know that you missed me that much."

Musashi smiled weakly, his mind still in turmoil over the sudden revelation, trying to sort out the rights and wrongs, where he belonged. He tried to think of something else, because this was really not the time and place to think about fundamental things, but now that he knew that his dreams were based on reality he did not know what to do. He loved his family more than anything, but had marrying Mamori really been the right choice when he dreamt of somebody else each night? Of something real, not something his sick mind supplied him with. Especially if the last part of the reoccurring dream was also true...

"Hey, it's your wedding anniversary, shouldn't you be with your wife?" Hiruma asked, changing the subject quickly.

Shrugging, Musashi answered, "I probably should... but there are too many people inside and I don't want to talk to them right now. I talked too much today anyways."

"Yeah, you've never been much of a talker, have you?" Hiruma smirked. "Honestly, I was always wondering how you could do what you have to do for your job. Talking to other people, being polite and keeping your own opinions to yourself most of the time..."

"Oh, shut up, I know that. I have enough black spots on my leg to prove that Mamori knows, too," Musashi explained, grinning lightly. "Plus, it's my birthday party, thus I want to spent some time with the best birthday present I had in years."

Hiruma snorted as he turned back around. "So, now I'm a mere present? A few moments ago I was still a person."

"Personally, I consider you as a present from the gods to me, for I have been such a good person over the last 20 years. Ask the yellow press, they don't even know my name unless some of those idiots read some news that are not just scandals."

"Yeah, you lead a fairytale life. With the perfect wife and the perfect children. At least on the outside," he added quickly before Musashi could interrupt and say that his

family was not perfect but perfectly normal. "It has been a good thing that you did not let your heart decide whom you wanted to spend the rest of your life with."

There, he said it. Not clearly, but hidden underneath a thick layer of inklings, but easily seen even for a thickhead like Musashi. Now it was his choice to react to it or just let it slip as if he had not heard it. Nervously Hiruma watched the older one closely. He expected him to look over to him in surprise – or anger – something with a hint of emotion, maybe he would even have the honor of seeing the other blush slightly.

"It was," Musashi mumbled though, his voice devoid of any kind of emotion, he just sounded awfully thoughtful.

Hiruma's brows furried, surprised by this lack of anything that he used to expect from a man like Musashi at such a statement he had just thrown at him. Maybe he was getting old, he was definitely losing his touch during these days. Back in the days, he would have had Musashi in his bed any time, he would have stirred at least *some* emotion from him, but the way it was then was kind of boring.

This conversation obviously over now, Hiruma suppressed the urge to sigh and lean his chin on his hand in an exasperated motion, as Musashi next to him straightened suddenly and mumbled some excuses that he had to go somewhere now. Shrugging in response, Hiruma continued to stare onto the sea, the city and all the little boats that cruised in the moonlight.

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A few hours later – it was well after midnight – Hiruma stepped out of the elevator that led to his current residence. He looked completely pissed off, but his gaze softened gradually when he saw somebody sitting on the great balcony, the steady sound of wood being carved with a knife sounding somewhat familiar over the sounds of the sleeping city.

"There you are," the blond mumbled as he stepped outside to sit down on a sun chair, laptop propped onto his lap.

"Mhm," Musashi mumbled, looked at the piece of wood in his hands, continuing to carve after he found a spot that was not yet to his liking.

"You know, your fucking wife has been giving me hell over your absence, she even blamed me for it," Hiruma continued evenly as if they were talking about the weather.

"Sorry," Musashi mumbled, it being the only hint that he was listening to the other.

"You could have at least taken me with you, you know?" The sourness on Hiruma's face had made it to his voice. "I had to ask your fucking *son* to take me here, because he was the only one on the party who knew of this dreaded place. You can imagine his mood. Especially since I had to forcibly extract him from the fucking shrimp's

daughter.”

Musashi’s only answer was an amused chuckle.

“That’s not funny, fucking old man,” Hiruma glared at the broad back. “I had to listen to everybody’s stories, it was fucking annoying to hear about every little shit that doesn’t interest me the least.”

“Welcome to my world,” Musashi grinned, taking a last look at the figurine he just made before he put away his knife and placed a little wooden Cerberus onto the ground, dusting splints off his pants.

“I said it’s not funny, fucking old man!” Hiruma pouted openly now at the man standing in front of him. “That was exactly the reason why I did not want to go! I knew this was going to happen and I wanted to avoid-“

He was suddenly cut off by a pair of warm, chapped lips on his own and a strong, rough but gentle hand on the back of his head. That pair of lips effectively stopped him from speaking until he melted into the kiss, involuntarily. As Musashi backed off with a soft grin, he needed a heartbeat to get his composure back just to glare up at the other.

“Damn it, your timing is still as worse as it was back then,” he chided the other, “This is your fucking 20th wedding anniversary-“

“No, it isn’t,” Musashi said calmly. “It’s just a day that we chose to celebrate it on. The actual day was a few days ago, you remember? It was the day after my birthday.”

Still pouting, Hiruma narrowed his eyes.

“I left because I had some thinking to do. Some serious thinking,” Musashi started to explain, kneeling down so that he was now at eye-level with Hiruma. “About my life, my feelings and how I want my future to be like.”

“Well, by the way Yoichi and Emi are acting around each other, you will soon be a granddad.”

Musashi nodded with a fatherly smile. “Yeah, I know.”

“You look good with your kids, and you’ll probably look good with grandchildren, too,” Hiruma declared, sounding curious instead of his hurt sounding words.

An enigmatic grin made the corners of Musashi’s mouth twist upwards. “Sometimes I watch over the kindergarten at the office when Mamori and the other secretaries are out for lunch. My office has the biggest space to keep all the kids in. They love listening to my stories of the blond demon that led a group of underdogs into a war against the biggest and strongest armies of the countries around them just to show them that you did not need to be a noble to win in war...”

Hiruma snorted and broke out into laughter. "You made up a nice story out of that? So, what happens in the end? Did the princess marry the demon or the strong carpenter of the underdogs?"

Musashi shook his head. "I never get to that part. The kids always fell asleep after I finished telling them about the second fight against the White Knights of the East."

Hiruma's laughter grew. "I always knew you were not able to tell stories in an interesting way!"

"No, unfortunately not," Musashi chuckled softly. "And I'm also not built to lead a company."

"You're doing a fucking good job for not being built for it," Hiruma argued, still unsure where to this whole discussion was leading.

"I know. It's just... I'd rather be outside and help the workers on the sites than actually lead them on. This entire fine talking and acting tires me endlessly. It takes a lot of self-control to stay calm most of the time; I would be nowhere if it had not been for Mamori leading me the right way. Yoichi will be old enough in a few years – after he finishes his studies – and he shows much more interest and talent in handling the things I have to face every day. In less than three years, I can finally go back to being a normal man instead of being the head of a billion-dollar-company. I can be myself again. At the young age of 50."

"...And that's why you built this little house up here," Hiruma said, knowing that he had done it to preserve the man that he once had been and obviously still was subconsciously, despite all the changes that he went through over the years.

Musashi simply nodded. "I... I knew you would be coming back. To be honest though, I thought you'd return in five years though, when Yoichi would be old enough to take over the company from me. Missed me that much, huh?"

"Don't let it get to your head," Hiruma said calmly, even though his insides were in a turmoil.

"All those times I have wondered what I would say to you once you were back, but now that you're here, everything that I wanted to say to you sounds absolutely foolish."

"Everything you say sounds foolish. Especially if you're talking about your feelings," Hiruma deadpanned, making Musashi laugh despite himself.

"Well, then I won't say anything anymore," Musashi said and closed the short distance between them for a kiss.

Hiruma allowed it for a while, but as Musashi tried to deepen the kiss, he backed away and looked up into his eyes. "What about Mamori?"

"She knows my feelings, better than I do most of the time," the older man said, voice husky with desire.

"She always did, didn't she?" Hiruma mumbled, licking his lips in anticipation of another kiss.

"Mhm," Musashi mumbled, watching that tongue sneak out between the other's lips hungrily.

"Fuck, who cares," the blond said suddenly and slammed his laptop shut, put it on the ground just to pull Musashi down at the edge of his shirt. "I've waited 20 years to do this again, so you better do it right, understood?"

"It will be a pleasure," Musashi grinned and let himself get pulled down into a deep and hungry kiss.

## Kapitel 15: Sureshot

Hiruma awoke the following Sunday, because some annoying ring tone woke him up. He tried to move, to put his hands out of the bed, but he was tucked comfortably under somebody's chin and held tightly in said somebody's arms. He tried to remember what had happened last night when suddenly he was hit by the memory.

He had talked with Musashi who had admitted that he had been living a lie; that he was fed up of faking his own personality for the better good, even though he had planned to continue doing that for five more years. Hiruma had laughed at him and they had made up afterwards, kissing wildly and hotly until Hiruma decided to put up a little show and take off his shirt in front of the other slow and tantalizing.

Obviously he had been a little too slow, because the next thing that he heard was loud snoring. Instead of watching him, Musashi had fallen asleep, too exhausted from the prior days. First, Hiruma felt neglected, but he was not able to be pissed off for long as he saw Musashi sleeping like a little child, waking not even when Hiruma tried to wake him up by pulling on his hair. Thus, he decided that he had no other choice but to lie down next to his lover and try to sleep as well. Fortunately, with Musashi lying next to him, he did not have any problems falling asleep.

And now, the other man held him so close in his arms that he was hardly able to breathe, but that was not what had woken him up.

"Hey, old man," he said, not too loudly, because he was not quite yet awake himself, "wake up. Your phone's ringing... Hey! Wake up!"

Musashi grumbled and groaned, blinking his eyes open drowsily. "Hm? What?..."

"Your phone is ringing," Hiruma repeated, starting to get impatient. "Oh, and while you pick it up, it would be nice if you gave me some space to breathe."

Musashi grumbled something unintelligible as he turned to lie on his back, reaching blindly over to the nightstand where he found his mobile phone lying around and he picked it up. "Hello? ...They hung up."

Just as Hiruma finished rolling his eyes, the phone started ringing again. This time, Musashi picked up the call more quickly than before. "Hello? Oh, it's you... What?... I promised to watch your match today? ...Well, yeah. Sorry. I forgot. When does it start? ... In two hours? Fine, I'll try to be there as fast as I can. Love you, bye-bye."

Hiruma pouted. He had hoped that he would get his make-up-sex now, after Musashi had fallen asleep on him so indignantly the night before, but with only two hours to get to Deimon High School that would only leave a quickie in the shower as an option. And that was something that not even Hiruma wanted, no matter how deprived he was. Even he wanted something that could count as celebration.

Thus, he turned his back on Musashi, closed his eyes and tried to get some more sleep. Naturally though, the other man had other plans.

"Hey, come on, get up," he cheered, wrapping himself around Hiruma's back, kissing the sensitive spot right beneath his ear. "We've got to go to a football match, Deimon Devil Bats against the Shinryuujii Naga."

"What, they're still using these old names?" Hiruma snorted, not turning around though.

"They're good names, both of them," Musashi smiled against the blond's neck, breathing out and smiling when he felt Hiruma shiver.

"They can have whatever names they want, for all I care," Hiruma mumbled, still not moving an inch. "I won't be going."

"Oh yes, you will," Musashi countered, using his strength to wrap his arms around Hiruma's waist and pull him over onto his lap. Hiruma squeaked despite himself, struggling against the other's strong hold. Back in the days he would have hit him or worse for that, but right then he was so surprised that he didn't even manage to struggle free.

"You will come with me because you promised my wife, me and most of all Ken," Musashi elaborated, emphasizing his point with a gentle nip at Hiruma's left ear, eliciting a moan from the blond that made him all the more want to ignore his son's request.

"Fuck you! Fucking old man, let me down!" Hiruma cursed, kicking his legs up in the air.

"Only if you come with me later," Musashi cooed, biting the blond's ear again.

Hiruma bit his lower lip not to cry out or mewl or make any other strange sounds, but ceased his struggling. "I refuse. I already accompanied you yesterday against my will."

"But that was for your own sake. This time it's because you actually made a promise to a member of my family," the other man elaborated, "and also because I know you want to see a good football match."

Hiruma said nothing, but glared up at the ceiling. "You say that like Deimon is really good... Well, they have to if they play against Shinryuujii right at the beginning of the term..."

Musashi said nothing to that, just smiled and released the blond out of his hold so that they could go and take their showers respectively.

~\*~

“Or Shinryuujii has gotten extremely bad over the years,” Hiruma sighed at the end of the second quarter. “How the fuck could that happen?”

Musashi chuckled, not exactly happy with the outcome himself. “Well, ever since the old Sendouda died things have gotten worse for the Nagas. Kongo Unsui had tried to take over, but taking care of his mental brother and the family business was taking up too much of his time so they never got a good coach again.”

Hiruma snorted. “What a pity.”

“Yeah, I know,” Musashi sighed. “Somehow American Football has lost a lot of fans since you left Japan. Thus, the funds that had been used for those clubs have flown into other clubs... Really, it’s a pity.”

Hiruma shrugged, pretending indifference to the compliment.

“Come on, it’s undeniable that thanks to you American Football has gotten popular during that year we made it to the Christmas Bowl. You did one hell of a good PR-job back then,” Musashi poked him further.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t have anything to do with that farce they call game down there on the field,” Hiruma grumbled.

“Well, both teams lack a good coach,” Musashi said and the blond made a face due to the hint behind his statement.

“I’m not going to train them, understood?”

“I’m not trying to talk you into it, I’m just stating the facts,” Musashi explained, watching his son’s team moving over to their side of the field, obviously talking about strategies to turn this match around.

“They’re not that bad,” Hiruma mumbled, his mouth for once working faster than his brain. “The quarterback is good... What year is he in?”

“From what I heard he’s a first year and that’s his first football match ever,” Musashi explained, wrecking his brain for the name of the boy, but somehow it deluded him, no matter how hard he tried.

“A natural, that’s good,” the blond said. “I take it the fatty in the line and the receiver are in your son’s year?”

Musashi nodded, “Yes, they have been training together during the past year. The other two boys stayed over a few nights and Mamori and I had to tell them of the old times. They watched all the videos from our old games one night... They remind me of us back then...”

“The other guys play like shit,” Hiruma stated as if Musashi had not said one word.

“Yeah, they’re all first years, the only ones that seemed to be interested in such a club. I bet a lot of them will leave after this game,” Musashi sighed. “And they had just found enough people to form an entire team...”

“I need to take a piss,” Hiruma said suddenly and stood up.

Musashi looked up at him in surprise, mumbled something that they were still where they were when they left school and asked if he should show him. The blond ignored him though and said that he was well able to take a piss by himself. Thus he left without saying any other word.

When he returned about ten minutes later, he had a look on his face that he usually had when he had found a strategy to defeat the opponent.

“...What did you do?” Musashi asked as he looked at the other sitting down.

“I took a piss. Nothing else,” Hiruma said, looking smug.

“You know I don’t believe you, don’t you?” the other man said, raising an eyebrow with an amused smile.

The blond just shrugged, saying nothing. A few moments later he was saved from answering any more questions as the match continued.

It was Deimon’s offense, the score was 7:8 with Shinryuujii in lead, 43 yards to go. All other offenses before had ended up with nothing, except for one where the receiver had luckily managed to catch one of the quarterback’s more well-aimed throws. This time though, they seemed to be going for a run, because as soon as the ball was thrown back, the tall, thin running back dashed forward, welcoming the ball from the quarterback just to keep on dashing forward right into the awaiting arms of Shinruujii’s defense.

But as everybody focused on the running back, nobody noticed how the quarterback put up the ball in a kicking stance. Ken, who had stayed behind as a last line of defense, took a small start-up and then kicked the ball with all his might. The visitors of the game jumped up from their seats, following the ball with wide eyes and loud cheers as the cheerleaders jumped up and down, singing some supportive chants. Everybody stopped moving because the ball was soaring so high that nobody would have been able to stop it; now the only thing that mattered was the fact whether or not the ball would fly through the poles or not.

Musashi, who was standing just as almost everybody else, squinted a little, but he knew from experience that the ball would be inside the poles. Still, he held his breath just like everybody else as Hiruma beside him chewed on his bubble gum as if nothing was strange at all. When the ball finally flew through the poles and fell down on the ground like it as supposed to, Hiruma popping his gum went under in the loud cheerings.

“How did you know that he was able to kick the ball that far?” Musashi asked Hiruma

as he sat down again.

The blond just shrugged. "I asked him. He said the farthest successful kick that he had ever done were 56 yards and that happened only once, so I figured this would be easy for him. The feint was their own idea though."

"...Well, thanks to that, they're leading now 10:8," Musashi noted. "Let's hope it stays like this until the end of the match."

"Oh yeah, it will make the fucking match even more boring," Hiruma mumbled, blowing another bubble with his gum.

In the end, Deimon tried to use some surprising moves a few more times, as did Shinruuji, obviously goaded on by Deimon's try. The result was close, but with 17:18 it was Shinryuujii's win. Hiruma stood up as soon as the game ended, fully intending to leave the place, but Musashi caught his arm first.

"Hey, Ken! Good game!" the man yelled down to his son, blinking in surprise when the captain of the cheerleaders came running towards his son, jumping into his arms and kissed him viciously, making Musashi shake his head with a fatherly smile.

"Oh, I remember that girl," Hiruma said next to him in a bored tone. "From the night that I stayed over at your family's house."

Musashi just rolled his eyes. "Well, great. Come on, let's get going."

"Gen! There you are!" a familiar voice cried out. "I thought we'd meet before the game!"

"I'm sorry, honey, but we overslept a bit," Musashi apologized to his wife.

"Oh, I know. Ken told me that he called you," Mamori smiled. "I hope you had a good night. Hiruma..."

The blond looked indifferent, but that was only to cover up a slight pang of guilt. How could he look at her without feeling guilty after what her husband had told him last night?

## Kapitel 16: Only One

Since Ken was the captain of the team, he stayed behind to talk a bit to his parents and Hiruma while everybody else had already gone showering. Thus, he was alone in the lockers afterwards, undressing and sorting things out, since everybody had already gone ahead.

Well, not completely alone.

“So, what are you doing now that you’re out of the spring tournament?” Youko asked, still in her cheerleader uniform, all over Ken.

“Train, of course,” the boy grumbled, frustrated with himself that he had not been able to score better in the game. “There’s still the autumn tournament... What the hell do you think you’re doing?!”

Youko looked up where she had started to undo the laces of his pants.

“I’m eating a cake, what does it look like?” she asked, with an innocent look that never reached her eyes or the rest of her body. “You always get a hard-on after the game and seeing you kick this ball so far has made me all wet and horny-“

“I promised to hurry up so that I could meet with my family to go out and eat lunch with them,” he mumbled, not holding her back though. “And I still have to take a shower.”

Youko pouted. “And what about me? You never take me to your family. Do you think I’m that embarrassing?”

Ken hesitated, the first words on his lips “yes, because all we ever do is fuck and that’s not something I can tell my parents,” but then he thought his answer over. What exactly was so bad about introducing Youko to his family? He knew that Youichi and Emi were behaving like rabbits all of the time as well, but on the other hand... Emi was cute and petite, had hardly any chest and was his mother’s little girl, because all she ever had were boys and so Emi was something like a daughter-substitute to her.

Youko on the other hand though... Was not “cute” at all. Not like Emi that is. She was cute in her own way, when she was trying to make him do things the way she wanted them, or when she cried out his name at the peak of...

But other than that, she was tall, had bleached blond shoulder-length hair, always wore a lot of make-up, hiked up her skirts and was an D-cup, making Ken feel like he was drowning and suffocating every time she pulled him close. And her ass... so sound and perfect it was almost criminal. She was nothing like Emi, who was more like a little girl compared to that full-fledged woman Youko.

“Come on, I won’t bother you if you just let me suck you-“

"How about you come with me later? For lunch, I mean. And maybe afterwards to a hotel, but only if you behave there," he added quickly as he saw how her eyes started to shine. Because despite everything, despite the fact that Youko looked like a perfect slut on the outside, he loved her with all his being.

"For real?" she beamed.

"Yeah, for real," Ken smiled back, patting her head despite the fact that she was one year older than him.

"Oh god, I love you so much!"

The boy almost doubled over as his girlfriend threw herself at him, throwing him off balance.

"But I can't go like that! I have to take a shower! I don't have the right stuff to wear! Oh my god! What should I do??"

"...Just wear your school uniform, or anything else that you have. I'll make sure they don't mind," Ken mumbled, tempted to massage the soft lumps that were pressed against his chest. "And um... Well, the showers are completely deserted since everybody already left..."

Youko grinned predatorily. "And who just told me to stop?"

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The little café Ocean Avenue was closed that day. It was always closed to public when the Deimon Devil Bats had a game these days. The Takekuras would invite everybody with them to go there and since they had been regular customers for over 20 years, the owner was always happy to hold those little family parties.

Today was no exception.

"Ken-kun, your kick was amazing! Just like your father at that age!" the shop-owner praised him, hitting his back so hard that he almost fell forward onto the table.

"Wasn't he? I always knew that he could do he, he just has the power in his legs and his hips-"

"Youko!"

"I'm just telling the truth here! Ask him, he was the one who suggested it!" Youko giggled as she pointed directly at Hiruma, who sat on the other side of the table, sipping on his coffee thoughtfully, wondering when all of this celebration was over.

Surprisingly, everybody had accepted Youko easier than Ken had expected; his mother had smiled at him fondly and with something like nostalgia in her eyes as she said that they looked good together. His father had hid his smile behind his hand, obviously nervous because of something, but Ken wasn't the cause.

On the other hand, Hiruma was just as nervous so something must have happened between those two, but Ken could not imagine what. He was just glad that he and Youko got along so well that they could have been father and daughter. And they had the same opinion on most things, too, which was kind of scary if you took a moment to think about it clearly.

"Yo, sis', what did you do to make Ken bring you here? He usually refuses to let you anywhere near his family," the wide receiver who had run the feint earlier asked, leaning over the quarterback's lap to talk to her. The tall boy did not move one inch though, he just sat there like a stone.

"Well, isn't my right as the leader of the cheerleader to be here?" she snapped back, flipping him the finger. "And how do you dare talk back to me?! I'm your older sister, wait till we get back home and I'll show you who's the stronger one of the both of us."

Musashi chuckled where he sat next to Hiruma, opposite to his wife. "Somehow, she reminds me of somebody..." he chuckled silently.

"Does she?" Hiruma asked in a bored tone, not really interested in the quarrel going on. "I don't get it, why are we celebrating when we lost?"

"Because it's fun and a tradition. We did it when Youichi was still at Deimon High and we just kept doing it after every match, just because," Musashi explained.

"Is that so," Hiruma sighed. "Maybe those guys should train more than celebrate."

"Do I sense criticism? You can still become their coach if you want to."

"Never."

Musashi laughed heartily. "Yeah, just like you never wanted to form a football team at all during Junior High."

"Shut up, that was then. What is more important, when are you going to tell Mamori?" Hiruma asked, staring up at the other through his bangs.

Musashi blinked, taken aback for a heartbeat, then scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "Um... I... Well, I don't know how to tell her."

Hiruma wished for one of his guns so that he could point it at the other man now, but in the rush earlier he had forgotten to take one. "Just say anything! She knows your non-existent way with words, you big stupid fucking geezer."

"Tell me what?" Mamori asked suddenly, making both man look at her in surprise, as if

she has just caught them in the act of something dirtier than just talking.

"Um... Well... it can wait. Until we get home," Musashi said, buying himself some time. "It's nothing that should be discussed on a party."

Hiruma rolled his eyes again and wished again for his guns, so that he could cause some commotion in this place.

"I still think training would be better than a party."

"And I still say that you should stop moping and become the coach of this team, if it's bothering you so much," Musashi grinned.

"Who is moping, fucking geezer?" Hiruma mumbled. Irritated he looked over to Tamura Kouichi, who had been eyeing him strangely for a while now, wondering what the hell he would want from him.

"Excuse me for a moment," he said to Musashi, giving the boy a stern look so that he would follow him a little bit later.

Outside, around the corner, he stopped and turned around to see the boy just behind him.

"What do you want from me," he demanded immediately, any fine speech completely forgotten.

"Whoa, straight to the point, that's cool," Kouichi grinned.

Hiruma raised an eyebrow, giving him the 'you annoy me, you die'-look for good measure.

"Whoa, scary!" Kouichi said, raising his hands in a defensive motion. "Well, it happens you're exactly my type."

Hiruma's eyes widened considerably in surprise and he wasn't exactly sure if he should kill this boy right on the spot or laugh out loud.

Neither option was favorable, so he just stood there, waiting for the boy to explain himself.

"You heard that right, I think you're hot. Wanna try me?"

...Hell, even Musashi was more subtle than that.

"...Kouichi, right?" Hiruma asked, his tone flat.

"Tamura Kouichi, that's right," the boy grinned. He was not tall, he was not very muscular, but had long legs and long arms. With the right training he could become a decent receiver, a fast one even. Perfect for long passes, and if Hiruma judged the

quarterback right, he was one who could throw long hard passes, just like he did when he was younger.

"You know how old I am?"

"Yes, you could be my father. Maybe my grandfather. Still you're a hot piece of meat."

Hiruma made a face. The youth and its language.

"Listen, if you don't want me to kill you on the spot keep your mouth shut, understood?" Hiruma growled, eyes hidden under his bangs.

"Y-yessir!"

"Fine, now that we cleared that up, come here for a moment," Hiruma said and beckoned the boy closer. Kouichi obeyed, looking almost eager. "Now face the wall... a little closer... put your hands next to your head... yes, perfect."

And faster than Kouichi could react, Hiruma had put his hand on the back of his head and banged it against the stone brick wall.

"Ow! That fucking hurt!" the boy protested, struggling against the steel-like grip.

"It did? Good," Hiruma said and repeated the movement. "Hopefully it helps you remember that I'm not interested. Not at all. You're like... 20000years too late."

"Could you stop banging my head against the wall? It got it, I got it!" Kouichi mumbled, tears streaming over his face from the pain, a lump already forming on his forehead.

Hiruma threw him against the wall one more time for good measure before he let go of him. "Very well. And now tell me what you really want? You can't be that desperate for a fuck, can you? Just ask one of your fellow students or something. I bet they're less declined to you than I am."

"I would, but I don't think that Atsushi's into *that* kind of stuff," Kouichi said, trying to measure the damage done to his head. "...Oops..."

"Oh, I don't think that he would be *completely* against it. He would have shoved you away earlier if he were," Hiruma grinned.

"But... Ken didn't seem like he would be completely against it either... and still he refused. And now he's fucking my good-for-nothing, stupid older sister," Kouichi complained, trying gingerly to cool his forehead by putting saliva on the lump.

"Well, maybe, just maybe, he's not gay. Or he doesn't want to endanger your friendship. You've known each other for a long while, haven't you?" Hiruma asked, not moving to help him clean up.

"Yeah, and I'm glad that I'm still his friend despite... everything," Kouichi sighed as he leaned the back of his head against the wall. "...I just tell them that I tripped and hit my head. That will be a magnificent headache."

"That would be better," Hiruma agreed. "...Let's go back inside."

Kouichi picked himself up, staggered a little from the dizziness before he was able to walk straight. They had not walked very far when they heard two voices – one male, the other female – arguing heatedly.

"How do you think I will be able to raise the kids alone? What have you... Just how?!"

"Please calm down, I have a plan, a good plan. I won't leave immediately, in 5 years maybe, so there will be enough time to prepare everything. So please calm down"

"I knew that this day would come! I knew it when he left, when he agreed on doing that! He never said it out loud, but whenever I see him looking at you it's like 'He's mine bitch and you know it! And I'm here to take him from you!' And I can practically hear him cackle"

"Mamori, please calm down, you're not yourself. You know he won't ever say anything like that"

"The fact that he doesn't say it doesn't mean that he won't do it! And you should know that best!"

Musashi sighed. "Please, calm down. It's not like you ever loved me, just like I never really loved you."

Hiruma stared in disbelief and the couple in front of him. That had to be the first time that he ever saw them argue, no, fight. And he wondered what happened to the time that Musashi had bought earlier.

"This... looks bad," Kouichi said next to him, a thin trickle of blood making its way down along his eyebrows.

Somehow, things had taken a turn to the worst possible scenario.

## Kapitel 17: Inside Out

Mamori glared her hardest at her husband, even though she did not quite mean it. She just hated the fact that she had known things would come to this. She had always known that she would be the one losing out in this complicated triangle of love, lust and necessities because Gen and Hiruma were destined for each other and that was nothing that she could change.

And even though she had come to love him over the years and had thought that maybe he had too, it kind of hurt when she had to realize that there was no way for her to win against that one true love.

On the other hand it was pretty romantic, just like the kind of love she read about in her novels, to keep loving somebody over the years and physical distance and everything, but she could not help to feel angry with her husband to do things like he had done them.

A few meters away, Hiruma stared down at the boy who had been so brazen to hit on him. Not that there had not been many like him before, but he was definitely the youngest so far. A part of him honestly respected him for his courage. Still, he regretted nothing. The kid was definitely one who had to learn things the hard way.

"How long do you plan to lie on the ground like this? Come on, you have a loss to celebrate." With that, he started walking back to the café.

Kouichi picked himself up, coughed and wiped away some blood, staggered a little from the dizziness before he was able to walk straight. They had not walked very far when they heard two voices – one male, the other female – arguing heatedly.

"How do you think I will be able to raise the kids alone? What have you... Just how?!"

"Please calm down, I have a plan, a good plan. I won't leave immediately, in 5 years maybe, so there will be enough time to prepare everything. So please calm down-"

"I knew that this day would come! I knew it when he left, when he agreed on doing *that!* He never said it out loud, but whenever I see him looking at you it's like 'He's mine bitch and you know it! And I'm here to take him from you!' And I can practically hear him cackle-"

"Mamori, please calm down, you're not yourself. You know he won't ever say anything like that-"

"The fact that he doesn't say it doesn't mean that he won't do it! And you should know that best!"

Musashi sighed. "Please, calm down. It's not like you ever loved me, just like I never really loved you."

Hiruma stared in disbelief and the couple in front of him. That had to be the first time that he ever saw them argue, no, fight. And he wondered what happened to the time that Musashi had bought earlier.

"This... looks bad," Kouichi said next to him, a thin trickle of blood making its way down along his eyebrows.

Hiruma found himself forced to agree, especially when Mamori's palm connected soundly with Musashi's cheek.

"You didn't have to say that!" she cried out, almost screamed as even from this far away Hiruma was able to see the tears in her eyes from the hurtful words that Musashi had just said. "I loved your and our family with all my heart and I really thought that you had, too!"

"Oh shit," Kouichi whispered, then suddenly his vision went black and he collapsed next to Hiruma, unconscious.

"Fuck."

Never had this word been more appropriate for any kind of situation, Hiruma thought, suppressed to hit his forehead with his palm and picked up the unconscious boy. For a second he wondered if Kouichi would have been happy to be this close to him, but then he directed his attention towards the bickering married couple.

"Oi, you two! Could you lend me a hand here?"

Musashi's head whipped around, staring at the blond first. "Hiruma! How long have you-"

"Kouichi!" Mamori cried out instead, her mother instincts taking over before anything else. With one look she ascertained the situation, saw the blood trickling down the boy's face and glared at the older blond as if he had done something. "What happened?"

"He hit on me," Hiruma dead-panned.

"...You mean, he hit you," Mamori corrected.

"No, I hit him when he hit on me," the blond said, not looking into her sapphire blue eyes.

"You did *WHAT?!!*" Mamori exclaimed and practically pulled Deimon's current wide receiver out of the blond's hold. "Why would you do something so unbelievably *ridiculous?!!*"

"I told you, he hit ON me! Had to teach the dumbass a lesson," Hiruma mumbled, not really happy with the consequences of his actions. Still, he did not regret them, but he

would a fool to rub that into the mother hen's face.

"...Gen, get here," Mamori ordered and since Musashi was never the man to disobey any orders when he knew he was at the shorter end of the line, he walked over reluctantly, his left cheek turning crimson. He took his son's teammate out of his wife's arms, threw his arm over his shoulders and watched in horror how Mamori aimed and took a well-aimed swing and hit Hiruma hard and square in the face.

Musashi winced as Mamori watched – with a certain amount of satisfaction that kind of scared the older man – Hiruma fall to the ground in slow-motion as she shook her now aching right hand.

"So, and now one of you calls the ambulance while I tell the others that the party is over."

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A few hours later, Musashi and Hiruma said in the waiting room of the local ER, both with a cooling pack pressed to their face. Mamori was currently busy telling Kouichi's parents what the doctor's had told them earlier, namely that the boy's injuries were not so bad, just that he fainted due to the loss of adrenaline and something else, Musashi had not really listened to all of this.

He was much more concerned with the fact that somebody might have overheard his quarrel with his wife.

"...Fear of paparazzi?"

"...yes," Musashi admitted with a sigh. "I will have to explain this tomorrow... I have a meeting." He motioned to his swollen cheek.

Hiruma snorted and then hissed as a wave of pain shot through his face. "At least you only got the palm... I got the full fist and a black eye for free in addition to that."

Musashi cast his eyes sideways and snorted at the pathetic picture of the blond. Mamori really had not held back with her punch and his left eye was already almost completely swollen shut. He held the cooling pack gingerly to it and tried to hide it mostly behind it. Well, there was no doubt that Mamori had a strong right arm.

"I'm sorry," Musashi chuckled. "Good thing you don't go out that often... and that you don't have to meet people who can ask uncomfortable questions."

"Yeah, but just me being here causes you that," Hiruma said, absolutely serious. "I shouldn't have come back now."

"...No," Musashi said after a moment's hesitation. "No, it's a good thing that you came back now," he sighed. "In three or five years – maybe when Youichi is married and

produced some kids on his own – I wouldn't have the courage to follow you... I'm not getting younger and sometimes I notice it, no matter how much I want to deny it."

He shifted the cooling bag against his cheek absent-mindedly. He knew that he would hurt a lot of people as a consequence for his actions and he still hadn't figured out just how to do it, but... he would do it. Stubbornly see it through, just like in the old days.

"...You're a sucker for kids, aren't you?" Hiruma teased, a small smile playing around his lips. "You just like to take care of them, don't you?"

Musashi stared at the blond, surprised by the sudden soft jab that lacked any malice or teasing that he had expected from the other. "I..." he started, but then snorted. "You seem to have a soft spot for kids, too. The way you handled Sachiko-"

"I had to take care of an abandoned kid once, while her mother was shopping. She called me all sorts of names and was the brattiest brat that I had ever encountered," he elaborated, staring at the tips of his shoes. "I hated her. But her mother forgot her just like that, when she was such a lively girl, I couldn't understand it. And it took her until fucking midnight to figure out that something was missing, too!"

Watching in poorly concealed awe, Musashi didn't know what to do with that explanation. He had always thought that kids would run away screaming from the self-proclaimed demon, but to argue with him and make him get fond of them while he did not like them before... that was a new one.

"That was the most educating day in my life," Hiruma sighed. "That brat showed me how to change diapers with her doll that kept on busting her fucking diapers, and it was just a doll, for fuck's sake! And it had the most obnoxious voice, too! Like this, 'Mama! Mama! I made poopoo! Change my diaper!'"

Musashi restrained himself but somehow the image of Hiruma getting unnerved by a doll was just too amusing. First, only chuckles bubbled out of him, but with his imagination running wild, it turned out to be a full fletched roar of laughter.

"That's not funny! That brat made me change that fucking doll's diaper for twenty fucking one times! Twenty-one! As if she knew the meaning behind that number!"

By then the older man was laughing so hard, that he had to hold his sides, tears of joy streaming over his face. "Oh, stop that, will you? This cheeks hurts like a bitch, just so you know. And laughing doesn't help either."

The devilish ex-quarterback grinned. "That's why I told you it's not funny! Geez, fucking old man, you never listen to me!"

Being unable to answer, Musashi just kept on laughing until his wife returned.

"...What are you laughing about?" she asked, incredulously, looking sheepish.

"Nothing important," both man said in unison, Hiruma's tone slightly bored while Gen just kept on grinning. She raised an eyebrow at that, but did not ask for further explanation. They had probably just been making fun of somebody.

"...How are your cheeks?" she asked in a small voice. "I'm so sorry for hitting you, really, I thought I had grown a little over the years, but-"

"It's okay," Gen smiled. "I'm sorry I hurt you, too. Let's talk about it later, okay? Just the two of us..."

Hiruma just kept his mouth shut, knowing that Musashi would inform him of the outcome anyways, but his wife did not think so.

"No, this involves Hiruma just as much. He should be there, too," she said firmly. "Let's go eat somewhere later-"

"No. Let's talk at home. I don't want to risk anybody overhearing what is going to be said, today was risky enough," Musashi interrupted her train of thought.

For a moment, they stared at each other, battling for dominance until Mamori sighed and gave in. "But I am not cooking... and you buy the alcohol. I know I will need some."

"Sounds good to me," Musashi said with a bemused snort. "Do they still need us here?"

"No, everything's fine so far. I explained to Kouichi's parents that he had had a rough day on the field, I'm not sure how well they would react to the revelation that a full grown man beat up a highschooler just because he felt disturbed by his choice in partners," she said, glaring down at the blond, who chose to ignore her and cross his arms in front of his chest defiantly.

"Let's hope somebody remembers to tell Kouichi that this is what he's supposed to say..." Musashi sighed, not quite happy with those lies, but he had more important things to tend to than dealing with teenage boys.

## Kapitel 18: Way Out

*[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]*

## Kapitel 19: How I Go

“Mom! Tell me this is NOT true!” Ken yelled as he made his way into the kitchen, the newspapers in his hands. The first page was full of big letters and a big picture of his father.

“What do you mean,” Mamori asked in a bored, almost stoic tone as she prepared the rice for everybody’s lunchboxes. Sachiko sat in her stool in the back, happily munching away on her piece of toast while Takeshi watched the whole scene over the top of his handheld player.

“Mom, don’t give me this! They surely must have called you already! He must have been brought to a hospital first, right?!”

“Please, Ken, calm down, what is going on, I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about,” his mother said in her stern motherly tone, the one that told her children that she knew more than she tried to let on.

“Mom! Stop fucking with me-”

“Don’t talk to me like that!” the woman interrupted him and raised the rice-scooper to hit him with it.

“I’m sorry for using swearwords, yeah, I know, you don’t need to berate me on that,” Ken defended himself, “but shouldn’t they inform you if your husband had a fatal accident on a construction site?!”

“What?!” escaped Takeshi’s mouth and he dropped the handheld onto the table. “Dad died?!”

“That’s what they say here,” Ken said and pointed wildly onto the big headline which read: “Fatal Accident! Boss Takekura Gen dead!”

“What?! How did that happen?” Takeshi asked as he grabbed the newspaper out of his brother’s hands and skimmed through the article underneath it, and then the ones on the next pages.

“Ken, Takeshi, please calm down. I did not receive a phone call last night, from nobody, not even those reporters. I don’t know what’s supposed to happen, but I do think that if something had happened a site of your father, somebody would have informed me-”

“Sorry mom, for being so late,” Youichi mumbled as he stumbled into the kitchen and helped himself to a cup of coffee. “There was an accident...”

“I know! They say dad died in it!” Ken jumped in before his older brother could even start explaining what had really happened.

Youichi just stared at him with his amber eyes and then sighed. "Damn, I had really hoped to be faster than the newspapers. Yeah, he had had an accident. He's not with us anymore," he sighed, but did not sound very sad about it. In fact, he sounded more annoyed than sad.

"How can you say such a thing without making a face?! How... how can you tell us about the death of your own father without shedding a single tear?!" Ken cried, his own eyes watery and blinking as he grabbed the older one's collar and shook him.

"...Youichi, come, we need to talk in private," their mother said suddenly, wiping her hands clean on her apron. "Ken, you stay here and keep an eye on the rice. We... we will see about things later."

"Yes, mom," Ken said, but wanted to follow the two to listen in on them. He knew his mother well enough though that he would not be able to stand a chance. Thus, he sat in the kitchen with his crying little brother, trying to console him while he himself wanted to wail like a baby, throw a tantrum and seek revenge on whoever was responsible for that stupid accident.

Sachiko on the other hand did not quite understand what was going on, but she knew that it was better to be quiet now than to start seeking for attention herself. Still, the ongoing silence between her two brothers was making her nervous and she also wanted to know what was going on.

"...Ken-nii?"

"Hush, Sachiko, everything will be alright," Ken lied for the sake of his little sister. "It's just that... we won't be seeing dad for a long time."

"Really?... why?" she asked, tears starting to well in her eyes already.

"He... he went on a business trip. For a longer time. We... we don't know when we will back. So, until then, we have to manage on our own, do you think you can do that?"

Sachiko smiled and grinned self-assured. "Of course I can! I still have mom!"

"Yes, we still have mom! And Youichi and me and our friends..." Ken sighed and patted Takeshi's head to cheer him up as well. It helped him to know that he could depend on his family in these hard times, but he still wanted to seek revenge on whoever killed his father.

On the other hand, what happened to his father's friend, Hiruma? After that disastrous game against Shinryuuji he had not really seen him again, but it seemed like he was staying together with his father, so he should have known what was going on during then nights that he had not been with his family. Sometimes his father had dragged the blond to their family dinners, but you could see clearly that he was not very happy to be there and Ken often wondered why. He should be happy to be with them, because they seemed to be the only family left for him, at least if you believed

what the head of the Takekura-family said. Also, his mom seemed to be quite keen on including him in every family-business, too.

Suddenly he heard some rustling with the door that opened behind them, and three pairs of eyes looked at their mother in waiting expectation.

Mamori looked pale, sad, but also very angry. She managed to keep herself down though to explain to her children what Youichi had just told her. "Your father... he has gone far, far away. He won't be coming back soon."

"So he's really dead?!" Ken blurted, unable to hold back anymore.

The woman flinched slightly, but the only affirmation that the boy got was a small, almost unnoticeable nod from her.

"Since... since he's not around anymore, I will take the lead of Takekura constructions in the mean time, until Youichi finished his studies. You know that he will be done in about two years, so that won't be much time. Your... your father would have wanted that."

"But mom! I can help you! You don't have to work more than you already do!" Ken protested, but one look from Youichi shut him up immediately.

"Don't you think I tried that already? It's not like I'm really needed in university, but she insisted that I finished my studies. I mean, we're all old enough to look after ourselves, so there should be no problem if we both take turns to look after Takeshi from time to time, right?" the older Takekura-son said calmly.

I still disturbed Ken how his mother and his brother could be so absolutely calm about this whole thing while still wanted to go around and get the head of that guy who was responsible for this!

"How did he die?" Takeshi asked suddenly in a quiet voice. All eyes turned to him and then to Youichi, who seemed to be the one to know most about it. "I... I mean, I read in the newspaper that he fell from the 20th floor of an unfinished building into the mould of a pillar with was filled with quick-dry concrete that was still wet then, but already completely hard when they started searching for him."

"That's... about correct," Youichi said, scratching the back of his neck in an embarrassed notion. "I really don't know how it happened exactly either, but it seems like Tamahachi saw him standing up there with somebody, but when he looked again, there was nobody there. So he thought that he had imagined things, until there was the sound of something falling into wet concrete. Then he saw that dad's car was still there and even though he looked everywhere for him, he was nowhere to be found. Hence, he assumed the worst, called the police and me, then the press got wind of it and that's about it."

"...So there's the chance of that other person pushing him down?" Takeshi asked silently and voiced Ken's thoughts with that.

"Please, why should there have been another person? It was night, it was dark and Tamahachi said he could not quite make out if there was another person or not. He's not even sure if he saw dad there, but since this is the only solution and he's not answering his phone anymore, we have to assume the worst."

"...So we don't know anything, really," Ken concluded, hope rising in him that this was just one giant misunderstanding and that their dad was in fact still alive and kicking.

"...If you want to look at it like that, then yeah. We don't know anything, other than dad has disappeared from the surface of the earth to god knows where," Youichi admitted. "But it's no use to wait for his return if we don't know what happened and the public sees him as dead already."

"Yeah..." Ken nodded, while Takeshi was biting his lower lip.

"Okay, then, you will go to school like every day, okay?" Mamori said and started to prepare their lunchboxes. "If... when I know more, I will write you a mail or call you, okay?"

"But mom! Our father just died! Can't we stay at home and help you with things?" Ken protested.

"No, I will be fine. I won't be home much anyways, so it will be better for you if you're at school, doing something that'll bring you further in life instead of chasing stupid wishes that aren't true anyways," Mamori said sternly. "Youichi and I will take care of everything, understood?"

"Yes, mom," Ken and Takeshi sighed in unison, but they both knew that neither of them would listen to that.

"Good, now finish your breakfast and hurry up or you will be late for school," their mother continued preparing their lunchboxes with mechanical efficiency. Her children sighed and continued their breakfast, even though they didn't have any real appetite anymore.

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"Mamori-san! It's been a long time! How have you been?" Yukimitsu Manabu asked as his current client entered his office. He smiled as he showed her to a seat, getting her a glass of water himself instead of asking his personal assistant to do so.

"Oh, it's been rough times lately," the woman smiled serenely. "I think you read the newspapers?"

"Yes, I did," the almost bald man said as he sat down across the desk of her. "I believe it's all lies?"

"Unfortunately not," Mamori sighed. "I know what happened, but I fear that there will be a lot of voices for a public trial, which is absolutely unnecessary."

"But it will get you a lot of publicity," the lawyer said, trying to overcome his surprise of the sudden announcement of one of his schoolmates and friends.

"Yes, but that's probably not the best thing for Takekura Constructions. We never wanted to be in the spotlight of society and tried to play in the background while others took the front row for us. They deserved it more than we did, we only did hard work while they entertained the public," Mamori reasoned. That had been her husband's doctrine and she tried to continue living by that.

"I understand. But by the way that things happened, it will be hard to stay in the background. You know that people will try to put their noses into things that they should better not know?" Yukimitsu said, already starting to take notes. "But first things first. In case of a trial or just an investigation for murder, we should be prepared for everything. I need all witnesses, everybody who knows just the tiniest bit of what could have happened that day."

"I will arrange that. Are you free any time soon? I can show you around on the construction site where it happened. You can ask everybody there."

"Well, I lost the last case and ever since I have been getting a bit less clients, so I'm actually free for the rest of the day and all day tomorrow," the other said sheepishly, rubbing the back of his neck. "So, if that's fine with you, I would like you to show me the site today? Before too many policemen trampled over all those evidences left."

Mamori laughed softly, reminding the man of their high school days, during the spare times that she had been able to laugh so freely. Secretly he wondered though how she was still able to laugh like that when her husband had just died. "I'm sorry, but of course you can come with me today," she smiled. "I only have to be at the kindergarten at the right time to collect Sachiko."

"Oh, your youngest one, right? How is she doing?" Yukimitsu asked curiously, hoping to distract her from her worries to see her smile more often. "And what are your sons doing? I heard that your second is trying to make the Devil Bats as successful as they were back in our days."

"Oh, yes, he is. But they are still lacking the right coach. He asked Hiruma, but he refused up to now," the woman told him.

"Oh? He's still in Tokyo?" Yukimitsu inquired, but only got a shrug in response. "I don't know. I know that Gen knew where he was and that he dragged him to some of our family dinners, but I don't know where his hotel is or anything. The only one who knew that was Gen..."

For a moment the balding man looked her thoughtful face and wondered what was going on in her mind and behind this cryptic story, but before he could ask, Mamori

spoke up again.

"I do have a feeling though that he is nowhere near anymore," she said with a crooked smile. "I don't know why, just call it female intuition."

"Oh, I learned to trust the subtle feelings of a woman before all hard facts," Yukimitsu chuckled. "So I will be very unlucky to see him again some time soon."

"I think, we all will be very unlucky with that," Mamori agreed. "Oh, I have another favor to ask. I need a personal legal advisor in a special case. I will tell you everything on the ride to the construction site, is that okay?"

Yukimitsu nodded and told his assistant that he would be leaving the office for the rest of the day and that she was allowed to go when she was finished with that day's paperwork, too.

She thanked him and set them off with a smile.