Ayako fully expected to wake up groggy and tired, she had put an all-nighter with the newest game she had purchased, after all. She knew she should have waited till the weekend, but having it right there in her room, sitting without use, was far too tempting…

When your family didn’t approve of anything that wasn’t martial arts, indulging in your hobbies was all the more tempting. She told herself it’d be worth it, she’d endure the consequences.

As it happened, she instead woke up feeling extremely well rested, without a hint of drowsiness the sort of pain in one’s eyes when you don’t get a good night’s sleep. It was like she had slept a full eight hours and woke up utterly and completely ready to start the day.

She had no explanation for it, so better not look at a gifted horse in the mouth.

Hoping out of bed with a body full of vigor, Ayako found she didn’t even have to stretch or take a moment to wake up fully. She felt like she had been up and it for hours already and with energy to spare. She hummed curiously to herself before shrugging and putting on her uniform, “Well, guess you lucked out, Mitsuzuri” Hey, maybe she’d be able to pull out some more gaming time tonight if this kept up.

Let it never be said Ayako Mitsuzuri didn’t have her priorities straight.

Heading out of her room with her school briefcase in hand, Ayako closed the door behind her, not realizing the material had bent somewhat under her grip.

X~X~X~X~X

As a physically active girl with various sports and martial arts under her belt, Ayako never had any issues with PE, she was a pretty good student in that regard, following through the exercises at a good rhythm and tempo. Though her specialty was archery, she did not particularly excel at other challenging activities. Such as the track field, that area was *ruled* by the trio of Yukika Saegusa, Kane Himuro, and Kaede Makidera. The last one, in particular, was their school’s star runner, whose potential and constant diligence towards the sport all but promised she’d have a career in the field one day.

Dressed in a plain white shirt and sports briefs, Ayako took her stance at the starting line along with the other girls. Even with the previous workout and exercises she still hadn’t managed to spend even a fraction of the energy she had welling inside of her. So when the coach’s whistle rang, she took off at full spring with energy spare.

She huffed in even rhythms as her arms swung back and forth in practiced locomotion, focused only on the task ahead of her, running over the field’s long line. It felt so… easy, so natural. Like she had done this a thousand times on much longer fields, not just track fields, but all sorts of terrains.

*Jagged arid hills, verdant forests, sandy beaches. Many of them plagued by all manner of beasts and deadly predators. They weren’t dangers or obstacles, there were just more tests.*

Ayako blinked as she came back from that… daydream. Honestly, she had no idea what that was, and when she snapped back into reality, she realized was running past Kaede, who looked at her in astonishment as Ayako kept running, outpacing *her* in speed and endurance.

When she reached the finishing line, there was only a slight sheen of sweat coating her skin, and her breathing was only a little bit agitated.

That… had been so easy.

Kaede and her friends finished close (relatively) while the rest of the girls were still going. The dark-skinned girl panted, resting over her knees while the rest of the trio tried catching their breath as well. “What the hell Ayako?!” The track star muttered, more out of disbelief than jealousy or anger. “How did you get so fast?!”

“I…” She barely had an answer herself. “Guess I’ve been training far more recently, you know how my family is…”

Himaru panted repeatedly, “They must be putting you on Olympic-level training if you were able to beat the school record and *barely* look tired…”

Okay, *now* Kaede looked angry and jealous.

X~X~X~X~X

As they hit the showers, Ayako kept thinking about what she had (unwittingly) achieved today. Even with all the training her family put her through for martial arts and archery, she still shouldn’t be at that level. Her brother trained almost as much as her and he certainly couldn’t do a college-level run like she had just now.

Was she hitting a peak? Was it a late-blooming potential of hers? Was all her training making her tap into some unknown power that took her to levels beyond that of her peers?

Ugh, she was playing too many visual novels…

She tried to forget about it for a moment, soaking under the shower. It became harder to do once Kaede’s excited voice called out, “Yikes, no wonder you beat my record! You’re getting cut!”

“Hmm?” Ayako looked down at herself and noticed something that had escaped her this morning somehow. Her arms were more defined, if she flexed them a small bump would come out. Her abs had a distinct series of lines running over them, and her legs were firmer and more toned.

She blushed when Kaede shamelessly poked at her stomach. “Girl, I’ve been working my ass off to get abs like this! What’s your secret?”

That was something Ayako was starting to wonder as well…

X~X~X~X~X

As class finished for the day, Ayako threw her briefcase over her shoulder and began walking home, running into someone else as she was leaving the school grounds. Rin Tohsaka looked like the prim and proper high-school star she always did, with a dignified air and a perfect pose.

Honestly, that was just Rin’s usual flair of ‘I’m better than you’ attitude. Particularly with how often she turned up her nose at just about everything. But this time she was looking at her with… curiosity.

“I heard you beat our dear track star’s record,” The Tohsaka said with vague interest. “My, you’ve been pushing yourself Mitsuzuri”

Ayako shrugged, ignoring how her uniform felt a bit tighter than before. “Fully expecting her to break that record again, honestly”

“Not so eager to defend your new title?”

Ayako snorted, “It’s her title, I got no interest in being the track star. I just got lucky I think”

“Hmm…” Rin muttered as she shot her a very strange look. “Lucky indeed” And turned around and left.

Weird girl.