

# Not good enough

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## Kapitel 20: The game

"Come at me like you're trying to kill me."

Taiga's eyes widened. But right that moment, Tatsuya meant it. He wanted Taiga at full strength. He wanted to beat that near perfect Alpha in all his grace and strength. He wanted to stand on top and know that being an Omega did not mean being weak. Taiga was a potential mate but also a rival. Right now the last part counted a lot more. Why ever did they have to exchange him? Sure, they wanted him serious, just like Tatsuya, but ... oh well, maybe his Omega could encourage him. Tatsuya wanted a real enemy. This should better be good. In the end it only supported their strategy of winning points off Seirin- had that center just shot a three? And why was their center acting as point guard? What the heck was with that point guard double team? Who would ever think of such a strategy?

Tatsuya watched in astonishment. And here he thought Hyuuga would have the main part in trying to take some points from them. No wonder Atsushi remembered that center's name. He was not only good, he was great. Brilliant. They were really pressuring them with shooting abilities, just that all of them could shoot and at least two of them had no trouble with overviewing game-play. That was hard, even for a team as good as them.

Their coach called for a time-out. Tatsuya immediately used a bit of his pheromones to calm Atsushi down. Really, they had to stop that vicious cycle of having Atsushi react to Teppei's moves. Coach explained the same. Atsushi only sighed and buried his nose in Tatsuya's neck for a moment.

"Stay calm," he murmured against his boyfriend's skin.

"Same to you."

They both nodded before going out again. So Kagami was back as well. Was he ... yes, he was. He was finally playing seriously. He was feral. Tatsuya smiled before he fainted, fainted again, faked – and lost the ball. What the heck? Tatsuya grit his teeth, ran, but could not even keep up with him.

Atsushi took the ball. Thank god. He was strong and would always be strong. They scored, took the ball from Seirin again and ran for it. Above all they were still much better. He would make that shot, Taiga was stumbling, he was ... getting the ball? Had he seen through that mirage shoot? How? Why was Seirin scoring this much? Yosen was triple-teaming Teppei, Seirin was triple-teaming Atsushi and somehow they still scored. Taiga was blocking his shots. Unbelievable.

"I can't take it anymore."

Tatsuya looked over his shoulder and saw Atsushi step forward on their offense. Oho? He had seen this once. That first game where he finally had enough of being insulted

and Atsushi stepped in to defend him, he had actually changed to offense for once. It was the most beautiful sight. Atsushi crushed three players all by himself. He stopped Teppei by himself. He stopped Taiga by himself. Atsushi was truly invincible.

Well ... he did not have to break the hoop though. Hopefully Akashi was fine with paying for that. Tatsuya kissed his boyfriend anyway and whispered: "Keep that up and you'll get a huge reward."

Stealth Full-Court Man-to-Man Defence. What a mouthful. And damn was it effective. He saw Atsushi kick the bench and get hit for it. But really, he should have more trust. This was their game. Tatsuya could do this, even all by himself if needed. Seirin would not win this. It was their moment, their game. Atsushi was the perfect partner. Tatsuya would win. He turned his hands into fist. He would make this team win. No way, they would never lose. He went out again, heart on fire, a visage of ice. He would not lose to Taiga.

Fukui got the ball and everyone ran to their positions. Taiga took center position right in front of Atsushi like he was able to ... was he trying to cover the entire inside like Atsushi? He saw his boyfriend grit his teeth. Rightly so. Taiga would never be able to be as good as Atsushi was. Ah, there it was. Atsushi's attack blew Taiga away. Tatsuya smirked.

Time to get serious. He got the ball and ran at full speed. Fake right, turn left, full dribble-

"Murochin, stop!," Atsushi shouted.

He reacted on sheer instinct with a full stop and a backwards dribble. Kuroko. Whenever did he get there? Gods, Atsushi had saved him there. It give Seirin enough time to sprint into position with Taiga as a lonely center again. Tatsuya grit his teeth. This stupid oaf! This wasn't courage. It was underestimation of their team! Tatsuya was better than that. Atsushi was better than that. He would never let that stand. He faked right again, passed left, dribbled forward and jumped for the shot.

So Taiga had figured out the mirage shot? Who the fuck cared. He simply shot the first one. Eat that, imbecile. If Taiga really thought he could win against Tatsuya and Atsushi by himself, he could taste the sore mouthful of defeat. They took Seirin's ball, having Atsushi score. Tatsuya took the next basket. One after one, they drew away from Seirin. Atsushi overcame Taiga in nearly every turn.

They scored and scored. Taiga seemed more serious but his team wasn't good enough. One could not hold out against a fully trained team. Seirin took a time-out but it seemed like they had given up. Their coach was gone, their center was gone. Taiga and Kuroko were on their last leg. Tatsuya dared to give Atsushi a kiss and smile at him.

They took the next basket. But Taiga stopped the one after. And the next. What the hell was going on here? Taiga was getting annoying. Atsushi took Seirin's ball for a come-back and ran. Tatsuya grinned before he saw Taiga sprint. Sprint! In the forth quarter. Had he taken drugs or something? He got in front of Atsushi, jumped higher than him and punched the ball out of his hands.

How was that possible? Could it be the zone? Tatsuya had heard about it but never seen it. An athlete without pain, without speed limits, full of stamina even though he should run on empty. Tatsuya scoffed. Let's test that. He called for the ball and faked off all his three defenders. His real opponent was Taiga. He jumped for a mirage shot while Taiga jumped for the first release. Tatsuya caught to ball again to shoot but ... Taiga was still in front of him. Floating. Flying. Eerie.

They ran back only to see Taiga draw ahead of them and shoot a three. He ran back before Tatsuya even reached his own side of the field. Well – shit. So this was the zone. How were they supposed to stop this?

"Give me!," Atsushi shouted.

Tatsuya breathed a sigh of relief. Of course. Atsushi. He was fighting for them, he was used to fight with and against people far stronger than any normal player. By now Atsushi was like a dog fighting for his bone. They had woken his soldier spirit.

And Taiga stopped him. Taiga took the ball from him in mid-air. Tatsuya's eyes widened. No way. Atsushi was brought to his knees from the force. No way in hell this was happening. No ... it wasn't possible. None of this was.

Taiga was faster than humanly possible. He was as agile as a cat. He dribbled while running at full speed. He zipped between players. It was like he was teleporting, somehow always holding the ball when he neared the basket. Even if it was Yosen's ball. Kuroko was completely in sync with him and simply took the ball from anyone. Tatsuya's heart broke when he saw Taiga air-walk above Atsushi and slam a dunk over his head. More than that – he had jumped over a guy that was more than two meters tall. That was taking the cake.

Their coach called a time-out. Thank god, hopefully she had some kind of solution to this. How could one stop a god-like player? All of them took their towels and drinks, trying to realize what just happened.

Atsushi was the first to find his words: "I've had enough."

"What did you just say?," Fukui asked after a moment of silence.

"I said I've had enough. I quit. Sub me out."

Tatsuya felt too stunned to react. What?

"What?," was what Fukui asked as well, "Don't be ridiculous! What are you talking about?"

"I don't understand," Liu admitted.

"I am not having fun anymore," Atsushi droned on in his pouting voice.

Coach asked a bench player for her sword.

Their captain stood and placed himself in front of Atsushi to say: "If you drop out now, we'll lose a game we might still win. Are you saying you don't care if we lose?"

"Yeah. After all, no one can stop Kagami now."

Tatsuya lost it. One moment he was sitting, next he was standing in front of Atsushi, a fist in his face. He punched him full-force, no matter the consequences. Who the fuck did that guy think he was? Tatsuya grabbed his shirt and shouted: "That's enough, Atsushi! The game's not over yet!"

"Ow." Atsushi looked up at him, his eyes without any spark. "It's annoying when you get hot-blooded. Besides, you're even more useless against Kagami than I am."

Tatsuya held back from punching his boyfriend again. Barely.

"Can't you tell he's better than you?"

No. He wasn't. He would never be ... Tatsuya stumbled back. Taiga wasn't better than him. Never. They had the same training. Tatsuya had always been better than him. He had the better technique. He trained more. He had always been better until ... until they hit puberty. Until Taiga grew over his head and got the muscle mass he never would have. Because he was only an Omega.

"I know." He took a shaky breath. "I know that. I have always been jealous of him." Being an Alpha. Being superior to everyone by birth alone. "But you have what I desperately want," he continued while thinking of that perfect body, those perfect

genes his boyfriend had, "and you're trying to throw the game." He tried not to cry. He really tried to. But how could he not when it was thrown into his face what a failure he was? By no other than his own boyfriend, his future mate? How could he? "You are making me mad with rage."

Atsushi blinked at him. Once. Twice. He finally said in low anger: "Get away from me. That's so annoying."

Tatsuya felt his heart break again. Not in despair. This was pure disappointment. Atsushi ... wasn't what he had thought he was. This was no way for his mate to behave.

"Anyway, I can't believe you're crying. I sort of noticed, but I didn't think you felt so strongly." What did that tone mean? "Actually, this is the first time I've been amazed ... by how much someone repulses me."

Tatsuya could not believe his ears. This could not be true. This wasn't ... didn't they have a bond? Was this really all there was? Disdain? Once he wasn't who Atsushi wanted him to be ... had there not been more than this? This was what their relationship was when their world-views clashed? Repulsion?

"I guess I'll stay on the court until the end of the game."

Huh? What? Atsushi stood, not heeding the hand still holding his shirt. He asked their coach for a hair tie. Seriously? Atsushi only got himself a hair tie when he was completely ... Tatsuya smiled in relief. It had never been Atsushi's word that counted. It had always been his actions. If this was his answer Tatsuya would forget his hateful words.

Atsushi would play.

And he would go all out.

Still triple-teaming him. Well, no matter. He could take three. Hell, he could take four. And together with Atsushi, he would even take Taiga in the zone. He jumped a fake for Kuroko, another fake for Taiga and passed to Atsushi – who passed back to him. This wasn't about pride anymore. This was a fight for survival, going all out, even overcoming their own instincts for the sake of winning.

Seirin countered with the same double-point guard strategy they had before, just with Taiga as their point guard. It was seriously annoying to fight a team with three people able to overview the whole court.

Yosen countered with a Tatsuya-Atsushi tag-team. Bouncing the ball back and forth in high speed even overcame Taiga. He could not be in two places at once. One of them scored without fail – just like Taiga scored by using his teammates.

Right until the last minute when Seirin decided to send Kiyoshi back in. Seriously? They still had him as a trump card? Hadn't Atsushi destroyed him mentally and physically? How was he still standing? He had seriously earned the title iron-heart.

Well, on to their last stand. Tatsuya got the ball and passed it to Atsushi while overcoming Taiga. But that one still jumped again to stop his boyfriend. Atsushi made a pass backwards into Tatsuya's hands but Kiyoshi jumped in front of him. No matter. He could not stop the mirage shot. He faked well, but now well enough for Tatsuya. He took the shot, released the ball – like lightning some hand speed in from the left. Their shooter? God damn it, they were all mad dogs.

"Stop them! Don't let them score!," coach Araki shouted.

Taiga shot a three and missed. Kiyoshi jumped above Liu and Okamura – how did anyone do that in the forth quarter with two guys over two meters tall? – and passed to their shooter who made a sudden three.

Okamura ran free and passed him the ball with a cross-court high pass. Tatsuya got it anyway and threw off that cursed shooter. Another fake to draw in Taiga before he passed to Atsushi.

"I'll win! I'll finish this game!" Atsushi jumped to dunk.

Taiga was fast enough again but not strong enough.

Kiyoshi jumped to his support.

I couldn't be. Atsushi was strong. But he still lost the ball to those two. Atsushi turned and was ... fast? Tatsuya realized he had never seen his boyfriend sprint at full speed. It was like watching a hurricane. He looped around Taiga and Seirin's shooter to stand in front of them. Atsushi was downright scary. There was no other word for it. Tatsuya knew that Alphas had a feral side. Sinking into themselves, close to their instinctual level was an animalistic graze in all of them. He had never thought he would see his slow, lazy, immovable boyfriend become feral.

He was beautiful.

Taiga still dunked over his head with a technique Tatsuya had last seen in America. Meteor Jam. Alex was one of the few who could pull that off. Tatsuya grit his teeth. No. He would not accept this. He would never accept defeat. He sprinted forwards just as Atsushi sprinted in the other direction. Tatsuya took the ball and made a cross-court pass.

They would win this.

But Atsushi could not jump anymore. In a nanosecond Tatsuya saw Akashi telling him he should feed his boyfriend better. Train those muscles. What a pathetic figure his boyfriend made. His eyes widened. No ... he saw Kuroko sprint up to his boyfriend, right beside him, jumping ... no way.

An Omega beating an Alpha.

At the turning point of their game.

And the whistle signaled the end of their game.

Tatsuya stared. He simply stood, unable to move. He saw Seirin's team run up to Kuroko to throw him in the air and parade him around. He saw Taiga hug that little Omega.

He saw fate.

This was a boy no one had ever expected to amount to anything. A scrawny thing, an Omega, a rape victim. He was everything Tatsuya never wanted to be: Weak. But all those bulky guys, those athletes, that perfect Alpha his brother was – they all loved him. They admired him. They accepted him as one of their own.

Why? Why was he different? Had it been himself that held others at bay? Had it been himself who always thought he was less worthy? Had it been his doing and his actions that made others treat him like dirt? Because this boy over there, this Omega, he did not believe himself weak. He did not accept the limitations life set him. He victoriously rose above them.

Tatsuya looked at Atsushi. His boyfriend. The one who had been treated like shit for something he could not do anything about either. He had always been the slowest, the dumbest, the worst at everything. His only island had been basketball. He had never lost that.

Now he had. Tatsuya had made him play this game. Tatsuya had taught him this pain. He saw his boyfriend shake like a leaf, not only from exhaustion but from grief. How could he console him? What could he say?

Okamura called them to the middle line to thank the other team for the game.

Atsushi and him both went on autopilot. Tatsuya knew he was sad, he just couldn't ... feel it. He told Taiga they weren't brothers anymore. That part was over. Taiga was his rival now. A rival that he wished the best of luck, especially in winning that unbelievable Omega in his team.

"I am quitting basketball," he heard Atsushi say. "I played until the end because Murochin was so desperate. But it wasn't fun. It's already a boring enough sport. There is no reason to keep playing after I've lost."

Tatsuya stared at his boyfriend walking away. Whatever should he say? Atsushi had played for him, he knew. His love had lost the only thing that ever made him feel good about himself. How to ... but had he lost it? And weren't there two things that made him feel good? Tatsuya smiled to himself. He suddenly knew what to do. He went over and said: "We'll win the next time, Atsushi."

"What?" He could hear the tears in his boyfriend's voice. "I told you I'm quitting."

"You sure? It doesn't seem that way to me." Because he loved basketball. And Atsushi loved him. His boyfriend would be able to overcome this.

Okamura praised him and patted his head. It only made Atsushi hit in his direction aimlessly.

Tatsuya stepped up to him and dried his boyfriend's face with his towel. He took some tissues out of the back and gave them to Atsushi while saying: "Dry your tears so I can kiss you. You did well."

"But I lost." Atsushi sounded like a pouty, whiny four-year-old.

"I know. But it's not about winning or losing. It's about giving your all. You did that and you earned yourself a big treat for that," Tatsuya promised.

Atsushi blew his nose but still sniffed.

He kissed him anyway.