Ayako fully expected to wake up groggy and tired, she had put on 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. It was a weird friendship that the two had. They didn’t really hang out all that often, but there was a sort of mutual understanding and respect between them. She sure was spending a lot of time with Shirou and Sakura now. Well, good for her. Rin always had difficulty making friends regardless of what her popular status might show, so Ayako was happy for her.

“I heard you beat our dear track star’s record,” The Tohsaka said with some 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.

Ayako continued walking toward her home, idly pondering on the strangeness of today. She had gone the entire day feeling completely energized, and even with the sun setting and casting an orange light over the city, she barely felt like she had spent a few drops from her tank, she was still firing on all cylinders without a hint slowing down any moment soon. She wondered if she might even feel tired enough to go to sleep today…

She would have continued her trek with a distracted gait if not for a sight that *instantly* made her go on alert.

Yukika Saegusa was a cute girl, the most innocent-looking one of the Track Trio. Less of a runner herself and more of a manager of the club. Someone who would have preferred to go into cooking but settled for the same club as her friends. So she was not the most athletic girl at school, certainly didn’t practice martial arts. Combined with her adorable appearance she proved to be a disarming presence.

Or to people with less than ‘good’ intentions, an easy target.

Down the empty street, Yukika had her back against a wall, trembling as she held to her briefcase for dear life. Her eyes quivering with pooling tears, the poor thing looked like she wanted to run away. But she couldn’t all her exits were blocked by the trio of men blocking her.

They looked like knock-off yakuza. Just delinquents barely of age who pretended to be real-life gangsters, with their torn jeans and ruffled jackets, sporting various types of piercings while casually brandishing handmade weapons. One had a baseball bat slung over his shoulder, another had a chain wrapped around his hand. The last one, who was getting way too close to Yukika’s space, had his hands in his pocket, and Ayako didn’t dare imagine he didn’t have a weapon on him.

“P-Please, I just want to go home!” Yukika begged them with a breaking voice.

“Now why you gotta be like that?” The thug smirked creepily at her. “I just wanted to get your number. Can’t blame a guy for wanting to hang out with a pretty girl like you?”

She gulped, tears streaming down her face.

“What, you don’t want to go out with me? Now that just hurts me,” His sleazy smirk began to show all his teeth. “You don’t wanna piss me off, girlie…” His companions laughed cruelly at that.

Ayako saw red.

“*Get the FUCK away from her!*”

She already dropped her briefcase and stomped her way toward them with her fists clenched, feeling her knuckles pop. The first thug looked at the newcomer annoyed, while Yukika had hope in her eyes. “A-Ayako-san!”

“Who the fuck are you?”

Ayako didn’t have the patience to retort with anything witty, she wanted these assholes to get away from Yukika *right now*. And she was willing to throw down against all three of them if she had to. Her soul was roaring with anger and indignation, unwilling to let the poor girl become a victim.

“You trying to ruin my fun?” He clicked his tongue. “Whatever. Beat that bitch up” He ordered the other two, who gleefully walked up to her in an attempt to intimidate her as they brandished their weapons.

Insects. Nothing but vermin…

“Don’t you know who we are, girl?”

“Trash”

It was almost funny how one word seemed to piss them off while she herself felt she was about to erupt into flames by how much her chest was burning with barely contained rage. They knew nothing of anger…

Bat guy came for her first, shouting as he brought down his weapon upon her.

Ayako was a practitioner of martial arts, a damn good one at that thanks to all of her family’s training. She saw the attack coming a mile away and should have easily dodged it. Yet instinctively she brought up her arm, letting the wood collide with her forearm.

The bat broke the moment it made contact.

The thug barely had time to react when Ayako delivered a powerful kick to the side of his stomach. The impact was so strong he was almost sent flying toward the wall, all he could do was double over in pain, unable to get back up.

“W-Woah, what the fuck?!” The chain guy exclaimed in shock, unwrapping his chain to use it as a whip to keep her distance after seeing what she did to his friend.

Ayako merely reached out, letting the chain wrap around her hand before she grabbed it tightly and *tugged*. The thug yelped as he was pulled forward, where Ayako’s fist was waiting for him. She took satisfaction in the feeling of his nose breaking as he was knocked down for the count.

Ayako’s brown eyes glared at the remaining thug, who in a panic fiddled with his pocket in an attempt to pull out his own weapon. She almost laughed at the pitiful switchblade he pointed at her with a shaky hand and an atrocious stand.

It was almost too easy to knock it out of his hand.

Just as easy as it was to grab his neck and lift him up until his feet weren’t touching the ground. He struggled, kicking and gasping as his hands uselessly clawed at her arm, trying to pry the fingers with an ironclad grip around his throat.

Just a squeeze, that’s all she needed to snap this lowlife’s neck.

He deserved it. He should never have prayed on a defenseless young woman. The amazon was going to make sure he never would again.

“Ayako!” Yukika’s voice barely registered in her ears until she started shaking her. “Ayako!”

The young woman blinked, as if snapping out of a trance. Amazon, that’s what she had called herself in her thoughts. Why… What was that about? She looked at her schoolmate, then at her arm, and the thug in her grasp who grew limp as the lack of air caused him to pass out.

Ayako dropped him, and he fell limply on the ground. Breathing but unconscious.

Yukika started at her savior with a mix of gratitude, wonderment, and *shock*. “How did you do that…?”

“…Are you okay?” Ayako avoided the question.

When Yukika shakily nodded, Ayako went back to pick up her briefcase, giving one last look at the thugs she had *easily* demolished. Once more, Ayako had no answers for what had transpired today.

“I’ll walk you home” She decided that was the best she could do right now.