

The bus's engine rumbled noisily as it stood on its parking spot, ready to depart. Shoichi was seated on the far back of the bus, right next to a window. He rested his chin on his hand as he lazily watched the now empty parking lot, waiting for the trip to finally get started. He'd been very anxious about it on the previous night, but now it was just something he wanted to get over with.

It's not like there would be any point to it, anyway. He probably wouldn't even get picked to play in the first place...

Just as the bus started moving and he thanked his lucky stars that the trip was finally going to get underway he saw a kid bolting towards the vehicle, a tennis bag on his back, yelling something he couldn't hear. The bus stopped once again, causing the young husky to roll his eyes, groaning and silently cursing to himself.

Before the doors could open fully, a shiba inu tossed himself inside, panting and gasping for air, a comically over-sized tennis bag hanging from his shoulder, almost pulling him down with its weight.

"T-Thank you..." he muttered in between breaths to the bus driver, his words fully audible to the husky thanks to his acute hearing.

"So you're the one who was missing? Let's see... Yuuichi Michimiya?" asked the club's instructor, checking the sheet on his clipboard. The man was a burly brown bear already on his forties. He had a generally unfriendly look and, at the moment, his eyes were glued to the husky with a very displeased look.

"Y-yes, sir!" the boy immediately stood upright, his body completely stiff as if he was saluting an army instructor. "Sorry I'm late, my little brother-"

"Eh, I don't give a rats ass about your brother, just sit down and shut up already." he dismissed the shiba's explanation with a wave of his hand. "Where's the last open seat? Someone raise their hands so I can see it!"

Shoichi groaned, the seat next to him was the only one still empty. He had been happy that he'd have more space for himself.

Great, he didn't even know that kid and he already didn't like him for taking his space. Reluctantly, the husky raised his hand.

"Ah, Urata-kun. Very well, Michimiya-kun, go sit there. Hurry up, we've been delayed enough already." the instructor gave the small shiba what was supposed to be an encouraging tap on his back, but the weight behind his arm was enough to make the boy stumble, nearly losing his balance, having to hold on to a seat to avoid falling face first to the floor. "Ah, sorry."

The kid readjusted the bag on his shoulder, giving the bear a dirty look as he walked to the empty seat next to Shoichi. Once he reached it and put his bag away in the top compartment, he looked down at the husky with uncertainty, before cracking a huge smile.

"Hi, I'm Yuuichi Michimiya. Nice to meet you!" he extended a hand on a greeting. Shoichi merely glanced down the dog's hand, his eyes resting on it before he glanced up at the boy's face and looked away.

"Yeah, sure. Nice to meet you." he mumbled, unenthusiastic.

The shiba, Yuuichi, sat down. Undeterred, he turned to face Shoichi once more, still smiling.

"So what's your name?"

Shoichi groaned. God, not this. Not a blabbermouth. This trip was already going to be bad enough without having to deal with... with *this*. He shot Yuuichi a dirty look, but if the boy noticed, he showed no signs of it.

"Urata." he said. Despite all the veiled irritation in his voice, the boy still smiled at him.

"And your first name? You *do* have a first name, right?" his enthusiasm was overwhelming and, frankly, unwelcome.

"Of course I have a first name, are you stupid?" he barked, feeling his temper flaring. Still, he took a few deep breaths to readjust himself. "But just Urata is enough for you."

"That's an odd name. 'Just Urata'... Is that even Japanese?" the boy answered in the most annoyingly chipper tone possible. Then, he begun repeating the phrase 'Just Urata' multiple times under his breath, like a small child when they hear something catchy.

"Wha- No. My name is not 'Just Urata', are you stupid?! It's Shoichi. Sho-i-chi!" he finally lost his composure, yelling out a little louder than he should have.

"Settle down, Urata!" the instructor yelled from the front of the bus, glaring at him.

"Y-yes, sir..." great. Now he'd gotten yelled at. Just wonderful...

He shot a murderous glance at the shiba, who was now grinning like an idiot, seemingly very proud of himself.

"Shoichi Urata, huh? I like it, it's a good name. It's a pleasure to meet you, Shoichi-kun!" Yuuichi's voice was filled with enthusiasm, as if he was completely happy to be sitting next to a complete stranger on the bus and even happier that this stranger told him his name.

Completely baffling, for sure.

"No. It's just Urata to you." he spoke coldly, turning away with a huff.

"Alright. Nice to meet you, 'Just Urata'-kun!" the boy responded without missing a beat.

"You little-" his anger was such that he jumped in his seat, standing completely upright and staring down at the boy.

It took every fiber of self control he had to keep himself from lunging at the smaller kid. If he clenched his fists any tighter he could actually puncture the palm of his hand.

"Urata!" the instructor yelled again, his voice so cold and icy that Shoichi felt himself being forced into submission.

"Y-yes!" he said, lowering his head and sitting back down again.

Yuuichi chuckled next to him, looking at him in amusement.

"You're a pretty funny guy." he boy said innocently.

"Oh, bite me!" Shoichi dropped any attempts to be friendly, simply being as rude as he could without actually coming off as hostile.

Sadly, this seemed like a battle he was fated to lose.

The bus started moving with a rumble, making the seats shake slightly. Shoichi was left fuming up in his seat, already thinking up excuses to back out from the trip at the last second. Better that than being stuck with an annoying chatterbox with no off-button for the next five hours.

But then again, after his father had paid for the trip, there was no way he'd be allowed to leave. Not without having to suffer through a very angry lecture from him.

Suddenly, the idea of being in the bus with the boy sounded much more palatable.

"So, Urata-kun, what sport do you play?" the boy looked at him, brimming with curiosity. Shoichi, however, completely ignored him, merely staring out the window in cold indifference. "Urata-kun? Hey, Urata-kuuun! ... Shoichiii!"

"I told you, it's Urata to you!" he snapped. God, it was hard keeping his temper at bay with this kid next to him.

"Alright, 'Urata to You', what sport do you play?" the boy immediately shot back with a cheeky grin on his face.

He had to be doing this on purpose...

"Wha- Listen here, kid, would you stop mocking my name already?!" he glared at the kid, looking him straight in the eye. He expected his larger frame and height to intimidate him, but the boy didn't back down one bit.

Instead, he smiled.

"Stop ignoring me and I'll stop making fun of your name. Now, what sport do you play?" Shoichi growled under his breath, but still did his best to control his flaring temper.

It was either that or punching the kid in the face. Somehow, he thought, that probably wouldn't end well for him.

"Are you always this irritating first thing in the morning?"

"Are you always this grouchy first thing in the morning?" the kid shot back without a moment's notice.

Getting harder and harder to keep calm...

"Ugh, fine. I play volleyball. There, happy?" he spat those words out with as much irritation and annoyance as he could muster. He even snarled a little while saying them. By all means, this kid should already know to leave him alone.

Instead, he just smiled.

"Oh, sweet. Volleyball is kinda like tennis, right? What position do you play, Shoichi-kun?"

Oh, he could already feel the beginning of a headache. A five hour long headache.

"Okay, first of all, I did not give you permission to use my first name. Second of all, volleyball and tennis are *not* alike. Volleyball is *much* cooler" And most importantly, are you going to keep bothering me the whole way over? Talk to someone else!"

Shoichi could already tell that a couple heads were turning his way. Even the instructor was now staring at him, shooting daggers with his eyes.

The husky, feeling suddenly self-conscious about all the undue attention, crossed his arms and looked away, as if declaring the conversation over.

"But--"

"Ah, don't even try." a voice came from the seat in the row ahead of theirs, a pair of big, bunny ears twitching in their direction. Then, they turned around and the face of a girl popped up from behind the seat as she got up on her knees and looked at the two with a smug look on her face. "He doesn't really get along with anyone, don't waste your time."

"Oh, shut up, Mizoguchi! This isn't any of your business, leave me alone" the girl remained undeterred, merely raising an eyebrow and shrugging.

"I believe I *was* leaving you alone. I was talking to the kid next to you, oh *Your Royal Majesty!*" her lips quivered a little as she shot back with snideness. Her indifference as she said those words made Shoichi's cheeks go red and he looked away, choosing to ignore her. "I'm Saya, by the way. Mizoguchi Saya. Nice to meet you!"

She extended a hand to the shiba, making the boy's face light up. He quickly grabbed her hand and shook it excitedly.

"I'm Yuuichi Michimiya. Nice to meet you!"

The girl smiled.

"So, you play tennis too? That's cool. How long have you been playing?"

The boy pondered her question for a bit, putting a hand to his chin and looking up in an over dramatized gesture to show that he was thinking.

Whether he was doing this on purpose or not, Shoichi couldn't tell.

"I started playing three months ago, my dad's the one who got me started!"

"Wow, that's a late start! I myself have been playing since I was four. My dad is a big fan of the sport too and he got me hooked when I was little!"

She glanced over at Shoichi for a second, the smile disappearing from her face.

"This guy, by the way, is a setter. And he's got the disposition to match, too. So cocky and full of himself. He doesn't talk to anyone, not even his team." she made a gesture with her head, pointing at Shoichi. Her lips quivered up once again as she found amusement in her own words. "That's why he never gets picked to play. He's not even on the bench!"

"I can hear you, you know!" he glared at her, but she merely stuck her tongue out, not bothered.

"Oh, I know. It wouldn't hurt if someone took you a peg down or two. You're so annoying most of the time, that's why you don't have any friends."

"Why you little..." Shoichi stood upright, grabbing the girl's shirt by her collar.

"Why are you even calling me little? You're just a bit tall for our age is all, it's not like you're older than me or anything." she looked back at him with a smug, condescending look. Shoichi's fists were quivering with anger and frustration and it took all the self-control he had not to punch her then and there.

"Urata!" the instructor yelled, getting up and starting to make his way to them.

"It's fine." the girl responded. She looked him dead in the eye, a mocking grin in her face. "What are you going to do? Hit a girl? Think that's gonna make you a big boy? I'd like to see you try."

Shoichi growled, he stared at her dead in the eye for a few more seconds. She already had him beat and she knew it, looking so smug like that.

With another growl, Shoichi pushed her away and sat back down, crossing his arms and leaning his head against the window.

"Urata, I'm gonna have to punish you for that!" the bear had finally reached their seats and stared at Shoichi, looking both frustrated and disappointed. He reached into his shirt to grab a pen, already holding up his clipboard.

"It's cool, coach. Shoichi-kun and I were just talking, no biggie." she shrugged, showing just how little she cared for the whole situation. The bear looked intermittently at the two of them for a few seconds, thinking over the situation.

"Fine. But if this happens again, I'll be forced to have a *chat* with your father, Urata!" The bear made sure to make his thinly veiled threats as overtly obvious as possible, to which Shoichi nodded silently. After making sure to have gotten his point across, the bear looked over the kids one last time before turning to go back to his seat at the front of the bus.

"See what I mean?" Saya started talking as soon as the bear was out of earshot, looking at Yuuichi. "Terrible personality."

"It's the pot calling the kettle black." Shoichi responded, making sure to put extra venom in his words.

Saya shrugged.

"How do you know so much about him?" Yuuichi asked.

"Hmm? Oh, right. My dad's the volleyball coach in our club, so he tells me things. 'The boy who left his school's volleyball club because he wasn't picked to play' is a pretty easy one to remember." she giggled, looking over at Shoichi for just a second.

The husky shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"Could you stop talking about me as if I weren't here?" again, he loaded his words with venom, hoping this time they'd have more of an effect. Unfortunately, the two people he directed them too seemed to be the only ones in the entire bus that were immune to it.

"So he doesn't like working with his team? But isn't a setter supposed to be the biggest team player?" Yuuichi asked, brimming with curiosity.

"Go figure." Saya shrugged.

"Okay, listen here. The setter doesn't work *for* the team, the *team* works for the setter. He's the one calling the shots. And if they don't want to listen then that's not my problem. It's not fair that I don't get picked because of that!" his voice rose a few keys as his temper flared once more.

Even as he tried to distance himself from their conversation to avoid getting scolded again, he seemed to find himself chiming in on it. It was incredibly annoying.

"See what I mean? Talk about a slave driver. Awful personality." Saya shrugged.

"This again?" he asked angrily, the hint of a snarl on his voice. Still, he was doing 140% of his best to try and keep his cool. The threat of having his father called was still looming over his head.

Saya stuck her tongue out again and Shoichi tightened his fists so much that he could feel something warm dripping from his palms. He didn't have to look to know that there was a little bit of blood.

"Soooo, you're new at our club, right? I know everyone in the tennis courts and I don't remember ever seeing you before." she directed her attention back to Yuuichi who was, at this point, merely watching their argument with an awkward look on his face.

"Ah, yes! I transferred to the city just last week. I used to live in Hokkaido before."

"Oooh, that's cool. What school did you transfer to?"

"Hmm... what's the name? I know I saw it when I visited it yesterday. Errr... A-Asa... Asagaki Academy?" Shoichi's ears immediately perked up upon picking up the name of the school.

"Nooooo!" he exclaimed, making Yuuichi nearly jump out of his seat in surprise.

Saya started laughing, covering her mouth with a hand.

"Oh man, talk about a coincidence. It's the same school we go to! Ahahaha!"

"Oh, that's cool. I didn't expect to meet people from my school here!" Yuuichi's tail started wagging excitedly, his smile growing ever wider. You could even see the tip of a tooth.

"I can't believe someone like *you* managed to pass the entrance exam. It's one of the hardest in the prefecture." Shoichi stared at the boy with a dumbfounded look. If his mouth gaped any more than it already was, he'd have to pick his jaw from the floor.

"It is? It was pretty easy to me." the boy answered back as if he had just told someone what he had for dinner.

"Wha-" Shoichi nearly choked upon hearing that. "How many points did you get?!"

"98 of 100. Why?" he looked completely puzzled by Shoichi's reaction up to now.

"Whooa." Saya muttered in admiration.

"W-wha-" Shoichi was stuttering, completely flabbergasted.

This kid... *this* kid got a 98 when Shoichi barely managed to get the 70 points needed to pass? There's just no freaking way!

"... I think I'm going to be sick." Shoichi muttered, resting his forehead on the palm of his hands. Yuuichi looked down at him with concern and confusion.

Oh god, the trip had only just started and he could already feel his head pounding and his stomach turning itself inside out...