



Summer Pockets Short Story [Kano Tenzen]

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A full-body illustration of the character Kanou Tenzen. He is a young man with short, dark blue hair and black-rimmed glasses. He is wearing a blue and light blue athletic jacket with white stripes on the sleeves and a white vertical stripe down the center. He is holding a tennis racket in his right hand, which is raised towards his chest. The title 'Summer Pockets' is overlaid on the image, with a butterfly icon between the words. Below the title is the Japanese text 'サマー ポケッツ' and the subtitle 'Amidst the Summer Brilliance'.

Summer Pockets

サマー ポケッツ

Amidst the Summer Brilliance

Chapter Kanou Tenzen

The Path Of Table Tennis, And Its
Beginnings

“Hngh...! Hngh! Hnn! Hngh! Hah!”

As I was just about to finish up my set of one thousand 10 kg weighted racket swings, I noticed some light streaming in through the various cracks scattered around the secret base. Morning had arrived already.

“...Looks like I pulled another pong-nighter, huh?”

I took off my glasses and wiped streams of sweat off my face, taking a huge swig from the water bottle I had placed on the ping pong table before slowly swallowing it bit by bit. As lukewarm as the water had gotten, it still felt great to my hot, parched body.

I guess I'll head back for now, I thought to myself. But, no... If I go back now, I'll probably fall asleep on the spot. I could tell that I had pushed my body to that kind of a limit, at the very least.

“And yet, there are still places that are beyond my reach... The path to mastery sure is arduous.”

Or rather, perhaps... As I am right now...

I pulled out the box that contained Ryouichi's and my old toys from where it had been stowed, deep inside the secret base. A Tamiya car, a hyper yoyo... A pair of nunchuks we had bought on a school trip... Buried even further below those crystallized memories of our childhood was an even older, more decrepit racket.

It looked a little different from the shakehand rackets I normally used—it was what we call a penholder in the table tennis world. On top of that, it only had rubber on one side; in other words, it was a true Japanese-style penholder racket. There weren't many table tennis players that still used this style of racket left in the world. And yet, to this day, I still had not won a single game

against the original owner of this unusual tool.

I gripped the Japanese style penholder racket in between my thumb and my index finger, just like one would hold a pen. The grip felt oddly comforting, even though it had been a while since I had last touched this racket. Perhaps that wasn't all that surprising though, considering that this racket could be called one of the most important starting points on my journey through the table tennis world.

I tossed a ping pong ball high up into the air, and then served it.

“Lethal Technique: Dragon Slave!!!”

I blasted the ball forwards with an intense forehand smash. The topspin on the ball was so powerful that it made a sound that almost sounded like a dragon roaring

as it tore through the air.

...But, it didn't even come close to touching the other side of the ping pong table, instead going soaring off towards the entrance of the secret base.

SMACK!!

“Gyaaah!!”

...Before then colliding with Takahara's forehead with a satisfying smack, who had just so happened to be entering the shed.

“Phew, just barely safe—I almost hit you straight in the face.”

“That wasn't safe at all! In fact, it was completely out! Totally!! One hundred percent!! More importantly, what

the hell was that!? Why am I getting smacked with ping pong balls as soon as I arrive, when all I want to do is chill for a bit!? Are you trying to tell me to go home or something!? I'm not a very mentally strong person, so I'll definitely bawl my eyes out as I go back, you know!?"

Takahara shouted, voicing his complaints very vocally as he clutched a bright, red, ping-pong ball sized bump on his forehead.

"Sorry, I didn't have any bad intentions or anything. It's just..."

"Just...?"

"It's not my fault you weren't able to dodge that."

"You aren't feeling sorry at all!!"

“I told you I was sorry, didn’t I?”

“What you said after that made it all moot!”

Takahara was a kid from the city, who had apparently come here over summer vacation to help sort through his late grandmother, Katou-san’s, leftover belongings. It did seem like he also had his own reasons for being here, but I didn’t pry too far into that. Everybody has a thing or two they’d rather not talk about.

“Actually, that secret technique just now... That was new, right? I’ve never seen that one before.”

He also often accompanied me in my training. That must have been why he found my technique from just now a little out of place.

“That wasn’t a secret technique. That was a Lethal

Technique.”

“...? Is there a difference? I mean, you did say ‘Lethal Technique’, but... That kinda seems like a childish thing to do, huh?”

“Of course.”

I gazed down at the Japanese-style penholder racket in my hands as I replied.

“It was a child who came up with it, after all.”

“...? Is there some kind of history I’m lacking here?”

“It isn’t anything that important. I just...”

If the fact that Takahara had arrived here at exactly that moment were to have any meaning at all, then... it was



probably a sign that it was fine for me to open up to him about that.

I turned towards Takahara and looked him straight in the eye.

“Would you be willing to hear me out about something?”

“U-Uh, sure...”

“It’s about why I play table tennis.”

“Ohh, that sounds pretty interesting. I’ve always been curious about what made you as invested into table tennis as you are now.”

“Is that so?”

Breaking away from the carefree expression that

Takahara was wearing on his face, I dropped my gaze back down to the racket in my hands again.

“This is a story about a certain boy...”

“Right, right.”

“Ever since he was young, that boy had been shy... and a little weak.”

“Right... right?”

“He was the type of boy who was too embarrassed to even pair up in PE class and stuff.”

“Wait.”

I paused, interrupted by Takahara’s outstretched palm.

“What’s wrong?”

“I feel like I’ve heard this before. Well, it does seem a little different, but... I’m just making sure here but, this isn’t about Ryouichi, right?”

“No. It’s about me.”

“I see... Sorry for interrupting. Go on.”

“Right, how far did I get again...? I think... That’s right, I was talking about how the girl departed for somewhere far away, far beyond my reach.”

“Wait!”

I paused again, interrupted by Takahara’s outstretched palm once more.

“You skipped a bunch! Not only did you skip a bunch, but I feel like you just blurted out a huge spoiler, too!”

“Hm? I see, I must have accidentally gotten ahead of myself in my enthusiasm.”

“You were talking about how you were too embarrassed to even pair up with people in PE class and stuff.”

“Ah, yeah, that’s right. Sorry. So, that boy was very weak and shy...”

I closed my eyes as I thought back to those nostalgic times.

“The elementary school that he had been attending had this library, you see... Even during summer vacation, that boy would hole himself up inside that library and read books, instead of going outside to play. He didn’t really

have anybody he could call a friend, either.”

Upon glancing back at Takahara, I noticed him groaning while holding his hand against his forehead.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s just... Well, whatever, I guess. Keep going.”

“Right. So, in that library, he met a girl, you see. The girl was both shy and liked books, just like him.”

“Then the two of them started to slowly talk to each other more and more, right? About, like, books, and stuff. And eventually, they began to secretly consider each other friends.”

“That’s exactly right.” I nodded, before realizing what it was that he had actually said. “...Have I told you this

story before?”

“Nope. Don’t worry about it.”

“In any case, I finally started looking forward to being at school, even if it was just a bit.”

As I spoke, I let myself sink into the memories of my elementary school childhood. That’s right, that was how that day had started as well—with the two of us seated across from each other at the library table, quietly reading books.

“Hey, Kanou-kun.”

I quietly lifted my head out of the book I was reading when I heard that unexpected voice call out to me.

“Isn’t it boring just reading books like this?”

“But... the library is a place where you read books, so...”

“That’s true, but... look, we’re together, aren’t we? Don’t you think it’d be a bit of a waste to just sit here doing nothing?”

After taking a quick glance at her surroundings, the girl began whispering quietly to me.

“Wanna try doing something bad?”

“Something bad...? But... that would mean we’d be doing

something bad, so wouldn't it be better if we didn't?"

"That's right, but you know... Doesn't that just make it seem so much more exciting?"

"...What are we going to do?"

The girl showed me a grin even larger than she had ever shown me before, as if the fact that I seemed open to her idea had delighted her beyond end. Then, she pulled out her pencil case from her bag and took out an eraser.

"Ehehe... Eraser battles!"

That was the game that the other boys in my class had always loved to play during our breaktimes. The rules were simple: all you had to do was try to knock your opponent's eraser off the table by flicking your eraser into it. There were a couple different tiers of matches

that people played. At the highest tier, or the “Pro Class”, the players were so serious that even the erasers themselves were a part of the stakes. It wasn’t uncommon for some kid to be bawling their eyes out because their shiny new eraser had been stolen away from them in a match.

Being as shy as I was, I could never see myself joining in with the rest of those kids, and yet... I would still watch from the sidelines, thinking about how it seemed like so much fun. I was sure that that was how that girl had been feeling, too.

And so, my heart leaped with excitement. I mean, it was that game I had always wanted to try and all.

“Got it. Let’s give it a try.”

I also pulled an eraser out of my pencil case, placing it on

the table.

“But, quietly, alright? We’re in a library.”

“Of course. Bad things are only fun if you do them secretly.”

The girl winked as she placed her own eraser on the table.

“An eraser battle, huh...? That sure takes me back.”

Takahara commented on my story with a nostalgic look on his face.

“They had them in the city as well?”

“I mean, I’m pretty sure every grade schooler has done that at least once in their life, right?”

“I see... In other words, you’re saying that we’re is the same when we’re kids, whether we live in the countryside or not, huh?”

“Yeah. But, we didn’t flick our erasers with our fingers, I guess.”

“How did you shoot them, then?”

“We used the button part of a retractable pen to push them around. Some of us would even make secret modifications to our pens in order to increase their firing power, like stacking two springs on the inside and stuff.”

“So, ‘Maniac Class’, huh?”

“Is that what you guys called it here?”

“It was a special tier accessible only to the wealthier kids. Namely, Tokuda and his group of friends.”

“Ahh, that guy from Tokuda Sports, huh?”

“In any case, we really enjoyed playing those everyday little games, because they were neither little nor everyday for us.”

Having gotten that far, I bit my lip.

“But, that didn’t last very long...”

“Did something happen?”

In response to Takahara’s words, I gazed off into the distance and began recalling my childhood memories once again.

The library tables, which were both much wider and more well-polished than our school desks, fueled the fires of our eraser battles even more. Even just a slight flick sent our erasers zipping over the tabletop—it seemed even more fun than the eraser battles I seen at school.

No. It was, in fact, more fun. That was why we both ended up getting too absorbed in our game.

“Eat this!! Dragon Slaaaaaaaaave!!”

“Guaaaaaaaahh!! My eraser split in haaalf!!!”

“Be quiet in the library!!”

We got in big trouble with library teacher.

“After that, the two of us apologized to the teacher on the verge of tears.”

“Well, I mean, of course you’d get yelled at if you shout in a library. Anyway, so this is where that ‘Dragon Slave’ thing first appears, huh? It split your eraser in half? What kind of a skill is that? Were the two of you really having an eraser battle?”

Takahara blasted me with questions, half incredulous and half curious.

“It’s a children’s game. As a kid, didn’t you feel like the power of your skills increased when you shouted their name as you used them?”

“Uh, but... it split your eraser in half, didn’t it?”

“I mean, once you reach a certain level of power, even

splitting an eraser into two pieces is a simple task, isn't it? In other words, that's what it was."

"Huh? Huh...? Is that what it was?"

Takahara didn't seem convinced by my explanation.

"In any case, that marked the end of our eraser battles. After that, we went back to our never-ending days of reading books."

I once again immersed myself in the memories of my elementary school life

That's right, on that day, too... The two of us had been seated across from each other at the library table, quietly reading books as well.

“Hey, Kanou-kun.”

I quietly lifted my head out of the book I was reading when I heard her voice.

“Isn’t it boring just reading books like this?”

“The library is a place where you read books. Also, we just got yelled at for being too loud the other day, too.” I whispered back at her.

“That’s true, but... look, we’re together, aren’t we? Don’t you think it’d be a bit of a waste to just sit here doing nothing?”

After taking a quick glance at her surroundings, the girl began whispering quietly to me.

“Wanna try doing something bad again?”

“I won’t do any more eraser battles, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“No no, something even worse than that.”

As she said that, the girl pulled a handful of marbles out of her bag.

“We’ll be able to be play as quietly as we like with these, since even just a slight flick should be more than enough to make them roll.”

I should have known.

The girl had said that she wanted to do something “even worse”. In other words, she wanted to play something even worse than an eraser battle. But even then, I couldn’t help but feel curious about the game that she suggested. I couldn’t help but imagine that it’d be fun.

“...Just once.”

Upon hearing my reply, the girl gave me an honest, delighted smile.

It only took a moment for our game of marbles to escalate into a war.

“Eat this!! Dragon Slaaaaaaaaaave!!”

“Guaaaaaaaaahh!! My fingernail!!!”

“Be quiet in the library!!!”

We got in big trouble with library teacher again.

“After that, the two of us apologized to the teacher on the verge of tears.”

“That’s the second time you’ve mentioned that ‘Dragon Slave’ skill, you know? Wasn’t that some kind of a skill that splits erasers in half?”

“It split my fingernail in half.”

“Agggggghhhhh!! That sounds so painful, don’t make me imagine that!!”

“In any case, the two of us had to apologize to the teacher again. While bawling our eyes out. And by that, I mean me.”

Even just thinking back to that time made the pain come back. I clutched my right index finger in my other hand.

“They even told us that we’d be forbidden from coming into the library if we ever made a ruckus again.”

“I mean, yeah.”

“And so, we went back to quietly reading books. But then, the girl spoke up again. ‘Isn’t it boring just reading books like this?’, she said.”

“Is she bad at studying or something?”

Takahara had an obviously exasperated look on his face.

“Yeah, that was exactly what I had thought too. Of course, I refused. I told her that I wouldn’t do any more eraser battles, nor would I play marbles... But.”

“But?”

“What that girl brought out of her bag was... an old ping pong ball.”

“Ah, so we’ve finally gotten to the part where ping pong comes in, huh?”

“Heh... It wasn’t even something I could begin to call ping pong. We didn’t even have a proper understanding of the rules.”

I gripped the ping pong ball in my hands, as if I were reliving my memories from that time.

“Using the wide library table as a court, we piled up some books to make the net, and then used another two books as our rackets...”

“...That sounds like the worst possible game you could ever try to emulate in a library, huh...?”

“Yep. It escalated, alright.”

Clack...! Clack, clack...! Clack...!

“Kanou-kun, you’ve gotten good enough to keep a rally going now, huh?”

“Yeah. I’m still not too confident, but I feel pretty good about it.”

“In that case, I’m gonna get a bit more serious, alright?”

“That’s just what I wanted.”

“Eat this!! Dragon Slaaaaaaaaaave!!”

“Ahhhhhhhhhh!! The teacher’s glasses split in half!!!”

“We ran away as fast as we could.”

“Rather than your choice of games, it’d be more fitting to call the two of you ‘the worst’, huh?”

“Heh... It was a mistake brought about by my immaturity. And so, that was how our place of respite, the library, had been stolen away from us.”

“Uh, that was completely your own fault. Why are you acting like the victim here?”

“However, turning points are a mysterious thing—you can never tell where they might hail from.”

“...?”

“The next day, the two of us were summoned to the teacher’s room. There, they asked us whether we wanted

to play ping pong.”

One man’s trash is another man’s treasure. There was somebody that, after having seen our rallies, felt that we had potential. We couldn’t help but feel confused since we had never been recognized in that way before, but... We were both overjoyed that somebody had their eye on us.

The girl and I accepted the teacher’s offer, together. In that moment, the library ceased to be our home—and in its place, we were introduced to the gym.

A recreational table tennis session was being held inside the elementary school gym for the island community. There were elderly people, housewives, and more, all cheerfully hitting ping pong balls around. Some saw the sport as a source of relaxation, playing like a leisurely walk through the woods. Others shot bullets at each other, leaving the details of the game to their muscles. The one common denominator between everybody, though... and that was the fact that they were all wearing smiles on their faces.

“Woah... So this is table tennis, huh?”

“Is it really alright for us to be in a place like this?”

“They were the ones who invited us here, so I’m sure it’s fine. Here, a racket.”

“It’s kinda squarish and hard to hold...”

“Apparently, that kind of racket is called a ‘penholder’.”

The girl made a loop with her index finger and thumb around the handle of her racket, showing me her hand. I copied her grip on my own racket. It fit my hand surprisingly well.

“You know how to play ping pong?”

“Nope, I just looked into it a bit beforehand. I was thinking I’d teach you.”

“...I wonder if I’ll really be able to play ping pong...”

“You never know without trying. Let’s try hitting it back and forth like we did in the library.”

“A warmup, huh?”

“Yeah.”

My first time standing at a ping pong table. The figure of that girl standing across from me, staring at me over the net. Everything about the situation felt so new to me that I couldn't stop my heart from thumping in my chest.

“Here I come...!”

“Bring it!”

“Eat this!! Dragon Slaaaaaaaaave!!”

“I thought you'd do that!”

Reading her motions, I hit the ping pong ball that had come flying straight at me right back at her with a precise swing. The satisfying smack of my racket against the ball. The refreshing sensation of a solid impact reverberating

through my arm. I felt I had awoken to something deep within me.

No, rather... it felt like a puzzle piece that I had always been missing had suddenly clicked into place.

“Not bad, Kanou-kun! Haaaaaaaah!”

“Wha!? I’m not done yet!”

Smack! Smack! Smack! The rackets went, as we smacked the ping pong ball towards each other. However, we really hadn’t properly understood the rules of table tennis yet, after all. We were simply just hitting the ping pong ball back at each other, without first letting it bounce on the table. In other words, we were playing badminton in ping pong.

Even so, the adults around us found our exchange

exceptionally amusing. ‘The most important thing is to enjoy yourself—’, they told us. It was into that mixing pot of enjoyment that you then added the proper rules.

‘When you serve, you must first make the ball bounce once on your side of the table.’ ‘You should only return the ball after it has bounced once on your side.’ The number of things that we had to keep track of while returning the ball increased exponentially, compared to when we were just hitting the ball at each other.

However, they also showed us how the requirement for the ball to bounce first could be seen as a plus, rather than a minus. If you add a lot of spin to the ball, you could make it change direction when it bounced. Once you got into that, you could also get exchanges based purely on how much spin each player added to their next shot.



“Lethal Technique: Dragon Slaaaaaave!!”

“Kuh...!!”

The impossibly curving drive smash that the girl unleashed flew off in a different direction every time it hit the table. I just could not catch the ball with my racket no matter what.

“Hehe, and with that, it’s 98 wins! Still want to keep going?”

“O-Of course!”

She was, perhaps, what most call a prodigy. Ever since we had started playing table tennis using the proper rules, I hadn’t been able to win against her even once.

“Haaaaaaaagh! Dragon Slaaaaaave!!”

“Guaaaaaaaaaaaaagh!”

“Alright! 99 wins!”

“O-One more! Please!”

I bowed deeply, clutching my racket in my hand.

“Mmm... But I’ve kinda started getting a little tired...”

“Then this is my chance!”

“Uwah, isn’t that when you’re supposed to mention something about how there’s no point in defeating me when I’m not at my best and all?”

“It’s only polite to try your very best when facing an opponent.”

“That’s a cool line you used, but still kinda uncool.”

The girl gave me a bit of a strained smile.

“Why don’t we take a little break?”

“Got it. But, please keep it moderate, so you don’t recover too much strength.”

“Ahaha, you really are desperate to win, huh?”

The girl plopped herself down on the floor while laughing. She began taking deep, slow breaths in order to regulate her breathing.

“Kanou-kun, you really are a boy, huh? Recently, I can’t help but feel the difference between our energy.”

“I’ve just been secretly training because I don’t want to

lose to you, that's all."

"I guess so. But, there really does seem to be a substantial difference between boys and girls, huh?"

"I still haven't won against you though."

"I've been trying my best too. I really don't want to lose to you either, Kanou-kun."

The feeling of wanting to win, and that of not wanting to lose. Which of these will end up victorious, I wonder? At the very least, not wanting to lose seems to be stronger for now, seeing as I haven't even won once yet.

"Hehe, hehehe."

"What's wrong? Why are you laughing all of a sudden?"

“It’s nothing. I just found it kind of odd, that’s all.”

The girl stared off into the distance, as if she were looking at something far beyond the walls of the gym.

“The two of us should both be in the library... and yet here we are, having tons of fun running around and moving our bodies.”

“Ahh. I felt the same about that too.”

“Maybe I’m only finding it fun because I’m together with you, Kanou-kun.”

The girl’s face seemed slight flushed as she said that. However, because I had been so flustered by what she said, I couldn’t look her directly in the face. I couldn’t be true to my honest opinions, to.

“I’ve just been losing over and over again, so I can’t say I’ve been having fun.”

Even saying that already took all I had. What was this exhilarating feeling in my chest, though? Whenever I was with this girl, I couldn’t help but feel like I was different from how I normally was. I couldn’t help but act tough where I normally would not, and try to show off whenever I got the chance.

“I want to try more stuff with you, Kanou-kun.”

“More... stuff?”

“We started off with eraser battles; then, we started playing marbles, and now we’re playing table tennis, like this.”

“Yeah.”

“I wanted to try so many more... Cough, cough...”

“...? What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing, never mind. More importantly, our next match will have to wait until tomorrow.”

“What?”

The girl stood up and took a deep breath.

“Actually, I’ve got a little something I have to do today. That’s while our match will have to wait.”

“Got it. There’s no point in defeating you when you’re not at your best, anyway.”

“You dummy, you’ve gotta say that earlier.”

The girl shrugged her shoulders, slightly exasperated.
After that, she looked directly at me.

“...You know, Kanou-kun... I have something I want to tell you after I get my 100th win.”

“That might be a little bit of a problem because I plan to win the next match.”

“Ahhh, you’ve really gone and said it now~!”

She laughed, and I laughed as well. The two of us had definitely become friends, and perhaps even something more than that.

“But... I didn’t notice, back then.”

I still regret my actions back then, even now. I should have made her play another match with me even if I had to force her.

“What happened?”

Hearing my subdued tone, Takahara looked at me with a worried expression on his face.

“The next day, I waited for her at the gym. But, she never came.”

“She didn’t come?”

“The day after, and the day after that, too. I kept waiting for her to come.”

“What happened to her?”

“I told you, didn’t I? The girl departed for somewhere far away, far beyond my reach. She was no longer within this world.”

I muttered to myself, as I gazed beyond the window of the shed.

“In the end... I never managed to win against her, huh?”

“Is that why?”

“Why what?”

“Is that why you’ve continued to play ping pong even until now? So that, one day, your name might reach her in that faraway place?”

“I suppose, yeah... It’d be nice if that happened, yeah.”

Past the window, and even further beyond... I looked up towards the sky. Takahara, perhaps sympathizing with me, didn’t question me any further.

“Wassup~! Huh? Hairi’s here too, huh?”

Ryouichi entered the secret base with something in his hands.

“Ryouichi? What’s that you have with you?”

Takahara inquired, pointing at the thing Ryouichi was holding in his hands.

“Hehe, it’s a radio! I was just thinking that I might as well come listen here, that’s all.”

“Is there some kind of news you’re looking to share?”

“Noope, it’s a match.”

Ryouichi switched the radio on in response to Takahara’s question. Sounds instantly started pouring out of the speakers as if the radio had already been pre-tuned to some frequency.

“Dragon Slaaaaaave!!”

“Wha!?”

Takahara face went into an expression of pure shock when he heard those words from the radio.

“And the first to score in the Japan National Women’s Singles Tennis Championship Finals is Ikaruga Urara!”

“Damn... Urara really is in top form, isn’t she?”

“Huh? Do you know her?”

“Urara’s from this island. Not only is she the same age as us, but she’s a pro tennis player too.”

“Huh... A pro tennis player from Torishirojima, huh...?”

“Yeah, although she suddenly had to move away because of her parents. Oh yeah, she played table tennis with Tenzen before she moved away, you know?”

“Huh... Wait, what?”

“She was a pretty clumsy kid... She never really made it clear, so we never realized that she had moved over to the mainland, you see. We thought she was on a vacation with her family.”

After hearing Ryouichi's explanation, Takahara gave me a questioning look.

"Tenzen, could that possibly be... the girl you were talking about just now...?"

"I told you. She was no longer within the (table tennis) world."

"That's so misleading!! And what was with that suspicious cough just now!? She was playing table tennis, so why is she playing tennis now!?"

"That's a silly question. Eraser battles, then marbles, then ping pong, then sepak takraw... It's hardly surprising that she chose tennis next."

"Wait, you inserted something really weird into that sequence just now, didn't you? What in the world has

she been doing since she moved to the mainland!? Why was she playing Thailand's national sport!? Wait, more importantly... Your story had this crazy first-love kind of atmosphere to it, didn't it!? You know, like the 'if I win this match I'll confess' kind of thing!!"

"I suppose. I might have done that at that time, but... Right now, I definitely wouldn't."

I heaved a deep sigh. Seeing that, Takahara narrowed his eyes. He seemed to have realized something.

"Is that because you really couldn't win, after all?"

"Nope."

I silently, but firmly shook my head. Then, I looked Takahara straight in the eyes, and said...

“Her chest size doesn’t really fit my tastes, unfortunately.”

“...Huh?”

“Time is cruel. No matter how much of a prodigy she may be, it won’t help her body grow.”

“You... You’re pretty horrible, you know?”

Turning away from Takahara’s scornful gaze, I picked up my racket once again.

Once upon a time, I had been introverted, weak, and shy. I had shut myself away in the library, and didn’t have anybody I could call a friend. But then, through my miraculous meeting with a certain girl, I had been introduced to table tennis. I had also managed to make many more friends compared to back then. Perhaps that

might seem like a minor development to most, but... to me, it was something that had changed my entire world.

And, on top of that... that really must have been my first love, after all.

That's why, to me right now... table tennis was still my entire world.

“Now then...”

I mentally took a step back and readjusted my grip on my racket.

“Up for some training today as well?”

