Untold

Von Gary

Kapitel 1: Glimpse

A practice game against Namisato High School. The fifth inning, Nishiura in offense, leading 4:2 with runner on second and third. With Tajima up next hopes were high that Nishiura would score again and all eyes rested on the short batter.
Watching Tajima steal bases or just bat at his best always caused Hanai's heart rate to pick up – and even knowing that he was *about to* made him tense up with excitement. He blamed it on the thrill it gave him, knowing that his teammate was bringing victory just a little closer to the Nishiura team, and never had given it a second thought.
The other teammates certainly felt the same way, didn't they? It was visible on everyone's faces whenever Tajima stepped onto the field: Hopes were high and admiration bubbled underneath the tense faces watching the play.
Hanai wondered if he would ever become a skilled enough player to cause the same reaction when he entered the diamond.

Tajima suddenly turned his head to meet Hanai's gaze with a piercing stare, and the team captain froze in place, feeling his ears heat up. Tajima couldn't read minds, could he? Unwittingly Hanai held his breath until the batter turned his attention back to the enemy pitcher, then released a shaky breath.
"It's still kinda intimidating, isn't it?" he heard Sakaeguchi next to him and gave a small nod, eyes never leaving the field.
The intense look Tajima put on whenever he concentrated during a game was something even his teammates hadn't gotten used to after a year of playing together.
"Hanai, you're on deck!" Coach Momoe's voice pulled the team captain back to reality and, realizing that he had gotten carried away by his thoughts, he rushed out of the dugout to warm up.
He stopped just in time to see Tajima swing at the next pitch and send the ball to the other end of the field, to an empty spot no one could reach in time to catch it. It met the floor. Both runners made it home and even though the umpire called Tajima out before he could reach second base, a cheer broke out among Nishiura's players. They had scored two more points thanks to him, after all.
Hanai was still amazed at the precision of his batting.
Tajima wore a satisfied grin and gave his team a big thumb up as he came running back towards the dugout, and Hanai turned away again to hide his expression.
"Tajima's so cool!" Someone gushed behind him, speaking out what the team captain had been thinking. It made him feel a little less bad about the heat on his face.

"Nice batting," commented Hanai as Tajima passed him. The batter stopped in his

tracks to smile at him.

"Thanks! I wish I had been a little faster though. Then you could've sent me home next."

The trust and confidence in him the words carried left a warm, fuzzy feeling in Hanai's chest as he stepped into the batter's box. *He believes in me. I want to show Tajima and the others that they can rely on me, too.*

A bead of sweat rolled down Hanai's temple as his eyes locked on the ball and he got ready to swing. He wasn't going to miss. Not with Tajima watching.

…

At the end of the 9th inning Nishiura's victory was announced with a score of 8:4.

It had been a good game with both parties giving their all, but Hanai couldn't shake the feeling that he could have done better. He struck out twice – unlike Tajima who had hit the ball every time he bat – even though he had wanted to prove his team that he was just as capable. But maybe he simply wasn't.

Hanai creased his face as he pinched the bridge of his nose. His head had been feeling fuzzy ever since the sixth inning and despite drinking a lot, he couldn't seem to cool down the heat rising in his body. Was he getting ill? He sure hoped not.

"Hey, are you okay?" He looked up to see Sakaeguchi staring at him worryingly.

They had finished thanking the opposing team and audience after the match, and most of the others had already run off to do ground maintenance, but Hanai had stayed behind without even realizing.

"Huh? Yeah, I'm fine. Just tired, is all." Hanai felt his head burn under his cap and he took a deep breath of fresh air, hoping it would cool him down a little. "Sorry, I must've spaced out."

"Yeah… Hey, why don't you go rest in the dugout and leave the maintenance to the rest of us?"

Did he really look that bad? He wasn't really in the mood to discuss it and felt like he really could use some water, so he accepted the offer with a nod. "Uh, alright. Thanks."

…

Drinking cold water in the shade of the dugout did help cool down a bit but Hanai felt guilty watching his teammates clean up the field while he stayed back doing nothing.

He walked over to Coach Momoe as soon as he felt better.

"You're not overworking yourself, Hanai, are you?"

"I'm not, Coach."

Her eyes attentively looked him over, the arms crossed in front of her chest making her scepticism clear.

"Well, most of the work has been assigned by now…" She looked over her shoulder at the other teammates. "You can help Tajima retrieve the baseballs if you absolutely want to help."

"Got it," nodded Hanai before he headed toward the outfield.

He really hoped a wind would pick up to keep his body cool because he felt heat creeping up inside him once again.

…

"Hey, what was that all about? Are you not feeling well? I saw you talking to Coach."
Hanai didn't have to look up to know who the voice belonged to. He did anyway and saw Tajima balancing half a dozen baseballs on his arms.
"It's nothing, don't worry about it."
For a moment there was no reply as hazel eyes rested on Hanai's face, long enough to make him feel awkward and turn away to resume his search. It was always a weird feeling to have the other guy stare at him like that and Hanai didn't really know how to handle it – or the way it seemed to make his heart beat harder against his chest. Why did the other make him that nervous? Judging from Sakaeguchi's words before Tajima's stare had the same effect on all team members though. So it wasn't just him. Hanai exhaled a sigh of relief.
"Alright", came the late reply eventually and Tajima changed the subject. "There are no more baseballs in the outfield. I got them all."
Hanai turned back to look at his teammate, furrowing his brows in doubt. "Are you sure? The field's big, you could've missed-"
"I'm sure."
Tajima's bold statement shut the team captain up but he couldn't keep the scepticism off his face. Despite the shorter boy's confident look, there was just no way Tajima could be *that certain* that he was right.
"Three balls dropped in the outfield without being retrieved during today's warm up, five more during game. Another two went over the fence in the third and seventh inning. Ren did a great job finding all the balls after last practice, so there's just these ten balls we have to find. I've got six, you've got two. That leaves the two that went over the fence."
Hanai stared at Tajima in disbelief. How had he remembered all these things? There was no doubt that Tajima was a genius but having a memory this accurate... Was there even a chance that Hanai could compete with this guy?
"So, you ready to look for the last two balls?"
"Y...Yeah..."

Hanai straightened up and followed Tajima to the dugout to put away the balls they had already collected, all while his mind was still running wild. How was it possible that a dorky guy like Tajima had so much potential and was so skilled at sports and memorizing things? *All while sucking at school*, his mind added, reminding him of Tajima's grades that were mediocre at best. No stranger would expect a genius mind to rest behind the overly excitable façade.
Tajima really was something. But despite being envious of his skills, Hanai still was happy for him somehow. *He deserves it.*
"Huh? Did you say something?" Hanai flinched when Tajima turned to look at him questioningly and he quickly shook his head.
"N-No, I didn't! Hah! ...hah... I'll look over there, though! It'll be faster if we split up."
Without waiting for Tajima's answer, Hanai jogged forward to hide his red face. Had he actually spoken out his thoughts? He needed to be more careful – the last thing he wanted was to embarrass himself in front of Tajima, after all.

...

Damn, Hanai thought. It was getting too hot. The afternoon sun was burning down

mercilessly and the embarrassment from before certainly hadn't helped either. His blush had faded but his body still felt too warm and it was starting to make him feel dizzy.

They had found one of the balls already, so at least it wouldn't be long until they could head back to the others and relax for a bit until they'd start with the debriefing. Hanai took off his cap to fan himself and closed his eyes for a moment.

"HEY!!! I FOUND THE LAST ONE!!" He heard excited Tajima's voice and the sound of approaching footsteps. "LOOK!"

Hanai forced his eyes open again, catching a glimpse of his teammate who came running towards him with an arm stretched over his head to proudly present the ball he had found. Suddenly the image began to sway.

"Hanai?"

He forced his unfocused gaze back to the boy whose jog towards him had accelerated to a sprint but the corners of his vision started to fade to darkness – "…Huh…?" – until his entire vision had gone black.

"Hanai!!"

"…"

…

When Hanai cracked his eyes open, a small groan escaped his lips and the first thing he saw were two hazel eyes staring down at him. "H…huh…?"

It took him a moment to realize that they belonged to a face – a freckled one – that was watching him with an unreadable expression.

What had happened? Hanai remembered that they had been retrieving baseballs and had moved out to find the ones that had made it over the fence. He remembered feeling hot and dizzy. Tajima finding the last missing ball. Then a fade to black.

Hanai opened his mouth to ask what had happened but something about the expression on Tajima's face kept him from breaking the silence.

His mind was slowly waking up again and when he realized that his head was cushioned on Tajima's folded knees, his face started heating up again. Why had Tajima chosen to watch over him in such an awkward position? He could have just laid him onto the ground and waited for him to wake up like that. He didn't have to make it so weird-

Hanai's thoughts stopped when he noticed that Tajima's hands that had carefully held his head in place were clammy and cold. Had he been worried? Hanai could have sworn that he had felt them shake a little just a moment ago.

"Hey, Tajima-…"

"Are you feeling better now?"

Tajima's question had come before Hanai could ask his own and the team captain wondered if he had done it on purpose. He figured that he owed Tajima an answer though – especially since he obviously had been worried about him.

"Not sure." He answered honestly. "I'm not feeling dizzy anymore but I still feel hot."

A cold hand moved to Hanai's forehead and he breathed out a blissful sigh. He felt bad that Tajima's hands were so cold but they did feel incredibly soothing against his hot skin.

"Your face is pretty hot."

"Thanks." Hanai answered without thinking, before the misunderstanding hit him a moment later. His eyes shot open, cheeks turning redder than they had been before. "Wait, that's not what I meant-!"

Tajima's laugh silenced him and Hanai sat up with a flustered expression. At least that weird, unreadable look had left Tajima's face, he thought. Hanai didn't recall having ever seen it on the other boy's face before and something about it had been disconcerting.

It made Hanai wonder if there were parts of his teammate's personality he did not know yet… but what more could there be? Tajima already was a pretty multi-faceted character. Could there be even more to him than being loud, obnoxious, optimistic, perverted, gluttonous, overly excited and infuriatingly good at baseball? Hanai wondered…

"Seems like you're better already!" Tajima grinned once he had calmed down and stood back up. "Let's head back and get you a real coolpack to chill your *hot* face though."

He picked Hanai's cap off the ground, then offered his hand to help him up.

The last comment had brought an embarrassed blush back to Hanai's cheeks but he accepted the hand to pull himself back up. It wasn't clammy anymore.

"Thanks." He put his cap back on once Tajima returned it, then followed him back to the field to return the two baseballs they had found.

"How long was I out anyway?" Hanai couldn't stop himself from asking, both worried and curious about his blackout.

"Just a bit." Tajima didn't look at him when he answered.

When he finally did glance at Hanai the odd expression from before lingered in his stare again – for just a moment – before Tajima blinked it away and turned his attention back to what lay ahead of them. The rest of the team that had gathered in front of the dugout after they had finished their chores and they had obviously been waiting for the two missing teammates to return.

Before Hanai could comment on Tajima's unsatisfying answer or weird expression, the boy ran ahead, waving the two retrieved balls in his hand.

"Hey!! We found the missing balls!! Also, Hanai collapsed because of a heat stroke or something!! He was out for minutes, I was wondering if he had actually died!"

"Don't—!!" Hanai's face paled in terror when he heard Tajima's words. If Coach Momoe heard him…

"HANAI!!"

…he was going to be in so much trouble.