What Became Apparent to Me a Year After

It happened on that day right before the spring break was over.

I dragged myself to the Keyaki mall. Once I defeated Ichinose and managed to return our class back to Class C, I decided to fight with Ayanokouji again.

I have to think up a good strategy or else it won’t work on that guy.

Which is why I seek someone who can become my hands and legs and move according to my will. No matter how insignificant they may be.

There should be several useful pawns in his class that could be easily swayed.

My class on the other hand, has for some reason too many of those who only have muscles for brain.

They are sorta excellent as foot soldiers, but they can’t follow detailed instructions.

And what’s more, my class still has a deeply rooted distrust towards me.

Right now, Ishizaki holds the position as the ruler of the class, but I’m getting bored of his acting skills.

A critical point for me to think over is when to take the reigns from him again.

«Good morning. Are you alone today?»

I sat down at a seat at the Keyaki Mall, waiting for Ibuki and Ishizaki to arrive, when a certain busybody called out to me.

It was Sakayanagi Arisu.

«I can say the same to you, what happened to those bodyguards of yours, Sakayanagi?»

I can’t see Kamuro or Hashimoto here either, those servants of hers… no, maybe I should say familiars?

«Fufu. Even I go out alone sometimes. Congratulations on your comeback victory.»

«Same for you. You beat Suzune’s class I hear.»

«4 wins, 3 losses. It was close of a result despite fighting with a lower class however.»

«But you won so they have just become stepping stones for you in the end.»

A lead of 500 points was too large to lose during a single year. You could safely assume it meant you were safe. Or at least, that’s how lazy people normally thought.

«Empty words coming from you. You mean to say you plan to close the gap in 2 years…no, within this year. At least, you eyes do.»

«Kuku, who knows?»

«How about it? Care for a cup of tea we while discuss the next year together?»

«Together? I have nothing to talk about. And I’m not in the mood either, alright?»

«Oh, really? I was thinking of a little celebration for your comeback. My treat, of course.»

She’s obviously looking down on me, but she’s still watching my every steps. Making sure she doesn’t miss anything.

If I show her even the slightest of strange movements, it would bring her joy beyond compare.

The battle between us has already begun.

Well, I can play with her anytime. We’ll just try to read into what’s hidden behind each other anyway.

I didn’t have any intention of doing that today.

«Later.»

I stood up, looking for another place to go. Seeing me like that, she called out to me again.

«Your aura has certainly changed.»

«What?»

«A year ago, you would look at me with full enmity in your eyes. You surely don’t look like that same person to me.»

I laughed making a sound saying ‘as if’. The same smile appeared on her face.

So, she doesn’t think I’m showering her with all my hostility now, is she? I thought while holding back my laughter.

«The fact that you still are directing it towards me hasn’t changed. But it’s obvious that the ‘colour’ has changed.»

It seems like what she tried to say wasn’t what I had expected.

«I didn’t think you were even worthy of being my opponent right after we entered school, but it’s different now it seems.»

«That’s stupid, Sakayanagi. Aren’t you overestimating yourself a bit, huh? My principle is to win no matter what methods I have to use. I can kick you down to the ground right here, right now if I wanted, you see? And just so you know, I won’t show any mercy to you even if you cry.»

Since neither Hashimoto not Kitou were here, she was just a weak girl who couldn’t even beat a brat.

«As you say, I’d have no chance to win in a physical fight, but that doesn’t mean you’d win either.»

«So you won’t admit a loss from violence just because of your handicap, huh?»

«That’s not the problem. Physical power is also a necessary factor to any fights. I’m just saying that exercising violence against me here wouldn’t led to your victory. A lot of people and survellance cameras are watching us now after all. It won’t just end with a suspension, if you raised a hand against me now. I, who can’t move as I please, I may say. What a third party observer would deem a victory is also an important factor as well.»

«Logically that is. But what if I wanted to use force to claim my victory for my own satisfaction, what then?»

I took a step towards her and lightly raised a clenched fist in a somewhat threatening manner.

I think it would have been a bit cute to see her frightened by this, somewhat charming. But she didn’t fret a single bit, only showing me that unpleasant smile of hers.

She’s way too naive if she thought I wouldn’t hit her for real. But that wasn’t the reason it seems.

She didn’t mind since being hit wasn’t a loss, but instead a step leading to her victory. That’s what her eyes told me.

«You do have intelligence, despite your appearances. I’m just relieved you also can calculate your gains and losses.»

Even if I punched her, she would end up brandishing her mark of the lowest scum onto me.

«I think you, as you are right now, have grown to be worthy of playing with, you know?»

You say I’ve grown during this year?

Lol….you say the most ridiculous things as you please.

«I haven’t changed at all.»

«You sure about that? You’ve changed quite a bit as far as I can see.»

She was still persistent on that despite my denial.

Foolish ideas, I thought…

But, I might have changed a bit.

I thought I didn’t have any room for growth after middle school.

I thought I had matured completely.

And everyone else was my playthings.

I had no empathy towards such things.

«The current you seems to have changed your view compared to how you were a year ago perhaps?»

Right… I’ve changed how I view things.

I decided this school wasn’t much of anything once I took control over Class-C in April.

I was aware that Sakayanagi, who used Katsuragi as her plaything, was pretty smart, but other than that she wasn’t worth taking notice of.

I only thought about how to stave off boredom by crushing Class B or Class D.

It’s laughable now that I think about it.

But anyway, even I was surprised by how much motivation I had towards trying to pull up my class now.

«It seems to me that something big has happened that made you change this much.»

Her attitude and eyes were telling me she was testing me, but I didn’t show her anything and just let it go.

«Fufu, I’m looking forward to— a new war this year too, okay?»

«You’ll end up regretting it.»

I noticed the guys I’d been waiting for, then turned my back and walked away from Sakayanagi.

«Good morning, Ryuuen-san. That was Sakayanagi…right? Did something happen?»

Ishizaki was taking glances back while trying to catch up to me.

«Just some small talk.»

I’d have wasted time and energy trying to explain to these guys anyway.

Even idiots learn in their idiotic ways since he shut his mouth and didn’t pursue the topic.

«Ah, by the way, we met Ayanokouji this morning. He also went to this Keyaki mall.»

«I see.»

At this time of day, the amount of places which could be used was limited.

Meeting up and talking with someone on the 2nd floor should be about it.

Well, I don’t think that would end in just 10 to 20 minutes.

Going out this early must mean that the talk must be somewhat important after all.

I’ll make these guys make the first moves for starters.

«Oh by the way, Ryuuen-san. I suggested a plan to Ayanokouji, but he refused it though. To have him and you in the same class and aim for Class A together…»

«Are you an idiot? No way Ryuuen will say that’s a good idea even if you told him.»

Ibuki was disgusted by it, but what Ishizaki said shouldn’t be overlooked.

It’s true that if we joined forces for real, there would be no enemies left standing in our year.

«Well, that’s impossible.»

«So it was impossible… yeah… sorry for my stupid suggestion.»

«And? Why did you call us today?»

«I wanted to talk about this 2nd year and what follows.»

«What follows?»

«It doesn’t have anything to do with special exams, I will crush Class A this year.»

«…You’re not joking, are you?»

«Sakayanagi won’t show us any openings but if we let Class A steamroll their way, any chances we have will disappear. I’ll drag them back with me and defeat them to smithereens, no matter how stubborn I have to be.»

But well, I need to make sure of the timing and such at least.

«What about Class B?»

«They’ll just self-destruct if we leave them alone. They won’t use any dirty tricks.»

In other words, they aren’t worth paying any attention to.

«Oh yeah, we don’t need to be aware of them, right.»

The only exception may be Kanzaki, but he isn’t worthy of being my opponent at this stage.

Whether he only has the ability to bark or not will become apparent sooner or later.

«That’s right, no need to pay them any attention, but—that’s why we must go out and finish them. To crush them so that they never can rise again.»

And defeating all classes will send him a signal as well.

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I was waiting for Ayanokouji to leave the café.

If he wasn’t alone, I would have to wait for the next chance even though it was a bother.

«You heard from Ishizaki that I would be here?»

«Yeah, I came here searching for you, even wasting my time to greet you, you hear?»

I looked at his face which lacked any expressions making it hard to figure him out.

«You already do know my contact info I’m sure. Wouldn’t it have been better to contact me then?»

«I thought it was better to speak up face to face to that dull face of yours.»

I don’t know anything about how he feels, but that’s why I can’t evade meeting him straight on.

To conquer him, breaking through that mental iron wall of his is of utmost importance.

Anyway, there is something I must check with him.

«What did you mean by ‘that’?»

Even though I asked vaguely, he immediately understood.

The thing I meant by ‘that’ was his message he made Hiyori tell me.

I’d won 5 to 2 against Ichinose and crushed her during the last special exam of the year

Her mental state as a leader had been shook thoroughly, the pressure to her classmates has continued, and some of her classmates couldn’t join the exam due to stomachaches caused by me.

He knew about my methods and cheekily left a message for me: ‘I’d would have easily managed over 5 wins with a better method’.

That move just made me want to talk to him whether he wanted it or not.

It was as if I was being forced to obediently listen to his preaching from some god’s point of view.

«Just as I said. I’d have done better than you.»

«What methods I use is up to me alone.»

If I’d use any other methods and won 5 times, it would still just be another 5 wins to me.

No difference at all.

«That isn’t definite. If you had to leave the school due to some blunder, I would be sad.»

Some blunder? No way I was going to lose against Ichinose.

I’d just follow this stupid joke of his.

«Kuku, what’s up with this joke? Quite arrogant of you despite losing to Sakayanagi and getting demoted.»

The match between Ayanokouji and Sakayanagi’s classes ended 4 to 3 with Sakayanagi leading her class to victory.

But of course, there is no way he’s inferior to her.

Since the peculiarity of that exam meant that the Keeps was limited in what they could do.

No… if he’d been serious I’d bet he could win any exams.

Which means he wasn’t serious or that someone interfered.

«It’s true our class lost to hers. I have no excuse for that since I was the Keep. Whether Sakayanagi is superior to me or not is for you to find out later.»

«What the heck— you looking down on me?»

He easily acknowledged his loss, but that just irritated me even more.

I came closer and peeked at his eyes which lacked any colours.

«Someone who beat me once can never be be inferior to her.»

«That’s flattering of you, but what if I really didn’t rest on my laurels during the exam?»

«Too bad, I don’t believe it. You didn’t want to fight from the beginning then rather than you getting serious and losing…. or that some kind of accident occurred. That’s a hell lotta easier to believe. I’d believe it if the school wanted to maintain some image and planned for Class A to win anyway.»

His strength isn’t on the level of a 1st year high schooler.

I came to experience that during our fight in the first year with my own body.

I even want to know what kind of life he’s led up until now to become this kind of monster.

«And? What are you going to do now after your comeback, Ryuuen?»

«You don’t get to decide whether I come back or not. I plan to enjoy this nice vacation for a bit longer.»

Now is the best time to make those various moves behind the stages.

«But… If I get bored of this vacation, I’ll crush Ichinose and Sakayanagi to warm up.»

«That’s a big change of heart.»

«Kukuku, certainly. I’m surprised too. I didn’t think I’d get this excited over a chance to take my revenge on you.»

«I see.»

No matter what he replied, there was no use trying to read into his intent.

But what’s clear is that Ayanokouji isn’t an ally of Sakayanagi and Ichinose.

No, it may be that even Suzune isn’t regarded as an ally by him either.

«I’m grateful for that. If you could crush Ichinose and Sakayanagi first, it would be the best I could hope for. I can smoothly aim upwards.»

«I thought you didn’t care about your class at all?»

«It’s a bit different now. That class will be in a good position by the same time next year. Even if I won’t be there anymore.»

«What?»

Even if I won’t be there anymore?

«I may be targeted from now on so it won’t be a surprise if someone managed to expel me. Right?»

That’s a stupid thing to worry about.

«Rest assured. If someone is expelling you, that will be me.»

I can’t think of any others from any classes in any years who can expel him.

I laughed silently due to my own thoughts.

«But—»

I said to him and suddenly closed the distance between us.

Giving him no time for caution, as quick as I could, as fast, directly at him.

«Raaahhh!!»

I aimed for the space right in front of his eyes using my right foot with no hesitation.

But that was the opening move.

Even if you managed to deal with it, it wasn’t that important.

It was just the first strike that came with any fight.

But if he managed to dodge it, that would be his downfall.

I proceeded to kick his head with all the power I could muster with my left foot.

But—

He calmly dodged the kick as if he’d known a second strike would come after the first.

He wasn’t too early or too late.

With just the neccessary movements.

I had thought of a third strike, but the movements he showed dampened my intent and tension released from my muscles.

«Hah, so even a surprise attack like this won’t do anything. What kind of monster are you?»

No matter how this was repeated, he would easily defend against it.

Any fights using force, in other words, brawls, won’t be able to defeat his intricacy.

I have to relentlessly strike at him using some unorthodox methods or strategy or else it won’t work.

«Quite the showman you are.»

He must be telling me to be aware of my time and place, but that’s why I did it.

The fact that a countless amount of cameras were installed here just made it clear I had to do it.

«My heart is howling at me; to devour you.»

If he was even a bit irritated by this surprise attack, I would gladly do it again.

«Not striking back?»

I tried provoking him, but he didn’t move of course.

«I want to avoid any risks from fighting with you here. And it’s not the right time for that.»

«Hah, the mercy of the strong? You saying it makes it seem so much real, this is getting exciting.»

My muscles began to tension again.

Maybe I shall strike him again now, I thought but…

«You have potential. That’s why you should grow up properly, Ryuuen.»

My tension turned into anger once I heard those words. That wasn’t the words used when dealing with an equal opponent, far from it.

Venting my frustration, I punched at those damn walls.

«Grow up properly, you say? When the fuck did you become my teacher?»

«I’m just telling you the truth. But don’t let the carpet get so easily pulled from under you.»

«What?»

«It seems you did some dirty tricks using Ishizaki and the others. It wasn’t a bad idea to use the karaoke to mix in those stuff, but if there were any traces left you would have been finished. You would have been expelled on the spot. Even if you managed to feign ignorance, if something strange had happened during the exam, the school would be suspicious of you, of course. The fact Ichinose didn’t file a complaint was your only saving grace, Ryuuen.»

«I used her good-naturedness in my calculations.»

«If so that was naive of you. You will never be able to catch up to me at this rate.»

«…Look at you.»

He pinpointed out the naivity in my strategy.

«Whether you heed my warning is for you to decide. But— if you remain as you are now, a rematch isn’t even on the table.»

So he’s saying if I wanted to fight with him, I need to grow up?

I’d kill everyone who tries to advise or warn me but…

«I’ll listen to your stupid advice since we’re here right now. But I’ll crush you sooner or later.»

Since he was the only exception I’d acknowledged, I’ll take it as an adult for now.

«That’s the spirit, Ryuuen. Having you crush and expel me doesn’t sound too bad after all.»

2

«Having you crush and expel me doesn’t sound too bad, eh?»

What an idiotic thing to say.

If you so desire it, I’ll expel you.

I usually would have said that straight to him, but even such a bluff wouldn’t work against him.

I’ve always challenged any opponent I’ve met without any fear until now.

Even an opponent such as Albert that I’ve lost to once would be devoured just like a snake and made obedient.

I have confidence that I can discover the winning move against any and all humans.

But he isn’t in the same dimension as those.

Any physical attacks don’t seem to work on him, not even mentioning psychologic ones.

And I don’t even need to say this, but I’ve never seen someone with such a sharp mind before either.

«Makes me laugh when thinking of my old self.»

Someone absurd has slipped into class D.

But there is no need to panic.

What’s important isn’t who is winning right now.

If I’m the victor at the very moment we are graduating in two years, there’s no problem at all.

It doesn’t matter whether we are in class A or Class D or whatever.

Me and Ayanokouji. The hound or the bitch. Who is which? It’s fine, I just need to win.

‘No matter the methods’ I have to use.