Volume 14 Chapter 2 Part 2

“Yoo~hoo~ Ayanokōji-kun!”

I arrived at the C6 Task site after about 40 minutes of walking, only to find Class 2-C’s homeroom teacher, Hoshinomiya-sensei, lying in wait inside a tent in an attempt to escape the scorching heat of the sun.

Furthermore, nearly 20 students from all three school years could be seen in the surrounding area.

“You came all the way here, but unfortunately, registration closed up about five minutes ago.”

Other than Hoshinomiya-sensei, there was a second adult who I had never seen before in the process of explaining the Task to the gathered students.

“So it seems.”

With that being the case, there was no point in me staying here any longer. I tried to leave, not really wanting to be around Hoshinomiya-sensei any more than necessary, but she grabbed me by the arm just as I turned to go.

“Oh don’t be in such a hurry! Feel free to sit back and watch for a while~.”

“Don’t you think it’s wrong for a teacher to encroach on a student’s time just for their own convenience?”

“Awh, c’mon~ Don’t exaggerate! You’ll have oodles of time after this~.”

As a teacher, she should be fully aware of the true nature of this exam, where a split-second judgment could very well mean the difference between a win and a loss, but… she still didn’t seem to have any intention of letting me go.

“My last designated area was D7, so it’s more than possible that my next will be here in area C6. If that happens, will you take responsibility for causing me to lose out on the Early Bird Bonus?”

At that, Hoshinomiya-sensei hurriedly let go of my arm and took a few paces back to distance herself.

“C-cruel! Don’t be like that Ayanokōji-kun, teasing is a no-no~ I just wanted to chat a lil’ bit, that’s all. It’s like, I’ve been feelin’ pretty grumpy recently, so how ‘bout you sit back and hear me out?”

While she had let go of my arm, it didn’t seem like she wanted our conversation to end yet.

I reluctantly decided to keep her company and listen to her, at least for a little while.

“It’s been since the end-of-term exam, yeah? Since we’ve talked one-on-one like this, that is.”

“That’s true.”

Given that she had witnessed me competing firsthand back then, along with my recent perfect score in mathematics, it wasn’t difficult to imagine that she was now more wary of me than ever before.

“Anywho, you’ve been attracting a lotta attention recently, you know? I didn’t think you were the type that liked standing out.”

“I don’t.”

“Then why’d you get that perfect score in math? I mean like, I think it’s pretty weird that you just went and got ‘em all right. There was even a problem that I wouldn’t have been able to get.”

From the perspective of someone who potentially saw herself as Chabashira’s rival, it made sense that she didn’t really like the way things had played out, but for some reason, it felt as though she was taking all of that out on me.

“Are you sure? I think there are plenty of students capable of solving that sort of problem, though.”

“Are there? Hmm… Are you like, guessing? Even if I assume you’re right here, I’d expect them to be like, Class A or B students at least. And what class are you in again, Ayanokōji-kun? A… B… C… Oh that’s right, Class D. Just say it out loud with me, ‘Class D’. This might sound rude or something, but the first thing that comes to mind for me when I say it is a laughable place chock full of problem children, filled to the brim with nothing but defects. And yet you wanna tell me that there are kids with outrageous specs like you mixed in with all that?”

“While I don’t know about me, I think there are plenty of outstanding students in Class 2-D. Moreover, if you take a look at Class 1-D, there are plenty of outstanding students there too, don’t you think?”

I wasn’t particularly informed about the third-year students, so I didn’t say anything about them, just to be safe.

“Uh… That’s true and all, but like… the school’s policies have changed a bit since last year, yeah?”

Even though she asked me this, there was no way that I’d know the answer to that.

In the midst of our pointless conversation, the Grip Strength Measurement Task began in front of us, with a third-year student named Oshio being the first on deck. They seemed to be going in the order in which they had registered for the Task. And, among all the participants was my fellow classmate, Sudō. His group members, Ike and Hondō, were nowhere to be seen, suggesting that he had probably split off and rushed here on his own to secure a spot in the Task.

“I’ll agree that there are some outstanding Class D kids out there, sure, but I don’t think they’re good enough to keep their class together or anything. When it comes to you though, I get the impression that you’ve influenced your surroundings.”

I’ve influenced my surroundings, is it? It shouldn’t come off that way though, at least not from an outsider’s perspective.

From the sound of it, she was awfully familiar with the circumstances at play on my side of things.

It was probably fair to assume that she had gathered a solid amount of information at some point without me noticing.

“Anyway, I’ve really like, lost my cool here. This is the first time I’ve ever had a class go and drop down to Class C like this. I dunno how to say it exactly. I mean, there always used to be an order to things. Class A would compete with Class B while Class C and Class D went at each other, you feel me~?”

If what she was saying was true, then this ‘order’ was now certainly a thing of the past.

“I really thought that this class would be the one to reach Class A, but… well…”

She openly voiced her dissatisfaction about the current state of Class 2-C.

“Isn’t it your duty as the homeroom teacher to do something about that?”

“What a cruel thing to say~!”

She covered her ears with her hands, unwilling to listen to anything more on the matter.

She was like an adult who hadn’t finished growing up yet, or more precisely, a woman who had never truly graduated from her years as a student.

“Ah! Me, me! You know what, Sensei’s got a totally revolutionary idea for you! Just like how Katsuragi-kun transferred to Class 2-B, Ayanokōji-kun can transfer over to my class! How ‘bout it?”

This wasn’t revolutionary at all. It was the kind of idea that even the likes of Ishizaki could come up with.

“I was wondering where you were going with this. You’ve really put forward something outlandish, haven’t you?”

“You’ll aim for Class A together with us, right? Right?”

She reached out for my arm again as she spoke. Her movements were those of a woman who saw physical contact with the opposite sex as her own personal weapon, but just before she touched my wrist, she faltered.

Having recalled my earlier warning, she pulled back her hand and shook her head a few times so as to keep herself in check.

“I wouldn’t be able to come up with 20 million points even if I saved up until the day I graduate. Furthermore, as things are now, even if I found a way to prepare such a large number of points, there’s no way to tell which class will be Class A in the end. So don’t you think it would be wiser to wait until the final moment and see how things play out instead?”

Not to mention, you’d be hard-pressed to find students interested in transferring to her class given that it had just recently dropped down to Class C.

“Y-you don’t have to say it so impartially…”

If you somehow managed to secure the right to transfer classes, it went without saying that you wouldn’t use it until you were right on the verge of graduating.

That is, unless you happened to get poached free-of-charge by one of the other classes like Katsuragi. Although… virtually none of the worthwhile students would jump at the opportunity to demote to one of the lower classes, so that was bound to end up failing as well. Even on the off chance that someone agreed to go through with it, whether or not that single person would be enough to raise the class all the way to Class A was yet another matter.

All of a sudden, the various groups of students in front of us began to swell with excitement as a new first-place result came in.

Oshio, having apparently just been knocked down to second place, had a disgruntled expression on his face.

“Sudō-kun has changed an awful lot, don’tcha think? I wonder who’s responsible.”

“Just for the record, it wasn’t me.”

While I might have played a key part in it, Sudō’s growth could be predominantly attributed to Horikita.

Shortly afterward, everyone finished having their grip measured, but in the end, nobody was able to beat Sudō’s first-place score.

And with that, Sudō’s group earned five additional points, for a likely total of eight. Compared to the measly one point I had earned in the same time frame, the difference was worlds apart.

As soon as the competition came to an end, the various students began to disperse; No doubt headed from Task to Task like a flock of migratory birds.

“Then, I should get going as well.”

Since she had lost her excuse to keep me here, Hoshinomiya relented and sent me on my way.

“There are two weeks until the end of the exam. I’m prolly gonna get sent around the island a lot, so maybe we’ll meet each other again~.”

I didn’t want to see her again if at all possible. With that thought in mind, I left the Task site.