Classroom of the Elite Volume 14 Chapter 4 Part 6

Our streak of good luck didn’t last long. We arrived at area I4, but as one might expect, we didn’t receive the Early Bird Bonus. We weren’t fortunate enough to come across any prospective Tasks either.

Although there was still plenty to be desired, the curtain fell on the third day of the exam.

“Should we keep walking toward the riverside?”

“Yeah. The terrain around here isn’t the best, and there aren’t many suitable places to spend the night either. Let’s keep going.”

“Okay!”

We cut a path south through the forest, pushing forward with our sights set on the river’s edge.

After twenty minutes, we finally reached our destination.

“Want to camp somewhere around here?”

“That’s fine with me.”

Just as the two of us came to an agreement, I heard a voice somewhere off in the distance.

“Heeey-! Ayanokōji-!”

A familiar voice, coming from a certain someone who was calling out to me from the other side of the river.

It was Ike, who was standing there with a bunch of dead branches in his arms.

“Ayanokōji-! Nanase-! I thought it was you two-! So this is where you guys’ve been-!”

He drew closer to the river, smiling with his pearly whites on full display.

“What an amazing coincidence-! Are you camping around here tonight, Ike-senpai-!?”

We were forced to raise our voices as we spoke, futilely trying to drown out the sound of the river running in between us. After shouting back and forth like this for a bit, Ike finally sent the signal for us to just join him on the other side. At his instruction, Nanase and I went upstream along the river.

Before long, we came upon a land bridge near the south side of H4 and met up with him.

Sudō and Hondō were also present, having come over after hearing our voices.

“Hold up, what was your last designated area today, you two…?”

“I4.”

Sudō exchanged glances with his fellow group members, surprised by my response. Apparently, their last area of the day had been I4 as well.

“Man, what’re the odds!”

This morning, we had all started out in the same location, and surprisingly, we ended the day in the same place as well. Although, given that I had run into Sudō several times now, there could be some sort of built-in tendency for our Tables to lead us to the same places despite being different.

At this point, we all decided to camp together again, just like we had yesterday.

Since we were free for the rest of the day, we all went and did our own thing for a bit.

Of course, we still worked together when necessary since we were all part of the same campsite.

I told Nanase that I was going for a stroll and went off into the forest on my own. I didn’t have a particularly deep reason for doing this or anything, but if I had to come up with one, it would be to take a look around the area for other students. After all, with the exception of Nanase’s group, I still hadn’t come across any others that seemed to have the same Table as me.

I returned to the campsite around half an hour later, just in time to watch Ike light the campfire he had been working on.

“You’re quite resourceful.”

“Well, you gotta do whatcha can to help out. You know how we were like, told beforehand that we’d be doin’ an exam out on an island this time? I reckon most people went and looked up how to handle this kinda stuff ahead of time cuz of that.”

With his eyes fixed on the campfire in front of him, Ike continued.

“But, well, there’s a difference between knowledge and experience, right? How should I put it… If you could do something just cuz you knew about it, nothing would be hard at all.”

It’s true that you can’t always replicate something just by reading a couple of articles or watching a video about it.

You’d only be able to find out what you’re capable of by trying it out for yourself.

“Ah, there you are, Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“What’s up?”

“You were gone for a while, so I went to look for you.”

Nanase turned her gaze over toward the forest as she spoke.

From the sound of it, we had just missed each other when I came back.

“Alrighty guys, I think it’s about time we had some grub.”

“Okay.”

Ike had a broad grin on his face as he went to retrieve a bucket from over by his tent.

And then, he proudly showed us what was inside.

“Wow, amazing…!”

The bucket contained several fish that Ike had apparently caught at some point.

“I had some time to kill back when my group was by the ocean, so I took the opportunity to catch a few. Let’s chow down!”

In somewhat of a hurry, Ike started preparing dinner.

At a glance, he seemed to be carrying on in good spirits, but it was obvious that he was just pretending.

However, he seemed to be taking on the uninhabited island exam with a far more level head than I thought he would, so for now, I guess there was nothing to worry about.

“Something smells really good over here—”

A group of three that happened to be passing through the area approached us, perhaps drawn in by the appetizing scent of the fish Ike was grilling. We were camping out in the open since we were next to the river, so it wasn’t surprising that they had seen us.

What was completely unexpected, however, was the identity of one of the three students in the group.

“Ah-!”

A girl, the second one to approach us, unintentionally let her voice slip and cried out upon making eye contact with me.

“What wrong, Karuizawa-san?”

“Oh, nothing. I was just, like, shocked ‘bout them grilling fish is all.”

She spoke, trying what she could to cover up her surprise about coincidentally meeting up with me like this.

The exam had only gone on for three days when I had my first encounter with Kei, but even so, she seemed to be doing fine so far.

Her two fellow group members were from Class 2-A.

Their names were Shimazaki Ikkei and Fukuyama Shinobu, and they were both very academically gifted students. While, as a whole, their group was rather lacking when it came to physical strength and endurance, they certainly had the potential to claim the top spot in any written test-based Tasks they managed to register for.

“Hey, why don’t we camp here too? I think Ike-kun’d be willing to treat us.”

“Haah!? Why should I treat you!?”

“C’mon, it’s not like you’ll run outta fish.”

“There’ll be less for us if you guys eat them! No way!”

Ike didn’t really like Kei in the first place, so he blatantly refused.

However, Sudō pulled him aside and muttered a few words into his ear.

“Dude, what’s the harm? She might know somethin’ ‘bout Shinohara.”

Upon hearing that, Ike went silent.

He still hadn’t been able to meet Shinohara on the island yet.

And since Kei was a classmate, it was reasonable to assume that she’d remember if she had seen Shinohara somewhere before.

“I-it can’t be helped! I guess I’ll just have to prepare for three more people!”

“For real? Sweet! It’s a good thing I tried asking.”

Kei was only half-joking when she brought up the idea, but somehow, it led to her camping together with us.

That said, preparing food would take time.

It would probably be a while before Ike would finish grilling the additional fish.

I announced that I’d be going into the forest for a bit, with Kei doing the same not too long afterward.

Of course, we didn’t go in so far that we could get lost; just enough to make sure the others wouldn’t be able to see or hear us. We met at a fairly large tree and sat down together with our backs up against the trunk.

“You seem to be doing alright.”

Kei’s group had secured 37 points over these past three days.

At least for now, they weren’t doing all that badly.

“I’m just relying on the other two, mostly. How about you, Kiyotaka?”

“I’m doing well, all things considered.”

“Well, since it’s you we’re talking about, you’ll be fine for sure.”

Kei let out a noise as she stretched.

“Anywho, I just wish this exam would end already… I can’t believe we’ve still got 11 more days of this.”

Considering the number of days we had remaining, there was no denying that we were still in the early phase of the exam.

“By the way, has anything happened these past few days?”

“You mean『that person』you told me about, right? Hmm, nope, nothing comes to mind.”

Before the special exam started, I asked Kei to go check on a certain something for me.

I did this in consideration of the possibility that the White Room student would try and come in contact with Kei.

However, it didn’t seem like anything had happened so far.

“Just in case, I’ve noted down everybody I’ve come in contact with on my tablet.”

She opened up the notepad app on her tablet and showed me a list of all the different students and groups she’d interacted with over the past three days.

It primarily consisted of second-years, with essentially no contact with first or third-years.

As expected, they wouldn’t let themselves get caught that easily.

“By. The. Way.”

“Hm?”

She suddenly leaned in very close to my face and peered into my eyes.

“I heard that first-year girl back at the campsite has been traveling around with you, Kiyotaka.”

“Word travels fast, it seems.”

“When I asked Ike-kun, he told me immediately though? Wait, that’s not the point here!”

Even I, who was ignorant when it came to love, understood that a girlfriend would be concerned if they were to find out that their boyfriend had been willingly traveling together with another girl. Even if I were to list out a bunch of reasons behind the decision, I was fairly confident that I wouldn’t be able to convince her.

I could talk of how Nanase might be involved in the expulsion plan against me or how she might have a connection to the White Room, but…

For Kei, things like that wouldn’t matter at all.

At the end of the day, she would still be extremely upset and uncomfortable with the fact that I was working together with another girl.

I drew in close to her face as I squeezed her hand in mine.

“Are you worried? That I’m spending all this time alone with another girl?”

“Wait wait wait, w-what? I’m not, like, worried or a… Of course I’m worried!”

Kei tried acting tough at first, but she quickly dropped the act and confessed.

“I’m just traveling together with Nanase in order to successfully get through the special exam. That’s it.”

“…Really?”

“Yeah. It goes without saying that I have no other intentions with her.”

“I believe you, but, but still like, when I think of you being alone with another girl… I hate it.”

Even though there was nothing between Nanase and me, as my girlfriend, it was only natural for Kei to feel anxious about it.

In this situation, no amount of smooth-talking would be able to ease her heart.

“Kei.”

When I called out her name, she turned and looked at me, her lips ever-so-slightly tapered into a defiant pout.

I took full advantage of this opening to lean in and pressed my lips into hers, smothering the pout away.

They must have only touched for less than a second.

The sensation of her lips, my first kiss, was far softer than I had imagined.

“Hu…h?”

A muddled noise leaked out from her mouth, her mind still processing what had happened.

In truth, I’d have liked to enjoy the moment for a while longer, but we were currently in the midst of a special exam on an uninhabited island.

It wouldn’t be surprising if somebody were to pass by while we were sitting here.

“Wa? Huh? I, J-just now… a k-kiss? …Eh? Eh!?”

“Have faith in me and wait for now, okay?”

At this, Kei absentmindedly nodded her head like a mechanical doll.

If she was distraught about the fact that I was traveling together with Nanase, then the fastest way to get around it was to give her something more intense to think about instead.

“The others may start to suspect something if we’re gone too long. You should head back.”

With that, I decided to have Kei, who was still in a daze, head back to the campsite.