Classroom of the Elite Volume 14 Chapter 8 Part 1

After getting the ten-point Early Bird Bonus for our first area, we decided to wait for a suitable Task to pop up somewhere nearby. But, perhaps due to the poor weather, there were fewer Tasks showing up than yesterday and we couldn’t find any to participate in.

In the end, we spent the next hour and a half leisurely killing time.

Then, once 9:00 AM came around, the second area of the day was announced. This time, our destination was the randomly-designated area E2.

For a random designation, this was honestly not that far away.

I wanted to try and make it there if at all possible, but…

“We’ll really have to think about how we’re going to get there, won’t we?”

“Yeah.”

If we wanted to make it there as quickly as possible, taking a direct path over the mountains of D2 and D3 was probably the way to go.

If the conditions outside had been like they were yesterday, I probably would’ve chosen this route in a heartbeat.

However, the weather didn’t seem like it was going to hold up for very much longer.

Once it starts raining, a usually well-traveled path would turn into a difficult one.

“How should we proceed?”

“Let’s see… Well, I guess it’s safest to take a detour.”

If it ended up looking too dangerous when it starts to pour, we could always give up halfway.

“That’s understandable. Depending on what the weather’s like after this, we might not even be able to continue our journey.”

Though she said she understood, she had an unsatisfied look on her face.

“But personally, I’d still like to go over the mountain.”

“If it starts raining, it’d be hard to find a proper foothold on the mountain. It’s too dangerous.”

Even I couldn’t say that I wasn’t afraid of slipping and taking a bad fall.

“I believe that most of our rivals will choose to take a detour in anticipation of the weather. However, that’s why it’s a golden opportunity for you to pile up another first-place Early Bird Bonus, don’t you think? Let’s make a run for it before it starts raining.”

Over the last several days we had been traveling together, she had never once opposed my decision on how to proceed.

That was the very least she could do to maintain common courtesy as someone who had asked to accompany me.

Of course, Nanase must have known that herself when she decided to say something.

I don’t think she spoke up just because she wanted to change my mind either.

“What if I don’t choose to go over the mountain?”

In order to find out for myself, I decided to toss her a question.

For a split second, she seemed hesitant about whether or not she should answer, but she ultimately fixed her eyes onto mine.

“…In that case, I will try to go over the mountain on my own.”

“There’s a limit to how impractical you can get. Hōsen and Amasawa might not even reach E2 in time to make a difference.”

Even if Nanase were to reach the designated area before anyone else, there was no guarantee that she would get her hands on the Early Bird Bonus.

And even if she managed to make it over the mountain before the weather got bad, there wouldn’t be any point to it if the other two members of her group didn’t get there within a similar timeframe.

So, why was she so fixated on pointlessly ascending a mountain this time around?

While I didn’t really have a problem with letting her go on her own, it would be dangerous for a girl to try and get over the mountain all by herself.

Although I didn’t exactly feel responsible for her, I’d at least like to see her off when I felt better about her future safety.

Furthermore, I still hadn’t figured out why she asked to travel with me in the first place.

If I chose to part ways with her here, I’d probably never figure out the answer.

“Alright. If you’ve already made up your mind then I’ll go with you.”

“Thank you very much, Senpai.”

As I looked at her expression, I came to understand something.

That, she had been absolutely certain I would choose to follow her up the mountain.

“Since we’ve decided on a route we should hurry up and get going.”

It would be pitiful if we only managed to earn one point after making such a big deal out of this.

We made our way east for a while, but not too long after, the path ahead began to incline upward, and the wind started to pick up speed.

The sky gradually turned into an even deeper, darker shade of grey. It seemed like the rain would start coming down any minute now.

I opened up my tablet to check our current location, and the GPS indicated that we were just about to reach the edge of area D3.

As much as I had hoped that we could hold out until we managed to reach the designated area─

I could hear Nanase begin to lose control of her breathing from behind me.

We hadn’t done anything particularly strenuous yet today, so it seemed far too early for her to be already running out of breath.

Was it because of all the fatigue she had built up over the past few days?

If she wasn’t feeling well, then the right choice would be to set up a tent to rest and wait for the weather to clear up. If she were to catch a cold, her poor condition would be reported back to the school due to her watch.

I decided to ever so slightly slow down my pace, only to the extent that she wouldn’t notice. If she decided to give up and ask for a break, we’d stop then and there. That being said, she certainly wasn’t the type to throw in the towel so easily. If it seemed like I needed to slow down even further, I’d have no choice but to force her to stop and figure out what to do from there.

Step by step, the two of us silently made our way up the slope of the mountain. The temperature had dropped sharply and the humidity kept on increasing by the second. We were both wearing standard, school-issue running shoes that weren’t suitable for traversing terrain like this, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Sure enough, the more we walked, the more Nanase continued to slow down. The time had come for me to make a decision.

I stopped walking and turned around to face her.

“Senpai…! I can still─！”

“Give me your backpack.”

“Eh?”

“You won’t be able to keep up with me while lugging around that backpack with you.”

“No way… How could possibly I have you carry around my things for me, Senpai!?”

“You can say that once you’re capable of keeping up the pace. At this rate, I’ll have to give up on the Early Bird Bonus. That being the case, you might as well give me your bag so we can get going already.”

The need to maintain pretenses and the need to face reality were at odds with each other.

And now that I had broached the matter, she no longer had the right to refuse.

“But, my backpack is really quite heavy. I think it’ll be tough carrying around, even if it’s you, Senpai.”

“I’ll decide that for myself once you hand it over.”

“…Alright, I understand.”

Reluctantly conceding, Nanase took off her backpack and handed it over to me with a seemingly apologetic look on her face. Although its contents were different, its weight was surprisingly not all too different from my own.

Given that, I should be able to maintain my initial pace without any added difficulty.

Normally, it would be easiest to use your lower back muscles to help support the weight of a backpack, but given that I was already carrying one, that wasn’t really an option here.

Instead, I chose to hold it in front of me and began moving forward once again.

“A-are you sure you can carry it?”

“You should get moving if you have the time to stand around and ask questions.”

Taking my advice to heart, Nanase promptly zipped her lips and began to walk.

This time, she stuck close behind me, maintaining a consistent distance of around two meters as we pushed forward.