Classroom of the Elite Volume 14 Chapter 8 Part 2

The sky grew dimmer and dimmer by the second as the overall visibility of our surroundings began to get much, much worse.

The wind was also getting stronger, and at times a particularly fierce gale would come and violently blow down the slope.

Despite all of this, the good news was that we were nearly finished with our journey to the top.

All we had to do now was follow a relatively smoother path heading down the other side.

Of course, we’d still have to make sure not to lose our footing somehow on our way back down, so we couldn’t be too careful.

“I’ll be fine now that we’ve come this far. My bag… I’ll carry it again from here.”

“Are you sure? I’d like to avoid wasting time later by having to go through the process of handing it over again.”

“Yes, I’m sure. Thank you very much for helping me.”

I looked to confirm once more just to be sure, but she seemed confident, so I returned her bag.

However, rather than sling it over her shoulder and wear it as she had earlier, she stood still and stared at it as she held it in her hands.

“So? Ready to go?”

I asked her this, but she didn’t even try to respond. It didn’t seem like the type of behavior you’d expect from someone who was in a hurry to get somewhere.

“Ayanokōji-senpai, I have something I’d like to ask you.”

“It’s seemed like you’ve been thinking about something ever since you first came out of your tent this morning.”

No, to be precise, I’d say she’s had this air of curiosity about her from the moment she first asked to accompany me.

“So… you noticed after all, huh?”

Nanase didn’t seem very surprised by this as she just nodded along as she spoke.

“There’s a reason why I’ve been sticking close to you these past few days, Ayanokōji-senpai.”

She stood there unmoving as she began to elaborate.

It clearly went deeper than just being because we both had the same Table.

Apparently, she was finally ready to tell me the answer that I had been looking for.

“But before that, please allow me to apologize for something.”

She turned her back on me as she went and placed her backpack down at the base of a large tree.

“I’m afraid you won’t be reaching area E2 today, Senpai.”

“That’s a strange thing to say. Aren’t we on our way there right now?”

“The reason I wanted to head up the mountain was to lure you here, Senpai.”

In other words, Nanase’s target destination hadn’t been area E2, but rather where we were now – the northern part of D3.

“We’re probably the only two people up here right now.”

“Yes indeed. I believe that to be the case as well.”

With her backpack now out of the way, Nanase turned back to face me.

“Over the course of the last six days I’ve been with you, I’ve been able to witness all sorts of things, Ayanokōji-senpai. You’ve made a lot of friends at this school and built up a lot of trust for yourself. And, slowly but surely, you’ve demonstrated what you’re truly capable of.”

Thinking back on the first week of our time out here on the island, Nanase began to summarize her impressions.

“I’d also like to express my respect for the depth of the insight and physical prowess you’ve shown from time to time.”

“I don’t remember having done anything special though.”

“If that’s really the case, then that just makes you even more amazing, don’t you think?”

Although she was throwing out praises left and right, her expression remained solemn.

“But, Ayanokōji-senpai, I don’t think you’re someone who belongs at this school.”

At this point, the aura around her began to change into something far different from what I had grown accustomed to over the last several days.

“You don’t? Care to explain the reason for that?”

To that, Nanase nodded as she slowly stood up and turned to look me in the eyes.

“It’s because you’re from the White Room.”

After all this time, I finally heard the words ‘The White Room’ come from the mouth of another student.

There were very few people who knew about the existence of that place.

Under more normal circumstances, I’d be able to say without a shadow of a doubt that she was the enforcer that Tsukishiro had sent in.

“As you may have already guessed, I enrolled here in this school under Acting Director Tsukishiro’s orders. And more precisely, those orders were to get you expelled.”

The way that she was laying everything out in the open like this made it hard to imagine how she’d been dormant behind the scenes for so long, hiding her true intentions.

“You could’ve done this at any point over the last few days, so why here? Why now? You must have had some other reason than just wanting to avoid the eyes of others, right?”

“I’m going to knock you out here and injure you, setting off your Emergency Alert in the process. The teachers would then come running and force you to retire, thus resulting in your expulsion. Something like that.”

“So, something similar to what happened to Komiya and Kinoshita. Were you the one behind what happened to them as well?”

“Well, hmm… What do you think, Senpai?”

“I don’t really think you’d have been able to make it there and back in such a short timeframe, but if you were really from the White Room, I’m not so confident about that.”

Either way, it didn’t matter anymore at this point.

“What happens if I tell the faculty members who came rushing to the scene that you were the one who had attacked me?”

“I don’t think you’d be able to explain your way out of it. If you want to know why, it’s because the faculty member who comes here will undoubtedly be the Acting Director himself.”

There wouldn’t be any point in trying to defend myself. After all, no matter what evidence or proof I might have, Tsukishiro would still choose to side with Nanase in the end.

“I see. So basically, losing to you here would be no different from being kicked out of school.”

I slowly began to take off my backpack.

And then, after setting it down beside a suitable tree, I turned to face Nanase once again.

“If Acting Director Tsukishiro sent you thinking you’d be able to take me down, then it looks like there’ll be no getting around having to fight seriously. Although, having said that, raising my hand against a girl could easily turn into a major issue in it’s own right.”

This probably wouldn’t just end as a harmless, childish scuffle.

However, if it got to the point where I were to strike back at her, then that would be more than enough to warrant a penalty.

There was no guarantee that Tsukishiro wouldn’t choose to retire, or rather, expel, the both of us just for exchanging blows.

If we were evenly matched, it would be my loss.

“If you’re looking for a way out of this, Senpai, then I believe your only option is abandoning your bag and running away.”

“Perhaps.”

“But, I’m afraid that would be futile as well.”

Trying to continue the exam without a tablet, a tent, or any other provisions would be suicide.

For Nanase, this meant that no matter which choice I made, she was fully prepared to respond.

“So, what will you do?”

“Since it’s come to this, there’s really only one choice I can make.”

I looked Nanase in the eye and steeled my resolve to fight.

“So you’ve chosen to fight. But, do you think you’ll be saved by doing that? This might seem cowardly of me to say, but my loss is no different from your own loss, Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“Maybe so.”

As the conversation progressed forward, I created an opening, making myself seem vulnerable to any attack she might throw at me.

However, Nanase didn’t engage immediately, clearly wary of the opening I was testing her with.

It didn’t seem like she was the type to fight reckless battles. Rather, she took on a more orthodox approach where she looked to methodically force her opponent into the corner.

Making a conscious effort to avoid getting caught up in your opponent’s pace had been the right choice for her to make.

“I’ll be making my move, then.”

On top of all of this, the fact that she had gone out of her way to warn me ahead of time was proof enough that she wasn’t very fond of plotting from behind the scenes.

Of course, that could easily be nothing more than a feint as well.

Although the ground beneath us was relatively soft, it seemed like it would fulfill its role as the foundation for our fight quite well.

“Hyaaah!!!”

Kicking off against the soil, Nanase closed the distance between us in a single breath.

Would she look to strike with her arms or would she instead focus on using her legs?

Or perhaps she would make use of both?

Under more usual circumstances, I would start out by closely analyzing my opponent’s fighting style like this.

After all, if I were to strike back carelessly, Nanase might end up getting seriously injured.

And, given what was said earlier, that would only serve to put me even more of a disadvantage.

With that being the case, my next thought was to try and look to restrain her by force instead, but I feared that it was all too likely she had taken that into consideration as well.

But even so─ it still wouldn’t be a very wise choice either way.

Even though Nanase’s words alone weren’t very trustworthy, I had been sensing a presence following after us all throughout the entire day today.

There was definitely somebody, or somebodies, watching to see how things played out as they carefully maintained their distance.

Whoever they were, if they weren’t reinforcements, then it was probably safe to assume that they had been tasked with recording conclusive evidence of what happened with a tablet or something.

Therefore, given the situation, the only real choice I could make here was…

After making a feint to her left, Nanase lunged straight at me with an outstretched arm.

She didn’t come at me with a fist, but a gentle, open palm. She had chosen to engage me with a grappling technique.

Upon seeing this, I took action, and while my movements were delayed, I easily surpassed the speed of Nanase’s incoming strike.

Cleanly avoiding her arm, I extended my own, the blow aimed straight for her face.

My fist, strongly clenched, stopped mere centimeters before making contact with Nanase’s forehead.

“!”

Since her kinetic vision was far better than that of an ordinary person, the threat of the impact unconsciously caused her to stiffen up.

“That’s the first.”

If I hadn’t chosen to stop my fist, the blow would’ve decisively settled the outcome of the fight.

Nanase’s consciousness would’ve been blown away in an instant, leaving her to simply crumble on the spot.

“Nanase, are you tired? Or was that hesitation? You should be capable of much more than this.”

Given everything she had shown me the past few days, she should at least be able to perform at a level above this.

In the end, her resolve to hunt me down and force me into a corner wasn’t strong enough.

“Do you think you can beat me without even trying to fight back…? Is that what this is?”

I pulled back my fist without giving her an answer, and as I did, Nanase retreated, putting around two meters between us. This was temporary, however, as she then kicked off against the ground once again, coming at me slightly faster than last time. Her left hand was clenched into a fist and, given the way she had lowered her stance, she seemed to be looking to strike with an uppercut.

Dodging to the side just before she made contact, I sent my own fist exploding forward, aimed straight for her cheek.

Of course, just like last time, I stopped one or two centimeters before making contact.

“And that’s the second. If I had gone through with it, I could’ve knocked you out two times now.”

“But you didn’t go through with it.”

Her eyes were trained on my fist, frozen in the air in front of her, but she didn’t seem scared in the slightest.

“That’s true.”

“Although you’re free to make this show of dominance all you want, you don’t stand a chance at winning if you don’t actually fight back.”

“I still wouldn’t stand a chance even if I did, though?”

“Correct. So, what will you do?”

From the sound of it, Nanase hadn’t been treating this seriously yet either.

She was watching me closely, examining my movements. Pushing forward on the offensive as she thought about how to dodge whatever I threw at her next.

“I’m not sure yet.”

“It would be great if you could figure that out while you’re still able to stand around and talk.”

At that, she suddenly sprang into action and grabbed hold of my right arm with a level of dexterity and strength that seemed to indicate that she was finally treating this seriously. It looked like she was planning to yank me straight down to the ground, so I steeled myself, counteracting her force with my own.

There are many forms of martial arts that allow one to gain the upper hand against raw strength through the trained application of technique and skill, regardless of their gender or physique.

However, that’s only the case when you were facing an opponent whose strength paled in comparison to your skill.

“What the─!?”

Seeing that she was caught off guard by the rigidity of my body, I took advantage of the opening to attack.

I went for an uppercut the moment she stopped trying to pull down on my arm. My left fist tore through the air, only stopping when it was less than a centimeter away from smashing into her lower jaw. The force of the swing had been so great that her long hair was sent dancing even though there hadn’t been an impact.

“!!!”

She stared down at my fist, her eyes wide, before eventually turning to me.

“I’ll say this just in case you haven’t noticed, but this makes three times now.”

For the first time, her eyes began to waver as she matched my gaze.

“It seems your strength is just as the rumors say, Ayanokōji-senpai…”

I couldn’t afford to fight back seriously right now. Breaking Nanase’s fighting spirit without actually hurting her was the only means I had at my disposal.

I had to make her realize that I was an opponent she’d never be able to win against.

“I know what you’re trying to do here, Senpai…”

Apparently, Nanase was aware of this as well.

“It’s true that it’s improbable that I’ll be able to win against you if we keep going on like this. I’ll admit to that.”

Had I broken her fighting spirit already…? No, that simply wasn’t possible.

Her eyes were filled with a clear mixture of hatred and fervor as she looked at me.

“‘I’… may not be able to beat you.”

Nanase had been at my mercy throughout the course of our fight so far. But now, as she spoke, the slight traces of uncertainty in her expression, in the way she carried herself, began to disappear. Or, rather, it was like she had never once harbored uncertainty in the first place.

It was as if she was trying to bring together all of her thoughts, feelings, and emotions and consolidate them to reach a state of inner unity.

After a brief period of silence, Nanase wordlessly kicked off against the ground once again, lurching forward at a high speed.

I didn’t have the time to calmly analyze the situation anymore and was instead forced to focus my full attention on taking emergency evasive action. Her movements were now twice as fast as they were only moments earlier. I distanced myself far enough away to avoid her strike, and then took a few additional steps away from her on top of that.

She glared straight at me with a look so sharp it felt like it could kill a man.

It was such a dramatic change that it was hard to believe she was still the same person. If I had taken that last attack of hers directly, I would’ve suffered a substantial amount of damage. If I slipped up even once, she may very well end up taking the upper hand after all.

The feeling she gave off was painfully different than anything I had seen from her before.

“Therefore…『I』will. Right here, right now.”

The change from ‘Watashi’ to『Boku』.

There was no way that this simple change in the first-person pronoun she chose to use was enough to change her movements.

But, even so, there was no denying that this last attack of hers was on a completely different level than the first three she had opened up with.

“Who are you?”

Given the circumstances, I couldn’t help but ask her this question.

“『I』came back from ‘that place’ in order to put a stop to you.”

‘That place’? For a moment, I thought she might be referring to the White Room, but that didn’t seem to be the case.

“From that dark… gloomy place…『I』have come back.”

Even though I didn’t understand what in the world she was talking about, I couldn’t afford to be negligent.

This new Nanase who referred to herself with『Boku』had shifted her fighting style from one that focused primarily on jiu-jitsu to karate. She came at me repeatedly with swift, lethal thrusts and jabs that, if landed properly, would probably be powerful enough to knock out an adult man.

After I got into the rhythm of parrying and dodging her repeated attacks, I began to contemplate the mystery behind why she had changed her first-person pronoun.

“Do you really think that you can keep dodging forever!?”

In Nanase’s mind, she had probably convinced herself that if she just kept attacking, ten, twenty times over, one would eventually have to hit the mark. For that very reason, she had done away with all hesitation and pushed forward with her relentless barrage.

If someone else were to bear witness to what was happening, they probably would’ve thought something similar.

They’d think that there’s no way I’d be able to avoid everything she threw at me and eventually reach the conclusion that I’d have to strike back at some point to try and defend myself.

“Ha, Haaa!!!”

Nanase’s breathing began getting heavier and heavier as she continued with her onslaught.

Naturally, there was no way she would be able to keep up with her rapid barrage of attacks forever.

Still, if I never ended up fighting back, she’d be able to recover her strength at any time.

“Whew… Haaa…!”

Just as anticipated, Nanase soon ran out of breath and distanced herself to try and get it back under control.

“Absolutely…『I’ll』absolutely defeat you… Absolutely… defeat… you…”

She was chanting these select few words like a Buddhist monk would a mantra, all while looking at me as if I were a murderer.

“『I』came back…『I』came back in order to bring you down…”

“You came back? What are you talking about?”

I hadn’t been able to understand what Nanase was going on about for quite a while now.

“It makes sense that you don’t understand. After all, you and『I』have never met in-person before.”

If that was really true, then this excessive hatred she had for me didn’t really make any sense.

I could imagine that the White Room student might bear a grudge against me even though I had never met them before.

However, was Nanase really from the White Room?

The tone of her voice was ever so slightly different than usual.

While she still looked like a girl on the outside, it seemed as though her personality had become that of a man.

“If you aren’t going to fight back, then that’s your decision.『I’ll』just have to do this over and over until you’re down on the ground─”

It had been less than twenty seconds since she stopped attacking, but it seemed like it had been just long enough for her to recover her energy.

“Hyaaah!!!”

Her feelings of hatred for me seemed to be spurring her forward more and more, seeing as she came at me with the fastest jab I had seen from her today.

Her slender, white hand came hurtling straight toward my face and her fist just barely grazed past the tips of my bangs.

She seemed like the usual Nanase on the outside, but perhaps she had become someone else on the inside?

As I asked myself this, another thought came to mind.

Namely, the notion of split personalities, or what was officially known as dissociative identity disorder.

Put in layman’s terms, it’s a mental disorder where two or more distinct personalities reside within a single individual.

If Nanase had dissociative identity disorder, everything would make a lot more sense.

There was more to this disorder than just a simple change in personality. From what I’ve been told, there have been rare cases where one of the personalities had a chronic illness, but the illness disappeared whenever the patient switched over to another personality.

Under that same logic, it was more than possible that this separate『Boku』personality residing within Nanase possessed physical abilities even greater than the original.

And, if this personality was that of a man, then she might even be able to demonstrate strength effectively identical to that.

“You don’t seem like Nanase anymore.”

Upon hearing me say this, Nanase momentarily stopped with her onslaught, a visibly irritated expression on her face.

“You still don’t get it, do you?”

She glared at me with her arm thrusted out in front of her; Her fists were shaking with rage just as much as the sound of her voice.

“『I’m』not Nanase. The one standing here before you right now is… Matsuo Eiichiro.”

“Matsuo Eiichiro?”

I had definitely heard the surname ‘Matsuo’ before, and it hadn’t even been that long since the last time I heard it either. The name had come out of ‘that man’s’ mouth back when he paid a visit to Advanced Nurturing High School. Given all of that, I had a fairly good idea of where this was headed.

“The son of a man who was killed by your father.”

Seeing that I still didn’t seem to understand where she was going with this, she spoke up once again, having completely lost her patience.

“This body has been borrowed.『I’m』right here, right now, all for the sake of bringing you down.”

“Borrowed? What a funny joke.”

It simply wasn’t possible for someone to take on the personality of another real human being.

“If you think『I’m』joking, then please, be my guest.”

Nanase kicked off against the ground once more, her arms trembling violently.

The traditional, orthodox attack style that she had used so far gradually began to change to something much more rough and unrestrained.

“『I’m』here…『I』came all the way here just to see you fall!”

And it wasn’t just her attack style, her movements in general had changed from being decisive and controlled to wild and violent.

Her goal was to try and overwhelm me with speed and strength, although her movements became somewhat less efficient as a tradeoff.

That being said, regardless of whether they were refined or not, it probably wouldn’t make much of a difference as long as she managed to land a hit on me.

“『I’ll』make sure you suffer retribution!”

Even though she had turned up the intensity, I wasn’t going to let myself get hit so easily. And after everything that had happened, Nanase should be more than aware of that as well.

Although she was pretending to be calm and composed, she was the one whose back was really up against the wall here, not me.

No matter how many short breaks she may take to recover her stamina, it was clear from the way her shoulders were heaving up and down that she was reaching her limit.

However, it would be meaningless to try and wait for that limit to catch up to her. There was no way that I could see her choosing to back down any time soon. In fact, she’d probably choose to keep challenging me until the bitter end. I really had no other choice but to break her fighting spirit.

“This is the first time『I’ve』encountered an opponent capable of dodging so many attacks like this. …But, there’s no way you can keep it up forever. If it’s『me』… If『I’m』the one you’re up against… Then『I』can definitely defeat you!『I』know it!”

Even though I was slowly chipping away at her will to go on, she still bore fangs at me as she tried what she could to bite back.

“I think I understand what you’ve been trying to say.”

While I didn’t know the exact details of the situation, there was at least one thing that I had ascertained throughout all of this.

After a few moments of mulling it over internally, I finished sorting out my thoughts and began to speak.

“Nanase, you don’t have multiple personalities, nor did someone else’s personality take over you.”

“Like I said, if you think『I’m』joking, then please, be my guest. But there’s no getting around the fact that『I’m』the one right here in front of you.”

She raised her voice in denial as she stamped her feet into the ground.

But, that and that alone was proof enough it didn’t exist.

“No, it’s unfortunate, but I just don’t believe you. If this alternate personality of yours hadn’t been someone who actually existed elsewhere, then I suppose that I might’ve been able to believe you. However, you’re saying that ‘Matsuo Eiichiro’, a person who exists here in real life, has gone and borrowed your body. And sorry, but that’s just far too unrealistic.”

“If… If that’s the case, then how do you explain『my』presence here!?”

There was no need to think very hard about the answer to that. It truly wasn’t very complicated.

“You just took the liberty to dream up another personality inside of yourself. The reason you deliberately chose to change from using ‘Watashi’ to『Boku』was to remind yourself of that.”

Nanase was, fundamentally, a nonviolent person.

She didn’t like the thought of using violence and force to make her opponents submit to her.

Even so, since she had to fight, she had no choice but to conjure up a personality to do the fighting for her.

Or, put more simply, she had no choice but to ‘act out’ this personality.

“More than anything else, this force, this power is proof that『I’m』real!”

With that, her fist came flying at me, no doubt faster and stronger than any punches she had thrown before the change.

“You’re not showing me anything more than the strength you’ve always had in you, Nanase.”

Nanase’s face paled, seemingly shaken that I had managed to hit at the very core of the matter.

“Y-you’re wrong!『I』…『I’m』Matsuo!”

“If you really are this ‘Matsuo’ person, then there’s no need for you to be so upset by this.”

As Matsuo, she could simply turn up her nose and laugh at my blatantly misguided reasoning.

“There was something out of sorts about the way you were talking when you changed your first-person pronoun. It’s nothing more than a form of self-deception.”

She was just using the pronoun『Boku』as a trigger of sorts to make herself into a more aggressive person.

“No!!!”

“You want to believe that Matsuo’s personality resides within you… No, I’ll bet that deep down, even you don’t believe that.”

She was desperately trying to embrace the guise of self-deception, but couldn’t.

“AAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!”

Unable to listen to my words for even a second longer, Nanase cried out and threw herself at me.

The speed and sharpness she had displayed earlier was now nowhere to be seen. It had gotten to the point where I’d probably be able to avoid her with my eyes shut.

“It’s time to give up Nanase. You can’t beat me.”

“Yes『I』can!『I』have to!”

She extended her left arm and grabbed hold of the collar of my jersey.

And then, having decided that this was the chance she had been waiting for, she raised her right fist and swung at me in a wide, dramatic arch.

I was an easy target, wide open. And usually, there was probably no way that someone would be able to dodge from my position.

But, despite my movements being limited by her stranglehold on my collar, I deftly avoided the punch as it came barreling straight at my face.

“Tsk!”

Another punch was sent flying toward me immediately afterward, yet I dodged it just the same as the first.

“Why!? Why can’t『I』land a hit!?!? Why is this happening!?!?”

A third, fourth, and fifth punch came flying, but try as she might, every attempt ended up with the same result.

Fed up with the fact that her punches weren’t landing, she forcefully reached out to try and grab me by the hair.

She probably thought that, if she could prevent me from moving my head, she’d finally be able to hit me.

I seized her by the wrist just as it came close enough.

“L-let go!”

“Even if I let go, nothing would change.”

“Let go of『me』!!!”

She forcefully tore her hand away before repeating the entire meaningless cycle all over again.

Her fist came flying at me, only to once again punch through the open air. At this point, I’d already lost track of how many times we had gone through this.

“Haa! Haa! Haaaa…!”

She had finally reached her limit, both physically and mentally.

“Why… Why…『I’m』so close and yet… Only a little more, and yet!”

Nanase’s resolve to continue throwing herself at me had already disappeared.

Trembling at the knees, she tried what she could to spurn her legs forward, but her body refused to fight.

“From the very beginning, you were wrong to tell yourself that you’d eventually land a hit as long as you kept trying. At your level, even if you kept this up until the day you died, you’d never be able to hit me. Not even once.”

Of course, this was just a bluff.

Nobody could avoid being hit forever, not even me.

Nanase, however, had just been forced to come to terms with her failure to land even a single hit on me, so my words probably resonated with her.

“If you really want me expelled, your best bet is to start playing the victim now. If you make your clothes seem disorderly, that alone would probably be enough to drive me into a corner.”

Even though it seemed like I was helping the enemy here, I knew Nanase wouldn’t choose to do that.

After all, I didn’t think she really, truly wanted to get me expelled at all.

“『I』…『I』!!!”

She cried out as her knees finally gave in and collapsed to the ground.

No matter how much one may lay bare their fighting spirit, if, deep down, they had already given up, then doing so was merely an empty, meaningless gesture.