8.4

On the fifth day of my time on the uninhabited island, I encountered a lone first-year student.

Simply running into another student wasn’t a particularly unusual occurrence. If one had been left to travel as they pleased throughout such a vast, spacious island, it’s only natural that they’d eventually cross paths with someone, be they a classmate or not. But such instances were, for the most part, merely coincidences.

However, as far as this specific encounter was concerned, things were a little different. I had been contacted via a walkie-talkie I had secretly been entrusted with, and deliberately made arrangements to meet with this student ahead of time.

After all, given the circumstances, I had no other choice but to meet up in person. I was greeted with a smiling face when we finally saw one another, a smile that I responded to with my own as I drew closer.

And then, after confirming that there was nobody else in the surrounding area, I broke the ice.

“I received your report over the walkie-talkie this morning. You’re going to explain what happened, right?”

After a brief pause with no response, I decided to tack on the first-year student’s name as well.

“Yagami-kun.”

The de-facto leader of Class 1-B: Yagami Takuya.

“Thank you very much for coming all the way out here on such short notice.”

“You can drop the formalities. I’m asking you to explain yourself.”

In response to my urgency, Yagami averted his gaze as if troubled by something.

Shortly thereafter, he turned back and locked eyes with me once again.

“Things have their way of taking a turn for the unexpected from time to time, Kushida-senpai.”

The way he spoke as though this was someone else’s problem absolutely infuriated me.

It didn’t seem like this was going to get anywhere with me continuing to hide behind my mask.

“What do you mean ‘unexpected’? It’s your fault that those first-years found out about my past, right?”

Back when Yagami contacted me this morning, he told me that a group of first-year students, Takahashi Osamu from Class 1-A, Tsubaki Sakurako and Utomiya Riku from Class 1-C, and H?sen Kazuomi from Class 1-D, had pressured him into confessing about me. Allegedly, the four of them had been suspicious of our relationship from fairly early on and it had apparently been impossible for Yagami to talk his way out of it.

This was by no means a problem that could just be swept under the rug with the type of half-assed response he was giving me.

“Please allow me to apologize for that.”

“Seriously? Even if you apologize, it’s not like it’s gonna change anything.”

There were now four more people who knew my secret.

At this point, there was nothing I could do about it on my own anymore.

“Tsubaki-san and the others had been more informed than I anticipated. It was a surprise for me too.”

“A surprise? How stupid.”

“Please calm down Kushida-senpai. Tsubaki-san and the other first-years aren’t what’s important right now.”

“What?”

“Their objective is purely to get Ayanok?ji-senpai expelled from the school. I don’t think they’re very interested in what your past is like, Kushida-senpai.”

It didn’t matter if they were interested in it or not.

I simply couldn’t stand the thought of living in the same general space as someone who had their hands on my sensitive information.

Just why couldn’t anyone else understand that?

“Besides, those four are all first-year students. They basically have nothing to do with a second-year like you, Kushida-senpai.”

“Hah! Don’t make me laugh… You do know we’re in the middle of fighting each other on a freaking island right now, right? When the time comes that I have to go against them, they’ll have something to lord over my head!”

Inevitably, this would end up putting me at a disadvantage.

If they blackmailed me with the threat of disclosing everything, it wouldn’t matter what school year they were in; I’d have no choice but to comply with their every demand.

“Yes, I suppose that’s true. Looking at it from Senpai’s perspective, that must be awfully important.”

Yagami conceded, admitting to understanding where I was coming from.

“That being said, it would be nigh-impossible to get those four expelled right now. Or am I wrong?”

“Are you looking down on me? You’d best not get too carried away.”

“…I’m sorry. However, I still feel as though I made the best choice at the time.”

How exactly was it the ‘best choice’ to blab about my secrets without my permission?

I just barely managed to suppress the urge to sock him right in the nose as he continued.

“Do you remember what I told you back on the cruise ship? About how I was devising a strategy to expel Ayanok?ji-senpai?”

Of course I remembered that.

Yagami had come up with a secret plan to force Ayanok?ji out of school, one that he was going to implement once we were actually on the island.

However, he had only handed me a walkie-talkie at the time, leaving me in the dark about the exact details of what he was up to.

“For your sake, Kushida-senpai, I’ll add on a few things to my strategy.”

“Add on?”

“Once Ayanok?ji-senpai has been dealt with, I’ll make sure to have those four… unwelcome individuals shown to the exit as well. That should take care of the problem, right?”

Yagami spoke without so much as a trace of guilt lining his voice.

“For now, let’s think about getting a leg up on the rest of them. As it currently stands, even if Ayanok?ji-senpai’s expulsion goes by without a hitch, most of the credit will go to Tsubaki-san and the rest of Class 1-C. You and I won’t get a very large cut of the 20 million.”

“I don’t care about the points.”

“I understand, but having a huge sum of points at your disposal makes for a better safety net to fall back on.”

This entire time, I had been reluctantly going along with all of Yagami’s ideas.

Even if I didn’t want to, I didn’t really have any other choice given the situation I was in.

However, I was at my limit. I couldn’t afford to sit around on this sinking ship any longer.

“I’m done with you. It’s already clear enough that I decided to follow the wrong person.”

I hadn’t come all the way here today just to have Yagami order me around like this.

Rather, I came to draw the line and distance myself from him.

“You can still come back from this.”

“It’s already too late.”

“No, it isn’t too late at all. In fact, I’d say that this is your chance.”

“Wha…?”

“Currently, Ayanok?ji-senpai has his hands full with Nanase-san clinging onto him.”

“Nanase? Isn’t she that girl from Class 1-D? Don’t tell me she als?”

“Please don’t worry. You can rest assured that Nanase-san knows nothing about your past, Senpai.”

“You know I can’t trust anything you say anymore, right?”

“I truly apologize for betraying your trust. But, please, at least hear me out.”

Even though I had been making it painfully clear how irritated I was for quite a while now, Yagami simply refused to stop talking.

“I told you previously that she’s working with H?sen-kun to try and get Ayanok?ji-senpai expelled, right? Well, I have a general idea of what their strategy is this time around as well.”

“…So? What is it? Talk.”

“Given that H?sen-kun is the one who came up with it, I’m fairly certain it’ll revolve around violence.”

“Violence? That’d be problematic, but I guess the Acting Director did say the school would be looking past any minor disputes that popped up between students. I can’t imagine that’d be enough to warrant expulsion though.”

“If it’s nothing more than a light scuffle, then yeah, that might be true. But what if it’s violent to the point of turning into a gruesome bloodbath? What then?”

“H?sen certainly seems brutal enough to do something like that, but he’ll be the only one expelled if Ayanok?ji one-sidedly gets his ass handed to him, right?”

Although Ayanok?ji would be disqualified from the exam due to his injuries, I found it hard to believe that he would be expelled on top of that.

“I don’t think H?sen-kun will be the one squaring off with Ayanok?ji-senpai this time. As you said, H?sen-kun’s already got a bit of a reputation, so if a fight were to break out, he’d bear the brunt of the school’s suspicion.”

“If you say that, then…”

“Yes. The one facing off with Ayanok?ji-senpai will instead be Nanase-san. Although, even if she raises her hand against him, I can’t imagine that he’ll strike back right away. However, if she really puts her all into it, he’ll inevitably have to do something to keep her at bay. Perhaps he’ll actually end up hitting her? Or maybe he’ll get on top of her and pin her down? Either way, the spectacle would surely be quite unsightly.”

Indeed, if those two were to duke it out with each other… well, needless to say, it would be a big deal.

“So… You’re saying their plan is to have Nanase tell the school that Ayanok?ji beat her up…?”

“Precisely, and that’s why we need to keep an eye on her. Once she takes action, we’ll strike while the iron is hot.”

“Say you’re right about all of this, it’s not like we can do anything if we don’t know when the fight’ll happen, right? It’s not like we can just hover around them 24-7.”

“I’ve already got that covered. A certain somebody told me which day it’ll be taking place.”

“A certain somebody…?”

“While I can’t disclose their identity, they’re definitely trustworthy. Anyway, Nanase-san will be making her move on the seventh day of the exam. Though the exact timeframe is still unclear, chances are that once they’ve gotten somewhere remote enough…”

Then and there, things would start getting ugly.

“So, what exactly is your plan here? Your plan to get a leg up on the other first-years?”

“Our tablets come with the ability to record videos, right? If we use that to record their fight, it’d be possible for us to get our hands on incriminating video evidence.”

If we turned the video evidence of their fight over to the school, expulsion would certainly be on the table.

“But, a single video might not be enough to guarantee his expulsion.”

“It’d at least be enough to use as a threat. It’s even possible that he might choose to drop out on his own accord.”

I understood the gist of what Yagami was trying to tell me.

If it really ended up playing out the way he said it would, taking a recording would indeed give us the upper hand.

“I’d like to entrust the job of recording the video to you, Kushida-senpai.”

“Huh? Why does it have to be me…? Can’t you just do it yourself?”

“Compared to me, it won’t seem unnatural if you’re the one approaching him.”

“That’s what you think. Ayanok?ji’s already super wary of me.”

“I’m a guy. At some level, it’d be expected of me to step up and intervene if a fight were to break out in front of me, making it too suspicious if I were to just stand there and take a video. However, you’d have the excuse of just being a delicate, terrified girl who, despite not being brave enough to intervene directly, at least managed to turn on her tablet and record what was happening. You’d be able to represent righteousness, refusing to cower in the face of injustice even though the perpetrator was a fellow classmate.”

“While righteousness is great and all, I might end up being scorned by my peers for selling out one of my own.”

“In that case, you can just give the video to me. I’ll just say I got it from an anonymous source and leave it at that.”

Yagami was trying his best to persuade me, but as far as I was concerned, I was perfectly fine with letting Nanase or whoever else get rid of Ayanok?ji for me.

That being said, it’d also be worthwhile for me to put in the effort if it meant increasing the odds of success, even if only by 1%.

“I just don’t want to be on a sinking ship any longer.”

“Naturally.”

“… So what’s your role in all of this? Are you just gonna pile this on me and wash your hands of it?”

“Of course not. On the day of, I’ll be providing you back up over the walkie-talkie. Once the ‘GPS Search’ feature is made available tomorrow, I’ll be able to relay Ayanok?ji-senpai’s location to you at any time. That way, you’ll be able to maintain a safe distance while you tail them. Plus…”

“Plus?”

“There’s a chance Tsubaki-san is conspiring something too. She might try and pull something at the same time as us, so I’ll be poking around to try and find out what they’re up to as well.”

“What about that Utomiya guy you’re in a group with?”

“He’s nothing more than Tsubaki-san’s pawn. There’s no need to worry about him being up to anything.”

It was important, if not necessary, to take anything Yagami had to say with a grain of salt.

But right now, I didn’t really have much of a say in the matter anyway.

“You’ll do it for me, right Kushida-senpai?”

“…It’s not like I’ve got any other choice.”

There was no way out for me anymore.

For the sake of protecting my position at this school… My status…

I couldn’t afford to allow myself any more mistakes.