Ch5 Part 2

Now then, the sudden treasure hunt game had begun and would last until the evening.

There were a few rules that we needed to follow, but they were basically only about violations. All that was left was to hope for good luck and participate…

The area around the starting point was crowded because it was within the range of where the QR codes were posted.

Like locusts devouring a crop, the search was progressing at an alarming rate. If I were to try and join now, there’d be no space for me to throw myself into. Similarly, some students saw the swarm of locusts and started to change the location for their search.

What’s more, there were many students using their phones to keep in touch. They were probably looking for a QR code while simultaneously recruiting a partner to pair up with. They could also just split into two groups since you could form a pair on the app without meeting in person.

“Hey, Mori-san, why don’t we take a look from up top?”

Coming out of the hall late, Kei walked out with a classmate, Mori Nene, looking friendly. It seemed Kei grabbed a classmate early and made a pair.

I was on my own, of course, so I decided to go down to the lowest level for now. If I went upstairs like Kei did, we would be sharing the same space after all.

Even so…I didn’t receive any chat messages on my phone.

At a time like this, wouldn’t it be nice if someone would invite me to join them? No, don’t think about it too much. I felt like I would lose if I thought about it. In the first place, there weren’t many people with whom I’d exchanged contact information to either email or chat with.

Out of the members of the Ayanokōji group, Keisei was free, but he’d quickly announced that he wouldn’t be participating, as he wasn’t interested in this kind of game. Akito was in bad shape, and Haruka and Airi were like a pair from the start.

“Ah…”

As I started to move with that in mind, I suddenly bumped into Satō head-on. I raised my hind lightly in greeting before trying to leave, but…

“Ah, w-wait a moment!” She grabbed me by the arm and stopped me as if in a panic. “You know…Ayanokōji-kun, have you partnered up with anyone yet?”

“No, I’m alone.”

I didn’t add ‘for now’ because I didn’t plan to become part of a pair in the future. It was one thing to have made more friends, but it was another thing entirely to have people I could work with for events like this. I felt a little empty saying it myself, but I held it in.

“Then…then, um, you know? Would you…pair up with me?”

She made an unexpected suggestion, and I was at a loss as to how to respond.

Last year, Satō was the first person to ever confess to me. I couldn’t reciprocate her feelings, so I turned her down, and then I started dating Kei afterwards. As someone who expected to be hated; I never thought I’d be asked to partner up.

I had no reason to refuse, but to be honest; I also had no reason to accept.

I’d just seen that Kei had already partnered up with Mori for appearances sake, as she was keeping her relationship with me a secret. That being said, partnering with Satō was another matter.

“Are you worried about Kei-chan…?”

It was hard for me to say yes, but Satō seemed to immediately understand my attitude.

“I heard you were going to tell everyone about the fact the two of you are dating.”

“Is that so?”

It looked like Kei had gotten ahead of me and told her that we would be open about our relationship in the second semester. I knew from past conversations with Matsushita that Satō was aware of the relationship between Kei and I.

“We’ve been together for a while now. It’s not something we can keep a secret forever.”

“Well, there are some couples who go out in secret, but I think only a very small number people would notice the combination of Ayanokōji-kun and Kei-chan.”

Satō told some of the girls she was close to with that she suspected that Kei and I were involved. Of course, I didn’t hear her say it directly, but judging from Matsushita’s behaviour, there was no doubt about the fact that Satō contacted her. Of course, Satō didn’t do anything wrong. She didn’t know anything for certain, and was just letting them know what she’d guessed.

“Ahh, but you know? I suggested that we partner up because, how to put it…well, I thought I could rely on you if you were my partner. So there’s no different meaning there…so…is that not okay?” She spoke firmly, stating that there wasn’t any strange reasoning behind it.

“How many private points do you have on hand?”

“Well um, it’s a little embarrassing to tell you, but…about 180,000 points.”

I wasn’t in a financial position to speak for others, but considering the fact that it was right after the transfer of private points, it didn’t seem like a lot. Even though the risk was low, she must’ve had a certain amount of determination to spend her precious 10,000 private points to participate.

If that was the case, she’d want to pair up and find some of the more well hidden QR codes.

“Okay, I got it. If you’re okay with me, Satō, we can pair up. I can’t promise the results though.”

“Really?!...Yay!”

Satō’s disposition of honestly showing her delight when she was happy made me feel good as her partner.

We took out our phones and applied for and accepted our pair through the app. We were now officially paired up and would both be rewarded for any QR code that was scanned with either of our phones. All that was left was to grab a reward of at least 30,000 points.

“By the way, the teachers gave you some strange paper, right?”

Satō took a crumpled piece of paper out of her pocket. “Ah?!”

When she saw the state of it, as if she had forgotten that she’d crumpled it up, she quickly put it away back into her pocket looking embarrassed.

“Ah, it’s j-just that…I didn’t understand anything when I looked at it…ahaha. You have one too, right Ayanokōji-kun?”

It seemed she didn’t think she could solve the riddle, so she just rolled up the paper at random. I took out a piece of paper folded into quarters and spread it out front of Satō.

“This means we can find the three places where there are QR codes, right?”

“That’s right.”

“So if we can solve this, is there a chance we can get a million points?”

“No, I doubt that.” I was sorry to dash her hopes, but I decided to answer immediately.

“Ehh? Really?”

Only three of the hundred QR codes had answers provided from questions. Therefore, it was tempting to look for the QR codes given by solving the problems on the paper, but…

“The three hints are all of a similar level. With that being the case, I don’t think there is any difference in the reward for solving any of them. There are a reasonable number of codes that give 100,000 points…Or there’s also a possibility they could be worth 50,000 points.”

“Ehh? But if there are three, then what are the chances that they’re the three 300,000 point codes?”

“Certainly, having the three 300,000 point codes be the three specially prepared codes would be a nice fit, but the odds are slim.”

The hints were unlikely to include a large sum of private point rewards.

“Ehhh? Is that all we’d get for solving such a hard problem?”

“This treasure hunt is completely based on luck, and is placed as a bonus game. If the quick witted students who solved the problems get the extremely rare 1,000,000 points, 500,000 points, or as you said, 300,000 points rewards, it’s likely that many students wouldn’t be able to accept it. Wouldn’t you agree, Satō?”

If all of them were worth 300,000 points, then there would be no codes left in a game that was supposed to be about luck. In that case, as a game, it was tantamount to failure. This paper was only part of a bailout to be used at the very end and should be seen as a modest reward.

“I-I see. It’s true that if they were all expensive QR codes I might’ve been annoyed…”

She thought about how she would feel as someone who couldn’t solve it and was immediately convinced.

“It’s not a bad idea to use these hints to find a QR code, but we won’t know the result until we scan the code and get our private points. If we make a poor move, there’s a chance we’ll miss out.”

This treasure hunt game would last for hours, but the big prize would be decided within the first hour or two.

“So it’s okay for us to just ignore this, right?”

“If I ever use this hint paper, I guess it will be if I can’t find any good QR codes even at the end of the game. At that time, I’ll know where to point.”

Well, I was sure that by the time I rely on it, other students would’ve already collected the rewards.

“…By any chance, have you already solved the paper’s hints, Ayanokōji-kun?”

“Pretty much, I guess.”

“Wow…”

The hints weren’t designed to be difficult. Because the game allowed first-years and third-years alike to participate, it was more like a riddle than a straightforward problem.

While we were talking, students participating in the treasure hunt were searching for QR codes around us at random. Even if the area where the QR codes were posted was limited to some extent, most of them would be found quickly if 200 people searched for them all at once. It was possible that the high reward QR codes were hidden far away from the starting point.

“I think I’ll search the lower levels for the time being.”

“Got it, I’ll leave it up to you to decide where we start looking, Ayanokōji-kun.”

Satō and I walked side by side to the lowest level of the designated search area.

The two of us spent the next five minutes looking for a good QR code, but we only found two blatant stickers. Was it a bad location, or were they hidden in a more difficult to find place?

Without a clue, the number of students around me was starting to increase.

“Um, Ayanokōji-kun…”

“What’s up? Did you find something?”

“T-that’s not it…c-can I go to the restroom for a second? I’ve had too much to drink…I was actually gonna go earlier, but…” Satō asked, looking extremely embarrassed.

“I see, so that was when you found me?”

She nodded her head, blushing. “I’m sorry; I was trying to hurry things along, even if just a little.”

I had no intention of telling her not to go to the restroom, so gladly sent Satō off.

“I-I’ll be right back!”

“There’s no need to hurry.”

For the time being, I sent Satō off to the bathroom and resumed my search of the nearby area.

“Are you participating in the treasure hunt game as well, Ayanokōji-kun?”

As I was peaking under the sofa, someone called out to me from behind. I thought someone was looking to stop me in my tracks, but it was my classmate, Matsushita. Today was one of those rare days when I was often approached by classmates. At the same time, a third-year student, Tatara, who seemed to be talking to Matsushita, showed a suspicious looking expression.

“…Ayanokōji, huh”

“You know about Ayanokōji-kun?”

When Matsushita looked at Tatara’s face curiously, he turned his gaze away, looking embarrassed. Matsushita had no way of knowing, but it was certain that some sort of order had been given to the entire third-year by Nagumo regarding me.

“We’re in the middle of a treasure hunt right now, so talk later. We’re wasting time so let’s go.”

“If you’re going to say that, then it’s the same for you Tatara-senpai. Don’t worry about me and find someone else to pair up with.”

The presence of the third-year student Tatara that showed up here might be a good opportunity to explore Nagumo’s strategy.

“I see that you’re also participating in the treasure hunt, senpai.”

When I called out to him in order to jump in, he gave me blatantly disgusted look and turned his gaze away. When Matsushita heard the slight click of his tongue, she also sensed that Tatara’s demeanour had changed.

“What’s the matter? Tatara-senpai?”

When I called out to him once more, it was obvious that Tatara was trying to escape. I could tell from first impressions that he had some kind of fondness for Matsushita. The fact that he was more reluctant to make contact with me than he was eager to form a pair meant it was safe to assume that he was instructed not to engage in careless conversation.

“Another time, Matsushita.”

“Ah, sure.”

Laughing lightly without understanding what happened exactly, Matsushita waved goodbye to Tatara. He looked at Matsushita as if he had some regrets, but he then glared at me and walked away.

“Fuu. I don’t really know what happened, but I’ve been saved. Ayanokōji-kun, did something happen with Tatara-senpai?”

Even though she didn’t know about Nagumo’s orders, she would’ve been suspicious after seeing his attitude.

“There was nothing. I’ve never even talked to him before.”

“Hmm?”

I wouldn’t say she was convinced, but she breathed a sigh of relief, as if a burden had been lifted from her shoulders.

“Hey, are you perhaps alone too, Ayanokōji-kun? If you’re alone, do you want to pair up?”

“Ahh, no───”

Just as Matsushita was about to invite me to join her in the treasure hunt, I heard footsteps running from behind me.

“Wait a second, Matsushita-san, I’m working with Ayanokōji-kun!”

When Satō returned from the restroom, she made a mad dash to close the distance between herself and Matsushita and grabbed her by the shoulders.

“Eh? Oh, really?”

Matsushita looked back at me, surprised by the sheer speed and pressure.

“I mean, I saw Tatara-senpai earlier, wasn’t he together with you, Matsushita-san?”

“Rather than saying we were together, it was more like I was just being followed…”

Apparently, not only Matsushita, but also Satō knew about the third-year student named Tatara. He was a third-year Class A student who had a somewhat high level of maturity and was performing above average on the OAA, with scores ranging from a B to C. He also had a long, unusual haircut for a boy.

I wondered what that kind of hairstyle was called…I didn’t really know much about those kinds of things.

“He was coming on too strong so I was wanted to pull back a little. I was trying to turn him down in a roundabout way."

“Ah ~ I get it ~”

I don’t understand.

For the time being, I decided to check the bottom of the sofa I had just been in the middle of investigating.

“I mean, Ayanokōji-kun, it’s probably not there, right? Even if there is one, I think it’s probably a cheap one.”

Indeed, underneath the sofa would be easily chosen as a typical hiding place for a QR code. In fact, on the floor of this sofa, if you crouched down at a slight angle, you could see a QR code peeking out at you. Of course, I didn’t want to read this QR code.

“What’s important is the school’s pattern.”

“Pattern?”

“When they decided to implement this treasure hunting game, how the values of the QR codes were determined was important.”

“U-um…?”

Satō tilted her head, not really understanding. In contrast, Matsushita responded without especially thinking about it.

“Naturally, there’ll be valuable QR codes in hard to find locations, right?”

“Yeah. Then the next question is, who decides what’s ‘hard to find’?”

“The teachers!” Deciding that she would answer this time, Satō spoke before Matsushita could.

But as a supplement, Matsushita added, “It’s a lot of work to put up a hundred QR codes, right? I don’t doubt that the teachers are the ones putting them up, but it’s hard to imagine that it’s only one or two of them. Even if they split it up and put them up at midnight last night, several people were sent out…”

“Did they take their time deciding where to put the codes while the students were doing the uninhabited island exam, or did they just suddenly leave it to the teachers in charge? If we can find that out, it’ll be easier to guess where the stickers are put up.”

“Sorry, I don’t understand a word you’re saying…”

“The way the aisles are made and the decorations are placed is basically all the same, right?”

“Did you understand what all that meant, Matushita-san?”

“Pretty much.”

“That’s amazing, Ayanokōji-kun!”

“I think it’s an interesting point of view, but given that it’s just a treasure hunt game, it’s okay to be a little more easy-going, you know?”

“…I guess so.”

If you say it like that, there’s nothing I can say back any more.

I just thought it would be better for me to at least have some reasoning behind it so I wouldn’t regret it.

“But yeah, that’s too bad. To think someone beat me to it.”

“T-too bad?”

“I think I’m going to go look for a slightly more dependable partner. See you later.”

Standing around talking like this was just a missed opportunity for everyone in this place.