Ch5 Part 4

Even though the ship was vast, students couldn’t just freely go wherever they liked. People would inevitably focus on places where they could hang out and relax, so unexpected encounters were common.

One boy was going to the café terrace, while the other was heading back to his guest cabin. The two people who were going to completely unrelated places met in a hallway.

Both were walking in the middle of the hallway, and neither side showed any sign giving way. The boys noticed each other’s presence at almost the same time and stopped with a metre separating them.

“Yo Ryūen, you did so much for me the other day.”

The first to speak up was first-year Class D student, Hōsen Kazuomi.

“You sure it’s okay not to be sleepin'? Might as well go rest in your bed for another week or so.” Ryūen Kakeru, who received those words, responded as if to accept them.

“Don’t worry 'bout it. If I half kill you…nah even if I fully kill you in this place, it won’t make me feel any better. The number of targets I gotta kill’s gone from one to two, so it’s gonna get busy.”

“You’ll look real lame if you lose to the same guy twice. Don’t force it.”

They repeatedly provoked each other, but never brought out their fists.

“Ha? Anyway fucker, I heard you been secretly buyin' up ‘Free Ride’ cards from first-years. Sounds like ya bet it all on some third-year called Nagumo so you must 'ave made a good bit of money, eh?”

“Kuku. Who was it that pissed his pants? We had a contract to keep their mouths shut.”

Before the uninhabited island exam, Ryūen approached first-year students with the ‘Free Ride’ card and signed contracts with them. If the group they designated won a prize, they would give up all the points they gained to Ryūen.

If the group they designated only got into the top 50%, they would only get 30,000 points. In other words, if you were to pay more than that, some people would give up their rights. In the end, Ryūen guessed Nagumo and got a reward of 280,000 points for the number of students who signed up.

Most of Ryūen’s classmates were kept in the dark about this fact; only the ones who were used to execute the plan knew.

“If you lick my shoes, I’m okay with givin' you a little somethin' for your trouble you know? Gorilla.”

Laughing, he walked away without once taking his hands out his pockets. Hōsen could’ve stood his ground, but he took a step to the side and made way for him. Ishizaki was wary of Hōsen, but hurriedly followed after Ryūen. Hōsen also didn’t look back and walked proudly down the middle of the hallway.

“That guy’s just as scary as always, eh? But he was so scared that he had to clear the way.”

“He’s got balls, that guy.”

“But…”

“He’s saying if I do it to him, then next time he’s gonna give it to me. It’s a show of his resolve.”

As soon as they passed each other, Ryūen sensed the outpouring of killing intent and his violent nature.

“It’s a pain in the ass, right?”

“Leave it. I know he’s a troublesome opponent, but we gotta find the culprit first.”

“Got it. I’m having Nishino hold it down.”

Ishizaki took out his phone to check, and then led the way for Ryūen.

Not long after that, they arrived at the target location. Before Ishizaki could utter a word, Ryūen approached a lone female student.

“Nanase Tsubasa, right?”

“Yes. What can I do for you?”

Nanase, who’d been stopped in her tracks, stared at Ryūen without a sign of panic. She didn’t understand why she’d caught the attention of an upperclassman from the year above.

“Sorry, but I’m gonna need some of your time.”

Normally, Ryūen alone or with Ishizaki would’ve been sufficient, but he also had Nishino, the girl he was using to hold her back, accompany them. He knew that a situation with only boys surrounding a younger girl could be detrimental to them and would never be an advantage.

“I’ve got a question for you about the uninhabited island exam.”

“The exam, is it?”

Nanase still didn’t understand the situation, but the following words cleared everything up for her.

“Komiya was injured. I’m lookin' for the one who did it.”

“Why me?”

“The first ones to arrive at the crime scene were Sudō, Ayanokōji, Ike, Hondō and also you. With Sudō, Ike, and Hondō, there’s no way we’d get any leads.”

“Then I think it would be better to ask your fellow second-year student, Ayanokōji-senpai, no?”

“'Course, I’ll speak to him when the situation calls for it. But I’m gonna start with you. You were stickin' to Ayanokōji during the uninhabited island exam. Why?”

“I don’t think that has anything to be with the incident.”

“I won’t be able to judge if it has anythin' to do with the incident or not 'til you tell me.”

Most people would readily confess when confronted by the Ryūen’s overbearing demeanour.

“I’m sorry, but I have nothing to tell you.”

But instead of getting flustered, Nanase calmly refused.

As Nanase tried to leave with her head down, Ryūen kicked his leg out and hit the wall with the sole of his foot.

“You don’t get to decide whether to talk or not, bitch.”

“You’re very violent aren’t you? I think you’re going to have a problem if anyone sees you in this situation.”

“Don’t worry. I got a few guys on watch to make sure that don’t happen.”

“I understand that Komiya-senpai is one of your classmates, Ryūen-senpai. However, I don’t think I can help you in any way. I don’t have any leads.”

“Really? You’ve been movin' around an awful lot these last few days, haven’t you?”

“Whatever could you be talking about?” Nanase replied that she didn’t know what he was talking about without looking at him, but for Ryūen, that was an opportunity to take advantage of.

“In the middle of all these people playin' around, you’ve been keepin' an eye on Kurachi from first-year Class C all day, right?”

“…” Here Nanase opened her eyes for the first time and showed signs of agitation.

“Once I heard from Komiya, I set up lookouts on you Sudō, Ike and Hondō just in case. The other three were playin' around like idiots, but that’s normal behaviour on this ship. But you don’t play at all; you just stalk a certain first-year. I can’t call that normal.”

“It’s just a coincidence.”

“A coincidence, huh. A lot of people are playin' around today, like treasure hunting. That Kurachi guy is participatin' but you’re not. And yet, until Nishino caught you, you were following Kurachi the whole time. Are your actions today also a coincidence?”

Once you’d joined the game, you had to go searching for QR codes, but if you weren’t participating, you could save yourself the trouble. Nanase was so focused on keeping an eye on Kurachi that she didn’t notice the presence that was keeping an eye on her.

“I’m so inexperienced, aren’t I? To think I didn’t even realise I was being followed day after day. I’m surprised.”

“You should be thankin' me for reaching out to you first.”

“Well done, Ryūen-senpai. But the Komiya situation has nothing to do with Kurachi.”

“Is that so? Then I guess I’ll go talk to Kurachi directly.”

“That would be a problem.”

“Then tell me what you know. Or are you not allowed to speak unless ‘someone’ gives you instructions?”

“That’s not the case. But what’s irrelevant is irrelevant.”

“Don’t make me repeat it. You’re not the judge of that, I am.”

Ryūen never stopped smiling, and that continued to be the case even now. However, the air he radiated changed.

Ishizaki, who’d been watching from the side, had felt Ryūen’s intimidation many times, but he still hadn’t gotten used to it. He felt like giving in even though he wasn’t the one being interrogated.

“That’s incorrect. You don’t have the authority to make that kind of judgement on your own, Ryūen-senpai.”

In spite of this, Nanase looked straight back into Ryūen’s eyes without showing any sign of fear.

“What you waitin' for? Why don’t you just get on with it?”

Certainly, Nanase Tsubasa was bewildered and troubled. The seeds of her troubles were born during the middle of the uninhabited island exam. The story goes back to the day when she vented her uncontrollable anger on Ayanokōji; after Amasawa appeared in front of them with a deadly weapon in hand.

It was when Ayanokōji concluded that there’d been someone else before Amasawa. At that time, Ayanokōji decided against doing any GPS searches, but Nanase secretly did one anyway in the tent she’d assembled.

However, she slipped into Ayanokōji’s tent without looking at the details. It was because she knew that if she wasn’t careful and found something, he would be able to see through her surprise and agitation. As a result of her secret GPS search, she noticed that there were two people, excluding Amasawa, who were nearby. Kushida Kikyō, a second-year, and Kurachi Naohiro, a first-year. Normally, she would look into both of them, but the second-year, Kushida, was Ayanokōji’s classmate, so she was putting it off.

Apart from that, Nanase had been in regular contact with Ayanokōji to check if anything was wrong and to protect him if necessary, but it seemed to go unnoticed.

“What a waste of time, let’s go talk to him.”

Nanase looked down as if she had given up, but she quickly lifted her head. “It’s a shame, but I don’t know where on the ship he went to find the QR codes.”

Ryūen gave a small laugh and pulled out his phone. “Where’s Kurachi at? Fourth floor…the guest cabin floor, huh? I’ll be right there.”

Ryūen, who had anticipated all of this, ended the call quickly and returned the phone to his pocket.

“So after you pulled me away from him, you had someone watch Kurachi-kun?”

“Unlike you, I have a lot of people who can be my hands, feet, eyes and ears.”

“Kurachi-kun could really be irrelevant, you know?”

“I don’t need you to tell me what to do. I’ll just cross 'em off one by one.”

For both Nanase and Ryūen, the only lead they could follow right now was Kurachi.

“Hurry up and decide; you goin' or not?”

If Nanase refused at this point, there was no need to imagine that Ryūen would approach Kurachi alone.

Nanase nodded once and decided to head towards Kurachi’s location with Ryūen.

Soon after, they spotted Kurachi looking for a QR code with Taguri, who he seemed to be in a pair with.

“First, let me and Kurachi-kun speak alone please.”

“What?”

“I’ll get the information out of him.”

“What guarantee do I have that you’ll give me the information I asked for?”

“You will just have to trust me.”

“Sorry, but I don’t trust you.”

“You have no choice but to trust me, even if you don’t. I will definitely report everything.”

“Ah, whatever. But I’m not gonna show you any mercy if you screw up, even if you are a girl.”

“I am aware of that.”

Gesturing with his chin, Ryūen instructed Nishino and Ishizaki to pull Taguri away from Kurachi. Being approached by a second-year like Ishizaki, they had no choice but to obey quietly.

“Could I have a moment of your time, Kurachi-kun?”

“Huh? You’re that Nanase from Class D…right?”

Kurachi, who was upset that Taguri had been summoned by some upperclassmen, couldn’t keep his composure.

“I’d like to ask you a few questions.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m on a treasure hunt right now, so I don’t have───”

“Tell me why you were targeting Ayanokōji-senpai during the uninhabited island exam.”

“Ha? W-what are you talking about?”

Nanase didn’t know if Ryūen would butt in if she took her time. She needed to ask the questions while they were alone.

“There’s no point trying to hide it. On the day of the exam when it was raining heavily, I used a GPS search to find out who was in the vicinity. There was Amasawa-san and one other person, you. And then, not far from the scene, there was a tool for beating people. You can’t make any excuses.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Kurachi denied it out loud and tried to run, but Nanase grabbed him by the arm.

“You see the second-year behind us, right? He is desperately trying to find the culprit who almost attacked Ayanokōji-senpai. In some cases, he may even resort to violence.”

“H-huh? Don’t screw with me, what the hell is that?!”

“Shh. It’s better for you if you don’t antagonize me by shouting too loudly.”

“Huh! B-but, I…I just…”

“Just?”

“…He said he’d give me money if I attacked Ayanokōji-senpai…That’s what he said…”

“Money for attacking him, is it?”

“Normally, I wouldn’t take it. But I spent all my private points, and…”

“And?”

“I was told I could just ‘pretend’ to attack him and that it wouldn’t be a big deal. I didn’t exactly do anything wrong, you know that right?”

It was true that pretending to attack someone could be treated as a joke.

“Who was it that said he would pay you money if you pretended to attack him? First of all, when?”

“That’s...It was before the start of the uninhabited island exam…”

“B-before the exam, is it?” Nanase was also surprised by the unexpected timing. “In other words, it was planned from the beginning…right?”

“And I don’t know who it was that gave the order. The private points were all transferred to my account without me doing anything.”

“───That’s a lie, isn’t it?”

“Huh?! I’m not lying.”

“You obviously know something and are hiding it, that’s how I see it.”

“I don’t have anything…”

“I don’t think you were well-informed about this, Kurachi-kun, but because of your actions at that time, Hōsen-kun’s plans were changed in addition to Ryūen-senpai’s.”

Kurachi’s eyebrows furrowed as the conversation suddenly switched.

“Right now, he’s gotten desperate and is searching for the culprit. I wonder what would happen if I reported this? I’m sure that Hōsen-kun will mercilessly raise his fists against you, Kurachi-kun.”

Ryūen, a second-year, and Hōsen, a first-year. The two fighters were threatening to come after him.

“W-w-wait! I said wait! Okay, I’ll talk to you, I’ll talk, so please don’t do that!”

He was whispering, but frantically raised his voice. Hōsen was the most hated and feared among the first-year students. The power of that name was far more effective than Nanase had imagined.

“…It was my classmate, Utomiya.”

“Utomiya-kun, is it?”

“Yeah. He said he wanted me to attack Ayanokōji-senpai and would give me the money after the special exam ended.”

“Is that the truth?”

“Seriously, really, it’s the truth!”

Looking into Kurachi’s eyes, Nanase nodded once.

“I believe you, Kurachi-kun. I just have one last question; do you know anything about the injuries to Komiya and the others?”

“Komiya? What are you talking about? I got no idea. No, I really don’t know. Anyway, don’t tell Hōsen that I had anything to do with it, yeah?”

“I understand, I promise.”

When she told Kurachi to go, Taguri was released at the same time.

Ryūen immediately approached and demanded to speak with Nanase. Kurachi didn’t seem to know anything about Komiya’s case, but even after she told him that, Ryūen didn’t believe her. Even if he’d only been watching from a distance, he would’ve known that Kurachi had told Nanase something.

“According to him…Utomiya-kun might know something.”

“Utomiya?”

“It’s Utomiya Riku from first-year Class C, just like Kurachi-kun.”

Ryūen immediately took out his phone and checked Utomiya’s face and abilities with the OAA.

“I don’t remember seein' him around. But an A in physical ability, huh.”

“If it’s him, he might have the ability to push Komiya-kun without him realising, but we don’t have any proof yet.”

“You’ve started to see things, eh.”

“…What do you intend to do?”

“It’s obvious 'aint it? I’m gonna hunt down this Utomiya brat and get him to talk.”

“Please wait. I don’t agree with that.”

If Utomiya was a student from the White Room, he would be tough to deal with, no matter how many people Ryūen brought with him. Above all else, the fact that she had gone this far without Ayanokōji’s permission was not something to be praised.

“This is a case without conclusive evidence…this is problematic. Even if Utomiya-kun is the culprit, if it was decided he was innocent, that would be the end of it, wouldn’t it?”

“Just like how Kurachi spat it all out just now, it’s all about how you threaten them.”

“That was because I’d been following him for the past few days and was able to do some preliminary research. Given his personality, I knew I could push and shove him around. However, Utomiya-kun is an unknown quantity.”

“What do you want from me?”

“Give me time. Of course, I don’t mean for free.”

“Oh? Go on.”

“I’ve been keeping quiet about it, but there is a witness to Komiya’s case that you don’t know about, Ryūen-senpai. I don’t mind telling you who that person is.”

“Who?”

“I can’t tell you now. I will tell you if you refrain from contacting Utomiya-kun.”

“That’s a tough deal for me, you know? Ah well, whatever, I’ll accept those terms.”

“Thank you very much. I’ll get back to you with the details.”

“But if you’re lyin', you better be prepared to pay the price, yeah?”

“I’m not lying.”

“Kuku, I bet. Go ahead, and call me before I lose my patience.”

Nanase gave a short reply, nodded and then left.