Chapter 5: Ubiquitous Things

Introduction

Sunday passed by in the blink of an eye and it’s finally Monday, the fifth day of the exam. All four hours of the morning’s lessons are dedicated to physical exercise. We’re to walk and run 18 kilometers in total around the course that’s going to be used for the long-distance relay race and be done with it in time for the afternoon lessons. The actual long-distance relay exam isn’t that long, since each student would only be running a distance of about one or two kilometers but it’s a winding mountain road. We continued walking for about five kilometers, exhausting ourselves. Up until the other day, we had only worked up a slight sweat here but the difference is astounding.

“How much further does this slope go? Isn’t it ridiculous? It’s too damn hard.”

Past a sign that warned us of wild boars, Ishizaki continued to spit these words.

“Speaking of wild boars, are they big? Like this guy here.”

Saying that, he turned his eyes displeasingly towards me.

“That was amazing. I misjudged you, Ayanokouji.”

Hashimoto, followed by a bunch of other people, complimented me. But if you ask me, this is just uncomfortable.

I felt troubled, thinking this topic would be used to toy with me for a while. Albert even went as far as to clap his hands lightly in applause. But soon enough, teasing time ended. The winding road to the summit, although paved to allow cars access, is on an extreme incline. It’s to the point where just walking up it would put on a strain on our legs. Furthermore, since we’re getting up early to cook breakfast too, we’re wasting more of our stamina compared to the seniors. The break we got on Sunday is probably the school being considerate.

“How long is it going to take to go back……?”

“The average walking speed of a person is about four kilometers. The total distance is eighteen kilometers so if we’re just going to walk the entire time then it’ll take about four and a half hours.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me. If so, we won’t even have time to eat our lunch.”

“Then that just means we’ve got to run, Ishizaki. The more we run, the less time it’ll take.”

Moriyama from Class B said so sharply. As a matter of fact, we started out as part of our large group but most of the 2nd years and 3rd years went ahead at a faster pace.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Like I can run 18 kilometers.”

“Don’t tire yourselves out talking…you’re all here because you agreed with my strategy right……?”

While panting heavily, Keisei warns Ishizaki and the others. Students who don’t have a problem with their stamina and long distance running could have started running from the very start but running 18 kilometers certainly isn’t the best of ideas. Keisei’s strategy is that we walk the first nine kilometers then reach the turnaround point and start running. The fact that we’d be going downhill if we turned back is also something he factored in when he proposed that.

“We haven’t even started running yet. As if we’ll be able to hold out until the turnaround point.”

“Shut it……just pipe down and walk.”

Keisei, who’s never been good at physical exercise, seems to have already sustained damage in his legs since he’s clearly losing his composure. It’s not like it’s impossible for us to traverse the remaining 13 kilometers within the time limit set for us. It’s the natural course of action to keep the talking to a minimum and focus on walking. Still, thanks to this lesson I feel like I’m starting to see who the runners are. There’s no doubt that Yahiko and Keisei, both currently suffering, are unsuited for it though.

I feel like Kouenji, who’s walking behind us, would be reliable but I heavily doubt he’ll run seriously.

“Pipe down and walk? You sound pretty haughty for someone who’s out of breath, Yukimura.”

Ishizaki looks like he’s going to keep going. It doesn’t seem like we’ll be able to cut down on the talking anytime soon.

“As the leader, I’m saying this with the group in mind…please don’t talk.”

“‘As the leader’? Don’t fuck around.”

Perhaps the reason Ishizaki is verbally attacking Keisei without end right now is because he’s under an excessive amount of stress.

The students who could no longer let that pass, Moriyama and Tokitou, made their displeasure known to Ishizaki.

“Cut it out already, Ishizaki. Yukimura’s right this time.”

Feeling the sign behind us growing distant, I looked back. And when I did, I realized Kouenji who left the road and wandered into the forest. The other students don’t seem to have noticed, only looking forward and walking ahead. Ishizaki isn’t the only problem child we have. This surely isn’t a mere detour. I could no longer see him and there’s no sign of him coming back anytime soon.

“No helping it…”

I thought about quietly chasing after Kouenji but they’ll end up thinking I left the road too.

“Kouenji went into that narrow path back there. I’ll go and bring him back.”

“Ahh? What the hell is that oddball doing!?”

Since there aren’t that many students capable of stopping Ishizaki, he seems to be getting louder and louder.

“Don’t be distracted too much by that, Ishizaki. It’ll be your loss unless you treat Kouenji as something that’s just not there.”

Keisei’s strategy is to treat Kouenji as an invisible presence. Even so, it’ll be difficult to completely ignore him. While problems arose here and there, Keisei apologetically said this.

“…sorry, Kiyotaka. I’ll leave this to you.”

I could tell Keisei no longer has the energy to turn back and go looking for Kouenji. I replied to him immediately.

“If it’s Kouenji, won’t he be a problem for you? Do you want me to help?”

Hashimoto offered. But I politely turned it down.

“We may be unable to bring him back, no matter how many of us are there. In that case, keeping as many people as possible on the course would give the school a good impression. Doesn’t seem like he’s just lost either.”

“I see. Maybe so. It’s best if you come back the moment you feel you won’t be able to bring him back with you.”

I nodded at Hashimoto’s advice and decided to follow Kouenji.

I hadn’t planned on actively making a move here but there’s also the fact that it’s not exactly easy to get an opportunity to be alone with Kouenji. If I’m going to have a chat with him then this is about the only place I can do so.