Chapter 16.5: Student Autonomy.

Well, this brings back memories.

…I had some emotional connection with this place, especially since Innō didn't even attempt to help when I was to be expelled.

While I felt betrayed, I forgave everyone who abandoned me, though there was no reason for me to contact Innō, so I haven't talked to him ever since.

Anyway, Takagaki came quite quickly, especially since we texted him barely three minutes ago.

Talk about being fast.

"Hello, Takagaki-san," Ito waved as soon as he saw Takagaki.

"Hey, Ito-kun, and you are…?"

"My name's Nakamura."

"I assume you're classmates with Ito."

"Yes, we are both Class Epsilon students."

"I'm sure you're here cuz of the case about the thief—let's have this conversation elsewhere."

"Ah, yes, good thinking," I replied.

I was about to just say that and even expected Ito to say something, but he simply observed us.

He wants to see what I'll do.

I was sure that he wanted to see how I would handle this situation. However, I wouldn't be doing anything too special for now.

We walked over to the mall and went to a cafe on the top floor.

Luckily, since today was a school day and we were preparing for the special test, the place was practically empty, with only 3 customers, excluding us.
It was quite a calming and neat place—with neat, clean wooden chairs, soft jazz music, and soft lighting.
It was also quite quiet. Anyway, we sat close to the entrance for no particular reason.
“Now back to business,” Takagaki said with a warm smile as soon as he sat down.
Though his smile seemed fake, considering it didn’t extend to his eyes. It was a forced smile, proof he didn’t enjoy this in the slightest.
But why force a smile? Just say you don’t wanna be here.
“Just so you know, we are not recording this,” I said as Ito and I brought out our phones, showing we weren’t, before dropping them on the table.
After I said that, Takagaki looked at Ito; he probably thought that Ito told me about how he had questioned him, too.
“Yeah, I’m aware,” he smiled, still faking it.
“Also, before we start, could I ask what class you’re in?” I asked.
“I’m in Class Delta.”
Delta, huh. Not Beta. Isn’t that interesting?
…Though I must say, why talk about how dumb my class is and about how easy it is to know our class secrets when you’re just a class above us?
“Why’d you ask?”

“I was just curious.”
“I’m sure you asked because of what I said yesterday.”
“...Yes, actually.”
Way to give me a believable lie.
“I apologise for that; you see, I acted like that because I was with some Class Alpha friends. I hope you didn’t take any offence.”
“Nah, it’s fine, though how is your class anyway?”
“We’re like a big family,” he smiled—an actual smile.
Hmm.
“Ok, back to the thief allegation. I want to just come out and say that I’m not the thief.”
“Well, an exposed thief would say that.”
“Haven’t thought about how *I* would even be able to steal such a thing?”
Yes, I had considered such a thing, and I wanted to even ask Jackson-sensei, but then I changed my mind because of a certain hypothesis I had.
“Well…”
“Such records are kept with homeroom teachers, so of course I wouldn’t know.”
“But she isn’t aware,” Ito spoke up.
While Ito shouldn’t have basically revealed our hand to the enemy, it was necessary to prove my point, or rather, the point I planned to bring up.
Exactly. The records were kept with the homeroom teacher, so if they were stolen and she didn’t know, then that meant that the person who ‘stole’ the records had a

copy of them—whether it be a picture or even a printout—and that meant Jackson-sensei didn't know. You might ask, "How do I know that she didn't know?" Well, if she knew, she would say so during homeroom. In fact, I'm surprised no one said anything during homeroom; Ito must have said something to them.
That being said, I could have asked her about the records, but if I did, then it would have made her know that we were looking for the thief/traitor, and if I did solve this case, then she would know that I did, and I really wanted to avoid that.
I also wanted to check a certain idea of mine; if I were right, then it would make me know how this school works.
"So your homeroom teacher doesn't know that the records are lost; that's pretty bad, y'know. You should tell her," Takagaki smirked.
I'm sure he wants us not to suspect him, but then why smile?
"That doesn't mean it couldn't be someone outside our class; she teaches other classes too."
"Yes, but that doesn't mean that I'm specifically to blame."
"Yes, but you're still the prime suspect."
"On what grounds? While I apologise for calling your class dumb, you are still the least intelligent class, so in theory, your secrets should be the easiest to figure out, right?" Takagaki smiled.
"I suppose so."

Takagaki was obviously correct, but his voice and demeanour were really weird, though I couldn't pinpoint why yet.
"I mean, unless you guys really are as dumb as I suspected."
"What's that supposed to mean?"
Ito was about to say something, but I said something first and gave him a look that said, "Leave it to me."
"It means that you guys are dumb—well, only if you take it bluntly. Speaking of blunt…" he grinned.
"Are you insulting us?"
"A famous person once said the truth is cruel," he said, still keeping a grin.
It was then I realised that he was being condescending; it gave me a reminder of what I did to Shimuzu and Arai, though I didn't focus on that for now.
"It seems we aren't getting anywhere," I sighed.
"Is that so? You really might be the smartest ape I've met."
"What?!"
It was more than obvious that he was trying to make me hit him, but to be sure, I wanted to act as if I fell for his trap.
"Huh? Are you deaf, too?"
I rushed over and grabbed his collar, of course, much slower than what I did with Jackson-sensei. It was so slow that anyone could dodge it, though not too slow that you'd know I was pretending.

As I got a hold of his collar and wound my hand for a punch, I saw a huge grin on Takagaki's face.
“Hey, Takagaki,” I brought my fist quite close to his face. “You might need beating to shut that fucking mouth of yours—”
“Hey, Nakamura, relax,” Ito got a hold of my hand.
“Huh? Yeah, you’re right.”
Takagaki’s expression suddenly became sour before returning to the condescending smile.
“I think it’s best if the conversation ends before it escalates,” Ito said.
“Wait, we can still… Actually, now that I think about it, you’re right.”
Though Takagaki wanted to protest, he sensed that it would reveal his intentions even though they were already quite obvious.
“Thanks for humouring us.”
“Anytime,” Takagaki waved as he left.
After he left, we walked to the dormitory, though after some time, I stopped Ito.
“Did you notice it?” I said.
“Is it how he was egging us on? You did that stunt on purpose, right?” Ito replied.
“Yes, I needed to confirm something.”
I was aware that he was egging me on, but that was pretty obvious; what I was interested in was the main reason why he did so.
“I’m guessing that something is related to why he egged us on.”

“Yes. Throughout our conversation, he was acting differently.”
“Yes, I was wondering that too.”
Takagaki really acted weird, completely different from before. Everyone has a way they act, and it follows a certain pattern.
Of course, for strangers it’s hard to know how they act, but first impressions give a general idea—and, based on the voice recording I had, I could figure out how Takagaki was.
If not for the voice recording, I would have just thought it was because Takagaki thought we were recording him, but Ito and I brought out our phones and showed that we weren’t.
We could have voice recorders, but I doubted that was why he acted weird.
“Why do you think so?”
“Maybe because he thought we had voice recorders.”
“Maybe…”
Of course, that wasn’t the reason I had in mind.
Takagaki was quick to believe Ito when he said he wasn’t recording; well, it was because Ito probably had built a reputation of being a good person who wouldn’t do underhanded things or something like that.
Yeah, then maybe Takagaki was sceptical because Ito didn’t say a word; perhaps I messed up there.
No, I doubt that.
The main issue was that Takagaki wasn’t acting like Takagaki. As I said earlier, you can tell how someone

acted from your first impression of them, especially if it's an unexpected first impression.
This is because the brain is deciding whether to like or not like them, so the brain considers a lot of stuff. Of course, after the selection process is done, it feels like you chose something superficial, making you feel like you 'judged the cover'.
However, I could do something that some people could not do: I could analyse those reasons and understand them indefinitely, making me able to understand strangers very well. It wasn't particularly a special skill, though.
Very capable detectives and psychologists could do it—not that I was on their level, though.
At any rate, that was the main reason I voice-recorded Ito and Takagaki, because there was no use for the voice recording besides this.
"...I don't think it's because of the voice recorders."
"Then what could be the reason? Maybe it was cuz he was paranoid or…"
"Hmm? That's the question."
Think, Eiya. What haven't you considered? What's the improbable hypothetical that suddenly doesn't seem all that hypothetical? What am I missing…?
…Wait a minute!
"Hey, Ito, did it spread that he was a suspected thief?"
"Yes, though it was contained and de-escalated by his class in less than one day before it even became a rumour."

Whoa! That's amazing, especially when you realise the rumour just began yesterday.
"So it's not revenge either."
It was then that I took my own advice and looked at the hypotheticals. With that, I looked at it from another perspective, and then I got a sudden, improbable idea—he was ordered by his class mastermind.
Let's start with that.
"Hey, Ito, what classes have masterminds?"
"Every other class except ours—are you suggesting it was the work of the Class Delta mastermind?"
"Well… I don't have anything concrete, but I have a theory. How's their class anyway?"
"They're pretty chill, though if you mess with someone with their classmates, they get really serious. Though, I don't think their mastermind did this. Yeah, Takagaki was acting weird, but—"
"I know I said I have nothing concrete, but let's say I *was* almost certain of my theory."
"Dude, that basically means you're sure."
"I guess so."
"So, like, how sure?"
"I'm 9% sure!" I exaggeratedly spread my arms.
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..
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"Uh… Isn't that a low amount?"

“It was the plan of the mastermind,” I continued, as if I didn’t hear Ito. “Anyway, do you have a photo of Class Delta?”
“Uh, sure, give me a second,” he brought out a picture on his phone and showed me. “This is the end-of-term picture from last term.”
In the picture, everyone huddled, and some boys carried the smaller people, so everyone was in frame—everyone looked happy and together, like a family.
Huh.
It was then that I got the last pieces of the puzzle through Ito just now.
You see, I deduced through Ito’s words and the picture that Class Delta was a close-knit class. In fact, when Takagaki described his class, he gave a sincere smile. With this, I was quite sure that when Takagaki got called a thief, his class helped him out, and the mastermind, maybe a pseudo-parental figure, wanted to avenge him, so they gave him a plan to follow.
But all of that is just a theory…but probably a true one.
“I’m sure now; Takagaki was told to make me attack him.”
“You’re sure just from the photo?”
“No, that wasn’t nearly enough; it was just the final piece. At any rate, it’s just a 15% certainty.”
“That’s still a low number,” he said. “Oh well. I have questions, but I presume you’re not going to answer me directly and will just lie.”

“I won’t—”
“No need to lie,” Ito smiled. “That being said, I’ll see you tomorrow, Nakamura, since the study session has probably ended for today.”
“See you tomorrow, Ito. I’ll be heading to the dorms.”
I don’t want *to lie, but… I have to. Sorry, man.*
After Ito left, I texted Kagura to meet me in the cafe. It was the reason why I told Ito to stop, so going back would be easy.
As I walked back to the cafe, I remembered something about what I wanted to know.
While talking to Takagaki, I got an idea, and that idea was that the school knew who the culprit was and didn’t inform Jackson-sensei for one reason.
Yeah, it could only be—
Student Autonomy.
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Author’s Note:
So, I just have to say this so there won’t be any complications. The numbers that Eiya called are NOT made up; that is genuinely the percentage of how much he believes in the theory (unlike what the Death Note author did with L.).
And this is not a joke; those are the actual numbers.
Anyway, remember to comment, share, and leave a review. Thanks for reading the chapter, and see you in the next one.