

It was late December, just three days before the last day of school.

In the morning, the students had a regular class with upperclassmen, and after a service activity at the cafeteria, the students had a sewing class in the afternoon in the clothing room.

In less than three hours of the second lecture and practical training, which focused on embroidery, Akiharu Hino's eyes were straining, her shoulders were stiffening, and she was exhausted when she heard the voice of the maid instructor.

That's all for today's lesson, but I'd like to conclude with an explanation of this subject test and the special lesson that will be given tomorrow.

"..... Oh?"

The sudden and abrupt declaration made Akiharu straighten his back involuntarily.

The cool-beauty voice of Fukakan, dressed in an indigo maid's outfit, is highly effective in arousing tension, but the content is just that: content.

If I were to make a slight yawn, I would surely fall prey to a fountain pen flying by at the speed of sound.

She placed her hand on her knee, which had been cleaning the lint from her morning coat, and straightened her posture in her chair, and waited for the words of Fukaba, who stood in front of the sewing machine table.

With icy eyes, she looked around the room quietly and nodded her head to make sure that everyone's eyes were on her. As you may already know, the Christmas Ball will be held on December 24. Although we are already on winter break, as a rule, all students in the Education Department are expected to attend.

Well, that's all well and good, but what are you going to do at the ball?"

Yes, yes, yes! Since we're going to blow off our Christmas date, we should have a little something to look forward to!

Aside from Sanke who are too reserved in asking questions, I would like to tell Todoroki, who is as foolish as ever, to shut up for a minute.

It's fine for them to take the liberty of punishing the maid teacher for making her angry, but sometimes they take it out on us as a joint responsibility.

If he was within reach, he could have hit her to shut her up, but since he's surrounded by different work stations, unfortunately, he can only give Akiharu a glare.

I mean, that pseudo-Kansai person should never have a date, so how can he speak out so openly in such a hurtful manner?

While Akiharu was feeling frustrated and uneasy, he heard the cold voice of Mukan.

The main role at the ball is to serve, but there is one more important role. Shikikagami, do you understand?"

"W-wait a minute... Oh, you mean to be the belle of the party?"

"..... I'm sorry, but there's been a mistake."

(alt: "... I'm sorry, but it's a mistake.") I can only say that Shikikagami is truly a master at giving disappointing answers.

Also, Fukayoshi is asking the wrong person the right questions.

As Akiharu looked on in frustration, not being able to get into anything, Fukakan cleared his throat and said, "The other thing I want to do is to dance with the students in the upper division who are going to participate in this event.

He casually mentioned something quite troubling.

..... Dancing is what we call ballroom dancing, since we dance at a ball.

This partner should not be someone who claps along to the dancing, but rather a partner who dances in pairs with the dancers.

To be honest, I don't think I can do it at all.

Also, embarrassing.

Just imagining myself dancing makes me blush and want to scratch my head in embarrassment.! Last year we only had female students, so we used to ask for nominations from the upperclassmen to play the male roles, or we would have the students vote and nominate someone else to play the male role. From this year, however, the male partner will be played by a student from the obedience course.

(alt: Just imagining myself dancing makes my face turn red and I feel so embarrassed that I want to scratch my head...! "Until last year, there were only female students, so conventionally, you would either solicit candidates from among the upper secondary school students who would play the male roles, or have the students vote for someone else who they would like to play the male role. It was a method, but from this year, a secondary school student will act as a partner."

) While Akiharu was inwardly agonizing over the matter, Fukayoshi's explanation continued, and he also made a comment that caught my attention.

I think that someone will probably ask me a question even if I don't say anything, but for some reason, it has become a habit that it is the role of boys to actively ask questions at times like this, so Akiharu has no choice but to raise his hand in a small gesture.

But there are only five boys in the class, including Daikichi from the upper secondary school, right? Is it enough to rotate with only five?

Not enough. So all the obedience students will be asked to play the male roles on the day of the event. The female students will not be dressed as maids, but as tails, so please wear those.

This comment elicited a small cheer from the girls.

I know that the president had planned to wear a men's uniform in the past, but apparently it was a big hit with everyone.

"Ummm, a tailcoat... .. I don't like men's clothes because they are too tight around the chest..."

..... Correction, with the exception of a few cases.

Shikikagami, who is pinching the blouse around her chest, is much larger than the average high school girl, no matter how one looks at it, so it must be tight.

I mean, even now that she is wearing the maid's outfit, she looks so bloated that she looks like she is about to burst.?

I saw Daichi, who usually has a hard facial expression, with an even more expressionless face than usual, but with a murderous intent in his eyes.

..... No, I saw them, or rather, their eyes met mine.

There was no way to make a mistake, and the target was so clearly visible that it was easy to tell that it was you.

Akiharu does not know how to respond to his roommate, whose murderous intent seems to be growing to the point where a fist or knife is about to fly at him at any moment.

Maybe he's a germaphobe and is mad at for staring at Shikikagami's tits? No, it's a pretty strange reason for him to be angry, but I can't think of any other cause other than that, so if he's not, the reason is seriously unclear.

But if that's the case, it's not right to apologize, and although she may have lacked delicacy, she didn't do anything wrong, and she wondered how she could resolve this mood.

After I raised my hand, I found a fountain pen lightly trembling between the index and middle fingers of my right hand, which had been placed on the desk without thinking, in the aftermath of being stuck in the pen.

Seeing it, which should have pierced his finger if it had been off by a few more millimeters, sent a chill down Akiharu's spine, and he hurriedly turned his gaze toward the sewing machine table.

There, the ice eyes, which were cold to the touch, were so severe that just looking at them made one's heart freeze.

In his left hand, he was holding an additional fountain pen and asked, "..... I haven't finished my explanation, may I continue?"

Of course, of course!

He said, "If you disturb me any longer, the next time I'll hit you right between the eyes."

The pressure was so strong that Akiharu immediately shook his head.

As I watched with trepidation for the second throw, Fukakan quietly lowered his left hand and said in a matter-of-fact tone, as if nothing had happened: "You will be serving and dancing with the Upper School students when they ask you to. So, here are the details of your obedience test: Unlike usual, if you don't practice before the day of the test, you may embarrass your partner.

The gesture had a certain ring to it for Akiharu, whose expression had become tense.

I think most of the guys understood the flow of this conversation.

In other words, the subject of this year's exam is: "The exam is to be awarded the honor of dancing with your master. In addition to your dancing skills, you will also be evaluated on your ability to entertain your master, so please keep that in mind."

"....., just to be on the safe side..."

(alt: "... even if you tell me to keep it in mind.") I'm sure. I'm sure you need to be prepared.

(alt: "I don't know. It's true that you need to prepare yourself mentally.") After class, the three boys, excluding Sanke who were heading to the service activity, were walking back to their dormitories when Akiharu muttered something, to which Todoroki was the first to respond by coming around to the direction they were going, and finally smiled.

I was expecting this crude laugh, and thinking he must not be thinking straight, when he said, "Ballroom dancing, you know, that thing, right? A man and a woman are so close, both physically and emotionally, that they might inadvertently fall in love! It's possible that an intended partner in an exam could turn out to be a private partner as well!"

No, there is no such a flow anywhere. The first thing to do is to make sure that you are able to participate safely.

I'm on it, akki-y! This nice guy, Todoroki-san, isn't the kind of no-good guy who's going to make the same mistake over and over again, is he?"

It has been a long time since I have heard such a statement that lacks persuasive power and leaves nothing but room for rebuttal.

I guess I can't say anything if there are too many things to poke into.

It's hard to know where to start and how to go about it.

While walking backwards in front of Akiharu, who was quietly looking on in dismay, Todoroki pointed at himself with his thumb and said, "I'm not like those days when I couldn't even get a

single partner card. It seems that lately, the ladies in the upper school are starting to see the good in me, too, huh?

"....., okay, so?"

I remember the last time I took the test, they came to give me the card before I could ask them to do so. And they had tears in their eyes and their hands were shaking. He was surrounded by his girlfriends later and they were saying how happy he was, but that's the kind of guy you see in comic books: "I wanted to confess, but I didn't have the courage to do it"! I guess it's a sin to be a popular guy!

Saying this, Todoroki starts laughing loudly.

On the other hand, Akiharu, after sorting through what he had just heard and imagining what it all meant, remained silent.

Then, Daichi, who had been thinking like me, raised his head and looked at me as if he had just thought of something.

..... Hino. I'm a little curious, does Todoroki really have a crush on you?"

Don't touch it. If you dig up the facts, it may become a very funny thing.

Because, the scene that came to mind was, no matter how you look at it, "I gave you a card for some kind of punishment game."

It's just a picture of a picture of a picture.

I can only assume that some kind of strange game has become popular among the upper class.

I wonder if this idiot would laugh and deny it even if I told him the truth, Akiharu thought to himself as he looked at Todoroki's face, who was laughing continuously,..... No, you can't do that.

You're laughing like a madman, but if you look closely, you can see a vacant color in your eyes.

I wonder if they know how they really got the card.

You may have decided to play the clown and pretend you didn't notice, but when the spear of truth hits you from the inside, you say, "..... what the hell am I doing?"

I am sure they must have felt like they were in a state of shock.

Akiharu thought that it was the mercy of a samurai to pretend not to see anything and play the role of an insensitive friend, so he gave a hard tap on Todoroki's back, who was beginning to sob from laughing too hard, and shoved him.

Oh. The ball is after the winter break, so you may have a lower chance of getting it than usual, but there are more upperclassmen than cadets. We'll make it work."

(alt: "Ah. The ball will be held after the winter break, so the chances of receiving it may be lower than usual, but... originally, there are more advanced education students than secondary education students. There are many.) I mean, Daichi has nothing to worry about. In fact, the number of girls who want to dance with us will be so overwhelming that it will put me and the other C.E.D. students in trouble."

While saying so myself, I can easily imagine the scene, which makes me feel a sense of crisis.

They may give you their partner cards just for the fun of it, but if you are going to dance with them at a ball, it should be a different story.

From a woman's point of view, I would rather give my card to a slightly shorter, but very attractive girl with a great face than to a girl who is a roaring star or dresses like a man.

Akiharu was suddenly feeling uneasy, thinking that he might be in trouble if he doesn't make an approach soon, when Todoroki, who had finally returned to normal mode, said, "Oh, yeah. I've got the card, but that's where the problem starts."

What?" Is there a problem?"

When I asked him about the unexpected turn of events, he replied, "He doesn't know what he's talking about.

He cowered his shoulders as if to say, "I'm sorry.

(alt: I just shrugged my shoulders.) If you only get one, that's fine, but if you get more than one, you have a serious problem, don't you? There's the big question of who you're going to work with."

"..... is the first person who gave it to me, right?"

Akiharu agrees with Daichi's model answer, but apparently Todoroki is not satisfied with it.

He wagged his finger to the side in a way that made me feel annoyed and said, "It's rude of them to pick such a trivial choice. It's a ball, and it's Christmas Eve! Since they gave us the cards with the appropriate determination, we should respond to them and show our sincerity!

I don't see anything at all, so you have to be concise. What do you mean?

I think he is an impatient person. In other words, he wanted to say that it is right to work with the partner you like the most.

Akiharu was absolutely stunned by what he was told after deliberately waiting for a long time.

I didn't expect anything rational from Todoroki in the first place, but this is not a fluke.

If you don't expect it, you can't conceive of it any more than you can conceive of it.

This outrageous statement has raised the eyebrows of many people with common sense, but also of those with good sense.

"..... Does that mean you're going to work with someone you know well?"

It means something more positive. I want to go out with this girl, or this girl is my type.

"....."

(alt: 「.....」) After receiving a blunt answer, a large land with a deep crease between its eyebrows glanced over at me.

After letting out a small sigh, Akiharu looks at the source of the problem with a wary eye.

You know what? It's an exam. If you mean whether or not it's easy to work together, then you should consider their preferences, but you're going too far. First of all, the other party wouldn't have given you the card with the intention of confessing to you.

What are you talking about? A man is supposed to be sensitive to his partner's feelings.

No, it's not that I'm sympathetic to your feelings, it's just that I'm under a delusional interpretation of what you want.

This idiot is really no good, Akiharu thought sincerely.

Even though it's Christmas Eve and you're supposed to be dance partners, it's still just an event and part of the exam.

As he gazed at the dormitories that were beginning to appear, Akiharu sighed once again, thinking that only he would be the kind of idiot who would be so excited by such unnecessary meaning.

I was surprised to find that the annual Christmas dance had a different meaning. Tomomi Saikei, lying on the bed in her school uniform, flips the red partner card over and over in her raised hand and exhales deeply.

The other hand, which is not holding the card, is holding the printout.

The letter requested cooperation in the examinations of the Department of Education, including the date, time, and content of the examinations.

Tomomi, as usual, would not hesitate to decide what she should do right away.

"How can we make this more interesting?"

The first priority is to find out how the people around you, including your childhood friend Akiharu Hino, will react as a result of your actions, and from that, to some extent, determine what your next action will be.

..... and yet here we are, stuck.

Of course, I planned to attend the ball, and I expected that my students would participate as well.

What was unexpected was the inclusion of the HSE exam and its content.

If I didn't even know what it was, I could have gone to give the card to Akiharu as usual, but with the information, I couldn't help but be reluctant to do so.

Because I was afraid that people would think that I was having a crush on her by asking her to a dance on Christmas.

She was so embarrassed thinking about it that she turned over and lay on her face, pressing her face against the futon and moaning.

It's not that I don't have feelings, but I don't want Akiharu to see through them, and I'm having a hard time believing that.

I don't dislike my childhood friend whom I met again at Hakuryo Ling, who has a strong face and an attitude that is not very good, but she has a small temperament, and is also good-natured and serious.

..... Not.

I don't dislike it, but I think I like it a lot.

It's a bit of a puzzle that I can't be sure of my feelings, but if I'm not good enough, this will be my first love, so I have no choice but to tolerate it.

I have had a few flirtations with men in my life, but when I think about it, they have always been much older than me, and I don't think I have ever had a crush on a boy my own age.

And when the first time partner is Akiharu, I think it can't be helped but to be extraordinarily confused.

However, no matter how good the excuses you make to yourself, the reality is so ruthless that they will never solve anything.

While lying face down on the bed, Tomomi moves her face up and looks at her partner's card again.

It's a very enjoyable event, but I can't move like I used to.

I never imagined that just because I fell in love with someone, it would be so difficult for me to move around.

I wonder if it's because I can't move easily when I'm feeling heavy. In shoujo manga, I tend to be more aggressive.

(alt: "... I wonder if when you feel heavy, you can't move lightly... In shoujo manga, you tend to be more aggressive.") It makes me want to lament, "Why do I have to be so boorish?"

Tomomi is well aware of her tendency to back down at the critical moment.

You can be curious and competitive about most things, but when you are feeling strong, you need to be ready to push yourself and take advantage of the momentum.

We know we will be at a disadvantage if we don't move quickly.

For someone with a face that looks like he has already drowned several people in a sea of blood, Akiharu is very disciplined, so if he receives more than one card, he is sure to pair up with the first person who offers.

That's what you should almost certainly do, unless you have a specific reason not to.

Tomomi knows this, yet she is unable to move.

Teasingly, he traced the surface of his partner's card with his fingertip, sighing for what must have been the umpteenth time, and said, "I envy you, Ms. Selnia, your momentum at times like this.

The face of my rival from junior high school in my mind made me feel even bluer.

..... means that the seniors will go home after the closing ceremony?

The day after the announcement of the ECE exam, Akiharu was hard at work in the cafeteria during lunch break.

I am still having a hard time compared to the other students because of my appearance and the strange rumors about me, and the sad fact that no one comes to my area except for my acquaintances.

In addition, I should refrain from private conversation while working, but I end up talking to the few acquaintances who do show up and am often asked to make small talk, so I don't think I look like I'm taking my work seriously at all.

At least if it was Tomomi or Selnia from the same class, I could emphasize that I was working a little and keep my distance.

However, since the only table in my area that is currently occupied is occupied by an upperclassman who looks like an elementary school student and a junior who is as young as he looks, I can't seem to push him away.

So, while waiting for my lunch order to arrive, and while drinking tea after lunch, we got to chatting about the winter break.

Then Akiharu asked about the ball, and it seemed that neither of them would be at Hakuryo around Christmas time.

M'mmm. I am supposed to return to the Sfor Kingdom on the afternoon flight. I had promised to spend Christmas in my home country.

She is going on a trip to Italy with her family, but before that, she has to go to the hospital for a checkup. Besides, it's embarrassing for her to dance in that dress.

(alt: "You're going on a trip to Italy with your family, so you'll have to be hospitalized before that. Besides, dancing in a dress...it's embarrassing...") Perhaps imagining herself dressed up and dancing, Minna turns over while holding a cup of hot milk in both hands.

Mina Sakurazawa, who is famous in the world as the most remarkable young painter, should be suspected of being an esper if he is able to convince you on the first look.

This is clearly an elementary school student who had to perform a role with lines at an arts and crafts show.

Compared to Mimina, Pina's title of princess is less of a gap.

Pina Sformkran-Esto is an ostentatious name to begin with, with skin as white as a snow fairy's and hair as silver as it shines.

However, her long hair in a twin-tail and strange speech style make her stinky and explosive.

In addition, he often lets his nerdy hobby run wild and makes a fuss with the board president, so he has a strong sense that he is a junior who needs to be taken care of.

Akiharu returned his gaze from the princess, who was worried about her future in many ways, to Miminami and said, "Whatever, I hope it doesn't get stuck in the test. There's nothing wrong with your health or any visible abnormality, is there?"

I have no idea. It's just that the year-end visit was moved up. It's no different from a routine checkup."

I see. That's good.

I heard that he was cured after the surgery, but I still worry about him because I have no knowledge of his heart disease.

I was so relieved that my expression relaxed, and then Minami glanced up at me, shaking her shoulder for some reason and saying, "Oh, no..... I can't help you this time, but I can help you next time, okay?"

Next Next?"

When Akiharu tilted his head, the small senior blushed and puffed up his cheeks.

So, I'm talking about the next exam! I know that this exam will be held on the day of the ball, because I received a notice from you.

..... ah." I see.

(alt: "... Ah. I see.") I asked them, in the course of conversation, if they were going to be at the ball.

I asked her if she wanted to help me with the test, but she thought that I was asking for her cooperation.

To be honest, I had no intention of getting a partner card from my seniors just for the topic, so I had to read the situation and avoid saying anything.

If I were to blurt out such a thing, there is a possibility that I would be mistakenly embarrassed and even cry.

Since there was no doubt that it was a very kind offer, Akiharu decided to stop talking nonsense and express his gratitude honestly.

So next month's means the next one is already next year. If you are free when the examinations are held in January, I'll ask my seniors to accompany you.

"Uh, yeah. Promise, right?"

I think Mimina would enjoy cooperating with you. I can't wait to go to school and play with Akihar and the others.

"No, it's an exam, okay? There's no element of fun in this at all, okay?"

I correct Pina's pointy lips to show her that she is not listening to me, as she rests her chin on the table and looks bored with her lips.

She also began to flap her legs and deviate from the manners of a place to eat, so Akiharu grabbed Pina by the neck and forced her to straighten her back.

"Don't behave, princess. Can't you at least consider the time and place so as not to disturb others? At least consider the time and place so as not to disturb others."

"What's the matter with you, what's the matter with your evil way of speaking? You're trying to get rid of me!"

I think he was just admonishing them about common sense. I think I was just giving them some common sense. It's like having age limits on some movies and video games.

Noooooo, you're a grown man in spirit! You should look older than Mimina! In other words, it should not be an exaggeration to say that you are in fact over 20 years old!

"Mimi, you're supposed to look more solid than Pina! She may be a little short, but she's a lady inside.

Pina started a terrible rant, and Mimina, blushing, tried to get in his face, but honestly, both of them were too much for him.

Both of them are old enough to wear a school bag.

The two little kids were giving him a hard time, and Akiharu was looking for a suitable topic to stop them from glaring at each other so sharply.

As I thought about this and that, a question that had been nagging at the back of my mind began to come out of my mouth.

It's not something that makes you want to tilt your head in the direction of the story, but it's a good story to have a connection to it.

Since Minato and Pina's gazes were turned toward us, Akiharu continued, "Well, you know, there have been many subjects in the obedience test in the past, but basically it was something that could have been done by a butler or a maid. It would be a little strange for her to be a partner in a ball, let alone a dance practice partner.

It's strange that Fukayoshi would change his mind at the end of the second semester, and I'm sure he has many ideas, but unfortunately, I don't know.

(alt: It's strange that Fukagawa changed his purpose at the end of the second semester, and I'm sure he has various ideas, but unfortunately I don't know.) I was waiting for their reaction with a faint hope that the junior, who is a princess by birth and upbringing, and the senior, who is more like a normal person but has a certain amount of experience as a senior, would be able to understand, but they said, "— — There is nothing strange about it.

"Aah!"

The irregularity of being suddenly interrupted in conversation from behind caused Akiharu to raise his voice involuntarily.

Driven by surprise and embarrassment, I turn around to look at the owner of the voice and am almost taken aback to see that it is

There was Selnia, dressed in her school uniform, with her large volume of blonde hair set in a drill.

I couldn't distinguish her voice because it was so sudden, but it definitely sounded like this driller's high-pitched, clear voice.

What is it about, with its folded arms and somewhat cold gaze, that makes me feel as if my whole body is overflowing with enthusiasm?

It may have been my imagination, but I had to ask first of all to Selnia, who was creating a subtly incongruous atmosphere.

How long have you been here? Have you been hiding and listening to me this whole time?" There is no way I would do such a bad-mannered, idle thing! I just arrived at the cafeteria a few minutes ago, and I just happened to overhear Akiharu talking about the exam.

There is nothing wrong with the explanation of the blonde drill that easily overheats, but there are still a few things that are a bit curious.

So, while Selnia was already clenching her fists and preparing for battle, Akiharu lightly raised his arms to show that he had neither the will to fight nor the will to oppose her, and asked, "Are we having lunch now?" "You're late, just because you don't have afternoon classes.

I had to make a phone call at home. If I had my cell phone with me, I wouldn't have to go through all this trouble.

(alt: "I needed to call home.) Oh, I see.

Since the use of cell phones is prohibited outside of the dormitory except on vacations, they had to go all the way back to the dormitory or borrow a phone from the staff room or office.

Akiharu thinks it is troublesome, but he also agrees that it can't be helped because it is a rule.

"What do you mean, at, it's not strange for an obedience student to be a dance partner in an exam? You're going to tell me, right?"

Now that we understand the reason for the rather late appearance of this group compared to the other cafeteria groups, let us ask the main question once again: "What is the reason for the late appearance of this group?"

Sernea, not being particularly proud of her performance, looked rather calmly with one eye closed and said, "It's fallen into disuse, but in the old days, some servants were allowed to dance at home parties. The stewardess should have been entitled to dance with the most employed of the servants, the lady of the house.

"So,, even butlers and maids are allowed to ballroom dance?"

I'm pretty sure maids aren't supposed to benefit from that. And it's probably not what you think of as ballroom dancing. It's a non-competitive ballroom dance that anyone with a few simple steps and a few tricks can do in no time.

I see.

(alt: "so it is.....") I see.

The commentary was spun as if reading from a script, and even the two little children at the table were amazed.

I'm sure you've heard of it, but why is Pina reacting like it's the first time she's heard of it? Even if they are royalty, right?

It's not a temporary or anything, it's royalty. But, Akihar. My country and England are not so far apart in the whole world, but still there are great cultural differences.

She speaks with a calm tone that is unusual for Pina, who has a low boiling point, and twirls the tip of her twin-tail around her finger, "I don't think any of the parties I hold in my house can be called a home party. If she dances with servants at a banquet to which a state guest or a prominent figure of the country or a person of culture has been invited, it would be a violation of her status as royalty. It is not possible.

"Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah."

Unlike the U.K., Sfor is closed to snow for a long period of time. Except for the occasional festival, there is little noise, and even the upper classes lead a simple life. I have taken to dancing, partly as a form of royal education and partly because I learned it from the openings and endings of cartoons, but I am sure there are many who can't even manage a single step.

Although some unnecessary background information may have been mixed in along the way, it was a very instructive story for Akiharu.

I took it for granted that Pina, a royalty, would have had a better life than Selnia, an aristocrat, but the world is not that simple.

Akihare, who felt he still had a lot to learn, straightened his back, remembering that he was now in the midst of his service activities.

Then, after adjusting the position of the tie, he asked Selnia, making as serious an expression as he could, "What is it that you want me to do?"

By the way, have you decided where you want to eat? If not, please call me.

The other areas they were assigned to were fairly crowded, and the Daichi area was full.

On the other hand, since my area is constantly being vacated, I feel like crying when I say this, but if you want to eat slowly without sharing a table, it should be possible.

In response to our work mode and tone of voice, Selnia said, "We'll have lunch in the dorm cafeteria, so that's fine.

..... She turned it down very easily, without even showing any sign of thinking about it.

This made even Akiharu's cheeks go up, but it couldn't be helped.

I don't understand why, in the normal course of events, one would go to the dining hall and declare that one would not eat there, even though one was running late.

I couldn't help but half-glance at him and say, "....., what the hell are you doing here"?

For some reason, Selnia folded her arms and smiled confidently.

When Akiharu wondered where she got the reason for such an expression, Drill-sama turned his head to the side with a winking look and said, "That, of course, Akiharu, is not because you have some favor to ask me, is it?"

"..... is it?"

What is it about this question that makes it so difficult to respond?

They came to the diner and joined the conversation, so why should I be the one to ask for help?

Not knowing exactly how the situation was unfolding, Akiharu decided to respond frankly.

What makes you think I'd want you to do anything for me?

Oh, it's not an assumption. Is there something about the ball that you don't know?"

"..... mu."

(alt: "..... nothing") The words that came out of Selnia's mouth were, indeed, "I don't care about that.

The answer was not possible because of the momentum.

As you all knew, of course, this driller knows what is involved in the NAT exam.

If this is the case, is it not possible to anticipate and understand the obstacles we are facing?

It's not fun to be slick with Selnia, who looks so proud of herself, as if she can tell by her facial expressions that I'm thinking things over. But I understand too well that I have to be patient if I want to deal with the big problem of the exam.

(alt: You can tell from my expression that I'm deep in thought, and it's kind of uninteresting to be followed by Selnia, who has a proud look on her face. I understand too much.) Although it may seem a bit colorful, an obedience test is a great test.

Evaluations should lead to the future, and even if it's not that dramatic, we want to produce results, not just take an exam.

Since he thought that he should make the necessary efforts for that purpose, the actions that Akiharu should take were quite limited.

..... Well, it can't be helped.

I feel a little annoyed that Selnia is giving me such a big look, but I know I can't turn my back on her.

We should be rather pleased that they are willing to do so.

After taking a pause for a moment, Akiharu looked at Selnia's profile and asked, "Then, may I ask you for a favor?"

I'm sure it's fine. Whether you accept or not, it is a matter of course for a good nobleman to listen to the wishes of those below him.

(alt: "Fufun, that's fine. Putting aside whether or not you accept it, it's only natural for a good noble to listen to the wishes of the lower class.") The classmate who was in a very good mood, with the vertical rolls that had been rolled up in a soft, flowing backwards, said to him with a serious look on his face: "I'm not a good mood person.

"I'm sorry, but would you be willing to accompany me to the dance practice for the examinations to be held at the ball?"

If Akiharu insists, I will practice. What?

Selnia, who had been enjoying herself so much that she couldn't have been more excited, froze with a small question.

The elegant smile has broken down into a half-smile.

Not quite sure why he was reacting that way, Akiharu nodded and said, "Ah, since you already knew what you were going to do for the exam, I was thinking of practicing. I know you are supposed to teach me in class, but I'm a little, no, I'm quite anxious."

"....., are you the type of person who doesn't have much of a sense of rhythm?"

We can only nod our heads in agreement with her straightforward words.

I can do it if I just do the movements I'm supposed to do, but if I have to do it in time to music or at a certain tempo, then I can't do it very well. If you are not good at it, you might end up stepping on or kicking your opponent's foot.

It is one thing to use it as a proverb, but to do it in real life would be a bit unfashionable.

Kicking a young lady in the face is not only a point reduction, but also a severe punishment.

Her father was supposed to be a dexterous man, yet Akiharu cursed his heredity, hearing Selnia's voice moaning from the depths of Daichi.

You want me to go to so I can go to to practice? Is that what you're asking?"

Next Uh, yeah. You're used to that kind of dancing, aren't you, Selnia?

Is there anything else on? On the 24th, more more more!"

No, you don't have to take it personally.

I can't make a bothersome request to someone with an angry shoulder and a clear expression of dissatisfaction.

And, perhaps it is more convenient that someone other than Selnia is also in the immediate vicinity.

When Akiharu looked at Pina with anticipation, she saw Pina staring at her hair, which had developed a habit because of the way she had wrapped it around her fingers for hand games.

The junior, who has the keen sense of perception of a wild animal, immediately noticed that I was watching her, and her eyebrows twitched. "What's wrong with me?"

I thought maybe Pina could teach you how to dance. You said earlier that you learned it as a form of education."

I'm far from a professional, but I could probably teach a beginner a thing or two."

He did not seem very confident, but on the other hand, he did say something that confirmed our expectations to a certain extent.

That's enough. Well, I'm sorry.

(alt: "That's enough. Sorry, but——") Akiharu was pleased with the reply, just as he had expected, and was about to ask Pina for help once again.

Selnia's high-pitched voice rang in my ears as if by surprise.

"Hey, Autumn weather? Are you going to ask Mr. Esto to do this for you?"

"....., yes, but what's the problem?"

From what I've heard, Selnia is not going to be able to do it, and Pina might be able to do it if she can find the time, so I don't see any particular problem.

And yet, for some reason, the drill mistress glared at us with a furrowed brow and said, "You're in big trouble! Asking a princess of a country to teach dancing to a middle school student is a crime! It's a crime!"

Wait a minute! How can practicing dancing be a crime? First of all, I would never do anything strange with a child!

I don't know. Father used to tell me that adolescent men are creatures with delusions of taking advantage of younger, innocent girls!

(alt: "Hmph, I don't know. My father used to say that adolescent boys are delusional creatures who beat innocent young girls!") That's a statement that your father has a serious problem with you. You don't know what you're talking about, but you're making some serious accusations!

I will not allow you to insult my father!

If anything, I'd like to tell him that you're causing his father's dignity and stock price to plummet, but he probably won't get the drill.

I mean, what kind of education is that English gentleman father giving his daughter?

I'm not saying it's a mistake, but it's a statement that can't be wrapped up in anything other than a cover-up.

After getting into a standoff with Selnia, Akiharu wonders what he can say to persuade the Japanese-English quarter girl.

It is a very difficult problem because we have failed at similar problems many times in the past.

..... So I'm a little late to the party.

Who is the child?

I turned around at the sound of an explosive voice and saw Pina trembling, her distinctive silver hair shaking slightly. Well, yes, she's angry without even needing to confirm it.

(alt: When I turned around to hear the voice that sounded like an explosion, I saw Pina trembling with her distinctive silver hair slightly shaking...well, yeah, she was angry without even asking the person herself.) I realized it was a bad idea, but I also understood that it was too late.

Still, Akiharu, trying to hold out a glimmer of hope, hurriedly smiled and put his hand on Pina's shoulder, "No, I mean, it's not that I think you're childish, you know.

(alt: Still, Akiharu tried to pull back a faint hope, smiled in a hurry, put his hand on Pina's shoulder, and said, "No, no, I don't think you're childish. Wh...") What difference does it make?

You are only a few years older than me, and you speak as if you were a child at your age!

I didn't say that much! Besides, you see, only those who are older than me look more mature than their seniors, so they should be fine!

That's no consolation at all! Tell Mina!

"Mimi, Mimi is more mature than Pina! We don't do that together."

"No, you're a traitor even this close to home.?"

..... No. Instead of cooling down the heat, it heated up.

Moreover, even senior employees who had nothing to do with it were involved.

While Akiharu was feeling despair at the helplessness of the situation, Pina, who got off the chair as if she was flying, glared at us intensely and said, "Yes, I feel bad! I'm going to have to go back to my room and watch Magical Diva from the first episode to the OVA version!

Hey, wait! You're not going to practice with me? Besides, you're just doing what you want to do, right?

They will not listen to you! You always, always, Akiharu, always try to upset my delicate mind.!

(alt: "You don't have ears to listen! Seriously, always, always, Akiharu is stroking my delicate spirit...!") After the threat is over, Pina leaves the dining room with a rough gait.

Akiharu reached out his hand to look at her back, but not knowing what to say to her, he could only look away.

In addition, Minami also left, leaving a protesting look in her eyes. In the end, the only one left in the area was Selnia, and Akiharu let out a deep breath.

(alt: On top of that, Mina also left with a look of protest on her face... In the end, the only one left in the area she was in charge of was Selnia, and Akiharu let out a deep sigh.) I'm going to be in deep quiet later on with this ugliness."

I think it's almost a done deal, since they had to send out the person they should have served in such a bad mood.

Including the fact that I almost forgot I was in the middle of a community service activity and got so rowdy that I spent about 30 minutes in the sauna room doing push-ups while reading my reflections. I can't complain since it was partly my own fault, but still, Akiharu looked at the culprit, the blonde driller.

You know,, this kind of thing is called business obstruction. Do you know that?"

I know it won't make much sense, but I'll say it nonetheless. Selnia huffs and folds her arms, sniffs, and says, "Hmm, you might want to put your hand on your chest and think about who's to blame. I just saved a future middle school student from a crisis."

So I have no guilt uh anymore."

Scratching his head, Akiharu interrupts what he was about to say.

There is no point in arguing with Selnia here, since Pina is already gone.

Instead, it will only make the situation worse.

Patience, patience, patience with an adult's response.

..... What a stressful place to work, isn't it, Hakuryo?

I decided to take it all in stride for the future and let Selnia take some of the responsibility instead.

So, what are you going to do about my missing training partner? Don't tell me you're not going to take me up on this at this point in my career?"

I know my language is a bit harsh, but I would like to be forgiven for this in extenuating circumstances.

Selnia, who was looking at me for sincerity, seemed to huff and puff and said, "..... I don't have a choice. It's too good for Akiharu, but I'll give you a dance lesson.

He responds well, even though he is extremely condescending.

While Akiharu was feeling down, thinking that although it was quite complicated, at least there was a harvest, so it was all good, a chime suddenly echoed through the cafeteria.

"Well, I guess the service is over. We have afternoon classes, so we're going, but could you text me a good time to practice later?"

..... is good, but"

I couldn't see the expression on Selnia's face as she spoke because she was cleaning up the table that Pina and her friends were using.

I turned around without resting my hand and saw that he was looking at me with a slightly wrinkled brow and a searching look, just as I imagined from his voice.

..... Is that really all there is to it? Are you sure that's all there is to it?

"And, in particular, "Now. The exam is very important right now.

So I'm going to Oh, for heaven's sake! I'll make a fool of you later, when you remember that you're a bad person.

Saying or rather, in a fit of anger, Selnia turns on her heel and walks out of the dining room.

The sudden departure of the drills, which disturbed the scene, must have turned them into hurricanes.

The shapes are common.

After seeing that her rough classmates had disappeared, Akiharu heads to the back of the kitchen, holding a tray with glasses and other items in one hand.

As I watched the other students in the obedience course tidying up, my mind wandered back to my classmates in the quarter, who were still looking angry.

Although he did not know why Selnia was in such a bad mood, Akiharu had his own opinion on the matter, even without considering the current situation.

So I elbowed Daichi lightly on the shoulder as we met at the kitchen sink, and said, "Hey, I need you to do me a favor:?"

He succeeds in quickly securing an appointment with his roommate, who nods her head with a hint of surprise.

As we approach the last event of the year, I have a strong feeling that things are generally going well.

..... Well, except for the fact that the key test partner is still undecided.

..... is totally impossible.

Walking back to her dormitory, Selnia muttered for the first time in the past ten minutes and looked back toward the school building where the cafeteria was located.

This does not mean that I can't see Akiharu Hino, the cause of my anger, but I still stare at the small school building in the distance with the intention of expressing my resentment toward that man who is supposed to be over there.

People went to the cafeteria when they had nothing else to do.!

(alt: "People took the trouble to go to the cafeteria even though they had nothing else to do...!")

I told them that I had to call my parents.

He also mentioned that he had to eat in the dormitory because he had not yet had his meals.

....., and you go all the way to the diner, and then you ask, "Do you need me to do something for you?"

I asked him, "Why did he do that?" and he said "Why did he do that? Why doesn't he come to me and ask for a partner card?

Even though I stepped on the brick-paved sidewalk with great force, as if the heel of my shoe would break, it did not relieve my stress at all.

With a little thought, you should be able to figure out what they were doing there.

No, it was the day after the exam was announced, and we were in the middle of discussing the exam, so they should have casually handed the card to someone or asked us what our plans were for the day.

..... So why is it that those bonkers folks are asking me half-heartedly to be their dance training partner?! With her indignation unquenched, Selnia glares once more at the school building before walking back to her dormitory.

However, I can't get the event that just happened out of my mind.

I think it's still unnatural that you didn't mention the partner card in that context. If they dared to avoid talking about it, it would have been

As she mulled over the possibilities, Selnia suddenly noticed something that stopped her in her tracks.

"..... already got a card from someone?"

If that is the case, it is understandable that they do not ask for the second card.

However, this raises a different issue or question.

Tëm, who gave you the card?

Selnia immediately thought of her arch-enemy, a female student in her class.

Tomomi Saikei, who is also a childhood friend of Akiharu Hino, would have moved this morning, or even yesterday when the card was distributed.

If you were waiting for Akiharu to call out to you with a little time to spare, and on the contrary, you were taking the lead, then you were completely late to the game.

But even if that were the case, "I don't want to give you my card and say, 'I want you to be my partner,' for any reason whatsoever.!"

(alt: But even if that's the case, "If there's a reason, I definitely don't want to hand over my card and say, 'I want you to name me as your partner'...!") Even if she had a certain amount of affection for him, Selnia's pride would not allow her to take advantage of that impudent commoner.

I'd like to see Tomomi and Akiharu dance at the ball without doing anything.

(alt:But I also don't want to see Tomomi and Akiharu dancing at the ball without doing anything.) And to be so gracious as to give her a dance lesson.

Selnia shakes her head to drive out the sight, which makes her blood pressure rise just thinking about it, and further multiplies her mood.

I kick the brick-paved ground with a fast walk as if seeking an outlet for my stress.

It is still unclear whether Tomomi gave the card to Akiharu or not.

If they had given it to him, he would have likely provoked one or two of them, so I think a 50-50 split is a reasonable line to take.

.....

What if I didn't receive the card from Tomomi Saikei? If so, doesn't that simply mean that she had no intention of receiving the card from him? You are really an unbelievable person,!

The unpleasant sound of teeth grinding against each other echoes in my skull.

I did it unconsciously, but it was all his fault.

That's what I decided.

"If this is how it's going to be, I'm going to be mean! If Akiharu doesn't give me the partner card, I'll never give it to you.!"

Selnia, who had been standing out in the cold with no one else in the room, was determined not to give in.

I was so excited that I was surprised when my friends met me in the hallway of the dormitory.

I'm not sure how many times I've thought about this school since I came to Hakuryo, but I don't know what to think anymore.

(alt: ◆ ◇ This school is strange in various ways——How many times have I thought since I came to the White Mausoleum, Akiharu no longer knows what to do.) The events were all that out of the ordinary, and most of them should have been related to events organized by the school.

So, as usual, we should probably say, but this time it was so half-baked that it made us want to twist our heads in puzzlement.

..... Why does this school even bother to hold the closing ceremony on a national holiday?"

I don't know when it started, but it seems that for at least twenty years now, the last day of school for the second semester has been December 23.

(alt: "I don't know when, but it seems that the closing ceremony for the second semester has been held on December 23rd for at least twenty years.") Selnia responded to her single-minded mutterings, and Akiharu was able to find a place in "A Studio".

The door with a plate on it opens and he turns around.

Where did you get that information?"

My mother is also from Hakuryo. I remember hearing about it when I was in middle school.

"So it was so. It's quite emotional for parents and children to go to the same school for two generations."

There are several similar students at Hakuryo. That's not the point."

I took the trouble to stand next to the open door and offer to let her in, but for some reason, Selnia looked at me with a stern look.

I felt a grudge in their eyes, and the pressure was too much.

Not understanding why Akiharu would look at her that way in the midst of her act of kindness, Selnia glanced back and asked, "..... Why is Shikikagami here, too?"

I have mentioned another person who was present.

But that's exactly what Akiharu is asking, "Why?"

I want to ask back.

No, I don't mean that Shikikagami is here. I mean, why are you asking me at this time?

After the closing ceremony and class LHR, it was decided that the students would meet in front of the second school building at 2:00 p.m. after lunch.

The first to arrive at the site was Akiharu, followed by Shikikagami.

After Selnia arrived at the end, we moved to the school building, unlocked the special classroom for the first time with the key we had borrowed from the office, and finally went inside to practice the dance.

If you had asked me earlier, for example in front of the school building, I would have explained it to you on the spot.

Akiharu, who had assumed that since he was not asked for any explanation, he had realized and understood the situation at first glance, looked at Shikikagami to see if he felt any awkwardness at Selnia's statement.

The maid-swathed classmate who had caught their attention immediately transformed her staring face into a bright, bouncing smile and said, "Well, I heard that Ms. Hino is going to teach Ms. Selnia how to dance, so I thought I'd come and teach her with you!

I'd like to teach you, but unlike the average person out there, Shikikagami has been to many dance parties, hasn't she?"

Well, she is the daughter of a prominent family, the Hakujo family, that seems to have fallen from grace a while ago, so it should be no surprise that she has experienced at least that much.

However, recalling the actual dance instruction class, Akiharu could not agree with Selnia's words lightly.

I've never been good at dancing, but when it comes to male roles, I'm in a really bad mood. so I want to get as good as I can so I don't cause you guys any trouble at the ball tomorrow."

Shikikagami's determination and ambition are admirable, but at the very least, what she did in class yesterday was more than just a nuisance; it was a minor human disaster.

Fukakan is so great that he predicted the outcome and made his Shikikagami opponent wear safety shoes with steel plates.

And even then, the other person would say, "Ow! Sanae, it hurts! It's a give!

The guy who made them scream was also amazing.

In just two hours of practice, she stepped on her opponent's foot, reaved him vigorously, and even missed a turn to elbow Roar in the back of the head.

So Akiharu put his hand on Selnia's slender shoulder and said, "I'm asking you to do something for me too. I don't want to see a lot of injuries and problems, but I also don't think it's right to keep them out of the loop.

That's certainly true, but if it's Saori-san, shouldn't it be okay?"

If all you want to do is dance in the exam, you can do it. But that's not really the case, is it?"

Although the role is part of the examinations for the education department, the male roles are only available because of the overwhelming shortage of male dancers at the ball, and of course the roles continue after the examinations.

According to the excellent lesson given by Shinkan, apparently, this kind of dance is not to dance with the same partner for a long time, but to change partners as you go along, to deepen friendship, or to show off yourself.

In other words,, it is not a matter of one person being sacrificed.

However, as a rule, male dancers are not allowed to choose a partner and ask for a dance. Of course, without a partner, you are a wallflower.

..... However, it's not as if we don't do our best in the hope that this will happen.

This is especially true since Shikikagami is overflowing with enthusiasm.

Serunia seemed to understand this, and even though she wrinkled her brow with difficulty, it was softened with a small exhale.

I understand now. I'll be strict with you since I'm teaching you, but is it okay with you, Shikikagami?"

Yes, I'm fine! Despite the fact that I look like this, I actually like to be punished and hurt!

The strange coming out came in with vigor and vitality.

..... No, wait, I'm sure this is just a figure of speech, and it must mean that he genuinely likes practicing and training.

(alt:No, wait, this must be a trick of the word, and it must be that he genuinely likes practice and special training.) If not, Shikikagami will become a mere metamorphosis, passing for natural.

That should not be the case, by any means.

Akiharu, who reconsidered his decision for the sake of his schoolmate's honor, saw Selnia with her cheeks drawn back and her eyes twinkling, and thought that he probably had this expression too, and said, "..... Please, for that reason. We don't have much time.

..... Yeah. Okay, I understand.

(alt: "... yes. I understand...") The voice came back with a lot less motivation and energy, but it was unavoidable.

To be honest, I feel it's better that I'm not going home right now.

Although tired before the start, Akiharu and his team entered Studio A, took off their shoes, and put them in their lockers.

The hallway and the wall opposite the lockers were mirrored.

The bar in front of the mirrors is the kind you might see at a ballet rehearsal, and the wooden floor is hard but feels resilient, making it quite authentic.

..... Well, I'm not impressed at this point in time.

I am no longer surprised that a school with a horseback riding arena and an all-weather heated pool has studio facilities that look like they belong in a gymnasium.

So when I entered my friend's room for the first time, I thought, "Wow, I didn't know they did it this way.

With a reaction so thin that one would think that she was wearing a pair of indoor sneakers she had brought with her, Akiharu put on a pair of sneakers.

I heard that special shoes would be better, but I don't have such shoes, and it's not possible to buy them just for this purpose.

While you wait for them to change their shoes, as you did, take off your morning coat and do some light preparation.

I really want to change into a jersey or something, but I'm wearing a uniform for the actual event, and since I did the winter mountain climbing in a uniform, I don't think it's too difficult to move around now.

As I finished bending over, Selnia and her friends came up to me in their uniforms without their coats and said, "Let's begin. Have you learned the basic movements?"

When he announced the start of practice, Akiharu responded with a nod and said, "Oh, just in case. It's just that it's a little difficult to improvise, or dance somehow in accordance with the song and the situation.

I'm not very good at leading, so I get tangled up in my head pretty quickly, and then I find myself getting tangled up in my body as well"

..... I think I've got it pretty much figured out.

(alt: "... I understand most of it.") Serunia was completely unaware of what Shikikagami was talking about, but she understood her words while giving a somewhat thoughtful gesture.

This is a testament to the fact that they have all been in the same consistent school since they were small children.

In front of Akiharu, who was impressed, Drill-san, who played the role of a reliable teacher, put his hand on his waist and loosened his mouth confidently, "It's not a problem that can be fixed by talking about it. The best shortcut is to gain experience rather than practice.

Does that mean I have to dance all the time?

You are a poor thinker if you think that just doing a lot of work is enough to gain experience.

Selnia, who had dismissed my answer out of hand, continued in a tone of rebuke for the student's poor performance.

The key is to get a sense of success. Even if you have learned to dance to some extent through hard work, when the time comes to perform, if the memory of failure is still strong, it will cause you to lose your rhythm and your footing will become doubtful. That's why it's so important to keep repeating good results.

"Oh,, I see."

As long as you stay calm and just let the music take over, ballroom dancing is not that difficult. In fact, it's so easy to do that it's almost a little disconcerting.

When I hear you say that with such confidence, I feel like I can do it.

How bad was it in the classroom? How bad was it in the classroom?

I am appalled at my own simplicity, but it is much better than doing it while thinking I can't do it at all.

In this kind of thing, it's important to be prepared.

After getting back into the swing of things, Akiharu went to the center of the studio to start practicing immediately. Is Shikikagami ready?"

Yes, anytime!

I'm going to play music on with that equipment. Do you know how to use that?"

When I ask her, pointing to a classroom-size device in the corner, she frowns and nods.

I know what it is because it seems to be from the same manufacturer as the one I have used several times. It probably has the orthodox songs, so if I could just get a list..."

"Maybe that's the file on the shelf over there. You see, it's labeled "track number."

While changing shoes, I noticed something on the shelf next to the locker that looked like a locker.

It looks like a good start for them, as they can find what they need without difficulty.
I was just told to be positive, and although it's a small thing, I think it's good to cherish these aspects of our lives in order to build an image of success.

The only thing that bothers me is why is that driller staring at me like he is looking at a junior officer suspected of espionage?

It would be difficult to leave it at that, but we can only use the studio until 3:30 p.m.

Since the students from the upper elementary school who have applied for permission to use the room will use it from there, they will only have about an hour to practice, including cleanup time.

So, Akiharu decided to ignore it while still feeling a lot of discomfort and said, "Yes, I'm going to do it. Shikikagami, I'm sorry, but can you ask me to play the other player first?"

Oh, yes. I'll be fine later!"

Hey! You weren't supposed to tell me what to do!

A voice like a spear with a sharp point came flying at me.

Though quite surprised by the sudden loud voice, Akiharu managed to keep her scream deep in her throat and turned around.

Then I see Selnia's mood double from questioning to angry, so I try to act nonchalant and say, "Well, of course I'm going to do that, but..."

If that's the case, then why is it that Shikikagami is going to be my opponent and not me?

What?" Since you're going to teach me, wouldn't it be easier for you to see what's wrong with me if you could see it from the side?"

In fact, when Fukakan would teach me how to dance, she would call on someone else instead of herself as a partner.

So naturally, I thought that if there was one more person, not just two, then Selnia would be the one to give me advice, but I was thinking that everyone has their own way of doing things, so maybe it's different for everyone. "Eh, you're right!"

..... No way, I got a full affirmation with anger.

Is this drill really safe?

He lacks the calmness to suggest that he should stay somewhere in the countryside or at a hot springs resort.

As Akiharu looked on, feeling somewhat uneasy, the quarter noblewoman with angry shoulders and frustrated eyes filled with a hint of resentment, opened her mouth with her cheeks pulled back.

..... Enough already! Let's get started!

(alt: "... Enough! Let's get started!") Yes. Yes.

(alt: "Yes yes") "..... Oh."

(alt: "..... king") Unlike Shikikagami, who reacted like a child being scolded, Akiharu responded by expressing his unconvinced feelings.

However, since we agreed that we should practice immediately, we did not dare to push back.

As I looked at the instructor with a certain feeling, Selnia stood on the spot with her nose in the air and said, "At first, we will not use music, but will beat the rhythm with hand claps for ease of understanding. We're going to count one, two, three, and so on as we go along, but I think is good enough for now, don't you?"

Oh, just in case. I do remember how to get there.

I'm okay too. It's like we go, we cuddle, and then we go again, right?"

..... I'm fine with the general nuance. I'm still a little nervous about it, though.

(alt: "... I'm fine with the rough nuances. I'm still worried, but...") I can understand how Selnia's expression is clouded.

I am even convinced that we share the same anxiety, so I probably should have a similar look on my face.

It's OK if you get stepped on, but I hope you don't get hit in the back of the head with a barging hip throw like Todoroki did.

I saw it being thrown in front of me, but it was too fast for me to properly catch it, and the level of damage that would knock Roar out for a few minutes would be enough for an ordinary person like me to be hospitalized in an emergency.

As Akiharu was thinking seriously about how to prevent such a situation from happening, he heard Selnia's high-pitched voice.

And then, Akiharu. You don't have to play a man's role, but first play a woman's role.

What? and I don't mind, but why?"

I think it's because I can learn faster that way. For Shikikagami, leading an unfamiliar opponent is also good practice.

Is that what is for?

I don't really understand the logic behind this, but since he says it so confidently, it must be true.

The first thing to do is to take a look at the "Shikikagami" and see if you can find anything that you can use to help you.

I've never played a female role before, so I'm not sure what to do and how to do it, and it makes me nervous.

(alt: I have no experience playing female roles, so I don't know what to do and I get restless.)

Perhaps reading our state of mind, Selnia put her hands on her hips and held them wide, "The only thing you have to do, Akiharu, is to trust your partner and surrender yourself to him. If you match your partner's movement, your body will naturally follow, right? So, don't panic, don't make a fuss, just trust in Shikikagami and believe in her.

"Trust or"

Shikikagami should lead with confidence. There is no need to panic if there is no danger of bumping into others, is there? I know that I don't need to teach you step and turn techniques at this point, so don't worry about making a few mistakes, just dance and think about guiding your inexperienced partner.

Yes! I have confidence and I always have confidence, so you can count on me!

..... That makes me very uneasy.

Do we really have to put our full trust in such a person?

Although he feels danger close at hand, Shikiho is full of enthusiasm and has nothing to say.

And while I was still unable to overcome my anxiety, Selnia finally announced not the execution, but the start of the practice.

Shikikagami. I will tell you if there is anything you need to know, so please try to dance with as much confidence as you can.

..... is like...

(alt: "..... Yes") It's important to relax and not become too rigid.

Although there are only two main points, Akiharu thinks that it must be rather difficult because of the mental aspect, but he immediately understands that this is not the time to be so absorbed in worrying about other people.

Unfortunately, he was not as bold as he had been when looking at the mirror in the four seasons, and could not remain in a daze when he felt Selnia's eyes on him, as if she were looking at a useless hunting dog that was scared of a small bird.

What are you doing? Let's get started.

"Oh, oh. I'll leave it to you then."

Although she wanted to relax, Akiharu responded with nervousness under pressure, wiping her sweaty palms with her trousers.

After becoming more aware of her role as a woman, she reaches for the Shikikagami again.

I immediately took a half-step closer to to see if I could get a close-up of his face, which is natural, but very embarrassing.

Although I am not usually aware of it, Shikikagami is also a beautiful woman, as her sister Saori is a model who has made a big leap forward since her debut.

She looks like the type of person who would look outstanding in a kimono, rather than a maid's outfit, if she were to serve as the hostess of an inn, and since she has been reminded of her good looks many times in the past, there is no need to remind her of them.

..... and zero weird meanings or anything? I'm not guilty of anything, just that I've fallen prey to happenings like getting close to them, seeing them in their swimsuits, and so on.

Anyway, usually they hug me or shoot me in the face with force, but when we are facing each other quietly like this, I suddenly feel restless.

In such a state, he put his hand on my back, so I was afraid to put my hand on Shikikagami's back and "..... Akiharu, are you seriously going to do this? Are you seriously going to do this?

Cerne's cold voice pierced through from the side, as if she didn't take the gesture seriously, "You need to pull your body closer to the body! "You have to lean into it!

"..... I get it, but why the temper tantrum"

I'll tell you what! You're a hundred light years too early to be talking back to me!

When I interrupted him, his tone of voice sounding as if he was choking back his anger, he stepped up a gear and yelled back at me.

It's unreasonable, and light-years are about distance, not time.

If it is a misunderstanding, it would be human kindness to correct it, but I am afraid to do so, so I have no choice but to remain silent.

And the second half of the story, however, is true.

It is impossible to be shy and only half-heartedly do things when someone is trying to teach you.

Akiharu reminded himself that this was a serious dance practice, and his somewhat hesitant body was much closer to the dance floor.

Our clothes were on the verge of touching each other's chests, and the tension level was even higher, but I managed to pull my chin back and look at the mirror without averting my gaze.

I ignored the close eye-to-eye contact, as well as the warmth of her body and the faint sound of her heartbeat coming from her hand on her back through the thick winter fabric of her maid's outfit.

You may feel your face heat up, but you will pretend that it is just your imagination.

At, we clap our hands. Ms. Shikikagami, if you could start at your own timing, that would be fine.

A dry hand clap echoed through the studio after a voice that sounded somewhat inorganic.

Shikikagami moves her lips in rhythm with her partner, and Akiharu watches her partner's face to make sure he is always ready for her.

One, two, three, one, two, three!

"..... 大丈夫か、四季 鏡？

Yes! I'm going to Oh, no, no, not yet, next time!"

It is obvious that she is very excited, and this makes us feel strangely excited, but Akiharu pulls her chin back and concentrates.

If you are not careful, you could be thrown to the ground and end up in the hospital with severe damage, so be on the alert.

The fact that I am somehow able to keep myself from running out of control despite the abundance of elements that could easily mislead me, such as the slight touch of my clothes on my chest and my increasingly hot palm, is due in large part to the cold eye of Mr. Drill, who is my mentor.

But if you don't do it soon, it's hard to endure, because your mental energy is being drained away, so Akiharu wondered whether he should urge her to start or not. "..... Hey, Shikikagami," he said, "I'm not sure if I can do it.

(alt: However, if you don't do it quickly, just enduring it will hurt your mental strength, so Akiharu worried about whether or not to urge him to start.) Almost at the same time I was about to ask her if she wanted to finish up, Shiki's eyes widened and she said, "I'm going to do it!

"Oh,!"

With the declaration, they started to move forward, and Akiharu hurriedly followed them.

I had no time to think about taking the first step backward because I was playing the role of a woman, and I was pushed almost to the ground and somehow managed to retreat without falling down.

The music is not playing, but instead, Selnia is clearly marking three beats, and Shikikagami moves in time to the beats.

Akiharu had learned all the steps and was sure she could handle the turns if she just took her time Hah! Shikikagami, go a little slower!

And, but! If I move any slower, I'm going to lose my balance!"

In fact, not only the Shikikagami, but also this one is in a very messy state.

It should not be moving that fast, but for some reason, it feels as if it is moving so rapidly that it is difficult just to keep up with it.

In addition, perhaps because we are not breathing together, the timing of our movements is always delayed. Because of this, Shikikagami's chest is pressed against me with a feeling of being squashed, her legs are almost entangled, and our faces are so close together that we are almost touching cheek to cheek.

(alt: On top of that, maybe because I wasn't breathing properly, the timing to start moving was delayed no matter what... Because of that Shikikagami pressed against me with the feeling of being crushed, and my legs almost got tangled up. His face was so close that he could almost touch his cheeks, and he was mentally cornered.) As a result, what should have been an easy step became a struggle, and I became increasingly impatient.

"Ooooh?"

Finally, or perhaps I should say finally, Shikikagami fell down first, losing his balance in a spectacular manner.

Akiharu was unsteady on his feet mid-turn and was pulled along by Shikisyo, who was still holding his hand.

The moment I felt a jolt, my vision became slanted, and I immediately thought, "This is bad. I am not able to do anything about it anymore.

It is impossible to resist, and although I wish I could at least protect Shikikagami, the source of the problem is lying on his back on the floor.

If that is the case, I would like to avoid Shikikagami somehow and fall down, but that is also impossible.

The Shikikagami guy was holding my hand so tightly that it looked as if he was holding a lifeline.

I mean, it hurts, it hurts so bad it feels like it's going to crush my hand.!

..... and bury your face in a big chest.

"Huh.!"

Sorry. Did it hurt?"

Akiharu immediately apologizes and raises his free hand as if to appeal, saying that it was just an accident and he had no other intention.

Instinct booms at the instantaneous departure of such a wonderful sensation, but we ignore it. If you follow them one by one, there is no end to it, or you might become a criminal.

I looked at Shiki's face in the mirror with a mixture of worry and guilt, and the maid-clad classmate who had been cracking her eyes open nodded her head while lying on her back and said, "Yes, I'm fine. I'm fine. My health and sturdiness are the only things that keep me going.

"..... Right?"

I think there is something wrong with the specifications for the daughter of a former prominent family, but, hey, it's Shikikagami.

It seemed as if he fell down with great vigor, but there was not even the slightest sign of pain. I have no other choice but to agree.

While Akiharu was relieved that there were no injuries, a voice with a mixture of sighs came down from above.

..... Are you two working seriously?"

I understand very well what Selnia, with her eyebrows raised and her hand on her temple, means when she says this.

So Akiharu stood up and pulled Shikikagami up by the hand, "As you can see, I'm not very good at all, but I'm serious.

..... is not something you want to take lightly.

(alt: "... it's not like you're going to make a cheap deal...") Akiharu had no words to reply to what was muttered to him gravely.

In fact, if you were to ask me to take what I just saw and bring it up to a slightly better level in an hour or so, even a professional instructor would say, "I'm sorry, I can't do that.

(alt: In fact, if you look at what I'm doing now and tell me to bring it up to a slightly better level in an hour or so, even a professional instructor would say, "Sorry, I can't.") I might refuse.

But since I'm looking at a noblewoman with a lot of pride, I don't pause to give up, even though I'm getting a headache.

I think it's a great idea, and I appreciate it very much.

Even if you go to

While Akiharu was wondering if it would actually be possible to solve the problem today or tomorrow, he heard a clear voice that blew his worries away.

Well, now even the stupid people should understand the importance of the lead, right, Shikikagami? I'll show you a sample, and you can take a turn.

Huh?" Oh, yes, I'm the musician, right?"

No, you don't have to do anything. Instead, I need you to watch me very carefully.

Akiharu, who had been idly watching Selnia approaching while issuing instructions, noticed the change in timing and became a bit panicked.

"Oh, that? Me and you?

Yes, it is. Akiharu, you will play the male role. But observe my movements so that you may follow Shikikagami's example.

..... that's a lot more difficult than just dancing.

(alt: "... That's more difficult than just dancing, but...") I don't need to whine. First of all, if you actually do it, you'll soon realize that it's not so difficult.

I was told this in no uncertain terms, but it didn't make any sense to me.

But there is no time to argue, and since Shikikagami has moved to the edge of the room so as not to get in the way, I have no choice but to make a decision.

When Akiharu held out his hand to her, Selnia took it without hesitation and said, "One of the things that went wrong earlier was that you, as a woman, didn't surrender yourself to your partner properly.

What exactly are you talking about?"

The difficulty of taking a lead will increase if the other party is not cooperating. That's why we've created

The hand is cold compared to the Shiki mirror, Akiharu thought as he listened to the explanation, but a soft tickle on the tip of his nose pulled him back to consciousness, and he said, ".....?

It was there that I finally realized what kind of situation I was in.

Selnia is even closer to Shikikagami than when they were working together earlier, and they are almost in close proximity.

Naturally, the clothes weren't even touching, but were pressing against my breasts to the point where I could feel their elasticity. What, is that it? Is it a new kind of trap called a sex trick, or is he trying to make it look like she's at an age where she misses human skin and is trying to make it look like she's a mackerel fold? I can't. I have to calm down.

Then, both the former and the latter will be defeated in the end.

But the fact of the matter is, this attack is powerful.

In my head, I'm "cool."

The "I'm not going to let you go," the warning bells are ringing loudly, and yet you can't move away, shake off the hand, or vice versa.

As Akiharu became completely immobilized, Selnia's expression turned quizzical a few dozen centimeters away.



..... Hey, it's autumn weather. It's getting hard.

"Aaah! No, it was a misunderstanding or a mistake or something.

He is nervous all the way around. Can't you at least relax your shoulders?"

I'm going to go to "....., uh, yeah. I got it."

I think I may have succeeded in relaxing.

I was in such a hurry because I had made a stupid mistake, and I was quite distracted.

However, the situation is still very close, and although it is probably much better than before, I still feel a little nervous.

"Hey, wouldn't it be easier to dance a little further back?"

When Akiharu asked her, hiding the real reason why she was so bad at it, Selnia narrowed her sky-blue eyes and said, "If you were good at dancing, we wouldn't be so close to each other and we'd be able to keep our distance. If you weren't so good at dancing, you wouldn't be so close to me, even though you don't want to be.

"U....., is that so?"

It's easier for us to lead from here. "Follow my movements, Akiharu, and memorize the sensation of dancing in your body.

You're the lead, right?

Just as she was about to express her doubts, Selnia's face suddenly moved slightly backward.

Naturally, my body was pulled along with it, and I naturally stepped forward.

Selnia took the next step, turned her body, and made her turn, so there was no time for Akiharu to remain surprised and calm.

There was no music and no clapping.

The only sound is the scrape of the soles of my shoes against the floor.

I was surprised in a different way than before because there was no lethargy in Selnia's movements, and before I knew it, my body was moving naturally along with hers.

The awkwardness is probably my own fault, but it is still a far cry from when I was dancing with Shikikagami.

This certainly explains why lead is so important.

I thought I was more attached than I should be, but now that I'm being guided in this way, I can see that it's appropriate.

Moreover, before she knew it, the leadership of the dance had been handed over from Selnia to herself, and Akiharu could not help but be impressed.

I was so surprised and thrilled that my mind was completely blank, but to be able to lead them so brilliantly is nothing short of amazing.

I wonder how much time had passed, but after several turns since the initiative had passed to Akiharu, Selnia suddenly stopped and opened her mouth.

Well, that's about it.

He takes his hand away from hers and steps back, keeping his distance, but his tone is not boastful, and although his face is a little red from the exercise, he does not seem self-conscious about it.

Does this mean that it really wasn't a big deal for Selnia?

I think he did a pretty amazing thing without even trying.

The lady of the house is an amazing creature,.....," said Akiharu as he looked at her, and Selnia folded her arms and looked back at him with a challenging look, "The lead role requires more than skill, but confidence and a careful attention to detail as you dance and care for your

partner. There are other dancers in the dance hall, and it is the duty of the gentlemen to avoid contact with them.

It's like being told that something is several times harder than remembering a complicated step.

Shikikagami seemed to agree with Akiharu's words as he grunted, nodding his head in agreement.

Perhaps not pleased with the attitude of the two temporary students, Selnia changed her expression to a stern one, put her hands on her hips, and said, "Then we'll have a lesson! We don't have much time, so we can't waste even a second!

Your motivating declaration is very much appreciated.

(alt: I am very grateful for the declaration full of motivation... but.) As for Akiharu, who does not feel like he will be able to do anything at all, he nodded his head with a shallow hope that he will be able to do at least a little better in time.

I was thinking, "I'm probably going to be very tired.

..... Most predictions that don't have to be good are usually good, right?

I sounded very tired, but I knew it couldn't be helped, so I let out a small breath.

An hour of dance training was far more demanding than I had anticipated, and to be honest, I feel like I need to take a break somewhere right now.

Shikikagami, who went to return the key to the studio, was also somewhat unsteady, but like myself, I think his head was tired, not that his physical strength had bottomed out.

As a result of their hasty response to Selnia's instructions and continuous practice with no breaks, both Shiki and herself were able to dance in a way that made them look good, so it seems that the teaching methods were appropriate, even though they were spartan.

I am very thankful to you. Now I may be able to save myself the embarrassment of going to"

Selnia, who was walking in front of them wearing a bright white coat, turned her face toward them and gave them a look that was hard to tell whether it was one of dismay or disdain.

"You took my teachings, didn't you? If you make any mistakes, I will make it very difficult for you later.

..... Uyi, hang in there."

Although her response lacks panache, Selnia looks forward with a small sniff, as if she is satisfied for the moment.

While gazing at his back, which looks thin and small in spite of his height, Akiharu scratches his head.

The cool air feels good on my tired body, and the sense of accomplishment helps me feel a little sleepy, but I can't sleep for a while yet.

Since I have to leave Hakuryo later in the day, I will probably be able to take a relaxing bath after dinner.

I was thinking about whether I would like to eat something sweet on the way out when I noticed that I was near the path that leads to the dormitories of the upper and lower education departments.

I'll tell you what...

As Akiharu was about to thank Selnia one last time, Selnia suddenly stopped in front of her.

Hooked by this, Akiharu stopped and looked at his classmate's face, who was glancing back at him, and a question came to his mind.

Have you decided who you're going to take the test with tomorrow?

Uh,"

Unexpectedly, this question was not expected, but it is quite normal to be interested in the subject.

All I've been doing up until now is practicing for that exam.

..... but to be honest, it is quite difficult to answer.

It is inevitable that they will be appalled at what we are saying now.

However, there was no way to avoid answering, so Akiharu bit down on his awkwardness and opened his mouth while putting his hand on the safety pin in his right ear.

That hasn't been decided yet.

Is that what you mean when you say, "I'm lost? You are a very proud man for such a crude, commoner creature.

No, no, no, no, no.

When I waved my hand sideways toward Mr. Drill, who seemed to have misunderstood me, he gave me a dubious look.

To correct his mistake, Akiharu let out a small breath and said, "I haven't received cards from anyone yet, so that means I may not be able to participate if I don't do anything.

I think and say to myself, "I'm not worthy of this.

We have tried approaching some of them, but with no success.

I tried to talk to some of the less friendly upperclassmen, but they either screamed and ran away or broke down in tears, as usual.

I will do everything I can until the time limit of tomorrow's ball, but in this condition, it may be difficult to participate.

Well, even if you don't take the exam, you will still be a dance partner, so your practice should not be in vain.

..... Well, it is obvious that most of the upper secondary students will avoid you, so you may only be able to deal with a few people at best.

So, as for Akiharu, tomorrow's exam is important, but there is something I need to ask him about immediately, so I wanted to take care of that first.

I had been looking for the right time to ask him since this morning, but since it was almost evening, I didn't have much time.

I'm sure Selnia will feel a sense of accomplishment from a successful dance lesson, and since it's not a big deal, I'm sure she'll be able to answer easily.

(alt: Now that the dance lesson went well, the instructor, Selnia, must have a sense of accomplishment, and since it's not a big deal, she should be able to answer without hesitation.)

Akiharu, who had been thinking so, finally realized when he was about to ask a question.

I was not able to see her, but I saw her.

Although her face is not very visible from her slightly prone position, her tightly knit lips and angry shoulders give off a swarthy atmosphere.

Fists clenched tightly are shaking and this is definitely a critical situation, on the verge of eruption.

But I don't know why or what triggered it.

(alt: But I don't know why or what triggered it.) In front of Akiharu, who was too upset to ask the question she was supposed to ask, Selnia slightly opened her lips, from which a white sigh escaped.

"You still haven't given me, you mean?"

..... The sound of murmurs that sound like the grinding of various negative emotions can be heard, and Akiharu unintentionally takes a step back.

Then Selnia looked up, her eyes piercing, "Then why didn't you come to me and ask for the card?

A strong voice, a mixture of yells and screams, came into my ears.

The force and the anger that was contained in it made Akiharu's cheeks go up, but if you think about it carefully, what he just said is a little strange.

Because the way you say it, it's as if you're saying, "..... What? Did you give it to me when I asked for it?"

I think that's a good point! I think I have the capacity to give you one or two acts of kindness, depending on your sincerity!

But the exam is tomorrow, right? It's on the 24th.

I know that. What in the world do you want to talk about, you bonkers commoner?

The questions in my head are so big that I don't even care about the forceful abuse.

..... I have a big question: Have I perhaps made a premature assumption?

After unconsciously swallowing spit, Akiharu fearfully asked an angry Selnia a question that seemed like it was too late to ask.

"..... Are you going to the ball tomorrow, by any chance?"

I'll get it! What, are you trying to tell me that I shouldn't get out?

No, no, no, it's not that. It's just that has a birthday tomorrow, right? I thought you were going to go home and have a party or something since it's winter break, but you're not?"

When she helped me choose a birthday present for my cousin Natsume, I remembered Selnia's birthday because I had learned it from her.

It's a little difficult to tell people to forget about it since it's on the same day as Christmas.

I have seen on TV several times how Westerners spend Christmas with their families or go to church to pray rather than spending it with their loved ones.

I had a strong image of that, and I also thought that Selnia was on good terms with her father at her age, and that she would naturally return home to spend Christmas and birthdays as special occasions. But when I looked at her again, the noblewoman, with a look that said she wasn't quite angry enough, answered with bared teeth. The noblewoman, with a look that said she wasn't quite angry enough, replied through bared teeth, "I'm not angry enough.

(alt: That image was strong, and on top of that, Selnia was on good terms with her father for her age, and I always thought that on Christmas and birthdays, special days like that, she would just go home and spend it, but... I'll look again. When I sent him a glance, the aristocratic daughter, who had an expression that seemed to say that she was still not angry enough, bared her teeth and answered.) I'll be back after the ball! We did it last year, and father is going to pick us up at the Hakuryo Ling!

"Ah,, so I just made my own assumptions."

..... So you're saying that Akiharu didn't ask for my card because he thought I would return to my home in Atami instead of attending the ball?

The question, which she stared at him, made Akiharu feel awkward while he said, "Ah. He nodded.

I just don't understand why there is so much anger over

I wondered what had touched this driller's pride, but before I could gather my thoughts, Selnia put her hands on my hips and leaned forward, bringing her face close to mine.

At close range, and peeking into her eyes with an intimidating air that was different from the time of the dance, Akiharu gulped as she looked into her eyes, "..... You made your own decisions without even asking me what my plans were, you asked me to practice, and then you even brought someone with you who was not on your schedule.... Could this possibly be on purpose? If so, then they must have really disliked you and underestimated you.!

No, no, no, no! He didn't do it on purpose. He didn't mean it. He didn't mean it.

(alt: "No, no, no! It's not on purpose, it's just malicious — —") I don't need any more excuses.

When we interrupted her, she kept her mouth shut.

He was not yelling at me, but he was very forceful, and I thought, "I'm not supposed to be yelling, but if I defy him, he'll kill me.

The film was filled with so much emotion that one would have thought that it was a "one-way ticket" to the next level.

Selnia looked at me with a piercing coldness, as I was completely frozen, unable even to jerk, and said, "I have many things to say to you. There are so many things I want to say, so many things that I could fill the Mariana Trench with, but instead of just swallowing them all, I'm going to ask you one thing:!

"....., what is it,?"

..... All of my upset was blown away by a question that I had not anticipated at all.

While I can think calmly that this is what happens when shock is too much, my brain barely works.

With eye-to-eye contact, a distance from which you can feel her breath or even the slightest hint of her body heat without even touching her, and a state in which she would collapse if pushed too hard, the only thing Akiharu can do is to say, "I have no complaints at all.

(alt: Akiharu is at a distance where you can feel her body heat faintly even though your eyes are not touching, let alone breathing. ... There is no dissatisfaction anywhere...") After I say it, I want to hold my head in my hands.

There could have been a better response, and what is the point of answering if you don't understand at all what the other person meant and why he/she was asking in the first place?

In reality, however, the snake-struck frog is still at work, and the silent, piercing glances it is receiving make me break out in a cold sweat.

After more than a minute, which is well over a minute in my experience, and at the point where I was feeling very breathless, Selnia finally moved her face away from mine.

Then he sighs in amusement, and says, "..... This is absolutely beyond ridiculous. I've heard of people's pride being shattered, but I never thought it was possible to sink so far into the mire.

(alt: Then he let out a sigh and said, "...I've heard of pride being shattered into pieces, but it's like sinking into a quagmire. I can't believe there is...") He started mumbling something while looking down, but I had no idea what he meant.

However, there is no reason why we should not be able to ask them in-depth questions.
I don't want to die yet.

So, Akiharu regained her collapsed position and decided to wait for the other side to make a safe move.

For a few seconds, I was shrinking, anxious about what was going to happen next.

Selnia looks up and her eyes meet ours again, but for some reason she seems a little tired.
..... I wonder if it's my imagination or not.

(alt: Selnia's eyes catch me again as she looks up... but for some reason she's feeling a little tired.) Enough is enough. I have already understood that Akiharu is a coarse, crude, and unrefined person with no way to deal with his nerves. Oh, I've already given up. It's only going to become even more ridiculous if I persist in my stubbornness.

(alt: "... It's enough. I already understand that Akiharu is a helpless commoner with a crude and rough nerve. It's just getting worse.") "..... uh what is?"

I ask her, afraid to ask, but she doesn't answer me.

Instead, he sticks his hand in his coat pocket and offers me something he has taken out.

It was a red business-card-sized card, which Akiharu was also familiar with.

I blinked and muttered several times, but I never thought I would see it here.

Is this partner card?"

"Does it look like anything else to you? Or do you still say you don't want it?

"Yes, no, I'm here, I'm here! I'm here, I'm here, but I'm at"

There's no doubt that the company is doing this, but how is it that this is unfolding?
While Akiharu was unable to extend his hand to the card because of this concern, he suddenly saw Selnia's expression with a lowered eyebrow.

"Is there any reason you wouldn't accept from me?"

The voice was different from her usual one and sounded somewhat weak, and Akiharu had to blink again.

..... Because this is that driller, right? I can't believe that Selnia, who is so bossy, proud, and belligerent that even a country delinquent wouldn't be so bloodthirsty, would show her face like this.

If it wasn't a trap, it would be a perfect example of "the devil's own good deeds.

But I don't get any sense of deviousness from the Selnia in front of me in reality. Above all, I think it would take a very heartless person to be kept in a state of doubt and suspicion by this kind of facial expression.

(alt: But, in reality, Selnia, who is in front of me, doesn't look like a trick... Above all, I think that only a heartless person can do something like this and continue to be driven by suspicion. .)
So, unable to formulate any good words, Akiharu extends his hand to accept the card offered to him, hoping to show by his actions, ".....?"

Before my fingertips touched the paper, I noticed something and stopped moving.

The first time you see it, you will see something a little impossible.

It's not a ghost or a pina cocooned in cosplay, it's just a person in a school uniform, but that's why it's not possible.

People wearing the uniforms of the school uniforms of famous young ladies were running at a very high speed.

They are approaching from afar, moving toward you and Selnia.

..... And besides, that person looks like someone I know. Must be some kind of mistake or something, right? "..... Autumn Sun? How do you...

Selnia looked doubtful as she saw us come to a halt, then turned around to look at us and froze.

And then, with a single word, her small lips moved.

Is that Tomomi?"

"....., uh,, that's how you see it."

(alt: "... ah... does it look like that...") Unfortunately, as far as Selnia is concerned, she must be the real Tomomi Saikei.

But that's why I think it's impossible.

Tomomi, who comes from an ordinary family like myself, but as a result of her hard work and effort, is playing the role of a respectable young lady who is on par with the other students, is running around in public even though the school day is over.

Even if you have something urgent to do, how can you be out in this cold weather without a coat? While Akiharu was confused, Tomomi was closing the distance and by looking into her eyes, it was easy to see that she was running with her eyes fixed on us.

Just as I was beginning to wonder what had happened, Tomomi, who was about 30 meters away from me, said loudly, "You two, hold it right there! Don't move!

The impasse sounded so desperate that not only Akiharu but also Selnia remained frozen in place and unable to move.

What is really going on here?

Tomomi stops as if to hit the brakes, and says, "I guess I'm just in time for"

Tomomi says, her shoulders bouncing and her breathing heavy, her eyes shining brightly.

I don't know how he got there in time, but the intensity of his childhood friend with sweat on his forehead was so great that I couldn't go into it.

(alt: I don't know how I got there in time, but the force of my childhood friend's forehead with the sweat on his forehead is so powerful that I can't rush into it.) "When I finally made up my mind to come out, I saw these two distinctive figures and thought for sure I'd run, but it turns out I was right.

"....., no, it's just too much to make sense...?"

She may have been talking to herself, but it was too severe to leave her alone, so Akiharu dared to ask her about it, and Tomomi laughed with a face that had turned red from running.

They seem to be very lively, but I don't understand why they are so excited.

Tomomi put her hand on her chest, took a deep breath, glanced at Selnia, who stiffened in surprise, then turned to Akiharu again and quickly took something out of her skirt pocket and held it out to us.

The same thing happened again just a few minutes ago, but it was the red partner card that was shown.

Yes, Akiharu-kun. Yes, Akiharu-kun, you will receive it, right?"

Hey, what's going on? Wait!

Tomomi smiles softly and Selnia reacts to her words before she does, "What do you expect me to do, coming here out of the blue? I'm in Akihabara right now..."

'Oh, no? But I haven't given it to you yet, have I? And even if someone gave you the card first, you know that she can give it to someone else later, don't you?"

Tomomi says with a nonchalant look on her face, but then why did she wait for him earlier?

If you knew what you were doing, you wouldn't have had to run so slowly, so breathlessly, to get to them.

I wanted to tilt my head back, but unlike myself, Selnia, who had just been lightly attacked, was not about to let that stand in her way.

"....., you have quite an attitude.! But if that's the case, it's fine with me if I give it to you first.

(alt: "... you're going to take a serious attitude...! But then you don't mind if I hand it over first.")
Yes, that's right. But is there a way to make it easier to understand and save time later?"

Akiharu could see Selnia's eyebrows twitching with irritation and doubt at the provocative way she nodded her head.

Of course I would be angry if things suddenly turned out this way, but I have a bad feeling that there is an altercation happening right in front of me, but I have a worse feeling about it, and it doesn't make me calm down.

If I could, I'd run right now or get the hell out of here.! If we were in a building or in a dense forest, we could hide in the shadows and retreat slowly, but alas, there were no benches or monuments nearby in the open.

(alt: If possible, I want to escape right now, or disappear from here...! If this was inside a building or in a dense forest, I could hide behind something and slowly retreat, but unfortunately it was an open place, and there weren't even benches or monuments nearby.) In other words, you have to live with the situation or believe it's all in your mind.

I hope nothing will happen to you," said Akiharu, praying, "It's not necessary to wait until tomorrow. I don't need to wait until tomorrow. I just need you to decide right here and now who you will choose as your partner.

..... Without even a moment to offer a word of prayer, my premonition was right on the mark.

Tomomi, who had thrown the bomb, and Selnia, who was playing her opponent, turned their gazes toward her at almost the same time, and that alone suffocated Akiharu and made him feel distant.

It's strange, how did it come to this?

The test partner should be chosen tomorrow, and it makes no sense that we are suddenly being forced to choose two partners when we had no cards to choose from just a few days ago.

It makes you wonder if it was all a calculated trap.

But it would be a thousand times better if it was just a trap.

If Tomomi and Selnia are behind this, then the exchange in front of us is not a real fight, but half a play.

..... In reality, no matter how you look at it, the tension between the two of them is so real that even a Bengal tiger would run away from the pressure on me. What a selfish...!

"Oh, really? Well, if you're confident, that shouldn't be a problem.

I have the confidence to be chosen. Yes, I know, I know! If you insist so much, I'm going to have to show you how badly you've lost here.

I'm fine. I can see the result.

..... Moreover, things are progressing on their own.

I'm the one who is involved in this, and yet I'm being completely left behind.

I wish they would just leave me alone until the end,....., but since they won't let me out of their gazes, it seems that it's impossible.

Tomomi, who is smiling but has scary eyes, and Selnia, who has an aura of anger rising from her whole body, are both staring at her, and Akiharu alternately looks at the cards offered by the two of them.

..... Decide now? It's the last important exam of the second semester, and I'd like to take my time and think it over.

Tomomi tried to buy time, or at least resistance, but Tomomi smiled and shook her head unceremoniously.

No. If you don't choose to give me the card right now, I'll pretend we never had the conversation about me giving you the card.

What?" Then, as a result, only from Selnia.

"I am not joking about becoming an exam partner in such a process! If you do, I won't give you this card either!

What's that? Didn't you guys think you were going to get the card in the first place?

That stage has long passed. What are you going to do?

Tomomi nudges him, saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

(alt: Saying that, Tomomi crept up to him.) Selnia, who was nearby to begin with, did not move, but instead folded her arms, still holding her cards, and gave me a fierce look.

With such a threatening atmosphere, choosing between the two is almost certain to lead to a situation that will be both troublesome and unsafe for you, no matter which you choose. At the very least, it's like, "I'm sorry, but I think I'll pass on this one."

(alt: If you had to choose between two opponents with such a threatening air, wouldn't it be almost certain that you would end up in a troublesome and unsafe situation, no matter what you chose? "At least I'm sorry, but I think I'll give up this time.") The chances of a simple end like this are about the same as winning a special prize in a shopping street raffle, I think.

Akiharu, who understood from his senses that the way out was completely cut off, frowned and thought.

I'm not sure I'm ready for this, but I guess I'll have to make a decision here.

(alt: I haven't made up my mind, but it looks like I have no choice but to make a decision here.) If not, the worst that can happen is that you don't get the card and your rating drops to the bottom.

The problem is, "What is the criterion for choosing one out of the blue?

It's that simple. Just choose a partner that you think is suitable for the test, that's all there is to it. No, there doesn't have to be any other reason.

(alt: "It's easy. Just choose a partner who you think is suitable for the exam, and that's enough... No, I don't need any other reason.") Selnia is right, unusually enough. You just have to choose which of the two you want to take the test with.

When the two answered each other's questions, a standoff ensued, and Akiharu's thoughts went into overdrive as he played with the safety pin in his right ear with his fingertips.

Not to mention Selnia, Tomomi should be able to dance without any problem.

Moreover, since it is not a competition, there is not much need to partner with someone who is good.

In other words, it is really up to you to decide according to your own feelings.

Frankly, I think it would have been easier and better if there had been a factor that made it difficult to choose one of the two, so that it was no choice but to drop one of them.

I don't know, but neither Tomomi nor Selnia seemed to be in the mood for a mere sideshow.
(alt: I'm not sure, but neither Tomomi nor Selnia have the atmosphere of a mere entertainment.)
) I don't know the reason, but I feel that we have to give serious thought to our choices.
(alt: I don't know why, but I feel like I have to give it some serious thought and choose.) The person you will be dancing with at the ball at the end of the second semester.

Tomomi, a childhood friend who seems to have been avoiding me lately, but in the end she helps me out in this way.

Selnia, who was so kind as to accompany us for today's practice session, is a perfect match for a spectacular performance.

I have no complaints either way, but if I have to make a choice,....., I would have to choose one. After thinking about it for a few dozen seconds, Akiharu finally opened his mouth to say the conclusion he had reached.

The two men, who were still glaring at each other, seemed to sense something in our mood and turned their gazes at almost the same time.

That alone made her determined answer seem to choke, but Akiharu managed to hold it in, and said, "Ah, I'd like to ask you to be my partner for the next exam..."

After much thought, I called out his name.

The Tansuiro, set up for a ball, seems much larger than it is, even though most of the tables have been cleared away, which should be familiar by now.

Still, as soon as more than two dozen groups danced at the same time, we heard voices of almost colliding and words of apology from all around.

The all-foreign string quartet was playing a relaxed tone, so I was more than a little concerned about their voices informing me of the happenings, but I was too busy dancing with the other people in front of me to help them even if they were having a hard time.

Although she was able to take steps without being conscious of it, she was still unable to lead her partner or follow the flow of the song, and even by the midpoint of the song, she still did not have enough time to relax.

..... Are you still nervous?"

Tomomi asked me in a small voice that only Akiharu could hear, "Your practice is paying off, so you should be able to take it a little easier. This is a dance party before it is an exam. You should have more fun.

He dances with a surprisingly assured ease, and he even sends his friends a look as they pass him by, wearing the mask of an honor student.

She was dressed in a white elegant dress and pin-heeled shoes, looking as if she would have difficulty moving, but she didn't make me feel that way at all.

It's very good to have a little leeway.

..... So, you're supposed to be able to afford it, and yet you're saying, "Why don't you try having a little more fun over there? You're supposed to be having a good time, and you're supposed to be smiling and looking like you're having a good time.

I know them well enough to know what they are talking about.

Compared to her usual graceful, ladylike performance, she's a few notches down.

If it was because I was a bad dancer, that would be understandable, but since I somehow sensed that this was the case before the dance, the cause must have been something else.

Just as he was wondering what in the world was going on, there was a sign of another pair passing right behind him, and Akiharu panicked and turned his attention to his surroundings.

If I'm not careful, I lose my rhythm and forget the steps I've been working on, so I have to be more focused.

Just as I was thinking that, I was told, "..... doesn't mean it's boring. If you ask me if I'm enjoying it, I'd say yes, but..."

Tomomi's smile was gone and her lips were pouting as if she was sulking.

I know you may say, "It's too late for that," but I'm curious. I'm wondering why you chose me as your partner and not Selnia."

"What, you're not happy you were chosen?"

Tomomi was the one who gave me the card, but it was too unreasonable.

But as I recall, yesterday, when Tomomi and Selnia were about to give me their cards, and I was forced to choose one of them, my childhood friend had a subtle expression on her face.

I think they were surprised, not pleased, not feeling superior, but for some reason surprised.

On the other hand, Selnia, who looked as if she was trying to push through her frustration, went back to her dormitory without saying a word. I saw her with a few other upperclassmen, including Feng, by the wall a few minutes ago.

(alt: On the other hand, Selnia, who had an expression that seemed to suppress her frustration, returned to the dormitory without saying anything in particular. I just saw this.) She was wearing a flaming red dress with a long skirt, but she looked angry, so I haven't talked to her yet.

Well, I can still understand Selnia's decision to turn down the offer, but it's a little depressing to see Tomomi in such a bad mood.

What was the competitive exchange yesterday?

When she looked at her childhood friend with her eyes filled with disappointment, Tomomi shook her head slightly and said, "It's not dissatisfaction, but doubt. I heard about it from Shikikagami at She told me that Selnia taught her how to dance yesterday.

What's wrong with that?"

I usually go to Yesterday I didn't know about it, so I went a little overboard, but if I had known about it before, I would have refrained from doing it. It's not like you let someone prepare and cook the ingredients and then eat the finished product from the side.

Tomomi muttered, "I've done something so small," but Akiharu didn't quite understand what she meant.

Certainly I owe a great deal to Selnia for allowing me to dance like this, but how does connect that to my test partner? When Akiharu couldn't nod his head because he couldn't share her opinion, Tomomi did a deft imitation of sighing while dancing, "So, I can't help but wonder why Akiharu didn't choose Selnia. I wonder what criteria she used to choose me.

How do you mean:

Will they ask me about it face-to-face?

I think it's almost mildly humiliating to tell them why you chose them.

I would like to just fool around and get it over with, but the eyes of the person I'm attached to and dancing with are so serious that it seems impossible to do so.

If you are dexterous enough to make fun of this, you must have had a much easier time in high school.

The song was almost over and Tomomi's eyes were not leaving my face.

It's a good time to try to run out the clock, but with the way things are going, it's likely to be pursued persistently later, so it's better to get it over with as soon as possible.

So, Akiharu held back his embarrassment and said the minimum amount of words possible.

I thought about it and chose Tomomi because I thought she would be a better fit for this show."

"Compared to Ms. Selnia, who am I? Really?

"You can't help it if you tell a lie that's going to get you caught, can you?"

As he answered, he was about to collide with Sanke who were dancing nearby, so he paid attention to his surroundings, and then he heard a voice that sounded different.

I'm sure you're tempted to get your hopes up when you say things like that.

(alt: "... already... when you say that, you don't want to get your hopes up.") Oh?" What?

As I was about to ask, "What?" the performance stopped, leaving a lingering echo in the air.

Tomomi, who had also finished her dance, took a step back from Akiharu, who naturally stopped in her tracks, and bowed to her with a graceful gesture not inferior to that of any other young lady.

Too bad, time is up. It's bad manners to keep dancing, and I have an appointment with a girl in the pre-school, so we'll have to continue next time next year."

I'm not going to get another chance to dance. "What do you mean, we won't get another chance to dance next Christmas?"

If that is the case, I would like to say that you are being very hasty.

The only reservations I've heard of in a year's time are for a hotel with a window view of a car race in Monaco or a fireworks display from a houseboat.

However, from the way Tomomi was smiling, it seemed that this was not the case.

No, I'm talking about us. But you're right. Whatever happens, you have to do it in your own way.

(alt: "It's okay, it's about me.... But yeah. No matter what happens, you have to be yourself.") I don't know which side of the story you're on,, but it really doesn't make sense.

(alt: "... I don't know which one you're talking about, but it's seriously meaningless.") Don't worry about it. Thank you for the dance, then."

Tomomi smiled, turned on her heel and walked away.

I don't understand what's going on here, and we are the ones who should be thanking them.

Today's, or rather, Tomomi is somehow strange and out of tune these days.

We are wondering what is going on, but the other people in the hall are starting to move, so we can't just stand there.

"Well, and the exam is over, but what do we do now?"

The hall becomes noisy with chatter, and I move to the wall for the time being.

While doing so, Akiharu looks around the area where Selnia was before she danced, but she cannot find her, even though she should be conspicuous.

With her combination of blonde hair and red dress, and her height, she should be hard to miss, but no matter where I looked, she was nowhere to be found.

Feng, who was with me, had already found him in the same place as before, so it would be quicker to ask him where he had gone.

Since there is no way that anyone other than someone she knows is going to ask her to dance, and since she wants to leave before she leaves, Akiharu approaches to make contact with Hou and suddenly sees something strange and stops in her tracks.

There is a big Christmas tree right in front of the counter with the kitchen, etc. in the back. The Education Department did all the moving and decorating, so I knew it was there from the beginning.

The problem is the big box next to it.

When did that yellow-wrapped box, almost as tall as my waist, appear?

Although she didn't know who brought it, she thought the most suspicious person was, so Akiharu went near Kaede, who was looking at the extra-large Christmas cake with a smile on her face.

"Hey, did you bring that?"

Yes? Is that the box?"

The president turns around and stares intently at the product we have indicated with our hand.

This reaction, apparently, is different.

Who then? Akiharu looked again at the box to see if there was anything that might give him a clue, and he noticed something he didn't like.

..... that the box wrapping is printed with roses of all colors.

So, this is that.

Inside are presents from Santa Claus, which are not at all pleasant, or, as usual, perverted narcissists in white costumes.

"Um, Akiharu-san? Did you understand something?"

I'm not sure what to say. I didn't see anything.

(alt: "... No, nothing. I didn't see anything.") Kaede looks at him curiously in response, but Akiharu decides not to mention it.

There are times in this world when it is necessary to turn a blind eye.

If there is no harm, but something you absolutely do not want to be involved in, it is best to keep it quiet.

Akiharu decided to leave the big box behind, leaving the President, who seemed to be very interested in it, to quietly keep his distance.

They have already decided when to come out of the box, but if you stimulate them too much, they might jump out of the box in a very opportune moment, so you don't want them to notice that you are paying attention. What's wrong with you, acting suspiciously like a lingerie-dropper?"

..... I've been discovered by a very nasty fellow.

The most selective of them are the idiots who would happily shoot rockets into a powder magazine instead of pouring gasoline into a fire.

When I looked at Todoroki, who approached me with a sigh of relief, it seemed that he immediately noticed the mysterious box and turned his gaze toward it, saying, "Oh? What is this, a surprise present? It's Christmas, and there's a cake in it?"

..... I don't know. If you're interested, you should ask him, or the president of the board of directors.

(alt: "...I don't know.) What are you trying to say? What are you talking about? What are you going to do if you can't figure out this unnatural thing by yourself?"

He said, "Just stop it. I warned you, didn't I?"

I glared at him and tried to give him one last warning, but Roar's smirk only grew worse and he said, "That's the 'don't push, don't push' guy! I can't help but do it if he begs me to do it. If I don't, I'll lose my manhood!"

..... Yeah, well, I've always been an idiot.

I seriously believe that the inability to read the atmosphere is first-rate.

For a moment, I thought about knocking him out to stop him, but he's a strong guy for nothing, and there's no guarantee he'll just pass out.

If this is the case, there is only one possible way to get the money.

When his thoughts had been collected, Akiharu nodded his head and said, "I won't take any responsibility no matter what happens. Then, I have some business to attend to, so I'll be going."

"What, what do you mean, I can't look? How can you ignore such a suspicious box, Akki is as indifferent as ever.

With Todoroki cowering his shoulders and striking an irritating pose, Akiharu begins to walk quickly toward the location of Hou, his original goal.

If this happens, we must leave as quickly as possible and avoid getting involved.

The second song was about to start, and the hall was filled with girls in dresses facing each other in pairs and the obedience students dressed in men's clothing chatting in low voices.

Since I and Todoroki were not present, at a glance, it seemed as if all of the students wearing tailcoats were girls.

But, there is no Selnia among them, and she has not returned to the vicinity of Phoenix.

He had a rare atmosphere that made him stand out enough to be the center of the scene, not just because of his clothes and hairstyle, so it was oddly disconcerting not to be in a spectacular setting.

"....., where did that guy go,?"

Akiharu muttered to himself, and decided to check with Feng, who probably knows where she is: "Well, what's inside is hmm? I heard a sound from inside. What the hell, it just popped out?

"Let us all meet the expectations of the "Miracle of Beauty", Kouichiro Kazamatsuri, and let's make a grand entrance!"

"Daikichi"? I thought I hadn't seen you, and then I saw you here plotting such a delicious turn of events!"

The show was a little earlier than planned, but we heard people say they couldn't wait to see the show, so it was our duty to respond to their requests. Now, enjoy my beauty, which is equal to the miracle of the Holy Night, and worship me in a grand way.!

(alt: "My turn came a little earlier than planned, but since I've heard voices complaining that they can't wait, it's the main character's duty to respond to that. Now, enjoy my beauty, which is like a miracle on Christmas Eve." And it would be nice to worship it grandly...!") "What, what? From inside the box, Kazamatsuri-san came to and asked, "Where is Kikanchan? Where is she who can do something about this place?

..... It's getting very noisy in the back, but I dare not look.

I will never watch it.

Or, rather, we assume that nothing is happening in the background.

The voices of Todoroki, the president, and the other idiot who was supposed to have been gone a moment ago were also determined to be auditory hallucinations.

Sometimes in this world, you have to compromise and pretend not to see things.

(alt: "There are times in the world when compromise and pretending not to see it are necessary...") With a strong heart, Akiharu ignored the commotion behind him, and quickly approached Feng, who was rounding her eyes at the sudden situation.

◇ "....., you're really making a racket.

(alt: ◆ ◇) With a small murmur in her mouth, Selnia turned around and looked up at Yansuiro.

The floor was well-lit, and the ball was just getting into full swing.

This should be the second or third song, and the obedience students should be getting used to it, so they should be able to handle a different opponent than they normally do.

The ball, which will last for one and a half hours, has only just begun

Selnia had just left the Yancuiro and was on her way to the main gate.

After all, I have not danced once.

I left the hall before the first song was over, returned my coat and bag, and called my father on his cell phone to ask him to send a car to pick me up early.

I had planned to dance at least a few dances, enjoy chatting with my friends who would be meeting me for the last time this year, and eat the cake that would be served at the end of the ball before leaving.

All that's happened is that the schedule has been thrown off. No, it's not very ladylike to take it out on us.

(alt: That plan went awry because everything--) Selnia bit down on the emotions that welled up in her and let out a small breath.

It is strange to say who is to blame.

The fact that I had to leave the ball in the middle of the dance, and the fact that I feel terrible about it, is not anyone's fault but my own.

It was just that they had their own imaginations about what they wanted and what should happen, but it didn't happen in reality.

We tried our best, but if you ask me if we were giving it our all, I would not say

If they really wanted to have the future they imagined, they should have acted more openly.

If you have failed to do your best and put your pride first, you should not be able to blame anyone, nor should you be able to wallow in the melancholy of a tragic heroine.

So I have to accept the fact that I wasn't chosen. "..... I can't do that. I think my thinking is going in a negative direction.

(alt: That's why I have no choice but to put up with the fact that I wasn't chosen...) Selnia exhales again, turns on her heel as if to turn away from Yansuiro, and starts to walk away.

It would be a while before the car arrived to pick me up, but my desire to get away from here as soon as possible drove me to speed up and I said, "Wait!

..... I had to stop because I heard a voice I didn't want to hear.

When I look back, there is no mistaking the sight of Akiharu Hino, who is approaching me at a light trot.

She was carrying a small tote bag in her hand, not even wearing a coat in this cold weather.

I don't know what she's doing here, but Selnia doesn't want to face her, but she doesn't run or look away because it makes her feel defeated.

(alt: I don't know what he came to do, but as Selnia, I don't want to see him face to face... but I feel defeated, so I won't run away or look away.) As I was thinking that I had a bad temperament, Akiharu came very close to me, his white breath bubbling, and gave me a surprised look.

The ball has just started, and you're leaving already? Feng was surprised too.

..... Hm." This has nothing to do with Akiharu.

(alt: "... Hmph. It has nothing to do with Akiharu.") I would never say that the person in front of me is the cause of the problem, let alone that he or she has nothing to do with it.

It was so annoying to see her so absorbed in her work that she folded her arms and turned away, asking, "So, what are you doing? The exams may be over, but you still have to do your duty as an obedience teacher, don't you?"

Ah, yes. But, well, no one would be so drunk as to want to dance with me anyway, and I've already told Fukagan I'm out for a bit, and in that situation, I don't think I'll be dancing again anytime soon."

I don't know what you mean when you say "....."

(alt: "... I don't understand what you mean.") Even now, the sound of activity can be heard coming from Yansuiro, and yet this man's description of "the situation" is not the same as "the situation" in the restaurant.

I have no idea what that means.

..... It's true that it may be a little too noisy for a good social dance, but it's not a bad idea.

The more important question is, "What are you doing here, anyway? If you have any reason to offend us, feel free to and we'll beat you up."

What an outrageous character to begin with.

Mumbling, Akiharu puts his hand into the bag he is carrying.

Selnia glared at him and decided that if he did anything to raise her level of irritation, she would go on a serious rampage.

Even the nobility must sometimes be forced to inflict harsh sanctions with their own hands.

It is unladylike behavior, but as a nobleman, it can't be helped.

I have no choice but to go to and give it all I've got.

In front of Selnia, who had half-decided that she had no choice but to hit or kick, Akiharu took something out of his bag and said, "Here, this."

He offered it to us.

What I found was a ribbon-wrapped bag that looked like it could hold a reference book.



"..... What is this?"

What? No, that's why it's that. It's a birthday present."

I was so angry and frustrated that I was just blown away by his words.

Selnia repeatedly looked back and forth between the bag and Akiharu's face, ".....,, why...? Why...?

I know how upset I am by the unintentional outburst.

As if he didn't notice our ugliness, Akiharu made a disgusted face and cowered his shoulders deliberately.

"You know, you asked me to give you a birthday present, right? Well, I guess I was just going with the flow, you know?"

"....."

(alt: 「.....」) I said it for sure.

Selnia remembers it too.

When I helped Akiharu choose a birthday present for her cousin Natsume, I remember that I told her my own birthday and even requested a present.

I just didn't think it would happen.

Unable to shake her, Selnia accepts the bag offered to her.

It was light and thin, yet hard to the touch.

I had my grandmother help me look for a CD of a band I've been liking lately, and I figured that most of the students in the upper secondary school would be able to get what they wanted on their own, so I picked one out for my own taste, even if it was a little intrusive."

Music on CD.....

Oh. I was going to give it to you on my way home, but I was in a hurry because you left so early.

He may have been embarrassed when he looked away and said quickly, "I'm not sure I'm going to be able to do this.

(alt: Averting my gaze and speaking quickly may be because I'm embarrassed.) Normally, I would have taken this opportunity to look down on him from a higher elevation to remind him of the difference in our positions, but I couldn't bring myself to do so now.

I think there must be some kind of mistake to think that I can get a birthday present.

In our relationship from the time Akiharu came to Hakuryo until today, I understood that this commoner was a man who was very attentive to others in spite of his appearance and attitude.

Instead, he has the worst lack of understanding of the female mind, but if he thinks of me as a friend, he should at least give me a birthday present.

What Selnia didn't expect, however, was Before we thank you, let me ask you something.

Oh?" What?"

Why did you choose Tomomi over me yesterday at?

Why,, are you asking that too?

Other words that indicated that someone had asked the question, but "someone else..."

You don't have to ask me what it is.

What is more important is the reason why they were not selected.

If Selnia is right - that she has chosen a favored partner - then we can be sure that the gift will have no meaning other than friendship.

If so, then "....."

Selnia bit her lip as the image of Akiharu and Tomomi dancing together flashed through her mind.

But I had already asked him.

Cannot withdraw.

And I can never live in such a way that I have to run away, to pull out of this place, because it is in my blood and in my name.

Selnia, with her jaw pulled back and her resolve set, but still placing her hand over her chest, which felt as if it might be crushed by anxiety, waited patiently for Akiharu's words.

Akiharu, who had been looking very uncomfortable, let out a small breath and then said, "I've carefully considered the contents of the exam and made my choice as to which one is right for me.

So, what's your criterion for being "my own person"? At least I'm a better dancer than you!

Uh,, that's it.

Selnia's uneasiness and frustration grew as she became more and more uncomfortable with the unsettled attitude, and she was no longer satisfied with just glaring at him.

I even thought a couple of slaps might make it easier to talk, and was seriously considering whether to go through with it when I heard, "The exact test was 'honor my master's dance partner,' wasn't it?"

Looking away awkwardly, Akiharu touched the safety pin on her right ear and said, "Between you and Tomomi, it was Tomomi who could imagine being hired by the master, or rather, in real life. That's why I chose Tomomi."

The answer was so different from what she had imagined that she almost dropped the gift she had just received.

If what he just said is true,, he would not be lying at this point in time, so he must have really chosen them based on that criterion.

..... If that's the case, it doesn't mean that the chosen one is preferred.

The choice was based on who you wanted to work with.

Of course, there must have been some favoritism or generosity involved, but it should not be an absolute certainty.

In other words, "..... chance is still left for, isn't it?"

The small murmur in her mouth dissolved and disappeared like cotton candy, and should not have reached Akiharu's ears.

That's all right.

I was just telling myself I was doing my job.

I have not yet decided everything.

It remains unclear who Akiharu likes.

I was mistaken in assuming that the game was over without clearly expressing my feelings.

It's quite embarrassing that I made such a mistake, but it has given me some backbone.

Selnia looked at Akiharu again, aware of the burning passion in her heart.

It's not so much a stare as a glare.

"Uh, and, what? If you're thanking me, why are you giving me such an aggressive look,?"

..... autumn weather. I have a question for you.

(alt: "...Akihare. I have a question for you.") "What? What?"

Akiharu is obviously perplexed, but Selnia has no intention of correcting him.

It's my birthday, and it's Christmas Eve.

A night with the moon and stars in the sky and an incoming string music performance in the background.

And, as a final push, just after I was about to give up, I realized exactly how I felt.

I don't think I could ask for a better situation, and even if I had a better situation, I don't think I would be more excited than I am right now.

So now, right here, right now.

With the intention of making up her mind, Selnia squeezed her hand and said, "If you don't think that the dance for the exam is going to be with my husband, then I'm not sure I'll be able to do it."

(alt: Intending to decide here, Selnia squeezed his hand tightly and said, "What if the dance partner in the exam wasn't set to be my husband?") — If you were lovers, which would you choose? Just as she was about to ask this question, bright music started playing in Selnia's coat pocket.

Incoming call? At this critical moment,"

She was tempted to ignore it, but since it was a call and not a text message, she held back the urge to lash out and picked up her cell phone,..... and looked heavenward.

There, we hear the voice of Akiharu, who tends to be reserved.

Hey, you sure you don't want me to answer? Who are you getting this from?"

"..... It's your father."

(alt: ".....I am your father.") I know what I need to do, and I don't have to answer.

They must have contacted us because they have already arrived at or are very close to Hakuryo.

I never thought that I would be interrupted by my beloved father after all the choices I had made.

If only I were to be interrupted, my passion would be drained away, and the courage I had worked so hard to muster would be blown away, making it impossible for me to try again quickly.

Selnia, her shoulders slumped, "I can't keep you waiting after calling, so I'm going to go now.

..... Oh. I don't know what's going on, but I got it.

(alt: "... ok. I don't really understand, but I understand.") The reply was somewhat disconcerting, but Selnia was tempted to say that it was the same for us.

I would like to complain that we have been made to feel so gutted that we would like to scream out a hundred or a thousand times more than Akiharu.

Selnia held back these impulses, straightened her back, and looked at Akiharu.

I want to turn my back on them as quickly as possible with my shoulders slumped, but courtesy dictates that I cannot allow myself to do so, so I gather up all my strength and shan.

I appreciate your birthday present. I'll repay you someday next year, but I promise I will."

No, it's fine. It's just a matter of timing. There's no need to be so formal about it.

That's not going to happen.

As the daughter of the Flameheart family, not"

Selnia's own feelings are not going to stop there.

So, with a final burst of courage, like a squeeze, he said, "I'm not going to let you down. I will definitely get my revenge in the near future. Prepare yourself.

When I said these words as a declaration of war, Akiharu looked surprised and said, "Wait, what do you mean by 'revenge'? You just gave away a present and you call it revenge. That's ridiculous, no matter how you think about it!

The unexpected response makes Selnia feel a little better.

Let's just call it a punishment for upsetting a sensitive woman's heart.

Good bye, then. Have a good New Year's."

She concludes with a polite, ladylike greeting, turns on her heel, and walks away without waiting for a reply.

While listening to the noise in the background, Selnia held her birthday present in her hand and smiled slightly.

All in all, this may have been the worst birthday ever.

But there was a little good that came out of it, so I'll take it as a good thing.

And I did find out one thing.

Very, very unfortunately, it seems that I like that man.

At least, not to the point where it would shock and depress me if someone else fell in love with me.

..... totally sucks.

(alt: "Really... it's the worst.") I had my concerns before, but now that I am reminded of them, it is hard to believe in myself.

Still, I have no choice but to admit it.

I do not like Akiharu Hino, but I like her more than I dislike her.

If only her father had not called, she might have confessed to him that she liked him enough to confess her feelings to him.

..... I hope it cools down well over the winter break, though.

(alt: "... it would be nice to be able to cool down well during the winter break...") I hope she'll have some closure by the next time we see each other, but I somehow know that's not going to be the case, so Selnia sighs.

I realized, even after all this time, that my face was burning from the heat coming from the hand on my cheek.