

衣笠彰梧

KINUGASA SYOUGO

トモセシュンサク

TOMOSESHUNSAKU

2

ようこそ

実力

至上主義

の教室へ

ようこそ
じつりやく
しじょうしゆぎ
のきょうしつへ



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Youkoso Jitsuryoku Shijou Shugi no
Kyoushitsu e

Welcome to the Classroom of the Know-It-Alls

vol.2

by Kinugasa Syohgo

Translation Group: [Confused Translations](#)

Classroom of the Elite

2

ようこそ**実力至上主義の教室**へ

衣笠彰梧 × トモセシュンサク

かる い ざわ けい
軽井沢 恵

人気者・平田の彼女に
いち早く収まった女の
子。オシャレが大好き。
勉強やスポーツは意外
と出来る。

「あたしもさんせー」

「同じクラスの仲間を
最初に疑うような真似は間違ってると思う」

ひら た よしき
平田 洋介

容姿端麗でコミュ力抜群、
さらに勉強も出来るイケ
メン男子。女子の人気を
一身に集めている。

「ごめんね、影薄くて……
おはよう……」

さくら あいり
佐倉 愛里

メガネをかけていて、
長めの髪はたばねて
いる、オシャレな感
じはない地味な少女。
とにかく目立つこと
が嫌い。





今をときめくアイドル
雫ちゃんの夏がきた!

Shizuku's Summer
has come.

ここっぴっぱったら、
どうなると思う?

「えーい、悪党は最後までしぶといつ。
そろそろ年貢の納め時だよー!」



「之瀬はバツと右手を広げ、高らかに宣言する。
オレがいちいち説明しなくても、
」之瀬に任せておけば大丈夫な気がしてきた。

氏 名	綾小路清隆	あやのこうじ きよたか
クラス	1 年D組	
学籍番号	S01T004651	
部活動	無所属	
誕生日	1 0 月 2 0 日	
評 価		
学 力	C	
知 性	C-	
判断力	C-	
身体能力	C-	
協調性	D	

面接官からのコメント

積極性に欠け将来への展望なども持ち合わせておらず、現段階では期待の薄い生徒だと言わざるを得ない。協調性や個性と呼べるものも感じられない。受け答えそのものは高校生として許容範囲内ではあるものの、現段階での学力と身体能力は平均をやや下回る。

特別な資格もないこと、別途資料による事情等からDクラスへの配属が適正であると判断。友人関係の構築、教師との関係に注意しつつ生徒個人の成長を望む。

担任メモ

7/1現在成長の様子なく、経過観察状態であることを報告します。

氏 名 堀北鈴音

ほりきた すずね

クラス 1年D組

学籍番号 S01T004752

部活動 無所属

誕生日 2月15日

評 価

学 力 A

知 性 A-

判断力 B-

身体能力 B+

協調性 E



面接官からのコメント

小学校の段階から毎年高い成績を収めており、面接時の態度なども良好。進学を見据え学力向上に取り組む姿勢も十分に評価できる。また中学校では3年間無遅刻無欠席を記録するなど自己管理も問題なし。この点だけで言えばAクラス相当の実力者である。しかしながら他者を思いやる気持ちや協調性においては多々欠けている部分があり、中学校では度々クラスメイトや教師と衝突することがあった。社会に送り出すには強い矯正が必要であることからDクラスへの配属とする。

担任メモ

初めての友達が出来、少しずつ変化が見られます。協調性の向上に期待します。

氏 名 櫛田桔梗

くしだ ききょう

クラス 1年D組

学籍番号 S01T004721

部活動 無所属

誕生日 1月23日

評 価

学 力 B

知 性 B-

判断力 C+

身体能力 B

協調性 A



面接官からのコメント

学力、身体能力共にBクラス相当の能力を持ち合わせており、卒業校からの報告における心証評価も極めて高い。本年度における面接試験では満点を記録するなど、一見した限りでは問題のない優秀な生徒である。小学校から提出された資料によれば非常に交友関係も広く、上級生下級生にかかわらず人気者だったことから、優れたコミュニケーション能力を持ち合わせていると言える。しかしながら別途資料における事実を憂慮し、Dクラスへの配属とする。

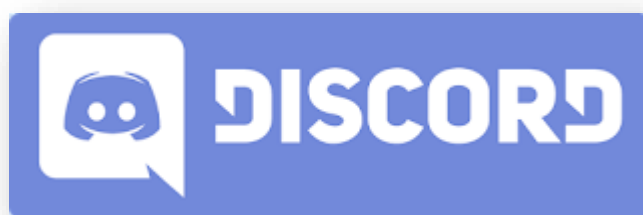
担任メモ

現段階では何も問題なく、クラスを中心として日々学校生活を楽しんでいます。

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Prologue: The monologue of Sakura Airi

I'm not very good at interacting with other people.

I'm not very good at talking to other people while making eye contact.

I'm not very good with crowded areas.

I don't know when I started to be bad at those things.

However, the one thing I'm know is that a person can't live completely alone.

No matter how much I love being alone, I cannot possibly survive by myself.

So, I came up with a solution.

Putting on a facade, I live by hiding my true self.

Only then am I no longer me, but rather, become me.

In this dark, lonely world, I can continue to survive.

The world is not a beautiful place. While it's common sense, everyone secretly wishes for a beautiful world. A bit of a contradiction.

Anyone... anyone's fine, so tell me this.

Is everyone putting on a facade like me?

Or does no one bother to create a distinction, and show their true selves instead?

Since I don't have any relationships with other people, there's no way for me to find out.

So, I'm all alone today too.

I'm alright by myself.

I'm alright with being alone.

I—

I—from the bottom of my heart, want a person that can reach me.

And so, the me today will continue to live quietly, with my eyes cast downwards.

Chapter 1: The abrupt beginning of turbulent times

It was the worst timing possible.

While looking for places to take a selfie, I stumbled upon an incident. It was a tense state of affairs. The whole thing started a few seconds ago, when a trivial accusation provoked the other party and turned into a fist fight pretty quickly. No, saying fist “fight” is more accurate. Three male students were on the floor, covered in injuries. A red-haired boy was standing over them, looking down. It was a pretty one-sided fight.

I saw blood streaks on his right fist from the wounds of the other boys. It was my first time seeing a real fist fight. In elementary school, I saw boys pulling at each other’s clothes and pinching each other, but this was different. I could feel the weight of the tense situation.

Even though I was afraid, I unconsciously took pictures of the scene. The shutter went off silently. I thought to myself, “What am I doing?”, but in my panic, I couldn’t think very clearly.

I tried to leave the area as fast as I possibly could. But my brain wasn’t functioning normally, and my legs wouldn’t do what I told them to. Feeling paralyzed, I couldn’t move at all.

“Hehe, do you think... things will be over with this, Sudou?”

The boy who was barely able to move his upper body desperately tried to resist despite his fear.

“Are you trying to make me laugh? You three are in a sad state. Do you want to go at me again? I won’t hold back next time.”

Grabbing the collar of the student who had lost his fighting spirit midway, Sudou brought the other boy’s face a few centimeters away from his own. Looking as if he’d devour them at any moment, the defeated boys looked away.

“Are you shocked? Did you think you could win if you had more people?”

Laughing through his nose, Sudou-kun dropped him on the ground and picked up his bag.

As if he already lost interest in the three boys, Sudou-kun turned around and started walking away.

That instant, my heart rate shot up. Well, it’s natural. Sudou-kun started walking in the direction of my hiding spot, after all. My routes off the rooftop are limited. The theory is to go down the staircase that I used to get up here. Losing the right timing to escape, my body isn’t able to move as I want it to. When someone gets into an accident, I heard that their body tenses up and feels paralyzed, and that was the exact situation I was in right now.

“That was pointless. Making me tired after practice, give me a break.”

The distance shortened. He was only a few meters away.

“...The one that’ll regret this later is you, Sudou.”

One of the boys called out to Sudou in a strained voice.

My paralysis slowly faded away, as if a curse was being lifted.

“There’s nothing as shameful as the whining of a loser. No matter how many times you try, you won’t win against me.”

He clearly wasn’t bluffing; it was obvious that he had the confidence to back it up. After all, Sudou-kun was able to come out unscathed from a fight where he was at an overwhelming disadvantage.

Tomorrow was the first day of July; it was starting to look like summer.

Still not moving from my hiding spot, sweat started forming on the back of my neck.

Without panicking, I decided to leave from my spot quietly.

I just have to avoid being seen and getting involved in the situation.

If I get involved, only a dark future awaits my calm and tranquil school life.

Carefully but quickly, I moved away and left the place behind me.

“Is someone there...?”

Unconsciously wanting to escape, the air slightly changed. Feeling the change in atmosphere, Sudou peered into the location where I was hiding just moments ago. However, I was able to escape by a hair’s breadth.

If I was late by one or two seconds, he would’ve probably seen my retreating figure.



The morning was always lively in class D. It was because most of the students were far from being serious.

But, today was louder than usual. The reason goes without saying. It was because we would most likely get some points ever since our entrance ceremony.

The school I go to, “Koudo Ikusei High School”, uses a novel system called the S system. I’ll explain a bit about it.

Taking out the mobile phone given to us by the school, I opened the preinstalled school app, and logged in using my school ID and password. I then clicked on the item that said “Remaining Funds”.

A lot of things can be done from this page. You can check your own points and the class’ points. Also, you are able to give other students points from your own account.

There are two types of points listed; the one at the end is listed as “cl”. It stands for “class”, and it lists how many points the class has. It isn’t what everyone individually has, but rather, the points the class itself has. Next to our class, class D, it showed that we had “0 cl” since June. In other words, we don’t have any points. Another type is “pr”. It stands for “private”, and it shows our individual points.

On the first day of every month, cl times 100 number of points is deposited into our private account.

These private points are for us to buy necessities, meals, electrical devices, or any other good; they serve the role of money and are very important.

Because real money can’t be used on campus, if we don’t have any private points, we are forced to live day by day without any pocket money to use.

Since class D's points are 0, we inevitably don't get any private points, and therefore have to make do without any money.

However, at the start of the year, our class points were at a thousand.

If we kept our points, we would be getting 100,000 yen every month. However, our class points fluctuate from day to day. Things like getting bad grades or whispering during class contribute greatly to the deduction of points. As a result, class D has no points by the time the first of May came around. It's sad, but that has continued until today, July 1st.

In addition to our monthly allowance, the class points also determine our class' merit. In descending order of points, the classes are ordered from class A to class D.

So, if class D got more points than class C, class D would probably become class C for the next month. And eventually, if we make it to class A, our dreams for high education and job opportunities would be fulfilled.

When I first heard of this system, I thought it was important to keep our class points as high as possible. Saving private points wouldn't help at all.

But my thoughts changed once we bought a point on the midterm.

On the previous test, I was able to buy a point for Sudou, who had regrettably missed the cutoff by a point. When I saw the school readily agree to sell the point, I understood that Chiyabashira-sensei wasn't joking when she said those words.

"At this school, there's nothing you can't buy with points."

That is, holding private points means that you can make a situation more advantageous.

If that's the case, it's probably possible to get more than just test points."

"Good morning. Everyone looks more restless than usual today."

As the bell rang for homeroom, Chiyabashira-sensei walked in the classroom.

"Sae-chan-sensei! Do we have 0 points this month too!? When I checked this morning, I didn't even have a single point!"

"Oh, so is that why you guys were restless?"

"This month, we worked our asses off! We got past the midterms... so isn't it cruel to still be at 0!? We weren't late to class, weren't absent, and didn't whisper!"

"Don't go off deciding things on your own. Let me talk first. Ike, you clearly worked harder than I've ever seen you try. We recognize that. Naturally, the school understands how you feel too."

After being admonished, Ike closed his mouth and sat back down.

"Well then, these are this month's point totals."

The point results were listed starting from class A on the paper she put up on the board.

Other than class D, all the classes were pretty close in points, and everyone had been awarded about 100 points.

Class A was at 1004 points, slightly above the amount of points everyone started with.

“...Not a very pleasing development. Have they already figured out how to reliably increase points?”

My seat neighbor, Horikita Suzune, seemed to be concerned only about the other class' points, but Ike, along with most of the class, didn't care about the other classes. To them, is it only important that we have points?

Written next to class D was—87 points.

“Huh? Is that, 87... did we actually increase our points!? Woohoo!”

After seeing the points, Ike jumped up and down in excitement.

“Don't be so excited already. All the other classes increased their points about the same amount you guys did. The gap didn't get any closer. This looks like a reward for just passing the midterm. Everyone was paid about 100 points.”

“I see. I thought it was strange that we were awarded points so quickly.”

Horikita, who was aiming for class A, looked like she wasn't happy with the points we got, and wasn't smiling.

“Are you disappointed, Horikita? Because the gap has slightly widened.”

“It's nothing like that. I got something out of it this time, after all.”

“What do you mean, you got something out of it?”

る。

Ike stood up and asked Horikita. Attracting the attention of the other classmates, Horikita sunk back into silence. Hirata Yousuke, after watching the situation unfold, stood up and answered for her.

“The deductions we got during April and May... in other words, along with whispering and being late to class, there were no other deductions, is what I believe Horikita-san was saying.”

The quick-witted Hirata answered without any problems. That’s impressive. Right on the mark, too.

“Ah, is that so. If there were a lot of deductions, our 100 points would’ve been 0.”

After having understood the easy explanation, Ike raised his arms in celebration.

“Huh? Then why didn’t we get any points?”

Returning back to the original question, Ike looked at Chiyabashira-sensei.

If we didn’t get 8700 points, it would be strange.

“This time, there’s a bit of trouble. The points for the first-years were delayed. Sorry, but you’ll have to wait for a bit longer.”

“Eh~, seriously? Because the school is having trouble, shouldn’t we get some kind of freebie?”

All the students grumbled in discontent. As soon as they understood that they got points, their attitudes completely changed. Having 87 points and no points is a world of difference.

“Don’t blame it on that. The school decided it, not me. Once the trouble is resolved, you’ll get your points. If there are any points left, that is.”

Chiyabashira-sensei’s words hung in the air.

Once it was lunchtime, everyone went off on their own to get food.

Lately, however, I've been thinking that going out with friends during this time is the hardest thing about school life. Take Kushida Kikyou, for example. She's friends with a lot of girls and boys, and is immensely popular, so while she obviously gets invited in person, she also gets invited over email and phone all the time. Even though she has to refuse people at times, it looks like she has a life, going out to eat with a lot of friends.

On the other hand, people who are unpopular with girls like Ike and Yamauchi seem to always eat with a close group of boys. Sudou and Hondou are part of that group.

What I want to say is that I don't have anywhere that I belong.

I'm friends with Kushida, and also friends with Ike and Yamauchi. Even though I would eat with them, it wasn't very frequent. Generally, it was a relationship where the other party would approach me and ask, "Wanna eat lunch" or "Are you free after school?".

I didn't mind it at the start of the school year. Since it was before I made friends, it was only natural that I would be alone since there was no one else that I knew.

But now, it was a strange phenomenon of "being alone even though I have friends".

This phenomenon... is a really uncomfortable experience. If there was a day where we decided on groups for a school trip and I was absent, it would be really likely that I wouldn't be invited by anyone. Do they think that I'm a low ranking friend, or is it that only I think of

them as friends? I might be having a wild misunderstanding about our relationship.

Feeling restless, I looked towards Ike's group. I'm over here, it's fine to invite me. It was a gaze of selfishness and faint anticipation.

And then feeling bad about myself, I reminded myself that it was bad to not know when to give up and averted my gaze.

These miserable events repeat every day.

"You're still not used to it, I see. As usual, you're pitiful, Ayanokouji-kun."

My neighbor looked at me with a cold gaze.

"...You look like you're completely used to being alone."

"I'm fine, thank you."

It was meant to be sarcastic, but she responded frankly.

Most of my classmates had already formed groups, but the number of people like her who were eating alone weren't few by any means, so I felt relieved.

Koenji also spent most of the time by himself. At first, he was surprisingly spending a lot of time in the cafeteria with girls from other class and other grades, but since his points were running low, he started spending more time in the classroom.

The only heir of the Koenji Conglomerate, one of the biggest companies in Japan, didn't prefer being alone, but rather, was a person that liked himself and held little concern for others.

I felt respect for him because he didn't feel any anguish from loneliness.

As usual, he checked his face with a hand mirror, and it looked like he found no faults with his own appearance.

Other than him, though, there was a quiet girl wearing glasses. At one point, Ike was interested in her because he was going off about breasts, but since she was plain and didn't particularly stand out, no one had any interest in her afterwards. She was always alone, and she never talked.

Like every other day, she was eating her bento alone with her back hunched. She was one of the few that made her own bentos.

And then, my neighbor took out a bento from her bag and started opening it.

Lately, Horikita hasn't been going to the cafeteria, and instead, brought homemade bentos.

"Don't you need a lot of time and effort to make your own bento?"

Although it's not a luxurious thing to do, but there are relief measures in the cafeteria for students who have used up all their points. Since it takes time and costs some points to make your own bento, the free meal seems like the better option.

"I don't know. The supermarket also has free ingredients, you know."

"You made this with free ingredients?"

Without denying it, Horikita opened her bento. It didn't have a lot of meat or fried foods, but it looked pretty good.

"Are you good at cooking as well? It doesn't really fit with your character."

“Anyone can cook after reading books or looking things up on the internet. All the dorms have the necessary tools as well.”

Without bragging about her skills, she took out her chopsticks. I guess she replied like that because she thought it was obvious.

“But why’d you decide to make your own bento?”

“The cafeteria’s loud. It’s a lot calmer to eat in here, right?”

A lot of students went to go buy bread or other meals at the cafeteria at the beginning of the year, but now that many students no longer had points, an overwhelming amount of students went to go eat the free meal. If you paid attention, only a few people would be left over in the classroom.

Is this what Horikita prefers? At any rate, Ike and the others were no longer in the room.

“Did I already miss the big wave...?”

“You always gaze at the ocean, but you don’t even have a surfboard nor the resolution to ride the wave. Even then, saying that you couldn’t get ride the wave... you talk like some big shot.”

I wish I could argue, but she wasn’t wrong.

3

Unlike lunchtime, after school feels more comfortable since there’s no need to be worried about personal relationships.

Also, I don’t really stand out if I try to go back to the dorms right after school since there are quite a few people who do the same.

There's some merit in being able to disappear into the crowd like a ninja. If I stick to the back of a group of friends, I can pretend to be a part of their group.

"...How sad."

I was satisfied with myself for skillfully pretending that I had friends, but in the first place, there isn't anyone in this school that cares about who I hang out with.

"Sudou. I have something to tell you. Come to the staff room."

Sudou, who was trying to quickly leave the classroom, was stopped by Chiyabashira-sensei.

"Hah? What business do you have with me? I have basketball practice now."

Feeling listless, he opened his bag, grabbed his uniform and showed it to Sensei.

"I already talked to your advisors. You don't have to come, but you'll face the consequences later."

Sudou was on guard after Chiyabashira-sensei threatened him.

"What the hell... Is this going to end quickly?"

"That depends on you. Just by staying here, we're wasting more time."

With those words, it looked like he had no choice but to follow.

After clicking his tongue, Sudou walked behind Chiyabashira-sensei and walked out of the classroom.

“I thought he changed, but I guess that Sudou is the same as ever. Wouldn’t it have been better if he dropped out?”

I don’t know who it was, but I could hear someone in the class mumbling to themselves.

After the last test, I thought that the class had become more united as a group. Somehow, that seems to have been my imagination; guess it was a lie.

“Do you think so too? That it would’ve been better if Sudou-kun was expelled.”

While talking to me, Horikita was putting her textbook in her bag in order to return to the dorms. There probably aren’t many students that take their textbooks back and forth to review and prepare for the lessons. It’s a sad thought.

“Eh, not really. How about you, Horikita? As the only person who helped out Sudou.”

“Hmm... Well, we still don’t know how many positive points we’ll get.”

My neighbor, Horikita, replied with an uninterested voice.

When Sudou was on the brink of being expelled, she purposely lowered her own grades, and spent her points to buy a point on the test for him. I didn’t expect that kind of behavior from her.

At the same time, we both got up from our seats out walked out of the classroom together. I don’t know when, but we started going back to the dorms together. Since we don’t eat together, nor hang out, it’s strange that it became this way. The only thing we had in common was that we were walking back on the same exact path. That’s probably why we ended up walking together.

“I feel a bit worried. About what Sensei said this morning.”

“About how our points were being delayed?”

“Yea. It looks like there was trouble, but is that trouble on the school’s part or from our part? If it’s the latter...”

“You’re overthinking it. Lately, we haven’t been making trouble. She said so herself. I doubt class D would’ve been the only class to not get any points. Simply speaking, it’s the school’s issue.”

If there was strong concern for worry, all first-years would’ve been delayed, so the probability that class D is involved is rather low.
...Probably.

“I wish that was the case. After all, trouble directly affects our points.”

Everyday, Horikita always thinks about how we can increase our points. She doesn’t think about her private points, but rather, the class points so that she can reach class A. Of course, it’s not impossible, but even then, it’s pretty far from our grasp.

However, there’s still hope. If Horikita is able to find a reliable way of increasing our points, it’ll become a great advantage for class D. Furthermore, our classmates will trust Horikita more and she’ll be able to make more friends. A win-win situation.

“Oh, right, you should join the chat. You’re the only one who hasn’t participated.”

Taking out my phone, I opened the group chat application.

After the test, we invited Horikita to the group chat. Kushida thought that Horikita, who hated interacting with other people,

would be able to participate if it was a group chat. However, her efforts were in vain, and Horikita hadn't participated at all.

"I have absolutely no interest. I also keep my notifications off."

"Is that so?"

Well, it seems like she had no intention to participate in the first place. She probably didn't delete the app because it'll send notify the rest of the group.

Whether or not she participates is up to her, so I didn't pursue the subject. I don't really have the right to do so either.

"Ayanokouji-kun, you're also more talkative lately."

"Really? I thought I was always that way though."

"It's only a slight difference, but you've definitely changed."

Although I didn't mean to change, I must've changed without having noticed myself. I must've gotten used to it.

Especially, I feel like I get along with Horikita—wait, no, we definitely don't get along, but strangely, I don't feel awkward around her. If it were some other girl, I wouldn't be able to converse normally, and would probably be flustered.

That's why I only talk to people close to me.

More than anything, I'm grateful that being silent doesn't make the mood worse.

"Is there anything that made you change?"

"I wonder... If I had to come up with a reason, it would be that I simply got used to school life and made a few friends. Also, Kushida was probably a big factor as well."

If it's only a group of boys, then no one really says much and there's a lot of silence in the conversation.

If Kushida's there, though, someone's always talking at a given time, and the atmosphere feels more lively.

"You seem to be getting along with Kushida-san. Aren't you concerned, especially knowing about her other side?"

"I was surprised when she said that she hated you. But it's natural that you'll like and hate some people. It's no use to get concerned over such small things. Even when she's said it explicitly, why do you pretend to get along with her?"

"I see. Well, I also hate Ayanokouji-kun, but we still talk normally. I don't really mind it."

"Hey..."

What the hell, why say it to my face...

"That's what I'm saying. If someone else says that they hate another person, it's fine, but if someone says that they hate you, don't you feel bad?"

"...Were you testing me?"

While saying "I don't know, was I?", she started coming her hair. Completely forced.

"I don't intend to bother her, but Kushida-san and I are like oil and water. I think there's no need to fight with her."

In other words, it probably means that she won't join a group chat with Kushida in it.

"In the first place, why does she hate you?"

Ever since the start of school, there wasn't much contact between the two. Since when did she start hating Horikita?

Kushida did say that it was her goal to get along with everyone.

"I don't know. She probably doesn't know much about me either."

Even if that's the case, it looks like there's something in between Horikita and Kushida.

"Are you that curious? Go ask her yourself."

That's impossible.

Kushida Kikyō is normally an angelic and perfect girl, but she inadvertently showed me a different side of her.

It's impossible to tell from her kind smile and her tone of voice, but I still remember her remarks from back then. I don't think Horikita knows either.

"No need for that. I'm fine with Kushida as she is now."

"That's just disgusting, you know?"

"...right?"

Even though those words came from my mouth, it sounded disgusting to me too.

4

After I finished my dinner, I returned to the dorms. Taking out my phone, I checked my balance. I had 8320 pr remaining. It hasn't changed since the morning.

Considering that we got 100,000 points at the beginning of the year, it's a really small amount.

I spent a lot of points to buy Sudou's point.

"It would be huge if we got our 87 points."

In yen, that's 8700 yen. Although it's not enough, it's still relatively big money.

"Save me, Ayanokouji!"

While I was playing with my phone on the bed, the door suddenly opened. It was a flushed Sudou.

"...Why are you in such a rush? Or should I say, how'd you even get in?"

I remember locking the door when I returned to my room. I don't think I forgot to do it because I do it out of habit now. Did he kick his way through the door or something?

Just to make sure, I checked the door, but it wasn't broken.

"This is the room where our room meets, so we held a discussion and decided to make a duplicate key. Didn't you know? It's not just me, everyone else has a key too."

He was spinning the key in his hand.

"I learned this important fact just now..."

Somehow, it looks like my room is no longer safe against invaders.

"Anyway, that stuff doesn't matter. I'm in a really dangerous spot right now! Help me out."

"It definitely matters. Give me the key."

"Hah? Why should I? I bought this with my own points. It's mine."

What kind of faulty reasoning is that? If you've committed a crime, it's still a crime, no matter what you say.

Even if we're friends, it doesn't mean that I'll allow anything.

"If you're worried about something, how about asking Ike or Yamauchi?"

"Those two are no good. They're stupid."

As he was talking, Sudou sat down on the floor.

"Buy some carpet. My butt hurts."

I don't have enough to spend money on the interior.

In the first place, even though my room was designated the meeting place, we've never met in here ever since the party. Even if I bought carpet, only I would be sitting on it. The very thought of it feels surreal.

When I got up to get some tea, the doorbell rang.

The person who poked her head through the entrance was Kushida, the Madonna of class D. She's cute whenever I see her. She saw Sudou, who was still sitting on the floor.

"Oh, Sudou-kun's here."

"I'm just asking, but do you also have a duplicate key?"

"Uh, yea? Isn't it so that we could meet up... by any chance, did you not know, Ayanokouji-kun?"

She took out a key from her bag and showed it to me. It looks exactly the same as my key. Apparently, Kushida thought it was done with my permission.

“Um, this... should I return it?”

She apologetically gave me the key.

“It’s fine. There’s no point if you’re the only one that returns it. It doesn’t seem like Sudou wants to return the key.”

Is it really alright for Kushida to have the key? No, well, in my delusions, you could say that it feels like I have a girlfriend if she keeps the key. Men are calculating creatures.

“Since Kushida has also come, can we move to the real topic?”

“It can’t be helped... well then, what’s the issue?”

After they came to my room, it’s not like I can bluntly refuse them.

With a meek look on his face, he slowly started talking.

“You know how I was called out by the teacher today? Then, uh... actually... I might be suspended from school. And for a while, too.”

“Sus... suspended?”

That’s unexpected. Compared to the beginning of the year, Sudou has been pretty well-behaved. He hasn’t been talking or dozing off during class, and is doing well in his club activities.

“By any chance, did you insult or slander Sensei?”

When Chiyabashira-sensei stopped Sudou from going to his club today, he looked unhappy.

He probably got mad and said some reckless remarks once again.

“I won’t say.”

“Then did you grab her by her collar and threaten to kill her or something?”

“I’m not saying anything.”

Without any hesitation, Sudou refused to speak. Is that really not it?”

“It’s probably worse than what you’re thinking...”

I thought that my first two guesses were pretty bad, but to say that it’s even worse...

“Oh, this is how things happened, Ayanokouji-kun. I beat up and assaulted Sensei and then spit on her!”

“That’s cruel. ...or should I say, your wild ideas are way too cruel...!”

“Ahaha, it’s a joke. Of course, I wouldn’t go that far. Sudou-kun as well.”

Even though I thought Sudou would immediately deny it, he jolted in surprise from Kushida’s joke.

I guess it shows how rattled he is.

“What’s wrong?”

“Actually, I beat up some kids from class C yesterday. And earlier, Sensei said that I would be suspended... This is probably punishment for that.”

Surprised from Sudou’s words, Kushida unintentionally looked towards me. I couldn’t swallow the situation at first. That Sudou had been involved in trouble again. Were my worries spot on?

“Beat them up... that, uh, why’d you do it?”

“For your information, I wasn’t at fault, ok? Those class C brats were in the wrong. I just responded when they tried to provoke me. And then they went and told on me. They were being untruthful, too.”

Somehow, it seems like Sudou also hasn’t been able to gather his thoughts. I understood what he was trying to say, but I still didn’t know why the fight started nor the details of the fight.

“Wait a second, Sudou-kun. Can you say it once more, but slower?”

Kushida encouraged him to calm down and tried to get him to tell us how the fight started.

“Sorry, I must’ve left out too many parts...”

Taking a few deep breaths, Sudou started from the beginning once again.

“The club advisor and I were talking about being able to be a regular for the summer tournaments.”

I heard that he was good, but I didn’t expect talks about becoming a regular so soon.

“Isn’t that super good, Sudou-kun!? Congratulations!”

“Nothing’s decided yet. It’s just that the possibility exists.”

“Even that’s great. We just entered high school, after all.”

“Well, yea. Actually, I was the only first year to be nominated for becoming a regular. And even then, it’s not like I’m definitely becoming a regular. On the way home, those guys... Komiya and Kondo, who are also in the basketball club, called me out to a special

building. They said they had something to talk about or something. I could've ignored them, but I've argued with them quite a few times during club activities, so I thought I would settle this. Of course, I went to meet them, you know? And then this Ishizaki guy was there, waiting for me. Komiya and Kondo were this guy's friends, and said how they couldn't stand that a class D student like me was being considered as a regular. He then told me to either quit or face a painful experience. I refused and beat them up, but then all of this happened."

It was a hurried explanation, but I got the general gist of things. It looks like Sudou's satisfied with his explanation.

"And then you were portrayed as the bad guy, huh."

With an exasperated look, he nodded. Those class C students started the whole thing, and when Sudou refused to quit, they resorted to the use of force... that is, violence. However, Sudou, who was experienced in fighting, turned the tables and beat them up. Naturally, they were injured. But, there was no evidence, so they lied to the school that Sudou beat them up for no reason.

"Sudou-kun's not the problem if the situation was started by class C."

"Right? I seriously don't get it. I don't believe that teacher either."

"We should tell Chiyabashira-sensei tomorrow about what happened. How Sudou-kun isn't at fault."

Things aren't that simple. Sudou must've told the school what he just told us now. But since there's no evidence to back up his claim, the school decided to punish him."

"When you told the school, what did they say?"

“They said they would give me time until next Tuesday to prove it. If I’m not able to, I’m suspended until the summer. On top of that, the whole class will be deducted points as well.”

It seems like the school has decided to wait. But, it seems like Sudou is more worried about not being able to become a regular, rather than getting our points deducted or being suspended. I guess he couldn’t stand the thought of his chances being ruined.

“What should I do?”

“Sudou-kun, you tried to tell the teachers truthfully, right? It’s strange, since they didn’t believe your story, even if you did nothing wrong. Right?”

Kushida was looking for a positive response from me, but sadly, I couldn’t give an affirmative reply.

“Well, I wonder... I don’t think this is that simple.”

“What do you mean by ‘I wonder’? Are you doubting me?”

“At the very least, the school doesn’t trust you, right? For example, it wouldn’t be strange if Kushida was agreeing with you just so that our points wouldn’t decrease.”

“That... that may be true.”

This time, the trouble won’t be solved by proving who started the fight.

The three of them might be suspended for a week, for example.

There are three people that say that they were beaten. Without sound proof, Sudou will most definitely be punished. And that means only one thing.

“Even if the other party is the one at fault, Sudou might still take some of the blame.”

“Hah? Why? It was legitimate self-defence. Right!?”

Sudou, unable to understand, hit the table with his fist. Kushida jumped in surprise.

“My bad, I got slightly upset.”

Seeing Kushida’s frightened face, Sudou apologized.

“Hey... Why will Sudou-kun still take some of the blame?”

“Sudou hit them, but they didn’t hit Sudou. That’s a big reason why, I think. It’s a more difficult problem than just saying ‘self-defence’. If they came at you with a knife and a metal bat, things would be different. Normally, if they were going to pick a fight, they would probably prepare for it. ‘Self-defence’ is when you have to defend yourself against sudden, dangerous attacks. In other words, I don’t think this is exactly ‘self-defence’.”

This is the best I can think of, given the circumstances.

“I-I don’t understand. There were three people, three. I think it’s sufficiently dangerous.”

I think the number of people has to be taken into account, but this case is a delicate one. If the school thinks that the number of people than I think, then Sudou might be declared innocent.

But it’s dangerous to think optimistically.

“I think the school gave a few days because they also found it difficult to come to a decision.”

The proof we have right now... the only possible key we have is the injuries of the other three.

“Then... they’re planning on heavily punishing Sudou-kun, huh.”

“Whoever brought it up first has the upper hand. The victim’s testimony works as evidence.”

“I still don’t get it. I’m the victim! This isn’t a joke. If I get punished, I won’t be able to become a regular for this tournament!”

Those class C boys purposely lost to Sudou to crush his chances. They’re trying to stop him from becoming a regular, while bringing down the rest of class D as well. That kind of plan seems likely.

“Let’s ask the three class C students to speak honestly. If they feel like what they did is wrong, they’ll definitely have feelings of guilt, right?”

“Those guys aren’t idiots. They won’t speak honestly. Dammit... I won’t ever forgive them, those bastards...!”

Picking up the ballpoint pen that was on the table, he snapped it into two. It’s not like I don’t understand where he’s coming from, but that’s my ballpoint pen...

“If trying to explain it didn’t work, then we’ll have to find some actual proof.”

“Yea... It would be great if there was evidence that proved that Sudou-kun wasn’t at fault...”

If things were that simple, this wouldn’t be so difficult. Even then, Sudou couldn’t deny it, and started thinking about the situation.

“There might be something. It might just be my misunderstanding, but... When I was fighting with those guys, I felt a strange presence around the area, as if someone was watching.”

Even though he wasn't too confident about it, Sudou threw the idea out there.

“So you're saying that there might be an eyewitness?”

“Well, that's what I thought. There's no definite proof.”

An eyewitness, huh. If they saw the whole thing, it would be good. But in some cases, it might drive Sudou further into the corner. For example, if they only saw the situation after Sudou started fighting, it might be the final blow for Sudou.

“...What should I do...”

Sudou held his head in his hands. Kushida talked, breaking the heavy silence.

“There are two ways to prove your innocence. The first is to go get the class C boys to admit their lies. Since Sudou-kun wasn't in the wrong, it is probably best to get them to acknowledge it.”

That's definitely idealistic.

“Like I said earlier, that's impossible. They won't admit that they lied.”

Like he said, they probably won't admit it. If they confessed to the school that they liked about someone else to get them into trouble, they would definitely get suspended.

“And then the other method is find that eyewitness. If someone saw you guys fight, we might be able to look for more evidence for the truth.”

Well, this is about the only realistic plan we have.

“How do you plan to look for that eyewitness?”

“Asking people one by one? Or asking each class works too.”

“It would be great if someone came forward, but...”

I thought that our discussion had been going for pretty long, so I went to the cupboard. I took out the instant coffee and tea packs that I bought at the convenience store right after school started. Well, Sudou’s not very good with coffee, though. After preparing a pot of hot water, I put everything on the table.

“This might be a shameless request, but... can you keep this a secret?”

Taking the cup from the table and blowing on it, Sudou asked us apologetically.

“Eh... a secret...?”

“If rumor of this spreads, it’ll make its way to the basketball club. I don’t want that to happen. You understand, right?”

“Sudou, even then—”

“Please understand, Ayanokouji. If I can’t play basketball, I have nothing left.”

He grabbed both of my shoulders and pleaded. Things won’t blow over even if the rumors don’t spread. If word spreads that he used violence, the basketball club might not let him stay anymore.

“Won’t the class C students spread the rumors themselves? It would be convenient for them.”

That was what I was thinking about. It wouldn't be strange for them to spread the rumors themselves. As if he was saying "Seriously!?", Sudou held his head in his hands once again.

"What if rumor got out already...?"

"No, for today, the news of the incident probably hasn't spread."

"Why do you think that?"

"If those class C kids spread the rumor already, it would've probably reached us long ago."

The school called in Sudou after school.

Also, there wasn't any word about it during the day.

At least, it hasn't spread widely yet.

"So we're safe for now?"

But how long will that last? Even if you put a gag order on it, it'll become a rumor sooner or later. Before long, it'll be known to the public. Right now, the only thing that's certain is—

"Sudou-kun, you should probably try to stay away from this case."

Kushida, also understanding this, advised Sudou.

"Yea, it'll be bad if the related party tries to do anything."

I replied, agreeing with Kushida's words.

"But, pushing the whole thing onto you guys is—"

"I don't feel like this is being pushed onto us. We just want to help Sudou-kun. I don't know how far we can get, but we'll do our best. Ok?"

“...Alright. I know this is a bother, but I will leave it to you guys.”

It seems like he understood that things would get more complicated if he tried to get involved himself.

“Well then, we’ll return to our rooms. Sorry for intruding so suddenly.”

“Don’t worry about it, other than the fact that you made duplicate keys.”

Saying “I won’t return it”, Sudou put his key in his pocket. I should lock the door with a chain from now on...

“Kushida, see you tomorrow.”

“Bye-bye, Sudou-kun.”

She saw Sudou off, who looked kind of sad. It’s only a few rooms over, though.

“Well then. Kushida, are you not going back?”

“I just wanted to ask a few more things about what happened today. You don’t seem like you’re very enthusiastic to help Sudou-kun.”

Kushida looked at me with wavering eyes. I got the sudden urge to hold her hand. I stretched my back and shook off my bad thoughts.

“It’s not like that, but there’s not much I can do. I can only respond to Sudou’s story. If it was Horikita or Hirata, they might be able to give some better advice.”

“That’s probably true, but Sudou-kun came to rely on you. Even more than Horikita-san, Hirata-kun, or even Ike-kun, he entrusted his story to you.”

“I don’t know if I should be happy or not.”

“Fu~n.”

I was confused Kushida’s eyes turned cold for a split second.

Speaking of which, Kushida once told me that she hated me directly to my face. She always has a gentle smile, so I forget from time to time, but I might get burned once again if it happens one too many times.

“It might better if Ayanokouji-kun makes a bigger effort to blend in with the class.”

“Well, I’m more or less trying. It’s just that not much has come out of it. This time, I don’t have the courage to say that I will help Sudou.”

I guess she doesn’t think that I worry about not being able to eat lunch with anyone.

I may think that way, but Kushida probably knows that I have trouble.

“Kushida, you’re going to help Sudou, right?”

“Of course. We’re friends. Ayanokouji-kun, you’ll—what are you doing?”

“As I said earlier, talking to either Horikita or Hirata is better, right? Well, Sudou hates Hirata, so Horikita is the obvious choice.”

But I don’t think that Horikita would have a good idea to solve this problem.

“Will Horikita-san even help?”

"I don't know. We'll have to ask. But she won't idly watch as class D collapses... probably."

I was feeling a bit hesitant. After all, it's Horikita.

"I know you're trying to avoid the question, but Ayanokouji-kun, you'll help too, right?"

She steered the conversation back even though I was trying to change the subject.

"...Is it fine if I'm no help? I'll probably be useless, you know?"

"It won't be like that. You'll be useful somehow."

She didn't say how I would be useful, though.

"What should we starting tomorrow? Sudou-kun said that it would be useless, but I still think that it's a good idea to go talk to the three people he fought. Actually, I'm friends with Komiya-kun and his group. So, we might be able to persuade them. Hmm, is it dangerous...?"

It seemed like Kushida couldn't throw away the option of talking to them.

"The risk is high. Not considering who started the fight, it's the three of them that first brought it up to the school. They have the upper hand in this situation. Also, it wouldn't work. Since it was them, not Sudou, that picked a fight."

There's no easy way to prove to the school that they lied. But if the school knows that they fabricated a lie and told them, class C would get a massive penalty."

"Then, I guess looking for the witness is the way to go."

Even that's pretty difficult. Without any details, it'll be impossible to find an eyewitness. Asking "Did you see something?" is an extraordinary waste of time and effort.

I won't reach a conclusion now, no matter how much I think about this right now.

If any change occurs in the situation, the flow of events might change a bit.

Chapter 2: Weak point

The bad events didn't stop there. The following morning, during homeroom, Chiyabashira-sensei had an announcement to make.

"I have an announcement for you all today. There was a bit of trouble the other day. Him over there, Sudou, and some class C students were involved in an incident. To say the truth, it was a fight."

The classroom became noisy.

Depending on the details of the disagreement between the two groups, Sudou may be suspended and the class points may be deducted. Sensei told the whole situation to the class.

Chiyabashira-sensei was so disinterested and had absolutely no expression in her face that it had a certain beauty to it.

Without any bias, she explained the school's neutral position on the whole matter.

"Uh... why hasn't the matter been resolved already?"

Hirata asked a reasonable question.

"The complaint was raised by class C. They said it was a one-sided fight. However, when we asked Sudou, he said that their claim was not true. He said that the class C students called him out, looking for a fight."

"I wasn't in the wrong; it was self-defence."

Declaring that without any shame, Sudoi attracted the cold gazes of his classmates.

“But you have no evidence. Am I wrong?”

“Evidence? I don’t have anything like that.”

“In other words, we don’t know the truth yet. Therefore, the situation has been put on hold. The outcome will be decided on who the actual perpetrator is.”

“I don’t know anything except that I’m innocent. I want money for my troubles.”

“He says so himself, but as of now, there’s not much credibility. If, as Sudou says, there is an eyewitness, the situation may change. If there are any witnesses to the fight, please raise your hands.”

Chiyabashira-sensei kept talking with an indifferent voice. No student raised their hands.

“Too bad Sudou, but it seems like no one here was a witness.”

“...Looks that way.”

When Chiyabashira-sensei looked at Sudou with doubtful eyes, he looked down at his desk.

“In order to look for a witness, each teacher is informing their class about the situation.”

“Hah!? You told everyone!?”

The school probably can’t do anything else. Since Sudou raised the possibility of a witness, each class in the school had to be asked in order to find such a person.

For Sudou, who had intended to hide the incident, this was not a good situation.

“Damn...!”

Sudou’s plan of keeping it within our group had already failed.

“Anyway, that’s all. We’ll most likely get a final decision by next Tuesday, taking the presence or absence of evidence into consideration. Homeroom is now over.”

Chiyabashira-sensei left the room, with Sudou quickly leaving right after. He probably knew that he would get mad at someone if he stayed in the room.

“Hey, isn’t Sudou the worst?”

The first to talk was Ike.

“If we lost points because of Sudou, doesn’t that mean we’re going to have 0 points again?”

The situation was getting out of hand as the classroom became clamorous.

If we ended up losing points, Sudou would be the target of the class’s frustration. Naturally, Kushida tried to alleviate the situation.

“Hey, everyone. Can you all hear me out?”

Kushida took the chance to stop the uproar and change the situation.

“As Sensei said, Sudou-kun was involved in a fight. But Sudou-kun was dragged into it.”

“Kushida-chan, by saying ‘dragged into it’, does that mean you believe in Sudou’s words?”

Kushida told yesterday’s story to the whole class. About how he was being considered as a regular, and how a few people who were envious tried to get Sudou kicked out of the club and the resulting fight. She explained that Sudou beat them up in self-defense. Most of the class listened to Kushida’s sincere words in silence. If Sudou or I had tried to explain the situation in the same way, it wouldn’t have the same effect.

It was a reasonable story, but considering his usual behavior, no one could believe it so easily.

“I would like to ask again. If anyone knows someone in this class, among your friends, or among your senpais that saw what happened, please tell me. You can contact me at any time. I’d appreciate it.”

Even though she had said the same thing as Chiyabashira-sensei did, the class had a completely different reaction.

It’s fascinating how she’s naturally gifted at being able to connect with people.

The class was wrapped in silence. The one who broke the silence was not an eyewitness, but rather, Yamauchi.

“Hey, Kushida-chan. I don’t believe Sudou’s story. I think he’s making it up to justify his own actions. During middle school, he kept talking about beating people up. He even lectured us about how it was fun to beat people up.”

Starting with Yamauchi, the whole class voiced their dissatisfaction towards Sudou.

“Earlier, I saw him grab some kid from another class just because they bumped in the hallway.”

“I saw him cut in line at the cafeteria and get mad at someone who tried to warn him.”

Kushida’s words about Sudou’s innocence didn’t reach the class. The class, feeling that they were going to lose their hard-earned points, all left Sudou to dry.

“I want to believe him.”

The Hero of the class, Hirata, stood up as if to support Kushida.

“I can understand if a student of another class doubts him. But I think it’s wrong to doubt a friend, a fellow classmate. Isn’t helping out someone in need what friends do?”

“I think so too~”

Brushing her bangs to the side, Karuizawa followed up after him.

“If it’s a false accusation, wouldn’t it be a problem? In any case, it’d be sad if he was innocent.”

If Kushida is a leader with a soft heart, Karuizawa is a leader who is strong willed. Most of the girls voiced their agreement, seemingly influenced by her presence.

It’s a typical behavior of the Japanese people: following suit when one person does something assertively. Secretly, they were probably making fun of him, but at least they were pretending to help. For now, the criticism of Sudou stops.

Hirata, Kushida, and Karuizawa. These three were particularly popular.

“I’ll ask my friends.”

“Then I’ll ask my senpais in the soccer club.”

“I’ll ask around as well.”

With these three in the center, the attempt to prove Sudou’s innocence began.

I guess I don’t have to help. It’ll be better to leave it to them anyway.

Well, time to fade out quietly.

1

“I planned to... fade out, but...”

Lunch break. For some reason, I was involved with the usual group and went to the cafeteria.

The members were me, Kushida, Horikita, Ike, Yamauchi, and Sudou.

It was inevitable. When lunchtime arrived, Kushida came up to me and asked, “Want to go to lunch?” with a smile. I couldn’t possibly refuse right? So I said, “Sure!”. .

“You seem to be involved in one problem after another, Sudou-kun.”

Horikita sighed in exasperation.

Naturally, the topic of discussion was how to prove Sudou’s innocence.

“Well it can’t be helped, so we’ll assist you as friends, Sudou.”

Although he treated Sudou as a bad person at first, Ike's attitude changed. It's definitely because Kushida stepped in. Even so, Sudou apologised.

"I'm sorry for causing trouble again Horikita. However, I wasn't the one at fault this time. I was really frustrated at those class C bastards."

As though it was someone else's problem, Sudou talked to Horikita in an indifferent tone.

"I'm sorry, but this time, I don't really feel like helping."

Horikita immediately rejected Sudou's request for help.

"The most important thing to class D in order to rise up is to take back the points we lost as quickly as possible. However, because of you, we probably won't be able to get any points. In other words, you've just messed up that plan."

"Wait a second. It's probably true, but I'm seriously not the one at fault! I only hit them because they provoked me first! What part of that is my fault!?"

"You keep saying that they started the fight, but it's nothing more than a trivial difference. Were you not aware of that?"

"Trivial my ass. It's completely different. I'm not the one to blame!"

"Is that so? Well, good luck."

Grabbing her untouched tray, Horikita stood up.

"Are you not going to help!? Aren't we friends!?"

“Don’t make me laugh. I’ve never considered you as a friend. I feel most uncomfortable when I’m with people that don’t realize how stupid and foolish they are. Goodbye.”

Horikita sighed, looking more exasperated than angry, and left the room.

“What’s up with her!? Dammit!”

Unable to vent his anger anywhere else, he hit the cafeteria table.

I noticed the nearby student’s miso soup spilling . I saw him glare at Sudou, but fall silent upon looking at his face. And I understood how he felt.

“I guess we’ll have to make do with what we have”

“I knew you would understand, Yamauchi. I’m relying on you too, Ayanokouji.”

Seems like I’m second to Yamauchi. Well, it’s not really surprising.

“Even if you ask me to help, I can’t really do much, you know?”

It’s ineffective to self-deprecate whenever someone asks for help, it seems.

“You’ve been saying that ever since yesterday Ayanokouji-kun. Ike, say something.”

“No, but... well, it’s strange for Ayanokouji to say that he won’t be useful. Well, it’s better than not being there. Probably.”

As expected, Ike couldn’t come up with how I would be useful.

With a smug face, I looked at Kushida. It was though I was showing off the power of being a boring person.

“This is disheartening. I thought we got along when we were preparing for the test...”

Ike said in a disappointed tone. I saw Horikita sitting back down in the distance, looking slightly irritated.

“I don’t understand Horikita at all. What’s wrong with her, Ayanokouji? Why is she like that?”

I didn’t know the answer to the question. What am I, a user manual for her? To avoid answering, I stuffed my face with rice.

“It’s strange though. Horikita-san wants to get to class A, right? If we save Sudou-kun, the class would receive points. I wonder why she doesn’t want to.”

“Isn’t it because she dislikes Sudou? She said she didn’t think of him as a friend.”

Saying that wasn’t going to help..

They misunderstood what she said earlier for her dislike of Sudou..

“I don’t want to think that way, but I guess it’s true...”

“Kushida, Horikita is—”

I unconsciously start to speak. Kushida looked at me in interest.

“Horikita-san is?”

“Ah... It may not be relevant, but here are my thoughts on this: I think Horikita normally talks in a harsh manner. But I also think you guys are misunderstanding her.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“She won’t help if there’s no reason to do so... I think.”

“What do you mean by, ‘I think, I think’? Are you just guessing?”

Sudou bursts into the conversation. As he is aware of Horikita, it wasn't difficult to understand that he didn't like being rejected by her.

Horikita had probably realized this when Chiyabashira-sensei was telling us about the incident.

This happened for a reason. And the ending she foresaw... in other words, the probability that this would end with positive results is near impossible. Upon realizing that, Horikita purposely acted cold towards Sudou.

If it were to be said here, it would not be able to much of a difference as it'll only make them feel disheartened. Without knowing how things will end, I hesitated to reply to Sudou's outburst.

Not wanting to pour cold water onto their plans, Horikita probably didn't say anything and left.

“Well... It's a guess like you say, Sudou.”

“You don't even have a reason for thinking that way?”

“Horikita's smart after all. I felt like she came to a conclusion that made her act that way.”

“A conclusion? Yeah, a conclusion to forsake me.”

“Let's not accuse others, Sudou. It's only natural for Ayanokouji-kun to defend Horikita, since he's always with her all the time.. She's important to him, you know?”

Ike quipped at me with an evil smile on his face.

Sudou clicked his tongue and reached out for his tray, still feeling irritated.

“If someone came up as a witness, it would be great. Since the teachers asked all the classes, this will probably be resolved quickly.”

I understand wanting to think that way, but would the situation be resolved that easily?

After all, the issue was serious. It's not unreasonable for Horikita to give up. It would be checkmate if the witness, assuming there is one in the first place, was from Class C. It would be natural for class C to hide the truth in order to protect themselves. After all, this school is made up of ranks. It's unlikely that any feelings of guilt will outweigh the disadvantages the class may get.

But if the witness is not from class C, the problem is where to look.

If it was someone that was neutral and had seen the situation unfold from the beginning, the result may be different.

“Ah, sorry, I'll be gone for a bit. I'm going to go ask my senpais that I just saw over there.”

Kushida stood up from her seat.

“You're doing your best for people like Sudou, Kushida-chan. It's cute.”

Fascinated by Kushida's back, Ike was enchanted.

“I should seriously confess to Kushida-chan...”

“It's impossible. You think she'll drop to your level?”

“I have a better chance than you do.”

The two similarly enchanted boys quarreled.

“If I dated Kushida-chan... fufu.”

Drooling, Ike started to fantasise with indecent thoughts.

“Hey. Why are you fantasizing about my Kushida-chan?”

“Noo...”

“W-what delusions are you having!? Talk!”

It seems like he lost his sense of control.

“What do you mean, what? Of course I’m thinking of her nude, right next to me. In other words, cuddling.”

Somehow, the whole scene was imaginable to a certain extent with those few words.

“Dammit, I won’t lose! I’ve also thought of various things!”

Hey hey, that’s neither ethical nor suitable.

“Stop it. Don’t touch my Kushida-chan with your filthy hands.”

In some way, Kushida seemed pitiful.

She’s probably the object of several boys’ fantasies every night.



“As I thought, the best part about high school are the girls. I really want a girlfriend. If I have a girlfriend during summer, I can go to the pool with her! It’d be the best!”

“It would be the best if Kushida-chan was my girlfriend... it would be the best if she was my girlfriend...”

As if it was something valuable, Yamauchi said it twice.

“But since Kushida-chan is cute, won’t she get a boyfriend sooner or later...?”

“Don’t say that, Yamauchi. It doesn’t look like she has a boyfriend, so it’s alright.”

Ike replied with self-confidence, though it seemed like he was trying to reassure himself.

“Do you want to know? I bet you guys want to know.”

“What? What are you talking about, Ike? Tell me.”

While saying, “Well, guess I can’t help it,” Ike took out his phone.

“Using the phone we got from the school, we can actually track the location of registered friends.”

Ike searched for Kushida’s location as he said so.

Shortly after, the phone blinked with Kushida’s information, showing that she was in the cafeteria.

“I’ve always been checking regularly, even on weekends. And then I talk to her, pretending that we met by chance, in order to make sure that she doesn’t have a boyfriend.”

While crossing his arms, Ike had a confident look on his face, but what he was doing is nothing more than stalking her.

It's already at the level where the police would usually intervene.

"Realistically, Kushida-chan is out of our league... she wouldn't drop to our level. Would it be possible if I aimed lower...?"

"Yea... in the first place, my girlfriend can't be ugly..."

"They've got to be at least a 70..."

It seems like the two boys started to dream about getting a girlfriend.

Their wild delusions were shattered, but they could not get rid of their high expectations.

"Ayanokouji, do you want a girlfriend?"

"Well, if it's possible."

If I was able to get a girlfriend just because I wanted one, I wouldn't have much difficulty socialising with others.

"I'm just asking again, but are you sure you don't feel anything for Horikita?"

He thrust his chopsticks towards me while asking.

"I don't, really."

"Are you sure?"

He asked again, looking like he didn't believe me. I nodded my head vigorously to get the point across.

“...Then it’s fine. I thought you were clinging onto her. I mean, that would be a bother for Horikita.”

I don’t remember clinging onto anyone. Especially not her.

“But are you ok with Horikita? Well, she’s cute, but... she’s pretty boring, right? I wouldn’t be able to stand someone like her. She wouldn’t want to go to the pool or go on any dates.”

“I don’t know. Horikita’s better than Kushida.”

Sudou nodded two, three times and crossed his arms while being prideful about his preferences.

“If it was someone unrelated, she would refuse the date, but if it was her boyfriend, she would probably agree, right? And she would show her boyfriend expressions that she wouldn’t show any other boy.”

“I see... I can imagine it too. She’s cute, after all.”

While glancing at Horikita, who was sitting quite a distance away, Yamauchi entered his delusions.

“But that Horikita seems to have abandoned you, Sudou.”

“That’s... well, it’s true. Damn it, I feel sad now.”

“Well, I’ve got nothing to say since the number of rivals for Kushida-chan just decreased.”

It seems like Ike decided to look for girls around a chest size of 70 while keeping Kushida as his main goal.

“By the way Ayanokouji, if you don’t like Horikita, who do you like? Sudou has Horikita, Yamauchi has Kushida-chan. Are you going to be a rival?”

“Who...”

No particular girl came to mind.

For a few moments, I thought about it seriously. If I were to choose, then... Kushida? She's the person I talk to the most, so it's inevitable. But since I know she doesn't like me, I haven't really thought about her.

“There's no one.”

However, Ike and Yamauchi sent me doubtful glances.

“Do you believe that there are guys that don't have a crush on a girl?”

“There's no one like that at all. Don't hide it, Ayanokouji.”

“Unlike you guys, I haven't really met with many girls other than Horikita and Kushida.”

“Well, I guess. I haven't really seen you talk to any other girls.”

It's sad that it's true.

“Should I introduce you to some girls?”

Placing an arm around my shoulder, Ike talked with confidence.

“Isn't it sad that you're trying to introduce some girls when you don't even have a girlfriend?”

“Uu... yea...”

“Sae-chan-sensei said that we would have a vacation in the summer, right? I'll definitely get a girlfriend then. Kushida-chan if possible! Or some other cute girl!”

“Me too, me too! Even if she’s the worst, I’ll get a girlfriend... and then I’ll have my lovey-dovey high school life!”

“...When should I confess to Horikita...”

The three of them talked about the girls in their minds.

“We should have a competition to see who gets a girlfriend first. The first person to have a girlfriend will treat all of us with food! Alright?”

It was difficult to decide if I was a true friend by participating in a competition like this.

“What’s wrong, Ayanokouji? By any chance, you’re not going to say that you won’t participate, will you?”

“No, I was just wondering why the first person to get a girlfriend is the one to treat everyone else.”

“Oh, I see. You’re just being jealous, right?”

“A person who gets a girlfriend is happy. Since they’re happy, they treat everyone. It’s that kind of feeling.”

Although they were getting excited, Sudou’s problem still persists.

2

The class was divided up into certain groups after school.

However, there weren’t many people helping in the first place.

Hirata and Karuizawa led the Hero & Girl team while Kushida led the Beautiful Girl & Co team.

They had decided to look for the witness by themselves.

Even so, it's difficult to get results in such a short amount of time.

There are 400 enrolled students at the school. Even if everyone from Class 1-D was left out, there isn't much of a difference.

It would be difficult even if all the time during the morning, breaks and after school were included.

"Well, I'm going home."

"Are you really going to go Horikita-san?"

"Yeah."

Horikita replied without hesitation and left the classroom.

As expected of Horikita. She wasn't discouraged by the surrounding gazes, all asking, "You're leaving?" When she becomes an adult, she would probably be the type to quickly leave a drinking party—promising to finish things up at the next meeting—without reading the mood.

"Well..."

If Horikita's tactic is to leave out in the open, my tactic is to leave quietly in the shadows.

"Ayanokouji-kun."

Kushida called out to me with an anxious voice. The small size of the classroom prevented my escape as I was immediately discovered despite my stealthy footsteps.

"What is it? Do you need anything from me?"

Sorry, Kushida. I'm going to reject your invitation with a heart of steel. And then I'll return to the dorms.

“You’ll... help, right?”

“Of course.”

I couldn’t refuse her. Kushida’s upturned eyes and her cute request added up to a lethal combination.

I couldn’t help it; it felt like I was being controlled by Kushida. I wasn’t able to resist.

If a person resolves to stay awake, they’ll fall asleep in 24 to 48 hours. Despite some people who occasionally claim that they can stay awake for a long time without sleep, they would eventually collapse.

To put it simply, a person has a limit as to how long they can endure. It’s a human mechanism.

After I finished giving an excuse, Kushida made a suggestion.

“I really want to get Horikita-san to help this time. Can you ask her again please?”

“But she went home today.”

They failed to stop her just a few moments ago. Was it already time for revenge?

“Yea. Can you chase after her? If it’s Horikita-san, I think she will definitely become a big help.”

“Well, that’s true.”

“If we take the time to persuade her, don’t we have a chance?”

If she wants to try again, I have no right to stop her. I nodded, telling her I understood.

“Ike-kun, Yamauchi-kun, can you stay here? I’ll come back quickly.”

“Ok.”

The two of them aren’t on the best of terms with Horikita. Anyway, it doesn’t seem like Kushida’s forcing them to follow along.

“Let’s go.”

Taking Kushida’s arm, I left the classroom. I wonder what this bittersweet feeling is. For some reason, I heard Ike and Yamauchi’s angry voices behind me. It must have been my imagination. Heh.

As I made my way down to the entrance of the building, there was no sign of Horikita. I decided to go out of the building. As she’s not the type to stop for anything on the way back, she was probably heading straight towards the dorms.

I pushed past the crowd of students putting on their shoes. Soon after, I saw Horikita in between the school and the dorms (as there’s not much of a distance in the first place).

Most of the groups headed back had two people or more, but there was alone figure that stood out.

“Horikita-san.”

I hesitated before speaking to her, but Kushida called out to her with confidence.

“...What is it?”

Horikita turned around, looking slightly surprised. It seemed like she didn’t expect us to chase after her.

“I really want Horikita-san to help with Sudou-kun’s incident... Is that not possible?”

“I thought I already rejected that a few minutes ago.”

She shrugged her shoulders, as if the person she was talking to was an idiot.

“I know, but... But I do think we need to do this to get to class A.”

“We need to do this to get to class A, huh?”

Looking completely unconvinced, Horikita didn't listen to Kushida's words.

“If you want to help Sudou-kun, go ahead. I don't have the right to stop you. However, if you need someone to help, go ask someone else. I'm busy.”

“There isn't anyone that's playing around right now.”

I unintentionally retorted. She glared at me, with eyes that said, “Why are you talking?”

“It's important to spend time alone. It's uncomfortable to have that time snatched away.”

As expected of a loner's line of thought, she disliked spending time with other people.

“Even if I help him now, this will happen again. Won't it just be a vicious cycle? You may believe that Sudou-kun is the victim this time, but I think differently.”

“Huh? ...Isn't Sudou-kun the victim? It would be troubling if he was lying though.”

Kushida didn't understand what Horikita said.

“Maybe it really was class C that started the fight this time, but in the end Sudou-kun is also the perpetrator.”

“W-Wait, Why? Wasn’t he dragged into the fight?”

With an expression that said, “Oh my”, Horikita looked in my direction.

Not me, I hadn’t said anything. I avoided looking into her eyes.

After a few seconds of silence, Horikita spoke with a tired voice.

“Why was he dragged into this incident? The entire issue will be difficult to resolve without solving this fundamental question. I will not agree to help until this question is answered. Since I can’t help you, why don’t you ask the guy next to you? Even though he pretends to not understand, he probably knows what I’m thinking.”



Please stop talking with the impression that I understand.

Kushida looked at me with a confused expression, as though she was asking, “Do you know?”

Horikita, don’t say anything unnecessary... She resumed walking, implying that we were left to resolve the issue. Kushida, having understood something from Horikita’s words, was unable to stop her.

“Sudou-kun is also... the perpetrator? Is that... so?”

Kushida looked at me, asking for advice.

After Horikita revealed that I was pretending, even if I were to try to feign ignorance, the future seems troubling. Moreover, if Kushida were to ask with a cute expression, I would gladly give her my bank account information.

“I kind of understood what Horikita said. At the very least, Sudou is partially at fault here. He’s the type of person that easily resents others, so he has a violent behavior and tends to say reckless remarks to those who provoke him. I was surprised and impressed when I heard that Sudou was being considered as a regular. He seems good at basketball, but his arrogance and pride would eventually make some people, particularly those who practice just as hard, hate him. Furthermore, there have been rumours that Sudou has been fighting since middle school. I don’t know anyone who knew Sudou previously, but seeing that the rumor has been circulating for awhile, there must be some truth to the matter.”

The impression other people had of Sudou wasn’t good.

“This was bound to happen sooner or later. That’s why Horikita said that Sudou was the perpetrator too.”

“In other words, his usual actions caused this situation, didn’t they?”

“Yep. As long as he continues to provoke those around him with his behavior, this trouble was unavoidable. And if there’s no proof, his image, particularly his impression on others, would be used against him. For example, let’s say there are two suspects for a murder case. One of them has a previous record of murder, while the other is upright and diligent. Who would you believe?”

If one was forced to answer, the majority would have made the same choice.

“That’s obvious; the upright person.”

“With or without evidence, a decision must be made; even if it’s not the truth. That’s what’s happening right now. So long as Sudou doesn’t recognise his mistakes, Horikita won’t give in.”

However, it felt slightly different than the expression of “you reap what you sow.”

“I see, so that’s what she meant...”

Kushida, finally understanding what Horikita meant, gave a small nod.

“So Horikita-san isn’t helping in order to teach Sudou-kun a lesson?”

“Something like that. By punishing him, she wants Sudou to have some self-awareness.”

Kushida seemed to understand, but couldn’t agree with it.

Instead, it looked like she was mad; she had balled her fists in anger..

“I don’t understand why she would abandon Sudou-kun just to punish him. If she’s dissatisfied about something, she should tell him directly. That’s what being a friend is for.”

I didn’t think Horikita considered Sudou a friend in the first place... Putting that aside, she wasn’t the type of person who would teach this nicely. She had no sense of responsibility for others.

“You should do what you believe is right. Wanting to help Sudou isn’t wrong in the first place.”

“Yeah.”

Kushida nodded without hesitation. She’s the type to help out however many times for her friends. To be honest, it’s a really difficult thing to do; something only people like Kushida could do.

“However, it’s probably better to be more careful when telling Sudou directly. Since there’s no point if he doesn’t reflect on it, he should become aware of it by himself.”

“...Alright. I’ll follow Ayanokouji-kun’s advice.”

Changing her line of thought, Kushida stretched her back.

“Let’s go look for a witness now.”

After returning to the classroom, I joined up with the others.

“Were you unable to persuade Horikita in the end?”

“Sorry, we tried.”

“It’s not Kushida’s fault. We should be fine with the people we have.”

“I look forward to working with you, Ike-kun, Yamauchi-kun.”

Kushida stood there, eyes shining brightly, asking for help. The two of them stared back at her with mad love in their gazes.

“Where are we headed?”

Looking randomly for a witness would be inefficient.

It would probably be best to come up with a plan before making a move.

“If everyone’s fine with it, how about asking class B first?”

“Why class B?”

“Because they’re the class that benefits the most if a witness is found.”

“Sorry Ayanokouji-kun, but I don’t quite understand.”

“Between classes D and C, which class is an obstacle to class B? To put it simply, which class is more of a threat?”

“Of course, it’s class C. So we should ask class C last. But why not class A?”

“In the first place, there is very little evidence. Class A has no need to provide help in a situation that wouldn’t affect them as this dispute is between classes C and D.”

Of course, we still weren’t sure if class B could be trusted. If it was someone crafty, they might have a plan to defeat not only class C but also class D. Even if their plan isn’t as detailed, they would have some kind of plan.

“Alright, let’s head to class B!”

“Stop.”

I reflexively grabbed the back of Kushida's collar as she went ahead.

"Nya~!"

Startled, Kushida let out a cat-like scream.

"Moe~!"

Yamauchi had hearts in his eyes at Kushida's cute yelp. That action was probably on purpose...

Although I had thought that, my heart died from cuteness overload.

"Kushida's communication skills are vital here. However, it's not as simple as casually entering the class and attempting to make friends.

"Is that so?"

If the witness was a friend, or would help for free, there'd be no problem. However if it was a more calculating person, they wouldn't agree to help without a price.

We won't know whether or not they'll help us until we talk to them. Even if we take that into consideration... will things turn out as expected?

"Do you have any acquaintances in class B?"

"Yep. There's only a few people that I talk to and get along with, though."

"Let's try to ask those people first then."

We didn't want word to spread quickly that we were looking for witnesses urgently.

“One by one? Isn’t it better to ask all of them at once?”

Ike seemed to dislike the indirect strategy.

“I also think we’re looking at it a bit too negatively. It might be good to ask class B first, but I think it’s better to ask a lot of people at once. We might not be able to find the witness in time if we do it slowly.”

“I see. That might be true; do what you think is best Kushida.”

“Sorry Ayanokouji-kun.”

Kushida held her hands together in front of her apologetically. It was nothing she should be sorry about. It’s natural that our opinions didn’t match, and if there were several different viewpoints, we should go with the majority opinion. I withdrew and left the plan up to Kushida and the others. Unexpectedly, I felt someone’s gaze on me and looked behind.

Only about a third of the class remained in the classroom.

Nothing seems out of place.

At the very least, I couldn’t pinpoint what’s bothering me.

3

The first class we visited felt slightly odd. Although it had the same basic layout, it felt like we came to a completely different place. I corrected my initial misunderstanding that a home and an away game were only slightly different. Since we didn’t know if the class would be an enemy or an ally, our initial impression of the class was also different. Even Ike and Yamauchi were shocked; they couldn’t move from the doorway.

Being the only one unfazed, Kushida started talking to her friends with a smile right after she entered the classroom. What an amazing attitude. She was able to easily chat with her friends regardless of their gender, similar to how she acted with class D. I wouldn't be able to do the same.

The two who were the most jealous were Ike and Yamauchi. Kushida was talking and having fun with people who were clearly more attractive.

"D-Damn it! There are way too many guys aiming for my Kushida-chan!"

What do you mean... What kind of dialect is that?[1]

"Don't panic Ike, it's alright. We've have an advantage: we're in the same class as Kushida-chan!"

Feeling annoyed, the prideful two comforted each other. Although there were only 10 people in the room, Kushida started explaining the situation to those who were there.

Class B's atmosphere felt the same as Class D, certainly not someone one would expect from a bunch of honor students. It wasn't stiff at all and, contrary to how I imagined them, there were people who dyed their hair while some of the girls were wearing skirts that were too short.

I guess you couldn't judge a book by it's cover. Or was there something other than academic ability that Class B was better than Class D at? This school's system still had way too many mysteries.

It's bothersome to think about these things.

As this was Kushida's lead, I left her to take care of things.

Trying not to be noticed by the others, I took a few steps back from the doorway.

“I want to go home...”

I didn’t want them to hear me complaining to myself.

Out on the field, I saw the track and field club running laps around the track.

Since the air conditioning was comfortable, I didn’t feel like going outside.

“The sports club sure is working hard.”

Having finished scouting out class B, Ike joined me in looking out of the window. He’s a fickle guy; this wait must have been boring for him.

“People who participate in club activities are stupid.”

“What’s with the sudden thought? You know that saying those kind of things will turn half the school against you, don’t you?”

I didn’t know the exact number, but I estimated that around 60 to 70 percent of the students participated in club activities,

“Where’s the merit in such a harsh training regimen? If they like to exercise, they should just do it as a hobby.”

It was strange to consider club activities solely as a benefit or a drawback.

Participating in clubs had its benefits. One was able to socialise with others, as well as experience success and failure. These were experiences not included in academics. Furthermore, members of the go home club wouldn’t receive the benefits of being in a club.

“I guess.”

I waited for Kushida’s report for the next few minutes, but I didn’t get what I was expecting.

1. When Ike says there are “way too many guys aiming for Kushida-chan”, he says “suginai”, which is spelled in kanji as “Sugiuchi”, a famous baseball player. Apparently this is a meme that Ayanokouji also doesn’t understand when he says, “Is this some kind of dialect?” (I don’t really know the meme either but it exists.)

Chapter 3: The unexpected witness

Note: this is largely self-edited and will be completely edited later.
Read at your own risk.

The next morning. Part of the class, which consisted of Hirata and Kushida's groups, was in a hurry to exchange information.

Ike and his friends hated Hirata due to his popularity with the girls. That being said, they were idly chatting and enjoying themselves due to the girls that clung onto Hirata.

However, as I listened to their conversation, it appears that they didn't get the information they wanted. They were just recording the names of the people they directly asked, occasionally writing memos on their phones. It would be too good to be true for someone to actually come after school.

As for me, I was naturally alone. Although I can talk to Kushida, I still couldn't handle groups. So, I asked her to tell me what happened later, and stayed away from the group.

Meanwhile my neighbor, who had rejected Kushida's invitation, was preparing for class with a nonchalant expression.

The person actually involved in the matter, however, was not at school.

"Hah... Can we actually prove that it was class C's fault...?"

"If we can find a witness, it's not impossible to prove. Let's do our best, Ike-kun."

“Before we start ‘doing our best’, is there actually a witness in the first place? All Sudou said is that he vaguely recalled there being one, right? Isn’t that just a lie? After all, he’s violent and tends to provoke people often.”

“If we keep doubting him, we won’t be able to get anything done. Don’t you agree?”

“Yeah that might be true, but... If Sudou is at fault, all of our points will be revoked, won’t they? We’ll be back at zero and return to our difficult lives without any pocket money. Our goal of being able to play to our heart’s content will remain a dream.”

“Then we can start saving up again. It’s only been three months since the beginning of the year.”

The girls in the class blushed while listening to Hirata’s honest words. The hero of our class, as always, gave splendid advice without wavering. Karuizawa looked proud of her wonderful boyfriend.

“I think our points are precious. It’s tied with our motivation, right? So, I think we should do anything to defend those class points. Even if we’re defending only 87 points.”

“I understand how you feel. However, I think it’s dangerous to be so adamant about defending points and losing sight of reality. The most important thing for us is to cherish our close friends.”

Ike looked at Hirata with a suspicious gaze.

“Even if Sudou was at fault?”

It’s natural to feel horrible if an innocent person was punished.

However, Hirata nodded without hesitation. It looked like he was saying that such a self-sacrifice is a trivial matter. Because of Hirata's upright morals, Ike looked down, feeling overawed.

"What Hirata-kun is saying is completely natural, but I still want my points. Every month, the class A kids always get around 100,000 points a month. I'm really envious. There are people who buy a lot of stylish clothes and accessories. Compared to them, aren't we just pitiful?"

Karuizawa was sitting on a desk while dangling her legs. Our classmates seemed really bitter when she pointed out the large difference between the classes.

"Why couldn't I have been in class A from the start? If I was in class A, I would be having the time of my life right now."

"I wish I was in class A too. I could be playing around with my friends all the time."

I realized that the people who met for the sake of saving Sudou had practically given up.

No one noticed other than me. Horikita, on the other hand, couldn't stifle her laughter because of Ike and Karuizawa's delusions. It looked like she wanted to say that they wouldn't have been able to start in class A even if they tried.

Horikita immediately took out a library book and started reading, trying not to be distracted by the noise. I looked at the cover; it was Dostoyevsky's

Demons

. A good choice.

“It’d be great if there was a trick to get to class A in an instant. It’s so difficult to save up class points.”

The difference between our class and class A is a thousand points. Needless to say, it’s a massive difference.

“Luckily for you, Ike, there is a way to become class A in an instant.”

A voice called out from the entrance of the classroom. It was Chiyabashira-sensei, who had come 5 minutes before the start of class.

“Sensei... what did you say?”

Ike, who had practically fallen off his chair, composed himself and asked.

“I’m saying that there is a way to get up to class A, even without class points.”

Even Horikita looked up from her book, wondering if she was lying.

“You’re kidding~. Sae-chan-sensei, don’t make fun of us.”

The usual Ike would’ve taken the bait, but he laughed it off this time.

“I’m being serious. There are such special methods in this school.”

However, it didn’t seem like Chiyabashira-sensei was joking around.

“It doesn’t seem like she’s lying to cause chaos...”

There are times when Chiyabashira-sensei omits information, but she usually doesn’t lie.

Ike's laughing gradually stopped.

"Sensei, what are those 'special methods' you speak of...?"

Ike asked in a polite tone, trying not to offend her.

All the students that were in the classroom were also looking at Chiyabashira-sensei.

Even the students who didn't care about getting to class A are probably thinking that it wouldn't be bad to know the method.

"On the first day of school, I said that there's nothing you can't buy with points. In other words, if you use your private points, you can force a class change."

Chiyabashira-sensei glanced at me and Horikita. We put her "special method" to the test by buying a point for Sudou right after the exam, and it worked.

Our class points and private points are linked. If we don't have any class points, we won't get any private points every month. But that doesn't mean they're strictly the same thing. Since we're able to transfer points, in theory, we can get private points even if we don't have class points.

"S-Seriously!? How many points do we need to make that happen!?"

"20 million points. Do your best to save up. Then you'll be able to get to the class you want."

Hearing the absurdly high number, Ike completely fell off his chair.

"If it's 20 million... isn't that just impossible!?"

The whole class started booing. Everyone's hopes were crushed.

“It’s usually impossible. But since it’s a surefire way to get to class A, it’s only natural that the price is high. Even if you reduced the number by a single digit, there would be a hundred class A students graduating every year. Then there would be no point in having a ‘class A’.”

Even if we were able to maintain the monthly 100,000 points, it’s not a number that can be easily achieved.

“I’m just curious, but... has there ever been a class that successfully bought their way out?”

An obvious question to ask. Koudo Ikusei High School has been in existence for about ten years. Thousands of hundreds of students have struggled their way through this school. If anyone accomplished it, there would still be word of it today.

“Regrettably, there has never been such a case. The reason is as clear as day. If you save up for three years by maintaining the initial value, you’ll get about 3.6 million points in three years. As class A, you can maybe get up to 4 million points. Ordinarily, it’s not something that can be done.”

“Isn’t that the same thing as being impossible...”

“It’s very close to being impossible. But that doesn’t mean it is impossible. It’s a big distinction, Ike.”

However, about half the class had already lost interest.

For class D, who wished for 100, maybe 200 points, getting 20 million was a far-fetched dream. It was outside the reaches of our imagination.

“May I also ask a question?”

It was the observant Horikita who raised her hand. It seems like she decided it would be helpful to know more about the details.

“Ever since the founding of this school, what is the highest number of points that a student saved up? I would like to know for reference.”

“A very good question, Horikita. It was about three years ago, but it was a class B student that was close to graduating. He saved up about 12 million points.”

“T-Twelve million!? And a class B student on top of that!?”

“But before he could reach 20 million, he was forced to leave the school. He was expelled because he was carrying out a large-scale fraudulent scheme.”

“Fraud?”

“He went to the new first-year students one by one and scammed points out of them. It was probably so that he could gather 20 million points to get to class A, but the school couldn’t overlook his actions. Although his objective wasn’t bad, the school had to punish his actions that broke the rules.”

Far from being a point of reference, it was a story that made the feat sound even more impossible.

“So you’re saying that even if you resort to shady methods, 12 million is pretty much the limit.”

“Give up on this method and try to cooperate with your class to move up.”

Horikita resumed reading, as if she felt like an idiot for raising her hand.

In this world, offers that seem too good to be true are really too good to be true.

“Oh, right. None of you have gotten points from club activities, huh.”

Suddenly remembering something, Chiyabashira-sensei started talking about a different topic.

“What do you mean?”

“There are cases where points are given to individuals for participating in club activities and for their contribution to the club. For example, if a person in the calligraphy club wins a prize in a competition, the school will award them points that correspond to the award.”

The classmates were taken aback from the new information.

“W-We can get points for participating in club activities!?”

“That’s right. The other classes probably know about this already.”

“Hey, that’s mean! Why didn’t you tell us earlier!?”

“I forgot about it. However, clubs don’t exist just for you to get points. So, learning of this fact earlier wouldn’t have helped.”

Chiyabashira-sensei said without any shame.

“No no no, it definitely would’ve helped. If you said so earlier, I—”

“Are you saying you would’ve joined a club? Do you think you would’ve been able to achieve anything by joining a club and going out to competitions with such a weak will?”

“That’s—that might be true, but...! It might’ve happened!”

I can understand what both Chiyabashira-sensei and Ike are trying to say. In the first place, if someone joined a club just for the sake of earning points, they would probably be unable to create any results. Also, joining a club and putting in half-hearted effort would just hinder the serious club members.

On the other hand, someone might join for the sake of earning points and then find that they have a talent for that activity.

What I can say is that our homeroom teacher is being deliberately mean.

“Thinking back on it, it was pretty obvious.”

“What do you mean? Hirata-kun.”

“During swimming class, our PE instructor Higashiyama-sensei said that the student who got first place would receive 5000 points, right? Even that hints towards the fact that doing club activities give points.”

Ike said “I don’t remember~”, and shrugged his shoulders while scratching his head.

“If we got points, I probably would’ve done calligraphy or some kind of art class.”

It seems that Ike is only looking at the positive side; in reality there’s obviously something else involved.

If someone didn’t participate seriously and slacked off, there might be a case where they’re negatively assessed; going the easy way will only destroy you.

However, it’s great that we learned that results in club activities also gave points.

“Horikita. Doesn’t this show that there’s some worth to saving Sudou?”

“Are you saying that we should save him because he plays basketball?”

“You heard the other day that he was the only first year being considered as a regular, right?”

Horikita made a small nod as she thought back on it.

“If he was speaking the truth...”

Somehow, it looks like she’s still in doubt.

“It’s better to have a lot of points. Right? We can support our own grades, and help others like we did with Sudou’s test.”

“I don’t really think you’re the type of person to spend your own money for other people though.”

“I’m just saying that it’s beneficial to have a lot of points. You understand, right?”

It’s good to have a lot of points, both class and private.

It’s never harmful.

Also, we don’t know many methods to get points in the first place. If our chances of getting points increase with Sudou being in the class, then it would definitely contribute to our class effort. Horikita sank into silence because she couldn’t think of any other way to increase our class points.

“I’m not going to say that I’ll help, but it is necessary for me recognize Sudou’s existence.”

Horikita was being harsh, but she recognized and understood her own interests.

The facts should be accepted as facts.

I didn't think I needed to say much more, so I stopped talking.

For a short while, I looked at Horikita ponder over the issue and passed the time in silence.

1

The class was temporarily excited, but quickly returned back to reality. Like yesterday, they were trying to get information about witnesses.

On the other hand, I was standing in the back of a room like a ghost, feeling admiration for Ike's group and Kushida for being able to casually converse back and forth.

It was as clear as day that I, who can't even talk coherently, wasn't fit for the job of looking for witnesses. How can they talk so easily to strangers? They're monsters.

During the investigation, they gathered not only names but also asked for contact addresses. Kushida's presence probably prompted them to tell her their addresses immediately after being asked. That's also a great talent...

Even though Kushida and her group were walking to the second-year classrooms and asking all the upperclassmen, there haven't been any leads.

As time kept ticking, the number of students left after school was rapidly decreasing. When we stopped passing by other students, we decided to call it a day.

“We didn’t find anything today either...”

In order to revise our strategy, everyone returned to my room.

Soon after, Sudou came by and joined in the discussion.

“What happened today? Was there any progress made?”

“Sadly, no progress was made. Sudou, was there actually a witness?”

I understand Ike’s feelings of doubt. Even after the school reported the same information, there was no indication at all that a witness actually existed.

“Hah? I never said that there actually was a witness. I only said that I thought there was a witness.”

“Is... is that so?”

“Certainly, Sudou-kun didn’t say ‘I saw’. He said that he thought someone was there.”

“Couldn’t that just have been a hallucination? You must be doing some strong drugs.”

No, that’s a bit too far... Sudou put Ike in a headlock.

“Hey—! I give, I give!”

While the two fooled around, Kushida and Yamauchi were still puzzling over the situation.

After the discussion continued on for ten minutes, Kushida spoke up, having come up with a new idea.

“I think it might be better to change the direction of our efforts. For example, let’s look for a witness that might’ve witnessed the incident.”

“Look for a witness that witnessed the incident? Isn’t that kind of useless?”

“Are you going to look for the people who went into the building that day?”

“Yeah. What do you think?”

The idea’s not bad. There might’ve been a few people that entered the building on that day, but the entrance is pretty easy to spot. In other words, if someone says that they saw a person entering the special building, we would be getting closer to finding the witness.

“That sounds like a good idea. Let’s do that immediately.”

When I noticed, Sudou was using up his stamina on a mobile game he got addicted to recently. It looked like it was called the “Generation of Miracles” something, but I didn’t really know what was happening. After winning the match, he made a triumphant pose.[1]

Even though Sudou really couldn’t do anything in the present situation, Ike and Yamauchi look disgruntled. However, since they were scared of Sudou’s counter-attack, they decided not to point out their own dissatisfaction. Both of them stayed silent, pretending not to have seen anything.

It’s almost Friday already. It’ll be difficult to get anything useful on the weekend.

In other words, the actual time we have to find a witness is very short.

The bell rang and a visitor appeared at my door.

The small group of people that regularly visit my room have already gathered, so i

t was probably that person.

“Has progress been made?”

Horikita asked with a condescending attitude even though she probably knew the answer to her own question.

“No... not yet.”

“I’m only saying this because it’s you, but I have something—”

While she was talking, she realized there were a lot of shoes lined up at the doorway.

She turned around and held herself back in a panic.

Kushida popped out, probably worried that she would head back quickly.

“Oh, Horikita-san!”

Kushida waved at Horikita with a smile. Looking at her cheerful attitude, Horikita naturally let out a sigh.

“You can’t run now, you know?”

“Seems that way...”

Horikita entered the room reluctantly.

“O-oh, Horikita!”

Of course, Sudou was the happiest to see her. He put his game on pause and looked up.

“Did you decide to help? I’m glad you decided to join.”

“I don’t intend to help. After all, you haven’t found the witness yet, right?.”

Kushida nodded her head dejectedly.

“If you didn’t come to help, why’d you come?”

“I was wondering what kind of plan you guys had.”

“I’m happy even if you’re only going to listen to the plan. I wanted advice as well.”

Kushida then told her about the plan that she came up with a short while ago. Horikita’s expression was stiff throughout the whole explanation.

“It’s not a bad plan. It might even produce results with enough time.”

Time is definitely the issue here. It’s doubtful if we’ll be able to get anything done in the few days we have remaining.

“Now that I’ve checked up on the situation, I’ll be leaving.”

In the end, Horikita decided to leave without even sitting down.

“Did you think of something?”

When she was standing at the door earlier, she clearly had something to say.

She’s not that amicable to have come to my room for no reason.

「.....実りの薄い努力をしているあなたたちに一つだけアドバイスしてあげるわ。灯台下暗し。須藤くんの事件を目撃した人物は確かに存在していて、その人物は身近にいる」

“...I’ll give one piece of advice to help your weak efforts. It’s hard to see what’s right in front of you, after all. If there really is someone that witnessed the incident, then that person is most likely close by.”

The information that Horikita gave us was much more significant than I thought it would be.

She’s talking as if she already found the witness we weren’t sure existed in the first place.

“What do you mean, Horikita? Are you saying you found the witness?”

Surprise and doubt came first before joy for Sudou. It’s understandable.

Everyone, including me, was in disbelief until she replied.

“Sakura-san.”

An unexpected name came from Horikita.

“Sakura-san, from our class...?”

Yamauchi and Sudou exchanged glances. They looked confused as to who Sakura was. That was probably expected, though. I also had to think about it for a bit.

“The witness is that girl.”

“Why do you say that?”

“When Kushida-san was asking the class for witnesses, she looked down. A lot of the students were looking at Kushida-san, but she was the only one that looked uninterested. She wouldn’t have acted that way if she actually was unrelated to the incident.”

I didn't notice at all. Horikita's powers of observations are really impressive.

"Since you're one of the people that were staring at Kushida-san, it's only natural."

What a sarcastic tone.

"So, you're saying that this Sakura, Kokura something person is probably the witness?"

Sudou said something reasonable, unlike the role of a boke.

"No, Sakura-san is definitely the witness. Her actions made it obvious. Although she may not admit it, she's who you're looking for."

Horikita was acting like her usual self.

All of us were moved that Horikita was doing this for the class.

"Did you really do this for my sake...!"

Sudou looked especially moved.

"Nope. I just didn't want to waste this time and look shameful to the other classes. That's all."

"Um, so in short, you're saying that you helped us right?"

"You can interpret it however you want, but I'm just saying that you're wrong."

"Don't lie~. You're just a tsundere, Horikita~"

Ike hit Horikita's shoulders playfully, but she threw his arm onto the ground.

“Ouch!”

“Don’t touch me. There better not be a next time, because I’ll despise you until we graduate.”

“I-I won’t touch... even if I tried to touch... Ow, ow!”

She pinned him down in a headlock. Unfortunate, but he deserved it.

At any rate, those weren’t the movements of a normal girl. Since her older brother does karate and aikido, does she do martial arts too?

“My a-arm is...!”

“Ike-kun.”

Horikita talked to Ike, who was on the floor in pain. Isn’t this just overkill?

“Should I revise it to, ‘Despising you until we graduate won’t cut it?’”

“Uu! Sho cruel!”

Ike was defeated by those final words.

But Sakura, huh... Of all people, it was a class D student.

It’s hard to say whether or not this is a good thing.

“Isn’t that great, Sudou? If it’s a class D student, we definitely have testimony!”

“Yeah. I’m happy that there is a witness, but who is this Sakura person? Do you know her?”

Yamauchi replied in surprise.

“Are you being serious? She sits right behind you.”

“No, that’s wrong. She’s diagonally in front of you to the left, right?”

“Both of you are wrong... she’s diagonally in front of Sudou-kun to the right.”

Kushida corrected them with a pout.

“Diagonally in front to the right... I don’t remember. I do know that there is someone though.”

That’s obviously a given. If the seat diagonally in front to the right was empty, that would be strange.

This girl, Sakura, certainly doesn’t stand out. It’s a big problem that we don’t know who she is.

“I probably know her, but I don’t exactly know where I’ve heard her name.”

I can’t quite put my finger on it.

“Tell us how she looks like.”

“Well, would it help if I say that she has the biggest boobs in the class? Excessively big, you know?”

Ike, who looked lively again, told us her physical characteristics, but I don’t know who she is with that explanation.

“Oh, that plain glasses girl, huh?”

How’d you understand with just that...? I drew back a bit.

“It’s bad to remember people like that, Ike-kun. That’s pathetic.”

“N-No, it’s different, Kushida-chan. I’m not trying to be offensive. You know how you might remember a tall person by their height? It’s just like that! The only difference is that I’m remembering other people by a different characteristic...!”

Ike tried to smooth over the situation when Kushida quickly lost faith in him. But it’s too late.

“Damn it! It’s different, it’s different! I don’t like a plan girl like her! Don’t misunderstand!”

No, I don’t think there are any misunderstandings here.

Everyone else shifted the topic towards Sakura as Ike broke down crying.

“Then the next step is to find out how much Sakura-san knows. Does anyone know?”

“Hmm, I’m not sure. We’ll have to ask her directly.”

“Can’t we go to her room right now? We don’t have much time.”

The proposal from Yamauchi seems safe, but it also depends on her personality and character.

Sakura is an unusually shy girl. If people she didn’t know very well suddenly appeared at her doorstep, it’s easy to imagine that she would be confused.

“Then should we call her?”

Speaking of which, I forgot that Kushida has everyone’s contact addresses in the class.

Kushida was on the phone for 20 seconds, but she shook her head and put her phone away.

“No, it didn’t connect. I’ll try again later, but it’s a difficult matter.”

“What do you mean?”

“She told me her contact address, but I think she’ll be annoyed if I try to contact her, especially since she doesn’t know me very well. Also, I don’t think she was actually there to pick up the phone.”

She might also be pretending to be gone.

“So she’s kinda like Horikita?”

Why would you even think to ask that in front of the person herself, Ike?

She probably wouldn’t mind. Rather, it didn’t seem like she was interested in what Ike was saying either.

“Goodbye.”

“Ah, Horikita-san!”

Looking like she was caught off guard, Horikita quickly stood up and walked towards the door.

By the time I got up and chased after her, I heard the sound of the door closing.

“Tsundere.”

Sudou looked happy as he laughed, scratching his nose with his index finger.

She doesn’t have tsun, nor does she have dere. I think she’s a lost cause... No tsun, no dere.

Since we couldn't do anything about Horikita's absence, the conversation continued without her.

"I think Sakura-san's just a shy person. That's the impression I get from her."

It's strange to talk about a person's character without ever having talked to them before.

"Anyway, she's plain. It's a complete waste of what she has."

While talking, Yamauchi gestured towards his breasts.

"Yea, yea. Her boobs are super big, though. That's cute by itself!"

Ike seems to have already forgotten the regret he felt a few seconds ago and started to get excited.

Ah, but Kushida had a strained smile. Noticing her expression, Ike regretted his words once again.

This is a perfect example of a living being that keeps repeating its mistakes.

The problem is that even though I'm staying quiet, I feel like I'm getting treated the same way as Ike and Yamauchi. Kushida expression seems to say, "You're also obsessed with the boobs, right? You pervert." Of course, this is my own persecution complex.

"Um, about Sakura's face... Nope, don't remember anything."

I can barely match the name to the face. I remember seeing her face back when we were doing the bets. I also remember her breasts, though. Somehow, it seems like I'm just the same as the others...

Sakura gives off the impression that she would always be alone and hunched over.

“Which reminds me, I don’t know if she actually talks to anyone. How about you, Yamauchi? Wait, wait a second... Yamauchi, you said that you confessed to her before, right? Were you able to talk to her?”

Oh right, Yamauchi did say that he confessed.

“Ah, ah. Well, I don’t remember if I did such a thing.”

Yamauchi pretended to have forgotten.

“Was it a lie...”

“Bah. No, I wasn’t lying. It was a misunderstanding. It wasn’t Sakura, it was a girl from the neighboring class. A girl who isn’t as ugly and gloomy as Sakura. Oh, sorry, give me a sec.”

Yamauchi dodged the question and took out his phone.

Sakura may be plain, but she’s not ugly. I’ve never looked at her face directly, but she has pretty nice facial features.

But even then, I can’t say with confidence because she has such a thin presence.

“First of all, I’ll try to talk to her by myself tomorrow. She might be wary if there are a lot of people.”

“That sounds good.”

If Kushida isn’t able to get through to her, probably no one can.

2

“...It’s hot.”

This school doesn't change uniforms with the seasons, and so we have to wear blazers for the whole year. The reason is simple; every building is equipped with heating and cooling systems. The only drawback is that it's hot whenever we go to and from school.

It was the morning commute. My back started sweating in the few minutes that it took to get from the dorms to the school.

After making my way to school, I took refuge in the cool building.

It must be hell for the students that have morning training. In the classroom, the boys and girls with morning practice were all surrounding the air conditioner. It looked like moths crowding around a light source. Is that a bad analogy?

"Ayanokouji-kun, good morning."

Hirata called out to me. Like always, he had a refreshing face. I could also make out the faint smell of flowers as well. If I was a girl, I'd probably beg to him and, "Please hold me!"

"Yesterday, I heard from Kushida-san that Sakura-san was the witness."

Hirata looked at Sakura's seat, which was still empty.

"Are you going to talk to her?"

"Me? No... I'm only going to greet her. I've wanted to talk to her because she's always alone in class, but I can't be pushy and invite her, especially as a boy. Also, if I asked Karuizawa-san to talk to her, it would also be problematic."

It's hard to imagine a conversation between the super assertive Karuizawa and Sakura.

"For the time being, I think we'll wait for Kushida-san."

“That’s great and all, but why are you talking to me? Talking to Ike or Yamauchi is probably better.”

There’s no reason to tell me, who wasn’t really part of the “team” we had.

“There’s no particular reason, but... if I had to say a reason, it’s because you’re related to Horikita-san. She doesn’t talk to anyone but you, so I thought I should tell you.”

“I see.”

Is that the only aspect where I’m better than the other two? While Hirata was nodding, he had a cute smile on his face.

If I was a girl, my kyun-kyun points would’ve reached a hundred and my heart would be beating fast.

“Oh, right. We should hang out sometime. Are you free anytime soon?”

Hey hey, are you no longer satisfied by girls and trying to make my heart throb now?

It would be a grave mistake if I accepted his invitation without any consideration.

“Well, it should be fine.”

Ah, I said the exact opposite of what my mind told me to say. Damn this defective mouth.

I definitely wasn’t waiting for Hirata to invite me or anything.

That’s right, that’s right. This is the problem with Japanese people. Since we’re unable to say “no”, we’re unable to directly reject an invitation.

“Sorry, do you not want to hang out?”

Hirata sensed my uneasiness.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. I’ll definitely hang out with you.”

I replied, sounding a bit disgusting.

I tried acting pridefully, but I really did want to go, so I gave up in the end.

“But are you fine with my girlfriend coming too?”

“Huh? Oh, Karuizawa-san? Yeah, that’s fine.”

My response came surprisingly quickly. Well, there are various types of couples.

Since they still called each other by their surnames, I guess they’re not that close yet.

Reluctantly parting with Hirata, I waited for homeroom to begin as I held my phone in my hand.

Then I noticed that Sakura was at her seat.

She was sitting down, waiting for the time to pass idly.

I wonder what kind of student Sakura is.

In the three months I’ve been at this school, I’ve heard nothing about her other than her last name.

It’s probably not just me, but the whole class as well.

Hirata and Kushida are active and outspoken. Horikita doesn’t feel the pain of solitude.

Then what about Sakura? Does she like being alone like Horikita? Or is she suffering because she doesn't know how to talk to people like me? That's the question Kushida will answer soon.

3

After homeroom ended, Kushida got up from her seat and walked over to Sakura, who was quietly preparing to go back home. Kushida seemed strangely nervous.

Ike, Yamauchi, and Sudou noticed and looked towards Kushida.

"Sakura-san."

"...W-What...?"



The girl with the glasses and the hunched back looked up listlessly.

It looked like she didn't expect someone to call out to her, since she was panicking.

"Do you have time, Sakura-san? I want to ask you something about Sudou-kun's case..."

"S-Sorry, I... have plans, so..."

She averted her eyes; it was obvious that she was feeling uncomfortable. Talking to other people does not seem to be her strong point. Or rather, it felt like she didn't like talking to other people.

"Can you make some time? I really want to talk because this is important. During Sudou-kun's incident, were you nearby by any chance..."

"I-I don't know. I already said this to Horikita-san, but I don't know anything..."

Her words were frail, but she denied it strongly.

Kushida, also seeing how unwilling she was, probably didn't want to push it too far.

Although she looked confused at first, she immediately went back to smiling.

But even then, she wasn't willing to withdraw so easily.

After all, this person will greatly affect Sudou's case.

"Is... it fine if I go back now..."

But something feels strange. She's not simply bad at talking to people, but rather, it looks like she's trying to hide something. That much is obvious from the way she's acting.

She was hiding her dominant hand and wasn't making eye contact with her. Even if she may be uncomfortable with looking at her eyes, Sakura refused to look at Kushida's face.

If it was either me or Ike talking to her instead of Kushida, it would make more sense. After all, Kushida was able to get her to exchange contact addresses. Interacting with Kushida is a completely different experience. I don't think Horikita was wrong in sensing that something was off. I also felt the same way.

"Can't you just give me a few minutes?"

"W-Why? I don't know anything..."

If Kushida failed here, their conversation would amount to nothing.

The awkward conversation naturally gathered more attention as it dragged on and on.

But this situation seems like a complete miscalculation from Kushida. Since they were acquaintances that had exchanged contact addresses, she expected this conversation to go much smoother.

If she wasn't expecting to be rejected, then this situation would make sense.

My neighbor looked over the situation attentively, then looked at me with a slightly smug expression.

It seemed like she was saying, "I know that your powers of perception are exceptional"...

"...I'm bad at talking to people... sorry."

She was speaking in a strained voice, trying to keep Kushida away from her.

When we were talking about Sakura earlier, Kushida said that she was an ordinary girl, despite being shy.

Looking at her current behavior, she's clearly not normal. Kushida probably thought the same thing, because she looked completely confused. Even though she's good at getting people to open up, she couldn't do it this time.

Horikita, also watching the situation, came to a conclusion.

"Too bad. Looks like she couldn't persuade her."

It was as Horikita said. If Kushida wasn't able to do it, I don't think anyone in the class would be able to start and maintain a conversation with Sakura.

Kushida is good at creating an atmosphere where unsocial people can easily socialize.

However, everyone has a "personal space".

The anthropologist and cultural researcher Edward Hall further categorized this idea of "personal space" into four parts. One such part is the idea of an "intimate zone". The "close phase" is about hugging distance—if an outsider tries to enter this area, they will be strongly rejected. However, if it was a significant other or a close friend, the person wouldn't feel uncomfortable. If an acquaintance entered Kushida's "close phase", she normally wouldn't mind it. That is to say, she doesn't use this idea of "personal space".[2]

However, Sakura clearly rejected her.

No... rather, it looked like she was running away.

The first time around, she said that she “had plans”, but she didn’t say it the second time. If she really had somewhere to go to, she would’ve said it again.

Sakura stood up and took a few steps away from Kushida.

“G-Goodbye.”

Seeing that she couldn’t end the conversation, Sakura decided to run away.

She grasped the digital camera that was on her desk and walked away.

However, she bumped shoulders with Hondou, who wasn’t paying attention to his surroundings as he texted his friend on his phone.

“Ah!”

The digital camera fell out of her grip and clanged onto the floor. Still focused on his phone, Hondou waved it off, saying “My bad, my bad”, and walked out of the classroom.

Sakura picked up her camera in a panic.

“No... it won’t turn on...”

Sakura put her hand over her mouth in shock. Somehow, it looks like the camera broke from the impact. She kept pressing the power button and tried taking out the batteries and putting them back in, but it didn’t turn on.

“S-Sorry. I was being too pushy...”

“No... I was being careless, so it was my fault... goodbye.”

Unable to stop the despondent Sakura, Kushida looked frustrated and couldn't do anything but watch her leave.

"Why is a gloomy girl like her the witness? How unlucky. She doesn't even want to help."

Sudou leaned against the chair and crossed his legs as he let out a sigh in resignation.

"I'm sure there's a reason. Also, Sakura-san didn't say that she was the witness herself."

"I know. If she was going to say something she would've said it. It's because she's an adult that she stopped herself."

"Sudou-kun, it's actually better that she's the witness."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"She's not going to give testimony as your witness. This case will be treated as your fault. As a result, class D won't be able to completely escape the consequences, but we can think of it as fortunate. In an incident like this, it's unlikely that they'll be able to penalize us by 100 or 200 points. We're lucky since we can only lose 87 points. Also, since you said that you were innocent, the school can't ignore it and expel you. We'll be affected more than class C, though."

Horikita relentlessly said all that she wanted to say at once.

"Don't joke around. I'm innocent, innocent. The violence was legitimate self-defence."

"Self-defence isn't as helpful as you think it is."

Oops, I accidentally spoke out loud.

"Hey, Ayanokouji-kun."

When I turned around, acting aloof, Kushida's face was super close. Even when I look at her this closely, she's cute. Rather than feeling uncomfortable about the invasion of my personal space, I wanted her to come even closer.

"You're Sudou-kun's ally, right?"

"Well... yeah, but why are you asking again?"

"It's looking a bit iffy right now, since everyone's willingness to help Sudou-kun is diminishing."

I looked around the classroom.

"Seems like it. They probably think that whatever we do will be useless."

If the key witness Sakura denies it, there won't be any progress made.

"It doesn't seem like a perfect solution will appear. Let's give up, Sudou."

Ike mumbled halfheartedly.

"What's wrong with you guys? Didn't you say that you'd help me?"

"That's... huh?"

Looking for approval, he appealed to the remaining classmates.

"Even your friends don't want to help you. That's too bad."

The other classmates didn't say anything to deny what Ike and Horikita were saying.

"Why is no one on my side? Man, all of you are useless bastards."

“How interesting, Sudou-kun. Have you noticed that everyone’s turning on you?”

“What are you trying to say?”

The class becomes tense often, but today was even worse.

Since Sudou was talking to Horikita, it looked like he was trying his hardest to hold back.

However, the blade came from an unexpected direction.

“Don’t you think it’s better for us that you’re expelled? Your existence isn’t a beautiful one. Rather, it’s quite ugly, Red hair-kun.”

The one who spoke was fixing his hair with the hand-mirror he carried around everyday.

It was the particularly conspicuous boy, Koenji Rousuke.

“...What did you say? Try saying that again.”

“It’s useless to keep saying it. It’s nonsense. Since I already know that you’re dumb, it doesn’t matter if I say it one more time or not, does it?”

Koenji didn’t even look at Sudou and replied as if he was performing an aside

The desk flew into the air and crashed onto the floor. The students still felt hopeful, but the whole room froze. Sudou stood up and walked over to Koenji in silence.

“Alright, stop right there. Calm down, you two.”

The only boy to move in this difficult situation was Hirata. My heart pounded.

“Sudou-kun. You’re part of the problem, but Koenji-kun, you’re also in the wrong.”

“Fu. I don’t think I’ve ever been wrong since I was born. You’re mistaken.”

“Hah, that’s just fine. You better kneel down right now or I’ll beat you up and smash your face in.”

“Stop it.”

Hirata tried to hold Sudou back by grabbing his arm, but he wasn’t showing any signs of stopping.

It seems like his intention is to vent all of his frustration by hitting Koenji.

“Please stop already. I don’t want to watch my friends fight each other...”

“It’s as Kushida-san says. I don’t know about Koenji-kun, but I am your ally, Sudou-kun.”

You’re too good, Hirata. I think you should change your name to “Hero”.

“I’ll end this here. Sudou-kun, you should act more like an adult. If you made another big uproar here, the school’s impression of you would only turn worse. Right?”

“...Tch.”

Sudou glared at Koenji and left the room. After the door slammed shut, a loud voice rang out from the hallway.

“Koenji-kun. I’m not going to force you to help, but you were wrong to blame him.”

“I’m sorry, but I have never been wrong in my life. Oh, look at the time—it’s about time for my date. Please excuse me.”

While watching their strange interaction, I realized that there was no class unity.

“Sudou-kun isn’t mature, I see.”

“Couldn’t you also have been friendlier, Horikita-san...?”

“I won’t have mercy on anyone that doesn’t listen. He’s done great damage and doesn’t have a single advantage.”

It’s not like you have mercy on people that do listen.

“Yes?”

“Uu...”

While shrinking back like a sharp knife (gaze) just stabbed me, I made a small rebuttal.

“There’s a saying that ‘great talents mature late’. I think Sudou has the possibility of becoming a future NBA player. He might have a chance of making a big contribution to society. The power of youth is infinite.”

I used a catchphrase that felt like it came straight out of a commercial.

“I’m not saying that he won’t become good in 10 years, but I need the strength to get to class A right now. If he doesn’t have the talent now, he has no use to me.”

“Yeah, that’s true...”

Horikita had a consistent opinion, but the rest of the classmates were wavering.

The situation doesn't look very good.

"You get along with Sudou, right? It seems like you guys eat together often."

"I don't think our relationship is bad. But it feels like a burden. He's the person who skips class and fights the most. I have to draw the line there."

I see. It looks like Ike has his own opinions.

"I'll try my best to persuade Sakura-san. Afterwards, things will surely take a turn for the better."

"Hmm, I wonder. Under these circumstances, I don't think that Sakura-san's testimony will have a big effect. Also, I think the school will be suspicious that the witness suddenly appeared from class D."

"Suspicious... you mean that the school will think that this is a fake witness?"

"Naturally. They'll probably consider the testimony along with the circumstances. It won't become absolute proof."

"That's... what kind of evidence would be soundproof?"

"If you believe in miracles, the best evidence would be a witness that the schools trusts from a different class or a different grade that watched the event from the very beginning. There definitely isn't someone like that though."

Horikita said with confidence. I also thought the same thing.

“Then... no matter how hard we try to prove that Sudou-kun is innocent...”

“However, if the fight happened in a classroom, things would be different.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, those cameras record the classroom, right? So if anything happened, those recordings would serve as evidence, and crush the lies of those class C students in a single blow.”

I pointed at the two cameras in the corners of the classroom.

The cameras were small and blended into the walls, but it was unmistakable that they were there.

“The school uses those cameras to check if we’re whispering or nodding off during class. Or else they wouldn’t be able to do those monthly class assessments.”

“...Seriously? I never knew...!”

Ike looked at the cameras in shock.

“I also just learned of this... that there were cameras in the room.”

“It’s hard to spot. I also didn’t notice until they started talking about the points.”

“Well, ordinary people don’t really care about where cameras are located. They probably wouldn’t know where the cameras are in a convenience store, even if they always visit that store.”

If someone did know, it would be someone who was either overly paranoid or felt guilty about something. Or they might’ve accidentally seen it and noticed.

Alright, shall I head home since we don't have to look for a witness anymore?

Kushida and the others might talk about looking for another witness. It'll be a bother to get involved in that.

"Ayanokouji-kun, want to go home together?"

"..."

Hearing Horikita's invitation, I reflexively put my hand on her forehead. Her forehead felt cool, but her skin was still warm and soft.

"...I don't have a cold, you know? I just wanted to ask you about something."

"O-Oh. Well, I guess it's fine."

It was strange for Horikita to invite me. I wonder if it'll rain tomorrow.

"As I thought, haven't you two gotten closer? Yesterday, you looked like you would kill me when I only touched your shoulder..."

Ike looked a bit dissatisfied as he gazed at my hand on her forehead.

Horikita's facial expression didn't particularly change.

"Can you take it off? Your hand."

"Oh, my bad, my bad."

I was relieved that Horikita didn't counterattack, and drew back my hand. I didn't notice at all.

The two of us walked out into the hallway. I think I know the general gist, but I wonder what she wants to talk about.

“Oh, right. I want to go somewhere before we go back; is that fine?”

“Well, as long as it doesn’t take too much time.”

“Yeah, it’ll take about ten minutes.”

1. Kuroko no Basuke reference.

2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proxemics>

It was hot and humid after school. I made my way towards the club building where the incident happened a few days ago. The area didn't look any different; after all, it wasn't like it had to be taped off because there was a murder case. Now that classes were over, I couldn't see anyone around since the home economics and the audiovisual rooms were rarely used in the first place. This would be one of the most ideal places in the school to call out Sudou.

"Man, it's hot..."

This weather is pretty abnormal. I guess this is how summer should usually feel, but I didn't think it'd be this hot and humid inside the building. Well, this is the effect of getting used to air conditioning every day. It felt even hotter because I was so used to the cold air of the A/C.

The air conditioning was probably on during classes, but I couldn't tell from how hot it was.

"Sorry for bringing you over here."

Horikita, who was standing next to me, didn't look like she was feeling the heat as she looked down the hallway.

"How strange of you to stick out your own neck for this case. Since we've already found the witness, there's nothing that can be done anymore. What more are you trying to do?"

"Sudou's the first friend I made. I want to help him out a bit."

"Do you think there's a way to prove he's innocent then?"

“Hmm, I don’t know. I can’t really say anything yet. I’m just acting by myself because I’m not very good at interacting with a larger group of people. It seemed like some responsibilities would be pushed onto me if I stayed, so I ran instead. After all, I like to avoid trouble.”

“Yeah, clearly. But even then, it’s contradictory for you to say that you want to help because he’s a friend.”

“Well, human beings are mutually interdependent creatures.”

I’ve talked about this subject to Horikita before, but she seems pretty open-minded about my way of thinking.

Horikita usually acts by herself, so as long as it doesn’t affect her negatively, she’s fine with it.

“Well, your way of thinking doesn’t really matter to me, so you’re free to do whatever you want. Also, I think it’s fine to avoid those two.”

“I mean, that’s just because you hate them.”

“Having common enemies leads to cooperation after all.”

“No, just because I’m bad at dealing with them doesn’t mean I hate them. I’m not like you.”

By all means, I do want to get closer to Kushida and Hirata.

But Horikita has a broad interpretation of my thoughts and is trying to say that we are similar.

I walked down the hallway, scanning the corner between the wall and the ceiling.

Horikita suddenly noticed something and started looking around.

“Hmm, there aren’t any here. That’s too bad.”

“Huh? What isn’t here?”

“Cameras like the ones in the classroom. We would have solid evidence if those cameras were in the hallways, but there aren’t any.”

“Oh, right. Those cameras. The case would be solved instantly if they were here.”

There were outlets near the ceiling, but weren’t being used.

The hallway doesn’t have any obstacles, so if there was a camera, it would’ve been able to record the whole incident.

“In the first place, does the school usually have cameras in the hallways?”

The other buildings probably don’t have cameras in the hallways as well.

“I mean, they probably wouldn’t be in the bathrooms or the changing rooms, right?”

“Yeah, probably not.”

“...It’s not something to be sad about now though. If there were cameras, the school would’ve checked them first and this wouldn’t be a problem.”

I shook my head, feeling ashamed that I got my hopes up for a split second.

For a short while, we wandered around aimlessly without getting anything done.

“Did you think of a plan to save Sudou-kun?”

“Of course not. It’s your job to come up with a plan. I won’t ask you to save Sudou, but it would be nice if you could put us in the right direction.”

Horikita shrugged her shoulders in exasperation. She’s probably trying to find a way to respond to that. However, she found the witness, so at least she’s considering helping out.

“You want me to help? Right now?”

“The witness doesn’t really help the situation because she’s in class D. I think it’s better to go look for something else.”

Horikita probably told the others even though it wouldn’t help much. If she didn’t want to tell them at all, she probably wouldn’t have listened nor replied to their request.

However, she was calmly wandering around as if she didn’t have a care in the world.

“There are a lot of unpleasant things about Sudou. However, I want him to take less responsibility for the incident. Having a few points left over is the best possible outcome, even though it’s a loss if the impression of class D gets worse.”

I think she’s saying her honest feelings, even though she’s not usually upfront.

That’s not a bad thing. However, most people are weak to loneliness. That’s why some people hypocritically act to stick together. That isn’t the case for Horikita, though.

And unlike Kushida and the others, she definitely gave up on trying to prove Sudou’s innocence.

“Like I said earlier, unless a perfect witness shows up, it will be impossible to prove that Sudou-kun is innocent. Well, it might happen if

class C admits that they lied. Do you think that’ll happen?”

“Definitely not. Class C won’t do that.”

Since the other class also doesn’t have any evidence, the lie won’t go anywhere.

We also don’t have anything to believe other than Sudou’s words. The whole situation is in the dark.

“There’s no one here after school.”

“Obviously, since this building isn’t used for anything other than clubs.”

One party called out the other to the roof. Afterwards, as if by fate, the two quarreling parties fought. In the end, Sudou injured the other party, and they complained about it.

I wouldn’t bother coming to this hot place unless someone else called me out here.

The humidity is oppressive. I feel like I’m going insane in this heat.

“Is it not hot for you, Horikita?”

As my body was suffering from the heat, Horikita was looking around with a cool expression.

“I’m pretty good against the heat and the cold. You look
... not so good.”

I was out of it from the heat and moved towards the window in search of some cool air. I opened the window to save myself from the heat... but I immediately shut the window right after.

“...That was dangerous.”

As soon as I opened the window, the hot wind burst into the room. It would be an even bigger disaster if I kept the window open.

When I think about the fact that it'll get even hotter until August, I feel depressed.

However, there were results from coming here today. It's not impossible—

“What are you thinking about right now?”

“No, nothing much. Just that it's hot... I've reached my limit already.”

It looked like nothing more could be done right now, so the two of us started heading back.

“Ah.”

“Oops.”

As I turned the corner of the hallway, I accidentally bumped into another student.

“My bad, are you okay?”

It wasn't that strong of an impact, so neither of us fell over.

“Yes. Sorry, I was careless.”

“Me too. Oh wait, are you Sakura?”

As the girl apologized, I recognized who she was.

“...Ah, um...?”

From her flustered response, it seems like she doesn't know who I am.

After she looked at my face for a few seconds, she recognized that I was one of her classmates. Then again, it's kind of pointless if you can only recognize someone by looking at them carefully.

Sakura was holding her phone tightly in her hand.

“Ah, um. My hobby is taking pictures...”

She showed me the screen of her phone. I wasn't really planning on asking in the first place.

After all, it's not unnatural to use a phone while walking.

Sakura was probably wondering why we were in this building.

“What pictures were you taking?”

“Things like the hallway... and the view out the window.”

As she finished her explanation, she saw Horikita nearby and cast down her eyes.

“Ah, um...”

“I have something I want to ask you, Sakura-san.”

Sakura looked uncomfortable, but Horikita took a step forward.

She stepped back in fright. I held back Horikita lightly, gesturing for her to back off.

“G-Goodbye.”

“Sakura.”

I quickly called out to Sakura, who was already running away.

“You don’t have to push yourself.”

I didn’t really have to call out to her, but I did.

Sakura stopped walking but didn’t look back.

“You don’t have to come out as the witness. There’s no meaning to forcing a testimony out of you. However, if there’s someone scary trying to threaten you, you can talk to us. I don’t know how much I can help, but I will help the best I can.”

“Are you talking about me?”

Let’s just ignore the possibility that a scary person exists and let her go.

“I didn’t see anything. I’m the wrong person...”

She kept insisting that she wasn’t the witness. After all, we are only working off Horikita’s insight, and nothing else. There is a possibility that the actual witness may be someone else.

“Then that’s fine. If someone else tries to press you, though, tell me.”

Sakura gave a small reply and headed down the stairs.

“That was a once in a lifetime chance right now, you know? She probably walked away because she knew something was going to happen.”

“Since she denies it herself, there’s nothing more we can do. Also, you know that a witness from class D is pretty weak.”

“Well, I guess.”

She'll act based on her thoughts. Then again, I don't know what she's thinking.

That's why we're not really investigating right now.

“Hey you guys, what are you doing here?”

Both of us turned around, not having expected someone to call out to us. A strawberry-blonde haired girl was looking towards us.

I've seen her face before. She's Ichinose from class B, but I've never talked to her before. Also, I've heard that she's an amazing student from the rumors floating around.

“Sorry to call you out so suddenly. Do you have some time? Oh, but if you're here on a date, please get out quickly.”

“It's nothing like that.”

Horikita immediately denied it. It's only times like these when she's fast to respond.

“Ahaha, I see. This place is too hot to be a date spot anyway.”

Ichinose and I have never talked before. I'm saying this without any proof, but she probably doesn't know my name. After all, I'm only one of the many students she sees every day.

Is she Horikita's acquaintance or friend? ...Nah.

If they suddenly went, “Hey, long time no see~ How are you doing~?” “I'm doing well~!”, I'm sure I would collapse while foaming at the mouth.

“Do you have some business with us?”

Of course it probably wasn't something like that, but Horikita became immediately wary of Ichinose, who had just appeared. She probably thinks that this isn't coincidence.

"Business... well, something like 'what are you doing here?'"

"Nothing much. We're somewhat wandering around."

It would've been fine to answer honestly, but the pressure from Horikita's gaze made me answer differently.

"Somewhat, huh? You two are in class D, right?"

"...You know us?"

"I've met you two times before, even though we haven't talked. Also, I remember seeing him in the library before."

Somehow, it seems that she remembered my figure (guess I look pretty cool).

"I have a good memory, after all."

Are you trying to say that you wouldn't have remembered me if your memory wasn't good?

I was a bit happy, but my good mood disappeared from that jab.

"I thought that there would be something here that would be related to the fight. When I wasn't at school yesterday, it seems like some information about the witness had reached class B. I only heard later that the students of class D were trying to prove him innocent."

"If we're doing investigating here because of the incident, then how does that affect you?"

“Hmm, how does it affect me? ...well, it doesn’t. But, I had a few doubts when I heard about the story, and so I decided to come here to check things out. If it’s fine with you, would you tell me about the circumstances?”

Is it fine to chalk it up as “curiosity” then?

After a few moments of silence, Ichinose spoke apologetically.

“Does that mean no? If other classes were interested...”

“No, it’s nothing like that, but...”

“I can only think there’s something else to this.”

I tried to go about things peacefully, but Horikita immediately shot down that plan.

Ichinose tilted her neck and smiled, interpreting the meaning behind Horikita’s words.

“Something else? Do you feel like we’re going to make a secret move to interfere with class C and D?”

She looked like she wanted to say, “Oh, that’s disappointing”.

“I don’t think you have to be that wary, though. I’m really just curious.”

“I don’t want to answer someone who’s ‘just curious’. Just do as you please.”

Horikita answered, trying to get her to back off, and looked out the window.

“Please tell me something. All I heard from my friends and the teachers were that there was a fight.”

Although I hesitated for a bit, I knew that there wasn't much information out there and decided to explain how the three class C students called out Sudou, got beat up, turned it around on him, and how two versions of the story were reported to the school. Ichinose listened to the whole store seriously.

"I see, so that's what happened. That news hasn't come to class B yet. I see, I see... Hey, isn't this a huge problem? It doesn't matter who lied, since it's a case of violence anyway. Shouldn't you discover the truth?"

"That's why we're here in the first place, but we haven't discovered much."

It's not a murder scene, so I didn't think there were any hints left over, but we did get some results, contrary to our expectations.

"So, you're believing Sudou-kun because he's your friend and your classmate. And therefore this case has become a case of false accusation to class D."

It would be hard for Ichinose, a third party, to understand that it wasn't because he was our friend or because he was our classmate. But I'm not going to explain that much.

"What would you do if Sudou-kun was the one lying? For example, what if there was evidence that clearly proved he was guilty?"

"I would honestly report it. After all, such a lie would only bite us in the back later."

"Yea, I agree."

It's not like Ichinose would be affected anyway.

"Then we're good, right? Since you got what you wanted."

She spoke quickly, as if she wanted to turn her away as fast as possible.

“Mmm. Hey, is it fine if I help? I can help look for the witness. It’s faster if there’s more people, right?”

Obviously, the more people the better. That’s true. But it’s not like we’re saying, “Please listen to our story, it’s a disaster!”.

“I wonder why a class B student is offering to help.”

“Are class B and class D completely unrelated? We don’t know when and where these kind of cases will pop up. Since the classes are competing against each other, there’s always of a risk that these troubles appear. This time was just the first such case. It’ll also be a huge issue if the party that lied wins. Also, I personally can’t overlook this after hearing what happened.”

I couldn’t tell if she was being serious or if she was joking.

“If class B helps in finding a witness, don’t you guys have more credibility? Well, it’s possible that class D is the one that suffers damage after the truth is revealed...”

If Sudou’s words are proven to be a lie, that means class C’s claim is the correct one. Sudou would be suspended, and class D would take some heavy damage, perhaps fatal.

“What do you think? I think it’s a pretty good proposal.”

I looked over at Horikita. However, she was still facing out the window with her back turned to me. I wonder what she thinks about her proposal.

Naturally, we were most worried about our merit. If the students of class D tried to prove Sudou’s innocence by ourselves, the

credibility of our proof would be low unless the evidence completely solved the case.

If an unrelated class B student got involved, the situation would be completely different.

“You may think I’m being a hypocrite, but I also don’t intend to carry such a heavy responsibility.”

I weighed the positives and the negatives of her proposal. Obviously, we still couldn’t trust Ichinose yet. After all, she’s a student from class B, and there’s no clear benefit for her in choosing to help. If helping other people repeatedly was related to the class and private points, then her actions are understandable. She probably won’t give up such valuable information so easily... but there’s no other way but to ask.

“Let’s accept the help, Ayanokouji-kun.”

Horikita must have determined that the merits were greater than the risks.

I was thankful that she came to a decision quickly.

In the first place, I didn’t really have any power to decide; it was all up to Horikita.

Ichinose smiled, showing her white teeth.

“Then it’s decided. Um...”

“Horikita.”

Horikita readily gave her name; it looks like she approves of this cooperative relationship.

“Nice to meet you, Horikita-san. And Ayanokouji-kun as well.”

By an unexpected turn of events, we became acquainted with Ichinose and formed a cooperative relationship, but it's still up to chance whether or not this is a good thing. Either way, it'll bring change.

"We already found the witness, but sadly, they're in class D."

Ichinose let out a sigh, facepalming.

"Well, that means a witness isn't in any other class, right? At least, the probability would be low."

A very low chance, but a chance is a chance.

"Even then, your friend is being considered as a regular, right? That's awesome! Even if he's holding you guys back right now, he'll be a great asset later on. If he goes out and does great, he'll get points and so will the class. Wait... did you not know? Did your teacher not tell you?"

We were only told that our private points were affected.

"It's my first time hearing that it affects our class points... I'll have to bring up a complaint with Chiyabashira-sensei later on."

Horikita mumbled in dissatisfaction.

Either way, Sensei omitted something once again. I wonder if it was their teacher that told class B about the class points...

As usual, Sensei doesn't even try to pretend that we're all equal. I'm feeling the extreme discrimination.

"There's something strange about your homeroom teacher."

"In the first place, she just doesn't have any motivation to tell us and is apathetic to the students. There are those kind of teachers."

I didn't think it was something to be surprised about, but Ichinose took a step back.

"Did you know that the homeroom teachers are evaluated when their class graduates?"

"No, first time hearing it. Are you sure?"

I wasn't interested; rather, I had to be interested. An important distinction to make.

"My homeroom teacher, Hoshinomiya-sensei, says it like it's her favorite phrase. She always says that she has to do her best because the teacher in charge of class A will get a bonus at the end. It seems like it's different for you guys."

"I'm envious of your homeroom teacher and your class."

It feels like our homeroom teacher has no sense of ambition and no desire for money.

Rather, it feels like she would say, "You guys are failing—great!"

"I think it would be great to meet up and discuss things sometime."

"I wasn't expecting to be helped by the enemy."

"I mean, it feels like this is a problem before we can compete. After all, we're not on even playing ground."

We were being pitied, even by the other classes.

It shows the lack of enthusiasm Chiyabashira-sensei has for her students.

"I wish we could switch teachers."

"No, I think there are a other problems with that."

I thought back on the time I met Hoshinomiya-sensei. She seems like a whole different set of troubles.

“Ah, it’s so hot here.”

Ichinose took out a handkerchief with a cute panda on it and wiped the sweat from her forehead. Our thick uniforms trap the heat well.

“A school that turns on the air conditioning 24/7 even when the whole building is empty is bad for the environment and is detestable.”

“Ahahaha, I guess. You’re an interesting one.”

Ichinose laughed even though the line wasn’t meant to be funny.

“I don’t think there was anything to laugh at...”

“How about we exchange contact addresses to make sure things go smoothly in the future?”

Horikita sent me a look of, “I don’t want to, so you give her yours”.

“If you’re fine with mine. I’ll reply when you contact me.”

“Okay, I got it.”

I only realized after we exchanged addresses, but wow, I have a lot of girls’ contact addresses.

Granted, I only have seven addresses (three of which are girls’), even though it’s the beginning of July.

Somehow... I may have been enjoying my youth without even knowing it.

This is unrelated, but Ichinose’s first name is Honami.

According to her mail, Ichinose seems to be planning a strategy so that we would come to trust her. She decided to ask for permission every time she would do something, but I didn't think it was necessary for her to restrict herself that much. After having returned to the dorms, I thought that Horikita would go her own way, but she followed me to my room.

"Sorry for intruding."

She said politely, even though there was no one else in my room.

I wonder why I feel nervous even though it's only Horikita in the room with me.

"Oh, by the way, do you also have a key?"

"To this room? Ike-kun asked me if I wanted one, but I refused."

As expected of Horikita. It seems like she's the only one with common sense around here.

"After all, it's rare for me to go to your room. Going to your room is like a shame, a disgrace. You understand, right?"

That reply was also within my expectations. I'm totally not hurt.

I totally didn't think, "It's harsher than I expected".

"Why are you tracing out characters on the wall with your finger?"

"To hide the unrest in my heart, or something like that."

The most terrifying part is that she doesn't have any ill intentions.

If I brought it up to her, she'd probably go, "I only said the truth".

“I want to hear what you think about Sudou-kun’s case again. Also, I think Kushida-san’s actions are a bit troubling.”

“Wouldn’t it have been better to have participated from the beginning if you’re worried about the situation?”

“That wasn’t possible. I couldn’t accept the person in the beginning. I’m only helping for the class right now—frankly speaking, I still think it’s better to abandon him.”

“Even if you pitched in and helped Sudou during the midterms?”

“That’s a separate matter. Even if we manage to miraculously prove him as innocent, do you think he’ll be helpful later? I think that it’s quite likely that our help will backfire.”

Her eyes said, “Do you know what I’m trying to say?”.

“Is it for Sudou’s sake that you’re giving up on proving him innocent and letting him take the punishment?”

Horikita had a discontented expression, but then looked like she understood something.

“You already knew from the beginning that it would be very difficult to prove Sudou-kun innocent considering his personality, right? It makes it easy to think that it would be better for him to get punished. Especially for those who hate him.”

It looked like she wanted to say, “You’re thinking the same way, right?”

I feel like I’ve been cornered, unable to get away. If I try to force my way out by denying it, she’ll just deliver the final blow.

“Well, isn’t that obvious to anyone with a bit of thinking?”

“Probably. It’s not like Kushida-san’s group hasn’t noticed. It’s just that they believe Sudou-kun and working with the class to try and disprove the lie. They don’t understand why this incident happened and the urgency of the situation at all.”

Her remarks concerning her classmates were considerably harsh.

“At least Kushida is trying to help after understanding the situation already.”

“After understanding the situation? Is that something she realized by herself?”

“Huh? No, that’s...”

“You told her, right?”

It felt like I was being interrogated. Scary.

“Getting old test questions, buying points on a test... I’m not surprised because you seem to be quite cunning but even then... I’m discontent.”

I guess she’s learned that I’m a cunning person.

“Don’t overestimate me.”

She laughed—that’s not what I meant to do. However, she immediately stopped.

“Honestly speaking, you’re a mystery. You’re the hardest person to predict in the class. Tactful yet idles often, and is never constant. It’s like you’re in a separate category of ‘cannot be categorized’.”

“All of those are questionable descriptions. Not what you’d say when you praise someone...”

I mean, there are better ways to put it, right? However, Horikita looked at me with distrustful eyes

“In other words, you’re hiding your true ability. You make me feel the most disgusted.”

...I see. I wonder if it’s normal to not know what those five words mean together.

Somehow, I fell straight into Horikita’s trap. A slight blunder on my part.

“At any rate, saying that I make you the most disgusted is too much. Koenji is somewhat similar too.”

That is, without a doubt, a seasonal good. If she related him to me, I would feel hurt.

“He’s surprisingly easy to understand—after all, he’s smart and athletic. His behavior is the only problem, which is explained by the two words ‘self-conceited’.”

Actually, it’s fairly easy to understand. Certainly, Koenji’s way of life is pretty simple.

“I think you’d be a good teacher.”

If I became a teacher... I feel like I’d be just like Chiyabashira-sensei.

6

On this campus, there are four dorms. Three of them are for the students; the students stay in the same dorm they were assigned to in their first year for all of high school. In other words, this dorm was used by last year’s third-years. The last dorm is for the teachers, and for all the live-in employees that work at the shopping mall.

In other words, since all the first years were in the same building, it was inevitable that people from different classes would get to meet.

I locked eyes with a person who had been a complete stranger until now.

“Thank you very much.”

The girl who said her thanks to the dorm manager noticed me and called out to me.

“Yaho, Ayanokouji-kun. Good morning. You’re early.”

Long, wavy hair and wide eyes. Chest straining the second button of her blazer. Her posture matches her personality, and what charms me is how cool she is, rather than her looks. It was class 1-B’s Ichinose Honami.

“I woke up earlier than I expected. What were you talking about with the manager?”

“A few people from my class wanted to make a request to the dorm. So, I gathered all the opinions and relayed it to the manager. Things like water usage and noise.”

“You did?”

Usually, complaints or issues about the rooms were handled individually. I wonder why Ichinose collected their opinions.

“Good morning class rep~”

Ichinose replied to the two girls who walked out of the elevator.

“Class rep? Why class rep?”

I've never heard of that before. There are no positions like that here.

It doesn't look like they call her 'class rep' because she studies too much.

"I'm the class rep for my class."

"Class rep... do all the other classes have one?"

Normally I'd be surprised, but our homeroom teacher would've probably decided to leave that out.

"No, we just made it on our own. I think it's good to assign a few roles."

I understood what she was saying, but it's not like we were going to assign a class rep anyway.

"By any chance, do you have any positions other than class rep?"

"Pretty much. Whether or not they're useful is a different question, but we do have other roles like vice class rep and secretary. It'll be useful whenever we have some kind of festival. It would be fine to decide things on the spot, but that might become troublesome."

I remembered that Ichinose was studying with a group of boys and girls at the library some time ago.

She was probably fulfilling her role as class rep back then as well.

Usually, most people wouldn't want to be part of a class committee. They're forced to do troublesome things and have to participate in discussions from time to time.

However, with Ichinose taking the initiative, things probably went a lot smoother.

“I guess you’re like the leader of class B then.”

My honest feelings leaked out.

“Are you thinking of something strange? Everyone’s doing this for fun. Also, there are a surprising amount of people who cause trouble. There are a lot of issues.”

As she said “There are a lot of issues”, she laughed in delight. Taking advantage of the current situation, we were walking to school together.

“Do you usually leave later? I never see you at this time.

Ichinose asked a harmless question, as if she was following a template.

I felt somewhat accomplished when I heard those words. My relationship with Ichinose will surely grow with small talk like this.

“There’s no need to leave so early, so I usually stay in my room for 20 minutes.”

“Then I guess you get there just on time.”

As we got closer to the school, the number of students multiplied.

Oddly enough, a number of girls turned towards us with jealous looks. Is this my popularity phase that’s rumored to come three times in a lifetime? Since it’s never happened to me, I feel like this is just about the right time for it to come.

“Good morning, Ichinose!”

“Good morning, Ichinose-san!”

Ichinose monopolized all of the gazes of the girls.

“Wow, you’re popular.”

“Since I’m the class rep, I just stand out more. That’s all.”

Instead of being humble, it seems like that’s what she truly believed.

It seems like she naturally attracts the attention of nearby people.

“Oh, right. Did you hear about summer break?”

“Summer break? No... isn’t summer break just summer break?”

“There are rumors that our vacation will be on a tropical island.”

Speaking of which, something else crossed my mind.

I forget when, but Chiyabashira-sensei said something about a vacation.

“I can’t really believe it, but do we really have a vacation?”

It probably isn’t just a trip... Look around and seriously think about.

It isn’t an exaggeration to say that this school goes all out. Going to a tropical island during summer vacation and an onsen during the winter.

...It’s very suspicious. I don’t think the school is that nice. There’s definitely something else lurking around. I wonder what Ichinose thinks.

Without having to ask, I could tell from the bitter smile on her face.

“It’s suspicious. I think that’s one of the turning points.”

“In other words, this might cause a huge change in the class points?”

“Yea, yea. This might have more influence than the midterms and the finals. Otherwise, the only difference between the classes would be these test scores. This trip is so that the school could separate us.”

It wouldn't be strange for a big event to happen soon...

“What is the gap between class A and B?”

“We have about 660 points, so around 350.”

It was a given that the number would've dropped since the beginning of the year, but it's amazing how many points they held on to.

“There haven't been any other methods of getting class points other than the midterms, so it was unavoidable that we lost some points. After all, class A also lost a few points in the beginning.”

However, class A was able to gain a net positive with the recent midterm.

“You don't seem very worried about your class points.”

“I do care about it, but there I think that we have a chance of making a comeback. I'm only going to gather my thoughts in preparation.”

I think that the first part that statement is correct.

However, that's only possible because they have a solid foundation.

We've only got 87 points. We're not close to even competing with the other classes.

“I wonder how much this event will change things.”

It probably won't be a measly 10 or 20 points.

However, it's also difficult to imagine that the totals would change by 500 or 1000 points.

"We're also in a pinch. If the gap widens, we might not be able to catch up anymore."

"I guess we both have to work hard."

Actually, it's Horikita, Hirata, and Kushida that have to work hard.

"At any rate, it doesn't look like the situation will get much worse."

I don't want to start complaining already, but it seems like a troublesome event will happen soon.

"But if it's actually a vacation on a tropical island, that would be super amazing!"

"I wonder..."

"Huh, not looking forward to it?"

Only people who have friends and interact with others can enjoy their break.

There's nothing that feels as uncomfortable as traveling without people you're close to.

Even more so if traveling with a group. Just thinking about it makes me feel sick.

"Do you hate traveling by any chance?"

"I don't hate traveling. I think, at least...."

While talking about this and that, I imagined what it would feel like. After all, I've never traveled with a friend.

Speaking of travel, I've been to New York with my parents when I was very young. None of it was fun. I felt weary by the bitter flashback I had.

"What's wrong?"

"I just recalled a certain traumatic memory."

My dry laughter echoed along the hot road.

No, no. If I spread my negative aura, then Ichinose would be troubled as well.

However, my worries were for naught, and Ichinose continued to talk, looking like she didn't mind.

"Can I ask you some questions?"

Ichinose was a dazzling existence, though different from Kushida.

It seems like she's acting sincerely for her own satisfaction.

Even when she's talking to me, it seems like she's giving it her all.

"The whole grade is separated into four classes, right? I wonder if that's actually by ability."

"I know that the results of the entrance exam don't directly correspond to the results. There are people that deserve to be in the top class based on test scores, so I figured about that much."

Horikita, Koenji, and Yukimura would definitely rank highly in the grade.

"Isn't it something like 'overall ability'?"

I gave a vague reply. I've also thought about it many times, but couldn't come up with an answer.

"But I always wondered. People might be good at studying and bad at sports, or vice versa. But if the students are ranked by overall ability, doesn't that mean that the lower classes are at a severe disadvantage?"

"Isn't that how societal competition works? I don't think it's strange."

Ichinose crossed her arms and paused. It looked like she didn't understand.

"If it was an individual match, then maybe. But this is a class competition. If you put all the good people in class A, isn't there absolutely no chance of winning?"

I mean, that's pretty much the current state of the class points.

However, it seemed like Ichinose's thoughts were different.

"There's definitely a difference between class A and D, but I think that's because they're trying to hide something by using something so trivial."

"Your reasoning?"

"Ahahaha, nothing much. It just came to me for some reason. If that wasn't true, it would be accurate to call this situation harsh. I think that there are people who can study and do well in sports in class D for a reason."

Is that different than the usual system?

If the classes were separated using only our academic ability, there would be no way to beat the other classes, no matter how hard we tried.

An important factor to this system is being an expert in many fields.

“...Shouldn’t you keep quiet about this?”

I advised Ichinose, feeling slightly worried.

“Hmm? About what?”

“About your thoughts right now. Horikita said it early, but you’re helping out the enemy.”

I might get some new ideas and try to do something with it.

“I don’t think that’s true. It’s important that a lot of ideas are circulated. Also, since we’re in a cooperative relationship, it’s completely fine.”

It wasn’t the complacency of being in class B... but rather, it was a characteristic of Ichinose. Somehow, I could understand what she was thinking. Anyway, she’s actually a good person—and doesn’t have two sides to her.”

“My brain isn’t good enough to exchange ideas and such. I can only say ‘I’m sorry’ to that.”

“It’s fine even it’s just me talking. If you think it’s useful information, you can use it.”

Ichinose seemed to remember something and stopped in her tracks.

As I wondered what it was about, I turned my head and saw her serious expression.

“You know... I wanted to ask you something. Is that okay?”

I could hardly imagine the cheerful Ichinose from a few seconds ago. My body stiffened up.

“I’ll answer to the best of my ability.”

There’s nothing I can answer with my brain that has the knowledge of a hundred million books (a big lie).

“Have you ever been confessed to by a girl?”

Um... That wasn’t in the millions of books I read...

“Do I look like a person who hasn’t been confessed to before...?”

Is this when she calls me disgusting, a virgin, or makes fun of me? I’ll cry, you know?

I’m only a first-year high school student! It’s way too early for that. Hey, hey. Don’t you think so too?

I’m pretty sure that the proportion of people who have confessed to those who haven’t is very small. I have no proof to back it up, however.

The number of people who die in solitude, hidden away from the rest of humanity, cannot be counted.

“No, no. Sorry, it’s nothing.”

That’s not a face that says “it’s nothing”. However, it looks like she’s more worried than anything else.

“Did someone confess to you?”

“Huh? Oh, yea. Something like that.”

Somehow, it seems like a lot of people are trying to become a couple just like Hirata and Karuizawa.

“If you have time after school, I want to talk to you about confessions. I know you’re busy and all about the current issue, but if you have time...”

“It’s fine. I don’t really have much to do.”

“Don’t have much to do?”

“I don’t think there’s any use to find evidence or look for a witness. It’d be troublesome to waste my time doing something like that.”

“But you went to the scene of the incident yesterday, right?”

“That was for something else. Anyway, it’s fine.”

“Thanks.”

But I wonder what this has to do with me.

Is this the pattern where she makes up a lie and says “This is my boyfriend”? However, I immediately pushed that thought away since it would be better to use a more reliable ikemen instead.

“After school... I’ll be waiting at the entrance.”

“A-Alright.”

It’s the natural that I felt somewhat excited, even though I knew nothing was going to happen.

The entrance to the school was overflowing with the wave of students going home.

What does Ichinose want with me? I was a little worried on coming here. I guess I'll find out soon.

Although she's cute, she has a presence that dominates this place.

Honestly, I don't know how to describe it. I can only express it as being vaguely soft but powerful. I also noticed all the attention she gets from the first-year students.

She's Kushida's equal, or even more. She's popular with both men and women, after school everyone came after her wanting to talk, one after another.

As a result, I had to find a way to waste about 5 minutes while she finished talking.

"Buddy, Ayanokouji, over here!"

Finally, Ichinose remembers me and calls me over.

She raises her hand for me to come join her.

"So what am I supposed to do now?"

"I'm going to finish this right away. Follow me."

I put on my shoes, and I head to the back of the school while being led by Ichinose.

I arrived at the back of the building. It's a perfect place to confess.

“Let’s see...”

She took a quick breath and looked up at me. No way, Ichinose to me?!

“Confession——“

Woah, just like that...

“I’m going to be confessed to here.”

“...Huh?”

With that said, Ichinose showed me a letter.

It was a lovely letter with a cute seal on it.

Although it also looked fine when I peeked inside, I noticed something unusual.

The inside was just as cute as the outside, the writing was very girly.

Since I first entered this school, I’ve had a desire. I just realized what it is.

It was written that she wanted to meet at the back of the gym at 4 o’clock on Friday evening after it closed. That would be in 10 minutes.

“Wouldn’t it be better for me not to be here?”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t feel the same way How can I turn the person down without hurting them? I’m not sure how to stay good friends. So I wanted you to help me.”

“I don’t think it’s best asking me, I have no experience with confessions. There are many useful people in B Class.”

“The one who confessed....is in B Class.”

I see. Somehow I understood why I was picked out.

“I want to keep what happens today as secret as possible. If not, things will be awkward in the future. Ayanokoji, I know you’re not going to tell anyone.”

“But Ichinose, aren’t you used to being confessed to?”

“Eh! What? Not at all. Even so. I don’t know anything about dating!”

I would have never believed her if I had not been asked to help that day.

“So, I just, I feel...”

Really it can’t be helped, Ichinose is cute, but I don’t think it’s only looks. Judging by the responses of other students to Ichinose this morning, her personality also seems really nice.

“So... Can you pretend to be my boyfriend?”

Wow, this has been an interesting evening!

“After looking at all the options, saying that there is someone you are going out with seems to hurt the least. . . .”

“I know the feeling of not wanting to hurt someone, but won’t the lie hurt more later?”

“I decided we should break up right away. I want us to say that I was dumped.”

You don’t think there’s a problem, but...

“It’d be better to talk one on one, absolutely. It would also be the honest thing to do.”

“But—hey!”

Ichinose saw something, she raised her hand awkwardly.

It seems that the other party came earlier than we thought. What kind of boy is this?

When you look at the face, it looks like a man and woman. You have to look carefully.

No, no matter how it looks it is a girl. I thought so when I was looking at the letter, but it really was a girl. Unlike men confessing to men, it is because I am a man that this seems to be okay even if a little against the established way of doing things.

“Ichinose, who is that person?”

The girl who came here was wary of me, an unknown boy.

“He is Ayanokoji of D class. I’m sorry, Chihiro-chan, I brought someone you don't know.”

“Is this perhaps your boyfriend...or?”

“Ah. . . Uh. . .”

I thought Ichinose would probably answer "Yeah." However, it seems the answer got stuck in the back of her throat, probably from the guilt of lying.

“Why is this Ayanokouji person here?”

The girl, Chihiro-chan, was confused by the unexpected situation and became teary-eyed. Is he your boyfriend? Why is another person here if he's not your boyfriend? I don't understand.

Then I noticed Ichinose, she looked panicked, as if she had no idea what to do. She appears to be a reliable girl, but has unexpected weaknesses.

"Well, could you go somewhere else? I have an important matter to discuss with Ichinose."

"Wait a minute, Chihiro-san. Well, um...? Actually, Ayanokouji-kun...."

Ichinose made the first move somehow and seemed intent on declining.

Perhaps she thought that she would have a hard time if she said "girls" in direct language.

". . . What is it?"

"Ayanokouji-kun? That's my—"

There is basically nothing I can do at this point. If only there was....

"I'm just a friend."

Before Ichinose could twist things, I spoke up.

"Ichinose. I don't think it's a good idea for me to be here, since I'm not being confessed to. It was a mistake to get me involved."

I answered clearly for both of us.

"Confessing to someone is not an easy thing. You simulate it in your mind over and over again, spending every day in anguish, yet

still cannot confess. Even when you think you'll confess, the word 'love' hangs in your throat and does not come out. I think her earnest feelings deserve a proper answer, don't you? Being in such a situation and never speaking up only leaves regret."

"Umm..."

Perhaps Ichinose has never really liked someone. So, she didn't know what to do, and didn't know what was wrong. The feeling that I do not want to hurt my friend has produced no results. When refusing a confession, hurting the other person is a path that cannot be avoided. It might make it a little better if you think of a good reason. Now I want to focus on my schoolwork, or someone else I like. There are people like this now. However, the other party is still hurt. The rejection hurts more if it's painted with lies.

I did not wait for Ichinose's response, I left. I stopped on a tree-lined street leading to the dormitory.

I sat on the handrail and took a deep breath while looking up at the green leaves. After about 5 minutes of this, a girl rushed past me. She had tears in her eyes. Even so, I continued killing time without moving from that spot. As the sun sank, Ichinose quietly returned.

"Ah..."

When she came into sight she looked uncomfortable and was looking down, but immediately lifted her head as she approached.

"I was wrong. I tried desperately, thinking only how to not hurt her without trying to understand Chihiro's feelings. I only thought of escaping, that was a mistake."

"Love is difficult" muttered Ichinose as she sat next to me on the railing.

"Tomorrow we're supposed to act normal, I wonder if we can get back to where we were."

"It depends on you two."

"Yeah..."

"Thank you for today. I made an interesting memory."

"Good, sometimes there are days like this."

"Our positions were reversed. Although I intended to lend a hand, I ended up being helped."

"I'm sorry that I was insolent."

Ichinose looked ahead and it seemed like something was wrong.

"Ayanokouji-kun, you have nothing to apologize for. Nothing at all."

She stretched her hands out to the sky and leaped to the ground.

"Now it's my turn to cooperate. I'll try to do just that."

How is Class B student Ichinose going to handle this difficult situation?

I look forward to watching.

That night, while browsing some online shopping sites, my phone received a call.

The phone was charging by an outlet, and I saw the screen light up.

Kushida Kikyo was displayed as the caller.

I looked a second time to be sure it was her. I wouldn't be brave enough to call back when the call ended, so I slid out of my chair, grabbed the phone and dove into bed.

"Sorry, I know it's late at night, were you still awake?"

"Huh? Oh, I was just about to go to sleep. What do you want?"

"Sakura's camera is broken, isn't it? I think it's partly my fault that she rushed away because I spoke to her, so I wanted to take responsibility for that..."

"I don't think it's really necessary for you to take responsibility. And she can just get it repaired, right? If it's that important, why doesn't she go and get it fixed?"

However, things aren't as simple as they sound. Sakura is not very good at talking to people, and it seems she's not going to go to the repair shop alone. It may be similar to being hesitant to go into a restaurant alone.

It suddenly seems incredible, but there are people of various personalities and characteristics in the world.

It's still surprising, though, when someone is unable to interact with other people.

"Kushida, did you offer to help her?"

In order to have contact with Sakura, you have to take actively seek it.

"Yeah, she seemed a little hesitant, but I hope we can do it the day after tomorrow. I think that camera may be very important to Sakura."

And thus, Kushida had beautifully taken the first step to get Sakura to open up to her.

"But why with me? Couldn't you two do it just fine?"

"If it was only for getting repairs. There is something else important to do. I want you to cooperate with me."

"Do you know if she knows about Sudo's incident?"

"Horikita thinks so, and after meeting Sakura, I feel like she knows something too. There has to be a reason she's denying it."

If that's true, it would be best to take Horikita, but Kushida being with Horikita on their day off couldn't even happen in my dreams.

By process of elimination, I was singled out as the least harmful option.

If she took Ike Yamauchi, he would only see Kushida.

This is convenient, I did want to visit an electronics shop.

I stood and leaned up against the wall near the bed.

For some reason I felt it would be rude to agree to go while lying down.

“Ok, I understand. Let’s do it.”

Although I was ready just to reply normally, my voice cracked a bit and betrayed me.

Luckily, it didn’t seem particularly strange to Kushida and she didn’t catch on.

Then for a while, Kushida and I had a chat.

It’s not too stressful to have a regular conversation.

It’s proof that even when she steps into your personal space, it doesn’t feel uncomfortable.

In my mind I felt like we were friends, I firmly recognized it.

“That said, when Koenji-kun and Sudo were about to fight, I was scared.”

“Oh, that maybe it was on the verge of becoming a fist fight.”

Koenji was in control of himself, but he would’ve fought back if Sudo hit him.

That may have been a catastrophe.

“I couldn’t move...Hirata-kun is amazing, right? I respect him.”

“Yeah.”

I was a little jealous of the praise Hirata got, but I later regretted it.

If you have the courage and guts to jump up during that scene, it’s only natural you’ll be respected.

"It's thanks to you and Hirata that Class D is arranged the way it is. Both boys and girls think well of each other."

Sometimes girls can only be understood by girls.

"I'm just doing what I normally do. I didn't do anything special."

"I'm sure Hirata would say the same."

There are many special people who do not think that they are special.

"Speaking of special, I'm more special than Horikita-san, right? I can study and socialize, I'm accepted in Class D."

That is not special, we're in a special class of people.

I should stay quiet, I'm afraid if I speak I may insult her.

"Because you're not sociable, you were put in Class D for defects, right?"

"But you usually talk to me, don't you?"

"Isn't that normal...?"

Based on the terrible way Horikita treats me, not really..

I remember Ike's agony and tremble.

"I'll say that I still feel a wall between Horikita and me, that's the state of our relationship. Just to let you know."

"Huh?"

I heard a little doubt in her voice. I don't want Kushida to misunderstand me.

“Oh, yeah, there is something I want to ask, Kushida, is your room on the 9th floor?”

“Eh? Oh, yeah? Is something wrong?”

“No, nothing. I was just curious.”

I noticed Kushida became quiet. The silence was unexpected.

The conversation that had continued for a while stopped.

Most of the time, Kushida would talk again soon, but not now.

Was it by any chance bad to have asked what floor a room was on?

Fidgeting and becoming uncomfortable, I look around every corner of the room aimlessly.

Ah, I just want to be a well-liked, cool guy. I can't help but think that way.

During that time, only the sound of us breathing could be heard.

“It's getting late, we should hang up soon.”

I couldn't take the silence. I gave up.

A silent phone call with a girl just brings heartache.

“Hold on-”

“Eh?”

Kushida broke the silence. But it came back.

I felt unusually hesitant to speak. This isn't like Kushida, who always makes the conversation brighter.

“If, if I am ... I am ...”

The words stop again. Then, the silence came and 5, then 10 seconds passed.

“...no, nothing.”

It's a response, then nothing.

But, what is it, say it. The courage had gone away.

Sorry Kushida. If you were to go to war, I would be the chicken sneaking around, saying that sniping from a distance is just fine.

Forgive me.

“Well, hopefully the day after tomorrow goes well, Ayanokouji-kun.”

After saying that, Kushida hung up the call.

I wonder if it was that last thing I said. It's going to be hard to go to sleep tonight.

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