

衣笠彰梧

KINUGASA SYOUGO

トモセシュンサク

TOMOSESHUNSAKU

よつとして
実力至上主義
の教室へ

こそ
じつりよく
しじょうしゅぎ
のきょうしつへ

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Kinugasa Syougo
Tomose Shunsaku

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Welcome to the
classroom of the Elite 1

ようこそ
じつりょく
Fan Translation
Anime Anyway

実力至上主義の教室へ

衣笠彰梧
トモセシュンサク



Arisu Sakayanagi

"In the end, I think that the ones who stand out are simply the children who have excellent DNA."



Anime Anyway
Fan Translation



"What are you going to do when you leave into the outside world? Is there a point to this?"

Translator's Note

This is a Fan Translation of Volume 0 of Classroom of the Elite. This is fully translated by a Human Translator and we made sure that it's accurate to the original version. Thank you, the reader, for choosing to read this. Also, I want to give thanks to the Author - Kinugasa Shougo and Illustrator - Tomose Shunsaku for this Volume. All Credits go to the original publishers for the Series. If you can, then please go and buy the official version to support the Author. This is just an extra effort towards the Classroom of the Elite community. I hope you Enjoy, Personally, I really Enjoyed this Novel, So I hope you also have a good time. Also, If you'd like, you can Support us [Here](#).

Have Fun !

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ようこそ
じつりよく
しじょうしゅぎ
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ようこそ**実力至上主義**の**教室**へ

衣笠彰梧⁷ × トモセシュンサク

Classroom of the Elite Volume O

English Translation by Anime Anyway

Prologue

Ayanokoji Atsuomi's Monologue

Wealth, poverty.

The difference between the rich and the poor.

High academic achievements, inferior education.

The gap between education.

The city, the countryside.

The gap between regions.

The young who were not blessed, the old who were.

The gap between generations.

This Japan is a society of gaps.

I have only shown one part, but it truly represents both heaven and hell.

The important thing is, that for the most part, circumstance is by no means something that cannot be changed. If a man of poverty can grow to become wealthy, a man of wealth can also fall into poverty.

If one is displeased with the disparity between regions, they may head into the big city.

While understanding the logic, I still had nothing.

Born in the countryside, extremely poor, and a pathetically poor academic history.

With my physical strength also only average, even if I was endowed with perseverance, it is not as if I was a hard worker.

If I ever looked strong enough to have the characteristics of a fighter, that was simply my youth.

However, without realizing this potential, I spent my life wasting most of my time away.

I was, indeed, a man crawling on the dirt.

Without the expectation of anything resembling a bright future, there was only the simple possibility of living a pathetic life.

However, with my own hands, I cut open my future.

Because I had one thing, just one, that I possessed more than anyone else.

That was, my "*ambition*", to keep consistently fighting without halt.

[TL Note 1 : There are two meanings for the word translated into "ambition":

1: Ambition, aspiration

2: Sinister plans, treachery.

There isn't really anything indicating it was used with the second meaning but I wanted to let you know. The author *might* have also used this word on purpose to indicate both meanings.]

No matter what, I will rise up to the top of this country.

I have lived up until now with that one idea in my heart.

That ambition alone was what supported my life.

As I faced my 25th years of age, for the first time, I gained eligibility to be elected in politics.

I had saved up a sum of 3,000,000 with my part-time job.

With this, I was to become a politician, a member of the assembly, and make a name for myself as a man of great fortune.

A faint, hard to achieve dream. Taking the election lightly, I failed in a way that was painful to even watch.

It would have been fine if it had ended there, but as I could not even reach the minimum amount of votes, the 3,000,000 that I spent all my life saving up was confiscated.

Poverty resolution, clean politics, countermeasures against the declining birthrate, wage increases, NO WAR.

I thought that if I simply lined up some lip service, the election would be easy.

A shallow and foolish idea. Anyone can think of and realize shallow ideas like that.

What mattered for winning the election was which organisation you belonged to, and who you were under.

Whether you can differentiate friend from foe and endure being wrapped up for the long haul.

What happened after that?

Did I think that I was ruined?

I wanted to join the ruling party, the "Citizen's Party", and started my first step as a politician.

That's correct, after two years, I entered the election again, and was elected.

From when I was 27 years old, I succeeded in reaching a position where I could put all of my life, my heart and blood, into politics.

Perhaps I was able to become the winning side, then, but... for me, being elected was not the goal.

Most of all, the world of politics isn't so easy.

No, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, in a certain meaning, it is a deeply dark world.

Because, even if I had the spirit, I was nothing but a young and alone parliament member with no shield or power behind me.

Half of the people who are able to rise up, are second or third-generationers granted the privilege at the time of birth.

The sons of big politicians, ignorant, foolish and unaware of the impending crisis, are just repeating their dull delusions on TV day and night, like carbonic acid losing its air.

There are those who make a name for themselves in the entertainment world, and move over to the world of politics.

Most of them are nothing more than crowd attractors, but they still have a bigger chance than nameless politicians like me. It's an ironic story.

As such, the methods for me to make a name for myself as a politician... The choices I had were limited.

To take on the dirty work in the shadows that no one wants to do.

A role in which if I failed, my life as a politician would have been over... or, depending on the case, I might even have received a criminal complaint against me.

By taking this on by my own volition, I was able to slightly increase my presence inside the party.

Before long, as the hidden sword of "Naoe Sensei", who bound together many factions in the Citizen's Party, I had my hands in all kinds of evil deeds. Mediation of underage girls, bribery, espionage to hostile organizations.

Once I was assigned to this project, the boundaries between right and wrong were removed for the sake of success.

There were times when I would come in contact with Yakuza or other criminal gangs and resort to violent means.

I had no time to rest, and, as I continued to challenge, before long, I was gaining influence inside the party; when I was 36 years old, I was able to gain some political power.

However... from this point on.

In order to jump into the center of the political world, more achievements, and transgressions, would be necessary.



A newborn, one month old baby.

The first time I saw my child through the glass, he was staring blankly at the ceiling. No special feelings came up in my mind.

If I was forced to say, the only feeling I had was the relief that my key to move the people upstairs had arrived.

For almost around a year, this is what I had been waiting for.

"We've completed the health check."

"Any problems?"

"Currently, there aren't any problems. No problems were found in the EEG and all the other tests. The results of the DNA analysis were also all good."

Tabuchi, completing all of the tests, looked at the results and gave me his report.

"I see."

We can't allow anything to stop us at this pre-start stage.

With this being cleared up, I could say that I was able to go through the first stage.

"You may come in direct contact with him now."

"No need. Just like all the children up until now, start the tests right away."

The White Room project is already on the fourth stage. There is no need to waste time.

I stopped to look at my child, who was being carried out with my instructions.

If I enter him into the White Room, I suppose I will not be seeing him for a long time. Right?

"Wait a bit."

I headed down to my son, who was behind the glass that separated us.

Being directly in front of him, I could once again feel this small life close to me.

He could not hold his head up, so I slipped my hand behind his neck, and gently picked him up.

"You are Sensei's son, after all. A rigorous education is awaiting you from now on, but I hope you can achieve the results that—"

"What are you saying? Get ready for the photographs right away."

"Huh..?"

Tabuchi was stunned, as if he did not understand my intent.

"I'm sending my child, who is even more important than my own life, into the White Room. You should capture this determination and tension with a camera. It will be important promotional material for the next fund-raiser."

A parent giving away a child he has no interest in, or a parent wanting to hold on to his child but giving him away for the sake of the future.

I don't even have to think about which one would pull more eyes at the galleria.

"Huh...? Ah, o-okay."

Tabuchi, hurriedly taking out his phone, took a photograph and video of me holding my child.

After about a minute of this performance, I put the baby down.

"Take him away."

"U-understood."

I put my sight away from the baby, and started preparing for the coming event.

"Anyhow, all the necessary preparations have been completed. Please connect me to Sakayanagi."

It had been about 10 years since I stepped into the world of politics.

Outwardly, I've been slurping muddy water with a smile on my face, but that ends today. I'm starting a new life for myself here.

I will use and sacrifice anything I can, including my own child.

Even Naoe Sensei, who reigns as the absolute authority, is nothing more than a stepping stone.

He is an enemy; one that I will eventually have to surpass and crush.

"If you don't want to die, you have to struggle for yourself. Kiyotaka."

Whether you are a baby or an adult, in the end, you have to do everything yourself.

Your circumstances may be awful, but, unfortunately, it is the same way for me.

If you had been raised as a family member under me, you would have been even more neglected. In that sense, I could say that you are still off to a good start.

I quietly closed my eyes by myself, in the room where my child had disappeared from. However, you never know what life will bring.

I never thought that I would have a child of my own blood in any shape or form.

The turning point came around 4 years after I started working under Naoe Sensei.

That's right. It was then, when I learned of the White Room project's existence.

Chapter - 1

The Project's Launch

Intro

A traditional Japanese restaurant. Sasagawa. It's the latter half of January, there is no snow but it is a day of below freezing temperature.

Already, for an hour under the cold sky, I have continued waiting for the arrival of the owner.

"It's cold, isn't it, Ayanokoji-san... I wonder when Naoe-sensei will be coming..?"

Kamogawa, whining again for a third time, is breathing into his hands to warm them up.

"It's always the same. For Naoe-sensei, a set time is nothing but a simple suggestion."

"Wait, does that mean that he could be late an hour, or even two hours?"

It is likely, that this is the worst feature of this man.

"How naive. We're lucky if he comes here today. A lot of times, he never shows up at all."

"Wow... No way... Then, how long will you wait for someone who might not even come?"

"Indefinitely. As long as there is not a message from him, I will wait even if the restaurant closes."

"You'll end up dead in that case, you know."

"If I can consider myself a part of the Naoe faction, then I would gladly die for him. Though, Naoe-sensei would never be concerned about someone dying."

We're nothing but attendants of the intermediary role.

Rather, it's the person simmering inside waiting for Naoe-sensei who must be uncomfortable.

"But... it's amazing to be forgiven for being careless with time like this. Normally, that would make people angry."

"Careless with time, is that really what you think?"

"I mean, isn't it true?"

"Even arriving late becomes a weapon in Naoe-sensei's hands. It's even in an anecdote of Miyamoto Musashi, Ganryuujima."

Of course, normally one would not use such old, useless battle strategies.

This display of power can be forgiven precisely because it is Naoe-sensei.

"Obviously, 80% of the people who get stood up can do nothing but cry and go home."

These numeral figures, they're the proof that there is no one who can defy Naoe-sensei. Even the current prime minister has to ask Naoe-sensei for instructions.

No matter how much I am made to wait, I will welcome Naoe-sensei with a smile.

"The remaining 20%... who are those?"

"What use is there in asking about the remaining 20%, the idiots?"

"A-as a reference..."

"The idiots get annoyed after being stood up, and roughen their voice.

Then, they approach me, as if about to strike at me, and demand so:

"How long are you going to make me wait? Quickly, call Naoe-sensei", and such."

Rumbling his throat, Kamogawa next to me swallowed his saliva.

Even this man, for whom it had not been many days since joining the world of politics, understands how terrifying it would be to give an order to Naoe-sensei.

However, each time, I hold a resolute attitude and deal with every member the same way.

"I don't want Naoe-sensei to be taken lightly. I'll just kick you out."

Will you lower your head or ask for another appointment, or will you not show your face a second time?

With this, 80% of people again lower their heads.

While cursing in their hearts, they put priority on getting an audience. Well, at the point where they make this choice, the chance for them having a smooth relationship with Naoe-sensei mostly disappears.

"It must be a lot of trouble when you are in the middle like that, Ayanokoji-san."

"I know I must spare no effort, but it isn't just once or twice that I've been hit. I've even almost been killed by an ash-tray or a golf-club."

As long as they can't put their hands on Naoe-sensei, that frustration has nowhere to go but me. However, it isn't like hitting me will get them rewarded by Naoe-sensei.

"That's very rough. Has it been the same all these four years, Ayanokoji-san?"

"It's simple, but not everyone can do this work. You really have to give it your all."

That's precisely why this chance came to me, someone with no-one behind him, no academic achievements, no intelligence, and no social standing.

Still, this guy is way too clueless.

"Didn't parliament member Kamogawa teach you the ironclad rules?"

This man standing next to me, he is one of the kinds of politicians that I despise the most.

"Father didn't say anything about that..."

Typical second-generation. Leeches, being raised spoiled and eternally continuing to live in the world of politics.

He is a loathsome leech, but, he can become a chosen one, being born into a rich, privileged social standing.

His father, Parliament Member Kamogawa Toshizou who has been supporting Naoe-sensei for quite a few years, is a great veteran with more than 30 years in politics.

Of course, his son would not be allowed to experience severeness in the low ranks.

He is not a pawn to use up and throw away like me, as such, he will continue to be valued as one of the parts holding up the Naoe faction's framework.

"What I did learn, was that as a politician, it was best to shut up and follow along with Naoe-sensei. That I can be a parliament member for a long time and have a stable income, and that I could get a pretty good position one day."

He became a politician not because there are things he wants to accomplish, but simply to make a living.

A lot of people like this exist, whether second-generation or not.

It is a foolish and rotten thought, but, for the guys above, a presence from whom they can gain a vote from without any discontent and complaining is one to be thankful for.

"I want to get up from the bottom of the ladder and get a comfortable job already."

Kamogawa, looking up at the night sky while mumbling and muttering.

"I'm hungry, too... All they have on a cold day like this is hot sake."

"Enough, Kamogawa. Shut up for a bit."

"Come on, it's good to chat, at least. It's not like Sensei is here. More importantly, please, tell me more about yourself and Naoe-sensei."

"About myself?"

"I'm hearing rumours. That despite the fact most people under Naoe-sensei become useless right away, you're being valued and being expected to do well. I want to know the details of your secret methods."

Kamogawa, swallowing the rumours and speaking as if talking about other people's affairs.

I am being pressed by the impulse to punch him away right now, but, the only thing that would earn me is a momentary sense of relief.

I'm considered a newcomer, even after four years. I have to make this fact the main issue.

"The time for chatting is over. Put it off your mind."

"Eh?"

After faintly hearing the taxi from afar, I corrected my posture.

Kamogawa also understood what this meant, cleared his throat and straightened his back. The taxi slowly parked in front of the restaurant.

Immediately after, a black painted Sedan also parked a little behind the taxi.

Without even needing to glance at it, it is clear that they are Naoe-sensei's bodyguards.

I returned my gaze to the taxi right away, yet, the door did not open, and Kamogawa tilted his neck with curiosity.

He was able to see Naoe-sensei's figure through a window so he was about to start running, but I stopped him.

"Don't do anything selfish."

"Huh? B-but..."

In the taxi's backseat, from what can be seen by peeking in through the window, I can see a man and a woman intimately touching each other.

If we do something to bother them now, I am afraid of unnecessarily being reprimanded.

However, it is rare for Naoe-sensei to take a woman along.

Further, even if it is a taxi in the middle of the night, as a politician, I can't think of this as anything but a careless move.

After around a minute of silence in the taxi, the door to the backseat of the taxi finally opened.

"See ya, Sensei~"

As we could hear the wheedling voice of the young girl who was in the back, Kamogawa also finally understood.

After that, Naoe-sensei spent some time chatting with the woman, but then he slowly exited the taxi.

From the driver's seat of the Sedan behind, a slender man quickly came out.

Without saying anything, he silently stood next to Naoe-sensei.

This body-guard is a new face that I haven't seen before. However, I don't have the leeway to worry about that.

"Thank you for your hard work, Naoe-sensei."

"T-thank you!"

Was he shaken because of the scene with that woman, or is it simply because he's in front of Naoe-sensei?

Even if it was the latter, this is very stupid at a time where it shouldn't even look like it is the former.

Stepping one foot ahead of the eyesore that is Kamogawa, I blocked his face with my shoulder.

However, it may have been an unnecessary worry.

Naoe-sensei, not even taking a look at Kamogawa, had his sharp eyes just on the restaurant.

"Where's Asama?"

The suit he wore and his posture made it hard to think of him as an old man, and at the same time made the others around feel a sense of youth from him.

"I have had the pleasure of waiting for you. I will humbly guide you to him."

[TL Note 2 : This sentence isn't a direct translation but he speaks in an extremely respectful way in the original text and this is the best way to reflect that with some paraphrasing.]

I gestured with my eyes to the nervous Kamogawa behind me that he should pay the taxi fare, and guided Naoe-sensei into the restaurant.

As we went under the curtain, everyone from the proprietress to the head chef quickly presented themselves and bowed their heads.

Naoe-sensei, putting on a big aura and not changing his expression, took off his shoes.

While stepping on the wooden floor, he headed for the private room at the back of the restaurant.

Naoe Jinnosuke. Based in the ruling party, the Citizens Party, he has experience in many positions such as Minister of Transport, Minister of Economy, and currently works as Secretary General.

Without mentioning the Prime Minister, his position is only half a step behind the Vice President, but, speaking of it in terms of importance, I can say that the Secretary General is certainly higher. He is the general manager holding the party's real power. The man is 68 years old now, but, there is still not even a hint of him retiring from his current role. In the world of politics where there is no age limit, as long as there is not a bodily problem, I think this man can continue to hold his position for 10, or even 20 more years.

"Asama-sensei, I have brought Naoe-sensei here."

Beyond the sliding door, Asama-sensei was waiting, seated, to welcome Naoe-sensei.

Upon seeing Naoe-sensei, he stood up, and deeply bowed down.

Asama Hisashi. He is 71 years old, 3 years older than Naoe-sensei.

Currently, he works as the vice minister of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, and is a leading figure in the Naoe faction.

To me, even Asama-sensei is a resident of the clouds above.

However, when Naoe-sensei showed up here, he instantly switched from master to slave. It is a regularly occurring scene that shows at a glance how much power difference there is between the two.

"I have been waiting for you, Naoe-sensei."

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, Asama. I was busy with work."

"I know how busy you are."

I bowed down so deep that I almost rubbed my forehead against the tatami mat, and quietly closed the sliding door so as to not disturb the two's conversation.

From this point of view, listening to the two big-name politicians talk would not be allowed.

"This is quick, Naoe-sensei, but about that thing..."

We are only separated by a sliding door. The devil has been whispering to me to eavesdrop and pick up useful information. I could even install a bug.

However, this world is not so easy.

If I was planning any conspiracies, this evil deed would quickly be exposed and my political life would be cut short.

I got up, left the place, and moved to a room far away.

Part 1

In the private room that was provided, Kamogawa was sitting down as if prostrating, and focusing solely on the sake in front of his eyes.

"Kept you waiting, huh?"

"No. Let's start right away too."

"Don't drink alcohol."

"W-what? But there's this delicious sake put here right in front of my eyes. What is this brand? I've never seen it in an izakaya before."

"Do you want them to smell alcohol when we're seeing them off? This thing is just for decoration. There's nothing to gain by carelessly putting our hands on it."

"But..."

A high-class traditional Japanese restaurant that dazzles the eye. I have no intention of condemning him for his desire to drink before the meal. In truth, in the old days, I've almost lost to temptation many times too.

Fortunately, I witnessed the moment of the man who was taking care of me back then being reprimanded and then eliminated for putting his hands on alcohol, which is connected to my abstinence now. The ones who hold power are drinking by making a side-dish of the humans below them, that's what I decided to think.

Not just the parliament members below them. They look down on the citizenry itself.

They are always intoxicated by the fulfilment of their desire for conquest, which they rule by the rules of their own making.

"Ayanokoji-sensei, there is one thing on my mind."

This guy really likes talking.

"Why do you always sit on your knees? You can sit as you want in this seat, right?"

"I'm used to it. I have to comfortably sit on my knees for hours in front of Naoe-sensei and the others. If I don't get used to it in regular times, I'll be in trouble when the time comes."

I am not even allowed to say something like "Is it okay even if I break my legs?". There is no option but to continue sitting on my knees until my legs go necrotic.

"T-that's terrible..."

Kamogawa, who probably has no confidence sitting on his knees, hurriedly sat back down into his seat.

Even an egg-tofu dish served on a small plate can cost four figures if ordered as a single item.

However, I am not grateful. I roughly grabbed the small plate with my hand, and pushed it into my stomach without even chewing.

"Whoah, what a waste..!"

I continued eating, ignoring most of the drivel Kamogawa was chatting to me about.

I am not interested in how expensive it is, how fresh it looks, or where the plate came from. As long as I can intake enough energy to be able to move afterwards, that's what matters.

"I'm going to the bathroom."

I lightly told Kamogawa, got up on my slightly numb feet, and left the room.

After using the toilet, I was about to return to the private room where Kamogawa was waiting for me, when I saw a group of men in suits.

Among them, was a single man who stood out of the crowd.

However, it was only for a moment that I saw him, and he turned a corner ahead in the corridor and disappeared.

"That was..."

I was pressed by the urge to chase after him and find out his identity, but I have to restrain myself here.

However, the back of that figure definitely looked like Parliament Member Kijima. Unaffiliated with Naoe-sensei, Isomaru-sensei, or Prime Minister Miyako, he is the fourth force in the Citizens Party.

He is so promising that he is even praised as the man closest to the Prime Minister among the younger generation.

It cannot be that they just happened to be at the same restaurant at the same time.

Because it is customary for the restaurant to privately arrange things so as not to create a clash in schedules.

Could it be that Naoe-sensei has already begun to make moves towards the next term's election?

Part 2

It was about two hours after Naoe-sensei entered the private room when the meeting ended. After seeing Parliament Member Asama off, Kamogawa and I were called to the private room.

Parliament Member Kijima must have been in this room after all, as the number of bowls were the same, but there were three sake cups.

However, seeing that there was no trace of the chopsticks being used, it wasn't as if he was enjoying the meal and the conversation seemed to be over. It seems that he just drank one or two cups of sake and listened.

"Is there something on your mind?"

Thinking he's read my faint gaze, a sense of nervousness runs through me as if grasping my heart.

"No, it's nothing."

"Who was here?" It is not as if I can speak of such a thing.

It is only natural that he sensed what was in my mind, but, Naoe-sensei did not particularly press further.

"Ayanokoji, how long have you been working under me?"

"I have been humbly studying under you for 4 years now."

"That's right. There are only a handful of people who can become a politician in their 20s. There's no mistaking it, I can say that among the have-nots, you've climbed up the stages of success in life faster than any-one else."

The have-nots. A word created by Naoe-sensei, indicating the people other than the second or third generations that I hate, i.e. other than the people who are born in a blessed environment or whose parents are from the business world and have strong backing. So 'Have-nots' basically being the people who did not have a blessed environment with rich parents and strong backing.

It is a word that is mainly used with factions, but it would not be too much to say that in truth, whether you succeed as a politician or not depends on these two categories of "the haves" and "the have-nots".

In simpler terms, it is like a company that is owned and operated by a family member.

No matter how excellent they are, an outsider is an outsider. Unless you have a surplus of true ability and fortune, the peaks which you can aim for are limited.

There is no bright future awaiting the have-nots.

In other words, for people like me, the highest point we can reach stops at the world of politics.

To aim higher than that, I would have to connect to a second generation and leave it to my child. After choosing the best option in this way, I will be allowed to encroach onto a high position somewhere in the world.

However, since there are already many second and third generation politicians vying for the few seats available, even if I send my descendant into the world of politics in the future, it will not be easy for him to rise up.

The ones who had been sitting in the seats before will then be connected to the even stronger fourth and fifth generations.

"I am really grateful to you, Naoe-sensei. For picking up someone like me."

"You owe everything to your competency. In truth, I'm being helped by you in various ways as well."

There is no meaning in flattery.

However, it is a path you cannot avoid as a politician.

Rather, when Naoe-sensei praises someone, there is something you cannot welcome so easily awaiting afterwards.

"However, among the party, your true ability is not yet acknowledged."

"Of course. I am very aware of that."

No matter big or small, all of my achievements are being taken by Naoe-sensei.

It is only Naoe-sensei in front of my eyes who understands that they are my achievements. I'm sure that I am nameless for the opposing party too.

"I'm sure you've guessed what it was about, but, today, we were talking about Isomaru."

Isomaru Youkou has been in the world of politics for a long time as the number 3 of the Citizens Party.

"He's grown older too, just like me. There aren't that many chances to attach yourself to the prime minister's seat, so..."

It must have been a discussion to oppose Isomaru, who is a rival presence for Naoe-sensei.

"The guys in the faction are very wary of Isomaru. He really is a foe that cannot be underestimated, but, if I was asked, I would say he is an easy man to understand. He's a guy who uses nothing but stale methods."

After decades of friendly rivalry, I'm sure that they know each other like the palms of their hands.

"I think that the foe we really have to be wary of is not Isomaru."

"In other words..."

"Ayanokouj, have you ever met Kijima?"

Maybe because I saw a back that looked like Parliament Member Kijima's, my body reacted without my noticing it.

I'm hearing nothing but the names of the big-shots today, including Asama-sensei who had a meeting with Naoe-sensei in the first place.

Naoe-sensei's usual, sharp eyes are gazing at me.

"I have seen him many times, but I have not had the pleasure of a direct conversation with him."

"I think that he's actually our greatest enemy, the one that we must be wary of."

Despite being in the same political party, he calls him "enemy" without hesitation.

It is proof that Naoe-sensei, who wants authority, is strongly wary of Kijima-sensei.

If Naoe-sensei and Isomaru-sensei are the Citizens Party's shadows, then he is the opposite. Kijima-sensei is a young influential man sold as the signboard of the Citizens Party, a person who stands under the light and pushes clean policies into the front.

Naturally, as the number of party members supporting him have been increasing, I have thought that it would be a bit further ahead when he would threaten Naoe-sensei and his allies.

However, it seemed that he was evaluating Kijima-sensei higher than I expected.

This means that before I could notice, he's grown to the point of threatening Naoe-sensei.

Naoe-sensei, number 2, Isomaru-sensei, number 3, and Kijima-sensei, number 4 are gathered under Prime Minister Miyako.

These are the people who will struggle over the seat of the next Prime Minister.

"Do you know what is the biggest factor that has brought Kijima up to his present post?"

"I think he has many achievements, but the eye-catcher has to be the *"High"*, right?"

Advanced Nurturing High School. A facility established to nurture young people for the immediate future of the government. Not much has been achieved yet, but a lot is being expected. No, it's better to say that the government is pressing them.

"There is an inseparable relationship between the education of children and the development of the country. It is also well received by our supporters. While he is an enemy, I am impressed that he came up with such an interesting idea."

Without being able to break into the conversation, Kamogawa listened while sweating from his forehead. The air conditioner in the room is not too hot, but from the contents of the conversation, it is understandable.

"Somehow, young party members have a blind dedication to him."

There is a lot of media exposure, and there are many people who have the image of the Citizens Party = Kijima.

"I thought I'd make sure if you're one of them or not."

"You must be joking. You will always be the only one I will study under, Naoe-sensei."

This is at least not a lie.

In the first place, once you start the path to the Naoe faction, you are not allowed to get off the ship.

Even if Isomaru-sensei and Kijima-sensei's factions make great strides in the next election and Naoe-sensei loses his position, they will have to share the fate of the sinking ship.

But what was the purpose of having dinner with Kijima-sensei, who is such a wary opponent?

I'm curious, but I don't have time to pay attention to that right now.

"Actually, today we decided to officially launch a project that we were considering behind the scenes."

Naoe-sensei threw a brown A4 size envelope on the table.

"This project is a serious one that could change my political life. Now that not only Isomaru but also Kijima, and the opposition parties are slowly rising, it's finally time to move with it."

As the sake cup became empty, I quickly poured in hot sake. Naoe, who was living a life where things would be filled up when emptied, drank it down in one gulp.

"The existence of the project will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the election."

That's why the contents of the envelope in front of me are an important matter.

"Most of my aides leave in less than six months. I don't know if it is a pure lack of competence, or an inability to keep up with unimaginable hard work. But even though it has been four years, you are gaining momentum day by day, rather than faltering. It reminds me of my old self."

"Thank you very much."

"I'll ask you. What kind of politician is an extremely good politician? Kamogawa, answer me."

Naoe-sensei asked such a question, perhaps as a side-dish for his sake.

"What!?"

It's a situation where you can't be silent, but you can't just give a random answer either.

A very good politician will vary greatly from the point of view of the viewer.

"He who can answer the wishes of the people... or such, right?"

It's a straightforward answer, but it is an answer, I suppose.

Only from the public's point of view, though. It's an answer that even a child could think of, but Naoe-sensei nodded once and then looked at me this time.

"What do you think?" Ayanokoji.

Excellent or not, the answer.

"I am inexperienced, but I think people like you are the best politicians, Naoe-sensei."

Naoe-sensei turned his mouth into a smirk, but I quickly continued.

"Bad politicians offer tempura to customers who want to eat sushi."

"C-customers? What do you mean..?"

"Customers are customers. Sometimes it's the people, sometimes it's politicians, sometimes it's something else."

Politicians do not deal with one particular kind of person. Politicians who cannot respond to requests from an unspecified number of customers are a nonsensical existence.

"Now that's interesting. So, continue."

"A good politician makes sure that customers who want to eat sushi eat good sushi. Most likely, 30% of politicians can do this...no, I should say 20%."

Politicians who are supported by many people naturally fall into this category.

"Isn't that an extremely good politician? Because you serve the sushi that customers want, and you serve delicious ones, right?"

Certainly, this is the limit of what a good politician an ordinary person can reach. However, I don't think this is an excellent politician in the true meaning.

"If you claim to be an extremely good politician, you need more than that. I think he is the one who can induce customers who want to eat sushi to be as satisfied as possible by serving curry or beef bowls."

Politicians are not people who just respond honestly to requests.

Sometimes, even if you can't answer a request, there are many situations where you have to avoid causing the other person to complain. Even with a single bill, there are only two choices, of passing it, or not.

The ones who couldn't get their bill passed will be dissatisfied. That is why you prepare a third option that is neither, and suppress both support and opposition. Naoe-sensei in front of me has shown such skills many times.

"I see. That's a pretty good expression."

"Thank you very much."

At this point, Naoe-sensei's eyes change to an even more intense and sharp one.

"I hope, that one day, you can put that idea into practice with your own hands."

One day. One day, huh? It's been four years now, but it's a very short time for the world of politics. I wonder how many more years I have to continue to build up this foundation before that one day will come.

"Don't look so dejected. You are capable. After watching you for four years, I can understand that. That's why I'm looking for a tangible achievement from a young man like you."

He took a bite of his side-dish with his chopsticks, and when he had it in his mouth, he pointed the tip of the chopsticks toward the envelope.

"I don't think it's been "only 4 years". It's been 4 years already. Isn't it about time you got some credit for growing so much?"

"...does this mean that you are giving me that opportunity?"

Many times, I have repeatedly set things up for Naoe-sensei.

The credit goes only to Naoe-sensei, and the misconduct goes only to me. It's not because of simple charity that I repeated this irrational absurdity.

The fist resting on my lap naturally clenched strongly.

"You can see it that way. But, I must have you succeed. Are you ready?"

Can I wait to see what's inside? Of course, I can't say anything like that.

"Shortly after I started studying under you, you said something to me. All human behaviour is determined by their goals..."

I didn't know it at the time, but they were the words left by a great man. If I fail, my last four years will probably be erased in an instant.

"I will serve with all my heart."

Bowing deeply, I readily agreed to accept.

"If you succeed in this project, fame will naturally follow."

I don't trust him at all, but he has never even made such insinuations before. It is reality that at least it is a different project than the ones before, and an important one.

This is a chance I've gained, precisely because I've gained his trust. I won't miss it.

"Look it over."

"Excuse me."

I picked up the brown envelope on the table and pulled out a stack of papers about 5 mm thick.

The title of the first page is "Human Resource Development Plan (temporary)".

"Japan's education levels are declining. In today's Japan, it is necessary to provide education with an eye on the next 5 or 10 years, not the next 20 or 30 years."

"It is my first time hearing that you were so passionate about education, Sensei."

"Politicians put a lot of effort into education. Even if you are not interested in the slightest, it will lead to votes at home and abroad."

This man doesn't really want to change Japan's education. He's just coming up with a strategy to strengthen his power and gain more support.

The idiot next to me is fidgeting and worrying about the details of the project.

"You can participate too, Kamogawa. Do it together with Ayanokoji."

"T-thank you very much!"

A happy smile broke out on his face, and Kamogawa peeked in somewhat forcefully.

There's no need for someone like this to help me, but if Naoe-sensei decided so, then it can't be helped.

The human resource development plan, briefly summarized, was to provide education for gifted children as soon as they were born. After reading everything, I had Kamogawa read the text over again.

"How about it? Do you understand, Kamogawa?"

"An educational institution under the direct control of the government... and it's from infancy, right? I've never heard of it."

The questions that spring up from the head of Kamogawa are meaningless.

"We can't call it a special program if you had heard of it, right?"

Without needing me to correct him, Naoe-sensei readily dismissed him. That's not the problem with this project.

"You need to have a little more flexible mind, Kamogawa."

"I-I'm sorry..."

"However, there is something I would like to ask you, because you are such a rookie. How did this project look to you?"

"How... how did it look?"

Glared at by the snake, no, without even having his eyes turned towards him, Kamogawa stiffened. He looked like he was about to cry and asked me for help.

"Sensei wants to know what you thought when you saw this project. He is not looking for a superficial approval, just answer whatever you want."

If he were to make a comment that would make Naoe-sensei look bad, it would only spoil his good mood.

"Well, then... I was just wondering... are there really any parents who want to leave their children in institutions to educate them? Unless it's a kidnapping... it doesn't seem like a feasible story, does it?"

Hearing this, Naoe-sensei looked at me, as if testing me.

"It's a valid question. Can you answer that question? Ayanokoji."

Dumb answers that might be acceptable from a newcomer are not acceptable from me. Once I adjusted my breathing, I turned to Kamogawa.

"That will be handled somehow. Every year, there are hundreds of children who are abandoned by their parents immediately after birth."

Procuring a baby is no trouble.

"Abandoned children are not at risk for their lives, receive generous support from the government, and receive appropriate education. It's a project that makes it easy to go to high school or college."

"No doubt about that. Yes, the answer may be the same, but if the steps leading to it are not, they will look very different. You have to study hard under Ayanokoji."

"Y-yes!"

"Depending on how things unfold, this could lead to an approach to mothers. In this Japan, where fertility is decreasing, more than 100,000 abortions are performed annually. It could be a satire for a society that doesn't readily allow childbearing, and also a receptacle for it."

Naoe-sensei nodded with a smile and carried the sake into his mouth again.

"And if this plan works, of course, the political community will be very interested."

"Apart from the lives that we throw away, there are many other lives that cannot be treated justly. Especially for the wealthy."

"Hidden children, unrecognized children, right?"

"Yes. There are many celebrities who make children in secret. However, they can't provide proper education because they can't support them publicly. If the government was to support them secretly, I'm sure their eyes would light up."

Little by little, I was able to see the full extent of this project.

"And, eventually, there will be people who want to give their loved ones the best education."

So this is the human resource development plan project that Naoe-sensei is thinking about.

Receive funds from the wealthy and educate the children whose identities are to be hidden.

Eventually, when the children reach adulthood, they will be thoroughly trained to become a member of the Naoe faction, and sent to the political world.

Obedient servants with special education. Moreover, the children will have the blood of the wealthy. Is this the beginning of a forward-looking plan? It may seem like a rather dangerous plan, but if it succeeds, the payoff is immeasurable.

If I refuse to accept the offer, I will be immediately removed from the ladder by Naoe-sensei.

"The people on this list are..."

"They are geniuses banished from their paths. They're hard to handle, but..."

There were about 10 documents, each one with a biography like a resume.

"They were the best in economics, psychology, and other fields in Japan and the world, but they left the stage because of some problems."

I see. This human resource development project incorporates various risks.

When it comes to providing semi-mandatory education to children, there will naturally be some budding objections.

In that sense, it is unlikely that an authoritative celebrity will move forward and cooperate.

On the other hand, those who have problems but are proven to be competent are more likely to agree to the project if they are given money.

They seem to have many problems with their personalities, but they certainly seem to have the right skills. Without knowledge and experience, education can only be done vaguely.

However, it would not be realistic to take a group of people like private tutors and turn them into representatives of Japan.

This is by no means an easy job.

"Do you remember? Soon after you came under me, you said something about education."

"Of course. My philosophy of education is to get kids interested in politics, to get them to learn about it, and to develop a strong political mindset. That will lead to the future of Japan, so I asked to study under you, Naoe-sensei."

"I thought it was just a clever little nonsense from a rookie parliament member right after I heard it, but it eventually gave me an idea of my own. In other words, you deserve to participate. Will you do it? Ayanokoji."

This is not a word of confirmation.

It is no different from any kind of coercion or order.

Then the minimum requirement is still the same this time, which is to accept the offer with two words of encouragement.

Above all, it is the best project that sublimates and embodies my philosophy of education.

"Of course, I will take this on."

"This is a top-secret project. Not only the opposition parties, but we are also not at the stage of informing the ruling party. Further, there are ethical issues involved. If you expose yourself to criticism at the halfway point, your political life will be over."

It will only end my political life, not that of Naoe-sensei, who conceived this project.

No, to be precise, it will result in several people hanging themselves, including Kamogawa II beside him.

"We will do our best. However, I have a favour to ask, Naoe-sensei."

"What is it?"

I know this might sound stupid, but I want to speak up now.

"This project seems difficult for me and Kamogawa alone. Could you bring in someone we can trust?"

"That is my intent, of course. There is a man named Sakayanagi who has a good face in the political and financial world. He is a young man, not much older than you, but he has a tight mouth and is trustworthy. We can try him."

I've heard that name before, but I'm sure it was an old man who was entrusted with high school education...

But either way, I suspect he is a man with the support of Kijima-sensei.

"I was a little short of words. The Sakayanagi you're thinking of has a son. It's him."

I see. Is he not a person directly connected to Kijima-sensei?

"Understood."

"Then I'll tell you what's important, but don't expect any financial help from me."

"Huuuh? Such a project would cost a lot of money-"

I grabbed the shoulder of Kamogawa, who spoke superfluously, and stopped him.

"I know it requires a certain amount of recklessness, but... may I borrow your name, Naoe-sensei?"

"That's not possible right now either. It's not a good idea to divulge what I'm involved with."

Realizing we will not get any support, Kamogawa's complexion turned pale.

"Well, good luck, Ayanokoji."

He speaks very selfishly. But if we do not swallow this absurdity, we will not be able to move forwards.

"We are sincerely committed to this project."

"Right."

Even if this was just an idea, and a plan to throw away tomorrow... If this is what Naoe-sensei wants now, I will have to respond to it.

Then, after a few moments of equally gratifying words to no avail, the meeting was closed. In order to see Naoe-sensei off, I took the initiative to open the door of the room. At the end of the hallway, the new bodyguard was waiting for Naoe-sensei to return.

"Oh, right. Was it your first time meeting this man, Ayanokoji?"

"It's exhausting work to be your bodyguard, so I thought that it is not unusual that they are being replaced."

The man in front of him is constantly looking at us with a smile on his face.

"May I introduce myself?"

When I showed no particular interest, the bodyguard said so.

Normally bodyguards are not allowed to make such comments, but Naoe-sensei did not seem offended.

He sounded thin-lined, but Naoe-sensei, seemed to value him. It's not just anybody.

"He's called Ayanokoji, he's a promising parliament member. There's no harm in greeting each other."

A man with a straight, beautiful posture stepped up to me and held out his hand.

"My name is Tsukishiro Tokinari. I'm afraid I'm not a bodyguard, but I'm happy to make your acquaintance."

I grasped back the offered hand.

"So you are not a body guard... Then who are you?"

"Well, this guy is... He's a jack-of-all-trades, to put it simply. If you have any trouble, you can rely on Tsukishiro. He's not much older than you, but he's a pretty useful man."

"Jack-of-all-trades?"

As if he had been waiting for me, the man who introduced himself as Tsukishiro offered me his business card.

"I will do whatever is necessary, from personal protection to information gathering."

So that's what he means by jack-of-all-trades. He's a shady man.

However, if Naoe-sensei is walking with him like this, there is no mistaking the fact that he has the talent.

"I am Ayanokoji, I have the honour of being trained by Naoe-sensei. If there are any problems, I will definitely ask you to lend me your strength."

"He has a certain amount of clout not only in the Citizens' Party, but also in the Peace Party."

Peace Party, the first opposition party.

It is an organization that is always hostile to the Citizens' Party.

Just before I became a politician, they even almost won an upset election against the Citizens' Party. If it hadn't been for Naoe-sensei's conciliation with the Peace Party, the regime might have been turned upside down.

If you belong to one side, you are hostile to the other side.

Whether politician or not, it is universal.

But, he's saying he has influence on both sides?

Tsukishiro walked out with Naoe-sensei, with an eerie smile on his face the whole time. I put Naoe-sensei in the taxi that he had been waiting for, and kept my head down until I couldn't see the car.

"Wow, it's cold. I don't think anyone's looking anymore, but..?"

"Still, I keep my head down for at least a minute after I can't see the car. And don't let up and look tired after the bowing is over. You can't know where there are eyes."

Even the people in the restaurant spy on us. After Naoe-sensei leaves, if it was spread around that one was using abusive language and such, that would be the end.

"But why was Naoe-sensei in a taxi today? And he was in the taxi, so openly getting close with a girl, right? Before even the age difference, it's an affair, isn't it?"

"I guess that's why he's called a jack-of-all-trades."

"Eh?"

Of course, I don't know the specifics either. However, if one dares to think of a reason, it is because Naoe-sensei himself is acting as a decoy to lure something out. I can think of something like that.

"That's not what we should care about. Let's Face the human resource development project."

It is always the case that things are unfolding horribly behind the scenes that we know nothing about.

"It's a great project, but... it's all getting a bit crazy, isn't it?"

It is true that it is an outrageous project. However, it seems like a blunder for Naoe-sensei to let Kamogawa talk to him as well.

This man is light-mouthed and has no convictions whatsoever. He thinks I should see this guy by my side?

I'm sure it'll be fine while the plan works, but, when it doesn't...

No, Naoe-sensei isn't a man who can't see that kind of thing.

Should I see this man as being by my side in case I fail?

Details are scarce, but it appears I have no choice but to start off in troublesome shackles.

Chapter - 2

Making Every Effort

Intro

Even with the voice of authority from a big-name politician, things won't move smoothly.

[TL Note 3 : 鶴の一声, Tsuru no Hitokoe, final word; voice of authority; authoritative pronouncement, Idiomatic expression. Lit. "Cry of a crane".]

The Human Resource Development Plan is still in the planning stage, with everything including the funding starting from this point forwards; it's a start from a blank page, so to speak.

Other than the unchangeable framework that is "nurturing from infancy", many things will be changed.

We need to be flexible and adapt to changes.

"...It looks like it'll be a troublesome project."

I put both feet on the table full of messy documents, and continued staring at them.

If we make one mistake in the cut, let alone earning praise, this project will earn scorn.

A facility not to take advantage of children, but to help them.

We must give the people that impression.

However, these are subjects that should be handled after the project actually starts.

Currently, taking this starting stage, we are to collect children to be test subjects, and a great budget.

Further, some means to protect the children is also necessary.

I manually entered the 11-number digit from my memory and made a call.

"It's me. Please give the phone to Ooba, I have a new job to ask of him."

First, I have to think of a way to approach the pawn that I can use who won't worry about right or wrong.

After Ooba picked up the phone, I conveyed that I was looking for a way to acquire newborn infants, and asked what I should do.

However, at the point I contacted Ooba, I suppose that it will be inevitable that evil methods will be used.

During the phone call, a buzzer-like sound was ringing.

“Sorry, I’ll contact you again.”

I cut the conversation with Ooba, and responded to my visitor.

“Good morning. It’s Kamogawa. Is Ayanokoji-san there?”

“Just come in. It’s not locked.”

“Excuse me...”

Kamogawa showed his face at the corner of my run-down office of 10,000 Yen in rent, though it is close to the centre of town.

“Whoah.”

As he opened the door, Kamogawa clearly showed his rude manners.

However, without saying anything about it, I reacted to my visitor.

“Ayanokoji-san, are you perhaps living in this office? That’s what it seems like...”

The beer cans rolling around under his feet, or the unwashed sheet over the rotten sofa.

Seeing the clothes randomly thrown around all over the place, even a child can easily imagine that I live here.

“What about it?”

“No, I didn’t mean anything by it, but... Well, it is a bit unlike you, or...”

“Not fitting for my years of service, is it?”

The salary for a national parliament member is just over 1,000,000 Yen. Adding on the bonus and other things, it’s over 20,000,000 Yen. Further, I am also granted various allowances under different names.

“Kisarazu-san who is three steps above me was boasting that he got a place at the top floor of a tower mansion at the centre of the city the week after he became a parliament member. Apparently, a loan examination that would normally be impassable is also a one-shot for him.”

"It's not as if the loans are passed because he is a parliament member."

"Huh?"

"From any point of view, the annual income of a parliament member is indeed quite high. However, whether you are in the House of Representatives or the House of Councillors, you are restricted to be elected one time every few years. A bank would not loan money based only on such an unstable job."

"But, Kizarazu-san said that..."

"The loan amount, which bank it is, and your connections. There are many other conditions to arrange the passing of a loan."

"I see, that's how it works... I guess I can't pass for one, huh..."

It's probably the other way around. It is true that the evaluation for Kamogawa in front of my eyes is lower than Kizarazu, but, the bank will see through to his father, Kamogawa Toshizou.

If they hear that he was looking for a loan, staff from various banks would come meet Kamogawa.

Bringing one or two boxes of cake with them.

"How boring."

"Boring, is it? Wouldn't anyone long for living in a high class tower mansion?"

"Kamogawa. I will say this for your sake, don't imitate someone like Kizarazu."

For a parliament member who's only in it for the money, it is no strange thing to spend your money in such a useless way.

"I'm not saying you shouldn't buy any real estate. However, I am saying that you should not do so with the wrong timing. Money is limited, but its possibilities are limitless."

"I see..."

Kamogawa did not understand, but he nodded, as if he did.

"Let's say that 100,000,000 million appears in your hands from today on. What would you do?"

[TL Note 4 : Doesn't say "Yen".]

“Huh? 100,000,000? I will save around 90,000,000, and use up 10,000,000 as I want. I’d go to hostess bars, buy a car and such. Maybe I’d put some into stocks. I would buy a mansion too if I had around 200,000,000, though.”

It’s a model answer, in a certain sense, but still a useless way of spending the money, just like Kisarazura.

“You would use it in a different way, right, Ayanokoji-san? What would you do?”

“Think about it yourself.”

“Huh~? Please tell me~”

100,000,000. If I had around that much money, I would probably use it all up in a few days.

Various bribes and investments to connect with the financial world, I would invest for my future in many ways.

I have no time to spend money on an office or a house when even small change is too valuable to spend.

All I need is the money I invest coming back to me many times over in many years.

If the title of the greatest power holder in this country, my final station, comes in such a way, then that’s perfect.

“So, what are you here for?”

“Aren’t you being cruel? As Naoe-sensei said, I am here to help you, Ayanokoji-san.”

“No need.”

“That won’t work. I am one of the people who heard about that project too. I don’t have any complaints about you getting most of the merits, but even I-”

Kamogawa is a talentless man living a shitty life, but I can understand his feelings that he wants to be recognized. Because it is indeed rare that you can seldom acquire it.

However, at its core, being a parliament member is a job that you cannot take a vacation from. We are special servants for the nation with no set working times.

Further, we are currently in a parliamentary session. We must participate in strategy and research meetings for the Citizens Party.

Most of my schedule is filled with support groups, visitor correspondence, government affairs, and public business.

“Can you be of use?”

"I will show you that I can. Even if I am rotten, I am Kamogawa Toshizou's son, you know?"

Your father doesn't have such a name in the world of politics that you can speak of him so greatly, though.

However, I suppose I cannot so easily ignore a directive from Naoe-sensei.

"Then, you can be as useful as you want to be."

Since he had never been given a role in anything worthwhile before, Kamogawa's eyes lit up.

"What kind of work is it?"

"We have to secure an experimental facility for the project. You will be in charge of selecting the site. The size, the budget, and an ability to avoid publicity. If it all goes well, I will give you your next assignment. You want to be a great parliament member who can be recognized by Naoe-sensei, right?"

"I, I see. That is certainly something I have to do."

"It may not be on the scale of a high school, but the number of children will be increased on a yearly basis. As such, it will naturally be required to have a suitable amount of space. It will also be important to maintain anonymity."

This project cannot be advertised openly.

We can't afford to have the press write about some dangerous education of infants and toddlers.

"Looking at it from a budgetary standpoint, it is inevitably going to be a rural place, right?"

Kamogawa's face, which had been looking so stupid for a while, changed.

He is a man who has been in warm water for a while, but he is certainly not happy to be called a second-generation.

If he is given the right work and the right words of praise, he might be useful, to some extent.

No, he has to be.

"I understand. I will give it my best."

"That's all I ask. This is the best you've looked since I've met you."

"Is, is that so?"

After praising him only a little, his silly face returned.

“What are you going to do now, Ayanokoji-san?”

“In order to prepare the facilities, money is the most important thing. I’m going to start making arrangements for that.”

Applying the conditions I’ve talked about, we will need a considerable amount of money just for the initial start-up.

If we also take into account the necessity of securing human resources, we would need to prepare 500,000,000.

To buy safety, we will need more than 600,000,000, or 700,000,000, but...

“You mean talking about this project and asking for funding, right?”

“Of course, that is my goal.”

“Wouldn’t they be happy to give their kids a special education?”

This guy really can’t see what’s ahead of us.

Who is going to fund a project that is only a few sheets of paper?

In the first place, it isn’t an amount of money that the wealthy will give over after just saying a few words.

Of course, as a politician, I cannot accept donations on the surface; as such, it is necessary to go through a process of making donations to groups such as supporting associations.

There are upper limits and such on donations, but it is difficult to find a politician who adheres to them. There are many ways to circumvent donations and many loopholes.

However, even on a piece of paper like this, if Naoe-sensei simply says the words “I’ll do it”, large amounts of money will come out of nowhere.

Without that, it is imperative that we find one big investor first.

Even if I don’t have the same unifying force that Naoe-sensei has, if that person is to invest in us, then I have to make him believe that I do.

If that were to happen, I’m sure it would not be impossible to raise an amount of money close to 500,000,000.

As I halfway chased Kamogawa out of the office and sent him to work, I took out three bankbooks from my desk. Three bank accounts, including a regional bank.

“In total... Just a little less than 10,000,000, huh?”

It is an unreliable campaign fund, but I have no choice but to start out with this.

Part 1

An upscale residential area, located in Shirokane in Minato Ward.

In the corner, a single large, soaring historical estate stands out.

Probably being remodelled many times with a lot of money, the exterior did not feel old. It was not a place for a mere politician to be living in.

With numerous monitoring cameras before the entrance, it has a strict atmosphere.

After glancing at the fine nameplate with Sakayanagi written on it and pressing the chime, the first one to come out was a middle-aged man who looked to be the servant of this estate.

Since I had already made an appointment, I was allowed to pass through the gate without any trouble.

The spacious tatami mats with the scent of soft rush grass showed no signs of spoilage.

Probably being re-papered in set periods, I could tell at my first look that there was a lot of money spent on this area.

As I proceeded further into the building, a Western-style room came into view, and I was told to sit on a sofa and wait.

I'm thinking about how I should behave towards the person I am about to meet soon.

Without hesitation, I chose to deeply sit on the sofa and wait.

As someone who works alongside Naoe-sensei and someone who has a project for the future, I have no intention of making myself look small.

As I stared at the steam from the tea that was eventually brought to me, the person I was waiting for appeared.

"Thank you for waiting."

My first impression at this time was that he was a thin, delicate man.

His voice was quiet and he did not have the arrogant attitude that many rich people had.

"Pleased to meet you. My name is Ayanokoji. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule."

While keeping a confident attitude, I still showed the minimum amount of courtesy.

"I am Sakayanagi. I have heard many times about you from Naoe-sensei."

"Nothing bad, I hope."

"Of course not. I was told that you were a very brilliant person. Further, when I heard that you are the same age as me, I felt a sense of embarrassment."

There is no way a man who has been walking on the winning path since birth would care about someone below him. If it is simple modesty, I shall praise him for being a good liar.

"Thank you very much. However, I hear that you are also quite famed, Sakayanagi-san."

First, I will begin by confirming Sakayanagi's character and authenticity.

"No, I still have a ways to go. It's just that my father was amazing. That is really all there is."

He did not go with my compliment, but smiled bitterly as if he was troubled.

From then on, we continued to probe into each other with words in turns for a while, but my impression of him did not change.

He showed no signs of wanting to end the conversation, so I thought it would be best that I took the first step.

"The reason I am here bothering you like this is that I remembered that Naoe-sensei has told me I should ask you for help if I am ever worried about something. I have humbly come here to do so."

Most of the time, the wealthy do not welcome a conversation starting in this way.

As for the reason, it's because money is at the root of most worries.

Wanting to invest but lacking capital, or wanting to start a business. It's all related to money.

"What did you need of me?"

He doesn't look to be on guard, but his face changed slightly.

"Currently, I am thinking of starting a project. However, I will need a large amount of money to proceed with this project."

"I see. So, what kind of trouble... No, what kind of request did you come to me for?"

"I am not telling you to put out money after meeting you for the first time, Sakayanagi-san. However, I am here to ask for something close to that. I want you to be a pipe between me and the financial world."

I took out a new document from a clear file that I had prepared on my own, and pointed towards it.

Without reaching for it, Sakayanagi continued looking over at me.

I could not tell it from his expression, but he was wary, after all.

No, he has to be.

Even though he has heard of me by name, I am still a stranger to him.

It is not as if the titles of politicians are recognized by the public either.

If that were the case, he would not simply look over the documents.

If he knew, he would realize that it would be troublesome to get involved.

"I see. So, are you saying that you are not asking me to invest money?"

"Yes. I can't suddenly barge in and ask you to give me money. If you agree with the project, then that's fine, but the important thing is not to bow my head and ask for money, but to convince you and have many people give me money."

However, if I don't even get a chance to present the project, it will end up being nothing more than an unimplemented empty theory.

"We want to launch this project to save the lives of as many children as possible, and ensure that they receive the correct education. I am hoping to provide such a facility. I am one of the people who were strongly impressed by the advanced nurturing high school that your father has implemented."

Children, Education, Life.

It is certain that these words will connect with Sakayanagi.

This man's father is in charge of high school education, and he is the very leader who guides children.

He cannot allow himself to go through the wrong path of not even taking a look at this.

"In that case, wouldn't you also have the choice of seeking counsel from my father instead of me?"

"That may indeed be the right course of action. However, the world of politics is not that simple. It is Kijima-sensei who informed the world of the advanced nurturing high school. I believe that your father has a deep connection with Kijima-sensei. In which case, how could I, a member of his rival's, Naoe-sensei's faction, seek his advice?"

“Did you not consider the possibility that I might have a close relationship with Kijima-sensei?”

“Of course, there is a possibility. However, I’ve never heard of such a thing. I thought that, in this case, I would take a chance.”

There are lies mixed into my words, but the truth is the majority. Even if this man’s father is a sensible power-holder, if he is in the Kijima faction, I cannot tell him about our plans.

“Let me ask you frankly, you definitely want to avoid this information being leaked to Kijima-sensei. Isn’t that so?”

“I will not deny that.”

“In that case, I find it a little hard to be convinced. Am I on Kijima-sensei’s side, Naoe-sensei’s side, or in the middle? This is not clear to you. Despite that, are you not worried about telling me about this? If I take a look at those documents, I will gather information. You can’t know to whom I will tell about it.”

“That is indeed true. Still, if I lied and told you that I trusted you after only talking for a few minutes... Things will just get cold.”

Sakayanagi nodded without hiding.

“However, as a politician myself, there are things that I also humbly hold faith in. Which is to say, I completely trust Naoe-sensei. Naoe-sensei knows the weight of words very well. If you were the kind of person who would leak our talk to Kijima-sensei or your father, then Naoe-sensei would never tell me to rely on you if I had a problem.”

“You trust Naoe-sensei, huh?”

“Most politicians join a faction sooner or later. No matter what faction you are in, once you have decided to support someone, you just have to believe them until the end. I think there should not even be a shred of hesitation in that.”

“I see. So Naoe-sensei keeps you close by his side.”

“As you know, Ayanokoji-sensei, my father is a close friend of Kijima-sensei. Did you ever think it strange that I would have a connection with Naoe-sensei?”

“Of course, I can’t say that I have never questioned it.”

“I respect my father, but, at the same time, I see him as my objective. I don’t know if we will follow the same path or different ones, but I at least want to explore different possibilities. That is why I have been closely studying with Naoe-sensei, who is considered a worthy rival of my father. My father does not object to this, and, in fact, he quietly supports it.”

“It is quite broad-minded to broaden your horizons even if it is with an enemy. Further, at the same time, he seems to trust that you will definitely keep your mouth closed.”

In a position like this man's, it is basically a case of following his father's footsteps.

If you have a relationship with a hostile organisation, you have an opportunity to gain information about them, but there is also the risk of passing it onto them.

However, I can see that Naoe-sensei likes him, and it is probably true that Sakayanagi has his trust.

“In that case, I have even more confidence. I would definitely like you to take a look.”

“Depending on your conditions, I was going to immediately ask you to take it back, but I suppose I cannot do so now.

I have certainly seen your spirit and conviction. I will take a look.”

Finally, Sakayanagi picked up the documents and looked through them.

After reading through them, he muttered to himself without thinking too deeply.

“It is true that several hundred children are abandoned in Japan every year. We are not accepting this reality, and it is no bad thing for a politician to try and do something about it. In fact, it should be welcomed.”

“You mean you sympathise with me?”

“Of course I do. However, this is exactly the sort of issue that should be on the government's agenda, and I don't mean to sound rude, but, as a private citizen... isn't this none of my business? I definitely hope that you will take this issue on and work on the countermeasures.”

“If I could do that, I would. However, the national system is not that simple. There are still children being abandoned. There are still children who cannot receive the education they want because of a fatherless, motherless, or a poor household. This cycle of poverty shows no signs of stopping, and the inequality in society is continuously widening. Am I wrong?”

“...That's right.”

“If you watch TV, I am sure you already know. Mothers in despair secretly giving birth in train stations. It is certainly not a rare story. I think it is very regrettable for a mother to end the life of her child because of the current lack of legal provisions, or because of the public's attention. Of course, there are those who can become ruthless towards unwanted births, but that doesn't mean everyone wants to become a criminal. If there is a generous place where people can be helped with open arms, the number of grieving people will be kept to a minimum.”

If this project comes to fruition, it will save the lives of 10, 20, and one day, over 100 children.

No, I am sure it will increase beyond that.

“I am sure that you, Sakayanagi-san, also understand that one cannot do anything they want just by becoming a politician. Whether you are a member of the parliament or a local council, your title says that you enact laws, decide budgets, and enact ordinances, but while those who hold the real power act for their own personal gain, no one listens to young politicians. Or... Do you expect me to continue to forsake the lives of children for 20 or 30 years until I become a leading politician and earn the right to speak?”

[TL Note 5 : Ayanokoji uses “Ore” in this sentence instead of “Watashi” like usual, indicating that he is suddenly acting more confident and overpowering in this scene.]

Sakayanagi, who is listening to me here, is just as guilty if he does not make a move. That’s what I will strongly imply.

“But... You are still a parliament member, Ayanokoji-sensei. You are someone who should face the nation and fight against it. How do you intend to proceed without putting this on the agenda as a nation?”

“We are politicians and public servants, but it is a special job. People with special jobs are allowed to work on the side. I do not intend to profit, but I am saying that there is still a way for me to move forward with this.”

“Are you saying that you will personally work to save the children?”

“I think, now that I am being heard by you, and now that I have started taking steps as a politician, the people around me may start listening to me. That is precisely why I think that you creating a pipe between me and the financial world is one of the steps to implement this.”

“It is true that unlike ordinary people, people look at you differently when you simply state that you are a politician. If the project written here is realised, then there may indeed be people who will throw their hat in the ring, but...”

This man, who is a second generationer of his great father, is at least far more capable than Kamogawa and the others.

While showing a good-natured face, he does not give cheap answers.

“There are ways to raise funds. As you said, Ayanokoji-sensei, you are allowed to work on the side, are you not? If we send our message on the internet, we can not only appeal to the domestic market, but also to the world.”

“You want me to raise the fact that our country’s laws are not up to par? Sending a message like that out into the world... It would not be my face that will be disgraced, but Naoe-sensei’s. At this stage, this is a matter that must be progressed in the strictest

confidence. That is why we need the help of the financial world. Please lend me your strength.”

“...I have no problems with introducing you. However, it is another matter to really make it work. People will not be pleased by mere lip service. Rather, I think they will be wary.”
“Then, what do you think I should do?”

“Do not lie. Lay bare all of your thoughts and goals.”

If I can do that, I will not face hardship.

“I understand that it is difficult. However, I am not in the least thinking about profiting. I only want to save the children’s lives. I do not want any credit. Would you believe someone saying such things, sensei?”

Indeed, if such a person were to appear in front of me, I would probably laugh him off.

“You want status and prestige. You want to earn money. That is why you save children. I think people would be more likely to believe you if you told them that. Not to mention that you are a parliament member. If they know that this is the foundation of a higher aim for you, I think some of them may think that they will gain a great reward when you eventually become a big name.”

“...Indeed.”

“Of course, it would be better for the children if you had no self-interests at all, and I have no doubt that this is your ideal. What is it you are looking to achieve by setting up this project?”

“Status, prestige, and money. These are indeed indispensable things, things that I will want one day.”

As this man says, this is all absolutely necessary.

However, there is a big reason that I am interested in this project.

“As things are now, Japan cannot compete against the world. However, it cannot catch up to the global world by only watching the education of human resources who can compete naturally. That is precisely why I want to encourage the thorough education of our children, and develop capable people, geniuses, who can compete against the world. That is what I think. This isn’t just about saving lives. I want to transform those lives into ones of high value to the world, that is my true objective.”

Compulsory life aid and education. This will be hard to accept for the world.

“The education of children is left entirely up to their parents. So you thought that children whose parents are absent can be raised and educated for the sake of your ideals, right?”

“It isn’t for my sake. It is for the sake of Japan’s future.”

After the war, Japan had grown with the bubble economy, but now that it has disappeared, it is only falling down.

We have to put an end to the current situation in which Japan is already being ridiculed as joining the group of developing nations.

“What do you think when you see that all the politicians are old people? Do you think that elders of 70, or 80 years of age truly think about Japan? They don’t care what happens in the little time that they will live. They don’t think about what will happen in 50 or 100 years at all, either. Even I, one day, may change to such a mistaken way of thinking. But, not now. Now, as a representative of the young people, I am thinking about the future, and I want to save it. That is why I must move to action as soon as possible.”

Before I noticed, I was passionately talking to myself.

Was I seduced by this man’s shrewd thinking, or did my instincts as a politician get riled up?

“Naoe-sensei knows about all this, yes?”

“No. These are all my personal thoughts.”

I can’t answer with a “yes” here.

However, as if he knew, Sakayanagi nodded once after looking at my eyes.

“Mine and my father’s philosophy of education, and that of yours seem to be very different. However, that does not mean that it is a bad thing. Rather, I believe it is one of the important approaches. It is also a case to judge which side is right. The situation is very similar to what I find myself in, near Naoe-sensei, right now.”

This man’s father is in charge of the advanced nurturing high school.

It is certainly one of the new ventures.

However, as Sakayanagi says, that is largely different from my policy.

“I will introduce you, as you wish. However, I will give you one condition.”

“What would that be?”

“When this project actually comes to fruition, please let me stand by you and watch over how you do it.”

“Is that really all you want?”

“For me, this is very important. I will be learning a lot.”

“I promise. Once the facility is actually built, you will be free to enter and leave as you wish.”

It is a cheap price to pay if I can build a pipeline to the financial world.

Besides, even I am curious about many things about the advanced nurturing high school. I may also be able to find out some information about Naoe-sensei’s rival Kijima-sensei.

Whether friend or foe, information is power.

But, will things really go so easily?

The man in front of me has been smiling from the start, and even as we exchange opposing opinions, he is showing me a friendly attitude.

Is there not a possibility that there is something behind this?

Just because Naoe-sensei recommended me to do this, there is no proof that he is not under the patronage of a different person.

If what we are trying to do leaks out from this man.....

I was rushing to raise money, but perhaps I stepped too far in?

Even though I have done research on this man beforehand, I did not have enough time to do as much as I wanted. It would be dangerous to accept him without questioning, but...

I must have the resolve to repeatedly deal with risks like this.

“If it is alright, I would like to have dinner with you soon. I would love to further inquire about your high school education.”

“I was also hoping to hear about politics from you, in addition to this project. I would be happy to join you.”

Things like dinner invitations are merely a ritual to make a simple shallow relationship seem more proper.

Well then, let’s go for round two, shall we?

Part 2

When I woke up, I could see the dirty stains on the ceiling wiggling and shaking.

“I think I drank too much after all...”

As I was in a daze, unable to put up the energy to get up, the bell rang three times at short intervals.

Perhaps noticing that the door was not locked, the visitor came in without hesitation.

Kamogawa, with whom I have had no contact for two weeks, came to the office, out of breath.

“Ayanokoji-san! Wake up! I found it, I found the perfect place!”

“...Don’t yell out loud.”

Coupled with my lack of sleep, I felt as if I was being yelled at through loudspeakers.

With my ears ringing, I had no choice but to sit up, and received Kamogawa’s report.

“You very much smell like alcohol. I’m jealous, where did you eat something delicious?”

“Drinking alcohol is also my job, it is a series of hardships; I do not have the nerve to think of it as being fun.”

If he thinks that I’ve been drinking cheap alcohol with some ladies, he is talking naively.

Even if you become a politician, you can’t hold a self-important attitude, and have to repeatedly pour alcohol for those above you. It is no different from the daily lives of salarymen.

The documents Kamogawa reported with great joy were the documents of the property that was to become the stage for our project.

“Saitama, huh? It was your hometown, right?”

It is not really a surprise, as I thought Tokyo would be unrealistic with the high land prices.

“Yes. There was a pharmaceutical company factory deep in the mountains, but sales dropped after problems with pollution were reported a few decades ago, and the company went bankrupt some years back. The factory was not demolished, and it remains there to this day. The site was neither too large nor too small, so I thought it seemed like the perfect location for the project.”

He put the documents on the desk and displayed the map on the computer to confirm its precise location.

I am grateful that in this day and age, you are able to get the information you want in real time wherever you are.

It is an ideal location more than an hour away from the nearest train with no buses in the area.

The site also includes the prices for both renting and buying. They are a little expensive, but we can also make the choice of purchasing it after a long-term contract.

Well, depending on the negotiations, the period and price can vary.

“However, 2,4 million is a bit high, don’t you think? There is a similar place 30 minutes from the station for 2.5 million. I think there may be more room for negotiation.”

“I think that they are also just testing us at first.”

This place is in a situation where it can’t get a tenant so easily, so it won’t be hard to convince the other party to be the ones asking us to rent it instead of us asking them.

If it becomes a long-term contract, there is a possibility that the other side may agree to a suitable price reduction.

“It’s a nice place, right?”

“You seem quite enthusiastic, but do you have a budget estimation for the remodelling?”

“Here it is!”

He pulled out another document from under his arm and offered it to me.

It seems that he at least has the ability to think things over.

He seems to have already accounted for all the items that would be considered necessary for the construction.

Further, he’s even made a 3D model.

“Is this yours too?”

“Yes. I asked a friend of mine who works in the construction industry for help. Of course, I did not tell him anything about this project, so do not worry. How is it?”

“Not bad. However, we definitely don’t need any extra paint. I’m not going to spend money on looks.”

“Thorough budget cuts it is, then, yes?”

“We can worry about appearances after securing some money.”

“I will re-adjust things in that direction.”

The first step is to put the project on track.

However, results will also be demanded of us.

“You did well, for the time being. I’d like to contact the owner of this place as quickly as possible.”

“What about an intermediary? Will you send one there?”

“No, since we already have an intermediary, playing clumsy tricks would have the opposite effect. Rather, it would be better to move them to our side.”

“I understand.”

I do need to keep searching for a second, or third candidate, but I’d like to resolve things in one try, if possible. The date of my party with the financial world through Sakayanagi is approaching.

“Assuming all goes well, what about the children? Even if we have the money, the facility, and the educators, we cannot do anything without the children, can we?”

Of course, things are moving forwards on that point, too.

“Don’t worry. I have my target set.”

“Target? Please tell me in concrete terms. I am your ally too.”

As Kamogawa looked at me with expectations in his eyes, I glared at him.

“There are things in this world that you would be better off not knowing about. If you carelessly learn something you should not, I won’t be able to help you if something happens to you. Let alone not being able to become a parliament member, are you prepared to spend years, or decades in a prison?”

“N-no..! I don’t, not at all..!”

It’s not a threat.

In truth, I’ve started moving with a plan that would be over at the drop of a hat if it were to get out. I can’t let Kamogawa get involved in this matter.

This isn't to protect Kamogawa, but me. If this guy were to be taken in by the police,

It would be impossible to evade a vigorous inspection. Besides, I'm sure he won't keep silent to them.

"Anyway, there are many ways to secure children, so don't worry."

Normally, when a newborn baby is born to unidentified parents, it is sent to a nursery or an orphanage through the children's welfare center. From then on, foster parents are found for the baby and it is adopted.

There is no knowing if their life will be happy or not after that, but the same is true for those who are raised by their own parents.

The important thing is to provide a favourable environment. As long as a method to secure the baby is established, here is nothing wrong with a nurturing agency stepping in.

"I wish there was a simpler way to obtain children, one that I could tell you about, but it's difficult for now. If we moved with a frontal attack... Even if I am a politician, no one would hand over a child to someone they don't know."

"Is that how it is?"

Of course, with a few words of warm protection, government favouritism, and some jarring nice words, a mother may be willing to give up her newborn.

However, I have to assume that such will not be the case.

"Is there not a way to take babies from an orphanage?"

"There are no orphanages in Japan. To be precise, they are foster homes. Further, in the case of newborn babies, which we are looking for, it will not be an orphanage, but a nursery. However, we cannot evade their suspicions either. Because it is a matter of life or death."

"...I see."

If you live an average life, it's not unreasonable to be indifferent to this sort of thing.

I'm sure Kamogawa had his hands full coming up with a list of potential sites for the facility.

"Of course, we are going to check into nurseries. But that will only happen once the operation of the facility gets off the ground and it is decided that it's a government-led policy."

However, the real mission will be to eventually set up and provide the children ourselves. We will either buy out the director of a gynaecology department, or, if that does not come to fruition, we will open a gynaecology clinic.

It's not that hard to find a doctor who will sell his soul to the devil, so.

I showed the concrete documents to Kamogawa on the computer and explained this to him. That we will inevitably create a place to act as a receptacle for mothers who are unable to raise their children.

There is no reason for anyone to interfere with this.

The day a child is born from the mother's womb counts as day 0, and babies under 28 days old are called "newborns", but, behind the doors, we will take in the newborns up to three month old babies.

The mothers will not be held responsible for their children, and, in exchange, sign an agreement to have nothing to do with their babies.

Further, the babies will be raised under strict physical supervision until they reach six months of age, at which point they will be placed in the educational program.

"So you're prepared to abandon a perfect education for the first few years?"

"Don't be foolish. We will give them a thorough education from the first year, whether there is money or not. You are naive if you think that half-baked results will move the political and financial worlds, Kamogawa."

They, too, are educating the children of their own flesh and blood to be gifted from an early age. If we are not able to show an overwhelming difference in ability compared to that, the credibility of this facility will be shaken.

We have to make them the best in both intelligence and physical ability.

"The bigger the sample, the better it is. Whether it's 10 or 20 people, we'll take them in."

No matter how many of them break, we can simply suppress the facts.

If there are 10 survivors, we'll simply pretend there were 10 from the beginning.

This will show how competent it is as an educational institution.

"But how can you educate infants? They can't even understand words."

"Do you know what baby signing is?"

"Baby signing? What's that?"

"As you say, infants can't speak. So, there are signs that were thought up to attempt communication with babies. Brain development and muscle growth are vital for learning and handling words, but, the development of hands or fingers are a lot quicker."

Of course, acquisition of these baby signs will be difficult until they are around six months old.

“Oh...”

“I’m saying that babies have a lot more intelligence than adults think they do. If you don’t teach them, they can do nothing but cry, but if you teach them baby signing then they can convey the reason why they are crying to adults. This project will go beyond that.”

The ultimate form of early learning. From the moment of birth, a thorough education will be imparted onto the child.

That is the goal of this project.

Part 3

I've secured my chance to gain connections with the financial world.

However, I won't be able to conveniently get funded money if I suddenly take this challenge on without a plan.

A room, inside a building at the center of Kabukichou.

This evening, I was visiting this place by myself.

I visit this hostess bar 2, or 3 three times a month at most when I want to think about some things.

It is a business that is becoming old-fashioned, but it is still high in demand by the elderly. This is inseparable from the world of politics.

"Welcome, Ayanokoji-sama."

A familiar boy in a black apron welcomed me, and guided me into the establishment with a quick reception.

"Where's Mika?"

"Yes, she's at work. She was right when she said that you would be coming soon."

Well then, over here, please."

I was shown to my usual VIP room at the back of the establishment.

There were already several bottle keep bottles in the rool, and some snacks were prepared.

[TL Note 6 : bottle of spirits that a bar customer buys, writes his name on, keeps on a shelf at the bar, and drinks little by little on successive visits.]

This means that preparations have already progressed before I even arrived

"Please wait a bit."

The boy bowed his head and left the room.

As I silently sat down on the luxurious sofa, a wave of exhaustion washed over me.

I leaned back against the backrest, not even bothering to reach for the drink.

“Phew...”

A deep sigh, even surprising myself a little.

I haven’t been sleeping well recently.

The pressure of the human resource development project which I was hurriedly put in charge of and the heavy responsibilities that lie behind it.

A job of life or death that I cannot fail by even the slightest chance.

The location of the education facility is in sight, but there is not enough money to secure it, and no suitable educators have been found. Further, a lot of manpower is also necessary to operate the facility.

It is also necessary to gather people who won’t talk too much and think of a mechanism to prevent them from leaking information to the outside.

Naturally, for this, even more money will be needed.

“Money, money, money, huh..?”

I have been given an opportunity to get the money through Sakayanagi, but I don’t know what will actually happen yet.

“We’ll see what happens...”

Unable to endure the sleepiness assaulting me, I closed my eyes.

I laid down to rest, reflecting on the difference between this place and the hard fabric of my office.

I wonder how much time has passed since then.

Was it one minute, or one hour?

As I unexpectedly opened my eyes and woke up, there was a face glancing at me from the side.

Familiar large eyes and lips.

The same gaze that always looks at me.

“Did you wake up?”

“...How long did I sleep?”

As I got my body up from the sofa, I washed down a glass of whisky to wake myself up.

“About 10 minutes, probably? You look really tired.”

Only 10 minutes. However, it feels like my body became just a little lighter in these 10 minutes.

“Do you want some tea or water instead?”

“No, drinking is much better for my body in times like this.”

Mika nodded in dismay, then skillfully added more alcohol and wiped the water droplets from the glass.

“I have something to ask of you.”

“Is that your first conversation topic after waking up? How about forgetting about work for a little?”

“I can’t do that.”

I spontaneously put strength into the hand I was holding the glass with.

“It’s very important work, huh?”

“There is no line between important or not important work. I can’t miss even a single thing.”

For me, even finding a chestnut in a fire is an important order.

“Being a politician is hard, huh? I watch them on TV and see them dozing off in parliament, being accused of corruption, or being accused of philandering. It doesn’t seem like there’s many who do their jobs properly, but...”

From an ordinary person’s point of view, the world of politics is exactly like that.

The ruling party and the opposition parties are seen as doing their job while shouting abuse at each other like children.

“It’s good for me. If the people above me worked properly, then there wouldn’t be any gaps for me to enter through, so.”

Thanks to the many old politicians acting as they please, I can aim for the few empty seats.

“I think that you can become a great politician, Atsuomi.”

After saying so, she gently put her hand on my thigh.

“You say that with a lot of confidence for a woman who knows nothing about politics.”

Mika next to me came to Tokyo after graduating from middle school, and threw herself into the world of cabaret after going through a few jobs.

With her good looks and confident attitude, she quickly went up to being the number 2 girl in this bar.

I met her while looking for a place to entertain a member of parliament, and we deepened our relationship.

We even dated as lovers for a time, but that was a long time ago.

The reason that we did not break off our relationship then was not just because of the physical aspect, but because she is also talented with her work.

Mika knows how to use her weapons, and she has had close relationships with several men who are at the core of the ruling and opposition parties.

A young, beautiful woman who can only socialise as an adult without negatively affecting her family.

Politicians have a lot of secrets. The more secrets people keep, the more they want to tell.

Politicians are wary of smart women.

On the other hand, they are less cautious about women who are not so smart.

If a woman responds with a knowing but not understanding "huh" when any secret is divulged, it will be easier to have pillow talks. Because you won't have to worry if you say too much, since the other party will not remember.

But this Mika is different. She has no knowledge, but she has at least a minimum amount of wisdom.

She knew how to sniff out the money in politicians' statements and record it in any way she could.

And it all started when she demanded the number one position and money in exchange for cooperating with me.

Further, it was with the hope of not only dragging down the number 1, but thoroughly crushing her.

In response to the easy to understand price, I drugged the woman who was number 1 at the time and eliminated her.

Now she is probably somewhere earning a pittance by keeping company to dirty customers.

Since then, we have become more involved and have been maintaining a give and take with each other.

“I want to grasp some people’s weaknesses.”

I put the photos of the seven people I’ve picked out from the financial world onto the table.

“Do any of these faces look familiar to you, or do you think they are people you can pull in?”

“Let’s see. I don’t think any of them have shown up over here, but... Ah, I think I saw this guy at one of our affiliate establishments... Wait a minute, let me check. What’s his name?”

“It’s Sonezaki.”

As if to jog her memory, Mika called somewhere on her cell phone.

“Ah, hey, Sofia? There’s something I’d like to ask, but do you know a customer called Sonezaki-san?”

After a few moments of friendly chatter, Mika ended the call and nodded.

“Bingo. There’s a big customer who’s really into Sofia, it was him.”

“That’s very convenient, then. Can you use him well?”

“What should I do?”

“This Sonezaki is a married man with two daughters in middle school. It’s only natural for him to play around with women after becoming wealthy, but he still wouldn’t want his circumstances to be made known to his family.”

“This ended up being quite simple, huh?”

“Try to come up with something for the remaining people, too.”

“Okay.”

“And one more thing. I want you to get close with Sasada too. It seems like his position has been going up lately. I want to learn one or two of his weaknesses in advance.”

“...Sasada, right? Why?”

Hearing Sasada’s name, Mika did not hide her disgust.

“I hate scummy bastards who touch my body without permission in plain sight though, you know?”

“Is he obsessed with you?”

“He even says that he’ll give me any amount of money I want if I spend a night with him.”

“That’s perfect. Respond to his desire. He will give you more money than you think.”

A weapon that men cannot possess. It’s a simple and effective strategy.

“How much will I get?”

“It’ll live up to your expectations if you show results.”

“I got it. I’m not enthusiastic, but I’ll do it well.”

“And don’t forget to be with Naoe-sensei too. That person values you too.”

“...We’ll see.”

For the first time, Mika’s expression shadowed a little.

“That, how should I put it... no matter how many times I get in close contact with him, I can’t ever see his true heart.”

She took a hand towel, and folded it suitably.

This is a habit Mika does a lot to distract herself from topics she doesn’t like.

“From my point of view, he’s an old man but he has an energy that makes you feel otherwise.”

“I never thought I could get you to say so much. As expected of Naoe-sensei...”

He is a person who shouldn’t fool you by his aged appearance.

“Be careful. I don’t want you to get swallowed up.”

“I wonder how many men you’ve presented these words to.”

I pulled a handful of bills from my wallet and messily put them on the table.

“Take it.”

“Are you leaving already? I have some time, you know?”

“Sorry, but I don’t have the time to be so leisurely.”

Alcohol and women are luxuries to indulge in, nothing more, and nothing less.
All that stuff will come eventually.

What's important now is to perfectly execute the project, and to make a name for myself in the Naoe Faction.

Part 4

A few months later, in my office, I was looking at the finished photos of the building that had just finished construction.

The floors, ceilings, walls, and everything else are painted with a white base.

The reason for this monochromatic colour scheme is to give the impression that the facility is clean.

Pure, innocent, clean, and holy; white has a number of strong positive connotations.

Many government officials will eventually visit to inspect the education that will take place here.

It is a little bit of an image strategy, but it is an element that should not be underestimated.

“Good morning, Ayanokoji-san.”

Kamogawa had arrived early at the Saitama site with the engineer for the final checks and reviewed the facility with a board in hand.

The work seemed to have come to an end, and he came back to the office with a look of relief on his face.

“All construction is complete.”

“Well done. It looks like the facility was made exactly in the way I imagined.”

“But, with that budget, how did you renovate it so beautifully? Normally, it would be no strange thing for it to cost almost twice as much.”

“There are a lot of construction contractors where dust comes out when you knock on the door.”

If you whisper too good to be true stories along with threats in their ears, they will cooperate without regard to profit.

“It is finally becoming a reality, huh? The human resource development project.”

“That’s right.”

“All of it, it’s all because you were able to move the people in the financial world, Ayanokoji-san. You collected around 400 million in one night, that’s a pretty big thing.”

The 400 million was invested in the educators, the land, the buildings, and the construction of the facility itself.

Most of it is gone now, though.

I had my life on the line to collect the money, but I won't have any trouble using it.

"These people are fed up with money, but they are always hungry for honor and prestige. If this project succeeds, they will get that in return. From the look of the party, they must have a lot of deals like this going on behind the scenes."

They are probably investing in a number of projects at the same time, including mine, and only think of it as a profit if one of them succeeds.

Some of them may have even forgotten about my existence.

"Are you saying we're not special?"

"It's fine to say so for now. Rather, it's more risky to get too much attention."

However, what's ahead of us will also be crucial.

In addition to the teachers who will provide the education, the children who will receive it must also be secured.

"But first, I have come up with a name for the facility that will be responsible for the human resource development project."

"Huh, really? What did you name it?"

"White Room. To emphasize white, which gives an image of purity, and to push it forward."

"White Room... I see, it is simple but also easy to understand."

Anyone will be able to see, that as its name suggests, this place is the White Room.

"I hope we can get the teachers and many others to visit us soon."

Kamogawa is becoming merry, but things will not go so easily.

"Kamogawa. I have something important to tell you. The world of politics is not a simple binary of friend or foe. If you go into it with an easy way of thinking, you'll end up in a mess you can't get back from."

"Huh..?"

He tilted his head back with a dumb look on his face, as if he didn't understand what I meant.

"It's fine. I guess you weren't ready for that talk yet."

No matter how favourable it looks, I am still walking on a bridge that could collapse at any moment.

Kamogawa doesn't know the fear of walking on that bridge yet.

"What will you do after this?"

"I'm supposed to meet and interview a few people here today. It's not possible to run White Room just by myself, so. It's scheduled for 4 o'clock."

It's impossible for amateurs to educate children out of the blue.

Kamogawa looked at his watch and bowed his head, looking a little offended.

He must have thought he was in the way, since the interview time was about 10 minutes away at 4:00 p.m.

"Come with me too."

"Oh, really?"

"You're also in charge of White Room, and you have a right to see who you're dealing with."

With a gleeful gleam in his eye, Kamogawa hurriedly began to clean up.

Exactly when it was about a minute from 4 o'clock, a visitor knocked at the office door.

"Come in."

Souya, a man appearing in a white coat, lightly bowed and approached.

"Hello there, Ayanokoji-san. I never thought that a stray researcher like me would be approached by a great politician like you."

"I haven't said I'm hiring you yet."

The man who showed up, Souya, was originally a doctor, but as a result of a number of problems he had caused, his medical licence was revoked.

After that, he began research on human growth. He was highly praised by some, but he has not been able to return to the limelight because of his past history.

"Kamogawa. If you have any first impressions about him, tell me."

"Is it... Alright?"

Kamogawa looked like he was not trying to interrupt, but I could easily tell he had things he wanted to say.

"I want to hear your opinion."

"Umm, I'm sorry, but why are you here in a white coat?"

"I can't come here naked, can I?"

"That's not what I... Normally, it's common sense to wear a suit for an interview, but..."

Souya looked at his clothes, and nodded somewhat unconvincingly.

"Isn't that a minor detail? My formal attire is a white coat, so I don't think there is any problem. I'd rather you take me more seriously with this than with a suit and tie."

Souya replied so, without a trace of apology.

"Ah, Ayanokoji-san... what will we do?"

Are you going to hire a man like him? That's what his eyes were telling him.

It is true that he had a lot of problems with his attitude and the way he dressed, which could not be said to be appropriate for an interview.

However, neither of these things were a necessity for the personnel that White Room needed.

"I don't have a medical license, but I'm proud to say that my background is impressive."

"I don't care about your personal history."

It seems that we need to cut away this misconception first.

Then, for the first time, Souya's nonchalant attitude hardened slightly.

"Enough... You're here to judge me for what I did too, aren't you? I came here because you said you would interview me regardless of my past problems, but it turned out to be a mistake."

"Don't jump to conclusions by yourself. I told you that I don't care about the past. I'm talking about your entire career path. What university you graduated from, what hospital you worked at, what kind of crime you've committed.

I have no interest in any of it."

Souya, about to get up from his seat, stopped moving.

"All I'm looking for is your current thoughts and abilities. You have a good perspective as a person and insight into human beings. Are you confident that you can use your skills?"

"I know most things when I see someone. That hasn't changed."

For the first time, Souya showed his face as a researcher.

"It takes a lot of guts and determination to enter the illegal world. That's all I wanted to see here. I can't really judge whether or not you're actually useful until I see you in the field."

I don't have the luxury of picking and choosing someone with a personality I like.

"...My apologies."

Souya bowed deeply, even though I didn't ask him to.

"The few years after I was discharged... I was always frustrated as I ate up my savings. I shut myself in and continued cutting myself off from the world."

"You regretted it, didn't you? The past mistakes you've committed."

"Regret? I do not regret anything. I just can't help but get mad thinking about why they sold me out."

He doesn't in the least think that he did anything wrong.

So he was exactly of a nature that was bound to fail, and he did.

Kamogawa, who had led a serious and mild-mannered life, must be a bad match for him.

"I will give you a chance to come back to life. From now on, you will work for me as a former doctor and researcher, managing the subjects and helping them grow. Understand?"

This man with nowhere to go has nothing to complain about when I employ him with the same treatment as before.

"Thank you very much. I'll make sure I'll live up to your expectations."

I told him right there and then that I would be employing Souya, and left.

"I'm really worried about whether it's okay... to hire someone like that."

"I understand what you want to say. However, this is actually more convenient for us."

"Is, is that so?"

"There is no one around him who he is close with. Further, he is obsessed with money, and does not seek honour in the outside world. If we give him money and a place to work, I am

sure he won't betray us. It is impossible to contact outsiders and generate a third party income here."

Of course, there is a possibility that he will threaten us and demand higher wages, but if that is the extent of his behaviour, there is no need for us to hesitate.

"I'm sure he also understood while dealing with me, that it would not be profitable to make an enemy of me."

"I, I see..."

"If that man is the only one coming in, we won't last much longer. Leaving aside this Souya, I gathered a lot of people who are talented but were fired after causing a lot of problems, so."

I can't be negligent in terms of leadership, but as far as their competency goes, they are dependable.

In addition, we have other professionals from the field of training, including one who ran an obstetrics and gynaecology practice, an expert in ecology, and a mentor who has built up olympic athletes.

Of course, this is just the start. From here out, we will expand our reach and bring in geniuses in all kinds of fields to work on the children's development.

"But, was it okay not to ask for more details? We don't really know how well he can work."

"Detailed explanations are unnecessary. I don't know anything about medicine or education, anyhow. So, I'm going to emphasize that they will have to work hard, and employ them based on the fighting power they can bring in."

"So you're saying that... almost everyone who comes in for an interview has already been accepted?"

"That's what I'm saying. So it doesn't make any difference whether you are sitting next to me or not."

In the sense of putting pressure on them, I can see that it helps a little.

I'm not sure how much knowledge I can gain by studying now.

It's best to put the experts against the experts, rather than have a complete novice stick his neck out.

"The answer to the question of whether the guy can really do it or not, or whether the guy coming in for an interview is capable of it or not, can be found by letting the people you hire compete with each other."

A separate team of experts will analyze whether the education has produced results. If they don't see certain results, they will simply cut the head off without mercy.

Part 5

"It's, it's over, huh... I'm more tired than I expected."

The interviews began at 4:00 p.m. and ended at 8:00 p.m. after meeting with a total of six people.

I understand Kamogawa's feeling of weakness.

I have no doubt that all of them are professionals in their field.

However, as human beings, they were all so immature and nauseating.

I knew that I should not think that I could have a decent conversation with them.

It would be easy to hire all of the people gathered here today, but...

"What will you do?"

"There is a big problem in regards to their characters, but, I will hire Ishida, Souya, and then Tabuchi, who seem to have the most proper personality. As for the rest, their inner problems were stronger than their ability, so I intend to let them go for now."

"Leaving aside his statements, his history, and way of thinking were great, huh? I don't really understand that well, but..."

However, it remains unknown whether this will help the project get off the ground.

I thought that I might see things a bit better with the interviews, but...

In no way can I shake off this feeling of uneasiness.

Even if they are competent, I didn't feel anything breaking through.

Is it really possible to provide the best education like this?

"Let's go eat something."

I won't make any progress even if I think about it, so I should probably reset my head for now.

"Right!? Let's go, it's just the time for it right now!"

I invited Kamogawa out to dinner for a change of pace, and right after I got up from my seat while taking my cell phone out of my pocket...

“Ayanokoji-san, did you drop something?”

After saying so, he held out a piece of paper he picked up from the ground to me. It was a business card.

“Ah, he did give this to us, didn’t he? It’s all crumpled, but...”

“It might be a good idea to see how useful he would be.”

“Wait, are you going to contact him? His smile, it was kind of scary, but...”

It is a dubious title, but that Naoe-sensei would not put someone of no use besides him.

It might be a good idea to just get in contact with him.

I tried calling the number written on the business card on my cell phone.

If I couldn’t get a connection, I am willing to dismiss it as a lost opportunity.

That’s about how I felt.

After I put in the numbers and the call rang a few times...

“I thought you might be contacting me, Ayanokoji-san.”

I could tell from the voice also that it was Tsukishiro, and he answered without hesitation.

“How did you know it was me?”

I never gave him my number, and this was the first time I had ever called Tsukishiro.

“Because it is only natural to investigate beforehand.”

“I don’t like it.”

The act of looking into my number itself did not surprise me.

It’s just a matter of asking around Naoe-sensei, or his secretaries. What I don’t like is the way he seemed to know that I was calling.

“What is Naoe-sensei making you do?”

I don’t think it’s just a mere introduction.

I sensed intuitively that there was a set-up behind the scenes

“I understand what you mean, but I can’t give an answer here.”

“You’re watching to see if I mess up, that’s about it, right?”

I can’t sense the other party’s agitation or true nature just by his voice.

However, at the same time, that would also be a risky decision.

At the very least, it is hard to believe that this Tsukishiro man would shop an opening so easily.

“I’d like to meet you soon if it’s alright. I may be able to meet your expectations as well.”

As I was thinking about what to do, the invite came from Tsukishiro’s side.

“Expectations?”

“You called me because you are in trouble, didn’t you?”

“You are very confident, huh? I haven’t said a word about it yet. You may regret it if you set your expectations too high.”

“I’m ready even now, if I am needed.”

Now? He has quite some confidence, huh?

Or, he may have a different objective.

Do I stay on guard, or do I purposefully go along with him?

“In that case, it’s now.. I won’t let you say it’s unreasonable, then.”

“Of course. What shall we do, then? I can visit you myself. You are in the office right now, right?”

“...Fuck you.”

Is he saying he even knows I live in my office?

“It looks like things will go smoother if I am the one who goes out. Can I have around an hour, then?”

“Do whatever you want.”

Leaving aside if Tsukishiro had confidence that I would visit him or not, there is no mistaking the fact that he has been searching for my vicinity and that he has grasped it.

It seems like information about this project is already flying around with Naoe-sensei at the center.

“Umm, what happened?”

“I’m meeting Tsukishiro now.”

“What, now!? What about food..?”

“Go alone. I’ll meet the guy by myself.”

As long as he has one foot in this project, Kamogawa is a trove of information.

As long as there is the possibility of this man being an enemy, Kamogawa’s existence will be a nuisance.

Part 6

One hour from then. I had been waiting outside the office to see how he would show up.

Then, at pretty much the agreed upon time, a black BMW's figure came into view.

"I'll go to the parking lot, so please wait a bit."

Tsukishiro, opening the driver's side window and saying so, put his car into a parking lot and came back.

"I didn't expect you to drive yourself."

"I work alone most of the time, so. Besides, I don't like leaving the driving to someone else. It is the same thing as having your life in their hands."

I thought the man was being exaggerated, but on the flip side, he may just be exposed to that much danger.

Moving on to the office, I sat Tsukishiro down at a suitable spot.

"You said you may meet my expectations, but do you know what needs to be done?"

He never broke his smile, which gave rise to an unpleasant atmosphere.

"Yes. It is related to the human resource development project, right?"

"Looks like Naoe-sensei sees through anything and everything. huh? I guess this means that he had no intention of leaving it all to me from the start."

That day, I thought that Naoe-sensei left the project to only me and Kamogawa.

No, maybe it's my fault for interpreting it in that way.

My first big job. I guess it is only natural that because he must succeed, Naoe-sensei would want to have things guaranteed.

"If I go down, you'll take over the project and be left with its management, right?"

"Maybe I will, or maybe I won't."

Of course, there's no way he would answer honestly.

This man's age shouldn't be that different from mine. It seems like he's stepped into a lot of places.

In that case, it would be normal to depend on him.

“No, I’m wrong, I think. He must simply be looking out in advance for the politician who will be my replacement.”

If Kamogawa and I fail, a different politician will take over the project.

“Impressive. That’s a half-correct answer, Ayanokoji-san.”

“Half, is it?”

“Yes. There are two duties left to me; one is exactly what you spoke of. The other one is to aid the politician who is in charge of the human development project.”

“Aid?”

“A strong support. However, you don’t seem to be pleased, huh?”

It sounds good when you say “aid”, but a process for the case of me failing must also be included.

“I can’t make sense of it. I don’t think Naoe-sensei would rely on you, who is around the same age as me.”

“It is true that, just like you, I am young if you look at it from the world of politics. However, if you are good at supporting the big name politicians, you will be valued even if you are young. Well, in my case, I work with any partner, regardless of if they are a politician or not.”

Tsukishiro, not even trying to hide the fact that he is successful.

I don’t think it is overconfidence. He’s showing me confidence based on his achievements.

“Before asking you to work, there’s something I’d like to confirm beforehand.”

“What would that be?”

I pulled out the newspaper from this morning, and put my finger on an article in the corner.

“Ooarai City in Ibaraki Prefecture. It looks like there was a body at the port there.”

“It isn’t that rare of a story, is it? Many people are dying all over Japan, so.”

“He was a local journalist, I know this man. He was a lone wolf who hated the world of politics... mainly the ruling party, Citizens Party.”

“What about it? Does it have anything to do with now and this place?”

"Did you do it, Tsukishiro?"

"You ask very direct questions, huh, Ayanokoji-san? Do you think I will answer with a yes?"

"That doesn't matter. What I want to know is whether or not this reporter was keeping a watch on Naoe-sensei when he met you at the restaurant the other day or not."

Without even moving a brow, Tsukishiro lightly dropped his eyes onto the newspaper article."

"He seemed like he was about to write a gossip article about Naoe-sensei, you see. That he's playing around with young women even though he has a wife and children. The Citizens Party couldn't have avoided its image being damaged."

As I expected.

This is the reason that this man was moving together with Naoe-sensei in the restaurant the other day.

He put a woman on Naoe-sensei on purpose, determined the reporter who would be aiming for this, and took care of him.

Of course, I'm sure he will not admit it in daylight, but...

I made a fist, and strongly hit the table.

"That does not seem to be fear, huh? Goodness gracious... Could it actually be, anger?"

Tsukishiro continued while curiously analyzing my movements.

It is true that with this talk, shaking in fear or fright would be the normal thing.

Because it is possible that the man before my eyes has killed a man as a job.

"You're wondering why you weren't left with the work yourself... Is that the source of this anger?"

"Dirty work is my role. It's been like that up until now too."

If I get even one order, I am confident that I can deal with it just as well as this man.

"At the least, I won't be so stupid that the body will end up found."

"I know your circle of friends very well. You are very close with the Ooba Group, aren't you, Ayanokoji-san?"

Does he naturally have a grasp on everything about me?

"Then you should have already understood very quickly that I would not be afraid of you."

“The Ooba Group is not a large organization, but they are quite notorious. I am aware that you worked very hard to build up a friendly relationship. However, if the corpse is not found, then it is not a corpse. A missing person could not have put fear into the hearts of the numberless enemy rats watching Naoe-sensei, could it?”

In other words, he did not fail to hide it, but purposefully let the body be found, huh..?

Whether or not Tsukishiro is involved in the death of a local reporter is no longer relevant.

I don't think this is a guy I can threaten by reaching out with my arms and grabbing him by the chest here.

If I am being made to think so, then his strategy is working well.

“I understand how you feel, but that is proof that Naoe-sensei is putting his heart and soul into his human resource development plan. Since he decided to select you, he couldn't let you cross a dangerous bridge just to sink a reporter. Even if this incident becomes a problem, the person who would be blamed for it would be someone else, someone you don't know anything about.”

This man is dangerous. However, his talent is high, and he is a quick talker if he knows what's going on.

If he could not manoeuvre over the people he faces, he could not have reached these heights.

“There are a lot of things about it I don't like, but you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs.”

“That is correct. We should keep our personal circumstances separate and think things through, right?”

Any more idle chatter is just a waste of time.

I should try to get into the main subject.

“I've been interviewing staff for a new research facility. I've managed to secure some personnel, but I'm still lacking a deciding factor. I will need time to search again.”

“So you're asking if I can help you with arranging human resources? That was fast.”

“If you have any ideas. I'm not looking for a half-hearted asset, though.”

“Do not worry. I know of a person of talent who would convince you, Ayanokoji-san.”

“Oh?”

“However, it is a different story if I will introduce them to you. You understand, right?”

This world is mostly about business.

It doesn't matter if you like your partner or hate them, or if you have a deep or thin relationship with them..

“I understand. How much?”

If I can get a reward of equal value, I have no dissatisfaction about paying money.

“In theory it is best to handle things with cash, but I have some policies of my own. I would like to sit down and talk with potential clients. First of all, would you be willing to allow me to interview you?”

“That's funny. I was the one interviewing just a few minutes ago and now I'm on the receiving end.”

What a joke. However, it would be foolish to throw away an opportunity for the sake of a little time and pride.

“Alright. You can do whatever you want.”

I'm going to play along with Tsukishiro's game here and see if I can use him or not.

“Thank you very much.”

Tsukishiro took out a light blue clear file and pulled out several sheets of paper from it.

So, was it all calculated to get us to this point?

“Ayanokoji Atsuomi, 31 years old. Male. Born in Kumamoto Prefecture, Aso City. Education history is high school-”

“Wait a minute. Is it necessary to confirm that stuff with an interview?”

“It is important.”

He may not be joking, but his thin smile makes me want to vomit.

“You and I are equals. No, maybe not even equal. What determines our hierarchy is up to you now, and you can decide. If you feel like swearing, please do not refrain from putting it into words.”

He is smiling, but I wonder how serious he is.

However, I have already made my decision.

Because I've come to understand that he seems so different, yet so similar in character.

"I have not been refraining from anything, but I still had to restrain myself with Naoe-sensei behind me. From now on, I will deal with you without reservation in the true sense of the word."

"That would be best."

After grinning, Tsukishiro began to speak again.

"I've followed your career as far as I can. Your life has not been easy, and it seems that you had a poor childhood."

I'm not sure how much research he's done, but it seems he's done his fair share.

It seems likely that he is in contact with someone who knew me as a child and as a student.

"I've also investigated your family structure. It seems your parents abandoned you when you were little, and you were raised by your grandparents from your father's side."

From the way he speaks, it would seem that a bad lie would have the opposite effect.

"No parents, no money, no proper house. That's how my life was."

"No proper house? What kind of place did you live in?"

"A shack for farm equipment maintained by the adults in the neighbourhood. It had a crude tin roof and no electricity or gas. I could only take a bath once or twice a week with hot water boiled in a cassette stove."

It's not a past to be proud of; in fact, to others it would sound like self-torture.

However, I'm not pessimistic about the past.

I think it has allowed me to lead a life that has given me the determination to rise to the top.

"My grandfather died when I was in junior high school. But, it was a turning point. I was able to buy an old house nearby with my grandmother with the money from an insurance policy he had put out before he died and moved."

It wasn't the kind of house you'd want to live in.

However, I remember that I was happy because I felt like I had a big castle.

"Is your grandmother alive?"

"No. I remember that she died when I was over 18 years old. Probably."

"You don't seem to care that much."

"I didn't see her die, and I have no interest in it. I was too busy living my life for myself, so."

I did not attend the funeral, although I received one phone call from someone who seemed to be a distant relative. I paid only the minimum expenses and let them handle everything.

Including my grandfather, I don't even know where their graves are and where their remains are buried.

"I see that after all the hard work she put into raising you, her life ended in vain."

"I don't know if it was hard work or not."

Of course, I know that raising a child is hard work, and I think so.

"But it is true that it was an empty end. The son she had raised with all her heart and soul abandoned his child and disappeared, and the grandchildren who were left behind did not even try to help the parent who raised them. She had to live in poverty for decades and never had the luxury of living a good life."

If I had lived as my grandmother, I would have described it as a living hell.

"How do you feel about that situation, looking at it objectively now? Does it hurt?"

"No? Nothing has changed from that time. No, it's more than that. My grandmother lived a life of a loser and died as a loser. If she had at least abandoned me, her grandson, and made good use of my grandfather's insurance money, she would have had a somewhat better life."

I have no intention of living such a miserable life.

I can say that she was useful to me as a close antagonist.

"When was it that you decided to become a politician?"

"It all started when I was a host and a woman who came as a client told me a story. She told me that being a politician is not only about money, but also about power."

In fact, there were many parliament members in the area who played around in cabarets.

I was jealous of these people who played around with the public's blood money.

"You ran for the first time at the age of 25, but your vote count was hopeless and you lost badly, also forfeiting your deposit money."

Tsukishiro read out the profile he had investigated of me.

“At the age of 27, you announced your intention to run again when the House of Representatives was dissolved, and was first elected after being favoured and encouraged by Naoe-sensei. It seems you learned a lot about politics during those two years.”

“I admit that I was the most desperate man in my life. As a former host, I used women to get close to Naoe-sensei. Of course, that alone would not have won me his approval, but I am proud to say that he bought my persistent touch, my enthusiasm, and my ambition.”

Tsukishiro nodded his head in satisfaction.

“Thank you for the details.”

Closing the file, Tsukishiro turned to face me.

“It should be fine. I will accept you as a client.”

Saying this, Tsukishiro pulled out a new file.

“Wait a minute. You’re accepting me as a client with this kind of talk?”

“You may lack some knowledge, but that is not important. You can make up for it plenty with your rich intellect and body.

What’s important is your “thinking”. Your ambition painted with unhidable evil, I’ve judged that you excel in the qualities of a politician.”

I looked down at the file in front of me.

“They are excellent personnel that will live up to your expectations.”

Did he even foresee that I would contact him looking for personnel?

No, there is a possibility that Naoe-sensei is backing him up from behind the scenes.

“How much?”

“Not this time. It is best if I can be repaid in a big way one day in the future, so. You may become a big-name one day. That is the biggest reason that I decided to accept this.”

“Don’t make me laugh. How many politicians have you whispered the same things to? Do you think that I will accept such flattery?”

Even this man who is babbling that he has accepted my talents only decided to cooperate with me after seeing my background.

“Of course, I’m sure it’s not just one or two people, right?”

He admitted easily and stood up.

“If you surpass others in talent, you will increase your enemies in the political world. Your stakes will be driven down, and your political life will be snatched away. Your evil and ambition may be held down by a stronger force.”

“I won’t be so easily crushed, though.”

“That may be so. If you find yourself in a place where you are about to be killed, you have to have the resolve to take the person next to you along with you.

That kind of person tenaciously survives.”

Being a newcomer to the world of politics, I can’t do anything without Naoe-sensei shielding my back.

As I left the office with Tsukishiro, a young man in white clothes came up to me.

“He is the one you are looking for. I had instructed him in advance to come at this time.”

“Was this your intent from the start?”

“Of course, I had no intention of letting you meet with him if you were unsuccessful in my interview.”

Interview time for another newly added person.

On his resume, a slightly rare name was written: “Suzukake Tanji”.

“Hi.”

“Please sit.

Even though the personnel were arranged by Tsukishiro and Naoe-sensei's side, I still can't let my guard down.

The person to be hired must be questioned in detail and checked for any problems.

The man called Suzukake who entered the room looked like a middle-aged man with a stubble beard, but he was even younger than me: 29 years old.

He had graduated from the University of Tokyo at the head of his class and went over to the U.S., but he never made any significant achievements.

He was a man without any titles except his intelligence, so to speak, but I still don’t know why the Tsukishiro Side recommended such a man.

“Your résumé seems pretty blank, but what did you do abroad?”

“ I was doing what I wanted to do.”

“...What did you want to do?”

“Well, all kinds of things.”

“I can’t really understand that. Please speak concretely.”

“Human observation.”

I’m glad I’ve been seeing so many people today who can’t even use proper honorifics. I’ve learned that it’s somewhat better to be spoken to normally than half-heartedly in honorifics.

“Then, please tell me why you decided to take this interview.”

“I heard it pays well. I need money to stay abroad.”

“The cost of living can’t even be compared to Japan, so I can understand.”

If one has the ability they should work on location, but judging from this man’s attitude, I don’t need to question him about the difficulty of doing so.

“I have a question for you too, but...”

“What is it?”

“Before that, please stop with that disgusting formal speech. You can look at me like I am insect all you want, but if you really want to work, then I want to know your true character.”

“...I see. That’s fine, but won’t that just mean you’ll have to leave?”

If this is what he wants, I don’t have to wear human skin either.

I broke my slightly upright posture, and crossed my legs.

“You aren’t hired at the moment, Suzukake. You graduated from a prestigious school at the top of your class, and you deserve credit for your brains, but you haven’t left anything behind.”

“Because I just wasn’t even provided the stage to do so.”

Replying so, he continued his words right after.

“I’m not looking for fame or a title. But, I do want to understand the mechanisms of a human. This project’s policy of human resource development seemed like the perfect opportunity to solve my questions.”

“You’re not looking for a title, huh? If you perform to my expectations, you will be provided rewards you haven’t been able to gain at the front stage.”

When I handed him the materials regarding the White Room, Suzukake immediately began to look through them.

I have to dangle a large amount of carrots in front of these guys and make them show their talent without regret.

That’s what I thought, but researchers are hard to understand.

With a childlike gleam in his eyes, he checked out the facilities and environment, and began to randomly murmur about his hopes and ideals.

Part 7

Later, I visited the White Room in Saitama, which had undergone renovation work, and was exploring the image of the room and worrying about the selection of further educators.

Then, Kamogawa came to me.

“Thank you for your hard work, Ayanokoji-san. Have you made arrangements for the children?”

“The plan couldn’t start if I hadn’t. The scheme is almost complete.”

“Wow, of course... Of course, you don’t have to give me the details. I don’t want to, umm, get caught or anything yet.”

A means to gather children, which I am not speaking of to this Kamogawa.

That is, to get newborns illegally from black market brokers using the Ooba Group.

However, this entails many dangers.

As such, we must eventually switch to a more legitimate way of collecting children.

Although it is still in the planning stage, we will soon launch a website and announce that we will be a place for parents who cannot raise their unborn children due to unavoidable circumstances to be able to take their children to.

Ideally, we would cooperate with the parents even before the birth of the child. Some women can’t even pay for a birth without relying on the government’s system.

There are many cases of women giving birth in secret and their children dying. Of course, this is theoretically possible. However, at the same time, there are great risks involved.

A woman is not a parent in the true sense of the word yet just by carrying a child in her belly.

She may not be able to give birth,

or she may have no choice but to become a mother when she comes face to face with her child one day.

And what if there is a fatal accident?

If they sue for the return of their child, it will be traced back to the White Room in the backscene.

That must be avoided.

If it becomes public, it would be more than just a matter of tarnishing Naoe-sensei's name.

It is imperative that we only accept children from those who have given birth elsewhere, are not responsible, and cannot be mothers.

It would be good to have a myriad of beautiful and hypocritical words on the homepage.

"Don't take a life," "anonymous baby adoption," "counseling for the needy," "foster care system," and so on, all of which seem to guarantee a future for you and your child.

Whenever a mother visits a hospital, the first step is always to set up a meeting.

We don't ask her name or where she lives, we just ask her to give a reason why she can't raise her child freely.

If the child is simply unacceptable, some will readily allow the child to go to foster care. If they are strapped for cash, we can just give them some money.

If they have no choice but to give the child to the hospital, we will be sure to provide an extension of one week.

Some parents may regret giving up their children the following day.

In this way, unrecognized children will be gathered and sent to the White Room.

In order to be prepared for the possibility of being asked to return their children two or three years later, a connection will be made only with each mother in the form of a name.

Of course, you can't just return a child from foster care, that kind of reasoning doesn't work.

As long as we are doing something illegal, we need to avoid being publicized.

Further, the commodity called children must be treated very delicately.

"The problem is, if anything, beyond that. It is the medical care of the children brought to White Room."

"Medical care..?"

"Children are weak. They get sick at the slightest thing. However, as it would be difficult to take them to a hospital, it is essential to have doctors who can treat them in White Room."

Not just any doctor, however.

There are many conditions... They must have had their physician's license taken away. Their thinking must be flexible. The doctor must be as old as possible, but not too old. Further,

they must be able to re-acquire their physician's license if the situation demands it. They must also need money and be unwilling to work in the real world.

"That's... Quite a lot of difficult conditions, huh? Should I say it's not beautiful, or..."

"You're right in thinking that. However, all over Japan, in every nook and cranny of the land, you will find those with unexpected histories if you search for them. In my search, I came across a former doctor who lives deep in the mountains of Tottori. He had a history of a traffic accident that killed two university students who were riding a bike in the past."

Accidents are not rare.

While returning home after a late night at the office, the doctor was assaulted by a feeling of sleepiness and started to make a right turn without realizing the distance between himself and the bike coming straight ahead, and they collided.

They could not be saved even after the police and an ambulance were immediately dispatched.

Unfortunately, the person he hit was a child of a well-known local landowner,

and after that, he fled to an unrelated region to run away from the people's eyes.

"10 years since that accident. It was possible to get his physician's license back, but, he's been living his days drowning in alcohol."

"That, that kind of person is... But, while it is good news that you found him, aren't you worried?"

"He was always a flamboyant and extravagant person. That's what I'm aiming for."

One person, at the very least.

Another one if possible.

I have to secure doctors to be in charge of the children's health.

Part 8

3 months after that.

The arrangement of the children is progressing, and the operation is finally about to begin.

However, the final phase of the project, the educational part, has to be finalized with the educators.

I brought what little luggage I had into the white room and was about to gather the live-in researchers into the lab for a discussion.

Ishida, Souya, Suzukake, Tabuchi.

The four of them are sitting down wearing their white robes.

“From now on, you four will be in charge of training the first batch of White Room students. This is the first time we meet in person, but we’ve had many discussions in online meetings. I don’t think there will be any obstacles to working together.”

“Please wait a bit. We did have many discussions, but we have not yet reached a consensus in the direction we are heading or our policies.

How do you intend to align us together?”

Souya, the elder, strongly expressed his mind.

Ishida and Suzukake were not even nodding, but instead were confident that they were not mistaken in their own principles.

This was the same in the repeated online meetings too, so it’s no surprise.

I could endlessly let them continue discussing the direction they want to take, but they would never get along.

“What if I tell you to twist your opinions and obey me?”

“I can’t do that. In that case, I’ll get out.”

“Me too. I’m here to provide my ideal education. If I can’t do that, I don’t feel like being here.”

The same goes for Suzukake.

The idea of compromising was never even in the corner of his mind.

“What is with the rude attitude towards Ayanokoji-san? I know you’ve been paid a fitting amount of money at the preparation stage.”

Kamogawa, an amateur in the field of educational theory, could not overlook the fact that they were being disrespectful. However, I rebuked Kamogawa.

“They’re saying troubling things, but there’s no need to jump to conclusions.”

The children we’ve prepared and can use right now are 15 in total.

I lined up 15 sheets of business-card sized paper with the babies’ names, genders, and dates of birth written on the backs.

Then, I shuffled them as if randomly mixing cards, and put them on top of the table.

“Ishida, Suzukake, Souya. Pick 5 random cards each and take them. They are the kids you will educate and be in charge of. Educate them for a certain period of time. The first term White Room students will be trained in three groups at the same time. Tabuchi has agreed to supervise you all equally.”

Tabuchi nodded, and sent a glance towards the three.

“I see. Good idea. As long as our views don’t align, this is the only choice.”

The conclusion I came up with was to let these three compete freely.

It would be an impossible task to ask these geniuses, who have different philosophies and beliefs, to align themselves from the start.

“However, it’s not going to last forever. The training period is three years. When all the children reach the age of three, they will be given a comprehensive test, and the one who led the group with the best performance will be the official leader.”

There was no cause for concern, as no one thought they would lose.

Ishida nodded, satisfied with the content, and reached for the paper, so I glared at him and grabbed his arm.

“W-what!?”

“Listen. If you lose and then say something stupid like that your children have different qualities or that you are not going to abide by the decision, you will lose the three years’ worth of money you have inscribed in your bank book as a penalty. And you will completely lose your position in the underworld, and not just in the public eye. Make sure you don’t forget that, alright?”

Ishida in front of me took in my words and strongly, slowly, took a gulp.

“You two are fine with it too, right?”

“No objections.”

It seemed that Souya was convinced too, but I’m sure he is more certain now.

However, Suzukake was the only one with a stern expression.

“If you have any complaints, talk now.”

“I understand. I’m just stuck on the follow the leader part. I don’t think I’ll lose, but I want to know how the people by my side will move. Am I supposed to follow a leader of different principles with blind acceptance? If so, I have no intention of taking this on.”

“If all I want is a yes, I don’t need a genius. There is no merit in uniting three people, much less three different people like you. The leader has the final say, and if there are any objections to the policy, I’ll ask for a thorough discussion. That’s also why Tabuchi is here, so.”

“It’s like the ruling party and the opposition party, huh?”

As if impressed, Kamogawa spoke like a politician.

“... I understand.”

Ishida has also calmed down, but still has not lost color in his confident eyes.

It will delay the plan, but for now this is probably the best option.

The first term students will be trained in three groups over a period of three years, and after that, a leader will be chosen.

It will cost money and reduce efficiency, but it is a necessary step to bring these educators together.

I will create a new educational policy and start training new term students on a yearly basis.

I’m sure I will be forced to modify various plans along the way, but this is the best option I can take now.

Chapter - 3

Start-up Phase

Intro

Dreams. People dream almost every day, and whether or not they remember them is related to the depth of their sleep.

Considering the fact that this dream is etched in my brain in a very vivid way, it seems that I have been sleeping quite poorly.

The dream I'm seeing right now is, yes, a long time ago, when I was still a teenager.

I was remembering in my dream how I felt when I saved up the money to buy one of those used light cars.

The car had over 100,000 kilometers on the odometer, and the interior was a shabby piece of junk that could not be fixed in any way.

I can't say it was a comfortable ride, but I still drove it around feeling like a pillar of the family.

I had no friends or lovers, and the time I spent with just myself and the car was irreplaceable.

A long time has passed since then, and I am now asleep in the back seat without driving myself.

The deep, soft comfort of the genuine leather seat.

The warm feeling covering my back.

All of these things have changed to something far more luxurious than the car I used to drive.

But why?

Why is it that I can't quite reach the excitement and joy of those days?

"Ayanokoji-san, we will be arriving soon."

I quietly opened my eyes to hear such a voice from the driver's seat.

The scenery had changed from the city to a rough road surrounded by mountains.

“It's going to be a little bumpy from here on out.”

“I know.”

Three years have already passed since I was put in charge of the human resource development project by Naoe-sensei.

At first, I wondered what would happen, but the project, officially named the White Room Project, was launched in secret.

The number of people from the business world who wanted to invest in the project increased day by day, and the project succeeded in creating a surplus of funds.

Of course, all the money raised is designated as being for the White Room.

An important talk of investment.

Even going back to the past, I can't think of any subject that has gathered so much anticipation without even showing results yet.

Like certain stocks, by the time that ordinary people learn they can make money, it'll already be too late.

Only those who heavily invested while the project was still hidden will be able to make money.

Even without mentioning Naoe-sensei's name, profits will be predicted when I start working.

All of this is on my side.

The presence of the high education that the government has already succeeded with ahead of time will become quite important too.

The government will eventually get involved in the white room, even if they don't talk about it.

Those who have invested ahead of the curve can expect enormous publicity and payback.

Even if things have been going well up to this point, if when the lid opens the results are disappointing, the investors will not hesitate to return fire, and those who call us “sensei, sensei” will hurl abuse at us all at the same time.

The important thing will be to achieve clear and constant results.

We cannot let our guard down at all.

While I was on the move, I received a new call on my cell phone from someone in the business world who wanted to invest in the project.

Although the true value of the children of the first term had not yet been publicly announced, as soon as the second one began their intake period, applicants began to arrive one after another.

This was despite the fact that we had not yet ostensibly told them about the education and growth of the first term.

Of course, this is my strategic move.

The fact that the education in the white room was going well, that it was more successful than we had imagined, and that there were so many applicants that we might not be able to accept all of them.

By secretly disseminating such information about the White Room, I was increasing the value of its existence.

In addition, there were people who wanted to use the White Room for purposes other than what it was intended for.

Which was, the existence of illegitimate children, an issue inseparable from wealthy families.

The mistress insists on giving birth to a child, and as a condition for that, she is allowed to leave her child with the White Room.

In this way, it is possible to completely eliminate the child's existence in public eyes.

The achievement of giving birth to a child and the connection with her partner can still remain.

Of course, this may be difficult for most people to understand, and irredeemable.

We have no reason to hold back, since it will lead to the securing of human and financial resources for the White Room.

I accepted the offer and immediately added it to my list.

"They never learn, do they?"

Do people go crazy because they have money? They easily repeat unwanted pregnancies because of their selfish acts.

I don't mind utilizing them for secret births, but the looseness of their nether regions is appalling.

Now more than 30% of the entire second trimester has accepted illegitimate or other children that cannot be revealed.

In other words, the white room is still worth about that much.

We don't have enough credibility and track record to have beloved children entrusted to us.

The financiers offer money and children, but there is still much they don't know about the real plan, and of course many of the staff members don't know the true meaning of the experiment.

They will not doubt that the purpose of the experiment is to provide an education for children born under an unfortunate star, to raise them well, and to return them to society.

"It's not unreasonable, though."

I, myself, am still far more inclined to see children as experimental subjects.

To take care of the precious children of wealthy families now is to take a big risk.

How to bridge this discrepancy is also an issue that cannot be avoided in the future. Regardless, any child will be thoroughly educated.

White Room will eventually turn into a government-approved facility, and not just a pipe dream.

Eventually, educational facilities around the world will model themselves after the White Room.

Naoe-sensei and I will take the lead in building that bridge, and we will have a greater voice within the party.

When the aging Naoe-sensei retires, I will have a huge boost waiting for me.

Little by little, I am steadily moving forward one step at a time.

I'm starting to really feel it.

It was not a mistake that I started working on the human resource development project with all my might from the day Naoe-sensei entrusted it to me.

This project is an essential part of my life.

There is no doubt that bright hope lies far ahead.

However - I am not completely free of any uncertainties.

While I was working on the White Room Project, I've been inevitably becoming more and more distant from the political world.

They have a very keen sense of smell.

Some of them must have figured out that I was working on a project like this behind the scenes.

I am the right hand of Naoe-sensei who has a lot of allies but also a lot of enemies, so there are many people trying to pull out my weaknesses.

I had to get some distance in order to differentiate the ones who are on my side, and the ones who are against me.

White Room is now half my body.

But that's why I made sure that my connections to the financial world were strong.

If you can't expand your connections in the political world, you should strengthen your position in the business world.

This is a meaningful conduct precisely because the political and the financial worlds are connected as one in front and back.

My ties to the financial world are becoming stronger day by day, so I have chosen to wear the mask of both a politician and a wealthy man.

I channel money from right to left, left to right, and strengthen myself with the money I collected.

"I heard that Sakayanagi-san arrived at the White Room just now."

"I see. I don't mind the shaking, just hurry up a little."

"Understood."

Part 1

Even though I still had some time before my appointment, he was a guest, and it was not a good idea to keep him waiting.

After passing through the gate and letting the car pull up to the front entrance, I strode to the guest room.

Sakayanagi, who had not sat down on the sofa but was standing and staring out the window, looked back at me.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“I don’t mind, Ayano-koji-sensei. You arrived earlier than planned, so.”

Bowing politely, Sakayanagi approached me, smiling as usual.

“I was looking forward to today's unveiling of the White Room”

“It looks like it.”

Over the past three years or so, I have continued to interact with Sakayanagi frequently.

I had thought that I would not get along with Sakayanagi, who was born into a privileged environment, but even so, you never know what people will do when they have some common goal in mind.

The fact that I had been dealing with people who were always trying to find out what was in each other's minds made it less painful for me to meet with Sakayanagi, who had no secretive side.

“Still, I was surprised at the security that didn't suit this kind of place.”

“I have no choice. Right now, we can't make this place public. There are a lot of people out there desperately trying to find a scandal about me or Naoe-sensei.”

Perhaps troubled by this response, Sakayanagi only smiled bitterly.

“You helped me first with the White Room Project, so I wanted to show it to you first.”

“I just want to support a plan that will increase the number of children that will be saved.”

Sakayanagi in front of me, without any doubts, thinks that the children will lead Japan.

This is only a card to let us move up in the world for me and Naoe-sensei, but that's already been factored in.

Whatever the aim, if there are children who will be saved, this man will accept it.

He is a good man beyond help, but that's why there's no telling when he'll become an enemy.

If he notices the reality that the children's future is not being guaranteed, I'm sure this man will distance himself from me.

"Let me show you around."

"Please."

Taking Sakayanagi with me, we headed for the first laboratory.

"Today is a big day for setting new policies for the White Room, and I definitely want you to see how the children have grown up."

"The children you've taken in, they're already over three years old now, yes? That was very quick."

Sakayanagi, my collaborator, had also seen how many children there were.

I'm sure there are many scenes he can recall.

"Will you not have children?"

When I met Sakayanagi, he had already been married for several years.

I still haven't heard anything about her being pregnant or giving birth.

"It's not that I don't want to, it's just that I haven't had the chance. We have talked about letting nature take its course."

In other words, if either the husband, wife, or both of them have a problem, they won't mention it.

If they have mutually agreed, it's not a bad choice either.

"I see. I said something unnecessary, please forget about it."

"I've always wondered if you were going to get married too, Ayanokoji-sensei."

"If I had a partner, I would consider it, but unfortunately, I have been single for some time now, and I have no plans to get married."

“A partner is indispensable for a politician to continue working for a long time. I hope you will find a partner soon.”

Love, marriage, childbirth. I don't have time for that.

They say that having someone to protect you makes you stronger, but unfortunately I don't think so.

To have someone to protect you is to be weak at the same time.

Because I've seen many politicians die for their protectors in the past.

Part 2

When I arrived at the laboratory, I was met with a bit of a hustle and bustle.

A comprehensive test of the children raised by Suzukake and the other three researchers was to take place.

“Sorry you had to wait. Please start immediately.”

“Understood.”

Tabuchi, the only one in the room on a level playing field, moderated the session without any personal feelings.

“We divided them all into three groups, and worked for three years on educating them as thoroughly as possible.”

“We will decide who will represent us by seeing which one of these three teachers shows the most results.”

Being given a brief explanation, Sakayanagi could see the situation.

“That’s right.”

“I’m sure you already have a prediction of the outcome, Ayanokoji-sensei?”

“No. For the past three years, I’ve mostly not touched anything. I’ve been providing only the necessary support without any layman’s interference. I don’t even know who is going to show the best results.”

For the past three years, I’ve let everything move without even looking at the progress.

When I answered honestly, Sakayanagi applauded in surprise, as if amused.

“It must have taken a lot of courage to leave everything completely to the field, right? Most managers cannot trust their subordinates to do their work, and they tend to talk over them.”

Because the ones who spend money usually hold needless, wicked thoughts.

“After all, I’m working with other people’s money. If it had been money made from my blood and sweat, I might have been more critical. The only ones who will suffer if the money goes down the drain are the investors.”

That’s why I was able to stand firm and wait three years.

“But, still. If you fail, there is a high possibility of you losing everything, Ayanokoji-sensei. It’s the same for ordinary businessmen. They receive large loans from the bank and fight a battle for the company’s fortune. It is the bank’s money, but you can also say that it is the company president’s personal money.”

In the sense of assuming responsibility, it may be no different from being a manager.

“You have never changed your habit of immediately lifting up other people.”

“It’s my nature. There is always good in others, and it’s my job to recognize it.”

He answered without hesitation that what I said was a true compliment.

This is what I like about this man, and what I don’t like about him.

Children are coming into the room through the glass that is also a one-way-mirror.

The children, who were clearly labelled with the name plates of each researcher, took their seats in an orderly fashion.

“If they are 3 years old, they are just about ready for a little conversation, right?”

It is understandable that Sakayanagi, who does not have any children of his own, does not intuitively understand this.

“The children are beginning to show signs of understanding, intelligence, and self-esteem, as well as a bit of manual dexterity. The most obvious development at first sight may be motor development. Standing on one leg, walking on tiptoe, and climbing stairs smoothly. That’s just a generalization, though.”

“I think it’s impressive enough that they can do that, but...”

With a tense look on his face, Sakayanagi looked at the children.

“Begin!”

Under the instruction, the children turned over the paper at once and picked up their pens.

“A... test?”

No one got out of their seats, and they were more focused on the questions with a power of concentration stronger than those of primary school kids running around the neighbourhood.

“What’s the contents of the test they’re challenging?”

“It’s an arithmetic problem. Here it is.”

I received the paper that Tabuchi had brought, and together with Sakayanagi, I looked it over for the first time.

The problems range from addition and subtraction to multiplication and division.

“These are questions that are meant for primary school kids, right? Amazing.”

Sakayanagi was impressed, but Tabuchi calmly replied:

“The world is a big place. There are gifted children who can solve more difficult problems. They are undoubtedly genetic prodigies.”

“But, the children here are a bit different than the gifted ones, aren’t they..?”

“Yes, they are. They are not special. They're just children who don't show any ability bias. They've all developed the ability to face problems.”

The way the children were struggling with difficult problems was no different from that of the students taking the exam.

The first discomfort I felt when looking at the three groups was that Ishida's and Souya's groups were so similar in their attitudes and reactions to the test that I could not tell the difference even if I mixed them up, whereas Suzukake's group did not move an inch.

The real-time camera tracking reveals that some of the children's answers are wrong, but they never seem rushed, upset, or distraught.

Regardless of whether this is a good or bad thing, Ishida and the others are clearly upset.

“What kind of education can create such inorganic children..?”

Souya's mutterings were those of a researcher.

“My first task is to make sure they have a mature mindset, so that when they can't solve a problem, they can do so calmly, objectively, and without panic. I have mercilessly punished children who fail to do so.”

Far from being the reaction of a child, they were like robots without feelings.

“Corporal punishment? For 3 year old children?”

“No, from when they were newborns. And I don't want you to call it corporal punishment, Souya. This is my education.”

It would be a big problem if not accompanied by results, but the overall percentage of correct answers was clearly higher than that of both Ishida and Souya and their children.

“The concentration of those children is close to that of adults. They are so absorbed in their work that even if I called out to them nearby, they might not notice me right away.”

After saying this and having grasped the academic ability of almost everyone, Suzukake played music in the room.

At the loud sound, which was also out of place, the children in the room stopped their hands and began to look around.

However, the children Suzukake was educating were not responding to the sound, just as the man boasted, but were instead focusing on solving problems.

“How is something like this possible?”

Ishida, too, was surprised by Suzukake's education.

“Education. Children are terrified of being punished in a variety of ways. They will do whatever they deem effective against this, whether it be physical pain or mental anguish. If you push them to the edge of their fears, the fears will eventually go away. Not in the metaphorical sense, but in the real sense. We're still in the process of doing that.”

“...With all due respect, that is unquestionably corporal punishment. There is no meaning to the abilities gained by doing this. I don't think your educational policy is the right one.”

It would certainly be flattering to say that there are no problems at all.

Sakayanagi has reason to be angry.

“I have no right to interfere, but I can't agree with Suzukake-san's way of doing things.”

“Sorry, Sakayanagi, but I'm not looking for an outsider's opinion. Don't bud in.”

“But, Ishida-san and Souya-san's education also shows suitable results.”

Ishida and Souya's groups seem to be growing more naturally as human beings.

However, will they grow up to be geniuses in the true sense of the word?

Even if they grow up and become excellent human beings to some extent, it is doubtful whether they will be able to compete with the naturally occurring gifted and geniuses in certain fields.

On the other hand, Suzukake's education seems to have both big risks and big returns.

“I only care about results. I don't care about the process.”

“That's precisely why. That's the reason I chose to work under you; because I knew that you would let me be free. I knew that you would only care about the results.”

Unlike Sakayanagi showing his disgust, Ishida and Souya are acting as expected.

I won't say he has zero feelings towards the children, but he seems more focused on being a researcher.

The adults are gazing at the children Suzukake has created with a twinkle in their eyes.

After the tests on the academic side, the next step is to check their development in terms of physical exercise.

"The three groups have very different educational orientations, so unlike the study aspect, where we have standardized the testing methods, we tell each of them to express the abilities they have acquired in their own unique way."

The children Ishida educated are dexterously using their small hands to perform crafts. Souya's children are successfully using the iron bars and jungle gym to show their movement.

However, it is the children educated by Suzukake who are also astonishing in this physical aspect.

It is not only their dexterity and physical agility. They are also able to perform on the piano and have acquired a variety of other skills.

"This is a 3 year old playing...? I can't believe it."

Of course, it is obvious to anyone with ears that the children's skills are far from professional.

But even an adult could not play this well with just a little practice.

However, the important thing is not whether they can play the piano or not.

"How much more have you ingrained into them in just three years, Suzukake-san..?"

"My education is far above the average person's ability to learn. If you don't have the talent to learn in a short time, you will be punished endlessly. The brain naturally hates it and forces you to mature quickly. People who are small, but have the same things we have, have unlimited potential."

This is the difference by three years. Then, when it comes to 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years...

I wonder how much of a lead we will have?

I myself get goosebumps when I see this result.

The group trained by Suzukake was by far the best in the overall results.

Ishida and Souya forgot to hide their frustration and looked at Suzukake's data.

"You did well. You have shown me your talent."

"Thank you. But, I don't think there is a large difference of talent between me and these two. I'm rather impressed with how well they've done in their formal education."

"So even you praise others, huh, Suzukake?"

"The truth is the truth. Besides, as you can see, my children inevitably lack something."

"Emotion, right?"

"Yes. Ishida-san and Souya-san were nurturing the children with human feelings. That is normal. However, I have thoroughly eliminated them. I thought that by not allowing the ability to communicate through dialogue to flourish, I could raise the level of human potential."

The competition is only in terms of the brain and the body.

In other words, for Suzukake, victory was already in sight from the beginning.

"If you choose me as leader, you risk creating an impersonality that, to say it clearly, cannot be compared to the first-term students. But I believe we can create the strongest human being."

After three years of putting this research into practice, Suzukake was clearly convinced on this point.

"Ishida, and Souya. What do you two think about emotions?"

"There is no denying that the inhumanity factor will be heightened. But... I also believe that this is what the White Room should be. As one of the researchers, I would like to see the strongest human being cultivated by Suzukake-shi."

[TL Note 7 : "-shi" is an honorific like "-san". While this Japanese honorific isn't widely used in speech, The suffix -shi is used when politely referring to strangers, and is fairly formal.]

Souya, agreeing, also nodded.

"Very well. With Suzukake as the leader, we will now start to create the curriculum for the second term students. You will be in charge of what kind of training policy we will adopt."

"Thank you very much."

Suzukake bowed deeply, and looked to shake hands with Ishida and the others.

"I..."

Sakayanagi turned around, and was about to leave the room.

“I know you don't like it. However, this is also a form of education.”

Without looking back, Sakayanagi left the room.

I don't care if a considerable number of children will probably be sacrificed for the research.

If we can finally create the perfect human being, I would say it is a small sacrifice.

The goal is to train 100 people and make 100 of them perfect.

However, that is the ultimate final goal of White Room.

For now, the first step is to find out how far human beings can be trained.

In that sense, it is encouraging to have someone like Suzukake who is capable of fearless research.

Further, with the support of people like Ishida and others who have some common sense, it is also possible to prevent reckless behaviour.

It seems that we are already past the stage of grumbling about trivialities.

Now, it is my job to do my best to suppress this and to stop it from becoming public knowledge.

I must continue to provide a place to research without hesitation.

Part 3

After about an hour or so, I faced Sakayanagi.

How did an outsider unrelated to White Room feel after seeing today's results?

Needless to say, this is my best opportunity to find out.

"Let me ask for your opinion again. Of course, there is no need to hide anything."

"Let's see. I've been thinking a lot today while watching how the children have grown."

White Room's reason for being, and its usefulness.

I wonder if Sakayanagi was able to feel this first hand.

"The children I saw today were far from the ordinary 3 year olds I know. Needless to say, the children educated by Suzukake-san, and even those by Ishida-san and Souya-san, are probably better than 90% of the children in this world."

Sakayanagi's signature of starting his search with praise remains unchanged.

"I'm sure that even for a gifted student from a wealthy family, it wouldn't be easy to bring them to this level."

"But, are you saying that they can't compete with the remaining 10%?"

"Didn't you experience that yourself, Ayanokoji-sensei?"

We have been able to demonstrate that children who have grown up to the age of three have more developed intelligence and physical abilities than the average child.

There are certain results coming out.

However, the financial world was still skeptical, and I felt that we would not be able to dispel this skepticism.

If you ask me if they are as good or better than the gifted geniuses at age 3, it would be a gray area.

Even if I wait for the first term's children to grow up to four or five years like this, it would still not be conclusive.

"But, I thought that it was good enough.. If we can give these children, who may not get the education they want, this thorough education, we can give them the skills they need to be successful after stepping into society."

A general review from Sakayanagi, who does not know White Room's true shape.

"That's why I had some misgivings about Suzukake-san as the leader of the group. For children... No, for human beings, emotions are essential. It is not possible to be happy, angry, sad, or happy without any of them. If you can rectify this thought, I will not hesitate to continue my support and assistance."

"I see. I knew you would say that. But do you really think that will convince your current investors and those in the business world whom you have yet to meet? Not everyone thinks only of the children like you do. There are big interests involved in this White Room."

"Do you think even more rigorous education is necessary?"

"That's right. Anyone with a certain amount of money can produce brilliant students. We can have lecturers who graduated from top universities and coaches who have produced Olympic athletes. If you continue to educate the gifted from an early age, you can usually improve their skills to a certain degree. There is no point in having a White Room that produces nothing more than the same level of results. It's worthless."

Who would invest tens or hundreds of millions into the White Room then?

"What is needed is outstanding ability. The ability to go beyond Japan's top universities to become the best in the world, and the physical ability to surpass that of Olympic athletes. We need people who have the mental fortitude to compete with the best from around the world. That is the kind of power we need in the White Room."

"Isn't that a bit excessive? Not all children who have no parents or who have been abandoned by their parents are looking for that kind of power. It is enough to give them the ability to fit in and survive."

"I understand what you are trying to say. It's a good enough opinion for consulting."

"...Ayanokoji-sensei. The story you've told me is really true, right?"

"Of course. I am working to save underprivileged children. You know that I have my own ambition, but nothing more and nothing less."

Sakayanagi, who had been looking at me with suspicious eyes, bowed his head lightly as if he was apologizing.

"If that is the case, I have nothing more to say to you. Certainly, please give the children a caring and thoughtful education. If you do so, the day will come when the people will recognize the White Room."

After saying so, Sakayanagi left the office. He did look unconvinced, though.

“You’re naive, Sakayanagi. That’s no good.”

This world is not so naive as to accept such mere idealistic thoughts.

What I am looking for is not a reasonable result, but the best result.

However, it’s still not enough.

I want another push, and another push after that.

There is no guarantee that the current results will be enough to keep the investors nodding their heads forever.

A factor that will strongly push their backs...

I want a decisive blow.

However, imposing a more rigorous education on the children now will not produce immediate results.

It will take three years... no, five years, or at least that long.

It is necessary, to create a persuasive force.

What should I do..?

In a short period of time, how can I get the financial world to move in the direction of more money?

Think, I have to think...

This White Room may change the world.

I want these words of mine to have weight.

Weight, huh..?

“...I see.”

Here, I am reminded of the words Naoe-sensei said to me.

There is no real success, without cutting oneself.

No matter how passionately I talk about the success or failure of education, my words will never carry any real weight.

The financial world doesn't trust the White Room either.

Why is that?

It's only natural. No matter how far I go, it's someone else's education.

It doesn't hurt me.

With this, it's just some extended play.

It is necessary to show proof that one can safely leave their own valuable child in White Room.

For that, there is one thing I can do.

"...Hello?"

It's late now, but the owner of the phone who was probably still sleeping answered with a sleepy voice.

"Mika. I have a favour to ask of you."

Part 4

A red colour is illuminated at the end of the darkness, followed immediately by rising smoke.

I saw a silhouette emerge in my vision in the dim light, and raised my upper body.

“Sorry. Did I wake you?”

“Never mind, it's time to get back.”

The plan was to close things out at 11 p.m., but the date had changed.

“Politicians are so busy, huh? Working until this kind of hour.”

“It's easier to move around at night than in the daytime.”

Mika's brand of cigarettes changes every time we meet.

This is because every time Mika changes the man she sleeps with, it is an old trick of hers to show that she is tainted by him.

“How long are you going to keep doing this kind of work?”

“Right, I can't keep doing this forever. I have aged a lot since I met you, Atsuomi.”

Freshness is life for a woman.

Year by year, as time goes by, this freshness decays.

The world tends not to acknowledge this, and in fact, hates to put it into words, but only those who understand it will succeed.

If they understand this, they will gain a weapon other than their youth.

“My advice to you. It's time to wash your hands of this business.”

“Hearing that from you... It's a bit surprising.”

After smiling in a funny way, Mika got up from the bed, still stark naked.

“Well, I too thought it was time to move on. But I don't have a vision for the future. I don't have a vision of marrying someone and having a happy family. It's not like I'm going to have children, make friends, send them to primary school, and all that... heh, I laugh at myself when I think of that.”

"I think you'll do fine."

"I don't know. It's not often that people of the same sex like me. I might have a harder time than you think. But... I think I'll step out for a bit. You've made me a lot of money and allowed me to dream."

Mika's assets would be enough to just live decently.

However, this woman got her money at a young age.

She must be more than a little afraid to lower that standard of living.

"I need you to do one last big job for me."

I took out the marriage certificate I had prepared and put it on the table.

"Huh? What is this?"

"I want you to marry me."

"You're joking, right?"

"Of course I'm not joking."

"Atsuomi..."

As Mika approached, her eyes moistened slightly... and she gave a small laugh.

"What do you want? You're not the kind of man who would choose me, are you?"

"Don't I look like a man who wants a pure marriage with the woman he loves?"

"Not at all."

"You're right. It's a very different kind of marriage than the one you want, and it's only a formality when you roll it up."

I have a future I need to achieve.

For that, it is essential to have someone like this woman who has future troubles.

"What do you mean?"

"I have a new piece of the puzzle that I need in order to proceed with my plan. I need your help for that."

"Explain it to me in a way I can understand."

"It's a child. A child of my flesh and blood. It will be an important pawn in my rise to power."

Mika was taken aback, but eventually understood what I was saying.

"So... You want me to have a child?"

"That's right. Of course, I will pay you as much money as it takes to convince you."

"Wait a bit. Why me? There must be a mountain of women willing to happily give birth if you pay them money."

"If it were only about money. However, you are convenient for me in many ways. You have some influence in the financial world, and you're a good liar. The important thing is to deceive the people around us. There's no meaning if I have a child from a woman I don't know."

"I guess I'll have to play the good wife, huh..? Until when, though? Do you want to make me pretend to be your wife for years and years?"

"Don't worry. We will announce the pregnancy and hold the ceremony when the time is right. As soon as we have the baby, I'll let you go."

She understands, but she still can't perfectly grasp the situation.

"There is another reason why I chose you. Your origins are obviously inferior to the general social values. Your mother is an uneducated woman who works in the night business. Your sister is the same, divorced and living a life of no worth whatsoever."

"Wow, that's a bit rude, isn't it..? It is true, though."

If a superior mother gives birth to a superior child, that means it was already a diamond from the start.

"It is my job to polish a nondescript stone on the side of the road so that it shines like a gemstone. Refine it so that a mere stone becomes more than a diamond."

"But that doesn't mean that..."

"As I said before, it is absolutely essential to deceive people. It's easy to get an incompetent woman to be a surrogate, but it's hard to hide the whiff of artifice. One can't fool the financial world, which has a keen sense of smell."

If I want my precious child to appear on stage, I need to go through the proper channels. With Mika, more than a few people know about our connection, and they will accept it as a natural progression.

“You can choose the method you want, whether it's artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization, regardless of timing or method. Ideally, you should be able to have a baby within a year to a year and a half.”

I will entrust my own child with White Room, and further signify its existence.

Now this is truly a well-thought-out plan.

Chapter - 4

An Unprecedented Experimental Facility

Intro

When Mika saw the pile of cash on the white table, she couldn't help but let out a sigh of admiration.

"The amount is 50 million, I have arranged it in cash form as per your request, and it will not leave any traceable evidence."

I spoke to Mika while avoiding direct eye contact.

The 50 million does not cover any expenses associated with the pregnancy, including delivery and hospitalization.

"Politicians really do have free reign over money and everything else, huh? Was it easy for you to get 50 million?"

Mika said sarcastically, dressed in a suit she was probably not accustomed to wearing.

"Money is important, but I can provide as much money as you need to live. That's the world I live in."

As I detachedly spoke in a robot-like way, Mika laughed at me, as if fed up.

"The fact that your child will be born does not affect your heart at all, huh?"

"Then, are you going to tell me that you've awakened to motherhood now?"

"No way. If that were the case, I would not have given the child away. For me, the whole process of having and giving birth to that child is work, nothing more, nothing less."

I was relieved to hear that.

I could see in her eyes that this wasn't Mika's bluff, but that she was telling the truth.

"I guess I made the right choice picking you after all."

"I almost regretted it when my belly started to grow and the morning sickness started to get worse. I came here thinking I would complain or something, but when I saw all this money in front of me, I didn't care anymore."

Even for Mika, who had been receiving a monthly salary of well over a million, it seems a lump sum of 50 million was a different story.

I wouldn't want to hear any complaints in the first place, anyway.

The money I paid for her to give birth and the other expenses were more than double the market rate, even if I estimated them highly.

"Normally, I would have to pay almost half of this amount to the government."

"That's right, you have to earn 100 million to save 50 million, don't you? I can't help but think you're crazy if you have to pay almost half of this in taxes."

Mika tiredly laughed a little as she touched the surface of the roll of banknotes.

"Have you ever properly paid taxes?"

It is said that many people in a profession such as Mika's do not pay taxes.

"Now that you say it, I can't really remember. Well, I will start a new job now, so maybe I will, so I guess it's fine. More importantly, how have you been recently? Is everything the same?"

"Sorry, but I'm busy and I don't want to have a long talk. Let's just do what we have to do."

I took out the contract and held it out in front of Mika.

"If you want the money, write it down. You have the rights of the child until you sign here."

"You worry too much. Don't worry, I only had the baby for the money. I have no hesitation."

Mika had no intention of refusing the money, and she reiterated her willingness to accept it.

"No matter what, you will not be allowed to identify yourself as the mother in the future for the rest of your life."

This may sound like an insistent statement, but it is extremely important.

I cannot deny the possibility that the White Room would be exposed if Mika, who is well versed in the underworld, were to publicly try to get her child back.

"I know. Don't talk about me to that kid either."

"Of course I won't. There's no need to."

"Can you just tell me what's going to happen to him?"

I haven't told Mika anything relating to White Room.

So it's understandable that she's curious about the future.

"There's no reason for you to know that. Once the contract is signed, your relationship will be severed, so."

"Right, right."

As if understanding there was no point in further continuing, Mika started signing the contract.

"All good?"

Judging by the strength of her writing, there was no hesitation at all until the very end.

I'm sure there will be no apprehensions left after emphasizing things this far.

I gave instructions and had the attaché case containing the money put into the trunk of Mika's car.

It is a bit risky to carry such a large sum of money in cash, but both Mika and I agreed to avoid transferring the money via banks and such.

"I'll go now, then."

This would be the last time I would see Mika, and the last time I would speak to her.

As I was about to silently walk away, Mika took a few steps and then stopped.

"...Aren't you going to ask? What will I do with this?"

It was impossible to read the expression on her face.

However, I could detect that there was a hint of emotion in her voice.

"I'm not interested. You are free to go to that host or fly abroad with the money."

She was slightly surprised, but then understood and laughed.

"You knew? You knew about me and him?"

"I didn't have to investigate, the people around did that on their own."

"How long have you known?"

"Before I asked you to marry me and have a baby."

"Didn't you suspect that this was brood parasitism?"

[TL Note 8 : brood parasitism : (planting one's eggs in another bird's nest, as demonstrated by the cuckoo, etc.)]

Mika's eyes narrowed, as if she was messing with me.

"It's a question of before doubt. You would have predicted that I would do a postnatal exam. And if by any chance you were carrying someone else's child, you'd lose your reward. It's an impossible choice."

"Hehe, indeed."

"But you restrained yourself well. I must commend you for keeping your secret meetings with him to a minimum during our married life, and for being as discreet as possible to avoid detection."

I am unsure if that host really wants to make Mika happy.

At the very least, Mika's fortune should be over 200 million, including this 50 million.

Maybe 5, or 10 years? Until the money runs out, she will have happy days with the host.

"Atsuomi... Did you love me, even once?"

"You will do anything for money. That's the most valuable thing about you."

"That wasn't really my point... No, I'm sure you have nothing else to say."

I've never had any special feelings towards Mika.

And, at the same time, this woman does not even have a lingering affection towards me.

All the words here that seem to invite sympathy are an act to make her look good.

She likes young, good-looking, good-talking men, and above all, she values herself and money.

That is the woman called Mika.

"Farewell, Atsuomi."

"Wait. This is the congratulatory money from me."

3 million on top of the fee I had originally prepared for her.

I handed over the money to Mika, including the congratulatory gift, which might also be considered consolation money.

"You don't have to go that far. I wouldn't have sold this to a weekly magazine. I have done many black-hearted things with you too."

Mika has a lot of things in her life that she doesn't want to be revealed.

"I'm sure you're right. That's why this is a pure celebration money without any back and forth. If you don't need it, don't force yourself to take it."

As I reached out to pull up the money, Mika stopped my hand with a laugh.

"I have to have money to build my own home. I heard that land is getting more expensive these days, right?"

"You don't even know the underlying reason why land prices are going up, do you?"

"I don't know. As long as I have my money, I don't care, so."

"That's just like you. I'm sure you know, but it will be some time before you can officially marry someone else."

"Because the plan is for me to go back to the country while I'm still your wife, right?"

Until a while after I put the kid in White Room, we have to keep the marriage in place.

"It won't be that long. If you wait two more years, you can do whatever you want after that."

For that, I've already given Mika the divorce papers, complete except for the dates for me and her.

"One last thing. If you've decided on a name, I'll file under that name."

Since eleven days have already passed since the birth, there are three days remaining unless additional steps are taken.

"You're letting me decide, even though I have no right to the child?"

"The name is just a symbol. No matter who gives it to him, his substance as a human being will never change."

After a short pause, Mika uttered the child's name.

"Then, Kiyotaka. Make it Kiyotaka."

"It's just like you to suggest that."

I was a little surprised at this unexpected turn of events.

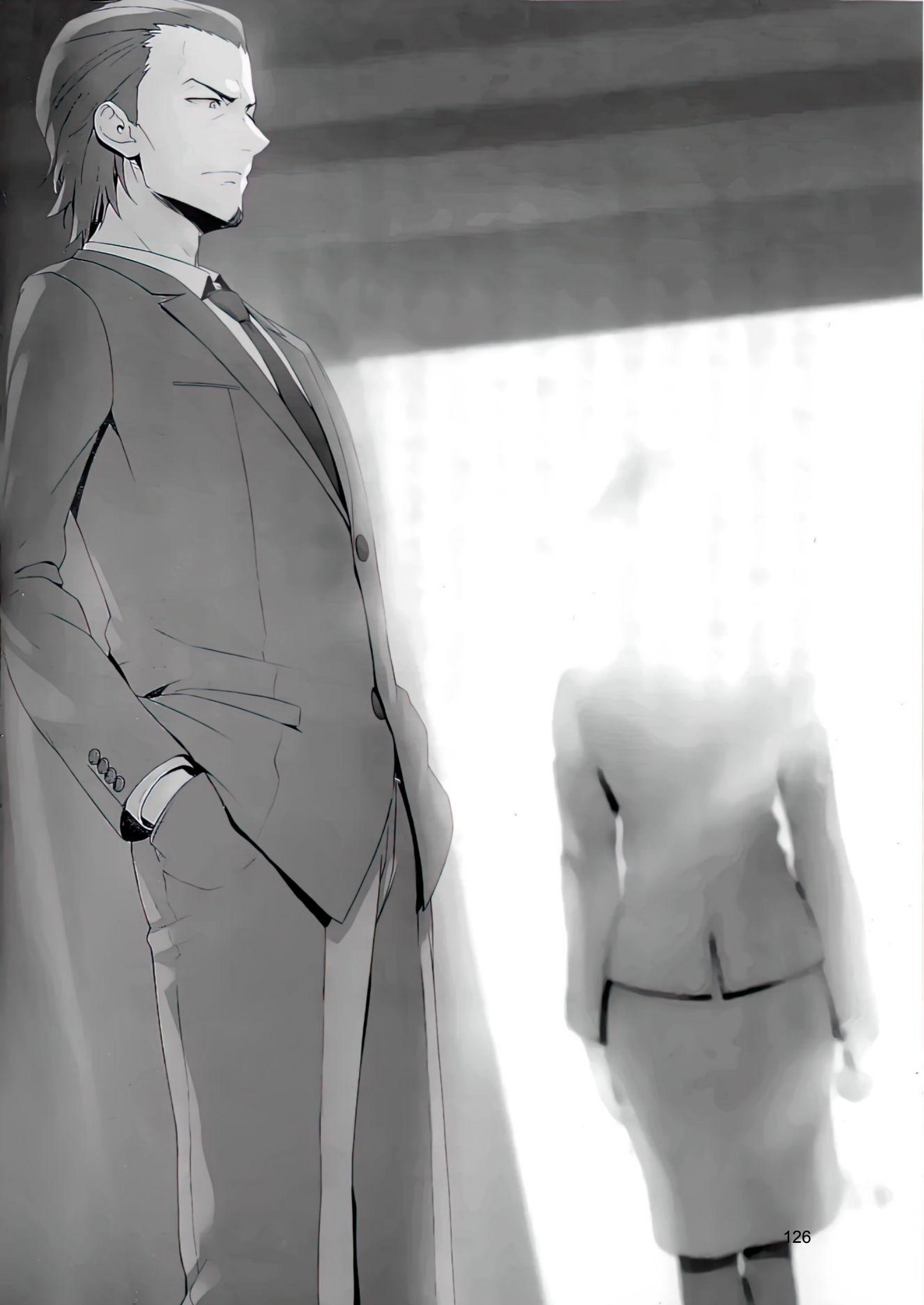
"Well, if it's going to be remembered by you, I thought this would be the name."

“That’s fine. I’ll accept it.”

“You really are a very calm, and cool-headed person. This would make an ordinary person angry, right? It’s the right answer to name him after the host I like... isn’t it?”

Mika started to walk away. This time, her legs did not stop.

“Farewell, Atsuomi. The time I had with you was a very important experience for me. Both good and bad.”



After Mika left, I wrote down “Kiyotaka”.

She shouldn’t have any complaints after I let her have that much money.

As the representative managing White Room, I put my child out.

If I can establish that track record, I can say that the money was a small price to pay.

As long as Kiyotaka can be useful for at least five years, there will be no problems even if he breaks down after that.

Because there is no need for my real child to be superior.

“She was quite a lovely woman, wasn’t she, Ayanokoji-san?”

Tsukishiro, who was waiting in the next room, appeared with the same smile as usual.

“You did great work too. I made you play detective.”

“I’m a jack-of-all-trades, you know. But are you sure you want to trust her? If necessary, you might want to consider getting rid of her. She may be quiet as long as she has money. But with the way she is, she will run out of money in a few years. Or, she could lose her money to a man running away with it, right?”

Yes, you never know with people.

If she loses the money in the future, Mika may appear in front of me again.

However, I hope she is smart enough not to choose to do that.

No matter how filthy and worthless a soul is, it is not a joyful thing to disappear for nothing.

“It’s a standard practice to make the first move, but it depends on the time. If Mika disappears, it creates other risks. It is necessary for her to exist as a mother for now.”

With the sequence of these events, it is clear that I have no attachment to my child.

If this was revealed by the person who was my wife on the family register, my credibility in the financial world would be lost at once.

“Indeed. It is just as you speak.”

“In a few days, my child will be delivered to me after the tests are complete. We will then begin the fourth term experiments.”

“Just like you, it seems that your son has a harsh life ahead of him.”

These words sounded like pity, but Tsukishiro had no such feelings at all.

Part 1

On this day when Kiyotaka arrived in my possession, I was gathering Suzukake and other researchers.

“Ayanokoji-sensei. This is the curriculum for the fourth term students who will begin this year.”

Tabuchi was using a computer with dark circles under his eyes.

I read through the materials projected on the big screen as he explained them to me.

When it was decided that Suzukake would lead the second term students, he created a curriculum with a total of 10 levels.

Now, the fourth term students will be assigned difficulty level 4.

“The dropout rate for first-term students who will turn five is 14%, the dropout rate for second-term students who are two years old is 6%, and the dropout rate for third-term students who are one year old is currently 6%. From now on, I expect more than 20% of the second term students to drop out when they reach 5 years old, and more than 25% of the third term students. I’ve increased the difficulty until now, but I haven’t touched the fourth term students yet.”

The higher the level of difficulty required of the children, the steeper the passing line becomes.

In particular, Suzukake's curriculum is structured in such a way that the difficulty level increases dramatically after the age of 6, when the foundation is solidified.

It would not be surprising if the dropout rate for first-term students also increases sharply in the future.

“I wonder how much the continued increase in difficulty will really change the situation.”

“We have only three sets of data, but even when comparing the abilities of the first and third term students at the same age, the students on the lower end increased by 11% and the students on the higher end by 37%. I think this proves that the educational method you have proposed is connected to the improvement of human abilities.”

The research so far seems to be going well.

If we continue to educate children in order, we will eventually be able to produce children who are incomparable to those in the first term.

However - it will take many years to achieve this.

“Also, there are several significant changes. As an example, we have analyzed the results of those who dropped out, and discovered some problems. One, is their extremely low social adaptability. The reason is already clear: 99% of them only lived in the White Room. The first term students in particular can only understand the outside world through fragmentary learning materials and pictures. It would be impossible for them to imagine and draw cityscapes in their minds. They did not even have a good understanding of what Japan and other countries are like. The second and third terms showed improvement as they began to learn through video, but they still lack the everyday knowledge that a Japanese child should have. Their lack of recognition through hands-on experience with vending machines, streets, shopping malls, convenience stores, and supermarkets in the city caused great discomfort to outsiders. Even if they remember these things in words and letters, they cannot respond naturally because they have no real experience with them.”

“So? What’s the solution strategy?”

“To put it simply, if we can take them out of the White Room and conduct something like extracurricular lessons, things will be simpler, but I know we can’t do that. The more people acting outside, the greater the risk that the facility’s existence will be known, and the impact on young children is immeasurable.”

Ishida continued his explanation and pulled out a pair of large goggles.

“This is where the virtual console comes in. Using VR, we can instill in them a strong sense of the outside world from an early age, allowing them to travel, learn, and memorize anywhere in the world.”

Souya followed up in agreement.

“Ishida-san’s idea is not bad at all. It would be great if they can understand the minimum common sense that they need to acquire in a virtual environment. Even if it is in a virtual space, things can be reproduced perfectly, and the experience of walking through the world will be imprinted on their minds. I think it’s going to be a lot easier to adapt to the outside world because the structure will be the same.”

If they don’t have to go outside the White Room, it would be a small price to pay.

I agreed, and approved the additional budget.

“There doesn’t seem to be any problems with the curriculum’s contents.”

Tabuchi nodded with satisfaction, and Ishida and Souya also stood up.

“I don’t mind if you use the virtual console. You can try anything else you want to try. However, I would like to have a different curriculum for the fourth term students this time.”

“Different, is it? What kind of change would you like to add?”

I looked at Suzukake, who had been sitting quietly.

“We will adopt the Beta curriculum.”

As I conveyed so, the researchers tensed up.

“..Huh? You... What did you just say?”

Suzukake was probably more surprised than anyone else.

“I said we are going to adopt the Beta curriculum. Don’t make me say it over and over again.”

Suzukake had created a curriculum with 10 levels of difficulty.

The Beta curriculum, which is the most difficult of the 10 levels, is the one that Suzukake named as the one that is too different from the others.

When compared to the third term, not to mention the fact that things are more rigorous compared to the education at age 0, the level of difficulty jumps by a great magnitude after the age of 6, which is when the fundamentals have been laid out.

Even I, not knowing much about education, judged that it was not feasible based on the curriculum and the limitations of the children that I saw from the first term education, and decided not to implement it.

“I explained it to you at the time. I divided the curriculum into 10 levels of difficulty, but Beta is on another dimension that will never be reached. In effect, the fifth or sixth level is the limit of human development.”

“I think he is right. The second and third terms we are conducting now cannot even be compared to the Beta curriculum. The current curriculum up to the third term is also certainly not easy, and it would not be a compliment to say that it has produced remarkable results. In such a situation, putting out the Beta curriculum now would do nothing but break down our sample materials—”

“I know that it is necessary for research to increase the difficulty level step by step. However, it takes time to climb up the stairs one step at a time. I would like to see the limits of human beings in this area. I don't care if they all drop out.”

“Of all the things, choosing this timing when your own son will be here..?”

“My son is the one who will receive the most rigorous education. This is the perfect opportunity. If we can create even one successful student in the Beta curriculum, it will be a great opportunity for future research.”

“...However, what kind of criticism will we receive from the supporters?”

"That's why I said we would adopt the Beta curriculum when my child is enrolled in the fourth term. It is for the sake of research. If I am to speak freely, I don't even care if he dies."

Everyone, including Ishida and the others, fell silent and were speechless.

"Are you... Are you really sure about this?"

Ishida may be an eccentric researcher, but he is still a human being.

That's why he's flaring at me, but he must have realized that this is the decision.

"Yeah. Assign the fourth level of the curriculum that you were going to assign to the fourth term students to the next fifth term students. The only exception will be for the fourth term students. Because there's no point in implementing an inhumane curriculum if it has no future."

It will not be too late even after all the results from the fourth term students are present.

"We have a reasonable sample of kids to finish things with this one time."

I showed him the list of children who will be in the fourth term, which I had kept secret up to this point.

"This is... A total of 74 names!? This is more than double the number of children in the third term, you know!?"

"I mostly picked up the have-nots that we can use and throw away."

The amount I paid to the Ooba group, and the black market brokers connected to them is not cheap, but it's not a bad thing to have some extra samples. I'm sure I've conveyed to these people how serious I am.

But, the truth is that there are a few children from the business world mixed in with the have-nots.

They must be dreaming of great growth in a stern environment. We took them in without accepting any responsibility.

However, I'm hiding which ones are from the financial world from the researchers. I don't want them to get involved in any strange ways.

Suzukake, who had been listening in silence, walked up to Ishida and the others who were not so enthusiastic about the idea.

"I myself have learned various things since I began researching with Ishida-san and the others. That there is a line one should not cross as a human being. So much that I regret

creating the Beta curriculum. I can see nothing but a result of breaking down, but, as long as you insist, Ayanokoji-sensei, we have a duty to carry this out.”

“But..!”

“As Ayanokoji-sensei said, as usual from the 5th term, this is a special case. It is also a great opportunity for me to reject the reckless curriculum that I have created. I know it will make the fourth term students cry, but I want you all to think that this will connect to the research of the future, and follow me.”

Suzukake who has been the leader for these few years also seems to have become quite the adult.

They constantly clash over the content of their research, but in the end, Ishida and the others nodded their heads in agreement, recognizing Suzukake's enthusiasm and determination.

“It's my job to worry about this. I'll be thoroughly involved in the education of the fourth year students too.”

Because, as a representative of White Room, I myself should be here to witness the results.

“...I understand what you are saying. Of course, I will obey your instructions. However, please let me make a recommendation for the treatment of those who have dropped out.”
“What do you mean?”

“I will speak clearly, but, the abilities of the children who have dropped out far exceed those of the average person. I can easily say that it is also a good accomplishment. I think that it is a waste to throw them away...”

“At which level are you talking about? Do you think that the objective is to enter a top university, or to win some competition among the masses?”

“N-no, that's...”

“That's good enough as a reason for the public. However, the true objective is completely different. It is to give birth to humans who have the strength to protect this country from the world, make this country stronger, and move this country.”

It's not as if we can simply create honour students, then send them into politics and win. What is necessary, what I want, is the ability to overwhelm others.

Someone who will never give in, someone who has a will of steel that will never sway.

Only a person who is appraised as a monster by others can cut their way into today's degenerated world of politics.

"Carefully care for and return the dropouts with a name to their parents. As long as they have exceptional abilities, they will be somewhat satisfied."

"...Then, what about the children with no names?"

"Same as planned. Send them to the facility you have set up and let them run wild. After training them not to talk about White Room, of course."

"But that alone makes it very difficult for them to become independent and integrate into society."

"So what? We've given them an education. Even though they have problems, they have probably shown more excellence than their peers. They'll have as many chances to crawl up the ladder as you want. Do you have a problem with that?"

Tabuchi is the only researcher who is strongly resistant to the general idea.

That's why I have to give him a firm warning.

"Shut up and follow my orders. If you disobey my orders, I will cut you off without mercy, even if it's you. Is that clear?"

"Y-yes. I am very sorry."

My cell phone rang. The caller was Sakayanagi.

"I'm leaving for a while. Please continue the discussion, including how to deal with the Beta curriculum."

I went out into the hallway and answered the phone just as the door closed.

"Ayanokoji-sensei..."

"What is it, Sakayanagi? You sound very gloomy."

"I didn't want to contact you in this manner, but I heard that you had a son."

"Right. I'm sorry I haven't been in touch. I've been in the middle of some things."

"...Are you really sure about this? This is your long-awaited son, you know?"

"I've been prepared for this ever since we decided to build White Room. I'm a man who educates abandoned babies. I never thought about having a legitimate family."

"But I think that's a bit of a leap. The babies at the shelter have an unfortunate history of being abandoned. Rather, they are happy because they can grow up in White Room without any problems. But, your son is different. He deserves the love of his father and mother."

"I've already made my decision."

On the other end of the line, Sakayanagi gulped.

“I’m sorry to turn this call around on you, but I’d like to consult you about one thing.”

“Consult me, huh..?”

“I’m sure you’re going to have a baby too one day. I’m ready to accept your child if you need me to.”

“... I’m not as strong as you, sensei. When it is born, I intend to raise my child together with my wife with all of my love and devotion.”

“I see. I knew you would say that.”

It’s Sakayanagi. I’m sure he will provide a proper education and raise an excellent child.

I’ll consider that as another result, and look forward to it on a personal level.

Chapter - 5

The Story of the Pure Children

Intro

Colour. Colour spreading through my view.

The first thing I took memory of was the colour white, equally spread over the surface.

Just like how it was named “White” Room, this facility’s underlying tone is white.

The ceiling is no exception to this either.

My first memory was that I was there, staring up at the completely white ceiling.

Before I even showed interest in my fingers, I was only thinking about what this white ceiling was.

Every day, every day, I passed time just staring at that white ceiling.

First I cried, I cried because I was lonely, but I eventually learned that no one would come to save me.

That’s how I think back on it now, this was not logic, but something I felt with my instincts.

This was the first thing that I, a newborn who could not even speak words, learned by taking in his environment.

After that, I noticed the existence of my fingers.

All day I stared at my tiny fingers, held them in my mouth, licked them, and passed the time without doing anything.

Cold adults carried in the necessary nutrition for me to keep living.

This did not change even if I got sick.

Treatment was carried out indifferently and I returned to my normal daily life.

No one hurried, no one worried, and no one delighted.

One day, I knew. That I was being raised here, politely, and at the same time, strictly.

Human beings have feelings of joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure.

However, none of these emotions are of much use in this facility.

My yet undeveloped brain learned this at a very early stage.

It's understandable.

Even if I laughed, or cried, was angry or sad, the teachers never came to help.

The only time I could move forward was when I showed results.

It is when I was two years old that I remember first understanding that words are words.

There was a teacher sitting in front of me, and I was sitting across from him.

With nothing else in between, the teacher was simply reaching out to me with open hands on both arms.

Before long, the teacher put one small gummy into his right hand, making sure that I could see it.

For the children who live in this facility, what we call snacks were extremely rare things.

This sweetness that I normally can't taste. I remember that I was no exception when little, and my desires were the same as everyone else's.

"If you can tell me which side the gummy is in, you can eat it."

The adult then grasped the gummy in his right hand, and offered it out.

His face was stern, almost expressionless.

On the other hand, the child he was facing - Ayanokoji Kyotaka, in other words, I, did not have feelings yet either.

Both sides were without feeling, but, in contrast to the teacher consciously working, I was in my natural attitude.

Further, so were the other children.

I could sense that the other children also knew feelings would only shackle them.

A one versus one of the adults hiding their feelings, and the children who have almost none.

"I'll give you three chances to miss"

The teacher, whispering so before me.

“ ... ”

I could not yet understand the adults' words and their structures.

Miss, chance, a two year old child has no way of comprehending either of these words.

However, he can sense by instinct what is being asked of him.

He can sense what is being wanted from him.

Just as I saw with my eyes, I simply touched the right hand.

The teacher opened his right hand without hesitation, and I could take one small gummy.

Besides me at the same time, the other children were also working to get the gummy.

All the teachers had grasped it in their right hands, and all of the children gave the correct answer.

“Next.”

This time, they took the gummy in their right hands, but quickly put it into their left hand instead right after.

Of course, I touched the left hand without hesitation. Correct again.

I repeated this simple work four more times after that, and was granted four gummies in total.

They weren't that sweet, but as rare candy in this White Room, they were popular with the children. I was no exception, and I remember that I loved the taste of this gummy.

“Next.”

Round 5.

This time, the teacher put his arms behind him and offered up his hands after grasping the gummy.

The force in his hands, and their positions were mostly the same.

The teacher's expression did not change either, and I could not see anything different in his eyes.

With this, there was no way of objectively identifying which hand the gummy was in.

No matter which one you pick, it would be 1 in 2.

So, in this case, I will prioritize time.

I touched one at random.

The right hand was empty.

The other children were spread between the two but their rate of picking the right hand was higher, though I'm sure there was no reason for it.

But, after all, the teachers were all holding the gummy in their left hands.

"Next."

The teacher once again hid his hands behind himself, and offered them out after holding the gummy.

I wondered if they were going to continue with this simple 1 in 2.

There's no meaning to either choice, but maybe I should pick the left hand to make sure. No.

After thinking for a short moment, I decided to look around first instead of answering right away.

The children were focused on the teacher and the gummy in front of them, and did not even glance anywhere else.

This time, most of the children picked the left hand, but the correct answer was right.

So, the possibility that the teacher before me is holding the gummy in his right hand is high.

When I pointed at his right hand, he opened it just a little, and the green colored gummy showed itself.

"Next."

There is no being praised even if I get the right answer, but at least I can eat a gummy.

While rolling the gummy around with the tip of my tongue, I focused again. The teacher held the gummy behind his back again.

Then, he put his hands out at the same timing.

Of course, I looked around again this time too, but...

Even though all the children had given their answers, the hands were not opening.

“You’re the last one.”

In other words, they will not open their hands until all the answers are collected.

As it was now completely a no-hint situation, I just pointed at the right hand.

However, we all missed it. Both the children who pointed right, and the children who pointed left.

At this time, a lot of children had missed for the third time, and became unable to gain another chance.

I also only had one last chance left.

“Next.”

Just like the past two times, he grasped the gummy with his hands behind his back.

I could not think of any way to judge which hand it was in, and they didn’t seem to be opening their hands even after the other children had given their answers.

With this, there’s no difference between picking right or left.

That has to be true.

...Or...

My last one chance.

What if it isn’t in either one of these..?

The teacher didn’t ask which hand the gummy was in.

He only said to point where the gummy is.

In other words, maybe there is the possibility that the gummy is hidden somewhere other than his left or right hand.

Thinking with my infant brain, without touching either finger, I pointed at his back.

“...”

He was just looking at me, without answering.

“Why did you point behind me?”

“Gummy, not, hands.”

I answered in such a way, not able to perfectly control my words yet.

Still silent, the teacher opened both hands at the same time.

Then, I saw that there was a gummy being held in his right hand.

“That was unlucky. The correct answer’s right.”

After answering so, the teacher put the small gummy into his own mouth.

One of the remaining two children correctly answered right, and was given the gummy.

“Special for you, I’ll give you one last chance.”

He took one gummy, grasped one with his hands behind his back as if repeating the same thing, and put them out.

I thought that his hands behind him were empty, but it was actually in his right hand.

So, was it just a 1 in 2 chance, without hiding it from the start?

Or, did he estimate that I would think so after he hid it two times, and purposefully grasped one?

Isn’t the possibility that he actually has one higher than the possibility that both his hands are empty?

The remaining child pointed left.

I wonder what I should do...

Left, right, or hidden behind his back?

“Behind.”

After thinking about it, I gambled.

I threw away the right and left hands, and judged that both were empty.

The teacher opened both hands. There was a gummy in his left hand.

“That was unlucky. You missed again. Are you frustrated?”

It is true that I am disappointed.

I nodded slightly.

That’s not because I wanted a gummy.

It was frustration against my own idea not working.

“He is different after all, this child.”

The adults who had gathered besides me were muttering to each other.

As I could not comprehend complicated words at 2 years old, I only remember that time in enumerations.

“All the children other than Kiyotaka only earnestly picked right or left. However, Kiyotaka observed the choices in his surroundings, and was even conscious of the third choice of the gummy being hidden. Further, even after it was clear that the gummy was not hidden, he still did not abandon the idea that it could be hidden. These aren’t the thoughts of a 2 year old infant.”

“Maybe you’re thinking too much about it?”

“But, in all of the other tests until now too, this child’s way of thinking and viewpoints have been different.”

Inside the thoughts that I could not comprehend, I etched the teacher’s words into memory.

I may get some hints from this conversation after this.

When I have grown to be bigger one day, I can just open this drawer and do what I have to do.

“...It’s creepy how he’s looking at us. Like he can understand what we’re talking about.”

“Impossible... He’s 2 years old, you know. There’s no way he comprehends any words other than the minimum necessary ones.”

“That’s true, but...”

The buzzer rang, and the announcement for the test’s ending echoed through the room.

The adults looked at each other, ordered the children to stay as they were and left the room.

None of the children cried, but instead looked on at the familiar scene.

No one asked for help.

Because, by 2 years old, this was already drilled into our flesh and bone.

Part 1

Another remnant of the memories I've dug up.

Sometimes, I remember these while doing the work to erase unnecessary memories.

"Sit down and say your name."

Say your name.

My brain received this instruction, and a transmission from my brain towards my throat occurred.

"Kiyotaka."

That's my code. My enumeration.

An important factor to differentiate human beings.

All of us White Room students have learned our names as a way to differentiate each individual.

However, we were not given our surnames as infants, and the teachers all called us by name.

There was no reason to know it at the time, but, learning our surnames would give birth to inconvenience.

It was obvious that they were anxious about the possibility of us connecting to our specific identity.

At around 4 years old, new curriculums started being put to practice one by one.

"The learning test will be conducted now."

The thing representing this would be the written test.

Everyone corrected their postures, and faced the test paper.

The letters were composed of five categories: Hiragana, katakana, *alphabet*, numbers, and simple kanji.

[TL Note 9 : It just says "alphabet" here. But in Jp text it would be referring to the latin alphabet.]

We have already been taught how to write in the period of one year after 3 years old, so there is no hesitation in my fingers holding and moving the pen.

If I don't get a specific result within the time limit, I will be punished.

At the same time, they will also check how good our handwriting is.

There will be no points added for well written letters, but points will be subtracted if I panic and write badly, so caution is necessary.

No one in this facility questions whether or not we can solve the problems we face.

If you ask why, the only answer will be that because everyone can do it.

The ones who cannot are eliminated at 3 years old.

Our group, which they call the fourth term students, was at first 74 people in total.

However, as mentioned before, the children who were unsuccessful have already dropped out at 3 years old.

Because of that, we are currently 61 people, but, except for sleeping time, we're spending most of our time together.

The written test was 30 minutes, but the contents were such that if you solved the problems without hesitation, only a time of half a minute to 3 minutes was necessary.

This is the same for all the written tests that have been conducted in White Room.

Solve the problems, and move to the next one. Find the answer and write it down.

At the same time, I'm checking if the problem I solved before was correct.

After writing everything down, I raised my right hand right away.

After signaling that I'm done, I turned the paper around.

Getting a full score is the minimum requirement in the written tests. Both good writing and speed is required.

This is the 7th written test since we've become 4 years old, and I've been getting first place for 4 times in a row.

24th place in the first written test, 15th in the second one, 7th place in the third one; I wasn't at the top right away.

I used the time to understand the structure of the written tests and get a grasp on the logic and optimization needed.

After unraveling the mystery once, I never lost it again and I've certainly polished myself further.

The difference between me and the second place has been widening each time the written test was conducted, and it got up to around 5 minutes.

Even if I get a full score, even if I finish in first place, no one would praise me.

After everyone cleared the test, we moved to the next curriculum.

"Now, we will be conducting judo. Everyone, change your clothes and follow the teacher to another room."

Wrestling.

Like the written tests, this was also added with the curriculum when we were 4 years old.

It's already been 4 months since I've learned judo.

As the basics were hammered into me, I progressed to the point of being able to do randori in real fights.

[TL Note 10 : Randori; free-style judo training.]

"Haa!!"

My field of vision swayed, and a sharp pain ran through my back.

In confrontations with the teachers, the children were always made to suffer hardship. Of course, I'm no exception to this.

"Get up!"

Beaten into the ground without mercy, unable to breathe; but they won't let me rest.

If I don't get up instantly, thick arms will fly at me again along with a scolding.

I was beaten into the ground again and tried to defend myself, but the damage was too much to breathe through.

As I was pinned down on the ground, the same thing was being repeated all around me. The children were all writhing in pain while crying or sobbing.

"I... I can't stand up any more...!"

As if asking for mercy, Mikuru weakly clinged to the teacher's legs."

“Get up anyway!”

Her arms were forcefully pushed out and he demanded her to stand up, but her body doesn't seem like it can move.

The fact that she is a woman will not in the least be taken into consideration in this place.

“I'm telling you to get up!”

Mikuru, being kicked around on the floor and spitting out vomit.

Of course, the adult isn't actually kicking her seriously.

Even so, it is obvious to anyone looking that the force is unbelievably strong.

“I won't show mercy, even to a kid! You should know that by now!”

A normal mind would have a strong resistance to hurting a child to this degree.

However, the teachers who were called to this White Room were not normal.

They are the kind of people who would not even resist sending women and children to the brink of death.

“No matter how many of you disappear, no one will cry for you! Stand up on your own and come at me!”

Mikuru, convulsing and unable to focus, tried to stand up by pushing herself with both hands.

“Yes! That's right! Show me your spirit!”

“Uh, uuh... uhh... uh..!”

However, perhaps because the kick from earlier was a critical one, Mikuru collapsed and lost consciousness.

“Tsch! A coward, huh? Carry her away right now! She's a hindrance!”

The teacher stepped around angrily, and yelled out while forcefully eliminating Mikuru.

I'm sure one would think this is a pitiful scene.

In which case, they should rethink things.

This is only the start.

The excessive reactions like Mikuru's are fading away day by day, and even her expression towards pain is fading away.

Even human instinct is being eliminated as an unnecessary function.

It is natural to be thrown around. It is natural to have difficulty breathing.

It is natural to be in so much pain that you can't help but weep.

Further, even thinking about all of this is a waste of resources.

The only way out of the situation is to try and reduce the number of times that we can be thrown around within the time limit.

Of course, the most ideal option is to defeat your opponent.

However, the opponent's strength, body structure and technique are all overwhelmingly superior.

There is no need to say that it is no simple thing to close the difference between an adult and a child.

Everyone stood up, battered and bruised, after being forced to fight hard and without breath.

After receiving the strict training of the teachers, at the end of the day, we have an obligation to conduct randori with three people.

I have learned that any prey that looks like he has weakened is destined to be hunted down by the strong.

My total record is 144 battles.

127 victories and 17 defeats.

Further, currently, I have 64 victories in a row.

Our opponents are on a rotation unrelated to gender, and this time Shirou silently stood before me, preparing his stance while waiting for the starting signal.

Shirou has an overwhelmingly positive record with 135 victories and 9 defeats.

I faced him two times until now, with 1 victory and 1 defeat.

I lost at our first randori, and haven't lost since after the rotation came around again, but he has the most skill in judo among the other students.

Precisely because this is a strong foe that I cannot be lenient against, my sensibilities are sharpened even further.

Shirou is always aggressive and takes the initiative in his fights with others, but today, his third fight, he took a wait-and-see stance and seemed to be aiming for a counter-attack.

I welcomed this, as I want to increase my attacking experience facing a strong opponent.

“Begin!”

Along with the teacher’s voice, we started our struggle and fought to the bitter end with defeat on our backs.

Win or lose, we will move to the next curriculum as if nothing happened.

Karate is the martial arts that started a little later.

Here, the students take more blows from the teachers compared to judo.

I’m sure the variety of martial arts will increase as we become 5 or 6 years old.

There was a common awareness of this among all the children.

Part 2

At around 5 years old, the number of children decreased further, and we suddenly became 50 people in total.

No one cared.

We have no leeway to do so.

Here, the only thing required of us is our own abilities.

There is no end.

No, even if there is, it is far, far away.

If you stop moving once, you can't catch up again.

One would think this is unusual.

I don't.

For me, this is what's usual.

A dinner, some time after our numbers had decreased by quite a lot.

The dinner is progressing with all of us gathered together.

During the dinner, the teachers left, and the children were left alone with each other.

However, no one directly conversed, not even once.

It is so much that I've never heard anyone's voice without a teacher between us.

Why don't they talk?

It's not like the teachers are forbidding it.

It's just that there is no need for conversation, so it isn't happening.

We know each other's names through the teachers, and we also know how well everyone can study, and each person's athletic ability.

All of our inner abilities are clearly visible.

Fundamentally, there aren't any foods I like or don't like.

The rule of eating anything that is handed out to you doesn't change for anyone.

In other words, there is no need to converse about the meal either.

There is also no awareness of us being students learning side by side.

A presence that doesn't help or hinder you simply becomes the surrounding scenery.

"I don't like this..."

I could hear a girl with the name Yuki, who always sits before me, muttering so with a tiny voice.

Private conversations during dinners are not forbidden, so this doesn't count as problematic conduct.

It's just that no one feels the need to talk with each other, so they don't.

In this situation, this is the first change.

I thought she would give up speaking after no one replied or reacted, but Yuki didn't do that.

"Kiyotaka, do you like it?"

Facing me in front of her, she asked if I like or dislike carrots.

Should I reply, or should I not?

However, I've never held any feelings of liking or disliking carrots in the first place.

I don't see it as anything but a type of nutrition that human beings should consume.

Beta carotenes make up the majority of the nutrition in carrots.

Its function is to turn into Vitamin A after being taken into your body.

It protects your cells against aging, and maintains the health of skin and mucous membranes. It's also very important for protecting against viruses, and-

"Do you like carrots, or do you dislike them?"

"I don't like them either."

The one who answered wasn't the person she asked, but Shirou sitting to my left.

Perhaps surprised by this, this time Yuki quickly moved her gaze.

While having my attention drawn by the two's conversation, I checked the security camera.

Even this dinner is, obviously, being watched by the teachers every day.

I'm sure they're picking up sounds and voices too. Seeing as there is no reproach or reaction, it seems that conversations like these are allowed after all.

However, we haven't even once been encouraged to have conversations like this.

As long as there is no merit to having a conversation, there is no need for me to react to the two.

Do I like carrots, or dislike them?

The answer was that I don't hate them.

After dinner, I'm always a bit lost. Because I don't know how to kill time.

As it was the most comfortable thing to do, my best choice was to simply sit and wait.

However, it seemed to be different for Yuki, as she was walking around the room by herself.

I thought it was a waste of energy to walk around, but I just watched in silence.

It was when she was right in front of my eyes after walking around the cramped room three times.

"Ah..."

Yuki was about to fall down in front of me as if she had tripped.

I instantly offered my hand, and stopped her from collapsing.

"It's weird to fall down when there's no reason to, huh?"

After I said so as I analyzed the situation, Yuki was surprised with wide open eyes.

"Or, are you too exhausted? No... It doesn't look like it, though."

I could not understand why she tripped over.

Further, it seems that it was the same for Yuki.

"Mhm. I don't know why I tripped even though I'm not even tired. It's a bit weird, huh?"

After saying so, she showed me an expression that I had never seen before.



The mimetic muscles on her cheeks, her orbicularis oculi muscles, and the wrinkling muscles near her eyebrows created a new expression.

I haven't ever seen it from the students learning along with me, nor from the teachers.

It seemed that the fact that I found this curious was also conveyed to this girl.

"Huh...? Just now, I..."

I can perceive an expression of confusion and embarrassment.

It's only natural.

I haven't learned of such a thing. No one taught me about such expressions.

However, I do know about them as information.

It didn't take long to learn that this was a "smile".

Something that human beings possess as an instinct after being born, no, maybe even before birth.

Perhaps that's exactly why she can do this without having been taught how.

Part 3

The rules the children are taught in order to survive this world are not that many.

However, there are a few strict rules.

That did not change, even after I became 5 years old.

7 o'clock in the morning.

"It's time to wake up."

Along with the guidance of the featureless mechanical voice, the timer rang without even one second of a delay, and I began waking up in my small personal room.

Before I got up, a staff member came in and removed the attached electrodes.

After I got up, he quickly performed a health check.

I didn't fidget, and my everyday life spread before my eyes.

After checking if there was no change in my height or weight, I finished my business in the toilet.

Urinalysis is done once a month and a small amount of blood is drawn at the same time.

After the inspections ended, the staff member left without even greeting me.

After that, I rehydrated and warmed myself up with 30 minutes of basic training.

After keeping daily physical records such as grip strength, everyone went to the training area at the same time, and we performed our assignments divided by gender.

The possibility of wondering what will happen if you don't complete your assignment, does not exist.

If you ask why, it's because it's already decided that everyone will complete their assignments.

Those who cannot keep to this will not be stepping into this room tomorrow.

This series of processes ends towards 8 a.m.

Nutrition being an important point in breakfast, compared to when we were little, it has become more efficient with vitamins and block nutritional meals and such.

Does it taste good, or not?

Do I like it, or dislike it?

This still doesn't matter.

You eat what you are given in the order that they are given.

Only, and only that.

After the meal ends, the day's curriculum starts.

With language and mathematics as the beginning, we started studying a lot more subjects such as economic studies and political studies.

This is repeated until noon with small breaks in between.

At lunch, we eat a similar menu to dinner, and the curriculum starts again in the afternoon.

After continuing to study before a table until 5 p.m, the physical education starts.

Everything ends at 7 p.m.

Until now, we haven't spoken out of our volition even one word.

After finishing lunch and bathing, it's 9 p.m. when the physical examination ends.

Here, for the first time, something called a meeting where you speak about the day was set up.

Conversation in the tiny space with no teachers and only children.

However, it isn't as if we can talk about any theme we want.

How did you feel about today's studies, and how did you deal with them?

This time is for organizing and scrutinizing such things from the side of the learners.

As long as the adults don't hear anything they consider unnecessary conversation, they won't intervene.

Regardless of whether it is beneficial or not, as long as you maintain the rules, this is a time you can stay silent.

It's about 30 minutes, but I always simply listened in and never felt like talking to myself.

Even if we are allowed to speak between just the children, the adults are fundamentally always listening in.

I am certain that even these conversations are a part of the curriculum.

However, it isn't as if we are given a specific assignment.

At the same time, perhaps this is also to hear what the children are really thinking.

If they clumsily set up an assignment, it will naturally become a conversation just for that.

Towards 9:30 p.m., we are all returned to our personal rooms.

We are obliged to go to the toilet and be laying on the bed by 10 o'clock.

Electrodes are put in, and lights out.

The medical check is never skipped.

365 days, no matter what kind of day it was, time is set aside to confirm the situation after that day.

With that, the day ends.

Our educational policy, from waking up to going to sleep.

One day in the White Room.

A world that doesn't change in the entire year.

Part 4

Once every few years or months, sometimes, a big change happens.

That is when, among the children, numerous students who cannot keep up with the curriculum begin to become visible.

As the studying increases in difficulty by 2 or 3 stages, they begin falling behind.

It was clear that even if we all studied the same amount of time, there are differences between individuals.

The first time we learned addition.

The first time we learned multiplication.

We should have started on equal grounds, but excellence shows itself before long.

You can somehow manage to move to the next step on the way, but the children who stand out by falling behind too much trip on the next step after that.

I am sure it isn't as if the adults welcome the children dropping out.

However, they cannot keep allowing a child to stay in the same place as the others if they can't keep up.

There will be dissonance if the children who cannot keep up are left alone, but if the other children were made to fit with the children who cannot keep up, then the children who are in the front will have their rhythm broken.

They'll lose their next chance to learn.

That's precisely why the work of "culling" the children is necessary.

"10 minutes left."

Before conducting the culling, there is a special high difficulty writing curriculum in the periodical learning ability test.

I noticed something while repeatedly studying every day.

The fact that this special written test's difficulty increases in accordance with the top grades from the previous tests.

In other words, when you get a full grade, you move the standard of the whole test up for everyone and, next time, it becomes even more difficult for the children who got low grades.

Conversely, if the top students' grades are lower than a perfect score, it will lower the ceiling for everyone else.

No matter how hard the problems are, excuses such as making a tiny miscalculation or a careless miss won't be accepted.

That's why the children repeatedly check their own answers even after solving everything within the time limit.

Because it will all end if there is a hole somewhere, they desperately consume the test paper.

Leaving aside such busy things, I simply continued staring at the front with a pen in my hand.

I continued pretending to challenge the test.

I am not worried about even the slight chance that I may have written something down wrongly.

As for the reason, it is because I don't make such mistakes.

The questions on the test paper and the written answers are imprinted word for word in my head.

"5 minutes left."

With the announcement, the sound of the writing around me became more intense.

Perhaps in an impatient state of mind, I can hear the sound of the pressure from the eraser by my side getting stronger.

This test is numerous stages higher in difficulty than the last one.

During math time, when we were solving problems about the equality conditions arithmetic means, geometric means and such, something strange happened.

I had almost half of the 30 minutes left to write the final problem, and had only been staring at the front of the room for the remaining time, waiting for the ending signal.

Suddenly a man, a representative of White Room, entered the room with a grim look on his face.

It's not the first time an adult has shown up in the middle of a test.

This happens in cases such as there's someone who couldn't keep up with the test and hyperventilated or collapsed, or there's someone having spasms or convulsions.

Right now, I don't sense any children like that.

Very rarely, someone may have recklessly cheated, being too preoccupied with solving the problem.

However, I learned quickly that the objective was no one else but me.

He stopped a bit in front of me to my left, looked at my test paper, and quickly looked over to me.

"Kiyotaka."

Since my name was called, I looked up.

"Remember this well. One who possesses power but does not use it is only a fool."

As for what I had done, it's as if it was already obvious.

"Leave the room."

After being ordered so, I followed the man and left the room.

"What is it?"

"What is it? You understand the intent behind my question, don't you?"

I was made to sit down in the small room I was led into.

"Looks like you solved all the problems, huh?"

"Yes".

"Are you sure that you will get a perfect grade?"

"I am not."

"Of course."

The test's problems are purposefully restrained to 80 points.

"Why did you cut corners?"

"I haven't been instructed to cut corners."

Even if I don't have a perfect grade in this test, I know that I will not be dropped out.

“Are you aware that you are already driving the front of this period?”

“Yes.”

“So, there can only be one reason that you cut corners.”

After saying so, the man pointed at me and answered like this:

“Is it because you noticed the structuring of this curriculum? If you get a full grade, the 4th period students’ special curriculum will increase in difficulty. Naturally, the number of dropouts will increase. Did you want to stop that from happening?”

That answer is correct.

“Is there actually some sense of comradery growing inside you towards those children?”

I see, so this is the conclusion that the adults came to.

“Did it look like that?”

“Yeah, it did.”

“How did you feel about that, Ayanokoji-sensei?”

I am interested in the answer.

“Cutting corners to help your comrades or such, is not going to help anyone at all.”

I am sure that it is indeed so.

I’ll ask myself.

“That is wrong.”

I’ll deny.

“Then try arguing me down.”

Being ordered to do so, I put my own thoughts into words.

“In the first place, I have never seen the children around me as comrades.”

“Then why didn’t you try to get a perfect grade?”

“The teachers already estimated that I would get a perfect grade. So, there is no need to write it down on paper each time. It’s more time-efficient to finish it with an empty paper.”

Using your power when not needed, is precisely nothing more than a waste of resources.

“That’s a presumption. Knowledge thins out with time. That’s why you keep doing your best to not forget. Even if you have the ability to get a perfect grade, there can be errors in your memory or mistakes. It is necessary for you to keep aiming for the highest condition.”

“That is not wrong.”

“You stated that very definitively, huh?”

“Besides, the reason that I cut corners is different.”

“What?”

“I know that if I don’t cut corners, the percentage of children who drop out will greatly increase compared to now. In other words, if I cut corners, the world changes into one where the children who were supposed to drop out still exist.”

“That’s right. That’s what’s called a feeling of fellowship.”

“That is wrong. I thought that I would lose my chance to be in contact with the children who will drop out, and lose out on experience.”

The teachers looked at each other with puzzled expressions.

My brain, seeking knowledge, is looking for answers by analyzing any pattern possible.

“It is simple to throw them away at this stage. However, I am still in the learning stage. I want to learn the things that only the weak can see, that only the weak can feel.”

“Are you saying that it’s too early to make them drop out now?”

I nodded.

Before long, most of the children around me will become unable to keep up.

“Do you intend on earning knowledge, and standing above us? You’re not the one to decide that. We’re the ones who make the choice on who is adopted or rejected.”

“Of course. Everything is determined by the state of the White Room.”

Even if this man tries to squash me with logic, it’s useless.

The only thing that matters is that the only choice I had was to cut corners.

Still, I’m sure it’s not simple to accept this decision.

Even if I get 0 points, the ones who will judge if I cut corners in the end are a third party, the teachers.

I won't be disqualified with that.

Still, it is only natural that they can't obsessively treat someone who got 0 points like someone who got 100.

"Isn't this okay? If this is how he thinks, maybe we should see how everything goes."

"What do you think, Suzukake?"

"I agree with Ishida-san. If he is doing something we haven't even thought of, then that's exactly what we're looking for."

After the men fell silent for a while, he dropped his gaze over to me.

"Do whatever you want. Just make sure you don't forget what I said."

That those who don't use the power they have are fools.

Leaving aside the question of if that is reality or not, this was the moment that I decided to memorize it as something of interest.

Yet at the same time, a different emotion peeked from my face.

That is, the fact that I began to feel that I don't like this man.

Now, I could understand Yuki's feelings a little from when she said she disliked carrots.

When I was returned to the room and took my seat, the buzzer rang.

At the same time, the children all put the pens they were holding down onto the table.

That is the rule, the regulation.

However, only one of the sounds of a pen scratching and writing on the paper had not disappeared.

This isn't rare either.

One young boy, continuing the test while breathing heavily and sobbing.

Even after the automatic door opened and the adults came in, there was no change in the fact that he looked to be continuing the test.

His right arm was forcefully grasped.

“No! Let go! No! I can, I can still solve them! I can solve them! W-waah, waah! I don’t wanna drop out!”

Realizing his own defeat on top of the extreme pressure, he scattered his gastric juices on top of the test paper.

The gastric juices stuck to his clothes from the nape of his neck, but the adults restrained him from both sides without paying attention to it, and pulled the resisting child out of the room.

The children have lost their feelings, but the time of the tests alone is an exception.

It is a case of losing your reasoning as your instincts get awakened with death before your eyes.

Some looked towards him, but most of the children are looking ahead without taking any action.

“Waaaaaaah! Waaaaaaah!”

The cries that I had never heard the likes of until now echoed, and moved to the other side of the automatic door.

When he was taken out, the door quickly closed and silence returned.

He really doesn’t know anything.

That no matter how many points you get in this special curriculum, you won’t be dropped out.

If you can’t even distinguish that difference, it can’t be helped that you’ll drop out here.

Part 5

Fundamentally, there were no feelings of liking or disliking inside me.

Not just with food, but also with the curriculums.

I respected the traditional culture such as music related things like piano and violin, calligraphy, and tea ceremony.

I spent the days just challenging the subject before me, but among that, there was one thing that I was not very into.

The curriculum was newly introduced when I was 6 years old; it was a lesson that was conducted once or twice every month for half a day.

It was a study named “travel”, which used a virtual console.

Standing up, all the children put on large goggles.

The screen quickly lit up and the program appeared, then, a while later, it started.

“You’ve been learning about America overseas with places such as New York and Hawaii, but this time we will conduct the curriculum at the center of Japan. First, we’ll start with basic public transportation.”

The basic premise of the study.

The fact that this world is not just the White Room.

At this time, we are quickly told that it is still time for us to learn, and that the children cannot leave this place until they become adults.

The virtual console reproduces the same scenery as in real life in 360 degrees with a quality that could be mistaken for the real thing, and the visuals are accompanied by sound, creating a sense of realism.

Even the people passing in the scenery of the city are recreated, such as a salary-man in a suit, an old man with a cane, or an old woman trying to get into a taxi.

Of course, there are also the figures of children, but unlike the real outside world, you can’t see them playing around and having fun, and instead they’re just mechanically moving around like machines.

In this place, we learn about history and the structure of the world.

In order to adapt to the world without any problems when we leave into the outside world one day.

I know that it is necessary, but I think there are problems with this method of learning.

One of the reasons that I am not enthusiastic about this is that there is something unpleasant about this which I can't put into words.

Something that is commonly described as "3D sickness".

The possibility has been raised that an imbalance between visual perception and perception by the semicircular canals may cause the brain to falsely believe that it is seeing a hallucination.

There is no way to stop the sickness on an individual basis; the only way would be to let the brain learn over time.

It wasn't so hard that it was impossible to continue, but this is the reason I could never like it.

Of course, this virtual console is not only used as a visual device to perceive the outside world.

It was also used as a tool to develop our observation and insight.

We were asked to spot unnatural points in the story as it unfolded in various locations.

If the point was wrong, or if we could not find the unnatural point itself, the instructors would mercilessly instruct the students.

The method of this instruction varied, but it was mainly something that caused pain to the person.

That's precisely why we observed with bloodshot eyes, trying not to even blink.

With the danger to our life we feel sharpening our senses, we can see things that we could not before.

As I was walking through Tokyo City with the virtual console, the screen was suddenly covered in darkness.

The voices of the teachers reaching my ears also stopped, and everything fell silent.

"Everyone take your goggles off."

Hearing the voice not coming from a microphone, but from inside the room, we all obeyed the instruction at once.

“There is a technical problem. This will be it for the virtual console today. There is around 30 minutes until the next curriculum, so you can keep waiting here.”

Along with that instruction, all the goggles in our hands were collected.

“Wait, huh..?”

It looks like most of the children intended on killing time while standing still.

It seems that the technical problem cannot be solved right away, so the teachers decided to move onto another curriculum.

The children were, of course, immediately lined up and changed their minds towards the next process.

“I will start reading names. The ones whose name was called will follow the teacher and move.”

Along with this instruction, three names were called at the start.

In the end, I was the last one to be called.

As I obeyed, the instructor slowly walked and invited me into my personal room.

A one on one with the instructor without any other children.

There was only a table and two folding chairs at the center of the room.

“Sit down, now.”

It wasn't as if I had stopped, but the instructor said so while hitting the table and ordered me to take my seat right away.

As I sat before the instructor, he spread five cards that were in his hand.

There were different marks on each of them.

From left, it's circle, square, cross, star, and wave.

“I will show you what I'm going to make you do after this. Make sure you observe well.”

The instructor and I faced each other, and the side who had the lead turned all the cards around.

The five cards had the same pattern on the backs, so in this situation, it is impossible to tell which card has which mark.

I suppose I am to guess a specific card from among these.

That's what I thought, but...

The five cards, rearranged.

"I will give you 10 seconds at one time."

"...Square."

Saying so, the instructor turned over the card on the left end.

It was a star.

He missed, but the instructor continued with saying marks and turning over cards.

"Circle, star, cross, wave..."

From the second card to the fifth one, wave, square, cross, circle.

Only the fourth one, cross, was correct. In other words, the correct answer rate was 20%.

"This is the cycle, which we will repeat 10 times. Look carefully."

5 guesses, 10 times. In other words, 50 in total.

They calmly kept repeating the same thing.

In the end, the correct answer ratio was 15 from 50; 30%.

"It's your turn now, Kiyotaka."

"Yes."

The teacher who was the answerer stood up from his seat and I sat down in his place.

I wonder what the objective of this practice is.

I'm sure it's not to trigger a superpower or something.

Saying it differently, is it to train our intuition?

No, it's hard to think of this as a legitimate and realistic training for that.

The instructor mixed five cards.

He uses an overhand shuffle to mix the cards each time.

Is this just a habit, or is it intentional?

It is impossible to determine, but it is easy to dismiss it as meaningless.

If it does have a meaning, I wonder what it is.

The material of the table makes it seem smoother and easier to do a wash shuffle while on the table.

Is he using an overhand shuffle on purpose?

Another thing that bothers me is that when the instructor arranges the cards, they are not always arranged from the same position.

Sometimes he lines them up from the left end, sometimes he starts in the middle, then the right end, then the left end.

I don't think there was any kind of law as far as I could tell from the 10 times I saw it.

I can't just dismiss this as a habit.

On the back side of the cards, even if you stare at them closely, you can't feel any difference.

In other words, I don't think either the instructor or I could tell the difference.

However, there is a big difference between me and the instructor.

That is, whether or not we can touch the cards or not.

When mixing, distributing, and flipping the cards, the instructor is the only one who does all the work.

What if... He doesn't want me to touch them?

It has to be because the teacher can see the answer on the cards, even though he shouldn't be able to.

Yet, even if he can see it, I still can't see it.

I am not forbidden to reach out and touch it, but is that the right answer?

At this point, it is clear that this is not just an exercise in intuition.

Then, a possible rule I can think of is...

Five cards are laid out and the 10 second count begins.

In order to increase the percentage of correct answers by even 1%, I decided on the first mark to utter.

"Star."

When I answered, the instructor flipped the leftmost card with an unchanging expression on his face.

The "star" appeared.

It's still only 1 in 5.

"Wave, square, cross, circle."

The instructor flipped the cards from the second to the fifth.

The marks I said were turned over as the correct ones.

"There's still 9 times left."

"Yes."

With the recent correct answers, I am convinced of one rule.

Then, the rest is easy.

9 more times. I correctly guessed 45 more cards in total.

"...Correct answer ratio is, 100%."

As he finished collecting the last card, the teacher stared at me.

In those eyes, was hidden a feeling that shouldn't have been there until just now.

"I never thought you would hit the mark after just one time."

The teacher who showed the practice to me at first. If it's just the explanation of the rules, repeating the same thing just one or two times would have been enough.

That is to say, it wasn't a simple explanation of the rules.

They purposefully hid that it was a test of memory strength, and tested how quickly I would notice this.

"Still, this perfect memory strength is a little hard to believe..."

"Didn't you memorize them too? They were all lined up in the same way as the first time."

“...Impossible. The only thing I memorized were the 5 small chips on the cards that could not be seen with the eyes. The reason I could line them up in the same way as the first one is because I received instructions from an intercom set up in my year.”

“That’s why there was a camera on the ceiling, right?”

“...You noticed that too?”

“It looked like it was being hidden, which I felt was strange.”

When I entered the room, he called out to me in order to focus my gaze on one point.

Further, it was also unnatural how he rushed me to sit down.

If for some reason they wanted the curriculum to progress quickly, they would have been in a hurry even before I entered the room, and the practice they showed me should have been done faster.

“You’re the first one who passed this curriculum in one try... You can go back.”

“I will take my leave.”

Thinking of this as a change from the virtual console curriculum which I don’t like much, I can say that this curriculum today was much more fun.

Part 6

There are many exclusive special rooms in the White Room for the various curriculums.

Among those, there is a warm water pool where we can swim in through the entire year.

Swimming is thought to be very important for training your physical capabilities.

For the children whose bodies are not completely developed yet, swimming is a perfect fit with its low load on the body.

Further, the time we spent in the water was very important for the children to release stress too.

The lessons took two hours at a time, with 10 minute rests after every 50 minutes.

Then, there was 30 minutes for serious competitive swimming with competitions and target times.

After that was over, the children were given 30 minutes of free time.

We could either relax in the water or take a break from swimming.

I always made it a habit to go up to the poolside and watch the children as they spent the remaining 30 minutes.

"So this is where you are, after all. You set a new record again today."

"I haven't reached the time set by the instructors yet, so."

"We are children. They're adults. It's not weird that we can't beat them. It's more that I can't beat you anymore, Kiyotaka, and that makes me a little bit nervous."

Until a few weeks ago, Yuki was the fastest swimmer, regardless of how she swam.

"The difference in our records have been widening ever since you passed me once. How can you swim so well? We've been practicing the same amount, but..."

"Breath taking."

"Huh?"

"Your form is perfect when you are swimming, but when you take a breath, your form is off. If you improve that, your time will increase a little."

"I see... That wasn't pointed out by the instructor."

"The instructor in charge of swimming doesn't tell us everything. I think they're making us aware that we have to find out for ourselves."

It's not like I haven't noticed.

"You're not just looking at yourself, but also into your surroundings. I don't have such leeway."

"I'm just getting to grips with this too."

She's behind the curve on a lot, especially the curriculum that we're taking on for the first time.

If you haven't mastered the basics, you are inevitably focused on learning and not on the results.

On the other hand, people like Yuki and Shiro often achieve good results the first time.

They don't know the fundamentals as well, but they are able to quickly learn them.

Sense, you might say.

That's the difference.

But, I don't envy them.

It has been proven through many curriculums that even if there is a gap at the beginning, you can make up the difference by learning and consolidating the basics.

It's okay to be bad at first. You can build the foundation and learn to apply yourself first.

Yuki is looking at me as I stand there, not walking away.



"...Do you need something else?"

"Is it weird that I'm talking to you if I don't need anything?"

"It is. Normally, you only talk to me if you want something."

"You really don't change."

Without looking at her, I began thinking about Yuki.

Recently, she has been talking to me more often.

Further, she's speaking in a different manner than she usually does.

Why is she doing something inefficient like this?

It's not a bad thing as an object of observation.

Besides, the instructors aren't close by listening to us right now, so we won't be scolded for this.

Of course, I can't deny that we may be being observed, but there is no need to aggravate things.

"Can I ask one thing?"

"Huh? Sure, but..."

"Why are conversations your strong point, Yuki?"

"Huh? Are they... my strong point?"

"You're better than me, at least. I can never become motivated about speaking, no matter what I do."

"It's not like I'm so enthusiastic about it either, but... It's just that... Well... I'm not sure."

She's talking, even though she herself doesn't understand why? Now that's impossible to understand.

"Then, how come you're able to laugh? You laughed before, right?"

"Why? ...I don't know that either."

"You don't know? Even though you can laugh, you don't know why?"

"I mean, I'm not laughing now, so."

Indeed, Yuki did laugh before, but I don't remember seeing her laugh since then.

Was she able to laugh just once by coincidence?

Are feelings something that just come up by coincidence like that?

"I don't know, but I feel like I can laugh again if I'm by your side."

"I can't comprehend that."

Is it that you don't feel like laughing unless you're with someone specific?

No, maybe that does make some sense.

When the instructors show feelings of anger also, they are mostly faced towards someone else.

Smiles, too, are something you show others.

Thinking of it that way, I can understand.

I looked at Yuki.

"...What?"

Let's try laughing.

I thought so, but I couldn't understand how to laugh.

I haven't even learned the basics of the feelings of joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure.

If I don't have the basics, I can't do anything.

"It's nothing."

If it's something I haven't learned, then feelings are not needed after all.

I stopped thinking about this any more.

Part 7

Children are designed to forget most of their memories from infancy, such as at the age of one or two.

It seems this is called infantile amnesia.

The young memories that can be recalled in detail are usually from around age 3.

However, if you ask if memorization is completely impossible in infancy, then it's a no.

Some can remember the details of their infancy.

The proof that this is true is nothing else than the fact that this child before my eyes, remembers well.

"...Flawless."

For him, he is just looking back on his memories and putting them into words.

However, it is something that no ordinary human being could ever do.

An experiment with gummy bears at age 2, and the curriculum that followed.

The casual interaction in the pool. Kiyotaka is choosing the necessary memories to remember and keeping them.

He remembers so vividly that I want to dismiss them as a child's fantasies.

After hearing about the past seven years of Kiyotaka's life, Tabuchi and the others in front of him are very excited.

"If we announce these research results, the scientific community will be shocked...! This is incredible, Ayanokoji-sensei. Your child is showing results that are on a whole different level than the children up until now."

"Tabuchi, it doesn't matter that he's my child. Just tell me how "incredible" he is in a straightforward way."

"Y-yes. It is proven that memorization is possible while the baby is inside the mother's belly. However, the learning ability of infants is extremely untrained and unstable, so it was commonly accepted that they could not keep their memories. Or memories are stored, but as they develop, they are buried deep within and cannot be retrieved. It was thought to be one or the other. However, your son... No, Kiyotaka, is able to easily retrieve them."

"What do you mean? How is that connected to his excellence?"

"For example... If we take only the three years between the ages of 0 and 3, he has a memory advantage of 1,095 days. Of course, it's not that simple, but the secret of his overwhelming learning ability is also tied to this."

So, even though the children started side by side, there is a big gap in their abilities at the age of three?

"He's a genius, no doubt about it!"

It must be the nature of a researcher to talk like this with unquenchable excitement.

However, we cannot simply rejoice in this.

White Room would be meaningless if he were simply dismissed with the word "genius".

"Unfortunately, neither I nor Kiyotaka's mother are very bright. In that sense, it can't be directly linked to heredity, but, we can't deny the possibility that this is a mutation either, can we?"

"That's... That's right. There is much about genes that we still don't understand."

"Listen. This organization's objective isn't to find people who were geniuses from birth. Don't forget that our standard is to raise excellent human resources, no matter how good or bad their DNA is."

The simple fact that we can create something like this is a joyous occasion.

But, it would have been better if it wasn't my child.

Looking at it as a third party, people will mistakenly see this as me giving my own child a special education.

The fact that most of the children from the same period and the same curriculum ended up as useless trash should be something to regret.

I gave the instruction to return Kiyotaka to the other fourth period students.

I'm planning to show the situation of the fourth period students to Sakayanagi, who will be coming as a visitor.

"This is a proposal to make good use of his abilities, but what do you think about letting the children other than the fourth period students learn of his existence? Competition will increase their abilities. I think it will be especially effective for the children aiming to get first place among all of the periods."

It is true that you can only aim for the highest objective you can see.

If you are at the top in a small environment, you will understand that there is not much more room to grow.

Including Ishida and the others, most of the researchers agree with this opinion.

However, Suzukake spoke out in disagreement.

"It's not a bad idea. I agree that it is important to have goals, but if they are unattainable, they are meaningless. That's how big the gap is between Kiyotaka and the rest of the children."

"...You have a point there."

"The important thing is to make them feel that they may be able to catch up even though they feel it's a high goal. We should control the information we disclose and make his abilities appear lower than they really are. The children at the top will still doubt his very existence, but we can show them evidence of his actual existence in a way that cuts through indirect scenes."

So, after that, the rest of them will automatically continue to fight in a world of rivalry and non-communion.

"You can do as you please, but please do not favor Kiyotaka and continue to educate the remaining fourth period students as you have done in the past."

"Even if the number of dropouts continues to increase, right?"

"Yes. I don't care if Kiyotaka fails. If we can see the results of the more-than-imagined achievements, we can determine the line of defense for when more outstanding students are born in the future."

We must not be satisfied with immediate results, but must aim for even greater heights.

If my son is crushed in the process, we will be able to gather some sympathy from the outside.

We will make our enthusiasm for this project known.

"About the fourth period students being given the Beta curriculum, there is a cause for concern. The end result of this rigorous education is that they mature mentally too quickly."

As Suzukake replied so, Tabuchi quickly continued with his explanation.

"I'm afraid that, when they are around high school age, they will possibly have the psychology of a person that is 20... No, 30 years old. Combined with the alienation of not knowing about the world, it will have the reverse effect of giving them an infantile surface."

So we must also think about the possibility of going overboard.

“We need a different approach somewhere. Can they learn of their own will, and keep growing? However, I’m sure that would be quite the gamble. They will change a lot with effects from the outside, and their value as a work of art may decrease.”

Having led the camp up until this point, Suzukake’s face is heavy and stiff.

That is enough proof that he is at a loss as to what to do from now on.

“Excuse me. Sakayanagi-sama has entered the inspection room as planned, but... What shall we do?”

It’s about time we should go out there, but...

“Keep him there for a while. Keep the curriculum we’re showing him simple as planned. If we show him something too stimulating and strong, he may end up rejecting it.”

I stood up from my seat, and stepped into the inspection room without going to Sakayanagi right away.

Then, I activated the sound on the cameras set up in the inspection room. Sakayanagi is fundamentally in a neutral position, but he is in a position where he may turn over to the enemy side one day.

The possibility is low, but I can’t deny that he may have come here to scout the White Room. First, I will see the degree of this risk.

I can see Sakayanagi’s figure on the screen, and a girl who seems to be his daughter under his arm.

The two seem to be watching the White Room students through the magic mirror.

“Look, Arisu. These are the children that may be in charge of Japan’s future one day.”

It seems that it was not her father’s initiative to offer to visit on his own.

She’s looking inside with her hand on the glass, as if taking it all in.



5 minutes, 10 minutes, without getting bored.

“What is it, Arisu? It’s rare for you to be so interested in something.”

“The experiment to artificially create geniuses. There is no way I would not be interested in this.”

“...Words unfitting of a child, as always.”

I can’t sense anything artificial between the father and the daughter.

“Just, aren’t there a lot of problematic points with this experiment?”

“What do you mean?”

“I think they will be criticized from all sides on a humanitarian front.”

“Ha, haha...”

She possesses the same viewpoint and feelings as an adult, so much so that you would not say that she is a child.

“Above all, I don’t think that you can artificially create geniuses. Even if such a presence stands out in this facility, would you not say that it is simply the result of the experiment?”

I had intended on meeting them after making some judgments, but I became interested in Sakayanagi Arisu’s viewpoints.

I don’t get many chances to hear a child’s opinions on the White Room.

“Why do you think that way?”

“In the end, I think that the ones who stand out are simply the children who have excellent DNA.”

“I see. Indeed, the curriculum that the children are receiving is strict. There is the possibility that the children who survive that may have already been excellent from the start. You really are wise, just like her. You have the same personality too.”

“I’m happy to hear that. I want to be like my mother. That is the best praise that I can receive.”

As she points out, it is difficult to distinguish between genius and mediocrity.

The important things for the process of a human being’s growth are indeed “genes” and “environment”.

The reality is that the children who have been granted the environment of the White Room aren't necessarily excellent from the stage of their genes.

"After all, even if there are children who survive the curriculum, it's just that they are blessed by their parents' abilities."

It looked like Sakayanagi was bewildered before the issue that even an adult cannot give an instant reply to.

"Who knows? It may be so, or it may not be. I don't know either. But, I can't throw away the possibility that the children here may be in charge of the future one day."

He explained so, but the girl did not seem to be very interested in his answer.

She's watching the White Room even more seriously than up until now.

"...That kid, he's been solving all the challenges so calmly and easily, huh?"

"Yeah, he's sensei's son. I think his name was... Ayanokoji... Kiyotaka-kun."

It seems that she quickly noticed how different Kiyotaka is.

"If he is sensei's kid, his DNA must be excellent, after all."

"Maybe. Still, even if sensei has graduated from a top university, that doesn't mean his motor nerves have to be good. His wife is also a really normal person, you know. It isn't as if either of his grandparents possessed outstanding talent either. Just, sensei has more ambition than anyone I've met, and is a man of unrelenting will that never gives up. That's why he became such a big man. So much that at a time, he tried to move the country."

"Then... Does that mean he is the most fitting subject for this experiment?"

"Maybe... For that person, he must be the ideal child. But... For me, I can't help but feel bad for that child."

"Why?"

"He has been living in this facility from the moment of his birth. For him, the first thing he saw was not his mother or father, but the white ceiling of this facility. If only he had dropped out at an early stage, he could have lived together with sensei. No, maybe it's because he's continued to remain here this long that he can receive sensei's affection... In that case... The final objective of this facility would be to raise all of the children here to become geniuses. But, it is still in the experimental stage right now. This is a fight with 50, 100 years in the future in mind. The children here aren't meant to show their own talent when they grow up, but to live here for the sake of the children of the future. The drop outs, and the ones who remain, are nothing but a sample."

"Father, do you hate this facility?"

The remark that I wanted to say in order to break through the core of the matter, came flying from the daughter.

Depending on this answer here, there will be a lot of things I will have to think about, but...

"Hm? Well... Maybe I can't honestly support this. If the children being raised here really grow up to be more excellent than any other. If this facility becomes a normal thing. I think that it would only be the beginning of misfortune, and nothing else."

I can't see much of a connection with Kijima.

The answer is just like Sakayanagi, who is, until the end, a good man.

"Please don't worry. I will break through that. I will prove that a genius is not something that is decided with education, but something that you are from birth."

"That's right. I'm counting on you, Arisu."

The father, happily patting his daughter on the head, doesn't seem to be hiding anything.

"By the way, father. I think I'd like to learn how to play chess."

There, I cut the sound from the camera, and stood up from my seat.

"I guess I didn't need to be worried."

However, I can't be too cautious.

Right now, as the time of the announcement is closing in, there is no telling what may happen.

Part 8

Repeat. Repeat. Repeat each day.

I repeatedly learn each day, as if continuing for an eternity.

In this world with almost no rest, I continued repeating the fourth term curriculum.

There is nothing more to tell any more.

No matter how complicated or difficult it becomes, the things I must do do not change.

Tomorrow, the day after that, and the day after that, and the day after that.

Repeat.

Repeat.

Repeat.

The next day, coming in as usual.

Learn something new again.

Breathe.

If I don't breathe, I can't live.

Being branded as a dropout is the end, because there is no taking that back.

Further, what's normal yesterday may not continue today.

The buzzer rang.

The children obeyed the rules and put their pens on the table.

At this time, this high difficulty written test curriculum is all finished.

The test papers were collected and the scoring started right away.

But, I already know most of the results before they come out.

All of the children remaining here have a grasp on how many of their answers are correct.

In the seat in front of me, there is a back slightly trembling.

I looked at it without anything in my mind, and waited out the time.

One instructor entered, and faced the trembling child.

“You failed.”

Before that child... Before Yuki, the instructor calmly declared so in the same way as usual.

With that, it was decided that one more person would drop out.

There were only four people remaining in the fourth period, but another seat has now disappeared.

“B-but...”

In the white room, a problem in the practice and learning stage is considered absolute.

The process up until the test doesn't matter, and it doesn't matter whether you take 10 points, or 5 points. The instructors simply continue the learning without halt.

Whether you drop out or not, is all decided at the periodical tests.

If you are not able to fulfill the requirements here, you are judged to have no talent and become a dropout.

“Get up.”

Short words with no impurities.

“No... I don't want to...”

If you answer that demand, it's all over.

You will no longer be allowed to live as a White Room student again.

Even if you deny it, it's still the same. Nothing will change.

Despite this, there are always children who resist like Yuki.

“Don't say it again. Get up.”

“Please... Give me a chance...”

Yuki continued resisting while squeezing out her voice, but the instructor cut his gaze and looked up to the second stage.

He must have called for support after estimating that there will be a struggle.

"I, I know that I didn't get enough points. B-but, I got through last day's physical ability curriculum. I... I should have gotten 5 points there too. I will study until next time, and I promise that I will be able to get enough points...!"

Leaving the begging Yuki aside, three new instructors came into the room.

If her grades are as I estimate, they were just short 5 points from the passing grade.

Those looking from the outside may say that it is only 5 points, but in the White Room, there is no salvation even if you are only short 1 point.

This is the reality among the many students who have been raised here up until now.

A child who has failed to reach the passing line once has a low learning ability.

That has been proven. In other words, if they close their eyes here and let her go until the next periodical test, there is no changing the fact that she will drop out again.

"Rotten oranges must be taken out. You will only be a burden for the others' growth."

I don't think they want to waste any more time than this.

One of the instructors reached out for Yuki's arm.

"N-no... No!"

Yuki stood up from her seat while pushing the arm away, and ran up to me in a state of disorder.

"Help me, Kiyotaka! I, I don't want to disappear!"

As tears overflowed, Yuki asked for help.

While keeping an eye on the instructor slowly walking closer, I kept myself uninterested.

"There's no way."

"...!"

[TL Note 11 : The small letter at the start here is just something for emphasis and doesn't translate to anything.]



I can't save her. No, I have no intention to.

"Please! I promise I'll work hard next time! I promise!"

"Next? Why didn't you work hard before that? You should have known that there is no 'next'.

"B-but..!"

Those who cannot work hard now, cannot do so next time either.

Just like how you have only one life, it is impossible to continue.

"But...! I, I can do it, so...! I did it before, so..!"

The instructors surrounded us.

"Eek!?"

I stopped the approaching instructor with my eyes, and spoke out to Yuki.

"It is true that you kept up with the curriculum other than the written test. However, you've only been going down year by year, and didn't show any signs of improvement. In other words, this is your limit, Yuki."

Even if there would be salvation, it would not be the child's decision, but the instructors'.

At this time, I couldn't think of this as anything but Yuki judging things wrongly.

"Come here."

"No! No! I'm begging you! Let me do it one more time!"

While raising her voice, Yuki showed a bizarre amount of resistance.

It isn't rare conduct for someone who has dropped out, but this is different from how Yuki has been acting up until now.

"You already know White Room's rules. Why are you making such a fuss?"

Including me, the White Room students can't comprehend the situation.

However, the instructors understand why Yuki is resisting so much.

Yet, they won't put this reason into words.

She was forcefully pulled away from clinging to my arm.

“Help me! No! Kiyotaka! Kiyotakaaa!!”

Again and again, she called my name, and asked for help.

“Help, me...!”

While collapsing, she reached out to me with her hands, seeking help.

Help?

The girl before me has already been told that she has failed.

The ones who fail leave this room.

And they never come back.

There are no exceptions.

Then, why is there a need to ask for help?

It is nothing but a useless effort; a waste of time.

“Please, I... No, I don’t want to... I don’t want to leave!”

The two adults who have been watching her refuse to leave the room rushed inside.

Then, they pulled the girl out of the room.

“No! No! Help me!”

I’m sure the remaining children are also looking at her with cold eyes, just like me.

Or, they may be afraid that they will be next.

It doesn’t matter.

As long as I can be the last one to remain here, I’m fine with that.

From the very start, I’ve been living in this world with that feeling in mind.

I continued living in this white world.

We continued learning in the same years together, like family, or, perhaps, on a completely different level, the crying came from a fondness for the opposite gender.

To be taken out of this place is to have yourself completely denied.

That’s why everyone continued studying, so that this would not happen to them.

But...

"Please wait."

I quietly whispered so and spoke out to the instructors.

"Who said you can talk? If you open your mouth again, it's not going to end well."

"That's fine with me, so please hear me out."

After I said these words, the instructor approached me without speaking or hesitating and struck me.

"I haven't allowed you to speak."

"Yuki looked ill since before lunch. She could not calm down during the test either, and she couldn't display her true talent on anything except the ability sections, so—"

As I was trying to continue, my chest was grasped and I was taken up.

"Being in a ready condition is part of your true ability. Do you think that kind of excuse will be accepted at this point? In the first place, she looked just fine this morning."

"That is true. However, if it was something she could not anticipate, that changes things."

"Something she could not anticipate?"

The instructor turned around, and looked at the other instructors surrounding Yuki on the ground.

"...She is bleeding."

It seems that the instructors have also noticed that Yuki was not in a normal condition.

"Bleeding? Was she wounded somewhere... Ah, I see."

"Yes. Normally, it can start as early as 9 years old, but this is quite out of the ordinary. Perhaps it is because of the high amount of stress she is under, unlike the students from the other terms. It looks like she has a fever too, so perhaps you can accept this as an unpredictable condition of poor physical health."

"To the doctor's office. We'll decide whether she's failed or not after properly examining her."

The instructor said so and gave the instruction, and Yuki was carried out of the room.

Yuki looked at me as she was being taken away while crying, but I did not meet her eyes.

“You did well to notice. I’d like to say that, but we would have noticed it after this even if you hadn’t pointed it out. It is a problem that you spoke without being allowed to, after all.”

“Will you punish me, then?”

Breaking the rules outside the curriculum brings with it bodily punishment.

However, in the end, that’s all it is.

I know that it will not go so far as to make me drop out.

“Are you making fun of me?”

“If you’re watching from the sides, please observe more carefully.”

“...You little shit!”

Too slow. The instructor squeezed his right fist with killer intent, but I dodged it.

“Stop!”

A different instructor quickly stopped the instructor that showed an extreme reaction.

“Don’t let a child’s words sway you, rookie.”

“...”

There are inexperienced instructors, but this new instructor is going to make more mistakes in the future.

That is why it is necessary to make this known now.

If he is useful, he will be educated better. If he is judged to be useless, he will be dealt with.

However, in the end, after this day, Yuki did not come back.

Part 9

After some time, the fourth term students disappeared, and there were the two of us left in the room.

Me and Shirou.

A few months passed after it became just the two of us.

We did not converse even once in that time, and each day passed in silence.

However, I don't mind. Rather, I thought this was more comfortable.

With my conversations with Yuki disappearing, I was able to focus more on my own learning. Today is the first judo day in a few days.

As the curriculums increased, the designated matches were only being held once every few days.

Still, both Shirou and I have been improving our techniques.

Although the competitions were different, the results of our training allowed us to apply and become familiar with many martial arts.

"Conduct randori with each other as usual. I'll be out for a moment."

As if he was called from somewhere, the instructor who was the referee left the room in a hurry.

Left with each other in the room, we began our randori as instructed.

Shirou has been repeating the same thing for tens, hundreds of times.

"Got a moment?"

What broke the silence that has been continuing for these months, was Shirou whispering by my ear.

I thought it may be a psychological attack, but his movements had completely stopped.

"It's been a lot of years since I beat you in judo, right?"

"That's right."

After my first two defeats at the start, I've continued winning every time.

“Boxing, karate, jeet kune do, it’s all the same. Even if I win the first or second round, after it turns around once, I can’t do anything any more. You really are incredible.”

Why is he saying something like this in the middle of randori?

“There is one thing I want to say to you.”

“...What?”

Trying to avoid the instructors’ notice, the close distance whispering continued.

“I decided to leave this facility.”

“The only ones who can leave this place are the ones who drop out.”

“That’s why I will drop out myself and leave. Looking at the tendencies of the dropouts and the adults chasing them out, I can imagine what kind of path to take. I know that I won’t be killed, at least.”

“What are you going to do when you leave into the outside world? Is there a point to this?”

“There is. I want freedom.”

“Freedom?”

“I want to be free. I want friends. Isn’t it normal to have such feelings? Look around. It’s only you and I left here. This is going to continue for 10 more years, you know.”

I don’t understand the meaning of what Shirou is saying.

Why does he want something like that?

“Are you not interested in the outside world? No, can you stand the suffering here?”

“I’ve never held such interests or doubts.”

“The one-sided knowledge we are granted. This cramped space. Are you satisfied with this?”

“I’m not dissatisfied, at least.”

I am clearly growing in the days that I’m learning in White Room.

Doesn’t he want to see how much he can grow?

“We can’t receive this education in the outside world. In other words, leaving would reduce the efficiency of my self-improvement.”

“...You’re strange, you know. I want to see the real world, not the virtual one.”

Objectively, I can see clearly that many children dislike having their lives restrained like this.

But, no one thought that they should drop out after not being able to endure this.

“I was convinced when Yuki dropped out. Looking at her, I was even jealous.”

“Right.”

If this is the answer Shirou came up with, then there is nothing for me to say.

“I thought you were the same as me. I thought that you would want to enter the outside world one day.”

“Sorry, but I never thought like that.”

“...I see. I wanted to invite you to leave with me, but...”

The adults observing, just like me, probably don’t know about his thoughts.

The fact that Shirou holds various feelings towards this facility.

He shouldn’t know of anything that he hasn’t been taught, they’re sure of that.

However, the discovery is that, just like the person before me, there are those who want nothing more than to leave the White Room right away.

I don’t know if this discovery will have any meaning after I become the last one remaining, though.

“I’ll go ahead... Let’s meet again some day, Kiyotaka.”

I didn’t reply to those words.

Just, I can feel his extraordinary determination. I can feel his spirit, something that I’ve never felt when he was trying to beat me in these fights.

The one before me is not an easy foe compared to the half-hearted adults.

But...



“Guh!”

I parried Shirou’s attack, and took the round in a clean manner.

As long as I’ve learned the same things as my foe, I will never be defeated.

If he puts out 120 units of strength, I will put out 130.

If he puts out 140, I will put out 150.

How comfortable the White Room is, how important freedom is, none of it matters.

The important thing is that there is still a lot here that I should learn.

In order to improve myself, this is a path that I should not avoid.

In other words, my curiosity for knowledge still remains in this White Room.

“That’s enough!”

Even if the referee wasn’t nearby, we are always being observed from the room on the second stage.

I beat Shirou down onto the mat, and the instructor let us know that this was the conclusion.

“I lost again, after all. I wish I better remembered the time when I won.”

Holding his head with his arms and breathing heavily, Shirou put to words his fading memories.

“I kept losing in these 5 years. I knew that even if I remained in this place, I could never win...”

“Are you really going to drop out?”

“Yeah. I will find the right timing, and leave this White Room.”

It seems that he doesn’t intend on changing his mind any more.

I cannot comprehend it. Leaving the White Room, in any manner, is death.

Letting yourself die. I cannot think in this way.

However, I’m sure Shirou has his own thoughts.

If he wants to harm himself, I won’t stop him.

“Goodbye, Shirou.”

“Goodbye, Kiyotaka.”

This was the last conversation between me and Shirou.

Part 10

A short while after that, Shirou dropped out.

The last person disappeared.

My memories after that became simple.

Without anyone to talk to in the real sense, depending on the curriculum, some days ended without even opening my mouth other than to eat.

Even after becoming completely alone, what I had to do did not change.

If there is something that changed, that would be mostly related to hand-to-hand combat.

I have been competing with White Room students up until now, but as they all disappeared, the opponents I fought inevitably were adults.

Around 9 years old, I defeated all of the instructors that had educated me up until then.

Perhaps that's why the instructors had now all hurriedly gathered inside the room.

"Kiyotaka. I will now make you fight with multiple people in the shape of an actual fight. Think of it as a compilation of everything you have learned up until now. I will allow you to use any method necessary."

"Yes."

"Further, no holding back is needed. You can fight with the intent to kill."

"Are you saying that it's alright if I actually kill them too?"

"Yes."

The large room for our practice. Adults that were wearing suits entered.

All new faces.

The adults looked at me, and started laughing like idiots.

"I thought it was a joke, but you're really making us fight this brat, huh?"

They are clearly different from the adults that have been teaching me hand-to-hand combat up until now.

Their movements were not flowing, but instead were rough and aggressive.

Are they supposed to be opponents who can fight in an asymmetric battle instead of an equal one?

The difference in muscle mass is obvious.

If I fight these opponents head on, I will lose even if I try a hundred times.

“I know this is ridiculous. It’s ridiculous, but don’t hold back. I’m telling you that you’re going to get that amount of money by just overpowering one child. You can think of him as someone who possesses extraordinary technique.”

Someone who seems to have a higher standing among the men told them so.

“Listen. You’re going to come at us like you’re trying to kill us. No, try to kill us. If you don’t come at us with the spirit and mettle befitting of that, I’m going to feel bad about beating you away.”

The man who seems to be the leader said so, and pointed to me.

He doesn’t need to say it; that’s my intent. I’ve already received my orders.

“If necessary, I will give you the weapon you need.”

Saying so, the man put his bag on the floor.

A metallic sound echoed out from the floor.

“It isn’t necessary.”

“...Are you saying you’ll do this bare-handed?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t think you’re messing with us, but... We’re serious too. Just pick one.”

I looked up to the instructor looking down from the second floor and asked for an order.

“It’s an order. Do as that man says. They should all be things you’ve already learned how to use.”

In that case, I will only obey.

I looked into the bag.

“Baton, stun gun, knife, you can pick whichever one you want.”

Indeed, they are all things that I have seen, held in my hands, and learned how to use in the past.

If I want simple lethality, it's the knife, but I want reach.

"I will pick this one."

I reached out to the baton without hesitation, and grabbed it.

The baton from the bag is about 30 centimeters in length.

"Do you know how to use it?"

"If I swing it, I will have a reach of 80 centimeters. I'm supposed to hit my foes with that, right?"

"That's right."

In order to win, I have to accurately break through the human's vital points.

I'm sure my foe doesn't have experience fighting an opponent of my stature.

I have to make use of the fact that it will be difficult to confront someone of small stature.

After a few minutes, as the last adult had collapsed with his leg broken, I raised my baton.

I'll hit the top of his head with this, and at least make him lose consciousness with one attack.

If I can't do that, I'll just have to make a second attack to crush his skull.

"Stop! Stop!"

After hearing the voice echoing through the room, I stopped my movements and lightly threw the baton far away.



The adults rushed into the room and helped the collapsed adult.

“What the hell is this..? Carry him to the doctor’s office right now!”

Looking at his condition and seeing that he is heavily wounded, the medical team carried him out on a stretcher.

“What are you trying to do, Kiyotaka?”

“I was ordered to try to kill them.”

In order to get a confirmation, I asked again if it is really okay.

So what’s the problem with this?

The instructors were speechless before the situation, but the room’s door was opened right away.

“A-Ayanokoji-sensei!?”

“Take care of these guys. I want to talk with Kiyotaka for a bit. Come with me.”

Orders are absolute.

I followed him without hesitation.

There would usually be numerous instructors by his side, but it looks like he’s alone today.

“I think you already comprehend this, but I am the one in charge of this White Room, and your real father.”

“I know.”

“I never directly called myself your father, so when did you find out?”

“When I was 4 years old. I remember hearing it when you were talking with the instructors.”

“I see. You’re continuously showing overwhelming achievements as a fourth period student. Before I noticed, it was just you left, and you’ve been continuing to silently show perfect... no, more than perfect results in the curriculums.”

Father. For me, that isn’t anything special.

Just, the reality that he is so. Nothing more, nothing less.

“For me, you’re a special presence.”

“ .. ”

“White Room has been in operation for only a short 14, 15 years, but I still can’t imagine a genius of your caliber being born in the years ahead either. Leaving aside the first, second and the third periods, even the fifth period students are nothing special. Of course, as the terms progress, we are reducing our shortcomings and overcoming our challenges, but...”

I think I’m not mistaken in that I am being praised.

However, as my father says, this is simply the truth.

“You can go back now.”

“Excuse me.”

What was the point of this conversation?

Perhaps it’s related to the device attached to my hand.

As if supporting this theory, the man began speaking.

“How were the results?”

“There wasn’t even a slight disturbance in Kiyotaka’s pulse, not while fighting and not while conversing with you.”

“His heart did not move a bit even after telling him that he was a special presence, huh? No, I think I can say that his heart already no longer functions as that of a human being.”

“For Kiyotaka, that is a strong point, and also a shortcoming that he cannot get rid of.”

“Ishida is right. It is fine to have a minimal amount of joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure and such, but emotions are still indispensable. It would have been enough if he had even half of what an average person has left, but in Kiyotaka's case, it is almost zero. He is suited to be an educator and a politician, but at the same time, he is not suited to be one.”

The two adults comfortably talked without hiding anything with the person in question just before them.

This must be a part of the curriculum too.

It doesn’t matter if I’m being praised or disparaged about anything.

The only thing that matters is whether I drop out or not.

“Perhaps it is impossible to learn joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure in the environment of the White Room.”

“Yes. However, he can lie skillfully when it is needed. Even if he lacks the feelings of joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure, I think I can say that he knows how to make use of them.”

“That’s precisely the problem. It is already too late for him to learn joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure in the White Room. In which case, there is nothing else to do but to change his environment.”

“...I don’t understand.”

“You don’t understand?”

“Up until now, I’ve educated many children from the first period to the currently running 13th period. As the difficulty of the curriculums also greatly differ, Ayanokoji Kiyotaka alone is clearly of a different quality. I can’t say that it is favoritism because he is your son, he is abnormal.”

“That is true. No matter how harsh the environment, Kiyotaka quickly shows his ability to adapt. Every child has hit a plateau, so why is Kiyotaka alone the exception? Why does he completely absorb everything we teach him?”

“I don’t know... It is easy to dismiss it with a word like atavism, but without investigating this matter, the White Room cannot be truly perfect.”

“If I can provide a stable supply of talented people equal to or greater than this child, my ideal will come true. Thoroughly clarify this. Don’t stop thinking until you comprehend everything. That’s what I’m paying you all to do.”

I will continue to receive this education.

What awaits at the end, what lies beyond the quest for knowledge?

That’s all I want to know.

Chapter - 6

Despair and Survival

Intro

Tokyo was unusually covered in a great amount of snow.

Today, at the end of January, I was in the Sazagawa *ryokan*.

The garden I could see from the window in the corridor was lit up and the night's snowy scenery spread before my eyes.

Kamogawa and I leisurely headed towards the meeting place.

On the way, Kamogawa stopped in his tracks and stared at the snowy scenery.

"Do you remember? When we were waiting for Naoe-sensei under the cold sky more than 10 years ago."

"Yeah, like it was just the other day."

"That day, you were put in charge of the White Room project, and I was also appointed. There were a lot of difficulties, but we were able to get this far."

That is very true.

I have more than a couple stories that I will take to the grave without telling anyone.

"You've grown a lot too. I think you've come to understand how politics works."

"Thank you. I was able to progress a lot working under Naoe-sense and you, Ayanokoji-san... no, Ayanokoji-sensei. My only regret is that I can't tell my father, who passed away last year, about all that we've done, but..."

Around this time last year, Kamogawa's father collapsed and died because of a heart attack.

Kamogawa wanted to directly let him know about the announcement of the White Room.

That the country is arranging an organization to take in and raise children.

Right now, the Advanced Nurturing High School for high school students is already running ahead of us, but we will go above that.

An organization to save the lives of the children who are born.

An organization to educate and turn the children into geniuses.

The White Room plan is something that will be an inevitable necessity for the world of the future.

Lives being thrown into the toilet. Lives being ended by abortion. Lives being killed by negligence.

Under the government's guidance, this will all disappear.

This plan is also a measure against the declining birth rates.

"We will put out such results that they will reach the heavens. Don't be satisfied by today, Kamogawa."

"Y-yes!"

This is a special day.

Different from back then, when we were waiting under the cold sky for Naoe-sensei.

After many twists and turns, the White Room experiment has started showing real results.

Today, finally, I will give a detailed report to Naoe-sensei, and go out onto the front stage.

My steps towards the sun begins now.

Without blood, hard work, and courage, I would not have succeeded.

We sat down on our seats first, and began waiting for Naoe-sensei who is to appear on the seat of honor.

I know it would be more mannerful to wait outside, but this is an instruction from Naoe-sensei.

In other words, I understand that he also intends to show me his gratitude with this.

"After announcing this project, Naoe-sensei will finally rise up to the summit of this country."

"Prime minister... right?"

With this, preparations for the coming election are perfectly complete.

"Not a simple prime minister. He won't just have the honor, but also more actual power than any in history."

In the true sense, I can say that he will be the man at the top of this country.

I don't normally get nervous, but I can tell today that my heart is beating a little faster.

Because I've gambled my political life on this project.

This day, when I will be rewarded for it all... I saw it in my dreams many, many times.

"Naoe-sensei has arrived."

After a long seeming but short 30 minutes, the notice of Naoe-sensei's arrival reached us.

"It was faster than I thought."

Only 10 minutes later than the agreed time.

After intending to wait for one, or two more hours without minding, I was surprised.

Now, I will seal my soft emotions, and begin a stern conversation with Naoe-sensei.

Before the curtain opened, we lowered our heads, almost touching the ground.

I started hearing Naoe-sensei's confident and silent footsteps.

"Sorry I kept you waiting."

After his arrival, Naoe-sensei apologized for being late.

I could not help but feel something strange towards these words.

"No, not at all. Thank you very much for taking the trouble to visit us in this cold today."

After saying so, I cleared away the unnecessary thoughts from my mind.

There is nothing to worry about.

There is no mistaking it, I will climb up and fulfill my ambitions.

"Raise your heads first. I can't talk like this."

"Yes."

Kamogawa and I raised our heads, and I reached out to a glass to pour beer for Naoe-sensei.

However, Naoe-sensei stopped me.

"We should talk before that."

"I apologize."

I quickly pulled away, and began listening to Sensei.

"There is a lot to talk about, but... First, let's start with *that*."

After a slight hesitation, Naoe-sensei muttered so as if he remembered something he had forgotten.

"It's the election for the next prime minister. I decided to pass on my candidacy."

"...Huh?"

For a moment, I could not comprehend what Naoe-sensei was saying, and for the first time gave such a stupid reply.

Kamogawa next to me must also be the same.

Among the quietness, an ear-scratching ringing sound was heard.

"Sensei, that is... Some kind of joke, right?"

The words came out of Kamogawa's mouth, not as a confirmation, but as a reflex.

Even if he did not want to speak out of turn, I'm sure I would have said the same thing.

"It's the truth. The candidates will be lined up tomorrow, and I will be voting for Kijima. I will also make you vote for him."

Kijima? Why is Naoe-sensei supporting Kijima-sensei?

No matter how young and promising he is, Naoe-sensei's position is higher.

"Please wait. Why? Naoe-sensei, what about all of your preparations for this time?"

Pitching forward, I could not push down my emotions no matter how much I tried.

I know that becoming the cabinet's prime minister is not everything.

In fact, Naoe-sensei before me has been reigning for many years as a shadow fixer without a position, even though he has had many opportunities.

However, it is still the default route for him to become the Prime Minister now.

Rather, if he doesn't run here... It is essentially the same thing as giving up the seat of the prime minister.

If he gives his seat up to Kijima-sensei once, that person will unmistakably keep his position. Naoe-sensei's faction will start losing its centripetal force, and he won't have the opportunity to become prime minister again.

If he withdraws, one can't help but think that something bad has happened.

Further, it will have a big effect on White Room.

It is precisely because I understood all this as an instinct, that I had to confirm.

The most surprising of all was the fact that the one Naoe-sensei decided to support was Kijima-sensei.

"K-Kijima sensei... He's a clear enemy of yours, Naoe-sensei... Right..?"

Not able to hold back either, Kamogawa said the name out loud.

The candidates from the Citizens Party were narrowed down to three including those from inside and outside the government, and including the mass media.

The favourite being Naoe-sensei before me, the follower up being his rival Isomaru from the same period, and Kijima-sensei a bit further behind.

These three are the only ones who have a ticket to become the prime minister, and Naoe-sensei should have been the leading candidate.

"I didn't want to make him the prime minister, but I ended up having to do just that."

"Are you saying you could not gather the votes..?"

"That's right. The votes inside the Citizens Party had been cleanly split between me, Isomaru, and Kijima, but, it looks like a part of the rival party has decided to crush me. The results ended up being that I lacked from 20 to 30 votes."

I am sure he tried many strategies already, but I saw Naoe-sensei's smile of resignation.

"Even if I play a good match, if I lose, I lose a lot of centripetal force. In which case, the only choice is to support Kijima and protect my position, isn't it? He's still young, and he has a lot of momentum. After thoroughly searching, he is not involved in any scandals either."

Women, money, a politician with nothing to feel guilty of.

Further, he has also always been in good health.

"However, in that case, isn't it better to support Isomaru-sensei? Even if you are rivals from the same period, you are acquaintances. I don't think you need to support Kijima-sensei, who is difficult to handle, but..."

I'm sure he doesn't have childish thoughts such as wanting to give the credit to someone from the same period.

If he judges that it is the correct thing to be under Kijima-sensei, then there will be no hesitation.

"You get it already, don't you? The answer is that it is more beneficial to be under Kijima. If I force myself onto Isomaru's ship now, the possibility of going down along with him is high. Between the two, most in my faction also want to support Kijima."

There is the fear that even Naoe-sensei will be resisted if he tries to forcefully go over to Isomaru-sensei's side.

I had no idea that he was driven into a corner like this.

I thought I understood everything about the political world, but it looks like even I didn't know what was going on behind the scenes.

"It... It is too early to give up, Naoe-sensei. We still have the White Room project! If we use this as a weapon, we can-"

"Stop, Kamogawa."

I strongly restrained Kamogawa who was trying to get to grips with this.

"If Naoe-sensei has made such a decision, then we must follow it. However, you understand that the White Room is a different issue, right?"

Supporting Kijima-sensei, Naoe-sensei will naturally be appointed again.

In other words, it should already be confirmed that his position will not change much.

I can say that this will not have that much of an impact.

However...

"Ayanokoji. That's the matter I came to see you for today. After all these years of your hard work, I am sorry, but, I need you to keep quiet for a while."

The last words I wanted to hear came flying out, and my cold sweats started flowing out.

"...What does that mean, Naoe-sensei?"

While beginning to understand the situation, I still could not accept it.

"I understand what you want to say. However, all of this will only happen if I can maintain my current position. You get it, right?"

“...Of course.”

“Sure, I've been unofficially promised my next post. However, it's not something I've won. It was the last stronghold that I defended after losing the factional war. I can't promote the White Room project, which has a high possibility of attracting controversy.”

If Naoe Sensei makes a bad move, Kijima-sensei's side will not remain silent.

It is obvious that he would be suspected of trying to gain more influence by increasing his achievements again.

I understand that logic very well.

“Ayanokoji. You are an excellent man.”

“...Yes. Thank you very much.”

“After I picked up a have-not like you, you should know very well that I don't solely judge people on the basis of academic record.”

“The world of politics has always required a certain academic record. If it was not for you, Naoe-sensei, no one would have employed a man like me.”

Naoe-sensei nodded, and sighed.

“For better or worse, people who have been involved in politics for a long time tend to follow their educational background and become incompetent. They care about nothing other than keeping their title as a politician. Both the politicians who want justice, and the ones who aim to be the bad guys get swallowed on the way all the same.”

Naoe-sensei was about to pick up the empty glass, but quickly pulled his hand away.

“Despite that, Kijima never changes. That fucking man is a real politician.”

I don't think that Naoe-sensei has ever praised someone with words like this.

He is already doing the analysis of a war that has ended.

“I felt it with you too. Your direction is different, but you're also a man that doesn't change.”

“...Yes. Neither my conviction nor my ideals will ever change.”

“This country's peak point... That was your aim, right?”

“Yes.”

“No hesitation, huh? However, that is to say that you want to defeat Kijima. He's a considerable foe, you know?”

"I have the will. However, if you are saying that you will support Kijima-sensei, then please let me obey. From now on, for you, and for Kijima-sensei, I will."

"I said it before too, but I need you to stay quiet for a while."

Ah, I see.

I did have a bad feeling about this.

This means that I was right.

"...What do you mean?"

"You've become an eyesore for Kijima. It's reached his ears many times that you've been involved in the business world in a gaudy way these few years. Do you understand? I can't have someone like that under me."

"I only want to do as you instruct me, Sensei. To create a facility that will surpass ANHS education, to change this country... Did you not tell me to be thorough?"

Naoe-sensei's expression changed.

"Managing the White Room wasn't fucking enough for you, so you've gathered up quite a lot of money too. You have connections with the yakuza too, and you're not just a simple politician. Right? Isn't that so? Did I tell you to do that much? You've been maneuvering for your own damn benefit. How many fires do you think I've put out these few years?"

His demeanour changed, and before I could notice, I was being strongly scolded.

"Then... What do you intend on doing about the White Room project?"

"Isn't it obvious? A clean slate."

"That's... A clean slate..?"

Kamagawa, who had been explaining his joy up until just now, suddenly changed his expression to one of despair.

Stiff as a statue, I can't deny that I had a stern expression.

A clean slate for the White Room project?

Does he know how hard I've worked up until now?

He can't just sweep it all away with only the two words of "clean slate".

...No, it was always this way.

With Naoe-sensei's word, everything moves from right to left.

This isn't anything special.

If I get clumsy and show resistance here, it will only make Naoe-sensei's mood worse.

Even if only slightly, he must have come all the way here because he felt bad for us novices.

I have to be an adult here and react calmly, or I will lose my footing.

If I get dismissed as an impertinent man, there won't be a second chance for me to be of use.

I gained enough money to gather the envy of others.

Even if I am abandoned by Naoe-sensei, I can probably keep on living.

However, as a politician... That would be it for me.

With that, my ambition would all come to nothing.

"That's all. Don't take it personally."

Is it all over with this?

I don't think Naoe-sensei intends on leisurely dining here.

That's why he didn't hold the glass once up until now.

"When Kijima accepts that you have no fangs, I'll put you out in front again. You're fine with that, right?"

To keep surviving as a politician.

I will throw away the White Room, and start again from scratch.

This is the best choice.

I know.

I know.

I know-

"...Please stop screwing around with me."

This time, I couldn't handle myself calmly and wisely as usual.

There's no way I could.

How hard does he think I've worked for the sake of this project?

In these ten years, I gave everything up and grinded my body to dust.

I won't let it all be for nothing.

"White Room is receiving a lot of funding and continuing to operate. There is no way I can withdraw now."

"Huh? Who the fuck do you think you're talking to, Ayanokoji?"

This incalculably overwhelming attitude before me, unfitting of an old man.

Without showing fear or timidity before my boldness, he simply looked at me with his pitch black pupils.

For Naoe-sensei who has been in the world of politics for decades, this kind of attitude is a daily occurrence.

Yet, I can't pull back here now just because of that.

After pulling the bow, there is no more going back.

"I told you to return it to a clean slate. If you can't do that, just fucking hang yourself and die."

"Are you saying that now, after all this time?"

"Who gives a shit about your 'after all this time?' "

"I cannot accept this."

"It doesn't matter if you can accept it or not, I'm telling you that it's over."

"Then what will become of me? I looked up only to you, and threw away many opportunities for the sake of this project. Even if I can protect my title as a politician, it is pointless if I can't do anything with it."

"You'll just have to endure for a few years. When that's over, I'll give you your next job."

Can I believe him?

There's no way I can.

"Under your instructions, I have been working only for this project. I cannot... I cannot accept such an illogical thing..!"

I have to lament.

I have no choice but to do so.

“I understand how you feel. But you should know how these things work. This is the kind of world we’re in. So don’t hate me, and keep backing me up. I was the one pushing you to help with the project’s progress, right? You were able to get elected with minimal work thanks to that. Isn’t that right?”

Indeed, I left all of the normal election processes up to Naoe-sensei.

And I am grateful to him for making me get elected.

“I am grateful for that. However-”

“Stop it, Ayanokoji. You’ll lose your footing if you get obsessed over one project.”

Why am I becoming so frantic?

I’m sure Kamogawa sitting silently beside me can’t even imagine why.

It’s not because I hate the idea of the White Room project ending and continuing to cling onto it. It’s because I understand the future.

This means that for Naoe-sensei, “I” have become something that needs to be used up and abandoned.

He will put me aside until the election time while telling me he will give me another chance, and when the time comes, he will cut me away without giving me any support.

Up until now, I’ve seen many politicians get cut off in the same manner right in front of my eyes.

In other words, when I was told the words “clean slate”, my destiny as a politician was decided.

In that case, my instincts that want to resist until the end chose to fight.

“In other words, you want me to be the only one covered in mud... right?”

“You’re still young. Unlike me, who doesn’t have much time left, you will have many other chances. But this is it for me. I can’t pull back here. I want to die as a politician, so.”

“Sensei...”

“I’m not telling you to quit being a politician. All you have to do is stay obedient.”

“Sensei, you will not abandon me or anything like that, right?”

“Of course. I won’t do anything bad to you. I spoke harshly, but, on the other hand, it seems like Kijima also values you highly. If you stay quiet, the bowl will come around. I can let you hold it when that time comes.”

It’s all over...

“I understand.”

“I see, good.”

“As you are telling me to, I will end the White Room project. I will start moving tomorrow to conduct the after processings.”

I deeply bowed.

“You do that.”

Naoe-sensei before my eyes no longer held even the slightest interest towards me.

It doesn’t matter if I am skilled or not. What matters is that he has to abandon me along with the project, and that he will no longer use me.

Part 1

“...Ugh.”

The only things in the room after Naoe-sensei left were Kamogawa crying and collapsing, and the cold food.

“What a fucking joke!”

I yelled out with anger.

“He’ll give the bowl to me later on? Don’t make me laugh...”

If you drop out from the world of politics once, it’s already over.

It doesn’t matter if I plan for a second coming, I will be crushed and ended.

“What are we going to do now..? Is it all over with this? Ah...”

Should I have beat him up..?

No, there’s no meaning in doing that and gaining momentary satisfaction.

I would be arrested right away, and lose not just my status as a politician, but everything else I’ve gained up until now.

It’s fine to show your strength in a physical fight if it’s a quarrel between brats.

However, in this world, physical strength is only one of the many weapons one can hold, and its effectiveness is weak.

Naoe, while looking like nothing more than a frail old man, holds an innumerable amount of weapons.

“Don’t think that you can use me up and get rid of me so easily, Naoe...”

I strongly hit the table with my fist, and spat out my anger.

Putting everything short, I was used up well and abandoned.

In the world of politics, there is no hope of getting back up if you fall down once.

“Am I finished?”

Even if put to words, I can’t feel any sense of reality towards this.

How much does he think I've anguished and sweated for the sake of moving this country, for the sake of rising to its summit?

Does he know how much I've been humiliated, insulted, and scorned?

That man is of no more use to me.

However, even if I try to fight back now in a new manner, I will simply be crushed and ended.

I can say that until that man retires, no, dies, the path of my success is completely closed off.

Then... This also means that if that man dies, I will have the chance to move again.

Do I contact Ooba, and have Naoe killed..?

"What a stupid idea..."

If I make such a request, it'll only end up with Ooba abandoning me.

I don't even need to think about which option would be more beneficial.

"Kamogawa. Come to your senses, you're going to start everything again from tomorrow."

"That's... That's all I can do, but... Ayanokoji-sensei, what will you do? You will not ignore Naoe-sensei's order, right?"

"...It's all over for me, no matter what. My treatment won't change now even if I stop resisting. In which case, I will continue managing the White Room even if I stop being a politician."

"P-Please wait! I respect you so much, Ayanokoji-sensei! I think you're the kind of man who will surpass Naoe-sensei one day! Please don't say that you'll retire!"

"My path is already set. I can't change it any more. But, you can still save yourself. Your father's influence still remains. So you should keep fighting as a politician under Naoe."

"Ayanokoji-sensei..."

"I won't give up politics, or White Room. But I will throw politics away for a moment."

That is the one and only method.

"No matter how much power Naoe has, he can't beat me in lifespan. One day, he will die before me."

If it's going to take time anyway, then I can just wait.

I will satisfy the old man and wait out his short political life.

However, when that's over, I'll...

"It's not just Kijima. When I come back to the world of politics, I'll burn his son to ashes too."

"Haha... When you're the one saying it, it doesn't sound like a joke."

Wiping away his tears and saying so, Kamogawa smiled.

Part 2

After putting Kamogawa in a taxi and letting him leave, I started walking alone on the snowy road.

I wanted to be alone, and cool down my hot head.

I have to think about the future.

That's precisely why I need to know everything that is to come, and make the calculations in my head.

I made a call to that man with my phone.

It was late at night, but I was convinced that the call would certainly connect.

"Tsukishiro, answer me. Why did Naoe stick with Kijima, even throwing away our own positions?"

"This is going to be an interesting call, huh?"

"I'm sure you know everything. Right?"

"Up until now, Naoe-sensei thought that he was the best politician. However, he learned something, that Kijima is a presence even surpassing him."

"How foolish."

"The two have very different ideals, but they surprisingly also have a lot of common points."

"With that... Am I supposed to be convinced with that?"

"Kijima-sensei is not happy about the White Room, which you've taken part in."

"What are you saying? That man has ANHS education. He can even come out with it as his second policy."

"That is certainly one of his main policies. However, he was also working on a similar new plan behind the scenes. In other words, his second policy was already in motion. It would not have been desirable for him to have it come out ahead of time."

"...Is that the reason Naoe abandoned me..?"

"It isn't clear at which stage it was, but word of White Room has reached Kijima-sensei's ears. I think I can say that he talked with Naoe-sensei, and promised to let him keep his position afterwards if he brought it to a halt."

So Kijima had also thought of a plan that resembled White Room, huh?

"It is not just that. You were much more capable than Naoe-sensei had even imagined. He relied on you a lot in these few years, but at the same time, did you not also think that he had a lot of unreasonable demands?"

"...Yeah."

"I think that is because Sensei was afraid of you. It was as if he was waiting to crush you one day, rather than to make use of you. However, you did not fail. No, we cannot say that you did not have any failures at all. However, you conducted yourself well, erased any signs of failure and made sure you did not stand out. I have to admit that is quite the skill. Naoe-sensei did not raise you to put you on the top. I think that he was expecting you to support his son as his right hand when he rose up to the top of the country in the future. Sensei could see ahead in everything, but he made one miscalculation. Your limitless ambition, it seems that was the only thing he did not understand."

After 10 years, even Naoe-sense won't be able to crush me.

So, he played his hand now, as to prevent that from happening.

Do I consider it as a handout to his son, or a result of his fear that I would crush his son?

"Were you satisfied with the answer?"

"Why did you talk honestly?"

"If you were a man who would be crushed here, I would not have talked. However, my intuition tells me that this isn't the case. One day, you will be back on the front stage. With even greater power. That is the reason I talked."

"That is a wise judgement. Naturally, however, do you intend on showing up no matter how I fall?"

"That is the question."

This man will not rely solely on me. He is already someone else's ally, and it is the same for me.

If I am judged to be incapable, I am sure he will throw me away in that instant.

"You can sell my information to Naoe or anyone you want. In exchange, I will receive information from you. I am sure that a situation where we both can observe each other is preferable for both sides."

“I am aware.”

“It seems we will associate with each other for a long time, Tsukishiro.”

“I hope so. If you have any requests, please contact me any time, Ayanokoji-sensei.”

Saying so, Tsukishiro hung up the phone.

That’s right, I won’t be finished here.

I will thoroughly prepare myself to protect my own life for the future, and gather my strength.

And at the same time, I will create my soldiers in White Room.

Part 3

200 meters tall, 50 floors.

The banquet floor in the middle of the ultra high-class hotel fighting for the top position in Tokyo.

Arriving slightly later than the planned time, I started going up in the elevator while thinking upon some things.

It costs about 3,000,000 to rent the floor for 3 hours and to serve meals for 60 people.

If I could say “only”, that would be about it, but considering my uncertain financial circumstances, it’s not cheap.

The party has been continuing every year since the operation of the facility started, and it’s been getting larger each time.

I have to collect a bigger amount of contributions than ever before.

Many investors turned their backs to me by Naoe’s hand.

It’s obvious from the fact that the 200 supporters I’ve had before decreased to 60.

Money, I need money. I have to scrape together manyfolds of money.

The necessary thing here today is to show my own strength.

I looked at my own eyes reflecting in the metal glass of the massive elevator.

I’ve gotten quite old too...

Looking back, I can calmly reflect on my own aging.

I think I can say that the fact that I’ve started and continued managing White Room is a miracle.

However, I am only half-way through.

It’s been some time since I was banished from the financial world, but the fires of my ambition, let alone being extinguished, are burning even hotter.

I reached my destination, got out of the elevator and headed to a vacant room.

Losing my title as a politician, I am now treated as a former politician.

Normally, my cohesive power would have reduced greatly.

However, the title of the man in charge of White Room is increasing my power.

If it wasn't for that, the people I call investors would not have gathered in this place.

"Ayanokoji-sensei, it is about time."

"Yeah."

There is a lot to think about, but the most important problem to solve is the money.

As the scale gets larger, White Room requires more and more funding.

In order to provide this financing, I need more than an amount of money to use and throw away; I need money to keep living.

"S-sorry I kept you waiting."

"You don't seem calm, huh? Besides, how many times have you gone to the toilet now?"

Tabuchi, coming back to the vacant room, sat down on a chair in an uncalm demeanour, and started slightly shaking his left leg.

"When are you going to get rid of that habit?"

"I am sorry, but, when I think about the possibility of missing this chance... I feel uneasy."

Indeed, if the funding is short, White Room will be in big trouble.

It will be alright if it just ends with a temporary freeze, but it is critical that the children's education does not stop too.

It is the same as the baby birds you've raised getting sick and dying.

"Listen, Tabuchi. We can't turn our backs to the fact that this is our last chance. However, that is precisely why we have to strongly step ahead without looking back. You can think about failure if we fail."

The shaking of his left leg became slow, and Tabuchi looked up to me.

"Thinking about the difficulties we've gone through up until now, this isn't anything special. Used up and abandoned by Naoe, ordered to bring White Room to a halt, and losing my title as politician."

Still, I did not stop moving.

I can proudly say that I have led such a difficult life that I can't even begin to tell other people about it.

Leaving aside people like Naoe and Kijima, it isn't easy for even a mere politician to have an audience for me.

I did lose my title as a politician, but there is no mistaking the fact that I've surpassed my past self.

I noticed that Tabuchi had stopped shaking his leg, and was clenching his fist with strength.

I have to show this to the people who believe in White Room, I can't let them regret it.

"Today's battle, is there any chance for victory?"

"Of course. Do you know what a weapon that is easily usable by anyone is?"

"...Huh? Is there such a thing?"

"There is. Of course, it is a double-edged sword with risk. It's "lie".

"Lie... Is it?"

"There are those in the world of politics that have risen up with just one lie. That is how much power there is in lies."

Of course, there is only a point to this if you can use lies well in the first place, though.

"We will fully utilize this weapon. Let's go, Tabuchi, this is do-or-die for White Room."

"...Yes!"

Part 4

The first thing that the rich do is to compete with each other on the surface level with high class clothing.

Next, houses, cars, and asserting dominance in their company.

However, they sometimes move on to an unexpected point after all this.

Normally, these parties are only attended by adults, and you wouldn't see many children around.

However, when it is the top class of the financial world, the number of children rather increases in one breath.

That is of course to make their kids meet each other with the future in mind.

Businesses with cooperative relations, and businesses with relations of rivalry.

No matter the position, it isn't a bad thing to make the inheritors meet with each other.

Above all, the parents bring them in thinking that their own children are excellent.

As if showing off their most prized toy, they duel with their unique cards.

That is precisely why I can say that White Room is a factor that can be accepted by the financial world.

"Hmph..."

It's ironic. I've learned this ability of judgement, this sense of value, all from Naoe-sensei.

He's turned to become my hated enemy, but his strength was unmatched, and the real thing.

The party just started. First, I'll greet everyone and show my face all around the floor.

"It's been a long time, Ayanokoji-sensei."

As I was speaking out to a variety of people, a middle-aged man with a young looking face approached me with a bright attitude.

I quickly changed to my business face, turned around and put out my right hand.

"It has been a while, Director Amasawa. Around two years, I think. After sending the invitation letter, I was worried that you would not do me the favor of coming here."

“Ah, I’m sorry I couldn’t come here last year. She really wanted to spend her birthday in Hawaii, and wouldn’t listen to me. Work has been busy too, and I couldn’t come up with the time. So, in the end, I bought a house in Hawaii, and I’ve been there since.”

“I am glad to hear that your work and private life are going well.”

He should be slightly older than me, but he does not make me feel that in a bad way.

Covered in brands liked by the young, he’s wearing sandals unfitting for a place like this.

Lacking in the dress code in this way, he could even have been rejected at the door by someone who doesn’t know anything.

He’s not ordinary. He must be trying to make that fact clear by looking different.

I do not favour this man’s clothing style, nor his thinking, but as he is one of the people investing in White Room, I can’t be harsh with him.

He didn’t participate in the party last year, but I was still able to get the investment money from him.

He’s someone I should treat as the exact kind of man that I should welcome with open arms.

“It seems like you aren’t a sensei anymore, but I can’t feel that from you at all. You look like an evil politician, no matter how you look at it.”

He laughed leisurely while tapping me on the shoulder with the palm of his hand.

“We can stay in contact, just like when I was a politician, right?”

“Of course. I value you very highly, you know, Ayanokoji-sensei.”

While continuing the boring conversation, I thought back on the first words Amasawa uttered.

While this man is married, it is clear that this “she” or whatever he spent time with in Hawaii is not his spouse.

“Can we talk a bit?”

While laughing foolishly, Amasawa guided me towards a window.

“Actually, there’s something I wanted to ask of you, Ayanokoji-sensei.”

“A request from you? Just what could that be?”

“Actually, that girl in Hawaii got pregnant. Further, she insists on giving birth in Japan.”

"That is a joyous occasion, but it is a bit troublesome, is it not?"

"Of course. My wife also seems to have suspicions of me cheating, and if it gets out that a secret child was born, I would be in a lot of trouble."

If you're going to play around, then you should just not get married in the first place, but I suppose that's a different issue.

"Even though there's no way she can raise a child, she's afraid of losing contact with me. Otherwise, someone who loves Hawaii so much wouldn't want to give birth in Japan."

While shrugging with worry, he doesn't look to be in that much of a panic.

"I think I'd like the child to be educated in White Room, but... How about it?"

"Will she consent to that?"

"She will, she will. What she wants is to give birth to my child, in other words, that's her goal. She certainly doesn't want to be a mother and raise a child."

For me, I would welcome another child that brings no danger along with them.

However, there are many things I need to confirm.

"I've already taken your daughter into White Room, Director Amasawa."

"There's no problem with another one coming in, right?"

"If necessary, I of course will not object. However, are you sure?"

"It's fine, isn't it? She'll have the achievement of having given birth, I'll have pushed a troublesome kid onto White Room, and you'll profit from it. A happy end for everyone, right?"

This man thinks that White Room is just a useful creche or something like that.

However, this is also convenient for me, and just what I need.

"You know the contents of this party, right?"

"I do. I will invest, of course. Generously. Alright?"

Saying so, he raised one finger.

"Double the amount of last year. I'll put out 100,000,000. If I can buy safety with that, then it's a cheap price to pay."

"Thank you very much. Do you know the expected delivery date?"

“Ah, wait a bit. She messaged it to me, so.”

He told me the hospital and the expected delivery date from his phone, and I contacted my subordinates to instruct them to move with the preparations.

“Then, I will handle this without delay.”

“Thanks”.

Nodding with satisfaction, he grabbed two glasses of champagne from a waiter walking around nearby.

I took the glass with a tinkle, and gulped it down in one breath.

“By the way, Director Amasawa. You know the rules of White Room, yes? Unless there is a special reason, meeting face to face is fundamentally impossible. You can only regularly meet the child after they become an adult, or leave White Room.”

“Mhm. I’ve heard all that before, you know.”

“You are really sure, right? This is not an exception even for the mother.”

“Of course. If you just regularly send her photos, she’ll be convinced.”

If I can get funding, I don’t care the manner in which I get it, but I do have to keep up appearances.

There is also one more thing I need to confirm.

“Director. I think it has been a while since we took in your first daughter, but you have not come to see her even once yet. Have you thought about what that means for the future?”

Parents who don’t come to check up on their child are very rare.

Normally, they come and check on their growth and see how they’re doing.

“Please do as you want with her future and everything else. In the first place, *that* was a baby created in a test tube, and I don’t see her as my real child in the least.”

Amasawa told me without much interest that it was just something he did for play.

White Room has taken in all kinds of children.

There are test tube babies, and sometimes we even take one child from among siblings to test how good the education in White Room is.

I have to observe the other party's circumstances and feelings, and keep them in mind as to not displease them.

"I shall freely do everything on my side, then."

So far, she has grown up to be the second best among the 5th period students.

Considering that she is just as capable as the boys, if she doesn't drop out, I will be able to find some use for her skills.

"Of course. Do whatever you want."

He tapped me on the shoulder again in a familiar manner, and started happily humming.

Some people who have amassed billions and billions of assets think that their children have no value.

They are very rare, but this means that Amasawa is one of them.

He does not feel that his child is a sign of his status, and only cares about himself.

"I'm going home now. I want to enjoy Japan for the first time in a long time, so."

"I'll have you seen out."

I left the happy Amasawa in the hands of my subordinate and saw him off on the spot.

I felt like I wanted to take a break, but there was no time to rest.

Part 5

I had already hurriedly greeted the bigwigs I needed to talk to.

So after Amasawa, I spoke with several directors and succeeded in obtaining new funding.

It hasn't reached the informal target amount yet, but I can say that things are progressing favourably.

An hour has passed since the party started.

Here, I decided to take a small rest.

Because of all the chatting I did, my throat also feels a little tired.

However, I won't waste time even while stopping.

It's important to confirm the atmosphere on the spot and check into the tone of the situation.

When I approached a waiter to grab a glass of wine, I felt a light shock run through my feet.

A running child hit into me, and ran away without even apologizing.

I wondered where he was rushing towards, and it was the corner of the venue.

It looks like many children are gathering in that spot.

As most of the parents know each other in various ways, it's only natural that the children they brought along also know each other.

As they are a bit separated from the adults, the children's high voices are echoing around.

So much that I can say they are screaming. When they become grouped up, they're almost unstoppable.

I approached to warn them, but I noticed that they weren't playing around.

All boys, including the running child. However, 3 children among the 5 are surrounding one child, yelling and grilling him.

The one other child is watching them from some distance, but I see no fear in his expression.

There is a risk that the children will notice me if I get closer, so

I stopped. Because I was a little interested in what they were talking about.

They must be around the same age as Kiyotaka. I normally don't come in contact with ordinary children, so I'm also interested in comparing them with the children in White Room.

I tried probing into them a little, but the children looked to be in a very hostile mood.

Most children easily start fights without knowing the right or the wrong place for it.

That also doesn't really matter.

"Did you really get an autograph from Kazuya?"

The child who was running seemed to be the leader, and pressed for an answer while seeming to control the other children.

"...I, I did."

He answered so while averting his gaze.

I only just took a glance, but he doesn't seem to be telling the truth.

"You're lying, right? When I met Kazuya, he said that he doesn't normally give out autographs."

"It's... It's true."

"Where did you get the autograph?"

"He, he came to my house."

"Hah! So you are lying. Because Kazuya told me that I was the first child he gave an autograph to outside the venue."

"I, I'm saying I really did get one! I got him to sign... my soccer ball...!"

It looks like they were talking about their suspicion of this child receiving an autograph or not from a Japanese athlete called Kazuya that is active overseas.

Including the leader, the 3 children are accusing the 1 weak-spirited child.

I suppose the suspiciousness of the accused child's demeanour is also clear to the children.

It looks like he's having some hard time because of a cheap lie he made up for the sake of bragging.

"Let's have a majority decision then. About who thinks this guy is lying or not."

Immediately, laughing, the three children raised their hands in collusion.

The one boy who was silent did not raise his hand, so they naturally asked him to do so.

“Which side are you on, Ryuuji?”

Perhaps knowing everyone, the child in lead called him by his first name.

“...It has nothing to do with me. I don’t care either way.”

“What the hell’s that? I’m asking you which one it is.”

“If I am to judge objectively, I think he’s lying. He should just apologize already.”

Of course, it’s a natural decision.

The child called Ryuuji decided that he was lying, and encouraged him to apologize.

Considering the difference in numbers and physique, there’s little benefit to protecting him.

It’s best to apologize here, but humans don’t always make the best decisions.

“It’s, it’s not a lie...”

Looking at the child insisting that he isn’t lying, Ryuuji sighed with boredom.

“What about you just forgive him already? It’s clearly a lie, so there’s no need to keep pressing him.”

“Huh? Don’t get so cocky, or should I ask my dad to crush your parent’s company, huh?”

He’s showing off his father’s power as if it was his own, and acting like some king.

“If you make a fool of Nogi-kun, it’ll end really badly, you know.”

Nogi? That Nogi Medicine Manufacturing?

A powerholder who possesses a prominent track record even among the investors who came here today.

This is stupid, but it’s the truth that he holds real power.

It looks like he’s greatly failed in raising his child, though.

“What does he need to do to satisfy you guys, then? What do you want from Fuji?”

I can see that the group of 3 including Nogi, Ryuuji, and Fuji all know each other.

“Kneel, kneel! If he kneels down and apologizes for lying, I’ll forgive him.”

This really is stale.

I don’t think Director Nogi is the kind of person who usually tries to force others to kneel, but if his child is saying these things, then it can’t be helped that the surrounding people will suspect him to be so.

“Like I said, I’m, I’m not lying..!”

“Prove it, then. If you won’t prove it, and if you won’t kneel, then I’ll beat you up, you know?”

Getting more and more annoyed, Nogi licked his lips with dissatisfaction.

“It’s best if you just kneel already.”

Ryuuji continued trying to get him to apologize, but Fuji shook his head sideways.

Even while tearing up, he’s insisting that he received the autograph.

This seems like the right time.

I can’t overlook children fighting, even if it has already started.

If it ends up becoming a bloodshed, Director Nogi’s name will be blemished.

However, a change in the situation suddenly occurred.

“Fuji isn’t lying. That’s what I think.”

While it seemed like the answer was already decided, a 6th child showed up.

Even though all four children, including the non-hostile Ryuuji, decided that he was lying.

The appearance of the presence insisting that he was not lying, naturally, changed the atmosphere.

“Who the hell are you? I don’t know who you are, but are you going to protect this kid?”

“Don’t you think it’s pointless for Fuji to insist on lying while surrounded by strong kids like you?”

The child insisted that it would be strange for Fuji to be stubborn like this.

“I don’t know if you’re friends or whatever, but you just want to protect him, right? It’s obvious he’s a liar.”

“I’m not going to protect him for no reason. But, I just think that it’s true.”

The child, confronting the 3 without fear.

“What did you say!?”

“Sorry, Fuji, I was occupied talking with my father.”

“Ishigami-kun...”

The child called Ishigami gently caressed the crying child’s arm, and stood up against Nogi and the others.

However, something unexpected happened to this saviour here.

“Sorry Ishigami, but I think Fuji is lying.”

“What’s your basis for that? You don’t know Fuji that well, Kanzaki-kun, do you?”

“I have no basis. But, there’s no proof that it’s real either. In which case, I can only decide by his demeanour.”

“Decide by his demeanour? Can you really make a clear decision in a situation like this, surrounding him and almost forcing him to admit that he’s lying? You’re just deciding based on the flow of the place.”

“But, Nogi said so. That Kazuya doesn’t normally give autographs. That he was the first.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, it is. Kazuya really said so when he gave me an autograph, you idiot.”

“But, there’s no proof that your story is true, is there?”

“Ha! Look at this, it’s a two-shot that Kazuya and I took.”

As if he was waiting for this moment, Nogi showed the screen of his phone.

“So? The date is two months ago. What about the possibility that Fuji got the autograph after that? It has nothing to do with that photograph, right? Maybe you wanted to spread around that you’re being treated specially, and lied about it?”

He wanted to show off his evidence, but it seems like he made a gap to be taken advantage of.

“I’m not lying! I’ll beat you up!”

“Stop, Ishigami. Why are you pointlessly objecting like that? Earlier, when you had a quarrel with me and the guys from the same class in cram school, you didn’t even object, did you? If he just apologizes, this will all end peacefully.”

“That’s because I was the only one dragged into that. It would be annoying to worry about all the little things a few low-level opponents are saying. But if it’s my friends in trouble, then it’s different.”

More and more, from the contents of this conversation, I can tell that Ishigami is an excellent child.

That must be precisely why this child called Ryuuji can’t help but snap at him.

“What does your dad do? He’s bigger than mine, huh?”

This is no place for me to bud in, of course, but Director Ishigami’s company isn’t really that large.

“Our parents’ power has nothing to do with this, does it? How about your own abilities?”

However, his child is above the others in his education and talent.

Is it the result of excellent genes, or the fruit of good education?

“I’m gonna beat the shit out of you!”

In a rage, Nogi greatly swung his right arm.

“Wait a bit.”

About to get hit, Ishigami stopped Nogi.

I thought he was going to apologize, but that doesn’t seem to be the case.

“When you’re going to hit someone, you should first grab them by the chest and make sure they can’t run. If you clumsily swing into the empty air, you’ll roll over in an uncool way, right?”

“Huh..?”

The young man froze up with his fist squeezed.

“I’m not proud of it, but I haven’t ever been in a fight or anything. I bet I can’t win against you. But I can run around. Which means, this’ll end up with us running around yelling at each other here. As great as your father is, it will be very embarrassing for him. Right?”

The party venue is covered in laughter and elegant music is playing in high volume.

However, if children start making noise, it will naturally stand out.

“So. If you’re going to hit me, you should grab this area with your left hand first. They always do that first when hitting people in television and TV series too.”

After being guided, Nogi grabbed his collar with his left hand.

The other children also surrounded Ishigami so that he could not run away.

“I’ll do as you want!”

Coming in close, Nogi threatened Ishigami.

Then, he raised his fist again.

“You can’t run away now!”

“You neither.”

“Huh..?”

Right after saying so, Ishigami grabbed Nogi’s arms back.

So that Nogi could not let go of him.

Then, he looked at an adult a bit farther away.

He looked at me for a moment, but ignored me and called out to a different adult.

“Please help me! Someone, help!”

“Wha-!?”

The adults turning around to the screams all looked at Ishigami, who was caught by his collar.

Seeing him surrounded by 3 people and about to be struck, it doesn’t matter which side is in the right or the wrong in this quarrel.

Nogi’s name is powerful, but that naturally doesn’t matter when it’s about some silly fight between children.

“What are you doing!?”

Seeing the adults rushing towards them, Nogi quickly let go and started running like a scared rabbit. The crying Fuji, Ryuuji, and Ishigami were left behind.

“Kanzaki-kun. You could have handled these guys, couldn’t you?”

“...I hate trouble. Besides, this isn’t a problem to solve by beating them up.”

“I’m not saying you should hit them. I’m saying you should have solved it by talking. I know it’s easier to just let them go. But it’s also possible that there will be more unnecessary trouble if you don’t do anything. Especially when you’re facing people who try to use their parent’s power.”

“He lied, though. Isn’t that right?”

Ryuuji asked what the truth was.

Ishigami didn’t need to give an answer; Fuji’s expression told the story.

“Sometimes you just want to lie through your teeth.”

“I don’t get it... It’s a pointless lie.”

“If Fuji was your friend, Kanzaki-kun, would you have helped him? Or would you have abandoned him all the same?”

“...I...”

“At the very least, I’ll help my friends when they’re in trouble. No matter what I have to do.”

It seems that compared to the infantile, no, the children who act befitting of their age, Ryuuji and Ishigami can judge things very calmly. But their ways of thinking are very different.

Here, it looks like Ishigami handled things better, but it’s true that he walks on a dangerous bridge.

If he forced Fuji to admit his lie like Ryuuji and apologized, Nogi and the others would also have forgiven him at an early stage.

Of course, he would have to know that he would be made fun of.

“Ayanokoji-sensei. I am very sorry I was late.”

As I was finished observing the children, Sakayanagi walked up to me while slightly short of breath.

“You came, Sakayanagi?”

“Of course. Even if we started with very different goals, there’s no changing the fact that I respect you.”

After he said so, I shook hands with Sakayanagi whom I hadn’t seen for a long time.

While this is a person I should welcome, the children also seemed to be moving.

“Good Evening, Kanzaki-kun.”

“Did you just get here, Sakayanagi?”

“Hi. I’ll be going now, Kanzaki-kun. See you at cram school.”

“...Yeah.”

“You look very stern, but what happened?”

Ryuuji replied that nothing had happened, and left in a hurry like he was running away.

“Your daughter has grown up a lot too since I haven’t seen her.”

“She’s precocious in various ways, so there are a lot of things to worry about as a parent, but...”

She seems to be intelligent, but it looks like she will keep her birth handicap for a long time after all.

I did invite her to White Room once, but it was the right choice for her to refuse.

The fundamental requirement in that facility is to be above average in every category.

“I’m sure it’s a problem for you to be close to me, considering your position. But I’m really grateful that you came. Please enjoy your time here.”

“Thank you very much, Ayanokoji-sensei.”

Smiling happily, Sakayanagi took his daughter to greet the others.

“Well now.”

I walked down to Ishigami, the boy who has been looking at me from a distance the whole time.

“What do you want from me?”

“Same for me. It looks like you were looking over here, but did you want something?”

“Did you notice?”

I was surprised that he even had time to look around in that situation.

“I want to ask you something. Why didn’t you call out to me when you looked for help from the adults?”

"I was aware that you had detected the call for help from Fuji early on, but you remained silent. I could get no assurance that you would be on our side."

There is no denying the possibility that if he had asked me for help and I had turned away, this child could have been beaten in the meantime.

"Kyo! I hope you didn't give Ayanokoji-sensei any trouble!"

The one who appeared with the panicked voice of an adult was the chairman of the Ishigami Group.

"I thought you were a very bright boy, but you are the son of Chairman Ishigami, aren't you?"

Ishigami Gorou.

He is now over 60 years old and still holds the position of chairman, but his power is still strong.

He and his ex-wife had no children, but.... I guess he was blessed with this child when he remarried after his ex-wife's death.

"Go have dinner over there."

"Understood. Father."

Lightly bowing his head, Chairman Ishigami's son left.

"Our Kyou really didn't give you any trouble, did he?"

"I was rather impressed, actually."

"That's alright, then, but... He's old enough to be my grandson, so I feel uneasy."

He is very young and precious for him, so I can understand that.

More importantly however, what impressed me most is his calmness.

"You seem to be raising him well."

"Thank you."

In terms of his position, this man is highly superior to me, but his manners are soft and polite.

If he grows up properly, that child will take over the Ishigami Group, and a solid generational change will be possible.

I suppose the only concern is his age.

At the earliest, the child will be in his early twenties when he takes over.

If cautious, it will be when he crosses 30 years old.

By then, Director Ishigami will also have crossed 80 years old.

“Sensei, you intend on returning to the world of politics one day, yes?”

“Of course, that is my intention.”

“Then, one day, will you put my son by your side?”

“Your son... is it?”

I thought it was only a joke, but I can’t see any sign of falsehood in his expression.

“Yes. Because that child seems to be interested in the world of politics. Normally, not much catches his interest, but as his parent, I think I want to sympathize with his feelings as much as I can.”

Perhaps preferring this to Kyou succeeding him, he laughed while wrinkling his cheeks.

“If he still wants to enter the world of politics when he grows up, then I will gladly welcome him.”

This was just lip service, but I did feel a glimpse of talent from that child.

Of course, whether that is meant for politics or not is another issue.

Part 6

There was about 30 minutes left in the three hour party.

Including my reunion with Sakayanagi, I was able to gather plenty of financing to keep operating.

I also learned that there are those awaiting my return to the world of politics.

“Ayanokoji-sensei! May I take just a little bit of your time!?”

“You are...”

“I am so honoured that I was able to meet you! I am Kanzaki. Kanzaki Tokihiro from Kanzaki Engineering.”

“Director Kanzaki? The honour is all mine.”



I remember that when the White Room Project was launched and the story was passed on to some conglomerates, one of them was willing to make an offer to us.

However, because of the company's short history and weak ties to the political world, we ultimately rejected the offer for our own reasons, but two years later, without a sour look on their face, they once again offered us a small investment.

"This is my son Ryuuji. Introduce yourself."

"... I am Kanzaki Ryuuji."

The child quietly said hello while averting his eyes.

I see, it's the child from earlier.

"He seems like a bright kid."

"I am proud of him. I want him to become both a literary and a martial master, so I have been teaching him everything I can with cram schools and private tutors, including karate and judo, of course."

"I had guessed that you were passionate about education, Director Kanzaki."

"As for karate, his assistant instructor also praised him for having the talent to earn a black belt already at this time."

"Wow. You seem to be raising him well."

However, if that is true, then there is something I need to ask him about.

I lightly asked the director for permission, and threw my words at Ryuuji.

"There is one thing I'd like to ask, but why did you not try to save him in a concrete manner while watching that kid get bullied from up close earlier?"

"...That is..."

"Of course, the other party was above you in terms of numbers. However, from what I heard from Director Kanzaki, you seem to be excellent. Couldn't you have thought of a few methods?"

I pretended not to know the turn of events, and asked him such a question.

"Because it doesn't have anything to do with me."

Saying so, he awkwardly averted his eyes.

“Indeed, you weren’t the cause of the conflict. However, if you helped him out, he would have been in your debt. There is a possibility of that benefitting you in the future.”

“ ... ”

“If you don’t have the power to help, you can run away, or ignore it. However, only a fool doesn’t use his power if he has it.”

I don’t have any interest in this child, but I passionately spoke so and put my hand on his head.

“Think and worry, and become a fine adult. Become an adult that can help people. Become someone that can support your father and take over the business one day.”

If I preach to him like this before Director Kanzaki, it will be hard for him to be unkind to me and to pull his hand away from funding.

There’s nothing more important than pulling in some money, no matter the amount.

“...Umm, thank, you.I’ll think a little about what I can do.”

Perhaps moved by my words, he bowed with a happier expression than the stiff one he had up until now.

Part 7

The party ended, and I sat down on a chair in the vacant room without hiding my exhausted figure.

“Sorry I look like this. Things have been tense for me too.”

“Do not worry. Rather, from how you look, have you not been sleeping properly these few days?”

“Ah... You noticed that too, huh?”

“I know you force yourself to work to your limit, Ayanokoji-sensei. Besides, White Room is currently in an existential crisis. I figured you were keeping up a calm appearance to the end, no matter what the situation ends up becoming. I deeply admire your psychological power, sensei.”

I lightly waved my hand to Sakayanagi, telling him to stop complimenting me.

“Tell me the reason you came here. You didn’t come to tell me words of appreciation again, right?”

“Talking things through with my father, he readily consented to me becoming a board chairman for the Advanced Nurturing High School.”

“Oh? So you’re finally standing on the front stage too. After seeing all sides, what you decided on in the end was to succeed your father, huh? It lacks appeal as the final decision, but it is just like you, Sakayanagi. I shall congratulate you honestly.”

“Thank you very much. It is thanks to you allowing me to study by your side for all these years.”

The fact that he doesn’t look happy must have something to do with what we will talk about after this.

Now that it is revealed he will succeed his father, I don’t even have to try to guess the reason.

“If it becomes known that you have a relationship with a man like me, there will be a lot of problems for you as a board chairman for high education. This is a good time to cut off our ties.”

“We have different ways of thinking, but I value you highly, Ayanokoji-sensei. I was very surprised when you rose up against Naoe-sensei, but I could feel that your passion for White

Room was certainly the real thing. That's precisely why... I do not regret having to distance myself from you."

It's a line that sets your teeth on edge, but it's an utterance with contents that I can say "this is it, Sakayanagi" to.

"I am not obsessed with White Room. I'm a have-not. Just, if I had not resisted Naoe, the only future that awaited me was one where everything would be taken away from me. Even if I was able to survive as a politician, I had no hope of success. Japan is too tied up by seniority by length of service. No matter how talented you are, if you are young, you fall through the screening process. If you try to force your way out, your fangs are cut off by the others' power. But, if you look at the world, you can see it. It is becoming less and less rare for even people in their 20s to get into important positions. There are even those who stand at the top of the country in their 30s."

No matter how much I try to push it down, the limitless ambition inside me is overflowing out.

"How can we let these old fools with little life left stay in control of the political world? They don't even hold back from offering up the country's blood and meat just to protect themselves for 10 or 20 more years. Then, how will things be 30 or 40 years from now? We will be devoured by other countries, and the country of Japan won't even have its blood or skin remaining."

If I find someone competent, I will use them, no matter what kind of person they are.

Of course, there will also be an abundance of ambitious people who will try to take advantage of me in my sleep, or people who will do things in the dark under someone else's orders, but if they are competent, I will use them as well.

Otherwise, the murky blood in the political world will not be replaced and will remain stagnant forever.

Fighting to protect one's own position does not do any good for the nation.

"I have my doubts about that, too. When you are in your 60s or 70s, you are finally qualified to be the leader of your country. I can understand why you might be doubtful about that point."

"Taking White Room as a base, I am going to send in people who can rewrite the organizational chart of the country, and we are going to overturn the system from the very bottom up."

Even if it is laughed at as a fantasy, I will prove that I can make this happen.

"It is a grand plan. It may take more than 10, or even 20 years."

"I know. We may not be able to change everything in my generation, but I will need someone to take over White Room. It is also important to create "educators" who can create even more perfect human beings than we have now."

Some of the children are already beyond the scope of Suzukake's curriculum.

"However, if I can, I would rather stand in front myself than the next generation. My ambition has never waned. But... For someone who defied a big power holder once, coming back is almost impossible. As long as Naoe is in the Citizens Party, I will never have a seat there."

"I heard that you were approached many times by the opposition party."

"You know the situation too, huh? I do have a grasp on a lot of opportunities. I'm sure that I'm a presence that the opposition party would do anything to gain. If I enter the party, however, I will simply be used. As long as the state of things doesn't change, all I can do is wait. That's when my fight will start. I have to save up the strength to be elected. By then, the people hindering me from above will have died, or have stepped back into hiding."

"It really is a daunting prospect..."

Precisely because I've gathered a variety of experiences with both successes and failures, there is an unshakeable conviction inside me.

That is why I will not imitate other successful people.

Anyone can succeed by copying others who have succeeded.

What do I do, then? I won't do the same things that the people who do not succeed are doing.

Most of this world consists of people who do not succeed.

I'll look at them, and make sure not to make the same mistakes.

This is similar, but different. I think it's an extremely important point of focus to implement.

"I'll pray for your health, Sakayanagi. Let's meet again some day."

I exchanged a handshake with Sakayanagi, and said farewell for a while.

Then, after seeing him off at the entrance, I quietly gazed at the sleeping city spreading before me by myself.

In this word, there is a phrase called strengths and weaknesses.

[TL Note 12 : 功罪 Kouzai: merits and demerits; good points and bad points; strengths and weaknesses. In Jp text It's not really a phrase or idiom, it's actually one word but I said phrase because it has to be translated as more than one word.]

The meaning is achievements and faults.

It is a useful phrase that includes both the bad and the good things.

This phrase is often used and is appropriate for many famous politicians.

They publicly succeed in various reforms, but fill their own pockets behind the scenes.

The problem is, that the achievements and the faults are by no means evenly matched.

From the eyes of the others, 5 faults are a lot more important than 10 achievements.

Saying it differently, this means that if you save 10 people but kill 5, it means you are the bad guy.

So the public says.

Save 10 people, and don't let anyone be unhappy.

If you save 1000 people but bring misfortune to even one person, you are evil.
This is the psychology of the masses.

Of course, there are some who say it differently.

"He saved 1000 people, so you should ignore the few victims."

However, there is one more trick here.

Which is that the voices of the ones criticizing you are the loudest.

If 10% of the population raises voices of criticism, the media will gladly pick them up.

Then, they will create the illusion that the whole country is criticizing you.

Rather than praising someone, wanting to beat someone up catches the people's eyes a lot better.

"Keep waiting. One day, I will surely stand at the summit of this country."

Epilogue

Misjudging the Future

Intro

"Today is March 11. The recorder is Suzukake Tanji."

Putting his phone's camera in recording mode, Suzukake placed it on the desk. Then, he turned the lens towards himself.

"For a long time, I've been in charge of education in this White Room."

On this day, Suzukake decided to quietly record his research impressions on his phone.

"However, from today, White Room will be frozen for a while. I don't know anything about politics, but it looks like a politician called Naoe started working towards stopping Ayanokoji-sensei's return. He's really making trouble for us. But, I decided to think with the future in mind. A long vacation after all this, that's not so bad either."

As if to take a breather, Suzukake turned off the computer's monitor.

"Humans really are interesting. As with all children, there are times they can learn things that they haven't been taught. Just like how they can breathe without being taught how to, the children kept in a closed environment, while only slightly, are seeking communication. After noticing this with the education from the first to the fourth period students, after the 5th period students, I decided to introduce a curriculum that encourages communication. Of course, this also caused some inefficiency. The rate of increase of their abilities decreased with the birth of emotions. Despite that, the 5th period students who have a more difficult curriculum are more capable than even the 3rd period students."

Punishment, and emotions should remain as extras.

Suzukake still hasn't changed his way of thinking on that.

"Regarding the curriculum of 10 levels, the 4th level of difficulty is applied to the 5th period students, and the 5th level of difficulty is applied to the 6th period students. This is probably the limit. With the 6th level of education we applied to the 7th period students, all of them have already dropped out. We have modified the curriculum since the 8th period and are continuing to use the 4th and 5th levels in combination, mixing them well. In time, these children will become ideal adults. They will be able to integrate into the world as one of its common people."

Then, Suzukake was silent for a moment.

"I guess this kind of thing is easy to figure out when you look at the files. The reason I wanted to leave a recording today is to remember the passion that kept us running. Many children have already learned in, and dropped out of White Room, but the presence of that child... Kiyotaka Ayanokoji, is still significant. His extraordinary ability to learn, adapt, and apply himself. His talent continues to amaze me every day, and his valuation never ceases to grow. The researchers in White Room believe that they can train him in the same way as those children, but in my opinion, that child is the exception. He is even more unique in this distorted environment. A true mutation."

The self-made beta curriculum. A product of education that boasts the highest level of difficulty.

"No... I don't know if I should say product. Rather, we can't replicate him. However, even that Kiyotaka wasn't flawless from the beginning. His studies, karate or boxing, his achievements were normal and did not stand out at first. The greatness came after that. He is able to quickly absorb everything into his abilities. After he learned the basics, he also learned the technique and the extraordinary ability to adapt and deal with anything he touches."

Even if I close my eyes, Kiyotaka's figure which is burned into the back of my eyelids does not disappear.

"The remaining children in the 8th year have decreased to 5. Considering that there were 74 at the start, the drop out rate is over 93%. The average dropout rate from the 1st period to the 3rd period is 27%, and 30% after the 5th period. I can surmise that the beta curriculum was reckless, after all. At this time, I was afraid that everyone in the 9th year would drop out. No... Rather, I wished that they would. If by any chance, a child who was able to succeed through a curriculum that humans shouldn't be capable of was to remain... that is already a monster that I cannot consider as a human being. It shouldn't exist. As if supporting this theory, heading towards spring, only one child was left in the end. However, the problem is what happens after. That person shows no signs of dropping out even after 10, 11, or 12 years have passed. Let alone drop out, he became able to surpass us researchers and instructors. Adults with superficial knowledge left White Room scratching their heads after only a few days. White Room's objective in the first place is to continue the education until adulthood. However, 6 more years... It's impossible. In the near future, that child will surpass our knowledge. This isn't just a hunch, I'm convinced. At the same time, I can no longer tell. Whether this presence was born because of my curriculum, or whether he is a genetic mutation. How was he able to survive without dropping out? I can't prove the reason for that. I'm almost going crazy."

Then - How should we perceive the existence of White Room and Kiyotaka in the future?

The one who will decide in the end is Ayanokoji Atsushi, this facility's representative, but the opinions between the researchers are largely divided.

"We still haven't proven if it is possible to create artificial geniuses or not, but I can say that we have proven that White Room can create superior human beings. However, every child must have a cap that will be their upper limit."

Suzukake looked at the empty cup that had green tea in it a few minutes ago, opened a new bottle of mineral water, and took only the cup and the bottle cap.

“This represents the talent of an educator. This small cap is in other words the limit of a normal educator’s talent. It’ll be easy to understand if you consider this large cup compared to this cap is the talent of the educators in White Room. The children receiving their education increase their own limits in accordance with the educators’ talent. Considering the cap’s size as the limit for an average human, if they receive an education here their talent can reach the size of this cup.”

He poured the new mineral water into the cup.

“Once you reach the upper limit, there is fundamentally no more room for growth. The water spills out, and you become unable to absorb anything new. ...No, maybe that isn’t the correct way to represent it. As you absorb new knowledge, your old talents are slowly lost. Without you even noticing it.”

Looking at the water spilling out onto the desk, Suzukake sighed.

“There are a variety of problems ahead. First, there are only a limited number of people with the talent that is the size of this cup. Second, that even if they have the talent, they do not necessarily have the ability to teach others. Thirdly, that it is not always possible to have this amount of talent. The upper limit is the size of this cup, but some individuals are often one or two sizes smaller than that. Of course, there are also cases of children who develop to be one or two times larger than this upper limit, but the ratio of these children is smaller than the former. The most important part is that geniuses in this world are not limited to the size of this cup. They have talent beyond the size of this mineral bottle, or even more. There is no one who has that much talent, and also the skill to educate others. And even if there was, the children would probably never grow up to be bigger than the cup.”

This reality is also clear from the research date up until now.

“A warm education provided to the children, or the other way around, a strict education. No matter which way you go, I think there is a limit to the aptitude a child has.”

The goal of the White Room project is to create geniuses from ordinary people, and raise up human resources that can fight the world.

“It is possible to intentionally create the top 10% of the category of humans. In that sense, White Room is established as an organization that can come up with sure results. However, we may not be able to create the 0.01% that would be able to fight against the world.”

A feeling of defeat as a researcher, indeed.

Suzukake was keenly aware of this through Ayanokoji Kiyotaka.

“That child has no upper limit to his talent right now. He will absorb as much as we teach him. It could be said that he was born a genius, or that this is a result of his education in White Room, but I think that both of these are correct and incorrect. If Kiyotaka had not been educated in White Room, he would probably have been only a moderately talented person. If Kiyotaka’s education continues like this in White Room, he will be an asset that will greatly increase the talent ceiling of the next generation of children. If Kiyotaka were to take my place and nurture these children, I think the children would grow up to be as big as the plastic bottles, instead of cups. ...I would love to see the process of that happening.”

An angel and a devil are arguing in my mind.

I wonder how much he would accomplish if he were sent out into the world to lead Japan, instead of staying as an educator in the small White Room.

Which choice would be better for Japan, and for the future?

It is not for me to make the final judgement, but what choice will Ayanokoji-sensei make?

“I’m going to see it all through, and regardless of his choice, I will keep my connection to White Room for my entire life.”

I’ve never had so much fun in my life, and I am filled with more satisfaction than when I was forced to flee from Japan to overseas.

“But - no matter how extraordinary he is, if you ask me whether Ayanokoji Kiyotaka is a true genius or not, I still have my doubts. For his emotional side, he is greatly inferior to even average people. We don’t know how the effects of that will be. He is imperfect.”

While continuing to talk, Suzukake reached out to his phone and stopped the recording.

“That child I’ve produced... I wonder if he will grasp happiness before he dies...”

He felt greatly uncomfortable recording an utterance so unbecoming of a researcher.

Part 1

It was a day when the season just coincided with the blooming cherry blossoms.

I left Saitama, and returned to Tokyo for the first time in several months.

Instead of my home in Meguro where I had settled a few years ago, I drove to my office, which I had not visited for some time.

“I wonder when’s the last time I was here...”

I looked up from my car’s window at the building which could break down any time, and gave the instruction.

After I pulled over to the shoulder of the road, one man came out.

I have been away from the world of politics for a long time, but the time for my return is near. Naoe, who has been hiding in Kijima’s shadow as a fixer, is now also 80 years old, and even seemed to be seriously ill at some point.

Publicly, he has returned to politics after being cured of his illness, but in reality his life is in a precarious state.

The proof is the acts of sabotage towards White Room and its shadow supporters by the Naoe side. They decided to get rid of me before their own lives would end.

It was indeed a hard blow that I was forced to temporarily freeze White Room, but I’ve come to think that I received just the right amount of time to prepare for my counterattack.

“Naoe got pretty old too, huh.”

My war in the world of politics will start again very soon.

This is the omen and premonition of that.

As if congratulating me, Kamogawa appeared before me, looking just like he did when we spoke in the *ryoutei* that day.

“It has been a long time, Ayanokoji-sensei. I did not think that you would take the trouble to come here.”

“Might as well. Don’t worry about it. Are you ready?”

We have been conversing on the phone, but I’ve been having fewer chances to meet with him face to face than even with Sakayanagi.

Because a clumsy movement would get caught in Naoe's web of observation.

"Thanks to you, I have been handling things somehow well. There are no changes with you either, right, sensei?"

"You're the one who should be called 'sensei', seeing as you're repeatedly participating in elections."

As I spoke so half-jokingly, Kamogawa replied with an extremely serious expression.

"Indeed, you are not a politician right now. However, you've taken in a lot of investors, and are in charge of White Room, which is well-known only to those in the know.

Those rumours will never die off."

Indeed, I continued surviving even in this difficult environment.

Although I was chased out of politics, I've brought in many wealthy people with White Room as the starting point, and have improved my own finances to a point even beyond my own imagination.

My title as a politician no longer exists, but more people are calling me "sensei" now than ever before.

"I heard that your son has been very successful in White Room."

"Is that sarcasm? Because we had to temporarily close it down after overdoing it."

Kamogawa bitterly laughed, but he had the same look in his eyes as he always did.

No, it rather looks like he is continuing to grow and develop.

"I think you already know, but... Naoe-sensei is pulling the strings from the back. I do not think he will make White Room known to the world, lest he burn himself too, but it looks like he is beginning to use any method possible to destroy White Room."

"If this wasn't that man's idea, I think it would have already been destroyed, so. I can see that the other side is having a hard time getting over this point too. What's his next move?"

"Things are unclear for now. I am somehow within reach of Naoe-sensei's faction, but because I used to work by your side, they do not completely trust me."

Even trying to force my way in, I suppose it is difficult to slip past Naoe's protective web.

It is more important to rather keep hiding on the inside.

"Just - it looks like his physical condition is getting much worse recently."

Trying to hide his voice, Kamogawa whispered to me.

“I’d like to bury that man with my own hands, but I suppose him dying of illness is the best possible outcome.”

That’s how hard it is to find a gap in Naoe’s defense.

Considering his age, it should be any time now.

“The day of your return is finally getting closer, Ayanokoji-sensei.”

“Yeah. Most importantly, even if that man is gone, that won’t make it easier to stand up on the top of the world of politics. No, I think it will be even more difficult than before.”

“You are right. I think Naoe-sensei was a leading figure even in the world of politics. However, I think that President Kijima will control him and rise even higher.”

If things keep going this smoothly, the day when the record for the longest tenure will be broken is near.

Furthermore, he is still only 60 years old. If I handle things badly, Kijima’s time will continue for 10, or 20 more years.

I, who used to be the young choice, am piling on more and more years.

“This is my last chance to shoot my shot.”

“That is precisely why you want to have the perfect timing to shoot him down, right?”

White Room’s temporary freeze.

I don’t know if it will be half a year, or 5 years, but my biggest worry is this becoming public.

However, my salvation is that the Naoe side also thinks the same way.

There is no doubt that they are somehow trying to bury it from darkness into another darkness.

The car I had arranged arrived, and Tabuchi opened the rear passenger door.

Kamogawa also slowly entered the passenger seat.

“Tabuchi. Are the arrangements done?”

“As planned, the children will be supervised and handled by the temporarily purchased children’s home.”

“Yeah.”

“Your son - are you really sure?”

“I’m not going to treat him specially just because he’s my own son. However, as White Room’s greatest creation, I can’t say that he doesn’t have the “qualification”. So much that even I’m hesitating. That in itself is significant.”

While heading for our destination, I decided to wait for Kiyotaka, who was being taken out of the clinic.

“Still, a counseling clinic... What happened with Kiyotaka-kun?”

“Well, the reason we stopped by here is that there is someone who wants to meet Kiyotaka no matter what. He’s a big investor, so I have no choice.”

“Wants to meet him?”

“It’s shallow. It’s meant to close the wound, but he doesn’t know that it will have the reverse effect.”

Ishida left the clinic and joined us.

“Kamogawa. When was it that you last saw Kiyotaka?”

“Let’s see, I think it has been 5, no, 6 years since I have seen your son. I am looking forward to seeing how well he has grown up.”

“...Looking forward?”

After entering the car, Ishida glared at Kamogawa with a stern expression.

“Huh? Umm, did I say something strange?”

“*That thing* is a monster. He’s not something you should look at with such soft feelings.”

“Monster..? He is sensei’s son, you know, you should be careful how you-”

“I don’t care. Ishida is also someone who’s been watching Kiyotaka grow from the start.”

He can say whatever he wants about him.

He is more qualified to do so than someone like me, with nothing but a simple blood connection.

The degree of his perfection as a human being is unimaginable, considering he would be a 3rd year in middle school now.

However, there are many things he lacks in exchange for that.

That must be one of the reasons Ishida calls him a monster.

Kamogawa wrinkled his eyebrows at Ishida's brutally honest words, and stared out the window.

Part 2

The years I've spent in White Room are now over 14 years, and I was at the age where I would finish 2nd year in middle school, as the world would call it.

The real world of the outside, which differs from the virtual.

However, I don't feel as out of place as I thought I would, and am taking it all in.

It's unclear whether this is because of a curriculum, or the result of something different.

While waiting in a vacant room after Researcher Ishida's instructions, one man raised his voice.

"Kept you waiting, Ayanokoji Kiyotaka-kun. Thank you for coming here today."

"You are?"

A new face, around 40 years old.

From his peaceful expression, I could tell that he isn't related to White Room.

What caught my eyes more than that, was that he had a vase with flowers growing inside.

I haven't seen this thing before either. Not except in my knowledge or images.

"There was a kid I really wanted you to meet. I begged Ayanokoji-sensei to allow me to do so."

"I cannot comprehend what you are saying."

"That kid's heart is really weak, you see, and she can't go out as much as she wants. She can only keep her composure in her house, and in this clinic. That's why I had you come here."

"Are those... Sakura flowers?"

"They were decorating this room, so I had them watered a little. She likes these. She should be back from her medical examination soon."

Saying so, he put the vase on a table by the window.

"Kiyotaka....!"

While waiting after the lack of explanation, the room's door was opened after a short while, and my name was yelled out.

She must be at around the same age as me.

The girl is looking over here with wide open eyes.

"I missed you... I missed you so much!"

"You are..?"

"Yuki, I'm Yuki!"

Yuki. I have a memory of that name.

She's a White Room student who dropped out a long while ago.

It's only natural that I still have some memories I could not intentionally delete from my mind.

"Why are you here?"

Even if she did not die in the real sense, she is someone who lost everything after dropping out.

A meeting with the dead.

I sense some discomfort in this, but I wonder what the real objective of this meeting is.

"Since she left Wh-... the same place as you, my daughter Yuki has been getting weaker and weaker. She's been in low spirits. She couldn't leave the house, and just kept worrying about you."

The man who said so while watching from a distance seems to be Yuki's father.

This is a little different than the smile she showed me when we were little, but I can still sense the fullness of her emotions.

"It really has been a long time, huh? Kiyotaka, have you... have you been in that place ever since?"

She looks frightened to remember the past.

From looking at her father and Yuki, it seems that they do not like saying White Room's name out loud.

"All 14 years. I went outside for the first time today."

"You really are amazing, Kiyotaka... What about the other kids? Did everyone else leave?"

“Who knows? They’re all gone already. It’s been years since I became the last one. I don’t know.”

Including this child before me, I never cared about anyone who dropped out.

“Alone... all that time, in that place...? I... I... that place...!”

As the fear she was pushing down started to come out, Yuki’s body started trembling.

“Yuki, please stop remembering that.”

She’s losing her composure after her memories were triggered.

Are all the people who dropped out this miserable?

I did understand one thing, which is that she is the child of someone significant in the financial world.

I can tell that she is being treated politely after dropping out.

However, if she is going to counseling, that means the wound in her heart has not healed.

And a method to try and heal her, was to let her meet someone else from the 4th period... Me.

I have a grasp on the situation, so I have nothing to do in this place any more.

“I’m leaving now.”

“W-wait! But we just met! I, I want to talk a lot more!”

“I don’t have anything to say to you.”

In the first place, if we can’t talk about White Room, then we can’t build up a conversation.

“Please wait, Ayanokoji-kun. Can’t I ask you to chat with her a little? You can talk about anything you want. Even silly, insignificant subjects.”

“What would those be? You understand that this is my first time in the outside world, right?”

“That’s...”

“Of course, if you want me to lie and make things up for the sake of talking, then that’s fine with me. I have no problems with being forced to converse within the limits of my knowledge. That isn’t what you want, though, is it?”

“I, I’m fine. I’m fine with talking about W-w-white Room too, so!”

Even while breathing hard, Yuki grabbed my sleeve, not letting me go.

“You should stop. You don’t have the capacity to talk to me.”

“That’s, that’s not true...! I always wanted to meet with you, Kiyotaka...”

“You should have stopped it there. Meeting me like this, it’s only going to create a gap in your memories and ideals. If you want to get better, you should continue your treatment here.”

It’s enough now, right? If I’m gonna waste my time here, I’d rather look at the scenery outside.

Even if only a little, I am still curious about the outside world.

“Please. Please, just a while-”

Yuki’s father reached out with his arms to block the exit.

“Is that an order?”

“No... It’s...”

“It isn’t, right? White Room’s representative did not give me any concrete instructions.”

“Yeah. Ayanokoji-sensei only promised to let Yuki meet with you. This is my personal request.”

“I will refuse, then.”

“Wha-!?”

“Because I have decided that this is the best choice for her sake.”

“Are you saying that you don’t care about her because she dropped out!?”

That’s exactly right. Children who dropped out don’t matter.

But, it was this man’s fault to call me for the sake of counseling.

“Excuse me.”

“No! Don’t go, Kiyotaka!”

“Nothing’s changed since back when you dropped out, huh?”

“...!”

“You should be grateful that you were blessed with parents, and continue your treatment here. If you expect anything from me, you’ll only be disappointed.”

“No! I, I want to talk with you! Like we could back then!”

Yuki’s extremely infantile way of speaking and reactions have not changed in the least from back then.

“Please wait! Please!”

“Please move.”

“It’s... It’s not just me. Neither my wife nor her sister can reach out to Yuki. They can’t. Yet, she can talk with you. That has to be a big help for her..!”

“Goodbye. We shouldn’t see each other again. I will take my leave now.”

“Nooo! No! Kiyotaka! Noooo!”



The voice of the girl crying and screaming, and the man who can't hold himself back from cursing at me.

None of it entered my ears. I'm not interested.

Leaving the hospital, I returned to the car that was waiting for me.

The man who peeked out from the passenger seat's window waved at me.

"Hey, Kiyotaka-kun. We haven't met, right? My name is Kamogawa-

I've seen this face.

With this in my mind, I sat down on an empty seat in the back.

"...Nevermind, haha. Forget about it."

He bitterly laughed, scratched the back of his head and looked ahead.

"Please drive."

"Understood."



Inside the silent car, I looked out to the outside world through a window.

“Seeing it for the first time, what do you think about the outside world?”

“Nothing.”

At least, it’s not moving anything inside me that I can call emotion.

“Nothing, huh?”

I’m sure that’s what this man, who is my father, is thinking.

That I am looking out the window, but that there are no emotions inside me.

That this is no different for me than looking at the virtual world.

That is a big mistake.

It’s just that it’s easier to make him think that I have it all under my control.

At the very least, that is the most beneficial thing for me to do right now.

There is no need to let this man realize that I am already sharpening my fangs.

“You will continue the White Room curriculum by my side for a while. I will send you back to the facility when White Room reopens.”

“I know.”

Even if my environment changes, there will be no obstacles as long as I have the skills I acquired in White Room.

Part 3

"It's pretty annoying, isn't it?"

After taking Kiyotaka to the mansion, I left Kamogawa behind.

"What is?"

"That there is only one ultimate perfect result. If we follow a sound strategy, we should let him devote his life to nurturing people who can surpass Suzukake in the white room. If we do this, there is a possibility that more than one person will emerge who will eventually come close to Kiyotaka."

"That was the plan from the start, right? Isn't that good enough?"

"My return to the world of politics is starting to become a reality. That's what's making me hesitate."

"No way..."

"Annoyed by the fact that there is an age limit in the world of politics, this is the first time I've thought of such a thing."

"You want to make him, Kiyotaka-kun, into a politician..?"

"The strategy of making him an educator in White Room and connecting to the next generation is the true nature of White Room. It is an unavoidable project for the sake of allowing Japan to take the lead in the world in the next 50 or 100 years. That hasn't changed for me."

However...

"Yet, in order for me to reach the summit of the world of politics, I need a strong ally. The earliest age that Kiyotaka can get the right to be elected and become a parliament member is 25. I'll be 61 then. I'll be right on the edge."

"But, as a politician - he will also need some time to mature and get into the swing of things, right?"

Of course, Kiyotaka will not be able to do anything immediately after becoming a parliament member.

Theoretically however, he can be appointed as prime minister at 25 years old, he will have that right.

He has the potential to be far more useful than the usual parliament members.

“What do you plan on doing..?”

“I don’t have an answer. If I or Kiyotaka take the lead in the world of politics, we can change this Japan in a big way. However, that would mean a delay in education in White Room. That’s why I’m so troubled.”

The most annoying thing is that he has the title of being my children.

When you enter the world of politics, the public thinks that you just want your second generation to take over.

Big disadvantage.

But, I have an idea.

An idea that might put this disadvantage to use.

He lacks feelings of joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure, and I am very uneasy about his emotional side too.

There is a need to improve these.

“If it’s Kiyotaka-kun, I’m sure he’ll work very obediently, so I would expect a lot of things from him.”

Obedience? Even I don’t know to what extent Kiyotaka himself can be controlled.

His brain has already far surpassed mine.

Even if his emotions are thin, I’m sure he’s already thinking far ahead into the future.

On the other hand, I am fortunate that he is naive on some things about the world.

He hasn’t reached the point for me to be cautious of yet.

For now, I should be prepared to change my plans.

I have a strong and unwavering will to take over this country.

“I’ll have you hang out with me for a little longer today, Kamogawa.”

No matter what I do, first of all, I need to take measures relating to the formation of his personality.

“I do not mind, but... What are we going to do?”

A hand appeared to lightly knock on the car's window, and Tsukishiro naturally entered the driver's seat.

Not only does this man have influence in the ruling and opposition parties, but he also has connections in the financial world.

I can't trust him too much as he always stands on the winning side, but his skills are still certain, even at this age.

"You look well, Ayanokoji-san. It seems like you've been getting along quite well with the people from the Peace Party."

"That doesn't matter. What happened with the thing I asked you for?"

"The arrangements are complete. There will be no evidence left, so there shouldn't be any problems."

"Alright. One more thing, there's something else I want you to ask for what's ahead of us."

I told the plan to Tsukishiro and Kamogawa.

Unlike Kamogawa who continued to be surprised as he listened, Tsukishiro took it all in with a calm smile.

"That is very interesting. I want to say that I would welcome the work, but I have gotten older too. Things may not go as they would if I was younger."

Despite his modesty, this man would not take on something he cannot do.

"You're the right man. I want to see how far he can go."

"If you will leave it to me, then that is fine with me. I understand. I shall cooperate when you put this plan to practice. We will need to prepare some of the missing pieces for later."

I instructed him to drive, and Tsukishiro started the engine.

I told Tsukishiro, whom I did not trust, only about the parts relating to Kiyotaka's future.

But that's not all I'm after.

I need to grasp the weaknesses of Kijima and the Advanced Nurturing High School, an enemy that I will need to crush in the future.

One year after this, Ayanokoji Kiyotaka will enroll in the Advanced Nurturing High School.

Afterword

Thank you very much for kindly reading Volume 0.

My favourite food is *chazuke*, my favourite drink is black tea, and my hobby is watching baseball games. I am Kinugasa Shougo.

[TL Note : chazuke : Cooked rice with green tea poured over it.]

I'm itching to get a dog or a cat, but when I take vote among my family to pick one, they're always divided equally 2 against 2, so I can't choose either one.

Recently, I have been troubled by the fact that when I heat up frozen pasta in the microwave for a long time because I want it to be hot, the noodles often dry out and I end up eating them dry.

Is it my fault, or rather the microwave oven's fault, that a pattern of repeated fine-tuning eventually produces the same result? It must be the latter.

—Well now, let's stop talking about useless things and move onto the subject of Volume 0.

What do you think about this volume that clearly tells the entire past chapter, which is a secret in Youjitsu's publication?

The setting of White Room existed as a document in 2015 when the story of Youjitsu started, but I had no idea at the time that I would dig deeper into it and write it down in a single volume.

As a writer, I am very happy that this has been accomplished even in this particular way.

It was quite difficult to write the book without disturbing the pace of publication, but I hope that as many people as possible will be pleased with it.

In fact, along with the White Year arc, there is another blank one year arc that has not been released to the public.

At this stage, I have no plans to publish this material in book form, but I am beginning to think that it would be interesting to do so if the opportunity arises in the future.

Well then everyone, it was pretty short, but I'll end it here for now.

Let's meet again at the afterword of the next volume. See ya!

Thanks...

Thank you, the reader, for reading this Translation of Volume 0. I hope you had fun. This was finally the volume where Kiyotaka Ayanokoji's past was revealed and boy was it interesting. For sure this volume would be in the Top 5 Cote volumes for most. All the insights into new characters and some familiar names popping up hyped me a lot for the future. There was also a lot revealed about the 'outside world' which was interesting. And it left me wondering... How is it going to Connect to things in the Future? Well, it seems like we might get our answer in the next few upcoming volumes. Speaking of which... The Next Volume is Classroom of the Elite Year 2 Volume 9! which, I believe will spark a lot of Debate. As it is clear from the Already available information that it might have some major decisions and events in the world of Cote. For the Release date - It is supposed to be released on 25th February, 2023. As for the Estimated time of translation, I would say it might remain the same. However, I will try to make the translation time as shorter as possible while making sure that the translation quality doesn't get affected. So, Look forward to it. I am really excited for Year 2 Volume 9 and for more updated information on it you can follow me [here](#). I will keep providing you with the best quality translation of Classroom of the Elite for as long as I can. Again, Thanks for the Support everyone!

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Hope to see you all again soon!

Have a great time Ahead~