

Classroom of the Elite

Year 2 Volume 6

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Prologue

The Monologue of Akito Miyake

I never once thought of myself as a special person.

I guess I'm an average person with no special strengths or flaws.

I've been going about my life as usual, simply coasting along.

I've done some bad things from time to time, and I've done some kind things too in my own way. I'm not a good guy, and I'm not a bad guy either. If I were to evaluate myself, I would be that kind of person.

Ever since I was born, I've been walking around as a human being who's neither good nor bad. However, It wasn't until I went to high school that this became more apparent.

I just randomly started watching Archery and thought I'd give it a try to pass the time. It's like giving in to the flow, just going about your life as normal.

I don't pay attention to the big things, and my daily life seems to repeat itself. It may be a boring routine, but I did it because I thought it would be easier. Perhaps because of this, I never made any friends in high school initially.

I wasn't lonely at all, but an unexpected turn of circumstances led to me making some new friends.

Keisei, Kiyotaka, Haruka, Airi.

Despite the fact that there were only five of us, including myself, I felt strangely at ease in that little group.

I had a feeling that the rest of our school life will be spent in a relaxed manner with the five of us.

The environment around me may have changed, but I was still me. That was the only thing that I knew would never change.

In spite of these expectations, one major change occurred.

'Loving Someone.'

I have always thought of girls as cute and beautiful, but I never fell in love with any of them. I wonder when it started.

I started to look at Haruka's profile frequently.

And what made me sure was when during the unanimous special exam it was stated that Haruka would be expelled.

There was a part of me that couldn't accept that we would be separated.

Emotion, not logic, was the top priority for me at that time.

I wanted to protect her, even if it meant abandoning Airi, a member of the group I cared about as much as she cared about me.

I don't know if this feeling is acceptable.

I gave priority to what I wanted to protect by all means rather than what was right or wrong.

But I have no regrets.

"Will you join me in my revenge?"

The sound brought me back to reality. Her eyes looking at me are the same as always.

Those were strong, straightforward, and dangerously presenceful.

But she had a will of determination that was not clouded by a single speck of uncertainty.

I didn't answer aloud.

No, I couldn't.

The revenge/vengeance will surely cause our friends and our classmates a lot of trouble. She must have seen through my emotions, because she smiles and walks away, turning her back to me.

In the past, I would have probably just sent her off without a second thought.

The right thing to do is to forget it.

Yes, how much easier it would be to just back off.

I didn't know that falling in love with someone could be so tedious, difficult, and troublesome.

I'm... / Ore wa

No matter how many people are going to hate it in the future.

My emotions would not allow me to let her go alone.

On this day, after the Sports festival, I made an impossible decision.

Chapter 1

The Price of Victory

Intro

The unanimous special exam was over, and the week began after the weekend, September 20th.

I woke up around 6:30 a.m., turned on the TV, and started preparing breakfast. A new Monday has arrived, and it will be a very different routine than the one we had last week. It's not hard to guess why that is.

There are two main factors responsible. The cracks in the relationship between the classmates caused by Kushida's revelations and By overturning the precondition of limiting dropouts to traitors, that is, Kushida, trust of our classmates in me and Horikita has been broken.

The choice was to expel or not expel the traitor, and I got everyone to vote in favor of it, promising that only the traitor would be expelled. I then used my previous strategies to push Kushida into a corner, and after she confessed to being a traitor, I carried out my plan to expel her.

Kushida was protected by the students who wanted to believe in her and those who liked her, but their trust was lost when she finally revealed her true nature and started revealing their secrets.

She was one step closer to being expelled, but then something unexpected happened.

It was Suzune Horikita, After knowing everything, She appealed that Kushida was a necessary resource for the class.

To top it all off, she even went so far as to say that she would never agree to expel Kushida.

Originally, I promised to drop out only the traitor, and Horikita only agreed to it, but I was still surprised that she defended Kushida.

With the little time we had left, we could either leave Kushida and accept the penalty of the exam, or let someone else leave the school and pass the exam.

Anyway, as mentioned above, the trust of my classmates in Horikita, who changed her policy, and I, who accepted it and decided to drop out someone else, was greatly shaken.

A person who is genuinely hurt by the revelation of a faint love affair.

A person who has become suspicious because he has been slandered by his friends behind his back.

A person who loses a friend and now resents others

The list of reasons for the seriousness of the situation in the class are endless.

The impacts of this, on the other hand, are not a cause for concern; rather, they were anticipated from the start.

It was an unavoidable and necessary task to bring down Kushida, a person of trust in class.

It's easy to pass off If you think of this as just a disadvantage.

But I don't see it that way. You can't gain experience if you take that approach. It is a loss of opportunity to miss the chance to grow.

Airi was the only one of the four classes to drop out of school. Her classmates were deeply hurt. In return, we gained class points.

No.

It is important to change the perspective of the situation.

We shouldn't just stop here, but look beyond it.

We must assume that this hurting situation has given us an opportunity to strengthen our bond.

By doing so, Horikita's class can become even stronger.

It's unclear how many students are aware of this, but they need to face the problem, not run away from it.

The special exam for Horikita's class is still going on.

The weight and preciousness of 100 class points. It's a good way to reflect on and learn about your own actions.

Of course, we need to be careful because if we let it go, we could throw away all the advantage gained. If left untreated, the wound could only spread further.

I finished my breakfast and checked my phone with my toothbrush in hand.

It seems that there has been no new communication made since midnight.

"And yet..."

Anyway, I am still surprised that the special exam took an unexpected turn, as this was not the ending I had originally planned. From a variety of perspectives, including rationality, consistency, and objectivity, there was no choice but to expel Kushida Kikyo, who had continued to insist on expelling, plunging the class into chaos.

I had decided that her withdrawal would leave the least damage to the class and we could shift everyone's mind immediately to the sports festival.

In other words, from my subjective point of view, Horikita's choice not to expel Kikyo Kushida, the traitor, is unreasonable, irrational, and a mistake.

Even though I felt that it was a clear mistake, I supported Horikita in her decision to expel Airi. In other words, I chose to resign myself to an irrational failure.

At least, it's an option that I never would have had before I came to this school.

So what is the reason for accepting it now?

A student named Suzune Horikita had stronger feelings for Kushida than some of the other students.

Kushida was undoubtedly a Close friend to Horikita, even if the expression "close friend" is not quite correct. It is natural to want to keep those who are special to you, but if you make judgments based on that, it will remain unfair.

In addition, it could be seen as an abuse of her established position as a leader.

It would be easier to understand if we take the perspective of Haruka, who was Airi's best friend, as an example.

From Haruka's point of view, Kushida's persistence on the option of 'expelling a student' was evil and she should be eliminated. And initially both I and Horikita were also proceeding on the premise of eliminating that traitor. That's why she cast a vote for the expulsion. Nevertheless, her best friend left the school because of Horikita's preferential treatment of Kushida.

Even if she were told to start working hard again next week, she would never be able to convince herself to do so.

But let's not forget that Horikita's choice was not an easy one either.

In that special exam where she was forced to make a difficult choice, Horikita came up with a clear answer for herself.

And at the risk of getting herself in harm's way, she declared that she would keep Kushida.

This alone is an impossible decision for an ordinary student. Even though she was prepared to be accused of being unfair, Horikita believed that keeping Kushida was in the best interest of the class.

"Of course, that doesn't mean it's the right answer at this point."

Before the unanimous special exam, Kushida was clearly more valuable than Airi in bringing benefit to the class. Even after the revelation, Kushida still had the upper hand, but the gap that had been so large had definitely narrowed. In addition to that, Kushida herself has not changed her mind and is expected to continue to be uncooperative with the class in the future.

In other words, there was no guarantee that keeping Kushida would benefit the class.

Horikita's idea seems to be going wrong at this point.

Only that conclusion remains unchanged. Still, I supported Horikita's idea for only one reason.

To put it bluntly, I want to see Horikita's growth, direction, and results.

*'What lies at the end of an action that cannot be chosen by the human being
Kiyotaka Ayanokoji?'*

I wanted to see the class chemistry that would result from leaving Kushida behind.

Horikita

*Will you prove your choice right by grabbing Class A by a narrow
margin? Or*

Will the Class collapse and you learn the error of your choice?

Or will it bring other unexpected changes?

At least, I think it's more likely to create negative changes...

When I activated OAA from my phone, I found that Airi Sakura's name had already been deleted from the class list. It was as if such a student had never existed in the first place.

I put my phone in the right pocket of my uniform, then grabbed my shoes and headed for the door.

Apart from the situation in the class, there was also a strange unusual movement in other classes.

It was the fact that Ryuen and Sakayanagi wanted to fight each other in the final exam. It was not strange for Ryuen to nominate Class A to take away class points. But what about Sakayanagi? I'm not sure why she would want to nominate the lowest ranked Ryuen class at that point. she judged that it would be better to fight Ryuen.

I wonder if the "promise" made between Sakayanagi and Ryuen has anything to do with it. It's worth paying attention to. So we've got the best situation for Horikita's class...

I left my room at the same time as usual and headed out of the dormitory.

When I got off the elevator, I saw Horikita sitting on the sofa in the lobby, waiting for someone. She took one look at me, but didn't seem to be trying to get up.

However, perhaps because there was exactly no one around, she stood up somewhat late and approached me.

"Are you waiting for Kushida?"

Before Horikita could speak, I asked her, and she replied, stammering for a moment. "Y- You have a good idea. Yeah. I went to her room several times on weekends ..." It seems that she tried to take care of her mentally, but she couldn't even make contact with her.

It would've been the most humiliating thing she'd ever experienced in her life. Kushida wouldn't be ready to face Horikita right away.

Perhaps Horikita had been waiting here for Kushida to come down from a very early hour. But

What bothered me more was that I could easily see the lack of sleep under Horikita's eyes.

"Looks like you're pretty distressed about Kushida."

"What? Oh, no. It is lack of sleep, but this is a little different reason. She never got out of the room. No matter how many times I visited, she was away. Still, I've been on the lookout for her."

"You mean you were waiting by the front door?"

Even if it was only on weekends, it would be a big deal if she was out from morning till night. "I repeatedly pressed the bell and waited. Still, it was quiet, not a single sound." It was no surprise that there was enough food in Kushida's room to last her for a couple of days.

"And we need to be careful about our surroundings, don't we? It wouldn't do us any good if the other class knew about Kushida-san ."

Her nerves were on edge as she waited in the hallway for her to come out. It was truly a hard day.

An ordinary student would have been defeated by Horikita's passion, but Kushida was the opposite student for this.

"After what happened the other day, she can't be what she was before."

"Since you made the choice to keep Kushida, it's only natural that you would certainly follow through."

Horikita nodded with a hint of determination, but I'm sure she wasn't entirely without her thoughts.

"How was your... weekend, Ayanokoji-kun?"

What was it about, oh of course, the Ayanokoji group. Since Airi was expelled, Horikita should see that there are more problems than leaving Kushida.

"I've had brief contact with Keisei and Akito, but that's all."

That, too, was not part of the conversation, especially about Airi. And when it came to Haruka, there was no sign that she had read the message. I'm not an expert on how to use apps, but I wouldn't be surprised if she blocked me, even if she didn't leave the group.

"I take it you haven't had a chance to talk to Hasebe yet."

"Well, yes. I couldn't muster up the courage to get in touch with Haruka."

After showing an apologetic look, Horikita bowed her head.

It's impossible to talk to each other now, even if we meet forcibly.

Instead of trying to fix the relationship, it is more practical for the three of them to maintain the group relationship with me out of it.

In other words, keeping an eye on things for now is the best option.

Even if Haruka still holds a grudge against me in the process, it will eventually come out at some point.

It would be better for the class if that were to happen, but we have to be prepared for it if it doesn't. If she continued to hold a grudge against me, Horikita, and the class, it's possible that Haruka could harm the class for her personal reasons.

Her specs are not essential to the class, but missing one reasonably useful piece and reducing the class maximum value even by one is of course a disadvantage.

Along with this, this could also affect Akito and Keisei in the process.

"I don't think anything I say will get through now. We'll just have to wait."

First of all, this is not the place to discuss it, that's for sure.

After confirming each other's situation, Horikita quietly took a deep breath.

"By forcing you to make the choice to keep Kushida-san, I've changed your relationship."

I was the one who directly handed Airi over to her, but it was a role I took upon myself.

It's my responsibility, at least for that part.

"You don't have to apologize twice for the same thing. If you thought it was the right thing to do, so be it."

"But you covered for me. No, that's not all..."

She spun her words carefully, as if trying to clear her head.

"Even if I had induced Sakura-san to leave the school in that situation, I'm sure Hasebe-san would not have relented until the end. In other words, the penalty for running out of time was unavoidable."

Thanks to the time this weekend, she'd got a good idea of what's going on. The burden of the role of pronouncing expulsion and the difficulty of carrying it out are different. The fight against the limited time was tougher than imagined.

She was relieved that we had avoided the worst of it, but her eyes looked somewhat anxious.

A small number of us are seeking salvation to a path where no one has ever left the class because the time ran out.

A world where 39 people were there, not a single one missing. Despite losing class points, she was able to bond and aim for Class A again by protecting her friends.

Horikita knows that this is an escape thought.

That's why, deep down, she holds back the thoughts.

"That test, it was as if you had it all figured out from the start."

"I didn't foresee the future. I just went into it with all kinds of assumptions."

"Still, It's amazing. Creating some images of situations in mind, trying to read through them perfectly. The content of the assignment, what kind of statement will make the other person move as you want. It was all based on calculation."

Little by little, she began to notice the world I was seeing and thinking about.

"Reflections and analysis are all well and good, but right now we have to solve the problems in class first, don't we?"

"Yeah, yeah. Right..."

"Don't expect things to be the same as they were the other day."

"Of course I'm prepared for that. I'm sure Hasebe resents me, and I'm sure Yukimura and Miyake-kun feel the same way. And there are students who are not convinced that I made a strong move to keep Kushida-san."

You say you're prepared, but that's still not a true understanding of the situation.

How long can you remain calm about the changes that your decisions lead to?

It would be fine if this was just a positive change, but this time it is almost the exact opposite. It's a negative change.

You won't be seen as a meritorious person who has increased class points.

"I think it's time to go to school now."

I don't see the point in having a long conversation here, since Horikita is too busy dealing with Kushida right now.

"And there's no good in standing out."

This isn't just a dormitory for the students of Horikita's class.

Students of other classes, such as Sakayanagi and Ryūen, live in the same dorms.

I don't believe that we can keep a lid on things related to Kushida's true nature, but that doesn't mean that there is any need for us to expose it ourselves.

The class certainly scored big points.

It will be up to the students in the future to successfully deal with the cost. But before that.

What should be done about the problem I noticed in the class.

Part 1

When I entered the classroom, I instantly noticed that the mood had remained unchanged since the special exam.

There were a few students who looked at me at first. This is an unusually high number of students who I do not have close friendships with on a daily basis, but it should come as no surprise.

Considering that I've spent the majority of my time without getting involved in things, I've taken quite a few steps.

They don't comprehend a lot of things about Kushida's relationship and her previous outward attitude. Not many of them are able to come and talk to me directly, even though they care about it.

"Good morning Ayanokoji-kun"

In the midst of all this, Matsushita approached me, looking happy to see me.

"Good morning."

Everyone's glances shifted to astonishment at her unexpected behaviour.

Although Matsushita had waved at me from a distance, this was probably the first time she had approached me like this after I had just reached the class.

Was it out of concern for what happened the other day, or was there another purpose?

Matsushita has a high opinion of my abilities. The fact that I attempted to expel Kushida and the manner in which I confronted her may have enhanced rather than lowering my reputation. Even in the process of expelling Airi, Matsushita was one of the students who vocally agreed that it was inevitable.

"Are we finally on our way to Class A?"

"I don't know."

I avoided it, and then, simply withdrew, as if there was no need to go any farther. After that, she shifted her gaze to the side.

"There might be a lot going on for a while, but I don't think you need to worry about it."

After she said that, she added,

"Since it's Ayanokoji-kun, I'm sure he doesn't mind."

She's going to be honest with me.

"The important thing is that it is not Ayanokoji-kun or Horikita-san."

Matsushita seems to have a better understanding of my feelings than Horikita when it comes to how I feel about this outcome.

The problem would be Shinohara, Haruka, and Mii Chan and Kushida.

The students I've just named are those who were particularly damaged by the unanimous special exam.

A painful gaze from Shinohara sometimes turns to me.

It was not directed at me, but at Matsushita. However, She seems to be unconcerned..

"I tried to make it work this weekend, but she canceled on me."

She whispered, perhaps noticing Shinohara's gaze.

"Girls tend to linger in these situations."

"It's hard."

"Well, I'm the one to blame,"

It originally started when Kei, Matsushita and others made fun of Shinohara and Ike as a couple. It was only natural for Shinohara to be angry, since she had been bad-mouthed behind her back about her looks.

"It's just an everyday thing. There have been times when things were worse."

The dynamic relationship between girls is something that boys who only have a superficial relationship with girls cannot understand.

I don't think I want to know.

After that, no student in particular approached me, and time passed by. Horikita also came to school late, but there was no sign of Kushida.

Sudo and some of the students tried to talk to Horikita, but since it was just in time for school, the bell rang and they each took their own seats.

Kushida, who did not appear in front of Horikita over the weekend, seems to be still hiding from her.

There were several empty chairs in the morning homeroom.

When Chabashira-sensei came to the classroom, she immediately noticed the empty seats.

"Kushida, Hasebe, and Wang will be absent. That seems like a rare occurrence."

We don't know the details of their absence, but Chabashira-sensei does.

"As for Hasebe and Wang, they have notified about their illnesses and it's being accepted. As for Kushida, we have not heard from her, so we will call her later to confirm. I'm sure we'll soon find out if she just overslept or if she's too sick to get up."

Although she used a somewhat exaggerated expression, she was probably making a statement based on the assumption that she was suffering from a temporary illness.

It's not uncommon for students to be absent for long periods of time in school.

But this is the first time in the past year and a half that all three of them have been absent at the same time. Until now, even when someone was absent, Chabashira sensei had never said anything. It's different from the past where she just went about her business. If this were a normal school, the cost of the absences would all come back to that person; if you were absent for a week, it would affect your internal evaluation score, and you might even be left behind in class.

However, in this school, one person's responsibility is also everyone's responsibility.

All of them are not saying anything, but I'm sure Chabashira-sensei understands what they're worried about.

"Don't look so anxious. A day or two off won't affect your class points. It just so happens that all three of them got sick at the same time."

She assures everyone that there will be no impact on the class at this

moment. Everyone must have been relieved to hear her clear words.

"But that's not the case if this vacation lasts too long. And if it turns out to be a malingering illness, the problems will gradually come to the surface."

[Malingering means here, to feign illness, pretending to be sick]

She stares at Kushida's seat, who is not in contact with the school, and responds.

"Well, perhaps the term 'malingering illness' was a bit of an exaggeration, but there is a limit to how long you can be ill without any specific details. I'm hoping for a speedy recovery, if possible."

Even if she didn't want to, the eyes of everyone would be drawn to Horikita. In the unanimous special examination, she declared that she would put her own ideas first and prevent Kushida's expulsion. Naturally, most of the blame was directed at Horikita.

While receiving the pressure ---- of the stares, Horikita does not move an inch.

After looking at the situation, Chabashira-sensei coughed once and forcibly pulled the students' attention away from Horikita.

"I'm concerned about the absentees, but we can't afford to dwell on that. The unanimous special exam is over, and you must turn your attention to the next exam."

She lightly placed the palm of her hand on the monitor behind her to bring up the screen.

"I would like to explain the details of the Sports festival and the special rules that will be applied this year. Please listen carefully."

The Sports festival that awaits us will be the same as last year's. That's what the students were thinking.

"Special rules... Are you saying we're going to have a different sports festival than last year, sensei?"

Chabashira-sensei nodded once in response to a question from Sudo, who was more enthusiastic about the sports festival than anyone else.

"The new way of this school proposed by the student council president is being accepted, including the uninhabited island test. An attempt to strongly incorporate a plan that emphasizes individual ability, and it will be a sports festival that represents it."

In the desert island examinations, Koenji, with his high academic ability and above all his outstanding physical ability, performed very well and earned class points as well as a huge amount of private points individually.

It was a true representation of a meritocratic school. On the other hand, students who were not good enough were in danger of being expelled. This was a sports festival where the same emphasis was placed on individual abilities as at that time. If we were to take the words alone, it would be a tough test for students like Keisei, whose academic ability was their strong point, but who were worried about their physical abilities.

"However, this year's sports festival has been coordinated in such a way that no individual student will be expelled or suffer any damage due to lack of individual ability. Because not everyone is able to perfectly embody both literacy and athletics."

Perhaps to avoid a mild panic, Chabashira-sensei explained gently.

Some of the students looked at each other in surprise at the softer tone of voice that was different from last week.

Needless to say, the monitor displayed the outline and rules of the athletic festival.

Outline and Rules of the Sports Festival

Overview

A sports festival for all grades, consisting of various events.

A sports festival for all grades, consisting of various events, held from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (with a break from noon to 1:00 p.m.) Students are free to participate in any event of their choice, score points, and compete in class for the overall score.

Rules

Each student will be given 5 points at the start.

Students participating in the athletic festival need to participate in 5 different events.

1 point will be given as a prize for participation in each event.

Winners will receive additional points depending on the event.

After the 6th event, you can participate every time you pay 1 point (you cannot get 1 point of the participation prize).

The maximum number of events that can be participated in is 10 per person. If an

athletic event ends with less than five events, all points earned will be forfeited.

Non-participation or Absence from entered competitions except for unavoidable reasons will lose 2 points.

Students who have completed their competitions should be in several designated areas.

The above was displayed on the monitor.

Just by reading this overview and the rules, you can see that this is something completely different from last year.

"This is the outline and rules of this year's sports festival. Unlike the usual event where the whole school watches a single event, this year's event will be held at the same time in various locations."

"Well, it looks like it will be a busy day."

Sudo was puzzled by the rough image of the day in his head.

"Participating in competitions and aiming for high rankings is a top priority, but it requires a detailed schedule. If you plan to participate in many events to win, it will be a busy sports festival. There are two main types of competitions: the first is called the basic competition. These are competitions that can be participated in by one person, and all the basic competitions have a fixed reward of five points for first place, three points for second place, one point for third place, and one point as a participation prize. The other type of competition is called "special competition," where two or more people can participate in a team competition. The rewards are higher in the team competition, and all participating teams receive equal points. While the rewards are attractive, they also have drawbacks such as the need for coordination and longer time constraints."

There is a clear distinction between individual and team competitions, and the team competition seems to be given more points.

There is no risk of getting the lowest rank, which is a nice consideration for students who are not good at sports.

"The rewards for team competitions vary from event to event, so be sure to check them out

separately."

It's a simple rule once you understand it, but there's a surprisingly large number of things you have to do.

The initial five points and the five points for participation, a total of ten points, can be obtained by participating in the sports festival and completing the competition regardless of the grade. If there are any students who fail to meet the minimum requirements due to some kind of accident, the points will be reduced by 10 for each student.

If we assume that everyone will participate, Ichinose, who is in the 40-person class, currently has 400 points, and this class, which is missing two students, has 380 points. We will be fighting with a handicap of 20 points at the start.

The reward for individual battles that is known now is 5 points if you take 1st place. Four More are required to take first place. It might not seem that much, but only up to 10 competitions can be played by each person.

In other words, it is impossible to have Sudo work full-time and participate in 15 or 20 events and make a lot of points. It will be a heavy burden on him.

"It's up to the individual and the class to decide whether they want to pay their points and participate in the sixth and later events. The overall score at the end of the festival will determine the ranking of each grade."

The monitor switches to show the rewards by grade.

Ranking reward by class

*1st place
150 class points*

*2nd place
50 class points*

*3rd place
0 class points*

*4th place
-150 class points*

In terms of regular exams, I feel that the class points fluctuate somewhat.

But

I wonder if it has something to do with the fact that it's a big overall event, the Sports Festival, and the fact that the currently announced Cultural Festival has relatively slow fluctuations in class points.

"These were the rewards for each class. I will now announce the rewards for individuals."

The class-based rewards alone are motivating enough, but it doesn't stop there.

As this was a sports festival that was meant to test individual abilities, it was inevitable that individual rewards would also be prepared.

As Sudo leaned forward, he waited while holding his breath for the monitor to switch.

He knows better than anyone else that this is the event of the year where he can shine.

Individual competition Rewards (by grade and gender)

1st place: 2,000,000 Private Points or Class Transfer Ticket (limited)

2nd place: 1 million private points

3rd place: 500,000 Private Points

Sudo gasps at the reward of high private points. In addition to that, it also contained a statement that I had never seen before.

"Class transfer tickets," no way!?"

The class buzzed with surprise like never seen before.

"The school was also very cautious about implementing this new system; the introduction of protection points was also unheard of, but it was implemented not long after; yet it's also a natural right for students who have demonstrated their individual qualities to advance."

The only winners in this school are those students who are able to graduate with an A grade. It's no wonder that if you're the number one student in your grade in a physical education exam that requires a great deal of physical ability, you deserve the right to move classes.

As a matter of fact, the sports festival doesn't seem to fall under the category of a special exam. However, what's interesting is that 2 million private points and class transfer tickets are treated as equals. Originally, the number of private points needed to move classes was 20 million. In other words, there's a lot missing. Nevertheless, the right to move classes is given. The answer

to this disproportion may lie in the limited text mentioned on the class transfer ticket.

"What do you mean by limited... like you have to move and come back sometime?"

"No, you don't, do you? That doesn't make any sense."

Sudo and Ike, confused by the word "limited", started talking from their seats.

"It'll give you the right to move classes. But it's also true that we can't make everything definite at this point. Therefore, the term "limited" refers to the period of use. The right can only be used during the second semester. In other words, if you don't use it before the third semester starts, it will be invalid."

Limited class transfer tickets are with a period of use, so to speak.

This makes some sense why it is considered equal to 2 million points.

If you can hold onto your ticket until after graduation, it's practically an A-class ticket, but since there is a deadline, you need to have an eye for the class that will ultimately be the Class A.

If you move from your current class to another class, but eventually the original class graduates from class A, you'll be worried for a long time that you've fallen into the trap of temptation of this ticket.

Even if you don't suffer such a worst case scenario, still it takes a certain amount of courage to use it.

Because abandoning your own class, which you've been used to for over a year and a half, is not an easy thing to do.

Even if Sudo won the right to do so, when I objectively thought about whether he would leave Horikita and his friends and go to Class A, I couldn't easily imagine him moving classes.

Even though it was a high-profile sports event, it didn't mean that a single success would guarantee you a spot in Class A.

It needs to be kept in mind.
However, that's only for the second year.

If you are in a different grade, the value changes.

If you are a freshman, you may abandon your current class, which you are not so close to yet, and move to a class where you feel you have a better chance of winning, or simply to A class.

On the other hand, for the third-year students, it is the strongest right to move to Nagumo's class.

The reason is that it is the same as graduating with an A class. Since you can use it right before graduation.

The right to move classes in any grade, and to be given that very limited choice, is huge.

It will be interesting to see how this will affect the future.

I'm sure the school will see the response and decide if they want to offer the same kind of tickets again.

I think it's an interesting reward with an interesting balance overall.

"The students who come in first place, male and female, will be asked to choose between them. Sudo, if you plan on taking the top spot in the individual competition, you'd better think twice."

I could see Sudo's back stiffen.

Instead of delusionally prioritizing your friends and jumping to 2 million points, look further. Will you choose Horikita's class, where you are now, or will you move to Sakayanagi's class A? You have the right to face your future and consider it carefully.

"Now let's move on to a more detailed explanation. There are two types of competitions: those that are open to the public in advance and those that are not open to everyone until the day of the competition. In other words, there will be a certain number of events that you will have to tackle on the spot."

In addition to the basic events such as the 100-meter run and steeplechase (obstacle chase), there are also some unusual events that look interesting such as penalty kicks, basketball shootouts, tennis singles and mixed doubles. You won't find any of these events at a normal sports festival.

There are a lot of competitions that you won't see in a normal sports festival.

"You may not be able to participate in all the competitions you want due to the limited number of participants or the time of the event. If you force yourself to make a schedule that doesn't fit the time schedule, you may not be able to participate in time and may be treated as absent. Don't forget that you also run the risk of losing your points."

It is necessary for students who have excellent physical abilities in the school as a whole to participate in many events where they can efficiently earn points. In this sense, there is also an aspect of using one's head, and one's luck or ability to guess who will be able to participate in which event.

However, if the sports festival were to be held in this state, the students would panic. On the day of the event, if all the students crowded into a particular event at once, it would be impossible to compete.

Of course, the school would be aware of it.

"To participate in the open events, you can make a reservation on the dedicated app from 10 p.m. today. The earlier the better for all grades. We will accept cancellations up to one week before the event, but you can only cancel three times. The last reservation deadline is two days before the event, and if you haven't registered for the maximum of five events by then, you will automatically be assigned to an available spot."

Then a timetable that appeared to be an app screen was displayed.

"Let's say you want to try out for the 100-meter dash."

The screen switches.

This is an event for up to seven participants of the same grade and gender. Four races in total. You can register for any race. You can register for any race, or participate on the day if there are seats available. Participants must arrive 5 minutes before the start of their race to complete their entry. There's no need to wait until the end of the race. Scheduled start time for the first race: 10:15 a.m.

Because of this, the maximum number of boys and girls who can participate in the 100-meter run is 56 combined. No matter how many races you participate in, the competition starts at 10:15, which means that you must arrive at least five minutes before the event. From the explanation that there is no need to wait after the competition, if you participate in the first race, you can start moving on to the next competition in a short time. On the other hand, if you participate in the fourth race, you will be detained for a long time. Same competition, same reward, but you lose some time.

"It is also important to note that students who are currently enrolled or have been enrolled in a club at least once during the school year will not be allowed to participate in the relevant event. Example Hirata, you can't participate in soccer, and Sudo, you can't participate in anything related to basketball."

The Students who are involved in club activities are simply at an advantage. So there are these restrictions. Certainly, they want to avoid having a confrontation between students who have experience in club activities, since it is unlikely that any student can beat a real professional like Yosuke or Sudo.

If Sudo is playing soccer and Yosuke is playing basketball, the other students will have a good chance to win.

In junior high school, you devoted yourself to club activities, but did not choose it as a club activity in high school. Then you have the upper hand.

There will be a small number of such students.

There may be some disadvantages in that area.

"But the app is... it's like reserving seats... like for a movie."

Sudo, who had been taking the explanation seriously, was right on point.

"I'd say the system is similar, for sure. The system is designed to reflect in real time who chooses which events and at which time slots."

"That means some students can cancel because they don't want to play against me, right?"

Crossing his arms proudly, Sudo mutters.

"Yes. But those students will sooner or later hit the three cancellation limit."

Since the number of people who can participate in each competition and the time are fixed, you would want to choose your strongest events and specific races as soon as possible in order to plan your schedule. However, the earlier you get there, the higher the risk of being targeted by strong opponents. However, once the number of 'withdraw' limits has been decided, students will hesitate to even make a reservation this time.

There will also be a battle to check and explore.

It's like the beginning of a sports festival, where the competition takes place online.

"Also, if there is a tie in the individual competition results, private points will be split equally and no class transfer tickets will be available."

If students were to collude to create a large number of ties for first place and win a large number of class transfer tickets, the system would collapse. I guess this is a measure to avoid that.

Anyway, if you play an active part and get all the rewards by yourself, you will get a lot of money or a class transfer ticket. It is a reward worthy of the ability.

Even if you don't plan to move classes, 2 million can be used for a variety of purposes. It is also possible to accumulate 20 million points and set the stage for Class A.

On the other hand, students who are not confident in their athletic ability should be allowed to participate in the five compulsory events as much as possible. If they don't win in the sixth or later events, they will lose a point. That's a big disadvantage in a class battle. However, it also depends on how you fight. As soon as Chabashira-sensei finished her explanation and left the room, the classroom became as heated as boiling water.

"Okay, Suzune, let's get this meeting started."

The first one to shout out loud was Sudo. He was suddenly very motivated after hearing the rules.

Yosuke naturally sat up and started to walk towards Horikita. Up to this point, it was the same flow as usual.

However, some of the students were beginning to look coldly.

Doubts swirled around whether it was okay to really leave it to Horikita.

"There is one thing I need to tell you before we start discussing this sports festival."

Moving before anyone was able to say anything. She stood up from her seat and turned around so that everyone could see her face.

"During the special examinations held last weekend, I made the choice not to expel Kushida-san, in violation of my promise to everyone. Let me first apologize for that."

Horikita bowed her head after that. When she looked up, though, she had a fierce will in her eyes.

"But I think I made the right choice. She's a great asset to the class."

"I don't think so."

Shinohara was the first to deny Horikita's words. She was one of the victims of Kushida's revelation.

"Now that I know Kushida-san is like that, I don't trust her. I don't feel like anyone is talking about her to the rest of the classes right now, but it's only a matter of time, isn't it?"

Shinohara cuts into an important factor that should be put on the table and considered whether you like Kushida or not.

We can't change the fact that Kushida will continue to exist as a classmate, and if we're going to proceed on that basis, it's better to keep the inconvenient "truth" to ourselves as much as possible.

In other words, to go around telling the enemy class Kushida's true nature is to strangle yourself.

It's a simple thing about the benefits of keeping quiet, but it's surprisingly difficult to do so.

In particular, Shinohara, who is protesting now, has been directly hurt by Kushida.

It is something that would not be surprising if it had already spread, but for the moment it seems to be contained.

Shinohara doesn't seem to understand its advantages. If that is the case, it is no wonder that someone smart enough to understand this, someone like Yosuke, would have urged her to keep quiet about it beforehand.

However, it is doubtful that this will continue indefinitely. When the doubts and insecurities about Kushida reach their limit, they will break down at once.

"Hey, Horikita-san. Can you really say you were right to not expel Kushida-san? Answer me."

Shinohara's words made Horikita, who had only been looking at her, numb and rush her answer.

"It's not something that can be answered at this moment. It's the same for me, Shinohara-san, and the rest of our classmates. We need to make our presence felt for the rest of our school life."

"What's that? I want an answer now. In all likelihood, Kushida-san will get in the way of the class no matter what."

"Indeed, the unanimous special examination may have hurt you. It may have hurt Wang-san and Hasebe-san, who are absent now. But the fact that Kushida-san has contributed to this class for a year and a half will never disappear. Or do you think that you have achieved more than her?"

Causing major problems doesn't make past achievements go away.

She has been influential in bringing the class together, caring for everyone and raising the academic and physical averages.

At least Shinohara personally has not achieved more than Kushida.

"I can't blame you for not taking kindly to my change in decision and Kushida-san's persistence in sticking up for the drop out option. But if you had expelled Kushida-san, how could you say it was the right thing to do? How can you be okay with your class average dropping and losing the special exam?"

"That's... You don't know that until you try it."

"You're right. Then what I'm about to do is something you won't know until you try it."

Either way, it's still an uncertain future.

For Shinohara it won't be easy to argue with Horikita.

"Can I have a moment?"

As Horikita and Shinohara stared at each other, Yosuke stood up, raising his hands.

"There's something that's been bugging me. If we are to make the most of Kushida-san's skills, we need to keep her secret within the class. That's why I've been asking everyone in the class to keep quiet about it."

"That's right. If someone hadn't given instructions behind the scenes, it would have been spread everywhere by this time."

Horikita was wondering the same thing, as the rumors about Kushida had still not circulated anywhere.

"But Horikita-san never asked to keep quiet. Why is that?"

"Because it doesn't matter how many words you put up against someone who wants to bring her down. The only difference is whether the school finds out about it sooner or later."

Regardless of the process, this will help the students make a decision. Will they let their emotions take over and make their true nature known to get back at Kushida, or will they keep it a secret for the sake of the class?

"I wouldn't talk even if Hirata-kun doesn't ask me. We had a chance to get together on our day off, and we were discussing how it wouldn't do any good to leak this out. Of course, I'd be lying if I said I didn't have thoughts for the current Kushida-san."

Matsushita is Smart. Although she was one of those affected by Kushida's revelation, she

understands the disadvantages of spreading the word on her own.

You've been exposed, so you expose back. The only thing you get from doing that is a temporary sense of accomplishment.

"I will bring her back. And if I can't... I'll take whatever responsibility I have to."

The students, who were looking coldly, at her strong determination to take responsibility, clears their throats and gasps.

Shinohara is no exception.

"Are you really going to take responsibility?"

"It was with that resolve that I chose to keep Kushida-san. If it comes to that, you people can judge me."

Akito and Keisei also stared silently.

It's not hard to imagine how they must be feeling listening to this.

Anyway, with a strong word from Horikita, the conversation was settled and idle time arrived.

Horikita's gaze was not on me, but on someone else. That person also looked back at Horikita, and eventually Horikita left the classroom. At the same time, Koenji, who was sitting across from Horikita, stood up and walked out of the classroom as well.

I was curious about what was going on, so I decided to go to the door, opening it a little to check it out.

"You acted like you wanted to talk to me about something, what was it?"

"I just want to make sure everything's okay with the upcoming sports festival."

"Huh. I don't have to cooperate with you, am I right?"

"Of course. I just want to be sure of your intentions. Can you tell me that much?"

Whether or not to include Koenji's activities in the calculation. Depending on that, the strategy will change.

When asked, Koenji grinned and put his hand on Horikita's shoulder.

She was annoyed by this and tried to get rid of it, but Koenji's arm did not twitch.

"You seem like a very lucky girl."

With his hand still on her shoulder, she questioned him about the true meaning of his words with a slight frown.

"Does that mean you're motivated?"

"I've made some money from the desert island trials and the treasure hunt, but now it's time to spend some more money. I see no reason why I shouldn't participate."

Koenji, who had shown overwhelming power in the deserted island test, was not expected to move in the future, but if it was a special test that would bring in a huge amount of money for the individual, he would get fired up.

For Horikita, it's great. As long as she earns as many points as possible, she has nothing to complain about. And with Koenji, there is a good chance that she could easily earn 10 or 20 points.

However, she may be worried about this reward.

Horikita seemed to hesitate for a moment at this, but then asked.

"If you get the right to move to a class ... what would you do?"

Koenji is undoubtedly the most problematic in the school, or rather, the most free spirited.

If he decided he wanted to, he wouldn't hesitate to abandon the current class. Whether Koenji would be good for the class in the future was another matter, but at least Horikita wouldn't consider the loss of students from the class as a positive thing.

Besides, he may take seriously the special exams that cost a lot of money, such as the desert island exam and the sports festival. If that happens, he could stand as a strong opponent.

"That's a no-brainer. I don't think the other classes are attractive enough at the moment for me to give up my contract with the Horikita girl."

"For now..."

In other words, depending on the conditions, there is always the possibility of class transfer.

"As of right now, it's safe."

I don't think that would lead to safety at all, but well, I'm skeptical about how many classes would want to bring in Koenji. I'm sure it has its advantages, but it also carries disadvantages.

"Okay, I'll take your word for it. It's just that I don't trust you either if you're swayed by whims. You'll get enough points to take the top spot, is that correct?"

"You can take that as a yes, although I won't be working with anyone else."

It seems that he is only going to score points in competitions that he can participate in individually. I wouldn't be surprised if Koenji got first place in all the events. It means he is likely to get a maximum of 55 points.

"Are you sure you're not interested in moving up to Class A?"

Koenji answered the question with a smile and returned to the classroom.

"Do you enjoy eavesdropping?"

Perhaps he had guessed from the slightly open door, or perhaps he had known all along.

Koenji stops behind me and asks.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't curious about what's going on with the sports festival."

"Yeah...Let's put it that way."

"May I ask you a question, Koenji?"

"I'm in a good mood right now, my mind is racing with the rewards of the sports festival. I'll answer it for you."

"Horikita and you made a promise. It isn't, however, a 100% guarantee. There was a possibility that you might be cut off, just as she let Kushida stay behind antagonizing the class. Do you have any thoughts on that?"

I asked to see whether he's worried about his promise being kept or not.

Even though Koenji had the purpose of extracting private points behind her back, he was in a position to take a strong stand and he voted in favour to expel the students in the unanimous voting.

"It's all a matter of calculation. If there was ever a situation where I was the final candidate for expulsion, I would vote against it before it happened. The talk about trusting the Horikita girls is also based on that assumption."

"I see. You didn't fully trust Horikita, did you?"

"I would never put myself in the hands of another person. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Maybe."

Koenji seems to be precise and carefree, but there is also a calculated thought behind it. I

couldn't get a read on this man no matter how much I tried to analyze and arrive at an answer.

Part 2

"Ayanokoji-kun. Do you have a moment?"

Just after the lunch break, Horikita approached me, saying so.

"For the time being—"

"We're supposed to eat. Sorry, okay? I can't lend you Kiyotaka."

Kei dashed in between us and forcibly intervened to block Horikita's invitation by spreading her hands to say no.

"I don't think asking a guy out who already has a girlfriend is a good idea."

"Yes. But it's not me who wants to borrow him, it's someone else. And it's not a girl either. But would you still allow him to go?"

She pointed her cell phone at me, and Kei looked at the screen before I could.

"Yagami... Takuya? Who?"

"It makes no difference who sends the message. It is the text that is important." The text sent from Yagami to Horikita seemed to have been sent about an hour ago.

"Can you call Ayanokoji-senpai to the student council room during lunchtime? The student council president has requested it. If it's too difficult for you, please let me know and I'll do it for you."

That's what was written.

"As a member of the student council, I have a role to play. If they tell me they have something to do, I can't refuse their request."

Even though she had no choice, she came to tell her side of things.

"I think student council president Nagumo wants to see you. What did you do again?"

"I didn't do anything."

Not recently, at least... I added in my mind.

"If you refuse, Yagami-kun will come here. If you still refuse... maybe the student council

president Nagumo will come here himself. So, how should I respond?"

Horikita is just an intermediary. Regardless of how I respond, she will simply proceed with the process.

"Sorry, Kei. If I ignore the student council president's orders, I'll be in trouble later."

"Hey!! Well, if it's the student council president, you can't help it ... Sato-san, let's eat together?"

Understanding that she had no choice but to accept this situation, Kei quickly ran over to Sato and the others.

"She's quick to switch. Your girlfriend, I mean."

She muttered something about being impressed or disappointed.

"I will be going now"

"Then I'll report that to Yagami-kun."

"If you're exchanging contact information at the student council, wouldn't it be quicker if the student council president contacted you directly instead of going through Yagami?"

"The only person in the student council who has exchanged contact information with me on the app is Yagami-kun, who requested it directly."

Horikita followed me out into the corridor after I was convinced and left the classroom.

"I don't know what the reason is, but I recommend that you don't offend as much as possible."

I had no choice but to go to the student council room after parting ways with Horikita, who had given me some advice.

It's far more convenient for me to go out there myself rather than have someone come to me.

I arrived in front of the student council room and knocked quietly on the door. Shortly after, I opened the door after confirming that I could hear Nagumo's voice in the room. As expected, there was no one else in the student council room but Nagumo.

"Hello, Ayanokoji. How's your life lately?"

He starts off with a light poking.

The only person who is disrupting my life is the student council president himself.

The pressure of the stares I receive from the third-year students every day has not weakened at all.

The third-year students, who didn't know me well, remembered me without hesitation. I am without a doubt the most famous junior among the third year students.

Even though they don't know the details, I am known as a junior who challenged Nagumo.

"There isn't much of a difference. That is something I would like to convey, but there are some concerns."

It's simple to act as if you're not aware of anything, but if you don't show that you're overwhelmed, it could escalate the situation even more.

"As the student council president, I'm happy to help you with your problems."

"It may just be a misunderstanding. I'll ask for help when I'm really in trouble."

If you make him feel good to some extent, you can leave the possibility that Nagumo will back off.

...No, that's too optimistic. Nagumo's main desire is for me to be defeated in a direct manner. I'm sure he will not be satisfied with this.

Nagumo has a strong feeling about something, but he can't end the conversation with it, so he shifts the focus.

"You've heard the rules of the Sports Festival, right? That means it's time for a direct confrontation, Ayanokoji. Some of the events in the festival are open to all grades. You can fight me in it."

"Strict Competition for a Junior? I've seen Student Council President Nagumo's OAA. Unless it's a competition with a large element of luck, there's no way I can win even if I stand on my head. The results are clear as day."

Even though there was no other choice but to play it down, Nagumo would not be satisfied with that.

"That's what you'll say. You're the kind of guy who thinks he can satisfy me by playing it down."

No, I can't blame you for that. You have no choice but to play it down now."

He doesn't appear to be a man who can't see through nonsense.

"I know you're not enthusiastic about it and I don't want to waste my time with you. So, if you win one match against me in this sports festival, I'll let all this stuff slip."

"One win?"

It was much easier than I had imagined.

"You seem to be wondering if only one win is enough. Is it that easy for you?"

"That's not the case, but I think it's a possibility."

"Then You have to win all the games. No, it'd be a disgrace to the student council president if I confronted you with the condition of winning all the games."

I don't believe it's just a case of pride getting in the way. In reality, he's using his arrogance as a shield to lure me into the fight.

"But there are conditions. Participate in all five competitions I specify, regardless of whether you win or lose. If you miss even one, you lose."

"What happens if I lose? Wouldn't the winning student council president be satisfied with that?"

"I hope so. Otherwise Your worries will never go away, and you'll probably get repeated calls from me like this. Or maybe you'll have to deal with it more often than before."

"There is a class policy for registration in events. Can you give me some time?"

"Well, that's all I can say for now, I'll give you a week's time. Call me by next Monday."

"I understand. Is it okay if I leave now that we've finished talking?"

"Don't be in such a hurry. Or do you have plans after this? Since I called you, you didn't make any plans, did you?"

"Yes, well. I don't have any plans."

"It's good to hear that."

Nagumo was talking while checking something on his cell phone from time to time.

It seems that he has no intention of letting me go yet.

"Excuse me."

From the other side of the door, I heard a voice I hadn't heard in a long time.

"Yes—"

Ichinose was holding a plastic bag in her hand.

"...Thank you for waiting, Nagumo-senpai."

"I'm sorry. I couldn't go buy it with you today."

"Er..."

"Oh, this? For the past few days, Honami and I have been having lunch together in the student council room. I've been busy with student Council work. My secretary keeps me busy."

I had thought that the chances of passing each other or running into each other during lunch break were decreasing, but I guess that's not the case.

Normally, if you were in the student council room, which is off-limits to normal students, you wouldn't have seen me.

"When we're together, we hear about all kinds of things. Right? Honami."

"Yes, yes."

"I told her I was expecting a visitor today. You should join us for Lunch, Ayanokoji."

There are three lunch boxes peeking out of the bag.

He seemed to have planned to have us eat here from the beginning while he finished talking with me.

It's easy to say no to this.

It would be emotionally painful for Ichinose to be in the same room with me now.

However, there's no way to escape since I already told him I don't have any plans.

"You said you didn't have plans for the rest of the day, right? Then you should sit down."

In a situation where I was surrounded If the student council president orders you to do something, it's almost as if you don't have the right to refuse.

I sat down on a seat away from Nagumo.

Ichinose, who always eats next to Nagumo, handed him a plastic bag and sat down next to him. She didn't look at me, but started to prepare her lunch with a slightly downcast look.



It was impossible for Nagumo not to notice the unnatural behaviour, and he would think back to the exchange on the ship.

"The rules of the sports festival are very different from last year's, aren't they?"

"You should be thanking me. Because if we did the sports festival with the exact same rules as last year, I was pretty sure I'd win."

The rules of the previous year's sports festival had been to divide the students into red and white teams to fight.

Nagumo is in control of the entire third year. This means that he was able to intentionally make the students in the groups he did not belong to lose.

No matter how much the remaining first years and second years struggled, their chances of winning would be zero.

The conversation that was supposed to take place between the three of us soon turned into a convocation between Nagumo and Ichinose, and I silently kept eating my lunch.

I finished my meal with the two of them not even halfway through, and I closed the lid and held it in my hand.

"What, you're done eating? You can leave it there."

"Thank you."

I replied, but Nagumo was already looking at Ichinose, not at me.

Ichinose was also facing Nagumo, perhaps to avoid focusing on me.

"Excuse me."

There was no point in staying here, so I left the student council room.

"A strategy to demonstrate superiority/dominance, huh?"

It may look like humiliation to the casual observer, but it's meaningless if it doesn't cause psychological damage to me. If he wanted to achieve that effect, he should have prepared a few more members of the student council to watch from the sidelines.

That way, at the very least, For them I could be labelled as pathetic. Nevertheless, judging from the way he was acting, Nagumo would probably continue to contact Ichinose in the future.

It is no wonder that in some cases, events might happen that can change their relationship.

As I started to walk away, I started to think about the effects of this.

Will becoming a part of Nagumo lead to Honami Ichinose's growth?

If all goes like this, she may be able to get the favor of taking over the position of student council president.

The confidence that comes from that - no, that idea is a little too naive. If Nagumo's obsession with Ichinose was caused by me, he might as well cut Ichinose off at the last moment. If she couldn't become the student council president after devoting her heart and soul to the cause, and if instead Horkita is recommended, who had made lesser contributions, her spirit would be crushed within a year.

In that sense, I wouldn't underestimate Nagumo's position.

I need to keep Nagumo in mind, but there are other things I should be doing right now.

We need to prepare for the upcoming sports festival, but we also need to prepare for the cultural festival that is just around the corner.

We need to prepare for the upcoming sports festival, but we also need to prepare for the cultural festival that is just around the corner. I've asked Sato, Matsushita, and Maezono, who came up with the idea, to be on hold, but we need to make preparations to secure a staff for the maid cafe.

Airi's participation, which I originally wanted to include in my calculations, is gone, and Haruka's participation is also not expected at this point. The strong point of Kushida has also disappeared.

Besides, I can't rely on my classmates to get around to learn the ins and outs of this field.

If you bring up the topic of maid cafes in the midst of this class situation, you risk being shunned and having your information leaked because of it.

"Maid cafe..."

It's a thing that I don't know the ins and outs of, but the budget calls for big sales. Towin, you'll need a strategy as well as research into what your competitors are offering and doing.

Part 3

The morning homeroom started, the day after the specific rules for the sports festival were explained.

Just like yesterday, the atmosphere in the class was not very cheerful.

The reason for this is the absence of three of my classmates. They are absent today as they were the other day. It's not uncommon for anyone to miss school due to illness or health problems. But in the case of these three students, I think everyone thinks that they are all absent for other reasons.

In case of consecutive absences, it is usually necessary to go to the hospital in the Keyaki Mall to have a medical certificate written. On the other hand, as long as you have a medical certificate, it's not a big problem.

In other words, even if you don't have a fever, if you complain of any kind of discomfort, the hospital will probably take care of you for a couple of days.

However, according to what Chabashira sensei said in the homeroom, none of the three had been examined at the hospital.

Two of them, except for Kushida, have been in touch with the school, but it is still unclear how long school will allow them to do so. The problem is if the three of them continue to be absent after tomorrow.

Haruka's absence is related to Airi's expulsion from school. Wang's absence was due to the revelation of her love for Yosuke. Kushida's absence was due to the revelation of her true nature.

All of these are unrelated to illness.

What will happen if this continues for three days, five days, or a week? It would not be surprising if the school did not think this was just a coincidence and started to investigate. As Chabashira-sensei said, it will eventually start to have a big impact on the class points.

Furthermore, some cracks are beginning to appear in obscure regions.

Wang is not the only casualty of Kushida's revelations. The two new couples, Ike and Shinohara, are also affected, which is a matter of concern. In fact, Shinohara doesn't seem to be talking to Kei, Matsushita, or Mori, who are said to have been bad-mouthing her. Although other names were not called at that moment, we cannot exclude the possibility that it was for the same reason that Shinohara did not talk to other students such as Sato and Maezono.

Even though the groups I usually interact with are different, it was originally a class with strong parallel connections between girls.

It is obvious that this has now created a huge gap.

It's time to start deciding on the members of the team to play team games to earn points, but we haven't reached that stage yet in this class.

If we try to divide the teams as we are now, the internal division will be even worse. Knowing this, Horikita is unable to take the next step. On the other hand, it's impossible to bring about cooperation and harmony at this moment. Not only Horikita, but also Yosuke is well aware of this.

But time flies, and the morning homeroom is over.

Shortly after, I received a message on my tablet.

"I need to talk to you for a minute. Follow me."

It was a short instruction from Chabashira-sensei.

Not long after Chabashira-sensei left the classroom, I left my seat as if I were going to the bathroom.

The advantage of sitting at the end of the hallway was fully demonstrated, and no one could notice me.

As I rounded the corner of the corridor to the staff room, I spotted Chabashira-sensei standing with her back to the wall.

"It's unusual for you to call me like this. Is it something urgent?"

For a moment, I thought it was about the three of them being absent, but apparently that wasn't the case.

"Yes. There's something I have to tell you. It's about Sakura."

"You mean Airi?"

Airi had been gone from this school for a week, and time had flown by. Is there anything to tell now?

"When she was expelled, the school of course followed procedures. Packing up her belongings, collecting her private points. You know... It's called post-processing"

She was straightforward in her expression, but she stuttered her words a bit. I wondered if it was because of the emotion of missing one of the students from her own class..

"The items pre-purchased in the school are basically the property of the students, and It is up to the student to decide what to do with them. There is no problem with leaving them behind or taking them with you. The official acceptance of the expulsion is done in the staff room... and Actually, one unexpected thing happened before that."

" 'Unexpected,' you say."

"Yes. After the unanimous special examination, Sakura was found to have used about five thousand of her private points, and it would be better to say that she was unable to decide what to do with 'it'."

"Aren't the private points of dropouts taken from them?"

"Yes. But, as I said before, it is only valid when it is officially accepted. However, the school believes that this is also an extremely gray area. For example, they don't allow the transfer of private points to certain students."

"That's right. If I were to transfer all my private points after my expulsion was decided, it could be a problem. But if Airi used 5000 points for something?"

"No, it's not that. Sakura..."

I was told how to use my private points in an unexpected way.

In the midst of the explanation, I simultaneously realize that I am not an irrelevant person for this thing either.

"-So I thought I'd give you a call as the person in charge. Of course, you are under no obligation to take on this case. If you refuse, I'll handle it myself."

Airi's actions took place in the short time after her expulsion was confirmed.

With a certain hunch about the answer, I decided what I should do.

"It's not that big of a sum, so leave it at that."

"You mean you'll pay for it?"

"That won't be a problem, will it?"

"Yes. It will be your private points that you utilize, thus the school will not consider it a violation."

"I understand."

I Confirmed with her that this will not be a problem.

"Let me ask you something. Is this something you're involved in? Is this about you too?"

She asked me while giving me a slightly keen look.

"No, it's not. It was a conclusion I had thought and drawn in that limited time."

Of course, I don't know the details at the moment, but as time goes by, I'm sure we'll find the answers naturally.

"It's good news for me that I've solved one problem, albeit a small one. I'm not all that happy about the class situation."

As a homeroom teacher, she can't help but worry about her class.

"What's with the eyes?"

"No. It's true, as you said, the class is unstable right now. I was going to forcefully correct some of it, but maybe that's not necessary."

"What do you mean?"

"For now, please watch over them. Watch each student grow and develop."

Chabashira-sensei looked a little dissatisfied, but nodded gently.

Chapter - 2

The Inevitable Path

Intro

This class is once again confronted with many challenges at the same time.

A leader shouldn't just stand by and observe as the situation around them worsens. There's nothing wrong with wanting to do everything yourself, but if it's out of your ability, then it's just wishful thinking. No, even if you have the ability to solve problems, there are some things that you can't handle alone. What is required now is to rely on your friends, to work together, and to choose the right path at the same time.

I've made no real efforts to help since the weekend.

As I finished watching today's news on my cell phone, I decided to leave my seat a little later than the students who were going out to clubs after school.

A man came rushing after me, as if he had been waiting for the proper moment. I

knew that if he was in a hurry to find a solution, he would eventually come to me.

"Um, Kiyotaka-kun. I was wondering if we could make some time somewhere this evening. I need to discuss something with you."

He was a little concerned about the surroundings, so he whispered to me that he wanted to talk to me.

"I have plans to meet Kei in the evening. Can't we do it now?"

I didn't really have any plans to do so, but I lied to see his reaction.

"It's..."

Of course he wouldn't say yes.

Yosuke is involved in club activities, so he doesn't have free time right after school.

Since the club activities will be temporarily suspended as the sports festival approaches, he would want to participate as much as possible now.

"It was a joke. I'll talk to Kei about it. I'll see her next time for a date."

"Oh, thank you."

"Just so it's clear, you want to talk to me?"

I knew that, but I persisted to ask him back. Yosuke simply nodded, unconcerned.

"Yeah. I believe we should act as soon as possible."

"I see. Anyway, if you're okay with my room, I'll make arrangements for the evening."

Yosuke's face relaxed and he grinned like a child at the positive response.

"If it's possible, it'd be great if Karuizawa-san could be there too, but I'm not sure if she would want to."

"Kei? Of course she'll be happy to be there, but won't she get in the way?"

"I have a few things I need to resolve, and I could use her help."

There is a big difference between having Kei with the girls' information network and not having her there at all.

I didn't even have to ask what Yosuke was planning to do. It's about Kushida, Shinohara, Haruka and the others.

"Can we then Meet... around 7:30?"

"Don't worry. I'll be there without delay."

Narrowing his eyes happily, Yosuke seemed to be walking fast to his club activities.

As soon as someone has a problem, he reaches out.

"That's problem number two in my class."

Of course, this is an unavoidable aspect. As long as I have been the one to give Yosuke a hand when he is in trouble, it is inevitable that this will happen.

It's not easy to destroy what you've built, but it's an inevitable path.

Well. I'll call Kei to come to my room around 7:30 p.m.

Part 1

It was 5:30 p.m. when I got back to my room and was slowly waiting for Yosuke to arrive. I received a notification on my cell phone.

'Can we hang out now?'

My girlfriend, Kei, sent me a message with a cute cat stamp.

The time of the meeting with Yosuke is 7:30 pm, which is quite soon.

"Let's have some food while we're at it."

Before I can respond, the message arrives. She seemed to want to eat dinner with me.

In response to Kei's message, I sent her a short message saying that I was ready. "If that's the case, I'll have to cook something."

I could serve yesterday's leftovers, but if I want to make something quick and that Kei likes....

As I opened the refrigerator and stared at the contents, the doorbell rang. When I opened the front door, I saw Kei smiling at me.

I was a little surprised, but I didn't panic and slowly invited her inside. Now that we're in an open relationship, it's great that I don't have to worry about when to let her in.

"You're early."

While taking off her shoes, Kei goes up to the room with a usual movement.

"Because I called you before I got on the elevator."

She said that she was going to visit me anyway, with my schedule as an afterthought.

I gave up on cooking and sat down on the floor by the table with Kei.

"Maybe it's because I've been in Kiyotaka's room so much lately, but it's starting to feel like my own room."

"I'm glad to hear that. On the contrary, I haven't been invited to Kei's room."

"Oh, yeah? That's a little embarrassing... well, maybe someday, when you're ready!"

She didn't give me a straightforward yes, but I'm sure she has her own reasons, there must be various circumstances when it comes to girls' rooms.

Let's not pursue this too deeply.

"Speaking of which, what do people around Kei say about our relationship?"

"The girls? I think they've accepted it surprisingly easily. I mean, ... It's nothing."

She tried to say something, but it was unclear. I was a little curious, so I pursued the matter.

"What is it?"

"Well, you know. There is a so-called status attached to Hirata Yosuke. Many girls are perplexed as to why I would give up on him."

I see. It means they don't understand why she went to the trouble of switching to a no-status guy.

It's certainly not surprising that they would openly talk about such things when comparing me and Yosuke.

"In a way, I've been affected by it too. I'm supposed to be the one who rejected Yosuke, but in fact they think I am the one who got rejected."

If the guy you switch to is more or less irrelevant, you can't blame them for their suspicions.

"But that's only part of the story. Kiyotaka's reputation has been *anagonobori* lately."

"It's an eel, if you say so. It's *Unaginobori*. What kind of mistake is that?"

(T/L Note - Unaginobori is a Japanese expression for - Rising rapidly. Kei here uses the wrong expression and says 'Anagonobori' which means conger eel)

I wonder if it was on purpose, but Kei was smirking at me.

"I know that much too."

"Your Tutor must be excellent."

"Thank you for everything, sensei. Thanks to your secret private lessons, my scores are getting better."

Kei's academic performance has been gradually improving, and at the beginning of September, her OAA showed that her academic performance had risen to a C-48.

It means that she's finally getting to the point where she's an average student. After a few minutes of such idle chatter, I sat up and headed back to the refrigerator.

"I'm thinking of making Omurice / Omelet rice, do you want some?"

[T/L Note - Omurice also known as Omelet rice looks like this for reference -



When I ask without looking back, Kei immediately raises her voice in happiness.

"I want it! I want it! With a lot of ketchup please. Chef"

This is not the first time I've served Kei a home-cooked meal.

After we started dating, the opportunity to serve meals in my room came up regularly.

So far, Kei has shown little desire to cook on her own, but that's okay.

It's just that the person who wants to make it should make it, because it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman.

I don't mind cooking, and Kei is happy to eat it.

Kei, who likes to talk, is able to talk to me, who is not a good talker, and makes the place more lively. I think we have a good balance by supporting each other in this way.

I took out eggs, ketchup, chicken, and butter from the refrigerator. If I get some salad oil from the shelf, I'll be all set. I took out the frozen rice and started to defrost it in the microwave. In the meantime, I prepared the onions. I wanted to add some carrots, but unfortunately, I didn't have any in stock.

Then, as I placed the onions on the cutting board and picked up the knife, I felt a presence behind me and it came close to snuggling up to my back.

"What are you doing?"

Since it is somewhat dangerous, I stopped moving and asked her.

"I'm just watching ~"

Kei answered, although she shouldn't have been able to see what was going on because she was stuck to my back.

"You can ignore me. I'll just stand by."

"Okay, got it."

Ignoring her for the time being and continuing with the work as I was told.

On the cutting board, I cut the onions into 5 mm cubes. While I was cutting the onions, Kei stayed close to my back, never leaving me.

This time I put down the knife and reached for the bowl to crack the eggs, but at that moment Kei wrapped her arms around my waist and hugged me.

"What are you doing this time?"

"Hmm! ...? Just watching!"

"It doesn't look like you're just waiting to see what happens. It's more like interference."

It wasn't quite a warning, but I prodded her about the slight loss of work efficiency, but she didn't seem to mind.

"Oh, I'm so happy. What else could make me so happy?"

She muttered briefly, and her arms tightened into a hug. She seemed rather satisfied.

"That's cheap happiness. Isn't there greater happiness out there? Buying what you want, watching the TV you've always wanted?"

"That doesn't make me happy at all."

"That was a random remark, but you actually have one?"

"No, I don't. Even if there were, I wouldn't need it. The happiness I have now is enough for me."

If you're happy with this, I don't have much more to say.

"Can I resume cooking?"

It was too much of an inconvenience to continue in this position.

"Huh? What should I do?"

She peeked at me and smiled while glancing into my eyes.

"I need a reward for being quiet, don't you think?"

"There's chocolate in the fridge."

"Buh. That's not what I meant, but... there's something off about you, isn't there? But that's just like Kiyotaka. I'll be waiting quietly."

Satisfied with herself, Kei pulled away and sat down on the bed.

Well, now I guess I can concentrate on making omelet rice for a while.

Kei waited for the food to be ready, alternating between her cell phone and the TV, and the two of us sat around the table to finish dinner a little earlier than usual.

"Speaking of which, about Shinohara-san..."

I didn't bring up any particular topic, but Kei said so and started talking.

"I'm sorry about that, but that revelation seemed to have an effect on her and she wouldn't talk to me."

"It's natural."

The quality of one's appearance differs from person to person depending on one's taste and sense of style, but generally speaking, those who are considered to be superior make condescending remarks about those who are considered to be inferior. This in itself is not an uncommon occurrence and can be found anywhere.

More often than not, there is no such thing as malice, and people are only expressing their opinions.

"Do you hate Shinohara?"

"I don't dislike her at all. Shinohara-san is more like a funny girl, and she's popular for her role in making things lively."

"I see. That's why you were unconsciously messing with her and Ike."

"..... I guess. We were laughing and saying things that would hurt if heard."

She muttered regretfully, as if she had intention of reflecting.

"Are you going to hate me for being so mean?"

"Other people make negative remarks about others. That is something I will not deny. It's harder to find someone who doesn't speak ill of others at all, even to varying degrees."

I don't like the senior members of the club because they are overbearing. I hate bossy teachers.

It's okay to have a place to complain about one or two things like that. There are some things that are too much, such as playing with one's appearance or pointing out one's academic abilities, but as human beings, it's not surprising that we sometimes talk about them.

"But basically, we have to make sure that the bad gossip doesn't end up in the ears of the person in question."

"Right?"

"It must have been a shock that Kushida, one of the exceptions, was the one who told everyone. If you tell the truth to anyone, it means you are taking a risk."

The revealed story from Kushida that her friends had been joking about her looks naturally hurt Shinohara deeply.

That's not all. Shinohara's friends who don't have a bad impression of her, her boyfriend Ike, and Ike's friends naturally don't think well of Kei and her friends.

This time, Shinohara and the others might go around talking bad things about Kei, Matsushita, Mori and the others in a conspicuous manner.

It takes a lot of effort to break the negative cycle once it has begun.

"So you didn't just feel bad, did you? What's wrong?"

Matsushita had given me a brief explanation, but I had to hear it from Kei's mouth as well.

"I've tried to talk it out, but it's been a bit of a misunderstanding. I also tried to solve it through discussions, but there's nothing I can do about it at the moment. She's unapproachable now. "

"Unapproachable."

"That's it... I did that on purpose, didn't I?"

She thinks she really made a mistake on this one.

In their own way, Kei and the others seemed to have tried to repair their broken relationship with Shinohara.

"So how do you think we should make up?"

"You're asking me?"

"It's not a surprise. I'm sure Kiyotaka will come up with a good plan."

Kei is also facing the same problem as Yosuke, albeit no solution appears to have been found thus far.

"I'm just thinking about it. Give me a little more time."

I'll tell her that for now and postpone answering.

"Hey, can I ask you something really Strange?"

As I listened without saying anything, she looked up at me with a curious face and asked.

"Didn't Kiyotaka use the OAA as the basis for the special exam to get Sakura-san expelled? What if..."

When our eyes met, Kei choked on her words.

"It's okay. It's nothing."

"If you were in last place in the OAA, you are wondering what I would have done?"

Kei's eyes widened in a striking way.

"As I said about Ike, if you have similar grades, the difference in friends is overwhelming. I wouldn't have expelled you."

"So what if I don't have any friends? What if I'm low in the girl caste?"

She started to feel uneasy, and her emotions made her spit out words in rapid succession.

"That argument is futile. If we use that assumption, then Kei Karuizawa would be a completely different person. If that is the case, then Kei and I should not have developed into the relationship we have now."

"It's... That's... I see. I'm sure you're right, but... if I were a different person and hadn't gone out with Kiyotaka, would I have been expelled?"

She understood that it was a meaningless discussion, but she couldn't help but ask.

"If that was the situation you were talking about, then yes."

"Umm..."

"I can understand how it might hurt your feelings, but it's not you. That's not who you are. You were bullied and hurt, so you established yourself as an independent girl in high school to turn things around. You used Yosuke to meet and date me. That's who you are, Karuizawa Kei."

When I had answered that much, Kei's lips twitched in apparent frustration.

"I will protect you no matter what. This is the right answer for Kiyotaka, okay?"

"...I see."

Even if it's not me, She wants me to be the one who declares that I will protect Kei Karuizawa no matter the situation.

I have learned that logic is not necessary there.

I laid her down on my lap and patted her head to shift her into a good mood. After a few minutes of enjoying Kei curling up on my lap like a cat, she started talking in the same position.

"Hey Kiyotaka. I think it's okay that you cut Sakura-san. There is nothing wrong with what Kiyotaka did. But was it really right for Horikita-san to keep Kushida-san? She's definitely an obstacle, isn't she?"

Kikyo Kushida is the one who caused a rift in the class. Kei feels that the disadvantage of her not dropping out of school is huge. It's nothing unusual, just a natural reaction.

Everyone has questions, but it is not easy to speak up when time is running out. And in the end,

all we think is to save ourselves. It was probably around the two days off after the exam that the heat started to cool down. Some of us wondered if it was really a good idea, while others were glad that they were not expelled. And then there are those who are scared that they might be next.

"There's Something Kushida has that Airi doesn't. Do you know what it is?"

"What? Study and sports, right? Kushida-san is pretty amazing. She's good at everything."

"For superficial reasons, yes. But that's not what's important."

"... What do you mean?"

"It's a possibility that she will become an important piece in Horikita Suzune's awakening as a leader. Not Yosuke, not Kei, but she could become a partner to Horikita."

"Kushida-san...?"

"I don't think Horikita herself fully understands it yet. She just trusted her instincts in a tight situation where time was running out."

"That's what Kushida-san has and Sakura-san doesn't..."

"The perspective that only Kushida has, the thought that only Kushida has, the remarks that only Kushida can give off. These are the elements that can be exerted regardless of whether you are popular or not. And that's what drives Horikita."

While she was convinced of a certain point, Kei herself was not fully convinced.

Is that a natural reaction?

This is an uncertain future.

It's just a theoretical approach that assumes Horikita was right in making that choice.

"I'm sure She knows that Haruka and those close to her will resent her for this. But the results won't come in a day or two. We'll just have to wait and watch."

"But doesn't Hasebe-san hate Kiyotaka more than her?"

"Yeah."

It was difficult to get unanimous agreement in that situation when the time was almost up. No matter how many others Horikita mentioned, it was nearly impossible to get them to unanimous

agreement.

And the negative class points were an unacceptable reality. If that happens, there's no way to save it except for me to act.

"It would be easy if we could just talk about the results, the conclusions, the answers. But the reality is that you can't."

"You mean Horikita-san?"

"Suppose there is a hurdle in front of you that is so high that you can either jump over it or not. If you try and fail, you might not be able to jump over it and just fall, or you might scrape your leg, or if you're unlucky, you might break a bone."

Imagine a situation where the hurdles in your path are exactly in line with your abilities

"What do you think you need to do to make sure you overcome that hurdle?"

"Yeah,...? Ummm...----- lots of practice before you jump?"

"What if I can't practice?"

"We'll just have to do it on the spur of the moment, won't we? It's the only way."

"It's the same thing. Horikita couldn't stop running, so she tried to jump over the hurdle in front of her."

"In other words, Horikita-san failed the challenge and fell?"

"No, she just jumped and her foot hit a hurdle. How bad is the injury, is she going to fall down? And will she be okay or will she be seriously injured? That has yet to be determined."

It was easy to avoid that hurdle. All she had to do was not jump and take a short detour. However, this is where you should keep an eye on Horikita.

Once again, I found myself wondering about something that I had never imagined when I first entered the school.

"I guess that's it. But I'm still not convinced by Horikita-san's decision. She broke her promise, didn't she? And she even said she would protect Kushida-san."

It is true that there is an aspect of intimidation, but it is also true that until now Horikita's class has been too undisciplined.

By doing this here, everyone knows that their personal safety is not guaranteed. Of course, there would have been a strong shake of trust in Horikita, but that would be made up for in the special exams ahead. Provided that they continue to carry out the goal of getting closer to Class A.

As we were talking, the time was around 7 pm.

I put away the dishes and went to the kitchen to wash them now.

"Hey, hey. Let's chat together over here~"

"I'll do the dishes now, then we'll see."

"What? Then it'll be 7:30."

I can hear the complaining because the discussion will start when Yosuke arrives.

I listened to her and started washing the dishes. Kei was quiet for a while, but then she gradually lost her patience and started demanding again.

"Well, well, well. Don't be shy, come here. See? Hey?"

As she said this, she patted the bed with the palm of her hand three or four times.

"It's pointless."

I wanted to at least wash the dishes before Yosuke came to my room, but I gave up on that.

As I sat down at the designated spot, Kei happily poked my right cheek with her index finger.

"Your skin is so soft for a boy. What are you using?"

"It's just lotion."

Considering the strain on teenage skin, I believe that further care is basically unnecessary.

"Hmm..."

She was convinced, but she didn't really care, she just wanted to touch me and wouldn't stop poking me on the cheek.

I grabbed Kei's hand and pulled her close to me and pulled her lips into mine.

I thought she would be surprised, but she seemed to be rather waiting for it and laughed nervously.

"I've been waiting for you since I came to your room today."

"Oh... So that's it."

I'd have to say I'm still a little naive in my reading of that.

Then our lips repeatedly met in near silence.

The repeated kisses tasted like omelet rice, a rather unusual experience.

"Suki..."

[T/L Note - Suki means 'Love' / To be in Love. Used for saying similar phrases like 'I love you' as in 'Suki Yanen' (好きやねん) / 'Suki desu' (好きです)]

I gently held Kei in my arms and was met with a quiet silence. It was a comfortable time, not an awkward one. For how many minutes did we just hold each other tightly?

As if to tear apart the silence, the bell of the room rang.

Suddenly jolted back to reality, Kei hurriedly distanced herself in sudden embarrassment. There's no hurry, the door is locked, but well, I know how you feel.

After giving Kei some time to calm down, we both welcomed Yosuke into the room.

Yosuke, who was still in uniform, entered the room.

"After club activities, I went to the keyaki mall with the seniors."

That's what Yosuke said when he noticed that I was focusing on the uniform.

"Come on in. Feel free to come in."

Yosuke smiled happily at Kei, who acted as if it was her own room.

I knew that he must be happy to see Kei's current cheerfulness and freshness because he had watched over Kei more than anyone else since she entered the school.

"Sorry to bother you."

After carefully arranging his shoes, Yosuke came up to the room and sat down, and I served him tea.

"Thank you."

"So, what did you want to talk about?"

Since there is no point in holding them back for a long time, I encourage him to talk to me. Of course, the contents are all predictable.

"Yeah. It's about the class. As Karuizawa-san knows very well, I thought it might be dangerous to go into the sports festival like this. Especially for the girls, I thought it would be difficult to coordinate with them."

Yosuke looked at Kei, thinking that she would know more about that.

"I was talking to Kiyotaka earlier about what happened with Shinohara-san. Honestly, no one is focused on the sports festival right now."

It's because They're just starting to reestablish their relationship as friends.

"So I was wondering if you had any good ideas. I need your help, Kiyotaka-kun."

Kei, who had also asked for help earlier, gave me that same look.

If so, I'll talk.

"Yosuke, did you bring this up to anyone else before me?"

"What? No ... this is the first time. I didn't want to be careless and let people know that I'm trying to fix things, because I don't think it would work."

They would be happy if you honestly wanted to help them, but if they knew that you were trying to befriend them, they might be wary of you.

There is a risk that they might suspect that there is something behind the kind words.

"And why did you ask me?"

"I thought I'd like some advice."

"If that's the case, from now on, I want you to bring up the matter first to Horikita, the leader of the Class, not me."

"But I think Horikita-san has her hands full with Kushida-san right now, so to bring up another classmate's problem to her right now would be..."

"So if I was dealing with Kushida, would you have approached Horikita?"

"It's... I don't know. I might have approached Kiyotaka-kun anyways..."

Yosuke imagined what it would be like, and then he admitted it honestly.

"Horikita-san is doing a great job. But I know that Kiyotaka would be able to see the big picture and make the right decision."

"I'd do the same. I mean, if I leave it to Kiyotaka, he'll give me the perfect answer."

"I told you that before, the special exam. You can't always rely on me. Even if you're worried, you have to go through the process of talking to Horikita-san first."

"But..."

"I understand it's a burden. You don't always get a satisfactory answer. That is why we do not rely on a single individual. Do you consider Horikita to be a true leader alone in the true sense of the word? How about Ryuen, Sakayanagi, or Ichinose as a leader? Don't you think they'd be the first to voice their concerns, even if they were preoccupied with other matters?"

The important thing is to rely on and be relied on. Horikita and the class are about to grow through repeated successes and failures.

"Failure is a learning opportunity. Everyone has had difficulty at some point in their lives. Horikita isn't quite there yet, but that's only due to a severe lack of experience."

Don't miss the process of discussing and seeking solutions before expecting a solution.

"I want you to tell me only after she's answered that she has her hands full with Kushida."

"...I see. I see what you mean, Kiyotaka-kun."

Yosuke nodded numerous times, his mind processing the meaning of the words.

"It's important to experience failure, but this is not the same as a test score. I don't think that just because you got a bad score doesn't mean you should try harder next time. It's an important thing that deals with the student's mind. If a rift in the relationship is broken by immature decisions, ... That's a problem that can't be undone."

This area is critical to Yosuke. He didn't bring up the subject just for the sake of getting an easy answer.

"Good call. But I think you're reading into it a little too much. It's true that there are cracks in the friendship between classmates. And it's true that frictions, fights, and bad language between

friends can lead to irreversible problems."

If it escalates from bad language to harassment, ignoring, and bullying, then the worst case scenario is born.

But that's really the worst case scenario.

"Kei. Is your conflict with Shinohara really that serious?"

"Hmmm... When you put it that way, well, it's a prolongation of the fight, isn't it? It's hard for me to say something bad Because I'm the one who started it. I'm not trying to harass her or anything. On the other hand I don't think there are that many girls who don't like Shinohara-san."

By taking it too seriously, you're causing unnecessary anxiety. That was the view.

"And you're not going to let Horikita solve this alone, are you?"

"Of course I will. If there's anything I can do, I will."

"That's fine. I've calculated that if the two of you can get around well with Horikita in front, you can get through most things."

However, these words alone will not be enough to completely remove the anxiety.

So I'll add something important.

"Of course, there will be things that can't be solved only by working with Horikita. In that case, I'll lend a hand."

The two seemed to be satisfied, but Yosuke's expression was not completely clear, as he still had something on his mind. We exchanged information for a while, and when it was 8:00 p.m., I urged them to leave.

"Um... if you don't mind, I'd like to talk to you alone for a few minutes."

On the way home, Yosuke, who knew he couldn't go on like this, broke the ice.

"Okay. I'll go home first."

Kei replied to Yosuke who still needed to talk to me and walked away quickly.

After the door closes, Yosuke looks back again.

"Kiyotaka-kun. I'll bring the situation to Horikita-san tomorrow. But do you have a clear path in mind at this point?"

"To be honest, I don't have any immediate ideas on how to solve the problem with Haruka and Kushida. I'm hoping that you guys can discuss it and guide me as well."

"That means... it's different when it comes to Mii-chan."

"In case anything goes wrong. We have a chance, but it will take time. If you're in a hurry, there's a risky treatment."

"Risky treatment? If there's anything we can do, I think we should do it."

Even when talking about girls who like him, Yosuke reacts in the same manner as the others.

"I told you it was risky treatment. I don't recommend it."

"What kind of method is that?"

"It's about Yosuke going to see Miichan and reciprocating her feelings."

Yosuke reacted in a way that I hadn't expected.

" 'Actually, I liked you, too. I want you to go out with me.' "

If we can make it work that way, she'll come to school tomorrow. "

I was a little reluctant to say it, but it was the only solution I could think of right now.

"If it wasn't for Yosuke, I wouldn't be talking about this kind of thing. But I thought it might be possible if it was you who had been asked by Kei to go out with her under false pretenses."

'Surely.' Yosuke muttered this, but his expression did not brighten.

"The reason why me and Karuizawa-san supposedly agreed to go out is because neither of us had any romantic feelings in between. It's not the same as pretending to be responding to Mii-chan's feelings and going out with her. It'll only hurt her deeply later."

" I don't mean to endorse this idea, but. We don't know at what stage Mii-chan fell in love with Yosuke, but we can't deny that there were students, including everyone else, who had romantic feelings for him right from the start of school. In other words, at the cost of protecting Kei from abuse by dating her, there may have been girls who were hurt because they were indirectly rejected because of the lie."

"It's..."

If Kei and Yosuke were serious about their relationship, it would be a legitimate reason.

However, as long as this is not the case, there is not much difference in what we are doing, even though the circumstances are different.

"What if Mii-chan came crying to you and told you that she couldn't go to school anymore unless you went out with her? Would you be able to say no?"

Yosuke choked on his words. Perhaps Yosuke would not be able to make such a choice.

"If you can't say no, you have two choices. You can either tell her you don't like her and go out with her, or you can lie and say you liked her too."

If true love can grow in the midst of it all, it can be brought to the best possible end.

"I don't think I should do that."

Even if he understands my point of view, the emotional side still gets in the way. "It's a hastily forced solution. It will take time, but we're in the process of planting the seeds."

"I get it. But Kiyotaka-kun is really strong, isn't he? He doesn't seem to be dragged down by Sakura-san's expulsion in the slightest."

As Yosuke spoke quietly, there was no sign of sadness or anger.

"I still... I still have that feeling in my hand."

He looks down at his outstretched hands and stares at the palms of his hands.

"It's the sensation of your fingertips touching the tablet and pressing 'yes'. I'll never forget it."

Yosuke, who works day and night to help his classmates, does not show much weakness.

However, he is still struggling with the idea of being in the same position as me, responsible for Airi's expulsion.

"I know what Yosuke was thinking at that moment, and there is no way he would have agreed to expel Airi, who had done no harm in the exam, but you persevered. You could have said at the end that you didn't agree with it, but you restrained yourself from saying it."

Our classmates would regain their composure if he grumbled about the situation and forced them to face it. Unanimity would have been impossible without a broader vision, which was

restricted by the pressure of time running out.

"I told myself, 'The most important thing is for our class to get to Class A.'..."

I guess that's what it's like to know something in your head but not be convinced of it.

"Hasebe, Kushida, and Mii-chan are absent. I wonder how long this will continue. Classmates are horrified to see the reality that students with lower grades are being dropped out. The cheerful class we had until last week remains so quiet as if it were a lie."

Even if you're moving toward a solution, you're probably still suffering and asking yourself the same questions over and over again.

"I know you are not happy with the choices I and Horikita have made. But we have to accept it. We have to understand how good we are in our current class and take it in stride. That's why Horikita needs a lot of support. Sometimes we choose the right path and sometimes we choose the wrong path. And there will be times when we choose the uncertain path."

Even if I tell him, not everything can be digested in Yosuke's mind.

"I guess I should have chosen to - run out of time... I mean..."

Yosuke's shoulders tremble slightly as he grows insufferable.

For Yosuke, the thought of sacrificing anyone is something he does not want to have.

Still, the fact that he was able to make a decision in that situation can be seen as a definite growth.

"...am I getting stronger, or have I broken myself? When it happens again, I'm afraid I don't know what decisions I'll make."

I couldn't see his face because he was looking down, but he rubbed his eyes once with his sleeve and then raised his face.

"I'm sorry for being so weak, even though Kiyotaka-kun should be suffering the most."

"It's okay. Both Horikita and I were saved by Yosuke many times in special examinations. We can expect a tougher battle in the future. I hope you will continue to lend your strength to the class."

Yosuke smiled and nodded. He'd still be devastated, but he managed a small smile.

Yosuke reaches for the front door, but stops himself.

"... Thanks for everything today."

"Do you resent me for expelling Airi?"

Unlike other students, Yosuke does not show it outwardly, but it is not surprising that he does.

"... If you only look at that point, then yes. But I believe in you."

He thought to himself and put it into words, but then added more, as if he wasn't convinced.

"No, it's not that. I want to believe in you."

If it is any kind of delusion, Yosuke considers that thought to be dangerous. But there is certainly a will behind those eyes. A firm demand to not betray because he believes in me.

"Well, good night."

I believe I might have relieved some of Yosuke's burdens, but I could also have imposed new ones on him. It would be ideal if I could use this occasion to completely drain him of his negative emotions. I'm not sure how much of an impact this will have, but we'll have to see how things progress.

Part 2

The next day, the three empty seats were still there.

Of course, the chaos in the classroom still hadn't calmed down. The first necessary thing for a fundamental solution was for the three of them to come to school.

"Hey. Wanna go to the bathroom with me?"

Sudo called out to me while I was sitting at my desk looking at my phone, waiting for the next class.

An unusual invitation.

He pretended to be going to the restroom, but his expression was serious. The fact that he needed to use the restroom was merely an excuse; he had another purpose beyond it.

It's the same as Yosuke and Kei, he wants my opinion on something.

"Ah. I guess so."

There was no reason to refuse, so I left my seat and stealthily left the classroom in the flow of the two of us going to the bathroom. It wasn't a big deal because of my convenient seating location. However, one student soon followed us.

"Sudo-kun. I'd like to talk to you for a minute, if that's okay."

She seemed to have some business with Sudo and was trying to time his appearance in the hallway.

"What is it, Onodera?"

Onodera stopped talking when she saw me standing next to Sudo.

"Ah, you're with Ayanokoji-kun. Well I needed to tell you about something so..."

It appears that my presence was unwelcome. However, I had no choice but to stay because Sudo had asked me out to come along during the break.

"We're both going to the bathroom. Can't this wait?"

"Well, I don't know."

She looks a little lost, as if she doesn't want me to hear what she has to say.

"Can I wait here? I want to talk to you as soon as possible, if that's okay with you..."

Onodera decided that if we were going to the bathroom, she would just wait for us, but this time Sudo looked embarrassed. If he had something to discuss with me, it wouldn't just take a minute or two.

"Well, I'll ask you now. I'll keep Ayanokoji waiting."

Just when Onodera was ready to talk later, she was confused by Sudo's unexpected response.

Onodera looked somewhat resistant, but she scratched the back of her head lightly and cut to the chase.

"The individual rewards for this sports festival are evaluated by gender, right? I'm assuming that Sudo-kun will naturally go for the first place among men, is that correct?"

"Of course. This sports festival is the biggest chance for me to shine."

He answers confidently.

Onodera nodded in satisfaction at his passionate reply.

"Actually, this sports festival has a lot riding on it for me. Being first among the girls is a step towards Class A. It's not often that I get the chance to compete in an area where I excel."

She is an accomplished swimmer, but she also showed her sprinter side at last year's sports festival. Her OAA physical ability is also near perfect, and she is a student with an extraordinary talent for sports in general.

Onodera is expected to be good enough to adapt and win in a variety of competitions.

"I think you might be able to get first place. I'm seriously rooting for you."

"Thanks. But even if you can win some individual competitions, there's no guarantee that you'll get first place in everything, right?"

"Why not, if I keep winning first place..."

Sudo's idea of thinking that only taking first place would be enough wasn't wrong, but in reality, one might end up losing in unexpected ways.

"It's because of the high score of the team competition, right?"

I supplemented, and Onodera gave me another hard look, but nodded in agreement. Onodera appeared to be wary of me.

The other day at the unanimous special exam, I cut off my own group of friends. No wonder some of the students reacted this way.

"Well, sure. If someone wins first place only in team competitions, it might be bad. But even so, it's not easy to form a team, is it? As Suzune said, there is a possibility of harm if you group up five or six people too tightly. Besides, I don't like the idea of five or six people getting together to fight as a team."

If they were all at the same level as him, Sudo himself would be satisfied.

In reality, however, some students might actually hold you back. As a result, it is quite possible that you might lose the competition because of it. That is what a team competition is all about.

"Yeah. I'm not thinking about a large number of people either. But... What if we can participate in a competition with two people who are sure to win? Moreover, there are some competitions that can be participated in only by pairs of men and women, right?"

At this point, Sudo also starts to guess the purpose of what Onodera was talking to him about.

"Sudo-kun and I will have no trouble cooperating with each other. If we're going to team up, I'd like to choose the best partner possible, don't you think?"

It will be a point of the class, and it won't be a detriment to trying to get first place in the gender division.

"So you're asking me... well, maybe."

"That's what I mean. Unless, of course, you have an objection to it, Sudo-kun. The class is in a bit of a bad mood right now, isn't it? Sakura-san has been expelled, Hasebe-san and Wang-san are also absent."

She turned her gaze to me for a moment, but then quickly turned it back to Sudo.

"That's why we have to lead the class."

Sudo didn't feel bad about the invitation based on the recognition of his abilities, but he wasn't very crisp.

"Am I not strong enough?"

"No, that's not it. I'm not gonna deny that you are good."

Even though he had absolute faith in her physical abilities, there seemed to be something else that bothered him.

"You don't want to be paired with anyone other than Horikita-san?"

"W-what? No no, that's not true..."

He looked uncomfortable at Onodera's point.

Pairing up with a partner you like. It's true that this may be very important to Sudo in addition to his ability.

As long as she can't participate in swimming competitions, there won't be much difference between Horikita and Onodera.

"You know, there's Koenji. I hate to admit it, but he's better than me."

"That may be true about your ability. But I don't trust Koenji-kun. I hate him more than anything."

Onodera clearly rejects Koenji. Her appeal to Sudo is genuine, but how will Sudo respond?

"What are you going to do... if I say no?"

"If there's anyone else in the class who has the ability and seems trustworthy, it's... well, only Hirata-kun, but I'm not going to ask him to be a pair, you know? I don't want to be misunderstood in any way."

When paired with Yosuke, who is immensely popular with the girls, it is more than just one or two people who would be jealous.

"So if Sudo-kun refuses, I'll go as far as I can on my own?"

She doesn't threaten him in the slightest, but simply states the facts.

The first place of the school year is in chance, but I can imagine her earning a solid amount of points.

The decision between Onodera and Horikita upset Sudo, but when he saw Onodera's determination, he immediately regained his composure. It was because he realized that he had been trying to refuse Onodera's invitation for some silly reason.

"I'm down for it. Let's pair up, and win this thing, yeah?"

"Really?"

"For sure. Let's use our power to carry this class."

Sudo promptly extended his arm to shake Onodera's hand. After staring at it for a while, Onodera gave a powerful response to the handshake.

"I like your style, Sudo-kun. Let's definitely take first place in the male and female categories together."

Satisfied with the conclusion of the contract, Onodera heads back to the classroom.

"It turned out kind of unexpectedly, but it's okay, right?"

"I think so. I'm sure you wanted to team up with Horikita, but it's better to work with Onodera and show 100% of your strength than to have a bad distraction."

"That's..."

There were only about five minutes left, but I headed to the bathroom as originally planned.

"Hey, by the way. I wanted to talk about Kanji, Shinohara, and the related stuff..."

"Is it related to the revelations of Kushida?"

"Honestly, I don't think it's a good idea, their relationship is so awkward now."

"Wouldn't it be more interesting for sudo if they split up?"

"I've said it as a joke before, I want it to work, I really do."

I asked him as a test, but he seemed to be genuinely concerned.

"But unfortunately, I don't have much of a relationship with them. There's nothing I can do for you."

"Can you at least give me some advice?"

"We can't solve the problem without talking about it. Whether what Kushida said is true or false is a separate issue at this point, and they may need to expose their true feelings to each other at least once."

"Isn't that a bad idea? It could make things even worse than they already are."

"That's right. That's why we need someone who can control the situation. Someone who is able to listen to both sides of the conversation and calm the flow of the conversation that's about to get disrupted."

"Oh, I can't do that, can I?"

"Then you'll have to ask someone who can do that."

I won't give an answer here, but let Sudo think about it.

"If that's true, this kind of role would be done by Kushida, right..?"

"Correct, but that's not available now. If we can't rely on Kushida, then we'll have to use another student."

The answer is so simple that it doesn't even take him a second to guess it"

"So, Hirata?"

Sudo has an immediate idea. Although Sudo doesn't get along with Yosuke, this isn't the situation to be talking about that.

"Alright then, I'll go ask for his help."

Sudo and Yosuke have a distant relationship, but that may change after this incident.

"Thanks, Ayanokoji."

"I didn't do anything. You just thought about it and came up with the answer on your own."

That's how classes go around.

Part 3

Same day

Each class, or rather all the grades, is gearing up for the sports festival. As was the case last year, some of the events were already known, so the students made time to start practicing as if they were the real thing, using the ground and the gymnasium during lunch break. They will want to devote as much practice time as possible to team competitions, especially those involving two or more players.

In the gymnasium where we came to scout the area, many energetic voices are resounding everywhere. It seemed that the gym was carefully equipped so that all the students, from the first year to the third year, had a certain amount of free space and could practice fairly. Today's second-year students seemed to be playing volleyball and table tennis.

The vast number of participants in one of the classes, as well as the exceptionally high level of enthusiasm, were the first things that struck me. They were shouting and avidly debating the game's tips and tricks.

"You can see how serious Class A is."

"Yeah."

I was here with Yosuke, and he calmly analyzed the students and said so.

"Purely class-based sports competitions aren't Class A's strong suit, you know."

"Yeah. For better or worse, there are many students with average athletic abilities, and just a handful of them are eligible for top awards."

Because they know they are at a disadvantage in terms of overall strength, they are working together to quickly raise the level of their abilities. They plan to practice and aim for competitions where they can gain points with their experience.

I can't confirm her appearance, but I'm very confident it's Sakayanagi's orders first and foremost.

There are students from Ichinose's class and Ryuen's class, but they still seem to be picking their way around. On the other hand, there were no students from Horikita's class; I thought one or two might show up, but even if they did, they would just be standing in the corner, unable to do anything under the circumstances.

"We're not out of the unanimous special exam yet. It's not going to be easy to try to practice under those circumstances, is it?"

"You're right, there's still a lot of uncertainty. But it's not necessarily all gloomy."

I told Yosuke that Sudo and Onodera have teamed up to become the number one male and female 2nd years. The few pieces of good news made his face relax, if only a little.

"If we keep getting first place in both the single and pair competitions, we should be able to get enough top places."

"Those two have a good chance of winning, don't they?"

There was a great deal of hope, but it still took more than just the two of them to win the class. A system that can temporarily cooperate with them is urgently needed, even if it's full of joints.

"Speaking of which, Sudo-kun asked me to meet him after school today, before club activities. Could it be that Kiyotaka-kun is involved behind the scenes?"

"I didn't do anything. I'm sure Sudo thought about it himself and decided to ask for help."

"It's probably something related to Shinohara-san, right?"

"Sudo probably thought that he couldn't leave it like that."

"But what about Mii-chan?"

"I think I'll take care of that one."

"Kiyotaka-kun?"

If I tell him that I'm going to leave it alone or leave it to the right person, Yosuke will have a hard time accepting the situation. The reason why he is so concerned about Mii-chan is because he feels it is his fault. Of course, Yosuke is not at fault at all.

In the midst of the stillness, I decided that Mii-chan was the one who require a little assistance.

One of the reasons is that Yosuke cannot be used as a key.

Chapter 3

Even So, I have to do it.

Intro

The last time I saw Kushida-san was last weekend at the special exam. For the next week, I did not see her once until after school on Friday.

That's not all. Neither Wang-san nor Hasebe-san are attending school. It's been five days already from Monday to Friday.

Things will not wait in the meantime as the time went by.

Be it meetings and initial research for the sports festival, Student council work, Usual Studying.

Sometimes my knees shake and I feel like falling backwards. But I can't let myself fall down here right now.

I have no right to complain about it when I have declared that I will definitely bring her back and have not achieved anything.

I had multiple occasions where I wanted to contact Ayanokoji-kun, but I had to stop myself. If I ask for help, chances are he will respond and It could lead me to the answer I am looking for.

But at least this time it's something that I have to solve for myself.

"That concludes the homeroom."

As soon as Chabashira-sensei finished her last homeroom of the day and left the room, I quickly followed her.

"Sensei, may I have a word with you?"

"I don't mind, but... yes. Let's walk and talk."

The hallways are conspicuous because many students leave their seats to use the restroom at this time. Perhaps she understood my intentions, so she decided to talk to me as we walked.

"It's been five days since Kushida-san, Wang-san, and Hasebe-san have been absent from school."

"Ah, yes. Apparently, Hasebe and Wang informed that they are sick, but they haven't been seen at the hospital as they should. As for Kushida, she's just saying she'll be absent and hasn't given us any details."

They weren't gone for cheery reasons by any means and The refusal to attend school felt like a punishment for me.

"Are we in a state where we'll start receiving severe penalties?"

I know she won't be able to give me a specific answer, even so I will ask her once.

"Don't worry so much, The rules are designed to give longer grace periods, especially for honor students like Wang and Kushida. As for Hasebe, she is not a problem child, so it is not such a big deal now. Unless, of course, the students don't have a good record or have bad behavior."

"Does it also depend on the daily activities of Individual?"

"That's the way it is. Besides, there are students who successfully exploit the rules, and there are others who clumsily take off the week. It's hard to tell. So the only way to judge them is to look at their attitude and performance in school so far."

I feel my heart lighten just by being told about it.

"Besides, the school isn't evil either. They don't want to force you students into class while something is already troubling you. Anyway, the three students who are currently absent have never been late and have been diligent in their classes. They are fully qualified to be given an exemption."

In a soothing tone, Chabashira-sensei tells me this.

She appeared to be really different from her typical self, and I'm wondering whether there's a reason for it. It's possible she'd changed since the special exam, something the class frequently speculates about.

"Most importantly, they understand that the school will be administering a difficult special exam soon."

So, the fact that rest is needed and that the students are already mentally strained means they've been given more freedom to skip school.

Chabashira-sensei pauses to make sure no one is nearby before continuing.

"But the time limit is almost up. If they continue to be absent next week, you'll start losing the 100 points you've worked so hard for."

The secret message from sensei was to do something this weekend. But would I really be able to respond to that message? I wanted to ask sensei how I would go about my current situation, but my weakness was already starting to show little by little. That was something I didn't want to happen

"Thank you very much. You've been very helpful."

"Wait, Horikita. Don't you still have something to say?"

"No, I don't wish to trouble you anymore, sensei."

"You won't know if it's troublesome until you ask me. We still have a little time left, wouldn't it be a little easier if you tried talking to someone?"

Chabashira-sensei must be able to see right through my state of mind. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous, but I chose to be brave about it and share my feelings.

"We got class points by expelling Sakura-san. Was that the right thing to do?"

"Do you regret your decision?"

"I thought it was the right decision at the time. Even so... I can honestly say that I'm anxious now."

"I wish I could give you an answer, but I can't."

"I understand. As a teacher, you can't give me an answer, can you?"

"No, that's not it. It's just that at this point, I can't tell myself whether you were right or not. It's true that your decision was a bit dictatorial and self-serving, and some students may have seen it that way. As a result You're suffering from their judgment and you're beginning to feel that you gave the wrong answer."

That hurts to hear, and I don't know what to say.

"But does it actually make a difference? No one is perfect from the beginning. We make mistakes even in simple additions and multiplications, we learn, and then we move on. I'm walking through a life full of mistakes too."

"You too... mistakes?"

"That's correct, back when I took the same special exam. I couldn't answer the question before

time ran out. In that respect, you gave an answer. I think you're doing well. There is no one who can get 100 points without experience. At the time of the special exam, you were recognized as a leader and given authority. And you were ready to cut someone down to protect Kushida. Now it's up to you to prove that it was the right decision."

Sensei had just said something what a normal teacher would say.

I was a little confused, as I have rarely seen her like this before.

"At this point, you don't have to aim to achieve a hundred points; you can either reduce the OAA's bottom line in a reasonable way or prioritise your commitments. There are two options, and you must endure the hardship of one of them."

"Yes, that's right..."

I know she's right, and yet I'm still confused.

"But... I also think that I may have been blind to my surroundings. I think that if I had listened more, I might have grasped a better, more correct answer."

"It's possible to lose sight of your surroundings. And later, when the heat settles down, you may wonder if you made the right decision."

I've never had that experience. I was so frustrated that I unconsciously clenched my fists.

"You've always made decisions that were simple at best, or simple at worst, haven't you? Of course, that's normal. It's just that we each have traits and this is the first time you're forced to search for a new option."

"Yes..."

Even with the strong advice, I still hadn't found the right response.

Despite the fact that I must have appeared pitiful, Chabashira-sensei treated me with kindness.

"Didn't you fight within the school's rules?"

"Yes, but I broke my promise not to expel anyone except traitors."

"Did you decide from the start to protect the traitor and lie about it in order to get a yes vote?"

"No! I was really ready to do that at that time... I swear."

"In that case, there's nothing wrong with it. It's important to keep your promises. However, even adults sometimes make mistakes in their promises. I know you changed your mind because you realized that leaving Kushida wasn't the right thing to do. You are free to despise or ignore those who think poorly of you now. Some will follow you, some won't, and uniting a class of nearly forty students is no easy task, even for Ryuen, Ichinose, or Sakayanagi. The other students may be loyal and devoted on the surface, but you never know what they're thinking on the inside."

Chabashira-sensei said, placing a gentle hand on my shoulder.



"Don't be afraid to fail. I'm not an adult who won't admit or forgive a child's mistakes."

"I haven't failed yet."

"That's right. I'm willing to see the choices you make through to the end."

After giving me a slightly troubled look, sensei looked me in the eye again. Her polite, stern yet loving words almost make me choke up a little.

"You've changed, Chabashira-sensei."

I didn't mean to say that, but it just came out. I suppose it's what I honestly felt.

"Is it that strange for me to act like a teacher now? Have I been treating you that coldly?"

"I'm a little surprised, but no, it's not strange."

"Well, that's good."

Chabashira-sensei probably thought she had talked too much, so she cleared her throat and changed the subject.

"What did Ayanokoji say in regards to Kushida?"

"Ayanokoji-kun...? Nothing specific about her. If I had to say, I think he's observing me to see what I do."

"I see. So he thinks it's something you should solve on your own?"

"It may be that he just can't deal with my selfishness."

"I wonder. But Ayanokoji was the one who took a drastic step with Kushida's case. Even if you don't trust him, I don't think he's the one to leave you alone."

"You're buying into Ayanokoji-kun quite a bit, aren't you? I remember you saying that Ayanokoji-kun was the most defective piece in our class."

"How can you remember such an old statement?"

"I am certain he is better than what his OAA shows."

"I see that your evaluation of him has increased considerably."

"There are some difficulties with his personality, but those aren't limited to just Ayanokoji-kun. I still don't understand what you meant by him being defective."

He is unquestionably superior, far more calm and composed than I am. I don't see any reason for him to be labelled as a defective student.

"You don't have to take every single thing I say seriously. You've spent more time with him than I have, right?"

"Still, I'd like to hear your reason."

"In that case, my assessment hasn't changed since. No, I believe that the credibility of that assessment has increased."

Chabashira-sensei still believes that Ayanokoji-kun is defective, even after everything he's done and shown us.

"But don't dwell too much on it now because you have other problems that you need to solve quickly."

"Yes that's right..."

It was true that I was curious about it, but it could certainly be done later. I have to make sure that Kushida-san, Wang-san, and Hasebe-san come back to school.

"Is it tough with Kushida?"

"So far she's been a pushover. No matter how much I visit or wait, she never opens the door."

"That's tough."

She has countless opportunities to leave her dorm to get supplies when I'm in school, and hide out during the weekend.

It's pointless to try to confront her in such a way by ambushing her. I even tried to contact her on her cell phone, but she never picked it up.

"She most likely understands that I'm on the other side of the door, pacing left and right, and she's okay with that."

"I suppose you have a point. That said, if you don't make a move, things won't progress and they'll slowly get worse."

"Yes, That's right..."

"When you can't do anything on your own, it's a good idea to ask for help from another person."

"But the only classmate who would be willing to help persuade Kushida is Hirata, But... He probably doesn't have time for that right now."

Hirata-kun is currently occupied with Wang-san and Shinohara-san.

"Sure, Hirata would be able to make a large impact. Although I'm not sure if he'll have much effect on Kushida. I don't think it would be easy to open the doors if you took someone like that with you. A righteous, sensible, good person."

Somehow, I think I understand what sensei is trying to say. Hirata-kun would lie to make Kushida-san feel better, and she knows that.

"I'm afraid I can't think of anyone suitable at the moment, but it might not be a bad idea to look at someone other than your classmates."

"When I try to confront Kushida-san, I'm confronting her true feelings which relate to what happened in class. It's quite a disadvantage to tell that to an outsider."

"I suppose you'll have to work on balancing the advantages and disadvantages. Even so, that doesn't necessarily mean you're not allowed to tell them. Some of us teachers, for example, know about Kushida's past, and some of us would probably let others know if we chose to. I believe that there are no such things as secrets."

There is no such thing as a secret...? Maybe... there is someone who can move Kushida-san's heart. No, even if they can't move her heart, if there's someone who can make a breakthrough, I think I need to visit her.

"It's time to go. I don't know if it's too much to ask, but I just want to say one last thing. The most important thing is what you want to do with Kushida. You must think about it carefully."

What do I want to change within Kushida-san?

"Thank you very much, Sensei. Thanks to you, I feel more prepared."

I still didn't have an answer, but I had the energy to try again.

"Don't worry about it. I'm sure it's only natural for a teacher to do this much."

With that, Chabashira-sensei walked back to the staff room. I continued to watch her from the stairs until I could no longer see her back.

Part 1

When I returned to my dorm after shopping at Keyaki Mall, I found Ibuki Staring at the entrance next to the elevator. I ignored her and pressed the elevator button, and she seemed to be extremely angry.

"Don't ignore me!"

She yelled at me with such force that she spit her saliva out onto my face. I was ready to enter a long battle with Ibuki-san, but what the hell was going on?

It seems like she's going to follow me even into the elevator. I had no choice but to stop and watch as the elevator doors opened for her.

"Ignore you? What do you want from me?"

"This! What did you mean by this sentence? Tell me the answer."

She thrusts the screen of her cell phone in front of me, glaring at me. A blinding light illuminates my eyes and all i can see is white light.

"Are you stupid? It's too close for me to see, can you move away?"

"Damn it! Here!"

She took a step back, and I was able to read what it stated just by looking through some of it.

"That is an impressive and well-written piece of writing. I'm convinced it was written by a knowledgeable individual."

"Don't pat yourself on the back! I mean, what's so intelligent about this?"

"Maybe if you read it out loud, you'd understand."

"Huh? *'If you drop out of school when I have nothing to do with it, then of course you've lost to me.'* Don't be such a dumbass. Where's the intelligence in that? No, that's enough, just tell me what it means!"

"You read it and didn't get it?"

"Not at all. I've been thinking about it all week and I didn't get it. So what?"

She sniffed and crossed her arms.

I wasn't expecting her not to understand my simple advice. No, I'd rather thought it could be potentially effective.

"It's not something that makes sense to ask about now. You didn't seem to have a problem with what I said, seeing as I got no response."

"What? Explain it to me in a clearer way."

She has no idea what's going on. I'm curious whether her athleticism and fighting instincts are all she has.

"I wanted to encourage you to avoid being expelled. You aren't well liked by your classmates and could have been in trouble if the question during the exam had anything to do with your expulsion. To get back at me, wouldn't you try to stay in school even if you didn't want to?"

"Don't tell me you're worried about... me?"

She backed away, not surprised but with a disgusted look on her face.

"Don't take this the wrong way. It's just that there's a lot left for you to do here. Even if you were dismissed from the last special exam, Ryuen-kun's class would gain 100 points, alongside abandoning you. If you're going to leave anyway, it's more profitable to have you disappear in the exam with a penalty attached to the class."

When I tried to explain it to her, she didn't seem convinced in the least.

"I think it's time for me to leave."

With her silently and angrily making way for me, I pressed the elevator button again. Then as I got inside, I noticed that Ibuki was not following me.

"You're not coming?"

"I don't want to get in the elevator with you."

"Don't be silly, we've been inside together a few times by accident."

"I don't feel like going with you right now."

"Right. Then do what you want."

Pressing the close button, I head for the floor where Kushida-san lives.

From here, I'll have to keep trying until she finally lets me in. I wondered if I'd be able to make a breakthrough as the elevator started ascending. It will not change unless I try something new. If that's the case, everything I'm going to do will be a complete waste of time. I arrived at my destination floor and the door opened.

But I can't take the first step to get out, and I'm stuck there. I don't know what to do, how to communicate with Kushida-san. What has changed that will help me to talk to her?

Time passed and the elevator closed. Before I could press the button, the elevator started moving and began to move downstairs.

"Ugh..."

Don't think you can persuade Kushida-san to come face to face with you with your current thoughts.

I think back to the words from Chabashira-sensei.

The elevator came straight back to the first floor. When the doors opened, Ibuki-san, who was looking down at her cell phone, took a step forward without noticing me. She looked up when she felt the presence of someone in the elevator, saw me, and let out a slight groan.

"Why are you here?"

I can't say I expected any other reaction.

"You're not getting in?"

"I told you I'm not getting in! Are you harassing me?"

Shaking my head, I reached out to press the close button again. Then I saw Ibuki-san averting her gaze and felt something tugging in my mind. Just before I touched the close button, I pressed the open button and stared at her.

She looks at me, suspicious that the elevator isn't closing.

A breakthrough may be lying in an unexpected place.

Maybe it's time to put Chabashira-sensei's advice to use...

"What the hell?"

"I thought I'd ask you to help me with something."

"Huh?"

It's a significant risk, but it might well be the key to breaking the deadlock. There will be an unseen breakthrough, and it may be a surprise ambush that will break us out of the current impasse. I realise it's risky, but for the time being, I'll have to do whatever it takes.

"Get in."

"How many times do I have to tell you I'm not getting in?"

"Just get in."

"What the hell?"

I pushed the close button, checking on Ibuki, who got in, despite her irritation.

"There's something I need your advice on."

"No, no, no, I would not get on it and I am not helping you."

"You are already in the elevator."

"You're the one who told me to get in!"

"Then why don't you give me advice?"

"No, it doesn't make sense!"

"At least hear me out... Maybe it'll benefit you."

"Don't get ahead of yourself. Just because you're asking me about it, I know it's bad news."

While we were talking, the elevator reached the floor where Kushida-san's room was located. I stepped out first and looked back at Ibuki-san, who was still in the elevator.

"Get off. We don't know who's listening, so stay close."

"I'm going home. I don't know what you mean."

She presses the close button and tries to leave, but the elevator doors do not close.

"It looks like the elevator wants you to get off too."

"That's because you're blocking it from the outside by pushing the button!"

"Do you have any favourite things? Like, things that are important to you?"

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"Just answer the question."

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"No, uh, I don't know... I can't think of anything at all, but maybe strawberries?"

"That's surprisingly cute for you, Ibuki-san. Anyway, just forget about what I just said."

"Then why the hell did you ask?"

As Ibuki-san grew unsurprisingly unhappy, I decided to cut to the chase. I realized that it would be better for her if I quickly shared my story and moved on to the next part of the plan.

"I'm going to go see Kushida-san now."

"So? Why don't you go see her on your own?"

She hit the close button repeatedly, but of course it didn't work.

"It doesn't work that way. She hasn't shown up once this entire week. I've been to her dormitory and she hasn't shown any sign of coming out. I need you to get her out of her room. Do you understand?"

"What? Wait, why do I have to do that?"

"It's another way of helping people."

"If I don't even help my class, why would I help your class?"

I already knew that Ibuki-san is unlikely to accept my offer. But It's a different matter if there's a benefit. The warning buzzer begins because the elevator is left open the entire time.

"Fine. After that, I'll compensate you then."

"I don't want it. If you think I'll do it for money, you're wrong."

"I'm sure you aren't. But I'm sure my reward will be something you strongly desire."

"I don't think there's anything like that."

It's difficult to Change Ibuki's mentality. However, if you confront her with particular things, her mentality will totally shift.

"You can pre-register for up to five events of your choice for the sports festival. You are free to choose which events and which groups you want to participate in. The main purpose of this system is to be used to clear the required events, or to avoid strong opponents. On the other hand, it is also a system that allows you to fight against targeted opponents."

When I had explained that much, Ibuki-san's eyes, which had been unmotivated, lit up.

"I'm sure you're waiting for the right moment to fight me, aren't you? But Unfortunately for you, I'm not going to make a decision until the last minute. Depending on the situation, there's a high chance that I will apply for the last slot in the events. So even if you wait, you'll never get the chance to fight."

"So you're saying that if I cooperate, you'll fight me?"

"Yes. I'll fight you in one of the competitions of your choice. Of course, I won't go easy on you because of your class, so you won't be able to pick up any points. That is, if you're okay with it."

"Ha. That's interesting. But I'm not satisfied with just one. I'll help you if you give me at least three competitions, so we will have a best-of-three."

"Three? That's greedy..."

I make a pretense of thinking as the warning beep goes off again.

"It's non-negotiable."

She has a point, I agree that it's not clear who would be better out of one competition. On the other hand, if we play two or four rounds, there is always the possibility of a draw.

It was expected from the beginning that the game would be decided by three rounds, but if I presented a three match setup at the beginning, she might have been asking for five rounds.

If she's willing to accept three rounds, then we're right on schedule.

"Fine, I'll face you for three rounds and join the competition. Is that okay with you?"

"Deal. No changing your mind later."

With that, she stepped off the elevator. I took my hand off the button and the elevator began to slowly close its doors.

"Of course. However... you're going to have to help me out this time until we get this matter resolved."

"Just tell me clearly what the goal is."

"Kushida-san coming to school on Monday. That's it."

"How hard can that be? I mean, what's the point if Kushida is absent? Everyone gets sick at least once in a while."

Chabashira-sensei said that secrets shouldn't matter when it comes to resolving Kushida-san's issue. Also Kushida-san's secret isn't exactly a secret anymore. The important thing is who I'm telling the secrets to.

I chose to take her advice and share the entire story. If it were to spread then it would be my fault for not realising that Ibuki is the type of student who would blow this up and tell everyone around her. Now is the time to find a method to break the ice, even if it means pushing myself even more.

I told Ibuki-san everything about Kushida-san, with nothing left. Ibuki-san only knows what kind of life she's been leading through some encounters. But I explained to her Kushida-san's true nature, her way of thinking, and every detail of her current situation. While I was talking to her, Ibuki-san was listening to me with a disinterested look on her face, looking in some random direction.

Normally, I would have been displeased with such behaviour, but oddly enough, her manner of listening rescued me. Ibuki-san let out an exasperated sigh as I finished giving her the truth about why she was currently missing from school.

"Whatever."

Without showing any strong interest in her true nature, she nonchalantly commented on the fact.

"You don't seem surprised. Did you know anything about it?"

"Nah, I just don't believe in straight-up good guys. The same goes for Hirata and Ichinose. It's a rule that people who pretend to be good people are always dark behind the scenes."

"That's an interesting way of thinking."

She might have a surprisingly good point.

"So, in your mind, is Ryuen-kun quite highly regarded? He's not a good person on the surface but he's not a good person behind the scenes either."

"That's why I hate him more. I also dislike guys who seem harmless like Ayanokoji these days. People like that piss me off."

When she goes that far, I wonder if there exists anyone that Ibuki-san finds likable...

"Well, I don't hate the idea of exposing a person like that. I'd enjoy asking her how it feels to be exposed as a bad person."

If she goes too far, I'll have to stop her, but that kind of forcefulness is something I need to learn from.

"You want me to drag Kushida out of her hiding place, right?"

"Yes."

Seeming quite confident, Ibuki-san walked lightly to the front of Kushida-san's room.

"Are you going to do this all by yourself?"

"Just shut up and watch."

Very well Ibuki-san, let's see what you do.

When she walked to the front of Kushida-san's room, Ibuki-san suddenly held her stomach and kneeled down onto the floor.

"Oh shit! Ouch ouch ouch!"

She then let out a scream that echoed down the hallway.

I couldn't understand what she was doing for a moment, and stared at the scene in amazement.

"This stomach-ache... I can't! No way I can't make it back in time..."

A stomachache? Please don't tell me this is the best she can do... Aside from the cliched concept, it's a disaster in terms of acting.

To begin with, this is not the floor of Ibuki's room. Even if the floors were the same, it would definitely be faster to run to your own room.

"Uh, excuse me?! Can I use your toilet real quick?"

She rapidly hit the bell on Kushida-san's door and continued to do so for about ten seconds, but there was no sign of Kushida-san opening up from inside.

It seems that asking Ibuki-san for help was an obvious mistake, I was ready to lose my head from all the pointless noise she was making. She continued to keep acting for a few dozen seconds until she got up and turned to face me with a straight face.

"Maybe she's not at home?"

"First of all, I'm pretty sure she's in her room."

"Really? If she doesn't get caught by that act, she's quite a tough one, isn't she?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

I said, motioning Ibuki-san to follow me. I instruct her to follow me quietly and open the box with the built-in electric meter attached to Kushida-san's room.

"You see a disk here, right? If the speed of this disk is slow, she's probably not home. But if she's at home and using the TV or computer, the rotation speed will increase."

The disk was spinning slightly faster than normal.

"Now you know it's more likely that she's at home, right?"

"I didn't know you knew about being a thief?"

"I learned a lot about it last weekend while I was waiting for her. Don't abuse it."

"Of course I won't!"

She answers while giving me a cold look.

"Can you think of any other way? If you don't, then I suppose we should give up now..."

"We're doing it wrong."

"What?"

"It's one way or another, but it's okay, right? I'll forcefully pull Kushida out."

I feel like I should inquire further, but I see her spirit and decide to leave it to her once more. I keep my distance, and then she steps to the door again.

"Hey, Kushida. I've heard a lot about you. I heard that you've been wearing a mask up until now, and it was exposed in the exam?"

When I wondered what she was going to do, she started babbling nonsense.

For a moment, my brain thought I should stop her, but there was no point in doing so. Even if I stopped Ibuki-san here, it would have already been heard by Kushida-san.

"That's gotta hurt... How does it feel to go from being the most popular person in the world to falling down so low? Oh, Ichinose is the most popular in the school. How does it feel to fall from second place?"

The approach of inducing agitation is far superior to her previous dreadful acting. Furthermore, because she is being told by an outsider, Ibuki-san, Kushida-san may become quite enraged. But there was no response. I guess rough treatment wasn't enough...

Ibuki-san didn't change her expression, nor did she try to stop her words.

"Show me your disgusting face."

She slams her right toe against the door extremely hard.

"I'm so stressed out because of Horikita right now, I just want to get rid of it all."

Honestly, that was Ibuki-san's true intention, she didn't want to save Kushida-san in the slightest. I'm sure she's on the other side of the door listening...

"Kicking in the door of someone's room might not be such a bad idea. I can understand Ryuen's feelings a little."

After a few such kicks, I heard a sound from inside the room. Despite this, as she was about to unleash more kicks, the door to the room suddenly unlocked.

"It's annoying, so can you please stop, Ibuki-san?"

Kushida-san, in her casuals, finally showed herself.

I honestly didn't expect Ibuki-san's violent strategy to work... I'm a little shocked, wondering what all my efforts were for during the past week.

"There she is. See? I knew she was that type of person."

Maybe there were parts of Kushida-san's personality that Ibuki-san could relate to...

"Whatever you're trying to do is pissing me off, can you stop?"

"Aren't you more likable when you put on your mask or something?"

"I've never actually liked you, you know. I can see Horikita-san over there, that was probably the reason you're even here."

Her mental state seems to be calm, judging by the fact that she used "san".

Since there was no point in hiding, I walked without hesitation to the front of Kushida-san's room.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to come inside your room. I'm getting a little tired of waiting around all the time."

"Well, it's no use trying to close it."

She can't close the door because Ibuki-san has one foot firmly inserted in the gap between the doors. Kushida-san looked down at the foot for a few seconds before suddenly, without warning, stomping on it.

"Ah!"

She continues to stomp forcefully, but Ibuki-san doesn't pull her foot back either.

"Yeah... it's not closing."

Kushida-san sighs.

"That's enough...!"

I try to force the door open and step in, but she only retreats and greets us with a straight face.

"Come on in, then. This may be the last time I'll do this, so take your time."

She says it with an implied tone, but I guess she's been prepared to do something like that for a while. It was no small feat for Kushida-san to annoy the class by maintaining the situation indefinitely. She must have invited us in because she's made up her mind about something. This is our last chance, I guess.

I could tell at a glance that Kushida-san's room was being used in a clean and neat manner. In terms of her love of cleanliness, I get the idea she's even more steady than I am.

"Well, well, it's pretty tidy."

Ibuki-san says, looking around the room with a hint of admiration and surprise.

Kushida-san saw this attitude and made a strange face.

"Ibuki-san's room looks like a mess, with her undressed clothes scattered all over the place."

"Wh-what? How do you know if you haven't even seen it?"

It's clear from Ibuki-san's reaction that it's true.

"Sit down. I'm not going to offer you anything to drink or snack on, but that's okay, right?"

"Yeah, no thanks."

We looked at each other for a moment and then sat down. Kushida-san sat across from us, making it a two-on-one situation across the table.

"You've been making noise in front of my room for so long, what do you want?"

"You know what I want, don't you? You've been absent out of school for the past week."

"Yes..."

With an absent-minded reply, Kusida-san continued.

"Do you really think I'm going to go to school after what happened? I'm not really surprised, but you told her about me, didn't you? Is that another way to get back at me?"

"No, it isn't. She wouldn't carelessly tell anyone else."

"Do you trust her?"

"No, I don't. It's just that she doesn't have anyone to talk to."

"Hey!"

Ibuki-san slammed her fist on the table and glared at me, but I ignored her. It is true after all...

"Even if that's the case, you're not thinking about my feelings, are you? I'm hurt."

"Do you really have the right to say that?"

"Even if I don't, there's no reason why you shouldn't think about how I feel, Horikita-san."

The sharp exchange of words quickly brought up new tension.

"Let's move the conversation forward. I know I have been inadequate in some respects. But you were the one who initiated the hostility in the first place. Isn't that right?"

We were just classmates, but she had always seen me as someone who should be expelled.

"I won't deny that point. But I can't help it, I couldn't stand you..."

"I don't know what I should have done. I look back on it now and I can't get a clear answer."

"I know, I know. I've thought about the same thing a few times. And I've come to one conclusion. Maybe you should have voluntarily withdrawn from school for me, because I couldn't stand your presence."

"Don't be absurd. That's not a solution, it's just your angry feelings."

"It's complicated. But it's the only argument I have."

Although she answered my questions, it was not a friendly way.

I suppose these were just her true feelings.

At first, I was trying to listen to her, but then she started to slowly stop talking and the lifeless look in her eyes returned.

"I wonder if you'd be willing to help me and put all of this behind you."

"I knew that's what you were getting at, but come on, don't make me laugh."

"You're good enough and worth it."

"I know."

She answers immediately, not even showing any signs of modesty.

"Super self-conscious..."

To Ibuki-san's muttered response, Kushida-san simply turns and stares at her.

"Did you think so? Well it's not very true. However, I wouldn't expect someone with your competence to realize that."

"Do you think you're all great? Why don't we go at it here or something?"

Ibuki-san said and clenched her fists.

"You're even more of an idiot than I thought, Ibuki-san. That's not what competence means, okay? Why don't you take a look at OAA? My ability in this school is my good grades, right? I think the difference between me and Ibuki-san is more than physical aspects, don't you think?"

Ibuki-san took out her phone and checked the OAA. She then compared it to her own overall strength, paled, and silently closed her phone.

"I want you to use your high ability for the good of the class. If you continue to be absent from school without permission, you will eventually lose your place."

"It's already gone. As for you, you were prepared for the backlash and opposed my leaving the school, right? So the one who would be troubled if I'm useless is you. I can understand why you would want to desperately try to persuade me to come back."

The situation in the class must have been very obvious to Kushida.

"I've lost. There's no reason to stay anymore. But the reason why I stayed quiet at the end of that unanimous special exam was to damage you as much as possible. If I continue to be absent from school, the school will punish the class with non attendance, right? And the blame for that punishment will go to you."

Indeed, if Kushida-san continues to be absent, the class will be continuously damaged like a continuing poisoning. It was possible that the Non-participation strategy would eventually get stopped with special exams, but Kushida-san would be able to accomplish her revenge successfully.

"There's no gain in it for you, why keep this up?"

"It's too late, I have nothing to lose at this point. Isn't it normal to give you a little hurdle?"

"How is it normal? Don't get carried away just because your OAA numbers are above average."

Ibuki-san Muttered sitting next to me.

"I invited you in just for the fun of it, but I guess I was right. You're funny, Ibuki-san. If it was just me and Horikita-san, it would have been a boring conversation. I guess I was wrong when I said it was normal. What is normal to me must be abnormal to you."

"So you admit that you have loose screws?"

"Not in my eyes. To me, I do everything right and you do everything wrong. I can't tolerate anything that doesn't suit me."

"That's disgusting."

"Whether it's disgusting or not is irrelevant, I can't just change my way of thinking... I was born that way."

Kushida-san was acting more strange than usual, trying to keep a calm image as she let her dark thoughts spill. No... maybe she found it amusing.

She was much more formidable at the moment rather than when she was screaming and revealing her weakness.

"I'll continue to be an issue until the school does something to force me to change my ways."

Kushida-san declares that she will continue to hinder our class with determination. She preaches to me in a matter-of-fact tone, so I know she's not lying.

"What are you going to do?"

"What am I going to do? Nothing, I have no choice but to have a talk with you like this."

"You're inconsiderate, aren't you? You're very different from Ayanokoji-kun."

At the mention of Ayanokoji-kun's name, Ibuki-san lifts her head up.

"I thought I was taking advantage of him, but it seemed I was very wrong. On the contrary, he was planning to use it against me the entire time. I think he was someone I shouldn't have made enemies with."

"Ayanokoji-kun is very different. It's clear that he can see things deep into the future. It's only recently that I've been made aware of this."

"Then I suppose we're in the same boat."

"I suppose so."

A bit of silence.

"You're mostly an idiot too, Horikita-san. It would have been so much easier if you had just cut me out."

"Maybe I am an idiot. Unfounded intuition, unfounded confidence. That's what you might take me for. However, there is no doubt that you are undeniably an excellent student. Although I can understand how my knowledge about past events and your desire to remove Ayanokoji-kun have caused troubles, at least the reputation you have continued to contribute to the class for a year and a half remains unchanged."

Kushida-san has done well and she shouldn't be ashamed of it.

"If annoying the class is really your top priority, you might be able to succeed in your revenge if you just keep taking time off. But, is that what you want?"

"What's your point?"

"I'm asking if that's enough to satisfy you."

"I can be satisfied. I don't want anything more than that right now. No matter how many words you try to convince me, it's useless, I won't ever agree with you."

I'd never be able to persuade her. I felt as if I couldn't say anything after hearing such statements. I certainly want Kushida-san to attend school because it would benefit everyone, and I also want to demonstrate that my decision was not a mistake.

Kushida-san, who is right in front of me, knows that better than anything else. In the end, it's still for my sake. It's hard to say that it's the best choice for Kushida-san to come back.

"Maybe I was wrong about you."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought I was here to 'persuade' you, but I was wrong. It was for myself and the class. I wasn't able to take your feelings into account."

"What? Now you're going to pity me?"

"I just realized that taking you out of a school that you don't want to go to is over-ambitious."

"Then I guess we're done talking. If I drag my feet, Horikita-san will automatically fall too. I'll be happy if you suffer through school without me for a long time."

"That's fine with me. But at the same time, it means you'll suffer too."

"I'll suffer? Why's that?"

"Because you still have a place to go back to and you're going to lose it."

"You've become so selfish. There is no place to go back to."

The more I think about her, the more one emotion comes to mind.

"You keep driving me insane, don't you Kushida-san..."

"What are you on about...?"

"I try to lean on you, but you can never support me because you're like a child. The point is, you've just made the wrong choice at every turn. This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't tried to get rid of me, especially since I don't tell secrets and don't actually know anything of the past. The same goes for Ayanokoji-kun."

"Even then, I just can't stand you."

"That's what kids do. They can't stand it, so they lash out. You are like a child."

Ibuki-san, who was the first to be hit by my words, bursts into laughter. This upset Kushida-san, who glared angrily at Ibuki-san.

"You are already a high school student, you know. All you have to do is walk to class, and you can't even do that. Don't just lie in bed all the time, get up and walk by yourself."

"That's not very nice of you, Horikita. But I'm a poor girl who is hurting. If I go to school now, my classmates will ignore me, and things won't be the same as before. It's cruel of you to try to take me to such a painful place. when you're not even close to me?"

"I'm not in a position to speak for others, but you're not looking very good right now either."

Kushida-san was at a loss for words.

"The class already knows who I am. I can't mend my ways any more. I can't fix it anymore. That's what you think right now, right? When you cried and screamed in class, you looked like a child. No, a toddler. I still feel like I'm dealing with that toddler right now."

"Don't be stupid!"

She raises her hand and tries to slap my cheek before I calmly grabbed her hand and restrained her.

"You want to make fun of me, don't you? You're nothing more than a toddler, annoying me, annoying your classmates, and making it your top priority just for your own pleasure."

"So I'm supposed to be the only one who has to suffer, put up with, and help you and the rest of the class?"

"Don't take this the wrong way. You've got solid power. Then use it for 'your own good'. It doesn't matter what's around you. If you act for yourself, and rise to Class A for yourself, that's unquestionably your "achievement". And you can use the privilege of Class A to do whatever you want. If you want to do the same thing, this time go someplace where no one knows about your past."

Kushida-san glared at me but she didn't say anything.

"You only have a year and a half of school left. It shouldn't be that hard, should it? For the past year and a half, you've only been putting on a good front for your classmates. It's easier than that. Or is that not even possible with your abilities?"

I could feel Kushida-san's hands trembling with anger as I clenched them. But I've come to another conclusion.

"This is the only time I will be visiting here. The rest is for you to think about. If you're still going to be my enemy after all I've told you, then I have no more treatment for you. You'll remain a child for the rest of your life."

"That means that while I'm standing still, Horikita-san will continue to move forward..."

Even if I didn't explain everything to her, Kushida-san could see where things stood now.

"You're going to be expelled. I'll be graduating from Class A and fulfilling my own dreams. It's a big difference."

Kushida-san contemplates a future in which I've won, and it's something I know she despises. School life is only a small percentage of a long life.

"Do you really think that from here, I have a chance to go back to school?"

"That's up to you. You can decide whether you want to fight with your chin up high or sit around in sadness and anger."

Although I could still feel the strength in her arm, it was slowly fading away.

"I'll at least listen to you. Tell me what strategy you have in mind, Horikita-san."

We finally reached a point when Kushida-san was willing to listen after a lot of talking.

But I can't try to fix things to make her feel better. I have to convince her with a plan for her survival. I have several tentative answers, and I'll reconstruct them here to arrive at the ideal answer.

"I'm not going to spend my school life carrying you, Kushida-san."

"No, I wouldn't want that. But then, it's impossible, right? My classmates saw my true nature, and that fact can't be changed no matter what, right?"

"That's true. But in other words, there is a possibility that you can recover yourself for those who haven't seen your true nature, right?"

Kushida-san showed a slight gesture of consideration, but muttered,

"I don't know."

"Up until now, there were only a few people who knew the real me, like Horikita-san and Ayanokoji-kun. That's why I didn't hesitate to mend my ways yet, but now we've got more people in our class, right? Not only are there smart people, but there are also a lot of stupid and shitty students mixed in among them."

Kushida-san had a point. But before I could react, Ibuki-san reacted.

"You're one to talk!"

Ibuki-san overreacted when Kushida-san brought in other students.

"I'm not talking about you, so why does it matter?"

"If you can't keep your mouth shut, Ibuki-san, you can leave, okay?"

"Oh, yeah. Then I'll leave. It's okay if you keep your promise, right?"

As she tries to stand up, I told her what she needed to hear.

"No, you can't. If you leave now, it'll be considered abandonment and I'll have the contract voided."

"Huh? What the heck... Oh my god, then I'll shut up and you can get on with it."

"Contract? What does that mean?"

"I'm only promising to fight her during the sports festival if she'll help me get you to school."

I quickly explained the reason for Ibuki-san being willing to help.

"So that's what it was about, huh? I was wondering why it was Ibuki-san, but that explains it..."

"At least thanks to her, I was able to visit your room, so I need to thank her."

Ibuki-san had a great deal of things to say, I could see it on her face.

Even so, she stayed quiet as instructed.

I admire her spirit, she's willing to be patient in order to fight with me.

"Back to the topic at hand, can I take that to mean that it's painful to continue to play the role while your true nature is known?"

"Yes, it is. You can do your best when you're acting in a meaningful way, but you can't do your best when you're acting in a meaningless way, can you?"

Up until now, if she expelled me or Ayanokoji-kun, the meaning of continuing to act would live on. However, it was nearly impossible to expel the entire class.

In junior high school, when Kushida-san was in a similar situation, she brought the class down and ended it all.

She tried to do the same here, but it didn't work out.

"If you don't want that, then you don't have to hang out with your classmates like you used to."

"Huh?"

That seemed to be a surprising response not only to the Kushida-san in front of me, but also to Ibuki-san, and both of them reacted similarly.

"Even if you keep your mouth shut to some extent, there is no absolute guarantee. If that's the case, it's inevitable that the rest of the class will stand around with the assumption that Kushida-san is a two-faced and troubled student."

Kushida-san would then lose half of her effectiveness.

She can study well and play sports, but she's not top notch at either of them. Just another honor

student. Even if she is superior to Sakura-san in her natural abilities, she lacks charm in other areas.

"I'm not trusted by anyone. I don't think everyone would be satisfied with me anymore. Don't you?"

"It certainly wouldn't be the same as it has been. But can I really say that I've completely lost faith in you? What do you think? Ibuki-san."

I looked over to Ibuki-san, who was staring at the wall not even letting me know that she acknowledged my statement.

"..."

"Ibuki-san, answer me."

"You told me to shut up, didn't you?"

"I'll allow you to speak."

"What the hell, first shut up, then speak, I'm not your student or anything."

"You don't want to compete? Then just tell me so..."

"Oh, my God!"

While scratching her head, Ibuki-san replied.

"You've just been playing the good girl too long, that's all. I don't believe in the perfect good person, and I think you acted worse before. If I had to choose who to believe, the old you or the new you, I'd say the new you is more honest."

She said what she thought quickly. I guess it sounded straightforward to Kushida-san because she didn't have any tricks or wisdom.

"Hahaha, that's an interesting answer. I mean, you have an unusual way of thinking, don't you? But not everyone is as unusual as Ibuki-san. If anything, normal people would hate her."

"Well, she's certainly not normal, that's for sure."

"Hey!"

"But everyone has two sides to them, big or small. Ibuki-san appreciated the part of your true heart that acts for yourself above all else. That's why you'll never change your true intentions."

This talk of making her change her true intentions was wrong to begin with.

"And if you don't change the way you speak and your tone of voice to the outside world like you have been doing, it will be difficult for those who haven't seen your true nature to imagine what you really are. No matter how many words are used to explain it, a person cannot understand it until they experience it firsthand."

"What do you mean?"

"For example, Ichinose-san. She's someone you could say is certainly more of a good person than Kushida-san. But the truth is that she's really a violent, foul-mouthed person who likes other people's failures more than anything else. Would you believe that right away if someone told you that?"

"That might be difficult. She seems like a really good person."

"You'd have your doubts, though."

"It's not about Ichinose-san, it's about the existence of good people, right?"

"Well, you'd certainly have to see it in person to know for sure. I couldn't know for sure just by hearing about it from Horikita-san."

"Isn't that right? At least for the past year and a half, Ichinose-san has been a good person. Even if someone were to make such a revelation, they wouldn't believe it. Nevertheless, if all of her classmates were to say out loud that Ichinose-san is that kind of person, we would naturally be suspicious. But I guess the image is still not completely clear, is it?"

No matter who says that Ichinose-san is ruthless and violent, you couldn't believe it. Even if you were told repeatedly, you couldn't believe it unless you saw it for yourself.

"It's true that you can't understand something until you experience it. In martial arts, there are times when you are warned that a technique is dangerous, but you don't feel like it is at all. Then when you're actually hit, you understand how amazing it is."

"That's exactly like it, Ibuki-san."

But as long as there are still doubts, they won't trust you completely.

"That's where your skills come in. You have to do the best you can with the way you're going. It's a fact that your fallout control and communication skills are better than others."

Whether or not she would be able to gain their trust beyond that was unknown at this point.

"Even if that's fine for the other classes, what about our other classmates? Shinohara-san,

Wang-san, Hasebe-san, would probably all resent me. I don't know if I can unite with them.."

"Maybe not with all of them. But you can produce results if you use your abilities to the best."

Even if they just kept getting higher than average results, students who only got grades below Kushida wouldn't be able to complain easily.

"If the untrustworthy side of you comes out, I'll help you."

"Do you think I would honestly believe such sweet words? I'm afraid you'll betray me."

"Being doubtful is fine. I'll accept your bitterness, but I've accepted you even after you betrayed me."

For Kushida-san, there is nothing to be afraid of, as she has already done it once before.

It was all up to her to decide whether to stand up again or not. After staying quiet for a while, Kushida-san closed her eyes.

Then she began mumbling something that I couldn't understand. She finally opened her eyes, as if she'd reached a conclusion.

"All right. I'll fight for a year and a half just for me, and contribute to the class. I won't fight for Horikita-san or for my classmates. That's fine with you, right?"

"I'm not complaining at all. I just want you to respond with results."

Standing up, Kushida-san holds out her left hand instead of her fist.

"Wasn't it the other way around last time?"

Kushida-san didn't respond to my right hand I offered all that time ago.

"A left-handed handshake means hostility."

"Is that so? Which hand did I offer you before?"

"Left hand."

It seems that she remembered clearly, as Kushida-san answered immediately. This time, it was her own left hand that was extended. I stood up and offered my left hand in response and we shook hands.

"It's like commemoration, isn't it?"

"Don't you think that's more like us?"

"I suppose it might be."

She squeezed my hand back forcefully, and I squeezed it back.

"Yes. There's one thing I've been wanting to do to you, Horikita-san, if you don't mind..."

"Please go on. What is it?"

"It's..."

She smiled and slowly extended her arms towards me.

Her hands came close to my face. And as soon as she touched both cheeks, I felt a sharp pain surge through me.

It was immediately after that that I realized that the pain was caused by being pinched on the cheek as hard as she could.

"W-what are you doing...?"

"I really hate you, Horikita-san."

She said and pinched my cheek even harder.

"I've been on edge since we met today, and I'm still on edge now that we're cooperating. I just thought it would be bad stress to think that this would go on all the way from Monday. I need to let it dissipate like this for a bit."

The force she put into it gained even more momentum and showed no signs of stopping.

"Is that enough?"

"No, no, no. It's not enough."

I was willing to accept a little bit of this, but Kushida-san was getting carried away and wouldn't stop pulling on my cheeks.

If she's not going to loosen up at all, I have no choice but to retaliate. I

reached out with both arms and pinched her cheeks in the same way.

"What —?"

"I wonder if you'll let me go now?"

I assumed that she would stop once she felt the pain.

"Come on Kushida-san, time to wipe that frown off your face."

Without hesitating, I put all the strength I could into my fingertips and gripped back with the determination to tear her cheeks off



When it comes to such a thing, it's a war of will and determination.

"You guys can keep going until you're both shreds, I'm leaving."

Ibuki-san, who was the only one that was still calm, said that and walked out of the room first.

It continued for two or three minutes, when the pain started to paralyze us.

We both realized that we were making each other look incredibly stupid, and we both let go of each other's face without a second thought.

When I saw Kushida-san's face turn bright red, I realized that I must be the same.

"Come to school on Monday."

"You're so persistent. Can you please just leave?"

Half-heartedly pushed out of the way, I walked out of her room and into the hallway.

"Ouch..."

Stroking my aching cheek, I looked towards the elevator and saw Ibuki-san getting in.

"Were you waiting for me by any chance?"

I said and walked to her, Ibuki-san stuck out her tongue and pressed the button for the elevator.

"Maybe you have a talent for making people angry."

Even so, it was thanks to her that I got to meet Kushida-san today. I'll have to give her my all at the sports festival, just as she wanted.

Part 2

I rolled out of bed after raising my heavy head. I didn't have a fever, but I did have a minor headache that had been bothering me for quite some time.

The reason was obvious. I had skipped five days of school with a feeling of guilt. I've never missed a day of school before, except when I was sick.

I attempted to think about something else to distract myself from the guilt, but I can't get it out of my mind.

If I could just get rid of it by trying to forget about it, I wouldn't have taken five days off.

I'll have to do something for a change.

I grabbed my cell phone and tapped on the gallery, leaving several messages unread, and I accessed the earliest records I had taken. Scrolling through the photos, I looked at them nostalgically.

The first photo that made me stop was one taken just after I entered school, when I didn't have anyone I could call friends yet.

It was the first and only two-shot I took with Hirata-kun, who was smiling gently beside me while I was still unable to smile.

I'm still not very good at smiling, but I think I've improved a lot since then.

"I miss this..."

I didn't know my way around school life in Japan.

Hirata-kun was the first person who helped me relax when I was surrounded by tension.

At that time, I was still unaware of my feelings of love. All I could think of was that he was good-looking, kind, and a nice person.

I didn't realize it because I didn't have the time to fall in love in China, where competition was so strong and the level of study so high.

I don't know when I realized that I was in love, but from the day I became aware of it, I knew I would never put it into words.

Hirata-kun is very popular and not someone I can reach.

If I conveyed my feelings to him by mistake, it would only embarrass him. As a result, I kept my

thoughts to myself and was satisfied to simply be by his side.

"And yet..."

I was so embarrassed and scared just thinking about it again, tears welled up in my eyes.

"How can I..."

Everyone in my class knew that I liked Hirata-kun. When I changed my seat, I'm sure they noticed that I was trying to be near him, right? I don't know what I should act like when I go to school... After I came to this conclusion, I was struck by another guilty feeling. Sakura-san, who had shown both kindness and strictness to Hasebe-san, left the school. Her feelings must have been immeasurably painful. And yet, I was so full of myself that I pushed the button in favor of expulsion, just wishing that those exams would end.

"It's the worst..."

I hated myself for being that, and I was in so much pain. I'm such a burden... I was about to turn off the screen of my cell phone because I didn't want to look at myself smiling awkwardly when I remembered the email I had received from Ayanokoji-kun on Monday night.

I wonder how he is feeling right now. Is he still able to go to school after having his precious friend expelled by his own hands?

If he is.. how is he doing it?

I'd like to meet him and talk to him in person, so I read through the email that he sent me.

I want to talk to you in person.

"Oh..."

Ayanokoji-kun's message was linked to mine, as if my feelings had become text. A phone number and room number are attached, just in case.

Is he going to give me advice?

There are a few people besides Ayanokoji-kun who are worried about me.

Are you okay?

Do you want me to listen to you?

Don't force yourself, okay?

While I was grateful for such kind words, I didn't feel confident that any of them would lead to a solution.

However, Ayanokoji-kun can be different...

I want you to listen to me. I want to hear what you have to say.

"Maybe I should go."

It was still 5:30 p.m.. It's early for dinner but... I think it's rude to visit him out of the blue. I paced back and forth in my room for a while, thinking, and time just went by.

I made up my mind and resolved to visit Ayanokoji-kun. I pick up the phone nervously. Five times, six times... I hear the tenth ring, and I'm wondering if I should hang up.

Ayanokoji-kun answered the call, and I panicked and shouted.

"Oh, um... it's Wang! Is this Ayanokoji-kun?"

"You called me."

Ayanokoji-kun's slightly echoed voice and the sound of the shower running faintly reached my ears.

"Yes. I've been having trouble leaving my room for a long time. I feel like I can get out now, so I was wondering if I could talk to Ayanokoji-kun for a minute..."

"Now?"

"Is this a bad time...? I'm sorry for calling so suddenly. I'm no good at this..."

It's just a bad time and I can't do anything about it.

"It's not that, but can you give some time? I'll be ready in half an hour, no, twenty minutes."

"Oh, thank you very much! I'll be there in 20 minutes! Excuse me!"

I was strangely nervous and hung up the phone immediately, unable to withstand it.

"Fuuu... I was so nervous."

Maybe the fact that I hadn't talked to someone in a week had an effect on me. I made myself presentable as I waited, and after about 20 minutes, I got ready and left the room. When I unlocked the front door, which had become much heavier....

"Oh, it's there again."

There was a plastic bag placed by my door.

"They came by again today."

Jellies, tea, and sandwiches are among the items inside.

I first noticed it on Monday night when I quietly left my room to go to the convenience store.

At first I thought that someone had just put it there by mistake, but the plastic bag contained a small piece of paper with my room number written on it. It didn't have the sender's name on it, so I didn't know who it was.

"Oh, there's also a salad in there today but it's not exactly my favourite..."

A chicken salad with a lot of protein.

Still, it's kind of nice to see that the selection changes a bit every day.

"I wonder who is doing this."

There's nothing else in the plastic bag that could be a clue, and no receipt. Thanking them, I leave it at the door for now and take the stairs to the fourth floor where Ayanokoji's room is located.

I feel strangely nervous on the floors where the boys' room is located. With this in mind, I opened the door and entered the hallway, just as the door to a room opened. It looks exactly like Ayanokoji-kun's room. But the person who came out from inside...

For a moment I wondered who it was, but it was Karuizawa-san. She didn't have her usual nice ponytail, but her hair was smooth and straight.

And she was dressed roughly.

Could it be that they were on a date in their room?

If that's the case, I must've made a particularly irritating phone call... I was on the verge of becoming depressed again, but I couldn't return home. Not after coming this far.

My eyes met with Karuizawa-san's, who immediately took action to look around, as if other people were watching.

"Oh you were talking to her? She's here. See you later Kiyotaka."

Nervously, I took a deep breath, and Karuizawa-san also took two deep breaths. She might say

something about Hirata-kun.

"Ba, bye bye!"



"Wh—, what?"

I brace myself, but she just says goodbye and walks past me without making eye contact.

I stopped her as she leaves in a hurry.

"Um, Karuizawa-san!"

"What?"

"I'm sorry... for suddenly calling Ayanokoji-kun, I'm sorry for disturbing you..."

"That's not true, not at all. Really."

"But..."

"Didn't you want to ask him for some advice? Are you sure you're not going to call him right now? It's good to put your newfound bravery to good use."

It seemed that my feelings had been conveyed over the phone after all.

Karuizawa-san stopped and came back a bit and smiled gently at me.

"Don't hesitate to ask him for advice, I guess. That guy seems to have a lot to say, but he's not very good at talking. Even then, I think he can give you an answer."

"Yes."

I've come this far. I have to put everything I'm thinking into it. I feel that Karuizawa-san has helped me to create that kind of feeling.

"Well then, I'll be waiting for you next Monday."

She gave me an encouraging pep talk and she went straight to tapping the elevator's button. But when she realized that the elevator wouldn't be coming soon, she left by the emergency exit stairs.

"Thank you, Karuizawa-san."

At least it didn't look like she was unhappy with me.

I always had a strong impression that she was scary when she got angry, but today Karuizawa-san seemed soft and kind... And now I don't have time to think about anything else, so I hurried to Ayanokoji-kun's room.

I pressed the bell and the door opened in about 30 seconds.

Ayanokoji-kun was silent as he welcomed me in, so I immediately started to get impatient.

"Oh, um, I got message from you... and... well, I just wanted to talk to you!"

Part 3

Almost exactly at the scheduled time, Mi-chan came to visit me in my room. I really wanted to send Kei back to her room a little earlier, but this was still quite a rush.

I wanted to have a few more minutes to get ready, but I had to be careful not to change Mii-chan's mind.

"Don't hesitate to come in."

"Sorry to bother you...!"

Mii-chan couldn't hide her nervousness, but there was no sign of turning back.

From the little I saw of her, I could tell that she was trying very hard to get up on her own. Unlike Haruka and Kushida, she didn't want to stay where she was.

"Do you want something to drink?"

"No, I'm fine. Thank you for your concern."

She politely declined, and sat down on the carpet in a reserved manner.

I also sat down across from her and prepared to talk.

"The reason you're here has something to do with the leaking of Kushida's secrets regarding Yosuke, right?"

Mii-chan's shoulders jolted at the mention of his name, then she nodded quietly.

"Also, I'd like to know what's going on in class. Shinohara-san, Matsushita-san, Hasebe-san... At least the ones who are hurting much more than I am. And also about Ayanokoji-kun."

I didn't expect my name to be mentioned here, I suppose it isn't surprising. From her perspective, it looks like I've cut off one of my friend groups with my harsh decision.

"Aren't you getting a lot of calls?"

"Thankfully, there are a lot of people who are worried about me. But I just can't see them. If I do, I'll have to reply to them."

She sees the messages and calls, but never checks them. Otherwise she have to reply to them.

So the best thing is to not see them.

"Well then, I guess you're right. It doesn't have to be in order, but if you have any questions for me, feel free to ask."

It's not often that two people talk to each other alone like this.

We don't need to talk smoothly, but we can't solve things if we are reserved. It's better to find a way to get to know each other a little better.

"Well, you know, I'd like to talk about the matter with Kushida-san... Ah, but before that... just to confirm, was it Ayanokoji-kun who bought and placed various things in front of my room?"

When i didn't understand Mii-chan explained to me. So, There was a person who delivered food to her once a day after she started taking a break from school. There was a piece of paper with only Mii-chan's room number written on it, but nothing to identify the sender.

For a moment, Yosuke came to mind, but there was no mention of him in the vicinity of Kushida and Haruka. Yosuke treats his classmates equally, but if he were to offer it to Mii-chan, he would have done the same for the other students, and he would have told me about it in the several times we had met.

"I'm sorry, but that's not me, and I don't think I have any idea what you're talking about."

"I see. That person also helped me a lot and... I wish I could thank them."

"Well, whoever it is, it means that there are students who care that Mii-chan is absent."

Some of them message her, some of them call her, some of them bring her gifts. Or even if they don't contact her, there will be plenty of students around her who are worried about her.

After nodding a bit happily, Mii-chan asked a question.

"Ayanokoji-kun is still going to school, right?"

If she's not in contact with the outside world, it's not surprising that she doesn't even know for sure that I'm attending. Of course, you wouldn't expect someone who claims to consult with you to be depressed themselves.

"I went to school, this week was no different."

"Wasn't it hard? No, of course it was hard, but you didn't think you'd hate going to school?"

"That's a difficult question to answer isn't it? I've never been one to lead my classmates on before, and I'm sure everyone was surprised by my actions in pushing my friend out of school."

"Yes. It was different from the Ayanokoji-kun I knew. It was a bit... scary."

She is straightforward and honest, and states what she felt.

There is no point in talking about the superiority or inferiority of friends and classmates here, or their priorities. Such things were explained in the special exam, and it's not something to dig up now.

"It was just cover myself up and It's just that I was never good at letting my emotions out, and no one noticed that. I think the only reason I can go to school now without missing a day is because I didn't want everyone to think that I was hurt as it would be awkward."

"I've thought about that a bit too. I don't like the idea that by taking a day off I'm illustrating what Kushida-san said, that I'm hurting, and that people will know that. On Monday morning, I changed into my uniform and went to the door. But I couldn't take the next step, and after taking a day off, the door became more and more distant and heavy. It's all my fault..."

Then, as if remembering, Mii-chan bowed her head.

"I'm sorry I missed a week because of this."

"You don't need to say these things to me. It must have taken a reasonable amount of courage for you to come here. Besides, you haven't completely given up on going to school, have you?"

"Of course I haven't! I really want to go to school right away. But still... I'm so embarrassed and ashamed..."

Secrets. I'm not sure how many students were aware of it, but it's understandable that she would be deeply hurt.

"I can't say that I can understand the position you're in, or that I can help you. But at least our classmates are worried about you."

"Yes..."

"And it's also true that you're causing trouble for the class right now."

She gasped, stiffening as if I had pointed a gun to her head.

It's easy to put up words that are pleasing to the ear, but they only have the effect of postponing the conclusion. The side may seem like a rough treatment from the outside, but it works to touch

the heart.

"But fortunately, right now, Kushida and Haruka haven't surfaced. But next week, we won't know. What will happen if those two come to school and only you remains absent? Do you understand?"

Imagining your own situation is something even elementary school students can do.

Her arms trembled slightly as she bowed her head, like though fear was mounting in her. She wouldn't take it easy if the stimulus was too great, but there was no sign of danger. Her core was relatively solid and would not be easily broken, despite her small size and timidity.

"You can just come to school with an unsuspecting face. You don't even have to tell Yosuke anything special."

"But... I'm in the seat in front of Hirata-kun, and I'm... close to him."

"Oh, by the way, when we were changing seats, you were the first one to grab the unpopular middle seat. Was that because you thought that Yosuke would take the seat behind you?"

"Fuu..!"

Because of her blatant attitude, I knew the answer without her having it directly put into words.

"That's important. You've observed and understand Yosuke very well."

"Ugh, this is embarrassing..."

She hugged her knees and shook her face sideways. Apparently, shame is a stronger issue.

"Well, did Hirata-kun say anything about me... Do you think he cares?"

She steps into the part that must have been bothering her all along. But her face was hidden behind her knees so that I couldn't peek at her.

"Of course, he cares about you. A lot more than he cares about Kushida and Haruka."

"That's because he still feels annoyed... right?"

As the party in question, it was natural that Yosuke would be more concerned than about the

other issues.

"It's different from annoyance. He feels sorry for the opposite reason, that he caused you to stop going to school."

"Oh no... Hirata-kun didn't do anything wrong!"

"I know. It's just that you should know very well that he's that kind of guy."

Yosuke can be happy for someone else's happiness as if it were his own. On the other hand, when someone is unhappy, he feels unhappy as if it were his own. That's the kind of personality he has. Yosuke is also suffering because of Mii-chan's own seclusion.

Understanding this is the most effective and important thing to do in order to overcome the current situation.

She looked up slowly and her eyes were a little red, but she didn't show any tears as she lowered her knees.

"It's not that I didn't think about it. It's just that I didn't think that Hirata-kun might be suffering because of me. But I put myself first and tried not to see it..."

Apparently, I didn't have to teach her from scratch, but just giving her a chance to reflect was enough. When looking at her as a sophomore in high school, it was safe to say that the student named Mii-chan was almost complete.

"Your expression is different from earlier."

"Thank you. I feel so much better after talking about everything. It's thanks to you, Ayanokoji-kun."

"I didn't do much. It's just that I happened to be there when you were recovering."

"That's not true. I thought that if it was Ayanokoji-kun, he might be able to solve the problem if I met him."

She told me firmly and bowed deeply.

"I-I'll definitely go to school on Monday, without fail."

"I know. But when you really have a cold, you should honestly take a day off."

"No, I'll go to school on Monday, even if I have to crawl."

I feel like she's trying a little too much, but if she's enthusiastic, that's good enough for me.

"Also, I'm worried about the person who's been supplying me with food, because I've made them do a lot of shopping over the past five days, and I think the total amount is close to 10,000 points."

If it's just one person's action, that could be a pretty hefty sum indeed. As she was leaving, she kept thanking me repeatedly, so I escorted her to leave quickly.

"I guess it's the result of my parents' teachings. I understand if it's a little too much."

She's too polite even for her classmates. Although, that can be considered one of Mii-chan's strengths. Now that I've solved one problem, I'd better finish what I left in my room. The number of students visiting my room has been increasing lately, so I can't afford to be distracted, as I'm sure that Horikita, Yosuke or any other student could come and visit me at any time. Just as I had resumed my quick cleanup, the doorbell rang again.

I quickly looked at my cell phone, but there was no notification of any contact from Kei or any of her friends.

An unannounced visitor. That's extremely bothersome timing.

I'll try to stay silent for a while. In some cases, I could have used the answering machine. But about 30 seconds later, the doorbell rang once again. It was dusk, and after turning off the lights in the room, I decided to slide the lid of the hole and look through the hole into the hallway, killing any sign of my presence.

The person I least wanted to see was standing there, a first year student named Amasawa Ichika.

Thinking back, this had happened to me sometime ago. I remember that day, too, the timing of her was bad, and I didn't want her to come inside. Seeing that she was wearing her school uniform even though it was Saturday, I wondered if she was visiting school.

Should I view her visit as a mere appearance or as a deliberate act?

Considering what happened last time, I couldn't help but wonder if it was intentional this time as well. She obviously knew I was in the room and came to visit me.

In the meantime, the doorbell rang for the third time.

"Hi, Senpai~ I've come to visit you!"

As I was still looking for a response, Amasawa called out to me in a sweet voice.

"I'm sorry, but I'm in the middle of something. Could you come by tomorrow?"

"That's not going to happen. I've heard that my senpai is doing something bad with the girls, so I've come to investigate. If you don't open the door, we'll have a problem!"

A voice echoed through the hallway, trying to force the door open.

The neighbours would ultimately hear the uproar if I allowed her speeches go like this. I had no choice but to face Amasawa and open the door.

"Where did you hear that I was bringing girls in?"

"I'm the source of that information."

"That's a totally unreliable source."

"That's not true. You brought in Karuizawa-senpai and Wang-senpai today."

It wasn't just a hunch. She didn't hesitate to mention the names of both of them. Even if she could have guessed Kei at random, that would not be the case with Mii-chan. She clearly knows about it

"Oh, I'd like to reassure you that I didn't plant any listening devices in your room, okay? The school seems to be doing a thorough inspection."

It's true that you can't buy those kinds of nosy things through mail order. However, there is a way to obtain them, but only for Amasawa.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you had one or two in your possession from when you were connected to Tsukishiro."

She simply continued to smile at me, even after I pointed that fact out.

"Can I come in for now? I'm sorry to disturb you."

Before I could give her permission, Amasawa walked into the room with the momentum of taking off her shoes. She then began scurrying around the room without reservation.

"What are you doing here?"

"Huh? Ohhh, I'm just checking the room."

I would like an answer as to why she needs to check the room.
Amasawa, who continues to rummage without hesitation, approaches the bed with her gaze.

"You're probably wondering how I was able to guess about Wang-senpai, right? Did I happen to see her come and go, or do I know her in some way?"

"Do you go into other people's rooms and brag about your own information network all the time?"

Quickly affirming without denying, Amasawa touched the bed with her hand. While fixing the wrinkles in the sheet, she was searching for something with her fingertips in every corner.

I sat down on the carpet and observed Amasawa, who would investigate until she was satisfied.

"Senpai's girlfriend has long hair, doesn't she? That means you like girls with long hair, right? That's why I'm growing mine out little by little."

She continued to move her hands and eyes while talking about her hair, which I hadn't even asked her about. I couldn't force her to stop, so I had no choice but to watch her, when she suddenly stopped moving.

Then she picks up something from near the pillow of the bed with her index finger and thumb and lifts it up.

"What's this?"

As if it were the head of a demon, she raises a strand of long, golden hair.

"It must be Kei's. She comes to visit often these days."

"I'm sure she does, but why is it near the pillow?"

"I'm sure there are many possible cases, but do I have to list them one by one?"

"No, no. There's no need for that~"

Then she got down on all fours on her knees on the floor and started looking at the floor like a detective, searching for something.

I don't know what she's looking for, but I doubt she'll be satisfied.

"Did they teach your generation how to explore people's rooms in the White Room?"

When I posed a question about the White Room, Amasawa stopped dead in her tracks.

"Don't you have any doubts, senpai? Those, who were sent to this school in order to get you expelled, could still be blending into everyday life without being noticed by my senpai?"

"At least you seem to have been branded as disqualified and unwanted by the White Room."

"I won't deny that, but then what do you think about other potential candidates?"

"I'm not interested."

"Well, you're right. If you're still wary, you won't act carelessly."

"I'd recommend that you leave me and yourself out of it and just enjoy your school life."

"I agree with that. I think you should do the same..."

After a short pause, Amasawa continued her search. With her back to me and her butt sticking out, her underwear was slightly visible through the short length of her uniform skirt.

It's not like she didn't notice, but she continued to crawl while pretending to act as if she didn't care.

As she crawled under the bed, her underwear became even more exposed.

"You're glued to my underwear, you're so naughty, senpai."

"I'm sorry, but I'm more wary of what you'll do to me if I take my eyes off you than if I'm looking at your underwear."



As I keep my eyes on Amasawa, she pulls her face out of the bed and looks back at me, looking far too mature to be a first year, and crawls straight up to me.

"I think you're getting out of control, don't you? I think you're confusing the means with the end. That person is more concerned with getting his you expelled than he is with getting himself back into the White Room."

A murmur at close range, only a few centimeters between our lips.

A sweet smell reaches my nostrils.

"They seem like quite the nuisance, don't they?"

"For a senpai, yes it is. So I've been thinking about it lately. I've been thinking that it would be better if I told my senpai, who It is, and ask him to take me away~"

"Or maybe I'll be the one to be taken away."

"Fufufu~ that's hilarious."

I didn't seem to find the topic of my kidnapping back to the White Room all that amusing.

"What shall we do? Do you want to hear the name perhaps...?"

As she got even closer, about an inch, Amasawa waited for my response.

"I appreciate the suggestion. But I'll refrain from asking."

"Is it because you're not confident that you can win when you hear their name?"

"If their identity leaks out from an unexpected source, you'll be the first one to be suspected. What will be the result of that?"

"They, of course, might point the finger at me."

"There's no need to make your school life uncomfortable just to find out what I am."

I wouldn't show any mercy if she stood in my way as an enemy, but Amasawa doesn't seem to be doing that at the moment.

"You're very kind, senpai."

Besides, trusting her too much in a bad way is also a problem. If she was acting with some strategy, I couldn't deny the possibility that this statement of Amasawa's was also a trap.

"Now that you've rejected me, I'm going home."

"Did you come all the way to my room just to tell me that? Or did you mainly come to look for trash?"

"Hmmm I wonder..."

Laughing devilishly, Amasawa quickly turned her attention to the garbage bag that didn't contain much in the kitchen as she tried to head for the door.

"I've visited your room a few times, but today you take out very little garbage, don't you? I thought you were the type to fill the bag to the brim with garbage like this and then throw it away."

"It's just that there's so much food waste from vegetables and fish that I'm not comfortable leaving it until next week."

"In that case, would you like me to take out the trash on my way home?"

"I'm sorry, but it's forbidden to take out the trash after eight o'clock at night."

"I see you're following the law."

I hadn't expected Amasawa's visit, but I had finally been tipped off as to her true motive for coming here.

"I see a little of the purpose for which you came here today. You've come to visit me to make your current proposal. The reason you were searching every inch of the room was because you were wary that someone else might be listening in."

The fact that she pretended to ransack and find something private about me personally was all because she was on the lookout. Amasawa was wary that the White Room students had already done what she feared.

"Senpaii. I'm sure senpai will be fine, but still, if I'm expelled from school, please consider that something unexpected is going to happen to you as well."

On her way out, Amasawa left the room with those words.

I checked my phone to see if there was anything unusual, and found that I had received a chat from Akito.

'Haruka will be coming to school next Monday.'

That was good news for a start. As a member of the group, he might have succeeded in convincing Haruka to come to school. The problem is that the message was not sent in the group chat of the Ayanokōji Group. After staring at the screen for a while, a new text was sent to me.

The text itself was plain and simple:

*Please keep a **quiet** eye on Haruka for a while.*

The text itself is plain, but the "quiet" part is emphasized.

She'll go to school, but she might not want to talk to me. If I talk to her carelessly, she might not go to school again. I guess that's the reason. I have no objection at all if she comes back to school.

All right. I'll be very careful.

Thank you. I hope things will be the same again.

After a little while and after a few encouraging texts from Akito, I ended the chat.

"Another problem solved..."

However, this fix is not a true solution. It's better to think of it as just a temporary revival of Haruka.

The dizzying few hours were over, and I was feeling a greater fatigue than usual.

"I think I'll go to bed early today."

I'll just have to make sure I remember to take out the trash.

Monday came around again. Saturday was a big day, with Mii-chan directly consulting me, and Akito indirectly informing me of Haruka's intention to go to school.

Still, there was no assurance that she would attend class, and it was up to her to determine whether or not she wanted to. As for Kushida, I haven't received a single call from Horikita until this morning. Even if she did show up at school, no one could predict how she and her classmates would respond.

I arrived at school at the same time as usual, and sat down to wait for the three of them to arrive. After about a quarter of the class had arrived at school, I saw the surprised smiles of some of the girls.

Mii-chan walked into the classroom in a reserved manner.

"Oh, good morning..."

Mii-chan, who had come to school prepared to be tormented, looked up fearfully. But her worries vanished into thin air, as the girls immediately welcomed her without mentioning the subject in any way.

"Good morning, Mii-chan."

"Oh, good morning, Hirata-kun."

And he also welcomes Mii-chan back with a smile that hasn't changed one bit. At this point, I don't know if there is a way forward for Mii-chan's love life. However, even if it hasn't started, it certainly hasn't ended. It is conceivable that there will be a major turning point in their school life in the future.

The girls never left Mii-chan after that, who was still tense, and they began giggling about what had happened at school the week before. Haruka arrived at the door after the majority of her students had arrived. Akito accompanied her to her seat, following her to prevent her from running away, as if she might do so at any moment.

Keisei was a little hesitant, but he made up his mind and walked over to Haruka and called out to her. I never thought I'd see the day when I'd be glad I wasn't around those three people when we switched seats.

Haruka looked at me for a moment, but then quickly looked away and down at her cell phone. Mii-chan and Haruka both came to school. They have friends who support them when they are in pain. For Mii-chan, it was many of the girls. For Haruka, it was Akito and Keisei. Even though they aren't that many, they can be called best friends.

For the moment, it seems that the class has avoided the negative impact we were all fearing.

But what about Kushida?

Horikita arrived at school alone with less than three minutes to go before morning homeroom. She took her own seat and glanced straight at the blackboard after a quick glimpse towards Kushida's seat.

She was not in the lobby this morning, so I was hoping that she would be there, but I guess she was not. Shinohara and some of the other students must have thought the same thing when they saw Horikita. Eventually, the bell rang and it was time for homeroom.

Chabashira-sensei appeared in the classroom, with all the seats filled except Kushida's.

"I see you two are feeling better. It looks like it was a long cold, but you'll have to take better care of yourselves in the future."

She scolded them lightly, but confirmed their attendance without strong censure.

"So today's absence is Kushida? I don't think I've heard from her, so..."

At that moment, I heard the sound of the classroom door being opened.

She was slightly out of breath, but quickly adjusted herself.

"I'm sorry, I'm late."

With a calm voice, Kushida made her way into the classroom.

"This is your first time being late, Kushida. You've been absent for a long time, but is your body okay now?"

"Yes. I'll be more careful next time."

She responded calmly and without flinching. Kushida sat down in her seat. She didn't say anything to anyone and kept her focus fixed forward.

The classroom became tense at once, but since there was no room for private conversation, silence followed.

"I know a lot has happened, but it's been a week since we've all been together."

Chabashira-sensei nodded in satisfaction, though she could still sense the unstable situation of the class.

"It's getting close to the start of the sports festival. I expect you to make significant progress and perform well."

After that, homeroom was over and the classroom was suddenly in an uproar. Needless to say, it was due to Kushida's arrival at school.

The students stared at her as if she were a ghost or something. Will she remain silent, or will she put on her usual smile? Or will she bare her fangs again? I quietly pulled out my chair and walked out of the classroom to head down the hallway.

Then I opened the door to the hallway. I didn't want to accidentally expose it to the rest of the class.

I thought so, but...

I'm watching you, don't worry.

I received such a message on my cell phone. In the corridor, where I only showed my face, Chabashira-sensei spotted me and answered with a single nod. After confirming this, I decided to close the door without being noticed. As a teacher, she will do everything she can. I'm sure that's what Chabashira-sensei is following up on.

No one was able to make a move in a situation where anything could have happened.

When Horikita was about to pull out her chair, Kushida stood up to overtake her. With that one action, she seemed to be threatening to do something unnecessary.

The first thing she did was to go in front of Mii-chan, who was also sitting near her. When Mii-chan finally came back to class, she stiffened like a frog being stared at by a snake.

"I heard from Horikita-san that you were absent because of me."

"Oh, yeah, um..."

"Do you hate me now?"

"No, no, it's not like that..."

"There's no need for you to like me, Wang-san. I can't change the fact that I revealed your secret in front of everyone, and I don't intend to get along with you either. I guess I don't have to tell you this."

"I don't intend to get along with you."

The tone of voice was soft, but the strong words made Mii-chan stiffen even more. The eyes of many of the students looking at them showed dissatisfaction, anxiety, and doubt.

Normally that would be painful enough, but it didn't affect Kushida in the slightest.

"I'm not going to ask you to understand how I felt at that time, but I had to do that. I'll apologize for making you one of the targets."

She said and bowed deeply. It seems more clerical than a sincere apology, but at least I don't sense any malice.

"I'm sorry for causing trouble to Shinohara-san, Matsushita-san, and the others. It looks like you've made up for it."

If you ask me, Shinohara, Matsushita and the rest of the group are very close. Maybe Yosuke, Sudo and the others had been working during this weekend to make things right.

"Do you think you can just apologize?"

Shinohara's words were a little harsh, but she was trying to restrain herself.

"I'm sorry, but if I don't apologize, we can't move on, can we?"

"What kind of apology is that?"

"I don't know. But this is the real me."

This isn't the false mask that she's been wearing. That fact alone must have made the whole class nervous.

"In the days to come, I intend to maintain some semblance of appearance as I have in the past, so I can gather information from other classes as the occasion demands. But if anyone in the class wants to interfere with that, that's fine with me."

No matter how much Kushida tries to arrange things on the outside, if someone on the inside gets in the way of that, the relationship can't be built.

"I'll leave it up to you all to decide if you want to use the weapons I've built or not."

If Kushida was someone who valued her friends and feared being alone, isolating her would be a way to get back at her. But Kushida was not passive, she was on the offensive.

"And I have no mercy for anyone who turns against me. It's really only a small part of what I exposed in the special exam. I'm sure there are plenty of others who have facts they want to hide, right?"

She muttered nonchalantly, as if threatening the entire class rather than someone in particular.

"But I'll promise you one thing. I won't reveal any secrets you have unless you're trying to trick me. This isn't for the good of the class, this is for my own good, to graduate from class A. It's my last line of defense so that I don't lose my value as a person."

As long as my classmates resent her, complain about her, and distrust her, depending on the situation, she could be the one to be cut down. So, in order to not let that happen, she will not reveal any more secrets. However, if you stab her in the back, you will not be tolerated. She promised to contribute to the class as soon as she learned how to protect herself.

Kikyou Kushida's abilities are among the top in our class. At least in academic and physical challenges, she would not be a drag.

"Hey, Hasebe-san, are you okay too?"

She directed her words at Haruka, who hadn't moved from her seat or even looked at her. Haruka didn't respond and let her gaze drift out the window.

My daily life has begun to change drastically in the last week or so. Not once did the Ayanokoji Group get together, and that didn't change, or even return, when Haruka came to school. The way she spent her time at school had changed since the gathering that had been the normal had vanished..

I was generally alone or talking with Kei during the ten-minute break. I'd have a quick chat with students like Sudo or Matsushita now and then, but my chances of chatting with Akito or Keisei had significantly decreased.

My life was strange at first, but little by little my body began to accept and adapt to it. Lunch break is a similar cycle, but when Kei goes out to eat with her friends, I go to the library. It's the same as before, my own personal repose time.

It's a shame that Hiyori hasn't been coming to the library lately and we haven't been able to talk about books.

Even after school, the sequence of events stays the same. I didn't have any special arrangements today because Kei had told me ahead of time that she was going home to hang out with her friends.

I decided to go back to the dormitory as soon as possible, as staying behind would be a mental burden for Haruka. However, something unexpected occurred.

"Kiyopon, do you have some time now?"

Haruka, who I thought would never come into contact with me, approached me as I went out into the hallway to leave.

Her voice was filled with a sense of urgency.

Perhaps the purpose of her coming to school after a week was to make contact here.

Without looking back to check her expression, I answered that I did.

"I see. I can make some time if I have to."

I tried to give off the vibe that I had plans, so I could find her true reason for asking.

"Then make time. Okay?"

She didn't seem to shy away from asking me forcibly.

"I've already talked to Horikita-san. I'll wait for you at the cafe in the Keyaki Mall first."

That's all she said, and Haruka left the classroom.

Shortly after, Akito followed Haruka and came towards me.

"So she came to school to talk to me?"

"I don't know... I've never heard of it either from here. So I don't know what we're going to talk about. But I don't think I can take your side in this situation."

Akito apologized, but he would rather not take my side.

"That's fine."

After a brief conversation, Akito and then Keisei also left the classroom. It seems that she gathered all the members of Ayanokoji Group, and even called Horikita there as well.

Of course, it had to be about Airi's expulsion.

Horikita came up to me as the three of them left.

"I tried to make sure it was just me she called out, but she wouldn't listen to me saying that you definitely need to be there."

She seemed concerned and tried to solve the problem alone, but this time, circumstances were what they were.

The two of us left the classroom together and headed to the cafe.

I decided to confirm what I had been wondering about before we got into the heavy stuff.

"It looks like you succeeded in bringing Kushida back to school. I'm honestly impressed."

"Well, she's officially back. But there are still many uncertainties. It's not going to be the same as before."

"Still, you can't ask for much more than that right now."

Although Kushida's tone of voice had changed drastically, she came back with an answer that was close to the best for the class. I'm sure that Horikita's advice helped her to come to that conclusion.

Fortunately, there have been few leaks to the other classes. Even if it is eventually discovered, it is likely that time will have passed and the severity of the situation will have diminished.

"How did you convince her? I don't think you've been straightforward with just a good suggestion."

Even if the final landing point is today's statement, there must have been many twists and turns to get there. I was more interested in that than the current situation, but Horikita's expression was complicated.

"I'm too mature to do something so childish as to bribe her or something. But I've done more than I'd like to say."

From the way she avoided talking about specifics, she must have done something she really didn't want to talk about. She didn't seem likely to answer if I pursued it too deeply, so I had no choice but to give up.

"But considering the person I'm talking to, I might have made the right choice."

She replied, lightly stroking her cheek with her left hand, as if remembering the details.

"Anyway, it took a week, but we managed to get the whole class together."

"Come to think of it, the girls' troubles have calmed down as well."

I had told Yosuke to rely on Horikita, so she was definitely involved.

"Shinohara and the others' case was initiated by Hirata-kun, and we gathered at Keyaki Mall on Sunday."

"You were also present?"

"I was. On top of that, we agreed to let the matter pass by regarding the exposed secrets. Shinohara-san was protesting strongly for a while, but Ike-kun calmed her, and that was a big thing."

She replied with a straight face, like it didn't mean much.

The way Horikita was talking, it was clear that Ike had played the role of boyfriend.

"So many different students are growing up without even knowing it."

"You don't seem happy about that."

"I'm happy for them, you know. It's just that it makes me look relatively pathetic. I get... anxious

about whether I'm growing or not."

It is easy to evaluate others, but difficult to grade oneself. If you want to be lenient, you can be as lenient as you want, and if you want to be strict, you can be strict.

"I'm sure a third party will eventually give you an answer."

"Sure."

She needs to focus on getting the class back on track first. Her own reputation will follow on its own after that.

"I heard that you were the one who helped Wang-san, she was one I couldn't reach. Thank you."

"I was just giving her some advice. Even if I hadn't done anything, someone would have rescued her eventually."

"You helped me get back on my feet as soon as possible. I feel like I've been confronted with the fact that I can't do anything on my own."

She speaks in a rather light tone, even though she would normally be depressed.

"Oh, that's right. I'd like to give you a message from the student council president, Nagumo."

"A message? You seem to be acting like a messenger these days. What is it?"

"He said that he's open to suggestions, otherwise to accept the offer.."

"Accept the offer...?"

"I don't know, Ayanokoji-kun. I was just instructed to tell you."

"Fine. I'll go to the student council room later, and I'll figure things out."

This sports festival. I still haven't decided if I want to participate or not.

But now that the deadline is a week away, I guess I'll just have to say yes.
I'm sure Nagumo would mind if I don't compete with him in some way sooner or later.

"Now it's just a matter of Hasebe-san. I honestly can't read too much into what she's going to say."

"Judging from the way she's been acting all day, I wouldn't be surprised if some rude words came out of her mouth."

"Just don't be caught off guard."

Mii-chan and Kushida came to school after overcoming their assignments. But the waves would be different for Haruka.

It is highly likely that she will now stand in the way as an obstacle.

"While I was waiting to meet Kushida-san, I also briefly checked in with Miyake-kun and Yukimura-kun a few times."

I didn't realize that she was paying attention not only to Shinohara and the others, but to the Ayanokoji Group as well.

"Hasebe-san was the one who had the hardest time with the special exam. Following her is inevitable."

Still, the expression on Horikita's face as she walked beside me didn't clear up, probably because she hadn't achieved much at all.

"The only time I've talked to her was when she showed up at my door, but she didn't tell me anything. Miyake-kun told me to leave her alone, so I decided to give her a week."

So that's what happened today. I guess Horikita didn't expect Haruka to come to school.

"Either way, Akito-kun was able to bring her to school today so I suppose something should work out."

"I hope that's the case, but... that might not be true."

Since the two of us were summoned in this way, it is normal to think that something is going on. It's not like she's going to be working hard again from now on.

"I'm the one who nominated Airi for expulsion at that moment, and I'm the one who pushed her into it. All you have to do is listen to what I have to say."

"That's not how it works. I was of the same opinion, so I'm equally responsible. No, it's all because I made a promise that I failed to keep. I have to take it all in."

She seems to have more room in her heart now than she did then, but I'd be worried about her getting too worked up.

"It's important to take care of Haruka, but you also need to shift your mind towards the sports festival."

We've already spent a week trying to resolve our class issues. In the meantime, as long as we're starting to focus on Class A and our efforts to win, we can't afford to miss the boat on this one either.

"Right. Of course, we're thinking hard about how we're going to compete in the sports festival. I think we've got some ideas of what we're going to do."

While backing up Kushida, Shinohara, and the others, she seems to be on top of that as well.

"Then let's hear it. What's the goal for the sports festival?"

I asked Horikita about her goals in order to succeed.

"I'll go for first places, naturally. No, I will definitely take first place, I have to."

Confidence peeked out from Horikita's profile as she stared ahead.

"There's nothing wrong with setting high goals. We've got some strong students in our class, and we're not going to lose to anyone else. So, do you have a strategy in mind? It includes a battle of all the grades, but the focus will basically be on fighting for overall points in the same grade. Sakayanagi and Ryuen can come up with strategies that you wouldn't expect."

"The rule is that if you finish with less than five events, you forfeit all your points. If it's Ryuen-kun, he could feign an accident during the competition and try to injure you and get you to leave the competition."

It's not surprising that Ryuen would try to use such a method, as he did last year when Horikita was targeted. If it was Sakayanagi, she would look at the participants of the competition and guide her classmates to the best possible outcome.

"Against all odds, what moves are you going to use?"

"Basically a straightforward one. Have Sudo-kun and Onodera-san ramp up the scoring, and then use students like Kushida-san and myself to score points. We'll just do what we need to do to win."

"If we can win with that, though, we won't have any trouble. There's also the handicap of having thirty-eight people in the class."

Horikita nodded immediately. She had expected that response from the start.

"That's why I've decided to take one risk. I'm preparing for it now."

"Risk?"

"I was wondering if you could join me tomorrow after school to talk about the specifics."

"You mean you need my help?"

"No, I don't. Just stay with me and listen to what I have to say. And finally, I just want you to give me an objective answer as to whether or not it's worth the risk."

"Are you sure that's all you want?"

"I don't need you to keep giving me solutions, it's fine."

She doesn't need suggestions or guidance because she already knows what she wants. If that's the case, I'll merely wait to hear Horikita's thoughts on her sports festival plan.

"Alright. I'll let you know tomorrow after school."

When we eventually arrived at the cafe, the three members of Ayanokoji Group were seated and waiting for us.

There was no sign of chit-chat, and three drinks were placed on the table. As long as you're using a restaurant, it's common courtesy to at least order one drink.

"Sit down."

As soon as we arrived, Haruka said and urged us to sit on the two empty seats. We individually chose our drinks at random and then started to take our seats.

"It seems like you wanted to talk to me a few times while I was resting, so I thought I'd ask you about it."

Haruka cut to the chase nonchalantly without looking at either Horikita or myself. It seems like it was both of us who she asked the question to, but right now it is definitely Horikita who is the subject.

"What did you want to talk about?"

"The problem has been solved in a way, it was because you've been absent from school for

several days."

"You mean you were worried that I would start bringing down the class for being absent for too long."

"Of course it's not just that. You have had good reason to be absent for a week. Right?"

"I'm not feeling well. That's what I told the school, so there shouldn't be a problem, right? Miyake told me that there might be a penalty if I miss another week, so that's why I came to school today."

What's wrong with that? Without showing any joy, anger, or sorrow, Haruka answers calmly.

"Indeed. But the reason you were absent wasn't because you were just sick, right?"

"How can you be so sure it was? It could have just been purely physical."

Without denying it, Haruka took a sip from her cup.

Whether the absence was due to health problems or not, that was just the first stage of the problem.

No matter how Horikita answered, Haruka would never be satisfied.

"I know you're doubting me, but it's true that I've been sick. It wasn't sickness. I just had a hard time mentally, I couldn't sleep, and because I was so stressed and tired I just couldn't find the strength to come to school."

Akito and Keisei seemed to be listening calmly, but that was not the case. They understand that although they are suffering as well, their suffering is far from Haruka's.

So they can only listen in silence.

"Why don't you stop playing with lame words and say what you want to say?"

Rather than taking a backhanded approach, Horikita takes a strong stance.

That attitude usually has the opposite effect, but Haruka is unfazed.

It's as if she has kept his emotions bottled up deep inside.

That's the impression I get from her.

By her side, Horikita felt the same thing, which is probably why she used excessive expressions.

"Are you satisfied with the fact that you got more class points from the special exam?"

Haruka coldly asked Horikita.

"I'm not satisfied, no. There's still over five hundred points separating us from Class A. Besides, if possible, it would have been ideal to aim for Class A without missing anyone, which was the goal. But there's no point in talking about it now, is there?"

No one wants to see anyone drop out of school.

But there is no point in talking about it now.

That fact has already been stated.

"My best friend was a victim of your selfish decision. Are you aware of that?"

For the first time today, the words that Haruka wanted to say come spilling out.

"Yes."

It's been more than a week since the special exam ended, and Horikita has been fighting against her own judgment.

You don't have to ask her that directly, but you can tell by watching her every day. But such things have nothing to do with Haruka.

She won't forgive her because she is working hard or if she gets results.

"You're a great leader. You don't care what it takes to get your class to win."

"I'm not there yet."

"You know I am being sarcastic. Right?"

"Of course, I know."

"Where's your promise to cut off the students who were the traitors?"

"I'm afraid I didn't look far enough ahead on that one. But since we can't pretend that the special exam the other day didn't happen, we'll just have to make use of it next time."

"There are some mistakes that can't be forgiven."

"I won't deny that either. You're right."

"Kiyopon... do you think it was the right decision to leave Kushida-san in the school?"

"I decided it was the right thing to do, so I left her, ready to face the backlash. I guess I am repeating myself."

"Ah, yes."

Horikita didn't show any change in her composure, and her speech intensified slightly.

"I'm not going to make a lame apology. No matter how much you argue with me, the fact is that I changed my mind and decided that Kushida-san should stay. It's natural for you to hold a grudge, and I may suffer a painful reprisal someday. But I decided that the person who could be a more valuable asset to the class was Kushida-san. I'm slowly becoming more and more convinced of that."



"Even if Kushida-san was brilliant, there were others who were incompetent. It didn't have to be... her."

There were other people to choose from.

With Horikita in front of her, who couldn't come to such a conclusion, Haruka continued.

"I don't approve. No matter how many people recognize Horikita-san in the future, I will never recognize her."

Saving her emotions as much as she can, Haruka shows no signs of trying to forgive.

"I guess I'll just have to try harder to get you to admit it."

"I told you I won't approve."

"I'm responsible for Sakura-san's expulsion. I can't deny it and I won't deny it. But that doesn't mean I should go about reprimanding it to everyone who's affected. Are you now asking me to expel from school or something to make you feel better?"

It's not like that would bring Airi back. The 100 class points she had sacrificed for the class would be wiped out by that act.

"Or do you want me to get down on my knees? Would that make you feel better?"

A brave spirit. That's what it looks like, but it's not. Horikita is suffering, but she's facing Haruka with an air of insolence.

As I sat next to her, I was able to peek into the true meaning of her wavering eyes.

"Give me back Airi."

"I can't meet your demands if you ask me to do something I can't... do."

"That's all I want. I don't care about class, I really don't care."

She grabbed a few strands of her own hair and tore them out as hard as she could.

"I made the wrong decision back then."

"If you were unhappy, maybe you should have fought."

Immediately after those almost provocative words were released, Horikita followed up with more.

"But it's useless. Even if you had fought, there would have been nothing you could have done to resist."

"That's true. You're right, there's nothing I could have done. Kiyopon used Airi's feelings to push her into a corner without mercy. No normal person could have done something like that."

This was the first time she looked at me with contempt.

But she didn't seem to want to talk to me, so she turned her attention back to Horikita.

"Is Kushida-san really going to act for the class's sake? She could betray us."

"I'm sure I'll regret it if Kushida-san drags the class down in the future."

Indeed, Kushida wasn't necessarily guaranteed to be useful to the class.

If Horikita made a mistake in steering the ship in the future, there might come a day when she would regret her choice to cut Airi.

"But even if I were to go back in time with my current memories, I'm sure what I would do would not change much. I'd repeat my decision to bail out Kushida-san and choose Sakura-san as the student. The only difference is that I won't make anymore wild promises."

She repeats that she will not change her conclusion.

"Why not. what did Airi ever do to you...?"

Horikita would have answered even if I hadn't said anything, but here I decided to speak my mind.

"It's a matter of perspective. This incident has been a strong stimulus for the students whose names are in the lower ranks of the OAA. If they continue to stay low, they might be the next one to be expelled. I think it's a plus just because they now have a strong sense of such danger."

Because that was also my role in naming Airi.

"This sounds just like Ryuuen's class. If you're not good enough, you'll be cut down?"

"Yes. I don't know what kind of policy Ryuuen is following now, but it's almost like fear and work. Until now, the class policy has been too vague and loose."

"It kind of reminds me of when I first started school. It's just like when we were selfish and had

no cohesion whatsoever."

She may believe it's similar but it's not the same thing.

"The situation is different from that time. Preventing damage that doesn't need to be released is a necessity, but minimizing the damage that needs to be released is what we did this time."

"But...!"

Here, for the first time, Haruka raised her voice.

"Horikita came to that conclusion because she saw the possibility that the effect of having Kushida on her side would be far greater than that of Airi. And because I could see that future, I respected Horikita's opinion and decided to help her."

Basically, there is no such thing as a definite future. We can only imagine and act to grasp the future we see. People are not all-powerful.

"Airi is gone, but I've noticed the class is back to its usual routine."

"I understand your frustration, but did you feel the same way about Yamauchi-kun?"

"That guy got what he deserved. This is a different case."

"It's the same. You're just angry at your friend's sacrifice."

"What's wrong with that?"

There was no clear goal to this discussion.

Strictly speaking, there is no solution other than for Haruka to snap.

"I can't accept such a reality. I just can't."

And if Haruka doesn't break, then there's a big problem waiting for her.

"Kushida-san may indeed have been a threat. Maybe she's reformed now and is going to act for the good of the class from now on. But do you think I'm going to take that seriously and cooperate?"

"Yeah... when you took a week off, I felt it was going to be a longer lasting problem than anyone else."

Horikita said that while Kushida needed to be dealt with quickly, she was prepared for the long

drag with Haruka.

Having lost Airi in the exam, Haruka was not afraid now.

"But you came to school. If you just wanted to talk to us, you can do it even if you're still not going to school. Isn't that right?"

I was grateful for the faint hope that Haruka had submitted herself to come to school. However, the world is not so naive.

"I just came here because I don't have an answer yet."

"Answer?"

"I came to school to look for the answer that I couldn't see when I was locked in my room."

Akito and Keisei heard those words, and their eyes fell down.

"I'm looking for the answer to how I can get back at Horikita and Kiyopon."

Haruka said coldly, the coldest she had ever said.

The words that escaped from her slightly dry lips were different in nature from any kind of threat or bluff.

"You're serious, aren't you?"

Horikita was also reminded of the weight of those words.

"Because that's what I wanted to tell you today. I'm going to make sure you regret expelling Airi."

Without even touching her own drink, Haruka left her seat.

Akito followed behind her.

It was not only Horikita who looked away in dismay, but also Keisei.

"I don't think Horikita or Haruka are wrong. It's a sly way to put it, but that's what I really feel. At the end of the day, I'm fundamentally of the mindset that as long as I can save myself, that's all that matters."

Keisei comes to reveal the truth without covering it, as though he is embarrassed of himself.

"It's the same for everyone. It's not strange that you want to save yourself."

"That's why I can't understand what Haruka is feeling right now. But that doesn't mean I think I have the right to tell her to stop. Even if it's to prevent trouble for the class."

He tapped the table with his fist forcefully, and Keisei also left his seat.

"The group is already half destroyed. Still, I'll be useful to the class as I am. As long as I can't play an active role in the sports festival, I'll study harder and contribute to the class. If I don't do that, there's a... virtually no chance that I'll be expelled."

Even though he is good at studying, Keisei is lagging behind in terms of athleticism and social contribution.

It's evident that he's at a disadvantage when it comes to the quantity of friends he has.

Chapter 4

An Agreement

Intro

I came here to listen to the rest of yesterday's story at a karaoke room in the Keyaki Mall.

Certainly this is one of the best places to have the most private space, with the exception of the dorms.

When we stepped into the room, there was no one in sight except for me and Horikita.

"Why come all the way to the karaoke room if we just need to talk?"

We've been in each other's rooms in the past, so it's okay to talk in either room.

In other words, the fact that she chose this location means that someone else is also coming here.

Let's not go too deep and just leave it to Horikita.

"Since We've got a little time before our scheduled time... do you want to sing?"

She takes a microphone that was on the table and holds it out to me.

"No, thank you. Why don't you take up singing? At the very least, I'll assist you with it."

"No."

Immediate denial.

Why encourage people to do things you yourself don't want to do...

"Because I'll study."

She calmly took out her notebook and began studying with her own reference book after saying so.

While many school courses now employ tablets and other technology, it is still probably easier to learn independently by accessing books and notebooks directly.

When the song isn't playing, the room is fairly silent. Despite the weird mood created by the strange discussion, I chose to sit quietly on the sofa and wait for the time to pass.

Then the time passed 5:10 pm.

Horikita sighed as she looked up from her phone, which she had been checking every few minutes since before 5:00.

"I'm sorry. This may turn out to be longer than I thought."

I didn't ask who we were meeting with, but I can assume that they were confirmed to come late, although the meeting time was 5:00.

The fact that she did not contact them suggests that there were unavoidable circumstances, that they were unprofessional, or that they were deliberately late.

I continually thought of and eliminated numerous students, then waited another 15 minutes.

An outsider carefully opened the door to the room, which had remained still for some time.

The person who showed up was someone I had not expected to see.

It was Kohei Katsuragi, a second-year D class student.

At first glance, he seemed to be very punctual which is why I was surprised.

"Sorry I'm late."

"No, I don't mind. You must have gone through a lot, too. Katsuragi-kun."

"Well... Somewhat."

Muttering so, Katsuragi urged the person behind him to enter the room.

Another person shows up.

"Suzune, it's nice that you want a date with me, but it looks like you have a lot of extra people."

It was Ryuen Kakeru, the man who pulled Katsuragi, once the leader of Class A, out of his own class.

"Because it would be difficult for me to have a constructive conversation with you alone."

Despite his mocking smile, Ryuen shows no sign of relaxing his keen observation of Horikita.

Horikita has regained her usual composure now that the Kushida situation has been resolved and the distractions have been gone, and since there has been minimal direct Confrontation since going up to second grade, it is not surprising that he detects a change in Horikita even at

this level.

"I'm curious if you were deliberately late in order to gain a psychological advantage?"

"I don't know. I wonder about that..."

They started exploring, checking, and fighting each other even before they came together. I can only assume that Ryuen has not yet been told the reason why they were called here.

"You said you wanted to talk... let's hear the details."

"Can you have a seat? If it was just for a minute or two I wouldn't bother to call you out here."

Ryuen gave me a quick glance, but sat down proudly on the sofa, grabbed the charging tablet and began to operate it, completing his order normally, and then tossing it messily onto the table.

Horikita notices this and reaches for the tablet to pick it up.

"Katsuragi-kun, is there anything you would like to order?"

"I'll have some oolong tea."

After listening and completing the order, she puts the tablet back at its charging position.

"I'll tell you why I called you here..."

She was ready to begin when Ryuen abruptly stopped her with a hand, as if to discourage her.

"Before that, I had a question for you. How does it feel to be rewarded with class points for cutting off a classmate who is slowing you down? Is it as good as it sounds?"

He wasn't afraid to ask her a potentially damaging question..

It's a way of trying to gain the upper hand when he doesn't even know what we're going to say yet.

It's clear that Ryuen was using his classmates to figure out what went on in our class in the exam.

It was a move based on the assumption that the internal affairs problem was still unresolved, but Horikita beside me was unaffected.

"It's not like it didn't cause problems in doing so. But, I'm afraid, it's not going to work out the way you wish. Most of the big problems have already been solved."

That's a lie.

Even though some problems have been solved, the issue regarding Haruka is still unsolved, and it is uncertain when it might explode.

"For a liar, you're rather bold, aren't you?"

Ryuen thinks that it is a lie, but Horikita does not care.

"Do whatever you want if you think I'm lying. You're not the type of person who believes everything I say to begin with, are you?"

"Well, I don't know. Maybe I trust you more than you think."

"It's not funny, whether you mean it or whether you're joking."

Horikita dodges his provocations.

Katsuragi slowly crosses his arms, his gaze falling on Horikita as if he was analyzing her.

"What was the matter with you? I thought you were going to expel someone."

Horikita asked Ryuen.

"Aren't you concerned about not having anyone around? Because you're almost certainly the only one who made a bad decision."

Three out of four classes protected their classmates.

He attempts to give the impression that Horikita was the only one who made the wrong, careless decision.

"It's too bad we were the only ones who chose the right answer, because we did get a step ahead in the Class A competition."

"That's enough for the moment."

As Katsuragi restrained Ryuen, there was a light knock at the door of the room. The waiter showed up and brought out the oolong tea and orange juice that was ordered. The drinks were placed in front of them.

Horikita and Katsuragi's gazes were caught by this strange combination.

As it happens, so did mine.

Ryuen and orange juice... don't match each other.

"So, What's the purpose of this meeting?"

While everyone was poking around in their minds, Katsuragi encouraged Horikita to start the conversation.

Horikita nodded, and then began to speak, looking at both Ryuen and Katsuragi.

"In order to defeat Sakayanagi's class, I propose a cooperative relationship at the next sports festival."

Katsuragi reacts with a slight shoulder reaction, indicating surprise. Immediately after, he returned to his usual manner and asked a question.

"What do you mean by... cooperative relationship?"

The word 'Cooperation' can be perceived in very different ways

It was only natural for him to want to know the specifics, but he had no intention of denying the proposal carelessly.

Ryuen, on the other hand, was not surprised, nor did he seem impressed.

He was just observing with a smirk on his face.

"This special test has aspects of both competition among all students and by grade. I'm trying to make the most of a system that allows you to score equally if you win a group competition played by multiple people."

"Why our class in particular? Do you mind if I ask that?"

The class leader, Ryuen, did not speak at all, and isn't making a move to interrupt it.

"First of all, it goes without saying that Class A is out of the question. It's not worth it if we're giving points to the target class that we should be catching up with. The two choices that remain are Ichinose-san's class or Ryuen-kun and Katsuragi-kun's class. I would say that Ichinose-san is the most trustworthy, but it's hard to say that many of her students have excellent physical abilities."

"So you're saying you chose us by process of elimination."

"If it were a simple process of elimination, I wouldn't have teamed up with any class in the first place. The one person I don't trust more than Sakayanagi-san is you, Ryuen-kun."

He's certainly not an easy person to work with.

As if sympathizing, Katsuragi also nodded deeply.

"Indeed, even I, who have now joined the class, believe so. There is no one I am more afraid to entrust my back to. So then why did you take such a great risk by proposing a cooperative relationship?"

"To win of course, we can't win without stopping Class A's dominance."

"But what's the point if that doesn't happen? This man, Ryuen, will go to any lengths because that is the type of person he is. I know this because I've been there myself. I wouldn't recommend it."

He expresses harsh opinions about Ryuen to the extent that he does not seem to be the chief strategist of Ryuen's class.

If we join forces carelessly, we will be swallowed up by Ryuen's class, rather than beating Class A.

He warns us of the dangers.

"I wasn't going to get right to the point in today's discussion. The most crucial thing to keep in mind is that you cannot trust someone who is consistently late and inconsiderate. But When I watched Katsuragi-kun apologizing for being late, I changed my mind. At the very least, I have faith in you."

"That's naive thinking. Don't you think this attitude of mine is also a trick by Ryuen?"

"If I can't seem to see past the trustworthiness, then sooner or later I'm just going to get swallowed up."

This is probably the best bet for Horikita here.

If you put Ryuen and Katsuragi side by side, Katsuragi would appear to be a relatively sensible and good person.

But if Ryuen has already come here with a plan in mind, Katsuragi has no choice but to follow his orders.

"You look a little different from before, Horikita. You're growing up."

Katsuragi senses a change in Horikita, a growth, and is once again ready to resume the conversation.

"I understand your side of the story. Let me give you my personal opinion from here."

He added the word '*personal*' which means that Ryuen's intentions and thoughts were not taken into consideration.

"I also had a plan in mind to join forces with your class this time and take down Class A."

"You too...?"

"Yes. Your class has talented players beyond our grade level, such as Sudo and Koenji, who are at the top of the physical ability in all of the four classes of the second year. There is no need to worry about them being dragged down by their peers. You're not someone we can trust unconditionally, but we're also not a class you can easily betray, which isn't a bad factor either."

Next to Katsuragi, Ryuen's eyes were fixed on me, but his mouth remained closed.

Because no one else was available to undertake negotiations, Ryuen has always taken the lead in dialogue. However, with the addition of Katsuragi, the need for this has diminished and the option to wait and see has been created. This is a very big positive factor.

It's uncanny not knowing what Ryuen would think, what he will propose, or when he will propose it..

While it is easy to talk to Katsuragi, Horikita is probably becoming more aware of such concerns.

But it is a path that cannot be avoided if discussions are to be brought up regularly over the next 18 months.

"But in practice, it was 50/50 whether Ryuen would approach with a proposal for cooperation."

It has been more than a week since the details of the sports festival were announced. If they were to move on the basis of cooperation, it would not be surprising if such talk had already reached the ears of Horikita. In other words, the other half of Katsuragi's priority was not to join hands.

"When it comes to co-operation, we will naturally have to secure first and second place in our class. When that happens, inevitably the overall strength of the class is what decides the winner. If we just look at simple probabilities, we are willing to accept the possibility that Horikita's class will come first and ours will come second."

By working together to outsmart Sakayanagi and Ichinose classes, a Horikita class versus Ryuen class situation is created..

That is why Katsuragi answered that it was 50-50; because he could foresee it.

Even though Katsuragi is a good communicator, it doesn't mean that he would agree to a cooperative relationship.

If we don't get over the hurdle in front of us, we won't be able to start negotiations with Ryuen..

"So our class is seen as a threat to yours."

"Of course, things have changed dramatically since a year ago. You are now in Class B, as opposed to Class D a year ago, when you were mocked as a bunch of defectives. And that's after losing all of your class points. Also, You recently gained 100 class points by cutting off one of your classmates in the unanimous special test, in addition to Koenji's single victory in the uninhabited island special exam. There's no denying that you're formidable opponents."

"It's not my achievement, but I don't feel bad that you think that way. But if we don't co-operate and we go to the sports festival separately, the worst case scenario is that Sakayanagi-san's class will win first place. The important thing is to defeat Sakayanagi-san's class. Am I wrong?"

"Indeed. That is also true. Ryuen, what do you think?"

Here, for the first time, Katsuragi asked Ryuen for his opinion.

"You'll offer me something in return if you want my aid, right?"

"I'm wondering if you misinterpreted something. Although I was the one who presented the idea, this does not imply that I must pay for it. Rather, you should recognise that you are in a position to form a cooperative connection with the first-place candidates class."

"Don't make me laugh. I'm in a position where I could win without your help, but if you ask me to help you, I can lend you a hand. If you don't like it, there's no point staying here."

"Do you know how to get back? Go out that door, turn left and you'll be heading the right way."

Without needing to consider any kind of concession, Horikita urges Ryuen and Katsuragi to leave.

This attitude is the core of negotiating, but at the same time, Horikita gives off the impression that she is not betting everything on this strategy.

The proposal to defeat Sakayanagi together still stands. In other words, negotiations will break down when Ryuen leaves the table.

The situation will be different if Ryuen again says that he is willing to join forces.

"You've got some balls for a bluff."

"What do you mean? Our class is a reasonably competent class in the sports festival, as Katsuragi-kun stated. Do you believe you have what it takes to beat Sudo-kun and Koenji-kun in a head-to-head battle?"

"If we face them honestly and head on, maybe not. But there are plenty of other ways to do it. It's not like you've forgotten what happened last year, right?"

This is exactly what I was expecting, a dirty trick by Ryuen, disguised as an accident.

It is obvious that this is what he was trying to say..

"This year there will be several guests, and the rules of the sports festival, by its very nature, will be closely monitored. Let's see how sneaky you can be this time."

"There are plenty of blind spots. And it isn't only limited to during competitions."

This means places that are unsupervised, such as changing rooms and washrooms.

"So you're still the same huh..., and your thinking is certainly threatening, but... I have already seen that far."

Undiscouraged, Horikita slammed the notebook shut.

"Ayanokoji-kun. Thank you for accompanying me today. It seems that this case is too risky for me to ask your judgment. I think I'll call it a night here."

"If you're okay with that, then there's no problem."

That's where Horikita left it and started to put the notebook away.
Ryuen saw this and made no response, but Katsuragi made a move.

"Ryuen. Apparently, Horikita is even more different than we imagined so far. If we don't get to the negotiating table properly, it's us who will be cut off."

Having calmly analyzed the situation, Katsuragi turns his gaze once again to Horikita.

"You didn't bring this up with me because you saw the downside of teaming up with me?"

"We never suggested it. But when Horikita had talked to us, the situation changed. Besides, I had a feeling that it would exceed my expectations."

The updated data they attained has resulted in a slight increase in Horikita's class's evaluation.

In other words, they re-evaluated the class to be suitable for cooperation.

"I'm bluffing, but that's all from my point of view. It's natural to try to spin things to your advantage. I've improved my communication skills, but the only reason it appears to be working for you is because Ayanokoji is by your side."

With that said, Ryuen picked up the glass of orange juice in front of him and sprinkled all the contents toward me without hesitation.

By sidestepping from my seated position, I was able to avoid getting hit and evade the attack. A large yellow stain spreads and fragrances the place where I had been sitting until just before.

"You've noticed how crazy he is, haven't you? I wonder if you could have dodged that one?"

"... I don't think so."

"Yeah. A normal person would be soaking wet before they could even react. Most people can't avoid it, but he just looks at you like everything's normal and looks unconcerned."

"He has a hell of a reflex, sure, but... what does that have to do with this discussion?"

"Don't you get it? Ayanokoji is the Ace of your class, Suzune, and if you ask me. It's no wonder you've got a big mouth when you're showing off your weapon to an unarmed opponent."

"Did you go out of your way to ask for orange juice to do this? Give me a break."

I also thought it was odd, but he's the guy who does the most crazy things. It was right to remain conscious of the untouched drink.

"Why did you dodge? If you had taken it all from the front, we could have silenced his response."

"Don't be absurd. I don't want to be covered in juice."

It smells awful, it's sticky and it doesn't come off. It is a hassle to deal with.

If this had been oolong tea, I could have perhaps been tolerant.

Orange juice is probably one of the best drinks to spray on someone for harassment.

"If you want to negotiate properly, first remove Ayanokoji from the room. Then we can talk."

Ryuen Offers to continue negotiations on condition that I am removed from the room.

"That sounds like something you'd say. But I refuse. He's my classmate. He has the right to be present and I asked him to be present. I don't see what's wrong with using the weapons you have to negotiate."

She's really courageous. Another thought was that Horikita has obtained information about Ryuen and I without our knowledge. Ryuen also sensed this.

The extent is unknown, but it would not be surprising if she heard about the rooftop incident involving Kei.

Horikita told me that she does not need my help and only needs me to be present from the beginning.

I can't complain because she is just using me while keeping her promise.

"My class, which is in an advantageous position, is offering to enter into a cooperation. If that doesn't convince you, then you can pretend that this whole thing never really happened."

Ryuen will never cooperate with Sakayanagi. Even if they approached Ichinose, it is unclear how much helpful power they would be able to obtain.

A wrong decision here will inevitably have an impact on the future for Ryuen. It is even possible, although unlikely, that a Horikita-Sakayanagi alliance could be formed.

This is because it is not a bad outcome if Horikita's class comes first and Sakayanagi's class comes second in the results.

But allowing this to happen would make it more difficult to pursue Sakayanagi.

"Depending on the discussion, I would be willing to join forces with your class. Now, may I hear your response, take it or leave it?"

The next response was left to the leader, Ryuen, rather than Katsuragi.

After a few seconds of silence, Ryuen makes a decision.

"Fine, I'll take you up on that offer."

He replied, but Ryuen's words did not stop there.

"However, I will put a condition. Because the relationship between us should be stronger and more equal. There will be a 100-point differential in class points gained if either my class or

yours, in no particular sequence, achieves the goal of first or second place. To make up the difference, the winner will give the loser private points, which will be distributed until March 1, the day before graduation. Add this condition."

He is trying to do the same thing as last year's uninhabited island exam when Ryuen signed a contract with Kasturagi for private points.

If one side gets more class points, the difference should be made up with private points.

Ryuen must be well aware of his disadvantage.

He is aware of this and is attempting to stress it in order to gain an advantage, but Horikita is also aware of it..

"Surely those terms themselves are equal. But I refuse. It is a serious competition as to who will take first or second place. We will only settle it after a fair fight."

If they were equal, with or without conditions, there would be no conditions as long as they were judged to have a good chance of winning.

"Kuku. I'm not going to let you take everything for yourself, am I? But that doesn't make it any better for us."

"It is difficult to extract concessions from Horikita. I think we're about to tie our hands on a firm deal."

Ryuen is not yet ready to formally sign a contract but Katsuragi shows a flexible attitude towards it.

"That's not enough. If you're going to ask me to help you, you're going to have to show me more sincerity."

"Sincerity? Isn't it the same for me? If the strategy brings us to the top and brings Sakayanagi's Class A to the bottom, it will be minus 150 points for them. There is plenty of room to consider this strategy of cooperation. But, we're taking a risk here, too."

As if to rebut, Horikita continues.

"The doubt that has been swirling around me all along. It's whether or not I can trust you. If we focus our main forces on team competitions in order to form a strong team, it is inevitable that the individual competitions will be neglected."

It is quite possible that Ryuen will instruct his class to betray and cut corners in the competition, or even not show up for the promised competition in the first place.

It is doubtful that all the competitions will be monitored, as Horikita and the others will be busy in different competitions on the day of the event.

Also it is not allowed to bring cell phones or other devices, so they cannot coordinate from different places.

"Trusting you, who is untrustworthy. Taking that risk is the maximum concession and cooperation we can offer. We will not concede a single millimeter more."

This is something that Ryuen has to hear.

Even if there is an attractive competitive force in the class, Ryuen cannot be trusted, and that is the basic premise of the discussion.

Horikita is saying that she will accept it despite that, and that they should cooperate without saying a word.

"You're right. I had no trust in your way. I guess we'll just have to accept it here."

"I'm not looking for you to trust me."

While laughing it off, Ryuen still relaxed his shoulders, as if he was convinced by Horikita's words.

"Can you really trust me?"

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend. I'll take the word for it, a handy phrase invented by our forefathers."

It's hard to reach your full potential in an alliance when you still have lingering doubts. In some cases, you may find yourself focusing your attention more on your back than fighting with the enemy.

"I don't approve of everything you say, but one thing is for sure, it's not a good idea to keep letting the Sakayanagi class take the lead."

To Ryuen's remark, both Katsuragi and Horikita agreed, nodding their heads without hesitation.

To allow Class A to win. That is an act that, no matter what, cannot be allowed any longer.

"Even though we have a direct confrontation with them coming up at the end of the school year, we won't be able to overturn the class points with just one of those."

In the meantime, they want to be within range. The idea seems believable.

"I've had you listen to me in silence, but it's time for me to hear your opinion, Ayanokoji-kun."

Horikita's idea, its risk.

Objectively, do I accept this strategy or not?

"Cooperation in interest is not a bad thing. There might be some objections, but I think everyone will understand that it's important to defeat Sakayanagi. I'm sure Yosuke and Kei will follow up on this."

Horikita is once again confident in her idea. But Ryuen stopped.

"I'd like to make a contract, but not yet."

"Still? Do you think you can extract any more concessions?"

"Let me check one last thing. Was it you, Suzune, who brought up this proposal? Or was it Ayanokoji who was observing the situation silently? Which is it?"

He seemed to be quite interested in learning who came up with the idea.

"If it was not initiated by Ayanokoji-kun, would you accept this? There seems to be a relationship between you and Ayanokoji-kun that you can't let anyone else hear about."

Horikita seems to be implying something when she says that.

"I know firsthand that you recognize each other's abilities as enemies. And that I'm out of place."

"Did I say anything about that? I'm just asking you to answer who came up with the idea."

Ryuen, somewhat irritated, hurried his words to Horikita in the form of a glare.

"It's me. I only asked Ayanokoji-kun to be present this time, and I didn't even let him hear about it until we talked about it here."

If I was the one suggesting the idea, Ryuen might refuse.

When Horikita speaks honestly, Ryuen laughs.

"I see. I'm relieved to hear that. If that's the case, I'll accept your proposal."

That was the deciding factor, and Ryuen formally accepted to join forces.

"Why?"

"Why? I don't know. You'll have to figure out why yourself."

He dodges the answer.

"It would be better for both of us to have a proper contract in place, just in case. No, especially for you."

"Of course I will. I'm going to have Chabashira-sensei, and Sakagami-sensei in between."

The contract is based on the involvement of the faculty. It would naturally include consequences of breach of contract in it.

Even if it is Ryuen, there is nothing that can be done if it is bound by rules that cannot be broken.

"Then, I will leave the preparation of the documents to Horikita. Is that alright with you?"

"Yes. Can I have you and I look it over together a few times, Katsuragi-kun?"

When Katsuragi checks Ryuen with a glance, he replied with a face saying,

"Do what you want."

Katsuragi's presence is really significant in Ryuen's class, where trust is important. He is smart, trustworthy, and able to express his opinions to Ryuen without any hesitation.

The degree to which Ryuen entrusted Katsuragi and the way he selected him, was nothing short of brilliant.

It was truly worth the large sum of money that was spent to bring him in.

"Okay. Let's formally exchange a written agreement and then work together in the sports festival."

Thus, it was decided that Horikita's class and Ryuen's class would fight together in the sports festival.

The goal is to prioritize the victory of the class and aim for cooperation within it.

However, this was not the end of the story, and Katsuragi changed the subject.

"It is good that we have reached an agreement to cooperate with each other, but then there are

some things we should think about. It is quite conceivable that Sakayanagi and Ichinose could join forces, but what do you intend to do about that?"

An alliance against an alliance.

That development would be quite possible.

"No problem. Even if Ichinose cooperates with Sakayanagi in this sports festival, our unity is better. Besides, Sakayanagi would have to give up even the third place. Just as you feared second place when you teamed up, Ichinose would have the advantage if they teamed up as well. Sakayanagi's class has 38 members due to the withdrawal of Yahiko and the transfer of Katsuragi. With Sakayanagi's non-participation also confirmed, there are 37 members in the class. Ichinose's class has 40 students, a surprisingly large difference of 3 students."

The athletic ability of both classes are almost even. If this is the case, the difference in the number of three classmates may determine the winner.

"But it's Sakayanagi, she'll come up with a strategy to just cover the number of people."

"Didn't you see the rules this time? When you don't participate in the festival, you're on standby at your dormitory. And since you can't even use your cell phone, that means the A-class is completely nonfunctional."

"Of course I read the rules. It is true that Sakayanagi cannot participate due to her physical condition. However, she can formally participate and earn a total of 10 points, 5 points from her score and 5 points from the participation prize. Once she meets the minimum requirements, she can continue to stay and send instructions."

"Sakayanagi, who has a high pride, can't do it."

As long as she is unable to compete satisfactorily in any event, it is inevitable that Sakayanagi will be the only one to stand out.

"Not so conveniently. Abstention from competition is a given right. If you participate formally and then abstain, there is no shame in it."

"Does this fall under a compelling reason? If you're participating with an understanding of your own physical condition, you're required to justify it. She'd have to finish the 100-meter race with a cane in her hand when everyone else has finished running. I don't think she'd make such a spectacle of herself."

"Certainly, normally she would not participate because of her personality. However, if she knew that we had teamed up with each other, Sakayanagi would consider the risk of losing on purpose to give out commands on the field. I'm saying that it's a problem to assume her absence will be a sure thing. You are saying this lightly, but give me a probability that she will not participate. Give me a serious answer."

"Ninety percent."

"90% based on your baseless assessment. If that's the case, the appropriate value is even lower. 70% to 80% at best."

"You should be happy with that number."

"That won't do. If we want to be certain, it should be at least 95%."

Forgetting about us, Ryuen and Katsuragi engaged in a debate.

"That's absurd. But if you want to be more sure, there is a way. I'll thoroughly hang up with Sakayagi before the sports festival. Telling her that If she participates, the whole class will mock her during the competition. That way we can reach the 95% you're talking about."

Ryuen says she will give in to the threat of trampling on personal dignity.

"That's not acceptable from an ethical standpoint."

"I agree. I don't think the school will stand by idly and watch."

Both Horikita and Katsuragi denied that they would accept such things.

"If Sakayanagi ever joins, I'll crush her."

"Remember, we are in the lower classes because it's not easy to crush Sakayanagi-san."

If Sakayanagi were to function as a leader during this sports festival, it would certainly be difficult to predict what kind of moves Class A would make.

Whether she participates or not will have a significant impact on the outcome of this sports festival.

If we can ensure the absence of Sakayanagi, it means that victory is at hand.

"Horikita. Are you including my contribution to the class victory?"

"I basically tried not to think about it. You're the only one who remains in a special position."

"That's convenient to hear. If the presence or absence of Sakayanagi's participation is hindering the cooperation, I may be able to help."

"What do you mean?"

Interested, Katsuragi stopped talking to Ryuen and turned around.

"If you leave it to me, I'll make sure Sakayanagi doesn't participate in the sports festival."

"What.....?"

"Huh?"

Horikita shows surprise, and Ryuen seems impressed. And Katsuragi continues to listen in silence.

"However, for making sure Sakayanagi does not participate, I don't want you to rely on a single point from me at the sports festival. Not just Horikita, but you too Ryuen."

"I didn't include you in my calculations from the beginning. If you can stop Sakayanagi, it will save us a lot of trouble."

"I can't even imagine what you will do, but if Ryuen and Horikita believe in what Ayanokoji has said and leave it to him, I have no intention of saying anything more about this matter. If Sakayanagi is not participating, it won't be hard to bring Class A to the bottom."

"But can you really do that?"

"Oh. There's a good chance you'll get it without me doing anything, but you can leave it to me. And I've been thinking, it's not every day that Horikita and Ryuen get together and cooperate with each other like this, is it? There's something else I need to talk to you about, okay?"

I was thinking a little differently than the three of them during this discussion.

"What is it?"

As I begin to share my suggestions, Horikita and Katsuragi look at each other and Ryuen listens in silence.

As soon as I finished my explanation, the ice in Katsuragi's glass melted and clinked.

"That's an interesting idea, but..."

Horikita looks at Ryuen, perplexed, unsure if he would accept it or not.

"It's certainly not impossible according to the rules. But..."

"You don't like my proposal?"

Even for the agreement related to the sports festival, if it had been a proposal from me, there is a possibility that he would have refused.

"Yeah, I don't like it. I reject it."

Ryuen had denied it, but Katsuragi interrupted.

"Your personal feelings can wait. It's honestly not a bad idea. We may have to go over the details and the rules again, but no, we're talking about Ayanokoji's plan. I'm sure he's made sure of that."

"There is no problem with the rules. We can make a more powerful development if we have students from Ryuen's class cooperate with us rather than just our class. Don't you agree?"

"Yeah, sure."

Horikita is well aware of the issues we're dealing with right now. We can relieve some of the stress if we can get help from somewhere else..

"Take it on, Ryuen. We should now proceed with preparations for a direct confrontation with Sakayanagi."

"Listen, Ayanokoji. After crushing Sakayanagi, you're next."

"If you reach that point, it's inevitable."

Perhaps those words were decisive, as Ryuen also accepted my proposal.

"Katsuragi, you're in charge. Start preparing"

"I will."

"That's exactly what a war with Class A is all about."

"The first objective, however, is to keep Sakayanagi out of the sports festival. Because without completing this initial step, neither the partnership at the sports festival nor the proposal from Ayanokoji can begin."

"I know. Just leave it to me."

I have a strategy for holding off Sakayanagi that neither Ryuen, Katsuragi, nor Horikita have.

Part 1

Just before 7 p.m. Sakayanagi, Kamuro, and Hashimoto of the 2nd year class A were gathered at a cafe in the Keyaki Mall.

"I'm not surprised to be called out of the blue, but what can I do for you today, Princess?"

"I'd like to talk about the sports festival about what we should be doing."

"I thought you said you had a plan for it right?"

"The situation changes from moment to moment. And today, another new change has taken place."

Saying so, Sakayanagi continues.

"Ryuen-kun's class and Horikita-san's class have made contact."

Hearing this, Hashimoto's eyes widened.

"Which one of them approached the other? Did Ryuen approach Horikita?"

"That is unknown. But either way, it is safe to assume that the two are connected."

"Wait a minute. I don't think it's going to work out that easily. I don't think Horikita will trust Ryuen so easily. He's not someone you can ally with."

"You know what they say,

'The enemy of my enemy is my friend.'

We are in a situation to be alone. They don't have to trust each other, but as long as they have the same goals, they work well together."

The possibility of the two classes joining forces is easily guessed by both.

The news isn't good, and their expressions become more serious.

"It's not good to go on like this, is it?"

"We can't beat them on our own?"

"If we assume that the three classes were going to compete separately, there was still a chance

for any of them to take any of the places, but the connection came from an unexpected source." Sakayanagi makes it clear and looks at Hashimoto.

"One wouldn't join forces with Ryuen, though. You never know when you might get stabbed in the back."

"Rather, it would be more convenient if he did... If Ryuen-kun's class is in first place and Horikita-san's class is in second place then I welcome the result, but if it's the other way around, it's a bit troublesome."

Sakayanagi is more wary of Horikita's class than Ryuen.

Hashimoto's slight smile vanishes as a result of Sakayanagi's remark.

"And there's no question that they're gaining momentum right now. I thought it was impossible for anyone but the class of Ryuen to expel someone and take 100 class points. Has Horikita grown up... or... Perhaps **Ayanokoji** is working from the Shadows?"

He emphasizes Ayanokoji's name and directs it to Sakayanagi. As if to confirm something.

Sakayanagi continues in an uncaring manner.

"He's really stepped up his game lately, What's going on?"

"I don't think he's hiding anything more than his OAA. Well, Ayanokoji is not the only student like that."

Hashimoto quickly backed down, as it was not a good idea to provoke and get attention.

"But what are you going to do? We'll lose without you, but you're going to be absent, right?"

In other words, you're throwing away the Special exam? Kamuro poses the question.

Hashimoto, who had been smiling, seemed concerned about this point, and his expression hardened again.

Minus 150 points. Even if Class A sank to the bottom, it would not cause much damage.

The defeat, on the other hand, is not to be welcomed, as their current situation has been possible because of continuous wins.

"There's only one answer."

Sakayanagi laughs and continues.

"I will also participate in the sports festival. Even if they really join hands, they are calculating that they can barely win combined with my non-participation. Let them know that this is an illusion."

"Seriously? Will you be okay?"

"I like that you're willing to do this, but are you sure?"

The two are concerned by Sakayanagi's announcement of participation.

"Being made a spectacle of? I can get around it as I want."

"Well, I'm sure you'll do fine. If you say you'll come out, then the outcome will be different."

"It does not, however, boost overall athletic performance. It can only pick up the competition that we might miss out on. To put it another way, taking first position will be a difficult task for us."

"I think it's enough that we won't be at the bottom."

"It's not so difficult to crack the relationship between Horikita-san and Ryuen-kun. Let's deviate them on the day when they are desperately trying to work together."

Hashimoto and Kamuro have confidence in Sakayanagi, who has absolute confidence in them. It has produced high results time and again.

"Well that's a relief, huh? Well, I'm surprised that you could pick up the information so quickly, Princess. You didn't do it yourself, did you?"

For everyday information gathering, she often used Hashimoto and Kamuro. But this time the two had never heard of it before, and Hashimoto asked curiously. "I'm still the Class A representative, and I'm getting to know some of the first-year students." Sakayanagi grinned softly, as though she was relishing the unexpected question.

Part 2

The month of October had finally arrived, and the Sports Festival was near.

Kei and I had come to Keyaki Mall after school for a date.

The intense gazes of the 3rd year students were the same as ever. Despite getting caught in the crossfire, Kei gave off no impression of caring. It appears that when she said she was used to it already, she wasn't just simply saying it for the sake of it.

Kei seemed to have a list of stores she wanted to visit today. To begin, we went to a electronics store.

"What do you want to buy?"

"Eh? I don't really want anything for myself? Ah, well, it's not that I don't want anything, but we didn't come here for my sake today."

Huh...Not for herself, So it must be for someone else.

"Isn't your birthday coming up soon? I considered surprising you, but then I decided that bringing you something you actually want would be a better option."

Now that she mentions it, my birthday is coming up.

"I was thinking of walking around together and finding something you want."

"I see."

Of late, I do remember Kei asking whether there was anything I'd been meaning to get, but I'd typically respond with whatever came to mind because I hadn't been thinking about it too seriously. As a result, it seems like Kei thought of finding a present I would want with me.

"You'll have to spend private points, you know?"

Kei didn't have a lot of money saved up.

"I understand what you're saying, but I think it'll be fine for your birthday. Just get what you like!"

She was determined on buying whatever I wanted, but that wouldn't do.

That said, in this situation, I know that telling her I didn't want anything would be the wrong answer and it is obvious that she would not be convinced if I wanted something extremely cheap.

I'll choose something that wouldn't put much pressure on Kei's wallet.

That was the kind of reaction this moment demanded.

"I know exactly what you're thinking right now, you know~?"

She looked at me and forcibly linked our arms.

"I'll buy what you want! Okay?"

"... yes."

At the very least, I should limit the burden on her and refrain from buying something that I do not require.

Just as we started walking with our arms linked, Kei put her cheek on my arm.

"Ehehe. I'm so happy"

She said as she hugged my arm harder.

"There's nothing I'm hiding from you anymore. I've told you everything there is to know about myself. I never thought that there would be someone more important to me than my mom and dad."

Her face flushed and her eyes narrowed in true happiness.

"Kiyotaka, keeping anything from me is also a no-no, you understand?"

"Uh huh"

Hiding things. I wonder what she was referring to.

My family. The White Room. The things I'm trying to do at school.

Friendships or my romantic feelings.

There was nothing there that I could swear wasn't hidden if she was referring to any of them. To put it another way, I've never told Kei the truth about myself.

"Ah-"

We ran across Satou, who had come to the store alone, as we were going around the store, talking about the things and idling. Her eyes were fixed to our linked arms when we bumped into each other.

“Lovey dovey~ You two are so in love, aren't you!. Sorry for bothering yoooooooouuuuuuu”

“oh, wait, wait a minute!?”

Kei tried to stop her, but Satou had run off at full speed.

“....ah, no...”

Kei puts her hand on her forehead.

“You’re still concerned about Satou?”

“It’s not really that... but it doesn't make me feel good, you know...”

"If that's the case, we should avoid joining arms the next time we're out."

“Nope.”

Although she felt sorry for her friend, it seemed like she wouldn’t give up on it.

"Ohh? Hey Ayanokoji!"

While walking around the rice cooker and kettle corner, we ran into Ishizaki and Albert.

At that moment, I could feel Kei’s hold on my arm tighten slightly.

"On a date with Karuizawa? You guys are even linking arms... such norms..."

Ishizaki was envious of us, but my gaze was drawn to Albert, who stood next to him, holding a large, branded pot. It was curious because the large pot didn’t seem so large in Albert’s large hands.

"Oh, this? The 20th of this month is Ryuen-san’s birthday. We’re just picking something out for him."

"Eh? The 20th... you guys have the same birthday?"

As she looked up at me, Kei was surprised and a little wary.

“This is the first time I’ve heard of it.”

"Who has the same birthday?"

Kei stared at Ishizaki and took a short step back to hide just as Ishizaki's gaze shifted to her.

"What's wrong, I'm asking you to tell me——"

At that moment, Albert placed his hand lightly on Ishizaki's shoulder. Finally, it appeared like Ishizaki figured out the reason Kei was on her guard.

"... oh, right..."

I could hear him muttering to himself.

Even though it was on Ryuen's order, Ishizaki had cooperated in calling Kei to the rooftop and bullying her. Naturally, Kei would be uncomfortable in the presence of Ishizaki.

Ishizaki bit his tongue and softly smacked his head with his hand, irritated by his own insensitivity.

"I'm... sorry. I think I should have said it earlier... I, on the rooftop——"

"Don't talk about that here."

Ishizaki was about to apologize, but he still lacked decency.

This was Keyaki Mall. It wouldn't be surprising if you ran across someone you knew at any time. In this scenario, Kei would prefer that he not bring up the rooftop.

This problem would have been solved if we had simply moved away from them, but as long as our connection remained, the number of times she would get involved with Ishizaki wouldn't be small.

"Let's go somewhere else."

There were a few secluded areas even within the crowded Keyaki mall.

Although Kei seemed dissatisfied, with her arms still connected, she came with me without saying anything.

Albert returned the product back to its shelf and came along with Ishizaki.

Maybe because they both felt sorry, they wanted to apologize.

We'd be a long way from the shops if we stood by an emergency exit, and other students wouldn't notice or hear us.

Even if we see someone we know coming, due to our location we could stop our conversation

right then and it wouldn't be a problem.

"I'm very sorry! I should have apologized sooner!"

"... you don't have to. I don't care even if you did. In fact, it just makes me more irritated."

"Eh, What...?"

"You guys were beaten to pulp by Kiyotaka, and since you lost you have no choice but to apologize."

"Well, that's.. not..."

"If Kiyotaka didn't come to the rooftop... or if he lost to you guys, you wouldn't apologize like this. Am I wrong? That's why You guys are just annoying me."

Kei had a point when she said it was annoying and troubling.

Although I've had some interactions with Ishizaki and Albert since then, it's primarily due to what happened on the roof. Kei's hypothetical scenario was not unreasonable.

"I know I am to blame, but..."

"I'm not really blaming you. It's natural for the strong to be on top. I despised being at the bottom too, so I adopted this high and powerful attitude in order to rise to the top. That's correct, isn't it?"

Ishizaki and Kei shared similar personalities, albeit to varying degrees.

If you can't beat them, join them.

That was their sense of values.

"I understand your point of view. But - now that we've started interacting – there's something I'm starting to see: Even if it's a little, Ishizaki has definitely matured in a good way."

"What's this good way? It seems to me like he hasn't changed at all?"

"Well, at the end of the day, it's just how I feel, but I don't think Ishizaki would just obey if Ryuen instructed him to do to what they did to you to someone else."

"Really? But I doubt he'd oppose Ryuen."

Because Ishizaki was at a loss for words, that was probably right on the mark.

Ishizaki's irritation bubbled over because he couldn't say anything, so he slapped his own knees with his palms.

Kei sighed as she saw Ishizaki in that state.

"That's enough. Right now, you are Kiyotaka's friend, right? I won't forgive you but I will stop blaming you."

"Is- is that alright?"

"I've already said it, haven't I? It's over, got it?"

"Y, yes!"

Ishizaki raised his head in happiness.

"Umm... So about that. Earlier, whose birthday was it?"

Ishizaki questioned her once more. Kei didn't have complete faith in him yet, but she pointed her pointer finger at me.

"Eh? Really? Ayanokoji's birthday is also October 20th!?"

Ishizaki was shocked beyond words.

"This is fate, isn't it!?"

"What fate, with over 400 students in this school, it's not surprising that some people share the same birthday."

"But, isn't it amazing that it's Ayanokoji and Ryuen?"

Ishizaki was overjoyed over a simple coincidence.

As Kei said, it wasn't strange, but for some reason even Albert looked a little happy.

"Can we return to the store now?"

"Ah! Right! Wait a second!"

Kei, irritated, put her fingers into her ears since his voice was so loud.

"I have a suggestion – if it's okay with you, why don't we celebrate both their birthdays together?"

Ryuen-san's and Ayanokoji's double birthday party, won't it be amazing?"

No, from the moment I heard that suggestion, I did not for a second think it would be amazing... I

attempted to visualise it, but it was difficult for me to do so.

"If he apologizes, I'm okay?"

"Eh, What?"

"I said if that guy, Ryuen bows his head and apologize then I accept."

Her response was just another way to refuse.

Ishizaki's jaw dropped as he realized how difficult it would be.

"Ryuen won't apologize to me, right?"

"Well yeah, that's definitely not happening..."

It would be impossible for Ishizaki to even advise Ryuen to apologize. Ishizaki froze, but then, as if he had made up his mind, he opened his mouth once more.

"If both of you agree, then I will suggest it to him!"

"You probably shouldn't?"

A beating was probably waiting for him if he did that.

This was the image that came to our minds.

"I'll do something about it! If I can get the promise of an apology, it'll be a birthday party!"

"Well... if you can really make it happen I'll think about it..."

Ishizaki was overflowing with enthusiasm and nothing could bring down his mood.

Maybe I should clearly reject this idea.

It's true that Ishizaki has been able to express his intentions more strongly of late. Furthermore, Ryuen's way of thinking was beginning to alter, as evidenced by the fact that he did not expel anyone during the Unanimous Special exam.

However, you shouldn't take it as proof that it was his instinct or that those were his true objectives. Even if you desire to change, humans are difficult to change.

And Ryuuen wasn't trying to change, he was trying to evolve.

Being a man who has only fought using evil, he has simply started to use good too. He was beginning to freely control both sides.

If Ishizaki is misreading it then——

"I think you should probably stop."

Kei tried to stop him, but Ishizaki was determined.

"If Ryuuen says he will apologize, it's fine right?"

"But ——"

"I understand! On top of that, let me apologize again. I'll get you something that I put even more effort into than I put into Ryuen-san's present!"

Kei reluctantly admits that she was defeated by Ishizaki's high level of enthusiasm.

"Okay, I get it."

"Done! First, let's go look for Ryuen-san's birthday present!"

Albert nodded, and he and Ishizaki went back towards the mega mart before us. They clearly understood that the two of us couldn't accompany them.

"Why did you accept Ishizaki's idea? I thought you were going to say no."

Accepting the honest apology was one thing, but I had never thought she'd choose to meet Ishizaki and the others on my birthday.

"I mean, for me, being together on your birthday, just the two of us would be great... but..."

"Are you betting on the chance that Ryuen will apologize?"

"That's impossible. It's not that....."

Kei turned around and looked at Albert and Ishizaki as they were walking away from us. Ishizaki was happily talking to Albert.

"I got the impression that Ishizaki-kun enjoys being your friend. Even Kiyotaka needs friends, you know."

I quickly realized that she was referring to the fact that the Ayanokouji group was no more.

Kei glanced away, her face flushed, as she realised I had understood what she was thinking.

"Also? Ishizaki-kun did say he would once again apologize, and I just thought it wouldn't be a bad thing to accept that."

That side of her that wasn't honest was somehow very Kei.

However, it was more likely that it would not happen. Ishizaki's idea should be taken with a grain of salt.

The days went in this manner until the day of the Sports Festival.

Part 3

Sato, who had run out of the electronics store a step ahead of the others, catches her breath in front of the women's restroom.

"Oh, why did I run away?"

My dear friend went out with someone I love. There is nothing wrong with that.

Even Knowing this, she was struck by an unspeakable urge when she saw them with their arms crossed.

I don't know how I would have behaved if I had stayed in there.

She thought so and abruptly ran away, but now she feel a strong sense of guilt about it.

She sat down on the spot and hugged her knees.

"I must try not to panic next time..."

Because of this, Kei must be holding herself in the classroom with Ayanokoji-kun. In fact, she would have liked to be closer to Ayanokoji-kun more and more.

As she stood up with this thought, a shadow fell on Sato.



"Excuse me for interrupting. You are Maya Sato senpai, right?"

Sato was approached by an unfamiliar student and was confused for a moment.

"That's right, but... well, who are you? A First grader, right?"

" *'Who am I?'* I don't think it's a big deal right now. Actually, I have something I need to tell Sato-senpai as soon as possible. If possible, could you give me a moment of your time?"

"What? What do you mean?"

She is confused when a junior she does not know tells her that there is something important to be discussed.

The image of Ayanokoji and Karuizawa walking closely with each other was still in her mind, and she still hasn't calmed down.

"It's information about Ayanokoji-senpai."

However, Sato's movement stopped after those words.

"...Ayanokoji-kun?"

"Yes. He and his girlfriend, Kei Karuizawa-senpai."

Sato turned her gaze involuntarily because she heard the names of the two people who have been occupying 99% of her mind for quite some time.

Sato tensed up a bit, as the distance between her and the first grader decreased.

"Can we talk somewhere private afterwards?"

"It's..."

The first-year student takes advantage of Sato's low physical abilities to get close enough to touch their lips to Sato's ear.

"If Karuizawa-senpai were to withdraw from school, don't you think that would give Sato-senpai a chance?"

Karuizawa, who is now my closest friend, and Ayanokoji, whom I have feelings for. The first grader says it's a chance to change the relationship between the two and her position.

Several emotions begin to flow.

"What are you talking about?"

"I leave it to your judgment whether or not to listen to what I have to say. But if you don't listen, you will regret it for a long time to come. If you don't want to be noticed, you can come to my dorm room."

Satisfied after verbally giving the room number, the first-year student turned away and left Sato.

Sato, who was left there, was left confused, unable to take in the situation. But only one thing stuck in her memory.

"I will have a chance"

Words that suggested the possibility of dating Ayanokoji.

Her chest tightens, and at the same time, feelings she doesn't want starts creeping up from the bottom of her heart.

"I —"

Part 4

While certain challenges remained, the class worked diligently to prepare for the sports festival.

Some students objected to the idea of a cooperation with Ryuen, but when everything was disclosed and practice began, there were no major disputes, and practice for the team competition proceeded smoothly. Even classmates who were negative at first began to cooperate with each other in order to win, as they practiced and trained day and night.

Finally, it's the night before the Sports festival.

Around 9:30 at night, I made a call to Horikita.

"It's very late. I was about to go to bed."

I could hear the sound of a hair dryer in the background.

"I have something important to tell you, something to do with the sports festival."

"Something Important from you? I suppose I should take this a little more seriously."

As soon as she said that, she turned off the hair dryer and everything went quiet.

"Oh, I was going to say something first as well. Sakayanagi-san is still intending to participate in tomorrow's sports festival, right? Didn't you say you could stop her?"

"It's also related to that. I'm going to be absent from tomorrow's sports festival."

"... Absent? Wait a minute, what do you mean?"

I could tell she was taken aback by my unexpected statement on the other end of the line. I heard a loud clang and a slight scream.

"Are you okay?"

"Sorry, I dropped the hairdryer ..."

I heard the sound of a cell phone being put somewhere. It sounds like she is in a hurry to pick up the hairdryer.

"So, what's the absence for? It's not like you're sick, right?"

It is understandable to be confused by the seemingly healthy voice.

"I have no problems with my health. In fact, I feel better than usual."

"Then why? If you're absent, you lose the 10 points you have. Even if we don't count your wins, losing these 10 points is not good."

Since the class only had 38 students, I can understand her temptation to complain.

"I wouldn't say 10 points are low and easy to get. But this is the strategy I need."

"...Your strategy?"

Of course, not every time is there this sort of event where one's father's thugs will be mixed in as guests of honor.

I'm going to say something here that I have been silent about until now.

"It will lead to a way to hold Sakayanagi, which is inevitable when aiming to take down class A."

"A way to hold off Sakayanagi-san ...?"

"I told you. I have a way to keep Sakayanagi out of the sports festival."

"I don't know why your absence would lead to Sakayanagi-san's absence, but ..."

Horikita was about to ask why, but she quickly reconsidered.

"There is no way I can understand what you are thinking right now. Besides, even if I try to persuade you, you won't change your mind about taking a day off from the sports festival, right?"

"Oh. I'll call the school first thing tomorrow morning to let them know I'm not feeling well."

"Then I guess I have no choice but to trust you here."

Despite her displeasure, Horikita agreed and gave her approval.

"I was planning to get at least 3 first place as my personal goal, but now I have to add 10 more points."

"Please Take care of it."

After finishing the call, I plugged my cell phone to the charging cord.
Horikita, who was just before going to bed, won't be able to sleep for a while because of her mind doing the recalculation of points.

It was a little harsh, but I'll excuse it as a necessary cost.

And there is one more person to call.

All I have to do now is provide them with the required information, and I'll be good to go.

Chapter 5

The Second Sports Festival

Intro

It was morning as I, Suzune Horikita, stood on the faculty side, watching the students gather on the field.

On the stage that had been set up for the event, Student Council President, Miyabi Nagumo-senpai was giving the opening address.

Guests from outside the school who had been invited looked at the students. There were only a few dozen of them.

Even still, the students were uneasy at the sight of these outsiders.

With a positive attitude, everyone is about to give their best in this sports festival. The student council had told in advance that guests had been invited, but the number of guests was more than I had imagined.

They come from the political and other circles that have played a role in the creation of this school. There were no politicians that I had seen on TV, but I was sure that they were important.

Everyone is dressed up in suits and has a harsh expression on their faces as they watch.

It was as if they were monitoring prisoners. Even in the midst of all of this, Student Council President Nagumo maintained his composure and proceeded to speak with dignity. He was gracefully fulfilling his role as my brother once had in front of students.

After the speech was over and the students applauded, the teachers once again informed everyone of the precautions that would be taken at the sports festival.

Finally, the time arrived.

From this point on, the students were free to do as they pleased.

They may compete in the events they are currently entered in as long as they follow the regulations, or, despite the fact that they must gain points, they may abstain and compete in another event on short notice if they observe their opponents and believe they are at a disadvantage.

It's also worth noting that students who have completed all of the competitions or who do not want to compete are required to cheer in the allocated area.

If you are caught chatting, resting, or Bypassing around in unrelated areas, you will be disqualified from participation and your points will be taken away.

Students who are capable of winning are chosen from each other's classes for the team competition, and the number of students competing is balanced.

The maximum number of students who could participate in a group competition were limited, no matter how good the other students were.

This is a contract to lend a hand in up to three events per person in the team competition, in order not to hold only outstanding talents such as Sudo-kun and Albert Yamada-kun for long periods of time. The above arrangement was also included in the contract to limit the number of events to those that can be entered in advance.

It wouldn't make sense to have a dispute on the day of the sports festival, asking for cooperation in this or that.

We don't have a rule that prevents us from working with other students, such as Ichinose-san's or Sakayanagi-san's class.

If there is a competition that needs teamwork with others to gain points then, we are able to team up according to the situation.

Fortunately, I had already devised a strategy with Katsuragi-kun and had gone through it several times to ensure that it would not be an issue.

Although I am less concerned about the competition's opening because of the high number of competitors in the competitions I have scheduled, I must remember to meet with my classmates every hour to check for any potential problems and make minor adjustments.

The 100-meter dash is the first event in which I'll compete. There is no need to rush because the start time is 15 minutes after, but I wanted to be there early to check on the participants.

"Come on, Horikita! It's time!"

Ibuki-san came sprinting up to me at full speed as soon as the assembly was disbanded and we were free to leave.

She was out of breath and staring at me.

"Are you stupid?"

"Huh! What is this all of a sudden? Are you afraid you're gonna lose? Is that what you mean?"

"No I am not..."

I immediately denied it.

"What is the competition you are going to do now? Catch your breath and then answer."

"Of course, the 100 metre dash. I made a deal with you, and I'm not going to forget it."

"Yes, the 100 meter run. We both entered in the first race. That was the deal. That means we'll be running right after this. If you know we're going to race, why would you use up your energy now? Needless to say Shouldn't you wait for me at the designated place?"

I guess she understood the situation as I told her.

"Anyway, it's time, let's go!"

"Don't worry. You don't have to tell me to go."

Ibuki-san is not an easy opponent. Last year, I won the 100-meter run by a narrow margin. If it were possible, I would avoid competing with her, but I am greatly indebted to her.

If not for Ibuki-san's help, Kushida-san might not have come to school yet. Even then, I can't lose to her. I know she doesn't want that either, so I'm going to compete with her and win fair and square.

Ibuki-san didn't seem to like walking side by side with me, so we separated and headed for the first entry. A pleasant sense of tension is building up.

First up was the battle for the second-year girls only.

Not much had changed from the prior reservations, and the only potential rival was Ibuki-san.

But to think that it's fortunate would be naive. If I have an easy fight, it indicates that my classmates will have to compete against harder opponents in several events.

Part 1

The 100-meter sprint was the first competition I took in the sports festival, and the first competition regarding the deal with Ibuki-san.

I came out on top by a razor-thin margin. Surprisingly, it was almost identical to the previous year. After crossing the finish line Ibuki-san kicked up the dirt and made a lot of excuses, claiming that she had run as fast as she could before the race.

My next competition with her was in the fourth event, the long jump. For the two events in between we went into separate events.

The steeplechase was the second event, in which I placed first, and the team tug-of-war was the third event, in which I placed third..

So far, I've accumulated a total of 21 points, including 5 points at the start, 10 points for the two first places in the individual competition, 3 points for the tug-of-war for third place in the team competition, and 3 points for the participation prize. It was a promising start.

Then, around 10:00 a.m. The second round of the long jump with Ibuki-san began. I

had just finished the competition and the record I set was 5 meters, 79 centimeters.

Not bad. I think I almost set a personal best record in a situation where no mistakes were allowed.

Ibuki-san, who was three places behind me in the lineup, was looking at the record and regulating her breathing.

There were three jumpers left. By jumping into provisional first place, she was much closer to scoring points in this event.

"Suzune! I found you!"

As I was watching the next long jumper, I heard a voice calling me from behind. I turned around to see Sudo-kun running up to me and Onodera-san walking behind him.

They are the pair that I have high hopes for as the point scorers in this sports festival.

"From the looks of it, you seem to be in good shape."

"Sudo-kun has won three in a row in the opening round. And he was completely at ease."

"Well, yeah. But you also competed in two events and won first place in both. Right, Onodera?"

"But I was a little lucky on both."

Onodera, who has no equal when it came to swimming, also showed off her talent in track and field.

"When I first entered the school, I didn't have the impression that you were that fast. Where did it come from?"

I was curious about this because I always see her in P.E. class.

"I don't really like running, and I'm not interested in anything but swimming, so I'm just doing it at random, I guess."

"You said you never do long distances."

"It's super tiring, and I can't run that fast, and that's not a good thing."

They have been practicing together every day since they decided to pair up, and it seems to be a much more natural pairing than I had imagined.

"It's true. Anyways I really wanted to fight with Koenji if possible. He participated in three events and took first place in all of them, and it looks like he's still going to extend his winning streak."

"That's no good. It's not a good idea to crush each other as classmates. You know that, right?"

Both Sudo and Koenji have the potential to take first place.

I understand their desire to compete in the same race, but they have to give priority to their class.

"I know, I'm kidding."

"It'll be fine. I'll keep an eye on him for that, don't worry."

"Yes, that's good. The more I can leave it to Onodera-san, the less I have to worry about it."

"I guess I ain't trustworthy..."

He seemed dissatisfied, but when I looked directly at him, he averted his gaze uncomfortably.

That's a sign that he's reflecting on how he's behaved in the past.

"Sudo-kun and the others are going to participate in a series of pair competitions after this, aren't they? Good luck."

"Oh. I'm going to extend my winning streak."

That's very encouraging. And here the last runner stood at the starting line.

I stopped the conversation and turned my gaze toward Ibuki-san.

"Well, sorry to interrupt. Let's go scout the next competition."

"Let's do that. See you later, Horikita-san."

"Yeah."

I gave them a light sideways glance as my attention was on Ibuki-san, who had started to get ready for her turn.

I fully understand that her ability is close to mine. In other words, it is conceivable that she could surpass the record I set.

I was torn between two emotions: one, I wanted her to fail, and the other, I wanted to compete equally with her at full strength. Despite the fact that she should be under a lot of stress, her motions were graceful and agile.

She leapt, landed on the dirt and fell forward.

With dirt on her face, her eyes immediately turned to the record keeper: 5 meters, 81 centimeters.

A mere two centimeters, but still two centimeters short, and my loss was confirmed.

"I did it!"

Ibuki-san sat in a gut-punching stance, beaming like a child. She made a spectacular leap that barely cleared my own mark..

"See! I won! You lose!"

I understand she was pleased to the point of insistence, but it is, as one might anticipate, a little frustrating.

"I guess you had the advantage of less air resistance after all..."

If there was no difference in our abilities, that is the only possible difference between us...

"Huh? Air resistance?"

"It's nothing."

"Stop messing around and just admit defeat."

"Don't get carried away. Now we both have one win and one loss. We're even again."

Even though I warned her not to get carried away, Ibuki-san had a smile on her face the whole time.

I guess I should regret missing first place on my part, but when she is so pleased with herself, I can't help but feel that I have no choice besides beating her in the next round.

"I win! I win! I won and you lost!"

... I still can't believe it.

Instead, I feel like my mental stress has increased a lot.

Now I have one win and one loss.

I'd like to play the third match right now, but there are other high-scoring team events coming up after this, so I'll have to settle the score with her later.

Part 2

The sports festival began without Ayanokoji-kun.

The gymnasium is equipped with an electronic bulletin board so that students can check the results of their classes at any time.

It was at the start of the festival that Ryuen-kun's class took first place, but it wasn't long after that we, Class B, took first place, and we have maintained that position ever since.

Ichinose-san's Class C is in third place, and Sakayanagi-san's Class A is in fourth place, an ideal ranking.

I hope things will continue to go on like this without any trouble until the end of the event. However, since there was still some time before the next competition, I moved to the cheering section to pass some time.

"I just wanted to congratulate you for your hardwork, Horikita-senpai!"

Yagami-kun, a first-year Class B student, approached me.

"It seems that Yagami-kun's class is also fighting quite well. You are now in second place by a narrow margin."

"It's more surprising that my senpai is in first place. I can't believe you started in Class D last year."

Is it meant to be a compliment? Or is there sarcasm mixed in?"

"No way. I genuinely respect you. But not as much as Student Council President Nagumo."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that at this very moment Student Council President Nagumo broke through the finishing line tape.

"The third-year senpais were talking earlier, and they said this is his fifth consecutive first place finish."

As the girls cheered, the guests of honor turned their attention to the student council president. Student Council President Nagumo, on the other hand, walked away from the scene with a blank expression on his face, telling the girls who called out to him that he would like to be alone and walked away.

"I expected him to say something, but he doesn't seem pleased."

"Even if he wins or loses, it's not as if this competition matters to him in the slightest. His graduation from Class A is already secured. So, I don't think he would be enthusiastic about it."

Certainly, the results of the sports festival are irrelevant to the student council president, who is in a strong position in terms of rankings; he is aiming for first place because he doesn't want to look bad in front of present students and visitors, I imagine.

"I'm going to have a little talk with the president."

"I see. I have another competition, so I'll leave you now, senpai."

After exchanging a few words with Yagami-kun, I decided to approach the student council president. Beside him, another third-year girl called out to him.

She is Kiryuin-senpai, a third year Class B student. She is someone I have heard rumors about from time to time in my interactions with third-year students. I know that she is an exceptional student on the OAA.

Since I couldn't interrupt the conversation, I chose to stay put and wait.

"Congratulations on your fifth straight win, Nagumo."

"What do you want?"

"You don't have to be so rude. I'm just concerned that you don't look happy with your success. It seems there were more than one or two people giving you a cheer."

"I'm not really in the mood for jokes. How can you call winning a game like that a success?"

"You could have gathered the weak and forced them to participate in order for yourself to get first place, but I don't think the members of the race just now were a group like that."

Kiryuin-senpai pointed out that he wasn't trying to cut corners.

"I heard a rumor that Ayanokoji is absent, is that the reason for the gloomy look on your face?"

Ayanokoji-kun. Once again, his name keeps popping up in places like this.

Without looking back at Kiryuin-senpai, the student council president let out a soft sigh...



"I thought that guy would finally be able to give me a challenge. I guess I was wrong."

"You poor thing. I'll be your opponent, then, how about it?"

At such provocative words, student council president Nagumo gave a sideways glance at Kiryuin-senpai, the first time he looked over. However, when he saw her fearless smile, he looked away once more.

"That's a cheap lie. Even if I wanted to, I can't imagine you'd ever compete with me."

"Hmph. I guess I've been found out. Haven't I?"

Hunching her shoulders, Kiryuin-senpai, who had come up to Student Council President Nagumo's side, says so.

"One more event and I have fulfilled my minimum obligation. After that, I plan to relax and watch the games."

"I'm sure you will."

"You should no longer be concerned with juniors. At least you've dominated your grade level and secured Class A. You're the student council president. That's enough. I suggest you graduate quietly."

As if to offer some advice, Kiryuin-senpai told him that.

"You're advising me? What's gotten into you? I've talked to you more in the past six months than I did before Ayanokoji got involved."

"Maybe so."

"Don't worry, Kiryuin. I don't need you to tell me that I should give up on playing with Ayanokoji. He chose not to fight me. There's no point in going after him too hard."

"If he loses the direct confrontation with the student council president, Ayanokoji will not be able to remain as composed as he has been in the past. Take into account his desire to run away. He has a cute side to him."

Fighting against the student council president? Ayanokoji-kun?

Perhaps that's why he was called to the student council room the other day, to talk about this?

It also corresponds to the message Nagumo-senpai entrusted me with.

Kiryuin-senpai lightly glanced at me, but walked away without saying anything.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting, Suzune. What do you want from me?"

"Ah, well, I was going to ask you the same thing as Kiryuin-senpai. I saw student council president Nagumo-senpai take first place, but you didn't look happy at all. Also... you seem to have promised Ayanokoji-kun that you would compete with him in the sports festival?"

"Clearly, it didn't work out in the end. He seems to be absent. That's the end of it."

Ayanokoji-kun told me that his absence was due to a plan involving Sakayanagi-san, rather than illness. That fact appears to be unknown to Student Council President Nagumo, and it would be best not to let him know.

"When it's time for lunch break, come hang out with me for a bit."

I couldn't refuse the request and agreed to do so.

A short time later, during the lunch break, I was looking at the lunches provided on the grounds.

I could choose what I wanted from this bunch of meals.

Sandwiches and other light meals. The lineup was diverse, ranging from a variety of dishes such as pork cutlet served on top of a bowl of rice to more stamina-and strength-enhancing dishes.

Sandwiches and other light meals are available. The menu was wide, with items ranging from Katsudon to more stamina and strength-boosting options.

[T/L Note : Katsudon is pork cutlet served on top of a bowl of rice.]

I'm both impressed and appalled at how prepared and thorough this school is. Moreover, the prerequisite is that the food must be consumed, and you can take more than one.

Most of the students just picked one, but I observed that there were some boys who took more than one. I saw a large student who happily carried three or four of them on his chest.

I've seen this student before in the first grade, but...if he ate all of that and was ready to compete this afternoon, he either still underestimated this school or he's confident in himself.

"Thanks for waiting."

I was just reaching for a light meal when I was approached by the student council president.

"No problem, senpai. However, I have a meeting, so if you could make this quick, that would be

great."

"Ah. Well then, I want to know something about Ayanokoji. I heard he got sick, but how did he suddenly get sick?"

Although he didn't point it out earlier, apparently he is suspicious of Ayanokoji-kun.

"I only received a notice in the morning apologizing for his absence, because an absent student loses 10 points. If he is sick, I can't force him to show up."

I am the only one who knows he was absent for another reason. Naturally, I need to cover that.

"I hope he's really sick."

"What does that mean?"

I don't think I gave it away from my attitude. I wonder if the student council president has another reason to think otherwise.

"You heard what Kiryuin said. Maybe he didn't want to be humiliated and decided to stay indoors."

"I suppose it's always a possibility."

I gave a safe response so as not to provoke him.

"Right well... I guess that'll end up costing your grade."

"What... Do you mean by that?"

"Well, the only way to make up for his absence, is to take it out on someone else, right?"

He didn't directly answer my question, but mumbled to himself.

The student council president then raised his hand lightly to let me know he's leaving and walked away without picking up his lunch.

"Take it out on our year? What does he mean by cost...? I wonder what it meant..."

It seems like Ayanokoji's reputation is really all over the place. I, too, was impressed with him again today at the sports festival.

When he told me that he would be absent, I was nervous about what would happen, but as it turned out, Sakayanagi-san was also absent.

Without a doubt, Ayanokoji did something to hold off Sakayanagi-san. And the results are

evident in the current Class A scores and rankings.

If suddenly the commander is unable to appear on the scene, it is not surprising that they cannot work well together.

It's a pity, but this is a serious game.

I'll make sure I rack up wins whenever I can.

Part 3

After a midday break, The sports festival resumed in the second half of the day.

More than half of the students had already completed the minimum required five competitions, with those who showed confidence in their athletic talents progressing to the sixth and seventh competitions.

Without their captain, the Class A students like Matoba and Shimizu were struggling against other classes because of leaders like Horikita and Ichinose, who were assessing the contests' participants and members minute by minute.

"Next is doubles table tennis in the gymnasium. Satonaka reported earlier that there were no strong rivals. There are two more seats available. There is a good chance we can win it."

"We have to keep winning games and at least try not to finish in the bottom of the standings."

Sakayanagi's non-participation discouraged many of the students of the second year Class A, but on the other hand, there were many who were motivated by it.

They abandoned the penalty shootout competition they had planned to participate in and rapidly began moving after learning that the tennis doubles tournament, which was about to close in 10 minutes, was running low with talented students.

Ishizaki, who was walking in the opposite direction as the two students, had a slightly downcast expression on his face and was not looking forward.

Shimizu moved to the right to avoid the approaching Ishizaki, but Ishizaki also moved to the left at about the same time.

Shimizu tried to get away from him as quickly as possible, but he was unable to do so, and their shoulders bumped. The collision was twice as immense as expected and could not have happened by chance.

Shimizu tried to raise his voice when he realised he had been hit forcibly, but....

"Hey! What the hell are you doing?!"

Before he could react, Ishizaki yelled and walked up towards him.

"You were the one walking forward, and I could have been hurt!"

Shimizu from Class A and Ishizaki from Class D glared at each other.

"You're the one who wasn't looking ahead!"

"Huh? What... are you pretending to be the victim? So, you hit me on purpose?"

"What, no? You bumped into me on purpose, no matter how you look at it. Right?"

Shimizu calls for help and asks Matoba to cover him.

"Ah. You weren't looking straight ahead."

"I wasn't looking away. You two are making accusations against me. That's dirty."

"Dirty? It's clearly your fault."

"Huh? Me? When You guys were too busy talking to watch me."

The blame-shifting continues, and time passes without any sign of Ishizaki's attempt to apologize. Matoba, convinced that they were right, told Shimizu to calm down.

"Let's Leave him alone."

"I'm not convinced."

"I know how you feel. I feel the same too, but we have priorities right now."

"... That's right."

He was sensitive to Shimizu's feelings, but he also reminded him not to forget that he had to participate in the competition and win.

Shimizu nodded, glared at Ishizaki, and walked away.

"You better be careful next time."

"Ouch..."

"What?"

As he was about to walk past, Ishizaki suddenly held his left shoulder and mumbled, "I

was caught up in the moment, I didn't notice... I think I might have been hurt by that."

The two couldn't grasp what he was saying for a little while, but they quickly realised what he was saying. They realised Ishizaki had prepared a simple trap for them.

The two looked at each other and laughed. However, the situation takes a sudden turn immediately after that.

"You're making a ruckus? What's the matter, Ishizaki?"

"Ryuen-san! Please listen to me! They are messing with me!"

Ryuen appeared just as things were starting to get tense.

"So Ryuen is involved? What a troublesome guy. I didn't expect him to use such obvious tricks."

"What are you even talking about? I only came here because I heard the stupid commotion"

"You've got to be joking, right? You know you two have a record."

"A record? Certainly we may have a record. So, what?"

"You know what I mean."

"But you know what? Even if we do have a record, it is completely irrelevant to whether we did it this time or not. If an innocent little person was hurt by Class A's tricks then it will be a big problem right?"

"What with the 'innocent little person'? Stop with the act. You're the one who talked him into it, aren't you? I'm calling the sensei...!"

"Kuku. Of course, you call the teachers when you're in trouble. That's pretty funny considering we're the victims here. I'll explain it thoroughly, so don't worry. Right, Ishizaki?"

"Right. I'm the victim."

"What Victims? You clearly aren't even taking the sports festival seriously, so does it even matter to you? Go call sensei."

Matoba decides that it is unavoidable and tells Shimizu to call sensei, and sends him running somewhere.

Shimizu, who had gone to call the teacher, returned shortly after with a harsh expression on his face.

"What's wrong? Where's Sensei?"

"No, that's..."

Shimizu didn't bring back a teacher but Hashimoto Masayoshi, who was in the same class.

"I saw Shimizu running all panicked so I asked him about it. If he called the teacher, the commotion would get bigger. If you decide to turn it into a situation, you might not be able to participate in the competition."

"But—"

"I know. Don't forget that's what Ryuen wants, to make a big commotion. Don't play into his hands."

Instructing him to relax, Hashimoto placed his hand on Shimizu's shoulder.

"I'll talk to him for now."

"I understand. Deal with him fast please."

Matoba, who had no choice but to leave the situation to Hashimoto, watches from a short distance away.

"Please keep it civil, Ryuen."

Hashimoto, who heard the story, approaches with calm steps amid the commotion.

"Ah? It was them who initiated it. We only bought the fight that was sold to us."

"Sure. But if you don't back off, we'll both be in trouble. We're the breadwinners of the sports festival, and it's still holding back the main force. I'm sorry to say this, but Ishizaki can only achieve a certain level of results, right?"

No matter how you look at it, it is clear that it benefited the Ryuen side.

Hashimoto took advantage of this point to hold back Ryuen so that he could end the debate.

"Don't be arrogant. Ishizaki has been working hard for this day. To show that he has the potential to compete on equal terms with the breadwinners you speak of. Isn't that right?"

"Lies."

Hashimoto, who had seen Ishizaki playing around on a regular basis many times, could not help but be disgusted.

"Damn. You always push things to the edge."

Hashimoto knew that he could not win in a proper debate, but he couldn't resist scratching his head.

"However, this clarifies the situation. Isn't it true that you really want to crush us in this sports festival, and that's why the elite first-years are sticking around like freaks?"

He noticed early on that the physically gifted first-year students were following the talented second-year Class A students around as they competed in the competition. However, there was no way to stop the entries once they were noticed, and so far they have only achieved less than expected.

"Because of the princess' absence on the day of the competition, we're pretty desperate to avoid the bottom of the standings. If we make an enemy of you too, we won't stand a chance. Let's just call this *Itamiwake*."

[T/L Note - *Itamiwake* (痛み分け) is a Sumo term which refers to a match declared Draw due to injury, or here damage to both sides.]

"*Itamiwake*?"

Ryuen's attitude, which had been relatively friendly until now, changed drastically, and his smile disappeared.

"I don't know what's going on in Class A. We are in D class. I'm doing everything I can to climb up from the bottom. If you think you can simply end it after saying that, you're mistaken."

Hashimoto's expression, which had been thinly veiled in a smile, froze for a moment as Ryuen became serious.

"Then what should I do? Am I supposed to apologize unilaterally to you?"

"That's exactly what I'm referring to. I am not attempting to get money from you. All I want is an honest apology. Ishizaki, right?"

"Sure. The pain in my arm has subsided a bit, so that's good enough for me."

What hurts more than anything is the loss of more time.

After confirming that no special money or other demands would be made, Hashimoto decided to accept the proposal.

"Give me some time to persuade Shimizu."

"Hurry up. We have another competition coming up."

Since the argument began, more than five minutes have gone. It's almost too late to apologise and make it to the gymnasium on time.

"You heard me. I know you're not convinced, but you should apologize honestly here."

"Don't be silly. You said you would take care of it, so I kept my mouth shut and listened. I'm not going to go along with it."

"So it's not a big deal if we don't win? You might be able to save your pride by being stubborn and standing up for yourself in this situation. Will this, however, persuade you if we lose by five or ten points?"

"Well, that's..."

"What matters now is that the class wins. Right? You stepped into some shit, so apologize and get over it."

One word of apology and you can head right back to the competition.

"Damn! Why should I..."

Shimizu, who showed great irritation, finally cooled down and reluctantly agreed and stepped forward to apologize to Ishizaki.

"Wait, Shimizu. Matoba is just as guilty as you. Claiming I was looking away and all that."

"Matoba..."

"Okay..."

The two students have no choice but to stand next to one other and bow slightly to Ishizaki.

"It was our fault. We're sorry... Is this okay?"

They quickly raised their lowered heads and were about to leave, but Ishizaki quickly stopped them.

"Ryuen-san, are you seeing this? I don't really see any apology from these two?"

"It's like they're faking it. I don't feel like he's received a full apology. You don't have enough sincerity."

"Are you insane, Ryuen? I won't back down any further."

Hashimoto had already attempted to negotiate for Shimizu's sake, but he had also concluded that this was as far as he could go at this point.

Hashimoto hurried over to the teacher, deciding that there was no other option except for the teacher to intervene.

After about a Minute, he returned with the teacher.

"What in the world is the matter here?"

"Actually..."

"I accept your apology."

Hashimoto was about to tell the teacher what happened, but just before he did, Ishizaki accepted the apology.

"Please accept my apologies, Ryuen-san. You stood up for me, but I wasn't mature enough to admit it was just a minor annoyance. So, because these two just apologised to me, I believe I'll make it up to you later. Is that all right?"

"If you're okay with that, it's none of my business."

As soon as the teacher had arrived, Ryuen and Ishizaki cut the conversations short.

Hashimoto, who had brought the teacher along because he knew Ryuen could not turn his back on the teacher, was also confused.

The teacher, seeing the situation, came to a conclusion.

"You two bumped into Ishizaki and apologized. And he accepted it. Is that correct?" "That's—"

Shimizu tries to speak up as the problem seems to have been solved, but Hashimoto stops him.

"Yes. That's it.."

"Good then. Avoid further trouble during the festival, okay?"

Hashimoto pushes the two, who seem to be about to explode in anger, away from the place.

"Go quickly while the teacher is watching."

They turned around several times to glare at Ishizaki and Ryuen, but eventually they blended in with the crowd walking towards the gymnasium.

Ryuen and the others also dispersed at the same time.

When no one was left around Hashimoto, he lamented deeply.

"You did this in front of all these people... I don't want to make enemies with you at all."

Hashimoto was unsettled, but he said this and laughed alone in joy.

Part 4

3:00 p.m.

With less than an hour left, the sports festival is finally coming to a close.

We are still in first place going into the last phase of the competition, with only 17 points separating us from second-year Class D, who are closing in on us while in second place.

The team's perseverance was beyond our expectations, and we had to assume that Ryuen-kun's strategy was working.

Despite this, there was no conflict among us second-year students, and we were working well as an alliance.

However, there's a good probability of a disorder in rankings if we don't score more points in the final hour. I stood in the gymnasium's corner, staring at the remaining competitions, their regulations, and schedules.

Then Ibuki-san, not even bothering to hide her annoyance, approached me.

"Let's play another match!"

"That's strange to say. I won by two wins and one loss, didn't I?"

"I didn't participate!"

"I don't know about that. It's your fault for not showing up at the exact time, isn't it?"

"I...! I just got the time wrong..."

It was the third round of our competition, and it closed for entries at 1:20 p.m.

Ibuki-san was unable to compete since she did not arrive in time to submit her entry. Of course, I wasn't left out, and despite missing out on first place, I came in second and earned three points..

"I know you're not happy about it, but in the real world, that's called losing."

"One win, one loss! It's not settled yet!"

She keeps fussing in my ear, and she has no intention of stopping.

"I participated in a total of nine competitions. One more event is available..."

"That's it! Tell me what you're participating in."

"If you want to ask me to compete, you'll have to behave accordingly.."

"Ugh!"

"Do you want me to compete or not?"

"Oh, please... Please... fight with me... while you're playing!"

Ibuki-san asks, trembling with anger as if she is about to spit out flames from her mouth.

"Happy now?"

"Yes, That makes me feel a little better."

The situation is changing by the minute and the competition slots are filling up. Should I go with the original plan or aim for an even higher score?

"Now, answer me, what are you going to participate in?"

"Could you please be quiet for a minute?"

"I can't!"

Ibuki-san yells as she provocatively lifts up a certain finger in my face.

I don't want to deal with her right now, but if I ignore her, she will only get louder.

"I was planning on joining the shuttle run after this."

"Is the shuttle run the one where you go back and forth endlessly until you drop out?"

"Yes, that's right. It's also called a round-trip endurance run."

"I remember doing this in middle school. It's good for the final battle."

She nodded her head in satisfaction and tried to run out to the entry.

"Why aren't you coming?"

"If you want to join, go ahead."

"No, you're in it too, right? It doesn't make sense if we're not in the same group."

"I'm just considering it. I haven't finalized it yet."

"What?"

"To be honest, right now the last competition I want to compete in is volleyball."

"Volleyball? Volleyball has six participants, right? From the looks of it there's no way you're going to get six people together now."

One of the competitions announced on the day of the event, a separate competition for men and women with participation from all grades.

We decided to not participate in the event in our class, judging that the need for six competent members would be troublesome, but the teams participating in the current volleyball tournament seemed unexpectedly weak, as if the other classes were thinking the same thing.

"There are still three spots available with 10 minutes left to enter. From what I've observed, the teams competing don't appear to have many formidable opponents. It will be worthwhile to forego the shuttle run if we win this competition. A lot hinges on the ability of the excellent students in a team challenge where teams must adapt. We'll have a better chance of winning if we can acquire one or two additional students who are confident in their abilities."

"So what about the thing I desperately asked for?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to give up."

Ibuki-san was astonished. I thought she was going to get angry again, but it turned into disappointment and resignation.

It all started with her own misunderstanding of the entry time.

"All right. Then I guess the game is over here..."

"Why don't you join the volleyball competition?"

"I will need five people to fight you. There is no way I can gather them. I'll pass."

"You don't have any friends"

"Neither do you."

"I think I at least have classmates who are willing to help if I call on them."

"I don't know. I was hoping to settle it, but I'll save it for another time."

I won for the record, but that's OK.

"Are you going to participate in the shuttle run then?"

"All I'm interested in is settling this with you. I'm not going to go out of my way to contribute to Ryuen."

"That's convenient. The less points you score, the closer our class is to winning."

I think it would be better to let this go on without provoking her. That's what I thought, but for some reason, Ibuki-san didn't want to leave.

"Is there anything else?"

"If you don't have enough people for volleyball, aren't you going to join the shuttle run?"

The deadline for volleyball is 2:20.

The shuttle run deadline is 2:25.

Ibuki-san noticed the part I didn't mention.

"Looks like you noticed something I didn't mention. I didn't realize you had a brain to use."

"Shut up. I'm going to stick with you for a while longer."

The worst-case scenario is that if volleyball does not have enough people, Ibuki-san and I will have to settle for a shuttle run.

Well, that might not be so bad. I look to the girls in my class in the cheering section for available talent.

However, there was no way I could find such convenient students right away, and time passed by without much thought.

I noticed that Ibuki-san, who was sitting beside me, was yawning.

Give up already and just compete in the shuttle run. That's what her face was saying as she looked back at me.

"Ah~ Isn't that Horikita-senpai and Ibuki-senpai? I want to congratulate you both for your hard work, senpais!"

As we waited for a possible member to invite, first-year student Ichika Amasawa called out to us.

At that moment, Ibuki-san, who was sitting down, stood up and glared at her.

"Oh, no. You look kind of scary. — Could it be girl's day or something?"

Amasawa-san teases. But half the words didn't seem to reach Ibuki-san.

"If you can still participate in events, why don't we compete?"

"I haven't played much today. We don't have a lot of opportunities to play when we're in different grades, so it's no use. I think it's better not to play. You'll lose anyways, senpai."

"You should be thankful you didn't get paired with me."

"You're still so stubborn, aren't you? By the way, what are you two doing here? If you're not going to participate in the competition, you might as well be cheering us on."

"How about you shut up and join the shuttle run? Then we can compete."

"Oh, were you planning to participate in the shuttle run? I'm-"

"I finally found you."

As we were talking, Kushida-san showed up. I wondered if she wanted something from me, but she didn't even look at me, just at Amasawa-san.

"I thought someone was following me, but it was Kushida-senpai, wasn't it? What do you need? If it's okay with you and Horikita-senpai, I'll listen to what you have to say."

"Horikita-san? What are you..."

It seemed that she was so focused on Amasawa-san that she was unaware of our presence.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Kushida-senpai. It looks like my friends are all there, so I should get going."

In the direction she was pointing, I could see Nanase-san, another first year student, and four unfamiliar girls.

"I came to the gymnasium to join the volleyball thingy. It's my first experience with volleyball~"

Apparently, Amasawa-san plans to participate in the volleyball tournament.

I guess the first-year students have moved on after all, seeing the situation of the participating teams, which are short-handed.

"Then I'll See you later. Good luck with the shuttle run~"

After coming over on her own accord and talking as much as she wished, Amasawa-san joined up with the group.

"So she's joining the volleyball competition."

Ibuki-san said, glaring at her back.

"Seems so."

"Then I'll join too. You wouldn't be able to get five members without me anyways."

"What?"

"I said I'm going to be there. I hate the idea to work with you, but it's a chance for me to beat that cocky little freshman."

If Ibuki-san is willing to help us, she's a perfect asset to the force.

"Don't decide on your own. I haven't said I'll take you on the team yet."

"Huh? You haven't even gotten a single student so far. What choice do you have?"

"Points are distributed evenly in team competitions. Isn't it natural to prefer to fill in the gaps with students from your own class over students from other classes?"

Even if I had scored more points, Ibuki-san was in the second place class.

In other words, the point difference would not open up at all.

"I don't know anything about that. I'm fine as long as I can see Amasawa's frustrated face."

"Anyway, it depends on the other members. Our class must make up a high percentage of the total."

"Then why don't you let me join you?"

Kushida-san, who had been watching Amasawa-san's back as well, utters this without changing her gaze.

"What are you trying to do, Kushida-san? I don't think you've changed your mind and are now cooperating with us."

I spoke my mind frankly, and Kushida-san didn't deny it. However, it bothered me that her eyes were strongly directed toward Amasawa-san, instead of me while talking.

"Me and this first year, Amasawa, have something to settle.."

"With Amasawa-san...?"

"You too?"

Me and Ibuki-san both said at the same time.

"I'm not going to tell you why, but I'd be happy to lend you a hand in returning the favour."

"I'm fine with that. You're a great classmate and a great asset."

It is often said that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

And just like that we started to gather a team.

"But she will definitely be a formidable opponent."

"Surely."

Ibuki-san had already started warming up and getting into the swing of things.

Amasawa-san watched her from afar and giggled. Ibuki-san and I experienced firsthand how amazing Amasawa-san was, but I don't know the details of the other students.

I remember that Nanase-san's physical ability was relatively high, but I have no impression of those who came after her.

I'm sure I can remember the names of the students who got close to A's, on the OAA, so I'm sure they were just below a B at the highest estimate.

More problematic is that we are still three students short. It's a bit of a catch to analyze our opponents when we haven't even met the requirements for participation.

"What are the requirements for the remaining three? You don't want them to be from Ryuen-kun's class, right?"

Kushida asked about the selection of people.

"Yes, that's right. Of course, it's better to have our own classmates as much as possible. But the priority is the match and the strength of the team."

"Okay. Then wait a minute."

With that, Kushida-san left our side and started to walk away.

"Okay, but what is she going to do? We can't find help easily."

Ibuki-san and I followed her as she went to Rokaku-san, who is in Class A. After talking with her for a while, the four of us went on to meet Fukuyama-san, who was also in the same class. Finally, we went to the gymnasium to see the students who were cheering for the other competitors.

"That girl over there is Himeno-san from Ichinose-san's class right?"

It took a few dozen seconds for the four of us to talk, there were two from Class A and one from Class C.

Then Kushida-san returned with Himeno-san.

"She's going to join us in volleyball. Himeno-san isn't a good volleyball player, but she agreed to join the five of us. Just leave the competition to us, and we'll take care of it, okay?"

Kushida-san speaks in a kind tone to Himeno-san. She's seemingly turned on her charm mode once again.

I can't hide my surprise that the two Class A students were so open to lend us a hand.

"We're also in a hurry because we're about to lose, and even if we don't win at worst, we want to leave a record that we contributed."

The two look at each other and nod. They want credit because they are in Class A, which is largely in last place.

While seeing through that psychology, Kushida-san instantly recognized them as capable students. Even though I could not remember their specific grades at OAA, as a friend of Fukuyama-san and Rokaku-san, she had a firm grasp of how physically capable they were.

"This is something you will never be able to do, Ibuki-san."

"Shut up. You couldn't find anyone either."

"There were still five or six students in the gymnasium that I could talk to, but —— I think this is probably the best group we can make right now."

At any rate, the six members of the volleyball team, who had been in doubt about their ability to participate, were all here.

The difference in the number of members from Ryuen's class is only one person. Winning the match and earning 10 points, on the other hand, would be significantly more satisfying than competing in the shuttle run and earning only 2 or 3 points.

The fact that even if we lose, the gap between us and them will never close is also an advantage for us.

The top two players consisted of me and Ibuki-san plus Kushida-san and the other students who were available, such as Rokkaku-san, and Fukuyama-san.

Although there was a slight loss in skill due to the addition of Himeno-san, the strength of the team was more than enough to make up for the loss.

We won our first match with ease, and then started watching the match of Amasawa's team.

Nanase had the initiative in the game. With her movements, she dominated both offense and defense, and overpowered her opponents and teammates alike.

"Nanase was no-mark, but isn't she much better than we thought?"

"Well, she isn't actually as good as I had feared. I thought she was kidding when she said she never played before, but..."

She might be holding herself back on purpose, but it didn't look like that at all. Of course, this was still better than nothing at all, but she shouldn't be that much of a threat.

Suddenly, Ibuki also started to get serious.

In just one match that didn't even cross ten minutes, Amasawa had shown great improvement.

It couldn't be explained just with her physical strength; she also had good reactions and game-sense.

As Amasawa started showing glimpses of what she could really do, Nanase decided the game with a spike.

"We're facing them the match after the next one. They might get even better by then."

"Even if they do, they have only a few matches under their belts; they have no experience. We can win."

Too much optimism is a dangerous thing, but Amasawa doesn't even have to actually touch the ball, Nanase can carry the entire team to victory.

We won all our matches one by one, and faced our decisive match when the time passed 3:40.

In sports, the rules for unofficial and an actual match are very different, Volleyball is no exception.

Servers must be rotated, and to win the match, you have to get ahead by 10 points, or have more points after ten minutes.

If you still have the same score after the ten minutes are up, the team that scored last would take a serve, and the match would continue until one of the teams got ahead.

"It's about time I see your losing face."

"Is winning in volleyball really all you care about in life, Ibuki-senpai?"

"First, I'll beat you in volleyball. Then, I'll beat you in a fight."

"A-ha-ha-ha. If that's how you wanna go, sure."

Amasawa didn't really care about what Ibuki was saying, she just messed around a bit while waiting for the match to start.

Amasawa being here was a bit ominous, but Nanase was more dangerous.

"I'll be the attacker, just like the last match. I'm gonna smash everything into the court facing me."

Ibuki was fired up and made her challenge.

Her control isn't great, but it's true that her spikes can be dangerous. As the decisive match began, Ibuki scored a point with a serve.

Nanase scored back with a spike right away.

I thought it might go on like this for a while, but somehow we managed to get a 4 to 2 lead on them.

Nanase was about on the same level as Ibuki and me, but our side was a bit

better. At the middle of the round, with five minutes left, the situation changed. Ibuki

took three steps back, dashed forward, jumped and hit a spike.

The same spike that had won so many winning points until now, but Amasawa suddenly appeared on the other side of the net and blocked it.

No, she actually scored a point after the block. The ball dropped down onto our side of the court, and we lost a point to a year 1 team.

"That's so unfortunate, huh, Ibuki-senpai? Nanase-chan, what was that kind of play called again?"

"It's called a dash attack, I believe. I don't know much about it, but..."

"Well, we already know everything about Ibuki-senpai's attacks, so we're not gonna let anything else through from now on!"

"You! I'll definitely score next time!"

"Calm down. Next time, pass the ball to me."

The score was 5 to 3. Our serve.

I hope we can end it now, but...

If it's an out, the opponent gets a point, so I have to be careful.

If I make it too simple, they'll return it.

We have to keep our defenses strong. I passed the ball to Ibuki.

"This time, for sure!"

She changed her rhythm and took two steps this time, and launched the best spike of this match.

The two year 1 students couldn't even touch the ball. It was coming down onto the ground, but Amasawa was there to block it.

She received it in beautiful fashion, as if she knew exactly where it would go, and the ball went flying into the air.

With her golden hair flowing through the air, Nanase leaped upwards, and hit a spike towards Himeno's direction.

As Himeno was frozen still, Kushida forcefully stepped in front of her and tried to receive it, but failed to control the ball's momentum.

The final match with the year 1 students who crawled their way up from the bottom was now at a tie.

6 to 6. About two minutes left. With this pace, it just might end with a time

over.

"I'll take the next one too!"

After being blocked two times by Amasawa, Ibuki swore to herself that this time for sure, she would score.

I signaled my teammate, and the game started up again.

As the give and take starts, First years created an opportunity for Amasawa to finally hit a spike.

"You think I'll let you do that!?"

Ibuki leaped for a block, but Nanase suddenly appeared behind

Amasawa.

"Out of luck again, huh?"

Amasawa laughed, she was faking.

They planned for Nanase to hit the spike from the start.

Ibuki tried to reach out, but she couldn't touch the ball.

Right as it was about to hit the floor, Kushida leaped to the ground and received it, then passed the ball.

"Ibuki!"

All eyes were on Ibuki, and the year 1s hurriedly took defensive positions.

Amasawa was waiting for an attack from Ibuki-san with a relaxed expression.

"..—The hell!?"

Even after trying so hard, the course of the match still didn't change.

Ibuki wanted to keep trying, but she swallowed her pride and tossed the ball. I took in

Ibuki's rage, and released the strength that I had saved up in my body until now.



I hit a spike towards Nanase who was very tired; she couldn't control the ball, and it went out of bounds.

If she wasn't so tired, she might have handled it well.

Now, it was 7 to 6. Not much time left, and we have a 1-point lead.

The match would be over in one minute no matter what. Our turn to serve.

"Then, I'll show them what I can really do."

Amasawa said so, as if she was not being serious until now. Nanase blocked Ibuki's serve with ease.

The ball lost its momentum, and slowly started flying straight up. All eyes were on the ball.

"My target is..!"

As if she was doing so on purpose, the ball slowly fell towards me. My reaction was too slow, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't reach the ball. I heard the sound of it hitting something.

"Out!"

It was lucky that I wasn't fast enough to reach the ball; it was just halfway over the court line.

"Sorry, Nanase. I missed. It's hard to control the ball well, isn't it?"

"That was close... However, we really can't take her lightly."

The whistle blew, and Nanase was in shock, Amasawa, who was about to hit the ball towards us, landed on the floor without swinging her hand down.

"Time over. It was just getting interesting, but..."

Amasawa had no regrets, she was just happy that she got to play volleyball.

I talked with Nanase a bit, and left the court.

Even though they lost, they would still get points for being second place.

Of course, as the first place, we would get the most points.

"I feel a bit strange... I almost feel like we didn't actually win, or something."

"It was pretty close there for a while. I can't help but think about what would have happened if they hadn't ran out of time."

We should have relaxed after winning, but we couldn't help but be worried. Even still, this was a huge win, and a fine match to close out our sports festival.

When I came to myself, I started hearing the crowd clapping.

Part 6

The sports festival was slowly coming to its final parts. The gymnasium was very lively as the finals of team competitions were beginning here and there.

"The match is starting soon, Sudou. Are you prepared?"

Sudou and Onodera, who participated in many pairs competitions, were now advancing to the finals in mixed gender doubles tennis.

"Yeah..."

After Sudou's not so enthusiastic answer, Onodera continued.

"Still, don't you think we make a great combination? 4 matches and 4 wins so far in the pairs competitions. I bet everyone from our class is surprised, too."

The pair won their matches both against the same year students, and against year 3 students as well, and now they were headed for their fifth victory in a row.

In addition, including individual battles, Sudou had won 9 matches. He was headed for his 10th win.

Onodera, on the other hand, was not first place in all 9 matches like him, but still kept high ranking.

"You've been staring at that year 1 student, what's going on?"

"Huh?"

"It was Housen... Right? He looks too big for a year one, and seems pretty strong. However, I don't think that's what you're concerned about. What's going on?"

"Nothing. Don't worry about it."

The Housen pair won their match with ease, and their opponent for the next match was decided.

The two absentmindedly looked towards Housen while talking, but Housen and Onodera's eyes suddenly met.

Until now, they were comfortable enough, but they were clearly starting to get

worried. They were together not just today, but most of the time in this sports festival.

They went to school together in the morning, practiced together, and ate together.

So, Onodera knew how to notice the changes in Sudou's expressions. Even he had his weaknesses.

He was rough, and quick to anger, and easy to read. Because of these faults, there were times when Onodera was held back.

"The finals are about to start. Please get prepared."

As they were sitting down and resting, one of the staff made the announcement.

"Let's quickly get this win, then!"

Sudou and Onodera pretended to be relaxed.

They were worried about Housen, but they didn't think it would be that much trouble.

"Okay!"

Sudou and Onodera took their rackets and got ready.

Their classmates also started coming into the gymnasium to support them, and even quite a few adults seemed to be interested in the final.

"Things are getting busy here, huh?"

"Yeah, it almost feels like a real tournament."

"This feeling of tension is pleasant and uplifting."

The two knew that they were a strong pair, so they weren't worried about losing. But...

"I never thought my finals would be with you, Sudou."

"Housen!"

When Housen approached the net and starting talking to Sudou, the atmosphere quickly changed.

"So you think you can win against me if it's tennis? It's gonna be fun destroying you."

The time came and the doubles match started.

4 points per match, best of 3.

Serves would be by the side that lost a point, and there would be one server per team.

The curtains opened with Housen's crazed attack.

The massive and strong Housen served a ball that was too fast to be caught, and it easily hit the floor of the court.

On the other hand, Sudou's serve was lacking in power, and the score quickly became 3 (40) – 0 (Love).

Onodera was rightfully worried. Housen's attacks were terrifying.

"What's going on, Sudou? This is too damn easy!"

"Damn it!"

Sudou held the racket tight and wanted to smash it into the ground.

"Stop it, Sudou!"

"Tsch!"

"You need to calm down, or we're gonna lose!"

"Bu-but!"

Sudou was in a state of utter stress.

Seeing this from the other side of the net, Housen was laughing.

"I'm not one to show off either, but you're playing much worse than before."

Sudou was stressed and was moving very roughly.

"I can't let you take the serve."

Onodera took the ball, and signed Sudou to go on defense.

She shot with a beautiful line, as if she wasn't unexperienced in tennis, but Housen quickly approached the ball and beautifully returned it, as if the racket was a part of his hand.

Sudou reached out with his racket, but the ball hit the racket's shaft, and the year one team got a point, and the match.

"You really are pathetic, Sudou. I'm gonna beat you like a dog."

Compared to Housen who was clearly enjoying the match, the Housen pair's faces were painted with fear.

Housen had handled everything in the match, and it was more like a 2 versus 1 than a pairs match.

In the second match, they thought that Housen's crazed attacks would continue, but something else happened.

Housen's attacks weren't as fast as before, and could easily be returned.

When they thought that Housen was finally getting tired, it suddenly happened.

He launched a smash that couldn't be seen with human eyes. He hit it straight ahead, as if he was targeting Onodera.

Her face was grazed by the ball and she was in pain. In her shock, she dropped the racket to the ground.

"You bastard, you did that on purpose, didn't you!?"

"Huh? Things like this are only natural in tennis, right? I have to be careful not to shoot the ball too far out. You don't even know that? Stop complaining so much."

"Damn it!"

Housen was clearly showing his character.

Onodera hurriedly picked her racket back up.

"Don't worry about it. It's just a scratch. Besides, he's right. It seems like these things do happen a lot in tennis."

"So what? This is just a sports festival, not a professional tennis match."

Sudou was targeted by another serve, but it was out.

He returned the second serve, but Housen easily answered it. It wasn't too fast, so Sudou beautifully returned the ball.

As the rally continued, Onodera took the front and hit the ball.

Housen closed in, swung his arm down and smashed the ball back.

"Ah!?"

In her fear, Onodera could barely move her racket. Sudou tried returning the ball to his opponent's side, and Housen targeted Sudou once again with a volley.

It was as if Housen was just messing around.

The score: Team Sudou 3 (40), Team Housen 2 (30).

Onodera was struggling, trying to do something, but she was still too scared to play properly. So much so that she twisted her left leg and fell down on the spot.

"Onodera!"

Sudou covered for Onodera who couldn't even stand up, and returned Housen's strike.

The ball dropped barely inside the court, and Team Sudou took the second set.

However, with this, instead of cheering up, Sudou became even angrier.

"Come on already! Can't you play fairly!?"

"How many times do I have to say it? It's not my fault that she sucks. So damn boring."

"Calm down, Sudou. This is what he wants."

Onodera ignored Housen, and tried to calm Sudou down.

"I know that, but this isn't okay!"

"Even the referee is suspicious, but you're making him doubt himself. You get that, right?"

Housen didn't even care about the match; he just wanted to make the two suffer as much as he could.

He wanted to scare Onodera, and maybe even hurt her.

"Anyway, we need to calm down."

Even as she was in pain, Onodera tried to calm herself and Sudou down.

Sudou was still angry, and glared towards Housen, but he looked at Onodera, and realized what must be done.

Onodera's graze was taken care of by the medics.

"That's unfortunate... I dropped a round. But, you losers are gonna have to play another round against me now. That must be hell for you."

Housen yawned and looked at the two, and started talking to his partner.

"That bastard... He lost on purpose, just to play with us until the end."

Sudou said so in a worried voice, while looking at Onodera's foot.

"Are you alright?"

"Well, somewhat. But, how pathetic... I got scared of the ball and hurt my foot trying to run..."

Laughing at herself, she finished taping up her ankle and lightly hit her foot to check it.

"You're not without reason. I hate that guy, but I gotta admit, he's good at this."

Even Sudou feared the volleys he launched using his strong, muscled body. He couldn't help but panic when facing Housen.

"I... I've always thought highly of you, Sudou. Ever since I first got into this school."

"Huh? What are you talking about now? Just finish up your ankle."

"Come on. I'm wounded, right? I just want to make some time to relax."

"You're stubborn... Anyway, is that really true?"

"Mhm. You were number one on my list of people not to mess with, though. You were pretty rough, so..."

"Uh..."

"Everyone thought badly of you since you never studied, but I respected you as someone who tries very hard in club activities, and supported you. You're actually pretty strong and hardworking, Sudou, aren't you?"

"You can tell?"

"I can. When I had to return home at a late hour, I always passed by the gymnasium. I saw you cleaning it up and taking care of everything."

"What, you saw that? That's Embarrassing..."

"But... Right now, people still look down on you."

"Oh?"

"Back when you got angry for me. I'm not saying I didn't like it, but you're way too quick to anger. That may get you into some trouble in the future."

"...That's..."

"You should work on that."

"I... I get it, but..."

"Even in sports, that can lead to failure, right?"

"Well, that's true. My shooting percentages and such may be dropping because of that..."

"I'm like that too. When I get annoyed, I get fired up and try to play better, but I end up being even worse than normal."

"Onodera, that happens to you too?"

"One time, after losing an important match, I was so depressed and angry that I started punching the lockers in the changing room, and hurt my hands. That was a bad time."

She peeked her tongue out a bit in a playful manner, as if ashamed of her past self.

"That's when I understood, that getting so angry would be no help, and actually hurt you instead."

"How did you manage to stop getting angry?"

"With magic, of course!"

"Ma... Magic?"

"Yep. I'll teach it to you too, Sudou. The magic that lets you push your anger away."

"How do you do it?"

"Well, the peak of your anger is actually just a few seconds long. So, if you want to yell or scream, yell out once in your mind, then count until 10."

"So... It's like delaying your anger by ten seconds? That's it?"

"That's right. I think it'll work, so try it out."

"...Alright."

Sudou reluctantly made a note of this conversation in his mind.

"Sudou, I wanted to team up with you, because I believe in you."

"Onodera..."

After taking care of her ankle, Onodera checked her condition once again and stood up.

"It's fine. No matter what happens, this round will decide everything. If we lose, we lose. But, if we take the round, we win."

"Right."

Round 3 started.

Housen continued targeting Onodera, who already had an injury.

Even if it would cause him to lose a point, it was all that he focused on.

3 (40) versus 1 (15), Team Sudou has the lead.

It was Housen's match to lose with just one point, but he kept trying to hurt Onodera instead of focusing on the match.

She couldn't dodge this time, and the ball hit her left foot. She screamed in pain.

"How the hell can this be called a match? You bastard..!"

Sudou remembered the magic that he learned from Onodera earlier.

While glaring at Housen, he screamed in his mind.

1... 2... 3... He took a deep breath, and calmed himself down.

8...9...10... The words that he wanted to yell out at Housen came to a halt inside his mouth.

The anger didn't completely disappear, but he managed to calm himself down enough to see everything clearly; The suspicious eyes of the referees, Onodera, the match that must be won, the time left.

If Housen does the same thing again, the match will be stopped.

"Onodera, do you believe in me?"

"...Of course. That's why I'm with you now, isn't it?"

Sudou took a deep breath, and hit the best serve of the day. Housen returned the ball, and the rally started.

They were both furiously hitting the ball, without giving an inch.

After Housen returned a ball that was too easy to handle, Sudou smashed it into the opposing court's floor.

"Yeaaaah!!"

Holding his racket tight, Sudou screamed loud enough to echo throughout the entire gymnasium.

"We did it! We did it!"

Housen was annoyed after losing to those who he sees below him, and smashed his racket into pieces.

"We won, Onodera! It's all thanks to you!"

Sudou excitedly ran over to Onodera, and hugged her tight.



For a moment, Onodera didn't understand what had happened, and panicked.

"Ah, it hurts! You're hurting me, Sudou!"

After she yelled out in pain while squeezed between Sudou's arms, Sudou calmed down.

"So... Sorry!"

Leaving aside the score, he was also happy about finally learning to control his anger, so Sudou was in a great mood.

"Congratulations on your victory, Sudou."

"Thanks, Onodera. Without your strength, it wouldn't be possible."

"That's not true. I actually held you back..."

"Back when you were hurt, I thought we had lost. Nevertheless, you managed to calm me down."

"I see. We make good partners, huh?"

"Yeah! It was so easy to trust you and work with you. You really are the best, Onodera. I hope Suzune is watching this."

There were too many visitors around to spot Horikita.

"Suzune..?"

"Huh? Where? Where is she!?"

"Ah, sorry, my mistake..."

"Damn. Maybe she's on the other side..."

"We should have dinner after the next club activities."

"Huh? Well, why not? More importantly, help me look for Suzune! Suzune, where are you!?"

"A-ha-ha-ha. No way."

"Hey, Sudou. You don't actually think that you're good or anything, right? You would have lost if I actually took this seriously."

Not caring that the match was over already, Housen closed in on the two.

"Why don't we play around in the back a bit?"

"Come on now, that's..."

Onodera faced Housen and was about to say something, but Sudou quickly calmed him down.

"I've had some trouble with this guy in the past, he can't help himself."

"But, still!"

Sudou understood that Onodera was just trying to keep him from trouble, and smiled. Then, he faced Housen.

"Sorry, but I'm not gonna play along this time."

"Huh? Do I look like I give a damn?"

"I told you, I'm not doing this!"

After being denied again, Housen held his fist tight with rage and smashed it into Sudou's abdomen.

Sudou fell onto his knees.

"Sudou!"

Sudou gently pushed Onodera away, and stood back up.

Even when the teacher came rushing, Sudou said that nothing happened.

"...Ugh. I already knew that you were a good fighter. Back then, I was at fault too, so I'm letting this one go, but if you keep going, I'll go to the teacher."

"Are you kidding me? Why don't you hit me back, you coward!?"

"I wonder why... Onodera, let's go."

"Ri... Right!"

"Boring bastard. Don't talk to me again."

Sudou felt safe after the words "don't talk to me again".

He figured that, from now on, there wouldn't be any more trouble if he didn't start it himself.

He could see now that things could be much different if he didn't let his anger control him like before.

"I gotta thank Housen. Seeing how he looks from the outside, I can understand how lame I used to be. Also, I used that thing you taught me too, and it really calmed me down. It almost made me wonder how I was so angry all this time until now..."

Sudou was grateful for his tenth victory in a row.

He was grateful to both Onodera, this gymnasium and the Sports festival.

Chapter 6

Visitor

Intro

It was around 11:00 a.m., and I could faintly hear the cheers coming from outside the closed window.

The sports festival seems to have been quite exciting.

Not everything went smoothly, but the class is still putting in a lot of effort to win. They can compete well with other classes and grades.

As a result, I was able to decide without hesitation not to attend the sports festival.

All the arrangements are in place, so I'll leave the rest to Chairman Sakayanagi.

I don't necessarily have full trust in him but If he were to betray me it would be practically impossible for me to stay in the school, so it's easier to make a choice.

The only thing that remains to be seen is what kind of battle the second year students will have at the sports festival, and what results they will leave behind.

Sakayanagi's presence determines the winner of the sports festival. So did she participated or not?

I looked at the door.

I had a strategy to keep the situation under control... if it worked, the results are taking a while to show up.

There are a lot of things to be concerned about, but I guess I'll just have to wait and see, including what happens at the sports festival.

It's time to start preparing for lunch.

Just as I was beginning to think that, the doorbell finally rang.

Now is this visitor a welcome presence or not?

You can't be sure about this until you answer them.

"Hello, Ayanokoji-kun."

I heard such a voice, probably anticipating, as I kept my distance from the front door and kept an eye on the situation.

I let my guard down a bit and put my hand on the front door.

I tried to think of various situations.

The only person on the other side of the door was Sakayanagi, dressed in plain clothes, smiling and looking up at me.

"I was wondering if I might interrupt you for a moment. Even though I'm only forbidden to leave the dormitory, visiting a man's room during a sports festival is a bit of a problem."

"But Going inside will be even more of a problem."

Having said that, I decided to welcome Sakayanagi without turning her away.

"Excuse me for disturbing you."

With slow movements, due to physical disability, Sakayanagi takes off her shoes and walks up to the room.

"Come to think of it, this is the first time you've been in my room."

"I don't usually get to visit you, you know. Have you eaten lunch?"

"I was just about to get ready."

"I see. I'm glad to hear that. Here, it's a souvenir."

She said, handing me a small plastic bag.

"I bought it at a convenience store early this morning. It seems to be a new product, and I thought it would be a good time to share it with you."

I looked into the plastic bag from above and saw two small Mont Blancs in it. Mont Blanc would be good with some coffee.

"Sitting on bed would be better than sitting on the floor. You can sit on it if you like."

"Thank you for your consideration."

After getting Sakayanagi to sit on the bed, I stood in the kitchen and twisted the gas regulator to start pouring water into the pot.

"You don't seem to have come to visit me on a moment's notice, do you?"

I said this with a plain expression on my face, but Sakayanagi, behind me, amusingly laughed a little.

"On normal days, I don't know who would be in the dormitory, and it would be strange if I, as the leader of Class A, would visit Ayanokoji-kun's room alone."

No matter who you are, if you see Sakayanagi like that, you will be surprised and suspicious. That's why Sakayanagi never usually came in contact with me in the dorm. Until this moment.

"You're a really bad person, Ayanokoji-kun...this is Ayanokoji-kun's strategy, isn't it?"

"Strategy? What do you mean?"

"No need for small talk, Ayanokoji-kun was almost certain that I will be here today... no, let me correct that. I'm sure you were sure of that."

As far as Sakayanagi was concerned, she saw through the trap without even having to think about it.

"In this sports festival, we, Class A, with our small number of athletic students, are at a disadvantage. Furthermore, there are students like Kito-kun and Hashimoto-kun who are promising, but their average is not enough to reach Horikita-san's class. If that's the case, what we need to do in order to win is to determine who will be participating in which competitions, as well as the participation of your rivals in the events, and manage our schedule from time to time."

The water started boiling in the pot. I grabbed a jar of coffee powder from the cupboard and prepared a cup and filter.

"Then again, you never know how things will turn out if I participate."

"You still have a high self-esteem, don't you?"

"The best way to ensure that the other classes beat Class A is to not have me participate in the sports festival."

The sports festival must proceed under a precise schedule, Sakayanagi is capable of placing and directing the students in the right places in her mind. Besides, she would be able to coordinate the participants of the competition using students from other grades.

"Last night, my father told me that he asked Ayanokoji-kun to be absent. He said he was assigning security to the dormitory to prevent any contact with the people being sent from the White Room as guests."

"It's true that I was asked by Chairman Sakayanagi not to participate in the sports festival, but I didn't expect him to tell his daughter about it as well."

"Please stop joking, Ayanokoji-kun. It was you who instructed my father to tell me what I just said, wasn't it?"

Has she read through it?

Even though she is his own daughter, Chairman Sakayanagi would never do anything like mixing public and private affairs.

So, I asked Chairman Sakayanagi to let her know what was really going on, instead of telling her myself.

I asked him to explain the situation beforehand in case Sakayanagi, who might be absent from the sports festival due to physical reasons, thinks of visiting me because I wouldn't want her to get involved in any trouble between me and the White Room.

Sakayanagi was willing to participate as the leader of Class A, but I don't think the chairman knew about it.

Even if he did know, it would be safer to tell her, in case she took a sudden leave of absence on the day of the sports festival.

If it was his own daughter, he would have known that there was a risk of her getting involved. However, there was something that Chairman Sakayanagi could not fully understand.

Sakayanagi's curiosity and instincts are not easily controlled. It's not surprising that she believes it'll be a good opportunity to chat to me without being interrupted if I'm going to be absent.

In fact, she showed up in my room, which is currently one of the most dangerous areas in the

school, without fear.

"Did you choose to come before noon just to make me feel uneasy?"

"I was trying to be a little mean. I wanted to make you think that maybe I was going against Ayanokoji-kun's strategy and participating in the sports festival."

"So that's how it is."

"By the way, everyone is present today except for myself and Ayanokoji-kun."

With Sakayanagi's information network, it appeared that someone had validated the attendees of each class and relayed the information via cell phone prior to the sports festival.

They're not slacking on that regard.

"I was a little mean, but I was actually planning to visit you a little earlier."

Sakayanagi said, just as the water in the pot started to boil and make a bubbling sound.

"I just went down to the lobby to check on the situation outside."

As I was seemingly on sick leave, it was strictly forbidden for me to go outside my room.

Sakayanagi, on the other hand, is also not allowed to leave the dormitory, but she is not absent in the form of sick leave.

Even if she is warned for going out, it does not violate the reason for her absence.

"So, how was it downstairs?"

"There were three people who seemed to be security guards. They seem to be stationed throughout the school, not just in this dormitory, so it shouldn't look particularly unnatural."

While the purpose is to protect me, the guards are disguised as security for government officials.

"The *Shukun-sho* for this sports festival wouldn't go to Horikita-san, who offered cooperation to Ryuen-kun, nor Ryuen-kun, who accepted it but to Ayanokoji-kun who made me become an absentee. That was the only thing that decided the winner, so it is as expected."

[T/L Note - '*Shukun-sho*' is a special prize given for outstanding performance (It's a sumo term.)]

"You don't know how it's going to end yet."

"True, there are always surprises, but they are unlikely. By now, Class A is probably at the mercy of Horikita-san's class, who is fighting head-on, and Ryuen-kun's class, who is doing everything they can think of. Even if you have excellent arms and legs, you can't do anything without a brain. That's the class I'm building, you know."

Something similar could be said about Ryuen's class, but that's the problem with too much power at the top.

The fact that the leader solves all of the problems means, on the flip side, that nothing can be solved without the leader.

"Well, that's okay. Because this time, I will enjoy my time with Ayanokoji-kun instead of winning 150 class points."

She didn't seem as if she cared about the damage that Class A would suffer.

"You're not afraid of losing class points, are you?"

"This school system is game for me. As long as I can maintain my Class A status to some extent, I don't have any problems."

I took the Mont Blanc out of the pack and placed them on the plate, and placed two of them on the table.

Then I poured hot water from the pot into the filter with the coffee grounds.

"You're pretty good at this."

"It's no big deal."

"Is each of these preparations new and fun for Ayanokoji-kun?"

Sakayanagi could tell that this was something I would never do in the White Room.

"It's like everything else in school. I just wanted to do something normal, that's all."

Still, Sakayanagi's words from earlier bothered me.

"You have a sense of purpose to maintain Class A position. Is that your

pride?"

I ask her about that as I place the milk and sugar stick on the table.

"At start, I had no intention of committing to Class A. However, when I learned that Ayanokoji-kun was a student at this school, I changed my mind. We may be in for a genuine fight when Ayanokoji-kun eventually leads the class up to Class B."

To put it simply, she'll wait on the top.

"Class D gave away all of their class points in the first semester of the first year. They did, however, begin to increase their class points after a certain point and eventually rose upto Class B. The reason for this was, of course, the presence of you, Ayanokoji-kun."

She speaks expressively and happily as if she were bragging about herself.

She picked up plate from the table and placed it on her lap.

"Let's eat together, Ayanokoji-kun."

I sat down on the bed without complaint when she asked me to sit next to her.. She took the Mont Blanc with her fork and scooped it up, then held it out to me.



"Here you go."

"What do you mean 'here you go'?"

"Can't you see it? Please eat it."

"No, I can see that, but"

"It doesn't matter. Right now It's just me and Ayanokoji-kun now, and no one will bother us."

I was curious if there was a reason for this, but it didn't appear to be the case. The sweet aroma spreads as I bite down on the fork into my mouth. Surprisingly, it was the first time I had ever eaten Mont Blanc.

"Is it good?"

To be honest, I don't really like the taste that much.

Personally, I thought a simple shortcake had a more pleasing taste. But I don't want to be mean.

"Of course."

Sakayanagi smiled slightly when I told her simply that it was delicious.

"Then I'll have some, too."

Without caring about the fork that I used to eat, she scooped up her own portion and put it in her mouth.

"It's not as good as the ones at the cafe, but as a convenience store sweet, it's good."

She nodded in satisfaction and held out her fork to me again.

We easily finished the first Mont Blanc, as we both ate one at a time

"I'll bring you another cake next time."

"Huh?"

"Since Ayanokoji-kun's reaction was that it didn't seem to suit his taste very well."

"I thought I responded with a normal response."

"I'm proud to say that I still have excellent insight into this. Especially when it comes to Ayanokoji-kun."

I didn't expect her to be able to see through what I was feeling about it.

"You never show any gaps when you're really serious in your thoughts, but in this kind of private life, you can't always hide your feelings."

"Maybe it's because I'm not used to it after all."

"Fufu~I like that part of you, too."

I can't tell if she's serious or joking, so Sakayanagi continues.

"Please let me have my revenge next time. If I find a good cake, I'll bring it to you."

"I wish there was a time when I could reliably avoid the public eye like this."

Regardless of weekdays and holidays, it's nearly impossible unless it's when people are out of the dorm. Or there's also the line of early mornings and late nights, but that also brings up

its own issues.

"But it's Ayanokoji-kun's change of heart that's unusual. Why is it that you not only occasionally assist others in their school lives when you were supposed to be quiet, but also to begin seriously aiming for Class A?"

"I guess there are some things you don't understand."

"I'm not a God. And because I know Ayanokoji-kun's situation, there are parts of it that I don't understand and my thinking hasn't been able to keep up. Could you please tell me about it?"

The genius, driven by the quest for the unknown, wants an answer.

The main reason Sakayanagi is not interested in the A or D class ranks is probably that she will not benefit from them after graduation. As the daughter of the school's chairman and a talented student herself, most things are within reach for Sakayanagi.

She doesn't care because she doesn't have to use her Class A privileges to do anything. This is also true for me as I'm sure I'll be back in the White Room after graduation.

We are not on the same path but the privilege of Class A doesn't mean anything to both of us.

"It may seem strange."

"It's not so that you can play around with a lot of private points like Koenji-kun, is it?"

"He's in a similar position like us, I'm sure."

He is the type of person who grabs and holds on to his parents' power and his own talent alone. Koenji, such as he is, occasionally contributes to the class on a whim for class points.

"You at least have the right to ask why I decided to contribute to the class. You played into my obvious trap and gave up on winnings at the sports festival."

If she risked losing 150 points and gained nothing, there was no way she would help going forward. However, if I give her a sprinkling of bait here, I can leave a chance for her to get on board if we follow the same strategy again.

"If I get an answer to my question, I'll come back here the next time it happens."

"Don't say what I was just thinking."

"Fufufu."

"It's basically what you're attempting to do, Sakayanagi. By defeating me, you're attempting to answer the issue of what it means to be a genius. In my own way, I'm attempting to demonstrate that White Room education is not without flaws."

I can't sense the surprise from Sakayanagi. It was evident that she had been expecting that line of thinking, even if it wasn't confirmed.

"Are you saying that Ayanokoji-kun is trying to create the strongest class with his own hands?"

Nodding in approval, Sakayanagi puts her index finger to her lips.

"It's not that I haven't thought about it, but... it does raise a few questions."

"Go on."

"This sports festival. Ayanokoji-kun could have forced himself to participate regardless of the conditions. Wouldn't it have been better and more efficient to give orders directly to increase and solidify the victory rate? And I'm sure he wasn't afraid of my participation."

"I spent this sports festival based on one theme."

"Interesting story. What is the theme?"

"*Seikan*. I decided it would be a good opportunity to see how well they could compete on their own, without interfering directly in the festival. Your absence was a byproduct of that."

[T/L Note - '*Seikan*' - means Careful Supervision.]

"It's just that I came to see Ayanokoji-kun for being quiet, and he didn't do anything directly regarding the content of the sports festival. I see."

As we were talking, Sakayanagi arrived at the conclusion one step ahead of what someone else in her position would.

"In other words—Eh"

I lightly pushed Sakayanagi, who was about to give her answer. No, it's not as if I'm

exaggerating when I say I pushed her. I just lightly grabbed both of her shoulders and pushed her backwards, causing the weak Sakayanagi to fall backwards onto the bed unbearably.

The sound from the mattress and the faint creaking of metal. Even Sakayanagi, who prides herself on being a genius, would not have thought of this action at all.

I looked down at Sakayanagi as if covering her before she could catch up with her understanding.

"Ah, umm?"

Sakayanagi, who was always so strong and relaxed, wasn't keeping up with the changes in the situation.

"My school life is based on this plan I have. The fact you would come here today, would show interest in and eventually reach the answer as within possibility."

Sakayanagi, who has never been handled by a man before, clears her throat from impatience and nervousness.

"You will be a hindrance if you told anyone else about this."

"You think I'm going to tell anyone about it?"

"The chances aren't zero. You may try to blackmail me by saying you'd expose it unless I agreed to have a match with you. I'd have no other options in that case."

"I see, that's certainly true... But, if I'm willing to force a match between us couldn't I just reveal the truth about the White Room instead?"

"No, that won't work. Even if you make the existence of such a facility known, it's not something that other people can understand. It wouldn't be a risk to me personally."

Kiyotaka Ayanokoji was raised in a White Room institution.

Most people would probably just nod their heads and shrug if they heard such a story. It's not something you can search up on the Internet.

It would create some confusion in Sakayanagi's case, but of course it would do nothing for me.

"I'm not at the stage where I want people to know what I'm planning to do. I can't let you use that as an excuse to blackmail me."

I closed the distance to Sakayanagi, casting a dark shadow on her as I came in the way of

ceiling lights.



"Well, now I have come to know. What do you want me to do...?"

"A secret for a secret. A threat for a threat. The only people left in this dormitory right now are you and me. That means that no matter what happens here, no one will come to your aid. Even if you shout out loud, at best it will only be audible in the hallway."

"Are you going to commit a crime to protect your plan?"

"Crime? You and I are going to share a collective secret."

I pulled out my phone and activated the Camera.

"I guess the only way to refuse would be to run off on your own."

With her disability— No, even if there were no problems with both legs, there is no way out for Sakayanagi.

How could she answer in this hopeless situation?

"——Do you think you can beat me?"

"Can I Win?"

"If things were to go as Ayanokoji-kun envisioned here, would he really have an advantage...?"

"I'm sorry, but you can't win."

"A slight difference in experience, for example, can be caught up with and overtaken by one way of learning. In fact, you might even learn that you've been studying the wrong way, right?"

"The difference in experience is only a matter of how you learn and how you catch up. Even with a slight difference, one can catch up. In fact, you may even find out that your way is the wrong way."

Even though she was in a tight spot, Sakayanagi continued to think as calmly as possible.

She must be anxious, but it's impressive that she's been able to keep it under control so far.

I throw the cell phone and slowly move my hand toward Sakayanagi.

I grabbed her by the shoulders and brought my hands closer to her neck.

Even so, Sakayanagi only averted her gaze.

"Shall we start the special lesson?"

Sakayanagi smiled and calmly closed her eyes without resistance.

Part 1

"You really are a mean person, aren't you?"

"Yeah, Maybe."

It had been about an hour since Sakayanagi had come to my room.

"So now there's a secret between me and Ayanokoji-kun that I can't tell anyone~"

"That's a deceptive way of putting it."

"It was Ayanokoji-kun, of all people, who first said it that way, wasn't it?"

"Sure."

"Then again, this is the first time I've ever been in a man's bed."

"You were out of it in ten seconds, it doesn't even matter."

"That's taking the girl's memory lightly."

While showing the cell phone screen to Sakayanagi, I select and dispose of the necessary items. Perhaps because I slid it too far forward in the process, a picture of me and Kei showed up.

It was a picture of the two of us at the Keyaki Mall.

"It seems that your relationship with Kei Karuizawa-san is going well."

"Well, That's right.."

Sakayanagi continued, looking at the picture of Kei smiling happily.

"Either her appearance, voice, or personality attracted Ayanokoji-kun to her.. Normally, I would have thought so, but there are a few things that don't quite add up."

Sakayanagi then looked up at me, her eyes narrowed, as if she was fighting me.

"I've looked into her as much as I can. From how she spends her time after school to how she spends her days off. And also now Ayanokoji-kun can easily be followed."

As long as the entire third year was monitoring me, I wasn't paying attention to every single one of them. If Sakayanagi's spy was mixed in, it would be difficult to distinguish them.

Even if it was Hashimoto, who I had noticed before, or someone else, there was no way to identify them.

"I have not been able to find out the truth of why Ayanokoji-kun chose to go out with her, but I have been able to understand some things. Her behavior, to which she is directing her strong trust and affection, could be described as delusional. Is Ayanokoji-kun going to use her for his experiment or is Ayanokoji-kun trying to save her? I have deduced that it is something like that."

I don't remember giving her any unnecessary information and I don't think she has as much information about Kei as Ryuen does, so I don't know how she could have guessed so close to the truth in that situation.

"That's what your special lesson for me was about, right?"

"I'm getting tired of using the word special, but you're right."

Sakayanagi was able to understand me without the needs for words, but in a different way from Kei.

Ding dong.

Abruptly the bell rang suddenly in the room.

It was around 12:30 p.m., and the students would be about to finish their meal. In a dormitory where no one was supposed to be left, a visitor suddenly appeared. After looking at each other, I and Sakayanagi stare at the front door at the same time.

There were supposed to be three bodyguards waiting in the lobby, but did they force their way in?

No, even if they had used their skills to subdue the armed bodyguards by force, the problem didn't stop there.

If that was the case then they would not take their time to ring the doorbell, they would at least try to break in.

The doorbell rang once more.

It would be strange to ignore it much longer when I was meant to be resting in my room.

It is possible, though unlikely, that it is someone from the school.

"Who is it?"

I call out to the visitor, not moving from my position on the bed.

"Stay where you are and listen."

The man replied, as if he could tell from my voice that I was sitting far away from the entrance.

A young voice. Not an adult, but the same age.

"That voice sounds familiar."

But no figure comes to mind. It is a voice that seems to be that of a student, and while I don't recognize it, the voice sounds familiar enough to me. Of course, when you live in a school, you hear an unspecified number of voices.

But I quickly came to an answer about the owner of this voice.

"You called me once, didn't you?"

When I asked back, the person behind the doorway remained silent for a bit.

"I'm impressed. You remember my voice that you only heard once."

The fact that it was after my father had visited this school was also impressive and left impression on me.

"You didn't say what you wanted back then."

"It was a good thing I did, but something inconvenient happened soon after. I haven't been in touch with you since then, but if you're wondering, it doesn't matter who I am. Because I'm neither your friend nor your enemy."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Once Tsukishiro is gone, all that remains is to eliminate the white room students and peace will return. I thought you might be making that mistake, so I came here to advise you."

"Fufu~ That sounds like lot of fun. Would you be willing to let me join you?"

"Sakayanagi Arisu, huh?"

The man on the other side of the door shows no sign of being anxious by Sakayanagi's

unexpected response.

Rather, they instantly say who it is just by hearing the voice.

Perhaps they had narrowed down the list of absentees for the day, or perhaps they knew Sakayanagi and recognized her voice.

"Anyway, be on the lookout if you want to stay in school until graduation."

"For a neutral, you've got a lot on your shoulders, don't you?"

"Your presence is having a negative impact. I'm just trying to prevent more of it..."

The Visitor replied as the voice trailed off.

Apparently, they did not intend to stay long, and it is safe to assume that they walked away.

"That voice... somewhere..."

"Do you have any idea who the voice belongs to?"

"I can't answer that as clearly as Ayanokoji-kun. But I think I vaguely remembered the presence on the other side of the door."

So it's something different from what I remembered from the voice.

"It's not a recent memory, it's a reasonably old memory, five, ten years anyway."

"If you're sure about that, then the possibility of a White Room student seems infinitesimally small."

"Yes. If I had met, when I was little, then yes that would be the case."

His reaction to learning of Sakayanagi's existence was somewhat verifying this fact.

In addition to the lack of surprise, they reacted as they would to someone they were acquainted with.

But whether it's Amasawa or the other one, it's not something I care about. As long as

there was no harm done to me at the moment, I wouldn't do anything about it.

Part 2

The sports festival, in which I was not present, ended in an almost ideal way. The class was excited by the final result, which was unthinkable in the past year and a half.

Horikita's class had decreased the gap between them and Class A, and Horikita's class had been able to enhance their class points through the desert island exam, the unanimous special exam, and the sports festival, all of which were unquestionably beneficial.

A few days later, it was the middle of October.

The ranking of the sports festival was

Horikita's class in first place, Ryuen's class in second place, Ichinose's class in third place, and Sakayanagi's class in fourth place.

Of course, this was not due to any one person, but to the will and strength of the entire class.

Furthermore, the Sudo and Onodera pair took first place in the individual competition.

Koenji also achieved 1st place in all 10 events, but ended up in 2nd place because they were all individual events.

That seemed to be good enough for him, and he never had any problems.

Sudo Onodera were then given the right to move classes, but private points were chosen without hesitation. Despite his unsteadiness, Sudo is steadily moving up the ladder to Class A.

On this day, Kei, who apparently had an appointment with a friend, decided to stop by Keyaki Mall and go home.

As I was about to head home alone, I was approached by Horikita.

"I'd like to talk to you for a moment, if that's all right."

"If you don't mind, we can do this on the way home."

"That's fine."

Since she approached me as I was leaving, I guess it's not something that can be overheard by many people.

"I've learned a lot from the last unanimous special exam."

“Let’s hear it then?”

The sports festival was over, but all of the problems had not been solved, and the class was starting to move forward, although it still left an uncertain situation, one that Horikita was still struggling with and learning from.

"I made the right choice to leave Kushida-san behind, and I can now recognize once again that I made the right decision."

Kushida contributed to the class by scoring more points at the Sports Festival.

She has returned to being a dedicated honour student in her daily academic life, and while her social participation in OAA was reduced in the beginning of October, it is likely just a matter of time before she regains it.

If we're going to draw harsh comparisons, she has significantly contributed more as a classmate than Airi.

Of course, it is not all just benefits.

"I know. I'm leaving a couple questions unanswered. I honestly don't know what to do with Hasebe-san right now. But I think I'll be able to handle it better next time if there's another special exam like that."

"What's your basis for that thinking?"

"I made a careless pledge in that exam to obtain unanimous approval. I promised to expel the traitor, but then I backtracked. It seemed a simple way to achieve consensus, but I didn't realise the gravity of the risk. Kushida-san, I knew, was a traitor. And that I'd made that decision before I'd even had the confidence to expel her out of school. That was a big mistake."

"If there was a possibility of leaving her behind, then surely a careless promise would only hurt you later on."

It was a desperate measure as time was running out, but if we had been able to make a unanimous decision at that point while leaving open the possibility that Airi or someone else with similar abilities might be cut off, the after effects would not have been as severe as they are now.

What to leave behind and what to choose.

“We gained class points. But we also lost many things. That special exam has taught me a lot. It has shown me both sides of success and failure.”

"Even so, not making a mistake is preferable."

Horikita closes her eyes, exhales, then opens them again.

"I'm only a second year in high school. I'm just a kid. It's okay to make mistakes."

"You've reopened your mind."

"It's not like me to dwell on it. I'm going to - I'm going to be me. I may not be able to do as well as the other leaders. But I have Hirata-kun, Karuizawa-san, Sudo-kun, Onodera-san, Kushida-san and Koenji-kun. With the support of these people, I am moving forward. Class A is waiting for me after that, that's what I believe."

"I see."

"Of course, you're one of them. I don't know what you're thinking, and you're often uncooperative, but... you're indispensable to the class and to me."

My existence is similar to that of a bicycle's training wheels.

Even though it's a necessity at first, you will take it off, fall, shake again and again. Eventually, you are able to ride without difficulty. The bicycle you start pedaling isn't supported by a single person.

You will literally be supported by all your classmates.

After I have witnessed your growth

I will leave your class.

I won't put it into words now, but one day you, Horikita, will know the truth. And then

You will understand.

That there will come a time, when the class you thought was invincible, will be met by a reality that you cannot defeat.

I will teach you that.

I'm not doing it for anyone else but myself.

I— As long as I win in the end, that's all that matters.

Once I decide to become your enemy and defeat you, Horikita, everything will be set in stone.

But, I am leaving because I want to be defeated.

There is this uncertain future that I wish for.

It's a contradiction. I have the answer, but I wish for it to be wrong.

Epilogue

Arrival of Autumn

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

Hasebe lightly tapped Miyake's shoulder as she called out to him from the front entrance.

"No, I haven't waited for long. I was bored anyway."

Hasebe missed a week of school but has been showing up at school every day since then.

"Are you fine you quit the Archery Club?"

"It was like passing time aimlessly, to begin with."

"It's my fault, isn't it?"

"No. I just quit because I wanted to quit. Better than that, I'm glad you're coming to school."

She participated in only the minimum five events at the gymnastics festival.

She also contributed to the class at the very least, although not in terms of results.

However, she rarely speaks to anyone other than Miyake and has a strained relationship with Yukimura, who agreed to expel Sakura from the school.

Miyake stands by her side, silent, as though this is something that can't be avoided at this point.

"At first, I wanted to destroy everything, not only Kiyopon but all the classmates who abandoned Airi. I know I'm a bad guy."

"No, —I know how you feel."

"Someone had to be expelled from that exam. But it had to be Kushida-san because that was the original promise. Right?"

"..... Yes."

"I will not forgive Kiyopon. I won't forgive my classmates. But I thought it was wrong to keep dragging you down and making you suffer."

She tells Miyake the answer that went through all his thoughts.

"Hey, Miyachi. Will you help me in taking my revenge?"

Her eyes were not smiling, and Miyake did not have the courage to ask back if she was really serious.

"Haruka"

"What a Joke."

Laughing and deceiving, Haruka begins to walk.



"I'll take my revenge alone."

"I——"

He tried to reach out to Hasebe with his hand but then withdrew it.

She turns her back and walks away.

Despite his hesitation, Miyake silently began to walk behind her.

SS : Something That Can't be Forgiven

It was after homeroom had ended and my conversation with Horikita was soon about to end.

“We’re soon out of time. Just let me tell you one last thing, although it may look like I’m meddling too much. The most important thing is what you, Horikita, wants to do with Kushida. Think carefully about this.”

The focus was to make Kushida return to class, but this wasn’t as important now. I’m not sure how useful my advice would be to her, but at least I hope it may have cleared her thoughts a bit.

“Thank you, teacher. I’ve decided what to do now.”

“Don’t mind it. As your teacher, this is nothing— it’s surely something to be expected after all.”

After sending her off, I walked back to the staff room.

After going down the steps and into the hallway where the staff room was, I heard someone running from behind.

“Don’t run in the hallway...”

“Sa~~~~e-chan. Yah-ho!”

I planned on warning the student, but I knew it was a teacher by instinct.

“Is that you, Chie? How are you going to set an example if even you are running full
Ahead?”

“Bu~ut, I saw you right ahead!”

“Stop with that Bu~ut! Just call for me like normal.”

There was no need to run up to me this way,

“By the way, you were taking quite a long time talking with Horikita-san.”

“... so you even heard that?”

When in the world did she start?

“There was a huge risk of this leaking If Chie heard about Kushida.”

“From when I heard her say thanks to you.”

When it was almost over, in other words.

I can't exclude the fact it may have been a lie, but it was true I didn't notice her before
Either.

“Looks like even the model student Horikita has lots of worries.”

“She's just a child, right? But that's not what I wanted to say.”

She smiled as she walked right beside me. Her eyes weren't laughing.

“Why have you gotten closer to your students now?”

“There's nothing weird for a homeroom teacher, is it?”

“It is. You are not that kind of a teacher. You have never been until now, have you?”

“That may be true.”

“I won’t acknowledge it. There is no way Sae-chan would ever act like a teacher.”

“... I know.”

I replied, but my reply never reached her.

SS : Complicated Feelings

I was having a good time chatting with Ayanokouji-kun who excused himself from joining the sport festival and was absent.

I always had to be careful about what others until now, and today was the only chance I had where nobody could interfere.

“You were just observing, but even made me come here and visit you. You are not planning on doing anything during the festival either, right? ... I see.”

I pieced together all the scattered hints he had been giving me during our conversation.

“In other words—Eh”

Suddenly, he gently grabbed my shoulders and pushed me back.

Usually, this amount of strength was nothing to most people, but since my body was rather weak and I hadn't expected it, I fell backwards in a daze.

It didn't hurt of course. I just fell back from where I sat on the bed.

I should have been seeing his face right now, but my eyes were spinning while looking at the ceiling.

Before I managed to sort out the situation, Ayanokouji-kun began mounting me.

He had his hands on both sides of my head leaving me without any way to escape.

“E-excuse me?”

I didn’t look like he had succumbed to his primal desires.

It should have been impossible, but somehow the possibility was within my calculations.

My thoughts were all scrambled and that hindered me from coming to an answer.

“My school life is founded on this plan I have. The fact you would come here today, would show interest in and eventually reach the answer as within possibility.”

As if he were making fun of me, he reached his conclusion against this situation.

“You will be hindrance if you told anyone else about this.”

“You think I... would leak this?”

I wasn’t so naïve that I didn’t understand how much of a bother that could be to him.

I thought we both understood that...

“The chances aren’t zero. You may try to blackmail me by saying you’d expose it unless I agreed to have a match with you. I’d have no other options in that case.”

“I see, that’s certainly true... But, couldn’t I just reveal the truth about the White Room instead?”

His true goal was hidden.

That was definitely true, but I still haven’t managed to calm myself enough right now to think about it.

While my mind was working, trying to calm down my thoughts, I continued to talk to him.

“Shall we start the special lesson?”

I saw his eyes as he muttered this and finally understood his goal.

I couldn’t help but laugh, close my eyes and wait for the lesson.

If this was his goal, I won’t mind.

With these complicated feelings, I acknowledged that I would be used by him.

But, do remember this, Ayanokouji-kun.

If you are going to use me—I’m going to use you until the very end.

SS : That's What I Believe In

A hit with unbelievable power brushed against Housen-kun's racket.

His rage was being transformed and brought into the game itself, my ideal form of sportsmanship.

The scattering sweat sparkled like gemstones.

"HELL YEEEEAAAAAAAAAAHH!!"

Seeing Sudou yelling from his very core, I couldn't help but frolicking in this victory.

"We did it! We did it!"

Housen-kun, who we had been playing with, looked frustrated and smashed his racket to the ground.

"We won Onodera! All thanks to you!"

Sudou ran towards me, and I raised my hand for a high-five but was met with air instead.

I was embraced with both of his hands around me in a hug.

"W-w-wha,, wha-wha!?"

A happiness followed by a surge of panic.

But I was the only one flustered as Sudou just looked all happy and excited.

He was starting to squeeze harder, so I tried to pull out.

"Wai-, ouch, it hurts Sudou-kun!"

He finally noticed my distress and now he was the only flustered.

"M-my bad!"

We were trailing due to my injury, but turned that into victory, never giving up until the very end.

Our beliefs and tenacity beat Housen-kun's by a mile.

"Congratulations! You won all your events, Sudou-kun."

"Yeah, thanks a lot Onodera. If not for you, we'd have lost this match for sure."

"That's not true. I was probably a hindrance..."

"Could have been a fluke, but when you got hurt and I just snapped, I thought we'd lose this. But you were the one to call me back."

His eyes looking straight at me felt like they were sucking my in.

"I see, then we... are a pretty good combo, right?"

"Of course! Easy to work with and rely on. Yeah, you are the best Onodera. Ah, maybe Suzune was watching me from somewhere too?"

His eyes that I felt I could watch for eternity withdrew from me and scanned the area around the gymnasium.

"Suzune...right?"

I muttered. He reacted like a dog at that name and suddenly looked questionably at me.

"Eh? Where? Where is she!?"

"Ah, eh well, sorry, looks like it was another person."

"Shit. I see, maybe she's on the field then..."

I hate losing and that lit the fighting spirit within me ablaze.

Yes, I have to admit it.

I'm, interested in Sudou-kun.

I can catch up and show some results, no matter how far ahead he is.

That's the sportsmanship that I believe in.

“Let’s eat on our way next time after clubs, okay?”

“Eh? Ah, sure I guess. More importantly, help me look for Suzune. Where are you, Suzune.”

“Hahaha, absolutely not.”

SS : The Truth is, I've Always

As I entered Senpai's room, I began searching with conviction.

But as expected of him. He had cleaned it all in that short amount of time.

But that wasn't my true goal. My true goal was to check if this room was being wiretapped or not. It did look too clean for it to not be wiretapped. Had he already made a move, I thought but...

"They should just ignore me and enjoy their school life. I highly recommend it."

To him who was fully enjoying his freedom, I, who was White Room student was just a nuisance.

I know that.

"Yes, I agree as well. I think I should do that too but..."

That's why I want to expose Takuya and let them fight it out ASAP.

If he could observe Ayanokouji-senpai from at close, touch him, feel him, he would understand.

But Senpai wouldn't bite. No emotions at all as he was just waiting for me to leave.

I wanted to upset him so I face my butt in his direction.

From this angle, that and that could be seen and I wondered if that would work.

“Drawn in by my underwear? How pervy.”

I am the one showing him so what the heck am I saying, right?

“Sorry, I’m more worried about what else you may be doing if I take my eyes off you.”

Clever, but uninteresting.

Our conversation would naturally return to just discussing daily topics, so I moved the topic back

I turned around and got closer to him, but he didn’t even raise an eyebrow.

“I think they may have gone on a rampage by now? I feel like they have gotten their methods and goals all wrong. Instead of returning to the White Room, they are more focused on expelling You.”

“What a bothersome topic.”

It didn’t show on his face, but it was probably true that he thought it was a nuisance.

“That may be true for you, yeah. I have been thinking this for a while, but how about I just reveal them to you and just let you do your thing?”

But he didn't even bother getting to know. His premise was that I was untrustworthy and he didn't want to listen to unnecessary information from me.

He didn't answer my proposal as he read his opponents one, two steps ahead.

The truth is, I want to be by his side.

Even if I'm a nuisance, just being close to the person you look up to. But...

There is no guarantee that my school life could go on forever.

Afterword

Both to newcomers and to people who have been here before, Welcome.

I'm Kinugasa Shougo. I'm gonna be a bit serious this time, as you will see soon.

After five years, [Classroom of the Elite] got a new season. It's such a short time when written like this, but I've had to overcome many difficulties to get to this point. I even stopped writing once or twice.

From time to time, I got worried about the anime's continuation. But, the reason that I've been able to keep writing at this pace, is because of all the fans that have been supporting me, especially since the anime's release in 2017.

Without this support, the anime would never have been renewed.

As a writer, I couldn't be happier, I'm very grateful for all this. Thank you all very, very much. Please let me say that much, at least.

More than anyone, I want the anime to continue. It has been around two years since the talks of a renewal started; right when around the global pandemic, unfortunately, was starting up. Therefore, I'm grateful that I can safely tell you about the news now, after all that time and trouble.

We will do our best to connect it. Moreover, of course, I will continue on this original work and try to make it as interesting as I can. There's a lot more that I want to tell you all, but this is it for now.

It's been a long time, but I'm happy that we'll get to see Ayanokoji and the others again.

"Won't you do an anime till the end of the story? Won't you!? Won't you!!?"

Well, leaving all that aside.... Woohooo!!! I did it!!!

Everyone, once again, I hope you all enjoy it!!!

TL Note:

With this Year 2 Volume 6 is Finished.

First Thanks to the Author, Kinugasa-Sensei for writing this amazing Story!

I Hope you all Enjoyed it.

Also Thanks everyone for supporting me in this.

My Review on it will be soon Available [here](#).

AND YES!!! ANIME ADAPTATION!

With the way Story is progressing and the arrival of anime, this might be one of the best Years
for Cote!

I'm Looking Forward to it!

See you Soon~

Until then Have a Nice Day!