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Welcome to the **Classroom of the Elite** 2

Fan Translation
Anime Anyway



Classroom of the Elite Volume O

English Translation by Anime Anyway

Prologue

Ayanokoji Atsuomi's Monologue

Wealth, poverty.

The difference between the rich and the poor.

High academic achievements, inferior education.

The gap between education.

The city, the countryside.

The gap between regions.

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

The gap between generations.

This Japan is a society of gaps.

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

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

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

While understanding the logic, I still had nothing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1: Ambition, aspiration

2: Sinister plans, treachery.

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

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

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

That ambition alone was what supported my life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What happened after that?

Did I think that I was ruined?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However... from this point on.

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



A newborn, one month old baby.

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

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

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

"We've completed the health check."

"Any problems?"

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

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

"I see."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Wait a bit."

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

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

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

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

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

"Huh..?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Take him away."

"U-understood."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter - 1

The Project's Launch

Intro

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We're nothing but attendants of the intermediary role.

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

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

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

"I mean, isn't it true?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"A-as a reference..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Still, this guy is way too clueless.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"About myself?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Eh?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Don't do anything selfish."

"Huh? B-but..."

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

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

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

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

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

"See ya, Sensei~"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"T-thank you!"

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

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

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

However, it may have been an unnecessary worry.

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

"Where's Asama?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I know how busy you are."

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

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

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

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

However, this world is not so easy.

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

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

Part 1

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

"Kept you waiting, huh?"

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

"Don't drink alcohol."

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

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

"But..."

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

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

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

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

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

This guy really likes talking.

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

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

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

"T-that's terrible..."

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

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

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

"Whoah, what a waste..!"

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

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

"I'm going to the bathroom."

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

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

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

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

"That was..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part 2

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

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

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

"Is there something on your mind?"

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

"No, it's nothing."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is no bright future awaiting the have-nots.

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is no meaning in flattery.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"In other words..."

"Ayanokouj, have you ever met Kijima?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is at least not a lie.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thank you very much."

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

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

"What!?"

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

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

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

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

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

"What do you think?" Ayanokoji.

Excellent or not, the answer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Politicians are not people who just respond honestly to requests.

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

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

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

"Thank you very much."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The fist resting on my lap naturally clenched strongly.

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

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

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

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

"I will serve with all my heart."

Bowing deeply, I readily agreed to accept.

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

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

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

"Look it over."

"Excuse me."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"T-thank you very much!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I-I'm sorry..."

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

"How... how did it look?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Procuring a baby is no trouble.

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

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

"Y-yes!"

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

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

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

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

"Hidden children, unrecognized children, right?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The people on this list are..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is by no means an easy job.

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

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

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

This is not a word of confirmation.

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

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

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

"Of course, I will take this on."

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

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

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

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

"What is it?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Understood."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, good luck, Ayanokoji."

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

"We are sincerely committed to this project."

"Right."

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

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

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

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

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

"May I introduce myself?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

I grasped back the offered hand.

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

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

"Jack-of-all-trades?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peace Party, the first opposition party.

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

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

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

Whether politician or not, it is universal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Eh?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter - 2

Making Every Effort

Intro

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

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

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

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

We need to be flexible and adapt to changes.

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

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

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

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

We must give the people that impression.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Sorry, I’ll contact you again.”

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

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

“Just come in. It’s not locked.”

“Excuse me...”

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

“Whoah.”

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

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

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

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

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

“What about it?”

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

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

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

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

“It’s not as if the loans are passed because he is a parliament member.”

“Huh?”

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

“But, Kizarazu-san said that...”

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

“I see, that’s how it works... I guess I can’t pass for one, huh...”

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

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

Bringing one or two boxes of cake with them.

“How boring.”

“Boring, is it? Wouldn’t anyone long for living in a high class tower mansion?”

“Kamogawa. I will say this for your sake, don’t imitate someone like Kizarazu.”

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

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

“I see...”

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

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

[TL Note 4 : Doesn’t say “Yen”.]

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

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

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

“Think about it yourself.”

“Huh~? Please tell me~”

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

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

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

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

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

“So, what are you here for?”

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

“No need.”

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

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

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

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

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

“Can you be of use?”

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

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

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

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

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

"What kind of work is it?"

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

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

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

This project cannot be advertised openly.

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

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

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

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

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

No, he has to be.

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

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

"Is, is that so?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Of course, that is my goal.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thank you for waiting."

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

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

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

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

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

"Nothing bad, I hope."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What did you need of me?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No, he has to be.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Children, Education, Life.

It is certain that these words will connect with Sakayanagi.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I will not deny that.”

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

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

Sakayanagi nodded without hiding.

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

“You trust Naoe-sensei, huh?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You mean you sympathise with me?”

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

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

“...That's right.”

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

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

No, I am sure it will increase beyond that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Indeed.”

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

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

As this man says, this is all absolutely necessary.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Before I noticed, I was passionately talking to myself.

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

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

“No. These are all my personal thoughts.”

I can’t answer with a “yes” here.

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

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

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

It is certainly one of the new ventures.

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

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

“What would that be?”

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

“Is that really all you want?”

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

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

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

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

Whether friend or foe, information is power.

But, will things really go so easily?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

“...Don’t yell out loud.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It’s a nice place, right?”

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

“Here it is!”

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

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

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

Further, he’s even made a 3D model.

“Is this yours too?”

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

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

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

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

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

The first step is to put the project on track.

However, results will also be demanded of us.

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

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

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

“I understand.”

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

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

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

“Don’t worry. I have my target set.”

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

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

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

“N-no..! I don’t, not at all..!”

It’s not a threat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Is that how it is?"

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

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

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

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

"...I see."

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is no reason for anyone to interfere with this.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do you know what baby signing is?"

"Baby signing? What's that?"

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

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

“Oh...”

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

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

That is the goal of this project.

Part 3

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

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

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

This evening, I was visiting this place by myself.

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

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

"Welcome, Ayanokoji-sama."

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

"Where's Mika?"

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

"Well then, over here, please."

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

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

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

This means that preparations have already progressed before I even arrived

"Please wait a bit."

The boy bowed his head and left the room.

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

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

“Phew...”

A deep sigh, even surprising myself a little.

I haven’t been sleeping well recently.

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

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

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

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

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

“Money, money, money, huh..?”

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

“We’ll see what happens...”

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

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

I wonder how much time has passed since then.

Was it one minute, or one hour?

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

Familiar large eyes and lips.

The same gaze that always looks at me.

“Did you wake up?”

“...How long did I sleep?”

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

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

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

“Do you want some tea or water instead?”

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

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

“I have something to ask of you.”

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

“I can’t do that.”

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

“It’s very important work, huh?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Politicians are wary of smart women.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It’s Sonezaki.”

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

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

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

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

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

“What should I do?”

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

“This ended up being quite simple, huh?”

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

“Okay.”

“And one more thing. I want you to get close with Sasada too. It seems like his position has been going up lately. I want to learn one or two of his weaknesses in advance.”

“...Sasada, right? Why?”

Hearing Sasada’s name, Mika did not hide her disgust.

“I hate scummy bastards who touch my body without permission in plain sight though, you know?”

“Is he obsessed with you?”

“He even says that he’ll give me any amount of money I want if I spend a night with him.”

“That’s perfect. Respond to his desire. He will give you more money than you think.”

A weapon that men cannot possess. It’s a simple and effective strategy.

“How much will I get?”

“It’ll live up to your expectations if you show results.”

“I got it. I’m not enthusiastic, but I’ll do it well.”

“And don’t forget to be with Naoe-sensei too. That person values you too.”

“...We’ll see.”

For the first time, Mika’s expression shadowed a little.

“That, how should I put it... no matter how many times I get in close contact with him, I can’t ever see his true heart.”

She took a hand towel, and folded it suitably.

This is a habit Mika does a lot to distract herself from topics she doesn’t like.

“From my point of view, he’s an old man but he has an energy that makes you feel otherwise.”

“I never thought I could get you to say so much. As expected of Naoe-sensei...”

He is a person who shouldn’t fool you by his aged appearance.

“Be careful. I don’t want you to get swallowed up.”

“I wonder how many men you’ve presented these words to.”

I pulled a handful of bills from my wallet and messily put them on the table.

“Take it.”

“Are you leaving already? I have some time, you know?”

“Sorry, but I don’t have the time to be so leisurely.”

Alcohol and women are luxuries to indulge in, nothing more, and nothing less.
All that stuff will come eventually.

What's important now is to perfectly execute the project, and to make a name for myself in the Naoe Faction.

Part 4

A few months later, in my office, I was looking at the finished photos of the building that had just finished construction.

The floors, ceilings, walls, and everything else are painted with a white base.

The reason for this monochromatic colour scheme is to give the impression that the facility is clean.

Pure, innocent, clean, and holy; white has a number of strong positive connotations.

Many government officials will eventually visit to inspect the education that will take place here.

It is a little bit of an image strategy, but it is an element that should not be underestimated.

“Good morning, Ayanokoji-san.”

Kamogawa had arrived early at the Saitama site with the engineer for the final checks and reviewed the facility with a board in hand.

The work seemed to have come to an end, and he came back to the office with a look of relief on his face.

“All construction is complete.”

“Well done. It looks like the facility was made exactly in the way I imagined.”

“But, with that budget, how did you renovate it so beautifully? Normally, it would be no strange thing for it to cost almost twice as much.”

“There are a lot of construction contractors where dust comes out when you knock on the door.”

If you whisper too good to be true stories along with threats in their ears, they will cooperate without regard to profit.

“It is finally becoming a reality, huh? The human resource development project.”

“That’s right.”

“All of it, it’s all because you were able to move the people in the financial world, Ayanokoji-san. You collected around 400 million in one night, that’s a pretty big thing.”

The 400 million was invested in the educators, the land, the buildings, and the construction of the facility itself.

Most of it is gone now, though.

I had my life on the line to collect the money, but I won't have any trouble using it.

"These people are fed up with money, but they are always hungry for honor and prestige. If this project succeeds, they will get that in return. From the look of the party, they must have a lot of deals like this going on behind the scenes."

They are probably investing in a number of projects at the same time, including mine, and only think of it as a profit if one of them succeeds.

Some of them may have even forgotten about my existence.

"Are you saying we're not special?"

"It's fine to say so for now. Rather, it's more risky to get too much attention."

However, what's ahead of us will also be crucial.

In addition to the teachers who will provide the education, the children who will receive it must also be secured.

"But first, I have come up with a name for the facility that will be responsible for the human resource development project."

"Huh, really? What did you name it?"

"White Room. To emphasize white, which gives an image of purity, and to push it forward."

"White Room... I see, it is simple but also easy to understand."

Anyone will be able to see, that as its name suggests, this place is the White Room.

"I hope we can get the teachers and many others to visit us soon."

Kamogawa is becoming merry, but things will not go so easily.

"Kamogawa. I have something important to tell you. The world of politics is not a simple binary of friend or foe. If you go into it with an easy way of thinking, you'll end up in a mess you can't get back from."

"Huh..?"

He tilted his head back with a dumb look on his face, as if he didn't understand what I meant.

"It's fine. I guess you weren't ready for that talk yet."

No matter how favourable it looks, I am still walking on a bridge that could collapse at any moment.

Kamogawa doesn't know the fear of walking on that bridge yet.

"What will you do after this?"

"I'm supposed to meet and interview a few people here today. It's not possible to run White Room just by myself, so. It's scheduled for 4 o'clock."

It's impossible for amateurs to educate children out of the blue.

Kamogawa looked at his watch and bowed his head, looking a little offended.

He must have thought he was in the way, since the interview time was about 10 minutes away at 4:00 p.m.

"Come with me too."

"Oh, really?"

"You're also in charge of White Room, and you have a right to see who you're dealing with."

With a gleeful gleam in his eye, Kamogawa hurriedly began to clean up.

Exactly when it was about a minute from 4 o'clock, a visitor knocked at the office door.

"Come in."

Souya, a man appearing in a white coat, lightly bowed and approached.

"Hello there, Ayanokoji-san. I never thought that a stray researcher like me would be approached by a great politician like you."

"I haven't said I'm hiring you yet."

The man who showed up, Souya, was originally a doctor, but as a result of a number of problems he had caused, his medical licence was revoked.

After that, he began research on human growth. He was highly praised by some, but he has not been able to return to the limelight because of his past history.

"Kamogawa. If you have any first impressions about him, tell me."

"Is it... Alright?"

Kamogawa looked like he was not trying to interrupt, but I could easily tell he had things he wanted to say.

"I want to hear your opinion."

"Umm, I'm sorry, but why are you here in a white coat?"

"I can't come here naked, can I?"

"That's not what I... Normally, it's common sense to wear a suit for an interview, but..."

Souya looked at his clothes, and nodded somewhat unconvincingly.

"Isn't that a minor detail? My formal attire is a white coat, so I don't think there is any problem. I'd rather you take me more seriously with this than with a suit and tie."

Souya replied so, without a trace of apology.

"Ah, Ayanokoji-san... what will we do?"

Are you going to hire a man like him? That's what his eyes were telling him.

It is true that he had a lot of problems with his attitude and the way he dressed, which could not be said to be appropriate for an interview.

However, neither of these things were a necessity for the personnel that White Room needed.

"I don't have a medical license, but I'm proud to say that my background is impressive."

"I don't care about your personal history."

It seems that we need to cut away this misconception first.

Then, for the first time, Souya's nonchalant attitude hardened slightly.

"Enough... You're here to judge me for what I did too, aren't you? I came here because you said you would interview me regardless of my past problems, but it turned out to be a mistake."

"Don't jump to conclusions by yourself. I told you that I don't care about the past. I'm talking about your entire career path. What university you graduated from, what hospital you worked at, what kind of crime you've committed.

I have no interest in any of it."

Souya, about to get up from his seat, stopped moving.

"All I'm looking for is your current thoughts and abilities. You have a good perspective as a person and insight into human beings. Are you confident that you can use your skills?"

"I know most things when I see someone. That hasn't changed."

For the first time, Souya showed his face as a researcher.

"It takes a lot of guts and determination to enter the illegal world. That's all I wanted to see here. I can't really judge whether or not you're actually useful until I see you in the field."

I don't have the luxury of picking and choosing someone with a personality I like.

"...My apologies."

Souya bowed deeply, even though I didn't ask him to.

"The few years after I was discharged... I was always frustrated as I ate up my savings. I shut myself in and continued cutting myself off from the world."

"You regretted it, didn't you? The past mistakes you've committed."

"Regret? I do not regret anything. I just can't help but get mad thinking about why they sold me out."

He doesn't in the least think that he did anything wrong.

So he was exactly of a nature that was bound to fail, and he did.

Kamogawa, who had led a serious and mild-mannered life, must be a bad match for him.

"I will give you a chance to come back to life. From now on, you will work for me as a former doctor and researcher, managing the subjects and helping them grow. Understand?"

This man with nowhere to go has nothing to complain about when I employ him with the same treatment as before.

"Thank you very much. I'll make sure I'll live up to your expectations."

I told him right there and then that I would be employing Souya, and left.

"I'm really worried about whether it's okay... to hire someone like that."

"I understand what you want to say. However, this is actually more convenient for us."

"Is, is that so?"

"There is no one around him who he is close with. Further, he is obsessed with money, and does not seek honour in the outside world. If we give him money and a place to work, I am

sure he won't betray us. It is impossible to contact outsiders and generate a third party income here."

Of course, there is a possibility that he will threaten us and demand higher wages, but if that is the extent of his behaviour, there is no need for us to hesitate.

"I'm sure he also understood while dealing with me, that it would not be profitable to make an enemy of me."

"I, I see..."

"If that man is the only one coming in, we won't last much longer. Leaving aside this Souya, I gathered a lot of people who are talented but were fired after causing a lot of problems, so."

I can't be negligent in terms of leadership, but as far as their competency goes, they are dependable.

In addition, we have other professionals from the field of training, including one who ran an obstetrics and gynaecology practice, an expert in ecology, and a mentor who has built up olympic athletes.

Of course, this is just the start. From here out, we will expand our reach and bring in geniuses in all kinds of fields to work on the children's development.

"But, was it okay not to ask for more details? We don't really know how well he can work."

"Detailed explanations are unnecessary. I don't know anything about medicine or education, anyhow. So, I'm going to emphasize that they will have to work hard, and employ them based on the fighting power they can bring in."

"So you're saying that... almost everyone who comes in for an interview has already been accepted?"

"That's what I'm saying. So it doesn't make any difference whether you are sitting next to me or not."

In the sense of putting pressure on them, I can see that it helps a little.

I'm not sure how much knowledge I can gain by studying now.

It's best to put the experts against the experts, rather than have a complete novice stick his neck out.

"The answer to the question of whether the guy can really do it or not, or whether the guy coming in for an interview is capable of it or not, can be found by letting the people you hire compete with each other."

A separate team of experts will analyze whether the education has produced results. If they don't see certain results, they will simply cut the head off without mercy.

Part 5

"It's, it's over, huh... I'm more tired than I expected."

The interviews began at 4:00 p.m. and ended at 8:00 p.m. after meeting with a total of six people.

I understand Kamogawa's feeling of weakness.

I have no doubt that all of them are professionals in their field.

However, as human beings, they were all so immature and nauseating.

I knew that I should not think that I could have a decent conversation with them.

It would be easy to hire all of the people gathered here today, but...

"What will you do?"

"There is a big problem in regards to their characters, but, I will hire Ishida, Souya, and then Tabuchi, who seem to have the most proper personality. As for the rest, their inner problems were stronger than their ability, so I intend to let them go for now."

"Leaving aside his statements, his history, and way of thinking were great, huh? I don't really understand that well, but..."

However, it remains unknown whether this will help the project get off the ground.

I thought that I might see things a bit better with the interviews, but...

In no way can I shake off this feeling of uneasiness.

Even if they are competent, I didn't feel anything breaking through.

Is it really possible to provide the best education like this?

"Let's go eat something."

I won't make any progress even if I think about it, so I should probably reset my head for now.

"Right!? Let's go, it's just the time for it right now!"

I invited Kamogawa out to dinner for a change of pace, and right after I got up from my seat while taking my cell phone out of my pocket...

“Ayanokoji-san, did you drop something?”

After saying so, he held out a piece of paper he picked up from the ground to me. It was a business card.

“Ah, he did give this to us, didn’t he? It’s all crumpled, but...”

“It might be a good idea to see how useful he would be.”

“Wait, are you going to contact him? His smile, it was kind of scary, but...”

It is a dubious title, but that Naoe-sensei would not put someone of no use besides him.

It might be a good idea to just get in contact with him.

I tried calling the number written on the business card on my cell phone.

If I couldn’t get a connection, I am willing to dismiss it as a lost opportunity.

That’s about how I felt.

After I put in the numbers and the call rang a few times...

“I thought you might be contacting me, Ayanokoji-san.”

I could tell from the voice also that it was Tsukishiro, and he answered without hesitation.

“How did you know it was me?”

I never gave him my number, and this was the first time I had ever called Tsukishiro.

“Because it is only natural to investigate beforehand.”

“I don’t like it.”

The act of looking into my number itself did not surprise me.

It’s just a matter of asking around Naoe-sensei, or his secretaries. What I don’t like is the way he seemed to know that I was calling.

“What is Naoe-sensei making you do?”

I don’t think it’s just a mere introduction.

I sensed intuitively that there was a set-up behind the scenes

“I understand what you mean, but I can’t give an answer here.”

“You’re watching to see if I mess up, that’s about it, right?”

I can’t sense the other party’s agitation or true nature just by his voice.

However, at the same time, that would also be a risky decision.

At the very least, it is hard to believe that this Tsukishiro man would shop an opening so easily.

“I’d like to meet you soon if it’s alright. I may be able to meet your expectations as well.”

As I was thinking about what to do, the invite came from Tsukishiro’s side.

“Expectations?”

“You called me because you are in trouble, didn’t you?”

“You are very confident, huh? I haven’t said a word about it yet. You may regret it if you set your expectations too high.”

“I’m ready even now, if I am needed.”

Now? He has quite some confidence, huh?

Or, he may have a different objective.

Do I stay on guard, or do I purposefully go along with him?

“In that case, it’s now.. I won’t let you say it’s unreasonable, then.”

“Of course. What shall we do, then? I can visit you myself. You are in the office right now, right?”

“...Fuck you.”

Is he saying he even knows I live in my office?

“It looks like things will go smoother if I am the one who goes out. Can I have around an hour, then?”

“Do whatever you want.”

Leaving aside if Tsukishiro had confidence that I would visit him or not, there is no mistaking the fact that he has been searching for my vicinity and that he has grasped it.

It seems like information about this project is already flying around with Naoe-sensei at the center.

“Umm, what happened?”

“I’m meeting Tsukishiro now.”

“What, now!? What about food..?”

“Go alone. I’ll meet the guy by myself.”

As long as he has one foot in this project, Kamogawa is a trove of information.

As long as there is the possibility of this man being an enemy, Kamogawa’s existence will be a nuisance.

Part 6

One hour from then. I had been waiting outside the office to see how he would show up.

Then, at pretty much the agreed upon time, a black BMW's figure came into view.

"I'll go to the parking lot, so please wait a bit."

Tsukishiro, opening the driver's side window and saying so, put his car into a parking lot and came back.

"I didn't expect you to drive yourself."

"I work alone most of the time, so. Besides, I don't like leaving the driving to someone else. It is the same thing as having your life in their hands."

I thought the man was being exaggerated, but on the flip side, he may just be exposed to that much danger.

Moving on to the office, I sat Tsukishiro down at a suitable spot.

"You said you may meet my expectations, but do you know what needs to be done?"

He never broke his smile, which gave rise to an unpleasant atmosphere.

"Yes. It is related to the human resource development project, right?"

"Looks like Naoe-sensei sees through anything and everything. huh? I guess this means that he had no intention of leaving it all to me from the start."

That day, I thought that Naoe-sensei left the project to only me and Kamogawa.

No, maybe it's my fault for interpreting it in that way.

My first big job. I guess it is only natural that because he must succeed, Naoe-sensei would want to have things guaranteed.

"If I go down, you'll take over the project and be left with its management, right?"

"Maybe I will, or maybe I won't."

Of course, there's no way he would answer honestly.

This man's age shouldn't be that different from mine. It seems like he's stepped into a lot of places.

In that case, it would be normal to depend on him.

“No, I’m wrong, I think. He must simply be looking out in advance for the politician who will be my replacement.”

If Kamogawa and I fail, a different politician will take over the project.

“Impressive. That’s a half-correct answer, Ayanokoji-san.”

“Half, is it?”

“Yes. There are two duties left to me; one is exactly what you spoke of. The other one is to aid the politician who is in charge of the human development project.”

“Aid?”

“A strong support. However, you don’t seem to be pleased, huh?”

It sounds good when you say “aid”, but a process for the case of me failing must also be included.

“I can’t make sense of it. I don’t think Naoe-sensei would rely on you, who is around the same age as me.”

“It is true that, just like you, I am young if you look at it from the world of politics. However, if you are good at supporting the big name politicians, you will be valued even if you are young. Well, in my case, I work with any partner, regardless of if they are a politician or not.”

Tsukishiro, not even trying to hide the fact that he is successful.

I don’t think it is overconfidence. He’s showing me confidence based on his achievements.

“Before asking you to work, there’s something I’d like to confirm beforehand.”

“What would that be?”

I pulled out the newspaper from this morning, and put my finger on an article in the corner.

“Ooarai City in Ibaraki Prefecture. It looks like there was a body at the port there.”

“It isn’t that rare of a story, is it? Many people are dying all over Japan, so.”

“He was a local journalist, I know this man. He was a lone wolf who hated the world of politics... mainly the ruling party, Citizens Party.”

“What about it? Does it have anything to do with now and this place?”

"Did you do it, Tsukishiro?"

"You ask very direct questions, huh, Ayanokoji-san? Do you think I will answer with a yes?"

"That doesn't matter. What I want to know is whether or not this reporter was keeping a watch on Naoe-sensei when he met you at the restaurant the other day or not."

Without even moving a brow, Tsukishiro lightly dropped his eyes onto the newspaper article."

"He seemed like he was about to write a gossip article about Naoe-sensei, you see. That he's playing around with young women even though he has a wife and children. The Citizens Party couldn't have avoided its image being damaged."

As I expected.

This is the reason that this man was moving together with Naoe-sensei in the restaurant the other day.

He put a woman on Naoe-sensei on purpose, determined the reporter who would be aiming for this, and took care of him.

Of course, I'm sure he will not admit it in daylight, but...

I made a fist, and strongly hit the table.

"That does not seem to be fear, huh? Goodness gracious... Could it actually be, anger?"

Tsukishiro continued while curiously analyzing my movements.

It is true that with this talk, shaking in fear or fright would be the normal thing.

Because it is possible that the man before my eyes has killed a man as a job.

"You're wondering why you weren't left with the work yourself... Is that the source of this anger?"

"Dirty work is my role. It's been like that up until now too."

If I get even one order, I am confident that I can deal with it just as well as this man.

"At the least, I won't be so stupid that the body will end up found."

"I know your circle of friends very well. You are very close with the Ooba Group, aren't you, Ayanokoji-san?"

Does he naturally have a grasp on everything about me?

"Then you should have already understood very quickly that I would not be afraid of you."

“The Ooba Group is not a large organization, but they are quite notorious. I am aware that you worked very hard to build up a friendly relationship. However, if the corpse is not found, then it is not a corpse. A missing person could not have put fear into the hearts of the numberless enemy rats watching Naoe-sensei, could it?”

In other words, he did not fail to hide it, but purposefully let the body be found, huh..?

Whether or not Tsukishiro is involved in the death of a local reporter is no longer relevant.

I don't think this is a guy I can threaten by reaching out with my arms and grabbing him by the chest here.

If I am being made to think so, then his strategy is working well.

“I understand how you feel, but that is proof that Naoe-sensei is putting his heart and soul into his human resource development plan. Since he decided to select you, he couldn't let you cross a dangerous bridge just to sink a reporter. Even if this incident becomes a problem, the person who would be blamed for it would be someone else, someone you don't know anything about.”

This man is dangerous. However, his talent is high, and he is a quick talker if he knows what's going on.

If he could not manoeuvre over the people he faces, he could not have reached these heights.

“There are a lot of things about it I don't like, but you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs.”

“That is correct. We should keep our personal circumstances separate and think things through, right?”

Any more idle chatter is just a waste of time.

I should try to get into the main subject.

“I've been interviewing staff for a new research facility. I've managed to secure some personnel, but I'm still lacking a deciding factor. I will need time to search again.”

“So you're asking if I can help you with arranging human resources? That was fast.”

“If you have any ideas. I'm not looking for a half-hearted asset, though.”

“Do not worry. I know of a person of talent who would convince you, Ayanokoji-san.”

“Oh?”

“However, it is a different story if I will introduce them to you. You understand, right?”

This world is mostly about business.

It doesn't matter if you like your partner or hate them, or if you have a deep or thin relationship with them..

“I understand. How much?”

If I can get a reward of equal value, I have no dissatisfaction about paying money.

“In theory it is best to handle things with cash, but I have some policies of my own. I would like to sit down and talk with potential clients. First of all, would you be willing to allow me to interview you?”

“That's funny. I was the one interviewing just a few minutes ago and now I'm on the receiving end.”

What a joke. However, it would be foolish to throw away an opportunity for the sake of a little time and pride.

“Alright. You can do whatever you want.”

I'm going to play along with Tsukishiro's game here and see if I can use him or not.

“Thank you very much.”

Tsukishiro took out a light blue clear file and pulled out several sheets of paper from it.

So, was it all calculated to get us to this point?

“Ayanokoji Atsuomi, 31 years old. Male. Born in Kumamoto Prefecture, Aso City. Education history is high school-”

“Wait a minute. Is it necessary to confirm that stuff with an interview?”

“It is important.”

He may not be joking, but his thin smile makes me want to vomit.

“You and I are equals. No, maybe not even equal. What determines our hierarchy is up to you now, and you can decide. If you feel like swearing, please do not refrain from putting it into words.”

He is smiling, but I wonder how serious he is.

However, I have already made my decision.

Because I've come to understand that he seems so different, yet so similar in character.

"I have not been refraining from anything, but I still had to restrain myself with Naoe-sensei behind me. From now on, I will deal with you without reservation in the true sense of the word."

"That would be best."

After grinning, Tsukishiro began to speak again.

"I've followed your career as far as I can. Your life has not been easy, and it seems that you had a poor childhood."

I'm not sure how much research he's done, but it seems he's done his fair share.

It seems likely that he is in contact with someone who knew me as a child and as a student.

"I've also investigated your family structure. It seems your parents abandoned you when you were little, and you were raised by your grandparents from your father's side."

From the way he speaks, it would seem that a bad lie would have the opposite effect.

"No parents, no money, no proper house. That's how my life was."

"No proper house? What kind of place did you live in?"

"A shack for farm equipment maintained by the adults in the neighborhood. It had a crude tin roof and no electricity or gas. I could only take a bath once or twice a week with hot water boiled in a cassette stove."

It's not a past to be proud of; in fact, to others it would sound like self-torture.

However, I'm not pessimistic about the past.

I think it has allowed me to lead a life that has given me the determination to rise to the top.

"My grandfather died when I was in junior high school. But, it was a turning point. I was able to buy an old house nearby with my grandmother with the money from an insurance policy he had put out before he died and moved."

It wasn't the kind of house you'd want to live in.

However, I remember that I was happy because I felt like I had a big castle.

"Is your grandmother alive?"

"No. I remember that she died when I was over 18 years old. Probably."

"You don't seem to care that much."

"I didn't see her die, and I have no interest in it. I was too busy living my life for myself, so."

I did not attend the funeral, although I received one phone call from someone who seemed to be a distant relative. I paid only the minimum expenses and let them handle everything.

Including my grandfather, I don't even know where their graves are and where their remains are buried.

"I see that after all the hard work she put into raising you, her life ended in vain."

"I don't know if it was hard work or not."

Of course, I know that raising a child is hard work, and I think so.

"But it is true that it was an empty end. The son she had raised with all her heart and soul abandoned his child and disappeared, and the grandchildren who were left behind did not even try to help the parent who raised them. She had to live in poverty for decades and never had the luxury of living a good life."

If I had lived as my grandmother, I would have described it as a living hell.

"How do you feel about that situation, looking at it objectively now? Does it hurt?"

"No? Nothing has changed from that time. No, it's more than that. My grandmother lived a life of a loser and died as a loser. If she had at least abandoned me, her grandson, and made good use of my grandfather's insurance money, she would have had a somewhat better life."

I have no intention of living such a miserable life.

I can say that she was useful to me as a close antagonist.

"When was it that you decided to become a politician?"

"It all started when I was a host and a woman who came as a client told me a story. She told me that being a politician is not only about money, but also about power."

In fact, there were many parliament members in the area who played around in cabarets.

I was jealous of these people who played around with the public's blood money.

"You ran for the first time at the age of 25, but your vote count was hopeless and you lost badly, also forfeiting your deposit money."

Tsukishiro read out the profile he had investigated of me.

“At the age of 27, you announced your intention to run again when the House of Representatives was dissolved, and was first elected after being favoured and encouraged by Naoe-sensei. It seems you learned a lot about politics during those two years.”

“I admit that I was the most desperate man in my life. As a former host, I used women to get close to Naoe-sensei. Of course, that alone would not have won me his approval, but I am proud to say that he bought my persistent touch, my enthusiasm, and my ambition.”

Tsukishiro nodded his head in satisfaction.

“Thank you for the details.”

Closing the file, Tsukishiro turned to face me.

“It should be fine. I will accept you as a client.”

Saying this, Tsukishiro pulled out a new file.

“Wait a minute. You’re accepting me as a client with this kind of talk?”

“You may lack some knowledge, but that is not important. You can make up for it plenty with your rich intellect and body.

What’s important is your “thinking”. Your ambition painted with unhidable evil, I’ve judged that you excel in the qualities of a politician.”

I looked down at the file in front of me.

“They are excellent personnel that will live up to your expectations.”

Did he even foresee that I would contact him looking for personnel?

No, there is a possibility that Naoe-sensei is backing him up from behind the scenes.

“How much?”

“Not this time. It is best if I can be repaid in a big way one day in the future, so. You may become a big-name one day. That is the biggest reason that I decided to accept this.”

“Don’t make me laugh. How many politicians have you whispered the same things to? Do you think that I will accept such flattery?”

Even this man who is babbling that he has accepted my talents only decided to cooperate with me after seeing my background.

“Of course, I’m sure it’s not just one or two people, right?”

He admitted easily and stood up.

“If you surpass others in talent, you will increase your enemies in the political world. Your stakes will be driven down, and your political life will be snatched away. Your evil and ambition may be held down by a stronger force.”

“I won’t be so easily crushed, though.”

“That may be so. If you find yourself in a place where you are about to be killed, you have to have the resolve to take the person next to you along with you.

That kind of person tenaciously survives.”

Being a newcomer to the world of politics, I can’t do anything without Naoe-sensei shielding my back.

As I left the office with Tsukishiro, a young man in white clothes came up to me.

“He is the one you are looking for. I had instructed him in advance to come at this time.”

“Was this your intent from the start?”

“Of course, I had no intention of letting you meet with him if you were unsuccessful in my interview.”

Interview time for another newly added person.

On his resume, a slightly rare name was written: “Suzukake Tanji”.

“Hi.”

“Please sit.

Even though the personnel were arranged by Tsukishiro and Naoe-sensei's side, I still can't let my guard down.

The person to be hired must be questioned in detail and checked for any problems.

The man called Suzukake who entered the room looked like a middle-aged man with a stubble beard, but he was even younger than me: 29 years old.

He had graduated from the University of Tokyo at the head of his class and went over to the U.S., but he never made any significant achievements.

He was a man without any titles except his intelligence, so to speak, but I still don’t know why the Tsukishiro Side recommended such a man.

“Your résumé seems pretty blank, but what did you do abroad?”

“ I was doing what I wanted to do.”

“...What did you want to do?”

“Well, all kinds of things.”

“I can’t really understand that. Please speak concretely.”

“Human observation.”

I’m glad I’ve been seeing so many people today who can’t even use proper honorifics. I’ve learned that it’s somewhat better to be spoken to normally than half-heartedly in honorifics.

“Then, please tell me why you decided to take this interview.”

“I heard it pays well. I need money to stay abroad.”

“The cost of living can’t even be compared to Japan, so I can understand.”

If one has the ability they should work on location, but judging from this man’s attitude, I don’t need to question him about the difficulty of doing so.

“I have a question for you too, but...”

“What is it?”

“Before that, please stop with that disgusting formal speech. You can look at me like I am insect all you want, but if you really want to work, then I want to know your true character.”

“...I see. That’s fine, but won’t that just mean you’ll have to leave?”

If this is what he wants, I don’t have to wear human skin either.

I broke my slightly upright posture, and crossed my legs.

“You aren’t hired at the moment, Suzukake. You graduated from a prestigious school at the top of your class, and you deserve credit for your brains, but you haven’t left anything behind.”

“Because I just wasn’t even provided the stage to do so.”

Replying so, he continued his words right after.

“I’m not looking for fame or a title. But, I do want to understand the mechanisms of a human. This project’s policy of human resource development seemed like the perfect opportunity to solve my questions.”

“You’re not looking for a title, huh? If you perform to my expectations, you will be provided rewards you haven’t been able to gain at the front stage.”

When I handed him the materials regarding the White Room, Suzukake immediately began to look through them.

I have to dangle a large amount of carrots in front of these guys and make them show their talent without regret.

That’s what I thought, but researchers are hard to understand.

With a childlike gleam in his eyes, he checked out the facilities and environment, and began to randomly murmur about his hopes and ideals.

Part 7

Later, I visited the White Room in Saitama, which had undergone renovation work, and was exploring the image of the room and worrying about the selection of further educators.

Then, Kamogawa came to me.

“Thank you for your hard work, Ayanokoji-san. Have you made arrangements for the children?”

“The plan couldn’t start if I hadn’t. The scheme is almost complete.”

“Wow, of course... Of course, you don’t have to give me the details. I don’t want to, umm, get caught or anything yet.”

A means to gather children, which I am not speaking of to this Kamogawa.

That is, to get newborns illegally from black market brokers using the Ooba Group.

However, this entails many dangers.

As such, we must eventually switch to a more legitimate way of collecting children.

Although it is still in the planning stage, we will soon launch a website and announce that we will be a place for parents who cannot raise their unborn children due to unavoidable circumstances to be able to take their children to.

Ideally, we would cooperate with the parents even before the birth of the child. Some women can’t even pay for a birth without relying on the government’s system.

There are many cases of women giving birth in secret and their children dying. Of course, this is theoretically possible. However, at the same time, there are great risks involved.

A woman is not a parent in the true sense of the word yet just by carrying a child in her belly.

She may not be able to give birth,

or she may have no choice but to become a mother when she comes face to face with her child one day.

And what if there is a fatal accident?

If they sue for the return of their child, it will be traced back to the White Room in the backscene.

That must be avoided.

If it becomes public, it would be more than just a matter of tarnishing Naoe-sensei's name.

It is imperative that we only accept children from those who have given birth elsewhere, are not responsible, and cannot be mothers.

It would be good to have a myriad of beautiful and hypocritical words on the homepage.

"Don't take a life," "anonymous baby adoption," "counseling for the needy," "foster care system," and so on, all of which seem to guarantee a future for you and your child.

Whenever a mother visits a hospital, the first step is always to set up a meeting.

We don't ask her name or where she lives, we just ask her to give a reason why she can't raise her child freely.

If the child is simply unacceptable, some will readily allow the child to go to foster care. If they are strapped for cash, we can just give them some money.

If they have no choice but to give the child to the hospital, we will be sure to provide an extension of one week.

Some parents may regret giving up their children the following day.

In this way, unrecognized children will be gathered and sent to the White Room.

In order to be prepared for the possibility of being asked to return their children two or three years later, a connection will be made only with each mother in the form of a name.

Of course, you can't just return a child from foster care, that kind of reasoning doesn't work.

As long as we are doing something illegal, we need to avoid being publicized.

Further, the commodity called children must be treated very delicately.

"The problem is, if anything, beyond that. It is the medical care of the children brought to White Room."

"Medical care..?"

"Children are weak. They get sick at the slightest thing. However, as it would be difficult to take them to a hospital, it is essential to have doctors who can treat them in White Room."

Not just any doctor, however.

There are many conditions... They must have had their physician's license taken away. Their thinking must be flexible. The doctor must be as old as possible, but not too old. Further,

they must be able to re-acquire their physician's license if the situation demands it. They must also need money and be unwilling to work in the real world.

"That's... Quite a lot of difficult conditions, huh? Should I say it's not beautiful, or..."

"You're right in thinking that. However, all over Japan, in every nook and cranny of the land, you will find those with unexpected histories if you search for them. In my search, I came across a former doctor who lives deep in the mountains of Tottori. He had a history of a traffic accident that killed two university students who were riding a bike in the past."

Accidents are not rare.

While returning home after a late night at the office, the doctor was assaulted by a feeling of sleepiness and started to make a right turn without realizing the distance between himself and the bike coming straight ahead, and they collided.

They could not be saved even after the police and an ambulance were immediately dispatched.

Unfortunately, the person he hit was a child of a well-known local landowner,

and after that, he fled to an unrelated region to run away from the people's eyes.

"10 years since that accident. It was possible to get his physician's license back, but, he's been living his days drowning in alcohol."

"That, that kind of person is... But, while it is good news that you found him, aren't you worried?"

"He was always a flamboyant and extravagant person. That's what I'm aiming for."

One person, at the very least.

Another one if possible.

I have to secure doctors to be in charge of the children's health.

Part 8

3 months after that.

The arrangement of the children is progressing, and the operation is finally about to begin.

However, the final phase of the project, the educational part, has to be finalized with the educators.

I brought what little luggage I had into the white room and was about to gather the live-in researchers into the lab for a discussion.

Ishida, Souya, Suzukake, Tabuchi.

The four of them are sitting down wearing their white robes.

“From now on, you four will be in charge of training the first batch of White Room students. This is the first time we meet in person, but we’ve had many discussions in online meetings. I don’t think there will be any obstacles to working together.”

“Please wait a bit. We did have many discussions, but we have not yet reached a consensus in the direction we are heading or our policies.

How do you intend to align us together?”

Souya, the elder, strongly expressed his mind.

Ishida and Suzukake were not even nodding, but instead were confident that they were not mistaken in their own principles.

This was the same in the repeated online meetings too, so it’s no surprise.

I could endlessly let them continue discussing the direction they want to take, but they would never get along.

“What if I tell you to twist your opinions and obey me?”

“I can’t do that. In that case, I’ll get out.”

“Me too. I’m here to provide my ideal education. If I can’t do that, I don’t feel like being here.”

The same goes for Suzukake.

The idea of compromising was never even in the corner of his mind.

“What is with the rude attitude towards Ayanokoji-san? I know you’ve been paid a fitting amount of money at the preparation stage.”

Kamogawa, an amateur in the field of educational theory, could not overlook the fact that they were being disrespectful. However, I rebuked Kamogawa.

“They’re saying troubling things, but there’s no need to jump to conclusions.”

The children we’ve prepared and can use right now are 15 in total.

I lined up 15 sheets of business-card sized paper with the babies’ names, genders, and dates of birth written on the backs.

Then, I shuffled them as if randomly mixing cards, and put them on top of the table.

“Ishida, Suzukake, Souya. Pick 5 random cards each and take them. They are the kids you will educate and be in charge of. Educate them for a certain period of time. The first term White Room students will be trained in three groups at the same time. Tabuchi has agreed to supervise you all equally.”

Tabuchi nodded, and sent a glance towards the three.

“I see. Good idea. As long as our views don’t align, this is the only choice.”

The conclusion I came up with was to let these three compete freely.

It would be an impossible task to ask these geniuses, who have different philosophies and beliefs, to align themselves from the start.

“However, it’s not going to last forever. The training period is three years. When all the children reach the age of three, they will be given a comprehensive test, and the one who led the group with the best performance will be the official leader.”

There was no cause for concern, as no one thought they would lose.

Ishida nodded, satisfied with the content, and reached for the paper, so I glared at him and grabbed his arm.

“W-what!?”

“Listen. If you lose and then say something stupid like that your children have different qualities or that you are not going to abide by the decision, you will lose the three years’ worth of money you have inscribed in your bank book as a penalty. And you will completely lose your position in the underworld, and not just in the public eye. Make sure you don’t forget that, alright?”

Ishida in front of me took in my words and strongly, slowly, took a gulp.

“You two are fine with it too, right?”

“No objections.”

It seemed that Souya was convinced too, but I’m sure he is more certain now.

However, Suzukake was the only one with a stern expression.

“If you have any complaints, talk now.”

“I understand. I’m just stuck on the follow the leader part. I don’t think I’ll lose, but I want to know how the people by my side will move. Am I supposed to follow a leader of different principles with blind acceptance? If so, I have no intention of taking this on.”

“If all I want is a yes, I don’t need a genius. There is no merit in uniting three people, much less three different people like you. The leader has the final say, and if there are any objections to the policy, I’ll ask for a thorough discussion. That’s also why Tabuchi is here, so.”

“It’s like the ruling party and the opposition party, huh?”

As if impressed, Kamogawa spoke like a politician.

“... I understand.”

Ishida has also calmed down, but still has not lost color in his confident eyes.

It will delay the plan, but for now this is probably the best option.

The first term students will be trained in three groups over a period of three years, and after that, a leader will be chosen.

It will cost money and reduce efficiency, but it is a necessary step to bring these educators together.

I will create a new educational policy and start training new term students on a yearly basis.

I’m sure I will be forced to modify various plans along the way, but this is the best option I can take now.

Chapter - 3

Start-up Phase

Intro

Dreams. People dream almost every day, and whether or not they remember them is related to the depth of their sleep.

Considering the fact that this dream is etched in my brain in a very vivid way, it seems that I have been sleeping quite poorly.

The dream I'm seeing right now is, yes, a long time ago, when I was still a teenager.

I was remembering in my dream how I felt when I saved up the money to buy one of those used light cars.

The car had over 100,000 kilometers on the odometer, and the interior was a shabby piece of junk that could not be fixed in any way.

I can't say it was a comfortable ride, but I still drove it around feeling like a pillar of the family.

I had no friends or lovers, and the time I spent with just myself and the car was irreplaceable.

A long time has passed since then, and I am now asleep in the back seat without driving myself.

The deep, soft comfort of the genuine leather seat.

The warm feeling covering my back.

All of these things have changed to something far more luxurious than the car I used to drive.

But why?

Why is it that I can't quite reach the excitement and joy of those days?

"Ayanokoji-san, we will be arriving soon."

I quietly opened my eyes to hear such a voice from the driver's seat.

The scenery had changed from the city to a rough road surrounded by mountains.

“It's going to be a little bumpy from here on out.”

“I know.”

Three years have already passed since I was put in charge of the human resource development project by Naoe-sensei.

At first, I wondered what would happen, but the project, officially named the White Room Project, was launched in secret.

The number of people from the business world who wanted to invest in the project increased day by day, and the project succeeded in creating a surplus of funds.

Of course, all the money raised is designated as being for the White Room.

An important talk of investment.

Even going back to the past, I can't think of any subject that has gathered so much anticipation without even showing results yet.

Like certain stocks, by the time that ordinary people learn they can make money, it'll already be too late.

Only those who heavily invested while the project was still hidden will be able to make money.

Even without mentioning Naoe-sensei's name, profits will be predicted when I start working.

All of this is on my side.

The presence of the high education that the government has already succeeded with ahead of time will become quite important too.

The government will eventually get involved in the white room, even if they don't talk about it.

Those who have invested ahead of the curve can expect enormous publicity and payback.

Even if things have been going well up to this point, if when the lid opens the results are disappointing, the investors will not hesitate to return fire, and those who call us “sensei, sensei” will hurl abuse at us all at the same time.

The important thing will be to achieve clear and constant results.

We cannot let our guard down at all.

While I was on the move, I received a new call on my cell phone from someone in the business world who wanted to invest in the project.

Although the true value of the children of the first term had not yet been publicly announced, as soon as the second one began their intake period, applicants began to arrive one after another.

This was despite the fact that we had not yet ostensibly told them about the education and growth of the first term.

Of course, this is my strategic move.

The fact that the education in the white room was going well, that it was more successful than we had imagined, and that there were so many applicants that we might not be able to accept all of them.

By secretly disseminating such information about the White Room, I was increasing the value of its existence.

In addition, there were people who wanted to use the White Room for purposes other than what it was intended for.

Which was, the existence of illegitimate children, an issue inseparable from wealthy families.

The mistress insists on giving birth to a child, and as a condition for that, she is allowed to leave her child with the White Room.

In this way, it is possible to completely eliminate the child's existence in public eyes.

The achievement of giving birth to a child and the connection with her partner can still remain.

Of course, this may be difficult for most people to understand, and irredeemable.

We have no reason to hold back, since it will lead to the securing of human and financial resources for the White Room.

I accepted the offer and immediately added it to my list.

"They never learn, do they?"

Do people go crazy because they have money? They easily repeat unwanted pregnancies because of their selfish acts.

I don't mind utilizing them for secret births, but the looseness of their nether regions is appalling.

Now more than 30% of the entire second trimester has accepted illegitimate or other children that cannot be revealed.

In other words, the white room is still worth about that much.

We don't have enough credibility and track record to have beloved children entrusted to us.

The financiers offer money and children, but there is still much they don't know about the real plan, and of course many of the staff members don't know the true meaning of the experiment.

They will not doubt that the purpose of the experiment is to provide an education for children born under an unfortunate star, to raise them well, and to return them to society.

"It's not unreasonable, though."

I, myself, am still far more inclined to see children as experimental subjects.

To take care of the precious children of wealthy families now is to take a big risk.

How to bridge this discrepancy is also an issue that cannot be avoided in the future. Regardless, any child will be thoroughly educated.

White Room will eventually turn into a government-approved facility, and not just a pipe dream.

Eventually, educational facilities around the world will model themselves after the White Room.

Naoe-sensei and I will take the lead in building that bridge, and we will have a greater voice within the party.

When the aging Naoe-sensei retires, I will have a huge boost waiting for me.

Little by little, I am steadily moving forward one step at a time.

I'm starting to really feel it.

It was not a mistake that I started working on the human resource development project with all my might from the day Naoe-sensei entrusted it to me.

This project is an essential part of my life.

There is no doubt that bright hope lies far ahead.

However - I am not completely free of any uncertainties.

While I was working on the White Room Project, I've been inevitably becoming more and more distant from the political world.

They have a very keen sense of smell.

Some of them must have figured out that I was working on a project like this behind the scenes.

I am the right hand of Naoe-sensei who has a lot of allies but also a lot of enemies, so there are many people trying to pull out my weaknesses.

I had to get some distance in order to differentiate the ones who are on my side, and the ones who are against me.

White Room is now half my body.

But that's why I made sure that my connections to the financial world were strong.

If you can't expand your connections in the political world, you should strengthen your position in the business world.

This is a meaningful conduct precisely because the political and the financial worlds are connected as one in front and back.

My ties to the financial world are becoming stronger day by day, so I have chosen to wear the mask of both a politician and a wealthy man.

I channel money from right to left, left to right, and strengthen myself with the money I collected.

"I heard that Sakayanagi-san arrived at the White Room just now."

"I see. I don't mind the shaking, just hurry up a little."

"Understood."

Part 1

Even though I still had some time before my appointment, he was a guest, and it was not a good idea to keep him waiting.

After passing through the gate and letting the car pull up to the front entrance, I strode to the guest room.

Sakayanagi, who had not sat down on the sofa but was standing and staring out the window, looked back at me.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“I don’t mind, Ayano-koji-sensei. You arrived earlier than planned, so.”

Bowing politely, Sakayanagi approached me, smiling as usual.

“I was looking forward to today's unveiling of the White Room”

“It looks like it.”

Over the past three years or so, I have continued to interact with Sakayanagi frequently.

I had thought that I would not get along with Sakayanagi, who was born into a privileged environment, but even so, you never know what people will do when they have some common goal in mind.

The fact that I had been dealing with people who were always trying to find out what was in each other's minds made it less painful for me to meet with Sakayanagi, who had no secretive side.

“Still, I was surprised at the security that didn't suit this kind of place.”

“I have no choice. Right now, we can't make this place public. There are a lot of people out there desperately trying to find a scandal about me or Naoe-sensei.”

Perhaps troubled by this response, Sakayanagi only smiled bitterly.

“You helped me first with the White Room Project, so I wanted to show it to you first.”

“I just want to support a plan that will increase the number of children that will be saved.”

Sakayanagi in front of me, without any doubts, thinks that the children will lead Japan.

This is only a card to let us move up in the world for me and Naoe-sensei, but that's already been factored in.

Whatever the aim, if there are children who will be saved, this man will accept it.

He is a good man beyond help, but that's why there's no telling when he'll become an enemy.

If he notices the reality that the children's future is not being guaranteed, I'm sure this man will distance himself from me.

"Let me show you around."

"Please."

Taking Sakayanagi with me, we headed for the first laboratory.

"Today is a big day for setting new policies for the White Room, and I definitely want you to see how the children have grown up."

"The children you've taken in, they're already over three years old now, yes? That was very quick."

Sakayanagi, my collaborator, had also seen how many children there were.

I'm sure there are many scenes he can recall.

"Will you not have children?"

When I met Sakayanagi, he had already been married for several years.

I still haven't heard anything about her being pregnant or giving birth.

"It's not that I don't want to, it's just that I haven't had the chance. We have talked about letting nature take its course."

In other words, if either the husband, wife, or both of them have a problem, they won't mention it.

If they have mutually agreed, it's not a bad choice either.

"I see. I said something unnecessary, please forget about it."

"I've always wondered if you were going to get married too, Ayanokoji-sensei."

"If I had a partner, I would consider it, but unfortunately, I have been single for some time now, and I have no plans to get married."

“A partner is indispensable for a politician to continue working for a long time. I hope you will find a partner soon.”

Love, marriage, childbirth. I don't have time for that.

They say that having someone to protect you makes you stronger, but unfortunately I don't think so.

To have someone to protect you is to be weak at the same time.

Because I've seen many politicians die for their protectors in the past.

Part 2

When I arrived at the laboratory, I was met with a bit of a hustle and bustle.

A comprehensive test of the children raised by Suzukake and the other three researchers was to take place.

“Sorry you had to wait. Please start immediately.”

“Understood.”

Tabuchi, the only one in the room on a level playing field, moderated the session without any personal feelings.

“We divided them all into three groups, and worked for three years on educating them as thoroughly as possible.”

“We will decide who will represent us by seeing which one of these three teachers shows the most results.”

Being given a brief explanation, Sakayanagi could see the situation.

“That’s right.”

“I’m sure you already have a prediction of the outcome, Ayanokoji-sensei?”

“No. For the past three years, I’ve mostly not touched anything. I’ve been providing only the necessary support without any layman’s interference. I don’t even know who is going to show the best results.”

For the past three years, I’ve let everything move without even looking at the progress.

When I answered honestly, Sakayanagi applauded in surprise, as if amused.

“It must have taken a lot of courage to leave everything completely to the field, right? Most managers cannot trust their subordinates to do their work, and they tend to talk over them.”

Because the ones who spend money usually hold needless, wicked thoughts.

“After all, I’m working with other people’s money. If it had been money made from my blood and sweat, I might have been more critical. The only ones who will suffer if the money goes down the drain are the investors.”

That’s why I was able to stand firm and wait three years.

“But, still. If you fail, there is a high possibility of you losing everything, Ayanokoji-sensei. It’s the same for ordinary businessmen. They receive large loans from the bank and fight a battle for the company’s fortune. It is the bank’s money, but you can also say that it is the company president’s personal money.”

In the sense of assuming responsibility, it may be no different from being a manager.

“You have never changed your habit of immediately lifting up other people.”

“It’s my nature. There is always good in others, and it’s my job to recognize it.”

He answered without hesitation that what I said was a true compliment.

This is what I like about this man, and what I don’t like about him.

Children are coming into the room through the glass that is also a one-way-mirror.

The children, who were clearly labelled with the name plates of each researcher, took their seats in an orderly fashion.

“If they are 3 years old, they are just about ready for a little conversation, right?”

It is understandable that Sakayanagi, who does not have any children of his own, does not intuitively understand this.

“The children are beginning to show signs of understanding, intelligence, and self-esteem, as well as a bit of manual dexterity. The most obvious development at first sight may be motor development. Standing on one leg, walking on tiptoe, and climbing stairs smoothly. That’s just a generalization, though.”

“I think it’s impressive enough that they can do that, but...”

With a tense look on his face, Sakayanagi looked at the children.

“Begin!”

Under the instruction, the children turned over the paper at once and picked up their pens.

“A... test?”

No one got out of their seats, and they were more focused on the questions with a power of concentration stronger than those of primary school kids running around the neighbourhood.

“What’s the contents of the test they’re challenging?”

“It’s an arithmetic problem. Here it is.”

I received the paper that Tabuchi had brought, and together with Sakayanagi, I looked it over for the first time.

The problems range from addition and subtraction to multiplication and division.

"These are questions that are meant for primary school kids, right? Amazing."

Sakayanagi was impressed, but Tabuchi calmly replied:

"The world is a big place. There are gifted children who can solve more difficult problems. They are undoubtedly genetic prodigies."

"But, the children here are a bit different than the gifted ones, aren't they..?"

"Yes, they are. They are not special. They're just children who don't show any ability bias. They've all developed the ability to face problems."

The way the children were struggling with difficult problems was no different from that of the students taking the exam.

The first discomfort I felt when looking at the three groups was that Ishida's and Souya's groups were so similar in their attitudes and reactions to the test that I could not tell the difference even if I mixed them up, whereas Suzukake's group did not move an inch.

The real-time camera tracking reveals that some of the children's answers are wrong, but they never seem rushed, upset, or distraught.

Regardless of whether this is a good or bad thing, Ishida and the others are clearly upset.

"What kind of education can create such inorganic children..?"

Souya's mutterings were those of a researcher.

"My first task is to make sure they have a mature mindset, so that when they can't solve a problem, they can do so calmly, objectively, and without panic. I have mercilessly punished children who fail to do so."

Far from being the reaction of a child, they were like robots without feelings.

"Corporal punishment? For 3 year old children?"

"No, from when they were newborns. And I don't want you to call it corporal punishment, Souya. This is my education."

It would be a big problem if not accompanied by results, but the overall percentage of correct answers was clearly higher than that of both Ishida and Souya and their children.

“The concentration of those children is close to that of adults. They are so absorbed in their work that even if I called out to them nearby, they might not notice me right away.”

After saying this and having grasped the academic ability of almost everyone, Suzukake played music in the room.

At the loud sound, which was also out of place, the children in the room stopped their hands and began to look around.

However, the children Suzukake was educating were not responding to the sound, just as the man boasted, but were instead focusing on solving problems.

“How is something like this possible?”

Ishida, too, was surprised by Suzukake's education.

“Education. Children are terrified of being punished in a variety of ways. They will do whatever they deem effective against this, whether it be physical pain or mental anguish. If you push them to the edge of their fears, the fears will eventually go away. Not in the metaphorical sense, but in the real sense. We're still in the process of doing that.”

“...With all due respect, that is unquestionably corporal punishment. There is no meaning to the abilities gained by doing this. I don't think your educational policy is the right one.”

It would certainly be flattering to say that there are no problems at all.

Sakayanagi has reason to be angry.

“I have no right to interfere, but I can't agree with Suzukake-san's way of doing things.”

“Sorry, Sakayanagi, but I'm not looking for an outsider's opinion. Don't bud in.”

“But, Ishida-san and Souya-san's education also shows suitable results.”

Ishida and Souya's groups seem to be growing more naturally as human beings.

However, will they grow up to be geniuses in the true sense of the word?

Even if they grow up and become excellent human beings to some extent, it is doubtful whether they will be able to compete with the naturally occurring gifted and geniuses in certain fields.

On the other hand, Suzukake's education seems to have both big risks and big returns.

“I only care about results. I don't care about the process.”

“That's precisely why. That's the reason I chose to work under you; because I knew that you would let me be free. I knew that you would only care about the results.”

Unlike Sakayanagi showing his disgust, Ishida and Souya are acting as expected.

I won't say he has zero feelings towards the children, but he seems more focused on being a researcher.

The adults are gazing at the children Suzukake has created with a twinkle in their eyes.

After the tests on the academic side, the next step is to check their development in terms of physical exercise.

"The three groups have very different educational orientations, so unlike the study aspect, where we have standardized the testing methods, we tell each of them to express the abilities they have acquired in their own unique way."

The children Ishida educated are dexterously using their small hands to perform crafts. Souya's children are successfully using the iron bars and jungle gym to show their movement.

However, it is the children educated by Suzukake who are also astonishing in this physical aspect.

It is not only their dexterity and physical agility. They are also able to perform on the piano and have acquired a variety of other skills.

"This is a 3 year old playing...? I can't believe it."

Of course, it is obvious to anyone with ears that the children's skills are far from professional.

But even an adult could not play this well with just a little practice.

However, the important thing is not whether they can play the piano or not.

"How much more have you ingrained into them in just three years, Suzukake-san..?"

"My education is far above the average person's ability to learn. If you don't have the talent to learn in a short time, you will be punished endlessly. The brain naturally hates it and forces you to mature quickly. People who are small, but have the same things we have, have unlimited potential."

This is the difference by three years. Then, when it comes to 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years...

I wonder how much of a lead we will have?

I myself get goosebumps when I see this result.

The group trained by Suzukake was by far the best in the overall results.

Ishida and Souya forgot to hide their frustration and looked at Suzukake's data.

"You did well. You have shown me your talent."

"Thank you. But, I don't think there is a large difference of talent between me and these two. I'm rather impressed with how well they've done in their formal education."

"So even you praise others, huh, Suzukake?"

"The truth is the truth. Besides, as you can see, my children inevitably lack something."

"Emotion, right?"

"Yes. Ishida-san and Souya-san were nurturing the children with human feelings. That is normal. However, I have thoroughly eliminated them. I thought that by not allowing the ability to communicate through dialogue to flourish, I could raise the level of human potential."

The competition is only in terms of the brain and the body.

In other words, for Suzukake, victory was already in sight from the beginning.

"If you choose me as leader, you risk creating an impersonality that, to say it clearly, cannot be compared to the first-term students. But I believe we can create the strongest human being."

After three years of putting this research into practice, Suzukake was clearly convinced on this point.

"Ishida, and Souya. What do you two think about emotions?"

"There is no denying that the inhumanity factor will be heightened. But... I also believe that this is what the White Room should be. As one of the researchers, I would like to see the strongest human being cultivated by Suzukake-shi."

[TL Note 7 : "-shi" is an honorific like "-san". While this Japanese honorific isn't widely used in speech, The suffix -shi is used when politely referring to strangers, and is fairly formal.]

Souya, agreeing, also nodded.

"Very well. With Suzukake as the leader, we will now start to create the curriculum for the second term students. You will be in charge of what kind of training policy we will adopt."

"Thank you very much."

Suzukake bowed deeply, and looked to shake hands with Ishida and the others.

"I..."

Sakayanagi turned around, and was about to leave the room.

“I know you don't like it. However, this is also a form of education.”

Without looking back, Sakayanagi left the room.

I don't care if a considerable number of children will probably be sacrificed for the research.

If we can finally create the perfect human being, I would say it is a small sacrifice.

The goal is to train 100 people and make 100 of them perfect.

However, that is the ultimate final goal of White Room.

For now, the first step is to find out how far human beings can be trained.

In that sense, it is encouraging to have someone like Suzukake who is capable of fearless research.

Further, with the support of people like Ishida and others who have some common sense, it is also possible to prevent reckless behaviour.

It seems that we are already past the stage of grumbling about trivialities.

Now, it is my job to do my best to suppress this and to stop it from becoming public knowledge.

I must continue to provide a place to research without hesitation.

Part 3

After about an hour or so, I faced Sakayanagi.

How did an outsider unrelated to White Room feel after seeing today's results?

Needless to say, this is my best opportunity to find out.

"Let me ask for your opinion again. Of course, there is no need to hide anything."

"Let's see. I've been thinking a lot today while watching how the children have grown."

White Room's reason for being, and its usefulness.

I wonder if Sakayanagi was able to feel this first hand.

"The children I saw today were far from the ordinary 3 year olds I know. Needless to say, the children educated by Suzukake-san, and even those by Ishida-san and Souya-san, are probably better than 90% of the children in this world."

Sakayanagi's signature of starting his search with praise remains unchanged.

"I'm sure that even for a gifted student from a wealthy family, it wouldn't be easy to bring them to this level."

"But, are you saying that they can't compete with the remaining 10%?"

"Didn't you experience that yourself, Ayanokoji-sensei?"

We have been able to demonstrate that children who have grown up to the age of three have more developed intelligence and physical abilities than the average child.

There are certain results coming out.

However, the financial world was still skeptical, and I felt that we would not be able to dispel this skepticism.

If you ask me if they are as good or better than the gifted geniuses at age 3, it would be a gray area.

Even if I wait for the first term's children to grow up to four or five years like this, it would still not be conclusive.

"But, I thought that it was good enough.. If we can give these children, who may not get the education they want, this thorough education, we can give them the skills they need to be successful after stepping into society."

A general review from Sakayanagi, who does not know White Room's true shape.

"That's why I had some misgivings about Suzukake-san as the leader of the group. For children... No, for human beings, emotions are essential. It is not possible to be happy, angry, sad, or happy without any of them. If you can rectify this thought, I will not hesitate to continue my support and assistance."

"I see. I knew you would say that. But do you really think that will convince your current investors and those in the business world whom you have yet to meet? Not everyone thinks only of the children like you do. There are big interests involved in this White Room."

"Do you think even more rigorous education is necessary?"

"That's right. Anyone with a certain amount of money can produce brilliant students. We can have lecturers who graduated from top universities and coaches who have produced Olympic athletes. If you continue to educate the gifted from an early age, you can usually improve their skills to a certain degree. There is no point in having a White Room that produces nothing more than the same level of results. It's worthless."

Who would invest tens or hundreds of millions into the White Room then?

"What is needed is outstanding ability. The ability to go beyond Japan's top universities to become the best in the world, and the physical ability to surpass that of Olympic athletes. We need people who have the mental fortitude to compete with the best from around the world. That is the kind of power we need in the White Room."

"Isn't that a bit excessive? Not all children who have no parents or who have been abandoned by their parents are looking for that kind of power. It is enough to give them the ability to fit in and survive."

"I understand what you are trying to say. It's a good enough opinion for consulting."

"...Ayanokoji-sensei. The story you've told me is really true, right?"

"Of course. I am working to save underprivileged children. You know that I have my own ambition, but nothing more and nothing less."

Sakayanagi, who had been looking at me with suspicious eyes, bowed his head lightly as if he was apologizing.

"If that is the case, I have nothing more to say to you. Certainly, please give the children a caring and thoughtful education. If you do so, the day will come when the people will recognize the White Room."

After saying so, Sakayanagi left the office. He did look unconvinced, though.

“You’re naive, Sakayanagi. That’s no good.”

This world is not so naive as to accept such mere idealistic thoughts.

What I am looking for is not a reasonable result, but the best result.

However, it’s still not enough.

I want another push, and another push after that.

There is no guarantee that the current results will be enough to keep the investors nodding their heads forever.

A factor that will strongly push their backs...

I want a decisive blow.

However, imposing a more rigorous education on the children now will not produce immediate results.

It will take three years... no, five years, or at least that long.

It is necessary, to create a persuasive force.

What should I do..?

In a short period of time, how can I get the financial world to move in the direction of more money?

Think, I have to think...

This White Room may change the world.

I want these words of mine to have weight.

Weight, huh..?

“...I see.”

Here, I am reminded of the words Naoe-sensei said to me.

There is no real success, without cutting oneself.

No matter how passionately I talk about the success or failure of education, my words will never carry any real weight.

The financial world doesn't trust the White Room either.

Why is that?

It's only natural. No matter how far I go, it's someone else's education.

It doesn't hurt me.

With this, it's just some extended play.

It is necessary to show proof that one can safely leave their own valuable child in White Room.

For that, there is one thing I can do.

"...Hello?"

It's late now, but the owner of the phone who was probably still sleeping answered with a sleepy voice.

"Mika. I have a favour to ask of you."

Part 4

A red colour is illuminated at the end of the darkness, followed immediately by rising smoke.

I saw a silhouette emerge in my vision in the dim light, and raised my upper body.

“Sorry. Did I wake you?”

“Never mind, it's time to get back.”

The plan was to close things out at 11 p.m., but the date had changed.

“Politicians are so busy, huh? Working until this kind of hour.”

“It's easier to move around at night than in the daytime.”

Mika's brand of cigarettes changes every time we meet.

This is because every time Mika changes the man she sleeps with, it is an old trick of hers to show that she is tainted by him.

“How long are you going to keep doing this kind of work?”

“Right, I can't keep doing this forever. I have aged a lot since I met you, Atsuomi.”

Freshness is life for a woman.

Year by year, as time goes by, this freshness decays.

The world tends not to acknowledge this, and in fact, hates to put it into words, but only those who understand it will succeed.

If they understand this, they will gain a weapon other than their youth.

“My advice to you. It's time to wash your hands of this business.”

“Hearing that from you... It's a bit surprising.”

After smiling in a funny way, Mika got up from the bed, still stark naked.

“Well, I too thought it was time to move on. But I don't have a vision for the future. I don't have a vision of marrying someone and having a happy family. It's not like I'm going to have children, make friends, send them to primary school, and all that... heh, I laugh at myself when I think of that.”

"I think you'll do fine."

"I don't know. It's not often that people of the same sex like me. I might have a harder time than you think. But... I think I'll step out for a bit. You've made me a lot of money and allowed me to dream."

Mika's assets would be enough to just live decently.

However, this woman got her money at a young age.

She must be more than a little afraid to lower that standard of living.

"I need you to do one last big job for me."

I took out the marriage certificate I had prepared and put it on the table.

"Huh? What is this?"

"I want you to marry me."

"You're joking, right?"

"Of course I'm not joking."

"Atsuomi..."

As Mika approached, her eyes moistened slightly... and she gave a small laugh.

"What do you want? You're not the kind of man who would choose me, are you?"

"Don't I look like a man who wants a pure marriage with the woman he loves?"

"Not at all."

"You're right. It's a very different kind of marriage than the one you want, and it's only a formality when you roll it up."

I have a future I need to achieve.

For that, it is essential to have someone like this woman who has future troubles.

"What do you mean?"

"I have a new piece of the puzzle that I need in order to proceed with my plan. I need your help for that."

"Explain it to me in a way I can understand."

"It's a child. A child of my flesh and blood. It will be an important pawn in my rise to power."

Mika was taken aback, but eventually understood what I was saying.

"So... You want me to have a child?"

"That's right. Of course, I will pay you as much money as it takes to convince you."

"Wait a bit. Why me? There must be a mountain of women willing to happily give birth if you pay them money."

"If it were only about money. However, you are convenient for me in many ways. You have some influence in the financial world, and you're a good liar. The important thing is to deceive the people around us. There's no meaning if I have a child from a woman I don't know."

"I guess I'll have to play the good wife, huh..? Until when, though? Do you want to make me pretend to be your wife for years and years?"

"Don't worry. We will announce the pregnancy and hold the ceremony when the time is right. As soon as we have the baby, I'll let you go."

She understands, but she still can't perfectly grasp the situation.

"There is another reason why I chose you. Your origins are obviously inferior to the general social values. Your mother is an uneducated woman who works in the night business. Your sister is the same, divorced and living a life of no worth whatsoever."

"Wow, that's a bit rude, isn't it..? It is true, though."

If a superior mother gives birth to a superior child, that means it was already a diamond from the start.

"It is my job to polish a nondescript stone on the side of the road so that it shines like a gemstone. Refine it so that a mere stone becomes more than a diamond."

"But that doesn't mean that..."

"As I said before, it is absolutely essential to deceive people. It's easy to get an incompetent woman to be a surrogate, but it's hard to hide the whiff of artifice. One can't fool the financial world, which has a keen sense of smell."

If I want my precious child to appear on stage, I need to go through the proper channels. With Mika, more than a few people know about our connection, and they will accept it as a natural progression.

“You can choose the method you want, whether it's artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization, regardless of timing or method. Ideally, you should be able to have a baby within a year to a year and a half.”

I will entrust my own child with White Room, and further signify its existence.

Now this is truly a well-thought-out plan.

Chapter - 4

An Unprecedented Experimental Facility

Intro

When Mika saw the pile of cash on the white table, she couldn't help but let out a sigh of admiration.

"The amount is 50 million, I have arranged it in cash form as per your request, and it will not leave any traceable evidence."

I spoke to Mika while avoiding direct eye contact.

The 50 million does not cover any expenses associated with the pregnancy, including delivery and hospitalization.

"Politicians really do have free reign over money and everything else, huh? Was it easy for you to get 50 million?"

Mika said sarcastically, dressed in a suit she was probably not accustomed to wearing.

"Money is important, but I can provide as much money as you need to live. That's the world I live in."

As I detachedly spoke in a robot-like way, Mika laughed at me, as if fed up.

"The fact that your child will be born does not affect your heart at all, huh?"

"Then, are you going to tell me that you've awakened to motherhood now?"

"No way. If that were the case, I would not have given the child away. For me, the whole process of having and giving birth to that child is work, nothing more, nothing less."

I was relieved to hear that.

I could see in her eyes that this wasn't Mika's bluff, but that she was telling the truth.

"I guess I made the right choice picking you after all."

"I almost regretted it when my belly started to grow and the morning sickness started to get worse. I came here thinking I would complain or something, but when I saw all this money in front of me, I didn't care anymore."

Even for Mika, who had been receiving a monthly salary of well over a million, it seems a lump sum of 50 million was a different story.

I wouldn't want to hear any complaints in the first place, anyway.

The money I paid for her to give birth and the other expenses were more than double the market rate, even if I estimated them highly.

"Normally, I would have to pay almost half of this amount to the government."

"That's right, you have to earn 100 million to save 50 million, don't you? I can't help but think you're crazy if you have to pay almost half of this in taxes."

Mika tiredly laughed a little as she touched the surface of the roll of banknotes.

"Have you ever properly paid taxes?"

It is said that many people in a profession such as Mika's do not pay taxes.

"Now that you say it, I can't really remember. Well, I will start a new job now, so maybe I will, so I guess it's fine. More importantly, how have you been recently? Is everything the same?"

"Sorry, but I'm busy and I don't want to have a long talk. Let's just do what we have to do."

I took out the contract and held it out in front of Mika.

"If you want the money, write it down. You have the rights of the child until you sign here."

"You worry too much. Don't worry, I only had the baby for the money. I have no hesitation."

Mika had no intention of refusing the money, and she reiterated her willingness to accept it.

"No matter what, you will not be allowed to identify yourself as the mother in the future for the rest of your life."

This may sound like an insistent statement, but it is extremely important.

I cannot deny the possibility that the White Room would be exposed if Mika, who is well versed in the underworld, were to publicly try to get her child back.

"I know. Don't talk about me to that kid either."

"Of course I won't. There's no need to."

"Can you just tell me what's going to happen to him?"

I haven't told Mika anything relating to White Room.

So it's understandable that she's curious about the future.

"There's no reason for you to know that. Once the contract is signed, your relationship will be severed, so."

"Right, right."

As if understanding there was no point in further continuing, Mika started signing the contract.

"All good?"

Judging by the strength of her writing, there was no hesitation at all until the very end.

I'm sure there will be no apprehensions left after emphasizing things this far.

I gave instructions and had the attaché case containing the money put into the trunk of Mika's car.

It is a bit risky to carry such a large sum of money in cash, but both Mika and I agreed to avoid transferring the money via banks and such.

"I'll go now, then."

This would be the last time I would see Mika, and the last time I would speak to her.

As I was about to silently walk away, Mika took a few steps and then stopped.

"...Aren't you going to ask? What will I do with this?"

It was impossible to read the expression on her face.

However, I could detect that there was a hint of emotion in her voice.

"I'm not interested. You are free to go to that host or fly abroad with the money."

She was slightly surprised, but then understood and laughed.

"You knew? You knew about me and him?"

"I didn't have to investigate, the people around did that on their own."

"How long have you known?"

"Before I asked you to marry me and have a baby."

"Didn't you suspect that this was brood parasitism?"

[TL Note 8 : brood parasitism : (planting one's eggs in another bird's nest, as demonstrated by the cuckoo, etc.)]

Mika's eyes narrowed, as if she was messing with me.

"It's a question of before doubt. You would have predicted that I would do a postnatal exam. And if by any chance you were carrying someone else's child, you'd lose your reward. It's an impossible choice."

"Hehe, indeed."

"But you restrained yourself well. I must commend you for keeping your secret meetings with him to a minimum during our married life, and for being as discreet as possible to avoid detection."

I am unsure if that host really wants to make Mika happy.

At the very least, Mika's fortune should be over 200 million, including this 50 million.

Maybe 5, or 10 years? Until the money runs out, she will have happy days with the host.

"Atsuomi... Did you love me, even once?"

"You will do anything for money. That's the most valuable thing about you."

"That wasn't really my point... No, I'm sure you have nothing else to say."

I've never had any special feelings towards Mika.

And, at the same time, this woman does not even have a lingering affection towards me.

All the words here that seem to invite sympathy are an act to make her look good.

She likes young, good-looking, good-talking men, and above all, she values herself and money.

That is the woman called Mika.

"Farewell, Atsuomi."

"Wait. This is the congratulatory money from me."

3 million on top of the fee I had originally prepared for her.

I handed over the money to Mika, including the congratulatory gift, which might also be considered consolation money.

"You don't have to go that far. I wouldn't have sold this to a weekly magazine. I have done many black-hearted things with you too."

Mika has a lot of things in her life that she doesn't want to be revealed.

"I'm sure you're right. That's why this is a pure celebration money without any back and forth. If you don't need it, don't force yourself to take it."

As I reached out to pull up the money, Mika stopped my hand with a laugh.

"I have to have money to build my own home. I heard that land is getting more expensive these days, right?"

"You don't even know the underlying reason why land prices are going up, do you?"

"I don't know. As long as I have my money, I don't care, so."

"That's just like you. I'm sure you know, but it will be some time before you can officially marry someone else."

"Because the plan is for me to go back to the country while I'm still your wife, right?"

Until a while after I put the kid in White Room, we have to keep the marriage in place.

"It won't be that long. If you wait two more years, you can do whatever you want after that."

For that, I've already given Mika the divorce papers, complete except for the dates for me and her.

"One last thing. If you've decided on a name, I'll file under that name."

Since eleven days have already passed since the birth, there are three days remaining unless additional steps are taken.

"You're letting me decide, even though I have no right to the child?"

"The name is just a symbol. No matter who gives it to him, his substance as a human being will never change."

After a short pause, Mika uttered the child's name.

"Then, Kiyotaka. Make it Kiyotaka."

"It's just like you to suggest that."

I was a little surprised at this unexpected turn of events.

"Well, if it's going to be remembered by you, I thought this would be the name."

“That’s fine. I’ll accept it.”

“You really are a very calm, and cool-headed person. This would make an ordinary person angry, right? It’s the right answer to name him after the host I like... isn’t it?”

Mika started to walk away. This time, her legs did not stop.

“Farewell, Atsuomi. The time I had with you was a very important experience for me. Both good and bad.”



After Mika left, I wrote down “Kiyotaka”.

She shouldn’t have any complaints after I let her have that much money.

As the representative managing White Room, I put my child out.

If I can establish that track record, I can say that the money was a small price to pay.

As long as Kiyotaka can be useful for at least five years, there will be no problems even if he breaks down after that.

Because there is no need for my real child to be superior.

“She was quite a lovely woman, wasn’t she, Ayanokoji-san?”

Tsukishiro, who was waiting in the next room, appeared with the same smile as usual.

“You did great work too. I made you play detective.”

“I’m a jack-of-all-trades, you know. But are you sure you want to trust her? If necessary, you might want to consider getting rid of her. She may be quiet as long as she has money. But with the way she is, she will run out of money in a few years. Or, she could lose her money to a man running away with it, right?”

Yes, you never know with people.

If she loses the money in the future, Mika may appear in front of me again.

However, I hope she is smart enough not to choose to do that.

No matter how filthy and worthless a soul is, it is not a joyful thing to disappear for nothing.

“It’s a standard practice to make the first move, but it depends on the time. If Mika disappears, it creates other risks. It is necessary for her to exist as a mother for now.”

With the sequence of these events, it is clear that I have no attachment to my child.

If this was revealed by the person who was my wife on the family register, my credibility in the financial world would be lost at once.

“Indeed. It is just as you speak.”

“In a few days, my child will be delivered to me after the tests are complete. We will then begin the fourth term experiments.”

“Just like you, it seems that your son has a harsh life ahead of him.”

These words sounded like pity, but Tsukishiro had no such feelings at all.

Part 1

On this day when Kiyotaka arrived in my possession, I was gathering Suzukake and other researchers.

“Ayanokoji-sensei. This is the curriculum for the fourth term students who will begin this year.”

Tabuchi was using a computer with dark circles under his eyes.

I read through the materials projected on the big screen as he explained them to me.

When it was decided that Suzukake would lead the second term students, he created a curriculum with a total of 10 levels.

Now, the fourth term students will be assigned difficulty level 4.

“The dropout rate for first-term students who will turn five is 14%, the dropout rate for second-term students who are two years old is 6%, and the dropout rate for third-term students who are one year old is currently 6%. From now on, I expect more than 20% of the second term students to drop out when they reach 5 years old, and more than 25% of the third term students. I’ve increased the difficulty until now, but I haven’t touched the fourth term students yet.”

The higher the level of difficulty required of the children, the steeper the passing line becomes.

In particular, Suzukake's curriculum is structured in such a way that the difficulty level increases dramatically after the age of 6, when the foundation is solidified.

It would not be surprising if the dropout rate for first-term students also increases sharply in the future.

“I wonder how much the continued increase in difficulty will really change the situation.”

“We have only three sets of data, but even when comparing the abilities of the first and third term students at the same age, the students on the lower end increased by 11% and the students on the higher end by 37%. I think this proves that the educational method you have proposed is connected to the improvement of human abilities.”

The research so far seems to be going well.

If we continue to educate children in order, we will eventually be able to produce children who are incomparable to those in the first term.

However - it will take many years to achieve this.

“Also, there are several significant changes. As an example, we have analyzed the results of those who dropped out, and discovered some problems. One, is their extremely low social adaptability. The reason is already clear: 99% of them only lived in the White Room. The first term students in particular can only understand the outside world through fragmentary learning materials and pictures. It would be impossible for them to imagine and draw cityscapes in their minds. They did not even have a good understanding of what Japan and other countries are like. The second and third terms showed improvement as they began to learn through video, but they still lack the everyday knowledge that a Japanese child should have. Their lack of recognition through hands-on experience with vending machines, streets, shopping malls, convenience stores, and supermarkets in the city caused great discomfort to outsiders. Even if they remember these things in words and letters, they cannot respond naturally because they have no real experience with them.”

“So? What’s the solution strategy?”

“To put it simply, if we can take them out of the White Room and conduct something like extracurricular lessons, things will be simpler, but I know we can’t do that. The more people acting outside, the greater the risk that the facility’s existence will be known, and the impact on young children is immeasurable.”

Ishida continued his explanation and pulled out a pair of large goggles.

“This is where the virtual console comes in. Using VR, we can instill in them a strong sense of the outside world from an early age, allowing them to travel, learn, and memorize anywhere in the world.”

Souya followed up in agreement.

“Ishida-san’s idea is not bad at all. It would be great if they can understand the minimum common sense that they need to acquire in a virtual environment. Even if it is in a virtual space, things can be reproduced perfectly, and the experience of walking through the world will be imprinted on their minds. I think it’s going to be a lot easier to adapt to the outside world because the structure will be the same.”

If they don’t have to go outside the White Room, it would be a small price to pay.

I agreed, and approved the additional budget.

“There doesn’t seem to be any problems with the curriculum’s contents.”

Tabuchi nodded with satisfaction, and Ishida and Souya also stood up.

“I don’t mind if you use the virtual console. You can try anything else you want to try. However, I would like to have a different curriculum for the fourth term students this time.”

“Different, is it? What kind of change would you like to add?”

I looked at Suzukake, who had been sitting quietly.

“We will adopt the Beta curriculum.”

As I conveyed so, the researchers tensed up.

“..Huh? You... What did you just say?”

Suzukake was probably more surprised than anyone else.

“I said we are going to adopt the Beta curriculum. Don’t make me say it over and over again.”

Suzukake had created a curriculum with 10 levels of difficulty.

The Beta curriculum, which is the most difficult of the 10 levels, is the one that Suzukake named as the one that is too different from the others.

When compared to the third term, not to mention the fact that things are more rigorous compared to the education at age 0, the level of difficulty jumps by a great magnitude after the age of 6, which is when the fundamentals have been laid out.

Even I, not knowing much about education, judged that it was not feasible based on the curriculum and the limitations of the children that I saw from the first term education, and decided not to implement it.

“I explained it to you at the time. I divided the curriculum into 10 levels of difficulty, but Beta is on another dimension that will never be reached. In effect, the fifth or sixth level is the limit of human development.”

“I think he is right. The second and third terms we are conducting now cannot even be compared to the Beta curriculum. The current curriculum up to the third term is also certainly not easy, and it would not be a compliment to say that it has produced remarkable results. In such a situation, putting out the Beta curriculum now would do nothing but break down our sample materials—”

“I know that it is necessary for research to increase the difficulty level step by step. However, it takes time to climb up the stairs one step at a time. I would like to see the limits of human beings in this area. I don't care if they all drop out.”

“Of all the things, choosing this timing when your own son will be here..?”

“My son is the one who will receive the most rigorous education. This is the perfect opportunity. If we can create even one successful student in the Beta curriculum, it will be a great opportunity for future research.”

“...However, what kind of criticism will we receive from the supporters?”

"That's why I said we would adopt the Beta curriculum when my child is enrolled in the fourth term. It is for the sake of research. If I am to speak freely, I don't even care if he dies."

Everyone, including Ishida and the others, fell silent and were speechless.

"Are you... Are you really sure about this?"

Ishida may be an eccentric researcher, but he is still a human being.

That's why he's flaring at me, but he must have realized that this is the decision.

"Yeah. Assign the fourth level of the curriculum that you were going to assign to the fourth term students to the next fifth term students. The only exception will be for the fourth term students. Because there's no point in implementing an inhumane curriculum if it has no future."

It will not be too late even after all the results from the fourth term students are present.

"We have a reasonable sample of kids to finish things with this one time."

I showed him the list of children who will be in the fourth term, which I had kept secret up to this point.

"This is... A total of 74 names!? This is more than double the number of children in the third term, you know!?"

"I mostly picked up the have-nots that we can use and throw away."

The amount I paid to the Ooba group, and the black market brokers connected to them is not cheap, but it's not a bad thing to have some extra samples. I'm sure I've conveyed to these people how serious I am.

But, the truth is that there are a few children from the business world mixed in with the have-nots.

They must be dreaming of great growth in a stern environment. We took them in without accepting any responsibility.

However, I'm hiding which ones are from the financial world from the researchers. I don't want them to get involved in any strange ways.

Suzukake, who had been listening in silence, walked up to Ishida and the others who were not so enthusiastic about the idea.

"I myself have learned various things since I began researching with Ishida-san and the others. That there is a line one should not cross as a human being. So much that I regret

creating the Beta curriculum. I can see nothing but a result of breaking down, but, as long as you insist, Ayanokoji-sensei, we have a duty to carry this out.”

“But..!”

“As Ayanokoji-sensei said, as usual from the 5th term, this is a special case. It is also a great opportunity for me to reject the reckless curriculum that I have created. I know it will make the fourth term students cry, but I want you all to think that this will connect to the research of the future, and follow me.”

Suzukake who has been the leader for these few years also seems to have become quite the adult.

They constantly clash over the content of their research, but in the end, Ishida and the others nodded their heads in agreement, recognizing Suzukake's enthusiasm and determination.

“It's my job to worry about this. I'll be thoroughly involved in the education of the fourth year students too.”

Because, as a representative of White Room, I myself should be here to witness the results.

“...I understand what you are saying. Of course, I will obey your instructions. However, please let me make a recommendation for the treatment of those who have dropped out.”
“What do you mean?”

“I will speak clearly, but, the abilities of the children who have dropped out far exceed those of the average person. I can easily say that it is also a good accomplishment. I think that it is a waste to throw them away...”

“At which level are you talking about? Do you think that the objective is to enter a top university, or to win some competition among the masses?”

“N-no, that's...”

“That's good enough as a reason for the public. However, the true objective is completely different. It is to give birth to humans who have the strength to protect this country from the world, make this country stronger, and move this country.”

It's not as if we can simply create honour students, then send them into politics and win. What is necessary, what I want, is the ability to overwhelm others.

Someone who will never give in, someone who has a will of steel that will never sway.

Only a person who is appraised as a monster by others can cut their way into today's degenerated world of politics.

"Carefully care for and return the dropouts with a name to their parents. As long as they have exceptional abilities, they will be somewhat satisfied."

"...Then, what about the children with no names?"

"Same as planned. Send them to the facility you have set up and let them run wild. After training them not to talk about White Room, of course."

"But that alone makes it very difficult for them to become independent and integrate into society."

"So what? We've given them an education. Even though they have problems, they have probably shown more excellence than their peers. They'll have as many chances to crawl up the ladder as you want. Do you have a problem with that?"

Tabuchi is the only researcher who is strongly resistant to the general idea.

That's why I have to give him a firm warning.

"Shut up and follow my orders. If you disobey my orders, I will cut you off without mercy, even if it's you. Is that clear?"

"Y-yes. I am very sorry."

My cell phone rang. The caller was Sakayanagi.

"I'm leaving for a while. Please continue the discussion, including how to deal with the Beta curriculum."

I went out into the hallway and answered the phone just as the door closed.

"Ayanokoji-sensei..."

"What is it, Sakayanagi? You sound very gloomy."

"I didn't want to contact you in this manner, but I heard that you had a son."

"Right. I'm sorry I haven't been in touch. I've been in the middle of some things."

"...Are you really sure about this? This is your long-awaited son, you know?"

"I've been prepared for this ever since we decided to build White Room. I'm a man who educates abandoned babies. I never thought about having a legitimate family."

"But I think that's a bit of a leap. The babies at the shelter have an unfortunate history of being abandoned. Rather, they are happy because they can grow up in White Room without any problems. But, your son is different. He deserves the love of his father and mother."

"I've already made my decision."

On the other end of the line, Sakayanagi gulped.

“I’m sorry to turn this call around on you, but I’d like to consult you about one thing.”

“Consult me, huh..?”

“I’m sure you’re going to have a baby too one day. I’m ready to accept your child if you need me to.”

“... I’m not as strong as you, sensei. When it is born, I intend to raise my child together with my wife with all of my love and devotion.”

“I see. I knew you would say that.”

It’s Sakayanagi. I’m sure he will provide a proper education and raise an excellent child.

I’ll consider that as another result, and look forward to it on a personal level.

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I am reaching out to ask for your support in this project to translate Volume 0 of "Classroom of the Elite" into English. As fan of the series myself, I am passionate about bringing this prequel to a wider audience and making it accessible to English-speaking readers.

To do this, I have hired professional translators to handle the translation work, but unfortunately this is a costly endeavor. If you are able to make a donation to help us cover these expenses, it would be greatly appreciated.

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With this the Chapter 4 of Classroom of the Elite Volume 0 has been completely translated into English. Hope you Enjoyed it !

Chapter 5 Full will be released in 12-14 days [here](#).

There will also be some previews of the next parts before they are released.

Look forward to it !