Epilogue: Youth is About to Bloom

Intro

The situation with Matsushita the other day, and before that, the problem with Horikita and Ichinose. As well as the establishment of a cooperative relationship with Chairman Sakayanagi, Chabashira-sensei and Mashima-sensei.

Also, the conversation with Acting Director Tsukishiro. Many things happened around me during the spring break.

First of all, I had to remain vigilant about Tsukishiro. Unlike other problems, ignoring him will only cause the situation to worsen. The next thing I know, I might be receiving a dropout notice.

Therefore, right now, the only thing I could do was to cooperate with the other teachers to try to respond to that.

That person said someone from the white room would be enrolling into this school. Although this is not something that was guaranteed to happen, the possibility was high.

Tsukishiro could not casually enter the corridors or classrooms at any time he wanted, so he could only attack me through indirect means, such as exams.

But students on the other hand, regardless of whether it was the corridors or classrooms, they could move freely.

At any time, they can set up an environment to come into contact with me, giving them an opportunity to expel me. Also, they are more beneficial as they could collect more information.

If what was said becomes a reality, this would be considered the biggest change that happened around me.

Next, there was Horikita and Matsushita, the so-called internal problems of the class. They questioned my true abilities and also wanted to learn more about my potential.

Although Horikita decided to compete against me one on one, there was nothing that needed to be done as of now. The same was true for Ichinose, it was also a matter for the future.

For now, I only have to care about next year’s battles, and calmly do what needs to be done.

However, these were only the things that had happened around me.

As for my own changes, they were minimal.

Yes——that was until today.

The spring break was also nearing its end, with only two days remaining.

Before the students welcomed the upcoming battle, enjoying the final day of rest, I started to make a firm resolution for action as I sought a great change.

If you wanted to move forward, then you had to take advantage of it now.

It was just past 6 o’clock, and the sun had just begun to set. It was now the time when day switched to night.

Having said that, if that’s possible, there’s something I wanted to ask you all.

For example, if there was someone of the opposite sex you liked, how could you open up a path towards a confession?

If you were handsome or beautiful, then you could just cut all corners and confess right away.

As long as they replied to me, “I feel the same way!”, then it would be worthy of celebration.

However, not many people met such conditions. They had an inferiority complex when it came to their complexion, personality, and body shape.

Those three factors could serve as obstacles to the road to confession.

In short, using a “confession” as a gateway to love was not that simple of a matter.

Because of this, I would have to seriously let my imagination run wild, and think hard in order to raise the success rate of the confession.

Was the success rate 10% or 20%? Or could it be, say, 50%?

There will be times where it reached 80-90%, or the rate of the confession might even approach 100%, but we couldn’t be sure.

Even so, we still would feel uneasy.

Because we were afraid that if the confession failed, it would affect our relationship with the other tremendously.

Although the number of people who did not care about this and would just move forward was not small, but for high school students, school was all they had. They would generally be fearful of the possibility of their relationships that had been built within the small world known as school being destroyed.

So they would think ahead about what could be done to raise the success rate, by even 1%.

Then they began to put effort into increasing the success rate.

First of all, start with what you could, such as changing your hairstyle to the type the other person liked, dress nicely, or start working out. It was also possible adopt strategies such as eating a meal together or giving a present.

Using all means to increase the probability.

The probability might increase from 1% to 99%, but if it failed, the chances might reduce from 99% to 1%.

In order to understand the feelings of the other, you had to do your best.

That was the process before a confession.

Then——as for me, I had experienced it all the same.

Thinking and worrying like other men and women.

However, such things were not limited to love.

Generally speaking, all things had a sort of invisible probability, and that would change everyday according to various phenomena. Just like studying harder to enter high school or college, it would change the chances of being accepted.

And the degree to which how one understands this principle could greatly change the understanding of the situation.

Exams and confessions were only the middle stage. Even if you succeeded, it did not mark the end.

It would be better to say that more things will happen after that.

If you suffered a setback before graduation, it could lead to being expelled, and you might also break up due to unfaithfulness or violence.

This was how I thought about the future. A month later, half a year later, one year later.

Sometimes, unexpected things might happen, but I didn’t like to act out suddenly.

What’s more, those were related to those actions that I did.

Then, let’s return to the main topic.

In fact, all the things I’ve done so far was to change a “certain probability”.

Needless to say, this is obviously to increase the success rate.

As for what the success rate was, maybe it would be revealed today.

If my predictions were correct, it was about time for someone to contact me.

The phone I was holding started to ring

An 11 digit number appeared on my device’s screen.

The number which was not registered on my phone belonged to Karuizawa Kei.

“It’s me, I’m sorry for making you wait.”

After she called multiple times, I finally picked it up.

30 minutes ago, I called Kei, but she didn’t answer it. Now, she called back.

“Nevermind that, what’s the matter?”

“You sound a little dissatisfied.”

“Not really, it’s not really dissatisfaction, it’s more like I wanted to confirm something.”

“Is it about me not contacting you after calling you out?”

On the day I met Hiyori, I called Kei, but in the end, I didn’t tell her anything.

At that time, I only told her that I would contact her when I remembered.

In the end, I didn’t contact her until the end of the spring break on purpose.

“So you still remember? What, are you deliberately trying to annoy me?”

“About the thing, can we meet up and talk about it?”

I said this and cut short the topic.

“Huh?”

“About the thing I told you I would tell you once I remembered, I’ve thought about it. Can you come over now?”

“Seriously…you sure know how to pick a good time….Well, it’s not impossible, but if we’re seen by others, I won’t be responsible.”

At this time, there were many people leaving and entering the dormitory.

The probability that Kei was seen coming to my room was very high.

“You don’t need to care about that.”

I told her it didn’t matter if she was seen, and asked her to come over.

“I know. Oh yeah, I’ve got something to do at 7 o’clock, so I don’t have much time.”

“I’ll try to be quick, it might take 10 to 20 minutes.”

“Then there’s no problem, I’ll see you later.”

After saying this, Kei hung up.

Now——let’s get started.

I’ve done my preparations. I looked around my room, which was tidier than before.

For once, I looked into the mirror.

Faced with my reflection having such a serious look, I immediately looked away.

Part 1

Kei, looking unhappy, was sitting in my room.

With her tidy appearance, it really did seem like she had plans afterwards.

“So, what is it?”

Kei looked at me, with an unhappy look, as I was silent.

After calling her out, I couldn’t stay quiet.

“What are you talking about?”

“No, what do you mean? Didn’t you say you remembered what you wanted to say?”

“Well, now that you mention it, that is true.”

“……”

“……”

Listening to my vague words, the look of dislike in Kei’s eyes intensified.

“That’s why I’m asking what you want?”

“Alright, you don’t have to be so hasty.”

“I just told you. 7 o’clock I’m eating out with my friends at Keyaki mall. Do you understand?”

“There is still plenty of time, it’s fine.”

“This is giving me a bad feeling, you know? You’re speaking nonsense.”

Towards me, who acted differently than usual, Kei started feeling a little suspicious.

“…Right, I’ve got something to tell you.”

Since I stayed silent, Kei started to complain.

“Something you need to tell me?”

To be honest, I didn’t know what Kei wanted to say, so I asked straightforwardly.

“Sato-san is suspicious about our relationship.”

Sato——We haven’t been in much contact recently, but she was a classmate who liked me.

“I thought she would hate me because I rejected her, so what do you mean?”

“She tried to get me to admit that I broke up with Hirata-kun to date you, in a roundabout way.”

That is to say that even if it wasn’t direct, her intentions for her words could be understood that way.

“Of course I denied it, but I’m not sure if she believed me.”

“I see. Something similar happened on my side too.”

“Huh? Something similar?”

“Matsushita also has various doubts about my relationship with you. Mainly about whether I was dating you.”

I reported the conversation from a few days ago, but after hearing it, Kei’s face turned pale.

“Eh? What? Are you lying? Is that true? Are you joking?”

I nodded to say I was not kidding, then explained the whole story.

The things I told her were about how Matsushita-san also hid her true abilities, about her observations which raised doubts about our relationship, and about her doubts regarding my true strength.

“Wa-wait. I can’t keep up with all this.”

Kei, who had a headache, placed her hand on her forehead.

“I feel like things are getting bad…what do you think?”

After understanding the situation, Kei asked me about my thoughts on it. No, she was seeking a solution.

Since this was partially related to why I called her over, it’s better to honestly tell her.

“I think it’s fine to leave it alone?”

“No, no, that’s not ok! Besides, there’s nothing between us at all!”

“So you’re saying that you dislike people thinking there’s a relationship between us while there’s obviously nothing there? Even if Matsushita spreads that rumour, why not just let her do it?”

“Huh? Saying whatever she wants… that kind of thing can’t be ignored. You should quickly go and talk to her, and say that there’s nothing between you and me.”

“Going to talk to Matsushita now would only be counterproductive.”

“You already knew this from the start. Why did you half-ass the lie?”

“No matter what I say, the situation won’t change. Isn’t Sato also dubious about my relationship with you? Then Matsushita, who is close to Sato, would have heard from Sato that my relationship with you was unusual sooner or later. No, the chance that she took action after she was told about the situation is high.”

It should be seen that she only came to contact me after she learned of the situation from students surrounding her.

“….That, although that is possible…”

After that, my contact with Kei was inevitable.

Even if I strongly denied it this time, next time, it would change their doubts into confidence.

If the other person knew that I was lying, they might spread the news.

In that case, drawing the enemy to your side during the early stage would be more beneficial for future actions.

But the thing Kei was upset about didn’t seem to be about this.

“But… if someone said that I broke up with Hirata, well, to date you, then rumours would spread not just in the class, but in the whole school, which would be a huge pain, you know.”

“Why would it be a pain?”

“Because, if that rumour spread, it would really affect me.”

Kei relentlessly expressed her dissatisfaction, talking non-stop.

“Get it? No matter what gender you are, if you’ve got a scandal with the opposite sex, the chances someone approaching you would be a lot lower.”

Understood? Kei held her index finger in front of me.

“So, in other words, I’m hindering you from getting a new boyfriend?”

“…Exactly.”

From the third perspective, you could understand what she was saying. Just like how when it was revealed that Sudo liked Horikita, it made it harder to approach Horikita. Something like that.

“Do you really understand? Listen up?”

Kei continued, thinking that I still didn’t understand.

“You…are close with this Shiina?”

“Shiina? Ah, are you talking about Hiyori?”

“Hi….”

She was one of the people who I called by their first name.

Of course, I also called Kei, Haruka, and Airi by their first names.

She should know this first hand.

However, it seemed like Kei didn’t expect me to have this kind of relationship with someone outside of our class.

“We’re pretty close, after all, we both like reading books. What is it?”

After telling Kei that, her face changed colour.

“Eh…so you’ve got the same interests. Reading books….hmm…hmmm. That’s completely opposite to me.”

Indeed, Kei and Hiyori had completely different personalities. She knew that herself.

“And so?”

“…Nothing, it’s just… Argh, that’s enough! You’re making me forget what I wanted to say!”

Kei got angry, raised her arms, and looked away.

And then quickly started talking, wanting to keep her cool.

“If the rumour with me spread, then it would be harder for you to get closer to her, right?”

“I see, that’s a possibility.”

I admitted this, and then Kei stood up.

“I don’t care, whoever you want to get closer to is up to you.”

After saying this, Kei turned around.

“Although I’m sorry, this topic…we should stop now. I want to get to Keyaki mall earlier, because there might be boys from the other classes coming as well, and to quell these rumours, I need to be motivated. I don’t have the time to help you.”

“Motivated?”

“Because I’ve broken up with Hirata-kun, I want to find a new boyfriend. Got a problem?”

“No.”

“…Right? So now I have to go.”

It seemed like I overdid the teasing.

I stood up as well. Kei thought that I was going to see her off.

“No need.”

Facing the tone of strong rejection, I called out Kei’s name.

“Kei.”

“Seriously, now what?”

“If you don’t like it, then just ignore it.”

“Huh?”

After showing her surprise, she paid attention to what I was going to say next.

“Will you go out with me?”

“Eh?”

Kei frowned, not understanding, overflowing with doubt, she looked back at me.

“What are you talking about? Where are you going?”

(TL note, in Japanese, “Date me” and “Come with me” mean the same thing.)

It seemed like she understood that as where I wanted her to accompany me, so she asked that.

“I don’t mean that. I mean to ask you if you would go out with me?”

“No, I mean- you mean…I don’t…understand…”

There was no need to continue talking. I looked into Kei’s eyes, and Kei accepted it. I wouldn’t consider the situation where we weren’t actually that close now. But between the two of us now, it only took matching up our gazes to convey our feelings.

“Wait, eh, ha, ehhhh!? This, what kind of joke is this, it’s such a bad one…!?”

“This isn’t a joke.”

“Bu, but! Just now, you were hinting that you liked Shiina-san!”

“That was a joke.”

“But- these few days-“

“That’s only, well, I wanted to try to see if you were jealous, Kei.”

Calling Kei to the cafe, allowing her to witness the scene between Hiyori and me talking together.

There was no need to have done this.

But, this was a way to let her see that I wasn’t so used to romance yet.

‘If, if what you just said was a lie, then the relationship we have is over…if this is a false confession, and you’d like to admit it, this is your last chance…this, do you truly understand?”

With doubt within her heart, this wasn’t a question where she could just say yes or no to.

“Of course it’s not a joke, so let me hear your answer.”

“…e, e-e-e-e-e-even if you say that to me how am I supposed to…?!”

“I said it just now, if you don’t like me, you can ignore or reject me, or whatever.”

“Who said I’d ignore it! A-anyway, why?”

“What do you mean by why?”

“That, that is, me, so uh…something. Anyway, why was it today, uh…”

The previous question was unclear, so I could only answer the latter one.

“Why was it today, huh. I can’t give you a good reason for me to choose today to confess, I have a good reason for confessing. Because I wanted to prevent you from becoming someone else’s girlfriend.”

“So basically-you, like-me-right?”

The questions issued by Kei contained strong emotions that I had not seen before.

I wanted t, at this moment, or the previous moment, to strongly shake up myself, and then give a firm answer.

“That’s right, I like Karuizawa Kei.”

One of the major events in life was to confess.

The fleeting moment where you’d express your true emotions.

To Kei’s question, was my answer truly from the heart?

Originally, the act of confessing to someone, the only motives one had was love, an action that turned someone you liked into someone that belonged to you.

‘”Your answer?”

The baton in my hand had been handed to Kei, and the rest I had to do was to wait for her reply.

The chaotic Kei sorted out her feelings within her mind, and then she did her best to move her gaze back, as it had unconsciously wandered away.

“-We-well, I’ll go out with you…then.”

“Can I interpret what you just said as that you like me?”

“Yo-you want me to say it!?”

Although I understood her confusion, it was an indispensable part of the confirmation.

Only after receiving a definite reply can the relationship between the two of us can truly change.

“Mhm, I want you to say it.”

I urged her like this, Kei, although she was surprised, did not outright reject it.

“….”

There was no third person listening in, nor was there a contract stamped between us.

It is only the two of us that know, it is a conversation between only the two of us, and it’s between the two of us that we agreed to mutually help each other.

“Can you not answer?”

If she couldn’t answer, then I had to propose what we should do, but.

“Wa-wait a second. Now, my emotions are all over the place…!”

Kei stretched out her open hands, to allow me to stop feeling anxious, waiting for a bit.

Looking at Kei, I decided to calmly wait for that moment to come.

After a bit, Kei looked at me, determination in her eyes.

“…Well, argh! That, how do I say it…”

Although she made up her mind, it still took some work to organize the words and speak them.

Due to me feeling that she was ineffably cute in that state, I didn’t feel depressed even though I was waiting for this long for her answer.

“To you…basically, I…”

Although it was extremely hard to work up the courage to do so, Kei did not try to look away.

This might be proof of Kei’s determination.

Karuizawa Kei’s strength was that, once she had made up her mind, she would carry it out to the end, no matter what the situation.

“Li-like…huh…rather than say that…”

Kei’s voice became softer and softer, stammering, but persisting in revealing her feelings.

“I also… like… like…you. I don’t want to say it but…I-I admit! I admit it alright!”

I don’t know why she was angry, but even so, she still revealed her feelings of love.

I stretched out my arms and gently held Kei’s arms.

“W-wait!? D-don’t say you want to kiss!?”

Kei’s reaction was even stronger than when I told her I liked her.

Even if we kissed now, I don’t think Kei would object, but I did not want to do it now.

“I don’t plan to do that, at least for now.”

“For…for now…”

In other words, after that, the scene of us kissing would enter her vision.

Imagining that scene, Kei was motionless, as if she were frozen.

I embraced the Kei in that state.

This was proof that my relationship with Kei had taken a huge step forward.

“This should be fine, right?”

“-Well, if it’s only this….”

Even if I didn’t see Kei’s face, I understood.

The Kei right now, must be feeling confused, anxious, and happy.

Her face’s expression had to be showing a feeling that was impossible to express with just a smile or other methods.

“Hey, haven’t you grown a bit taller?”

“Maybe.”

Before I came to this school, I measured 176cm tall. Growing during this year wasn’t much of a deal.

The same was true for the other students.

People would grow.

They’re also creatures that loved to learn.

This was instinct.

Just like learning how to ride a bike, or how to swim.

Just like learning how to use the chopsticks and how to drink from a straw.

I was also learning to fall in love through Kei.

This was something I had not learned in my life so far.

It was also something that couldn’t be learned in the white room.

And it drove my inquiring mind.

Moreover, there was an important reason why I selected Kei.

This love was necessary for Karuizawa Kei’s future growth.

Looking ahead to the next year, her relationship with me would be extremely important.

Kei’s way of survival, as a parasite attached to a host, would someday fail.

To prevent this from happening, this stage was necessary.

I-

Me right now, what expression did I have?

Was I smiling?

Or was there a shy expression on my face?

Or was there a confused smile?

I didn’t know.

The me now, did not know what expression I was wearing.

-No.

I actually knew.

The expression I had now.

I knew what I was thinking of now, and I also knew what I planned to do.

While learning, people would feel joy in the process.

Whether it was studying, athletics, or games, it was the same.

You felt happy when you made progress.

This was the same with love.

I still didn’t understand love.

I didn’t know what attachment was, and I didn’t know what affection was.

And I didn’t understand the relationship between men and women.

The embarrassment and happiness I felt waiting for the outcome, that kind of thing I was also not clear about.

In the near future, I would definitely learn the answers to those questions.

But nothing would change.

Merely learning, growing up, and moving forward.

In other words, Kei was like a textbook for me to the opposite sex.

And when I finished reading it- it’s “purpose” would have been served.

Or-

Was a different future waiting for me?

Not leaving her side, becoming an irreplaceable existence for her.

I didn’t know.

There was a part of me that hoped for that, and there was a part of me that understood that it wasn’t possible.

So, let’s pray.

Praying at the moment right now – holding an important person in my arms and smiling.

Praying, as a young student, swearing that I’ll treasure her.

I gently embraced Kei, quietly praying.