The Person Who Became Dear to Me

I finished changing my clothes and grabbed my phone, feeling a bit melancholic.

«Good grief… what is it now?»

I was preparing myself when I suddenly got a call.

An unknown 11-digits phone number that wasn’t in my contact list.

I obviously knew who it was. It was Kiyotaka.

The scene of him and Hiyori-san on that date appeared before my eyes.

He’s free to hang out with whoever, wherever he wants to, of course.

Since our relationship wasn’t anything special after all.

But still…

«Ah, enough! Why do I have to feel so irritated and getting pushed around by someone like him!»

I stopped thinking too deeply about it, dispelled my feelings and prepared to take the call.

I planned to eat out with Ishikura-san and Sonoda-san today. I’m going to have fun today.

«It’s me, sorry for calling you.»

I restrained my voice which was about to burst and calmed myself down.

«It’s fine. What?»

«You sound like you have some complaints though.»

«Not really. Not complaining, just wanted to confirm something with you.»

«That I called you out recently and didn’t get in touch with you later?»

If you understood that, so at least follow up, will you! Whoops, I should keep that to myself…

«You seem to understand then, what? Just wanted to harass me?»

«Could we meet up and talk about that?»

«Eh?»

«Remember the thing I said I would tell you if I remembered it? I just did. Could you come over?»

What’s up with that?… You didn’t contact me after that and now you want to talk with me? And in your room?

«Good grief… You always do it when it pleases you… I guess it’s fine. I’m not taking any responsibilities if someone sees me, okay?»

It will become a problem if I were seen trying to enter a boy’s room alone.

«Don’t worry about that.»

I thought he would have some misgivings about that, but it seems I was wrong.

Well, if he says he isn’t worried, then why should I?

«Got it. Ah, I have something planned by 7pm so I can’t have you take too much time, okay?»

«It will be short. Probably around 10 to 20 minutes.»

«It’s alright for me then. See you later.»

I ended the call and sighed.

I felt relieved the call didn’t turn for the worse.

«Why does my heart have to be pushed around by a guy like him?»

I don’t feel like being toying around by him either, but well, it can’t be helped.

This is a shield to protect myself.

Yes, that’s why it can’t be helped.

«…It wouldn’t be fair otherwise, right.»

1

I began to prepare myself before leaving for his room.

A meal is waiting for me after this. So let’s be done with this quickly, that kind of feeling.

But it was so quiet when I arrived.

He was just looking at me, not delving into any important topics.

«So, what is it?»

Don’t even tell me he has forgotten the matter after I came here?

His answer when I tried to cut through this awkwardness was…

«What do you mean?»

An evasive reply. I became a bit irritated by that.

«What do you mean? Didn’t you just recall what you wanted to say?»

«Now that you say it, yes, I suppose that’s true.»

«……»

I thought he would start talking again, but he became quiet and the silence returned.

«Oh come on, what is it?»

«Well, you don’t need to be so hasty.»

«I’m pretty sure I mentioned it, didn’t I? I’m eating with my friends at 7PM at the Keyaki Mall. Understand?»

«There still a lot of time. It’s going to be fine.»

«Hmm, you kinda give me the goosebumps, you know? The way you just go on and on about nonsense.»

He normally would keep things as short as neccessary, precisely to the point.

That was my usual impression of him.

I thought his usual self was impressive, honestly.

How shall I say it? He was being so calm despite the fact we are the same age. Or rather cool. That part of him was somewhat attractive, so to say.

No, no. I have to be angry now. What up with praising him now?

«…Oh by the way. I have something I need to tell you, okay?»

I didn’t like how he wasn’t himself so I changed the topic.

«Something you need to tell me?»

«Satou-san is suspecting my relationship with you, you know?»

Even if he had the initiative, even I could influence it.

That’s why I sometimes have to start the conversation myself. If not, something bad might occur.

«I thought she might begin to hate me after I rejected her. What suspicions?»

It would be easy to think she would dislike him after that. But his situation is totally different.

He seems like he would need an explanation about romance from A to Z just for him to understand as he’s kind of distant, right?

Unlike any middle schoolers I know of.

That’s what giving me so much stress right now.

«She thinks I might have broken up with Hirata to go out with you. She tried to ask me about it in a roundabout way.»

It was about a boy she liked so of course she would notice something.

And that—I really saw him differently from every other boy.

«I refuted it of course, but I’m not sure how much she believed me.»

I don’t think she would forgive me if she knew we were meeting up with each other like this.

If we had changed positions, I would feel the same.

«I see. I had a similar conversation too.»

«What? Something similar?»

There shouldn’t be anything similar to that as far as I know, except for Satou-san’s case.

«Matsushita was a bit suspicious about you and me. Asked whether we were dating or not.»

Eh? Matsushita? By Matsushita you mean the one from our class?

My mind went into a panic from the sudden mention of her name.

«Wha? What? No way, right? Really? You’re not joking?»

He nodded slightly and talked about the events leading to that but…

You mean, she started suspecting his real abilities during the special exam?

«W-wait a bit! I can’t keep up with this!»

It was bad enough with Satou alone. And now even Matsushita?

I’m getting a headache…

«I think it’s getting really bad, kinda… do you have something up your sleeve?»

It should still be possible to calm down the situation if I just apologised once of twice.

But what he replied back was…

«I think it’s fine to ignore it?»

He chose the worst option with that composed expression of his.

«No, no, that’s no good!— And our relationship… isn’t anything special to begin with either!»

I was the one who had the most to lose if I ignored it!

«Do you dislike others thinking there may be something even when there’s nothing there? Even if, let’s say she spread a rumour, just let her say what she wants, right?»

«What? Just let her say what she wants?…There’s no way I can do that. Tell it straight to her right now, that there is nothing between us!»

Whatever the truth may be, the important thing is how to convey that to the other person.

I want to avoid destroying the peace in my class at all costs.

Does he think it will be fine as long as he protects me with his body?

If he thinks so, he’s wrong. Peace of mind is also important.

«It may have the opposite effect if I tried to explain it to Matsushita now.»

«You should have known that from the start, didn’t you? Why make such a half-assed lie?»

«No matter how I explained it, it wouldn’t change anything. Satou is suspecting there is something between us right? Since she is close to Matsushita, she will eventually tell her that our relationship isn’t normal. No, the possibility that she made a move after being told is pretty high.»

«…You, may be right…»

Rumours of our relationship being spread far and wide, even if it was a lie, would be a total loss for me.

Or perhaps not. There would be a small saving grace. But just a small one, really.

If we truly were going out then, well, I mean, we aren’t so…

«I mean… won’t they think that I broke up with Hirata-kun to date you instead? I’m the one getting troubled if there’s even the slightest chance it spreads to our class, no, our whole school, you know.»

«Why should that worry you?»

He wouldn’t understand me no matter what.

«Listen here—. If such a rumour was was out there, it would affect me from now on.»

What’s going on inside this skull of this love-dead boy?

That’s precisely why he didn’t notice Satou’s and my feelings for him.

«Okay? Being approached by the opposite sex is hard if there is some scent of some other person there, understood?»

I pointed my finger at him.

«So you are saying you want to find a new love and that I’m in the way?»

«…That’s how it is.»

Honestly, I’m not thinking of getting a boyfriend now, but, that’s just how it is.

I seemed to have gotten the message through so I proceeded forward.

I was beginning to think he was pretending dumb after all this.

But since we arrived at this topic, I once again recalled that scene.

Hiyori-san and him discussing happily at the cafe.

«Do you really understand? Right, care to listen?»

Since we ended up here, I have to confirm something.

He called me up saying he had something to discuss, yet made me look at that until the end.

There’s no way I can leave without saying my piece of mind about that.

«You…are you close to this Shiina?»

«Shiina? Ah, you mean Hiyori?»

«Hiyo…»

He easily used her first name instead of her last.

Well… he’s free to call other girls by their first names as he pleases, like me.

Everyone in that group he’s so close to also uses their first name I hear.

But, Shiina-san is well, not like that… not that I care.

«We are certainly rather close. We both like to read books so our hobbies align. How about it?»

S-same hobbies… r-reading books? Isn’t that like, the total opposite from me?…

«Heee? The same hobby? Reading books… heee….heee. So completely different from me?»

I slipped up, saying exactly what I thought.

«And?»

He nonchalantly faced me like he was asking why I wanted to hear about that in the first place.

«…No, I mean… Argh! I forgot what to say!»

I just didn’t have anything else I’d wanted to say for that matter.

Anyway, I tried to squeeze out some words as if to compromise, still worrying.

«If the rumours about you and I were to spread, I mean, it would be harder for you to get closer to Shiina-san, right?»

There was some part of me that wanted him to deny it.

«I see. That’s certainly a possibility.»

But he didn’t deny it, instead he agreed with me in full honesty.

«Not that I care really. You’re free to get close to whoever you want for that matter.»

I turned my back towards him as if trying to run away.

Hey, I can’t do this anymore. My feelings I had tried to hold in was about to burst forth.

«Sorry but, could… we have leave this talk for later? I want to head for Keyaki mall a bit early. There may be some boys from other classes coming too. I’m going to chase away the rumours so I need to get into the mood. I don’t have the time to deal with you.»

I wouldn’t know what else I could have ended up saying to him if I were to stay here.

I don’t know what these depressing feeling are. I just don’t understand.

«Mood?»

«I’m looking for a new boyfriend since I broke up with Hirata-kun. Got a problem?»

It was just a gathering of girls eating together, but I wanted to put on the airs.

«Not at all.»

«…Right? That’s why I’m leaving now.»

He stood up as if trying to chase after me.

«It’s fine.»

Even if he were to see me out, it would just make me feel sick.

«Kei.»

He called me by my name.

Why does my heart have to skip just like that?

«What is it already?»

Why am I the only one being pushed here and there by his words and actions?

«It’s just, if you don’t like it, it’s fine for you to keep looking another way.»

Why am I— the only one…who…

«What?»

«Will you go out with me?»

«Eh?»

I frowned and turned around, not sure I understood.

«What did you say? Or, what is it?»

He was listening to me when I said I didn’t have time, right?

While I was thinking along those lines…

«That’s not what I meant. I asked if, you wanted to go out with me.»

Me going out with him?

«No I mean— I don’t really… under…stand…»

Going out?

Hmm…?

Eh, wait a bit. Wait a bit…?

The way he looked at me, that gaze and presence.

«W-ai, eh, wha, what!? What’s up with that joke, that’s bad taste even for you…!?»

«If it was a joke.»

Yes, if it was a joke, it wasn’t something I’ll ever forgive him for.

Swaying my heart right and left, left and right and saying this after all that.

«B-but—didn’t you mention getting closer to Shiina-san just now!?»

«That was the joke.»

«But—the other day—»

Didn’t you get intimate with Shiina-san recently…!

But Kiyotaka’s next words drowned out what I was about to say.

«That was simply, well. I wanted to test whether you would became jealous or not, I suppose.»

Then… so there really isn’t anything between him and Shiina-san?

In other words, he wanted to see my reaction to watching that?

So—well, Kiyotaka is, in other words, eh…

«If this is a joke, this is the last chance to take it back… You do know that, don’t you?»

If that was his idea of teasing, it would be a huge shame and disgrace on my part.

Our relationship will most likely break apart at once.

I became unable to reply.

No, maybe I had wanted it to be a joke.

Since—if he was serious, that would mean, that I have to answer him too—

«Of course it’s not a joke. May I hear your reply?»

It’s not… a joke?

You mean… you were serious?

So, in other words, Kiyotaka came to like me?

My mind went blank for a second, then it began to overflow.

«…Y, y-y-y-y-y-you are asking that of me!?»

Something inside me broke out and I started panicking, making a quite the commotion.

«As I said earlier, you can look away, reject me, you can do what you wish to.»

«I didn’t say I was going to ignore you! B-but, why!?»

«By ‘why’ you mean?»

«Well, that is, me… I mean… by the way, why today…?»

It was so abrupt. All the frustration built up until now was turned upside down in dramatical fashion.

«I wonder why. I’m not sure I can explain it very well, but there is one thing I can explain. I wanted to stop any other guy from getting you as their girlfriend.»

So my lie had taken form in a most unlikely way inside his heart?

«So you mean— You, you like… like… me?»

I tried putting it into words, trying to confirm it. There’s no way I wasn’t going to.

I wanted to hear his answer directly with my ears.

«Yes, I love Karuizawa Kei.»

I love Karuizawa Kei.

I love Karuizawa Kei.

I love Karuizawa Kei.

W-haaaaaaa!!

His voice was reverberating inside my brain like a ringing bell.

«You answer is?»

A-answer? What’s an answer? What should I say back to someone who said they liked me?

‘I love you too!’ Do I have to say something that embarrasing!?

Eh, eh? If I answer him, wouldn’t our relationship change here and there!?

I wanted to answer, but the panic, the agony, my head just shorted out.

No that’s wrong. I, have to admit it. That I’ve loved Kiyotaka from way back.

But still, I’d had thought our relationship didn’t change, wouldn’t change. But I was wrong.

«—I-I’ll let you go out… with me.»

I answered him as if confessing something.

But, he was somehow calm, didn’t cry, didn’t show a smile, just showing strong will.

«Can I take it as you also liking me?»

But he didn’t seem satisfied or something, like he wanted something else.

«You want me to say it!?»

«Yes, I want you to.»

N-no way. Ah, I haven’t even prepared for any confessions at all!

If I knew it would turn like this, I would have made some more effort and done something!

The only saving grace was that I was planning to go out to eat with some friends. I’m so glad for that…

Being dressed up like this, I mean.

But I have to answer him here.

As a boy and a girl. It was important to answer to the other person’s feelings.

«…Well, you know? I mean, you know—….I, I lik…kinda… kinda, sorta…»

I was so trying to be cool, but the voice I managed was so low I doubt it was audible.

I didn’t like that weakness of mine so I added some words as I continued.

«I also… like… fell for… It’s frustrating but…I-I admit, I admit it!»

Indeed. I looked at his eyes and said it. He then reached out his hands and gently grabbed both of mine.

«W-wait!? D-don’t say you wanted to kiss!?»

«No. I won’t do that. Not yet.»

He won’t do it yet!?

A-ahem. It’s certainly too early, I mean. A kiss now, when my heart isn’t calming down would be…right.

He quietly embraced me. His large body. I felt his powerful arms touching me.

«This should be fine, right?»

«—Well, if it’s only this…»

As he held me in his arms, I thought he had grown a bit from before.

«Hey, haven’t you gotten a bit taller?»

«I may have.»

From today, he and I started walking on the path of lovers together, unbelievably enough.

How far does this path of happiness stretch on?

Will this path go on forever?…

That’s—