Dark Clouds – part 3

Within the five-hour time limit, we reached the abruptly arrived at the last question in an hour.

There likely weren’t just a few students who thought that clearing it was guaranteed from how smoothly it was going. If the last item ends, it would be out of the way, the special exam would be cleared and 50 points would be given.

But if there was even one cause for concern then it would show on the homeroom teacher’s appearance.

“Now then… next is the final motion.”

Advancing to the next motion, the color of Chabashira-sensei’s face changed in a bad way. Was it also from finally reaching the peak? The paleness of her face was obvious even to the students’ eyes.

“Sensei, are you okay?”

Though we’re still at the stage before the motion is displayed, talking by oneself isn’t something to be praised.

But Yousuke, unable to overlook it, raised his voice.

“…What?”

“I mean, you seem visibly sick.”

“…Is that so? That’s not true.”

It didn’t look like she was bluffing.

In other words, she herself didn’t even notice that she looked strange.

You could say that her consciousness hasn’t even caught up, huh.

Anyway, being told that’s not true, even Yousuke had to back down.

The teacher at the back wasn’t moving either. The last motion would probably start like this.

But there’s one thing for certain. That the next motion should be assumed to have a big effect on Chabashira’s current condition.

“Well then, I will display the last motion. Prepare to vote.”

Saying that, Chabashira manipulated the tablet on her hand as she adjusted her breathing.

When she did, the last motion was displayed in front of our eyes.

Motion ⑤ ・ Expel one classmate and gain 100 class points in exchange

(If a unanimous agreement is reached, then another vote will be held to designate the student who will be expelled)

Choices Agree Oppose

The last motion had the least amount of choices until now, only two.

That’s because at first glance, one would think that the less choices there are, the easier it will be to settle.

But in practicality, the number of choices don’t hold that big of an influence.

In cases wherein many complete strangers gather and you’re unable to hold a discussion, having more choices would be disadvantageous. But our class can discuss repeatedly.

The important thing is the timing and the content of the motion.

Expulsion or class points.

The one that could even be called the worst motion that I had been imagining appeared here.

The students were not allowed to speak, but in their hearts they were likely reading the motion through with trembling.

If we agree to this motion, one of our classmates will be expelled.

In normal situations, the whole class should vote 『Oppose』 without hesitation.

100 class points is no small number, but there are likely many people who want to avoid losing a classmate to expulsion in exchange for that.

If most people think that, then we could likely have a majority vote against it on the first vote and settle it with that.

But the previous four motions have demonstrated that it wouldn’t go that well.

That’s why reaching unanimity, while simple, poses a challenge.

“The 60-second countdown will start from here… everyone, start voting.”

They wouldn’t give us too much time. The 60 seconds of voting time starts.

If we unanimously agree, then the selection for who gets expelled among this class will start right away.

It will repeat, but it goes without saying that there should be almost no students who will volunteer. 100 class points. It’s not an amount that we have to get no matter what after all.

If, hypothetically, we were in our third term of our third year, and we finally only had one or two tests left, then we probably wouldn’t feel like this right now.

At times when every point counts, the value of these 100 points would jump up. If this were that kind of time, then these two choices could be the final fight.

But right now, the situation is different. Almost nobody would hesitate to vote 『oppose』 at this stage.

Even so, it’s also true that there are several reasons for uneasiness such as Kouenji.

That’s exactly why I’m taking my time to think with my hands away from my tablet.

According to my agreement with Horikita, no matter what the motion is, for the first vote, I’m to vote for the first choice. But, if 38 people including Horikita vote against it, then we could end it without inserting an interval and with 39 votes in opposition. That would be better.

We should end this motion right away without leaving any excessive gaps. If we hold even one discussion, there’s no guarantee that no student’s heart will be swayed by those 100 points.

I’ve judged that an interval is unnecessary just for this motion.

After almost 60 seconds, we were notified that everyone had finished voting.

“…Because everyone has voted, the result will be conveyed.”

Even with something obviously wrong about her, Chabashira kept up her appearances and continued to advance.

1st Vote Results 2 in Agreement 37 in Opposition

I removed my finger from the voting button and quietly stared at the result.

“…………”

Though she should have read the result out loud and proceeded, Chabashira motionlessly stared at the monitor like the students. The division of the votes… wasn’t enough to suggest that this was an unexpected outcome.

There’s no assurance to be found that we would be able to reach unanimity without even a single interval.

That being the case, what weighs on Chabashira’s mind might be this motion.

“Chabashira-sensei. Please proceed.”

Though just a few seconds, Chabashira had been wasting time. She received a warning from the teacher at the back.

“… Sorry. Eh-… two in agreement, thirty-seven in opposition. Because unanimity was not achieved, we will enter an interval.”

Two agreed huh.

“Oi who the hell voted in agreement!? Are you fucking around!?”

Even as he asked who it was, Sudou’s intense gaze was one-sidedly faced towards Kouenji.

The fact that it was Kouenji, after speaking out regarding the protection point but not standing out too much, could be guessed from the contents of the motion.

Of course, Sudou boarded the train first but most students probably thought the same.

“Which did you pick Kouenji?”

“Is there a need to answer?”

“Not answering means that you agreed, doesn’t it?”

“Jumping to conclusions isn’t good, Redhair-kun. In the first place, from what Horikita-girl said, making an arbitrary choice for the first vote should be tolerated. I don’t think you have any right to complain regardless of which I picked, do you?”

Against his sound reasoning, Sudou’s mood visibly soured.

“Even if one of the votes was Kouenji, there’s one other person who agreed, right?”

Ike called attention to the person aside from Kouenji who voted.

“As you said, that’s also a problem. Who was it, oi!”

Sure enough, they weren’t able to figure out who the other person was. Sudou barked with a troubled expression.

“Don’t fret. The other person who voted in agreement was Ayanokouji-kun.”

“Haa? A, Ayanokouji agreed? How can you say something like that Suzune?”

“We’ve kept it a secret until now, but before this special exam he and I had made a promise. No matter what the motion was, he would coordinate himself in order to avoid a unanimous first vote.”

After having arrived at the final motion, Horikita spoke of our advance arrangements.

Indeed, there is no merit to hiding it at this stage.

It’s obviously a bigger waste to spend effort on searching for that other person.

“Avoid a unanimous agreement on one of the choices without planning, was it?”

Yousuke added in easily understood words for the students who didn’t yet understand.

“Yes.”

“…So that’s what it was. But if that were the case you should’ve said so sooner.”

“We shouldn’t have. The first vote before which it’s forbidden to talk is an important opportunity in order to accurately discern which choice our classmates want. If they had known that we had a tactic in place to avoid reaching unanimity, some students would vote sloppily. I wanted to avoid that myself. He was to vote for the first choice. I would vote for the second. That’s why there’s practically one person who voted in agreement.”

Looking around the classroom, Horikita addressed that someone.

“It’s a bit of an extreme motion, but whatever they vote for is the individual’s choice. It’s not a mistake to vote in agreement for more class points. But everyone should vote in opposition as one class. If you have an argument then just like before, it would be great if you expressed it here, but… is there no one?”

Usually, this would be where the names of the students who had voted in agreement would come out.

But despite having waited a long time, no one appeared to answer Horikita’s question.

“How long will you stay quiet Kouenji?”

“Fufu. I’ve said this before, but please don’t decide that I voted in agreement on your own.”

“Shut it. I know that you’re fucking around anyway.”

If it were not Kouenji, they might have been swallowed up by Sudou’s proactive anger and unable to say that they had done it.

If the class votes in unanimous agreement, the vote for who to expel from the class would start.

In other words, someone wants to expel a classmate for 100 class points.

Then they would suffer negative attention and criticism.

The truth is that nobody wants to be thought of as thinking that way.

“Knock it-“

“Calm down Sudou-kun. It’s still the first vote, there’s no particular need to panic.”

“Bu, but! I don’t like voting in agreement from these choices.”

“Interpreting it as that is up to you. But there’s no guarantee that it was Kouenji-kun. Besides, no matter who voted in agreement, I believe that they’re thinking that not naming themselves has been inexcusable. These votes are anonymous, so let’s not investigate deeply. If they vote against in the second vote then we will be unanimous. That’s enough.”

It would be out of the wya and the motion would be cleared. Horikita seemed to have judged that there was no need to waste time excessively.

I myself had also been thinking that this was the best choice to make now, not an investigation.

“There is no need for any more discussion regarding this motion. Well then, let’s end it with the next vote.”

Seeing that Horikita was calm, Sudou slapped both of his cheeks as if to control himself. Then while chatting about slightly irrelevant things, we reached the time for the second vote.

“A vote will start now for 60 seconds.”

The LCD screen changed to display the agree and oppose buttons.

Without using 60 seconds, everyone seemed to have finished voting in about 20 seconds.

“…Because everyone has finished voting, the results of the second vote will be displayed.”

2nd vote results 2 in Agreement 37 in Opposition

There hadn’t been a strong sense of tension in this special exam until now. But at the instant at which the second vote’s results were displayed, the air evidently froze. Two agreements again was the result.

Even after hearing the talk just now, they hadn’t changed their vote.

That fact was transmitted through the cold monitor.

“Wait… what is this?”

Saying that, the one to whom Horikita turned her gaze was not Ike but me.

Why did you vote in agreement at the second vote? That question.

Including Sudou, the students who understood her explanation from a while ago looked at me.

“In the first vote as well as in the second vote now, I have been voting in opposition.”

“Haa? O, oi, what do you mean? Weren’t you supposed to vote for the first choice?”

“Yeah. But with the content of the motion being as it is, I judged on my own that I should vote against from the first time. The reason I didn’t say that was because I didn’t want to invite unnecessary confusion.”

If two people had voted in agreement on the first vote, the uneasiness would increase.

Because it would no longer be possible to dismiss it as Kouenji playing around.

Even Horikita, who had been calm for the whole time until now, was disturbed a little bit.

“I see… which means that there are currently two people who are in agreement.”

Horikita brings her hand to her lips and thinks.

she probably wants to stop and deliberately contemplate, but intervals are precious.

“If you intend to continue voting in agreement from now on, will you not state your reason for doing so? As you can see, the results display 37 people in opposition apart from you two. If you want everyone to agree, then I would like a suitable presentation.”

The basis for moving the poll is to discuss.

If more people judge that there is more merit to voting in agreement, the votes will move on their own.

Conversely, if no discussion is held, it would not be easy for the votes to move.

But the reply to that request was silence.

“He, hey Horikita-san. It’s okay… right? Nobody from the class will be expelled right?”

Kushida got worried. Without enduring the silence she asked Horikita.

“My intention as I’ve said before is to not have anyone expelled.”

After Horikita said her intentions again, the silence started a second time.

It’s easy to tell what you will enforce at the end from the beginning, but…

“I don’t know who’s in opposition. But I want you to listen well.”

Yousuke stands up and starts with words that are packed with gentle power.

“We shouldn’t choose to gain class points by throwing away classmates. Even if it were 500 or 1000 points, I don’t think that there’s any value if they were gained through this choice. More than anything, we can only receive 100 points. It’s something we can amply recover from.”

An appeal from the man who doesn’t want to sacrifice someone more than anyone else, is natural.

Among 39 people, 37 understand what Yousuke says to some degree.

Although they want to save 100 points, they don’t want to have someone expelled.

But… whether that’s what they really think or not is a different problem.

From the first vote, the results of the votes from those in opposition and those in agreement have been swayed significantly by silent peer pressure.

There should also be students who don’t want to be expelled no matter what within this class.

It wouldn’t be strange if someone honestly thought that they didn’t mind sacrificing a classmate at this time.

“Fufufu, it’s become interesting hasn’t it, this special exam. Very cool.”

Kouenji cheerfully laughed and continued.

“I thought without a doubt that everyone except me would have moved to opposition by the second vote.”

Without showing any shame, Kouenji said.

“Except you… I knew it was you Kouenji!”

“Kouenji-kun, is that true? Though this could become a case of a boy who cried wolf and caused trouble and disorder so I’d like you to stop.”

For now Horikita prioritized clarifying whether or not he truly voted in opposition. She tried to verify again.

“Be calm. For the first time and second time, I made sure to vote in agreement.”

“Will you tell us your reason?”

“The answer is simple, see. We can get 100 more class points right? So necessarily we can get more private points for everyday use. There is no reason to refuse.”

“Telling jokes. You saying that class points are more important than comrades!?”

“You are also saying something interesting. I didn’t see you as such a person after we had entered this school, though?”

“Shut up!”

“Because I am voting in agreement, it’s only natural that I had considered things like that as well.”

“Bastard, what do you think comrades are…”

“Comrades? I’ve never thought of you lot as comrades though.”

“Do you mean that you won’t change to opposition in the next vote?”

“Of course. If it 『goes on like this』 then I would continue to vote in agreement. Doesn’t Horikita-girl want to avoid the time limit?”

“Ha. Don’t think that it’ll go as you wish Kouenji. If that’s what he intend to do, then let’s not go easy on him Suzune. Everyone can vote agree and expel Kouenji!”

That’s a sudden answer he arrived at, but it’s also a fact that the people who would move to agreement have that aspect in mind. It’s possible to band together and drive out a scoundrel of a classmate who we could do without.

People unconsciously pick what they want to believe and justify it afterwards.

I don’t want to have anyone expelled, but there are students who vote in agreement so it can’t be helped.

Trying to justify someone’s expulsion, the brain starts working.

They end up swallowing convenient reasons, conspiracies and false information.

“I don’t wish for everyone to agree either, you see. However, you should stop thinking that you can have me expelled with that. Right? Horikita-girl.”

Of course that would be the case. If Kouenji is found to be one of the people voting in agreement, then the people around him would naturally start clamoring to have him expelled. This man should understand that.

In line with the composure he’s showing, there’s no way Kouenji can be expelled.

“…It’s as he says. We can’t expel Kouenji-kun.”

“What do you mean?”

“I made a promise with Kouenji-kun before the start of the Uninhabited Island Exam remember? That if he took first place in the exam, then I would protect him from then until graduation.”

Our classmates should also remember the exchange from that time.

“Not even I expected him to take first place. But because he did, our class was able to approach B-Class. That’s an immeasurable achievement.”

“Tha, that’s true… but it’s a different problem if he drags our class down, isn’t it!?”

“Dragging you down is unthinkable. I’m doing nothing but expressing my choice by choosing it as I see fit. You can’t decide that voting in agreement is evil, isn’t that right?”

Hypothetically, if the content of this motion was 『One person from the class can be expelled. Agree or oppose,』 then you wouldn’t simply be able to just call voting in agreement evil. But this situation exchanges an expulsion for class points.

It’s difficult to assign a concrete number to a single student’s value. But Kouenji has calculated that agreeing would be more beneficial, and no one had the right to deny that.

As long as he used a sound argument and their promise, Horikita wouldn’t be able to vote for Kouenji’s expulsion.

“Ye, yeah. Annual the promise! Kouenji doesn’t think of his classmates as comrades. Even if he’s expelled no one would bat an eye!”

“I can’t. I don’t intend to break my promise with him.”

“Of course you don’t. A class leader who doesn’t keep her promises cannot be trusted. In that sense, I trust you more than anyone else right now, Horikita-girl.”

Kouenji’s troublesome parts come out even now.

With this, Horikita must first persuade Kouenji somehow.

But there are many remaining chances for that.

Even if Horikita fundamentally doesn’t betray him, Kouenji will not necessarily be 100% protected. The possibility that Horikita will abandon him should be at the back of his mind.

To put it another way, if that danger comes then even Kouenji would change his attitude.

But it’s also difficult to go in that direction.

Horikita, after starting to have self-awareness as a leader, instantly cuts off Kouenji, who showed good results.

That choice would become a great hindrance in the future.

“If we can’t cut off Kouenji then what do we do, Suzune?”

“Give me some time to think… though even if I ask that, we can’t just stay silent either.”

Yes, if the only one in agreement was Kouenji then it would’ve been a relief.

We can’t overlook the fact that there’s another person who agrees who hasn’t shown themselves yet.

“The person aside from Kouenji-kun who voted in agreement, will you please come forward?”

If we don’t know then we can’t proceed.

But sure enough, the only reply was a deep silence.

They could be concerned that if they come out here, they would be subjected to intimidation and opposition like Kouenji.

Rather, they could be frowned upon even more than Kouenji is.

No reply comes but silence.

We finally reached the time limit, and the third voting period comes whether we want it to or not.

The silver lining was that there was no limit to the number of times we could vote.

As long as time permits, we will have another chance to reach unanimity every 10 minutes.

3rd vote results 2 in Agreement 37 in Opposition

Just like the previous two votes, Kouenji and someone we don’t see is voting in agreement.

Most students are currently placing more importance on Kouenji, but that might not be the case.

The time when they become troubled because someone is eagerly and continuously voting in agreement isn’t far off. We’re confronted with the greatest danger that should be avoided from anonymity. But dealing with Kouenji is the first priority.

If we don’t have the votes in agreement turn into opposition then we will not be able to settle this.

“We can’t ignore whoever votes in agreement, no matter who they are. But that’s not absolute. I think that they’re stubbornly voting for agreement because they have a conviction of their own. If that’s the case then allow me to speak with Kouenji and the other person at the same time.”

Without wasting the passing time, Horikita starts contemplating.

“Us 37 have continued to vote in opposition since before. Two have continued to vote in agreement. The result awaiting us will be the worst-case scenario of reaching the time limit. The whole class will lose an equal number of class points. In other words we will all suffer the same. But we in opposition want to avoid losing a comrade even if we lose class points. We can pass this special exam without having anyone expelled. But those in agreement, far from any advantage, will suffer a great loss. Are you not putting the cart before the horse?”

Citing the concrete advantages and disadvantages, she explains the risk of ending the exam divided.

Of course, the person we can’t see won’t answer, but I wonder about Kouenji.

“Indeed, that’s what will happen if the time limit is reached. So switch to agreement.”

Kouenji tells Horikita to switch to agreement as if it were truly natural.

“…Indeed, if we reach unanimity in agreement then it will be a step forward. But what awaits us after that is a bigger hurdle of who will we have expelled. You don’t think that we can easily reach unanimity on that, do you?”

“Making that go well is also your role, Horikita-girl. And having someone expelled is not so bad is it?”

“It is. No one should be expelled.”

Before Horikita rebuts Kouenji, Yousuke declares.

“I don’t understand. You lot seem to fear expulsion, but obtaining this advantage here is better for the mind is it not? We can delete any unnecessary students and even get class points for it. You should understand how wonderful the choice of agreement is if you change your thinking a little bit. The one person aside from me voting in agreement understands, see.”

It’s a sharp way of thinking, but it’s more than a reason to vote in agreement.

“I don’t think so, Kouenji-kun. Losing someone from this class can’t be an advantage.”

As if she was sympathizing with Yousuke, Kushida also declared that we should prioritize our classmates.

As if to match with them, those in opposition who hadn’t spoken much until now start to cry their objections all at once.

But without softening his attitude, Kouenji simply laughs.

Though they wanted Kouenji to withdraw the most, he didn’t answer to the discussion after that, and the 4th voting interval arrived.

4th vote results 2 in Agreement 37 in Opposition

The appeals of several tens of minutes had no effect at all. Chabashira signalled the start of the third interval.

“What should we do? Damn, if I knock him out, could I vote in his place!?”

“Of course not. …Let’s try to think objectively for a second. If we do that then Kouenji-kun might change his thoughts.”

Horikita, wanting to avoid not reaching an agreement more than anything else, was forced to try different approaches.

“What do you mean objectively?”

“Aside from us, what will the other three classes pick?”

“Er… Ryuuen’s class would definitely throw someone away right?”

Sudou linked his arms behind his head and send without hesitation.

It seemed that most of their class would consent to that, so yes, people muttered.

Looking at his actions and thoughts until now, that’s indeed a big possibility.

“That’s right. It might be the most likely class to do it.”

“On the other hand, Ichinose’s class definitely wouldn’t right. Sakayanagi-san’s class… I wonder.”

Most people in Ryuuen’s class would likely vote in agreement.

Most people in Ichinose’s class would likely vote in opposition.

And Sakayanagi’s class could swing to both sides.

Interestingly and perhaps by coincidence, our classmates agreed that the three classes would all show different results.

In this case, Ichinose’s class wouldn’t really discuss over their opposition. Sure enough Ryuuen’s class becomes the focus of the talk.

“I don’t want to be overtaken by Ryuuen. We have a momentum right now, and if we go a step forward we’ll reach B-Class right?”

“Even if you say that, it won’t be a big difference. Even if we gain a lead now it would only be by 100 class points. It’s less than what can be made up in one special exam.”

“I understand what you want to say. But let me say one thing.”

Akito had stayed quiet in this special exam until now, but in the last motion he breaks his silence.

“The probability is low. But these 100 points will be enough to cry over someday right?”

“What’s that, Miyake. Are you telling us to have someone expelled?”

“Don’t misunderstand. I’m definitely against it.”

More than angry, he seemed upset as he objected.

“I believe that reaching A-Class without missing anyone from this class is optimal. That’s exactly why we can’t make light of the value that 100 points brings.”

“What do you mean?”

“When we’re near graduation, this special exam will have become a turning point. I believe that we should all think with that future in mind.”

It’s a mistake to vote against it without resolving oneself. That was Akito’s perspective.

“Ye, yeah, I might have not been thinking…”

You must vote against it at all times. The students had become to notice that peer pressure.

“Kouenji. I understand quite enough that you’ve made great efforts in the uninhabited island exam. Even without your promise with Horikita, I believe that many people voting to have you expelled because you voted in agreement would be strange.”

Not only towards Horikita and Sudou, but also towards Kouenji, Akito expressed his thoughts.

“But even still, it’s not good to trouble the class by doing whatever you want whenever you want. A relationship can’t be established with just class points. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Fuuffufuu…”

Kouenji closed his eyes and nodded deeply.

And as if he had been thinking of something or not, he opened his eyes and glanced at Akito.

“Of course – I don’t understand in the least.”

“…”

“Try thinking about the structure of this school. Everything is established with points. Things like friendship or affection are irrelevant. Class points are to decide which class is at the top. Private points represent individual assets. These are inseparable in this system. Having agreed with that as my first priority, I don’t think I am mistaken.”

“You talk without shame. Bastard, you haven’t ever contributed to this class until now! You can’t keep that attitude forever just because you took first place on the uninhabited island!’

“You should look at a mirror Redhair-kun. Whether the one who contributed more to this class is you or me, is easier to see than the sun.”

Sudou had been improving recently, but at the start of our time in this school he was a problem child like Kouenji. No, if you add the effect on class points then Sudou’s contribution was worse.

“Well, the important thing for me isn’t class points though.”

We had an attitude against Kouenji’s agreement since it had been thought to be beyond help.

But Horikita didn’t ignore what she had heard from Kouenji.

“Class points aren’t what’s important. If that’s the case then you aren’t doing this to gain 100 class points and advance to A-Class, but for more private points. That’s why you’ve been voting in agreement right?”

“Exactly. I’ve been agreeing for private points. We’ve decided to halve our private points for half a year two motions ago after all. I choked back my tears because it was necessary for you lot to protect me, but I can’t do that now, you see.”

In order to compensate for the private points that he was going to lose, he wanted class points.

The reason why Kouenji has been agreeing has been identified.

A portion of the students might take offense to the fact that he had been trying to expel a student for private points. But Horikita saw a chance here.

“-I understand Kouenji-kun. Let’s make a deal. It’s not a bad deal for you.”

“Hoou? That seems interesting. Will you present it to me?”

Kouenji welcomed her proposal as if he wasn’t surprised but had actually been waiting for it.

“If you switch to the opposition now and we reach a unanimous vote in opposition afterwards, then for every month from now until graduation, I will pay you 10,000 private points from the school. This is the same for you as getting 100 more class points isn’t it?”

“Ye, yeah, then there’d be no point to Kouenji voting in agreement…”

“As expected of you Horikita-girl. You seem to have reached that conclusion without needing much time.”

“…From the start, you’ve been agreeing so that I would make this proposal right?”

“It means my vote holds that much value. It’s not like I can’t raise the price, but I need Horikita-girl to be a trustworthy ally. Let’s proceed with those conditions.”

“There’s no need to go out of our way to write it down, is there? Chabashira-sensei is here after all.”

“Of course. I don’t think you will throw away your promise. The pledge has been established.”

Kouenji’s vote was thought to be immovable.

It finally moved, and he promised to vote against it.

Deliberately continuing to vote in agreement and having Horikita make that proposal should be expected of him.

With this, we have the fifth vote.

Kouenji’s declaration to switch to opposition should affect the other person we cannot see as well.

Even with anonymity, to continue asserting opposition is no simple task.

So even without being persuaded, they could switch to the opposition in this vote.

However-

5th vote results 1 in Agreement 38 in Opposition

Kouenji switched his vote from in favor to opposition, but there was still one vote in favor.

You may want to take some of the weight off your shoulders, but the real battle seems to be here.

An absolute vote in favor by someone anonymous.

In order to overcome this, we need to find out who is voting in favor of it.

But that is more difficult than anything else.

The tablet is basically impossible to spy on, but you can see where you touch with your fingertips if you want to. However, the school has anticipated this and the order of the choices is randomized from the beginning. It is impossible to check each other’s finger movements because the choices are switched each time the vote is taken. There is no other way but to make do with the repeated intervals.

Well, it looks like things aren’t going to be easy.

As stated before, unless there’s a unanimous vote to the contrary, the deal you just made is null and void.

“I know, right? But if the flow is unanimous in favor of it, or if we run out of time, we’ll have to give up.”

As long as it’s anonymous, there’s no way to prove that Kouenji didn’t vote yes, except by a unanimous vote of opposition. He doesn’t seem to think that he can get private points for any other choice. If they vote as they wish here, there will be no good news.

If anything, making an enemy of Horikita would be inconvenient for Kouenji, who wanted to have an easy time.

We had about three hours left.

Despite her struggles, Horikita is making progress toward a

breakthrough with a solid strategy.

However, it is also true that she cannot continue to be a sidelong

observer forever.

We need to get this to a unanimous vote before we run out of time.

Until then, I’m just going to sit back and watch this war unfold, but can I give some support? I coughed a couple of times during the interval.

In the midst of all the chatter, no one pays any attention to an

unconscious cough.

On the contrary, if you are aware of it, it is just a cough that you can hear.

“You know, Horikita-san…”

“…… is there something wrong, Karuizawa-san?”

“This is just a hunch of mine, but maybe you have an idea of who’s voting in favor?”

“Uh… why would you think that?”

Horikita’s face showed her surprise at the unexpected point made by Kei.

“It’s just a thought.”

Up until now, Horikita could have taken it as just a random comment.

But now that the fact that Kei and I are dating is out in the open, things are different.

“Yes, you’re right…… Karuizawa-san is right. I think I know someone who keeps pitching in favor of it—maybe……”

“What the— get on with it then. Who the hell is it?”

“I can’t tell you that. This special test is a poll for anonymous names. If you say a name just because you can think of it, you will not be able to take it back if you are wrong.”

“But!”

“…… I know. That’s why I think I need to prepare myself. We will have time to vote a few more times. If the number of yes votes still doesn’t reach zero…… then I’ll have no choice but to say the name.”

“I’d like you to wait, Horikita-san. I don’t agree with you. As Horikita-san just said, there is no way to know for sure who is voting for whom this time. I don’t think it’s acceptable to name names just because you have a hunch. Of course, I’m not talking nonsense just because I don’t want anyone to drop out. You understand, don’t you?”

“I agree with Hirata-kun’s opinion. I don’t think that it’s right to say

something without absolute certainty.”

Kushida, who agreed with Yosuke, also let out an uneasy sigh.

Starting with the two’s opinion, the students were filled with anxiety.

If Horikita misunderstood their names, they would be criticized.

If you are asked to vote in favor when you are voting against, you will be under siege without being able to do anything about it.

If 38 people vote in favor of the proposal because they are almost out of time, it will be inevitable that the named person will be

discussed as a target for expulsion.

“I know…… I know, that’s why I haven’t said the name until now. But I absolutely can’t let the time run out, either. Isn’t that right?”

“I understand how you feel. I myself am not the same person I used to be. And if I have to make a choice, I’m ready to make it. But it has to be 100 percent.”

“…… Yes.”

I tried to make some more changes to the situation, which was starting to get heavy.

“Is there no one other than Horikita who can think of someone who might be voting in favor?”

“I don’t see any. I can’t pin anyone aside from Kouenji who would be so adamantly in favor of it.”

Sudou’s question wasn’t something only he would ask.

People who think they can tolerate the situation where students are expelled.

“If we know who is in favor of it, even if we can’t say their names, it might change our minds a little. I’d like any students with suspicions to raise their hands.”

She asked again to make sure.

However, there was no one who seemed to have anyone in mind like Horikita.

“Yousuke. I know you don’t want to suspect anyone, but with your

wide range of friendships with both men and women, there’s bound to be someone, isn’t there?”

“……No one. I’m not lying, I really can’t think of anyone.”

“I see…… Then how about you, Kushida?”

Even when I suddenly interrupted her, she didn’t show any unusual emotion.

Instead, Horikita turned around disturbed as if to ask, “What are you going to say?”

“Who do you think is voting in favor?”

“No…… Sorry, Ayanokoji-kun. I agree with Hirata-kun, there’s no one that comes to mind.”

“Kushida knows the class best. I thought you might know a little bit about the students who were dissatisfied with the class. Everyone knows that you care about the class more than anyone else, and that you’re always there to offer friendly advice. I want you to try to remember well.”

The class looked at Kushida expectantly.

“Well, hmmm…… I don’t know, there’s no one that comes to mind…… But if anyone does come to mind, I’ll be sure to let you know.”

“Yes. Please, I have a feeling that people like Yousuke and Kushida are essential to this last special exam.”

Without the combined efforts of all of us, it will be difficult to break

through this challenge by opposition.

However, such cooperation was in vain, and the result of the sixth round of voting were put on display……

6th vote results 1 in agreement 38 in opposition.

Unchanging results. Repeated discussions.

7th vote results 1 in agreement 38 in opposition.

8th vote results 1 in agreement 38 in opposition.

The results continued to be the same, and the conversations became more and more silent. The eighth interval was about to begin. A little over an hour had passed since the start of this challenge.

‘BAM!’ – a sound like that resounded in the classroom as Chabashira collapsed with a loud bang.

She pressed her arms against the podium as if she was going to fall down, and managed to prevent herself from collapsing.

“Haa, haa……”

As the discussion continued, Chabashira, who had been standing at the podium the whole time, started breathing hard.

“S-sensei!?”

“I-I’m okay……”

She said and adjusted her posture as she tried to get herself together.

Chabashira stares at the students with vacant eyes, wondering what they were thinking.

Eventually, she exhales heavily with some kind of determination.

“───The teacher is not allowed to lead them to a particular option. Of course, I would never do such a thing. However, may I tell you an old story? Of course, it would take up a lot of your precious time. That is, if you don’t mind.”

“Chabashira-sensei. The teacher’s statement itself is not prohibited, but if it violates the rules, you won’t get off scot-free either. If you decide that you’re guiding the class to protect the class……”

“Yes. If I’m determined to be guiding you towards a choice, I am prepared to be punished.”

By answering that she understood, the watcher had no choice but to be silent.

As a matter of course, this was an unexpected suggestion from

Chabashira, who had never intervened in the special exam.

It could be taken as a ray of light in this deadlocked situation.

“We are suffering from this situation right now. As long as it doesn’t affect our choices, please tell us what you have to say, sensei.”

If we could break the ice in some way, that would be welcome, Horikita said.

Of course, if we are going to speak the truth, we want to have momentum for opposition.

However, as we are under watchful eyes, it’s important to avoid direct expressions.

“……I’m from this Advanced Training High School. And I have taken this special exam when I was a student.”

Horikita and the rest of her classmates are surprised to hear her story for the first time.

“Sensei, you also …… took the Unanimity Special Exam?”

“That’s right. There were five tasks, some of which were slightly

different, but the final task you are facing right now was the same, word for word. You could either get class points for expelling someone or protect your friends and not get class points.”

The students turned to look at Chabashira’s statement when she said that she had experienced the exact same special exam.

“One thing is for sure. One thing’s for sure: you have to give it your all without regrets. To be in favor, to be in opposition, or to run out of time. Whichever choice you end up making…… find a way to do it without regretting the outcome. There is still time. ”

For the first time, everyone listens to Chabashira as she speaks to her students with real emotion.

It does not guide them to choose any option, nor does it offer any

solution.

It was a solid piece of advice, just on the edge of what a teacher can do.

The teacher who was listening in the background didn’t tell her that she was breaking the rules, and she listened until the end.

I don’t know if this will make any difference in the outcome.

But it certainly gave the students the words they needed to face this special exam once again.

Even with the support from Chabashira, it is not advisable to waste the remaining time in the interval.

“The time when you will have to make up your mind is approaching…… But before you do, let me tell you one more time. I’m not your enemy…… I’m your ally.”

The name of the person in favor must have crossed her mind many times.

His face, his voice, his eyes, his breathing.

Horikita continues to try her best to persuade them without letting them know who the specific person is.

She must be asking herself the same question repeatedly.

I thought I should just tell her the name.

The reason she still doesn’t say anything is because Horikita sincerely wants her be on her side.

An appeal that resembles a heartbreaking cry.

In response to this, the ninth vote was cast.

The result───

9th vote results 1 in agreement 38 in opposition.

After all, the vote in favor did not move.

Only one. There is a student who insists on clinging to her 100 points.

No─── there is one who is clinging to the right to force someone to leave school.

This is the real truth that only I, or perhaps only two people including Horikita, are aware of.

It’s safe to say that a certain person’s thorough vote in favor of the

motion continues to linger.

However, there is no way to objectively confirm if person is in opposition here either.

Horikita said that if she ran out of time, she would be forced to say the name.

But in reality, no matter how many times the vote was repeated, Horikita never said her name. “Are you opposing me?” Because she knows that such a question is meaningless. In fact, as soon as she says the name, she may lose everything in the future.

Even though there is still some time left, the time limit set for the next two hours is approaching.

It was the deadline for making a big decision.