Ryuuen Kakeru’s Choice

The unanimous special exam began at 1:00 p.m.

Class D, another class of 40 students, was also beginning to feel the heavy atmosphere.

This was, of course, only because of the severe content of the last assignment that they had arrived at.

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)

1st vote results 14 in Agreement 26 in Opposition

The moment of disclosing the voting result. Like Horikita’s class and Ichinose’s class, there was a large concentration of votes against expulsion. However, compared to the two classes, the number of classmates who were in favor of expelling the students was not very small.

In other words, more than a third of students felt that they should prioritize class points over one of their classmates.

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

The first person Ishizaki asked for instructions after receiving the results was the class leader, Ryuuen Kakeru.

The process to get to this motion all started with this procedure.

Since there is a low probability that a task will be unanimous the first time, the idea is to ask the leader’s policy at the first interval and aim for unanimity in the second and subsequent votes.

The class’ confrontation in motion 1, the form of the protection point relationship in motion 3, and the ordeal imposed on the class in motion  4, all of them were unanimous in the choices Ryuuen had instructed the others to choose in just one interval.

The only thing that was left up to them was to decide on the school trip for motion 2. The classmates would debate for about half an hour as they wished, and in the end, they would unanimously decide on the destination with the most votes.

It was obvious to everyone that this fifth motion was of a different nature, but the approach was essentially the same.

All assignments that seem to require instruction are decided by a single word from Ryuuen.

The only thing the students strongly focused on was which side

Ryuuen voted for.

If Ryuuen was in favor, it would mean that someone would soon be expelled from the school.

Irresistible decisions. This is one of the characteristics of a class whose students are led by dictatorship.

Looking at the result, Ryuuen stood up from his chair with a smile.

“It’s been a boring and long time, but as it turns out, the school didn’t have any intention of playing around. Otherwise it wouldn’t be interesting…”

He mumbled to himself in a way that all of his classmates would hear, and made his way to the podium. Sakagami, who was watching over the developments that was unfolding inside the class, sensed Ryuuen approaching and took his distance.

He was well aware that this was where Ryuuen’s one-man show would begin.

Ryuuen sat down on the podium as if it was his reserved seat.

After taking a stance that allowed him to look at all of his classmates, he said his first words.

“All those who voted in agreement, raise your hands!”

There was no consideration whatsoever and Ryuuen’s order was met with intense tension, whether one voted for or against. In previous assignments, he never asked who had voted for what.

After a few seconds of hesitation, the hands began to raise. Among them were Nishino and Kaneda, who raised their hands while staring out the window, looking unmotivated.

“───five people, huh. Well, I guess that’s about right. Pretty good for the first time.”

However, there were nine students who did not talk about the fact that they did not follow orders and voted in favor.

Students like Ishizaki, Komiya and others were the first to be surprised to see this.

“Hey, what the point of this miserable attempt at trying to hide? It’s not like anyone’s going to get mad at you just because you voted in favor once, you know.”

Komiya appealed to his silent classmates, hinting that now was the time to get out of trouble.

“No one was ordered to do anything, wasn’t it? You were free to vote for or against according to your personal choice, isn’t that right?”

Komiya explains that there is no reason to be blamed for, and makes sure that it suits Ryuuen just in case.

But when Ryuuen didn’t respond immediately, Komiya tensed up for a moment.

If there was a difference in interpretation, it could lead to reprimand.

“Hurry up and raise your hands before you get into trouble!”

Not wanting the atmosphere of the place to become hostile, Ishizaki started to get flustered.

Then one student raised his hand apologetically after a delay.  This brought the total to six, but the remaining eight students still did not raise their hands.

“It’s fine, Ishizaki. Those who don’t want to raise their hand, don’t have to raise their hand. For now.”

“Wha—I-it’s fine?”

“As Komiya said, it’s up to each individual to support or oppose. So first of all, each one of you should think about what you’re going to do. We have just over eight minutes left, which is plenty of time.”

After checking the time without panicking, Ryuuen kept his smile on his face and did not change his posture.

He vaguely said nothing more than to think about it, and then he didn’t do anything.

And for more than two minutes, he remained silent, doing nothing.

“Listen, don’t waste your time. You need to figure out where you’re going to vote.”

And then another bout of silence.

Ten seconds, thirty seconds, a minute passed by, but nobody even tried to take any initiative.

All the motions up to this point had been forced onto the students to make a choice within the first interval.

That’s why the students began to wonder why Ryuuen wasn’t giving them any instructions.

However, few of them were able to express their thoughts and the more time passed, the heavier their mouths seemed to be shut.

『Please give us some instructions.』

Ishizaki and the others, who were able to say so before without any trouble, also started to feel more and more disheartened.

Their upper and lower lips were stuck together, and they would not open as if they were glued together.

The more time passed, the closer they got to losing their will to even speak.

Eventually, the urge to speak up is overcome by the hope that someone else would speak in their stead. When even that passes, their thought is replaced by the urge to vote as soon as possible, even though quite a bit of time was left on the clock.

The first interval, which felt long and drawn out, came to an end with the majority of the time spent in silence. Sakagami didn’t seem to have expected this himself as he forgot to proceed even after a few seconds of the scheduled time.

“Sakagami. Isn’t it time?”

Ryuuen got off the podium and started to go back to his seat of his own volition as he gave Sakagami a reminder, startling him a little bit.

“…… That’s right. We will now have the second round of voting, and you have 60 seconds to cast your vote.”

After everyone had voted for the second time, the results were

immediately shown on the monitor.

2nd vote result 10 in Agreement 30 in Opposition

Results of the second round of voting: 10 in favor, 30 in opposition.

Of the 14 votes in favor, four went to opposition. For the majority of those who did not want to be expelled, this result was generally not a bad thing. One or two more stern words from Ryuuen and the number of votes in agreement would decrease further. The result of the second round of voting was such that a unanimous vote in opposition seemed likely in the not too-distant future.

But Ryuuen shows his displeasure with the results.

“Is this the answer you guys thought up? I don’t think so.”

“Is it because are there are fewer votes in favor?”

Kaneda asked as he repositioned his glasses. But Ryuuen immediately denied it.

“Which means…… Ryuuen-kun is voting in favor, is that right?”

He denied it again and snorted, to act as if he was dumbfounded.

“W-what’s the catch, Ryuuen-san? I don’t get it.”

“Did you really reflect your will in your vote the first time and the

second time? This last motion is clearly different and unusual. That’s why I want to know your ‘true intentions’. Don’t worry about what I voted for, just make an honest choice based on your feelings.”

With that said, Ryuuen got up from his seat and began to walk slowly around the classroom.

“For the next ten minutes, discuss thoroughly whether you want to vote in favor or in opposition.”

With this instruction, the students were forced to debate frantically.

Surrounded by the hustle and bustle, they started talking about whatever they wanted.

Ryuuen listened to them, occasionally whispering into the ears of his students.

He didn’t seem to have any particular student in mind.

And the next time he drew near Suzuki, he whispered to him in a

similar manner.

“You’re free to agree or disagree. Vote for what you think.”

Then he whispered to Tokito, who was sitting two seats behind Suzuki.

While wondered if it was even something he should have bothered to ask, he let the discussion continue as long as time allowed. Then came the third time to vote.

3rd vote results 9 in Agreement 31 in Opposition

The same situation as the second result was displayed on the monitor.

Sitting down at his desk, Ryuuen decided to use the third interval to express his thoughts.

“Raise your hand if you voted in agreement.”

After receiving the results, Ryuuen raised his hand again. Only two people, Nishino and Kaneda, raised their hands.

The remaining 7 kept their presence a secret and refused to come

forward.

Ishizaki became frustrated by the invisible yes votes, but Ryuuen paid no attention to them.

“All three times you seemed to have voted in favor. Kaneda, why?”

“To win. It’s not a good idea to have students drop out, but I think it’s important to get 100 class points.”

“Don’t you think if you raise your hand, you will become the target

candidate to leave school?”

“That’s a silly question, Ryuuen-kun. You can cut off useless and

unnecessary people, but you won’t cut off necessary people. At least in this class, 100 points is not worth my value.”

He weighed his value on a scale and decided that there was no danger of being cut off.

“Well, you certainly have a lot of uses, except for your looks.”

“Thank you very much.”

Kaneda nodded satisfactorily without paying attention to the remark about his appearance.

“Are you the same as Kaneda, Nishino?”

“What? No way. I just agreed to a quick way to increase my class points. The only reason I raised my hand is because I don’t like sneaking around. There’s nothing wrong with agreeing with them.”

The way he spoke, as if he were about to get a glare from Ryuuen, made Ishizaki more nervous than the man himself.

“I’m going to tell you what you’ve been worrying about. What I voted for.”

“Yes, please tell us!”

We can’t start until we hear what Ryuuen, the policy leader of this class, voted for.

Ishizaki wished aloud as he leaned forward.

“I’ve voted ‘yes’ on this assignment three times out of three.”

In other words, three of the nine yes votes in the current poll were cast by Ryuuen, Nishino and Kaneda.

“S-so, you’re saying that you’re going to…… expel someone from the class?”

In response to Ishizaki’s question, Ryuuen simply smiled and chuckled wryly.

“Don’t jump to conclusions. I only told you what my vote was. Because I decided that what you want to do with this task is up to you guys.”

“Oh, us……?”

“Indeed, I voted in favor three times without hesitation”

If the vote is in favor all three times, it’s safe to assume that the policy is to expel classmates from the school. However, Ishizaki didn’t acknowledge it, so he choked on his words, not understanding the meaning.

“The reason I’m in favor of this is simple: if we cut down one person, we get 100 points. In other words, this is a great option for getting rid of unwanted items and getting class points. Which means it’s the best choice. It has good points but no bad points. However, even after repeating it three times, there were more votes against than in favor. In other words, more than half of the class voted ‘oppose’ to this assignment. If that’s the case, I’ll respect their wishes and consolidate my vote in opposition.”

Give up on class points and set a policy of keeping classmates.

“I-it’s settled! Vote in opposition instead of in favor! Ryuusen-san’s

orders!”

Ishizaki looked relieved at the easy to understand policy, and appealed to his classmates.

“Wait a minute. That’s not like you.”

Ibuki, who had been bored throughout the special exam so far, raised her voice in dissatisfaction.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re in favor, right? If so, why don’t you just push through with your choice like you always do? Are you going to act like a good guy and say you’re protecting your friends now?”

She implied that Ryuuen who would pick up the class points in front of him.

“What, you were in favor of it too?”

“I voted in opposition, but my intentions are none of your business, are they?”

“If it hadn’t been for the anonymous name, I might have let the vote be unanimous in favor. It would’ve been quicker to just expel anyone who disagreed with my opinion. But unfortunately, the exam this time requires unanimity. Since we can’t be sure who voted which way, it’s quicker to unify a majority in opposition.”

“So you’re saying you’re not confident you can get the in favor vote to be unanimous?”

“Kuku, you’re free to think what you want.”

“Hey, don’t be silly, Ibuki. Ryuuen-san said to vote in opposition. Isn’t that good enough? Sure the class points may be reduced, but at least we’ll be able to clear it.”

“It’s nothing. It just felt a little out of character and it bothered me. Do whatever you want.”

Now that the policy is set, there will be more silence in this interval.

And then the fourth round of voting.

The result───

4th vote results 7 in Agreement 33 in Opposition

Even if the vote was not unanimous, it was expected to be almost

unanimous in opposition, but surprisingly, quite a few votes still

remained in favor. Only two votes were lost.

“Kaneda, Nishino. What did you guys put in?”

“Of course in opposition, as Ryuuen-kun instructed.”

“I wanted to be in favor, but I put it in opposition because I don’t want to disturb the harmony.”

The two who had raised their hands as supporters were turned in the opposite direction.

And considering the fact that Ryuen had voted in opposition in the

current vote, the votes in agreement should have decreased by at least three to reach this result. And this time, instead of voting freely, they were coerced to vote in opposition because they had received Ryuuen’s instructions. Nevertheless, seven votes remained in favor. The possibility that the number of supporters has increased or that Kaneda and Nishino are lying could not be ruled out. Ryuuen himself voted in opposition 100%, but there was no way for people around him to even know that for certain. A new anxiety started to spread little by little. Ryuuen calmly considered this result. Instead of just looking at the number of votes, he tried to see through the anonymity and the flow of votes.

“Who is still voting in favor!?”

Ryuuen’s order was to cast a vote “in opposition”.

Despite the clear instructions, Ishizaki could not calm down as there were seven students who did not follow them. If Ryuuen changed his mind in favor of the motion, there would be expulsions.

“Kuku, don’t yell so much, Ishizaki. It’s about to get a lot more interesting. This is a completely anonymous vote, and no one can know  who you voted for. In other words, there are more than a few people who sincerely voted ‘in favor.’”

“B-but not following Ryuusen-san’s orders is a problem!”

“Not really. It’s not a bad thing to try to get class points by cutting

classmates. It’s just that there are seven students who are greedy enough to try to get to Class A, right?”

As if welcoming the situation, Ryuuen clapped his hands in delight.

“But when you allow people to be expelled, there is always the question of ‘who’ to expel. The seven people who voted in favor of this have a clear idea of who they should cut.”

“…N-no way, like me!?”

Ishizaki panics that he might be the target to be cut out.

“Well, I can’t rule out the possibility that there are people who think you’re unnecessary, but isn’t there anyone who has the courage to come forward? Someone who wants 『me』out of school, not just anyone else.”

Ryuuen issued a challenge to come forward.

However, the air was once again filled with silence, and of course, there were no students who would speak up.

“Hmph, not like any of you will just vomit it out either. Kuku, I’ll stay with you for as long as you need.”

Just like this, the fifth voting period comes.

In other words, four intervals have been completed.

That means they have already spent about 40 minutes on this task since it started.

And the results are…….

5th vote results 8 in Agreement 32 in Opposition

Contrary to Ryuuen’s aim to reduce the number of votes in favor, it increased by one.

“What are you going to do, Ryuuen? It’s been almost an hour.”

At this point, Nishino sounded irritated.

“Don’t be so hasty. There’s still plenty of time, right?”

“I know, but there are a lot of people who are voting against your order. Isn’t this a bad thing?”

The number of affirmative votes clearly symbolized that Ryuuen was not in control over the situation.

“Yes, it is. It’s also possible that you’re the one who’s voting yes.”

“…..Maybe.”

Nishino looked a little surprised but looked back and said bullishly to throw a counter.

“Well, there is no evidence unless you confess when you’re asked.”

An in dubio pro reo test.

(TN: Innocent until proven guilty)

“I have a little suggestion, is that okay?”

Yabu Nanami, who had been watching the situation up to this point, creates a stir.

“Go ahead.”

“Why don’t we just vote unanimously in favor of it and let a kid who doesn’t mind getting expelled get expelled?”

“So am I correct in thinking that you put your vote in favor?”

“No. I have put everything in the opposite way until now. But if the

votes in favor don’t move, I thought it’d be a good plan to focus on that. For example…… how about expelling Ibuki-san?”

Saying that, Yabu turned cold eyes towards Ibuki.

“If it’s Ibuki-san, then I support it…… Oh, of course, I’ve always voted against it up to now though.”

Following Yabu’s lead, Morofuji Rika also raises her hand in agreement.

“You guys— Since Ryuuen-san said to stick to the opposition, you must go with the opposition.”

“Wait a minute. I welcome the input of these two.”

“Wha-, Oh, for real?”

“The fact that you’re so far against it is probably true from the looks of it. If we don’t get at least two more votes in agreement on the next ballot, there will be a contradiction. You wouldn’t make such a blunder, would you?”

Both Yabu and Morofuji answered the question with a strong nod of the head.

Of course, there is no denying the possibility that the eight anonymous voters who voted in favor of the proposal will vote against it in the next round of voting, but Ryuuen understands that this is a different matter.

“I even went so far as to point out that I was ready to go along with it, unlike the eight anonymous people. It seems like some people other than Yabu and Morofuji seem to have taken the idea as well.”

The group of girls who are close to Yabu and the others are at the top of the caste in this class.

Ostensibly, it is the opinion of the two of them, but in reality, it could be taken as the opinion of the entire group.

“Can you tell us what you think of what we said, Ryuuen-kun?”

“In order to expel someone, it is a prerequisite that there are no votes to support them. Is there anyone in this class who wants to protect Ibuki even if it means risking their own expulsion?”

He asks the class that question. But no one immediately raises their hand.

“There you have it, Ibuki. Would you honestly accept to be expelled?”

If she accepts or says that he can do as he pleases, Ryuuen will move to expel Ibuki without hesitation. That kind of atmosphere prevailed in the classroom.

“I’m sorry, but I’m not going to drop out.”

Ibuki replied without looking at Yabu or Morofuji, who had called her by name.

“Huh? I thought Ibuki-san’s stance was that she didn’t mind dropping out of school.”

“I don’t care about school, but there are people I want to get revenge on in my own way. And do you really think I’m going to accept this form of expulsion? I’m not going to be conveniently used to line the pockets of people I don’t like.”

“You just don’t want to drop out for a reason. It’s obvious, but as I thought, you’re scared, right?”

Yabu laughs in order to provoke her.

“Haa. You’ve become arrogant, haven’t you? You used to be stuck to Manabe’s waist all the time. Did it make you that happy to be the leader of the girls as soon as she was gone?”

When Ibuki replied, Ryuuen’s smile faded and he intimidated her with his eyes.

“Oi Ibuki, you should be aware of your current position. Yabu has a few friends who oppose her expulsion. But you don’t have any. And you didn’t have any kind of redeeming quality for the school either, did you?”

“……So what?”

“I don’t hate you, but if you want to quit gracefully and contribute to the class, that’s a different story. Regardless of your intentions, we’ll eat your blood and flesh.”

“That’s not a bad thing, Ibuki-san. You’re the only one who thought Ryuuen-kun was taking good care of you.”

“Do you have a grudge against me, Ibuki?”

“Not really. I never intended to be friends with you in the first place. You’d do anything to win. So it’s not surprising. But I’m not going to drop out.”

She repeated his refusal, but then Ryuuen’s tone became a little harsher.

“It doesn’t matter if you intend to or not. I’ll ask you again. I’m going to make a bet and ask you if you want to vote unanimously in agreement. Raise your hand if you are willing to put your body on the line for Ibuki. You have one minute to decide.”

In the chilly air, Ishizaki’s body trembles faintly.

It was not for the fear of Ryuuen, but for the time to make up his mind.

“Stop it, Ishizaki.”

It was Nishino, who had been standing next to Ishizaki for some time, who stopped him.

“H-hey, Nishino!”

“We’re fighting to win. Your half-hearted camaraderie will only create confusion.”

“But, but. Ibuki is our…”

“Time’s up.”

A minute passed, and in the end, not a single student showed up to protect Ibuki.

There were cynical glances from Yabu’s group, pitying glances, and students who were relieved that they were not the target. All sorts of thoughts intersected in the silence.

“Oh, I see. If that’s the case───”

Ibuki was about to answer out of desperation, but she broke off for once.

She knew that she would be at a disadvantage in this motion because she did not have any decent friends in her life.

That’s why she told people early on that she was voting in opposition.

But now that it had come to this, she had no choice but to protect her life on her own.

“If that’s the case, what?”

As if waiting for the words to come, Ryuuen maintains silence.

“……I still have something left to do in this school.”

“Huh?”

“I’m sorry, but I’m not going to answer your expectations. Even if

everyone in the class votes in favor, I’ll continue to vote against it.

Unless it’s unanimous forever, this special exam will fail.”

“Huh, huh? Are you going to take the class down with you?”

“That’s right.”

Determined, Ibuki declares herself against it and stays.

“Well, that’s to be expected. It’s not a bad idea to change your mind, Yabu, but it’s too early to name names. If you really wanted to get rid of Ibuki, you should have have first gotten a unanimous vote in favor before you mentioned her name.”

“Kuu……!”

If someone knows that they are going to get expelled, there’s no way they would vote in favor of expulsion.

“You guys should just vote in opposition without any complain.”

Nishino felt a strange sense of discomfort as Ryuuen gave him these instructions.

“Why did you have to go through with this farce? Wasn’t it a complete waste of time?”

Nishino pointed out that Yabu and Ibuki could have stopped arguing earlier, and that there was no need for a meaningless show of hands, because it was obvious that unanimity in favor of the proposal would become difficult once the names of individuals were mentioned.

“It’s just a way to pass the time. We have useless time anyway.”

Although Ryuuen said that there was no deeper meaning behind his actions, a part of the class definitely realized that there was something to it. They understood that the reason why he went along with Yabu’s proposal, which was never going to pass, was to get Ibuki to say that she would never agree to it.

This is to indirectly imprint the fact that unanimous approval is difficult to achieve.

It seemed to be a clever move on Ryuuen’s part, but it also seemed to be a desperate measure born of his impatience to get out of this situation.

The next vote was seven in favor and 33 against, and the seventh vote was six in favor and 34 against. It seemed that the number of votes in agreement would decrease little by little, but the eighth vote was again seven in favor and 33 against. It was time for the ninth round of voting.

9th vote results 7 in Agreement 33 in Opposition

The votes in favor still remained.

This was a figure that seemed to represent the leadership of Ryuen at the moment.

For the sixth through ninth rounds of voting, Ryuen simply sat on the podium for ten minutes and never said a word. He just continued to observe with a creepy smile on his face.

However, that situation changed in the interval before the tenth vote began.

“Oi.”

Ryuuen, who had been laughing until now, suddenly turned to the

class and called out briefly.

The students, who had been chatting rather than discussing, hurriedly straightened their postures.

“You guys can’t even vote in opposition without me telling you what to do?”

The students all clammed up at the apparent change.

“You’re probably thinking that if the votes in agreement are somewhat fixed then they’re nothing to be afraid of. But if you think that I’ve just been staring at the votes meaninglessly then you’re making a big mistake.”

‘BAM!’ He kicked the back of the podium hard with his heel.

“You seem to be resting on your laurels under the guise of anonymity, but the truth is written all over your face. I’ve already gotten a pretty good idea of what you’re up to. If you do anything more foolish going further… you know what’s going to happen right?”

10th vote results 6 in Agreement 34 in Opposition

With a stern word from Ryuuen, one vote moved to the opposition.

However, since only six votes were in favor of the bill in the seventh round of voting, it was virtually ineffective.

The time that seemed to be so plentiful was being used like hot water.

“………..”

Before long, the smile had long since disappeared from Ryuuen’s face and was replaced by a grim expression.

“You are some tenacious people. Even I’m getting tired of dealing with you guys.”

There was about four hours left in the time limit, but more than an hour and a half had already passed by the last assignment.

11th vote results 7 in Agreement 33 in Opposition

The number of votes in favor of the motion, which had reduced by a trickle, came back to seven again.

“At this rate, how are you going to get them to vote against it?”

Nishino, no longer trying to hide her frustration, asks Ryuuen about his policy.

“Right. I’d better get this over with.”

“……You can do that?”

“You think I’ve been sitting here staring at you for nothing? You do

realize that for the sixth through the tenth time, there is one odd vote, right? I’m talking about the big asshole who wanders in and out of the vote for and against. Now I’m going to tell you who it is.”

There was tension in the classroom.

Normally, it is impossible to detect complete anonymity.

But───

“It’s you, isn’t it? Yajima.”

“Eh……!? I, I’m no-!”

The one who was named was Mariko Yajima.

She stood up hurriedly to deny it, but she was clearly upset and her attitude was restless.

“Don’t think I’m going to believe your denial just because you’re anonymous, okay? From what I think, you’re definitely in the black. Do you understand what I mean?”

“No, no, no… I’m…!”

“If I say it’s black, it’s black. If I say it’s white, it’s white. I’ll give you

one chance to be the first one. From now on, you have no right to vote in favor without my permission. Do you understand? If 『I』 judge that you are not doing so, I’ll reward you with an expulsion.”

This is a threat that cannot be ignored. Even if she continued to vote against this assignment and failed the special exam, she would be expelled by some heinous means in the not too distant future. It didn’t take long to imagine that.

“I’m not saying I know all of them, but I’ve got an idea of who’s voting in favor, and whether they’re idiots like Yajima who need to be told directly or not…… I’ll let you decide in the next vote.”

And so the 12th vote came.

12th vote results 5 in Agreement 35 in Opposition

Since Yajima had completely decided against it, there was no increase in the number of affirmative votes.

However, even after the final warning, only two people stopped agreeing with the motion, leaving five votes.

It became clear to everyone that threats would no longer work with five votes.

“Five votes, huh……”

After muttering this, Ryuuen checked the remaining time and left his seat again.

“I’ve got to admit, he’s a bonehead. But I’m still not satisfied. If you’re not going to give up, then come forward. The five anonymous people here want me to drop out of school. If that’s the case, we’ll have to make it a unanimous vote in favor. It would be boring to end this with time running out, right? Then move. That’s how we can fight on equal footing.”

Without achieving unanimity by either side, there is no clearing this special exam.

Unless the students who want to vote in favor can be identified, it’ll just be a waste of time.

It was thought that no one would show up to vote in this situation, but───

“Oh good, Ryuuen. Then I’ll come forward……. I’m the one who’s

putting it in favor.”

At this point, one of the anonymous people who had been voting in favor of the proposal finally stood up.

“Tokitou, you bastard! Do you even know what you’re saying?”

Katsuragi grabbed Ishizaki’s arm and held him back as he tried to jump on him.

“Stop it, Ishizaki. We’re in the middle of a special exam. Are you trying to cause violence here? If you make a bad move, Sakagami-sensei will cancel the exam without mercy, isn’t that right?”

“Of course. If that happens, then naturally, this special exam will end with your disqualification.”

“Damn it…!”

“And even though Tokitou self-reported, there’s still no guarantee that that’s the case.”

Even if you’re 99% sure, Katsuragi said, there’s no way to be 100% sure as long as you’re anonymous. There is no way to see if he is pretending to be in agreement while casting his vote in opposition.

“It’s true, though. I’ve been hoping for a special exam like this to come. A normal special exam wouldn’t help, but the moment this assignment came up, I was freaked out……. I knew this was the only time I could get rid of Ryuuen.”

“Why did you come forward now, Tokitou……?”

“I’ve had my eye on Ryuuen a few times. I could have come forward sooner, but it was thrilling to see that the number of those in agreement wasn’t decreasing.”

“Fine, Tokitou. It’s not the first time you’ve been rebellious. In fact, I’m honestly happy that you were in favor of it.”

“How long can you keep this up? You can’t afford it.”

“Yes. No matter how many times the vote is repeated, the votes in favor will never be lost. That means if time runs out, our class will lose 300 points, and we’ll be out of the race for Class A.”

“That’s right. You’re the leader of this class, after all. If you fail the

special exam, it’s not my fault. It’s on you. You’ve been able to control the choices in this special exam, too. You didn’t even listen to the people who said we should fight Ichinose’s class, and you forced us to pick Sakayanagi’s class as our opponents. Of course, you can take responsibility when you lose, right?”

“I see. So that’s why you rebelled here despite having obediently followed on the motions until now.”

“I’m just trying to show the class that they’re wrong. I’m not trying to trouble the class, I’m just dissatisfied that you’re in charge.”

“But here comes a chance to expel someone in particular. You’ve

decided to take a chance on it. So? So what’s your best hope for a good show of defiance?”

“If you want me, or any of us, to vote in opposition, you’ll have to step down as class leader here. If you swear to it in front of everyone, you’ll probably get more votes.”

Even though he dislikes Ryuuen, Tokitou knows how difficult it is to get a unanimous vote in favor. That’s why he proposes a compromise.

“Don’t be naive, Tokito. Don’t you have the confidence to expel me?”

“Don’t make me laugh. If the vote is unanimous in agreement, you’re the one who will be expelled, Ryuuen.”

00014.jpeg

“May I ask you a question, Tokitou-kun?”

Kaneda raises his hand as he adjusts the position of his glasses.

“It is true that if we fail the special examinations, part of the blame will fall on the leader, which is a logical notion. However, if the vote to expel the student by unanimous consent begins, it will be you who will be expelled. In fact, many students continue to vote against it as instructed.”

Despite Kaneda’s calm and composed explanation of what might lie ahead, Tokitou was unfazed.

“The “opposition” vote doesn’t mean anything now. You don’t think that all the people who voted against us are giving in to you, Ryuuen? It’s true that there aren’t many people who can protest openly. But right now, besides mine, there are four votes in agreement. Even though you repeatedly told us to vote against it, there are still four votes left. That’s the number of people with a strong resolve to have you drop out of school!”

“Compared to Yabu and Morofuji, you seem to have a lot more sense, Tokitou.”

After admiring and applauding him, Ryuuen continued.

“Then don’t be shy. Why don’t you and I have a go at it, Tokitou?”

“What?”

“I’ll have all 35 votes, including mine, which are still against, cast in favor of the motion. Then, like Kaneda said, they’ll start voting on who to expel. Then the rest is easy, you and I will beat each other with our votes.”

If the other students will not vote for you, then there is no need to fear a unanimous agreement.

“Are you sure? If we eliminate the option to oppose it here, it’s inevitable that there will be dropouts. There’d be no way for you to survive, Ryuuen.”

It was Tokitou’s own mercy that he left open the possibility of unanimity by opposition.

“We all want to avoid running out of time. If that happens, I’ll make it a unanimous decision between you and me. It would be more interesting for the class, right?”

There was no way he was going to accept Tokito’s proposal, so Ryuen urged a unanimous vote in agreement.

“Humans are selfish. If there was a risk of being expelled, I would not have been happy to come forward, but if either you or I were to be expelled, I’d have a different look in my eyes. I’m sure they’ll be happy to vote for you if you promise to reward them with an extra 100 points.”

“You think the people voting in favor now will agree to expel me?”

“Well, who knows? If it seems bad, you can just vote in opposition.”

“Go fuck yourself! It’s not me who’s getting expelled, it’s you, Ryuuen!”

“I see. If so, then let’s have a one-on-one fight.”

With four remaining anonymous votes and the students who disliked Ryuuen having no choice but to vote against him, Tokitou was confident that if he repeated the vote to expel Ryuuen Kakeru several times, the number of votes in favor of him would increase as the time remaining decreased.

“All right, if you insist───”

Just as Tokitou was about to accept the offer, the sound of tapping on the desk echoed through the room.

“Wait, Ryuuen. Can you give Tokitou a little time?”

The one making the sound was Katsuragi. He hurriedly stood up and called out to Ryuuen.

“Huh? What do you think you’re doing, Katsuragi? I didn’t give you any say in the matter, did I?”

“I’m not going to be deprived of my right to speak.”

When instructed to shut up, Katsuragi replied without hesitation and turned to Tokitou.

“As you say, it is not wrong to think that as long as the number of those who do not follow Ryuuen does not reach zero, we are safe. However, what Ryuuen says is also true. If a decisive vote is held with the restriction that it must be held until either Ryuuen or Tokitou leaves the school, the emotions of the students will fluctuate greatly with the time remaining. If this happens, the one who can control the majority of votes, that is, Ryuuen, will have the overwhelming advantage.”

“I told you. Don’t assume you’re superior just because of that, Katsuragi. The truth is that many in the class don’t welcome Ryuuen. They’re just frustrated because they’re being held back by force. You can find a lot of people who will stop defending and protecting him as time runs out. Even if it’s Ishizaki the dog.”

“The hell did you say?!”

“You once turned against Ryuen, didn’t you? Remember that rebellious spirit.”

“Tha-that was…”

Last year, during the rooftop incident, Ishizaki defeated Ryuuen and temporarily took control of the class when he tried to end the dispute with Ayanokoji. Tokitou was referring to that incident.

“I don’t know what was going on back then, but do you think you’re gonna win in the end?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then let me ask you a question. If Ryuuen drops out, who will be in charge of this class after that?”

“You can discuss it or whatever you want. But there’s no place for a stranger like you, Katsuragi.”

“It’s true that as an outsider, I may not be an option. But it’s also true that if you can’t clearly show who will be our next leader, you won’t be able to make a decisive move. You won’t be able to catch up with Sakayanagi and overtake her.”

Katsuragi looked at the big picture of the situation and continued to try to persuade him, but Tokitou would not stop.

“Oh please…… so what? If I wasn’t prepared to stab this guy in the back, I wouldn’t have come forward in the first place.”

“Kukuku, from the beginning? It seems like you waited a pretty long time for that.”

“……Shut the fuck up!”

“Well, you couldn’t help it if there weren’t at least some people like you.”

It was only when he was able to confirm that there were several votes that did not follow Ryuuen’s lead that Tokitou made his move.

“Please, Ryuuen. Give Tokitou a chance.”

In response to Katsuragi’s words that Ryuuen was definitely in an

advantageous position, Ryuuen snapped his finger.

“All right. Tokitou, I’m giving you a chance. The next vote depends

entirely on your vote. If you vote in favor, then you will be expelled.”

“You’ve got…… a lot of nerve. Do you think you can expel me?”

“Yeah. In the next round of voting, all votes except yours will be

negative. So it will be 1 in agreement and 39 in opposition. So if you vote no, the issue is unanimously resolved.”

“Hey, when did the four votes in favor disappear except for me?”

“Kuku…… I turned those four votes around during this interval.”

“Fuck yourself. No way you could’ve done that.”

In addition to remaining stubbornly in favor of the idea so far, Ryuuen spent most of this interval talking with Tokitou. There was no pretense of turning anything over.

“Then try it. Put it in favor, just like before, and you’ll get your answer.”

There was less than a minute left in the interval that was ticking by.

The air-conditioned room was kept at a comfortable temperature, but Tokitou’s back was starting to sweat. A mere threat, a bluff. It was hard to believe that anything had changed in this interval. But what if the votes in favor of the proposal were really changed into votes against it?

That would indicate that students other than Tokitou were in favor of Ryuuen. He could take the same defensive measure as Ibuki by running away to vote against before the vote was unanimous in favor, but he could not choose that option because it would expose his disgrace. In any case, a run-off vote with Ryuuen would be inevitable. If that happened, Tokitou himself will be decisively defeated.

“You’re ready to drop out, aren’t you? Don’t hesitate to vote in favor.”

“I don’t need you… to tell me what to do.”

Eventually, it was time to vote. Tokitou boldly casts his vote in favor.

“Then we will display the results of the vote.”

It was shown on the monitor at the same time as Sakagami’s

announcement.

13th vote results 2 in Agreement 38 in Opposition

“!!”

When he saw the result, Tokitou’s heart must have been racing more than anyone else.

That was because, as Ryuuen had said, all but one of the four remaining votes had gone against him.

“Well, I was really scared for sure……. But you see, there is another student who is just as strong-willed as I am! The one who didn’t give in even after being threatened to this extent!”

He shouted and let out a roar that was tantamount to declaring himself the winner.

However, he didn’t even look at Tokitou, he was looking at a completely different student.

“What the hell are you doing? You voted for it, didn’t you? Katsuragi.”

“What……?”

Tokitou was surprised to hear the name of someone he hadn’t expected.

“Yes. If I had voted against it, it would have gone to a decisive vote, with one vote in favor and 39 votes against, as you declared. If that had

happened, it would have been impossible to pass this test except by expelling one of us.”

“That’s how it was supposed to go. Depending on your answer, you’re going to be in for a world of hurt.”

“There is one reason. That is: I believe that Tokitou is a necessary

student for the class. No, it’s not just Tokitou. I’m an outsider who came here from class A. That’s why I’ve been looking at this class with an objective eye. As a result, I’ve come to understand that there is no such thing as an unnecessary student.”

“Someone like Tokitou, who doesn’t even follow orders, is a necessary student, you say?”

“Yes, I do. In fact, I consider him a valuable asset. He is someone who can disagree with you without hesitation, just like me, or even more than me. Though of course, the way he did it in this special exam is wrong. I can’t acknowledge the way he put the class in jeopardy just to drag you down.”

Katsuragi threw a look and a word at Tokitou as well as at Ryuuen.

“If you don’t like the fact that Ryuuen is the leader, then make a fair appeal to him in a way that doesn’t involve anyone else. If your claim is correct, I will stand by you without hesitation.”

“Katsuragi… You son of a…”

“If you get caught in Ryuuen’s strategy and leave school, you’ll end up doing nothing. It will all end with Ryuuen never even remembering the existence of a student named Tokitou Hiroya.”

“B-but right up until the last minute, we had four votes in favor…”

The unseen reinforcements that had pushed Tokito to this point.

This was also a source of comfort for him.

“There is no such thing from the beginning. It’s just an illusion.”

“An Illusion, you say…?”

“Or, more accurately, it was eliminated in the repeated voting. There were five votes in favor that remained after Yajima was named. It was you, Tokitou, and……”

Katsuragi circles around, slowly moving his gaze and pointing.

“It’s Shiina, Yamada, me and…… Ryuuen.”

In response to that, neither Tokitou nor any his classmates understood anything.

“What the hell are you talking about…… even Ryuuen voted in favor, you say……?”

“When the vote was still five in favor, there was one person left who was still anonymous. However, that also was revealed when you came forward.”

“So during this interval, Ryuuen was mocking me in his mind…… what a mess.”

“Not really. It is true that the purpose was to flush out those in favor, but that was already done when you came forward. You could have just voted for it without bothering to make a challenge. It would have been a unanimous vote in agreement, and the next vote would have been to expel you.”

“So you were just playing around to insult and humiliate me!”

“No, I wasn’t. I was giving you the chance to keep you from being

expelled.”

“Wha───……!?”

“But you didn’t see the potential and tried to push forward. In a

roundabout way, you probably didn’t even think that Ryuuen was giving you a chance.”

“I- I was……!”

“But no matter how much I tell you, if you don’t have the ears to listen, that’s it. I’m sorry to take up so much time, but can you please give Tokitou one last chance? I’d like you to give him one more chance so we could settle this in a vote in opposition.”

“You want me to give him another chance? I’m not that naive.”

“You are at fault, too. You were too provocative and overlooked the thread of salvation. Now that everything has come to light, we can finally give Tokitou a choice.”

“And if he doesn’t listen to you, you won’t object to his expulsion, will you?”

“Oh, I have no objection. You can do whatever you want.”

Katsuragi closed his eyes and crossed his arms. He wanted to leave it to Tokitou to decide what to do with himself.

If he voted in favor, he would be expelled 100%.

On the other hand, if he voted against, the vote would be unanimous and he could avoid expulsion.

But to vote in opposition meant to give in to Ryuuen’s demands.

This would seriously damage Tokitou’s pride.

“Then, we’ll start the 60-second voting period.”

With Sakagami’s words, the countdown begins.

Thirty-nine people, excluding Tokitou, finished voting within the time limit, but the count did not stop yet.

Sakagami looked up once and glanced at Tokitou.

“As I explained to you beforehand, after 60 seconds, the penalty time starts accumulating.”

Tokitou looks down and stares at the words ‘favor’ and ‘opposition’ on his tablet.

“Damn… damn it!”

It was supposed to be a full-blown counterattack. But halfway through, he found himself alone.

Everything was just a dance in the palm of Ryuuen’s hand.

Frustration, embarrassment and shame.

All sorts of negative emotions entangled Tokitou’s mind without letting go.

Pride peeked out of his face, saying, “I’m not going to give in to Ryuuen at this point.”

At his wit’s end. Or maybe, he could intentionally throw in a vote in agreement to buy some time, and if he kept putting it in along with 39 people in opposition, he might just make this challenge fail.

Without dropping out of school himself, ending the special exam in failure───

The thought crossed his mind, and Tokitou shook his head from side to side.

There was nothing to be gained by doing such a thing just to compete with Ryuuen.

It would cause a lot of trouble to his classmates, and he’ll only get shunned more than Ryuuen.

It was not something that Tokitou wished for.

“DAAA────────MN IT!”

With an exaggerated wave of his arm, Tokitou touched the voting

button.

“All voting has been completed. Now we will announce the results.”

Sakagami took a breath and operated the tablet to show the results on the monitor.

14th vote results 0 in Agreement 40 in Opposition

“Since the vote is unanimous, the motion is abolished. This concludes the special exam.”

It seemed like there was a strong possibility that some students would be expelled from Ryuuen’s class, but in the end it was confirmed that all students would remain.

“Tokitou, you…”

Ishizaki turned around and spoke to Tokito, who had his eyes downcast.

“……Don’t get me wrong, Ryuuen, I don’t approve of your methods. If I ever find that you have done something to prevent our class from moving up to Class A, I will eliminate you as soon as I can.”

“Come at me any time. Whenever you’re ready, I’ll take you on without mercy.”

“Hmph…”

It was complicated for Tokito to remain here, so he left the classroom quickly.

After watching him leave, Katsuragi walked to the side of Ryuuen.

“That was unnecessary, Katsuragi. I was welcoming any dropouts, remember?”

“Half of you was, I suppose. But the other half of you was looking for other possibilities, wasn’t it?”

“Fuck off, do I look that naive to you?”

“I don’t know if I’m being naive or not, but if the goal was to control the vote completely, it’s important to have students in your group who are loyal to you without doing anything unnecessary. However, after the second vote, you gave instructions to Shiina, your favourite, while giving an earful to the appropriate students. If you only give an earful to certain students, they’ll think you’re planning some kind of strategy. Then, through Shiina, you gathered friends who would vote falsely in favor of the motion through repeated discussions. And I was one of those people. That was because you foresaw that I would protect Tokitou, isn’t that right?”

“You protecting Tokitou? How would I have known that?”

“Shiina overheard me and Tokitou having a discussion about you. It wouldn’t be strange if you knew about it from her report.”

“I was just trying to find and select the guy who would be fooled by the false positive votes. Of course, to get him out of school and get class points. What a pity.”

After Ryuuen belatedly left the classroom, Katsuragi turned to the gaze that had been looking at them.

He was honestly impressed to see Shiina smiling so gently.

“So it’s possible that Shiina’s own decision might have drawn me

in……”

But either way, it doesn’t change the fact that Ryuuen prepared the strings to help Tokitou and give him a chance. Katsuragi was convinced seeing the students relieved that no one had been expelled.

This is the class that has the potential to beat Sakayanagi and become Class A.

And he realized his desire to pursue that path with this class.