Horikita Suzune’s Choice

“Then, I will now announce the results of the vote.”

10th vote results 1 in Agreement 38 in Opposition

The scene that I had grown tired of seeing was simply repeated.

Appealing to them to come forward will not change that. Neither will any amount of discussion.

The number of support votes will neither increase nor decrease.

The results would make one wonder if a fair vote was actually happening and not just repeated displays of the same screen.

“Since unanimity was not achieved, the interval will now begin.”

Even Chabashira, who announced with the standard phrases, showed signs of fatigue.

Now that she had told us of her past, all she could really do was to watch this motion go by as a teacher.

“Why…..? Is there really someone who’s intentionally voting in agreement?”

It was understandable why Keisei would raise a question like that.

At this point, even if we wanted to continue the discussion, there was already nothing left to discuss whatsoever.

I wonder how many times Horikita and Yousuke have tried to persuade the perpetrator.

“Everyone voting in opposition……..would it be possible for you to raise your hand?”

Since calling out to the one in support of the motion was futile, Yosuke requested for us to raise our hands if we were opposed to it.

Even as he proposed a meaningless reversal of the pattern, his diligent figure looking for a breakthrough did not falter.

Hands on both of my sides extended upwards. Of course, I too, raised my hand.

In this way, it could be seen that 38 people, including Yousuke, were in sure opposition.

The only one who didn’t raise his hand was Kouenji……

“I didn’t raise my hand, but I’ve been voting in opposition, so worrying is useless.”

Kouenji replied to Yousuke, who looked at him anxiously.

“Can we really trust you, Kouenji? In fact, I think you were the one who voted in support of it……”

“How many times has it been? This discussion. You really never get tired of it.”

Having no other way around this situation, Sudou poked at Kouenji. It wasn’t all that hard to believe that someone in this class would continue to lie.

After all, there could be someone who proudly raised their hands to say they were voting in opposition, and yet, in actuality they could be voting in support of it.

“I don’t want to think that some of the people who raised their hands now are lying, but from now on I’ll look at each and every one of them and ask them directly. If anyone is, tell me honestly … No, I want you to vote in opposition next time. “

Ten minutes of struggling. Horikita spared no time or effort to face each person individually.

My other classmates were probably worn out by this, but of course it’s not as if they could say that out loud in such a situation.

Haruka, Airi, Keisei, Akito.

Ike, Sudou, Mii-chan, Matsushita, Kushida, Onodera, Okitani, Mori. All of them looked straight into Horikita’s eyes and answered.

That I (I) had been voting in opposition.

(TN: ore(boku), masculine I(feminine I))

Eventually, Horikita reached the tail end of the classroom entrance, the last person.

Her eyes were a mixture of impatience and anxiety, but still burning with passion.

“How about you, Ayanokouji-kun?”

“Of course, I’ve been voting in opposition.”

“……That so.”

With this, it meant that once again, a pseudo-interrogation had been done on everyone.

There was no change in the declaration that all of my classmates were indeed voting against it. The only thing left to do, really, was to appeal to the remaining pangs of conscience in their heart and pray for them to vote in opposition to it………

“It’s almost at the ten minute mark. Return to your seat, Horikita, and we will begin voting.”

The time for voting came again. The answer was:

11th vote results 1 in Agreement 38 in Opposition

The result was no different. There were no more words to add.

The same, same, same and same results were displayed.

“Ahh jeez! I’m going to go insane! What’s going on–!”

Scratching his head messily, Sudou slammed his elbow down hard on the desk.

“H-hey, but seriously, what are we going to do? We’re running out of time, aren’t we?”

Until now, everyone had the assumption that even the one in support of the motion who persisted would eventually break.

I’m sure that Horikita and my other classmates knew that there shouldn’t have been anyone who would could choose to run out of time.

Absolutely, pretty sure, surely, probably, the person voting in agreement will vote in opposition due to fear of running out of time.

And just in time, but unanimous in opposition, they would pass the special examination.

After which they would work on the next sports and cultural festivals. They must’ve already painted such a picture.

However——–

The vote in support did not move.

Waiting another 10 minutes, 30 minutes, or even an hour would not change that answer.

The only thing that awaited us was the worst possible route: 『running out of time.』

Nine minutes to go until the next vote. These nine minutes were no longer just nine minutes.

After this point, we would be under a two-hour deadline.

For the past three hours, Horikita had fought hard against this final challenge.

It’s not as if Horikita’s strategy was naive. Even if she had done everything in her power to get a unanimous vote against it, it would have been simply “impossible.”

What was the reason for it? What was the underlying reason?

It was because all forms of persuasion, negotiation, and all other actions of the sort were meaningless.

The one in agreement was fighting just to prevent a unanimous opposition.

Most frightening of all, the person who voted in support did not see running out of time as the biggest negative.

Normally, that would not be possible in this particular test.

If we look at this issue objectively, the priorities of the three choices are in fact fixed and determined.

Oppose≧Support＞Time is up

This is an absolute inequality that is common to all four classes and all students.

This priority is solidified, which is the basic premise, so to speak, on which the special exam is based.

However—–what happens when there is only one student with a different inequality sign?

Support＞Out of time＞Oppose

If priorities were arranged in such a distorted order, the special exam becomes untenable.

That is why the school has had thorough monitoring and rules to prevent any intervention from other classes. In order to prevent them from signing contracts with people like Sakayanagi and Ryuuen, who would invite them into their own respective classes if they let them run out of time, or transfer a large number of private points to them.

The special examinations will become chaotic and confusing as the people who did not have that established would get mixed up.

Even if we continue to be stubborn, the only thing that would await us is “running out of time.”

So what should we do?

In the remaining two hours, there is only one thing I should achieve.

Unanimous Agreement

That is the best solution. There was no other way to open the door than to make this happen.

It was probably already in Horikita’s mind. But she was unable to take the plunge.

When it comes to cutting off your own classmates, it’s certainly not easy.

Selecting one person to be expelled from school is more difficult than making the vote unanimous in opposition.

Once you take the first step, there would no turning back.

Because it wasn’t acceptable to return to opposing the motion because sure enough, you couldn’t have anyone expelled.

But still, I was hesitant to go ahead with my plan when the time to vote came.

Why, I wonder. The ideal route was off, and I’m already running out of time to do the things I need to do in order to complete the plan.

The extra time will delay the progress for making the unanimous vote in support and subsequently selecting the expellee.

But still, I want to try to make it unanimous in opposition just once more, even if it would take up more of my precious time.

An irrational feeling I’d never had before surfaced in my mind.

I wonder what kind of decision you would have made in a situation like this, I ask Horikita Manabu in my mind.

There was no way I could get an answer, but I decided to modify my plan. I’ve decided to bet on one last chance, though I won’t change my strategy.

“Then, the results…….”

Chabashira, who had finished the tally, was momentarily at a loss for words

“…..will now be displayed.”

12th vote results 2 in Agreement 37 in Opposition

“Y-you’re kidding right!? Why!? It increased!?”

After a long period of time, one person turned from the 38 who had been consistently opposed so far to one who was in support.

It would have had enough of an impact to crack the opposition, which had been united.

“Looks like I’m having a bad dream……”

The person who casted this vote was me, of all people.

It wasn’t as if it was just a single vote. It was a strong vote in support by one of the 37 people who were firmly united and Kouenji.

Horikita, who was no longer having the thoughts she had before, went into thinking mode again.

What is it that we should do if we can’t bring the number of support votes to zero?

Horikita immediately understood that it was a vote that had been passed to avoid the option of “running out of time”.

Other than this, there was only the worst option of all left.

That is, running out of time. Even without any expellees, the class points would be subtracted by 300. Assuming all the other classes had passed, the difference would be 350, and if there was a class that had passed the last motion unanimously in support, the difference would be up to 450 points.

With such a huge gap, there was no guarantee that we would be able to catch up even if we had more than a year of school left. No, in fact, it could be said that it was all but hopeless.

Avoiding expelling someone in exchange for giving up on class A was no laughing matter.

And once this idea becomes widespread, it is inevitable that people will begin to question the point of continuing to vote against it. They would begin to think that it is easier to mobilize opposition votes, which have the potential to move in unison, than to mobilize the support vote, which remained unchanged.

Even if the biggest hurdle of who to have expelled will be awaiting us, we would be able to take half a step forward from this petrified situation.

“H-hey. I think we have no choice but to vote in support, don’t you think?”

“What the hell are you saying? If we do that, someone will have to be expelled.”

“But, you know…… if time runs out, we’re all done, right?”

The gradual erosion of the votes in support.

The first candidates to begin the move were the ones who were confident that 『they would not be expelled.』

On the other hand, the ones who continued to vote in opposition probably tended to be who thought that『they could get expelled.』

The vote in support of the motion continued to grow in us.

However, likely not even one person would admit that they had voted in agreement.

It was natural. If they were found out to be voting in support of it, they might be the one to be expelled.

Only when the vote is unanimous in support of the motion, can we move on to the next phase, which was selecting the expellee on equal footing.

13th vote result 5 in Agreement 34 in Opposition

Three more votes went in support.

Who voted in support!?, such a voice still remained strong in the air, but this was as far as it went.

14th vote results 12 in Agreement 27 in Opposition

The steady increase in the number of support votes did not stop, and the number only continued to grow.

Finally, for the first time, the number of support votes reached double digits, swelling to nearly a third of the class.

In the next round of voting, there would surely be even more votes in support.

After reaching this point, the time limit was only about an hour and a half left.

“W-wait a minute, you guys. If you really think it’s a good idea for us to lean in support here, you’re wrong!”

Unable to put up with the crisis, Yousuke asks for the ones who were voting in support of the motion to wait.

“I understand that we need to avoid running out of time. But that doesn’t mean that unanimously supporting this motion is the answer, don’t you think?”

“’Y-yeah ……After this, we’ll have to reach unanimity on one individual out of the 39 of us. It’s even more difficult to get unanimity in support of it than it is to get unanimity against it. We only have an hour and a half left. Do you realise that?”

In order to finish this in support of the motion, we would have to decide who will be leaving the school.

“It’s not too late. I think that we should vote in opposition.”

“I agree. Don’t get swept away by the votes.”

Classmates who continue to be emotionally affected.

It was around the time when it was no longer possible to make a normal judgment as to whether voting in support or opposition was correct.

“Above all, you yourself know that you should not vote for it. This fact can be proven by the twelve people that have voted in support of it, and not even one of them has come forward. Am I not correct?”

Even if the vote is repeated and the number of votes in support increases, there will be no ideal unanimity without a major intervention to force it. Originally, I was planning to do this in order to achieve unanimity for the next vote, but I decided to move it up my schedule and use it here and now.

“───Can I share my opinion?”

“Eh…?”

As if Horikita hadn’t expected it, she was a little bewildered by my sudden interruption.

“Horikita. I voted in support on the 14th round.”

This was a lie. I’d already been voting in support since the 12th round of voting.

(TN: He says it was a lie in the raws)

But no one could prove it.

“Ayanokouji-kun did? Why…….”

“No matter what, if we continue to oppose it, we will run out of time. There is no other way for us but to vote in support. I think we should all know that by now.”

In order to increase the number of support votes, this role had to be done by someone.

From the seat next to me, Satou was staring at me anxiously.

No, it wasn’t just Satou. Everyone concerned about this situation was.

“It won’t solve the root of the problem. We’ll only end up squabbling over who to expel.”

“I know. But we can at least break out of the stalemate. Even if we find out who has been voting in support of the motion, I still don’t think that person will vote against it. In other words, we can’t expect the vote to be unanimous in opposition. But now, having a unanimous vote in support is possible. And then we can put the only defector on trial and judge them with us 38 people. It’s a bit forceful, but it’s possible for us to obtain unanimity.”

There’s one person both me and Horikita should have in mind.

Of course, there is no guarantee that it is that person, but she should know what I mean.

“That’s───”

“Judge? Do you think we have the right to judge someone just because they’re voting in support?”

Yousuke catches the end of the words and counters it.

“Yes. If we can’t make it unanimous, we will never be able to move up to A class. I don’t think anyone would think that the perpetrator who continues to vote in support despite knowing this isn’t guilty at all.”

“B, but, but that’s…..if more time runs out, I’m sure the perpetrator will───”

“More? There are only a few more opportunities for us to vote. Are you going to involve all of our classmates in that slim possibility? The fewer opportunities we have left, the more the path to agreement closes. That would completely take away even our chance to reach unanimity.”

Even if I didn’t bother saying it, i’m sure both Yousuke and my classmates knew that.

The reason why many of my classmates did not take the first step is because the biggest hurdle for them is voting in support of this motion.

“It is true that there are many who are hesitant to vote in support. That is why I would like to identify the one who first started and still continues to vote in support of the motion and arrange it so that they would be the one to be expelled. In other words, we can ensure the safety of the ones who have been voting in opposition.”

Satou, who had been listening to my explanation more than anyone else, raised a small hand.

“I’m happy to hear that, you see… but it’ll be useless if we don’t know who’s actually been voting in agreement. In the end, when the time is up, we’ll just have to come up with random candidates for expulsion……. It’s scary.”

“If we can’t narrow down the perpetrator, we can choose to run out the clock again. What we have to avoid now is staying here and not taking that step when there is a chance to clear it.”

To my other classmates who were hesitant a push on the back, I gave them more things to consider in their decisions.

“Horikita brought this up a little earlier, but I have a hint of who the person who’s continuously voting in support is.”

“If that’s the case, why not say it here and now? But even Horikita hasn’t said that person’s name. Doesn’t that mean that you’re just bluffing? To be exact, you thought that if you threatened the perpetrator, they’d vote in opposition too, right?”

Although Miyamoto’s reasoning was not correct, it is certainly not unreasonable for him to think so.

“If you really have an idea about who it is, let’s all try to convince that person.”

“I’m doing this now because I cannot do that. If I were to mention that person’s name, we would never be able to sway their vote from support. Instead they would harden themselves and push through until the end. I want to avoid that.”

This was both an inducement to vote in support and a last minute plea from me.

If the perpetrator has been told this much, they would certainly know that we’ve been aware that they were the one who continued to vote in support.

If they were afraid of being exposed, they might be the one of the people to vote in opposition in the next round.

“Make up your resolve, Horikita. Your opponent is trying to bring you down. There is no other way but to hunt or be hunted.”

I left the silent Horikita behind and turned my gaze to someone else.

“And Yousuke. I understand how you feel, not wanting to have anyone expelled in our class. If you really don’t want to have anyone expelled no matter what, we have to gain results before time runs out. You know that don’t you?”

The day before this special exam started, I had warned Yosuke about it.

I understood that he was struggling well just by seeing him from the side.

I didn’t not understand why he wanted to continue to resist.

“But, I…….”

“The next round of voting will decide our fate.”

“…….I…….”

It was a painful decision, but still Yousuke was different from before.

He had grown since the deserted island exam and last year’s in-class vote where all he could do was stand still.

“Y-you’re right. It’s….. troubling the whole class just because of my own thoughts, isn’t good…..”

With his head hanging, he decided to make his move.

“I’m going to vote in support. And like Ayanokouji-kun said, I think we should make it so that we expel the person who’s been voting in support all along.”

The decision of Yousuke, the heart of the class, would have changed the situation even more drastically.

“All that’s left is you, Horikita. It’s time for you to make up your mind, so we avoid reaching the time limit.”

Time was running out before the next round of voting. It would soon begin.

“Please. Just one more time for us to make it unanimous in opposition. If we don’t get unanimous opposition on the next vote…… then I’ll…… resolve myself.”

There would be no more next time. We had succeeded in creating that situation.

The last round for the voting of unanimity by genuine opposition began.

All of them took no time at all and completed the voting in seconds.

However, things sometimes diverge greatly between ideal and the reality.

15th vote results 1 in Agreement 38 in Opposition

“Damn it! Its still no good after all!”

It was dangerous to force the votes that had begun to flow in support of the motion to once again turn against it.

With the time limit approaching, even that last strategy to make it unanimous in opposition was a misfire.

But with this, everyone has understood.

The perpetrator who continues to vote in support of this was prepared for us to run out of time.

“Horikita, Yousuke. Is it fine now?”

I succeeded in confirming the determination of the two and clearly obtaining their consent.

At any rate, the necessary preliminaries for the battle of getting the one soon to be expelled out of school were now in place.

Now that the intentions of the two main players, Horikita and Yousuke, have been made clear, the majority of the votes will now go in support. But even so, it’s easy to imagine that those who are worried that they themselves might be expelled will hesitate to vote in support.

That is why those who are prepared to throw their vote in opposition must also have an appropriate amount of resolve.

“If the next vote is in opposition, we need you to state clearly why. You should already know how painful it is to consume ten minutes of time with a single vote.”

If there was still time left, it would not be unreasonable for some of them to voice out their complaints.

But with almost an hour left, the escape route was completely cut off.

It’s a rough job, forcing classmates who don’t have the ability to make decisions to do so.

“Now that it’s come to this……we have no choice but to choose who will be getting expelled.”

“Are you for real?”

“I don’t want to lose any of my classmates either. But if we don’t expel someone here, the damage done to the class will be enormous. That is something that must be avoided.”

Looking at the changes in class points tally so far, the pain of losing 300 points can surely be felt.

Intervals were forced to last for 10 minutes.

They must be willing to resist the urge of running away and voting in opposition to it.

16th vote results 39 in Agreement 0 in Opposition

It was unanimous. Along with this result, the fear and anxiety of everyone was palpable.

“Unanimous in agreement huh……”

Chabashira mutters as if she had prepared herself for this to happen and continued to progress.

At the time of making this choice, the only way left was to either choose someone to be expelled or run out of time.

Of course, the latter would mean that this class will have been defeated until graduation.

That is to say, out of the 39 students in this class, there would soon be a dropout in about an hour from now.

Of course, I know who the person who should be expelled is.

“For the determination of the candidate, each individual can only be nominated once. You are to nominate a person by pressing their name on your tablets. But if there are no nominees, or if their votes do not exceed half the class, then as explained beforehand, you will hold a vote for a randomly selected person.”

It was finally time to decide who would be expelled from the school, and naturally there were many of my classmates staring at both me and Horikita.

Hurry up and name them. That pressure was continuously mounting on us.

This was an invaluable interval, incomparable to the previous ones.

Though it was still ten minutes, we were also to choose who to nominate.

“Since the unanimous vote in support of the motion is now definite……. At the very least, I would like for us to wait for the perpetrator to confess themselves in this single interval. Depending on the circumstances, we could choose to run out of time and help them.”

Of course, such a proposal would not be able to suppress criticism.

That is because no one would ever accept such a choice, causing the lost of class points.

However, Horikita kept silent and continued to listen and endure the complaints.

As for me, I needed to find the right timing, so I went along with her plan and kept silent.

A dark and harsh time passed with complaints directed at us and with each of my classmates sneaking glances at their seatmates beside them.

There was no way that anyone would select a specific student to be nominated for expulsion. The time for the interval approached.

If my classmates were to see their own name on the monitor, it would feel as if their heart had been grabbed. Especially if it is on the first vote, unanimity by getting carried away cannot be ignored.

“Sensei, it’s no problem if I nominate myself, right?”

“Of course not.”

“Well then, please vote for me.”

With that said, Yousuke came forward as that specific student just before the time was up.

Have 『Hirata Yousuke』expelled

Support Oppose

This vote had a different weight to it than the previous one.

If there were people who voted in support, it would be as if they were directly telling Yousuke that they didn’t care if he were to disappear, and that they wanted him to disappear.

17th vote results 6 in Agreement 32 in Opposition

It was so quiet that the gasp of each of my classmates could be heard.

The feeling of relief at the majority of opposition and the presence of the invisible six people who voted in support of the motion would normally continue to haunt him for some time to come.

However, as far as Yousuke was concerned, he may even be more relieved with the fact that we were all able to overcome the first obstacle with his candidacy instead.

“What do we do……. Are we really just going to expel someone from here……..?”

“We’re running out of time. You two, please tell us. Who was the one who voted in support all along?

As if he couldn’t wait any longer, Keisei shouted out, in demand for an answer.

“Of course I will give you the name of the perpetrator I have in mind. But I also think that it’s not so simple.”

“It’s not that simple? We don’t have a choice anymore. Since we’ve decided to expel someone, we have to find out who it is as soon as possible, even if it’s just a second earlier.”

Many of my classmates were still regretting their decision to vote in support and were now feeling anxious.

They were probably also feeling mentally tight on time from wasting the previous ten minutes.

That is why they wanted something to make them feel that they did not make a mistake in choosing to vote for support.

“For the next vote, if time just passes like this, someone will be chosen at random, right……?”

It was understandable why Sudou would feel restless. Even Yousuke had gotten 6 votes.

“Don’t worry, Ken. I’ll vote against it if you get chosen…….s-so make sure you protect me too, okay?”

“That should be obvious, Kanji. Y-yeah. If we protect each other, we’ll be absolutely fine, right…… right?”

“……Uuu……”

My classmates were losing their composure. A faint cry leaked out from among them.

She held her mouth and then tried to hide her eyes, but her voice could clearly be heard.

“K-Kikyou-chan…..y-you okay?”

Mii-chan rushed over and placed her hand on Kushida’s back.

“Mm, sorry…….Why did things end up like this ……When I started thinking about it, I couldn’t stop feeling regretful…….”

“That’s the same for me too. But someone has to….. has to be expelled.”

Most of my classmates were surely feeling this.

They were being forced to do something somewhat unrealistic.

“I’m really regretting my choice right now……..I should have kept voting opposed to it until the end no matter what…….”

“That’s the same for all of us. But we don’t have a choice. If time runs out, we would lose 300 class points.”

As if to justify her decision to vote in support, Keisei said that it was all but inevitable.

“But even so….. it will never take away this regret of mine, voting in support of such a thing……!”

Though unanimous in support, she confesses her regret for having played a part in it.

The color began to show more strongly in the people who felt the same way, but not in words.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself, Kushida-chan. It’s the same for us all too….. right?”

Sudou and Ike too, comforted Kushida.

“So frustrating…..it’s so frustrating”

The tears running down her cheeks. As she wiped them away, Kushida held her trembling body and raised her head.

“I think we really had the chance to make it unanimous in opposition, don’t you think? If we continued to persuade them, I think that the one who was in support of would finally understand…..”

“That’s───but the time…….”

“It’s true that I understand what Horikita-san and Ayanokouji-kun were saying. We had to avoid running out of time, right? Yes, I understand that…….But even if we were to be penalized, we should have been a class where no one would be left out, right?”

Kushida spits out all her feelings that she had accumulated so far.

“No, but it’s definitely the fault of whoever one who kept voting in support. Definitely.”

“No one deserves to be expelled just because of their academic ability or athletic ability, those are all trivial things. That alone cannot decide who deserves to be expelled.”

Despite being the person in agreement of this motion who was the cause for this situation, Kushida claimed that she truly wanted to stand up for them.

“B-but…..If that’s the case, how do you decide who to expel?”

“T-then…..what about drawing lots?”

“We can’t do that. I’m sure no one will be satisfied…….if someone were to be expelled because of that…..”

Wiping away tears with her fingertips, she continued.

“I’m prepared to be criticized.”

Putting her hand on her chest, Kushida appeals to our classmates.

“I——-I think that Horikita-kun, who was the leader of this special examination……or Ayanokouji-kun who urged us to vote in support, should take the blame.”

As expected, this would happen. The first move made by Kushida.

For Kushida. There was no benefit to be gained if people like Ike or Sudou were to be expelled here.

The words were the intense desire of the anonymous person who had unmistakably voted in support of the motion.

“I’m so disgusted that I’m going to hate myself for naming them, but I can’t let us run out of time. Someone has to carry this weight… That’s why I play the role of resentment… “

No one wants to be expelled

But even so, as long as someone has to be expelled, selection is inevitable.

Just like those who are laid off, those who sentence others to be laid off will suffer as much.

Kushida had brought that role upon herself.

It takes a lot of determination and reason to name someone.

I was able to get my classmates to recognize our names, which was my goal.

Kushida was much smarter than I thought. Normally, in Kushida’s position, she herself would not be expelled if she remained silent until the end as she was trusted and had many friends, thus there would be plenty of people who would vote in opposition to her expulsion. However, Horikita and I have already figured out that Kushida was the anonymous voter. If one of us were to raise a fist and blow the lid off of Kushida’s reputation, it could lead to an unexpected situation. Since that were the case, it would be more effective for her to take a non-fatal wound and use it as a means to defend herself.

By mentioning the names of me and Horikita ahead of time, even if I make a statement that deprecates Kushida, she could induce that it was due to the resentment over her proposing the decision to expel me.

“Don’t fuck around!”

The first to object to Kushida’s idea was not Horikita or me, but Kei.

“Why should Kiyotaka be expelled? We were running out of time, so all he did was ask us to vote in support of the disgusting motion. What’s the responsibility he needs to uphold in that?”

“……Yes. You’re right. I know exactly what you mean, Karuizawa-san. I honestly think that it’s wrong to name names now…..but we will never be able to move forward if we don’t.”

“I’m not voting for Kiyotaka’s expulsion. At that point, you know you’re never going to be expelled, right?”

“Wait Karuizawa. That’s a little selfish don’t you think?”

“Haa? You just promised to vote against Hondou-kun and Onizuka-kun, didn’t you? It’s the same thing.”

“Uhm, yes, b-but I’m not saying we should vote unanimously in support of it……”

“You’re the one who’s selfish. If I don’t declare my intentions, won’t his expulsion be a done deal? Not being able to move up to A class because time would run out? So what? Kiyotaka is everything to me. B class? D class?, I don’t give a damn about that.”

Kei was unrelentingly lashing out in anger, but it was time for her to stop.

“Stop it, Kei. What Kushida’s saying is correct.”

“B-but!”

Dissatisfied, Kei was glared at Kushida without hiding her irritation but she stopped here.

“If you let your emotions get the better of you and continue to argue, the identity of the first one who should bear the responsibility for Kushida’s words will be blurred, and the target will shift from me and Horikita. You know that don’t you?”

“……Yes……”

If she had lost her cool, she would have snapped at her, but that didn’t happen.

She was be able restrain herself as long as I gave her a reasonable enough command.

As it turned out, it wasn’t a bad thing to have a classmate speak what was on their minds.

“I’ll tell you what, I don’t agree with the idea of having Suzune expelled. It may not be the ideal unanimous decision, but it’s not Suzune’s fault. It is the fault of the bastard who’s sitting on their ass all day and not coming forward. I mean, do you really think we’ll be able to move up to Class A without Suzune? Everyone was convinced that she was reliable enough to give the protection point to. Right Yukimura?”

“……Certainly, it’s been decided that we would be giving Horikita-san a protection point. But in the end, if we fail this special test, the action itself will become meaningless; wouldn’t it be the same if we lost 350 class points?”

Keisei answered while holding his glasses.

“If Suzune’s here, we can still turn it around!”

“Do not underestimate this school. The 300 points that Kouenji earned in the deserted island exam was something of a miracle. If we exclude that, how long would it take us to finally reach our current class points? It’s not very realistic, is it now? Horikita is a big hole to fill in, but it’s not enough for us to lose 350 class points for.”

We could either fill the 350 point handicap with Horikita, or we could fight as equals without Horikita.

It’s hard to put a simple value on it, but what Keisei was saying, in a sense was generally true.

“I don’t agree with decision of having either Kiyopon or Horikita-san expelled right now. It’s not due to personal relationships, but because I think we should listen to their side of the story first. About the one who kept voting in support of this, as Sudou-kun said, right?”

Even Kushida had a surprised look on her face as if she hadn’t except Haruka to cut into the conversation.

Her explanation was not in the form of protecting either of us because of personal relations, but rather in form of saying that it was still too early to decide.

“……Y-you’re right. I think I may have lost my cool a little…….But if Ayanokouji-kun got the name of the person who continuously voted in support wrong……or even if he didn’t, if he were to say their name, all of their relationships would probably be destroyed.”

What would happen if I were to make a mistake in identifying the perpetrator. Such a pressure could be felt in the air.

At any rate, at this point, the baton once again was passed to me again.

“I know you’re still in the middle of a conversation, but I think you guys should leave it at here. We have ten minutes to decide on who we want to expel. If we can’t do that, we would have to vote on someone who would be selected at random.”

“…..Fine then. We don’t have much time before the vote anyway. I’ll have no choice but to do it. Please let me do it.”

“O-oi, Suzune!? What the hell are you doing!?”

“’If we’re going to have a vote in between anyway, I want to confirm something. That is, to see how many of you want me to be expelled.”

As if to test her own classmates, Horikita raises her hand and offers to be voted on.

If the vote were to be unanimous in support here, she would be expelled. On the other hand, if the vote were to be unanimous in opposition, she would be exempted from self-nomination again.

And if the vote were to not be unanimous in either direction, we will have to start all over again with the selection of who to vote for, including Horikita.

“Then, we will now begin the 60-second voting time for Suzune Horikita.”

The voting in support or opposition to Horikita’s expulsion began.

How many people would vote in support of Horikita’s expulsion…… After about thirty seconds, all of the votes seemed to be cast, and Chabashira displayed the results on the monitor.

18th vote results 16 in Agreement 22 in Opposition

I wonder if I was the only one who thought that this was an interesting result.

Objectively speaking, the only person who would be likely to vote clearly in opposition to Horikita’s expulsion is Sudou.

And then the next in line would be Kouenji, who probably wouldn’t want to give up his only ally, Horikita.

On the flip side, the rest of my classmates were voting purely on whether they agreed or disagreed with Horikita’s disappearance. To the 16 invisible classmates, Horikita’s presence was not all that important.

Or was there a segment of the population that was willing to accept anyone as long as they themselves wouldn’t have to be expelled?

“Are you all nuts? Raise your hand if you vote in support or I’ll kill you!”

Sudou stood up irritated, as if he thought that only a few votes at most would be in support to Horikita’s expulsion.

“Stop it, Sudou-kun.”

“How can I-!”

“You’re only wasting time by making a fuss. Let’s talk more constructively.”

“Hori-Horikita-san is right, Sudo-kun. Unanimity is the ironclad rule for this special exam. Even if there are thirty-seven votes in support, as long as you continue to oppose it, Horikita-san won’t be expelled.”

Yousuke convinces him, that there was no need for him spew his anger out anywhere.

It was exactly like he said, even if he were to be dissatisfied, as long as he becomes that one person who stays on her side, she will not be expelled.

That is also the only way to absolutely prevent expulsion from this special examination.

Only one vote. With an unwaveringly defensive vote in opposition, one can avoid the fate of expulsion.

On the flip side, when that last vote is lost, there would be no way left to prevent expulsion.

“We’re really running out of time here. It’s about time you gave us the name of the perpetrator who you think caused this situation.”

“I know that. I just want to make a suggestion before I say it”

“Suggestion?”

“Yes. I will be giving you all the name now, but this isn’t going to be just a mere statement. If I say the wrong person here, the word reputational damage won’t be able to cover up for my mistake.”

“That’s…… indeed true.”

“That is why it will not be just a ‘mere’ statement. Conversely, if it turns out that I have indeed said the wrong person, then I’ll take responsibility and nominate myself, after which you can all vote to expel me.”

“Wai-, Kiyotaka!?”

I myself, will take responsibility. Hearing these words, the class was in an uproar.

“A-are you really sure about this? Ayanokouji-kun…..I don’t want any of my classmates……but Ayanokouji-kun is still one of them too, isn’t he……?”

“I appreciate your concern, Kushida. But it’s fine.”

“You say that but Karuizawa-san will vote in opposed to Ayanokouji-kun’s expulsion, right? Then it’d be meaningless───”

“I won’t let that happen. Taking responsibility also means stopping those opposed votes. If the time comes, I’ll convince Kei vote in support to it. Is that fine?”

“……I understand, but I have faith that it will not come to that.”

“From Kushida’s words, I did agree with one thing. That having guided the class to agreeing, I should take some of the responsibility. But there was one anonymous person who obstinately continued to vote in agreement. I still believe that this person in particular should bear the responsibility.”

“That’s right. Someone in this class tried to get the better part of the deal, to take advantage of the anonymity and have someone expelled in secret.”

This is where decides to Kei join in, in order to protect me.

“I-I think so too……! That person should be held accountable……”

“Yeah, that’s true. The one at fault is whoever kept voting in agreement.”

Airi, Haruka and even Akito followed this trend to provide support.

“You’ve made your decision…..haven’t you?”

Her last piece of advice, the uneasy eyes of Kushida, were on me.

“I’m prepared to pay the price for naming someone. Above all, it’s only because I am almost 100% sure that I am willing to risk my own expulsion to speak out.”

“I-I got it. In that case, I’ll trust Ayanokouji-kun”

Trust. With such a word, Kushida’s strong eyes continue to be directed at me.

The timing of the announcement which had been pulled back, further increased the interest of my classmates.

Aside from that one student who actually voted in support, the rest of my classmates were inherently less concerned.

That was why everyone was quietly waiting for the name of the perpetrator and to vote in support for their expulsion.

Wanting a good reason to hit them with everything they’ve got, they were all waiting for the right time to shout abuse towards the perpetrator with their parched throats.

“The perpetrator’s name is…….”

The person I should expel from now on, and the person I have decided to expel.

I’m going to reveal it all here.

“───Kushida. It’s you.”

Silence grew. A world where sound has completely disappeared, and even the ringing in one’s ears do not reach.

I know how you feel, Horikita. Even though you had concluded that we now had to agree, I know the reason you still couldn’t go through with it painfully well.

However, Kushida didn’t back down one bit. She was determined to get Horikita or me expelled from this motion, and she continued to vote in support it. Whether or not she realizes that this was a bad move was already a trivial matter.

I judged that Kushida’s rehabilitation would be impossible, but you, wanted to face her until the end.

A sacrifice for the class. Even though you had been seeing the possibility, you did well to not name her until now.

You may not have been able to save Kushida, but there is no need for you to sacrifice yourself either.

I don’t know what Horikita was thinking of at this moment, but I could clearly see that she was looking at me more calmly than I expected.

Now Kushida has chosen to stand in the way as your difficult enemy.

Since that is the case, there is not choice but to fight. I will take on the role of defeating this opponent.

“Eh───?”

A voice that couldn’t understand leaked out.

I’m sure those words were not only something Kushida but almost all our classmates let out at the same time.

“M-e?”

Kushida points to herself, still not believing that her name had been called.

Or perhaps, she’s already guessed that her name would be called out.

That is why I also came prepared for it, setting things up ahead of time.

But even so, Kushida probably didn’t think that I would really sell her out. It’s even more so because she thinks that she has some weaknesses against me.

“That’s right. You’re the one who stubbornly continued to vote in agreement even though you were urged to vote opposed to it.”

Even my classmates, who were ready to hit her with words of abuse, did not utter a word.

“D-don’t tell me…… was it because I said that Horikita-san and Ayanokouji-kun should take responsibility?”

Seeing Kushida’s tears welling up with grief, Hondou hurried to follow up.

“N-no matter how you look at it, Ayanokouji, it can’t be Kushida-chan…..! Being resented is okay too.”

“That’s irrelevant. I’ve been thinking about this since before I named her, or rather, since the first vote on the fifth motion.”

“W-wait. I was voting in against it until the very last minute you know? So why are you…..”

“A false accusation, huh? Well, of course it would seem so under the circumstances.”

It was just a sloppy excuse made up so I could avoid getting expelled.

It would obviously look that way to anyone.

“There’s no evidence to show that you were in fact voting against it. Of course there wouldn’t be any, these votes are done anonymously. But even so, I can show that she’s the culprit here, with evidence. Are there any objections?”

“H-how awful……how could you say such a thing. But I was prepared for this……I was the first one to name you two after all. I’ve decided that even if I’m subjected to lies and slander, I’ll sacrifice myself to protect my class.”

Whatever I will say hereafter will all be lies.

By putting up that line of defense, she would make sure that others will defend her.

“First of all, I’ll tell you why I think Kushida was the one who kept voting in support of it. It is because she has people in this class who she really wants to expel. Of course, it’s hard to believe, but please hear me out until the end. The persons Kushida wants to expel are, as she herself has mentioned, Horikita and I.”

A lot of people were confused as to what on earth I was talking about.

Kushida, who should be more upset than anyone else, looked distraught but calmly and carefully chose her words. It was a debate where not even a single mistake was allowed.

“I named you two. This is how it’s going to be, isn’t it…”

“No, that’s not it. Kushida has thought of Horikita as a hindrance more than anyone else ever since she first enrolled into this school.”

Since I’ve come this far, Kushida should understand even if she didn’t want to.

That I’m going to disclose all the information I know about Kushida here.

However, she can’t order me to stop.

As long as she continues to play the role of a pretty, pitiful girl, there would be no way for her to stop me.

“Kushida. You have something in common with Horikita that our other classmates don’t, do you?”

“Eh? Something we have in common……?”

She knows it herself, but had to take the attitude as if she didn’t know anything at least once.

I could interrupt that performance of hers, but I dare not.

It’s because her defensive instinct will make her suffer even more from now on.

“Um……. Ah, could you be talking about the fact that we’re from the same middle school?”

No one would have ever heard of such a thing before.

My classmates were surprised to hear the information first-hand.

I myself didn’t have to reveal the things she’s been hiding, I just had make her reveal them herself.

“Yes. Not a single one of our classmates knew about that, did they?”

The person in question, Horikita, was currently staring straight at the podium, so I couldn’t see her expression.

On the other hand, I could easily see the gazes of my other classmates.

“B-but wait? It’s true that I’ve never told anyone about it, but I just didn’t really have the chance to talk about it. It was a reasonably large school, and we had never even been in the same class. It took me a long time to confirm that Horikita-san had went to the same school as me……..”

Kushida was saying that she couldn’t have wanted to have her expelled from the beginning.

And here, my classmates, unable to bear watching Kushida’s situation any longer, began to take action.

“Enough already, Ayanokouji. You said that you would tell us the name of the perpetrator who had continuously voted in support, so we listened to you quietly, but for it to be Kikyou-chan? That’s impossible.”

It was Ike who denied it and soon his voice spread throughout the class.

“Yeah! What you’re saying, Ayanokouji-kun, is crazy.”

“Despite leading us to agree with you to vote in support, you only mention Kushida-san’s name out of spite? What are you doing?”

“In the first place, why would she expel someone just for being in the same middle school as her? Now that I think about it, from how this story is going, was Ayanokouji in the same middle school as them too?”

Obvious questions were posed by my classmates.

The grievances that erupt multiply from one to two, to two to three.

One after another, her troops of friends appeared without her asking them to.

There is no doubt that this was the powerful weapon that Kushida Kikyou possesses.

“Now that I think about it, were you always this kind of a person? You’ve been acting weird since a while ago, Ayanokouji.”

“T-that’s true. It’s kinda scary…… even though I’ve always thought of you as the quiet type…”

In addition to protecting her, some people begin to distrust me for my unusual behavior.

“……Please don’t blame him, everyone. I’m sure even Ayanokouji-kun doesn’t want to do this either. I know what it’s like to be in a situation like this and wanting to blame someone else for it…..”

She picks up the words of our classmates with finesse and sets them off while pretending to protect me.

“You shouldn’t let him say whatever he wants. You’re too kind, Kikyou-chan.”

Automatically, when Kushida’s spokespeople got out of control, my right to speak was revoked.

But I too, have my own weapons to counter them.

“It’s Ayanokouji-kun who should be doing the important talking now. We shouldn’t interfere halfheartedly.”

So says Yousuke, as he gave a remark to the ones who interrupted me.

“Come on, Hirata. It’s no use listening to Ayanokouji’s lies any longer.”

“We should wait until we have all the material before commenting on whether something is true or false. Of course, if it turns out to be false, I won’t condone it either.”

“Is it really even something worth listening to?”

“Yes, it’s something we need to hear. It will greatly affect not only Kushida-san, who was named, but also Ayanokouji-kun’s own school life. Isn’t that so?”

I myself had told Yousuke in advance that there may be people who would try to control the votes if we were to run out of time.

However, there was no way anyone could have known in advance what the motions would be, and of course he hadn’t known about Kushida either.

As a purely neutral person, he had to make sure that the judgement that was to occur would be just.

“I have nothing to do with the origins of the two. The fact that they had went to the same middle school doesn’t mean much either, but rather, Kushida had a big secret she couldn’t tell anyone in her middle school.”

“Stop it, Ayanokouji-kun….. don’t pile on any more lies…..”

Tears start to flow down her cheeks, and Kushida began to cry on the spot.

“Hey Kiyopon, I’m on your side……but at the same time, i’m also on Kyou-chan’s. How do I say this, do we really have to continue talking about this?”

As I had said before, even if Haruka wasn’t a part of the Ayanokouji group, she would still try to protect me.

Haruka doesn’t have much friends, but she gets along well with Kushida even without the need for them to form a group.

If she cared about both sides, it was only natural for her to try to stop this conflict.

“Haruka. You’ve been waiting for the existence of the anonymous perpetrator to come to light, haven’t you? If that’s the case, then you need to hear this story through to the end.”

“But, I mean, Kikyou-chan’s……..”

“Not like that? I understand why you think that, but Kushida is not the person you think she is. I’m sorry, but let me continue. Kushida’s secret lies in her true nature.”

“Kikyou-chan’s…..true nature…..?”

“Yes. On the surface, Kushida appears to be a good person to everyone. She is a perfect honour student who is kind and caring, someone who can both study and play sports. But what if the truth is that she was more jealous than anyone else and could only be satisfied if she was first? What if as a result, she even had a history of driving her class to ruins when her true nature was revealed in middle school?”

“…… Honestly, it’s hard for me to believe this story. But even if it were true, it doesn’t add up. Certainly, in the case of Horikita-san, who also attended the same middle school as her, she may know about her past. But how does Ayanokouji-kun know about it? I don’t think Horikita-san would just tell you about it either.”

“That’s because shortly after I enrolled in this school, I coincidentally had the opportunity to see Kushida’s true nature. I witnessed Kushida spewing out negative emotions that were nothing like her usual mild-mannered appearance.”

Even as I talk about it, Kushida never acted as if she was going to glare at me.

She continues to play the role of a kind girl who stares at her poor classmate who’s continuously choosing to lie and lie.

She was confident that if she did this, she would be absolutely fine.

Of course, having bad things said about you, whether true or false, is a bad factor that will cast a shadow over your future school life. However, it was also a sign of her strong will to expel Horikita.

“Kushida wants to be seen as a kind person. She wouldn’t want her true nature to become known. On the other hand, she couldn’t stand the situation of having both Horikita and I holding onto her weakness. Why is that? It is because she always wants to take the mount from above.”

“……The interval will end in about a minute.”

As we were in the middle of a conversation, Chabashira informed us of the time.

“W-what do we do? About the next vote.”

“That’s…..for now, we’ll just have to take votes in the form of Ayanokouji, right?”

In the current situation, of course I would be next in line.

“Stop it───”

However, it was Kushida who stopped it, neither Kei or Haruka.

“Enough already…..M-my heart can’t take this anymore…..”

“Ku-Kushida-san?”

“The truth is, I don’t want anything to change… I don’t want Horikita-san or Ayanokouji-kun to be expelled. By naming the two of them, I’ve even made Ayanokouji-kun make up lies… I don’t want to have such a painful and bitter conversation anymore… So… So, I’ll give up… If I do that then everyone will return to normal right?”

Kushida volunteers to become a candidate for expulsion herself.

Among the criteria for nominations in this special test, if someone nominates oneself, just as Horikita and Yousuke did a while ago, their nomination would be acknowledged even if they were the only one.

“Are you sure about this, Kushida? Once you say this, you won’t be able to take it back.”

“Yes, I don’t mind……..Can you all agree for me to be expelled? Please…..”

When Kushida’s name was selected with those words, the vote appeared on the tablet.

My classmates were stunned by her unexpected candidacy.

19th vote results 5 in Agreement 33 in Opposition

With time, Kushida’s vote was taken, resulting in a unanimous vote in overwhelming opposition.

“Every, one…… why?”

“No matter what, there’s no way we would ever expel Kushida-chan. Right guys?”

The thirty-three people who voted in opposition responded with multiple nods with their heads in a show of solidarity.

“Ayanokouji. In all honesty, I don’t think it’s fair that you’re making Kushida-chan take the hit just so you yourself don’t get expelled.”

Except for my vote of support, only four people agreed with Kushida’s expulsion.

I’m tempted to say “only”, but I’m rather surprised that it got five votes.

“Next will be Ayanokouji-kun’s turn, right?”

It is true that if things continue as they are, there will be a vote held to expel me.

At that moment, there is a high chance that it would be a unanimous in support of it.

But not if I can change that decision in 10 minutes.

“Ayanokoji-kun, you say that Kushida-san’s true nature is something else, but it’s truly hard to believe that that’s the case.”

“Yeah! In the first place, has Kushida-san ever tried to expel Horikita-san before? If she really wanted to expel her, she would have taken action a long ago, wouldn’t she?”

If I wait for the right opportunity, I will naturally find a voice that would demand for me to talk.

“It’s not easy to get a classmate expelled. But in the very least, I’ve been a target of Kushida’s once, in a special exam very similar to this unanimous special exam.”

By avoiding direct expression, I let my classmates dig up their memories.

“Ah, the in-class vote……I’m pretty sure that was when Yamauchi-kun and Kushida-san had……”

Indeed. Last year was the first time our class had to vote to expel a classmate from our class.

There, Yamauchi ended up being expelled from the school, but Kushida was one of the people who had used Yamauchi to induce me to leave.

It was probably still fresh in their minds.

“Is it a coincidence? We’ve had two similar exams, both times I’ve been targeted for expulsion, and this time too, Kushida got involved. It’s too good to be true.”

If they were to remember back to those days, they will surely understand that it was strange for　Kushida to be involved once again.

“Sure, I would sometimes wonder if it really was just a coincidence. But Ayanokoji, if Kikyou-chan　was deliberately trying to get you expelled, would she have timed it so consistently?”

Practically saying that I should conduct myself better, but it’s not as simple as it seems.

“Kushida thought I was on her side, so she probably didn’t expect me to reveal everything behind her back like this.”

“……On my side?”

“Yeah. Did I say something wrong? Kushida.”

“…..Me too. I wonder how I’m supposed to answer, Ayanokouji-kun…… What’s the right way for me to answer?”

In other words, Kushida could only either deny or question it.

As long as she can’t affirm it, the initiative is always with me.

“Give us the proof, Ayanokouji. If you’re going to continue putting the blame Kushida-chan any further than this, it’s going to be necessary.”

It was Hondou who came to the forefront agressively. It seems that he had extraordinary feelings towards Kushida.

“That’s true. It would be barren to continue this story without evidence. I will now tell you the reason why Kushida trusted me.”

Without panicking, without missing. Bathed with water.

“It was quite a long time ago. I was blackmailed by Kushida into signing a contract with her where I would have to give her half of my private points every month in exchange for not expelling me.”

Hearing something that nobody had imagined, even those protecting Kushida were, of course, slightly shocked.

“Right? Kushida.”

“Eh……?”

Maybe she hadn’t expected for this to come up, or maybe it had been in the back of her mind but she hadn’t decided how to respond. Either way, Kushida was at a loss for words.

She couldn’t honestly admit that she was indeed receiving the private points.

On the other hand, it was hard for her to deny it.

Even if she could falsely say that she had not received any, the truth will come out when it can be confirmed later.

This is because of the fact that the person who had transferred money, where it was transferred to and how much was transferred will remain in history.

“What about it? Can you truthfully tell me that you haven’t received a single private point from me?”

“That’s───”

I wasn’t going to let her take her time.

Just as I was about to turn my gaze to Chabashira, Kushida replied with a quiver of her lips.

“….Certainly…. I have been receiving private points every month from Ayanokouji-kun……”

Kushida had been denying most of what I had said, but now she had to admit it.

If I were to get a confirmation from Chabashira since she could potentially know the flow of our private points, the situation would inevitably deteriorate for her.

There was some skepticism as to whether our teacher, Chabashira, was aware of the point transfers between individuals at any given time, and whether or not she could leak such personal information, but Kushida was not willing to take that risk.

“B-but…… the reason was completely different! Ayanokouji-kun asked me to keep it for him…….O-of course I didn’t use even a single point, you know?”

There were only one or two ways for her to justify the reason she was receiving half of the private points from a classmate every month. From what Kushida said, she had decided to go with one of them, which was that she was asked take to care of it. The other would have been that she was given it for free.

If she were to say that it was given to her unilaterally, as in the latter case, she would have had to compensate for that with a good enough reason, therefore she gave the reason of being asked to keep it. Well, at the very least, that’s probably how she thought.

“I didn’t just leave it with you. I was using it as payment, in return for not having me expelled.”

“S-stop lying…..”

The contract to give away half of my private points was made by me. I’m sure Kushida remembers it well. She had even taken the time to carefully record the day’s events. However, such a thing could be sealed away without being used, depending on the situation.

No, rather, it would be the opposite. It would come back as a weapon to stab her in the back.

“Lies, huh? But Kushida, when you signed this contract with me, you said you recorded it for insurance, right? If that recording comes out of your cell phone, you won’t be able to talk your way out of it.”

“R-recording? I don’t remember doing such a thing……”

She gave a denial, despite feeling overwhelmed. The recording must have been saved somewhere, but apparently it was not on her phone. I suppose she wouldn’t walk around with a risky recording directly, would she now? That would have been quicker, but it didn’t really matter.

“It’s the same even if you’ve got a recording hidden somewhere I don’t know about. We signed this contract in February of this year. I too have a recording of the contents of our conversation. I

recorded it in case of emergency if something were to ever go wrong.”

Kushida’s eyes widened as she looked at me. I’m certain she would’ve never imagined that.

“I’ve listened to the recording several times, so I remember every word that was said in there. 『I’ll give you half of the private points that I’ll receive from now on.』I think that’s how I started it.”

“T-that’s a lie. I didn’t hear such a thing.”

“ Kushida replied, ‘I’m sorry, but I’m not in need of private points. I guess it would be better to have more money, but I have enough.’”

“…..I don’t remember saying such a thing.”

“If you want, I could have Chabashira-sensei bring me my phone right now.”

“I don’t mind. But you can’t do that. We’re in the middle of a special exam you know?”

“It is inevitable that phones will be confiscated because using it can lead to cheating. However, all I have to do is to leave the operation of my cell phone to Chabashira-sensei and have her play back the recorded data. That way, there would be no room for cheating.”

Of course, I don’t believe that such a special exception can be granted unconditionally during the special examination.

But Kushida, driven by anxiety, couldn’t help but turn her gaze to Chabashira standing in the front.

“You’d be in trouble if she were to bring my cell phone. All the hard work you’ve done to cover everything up will be for naught. But you’ve already noticed, haven’t you? That I have no intention of stopping.”

Kushida was talking less. I wonder what she was thinking right now.

She turned her back against me and stopped moving as if she was petrified, keeping her eyes on her front.

Naturally, she would remember the events that took place on that day, and due to her cautious nature, she must have checked to see if her own recording was working properly. In other words, she too, had listened to it repeatedly. By me explaining the entire exchange, some words must have matched in the audio data in her memory.

“‘Even if it were enough to be used as pocket money, I would have no problem in case an emergency were to occur.’”

Kushida, who had been the victim up until now, was indubitably undergoing a major change.

You’ve come to the point where it’s no longer possible for you to continue posing as an angel in this class.

“Shut up already……”

Hearing a voice they couldn’t understand, a classmate swallowed their spit, wondering who it was that had just said that.

The only way for her to stop me from saying any more was for her to show her true colors.

But if she were to reveal her true nature, everything will be destroyed.

“‘You should’ve heard yourself from Chabashira-sensei. That private points are for our own protection───’”

“Shut up, shut up, shut up…….”

Despite receiving the words of rejection and interference, I didn’t care and continued until the end.

“‘That proposal. No matter how I look at it, won’t you be at a disadvantage? If you’re doing this because you might get expelled, I would understand that, you know?’ This was the conversation between me and Kushida before the deal was made. If you all could listen the audio which had the same words I’ve just said right here in front of us all, it would all come to light.”

It doesn’t matter if I really did have the recording or not.

The only thing that was necessary and important was the fact that my sentences matched the actual exchange.

“Enough I said!!”

Kushida, who had shouted and then gone silent, must have been trying very hard to recall what happened then.

It all started during our first-year, while we were still first-year students. I wanted the weakness of someone in our class and I knew that Kushida would have the weaknesses of plenty of our

own classmates. When she was asked for something in return for her cooperation, I proposed to offer my private points. For sure, the conversation before the proposal of the deal, where Kushida had said that she wanted me and Horikita to be expelled, will remain intact.

She thought she had a convenient hand to play, but she was wrong.

All she’s done is left herself with a bunch of evidence that will only stab her in the back.

“Tell me exactly what part of the conversation you want me to keep as a secret. Be specific so that the rest of the class and I can understand.”

Her friends, hoping that it was some kind of mistake, could only watch Kushida anxiously.

“……..Sorry.”

Shortly, Kushida muttered an apology.

“For what? What are you apologizing for?”

“Indeed, I had promised not to quarrel with Ayanokouji-kun in exchange for receiving half of his private points every month. That…..is the truth, so…..”

It wasn’t an apology to me, but rather, an apology to my classmates for lying to them.

“B-but….I don’t think about that anymore! I really wanted to get along with Horikita-san and Ayanokouji-kun. I wasn’t the one who voted in support───!”

Kushida stopped when she raised her voice to hang on to the part of her not being the anonymous voter.

The way our classmates looked at Kushida was very different from the warmth they had been showing her earlier.

Even if she really wasn’t the one who had been voting continuously in support, it was no longer possible for her to go about on her daily life as before. She herself seemed to understand that the most.

However, Kushida’s eyes were not yet dead as she looked at me.

“Isn’t it actually Ayanokouji-kun…….who was the one that kept voting in support of it?”

“What do you mean?”

“Ayanokouji-kun wanted to expel me, so he took action to force the vote to be unanimous in support of it. I mean, isn’t it weird?….. He’s always so quiet and unassertive, but all of a sudden he becomes proactive in order to get someone expelled…….”

Kushida, who was the closest to being the perpetrator, suddenly tries to shift the role from herself to me.

But I’m sorry Kushida, I’ve already assumed that you were going to use that strategy.

“Hey, Karuizawa-san”

Scratching up her hair, Kushida turned her gaze to Kei.

“What?”

“You seem to be dating Ayanokouji-kun, but did you know that when we first enrolled into this school, Ayanokouji-kun was desperately coming onto me and trying to go out with me?”

“…… What do you mean, what are you talking about?”

Kei is able to see things more objectively and calmly than most people, but even she has her weaknesses.

That’s because when love is involved, she explodes with uncontrollable emotions.

When my name was mentioned as a candidate for expulsion earlier, she aggressively defended me at her peril.

Kushida must have been able to see the gap in Kei’s mind because of this.

“You even touched my chest in the dark when I didn’t want you to, did you not?”

“Wha-…..c-chest!? W-what is she talking about, Kiyotaka!?”

“You didn’t know, did you? That he was doing such a terrible thing as soon as we enrolled here.”

A feeling of disgust begins to spread among the girls, including the boys who secretly had a crush on Kushida.

“I kindly advised him to stop on the spot, but….. I was too scared and couldn’t do anything about it.”

“It seems like she’s saying whatever she wants to, but I’ve never touched her chest.”

“B, But Kiyotaka is saying something else!?”

“’As expected, that’s what you would say, you have no choice but to say that. But in reality, Ayanokouji-kun has in fact touched my chest.”

“Kushida. I hate to be the one to tell you this, but isn’t that unseemly?”

“I have evidence too, though it’s not the same as the recording you have. I have a uniform with Ayanokoji-kun’s fingerprints all over it, and I kept it just as it was. You know what would happen if I were to submit it……… right?”

Just as I had said I had a recording of our conversation on my cell phone, she was going to use the same technique to get back at me.

If this proves to be true later, I will be the one standing on the edge.

“Please explain to me what this means.”

From the perspective of Kei, who was being told the story objectively, it’s certainly understandable that she would want to ask for an explanation.

“That’s not true at all. But before we get to whether that is the truth or not, you say that I have fingerprints on your clothes, but how well are they preserved? If it was right after we enrolled into this school, then it’s already been a year and a half. It’s not easy to collect fingerprints from clothing. If it hasn’t been kept well then of course it wouldn’t be in a decent state for it. I don’t think you’ll be able to get any fingerprints from something like that at all.”

Even at the best of times, the surface of the clothing is bumpy due to the knitting, making it difficult to see fingerprint lines. Taking into account factors such as UV rays, moisture, and dryness, I can say that it is close to being 100% impossible.

“…………..”

Just like the data on the recording, none of the cards you have are usable.

It doesn’t matter how many other cards you have in your hand.

Excuses that anyone could think of. I won’t allow you to use them.

“In the first place, if you had truly suffered like that then you should have reported me immediately.”

“Why….. why…… why…… why!?”

Kushida approaches and grabs me by the chest while glaring at me intensely.

As Kushida was becoming furious, I proceeded with the conversation in a clerical manner.

“At one point, you’d even teamed up with Ryuuen to get me and Horikita expelled. Isn’t that right?”

One after another, Kushida’s deeds were exposed to the light of day. At this point, even if I were to provide some wrong information, it wouldn’t have much of an effect.

“Why, why!?”

More power entered hand that was holding to my uniform.

“Why are you betraying me?!!!! We promised not to be hostile to each other, did we not!?”

“Of course I didn’t want to antagonize you. I wasn’t interested in the fact that you had two sides to you either. That was why I wanted it to be unanimous in opposition without me or Horikita having to name you. But as long as someone’s expulsion was at stake, I had no choice. It’s to protect our classmates.”

For the past year and a half, Kushida had been steadily building up a bond of friendship with our classmates.

But now, it all came crashing down with a roar.

With no words coming from anyone, Kushida too, began to tone down slowly.

“Ah-….. ah….. it’s no use anymore. I’ve had enough.”

Kushida’s face twisted in disgust at her own disgraceful behavior, as if she had realized everything and given up.

But even so, she quickly regained her composure, killed her smile and released her hand from my chest.

“Haa…….───So I was an idiot, huh? That deal was a mistake…… wasn’t it?”

Her angry demeanor disappeared at once and indifferent words came out from Kushida’s lips.

“I thought I knew that Ayanokouji-kun was a formidable opponent, but I still didn’t think you would betray me here. It’s unexpected, truly unexpected.”

“It’s a lie, right? Kikyou-chan?….What Ayanokoji-kun has just said….. it’s all a lie, isn’t it?”

“Lies? I’m sorry, but it’s all true.”

“No way…. why……?”

“There are some things that must be protected at all costs. Don’t you understand? Just kidding, of course you wouldn’t. Aーah, it’s all over.”

She shrugged her shoulders, unconcerned with her own plight.

“Yes. I couldn’t stand the presence of Horikita-san and Ayanokouji-kun. I just couldn’t forgive the two of them for knowing my secret that should be hidden. I’ve been trying to get the chance to expel them for a long time now.”

“I was certainly surprised by the contents of our last motion, but even so, you knew it wouldn’t be easy to corner me, didn’t you? You knew what would happen if you forced this.”

Even if she had hated us, she had more than enough time than needed to stop. Even so, Kushida continued to vote in support of the motion, and repeatedly acted in a manner that could be described as half-crazy. This was something that I’ve felt was unlike Kushida during this special examination. At that moment, Kushida’s eyes swam as she looked upset for a split moment, but that color soon disappeared. Before the special examination began, Kushida had asked Horikita to be the leader of this special exam. It seemed as if she was expecting this kind of task to come up…….

“It’s not as if……. I couldn’t stand the situation of letting my past be known. I knew it would be extremely difficult to get Horikita-san expelled, but I just couldn’t resist the urge.”

The ones who were protecting her since earlier on were at a loss for words. Even if it was true that she had been planning to expel Horikita, her friends wouldn’t be blamed as they wouldn’t have known.

Of course, she had done a serious crime, making our class choose the route of expulsion by continuing to vote in agreement. But even so, it would be difficult for me to say that we’ve successfully taken the votes to be unanimously in agreement of Kushida’s expulsion. In order to make sure that she would be expelled, I needed her to do more and more damage to this class.

“You couldn’t get either me or Horikita expelled. It’s truly a shame.”

“I will be expelled in the next vote. This class will be able to obtain class points because of my sacrifice. Good for you guys, I guess you can move up to B class now.”

It would certainly be hard for them to believe that she was saying this to the group of people she’d been getting along with until just this afternoon.

“You have no ways to turn things around.”

“Ahaha, that certainly may be the case. But…….”

Kushida brings her face closer to my neck and whispers coldly.

“I could at least show a little resistance, can I not?’

Even at a whisper, it was more than enough for the class to pick it up. Without my need to stir things up, it’s safe to say that Kushida had been preparing to do this inwardly.

“That would be impossible. You don’t have anyone left that would vote against your expulsion.”

“That’s not what I meant. If I’m going to be expelled anyway……I might as well destroy everything.”

Her true nature that had led to the collapse of her class in middle school began to show it’s face.

“…….I wonder what on earth is it that you’re on about?”

“Don’t you get it? I’m the only one who has all the secrets of this class. There’s still some time before the end of the interval, so I’ll let you all hear all about it.”

“There wouldn’t be any merit for you, even if you were to do so…….. am I wrong?”

“There would be nothing for me to lose either. Though, Ayanokouji-kun could get troubled because of it, so I might as well get started.”

Yes, that’s it. Let out the truth and the stress you’ve been accumulating for so long.

That way, everyone will be awed with your twists and turns.

Only then does the room for sympathy disappear, and the unanimity be completed.

“Aside from Karuizawa-san earlier——Ah right, Shinohara-san, you consulted with me on many things, haven’t you?”

Satsuki Shinohara was the first target chosen by the myriad of contradictions pointed at the large number of girls.

“W-w-what!?”

“It’s not like Shinohara-san is particularly cute or pretty, she’s more on the ugly side, isn’t she? Maybe that’s why only ugly guys like Ike-kun or Komiya-kun would come onto her, it’s really funny.

It was so funny that Karuizawa-san, Matsushita-san, Mori-san and others were laughing at it right?”

A single pike instantly split into countless pieces, and one by one, names were called and targets were dispersed.

“S-stop it! I’ve never said such a thing! Stop spouting lies!”

Mori immediately denied it, but Kushida had no intention of settling the matter.

“Eeh~? You were the one who laughed at the most, saying they were the perfect couple. Don’t worry, even though I had said ‘Stop it already,~’ I was laughing inwardly and felt the same way.”

“Is that true…… Nene-chan?”

“N-no….. I-I was just, um……”

“It seems that Shinohara-san got together with Ike-kun after he confessed his love to her on the cruise, even though she was wavering to choose between him and Komiya-kun until just before that. Or were you perhaps planning to go out with Ike-kun on a trial basis and then go out with Komiya-kun later, who was actually closer to your true love?”

“O-oi, Satsuki!?”

For Kushida, there were many flammable materials lying around all over the class.

As soon as the fire starts in one place and begins to spread, she quickly skips to another new material.

“Speaking of romantic relationships, Wang-san came to me for advice, didn’t she?”

“P-please stop it!”

“Stop it? By that, do you mean that I should stop talking about Hirata-kun, whom Wang-san likes so much?”

Suddenly in our classroom, Mii-chan’s love interest had been exposed to everyone.

In an instant, her face turns red and she begins to cry on the spot when she saw Yousuke staring at her.

“‘Stop it already?’ I’m just only getting started, though? These aren’t the only secrets I’ve been told. Should I try something a little more serious next? Let’s see…For starters, let’s start with Hasebe-san.”

“……Kyou-chan…….”

“Ah, stop calling my name like that. You can’t even make friends, and you call people by their nicknames just so you can feel like you’re getting closer to them. It’s probably annoying to the person themselves being called that.”

While Kushida shifted her focus to Haruka, Shinohara, Mori and the other girls, along with Ike, continued to press each other about the truth, about what was said and not said.

The interval time was almost over, and the unanimous decision to expel Kushida was drawing closer.

If this drags out for too long, Kushida will only continue revealing more information.