“Wow, it’s bigger than I thought it’d be . ”

Horikita and I met after school to go to the gymnasium .

Almost everyone there were first years; around 100 people were waiting nearby .

Waiting around the back, we were waiting for the club fair to start .

As we entered the gym, pamphlets with details about club activities were passed out .

“I wonder if this school has a particularly famous club . For example… something like a karate club?”

“A lot of clubs here seem to be high-leveled . There are a lot of members in a lot of clubs that are nationally known . ”

Even though this school isn’t particularly known for their sports like baseball or volleyball, it isn’t like the club activities are at the “hobbyist” level .

“The facilities are also high quality . Look, they even have oxygen capsules . All the equipment put pro’s equipment to shame . Ah, but it looks like they don’t have a karate club . ”

“… I see . ”

“Why, are you interested in karate?”

“No, not particularly . ”

“But you know, it looks like an inexperienced person will have a hard time joining a sports club . Even if someone made their high school debut, they would be a substitute for an eternity . I don’t think it would be fun . ”

Everything around here seems too orderly and tidy .

“Isn’t that dependent on the effort they put in? After 1 to 2 years of training, anyone can become good . ”

Training… I don’t think I would be able to put in much effort .

“I didn’t think that the word ‘training’ existed for people who avoid trouble like you . ”

“What does avoiding trouble have to do anything with this?”

“Doesn’t someone who avoids trouble also avoid any sort of manual labor? If you’ve declared that you avoid trouble, you should stick to your word until the very end . ”

“I don’t take it that far…”

“If you’re always noncommittal like that, you’re never going to make friends . ”

“Your words wound my heart . ”

“Thank you for waiting, first year students . A representative from each club will explain their activities and how to join . I am Tachibana, the secretary of the student council and the chairman responsible for this club fair . Nice to meet you . ”

After the greeting from Tachibana, the club representatives lined up on the stage of the gym .

There were various representatives, ranging from those wearing judo uniforms to beautiful kimonos .

“Hey, if you ever change your mind, try joining a sports club . Doesn’t that judo club look good? That senpai looks nice and encouraging . ”

“What part of him looks nice and encouraging? That gorilla looks like he could kill someone at any time . ”

“He’d probably preach to you that judo is an easy sport . ”

“Just stop!”

I thought that the conversation was really going somewhere, but she was just being rude again .

“Even if that was the case, the sports clubs clearly don’t welcome any beginners, looking at how they’re showing off . ”

“They should be welcomed . The more the people they get, the more money the school gives them and so they’d be able to get more equipment . ”

“That’s just using new members as a way to get money…”

“It’d be ideal to recruit a lot of new members, increase the budget, then get them to become ghost members . You need to be able to skillfully manipulate the rules in the world . ”

“What a bad world… Your way of thinking is certainly strange . ”

“My name is Hashigaki, and I’m the captain of the archery club . I think there are a lot of students who find it old-fashioned and simple, but it is a really fun and fulfilling sport . We give all new students a warm welcome, so if you’re interested, please join . ”

A girl wearing archery clothes started her introduction on the stage .

“Look, they seem to welcome beginners . How about you try joining? To make their budget bigger . ”

“Joining a club for that reason is a definite no! Also, a sports club is a meeting place for riajuus . Without knowing anyone, it wouldn’t be fun at all and I’d probably leave in an instant . ”

“Isn’t that way of thinking a result of your twisted personality?”

“Yup, absolutely . A sports club is definitely impossible . ”

I wouldn’t even want to do a part-time job that is completely lax and requires little effort .

Furthermore, I would probably only join a club if it was easy to join, calm, and quiet .

“Tsu… !”

As the club representatives introduced their clubs one by one, Horikita suddenly tensed up . She was looking towards the stage, her face pale .

“What’s wrong?”

In her tensed state, she looks as if she didn’t hear me .

I also looked towards the stage, but I didn’t see anything in particular .

The baseball club representative was giving his introduction while wearing a uniform .

Did she fall in love at first sight with him? Doesn’t seem like it .

Surprise? Disgust? Or maybe joy? To be honest, her expression is complex, making it hard to read her face .

“Horikita . What’s wrong?”

“…”

Can she really not hear me? She just stared at the stage .

I’ll stop talking and wait for an explanation .

The baseball club didn’t seem particularly more interesting than the others .

No matter how well they welcome beginners, or how appealing their meeting location and times are, it’s just another normal introduction . It wasn’t just the baseball club, all the clubs seemed ordinary . If I learned anything interesting from these explanations, it was that minor clubs like tea ceremony and calligraphy clubs existed, and that the minimum number of people needed for a new club is 3 .

Every time a new club starts their explanation, the first-years chat amongst their friends about the previous club .

The gym had a lively atmosphere to it . The club representatives, and not to mention the supervising teacher, continued their explanations with displeased looks . They must be frantic to get as many new members as possible .

As the senpais finished their explanations, they got off the stage and walked over to some tables . They’re probably setting up a reception area so they can talk to people one-on-one and sign them up .

Eventually, all the people on stage walked off until one person was left . Everyone’s gaze was centered on the stage . I realized that Horikita had been staring at that one person the whole time .

The student standing in front of the microphone looked over the first-years with a calm look .

What kind of club is he from, and what explanation will he give? My interest has been piqued . (T/N The person’s gender isn’t yet revealed, but I just used “he” to avoid saying “person” or “student” over and over again . )

However, my interest vanished the next second . He was completely silent .

Maybe his mind went blank . Maybe he felt nervous and his voice didn’t come out .

“Do your best~”

“Did you forget to bring your notecards~?”

“Ahahaha!”

The first years threw those words at the person . However, the senpai on stage didn’t waver at all . Neither the laughter nor the encouragement seemed to reach him .

Even when the laughter started dying down, his apathetic face didn’t change .

The students started wondering “What is this senpai doing?” and the gym got noisy .

Even then, the boy didn’t stir . He just stood there quietly, looking at the first-years . (T/N gender is revealed here)

Horikita also stared at the boy with an intense gaze .

The relaxed atmosphere gradually shifted in an unexpected direction . It was an electrifying change in mood .

Eventually, the whole gym was enveloped in a tense and quiet atmosphere .

There were no instructions given out, no one dared to talk—it was a dreadful silence .

No one could open their mouths to talk . This silence has been going on for 30 seconds already…

The student on stage started talking .

“My name is Horikita Manabu, and I am the student council president .

Horikita? I looked at Horikita next to me . I wonder if they’re related…

“The student council is also looking for first-years to replace the graduating third-years . There are no strict requirements to apply for the position, but those who are interested should not be affiliated with any other clubs . Generally, we do not accept any candidate involved in other clubs . ”

His tone was soft, but the mood was still tense . He alone silenced the whole gym .

Of course, it wasn’t his position as the student council president that gave him that power . Horikita Manabu also carried a powerful aura . His presence dominated the whole gym .

“Also, we, the student council, are not looking for anyone that has a naive way of thinking . Not only will that kind of person fail to get elected, they will inevitably become a stain to this school . The student council is only responsible for regulating the students, but the school expects much more . Those of you that understand can become potential candidates . ”

After that unwavering speech, he walked off the stage and exited the building .

Because no one dared to speak, none of the students spoke up when he left the gym . The students didn’t know what would happen if they tried to talk . Everyone felt that way .

“Everyone, thank you for coming . With that, the club fair is over . We will now open the reception area for anyone interested in joining . The reception area will only be open until the end of April, so anyone interested after then can bring applications directly to the club . ”

With the help of the chairman, the tense atmosphere slowly disappeared .

Afterwards, the club representatives opened the reception area .

“…”

Horikita still didn’t move at all .

“Oi, what’s wrong?”

Horikita didn’t answer . My words didn’t reach her .

“Oh, Ayanokouji-kun . You also came?”

A thoughtful voice called out . It’s Sudou . My classmates Ike and Yamauchi were with him .

“What is this, three people? Seems like you guys are getting along . ”

Feeling jealous, I called out to Sudou .

“Are you also thinking of joining a club?”

“No, I was just looking . Does that mean you were thinking of joining a club then?”

“Yea . I’ve been playing basketball since elementary school . I think I’ll continue here too . ”

I always thought he did some kind of exercise with that kind of body—guess it was basketball .

“How about you two?”

“We just came because it seemed fun and exciting . I also hoped some kind of fateful encounter would happen . ”

“The hell, what do you mean by a fateful encounter?”

I prompted Ike again after hearing that questionable goal, and he answered proudly after crossing his arms .

“My first objective is to make a girlfriend . So, I was hoping that a fateful encounter would happen here . ”

So it was that kind of thing . Having a girlfriends seems to be an essential part of Ike’s ideal school life .

“Also, that student council president has a strong aura . As if he ruled the place . ”

“Right? He was able to silence everyone . ”

“Yea, yea . Also, I made a male group chat yesterday . ” (T/N The conversation here jumps all over the place;  it’s pretty weird . )

Ike took out his phone .

“Do you want to join too? It’s pretty convenient . ”

“Eh, is that fine?”

“Of course . We’re all a part of class D after all . ”

I didn’t expect that . I’m glad to have been invited to a group chat .

A perfect chance to make friends finally came!

As I started to take out my phone to exchange numbers, I saw Horikita disappear into the crowd .

Feeling worried about her, I unintentionally stopped moving .

“What’s wrong?”

“No… it’s nothing . Let’s exchange numbers . ”

Regaining my senses, I shared my contact info with the others .

Horikita has the freedom to do whatever and go wherever she wants, and I have no right to stop her .

I felt like following her for a moment, but I decided not to .