“Hey, we’re hanging out with Kushida-chan and her friends later, you wanna go too?”

During one of the afternoon classes, I was absent-mindedly writing down notes from the blackboard when I received a text .

Oh… Is this what they call a youthful student life? This is my first time being invited somewhere after school by friends . I didn’t give any reason to refuse, but I asked who was going .

If there are a lot of people I don’t know, I probably wouldn’t go . It’d be somewhat awkward .

I quickly got a reply . Of course, Ike, Yamauchi, and Kushida were going . Then, including me, five other people . People I didn’t particularly know . If it’s that much, then I guess it’s fine . I replied, saying I would go, and another reply quickly came back .

“Kushida-chan’s mine, so don’t get in the way! – Ike-sama”

“No, no, Kushida-chan is my target, so you back off . – Yamauchi”

“Haa? You’re saying you’re also aiming for her? Are you trying to pick a fight with me? – Ike-sama”

I wish they’d got along, but rather they started fighting over Kushida .

I think hanging out after school would be fun, but now it seems like a bother .

When class ended, I left school with Ike and Yamauchi .

Because the campus is so big, I still haven’t explored much of the school grounds .

“We’re in the same class, but we couldn’t go together with Kushida…”

“She had to talk with one of her friends in another class . Kushida-chan’s a popular person, after all . ”

“Perhaps… she’s talking to a boy?”

“It’s ok, Ike, it was confirmed . She’s talking to a girl . ”

“Good, good . ”

“Are you guys seriously going for Kushida?”

“Of course . She’s honestly my heart’s desire . ”

Yamauchi must have had the same opinion, since he kept nodding his head in agreement .

“Well, you’re going for Horikita, right? She’s beautiful, I’ll give you that . ”

“No, there’s nothing happening there . Seriously . ”

“Really? During class, didn’t you guys glance at each other and casually hold hands? That kind of bittersweet, irritating event?”

As Ike pressed me for answers, I saw Kushida running over .

“Sorry for being late . Thanks for waiting!”

“Oh, we were waiting Kushida-chan! Wait, why is Hirata here!?”

Ike, who was excitedly jumping up and down, suddenly took a step back and exaggeratedly fell down . What a strange guy .

“Oh, he joined us on the way . He asked me if they could come . Is there something wrong?”

Kushida brought along Hirata, (what looks like) his girlfriend, Karuizawa, and two other girls . The two girls were Matsushita and Mori, who always hung out with Karuizawa .

“Hey, is there no method to refuse Hirata and send him back?”

Ike put his arms around my shoulder and whispered into my ear .

“I don’t think there’s any reason to send him away . ”

If that ikemen’s there too, our existences will be thin! What are you going to do in the unlucky event that Kushida-chan falls in love with Hirata? If we make the ikemen stay away from her, there’s no way the event can happen?”

“No, I wouldn’t know… Also, isn’t Hirata dating Karuizawa? Don’t worry . ”

“Just because you have a girlfriend doesn’t guarantee anything . If you compare a used, dirty, and gaudy girl like Karuizawa with the pretty angel Kushida-chan, anyone would pick Kushida-chan!”

As he kept fervently speaking, his spit got into my ear—feels disgusting . There are some disgusting words coming from his mouth too .

Certainly, Karuizawa looks gaudy, but she’s still cute .

“But Ike… you know that there’s no guarantee that a cute girl like Kushida-chan is still a virgin, right?”

Yamauchi joined our whisper conversation with an anxious voice .

“Uu, that’s… that might be true… n-no, Kushida-chan must be a virgin!”

The boys continued to do as they please as they indulged in their fantasies . I wonder if you could call this discrimination against women . If possible, I’d rather not be involved in this conversation .

“Um, if we’re intruding, we can go as a separate group . ”

Hirata said to Ike and the others in a reserved tone . He noticed our whispering .

“N-no, it’s all right! Right, Yamauchi?”

“Y-yea . Let’s hang out together . The more the better . Right?”

You two are being annoying! They couldn’t do anything, though, because if they tried to kick Hirata and his group out, Kushida may also be disappointed with them .

“Wow, that’s a pretty normal answer . Why are you three whispering stealthily by yourselves?”

Karuizawa’s words were reasonable, but I was shocked that she grouped me in with them .

“Ok, here it is . I was thinking like this . If we exclude Hirata and Karuizawa, the number of boys and girls are the same . In other words, this looks like a triple date . Ayanokouji, this is your chance too, you know?”

“Yamauchi, you’re fine with Matsushita, right? I’m going to talk with Kushida-chan . ”

“Hey, is that a joke? I’m aiming for her! We’re going to get married and give our vows under a big sakura tree! It’s fate waiting to happen!”

“Lies! I’ve thought this for a while, but all you say are lies!”

“Ha? It’s all true!”

If you believed everything that Yamauchi Haruki said, he would be a very good gamer, having been scouted internationally by pros, a national-level ping pong player in elementary school, the ace of his baseball team in middle school and unmistakably a potential future pro . What a very high-spec man .

There’s been no proof for any of his claims, though .

I didn’t know where we were going, so I stayed in the back and followed quietly .

Ike and Yamauchi were too engrossed in their fantasies, while Hirata was surrounded on both sides .

“Let me ask frankly, Hirata . Are you dating Karuizawa?”

In order to see if Hirata was his rival, Ike asked without beating around the bush .

“Eh… Where’d you hear that?”

Hirata looked surprised and confused at the same time .

“Oh, looks like the word got out . We are dating . ”

Before Hirata could even respond, Karuizawa came and hugged Hirata’s arm .

Giving up, Hirata scratched his cheek with his finger in embarrassment, admitting the truth their relationship .

“Seriously? I’m so envious that you get to date a cute girl like Karuizawa!”

Yamauchi said with fake envy in his voice . Lying without being conscious of it is surprisingly hard .

“Kushida-chan, do you have a boyfriend?”

While on that topic, Ike shifted the topic over to Kushida . Clever .

“Me? No, I’m not dating anyone . ”

Ike and Yamauchi were rejoicing in their minds, and their expressions lifted . Your delight is leaking out…

She might be keeping a secret, but for the most part Kushida was confirmed as single . I’m also a bit glad .

“Oh no, I’m crying…!”

“Don’t cry, Yamauchi! Our hope is right in front of our eyes now!”

It’s no longer an insurmountable mountain, but rather a really steep road…

Hirata, Karuizawa, Ike, and Yamauchi all walked together, surrounding Kushida . Matushita and Mori weren’t with the rest of the group .

They were walking behind them . I walked even further behind, all alone .

“Hey Ike, where are you going?”

A voice called out, asking about the destination . Ike looked back and brusquely replied .

“Since not a lot of time has passed since the entrance ceremony, we’re just checking out the facilities . ”

There’s no clear destination . In other words, this awkward feeling will probably continue for a while…

My expectations were broken in an unexpected way .

“Ne ne, Matsushita-san, Mori-san . Do you two have anything you want to see?”

While Ike and Yamauchi were happily talking to each other, Kushida fell back and talked to the two girls .

“Eh? Oh, um, I’ve always wanted to go to the movie theater at least once . ”

“Yea . Since school is over, I also want to go . ”

“Oh, that’s right! I’ve always wanted to go, but didn’t yet . Karuizawa-san, how about you guys? Anywhere you want to go?”

Kushida started to organize the three groups . As expected of her . I probably couldn’t do the same thing even if I tried . Also, she would occasionally turn around and smile at me . I didn’t see that coming .

Even though I tried to ignore her, I felt troubled because she kept looking at me . I tried to convey to her that I wasn’t trying to ignore her, but that it was how my personality and way of thinking was . If Kushida couldn’t read the atmosphere, and she just liked being in the center of things, she wouldn’t be able to receive my message .

However, there are also the type of people that go “What, can’t you read the atmosphere?” after you refuse their invitation to sing at a karaoke even though you only went without ever intending to sing .

After all, egotistic people who think that singing is fun = everyone should like singing are stupid . They can’t understand that there are people who simply don’t like to sing .

While I was lost in my bitter internal monologue, the surroundings got loud and busy .

Somehow, we were next to a clothes shop… we seem to have arrived at a stylish boutique .

Everyone seems to have been here already once or twice, so I also went in without hesitation . I only went outside during the weekdays for school and stayed in my dorm for the weekend, so I never had the need to buy any casual clothes .

There were a lot of students inside, though only a few of them were upperclassmen and the rest were first-years . Maybe it’s because it’s my first time, but I felt inexperienced and out of place inside .

After checking out a few clothes, the group walked to the nearby cafe .

Hirata was holding Karuizawa’s purchases from the store . The clothes were about 30,000 points .

“Are you guys familiar with the school yet?”

“At first I was really confused, but I’m used to it now . This is the school of my dreams, I never want to graduate~”

“Ahaha, it looks like Ike-kun is thoroughly enjoying his school life, huh . ”

“I wish we would get more points . About 200,000… 300,000 points? After buying clothes and cosmetics, my points run out quickly . ”

“Wouldn’t it be strange for a high school student to get 300,000 points a month for their allowance?”

“If you say it like that, then 100,000 sounds reasonable . I’m a bit scared . If my school life continues like this, I’m worried about how I would live after graduating . ”

“Are you talking about losing your sense of money? That really does sound scary . ”

The students all seem to have different opinions about our 100,000 point allowance . Karuizawa and Ike want more points, while Hirata and Kushida are scared of their life after their luxurious school experience ends .

“How about you, Ayanokouji-kun? Do you think 100,000 is too much? Too little?”

Although I was only listening at first, Kushida included me in the conversation by asking a question .

“Hmm… I don’t think I really have a good grasp of it yet . I don’t really know . ”

“What kind of answer is that?”

“You know, I can understand what Ayanokouji-kun’s saying . This is far from a normal student’s school life . It’s impossible for me to know without a good point of comparison . ”

“Well, it’s useless to be concerned over it . It’s seriously a good thing that I got in . I can buy whatever I want . Even yesterday, I just bought myself some new clothes . ”

Ike’s living a positive life, never looking back even once .

“Oh right, Kushida-chan, Hirata, Ike, and Karuizawa all got in, right? How’d you get in? Aren’t you guys pretty stupid?”

“Yamauchi, you don’t look smart either . ”

“Ha? I got 900 points on the APEC before . ”

“What’s APEC?”

“You don’t even know what that is? It’s a really difficult English test . ”

“Uh, isn’t that TOEIC, not APEC?”

Kushida inserted a small tsukkomi . By the way, APEC is the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation .

“T-they’re related things . ”

I don’t think they’re related at all…

“Well, this school’s goal is to nurture the youth with potential, so they probably don’t pick people solely on test scores . Honestly, if they only judged by scores, I wouldn’t have applied . ”

“That, that . The ‘youth with potential’ part . Those words describe us exactly . ”

Ike crossed his arms and nodded his head .

Despite being the preeminent school in Japan with a great employment rate, their admissions aren’t based only on test scores .

But how on earth does the school see potential in these people?

The question suddenly popped into my head .