Horikita was sullen in the morning . It would be great if she cutely puffed up her cheeks and cutely hit a boy’s chest when she pouted .

I say that, but she’s completely expressionless and silent . She doesn’t even acknowledge my existence .

But if I turned my back to her, she might take out her compass… School ended and then it was after school .

“Did everyone gather for the study group?”

The first words she said to me were about the study group . She also spoke in a way that heavily implied something .

“… Kushida will bring them . I wonder if they’ll participate . ”

“Kushida’s bringing them, huh . Did you tell her properly that she’s not allowed to participate?”

Horikita headed to the library with those confident words . As I was about to walk out of the classroom, I looked at Kushida, who returned a cute wink .

Securing a corner of a long table near the edge of the library, we waited for the students .

“I brought them~!”

Kushida came to where we were waiting . Behind her was—

“We heard about the study group from Kushida-chan . I don’t want to drop out that quickly after school . Please take care of us . ”

Ike, Yamauchi, and Sudou . However, there was one unexpected visitor . A boy named Okitani .

“Okitani, you also got a red mark?

“Ah, uh, no . I was worried because I was right on the border… am I… not allowed to join? It’s a bit difficult to join Hirata-kun’s group…”

Okitani looked up at me with slightly red cheeks . Slender frame, blue hair, and a short-bob hairstyle . A boy weak to girls would immediately shout “I’m in love~!” If he wasn’t a boy, it would be dangerous .

“It’s fine if Okitani-kun joins, right?”

Kushida asked Horikita . His score was a 39 after all, so it’s natural for him to be worried .

“If it’s a student worried about getting red marks, then it’s fine . But you have to be diligent . ”

“O-ok . ”

Okitani sat down happily . Kushida tried to sit down next to him, but Horikita noticed .

“Kushida-san . Did Ayanokouji-kun not tell you? You’re—”

“To be honest, I’m also worried about getting bad grades . ”

“You… you didn’t get bad tests on that last test . ”

“Well, that was luck . There were a lot of multiple choice questions . So for about half of them, I guessed . In truth, I barely passed . ”

Kushida cutely scratched her cheek while saying “Ehehe” .

“I think I’m about the same level as Okitani-kun, if not worse . So I want to participate in the study group to avoid a bad grade . That’s fine, right?”

I couldn’t hide my surprise at Kushida’s bold and unexpected plan . After confirming that Okitani could join, she turned the tables . Horikita couldn’t help but to let her join .

“… Fine . ”

“Thanks!”

Kushida bowed to Horikita with a smile . Bringing Okitani was probably a part of her plan too . She used him as justification for her to join .

“Below 32 is a red mark . Then is 32 points also a failing grade?”

“If it’s ‘below’, then 32 points is safe . Sudou, can you even make that?”

Even Ike is worried about Sudou . Of course these guys would like to know if it’s “below” or “up to” .

“It doesn’t matter either way . My goal is to make everyone here get at least 50 points . ”

“Geh, isn’t that too hard for us?”

“It’s dangerous to just aim for the bare minimum . You guys, who aren’t even at the mark, are really troubling . ”

At Horikita’s sound argument, the group of failures reluctantly agreed .

“I was able to summarize most of the topics that will be covered on this test . I plan to thoroughly cover these topics in the next two weeks . If you have any questions that you don’t know, ask me . ”

“… Hey, I don’t even understand the first problem . ”

Sudou scowled at Horikita . I also read the question .

“A, B, and C have 2150 yen collectively . A has 120 yen more than B does . After C gives B 2/5ths of his money, B now has 220 yen more than A . How much money did A originally have?”

A problem involving system of equations . For a high school student, it should be a free point .

“Try using your brain . If you give up from the very beginning, you won’t get anywhere . ”

“Even if you say that… I don’t even know how to study . ”

“Everyone else in the school passed . ”

The school doesn’t decide on admissions solely based on scores . Sudou was probably accepted because of his high physical ability . If you think about it, wouldn’t he get kicked out immediately because of his bad grades?

“Ugh, I don’t know either…”

Ike was also puzzled as he scratched his head .

“Okitani-kun, do you know how to do this question?”

“Um… A+B+C equals 2150 yen, and A equals B+120…”

Okitani, who somehow avoided failing the last test, started writing down the equations .

Kushida was looking over his shoulder .

“Un un, that’s right, that’s right . And then?”

Kushida is certainly bold . Even though she said she was worried about getting a failing mark, she was teaching Okitani .

“Honestly speaking, this problem can be easily solved by first-year and second-year middle school students . If you fail here, you won’t be able to do anything .

“Are we elementary school students then…?”

“As Horikita-san said, it’s pretty bad if you can’t solve these problems . The first few math problems on the test were about this hard, but even I didn’t know how to do the last problem . ”

“I can teach you how to do systems of equations if you want . ”

Horikita picked up her pen without hesitating . It’s pitiful, but the only ones who understood how to do the problem were Kushida and Okitani .

“In the first place, what even is this ‘system of equations’ thing…?”

“… Are you serious?”

Wow, these guys really live without studying at all . Sudou threw his mechanical pencil at his desk .

“No, stop . This isn’t going to work . ”

Before even starting, Sudou already gave up .

Looking at his pitiful state, Horikita was fuming .

“E-everyone, wait . Let’s try our best . If you learn how to solve these problems, you can apply your knowledge to the questions on the test . Ok?”

“… Well, if Kushida-chan says so, we’ll try our best, but… If Kushida-chan taught it to us, I would probably work even harder . ”

“U-um…”

Horikita stayed silent when Kushida was about to ask her . It was troubling that she didn’t say anything . However, if she stayed silent, the others might give up on studying . Kushida made up her mind and picked up the mechanical pencil .

“This is, as Horikita-san said, a problem that uses systems of equations . I’ll write down what I said as expressions . ”

As she said that, she wrote down the three equations . It looks like they’re trying their best, but even if she wrote down the equations and showed it to the them, they probably don’t understand . Rather than a study group, this is more like detention . They don’t get her explanation .

“So, the answer is 710 yen . Do you get it?”

Feeling satisfied, Kushida smiled and looked at Sudou .

“… Uh, then can you answer this question? Why?”

“Uu…”

She finally realized . They didn’t follow her explanation .

“I’m not trying to deny you, but you guys are way too stupid and incompetent . ”

The silent Horikita spoke up .

“I’m scared for the future if you can’t solve this problem . ”

“So what . This has nothing to do with you . ”

Feeling irritated at Horikita’s words, Sudou hit the desk .

“It has nothing to do with me . No matter how much you suffer, it doesn’t affect me . It’s just that I feel pity for you . I guess I’ve been running away from painful things all my life . ”

“Say what you want to say clearly . Studying’s useless in the future anyway . ”

“Studying is useless in the future? An interesting argument . What makes you say that?”

“Even if I don’t know how to solve this kind of problem, I won’t have any trouble . Studying is unnecessary . Rather than sticking to a textbook, aiming to become a basketball pro is much more useful for the future . ”

“That’s wrong . If you learn how to solve that problem, your whole life will be changed . In other words, if you study, you’ll have less trouble . It’s the same thing for basketball . I wonder if you’ve been playing basketball to your own convenient rules . Do you run away from difficult things just like you do while studying? From the looks of it, it doesn’t seem like you practice seriously . That’s the kind of personality you have . If I was the advisor of the club, I wouldn’t let you be a regular . ”

“Tsu!”

Sudou stood up and grabbed Horikita by her collar .

“Sudou-kun!”

Even faster than I could react, Kushida stood up and grabbed Sudou’s arm .

Horikita raised her eyebrows and stayed calm .

“I have no interest in you, but I can understand what kind of person you are . You want to become a basketball pro? Do you think that kind of childish wish can simply become true in this society? A half-hearted person like you who gives up easily can never become a pro . Furthermore, even if you become a pro, I don’t think you’d be able to get a sufficient annual income . You’re a fool for setting your sights on such a idealized job . ”

“You…!”

It’s clear that Sudou is on the brink of losing his control . If he raised his fist, I’ll also have to jump out and hold him back .

“Can you just give up on studying, no, school? And then you can give up on your dreams to become a basketball pro and live a pitiful life working a part time job . ”

“Ha… that’s just fine . I’m giving up . It’s not because it’s too difficult for me . I took a day off from my club activities, but it was a complete waste of time . Bye!”

“You’re saying some strange things . Studying is difficult . ”

Horikita shot him a final blow . If Kushida weren’t there, Sudou probably would’ve hit Horikita . Not hiding his irritation, he stuffed his textbook into his bag .

“Hey, is this ok?”

“Doesn’t matter . For someone who’s indifferent… it’s pointless to care about someone like that . Even though expulsion is at stake . He doesn’t have an ounce of determination to stay in school . ”

“I thought it was strange for someone like you who has no friends to invite people to a study group . At best, you brought us over here to call us stupid . If you weren’t a girl, I’d hit you . ”

“You just don’t have the courage to hit me, right? Don’t use my gender as a reason . ”

The study group started moments ago, but it was already crumbling .

“I also quit . Even though a small part of it is because I can’t study… most of it’s because I’m irritated .  Horikita-san may be smart, but that doesn’t mean you’re above us . ”

Losing his patience, Ike also gave up .

“I don’t care whether or not you drop out of school, so do as you like . ”

“Well, I’ll pull an all-nighter for that . ”

“Interesting . Aren’t you here because you can’t study?”

“Tsu…”

Even for the usually upbeat Ike, Horikita’s thorny words made him stiffen . And then Yamauchi also started packing up . Finally, the worried Okitani also stood up, unable to go against the flow .

“E-everyone… Is this really ok?”

“Let’s go, Okitani . ”

Ike left the library with the hesitant Okitani .

The only ones remaining were me and Kushida . Even Kushida would probably leave soon .

“… Horikita-san, why didn’t you stop anyone from leaving…?”

“I was mistaken . Even if I got these guys to barely pass, this situation would repeat . And then they’d give up again . I finally realized that this was a waste of time and effort .

“What do you mean by that…?”

“I’m saying that it’s good to throw away all unnecessary trash now . ”

If the students with low grades weren’t here, then there would be no labor needed to teach them, and the average would also increase . She came to that conclusion .

“So that was it… H-hey, Ayanokouji-kun . Do you also think the same way?”

“If Horikita concluded that, then isn’t it fine?”

“A-ayanokouji-kun, do you think that?’

“Well, I don’t want them to quit, but since I’m not the one teaching them, I can’t do anything about it . In the end, I have a similar opinion to Horikita . ”

“… I see . ”

With a dark expression, Kushida got her bag and stood up .

“I’m going to do something about this . I don’t want everyone to separate so quickly . ”

“Kushida-san . Are those your true intentions?”

“… Is that bad? I can’t just abandon Sudou-kun, Ike-kun, and Yamauchi-kun . ”

“It doesn’t matter whether or not you say those are your true intentions . I don’t think that you truly want to help them . ”

“What are you talking about? I don’t know what you mean . Why do you make enemies with your cold words without hesitation? That’s… That’s sad . ”

Kushida hung her head .

“… See you two tomorrow . ”

After those short words, Kushida also left . In a flash, we were back to the two of us . The library was completely silent .

“That was troubling . With that, the study group is over . ”

“Looks that way . ”

The library’s silence felt ominous .

“Only you understood me . I guess you’re a bit better than those worthless fools . If you need me to teach you something right now, I can do it . ”

“I’ll decline . ”

“Are you returning home?”

“Sudou and the others are heading there . I’ll go chat with them . ”

“There’s no worth in talking to people who will drop out soon like them . ”

“I’m just simply trying to talk to my friends . ”

“How selfish . Calling them friends while you sit back and watch them get kicked out . From my point of view, that looks like the most cruel thing you can do . ”

Well, I can’t deny that . She didn’t say anything wrong .

In the end, studying is all about how well someone can motivate themselves .

“I’m not going to say you’re wrong . I also understand why you’d call someone who doesn’t like to study like Sudou stupid . But Horikita, isn’t it also important to imagine Sudou’s circumstances? If he was only aiming to become a basketball pro, then there’s not much for him at this school . Don’t you want to see why he chose this school?”

“… Not interested . ”

Brushing away my words, Horikita continued to look down at her textbook .