The fragrance of the first tea of the season is now in the air, I hope all of you are doing well .

A month and a half since the start of school . I spent every day carefree .

“Excuse me, can you hear me? Is your head ok?”

She hit my forehead with her palm, and I rubbed it in pain .

“You don’t have a fever, huh . ”

“I don’t! I was just lost in thought . ”

I remembered how we reached this situation, and I involuntarily sighed . Maybe I shouldn’t have agreed to cooperate with her .

Oh well, no use crying over spilt milk .

At the time, I agreed to help to cheer her up, but thinking back on it, it’s really not like me to accept .

“So, Mr . Strategist . What should I do?”

“Well… of course, we need to persuade Sudou-kun and the others to participate in the study group again . To do that, you’ll have to grovel at your feet, begging them to join . ”

“Why do I have to do that… In the first place, you’re the reason there was a fight . ”

“The true reason is that they didn’t want to study . Don’t mistake that . ”

This girl… Does she even want to help them?

“It’s impossible to gather them again without Kushida’s help . You know that too, right?”

“… I know . I guess we’ll have to make some sacrifices . ”

Looks like she doesn’t want to be involved with Kushida in any way possible . Even though she wasn’t happy about it, she agreed since it was an emergency .

This is the best compromise possible for someone like Horikita who doesn’t want her close .

“Alright, go and quickly get her to work with us . ”

“Me?”

“Of course . You formed a contract with me .  Since you agreed to be my workhorse until we reach class A, you have to comply . ”

I don’t remember making that kind of contract .

“Here, look at this written contract . ”

Wow . It had my name and even my seal .

“You’ll be charged for document forgery, you know . ”

Giving up, I walked away from her . Horikita tidied up her desk and faced Kushida .

“Kushida-san . I want to talk to you . If possible, do you want to eat lunch together?”

“Lunch? It’s strange to be invited by Horikita-san, but sure . ”

Even though I was nearby, Kushida didn’t waver at all . She quickly agreed . Kushida then walked towards the school’s most popular Cafe Pallet .

It’s the place where Horikita got mad at us because we made up a lie and called her out .

Horikita paid for Kushida’s drink . Of course, I paid for my own .

Taking the drink with a smile, Kushida sat down in a seat . We also sat down in front of her .

“Thanks . What did you have to talk about?”

“I’m making a study group to help Sudou-kun . Can you help us one more time?”

“Who are you doing this for? Is it for Sudou-kun’s sake?”

Kushida also recognized that her request wasn’t purely altruistic .

“No, this is for me . ”

“Is that so . Horikita-san, like usual, acts for yourself, huh . ”

“Will you not help people who don’t act for their friends?”

“I think you’re free to think however you want . However, I wanted make sure that you wouldn’t lie, so I’m happy that you answered honestly . Ok, I’ll help you out . After all, we’re classmates, right? Ayanokouji-kun . ”

“Y-yea . Please help us . ”

“I want to ask you directly, though . It’s not for your friends, not for the points, but rather, you want me to help so that we can reach class A, right?”

“Yes . ”

“That’s, that’s unbelievable… isn’t it impossible? Oh, I’m not trying to call you stupid . But how should I say it… more than half the class has already given up, you know?”

“Is it because the difference between our class and class A is too big?”

“Yea… Honestly, I don’t know if we can catch up . I don’t even know if we can get any points next month .  I feel disheartened . ”

Horikita hit the table with a clang .

“I’ll absolutely do it . ”

“Ayanokouji-kun, are you also aiming for class A?”

“Yes . He is my assistant in reaching class A . ”

You made me an assistant without my consent…

“Hmm… ok . Let me help . ”

“Of course, that’s why we’re asking in the first place . ”

“Not that, I want to join you guys in aiming for class A . Not just the study group, but I want to help with everything else you’ll be doing from now on . ”

“E-eh? But…”

“Then do you not want me to help?”

Kushida looked at Horikita with widened eyes .

“Fine . I’ll formally ask for your help again if this study group goes well . ”

That was her reply . Even though Kushida probably had something in mind, Horikita decided to let it go for some reason and let her join .

After receiving an affirmative reply from the usually stubborn Horikita, Kushida jumped up in excitement .

“Really!? Yay!”

Looking truly happy, she cheered in delight . This appearance of hers is also cute .

“Best regards again, Horikita-san! Ayanokouji-kun!”

She extended her left and right arms towards the two of us .

Feeling a bit confused, both Horikita and I shook her hand .

“However, I don’t know if Sudou-kun and his friends with agree to join again . ”

“Yea . In the current situation, it certainly looks difficult . ”

“Well then, can you leave it to me once again?” I can do at least this much after joining you guys . Ok?”

I felt overwhelmed at the pace Horikita and Kushida were moving at .

As if she was about to leap into action immediately, she took out her phone . Soon after, Ike and Yamauchi came over with ecstatic expressions . As soon as they saw me and Horikita, they looked at me as if they were saying, “You really told her about the chat!?” . Well, it’s convenient, so I’ll just stay silent . Their feelings of guilt will probably be effective in getting them to agree .

“Sorry for calling you two out . I have, or rather, Horikita has something to ask of you two . ”

“W-w-what, what is it? What do you have to do with us?”

What an overreaction… They backed away in nervousness .

“Do you two have any plans to join Hirata-kun’s study group?”

“Eh? S-study group? No, we didn’t want to join because he’s too popular…  We’re going to cram the day before the test . It’s worked since middle school . ”

To Ike’s words, Yamauchi nodded two, three times . They seem to have somehow managed by cramming last-minute for the past few years .

“That kind of thinking suits you two . However, the probability of getting kicked out of school is pretty high right now . ”

“You’re the same as ever, whatever that means . ”

Sudou appeared while scowling at Horikita . Looks like Sudou was also caught in Kushida’s trap .

“The one who should be the most worried is you, Sudou-kun . You look like you have absolutely no worries about dropping at of school . ”

“You already knew that . If you’re not careful, I’ll beat you up . I’m busy with basketball right now . It’ll be good enough to study right before the test . ”

“C-calm down, Sudou . ”

Ike tried to calm down Sudou, as if he didn’t know what he said in the chat .

“Hey, Sudou-kun . Won’t you try studying one more time? You can probably barely pass the test by cramming . However, if it doesn’t work, you won’t be able to play basketball here anymore, you know?”

“That’s… but I don’t want to receive ‘charity’ from this girl . I haven’t forgotten the words you threw at me the other day . If you’re going to ask, apologize first . With sincerity . ”

Sudou declared that, showing hostility against Horikita . Personally, I think that even though he feels that it’s dangerous to not study, he was more insulted by her words about basketball .

Of course, Horikita wouldn’t apologize so easily . There’s no one that would openly brag about having been wrong with their own mouth .

“I think you are wrong, Sudou-kun . ”

“What!?”

Instead of apologizing, she only added more fuel to the fire .

“However, our antipathy for each other is only trivial in this situation . I will teach you for my sake . You will study for your sake . Is that bad?”

“Do you really want to move up to class A? To go as far as to invite me . ”

“Yes . Otherwise, who would choose to be concerned with you?”

At Horikita’s blunt words, Sudou got more mad .

“I’m busy with basketball . Even before a test, the others don’t take a break in order to study . I can’t afford to fall behind while I’m off studying . ”

Having predicted that Sudou would say such words, Horikita took out a piece of paper and showed it to him . It was a detailed schedule until the day of the test .

“At the last study session, I learned that regular method of studying didn’t work for you . None of you understand the basics of the topics . It’s like taking a frog and introducing it to the ocean . The frog doesn’t know where to start . Also, I understand that taking time away from your hobbies adds to your stress . Therefore, I thought of a plan to address that problem . ”

“What kind of sorcery is this? If there is such a plan, tell me . ”

Both studying for tests and club activities can coexist . Believing that there was no way for that to be true, Sudou laughed with his nose .

“We have two weeks from now . You will start studying every day during class as if you’d die tomorrow . ”

At first, I didn’t understand what she was saying . Everyone was confused .

“Usually, you three don’t work seriously during class, right?”

“Don’t decide that on your own . ”

Ike objected .

“Then, are you diligent during class?”

“… No, we aren’t . I do nothing until class is over . ”

“Right? In other words, you spend six hours a day just idling . Even outside of the one, two hours available after school, there is a ton of precious time being wasted . We must take good advantage of this time . ”

“Certainly… in theory that would work, but… isn’t that kind of absurd?”

Kushida’s worries are spot on . It’s because they can’t study that all the time during class is wasted .

If they can’t even stop themselves from talking during class, I don’t think they’ll be able to understand any of the problems by themselves .

“I can’t keep up with the material covered during class . ”

“I already know that . So, we’ll use all the free time we have and have a small study session . ”

Horikita then turned to the next page . It had a full description of what we would do .

In summary, it’s like this . After first period, everyone will meet up and discuss what they didn’t understand . In the ten minutes of break, Horikita will then teach what they didn’t know .

And then the whole process would repeat for the next period . Of course it’s not as simple as it sounds .

However, since they can’t keep up with the lesson, it may be difficult for them to be able to understand in that short time .

“W-wait . I’m confused . Is this possible?”

Ike also recognized that this would be a hard task .

“Yea, isn’t it unreasonable to think that you could teach us in just 10 minutes?”

“Don’t worry . During class, I’ll make sure to get all the answers to the every question . And then Ayanokouji-kun and Kushida-san will teach you guys one-on-one . ”

If it’s like that, I guess there is a chance that everyone can understand in just 10 minutes .

“You two, if it’s just explaining the answers, you can do it, right?”

“But… I still don’t think it’s possible in that amount of time . Studying is hard, so I don’t know…”

“The content covered in a single period is surprisingly small . It’s only 1 page of notes, or at most about 2 . And the material concerning the test only takes up half the page . Anyway, if the time isn’t enough, we can always use the lunch break . I’m not saying I want you to understand the material . I just want to make sure that it’s in your head . The important thing is to make sure that you pay attention to the teacher’s voice and the letters on the blackboard . Just forget about taking notes . ”

“Are you telling us not to take notes?”

“Trying to memorize the question and the answer is surprisingly difficult while taking notes . ”

Certainly, that might be true . By focusing on taking notes, valuable time is wasted .

At any rate, it looks like Horikita doesn’t want to use any after school time .

“Just try it out . You can give it a run before you refuse . ”

“… I still don’t want to do it . I want to spend my time differently than someone who studies 24/7 . Also, I don’t think I’ll be able to study with an cheap trick like that . ”

Horikita thought of the plan while considering the three of them, but Sudou still did not agree .

“It looks like you’re misunderstanding the fundamental concept here . Cheap tricks? There’s no such thing . There’s no way but to spend your time and study carefully . That’s not only for studying, but also for everything else . Or are you saying that there are cheap tricks and shortcuts for basketball?”

“Of course there’s no such thing . Only after you practice and practice do you get good . ”

Realizing what he said, Sudou inhaled sharply in surprise

“It’s absolutely impossible for people who don’t have the ability to focus . However, you would pour in all of your energy in order to get better at basketball . Even if it’s only a fraction, use some of that energy for studying . In order to continue playing basketball at this school . So that you don’t get kicked out . ”

It was a really small one, but Horikita unmistakably offered Sudou a small compromise . He hesitated .

However, his pride got in the way . No matter what, he would not agree .

“… I still won’t participate . Thank you for being more civil, but I still can’t agree . ”

Sudou tried to leave without ever having sat down, but Horikita stopped him .

If she let this chance go, there probably wouldn’t be another opportunity to form a study group . Normally, I wouldn’t have said anything, but I guess I have to pitch in and help here .

“Hey, Kushida . Do you already have a boyfriend?”

“Eh? Ehh? I don’t have one, why are you asking me out of the blue?”

“Then, if I get 50 points on the next test, will you date me?”

I stuck out my hand .

“Ha? What are you saying, Ayanokouji!? Date me! I’ll get 51 points!”

“No, no, me! Date me! I’ll get 52 points!”

Ike quickly responded . And then Yamauchi . Kushida quickly recognized what I was trying to do .

“E-embarassing… I don’t judge people by their test scores, you know?”

“But they want a reward for doing well . Look at their enthusiasm . If there’s such a reward, they’ll probably try even harder . ”

“W-well, how about this? I’ll date the person who gets the highest test score…  I like people who work hard to achieve something they might not even like . ”

“Woahhhhh! I’ll do it! I’ll do it!”

They were all breathing heavily in excitement . I called out to Sudou .

“Hey Sudou . Are you going to do it? This is your chance . ”

It’s a bit different than saying “Do you want to date Kushida?”

I have a rough understanding of Sudou’s character . In a situation like this, it’s hard to get him to participate . So, I have to find a compromise in order to get him to join .

“… A date, huh . I guess it’s not bad . Seriously, can’t help it… I’ll participate too . ”

Sudou turned and replied in a small voice . Kushida let out a sigh of relief .

“Keep in mind, boys are simpler creatures than you might think . ”

I welcomed Sudou to the group after saying so to Horikita .