



ようこそ**実力至上主義の教室へ**2年生編 衣笠彰梧 × トモセシユンサク
Welcome to the Classroom of the Second-year

Welcome to Year 2 Volume 7 of Classroom of the Elite 2nd year

Firstly, Thanks to Kinugasa-Sensei for Writing this Amazing Volume.
Also, Thanks to Tomose-Sensei for the ever amazing art.

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With that, Have Fun Reading the Volume!

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Prologue

Hasebe Haruka's Monologue

When I evaluate myself, I consider myself to be a bad person.

Everyone has done something once or twice that they were told 'You must not do.'

For example, ignoring a red light.

Even if you didn't have any malicious intent, you probably have some experience.

For example, if you receive more change at the checkout, and you do not return it.

Even if it is 1 yen or 10 yen, if the clerk mistakenly gives more, mostly no one returns it.

For instance, spitting on the roadside or littering on the street.

I know it sounds a little far-fetched, but it also qualifies as an offence/crime.

However, that experience alone does not position me as a bad person.

I...

No, it could also be insignificant from someone's perspective.

But because of my past, I decided not to make friends in school.

I wanted to distance myself from my former friends and enter a world where I was not connected to anyone.

So, when I learned about the existence of the Advanced Nurturing High School, I remember deciding that this was the place for me.

I thought it would go that way, but I found myself making friends.

Kiyo-pon, Yukimu, and Miyacchi.

And... Airi.

I have regained my youth.

That's what I thought.

But that youth was taken away from me on one unexpected day.

Who took it from me?

Surely, it's certain.

Suzune Horikita and Kiyotaka Ayanokoji.

I was a victim of the selfishness of these two people.

I can't allow it.

I can't forgive them.

That is why——

I decided to take revenge.

Chapter 1

Towards the Cultural Festival

Intro

It was Monday, November 1, the beginning of Autumn and chilly fall weather.

The months go by quickly, and in two months we will be on winter break.

Will the view I had from my new seat comes to an end in the not-too-distant future?

The fact that I feel regret for leaving is proof that the seat change was good for me. I don't know if there will be a seat change next year, but either way, the scenery will be very different from what it was before.

"Good Morning. Is everyone here?"

Chabashira-sensei entered the classroom seconds after the bell rang.

The students, who had been engaged in chit-chat, suddenly quieted down and looked and listened to her with a habituated look.

The school's unique approach, in which all class attitudes are evaluated by the entire class, has resulted in serious and disciplined behavior.

Not that anything has changed significantly compared to last week. But I can feel that it is a little better than last week.

Seeing such a situation with students who continue to grow day by day, Chabashira-sensei deeply nodded her head and opened her mouth.

"I believe preparations are steadily underway for the festival, but I have an additional point to explain. First of all, as a reminder, I will display an outline of the cultural festival again, so please check it if you need it."

The monitor behind Chabashira-sensei lit up and the explanation of the rules reappeared.

Cultural Festival Outline

- Each class in the second grade is given 5,000 private points per student that can be used only for preparation for the festival, and they are allowed to use them freely within that range.

(5500 points for first-year students and 4500 points for third-year students for the initial funds)

- Additional funds are awarded for community services, such as student council service, and contributions through club activities.

(Details will be announced for each class once confirmed.)

- Initial and additional funds are not reflected in final sales and will be forfeited if unused
 - 100 class points will be awarded to the 1st through 4th place classes

Fifth to eighth place classes will receive 50 class points

No change in class points for classes 9th through 12th

"So far, that's everything. You should be able to get this far in your mind without any difficulty."

Without any question from the students, Chabashira-sensei continues.

"I would like to announce that the details of the 'additional funds' mentioned in this overview have been finalized."

Additional Funds. The program is to increase the number of points available for the festival based on student council service, community service, and activities by clubs. The time has finally come to announce the details of this program.

The lack of a finalized budget made it impossible to determine the number of offerings, their contents, and their scale.

Despite the inconvenience, it is not a problem if all classes in all grades are in the same situation.

"First of all, It will display the total amount of additional funds given to this class, with the breakdown all at once."

As soon as Chabashira-sensei said this, operating her tablet, a spreadsheet list was displayed.

It turns out that a total of 12 people were eligible for this additional funding.

Suzune Horikita, Student Council Officer Bonus - 10000 points

Ken Sudo Club activity bonus - 10000 points

Kayano Onodera, club activity bonus - 10000 points

Although only three students were able to obtain that high amount of additional funding, Perhaps 10,000 points were the maximum, nine other students received hundreds to thousands of points in recognition of their contributions.

For example, Yosuke gets 3,000 points for the club activity bonus, and Akito gets 1,000 points.

Many names of students who seem to be active mainly in club activities were mentioned.

In total, the class obtained a total of 39,400 points of additional funds.

In terms of number of people, this corresponds to an initial point for almost six people.

These funds are essential for the working of the festival.

"I can't give you the breakdown, but the Sakayanagi A class received 18,800 points. Ryuen C class received 17,000 points, and Ichinose D class received 26,600 points in additional funds. In other words, among the second-year students, this class has the most additional funds."

Ichinose's class is 2nd, and Sakayanagi's class is 3rd, beating the Ryuen class by a small margin.

That's an unexpected result, but one factor could be the student council officer bonus. It is simply significant that both Horikita and Ichinose received 10,000 points for their presence alone.

Other reasons could be that Other students such as Sudo and Onodera are considered to be the best above the rest in their contributions to club activities throughout the entire school year.

At the school festival, private points owned by individuals cannot be used at all, so in the case of the Horikita class, The total number of initial funds of students in the Horikita class plus additional funds is 229,400 points. Even one extra point is good.

However, we should not be too proud to look at these results alone.

Although it is advantageous in the preparatory stage before the start of the project, as long as the additional funds are not reflected in the final sales, they will be a wasted treasure if they are not well utilized.

These seem to be the explanations for the additional funds, but this should not be the end of the story.

Several pieces of information needed for the festival have not been made public.

"Now. Next, I'll give you some details about the guests, which is very important for making sales."

How many and what kind of guests will come at the cultural festival?

And how much money they have has not been told so far.

"The guests are those who are involved in the operation of the school and their families. Naturally, there will be a wide range of ages, from the elderly to young children and elementary school students. It has also been decided that those who work at the Keyaki Mall and convenience stores will also be treated as guests."

The tablet screen switched to a graph, revealing the number of guests by age.

Those in their 30s and 40s accounted for the largest percentages, followed by those under 20 and those in their 50s.

"Each adult guest will receive 10,000 points. Minors will receive 5,000 points. There were 283 adults and 202 minors. The total number of participants will be 485, and the total amount of points will be 38,400,000."

The ranking of all 12 classes in all grades depends on how much sales can be made from that total.

"I should also mention that the number of participants includes us, the teachers. Homeroom teachers are bound to not be able to use points in the grade for which they are responsible, but they will be treated no differently than any other guests."

It would be essential to bind them to not use their points in the same grade. As homeroom teachers, they would normally want to drop money on their own class if they could.

"Is it possible to use more than given 10,000 points?"

In response to the question from Ike, Chabashira-sensei immediately shook her head from side to side.

It was an expected question, as usual, but she answered it without paying particular attention.

In fact, she seemed to be enjoying the unchanging Ike.

"No thanks. You cannot spend more than the given points. The maximum amount is fixed."

It means that guests do not have unlimited funds available to them. It is not a matter of preventing certain greedy guests, but it is inevitable that there will be competition and fighting for the guests.

"The key method of payment is through a dedicated cell phone application, which allows the school to track sales in real-time. Keep in mind that the app will be disabled the moment the festival ends at 4 p.m. You are free to set your own timing for the checkout, but we recommend pre-payment before you offer the product."

In some cases, particularly in the case of restaurants, payment is made after eating, which means there can be cases where it can go after 4:00 pm.

It means that you may not be able to collect points.

"Anybody with any questions at this point, raise your hand."

Time was allowed for queries, and Horikita immediately raised her hand.

"If the sales are the same, how are the classes ranked? What if, in a very extreme case, all the classes receive the same amount of 320000 points and are side by side?"

Since the total amount is nicely divisible, it is not as if the case horikita just mentioned will not happen.

Relying solely on chance, the odds of matching sales in all classes would be astronomical, but a secret agreement is not impossible. If all classes are treated as first place, everyone can equally raise class points.

I thought that some sort of countermeasure would have been considered, but...

"If the amount is the same, classes will be treated as the same rank. If all 12 classes make equal sales as Horikita says, all classes will get 100 class points as the first place."

Is this a somewhat loose rule, given that you do not lose class points even if you lose?

No. Maybe they've decided from the start that there won't be a large number of classes with the same amount of sales.

"However, the total amount of sales can only be confirmed after the exam, and any manipulation of sales by a third party is not permitted. It is impossible for classes to discuss and make a plan to combine sales before the festival, or to make an agreement to divide the sales equally after the festival. You know what this means, don't you?"

If you can't control the sales amount later, it's unlikely that all classes will be ranked number one side by side.

Above all, Classes are not likely to hold hands in a friendly manner without losing one valuable competitive opportunity.

"I don't see how it's normal to have the same amount of sales and money. I don't think you need to worry about it."

Not understanding the meaning of Horikita's question, Maezono voices her doubts.

"As Maezono-san said, if you are working normally, you don't need to worry about it. But it is not a bad thing to know if it is accepted as a rule or not."

Horikita's statement is also plausible. It is not a bad thing to know.

If it is said that the agreement does not take place at all, it is unclear at present. This is because it is possible for certain grades and classes to collude to create side-by-side sales.

There are numerous ways to accomplish this, but if the final sales amounts of all products to be manufactured ahead of time are aligned among the classes, it is quite simple to construct a scene in which sold-out = same amount.

But we also need to be prepared for betrayal, unforeseen circumstances, and trouble.

It would not be funny if we prioritized selling out above all else, and as a result, we ended up in the lower ranks in terms of sales.

The hurdles to overcome in order to intentionally create a tie are much higher than one might imagine.

"Anyone else with questions?"

No one raised a hand after that, especially regarding the festival.

"That's all I have to say about the cultural festival. Next, I would like to announce the results of the mid-term examinations for the second semester. This time, some of the students achieved results that surprised even me."

The conversation moves on to the mid-term test and the announcement of its results.

There are quite a few screaming voices from students who are not good at academics.

Depending on how you look at it, 'Surprised' could mean a 'bad' result.

However, given that Chabashira-sensei's expression is not dark and hard, that result seems unlikely.

All at once, the names of the 38 students in the class are displayed, and they are lined up in order of highest overall score.

Keisei took first place. His performance was flawless, and he received high marks in all subjects.

In second place was Horikita, just slightly behind. It was comparable to Keisei, and the difference in overall points was only 3 points.

From there, the names of the usual honors students line up, but the student whose results surprised Chabashira-sensei is surely the one who placed eleventh.

11th - Ken Sudo.

73 points in Modern Japanese,
76 points in Chemistry,
70 points in Social Studies,
78 points in Mathematics, and
70 points in English.

367 overall with well-balanced scores in all subjects.

The names above him in the rankings are honor students such as Yosuke, Kushida, Matsushita, and Wang. That is why Sudo's ranking was a surprise to everyone.

Sudo's dedication to studying and working hard was well-known, but it was an unexpected turn of events that Sudo, who also devotes himself to club activities till late every day, would come out on top.

"Seriously, Ken is in 11th place, that's amazing..."

The honest, or rather stunned, response comes from Ike, who was almost side by side, or even on top at the start of school in the rankings.

A leap beyond imagination. The difficulty level of this test was moderate, and the difference in the total score from Sudo to the 20th place below is only about 15 points, but still, this result must have astonished many.

I expected him to run around with joy, but he only made a small gut-punch and did not seem to be bragging or making fun of others for having passed them.

Confirming the latest updated OAA by operating the cell phone.

Ken Sudo

Academic ability C+,
Physical ability A+,
resourceful thinking C-,
social contribution D-.

Outstanding physical ability while maintaining a level close to the average as a whole. Moreover, if he maintains his test scores, he can see himself in the vicinity of a B in academic performance in the near future.

If he continues to refine his studies, it is likely that he will be able to achieve A or above in both academic and physical abilities. It seems that the efforts made over the past year are bearing fruit in more ways than one can imagine.

Due to the decrease in problem behaviors in private life, the lowest level of social contribution has risen to D-. He is also above the rest and best in the OAA growth rate.

By the way, my ranking is 14th. I'm in 14th place, which is lower than Sudo.

I got a perfect score in mathematics, but I save it for the rest of the subjects.

To say that this is me cutting corners would be an understatement, because in reality there is another aim.

Showing up with an all perfect score on the mid-term test in the second semester will only cause unnecessary confusion.

It is many times more important to make students like Sudo feel that they must grow and help the class, rather than reassure them that there are students who can achieve high scores.

In fact, Sudo's 11th-place result has generated a wide range of emotions among his classmates.

It's also something that almost all of them can only positively affect from.

While some of the names are in the top ranks, others inevitably sink to the bottom.

These students are, for lack of a better word, regulars, yet when compared to the average scores of the other classes, it is evident that their performance has become better over time.

More and more students are attempting to improve, albeit at a low level, and they seem to be steadily and gradually starting to show results.

Of course, not all of them will be able to do as well as Sudo. Even when it comes to studying, there are differences in the amount of talent and knowledge that can be absorbed, and there are also large differences in dedication and physical strength.

Above all, in Sudo's case, we must not forget that his motivation comes from his love for Horikita, who teaches and helps him to study.

In any case, the competition had begun as a result of Airi's expulsion from the school, in order to avoid losing and to become competitive even at the lower ranks.

Part 1

In the Classroom, the same day after school.

The main members gathered after everyone was said to leave.

Sato, Matsushita, Mi-chan, and Maezono. What they have in common is that they are the creators of maid cafes.

And then there are a total of six of us: including me and Horikita.

Meetings about the maid cafe were mostly held over the phone after the initial presentation to avoid information leakage, but now that we had reached the point where we could finally begin determining the layout and location of the stall in earnest, it was necessary to hold detailed meetings in the special building that we actually planned to rent. The outside location was cut off first, given the concept and scale of the maid café.

To put it another way, the place as classrooms has been fixed from the beginning, but the location of the stall is still in doubt to this day.

Students from other grades and classes come daily to inspect and scout out potential stall locations.

Therefore, we had to be creative in our inspection so as not to narrow down which concept and classroom we were going to use. If it were true, it would be more effective to include boys such as Yosuke in the group, but unfortunately, he is busy with club activities at this time of the day, and having too many people in the group would also cause problems.

As soon as we gathered together and started moving, Matsushita looked at Horikita and me and asked a question.

"What are you going to do about Hasebe-san and Miyake-kun?"

"What will we do? What do you mean by that?"

"They come to school every day but won't talk to anyone. It means they continue to see us, the whole class, as the enemy."

"That's right. Well, maybe mainly me."

Haruka's best friend Airi was expelled and she was forced to expel her from school, which created a big barrier for her.

Although they were able to come to school, they didn't break down that barrier.

"Hasebe-san may be trying to take revenge on the class in the future."

I don't think Matsushita was directly called or told by Haruka.

But if you look at Haruka now and sense that atmosphere, someone like Matsushita would guess.

"I guess you're probably right. But it's also true that so far we haven't seen any problematic behavior. She has been participating in the meetings for the festival."

Because I made a proposal for a maid cafe at an early stage, Haruka knows the fact that we are planning to open a maid cafe in this cultural festival. There is no reason not to include her in the group.

"Does that mean you condone revenge?"

"No, of course not. I understand why she would be upset, but that doesn't mean I don't mind her bothering the class."

These special exams cannot be avoided, there is no room for consideration as it can be treated as perfect evil.

As for Horikita, I am sure she strongly hopes that Haruka will not be out of control.

"Yeah, but that's not the case here, where that kind of logic is going to work. It shouldn't take long."

Matsushita repeatedly directed her gaze toward me during this conversation.

She seemed to be trying to draw out words from me while discussing it with the leader, Horikita. However, I did not give my own views at this point.

It is certainly clear that Haruka is plotting revenge, but right now she is attending school, taking tests normally, and not engaging in any action or behavior to bother the class.

Even if we don't know what will happen in the future, we can't question her at this stage.

"There's very little you can do in advance. Lecturing to people to stop taking revenge will only get on their nerves. However..."

"However?"

"If she really is looking for an opportunity for revenge, she certainly won't put it off for months."

I agree with that opinion.

It is unlikely that she will continue to live her life at school maturely for the next six months or a year.

To put it another way, the most concerning timing is ——

"We can't rule out the possibility that she might do something at this festival."

Matsushita, who probably wanted to hear those words, nodded quietly.

"Ayanokoji-kun said that Hasebe-san has no intention of working as a maid. So I gave her and Miyake-kun a general role while letting them know the situation. If we were to hide information from her or exclude her from the group, it would openly convey that we were suspicious of her."

It's likely that the extinguished fire will start burning again if Horikita and the others do anything to degrade Haruka's side, even though they have no intention of seeking revenge.

"So, It's about keeping them on your side, but avoiding giving them important roles."

"Yeah, I figured I should do that just in case."

Of course, you would not have strong concerns about them going rogue at a cultural festival.

Still, as a leader, it is important to stay ahead of the rest.

Many guests will come to the cultural festival. If bad things about Horikita's class spreads to the guests and they get a bad reputation, it will be no wonder that they may receive some kind of penalty.

"I know you're probably wondering about Haruka and the others, but we're about to arrive."

Matsushita was so absorbed in the conversation that she did not realize that we were getting close to the destination.

Many classes are still wondering where to set up their stalls.

You never know what place might be picked up.

There are a total of eight classrooms that can be opened in the special building, with three floors. We are currently on the third floor of the building, and the cost is gradually increasing in stages the closer you are to the stairs by the entrance. The third floor can be rented for 10,000

to 13,000 points, while the first floor can be rented for 50,000 points. This difference of almost 40,000 points can be used to purchase food and other necessities.

The number of points allotted to a class are limited. It's unavoidable that you'll be concerned about how much money to set aside for the cost of the stall location and how to pay for other expenses.

"It's a lot farther than I thought it would be."

Mi-chan's first impression was still about distance.

I think Everyone will agree on that.

"What do you think, Sato-san?"

Mi-chan asks Sato, who hasn't spoken up yet today, but she doesn't react right away.

"Sato-san?"

Once again, this time when approached at close range, Sato hurriedly replied.

"Ah, uh. I wondered if it was far away... ..Yep, I also thought."

"Unless we have a pretty good showing, I don't think most people will make a trip this far."

We did not stay long on the third floor, which is a lower priority, perhaps because everyone's opinions are generally the same.

Then we all came down to the second floor.

"It would be preferable to be on the second floor rather than the third. More specifically, I'd say the first floor is great."

Maezono mutters while looking at the outside scenery from the window.

"I agree. But... the first floor is still quite pricey, isn't it?"

Mi-chan makes a troubled face as she stares at her cell phone.

"But we have to make a decision soon. It's getting pretty full."

Matsushita mentions this while looking at Mi-chan's cell phone.

"That's right. Two of the five places we picked up are filled up... However, the fact that there are still candidates from the 1st floor to the 3rd floor is the point of concern."

Pay high points for convenience, or abandon convenience and settle by paying low points.

"I still think it should be on the first floor. It will be a disadvantage if we can't get people to go upstairs because they're interrupted and distracted by other exhibits and stalls along the way."

"Whether it's on the second or third floor, if we can make people want to come, I don't think it matters greatly."

Maezono, Mi-chan, and Matsushita discuss with each other.

Sato, who is always enthusiastic and often talks over others, has been quiet since a while ago.

Her friends occasionally look at her as if they are concerned about her, but she seems distracted and absent minded.

"She's been like that lately, Sato-san."

Matsushita noticed that I was concerned about her, and quietly told me what I wanted to know.

"Come to think of it, she may not be feeling particularly well for the last few days."

"I thought Ayanokoji-kun might know something about it, but I guess not."

Does Matsushita think I am an esupā or something?

[TL Note — 'esupā' also known as esper (plural espers) is A person who practices the development of psychic ability, or has psychic abilities.]

Or it may have been a statement made in anticipation of Kei's close relationship with Sato, but either way, I do not have detailed information.

"I asked her if she was having any issues, but she didn't mention anything specific."

"Sometimes people just want to be left alone, right?"

"Yes, but somehow I don't think that's what it's about this time."

"What do you mean?"

As Matsushita continues, I wonder if she has any idea about it, and we continue without cutting off the conversation.

"She wants to talk, but she can't. She's the type of person who keeps things inside that she doesn't like."

I guess after a year and a half of friendship, you can even tell that kind of thing.

"She can't just keep it bottled up inside and be done with it, right?"

"That's, well... she generally consults with me."

"If so, we will probably have to wait and see. If you are right, she will come to you for advice in the not-too-distant future, right?"

"...Maybe."

Although she seemed somewhat unsettled, Matsushita quietly withdrew, as this type of lengthy conversation was not something that we could have in the presence of Sato.

I am somewhat concerned about the absent-minded attitude, but the first priority is to decide where to open the maid cafe.

After the inspection of the second floor, we were about to move to the first floor when we encountered a small number of people from other group.

"Yo! Ayanokoji. Are you looking for a place to open a stall for the school festival?"

It was Hashimoto of the 2nd year A class who called out to me. Shortly thereafter, the leader, Sakayanagi, also showed up, along with Kamuro.

If all three of them are moving together then it can't be just a trivial walk.

"I don't know. Maybe it's already decided, or maybe they haven't even decided if they want it indoors or outdoors."

"No decision? That's an easy lie to see through. You're taking Horikita and the others to wander around the special building for no reason? Tell me about the kind of stall you're going to put on."

Sakayanagi does not join the conversation, but watches with a wry smile on her face.

"It's no use asking him. He's not in a position to keep track of everything in the class."

Unable to listen in silence, Horikita intervenes and interrupts the conversation.

"So you're just enjoying your harem?"

He points out that I am the only male of the six people and asks Kamuro to agree.

"You must be similar, Hashimoto-kun. With Sakayanagi-san and Kamuro-san. You are the only boy in the group, even if the number of people in the group is different. Now are you aware that you're the only one who makes these strange remarks?"

Horikita goes so far to respond at the same level, showing a relaxed response.

Ippon was taken, but that doesn't mean that Hashimoto, one way or another, won't do anything about it.

[TL Note — Ippon (一本, "one full point") is the highest score a fighter can achieve in a Japanese martial arts. Here referencing that Horikita sort of k.o. Hashimoto.]

Instead, he changed the subject as if the current conversation never happened.

"Sato and Matsushita, and Wang and Maezono. You guys talk a lot at school these days."

Hashimoto turned his gaze on the four maid cafe creators.

While the three were bracing themselves, Matsushita stepped forward in the same manner as usual.

"You can't and it's no good to try to get anything out of us."

"I wonder if you understood it."

The two girls went hard at Hashimoto, with Matsushita joining Horikita's glare.

"I didn't mean it that way. No, really. It's just..."

The implied tone of the statement is disturbing to all except me.

"Oops, I wonder if I said anything unnecessary?"

Grinning, Hashimoto looked over to Sakayanagi for the first time here.

You don't mind if I talk, do you? It seems as if he is asking this question.

"You seem to have something to say, Hashimoto-kun."

Matsushita, standing guard over the three girls, asked in a somewhat irritated voice.

As if he had been waiting for those words, his expressions were sparked on.

"I'm worried about your cultural festival. It looks like you and Ryuen got along well in the sports festival, but do you really think you can trust him forever?"

"What do you mean?"

"As he is. He pretends to be an ally, but he will not be afraid to stab you in the back."

"A sports festival is a sports festival, a cultural festival is a cultural festival. Sakayanagi's class is an enemy to be defeated, as well as Ryuen's class. How can we trust them?"

"I hope so. I just thought you were going to team up with Ryuen again."

If you do, be careful. He indirectly said, like a grandmother to her grandchild.

Matsushita must have sensed the hints and the hidden meaning behind the words.

She was tempted to ask him if he knew something, but Matsushita held her herself.

"We're in a hurry, and I don't think we can play word games forever. Right? Guys."

He turned around and looked as if to ask the girls and me to agree.

"Yeah. Let's go, it's a waste of time talking here."

"You really hate me, don't you?"

Hashimoto lets out a deliberate sigh at Kamuro, who spoiled the atmosphere.

"Maybe. I just asked it or heard it somehow... Well, good luck with that."

In the end, Sakayanagi didn't say a word and went into the classroom where we had been looking earlier.

"It was a little scary..."

Relieved, Mi-chan patted her chest and muttered to Sato, who stood to her left.

"Huh? Oh, um, yeah. It was Sort of."

Whether she was listening or not, Sato's attitude was unnatural here as well.

"Let's just move on."

If you stand here and talk, you might soon run into Class A again.

We all wanted to avoid that, so we decided to look for another potential site.

"What Hashimoto-kun said earlier... Won't we get in trouble?"

Maezono says briefly.

As we were preparing for the maid cafe, I and Horikita informed only these members of the group ahead of time. They must have been surprised and became anxious.

"It's been confirmed that you and Ryuen's class will cooperate with each other at the upcoming festival, right?"

"Yes. When we cooperated with each other for the sports festival, we also obtained permission from Ryuen-kun's side."

Making Stalls that do not overlap with each other.

If the stalls are similar or in competition with each other, then avoiding each other with the location of the store.

Being able to efficiently replace, temporarily lending, or follow up personnel.

Although it is a small arrangement, it is an agreement to prepare for unforeseen circumstances.

"I didn't mind it so much because the sports festival went so well, but when you say something like that, it makes me nervous, and I wonder if we can really trust them."

"I am not sure if I can trust Ryuen-kun personally. That's why I brought Katsuragi-kun into the discussion. I think it will be all right."

"I want to believe it, too. But didn't Hashimoto-kun seem to know something?"

"Yes, I felt it, too. Even if they don't betray us, it's conceivable that they're leaking the fact that we're working together."

"The ones who know are me and Ayanokoji-kun. Then there are the four of you who started up the maid cafe. From Ryuen's class is Katsuragi-kun. He may have told some of his other major classmates, but there is no merit in leaking it."

Horikita explains that it is hard to imagine information being leaked.

"I agree with Horikita. I think it was unexpected that Horikita and Ryuen joined forces to defeat A class at the sports festival. We're cautious for the next one. Also There may be similar contacts and probes in the future, but you shouldn't worry about it."

I followed up casually.

"Yes, I see. I understand."

Maezono and Mi-chan nodded their heads, and Matsushita and Sato also reaffirmed.

Afterwards, we returned to the classroom and gathered to make a final judgment.

"I'd like to take a majority vote among the members here on where we would like to open the store. May I?"

"What if the opinions are evenly split?"

"We'll think about that then. Let's try it once first. Rock for the first floor, Paper for the second floor, and Scissor for the third floor. Okay?"

Mi-chan recites in a whisper, perhaps to avoid confusion, and then looks at the palm of her hand.

"Ready. Let's go . 1, 2..."

The six of us, including myself, all expressed our decisions with our hands at the same time.

The results at a glance are — 4 rocks, 2 paper and 0 Scissors.

The third floor was excluded because of the hassle involved in getting to the third floor.

I chose to take 'paper' for the sake of keeping the initial cost down, but it would not be a bad choice to choose the first floor for its convenience. The other 'paper' was Matsushita.

Anyway, this is a step forward because the idea to choose the first floor has been decided.

"I'll apply right away. There are still a lot of classes that are being looked at, and it would be troublesome if they were taken."

Using her cell phone, Horikita immediately began working on an application to hold the first floor.

"Are we done for the day?"

"No, I need to talk to you about something first."

I have been gathering information about maid cafes in my own way until recently.

I should mention that.

"The maid cafe's main target is men. Many of the guests at the festival are families, but basically we are targeting male customers."

"I don't think there will be any female customers at all, but in terms of percentage, there will be a considerable difference."

This is what everyone thinks from the general image, without needing to do any research.

"There also exists a butler cafe, the opposite of a maid cafe. It's not the maid girls who serve there, but the men dressed as butlers."

Perhaps Matsushita and her colleagues had not heard of this information before, but they seemed impressed and surprised.

"Maids and butlers are a type of concept cafe. Aren't they?"

"...You are also familiar with this stuff, Horikita."

"I at least gather information. It can be decided if it's useful or not after learning it."

I would say that is an ideal example of this.

"Then we can move on. The most important and indispensable thing is a sense of cleanliness. I think that when holding a classroom in a special building, not only the floor you are on but also that area should be taken into consideration."

Each classroom is used very differently normally.

"Floors, walls, ceilings, and other chairs also show small variation in damage over time. We want to check for that as well."

"That's important. Even if we clean up after ourselves to some extent, there are some areas we can't do anything about. The cleaner it is, the better it is for the restaurant."

Everyone in the room agrees, and begins to look around the classroom again.

Consciousness, previously directed only toward convenience of the first floor and the outside scene, began to change.

"And as for the uniforms, we must not push the eroticism too far."

"What? What did you say...?"

"Eroticism. Eros and eroticism have been considered important elements in art since ancient times. Showing underwear and the like is out of the question, but it is also important not to turn down the hope that it might be visible."

Horikita, too, looked stunned, as if she had not thought about this.

"Oh, Ayanokoji-kun. Aren't you getting awfully knowledgeable?"

"As long as I'm in charge of running a maid cafe, of course I can't cut corners, I studied with as much help as possible."

It was also encouraging that there were several students in the class who were strong on this type of topic. Of course, I avoided explicitly mentioning that Horikita's class had a maid cafe, and approached them on the assumption that I was personally interested.

But It was also a little distressing that some of the students who mistakenly thought I had awakened to Otaku tendered me an unusual degree of hospitality and teaching, saying that they did not want anything in return if it would increase the number of like-minded people and comrades.

"Can I continue?"

"Um, yeah, go ahead..."

No one seemed to stop me, so I continued to talk about what a maid is like for a while.

It is important for those who actually wear maid clothes to know this.

Then It will also be possible to respond consciously to customers.

"Then I thought about a sales strategy. In addition to providing food and beverages, we will sell the right to take pictures, called Cheki. We will use a specialized camera and charge 800 points for a photo of one maid. For a photo session with a customer, we set the price at 1,200 points. In order to reduce costs, I proposed to use a printer to print out the photos after taking them with a cell phone, but this was rejected by the professor who taught me the method. He said, 'If you neglect quality for profit, no one will want to look at it.'"

[TL Note — Cheki are pictures with a small instant camera that gives you pics instantly.]

If well utilized, Cheki sales can be as good as the food menu.

"But you also have to worry about stock, right?"

"No, I'm optimistic about the pictures. I have a plan to sell out. Of course, the photos will not be made public. Also, under the leadership of Horikita, the construction of the stalls led by the boys has started. That food should also be linked to the maid cafe. "

When I finished speaking, Horikita was silent for a moment and then added one cough.

"The competition is inevitably high for restaurants because of the signs of multiple installations, including other grades. So we'll specialize in snacks while keeping prices low."

"But that doesn't make much money, right?"

"Yes. That's right. So it's a stepping stone to the maid cafe, which is our main goal. Buyers will be given a half-price ticket for one drink that can be used at the maid cafe."

We need to make people aware of maid cafe, and then we need to get them to visit the special building. We need to advertise outdoors and have a channel to direct them to ensure they reach the maid cafe.

Part 2

After the meeting for the maid cafe was over, I went to the Keyaki Mall.

This is because I am conducting a price survey of ingredients today.

Both things offered online and those sold in the mall fall under this category. The ability to produce quality food for the least amount of money is crucial.

If I invited Kei, it would turn into a date instead of a research, so I would do it alone today.

On the way to the supermarket, I found a man staring at a map of the building.

I was a little bothered by his rather grim face, so I decided to talk to him.

"You were the center of attention today, Sudo."

He seemed a little shocked when he turned around to face me and as if he hadn't seen me until I was near.

"Eh? Oh Ayanokoji? What do you mean, the center of attention?"

"I'm talking about the midterms."

"Oh, you mean that? I'm glad to hear that, I guess I got what I expected given the amount of studying I did."

Apparently, after the midterm, he even graded himself in detail.

"It would be surprising thinking what you were when you first entered school."

"I'm sure you're right. I'm sure my past self would be yelling at me, 'What's the use of studying and learning words and formulas, you should practice basketball more instead of wasting your time like that.'"

Sudo replied, imagining himself in the past.

I wanted to ask one question to Sudo, so I decided to ask.

"If your past self did actually tell you, 'Don't waste your time.' What would you say back?"

"Huh? Well..."

After thinking for a moment, Sudo put his own answer into words.

"What are you supposed to be if you can't even remember words and formulas...?' Or something like that?

It's a wonderful return, but it's also true that the old Sudo wasn't someone specializing in only one area.

"I'm going to become a professional basketball player, so it doesn't matter,"

he would reply.

"Ummm, sure...! I will say—What's the right response in that case? A professional who can play it smart is better than a professional who can't play it smart... I'm not sure. It's a little tricky when you can't reason with..."

Sudo laughs bitterly as he racks his brains.

"To be honest, I'm getting impatient since it's getting a little more difficult to understand. Up until now, once I got the hang of it, it went pretty smoothly..."

Sudo, who has been working really hard to make up for his academic shortcomings, appeared nervous and impatient. It appeared as though someone had begun again at the elementary school level, or in Sudo's case, junior high. Did he understand he's in a still position now that he's caught up to the typical second-year high school student?

Despite being proud of his 11th place finish this time, which is higher than half of the class, I fear that the momentum will stall at this point. It won't just be a matter of adding more study time from this point forward. More complex factors likely need to be considered in addition to effort, comprehension, efficiency, and talent.

"Anyways, what's up? What did you want from me?"

"Nothing in particular, I was just a little curious. Aren't you supposed to be at club activities today?"

I wondered why Sudo had come to Keyaki Mall at this hour of the day. Club activities still continued even though the cultural event was drawing near.

"I had to take some time off today."

"That's unusual."

At a quick glance, he doesn't seem to be in bad shape.

"I just had another problem..."

"Another problem?"

"Lately, my eyesight's been deteriorating to the point where I'm aware of it."

He said and stared off into the distance.

"I've always had a clear 20/20 vision since I was a little kid, but lately it's been strange."

Sudo's physical and mental conditions were thus being negatively impacted by his commitment to his academics.

Eyesight is crucial for an athlete. His play would likely suffer if his eyesight were to deteriorate in the future.

Of course, glasses or contact lenses can greatly compensate for this, but even so, good eyesight is better than nothing.

"I'm looking for an optician to measure my eyesight. I've never been to one before, and I was wondering where it was."

So that's why he's been staring at a guide map.

If you're feeling a strong sense that your eyesight is declining, there's a good chance that your eyesight is actually deteriorating.

"Even if my eyesight keeps deteriorating in the future, I will continue to study. I'm not going to stop playing basketball because I love it so much, but... I'm starting to think that it might be okay to have other options while I dream of becoming a pro."

"Other options?"

"Don't laugh, okay?"

"I won't."

"I thought I could go to a normal university and continue my studies, and even if I could force my way into the pros because of my academics, there's no way they'd use me in the sports world if I'm not good enough. If that's the case, then I can get into the university I want to go to and do my best."

The study that started with horikita has brought about a big change in Sudo's way of thinking.

"You can go to university and become a professional after graduation, right?"

"Yeah, that's right."

It's not that one has to branch off the path to a profession from high school.

Sudo had previously only considered the route from high school graduate to professional, but now he has considered the possibility of continuing on to college. His own path will also be divided up more.

"Ah."

Sudo noticed something out of the corner of his eye..

I also turned my gaze to the sight of Akito and Haruka's backs.

"It's not a date, is it?"

"Maybe."

If you just look at the back from a distance, it will only look like a couple is walking.

But everyone in class knows exactly what kind of state the two are in now.

"Can we really just leave them alone?"

"It wouldn't matter if we told them anything now anyways."

"That may be the case."

Sudo clenched his fists, his teeth grinding.

"I wasn't particularly close to Sakura, but I've had a similar experience."

Sudo used to hang out with Yamauchi so frequently that he and Ike with Yamauchi were once referred to as the three idiots.

Yamauchi's expulsion may have hurt him more than usual because of this.

"But I guess it's nothing compared to what I was like back then. I couldn't even go so far as to say that I would expel myself in his place."

For Haruka, it seemed like her school life was equal in value, or even more so, to Airi's.

"If you have any trouble, you can always tell me. Well, I'm sure you don't need my help, Ayanokoji."

"I don't think so. If I ever need to talk to you about something, I won't hesitate to do so."

"Oh, then I will be going for now. See you later, Ayanokoji."

I bid Sudo farewell and walked towards the supermarket.

Part 3

The next morning, I met up with Kei downstairs in the dormitory.

"Sorry Kiyotaka, have you been waiting?"

"Not really, shall we go then?"

Kei, who was standing beside me, took my hand without any hesitation and we started to walk.

The act of holding hands and walking side by side like this was not uncommon any more.

"Yesterday... Thanks for staying up with me until late. I'm very happy."

Kei squeezed my hand while blushing a little.

"But it'd be a problem if we get caught."

Although already past the curfew, Kei kept staying in my room last night. Fortunately, there seemed to be no witnesses when she left, so we would not be penalized.

"Ahaha, indeed."

For some reason, Kei's profile looked reliable. Can she change this much in half a day?

"Did it hurt?"

"...do you even have to ask?"

"Is it that bad?"

"No, but... how do I put this, I thought I was used to it."

Even though blushing, Kei was delighted.

"In a way, it was my first time so I had probably hadn't sorted my mind yet. However, I feel reassured that Kiyotaka was there for me all the time and did not care about the curfew."

That's true, who knows what would have happened if I hadn't been there.

Kei had taken a step up toward the stairs of adulthood after yesterday's experience. Although she had support behind her back, she had succeeded in standing with her hands off the ground. It was a long rehabilitation from the point where she thought she could never stand anymore.

Learning to get up on your own when you fall was important for Kei, a special case that didn't happen overnight like other students. It could be said that the prospect was finally here.

"G-Good morning, Kei-chan."

As soon as we arrived at the classroom, Sato, who had arrived early, spotted Kei and got up before running to her.

"Good morning, Maya ~"

Kei excused herself with her gaze to me and then immediately started talking to Sato in close proximity.

Despite the initial awkwardness, they soon started their routine small talk, or perhaps it was even nicer than normal. Even students who aren't generally involved, like Shinohara and Mii-chan, who have been having difficulties for a while, started to feel the circle of happiness that started with the two of them.

Horikita, who has gradually begun to show her strength as a leader, is awakening the skills to unite the large, but it is different. The ability to create, attract, and unite a small group. Without a doubt, Kei has the right qualities and characteristics to do so.

These matters, which are crucial for strengthening the class, appeared to be progressing smoothly on the way to the festival, but suddenly news of an incident with the potential to cause a significant issue emerged.

"Hey, is it true that our class is going to have a maid cafe?"

It all started when Ike burst into the classroom, shouting that as soon as he opened his mouth.

Since this was a thing that had been kept a secret from everyone but a few students, Maezono stood up in surprise.

The people who came up with the idea, such as Sato, Matsushita, and Mii-chan, all looked at each other.

Only some of the girls who are currently confirmed to participate as staff members and those who are approached are informed about the maid cafe. Then there is Horikita, who organizes the festival.

Horikita patiently listened to Ike's story without getting agitated. If she behaved inappropriately, it would be obvious to the entire class that they were truly planning to have a maid cafe.

And it would also be exposed to the other classes.

But the way Maezono and the others reacted to Ike's original question, that aspect was removed. It was quite doubtful that he was just making it up randomly since he said it was a maid cafe.

"Where did you hear this, Ike-kun?"

"Where did I hear? Well uh..."

Ike, frightened by Maezono's stiff, angry look, chokes on his words.

"Just now, in the lobby, Ishizaki, Suzuki... and Nomura, the three of them were talking about it as loud as they could."

"Hey Horikita-san, what does he mean? It was still supposed to be a secret, right?"

Matsushita, who remembered the contact from Hashimoto, approached us.

"Yes. I thought it was unthinkable, but I guess I was naive."

The answer was clear when Ishizaki and the others were making a fuss.

"Does this mean that Ryuen-kun betrayed us after all? You said it was okay, Horikita-san?"

As Maezono angrily confronted Horikita, the classroom door opened and Sudo came in, looking a little agitated.

"Hey! Ryuen and the others are coming this way."

"... I guess I'll just have to greet them. You guys stay inside the classroom."

Horikita got up from her seat and made the decision to meet Ryuen in the hallway, reasoning that the conversation would become problematic if an outsider joined them.

"Yo, Did you come all the way to meet me? Suzune"

Ishizaki, Albert, and Kaneda followed Ryuen, who was in the front.

"I wonder What are you doing with these noisy students?"

"I have something to tell you guys today. Hey, Ishizaki?"

"Ugh..."

Ishizaki looked around the room with a slightly nervous look on his face.

The Students who were instructed not to leave the class were also present, either because of curiosity or an inability to resist.

Maezono, in particular, was glaring at Ryuen without hiding her annoyance.

"I guess your morning's fuss was well received by these guys."

Ryuen, sensing the mood, replied with a laugh.

"I'm honestly surprised. You really don't mind doing things that you don't anticipate."

"Kuku, predictable behavior is boring"

Ryuen began to explain carefully so that Ike and the others, who hadn't grasped the situation, could understand.

"At Suzune's proposal, your class and I formed a cooperative relationship at the sports festival. And we were planning to join forces early on for this year's cultural festival as well."

To be precise, the request for cooperation in the cultural festival was made on my initiative, but it is an insignificant matter here.

Then, Horikita and Katsuragi summarized everything and agreed to continue working together at the school festival.

"We were supposed to make sure that the contents of our Stalls do not conflict with each other. Discussing stall locations. Being able to lend and borrow students and follow up with them as needed. Was that correct?"

"That's correct. We were planning to follow up with everyone a little further down the road. We were told early on about the content of the stalls and yesterday about the location."

Kaneda smirked as he added details.

"You were planning to betray us from the beginning, but you hid it from us until today because you were waiting for us to figure out where we were going to open the store."

"That's what I'm talking about. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to renegotiate our agreement to cooperate."

"That's a pretty big demand for a fresh start. You found out the location of our stall and thoughtlessly even revealed our exhibit."

"Revealed? Ishizaki was simply chit-chatting with his friends. Unfortunately, your class and the other classes happened to overhear them. They were pretty impolite to listen in, don't you think?"

Everyone in class slowly began to understand the situation.

"Is what you just said true, Horikita-san?"

The ongoing cooperative relationship with the Ryuen class, which even Yosuke had not yet informed of, asked horikita about it.

"I was going to tell you when everything was finalized..."

The plan was nearly in the final stage, but it was turned upside down at the last moment.

Classmates, including Yosuke, were just now informed by this scenario.

"I wonder why, so I'll ask just in case? What's the benefit in betraying us? Did you team up with Sakayanagi-san, or Ichinose-san?"

"I helped you in the sports festival with the aim of destroying the A class. But you guys won your way to the top, and you got a good taste of the action, didn't you?"

We both picked up wins in the sports festival, but we were 100 points ahead in class points as a result.

"We were on equal terms. The same goes for the cultural festival proposal."

"But at the end of the day, it doesn't matter if we crush class A, if you B's rise to the same position. It won't win us many class points, but we'll win the next festival. We'll have the same concept as you guys."

"Does that mean a maid cafe?"

It was Maezono who immediately responded to the keyword 'same'.

"Well, I'll change the concept a little but it will be something similar."

It's not so important if the event is leaked.

However, Our planners and classmates must have known that if they employ the same idea on the same stage, it would be a deadly blow to Horikita's class.

1st to 4th place. It was a declaration to compete for one of four seats to get 100 class points.

"You really mean you're going to make an extra effort to compete in the same genre market? It doesn't seem like it would help you in any way."

"Sure, it's probably riskier than the other ideas when it comes to competing for customers. But so what? We have a plan to outsell you and get to the top."

I don't get Ryuen's logic behind coming all the way here to tell us so.

"So, let's have a more intense competition, Suzune."

"Intense competition?"

"So, let's have some more intense game, Suzune."

"... game?"

As the ruckus grew a little louder, Ryuen's declaration of war was heard by Kanzaki and other unrelated students from different classes.

Hashimoto was watching this somewhat amusedly, probably because he learned of this fact before Horikita's class learned of it.

"Whoever earns even one point more than the other gets five million points from the other class. Wouldn't that be an interesting match?"

"Are you really serious? I don't think it's a very sane stake."

"If you ask me, it's only 5 million points."

Class points cannot be moved.

However, private points owned by individuals can be freely handled.

He proposed the 'bet' because of this.

This was a one-on-one proposal, separate from the 12-class competition.

Even if you don't take the top rank in the cultural festival and lose, as long as you win the direct confrontation you would get 5 million private points, it would certainly be an intense game.

"Well, I really wanted to have a more expensive battle with a different opponent, but Nagumo, the student council president, said he would not be involved in the festival this time and ran away. The third-year students, except for the A class, are not interested in the festival. So, It didn't look like he was running away, but as long as I couldn't find an opponent, there was nothing I could do. Let's have a showdown in the second year."

"Don't decide this on your own. I'm not going to accept such a reckless proposal."

"Are you going to run away too?"

"You broke the contract, leaked it, and then tried to weasel your way out of it. That's an impossible proposition. I can finally see Katsuragi-kun's true intentions in avoiding a penalty agreement."

"I don't care about that anymore. Aren't you sure you can win this fight with me?"

"I didn't say that."

"Ha?"

"I am not going to stand idly by and let you do whatever you want. I will positively consider the bet you proposed."

"Kukuku, so you say. I'll be waiting for your answer, Suzune."

Perhaps having finished his business with us, Ryuen pulled away as if satisfied.

As he turned around, his group followed and the others made way for them.

As Ryuen and the others left, students from other classes, who had been spectators, began to approach.

In the midst of all this, Hashimoto's eyes met mine, and he smiled thinly and shrugged his shoulders.

It was as if to say, "Do you understand that we are joining forces with Ryuen?" He seemed to be trying to say that.

This will already be known to the entire second grade and to all grades.

The maid cafes, including Ryuen's surprise entry into the competition, were placed in a difficult environment.

If some other classes were considering the same thing, I would not be surprised if they are now changing course.

But we have already started a lot of preliminary work.

"What are you going to do, Horikita-san? We're pretty well prepared, aren't we..?"

"Is Ryuen really going to make a maid cafe?"

Maezono and the others approached Horikita with their concerns and the frustration they were trying to hide.

"I believe it's very likely. I don't think it's just a threat."

"How about we shift to a different concept now?"

Yosuke suggests that they should consider that option in order to turn things around...

"We can't do that. Part of the budget's already invested."

We've already ordered as much as we could for the maid's uniforms and so on.

The money we have already spent on costs cannot be wasted. We would be wasting precious funds if we stopped. With our time being shorter, we need to reconsider how we will go around in the future.

It can be said that we have fallen into a state of sunk cost bias.

[TL Note : sankukosutobaiasu (サンクコストバイアス) mentioned in the sentence here is Sunk-Cost Fallacy. If you want, you can read about it [here](#).]

"We have to rather take advantage of this situation, Even if it's not 5 million points, let's take the bet and turn it into an opportunity to earn a lot of private points."

That is, of course, if the classmates accept this suggestion. Because the entire class would need to work together to raise the money in order to have a significant amount available.

Part 4

Apparently, it is unknown until the day of the event which class will open what store, at what location and what will they present. However, there are examples like Horikita's Class which was exposed by betrayal.

But the bigger the scale, the more preparation needs to begin in advance for the day.

In fact, each class was gradually starting to move in at the various points where they were anticipated to have stalls.

In the midst of all this, unexpected information came to light from the 3rd year A class led by Nagumo.

As if they had no intention of hiding it from the start, rumours spread that they were planning to rent out a sizable gymnasium space and stage an exhibit that mixed a "haunted house" with a "maze."

It can be described as the style of a person who doesn't have to compete for earning class points.

Perhaps it is not Nagumo's initiative, but rather the consensus of the class to let them do what they want to do. It was carried on in a way that made everyone think that winning was secondary.

Just by looking at the props being brought in from a distance, it can be seen that a fair amount of money has been invested. As if to show this, the 3-year class A finally announced its own pre-opening yesterday.

They started by inviting students who were interested in taking part to really experience the maze haunted house so they could get their feedback. I couldn't help but feel that the students were determined to present a high quality show to the guests on the day of the event.

I've never experienced a cultural festival before, so I would like to experience firsthand what the other classes have to offer, no matter how it is organized.

After school, I went to visit the gymnasium to attend the pre-opening.

There weren't many first and second graders present in the gymnasium even on the first day, probably because the pre-opening was divided into several days.

Because of the lighting being dim, Unlike usual, the gymnasium has a different kind of frightful atmosphere.

Shortly after lining up at the end of the line, I heard a familiar voice.

"It's amazing, Student Council President, that you would be so open about it. You're so proud to show it to the public."

"It's not easy to hide something on such a large scale, It was a wise decision to release the information at an early stage if it was to be used for practice as well."

Looking back briefly, I saw Ichinose and Kanzaki approaching.

Apparently, like me, they had come to check on the situation as well as to scout the area.

"Oh..."

Naturally, both of them became aware of my presence when they attempted to join the line.

Ichinose responded quickly and carefully, lowering her head slightly and averting her gaze.

Kanzaki silently glanced at Ichinose and I before joining the Line.

The line did not move as fast as it should have, as an awkward silence began to flow. Perhaps because it was the first day, the third-year students did not seem to be able to proceed smoothly.

"... Ah, yeah That's it. I just remembered something urgent. Kanzaki-kun, I'm sorry, but can I leave this to you ...?"

It was clearly random, but Kanzaki nodded his head in agreement without question.

"Oh right, See you later."

Ichinose, who could not be rude at any time, formally said a few words to me as well and left the line. Only Kanzaki and I were left behind.

Even a student with no prior knowledge of the situation is likely to somewhat understand the reason. If it's Kanzaki, then the situation would be clear as day.

"How are you doing?"

I asked him about that, but soon Kanzaki's face turned serious.

"You think I'm fine?"

Ichinose's class, which has been slowly losing class points, cannot be in any good shape.

A half-provocation would have been what it sounded like.

[Fill in your name and receive an explanation of the rules.]

Explanation is a kind of minimum etiquette.

[Do not use your cell phone in the hall. Always put your phone on silent mode.]

[No loud talking.]

[Don't stay inside for no reason.]

[Basically, no hand contact with anything inside (part of production).]

By the time I finished reading the explanation, Kanzaki had left the line and turned his back to me.

Probably waiting for Ichinose to come back.

I made this deduction based on the assumption that she would be back by the time I left the gymnasium.

After signing my consent to the explanation, leaving Kanzaki alone, I stepped inside.

The walls in the haunted house are naturally narrow and the visibility is quite poor.

The lamp, which appears to have been purchased at a uniform store, is wrapped in tape, perhaps to narrow down the light source, so it does not serve as a light as much as it should.

Recently, I often used the Internet to research cultural festivals, but I wonder if it is possible to produce such high quality. The technical proficiency of the third-year students, or rather the third-year A class, truly astounds me.

I began to observe more carefully, ignoring the ghosts.

It comes as no surprise that most of the significant and eerie elements are made by human hands while the atmosphere is primarily generated with ornaments that have been embellished.

The long neck of the rokurokubi is timed to the timing of the incoming guests by the student hiding behind it.

[TL Note - Rokurokubi (ろくろ首, 轆轤首) is a type of Japanese yōkai (Japanese Ghosts). There is a type whose neck stretches.]

Naturally the role of 'Ochimusha' Jumping out and drawing his sword was done by someone else.

[TL Note - Ochimusha (落武者) is a defeated warrior/Samurai that fled the enemy. For eg, Ghostly Versions of Samurai in Genshin Impact that appears in Sacred Sakura Cleansing Ritual.]

There are several tricks that are clearly still in the process of being produced, but they will be completed and their quality will be improved in the production.

Although it might not be as well-liked by adults, it might be highly well-liked by their families, especially kids. People will typically avoid something if the price is too high, but if it's something their kids want, they'll probably increase their spending restrictions.

This will play a significant role in the future clarification of the maid café policies.

I reached the halfway point of the exhibit.

As I was about to follow the sign that said "turn left," a shadow in my field of vision moved.

It seems they are trying to scare me again with a new trick.

"Wah, ah, oh~ oh!"

I was the one who was supposed to be screaming but the ghost who jumped out, stumbled over a step right in front of me and fell with a scream.

It was Asahina Nazuna from 3rd year A class.

I didn't help her because I thought it might be staged, but when I saw her fainting in pain, I was convinced it was an unexpected accident.



It's no wonder that this happened in this darkness...

"Ow, ow!"

"Are you okay?"

In a sense, it's a scary scenario reaching out to a ghost that shouldn't be alive.

"Ah, thank you... ouch, very much!"

She apparently has difficulty standing on her own and sits down on the spot.

Since I couldn't just leave it like this, I decided to help.

"Which way is the exit?"

"What? the exit...? Maybe it's this way?"

"Wouldn't it be better to turn back?"

Since I remember the way to the entrance, I should be able to return quickly with some help.

"Don't worry, just trust your Senpai..."

She screams in pain. It's as a result of her fruitless attempts to strike a confident, self-assured pose.

The instructions sounded very unreliable, but it would be better to follow them here.

It should be faster than me groping my way out from scratch.

I got lost several times, and then reached the exit, with my senpai who was afraid of the reaction of her classmates.

I had intended to leave immediately, leaving Asahina in charge, but due to the pre-opening, there did not seem to be any students available.

"Don't worry about me. Thank you, Ayanokoji-kun. I'm sure I'll be fine after a little rest."

I crouch down to check Asahina's ankle.

"Wait, hey?"

"Please Let me see."

"Uh, alright..."

It is beginning to swell at an early stage that is to say it was twisted a bit.

If she does not receive proper treatment, it could have repercussions later on in the future.

"I think you should go to the infirmary. Wouldn't it be hard to be out of action at the festival?"

"That's right. Yeah, maybe I should."

When she tried to get up and walk alone and realized that she could not do so due to pain, she switched to a plan of standing on only her left leg, which wasn't hurt, and moving forward on one leg.

But with each small jump, a vibration is felt in the right leg, causing painful expressions.

"I'll lend you a hand after all."

"Uh... but..."

She may be reluctant to seek my assistance for reasons, though I'm sure that feeling of embarrassment is not the only one.

"President Nagumo, is it?"

"... How'd you know?"

"Well, Somehow ."

"If he saw Ayanokoji-kun getting involved with an A-class student, it probably wouldn't look good. I can't have you getting in trouble because of me, can I?"

She seems to be more concerned about me than her own injuries.

"Don't worry. I'm sure that Nagumo, the student council president, doesn't take me seriously anymore."

"Oh Really?"

"I think he might have realized he was overestimating me.."

I decided to help Asahina and take her to the infirmary.

"Thank you." | "Arigato, ne"

The somewhat conspicuous attire is troubling, but I suppose it can't be helped.

I lent a shoulder and walked up to the infirmary, receiving curious looks from some people.

The doctor immediately sat her down on the bed to administer the treatment.

Asahina was told to wait a little more before getting ready to go.

As I was about to turn away to leave, I was called by a voice.

"By the way, that was a disaster for Ayanokoji-kun's class."

Missing the timing to leave the infirmary, I stood there and started talking.

"You mean the information leak? About the opening of a maid cafe?"

"Yeah."

A trick performed this very morning by Ryuen.

The maid cafe that we were secretly working on became known throughout the whole school.

Of course, there are basically more disadvantages of everyone knowing what your class is going to do.

"Class C. Ryuen's class has also decided to compete in the maid cafe."

Simply because we will have competing stores, we will be competing for customers with the same goal.

"We can only hope that, with the two classes fighting over similar concepts, no other class will follow suit."

"Even if you do the same thing in 3 classes and 4 classes, it will only make the customer's interaction and competition worse."

Chasing after, will only increase the risk.

It's not impossible for them to open a maid cafe as a side business, but it won't be easy to beat those of us who are devoting a lot of resources to it.

Soon after, the doctor brought bandages and other treatment tools. Eventually, I decided to watch the treatment process.

The treatment was soon over, and she is told that she will be able to walk without any problems if she rested for a few days. Once it was clear that there would be no problems with the festival, Asahina let out both the pain she had been enduring and the relief she felt at the same time.

"Oh, thank God. I didn't want to bother the class with this."

"The class advantage won't change, so why bother?"

If they get last place at the festival, they won't lose any class points.

"It doesn't work that way, There is nothing better than having a lot of class points. Even though Miyabi's letting it go this time, there are quite a few students who are against it."

With her eyes lowered, Asahina continues.

"For students who haven't decided to win, they still need as many class points as possible, don't they? Even at the festival, if you win first place, that's more private points you get by the time you graduate."

Given the rules of the third grade, which is dominated by Nagumo, it is natural to want as many as possible to graduate from class A.

Even for Class A, they cannot just abandon Class B and the rest.

"For the time being, it seems that Miyabi is saying that he will pick one person from the class that will take first place by competing, other than Class A."

So then the complaints from the three remaining classes would not be as strong.

But even so, it cannot be completely suppressed without showing a willingness to get as many class points as possible.

The pressure on the third year Class A, who abandoned winning, will only increase.

"I was just thinking about what you said earlier. Ayanokoji-kun, you said you noticed Miyabi was overestimating you and stopped, right?"

"Yes."

"At first I thought, well, that's maybe true, But maybe I was wrong after all."

"Why?"

"There wasn't a clear winner or loser with Miyabi and you, was there?"

"Yeah. That's true."

I and Nagumo have never once settled in a head-to-head match.

"If so, I still don't think it's over."

"I have no intention of fighting. I don't think I'm up to it by any stretch of the imagination."

It is a waste of time just to deal with this.

"I don't think it matters. In fact, it might go worse than it is now. It's not about Ayanokoji-kun anymore, it could be something he does to someone close to you."

There are some things that only Asahina, who has been watching Nagumo by his side for the past three years, can see.

"Like with former Student Council President Horikita, Nagumo likes to compete."

"Uh, yeah. I'm pretty sure that's true."

"Has Nagumo ever been clearly beaten by someone? Has he ever stumbled a little?"

It is not hard to guess from looking at Nagumo's attitude so far.

"I don't think Miyabi ever stumbled over one. At least not that I know of."

There is a lot of confidence in Nagumo's victory from his classmates.

"There is no doubt that Student Council President Nagumo is an excellent person. If he were falsely competent, it would be impossible for him to misrepresent OAA or become student council president."

There are numerous issues that cannot be managed just through political tactics.

"He likes to be number one. That's why he fought to be number one in this school. In the end, he even became the student body president, so he is a man of his word."

"But if you ask me if Nagumo is the strongest and number 1, I will immediately deny it."

"Why is that...? He has never lost to anyone in particular."

"I think it's because he never had good opponents."

Nagumo is not weak.

However, there is no doubt that Nagumo's opponents were weak.

"I think his greatest misfortune was that he had no one in his grade who was equal to or better than him and willing to compete with him."

"A worthy opponent... So you mean he didn't have any good rivals?"

"Yes."

Unfortunately, by competing only with lower-ranked players, Nagumo has been able to get to No. 1 without much effort. Of course, he may have had the second or third best from the start, but he soon overtook them and became the sole runner.

After running, He looked back and saw that no one was chasing him.

All of them gave up and walked away or stopped because they could not beat Nagumo.

There may have occasionally been individuals around who were equally gifted as he was, such as Kiryuin, but if they had not made an effort to catch up with and surpass Nagumo, they would have been nothing more than stones at the side of the road.

Nagumo's distorted mindset can be attributed to the fact that he was oblivious to the rigours and challenges of competition, as well as the anguish of losing right away.

The fact that he's planning and executing strange revenge tactics against me isn't out of any sense of defeat or inferiority complex, but it is only to bring me in the open.

He never imagined losing when he requested a one-on-one match at the sports festival.

Nagumo couldn't have known everything about me, so it's understandable, but even if he had witnessed my complete might in person, he wouldn't have questioned his success.

A person who has never actually experienced defeat. The negative effects of successive victory streaks.

"I wish we could just stop fighting in this school."

"I wonder"

"I just hope everything stays as is and nothing bad happens..."

That wouldn't be the case.

This cultural event has unmistakably demonstrated Nagumo's alteration in behaviour, which was subtly communicated to the general public.

The general public might assume that Nagumo's aggression and curiosity have merely been repressed.

In reality, this is not true. This is merely the calm before the storm.

After this, Nagumo will take action against me... no, against anyone other than me.

It may not be enough to just expel one or two people.

It can be said that this is the payback for the behaviour I have shown for Nagumo up to now.

If you leave the bomb that has swollen up to this point, it wouldn't be unexpected if the development just mentioned happens.

I recalled Horikita Manabu's words,

"Nagumo's methods make a lot of people unhappy."

That is half true.

Of course, I don't deny that I played a part in that factor, but the original plan was to just mess with Nagumo's emotions and thought process.

As for The other half.

Students who wouldn't have originally graduated in Class A due to Nagumo's methods are indeed getting that chance.

Even though in small numbers, first-year and second-year students have also been given class transfer tickets in addition to third-year students.

Although there are restrictions on how to use them, they are products that previously didn't exist.

If it had concerned me up until last year, I would've watched Nagumo's actions with more interest.

"I'm becoming a little more interested in Student Council President Nagumo."

"Did I hear you right just now?"

"Yes."

An interest that I have never felt before, even once, rises up from deep within.

"I knew you were unusual."

After casting her gaze down at her bandaged leg, Asahina gave a small laugh.

"It may have been a coincidence that we met, but maybe that's why Miyabi wants to fight."

Looking back, the result of "coincidence" was also a major factor in my making contact with Asahina.

Coincidence— huh?

In my conversation with her, I constructed a rationale.

The coincidence just mentioned is out of control.

But it's not entirely out of control.

Coincidences can change the form of the things greatly depending on one's point of view and perspective.

Asahina Nazuna and her amulet, the existence of coincidence and Nagumo Miyabi.

This is not bad as a test case.

Just as an experiment is a series of failures followed by success.

Part 5

Leaving Asahina in the infirmary, I returned to the gymnasium.

Another thing I was curious about was Kanzaki, and to find out how Ichinose was doing, who was expected to have returned. If I were to stand out too much, the same thing would happen again, so I walked farther away from the entrance.

The fact that Kanzaki is not visible in the line suggests that he is either inside or has already left.

However, by the looks of things earlier, it was clear that he was waiting for Ichinose's return.

Since there was a bit of a commotion when I took out injured Asahina, I don't think Kanzaki, who was waiting for Ichinose's return and for me to leave, would have missed it.

Then it took me about 15 minutes to come back from the infirmary.

Unless Ichinose had returned immediately after that, I wouldn't be surprised if she was still inside.

While making general observations, I also decided to pay attention to the faces of the students coming out.

Then a few minutes later.

Kanzaki slowly emerged from the exit.

I knew he was still in the gymnasium, but what surprised me was what happened after that.

I thought for sure Ichinose was next to him, but Kanzaki was alone. She was not lagging behind, nor did he seem to be concerned about what was behind him.

I thought he was just going to walk away, but then he turned around and saw me.

Then, after staring at me for a few seconds, he approached me.

"You're back after all. It seems her injuries were not too serious."

It would have been difficult to believe that I was just standing here, if it had been a major issue.

Kanzaki probably implied it from that.

"Are you wondering why Ichinose isn't here?"

"To be honest, a little."

"I didn't call her because I was worried about the possibility of bumping into you coming back from the infirmary. Besides, there are still a few days left for the pre-opening."

So, Ichinose will visit it later to observe without any rush.

The presentation for the Ichinose class appears to have a rather predetermined course.

You should push yourself to go on a visit if you are having trouble and refrain from asking in the process.

"I want to continue where we left off earlier. Your class seems to be doing quite well."

It was clear that he was referring to a series of events from the Uninhabited island exam to the unanimous special exam, and if we go back a little further, to the beginning of second year.

"Unlike Kanzaki's class, we had dropouts over here. We also have negatives that you can't see with class points alone."

"You're not the only ones with invisible risks, but you've made a significant difference in terms of the positives that you can see."

Rather than envy, I would say that this is an honest opinion of Kanzaki.

"A class like yours will eventually have to fight Sakayanagi's class."

One thing that stuck out to me was Kanzaki's somewhat optimistic, one-step-back assessment of his own class.

"Have you given up already? Moving up to Class A?"

"... Maybe."

Instead of a negative answer, Kanzaki replied somewhat positively.

It isn't difficult to guess what he was thinking. Ichinose's class isn't a disastrous one.

They are not likely to lose many points for tardiness, absenteeism, behaviour problems, and the like because they are a serious class.

They rarely make significant blunders on special exams and hardly ever lose class points.

But in other words, they don't have the opportunity to make big jumps on special exams.

"No one has yet to notice how the class is slowly sinking. It would still be endearing if they were just pretending not to notice, but they're all genuinely oblivious."

"Only you seem to be different."

"That was until a little while ago; there's no point in rebelling alone."

"You mean you've given up on trying to change their minds?"

"Our class will never make it to Class A."

Here, Kanzaki said it clearly.

"If the possibility has been reduced to zero, the only thing left to do is to find another way. If we are going to sink anyway, we should give as many people as possible a chance to escape."

"So you're going to move to a different class after accumulating 20 million points?"

"Because Student Council President Nagumo Miyabi has actually implemented this and it's shown to be effective. Concentrating private points on Ichinose is what we've been doing. If we execute this plan to the limit, we can move at least two or three people to Class A. In addition, the existence of class transfer tickets was shown for the first time at the sports festival. Of course, it won't be easy to acquire them, but the increase in options is a genuinely pleasing factor."

"Why are you telling me all this?"

"I don't know what I'm doing either."

It was an uncharacteristic response. Kanzaki paused for a moment and began to search for a better answer.

"I didn't have a place to vent. Maybe that's why."

If there's a problem in daily life, it'll be shared among those close to the student, regardless of whether or not they're within the same class, and a solution is found.

However, when it comes to class problems, the only way out is to give up on achieving Class A and transfer to another class.

If you say such a thing in class, it is inevitable that you will be surrounded by conflicts.

It would be impossible to get support in Ichinose's class for this.

"I could only think of you as someone who understood what I was saying and didn't interrupt."

I see. He believed I was the best outlet to express his negative emotions. Of course, that isn't the only reason.

It seems that he also holds resentment toward me, who has a strong influence on Ichinose.

"I don't care what happened between you and Ichinose or what kind of relationship you two have. The fact that you're having such a bad influence that she can't even do a satisfactory observation of the third-year Class A's exhibit is a major issue."

"It's a little harsh when you put it that way."

"You'll have to forgive me. I'm sure you understand how frustrating it is."

Kanzaki then raised his hand and told me he's leaving.

The back of the class strategist, who had given up on winning, appeared smaller than usual.

It's a little harsh to call him back here, but I can't just let Kanzaki leave as he is now.

"Can we talk sometime soon? I would like to talk a little about the future."

"Why not now? I have time to talk about the future."

"I'm sorry, but right now I need to do some research on the third-year's stalls."

Besides, starting a discussion now is not going to make any progress.

We need another piece that can enter the conversation in order to talk about the future.

"That's fine if that's how things are. Call me anytime."

Part 6

It was near the weekend, Friday.

I had come to a place I don't usually visit to meet a student.

When I opened the door of the student council room after knocking, Nagumo showed a surprised face for a moment.

Other than Nagumo, there were no students or teachers in sight, and as Asahina had informed me, he seemed to be alone today.

Even to him, it would have been unexpected for me to come.

The cell phone is clutched in his left hand, as if he had been looking at it just a moment ago.

I must have been an unwelcome visitor, but he didn't turn me right away, instead encouraged me to enter.

"Excuse me."

The door leading into the room closed with a slam, and a moment of silence passed between the two of us.

"Nazuna asked me to wait for some time here, so I waited but I didn't think that it was you who had asked. So, are you here for the student council?"

"I have no business with the student council. I'm here to talk to President Nagumo personally."

As I said that, he sat back deeper in his chair and put the cell phone in his hand on the desk.

"If that's the case, I have to give you credit for showing up in front of me. Right? Ayanokoji."

"I assume you are referring to the sports festival, but isn't being sick a legitimate and recognized reason for absence?"

"Don't make me laugh. Some of the guys saw you all fine at the Keyaki Mall the day after the sports festival ended.

"It only took a day to get better."

"That's a blatant lie."

"It might be true."

It was a bit of a play on words, but Nagumo seemed to realize that further pursuit was pointless.

"Truth or lie, I don't really care anymore. Anyway, let me hear your reason for coming here."

His troublesome attitude must've come from the bottom of his heart. He doesn't even bother to disguise the fact that he wants to wrap up the conversation right away.

A transparent demeanour, meanwhile, also suggests that he may be concealing his genuine emotions.

"May I sit down? I think it's going to be a bit long."

"You said you didn't have any business with the student council. So it's okay for me to turn you down, right?"

As student council president, Nagumo was prepared to listen even to those he did not like. But if it wasn't related to the student council, he did not want to listen any longer.

Well, it's not surprising.

"If you won't listen to me, I'll leave."

If Nagumo, as an individual, was too lazy to even converse with me, I had no choice.

However, I don't believe that's the case. If his interest in me completely vanished, that would be a different story, but deep down, I believe the spark is still there.

In other words, he'll never refuse. It's precisely because I'm certain of this that I also took time out of my precious day to visit this place.

After a few moments of silence, Nagumo instructed me to sit down.

I moved my chair and sat down so that we could face each other head-on.

"Too bad I don't have anything for a drink."

"No problem."

You can tell by looking that it is not the atmosphere and attitude of apology by looking at this situation.

For him, it is probably just a feeling of, 'What are you doing here after all this time?'

"I had no idea that the 3rd year Class A would do a pre-opening. It's normal to think of it as a disadvantage to expose the class's exhibit to the public."

"I'm also getting stories up here that some stupid class had their event exposed."

"It's a painful story, isn't it? By the way Come to think of it, I also heard that Ryuen even visited Student Council President Nagumo."

"He was pressing me to bet tens of millions of points with him."

"He wanted me to bet tens of millions of points with him."

"I heard you refused."

"Yeah, well, the game with you is over and so is my school life. As a result, the school festival has turned into something unimportant. Then, I don't need to bother to send instructions around. I'm just letting them do whatever they want for memories until graduation."

He therefore took a position whereby all the details about his class's booth are available while he takes part in a simple cultural festival like any other student at any other school.

The third-year Class A continues to be on the top whether they come in first or twelve.

The complaints of people in Class B and lower are presumably unimportant to Nagumo.

"But tens of millions? There won't be enough, even if he'll gather it together from his class."

Ryuen's class, which has high income but heavily spends, doesn't have lined pockets.

"That guy told me he would give me the right to expel any student I wanted, even himself."

Ryuen was going to use the students themselves as collateral for the funds he couldn't provide.

"Last year I would've taken him up on that offer. I'd be dealing with a separate year, but it would've been interesting if we were playing for expulsion."

Nagumo remarked he already lost his enthusiasm and interest in the school.

"If you want to compete, go ahead. You are free to do whatever you want."

"I understand your personal view, but aren't there many students who don't agree with it?"

"No one can complain to me, 'cause if they do, their Class A status will no longer be guaranteed. When the festival gets closer, I, or rather the student council, will make a not-so-bad proposal. A little help for a class that's struggling to win."

"I see. You've thought about it a lot, haven't you?"

"Well, I'm the student council president, after all."

After giving a model answer, Nagumo exhaled a sigh and urged,

"Come on, tell me what you came here for."

"All I want is to have a conversation with the student council president. That's all."

"I don't exactly believe that."

"You don't believe me? I'm actually a little surprised with my own actions. Until now, I've been trying to keep my distance from Student Council President Nagumo."

"I know that very well."

However, he probably didn't understand the root of why.

"Do you know why?"

"I don't know. I'm sure it's not because you're scared of my ability."

"Unlike the previous student council president, Horikita Manabu, Student Council President Nagumo attracts the eyes of those around him. This is partly because he is a bit too bright for a shady person like me to face."

"Sure. But that's just a front, isn't it?"

Nagumo lightly dismissed the pretense of respect and urged me to reveal my true intentions.

"I wasn't interested."

It's a bit of a stretch, but that's what I said. I'm going to speak my mind.

While recognizing a certain level of ability, it's all I could say.

That's why I didn't think I needed to get involved in whatever Nagumo was doing.

"If someone else said what I just heard from your mouth, I might've gotten angry."

"I didn't realize I was being rude."

"No, you don't need to apologize. It's your choice to feel that way. I'm the one who got you to tell me how you really feel."

Nagumo said that, but he quickly added,

"But still, if it hadn't been you who said that, I'd have changed their mind in a heartbeat."

He wouldn't hesitate to entrap the speaker so that the speaker would be interested even if he didn't like it.

With Nagumo's power and abilities, that is not a difficult task.

"Soon your term as student council president will be over, and Student Council President Nagumo will remain in Class A and graduate. I thought that would be fine. Until just the other day."

"You think otherwise now?"

"I had a change of heart. I felt that I could face you directly, and that's why I'm here."

There is no need for restraints, fake flattery, or false emotions.

It's better for the future if I express my thoughts. I informed Nagumo, who was waiting for me to proceed, of the primary reason I had come to this place today.

"I have a proposal for President Nagumo. Can I make a challenge to the student council president this time?"

Making such a statement probably never crossed Nagumo's mind.

"I doubt that, this isn't like you."

A change of heart, such an answer was not enough to convince Nagumo.

"I don't know when exactly this change of heart came, but it's too late. You ran away from the last chance I gave you at the sports festival. If I may borrow words from your true feelings, you weren't interested. Am I right?"

"That's right. I know it's a convenient story."

"Yes, that's right. After having given up so many chances to compete repeatedly, there is no way I could honestly say yes when you're asking me for a match now, mentioning a change of heart.

Nagumo didn't change his position and continued to show directness.

"And, get this, it's the same as what you said earlier about the sports festival. You said you were sick the whole time. I've decided that's an obvious lie. Besides, don't tell me you've forgotten about what happened on the island."

"Then, would you like to replicate what happened on the island? This time, in the opposite position?"

If Nagumo could punch me in the gut here, It could be like an apology.

However, he wouldn't be the one who would be convinced by such a thing.

"That's not funny, Ayanokoji. It wouldn't ever be the same knockout. There's a huge difference in value between you and me."

Naturally, there was no room for a discussion of the proposal. It was obvious that there was at least that much of a difference between Ayanokoji Kiyotaka and Nagumo Miyabi, at least in this school.

One was an ordinary student in the 2nd year Class B, while the other was the leader of the 3rd year Class A and the student council president.

The difference between what we're capable of was so great that even a comparison was unacceptable.

"I'm not going to delay it now, but I'm allowed to challenge you to a fight, but you're not allowed to challenge me to a fight. Do you understand?"

"I understand, but that's exactly delaying it. I'm right here in front of you and I'm willing to fight President Nagumo. Would you agree with that?"

I intentionally cut my fingertips and dripped blood on the bloodthirsty wolf.

But the wolf in front of me didn't bite easily.

The wolf was much more careful than in the past, when he had been acting provocatively but without any defence. He already would have had his fangs at my fingertips if he had previously viewed me as his enemy. He might not have realised it, but that was evidence that he saw me as a threat.

"You really are strange. You don't show any sign of hesitation when dealing with me. No, it's not only against me, but also against Horikita-senpai."

Nagumo looked out the window as if remembering the days of Horikita Manabu.

His original desire was to fight the elder Horikita, not me. That goal was unattainable, but it was also true that there were no other alternatives.

"—If I were to play with you, what would you do? It's almost the third semester of the school year, and we already passed the second semester's halfway point. As you probably know by now, I gave all the power to my classmates to compete for sales at the school festival. I can't ask them to give it back now. On the other hand, even if I wait for the next special exam, there's no guarantee that there will be a competition between all the grades."

We could leave it to luck and wait, hoping that there would still be a battle between all grades. Not that such a thing couldn't be done, but it wouldn't be very realistic.

"Above all, you're well aware of the difficulty of competing in earnest between different grades, as you and the former student council president know, don't you?"

Nagumo Miyabi was eager to compete against Horikita Manabu at the sports festival from the previous year, training camps, etc.

He forced himself to do it, trying to turn it black and white, no matter what form it took or how little the match.

Despite the circumstances, Manabu dodged Nagumo's provocations and didn't involve anyone in the match given the whole situation .

"More than anyone else. How hard do you have to work to adjust? Because of you, not just this year, last year too, the match with Horikita-senpai didn't happen."

In that sense, too, Nagumo was not pleased with me.

"Listen to what I'm about to tell you and think about whether a confrontation can be achieved."

With that, Nagumo sat back deeper in his chair to correct his posture a bit.

As I said this, Nagumo sat back deeper in his chair, correcting his posture a bit.

We had various patterns to use to prepare for the special exams the school administered, even if many of them were unknown. Because no matter what form the confrontation was introduced, there was always a method to execute. Nagumo didn't say anything after I finished telling him everything and he appeared to be thinking.

"I don't know if we can achieve a 100% perfect match, but I think this can become a reality."

"I agree, but do you really think you're going to be able to execute your plan?"

"I am sure that Student Council President Nagumo can already see the situation. You have been observing on a daily basis, haven't you? If that's the case, there's no way you don't know the details.

"I see. I was going to shake you up at the time, but instead of getting to that point, you decided to use it against me."

"Will you accept my proposal or not?"

We spoke for quite a long time, even for me. But this conversational work is necessary in negotiations with Nagumo.

"I'd be happy to accept your proposal, but..."

The reply was positive, but the words had other meanings.

"But what's your real purpose?"

"Can't you believe it? I just want to compete with President Nagumo."

"I don't believe it for a second."

As if convinced, he replied without hesitation. I was somewhat pleased, but decided to wait for Nagumo's next words.

"Alright, tell me the main issue. I'll think about whether or not I'll accept the proposal after that."

He let me cut to the other main topic without hesitation.

"I have a favor to ask of the Student Council President Nagumo."

I gave an explanation based on the content of the request and its specific development.

After hearing this, Nagumo sat back deeply in the chair of the student council president, where he had been sitting for almost an year.

"I understand what you're telling me. But that's not a proposal based on your desire to compete with me. You brought up the idea of a match because you had no choice but to control what you wanted to happen. Am I right?"

"Half right, half wrong. It's also true that I myself changed my view of the Student Council President, and that's why I want to compete. However, I also feel that half of it is a hassle."

"You're an honest guy."

"That's why I want you to accept my proposal."

"He's a joke. You requested a match, and now you've got the audacity to say that."

"I won't deny that."

"Do you think I'm going to play along with you and give you what you want?"

"If you refuse, that's the end of it. I will never fight the Student Council President again. Even if you use a classmate or someone in the same grade as me. Not even if you take someone hostage, I will thoroughly ignore them, and you."

"I doubt it. If it's a random guy, you'd probably leave him for dead, but if it's Karuizawa Kei?"

Here Nagumo tried to sway me by mentioning Kei.

"It doesn't matter who it is."

Nagumo's smile disappeared as I answered immediately without hesitation.

"It doesn't sound like you're bluffing. It seems like... you really mean it."

"I'm not an omniscient and omnipotent god. I can't protect everyone 24/7, 365 days a year, whether it's Kei or my classmates. If the student council president, who has the most power in this school and the control of a large student body, wanted to do so, he could have someone expelled from school without my supervision."

Of course, there was a risk of paying a significant price for the trouble, but I didn't care.

"Whoever you expel, I won't make a move again."

This was not a tactic.

Because it was pure sincerity, Nagumo's smile naturally disappeared.

"Means If I want to fight you, I have no choice but to accept your current proposal."

"Of course, you can ignore it and graduate without hesitation."

"But won't you be in trouble if I don't help you?"

"I've already made other plans."

Yes, there was no longer any need to go through the hassle of telling Nagumo my narrative.

But I mentioned half the reason earlier.

I wanted to have this conversation because I wanted to fight him. His next remark would decide everything.

The decision on whether or not the match between us will take place must be made at this point.

"Okay, I'll take your word for it, Ayanokoji. My graduation from Class A is decided anyway. It's not a bad idea to end up playing with you."

Nagumo couldn't even conceive about losing; he didn't believe it for a moment.

This was the overwhelming confidence of a man who was always proud of winning.

"Thank you very much."

"But are you sure you want to do this? If I do what you suggest, then... no matter how it turns out, people will be hurt."

"Of course. Either way, the Student Council President Nagumo would've been involved."

Nagumo reacted strongly to those words.

"...You..."

As I was about to leave, Nagumo stood up and approached me.

"You knew?"

"I have observed Student Council President Nagumo from a distance. I had an idea of what you would do after this."

Even though he already declared he had no intention of fighting, this man always had his sights set on me. It was expected that he'd take action at the right time, before it was too late.

"So you're saying that this is no exception, not only about Karuizawa, but also about Honami."

"Like I said, it's the same no matter who it is. Whether it's Kei's expulsion, toying with Ichinose, Horikita, or anyone else. It would be wise not to think you can sway me with that."

Snickering, Nagumo immediately switches to a serious expression.

"I take back my comment about playing around. You are the only one that Horikita-senpai recognized. I've been able to make sure of that."

"That's good to hear. Well then, I'll leave you here."

"Oi."

"Something still left?"

"I admit that you have a thorough poker face. I also understand that you negotiated hard to get me to agree. So let me ask you once more what you really think. If I was serious about expelling Karuizawa, would you have stood by and watched?"

"Kei, no, I don't think it's desirable to have an expulsion among classmates, no matter who they are. I was going to resist as much as possible."

"That's not the answer. The answer you're giving is about the disadvantage of expulsion of classmates. What I'm saying is that I didn't feel any anxiety from you about the expulsion of Karuizawa, who is very special to you."

I looked back. Normally, the solution here is obvious. I would just say something along the lines of,

"I'm just bluffing so you don't know what I am thinking."

However, I felt that was not the best answer for Nagumo.

"If it disappears, it's gone, and that's all there is to it. It is neither more nor less than that. If anything, it makes the cleanup easier, and that's a big help."

"You have a few screws loose, Ayanokoji."

This was the first time I saw Nagumo upset, or rather, muttering his opinion on something he didn't quite understand.

"I'll be in touch later."

I quietly closed the door and left the student council room.

Nagumo described me as having loose screws, but that's not true.

In my opinion, the person who makes the wrong decision based on temporary feelings is the one with loose screws.

It is the same whether the other person is a stranger, a lover, or a family member.

When the time comes to fail and drop out, that's it.

The first priority should be to protect yourself.

That is the only consistent "solution."

Chapter 2

The Rebellion's Smoke Signal

Intro

November the 8th, Monday.

Ryuen and the others surprised us at the concept cafe competition, and we had to deal with all kinds of problems, but, for these comrades who have determined what it is that they must do, it was not over yet.

As a reply to the bet that Ryuen came up with, Horikita obtained the agreement of her class and presented a one-on-one head on class battle for 1 million private points.

The agreement was that the class that had even one point more than their opponent in the Cultural Festival sales would take these points from the opponent.

No making a fuss, just a direct face to face battle.

Her class-mates were waiting for exactly such forward-facing momentum, so the table was set.

When Chabashira-sensei left the class-room and break time came, I took out my phone.

Then, I noticed that my message had a reply, so I started reading.

"It will take time. I'm headed for the planned spot."

It seems that my invitation wasn't useless.

I did well to plan things ahead for the other day, and after this.

"Hey, Kiyotaka. Let's go together."

"Sorry, I have some plans today."

"What, really? Okay... Then, Maya-chan, let's go together!!"

Thanks to my quick reply, she turned around to Satou who was still in class.

"I'm a second thought to Ayanokoji!?"

"Well, I wouldn't exactly say that, but... You know?"

Even as she was quipping, Satou did not have an unpleasant expression, and actually accepted Kei's invitation.

They invited a few other girls too and joyfully left the class-room.

A bit ahead of there, was the figure of Shinohara who was hostile to them until a while ago.

Kei, who had closed the distance between her and Satou, once again looked like she had completely turned around and grown.

Anyhow, for me, it's a good thing that these two are talking.

In order to meet Kanzaki after inviting him, I headed for the special building.

This time, I could not use call or text, and it couldn't be in front of the public.

On the way, I saw Mashima-Sensei who is the head of Year Two A-Class, and a few others talking in the hallway.

Though I was lured to this rare sight, I did not stop moving or such.

"Chabashira-sensei has changed recently, huh?"

While I was passing by, I heard such a conversation taking place between teachers.

"Should I say she's become more round, or... she's laughing a lot more too, so."

"Mashima-sensei, you were friends with Chabashira-sensei when you both were students, right?"

It seemed like the conversation was about Chabashira-sensei.

I think that it's best if they gossip in the staff room instead, but perhaps it wouldn't be right if they're talking about a specific teacher or a teacher from another gender.

Chabashira's transformation, which the teachers were talking about, was, needless to say, caused by the Unanimous Special Exam.

Mashima-sensei noticed my existence and interrupted the conversation.

There's no mistaking it, he seemed like he was acting improperly not just as a homeroom teacher, but as a teacher.

He must have judged that it wasn't the best idea to let a student overhear such careless words coming out of his mouth.

"Ayanokoji, do you have something to do in the special building?"

There are very few students who meaninglessly pass through these corridors after classes, so I could say this was a natural amount of suspicion.

"I have a meeting. I need to talk about something that I don't want to be overheard so carelessly."

After I answered so, for some reason, everyone except Mashima-sensei looked very angry and walked off.

I was able to get going right away too, but I still have some time until the meeting.

"Mashima-sensei, I'm glad I ran into you. I have something I'd like to ask, if it's okay."

I bet that there is a reason Mashima-sensei stayed while the others left.

"Me? What do you want to ask?"

"About some unspecified rules at the Cultural Festival."

He looked a bit suspicious for a moment, but Mashima-sensei faced me head-on as a teacher.

There are special rules in this high school that aren't at any other ones.

It's obvious that each student has their own point of view.

However, naturally, this makes everyone very curious.

"I don't know what you want to ask, but first you should try asking your homeroom teacher, Chabashira-sensei, right?"

He isn't wrong, but I ignored this and kept going.

Of course, normally I should have asked my homeroom teacher about the rules.

"Now and then, it's actually better that Chabashira-sensei isn't around."

"Teachers shouldn't have any biases facing students. However, if it's other classes of the same grade, problems can occur. You understand that, right?"

He reminds me that it may be too late after asking.

"I know that you are not a person who would disappoint people's expectations."

He does not reward people's trust, but he lets them do whatever they want if they trust him.

"So, about that thing, I wanted to ask about the unclear rules."

After getting permission, I started asking him about this special case.

After hearing this, he was not surprised at all, but that may only be natural.

The school also has secret rules that are not public in order to meet the various wishes of the students.

Which is exactly why it isn't strange for students to think like me.

"It's exactly as you think. It is not impossible to use them if we need to."

"So that's how it is, after all."

This is not sudden at all.

With the situation that the class was put in, it is not impossible to use them if needed.

"But, it wouldn't be sure to say that it would be effective. I think you know, but, if that happened between students, it would be a big problem. Well, you should have a meeting between yourselves to avoid that. Do you understand my meaning?"

"Yes. If the rules are not specified, it would be possible to act independently."

"That's right. There are risks, of course, so why are you considering such a choice?"

"I think it's only natural to prepare for unexpected situations."

After I replied so, Mashima-sensei looked down in thoughts.

"So you're not saying you'd necessarily use it, huh? I see, there really is no problem with just understanding things."

"I'm glad to have gotten a confirmation. Thank you very much."

"It's nothing."

With this, the things I had to confirm until the Cultural Festival are now one fewer, in an unexpected way.

After our conversation, as I was about to leave, Mashima-sensei called out to me and I stopped.

"Ayanokoji, I think that you heard a bit of our conversation about Chabashira-sensei, but... What happened at the Unanimous Special Test?"

"Haven't you heard about it from Chabashira-sensei?"

Mashima-sensei should know that the result is only natural, but, it seems that he does not understand the change of heart Chabashira-sensei had.

"Chabashira-sensei became able to laugh, without caring about the expulsions. So, in other words, in that special exam, something big happened that changed her mind. Isn't that right?"

Mashima-sensei and Chabashira-sensei really were formerly fellow students in the advanced nurturing high school.

There's a lot in their past, so it's no strange thing to be surprised.

"That wasn't the right thing to ask a student. Please forget about it."

"I understand."

After chatting a bit with Mashima-sensei, I headed for the meeting place, the special building.

Part 1

The Cultural Festival is close, but there's a problem coming along with it that I have to deal with.

This will completely change Ichinose's class.

The countdown until destruction is moving faster than I had guessed.

I have to make the necessary preparations to avoid that.

This time, I won't directly contact Ichinose, who is the leader.

I thought that the necessary thing to do now is to cause a transformation on the classmates under her.

However, it is necessary to do this very carefully.

The one who possesses enough power to hold that duty, is, of course, that man, and no one else.

"Sorry to have called you out here."

After classes, when I headed to the meeting place that was discussed in our communications, Kanzaki was already there.

"Do you want something with me?"

I've known Kanzaki ever since I enrolled in the school, but I wouldn't say we're very friendly.

He seems displeased with my existence lately, and I thought that he hated me. Well, if he does hate me, that doesn't mean he wouldn't come to the meeting.

It's not a strange thought to think that he wanted to be careful and come talk to me especially because he does hate me.

As this is a meeting with no traces of other people around, the possibility is very high.

"The time has come to talk about what happens hereafter"

"Hereafter? Just what do you... Ah, it's fine. Let me talk first."

Before I could tell him my terms, Kanzaki stopped me in my tracks.

I was surprised about this unexpected move and decided to first hear him out.

"I've been worried about something recently. All alone, without asking for help from anyone."

After his words, he corrected himself and spoke again.

"No, it would be exaggerating it if I said I was worried, but, I've been thinking every day on how I go about things."

His words were not like the usual calm and cool Kanzaki.

Until I needed an answer from him, I decided to play the part of the listener.

"About how I should live my life after this, after school..."

It's not like he would be worried about his friends or relationships.

There is only one point that the students in this school must care about the most, promotion to Class A.

"It might be a bit useless to talk to you about it now, but, my class can't win."

I wonder what he's talking about winning against.

Is it the Cultural Festival, or the finals?

No, this can't end with such an insignificant subject.

It is reality that Ichinose's class won't rise up to Class A.

This was a cry for help from Kanzaki, who realizes this already.

"Scholarly ability, exercise, leadership, we're certainly not that behind the other classes. I feel that we're actually distinguished on some aspects. However, gradually, I've come to know that this won't lead to victory."

He understood his own thoughts, and started worrying. As I thought, this was Kanzaki.

"I understand what you want to say. So, what do you want from me, Kanzaki?"

If all he wants is a pair of ears to listen and understand him, then anyone could do that.

"I... I want to get some advice from you about Ichinose."

There's the reason it had to be me.

The name of the person that is one of our few common interests finally came up.

"No, not just that. I want to ask you what would be the best for our class to do now."

"That's a big subject. Further, do you ask that of me, someone, who is not even your class-mate?"

"...You're right, I suppose."

Looking at Kanzaki's bitter expression, it's easy to read his mind.

This man isn't the type of person who can ask for help from others so easily.

Especially because he was driven into a corner like this, he had to take such a measure.

Well, at first, it would have been unthinkable to even consider this.

He also had the choice of taking everything upon himself all alone.

"She would never care about what I have to say. No, it would be the same with everyone."

"I had recognized that Ichinose was the type of student that would lend an ear to anyone, but..."

"That was only when you were going the same direction as her. No need to even explain it now."

I talked as if I was testing him, but this is also needless.

If I said it in an easy way to understand, if you ask for help to save somebody, Ichinose wouldn't care about the risks, wouldn't betray you, and help you out until the end. Reversely, if you asked for help to meaninglessly entrap someone, she would never help you.

Rightfully judging evil, these may be the words to describe her.

Even if you try to change this with money or other things, it's no use.

"I won't say that she's headed in the wrong direction. But, she's too idealistic."

"That idealism may actually be necessary."

"Perhaps. I'm prepared to follow along if things are going well."

In truth, Kanzaki and his classmates have been sharing joy and sorrow under while going along with Ichinose until now.

"How about now? We've lost points because of Ichinose's policies. We've sunk to the bottom, and can't even grasp a way to get out."

"You're talking very openly about this. Are you sure? Is it okay to tell me about your class' interior situations in such detail?"

"It's a stupid plan, huh."

As if laughing at himself, he sighed and whispered so.

"However, even if it's stupid, a plan is a plan. Right now, I have no other method than to trust you."

He turned his sad eyes away from me, and stared at the empty floor of the corridor.

"At the unanimous special exam, I asserted that they should try to get points even if it means their class-mates dropping out. I struggled to cast an affirmative note, but that was a misfire too."

I don't know anything about the class' interior situation, but, in this case, it's easy to imagine.

Kanzaki agreed to expel the students for the sake of making them understand the reality his class is facing.

Then, he kept voting in favor to try and change the awareness inside the class, but no one including Ichinose agreed with him.

Still, I'll logically address Kanzaki who has caused an uprising.

Even if he's not on point, something like this should have happened before.

"...This is a strange conversation."

After not getting a reply, Kanzaki whispered so to himself, as if to break the silence.

"No matter if we're enemies or friends, what are you telling me to do after giving me all this information?"

He already decided by himself that he will not get any advice.

He looks like he feels bad about making such a useless move.

"Ichinose is devoted to you. You're the one person that can change Ichinose's policies. I've come to only see it in a straightforward way like that."

"I see."

Change Ichinose's way of thinking and sense of value, to save the class.

The class itself does not have the power, so the light is shining on someone else.

"So you really do want to change how things are going and escape from this situation you're stuck in."

There was no point talking again, so Kanzaki just nodded deeply.

Something that the frustrated Kanzaki couldn't see.

This story about changing Ichinose and being saved, such a future is only a dream.

If Ichinose really did change because of my words, could that really be considered as growth?

Can they assault the other classes if Ichinose becomes someone that makes ruthless decisions?

Erasing what would be called strenghts, to make weaknesses disappear.

There's no proof that you can go back if you change directions into that way.

"I agree that the way it's going needs to be changed. However, I don't agree with the method."

"There's no other choice. You're the only one that can make Ichinose move."

"I wonder. Don't you think there's someone more fitting than me?"

"I don't."

For Kanzaki, who had no other ideas, this was a disappointing conversation.

"Actually, I've called another student here today other than you."

"Who?"

You could say that it is the person you'd expect the least to show up in this place.

"There's no way you called Ichinose, right?"

"Unfortunately, it's not Ichinose. It's a student that has the power to change this course of events."

"Sorry to hinder you, but there's no one in my class except me that can talk against Ichinose. I have enough experience to understand that."

"Your point of view is quite narrow, Kanzaki."

"What?"

"Ichinose's class seems like a monolith, but it's not that simple. There are also a lot of students who just cobble together others' thoughts and get carried away by their environment."

I replied so, but it looked like Kanzaki didn't understand.

I understand why that is too.

He doesn't want to make his own classmates feel unsafe so readily.

"Why is Ichinose's class losing its position, and facing danger?"

Where would I reach if I kept climbing up the error chain?

It's necessary to make Kanzaki and the others understand that.

"Huh? Why is Kanzaki-kun here too?"

She must have thought there wasn't anyone but me here, so Himeno seemed very surprised.

She was a bit earlier than planned, but this was actually great timing.

"Himeno? You were in contact with Ayanokoji?"

"Kinda."

Most people think that she never gets involved in school.

Not just Kanzaki, but all the other students should have the same opinion.

"I certainly can't believe that Himeno is the more fitting person that you were talking about."

In our school life so far, I can mostly understand what kind of image Kanzaki has had of Himeno.

Same as all the other students.

"I'll prove that from now on."

"Wait a bit. It looks like you're talking about me, but what is it?"

After being called here like this, it's normal for Himeno to be suspicious.

"That's... No, wait."

"What is all this, Ayanokoji?"

"What do you mean?"

"You called me here, but just what do you intend to talk about? It seems like you called Himeno here on purpose too, so this almost looks like, from the start..."

He suddenly stopped talking and looked at me and Himeno.

"What, what, what is it?"

"Today, I foresaw that you wanted some advice about the class... Were you yourself thinking about bringing change to our class? No, it would be meaningless for you to think about that, or to put that into action..."

I called Kanzaki here, and before I started talking to him, he told me all about the situation in his class.

It feels unnatural for Himeno to arrive with this timing, and go along with the talks.

"You... Just how much can you really see?"

Since Kanzaki started the conversation, he ended up unexpectedly understanding my plans.

As a result, it seems that this caused Kanzaki to be very surprised.

"Let's get to the main subject. I'll tell you why I called you here today, Kanzaki. It's not necessary for me to change Ichinose. What needs to change, is the class' opinion. If the class' opinion changes, it would also bring about a transformation to Ichinose."

"...It's useless. I've learned that all too well by now."

"By yourself, yes. But, if there are two of you? Three? If everyone except Ichinose had changed their minds, the Unanimous Special Exam's results would have changed, too."

"Changing everyone's minds is a dream in a dream. Besides, even if we could do that, would the result really have changed? Ichinose didn't wish for the expulsions from the start, right?"

"I really can't think that Ichinose, who cares about the class, would go along with expelling people from the school, but, it's another story if the Unanimous Special Exam ends in failure and we receive a penalty."

"Wait a bit. Ichinose-san will protect her class-mates, even if she receives a heavy penalty."

At last, Himeno who was a mere bystander until now opened her mouth.

"While 39 people are against it, could Ichinose really endure until the end?"

"Of course, it's Ichinose-san. Isn't that right, Kanzaki-kun?"

"I think so too, but... It's certain that there will be some contradictions occurring."

Ichinose will fight with all she has for the sake of her classmates.

However, if there's opposition from all of her classmates, I wonder what would happen then.

It's a different problem if even after she understands that she's doing the wrong thing, she continues to vote in opposition.

Even if she succeeds, what awaits her after would be self-loathing.

All that's left would be the reality that her class-mates lost points because of her.

"Ichinose, after being affected badly by her self-condemnation, might not be able to properly continue her duty as a leader."

"That would be the worst possible result, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah. Ichinose would not wish for such a development. So, what do you think really happened? Kanzaki."

"If all of our classmates, same as me, agreed to the expulsions?"

While understanding it isn't a realistic scenario, we will simulate it.

"Being prepared to run out of time, if all 39 students continued voting in favour, Ichinose will eventually change sides. Then, she will try to get herself expelled... Right?"

The answer came out right away.

The class, succeeding in gaining points by expelling Ichinose.

However, they also threw away their benefactor Ichinose at the same time.

"Impossible, I say. If such a development happened, the disadvantages would be way too many."

Ichinose withdrawing from her own class.

It would be an unexpected development, but this would help Kanzaki out.

"Of course, I don't want to tell Ichinose to drop out. Just, if her classmates change, then the class will change too. I think that we should change the opinion of the class instead of changing Ichinose. The ones to start that, are you, Kanzaki, and Himeno."

"M-.. Me?"

"I know you don't agree with everything Ichinose is doing. Unlike her other classmates, you can be suspicious of her, like Kanzaki. Right?"

"That's..."

"When Kanzaki showed opposition at the Unanimous Special Test, what did you think?"

"..."

Himeno silently hung her head low.

"Tell me. I want to know what you're thinking."

"I thought that it was pointless. The class won't change easily. They're so intent on being nice and making themselves the victim instead of their friends."

She quickly started talking about how she felt.

"I felt that Kanzaki-kun's resistance was a simple waste of time. So, I wanted that painful time to end quickly, and for him to come to his senses... That's what I told him."

Perhaps because he remembered that time, Kanzaki shut his eyes and hung his head slightly.

"When you heard those words from Himeno, you grasped that she was the same as the other class-mates, right? You should have come to grips with what Himeno said, that you shouldn't waste time, and that it's no choice at all to throw away your class-mates."

Without denying it, Kanzaki nodded once.

"However, the reality was different. Himeno herself has a problem with the way the class is."

"Then, why won't she put that to words? Not just at the Unanimous Special Exam, but she could have talked about it any time."

A conversation started that I couldn't bud into, as I didn't understand the circumstances of the class.

Normally, the talks shouldn't have been happening here.

Even if they let an outsider like me hear about it, normally it would not have any benefits for them.

However, right now, it's the opposite.

We can get a pledge from Himeno, precisely because I'm here too.

In summary, if they let this chance go, they will go back to the normal daily routine of the Ichinose Class.

"Ahh..."

Himeno's eyes did not show the full extent of her feelings, like Kanzaki's.

"Don't make it sound so simple."

While letting out a sigh, she averted her gaze.

"You get it even if I don't answer, right? Our class has nothing but strong peer pressure. Even if I think something is white, if the majority says that it's black, it becomes black. It doesn't matter if it's true or not. There's no point to a minority faction making proposals in a class like that. It's nothing but pain to have people try to convince you that something is white even though you're sure that it's black. That's why I said nothing until now, and I have no intention to say anything from now on either."

"But, if you don't say anything, white will be black forever."

"That's just fine. I'll accept everyone's arbitrary assertions that it's black. Because the color I'm thinking in my heart still won't change."

Himeno's manners made clear that she didn't care that this was the class' reality, she simply accepted it.

"Kanzaki-kun, you lost heart while trying way too hard to convince people too, right? That's because it was forcefully painted black and overwritten, even though you believed that it was white. That must be hard to endure, right?"

Useless labour. Himeno chose to go with the flow to avoid such a thing.

No, this isn't just Himeno.

It's the same for the other students in the Ichinose Class.

"I want you to stop thinking of me as an ally. Sorry, but I can't be as passionate as you, Kanzaki-kun."

As if trying to get away from Kanzaki away after he approached her, she took a step back.

"Are you really fine with the class staying this way?"

Kanzaki had decided at first that Himeno was no different than his other class-mates.

However, before I noticed, he was trying to convince Himeno while ignoring me.

"Leaving that aside, the important thing for me is just to protect myself, so. I'm not gonna become friendly with anyone, but I won't be anyone's enemy, either. There are times I'm invited, and times that I'm not. I don't want to break that sense of distance, that atmosphere."

She doesn't want to rock the boat, it's not a bad idea at all.

However, with that, the class will never move forwards.

"Kanzaki, if you're able to convince more than half the class, I'll come over to that side, too. You're fine with that, right?"

Himeno decisively said that she has no intention of ever being a part of the minority.

"Ugh..!"

Her true motives, and her reluctance were clear from her words.

If she joins Kanzaki's rebellion, what awaits her is an attack from the majority.

Until she lets go of her own thoughts, this will repeat over and over again.

"Can I go already? I won't tell anyone about this. If I did, it would only be trouble for me, so."

I wonder what Kanzaki will do as Himeno tries to leave.

If he lets her go like this, there will be no transformation brought about to the class.

"...Please wait."

"I don't want to wait, though."

"I didn't want to tell anyone about this, but, I'm actually trying to do something very decisive myself."

"What's that?"

"I don't intend to sink with Ichinose and the class forever."

Kanzaki let Himeno know his thoughts which he had not put to words until now.

"You're saying... You're going to betray the class?"

"I won't deny it. Because, it's pointless to stay with a class that can't win."

If Kanzaki leaves, the rebellion's signal won't fire.

Under the current circumstances, Kanzaki is the only one that can get ahead of Ichinose.

"I'm not trying to threaten you. But, I'll say that much, at least."

If Kanzaki did leave the class somehow, it still wouldn't have any effect on Himeno personally.

However, she must at least understand that it would mean the class would lose its chance to climb up.

Himeno is worried. She showed a reaction that was completely different to her demeanor until now.

"You get that, right? Himeno."

"So cunning. That is a threat..."

"I guess you could see it that way, too."

Himeno may tell Ichinose and the others about this sign of betrayal.

Leaving Ichinose aside, one may think that the class members will work towards stopping Kanzaki from getting the right to change classes, so this is very risky.

"...Do you really intend to change classes?"

"I can't say anything that will make you happy, but, what Ayanokouji said is true. I want to believe that changing Ichinose by our hands is the way to save the class."

"But, I..."

Biting her lower lip, Himeno strongly closed her eyes.

It is unavoidable that Himeno will get the cold shoulder if she allies with Kanzaki, who is alone and isolated.

Kanzaki understands well that this is not what she wants.

Still, someone has to do it.

"...I... If I can win, I want to win."

Himeno is softening up after Kanzaki showed her the possibility that he may disappear.

But, she isn't all in yet.

"In that case, we have to move now. Isn't that right?"

If Himeno doesn't make a move now, Kanzaki really will lose his chance.

Even if he doesn't want to make that choice, Kanzaki has to change his policy and aim for victory by transferring to another class.

With that, Himeno, who can't say that black is black, will certainly face defeat.

"I understand what you want to say... But, right now..."

"You intend to tell me that there's still a chance we can win with Ichinose's policies, right?"

Kanzaki's words that interrupted Himeno strongly pierced into her.

Without being able to continue speaking, she heavily closed her lips.

"Don't you want to graduate in the A class, Himeno?"

The words stabbed into her heart like a spear. Painful, enough to make her bleed.

"If I can graduate in the A-Class, of course, I want to!"

Her loud voice echoed through the corridors.

Perhaps it was louder than expected, and Kanzaki lost his words in shock.

"But, as things are right now, I can't think of anything to do! There's nothing to do, I'm telling you!"

Himeno yelled so with passion.



"Kanzaki-kun, even you understand that, right?"

"I get it, of course!! That's why I'm saying that we have to do it now! I don't want to lose to the other classes!"

He can't keep up with Himeno, but Kanzaki unexpectedly yelled so, and Himeno was the one in shock this time.

Looking at her face and seeing her falter, my conviction was renewed.

Himeno showing her true self for the first time, and, Kanzaki's child-like face.

There must be a lot of students in the Ichinose class that only want it to look like they're invested in the class.

After half a year, the Horikita class exposed their weak points.

They prioritize themselves as model students, and don't care about others being expelled.

They can't study, discuss things, and quickly turn to violence.

They get close to the people who have the power in order to get higher positions.

In order to make their past disappear, they plan the expulsion of their allies.

Such weak hearted students, fell down to the bottom, and crawled back up. On one side, they've shown unbelievable growth.

"...Kanzaki-kun, seeing you like that... You're always so calm, so I was surprised."

"...Same for me. I didn't know you had such thoughts, Himeno."

The Ichinose class didn't have the simply hardships that the Horikita class had.

If they find someone that has fallen and is hurt, they help them with a heavy hand, and support them from both sides so that they don't fall again.

Keep helping those who have hurt their hands.

Why did they fall? Why did they hurt their hands?

Actually, it hurts a lot worse, but they held it down in order not to raise any concerns.

What came with that, is the Ichinose class which was constructed with superficial relationships.

"The time has come to become true allies."

After staying silent, I said so to the two.

"However, what should we do? How can we progress forwards? Even if we can change Himeno's opinion, if we don't keep going after that, then there's no meaning."

"There's no need to rush the answer. We will search for them together from now on."

"Search... What do you mean?"

"Students who hold their true feelings secret, like you."

Even if I can't do it alone, with these two, my field of vision is many times larger.
With a change of view, many new discoveries will come our way.

"If... If we do find someone?"

"It's simple. This time, we'll search with 3 people. Then, make it 4. We'll just repeat that over and over."

One day, a small ember will turn into a large flame.

Then, Ichinose will know about it, too.
That the class is trying to change.

"It's not too late yet. Become strong. Then, prove that you can defeat the class that Horikita is leading in the year-end exams."

If they do that, when they go up to Year Two, they should still have some hope for becoming A Class.

"...What will we do, Kanzaki-kun?"

"You must have the resolve to suffer more than you can imagine. However... It's not impossible."

After seeing the real example of Himeno, he can't say that she doesn't exist in the class again.

On one side, Himeno should have been able to get close to Kanzaki's strong will and understand it.

"I want to graduate in the A-Class, too. Until now, I couldn't say it to anyone, but..."

By some way or other, Himeno's thoughts were conveyed to Kanzaki

"That's... That's right. Our target hasn't changed at all since the start."

Now, they're taking their first steps, like a baby.

"Umm... After hearing what Ayanokoji had to say, there's someone I'm curious about. After this, if it's okay, can we go meet them?"

After hearing Himeno's proposal, Kanzaki nodded strongly.

As the third person here, this isn't territory that I should step into.

"Ayanokoji, I'm going to return this gift at the year-end exam."

Does he mean winning, and getting the rights to challenge the A Class?

"The Horikita Class is strong, Kanzaki."

"You're right. ...Sorry, I'm going. I actually don't want to waste even a minute or a second, so."

Himeno also nodded, took out her phone, turned her back to Kanzaki and started walking.

I was a bit worried about just how far those two would change, but I might actually somehow get a result that is even more than I expected.

In the year-end exam, the Horikita Class may actually break.

No matter which way it goes, it won't hinder my plans, but now I have one more thing to look forward to.

Chapter 3

A Love Letter

Intro

Tuesday, November 9.

In the morning, I ran into Horikita in the elevator on my way to school.

After exchanging a quick greeting, we left the lobby and went directly outside the dormitory together.

"Have you heard? The day before the cultural festival, the entire third grade students are preparing a rehearsal just like it would be, on the next day."

"Yeah, I heard they're inviting first years and second years to participate as well."

This is exactly the information that was posted on the school bulletin board last night to inform the entire school. The source of the information was the student council - in other words, it was Nagumo's decision. This must be what Nagumo himself said last week that the student council would make a not-so-bad proposal.

It was up to us to decide how we would participate. It can be a simulated food service or an actual one. It is only a proposal to make adjustments for tomorrow's festival altogether.

"Many classes have already announced their participation in it to the student council. I'm sure the classes that have been keeping it secret all this time will want to get a third-party review before the festival."

"So you're saying more classes are taking it positively."

"I think it's because the 3rd year A class rented the gymnasium and put on a public performance that everyone is taking it well."

The exhibits were announced without keeping it any secret and were demonstrated in person.

Additionally, the way they integrated the enhancements that emerged from that approach became widely known among the students enrolled in the school. There must have been a certain percentage of students that wanted this festival to be successful and for them to enjoy it as students rather than as a competition.

"I'm sure the student council's decision to pay for consumable materials and other expenses was also an additional factor for it."

Even if you do a preparatory run, it will still cost money.

It is necessary to set up a separate budget from the one provided for the festival, and the source of funds will naturally be in the form of collecting private points from individuals.

It would not be surprising if some of the classes would have missed the preparatory event if they had to pay out of their own pocket for the rehearsal, but that is what the student council is all about. If the student council covers the cost of the event, there is almost no reason to refuse. They have already announced that if Classes bring in receipts, they will be paid off from the student council's budget.

Of course, it wasn't unlimited, but there were tens of thousands of points evenly set for each class.

"We're going to participate in it, right?"

"Of course. The whole school knows it's going to be a maid cafe. So, There's no loss in doing it."

"That's right. And then There's also the matter of Ryuen."

Horikita gave me a serious look, and I replied with a gentle nod.

"Let's see what they have in store for us."

It was a great opportunity to see how Ryuen would develop the concept.

"Do you feel like we can lose?"

"I don't know."

"You look pretty confident."

"I'm not confident. I'm just doing everything I can."

"That's true. Even so, don't you usually feel insecure?"

Apparently, Horikita is concerned that she might lose, even though she is fully prepared.

"Maybe I'm scared about losing."

Defeat doesn't only mean losing class points. But it's just as bad to fail to earn class points. Wanting to avoid stagnating is natural when you're on the momentum of reaching Class A.

"Maybe last year you wouldn't have been so anxious."

"It was just recklessness... no, I was just not seeing anything around myself at that time."

Now, Horikita was starting to broaden her horizons a little. That's why she couldn't help but think about losing.

"As a class leader, it's not a bad thing to be prepared for both winning and losing. I'm just one of the pawns making irresponsible statements."

Well, it's Horikita's shortcoming and strength that she cannot easily dismiss that statement. If it was Sakayanagi or Ryuen, they would've listened and dismissed it; if it was Ichinose, she would've taken it as if it was the only thing that mattered.

Horikita has both of these aspects.

"I know, but... Sometimes."

I patted Horikita on the back with the palm of my hand.

"What are you doing?"

"It's too early to get used to winning."

"I'm not going to..."

She looked a little angry, but she also realized that I hit the nail on the head.

"It was a conceited notion, not the result of anything I've done well myself."

The uninhabited island, unanimous exam, those weren't victories supported solely by straight-up skills.

"You mean...?"

"What?"

"I'm trying not to take everything you say seriously, but you've been very cooperative lately, which is even more annoying. I don't know how to process this in my head."

"Then please don't cooperate with me at all in the future."

I tried to walk quickly away, but she grabbed me by the shoulders.

"That's rejected."

I tried to get away, but was immediately grabbed and brought back.

"I'd like to stop by the convenience store before going to school, would you like to join me?"

"Convenience store?"

"I'm preparing for the day before the school festival, and I want to make the most of my lunch break today."

"I don't mind joining."

A few minutes in a convenience store wouldn't be a problem.

I followed Horikita to the convenience store and stepped inside.

There we ran into Koenji, who was just about to pay for his items.

He had only two things: a bottle of soy milk and a white meat salad.

It was a very light meal for lunch, but I wondered if he was going to have it during his morning break.

Since Koenji is rarely seen eating, his private life remains a mystery to us.

"Good morning, Koenji-kun."

Horikita called out to him, but after paying for his things, Koenji only smiled lightly and didn't exchange any words.

"I heard that Koenji is the only one not assigned work for the cultural festival."

"He told me he wouldn't do anything. I'm sure I won't change his mind."

Horikita didn't seem particularly concerned either and went to the cash register to select a quick meal.

She refused the plastic bag offer and tucked it away in her own bag.

"You didn't have anything to buy?"

"They don't have anything I need, and I don't have stacks of private points."

With the month of November, my wallet was filled to some extent, but I had plans to cash out soon.

"You're no longer paying points to Kushida-san, right?"

"Not really, since I haven't been charged for it."

"Would you really pay if she asked you?"

"Do you think she will ask me?"

Horikita replied to me with distaste, muttering,

"No, I don't think so. I don't want her to come back to troubling self and bother again."

Whatever the distortion, Kushida showed great change.

And we must believe that it is heading in the direction of growth.

Part 1

After school that day, Ichihashi approached Horikita, who was sitting in front of her, with some hesitation.

"Um, Horikita-san... can I talk to you for a minute?"

She usually does not have a strong connection with Horikita and rarely talks to her.

Usually, one would think that it would be about the cultural festival that is about to begin.

But the item held in her hand, implied otherwise.

"What is it?"

"Actually, I have a favor to ask you. You have student council work later today, right?"

"Yes. As I told the class a while ago, I have student council work to do. I can't help you with the festival."

"Yeah, that's not what I meant. This... Can you please...?"

With these words, she presented a letter.

A glimpse of a heart sticker clasped the envelope's mouth.

"What's this?"

"It's a love letter but..."

"Eh?"

No wonder she looked puzzled, unable to comprehend the meaning for a moment.

Even though we live in an age where diversity is accepted, it is understandable that a love letter from a girl to a girl would be more upsetting in another way than the opposite gender.

"Ah, uh? It is not from me to Horikita-san or anything like that. Actually... I was asked by a friend who wanted me to give it to the Student Council President Nagumo."

"To the student council president? But isn't that something you should give in person?"

If you're going to confess your feelings to someone you have a crush on, face to face is naturally the expectation.

"She asked me to deliver it to him because she was too nervous to give it herself. But I don't have the courage to hand it to the student council president in person either..."

Nagumo, for example, is more sociable than former student council president Manabu Horikita, but he is still a senior and representative of the school.

It would be a considerable hurdle for someone who is not in contact with him to approach him.

Horikita, on the other hand, was different. It was easy to imagine them conversing about student council business on a daily basis.

"I understand the situation, but..."

"Please. She's been struggling with it for a long time now, and... she's finally found the courage to do so."

If it was Horikita from a year ago, she might have declined the request.

But building her relationship with her classmates is now important to her.

There was no way around it to make up for her lost trust in the unanimous special exam.

"Okay. I'll see if I can somehow find an opening and give it to him for you. Is that okay?"

"Uh, yes."

Ichihashi answered, but she looked a bit tense.

"Is there still a problem?"

"Um, well, there's a little problem with this love letter."

When Horikita received the letter, he noticed that there was no name on either the front or the back. This means that the sender is unknown until you confirm the inside.

"Can I assume that it is written inside who this letter is from?"

"I don't know... If it were normal, I'd imagine it would be written. That girl, if she was just happy to tell him how she feels, she might not have written it."

In other words, neither the deliverer nor the receiver would know the sender of the love letter.

"That's a little hard to accept. Of course, I'll explain when I give it to him, but if I'm not careful, he might mistake it for a letter from me."

Saying she received it from someone else despite it actually being a letter from herself— the possibility of Nagumo taking it like that cannot be said to be zero.

"Well then, can't you ask someone else? Like a boy you know in the student council or... No? I'd like for you to give it today somehow."

"That's easier said than done..."

Despite her doubts, Horikita thought for a moment and nodded.

"I'll do my best, but there's no guarantee that I'll be able to give it to him, okay?"

"I'm glad Horikita-san took the job. I'm sure she'll be very pleased."

Although hesitant, Horikita agreed to deliver the love letter to Nagumo.

Normally, she would have asked who the letter was from, but Horikita was not interested and did not try to go deeper into the matter.

Part 2

Because of the unexpected request, my steps were a little bit... No, they were quite heavy.

"Why won't she just give it to him herself... jeez!"

It was a mistake to accept this, and why did I, an irrelevant person, took something like this—.

I should turn back and tell Ichihashi-san to give it to him in person.

"That would be the right thing to do."

When the feeling of escape came to mind.

I suddenly remembered the time when I was about to give a letter to my brother who had decided to go to high school.

I was an idiot and I didn't even realize that my brother was being cold towards me and was desperate to somehow get back to the old days when we were close.

I thought that if I couldn't talk to him face to face, I could just put my feelings in a letter. But the pen in my hand didn't move as smoothly as it did in my head.

For days and days, I thought and wondered, writing and erasing over and over again.

How could I convey my feelings?

How could I make my brother happy?

I struggled with the act of writing the letter itself.

And in the end—— I couldn't hand it over.

My brother left for this school and I could no longer see or contact him.

"I wonder what happened to that letter..."

As I dig up my memory, I recalled putting it in my brother's desk drawer.

"What if my brother goes home and sees it?"

I stopped in the hallway and felt my heart rate suddenly hasten. If my brother saw a letter like that now, he would laugh at me.

"———Let's forget about it."

Even if I get agitated here and now, It won't help in getting rid of the letter and pretend it never happened. Now all I can do is hope that my brother doesn't find it.

Remembering my brother's back from outside the window, I decided to put my hands together.

"That's right."

Writing a letter to someone you love is difficult. Additionally, the obstacle is significantly greater if you have to give it to them directly.

Even now, I would find it difficult to respond right away if someone asked if I could write my brother a letter.

I don't know who she is or where she is from, but she wants to give it to the Student Council President Nagumo Miyabi.

I understand her feelings of nervousness.

I made my way to the student council room and somehow came up with a reason for myself to present it to him. Except for Student Council President Nagumo, all of the student council members were present when I opened the door. Yagami-kun, a first-year student, Aga-kun, also a first-year student, and Kiriya-senpai, the third-year vice president, were the three boys present.

However, it would not be possible for just any boy to do what I need. I couldn't simply entrust them with the task of handing out love letters, which isn't even a responsibility for the student council.

But I was relatively close to Yagami-kun. I talk to him quite regularly. I knew I was taking advantage of my position as a senpai, but I couldn't turn my back on this letter. Yagami-kun was sitting down and chatting with Ichinose-san.

I reached for the love letter, hoping to get the troublesome matter out of the way quickly. But just then, Student Council President Nagumo appeared in the room.

"The meeting will begin immediately. Take your seats."

The voice of Student Council President Nagumo was as dark and heavy as he appeared. I felt the air instantly become tense and tight and put my hand back on my bag.

There was no way I could say that I was asked to hand over a love letter under these circumstances.

"Ichinose, if you have anything to report, let's hear it."

"Yes. It seems that it has been decided that all classes will participate in the rehearsal the day before the festival."

"It was decided in almost half a day? It seems that the student council president's decision was correct. However, if the decision was made by the student council, I wish you would have informed us a little earlier."

Kiriyama-senpai, the vice president, made a pointed remark.

"It's just an idea. I thought starting a little earlier would make the juniors feel at ease and happy."

Student Council President Nagumo replied without any particular apology.

Such a scene from the student council meeting was becoming a regular occurrence.

Basically, the student council-led things started with an idea from Student Council President Nagumo. Sometimes they were born from a comment made during the meeting, and other times they were created without our knowledge.

Then there was a sudden silence, and Student Council President Nagumo had his arms crossed and his eyes closed. It was obvious that he was holding back his anger.

"Um, what's wrong, Nagumo-senpai...?"

"Listen, I heard a strange rumor."

"Rumor...?"

"It's not proven, but there was some guy, who said that I was betting a lot of money to get certain students expelled from school."

"What? What do you mean?"

It's no wonder Ichinose-san asked back. I, too, could not immediately understand the meaning of what Student Council President Nagumo said.

"Who told you that nonsense?"

"Someone from your class, Kiriyama."

Student Council President Nagumo threw such words to Vice President Kiriya with his eyes closed.

"From my class?"

"It's just gossip among friends, so it wouldn't be strange if you were aware of it."

"Sorry, that's news to me. I don't understand why you would bet a lot of money to get someone expelled in the first place."

Typically, students will spend a lot of money to get a certain person into an "A" class. Even for me, if that's what he was referring to, it's not difficult to grasp. But the odds were stacked against students, particularly third-years, and if they were permitted to get into President Nagumo's class, they have essentially assured an "A" class status till graduation. It's more possible—for lack of a better word—that Nagumo, president of the student council, granted those with whom he has strong links, private points in secret, granting them the chance to get into his class.

"It's just a rumor. But I'm not willing to sit idly by and let the accusations against me go unchallenged."

Indeed, as student council president, such rumors could damage him one way or the other. It's understandable that he was visibly in a bad mood.

"The student council will be suspended for a while."

"Suspended...?"

Ichinose-san was surprised by this unexpected proposal from Student Council President Nagumo.

The student council used to meet like this once a week and repeatedly discuss various topics. The only exceptions were during test periods and some special exams. It was unusual to suspend them during the regular school year.

"We're done discussing the cultural festival, too. There shouldn't be any problems."

"Are you going to look for the culprits?"

"Of course, we'll look for them thoroughly. The next meeting will be held after the festival."

We then continued discussing the day before the festival, and we departed shortly afterward. I got up from my seat and headed toward Yagami-kun.

He looked up from his notepad, halted his hand, and closed it as if he had sensed my approach. He was maintaining the logs because he serves as the student council's secretary.

The other students left the student council room ahead of me, which I was grateful for.

When the two of us were alone, I decided to call out to him.

"I wonder if it's okay to talk?"

Yagami-kun turned to me after looking a little surprised.

"I'm sorry, were you still in the middle of writing it down?"

"No, I just finished. Don't worry about it."

He placed his hand lightly on top of the closed notebook and smiled at me.

"Is something wrong, Horikita-senpai?"

"Yagami-kun. May I ask you a slightly unreasonable favor?"

"What is it?"

"I want you to give this to the student council president. It's a love letter."

I took out the love letter and presented it to Yagami.

"That's very rare these days. Most of the time it seems to be done through chatting or phone calls..."

When he received it with a surprised look on his face, I hastened to add.

"Just to let you know, it's not from me."

"I see. I thought it was a love letter from Horikita-senpai... Or should I just give it to him as such?"

"No, that's not it. A girl in my class asked me to give it to him."

"There is no sender name. Whose love letter is it? I'll let him know."

"I can't tell you that. She wants to remain anonymous."

"It's an anonymous love letter...?"

"She asked for me to pass it on as a member of the student council, but there's the issue of anonymity, and if I give it to him, he might think it's from me, right?"

"That's quite possible. To be honest, I still have a little bit of doubt in my mind that it might have been written by Horikita-senpai."

Yagami-kun smiled a little funnily, but to me, it was anything but funny.

"I'm just kidding. I can tell by the look of disgust on your senpai's face that it's not."

I sure hope that's the case.

"Actually, it would've been smoother if I had given it to you before Student Council President Nagumo arrived..."

"Even if you gave it to me, I don't think I would've been able to hand it over. It didn't seem like the kind of atmosphere to give a letter."

"Yes, that was inevitable."

Under the circumstances, no one could talk to Student Council President Nagumo.

"I'm sorry to ask you to do this, but could you please deliver it as soon as possible? I'm sure they think I'll deliver it today."

"In that case, I'll visit the dormitory later."

Yagami-kun stared at the love letter intently while looking a little perplexed.

"Is this really a love letter?"

"Probably. I think she said she put her feelings into it, but I can't be sure."

I couldn't peel off the seal to see what was inside.

"If I gave it to him as a love letter and it turned out to be different, I think it would be disrespectful to the student council president."

"That might be possible."

"I'll put it somewhat vaguely, saying that I received the letter from someone."

"Yes, I think that's a good idea. Thank you."

I thanked him for his honest acceptance.

"By the way, even in this day and age, it's hard for a secretary to work with handwritten notes, isn't it?"

There is nothing wrong with using a computer to work nowadays.

"Tradition is also important. It seems that the notes have been kept on file ever since this school was founded. If we suddenly switch to digital, it'll create a sense of discomfort."

Yagami-kun turned to face the bookshelf and fixed his gaze there. Undoubtedly, there are numerous records that tell the history of the Student Council. The student council files being replaced with a disc wouldn't necessarily be a terrible thing, but Yagami-kun made a valid argument. If we cherish tradition, perhaps we should keep doing this.

"I also hear that it is better to have hardships while you are a student. If you get used to easy life early on, you may suffer later on."

Yagami-kun showed a slightly mature response, not like a first-year high school student.

"In that sense, this love letter is similar."

It is true that nowadays it is not uncommon to confess one's feelings using one's cell phone. But I can understand that there is a certain meaning to conveying your feelings through your letters.

"Even so, today's Student Council President Nagumo really didn't seem to have a lot of time to spare, did he?"

"Yeah. He's betting a lot of money to expel the students, isn't he? As I recall... What was his name..."

As if remembering something, Yagami-kun opened his notebook and showed it to me.

The first page that was flipped through was from the middle of last year and looked like something a current third-year student would have written in his sophomore year.

Then the page changed and switched to the most recent notes.

I instantly recognized this because the notes, which seemed to have been written by Yagami-kun, were written in a perfect, orderly manner that showed his meticulousness.

And the writing was so polished that it was hard to believe it was handwritten.

"There it is. He said that this Kishi-senpai might have spread a rumor. Do you know what class Kishi-senpai is in?"

Yagami-kun asked me with the same expression, as usual, showing me the meeting records.

But my brain was pulled into another realm all at once.

These characters.... They look very similar to that letter which had almost slipped from my memory.

Was he the person who presented me with the letter during the uninhabited island exam?

I held my gaze, which was about to blur with agitation, and reached the notes of today's meeting.

I looked at Yagami-kun from a broader perspective and saw that he was still looking at me with the same smile.

It couldn't be... But... No, it can't be.

Amidst a whirlwind of emotions, I think as I continue to feign looking down at the notes.

"Horikita-senpai?"

"Sorry, I don't know, but you should be able to figure it out pretty quickly if you look at the OAA."

"Sure. I'll look it up right away."

"I'm sorry, but I just remembered something I have to do. I'll leave you to it."

"Oh, really? I understand."

I looked away from him and quickly turned as if to run away.

"Well then, I'm sorry, but I need you to take care of my letter to the student council president."

"Yes, senpai. Thank you for your hard work, Horikita-senpai."

If he stared at me then, I probably would have asked him. I knew in my gut that I had to avoid that. I exited the door connecting the student council chambers and slowly closed it.

Just before it was about to close, I saw Yagami-kun smiling at me through the door's slightest gap. He looked at me with a smile, as if he was testing me.

It was as if he was challenging me with a question, "Did you notice?" It was as if he was trying to provoke me.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have taken the trouble to open the notebook and show me the handwriting.

The door slammed shut.

The possibility that they happen to have similar handwriting cannot be ruled out.

Since I saw that letter, a lot of time has passed, and my memory is blurry.

Yet, for some reason, it was similar enough for me to be certain.

Assuming he is the one who wrote the letter to me... he has been by my side the whole time and has been remaining composed and level-headed at all times.

At the same time, it did not seem to make this speculation very realistic.

Chapter 4

The Meeting Before The Festival

Intro

The days go by quickly, and Friday came, November 12. The day before the festival after school arrived.

Each class has been working on preparations for the festival. The student council will be leading the rehearsal this afternoon after school. It will serve as a crucial measure for how well We perform tomorrow.

With a few exceptions, all of the other students immediately started moving to start making preparations. Horikita's class has a total of four stalls.

The first is the well-known maid cafe, where tea, coffee, and other beverages are the main sales along with photoshoot with the maids.

The latter sales strategy will be a major source of earnings if there are numerous clients because it is time-efficient and the unit price is set high.

The second and third are outdoor food stands that sell Western-style pasta and bread as well as powdered foods (takoyaki, okonomiyaki, etc.). The stalls themselves generate sales, and the maid cafe also accepts orders.

A student in charge of delivery goes to the stall when an order is placed and brings it to the customers here in maid cafe.

In order to take advantage of the maid cafe's originality, a limited food menu is also prepared, which is a slight modification of the existing menu offered at the food stall.

And finally, the fourth and final event is an outdoor quiz competition for children, which was added on short notice with the extra budget.

"You guys didn't make Hasebe-san and Miyake-kun come?"

Maezono asked as her eyes followed Haruka and Akito, who had just left the classroom.

"There's no point in forcing them to do anything. Let's consider this a good opportunity to test whether 35 people, excluding Koenji-kun, Hasebe and Miyake, can be left alone without any problems."

But those three are not the only ones who are not willing to cooperate.

In the weeks prior to the festival, Kushida barely interfered with any of the sessions and she has been leaving school right away without helping.

She has visited Horikita several times to come up with new ideas because she is aware that she will be in charge of serving the customers as a maid at the festival. While they are only tiny components, some of them have even been adopted.

However, she did not participate in any practice sessions with other maids to make sure they were all on the same page.

"I'd like to do some final checks for tomorrow's event and also practice my activities for the day. Do you think you'll have time today?"

Sato called out, somewhat bravely, trying as much as possible not to let her guard down. Kushida, who had just gotten up from her seat, stopped and turned around on the spot.

"I'm sorry, Sato-san. I have something I really can't miss after school."

This was not the first time Kushida has said that.

"Listen, you keep refusing me like that. When are you seriously going to cooperate?"

The atmosphere was turning sour, and Horikita was about to get up from her seat, but Yosuke, who was standing beside her, stopped her as if he had anticipated this.

I don't know who was right.

However, it's impossible to create a smooth class if we interfere in everything.

Sometimes things have to be resolved by the people involved.

Yosuke's actions can be described as out of character because he typically is the one to stand out to anyone else...

Probably because he felt that unnecessarily showing Horikita's special treatment towards Kushida to the class was a bad move.

Of course, Horikita understood this, but she also had a dilemma that she couldn't leave alone.

"Don't worry, I've got the festival in mind, and I'm not going to drag the class down."

"But, Kushida-san, you haven't practised, not even a little. I can't trust you with the important role of a maid."

Today's rehearsal will be the perfect practice.

Sato, who had been reluctant to participate, seems unable to back down today.

Likewise, Kushida had been even more reluctant and it doesn't seem like she will budge today as well.

"Then why don't you remove me? I don't think there are any other decent candidates."

A merciless remark, but a fair one.

Even taking Kushida's appearance into consideration, a student who isn't currently playing the role of a maid wouldn't be able to serve as a substitute.

"I'll see you tomorrow at the festival. Bye."

Although she spoke in a kind tone, unlike previous Kushida, her actions may be interpreted as being harsh.

Until the very end, she turned down Sato's proposal and left the room.

Did she simply not want to spend time with classmates who know her true nature?

Or was it really that she had something she can't miss?

Obviously, the atmosphere in the classroom deteriorated, but that can't be helped.

"Hey, Horikita-san. Tomorrow's the festival, but I still think we should remove Kushida-san after all..."

Matsushita, unable to bear the sight of Sato's downcast and frustrated face, went directly to Horikita.

"I know what you mean. But I don't intend to remove her at the moment."

"But it's a lie that she has to do things every day, isn't it?"

Kushida's recent actions have been, in fact, somewhat mysterious.

She hasn't been interacting with others since the unanimous special exam, which is unavoidable, but her lack of cooperation has been evident,

"That may be so. I don't know why she doesn't participate in practice either."

"Then..."

"Don't worry. She's thinking about the festival and the maid cafe in her own way. Just believe in Kushida-san."

"Well, I guess you could say that we won't get anywhere if I don't believe in her..."

Matsushita looked unconvinced, but nodded and turned to follow Satō.

Matsushita, perhaps because she was one of the founding members this time, was also making a lot of efforts.

Horikita's attitude didn't convey any anxiety, despite the fact that Kushida's absence from practise is a cause for concern.

It appeared to be peering out with reasonable confidence, instead.

That's most likely the reason Matsushita retreated.

Let's wait and see because it didn't appear like she was in need of help.

Part 1

On the first floor of the special building, stall number "Special 02".

This area, which was typically utilised as an empty classroom, was being decorated by students.

The girls, it turned out, were by far the greatest at this kind of decoration.

The boys helped the girls out with some of the work.

With Horikita in the lead, it's probably safe to let them handle the setup.

Preparations for the concept cafe were steadily underway in the back of the special classroom on the second floor.

Unlike our maid cafe, the concept of Ryuen's class was "Traditional Japanese style."

The food and beverages were also completely different from ours, including Japanese sweets and tea.

While preparations were underway, we found a unique presence.

There was a girl sitting alone in a chair reading a book dressed in a kimono.

"... Good day."

When she noticed me, Hiyori lifted her book and, for some reason, hid everything but her gaze.



"Long time no see. I hear you haven't turned up at the library lately?"

"That's not true. It's a bit, I mean, I'm there at a different time now."

I found it strange that a bookworm would leave the library, but I believe she simply shifted the times when she was visiting.

"So, you are going to work at the store as well?"

"I am just working as the cashier. I'm not especially good at talking with people... nor with walking around. I have practiced carrying the trays with food, but that didn't go well."

In short, she's not very good at anything in general.

However, working as a cashier isn't hard and if she can handle it smoothly, it'll be fine.

"By the way, Ibuki-san is also participating."

"Ibuki? But she's not the kind of person who would ever wear that outfit, right?"

"It seems she made a bet with Ryuen-kun to be completely exempted from the cultural festival."

"And she lost."

Hiyori smiled a little funny as if she was remembering that time.

"So, where is this Ibuki who lost?"

"She's not participating today. She said she absolutely hates wearing it outside of the festival."

I can understand that feeling, but I hope she can serve her customers well when she goes out on the spot. Well, Ryuen would deal with such matters in a flexible manner.

I wanted to check on Ryūen, who owns the restaurant, but I couldn't see him. I wondered if he left the rehearsal preparations to other students.

"It seems that Ryuen-kun went to check Class A."

"Class A?"

"Because they haven't disclosed what kind of presentation they were going to put on."

Indeed, the details of Sakayanagi's class had been unknown until the day before the festival.

It's not strange to want to find out what they will be doing.

As long as all the classes were participating in this pre-opening the day before, there was no doubt that they would be preparing to open a stall somewhere.

"I'm going to go over there for a bit too."

After talking with Hiyori, I decided to look for Sakayanagi's class.

"Um, Ayanokoji-kun..."

"Hmm?"

"Ryuen and the others went up to the third floor, so I think that's where Sakayanagi-san probably went."

"I see, that saves me the trouble."

She seemed to want to say something else, but Hiyori immediately shook her head from side to side.

Three second-year classes concentrated in a special wing, and yet they are on different floors?

"I'll be at the library again, so please do come, Ayanokoji-kun."

"Yes, I will."

I raised my hand to say goodbye, and then walked up to the third floor.

The third floor of the special wing is the farthest from the school gate and the hardest to reach.

There were three classrooms available here, but until the previous day, they were not popular and had not been rented.

"I didn't think that Sakayanagi's class would rent everything there, though."

As it's currently an exclusive floor, the 2nd year Class A students roamed the third floor corridors as they pleased.

At first glance, it's hard to imagine what kind of display they are trying to put on.

The students were still wearing their school uniforms, and there were only a few cardboard boxes scattered around with their contents kept hidden from sight.

Since it's impossible to cook indoors due to fire regulations, that field disappears.

"Surprised by the unexpected?"

Hashimoto, who was supposedly keeping an eye on the students coming, approached and called out.

"What's this all about?"

"You can't even understand what you're seeing?"

Hashimoto laughed quietly, perhaps amused that I didn't grasp it.

"Well, that's understandable. But I can't answer you easily."

They probably want to wrap things up for preparations the day before, but they don't want to reveal them.

On the stairs going to this floor, a sign was displayed as if to signify this.

It read, "Due to an issue, the second-year Class A will not be presenting their activities today."

"That's what it means. I'm sorry you had to come all the way up here, but I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

Even if I persisted, I would still not be able to find out the details of the exhibit.

"It looks like Ryuen will be leaving soon, too."

With his hands in his pockets, Ryuen moved toward us after exiting a classroom at the back.

He gave Hashimoto and I a brief glance before proceeding straight through and downstairs.

"Or are you going to do the same as him and take a closer look, even if you know it's useless?"

"I'm going back."

"Good luck. You'll have to wait until we open to see what happens."

I was on my way back to the second floor when I noticed that Ryuen had turned his back to face me and stopped.

I shifted my gaze and looked into his eyes directly.

Ryuen raised the corner of his mouth slightly before opening it.

"Tell Suzune that it will be our class that wins tomorrow."

"I bet the Japanese attire cost more than the maid uniforms, didn't they? If you're going to challenge her to a match, at that point, you could have just worked together."

"It's simply my taste."

After replying with words that could be taken either seriously or jokingly, Ryuen started walking away.

Without paying attention to Hashimoto's presence from the upper floor, I also turned back to the maid cafe.

Part 2

Surprisingly, many boys from other classes rushed to the restaurant as soon as it opened.

There seemed to be more onlookers who wanted to catch a glimpse of the girls in cosplay rather than eating, which was fine with us.

The maids, who aren't used to being the focus of attention, would benefit from the experience.

Even Matsushita, who was always very composed, exhibited some stiffness and showed signs of nervousness.

Sato and Mii-chan's movements seemed to be much more sluggish than during practice.

Immediately afterward, the sound of plastic bouncing on the floor spread throughout the classroom.

It was caused by Mii-chan slipping a glass of water on the tray.

The heavy incident that seemed to split the air caused the person in question to freeze. Matsushita was the one who moved first amid all of this.

"I am terribly sorry."

After gently patting Mii-chan on the shoulder with a calm tone, she instructed her to bring fresh water.

Then she brought a rag to clean the floor.

"You're doing very well, Matsushita-san, I can't believe it's your very first time as a maid."

"Thank you."

Horikita, who was standing by and watching, was also impressed by Matsushita's outstanding actions.

"You're also participating tomorrow as a maid, right?"

"Basically, as a manager. I'll also serve customers depending on the situation, but I'm honestly not sure."

Unlike usual, Horikita answered somewhat timidly.

"Well, no one thinks you're good at putting on a smile, so good luck." I said turning to Horikita.

I'm sure she's not worried about the service itself, but offering a smile can be a challenge.

"You look pretty comfortable."

"It's almost like the work over here will be done by today."

It's like 90% prep and 10% production, and all we have to do tomorrow is the paperwork.

"Maybe I should reassign you to the stalls too."

"Don't reassign me just because of a personal gripe."

Horikita started to say something nasty, but quickly backed down because she wasn't serious.

"For now, it looks like Matsushita-san will be fine, and I'll be leaving for a bit."

"You're going to observe?"

"I want to see with my own eyes what kind of entertainment there will be."

"Take your time."

Meanwhile, I would work on making room for tomorrow's waiting room.

About an hour later, Horikita returned to the maid cafe.

"I'm back. How are things going?"

"There were a few minor mistakes, but now we're all settled in and getting used to everything."

"Thanks for the advance preparation."

Without this preparation, if we had just gone out and wing it, we might have been in danger.

I was aware that doing it in front of an audience of outside observers was entirely different than rehearsing without them.

Since the doors were opened, Matsushita, who had been operating at full capacity, had rounded up and approached me.

"Good job Matsushita-san. I'm honestly surprised how well you performed."

"Thanks. Everyone's getting better. We should be able to start tomorrow in good shape."

Matsushita said, though her expression was a little stiff.

"What's wrong?"

"I think there might be more sabotage, that's what I'm a little worried about."

"Sabotage?"

"When Ryuen-kun's class came over to the maid cafe, I was afraid they'd bring Ishizaki-kun and the others over and say there were bugs in the cups or something..."

Horikita and I exchanged glances for a moment, then quickly turned our attention back to Matsushita.

"Don't worry about that. It's not in their best interest to interfere in the practice stage. Besides, since there is a rule that students can't be guests in the activities, they can't do such a thing."

"Ryuen can't use his usual tactics in the presence of so many eyes at the exhibit. There is no need to worry." I added to Horikita's explanation.

The smile returned to Matsushita's face as she was almost simultaneously told by both of us that there isn't anything to worry about.

"Somehow, when the two of you say it, I feel a different sense of relief."

She patted her chest in relief, as if she had been somewhat preoccupied.

"You should take a break too."

"I guess I'll do that."

Matsushita stumbled a little as she attempted to leave the room.

"Did you notice that?"

"Huh?"

"No, it's nothing."

Perhaps because it was a minor discomfort, Horikita, who was nearby, did not seem to notice anything in particular.

I hope I'm just imagining things.

"So how did it go? What did the other classes put on?"

"I don't know if there will be another festival next year, but I learned a lot."

Horikita examined the completed room before leaving to check its condition.

"It looks fine. In another hour, we'll start cleaning up, and you should take another look too."

"I'll let you do that."

With permission, I decided to parade around the entire school.

Kei appeared as if she had been waiting for that moment and took me in arms.

"Let's go together."

"I'd rather not but I don't think you're going to leave me."

"I won't leave you."

"You're free to go together, but remember that you are only scouting."

"Yes, yes~"

While Horikita responded seriously every time, Kei seemed to be at ease from start to finish.

Well, it's not every day you get a chance like this.

In fact, even taking a look at the maid cafe, it seemed as if most of the others were enjoying the cultural festival in a normal way.

Part 3

First-year students and some of the third-year students were putting on a number of performances that resembled festival stalls.

Some of them involved technological intervention, such as target practice, ring toss, or dropping marbles on a handmade platform to win prizes at multiple goals.

The collection of prizes made the scene look a bit like a festival hall.

"Oh, it's Yukimura-kun and the others!"

Kei was the first to point and found Keisei, Sotomura, and the other boys busily preparing for the event.

Perhaps because they had practiced baking food in their dormitories, they seemed to be doing it with a certain degree of dexterity.

Let's not interrupt them by talking to them carelessly.

"Shall we try our hand at ring toss?"

"I'll try! Oh, that stuffed animal is kind of cute. I might want one."

Kei shouted and pointed from behind a student who was experiencing it first. It was a cute prize, a colorful bear.

Unfortunately, however, the ring toss was a demonstration.

Even if they succeeded in the ring toss, they wouldn't receive any prizes.

Even though the student council had a budget for the event, the number of prizes were limited.

If students took the prizes home today, it will be difficult to replenish them.

On the other hand, the shooting game that the 1st year Class B was putting on across the street seemed to be offering sweets as prizes, and they were giving them away if guests were successful.

The prizes were cheap, starting at 10 points, and even the most expensive ones were worth about 200 points.

I guess tomorrow there will be prizes other than sweets, but this way, the test would be as good as the real thing.

"Try it, Kiyotaka!"

She urged me to try it and lightly pushed me in front of a table where five shooting guns were placed in a row.

I was interested in the target shooting game, so I was willing to give it a try. You're given five bullets per game.

The gun seemed to be a type of toy called a cork gun, which was filled with cork and fires.

Each of the guns lined up on the table seemed to be more heavily built than I had expected.

The bullets, however, were distorted in shape, and it was doubtful that they can be shot with precision.

I had never held a gun in my hands since I was born.

I have a vague image of it from movies and TV dramas, but I am not sure if it's really true to the actual thing.

I can't even look at an example because there were no other students participating in the event. So, from my imagination, I grabbed the gun in the middle of the room and held it up.

"Aim for the most expensive one."



In order to drop the highest priced assortment of candy, I need to shoot down a large weight. I wonder how powerful it really is. Let's give it a try first.

The first shot was fired while receiving enthusiastic cheers from Kei.

With a light "pop" sound, the cork bullet was fired and approached the weight I had set as my target.

However, the bullet passed through a few centimeters to the left of the weight without delay.

My perceived aim was that it should have hit the target with pinpoint accuracy, but the trajectory was completely different.

Then, I shifted the muzzle a few centimeters to the right and fired a second shot. I thought I had corrected the trajectory perfectly, but this time it passed diagonally to the right and missed.

"This is pretty hard..."

As I was loading the third shot, the other students began to join in one by one. I decided to watch the other students and try to further correct the trajectory.

However, the students firing their guns were struggling to aim as well as I was.

One of the students fired a shot, which from the first shot struck a weight. He was able to push it back, but it did not fall.

As I kept watching to see if there was a trick to it, I realised that it wasn't my skill at play, but rather the fact that each gun, despite its similar appearance, performed differently.

The production process's millimeter-to-millimeter variations and the bullet cork's own quality. With each shot, a number of factors came together to produce an unusual trajectory.

Although it was a really intriguing mechanism, I was also aware of how challenging it was to shoot and drop the target.

Only the final shot, which was not an easy target to hit, was able to strike the weight that I had initially aiming at, so my first target shooting was a complete failure.

However, I was now aware of the gun's inclination.

Now, if I could just estimate the bullet's flight path from the cork's shape, I could do it again. That's what I initially believed, but I quickly changed my mind after seeing a sign that read, "Only one challenge per person today."

"Ha~.Even Ayanokoji-paisen, I mean is really bad at shooting?"

[TL Note : Here Hosen used the word 'Paisen' which is a funny way to say senpai. It's a slang and sounds not too serious. Only used if you don't care much about giving respect to a senpai or if you are friendly with them, or (in some cases) when you want to praise in a sarcastic way.]

[TL Note 2 : In the same sentence, Hosen choose a certain word called 'Sasuga'. Normally this word translates to 'As Expected' (or here 'Even') and is generally associated with giving a compliment but it's not always a compliment and when it's not, there are more subtleties to this word. So, When it's not a Compliment it has a Contradictory use. Means when someone is having bad result even though a good result is expected from them. And it heavily implies that the Contradiction (bad result) is happening because of a Special. Inevitable reason. This word here is giving us hint that this thing happened because of an inevitable reason. So, in short the word 'Sasuga' implies that some inevitable thing caused an unexpected result. It tells you that Something is up. Since Hosen used this word here, it implies that he knows about something that others don't and that's why he choose this word.]

Just as I put my gun back, Hosen came out from behind the stall, laughing with a funny smile on his face. Hosen's first year Class D stalls specialized in "games."

"I am surprised. You're doing something like this.."

This is a game in which adults return to their childhood memories and enthusiastically win trivial prizes at target practice and ring tossing.

"When I was a kid, I used to make a living with the adults at these kinda stalls."

What the heck kind of childhood was that...

[TL Thoughts : I feel like Ayanokoji should be the last one to say this considering his own 'childhood']

"I really wanted to do more serious gambling, but the school turned me down for some strict rules. But target shooting or not, It's the same thing as gambling. This kinda gambling is designed so that the house can win about all the time. It's a one-time cultural festival, and there's no way to be careful about when you get ripped off."

He took out his lighter and put it on the shelf, then came over to this side of the table and picked up the second gun from the far left.

The bullet fired from the projectile gun he held up flew straighter than I had imagined and hit the lighter. It shook, but showed no sign of falling over.

"As long as they don't take any of the limited prizes, it's all good."

"Wouldn't that keep the customers from coming back?"

"Not if we add value to the scrappy participation prizes and hand them out regularly."

Hosen had a plan. If the participation prizes were not attractive, adults might shy away. What appeared to be a participation prize peeked out of the basket.

They had prepared a large number of student photos, both male and female, using a printing press and laminated them in various patterns for handmade prizes.

"It's a good way to show off as an adult that you gotta memory of participatin' in a cultural festival."

The fact that many politician-related people will be attending means that some will communicate their participation in the festival as a kind of charity or community activity.

If you announce that you got the photos of the Students, it will lead to a good impression.

After parting ways with Hosen, who was surprisingly thinking things through, I returned to Kei, who was waiting for me.

"It was impossible."

Kei grinned happily and poked me in the stomach area with her elbow.

"You look pretty happy even though you didn't get any prizes."

"Because I was able to see Kiyotaka's cute side. I'm super satisfied as far as I'm concerned."

"What was 'cute' about it?"

I had no good points at all during that time.

"I was happy that it wasn't a manga-like development, where you hit it on the first shot. I realized again that you can't do everything."

That's true. My approach was based on experience. Unless I had some material from my past experience to draw on, there was no way I was going to do well on my first shot, toy or otherwise.

"That's cute, huh? I feel like you usually want your boyfriends to be cool."

"I've been shown enough of that."

She didn't blame me, but rather, Kei's emotions seemed to take pleasure in the fact that I didn't take the prize.

As I strolled around looking for other interesting offerings, I spotted Ishizaki.

"Yo, Ayanokoji!"

"Looks like something kind of unusual is being put on."

"Yes, it is, isn't it? It's an idea of mine and Albert's, you know."

"Really, how did an underling like you get permission from Ryuen? You couldn't even set up a birthday party."

Kei stared at Ishizaki with suspicious eyes.

"Uh..... I wanted to make it happen! But..... I made a proposal just like you asked and got kicked out....."

He held his abdomen as if he was remembering that moment. It was coincidentally on October 20, the day of my and Ryuen's birthdays.

For both of us, Ishizaki planned a birthday party. Kei's demand was that Ryuen directly apologise to her for what he did on the rooftop and bow down to her in order for Ishizaki to be successful at persuading her.

Naturally, Ryuen did not accept Kei's harsh conditions.

"But I'll get my revenge next year! You'll just have to wait for me!"

"No one's going to wait for you. So, what kind of booth are you putting up?"

"Who cares? Do you care? Okay, you guys go ahead and give it a try."

All that was provided was a desk and cardboard. The disposable chopsticks and cups on the table gave the impression of dining, but is it really?

"What is this?"

"You'll just have to wait and see."

Ishizaki then instructed Albert to take out tools from a cardboard box.

They were a bag of protein and a bag of citric acid. Both are familiar to those who take them during muscle training and other activities.

"This is chocolate flavored protein. Well, just take a light lick."

Two small bite-sized paper cups were prepared with Ishizaki's chocolateflavored protein.

"I don't want it."

Kei refused to drink it as soon as it was served.

"Oh, don't be like that. It's just protein."

"I've never had protein before, and I don't want to. I'm not trying to get muscular."

"You can't build muscle just by drinking protein shakes."

Albert stepped forward and mumbled English.

"Huh? What?"

"Don't worry about that. You can't build muscle by just drinking protein shakes. That's right. Since we're here, why don't you two give it a try?"

To be honest, I was a little curious to see what Ishizaki would do.

I took the initiative, picked up a paper cup, and drank the protein.

It may have been made by a different manufacturer than the one I used to drink, but it tasted a little like the old days.

"Well, I'll drink it for you then, just in case... it's bad."

Kei, on the other hand, who drank protein for the first time, frowned as if it didn't taste good.

"Tastes bad? Well, it's not undrinkable, right?"

"It's not undrinkable, but I don't really want to drink it."

"Well, you need a palate cleanser."

Water was handed to me, perhaps to rinse out my mouth. By the time I finished drinking it, Ishizaki was ready to move on.

"Next, this way."

With that, he prepared a citric acid drink, this time in another paper cup.

"Well, it's citric acid, I guess."

"I think I like this one better."

We muttered our impressions of the citric acid drink to each other.

"Well, that's the last one. The two you just drank aren't bad, are they?"

"I didn't like the protein."

"You're good, Karuizawa, how about Ayanokoji?"

"Yes, it wasn't bad at all."

Hearing this, Ishizaki laughed happily.

"By the way. If you add citric acid to this chocolate-flavored protein, you get a very strange taste."

He handed me the mixed protein and held it close to my mouth. It seemed like killing two birds with one stone, since both the protein intake and the citric acid intake are not bad.

"Now drink both of them at the same time."

"I'm kind of scared."

"Well, let's drink it."

We tipped our paper cups and started drinking.

But the moment I put it in my mouth, I involuntarily stiffened at the taste spreading from the surface of my tongue.

"Blaargh!"

Kei screamed next to me and spat it out on the spot.

She then made a vomiting gesture while thrashing about, strongly appealing the others.

"This, that, that tastes like vomit! Eeh!"

I also recalled that taste. My stomach was struck hard with a fist when I was learning martial arts, and the meal my body was digesting as well as the stomach acid both came up.

The smell and taste that spread in my mouth, it was something close to that.

"Hahaha! Yes! That's funny!"

"Not funny! Water!!!"

Pushing away Ishizaki, who was laughing exasperatingly, Kei drank from the water bottle

"This is, how can I say this, certainly a mystery drink."

"Even Ayanokoji is a bit taken back."

Not only was it not tasty, but it honestly didn't taste edible.

It became much less tense.

"I'm going to surprise my customers tomorrow. For 500 points a cup, I'm going to offer them a magical experience."

"I'm amazed that Ryuen allowed you to do this."

I'm more surprised about that as well.

"He said, 'Do whatever you want with your points. We're doing something else tomorrow.'"

I see. So Ishizaki is just going to rent the extra space for himself.

Then the expenses would be minimal, and, well, it's no wonder that about 10 guests would at least be curious about the experience.

"Ugh, a fun date turned into the worst..."

After that, Kei just kept giving Ishizaki resentful glances until she left the place.

Their relationship, which seemed to have improved a bit, may be back to square one.

After finishing our reconnaissance while genuinely enjoying a few of the activities, I returned with Kei to the maid cafe.

Students were present in large numbers in the classroom and appeared to love conversing with the maids in any way they desired.

When one of the students occasionally deviated from the moral line and persistently called out to them, Sudo intervened, forcibly interrupted them, and asked them to leave the room.

He suited the role of a bodyguard and was in charge of dealing with trouble.

The two-hour festival simulation would soon be over.

I discussed with Horikita whether or not we needed to make any changes to the final staffing for tomorrow.

As I, Sudo, and the other boys started cleaning up, Onodera showed up.

"We're done here, too," Onodera said.

"I wish I could have seen everyone's maid outfits."

Onodera, who had been sent out to the outdoor stalls, made a disappointed sound as soon as she returned.

"You wanted to see the maids?"

"I like cute things too. Besides, I'm not the kind of person who looks good in a maid's uniform, my legs are too thick."

"You don't know if it looks good on you or not until you try it on."

"With the limited clothes we have, I'm sure they won't even fit my size."

Onodera then replied with a wry smile, saying that it was impossible for her.

Onodera has a well-trained figure, with broad shoulders and more developed legs than most females, as a result of her dedication to swimming.

A custom-sized maid uniform would unavoidably be created specifically for Onodera if we gave it to her.

Sudo squatted and shifted his focus to Onodera's thighs.

"Wait, hey Sudo-kun!"

"They're the legs of a well-trained athlete. Well, it's certainly a little different from what you'd call a maid."

He placed his finger to his chin and said exactly what he thought.

"I'm so embarrassed!" Onodera blushed and ran out of the classroom like a rabbit.

"What's with her?"

I could sense the clear change in Onodera up close as I observed the two of them interacting. In addition to sharing similarities, the two of them were also incredibly close.

Sudo didn't appear to be aware of this, presumably because he had never previously expressed affection to Onodera or because he had never even felt the presence of it.

The arrows should have been facing each other, but they were currently pointing in different directions. I don't know much about love, but I do know that the fundamental rule in these circumstances was to maintain a warm eye on the parties concerned.

But it was the reason my curiosity and desire to observe the outcome of a different pattern overcame me. Will they still be able to be a couple if I break the "rules"?

"Don't you understand? Why Onodera behaved like that? The same feelings you have for Horikita, Onodera has for you."

"What?"

I said it in a slightly roundabout way, so Sudo didn't immediately understand. However, Sudo wasn't so rock-headed that he couldn't understand what I was saying at all.

"Huh? Onodera... me?"

"Yeah."

"No, no, that couldn't be it."

He seemed to have thought about it seriously, but denied that it could be true.

This was also a natural reaction.

"Although Onodera may not have been initially drawn to you, you have recently displayed remarkably rapid development. It wouldn't be surprising if she became aware of you as a member of the opposite sex, right?"

Little by little, Sudo's face turned grim as he began to reorganize his thoughts.

"What the hell... why me?"

"Of course, there's no guarantee. If you want to know the truth, it might be important to observe Onodera carefully and try to understand her."

"But, hey... I..."

Nothing else needed to be said to understand the situation. Right now, Sudo's feelings were strongly directed toward Horikita.

That was why I wanted him to show me how he'll change from this unnecessary comment of mine.

Will he move closer to Horikita or sway toward Onodera?

Or will he change into an unexpected third party?

"No. I'm getting a little confused, I'm going to go cool off while I go see the food stalls."

You'll have to think long and hard to come up with an answer.

"Kiyotaka-kun, was that... okay?"

Yosuke, who was standing by, seemed to have heard my conversation.

"I don't think you should have interfered."

"Is that so? Well, I'm sorry if that was careless of me. I'm still learning how this works."

I apologized to Yosuke with a blank expression on my face.

A little while later, it was time for the preliminaries to end.

"Good work, everyone. That's all for today. If there are any reassignments for tomorrow's show, I'll call you from my cell phone by 9 pm."

After all the cleanup was done, all preparations for tomorrow were complete.

The students were already on their way home for tomorrow's performance.

Only two people remained in the classroom, me and Horikita.

"I've been thinking about it a lot, but it just doesn't feel right for you to be a maid," I said.

"I don't want to do it, but it would be nice to have more hands, wouldn't it? It would have been a little easier if your girlfriend had cooperated."

"I'm sorry, but it's out of my jurisdiction. I've left it to Kei's will."

It seemed that Sato and the others, including me, had approached Kei, but she refused to wear the maid's uniform.

I haven't heard what the reason was, but I guess it was because she didn't want to change clothes rather than because it was too much trouble or because she wasn't suited for customer service.

Not everyone understood Kei's body and her past.

"I'm just kidding. It's not something you force anyone to wear. If you're unwilling to wear it, it won't make you look good to tomorrow's guests."

"Here, look through this. I've made some adjustments based on today's rehearsal."

I handed the notebook to Horikita for a final check.

"Thank you. It looks like the schedule you've put together is going to be fine."

Horikita looked up from her notebook, "All festival participants are required to take a one-hour break before the end of the festival after notifying their homeroom teacher."

They are not allowed to help with any of the stalls during this break and are required to manage their staff, whether or not they are busy.

Part 4

A boy and a girl were standing face to face in the centre of the street leading to Keyaki Mall.

There were no students in the area at all because the festival's preparatory preparations had already started.

"We can finally talk, Yagami-kun."

"I didn't think you would barge in on us while we were preparing for the festival."

"I wouldn't have caught you otherwise. It seemed as if you were avoiding me."

Yagami refused to confront the problem right away even after making contact, forcing Kushida to move to this location.

"We just didn't run into each other by coincidence. By the way, it appears that you frequently visited my room. I apologise; I was absent."

Both parties kept smiling during the conversation. The scene would seem to be one of friendly chit chat if someone were to see the two of them from the sidelines.

"Were you really away? Or were you using the answering machine to harass me?"

"Staying away? Why would I do that? There seems to be some kind of misunderstanding."

"There's no misunderstanding."

Irritated by Yagami's refusal to let her grasp the reality of the situation, Kushida stepped forward on her own.

"You cut me off because I was useless. That's all, isn't it?"

In the unanimous special exam, Yagami expected Kushida to expel Horikita and Ayanokoji. Since she failed to live up to that expectation, and since there was no contact between them, it wasn't surprising for Kushida to judge as such.

"Do you remember that I contacted you on the night of the unanimous special exam?"

"Yes. Of course, I remember."

On the night the exam ended, Yagami called and learned from Kushida's mouth that Horikita and Ayanokoji had not dropped out.

The call was cut off shortly after that, and Kushida has not been able to reach Yagami since.

"I will be honest with you. I thought Kushida-senpai hated me. That's why I haven't had the courage to face you lately, and maybe I've been unconsciously avoiding you."

"Stop it. It's no use lying to me like that now. Pretending to be a junior who has a liking for me only gives me the chills after I learned part of your true nature."

"Excuse me. Now, could you tell me again how that day happened?"

Kushida was beginning to understand.

The freshman in front of her was just having fun playing with her. He knew all about the unanimous special exam, and he was about to open his playful hands again.

"I won't answer."

"Why not? At least we know that Kushida-senpai acted to expel one of those two students. But as a result, Sakura-senpai was expelled instead of Kushidasenpai. What I want to know are the details of it."

"I did nothing in that special exam. So, Sakura-san, who was the lowest in OAA, was inevitably cut. That's it."

The class details in the unanimous special exam were not leaked to outsiders. So, Yagami wanted to know the details.

She attempted to exclude the narrative by implying that Sakura Airi was only chosen because of a lack of talent. However, Yagami didn't stop grinning and gently placed his hand on Kushida's shoulder.

"You shouldn't lie."

"Lie?"

"Kushida-senpai's behavioural pattern has substantially changed since the unanimity special exam. Although you seemed to be getting along with students in other classes as usual, I have previously looked into this and understand that you have cut off contact with your classmates. In other words, your true personality was somewhat revealed by that unanimous special exam."

Externally, Kushida had been smiling at her classmates. But there were limits since her classmates were more distant than ever.

A small group of girls used to hang out a couple of times a week, but now it's down to zero.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm still getting along with my classmates as usual."

Kushida implied that Yagami just so happened to miss the times she was hanging out with her classmates.

Kushida tried to push it that way, but Yagami kept smiling.

"It's no use trying to hide it; Kushida-senpai allowed her class to discover all about her past. And it was definitely Ayanokōji-senpai who pushed her into that corner."

Yagami spoke eloquently, as if he had been watching Kushida and the others fight in class. The fact that he mentioned Ayanokouji instead of Horikita's name was clearly unusual.

"You're imagining things on your own. It doesn't fit at all."

"You're free to misrepresent it, but... What on earth do you want from me if you have nothing to say? I have to help with the festival, so I'd like to get back as soon as possible."

"I'm tired of hanging out with you, Yagami-kun."

"You're tired of...?"

"I'm tired of being your friend, Yagami-kun. That's all I wanted to say today."

Kushida abruptly offered to end her relationship with Yagami.

"You want to end your relationship with me. I understand that feeling. Since Kushida-senpai's past and character are now known in the class, there is no point in pressing Horikita-senpai or Ayanokoji-senpai to be expelled now."

"I'm not going to correct every single thing anymore. If you want to interpret it as you see fit, go ahead."

"You're an interesting person, Kushida-senpai. What you just said was the truth. Besides, Kushida-senpai herself is beginning to think that it's okay to throw herself into this environment. So, she wants to end her backwards relationship with me and look forward."

She wanted to look forward. Those words stuck in her mind.

"Aside from Ayanokoji-senpai, have you made peace with Horikita-senpai?"

"I won't answer that either."

"By the looks of it, you've been heartbroken. I'm a little disappointed, Kushida-senpai."

Kushida resisted the urge to retort, but anger welled up within her, and she continued hating Horikita as much as ever.

"I am...!"

"Oh, that's okay. You don't have to say anything else. I can tell by looking at you."

His dismissive attitude lacked some of his former politeness.

Kushida couldn't help but be a little unnerved by this, but she couldn't risk appearing weak in this situation.

Instead, she stood out as being more tolerant than the ordinary student, possibly as a result of her frequent interactions with unusual characters like Ayanokoji, Ryuen, or Amasawa.

She was surprised and felt a sense of realization when acting tough.

"This is the end of us, Yagami-kun. We have nothing to do with each other, right?"

"Rest assured. You're worried that I might go around exposing Kushidasenpai's past, right? That's why you came to check on me while giving me a warning, right?"

"That's right, if Yagami-kun exposes me, rumors about me will go around the school."

"Then will you listen to what I have to say?"

"I'll tell them everything about Yagami-kun, about how you used me to get Ayanokōji and Horikita expelled from school, about how you're a devil with a kind face."

Yagami didn't know if this was a threat. Still, using the weapons she has now is the only way Kushida can defend herself.

"You have threatened back. Then I will keep that in mind. Are we done?" Whether it works or not, Yagami broke off the conversation and walked away.

"I'm the leader of the 1st year Class B. I'm busy with various cultural festival stalls, so I'll see you then."

"Don't forget, Yagami-kun, that as long as you keep your promise, I will keep mine."

Yagami smiled at last and disappeared out of sight with light steps.

"I hope this is the end of it."

While she held such wistful thinking, she also realized that it wasn't the end.
So what should she do?

Should she prepare to attack or should she just stand there and wait with her finger on her mouth?

"No. I can't stop Yagami..."

Up until now, Kushida had challenged and lost to various opponents, including Horikita.

She now realized that she was painfully alone.

She realize that she is alone. But even so, the situation has changed drastically.

The other person is certainly holding Kushida in low esteem. Not only at the outside but, also from their heart.

Even so, she prided herself on being able to read such things.

"Before I fight that guy, I have something to do."

She was aware that the issue goes beyond Yagami alone and needs to be resolved.
She had no desire to revert to her previous role as a kind honour student, but in order to keep her place in the class, she needed to make a significant contribution.

Kushida Kikyo knew how to survive by herself.

Part 5

In the middle of the night, I received a phone call.

"It's very unusual for you to call me, Sakayanagi."

On the other end of the line, Sakayanagi let out a little chuckle.

"Indeed you may be right. May I have a few minutes of your time now?"

"I wouldn't be answering if it wasn't convenient."

"I see. Then let's get straight to the point, Ayanokoji-kun, you will naturally participate in the cultural festival, right? My father seems to be concerned that there may be people from the outside who will come to bring you back."

"The chairman of the board called me a little while ago. He told me that I should consider taking this time off from the main event again, but I politely declined."

I probably would have attended the last sports festival if not for the fact that it was to give Sakayanagi a break.

"Aren't you afraid? No, that's a foolish question, I'll change the question a bit. Are you perhaps assuming that the people involved will not move to recapture you?"

Otherwise, Sakayanagi said, she doesn't see the point of me purposefully putting myself in harm's way.

"It's simply a question between actual harm and potential harm. If everything is settled with the sports festival and cultural festival, then sure it would be nice to rest, but there's also a school trip coming. There's no guarantee that next year's sports festival and cultural festival will be without spectators. It's easy to stay in your comfort zone, but the opportunities I will lose by doing so are far more troublesome."

"So you want to experience your remaining school life and what is normal for a student as much as possible."

She replied in agreement with my way of thinking.

"Besides, I have other objectives. I don't want to waste them."

"If that's the case, I have nothing further to say; I think it's best that Ayanokoji-kun does what he wants."

Although I was interested in the festival, I realised it was inappropriate to inquire about it. Was her goal to simply win the showcase or to completely dominate the opposition? Does she have another objective in mind? She might respond if I questioned her, but that would bring up a new topic.

It was up to Class A to make whatever choice they make, and no third party had the right to decide what was right or wrong.

"Unexpected events, however, are things that can occur at any time. Even if the festival is secure, anything could happen at any moment. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you need help at any moment."

"That's very kind of you."

"I can't have Ayanokoji-kun disappear before we have a rematch."

"I'll take care of myself."

"I'll see you soon then. Good night."

Avoiding any idle chatter, Sakayanagi ended the call with a mutter.

Chapter 5

The Cultural Festival

Intro

After a long period of preparation, the day of the cultural festival finally arrived.

Students are expected to arrive at school by 8:30 a.m. as the start time is 9:00 a.m.

Furthermore, the gates to the school open at 6:00 a.m., allowing students to prepare early in the morning if necessary.

In the very early morning, at 6:00 a.m., Horikita and I met in the lobby of the dormitory to go to school.

This is because we wanted to make the final checks in advance so that there should be no inconvenience to the production during the festival.

She looked at the box I was holding in my hands as soon as I joined her.

"Good morning. Is that the box you were talking about?"

"I'm sorry you had to come up with a budget you didn't plan for."

"It wasn't a huge amount, so the impact was minimal. Originally, Each of us in 2nd year were given 5,000 points, which we should have been able to spend freely."

We also bump across students who arrive early with the same idea from the first to the third year, though there aren't as many of them.

I stopped by the classroom once, placed down the box there, and then came to the maid cafe.

"Did you get the call from Matsushita-san?"

"I did. It must be hard for her, since she was one of the driving forces behind the maid cafes up to this point."

Early in the morning, Matsushita called to report that she had to take the day off due to illness.

"But it's a good decision."

If she had only a slight fever, she might have been able to go, but she had developed a cough and other symptoms, so she could not be trusted with a job that required customer service.

However, even if she was reassigned, Matsushita, who is in poor health, cannot be entrusted with a heavy workload, and the spread of a cold would affect the class after the festival.

"Besides, this is the kind of preparation we need to make in advance."

Simply reassigning staff is insufficient; you also need to know where to add in the necessary personnel.

"Speaking of which, did you hear? It's rumored that Hasebe-san and Miyake-kun may have been the ones who leaked the information about the maid cafe."

"Sounds like it. But we could have foreseen that at an early stage, couldn't we?"

This information came down from Kei, who was in close contact with the girls and had already heard about it.

"I guess so. But I wonder if it was really a good idea to leave it alone."

"Rumors are rumors. Haruka and Akito didn't actually leak the information."

Horikita's self-loathing at not being able to help Haruka and the others peeked out.

"You shouldn't show your weakness so easily. It will only give them an opening to take advantage of you."

"You're always so calm as if you're a stranger to the situation."

I noticed that Horikita was looking at me as if to check my expression.

The observation continued for five or ten seconds, and then I noticed that her face had changed to a difficult expression with a wrinkle between her eyebrows.

"I have a few questions...do you usually interact with the first-year students?"

"First-year students? No, I don't. I talk to Nanase or Amasawa once in a while, but that's about it."

I feel like I shouldn't say that I interact with them, since I rarely ever go see them myself.

"Is that what you wanted to ask?"

"It's not a big deal."

"Speaking of interaction, what about you? You talk to first years in the student council, don't you?"

"Well, I do. I'm getting a little bit more involved with the juniors."

The student council had gained three people from this year's first years; the second years only had Ichinose for a long time.

There was a distinct lack of quality, if not quantity, of talent.

The most recent addition was Horikita, but it was likely that the number of members were adjusted to fill the gap.

The student council could have as many members as it wanted, but it was stated that eight to twelve members were usually there.

At this school, there are currently three third-year students, two second-year students, and three first-year students.

It would seem that they were following past conventions.

"At first, I thought it was useless. I would rather be in my room studying than doing student council work because it would better benefit me. To be honest, that feeling hasn't gone away."

Student council work wasn't the only thing that seemed like such a waste of time. Whether it was club activities or friendships, it was basically a series of futility.

Some may go from club activities to becoming professionals, or from friendships to future jobs, but for many, these will be nothing more than memories of the past.

On the other hand, if you work hard at your studies, it is likely to lead you to a great future.

It would be the most solid and safe choice a student could make.

"There's a lot to be learned in futility. You're beginning to see that."

"Your brother was student council president, too."

"My brother's case is different from mine. He was able to carry out his student council duties flawlessly while also achieving impeccable results in his schoolwork. I don't think he ever felt that the student council was a burden, nor did he suffer from a lack of studying."

Even if we'll never know the actual truth, there was always plenty of room for Horikita to study. I don't think there was any way she didn't put in a lot of bloody effort, but she didn't let it show in vain.

"I'm grateful to you, if only for the results. Joining the student council has helped me see things I couldn't see."

She was honestly thankful, or so I thought, but she still went on with her words.

"It made me realize how great my brother is again, and I have to do a lot of extra work."

"I wish you had just been honest and thanked me."

"You have to accept some complaints."

"I agree and sympathize with you that academics are a difficult goal for you."

I am sure that I am not inferior to Manabu when it comes to pure academic and physical ability alone.

But if he was in the same grade under the rules of this school.

It's an unlikely story, but you never know what kind of fight it would have been.

If I'm right, he had that kind of power and influence to get me to think seriously.

Part 1

As 9:00 a.m arrived at the maid cafe in the special wing of the school, an announcement was made to all students at once.

Guests stepped through the main gate and the opening of the festival was announced.

"What do I do, I'm getting nervous..."

"I haven't had any contact with outsiders since I entered this school."

I heard a conversation with Ike, who was standing shoulder to shoulder with Shinohara.

I guess being in a closed environment for so long certainly created extra tension.

Meanwhile, Sato and the other maids continued to discuss the shift change due to Matsushita's absence.

Although the burden on each of them would inevitably increase, the time adjustment was nearing completion.

Sato, dressed in her maid costume, clasped her hands together in anxiety, but quickly slapped her own cheeks between her palms to regain confidence.

"We can do it, we can do it!"

"Maya-chan will be fine. I'll back you up too."

Kei, who was helping behind the scenes, cheerfully encouraged her.

"Yeah, I'll do my best!"

Since overcoming a big hurdle, the two of them have really grown closer.

Their relationship as best friends won't be broken in the slightest from now on.
The only other member I had to worry about was...

I looked around and observed the other students.

Sudo and some of the male team members were not listening to the announcements and were having their final meeting with Yosuke.

We had to keep our feet on the ground about what to do when it gets crowded or in case of trouble.

After giving out all the instructions, we realized that we were short two students. Immediately after, Horikata and I looked at each other.

We must've been thinking the same thing. She approached and spoke to me in a whisper.

"Hasebe-san and Miyake-kun seem to be missing."

"I guess it's not like they're in the restroom."

The other students seemed to be too busy minding their own business to have noticed yet.

"I knew there was something going on at this festival, but"

"If it's just simply slacking off, I guess I'm rather grateful."

For Horikata, who had not calculated them as a force to be reckoned with from the start, there was no need to get worked up if they just didn't help out.

However, if they were to sabotage the project, that would be a different story.

"But it also adds fuel to the fire because of the rumors."

"If you leak information and then skip the festival, well, that's enough blame, isn't it?"

"I've been keeping an eye on it so far, thinking only time will tell, but I still think we should do something about it early on. We should at least dispel the rumors."

"I understand what you're saying, but we should focus on the festival today."

"Is that what you want?"

"Even if we can erase the rumors, we can't erase the fact that those two have slipped out. Besides, there is still a possibility that they could embarrass the class in some other way at the festival."

With multiple sources of anxiety, a poor response could lead to unnecessary animosity.

Taking sides is certainly only for when Haruka and Miyake are determined to not be the enemy.

"I agree."

Horikita was a bit nervous, but she cleared her throat to get rid of her thoughts.

"I'm sure you'll be able to handle Hasebe-san and Miyake-kun just fine."

I replied with a glance, and decided to start greeting the guests.

Part 2

"Welcome!"

Sato's cheerful voice echoed in the classroom, or rather the maid cafe.

At the same time, the first guest to enter the store was a man who appeared to be in his 40s.

A total of six maids waiting in the store responded all at once as they had been trained to do.

"Let me show you to your seat."

Sato's voice was cheerful, but her movements were stiff, since she wasn't entirely comfortable yet.

Still, thanks to the rehearsal the day before, there were no major mistakes, and after showing the guest to their seat, she took the menu list and cold drinks to his table.

The only way to get back to the practiced routine was to repeat the process and let them get used to the guests.

Then, slowly but surely, the number of guests began to increase.

The age range was similar, but sometimes teenage boys and girls who appeared to be the guests' family members began to shyly walk in.

"A good start, huh?"

It wasn't suddenly full, but it was nice to see that the seats weren't all empty.

My cell phone was constantly receiving calls and reports from my classmates scattered around the school.

Which exhibits were attracting the most people and which were deserted.

Since the sales of each class were unknown until the end of the festival, we had no choice but to gather information personally.

Fortunately, all students were required to take a one-hour break, so there were always a certain number of students who were not busy.

That is why, of course, our class was always being scouted as well.

After watching the room for a while, I decided to take a look at the hallway.

It seemed that many guests had already made their way to the special wing, and as far as I could see, the guests outnumbered the students.

If that man was behind this, it's possible that he's already here.

I don't think he would be looking for me on the day of the event without having done his homework, leaving no stone unturned. But so far, I haven't seen anyone suspicious.

Besides, with so many adults, students, and children in the area, it would not be easy to make contact with me.

For now, the focus should be on the current students rather than on them. Yoshida from Sakayanagi's class was peeking into the maid cafe without trying to hide.

There was no sign of student's from Class C at the moment, but they would likely come to check the situation at some point soon.

The classroom door opened vigorously, and Ike and Hondo came out in a hurry.

"We took the order as fast as possible! I'm going to the food stall to get it now!"

"That's fine, but please be a little more calm."

Some of the guests were surprised by what happened.

"Oh, right. Sorry!"

It was not an ideal situation for customers or potential customers to watch a flurry of restaurant personnel run to get their food. With a warning, the two looked at each other, nodded, and began to move, albeit at a rather fast pace.

With this being the first delivery, we couldn't afford to be late.

Today, this kind of back-and-forth repeated itself every time an order was placed.

"Ayanokoji."

I turned around when my name was called and saw Kanzaki approaching me.

"Looks like you're already thriving."

We had gone through the preliminary phases, but Ichinose's class's offering was, as I recall, sweets-based.

They dealt things like crepes and chocolate bananas.

"What about you?"

"The kids love them. But the adults are not as receptive as we thought they would be, so we're not sure if we can aim for the top spot in terms of sales."

"You may have a hard time, then."

"Probably, but my priorities have shifted so I'm not entirely concerned about this festival at the moment."

Apparently, the first step towards change with Himeno may have worked.

"I'm going to the gym now. I want to learn what I can from the third year for the future."

"I see. See you later."

After seeing Kanzaki's walk off, I decided to return to the maid cafe and start working.

I didn't have much to do until "noon" arrived, though.

In a small partitioned off corner of the classroom, I stood by to deal with any problems that could arise.

I'm also in charge of taking pictures of guests who want to have their picture taken.

After the first photo shoot, the guests who had been watching quickly started wanting to be photographed one after the other.

I'm not saying that there weren't adults out there who would like to make some fun memories with high school students, but it was better to assume that the guests were taking advantage of the festival's purpose and dropping money on us.

In a sense, it seemed that quite a few of them decided that this was also their job.

Nevertheless, conversation and laughter gradually spread throughout the maid cafe, and it began to show aspects of a lively, ubiquitous cafe.

"New customers, please show them around."

Horikita's inorganic voice reached the classroom filled with laughter. Sato immediately approached to serve the customer and began to lead him to an empty seat.

"Sato-san will show you around. "

"Well then, if you'll follow me...."

Horikita, who is not very good at showing affection, was in charge of outdoor advertising.

She did not smile in person, despite the fact that she was dressed as a maid to draw attention from customers.

If this were a real maid cafe, Horikita would have been fired during her training period after passing her interview.

However, the idea of Horikita giving an interview at a maid cafe is totally unlikely.

Part 3

Within the first two hours of the event, the maid cafe was continuing to draw in customers as expected.

The important thing is how much we can sell the purchased products.

Especially because the film we bought in large quantities costs about 70 points per sheet.

So far it seems to be going on nicely, and I, the photographer and the instant camera, have been busy flying around the classroom!

The instant camera, which cost nearly 9,000 points, was not a cheap photographic equipment to have invested in, and I had to buy another one in case my current one broke down.

"I got one shot~!"

The maids' voices echo through the store, and I move out of the waiting room, camera in hand.

It seems that this time they wanted a photo shoot with Mii-chan, and Ichihashi, who was in charge of the bill, promptly received the points on her cell phone and completed the payment.

"Yes, cheese!"

After taking a two-shot of the laughing Mi-chan and the customer, I checked the film that popped out of the instant camera.

"As I thought..."

Although I was suspicious at the moment of shooting, I had released the shutter at the moment Mi-chan closed her eyes.

"Ugh, sorry Ayanokoji-kun....."

"Don't worry about it. I'll take another picture."

It's a souvenir piece, I don't mind if there are some problems with the guest's expression, but I cannot give them one with a mistake in the maid's expression.

This was not only a consideration for the guests, but also for the maids, such as Mii-chan.

As a girl, there was no way she would accept a badly taken photo.

That was why, even though each picture could be taken for 800 points, two, or in some cases three, sheets of film were needed.

The second shoot went well, so I handed over the photos that were ready to be developed. After the shooting was over, I quickly went back to the waiting room.

Well, I've been repeating this endlessly since morning.

But still...

This cultural festival, which has many political figures, is a great opportunity for that man.

I knew that even if there were many people around me, he would take some measures to set me up.

This must have been the same for Chairman Sakayanagi.

However, as noon approached, there was no sign of any change taking place.

Tsukishiro, and the mysterious student who visited him at the Sports festival, I remember Conversation that I had with both of them..

"But no matter how good you are, you are still just a child. You should understand that that person has already factored in that strength of yours and sent me to you."

"After eliminating Tsukishiro, all we have to do is eliminate the white room students and peace will return. I came here to advise you because I think you are making such a mistake."

If we were to tie these matters together somewhat forcefully, it would be natural to think of capturing me by force with adults who are not students through the cultural festival.

In fact, they decided to use Tsukishiro to forcefully hold the festival, so it should be so. Would they miss this great opportunity by letting me evade them?

No, the issue still hasn't yet come to light.

Missing an opportunity. Of course, the festival is not over yet.

But what if they didn't come here at all?

That would not be mere negligence, but....

"Ayanokoji-kun, what should I do, I seem to have run out of Darjeeling!"

Seeing Mii-chan rushing in with a panicked look on her face, I interrupted my thoughts.

Let's focus on the problem at hand for now.

We had prepared several kinds of tea, but the Darjeeling, which used high end tea leaves, sold out immediately.

We discussed and narrowed down our stocking to a minimum number because it is a high price range product costing 1,200 points, but it is selling unexpectedly well.

On the other hand, inexpensive tea bags sold poorly. Since it was impossible to buy more on the day of the show, we could not restore our inventory now.

"Put a Sold out sticker on all the menu boards right away. I'll handwrite corrections on the signs that are posted outside."

"Uh-huh."

I grabbed a pen and immediately corrected the sign with the menu at the entrance of the restaurant. Both were cheap props from the bargain bin, but they would work.

"That should work."

I highlighted the "Sold out by popular demand" written next to Darjeeling. Although this is a biased sellout, this will also serve as a form of promotion for the popularity of maid cafes.

Immediately after, an arm extended from behind me on the left side.

What came into view was not a school uniform, but the fabric of a suit.

"Take this without turning around."

The white paper, folded in two, swayed in the slight breeze coming in through the window.

There may be no contact, and just when I thought so, this is it.

It would be easy to ignore the order not to turn around, but I took it silently.

The person who approached me at such a short distance without giving me any sign of him was not an ordinary person.

"May I ask your name?"

"That's needless prying."

As soon as I grab the paper, his left arm disappears from my sight. I held that position for a while, and then I sensed another presence approaching.

"What's wrong, Kiyotaka-kun?"

Yosuke seems to have come out of the classroom, concerned that I didn't come back right away.

"Sorry, I was approached by a guest who got a little lost and had to be dealt with. Any trouble?"

"Orders are starting to not turn out well. The stalls seem to be doing better than expected."

"I see, the turnover is getting out of control. I'll be right there."

After confirming that Yosuke had left, I unfolded the paper I had been holding in my right hand.

[I'm here to pick you up. Decide for yourself what to do. I'll wait for you at the front gate.]

He even politely included his phone number.

I decide what to do? If they are really giving me a choice, did they really think I would choose to leave?

It was unclear how much significance the note had.

All I could say for sure was that the person who handed this to me was connected to the White Room.

Have they decided that they can't use direct force and will leave it to my judgement?

But the fact that no steps had been taken so far may have something to do with that sentence.

Either way, there was no point in worrying about it. I rolled up the small piece of paper, put it in my mouth, and swallowed it.

Paper originally comes from plants, and its main component is cellulose.

Since humans don't have any enzymes to break it down, it cannot be digested and is excreted as it is.

It is not a problem if a third party picks up this note, but carelessly keeping it in your possession could lead to some demerits.

If it's a cultural festival where it's hard to move from place to place, it's easier to do this quickly because there are no additional issues.

Part 4

It's been 3 hours since the Cultural festival started.

Around noon, new guests were arriving to replace the families who came to school first thing in the morning. After receiving a report from Ike and the others who had gone out to scout the area, I went near the entrance.

"Over there!"

Ike pointed to where several girls from Ryuen's class were shouting.

"We, the 2nd year C class, are now competing with the 2nd year B class for sales at the concept cafe! If we lose, someone could be held responsible and expelled!"

The atmosphere is clearly different from that of many students who are basically smiling, cheerful and continue to serve customers.

Many guests stopped to watch the saddened faces and the shouting.

"Please, Everyone Cooperate with us! Thank you very much in advance!"

One after another, they handed out the flyers that seemed to made by them.

I approached a boy of junior high school age who seemed to have received one of them and asked him to show it to me briefly.

It describes in detail the offerings of the class that will operate a kimono concept cafe on the second floor of the special building, but does not mention any menu or other prices.

Instead, it put the confrontation at the forefront, strongly emphasizing that this was a battle that could not be lost.

"What? What? This is bad, right?"

The girls made sincere requests, but it couldn't be said that they were not exaggerating.

It seems that Ryuen is threatening to drop out them from the school.

"Is he seriously trying to get someone expelled, that Ryuen guy?"

"I don't know. The possibility of that is probably low. Putting aside the forced expulsion with a penalty, it would be a problem if the expulsion was carried out without consent. In fact, if the threatened students report to the school, not only Ryuen's position gets under risk, but class points will also inevitably drop."

"Then it's a lie! Let's go there now and make it stop!"

"Impossible. His classmates strongly fear the chance he's telling the truth. Besides, if you listen to the words out loud, all they've said is that they might be expelled from school."

So there is nothing to determine that they are lying to the guests as well.

The fact that it is not just a mere confrontation is typical of Ryuen, who makes one move after another.

It was safe to assume that they were working more towards beating us than to be among the top four.

"If we lose, they'll take away 1 million private points, right? Oh no!"

I would love to tell Ike not to worry, but it's important to expose the public to the fact that they are seriously frightened. The importance of the confrontation becomes more clear.

"W-What are we going to do?"

"If they want to do this, we'll just fight back with a similar strategy."

"You mean threaten to expel someone too!?"

"No, not that way. We're going to show them that we're also putting all of our effort into the concept cafe competition as a second year B class. We are ready for that."

"What? And what do you mean ready?"

"Open the cardboard box I brought for you."

I had Hondo and Tonomura take the box down to the ground and remove the duct tape. Out of it came a bunch of flyers.

"This is...! It's a flyer just like theirs!"

"I was also planning to put up flyers to encourage guests to come if necessary. They beat me to it, but I think it will work."

The flyers prepared by Horikita and Ryuen's class were quickly circulated throughout the school, and word spread that the two classes were competing against each other.

This way, it was also self-evident that they were making big bets on the one on-one match-up.

Knowing about this confrontation will give the illusion that both classes were taking similar risks.

It doesn't create the need for me to go out of my way to threaten my classmates.

"I'm going to call the girls who have free hands now and ask them to spread the flyers all at once."

"Okay, okay! I'll let them know right away!"

The process was to have them use their feet directly and have Hondo and the others communicate the information to all classmates.

Then, in addition to the specified locations for handing out fliers, we informed the boys managing the stalls that we would also be confronting Ryuen's class.

"Did you hear that Horikita's class and Ryuen's class are playing for a lot of money?"

"I heard that the leader of the losing class is getting expelled?"

It seemed that word of the one-on-one match was beginning to reach the ears of ordinary students who had nothing to do with it.

Speculation led to rumors, and rumors led to speculation.

"I'm going back. Let me know if anything else comes up."

Ike and the others who delivered meals were always on the lookout for changes in the situation.

They assuredly nodded, so I let them continue while I made my way back to the special wing.

On the way there, I spotted a Japanese-style girl holding a leaflet in a corner of a largely empty corridor.

"Sshase!"

[TL Note : The girl here uses the word - 'Sshase'「っしゃせー」which like the word 'Shasu'「しやす」,used later on, is a godan Verb which means : to thank. It does have other meaning but in this situation, it's the character just saying the word to thank people.]

She periodically distributes pamphlets to passing adults in a manner that reminds me of the lethargic individuals I sometimes saw at the Keyaki Mall performing Tisshukubari with no energy at all.

[TL Note : The word ティッシュ配り, Tisshukubari is known as Tissue-pack marketing. In this, Instead of flyers and pamphlets you are given a facial tissue pack with the brand's logo and promotion material printed on it. Since most people don't take flyers as they are of no use, people surely take free tissue packs and end up reading it. Successful advertisement than flyers and much more useful. You can read more about it [here](#).]

It's just that she's dispassionately handing out the set number of leaflets.

"Can I have one?"

"Shasu."

She may not even be aware of my presence, but she mumbles a small thank you and holds out a leaflet to me.

However, when I received it, the other person's eyes saw me.

"Eh."

"I didn't realize you were handing out flyers in a place like this, Ibuki."

"Shut up. Go away."

She looked at me with such a disgusted look on her face that she turned away from me, as if she's being looked at by someone who she doesn't want to be looked at.

"I heard about it, but I guess that means you're keeping your word."

I had heard that she would dress in a kimono after losing the match with Ryuen, but it suits her better than I expected.

"Well, I guess 'fine feathers make a fine bird' huh?"

[TL Note : Here Ayanokoji didn't necessarily used the same phrase. He said - "Magonimoishō ka" / 「馬子にも衣装 か」 which is a phrase which simply translates to - "anybody can look good with the right clothes" but it could be represented as different phrases in English. I choose this Phrase because it looks like what Ayanokoji would say (with his literary knowledge) and unlike other phrases, it also looks like the phrase ibuki won't understand.]

She stared at me intensely, but I was relieved that she didn't seem to understand much of what I meant.

"It's nothing."

It's not easy to finish distributing all the flyers if you're handing out flyers in an unpopular place.

"Shouldn't you move to another location? I saw Yamashita and others handing out over there."

"You've got to be kidding me. Why should I work with those guys?"

Although I already knew her answer, she immediately rejected me.

"You take all of it from me, okay?"

"That's unreasonable."

"I've had enough. I think I'll just throw them away in a garbage bag..."

She swore as she looked down at the bunch of flyers.

The reason she didn't do so is probably to make sure she is well punished for her loss to Ryuen.

When you win, you force your opponents to do things, but when you lose, you run away.

If you continue to do that, you won't be able to compete with Ryuen or any other opponent in the future.

"By the way, what did you confront Ryuen with?"

"I would have preferred a one to one battle, but he suggested we play a card game."

"Card game? You mean like poker or something like that?"

"Well, they're kind of the same."

The content of the game itself was not important, but the fact that it was a suggestion from Ryuen was what caught my attention.

Maybe Ibuki was successfully lured into the trap.

Anyway, it's bad to interrupt Ibuki any more than I already have.

"I'll spread the word later about what you've been working so hard to promote here."

"Don't spread it. I'll knock you on your feet."

I hurriedly avoided a sharp kick at the same time as her costume swayed.

"Tch"

"Oh, by the way, the greeting at the cafe is 'Welcome home, master.' Just give it a try."

"I'll say it if you'll take my kick to your face."

"I think I'll pass on it."

She raised her leg slightly to threaten me, so I shrugged and left.

The rather laid-back mood that was present earlier in the day had vanished by the time I arrived back at the maid cafe, and the biggest crowd of the day had started to form a queue.

Horikita also joined the line, and started guiding the guests.

"It appears that you were able to start distributing flyers without any issues."

"Yes. From this point on, you and Ryuen's class should start to outpace the others."

"Everything is going according to your plan."

I'm not the one who added the unique element to it, though, I just accompanied and acted as support.

I nodded to Horikita, and we both turned to our separate positions after that.

Part 5

The Maid Cafe was headed in the right direction. The fact that Ryuen made his plans public at an early stage, meanwhile, might have worked against him because no other classes followed suit, effectively drawing clients.

This in itself was a welcome development, but a problem that had not occurred during the rehearsal arose.

The problem was that there were too many customers due to the confrontational attitude that had been adopted between Class B and C.

There was already an extreme amount of seating in the classroom, so adding more would just make the situation worse.

The only option was to make the customers wait in line, but maid cafes aren't known for having a quick service.

It was essential that students dressed as maids also enjoyed conversing with the adults.

Usually, in such a situation, we would consider handing out numbered tickets and asking people to come back later.

However, in a cultural festival, this was not a good idea.

What would a customer with 3,000 points left in their pocket do if they received a numbered ticket and were asked to come back in an hour?

Some customers would do so dutifully, but most would drop their money at another place during the waiting time.

The next thing you know, they've spent almost 3,000 points, and they have no more money to drop at the maid cafe, so they leave without stopping by.

This is a development that happens in the real world.

That was why we wanted customers who had lined up once to keep lining up until they entered the store and spent their money.

And if possible, we even wanted to take the points they plan to drop elsewhere.

"This is bad. We're starting to see customers tired of waiting and they are leaving."

The prospect of taking a risk and getting a big payoff was now a warning sign.

"Ayanokoji-kun, can I leave for a bit? I have a plan."

Kushida called out to me as I was about to walk to the end of the line.

She must have been curious to see what was going on and came to check on the situation.

"What are you planning on doing?"

"The guests who are waiting are bored, but they all show strong interest in the maid cafe. Since they are getting hungry it's not surprising they are starting to leave."

"You're right."

Since it was also right around lunchtime, it was obvious from the adults now in the classroom that many of them were there for food and drinks.

Kushida picked up one of the bags filled with homemade cookies that she had been selling , prepared for souvenirs and started walking down the hallway with it.

Then, with a smile, she called out to the now bored customers.

"I'm sorry for the wait!"



She then pulled a cookie out of the bag and started handing them out to the waiting crowd. She may be aiming to fill their bellies just a little, but there was more to it than that.

Once they receive something in return, they may feel guilty about leaving the place.

If Kushida were to leave her current post, it would not be difficult for someone to run away from the line with some guilt on their back, but she stayed and continued to talk to them with a smile on her face.

After receiving the cookies, it was no longer easy to leave the line, even though they were impatient.

There were some disadvantages to Kushida leaving the hall, but the customers who had already taken their seats were certain to spend some money.

For now, it was more important to bring the money-generating presence beyond that point.

She could see what was going on in the restaurant better than anyone else, and she also knew how to make the most of herself.

What could she do to get as many people on her side as possible?

She knew how to get close to adults of the opposite sex, engaged them in conversation that made them feel good, and sometimes even held their hand or did other skinship with them.

They showed not the slightest resistance or aversion to this behavior.

The other girls had been working hard all day, but Kushida was the only one who had managed to do all of these things perfectly.

Even when she was accounting at times, she made as few mistakes as possible, even when she stumbled over a calculation.

This was truly a gift, as she had never participated in any real-life practice sessions.

"Kushida-san's abilities are quite something. This is her element, I guess."

Yosuke nodded his head in respect as he looked at her workmanship.

"It seems that Kushida-san and Horikita-san, who have been facing strong headwinds, will also have some tailwinds."

They've done such a good job, I had to admit that to some extent.

"People are creatures that resent easily, but on the other hand, they are also creatures that admit easily. Especially when you are young, evaluations are like the two sides of a coin. From the front to the back, and now back to the front again. But the more you're pushed around, the more you'll feel like a tired presence."

"Still, I'm fine with it, as long as Kushida-san is able to fight alongside everyone in the class."

"I'm really impressed by what I'm seeing."

"I think it's a cumulative process. During the preparations for the festival, Kushida-san visited Horikita-san's room late at night several times. I think they were practicing."

So, in addition to her own talent, she was practicing well behind the scenes.

If Yosuke's reading of Kushida's life was correct, it was a reminder of Kushida's greatness.

It would also confirm Horikita's confidence that Kushida was in good hands.

We then went back to the waiting room and spent about 30 minutes pulling the camera around.

"Um, Ayanokoji-kun, where is Kushida-san?"

Mii-chan came out of the room, looking busy.

"Kushida?"

"There's a customer who wants to take a picture with Kushida-san, but I can't find her."

Kushida-san, who was supposed to be organizing the line, had disappeared?

Yosuke and I immediately looked down the hallway, and sure enough, Kushida was out of sight.

"Excuse me, have you seen a girl standing in line here?" Yōsuke called out to the guests in line.

"Oh, you mean the girl who was handing out cookies? It looks like she was approached by a girl from the same school and followed her about five minutes ago."

"What was she like?"

I asked about the person who approached her, as if interrupting a conversation.

"Um, a girl with her hair tied up in two knots."

Yosuke didn't seem to have a clue, but I had a strong idea.

"I'm sorry, but I need you to take care of the store for a bit and direct me to another maid the way Kushida did."

This was the kind of trouble no one expected. That's why I knew immediately that it was a problem I had to deal with.

Part 6

It is difficult to find a specific person at a cultural festival where many people of all ages and genders are present.

And even more so if you are dealing with someone who you cannot predict about where they are going.

While operating my cell phone, I sigh in admiration at the overwhelming network of information. I'm amazed at the speed and accuracy with which I can obtain location information within minutes of making contact.

The Location was not in the direction of the Keyaki Mall or the dormitories, but behind the indoor pool facility.

When I arrived there, I found Kushida's back facing me, dressed in an out-of-place maid outfit.

"So don't make me say it again..."

Kushida, who was probably having a heated conversation with the other party, was shouting at her.

"Wow..."

Meanwhile, the other person immediately noticed me and told Kushida to stop talking.

"What? Why is... Ayanokoji-kun here..?"

"Of course he's going to look for the ace when you've disappeared."

That's true.

Although I let the substitute maid take over the queueing example set by Kushida, I'm not sure how much longer she can maintain the same pace as Kushida.

"I thought I had taken her out well, but how did you find this place, senpai?"

The way she's talking, it seems that she was waiting for the moment when I wasn't around to take Kushida with her.

"Unfortunately for you, I am working with someone I can rely on now. No matter where anyone goes, I'll be sure to know where they are."

Even Amasawa doesn't seem to have any idea who it was, but she didn't inquire any further

"She was going to go right back after this, right senpai~?"

"Yeah. She's right. I'm sorry I slipped out without telling you, but I also wanted to talk to Amasawa-san for a minute."

"Then you could have just stood there and talked, that's no reason to leave for 10 or 20 minutes."

"That's..."

Kushida knew that the top priority was to organize the line and keep the customers in line. Still, Kushida abandoned customer service to handle the situation. Unless it was something serious, she would not leave from her position.

"Whatever there is between the two of you, we're busy with the festival. Can you talk about it some other time?"

There was no need to go to the trouble of choosing today as the day for the exchange.

"You are not the least bit surprised to see me and Kushida-senpai together, are you? Did you know about our history?"

"No."

Until now, I really didn't know there was a deep connection between these two.

"But today, with this timely contact, I understand everything."

Even information that seemed unnecessary was derived in my head on its own.

Why was Kushida so adamant about expelling me from the school in the unanimous special exam, and why did she take such reckless risks?

If a student from the white room was behind it and forced her to do it, it was not unreasonable.

I could also see why they acted at this festival, where they could not be easily traced. After school, Kushida's behavior was also consistent with the fact that she had kicked off invitations from her classmates and headed somewhere else.

"Kushida-senpai will return later, so can you give me a little time?"

Amazawa in front of me still doesn't realize that I have arrived at the answer.

"Sorry Ayanokoji-kun, could you please excuse me. I'll be back as soon as I can. I also really need to talk to Amasawa-san."

"I see what you mean, but it's not going to happen. This is enough, Amasawa."

"Senpai's eyes are so naughty, aren't they? You're looking at me like I'm naked or something~"

Amasawa pressed the tip of her finger against her lips in a seductive manner, but the tone wasn't sexual. It was an action to hide her wariness that I can see right through her.

"Kushida. You had a weakness regarding your past with Amazawa and one other person. That's why you forced the class to get involved in the expulsion in the unanimous special examination so that Horikita and I could be expelled, or perhaps you had been working with them on something even before that."

"Eh?"

I must have been right on target; unable to confirm or deny, Kushida simply looked surprised.

"Let's stop now, senpai. This is a time for me and Kushida-senpai."

"I'm sorry, but it doesn't work that way. Even before working as a maid, Kushida is a necessary presence in the class."

"What does that mean? I'm not doing anything wrong."

"You may be not, but what about the other one?"

When I replied, this was the first time I saw a change in Amazawa's attitude.

Immediately afterward, Amazawa, with an eerie smile on her face, grabbed the wrist of Kushida.

"What?!"

She then pulled her close and stood behind Kushida with her right hand locked in place and forcefully closed Kushida's mouth with her left hand.

"Perhaps Senpai has an idea of who the other student is?"

Kushida's words were silenced before Amasawa asked this question because Kushida knew the person directly.

In other words, she knew who the other white room student was.

That's why she went ahead herself to do it. So that Kushida wouldn't suddenly blurt out that person's name.

"You know, Kushida-senpai, if you say anything, I'll have you expelled, okay?"

Kushida's face contorted in pain, probably due to the tight grip on her right arm.

"This isn't like you, Amasawa. You seem like you've been cornered pretty badly."

"Wait, senpai, I didn't say anything, did I?"

"Every single action speaks for itself."

Kushida, enduring the pain, would not understand the nature of this conversation.

And Amasawa herself didn't know how much I understood.

"Let's talk about it again later, just the two of us next time. Please pretend you didn't see this and leave, Ayanokoji-senpai. If you do that, I'll let her go in about ten minutes."

"What if I don't say yes?"

"I might make Kushida-senpai as useless as a dead person then."

She said and squeezed her right arm even tighter.

"Nuh uh!"

"I'm a pretty girl, but I can easily break an arm or two."

"Then let's give it a try. Let's see if you break Kushida's arm first, or if I can stop you."

The distance between me and Amasawa was about 5 meters.

"Are you serious?"

"Are you serious about breaking her arm? Or are you saying that you don't think I can stop you?"

"Both."

"Then you're wrong on both counts. You really need to get serious."

Laughing, Amazawa loosens her grip on Kushida's right arm, albeit slightly.

At that moment I kicked the ground and dove in just as Amasawa switched to a motion to break her arm.

My right hand slid down Kushida's arm and reached her wrist as my left hand went around her mouth to her back, I grabbed Amasawa's right hand.

"No way..."

It must be a defensive instinct. In an instant, she abandoned the action of breaking Kushida's arm and shifted her attention to me, and tried to make a left fist with a tight grip.

However, I didn't give Amasawa any chance to make any further movements, and caught her, blocking her from moving towards Kushida.

Just as Amasawa had done to Kushida earlier, I went behind her and twisted her body to the ground with her arm behind her back.

"Fuu~!"

The forceful hold on the ground caused Amasawa to lose her breath for a moment and gasp for air. Her breath caused a slight dust cloud to rise.

"Oh my, that was... a little unexpected."

"Did you think there wasn't much difference between you and me?"

I could tell by the look in her eyes. Amasawa's pride, which was always high, was deeply wounded.

"You mean I was wrong about your abilities?"

"Probably."

Amazawa's fighting ability, which she has learned in the White Room, is real. Horikita and Ibuki, who have trained properly, or even Ryuen and the others, who have learned fighting in their own way, would not be able to beat Amazawa.

However, whether she can compete with me on an equal footing is a completely different matter.

Even if your opponent's skill level goes up from 5 to 20 or even 30, it will be the same situation if your skill level is close to 100.

"Since when did you think you could beat me?"

"From the moment we met."

"If it wasn't for Ayanokoji-senpai's words, it would be too excessive."

"I'll tell you this, you seem to think that the other student might push me out of school, but did you ever wonder why I never asked for the other student's name?"

The smile slowly faded from Amasawa.

Up until now, I had never willingly sought out a white room student on my own.

"That's because I didn't think they would be a match for me from the start."

"You mean... are you serious Senpai?"

"It's not you who doesn't understand that, right, Amasawa?"

If you had only half-heartedly practiced martial arts, you would not have had any real feeling for it yet. But Amasawa was different.

Even so, in less than 10 seconds of total movement, the match had already been decided by a wide margin.

"You and the other student should have challenged me at an early stage. You shouldn't have gone around and involved the people around you in the fun."

"So, you understood why I contacted Kushida-senpai..."

"It all connected just now. And now the unexpected is about to happen."

"The unexpected?"

"After 3 p.m., keep an eye on the student council room. Make sure to not be seen in front of anyone. Then you'll have all the answers."

Seeing Amasawa's strength slowly slipping away, I released the restraints.

There was no need for any more forceful techniques.

"We've wasted a lot of time. Let's go back to the maid cafe."

"Is it okay leaving her?"

Amasawa stood up, but there was no emotion in her face.

"It's okay. You don't have to worry about your past being exposed."

I started to walk away and Kushida rushed after me.

"How could Ayanokoji-kun know that?"

"Don't worry about it, but you can trust me."

"Who is Ayanokoji-kun?"

That question would be inevitable if you had witnessed the conversation and fight with Amasawa earlier.

"I don't know anything about fighting, but I can tell you're not normal."

"It's not uncommon for classmates to learn martial arts. Horikita and Ibuki, even Ryuen and Akito should be strong in fights, even if they are self-taught. It's not like boys and girls can compete with each other from the start."

I would explain that it was only overwhelming due to the gender difference.

Whether Kushida would be convinced by that is another matter.

"I'll have to get back soon and help them get in line. Please go back yourself."

"Yeah, sure."

Kushida replied, bowing her head as if she had made up her mind to do something.

"Thank you for helping me."

An unexpected thank you from Kushida. Of course, Kushida was easily more down-to-earth than most people on the external front. She was the type of person for whom expressing gratitude itself was easy enough to do.

"You don't think I'm sincerely grateful, but that's fine. I just felt like saying so, even if it's a lie."

"It's not a big deal. It's more of a natural behaviour for a classmate."

"Then you don't have to consider this as a debt, right?"

She emphasised that part, and I thought about it for a moment, but I didn't feel like indebting her.

"Of course."

If I did consider her to be in my debt because of what happened, she wouldn't really be able to repay me.

Chapter 6

Things Left Behind by Airi

Intro

Kushida, in recovery after withdrawing for a moment.

Thanks to a series of successful activities, she's successfully stayed without breaking the long line.

However, this time, there are too many customers, and not enough helping hands.

The situation of being over capacity is still continuing.

The maids' performance is decreasing as they are not able to rest properly in the one hour break they are given.

The men are still there, but even if the work in the background is done, they can't work in the hall, so the situation is still dire.

Eight maid outfits were prepared.

Two of them are considered spares, and six people are always in operation.

Excluding the break time, Satou and Mii-chan are always struggling as the aces.

Horikita, who had no plans to be in charge of the hall, started going around serving the customers.

Then, the other three, Kushida, Ishikura as Matsushita's substitute, and Inokashira, specializing in handing out leaflets

As Kushida is moving to hold back the people in the corridor, there are four working in the hall.

Normally, there should be more staff, but the reality is that there are no willing candidates.

We can't just use any girl.

Other than their leniency and charm, the person's real intentions are important too.

I've called on Sonoda and many others, but they couldn't bear the embarrassment of wearing a maid outfit, or the hard work they would have to do.

"Ayanokoji-kun. The waiting customers may be growing impatient... I don't think we can keep going like this for much longer."

Kushida, peeking into the room from the corridor raised her voice at me. Horikita, who has been serving customers (mainly carrying the dishes) spotted Kushida and approached her.

"How's the end of the line?"

"After I tell them they'll be waiting for a while, there will be people who stay, but about half of them will end up leaving."

Whether we like it or not, after seeing such a long line, people won't feel like waiting.

The remaining customers are not just simple customers, they are visitors who came for the whole Cultural Festival. Kushida is doing her best for us, but we may be on the verge of collapse.

"We have two more maid outfits, right?"

It might be time to pull out the outfits that we saved up for an emergency situation.

"Yes, but if there's no one willing to help, then they're of no use."

"That's right. What about Karuizawa-san?"

A suggestion from Kushida. As Kei is my girlfriend, perhaps she thinks she will do as I say.

It's true; if I force her, the possibility is high.

However...

"Actually, I believe she's on a break from 2 P.M."

"Yeah. She's on a break right now. If we say that she changes her clothes when she comes back at 3 o'clock, I'm not sure how much help she would be."

This is a point that the two can't understand, but she can't simply change in the dressing room.

Worst case scenario, if she leaves and comes back after she returns, it would take another 20 to 30 minutes.

"Umm, can I say something?"

Ike, after coming and going carrying food for I don't know how many rounds, raised his voice.

"What is it? Is there some trouble?"

"Oh, no, I just heard that you don't have enough workers right now, so... Umm, maybe we can ask Satsuki?"

"Shinohara-san? But, would she accept?"

"I think she would. Besides, it was only for a bit, but she's practiced being a maid, hasn't she?"

After hearing this for the first time, the three of us met faces.

Shinohara is in the stall working at preparing the food.

"Can you call her here right away?"

"Okay! I got this!"

Right now, I'm just thankful that there are students who would wear the maid outfit.

With Shinohara, we strongly convinced Azuma. It's now decided that she will participate.

"Ayanokoji-kun, I think you know, but we have to take a break from 3 o'clock. After we're through, some helping hands will be necessary."

"Don't worry. I've thought of everything, so it's okay."

After fifteen minutes, I will have Shinohara go to the hall, and have Azuma, along with Kushida, complete the task of stopping the customers waiting in the corridor.

However, from Kushida's expression in the corridor, it's clear that she isn't happy about this development.

"It's hard to say that the right person is in the right place. Looking at Shinohara-san, her impact is very low, and she isn't good at serving customers either."

"This is an emergency. There's nothing else to do."

"So we can't use Hasebe-san, after all?"

"That's been unclear since the morning. Formally, she's participating in the Cultural Festival, but she might have returned to her dorm."

"As revenge against Sakura-san's expulsion? She participated in the discussions before, didn't she?"

"It's more like she was just observing."

"Still, she has more knowledge than Shinohara, Azuma-san and the others."

"That's why it's such an effective act of revenge. Both Haruka and Akito, who seem to be working together, made their plans with our strength in consideration."

"...I see. I thought that since you know so much, you might have another possibility you've thought of in your field of view."

"Even if I know everything, it's not like I can increase the number of the students in the class. Besides, if I had moved in a different way from the start, Haruka, Akito and the others would have noticed. With that, I decided that it would be disadvantageous to let them be able to perform an unplanned sabotage."

"It's a bit annoying, but that's all. It's not so effective that I would call it revenge".

"If this is all."

"What do you mean?"

"Haruka and Airi were looking forward to the Cultural Festival. That's why they wanted so much to see it with their own eyes. Then, when that's all over, they have no more reason to remain in this school."

"...Are you saying they'll drop out?"

"It's possible. If the two drop out on their own, adding onto the simple fact that we don't have enough people in our class, our Class Points will take a big dive. It would cause a large amount of damage to the class."

"What do you mean with damage?"

"With the two combined together, 600 Class Points."

"Six... Six hundred!?"

"There's nothing to be surprised about. According to the school's rules, there is a penalty for dropping out of the school."

With the exception of the high risk of expulsion in the Special Test, I would say that this is only natural.

"If the two really do drop out, my plans to go to an A Class will be... There won't be any hope left."

'My'.

That's the way Kushida always starts talking.

"Do you intend to simply look on and do nothing?"

"I was planning on coming up with a breakthrough solution, but..."

I moved my eyes to my cell phone.

It's unfortunate, but, the message I've been expecting hasn't arrived just yet.

"After this unexpected trouble, the trump card still hasn't arrived, huh?"

Haruka's plan to obstruct the Cultural Festival, no, to drop out.

This is like an unstoppable killer technique.

No matter what counter-strategy we come up with, there's no way to perfectly defend ourselves.

Even if Haruka herself wanted to remain in this school and desperately tried to repeatedly obstruct us like Kushida used to do before, we can use the rules of the Special Exam and force her to drop out without much harm to class points.

One can't arrive to build a strategy that would do more than that with cheap tricks.

However, Haruka did not take an action beyond her means.

As she knew her techniques wouldn't work against me, she chose the most efficient method.

"Is it fine like this?"

"That's not something for me to decide. It's for Haruka and Akito to make a judgement on. If they are to run through the Cultural Festival, we can't do anything about that."

"I'm sure that you don't actually think that way, Ayanokoji."

"Do you get it?"

"I do. I mean, you've lent a helping hand to even someone like me. You won't abandon Hasabe-san and the others like this, right?"

Somehow, what I'm trying to do right now may be obvious to Kushida.

"The reason that you didn't try to convince them until now, was it to test the two?"

"I didn't understand their aim. Is it to mess up the Cultural Festival, or not? However, after all this time with nothing happening, I have a rough guess. We will make contact soon."

"Do you have any ideas as to where they are?"

"I'm having a lot of work done to find that out."

I showed her my phone's screen, where there was a certain message from someone with Haruka's location written on it.

"You have a really reliable ally, huh? I'm sure that this person is how you knew where I was, too."

"Yeah. They're great at finding people."

I already know where Haruka and the others are.

"Just, even still, my moves are limited. It's an entirely different problem to move their hearts. I'll be back."

I left this place to Kushida and the others, and headed for Haruka's location.

Part 1

I dropped by the classroom with the cardboard from the morning in my hand, then, I headed onto the road to Keyaki Mall. After a while, the spot where students use the benches to rest came into my view.

Over here, there are no customer seats, and, naturally, no students or guests.

As I approached them, I suddenly entered their field of view.

"Good job learning, we're here, Kyopon."

Haruka was on the bench, with Akito standing nearby and gazing at me.

"I know well that you and Airi always use this place to talk after classes, so."

Today, I've received information that Haruka and the others were walking around inside the school.

Then, after all that, they must have chosen this spot as the final station.

"As expected of the Former Ayanokoji Group. Correct answer."

"What did you come here to do? We had no intention to obstruct the Cultural Festival, but..?"

"That might really be true. However, you aren't helping, either."

"That's true."

"I want to apologize to you... No, to the class."

Akito, who hasn't shown his face since the morning, apologized thusly.

"It's fine. I know why you're standing by Haruka."

"More importantly, can I have you answer my question?"

"You mean why am I here? The maid cafe is busier than expected, and we don't have enough helping hands."

"Hmph, is that so? It might not have been so if Airi was there. I would have participated too, so you're lacking the help from both of us."

"In that case, Kushida wouldn't be there. That would have been an even worse situation."

"Answering sarcasm with sarcasm, I see."

"I'm only telling the truth."

Haruka's belligerent style, it always becomes a give-and-take like this.

I can see clearly that this is a method to anger me.

"May I not have your help even just for the last one hour?"

"You know the answer already, don't you? You know that it's pointless to try and convince me."

"That's right. Because, if you had any conditions, I'm sure that it would be to bring back Airi."

Of course, such a thing is impossible.

"Can I have you hear me out, at least? I'm sure that you're curious too."

I put the cardboard in my hand on the ground.

"I want you to open this box."

Even after I said so to her, Haruka simply moved her eyebrows with suspicion.

"What are you telling me to do now? Sorry, but I don't feel like going along with anything weird."

After she said so, Haruka pulled out an envelope.

The word "Expulsion Notice" is hand-written on the white envelope.

"I see you don't seem surprised."

"I knew that the possibility you might give up is high after the Cultural Festival is over. And, Akito, you intend to go along with her, right?"

"...Yeah."

Akita, too, took out an envelope with an Expulsion Notice written on it.

"This is great, Kiyopon. So this means that it was easy for you to expel Airi too, right?"

While talking, her eyes aren't looking at me.

She is simply staring into emptiness.

It is as if she is separate from this world, talking from another dimension.

"The Cultural Festival that Airi was looking forward to. The Cultural Festival, which should have been the platform to take a big step and change herself."

She closed her eyes with sorrow, and hit the bench with her fist.

"I've decided to take this until the end, in her place."

"It's true that I expelled Airi. I dealt with her, using her feelings as the opposite gender. I have no intention of saying that I have no regrets about that."

"I was a necessity for her. And, you, Kyopon, and the Ayanokouji Group were a necessity, too. What do you think her face looks like now, after being expelled by the man that she loved? Have you ever thought about that?"

"What does her face look like now? What is she thinking? Please tell me all the details."

Getting annoyed at my demeanour that she cannot understand, her feelings are being pushed forward.

"She's constantly crying, of course. With regret, sorrow, and pain, she's thinking back on her fun school days. Do you not get that?"

"Is that how you see Airi?"

"Not just me. That's how she is! Why won't you understand!?"

It wouldn't be considered a yell, but she's clearly getting angry.

"You know too, don't you? You just don't want to see the reality. You just don't want to think about Airi's pain after you made her get expelled!"

Haruka has decided that I'm simply running away.

"Unfortunately, I don't think of it that way. Because the students that got expelled have nothing to do with me. It would just be a waste to spend effort thinking about such things."

Knowing it would make things worse, I simply spoke the truth. This, of course, was hard on Haruka.

"Horrible. You really are the worst."

After spitting these words, Haruka slowly stood up.

"I always wondered how Airi could love someone like you, someone this cruel."

She slowly approached me.

She was now in reaching distance.

"I can't stand talking with you any longer. Won't you die together with me soon?"

She said so with the expulsion letter in her hand.

By die, does she mean that she's trying to tempt me into dropping out?

By those words which occur a Deja Vu in my mind, I am reminded of past memories.

"It's not like you've gathered bad attention onto yourself by causing Airi to get expelled. Further, you have no wish to graduate in an A Class, right? In that case, why not just give up?"

Human relationships collapse with just one simple mistake. Until now, no one would have thought that Haruka and I would be having a conversation like this.

"You can try, but I won't be convinced to drop out. I still remember how Airi was made to go along with your delusions."

"Huh? What are you trying to say?"

"I'm saying that you don't look to me like you understand Airi's feelings."

"I understand her better than anyone. You're the one who doesn't want to accept reality!"

"Don't be conceited, Haruka."

"..-ch!?"

With my overwhelming words, she fell completely silent.

Akito, mistakenly thinking that she's about to be attacked reflexively, stepped forward in between Haruka and me, and raised his left hand.

"I was just a bit surprised. I'm fine, so step aside, Akito."

The sense of danger that Akito's instincts made him feel must not have been picked up by Haruka.

Still on guard, Akito slowly lowered his left hand behind him.

"What do you mean conceited? What are you acting all high and mighty for?"

"I'm telling you to stop deciding Airi's feelings by yourself and stop speaking for her. The only one who can truly understand what she's thinking is Airi herself."

"You're the one who doesn't get it. Do you think she's fine with getting expelled?"

"She really might have been in despair at that moment. However, how can you claim to know how she feels right now?"

"That's... That's obvious if you just think about it a little, right?"

"No. In your mind, Airi has to feel bad right now."

"...Huh?"

"You're not sad because Airi was expelled. You're sad because you lost someone who was convenient for you. You wanted to have Airi, someone weaker than you, stay by your side, and make yourself into her protector. You loved the sense of superiority and the sense of satisfaction you got from this."

"That's not true at all! How can you say that when you don't even think about her or remember her!?"

She strongly denied it, but I could see her eyes faintly fluctuating.

"When I think about how she feels now... I..!"

"Did you really think about it?"

"Over and over again!"

Amidst this conversation which could be considered two parallel lines, Haruka only is wearing out her heart.

"You don't know the reality."

"That's... It's not like I can directly ask her about it!"

"It's true, there's no way to confirm it directly. However, here's a hint. This cardboard box. There's a high possibility that this is something that's necessary for you."

"Huh? I don't get it. That's not the thing that's necessary for me."

"Even if this was the last message left behind by Airi?"

"...Huh?"

Until now, she was devoted to being confident, but she opened her eyes wide along with Akito standing behind her.

"That can't be... What kind of a joke is this? I'm sure that you're the one who prepared this box, right?"

"The day that Airi's expulsion was decided, she left this package behind for me. I'm sure that in that short time, she understood what she had to do."

Haruka's sight dropped down to the cardboard box at my feet.

"If you look at the sender, you'll see that this isn't something I've made."

Haruka kneeled down and looked at the slip on the cardboard box.

There, my name was written as the receiver, and the name of an online shop as the sender.

I myself found this out for the first time after receiving it and taking a look.

When she noticed that, Haruka extended her hand and tried to rip off the tape with all her strength.

She had to try a few times, and finally succeeded in taking it off.

Then, the box was open.

Inside, is a single maid outfit.

"This, this is..."

Haruka should understand the meaning this holds.

"I was supposed to wear this... I was supposed to wear this together with Airi... Why..?"

"She noticed the possibility that you would come to a halt and not participate in the Cultural Festival. With this reason, this was sent for the sake of stopping such a future."

"Ai...Ri..."

"I, at the very least, can feel her strong intent from this gift. It isn't just sadness. How about you, Haruka?"

"Airi... Airi..!"

Haruka took out the maid outfit, and held it close to her chest.

Tears started flowing out and she started weeping.



"All I wanted to do was to be with her in the Cultural Festival... I wanted to push that shy kid from her back, I wanted to see her unveiling herself...!"

Thinking about the future that nearly could have happened, she cried.

Hopefully, with this, Haruka will show her understanding, and face forwards.

However...

"This is... Wrong."

She wiped her tears on the cuffs of her uniform, and stood up in rejection.

"Wrong?"

"This isn't something that she sent me because she wants me to participate in the Cultural Festival..."

Here Things cannot be changed that simply.

"She was just regretful. She wanted you to know her resentment by showing you that she was the one supposed to wear this... I'm sure of it."

This outfit can be interpreted as one wants. Since there is no concrete message left by Airi, it isn't clear that the reality is what I want it to be.

"It has to be that way, right? If this was for me, it would be sent to me. Yet, you were the receiver, so there is a different meaning to this, am I wrong?"

Different viewpoints are interesting, and it is true that I can't say for sure that this isn't possible.

So she thinks that Airi is trying to harass the person who caused her to get expelled.

Interesting.

"Wait, Haruka. I think that you may be a bit wrong..."

For the first time since I've come here, Akito opened his mouth.

"It's not wrong. Yes, of course. Even this package may be a play prepared by Kiyopon..."

"The fact that she sent her last present to Kiyotaka and not you could mean that she wanted to make you two get along with this, couldn't it?"

If the present was sent to Haruka...

And, if she simply took it...

In that moment, the possibility of me coming in contact with her would disappear.

"No, it can't be..."

"I... Even, I was a part of the Ayanokouji group. I know that Airi would think like this."

"Like I said, you're wrong!"

Haruka turned around and sprinted, then held Akito by the chest.

"Don't try to make things up! I won't forgive you for trying to make everything out to be the best for you!"

"But I'm not really..."

"Even if, and this is a big if, if it was like that, she had her place in the world stolen from her! That reality will never change! I won't accept a friendship that needs a victim to be formed!"

"However, no matter what we imagine, it won't have any effect on Airi. Where is Airi, and what is she doing? Isn't that the most important thing?"

"I know that. That's why I'll drop out, and see for myself. I'm going to be there for her!"

At the same time as completing her revenge against the class, she'll go and meet Airi.

This means that Self-Expulsion is an advantageous act for Haruka.

"You're too loud. Even here, if we're not careful, we'll gather people's attention, you know?"

As if trying to cut away the fury, these cold and calm words appeared.

Kushida, a figure that even I didn't think would come up.

With her maid outfit standing out in this place with a tense atmosphere, she slowly approached.

"Is the store alright?"

"We just took care of some customers, so we've made a little time for ourselves."

I don't know if that is the truth or a lie, but I know that she wouldn't be neglectful in coming here.

I can tell this from her eyes, looking at me, and telling me that the store is fine.

"What did you come here for?"

Not just Haruka, but I, too, feel suspicion towards her coming to this place.

"What did I come here for? To see with my own eyes, I suppose. Since Ayanokoji-kun told me that Hasebe-san and Miyake-kun might be dropping out."

Haruka looked at me for a moment, but turned her gaze back towards Kushida right away.

"If I'm to say why all this happened, you're the source, Kushida-san. If you had been against the expulsions from the start..."

"Sorry, but now I don't regret the choice I made back then. What happened back then made me look bad, but it was also the springboard towards opening a new future."

"...I'll show the people from our class that it was a mistake to leave you here."

"If you want to drop out, why don't you just do it?"

"Don't act tough. You said it yourself, Kushida, didn't you? That there is no other way other than to graduate in an A Class. It's the only reason that you can stay in a class that you can't stand to be in, isn't it? So, I'll take that away."

"Your revenge plans may indeed go well, but... Is that what's necessary? I don't think that Sakura-san would want such a thing to happen."

"Don't say the same things as Kiyopon. You're all so... What the hell do you know about Airi?"

"Well, who knows. But, I at least know that she isn't more irresolute than you are."

"Huuh?"

She may simply be saying whatever is coming to her mind, or, she may have a basis for her thoughts.

After wondering why she came to this place, I now have a new suspicion.

"Sakura-san was weak. That's why she got expelled."

"...Are you really the one to say that? You lost with shame too, didn't you?"

"I did lose, yes. I'll also accept that I was weak. But, the reality is that Sakura was the same too. No, she was even weaker than me, and that's why she got expelled."

In truth, Horikita judged that Kushida would be a more successful ally when compared to Airi.

Now, in the Cultural Festival, she's meeting her expectations and showing her abilities. Of course, if she did participate in the Cultural Festival, I don't doubt that Airi would have been very popular too.

But, the skill to deal with special customers and the ability to conduct yourself around adults can't be learned in one day. She doesn't lose to Airi on this point.

Before that, Kushida has the ability to achieve a good ranking in the second midterms, too.

So far, I can say that she has definitely been contributing.

"She really was weak... But that's precisely why I wanted to protect her..."

"You wanted to protect her? You think really highly of yourself, huh? Aren't you the only one who thought she'd be weak forever?"

"Don't mess with me!"

"I'm not messing with you or anything."

Kushida is not reacting to Haruka's aggressive words.

Perhaps because of her experience until now, she is clearly holding herself with a different toughness than normal students.

"Ayanokoji-kun. Can I have you look at this?"

Kushida turned her eyes away from Haruka, and turned them on me.

"Every day, I wanted to learn other people's secrets. I hungered for secrets. Because I believed that this would increase my value. Of course, even Sakura-san is not an exception to this."

No matter who it is, if it's someone that she can make use of, Kushida will make sure to encompass them.

Even if someone can turn their hearts towards something that interests them, it's hard for them to approach something that isn't interesting for them.

It is not possible to continue to do so with only ordinary mental strength.

"I figured that her secrets might have some use even after she got expelled. Then, I found it."

After saying so, Kushida took out her phone, and showed me the screen.

As I took the phone, I started scrolling and reading the details.

"This is..."

"So you didn't know about this either, huh? Though, I thought that you of all people would have noticed this, Ayanokoji."

"I can't decide if this is expected or unexpected. You've done well, I see."

"In the old days, she worked with you a lot on this matter, didn't she? That may be why."

That's about over a year ago, before we even formed the Ayanokoji Group.

Because of the subject of Airi, Haruka is staring at me with unease.

"You're curious, right? It's about Sakura whom you like so much."

Kushida flapped her phone around as if seeing through her and challenging her.

"What is it?"

Kushida shut off the phone's screen for a moment, and approached Haruka with it in her hand.

"I'm a really bad person too, but so are you. You just find satisfaction in finding people who need your help. You're not actually worried about Sakura-san, you're just sorrowful that you lost someone who needed you, right?"

Strangely, she is saying the same things I am.

After these words which were not even arranged beforehand, Haruka's eyes started to tear up.

"So you are just like your family after all, huh?"

Family? While being surprised by such an unexpected word, Haruka interrupts her.

"Please stop... Don't talk about that."

"Why? You're leaving the school, so what does it matter if I tell everyone what you told me? I don't need to protect this secret anymore."

Now that I think about it, Kushida knew a lot more about Haruka than me, huh.

"I'm not in the wrong. I wanted to protect Airi, I wanted to be by her side. Even if I was also doing it for myself..."

"I understand your feelings, but I can't say that your thoughts are correct. This kind of thing is why even after going to high-school, you couldn't make a single real friend. Am I wrong?"

"I..."

"Well, whatever. If I keep idly chatting here, it'll harm the maid cafe too. Why don't you just drop out like this, without knowing anything? You can't do anything now even if you learn the truth."

She stopped approaching Haruka, and turned her back towards her.

"Wait! What about Airi!?"

"You wanna know?"

Upset at losing the advantage, she quickly approached Kushida and grabbed her shoulders.

"She can't do anything without me by her side. She needed help!"

"You don't get it, do you? She's always been more of an adult than you think."

Almost as if trying to seize it, Haruka took the phone into her hand, and tapped the screen with her finger.

The browser history. There was the SNS (Social Media) account of a certain someone.

It's a useful app where you can let the whole world know your thoughts just by tweeting. In this school, there are a lot of restrictions in place to stop the students from revealing their identities, so I suppose there aren't a lot of students here using it.

However, for someone who isn't based in this school, there is of course no problem with using it as they want.

The account name is "Shizuku".

Another name of Sakura Airi, who used to work as a bikini/gravure model in secret.

Since the aforementioned case, Airi had to delete her account, but Kushida found that it returned the other day.

It has been only a few days since it was created, but it already has over a thousand followers.

"No way... Is... Is this Airi's..?"

This can be said to be the achievement of Kushida, who cares about nothing but collecting information.

"This... There's no proof she made this, you know. It's obviously a fake that you and Kushida-san made..."

"Do you still think it's us after reading what's actually written there?"

[After a long break, I've decided to restart my idol activities.]

The first tweet of the new account.

Then, there are things about how she focused on her school, and how she enjoyed her days with her friends.

About how she stopped being an idol.

Submitted here were things that only she herself could have written.

[I... I've decided to do whatever I can. To become someone that wouldn't be ashamed to face my dear friend. To show her after she graduates that I'm not ashamed of myself anymore.]

"It's true that I said you just liked being her protector. Airi may have been someone that needed a lot of help, but, after being expelled, she started growing unbelievably fast."

[I got the part that I auditioned for yesterday! I was so nervous, but I'm so happy!]

"This is..."

Haruka swallowed her breath. On the SNS, there were comments about her success in the third inspection.

[The reason that I wanted to be in the entertainment world is that I wanted my voice to reach people.]

[Sometimes it's hard, and sometimes it's sad, but... I want to face forwards. I'm facing forwards. So, you guys try your best, too.]

Of course, it is possible to create a fake account using Shizuku's name. However, she is being followed by entertainment producers, and it would be hard to fake the contents of these tweets.

That's precisely why Haruka should understand that Airi is the owner of this account.

"After reading all that, I can't imagine that Airi is in the dire situation that you think she is."

"You were overprotective, and thought you were above her, didn't you? But, after she was expelled, a new road opened for her. She hasn't stopped at all."

After forcefully taking the phone from Haruka's shaking hand, Kushida turned back towards me.

"Forgive me, I got a bit ahead of myself again."

After saying so, she showed her smiling face, which was unfitting for this place.

"I thought I was going to help you, but you helped me instead."

"You owe me though, okay?"

"I thought we weren't going to that?"

"I don't like borrowing things, but I do like being the one lending them."

After saying that, she started walking to return to the special building.

"What a shrewd girl."

[Note : Shrewd means showing clever resourcefulness in practical matters.]

After exposing her various weaknesses, Haruka stood, shocked and broken.
It reminded me strongly of the scene with Kushida in the unanimous special exam.

After skillfully exposing various weaknesses, she started walking around, this is just like Kushida.

"...Haruka. I don't think that this can be a fake."

Akito, who was looking at the SNS on his own phone too, handed it to her.

After this, too, Haruka started intensely rushing through the messages written by Airi.

"Uh, uhh..."

Her concentrated sight became dim, and tears started flowing out from her eyes.

She had thought that Airi could do nothing without her, but, before she could notice, Airi had started walking on her own.

Even now, though she should have a wounded heart, she was walking forwards with all she had. That was, because she was anxious that Haruka would stop in her tracks.

"What an idiot I am", she thought.

Haruka knew that she just decided all by herself that Airi was unhappy after being expelled, and arbitrarily empathized with her.

"This is new information even for me. I thought that for those who are expelled, for those who leave in defeat, everything was over."

She had decided that this unique package sent by her was the last thing she would leave behind.

"But, that wasn't the case."

Returning from defeat. There are those who can cut open a new beginning from their defeat.

This is a big difference from the world of the White Room.

No, further than that, those who were dropped out from the White Room could have made a comeback, too.

"She might become really big after this. Despite that, will you still drop out and go after her? Let aside being made fun of, she might not even talk with you."

If Haruka dropped out for the sake of revenge and met up with Airi, it's easy for Haruka to imagine what would happen too.

She would not be welcomed with a smile, she would actually face Airi's anger.

"I... What should I do..!?"

"There is only one answer. Become someone that can meet Airi with pride. If you graduate in the A Class, things will be different. You have to keep working hard, survive these three years, and become someone that won't be ashamed when you're face to face with Airi."

Airi won't chase Haruka. It's time for Haruka to chase after Airi.

"Just in case, this package's price is included in the budget to be used in the Cultural Festival."

Whether or not I could use this in the Cultural Festival was not clear, but it was good that I planned for unexpected circumstances.

In summary, if she wears this maid outfit and works at the maid cafe, it will not cause any damage whatsoever.

"I won't expect you to work as well as the other maids. But, you can burn into your eyes the sight that you wanted Airi to see. As her friend, that's your duty."

Haruka silently apologized to Akito, took out the expulsion notice, and left with the maid outfit held onto her chest.

There is little time left, but she still has the chance to stand on the front stage.

"Kiyotaka... Will your classmates let Haruka in?"

"There's Kushida. There's Horikita. There's Yousuke. We'll be able to handle any situation."

"...I see."

Akito put his phone away, grabbed the two expulsion notices, and tore them from the middle.

"There's no reason for her to drop out anymore. Likewise, I'm going to stay here until the end too, with Haruka."

"Haruka's heart is shaken after knowing the truth. You need to be the one to support her."

Right now, even if we can't all enjoy it with smiles together, there's still more than a year left in our school life.

The day that they can truly smile in real meaning, should not be so far away.

"I'll be attacked by my class-mates too for a while, but..."

He scratched his head with worry, and laughed just a little bit.

"What would have happened if Kushida hadn't appeared? What would you have done, Kiyotaka?"

"We might have been done for."

"You handled that well."

I took out my own phone, and opened the internet.

Then, I deleted my search history relating to Shizuku's SNS page that I prepared.

It was Kushida who first made effective use of this and opened the way out of this difficulty. So, this is her achievement.

"Shall we go back then, Akito? There's still some of the Cultural Festival left."

"...Yeah."

The time is around 2:20 pm.

I succeeded in taking back the members that the Horikita class was missing.

Part 2

After bringing Akito to the stall, the boys, though they were still poking fun, accepted him without hesitation.

After appreciating such a warm welcome, Akito's eyes became just a little red.

It's probably also because Akito was a centrist who didn't ever cause any disputes.

Keisei from the former Ayanokouji group had just taken his break, so, while unfortunate, he was nowhere to be seen.

After we returned to the maid cafe in the special building, the long line was continuing as usual.

Kushida, while serving the customers with a smile, was walking around and handing out the new cookies.

Both the older and the younger kids must have found comfort in Kushida, as she was gathering all eyes upon her.

I feel bad for Azuma working by her side, but the difference between their contributions is night and day.

"Please come again, dear customers!"

Satou shouted and guided them to the exit.

Two female customers left the class while waving to the maids.

Then, a new customer came in right away and was guided to an available seat.

The seats and the tables prepared in this former classroom are spread further apart for the sake of the scenery, but, right now, they are closer together for the sake of increasing our number of customers.

Normally, we should have set the place up to be more comfortable and spacious, but, we have to earn enough until the time we have left is up, so there's nothing else we could do.

"Looks like she came."

I received Kushida's words as she peeked in from the corridor for a moment, and awaited her arrival into work.

"Aah! Aah, aah! It's so hard to run here!"

Haruka, out of breath and swinging her shoulders up and down, finally arrived.

The maids were distracted by her too for a moment, but they have more important things to do right now.

They quickly shifted their minds towards their duties.

There's nobody pressing her as to why she has come here.

"Hasebe-san, where did you change clothes?"

"The girls' toilet... It was terrible."

"I bet it was."

Since they are in front of a crowd, Kushida, in her Angel Mode, bitterly laughed and welcomed Haruka.

"...What's the situation?"

"Ask that to Horikita-san. I already have my hands full managing the queue, so."

Horikita, in her maid outfit, called Haruka and entered the waiting room.

"You did well to come here."

After her first word, Horikita took her welcoming finger and caressed the stiff expressioned Haruka's back.

"I thought you wouldn't show your face today, but you've finally prepared your resolve, huh?"

I can't say that it's a full recovery, but Haruka calmed her breathing down and answered as she turned her head down.

"You're not originally supposed to be a maid. You haven't practiced. I don't think you can work with as much skill as Satou-san and the others, but... Right now, I'd even accept the help of a cat."

[TL Note : Here's the phrase that was used in the Original text - 猫の手も借りたい - Neko no Te mo Karitai - Wanting the help of even a cat. Btw Never thought I would see Horikita saying that she will even accept the help of a cat. But here we are in 2022.]

She can't escape being dug into this most severe battle of our sudden war.

"You came to contribute to the Cultural Festival. I can trust in that, right?"

"It's fine. I won't do anything to jeopardize the work you all have done, so. I'm sure you don't believe me, but..."

"No, I believe you."

After Haruka's words, Horikita made clear her trust right away.

"Why..?"

"I can tell from looking at your eyes. Ayanokoji-kun convinced you well, didn't he?"

[TL note : I used the word 'Convinced' here to fit the narrative of the situation but in the original text, the japanese word does have a negative connotation to it like deceive or trick. However, overall, It could be phrased with convinced too.]

"Hey."

"And, by Kushida-san, of course. I didn't think that you would approach me in a maid outfit."

"By Kushida-san? I wonder when you left your position..."

Perhaps because she was busy in the hall, it seems that she didn't know that Kushida had become absent.

"Anyhow, even if it displeases you, I'll have you forget about your grudges and hard-feelings towards me until the Cultural Festival is over."

"...I know."

"That's good, then. You'll focus on serving cold water to thirsty customers, and participate in their photos if they wish. Okay?"

"I'll try my best."

After coming all this way, Haruka is yet a carp on a cutting board.

Naive words such as "I want to" or "I don't want to" are not allowed to be said.

"I have to take a compulsory break at 3 o'clock, so I'll leave things to you after that, Ayanokoji-kun. Take good care of her, okay?"

"All I can do is just take good pictures."

Because I've already punched the shutter tens of times today.

I've gotten the hang of it by now.

Haruka, looking down, looked at me once and took a big breath.

Then, holding a pitcher of water with a slice of lemon in it, she left the waiting room and started walking around the store.

While introducing herself to everyone one by one, she courteously lowered her head.

Of course, it wasn't very smooth, and it was clear that she lacked practice compared to the other maids.

However, because of this, she ended up actually receiving the warm looks of the adults.

Haruka had a charming face as a woman, and those who looked at her, without seeing her inner face, unconsciously had favourable impressions of her.

"Facing victory or defeat, it seems that our class can finally be relieved, huh?"

"Indeed."

"Ayanokoji-kun. Hasebe-san just got a request for three photos. Please take care of it!"

Satou's voice reached the waiting room, and I prepared my camera right away.

Horikita also seems to have the resolve to do her final duties in the time left until her break.

"See you later."

After Horikita left the waiting room, I looked at the board inside the room.

It's made in a way that lets you understand who got the most photo requests at a quick glance, but, Kushida, who had increased her photoshoot numbers while I wasn't here, was first with 56 photos. Satou was second with 24 photos, so Kushida was clearly the first with an overwhelming difference.

By the way, Horikita, not being very amicable, only has 11 photoshoots.

If it's just about outer looks, she wouldn't lose to Kushida, but, it seems that isn't the most important thing.

Having some charm and courtesy seems to be the most important thing.

"Even if Haruka tries her hardest to make a comeback now, I don't think she can go past this record, after all."

Even as I was standing in front of Haruka with the camera in my hand, I can hear the new orders to take a photo with Kushida coming from the corridor.

"Alright, Haruka. I'm taking it."

"...Ri, right."

She is still a bit resistant to face me, so her expression is stiff.

I'm aiming for the best moment to come in front of the lens, but...

"Should I change with Yousuke?"

"Wait. I'm okay... Yep, I'm okay."

She whispered so many times as if talking to herself, and raised her hand.

It wasn't a full on smile, but she was expressive enough for a photo, so I clicked the shutter.



The first photo is alone. The other two are two-shots together with the customers.

Part 3

Around the time when 3:00 PM is finally closing in.

For the sake of making my last move, I put the maid cafe behind me to make the arrangements.

Nobody knows how much you have to earn to get first place.

Of course, it's possible to take the first place for sure if you get over half the private points that are circulating, but it's pretty much impossible to arrange this.

In summary, until the moment when the Cultural Festival is over, the most important thing is to earn as much as you can.

Both the Horikita class and the Ryuen class earned high praise with their student concept cafes.

The one on one composition is popular with the many visitors, and, encourages them to cooperate with one, or both of the classes to help them in their struggle.

In this situation that can be thought of as a deadlock in this struggle for supremacy, it was when I came to see the look of the Japanese concept cafe to know our opponents' feelings that new change happened. The customers who created the long line are impatiently waiting to enter the restaurant.

"I see that this place is no less successful."

Thriving more than expected, the Ryuen Class' students have no free time to chat.

I can't make a complete judgement by seeing just this moment, but I'm sure that there's not a big difference in the amount of points they're earning.

It looks very much like they're aiming for first place, but there's no definite proof that they will reach it.

"Sorry to have troubled you by calling you here, Chabashira-Sensei."

I called Chabashira Sensei, who is probably using her points for the classes outside the Year Two classes.

"Did you use up all of your private points?"

"Hm? Right, I have 80 points left. I told you I used them all, didn't I? What about it?"

Time is of the essence, so it seems that, as a proper teacher, she already finished contributing to the Cultural Festival.

"In summary, I could say that you have some free time now, correct?"

"That's right. All that's left for me to do is to wait until the Cultural Festival is over, but... Just what is this about?"

Not understanding why she was called here, she showed me an appearance that looked very worried.

The Japanese style cafe is only the background. I'm not going to say that it's prospering, or that there is a possibility the Horikita class might lose.

It's enough if Chabashira Sensei personally sees the way this course of events is going and interprets them on her own.

"Actually, I wanted to ask for your cooperation for the next hour."

"Stop there, Ayanokoji. Cooperation? I don't understand what you mean, but..."

[TL Note : The words used in Chabashira-sensei's dialogue implies that she is very much uncomfortable and nervous with Ayanokoji only asking for cooperation (Without even him giving any details)]

The teachers spend their points inside the school and contribute to the Cultural Festival. Today, she is only given that duty, at least.

"For the sake of increasing our sales in the maid cafe, I want you to become a maid."

I put into words the strategy I had in mind to solidify my victory, but...

"...Huh?"

This may be the first time I'm hearing such a dumbfounded voice from her.

"You want me to be a maid? I've never heard something like that before... What are you saying?"

"Like I said just now. I'm just making the moves I can for the sake of winning."

"Why is it necessary for me to become a maid? I'm a teacher in the first place. Furthermore, I'm also the homeroom teacher of the class. I won't be allowed to side myself with a specific class."

"That's not true, is it? With the rules right now, the school's teachers get treated the same as guests. Classroom Teachers can't use their points in their own year. These two rules don't apply here. There is also no rule that says only students can participate in the program. In the end, you should be free to serve guests. This isn't very usual, but if you say that it's alright, it's not a problem."

With these rules, this act won't fall under what is not allowed.

However, it would be a clear violation if it was an act of purchasing products outside the Convenience Stores, Keyaki Mall, or even the Cultural Festival using her own personal funds instead of her points.

[TL Note : In Japanese it literally says 'Hurried/Sudden Convenience Store' instead of only Convenience Stores. I don't know if that's a specific type of store or a real world reference of stores. So, I decided to use only Convenience Store. Just wanted to let you know.]

However, I am free to view her as "Human Resources" without these rules applying.

Perhaps because she could not make sense of these things, Chabashira Sensei was completely silent.

"Shall I explain it in an easier way? There is a student carrying a heavy baggage and his legs are shaking. A visitor passing by helped him carry it until his destination. Is this a violation?"

"...It's not a violation."

"That's right. This would be valid for students, too. The Year Two A Class asks the Year Two D Class for cooperation, and the D Class agrees. Is there a problem with loaning students out?"

There may be all kinds of reasons to loan someone out. Simply for the sake of helping with pure intent.

As a strategy to cause problems on the inside, or, expecting them to return the favour and exchanging labour.

No matter what the reason may be, if it is inside the rules, the school won't criticize such things.

In truth, even just by walking around the school, the figures of students supporting other classes can be seen here and there.

"There is... No problem, I suppose."

"This is the same as that. It isn't against the rules for you to answer my request for aid."

"No, I can't. I would still look like I'm lending aid to the class that I'm in charge of."

"That's true. Even if it is generally allowed, there will still be people who hold such an opinion like that."

This is precisely why I have to make use of the clear rules and make this legitimate.

"I will pay the private points that will be generated when I receive your aid. Looking over at this Cultural Festival, I'm sure the school has this possibility in its field of view."

"That's not... No, but... You've thought of everything..."

I've struck the bulls-eye. She is showing me such an expression.

Chabashira Sensei is a teacher of this school too, and, she has been in charge of a different class in the past, too.

For the Cultural Festival that has no practical examples from the past, the school must have all kinds of hypotheses.

As a general rule, private points are a strong weapon in this school.

They can be used not just for daily shopping, but also to secure personnel as necessary.

"There is nothing in this school that can't be bought with private points. Is that wrong?"

Denying this would be denying the school.

Further, it would be like admitting failure as a teacher.

Even if her true intent is different, Chabashira Sensei has no right to refuse.

She hurriedly started reading through the rules relating to the Cultural Festival on her phone.

"...In the case of receiving the help of a teacher, 100 thousand private points will be paid for one hour."

"I can see from your Strategy that you use well, the secret rules that the school alone holds."

This is the same as back when I bought points for a test with my private points.

"It's 100 thousand points for one hour, you know. That's not a cheap condition, but... Are you sure?"

"Of course."

Even if I do get her aid, I won't give her a big duty.

Even if I can make her cook, even if I can make her serve, without practice, it's a waste of my private points to make her my ally for 1 hour.

If she went out to serve customers in the cafe, it would be hard to succeed without practice in the actual event.

However, if I can make use of her in a way that differs from regular duties, it would be worth spending a lot of private points.

"You're really, really sure, right?"

"You're repeating yourself, Chabashira Sensei. Time is of the essence right now, so I'll have your cooperation even if you don't like it."

If it gets past 3:00 PM, I will not be able to fully receive her help and have it be worth the private points.

"Wa-... Wait. That's right, how about you ask Chie? She'll be better at this kind of thing. Even if she is from a rival class, I think she will fulfill her duty as a teacher."

"I suppose so. However, what I am looking for right now is not skilled personnel, but the reverse. I think I will get more effective results the more unskilled you are and the more unrelated you are to this field of work."

"I don't understand... I don't understand your reasoning at all."

It is true that, from the depths of her heart, she does not like or understand this.

Precisely because she does not understand, she will function as I imagine.

"We don't have any more time. Thank you for working with me."

I forced her to hold my phone and paid the private points to Chabashira Sensei.

"With this, the contract is complete."

"That's... That's sneaky, Ayanokoji. Using the school's rules and such."

This isn't sneaky, or anything else, I think that it is the perfect method of fighting, but...

"I don't have a clue about how to work in a maid cafe. I don't know how this will go, so."

"I'm not worried. I don't expect anything from you."

Chabashira Sensei, in the classroom wearing a maid outfit.

This reality alone will allow me to win.

Part 4

I pushed the displeased Chabashira Sensei into the changing room, then I pasted into my phone the text that I had prepared beforehand, and used it to communicate with my class-mates.

I conveyed the fact that Chabashira Sensei was going to work as a maid in the last one hour, for the sake of notifying the free students to go around inside the school announcing this.

As I aimed for, this subject spread quickly and far with word of mouth.

Using a teacher.

A grand, special event that is impossible for students to realize.

I understood that this would cause a big enough uproar to instantly change the atmosphere in the corridor.

Chabashira Sensei, slightly sprinting with a rush, reached me with her face all red.

"Here... Here I am, Ayanokoji. Quickly, let me into the classroom!"

"I've been waiting for you."

I can't just let her go by herself, so I took her into the classroom and guided her around.

"So, what am I to do here...?"

"You don't have to do anything. Please just keep standing here."

"Wh-... What?"

"Didn't I say already? That I don't want you to do this skillfully. Thank you for the help."

I threw Chabashira Sensei into the classroom like this, and gave her the work of just standing around.

Without speaking with anyone, and simply standing in the corner of the classroom with embarrassment.

Even if she looks for aid from someone, nobody will help her, no... I'll make sure that nobody will help her.

[TL Note : It's implied that he wants Chabashira-sensei to be in a vulnerable state to draw more attention to her.]

Now this is the ultimate eroticism.

From this moment on, I have to change the maid cafe's policies.

My biggest grounds for concern is the possibility of there being too many customers to fit into the classroom.

In order to solve this physical problem, it is necessary to grant the customers fitting compensation.

That is to set up a "Observing Admission Fee", and accept the customers that surpass our capacity.

I will add a rule that one may enter the classroom right away if they pay 1000 points.

I will make the proposal to the waiting customers that they may enter the classroom to stand and observe, and, if they accept, allow them to get to the front of the line to enter the classroom.

Some of the customers in the front of the line may be unsatisfied, but I have the resolve to take this risk.

"Standing and observing... I've never heard of such an idea in a maid cafe."

"It's like a second space."

We will use the side of the teacher's podium where we cannot set up tables and the empty space in the back as the observing spaces.

With this, it is possible to enter the room even without enough tables and seats.

Then, to take a photo with Chabashira Sensei, 2000 points.

It will cost many times more than the photos that students take alone.

I rushed towards the board at the entrance and wrote these in.

"Wow... Will customers really come in with that price..?"

"Look behind you."

Kushida turned around from looking at me as I was writing on the board, and saw the customers who finished paying for the observer fee being sucked into the classroom and disappearing.

The active faculty and the staff are also very curious about this sight that is sure to be never seen again.

Although there are restrictions in place that the teachers in the same year cannot drop private points, the number of teachers who are in charge of years other than Year 2 are naturally much larger.

In addition, even the adults who work at Keyaki Mall have an image of Chabashira Sensei as a regular straight-laced type of person who they would see many times a day.

Adults, adults, and more adults, coming in like waves.

"Somehow, it feels like our hard work is being overshadowed... I feel a bit down about this."

Some of the adults coming in from the outside don't understand the meaning of this phenomenon.

However, in the case of a thought such as "there's no harm in just taking a look", it's different.

Baited by the words "I don't really get it, but I should take a look anyway", they are being caught in the momentum.

The maid cafe is overflowing with standing observers, surpassing 10 people, then 20.

Let alone diminish, the line is gaining more and more momentum.

"There's... There's so many people, huh, Ayanokoji-kun."

The dumbfounded Kushida is taken aback by the crowd of adults pushing in.

"Yeah. Honestly, I didn't think there would be this many, either."

"When did you come up with such an absurd plan?"

"It was about two weeks ago. I came up with it as the ace up my sleeve for the Cultural Festival."

"I wonder how it would have gone if we had started from an earlier hour...?"

"This really may have a sustainable effect for two or three hours. It's just that, this raises a different problem. In the case that there is a surplus of time, different classes can do something like this too."

"Ah, right. There isn't even an hour left, so they couldn't copy us even if they wanted to."

If every class put a teacher out to perform, the effect would end up diminished.

"There is only this one last hour to have this premium feel."

Kushida and others spreading the maid cafe's reputation around in a good way also bore great results.

"...I see. That's why I couldn't win."

"Hm?"

"I've realized your strength once again, Ayanokoji-kun. It would be a lot of trouble to make an enemy out of you."

"Your eyes aren't laughing, Kushida."

"Maybe it's because I'm half glad to be your classmate, but also half irritated by you."

He said half, but I feel like the latter is higher.

"Please don't push! Line up here! Please don't push!"

Sudou and the others hurriedly created a human wall and tried to form a queue, but there are adults who are trying everything they can to see inside of the class-room, so it's becoming quite the crowd.

But, this is part of business, too. With everything inside hidden, and because of the fact that the windows are locked, the only way to forcefully see inside is to break the windows.

Of course, there are no adults who would do such a thing, so, we'll force them to get in a line.

As we did so, requests for photographs with Chabashira Sensei continued without stopping.

The customers who came in to observe standing, and the customers who were in before that too are asking for photographs one after another.

"In this one hour, she might climb up to the top of the personal sales chart... Even though she's not doing anything."

"We can't let any more people in, after all!"

Mii-chan's voice, sounding like a cry for help, reached me, and let me know that the second space is filled.

"This is it, isn't it? The customers aren't decreasing at all yet, and they don't seem to want to leave, so it's a shame, but..."

Kushida is saying that perhaps we should be satisfied with just letting in customers to stand and observe.

"Not yet. The customers who are still here are lining up because they have money. I have no intent of letting them leave."

"But... Wait, are you going to put in new tables? But you need cutlery for the tables too, so there's no way... It would take time to carry them here as well."

It is obvious that there is no longer any space inside the classroom to let customers in.

"I will start using the third space now."

"Third... Space?"

I faced all the customers waiting in line, and raised my voice:

"I apologize sincerely, but the cafe is completely full inside, so we cannot allow anyone else to enter the room."

After I announced so, the unsatisfied glares of the adults turned on me one after another.

"However, as a special offer, those who have more than 1 points currently may pay everything they have and look inside the room from this place.

This place, as in the corridor, is fitting to make a row shaped maid cafe.

I will remove the obstructions by opening the doors, and somehow widen the room by opening the windows.

"You'll... You'll use the corridor!?"

"That's right."

"But, you're asking them to pay everything... Maybe the ones that don't have much will do it, but will the people who have a lot of points pay them all?"

It seems that she doesn't think there are many who will pay everything even if it's for Chabashira Sensei.

"It's not a problem. I don't know if this is worth paying a big amount for or not, but, there's already very little time left. Even if they have 10,000 points to spend, where they can actually spend it is a big question."

"Ah, right... When the Cultural Festival is over, unspent points were going to be taken back by the school, right?"

"Yeah. Because it's set up to encourage people to spend it all. If they're not going to be able to spend the points anywhere else, they can just spend them all here. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that whether it's 1 point or 10,000 points, it's all the same for the adults who were granted points."

Actually, the more they have, the more they'll want to use them up here.

Further, the adults who have been made to wait until now are sure to have a lot of points.

"I'll check the sequential bill, so please wait there a bit."

After I gave out the instructions, several people went out to collect the sales.

Then, the adults were lined up in the corridor, and they were guided into the positions where they will be able to see inside the class.

"After that, just open the curtains that have been hiding the room until now."

With this, the third space will be complete.

The curtains, opening at once, and Chabashira Sensei, being surprised by this.



For Chabashira Sensei, this is a bit of a public punishment, but the school is being paid for it, so there's no reason to think this is a bad thing to do.

"Hey hey, I get it, this is..."

The voices of the teachers talking about Chabashira Sensei could be heard just now.

Someone from the opposite gender, standing alone, in a figure that they had never seen before, it must be very exciting.

With this, until 4:00 PM, Chabashira Sensei was on display from the corridor.

In the end, Chabashira Sensei took 63 photographs requests, and took first place, surpassing Kushida.

Chapter 7

A Surprising Appearance

Intro

After 3:00 PM, my work in the Cultural Festival was about to be over.

After the ace up his sleeve was activated, I left things to Ayanokoji-kun and left the classroom.

"Still, to think that he would make Chabashira Sensei into a maid..."

In this Cultural Festival, I made the advanced arrangements together with Ayanokoji-kun. I heard that Chabashira Sensei would be utilized in the last hour, but, I wasn't sure if it would happen for real.

But, after it was done, great results were about to be had.

I knew that when I walked through the corridor and heard the rumours about Chabashira Sensei.

Anyhow, Chabashira Sensei's participation in this war is an advantageous event for me personally too.

With a lot of attention gathering on the Special Building, people quickly started disappearing from the other places.

I sent that person a message with my phone, confirmed that it was read, and decided to head for the student council room.

The reason is that, once again, I wanted to confirm the record of proceedings.

Of course, I can ask for help from Yagami-kun on the day the student council will gather, but if I did that, I can't calmly observe things.

A person who would hint at Ayanokoji-kun's expulsion.

They seem connected with Amasawa-san, so, he is a dangerous person with a lot of ability.

Further, if it was Yagami-kun, if I asked him to show me the record of proceedings again, he will notice my suspicion.

No... If I am to assume that he is the culprit, I should assume that he already thinks that way.

In any case, in order to be sure that I wouldn't be found out, it was necessary to aim for a time period when no one was around.

Because of Student Council Head Nagumo's circumstances, the Student Council has been closed for a while.

In summary, I am limited on chances to sneak a peek into the record of proceedings, but, reversely, this also means that the people have already cleared out for me.

I saw my chance at the time of this Cultural Festival.

I told Chabashira Sensei that I might have forgotten my notebook in the Student Council Room, and gained the possibility to go get it after receiving the key in the staff room at break time.

Even if I am spotted stepping into the Student Council room, I now have a just cause.

I quickly changed out of my maid outfit, and headed alone for the staff room.

"50 more minutes, huh?"

I walked until nearby the Student Council Room, looked at the corridor clock that was set up, and sighed.

Before anything, today was a busy day.

It hasn't ended yet, but, my duty is over.

As I have to take a break for an hour, the Cultural Festival will end at the same time as my break ends.

Wearing a maid outfit since the morning, working without a break, it was very busy.

When I reached the Student Council Room after changing clothes, I silently put the key into the entrance.

Today was a busy day in the Cultural Festival, and there was no one around in the Student Council room.

In summary, it's no difficult task now to take a look at the record of proceedings, and take a photo of it with my phone.

That is what I thought, but...

My phone shook in my pocket, and there was a call. Looking at the name, my heart skipped a beat.

Yagami Takuya.

Why am I receiving a phone call from him at a time like this?

Feeling afraid of this coincidence, I answered.

"Hello?"

"Horikita Senpai."

Yagami's voice, which should be coming from over the phone, could be heard directly from nearby.

The person that I least want to see right now was waving at me while smiling.

As if freezing water had been directly poured into my heart, I felt a terrible cold in my entire body.

"Did I surprise you?"

After saying so, he turned off the phone, and started getting closer and closer to me.

"Yagami-kun, why are you here?"

"Why... What do you mean? Did you not like that I called you on the phone from nearby?"

With my attention being focused on other things, I forgot to point that out.

It was as if Yagami-kun was trying to figure out what I was so anxious about.

"By the way, Senpai, why are you in a deserted place like this? With the Cultural Festival coming to an end, don't you have some last things to take care of?"

"My work in the Cultural Festival is over since I've entered my break. With that, I wanted to be alone just for a little bit, so."

"So you're on a break from 3 PM? You chose quite the rare pattern of behaviour, huh?"

Rare, is it?

I've never experienced a Cultural Festival like this, so I can't make a judgement on that.

However, as there is a rule which states all participants must take a break for an hour, there must be other students that chose to take their breaks at 3 PM.

I wasn't able to think up a reply right way, and ended up staying silent for a few seconds.

Then, I noticed it.

The fact that there is no truth or lie to the words "rare pattern of behaviour" said by Yagami-kun.

That it was simply said to question whether I chose 3 PM without any reason, or if I chose this time with some plans in mind.

In reality, I was at a loss for words and could not reply right away.

No matter how I reply next, it might already be too late.

No, it's not over yet.

Even if I am late on my reply, I can still make a thorough choice.

"Rare pattern of behaviour". I have to ignore these strange words.

"Why are you here, Yagami-kun?"

"I saw you with a rare expression on your face, so, I was curious and came after you."

"Since when? No matter the reason, it's not admirable to follow after a girl."

"I called out to you, but, you didn't hear me in the hustle and bustle."

While coming here, I really was deep in my thoughts.

But, would I really not have heard someone calling out to me? It doesn't feel like he's trying to shake me like before, but, there might be another meaning to this line of conversation.

Besides, he could have called out to me many times in the time that I was coming here.

Could it be that he didn't chase after me, but was here from the start..?

This is all under the assumption that Yagami-kun is the skilled penman that I have been chasing.

I am so suspicious of him that I'd have to apologize later if he has nothing to do with this.

"Is it really okay for you to slip out of the Cultural Festival?"

"I'm the same too. I've done what I need to and finished my duties. It's not my break time, but, I've received some free time. There's no rule that says you can't take a break for more than an hour, so."

So this is a simple coincidence after all?

No, it would be better if I don't think like that.

If I realize that it's a coincidence after, that won't cause any problems.

But, if it wasn't a coincidence, then I'd be in trouble right now.

"Do you have something to do in the Student Council Room? It's locked, so I don't think there's anyone in there."

As if anticipating what I was going to do, Yagami-kun looked at the room's door and said so.

"I'm just searching for something. I got the key from the staff room, so it's okay."

"Searching for something, huh? I will help you with your search, then."

In my heart, calmness and impatience started to conflict and fight with each other.

I can't clearly judge if he said these words with good or bad intent.

"It's not so much that I need help from you."

"You're going to the trouble of searching around right in the middle of the Cultural Festival, it's something important, isn't it?"

He spoke as if my thoughts were laid bare to him, and he could see right through me.

"It's a notebook. I just bought it, but I couldn't find it so I was worried. When I think that someone else might have picked it up and read it, it's not good for my mental health. I was about to give

up, but it's always on my mind, and the student council room is the only place left that I haven't searched."

There's no reason to spend more time on this.

I'll just tell the same lie to Yagami that I told to the teachers.

"Then I'll help you with the search too. It's gonna get loud and crowded again when the Cultural Festival is over, so. Two people searching is simply more efficient than one person, right?"

"I... I guess that's true."

I slowly turned the key, and the door opened. As I was about to leave Yagami-kun standing next to me and take a step forward, I stopped moving.

"Horikita Senpai? Is it really necessary to have two people in order to find something in the student council room? Or do you have some other aim?"

"Huh?"

Considering my situation, I decided to go on the offensive.

"The reason I tried to deny your aid, was that honestly, I felt a little scared."

"You mean... Scared of me?"

"You don't get it?"

"I can't think of anything."

"The deserted student council room. You say that you called out to me, but I never heard you. It seems like you followed me, and now we're alone here. Do you know how that feels as a woman?"

Here, I challenge him not personally as Horikita Suzune, but with the viewpoint of societal differences between the genders.

It doesn't matter if his intent is good or bad, I'll absolutely drive him away.

"Ah, I see. Sorry, I didn't think about that at all... I see..."

With this, it would be way too thoughtless for him to enter the student council room, and, further, he also can't wait in the corridor.

It's only natural that it would seem creepy if he did such a thing.

"I apologize. I realize now that my actions were wrong."

Yagami-kun, deeply bowing his head.

"However, though I know how rude it would be, may I just say something?"

"What would that be?"

As he said so without raising his head back up, I wondered what he had to say now after reaching this point.

"The true reason that you came to the student council room is..."

The moment he said so and raised his head...

He suddenly lost his balance in front of my eyes and bent his upper body.

No, it was bent by someone else.



"Caught you!"

Along with such a voice, it was Ibuki's figure that appeared, in her Japanese outfit.

"Hey, come on, Ibuki-san!?"

"Horikita, stop idling and get in! It'll be a big trouble if we are seen, so!"

It's true, this clearly seems like a violent act, so it's a big problem if we are found.

As I opened the student council room's door, Ibuki-san forcefully pushed Yagami-kun and entered inside.

"What... What are you doing..?"

The first one to raise his voice, was of course Yagami-kun, the victim.

Ibuki-san, having restrained Yagami-kun after appearing from behind him, was confused about the Situation.

"You were saved by my efforts again, huh, Horikita!"

"What do you mean saved..? Nothing was being done to me..."

"You're the one that told me to be careful about this guy, right? So, with you being hounded by him... It's only natural that I thought something might happen, right?"

She chattily said all the things that she shouldn't have said out loud.

With her simple-minded actions, my entire conversation up until now has gone to waste.

[TL Note : Here the word is used 単細胞 - Tansaibou - Single Cell. Word used to mean "simple-minded" as a [colloquialism](#).]

Saying out loud that I was on guard against him right in front of the person in question... This is way too non-sensical.

"Umm, why did you tell her she should be careful with me?"

Yagami-kun, unable to move, naturally threw such a question at me.

Now that it's become like this, I have to tell him everything.

"...Sorry about getting rough. But, there are some things about you that I'm curious about. Earlier, do you remember when I had you show me the record of proceedings?"

"It was about the comment Student Council President Nagumo made, right?"

"Yes. I wanted to see again the letters you wrote that you showed me."

"Letters? I don't really get it, but what you were really searching for is the notebook of the record of proceedings, right?"

Yagami-kun continued with bewilderment.

"About you wanting to see what I wrote, what is the intent behind it?"

I'm curious about what he was about to say before Ibuki-san showed up, but, I'll continue my explanation.

Back when we had the Uninhabited Island Special Exam, a piece of paper was put into my tent. I'll told him I'm trying to find out who its sender was.

Yagami-kun is silently listening, still restrained.

"So, you're saying that the letters I wrote in the record of proceedings look like the letters in that paper?"

"Yes, that's right."

"If you're telling the truth, I can certainly understand why you're on guard against me. So, I suppose that this was the best time to confirm this in secret."

Because of the preparation period for the Cultural Festival, people were coming and going on Saturdays too, and students were walking around the school looking for a place to set up their stalls, so I couldn't collect it then.

"However, I am not the sender of that letter."

Yagami-kun, firmly denying. I do want to believe him, but...

As I wasn't simply accepting this, his voice's tone started to strain a little.

"Do you have a basis to suspect me?"

"Unfortunately, I don't. It's just that, I can't just accept what you're saying so easily."

"If it's okay, can I have you show me the paper? I think we can compare the letters with the record of proceedings too after that, so we can make clear the truth."

"Unfortunately, that's not possible. I lost it because of some trouble."

It was crumpled and thrown away by Amasawa whom I had to confront on the island.

"Well, that's no good. How can I make things clear, then?"

"That's why I want to take a second look at the record of proceedings."

"Even if you did take a second look, your memory can't be perfect, can it? Actually, right now, you're very suspicious of me. With that, the possibility that the memories inside your head will change and I will become the culprit isn't low at all. In this situation, I am clearly in the disadvantage."

"...That may be true, yes."

It's not like I want it to be Yagami-kun, but, I strongly want to find the culprit.

I do understand why he is worried about the developments that may take place now.

"It is regrettable that I am being suspected, but, can I at least have you let go of my hand for now? In any case, this isn't good for you two either, right? How do you intend to explain this if Student Council President Nagumo sees us like this?"

Restraining a boy from Year One without any reason.

It's true, for us, this situation is the very embodiment of inconvenience.

It would be different if he acted violently, but he isn't doing anything.

"Ibuki-san, let his hand go."

I instructed Ibuki-san to follow his words.

However, Ibuki-san's expression is stiff as she was restraining Yagami-kun, and she didn't move a muscle.

"Sorry, but I can't do that."

"Why is that?"

"Because my instincts are telling me that people who seem harmless and insignificant like you can be very dangerous."

[TL Note : Here - 人畜無害 - Jinchikumugai - Harmless to humans and animals. Yojijukugo (four character compound). [Colloquially](#) used to mean insignificant, unimportant, etc.]

That's something she learned earlier from Ayanokoji-kun.

However, looking at her manners, it was clear that her problem with him wasn't just because of the way he looks.

"Is there some other reason?"

"Even though you look lanky and weak at a glance, I can sense something dangerous emanating from you. You're not just a simple nerd, are you?"

[TL Note : Here Ibuki uses the word - がり勉 - Gariben - Person who is obsessed with studying, paraphrased as "nerd".]

Perhaps it's a feeling that she can get from directly being in contact with him that I can't from just looking at him.

The possibility is high that the person we are looking for has the appropriate mastery.

There is no helping the fact that I would be very suspicious about the possibility that this may really be Yagami-kun.

"The message that I was handed very much looks like it was written by you. Adding onto that, your hidden physical strength. Then, the fact that you showed up in this place."

"It's true that I like strengthening my body, so I am somehow confident on that matter, but..."

While sighing as if tired of all this, Yagami-kun slightly turned his eyes towards me.

"Even I'm getting a bit angry after all, you know? This situation is just way too one-sided."

Even though Yagami-kun possesses high physical strength, like Ibuki-san claims, there's nothing strange about it. In the first place, his OAA grades are average at C. Though his running speed is low and he isn't skillful at sports, one could still think that he can have a good understanding of Budou (Martial Arts).

Is it Black or White? Which way is it?

As the judgement was drawing near, the silence was broken in an unexpected manner.

Though no one should be there, the student council room's door opened by itself.

"Oops, this is a strange situation, huh..."

The one who showed himself is Student Council President Nagumo. Yagami-kun is the only one that didn't change his attitude, but, as me and Ibuki-san were feeling uneasy after our actions, we were very surprised.

"Student Council President, why are you here..."

"More importantly, what's happening here?"

What he means is the fact that Ibuki-san is restraining Yagami-kun.

"If you two are bullying your Kouhai(Junior Student), that's a big problem."

Of course, Ibuki-san couldn't continue restraining him, so she let both her hands go and released Yagami-kun.

"Thank you, Student Council President Nagumo."

Appearing to have calmed down,

Yagami-kun soothed his body after it had been restrained.

What's with his calm demeanor? It's as if he foresaw that the Student Council President would come here.

"Then, shall I have you explain the reason you're here without permission?"

"I lost my notebook". If I answer so, Yagami-kun may point out my lie.

However, if I tell him my story about the record of proceedings, then he will have to be included in the conversation too.

"Horikita Senpai lost her notebook, so I thought that I should help in her search. Apparently, Ibuki Senpai mistakenly thought that I was assaulting Horikita Senpai, and, did what she did a while ago out of a sense of justice."

Without doing anything that would put me in a bad position, he answered so, in order to protect my lie.

"I see, so that is the reason for your restraint."

"I think the misunderstanding has been solved, so, I don't really intend to make a big issue of it."

"There's no reason to extend this conversation any longer, then. So, did you find that notebook?"

If he's keeping up with my excuses, then I will do the same and follow along.

"No, I couldn't find it. This was my last hope, but... I think it might have been thrown out as trash. I'll give up on it."

He's checked it himself, so the notebook's whereabouts aren't important to him.

He meaninglessly averted his eyes from me, and returned to his usual seat.

"No matter the reason, this isn't something to do in the middle of the Cultural Festival. Disperse right now."

Even if I insist, I can't see the record of proceedings anymore. All I can do now is obediently withdraw.

With this in my mind, Ibuki-san and I were about to leave the room, but...

"Still, Student Council President Nagumo, how did you know that we were here?"

Standing next to me and Ibuki-san, Yagami-kun threw such a question at him.

"Are you bothered by something?"

"I thought that the student council room was supposed to be locked. Yet, you seemed to have so easily entered the room, so I'm a bit curious."

That really was strange.

I don't know if he has a spare key or not, but, he should have at least put the key in first to open the door.

Thus, it's not unreasonable to feel suspicion about him entering the room like that without any suspicion.

It's almost as if he knew who was in here from the start...

Did Student Council President Nagumo and Yagami-kun intend to meet up here?

In that case, I'll better understand Yagami-kun's prediction that the Student Council Head would come here.

But, the two's give and take is far from looking like it was planned beforehand.

"I can answer, but there's something I want to ask Yagami before."

"Me?"

"Before this, do you remember the matter we talked about in the Student Council Room? About the rumours that I was using large amounts of money to have students expelled."

"Of course. I've been investigating from my side too, but I still can't grasp where the rumours were coming from."

I can't follow along with this subject that they've dragged up.

"You actually know, don't you? Where the rumours came from."

"...What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that you're the one who spread those rumours."

Student Council President Nagumo lost his patience and lightly kicked the lower part of the table.

"Please wait. What is this all of a sudden? Why would I do something like that?"

After being suspected by us, now, he's being suspected by Student Council President Nagumo.

Further, it's about a completely different matter.

"The fuck do you mean why? The special exam that had prize money bet on it, which was done to expel specific students. You were one of the many people who participated, right?"

With that, Yagami-kun's expression slightly grew gloomy. He too was irritated, like Student Council President Nagumo.

"Student Council President Nagumo, what is the meaning of this? Just what are you talking about?"

"You denied it at the student council meeting, but I'm saying that this was the truth."

"Then, did you really..?"

"But, it's not like the rules were broken or anything, you know? It's only the school's policy. As the Student Council President, Board Chairman Tsukishiro and I came together to keep everything impartial. Isn't that right? Yagami."

There has always been merciless special exams occurring in this school, but to think that it was this much...

"Not me. There's no reason for me to put you in trouble, Student Council President Nagumo. Besides, there are many other Year One students who received the same explanation, right?"

"Who knows. However, you showed up here, right? That makes me want to be suspicious."

"That's just a coincidence."

Student Council President Nagumo and Yagami-kun faced each other, but, he moved his gaze to us.

"You should go back. I'll talk to Yagami now."

"I did not know about that matter, but please allow me to speak."

"Horikita Senpai. What do you intend to say?"

He's looking with Such piercing eyes. He covered for me earlier, but I'm going to have to ignore that fact.

"Say it, then."

"I don't know if he is the one that spread the rumours of that special exam. However, I don't think that it's a coincidence that he showed up here. Yagami-kun was following behind me. I strongly feel that he could actually have been standing guard around this student council room from the start."

"You hear what Suzune said?"

Yagami-kun's expression stiffened as he was being pressed from both sides, but then, he let out a tired sigh.

"...I see, I understand everything now. You two were together from the start, yes? Back when you handed me that fake love letter, you had already decided to forcefully corner me here, right?"

"Fake... Love letter?"

"You mean this?"

What Student Council President Nagumo took out of his pocket was, the love letter that I received from Ichihashi-san.

No, but, what does "fake love letter" mean?

"I don't get it. It's just a simple love letter from an unknown sender with someone's feelings for me written on it."

"You're wrong. At a glance, that letter really is a love letter, but, the words "Cultural Festival 3 P.M. Student Council Room" are written on it. Other than that, I've also spotted the words "Necessary", "Expulsion", and "Secret" in a few places. Am I mistaken?"

Opening the letter that already had its seal broken, Student Council Head Nagumo looked it over.

"Where's all of that stuff written? I can't see anything."

As such, Student Council President Nagumo made the move to hand me the love let... The letter.

[TL Note : In the original Japanese text it says - 'As such, Student Council President Nagumo made the move to hand me the love letter... Letter.' At first it's written in Katakana as the english word, then the word letter is written again as the japanese word for it. The meaning here is that it's not actually a "love letter" as it is a fake, so she hesitates and says "letter" instead the second time. That's the reason I decided to Paraphrase it that way to imply that.]

"Excuse me."

I took the letter and looked over the contents. However, I can't find the words mentioned by Yagami-kun anywhere.

Ibuki-san also curiously peeked at it, and had the same reaction as us.

"I hope you can forgive me for confessing without mentioning my name, I've always loved you...". The contents were such.

"Please stop this monkey show. If you solve the anagram, the truth will be clear."

[TL Note : 猿芝居 - Sarushibai - Monkey show, monkey acting... Idiom used to express someone acting in a foolish or unconvincing way.]

"What do you mean anagram..?"

Putting aside Ibuki-san who doesn't even understand the word's meaning, is he saying that the letter written includes anagrams? Changing the order of the letters and changing the meaning. Word-play.

No matter how many times I repeatedly try to find them, the answer won't come out.

I might be able to find them if I take some time, but, it's not possible in just a single moment.

"You're really smart, huh, Yagami-kun. Looks like both me and Suzune can't solve the anagrams that quickly, though?"

As we deepen our suspicion towards him, Yagami-kun is strongly on guard against us.

"Could it be that one of you two wrote it? Perhaps some common acquaintance of yours?"

"A common acquaintance? Just who would that be?"

"...No, I don't know, but... Please believe that I just reached this place thanks to those anagrams."

"The anagrams don't matter right now. Why do you already know this love letter's contents? This means that you read it before handing it to me, right?"

That's right. There's no other way.

"That, is just a coincidence. When the letter was dropped, the seal slipped off and the contents were out. I did think that I shouldn't look, but, I couldn't help but take a glance."

"As a member of the student council, that's a very unethical action."

It's not like I don't get why he would want to sneak a peek, but, normally, one should restrain themselves from such action.

Especially considering that the letter has nothing to do with him. Why would he take the risk to check the contents?

The fact that the sender is unclear certainly raises one's curiosity, but, it's a different matter to look inside just because of such a reason.

"You checked inside because you're regularly conducting evil plots, right? You were worried that you had fallen into some kind of trap."

"It doesn't really feel like you'll believe me even if I say that you're wrong."

This entire conversation strangely feels creepy.

The world as I see it, as Yagami-kun sees it, and as Student Council President Nagumo sees it.

It didn't even feel in the least like we saw things differently.

[TL Note : 三者三様 - Sanshasanyou - Three People, Three Appearances - Yojijukugo (four character compound), meaning each of the three has their own way of seeing things. *In the sentence above , she's saying that the situation isn't like that(the word mentioned in the note), so I phrased it this way.*]

It's like we're biting into each other, but we're not. An unclear feeling, like something is stuck on my back teeth.

Yagami-kun is at fault for reading the letter without permission.

However, the matter of him spreading ill rumours about Student Council Nagumo, and the matter of the record of proceedings are still ambiguous.

I also can't clearly judge if it's a coincidence that he showed up here, or if he had planned it.

There's no point in keeping Yagami-kun standing here more than we have...

Yagami-kun looked at both Student Council President Nagumo and me, and faintly laughed.

"Isn't it time to check our answers? The truth is that you all already know, right?"

As if he had put the situation in order in his mind, Yagami-kun broke his silence and spoke out.

"Horikita Senpai, you were shown the record of proceedings, which reminded you of the Uninhabited Island Special Exam, and you thought that I was the culprit. Then, you handed Student Council Nagumo what was made to look like a love letter, and secretly sent him a message."

For some reason, he suddenly touched on the subject of the record of proceedings and the letter, which was out of our minds until now.

"Why would we follow such a complicated procedure? We could just chat on the phone, right?"

"Because it wouldn't leave any proof that would let you suspect me, right? With this fake love letter, you can easily talk your way out of trouble. Further, you had intended to check the record

of proceedings together today. In order to confirm if I was the person that Horikita Senpai was looking for."

"Uninhabited Island? Record of proceedings? The person Suzune is searching for? What are you talking about?"

"Do you still intend to keep up this act, Student Council President Nagumo? I already know that you, and Horikita Senpai, are moving on the instructions of a certain someone. Everything was instructed by the one who created this letter's anagrams, Ayanokoji Senpai, right? How mischievous. I didn't even have to show you the record of proceedings to reach this conclusion."

"...Why is Ayanokoji-kun's name coming up now?"

"He's doing a lot of stuff indirectly. I thought that he wasn't keen on doing things publicly, but I didn't think that this is the way he would come in contact with me."

Laughing with joy. Compared to earlier, Yagami-kun's behaviour have completely changed.

"So, what comes after this? Do I finally come face to face with Ayanokoji Senpai?"

Yagami-kun, looking at the entrance like a child with a box of toys in front of him.

"This is tantalizing, isn't it? Until he arrives, could you tell me what he has been hearing about me? I'd especially like to hear it from your mouth, Horikita Senpai."

"Wait. I really don't get what this is about. I do suspect you of coming to my tent and dropping off the letter, but, I haven't talked about that with anyone but Ibuki-san."

Even if I tell the truth, Yagami-kun doesn't look like he'll believe it.

"Please explain it in a way I can understand too, Yagami."

"Hmph. I'm getting tired of this after all, Student Council President Nagumo. You had intended to pass the letter, and meet up with Ayanokoji-kun here along with Horikita-senpai. Then, you had intended to talk together with me. I'm sure he thought it would be dangerous to meet me alone too, right? Mhm, that's a wise judgement."

"I'm sorry to interrupt you while you're on such a hot streak, Yagami, but I'll tell you the reason I came to the student council room."

Student Council President Nagumo took out his phone and showed us the screen.

It seems there was an incoming call, as a phone number appeared on the screen.

"Looks like he's here. Come in."

He said so to the one on the other end of the line.

"Ah-hah-hah! Ayanokoji-kun was coming, after all! That's great!"

Yagami-kun, loudly laughing, put out his arms facing the slowly opening door as if welcoming the new arrival.

"Excuse me."

Along with such words, the person who entered was above and beyond our predictions.

The first one to react was not me, nor Student Council President Nagumo, and not even Yagami-kun. It was Ibuki-san.

"Huuh? Ryuen? Why are you here?"

It wasn't only Ryuen who showed up. He had two classmates with him.

"Hey, that outfit looks good on you, Ibuki. Doesn't it, Kinoshita?"

"It's true. It's so tight and cute."

"Huh? Hey, Komiya? And, Kinoshita too..!?"

Then, as the *pièce de résistance*, Teacher Sakagami and Teacher Mashima also showed up from behind them and entered the student council room.

[TL Note : 極めつけ - Kiwametsuke - Certifying something, guaranteeing something.
Colloquially used in the same way as "[pièce de résistance](#)", which is its dictionary definition as a colloquialism.]

"...What is this?"

Yagami-kun was the most astonished. He blurted out such words, not understanding what was happening.

"The reason you came to the student council room is to talk with Ryuen and the others. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, that was my intent, but it looks like quite the bustle was happening here already, huh?"

Yagami-kun had a stiff expression looking at them, as if he was still unable to understand the flow of things.

As Student Council President Nagumo stood up, he pushed the letter onto Yagami-kun's chest.

"The fake love letter with the anagrams, the record of proceedings, it's all so nonsensical, Yagami."

"...That shouldn't be the case. However, what is this..?"

Ryuen approached Yagami-kun who couldn't hide his confusion. Then, spoke thusly while pointing at him:

"This is the guy you all were talking about, right?"

Ryuen-kun said so to Komiya-kun and the others standing ready at the back, and checked something.

The two strongly nodded with nervous expressions.

"Yes. There's no mistaking it."

"Mhm. I'm sure."

Ryuen-kun, hearing this, approached Yagami-kun with his usual faint smile on his face. They were now at an arm's length.

"Listen here, asshole, we're gonna carefully talk through some stuff."

[TL Note : [for proofreader](#) : The word "てめえ" is used here to refer to this character which is a vulgar expression. I translated it like this to reflect that.]

"Talk about what?"

Ryuen extended his right arm, grabbed Yagami-kun's bangs and suddenly pulled them up.

"Ryuen!"

Mashima-sensei scolded him for such a violent act, but he didn't seem to care.

"You, what was your name?"

"...It's Yagami, Yagami Takuya, Ryuen Senpai."

Yagami-kun, his hair being pulled, and his expression changing into one of anguish.

"I see, Yagami, is it? I heard that you're the culprit who's pushed Komiya and Kinoshita."

"Huh..? I don't understand what you mean."

"Don't play dumb. Komiya and Kinoshita remembered just the last day. That all their serious injuries in the Uninhabited Island Special Exam were because of your violent actions."

The serious injuries on the Uninhabited Island. I know about the ones who broke their bones and received heavy injuries, but I thought that was an accident which occurred as the result of their carelessness.

"What, me? What the hell are you talking about!?"

"Because they lost their memories with the shock of their injuries, it got swept under the rug as an accident, but, they remembered, you see. That you were the culprit."

As if responding to these words, Student Council President Nagumo also confirmed this.

"It was just yesterday. I had intended to talk with just Ryuen, Komiya, and Kinoshita today, but... Why are the teachers here?"

"I called them here to save up on time. It seems that Sakagami came running when the two were injured."

"Speaking of Yagami-kun... Mashima-sensei, surely..?"

Sakagami-sensei, as if he remembered something, got a confirmation from Mashima-sensei.

"Yes, I don't want to look like I'm suspicious of my students, but.... I can't deny the possibility."

"What... What are you saying? I haven't done anything!"

It's only normal for him to make a commotion. Even I'm not entirely sure what's happening here.

"Yagami. That day, I know that when the two's alarms were ringing, your watch's GPS wasn't functioning. There are a few student who had their watches broken during the special exam, but, including you, there are only two people who were in contact with the two before they went unconscious. Of course, at that time, Komiya and Kinoshita, and Shinohara said that they were hurt by someone, but they couldn't come up with a name. Because of that, considering it an accident was the only way, but..."

"Though they were supposed to have no memory of it, they happened to remember at the same time and said my name? That can't be! It's obvious that they coordinated their stories beforehand and said my name!"

"Coordinated their stories? The reality that your watch was broken is not known by most students."

Over 400 people took the Special Exam in the Uninhabited Island. At the time they were wounded, only two people had the GPS on their watches broken.

The odds are way too low to call it a coincidence.

" They remembered that they saw the culprit. What's your basis for claiming that this is a lie? Tell us, Yagami."

Ryuen-kun, putting further strength into his fingers, pulled Yagami-kun's hair.

"Gah...! That... That's..."

"No one saw you, you did everything perfectly. That's what you're thinking, right?"

"Please... Please wait! I haven't done anything. Are you saying I could do something dangerous like that?"

Yagami-kun, who definitely could not be considered to have a large physique.

From an outsider's perspective, I'm sure that it would seem strange indeed.

However, Ryuen-kun was not trusting Yagami-kun's words in the slightest.

"I've already learned in the past that the ones who seem harmless are the most dangerous people. Isn't that right, Ibuki?"

"There's no mistaking it, this guy is strong. He was able to greatly injure Komiya and the others without even being noticed."

"Normally, as revenge, I'd want to hurt you even worse than you've hurt them, but, unfortunately, we're in front of the teachers. I'll forgive you this time. Because what awaits you is expulsion, and nothing else."

If the truth is confirmed, and proof can be raised that Yagami-kun caused great injury to Komiya and the others, it won't end with just suspension from school. Taking into consideration the circumstances, he can't avoid expulsion.

Ryuen-kun let go of the hair he had grabbed, and Yagami-kun faced his head low and bowed.

"So? Why are you here, Suzune?"

"I... I had something to investigate about Yagami-kun too."

"Oh? What's that?"

Now that it's come to this, my only choice is to tell him everything.

What happened at the Uninhabited Island, and about me searching for the student that wrote the beautiful letters. The fact that they looked like Yagami-kun's letters, and that I came here to check the record of proceedings.

I pulled out the notebook of the record of proceedings, and opened the page that has Yagami-kun's entry.

"The letters here are pretty much the same as Yagami-kun's handwriting. They fit perfectly with the ones in my memory."

"Can we have you explain what this is, Yagami-kun?"

Student Council President Nagumo does not have a complete grasp of the situation, so he asked thusly.

The only thing that's certain is that something mysterious has occurred in this place. While everyone here has some relation to Yagami-kun, they have no definite connection between each other.

Can something like that... Really happen?

If everything started from that one letter...

He took into consideration that I would entrust it with Yagami-kun, and that he would look inside?

He analyzed the anagram, and came here as if drawn to this place...

But, that person shouldn't have known that my suspicions were raised after I saw the record of proceedings.

...No, that may not have anything to do with it.

I'm an outsider. Ibuki-san, too, just like me, is an outsider.

Even if me and Ibuki-san weren't in this place, the flow of these events wouldn't have come to a halt.

Yagami-kun, who came to the student council room after being lured by the letter, would still have been pressed and questioned by Student Council President Nagumo.

However, is such a thing possible?

Even if this could be done... Who?

When, where?



No, this kind of self-questioning might not be the right thing to do.

It wouldn't be strange at all if Ayanokoji-kun was behind this incident too.

Ryuen-kun, Komiya-kun and the others who showed up here in an unnatural way. Then, the teachers.

This place was meant to press Yagami-kun and surround him from all directions as he tries to make up excuses.

[TL Note : 四方八方 - Shihouhappou - Four directions, eight directions - Yojijukugo (four character compound) used to mean "all directions".]

"Heh-heh, I'm surprised too, but there's nothing to do. You played with fire too much."

As if he was feeling the same way as I do, Ryuen-kun broke into laughter.

"Why... Why? This is so stupid..."

"I don't know what the background to this is, but, you've been caught, you bastard."

"I... Even if I continue to fight with him... No, even though this was before that? Is it ending... In a place like this? There's no way..."

Yagami-kun, with his entire body trembling, yelled out in a voice that was unheard from him until now.

"Does this mean... That he didn't even think I was worth facing directly? Ha...Ha-ha...Ha...Hah...! He's messing with me... He's messing with me!"

"Shut up. Stop yelling next to me."

Ryuen-kun put his right little finger into his ear, and gloomily whispered so.

Not seeming to have heard this, Yagami-kun's agitation did not diminish.

"It's fine. I can still... I can still just kill him with my own hands! If I do that, I can go back to the place I should be at! I'll take him along with me!"

There are two teachers here, but it is as if he doesn't care about that at all.

Showing us this clear sudden change, a killer intent is emanating from him. As he faced Ryuen and attempted to take a strong step towards him, Ibuki-san released a flying kick into Yagami-kun from his back.

Without even turning back, Yagami-kun quickly evaded it and smashed his elbow into her stomach.

"Guhh..!"

A single strike. However, Ibuki-san collapsed on the spot, and couldn't get back up.

When the teachers tried to stop Yagami-kun, Ryuen-kun stopped them.

"Pull back. This guy wants to fight. So, I'll take him on, alright?"

Without caring that we're in the student council room, Ryuen-kun clenched his fist.

"There's no way someone like you can stop me, you know. Okay? I won't show mercy to anyone who's standing in my way. Teachers, women, I don't care. If you don't want to meet the same fate that Komiya and the others did, shut up and leave."

"Heh-heh. So that's your true character. Now this is interesting."

Ryuen-kun, without hesitation, took a step forwards and lightly spread both his arms as if challenging him.

"I'll gladly stand in your way, so come at me!"

"You're nothing but a former delinquent..."

The aura emanating from this man with a small build did not feel like "a normal student", just like Ayanokoji-kun and Amasawa-san.

Ryuen-kun was eager, but it doesn't feel like Yagami-kun can be stopped at all.

However, somehow, we have to stop him here right now.

Even with the teachers present, Yagami-kun is driven by the urge to smash everything. If we let him go here, there is no guarantee that his rampage can ever be stopped.

Then, his next target would be... Ayanokoji-kun.

Something like this occurring right in the middle of the Culture Festival won't end with just a warning.

"Stop, Yagami. You too, Ryuen. There will be a huge penalty if a fight occurs here."

"I 100% can't avoid being expelled. In that case, there's no reason for me to stop, right? Mashima."

Disrespectfully calling Mashima by name without even saying his title, Yagami-kun spat such words out.

Despite that, as a teacher, Mashima-sensei got between Yagami-kun and Ryuen-kun.

"Get lost."

There is a great difference in their physiques, but, without even caring about that, he struck Mashima-sensei with a kick, and punched his face as Teacher Mashima's knee bent.

Sakagami-sensei, seeing this close up, fearfully took some distance. Ryuen-kun, excited about a perfect new fight starting up, hurled himself towards Yagami-kun once again. Then...

"Let's stop already, Takuya."

The student council room's door opened, and Amasawa-san with her clear red eyes showed herself.



"Huh? Why are you here... Since when were you..?"

Yagami-kun, though no one's words could reach him before, stopped moving.

"What do you think will happen if you keep acting violently like this? Do you think you'll be recognized then? Do you think you'll be accepted? It's... It's already over."

"That's not true! The teachers are waiting! I'm... I'm going to be number one!"

I wonder what he means with "teacher".

I can guess that he doesn't mean teachers from this school, at least.

"Today, I was just thinking of exposing his past and finishing off the Cultural Festival in an interesting way, but, he's done all this crazy shit..."

[TL Note : [for proofreader](#) : やがる - Very vulgar word used in the original text, phrased as "shit".
]

"Takuya, so that was your intent after all, huh..."

"Move. I'm going to make Ayanokoji regret what he did. It'll be so funny that he won't even be able to laugh..!"

"If you're saying that you'll go to Ayanokoji-kun's location no matter what, then I'll stop you before that."

"You? You haven't won even once against me, though? Don't make me laugh."

"Maybe I can't win with strength, yes. However... I'll do what I can."

"I knew that you were devoted to Ayanokoji-kun, but, to think that you were such a fool."

"The frog in the well knows nothing of the great ocean. I've simply come to realize that that's how things are."

[TL Note : 井の中の蛙大海を知らず - i no naka no kawazu taikai wo shirazu - The frog in the well knows nothing of the great ocean(literally), Proverb used.]

"In that case, die already. There's no meaning to your life."

When Amasawa-san prepared herself for the worst, numerous footsteps were heard from the other side of the corridor.

Five expressionless adults stepped into the student council room. I can't tell who they all are, but two of them are guests that I saw in the maid cafe before.

Yagami-kun, who could not be held back until just now, suddenly started trembling.

"Why... Why are you all here..? Why... Why..?"

"We recieved a phone-call to come pick someone up at the student council room. This is a bit different than what was planned, but..."

Yagami-kun, who was furious until just a moment ago, was suddenly shriveling like a child. He simply looked like a child that was found by his parents and was about to be reproached.

Yagami-kun, surrounded by the adults, was lead away without even resisting.

Amasawa-san also started walking to accompany him.

"You are..?"

Teacher Mashima asked thusly after enduring the pain and standing up.

"We're people involved with Yagami and Amasawa. We'll handle everything here, so please go and receive medical aid. Further, I'd like to ask you, the teachers, and the students, to keep everything that happened here secret. I will inform Board Chairman Sakayanagi of everything, so you need not worry."

"...Understood."

With the help of Sakagami-sensei, Mashima-sensei left the student council room. After so much commotion, the room was now suddenly covered in silence.

"Well, the fun's spoiled. Even though it was just getting interesting... Stand up, Ibuki, we're leaving."

"Ugh... At least lend me a hand!"

Ibuki-san couldn't stand yet, so Ryuen-kun gave a signal to Komiya-kun with his chin, and left the classroom after helping Ibuki-san.

The only ones left in the student council room were President Nagumo and me.

"That's that, I guess. That was all very surprising, but at least the matter was solved."

"How much did you know about today's matter? Ayanokoji-kun is involved, isn't he?"

"What do you mean? I said this before already, but I only came here with the intent of speaking with Ryuen."

"If that was true, then it shouldn't have been necessary to bring that letter with you."

The love letter was still fruitlessly crumpled on the ground.

"To borrow Yagami's words, it was a coincidence. It just happened to be in my pocket, you see."

An easy lie to see through. There's no talking about this further, such is the directive from the Student Council Head.

"The noisy Cultural Festival is at an end, too. You should also go back."

"...Okay."

It's Already 4 P.M. The Cultural Festival, having caused unthinkable happenings to occur, is ending.

Epilogue

The People Behind The Scenes

Intro

When 4:00 PM finally arrived, the hectic cultural festival was over.

Sales cannot now be recorded since, as previously stated, the accounting application was forcibly shut down.

Starting at 6 p.m., two hours later, the results could well be viewed on a cell phone.

Even though it's over, there is no change in the fact that the usual response to guests is required until the end.

Due to the closing of the store, the guests who stayed until the end began to leave their seats.

Those guests while leaving were telling the students their impressions of the maid cafe.

Positive remarks like "it was interesting" and "it was fun" were made by all of them. Those kind words really moved the students who had put in so much effort during the event, and their exhaustion seemed to vanish.

By the way, as soon as it was four o'clock, Chabashira-sensei ran away from the classroom like a scared rabbit.

[TL Note : Here - 脱兎 (datto) is used. Meaning - dashing or bounding away; with lightning speed. But generally (in this) used as an expression like running away like a scared rabbit.]

I think it would stand out if you ran around in that outfit, but let's leave it alone.

It was around 5:30 when all the guests left and all the classmates (except Koenji) gathered at the maid cafe.

"Everyone did a great job. Even though a lot happened, the festival was at least able to come to a successful conclusion. The sales, in my opinion, could not have been any better."

Ike and the others gathered in the classroom having just finished taking down the outdoor stalls.

There were still some spots to clean up in the maid cafe because some guests stayed around late to eat, but Horikita stepped up to conclude the cultural festival.

"The results will be announced later, but there is something I want to talk to you about before that."

Yes, there were 37 students in the classroom. Akito and Haruka also remained behind.

Haruka, who became the center of attraction here, took a step forward, without being prompted by Horikita.

"I would like to be the first to tell you. I have not forgiven everyone here."

Haruka mumbled in the silence of the classroom as she opened her speech.

Some of the students, expecting her to start with an apology, looked at each other, feeling more bewilderment than anger.

They didn't appear to be blaming her. Everyone understood. They were mature enough to understand what it was like to lose a best friend.

"But the person I can't forgive the most is myself. I assumed that everyone who left the school would be unhappy. Yamauchi-kun, who disappeared last year, and Airi."

At the mention of Yamauchi's name, Sudo, Ike, and the others seemed to be thinking back.

"I had assumed it would be best for Airi to continue her education here. I figured that would be the happiest course of action. That's why I despised everyone. ...and wanted revenge."

Haruka clutched the skirt of her school uniform tightly as she expressed her frustration.

"After this festival ended, I was going to leave school."

She didn't have to admit it, but she didn't want to keep it a secret, so she did. Although most of the students kept quiet about it, I believe some of them had anticipated it.

"I was going to go along with Haruka too."

At this point, Akito, too, could not remain silent and told the truth with Haruka.

"If we had dropped out, our class would not have reached Class A. It's the easiest and most powerful way to get revenge."

No tricks would be needed. Just leaving school was enough to make us lose a large number of class points.

"But if you can give me a chance, please let me stay in this class."

"You've had a change of heart, haven't you?"

"She is trying to spread her wings in the outside world. Kushida-san told me about it."

When Kushida's name was mentioned, everyone turned their attention to her. Kushida attempted to add something as most of them were confused by what was happening.

"Sakura-san, she seems to be working hard to become an idol; you can find her on SNS, so maybe you can ask Hasebe-san to show you later."

Some students were surprised, others thought it was a good. But the common perception that emerged was the fact that Airi had taken a new step forward.

"Airi will grow a lot. Probably more than I thought she would. So I want to be able to graduate in Class A and go see her. I want to be able to show myself without embarrassment."

The class learned that this was why she chose to stay at this school.

"You made a good decision, Hasebe-san."

"I'm going to accept punishment for the trouble I caused."

"I'm just as guilty. I didn't help with most of the festival and caused trouble for the class."

Horikita stepped forward before the other students could say anything unnecessary.

"Even though skipping the festival is a negative thing, it doesn't break any rules. It's the same thing because Koenji-kun hasn't appeared once since this morning."

Horikita approached Haruka with a look of dismay and relief on her face.

"If you are going to be punished, it will only be by remaining classmates with me. Can you face that reality?"

I wonder what Haruka thought of the reflection in Horikita's eyes.

"I'm going to try my best. Yes. From now on, you can think of me as your regular Hasebe-san, okay?"

"Don't worry. I won't bother you."

That was enough, Horikita nodded and declared.

"Miyake-kun is the same as before as well. Isn't he?"

"Of course."

"That's all for today then. Let's all finish the rest of the cleanup quickly."

Keisei walked up to Haruka and Akito, somewhat hesitantly.

Starting with Akito's apology, Keisei's eyes reddened a bit and he spoke with relief.

The three of them came together for the first time in a while thanks to Haruka's apologies, and they grinned faintly at one another. Akito and Keisei turned their attention to Haruka as if they had made up their minds.

The two of them signaled to Haruka as well, and the eyes of those three turned to me in confusion.

If I were to approach them here and now, the group might be resumed.

That was no longer necessary.

I turned my back and went to send words of thanks to Sato and the others.

The group of five was now three, but I hoped that the bond between them would be stronger than before.

That place doesn't need me.

The three of them could sense my actions as a sign of farewell. They didn't approach me or call out to me.

It was quick after that.

The cleanup that was left to be done would soon be back on track with 37 people.

All the cleanup was done before 6:00 PM.

Then the results of the festival were announced.

1st place, 2nd year B class (+ 100 Class points)
2nd place, 2nd year C class (+ 100 Class points)
3rd place, 3rd year B class (+ 100 Class points)
4th place, 2nd year A class (+ 100 Class points)
5th place, 1st year A class (+ 50 Class points)
6th place, 3rd year C class (+ 50 Class points)
7th place, 2nd year D class (+ 50 Class points)
8th place, 1st year C class (+ 50 Class points)
9th place, 3rd year D class (+ 0 Class points)
10th place, 1st year B class (+ 0 Class points)
11th place, 3rd year A class (+ 0 Class points)
12th place, 1st year D class (+ 0 Class points)

"We're in first place! We did it!"

"I guess Chabashira-sensei's cosplay really struck!"

Each was pleased and praised each other for a good fight.

"But Ryuen's place is also in second place, and Sakayanagi's class is in fourth place, as expected."

[TL Note : Here, also the word 'Sasuga' is used. But in this sentence it is used for a compliment. So, this doesn't carry the same meaning as before and hence translated as 'As expected'.]

"Ayanokoji-kun."

"Yeah, everything is going according to plan."

It was a certainty that Horikita's class would take the top place, and it was assumed from the beginning that Ryuen's class would also be in the top position.

"I was wondering how 'Ichiren Takusho' would play out, but you managed to outsmart them."

[TL Note : In the Japanese Text the word 'Ichirentakusho' is used which is a saying in Japanese. It means to be together throughout life until death, whether it may be in hardship or in happiness. But in this Context this could be referred as ; being in the same boat, facing the same challenge/fate. Implying to the situation between their class and ryuen's class (ie. being in the same boat aiming for 1st place with facing challenges)]

"But there was also something unexpected: Sakayanagi came in fourth."

"Yes. Did you see their performance?"

"No, I didn't go to the third floor of the special wing today. Did you see them?"

"Class A was selling brochures and stuff about the school for a low price. They didn't have any other food, drink, or other offerings. I wonder what kind of tricks they used"

"The clue is probably at the bottom of the list."

"First year Class D, Housen-kun's class, right? What about it?"

"If they were the bottom of the class as a result of a struggle, fine. But that's unthinkable. The class's entertainment, which was mainly a reenactment of the festival, was quite successful. I thought it was one of the top classes, and I don't think they should have been any lower than the third year Class A?"

"The 11th-ranked class is third-year Class A. They were priced out of the competition from the start. It was only about entertaining to please the guests, right?"

It was confirmed that the haunted house and other activities could be played for 100 points. On the other hand, the shooting and other stalls that Hosen had set up were priced appropriately.

"The top class got 100 points for this festival. It means that behind the scenes, Hosen might have gotten something else."

"Conceivably, you mean private points?"

"Doesn't this remind you of last year's desert island test?"

There was an agreement between Ryuen and Katsuragi to receive private points in exchange for letting them earn class points.

It would not surprise me if something similar happened between Sakayanagi and Hōsen.

"It's not impossible. Or maybe they signed a similar contract to replace it."

Accounting is done through cell phones. If Hosen and his class received cell phones from the 2nd year A class for accounting purposes and donated all sales, this would be a viable enough strategy.

If they were also providing funds to Hosen's class for the festival, it would make sense for the size of their stalls.

"So, she did that, right?"

"If you notice, she's now going for victory."

Either way, it means that Sakayanagi simply is not intending to give the position easily.

There is no doubt that they intended to steadily produce results by making it look as if they have abandoned the competition.

Part 1

The meeting was then dismissed, but Horikita called some of them to Class B classroom. With the exception of Matsushita, who was not present because of illness, they were the three maid cafe organisers.

"Actually, I have something I have to apologize to you guys for."

"What? Apologize for what? What is it?"

Despite the challenging nature of the day, Horikita had not displayed any faults on any given occasion.

Since Sato and the others had absolutely nothing in mind, they tilted their heads curiously.

"You remember how Ryuen-kun leaked the maid cafe information and how it spread throughout the school, right?"

"Yeah. It was a little panicky there, wasn't it?"

"Actually, it was already decided from the beginning that he would leak the maid cafe."

My idea that we somehow team up in order to work together and take the top spots at the festival is what inspired the story.

"What do you mean, the leak was already decided?"

"It was all planned. Ryuen-kun and I would work together, he would betray us and make the maid cafe's performance known."

"What? No way!"

Of course they would be surprised. Horikita and I were the only ones in the class who knew about this.

"So you also had a bet where the winner gets private points?"

"That was Ryuen-kun's idea. I was a little nervous when he suddenly said it."

"Hashimoto and the others, who had been looking forward to the result, must have decided to talk about the bet."

"Yes, Sakayanagi-san heard a lot of information from third parties. I'm sure that Hashimoto-kun and other spies must've told her about this as well. The two classes were supposed to cooperate with each other, but they got into a dispute, and Ryuen-kun unilaterally betrayed them."

"Then what about the one million points you'd get if you won first place?"

"I'm sorry, but we've also confirmed that in fact, no matter who won, no points will be handed over to either of them. He was willing to do it himself, but I think he's a bit chilled by now."

With the exception of Horikita, I kept this information a secret from our classmates, including Kei. And nobody in Ryuen's class knew about it besides him and Katsuragi.

Even close associates such as Ishizaki and Albert were no exception.

That was why I could only take it as a sign that Ryuen was serious about keeping the agreement.

"One of their strategies was to put up a Japanese-style concept cafe as a rival. Besides appealing to the public that we were enemies, it was also to keep other rivals out."

Rivalry.

The higher the excitement, the more responsibility the adults have and the more money they drop.

Knowing that there is a battle that neither side can afford to lose, it is natural to want a side to win.

On the other hand, other classes and grades were not in a fight to the death.

Of course, many classes wanted class points, but the amount of heat was one or two times lower than the Horikita vs. Ryuen battle.

"I'm really sorry. I even kept quiet to you guys, even though I was trying to win."

Horikita constantly felt bad since she wanted to share the plan as soon as possible.

She was genuinely sorry, and I'm sure the three of them could tell that.

"It's okay. We were first in the results, hey?"

Not particularly blaming us, Sato happily confirmed to Mii-chan and Maezono.

"Well, you know. If you do well, I guess I don't mind so much."

"Yes. If I had been told beforehand, it might have shown on my face."

Mii-chan replied honestly,

"I'm not even sure I'm confident enough to act."

"Good for you, Horikita."

"Yes, it's a weight off my shoulders. You guys can tell Matsushita-san about this. And as soon as the private points are transferred to us, we'll pay you all."

"We did it!"

The three of them high-fived each other.

"Was Chabashira-sensei becoming a maid also discussed from the beginning? That was probably the biggest surprise."

"That was amazing... we were on top of the scores within an hour."

"I know you have a lot to talk about, but we're going to end today off. Thank you so much."

The class found a strategy in the suggestion of a maid cafe and was able to win first place.

I was grateful that other uncalculated factors also worked positively.

After seeing the three of them off, only Horikita and I were left in the classroom.

A slightly stronger wind came through the open window and shook the curtains.

"Are you sure you're okay with it? Most of the plan was your own idea. You could've claimed more credit, you know? Staging the confrontation and making Chabashira-sensei the maid, it was undeniably your ability that contributed to the first place."

"It was only possible because of Horikita's position as leader."

"If it had been you in the past, you wouldn't have included me in this plan, would you?"

In the empty classroom, Horikita muttered without looking at me.

"I think so."

"You don't deny it."

"It's a fact, so it can't be helped. You knew it too, that's why you asked me, right?"

"Well, yeah, that's probably true."

It's not that I, Ryuen, and Katsuragi couldn't have forced the issue by ourselves.

However, I did not hesitate to tell Horikita at the same time when I made this proposal.

I wasn't sure if she could play the role or not, but it was not something that could be done without the leader.

If the proposal had been completely rejected, I would've been fine with it.

"I wouldn't hesitate to consider deceiving my colleagues if it's an effective means to win. When it's time to proceed, I will proceed, even if it's at a risk. Do you understand?"

The idea of creating strategies herself became more ingrained in Horikita's body.

"Maybe now I can understand. I think I'm starting to see it, little by little."

It may not be a very strong feeling yet, but she was definitely getting a feel for it.

"That's enough for today. The sun will be setting soon."

"Wait. Ayanokoji-kun, I really need to ask you something right now."

I tried to get Horikita to leave, but I had a feeling she wouldn't. Horikita and Ibuki's presence in the student council room didn't seem to be a coincidence, in my opinion.

That must be the case as they followed some form of thread to get there.

"What is it?"

"Today's cultural festival. A serious incident that was happening behind the scenes.
.....Ayanokoji-kun-----"

Conveniently or not, my cell phone rang at this moment.

"Sorry, hold on a second."

"Eh, yeah."

When I looked at the screen, it was a call from an unknown number.

"Hello?"

"Are you still in school? I'd like to talk to you for a minute if you'd like."

The voice sounded familiar: It was Tsubaki Sakurako, a student in first year Class C.

I didn't care how she got my number, as there were so many different ways to get it, but she was an unexpected person.

I'm not surprised as to why she made contact today.

"Are you alone now?"

"Unfortunately not."

"Then why don't we meet up?"

"Where are you?"

"I just left the front door. You're still on campus, right?"

"Give me five minutes."

"Okay."

After a short call, I told Horikita,

"I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to step out for a bit...I'll be back in about 10 or 20 minutes. Then we'll continue our conversation."

"Okay, I'll wait here."

I promised to come back here and left the classroom. Once I was alone, I decided to call the person who had helped me the most today.

"The third-year's information network is top-notch; whether it was Kushida Kikyo or Hasebe Haruka, you're able to find them immediately. I've once again realized the power of Student Council President Nagumo."

"Did you call me to say that?"

"I just wanted to thank you in advance. You were very helpful in today's search."

The number of eyes and the leadership among the third-year students who quickly located Haruka and Kushida were magnificent.

"I never thought you'd use the strategy I used on you for your own benefit."

"It was helpful that you were able to tell me what was going on in the student council room. Thanks to you, I was able to respond quickly."

"At first, I thought it was Yagami's crazy delusion, but was there actually a trick to that letter?"

"It seems to be a love letter to Student Council President Nagumo, but as Yagami complained, it had a somewhat complicated anagram in it. If someone deciphers it, they arrive at the sentence, 'I have an important meeting in the student council room after 3:00 p.m.' I also mixed in a few other words that I thought would be interesting. If he had a strong interest, he would naturally take me up on the offer."

In addition to the anagram, the love letter had a few other little touches.

The letter's envelope, along with the stickers holding it together, were available to anyone at any time at the Keyaki Mall.

If they had been custom-made and purchased online, Yagami could have been hesitant due to his concern that the contents might be discovered and that traces of them would be left behind.

However, if you looked at the Keyaki Mall, you would see that everything except for the handwritten letterhead was replaceable.

That's why he could check the contents without hesitation.

In addition, by writing directly, I could inform Yagami of the handwriting.

The calligraphy training the White Room students received ensured that their handwriting was of the highest calibre.

The love letter prepared in this way was passed to Horikita through another girl using Kei.

Then, she was led to hand it to Yagami, giving him time to examine it.

I made him act like he was in a terrible mood that day so that Horikita couldn't hand it over right away since there was a chance she would hand it directly to Nagumo.

"I didn't think he was the guy who went rogue on the island. How much did you know about him?"

"I don't know anything. Yagami just confessed on his own."

"What kind of a trick was used for Komiya and the others to name Yagami? Was it a coincidence that the teacher showed up?"

"I just told them that the person at the center of the trouble might be lured out. The Ryuen side, who couldn't identify the culprit, wanted a hint. I asked them to take me up on the suggestion, knowing the risk that no one would come to the student council. Or that even if they did, nothing would happen."

"I see? Well, I wonder how much you're telling the truth."

I left it to his imagination. What I did was really nothing but trivial. Nothing noteworthy.

"Well, that's fine. Now are you ready to fulfil your promise?"

"Of course. I'm looking forward to it, Student Council President Nagumo."

As I approached the front door, I ended my call and reached for my 'getabako'.

[TL Note : A getabako (下駄箱) is a shoe cupboard in Japan, usually situated in the genkan, an entryway or porch of the house. Here it is the infamous shoe racks that you see in every school in anime.]

Part 2

Is Tsubaki alone at the meeting place?

I thought so for a moment, but it seemed that Utomiya was talking to someone a little farther away. He was only looking at us.

"Was there anything that was difficult to convey over the phone?"

"Well, the first-year students are in a bit of a mess right now. There was an unexpected expulsion at the Cultural festival."

"Expulsion? That's a very disturbing story. Or should I say, 'What's the point'?"

A person who is involved in this school expulsion mess. That is Sakurako Tsubaki who is in front of me now.

"I'm satisfied with the result, which exceeded my expectations ...Ayanokoji-senpai."

Tsubaki made a circle with her finger as if to say, "you passed."



"It seems you've successfully extracted information from Sato-senpai and drove Yagami-kun out of school. I am very grateful."

"I didn't extract the information. You kept in touch with Sato and eventually cornered her. When she finally lost all patience, you coordinated your threats against her and forced her to confide in someone."

Tsubaki, right here in front of me, was the person who approached Sato without my knowledge.

"I don't know what you mean. As if it was like that."

Near the women's restroom at Keyaki Mall, Tsubaki presumably approached Sato. She piqued her interest by presenting some bait there that would change things for her, including a change in my relationship with Kei.

"It appears that you did not make a real effort to force Sato into damaging our relationship when you called her to your room and made weak threats. It was because you wanted to subtly let her know that we were getting close in order to pressure her into action or prepare for the threat posed by Kei's relationship with me."

Tsubaki, who listens silently, stares at me without denying it.

"The strangeness of the situation became apparent as soon as I questioned her about the specifics. You called Sato again as if to follow up as soon as you saw she wasn't going to accept your offer, made similar remarks, and agitated her. You eventually intensified your threats and pursued Sato after realising that she didn't appear to have consulted anyone. She would eventually consult someone, and that person would be me, therefore this was necessary." The goal was not to trap Sato, but to wait for her to ask me for help.

"Then, you most likely told Sato that it was Yagami who was behind the threats, not you."

The mentally exhausted Sato probably didn't have time to think about whether that was true or not.

I came up with the idea of using this one incident for personal use and decided to call up Kei during my discussion with Sato and had her confide in her about the abuse and almost everything that had led up to this point in her past.

The fact that Sato didn't choose Tsubaki's side afterwards convinced me that she would be on my side. As a result, the two of them elevated their relationship from friends to best friends in the truest sense of the word.

That was on November 1.

"Yagami-kun is a bad guy, isn't he?"

"You don't need cheap play. Yagami had nothing to do with this. He's not involved."

"You don't think it was actually Yagami-kun's instructions?"

"If Yagami had used Tsubaki to contact Sato, there was no need to bother naming him."

The only people who know about Karuizawa's past are those who are connected with the White Room.

Others can't easily imitate him in a way that wouldn't have made it difficult for me to see through their disguise.

"If that's the case, didn't you find that I was trying to frame Yagami-kun instead of the other way around? And yet, despite the fact that Yagami-kun, who might not be guilty, was expelled, you did nothing to me. That seems to be in conflict. There was no sign that Ayanokoji-senpai was thoroughly investigating it."

"Ah. I didn't investigate Tsubaki or Yagami. No need for that."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't feel like talking any more."

I was certain that I had said enough. Even Tsubaki wasn't the one controlling everything. In addition, the person who painted this picture is the one who is hiding in the shadows.

"Utomiya-kun, can you come here for a minute?"

Utomiya was on the phone when Tsubaki gestured for him to hand over his phone to me.

"By all means..."

Wary, Utomiya handed me the phone while it was still connected.

"Yagami had some of Tsubaki's classmates expelled. That's why the two cooperated."

It is definitely the voice of the man I spoke to last year on the phone and in front of my room.

"You didn't approach him directly because you were confident you could defeat him at any moment. However, this led to expulsions from the first year. If not for his bother, it wouldn't have happened."

"I don't deny it."

"The only way to avoid further unnecessary sacrifices was to have him expelled. But even if you knew that, it isn't easy to defeat Yagami. I know he is no ordinary high school student."

"That's why you wanted to use me."

He made this decision because he understood the white room student's purpose and obsession.

"I guess you got my message,"

"Eventually, you'll get in touch with someone close to me. And when that happens, there will be expulsions, right?"

"That's right. But to corner Yagami and expel him out all at once? That was a little outside of what was expected. Did you not consider the likelihood that Yagami was unrelated?"

"Yagami had the option of choosing to be expelled or not. It wasn't me who made the distinction between black and white. He was occasionally putting himself in danger, exactly as when he expelled a first-year C Class student. He pretended to be Kushida Kikyo's former junior when he spoke with her, and he exploited the information he received to influence and manipulate her. Upon the uninhabited island, he injured some unconnected students severely to incite them. He also read the contents of a love letter intended for a different person because he believed it to be a trap. Horikita and Ibuki may have been present for other reasons that I am unsure of, including his toying with fire."

Normally, you don't steal other people's love letters. And even if you did, you wouldn't notice the anagrams that were sprinkled throughout.

"So it was all connected."

"Even if there was no clear evidence left behind, the more tricks you play, the more traces you will always leave behind. That guy didn't realize he was strangling himself with silk cord."

[TL Note : Here the Kanji used '真綿' means - to drag things out; to creep up slowly on the point; (Here) to strangle (execute) slowly with a silk cord (instead of quickly with a rope)]

"Certainly, if Yagami hadn't done anything, he wouldn't have been expelled at this stage."

"I agree."

Playing with fire repeatedly had resulted in this situation.

I wouldn't have bothered Yagami if he hadn't offended the man on the phone, and he wouldn't have been expelled if he hadn't gotten in touch with Kushida or gravely hurt those guys on the uninhabited island.

He wouldn't have been in a position to be interrogated if he hadn't seen what was in the love letter.

"The only reason he was expelled was because Yagami indirectly admitted to himself being in the wrong."

I only prepared the groundwork for a test. There wouldn't have been a fuss if he had been entirely right in the first place. He just went to the student council room because he was smart enough and knew me.

"You seem to be as good as the rumors say you are."

"By the way, just to confirm, remember what you told me before? You told me that you don't think that even if I get rid of the intruders, it will bring back peace. That was a bluff, wasn't it? You wanted to create a sense of urgency that if I didn't take care of the problem soon, it would become even more difficult."

In order to make me move, he had made a move to get Yagami expelled from the school from that stage.

"As Ayanokoji-sensei said, choosing this school was the right choice."

"What do you mean?"

"Exactly as stated, I'm going to enjoy my school life, and as long as we don't have any conflict with each other during the first and second year, I'll let our relationship end here."

After saying what he wanted to say, the call was instantly ended. A quick glance at the cell phone screen showed that the call had been purposefully blocked.

Utomiya has registered the email address, and it is an action to prevent someone from seeing the phone number or the address of the other person.

"Have you figured it out?"

"Yeah."

"I initially believed Hosen-kun was responsible for my classmate's expulsion from school, but I recently discovered out it was Yagami-kun."

Yagami's potential may be impeccably high, but he'd been caught flatfooted by his own conceit. He was only concerned about me and didn't see his rivals standing on the same stage.

It seemed that Yagami was not a welcome presence in the first-year students' battle.

"Don't quit just because you've defeated your enemy, Tsubaki."

"I know. To be honest, I wasn't attached to this school at first, but that's changed a bit. This school is surprisingly fun."

Looking at the exchange just now, it was clear that there were a lot of mixed feelings other than simply taking revenge on an enemy.

"So, we're leaving." (said by utomiya)

"..... Excuse my rudeness." (also said by utomiya)

[TL Note : Here in the 2nd sentence Utomiya said - 'Shitsureishimasu' - 失礼します - A good English translation of 失礼します would be "Excuse me" or more literally, "Excuse my rudeness. Here This is of course in the present tense; so you say this before you perform the impolite action. Impolite action here being leaving before (people generally say this in offices while leaving before their seniors or other co-workers). Without diving deep much, in short Shitsureishimasu is a polite expression to use when you are leaving.]

Utomiya, who was forcing himself to be polite using Keigo, returned to the dormitory with Tsubaki.

[TL Note : Keigo (敬語; respectful language) is the polite or formal way of Japanese speech. This can be used when talking to people that are of higher social status or someone with power. 'Shitsureishimasu' is considered in keigo.]

"I have to get back to class too."

Part 3

After finishing the conversation with Tsubaki, on the way back to the classroom, I encountered an exhausted Chabashira-sensei.

"Thanks for your hard work today. You did a great job."

"What's with the compliment?"

Chabashira-sensei was clearly angry as she turned her childlike glare on me without hiding it.

"Did you really hate it so much that we made you wear a maid's uniform?"

I asked knowingly, and she shook her head and looked down.

"My photos were all over the teacher desks when I returned to the staff room. Not only that. In the brief time I've been there, I wonder how many teachers have approached me, how many comments about my maid's uniform have been made, and how many embarrassing moments I've had. I truly want to be a shellfish right now."

It must have been a really hard time for her, because she felt the pressure so intensely.

"That's..... not for me to know. It must be symbolic of your popularity."

"In no way am I a popular person. You went far beyond."

You were going to struggle in the future if you truly believed there was no such thing as popularity. Even though they hadn't come forward until recently, there must have been many adults who respected Chabashira-sensei as a person of the other sex.

"That's it. The class won first place, so isn't it good?"

"It's not good at all. If anything, the top sales amount was a sure thing even if I didn't do anything."

"I see. Well, first place looks better than second and third place, doesn't it?"

"That's not like you to say that... at all."

She took a deep breath and resisted saying anything, as if she felt there was no use in blaming me any longer.

"Even so, I didn't think you were cooperating with Ryuen's class under the guise of being hostile to them."

"If one class fights alone, the maximum strength is about 40 people. But if two classes join hands you will have a nearly twice that number of people will join hands. But this is not a foolproof system.."

On the surface, advertising doesn't have to be related to one another. You can put on a big spectacle without spending a lot of money if you gather plenty of people, albeit in various forms.

"Even the staff room was surprised. Everyone thought it was a real showdown."

Chabashira-sensei only mentioned the festival's success, but not Yagami's expulsion.

Teachers and even first-year students who weren't directly involved in the event ought to be aware of it, but none have brought up the topic with me, who they see to be uninvolved. She was doing the right thing as a teacher at this school.

"By the way, aren't you going back?"

"I have Horikita waiting in the classroom. Are you still working overtime?"

"I'm moving about the campus. There have been numerous reports of guests leaving things behind."

The teachers were therefore still busy cleaning up after the festival even after it had ended.

Part 4

Horikita was lying on her desk with her upper body on top when Chabashira-sensei and I entered the classroom.

We both exchanged glances before deciding not to speak to her. She appeared to be asleep as I moved in closer to check. The window was open, letting in a strong breeze.



For a moment, I wondered if I should put a uniform jacket on her, but I decided against it. I decided not to do that because I knew that Horikita would not be pleased if she knew that I had approached her later.

"hm....."

Hmm? For a moment I thought she was awake, but apparently not.

"No good..."

She was speaking while she slept. It was a bit of a remarkable statement, so I was a little surprised.

Horikita must have been tired today. I closed only the window quietly so that she wouldn't catch a cold at least. I went back to the corridor with my feet straight.

"I'm going to let her sleep a little longer."

"Are you waiting for her to wake up?"

"Well, we did manage to get first place at the school festival. She deserves this much."

She'll be up soon anyway.

"You can leave. I'll take over here."

"Are you sure?"

"As the man behind the scenes, you also deserve that much."

"Then I'll accept your offer."

"But Ayanokoji, don't ever think of a plan to humiliate me again, okay?"

"Do you still care?"

"...For me, it's a day I'll never forget for the rest of my life."

"Well, Chabashira-sensei, thank you for your hard work. Someday that will be a good memory too."

"Don't get cheeky, student."

Glaring at me, Chabashira-sensei sighed and leaned against the classroom door.

Well then, Shall I go home?

Class points at the end of the November Cultural festival

Class A led by Sakayanagi: 1201

Class B led by Horikita: 966

Class C led by Ryuen: 740

Class D led by Ichinose: 675

SS - Shiina Hiyori - Sprouting Feelings

Everyone in our class was doing their very best working on the Kimono Café for the school festival.

Ryuuken-kun had warned that those who tried skipping would get punished and that seems to have worked, I guess.

I was the cashier so I didn't have a lot of things to actually do.

And that is why, as per usual, I read another book I had borrowed.

Then a student entered the classroom with a casual and light stride.

It was Ayanokouji-kun.

He, was the one Karuizawa Kei-san was dating.

I wanted to hide myself somehow and hid behind my own book.

I should have known. My curiosity won out in the end and I took a quick peek.

Ayanokouji-kun looked as if he had witnessed something unusual and walked towards me.

"... Good day."

I couldn't ignore him, so I said that.

I'm not sure I managed to act like usual.

"Long time no see. I hear you haven't turned up at the library lately?"

"That's not true. It's a bit, I mean, I'm there at a different time now."

It was my sense of thoughtfulness to avoid meeting with Ayanokouji-kun, who also loved reading.

Seeing someone like me talking with her boyfriend may make any girl worried, I think.

“So, you are going to work at the store as well?”

“I am just working at the cashier. I’m not especially good at talking with people... nor with walking around. I have practiced carrying the trays with food, but that didn’t go well.”

I thought I was going to do better to be honest...

“By the way, Ibuki-san is also participating.”

“Ibuki? But she’s not the kind of person who would ever wear that outfit, right?”

“It seems she made a bet with Ryuen-kun to be completely exempted from the student festival.”

“And she lost.”

Ibuki was kinda cute when she stamped her feet in frustration.

It was really fun to talk with Ayanokouji-kun like this after all.

I... wanted to meet him at the library again.

That feeling grew within me like a sprout.

...It should be fine... right?

“I will be at the library again later, so please do come.”

She shouldn’t become angry with me if I meet him as just a friend, right? Surely...

SS - Kushida Kikiyo - Way to Survival

It had been 10 minutes since all the girls working as maids started worrying about what was happening right outside the classroom.

That was naturally due to the the insane amount of customers waiting in the hallway.

I had a little bit of extra time on my hand and went out to check.

Having a queue was something worth celebrating, but Ayanokouji-kun didn't look happy at all as he looked at the same scenery as me.

"This is bad. We're starting to see customers tired of waiting and they are leaving."

That's right. Even though we had so many customers, we couldn't service all of them.

The people waiting in front must have waited close to 30 minutes already.

Think.

Ayanokouji-kun and I were not the only ones worried about when this queue would collapse.

The girls working inside the maid café must be worried sick as well.

In that case I had to do something.

I know very well how difficult it is to overwrite bad impressions or your own image, but I also have no other options but to take the challenge.

"Ayanokouji-kun, can I leave for a bit? I have a plan."

"What are you planning on doing?"

"The guests waiting are bored, but they all show strong interest in the maid café. But they are getting hungry and it's not surprising they are starting to leave."

"You're right."

The quickest method to keep them here is...

Is the department store food sampling plan!

Baiting them with small pieces of food and pressuring them to make a purchase with smiles and coercion.

I was going to reproduce phenomena by force.

I grabbed a small bag with cookies from the souvenir corner and walked towards the people waiting in front.

"I'm sorry for the wait!"

I politely took a cookie and presented them to each customer while keeping a low profile.

And I repeated this until I reached the end of the queue, scattering feed all over.

All I had to do now was to stick close to them and watch.

If someone was about to leave I would use glances and gestures to appeal to them and convey how bad it would be for me if they left.

I can contribute to the class as well as make my classmates feel indebted to me, an important technique.

It was like killing two birds with one stone.

That's my weapon. A strategy to avoid expulsion and to emphasize my own presence at the same time.

SS - Horikita Suzune - The Dream I Will Forget After Awakening

I am dreaming. A strange little dream. Nii-san, I and Ayanokouji-kun were in the same class and were competing for class A. We all laughed together, ate together, played and faced each special exam. It was a dream so far from reality that I am sure I will forget it after waking up.

But it was comforting above anything. I wish I could dream on forever.

In my dream, Nii-san was especially talented and was leading our class. And I was beside him, supporting him. Ayanokouji-kun looked like he did nothing, but he was supporting us both from the shadows.

Before I knew it, several classmates started appearing.

Sudou-kun, Hirata-kun, Kushida-san.

Before long, each of my classmates had become important to me.

I am ashamed over remembering I once thought of them as hindrances.

And Yamada-kun, Ishizaki-kun, Ichinose-san were somehow also in our class...

But it can't be helped since it's only a dream.

"Nnn..."

I wanted to continue dreaming, but a cold wind from somewhere far away was trying to stop me.

"No, don't..."

Just a bit more, I want to see the rest of this dream.

Then as if my wish was granted, the prickling cold against my skin retreated.

I shall graduate as class A.

Even in my dream, this was still true.

I, together with Ayanokouji-kun, Nii-san, my classmates...

To prevent another tragedy like Sakura-san from ever happening again...

I have to move forward.

When I wake up, I will take another decisive step forward.

That's the only thing I can do after all.

"... Oh no, it seems I have fallen asleep."

I forgot about the dream and pulled the chair back, standing up.

"I thought I left the window open... perhaps just my imagination?"

The sun would soon set.

Let's go to sleep a bit earlier than usual, I thought and left the classroom.

Afterword

The year 2022, We find ourselves approaching the halfway point of the year. It's too soon, Kinugasa here.

Eating ginger has recently become my boom, and I regularly buy a few kilos of ginger, grate it, buy a few kilos of ginger, grate it, and repeat the process, eating it with meat and vegetables.

I especially like the combination of eringi mushrooms, ginger, and lemon sauce the best.

Hehehe, I've revealed a bit of my private life that no one is interested in.

Yes. I didn't have anything to write about, so I was a little confused, but let's get down to the main topic.

This story is mainly about the cultural festival in November.

I know some of you may have wanted to see the costumes of the other students, but please understand that this is a story for another time.

The story is progressing smoothly without stopping.

Soon the second semester will end, and we will enter the winter break and the turbulent third semester.

Although the number of volumes is a little larger than originally expected, the second grade version has finally passed the halfway point. I feel that we are getting closer and closer to the conclusion of the story.

Will Ayanokoji be able to graduate from school safely?

How will each class ultimately end up?

I think we will be able to see the whole picture little by little, so please wait patiently.

And then! Finally, the second season of the anime will start in July!

We have been waiting for it for a long time.

I waited so long that I was wondering how long I had to wait.

I can't wait to see Ayanokoji and his friends in action for the first time in several years.

There is also a 3rd season planned, so yeah, how can I put it... I'm overwhelmed with emotion. People who like You-Zitsu, people who don't like it, people who are interested and people who aren't, I hope everyone will watch it.it

I will watch it as one of those who have been waiting for the second season more than anyone else. Yay!

Finally, I would like to make an unusually serious announcement. Please understand this in advance.

"Classroom of the Elite 2nd season" will start soon, but I wrote "Classroom of the Elite Volume 0" as a BD&DVD bonus. It was really hard. Since it's Volume 0, it's about Ayanokoji's past. Thanks to the full cooperation of illustrator Tomose-sensei, we have achieved the same volume and number of illustrations as the main story.

That is all for now, and I will leave you with this afterword.

Well, everyone, I will see you again somewhere within the year.

Year 2 Volume 7 Ends Here

Thanks Everyone for reading till here.

And as mentioned in the Afterword, Next volume will be Volume 0 which will be released on October 26, 2022. Wanna Get Updates on it? Well, it will be available [here](#) (When it gets released)

Also, get all the Latest Updates on Cote [here](#).

Join this telegram group to get the latest updates on it - [Here](#)

Until Next Time~