

Cote 261

Chapter 261: Mommy Suzune's

The weekend weather was slightly chilly, a sign that autumn was gradually approaching.

"What would you like to drink?" Kaoru asked the girl sitting before him.

She was perched on the bed with her legs pressed together, a slightly short pleated skirt covering a small portion of her fair, delicate thighs.

Her black knee-high socks accentuated the perfect curves of her calves.

"No need for formalities. Do whatever you want." The girl, of course, was Horikita Suzune.

Her expression remained stern, not a single frown crossing her face.

"So, no matter what I do, you'll accept it?" Kaoru glanced at her sideways.

"A bet is a bet. I won't resist." Horikita Suzune paused, her eyes narrowing slightly with a cold, sharp edge.

"However, I hope you remember what I said before. If you dare go too far, I'll have no choice but to kill you."

In other words, he could do a little, but not too much.

"Was what happened last time 'too far,' or was it acceptable?" Kaoru asked.

Horikita Suzune's expression was slightly unnatural as her hands subtly clenched her skirt.

The smooth, delicate skin on the inside of her thighs seemed to twitch and tremble again, causing her to instinctively straighten her posture, her entire body stiffening like a machine.

"You're making it very hard for me to control myself. A charming, soft, and fragrant beauty sitting on my bed, alone with me in this room—asking me to restrain myself feels a bit unreasonable, don't you think?"

Kaoru openly appraised her, watching the gentle rise and fall of her chest before letting his gaze wander along her thighs.

This kind of attention made Horikita Suzune extremely uncomfortable, but she merely pressed her lips together and said.

"Don't you have a list? Aside from a few exceptions, most of the items on it... are acceptable."

Kaoru's expression turned odd.

She had refused adamantly before—had she given up resisting now?

"Suzune," he suddenly called out.

Horikita frowned, displeased. "I've never made a big deal about you using my first name, but could you do it less? It sounds disgusting."

"What if I don't want to die and want to do something even more outrageous with you?"

Horikita was momentarily stunned, then couldn't help but laugh in exasperation at his words.

"That's revolting. Weren't you the one who said you'd make me drop out? Now you want to humiliate me too?"

Kaoru nodded. "I agree, it is disgusting. But I've changed my mind. I didn't expect Suzune to agree to so many of my conditions. Making such an adorable little girl drop out... I just can't do it."

This guy—this guy really was disgusting.

Horikita Suzune was so furious her chest heaved violently as she glared at this shameless man.

"Don't even dream about it. I'm not dropping out. That's just your delusion. I'll stay at this school and defeat you!"

"Being defeated by Suzune would probably be the sweetest dream I've ever had."

There was a faint trace of regret in Kaoru's eyes.

He knew Class A would lose in this sports festival, followed by Class D.

With Class D's pitiful score as it was, they were likely headed for a repeat of the tragedy at the start of the term.

Horikita Suzune, unaware of this, gritted her teeth at Kaoru, convinced he was looking down on her.

"Enough nonsense. If you're going to do something, hurry up. I don't even want to look at your face!"

She was angry—her usually cool and composed face had completely transformed.

Kaoru quietly observed her furious expression, knowing even Class D's students rarely saw her like this.

"I've thought of a good request." Kaoru sat beside her. "It might be a little embarrassing for you, but it's something every girl has to go through. I'm sure Suzune can handle it too."

Horikita said coldly, "What exactly is this request?"

Instead of answering, Kaoru leaned sideways and lay down, resting his head on her thighs, his face pressing intimately against the soft skin of the girl's delicate legs.

Horikita stiffened in shock, barely suppressing the urge to shove him away.

"Is this your request?" she hissed.

"While I'd love to experience Suzune's lap pillow, this isn't what I had in mind."

"If it's not, then get up right now!"

"No, no, the request is somewhat similar to a lap pillow..." Kaoru paused, then slowly turned his head, intending to look up at Suzune's delicate face from below.

However, half his view was blocked by her breast.

While breast size doesn't affect breastfeeding—as long as mammary glands develop normally, one can still nurse a child—bigger ones are undeniably more comfortable.

Thus, as Kaoru gazed at the desires manifested upon her, he calmly uttered a sentence that left her frozen on the spot.

"Suzune, could you... temporarily be my mom?"

Horikita Suzune stared at him blankly.

The man's expression didn't change—no, if anything, it was resolute.

"I want Suzune to be my mom. I want to act spoiled with Mommy Suzune. I want Mommy Suzune to pamper me." Kaoru stated her manifested desires with complete calm.

If he could fulfill these wishes, perhaps he could draw the rewards he truly wanted.

At first, Horikita Suzune looked utterly disbelieving, thinking she had misheard him.

But upon hearing those words, her expression turned as if she had seen something vile, her eyes cold.

"Heh... Not just a foot-fetishist pervert, but now a mommy-con too?" Her voice was frigid, like a blizzard from a snowbound land.

Her face showed no emotion, not even disgust—as if anger would be wasted on him.

"You're truly disgusting. I never thought you'd actually make such a request."

She remembered.

She remembered very clearly that this demand had also been on the previous list.

Back then, she had assumed it was just one of Kaoru's jokes or pranks.

But Horikita Suzune never expected him to say it so seriously.

"It's not that unreasonable, is it?" Kaoru averted his gaze slightly—otherwise, his eyes would be glued to the soft swell of her chest.

The room fell into abrupt silence.

Horikita Suzune lowered her lashes, her delicate face etched with frost.

Her lips, usually so composed, trembled faintly.

"Not unreasonable at all." The girl's voice was tight, her teeth clenched.

She had never even held a man's hand—and now she was supposed to play mother to one?

"Good. Then I'm your baby now. What should you do?" Kaoru rested his head on her lap, feeling the smooth skin beneath him.

His face was close to her abdomen, breathing in her sweet, fresh scent.

Horikita Suzune's cheeks flushed crimson.

How would she know what to do in this situation?

After a moment of hesitation, she took a deep breath, then shakily reached out to pat Kaoru's head.

Forcing a stiff smile, she awkwardly cooed, "G-good boy... Go to sleep now..."

She had no experience comforting children.

This was just something she'd occasionally overheard mothers saying to their babies on the street.

There was no warmth in her tone, and even maintaining the smile on her face was a struggle.

Chapter 262: A Mom Who's Great at Insults

Truthfully, it wasn't just Horikita Suzune—Kaoru Mitoma also struggled to understand some of these wishes.

Making a cold, sharp-tongued girl play the role of a mother?

Shouldn't this kind of thing be assigned to someone gentle, cute, and flat-chested instead?

Kaoru mused that this wish might have been better suited for Sakayanagi Arisu—and he couldn't deny feeling a flicker of anticipation at the thought.

But since the wish had manifested on Horikita Suzune, he wouldn't complain.

Any wish that could be smoothly fulfilled was a good wish.

"Shh... good, good baby, go to sleep quickly..."

Horikita Suzune murmured words that even she found embarrassing, clumsily and stiffly stroking Kaoru's head.

Her thighs instinctively pressed closer together, subtly rubbing against each other, his slightly prickly hair tickling the sensitive skin of her thighs, sending waves of strange sensations through her.

Especially with him lying on her lap, his gaze fixed on her, her cheeks burned hotter, her movements growing stiffer, her voice gradually fading.

What on earth was she doing? How could she be doing something so shameless?

This guy—this guy must be deliberately trying to make a fool of her, right?

Making her play the role of a mo... mother? No matter how she looked at it, it was utterly disgusting and perverted!

"What are you doing?" Kaoru's voice snapped her back to reality.

Horikita Suzune frowned. "Didn't you tell me to do this?"

"I never said anything like that. Even if you were trying to lull me to sleep, your technique is way too rough." Kaoru sighed.

"How should a real mother treat her child?"

"H-how should I know?" Horikita Suzune flushed slightly, irritation creeping into her voice.

A sixteen-year-old girl like her obviously wouldn't understand such things.

"Mother, in the literal sense, refers to a familial relationship—typically the woman who gives birth to you. Clearly, Suzune, you couldn't have given birth to me."

"Stop spouting nonsense."

"Even though you didn't give birth to me, you're now my mother. Shouldn't you fulfill your duties?"

"D-duties?"

Seeing the blank confusion in Horikita Suzune's eyes, Kaoru cleared his throat.

"Ahem. Even if you don't fulfill your duties, at least try to make me happy, no?"

"Hah, and this isn't enough to satisfy a pervert like you?" Horikita Suzune sneered before closing her eyes, forcing a smile as if wearing a mask.

"Mommy's here. Go ahead and pamper yourself, you pervert."

"No mother would call her own child a pervert."

"One more word, and I'll kill you." Horikita Suzune kept smiling, though she was utterly uncomfortable with the situation, feeling nothing but disgust—so much so that she wanted to leave immediately.

"Hurry up and be happy so we can end today's request."

"At least say something nice about me?" Kaoru smirked, staring at the girl's pretty face, her eyes practically screaming murder.

Horikita Suzune clenched her teeth, swallowing the words stuck in her throat.

Not only was she forced to do this, but she also had to praise this pervert?

"Praise is the simplest way to make someone happy." Kaoru nuzzled against her thigh, his nose just centimeters away from the hem of her skirt—any closer, and it might slip beneath.

With his movements and the warmth of his breath against her sensitive skin, Horikita Suzune couldn't help but shiver, a jolt of electricity racing from the point of contact all the way through her body, making her shoulders tremble slightly.

Suppressing the teasing sensation, she took a deep breath and spoke flatly.

"You're the best. Amazing. Incredible..."

"No, this won't do. Please lower your head and whisper in my ear." Kaoru turned his head, lying sideways on her lap with his face pressed against her soft stomach.

"Also, it'd be best if you praised me—wholeheartedly treating me as your baby."

Horikita Suzune clenched her fists so tightly they nearly pierced her palms, then slowly bent down to murmur by his ear.

"Mitoma-kun is such a wonderful baby. Mommy has always loved you, you natural-born pervert. There's no shame in crying in Mommy's arms because you're an incurable pervert with a mommy complex..."

Kaoru's ear twitched.

This girl really didn't hold back—seizing every opportunity to insult him.

Yet the girl's breath carried a faintly ambiguous sweetness, her fragrance drifting subtly.

The sensation of her breathing against his ear felt feather-light, almost like being licked.

"Give me specific examples—like your impressions of me. Only nice things allowed." Kaoru closed his eyes, his nose buried in the warm softness of her stomach where maternal vitality seemed to pulse.

So many demands.

Suzune wanted to bite his ear off.

"Mommy isn't scolding Mitoma-kun. Mitoma-kun is a pervert by nature—demanding I drop out the first time we met, putting on that arrogant act in front of my brother. So irritating. Are you going through a rebellious phase?"

"Of course, your lecherousness is also one of Mitoma-kun's strengths. Not just towards me—no girl in class has escaped your clutches. Having such an outstanding child fills me with pride. Now shamelessly using a girl's lap as a pillow—I'm sure you'll achieve great things someday."

"Oh, I almost forgot—you're already the elite Class A student, the student council vice president, and decent-looking too. Plenty of girls probably adore you. If they saw you like this, I'm sure they'd be thrilled."

Kaoru opened his eyes and looked up at her helplessly, rubbing his temples.

"Is this how you comfort a child?"

"Did I do something wrong?" Suzune smiled faintly. "I'm just speaking the truth, sincerely believing everything Mitoma-kun does is right. Mommy couldn't love you more."

Kaoru turned onto his back again, gazing up at her lovely face as their eyes met.

"Just fulfill the simplest duty instead."

"The simplest duty?"

"Mmm. For a mommy, it's the easiest job."

At first, Suzune didn't understand—until his lingering gaze dropped to her chest.

Her fair cheeks instantly flushed crimson.

Panic, shame, anger, hatred, and resentment—countless emotions flickered through her eyes in an instant, betraying her inner turmoil.

"Would this kill me?" Kaoru asked.

"You disgust me. Honestly, I've never hated anyone as much as I hate you today." Suzune's fists trembled.

"But before making my decision, I already knew exactly how depraved you were."

After a moment of silence, she added, "It's just that I lost, and you claimed your spoils. That's all."

Kaoru suddenly smiled and said softly, "As a mom, Suzune is quite adorable."

"Guh..." Horikita Suzune nearly punched him, her face flushed red.

Chapter 263: Sooner or Later, I'll Kill Him!

What is a mother's duty? Even the most naive girl could answer that question.

Horikita Suzune might be clueless about relationships between men and women, but that didn't mean she was a fool.

Even if she had forgotten how her mother raised her as a child, she had at least heard about one thing.

A faint, slightly sweet fragrance filled the air beneath Kaoru's nose.

She didn't know how to seduce a man, yet her completely crimson face radiated an irresistible allure.

Her slightly trembling hands rested on the buttons of her shirt, her expression still carrying the usual untouchable coldness, her eyelids slightly lowered as she remained silent.

Soon, the snowy peaks before him slowly revealed their true form.

A blush gradually spread across her neck, her delicate collarbones glistening with an incredibly smooth and fair sheen.

Under Kaoru's gaze, Horikita Suzune silently covered her chest, then seemed to remember something and gritted her teeth before slowly lowering her hands again, though her eyes still burned with resentment.

"I feel like I'm forcing a decent woman into prostitution," Kaoru remarked with a faint smile.

"Up until now, your actions have perfectly embodied that," Suzune retorted, feeling the slight chill of late summer as a faint pink flush rose on her sensitive skin, making him feel increasingly heated.

"Or have you finally developed a shred of conscience?"

"No, I just never thought you'd actually go through with it," Kaoru said quietly.

Horikita Suzune grew angry, suppressing her irritation as she coldly replied.

"In your eyes, have I always been such a terrible person? I told you—once I make up my mind about something, no matter what it is, I'll see it through. I'll shock you and my brother."

Whether Horikita Manabu would be shocked, Kaoru didn't know, but he certainly was right now.

"Fine, my mistake. I shouldn't have underestimated your resolve," Kaoru apologized sincerely.

"Mommy Suzune, can I touch them?"

Horikita Suzune fell silent.

After going this far, why was he still asking?

The more seriously he posed the question, the more embarrassed she felt.

Wait—this guy was definitely doing it on purpose...

"I'll pretend I didn't see it," she said coldly.

Hearing this, Kaoru got the general idea and reached out, gently grasping the breast before him.

A while later, Horikita Suzune bit her lower lip hard, stifling the sounds rising in her throat, her full chest heaving uncontrollably as her neck flushed completely red.

"Unbelievable... you pervert!"

Her eyes burned with humiliation and fury, glaring at him as if he were trash, her words nearly grinding between her teeth.

Kaoru helped her straighten her skirt, unconsciously licking his lips before giving a somewhat guilty smile.

"Suzune, you're just too adorable. It's hard for me to control myself."

"Control yourself!" Horikita Suzune grew angrier the more she thought about it, her face burning red.

"Touching it was bad enough, but why did you have to... to... You're such a pervert!"

The words stuck in her throat—she simply couldn't say it out loud.

"But I listened to you in the end, didn't I? I didn't take it off," Kaoru argued slyly.

"You still dare to say that!" Horikita couldn't hold back anymore, pounding his chest several times.

"Today's demands weren't just one thing—first you wanted me to act like your mom, then you groped me, and in the end, you even... sucked! That's way too much!"

"Not at all. I only had one request from start to finish," Kaoru insisted, refusing to admit it.

"There are even guys out there who play as JK dads—what they do in private is way worse than this."

In truth, it was just that Kaoru happened to have several wishes he could fulfill at once, so he decided to check them all off in one go with Horikita Suzune.

Making Suzune act like his mom, getting her to cheer him up, touching her soft little nipples and tasting her sweetness—he had crossed them all off his list.

Horikita glared at him clearly furious.

"I don't care! This was my first time, you know. Aren't you afraid I'll tell my brother?"

"If that's the case, does that mean I have to marry you now?" Kaoru put on a thoughtful expression.

Horikita rejected him without hesitation.

"I would never marry a pervert. Not now, not ever."

As she spoke, she began putting her clothes back on, and her breast disappeared from view.

"Enough already. How long are you going to lie there?"

Kaoru closed his eyes and said slowly, "Let me calm down for a bit."

Horikita frowned.

What did he need to calm down about?

Then, the girl suddenly remembered what had just happened—the natural reaction of a man—and her face flushed again.

She couldn't help but sneak a glance.

It seemed much smaller now than before.

"Two more minutes," Horikita said sternly, though she had no idea how a man's body worked.

Still, this strange, thrilling sensation made her heart race uncontrollably.

She had expected Kaoru to take things even further, but surprisingly, he had stopped.

Not that what he had done wasn't already outrageous—Horikita had almost thought she was going to lose her first time right then and there.

Yet Kaoru hadn't pushed beyond that point.

Horikita stared at him with mixed emotions.

His closed lashes hid his usual teasing gaze, and his slightly youthful face still carried a boyish charm.

His jawline was clean and sharp, his lips slightly pursed and a little dry.

For some reason, she couldn't stop looking at his lips.

'Why would my brother take a liking to such a shameless guy?' Horikita muttered under her breath.

Just then, a faint vibration startled her.

Seeing that it was just his phone lighting up, she sighed in relief—only to feel a wave of embarrassment at herself for staring at him for so long.

Buzz—

The phone vibrated again.

Horikita glanced at Kaoru.

"Someone must be messaging me. Could you pass me my phone?" Kaoru suddenly spoke up.

"Can't you get it yourself?" Horikita replied coldly.

"I don't want to get up. The thought of Suzune running away the moment I rise makes me feel especially reluctant," Kaoru opened his eyes just in time to see her furious expression.

"Hmph. If you don't get up now, you'll face the consequences." Horikita Suzune's voice was cold.

Since his demands had been met, she naturally wouldn't tolerate him lazing around any longer.

Seeing this, Kaoru obediently sat up.

Horikita Suzune expressionlessly rubbed her thigh, which had turned red from serving as his pillow. It was slightly numb and would probably take a while to recover.

Kaoru picked up his phone from the side, glanced at it, then placed a box of tissues in front of Horikita Suzune.

"What's the meaning of this?" Horikita Suzune was puzzled by his action.

Kaoru blinked in surprise and tentatively asked.

"So... you're not wet?"

Horikita Suzune froze for a moment before snapping back to reality, glaring at him with gritted teeth.

"I'm going to kill you one of these days!"

Chapter 264: Joint Training

The weather was perfect, with gentle sunlight casting scattered shadows across the entire track field.

Since it was a physical education class, there were no other students around, though a few piercing gazes flickered from the school building under the morning light.

At the front of the group, the P.E. teacher blew his whistle.

After taking attendance, he led Class A through a set of warm-up exercises.

By the time the warm-up routine was over, Kaoru's entire body had heated up.

He then joined the others in practicing formation drills in preparation for the upcoming sports festival.

Perhaps due to a week of practice, Class A had already grown familiar with the entry and exit formations, earning a satisfied nod from the P.E. teacher.

Soon after, the teacher dismissed the class, allowing students to practice their respective events at their own pace.

Katsuragi had already sent someone to the storage room beforehand to borrow the necessary equipment.

He also divided the track field into several sections so students could focus on different events.

At that moment, Kaoru noticed Sakayanagi Arisu approaching him with Kamuro Masumi in tow.

"Let's find a quiet place to practice," Sakayanagi suggested first.

"That's fine, but why are you wearing that outfit?" Kaoru eyed her gym clothes—a short-sleeved top paired with long pants.

The faint outline of her modest chest was barely concealed beneath the thin fabric, exuding a youthful energy.

"One must maintain the proper attitude," Sakayanagi smiled faintly.

Her silver-white short hair fluttered lightly in the breeze, resting by her ears.

Then, leaning on her cane, Sakayanagi headed toward a less crowded area.

Kaoru followed without hesitation.

"We can't practice the relay race or scavenger hunt together, so let's start with the three-legged race."

As soon as they arrived, Sakayanagi handed the rope to Kamuro.

"Tch. Feels like I've turned into a puppet between the two of you," Kamuro grumbled but obediently crouched down to tie their legs together.

She was also wearing a tracksuit, but perhaps for greater ease of movement, the bottom half was shorts.

Even without deliberately focusing on her ass, her long, straight legs were even more distracting.

The exposed skin of her thighs was dazzlingly white, looking incredibly supple and downright delicious.

Moreover, with Kamuro's movements, the hem of her clothes or the cuffs of her sleeves would occasionally reveal glimpses of smooth, fair skin, hinting at graceful curves.

Since she was squatting on the ground, Kaoru could even peer down her collar slightly, where the smooth nape of her neck seemed to conceal a pair of soft curves.

"How long are you going to make me squat here?" Kamuro noticed his gaze—girls were always sensitive to such scrutiny.

Kaoru silently squatted beside her, took the rope from her hands, and proceeded to tie their legs together.

"Mitoma-kun, are you starting with your right foot or left?" Sakayanagi chimed in from the side.

"I'll take the left, and Kamuro-san can take the right. Then we'll count 'one-two, one-two' together to keep the rhythm," Kaoru instructed out of habit.

"Hmm, quite the expert, aren't you?" Sakayanagi grinned at him.

"But right now, I'm the one giving orders. Kamuro-san is 165 cm tall, right? How tall are you, Mitoma-kun?"

"180 cm. Is there a problem?" Mitoma asked.

"Of course there's a problem. There's a height difference between you two, meaning your legs are naturally longer than Kamuro-san's, right?" Sakayanagi analyzed.

"At first, it might just be a one or two-centimeter gap, but it'll gradually widen. Your strides will get bigger and bigger, and eventually, Kamuro-san won't be able to keep up."

"It's not that exaggerated. I'll keep an eye on him," Kamuro retorted stubbornly.

Kaoru thought for a moment before speaking.

"Let's see how it goes in practice first."

"I'll cheer you on from the sidelines," Sakayanagi said with a faint smile. "The race distance is 100 meters, and the passing time is 45 seconds—faster than a normal walking pace. You'll have to run for it."

The so-called "passing time" was actually the slowest record from last year's sports festival.

It was unclear where she had dug up this information.

When Sakayanagi had shared these details with the class earlier today, even Kaoru had been surprised.

"Run it is, as long as no one drags me down," Kamuro said dismissively, subtly jabbing Kaoru in the process.

Standing side by side, Kaoru naturally brushed against her shoulder and caught a faint floral scent—not perfume, likely her natural fragrance or perhaps the body wash she had used that morning.

"Alright, ready—go!"

At Sakayanagi's command, Kaoru and Kamuro started moving.

Tap-tap—

They had barely run a few meters before tumbling to the ground together.

"As expected, it's not working," Sakayanagi remarked, shaking her head at their misfortune.

"No, no, it's his fault for running too fast!" Kamuro suddenly lifted her head.

"I wasn't paying attention, and the rope tripped me."

Kaoru lay sprawled on the grass, sighing.

"My bad. Let's try again."

With that, the two stood back up—only to fall again less than ten seconds later.

After over a dozen attempts, every single one ended in failure without exception.

Fortunately, the grass provided some cushioning, otherwise their knees would probably have been red by now.

"Maintain the right distance between you two, and keep your steps synchronized," Sakayanagi remarked with amazement.

"Aren't you two usually in perfect sync? Logically, you should have succeeded quickly."

"It's because this guy's pace keeps changing—sometimes fast, sometimes slow—so I don't even know how to match it," Kamuro said, lying on the ground and breathing lightly.

"No, you're the one who keeps changing speeds. I was the one trying to match you," Kaoru replied, lying beside her with a lifeless look in his eyes.

"Nonsense! I was the one trying hard to keep up with you!" Kamuro raised an eyebrow, her temper flaring after so many falls.

Kaoru gave her a look that said, "Yeah, sure, whatever," and stopped arguing.

"This is strange. Have you two been at odds recently?" Sakayanagi asked, puzzled.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Kamuro paused. "Besides, I have no reason to be in conflict with this guy."

Sakayanagi turned to Kaoru and sighed.

"Have you not made it up to Kamuro-san yet?"

"Could you not say something so gross?" Kamuro's face darkened.

"As you can see, Kamuro-san is quite the sulky child," Sakayanagi said with a slightly apologetic expression.

"It seems my earlier behavior made her unhappy."

"I am not jealous!" Kamuro shouted.

As the words fell, the surrounding crowd cast extremely peculiar glances in their direction.

Chapter 265: Were You Serious About Stepping Back?

Soon, Kamuro realized her voice had been a bit too loud.

Under the increasingly odd stares from those around her, she grew visibly uncomfortable and simply shut her mouth.

"Shall I give you two some time?" Sakayanagi's lips curled slightly, carrying a soft smile.

"Where are you going?" Kaoru asked.

"To buy drinks for you." Sakayanagi leaned on her cane and turned away without hesitation.

Kamuro silently sat up and untied the ropes binding the two of them.

"I'm not naive enough to believe her words, let alone a joke like that," Kaoru suddenly remarked.

Kamuro paused briefly before murmuring, "That has nothing to do with me."

"But I get the feeling you're really annoyed with me," Kaoru glanced at her.

His Emotion Perception reminded him that she was currently agitated.

"You're only realizing that now?" Kamuro's tone was stiff.

"A pervert who harasses girls—no one in the world would like someone like that."

"So that's how it is?" Kaoru said.

"I thought you were just irritated because Sakayanagi keeps ordering you around."

Kamuro brushed aside the hair falling near her cheek and lifted her chin.

"No, you're right. That does annoy me. Around the two of you, I feel like a puppet being manipulated at will."

Kaoru thought for a moment before speaking.

"I'll talk to Katsuragi later and ask him to assign you a different partner."

The fingers twirling her hair suddenly stilled.

Kamuro stared fixedly at Kaoru before replying nonchalantly after a pause, "Sakayanagi won't agree. She's very interested in you right now. If not for her condition, she'd probably be joining you on the field herself."

"But if you're unwilling, I can't force you to participate with me," Kaoru said calmly.

Kamuro curled her lips in displeasure.

"Hearing that from you feels weird. Weren't you the one who forced someone to show you their—"

"I never forced you."

"Didn't you?"

"Have I?"

"I don't know."

For some reason, the atmosphere gradually turned awkward and silent.

Just as Kaoru was about to speak after a moment of contemplation, Kamuro suddenly said.

"Tell me the truth—do you think I'm jealous?"

The girl remained seated, hands clenched tightly on her lap, trying to maintain a composed expression.

Yet her eyes betrayed the turmoil within.

"No. Jealousy requires that Kamuro-san likes someone and wants to monopolize them," Kaoru touched his cheek.

"But Kamuro-san definitely doesn't like me, right? At least, not as a member of the opposite sex."

Though his words aligned with what she wanted to hear, they inexplicably irritated her.

Kamuro averted her gaze slightly.

"Yeah, as long as you understand."

As she spoke, her chest tightened faintly, and her trembling lashes made her eyes seem half-lidded.

"But I quite like Kamuro-san," Kaoru gazed at the sky from where he sat.

"Maybe it's lust, but whether as the opposite sex or as a friend—I like you, Kamuro-san."

Her breath hitched, as if something had suddenly struck her.

Her entire body became sensitive, her cheeks burning hot.

Kamuro Masumi swallowed, her mouth dry and parched.

After a moment of silence, Kamuro shot him a sidelong glance before spitting out one words.

"Pervert."

"Is liking you considered perverted?" Kaoru asked, puzzled.

"Because you've said this kind of thing to many girls."

Though her tone was skeptical, Kamuro stated it as a fact.

Kaoru dodged the topic and instead asked, "Do you really not want to change partners?"

Kamuro frowned, visibly displeased. "If you have the guts, go ahead and replace me."

Kaoru glanced at the rope she had untied, his silence deafening.

"Break. We need a break," Kamuro said after a pause. "And stop changing the subject in front of me. How many girls have you... never mind, I don't care. Just don't say that word to me again."

"Can I still say it now?" Kaoru blinked. "From the very first second of enrollment, I've liked you, Kamuro-san. Your face is adorable, your legs are fair, and the way you talk—"

Before he could finish, Kamuro abruptly smacked him, cutting him off while muttering curses.

"Do you really have to spout such embarrassing lines to feel satisfied?"

"Cough, just telling the truth," Kaoru groaned, clutching his stomach.

Kamuro stood up, ignoring him, and strode toward the rest area with her long legs.

Kaoru lay on the ground for a while until a shadow suddenly fell over his face.

"Do you still need the rope?"

It sounded like Ai Morishita's voice.

He tilted his head up, meeting her calm gaze.

"Probably not anymore." Kaoru sat up, casually removing the rope from his calf.

"Are you practicing the three-legged race too?"

Aside from the mixed-gender three-legged race, there was also a group competition—girls with girls, boys with boys.

Kaoru had already found his partner.

"Tanihara's rope snapped, and there are no extras in class. Katsuragi said he'd try to borrow some straps next time," Ai explained, standing beside him.

"I saw you and Kamuro-san weren't practicing anymore, so I thought I'd ask if I could borrow yours."

"She's taking a break. Not sure if we'll practice later, but you can take it for now." Kaoru handed her the rope, the brief touch of her soft fingertips lingering.

Ai took the rope but didn't leave immediately.

Instead, she asked curiously, "Did you two fight?"

"Why do you ask?" Kaoru tilted his head.

"Because Mitoma-kun is a player, and everyone's been wondering when things would blow up between you." Ai seemed oblivious to his dark expression and added.

"Also, I'm curious—why don't Sakayanagi-san and the others get mad at you?"

"Because they're not my girlfriends yet." Kaoru paused. "You ask me, but I'd like to know the answer too."

Ai stroked her chin, murmuring to herself, "So you're a lecherous man, yet they don't mind your lechery. How strange."

With that, she took a small step back.

Since Morishita Ai could sense that Kaoru was staring at her thighs—she was wearing shorts, leaving her fair-skinned legs naturally exposed—she took a step back.

"Was my gaze that obvious?"

"No, I didn't sense any malice, but it still felt... perverted. Sorry, please forgive my reflexive reaction."

"But was stepping back really necessary?"

"Some instinct told me that if I got too close to you, I'd end up becoming perverted too."

"..."

Chapter 266: Let Me Guide You?

Morishita Ai left, and Kaoru sat on the ground, watching as clouds drifted by, casting shifting shadows over the shaded school building and the sunlit track field.

Soon, his gaze naturally landed on Kamuro in the rest area, who was silently sipping from a can of green tea.

"How did it go?" Sakayanagi stopped beside Kaoru, her clear eyes glinting with curiosity.

"You keep saying those things to her every day—how could she possibly handle it?" Kaoru sighed.

Even if Masumi wasn't the jealous or angry type, hearing it constantly would wear anyone down.

"Because I'm not sure what kind of feelings Mitoma-kun has for Kamuro-san." Sakayanagi leaned slightly forward, handing him a juice box.

"I didn't know what you liked, so I got you juice."

The moment Kaoru took the juice, he unconsciously recalled the sweetness of a certain girl, as if her taste still lingered on his lips.

But he quickly snapped out of it, shifting his focus.

"Seriously speaking, we're definitely friends."

"And me?" Sakayanagi sat beside him, legs pressed together, her cane resting at her side.

The distance between them was mere centimeters.

"Probably the kind of feeling where I can't wait to see you in a school swimsuit and then snuggle shamelessly in your arms." Kaoru caught a whiff of her faint fragrance, wondering why all girls smelled so sweet and soft.

Even though she knew he was a pervert, Sakayanagi still made a strange face at his words before breaking into a smile.

"Mitoma-kun can snuggle with me as much as you want right now~" The girl recklessly spread her arms.

"Even if you end up crying, that's fine too~"

Kaoru glanced at her barely-there chest.

This flat-chested loli might actually make a great mom.

But before he could pounce, Sakayanagi suddenly withdrew her arms and instead poked his cheek with a mischievous grin.

"You really are a hopeless pervert, getting tempted by someone as petite as me. How pathetic."

"First of all, I'm not a lolicon. Second, you're cute. And third, I'm not a lolicon—you just happened to be the one tempting me." Kaoru swatted away her teasing hand.

"Truthfully, I prefer girls with a bit more... breast."

Sakayanagi seemed to completely ignore his words, nodding sagely.

"Pervert, foot fetishist, lolicon, two-timer... No wonder Kamuro-san is upset. If it were me, I wouldn't even spare you a glance."

Kaoru's eye twitched.

"Did you come here today just to roast me?"

"I actually don't care about any of that," Sakayanagi Arisu gazed at him deeply.

"What interests me is your heart—the way it restrains your lust. You don't seem inexperienced; you must have gone through a lot. And despite those lecherous eyes of yours, I don't sense any malice in them."

After a brief pause, she added with a faint, ambiguous smile.

"In other words, what exactly is it that you lust for?"

Kaoru fell silent for a moment before replying, "Does lust need a reason now?"

"Of course not. On the contrary, at this age when youthful desires stir, both boys and girls naturally take an interest in the opposite sex," Sakayanagi chuckled.

"The problem is, you seem to be after more than just the physical."

"And what am I after?" Kaoru countered.

Sakayanagi found it amusing.

"Shouldn't that be my question to you?"

"Actually, I don't get it. You know how awkward Kamuro is, so why deliberately provoke her?" Kaoru steered the conversation back to an earlier topic.

"Are you asking about my thoughts on you and them?" Sakayanagi seemed to see right through him, her smile turning suggestive.

"Hmm, I don't know either. It just feels... fun. Spending time like this with you helps pass the dull days, I suppose."

"Your way of killing boredom is rather unique," Kaoru remarked dryly.

"Could it be that Mitoma-kun thinks I'm jealous?" Sakayanagi grew even more delighted.

"I'm not narcissistic enough to assume that."

"Mmm, but I might indulge some of Mitoma-kun's little... preferences. Consider it a reward."

"Can I lie on your lap and have you clean my ears?"

"So direct. You've been wanting this for a while, haven't you?"

"It's a wish of mine."

"Ah, but a wish isn't the same as a reward."

After a while, Sakayanagi suddenly dropped her playful tone and said offhandedly.

"This is just my personal feeling, but I hope you'll pay more attention to Kamuro-san. Right now, she doesn't even understand her own thoughts."

Given Kamuro Masumi personality, even if she fell for a man, it would likely take her a long time to realize it—she might even find her own feelings baffling.

Kaoru remained silent.

The wish he had fulfilled for Kamuro seemed to be just one.

...

Since they had agreed to practice daily, Class A returned to the gymnasium after school to meet with Class D.

Class D's top performers were undeniably skilled, but the problem lay in the many students with poor athletic abilities.

Sudou Ken, acting as their coach, had to rely on his temper to drill them in various events.

With Class A's assistance, he could finally relax a little.

Contrary to expectations, Sudou Ken welcomed Class A's involvement enthusiastically, declaring that he would claim the title of top student and make Horikita Suzune take notice of him.

Kaoru had hoped to practice the three-legged race again with Kamuro, but seeing her occupied with group drills, he gave up.

At that moment, Kushida Kikyo inexplicably latched onto him.

"Hey, Mitoma-kun, do you know any tricks for the three-legged race?"

The girl stood before him with a playful smile, her big chest hidden beneath her short sleeves yet visibly full and bouncy.

As she leaned slightly forward, it seemed as if they were about to burst forth.

Her angelic face was close, her eyes sparkling brilliantly.

Beside her was Mei yu Wang, a petite girl with twin tails, said to be an international student from china.

"Three-legged race?" Kaoru was puzzled, noticing that Karuizawa Kei and Sakayanagi Arisu were subtly glancing in their direction.

"Yes. Though we've been practicing hard these days, it feels like Mei and I just can't sync well. Our best time is only around 36 seconds." Kushida Kikyo sighed in frustration—this result clearly wasn't enough to guarantee first place.

"W-we sometimes fall... It hurts a little," Mei yu Wang added softly.

"That only happened at first! It's much better now," Kushida reassured the younger girl.

"It's all because I didn't consider Mei's feelings enough. I'll definitely be more attentive from now on."

Kaoru Mitoma glanced at Class D's lineup, then back at the two girls before him.

Were they asking him to coach them for the three-legged race?

But... he himself had just taken over a dozen spills today.

How was he supposed to teach them?

Chapter 267: Too Despicable

The two girls were nearly the same height, though their figures differed noticeably.

Kaoru studied their calves—both wore athletic shorts, their perky bottoms enticingly snug beneath the fabric.

Their black knee-high socks tightly outlined the slender curves of their legs, a sight both delicate and alluring.

Upon closer inspection, however, their thighs were clearly different.

Mei yu Wang was slightly more slender, while Kushida Kikyo carried a hint of plumpness, even revealing a glimpse of the tender skin along her inner thighs.

Facing his gaze, the two girls reacted subtly.

Mei yu Wang lowered her head, not daring to meet his gaze.

"Hehe, what do you think, Mitoma-kun?" Kushida seemed completely unbothered, placing her hands behind her back and leaning slightly forward, her chest prominently displayed before Kaoru.

A devilish smile played on her lips.

"I don't mind, but I'm not very familiar with the three-legged race. I can't guarantee you'll win first place."

For some reason, whenever he saw her chest now, Kaoru couldn't help but think of Horikita Suzune.

"Winning first place would be ideal, of course, but Mei and I are aiming for second or third—just a decent ranking would be enough." Kushida paused, glancing up to gauge his expression.

"Besides, I don't know who else to ask. Won't you help us, Mitoma-kun?"

By the end, her voice had softened into a pitiful plea.

Though he knew Kushida was putting on an act, Kaoru's heartbeat quickened involuntarily.

Humans were naturally drawn to beauty, especially when a cute girl spoke in such a soft tone.

"Fine, I'll practice with you." Kaoru caught sight of Ike Kanji and the other boys glaring at him with envy, while whispers spread among the girls.

Just like Sakayanagi Arisu's earlier actions, Kushida was now reinforcing her connection with Kaoru in front of everyone, making them subconsciously assume there was something special between them.

Not only that, but Kushida could also help fend off some troublesome situations—like confessions and advances from certain boys.

Thus, Kushida was quite pleased.

She had no intention of snatching anything away, but she wanted to secure her rightful place—the position she deserved.

As Kushida's good friend, Mei yu Wang might not fully grasp her thoughts, but she could sense her mood.

After studying in Japan for so long, she had learned to read the atmosphere.

"Great! Mitoma-kun, let's practice over in that corner, okay?" Kushida beamed, as if merely guiding Kaoru, and naturally took his hand, leading him toward a less crowded area.

Kaoru glanced in Kamuro's direction, hesitating to speak.

The latter coldly turned her face away, while Sakayanagi gave him a gentle smile.

On the other side, Karuizawa frowned in displeasure and was about to follow when Horikita suddenly approached her, asking to practice the three-legged race together.

"Can't you find someone else to practice with?"

"I've tried. Onodera-san and Mori-san couldn't keep up with me."

"Tch, what a pain."

Given Horikita's rising status in the class, Karuizawa couldn't easily refuse and reluctantly agreed to practice with her.

Still, her gaze kept drifting toward Kaoru.

Soon, she saw Kaoru and Kushida already tying their legs together, standing close in an intimate manner.

Karuizawa bit her lip, recalling Kaoru's words to her.

Her chest tightened with unease, and a flicker of anger rose within her.

After saying all that to her, how could he just play around with another girl?

Was this what he called taking responsibility?

"Karuizawa-san, please take this seriously." Horikita Suzune frowned, noticing Karuizawa's distracted expression with a stern look.

"I am serious. You're moving too fast," Karuizawa replied airily.

"The three-legged race is a cooperative game. When I move, you have to move too—that's teamwork." Suzune observed Karuizawa's gaze lingering on Kaoru Mitoma but didn't dwell on it.

After all, Suzune couldn't care less about who Kaoru ended up with.

Karuizawa reluctantly tried to keep up, but Suzune's pace was so brisk that she nearly stumbled several times.

In contrast, Kaoru and Kushida coordinated perfectly, smoothly crossing the finish line on their first attempt.

"Ehehe, Mitoma-kun is really amazing, finishing the race so effortlessly on the first try."

Since it was a three-legged race, Kushida had no choice but to press close to Kaoru.

Out of breath, she clung tightly to his arm.

"I think it's because you matched me well," Kaoru muttered, a shiver running down his spine.

Their flawless coordination could only mean trouble ahead.

"No, Mitoma-kun's rhythm was just right—patiently waiting for me to catch up. It felt like you cared more about my comfort than winning." Kushida giggled shyly before lowering her voice.

"So? How does it feel to have a girl clinging to you in front of everyone? Pretty nice, huh?"

She glanced at his reaction.

Ever since realizing she could affect him too, Kushida had grown increasingly smug.

So what? She could tease him just as well, make him squirm too.

The thought of how he always reduced her to a trembling mess fueled her determination to pay him back double—she refused to be the only one flustered.

Yet, Kaoru suppressed his reaction.

"Because Kikyo-chan is adorable. If I let you fall, I'd regret it forever."

He lowered his gaze, his eyes softening as he looked at her, his voice a whisper that tickled her ear.

In an instant, Kushida's body grew warm, her cheeks flushing crimson at the faint smile playing on his lips.

This guy was deliberately using that tender tone with her name—how underhanded.

Still, she didn't push him away.

Instead, she beamed.

"Asking Mitoma-kun for help was the right choice. Want to go again?"

She planned to fake a stumble, but Kaoru sensed her devious scheme instantly.

"We can take it slow. The most important thing is teamwork. No matter how well we do, your final partner is Mei-yu Wang, right?"

He glanced at Mei-yu Wang, who had been standing nearby.

Petite with twin tails, she exuded youthful energy, her slightly bashful face giving off a girl-next-door vibe.

Come to think of it, she resembled Shiranami Chihiro a little.

Chapter 268: The Invisible Girl

Kushida didn't show the slightest hint of anger on the surface, but she secretly pinched Kaoru's arm—not too hard, likely as a warning.

"Ahaha, Mei, let's give it a try too," she said, releasing Kaoru and quickly untying the rope.

"Mitoma-kun's rhythm earlier was really good. We can use it as a reference."

"Um, should we try chanting like the others? It seems like they sync up better when they do," Mei yu Wang hesitated, glancing at the rope in Kushida's hand.

She knew she wouldn't fall now, but girls were always a little nervous about these things.

"Sure! Let's count 'one, two, three,' then move forward, forward, and stop, then..." Kushida paused mid-sentence, as if covering something up, before smiling sweetly.

"Anyway, with Mitoma-kun as our guide, let's try again."

She definitely knew how to coordinate in a three-legged race—at the very least, she had her own experience.

After all, this girl had probably been participating in group activities since elementary school.

Kaoru watched as the two crouched on the ground, the girls' calves pressing against their soft thighs, tracing a faintly adorable curve.

The slight lift of their shorts-clad rear ends was especially noticeable, making him itch to give one a playful pat.

Before Kushida could notice, he tactfully averted his gaze—only to realize Kamuro was nowhere in sight.

Only Sakayanagi remained in the rest area.

Strange, did she leave already?

Since they'd already had a P.E. class earlier that day and were now practicing intensively in the afternoon, some students in the class couldn't keep up with the pace.

Katsuragi had allowed them to stay for a while before leaving if needed.

Besides, some still had club activities to attend.

Kaoru surveyed the students of Class D. Some of them were slacking off too—either outright giving up or pretending to put in effort.

Among them, Hasebe Haruka stood out the most to him.

She appeared enthusiastic, participating in every practice session, but she only did each exercise once before sitting on the floor as if to rest, pulling out her phone to play games.

In contrast, another girl's stamina was genuinely lacking.

Kaoru had witnessed Airi Sakura finish a 100-meter dash, only to collapse afterward, her face flushed red as she gasped for breath.

Seeing her like this, he even wondered if the weight on her chest was too much of a burden, creating excessive wind resistance while running.

Still, judging by Class D's overall performance, Airi could easily rank in the top three among her peers.

Yet in the eyes of others, her plain, outdated fashion made her seem like an invisible girl—as if she had no presence at all.

While this style might help her avoid attention, trouble always had a way of finding her.

Right now, Haruki Yamauchi was boldly sidling up to Sakura, saying something with an ingratiating smile while she fidgeted awkwardly, clearly unsure how to respond.

"Keep practicing, I'll take a quick walk around and be right back," Kaoru called out to Kushida, who was still practicing, before heading straight towards Sakura.

Kushida instinctively opened her mouth to ask where he was going, but upon seeing his destination, she couldn't help but purse her lips.

Of course.

What a pervert.

Remembering how Kaoru kept sneaking glances at Mei yu Wang, Kushida's mood soured even further.

Whether it's the big ones or the small ones, you cant help yourself, huh?

Kaoru had no idea she was silently criticizing him behind his back.

Just as he walked up beside Haruki Yamauchi, he heard the other boy pressuring her with a question.

"Hey, Sakura want to practice the three-legged race with me?"

Airi Sakura had been at a loss for what to do, but the moment she saw Kaoru's figure, her eyes lit up as if all her confidence had suddenly returned.

Mustering her courage, she refused, "I-I'm sorry, I didn't sign up for the assigned competitions, so... so I can't practice with you."

Haruki Yamauchi, unaware someone had approached from behind, pressed urgently.

"I know, but we can still sign up together for the assigned competitions. Don't you want the prizes, Sakura?"

"Eh, p-prizes? I probably wouldn't win any..." Sakura's face flushed slightly.

Her physical abilities were poor, and admitting this in front of Kaoru felt embarrassing.

"Of course you can win! With me here, there's no problem at all!" Yamauchi raised his voice a little in his agitation.

He'd thought this quiet girl would be easy to win over—why was someone intercepting his plans?

Sakura blinked in surprise, then heard him continue boastfully.

"I'm actually pretty amazing, you know? In elementary school, I made it to the national table tennis championships. In middle school, I was the ace pitcher for the baseball team with the number 4 on my back. If you team up with me, you'll definitely win lots of prizes!"

'Is he really that impressive?'

Kaoru hesitated momentarily.

He'd observed Class D's situation—Haruki Yamauchi's physical abilities weren't exactly terrible, but they could hardly be called outstanding either.

"Besides, think about it—even if you don't join the assigned competitions, you'll still have to participate in the three-legged race with your group, right?" Yamauchi thumped his chest.

"You haven't had anyone to practice with lately, have you? I can totally practice with you. How about it? Pretty good deal, huh?"

Sakura instinctively cast a pleading glance toward Kaoru, who sighed lightly before patting Yamauchi on the shoulder.

"Wait, this is a crucial moment—don't interrupt me!" Yamauchi seemed to have misunderstood something and shook off Kaoru's hand impatiently.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. I just have something to say to Sakura-san."

In an instant, Yamauchi froze completely, mechanically turning his head to see Kaoru standing calmly behind him.

"Mitoma-kun." Airi quickly moved behind Kaoru, like a rabbit retreating to its burrow when encountering danger outside.

"Y-you were practicing the three-legged race with Kikyo-chan, weren't you?" Yamauchi's face flushed red.

It was precisely because he'd seen Kaoru with Kushida Kikyo that he'd mustered what he thought was courage to take his first step toward Sakura.

"Why are you paying attention to me?" Kaoru found this strange.

"Do you... know me?"

From the start of school until now, the two had rarely crossed paths, let alone gotten to know each other.

Yamauchi looked at Sakura, but the girl wasn't looking at him at all—instead, she was hiding behind Kaoru, her fingers lightly clutching at his sleeve.

At that moment, Yamauchi heard the sound of his dreams shattering.

He'd been cuckolded!

For just a moment, his entire body turned cold.

The afternoon sun seemed too intense, making him dizzy.

His arms, which should have been raised, now hung limply at his sides.

His Adam's apple bobbed up and down as his heart pounded heavily in his chest, a sour taste spreading in his mouth.

Haruki Yamauchi tried to force himself to stay calm, but it was as if he had lost control of his muscles.

He could only manage a trembling smile, feeling utterly pathetic inside.

Airi Sakura was supposed to be an unnoticed girl he had his eyes on—no one should have been competing for her attention.

With just a little effort, she should have fallen for him.

Why... why had things turned out like this?

The more Haruki Yamauchi thought about it, the angrier he became.

Yet, he didn't have the courage to act recklessly in front of the other person—their statuses were completely different.

"Don't believe this bastard, Sakura!"

After uttering those words, Haruki Yamauchi used up almost all his strength and immediately bolted.

Kaoru froze for a moment.

He had expected Haruki Yamauchi to charge at him for a confrontation, or at the very least, lash out in frustration.

And he just... ran away?

Chapter 269: Wanting You to Experience Youth

It ended so abruptly that Kaoru almost wondered if Yamauchi had gone to gather reinforcements.

Only when he saw Yamauchi running towards the restroom did he realize the guy's might be a coward.

And he still dared to harass girls in his class?

Kaoru Mitoma's expression turned utterly bizarre.

Thankfully, he didn't yet know that the boys in Class D even openly discussed topics like boobs and ass in the classroom—otherwise, his expression would have been even stranger.

"Mitoma-kun, thank you," Airi Sakura whispered from behind him, then quietly let go of his sleeve when he wasn't paying attention.

The gesture was so light that Kaoru didn't even notice—only Yamauchi had seen it.

"Are you close with him?" Kaoru turned to face the girl.

She was also wearing a tracksuit, likely afraid of her body being seen if she sweated, so she deliberately wore long pants and a jacket.

Even so, it couldn't hide her big breast—it was just too noticeable.

"N-no... I've never even spoken to him," Airi Sakura replied cautiously, stealing glances at Kaoru's expression.

"If that's the case, just treat him as a stranger and reject him outright," Kaoru said, then suddenly sighed.

"No wonder you're so easily targeted—even I can't help but notice."

Airi Sakura's face flushed red as she mumbled, "P-please don't tease me... I was actually thinking of rejecting him, but..."

"But what?" Kaoru asked.

Airi Sakura couldn't find the words.

No one would care about the thoughts of someone so unnoticed anyway.

Seeing this, Kaoru changed the subject.

"Earlier, I saw how you ran. Even though you were last, I didn't expect you to push yourself all the way to the finish line."

Airi Sakura immediately felt embarrassed, her face turning crimson as she waved her hands.

"I-I'm sorry! I don't usually participate in sports... I-I'll practice more from now on!"

"Hmm? I'm not mocking you. You really did your best," Kaoru comforted her.

"Some people run out of energy halfway and end up just walking to the finish line, but you didn't do that at all, Sakura-san. You truly gave it your all."

Airi Sakura really wanted to point out that nobody walks during a 100-meter race—that usually only happens in middle or long-distance races—because she used to be one of those people too.

However, the way Kaoru praised her was so natural and pleasant to hear that it made Airi Sakura blush, unable to refute his words.

"Running speed can't improve much in a short time. Since your stamina isn't great, you should practice your breathing rhythm," Kaoru said before asking, "Also, I heard from that guy earlier that you still don't have teammates for the team event?"

"I do, but... not really," Airi replied awkwardly.

"I was the leftover one, and the teammate I got paired with, Inogashira-san, was also leftover. Neither of us knows how to train properly."

"What about the cavalry battle?"

"I have teammates for that too... It's just... they haven't invited me to practice with them yet."

"So right now, you can only practice individual events?"

Airi let out a small "Mm," her hands nervously clutching the hem of her clothes as if she had done something wrong.

She lowered her head slightly, bracing herself for a scolding.

But Kaoru had no intention of scolding her.

Having lived for so many years, he understood well that people's personalities—even their core values—were incredibly difficult to change.

You couldn't expect someone naturally introverted and timid to suddenly act boldly.

If that were possible, the world wouldn't have shut-ins to begin with.

"Sakura-san, do you want to make friends?" Kaoru suddenly asked.

"Eh? M-m-make friends?!" Airi was so startled she nearly bit her tongue.

"Yeah. I feel like there are plenty of people who'd get along with you," Kaoru said, thinking of the many friendless individuals he knew.

Airi seemed tempted for a moment but quickly shook her head.

"No way... Someone like me could never have friends."

"I always thought we were friends," Kaoru replied, surprised.

Airi's eyes widened in panic. "Th-that's not what I meant! I mean... no one besides Mitoma-kun would... No, no! What I mean is, no one but Mitoma-kun would ever want to be friends with me!"

Seeing how flustered she was, Kaoru decided not to tease her further and simply smiled.

"I don't know what you were like before, but high school is supposed to be a wonderful time. Don't you think it's a bit unfair if you're the only one enjoying your youth alone?"

Airi froze.

"Sometimes, you should share a little happiness with others—like me right now, or the friends you'll make in the future," Kaoru said softly.

"I don't think anyone who truly gets to know you could dislike you."

For some reason, her face burned hotter and hotter, as if on fire.

Yet, far from feeling repulsed, she only grew more flustered, a strange warmth surging through her body, making her skin tingle and leaving her restless.

Just meeting his gaze made her heart tremble uncontrollably.

Stranger still, her body felt lighter, her chest blazing.

No matter how hard she tried to hide it, she knew her face must be bright red—and she couldn't tear her eyes away from him.

Every time Kaoru stood before her, every time she saw his face, her heart threatened to leap out of her chest.

Airi held her breath.

"W-why would you say that?" she said in a very small voice.

"What?" Kaoru didn't quite catch it.

"I mean..." Airi mustered her courage, but upon seeing his expression, her words faltered.

"M-Mitoma-kun, why do you want to help me make friends?"

"Because it's a little selfish wish of mine. Could you indulge me, Sakura-san?" A faint smile played on Kaoru's lips.

"I'd like to introduce a few people to you."

Airi instinctively puffed out her cheeks.

She knew this wasn't his real reason, but the way he phrased it—just the right amount of gentleness—was something she had never experienced before.

It made her heart feel sweet, like a little bear stumbling upon honey in spring, craving more and more.

"Are they... Mitoma-kun's friends?"

She felt a mix of anticipation and unease.

Were they girls?

"I can't say yet. Not until Sakura-san practices hard and competes in the tournament." Kaoru paused.

"Consider this my personal request."

Ugh, this wasn't making her happy at all.

Airi pouted in dissatisfaction.

Chapter 270: Unpredictable

Her irritated little mannerism was oddly endearing.

Without thinking, Kaoru poked her cheek—the puffed-up balloon of her frustration instantly deflated.

At the same time, Airi's eyes widened slowly, a flush creeping up her face.

"Seeing Sakura-san like this reassures me. I'm sure people will want to be your friends." Kaoru nodded approvingly, as if he hadn't just poked her cheek.

Airi wanted to deny it, but she had already said so many discouraging things before.

If she kept it up, Kaoru might start disliking her.

After hesitating, she murmured, "Thank you..."

"No need for thanks. We're friends, aren't we?" Kaoru shook his head. "If you keep this up, I'll feel guilty—especially since I still don't know who's been harassing you."

Airi quickly interjected, "That's not true! Mitoma-kun has always helped me so much!"

Kaoru only smiled before changing the subject.

"If anything's bothering you, tell me. No matter what it is, I'll help you, Sakura-san."

"Mm!"

Airi felt happy, but then a pang of guilt struck her.

Someone as hopeless as her kept troubling Kaoru—she really didn't deserve it.

Maybe... she really needed to make up her mind this time.

But the moment she thought of that stalker harassing her, her newfound courage evaporated instantly.

She had no guts to face the doxxing.

How awful.

She never thought she'd be doxxed one day, even though she always tried so hard to disguise herself.

"By the way, are you going to keep practicing?"

"I should."

"Alright, I should get back to my own training too."

His words left Airi feeling a little lonely, but she didn't dare show it.

Instead, she forced a smile and bid him a quiet farewell.

In the girl's eyes, Kaoru was always surrounded by people—someone far more important than her.

He couldn't possibly stay by her side all the time, and she couldn't shamelessly cling to him either.

With a heavy heart, Airi resumed her practice.

Before long, her teammate Kokoro Inogashira returned, ready to practice the three-legged race with her.

Not only that, but the two teammates for the horseback battle also approached her, agreeing to practice together in tomorrow's P.E. class and simulate battles with other groups.

The sudden turn of events left Airi Sakura stunned for a while.

Though she didn't understand how it happened, it seemed she wasn't left out anymore?

Thus, for the next half month, Airi Sakura was no longer isolated.

By the time Kaoru finished handling Airi Sakura's situation, today's practice was almost over.

Since he had asked Kushida Kikyo for help, she smiled and extended a finger towards Kaoru, symbolizing that the master now owed his little dog a favor.

Kaoru's face darkened, but he reluctantly agreed.

After all, as the master, he had to be magnanimous sometimes.

The joint practice between the two classes ended.

While everyone was packing up, Kaoru left the indoor gymnasium.

On his way back to the dorm, he took out his phone.

"Today, we've already started gathering information from Class A and Class D, getting close to the students, and sending people to observe their practice sessions."

This was a message from Kiriya Ikuyo.

Scrolling further up the chat history, he had sent Kaoru a message yesterday—the notification sound Horikita Suzune had heard.

"Does Nagumo know yet?"

"It's unclear for now, but he'll find out sooner or later."

Kaoru pondered for a moment.

Both Katsuragi and Kiriya had given him news that wasn't too bad.

Nagumo Miyabi hadn't personally arranged the participation lists for each class, instead letting them handle it themselves.

Katsuragi interpreted this as Nagumo emphasizing his own strength, intending to openly crush the recent rumors and undercurrents targeting him.

That wasn't wrong, but Kaoru was thinking about what Nagumo would do next.

Taking such measures meant Nagumo didn't believe there would be challengers among the second-years—or at least, no students who could threaten him.

Because of this, Nagumo didn't react particularly strongly.

For him, his current goal was likely to face Horikita Manabu and satisfy his own desires.

However, Kaoru doubted Nagumo would simply let him off the hook either.

Aside from Horikita Manabu, Nagumo would probably prioritize targeting him.

Thus, while Nagumo remained indifferent toward the second-years, he might already be focusing his efforts behind the scenes on Kaoru or Horikita Manabu.

Setting aside Horikita Manabu, if Kaoru were in Nagumo's shoes, how would he deal with Class A in the sports festival?

Since he wouldn't let his own class suffer losses, strategies like Kaoru's 'kill a thousand enemies at the cost of eight hundred of your own' were obviously impossible.

Moreover, Nagumo would never personally intervene across grade levels.

The simplest method, of course, was to kill with a borrowed knife.

Among the first-years, which knife was the sharpest?

Kaoru first ruled out Class D.

Between the remaining two, Class B was too honest—leaving only Class C.

Ryuuen wasn't a greatsword, but more like a dagger hidden in the wrist—short, small, fast, and sharp, capable of striking unexpectedly and ending the fight in one move.

Especially when combined with the participation list, the effect would be even better.

"If he finds out, let me know immediately."

Soon, a reply came.

"Got it. But won't that risk alerting the enemy?"

It was evident that Kiriya Ikuyo had many concerns.

The strength of their rebel faction was too weak to stand against Nagumo and now they were practically forcing themselves to assist Kaoru Mitoma.

"It's fine. We must let Nagumo know."

Kaoru's idea was simple.

Rather than letting Nagumo operate in the shadows, it would be better to lure him onto his own turf—a familiar battleground where they could face off directly.

Moreover, he was deeply intrigued by Nagumo's ability to control situations.

How long would it take for this news to reach Nagumo's ears?

"We must let him know?"

Kiriya Ikuyo found it hard to comprehend, but out of respect for Horikita Manabu and Mitoma's past actions, he decided to suppress his doubts.

"Can your people keep a close eye on Nagumo?"

"We should be able to... but I can't guarantee it. Usually, he's the one keeping tabs on us."

"What about Kiryuin-senpai?"

"She won't get involved."

"In that case, have your people monitor his subordinates—like Tonokawa and Mizoaki. They might not be as vigilant."

"I'll do that."

Kaoru put away his phone just as the sun dipped below the horizon, its fiery hues burning through the clouds in a dazzling, warm spectacle.

Strange—he hadn't caught sight of Sakayanagi.

Had she gone to Class C?

He hesitated but chose not to use the tracking function.

He figured the frail little girl should be able to deduce what he was up to.