

Cote 331

Chapter 331: Are You Serious?

Though seeing Karuizawa Kei here was unexpected, considering the nature of ANHS, it wasn't really strange.

In fact, it would be more unusual not to run into a few familiar faces at Keyaki Mall.

"Where are you guys headed?" Karuizawa asked with lively interest. "Want to go to karaoke together?"

"Yeah, we were just about to go sing. Ichinose-san, you should come too." Chiaki Matsushita extended the invitation to both of them, a faint smile on her lips, her dimples barely showing.

"Karaoke at this time?" Ichinose blinked in surprise.

It was still afternoon—usually, girls preferred going for tea and desserts at a café.

"Well, I just got dumped." Karuizawa said it as if it were nothing.

"I recently broke up with Hirata-kun, so I wanted to go out and unwind."

Ichinose's eyes widened.

She knew about Karuizawa relationship with Hirata Yosuke—they were practically the fastest couple to go public in their year, to the point where even Class B students had heard about them.

Yet, she never expected to hear about their breakup today, straight from Karuizawa mouth.

"Ah, sorry, I didn't know about that." Ichinose clasped her hands apologetically.

"But I really have to head back now. I don't have time to join you."

"Alright."

A flicker of disappointment passed through Karuizawa eyes before she quickly followed up.

"In that case, can we borrow Mitoma-kun for a bit?"

'Heh, didn't see that coming, did you?'

She was feinting east while attacking west.

Sure enough, Ichinose froze.

"I'm not really good at singing," Kaoru said regretfully.

Compared to his idols, he was practically tone-deaf.

"What does that matter? It's more fun with more people! Besides, you've already finished discussing student council stuff with Ichinose-san, right?" Karuizawa finally revealed her true intentions.

"You should relax once in a while. Think of it as a little mixer between Class D and Class A."

Kaoru found it amusing.

Wasn't she worried about raising suspicions?

Inviting a guy from another class so eagerly right after a breakup made her seem a little too desperate.

Next to her, Chiaki Matsushita was already wearing a strange expression.

"No, I still have things to do."

Karuizawa Kei's expression fell for a moment, but she didn't give up.

After rolling her eyes thoughtfully, she asked with some confusion.

"Is this about the recent exams?"

Kaoru wasn't sure what she was getting at.

After thinking for a while, he replied: "We've already started preparing test papers. After the minor exams, our class will probably have a review period too."

There was no need to hide this information—anyone could easily find out about a class's activities with minimal investigation.

Therefore, Kaoru saw no reason to keep it secret.

"Wow, as expected of Class A students!" Karuizawa's eyes sparkled.

"So Mitoma-kun will be preparing for review sessions too?"

"I'll probably help my partner with tutoring," Kaoru replied, beginning to sense her intentions.

"People with high academic abilities really have it easy. My grades with Matsushita and the others are terrible," Karuizawa suddenly sighed.

This wasn't entirely an act—she was genuinely worried about this matter.

Kaoru glanced at Chiaki Matsushita, who gave an awkward smile in response.

However, Chiaki didn't find the situation particularly strange.

Previously, Hirata Yosuke had been the one tutoring them.

Now that Karuizawa and Hirata had broken up, meeting again would likely be uncomfortable.

Chiaki figured this was probably what was troubling Karuizawa.

That said, Chiaki didn't really understand why Karuizawa had broken up with Hirata in the first place.

Both parties had kept the reason completely secret—no one knew what had happened.

"It's fine. If there's anything you don't understand, you can ask me. Even though we're in different classes, I'm happy to help."

"Eh, really?"

"Really."

Watching Karuizawa's visibly happy reaction, Ichinose Honami felt something was slightly off, though she didn't dwell on it.

Instead, she offered them a warm smile.

"I can help too. If it's just tutoring, that's no problem at all."

"I was just wondering what to do about this—this is perfect!" Karuizawa suddenly seemed a bit embarrassed.

"But isn't this too much trouble for you?"

"Not at all. Feel free to ask me anything," Ichinose replied cheerfully. She always enjoyed being helpful.

"Hehe, I won't hold back then."

In a moment unnoticed by Ichinose, Karuizawa shot Kaoru a mischievous smile.

"Please take care of me~"

What is this girl planning now?

Didn't I warn her that I'm dangerous?

Kaoru felt an unusual pang of headache.

Even he sometimes struggled to navigate such complicated relationships.

"Ichinose-san, Mitoma-kun, bye for now!"

Soon after, Karuizawa waved at them both, her face beaming with smiles.

"Karuizawa-san, let's go. If we don't hurry, all the private rooms will be taken."

"Coming right away."

The moment she turned away, Karuizawa's cheerful expression vanished completely.

With an impassive face, she followed after Chiaki and the others.

The school's tracking feature sure is convenient...

...

With their date interrupted by Karuizawa's appearance, the two had no reason to stay at Keyaki Mall any longer and could only return to the dormitory.

The walk back was mostly silent.

"When's your birthday?" Kaoru finally broke the quiet atmosphere.

"July 20th... this year's birthday has already passed," Ichinose Honami gazed at the fiery sunset clouds in the sky.

"Before I knew it, I've already turned sixteen."

Kaoru fumbled in his pocket for a moment before pulling out a small object.

"Sorry, I completely forgot about this and didn't prepare a gift. Consider this my apology."

When Ichinose finally saw what he was holding, her face immediately flushed with warmth.

With a mix of embarrassment and annoyance, she asked, "What exactly does this mean?"

"I got it from a blind box draw. Too bad there was only one, otherwise we could have matching rings." Kaoru took her small hand and slowly slid the "Wedding Ring" he'd previously drawn onto the middle finger of her left hand.

"You... we... haven't even..." Ichinose became completely flustered, quickly covering her mouth.

After struggling for words, she finally managed to ask, "Are you serious about this?"

"I'm serious now, and I'll be even more serious in the future," Kaoru said, looking into her eyes.

"But as you said, our relationship can't be like an ordinary one."

Ichinose Honami's expression was complicated.

To say she didn't care would be a lie—no one could be indifferent to their boyfriend's divided affections.

Yet, she couldn't bring herself to make a choice either.

"When's your birthday, Kaoru?"

"July 1st."

"That's already passed, hasn't it?"

"There's always next year."

"That's not the point! I had no idea about this at all!" Ichinose Honami was upset, though she wasn't sure who she was angry at.

"I'm supposed to be your girlfriend, yet I know nothing about you."

Kaoru blinked.

Truthfully, he was the same.

Then, as if making up her mind, Ichinose Honami asked.

"Can I see your room?"

Her cheeks flushed slightly as she spoke.

Chapter 332: Give Me the Key

"U-um, excuse me."

With nervousness in her heart, Ichinose Honami cautiously stepped into Kaoru Mitoma's room.

The first things she noticed were his bed and the laptop on the desk.

There didn't seem to be many personal belongings.

Though there were kitchen utensils, it looked like he only cooked occasionally.

The trash bin was nearly empty, and the entire room was spotless, the floor faintly gleaming.

"I'll make some tea," Kaoru's voice startled her, making her shoulders tremble slightly.

She hadn't thought much before impulsively coming up here.

Well, Ichinose Honami had acted on impulse, driven by her emotions at the moment.

Perhaps it was Sakayanagi Arisu's words, or maybe something Kaoru had just done, but her emotions had surged intensely.

Their relationship had progressed too quickly, skipping some of the usual steps.

Like birthdays—how could they be a couple yet know nothing about each other's birthdays?

It was strange.

While Kaoru went to make tea, Ichinose Honami slowly approached his desk.

There was a laptop on it, seemingly rarely used.

When she touched it, dust clung to her fingertips.

No gaming consoles, no otaku merchandise, no manga or DVDs.

On one side of the desk was a bookshelf lined with numerous books.

Snow Country, Paradise Lost, Anna Karenina, Murder on the Orient Express, Death on the Nile, A Study in Scarlet, The Decagon House Murders, The Long Goodbye, The Tragedy of X...

Ichinose Honami pulled out one of the books and skimmed the preface, surprised to find it was a mystery novel.

Did Kaoru usually enjoy reading these?

It wasn't like most boys.

Many guys in her class talked about games and anime, and a few even said they wanted to see their favorite idols live.

As she flipped through the pages, she noticed Kaoru had left notes inside—even cheekily marking the killer’s identity, making her lips twitch slightly.

Just as she placed the book back, she turned and saw Kaoru holding a tray with barley tea.

"Does Kaoru usually go to the bookstore?"

There was a bookstore in the Keyaki Mall.

Although Ichinose Honami had never been there, she could recognize the store’s label on the bookshelf—clearly, even the shelf had been purchased from that shop.

"Occasionally. Actually, I’ve already read these books—just bought them as collectibles." Kaoru placed the barley tea on the table.

These books were ones he had casually picked up while accompanying Shiina Hiyori to choose her own reads.

Especially when he had theatrically picked up Junichi Watanabe’s *Lost Paradise*, discussing the plot with Shiina Hiyori in an overly serious manner, just to watch her face flush red.

"Did you go with Shiina-san?" Ichinose picked up his barley tea.

Since she was wearing a dress, sitting properly on the floor was a bit inconvenient, so she settled on his bed instead.

Kaoru found it strange—was he in a state of being 100% mind-read now?

Sakayanagi Arisu could also read minds, and now even Ichinose Honami could do it?

"I guessed it." Ichinose blinked at him, amused.

"Weren't you two always discussing mystery novels during summer break? Shiina-san even lent me a book once. I read it afterward and talked with her about it a lot."

"Shiina-san doesn't have many people to talk to in Class C. She's usually either in the library or inviting me to the bookstore." Kaoru sighed.

"But I think it's because of her personality that the school placed her in Class C."

Class C and Class D were similar—full of party-goers and delinquents.

Forget reading, they probably only knew Conan and had no clue about Sherlock Holmes.

"I thought you two didn't interact much." Ichinose shot him a sideways glance.

This guy was way too familiar with Shiina Hiyori.

Kaoru sat beside her, watching her slightly unnatural expression with a faint smirk.

"More than that, I'm curious about what you're thinking. You know full well that in a situation where it's just the two of us, I might do something bad to you."

Though her dress was light and airy, Ichinose could feel her body growing warm.

Her exposed shoulders had a delicate, smooth sheen, making her appear fragile and petite.

When he took her hand, the girl's chest tightened.

Her fair cheeks gradually flushed, her breathing growing rough and uneven.

Her once-clear, beautiful eyes trembled, veiled with a faint haze of shyness.

Her snow-white legs lightly pressed together, her fingers unconsciously brushing over her ring—it felt a little hard.

As Kaoru drew closer, even her slender feet reacted, unsure where to rest.

Would she face his merciless teasing again today?

"Even so... I still wanted to come into Kaoru's room. It's exactly as I imagined." Ichinose pressed her lips together firmly, her long lashes trembling, yet her voice held no hesitation.

"Don't you find it boring?" Kaoru stroked the girl's small hand.

Unlike the bony feel of a man's, even though it was petite, her hand was soft to the touch.

"I keep wondering what Kaoru usually does in his room, whether he dreams when he sleeps, what he sees when he wakes up each day, whether he puts on his shirt or pants first, what he thinks when the weather outside is bad, if he ever considers cooking for himself..." Ichinose Honami grew slightly embarrassed.

"Every corner here carries your presence, and I can't help feeling like I've accidentally intruded into your world."

Kaoru studied her for a moment, making her blush furiously before smiling.

"Honami, you have the makings of a mother."

"Eh, m-mother?" Misunderstanding his meaning, Ichinose's face turned even redder.

"S-suddenly saying that... I'm completely unprepared!"

"I rarely dream when I sleep, and I don't snore, grind my teeth, or sleepwalk." Kaoru pointed to the desk and bookshelf.

"Though there are many books here, I don't read them unless they're new to me."

"The first thing I do when I wake up is check my phone, then wash up. If I bought ingredients the day before, I'll make a bento to bring to class."

"After returning, sometimes I use my computer, sometimes I stare out the window, and sometimes I go out for a stroll."

Hearing this, Ichinose bit her lip, her eyes softening as she whispered.

"Could you give me a spare key?"

"A key?" Kaoru was taken aback by the sudden shift in topic.

"I'm your girlfriend. I should be taking care of your life." Ichinose suddenly became serious, something within her stirring—just as she had cared for her younger sister during their mother's hospitalization.

Kaoru looked at her strangely. "I can give you one, but I don't think my life is particularly dull."

Before, he had been busy with idol activities, but now that the agency was gone, his current lifestyle just seemed a bit odd.

"That's not for you to decide." Ichinose thought of her plush caterpillar.

"We could put a stuffed toy on the bed, maybe a potted plant by the window... Actually, how about I come over in the evenings?"

"To tuck me in at night?" Kaoru chuckled.

Ichinose pressed her thin lips together, her eyes shimmering as she murmured.

"If you promise not to do anything too... improper, I don't mind helping you sleep."

Kaoru heart skipped a beat.

"What counts as 'too improper'?"

"Too improper is... too improper."

She was flustered, how could she possibly say it out loud?

Seeing the girl's smooth blushing cheeks, Kaoru couldn't resist kissing one.

"Does this count as too improper?"

His sudden attack startled Ichinose, the kissed spot burning as she pouted.

"You're so mean, teasing me again!"

"You being this cute is unbearable." Kaoru wrapped his arms around her slender waist—her skin was so smooth, her body soft and fragrant.

"But I won't do anything too bad. It's too early for that. I still owe you something."

Feeling his warmth, Ichinose quickly relaxed, lifting her gaze to his face as she whispered.

"What if I forced you to choose?"

"Before that, I'll make sure you can't say such things." Kaoru kissed her lips.

Her moral compass was indeed strong, but her weaknesses were just as apparent.

If Amikura got involved, she probably wouldn't even let Kaoru make a choice—she'd likely withdraw on her own.

However, humans are greedy creatures.

So-called rationality is merely neurons and nerve impulses generated by the brain.

The sensation of sugar triggers dopamine, compelling humans to indulge in more sweetness for the sake of pleasure.

Pavlov's conditioned dogs, Stockholm syndrome where victims fall for their abusers, and corporate wage slaves—all these phenomena prove that humans are no different from other animals at their core.

The mark Kaoru left inside her surged the moment their lips met, like a fruit quietly ripening, gradually releasing its unique fragrance.

The intoxicating sweetness was utterly mesmerizing.

The rush of dopamine filled her with pleasure, the restlessness in her body driven by hormones—not just from Kaoru's skill, but also from the deepest recesses of her own desires.

Ichinose didn't realize she was sinking.

She knew she didn't dislike this feeling—in fact, it was rather comforting.

It seemed the worse the act, the more pleasurable it became.

Yet, she didn't realize that physical sensations could also sway human consciousness.

From body to mind, Kaoru had no intention of relinquishing either.

The taste of Ichinose her soft lips, the way her fingers unconsciously tightened around his hand, her trembling body—every detail was intoxicating.

"I'm greedy. The more you resist, the more I want to force you to stay with me," Kaoru whispered in her ear, sending a shiver down her spine.

Ichinose eyes glazed over, her lips slightly parted as she murmured weakly.

"No... this can't... you're going too far..."

For a girl with such strong morals, Kaoru sighed softly.

Unless he dragged her down completely, her resolve would remain unshaken.

Chapter 333: The Unwelcome Ms. Kikyou

The steam from the barley tea swirled in the air, dissolving into the soft glow of the LED lights like dandelion fluff drifting in the breeze.

Outside the window, dusk gently brushed against the pale sky, thin clouds tinged with a wine-red hue.

The flowing light cast illusory shadows across the room's walls, while the wind rustled the curtains but failed to dispel the heat between them.

Ichinose panted lightly, her heart pounding.

She had done something wrong with him again—just a kiss, yet her entire body burned.

His scorching palms gripped her bare shoulders, searing her skin, sending waves of tingling numbness down her spine.

Now she understood why every romance story featured a kissing scene between the leads.

This feeling was beyond incredible—like a springtime bear stumbling upon a jar of honey, unable to resist taking another taste.

The mingling of their breaths, the intimate proximity of their bodies, his burning exhales, firm chest, strong arms, and his scent—this electrifying tension sent Honami's pulse racing, her face flushing, her body tingling as if struck by lightning.

If it were another man, she felt she definitely wouldn't have these kinds of feelings.

Girls are creatures of emotion—if it were a stranger or someone she disliked, she wouldn't feel the slightest bit of happiness or excitement.

Ichinose Honami didn't dislike Kaoru Mitoma.

Though at first, she had quite the aversion to this perverted foot fetishist—she never said it out loud, but deep down, she found it humiliating.

However, her impression of Kaoru gradually changed over time.

Perverted foot fetishist or not, this man wasn't just lustful.

From certain conversations they'd had, she realized he possessed an inexplicable gentleness.

This gentleness wasn't about Kaoru being gentlemanly or acting like a universal charmer.

Rather, Ichinose realized that he completely understood her grievances, sadness, unhappiness, and all other negative emotions.

Most of the time, what people express is never the literal content of their words, but their longing to be understood.

Kaoru understood what she was thinking.

He wouldn't blame her for her mistakes, nor would he interfere with her decisions—he simply encouraged her to consider things from a different angle.

This unique gentleness was something Ichinose Honami felt she should have noticed much earlier.

Even back in the student council office, Kaoru could have left with the recording—so why had he exposed himself?

He could have blackmailed Nagumo Miyabi afterward, then turned around and used it against Ichinose Honami, killing two birds with one stone.

Instead, he had recklessly jumped out—what could that possibly achieve?

Ichinose Honami licked her lips, her eyes gradually glazing over with a hazy moisture.

The only thing that could accomplish was making her his girlfriend... and doing wicked things to her.

"How does this kind of wickedness feel?" Kaoru right hand caressed the girl's delicate face, his fingertips brushing against her smooth skin, her slightly heated lips.

"Even if we don't do that, there are plenty of other outrageous things we can do. It's too late to regret it now."

"Haven't you done enough wicked things to me already?" Ichinose murmured softly.

"Honestly, I don't even know what to do anymore. I'm not like you—I have no experience. I don't know how to be in a relationship, or whether I should refuse you now. Even coming into your room was just a spur-of-the-moment decision."

"Truthfully, I've never been in a proper relationship either," Kaoru took a deep breath.

"To be honest, you're my second girlfriend."

He wasn't lying. I

chinose Honami froze for a moment, a shiver running down her spine as countless images flashed through her mind.

"Honami, how was today's date?" Kaoru suddenly asked.

Snapping out of her daze, Ichinose thought for a moment before answering quietly.

"It felt like playing a game. The monsters and stages at the beginning were so easy... but the boss now is terrifying."

"I see." Kaoru couldn't exactly argue with that.

To a girl, a perverted foot fetishist was naturally a boss-level threat.

And so, the wicked boss extended his claws once more, wrapping an arm around the girl's slender waist.

With a startled gasp from her, her full, firm chest pressed against the man's torso.

Then, the boss unleashed his terrifying magic—lightly nipping at her fair neck as if savoring the girl's tenderness.

A faint blush spread across her skin, her lips pursing as soft, sweet whimpers escaped her throat.

The boss's fingers threaded through her hair, his dark eyes seeming to reflect only her.

As he drew slightly closer, their breaths mingled, and her moist lips were captured.

The wandering hand that had been wrapped around her slender waist began to move, trailing down her back until it reached the base of her spine.

Though the scenery behind her remained unseen, the girl's pert, well-developed backside was undeniably alluring.

Under the boss's teasing, her body leaned forward slightly, her breathing growing erratic.

"Honami, is this okay?" The boss's voice nipped at her sensitive ear, like a demon tempting an innocent girl.

Ichinose Honami snapped back to reality—this guy had already seized the plump "white rabbits" at her chest.

She couldn't help but find it a little funny.

Was this a case of asking for forgiveness rather than permission?

"Pervert." The girl blushed, responding softly to the infuriating boss.

"I... I don't know... Even if we do it, I wouldn't hate you..."

Sometimes, a girl saying she "wouldn't hate" you was practically the same as saying she liked you.

Or perhaps, she simply didn't know what to do, so she left the decision to him, unwilling to think about the consequences.

In the dimming twilight of the room, the girl's skin glowed like flawless white jade, without a single blemish.

Her long hair cascaded over her shoulders, brushing against the faint blush on her slender neck.

The off-shoulder dress made her look delicate and soft, as if she could be devoured in one bite.

And more than that—her breast now rested in Kaoru's palm, allowing him to feel just how enticing the warm tits in his arms truly was.

From a primal instinct, Kaoru knew he couldn't let her go.

But this still wasn't right.

She had too many reservations in her heart—she was just avoiding thought, just evading reality.

"Honami..."

Just as Kaoru spoke, his phone buzzed in his pocket, the ringing tone cutting through the moment.

Snapping back to her senses, Ichinose flushed crimson and lightly pushed against Kaoru's shoulders.

With no other choice, Kaoru released Ichinose and silently pulled out his phone.

Sure enough, a certain name flashed on the screen.

"You're so slow answering the phone, you pervert. I need to pee," Kushida's voice came through the other end, her habitual complaint directed at Kaoru.

"I feel like I'm about to break. Now even going out requires calling you first."

'Actually, you don't have to call right now,' Kaoru thought to himself.

"Hey, hey, hey, can't you hear me?" Kushida Kikyo was clearly dissatisfied with his silence.

"I can hear you, but I don't have time to go out and play with you," Kaoru replied dryly, relieved that he was on speakerphone.

"Huh? Why would I invite you out to play?" Kushida suddenly felt disgusted.

"Are you planning to play that game again? I let it slide last time, but it's not acceptable at school. It's too dangerous here—even if we avoid the cameras, someone might still see us."

"Exactly. I've been busy reviewing lately. Aren't you preparing for exams too, Kushida?" Kaoru nodded toward Ichinose Honami, who was blushing furiously and didn't dare make a sound.

"What review?" Kushida was getting annoyed.

Why was his response so off-topic?

Just as she was about to scold him, Kushida suddenly realized something was off.

"You damn foot fetishist! Lolicon! Pervert! Pig! You degenerate!"

Kushida Kikyo's face burned red as well, and she quickly hung up.

Wasn't this guy supposed to be alone in his dorm at this time?

Chapter 334: Class C's Designation

The situation was a little awkward now.

The moment Kaoru set down his phone, he saw Ichinose straightening her clothes, her face still tinged with a faint flush.

"Was that Kushida?"

After months of conditioning, Kushida had grown accustomed to calling him to report in, from morning till night.

Unless someone was nearby, she would always call.

Without his orders, Kushida felt completely out of sorts.

Pavlov's dog was probably trained the same way.

However, Kaoru couldn't possibly explain the truth.

Not only might Ichinose not accept it, but Kushida would definitely lose her mind.

"They wanted to invite Kamuro, but she refused. So they thought they could try a roundabout approach through me," Kaoru said without hesitation, using Masumi's name as a shield.

After all, she had been quite popular among the girls lately, and everyone was curious about her.

"Are you preparing for review now?" Ichinose asked, then quickly realized she might be prying.

"I mean, am I bothering you?"

"Don't worry about it. Actually, Sakayanagi asked me to help with setting exam questions," Kaoru took a deep breath.

"You're preparing for the quiz and the designation too, right?"

Ichinose stole a glance at his expression and hesitated.

"If we in Class B designate you, Kaoru, would you...?"

"It's fine, it's all the same," Kaoru interrupted her. "What's between us is between us. What happens between classes is a separate matter. No matter what decision you make, I won't care about what happens between Class A and Class B."

"I understand," Ichinose smiled, though a shadow flickered in her eyes.

As Kaoru was thinking of how to salvage the mood, the girl rose from the soft bed and stood gracefully before him.

Beneath her white skirt, her slender legs were pristine, and the fading twilight behind her cast a radiant glow upon her hair.

"I know it's too early to say this, but there are too many girls around you, Kaoru. I have to invite you sooner rather than later."

As she spoke, Ichinose Honami gently touched the ring on her finger.

The setting sun outside the window pierced through the crimson clouds, casting its glow on her delicate face, making it seem within arm's reach.

"December 25th... Christmas. Kaoru, will you go out with me?"

It wasn't a request but a firm statement.

Ichinose Honami had clearly made up her mind.

She knew that if she hesitated any longer, nothing would change—only pain and regret would follow.

She couldn't stay stagnant forever.

She had to move forward bravely.

Kaoru looked at her expression and smiled before nodding.

"I wouldn't have it any other way."

...

With two days left until the exam, Class A was still deliberating over which class to nominate.

The debate was between Class B and Class C.

Sakayanagi Arisu advocated for nominating Class B, while Katsuragi Kouhei and Shinji Matoba leaned toward Class C.

This kind of division wasn't expected to emerge so soon, yet barely a month after the sports festival, the class had already split into opposing factions.

Just as Class A was about to take a vote, Mashima quickly delivered a piece of news.

Both Class C and Class B had nominated Class A.

Due to the overlapping nominations, the school decided that Class C and Class B would draw lots the day after tomorrow to determine the final opposing class.

"Huh? Seriously? Class C is challenging us? Shouldn't it be us challenging them?" Totsuka Yahiko was baffled, and many students shared his confusion.

"That's the current outcome. The only classes that haven't submitted their nominations yet are yours and Class D," Mashima said.

"The deadline is the day before the exam—so by the day after tomorrow."

"This is strange. Class C's academic ability should be weaker than ours. I can't understand their reasoning," Shinji Matoba muttered, frowning.

If it were him, he would never dare to challenge Class A—the risk was too high.

Only Katsuragi wore a solemn expression.

He quickly realized one possibility—only one person could have given Class C the confidence to nominate Class A.

"Heh. This works out perfectly. Whether we draw Class C or Class B as our opponent, it aligns exactly with our earlier discussion," Sakayanagi Arisu said, a faint smile playing on her lips.

"Now, all we need to do is nominate Class B. There's no better choice than this."

Since the outcome of the draw was uncertain, nominating either Class C or Class B could result in mutual nominations—where the opposing class also nominates Class A, leading to both sides setting questions for each other.

In their earlier discussions, the plan had been to nominate Class C while accepting Class B's nomination.

But Class C's sudden nomination disrupted their strategy.

Without knowing the exact result, nominating Class B became the optimal choice.

Thus, the scenario could unfold as follows: Class B nominates Class A, and Class A nominates Class B.

In this case, Class A would have a high chance of taking Class B's 100 points, thereby suppressing Class B and any potential challengers.

If they nominated Class C instead, even if they took Class C's 100 points, Class A might not widen the gap with Class B.

Winning this special exam would be meaningless—like a victory with no real gain.

"Katsuragi, what's your take on this?" Shinji Matoba couldn't decide and wanted to hear Katsuragi thoughts.

Katsuragi gaze was complicated.

He suspected that Ryuen must have received assistance from Nagumo Miyabi.

After all, the school allowed students to seek help from others, and even if upperclassmen got involved, they couldn't complain.

From this perspective, following Sakayanagi Arisu's suggestion to nominate Class B might actually be a good thing.

"Let's take a vote by show of hands," Katsuragi quickly made a decision.

Since Kaoru hadn't signaled him, it meant this matter could be decided at his discretion.

"Those in favor of nominating Class B, raise your hands now."

Swish—

All of Sakayanagi's faction raised their hands immediately, followed by some neutral students.

The Katsuragi faction members all turned to look at Katsuragi, awaiting his instruction.

Katsuragi knew he should oppose Sakayanagi's decision.

Agreeing now would mean conceding psychological ground to her.

"K-Katsuragi-san!?"

Totsuka Yahiko's face was full of shock as he stared wide-eyed at his leader raising his hand.

"I agree to nominate Class B." Katsuragi was very clear—with upperclassmen involved, Class C's current academic capabilities had to be taken seriously.

There was no need to waste Class A's points here.

Shinji Matoba didn't fully understand the situation, but he sensed Class C might have some hidden dangers, which made him hesitate.

That's why he had asked Katsuragi for guidance.

Seeing Katsuragi raise his hand honestly shocked him.

"I also agree to nominate Class B." Matoba soon raised his hand too.

He completely understood Katsuragi's reasoning—Class A was currently in first place; there was no need to take unnecessary risks.

That Katsuragi could make this decision showed he only had the class's interests at heart, not getting bogged down in factional struggles.

This realization gave Matoba mixed feelings.

"Dammit! If Katsuragi-san agrees, then I agree too!"

As Totsuka raised his hand, the rest of the Katsuragi faction gradually followed suit.

In moments, over half of Class A had their right hands raised high.

Mashima observed this scene silently before speaking.

"So your nomination target is Class B? No objections?"

"Please report this to the school, Mashima-sensei." Sakayanagi Arisu smiled faintly, though her gaze drifted toward someone in the back.

Kaoru showed no reaction.

After the class meeting ended, he took out his phone—the second-year special exam had officially begun.

Moreover, Nagumo Miyabi had realized there was a mole in his class and was conducting a thorough investigation.

He'd even deliberately leaked some bait information to lure the mole out.

However, Kaoru had long instructed Iijima to remain calm, send no messages, and continue lying low quietly.

Thus, even today, Nagumo still hadn't uncovered the mole's identity.

After finishing that day's classes, Kaoru visited the student council to assist the officers with their duties.

Nagumo didn't appear at the council.

According to Kiriya, he was preparing reform proposals—essentially gathering PowerPoint materials to persuade the school.

....

When the exam results came out, the final nomination outcomes were announced.

Classes C and B had overlapping nominations, resulting in Class C being randomly selected to nominate Class A, while Class B had to renominate.

Class A's nomination of Class B had no overlaps—their nomination succeeded.

Class B and Class D both nominated Class C, resulting in a duplicate nomination.

Considering the possibility of exceptions in the lottery outcome, the school intervened with mandatory measures.

In the end, Class C accepted Class D's nomination, while Class B nominated Class D.

Thus, the order for this special exam was finalized.

The most surprising development was Class C's decision to nominate Class A.

Many suspected Ryuen was making a suicidal attack, doubting whether Class C even had the capability for it.

Regarding this, Katsuragi received an answer from Nagumo Miyabi—it was Nagumo who supported Ryuen's attack on Class A, with second-year Class A students assisting Class C in their exam.

Nagumo Miyabi reasoned that since Sakayanagi Arisu was threatening Katsuragi's position, it would be better to let Sakayanagi lead Class A to a loss, allowing Katsuragi to reap the benefits effortlessly.

Though this reasoning sounded like nonsense, Katsuragi had no choice but to agree on the surface.

Then, prompted by Kaoru, he demanded compensation from Nagumo.

Whether it was compensation for Class A or for Katsuragi himself, Nagumo had only one intention—to sabotage Kaoru in the exam.

He promised immediate compensation in return.

At this point, Katsuragi understood Nagumo's intentions.

The latter no longer intended to keep up the pretense of cooperation and was likely planning to support Ryuen in replacing Class A.

Under these circumstances, the preliminary test to determine exam partners concluded quickly.

...

The next morning, Mashima announced the results.

Kaoru ranked eighth, meaning his partner would be the student ranked eighth from the bottom.

Miki Yamamura.

Chapter 335: A Low-Profile Presence

In Class A, a gathering of elite students, Miki Yamamura was an inconspicuous presence.

The only impression anyone had of her was that she was one of Sakayanagi Arisu's followers, occasionally seen accompanying Sakayanagi.

However, she wasn't a core member of the Sakayanagi faction.

This was also Kaoru's impression of her.

"You better not do anything weird to Yamamura," Kamuro Masumi warned Kaoru out of nowhere, her eyes filled with distrust.

"What could I possibly do?" Kaoru glanced at her legs. "Honestly, you seem close to her. Why don't you tutor her yourself?"

He expected Masumi to refuse, but instead, she fell into deep thought, seriously considering the idea.

Truthfully, her grades had been much worse than Miki Yamamura's initially, but after receiving Kaoru's tutoring, she had climbed out of the bottom ranks of the class.

"Are you planning to tutor her in the library?" Masumi discreetly glanced at Sakayanagi Arisu, making sure she wasn't eavesdropping.

"Either the library or a café. I can't exactly bring her to my room," Kaoru paused. "Besides, she might not even accept my help."

"She will. Yamamura's timid—she doesn't want to drag anyone down," Masumi said dismissively.

"Sakayanagi's been acting weird lately, keeping me away from you. Might as well have you tutor Yamamura instead."

Kaoru found it odd but didn't dwell on it.

Right now, the affairs of several girls were already enough to keep him busy.

....

After class, Miki Yamamura approached Kaoru on her own.

"Um, p-please take care of me, Mitoma-kun," the girl bowed slightly, her small hands nervously clutching her skirt as she glanced up at him.

"It's not our first meeting, no need to be so formal." Kaoru caught Sakayanagi glance.

"I've seen your grades, Yamamura-san. You're quite good at modern literature and English."

Although the school doesn't publicly announce everyone's grades, each class knows their own situation since homeroom teachers bring their class's score reports to the classroom.

"Eh? M-Mitoma-kun has been paying attention to me?" Miki Yamamura seemed startled, her words stumbling slightly.

"Is that surprising?" Kaoru looked puzzled. "Since you're my partner, it's only natural I'd pay some attention."

"N-no, that's not..." Yamamura flushed slightly, realizing she might have said something awkward.

"I just didn't expect... anyone to notice my situation."

Kaoru's expression turned odd.

Wasn't it because she normally had no presence?

And didn't she herself think this arrangement was fine?

"But I'll be relying on you, Mitoma-kun," Yamamura said softly. "With my current grades, it's really difficult for me to contribute much alone."

"Studying with a beautiful girl already makes me happy, so don't worry about it." Kaoru said it casually.

Though the girl tried hard to conceal herself, her looks couldn't be completely hidden from others.

The real world wasn't a manga—not everyone could transform from a superhero into an ordinary reporter just by wearing black-framed glasses.

Similarly, Yamamura wasn't like Airi Sakura, who wore glasses and tied her hair in twin braids.

Yamamura's beauty stood out completely, impossible to ignore.

She wore a slightly long side ponytail, strands occasionally slipping down her shoulders.

Her cool, unwavering gaze—perhaps unsure what expression to make—gave her face an aloof charm.

[Can't take it anymore, this dense yet aloof Yamamura—I want to guide her right in front of her face]

[I want to hold Yamamura's little hand] / [Can Yamamura call me a pervert?]

[I want to keep a Yamamura as a pet]

[Yamamura Miki? lick lick lick]

[While Yamamura stalks someone, I'll stalk her]

[Cover my room with her photos, then invite her over]

...

"Cut it out, Yamamura. This guy's a bit lecherous—better not give him any openings." Kamuro Masumi couldn't take it anymore and warned the flustered Yamamura from the side.

Yamamura nodded awkwardly, unsure how to respond.

Was she really a beautiful girl? Probably not.

"Kamuro-san, who's your partner?" Kaoru hinted subtly.

"None of your business." Masumi saw right through him and had no intention of leaving.

Kaoru decided to ignore her and turned back to Yamamura.

"Yamamura-san, I'm not entirely clear about your study situation. When would be a good time for us to study together?"

Although Miki Yamamura was also one of his marked targets, due to her lack of presence, he realized he didn't know much about her at all.

Come to think of it, during the sports festival, Kaoru had almost no impression of her, only vaguely remembering that Miki Yamamura's ranking wasn't high.

As for her usual academic performance, Kaoru only knew her grades weren't among the top—probably around average.

Still, no matter how he looked at it, he shouldn't have been paired with Miki Yamamura.

It was a bit strange.

"I'm free every day," Miki Yamamura quickly replied, her expression slightly uncomfortable.

"How about studying at the library?" Kaoru Mitoma added. "If it's too crowded, we can go to a café instead."

Miki Yamamura nodded, appearing completely deferential to his arrangements.

'How odd,' Kaoru thought to himself.

....

Meanwhile, Class D had also received notifications from Chabashira Sae.

"Eh? My partner is Karuizawa-san? What a coincidence!" Chiaki Matsushita's voice came from behind, startling Karuizawa who had been looking at the list.

She quickly put on a smile.

"So it's Chiaki. I guess we're both lucky."

Though she said that, Kei would have preferred a different partner.

After all, having a high-achieving partner would make the exam much easier.

Still, being paired with Chiaki Matsushita wasn't the worst outcome.

Suzune Horikita and Sudou Ken, Yosuke Hirata and Haruki Yamauchi, Kikyo Kushida and Kanji Ike, Teruhiko Yukimura and Kokoro Inogashira, Rokusuke Kouenji and Kyosuke Okiya...

Looking at the list, Kei's expression turned complicated.

The results were exactly as Suzune Horikita had predicted—the school would pair high-ranking students with low-ranking ones.

Her grades weren't the worst, but they weren't above average either—not even at the average level.

So, Kei's desire for Kaoru to tutor her wasn't just about clinging to him; she also had some anxiety about expulsion.

Chiaki Matsushita was mid-tier in Class D, so pairing with her was indeed fortunate.

However, this was Suzune strategy for the special exam.

Unlike Mashima from Class A, Chabashira Sae seemed to have completely given up, not explaining the pairing system to Class D and leaving them to figure it out on their own.

In the end, Hirata had to confirm the details with upperclassmen, causing a significant delay before Class D understood how the pairings worked.

To ensure correct pairings, Suzune had the bottom ten students in the class submit blank tests, while those in the lower tier scored just one point.

This forced high-ranking students to pair with low-ranking ones, preventing mismatches where low-ranking students ended up together and avoiding confusion among mid-tier students.

But Kei didn't care about any of that—she was in a good mood.

Now that the quiz results were out, it was time to visit Kaoru Mitoma.

'His room was on the second floor, right?'

She wondered if the dorm manager would give her the key.

Chapter 336: The Backup Girlfriend Must Also Strive

Cold droplets traced a path down smooth, delicate skin, a few strands of hair clinging to slender shoulders.

Riplets of water streamed over full, rounded curves as a small hand unconsciously brushed against a slightly taut abdomen, fingers encountering a jagged ridge that disrupted the body's graceful contours.

Nearly two years had passed, yet her heart still twinged faintly.

Flashes of shifting images flickered before her eyes—like an old, dust-covered film reel cast in chilling hues of horror.

Karuizawa Kei touched her own cheek.

Despite the cold shower, her body felt feverish, as if burning up.

He had seen this scar—not just seen it, but touched it too.

Yet she couldn't quite recall his expression at the time.

Of course, he had been doing something bad back then.

Even now, the memory made Kei's face flush.

How could she have possibly observed his expression properly when she had been so overwhelmed with shame and indignation?

Still, judging by his reaction afterward, he hadn't seemed particularly disgusted.

If anything, Kei had sensed a suppressed fury.

After enduring middle school bullying and rising to become the leader of the girls in Class D, she had grown acutely sensitive to shifts in mood—or perhaps she was just skilled at reading people.

If he had been angry... what had angered him?

Kei turned off the shower and slowly towed herself dry before facing the mirror and switching on the hair dryer.

Warm air evaporated the lingering moisture.

Come to think of it, she had never even properly held a boy's hand before.

Yet there she was, lifting her own shirt in front of him, letting him touch her—

No, no, no! It wasn't like she had wanted to!

He had forced her!

She couldn't understand what went through his mind.

Didn't he already have a girlfriend?

And yet, he had gone and touched another girl's chest.

It made no sense.

What's more, he looked so proper on the surface.

At first, she had even thought he might be the type to be indifferent to such things.

Plenty of girls in class were interested in him—only to find out he was the kind of guy who'd do that to a girl.

Wasn't that just awful?

The more she dwelled on it, the redder her face grew—because she had said far worse things to Kaoru.

She had practically acted like some shameless, indecent woman.

"Kushida, Ichinose, Sakayanagi, Kamuro..."

Even someone as terrible as him had so many girls around him.

The thought made Kei's chest tighten, her stomach constricting as if bound by an invisible rope, leaving her breathless.

At first, she had assumed Kushida was his real girlfriend and had secretly competed with her—until Kaoru himself confirmed it was Ichinose Honami.

Kei hadn't paid much attention to Class B's so-called "popularity queen" before.

The girl hadn't seemed like the type to date, let alone date someone like Kaoru.

But now... things were different.

In the past, Kei had believed she could overcome the darkness on her own.

Later, she realized she was wrong.

The only things that could truly shatter darkness were either the sun—or an even more terrifying darkness.

A single person could never accomplish anything alone.

It was only natural to weakly beg for his help.

Though Kaoru had said certain things to her—about deals, about love and affection—none of it had dissuaded her.

If anything, it had only strengthened her resolve.

Lust was Kaoru's flaw, and also his weakness.

Kei keenly perceived the essence of this guy—only a relationship where both parties satisfied each other could last.

As for whether she would regret it in the future...

Heh, there were no correct choices in this world.

The only thing one could do was strive to make the choice they had made absolutely right.

Karuizawa Kei patted her cheeks.

She needed to work hard from now on—at the very least, to secure a place for herself.

And then, make him fall for her.

...

The student dormitory was quiet at night.

The occasional rustle of wind drifted in through the window.

The thick clouds obscured the moonlight, and the evening chill seemed to seep into one's entire body.

Kaoru had just finished reading the message from Kiriyama and was about to take a break when he suddenly heard the doorbell.

Ding—

Strange.

Was it Ichinose?

With that thought, Kaoru quickly walked to the entrance and was met with an unexpected sight—a girl he hadn't anticipated.

"Yoohoo~ Surprised?"

Karuizawa Kei stood before him, her pretty face adorned with a radiant smile.

Her chest was slightly more pronounced than usual, and instead of her usual high ponytail, she had let her long hair cascade naturally down her shoulders.

She seemed to have just taken a bath, as a faint, pleasant fragrance lingered around her.

Kaoru's gaze drifted downward.

Beneath her skirt were a pair of pristine, slender thighs.

Her calves, bare and devoid of stockings, glowed with a delicate, translucent sheen.

More importantly, she was holding a few books in her arms.

"Honestly, yeah, you did surprise me," Kaoru chuckled. "Showing up at my room dressed like this—never mind if anyone saw you, aren't you worried I might do something to you?"

"I came to ask for your help with studying," Karuizawa said, her cheeks slightly flushed, though her tone was earnest.

Since they had previously agreed on tutoring, she had a ready excuse even if someone found out.

"You could've at least given me a heads-up. What if I wasn't in my room?" Kaoru let her step inside before closing the door behind her.

"That's the whole point of a surprise," she said, glancing around his room.

As if she wouldn't know whether he was here or not.

"Besides, I'm your backup girlfriend, right? Or... were you planning to do something with Ichinose?"

"I haven't told Honami about you yet," Kaoru said, clearing the table.

"Want something to drink?"

Karuizawa seemed to pause for a moment before sitting on his bed, her gaze fixed on his face as she asked, puzzled.

"Why would you tell her?"

Kaoru hesitated briefly, then smiled.

"Because that's just the kind of person I am. There's no need to keep hiding things forever."

"No girl would agree to something like that," Karuizawa said with absolute certainty.

"I'm working on it," Kaoru replied, taking the books from her hands—textbooks and notes.

"Wait, you seriously want me to tutor you?"

"What else? Do I look like a genius student to you?" Karuizawa felt a pang of displeasure.

When he said "working on it," did that include her too?

"First time I've heard someone admit they're not smart," Kaoru remarked as he flipped through her textbooks and notes, realizing she hadn't been taking them seriously at all.

"What's the problem? I'm not particularly good at studying anyway, so it's normal for me not to understand these things."

Karuizawa Kei puffed out her cheeks.

"Besides, this is your chance to curry favor with me."

A real girlfriend only needs to focus on dates, while a backup girlfriend has to consider so many things—like not disturbing them, restraining her own feelings, and maintaining a smile.

"Fine, I'll tutor you."

"What's with that tone? Did I upset you?"

"Because I was wondering if Kei would give me a reward later."

"R-reward?!"

Although she knew Kaoru was a lecherous guy, Karuizawa Kei still felt a hint of shyness.

Shouldn't topics like this be brought up casually by her instead?

Or perhaps teased out with the ease of an older sister playfully provoking Kaoru.

This way just made her seem too foolish, didn't it?

Chapter 337: The Reward for Tutoring

"The final exam won't cover new material. We'll just briefly review the previous key points. You should have highlighted the important... never mind, I'll mark them for you."

In the room, the two sat facing each other across the table.

Seeing her doodle-filled notes, Kaoru took a deep breath.

"Is this... really bad?" Karuizawa Kei flushed.

She usually spent her time having fun and rarely studied proactively.

If not for ANHS expulsion policy, she probably wouldn't even attend classes.

"At least your handwriting is neat." Kaoru pointed to a spot in her notes.

"But you got this part wrong. The cumulative formula isn't written like this."

Karuizawa Kei grew even more embarrassed and hurriedly corrected her mistake with a pen.

"You're pretty popular in class, right?" Kaoru glanced at her delicate face—there was no trace of her past bullying history in her.

With her pretty face, slightly pointed chin, and trendy style, she looked like the epitome of a social butterfly.

"Sort of. Some people hang out with me, others don't." Karuizawa Kei was actually quite proud.

She had adopted a tough-girl persona, yet no one in class had seen through her true nature.

On the contrary, everyone flocked around her.

She'd worried that breaking up with Hirata might affect her standing, but people were merely surprised.

Some even thought a gal like her should date multiple handsome guys.

"Are all the students who hang out with you like that?"

"Are you trying to pick a fight with me?"

"No, I was just thinking—if your grades suddenly improved, what would they think of you?"

"It wouldn't be a problem at all. I'd just drop your name."

Seeing Karuizawa Kei's nonchalant expression, Kaoru stroked his chin and asked a few more questions about Class D.

"Can you start teaching me now?" Karuizawa Kei looked at him pleadingly.

"Of course, but I doubt one night will be enough. We'll need more time."

Judging from her notes, Karuizawa Kei's wasn't just dumb—even the former Kamuro could easily surpass her.

Karuizawa Kei fully understood his implication and bit her lip lightly.

"Give me the key."

"What key?" Kaoru froze.

"The room key... I was thinking every day... as long as you're free, I'll come over immediately."
Karuizawa Kei tried not to let her voice sound too eager.

"Studying outside would make our pairing look strange, wouldn't it? So we can only have tutoring sessions in your room."

Kaoru looked at her with an odd expression while murmuring.

"Kei, when the wolf wants to eat the sheep, the sheep doesn't obediently walk into the wolf's den."

"We're studying," Karuizawa corrected him with flushed cheeks.

Of course she understood the implications, but wasn't the sheep also putting on an act?

Since it was studying, Kaoru proceeded to teach her the most basic concepts.

To make it easier for this airhead to understand, he explained everything in the simplest terms possible, almost like teaching a preschooler, which helped her grasp the material quickly.

Occasionally during the lessons, he would ask a question or two.

If Karuizawa answered correctly, Kaoru wouldn't hesitate to praise her.

Studying was inherently dull, and without positive reinforcement, motivation and enthusiasm would gradually wane.

Having tutored more than one or two high school girls before, Kaoru understood the psychology of airheads quite well.

Before she realized it, Karuizawa found herself listening more attentively, even breaking into happy smiles whenever he praised her.

At the same time, perhaps to listen more comfortably, Karuizawa gradually closed the distance between them.

The girl had moved from sitting across to right beside Kaoru, their shoulders now touching.

Kaoru glanced at her exposed shoulder—the smooth skin seemed to glow with a milky sheen.

The room's lighting cast a soft glow on her delicate face, while her slightly damp hair exuded an intoxicating fragrance.

With her hands propped on the floor and her body leaning toward him, her collar revealed a glimpse of snowy skin, the soft curves possessing an elastic suppleness that was visually arresting.

Her legs, crossed at an angle beneath her skirt, brushed against Kaoru's—even through the fabric, he could feel a faint, tingling sensation.

.....

"Alright, that's enough for today. Any more and you won't remember anything."

With that, Kaoru closed the textbook.

He had been teaching for three or four hours, and it was nearly midnight.

"Wah, it's over already?" Karuizawa Kei snapped out of her focus, rubbing her tired eyes.

"It didn't feel that long at all, totally different from class."

"That's because you were really focused on memorizing today, so you didn't notice the time." Kaoru paused.

"Honestly, I didn't expect Kei to keep up with my pace. You grasped every concept and could even apply them—it shows you're not bad at all."

Karuizawa Kei froze for a moment, then flushed bright red, waving her hands dismissively.

"No way! I'm completely hopeless at studying!"

"You're not dumb. Once you understand the material, you pick it up right away."

"Guh..."

Karuizawa Kei felt her face burning.

She had come tonight to spend time with Kaoru under the guise of studying—really, it was supposed to be a stay-at-home date.

But... but why had she gotten so absorbed in the lesson?

And why was he such a good teacher?

Being good at teaching was one thing, but he kept praising her every now and then, leaving her utterly flustered.

Noticing her reaction, Kaoru chuckled.

"Today's study session is over. Have you thought about what reward you'll give me?"

Though he hadn't pressed the reward topic earlier, he found it amusing how Karuizawa was clearly mortified yet trying hard to act composed.

Sure enough, her pretty face turned crimson, and she lowered her head, likely from embarrassment.

"Even though you're my boyfriend, spending this much time..."

Before Kaoru could finish, the girl suddenly lifted her face.

Her eyes were abruptly close, and then came the soft, warm sensation of her lips against his.

A sweet, pleasant fragrance drifted from her into Kaoru's nose, tickling slightly.

"Mmm..." Karuizawa Kei slowly pulled back, her eyes slightly raised, biting her lower lip, her face still flushed.

"Is... is this reward okay?"

Kaoru instinctively touched his lips with his fingers.

That brief peck was probably her first kiss—so inexperienced.

"Kei, are you tempting me?"

"Wah! T-tempting? Don't say something so indecent! I had to gather all my courage for that!"

"But you know what I'd do, right?"

"Wha—mmph!?"

The next moment, Kaoru suddenly kissed Karuizawa.

The girl's sweetness was like delectable milk candy, stirring an insatiable craving.

Chapter 338: Satisfied

The scorching heat was nothing like her own body temperature—it felt like it could ignite her entirely, setting her heart pounding wildly.

Amid the slightly naive, bewildered sensation, she intensely felt his breath, movements, heartbeat, and the sticky, intimate contact.

Her mind went blank.

Under the room's soft light, the girl's hair cascaded over her shoulders, a single strand resting on her slightly rising chest.

She tilted her neck slightly, matching the man's gentle lift of her chin, her eyes glazed with a watery haze.

Her long lashes trembled faintly, just like her body—so weak and pliant it seemed she might melt into his embrace at any moment.

Damp, soft, and tingling—this felt more like a proper kiss compared to the earlier light peck.

She closed her eyes, her fingers unconsciously loosening from their clenched fists, her stiff legs gradually relaxing.

The friction of lips, the slick and tender touch, the sweet and enticing scent of the girl, punctuated by occasional soft gasps escaping her lips.

Kaoru wrapped his arms around her waist, feeling the girl in his embrace melt like syrup.

He had only intended to tease her a little, never expecting her to be so responsive.

"Mmm... ah..."

Just as Karuizawa Kei was about to run out of breath, Kaoru pulled back.

Her ears were completely flushed, and a faint pink hue spread across her porcelain-like skin.

"I'm very satisfied with the reward Kei gave me," Kaoru chuckled lightly.

"And as a reward for Kei's hard work in class, this is my gift to you."

"Y-you're so shameless... suddenly using your tongue... pervert..."

Delayed embarrassment made Karuizawa Kei's face burn as she weakly pounded his shoulders.

"My legs feel so weak... I can barely stand..."

In many manga scenes, Karuizawa Kei had often seen heroines being kissed until their legs gave out.

Back then, she thought it looked amusing—but now that it was happening to her, all she felt was an indescribable shyness.

Being kissed until her legs went weak wasn't because Karuizawa Kei lacked stamina, but because the stimulation was overwhelming her sensitive body.

In other words, it felt too good.

Karuizawa Kei had imagined what her first love might be like.

After all, every girl dreamed of romance—a romantic atmosphere, two people gazing into each other's eyes, hearts fluttering with nervous courage as they slowly leaned in for a tender kiss...

She had succeeded, even if the pace felt a little fast.

But this feeling... wasn't unpleasant at all.

Since she didn't dislike it, it was only natural to enjoy it wholeheartedly.

A smile tugged at Karuizawa Kei's lips—no, she had already known she wouldn't hate kissing this guy.

Just as Kaoru was about to let her go, she suddenly leaned in closer, her eyes glimmering, her damp lips slightly parted.

"Hey... one more time?"

That tone, that expression—even a blind man could tell what Karuizawa Kei was asking for.

Kaoru paused, then smirked.

"If we do it again, I won't be so gentle."

"Were you gentle with her?"

The words slipped out before Karuizawa Kei could stop them, and she immediately felt a pang of panic.

She hadn't meant to say something like that.

Kaoru didn't answer.

Instead, he tilted her chin up and began his second conquest of the girl.

Though they had already kissed once, the difference in intensity and sensation was worlds apart.

It was as if he wanted to leave his mark on her—to make her acutely aware of what was happening, to ensure she knew there was no escape, that she could only surrender to the man before her.

In an instant, Karuizawa Kei was panting heavily, unable to suppress soft whimpers as the rough treatment flushed her face crimson.

Yet, she didn't pull away.

Kaoru could feel her clumsily responding to him.

As time passed, she seemed to grow more immersed, mimicking his movements, even attempting to push back against him.

Not sure if he should praise her learning ability, Kaoru had this fleeting thought before softly whispering during a pause in their breaths.

"Kei, though it might sound ridiculous, my feelings for you are the same as those for Honami. A girlfriend is a girlfriend, and love is love—there's no distinction between the main and the spare."

Karuizawa Kei's mind was still lingering on the kiss from earlier, a bit muddled, and she didn't immediately react to his words, instinctively licking her lips.

The next moment, Kaoru kissed her again, further dulling her thoughts.

"Mmm... ah..." Karuizawa Kei's waist twitched slightly as she could feel Kaoru doing something even more mischievous.

Though embarrassed, Karuizawa Kei didn't resist his actions.

Instead, her mind began to wander, flashing through various scenarios—so this is what guys really do at times like this?

Ugh, he was even worse before...

Soon, Kaoru released the flushed Karuizawa Kei, whose clothes were now slightly disheveled.

Her fair, delicate skin bore a faint blush, and without any deliberate movement, she naturally exuded an alluring charm—this must be what they call being in the throes of passion.

"Alright, the reward is over," Kaoru took a deep breath. If they continued, he might not be able to hold back tonight.

"It's too late now, you..."

Before he could finish, Karuizawa Kei, her face burning red, nudged him lightly.

"That... this thing was pressing against me the whole time just now."

Gritting his teeth, Kaoru retorted irritably, "With you like this tonight, do you think I'm a eunuch?!"

"I didn't expect it to turn out like this either. I thought I'd tease you a little, steal a kiss, and then run back right away," Karuizawa Kei covered her pretty face.

"But... but kissing you feels weird. My legs are so weak, I can't get up."

Kaoru wrapped an arm around her slender waist and fell silent for a moment.

"Kei, have you thought about the consequences?"

Thinking he meant a certain kind of consequence, Karuizawa Kei whispered.

"I saw... the school convenience store sells those things. Seems like even students can buy them."

Kaoru found it somewhat amusing.

"What I meant was, you should know I have Honami and the others around me. I can't give you a normal relationship."

Now it was Karuizawa Kei's turn to fall silent.

She lifted her face and stared straight at him.

"Kaoru, do you think someone like me could ever have a normal relationship?"

Kaoru froze for a moment before she continued, "I know exactly what you're talking about. But after everything you've done to me, do you think I could still have a normal relationship?"

"Impossible, right?" Karuizawa Kei reached out and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Besides, you don't plan on letting me go anyway, so why should I overthink it? You promised to take responsibility for me for life, didn't you?"

Kaoru had underestimated the girl's resolve.

She might be even more intense than Ichinose Honami or Kushida Kikyo.

"This... can I touch it?"

Hmm, Karuizawa was already curiously reaching out.... to his pp.

Chapter 339: The End of Spring Affairs

As the extravagance faded and spring affairs came to an end, the faint chirping of dawn light seeped through the half-drawn curtains outside the window, like fine sand slipping through an hourglass—soft and fleeting.

Kaoru glanced at Karuizawa lying beside him.

She was curled slightly on her side, her smooth, delicate shoulder exposed above the blankets.

Her skin was taut yet tender to the touch with faint rosy marks still visible here and there.

Her cute nose, slightly pursed lips, and steady breathing showed she remained deep in slumber—though one slender, snow-white arm was draped over Kaoru's body as she pressed close, as if clinging to him in sleep.

Recalling last night's events, Kaoru wasn't sure what expression to wear.

The girl's resolve had been far firmer than his own, her understanding far more piercing.

Karuizawa Kei's reasoning had been simple: since things had already come this far, she might as well shut her eyes and charge ahead into the darkness.

She'd staked all her hopes and future upon Kaoru.

For a girl who'd endured bullying, any future was acceptable—so long as it wasn't a return to the past.

And so, it was Kaoru who'd ended up pinned beneath her instead.

Gently shifting Kei's arm aside, Kaoru began rising from the bed—only for her to blink drowsily awake moments later.

"Sorry, did I wake you?"

At his voice, Kei seemed to freeze momentarily.

Slowly, a blush spread across her lovely face as last night's memories clearly flooded back.

The girl's sense of shame was practically exploding.

"Don't look...!"

Kaoru couldn't help but chuckle as she buried her face in the blankets, cocooning herself completely like an ostrich.

This from the girl who'd ridden him so boldly hours earlier.

"Take the day off," Kaoru said, dressing as he rose.

"It'd feel weird sending you to class like this. And you're sore besides."

A small head peeked from the blankets, cheeks still flushed.

"Are you leaving?"

Having tasted forbidden fruit for the first time, the girl now clung to her partner with fresh dependency and reluctance.

Her mind overflowed with him—with anxious thoughts.

'Does he think I'm too bold?'

'That Ichinose Honami would've been better? That I've already grown boring? That I looked ugly?'

Countless worries flashed through Kei's mind as she gazed imploringly at Kaoru, willing him not to go—and certainly not to think poorly of her.

"This is my room. Where would I go?" Kaoru gave her an exasperated look.

"I can't very well let you go hungry, can I? I've got ingredients from yesterday—might as well make you breakfast."

Kei grinned foolishly before asking, "Will you still go to class?"

"Not today. With you here, my head's not in the right space for lectures anyway. I'll work on assignments here instead." After a pause, he added.

"You can get your absence excused, right?"

"Hehe, I'll just say I caught a cold." Kei's voice turned syrupy sweet. "I'm staying until evening—Nene and the others won't be back till then."

Even if she hadn't fallen head over heels before, the girl was now past all hope of recovery.

After all, she and Kaoru had crossed the most critical threshold together.

Especially knowing she'd been first—that even Ichinose Honami hadn't reached this stage with him.

After some thought, it seemed like she had gone from being a backup girlfriend to the official one—her status had completely reversed.

Karuizawa Kei shyly covered her face to prevent Kaoru from noticing the mischievous thoughts running through her mind.

Kaoru spotted the towel on the bed and expressionlessly picked it up.

Though he didn't have a collecting habit, it did save him the trouble of washing the sheets.

When he went to the kitchen, Kei secretly peeked at his retreating figure, inhaling the lingering scent in the blanket.

The passion from last night had long faded, leaving only a faint trace—as if she were still wrapped in his embrace.

Feeling lightheaded, she rolled around on the bed a few times.

She had actually done it—what now? What now?

Should she confess to the others?

Her face burned with embarrassment.

Her actions felt so underhanded, like a sneaky cat stealing a taste.

But could she really be blamed?

If they were going to hesitate, wasn't it only natural for her to take the first step?

At this thought, she subconsciously raised her left hand, where a small ring glimmered brilliantly on her middle finger.

They said this finger symbolized engagement—she was his fiancée.

Along with her shyness, a hint of doubt arose.

She suspected Kaoru had prepared this in advance—otherwise, how could he have just happened to have this ring ready?

Surely, no one in the world would pull out a ring after the fact, right?

It was too strange.

Kei decided not to dwell on it.

She wouldn't wear the ring in public—it was too flashy, and she wasn't ready to expose her "misconduct" just yet.

"Kaoru, I want to take a bath."

The name that had once been difficult to say now rolled off her tongue effortlessly, even carrying a hint of coquettishness.

"I'll run the water for you. Wear my clothes for now—I'll wash yours and dry them before you change," Kaoru's voice came from the kitchen.

Kei felt a surge of happiness before stealthily slipping out from under the blanket, her slender, fair legs stretching out as her delicate feet touched the floor—as if worried he might turn around.

"After last night, you're still afraid I'll peek?" Kaoru spoke as if he had eyes on the back of his head.

"W-Well, any girl would be shy at a time like this!" Kei's cheeks flushed slightly as she covered her chest, where deep red marks still lingered.

"Even if... even if last night happened... it doesn't mean I'm that kind of person..."

With that, the girl dashed into the bathroom, giving Kaoru no chance to sneak a glance.

Not that a mere bathroom door could stop him if he really wanted to look—after all, this was his room.

But Kaoru wasn't the type to do something so tasteless.

Listening to the sound of running water, his thoughts grew tangled.

Maybe he should have been a little more forceful.

Before long, Kei emerged from the bathroom wearing Kaoru's shirt, her snow-white legs bare as she stood there, radiant.

The shirt was slightly loose on the girl, completely concealing her delicate form within its folds.

Only a few strands of glistening, water-kissed hair rested against her chest, like a lotus emerging from water.

The girl was pristine from head to toe, her fair skin glowing under the morning sunlight without a single blemish, embodying an elegant and exquisite beauty.

Yet, her bare legs exposed beneath added a touch of sensuality, as if lifting the hem would reveal even more alluring sights.

Especially with Karuizawa Kei's slightly flushed face, her fingers unconsciously tugging at the shirt's hem, and the occasional faint protrusions visible against her chest—it was abundantly clear the girl currently wore nothing beneath.

Kaoru took a deep breath, needing to restrain himself.

Otherwise, Karuizawa Kei would completely have him wrapped around her finger.

[Kay boys Karuizawa is the winner!]

Chapter 340: The Career Path Is Full-Time Housewife

Kei sat obediently beside Kaoru, the thin fabric of the shirt pressing against her hip line and upper thighs, making her feel somewhat uncomfortable.

Although last night had been one of life's pivotal moments, now that she had calmed down, she couldn't help but feel a mix of shyness and unease.

While she had been showering, Kaoru had prepared breakfast—fried eggs, sandwiches, rice balls, milk, and miso soup.

Due to the rush, he usually only made instant miso soup, and if not for the pre-made rice balls, the meal might have been even sparser.

Looking at the breakfast before her, Kei felt an odd sensation.

Shouldn't this be something a newlywed wife prepared?

"Does it still hurt?" Seeing her distracted, Kaoru brought up the topic at an inopportune moment.

"I-It's fine... just a little now..." Kei's face turned red.

How was she supposed to answer such a question?

If she said it didn't hurt, would that mean they'd have to do it again?

"Now you understand the consequences, don't you?" Kaoru looked at her expressionlessly.

"It's normal for the first time to hurt, but if it still hurts afterward, do you think I'm some kind of saint? You might not even be able to get out of bed today."

"It's not my fault! It's because of you—you kept pressing against me, so I thought you weren't satisfied yet!" Kei's pretty face flushed crimson.

Of course it wasn't her fault—she wasn't some wanton woman.

Because she liked him, even if it hurt, she could endure it.

After all, she didn't dislike him.

Kaoru chuckled and poked her puffed-up cheek with his finger.

"I didn't expect you to be so bold. But now that things have come to this, even if you regret it, it's too late."

Remembering last night's events, Kei unconsciously touched her lower abdomen, her face burning.

"Actually, when I came to ANHS, I just wanted a fresh start—to leave behind the days when I was bullied. I didn't care much about academics or future careers," she murmured.

"At first, I was really happy here. But after what happened with Manabe and the others, I've been reflecting... Did I go too far?"

Kaoru listened quietly, not telling her about Shiho Manabe and the others' current situation.

"I thought, if I kept acting like them—arrogant all the way until graduation—something bad would surely happen to me again in the future, right?"

"I told Hirata-kun about breaking up, and he promised to keep it a secret for me. I thought he might be upset or that the class would distance themselves from me, but it turned out I was overthinking it."

"Nene and the others probably stick with me because I'm one of the few strong girls in class. Shinohara and Satou were also fooled by my appearance, so it seems like I just need to keep things as they are."

"But now there's going to be some special exam here—what a hassle. Though I never really thought about the future—"

"Kaoru, what do you plan to do later?"

At the end, Kei tossed a question at Kaoru.

Judging by her expression, it seemed wherever Kaoru went, she would follow.

She just needed to maintain the status quo, so the future was something she entrusted to Kaoru.

"I might continue my studies. I want to work hard to support you all." Kaoru took a deep breath, knowing full well that having multiple partners wouldn't be possible in reality unless he stood at the very top of the world.

The first half of his answer left Kei feeling a little disappointed, but the latter half made her happy again.

"Hehe, I heard that in university, you can rent a place off-campus." Kei bit her lip, suppressing her shyness.

"I'll work hard to help you too. You just need to focus on studying then."

The girl had already made up her mind—starting today, she would pay close attention in home economics class and practice diligently.

As a girlfriend, she couldn't possibly let Kaoru make breakfast for her every day, could she?

Kaoru picked up a rice ball and stuffed it into her mouth.

They weren't even married yet, and she was already planning to be a full-time housewife.

Who knew what she'd come up with tomorrow?

Just as he was feeding Kei, Kaoru's phone suddenly rang.

Without even thinking, he picked it up—sure enough, it was Kushida Kikyo.

"Hmph, you answered pretty quickly today. Did you sleep well last night?"

Kaoru glanced at Kei, who merely blinked at him before he replied.

"Because you called me late at night, I couldn't sleep at all."

"Hah? I only called you because of your ridiculous request!" Kikyo, unaware of the situation, sounded annoyed.

"Do you think every girl would indulge your perverted demands? Who else but me would call you late at night just to report that I need to pee?"

"If you've got the guts, send me a video," Kaoru retorted through gritted teeth.

She had called at critical moments before, and last night she nearly ruined everything for him.

"Pervert!" Kikyo snapped without hesitation.

"I'm going to pee now, you foot-fetishist master!"

With that, she hung up immediately—probably still angry about what happened last night.

Kaoru set his phone down just in time to see Kei staring at him intently.

"Was that Kushida-san again?"

"Just our usual little game."

"Oh."

Surprisingly, Kei didn't press further and simply continued eating the breakfast Kaoru had prepared for her.

Hmmph.

In her eyes, Kushida Kikyo was no longer a threat.

At best, she was just a coward.

Once the two had nearly finished breakfast, Kaoru had Katsuragi notify Mashima that he wouldn't be attending class today due to feeling unwell.

Although it was quite suspicious for both of them to take leave on the same day, if they had to avoid even such things, Kaoru might as well retract his previous statement.

After breakfast, Kei had nothing to do and could only watch helplessly as Kaoru worked on preparing exam papers.

"Want to come take a look?"

"Eh? Isn't this your class's exam? Can I really see it?"

"It's fine. It's not like I'm setting questions for your class. Besides, I can take this chance to explain some of my thought process behind making the test."

Kei opened her mouth slightly.

Here they were, finally having some rare alone time together, and he wanted to teach her?

Still, his lessons were actually quite enjoyable—like a preschool teacher who constantly praised his students.

With a giggle, Kei snuggled into his arms.

It was obvious that the girl had completely forgotten one thing.

Before long, Kei's face grew increasingly flushed.

Since she wasn't wearing anything underneath, she could clearly feel Kaoru reaction.

"Kaoru... maybe... right now... I could help you again?"

"Honestly, the way you're acting makes me wonder if you're deliberately trying to seduce me."

"I am not!"

In the end, Kei went to the bathroom to wash her hands and changed back into her own clothes, finally shaking off her earlier state—though her face remained slightly red, and her heart clearly hadn't calmed down yet.