

Cote 361

Chapter 361: Tastes Good

Pat pat—

"Hehehe... I swear... I'll pay you back double for today... Mmm..."

Watching Sakayanagi Arisu's flushed face as she helplessly endured Kaoru's actions, Kamuro Masumi wasn't sure whether she should turn away and pretend she hadn't seen anything.

No—at this point, even if she pretended not to see, Sakayanagi would still know she was there.

Today had been truly awful.

Unconsciously, Masumi raised a finger to lightly touch her lips, as if his taste still lingered there.

And just like that, her first kiss had ended.

The girl's perky little bottom had an unexpectedly delightful feel to it—who would have thought such a petite frame could possess such a plump, springy softness?

Each smack sent a tantalizing ripple through her flesh.

After a while, Sakayanagi's initial defiance had melted into soft whimpers.

Her breathing grew slightly ragged, her skirt slightly disheveled, faintly revealing the delicate curve of her hips.

Her slender legs, perfectly straight and graceful, pressed tightly together, her thighs rubbing unconsciously against each other.

Her flushed face made it seem as though she had just endured something unbearably shameful.

Even for a problem child like her, being spanked was still an experience that bordered on the indecent.

After all, no matter how small she was, she was still a young girl.

"Did you... break her?" Masumi asked nervously. She had rarely seen such an expression on Sakayanagi's face—like someone drunk, cheeks burning red.

Kaoru wasn't sure either.

He had intended to teach her a lesson, but he hadn't used much force—more of a playful pat than an actual spanking.

Otherwise, it would have crossed into outright abuse.

"Dunno. But this expression's pretty good." Kaoru raised his phone.

Only when the shutter sound clicked did Sakayanagi finally snap out of her daze.

Her hazy eyes locked onto Kaoru like a detective identifying a criminal, quickly regaining clarity.

Her small chest rose and fell rapidly as she gritted her teeth.

"You... pervert!"

The little princess seemed thoroughly broken.

Not only had Kaoru spanked her in front of Ichinose Honami on the cruise ship before, but now he had even drugged her—and still went for her bottom.

No matter how you looked at it, being spanked was just too humiliating.

Not even her father had ever spanked her.

From childhood until now, no one had ever dared to disrespect her—wherever she went, people treated her with reverence.

Yet this guy showed her not an ounce of respect.

Today, he had drugged her on purpose, taken plenty of humiliating photos, and still spanked her.

Sakayanagi's heart burned with indignation.

But what shamed her even more was the fact that her body had reacted in an utterly disgraceful way.

Strangely, she didn't entirely hate the feeling of being spanked—it was like the bitterness of defeat, laced with something oddly sweet.

Every time Kaoru's palm landed on her pert little bottom, it sent a jolt of electricity racing up her spine, from the base of her tailbone all the way to her brain, leaving her tingling and dazed.

This sensation—knowing full well she was being violated, subjected to his rudeness, yet unable to resist and forced to endure the humiliation—left Sakayanagi utterly flustered.

It was a completely new and thrilling experience, something her sixteen years of life had never prepared her for.

"I was a pervert all along. Faced with a pervert like me, your lack of vigilance means screaming now won't help." Kaoru deliberately ran his fingers lightly over her thigh as she turned away.

"If Masumi hadn't stopped me, do you really think it would've just been a prank?"

Kamuro Masumi's face darkened.

Just moments ago, he'd been insisting he wasn't a foot-fetishizing creep, and now he'd finally dropped the act, hadn't he?

"Heh... I miscalculated indeed. I shouldn't have harbored naive hopes about a pervert like you."
Sakayanagi Arisu bit her lip.

This chess match—the guy had clearly been waiting for her to walk right into his trap.

Thank goodness she'd brought Kamuro Masumi along, or she'd truly be at her wit's end now.

"You're hardly one to talk. Don't tell me you don't know what Nagumo Miyabi is thinking."

Kaoru's words gave Sakayanagi pause.

After a moment, she replied calmly, "No one can survive entirely on their own. To gain more, you must leverage the strength of others. Some excel at academics, others at sports—division of labor is society's nature."

Then she added, "By the same logic, if I want more, a frail, petite girl like me can't defeat anyone alone. I need 'tools.' As for what those 'tools' are like... I couldn't care less."

Seeing her unapologetic demeanor, Kaoru understood—her physical condition was worse than others', making her more acutely aware of her limitations.

"Is Masumi also one of those 'tools' you don't care about?" Kaoru asked.

Sakayanagi sighed.

Denying it would sound like a lie, so she simply said, "I couldn't ask for a more convenient friend."

Masumi's expression darkened further.

Convenient friend? Wasn't that just another word for tool?

"Would it not matter to you if she got expelled?" Kaoru smirked.

The pointed question was tricky for Sakayanagi, especially with Masumi standing right there.

She could only smile faintly.

"Heh... That won't happen. Masumi won't be expelled."

Kaoru studied her briefly before lowering his head and licking her fair neck—smooth and slick.

"Mmm, that's the taste of truth."

The girl froze momentarily before her snow-white skin flushed crimson in an instant.

"Pervert!"

...

Mizuto Mizowaki was frustrated.

He hadn't intended to help Katsuragi Kouhei and the others in the first place—he'd only agreed for the Personal Points.

Yet now Nagumo Miyabi suspected him of betrayal, and the class atmosphere had grown increasingly tense because no one knew who the traitor was.

How had the list been leaked?

While Kiriya Ikuyo might have guessed they'd formulate countermeasures based on Class 2-B's roster, hitting every mark was just too absurd.

Someone must have tipped them off.

But the only people with access to the list were Nagumo, Mizowaki, and Tonokawa Sosuke.

It couldn't possibly be the two of them, could it?

The investigation had to focus on those who might have had incidental access, leaving the entire class on edge.

Asahina Nazuna was particularly displeased by this.

Mizowaki often overheard her arguing with Nagumo.

Though the childhood friends quarreled regularly, this was the first time he'd seen Nagumo stand his ground so firmly.

Mizowaki pondered these messy thoughts as he quickly made his way to the library.

Since they were helping Ryuen Kakeru and his group prepare exam questions, several high-achieving students from Class 2-A gathered at the library every day to brainstorm how to structure the tests.

Originally, the dormitory would have been a safer and more convenient place, but the space there was too cramped—having a whole group inside would make it feel especially crowded.

As for the café, it was too conspicuous, and they risked being seen by others.

The student council office was even more out of the question—they would definitely be spotted by Kaoru Mitoma and his group.

Though the library was also a crowded place, at least the boundaries here were very clear.

Upperclassmen and underclassmen didn't stay in the same area, and with final exams approaching, each class was also drawing clear lines between themselves.

On top of that, there were surveillance cameras. If anything happened later, it would be easy to investigate, making this place the safest option after all.

However, Nagumo Miyabi rarely came to the library.

The reason Mizuto was here today wasn't just because he had finished his own exam questions—the ones they were preparing for Ryuen were also nearly complete.

Thus, Nagumo would be coming to the library today, and Mizuto could hand over his exam for review.

Simply taking a photo of the questions and sending it to Nagumo would seem disrespectful, as if he held no regard for him.

That would be rude, and Mizuto didn't want to cause himself any more trouble.

Chapter 362: The Traitor Was Me All Along

It was after school in the afternoon, and many students were studying quietly in the library.

When Mizuto arrived at the usual seating area, he noticed that Nagumo and Tonokawa Sosuke weren't there.

For some reason, only Iijima was present.

"Where's Nagumo-kun and the others?" Mizuto frowned.

He had some impression of Iijima—apparently, he had dated a girl from their class for a while before breaking up.

Some said the reason for the breakup was that his girlfriend often got too close to Nagumo.

Though Mizuto knew Nagumo wouldn't go so far as to seduce someone else's partner, he was certain Nagumo had something to do with it.

After all, Nagumo didn't have to make the first move—he just had to not refuse.

"I heard the first-years were arguing, so Nagumo-kun and Tonokawa-kun went over there," Iijima replied honestly, clutching his stomach.

"Yamada-kun and the others finished their questions, so Nagumo-kun told them to go back and rest early."

First-years arguing?

Mizuto instinctively glanced around and soon spotted Nagumo and Tonokawa in the distance.

Near them, two groups of students were indeed standing face-to-face in a tense standoff.

Hmm... looks like Class 1-B and Class 1-C?

He could recognize them because he had some impression of the students around Ichinose Honami and Ryuen Kakeru—people like Kanzaki Ryuji, Amikura Mako, and Shiho Manabe.

Still, Mizuto didn't pay it much mind.

It was probably some trivial reason for the argument, and it seemed like it would be over soon.

Mizuto took a seat a little farther away.

Though the notebooks on the table were closed, he knew they contained the questions they had prepared for Ryuen.

Although Nagumo hadn't labeled him as a traitor, Kaoru still needed to keep his distance just in case, to avoid raising suspicions that he might peek and secretly report to Kaoru.

Moreover, the fact that Nagumo Miyabi hadn't invited him to help create the exam questions sent a clear message.

Mizuto Mizowaki was smart—he wouldn't make such careless mistakes.

After waiting for a while, Iijima across from him seemed uncomfortable, shifting restlessly in his seat while clutching his stomach with a pained expression.

Mizuto had noticed his odd behavior the moment he entered and couldn't help asking.

"Iijima-kun, are you feeling unwell?"

"Think I ate something bad," Iijima replied weakly.

Mizuto hesitated for a moment, glancing at the nearby surveillance camera before saying.

"Why don't you step out for a bit?"

"Huh? But Nagumo-kun isn't back yet—I need to keep watch here," Iijima said anxiously. "If someone sees the questions here, it'd be—"

Mizuto smiled. "There are cameras here. Anyone approaching would be obvious, and I'm still around. No one could possibly steal the questions."

After a brief hesitation, Iijima thanked him gratefully and hurried off.

Mizuto paid it no mind.

He didn't notice that the library's surveillance camera wasn't glowing red as usual, nor did he see Iijima quickly regain his composure after leaving.

Since Nagumo and the others hadn't returned, Mizuto idly scrolled through his phone, chatting with his senior girlfriend and watching short videos.

After a while, he suddenly received a message from Katsuragi Kouhei.

"Excuse me, Mizuto-senpai, are the questions finished yet?"

Mizuto was surprisingly calm reading Katsuragi's question.

With finals just a week away, it was natural for him to ask.

"Almost done. Should be ready soon."

"Sorry to trouble you, but could you get them to me by Monday?"

"I'll do my best."

Mizuto felt irritated—who did this underclassman think he was, talking to a senior like that?

But considering Katsuragi's ulterior motives, he forced himself to endure it and lied without hesitation.

The questions still needed Nagumo's review.

Katsuragi couldn't know about them yet.

"Can I take a look at the questions, senpai?"

In an instant, Mizuto realized Katsuragi might have guessed his intentions—this was a test.

Should he refuse?

Nagumo had told him to cooperate as much as possible.

Rejecting might alert Katsuragi.

He needed to figure out what Katsuragi was thinking.

"Sure, I'll send you the parts I've finished. If anything seems off, we can discuss adjustments."

Mizuto always carried his bag.

He pulled out his notebook, spread it open, and prepared to photograph a section to send to Katsuragi.

After all, Katsuragi wasn't here—he'd never know the entire set was already complete.

Click—

Mizuto sent the photo, then typed another message.

"Hope these help you out on the exam, kouhai."

Katsuragi Kouhei should be able to understand the meaning behind these words.

These questions either appeared in the actual exam or were merely used as decoys.

If they didn't match what he had said earlier, there was clearly something wrong.

If they were decoys, once Class C obtained these questions, it would mean Mizuto Mizowaki would also know about them immediately.

In that case, at least it was clear that Katsuragi Kouhei's intentions weren't deceptive.

The worst scenario was not knowing what the other party was planning.

However, Katsuragi Kouhei's reply sent a chill down Mizuto Mizowaki's spine.

"Senpai, are you in the library right now?"

"Great, I'm here too. Why don't we meet up later?"

"Or should I come find you now?"

Mizuto Mizowaki felt his scalp tingle.

The other party must have noticed the table in the photo—he had been careless and hadn't checked it thoroughly.

Damn it, should he refuse?

If Katsuragi Kouhei came looking for him, he would definitely realize Mizuto had betrayed their agreement. What should he do?

Without a moment's hesitation, Mizuto Mizowaki began packing his bag.

He needed to hide—maybe stay in the restroom for a while—then tell Katsuragi Kouhei he had already left.

He could say the photo was taken before heading back and ask Katsuragi Kouhei to wait for him at the café.

That way, he could avoid Katsuragi Kouhei discovering him with Nagumo Miyabi in the library.

As long as Nagumo Miyabi gave the okay, Mizuto Mizowaki could immediately take the questions and meet Katsuragi Kouhei at the café.

Killing two birds with one stone—Mizuto let out a sigh of relief at his own quick thinking.

"Mizowaki, where are you going?"

However, Nagumo Miyabi's voice suddenly rang out at that moment.

Mizuto Mizowaki's heart skipped a beat.

When he looked up, he saw Nagumo Miyabi and Tonokawa Sosuke standing right in front of him.

For some reason, Nagumo's expression was dark, and Tonokawa's face was equally grim.

"Katsuragi contacted me. He's also at the library and might come looking for me, so I wanted to step away for a bit." Mizuto explained, though even he felt a pang of guilt.

He hadn't done anything wrong, yet an inexplicable unease and guilt weighed on him, as if he had committed some grave mistake.

"Where's Iijima-kun?" Tonokawa asked.

"He wasn't feeling well, so I told him to leave first," Mizuto replied.

"You do know why he was supposed to stay, right?" Tonokawa pressed.

Mizuto glanced at Nagumo, who remained silent.

"Iijima-kun was worried that Nagumo-kun and I would misunderstand, so he sent us a message saying you voluntarily took over his role," Tonokawa said coldly.

"If it weren't for him, we wouldn't even know when you'd show up."

Mizuto realized his mistake—he should have reported to Nagumo Miyabi right away.

"Sorry, that was my—"

Nagumo cut off his apology. "What were you doing just now?"

Mizuto froze for a moment, his mind racing.

He had been talking to Katsuragi—he had even told Nagumo about it...

Almost instantly, Mizuto's expression stiffened.

"I took a picture of the questions for him, but only part of them. I didn't—"

"Enough, Mizuto-kun." Tonokawa shook his head and sighed, speaking up for his friend.

"From where we were standing, all we saw was you taking a photo of the desk."

The implication was clear—who knew what you were really photographing?

You were alone here, and the questions were right in front of you.

Mizuto finally grasped the issue.

Facing his friend's disappointed gaze, he opened his mouth but couldn't find the words to defend himself.

"If you don't believe me, you can check my phone. There's nothing suspicious on it."

Desperate to prove his innocence, Mizuto handed over his phone, frustration and indignation bubbling inside him.

He hadn't done anything wrong!

"Would that even matter?" Tonokawa, who usually never doubted his friend's intelligence, now felt deeply let down.

If even he could see through this, did Mizuto really think he and Nagumo wouldn't?

Checking his phone was the most basic move—who knew if he had alternate accounts?

Even if he did, who knew if he had deleted any evidence?

Tonokawa hadn't believed Mizuto would betray their class, but now, if Mizuto wanted to clear his name, he needed to provide an absolutely irrefutable reason.

What could that reason be?

Suddenly, Mizuto pointed at the surveillance camera that usually covered this area and said calmly, "There's a camera here. If I did anything just now, you can check the footage."

Indeed, it was precisely because there were surveillance cameras here that he felt reassured letting Iijima leave alone, without worrying about lacking justification to explain the situation.

Tonokawa Sosuke quickly realized it too—nothing was more convincing than surveillance footage.

So he looked up and saw the camera without its red light, a clear sign it wasn't functioning.

"..."

Mizuto Mizowaki soon noticed this as well.

He finally lost his composure.

Why did it have to malfunction at this moment?

Which part of the system had failed?

Nagumo Miyabi's expression darkened.

To be honest, he hadn't really suspected Mizuto Mizowaki in the first place.

The latter was one of his most trusted aides—there was no reason for him to betray.

The problem was that everything was just too coincidental.

Leaving aside the matter of the photos—which couldn't even serve as solid evidence—it would be perfectly normal for someone smart enough to delete the records immediately.

But for the surveillance to fail at this critical moment?

Moreover, Mizuto Mizowaki had left the scene right after taking the photos.

That was far too suspicious.

Nagumo Miyabi couldn't help but overthink it.

Of course, he also had his suspicions about Iijima, but the latter had been so meek even after his girlfriend broke up with him.

It was hard for Nagumo to believe he had the guts to defy him.

Chapter 363: More Than One Traitor?

Ever since the sports festival ended, Nagumo Miyabi had been in a foul mood.

The humiliation on the field had made him look like a clown, and the consecutive crushing defeats in both the group and grade battles had cast a strange atmosphere over his class.

The lower-ranked classes were gradually slipping out of his control, and the flames of rebellion seemed to be rekindling—especially in Kiriya Ikuyo's Class 2-B.

In the recent special exam, Kiriya Ikuyo had been relentlessly pursuing him.

Though the situation hadn't yet reached a critical point, dealing with Kiriya would still require considerable time and effort.

And on top of all this, Nagumo Miyabi still hadn't uncovered who the traitor was.

What's more, he had originally planned to play the role of the hero and make a grand reappearance before Ichinose Honami.

But to his surprise, she had chosen to self-destruct instead.

He hadn't even had time to react before losing his chance to intervene.

Today, when he came to the library, Nagumo Miyabi checked everyone's assigned questions before intending to have Ryuen Kakeru take them away.

Unexpectedly, Class 1-C and Class 1-B ended up clashing in the library—apparently over seating arrangements—with the girls from Class 1-C being particularly aggressive.

Seizing the opportunity to gauge Ichinose Honami's thoughts, Nagumo stepped in under the guise of his authority as student council president.

Ichinose Honami didn't seem pleased by his arrival, but he paid it no mind.

Just as he was about to probe further, Tonokawa Sosuke noticed Mizuto Mizowaki approaching.

When the two turned around, they saw Mizuto Mizowaki holding up his phone as if taking a photo.

Given the distance, they couldn't tell exactly what he was photographing.

Thus, Nagumo Miyabi and Tonokawa Sosuke had no choice but to return.

To their surprise, Mizuto Mizowaki seemed to sense the danger and immediately began packing up to flee.

"Why is the surveillance broken?"

At this moment, Mizuto Mizowaki's expression was grim as he muttered under his breath.

Nagumo Miyabi didn't care what he was thinking.

His voice was icy as he demanded, "Don't you have anything to say to me?"

To be honest, he was quite disappointed in this subordinate.

Searching his conscience, he had never treated those around him poorly.

If someone would betray him for something as laughable as Personal Points, it would be utterly absurd.

Personal Points didn't matter at all.

If Mizuto Mizowaki wanted them, Nagumo Miyabi could easily give him a few million more.

Mizuto Mizowaki snapped out of his thoughts, a flicker of confusion flashing in his eyes before they hardened with resolve.

"I didn't betray you. This must be Katsuragi and Mitoma's scheme!"

Nagumo Miyabi remained silent.

Of course, he had considered that possibility—why would Katsuragi Kouhei approach Mizuto Mizowaki? What was he trying to achieve?

But—

It was common knowledge that there was a traitor hiding in their class.

Under normal circumstances, Kaoru Mitoma and the others would surely try to conceal the traitor's existence to avoid exposing their identity.

Given that, Katsuragi Kouhei seeking out Mizuto Mizowaki was highly suspicious.

If their goal was to make him suspect Mizuto Mizowaki and thus divert attention from the real traitor, then all the oddities would make sense—for instance, the fact that the surveillance here had been turned off by Kaoru Mitoma.

However, Nagumo Miyabi was also wary. He had already fallen into Kaoru Mitoma's traps multiple times, each time unwittingly stumbling into a pit.

Whenever he smugly thought he had seen through Kaoru Mitoma's tricks, the reality was often far more tragic.

So this time, Nagumo Miyabi decided to think differently.

What if there wasn't just one traitor?

Sacrificing one traitor to make him believe he had uncovered the culprit, thereby hiding another, was a perfectly plausible tactic.

Nagumo Miyabi suddenly grasped the complexity of the situation.

He even began to speculate why Mizuto Mizowaki might have betrayed him.

Personal Points?

No, it couldn't be something so ridiculous.

He suspected it was the same as with Horikita Manabu—discontent and disapproval of his leadership philosophy at Koudo Ikusei.

Mizuto Mizowaki had always been in the student council.

It wouldn't be strange if Horikita Manabu had taken advantage of that, turning him into an ally behind his back.

Nagumo Miyabi started recalling Mizuto Mizowaki's usual behavior.

Things that hadn't seemed suspicious before now appeared increasingly dubious.

Mizuto Mizowaki had no idea what he was thinking and grew increasingly uneasy.

His gaze happened to meet Tonokawa Sosuke's, who subtly shook his head.

"Mizuto-kun, are you short on Personal Points?"

"N-No, not at all."

"I do believe you wouldn't betray me, but right now, it's hard to prove your words."

"I know! There are people nearby—someone must have noticed what I was doing just now!"

Mizuto Mizowaki suddenly remembered this.

Even if the surveillance didn't work, that didn't mean the library was empty.

Why not just ask a fellow student?

Excited, he rushed to the neighboring seat where a boy with black-framed glasses sat.

But when questioned, the boy just looked bewildered—everyone was studying; who had time to watch others?

Seeing this, Tonokawa Sosuke grew even more convinced that his good friend couldn't possibly be the traitor.

He knew him too well.

However, this wasn't his call to make.

Though Nagumo Miyabi appeared composed on the surface, Tonokawa Sosuke knew he had fallen into a state of self-doubt.

Under normal circumstances, Nagumo Miyabi would never take this long to identify a traitor.

He had begun questioning his own judgment.

"Hey, hey, hey, what are you seniors doing here?" Ryuen Kakeru's voice suddenly sounded beside Tonokawa Sosuke, causing the latter's heart to sink.

The timing couldn't have been worse.

As expected, Nagumo Miyabi quickly regained his composure and said calmly.

"It's nothing. You can go back now. There's a minor issue with the questions that I need to fix."

"Seriously? You made me come all this way just to send me back?" Ryuen chuckled softly.

"I told you before, I'm not your slave, right?"

Nagumo replied impassively, "I just realized something—the library is too conspicuous. Our deal should be conducted privately."

Ryuen frowned.

The other's words sounded almost like a joke.

The entire Class 1-C was being tutored by Nagumo's people.

Kaoru and the others weren't blind; they'd obviously know they were already collaborating.

However, as he studied Tonokawa Sosuke and Mizuto Mizowaki, something suddenly clicked.

"Tsk tsk, fine then. I'll go along with your plan. I'll head back and wait for your good news."

Ryuuen turned away before he could no longer suppress his smirk.

This tense atmosphere was all too familiar—it was exactly the scene when a leader discovered a traitor in their midst.

Back when he was a delinquent, he'd encountered this kind of situation countless times.

In the end, it was always his fists that made the traitors regret their choices for life.

Yet, for some reason, he felt inexplicably irritated.

While he was still figuring out how to climb the class ranks, Kaoru had already expanded the battle to the second years, completely disregarding his existence.

No—Ryuuen suddenly paused.

Kaoru had never taken him seriously in the first place.

Every time they met, Kaoru treated him like some street thug, never giving him a second thought.

It finally dawned on Ryuuen.

The reason he'd been so fixated on Kaoru wasn't because their methods were similar, but because Kaoru reminded him of those outsiders.

Some people occasionally hired delinquents to handle shady business.

Ryuuen had encountered such offers before, though he'd never accepted.

Still, he remembered their attitudes clearly—they were exactly like Kaoru's.

"So that's how it is..."

Ryuuen muttered to himself, repeating Kaoru's name under his breath.

Chapter 364: Even Little Slaves Deserve Praise

"Master, I've completed the task you assigned."

The familiar form of address came not from Kushida Kikyo, but from Shiho Manabe, whom he hadn't seen in quite some time.

In the afternoon, the girl was bathed in the golden hues of the setting sun. S

he wore her school uniform, the skirt slightly short, deliberately revealing her smooth, snow-white thighs and faintly blushing knees.

Her slender calves were clad in black knee-high socks, and the black loafers she wore would surely be the delight of many foot fetishists.

Meeting Kaoru's gaze, the gyaru slightly curled her lips, her hands clasped behind her back, her eyes sparkling as if eagerly awaiting his praise.

It had been nearly two and a half months since they last met after summer break.

Shiho Manabe was practically wagging an invisible tail behind her, staring at him with longing eyes.

Kaoru Mitoma knew full well that she had completed her mission—intentionally provoking a conflict with Class 1-B students to draw Nagumo Miyabi away, paving the way for Mizuto Mizowaki's involvement.

As for how he knew...

"Black-framed Glasses"—a reward he had recently obtained.

Wearing them would make others mistake him for someone else, though in reality, nothing about him changed.

The effect lasted for half an hour.

Once used, it entered a 24-hour cooldown period, making it one of the most powerful rewards he had ever drawn.

While Nagumo Miyabi and Mizuto Mizowaki were confronting each other, Kaoru had been watching from the sidelines.

At one point, Mizuto even naively approached him for advice.

"Mhm, you did well," Kaoru said casually, reaching out to pat her head. "What about Yamashita and the others?"

"They're still studying. If they're not careful, they might get expelled soon," Shiho replied, her expression one of contentment.

For some reason, despite knowing she had fallen victim to something inexplicable—becoming his slave—she couldn't muster any desire to resist.

In fact, she had been feeling unusually distressed lately because Kaoru hadn't come to see them, as if she had been abandoned.

She couldn't focus on her classes at all.

Today, after finally receiving Kaoru's orders again, it was like hearing the voice of an angel to Shiho. Her spirits instantly lifted.

"Did Ryuen Kakeru suspect anything?" Kaoru asked as he sat on a bench.

Shiho deliberately leaned closer, secretly inhaling his scent.

Truth be told, having Shiho and the others make an appearance would inevitably draw Ryuen's attention, even though these girls were usually unruly delinquents.

The more frequently they appeared, the more suspicious Ryuen would become.

Those who frequented the streets had an unusually sharp instinct—otherwise, they'd quickly find themselves on the receiving end of a beer bottle to the head.

"Ahaha, don't worry, Master. That guy wouldn't suspect us at all," Shiho said with a dismissive smirk.

Though she used to fear Ryuen's violence, things were different now—she was her master's loyal puppy.

"If you're really worried about him, why not have Nana drop out with him?"

Due to the results of the minor exams, Nana Yabu was now Ryuen's exam partner.

If she handed in a blank paper, Ryuen would have to score exceptionally high on his own to avoid expulsion.

And as a delinquent, Ryuen likely didn't have the academic prowess to pull that off.

To take it even further, Shiho could have Nana plant cheat notes on Ryuen, ensuring both of them got expelled.

However, this plan carried significant risks.

Ryuen wasn't an idiot and would likely see through their scheme beforehand.

As for Nana thoughts, well, they now considered themselves Kaoru's slaves, their minds entirely occupied with how to serve him, eager to contribute in any way possible.

Perhaps then, Kaoru Mitoma might be pleased.

"No, it hasn't reached that point yet," Kaoru said with a strange expression.

Though he had originally intended to use these delinquent girls as human bombs, having them actively volunteer for the role—even more ruthlessly than he had planned—felt a little off.

"Understood." Shiho Manabe nodded obediently, but in her mind, she was already scheming on how to deepen her relationship with Mitoma.

He had once ordered her to strip, so he seemed quite the lecher.

Maybe she should just push him down right here and ride him?

"Keep an eye on Nagumo from the second year for me these next few days," Kaoru said, placing the Black-framed Glasses in her hands and explaining how to use them.

"If anything happens, report to me immediately."

The Wish Machine didn't restrict how he used his rewards.

As long as they could be exchanged, he could give them to others—otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to gift the Wedding Rings to Honami Ichinose and Kei Karuizawa before.

Shiho Manabe was now completely devoted to him, body and soul, his personal slave.

Letting her hold the Black-framed Glasses wasn't an issue.

"Leave it to me." Shiho patted her chest, a deliberate little gesture meant to draw a man's gaze—even if her bust wasn't particularly large.

Kaoru fell silent for a moment before wrapping an arm around the girl's slender waist.

Under her slightly surprised yet excited gaze, he pressed his lips to hers.

At the same time, his fingers trailed down her thigh, slipping beneath her skirt and making her whole body tremble.

Instinctively, she clenched her legs together, her face flushing crimson.

"Mmm..."

After playing around for a bit, Kaoru withdrew his fingers—now slick with moisture.

Seeing this, Shiho blushed furiously. Her first kiss was gone.

But as her master's little slave, she obediently stuck out her tongue, gently taking his fingers into her mouth to clean them.

"You're getting tutoring from second-year seniors now, right?" Kaoru took a deep breath.

If he didn't change the subject soon, he might not be able to stop himself from pushing her down right here.

"Yeah, Tonokawa-senpai and the others from second year," Shiho murmured after a moment of thought.

"I heard they're the ones making the exam questions. They won't let anyone from our class interfere."

Seems Ryuen's secrecy measures are working, Kaoru mused.

Otherwise, Shiho would've told him about this much sooner.

"Hey, hey, Master, should I go steal the questions?" Shiho asked excitedly.

With the Black-framed Glasses, peeking at the exam would be child's play.

"Good. Handle it. On the day before the exam, disguise yourself as your homeroom teacher—only they receive the final version of the test." Kaoru was no honest man. If he had cheats, why not use them?

Shiho smiled brightly.

She had been terrified Kaoru would deem her useless and discard her.

Now, satisfying him had become her top priority.

Regarding this point, Shiho Manabe didn't see any problem at all.

Although the effects played a role, Kaoru's previous actions had convinced her that following this master was definitely a good choice.

Kaoru, however, fell into deep thought.

How should he explain the source of the exam questions to Class A?

After pondering for a while, Kaoru gave up on thinking about it—he didn't need to explain at all.

The more he explained, the less mysterious it would seem.

"By the way, if you feel like you might fail the exams, you can come to me. I'll do my best to tutor you."

"Eh, really?"

"But I don't have much time to spare."

"That's fine! Even if it's just an hour or half an hour, I want to be with Master!"

Kaoru clicked his tongue slightly. Somehow, compared to Kushida Kikyo, these delinquent girls seemed like the real good kids.

...

"Ah, I can't take it anymore! Let's take a break!"

As soon as she finished speaking, Hasebe Haruka flopped down without any restraint, her ample bosom pressing against the edge of the table, drawing sidelong glances.

By now, the café was packed.

With final exams approaching, most club activities had come to a halt, and students cramming for their studies occupied every corner.

Over the past few days, Kaoru and the others had moved between several cafés.

The most popular one among students, Palette Café, was probably too crowded to even enter now.

"You can take a break—after you finish this problem. I'll reward you with a coffee," Kaoru said, pointing at the notebook in front of her.

"If you finish all of them, I'll throw in your favorite dessert too."

"Do you think I'm some kind of dog?" Haruka whined, her voice practically pleading.

"If I keep going, I'll die. Let's stop now, Kaoru. Look, Airi's already out of it!"

Airi Sakura, who had been somewhat dazed, jolted at the sound of her name and stammered.

"I-I can still go on..."

"No way, Airi! You were muttering some terrifying incantation earlier—your soul was practically leaving your body," Haruka said with utmost seriousness.

"Honestly, I think studying isn't just about solving problems. Taking proper breaks is better for both physical and mental health."

"That... does make sense," Miki Yamamura agreed wholeheartedly.

Though her grades were decent, the strain of nonstop problem-solving was unbearable.

"Right, right! Let's chat for a bit. Miki, are you in any clubs?" Haruka perked up immediately.

Kaoru shot her a sidelong glance.

No wonder she had suggested studying at a café—she probably had this in mind all along.

"Eh, I'm not in any clubs."

"So, out of all of us, only Kaoru is in the student council. The rest of us are just going-home club members!"

"Haruka... you're not in any clubs either?"

"Because they're boring! Clubs and all that—I'd rather be alone. I'm not used to that kind of environment."

"O-oh, I see."

"By the way, Miki, Airi, where did you two go to middle school?"

"..."

The conversation seemed to have veered into close-friend territory.

Kaoru didn't interrupt their chatter.

The atmosphere felt like watching a slice-of-life moment from a group of high school girls—warm and nostalgic.

But with the mood like this, Haruka naturally didn't let Kaoru off the hook either.

"Where were you before, Kaoru?"

After getting responses from the other two, Hasebe Haruka turned to Kaoru, while Airi Sakura and Miki Yamamura also perked up their ears curiously.

Facing their gazes, Kaoru answered briefly, "Pretty much the same as now. I was active around the Tokyo area back then too."

Well, to be precise, it was the inspirational story of working as a producer at Agency, leading a group of high school girls to the grandest stage while the president was frequently absent and unreachable.

"Hey hey hey, that's basically saying nothing at all!" Hasebe Haruka seemed exasperated, then teased with a smirk.

Did you have a girlfriend back then?"

Airi Sakura grew tense, staring intently at Kaoru.

"You seem quite nosy, Haru-haru."

Hasebe Haruka nearly jumped at the nickname—it was definitely intentional and somehow gross.

"Nosy about what? Since you studied here before, weren't there any major, super popular stages two years ago?" The girl's face flushed slightly, but her tone was earnest.

"I really wanted to go, but couldn't get tickets, so I was wondering if you went."

Kaoru was speechless.

What did ticket scalping have to do with having a girlfriend?

"Never heard of it. I stayed home gaming every day back then, barely went out."

As soon as he finished speaking, Kaoru noticed Hasebe Haruka's strange look.

Before he could ponder it, a large hand clapped onto his shoulder.

"Sounds boring as hell. Your past life was a real failure, Mitoma."

With those words, Ryuen Kakeru forcibly sat down beside Kaoru, followed by Ishizaki Daichi and others.

"Sorry, I'm not a social butterfly. My deepest apologies to you all." Kaoru's lips twitched slightly.

"Also, I'm not really used to shoulder-patting with guys."

Ryuen Kakeru rolled his eyes.

Who was he kidding, hanging out with girls for tutoring every day?

If he wasn't a social butterfly, who was?

Chapter 365: Airi's Worries

Hasebe Haruka and the others clearly grew tense at Ryuen Kakeru's sudden appearance.

"You seem pretty free, huh? Tutoring your own class is one thing, but even helping Class D? Is one of them your crush or something?"

Yet, in response to Ryuen Kakeru's provocation, Kaoru answered bluntly.

"All of them."

For a moment, not just Ryuen Kakeru but even Hasebe Haruka and the others fell silent.

Airi Sakura's face burned red, and she fidgeted uncomfortably.

Then, Ryuen Kakeru burst out laughing. "Sometimes, I really admire your shamelessness, Mitoma."

"And I admire your lack of boundaries."

"Hah, I don't quite get it. Are you upset I interrupted your little date?"

"I just hate guys hitting on me."

"..."

Ryuen felt his orientation was being questioned.

He scoffed, silently moving away from Kaoru, then realized it was pointless and schooled his expression.

"You seem to have the wrong idea. Truth is, I am interested in you—just not in the way you think."
Ryuen Kakeru stroked his chin.

"Did you do something in the past?"

"Do what?" Kaoru looked at him strangely.

"You made a contract with the upperclassmen, didn't you? I'm curious—how does a newly enrolled high school student like you have that kind of money?" Ryuen Kakeru recalled the events at the start of the term, trying to piece everything together.

"A minor holding several million yen is hard to believe. Don't tell me you're some Tokyo rich kid too."

"There's no need to explain that to you. Even if I were, do I really have to tell you?" Kaoru found the question absurd.

Ryuuen stared at him for a moment, looking oddly amused before flashing a satisfied grin.

"Heh. You reek of lies, just like that woman over there."

Hasebe Haruka stiffened.

What did he mean by that woman?

"Mitoma, I don't know what you're thinking, but it seems you still haven't grasped the situation. Playing house with a bunch of high schoolers here isn't exactly an easy task."

Ryuuen stood up, hands in his pockets, smirking arrogantly.

"Whether it's you, Sakayanagi, or even that guy Nagumo—you're all underestimating people. Especially you, Mitoma." He paused briefly.

"Just a heads-up—someone's after you."

Kaoru frowned.

Someone wanted him?

"Could you be a little clearer?"

"Hahaha! Beg me, then!" Ryuuen burst into laughter before turning to Hasebe Haruka and the others.

"You'd better not get too involved with him. This guy's probably gonna drop out soon, and sticking around him will bring you nothing but trouble."

With that, Ryuen strode off, leaving everyone bewildered.

The atmosphere turned awkward, and Hasebe Haruka sighed.

"Kaoru, have you always been tangled up with people like this?"

From their perspective, Ryuen must have seemed like a complete oddball.

"Sorry for dragging you into this."

"Ah, don't worry about it. Honestly, I can't stand guys like him—the type who glorifies violence like some delinquent."

"So Haruka likes studious people?"

"I never said anything like that!"

With Hasebe Haruka's intervention, the awkward atmosphere quickly dissipated.

Kaoru treated them to some snacks, and then the study session came to an end.

However, Airi Sakura seemed a bit down.

So on the way back, Kaoru took the initiative to talk to her.

"Airi, are you worried about the exams?"

His words startled Airi, who then lowered her head and murmured, "N-no, it's not about the exams... Kaoru-kun teaches very well."

As she spoke, the girl kept glancing around subconsciously, as if worried someone might appear.

Kaoru immediately understood and whispered, "Is that pervert bothering you again?"

Truth be told, she faced harassment daily with all sorts of perverted remarks, but Airi didn't dare say it outright.

She vaguely replied, "Same as before... I'm sorry... I still can't..."

The online idol had grown numb.

Anyone subjected to daily perverted harassment would eventually grow mentally exhausted, even wishing for everything to just end.

Yet strangely, this particular stalker felt slightly more bearable than the previous store clerk, since he never sent her weird photos.

Sometimes, he'd even critique her photography skills, scolding her that an idol who couldn't even take proper photos would never become a top star.

Oddly enough, his advice was actually helpful, and under his "guidance," Airi felt she'd improved recently.

Still, Airi felt guilty—while he was coaching her, she secretly sent those photos to Kaoru, asking if they looked good.

Though he had some useful insights, a stalker was still a stalker.

He'd constantly talk about harassing her, claiming he could "go five rounds" just by looking at her feet, demanding photos of her Mary Janes and calling them his "lunchbox."

"It's okay, Airi. You're doing your best," Kaoru comforted the idol.

He had been carefully controlling the level of creepiness—just enough to scare and embarrass her, but never enough to terrify or drive her to despair.

Airi blushed. Being called by her first name was still embarrassing.

"But we can't keep dragging this on. We need to lure him out," Kaoru said gravely.

"Some stalkers escalate when they see no resistance. He might ambush you when you're alone."

Airi's face instantly paled.

This was exactly what she'd been fearing lately.

The stalker seemed to know her movements well, often sending creepy messages—praising her hairstyle, criticizing how she drank coffee.

It left Airi feeling helpless, as if perverts lurked everywhere.

Only Kaoru gave her a sense of safety.

"W-what should we do?"

Unconsciously, Airi moved closer to Kaoru, her small hand lightly tugging his sleeve, her face full of worry.

"Let's go to your room first. I have a good plan." Kaoru didn't want her to grow accustomed to the harassment.

It was time to strike back hard.

If he didn't fight back, Kaoru suspected that Airi Sakura would forever consider being harassed by a pervert as something completely normal.

"Eh eh eh eh, m-my room!?" Airi Sakura completely stuttered, flustered beyond belief, her pretty face redder than it had ever been.

Kaoru suddenly realized—he'd never actually been inside a girl's room before?

Chapter 366: Strategies Against Perverts

"Thanks for having me today."

Kaoru stepped from the entryway into the living room. Though the dorm rooms all had the same basic layout, it felt like he'd entered another world. The first things that caught his eye were all the girly decorations, and the air was filled with that uniquely feminine warmth and fragrance.

Yet, even in this room, the owner's personality shone through. Strange clothes were casually strewn across the bed, among which he could faintly make out some cream-colored garments.

The digital camera he'd seen before was placed on the desk, surrounded by a messy pile of photos—likely ones Airi had printed out specifically to keep as mementos.

He noticed some landscape photos pinned to the wall, and the corner of a photo album peeked out from a storage box. It looked quite sizable.

"W-wait a second!" Airi's face flushed as she dashed to her bed like a tornado, hurriedly gathering up her clothes—outfits she wore for staged photoshoots. There was no way she could let Kaoru see these.

Even if she sometimes sent him pictures of herself in them, that didn't mean he could see the actual clothes in person.

Kaoru sat at the desk and picked up a few photos to examine. He wasn't sure when she'd taken these, but they were from the sports festival, capturing everyone during warm-ups.

These weren't Class D students—Airi must have secretly photographed other classes one afternoon.

Was she trying to preserve memories of her high school life?

Kaoru flipped through a few more. Judging by the angles and lighting, it was clear Airi had taken his advice to heart—her skills had improved rapidly, now carrying a hint of artistic flair.

Hmm, he had to give credit where it was due. Otherwise, as her mentor, he'd have no face left.

But then he paused at one particular photo. That silhouette, that profile—it looked so familiar.

Wait, wasn't he supposed to be the one stalking her, the idol? Why was she, in turn, stalking him, the pervert?

The next moment, Airi snatched the photo from his hands, hiding it behind her back as she stared at him, her face burning red. Before he could say anything, she blurted out, "I-it's not what you think! Sometimes I... accidentally capture other people in my shots..."

Kaoru didn't call out her lie. Instead, he asked, "When you take photos, does anyone ever notice you?"

Airi shook her head vigorously, then nodded slightly, holding up her fingers to indicate a tiny amount. "Only a few students saw me. They didn't know who I was—I wore a disguise, a trench coat and sunglasses."

"..."

Kaoru stared at the sheer innocence in her eyes. Wearing a trench coat in the middle of summer, right in front of everyone—it was practically an admission of guilt.

Airi was deeply embarrassed. She tucked the photo back into her storage box and hid the digital camera away, making sure Kaoru wouldn't stumble upon anything else he shouldn't see. Actually, she hadn't been taking many photos of Kaoru Mitoma—just occasionally snapping a few shots from afar when she spotted him on the street.

Besides, Kaoru Mitoma never refused her, which meant it was okay to take pictures.

Thinking this, Airi Sakura felt much better.

Naturally, Kaoru Mitoma had no intention of blaming her. Paparazzi were impossible to guard against—how could he possibly notice someone taking photos from a distance with a camera?

"I think it might be your camera that gave you away," Kaoru Mitoma analyzed calmly. "Think about it—if you were taking pictures of the scenery and accidentally caught their attention, they'd definitely take a second look. If they happened to be your fan, recognizing you wouldn't be too difficult."

Airi Sakura found this reasoning sound and began to slump in defeat. Though she was usually cautious and tried to avoid others, even store clerks had recognized her before. It wasn't unreasonable for a stalker to identify her somewhere.

"However, since they didn't notice you right away, we can at least deduce they aren't from your class. They probably have little contact with you normally, but given how well they know your habits, they're likely a first-year student."

"They must have had the time and energy to follow you, which is how they noticed your unusual relationship with the clerk. Maybe out of jealousy toward a fellow admirer, they lashed out at the clerk."

"It's easy to understand the mindset of an obsessive fan like this. From their comments, it's clear they want to monopolize you—believing that Nene-chan belongs to them alone. They're a complete creep."

Kaoru Mitoma spoke at length, condemning the stalker without batting an eye.

Listening to his analysis, Airi Sakura felt both impressed and intimidated. She whispered, "What should we do?"

"It's simple. Since they want Nene-chan all to themselves, they definitely can't stand another man appearing by your side." Kaoru Mitoma gave her a meaningful look. "For example, if I were in your room right now."

Even though Airi Sakura hadn't changed her usual style—still wearing her plain glasses, twin braids draped over her shoulders, and messy bangs—she looked like a gloomy girl at first glance.

But upon closer inspection, her true beauty was undeniable—delicate features, flawless skin, and especially the pronounced curves beneath her blouse, full and soft enough to sink one's hands into.

Beneath her skirt, her slender legs were encased in sheer black thigh-high socks, with a glimpse of pale, smooth thighs peeking out. Her small, perky rear rested atop her rounded ankles, the faint outline of her bottom visible. Her toes, peeking out like strawberry daifuku, had a faint pink glow as they fidgeted restlessly.

Perhaps sensing his gaze, Airi Sakura's cheeks flushed, and she avoided meeting his eyes.

"If we let them know I'm alone with you right now, it'll probably lure them out. A creep like that would never tolerate someone else trying to take Nene-chan away."

"Ugh, I get it... but, um, please stop saying that name... It's so embarrassing..." Airi Sakura covered her face with her hands, wishing she could just disappear into the ground. The feeling was akin to having someone read out her cringeworthy online alias in front of acquaintances—it was utterly mortifying!

"It does seem a bit inappropriate. 'Airi' sounds much better."

"Guh..."

Kaoru Mitoma chuckled at her flustered, red-faced reaction. Modern idols really couldn't handle teasing, huh? Even introverts could become idols these days...

Wait, that might actually be a good thing?

Imagine if fans saw a cute idol girl blushing shyly right in front of them—chaos would probably ensue.

A timid, animal-like idol could have market appeal, especially if paired with a nurturing "motherly" type and a mischievous little devil who loved to tease. That might just work.

But something felt missing—maybe a hot-blooded idiot?

Tch. That felt way too cliché.

While idols who were good at fan service could liven up the atmosphere, variety was key. Different personas helped maintain popularity and made each idol memorable.

Take 283 Productions, for example—they had multiple idol groups with distinct styles. But Airi Sakura had debuted as a gravure model; singing and dancing weren't her forte. Kaoru also doubted whether she even had the stamina to keep up with a group.

And if she were to debut, they'd have to address her schooling and family situation first.

"Um... Kaoru-kun?"

Kaoru's train of thought derailed as he noticed Airi looking at him with concern.

"Sorry, I zoned out for a bit." He offered a faint smile. He was overthinking again—there was no way Airi Sakura would ever step onto a stage as a performing idol. She was much better suited as a gravure model.

Unaware of his thoughts, Airi felt a flicker of happiness. With him here, it felt like they could handle anything—even that pervert.

Still, it was a bit of a shame. The guy was actually a skilled photographer who had taught her a lot.

If it were just about exchanging photography tips, Airi wouldn't have minded being friends with him. Learning from him and taking beautiful photos would surely make Kaoru happy too.

Thinking back on her chats with Kaoru, Airi's cheeks tinged pink. In real life, she was timid, but online, she had been surprisingly bold—sending him photos frequently. Did that make her seem too forward?

Luckily, Kaoru never seemed to think anything weird of it. He always praised her shots.

"Airi, can I take a look at your chat logs?"

"O-of course!"

She hastily handed him her phone, then immediately deflated a little. Shouldn't she act more naturally? Like a composed older sister, maybe—smiling softly, brushing her fingers against his palm when their hands touched...

"This should be fine. Do you think you could help me with something?" Kaoru pretended to skim through the messages before turning to her. "This look isn't working. Take off your glasses, let your hair down, and either strip or change into your pajamas. Then lie down on your bed."

Airi froze like a statue.

A few seconds later, she let out a sound like a steam engine's whistle—high-pitched, flustered, and stammering with the unique embarrassment of a teenage girl—before practically leaping out of her skin, nearly knocking over the table in the process.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-what?!""You just lie on the bed, exposing your shoulders to make it look like you're not wearing clothes, and then..."

"R-really naked?!"

"Not naked, you can wear pajamas. The uniform is too troublesome. Then I'll lie beside you, and you pretend to be asleep while I take a photo..."

"W-wait, I have to sleep with Kaoru?!"

"Something like that. I'll take a photo and send it to that pervert. He'll probably misunderstand that we did something bad together."

"No way!" Airi Sakura's face turned bright red as she frantically waved her hands. "I'm not ready for this! D-doing something bad... I need to think about it!"

Kaoru Mitoma stood up expressionlessly and lightly knocked on the girl's head.

"Calm down. We're just taking a photo."

"Oww..." Airi clutched her head and crouched defensively. "J-just a photo?"

Mitoma nodded. Though he was actually the pervert in question, he needed to explain this reasonably.

"That guy really likes you, Airi. He won't be able to stand seeing you with another man. When he gets angry, that's when I can lure him out."

This sounded quite logical. Airi immediately recalled several classic scenarios from stories, her cheeks burning even hotter. Was she going to be the heroine tonight?

Chapter 367: Scoot Over

So she didn't actually have to be naked.

She thought they were really going to do it.

But thinking about it, of course not—Kaoru wasn't a pervert, and they weren't in that kind of relationship anyway.

Naturally, they wouldn't actually do anything bad.

Though she felt slightly disappointed, Airi trusted Kaoru completely on this point.

She didn't believe he would do anything strange to her.

Airi wasn't just introverted—she was particularly bad at dealing with boys.

Especially during middle school, when her body began developing differently from other girls, her noticeable proportions drew unwanted attention.

Whenever people talked about her, it was always things like "Her chest is huge," "I want to touch them," or "Her body is so lewd."

Despite this, the gossip didn't break her.

On the contrary, she admired the glamorous models in magazines who boldly showcased their figures under bright lights—wearing all kinds of outfits and styles, each radiating their unique charm.

And unlike how people treated her, her classmates didn't mock or stare at these models.

Instead, they treated the magazines like treasures, gushing with admiration.

This scene opened a new world for Airi.

Scouts aside, Airi began posting her photos online.

After gaining some popularity, an agency approached her, asking if she wanted to debut as a gravure idol.

Though terrified of interacting with people, Airi mustered her courage and agreed, attempting her first professional photoshoot.

She later told Kaoru what happened next.

She truly didn't know what to do.

Facing the camera and people's gazes, her body no longer felt like her own—her movements became awkward, her expression stiff, and she instinctively lowered her head whenever someone looked at her.

If there were boys on set, Airi would feel even more uncomfortable.

After struggling through a few sets of photoshoots, Airi Sakura was already considering quitting.

Even as an idol, the girl had never mustered the courage to face the camera, let alone now.

Airi placed her trembling fingers on the buttons of her shirt, her movements clumsy and awkward, as if something were crawling under her skin, making her unbearably uncomfortable.

Even though she knew she wasn't going to strip completely—she wasn't about to go bare—the thought alone was unbearable.

Besides, Kaoru had his back turned to her and wouldn't look.

Yet, this feeling was too strange, as if she were about to do something bad with Kaoru.

Airi's entire body trembled, her face burning hot.

What should have been a simple change of clothes felt like some kind of torture.

A task that normally took seconds now stretched into minutes with no progress.

A boy and a girl, alone in a room.

In such an ambiguous atmosphere, they would soon be sharing the same bed.

Airi's mind raced with countless scenarios.

Even though she knew Kaoru wouldn't do anything, her thoughts spiraled uncontrollably—what if their hands accidentally touched?

What if he leaned in by mistake?

And was it really okay to send these photos out?

What if people misunderstood and thought she and Kaoru had actually done it?

Ugh... if that happened, there'd be no explaining it away.

They'd definitely be seen as a couple.

"Shameless, going straight back to the dorm after school to go at it."

"Tch, they're gonna break the bed at this rate."

"Can't these high schoolers control themselves?"

Just imagining people looking at her and Kaoru like that made Airi never want to leave the house again.

If Haruka Hasebe and the others found out, the whole school would soon be buzzing with rumors about her indecency.

"Are you not done yet?" Kaoru asked after a long silence, hearing no signs of her changing.

"A-Almost!" Airi flustered.

This was her first time being so close to a boy, and her heart pounded wildly.

In her panic, she nearly tore a button off her shirt, her chest swaying unsteadily.

While she changed, Kaoru picked up his phone and sent a few messages.

If they wanted to drive out the pervert, they'd need an outstanding actor now.

Reading the reply, he put his phone away just as rustling sounds came from behind, followed by the girl's nervous voice.

"I-I'm done..."

Kaoru turned around to see Airi, no longer wearing her plain black-framed glasses or her braided hair.

She had changed out of her school uniform into simple loungewear—or rather, pajamas: a white long-sleeved shirt and white lace shorts.

Her curvaceous figure was wrapped in the thin fabric, her enormous bust straining against the buttons as if they might pop off any second, the outline of her undergarments faintly visible.

Below the shorts, her smooth, delicate thighs were exposed, her slender calves bare—no stockings in sight.

The discarded stockings lay on the bed beside her, her pale little feet planted on the polished floor.

Though she wasn't doing anything, the way she stood there, cheeks faintly flushed and eyes lowered, was irresistibly endearing—a mix of innocence and tantalizing allure.

"Airi really is idol material. If you appeared in front of everyone like this normally, you'd definitely become the school idol in no time." Kaoru smiled faintly.

Even the most demanding producer wouldn't be able to resist inviting Airi Sakura to join their agency at this moment.

The reason was simple - Airi Sakura could easily make a name for herself in the idol industry with just her face alone.

This type of presence usually served as the visual center of a group.

"I-It's so embarrassing... I really can't overcome this... It feels completely different from taking selfies..." Airi Sakura's face turned bright red as she kept muttering to herself.

"If you're shy, you can lie down on the bed first. I'll turn off the lights later." Kaoru comforted the nervous girl.

She naturally didn't know how to interact with boys, so feeling anxious and scared was completely normal.

As Airi Sakura climbed onto the bed and lay down, it suddenly occurred to her - wasn't this like a lamb walking into a tiger's den?

It sounded like the prelude to something bad.

Many scenarios started with turning off the lights.

Airi couldn't help letting her imagination run wild.

What if—just what if—Kaoru really tried something bad?

Should she resist?

Wait, what did she mean by 'should she resist'?

Normally anyone would resist, right?

But a girl's strength couldn't match a boy's, could it?

Maybe she could secretly kick him when he leaned in to kiss her, then try to run away?

But that might anger him, and he'd quickly pin her down on the bed to do bad things, leaving her clutching a pillow in tears.

Although... doing bad things seemed quite pleasurable.

Airi had seen many female protagonists show expressions of particular enjoyment, making her always curious about how that felt.

If Kaoru really tried something, she probably couldn't resist, so should she just beg him to be gentle?

After thinking for a while, Airi decided she'd prefer to start with kissing—the two embracing each other and just kissing continuously.

Gulp...

The girl patted her cheeks, feeling ashamed of herself.

How could she be thinking such things? Kaoru would never do anything bad to her!

"Airi, scoot over a bit."

Following Kaoru's voice, Airi looked up to see him shirtless, holding clothes in his hand as he approached the bed.

He casually tossed the clothes onto her bed.

Creak—

The single bed made strange noises, followed by a click as the entire room plunged into darkness.

Chapter 368: No Way!

Wait, what was happening now?

Airi Sakura tried to process the situation.

Kaoru had said he wanted to take photos, so she changed into pajamas and lay on the bed.

Now Kaoru was shirtless, lying on the same bed with her.

They were practically shoulder to shoulder.

She could even feel Kaoru's body heat and hear breathing that wasn't her own.

Even though nothing was happening, an odd electric current seemed to run through her entire body.

Especially when recalling what she'd just seen—who would have thought Kaoru Mitoma had abs?

His youthful body was full of powerful muscle definition, creating such contrast that Airi felt completely flustered.

As the light faded, the room was left in complete silence.

Outside the window, the moon was about to rise, its silvery glow casting a pale sheen on the windowsill.

The floor shimmered with faint shadows as a slightly chilly breeze drifted in from outside.

The girl's exposed shoulders trembled slightly.

She lay on her side, her soft, full breasts pressed together, their rounded shape almost threatening to spill out from her collar.

Her delicate collarbone looked particularly alluring in the dim light, and her long hair cascaded down as her eyes remained fixed on Kaoru.

Her hands clutched the blanket tightly, hiding her flushed cheeks, though her perked-up ears betrayed her readiness to bolt at the slightest sound.

The only illumination in the room came from the glow of Kaoru's phone screen—though, until recently, it had been Airi Sakura's phone.

Now, it was about to be used to message a stalker.

"Alright, we're starting now," Kaoru said, turning to the girl beside him.

Even though she was fully dressed, her appearance was still irresistibly tempting.

Hearing this, Airi let out a sigh of relief, completely overlooking one crucial fact: she didn't actually need to go along with this.

Simply proving she was with a man would have been enough to lure out the stalker.

And, for that matter, Kaoru didn't need to be shirtless either.

"Should I close my eyes and pretend to sleep?" Airi asked nervously, feeling as though every breath she took was mingled with his scent.

A warmth pooled in her lower belly.

"Yeah. Keep them shut until I say you can open them," Kaoru replied, holding up the phone.

Before climbing onto the bed, he had tossed Airi's uniform and his own clothes onto it, making the whole scene look suspiciously like something illicit.

True to her nature, Airi obediently closed her eyes, her fingers unconsciously twisting the blanket.

Even though she couldn't see anything now, her vivid imagination refused to quiet down.

'If my eyes are closed... the next step is a kiss, right?'

At this point, even the faintest sound—any slight movement on the bed—sent Airi's heart racing.

She couldn't stop picturing Kaoru's expression and actions right now.

Creak—

Airi's heart clenched.

'Is he going to kiss me now?'

She had completely forgotten about the stalker, her mind wholly occupied with what might happen next.

'Uwah... Sneaking a kiss while a girl's eyes are closed? That's totally cheating!'

With her eyes shut, she had no way of knowing when it might happen.

Even if she wanted to resist, she couldn't—she could only wait helplessly.

This feeling was even more unbearable than when she'd posed for gravure photos, as if ants were crawling all over her skin.

If they really kissed... would the next step be something even worse?

Would she have to stay with Kaoru from now on?

Kaoru had so many girls around him—she'd never stand a chance.

Would they tear her apart?

Wait... wait a second.

Was he targeting her because she seemed easy to bully?

With her around, Kaoru would have the perfect excuse to redirect everyone's hostility onto her while he continued cozying up to other women.

And if he ever turned abusive... what could she, weak as she was, even do about it?

'This is the end,' thought Airi Sakura, feeling her future looked bleak.

Although she firmly believed that Kaoru Mitoma wouldn't bully her, even if he didn't, the other women surely would!

"No, no!" Airi suddenly opened her eyes and flailed her arms, trying to push Kaoru away.

"I'm too weak—they'll definitely kill me!"

She wanted to be the main wife too, but the price was terrifying!

Airi had personally witnessed Sakayanagi Arisu and the others bickering before.

Honestly, she doubted she'd even have the courage to stand on stage, let alone face their piercing glares.

"Who's going to kill you?" Kaoru was baffled.

He had been about to take a photo when Airi suddenly shoved him aside, nearly making him drop his phone.

Airi caught sight of his exposed collarbone and chest—it seemed he really wasn't wearing anything underneath.

Her face flushed red, and her entire body grew hot.

"N-no... it's nothing... I just couldn't sleep..." the girl murmured softly, forcing herself to look away.

For the first time, she realized her heart could race like this because of a man.

"Is it because of me?" Kaoru's voice carried a hint of guilt as he recalled something.

"Sorry for suddenly lying on your bed. Having someone watching must be uncomfortable. I'll get up right away."

That wasn't the reason...

Well, it was partly true, but mostly, she was afraid of being "dealt with" later.

Airi was too embarrassed to admit it.

Sneaking under the covers with Kaoru behind their backs—if they found out, they'd surely tear her apart, wouldn't they?

"I-it's fine, don't worry about it!" Airi raised her voice, then quickly lowered it again when she realized she was being too loud.

"Um... should we take the photo with our eyes open?"

Kaoru thought for a moment before replying, "Sure, but I might need to trouble you a bit."

Airi agreed immediately.

As long as they weren't doing anything bad, she probably wouldn't be in mortal danger.

"Can you bare your shoulder?"

"My shoulder?"

"Yeah, make it look like you're not wearing anything."

"O-okay!"

At this point, embarrassment was pointless.

If she kept hesitating, she and Kaoru might end up spending the night here.

Slowly, Airi undid the first button below her collar.

Halfway through, she noticed Kaoru had turned his head away

. Her shyness lessened—he really didn't have any ill intentions toward her.

But for some reason, that annoyed her a little.

Did that mean she was the only one overthinking things the whole time?

Airi puffed her cheeks in frustration.

Did she really have no charm at all?

Kaoru often praised her for being cute, and while it was nice he didn't leer at her, couldn't he at least... show a little more interest sometimes?

Compared to them, she really had no advantage, did she?

Thinking of Haruka Hasebe only made Airi more disheartened.

Even in terms of bust and figure, the other girl was no less impressive than her.

"Stupid... stupid..." Airi muttered under her breath as she quickly undid the second button.

Her chest was nearly exposed, revealing snow-white skin and a glimpse of her undergarments—far more eye-catching than before.

She carefully pulled down her collar, revealing smooth and delicate shoulders, her hair falling upon them like faint silhouettes.

As if the air outside was slightly chilly, her tender skin prickled with fine goosebumps.

When Kaoru Mitoma turned his head, Airi Sakura was staring at him.

Their gazes met for just a moment before the girl's shyness flushed her fair neck red, her ears twitching slightly as if her face had grown too hot.

"Airi, what should I do? I suddenly don't feel like taking photos anymore," Kaoru murmured, even though he knew he was the pervert in question.

But the way she looked right now was far too heart-fluttering.

"Huh?" Airi was momentarily confused.

If he didn't want to take photos anymore, what were they supposed to do now?

"If I think about it, letting a pervert see even a little bit of your body feels like rewarding him."

Even though Airi had only exposed her shoulders, Kaoru couldn't shake the irritation, feeling like his mind was going a little haywire.

Airi pressed her lips together—if she didn't, she might have burst out laughing.

What was this? So she did have some charm after all!

"I've never posted risqué photos before... Risqué ones... Only you've seen them..." The girl whispered, her face growing redder by the second.

"But we've already come this far. If we give up now..."

Though the pervert Kaoru had been roleplaying as had made her send plenty of photos, she had never sent anything truly revealing—at most, black or white stockings.

And before sending even those, she had always double-checked with Kaoru if it was okay.

Seeing her expression, Kaoru suddenly pulled her into his arms, letting her rest her head against his forearm.

Her delicate face pressed against his warm chest, making them look just like a young couple.

"W-Wah—!"

Airi's lips parted slightly in shock, her entire body stiffening as her heartbeat raced wildly.

Feeling his breath against her, her own breathing grew erratic.

The places where their skin touched faintly burned, his heartbeat and warmth vividly transmitting to her.

The more aware she became of what they were doing, the hotter her cheeks grew.

Overwhelmed by nerves, she even forgot what she was supposed to do—her full chest pressed against his as she instinctively nestled closer.

Kaoru pulled the blanket over her, leaving just a glimpse of her smooth shoulder exposed, then snapped a few photos before turning the phone screen toward her.

"Airi, do you know the ultimate way to deal with a pervert like this?"

"W-What is it?"

"'I'd rather sleep with a stranger than with you. You're seriously disgusting.' See? Just send this, and you'll get a reply right away."

Airi stared at the photo of herself—her flushed face, lowered lashes, delicate skin peeking out, nestled in his arms like a doting girlfriend.

Even though nothing was exposed, it felt as if she were completely bare beneath the blanket.

'Wait, Shizuku-chan, you're lying, right? There's no way you'd sleep with a guy.'

'This is deepfake, isn't it?'

'Do I have to show you cream puffs for you to believe me?'

'No way, Shizuku-chan! This can't be real! You're definitely colluding with this guy to trick me, right?!'

'Haha, why don't you just post them? As for me... there's no going back anyway. Better to become someone else's plaything than be harassed by the likes of you.'

'Stop it! Just wait, I'm coming to save you right now, Shizuku-chan! Don't believe a word he says!'

With that, Kaoru Mitoma handed the phone back to Airi Sakura and said, "Though this method is effective, you shouldn't use it carelessly. If they get enraged and decide to take you down with them in some twisted way, it'll be trouble. Idols getting killed by extreme fans isn't exactly unheard of."

Airi Sakura didn't react immediately.

She was still wondering whether to keep these photos—after all, the two of them looked quite good together in them, like a perfect match.

Chapter 369: So You're the Pervert

"I'll go out and find him now. Since he could say such things, it means he knows where your room is. You stay here and don't come out. Leave the rest to me."

Kaoru released Airi's soft body.

If he held on any longer, he might not be able to suppress his male instincts—in fact, there were already signs of arousal.

Airi finally snapped out of her daze and quickly grabbed his arm, her face full of concern.

"Won't it be dangerous?"

In the girl's eyes, the fact that the pervert had overpowered the shop clerk proved his strength shouldn't be underestimated.

What if he was even more cunning and vicious?

Even if Kaoru was strong, what if the guy had a knife?

What if he flew into a rage and suddenly pulled it out to attack?

Just the thought of such a possibility filled Airi with terror.

Violent and bloody images flashed through her mind, making the world outside the room seem suddenly dark and dangerous.

She began to regret agreeing to Kaoru's plan.

If something happened to him, what would she do?

This was a scenario Airi couldn't bear to imagine.

Her earlier fiery emotions slowly cooled, as if rationality had returned to her mind.

She gazed at Kaoru pleadingly, hoping he would stay.

"There won't be any danger. This is a student dormitory, and the hallways have surveillance. If anything happens, the administrators downstairs will see it," Kaoru reassured her.

"Besides, if he dares to make a move, I'll shout for help. He'll be the one panicking and running away."

With that said, Airi had no reason to stop him from leaving.

She felt both worried and comforted—no matter what happened, he would always stand by her side.

Looking back now, their first encounter seemed almost miraculous.

When she had been secretly taking photos, she had coincidentally run into Kaoru and Akane Tachibana.

Even when her camera broke, it was Kaoru who helped her get it repaired.

Not only that, what surprised Airi the most was how knowledgeable he was about idols and photography.

There were many things she hadn't even known about until he told her.

It made Airi feel like she had found a kindred spirit.

And after all the times Kaoru had helped her, she had almost grown accustomed to relying on him.

Though it sounded like she was taking advantage of him.

Kaoru put on his clothes and quickly got out of bed, then turned back to look at Airi.

He had originally intended to tell her how to deal with perverts in the future, but seeing her expression, his words took on a different meaning.

"Airi, your Shizuku-chan is adorable—not just because you yourself are cute, but because your Shizuku-chan touches people's hearts," Kaoru said with a smile.

"This world is never short of cute kids, but to fans, their idol is the one and only adorable child."

As he got out of bed, Airi had also sat up, kneeling on the bed in a "duck sit" pose.

She hadn't expected him to say something like that, and her cheeks instantly flushed red.

"So, Airi, don't worry or feel sad. Some people are just unreasonable. You focus on touching more hearts—I'll take care of getting rid of the trash for you."

From the very beginning, Kaoru had believed that trying to please everyone was an unreasonable notion in itself.

It was even more impossible to expect every fan to be rational, well-mannered, and normal.

Airi nodded subconsciously, but when she saw Kaoru stride decisively out of her room, her thoughts took an abrupt leap.

Just now... was he worried that she might be afraid to continue her idol path because of the incident with the clerk and the stalker?

Realizing this, Airi bit her lower lip.

It felt as if a feather had lightly brushed against her soft heart—ticklish, as though she might burst into laughter any moment, just like before.

But this time, the sensation was even lighter, making her lean back as if sinking into a giant cotton candy—soft and sweet.

The girl couldn't help but roll around a few times, her adorable face flushed crimson.

It seemed she had truly fallen for Kaoru.

If what she felt before was filled with gratitude and admiration, now her entire body tingled with an unfamiliar sensation.

Her cheeks burned, and the places where they had touched earlier felt scorching, as if she might melt at any second.

Airi instinctively reached her fingers downward but suddenly remembered something and slapped her own cheeks in embarrassment.

What was she even thinking?!

Right now, Kaoru was out there risking his life for her sake, yet here she was, consumed by indecent thoughts.

How shameful!

The memory of the stalker jolted her back to reality.

Airi quickly scrambled off the bed.

Though Kaoru had told her not to leave, how could she possibly stay put?

She hurriedly dressed, threw on a coat, and grabbed her phone.

After a moment's hesitation, she rummaged through her room—only the kitchen knife could serve as a weapon.

The moment she picked up the knife, her legs trembled uncontrollably.

But there was no other choice. Only violence could counter violence.

If anything happened to Kaoru, she would regret it for the rest of her life.

Airi walked to the entrance, then ran back to her room, only to dash to the entrance again, as if psyching herself up.

Finally, she mustered her courage and charged out of her room.

The outside air was cold.

She had only a coat wrapped around her, her slender, fair legs completely exposed beneath her shorts, shivering slightly in the wind.

The hallway was quiet, with only a few rooms still lit.

At this hour, most students were probably still hanging out at the Keyaki Mall.

Every step Airi took felt like it drained an immense amount of courage.

The slightest noise made her tense, slowing her pace, afraid that any sound might invite something terrifying.

Where were they?

Had Kaoru already encountered the stalker?

What should she do?

Countless thoughts raced through her mind as she clutched the knife in one hand and her phone in the other, ready to call the police at any moment.

"...So that's how it is. No wonder Master suddenly came out."

Airi froze.

A girl's voice came from the emergency stairwell not far away.

"We can't scare her anymore. If she completely gives up on her idol dreams because of this, I'd feel pretty terrible."

Then, Kaoru Mitoma's voice followed.

"I thought the master wouldn't have this self-awareness. Using a sock puppet to harass your own idol, then swooping in to take advantage—sounds pretty rotten."

Airi Sakura silently set down her fruit knife.

It seemed she didn't need to worry about Kaoru's safety anymore.

"When accusing others, it's best not to laugh while doing it," Kaoru paused, "Also, keep your voice down."

"As you wish. But master, is the reason you're getting close to that glasses girl because her chest is huge?"

Chapter 370: Please, Hit Me!

Airi leaned against the wall, her once-warm body growing colder by the second.

Her face turned pale, and she desperately wanted to flee, but her legs felt as if they were weighed down by tons of lead, refusing to move.

Not only that, she even had to cover her mouth to keep them from hearing her.

Tears welled in her eyes, threatening to spill over at any moment.

So the pervert was Kaoru all along.

He had deceived her, played with her emotions, and was clearly just another lecher after her.

Right now, the girl's shoulders trembled uncontrollably.

Her throat tightened as tears pooled in her hollow eyes, and a heart-wrenching pain tore through her chest.

She was terrified of hearing Kaoru's answer.

"Shiho, that statement of yours makes it hard for me to deny. My orientation is cute, beautiful girls, and Airi just happens to be one. Though at first, I hadn't planned to approach her like this."

Just moments ago, Airi would have blushed at those words.

Now, all she felt was confusion—even revulsion.

She didn't want to hear his voice anymore.

Then, fury surged within her.

He kept calling her cute, yet his actions were no different from a pervert's.

What made him any better than those other men?

What angered Airi even more was the possibility that Kaoru had been lying from the very beginning.

Thinking back, when Kaoru took her camera, he must have discovered her secret.

That was why a pervert had suddenly appeared—who would've guessed Kaoru had another face?

Because Kaoru had fixed her camera, he'd learned about the store clerk's existence, then dealt with him.

Not only had he harassed her through a sock puppet account, but he'd also openly accepted her gratitude.

No wonder that pervert knew how to take such good photos—they were the same person all along.

Airi's entire body shook. She could no longer tell which version of Kaoru was real.

Had every word he said been a carefully crafted lie?

The beautiful dream she'd cherished had shattered in an instant.

She would rather have been torn apart by them than learn this truth.

It was too cruel.

"Master could've kept hiding it, right?" The girl's voice dripped with pity.

"She seems so clueless. Even if you deceived her until graduation, she probably wouldn't have noticed. Now you've just wasted a sock puppet account."

"I never intended to deceive her. The reason I used that account was because I wanted to do this to her myself. Every idol deals with obsessive fans—if I'm the one handling it, at least I can control the extent of it."

Airi Sakura froze, because Kaoru's words felt eerily familiar to her—he had said something similar before, telling her she should learn how to deal with perverts.

"Could it be that Master just wanted to train her?" The girl sounded slightly jealous.

"You could've just left her alone. With a glasses-wearing girl like her, you could probably get her into bed with just a flick of your finger, right?"

"I remember you weren't the type to have nothing but dirty thoughts in your head."

"Like master, like slave. After all, you've made me do those kinds of things before, haven't you?"

"..."

Airi had initially been happy, but hearing the other girl repeatedly call him "Master," her expression darkened.

Who was this self-proclaimed slave?

The voice didn't sound like any of the girls in their class, nor did it resemble Sakayanagi Arisu, Kamuro Masumi, Ichinose Honami, or Tachibana Akane.

It was completely unfamiliar—someone she didn't know at all.

Yet, the girl's words gave Airi a glimmer of hope.

If she looked at things from another angle—what if Kaoru Mitoma had only pretended to be a pervert for her sake?

If that were the case, then the outcome wasn't so bad after all.

"How enviable. Master went so far as to act like a pervert, then gave her advice on how to deal with one, all while winning her heart. Does Master really like her that much?"

In an instant, Airi held her breath.

Even before knowing the truth, Kaoru's plan had already succeeded—she had indeed developed feelings for him that went beyond friendship.

But what truly moved Airi wasn't that Kaoru had helped her deal with a pervert.

It was the comfort she felt around him, whether it was their everyday conversations or the way he quietly supported her from behind the scenes.

Even though study sessions had been intense lately, and she couldn't chat as effortlessly as Hasebe Haruka, she had at least made a friend or two—taking her first step forward.

She truly believed that, with Kaoru's help, she would make even more friends, freeing her lonely heart from its desolate past and stepping into a brighter future.

Because no one could remain isolated forever.

Even though she hadn't shown the slightest hint of it, Kaoru had still managed to grasp her thoughts.

Realizing this, Airi felt from the bottom of her heart that having Kaoru by her side was wonderful—that meeting him in high school was a blessing.

"What kind of 'like' are you asking about?"

Kaoru's voice made Airi's heart skip a beat.

If he had only taken such measures to help her adapt to dealing with perverts, she could accept that.

Compared to perverts or anything else, what Airi feared most was losing Kaoru.

Once that fear was dismissed, her girlish curiosity returned.

She wondered how Kaoru truly saw her, her heart fluttering with nervous anticipation.

"Um... physical attraction?" The girl sounded uncertain.

"Who wouldn't like a beautiful idol?" Kaoru found the question odd. "If someone doesn't like Airi, they must be gay."

Airi nearly gasped.

If he was physically attracted to her, didn't that mean Kaoru saw her as someone of the opposite sex?

"Does the master also have an emotional preference?" The girl racked her brains.

"Does the master like them a bit foolish?"

Airi Sakura wanted to rush out—who is she calling a fool?

"In terms of personality, it's probably because she's fun to be around."

As if recalling something, Kaoru couldn't help but smile.

"She does seem foolish in your eyes—insecure, slow-witted, hesitant in speech, extremely timid, always wearing a gloomy expression, like some tasteless, plain girl with no presence at all."

Airi froze.

Was she really that awful?

"But who says a background character can't have something interesting about her?"

"In places we don't see, she secretly uses her camera to document her life. Because the sunset is beautiful, she hides in a classroom of the special teaching building to take photos. Because the sports festival is important, she sneaks around alone, snapping pictures of others."

"Despite being a beautiful idol, she dresses like a complete frump. When faced with a creep, she doesn't dare resist and flees in fear, even going so far as to delude herself by wearing a trench coat and sunglasses, wrapping herself up like a rice dumpling. When criticized online, she doesn't dare clap back, instead trying to explain herself. When harassed, she leaves messages on 'read,' thinking she can avoid it all."

"Even though she's cowardly and afraid, she still chooses to attend my study sessions. Her grades aren't bad, but they're not great either. Though she struggles, she pretends 'I'm not worried,' too scared to ask questions or meet my eyes, terrified her lie of pretending to understand will be exposed."

"Still, I haven't yet grasped more of her inner self. Or rather, it'd be far too arrogant to assume I could deduce what kind of person she is from just a few conversations."

Hearing these words, Airi touched her cheeks—something warm was streaming down.

How strange.

She hadn't planned to cry, yet tears kept falling.

Her whole body trembled, wrapped in a comforting warmth that enveloped her tender heart.

For the first time, Airi learned Kaoru's thoughts—and for the first time, she realized someone could see her this way.

"It seems the master has already fallen for her." The girl's voice dripped with resentment.

"After we 'deal with' this creep tonight, she might just throw herself into your arms. After all, the master isn't a creep—she'd feel safe with you, right?"

Airi grew flustered.

She hadn't thrown herself into anyone's arms yet!

"A creep?" Kaoru sounded puzzled. "Who said I'm not a creep?"

"Eh?" Both the girl and Airi were stunned.

"I said it earlier, didn't I? The reason I harassed her with a burner account is because I genuinely had those thoughts. From an idol's perspective, I quite like her."

"Wait, so master was actually her fan all along?!"

"I suppose I'm a new fan."

"No, no, no, no—this is too weird! Were the things master sent her real? Were all those messages truly the master's honest thoughts?"

"Some weren't. I was just riding the mood and spouting nonsense."

"..."

Airi stood frozen, utterly dumbfounded.

So Kaoru really did have strange feelings for her?

The messages she'd received were his genuine thoughts?

From Kaoru deceiving her, to Kaoru training her, and now to Kaoru being a genuine pervert—these revelations were far too overwhelming for Airi Sakura.

"If that's the case, Master, you shouldn't give up on your alt account. Wouldn't it be fun to tease her every day?"

"There has to be a limit to teasing. Airi is really uneasy right now—I can't just ignore her feelings and keep acting recklessly."

"It's not like you'd actually do it!"

"She doesn't know that. For her, all of this could very well become reality someday."

"But deep down, Master really wants to do weird things to her, doesn't he?"

"..."

Airi Sakura desperately covered her mouth.

She no longer felt sadness or distress.

After hearing Kaoru's words, she believed this was the same Kaoru she had always known—his true nature hadn't changed at all.

However, she never expected that Kaoru would be her fan and harbor such feelings toward her.

Just the thought that all the messages Kaoru had sent her under his alternate account were genuine made Airi Sakura flustered beyond belief.

So, this was how he had always seen her—how he had always restrained his feelings.

No, she had to get back to her room quickly!

The girl, who hadn't fled earlier, now abandoned all hesitation, dashing back to her room like a startled deer.

Hearing the footsteps, Kaoru glanced back.

"She heard everything, Master." Shiho Manabe smiled faintly. "To have guessed even this... as expected of you."

As she spoke, she wrapped her arms around Kaoru's, pressing her slightly plump chest close enough for him to feel its softness.

Though it couldn't compare to Airi's proportions, it was still nothing to scoff at.

The person Kaoru had just contacted was Shiho Manabe.

Tonight's plan could only involve those he trusted completely—Kushida Kikyo wouldn't do.

"If you're going to do something like that, you should at least give her an explanation. Since I couldn't tell her directly, I figured letting her overhear would be the next best thing." Kaoru had known all along that Airi was eavesdropping.

In fact, he had planned it that way.

Despite Airi's usual timid demeanor, she had a strong desire to change.

Given the right push, she could convince herself to break free from her cowardice.

"How cruel. Now she's completely fallen into your hands, hasn't she?" Shiho couldn't help feeling a little jealous.

Even if Kaoru was setting a trap, at least his words had been sweet.

She wouldn't mind being deceived like that just once.

"You think I'm lying to her?" Kaoru glanced at her but didn't pull his arm from her embrace.

"Aren't you?" Shiho was puzzled.

If he knew Airi would eavesdrop, a little white lie wouldn't have been hard to pull off.

Airi probably wouldn't have noticed and would've believed it wholeheartedly.

Recognizing her thoughts, Kaoru chuckled softly.

"This time, it's the truth. I really do want to understand her better."

Shiho's eyes widened in shock, and she froze for a long moment.

...

To sell the act, Kaoru lingered outside a while longer, as if tying up loose ends, before finally returning to Airi's room alone.

Ding—

The doorbell rang, but Airi didn't come to answer it right away.

Kaoru steadied himself.

Though everything tonight—even the deliberate closeness with Airi in bed—had been orchestrated for this moment, to ensure she wouldn't build too many walls in her heart, he was no omnipotent god.

Sometimes, a girl's heart was hard to decipher.

He didn't know if Airi could accept him as he was.

Just as he was about to press the doorbell again, the door suddenly opened—only for a pair of stockings to appear right before his eyes.

They seemed to still carry their owner's warmth, the very stockings Airi had taken off not long ago.

"U-Um, p-please... make full use of these stockings!"

For some reason, Airi bowed deeply, her face burning red, as if offering a sacred tribute.

The gesture left Kaoru momentarily stunned.

"...Use them?"

"Y-Yes, no matter what Kaoru-kun wants to do with these... stockings, I'll pretend not to see anything!"

Kaoru Mitoma fell silent.

What exactly did she think he wanted to do with the stockings?