

Cote 371

Chapter 371: An Idol Who Fulfills Her Fan's Requests

Kaoru had imagined many scenarios - Airi Sakura questioning him, shutting him out, even crying and accusing him of his behavior.

But he never expected that Airi would not only quickly accept that he was a pervert, but also actively cooperate with him.

Because through his alternate account, Kaoru had told her that someday he'd "thoroughly enjoy" her stockings.

Truthfully, this wasn't entirely Kaoru's fault.

Having to fantasize about Airi every day would exhaust even the most perverse vocabulary.

When Kaoru ran out of depraved ideas, he simply voiced all his desires.

[Want to cum inside Airi's little leather shoes and have her wear them]

[Of course an idol should pose with peace signs for the camera]

[Defile the little idol's clothes]

[Want to take commemorative photos with Shizuku-chan]

[Airi Sakura's soft little hands, begging her to help me]

[Secretly sniffing her panties]

[Cumming on her hands and calling it a fan's gift]

[Printing Airi Sakura's photos to decorate my room and inviting her over]

[Asking about her masturbation habits]

...

Indeed, nothing could be more perverse than these desires.

Sometimes even Kaoru worried that acting on them might set new records in depravity.

However, through his constant fantasizing about Airi, Kaoru had actually fulfilled several of these wishes - some were relatively easier to achieve.

"These are your stockings, right?"

"Yes."

"Why give them to me?"

"B-because I thought they might be... beneficial for Kaoru-kun... like... um..."

Airi's gaze wavered uncertainly.

Clearly, she was realizing how foolish she sounded.

If she outright said "Please feel free to use my stockings to masturbate," Kaoru would surely suspect she'd been eavesdropping.

In her mind, her eavesdropping remained undetected.

Kaoru didn't know she'd learned the truth, nor was he aware of her understanding his... interests.

Wouldn't saying it directly be like revealing herself as the werewolf in that party game?

Thus, Airi hemmed and hawed for a long time without providing a reasonable explanation.

"While I don't mind your stockings, it's better not to give your used ones to others next time." Kaoru sighed.

"I'll help you throw these away later."

Airi froze momentarily, then felt inexplicably happy.

She believed she understood Kaoru's true meaning - pretending to disdain them while actually planning to take them home.

Then she felt pathetic for feeling happy. Here she was, delighted while facing a pervert.

Though she felt shameless, recalling Kaoru's words filled her with heavy guilt.

Kaoru could understand her feelings and knew so much about her, while she knew nothing about him.

Always passively looking up to Kaoru, hoping he would approach her - never daring to take the initiative herself

.If it weren't for tonight, she might never have known that Kaoru had another side to him.

Though initially angry at being deceived, upon calming down, Airi realized she wasn't entirely opposed—as long as the pervert was Kaoru.

As long as it was him, no matter how perverted he was, she still felt a strange sense of security.

Airi couldn't quite put her finger on what this feeling was, but from now on, she would try to understand Kaoru's... peculiar tastes.

"Ah, right! And these little dress shoes—p-please, take them with you!"

Mustering her courage, Airi picked up the black Mary Janes she had left by the entrance.

She knew exactly what Kaoru wanted to do with them.

Even if she didn't fully understand such desires, she could at least play along a little.

Kaoru fell silent for a moment, watching as she held up the shoes.

The girl's ears were burning red—clearly, she knew that in the eyes of a pervert, an idol's shoes were practically a meal ticket.

Knowing this and willingly offering them up was completely different from having them snatched away.

She was too embarrassed to even look at him now.

Wait, no—shouldn't he be the one sweating bullets right now? Not her!

"Airi... do you know what I was doing just now?"

"Eh? Weren't you... catching a pervert?"

"I've already dealt with him. He won't bother you again. Understand?"

Of course Airi understood.

The "alt account" had been sacrificed—now it was time for the "main account" to take the stage.

So she gazed at Kaoru with expectant eyes.

"I-I know! These are shoes I don't need anymore, so... Kaoru, please take them."

Kaoru's silence deepened.

Seeing that he wasn't accepting them, Airi grew puzzled.

Had she misread the situation?

W-wait, hold on!

She suddenly remembered—Kaoru's "alt account" had mentioned wanting to punish her right in front of her.

Uwah!

Airi's face flushed crimson.

That was way beyond what she could handle right now!

Even doujins didn't have plots like that!

No, no, stay calm.

If Kaoru could accept her, a gloomy girl like her, surely she could accept his... eccentricities.

Besides, that girl earlier had dared to play master and servant with Kaoru.

If she could do it, why couldn't Airi?

"Airi, I'm not a trash bin." Kaoru had considered fulfilling those fantasies, but this was just too much.

He'd rather just lick her shoes a few times.

"And if you give these to me, how will you go to school tomorrow? Put them down."

Reading his expression and deciding he wasn't lying, Airi obediently set the shoes down—only for her face to grow even redder.

She had been so shameless just now.

"Anyway, from now on, you don't have to worry about any perverts harassing you. If anything like this happens again, I'll take care of it completely."

Airi's expression turned odd.

That phrasing sounded way too familiar.

No wonder the pervert was Kaoru—she had been under his protection all along.

Though curious about what she was thinking, Kaoru restrained himself.

He couldn't let on that he knew she knew he was the pervert.

For a moment, the two stood there, staring at each other in awkward silence.

...

After leaving the girls' floor, Kaoru had just returned to his room when he noticed light seeping from under the door.

Suddenly, Kaoru remembered something and broke out in a cold sweat.

He quietly pushed open the door to find Karuizawa Kei lying on his bed, her slender legs raised high and swaying up and down.

The slight tremble of the girl's perky bottom was rather alluring.

"Hmph, you're so slow, Kaoru!"

Naturally, Karuizawa noticed Kaoru immediately, puffing her cheeks in displeasure.

"Something came up, sorry."

"You should've told me in advance! I almost got caught earlier. Good thing I had your key, or tonight would've been a disaster!"

While apologizing, Kaoru entered his room and saw Karuizawa's textbooks and notebooks on the desk, complete with today's notes—clear evidence of her diligent studying during class.

Their tutoring sessions usually took place in the evenings, though on weekends Karuizawa would find excuses to visit during the day too.

After nearly half a month, their secret remained undiscovered—quite the remarkable feat.

Compared to outdoor dates, these indoor rendezvous weren't bad, though Kaoru constantly worried about Karuizawa running into Ichinose Honami.

He'd been thinking about how to explain each girl's existence to the other.

Though both were already well aware.

Chapter 372: The Scent of a Woman

Karuizawa Kei sat on the edge of the bed, now accustomed to appearing in Kaoru's room like this.

Her jacket discarded, she wore only a white long-sleeved blouse that accentuated her youthful bust.

Below her pleated skirt, her legs were pressed tightly together—smooth, flawless skin resembling the finest porcelain, with plump, pale calves that looked irresistibly soft.

"I think I can score really high this time. I even showed the practice questions you gave me to Chiaki—she thought they were super hard and couldn't solve them as well as I did."

The girl smiled happily, hands propped on the bed as she gently swung her legs, crescent eyes fixed on Kaoru.

Though Chiaki Matsushita wasn't among the top students in class, she ranked fairly high among Karuizawa's circle of friends.

That even Matsushita acknowledged her rapid improvement thrilled Karuizawa.

She'd always believed herself hopeless at academics, never expecting Kaoru's tutoring to be so effective.

Perhaps it was because they were alone together, but Karuizawa found herself focusing more intently than in class, her gaze rarely leaving Kaoru.

For some reason, the sound of his explanations always made her heart flutter.

"Studying itself isn't difficult—the challenge lies in understanding the material," Kaoru said, glancing at her notes.

"A perfect score might be tough, but Class B shouldn't threaten you anymore."

Karuizawa pouted.

This was what she disliked—Kaoru only turned on the praise during study sessions, remaining all business otherwise.

"Hey hey hey, what score do you think I'll get, Kaoru?"

"Aside from math being slightly weak, you should score above eighty in other subjects."

"What do you know, I'm actually pretty good at this." Karuizawa Kei inexplicably blushed before casually asking, "I remember it's Class A against Class B. You guys should have no problem defeating Class B, right?"

"Not sure, but I think we'll be fine. our leaders seems very confident."

"Is the leader Sakayanagi-san?"

"She's our class's top student—probably smart enough to get into Tokyo University with her deviation score."

"That impressive? I didn't know. I always heard Ichinose-san was academically stronger. People from Class B say she ranked first in the entrance exams."

Noticing the faint smile on Kaoru's face, Karuizawa felt like her little scheme had been exposed.

Her cheeks flushed slightly as she quickly changed the subject.

"Kaoru, do you know who's in charge of our class's exam prep?"

"Probably Horikita-san, Yukimura-san, and a few others, right?" Kaoru had some impression of D-Class's high achievers.

Currently, these students were responsible for tutoring the weaker ones.

D-Class's strategy was class-wide improvement.

Top students like Horikita Suzune, Yukimura Teruhiko, Hirata Yosuke, Mei yu Wang, and Kushida Kikyo led study sessions in the library, helping not just the struggling students but even those with average grades.

Take Hasebe Haruka, for example.

Her grades were far from needing extra help—she usually sailed through midterms without issue.

But with the special exam at stake, Haruka had been dragged into the tutoring sessions.

Otherwise, Kaoru wouldn't have spotted her in the library.

There was no choice. D-Class had already lost everything.

If they didn't push themselves now, they'd be left with nothing but scraps.

Under these circumstances, the class had—for once—followed Horikita's arrangements without protest.

"Mhm, it's definitely them. But you know we're allowed to seek outside help for this special exam, right?" Karuizawa lowered her voice as if wary of eavesdroppers.

"Earlier, I saw Horikita stop our homeroom teacher. They went to the office together."

Kaoru found it amusing.

Normally so airheaded, she suddenly displayed this sharp observation—though he couldn't tell what sneaky plan she was cooking up now.

"Do you think Horikita sought help from Chabashira-sensei?"

The rules of this exam allowed teachers from each class to intervene, as long as students requested their assistance.

Of course, the teachers couldn't take full responsibility for creating questions—that would be blatant favoritism, turning it into a direct confrontation between homeroom teachers.

Horikita Suzune must have asked Chabashira Sae for guidance—perhaps on how to make the questions more challenging.

Only these teachers would know how to craft problems that were both difficult and reasonable.

"Well, it's allowed by the exam rules. Is Class A not planning to seek help from anyone?" Karuizawa asked with a subtle hint of provocation.

"With the homeroom teacher's help, defeating Ichinose shouldn't be too hard, right?"

Kaoru walked over to her bedside and pinched her small nose, smiling faintly.

"You're the one who wants to beat Honami, aren't you? If our questions are tough enough, her score will be lower than yours."

"H-How rude! I'm not some childish kid! I'm just offering reasonable advice from my position as your girlfriend!" Karuizawa grumbled, clearly displeased, though her cheeks flushed slightly red.

"I never said it was a bad idea. Though I really don't want you two to dislike each other."

Kaoru had long known that even the most harmonious groups would still compete in secret.

Even if it sometimes seemed childish.

"I know that already! But honestly, it's a little frustrating... Ugh, never mind. Let's just keep studying for now!"

Karuizawa forced a smile and snuggled up to him.

Only in his arms could she forget her unhappiness.

Wait—

There was a woman's scent.

Her expression instantly cooled.

She couldn't recognize whose it was.

Normally, she often caught whiffs of Ichinose Honami or Kushida Kikyo on Kaoru—the former’s citrus-scented body wash, the latter’s floral perfume.

She had confirmed these herself, accidentally leaning in close enough to catch the scents without their knowledge.

But she still didn’t know Sakayanagi Arisu or Kamuro Masumi’s fragrances.

Was it one of them?

Karuizawa bit her lip.

No good.

She needed to leave more of her own scent on him—only then could she assert her claim over him to the others.

"Kaoru, want to take a bath together tonight?"

...

With finals approaching, Class A’s top students had finally gathered in the classroom after school on Friday.

"Fufufu~ After a month of hard work, I trust everyone is prepared. May I check the final results?"

Sakayanagi Arisu leaned on her cane, glancing around at the students before her gaze settled on Kaoru.

A flicker of irritation flashed in her eyes.

Though Kaoru had been busy with tutoring lately, he was still aware of everyone's progress—thanks to their group chat.

Even without meeting often, these top students could share updates there.

Still, the whole setup felt like a work group chat, reminding Kaoru of some unpleasant memories.

After everyone had taken out their notes, Kaoru secretly glanced at Ai Morishita's notebook.

The girl's handwriting was neat, stroke by stroke, like a printed work of art, with occasional traces of corrections visible here and there.

Directly sharing the questions in the group chat would be risky.

Not only was there the possibility of betrayal, but even if someone happened to peek at them, it would be a loss for Class A.

Therefore, this was the first time Kaoru had truly seen the complete set of exam questions prepared by Class A.

Ai Morishita was responsible for English and Modern Literature, and it was clear she had put a lot of thought into it.

Kaoru assessed his own abilities and concluded he probably wouldn't score full marks.

"You're peeking at my notes again," Ai Morishita noticed Kaoru's gaze, though she wasn't particularly surprised anymore.

"Though it might sound like bragging, I referenced quite a few high school exam questions, you know~"

Some prestigious schools' exam papers would leak online, and students like Ai Morishita, who put in extra effort, were likely not rare.

"Impressive how you managed to tweak the online questions like this," Kaoru showed her his own notes.

"How many points do you think you'll get?"

Because of their height difference, Ai Morishita stood slightly on her tiptoes, leaning closer to Kaoru.

Her fingers unconsciously tucked a strand of hair behind her ear as she stared intently at his notes.

Kaoru noticed her small gesture and lowered his notes a bit, though he could still see the fair skin of her neck beneath her collar—the most delicate part, faintly revealing blue veins beneath the rosy-white complexion.

"I should've teamed up with you earlier," Ai Morishita suddenly regretted her decision.

After just a brief look, she quickly realized these were all questions Kaoru had come up with himself.

If she had partnered with him, she might have been able to slack off even more.

"No way. You'd probably dump all the work on me and then fall asleep on the side," Kaoru saw right through her.

"Sleep? Why would I sleep? And even if I did, it'd only be while waiting for you to finish writing the questions, right?" Ai Morishita seemed genuinely puzzled, while also kindly reminding him.

"Kaoru Mitoma, you shouldn't say such rude things to a girl."

Kaoru rolled his eyes at her.

He had once seen her napping alone on a bench outside during lunch break.

No wonder she had wishes related to sleep.

"You two seem to be getting along well. Feeling confident?" Arisu Sakayanagi approached Kaoru and Ai Morishita.

"Although you've shared your question ideas in the group, this is too important to leave unchecked. If there are any issues, please revise them over the weekend."

Considering the possibility that the questions might not meet the standards, Arisu had suggested reviewing them today.

Later, they would also need to visit the staff room and have Mashima take a look.

If everything met the school's requirements, then their task as top students would be complete.

The exams would begin next week.

Kaoru handed his notes to Sakayanagi.

Katsuragi watched from a distance as they exchanged questions for cross-checking.

Neither of them spoke.

Chapter 373: Bullying Again (Two-in-One)

After everyone had checked each other's questions and had Mashima review them to confirm there were no issues, Class A's exam papers were essentially finalized.

Kaoru spotted Chabashira Sae in the teachers' office.

Her face was cold as she kept her head down, writing something—though the contents were unclear.

However, she probably wouldn't be helping Class D with their exam questions in this setting.

She was likely just busy.

In contrast, Class B's homeroom teacher, Chie Hoshinomiya, greeted them enthusiastically, shamelessly trying to get closer.

Sakayanagi sent Kaoru to intercept her.

"Sensei, you look kind of cute today," Kaoru said, adapting his words to the person—sweet talk for the sweet, nonsense for the nonsensical.

"Eh, really?!" Hoshinomiya seemed pleasantly surprised.

She happily patted Kaoru's shoulder.

"You've got good taste, kid. But next time, don't say 'kind of.' Say, 'You're really cute today!'"

"Sorry, I didn't dare say what I really thought. A student calling their teacher cute is a little suspicious, isn't it?" Kaoru averted his gaze as if embarrassed.

Hoshinomiya froze for a moment before turning to Mashima and shouting.

"Hey, Tomonari! I'm taking this kid with me!"

Mashima, who had been reviewing the exam questions, looked up expressionlessly and replied.

"Go ahead, if you can."

"Wow, I really like this kid!" Hoshinomiya shook Kaoru by the shoulders. "This is the first time a student's called me cute! The kids in my class just call me a drunk. They even complained about me this morning—so mean!"

Not only did she shake Kaoru vigorously, but she was also overly excited.

Kaoru could clearly smell the faint scent of alcohol on her.

"Sensei, you're shaking me too hard. If you keep going, I might throw up on you."

"Ah, ah, ah! S-sorry! Got a little carried away!"

"Do you have something bothering you, teacher?"

"Bothering me?" Hoshinomiya poked her own cheek with her index finger.

"Do I look like I have worries?"

"If you don't have any worries, why do you drink so often?" Kaoru asked.

"Ahaha, that's the adult world for you. Kids wouldn't understand." She giggled and pointed at Chabashira Sae in the distance.

"See that woman? She always has this cold face, like she's frigid or something. But in reality, no one's crazier than her. That's why she never lets herself get drunk."

Chabashira shot her a cold glare.

Ever since she realized Hoshinomiya still held some delusions about Class A, the woman had been making snide remarks.

"I actually think your usual self is cuter."

"My, my, I have a feeling you're going to be quite the smooth-talker when you grow up. Poke, poke, poke~"

"Can I poke back?"

"Nope! Because I'm the teacher."

"..."

Kaoru poked her anyway.

She seemed stunned for a second before laughing even harder and immediately retaliating.

And so, the two began poking each other right there in the office.

Morishita Ai watched with great amusement—until Sakayanagi passed by Kaoru's side.

"Mitoma-kun, stop playing. We should go." Sakayanagi paused, then leaned in to whisper in his ear,

"Come with me. I have something to discuss with you."

Although the exam papers for Class A were already completed, they decided not to submit them just yet.

Mashima had warned them that the faculty office was crowded, and he couldn't guarantee that no one would catch a glimpse of the papers.

The best approach was to hold onto them and submit at the very last moment.

Kaoru wasn't sure what Sakayanagi wanted to say.

Puzzled, he bid farewell to Morishita Ai and Katsuragi before following Sakayanagi's lead.

"Hey, don't forget to drop by the office again sometime!" Chie Hoshinomiya cheerfully waved at him.

The woman walked ahead at a leisurely pace, leaving Kaoru trailing slightly behind, able only to see her slender back.

Her delicate calves were still clad in white garter stockings, though noticeably thicker than in summer—no longer sheer enough to reveal the faint hue of skin beneath, just a smooth, refined texture.

The stockings clung snugly to her thighs, the straps pulling taut. F

ollowing the suspenders upward, the sway of her skirt hinted at the gentle curve of her hips.

"Though it's a bit unfortunate, I have some bad news for you," Sakayanagi said, her tone unusually light with amusement.

"Just as I expected, you've been completely marked by him."

"Who?" Kaoru walked beside her, their shoulders nearly brushing as they headed back to the dorms.

"Don't you already know?" Sakayanagi replied. "I refuse to believe you can't guess what this bad news is. Ever since you joined the student council, you've been targeting him."

"So, was Yamamura-san your way of keeping tabs on me?"

"Yamamura-san is a good girl. Without paying close attention, it's easy to overlook her talents. A girl like her hardly needs remedial lessons."

"I thought she was just a substitute for Kamuro-san."

"What?"

"Never mind."

Sakayanagi sensed there was more to his words, but she couldn't be bothered to press him right now. Instead, she cut straight to the bad news.

"Nagumo-senpai asked me about the exam. When he heard it was a paired test, he decided he wants you expelled."

She wasn't lying—this was exactly the kind of thing Nagumo Miyabi would do.

For Nagumo, expulsion was the final move, the ultimate symbol of crushing his opponent.

However, simply having Kaoru's partner abandon the exam wouldn't be enough to get him expelled.

Given his grades, he could still scrape by with a passing score on his own.

So, Nagumo's plan was likely the same as Shiho Manabe's before—framing Kaoru for cheating.

All it would take was slipping a cheat sheet into his hands at the right moment, and the school would have grounds to expel him.

Alternatively, Nagumo might even go down with him, copying Kaoru's answers during the exam.

In short, as long as the scheme was malicious enough, Kaoru really wouldn't be able to guard against such underhanded tactics.

"Does he know Yamamura-san is your person?" Kaoru had a rough idea of what Sakayanagi was thinking.

Sakayanagi smiled, looking like a smug little fox as she murmured.

"The moment I heard the exam rules, I planned to have Yamamura-san be your partner. Seems my instincts were right."

"You're truly ruthless to your own subordinates," Kaoru remarked in a low voice.

Miki Yamamura had thought Sakayanagi Arisu had her tailing him, unaware that she had been turned into a bomb, ready to self-destruct at any moment.

"Don't say that. Nagumo-senpai offered a high price—he'll pay twenty million Personal Points as Yamamura-san's revival fee, and another ten million as our reward afterward," Sakayanagi sighed.

"At this point, what else can I do?"

If she chose not to revive Miki Yamamura, she would have a full thirty million Personal Points—a staggering sum that could play a huge role in the battles to come.

"Heh, seems like your failure, Mitoma-kun. Entrusting your safety to someone else was a terrible move. Beg me now, and I might just let you off."

Watching Kaoru's silent demeanor, the girl couldn't help but wear an intensely satisfied smile.

She could finally hold her head high—vengeance for past grievances was within reach.

What should she do next?

Maybe force Kaoru into a dogeza?

That seemed a bit low-class, and given his personality, it might even feel like a reward to him.

At the very least, she needed to come up with something that would make Kaoru feel fear and humiliation.

As Sakayanagi lost herself in thought, Kaoru glanced around and noticed few students nearby.

Slap—

Sakayanagi froze.

There was no mistaking that sensation—he had spanked her again.

"You insolent brute!"

The girl flushed with anger and embarrassment, raising her cane.

This time, she was genuinely furious.

The first two times could be chalked up to carelessness, but now, when she clearly held the upper hand, how dare he still spank her?

Kaoru easily dodged her attack and, taking advantage of her unsteady footing, grabbed her wrist, swiftly pulling her into his arms.

"Do you even understand the situation? Let go of me right now!"

For the first time, Sakayanagi felt such intense frustration and shame toward her own body.

"Do you have a death wish?"

"Why would I let go?" Kaoru found her reaction odd. "Since you're planning to expel me, I might as well do whatever I want. First on the list—getting back at you."

As he spoke, his hand slid toward Sakayanagi's thigh.

The cool, soft skin had an exceptionally smooth texture, and the stockings felt premium.

Sakayanagi stiffened on the spot.

Despite always being wary of Kaoru, she consistently underestimated his audacity.

She never imagined he would act so brazenly in public.

Unaccustomed to being touched, she instinctively squirmed in his arms.

Her small chest pressed against him, and as his fingers brushed over her pert backside, she trembled slightly, her legs clamping together.

"If you keep touching me, I'll scream," Sakayanagi forced a cold expression, refusing to let panic show.

"Do you think I care?" Kaoru's fingers lingered on her thigh, not pushing further—knowing it would genuinely upset her.

Like teasing a cat—rubbing its belly outright might provoke resistance, but taking it slow could make it enjoy the sensation.

Sakayanagi calmed down, gritting her teeth slightly.

"I never agreed to his terms. Only I can make you withdraw—do you really think I'd want his Personal Points?"

"With two million Personal Points, you could transfer classes. You could use his methods to win over the lower classes," Kaoru said confidently.

He was certain that if Sakayanagi dared to offer two million, at least Horikita Suzune would immediately betray her Class D.

"Idiot, do you think I wouldn't have considered what you just said?" Sakayanagi sneered.

"Why else do you think I placed Yamamura-san by your side? If it were Masumi-san partnering with you, you definitely wouldn't take it seriously."

Hmm, she just wanted to make Kaoru nervous.

"Personal Points mean nothing to me. I'd much rather defeat you fair and square."

Sakayanagi Arisu bit her lip.

At the very least, she couldn't let him spank her again next time—it was too infuriating.

He was clearly taking advantage of her being physically weaker.

Kaoru calmly released her, then took a perfectly measured step back, narrowly avoiding her cane once more.

"Can't you just stand still?"

"Because I want to make a deal with you. Once you agree, then you can hit me all you want."

"Heh, trying to turn the tables on me?"

"Just hear me out first—"

Seizing the moment before Kaoru could react, Sakayanagi successfully struck his shin, flashing a particularly sly smile.

...

On Saturday morning, after receiving the message, Nagumo Miyabi leisurely made his way to the café.

At this hour, most students hadn't gotten up yet, leaving only scattered figures in the café—among them, Sakayanagi Arisu.

"You're here awfully early. Makes me look like a poor gentleman." Nagumo flashed what he thought was a charming smile as he took the seat across from her.

"Any later, and this place will be packed. I'd rather not have others overhear our conversation." Sakayanagi smiled faintly at him.

"In that case, why not just come to my office? I'm planning to renovate it—maybe I could use your input." Nagumo did admire Sakayanagi.

Though he no longer felt anything for women these days, he could still recognize the arrogance in her eyes.

In the past, he would've been very interested in a woman like her.

Now, he was merely... intrigued.

"Heh, no need. I have other matters to attend to later." Sakayanagi had naturally been keeping tabs on the student council.

Since Nagumo took office, he had done two things.

First, he submitted his reform proposal to the school.

Second, he began preparations to renovate the student council office—rumor had it the council's accountant had already submitted the renovation report.

"What a dull woman." Nagumo leaned back into the plush chair. "About what I mentioned before, you should—"

His words abruptly cut off.

Because Nagumo spotted a figure who looked unmistakably like Mizuto Mizowaki.

The other was bundled in an unusually thick coat, wearing a hat and a pair of black-framed glasses, head lowered as he briskly entered the café and took a seat not far from them.

The position was deliberate—close enough to observe anyone entering, yet with his back turned to Nagumo, obscuring his face, blending seamlessly into the background.

In an instant, Nagumo narrowed his eyes.

Was he being followed?

Being tailed wasn't unusual.

The problem was, this particular stalker was one of his trusted subordinates—and for the past month, his behavior had been... off.

No, maybe he was just overthinking it.

Nagumo refused to believe his own subordinate would betray him.

There was no reason for it.

After all, it was he who had led their class to a perfect comeback.

Without him, these guys would never have reached their current status.

Yet, the next moment sent a chill down Nagumo's spine.

Mizowaki pulled out his phone—but unlike others who idly scrolled through theirs, he discreetly placed it beside his seat, the camera angled precisely toward them.

Witnessing this scene, Nagumo Miyabi broke out in a cold sweat.

Chapter 374: Wild Thoughts

Although the previous incident at the library had already exposed Mizowaki's issues, Nagumo hadn't trusted his own eyes at the time.

He suspected it was a scheme by Katsuragi and Kaoru to drive a wedge between him and Mizowaki.

Moreover, Mizowaki had no compelling reason to betray him.

However, it now seemed he had overthought things.

Nagumo was certain Mizowaki's phone was pointed in his direction, and his expression darkened.

The trust he had placed in Mizowaki was crumbling at this moment.

So he had misjudged the person after all.

It was now obvious that the one who had most likely betrayed him during the sports festival was Mizowaki.

The other party had been trying to take advantage of him while he was...

But why would he do such a thing?

Nagumo naturally recalled the reform proposal he had submitted to the school.

Mizowaki and Tonokawa knew its contents—there were even traces of their assistance in the PowerPoint presentation.

If Mizowaki had reviewed the entire proposal and found that Nagumo's reforms didn't align with his expectations, it wouldn't be surprising for him to decisively betray Nagumo.

Nagumo admitted that his proposal placed excessive emphasis on individual capability—suggesting that even without class support, one could still advance to Class A alone.

However, compared to previous conflicts, his proposal would also intensify battles between classes.

Under these circumstances, Mizowaki might have developed similar thoughts to Horikita Manabu and Kiriya Ikuyo.

Nagumo believed he had figured out Mizowaki's mindset.

It seemed no one but himself could truly understand his ideas—others simply couldn't grasp them.

Not that he needed anyone's understanding anyway.

"Before answering, may I ask you something?" Sakayanagi Arisu's voice interrupted his train of thought.

"Are you doubting whether I have enough Personal Points?" Nagumo snapped back to reality, curling his lips into a smirk.

He knew his capabilities were far beyond what first-years could comprehend.

Though he had lost a considerable amount of Personal Points, Nagumo still retained over ten million.

If he wanted, he could easily gather three million in no time.

"No, I'm not that shortsighted. Frankly, you're probably the only one in the entire school who could make such an offer."

These words made Nagumo unconsciously raise his eyebrows, barely suppressing a laugh.

Nothing was more gratifying than praise from a beautiful girl.

His previously gloomy mood instantly lifted by half.

He exhaled deeply and replied with a smile, "Ask away. Whatever you want to know."

A peculiar glimmer flashed in Sakayanagi's eyes, but she didn't answer directly.

Instead, she spoke in a leisurely tone, "Yamamura is one of my few allies. In the current situation, if I disregard everyone's feelings and forcibly expel Mitoma-kun, I might face backlash."

Whether it was framing someone or mutual destruction, others weren't blind—they would know Sakayanagi was behind the trouble.

"You're overthinking it. As long as you win, these people won't care about such things," Nagumo said nonchalantly.

"Besides, you're the chairman's daughter. Even if you do nothing, fools will still flock to you—that's your advantage."

In the place he didn't notice, when the words "daughter" were mentioned, a flash of irritation crossed Sakayanagi's face, though the girl quickly suppressed it.

"Compared to me, you've spent the most time with Mitoma. You should know just how much of a threat he poses. If you eliminate him now, I don't think Katsuragi will cause you any trouble. He's just an honest man—and in a place like this, honesty is the most useless thing of all."

Nagumo had seen through Katsuragi nature.

The guy was a by-the-book, straightforward, good-hearted person with a hint of cunning—but not enough to matter.

Sakayanagi was different.

To this day, Nagumo couldn't read her thoughts.

Only through the faint arrogance she exuded could he tell she wasn't the type to settle for being second best.

Moreover, her willingness to use Ichinose Honami without hesitation was proof enough that she wouldn't shy away from any means to crush her opponents.

Looking at the results, Nagumo felt regret.

He believed Sakayanagi was inferior to him—if it had been him, Ichinose would never have had the chance to self-destruct.

"Fufufu, everything you've said is my reasoning. But tell me, Nagumo-senpai, what's your reason for wanting Mitoma-kun expelled?" Sakayanagi smiled at him, her gaze piercing as if she could see right through him, making him deeply uncomfortable.

"That's not something you need to know."

Of course, Nagumo wouldn't reveal his thoughts, even if no one was watching him right now.

He longed for someone to be his rival.

Since childhood, he had always been first, surrounded by people who praised him.

That kind of dull, predictable life had left him utterly weary.

That was why he had come to ANHS.

It wasn't entirely for his childhood friend—he was genuinely interested in this place.

Horikita Manabu was someone who matched him.

Nagumo wanted to defeat him—a feeling he had never experienced before.

No matter how he tried to provoke Horikita, the other never took the bait—until Kaoru Mitoma suddenly appeared.

Nagumo had to admit that Kaoru was also a worthy opponent.

But compared to Horikita, this guy gave off a far more dangerous vibe.

Like an exceptionally cunning bear—possessing terrifying strength, yet lurking in the shadows, silently closing in on his back, footsteps barely audible, as if deliberately trying to unsettle him.

Against someone like that, Nagumo didn't think defeating him would bring any sense of accomplishment.

"Fufufu, I'm not a woman who can be brushed off so easily. If you don't satisfy my curiosity, I won't accept this request." Sakayanagi noticed his tension and grew even more intrigued—just what had Kaoru done to him?

Nagumo fell silent for a moment before laughing.

"I don't have the habit of indulging others' curiosity. If you refuse, then consider this conversation never happened. I'm sure others would be more than willing to take on this task."

Truthfully, even if Sakayanagi agreed, he would find an excuse to back out.

Their conversation had already exposed too much.

This plan relied on the element of surprise.

If Kaoru caught wind of it, success would be unlikely.

"Do you really think others would do better than me?" Sakayanagi frowned, seemingly displeased.

"I don't think so, but someone else is more suitable for this task," Nagumo Miyabi said, blatantly lying through his teeth.

"Moreover, we second-years are currently preparing for special exams and don't have the time or energy to spare here."

As if changing the subject, Nagumo began discussing second-year matters, including his recent exam arrangements—almost as if he were showing off.

Sakayanagi humored him with a few responses before their meeting concluded.

After Nagumo left, Mizowaki silently rose and departed as well, their figures disappearing down the road.

Sakayanagi waited a while longer until Kaoru finally appeared.

"He was quite nervous earlier. Did you have someone monitoring him?"

"Yes, he noticed."

"No wonder his expression turned so grim. The last part wasn't meant for me—he was testing you."

Sakayanagi recounted the earlier events to Kaoru.

Regarding Nagumo's inexplicable mention of second-year affairs at the end, she keenly sensed he was trying to draw out the identity of the watcher.

Because Nagumo had revealed part of his plans.

If the mastermind behind the scenes couldn't resist, they'd likely make adjustments accordingly—thus exposing themselves.

"No matter. I'll shatter his last shred of hope."

Kaoru knew Nagumo hadn't completely taken the bait.

The reason Nagumo said those things was that he still harbored a sliver of trust in Mizowaki.

If Class 2-B adjusted their plans as a result, it would mean Mizowaki had betrayed him.

Kaoru would, of course, grant his wish.

In fact, he could go even further—by leveraging "Black-framed Glasses," Nagumo would likely lose trust in everyone.

"Enough. Tell me about your affairs after they're settled. Right now, it's time for you to fulfill your promise, Mitoma-kun~"

Sakayanagi flashed an especially radiant smile.

She hadn't forgotten what Kaoru had promised her—now was the perfect chance for revenge.

Kaoru nodded, then raised a finger.

"Let me clarify in advance—I won't agree to anything indecent."

Sakayanagi fell silent.

Had this guy gotten carried away with himself?

"Stand up now and shout loudly, 'I'm gay—I've always liked someone in our class!'"

"I'm not gay."

"Then don't joke about it."

"Change the condition."

"Next month on Christmas, after 8 p.m., you must stay in your room—alone."

Chapter 375: He Definitely Likes Me

With final exams just days away and a rare day off, Kaoru didn't make Hasebe Haruka and the others continue with their supplementary lessons.

Airi, however, was unusually proactive.

Since Kaoru hadn't taken her shoes or stockings last time, she was now clumsily yet cautiously trying to gauge his thoughts.

The girl assumed it was her fault—worn stockings inevitably carried some odor, and she felt Kaoru might be put off by that.

Moreover, suddenly losing her "pervert account" left Airi deeply unsettled.

To her, that account represented Kaoru's other side.

Without it, she had no way of knowing what Kaoru was thinking.

Airi was on the verge of a meltdown.

Even if a man had slightly strange fetishes, it wasn't particularly hard to accept.

She wouldn't judge him for it—after all, she liked the real person, not some online pervert.

Kaoru remained completely unaware of these thoughts swirling in her mind.

Since the "Black-framed Glasses" were already in use on himself, he decided to spare some time today to assess the academic level of Shiho Manabe and her group.

To put it bluntly, delinquents were still delinquents.

They were much like Karuizawa Kei—rarely interested in studying, their minds preoccupied with fashion magazines, celebrities, food, entertainment, and beauty treatments.

Now that they had pledged loyalty to Kaoru, Shiho Manabe and the others were more focused on figuring out how to seduce him.

At first, it might seem odd, but imagine a puppy meeting its favorite owner—it would naturally want to stick close.

Otherwise, the term "simp" wouldn't exist in this world.

...

After tutoring them for a few hours and ensuring they wouldn't flunk out, Kaoru finally returned to his room.

Yet, even then, he wasn't free.

He still had to check in with Katsuragi and the others to confirm today's progress.

Though his "Black-framed Glasses" could deceive everyone else, they couldn't fool the actual parties involved.

To make the situation appear more convincing, those individuals had to be present.

Kaoru had already briefed them on what to do.

Meanwhile, Karuizawa bombarded him with messages, sharing the fun she'd had hanging out with friends today and even showing off her newly done nails.

Kaoru replied to each one.

Since it was a day off, Karuizawa couldn't use any excuses to sneak away from her friends for a secret rendezvous, leaving them with only these exchanges for now.

At the same time, Ichinose Honami and Mako Amikura were acting a bit strange lately—their relationship seemed closer than before.

Around 11 p.m., after finishing a call with Ichinose, Kaoru was about to sleep when Kushida immediately launched a barrage of calls at him.

"Enough, enough. You can go pee now," Kaoru said, preparing to hang up the phone.

"Hah? What do you mean?" Kushida sounded slightly angry.

"Is that the only reason I called you? If you dare hang up, I'll squat outside your door and cry until someone comes."

Kaoru had no choice but to stop.

If a girl was shameless, there really wasn't much he could do about it.

"Just say what you want. I'm already used to you needing to pee at night."

"Can you stop bringing that up? You're making me feel like I can't hold it anymore, you pervert!"

"Hey, isn't the one who can't hold it the real pervert here?"

"You're the worst! Lolicon, foot fetishist!"

"..."

Suddenly, the sound of running water came from the other end of the call.

Kaoru fell silent—the girl really couldn't hold it anymore, cursing him while rushing to the bathroom.

Pavlov's experiment was indeed correct.

Habit truly was a powerful force—before the brain could even process it, the body had already reacted on instinct.

Still, Kaoru was a little worried about Kushida.

Her bladder couldn't possibly be that weak, could it?

"Perverved foot freak, you'll never guess what I just ran into!" Kushida, unaware of his internal mockery, had long grown accustomed to being ordered to pee by Kaoru and hardly felt embarrassed anymore.

"What did you run into?" Kaoru could hear the excitement in her voice, though it sounded a bit strange mixed with the sound of running water.

"Take a guess. If you get it right, I'll give you a reward," Kushida said, giggling in her excitement.

"Here's a hint—the girl you forcibly kissed, her brain's gone completely broken."

Kaoru's expression turned odd.

He had forcibly kissed quite a few people, but Kushida was probably referring to Horikita Suzune.

Unless... she meant that his brain was broken?

"First, tell me what the reward is."

"Guess first! I've already made it super obvious."

"Is it Suzune?"

"Tch, she's your first thought? And you call her so intimately too."

"What's the reward?"

"There is no reward, because you only guessed the name. I was asking what happened that I ran into."

"You ran into Suzune, talked to her for a bit, and then decided her brain was broken."

Kushida seemed speechless.

His answer was basically a non-answer, and she couldn't even refute it.

"Fine, fine. I'll count that as correct."

"So, what's the reward?"

"The reward is... I'm going to tell you what happened~"

As she spoke, Kushida burst into laughter, feeling like tonight might be the happiest she'd ever been.

"Once you hear it, you'll definitely think her brain's broken too!"

Since she was laughing so happily, Kaoru decided to listen carefully.

"Horikita just knocked on my door earlier, and then suddenly told me she thinks you like her." Kushida suppressed her laughter as she recalled the scene.

"She analyzed a bunch of things—how you tricked her the first time, how you forcibly kissed her—and concluded that you must've done it all on purpose."

"..."

For a moment, Kaoru didn't know how to respond.

Though, well, he had done it on purpose.

But for Horikita Suzune—someone so emotionally dense—to reach that conclusion... that kiss must have left an indelible impression on her.

"She talked to me for a long time, and it seems she's not ready to accept your feelings. She feels she hasn't changed her brother's opinion of her yet, so she can't start a relationship."

"At the time, I asked her what if you forced yourself on her. Her expression became particularly conflicted and confused, constantly avoiding my question. So I said, even if Mitoma-kun doesn't force himself on you, what if he does it to me right in front of you, making you watch? What would you do then?"

"Horikita's expression grew even more conflicted. She still tried to act tough, saying things like kissing is normal, that virginity isn't really important, that love doesn't necessarily have to lead to marriage—almost like she was hypnotizing herself. In the end, she even tried to turn it around and ask me how I would feel."

"Of course I'd want to laugh. I'm not her. As long as I can see her pinned beneath a man, showing that lewd expression, what would I have to complain about?"

"Finally, as if talking to herself, she gave me an answer. Do you want to know what it was?"

Kushida didn't find her own words strange at all.

Subconsciously, she had already accepted the fact that Kaoru could force himself on her and didn't find the idea unpleasant.

Compared to that, she was more concerned about how Kaoru would react to Horikita Suzune.

"What did she say to you?" Kaoru thought about Horikita past responses—either kill him or marry him.

Of course, Horikita was naturally stubborn, so it was possible she would deny her true feelings.

"Horikita doesn't think she could ever like you. Even if you forced yourself on her, she still wouldn't like you." Kushida paused.

"Not only does she think she wouldn't like you, she believes she wouldn't like any man at all."

The answer was about what he expected.

Kaoru felt a bit frustrated.

Horikita Suzune was clearly still lucid—her mind wasn't broken.

"You foot-fetishist pervert, I know what you're thinking. Good thing I kept pressing her." Kushida grinned.

"She told me that even if she had to marry you in the future, she still wouldn't think she'd like you."

Wait, she's already thinking about marriage?

"You think her brain's broken too, right? That's how I felt at the time. She was so convinced you already liked her, swearing up and down about it, and even thinking about how to reject you."

"..."

"Why aren't you saying anything?"

Kushida finally noticed something was off and frowned.

"She's not wrong." Kaoru said bluntly. "No matter how you look at it, I won't let her go."

As soon as he finished speaking, a strange noise came from the other end, as if something had been knocked over.

Then, Kushida's voice slowly sounded again: "You... you actually like her?"

"Yeah. I don't just like her—I like you too." Kaoru's reply was even more straightforward.

Thud—

Another odd noise came from the other side, making one wonder if Kushida had fallen in the bathroom.

Chapter 376: I Came to Repay My Debt

After a moment of silence, Kushida finally spoke again.

"It's fine if you like her. No one's stopping you. You've had your eye on her since the start of the school year anyway."

The girl's tone sounded completely indifferent as she spoke.

She paused, then added, "I revealed her thoughts to you tonight. You must be quite satisfied, right? In my opinion, she's just being stubborn right now. Once you've had your way with her, I don't believe she'll dare to keep up that tough act."

No girl could remain indifferent to being forcibly kissed.

Given Horikita Suzune's personality, if she hadn't chosen to call the police immediately or felt particularly humiliated, she would have retaliated on the spot.

The fact that she didn't do so meant she at least didn't dislike Kaoru.

Horikita's current state seemed more like she was unconsciously avoiding Kaoru, unsure how to face him, which left her feeling conflicted and lost.

"Actually, I'm more curious why she would tell you all this?" Kaoru hadn't forgotten that Horikita and Kushida had a strained relationship—they were hardly close enough to discuss such topics.

If Horikita simply wanted someone to confide in, he felt she would rather talk to a wall than turn to Kushida.

"That's exactly why I said her brain must be broken. The reason she came to me was because she thought she could help me escape from you." Kushida let out a cold laugh.

"Horikita plans to 'rescue' me from your grasp—in exchange, I have to agree to her conditions, helping her deal with the class and get Class D promoted to Class A."

Kaoru thought about it.

From Horikita Suzune's perspective, she had realized her own strength wasn't enough to defeat Class A.

Recognizing this, she began making changes—trying to get others to understand her while also attempting to understand them.

During the previous sports festival, Horikita had noticed Sudou athletic abilities.

Influenced by Kaoru, she had genuinely tried to reach a mutual understanding with Sudou, hoping to gain his trust.

And today, the reason she had approached Kushida was also to gain her trust.

Horikita had no experience in dealing with people.

She didn't know how to beat around the bush, so she straightforwardly stated her intentions.

Because of this, Kushida had been able to pry out a lot of information—things Horikita likely considered bargaining chips to earn trust.

In Horikita's eyes, Kushida who had been blackmailed by Kaoru must resent being controlled by him.

So, she planned to "save" Kushida in exchange for her cooperation.

It was a plausible line of thinking.

If Kushida truly resented her situation, this plan might have had a chance.

"Heh, but I didn't reject her outright. The way she was so serious was hilarious. She even planned to exploit the fact that you like her to make you give up on me."

It was the first time Kushida had seen a sheep trying to strategize for a wolf—even willing to put itself in danger.

She couldn't help but find it amusing.

"How does she plan to exploit me?" Kaoru was curious.

If he let Kushida go, would Horikita agree to be with him?

"Who knows? I won't give her that chance. The only place she belongs is on her knees before you, making obscene expressions." Kushida's voice turned icy.

"Does she really think that just because she shows a little kindness, everyone has to grovel in gratitude?"

Kaoru had a bit of a headache.

Her conflict with Horikita wasn't actually irreconcilable, and they weren't mortal enemies.

The key issue was that the two of them simply couldn't stand each other.

The problem was that Horikita was already thinking about how to change, while Kushida still held a strong grudge against her.

If they had to coexist in the future, they'd probably end up arguing constantly.

"You perverted foot fetishist, you're not allowed to go out tomorrow. Stay in your room, take a bath, and be alone. Don't let anyone into your room, and turn off your phone too."

For some reason, Kushida started giving orders to Kaoru.

"Did you forget something?"

"Perverted Master, please wait for me in your room tomorrow. Is that better?"

"Give me a reason."

"Because I want you to see Horikita's shameless side. Will that do, Master?"

"Won't I get to see your shameless side too?"

"Heh."

...

Although some time had passed, Horikita Suzune still felt a lingering sense of tension and unease.

Of course she'd be angry about something like being forcibly kissed, but what she couldn't understand was why she had frozen up at the time—as if she hadn't been able to react, or as if she'd resigned herself to it.

In front of him, she often ended up at a disadvantage.

And after he'd done so many strange, bad things to her, Horikita felt like she had already grown accustomed to his dominance and her own repeated defeats against him.

Horikita didn't care about the former.

No matter how many bad things Kaoru did to her, she herself had never consented, so it wasn't her fault.

The latter, however, was a serious problem—one that filled her with humiliation.

She had actually grown used to her own failures.

But no matter how angry she was, Horikita had no choice but to face the cold, hard truth.

She might really not be able to advance to Class A.

Under Kaoru's influence, Horikita had come to realize that she'd been too fixated on her brother's shadow.

Blindly chasing after someone else would only cause her to lose her own independence.

That was probably also why her brother had been disappointed in her.

Still, Horikita wanted to prove herself.

To break free from her admiration and reverence, she needed to attain strength that surpassed his.

Nothing would prove that better than making both her brother and Kaoru change their views of her.

Horikita clenched her fists, then pressed her lips together and lightly knocked on the door in front of her.

She couldn't run away.

Her own rule for herself was to never avoid problems—no matter what happened, she wouldn't escape reality.

She knew Kaoru liked her.

In fact, she should have realized it during their previous conversations, but at the time, her mind had been entirely focused on how to defeat him.

Either fall for Kaoru Mitoma or kill Kaoru Mitoma.

Somehow, it felt like she'd set an impossible task for herself.

The thought made Horikita sigh inwardly.

The next moment, the door opened.

"Suzune?" Kaoru's eyes flickered with surprise when he saw her standing outside.

"I didn't call for you, yet you came to me on your own?"

Horikita had been about to avoid his gaze but forced herself to hold it instead.

Staring straight into his eyes, she said stiffly, "I'm here to repay my debt. I have 10,700 points this month."

Yes, all these Personal Points had been earned through her diligent extortion efforts.

After all, Sudou Ken had club activities, so he could cover the tutoring fees.

Additionally, she had already given all her personal rewards from the sports festival to Kaoru last month.

The girl hadn't spent over 500 points in nearly half a year, especially in the last two months.

If it weren't for the free goods and ingredients available at supermarkets and convenience stores, she probably wouldn't have survived until today.

Kaoru looked at her with a strange expression.

Though she had been diligently repaying the principal, he still collected interest.

Horikita Suzune seemed well aware of this, her face slightly flushed.

After all, since the forced kiss incident, she hadn't sought out Kaoru this entire month and had missed several weeks of interest payments.

Chapter 377: She Can't Satisfy You

The moment Horikita Suzune entered the room, she immediately regretted it.

Because there, sitting in a seiza-like pose on Kaoru's bed, was Kushida Kikyo.

Her short skirt revealed a generous expanse of snow-white thigh, while black thigh-high socks hugged her slender, straight calves.

Her knees pressed against the bed, their faint reddish glow visible through the fabric.

A collar adorned her fair neck, and atop her head sat a pair of pink cat ears.

Her striking eyes stared unblinkingly at Horikita, sending an eerie chill down her spine.

It seemed nothing had happened yet—the girl was still fully dressed in her casual clothes, though the top button or two of her blouse was undone, offering a glimpse of the soft, full curves beneath.

Her smooth, delicate collarbone only drew more attention.

"I wondered who was outside. You talked so big back then, but now here you are, delivering yourself right to his doorstep," Kushida sneered, though the effect was somewhat undermined by her current getup.

Horikita Suzune took a deep breath, doing her best to ignore the cat ears, her expression complicated.

"I know you resent me, but I meant what I said."

"Do as you please. I'm not pretending anymore. I really dislike people like you—acting all high and mighty when you're just someone else's plaything."

However, Kushida didn't leave her with even a shred of dignity.

Horikita decided to ignore her barbs and turned to Kaoru beside her, frowning.

"So now you plan to spend every day toying with girls in your room?"

"When have I not done that?" Kaoru stepped past her and casually sat on the bed, stroking Kushida's head as if petting a kitten.

"If anything, it's you who promised to pay interest but then avoided me for a whole month. Care to explain why?"

A flicker of disgust flashed in Kushida's eyes, but she remained silent, quietly rising from the bed and crouching beside Kaoru's thigh.

The position made it easier for him to pet her—and made her seem even more like a cat.

The scene suddenly made Horikita realize something.

While she had been avoiding Kaoru, it must have been Kushida enduring his unrestrained play.

No wonder the girl resented her, even to the point of mockery.

"Before I answer, I want to ask you something."

Kaoru shot her a glance and coldly replied, "No."

Horikita bit her lip.

Being rejected was only natural—she had broken her promise first, despite agreeing to fulfill Kaoru's demands as much as possible.

"What I want to ask is... have you gotten tired of her yet?"

"Suzune, don't assume people will always cater to your whims. Just because you ask doesn't mean they have to answer."

"You've been doing... bad things to Kushida this whole month, haven't you?"

Kaoru frowned.

It seemed she wasn't taking his words seriously at all.

"I don't know what you two have been up to, but after a month, you'd get bored, wouldn't you?"

Noticing his expression, Horikita quickened her pace.

"I won't deny that Kushida has a great figure—very tempting for a man. But can you really find satisfaction in her?"

Kushida nearly laughed in frustration.

Was she nothing more than a tempting body to them?

Yet Kaoru countered, "Why wouldn't I be satisfied?"

As he spoke, his hand settled on the girl's soft chest, the ample fullness molding perfectly into his palm.

The plush, generous shape seemed to sink under his touch, shifting fluidly with every movement.

Kushida stiffened, a faint blush spreading from her pristine collarbone.

She clenched her teeth, eyes burning with humiliation, but soon a quiet gasp escaped her lips.

Her thighs pressed together unnaturally, her usual innocence vanishing, replaced by something far more lewd.

"A woman like this? I could play with her forever and never get tired."

Horikita met his gaze and finally asked, "Then why didn't you target her from the start instead of me?"

"Couldn't it just be that I met you first?" Kaoru kneaded gently, savoring the girl's trembling.

The fabric dulled the sensation somewhat, but under the effects of his "Erotic Massage Technique," Kushida's acting grew increasingly convincing.

"Because you'd rather play with me." Horikita dropped a bombshell without batting an eye.

"Compared to Kushida-san, you'd prefer to see me making lewd expressions under your control. Destroying something pure and sacred probably gives you greater satisfaction, doesn't it?"

Kaoru was momentarily stunned.

How strange—this girl had suddenly gained some self-awareness.

"Not just lewd expressions. I do want to see more sides of Suzune," he admitted.

Upon hearing this, Kushida, as if unable to endure his teasing any longer, suddenly grabbed his wrist.

Kaoru suppressed her attack.

Horikita Suzune knew exactly what she was saying—she had to.

Just moments ago, she claimed she wouldn't feel jealousy or envy, yet now her grip was painfully tight.

"So, let her go now. I'm confident I can satisfy your tastes better than she can." Horikita concealed her true thoughts.

"Actually, the reason I've been avoiding you is that I didn't want this girl to appear here anymore. She'll never satisfy you, and you'll definitely grow tired of her."

Kushida couldn't hold back any longer.

Suppressing her anger, she retorted, "Do you think you're some kind of saint? Fighting to be a man's pet while looking down on me with that expression—what's your problem?"

"Whether I become a pet or not has nothing to do with you." Horikita was certain Kaoru liked her—his feelings for her were undoubtedly different from those he had for Kushida.

"Or do you think being a man's pet is something to be proud of?"

"That's my line!"

"Because I'm not a pet to begin with. Even if I do bad things, it's entirely of my own will."

"That's hilarious. So you're willingly letting a man play with you, is that it?"

"I'll only let him play with me."

Horikita stepped forward, crouched down in front of Kushida and plucked the cat ears from her head.

Without a change in expression, she placed them on her own, then lifted her gaze to meet Kaoru's.

"Tonight, do you want to collect a month's worth of interest... from me?"

The usually aloof girl now wore pink cat ears, her delicate face mere inches away.

Her slightly upturned nose, glistening lips, the gentle swell of her chest, and the slender legs beneath her skirt—though she wasn't doing anything provocative, the sight was undeniably alluring.

Especially after her bold words, Kaoru found himself holding his breath for an instant.

"Heh, who would've thought the usually untouchable Horikita would turn into a flirtatious girl seducing a man?" Kushida smirked, as if witnessing something absurdly amusing.

"Tell me, did you bring protection tonight? I remember seeing them at the convenience store."

Horikita Suzune hesitated briefly before shaking her head.

"I don't know."

Both Kushida and Kaoru couldn't help but make strange expressions.

If she had known, would she have bought some?

Chapter 378: I've Already Been in Your Seat

Setting aside the matter of protection, Horikita's current appearance left Kaoru somewhat surprised.

By voluntarily wearing the cat ears, she had, in a way, acknowledged that she should occupy a position beneath him.

Or perhaps, Horikita was actively catering to Kaoru's tastes.

"How vulgar. Should I give you my collar too?" Kushida touched the collar around her neck, her smile carrying a dangerous edge.

"I suddenly feel like taking a photo. What would everyone think if they saw this scene?"

"What they think doesn't concern me. The real question is, what are you thinking, Kushida?" Horikita knew her face was slightly flushed, but why should she care?

"The most vulgar person here is you. You've done this many times with him when I wasn't around, haven't you?"

Kushida's expression froze.

Her flawless acting made it impossible to discern her true thoughts—she merely appeared stunned, as if shocked by Horikita's accusation after having lost her innocence to Kaoru.

"Heh. No matter how vulgar I am, it can't compare to someone who willingly throws herself at him."

The girl clenched her fist expressionlessly.

What was this feeling? She had progressed further than anyone else—there was no reason for her to be angry.

Yet, it was infuriating. Unbelievably, inexplicably infuriating.

"You can leave now. We don't need you here."

Horikita gently took Kaoru's hand and slowly placed it on her own head.

"Girls with nothing but big breasts are everywhere, but I can fulfill your needs. And don't worry—I won't date you, so I won't interfere with your relationships with other girls."

Her long, silky hair cascaded like a waterfall of black silk, smooth and luxurious to the touch.

On top of her head sat a pair of fluffy pink cat ears, contrasting sharply with her frosty, delicate face.

Beneath her brows lurked an innate arrogance, and the glint in her eyes seemed to declare that even if she submitted to Kaoru, she would still raise her head and meet his gaze fearlessly.

Yet, this same girl uttered words that practically defiled herself.

As Kaoru stroked her head, she slightly closed her eyes, truly resembling a cat nuzzling against its owner's palm.

In that single moment, the sheer intensity of Horikita Suzune's desires became so overwhelming that Kaoru couldn't even process them all.

"What do you mean, 'girls with nothing but big breasts are everywhere'?" Kushida nearly laughed in disbelief.

"Do you even realize what you're doing right now? I've never seen anyone so eager to be a pet. Last month, didn't you storm out in a huff?"

Horikita couldn't answer.

Before encountering Kaoru, she had never imagined she would fall into a man's hands—she hadn't even spared a thought for something like her first kiss.

When suddenly kissed, her mind had gone completely blank, leaving her dazed and confused.

That was why Kushida had judged that even if Kaoru went further, Horikita wouldn't resist.

By the time Horikita regained her senses, what else could she do?

If she hadn't run, would she have stayed in that room, waiting obediently for her doom?

Of course, even Horikita wasn't foolish enough to answer that way in this atmosphere.

"Mitoma-kun, what do you think?"

She looked up at him nervously, still unaware that she had fallen into the deep pit of two perverts—sacrificing herself to secure Kushida's freedom.

As for Kushida's taunts, Horikita didn't really see them as an issue.

Instead, she believed Kushida was trying to distance the two of them, preventing Kaoru from realizing they had actually colluded.

Kaoru could sense both girls' gazes fixed on him.

Now, they were crouched on either side of his thighs, which was slightly awkward.

After all, he currently had one hand on Kushida's chest and the other stroking Horikita's cat ears.

"No." Kaoru rejected Horikita again

. "Who told you I've gotten tired of Kikyo?"

"I want to be Master's little Slave for life," Kushida said with an especially shy smile, lowering her head slightly.

Horikita saw right through her insincerity and pursed her lips.

"I..."

"Suzune, there are some things you'll never be able to do," Kaoru said calmly.

"For example, in places you can't see, Kikyo and I have already done plenty of bad things—even right next to your class."

Kushida's face darkened.

When had she ever done anything bad near their classroom?

Wait... it wasn't entirely impossible.

The only problem was the school's surveillance cameras.

Unless Kaoru had a way to disable them, she might reluctantly cooperate—doing something naughty in the hallway or classroom.

A mix of excitement and nervousness suddenly surged through Kushida.

Ever since the cruise, she had occasionally revisited those memories, and they were indeed quite thrilling.

With Kaoru around, all she had to do was enjoy herself.

"N-next to our class?" Horikita stammered.

The worst she had imagined was the two of them doing something in a room.

"You... really did it... outside?"

"That's right. Master messed me up at my desk until even the floor was wet," Kushida began fabricating wildly.

"I remember Master got especially excited and finished by thrusting on top of your desk."

Horikita short-circuited for a moment.

The two of them had gone at it on her desk?

"N-no no no! There are cameras in the classroom, right?!"

"Oh my, Horikita, have you forgotten the meaning of Personal Points?"

"Guh..."

Watching Horikita grit her teeth, Kaoru silently kneaded Kushida's huge chest, causing her smile to vanish instantly.

Instead, her face flushed red, and she clenched her jaw tightly.

'You're talking big now, but when Suzune eventually sees you losing your virginity, who's really going to be embarrassed—me or you?'

But Kushida wasn't about to stop.

"Understand now? Pets can't defy their Master, and Masters don't get tired of their pets. The only ones they hate are self-important people like you." She touched her collar.

"This is my proof of ownership. Shameless girl, don't think you're special. You only criticize others' chests because yours can't compare to mine, right?"

The moment she finished speaking, Horikita suddenly stood up.

"Heh, running away again?"

Ignoring Kushida's words, Horikita remembered seeing a cardboard box in the room last time—one that seemed to contain a lot of strange things.

Soon, the girl located the box.

Kaoru had no time to react before Horikita pulled out a collar, bell, and even a large tail from inside.

Chapter 379: The Isolated Senior

In the final month of the year, the weather grew increasingly harsh.

The official exams were scheduled for Monday, and each class had finally submitted their test papers.

At the same time, Kaoru received a message from Shiho Manabe.

With the help of "Black-framed Glasses," she had infiltrated the teachers' office and naturally gained access to Class C's exam papers.

After a quick glance, Mitoma noted that Nagumo Miyabi and the others, being upperclassmen, had set questions of decent difficulty, deliberately choosing obscure topics.

Kaoru estimated how many points Class A could score.

He didn't intend for them to achieve a perfect score—that would be too conspicuous and might make Ryuen Kakeru suspect a mole, exposing Shiho Manabe and the others.

Thus, Kaoru sent some of the questions to Katsuragi, instructing him to tell the class that these were "gifts" from upperclassmen to Class A.

Katsuragi commanded respect.

Even if he couldn't prove the authenticity of the questions, no one believed he would joke about something so critical or sabotage the entire class—what would he gain from it?

On Saturday night, Katsuragi distributed the questions to the class, eliciting widespread astonishment.

Totsuka Yahiko enthusiastically praised his "big brother."

However, this had little to do with Kaoru.

Before the exam, he briefly encouraged Airi Sakura and the others, then headed to the classroom.

The finals spanned two days: modern literature, English, Japanese history, and math on the first day, followed by the remaining subjects on the second.

Thanks to the leaked questions, the class atmosphere was lively.

Some repeatedly pressed Katsuragi for the source, to which he responded with an air of mystery, claiming only that Class C had sought help from upperclassmen—and he happened to know a few.

Sakayanagi Arisu remained entirely unfazed, sitting quietly at her desk.

"Yamamura says your skills are impressive—even she finds you remarkable," Kamuro remarked beside him.

"Her fundamentals are solid too. She doesn't seem like a poor student," Kaoru replied tactfully.

"I think Yamamura is about the same level as me. We've discussed studies before," Kamuro said, still unaware of the truth.

"She understands everything I explain, and her exam rankings seem similar to mine."

Kaoru glanced at her but held his tongue.

Ding—

As the preparatory bell rang, Mashima Tomonari entered Class A's classroom carrying exam papers and answer sheets under the students' collective gaze.

"The finals will now begin. The first subject is modern literature. You are not permitted to flip the exam papers over before the official start..." Mashima announced the instructions while distributing the papers.

"Though I have faith in you, I hope you perform well."

Kaoru took his exam paper.

The moment the bell rang, he heard the synchronized flipping of pages across the room, followed by several gasps.

...

"I can't believe you actually got your hands on Class C's questions."

After the exam, Kamuro looked at Kaoru with a complicated expression.

If this was the case, what had she even been studying for?

"The questions aren't that many, this is already the limit," Kaoru said. "And don't expect answers to fall from the sky every time. Remember, only the knowledge in your brain can cheat in exams."

Kamuro pouted. "So you even helped girls from Class D cheat. How nice, having different girls accompany you."

"I'd rather have you accompany me," Kaoru said without blinking.

Kamuro couldn't help but laugh in frustration, though she'd already suffered enough setbacks to know better than to attack Kaoru recklessly—otherwise it would just end up rewarding him again.

As Kaoru packed his things and stepped out of the classroom, he immediately spotted Sakayanagi waiting for him in the hallway.

"Have you succeeded already?" Sakayanagi knew exactly what the senior student situation was about.

She couldn't quite picture "Black-framed Glasses," but based on common sense, she deduced there must be a mole around Nagumo Miyabi.

And this mole seemed to be related to what Kaoru had been working on recently.

Sakayanagi had looked into the second-year affairs.

She knew what Nagumo Miyabi had gone through, but unlike him, as an observer, she could calmly piece together the whole process and uncover Kaoru's true intentions.

"Almost there." Kaoru glanced at her calves.

The white garter socks seemed thicker than in summer, no longer revealing the flesh tone beneath but instead resembling smooth ice cream.

"Want to play chess again next time?"

Sakayanagi stared at him expressionlessly.

She'd have to be more cautious about her personal safety when playing chess with this guy in the future—she'd heard that an emperor from a certain Eastern nation once killed his opponent during a chess match.

However, the girl let out a soft sigh.

"I feel a little frustrated. It's like I didn't do anything in this exam."

Kaoru didn't believe her at all.

Recently, she had only done two things: attacking Ichinose Honami and leading the assault on Class B's questions herself.

...

The next day, the exams continued.

After the final subject ended, the class collectively let out sighs of relief.

Many students eagerly discussed the questions they had just answered.

Class A had a solid foundation to begin with, and now with some of Class C's questions in hand, they were confident they could outperform both Class C and Class B in total scores, if not achieve perfect marks.

The results wouldn't be announced until the next day, but Class A had already started celebrating.

With Sakayanagi leading the attack on Class B and Katsuragi bringing Class C's questions, everyone felt the future was bright.

Maybe having two leaders wasn't so bad after all.

Kamuro wanted to say something to Kaoru, but in the blink of an eye, she saw him walk out of the classroom, seemingly in a hurry.

Suspicious, she considered following him.

But then she reconsidered—wouldn't that make it seem like she cared too much about him?

Instead, Kamuro decided to find Miki Yamamura.

With the two of them together, even if she was spotted, it would just look like a chance encounter with Kaoru on the way.

As it turned out, Kamuro's intuition was spot-on.

Kaoru did indeed have urgent business—his opportunity had finally arrived.

Before long, he spotted Asahina Nazuna sitting on a bench by the artificial lake, staring intently at the water's surface.

The surroundings were silent, save for a few birds skimming over the rippling waves.

In a little while, Tokyo's first snow would blanket the area, freezing the lake over, and these birds wouldn't return until next spring.

"Senpai, did you come out here to relax after the exams too?" Kaoru greeted her casually.

At that, Asahina Nazuna finally snapped out of her thoughts.

The dullness in her eyes faded as they regained focus, and she smiled.

"Oh my, I didn't expect to run into a junior here. I thought you'd all be celebrating by now," Asahina Nazuna chuckled.

"How were your finals?"

"Pretty smooth. But what are you doing here, Senpai?" Kaoru walked over and sat on the other side of the bench.

"I heard the school keeps ornamental fish here. Wonder if any will freeze to death."

Asahina blinked.

Did he think she was here just to enjoy the scenery?

No, that's not it.

This guy knew exactly why he was here.

He was aware of what had happened in class and understood his own position—because he had his own circle of friends.

Kaoru was just trying to make conversation.

After all, taking advantage of a vulnerable moment couldn't be too direct.

At this thought, Asahina suddenly found it somewhat amusing.

She was fully aware of Kaoru's intentions toward her and should have left immediately, yet now she felt indifferent.

"Fish in Tokyo don't freeze to death that easily. They've lived here for over a decade before you even arrived," Asahina said softly.

"They're used to snowy Tokyo, and Tokyo is used to fish hiding beneath the water. By next spring, they'll reappear in people's sight."

"So habits really are a terrifying force," Kaoru mused.

"In physics, some call it inertia—continuing along a set path in uniform linear motion."

"As expected of a junior who just finished exams. You haven't forgotten what you've learned, huh?"

"Aren't you the same, senpai?"

"Me? I don't usually bother memorizing this stuff. Just scribbling it down is enough."

"Just scribbling and still making it to Class A? Senpai's abilities are unfathomable!"

"Cut it out. I wasn't in Class A from the start. It was Miyabi who led us—"

At this point, Asahina suddenly froze.

She had been trying hard not to steer the conversation toward Nagumo Miyabi, so how had they ended up here?

Chapter 380: Questioning the Heart

The atmosphere between them fell into silence.

Kaoru blinked, seemingly unsure of what had happened.

Asahina felt a pang of irritation.

Deep down, she had many questions she wanted to ask Kaoru, but if they were mixed with other things, she feared their relationship would change.

She had no intention of getting involved with Kaoru, nor did she plan to deliberately distance herself from him.

Yet, Asahina Nazuna also knew this wasn't right.

Just as Nagumo had been dissatisfied with her—knowing full well that Kaoru might have feelings for her, what would happen if she continued meeting and interacting with him?

Asahina felt lost.

Everything that had happened recently felt strangely unfamiliar.

"Is Mizowaki one of your people?"

Her sudden question caught Kaoru off guard.

He shook his head. "If you don't believe he's one of us, then he isn't."

In other words, if Asahina believed Mizowaki was on his side, then no matter how much Mizowaki explained, the seed of doubt would already be planted in her mind.

Like the parable of the neighbor stealing the axe, from then on, Mizowaki would forever bear the label of suspicion.

Had she not doubted Mizowaki, none of the recent events would have happened.

At this, Asahina forced a weak smile.

Of course, she understood this logic, which was why she had never truly suspected that there was a mole in their class.

Even if there were one, Nagumo couldn't openly investigate.

"Miyabi... Miyabi thinks Mizuto-kun is the one who betrayed him—leaking the competition roster during the sports festival and then revealing the class's plans this month. Because Kiriya and the others adjusted their strategy yesterday and just happened to outmaneuver our Class A."

As she spoke, even Asahina found herself somewhat doubting Mizowaki.

After all, Nagumo's evidence and reasoning were far too solid.

The motive was to overthrow Nagumo Miyabi's position alongside Horikita Manabu and Kiriya Ikuyo.

The evidence was simple: if Mizuto Mizowaki wasn't the traitor, why would Katsuragi Kouhei approach him?

If Mizowaki wasn't a traitor, his test questions would either have been used against Class 1-C in the final exams or served as a decoy, just as Katsuragi had claimed.

Yet, Class 1-A remained silent.

It was obvious—the so-called "question leak" was just an excuse.

Mizowaki had been there to make contact, and when accidentally discovered by a classmate, he hastily fabricated a cover story.

Later, in the library, it was the same.

Nagumo already knew that Class 1-A had obtained partial answers before the exam—solid proof of collusion.

More crucially, the words Nagumo had spoken to Sakayanagi in the café had indeed reached Kiriya Ikuyo, who then adjusted their strategy and narrowly defeated Class 2-A.

Nagumo didn't care about this loss.

What chilled him was the realization that even Mizowaki was a mole.

Just how many more traitors were lurking in his class?

That's right—Nagumo didn't believe Mizowaki was the only one.

He even suspected that Mizowaki had deliberately exposed himself to divert attention, hiding the existence of other moles to lull him into a false sense of security.

So, after the final exams ended that day, Nagumo ordered the entire class to remain in the classroom, forbidding anyone from leaving, and began interrogating them one by one.

It was this very act that finally pushed Asahina to her limit.

Regardless of what fate awaited Mizowaki, given Nagumo's temperament, Class 2-A would soon be engulfed in an even more oppressive atmosphere.

The moment he suspected anyone, expulsion would follow without hesitation.

Asahina felt her childhood friend had completely changed.

Ever since he had distanced himself from women, she thought he had come to his senses and stopped his reckless behavior.

But instead, it marked the beginning of Nagumo's growing paranoia.

He became obsessed with others' opinions of him, flying into rages at the slightest provocation.

Even Asahina faced his constant suspicion and cold indifference.

Unable to endure it any longer, Asahina confronted him in a heated argument.

She had expected others to stand by her side, but the class remained silent—some girls even urged her not to oppose Nagumo.

In that instant, Asahina was stunned.

She had spoken up because she believed Nagumo had gone too far, yet not a single person in the class supported her—not even Mizowaki, who stayed silent.

And so, Asahina ran out.

"No wonder you're here admiring the view, senpai," Kaoru remarked after hearing her story.

"I want to know—was Mizuto-kun really at the café that day?" Asahina stared at him intently.

"Mizuto-kun claimed he wasn't wearing a trench coat, never saw Miyabi, and didn't record anything. He said Katsuragi-kun had called him out at noon."

Under Nagumo's relentless questioning, Mizowaki had repeatedly insisted that while he had been at the café, Katsuragi had requested the meeting.

He had even prepared a phone recording in an attempt to clear his name.

But his explanations only deepened Nagumo's conviction—because none of it made sense.

"Yeah, I framed him," Kaoru admitted bluntly. "I was the one impersonating him. Who else would show up at a café in a suspicious trench coat and glasses, drawing attention like that?"

Asahina froze for a moment, then expressionlessly pulled out her phone.

"How fortunate—I've been recording this whole time."

Kaoru glanced at her phone without even furrowing his brow and replied calmly.

"Go ahead. I won't lie to your face."

Asahina stared at him for a long moment before suddenly smiling.

"Just kidding~ You really know how to charm girls. Scary how smooth juniors are these days."

She put her phone away.

There was no way she could have prepared a recording—she had run out here on impulse.

Asahina just wanted to see if Kaoru would react, but he didn't even flinch, as if her threat meant nothing to him.

"Won't lie'—does that mean you'll answer anything I ask?"

"Yeah. Even if you don't ask, I'll tell you."

"How do you plan to deal with Miyabi?"

"Let him keep the student council presidency for a few days. Next year, I'll have him step down. The position is somewhat useful to me."

"And then?"

"Might expel him. Depends on how hard he struggles."

"..."

The atmosphere between them returned to its previous silence.

Reading her expression, Kaoru spoke again, "It's not a life-or-death conflict between us. If he backs off, I won't bother him."

Asahina let out a bitter laugh.

He wanted to expel Nagumo Miyabi, and Miyabi wanted to expel him—how was that not a life-or-death conflict?

"Seems like I can't talk either of you down. I never meddle in class affairs anyway. Miyabi and the others handle everything, so I never have to think about it." Her voice grew quieter.

"I know the class has come this far because of Miyabi's abilities, but... I never really cared about advancing academically or finding employment."

[Asahina Nazuna: Lost, lonely, resentful...]

[Suggestion: Take the target's hand and lead her to a hotel. Effective for alleviating loneliness.]

Kaoru studied the prompt.

Was his senpai feeling lost and lonely right now?

"I wanted to go somewhere unfamiliar, meet people I'd never cross paths with otherwise, make more friends... Study hard together, go out and have fun sometimes."

For Asahina, what had drawn her to ANHS was its closed-off environment.

"Senpai, I have a question," Kaoru suddenly said.

Asahina turned to him, her eyes still slightly dazed, but she nodded for him to continue.

"How would you feel... if Nagumo-senpai weren't here?"

The question was blunt, and for a moment, it made her angry.

But Asahina pressed her lips together and seriously considered it—what should she feel?

She had come to Kouyou alone, without a single friend from her past.

To her, this place was filled with unfamiliar faces, every person a new and unknown presence.

"Before coming to ANHS, did you ever think about arriving here with Nagumo-senpai?"

No.

The thought had never crossed her mind.

In fact, the moment she stepped through the school gates, something wonderfully unexpected happened—she made her first friend.

Like the start of a brand-new life, the girl had looked forward to each day ahead.

Yet, when she saw Nagumo Miyabi walk into the classroom, Asahina's emotions had been a mix of joy... and resignation.

"Senpai, do you want to date Nagumo-senpai?"

At this moment, Asahina Nazuna finally couldn't hold back any longer.

She fixed her gaze on Kaoru.

"Could you please stop talking? This is a private matter between me and Miyabi. Even if we're not dating, he still holds meaning for me..."

"Childhood friends, is it?" Kaoru cut her off, and her words abruptly ceased.

"From what I know, Nagumo-senpai sees you as a potential romantic interest—so much so that he doesn't allow anyone else to get close to you."

Asahina Nazuna averted her eyes and fell silent.

"How he feels about you—I think you should know best. After all, you've been childhood friends. Do you really think you can keep hesitating like this?"

"Enough. I've never thought about this. I just..."

"You just thought you could date him, except his usual behavior makes you uneasy, so you hesitate—is that it?"

"Just a mere junior—do you really think your words can shake me?"

"I'm not trying to shake you. But you're already shaken on your own."

As Kaoru pointed it out, Asahina realized she had unknowingly clenched her fists, as if ready to fight him at any moment.

"You're not just worried about Nagumo-senpai's behavior. The truth is, you don't like him at all." Kaoru spoke calmly.

"Do we truly like someone, or do we just convince ourselves that we should like them, and that's why we do?"

"Do you genuinely want Nagumo-senpai to change his womanizing ways before dating him, or is it just because everyone around you thinks you two should be together, so you feel like you should be with him?"

"Why did you choose ANHS in the first place? Why did you hope to meet new people here? Was it because your past felt like a shackle to you, or was it simply that you wanted to spend your high school years here?"

Faced with Kaoru's words, Asahina stared at him blankly.

A sudden wave of goosebumps ran down her body, making her instinctively hug her arms.

The air around them felt like the prelude to snowfall—a biting cold that made her nose and throat ache as if swallowing knives.

She glared at Kaoru and clenched her teeth.

"Did I go too far?" Kaoru studied her expression.

"It's really too much." Asahina gritted her teeth, desperately holding back her tears.

"So much that I wonder if you're deliberately attacking me, trying to drive a wedge between me and Miyabi, forcing me to overthink, making me voice the thoughts in my heart. This is the first time I've seen someone treat a girl—his senior at that—so cruelly!"

Kaoru was certain now—he hadn't misread it.

Asahina was utterly confused about her own feelings.

This senior of his had never harbored romantic affection for Nagumo Miyabi in her subconscious.

Their so-called relationship was merely that of childhood friends.

"Ever since we were little, it's been like this—as if I'm obligated to like him. In my parents' eyes, he's an outstanding, good boy. In his parents' eyes, I'm his future wife. I'm not supposed to have my own thoughts."

And at this moment, Asahina finally voiced her true feelings—the wild thoughts that had long been buried deep in her heart.