

Cote 381

Chapter 381: The Childhood Friend is Slipping Away

Fate, destiny, soulmates, childhood friends, future husband, an exceptionally special bond...

These things had surrounded Asahina Nazuna since childhood.

Even in her naive, ignorant years, people around her had already begun praising her playmate.

The perpetual top student, the undisputed genius boy—all these titles belonged to him, while her own name was often mentioned simply because she frequently appeared by his side.

Since their families lived close by, Asahina Nazuna would often see his parents and always greeted them politely.

Over time, their relationship grew increasingly familiar.

Later, his parents would occasionally invite Asahina over for visits.

She didn't think much of it—after all, he was the "model child" her parents always talked about.

Even if she didn't go, her parents would encourage her to interact with him more.

Thus, Asahina gradually grew closer to him.

In the beginning, she actually disliked this guy—always acting so superior, treating people poorly, completely inconsiderate of others' feelings.

As time passed, she slowly grew accustomed to their relationship.

They often walked to and from school together.

When classmates saw this, they couldn't help but tease them, calling them "the little couple."

It always made Asahina extremely uncomfortable.

No matter how many times she explained, no one believed her.

Not only that, some would even retort, "Don't all childhood friends end up getting married?"

Asahina didn't know where this notion came from.

Everyone seemed convinced that every pair of childhood friends were destined to be future spouses, natural soulmates—even though she just happened to live near him.

After hearing it so often, the young girl became numb to it.

She even secretly visited a shrine to consult the gods.

The first fortune slip she drew was "small blessing," followed by "medium blessing" and then "great blessing."

Frustrated, Asahina threw the slips away, only for the shrine maiden to retrieve them for her.

After that divination, Asahina began resigning herself to fate.

If this was heaven's will, she wouldn't struggle against it.

After all, there was no one around more outstanding than him.

Just when Asahina thought she would resign herself to this fate, Kaoru Mitoma suddenly appeared.

Fate could be changed after all.

Childhood friends weren't necessarily destined to be together.

Perhaps in the future, someone even more suitable than him might appear.

To be honest, Kaoru's actions at that time truly shocked Asahina.

It was the first time she had seen someone with such incredible luck.

Because it was too good, it made Asahina somewhat skeptical.

After returning, she kept pondering this question—what is the essence of fate?

Until today, Kaoru gave her an answer.

Was it truly liking someone, or believing that she was supposed to like someone, that led her to fall for them?

Was her fate to become Nagumo Miyabi's heroine as everyone expected, or to become the protagonist of her own life?

"I... don't dislike Miyabi..." Asahina spoke up, her voice strained as if squeezing through her throat, tinged with pain.

Yet the moment the words left her lips, she suddenly felt a surge of relief and unconsciously quickened her pace.

"But I don't like him either. I don't understand why everyone assumes I should be with him. If I wanted to be with him, why would I have dragged it out until now?"

"Besides, everyone should have seen how he usually behaves, right? As long as someone is good-looking, he'll find a way to flirt with them. How is he suitable for me?"

"To take a step back, even knowing he has me, he still goes around flirting. Doesn't that put me in an awkward position? And some girls don't even reject him. Am I supposed to personally catch them in the act? If I don't, they'll openly mingle, and if I show up, they'll just give me awkward looks. Every time, I have to pretend it doesn't matter."

"But I don't want to revolve around him. I want my own life. I want to have a boyfriend too. I want a normal high school life!"

If she hadn't met Kaoru, Asahina would never have voiced these thoughts.

All the emotions bottled up deep inside her erupted at this moment.

Kaoru observed his senior's expression.

Today, she was wearing her school uniform—a white shirt tucked beneath her blazer, her full chest rising and falling, outlining a plump, enticing curve.

Below her skirt, her legs were clad in black thigh-high socks, tightly wrapping around her calves and revealing a small stretch of pale, delicate thigh.

Perhaps feeling slightly cold, she unconsciously pressed her legs together, the smooth skin faintly showing the blue of her veins, looking delicate and tempting.

"Senpai," Kaoru closed the distance slightly. "Calm down. Someone might pass by."

Asahina shot him a glance, her expression almost amused.

Who else would pass by here besides him?

"It's strange. Even Miyabi couldn't tell what I was thinking. How did you know?"

Recalling Kaoru's words to her, Asahina eyes grew distant as she lightly pursed her lips.

"Is my acting that bad?"

"Not bad. I just thought you didn't like Nagumo-senpai." Kaoru moved even closer, his dark eyes fixed on her.

"If you did, you wouldn't have let him keep fooling around, nor would you have dragged it out until now."

Asahina instinctively tried to pull back, but her fingers accidentally brushed against his.

A strange ripple surged in her heart, and her pulse suddenly quickened.

"Ah well, perhaps I never really cared about Miyabi's flirtatious nature in the first place. With so many people around, getting jealous over each one would simply exhaust me to death."

At this moment, the young girl attempted to maintain her seniority demeanor.

"If you still choose to stay with Nagumo, I'll be very upset," Kaoru no longer bothered to hide his feelings, dropping all formalities when addressing her.

"After everything I've done, if you still prefer him, then I'll have no choice but to take matters into my own hands."

Meeting his gaze, Asahina felt a flicker of panic.

She suddenly realized she shouldn't have said those words in front of him—wasn't that just encouraging him?

But before she could react, Kaoru had already taken her small hand in his, sending a shiver down her spine.

"Today, I finally heard your true feelings, and it makes me happy. It proves you're not as blindly devoted as I thought—knowingly accepting a fate you don't want would be foolish."

Asahina Nazuna felt she should be angry. Her authority as a senior was being challenged, and she was far from foolish.

"L-Let go," her voice came out weak, barely daring to meet his eyes.

"No. Because you know what I'm thinking, just as I know what you're thinking," Kaoru replied matter-of-factly, tightening his grip on her hand.

"Why did you want Nagumo expelled? Because you are the reason."

Asahina froze, her eyes flickering with unease.

This wasn't the first time someone had confessed to her, but due to Nagumo Miyabi's presence, hardly anyone had dared to approach her afterward.

She did want to fall in love—but she wasn't sure if she liked Kaoru.

It was all too sudden.

Shouldn't there at least be some meaningful experiences first?

"I'm sorry, I understand what you're saying, but I think this is..."

"It's fine. I don't expect you to accept me right away," Kaoru cut her off with a faint smile.

"I'm worse than Nagumo. If there's something I want, I'll stop at nothing to get it."

Before Asahina could process his words, her phone suddenly rang.

Chapter 382: 100% Return

"Nazuna, where are you?"

Nagumo Miyabi's voice came through the other end of the line, cold and impatient.

He had called multiple times, only for Asahina Nazuna to repeatedly hang up on him—nearly driving him mad with frustration!

"None of your business. If there's nothing else, I'm hanging up," Asahina replied instinctively, glancing at Kaoru, who was still holding her hand, carefully tracing his fingers over it as if admiring a piece of art.

She hesitated over whether to pull away, but Nagumo's irritation only grew.

"Get back here immediately. Stop picking fights over nothing."

"Am I the one picking a fight? With the way you're acting, the happiest person would be Kiriya. They'd love nothing more than for you to turn the class into chaos—better yet, just expel everyone."

"So I'm not allowed to discipline a few traitors?" Nagumo let out a humorless laugh.

"In your eyes, do you also believe class unity is the most important thing? What a joke. Without me, do you think they'd have climbed to Class A's status?"

His anger only fueled hers.

After all, he was the one who had vowed to lead them to Class A in the first place.

Their current standing was built on the trust everyone had placed in him.

Otherwise, could he really defeat Kiriyama Ikuyo's Class 2-B all by himself?

"Ever since you took control of the entire grade, you've become completely full of yourself. Not only do you refuse to tolerate any weaknesses in your class, but you also won't allow anyone to oppose your decisions. You've even been manipulating the other classes— isn't that enough?" Asahina had always believed that Nagumo's so-called reforms were nothing more than a bored man's pastime, like someone who had already beaten a game and was just looking for new ways to amuse himself.

And for his amusement, even more students might end up expelled in the future.

Asahina Nazuna disliked this approach.

While some students genuinely wanted to rise to Class A, not everyone shared that ambition.

Some in her class simply wanted to enjoy a happy high school life.

"Oh? So you're speaking up for them now?"

Since this was a private conversation, Nagumo dropped the act.

"I don't care about the others, but why are you of all people siding with them?"

"I'm not siding with anyone!" Asahina Nazuna suddenly felt a pang of guilt.

Her mind flashed to Kaoru—their fingers had unconsciously intertwined, and he was silently watching her.

"Cut the act. Don't tell me you don't know what Mitoma is scheming. From the moment I first saw him, I knew that guy was up to no good!" Nagumo still remembered how Kaoru had questioned his childhood friend—clearly, he had ulterior motives!

Asahina Nazuna faltered.

Before, she could have shouted back without hesitation, but now she only gritted her teeth.

"Can you stop bringing him up every single time?"

"You're mine, Nazuna." Nagumo's voice was icy. "Don't forget—we're childhood friends. I've met your parents, and you've met mine. Don't do anything stupid."

Asahina fell silent.

Precisely because of that, she had wanted to escape to a place where no one knew her—to reject the fate others had forced upon her.

Then, Kaoru took her phone.

Under Asahina's stunned gaze, he calmly spoke to Nagumo Miyabi.

"She doesn't belong to anyone. And not all childhood friends are meant to be together."

Hearing Kaoru's voice, Nagumo Miyabi froze for a long moment before erupting in fury.

"What the hell are you doing? Don't think you can just swoop in like this! Give the phone back to Nazuna!"

"So you can keep pressuring her?" Kaoru ignored his impotent rage.

"You've never experienced failure in your life, have you? Must be boring—thinking everyone should worship you, believing you're always the protagonist. That's why when you met Horikita-senpai, you felt dissonance. You realized you weren't the center of attention anymore, so you decided to challenge him."

"Mitoma! I'm warning you—give her the phone back. You have no right to lecture me!" Nagumo was seething.

The mere thought of Kaoru being next to Asahina made him see red.

"I'm just stating facts. At your core, you're nothing but an arrogant narcissist. You've never lost anything, which is why Horikita-senpai terrifies and enrages you. It's not her you're afraid of losing—it's your sense of ownership." Kaoru paused.

"Sorry, but senpai can't stand you."

"Nazuna! You're listening, right? Get back here now!" Nagumo had no intention of confronting Kaoru.

His mind was entirely consumed by Asahina Nazuna, his face turning green with fury.

His Asahina shouldn't have betrayed him—no matter what, she never would!

Yet, Asahina was staring blankly at Kaoru, who was also gazing at her.

"Say something, Nazuna!"

"Where are you? Why is he with you?"

"Honestly, I don't want to fight with you, Nazuna. I know you've always been on my side. You're just angry with me, right?"

"Dammit, Mitoma, I'm warning you—don't try anything, or I'll make you regret it immediately. At this school, points can make anything happen!"

"Nazuna! This guy is full of lies. He was two-timing in his first year—both Ichinose and Kamuro were his!"

Nagumo's shouting was too much, so Kaoru covered the phone's speaker, a faint smile playing on his lips.

"Sorry, senpai. At this point, you have no choice but to rely on me. Nagumo won't let you off now."

No, he might come after you even harder.

Though she thought this, Asahina didn't say it out loud.

In truth, her mind was in complete disarray.

Not only had she voiced her true feelings today, but she had also run into Kaoru.

She was utterly unprepared—should she accept this underclassman?

"You're too sly. How do you expect me to answer?" Asahina bit her lip.

"Can you just let me—"

"Of course. Because I've already fallen for you, senpai, I can give you some time to slowly fall for me too." Kaoru smiled gently.

Seeing his smile, Asahina's cheeks flushed, her heart pounding so hard it felt like it might burst.

She stiffly tried to put some distance between them.

"I-I'll think about it..."

Kaoru grabbed her wrist, then lowered his head and softly pressed his lips to hers.

Asahina froze.

She had been kissed—by an underclassman?

In an instant, a whirlwind of emotions surged through her.

Her eyes shimmered with an indescribable complexity—this was her first kiss, and now it was gone.

Then, anger flared within her because Kaoru had acted without permission.

Just as she was about to push him away, he activated his two rewards: 「Critical Hit Charm」 and 「Fixed Anchor Point」.

The former could be used on any target to gain corresponding benefits, while the latter could be stacked on top of the 「Critical Hit Charm」 effect to lock onto a specific target.

Kaoru set the target as Asahina's affection toward him, using 'Fixed Anchor Point' to fix the gain at 100%.

Then, he activated both effects.

[Target 'Asahina Nazuna's' affection has increased. Critical hit rate: 14.3%...]

[Code error. Recalculating...]

[Target 'Asahina Nazuna's' affection has increased. Critical hit rate: 100.0%. Gain: 100%. Target's affection toward you has risen!]

[Anomaly detected. Correcting...]

[Correction complete!]

As a result, Asahina Nazuna felt her already weak body grow even weaker, melting into Kaoru's embrace.

Her vision blurred, and without thinking, she clutched the collar of his shirt.

This doesn't seem so bad either.

She didn't dislike Kaoru—after all, he was the first person who truly understood her thoughts, giving her a faint sense of destiny.

Wait, what was she thinking? Kaoru was just a robber who had suddenly snatched her away from Nagumo Miyabi, forcing her to accept his affections.

Asahina felt she should be angry, but hearing Nagumo's impotent rage over the phone had filled her with a vengeful thrill.

It was as if all her pent-up emotions had ignited, burning her face crimson and making her heart pound so violently it might burst.

She longed to respond with even fiercer passion.

"Mmm..."

Their kiss wasn't hidden from the other person.

Though the sound was faint, Kaoru hadn't covered the phone's receiver, so everything was clearly audible on the other end.

Chapter 383: Turning Enemies into Friends

Today, it wasn't just Nagumo Miyabi who felt embarrassed.

Mizowaki walked out of the classroom with a confused and heavy heart, occasionally running into a few classmates along the way, though they all avoided him.

He didn't understand what had happened.

He had indeed gone to the café, but Katsuragi had invited him there, saying he wanted to check the exam papers in person.

Mizowaki had no reason to refuse and even made sure to record the entire conversation to prove his loyalty to Nagumo.

When he met with Katsuragi, however, the latter didn't mention anything else—he simply reviewed Mizowaki's answers and then transferred the Personal Points to him.

This left Mizowaki utterly bewildered.

Had he overthought things?

Or did Katsuragi have other intentions that he couldn't see through?

Before Mizowaki could figure it out, Nagumo suddenly confronted him today, demanding to know why he had been at the café.

Mizowaki was stunned.

No matter how he explained himself, Nagumo refused to believe him, instead sneering and telling him to go back to Class 2-B—where Horikita Manabu, Kiriya Ikuyo, and Kaoru would surely welcome him as a comrade.

Not only that, but Nagumo also suspected there were other traitors in the class.

He believed Mizowaki had voluntarily stepped forward as a sacrificial lamb to dispel his suspicions about the rest of the class.

Though Asahina stood up midway, trying to persuade Nagumo to drop his interrogation of the entire class, no one listened to her.

Mizowaki, too, felt disheartened.

The fate awaiting him was likely expulsion in the next exam, wasn't it?

Since the start of the semester, over ten second-year students had already been expelled.

He wouldn't be the first, nor the last.

"Mizowaki-senpai."

Hearing his name called, Mizowaki instinctively turned toward the voice and saw Katsuragi waiting for him up ahead.

Instantly, his expression darkened.

"So that's how it is. You knew how Nagumo-kun would react. This was all your doing—you wanted to drive a wedge between us."

Facing Mizowaki's hostile gaze, Katsuragi followed Kaoru's instructions and replied quietly.

"Even without us, you should know what kind of person Nagumo-senpai is. To him, those without value are nothing but trash, meant to be ruled by the strong."

"Save your breath. All this talk is just to get me to surrender. Did you really think you could make me betray my class like this?" Mizowaki scoffed.

He wasn't stupid.

Though he couldn't figure out how Katsuragi had pulled this off, he understood the other's intentions.

Just because Nagumo didn't trust him now didn't mean he would actually betray his class.

Mizowaki knew exactly what he wanted—and nothing held more value than Class A.

"No, we don't expect you to join us," Katsuragi said. "Nor will we ask you to betray your class. You can stay in Class A. If anything unexpected happens, we'll even offer assistance to prevent your expulsion."

Mizowaki eyed him suspiciously.

"And what's in it for you?"

"Our goal is to get Nagumo-senpai expelled," Katsuragi answered.

Mizowaki was stunned as Katsuragi Kouhei continued, "Although Nagumo-senpai is the core of your class, you know as well as I do that he's made too many enemies. Not to mention the first-year students, how do you plan to deal with Horikita-senpai from the third year alone?"

"...Horikita-senpai will graduate soon," Mizowaki replied warily. "As for the first-years, aside from you and Mitoma-kun, what else is there to say?"

"There's also Ichinose-san," Katsuragi pressed on, echoing Kaoru's words.

"There are two first-year classes, Horikita-senpai in the third year, plus Kiriya-senpai from your own second year watching closely. Do you really think Nagumo-senpai can suppress all these forces?"

Mizowaki had seen Nagumo's reform plans, but he'd always been uncertain about their success.

If the conservatives led by Horikita Manabu launched a fierce counterattack, could their Class 2-A withstand it?

Moreover, Kiriya Ikuyo's Class 2-B had been closing in step by step recently, putting Mizowaki on high alert.

"If Nagumo-senpai were to be expelled, we first-years wouldn't interfere with your second-year affairs, and Horikita-senpai certainly wouldn't either," Katsuragi adopted a slightly threatening tone.

"Otherwise, cases like yours will keep happening in Class 2-A."

Mizowaki's expression changed.

He suddenly realized there must be a real mole in their class—otherwise, how could Katsuragi and the others know what was happening inside 2-A?

By the same token, Katsuragi wouldn't have been able to intercept him so quickly either.

...

Meanwhile, Nagumo Miyabi was seething with rage.

After seeing Asahina's location, he'd rushed over intending to forcibly take her away.

He never imagined Asahina would actually be with Kaoru.

Her previous claims had clearly been lies—they must have been seeing each other behind his back all along.

The thought filled Nagumo with humiliation.

Why? In looks, physique, ability, even emotional intelligence—was he inferior to Kaoru in any way?

He'd always treated Asahina with utmost respect.

When she said she didn't want to date, he never forced her or took advantage.

He respected her choices, included her in everything.

Yet not only had she failed to appreciate this, she'd even tried lecturing him—telling him to change his ways, to stop fooling around with women.

Nagumo couldn't comprehend this at all.

If she wouldn't date him, was he supposed to remain celibate?

To him, women were essentially playthings—just diversions to spice up a boring life.

Asahina should have understood that.

When he'd inexplicably lost interest in other women recently, he thought she might be pleased.

But when he merely asked about Kaoru, she'd immediately shown impatience.

Claiming they were just friends—and now the truth was out!

Nagumo couldn't swallow this insult.

He'd heard everything clearly on the phone—his precious Asahina, whom he'd never dared touch, had let Kaoru force a kiss on her?

And from the sound of her voice... she hadn't even resisted?

In an instant, Nagumo's rationality nearly evaporated, his heart filled with fury.

He wished he could kill Kaoru on the spot—only he could cuckold others, never the other way around!

Following the location data, Nagumo Miyabi saw the artificial lake right before him, yet there was no sign of Asahina or Kaoru.

His expression darkened as realization struck.

The phone's location was clearly useless now.

Asahina had likely turned off her phone and hidden away with Kaoru.

No matter.

Nagumo still had his underlings.

If anyone spotted Asahina and Kaoru on the way, he would receive word immediately.

He ordered Tonokawa to station men along the main routes.

There was no way the two could return to the dorms without running into his trap.

With that, Nagumo began searching the area.

Truthfully, he had set out the moment he heard Kaoru's voice.

He hadn't mentioned it to create a time gap, making Kaoru think he had left only after hanging up.

They couldn't have gone far, Nagumo thought through gritted teeth.

The earlier incidents had merely embarrassed him, but today's events had shattered his composure.

Mizowaki's betrayal had stung, but Asahina's betrayal cut far deeper.

Nagumo desperately wanted to find them, yet his mind kept conjuring images of Kaoru embracing his childhood friend and laughing mockingly at him.

The thought made him hesitate to face reality.

And then, he spotted two familiar figures.

Chapter 384: Total Betrayal

Tonokawa received Nagumo's message and immediately instructed the class to report any sightings of Asahina to him or Nagumo.

Since Nagumo hadn't explained clearly, Tonokawa assumed it was just a lovers' quarrel and Nagumo wanted to drag Asahina back.

He had no intention of meddling in personal affairs.

Frankly, he found it ridiculous—why involve the whole class over a mere argument?

It felt like Nagumo was treating them as his personal servants.

Tonokawa only followed Nagumo out of respect for his abilities.

But now, he couldn't understand why Mizowaki would side with outsiders.

If outsiders overthrew Nagumo, what would happen to Class A?

Tonokawa thought his friend must have lost his mind.

Deciding to humor Nagumo, he resolved to confront Mizowaki directly.

Following the location data, he ran into Mizowaki.

Their eyes met, and the latter froze.

"Mizowaki, can we talk?"

Mizowaki gave a bitter smile.

He knew what Tonokawa wanted to discuss, but it was too late—Nagumo would never trust him again.

Even if he warned that Katsuragi was targeting Nagumo, it would fall on deaf ears.

Moreover, Mizowaki felt a chill.

If Class 2-A suffered because of Nagumo's actions, could they really maintain their current standing?

From recent events, Nagumo's decline was becoming evident.

"There's no need to talk anymore. Whether I betrayed Nagumo-kun before or not, I've now sided with them," Mizowaki shook his head.

"It doesn't matter if I did it or not. Nagumo-kun will only believe the truth he's deduced for himself."

Tonokawa understood his meaning, his lips moving slightly.

So it wasn't him after all.

The real traitor was still hidden in their class—someone had been reporting detailed information to outsiders, which led to recent events.

Otherwise, none of this could be explained.

Tonokawa ran through several names in his mind, with Iijima standing out as the most suspicious, his motives clear.

Yet he didn't voice it.

"You'd better not betray the class. Nagumo-kun can't expel you right now. As long as you stay, there's still a chance," Tonokawa suggested, trying to help his friend.

"The fact that they're treating you this way means they must want something from you. Maybe you can use that to turn the tables on them!"

A double agent?

It sounded like a decent idea, but Mizowaki forced a bitter smile.

"They plan to make Nagumo-kun drop out."

"What!?" Tonokawa thought he'd misheard him.

After confirming it again, he immediately grasped their scheme.

"Nagumo-kun is our Class A's biggest asset. If he falls, we might not hold onto our current standing. We can't agree to this."

Mizowaki remained silent, and this reaction suddenly made Tonokawa sober up.

He looked at his good friend with a complicated expression.

Then, Tonokawa stepped forward and patted Mizowaki's shoulder.

"You didn't do anything wrong. If someone's about to kill you, picking up a knife is just self-defense," Tonokawa said quietly.

"But I hope you realize—making a deal with the devil never ends well."

Mizowaki spoke up, "I didn't agree with them. I only said I'd think about it. Maybe there's still a way out."

"No, I want you to agree with them," Tonokawa said seriously.

"Nagumo-kun is even snapping at Asahina now. He won't trust any of us. 'Useless people only drag others down'—those were his exact words. When Yamamoto dropped out, he did nothing."

That was right.

In Nagumo's eyes, even classmates weren't worth spending points to save if they had no value.

Since Nagumo no longer trusted Mizowaki, he might very well make him the scapegoat in the next exam.

For the class, having someone take the fall would ease the pressure on everyone else.

They'd just watch coldly—which was why Mizowaki had gotten no support before.

Because of Nagumo Miyabi's methods, everyone in class lived in constant fear, scrambling to prove their worth to avoid becoming the next sacrifice.

"But wouldn't forcing Nagumo-kun to drop out hurt the class?" Mizowaki asked uneasily.

"There are pros and cons. If they can force Nagumo-kun to drop out, it proves they're capable—we'll accept that. If they fail, it means they're weak, and we'll just watch from the sidelines, supporting whoever wins." Tonokawa analyzed the situation calmly.

"If they want our help, the only thing they can offer us is Class Points. We won't accept anything else."

Mizowaki was startled. "Wait, you seriously want Nagumo-kun expelled?"

"I've never liked him to begin with. The only reason I tolerate him is because he leads us," Tonokawa replied with a faint smile.

"By his own logic, if he loses, getting kicked out of Advanced Nurturing High School is only natural. What we need is a leader who can guarantee our graduation from Class A."

Mizowaki felt somewhat moved.

Tonokawa's words alleviated the guilt of betraying Nagumo, giving him a justifiable reason.

However, neither of them realized that Nagumo was nearby, watching the scene unfold with an expressionless face—his gaze as cold as if he were staring at two dead men.

He had overheard their conversation midway and never expected even Tonokawa to consider stabbing him in the back.

Though Nagumo was well aware of why people followed him, witnessing such treachery firsthand still ignited his anger.

Heh.

So they want me expelled?

Nagumo immediately suspected Kaoru was behind this, likely eager to see him gone so he could freely toy with his woman.

The mere thought of Kaoru's smug face nearly made him laugh in fury.

'I haven't even expelled him yet, and he's already plotting against me.'

'If I'd known it would come to this, I should've cut him off long ago—ended his high school life before he could scheme like this.'

Taking a deep breath, Nagumo regained some composure.

He decided against confronting Asahina now—there was nothing he could do at the moment, and showing up would only give Kaoru the chance to humiliate him to his face.

Better to wait for Asahina in his dorm and demand an explanation directly.

But to his surprise, Asahina didn't return to her dorm that night.

He waited alone in the first-floor lobby until midnight, his face darkening with frustration.

Chapter 385: Two Girlfriends?

Though Asahina wasn't afraid of what Nagumo might do to her, Kaoru was more cautious and simply brought her back to his own room.

What he didn't expect, however, was how readily she agreed—as if she had no concerns about what might happen.

The moment the senior stepped inside, she began scrutinizing the room's decor with a thoughtful expression.

"Is this caterpillar plush yours?"

"Sort of."

"What about these slippers?"

"You can try them on if you want."

"Why are there girls' clothes in your closet?"

"..."

Kaoru was taken aback and quickly moved to check, only to find Asahina grinning mischievously as she poked his cheek with her finger.

"Such a dishonest underclassman, always bringing girls back to your room."

Realizing he'd been tricked—Karuizawa Kei would never leave clothes here—Kaoru tugged at her cheek in mock annoyance.

"A senpai who willingly follows a guy back to his room is no better. Besides, a few people definitely saw you come up with me."

Asahina swatted his hand away, putting on a stern face.

"Honestly, you should be more respectful toward your seniors. Tachibana-senpai often complains about this habit of yours."

The intricate web of female relationships was terrifying.

Kaoru felt like they all knew each other privately and probably gossiped about him behind his back.

Asahina flopped onto his bed and immediately rolled around a few times.

The girl's alluring curves were completely exposed—her skirt rode up near her perky bottom, revealing the plump roots of her thighs.

Her snow-white, smooth skin was fully visible, faintly showing hints of black patterns beneath.

Clearly, she wasn't wearing any shorts, displaying none of the modesty expected of a young girl.

For a moment, Kaoru couldn't decide whether to avert his gaze or keep staring.

The bold senpai hugged Kaoru's pillow, took a sniff, and showed a somewhat satisfied expression as she muttered.

"So this is what a man smells like?"

To be honest, she had expected it to reek of sweat or something unpleasant.

"Senpai, doing this kind of thing on someone else's bed is pretty weird," Kaoru reminded her.

"I'm just too excited." Asahina sat up from his bed, already hugging a caterpillar plushie.

"Starting today, there's definitely no going back for Miyabi and me."

Not just no going back—Nagumo was probably having a meltdown right now.

Kaoru thought about Katsuragi and Mizowaki, wondering if they would understand his intentions.

He never expected Mizowaki to betray Class 2-A.

Anyone with half a brain knew betraying the class wouldn't benefit them.

But if betraying the class could be reframed as stabbing Nagumo in the back, Mizowaki might feel less resistance.

Even so, Kaoru knew something was still missing—a final push to make Mizowaki and the others realize Nagumo could no longer lead Class 2-A and might even bring harm.

Only then would they be willing to abandon him.

"Mitoma-kun, are you planning to do something to me tonight?"

For some reason, Asahina suddenly asked this bluntly.

"Huh?" Kaoru didn't show any sign of being seen through.

"Why would you think that, Senpai? I was planning to sleep on the floor while you take the bed. But if you don't trust me, I can stay somewhere else tonight."

"Do I look like an idiot to you?" Asahina smiled, watching his unflinching expression. "You saw it earlier, didn't you?"

As she spoke, the girl pressed down on her skirt.

No girl would be unaware of whether her actions might reveal something.

Kaoru didn't want to lie—that would go against his earlier words—so he nodded

"It was nice. I wouldn't mind seeing it again."

Asahina Nazuna froze for a moment before flushing with embarrassment and anger.

Wasn't the script supposed to be her teasing Kaoru further?

"Reward time is over. Now it's interrogation time." She put on a stern face. "I have questions for you. If your answers satisfy me, I might reward you again."

"Alright." Kaoru knelt respectfully in front of her, ready to comply—though his gaze involuntarily drifted to her calves.

The black thigh-high socks seemed to be slipping slightly, revealing more of her fair, delicate skin.

"Do you have a girlfriend?" Asahina Nazuna pressed her legs together, slightly uncomfortable with his direct stare.

"Why are you asking that, Senpai?" Kaoru found it strange.

If she wasn't planning to accept him, what was the point?

"No counter-questions."

Her reasoning was different—she might not be ready to accept him yet, but she wasn't rejecting him either.

If anything, she wanted to observe him a little longer.

"Do you have a girlfriend or not?"

"Yes," Kaoru answered.

"Who? Ichinose-san?" Asahina knew Ichinose Honami.

She had once talked to her about Kaoru, and Ichinose's reaction at the time had struck her as odd.

"Right now, it's Ichinose and Karuizawa."

However, Kaoru's answer left her utterly bewildered.

"Ichinose and Karuizawa?" Asahina froze for a long moment before suddenly realizing.

"You have two girlfriends?!"

This is bad—this guy seems even worse than Nagumo!

"For now, yes. Who knows about the future."

"W-wait, how many girlfriends are you planning to have?"

"I haven't counted."

"Is it really okay for you to say such things to me?" Asahina wondered if she'd misheard.

She'd just been considering Kaoru today, only to hear this.

"What kind of person are you? Telling a girl you just kissed that you plan to get more girlfriends while already having two!"

"Because I don't want to hide it from you, senpai." Kaoru knew perfectly well no one would be indifferent to such matters.

This only made Asahina angrier.

She understood what he meant—continuing to be with her despite knowing he had girlfriends was indeed more despicable.

But at least he could've given her some time to process it!

Being hit with such truth right away made Asahina feel like she'd escaped a tiger's den only to fall into a wolf's mouth.

"Do they know?" she couldn't help asking.

"Some do, some don't, but I'll tell everyone eventually," Kaoru replied.

Asahina was dumbfounded.

Frowning, she said, "Do you really think you can make everyone accept your way of thinking?"

She wasn't trying to discourage him—she genuinely believed it impossible.

Whether practically or psychologically, girls who could accept polygamy were exceptionally rare.

Let alone a whole group of them.

After a brief silence, Kaoru said, "I don't need reason. If I had to give you up, my coming to this world would be meaningless."

Asahina looked at him strangely.

Was he openly admitting to being a bad person?

"Does that include me too?"

"Having senpai's heart would be best, but having just your person would suffice too."

"What a selfish and extreme way of thinking. No wonder you're so hostile toward Miyabi. But is this really appropriate to say to me? Weren't you just telling Miyabi I'm not his possession?"

"Because senpai doesn't like him, whereas I'm confident you'll come to like me."

"Quite the boastful talk."

Asahina stared at him, and he met her gaze unflinchingly.

After a while, Asahina suddenly smiled.

"Do you know what I want?"

Kaoru shook his head. "No."

Curious, Asahina asked, "Aren't you supposed to be good at guessing?"

"I can't guess this. Only senpai knows what you truly want. If I knew that, I'd be you already."

Hearing this, a faint ripple flashed through Asahina's eyes.

She admitted Kaoru made her feel something completely different from Miyabi.

Miyabi would never play along like this—he'd only give her what he decided was the "correct answer."

"No, you must know." Asahina didn't believe him.

If he could see through her thoughts, how could he not know what she wanted?

"Will there be a reward if I say it?" Kaoru asked.

Noticing his occasional glances at her legs, Asahina blinked and changed her question.

"Let me ask something else—why do you want me?"

Truthfully, she was quite curious about this.

"Because senpai will definitely like me in the future, I can't let senpai down," Kaoru answered matter-of-factly.

Asahina nearly laughed in exasperation—was he reversing cause and effect here?

"Be serious. Is it because of my body?"

"Senpai is beautiful, and I don't intend to miss out. Also... I like you."

"What kind of 'like' is this?"

"The kind where I like you."

After talking for a while, Asahina felt like she couldn't break through his defenses.

She suspected he might be brushing her off, yet she couldn't help but believe him because he genuinely wasn't hiding anything.

After much deliberation, Asahina made up her mind.

"Mitoma-kun, please close your eyes now."

"Why?"

"Don't you want your reward?"

Kaoru closed his eyes.

Almost immediately, he heard the girl hold her breath, followed by the faint rustling of her getting up from the bed.

Light footsteps touched the floor, and her fragrance grew closer—so close it felt like he could reach out and touch her.

A strand of her hair brushed against his arm.

And so, he opened his eyes.

"Where are you planning to go now, senpai?"

Hearing his voice, Asahina, who had just reached the entrance, paused.

"Why did you open your eyes?"

"Because my reward seemed about to run away."

"Just for today. That doesn't mean there won't be one tomorrow."

"Really?"

Asahina had intended to keep up her tough act, but she sensed that Kaoru might actually pin her down and tease her mercilessly, so she quickly relented.

"Let me think about it some more. Even if I agreed, would the others really accept me?" Asahina hesitated—after all, she wasn't the only girl around him!

"Then I'll walk you back," Kaoru said, standing up as if he had no intention of explaining further.

Asahina looked at him, puffing her cheeks in dissatisfaction.

"I never said I was leaving. Isn't Ichinose-san upstairs in your place?"

Kaoru froze.

"At the very least, I should go up and meet your girlfriend, shouldn't I?"

Asahina didn't consider herself a homewrecker, but she also lacked confidence, feeling like a concubine who had to greet the main wife upon entering the household.

Oh right, there was also Karuizawa.

Chapter 386: A Changed Person

After the exams, Horikita Suzune deliberately called out to Kushida Kikyo.

"Do you have any plans for winter break?"

Kushida raised an eyebrow, slightly surprised.

But considering they were in the classroom, she plastered on a practiced smile and feigned delight.

"Huh? I don't have anything planned. Why do you ask, Horikita-san?"

"Thank you for these past days." Horikita extended her hand. "Without you, everyone wouldn't have studied so hard, and the tutoring sessions were especially helpful."

Kushida blinked, then took her hand with a smile.

"No need to thank me. I wanted to help everyone anyway."

"If possible, I'd like to be friends with you." Horikita said words that didn't sound like her at all.

Kushida's eyes suddenly widened, and then she excitedly hugged Horikita, her joy bursting forth.

"That's wonderful! I've been waiting for you to say that, Horikita-san!"

Witnessing this scene, many were taken by surprise.

No one expected Horikita Suzune to have such a day—actually willing to accept Kushida Kikyo.

Hirata Yosuke smiled.

Nothing brought him more relief and joy than seeing the class getting along harmoniously.

Ayanokoji, however, found it somewhat peculiar.

He could sense that Horikita had changed, as if her goals had become clearer and she now understood how to realize her ambitions.

It probably had something to do with Kaoru Mitoma.

Recalling the other's presence, Ayanokoji had a vague understanding.

He had already confirmed his own safety—Kaoru had likely heard of his name, which was why he took an interest in him.

As long as he pretended to be weak and fragile, he should be able to dispel the other's intentions.

However, Ayanokoji glanced at Sudou and the others.

Recently, Haruki Yamauchi seemed particularly fixated on Airi Sakura, while Ike Kanji had suffered a heavy blow due to Kushida and Kaoru, declaring that he no longer believed in "3D angels."

Meanwhile, Sudou appeared even more attentive toward Horikita.

Ayanokoji had seen him transfer his Personal Points to her more than once.

Within their small group, Sudou was the only one still earning Personal Points, as he was a member of the basketball club.

If he performed well, both the club and the school would reward him accordingly.

"Horikita, we're friends now too, right?" Sudou seemed eager to join in, his voice brimming with excitement.

Horikita, who had just managed to push Kushida away, gave a faint smile.

"I think we've reached a stage where we can trust each other, Sudou-kun."

"Whoa!" Sudou grew even more exhilarated, prompting Ike and Yamauchi to clamor for the same response.

Only after Horikita gave them identical answers did they finally settle down, cheering loudly.

Not only that, but Horikita also expressed gratitude toward Hirata Yosuke and Yukimura Teruhiko.

This wasn't just a change—it was practically a complete transformation, sending a slight chill down Ayanokoji's spine.

He had no idea what Kaoru had done to her.

Watching Sudou's elated expression, Kushida suddenly felt like laughing.

She didn't even know how to describe Horikita—her naivety and obliviousness toward emotions were downright staggering.

It took Kaoru forcibly kissing her for her to finally realize it.

'Wait... does Kaoru like me?'

And afterward, Horikita's reaction left Kushida utterly speechless—she genuinely believed she had the confidence to face Kaoru now, intending to act spoiled and willful.

If Kushida wasn't mistaken, Horikita still hadn't even noticed that Sudou had feelings for her.

In that instant, Kushida felt a pang of pity for Sudou.

The goddess he longed for had knelt before another man just two days ago, using her delicate lips to serve him.

Kushida licked her lips.

She had also gotten her fair share back then—should she go find Kaoru for another practice session?

After all, it was too humiliating.

She couldn't believe she had lost to Horikita Suzune of all people!

Just thinking about it made her furious.

Kushida felt she should have been the fastest, the most experienced—yet she had been outdone by Horikita!

Unaware of her thoughts, Horikita was awkwardly engaging with the others, trying to understand their intentions.

Even if she found it irritating, she kept it bottled inside.

After a while, Hirata speak sincerely, "Thanks to Horikita-san and everyone else this time, even Chabashira-sensei was willing to help us. I believe even if we don't surpass Class B and Class C this time, we'll definitely win in the next exam."

Horikita instinctively wanted to refute him, unable to understand why he was already thinking about losing, but she forcibly restrained herself and calmly replied.

"Rest assured. Chabashira-sensei has been at this school for many years after all. She knows exactly how to set exam questions."

Indeed, with Chabashira Sae's assistance, their Class D could predict exam questions and even obtain some information through teacher channels.

All of them were students, so Ichinose Honami's Class B couldn't possibly come up with innovative test questions.

They were most likely referencing questions from the same period.

If that was the case, their references were probably from popular or frequently tested topics.

The more popular the topic, the more questions there were to reference.

On the contrary, obscure topics didn't have many questions, so they wouldn't know the exact approach to crafting them.

If Ichinose stubbornly insisted on creating original questions, Horikita didn't believe their questions could compare to those made by professional exam writers—there would inevitably be flaws.

Therefore, Horikita boldly sought advice from Chabashira Sae, who provided her with past exam papers from previous years.

After reviewing the seniors' exams, Horikita felt somewhat confident.

She also revised her own questions based on these papers, believing that Ryuen and his group were unlikely to score high.

To prevent any leaks, Horikita deliberately submitted her questions to the teachers' office just three minutes before the deadline.

"I never expected even Chabashira-sensei to help," Hirata remarked with some emotion.

In the eyes of Class D, Chabashira Sae was a rather harsh homeroom teacher—difficult to get along with.

Truthfully, Horikita didn't understand it either.

She had only tried asking on a whim, never expecting Chabashira to agree immediately without even demanding Personal Points.

Looking at Chabashira's expression at the time, Horikita faintly sensed something off—it was as if a desperate gambler was clinging to their last hope.

Moreover, Chabashira had subtly hinted that she should try to bring Ayanokoji along in their climb up the class rankings.

Horikita mulled it over briefly before dismissing the thoughts.

Instead, she focused on the nervous anticipation for tomorrow's exam results.

If Class D didn't gain any more points, her winter break would be miserable.

The girl no longer cared how Kaoru wanted to toy with her.

If he liked her, she would have plenty of time to handle him.

What truly bothered her was the fact that she still hadn't repaid her debt.

If she couldn't clear her debt, wouldn't that just prove how useless she was?

Horikita had even considered taking on a part-time job, but fortunately, the school had blocked that path.

For a moment, she thought about asking Kaoru to bring out his previous task list—if she just let him play with her, she could settle the debt.

But the moment the idea surfaced, she quickly dismissed it.

Kaoru could play with her, but she couldn't do that.

Using her body to please Kaoru and using it to repay a debt were two entirely different things.

At the very least, the former could still be considered a playful dynamic between lovers, while the latter was outright selling herself.

Horikita refused to allow herself to stoop that low.

...

The next day, the exam results unfolded as expected.

Class A attacked Class B—won.

Additionally, they successfully defended against Class C's attack, gaining 100 Class Points.

Class B attacked Class D—failed.

At the same time, their defense against Class A's attack also failed, losing 100 Class Points.

Class C attacked Class A—failed.

Moreover, they failed to defend against Class D's attack, losing 100 Class Points.

Class D attacked Class C—won.

Since they successfully defended against Class B's attack, they gained 100 Class Points.

No students were expelled from any of the classes.

Thus, the first-year Class Points changed once again:

Class A: 1756

Class B: 866

Class C: 422

Class D: 100

...

Class A's exam questions had been set by Class C.

Since they scored high on the test, it was only natural they could defeat both Class C and Class B.

The victory of Class D came as a surprise to everyone else.

Their exam questions were set by Class B—how could they possibly score so high?

Chapter 387: Peeking is Still Peeking

Although the final exams had ended, winter break hadn't officially begun yet.

The closing ceremony was scheduled before Christmas, so Kaoru and the others still had to attend school as usual.

December brought weather that could bring snowfall at any moment, and the sun seemed dimmer than usual.

The gray-black sky was occasionally streaked with wisps of pale, ink-like clouds.

The Class Points seized during the final exams wouldn't be settled until the following month, but Kaoru still held one to two million Personal Points in his account, much of which came from his individual settlement.

Currently, Class A students received over 160,000 Personal Points per month.

Even after handing over half, they still retained around 70,000 to 80,000.

Since the start of the school year, Class A had accumulated more than 20 million Personal Points in their class fund.

All these valuable points were securely stored on the phone of Ai Morishita, a neutral party, which gave everyone a strong sense of security.

When Kaoru arrived at school in the morning and saw her changing shoes at the entrance, he greeted her.

However, Morishita stopped him.

"When do you plan to use the class fund?"

The girl had already switched to her indoor shoes.

Her slender, straight calves were wrapped in clean, thick gray tights, visible beneath her skirt, while her slightly plump thighs caused the hem to lift slightly, accentuating her well-developed, perky bottom.

Kaoru's gaze drifted to her chest—her full bust was completely hidden under her blazer and shirt.

A light-colored scarf draped around her neck, and her hair was tied into two braids resting on her shoulders.

The ends were slightly fluffy, resembling twin tails, giving her a cute appearance.

A charming hair clip adorned the side of her bangs.

"Why are you suddenly thinking about using the class fund?" Kaoru asked, puzzled.

Morishita then pulled out her phone and showed him her personal account page.

"There are already 20 million Personal Points here. I think they could be useful to you."

Her account displayed a seven-digit balance—far more staggering than what Kaoru had seen on Nagumo's page.

It could be said that half of Class A's wealth was in her hands, accumulated over eight long months.

Moreover, Class A had barely paid Ryuen and his group for their services.

For months, they had been using the points Class C had given them during summer break to cover the costs—effectively freeloading off Class C.

"Are you feeling burdened by holding onto so many points now?" Kaoru saw through her thoughts.

Twenty million Personal Points was no small sum—enough to cover the transfer fee between classes.

In other words, Morishita could abscond with the funds right now, lay low until graduation, and still enjoy Class A's privileges even if they expelled her, as long as she didn't drop out.

"Very burdened," Morishita nodded. "Are you planning to have me join Katsuragi's faction? With these points, Sakayanagi won't have much advantage over you."

Although Morishita was only responsible for safekeeping, she was still Class A's treasurer.

The Personal Points were in her possession, meaning she could transfer them to Katsuragi at any time without objection from others.

"That was the initial idea," said Kaoru. "But now, I want you to join the student council."

The topic shifted too abruptly for Morishita Ai to follow.

She tilted her head in confusion. "Me? Join the student council?"

"Yes. There's a position called treasurer, and I think—"

"No thanks," Morishita cut him off decisively. "I'm not looking to join any clubs yet, and the student council sounds like a hassle."

"Too bad. You're already part of my team," Kaoru rejected her rejection.

Morishita froze for a moment.

Since when had she become 'Kaoru's person'?

Then it clicked—when Kaoru had called out her name earlier and suggested she be the custodian, it must have created some ambiguity.

To others, even if they weren't close, it probably seemed like there was some connection between them.

With that realization, Morishita turned on her heel and headed back toward their classroom.

Seeing this, Kaoru immediately followed.

"We can talk this over."

"No need. I'll just tell everyone I'm not 'your person' and that we have no connection whatsoever."

Morishita's logic was simple: if people misunderstood their relationship, she'd just clarify it openly.

Kaoru was momentarily speechless.

This girl seemed either incredibly dense or just stubbornly self-assured—naively pure in her approach.

"Don't do that. I can't afford the embarrassment."

"Why not?"

"The harder you try to deny something, the more suspicious people get."

"..."

Morishita seemed to grasp his point, her expression darkening slightly.

"Keep those points for now. They might come in handy next semester," Kaoru said.

"And about the student council—it was just a discussion. You don't have to join."

"Then why ask me?" Morishita pressed, puzzled.

"Because our seniors are graduating, and we're short on members," Kaoru replied.

Morishita sensed this wasn't the whole truth.

"Is this just another excuse to keep watching me?" she asked bluntly.

Kaoru nearly short-circuited, but meeting her gaze, he nodded.

"Yes. But it's not 'watching'—I've always openly admired you."

Morishita eyed him skeptically.

She'd hoped to catch him off guard and gauge his reaction, but Kaoru remained unshaken.

She couldn't read him at all.

Come to think of it, he was one of the few people she couldn't figure out.

"Watch if you want. No need for excuses. I know I'm cute—I'm used to it." Morishita saw nothing odd about her statement.

She'd grown up under scrutiny, whether for her unconventional behavior or her looks.

....

By the time Kaoru and Morishita reached Class A's classroom, the atmosphere was lively.

The chatter only died down when Mashima Tomonari arrived to announce the final exam results—though the class's reaction was unsurprised.

"Hah! I knew it!" Totsuka Yahiko cheered.

Since Class A had been tested on Class C's material, scoring high naturally meant outperforming both Classes B and C.

According to Mashima's revelation, their Class A ranked first in the grade, Class D came in second, followed by Classes B and C.

However, everyone was still somewhat surprised by Class D's sudden rise.

Kaoru speculated that Chabashira Sae had completely revealed her true intentions during this final exam.

She wasn't pretending anymore—she genuinely wanted to advance her class.

It was likely that Ayanokoji's lack of cooperation had pushed this homeroom teacher to her limits, making Kaoru wonder: did homeroom teachers also compete against each other?

....

After school, Kaoru had originally intended to call out to Miki Yamamura, but she kept her head down as if avoiding something and hurried out of the classroom.

Hearing Kaoru's voice, she glanced in his direction, her face slightly flushed, and then ran even faster.

Left with no other choice, Kaoru turned his gaze toward Kamuro, who was packing her bag nearby.

"What are you looking at me for?" Kamuro glared at him guiltily, regretting why she had followed him that time.

Who would have thought he would suddenly kiss Asahina out of nowhere?

"Nothing, you just look especially pretty today." Kaoru reached out toward her cheek, as if intending to do something.

The image of him forcefully kissing Asahina flashed through Kamuro's mind, instantly turning her delicate face crimson.

She quickly pushed his hand away. "I'm warning you, don't try anything with me! I'm not like them—I'll bite your tongue off!"

Kaoru smirked. "Your hair's messy. I just wanted to fix it for you."

Only then did Kamuro belatedly realize that he wouldn't go so far as to kiss her right here.

Even if no one else stopped him, Sakayanagi certainly wouldn't let him off the hook.

"What were you thinking about?"

Faced with Kaoru's teasing expression, Kamuro stammered, unable to come up with a response.

Her reaction was far too suspicious—it was practically a confession.

Just as Kaoru was about to say something else, the girl suddenly grabbed her bag and, before he could react, bolted out of the classroom.

Seriously? Had his actions left such a deep impression on them?

Kaoru felt a bit frustrated, but he quickly realized that the two girls' reactions were actually quite mild compared to what was coming.

His "main wife" was now planning to have a serious talk with him.

"Kaoru."

Hearing this voice, Kaoru instinctively turned around to see Ichinose standing outside Class A's room, smiling brightly at him.

Chapter 388: Could It Be That She Doesn't Oppose a Harem?

Japanese high schools let out early, giving students plenty of free time.

Outside, the track field was already filled with students participating in club activities.

Though winter was approaching, the sunlight still carried a hint of warmth, making people feel pleasantly drowsy.

She wore a red blazer over a white button-up shirt, her full, rounded chest seemingly on the verge of bursting through the fabric.

Atop the graceful curves sat a pair of ribbon bows that trembled slightly with her movements—making it hard to tell whether it was the ribbons swaying or her chest threatening to spill free.

Underneath the exaggeratedly ample curves, the girl's slender waist was equally eye-catching.

Her smooth, soft abdomen carried a youthful innocence and vitality, accentuating her delicate and well-proportioned figure—almost as if it could be grasped with a single hand.

Further down, the plump curve of her hips and slightly wider pelvis arched enticingly into a graceful line.

Then, the sway of her skirt revealed a pair of snow-white thighs, their fair skin gleaming under the sunlight.

Black thigh-high socks hugged her legs just below the knees, while her slender, well-shaped calves disappeared into a pair of polished leather shoes, leaving only a hint of her ankles exposed, tinged with a faint rosy hue.

Her schoolbag was currently in Kaoru's hands, and the two stood close enough that occasional passersby cast them curious glances.

No doubt, rumors about them would only multiply from now on.

"Your test questions were so hard. I thought I could get a perfect score, but only English, modern literature, and world history were full marks," Ichinose Honami complained quite naturally about the final exams.

"Losing to your class is one thing, but even the questions we set for Class D were solved by them. I really shouldn't underestimate anyone in this school."

Yet, the more she acted this way, the more uneasy Kaoru felt, unsure of what she had discussed with Asahina last night.

Kaoru humored her conversation, but his mind drifted to Nagumo and student council matters.

Before the official break began, he would inevitably have to visit the council—meaning he'd likely run into Nagumo.

"What's on your mind?" Ichinose suddenly poked his cheek, a small gesture he wasn't sure where she'd picked up.

Kaoru caught her hand, then gently held it in his own, gazing into her eyes.

"I want to officially date you."

Ichinose froze for a moment, her gaze softening as she murmured.

"Wasn't it official before?"

Kaoru pointed at the onlookers stealing glances their way.

"They don't know yet. I plan to make sure everyone knows."

The implication was clear—he was done pretending.

He wanted Ichinose to be his publicly acknowledged girlfriend.

"Am I the only one?"

Instead of letting go, Ichinose tightened her grip on his hand, as if determined not to give him any chance to escape, her eyes locked onto his.

Kaoru had a feeling she and Asahina had talked about far more than they were letting on.

Asahina had even sent him a smiley face that morning.

"I'll introduce them all to you. After all, you're my first girlfriend."

Ichinose didn't seem particularly happy.

She bit her lip lightly—no matter how one looked at it, this was scummy behavior.

Yet, her concern lay elsewhere.

"My only condition is that you must not force anyone."

The girl's face rarely showed such a serious expression.

"Asahina-senpai is Nagumo-senpai's childhood friend. If you do this, you'll definitely incur his wrath."

"Did she tell you everything?" Kaoru asked.

Ichinose Honami shot him a sidelong glance.

Both he and Nagumo were student council members—did he really think he could hide things from her?

Of course, Asahina was well aware of this, which was why she had straightforwardly explained the situation to Ichinose Honami—though she omitted the part about Kaoru forcibly kissing her.

Not only that, Asahina had even curiously asked Ichinose why she had agreed to Kaoru's request.

Well, the details of that night's conversation certainly couldn't be disclosed to Kaoru.

Kaoru held her hand as they walked and chatted for a while.

When they arrived at the student council office, Nagumo was nowhere to be seen—only Tonokawa and Mizowaki were present.

"The semester is ending. After finishing up these last few days of work, you won't need to come to the student council anymore." Tonokawa briefed them on today's tasks.

With the council president absent, the two vice presidents had to take charge.

Kaoru studied Mizowaki's expression and noticed both seemed to have resolved themselves to something.

He already had a countermeasure in mind—he planned to have Katsuragi and Kiriya spread some rumors.

For example: Nagumo was planning to expel so-and-so; certain people were preparing to rebel against Nagumo out of love-turned-hatred; affairs, cheating, same-sex relationships...

He was confident people would enthusiastically engage with such gossip.

Kaoru was all too familiar with this muddied waters tactic and even considered coming up with a provocative headline.

....

After finishing their work, with still no sign of Nagumo, Ichinose quietly leaned closer to Kaoru and whispered.

"Do you think he's bothering Asahina-senpai?"

Kaoru thought the same.

Compared to him, Nagumo would undoubtedly be more concerned about Asahina.

"Asahina and Nagumo-kun had another argument," Tonokawa suddenly informed them.

"But this time, Asahina seems unwilling to engage with Nagumo-kun. They're giving each other the cold shoulder."

Ichinose looked at him in surprise.

Unaware of the full context, the girl couldn't comprehend why he would share this information with her and Kaoru—it didn't seem like something they needed to know.

"What I want is Asahina-senpai. I won't interfere with whatever's going on between you and Kiriya-senpai," Kaoru stated plainly.

Tonokawa gave him a long, searching look.

He didn't entirely believe this claim but chose not to press further.

Instead, he asked, "Do you have a way to make us give up on Nagumo-kun?"

"Before answering, I'd like to know why you senpais are so determined to graduate from Class A?" Kaoru countered.

"The school promises Class A absolute privileges—rewards that can't be obtained elsewhere," Tonokawa replied.

At this point, Mizowaki also joined the conversation.

"Didn't you come to this school for the college advancement and employment prospects too?"

Most students attended ANHS for precisely these reasons—only a minority came for other purposes.

"And why do people pursue further education and employment?" Kaoru asked again.

Tonokawa frowned, while Mizowaki asked in confusion, "Further education and employment are for future security. If we can get into prestigious schools, it'll benefit us whether we're looking for jobs or continuing our studies."

"Benefits like having a higher starting point in life than others?"

"Isn't that the case?"

"Then I'm confident."

Neither of them understood what Kaoru meant, their eyes blank with confusion.

...

After Kaoru left the student council office, Ichinose asked him, "Have you already teamed up with the senpais?"

The sharp-witted girl had picked up on the subtle dynamic between them—somewhat like allies, yet with an undercurrent of mutual wariness.

"Not yet. By next semester, they'll have no choice but to cooperate with me, whether they like it or not." Kaoru gave her small hand a squeeze.

"By the way, have you ever thought about the practical side of things?"

"The practical side?" Ichinose didn't follow.

"Like what qualifications I have to support you and the others, or how I can make everyone acknowledge my relationships with you all." Kaoru said this calmly.

Ichinose watched him quietly.

Unlike in novels, reality demanded that if he wanted to shoulder the futures of so many girls, he needed to provide some kind of guarantee.

"I originally planned to get along with you all peacefully, but now I'm done pretending. I'm laying my cards on the table—I'm a billionaire."

Kaoru's expression was dead serious, not a hint of joking.

Ichinose was about to laugh when she suddenly remembered his previous purchase of Personal Points.

Suspicion crept in.

"You're not lying?"

"No. This is my biggest trump card. I didn't want to play it, but the situation is urgent. If I delay any longer, I might lose." Kaoru's gaze darkened.

"Now I have no choice but to drop a bomb and open everyone's eyes."

Still, he knew that once he played this card, things would inevitably become far more complicated.

Sensing his mood, Ichinose suddenly smiled.

"I won't help you between classes, but for this matter, I'll definitely stand by you."

Kaoru fell silent for a moment.

Though she framed it as helping him overthrow Nagumo, her words were practically tacit approval of his relationship with Asahina.

He couldn't help but wonder what the two had discussed last night.

Could it be that Ichinose didn't actually oppose him having a harem?

Chapter 389: A Little More Practice

As it turned out, Kaoru was overthinking it.

Ichinose quickly started probing about how many other girls he had.

Kaoru began counting on his fingers, but halfway through, the girl inexplicably punched him several times.

It didn't hurt much, but the barrage of ordinary attacks made it clear she was holding back frustration.

"Besides the ones at school, were there others before?" Ichinose seemed fixated on his past.

Logically speaking, if he was this unrestrained here, he'd probably left behind plenty of romantic entanglements elsewhere.

Kaoru wasn't sure how to count.

Before his death, his agency had managed eight groups, totaling twenty-eight idol girls.

Industry insiders had dubbed them his "harem," leaving him utterly baffled.

Even many fans believed he regularly manipulated the idols in private—rumors like hugging them before performances, controlling them onstage, or even "flipping cards" to choose which idol to spend time with backstage.

At first, Kaoru thought it was slander and attacks from competitors, but he never expected the rumors to originate from within the agency itself—a few idiots couldn't keep their mouths shut and accidentally leaked it to the media.

Kaoru was so angry his face darkened for a while.

They were the ones who pushed things forcefully from the start, weren't they?

Though he often indulged their whims to fulfill their wishes, he never intended to cross all boundaries.

Yet, ironically, it turned out they were the ones with no limits.

For instance, Fuyuko outright tricked him into going to a hotel, while Hana's personality took a drastic turn, inexplicably tying him up in a room for days.

On top of that, a few foolish high school girls—whom Kaoru had no intention of pursuing—ended up ganging up on him.

The only thing that gave Kaoru some solace was that, no matter how crazy the others acted, Tsubakino Ena maintained her cold indifference toward him from start to finish.

Otherwise, he might've hanged himself right in front of her.

"We're not in contact anymore. I doubt they even remember me."

Kaoru's answer left Ichinose deeply dissatisfied.

This wasn't the response she wanted.

A sense of unease rose in her chest, stubbornly refusing to fade no matter what.

"How many were there before?"

"Even if I answer, it'll only make you feel worse," Kaoru said softly. "I understand how you feel, but the discomfort won't just disappear. Or do you think I can give you an answer that'll satisfy you?"

Ichinose pressed her lips together.

Deep down, she knew this was true, but a faint sense of foreboding lingered in her heart, as though something inevitable was approaching.

So, she fell silent.

Before they knew it, the two had reached the dormitory.

Under the gaze of a few students, Kaoru let go of Ichinose's small hand and was about to say something when a cold voice suddenly came from behind.

"Move."

Before Kaoru could react, a petite figure pushed past him and Ichinose.

Ibuki Mio brushed past them and stopped in front of the elevator.

Embarrassed by the attention, Ichinose's face flushed slightly.

Kaoru, however, could more or less guess Ibuki's thoughts.

Class C had suffered consecutive defeats, losing 100 points.

The gap between them and Class A was widening, while the distance to Class D was shrinking.

It was only natural that Ibuki wouldn't be friendly toward him.

Well, there's also that other thing...

Kaoru suspected Class C had realized their exam questions had been leaked.

Was Ryuen searching for a traitor within the class right now?

Thinking this, he sent a few messages to Shiho Manabe.

After a moment's consideration, he also messaged Asahina to check on her.

Soon, Asahina replied with a "no worries" sticker.

Kaoru figured it'd be best to resolve this issue quickly.

"Want to talk a bit more at the café?" he suggested to the girl beside him.

The dormitory's first-floor lobby had a café that was popular among students due to its convenience, though seating was limited.

"My mind's a mess right now. Let me calm down first," Ichinose declined, her brows slightly furrowed as she lost herself in thought.

Kaoru had no choice but to see her to the elevator, while he himself headed to the second floor.

The hallway was nearly empty at this hour, bathed in the golden hues of the setting sun that stretched shadows across the floor and walls.

Though night had yet to fall, a chill was already creeping in, making him instinctively hunch his shoulders and consider buying a scarf.

As soon as he stepped inside, he noticed a pair of small dress shoes by the entrance that didn't belong to him—and his own slippers were missing.

"You're late," Kushida remarked, sprawled across his bed without a care, engrossed in her phone.

The room's warmth had prompted her to shed her coat, and the top two buttons of her blouse were undone, revealing a generous expanse of pale, supple skin.

The deep cleavage between her full, trembling curves was impossible to ignore.

She wasn't wearing tights, and as she idly swung her legs, the hem of her skirt fluttered up slightly, offering glimpses of her pert, plump backside, its tantalizing bounce hinting at even more beneath.

Kaoru spotted his slippers by the bedside—clearly, she had taken them for herself.

Last time, Kushida had swiped his keys, forcing him to request a spare from the building manager.

"Don't you have anything better to do tonight?"

With that, Kaoru climbed onto the bed and grabbed her petite foot, only to realize—he really was turning into a foot fetishist.

"I do, actually. Mii-chan is thinking of asking Hirata out on Christmas now that he's broken up with Karuizawa. She wants to confess under the Legendary Tree, and I'm trying to figure out how to respond." Kushida sat up and wriggled into his arms.

"I don't get the appeal of playing with feet all the time. Your tastes are beyond me."

Flustered, Kaoru retaliated by groping her chest.

"Because anything else would make me seem too eager, and you wouldn't be able to handle it."

Kushida felt his palm scorch against her skin, and as he kneaded, her body undeniably reacted.

She pressed closer, nibbling his ear as she murmured, "So what if I can't handle it? I still need to practice tonight."

Kaoru instantly understood what she meant—this girl was still competing with Horikita Suzune.

No wonder she'd come over unannounced today.

...

Ryuen wasn't investigating the mole.

He'd already received word that the leaked exam questions were the fault of Nagumo's Class 2-A, where a traitor had emerged.

Since it wasn't his problem, Ryuen took his class's defeat in stride.

After all, Nagumo had compensated him for his support.

Though he hadn't managed to defeat Class A, Nagumo still transferred him a million points.

Strangely, last night, Nagumo had even gritted his teeth and made an additional promise:

If Ryuen could get Kaoru expelled, Nagumo would transfer him twenty million Personal Points as a reward.

Even more absurdly, Nagumo vowed to reimburse all related expenses.

That's right—the moment Ryuen could prove the costs were for targeting Kaoru, Nagumo would cover them immediately.

It left Ryuen feeling oddly uncertain now.

Yet Ryuen trusted his instincts.

He was almost certain that, one day, Kaoru would inevitably be expelled.

Chapter 390: Winter Is Coming

The first snow of the year arrived quietly in the night, the chilly wind carrying damp air.

Puddles lingered on the ground—traces of melted snow.

However, the real snowfall would likely come around Christmas.

Kaoru had grown accustomed to Japan's seasons by now.

What would they be doing at this time in previous years?

Kaoru had no time to dwell on such thoughts.

Recently, he'd been spending most of his time with Ichinose, appearing together so often that it quickly drew attention.

Coupled with their earlier date, many first-year students had already assumed they were dating.

One might have expected Class B students to react with outrage, yet no one confronted him.

It seemed none of them considered whether their leader dating a boy from Class A would cause any issues.

On the contrary, Kobashi Yume and the others were intensely curious about Kaoru, bombarding him with questions while inviting him to karaoke.

Kaoru sang a few songs, sending them into a frenzy.

Some even jokingly suggested he should debut as a singer.

He brushed it all off as playful banter, handling it with ease.

However, Shiranami Chihiro and Amikura Mako's gazes held something odd.

Moreover, Ichinose no longer seemed to restrict his interactions with Amikura, subtly nudging him toward her.

That was manageable.

What truly gave Kaoru a headache was how relentless Kobashi Yume and the others were—grilling him as if determined to uncover every detail about him.

By the time he returned to his room, he'd either find Kushida Kikyo or Karuizawa Kei waiting.

Kushida seemed addicted to mischief, more eager than ever—as if determined to experiment with every curiosity she'd ever suppressed.

After over a dozen rehearsals, even putting the "big rabbit" to use, she was finally satisfied, confident she wouldn't embarrass herself in front of Horikita again.

In high spirits, she flashed Kaoru a peace sign, her plump lips swallowing as a faint smile lingered in her eyes.

Her usually innocent face now bore an obscene expression from the sucking, the peace sign resting beside her flushed cheek.

Once Kaoru had finished, she proudly puffed out her chest, demanding praise—threatening to scold him if he refused.

Where she'd learned all this was a mystery.

She even encouraged Kaoru to try something strange with Horikita.

In contrast, Kaoru had no idea how to handle Karuizawa.

"She has a ring too, doesn't she?"

The bathroom lights were bright, making the ring on her finger impossible to miss.

Its dazzling, moonlike gleam seemed hazy, entirely different from Ichinose's design.

Kaoru held the petite Karuizawa in his arms, her slender waist swaying like a willow branch, fragile yet resilient.

Her long, shapely legs pressed together neatly, her slightly plump hips resting on his thighs.

Their smooth skin melded seamlessly, the rippling water faintly revealing her snow-white legs.

Her knees bore a delicate flush, her toes lined up like pearls in a river—only her ankles and soles shimmered with a tender pink glow, like freshly peeled figs, so dewy they begged to be tasted.

"Yes, but the design is different from yours."

After an especially intense workout, enjoying a peaceful bath together was quite nice.

Kaoru really liked holding Karuizawa like this, the two of them soaking in the tub together.

"If the designs are different, whose ring will you wear?" Karuizawa found it strange—rings were supposed to come in pairs.

It wouldn't make sense for both of them to wear rings while Kaoru had nothing on his fingers.

Kaoru suddenly realized the issue and felt a little awkward.

After thinking for a moment, he replied, "Every ring is unique. There won't be a second ring in this world exactly like yours—not even mine."

Karuizawa puffed up her cheeks.

He always sweet-talked like this.

She couldn't help muttering, "You must've been tricked by them. That's just what sellers say—there's no such thing as a ring like that."

Though she didn't believe his reasoning, she still felt a little happy inside.

Girls were easy to please—as long as she knew Kaoru was trying to sweet-talk her, that was enough.

"Would you like me to get you a different one?" Kaoru gently caressed the girl's delicate skin, his fingers tracing the slightly raised curves of her youthful chest that hadn't fully shed their adolescent softness.

The pert swell carried a springy resilience, beneath which he could faintly detect a tender resistance—a different texture from the smoothness elsewhere, as the rosy bud slipped through his palm.

Karuizawa was already reacting to his touch, her face flushed crimson as she bit her lip.

"Who said I wanted to replace it? Can't you just get me another one? That way the ring would have real meaning!"

She adored this ring—no matter how she looked at it, she couldn't bear the thought of exchanging it.

"Alright, we'll go pick one out together later." Kaoru felt himself sinking deeper into scum territory, yet he knew he mustn't view himself that way.

If even he couldn't convince himself, how could he possibly reassure the girl?

Karuizawa squirmed somewhat awkwardly in his embrace, the masculine scent making her body heat up instinctively.

However, Kaoru's movements remained restrained, merely gentle strokes that gradually eased her into this intimacy—a far cry from their initial encounters.

From petting like rabbits to kissing, then to the main event, even shared baths had become routine after several repetitions.

Karuizawa found it unbelievable—she'd never imagined she'd humble herself like this beside a man.

"Kaoru hasn't... done this with Ichinose-san, right?"

As if masking her petty thoughts, Karuizawa cupped a handful of warm water, watching the little rubber duck bobbing beside them.

Where Ichinose Honami brought caterpillars, she brought ducks.

As long as no one entered the bathroom, the duck's existence would remain her secret—a tiny competition she held against Ichinose in her heart.

"Still jealous? Though she was the first to receive a ring, I gave you yours almost immediately." Kaoru patted her ass, shifting slightly to avoid certain... rising complications.

Not wanting him to misunderstand, Karuizawa denied it.

"Not at all! She just came earlier—nothing worth envying. Besides, Kaoru likes her too. I understand... Kaoru wants a harem!"

As she spoke, the girl wriggled her waist, pressing her rounded curves against him again, cheeks pink—clearly dissatisfied with his earlier evasion.

Her movement proved disastrous.

Kaoru felt his control fraying.

"Kaoru promised not to abandon me... so you won't abandon Ichinose-san or the others either. That leaves only the harem option." Karuizawa could already feel the familiar heat, her voice growing faint as her cheeks burned.

"So it can't be helped... jealousy and envy... I just... don't want to hinder Kaoru..."

"No, Kei. You shouldn't have to accommodate me like this."

Youthful bodies were too greedy for pleasure—this reaction was the price of shared baths.

Kaoru struggled to keep his voice steady. "Jealousy is a natural response. If I saw you talking to other guys, I'd feel it too. This possessiveness is normal—you shouldn't suppress it. Solving this is my responsibility."

Out of his sight, Karuizawa allowed a faint smile to curl her lips.

She had known all along that Kaoru would respond this way—it was precisely because she anticipated his answer that she had given up resisting back then.

Karuizawa was well aware she was acting out of jealousy and pettiness.

Otherwise, she wouldn't have mustered the courage to offer herself so boldly.

If Kaoru was lustful, she would use her body.

If he desired sweet romance, she would play the part of a doting girlfriend.

In short, she was determined to surpass Ichinose Honami in some way—or rather, to outshine everyone else.

As it turned out, Karuizawa's gamble paid off.

She now had a ring to show for it.

Yet she craved even more attention, wanting Kaoru to dote on her endlessly.

"If I get jealous, will Kaoru keep indulging me?" Karuizawa stole a glance at his expression.

"Even if you're building a harem, there can only be one official wife, right?"

"Of course I'll indulge you. But as for marriage—who said we need legal recognition?" Kaoru leaned in, breathing in the girl's scent near her ear.

"Eh?" Karuizawa blinked in confusion.

Did he not plan to marry at all?

"We'll settle down somewhere later and hold our own private ceremony. No need for official registration." Kaoru said. "Even if someone reports us, I can handle it."

Karuizawa hadn't thought that far ahead.

She only knew there could be one true wife—she'd assumed it would be Ichinose Honami.

The realization that she might have a wedding too filled her with unexpected joy.

"Will we marry right after graduation?" The girl's cheeks flushed pink, looking utterly kissable.

"Does Kei not want to marry me?" Kaoru teased, deliberately provoking her.

"N-no! That's not it!" Karuizawa hurriedly denied. "I just... haven't really thought about it yet..."

"Legally speaking, Kei could get married right now." Kaoru continued tormenting her.

Japan's legal marriage age was remarkably young—high school students could wed, and university students registering marriages wasn't uncommon either.

Karuizawa covered her burning face.

She knew Kaoru was teasing her, but the embarrassment felt real.

Though they'd done many couple-like things and she fully intended to stay with him, certain reactions remained beyond her control.

Unable to resist, Kaoru kissed her—a taste as sweet as honey.

The sudden kiss deepened Karuizawa's blush.

Yet she nuzzled against him, raising her delicate face to lightly bite her lip.

A flash of shyness crossed her eyes as she began slowly grinding against him.

"Don't. If we keep going, the water will get cold."

"If it's cold, we'll just get out. Like earlier—I'll brace against the wall, and then Kaoru can... mmm..."

"I didn't bring any in."

"Maybe we should skip it today?"

"No way. Kei can't become a mom ahead of schedule."

"Just kidding. I want to keep spending our high school days like this with Kaoru too. After graduation we'll..."

"After graduation we'll what?"

"Meanie!"

Water rippled as crystalline droplets slid down the girl's snowy peaks.

Rosy cherries looked as delectable as sundae toppings.

Her smooth, delicate skin gradually prickled with goosebumps as soft whimpers once again filled the cramped room.

Outside the window, frosty rain fell as the weather grew colder—yet inside, the room grew hotter. Winter break approached.