

Cote 461

Chapter 461: Persuasion.

Even if he knew, he still couldn't stop this from happening—he could only shift the target to someone else.

Nagumo and Ryuen must have started plotting this on the bus.

Fortunately, Kaoru had many acquaintances among the girls, so there were no blind spots Nagumo could exploit.

If Nagumo were to confront him head-on, it would actually be troublesome, since Nagumo still held influence among the second-years.

"So, they targeted Miki because they thought you would save her?"

Haruka rarely felt this angry. "Aren't they worried about getting expelled themselves?"

Though they hadn't known each other for long, Haruka already considered Miki Yamamura a friend—just like Airi Sakura.

In the eyes of those two, Haruka might have seemed gloomy, but to her, a friend was a friend.

If she really disliked them, she wouldn't have joined the Study Group in the first place.

Wouldn't it have been easier to sneak off alone when no one was looking?

"I understand how you feel, but for now, let's set aside their motives. The first issue we need to address is your own situation."

Kaoru spoke patiently. "You always isolate yourselves—that's too dangerous. Even if no one targets you now, what if you end up expelled later for lacking connections?"

Haruka froze.

She had never considered that before.

Could someone really be expelled just for being unpopular?

Airi Sakura and Miki Yamamura would probably be the most anxious about this.

"Imagine a special exam where students can form teams or act alone, and the penalty is expulsion for the last-place finisher."

Kaoru asked gently, "In that scenario, what would you do if no one was willing to take you in?"

"Couldn't the loners band together?"

Haruka's tone was complicated.

"They could, but humans are social creatures. Even if the loners form a group, they'll create their own small circle—and that circle will still exclude certain people. Someone will inevitably end up marginalized."

Kaoru didn't elaborate further because Haruka had already understood.

"When a crisis comes, the marginalized are the first to be sacrificed, right?"

"Don't forget, this is a place that believes in meritocracy. If you don't demonstrate your worth, the school will be more than happy to watch you get eliminated."

"How cruel. Though I suppose it's the same outside too."

Kaoru neither confirmed nor denied this, then smiled: "Since no one's helping us, why can't we help each other?"

If friends were in the same group, Miki Yamamura couldn't possibly be targeted by Ryuen.

The only ones who could be selected would be loners and the timid.

Otherwise, Ryuen wouldn't be able to push forward and might even suffer backlash from victims fighting back.

The school might even intervene.

Haruka looked at Miki and Airi, feeling an inexplicable sense of helplessness and protectiveness.

"Kaoru's absolutely right. If we're in the same group, no one would dare bully Miki."

Hearing Haruka stand up for her, Miki was deeply moved.

"I... I don't deserve your concern like this..."

"Don't deserve it? In your eyes, Miki, don't we count as friends?"

"No, that's not what I meant. It's just... hard to believe."

Miki lowered her head, and just seeing her like this, Haruka could vaguely sense she might have gone through something difficult before.

"I actually understand how Miki feels."

Airi Sakura interjected softly, "When you're alone for too long, you become shrouded in darkness. The brightness from someone like Haruka can feel overwhelming at first."

Haruka's expression froze.

"But you don't dislike it, do you?"

Airi asked quietly.

Kindred spirits recognize each other.

Miki shook her head, then instinctively glanced at Kaoru—some people's radiance was strong enough to pierce through the fog.

At that moment, Airi was also stealing glances at Kaoru, her eyes sparkling with light before dimming slightly with disappointment.

"It's not just about sticking together. You'll need to interact more with others from now on."

Kaoru sighed, feeling like he'd become the caretaker of troubled kids again.

"Haruka, do you see any difficulties with that?"

"Shouldn't be a problem, though I don't want to deal with boys."

Haruka disliked the boys in their class.

Besides, the person from her dreams was right here—why would she bother with other guys?

Ahem.

"What about you, Airi?"

Kaoru softened his tone, as he couldn't quite grasp the idol's thoughts—she seemed so withdrawn.

"I... I'll try my best."

Airi spoke nervously, slowly adding, "As long as no one hates me."

'If you're willing, no one would hate you,' Kaoru thought.

But given Airi's personality, she probably wouldn't manage well.

He'd just have to guide her more.

"And you, Miki?"

After hesitating, Miki asked, "How should I interact? Does talking count?"

"It counts. Your presence is too faint—start with natural conversations."

Kaoru didn't consider Miki an outcast.

Apart from her low visibility, her personality wasn't particularly odd—Airi was far more timid.

Something from her past must have warped her self-perception, making her undervalue herself to this extent.

As for Airi, Kaoru suspected she might have experienced some form of bullying in the past.

For instance, girls who develop early during puberty often attract unwanted attention.

Airi habitually hunched her shoulders and kept her head lowered—a clear sign of low self-confidence.

She was also highly sensitive to male gazes, and Kaoru noticed she always seemed to detect his glances.

Despite her lack of confidence, she had taken the path of a gravure idol, taking self-photos in front of a mirror—an obvious result of excessive repression.

Kaoru recalled the photos Airi had sent him, most of which were private body shots never meant for public viewing.

She had truly been suppressing herself too much.

"Let's pause the topic of making friends for now. What should we do about Miki's situation?"

Haruka was deeply worried.

What if Class C's students actually succeeded?

At this, both Miki Yamamura and Airi Sakura turned their eyes to Kaoru.

Unconsciously, the girls had grown heavily reliant on him.

"Don't worry, I'm here."

Kaoru smiled faintly. "The problem will be resolved in a couple of days. Not just for Miki—I won't let them affect any of you."

Not now, and not ever.

Otherwise, what was the point of him securing so many class points for Class A?

However, as his words trailed off, Haruka's eyes flickered nervously, as if trying to hide something.

She took a sip of coffee, found it too sweet, and quickly took a bite of dessert.

Airi buried her face even deeper, her legs tightly pressed together under the table, her toes curling slightly as if bracing for a fight.

Kaoru glanced at Miki, whose face had turned red.

Had he said something wrong?

Chapter 462: Little H-kun

When they left the cafeteria and Kaoru was about to head back to the boys' dorm when Miki suddenly tugged at his sleeve.

"Thank you."

Her voice was soft, likely worried Haruka and Airi might hear, but the sincerity in her eyes was unmistakable.

Kaoru paused, then replied gently, "No need to thank me. Honestly, you were just dragged into this because of me."

"But... you've always helped me."

Miki whispered, "You knew from the start that I was Sakayanagi's person—that the only reason I teamed up with you was because she wanted me to monitor you. Yet you never blamed me and still accepted me."

She was referring to the final exams.

Given Kaoru's sharp perception, there was no way he wouldn't have noticed her usual academic performance. He must have deliberately turned a blind eye.

"Being monitored would normally make someone angry or resentful, but the monitor wasn't just anyone."

Kaoru averted his gaze. "Besides, did you or Sakayanagi ever actually try to harm me?"

His tone made it sound as if she were special to him.

Miki muttered under her breath, "B-but... what if I did something bad to Kaoru-kun?"

"That would depend on how you see me, Miki."

Kaoru's smile seemed to carry deeper meaning.

Perhaps sensing an inexplicable shyness from him, Miki grew flustered, but seeing his smile gradually steadied her heart.

Gazing at the boy right in front of her, she recalled the scene she had witnessed earlier.

Just as she mustered the courage to say something, someone suddenly tapped her shoulder from behind.

"Eh—?!"

Seeing the girl's flustered expression, Hasebe, who had initially moved closer, was also startled.

"Ah, s-sorry, did I scare you?"

"Ugh..."

Miki couldn't speak.

She glanced at Kaoru, then at Haruka, feeling her cheeks burn. "I—I'm going back!"

Haruka seemed thoughtful for a moment before nudging Kaoru with her elbow, a strange smile playing on her lips.

"For you, the girls here really are easy to handle, huh?"

As she moved, Kaoru could faintly sense a softness brushing against him, along with the delicate fragrance lingering in her hair—a scent unique to a girl.

"If they were that easy, I wouldn't be worried about you guys."

Kaoru sighed.

He really shouldn't have rushed things. "The worst outcome here is just expulsion. But outside, girls like Airi and Miki... I don't know how they'd handle social relationships."

Socially awkward creatures like them naturally exuded a gloomy aura, existing as outcasts beyond the social circle—something looked down upon in Japan.

Still, what comforted Kaoru was that Airi and Miki weren't completely averse to socializing.

They just hadn't built their own interpersonal connections yet.

"My, my, Kaoru-kun sometimes really acts like a fussy old mother."

"Actually, sometimes I'm a pervert too."

"Oh? Like eating one, holding onto another, and eyeing a third?"

"Exactly. If you keep bumping into me, I might just share my thoughts on oppai."

Hasebe seemed to realize belatedly and quickly pulled back, her face flushing as she stopped nudging him with her shoulder.

Sometimes, when a girl developed too well, she might accidentally brush against certain places, stirring a boy's heart.

"W-well, it can't be helped. Boys just have a lot of dirty thoughts."

Playing with her hair in an attempt to appear composed, she added, "Can't your girlfriend satisfy you, little H-kun?"

"What does 'little H-kun' even mean?"

Kaoru's face darkened.

Did he just get another nickname?

"Do I really have to say it out loud?"

Hasebe shot him a sidelong glance, lips slightly parted as she bit her tongue.

"Pe~r~vert~"

Her voice was almost a whisper, slipping quietly into Kaoru's ear, sending a ticklish shiver down his spine.

Kaoru stayed silent for a moment before replying, "How about you try stepping on me while calling me a pervert?"

Hasebe immediately backed away, her expression full of wariness.

"Somehow, I feel like Kaoru-kun just imagined me in some very... detailed scenarios. And the methods are way too perverted."

"Is it really that exaggerated?"

"Girls are naturally sensitive to boys' gazes. Someone as cute as me? I bet Kaoru-kun's head is full of nothing but dirty thoughts right now."

Looking at her confident expression, Kaoru felt a bit frustrated, but he couldn't really argue back.

After all, countless desires had flowed through her like water.

[Haruka Hasebe's big tits—lick, lick, lick!]

[Unspeakable desires]

[Lick Haruka Hasebe's feet until they're ruined],

[Unspeakable desires unspeakable desires unspeakable desires],

[Unspeakable desires unspeakable desires unspeakable desires],

[Please wear a maid outfit],

[A bunny girl outfit would work too],

[Find a way to turn her into little Popo—Honami can't lose here],

[Get beaten unconscious by her and taken back for unspeakable desires],

[Ask her out],

[Unspeakable desires],

[Unspeakable desires]...

Even so, Haruka didn't seem too bothered—she just wanted to tease Kaoru while she had the chance.

Girls do hate it when boys have lewd thoughts about them, but it depends on the situation.

"Are you heading back now, Kaoru?"

Haruka clasped her hands behind her back, leaning against the wall as she tilted her head to observe Kaoru's reaction.

"I still have some things to take care of today."

Kaoru paused. "Did you have something to say to me?"

Haruka studied him for a moment.

Miki and Airi had already walked off, leaving just the two of them.

Could he really not sense what this atmosphere implied?

After what happened last time, wasn't he even a little curious?

With their identities practically laid bare, wasn't he the least bit nervous?

"Nothing much. That CD you gave me last time was really nice to listen to."

Haruka turned her face away. "Actually, I'm a little envious of them. Whether they're happy or not, there's always someone by their side."

"Sometimes, reality isn't what you imagine it to be."

Kaoru knew his intentions had never been pure from the start.

However, Haruka shot him an annoyed glare.

"Are you trying to pick a fight with me? Don't say things without proof, thank you. Otherwise, I'll assume you're just another hater."

"..."

"By the way, I'm not their fan."

Haruka huffed in dissatisfaction. "You'd better not mention them in front of me. Yeah, from now on, don't act like you're the only one who understands them."

Kaoru touched his own face.

Was his expression really that strange?

"I'm a fan of the producer. Remember that."

Haruka's face remained blank. "In an utterly ordinary middle school era, an utterly ordinary middle schooler had a fateful encounter. That's all there is to this utterly ordinary story."

Even without using [Emotion Perception], Kaoru could tell she was sulking right now.

"Alright, I've said what I needed to say. Little H-kun is already eyeing his next victim."

Haruka brushed aside the bangs blocking her vision, and in the moment she turned away, she also blocked Kaoru's line of sight—he couldn't see her expression anymore.

This felt a little dangerous.

For some reason, Kaoru recalled that incident where an idol and a fan got tangled up in a mess, only for the fan to later sue the idol.

Back then, Toru Asakura had warned him with deep meaning—he absolutely couldn't touch underage fans.

Kaoru decided to put these thoughts out of his mind.

He planned to make a trip to the second-year dormitory.

...

At noon, Ryuuken ran into Nagumo and others in the school hallway.

"How are things with the girls' group?"

Nagumo asked directly upon seeing him.

Ryuuken glanced at the student beside Nagumo—someone he didn't recognize.

"Hello, I'm Ishikura."

The other party greeted Ryuuken with a faint smile.

In an instant, Ryuuken realized something, and an equally subtle smile appeared on his face.

"So it's Ishikura-senpai. I'm Ryuuken, a first-year."

The greeting left several students visibly displeased—his attitude toward an upperclassman was downright disrespectful.

"Ishikura will help your people drag down the scores, provided there are no issues on your end," Nagumo said coolly.

"I heard Mitoma has been in contact with the girls' group. It seems the target you picked has caught his attention."

Ryuuken shrugged indifferently. "So what if he finds out? I can make half the group slack off—can he stop that?"

Nagumo considered it and agreed.

They might not be able to compete in excellence, but when it came to dragging things down, leaving it to a delinquent like Ryuen was the right move.

"The Mitoma-kun you're targeting doesn't seem to be in Class A's core group. Aren't you going to mess with the boys' side too?"

This Ishikura-senpai sounded puzzled.

Ryuen thought for a moment. "Actually, I've been wondering about that too. Doesn't Mitoma realize how tempting his actions are?"

"What else could it be?" Nagumo sneered. "He knows I'm targeting him. If he hides behind his allies, he can't bait me into making a move. But if he steps out himself, he can divert my attention."

In Nagumo's eyes, Kaoru Mitoma was trying to lure him into attacking his group.

It seemed risky, but Kaoru himself was the group leader, and the members were handpicked from various classes, minimizing the danger.

Moreover, third-year Sato Keisaku was also connected to him, ensuring the upperclassmen wouldn't collectively slack off—further reducing the risk.

"Just focus on your own tasks. I'll handle Mitoma myself."

Nagumo had decided that no matter what Kaoru did, he would pretend to take the bait.

The real killing blow would be the open scheme targeting the girls' group.

Watching Nagumo and the others leave, Ryuen leisurely made his way to the cafeteria.

Truthfully, he didn't have high hopes for Nagumo.

If Kaoru could swindle tens of millions of points from him, it was hard to believe Nagumo could defeat him.

But Ryuen didn't care.

His goal was simply to squeeze as much as he could from Nagumo's sinking ship.

Whatever they did, as long as the points kept coming in, it was fine.

If Rika actually succeeded, Ryuen wouldn't waste points to save her—that'd be too much of a loss.

Besides, Ryuen planned to have Rika leave the school and contact certain people outside.

For example, he could have her hand over Kaoru's photos to Agency 283.

He had a strong feeling Kaoru looked way too familiar.

Though he didn't know the details, Ryuen was certain there was something shady going on.

Chapter 463: A Rematch is Set

Having missed lunch, Kaoru decided to indulge in a big meal for dinner.

Just as he sat down, a familiar sound approached—the tapping of a cane against the floor—before stopping abruptly beside him.

The next moment, Kamuro Masumi silently placed two trays on the table and sat across from him without a word.

Kaoru silently scooted over a bit, and sure enough, a sweet, pleasant fragrance wafted from beside him.

Even at a forest school, do girls still smell nice?

"One, two, three... Mitoma-kun, you haven't seen me for four whole days. Didn't you feel lonely at all?"

The whisper was like that of a little devil.

Silver hair peeked into view beside him, along with fair skin and a refined demeanor reminiscent of an aristocratic young lady from a drama.

Though her profile still held traces of youthful innocence, the makings of a beauty were already evident.

"That's strange. I remember seeing you often in the cafeteria. If anything, you're the one who's been cold, not even greeting me."

Kaoru caught sight of the ring on her finger—something Ichinose Honami wouldn't dare wear openly, yet she wore it without hesitation.

"So people's perspectives can differ this much. From where I stood, Mitoma-kun was always flirting with girls."

Sakayanagi Arisu smiled faintly. "But you seem to be in a rather good mood today, so I'll let it slide."

As she spoke, Sakayanagi placed her hat on the table.

If they had classes today, she wouldn't have worn this beret—it was too much trouble.

"Masumi, do I look happy to you?"

Kaoru turned to Kamuro Masumi, who was focused on her meal.

"No idea. I'm blind. Can't tell."

Masumi had no intention of engaging with the two of them.

Every time they got together, she ended up as the victim of their antics.

"And stop calling me that."

"It's just that you usually act like nothing can affect your mood, but today you seem unusually upbeat."

Sakayanagi tapped her lips, then the corner of her eye. "These little things give you away."

A bit scary, Kaoru thought.

If he was in high spirits, it was probably because he'd just dealt with some people earlier.

The exam would be over tomorrow.

Just as he was about to say something, he noticed Sakayanagi had already begun eating her dinner with deliberate slowness, leaving Kaoru momentarily stunned.

"Don't speak while eating, don't talk while sleeping."

With the air of a refined young lady, Sakayanagi effectively silenced Kaoru, focusing intently on her meal.

Was she always like this?

He'd almost forgotten—each group was responsible for their own breakfast, meaning Sakayanagi had to wake up early to cook.

A taste of commoner life for the aristocratic miss.

But the thought was fleeting.

Kaoru knew her physical condition meant she'd probably just supervise or hand things over—her domestic skills were likely lacking.

Come to think of it, could Sakayanagi even manage a full lotus position or long-distance running?

No girl in their group was more of a liability than her.

Watching her take small, delicate bites, Kaoru mused that this was indeed the image of a proper young lady.

Maybe it was only in moments like these that he could quietly enjoy the company of a beautiful girl.

"How long are you going to keep staring?"

Masumi's voice was icy.

"Not long. I'll be staring at you next, Masumi."

Kaoru shamelessly brushed off her glare—he was long past being affected by such looks.

"Could you at least... even just a little... have some shame?"

Masumi didn't sound angry, more like resigned. "Being around you feels like getting scanned head to toe by a pervert's gaze."

"Is it that obvious?"

Kaoru reflected on himself.

Sometimes, he was just looking at wishes.

"It's not obvious, it's blatant. You didn't even try to hide your thoughts. Tell me, who would say something like 'let me see down there' to a girl?"

Masumi gritted her teeth. "It's a miracle I didn't kick you away right then."

'But in the end, you still showed me,' Kaoru averted his gaze.

"Alright, I'm finished eating."

Sakayanagi wiped her mouth with a handkerchief. "Though I feel bad interrupting your flirting, we should begin our serious discussion now."

Masumi closed her mouth.

When had she even started talking with Kaoru like this?

"Regarding this exam, I believe Mitoma-kun must have some thoughts too."

Kaoru thought she was going to compare herself to him again, but the next moment, the girl simply chuckled softly.

"So let's set aside the exam for now. Mitoma-kun can do whatever you wish. What I wanted to say was—"

"Hold on."

Kaoru interrupted her. "There's an issue with this exam that I think we should discuss now."

"Oh? Of course, but what exactly does Mitoma-kun wish to discuss with me?"

Sakayanagi smiled calmly as she looked at Kaoru.

"Were all the girls in our class assigned by you?"

"Most of them were. Some wouldn't listen to me."

"Do you know about Miki's situation?"

"Is Mitoma-kun worried that Nagumo-kun might target the girls?"

Previously she had criticized Kaoru for answering questions with questions, and now she was doing the same.

Kaoru was momentarily speechless, but this actually revealed that Sakayanagi knew the truth.

"Fufufu, Mitoma-kun wants to ask why I didn't stop it during the grouping, correct?"

Sakayanagi laughed softly. "Even if I had stopped it, there would just be another victim. Would that have been meaningful?"

Class A of the first year had twenty girls, so it was obviously impossible to form a single group—a few would inevitably be left out.

"What I mean is, she's your person. You should protect her a little."

After Kaoru finished speaking, Sakayanagi looked at him with a strange expression.

"Isn't Yamamura-san your person now?"

Kaoru was taken aback.

Sakayanagi rested her cheek on her hand, tilting her body slightly to gaze at him with a mix of exasperation and faint amusement.

"Not just Yamamura-san, even Masumi-san is yours now. Why should I be the one protecting them?"

Sakayanagi continued, "And why do you assume I would protect Class A students in the first place?"

Based on their previous competition, Sakayanagi would have loved nothing more than for him to lose to Nagumo Miyabi.

That way, Class A would suffer heavy losses from being caught in their conflict, and resentment would inevitably fester in the class.

Chapter 464: Rematch

Kaoru snapped out of his thoughts, subtly avoiding her teasing gaze.

"Hehehe, your weak spots are so easy to exploit, Mitoma-kun. This won't do~"

Sakayanagi had already grasped Kaoru's current mindset, her lips curling slightly.

So, he did have vulnerabilities he cared about after all.

No wonder he ended up hanging himself in the end.

This really won't do!

"What are you two talking about?"

Masumi didn't understand. "Since when did Yamamura and I become his puppets?"

"Oh, it's nothing, Masumi-san. Just remember one thing."

Sakayanagi smiled mischievously. "If you're ever dissatisfied with this man, just throw a tantrum. If that doesn't work, threaten to hang yourself—he'll definitely cave in."

"Hey, hey, why would I do any of that?"

Masumi's face darkened, still not fully processing the situation.

Kaoru was silent for a moment before asking, "What were you trying to say earlier?"

"Running away won't solve anything. Your people are spread across the entire grade, even among the upperclassmen."

Sakayanagi's voice was faintly ominous. "If everyone affects your mindset like this, you'll eventually step into a trap."

"A trap is a trap. I don't care."

Kaoru had already made peace with it.

Life was short—might as well enjoy it to the fullest.

Besides, he had the Wish Machine.

"Heh, is this what they call a man's resolve?"

Sakayanagi smiled faintly before straightening her posture, reverting to her usual dignified young lady demeanor.

"Actually, I wanted to talk to you about our promise."

Kaoru was surprised, but given that this was their final semester, it wasn't strange for Sakayanagi to bring it up again.

"Are you conceding defeat early?"

"Can't we discuss the specifics of the competition?"

"Specifics?"

Their agreement was simple: whoever could control the class would be the winner.

However, Sakayanagi had some doubts about this.

"What exactly constitutes 'controlling the class'?"

The girl tilted her head. "For example, during this training camp, could you and Katsuragi-kun actually command our girls' group?"

Aside from the temporary discussions on the bus, Kaoru truly had no influence over the girls' group.

"Hehe, the actual authority ultimately lies with me. Do you think that counts as controlling the class, Mitoma-kun?"

"Having the final say in everyday decisions?"

"Didn't I already veto that?" Kaoru suddenly remembered.

After the defeat in the sports festival, Sakayanagi had seized the opportunity to propose a class-wide vote, and even Katsuragi couldn't suppress everyone's opinions.

So this was where the landmine had been buried?

"So even if you and Katsuragi-kun can rally twenty-one classmates to your side, I still have nineteen people here. Can a class truly be considered fully under control if there's a minority faction?"

As she pressed forward step by step, Kaoru shot her a sidelong glance.

"Do you think I can't tolerate a minority? Should I banish you beyond the borders like they did in ancient times?"

"No, I never said that."

Sakayanagi Arisu smiled faintly. "I just think our little competition should be clearer—more concrete."

Kaoru was intrigued. "What are you proposing?"

"This is the last semester of our first year. There should still be one or two special exams coming up."

Sakayanagi continued, "I've heard that every grade has a special exam at the end of the term. Why don't we use the scores from those as our benchmark?"

"You mean compete in the final special exam?"

Kaoru already understood.

However, Sakayanagi shook her head regretfully.

"I considered that, but unfortunately, we're in the same class. If I were to sabotage the exam for the class, no one would likely listen to me."

Kaoru was puzzled.

If she wasn't going to participate directly, did she intend to rely on proxies to compete against each other?

As if reading his thoughts, Sakayanagi smiled again.

"But isn't there a special exam happening right now?"

Kaoru froze for a moment before nearly laughing in exasperation.

The exam was already on its fifth day, and she was only bringing this up now?

"You take charge of this exam, and I'll handle the next one. We'll compare our scores—whoever earns the most points wins."

Sakayanagi added, "Of course, you could also choose to oversee the next exam while I take this one. The choice is yours."

"What if I choose the next one?"

Kaoru raised an eyebrow.

"Fine, then I'll take this one."

Sakayanagi chuckled before adding, "But if I score a perfect mark—the theoretical maximum for this exam—then you'll have to do the same in the next one. Otherwise, even if you score higher than me, you'll still lose."

The school's special exams didn't have a uniform standard.

Some could yield five or six hundred points at most, while others capped at two or three hundred.

So, Sakayanagi believed that beyond just the score, the upper limit had to be considered.

If she could achieve a perfect score, it would mean the exam's ceiling was too low, and Kaoru would have to match it in his exam—otherwise, it wouldn't be fair.

"You think you can get a perfect score?"

Kaoru gave her a strange look.

This training camp separated boys and girls, so at best, Sakayanagi could only achieve a perfect score in the girls' division.

"It's theoretically possible, though I'd certainly like to achieve it."

Sakayanagi puffed her cheeks slightly in dissatisfaction. "Does Mitoma-kun think I'm not qualified?"

She was adept at using her appearance to her advantage.

Kaoru averted his gaze.

"I'll take charge of this exam."

Sakayanagi blinked, as if asking why.

"Nagumo and Ryuen are coming after me. I can't let you deal with them." Kaoru paused.

"You'll be in charge of the next exam."

Sakayanagi was silent for a moment before replying softly, "If there are still two special exams after we return, this training camp won't count."

Kaoru's face darkened with suspicion, "Do you think I can't score high?"

The pleasant atmosphere suddenly soured.

Sakayanagi sighed and picked up her hat.

"That's right, I don't think you can score high. Masumi, let's go back."

Chapter 465: Begin Your Performance

Waving to her friends, a faint smile flickered across Kushida Kikyo's lips.

The mission was complete.

Someone ought to thank her.

With a light heart, Kushida glanced at Kaoru before leaving the cafeteria, also catching sight of Sakayanagi and Kamuro beside him.

She frowned slightly.

To be honest, she didn't have much fondness for Sakayanagi, that sickly yet beautiful girl.

Her intuition told her this was a formidable opponent, one best not to get involved with.

But what irked Kushida was how everyone else kept their rings discreet, while Sakayanagi seemed to flaunt her engagement like she'd stolen a march on them.

Though annoyed to see them chatting happily, Kushida didn't interrupt, deciding instead to hurry back for a bath.

Returning to the girls' dormitory, she soon found Horikita Suzune reading alone in her room.

As Kushida gathered her clothes, she asked Horikita, "Want to go to the bath together tonight?"

"Isn't it a bit early for that now?"

Horikita closed her book. "I heard you visited Class C's group this afternoon. Your connections are wider than I imagined."

Kushida replied coolly, "Don't worry, I'm not here to cause trouble. Aren't I actually following your lead right now?"

Without her, Horikita would struggle to direct the girls—just deciding who would visit other classes' groups would give Horikita a headache.

"So, you don't care about what happened back then anymore?"

Horikita found it hard to say aloud that their conflict had been resolved only after sharing the same man's bed.

"Of course I care. If I didn't, I wouldn't dislike someone like you."

Kushida gathered her clothes. "Right now, it's only for his sake that I can ignore you. But I still dislike you."

Horikita was at a loss for words. Was she really that hateful?

"If you're not coming, I'm leaving."

With her clothes in hand, Kushida quickly left the dorm.

Horikita silently returned to her book—until Kushida's head popped back through the doorway.

"Even if you've paid this month's dues, you'll have to keep it up next month too."

Horikita flushed crimson and gritted her teeth.

"Shut up!"

Kushida chuckled and hummed as she headed to the baths, thinking she ought to help Kaoru soften up this stubborn girl a bit more.

But there was one thing that really bothered her.

For someone who seemed so cold and stubborn, how did Horikita know exactly how to tease Kaoru better than she did? Was it just natural talent?

Kushida was feeling a bit frustrated.

She had wanted Horikita Suzune to fall from grace in front of Kaoru, but if she fell too hard, wouldn't that be awkward for her?

After greeting a few girls along the way, Kushida Kikyo entered the bathhouse alone.

By the time she came out, the sky was gradually darkening.

The men's and women's bathhouses were separated by a hallway, with a teacher stationed at the women's side to prevent boys from approaching.

Though she had bathed, she had only changed into fresh undergarments.

The tracksuits were replaced every three days, and dirty clothes had to be taken back—there was no laundry service here.

When Kushida returned to the dormitory, Karuizawa and the others had already come back.

"Oh, Kikyo-chan, you've already taken a bath?"

"Ahaha, yeah, because I'm planning to visit another dorm later."

"Kikyo-chan is so popular~ I think I saw you greeting that glasses girl at noon."

"Don't call her that. She's our classmate too—her name is Sakura."

"O-okay."

Watching Kushida prepare to leave, Karuizawa narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

Something about this girl didn't seem like she was just going to hang out with other girls.

She wanted to follow her, but Chiaki Matsushita and the others kept talking to her, so Karuizawa had no choice but to give up.

Meanwhile, the moment Kushida stepped out of the dormitory, she could barely suppress the smirk creeping onto her lips.

Along the corridor of the school building, the girl carefully avoided passersby and soon arrived at the place where they had met the night before.

Seeing the familiar figure, Kushida's face broke into a smile.

Her previously hurried steps slowed down; she couldn't afford to sweat at this moment—she should still smell delightful.

"Well, did I keep you waiting long?"

Kushida walked up to Kaoru and only then did she notice the height difference between them.

She had to stand on her tiptoes to reach his nose, feeling a bit dissatisfied.

Why were boys always so tall?

Clearly, the boys in their class were all shorter than him. Was he planning to compete in the national tournament?

"Did you take a shower?"

Kaoru noticed her appearance.

Although she was still in her sportswear, the graceful curves of her body were hidden beneath her jacket, but the pronounced swell of her chest was hard to ignore.

Water droplets clung to her ears, her hair glimmered with a slightly moist sheen, and beneath her simple brows lay a face as smooth as silk.

Her fair, tender skin exuded a faint fragrance, and just looking at her made him want to pull her into his arms and breathe in her scent.

Especially with that cheerful smile, Kaoru's heart inexplicably skipped a beat, reminiscent of a high school boy teasing a beautiful classmate.

"In your eyes, do you think I don't shower every day?"

Kushida huffed, but she felt a bit pleased.

Did this count as a date for the two of them?

In the youthful atmosphere of the forested school, a young couple took advantage of the nightfall to sneak away from teachers and classmates, meeting in a hidden corner.

Kushida had never imagined she would have such an experience.

Just seeing him standing there made her heart flutter with joy, even though they hadn't done anything yet.

"I didn't think that way; if I had known, I would have taken a shower too."

Kaoru sniffed his own scent. "Not too bad, not too strong."

Today was a free activity day, no classes, so he wouldn't sweat staying inside the school building.

However, Kushida frowned and punched him lightly.

"Can you not do such disgusting things in front of a girl?"

"So you know you're a girl?"

"What do you mean by that?"

Kaoru didn't explain but shifted the topic to Airi Sakura and Miki Yamamura.

"I met with them today. I ran into Airi at lunchtime, so I went over to eat with her, and she turned and ran away when she saw me."

"..."

Kaoru fell silent; it was very much in Airi Sakura's style.

"But she quickly came back, mumbling that she had to work hard to show him."

Kushida smirked, "Well, she did try, but she only stayed for five minutes before running off again, and this time she didn't come back."

Alright, I guess she did make an effort.

"As for Miki, I went to her dorm with a few friends this afternoon, and we played cards there."

Kushida thought for a moment. "Although I brought her along, the others aren't really familiar with her, so they might not give me any face."

"Actually, there was no need to worry about that; you could handle most people, and that would be enough."

Kaoru wasn't expecting Kushida to solve everything in one go; he just wanted her, the social butterfly, to be the new boss for Airi Sakura and Miki Yamamura.

"Alright, where's my reward?"

Kushida looked at him as if it were a matter of course.

Normal girls would expect his hand to hold hers, a kiss, or a hug, progressing to the next stage of their ambiguous relationship.

But Kushida was different.

She had already slept with this man; how could such small sweet gestures possibly hold any sway over her?

Kaoru fell into thought.

Why was the status between them so ambiguous when facing Kushida?

Or rather, where did it all start to turn upside down?

Then, Kushida heard a phrase from his lips.

"Do you want to masturbate here, Kikyo?."

Huh?

Though she didn't voice it, Kushida believed he could see the expression on her face.

What did he want her to do here?

"What are you talking about?"

"Like a little puppy, masturbate right in front of me Kikyo."

"N-no... are you serious?"

"Are you afraid someone will see?"

Kushida stared at him blankly. Shouldn't she be the one afraid?

"What I mean is..."

"Doing something a little thrilling; isn't that what you like?"

"Ah haha, yes, that's true, but..."

"If you perform well, you know what kind of reward comes next."

"Ugh..."

Perhaps recalling her experiences from summer vacation, Kushida's face turned red as she averted her gaze.

Her throat moved slightly; it was evident she understood.

Chapter 466: Night Operations

In the darkness surrounded by mountains, the wind outside carried a chilling air, and the school building was somewhat quiet.

Kushida could hear her own heartbeat.

At the same time, she occasionally caught distant sounds, as if the next person to speak would pop out from some corner.

Kushida sat on the steps, the corridor empty.

The aging school building had no need for surveillance cameras; only the traces of wires on the eaves reminded her that she wasn't in some ancient historical fragment.

Her friends were living in this school building with her.

The more she realized this, the stronger her sense of shame became.

Even if she wanted to trust Kaoru, this was a bit too stimulating.

"What does Kikyo usually do?"

Kaoru stood at the bottom of the steps, perfectly positioned to see the girl's figure.

"Don't, don't talk to me! What do you mean by how I usually do it? Am I usually so wild?"

Kushida's face flushed, but her fingers slowly pulled down the zipper of her jacket.

"You're such a pervert, with your mind full of H stuff!"

"Weren't you the one who wanted to engage in night operations with me yesterday?"

Kaoru's eyes held a hint of amusement; this was how they could return to their original status and relationship.

"If someone sees us, I'll bite you to death!"

Kushida began to unbutton her shirt, looking at Kaoru with a mix of anger and embarrassment.

"I thought Kikyo would get more excited if someone was watching."

Kaoru smirked. "By the way, I need to see everything."

"Go die! You should die a thousand times!"

Kushida shot back mercilessly, "Perverted foot fetishist, pig!"

Yet, despite her words, he had the "active point map," allowing him to sense the surroundings at any moment.

However, Kushida was unaware of this; her heart was filled with tension and unease.

Though she was just bantering, she knew it was strange to do such things outdoors, especially in front of Kaoru.

"Ugh..."

Kushida's face was red as she awkwardly rubbed her legs together.

She had done this before, but doing it while being watched felt entirely different.

Moreover, she felt a bit embarrassed to voice it.

Since summer vacation, Kushida had relied on this to relieve her stress, and the material for her spells was none other than a certain someone.

She had cast spells before, but without a fantasy object, relying on instinct and shoujo manga until that certain someone appeared.

"What are you taking so long for?"

Kaoru urged, "If you take too long, someone might come by any moment."

"I-I know! You're so annoying!"

The material for her spell was right in front of her, and Kushida fully felt what it meant to have a sense of shame.

"To actually enjoy watching girls do this, how disgusting."

"Before you insult me, can you put your hands up, Kikyo?"

Kushida glared at Kaoru fiercely, then gritted her teeth, finally dropping her last line of defense.

The cold night wind made her feel even more intensely embarrassed.

"Too bad I didn't bring my phone in."

"Don't, don't say that! Today is an exception. If you ever make me do this again, I swear I'll kill you, you perverted dog!"

"Night operations are fine, but this isn't?"

"It's different! This is so embarrassing!"

Moonlight flowed across the ground, casting the shadow of frost on the wall.

The girl's face was flushed, her fair and plump thighs slightly parted, her shoulders shyly hunching, yet revealing the high peaks of her bosom.

The delicate contours were faintly visible, and the moonlight enveloped her like a sheer white veil, sketching a dark silhouette in the mountains.

Though around four hundred people lived in the school building, it felt eerily quiet at this moment.

The corridor echoed only with the continuous sound of flowing water, and the girl's suppressed voice sounded like an unending drizzle.

She looked at Kaoru, her gaze dreamy and her breathing heavy.

The sudden chill in the air was slightly uncomfortable, yet it seemed to excite her even more.

"Mm... Kaoru... this, this is going to break... ah ha..."

...

"Kaoru."

In his embrace, Kushida's voice sounded somewhat muffled.

"I'm not laughing at you."

Kaoru tried to keep a straight face, his jacket draped over the girl to prevent her from catching a cold.

"Besides, didn't you say you needed to go to the bathroom?"

"Just now, my brain was malfunctioning."

Kushida rubbed against his chest, no, she should be so embarrassed she wanted to dig a hole and hide.

"How can you really hold me like this!"

Kaoru could only pat her back, comforting this little puppy who was being difficult.

"Actually, a master teaches their little puppy how to go to the bathroom. You've done really well."

"Go die!"

Kushida lifted her flushed face, hitting him several times. "You're such a pervert, enjoying watching girls embarrass themselves!"

Kaoru let her hit and scold him.

Not only had he seen her masturbate, but he was also holding her while she went to the bathroom.

This was already pushing the limits of what could stimulate a girl's sense of shame.

After a while, Kushida's anger subsided significantly.

She nestled in his embrace, enjoying the afterglow.

"Can I finish this here?"

The girl had only brought four items, and now two were used.

She felt a bit embarrassed.

She should have brought another box.

"Idiot, take it back. The exams are coming up in a few days. Do you think you can sneak out again?"

At this moment, they were in the woods outside the school building.

Kaoru had worried about someone coming if they stayed inside.

"I was curious about the feeling outside, but I didn't expect it to be so dark and cold."

Kushida pouted, disappointed with the so-called outdoor operation. "But since it was quite comfortable, if you like it, I can accompany you next time."

"Aren't you afraid of encountering snakes?"

Kaoru said in a low voice.

"W-what?!"

Kushida jumped in surprise, quickly looking around.

The school lights only cast faint afterglows here, and the moon in the sky wasn't bright enough for her to see clearly.

"If you scare me, I'll bite you to death!"

"If you're so scared, why are you still holding onto me?"

Kaoru's expression remained unchanged.

Kushida snapped back to reality, her face flushed. She was holding a very large snake in her hand.

"This isn't scary at all; it's quite cute."

"Cute?"

"So annoying. I didn't do anything, I'll give it back to you."

Kushida was clearly displeased.

In her eyes, this was actually quite fun—aside from Kaoru, this was her favorite thing right now.

Kaoru pinched her cheeks.

If this girl were a boy, she'd probably turn out to be some kind of twisted pervert.

"Almost forgot—what's the deal with Yamauchi?"

At the mention of Yamauchi Haruki, Kushida's expression stiffened slightly.

With a hint of reluctance, she said, "He's definitely hiding something from me. I'll pry it out of him in the next few days—just wait and see."

That guy was such a terrible liar.

His deception skills were so poor she could practically see right through him.

But constrained by her own persona, not only could she not expose him, she even had to smile and say, "How impressive!"

Still, dealing with someone like him wouldn't be difficult for Kushida.

People like him were easy to manipulate.

"I'll be waiting for good news."

Kaoru released the girl. "Staying out too long might make you catch a cold. Let's head back now."

Though somewhat reluctant, Kushida nodded.

Under Kaoru's lead, the two made it back to the school building without incident and bid each other farewell in the hallway.

Kushida returned the jacket, then seized the chance to steal a quick kiss from Kaoru.

"Goodnight, you pervy master!"

The girl flashed a grin, dodging as Kaoru leaned in, her eyes twinkling mischievously.

"Did you really think anyone would just let you steal a kiss?"

"You're the one who stole a kiss, aren't you?"

Kaoru's face darkened—this girl's habit of turning things upside down still hadn't been fixed.

"Not your business! Go home and kiss your girlfriend instead!"

With that, Kushida took off running, not giving him a chance to catch her.

After running a short distance, she glanced back at Kaoru, stifling a laugh at his utterly speechless expression.

Consider that payback.

Chapter 467: The Inquisition

"I'm back."

The moment Kushida opened the door, she froze under the eerie gazes of several people.

Horikita Suzune on the right, Karuizawa Kei on the left, and Ichinose Honami in the middle—they had been playing cards but now silently turned their attention toward the doorway at the sound of her voice.

"Huh? When did Ichinose get here?"

Kushida Kikyo sensed danger and decided to play dumb.

Aside from Karuizawa Kei and the others, the room was also filled with girls from their group—some chatting, others tying their hair—creating a lively atmosphere.

"I ran into Horikita at the baths earlier, so I just came over to hang out."

Ichinose Honami's expression was perfectly natural, her smiling eyes tracking Kushida Kikyo's every move, even catching the slight stiffness in her demeanor.

Kushida Kikyo subtly averted her gaze, forcing her usual cheerful smile as she greeted the chatting girls before moving to stand beside Karuizawa Kei.

"Oh, you're playing cards? Any stakes?"

"Of course there are stakes—what fun would it be otherwise? Not gambling, though."

Karuizawa shot her a glance. "But aside from points and small change, betting time isn't out of the question."

"Betting... time?"

Kushida was baffled.

Since when had humans started treating time as a currency?

"For example, a person has 24 hours in a day. Subtract the time used normally, and doesn't that leave only a few hours left?"

Karuizawa's words left Kushida confused, and she noticed that Horikita and Ichinose seemed to agree wholeheartedly.

"Time is a precious thing. If someone occupies a certain period, others can only watch from the sidelines."

Ichinose smiled faintly as she spoke, simultaneously playing a card from her hand.

"I've thought about it—if we can't discuss this properly, it'll definitely cause trouble later."

Kushida glanced at Horikita as if wanting to ask something but hesitated.

"I'm just here to make up the numbers."

Horikita said, "My time is more important. The gap between Class D and Class A is too wide."

"Actually, I think Suzune can definitely make him see you in a new light. After all, you've been working hard all along."

Ichinose looked at Horikita with encouraging eyes.

Seemingly uncomfortable, Horikita averted her gaze.

Kushida was sweating bullets.

Were they addressing each other by first names behind her back?

"Oh no, how should I play this hand, Kushida-san?"

Karuizawa suddenly pulled Kushida down, making her sit beside her.

She brought her hand of cards close to Kushida's face, leaning in naturally.

"Uh, maybe play this one?"

Kushida felt like she couldn't keep up the act any longer.

Because Karuizawa lightly sniffed at her, then raised her head and stared into her eyes as if looking at a hussey.

Wait, wait—what does this look mean? You're the one who wants to sneak a bite too, aren't you?

"No outside help! Kei, that's too sneaky!"

Ichinose puffed up her cheeks. "Kushida-san, you're not allowed to answer either!"

"Ahaha, sorry, sorry! I'll shut up right away!"

Kushida braced herself. What is this feeling?

Why are they suddenly calling each other by their first names?

"Cards are boring. How about we play Old Maid instead?"

Karuizawa straightened her posture. "The loser has to unconditionally obey the winner and must never disturb the winner's date time."

Kushida was momentarily speechless.

She just wanted to sneak a bite, but you're aiming to monopolize him outright?

"I want to play Old Maid too!"

Someone immediately raised their hand. "Can I play even if I don't have a boyfriend?"

"No, no, this is targeting me!"

Ichinose hurriedly objected while triumphantly playing her last card.

"Old Maid aside, it's my turn now—I win!"

"Alright, second place goes to me."

Horikita Suzune followed suit, playing her own hand.

"Your luck is really something."

Karuizawa pouted. "I quit. I'm going flower picking. You coming?"

Kushida was about to say something when she saw the others stand up, so she had no choice but to follow.

"Kei, Honami-chan, hurry back for Old Maid!"

"Got it, we'll be right back."

"Horikita-san, are you heading out too?"

"Yeah."

As Horikita closed the dormitory door behind them, the four stood silently facing each other in the hallway.

"I have something to tell you all."

After walking a short distance, Ichinose Honami suddenly spoke up.

"Kushida... can I call you Kikyo from now on?"

Kushida, like a well-behaved criminal awaiting judgment, nodded and asked, "Can I call you Honami-chan too?"

"It feels strange to always go by last names, so of course you can. In fact, I'd prefer it that way." Ichinose blinked, a smile playing at her lips.

"Honestly, I think we should've been doing this from the start."

The atmosphere didn't seem too bad, and Kushida let out a quiet sigh of relief.

"Suzune said you were hanging out with friends tonight. Is that true?"

"Friends?"

Karuizawa scowled. "She still has Kaoru's scent on her—she definitely did something bad!"

She wasn't some naive girl anymore.

She knew exactly what kind of scent lingered after certain "bad things," and she recognized it immediately.

Kushida's face flushed bright red.

She opened her mouth, struggled for words, then finally gave up and muttered, "It's not entirely my fault! I just wanted a reward, and then he started saying all these weird things... I couldn't help myself."

Something like masturbating—she'd rather die than say it out loud.

"What do you mean, 'couldn't help yourself'?" Karuizawa crossed her arms. "Did you forget what you said just a few days ago?"

Honestly, Karuizawa's idealized image of Kushida had completely shattered.

She used to genuinely believe Kushida was this bright, adorable, kind-hearted little angel.

Turns out, the other side of that angel was a shamelessly lewd pet.

Kushida hung her head.

She had messed up—when others had sneaked around, she'd interrupted them, yet here she was, hiding her own misdeeds.

"Kikyo, we're not blaming you," Ichinose said gently. "What's done is done. I could never give him up, so I've accepted that we all have to coexist peacefully. But just like you, sometimes... I really want him all to myself."

Kushida glanced at her, then at Horikita and Karuizawa.

So that's why they were on first-name terms—they'd already acknowledged each other's positions.

"Sharing is reality, but possessiveness is too. I'm his girlfriend, and he's your boyfriend as well."
Ichinose's voice was quiet but firm.

"I hope we can all understand each other's feelings. Wanting him exclusively sometimes isn't wrong—love is possessive by nature. Without memories that belong to just the two of you, that love would feel hollow."

She was certain—every one of the four girls standing here had fallen for Kaoru because of moments they'd shared with him alone.

Chapter 468: Do you have something to say ?

"I... I never said I was his girlfriend," Kushida mumbled. "Love and all that... it's too much for me. I can't say I'm that serious."

At that, Ichinose and Karuizawa both turned to look at Horikita.

"I'm not his girlfriend either," Horikita said, sensing their thoughts.

"Ahaha, so Suzune and Kikyo share the same stance." Ichinose smiled. It seemed there were two tsunderes in the room.

"Honami-chan..." Karuizawa sounded hesitant.

"Do you have something to say too, Kei?" Ichinose turned to the girl who, like her, held the title of "girlfriend."

"Actually... I already knew you were his girlfriend before." Karuizawa struggled for a while, "I know my thoughts are strange... I didn't even think there was anything wrong with it at the time... but... but how could you accept me?"

"Mmm, the answer is the same as before," Ichinose Honami said softly.

"What if he hadn't chosen you, or hadn't chosen me? What would we have done then?"

Karuizawa thought for a moment—it would probably be something akin to the world ending.

"Unfortunately, none of us know who his final choice would be. And right now, the answer he's given is to [Take all]."

Ichinose let out a sigh. "It might be a bad ending, but I'll still stay by his side and see it through."

"It's not that bad, is it?" Karuizawa had absolute faith in Kaoru.

She believed she could just leave the troublesome thinking to him.

"Isn't he a billionaire now?"

In Karuizawa's imagination, she would simply become a full-time housewife after graduation.

"That's not the issue... Kei."

Horikita was somewhat unaccustomed to using first names. "Haven't you noticed the number of people he's involved with is a bit excessive? Even if ninety-nine percent of them yield to him, there's still that one percent who won't agree to something like 'Take all.'"

Karuizawa tilted her head in confusion. "Does it matter if they don't agree?"

"It does. The normal response would be 'I refuse.' And we don't know what he'll do when faced with that answer."

Ichinose Honami added, "Even if no one refuses, with so many people, the exclusive memories each person gets will shorten."

"Maybe we could all try playing together?"

Kushida suddenly suggested.

Ichinose shook her head. "That won't work. Some are very proactive, while others are shy. The shy ones will easily get pushed to the sidelines."

"So, we're discussing how to allocate exclusive time?"

"A little, but that's not the main point. Do all of you have his rings?"

"On me."

"Each one has a different design. No idea where he bought them."

"Though his intentions aren't clear, I feel this ring carries the same meaning as it does in normal people's eyes."

"A wedding ring."

"Some don't have this ring."

"I see. So those without rings are enemies?"

After saying this, Karuizawa noticed the strange looks around her. Had she said something wrong?

"Kei's words... make some sense, but that's not what I meant."

Ichinose pondered for a moment. "I think he should consider our opinions now. He can hand out as many rings as he wants, but only with our approval!"

"Oh, I get it. For peaceful coexistence, he should take our feelings into account."

Karuizawa had an epiphany, then grew eager. "I remember he has many targets. Those are all ene—no, candidates for evaluation!"

At this, Kushida's expression shifted slightly.

"I won't get involved. I don't care about his affairs."

Horikita Suzune remained indifferent.

Ichinose didn't press her, simply nodding. "From what I know, besides us, Sakayanagi and Mako also have rings."

"Mako?"

Karuizawa blinked.

Where did this hussey come from?

"Amikura from your class?"

Kushida looked baffled.

Ichinose had acted faster than her—she hadn't even brought Mei yu Wang into the fold yet.

At the mention, Ichinose seemed a little awkward.

"I'll introduce Mako to you all later. Anyway, she's a good girl too."

Karuizawa muttered something about a hussey under her breath.

Horikita showed no interest, but Kushida narrowed her eyes slightly.

She had a feeling Ichinose was rushing to bind everyone together for something.

Still, it was necessary to rein in Kaoru's activities. That guy was too lustful, as if he wanted to sweep up every pretty girl in the entire grade.

"By the way, Kikyo, did you bring anything?" Ichinose asked.

Kushida hesitated for a moment before timidly pulling something out.

"T-Two were used tonight."

"Turns out you really can bring it in. I thought none of you had brought any. It'd be so troublesome if we accidentally got pregnant, so always remember when doing naughty things."

"Huh?"

Kushida felt her expression must have stiffened as Ichinose Honami stared seriously at her and Karuizawa Kei.

"You and Kei back then—"

"Stop! Don't talk about that, it's too embarrassing!"

"But getting expelled from school over a pregnancy would be even more embarrassing, Kei."

"Urk..."

Karuizawa turned her face away, revealing only her reddened ears.

"Honami-chan."

"Has Kikyo figured it out now?"

"I understand, but there's one thing I don't get."

"What?"

"Aren't you... going to judge me?"

After all this time, Kushida had been waiting for their scolding, but apart from Karuizawa, they didn't seem to care at all.

"Judge?"

Ichinose Honami blinked in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"That she kept him all to herself and did naughty things alone."

Karuizawa pouted. "I wanted to too, originally."

"Isn't that fine?"

Ichinose tilted her head. "Even if Kikyo didn't do naughty things with him, he'd still do them with us. Isn't that just how boys are?"

"That's exactly the point!"

Karuizawa grew more displeased. "Maybe Kaoru originally wanted to do naughty things with us."

"But he wouldn't let us off either, right?"

Ichinose cocked her head sideways.

Horikita Suzune interjected: "From what I understand, adolescent boys have extremely strong desires. They can get aroused anytime, especially when waking up in the morning, and need proper release."

"In other words, Kikyo satisfied Kaoru's desires."

Ichinose nodded sagely.

"No, wait—"

Kushida's mind was spinning.

"If not released in time, boys can feel very uncomfortable, and sometimes it might even leak out."

Horikita patiently explained this knowledge. "Boys at this age are very potent, and his body is even more so than normal boys. One or two people can't satisfy him, which is why he subconsciously seeks more girls."

"Is that so?"

Karuizawa looked half-convinced.

That's definitely not how it works!

Horikita doesn't even know about sexual intercourse—where did she even look this stuff up?

Kushida was utterly shocked.

"That's just how boys are. I secretly looked it up too, so Kei, you don't need to worry too much."

Ichinose smiled gently. "Actually, I've been thinking about how to help Kaoru relieve himself these past few days. With you all here, I feel much better."

Kushida felt she could no longer follow their logic.

What kind of nonsense were these idiots spreading? Did they actually believe the myth that boys would die if they didn't release it?

"No wonder he always gets hard whenever we hug." Karuizawa muttered under her breath.

"Horikita."

Kushida suddenly said, "You should really stop browsing... no, never mind. You're bound to him for life anyway, so look up whatever you want."

Horikita Suzune gave her a puzzled look.

How strange—she hadn't said anything wrong.

Chapter 469: Settling the Score.

The weekend had just ended, followed by P.E. class.

In the morning, we had a long-distance relay run covering a total of 18 kilometers round trip.

Each person had to run about 1 to 2 kilometers.

The distance was quite substantial, and the entire route wound through mountainous forests with uneven terrain.

The homeroom teacher wanted everyone to familiarize themselves with the route and return to the school building before afternoon classes, so Kaoru and the others set out in full force, trekking through the mountain woods in a group.

Thanks to the enhancement from the Wish Machine, Kaoru's stamina was actually better than most.

After walking five or six kilometers, some in the group were already struggling to keep up.

If Kaoru hadn't deliberately slowed his pace to accommodate them, the front and rear of the group would likely have been stretched far apart by now.

However, Kouenji spotted a sign warning of [Wild Boar Sightings] and promptly disappeared without a trace.

"Mitoma, are you seriously not going to do anything about that gorilla?"

Ishizaki felt Kaoru was being hypocritical—when he complained earlier, Kaoru had cut him off mid-sentence, yet he was turning a blind eye to Kouenji's antics.

"Maybe Kouenji just wants to help us add some meat to our meals," Kaoru said. "Have you ever had wild boar before?"

"No," Ishizaki answered reflexively before widening his eyes. "Wait, are you saying that gorilla is going after a wild boar?!"

"I don't know. Maybe there aren't any boars here."

Kaoru glanced at the distant mountains.

Without a map or GPS, it was hard to tell exactly where they were.

"Hey, hey, hey! If the school put up a warning sign here, there might actually be wild boars around!"

Ishizaki gestured wildly to emphasize the size of a boar.

"My grandma told me wild boars in winter are super scary—even Albert couldn't take one down, right?!"

Albert remained silent.

"Even you know humans can't win against wild boars. Do you really think Kouenji would be stupid enough to try?"

Kaoru understood the mindset of someone like Kouenji—in short, he was just bored and overflowing with curiosity.

Ishizaki was momentarily speechless, though he wasn't genuinely worried.

He just wanted to seize the opportunity to complain.

"Still, Ishizaki has a point. Should we send someone to look for him?" Hashimoto suggested.

After a moment of thought, Kaoru assigned Ayanokoji who's also from Class D, to go after Kouenji.

The group trudged on for a while longer before finally reaching the turnaround point, where they were greeted by Chie Hoshinomiya.

"Ara~ Congratulations on completing the course! Now, give yourselves a round of applause—clap, clap~!"

Hoshinomiya beamed, clapping enthusiastically before Kaoru and the others could even react.

"Is this woman a little... off?" Ishizaki muttered with a grave expression.

Hoshinomiya heard him and pouted.

"Now, now, student~ You shouldn't say such things about your cute and kind teacher, or even I might get a little upset."

Ishizaki gulped and nodded with great difficulty.

"Wow~ Mitoma-kun! Long time no see! Did you miss me over winter break?"

"Is this where we sign?"

Kaoru ignored Hoshinomiya's cutesy act, making her puff out her cheeks in frustration.

"So cold! You weren't like this with me before."

She pouted, waving the sign-in sheet in her hand. "Nee~ Mitoma-kun, is this what you want?"

"Are you free for lunch, sensei?" Kaoru asked.

"This depends on when your exam ends. If it finishes early, you can go back for lunch..."

Chie Hoshinomiya suddenly blinked. "Hmm? Could it be that Mitoma-kun is inviting me to eat together?"

"Is that not allowed?"

Kaoru sighed regretfully. "I think Hoshinomiya-sensei looks especially cute today, and you have such a mature, composed aura—it's quite captivating."

"Even if you flatter me like that, this kind of thing is a no-no~"

Hoshinomiya made an X gesture with her arms. "Students and teachers can't do that, Mitoma-kun."

"Fine, then let's keep it strictly business. Hand me the sign-in sheet—I'm leaving."

"Eh? Won't you chat a little longer?"

"Sensei."

"Actually, I'm very curious about what's going on between you and Ichinose."

"Sensei."

"Uuu... To think you'd hate talking to me this much."

Snatching the sign-in sheet from her hands, Kaoru signed his name and passed it to Hashimoto and the others.

Just as he finished signing, someone spotted Kouenji and Ayanokoji in the distance, their clothes slightly disheveled.

"Hey, where the hell did you run off to?!"

"Keh keh keh, what a nuisance. But since I just had a delightful frolic with a wild boar, I'll forgive your rudeness this time."

"What are you even saying?"

Not just Ishizaki, but probably most people wouldn't understand what Kouenji was talking about.

Seeing the group fully assembled, Kaoru led them back, and the group returned to the school building around noon.

Exhausted from the physical exertion, everyone rushed to the cafeteria.

Meanwhile, Kaoru searched for Katsuragi and finally spotted him in the crowd.

After sharing a meal with him, the two exchanged opinions in the hallway before afternoon classes began.

The afternoon continued with lectures.

In the large-group classroom, Kaoru noticed the presence of Hiroto Mutou and the few people around him.

With the end of zazen meditation in the dojo, today's classes concluded—bringing them one day closer to the exam.

At the same time, Kaoru approached Ryuen.

"Got a minute?"

Ryuen, who had been heading to the cafeteria, stopped and turned back, slightly surprised.

"Keh, I thought you'd keep quiet until the exam was over."

He smirked dismissively at Kaoru. "How about we talk over lunch in the cafeteria?"

"No, this won't take long."

Ryuuen frowned.

It wasn't strange that Kaoru had noticed the situation with the girls' group—even if he intended to stop Miki Yamamura's expulsion, that much was expected.

What was strange was that Ryuuen couldn't detect even a trace of anger in him.

Chapter 470: Silence

"This exam should be a great opportunity for you. Sacrificing one pawn could shatter Class A's 400-point lead. And since Nagumo will compensate your losses, the only thing he can give you is Personal Points. In the end, you lose 100 points and one pawn but gain millions in Personal Points. That's a pretty good calculation, isn't it?"

Ryuuen showed no panic at Kaoru's words.

Instead, he smiled as if it were the most natural thing.

"So what if you figured it out?"

He hadn't planned to hide this scheme from Kaoru in the first place—once Yamamura's situation was noticed, the conclusion was obvious.

"Want to take it a step further?" Kaoru said, "If we sacrifice one more from the male group, Class A might lose eight hundred points, and you could continue receiving Nagumo's rewards."

"Are you implying you're targeting me now?"

Ryuuen laughed.

He had considered this possibility when joining Katsuragi's group.

"If it's me, things get complicated. But do you even have enough points for this?"

To save an expelled student required both Class Points and Personal Points.

Ryuuen didn't believe Class 1-A currently had over forty million in Personal Points.

"Sorry to disappoint, but I do."

Kaoru replied calmly, "Thanks to Nagumo gifting me a substantial amount, combined with our class's pooled points, we can cover forty million."

Ryuuen's expression stiffened.

He knew Nagumo had suffered heavy losses from previous dealings with Kaoru, though no one knew the exact amount.

With recent rumors circulating, Ryuuen couldn't determine whether Kaoru truly possessed twenty million Personal Points.

But outwardly, he maintained his composure.

"You expect me to believe that?"

"If you don't, feel free to test it."

Kaoru continued, "Horikita-senpai answers to me. So does Kiriya-senpai. Even Katsuragi here is mine. They can afford low scores—might even slightly disrupt your exam."

Ryuuen scoffed coldly, "You take me for a fool? Horikita's graduating soon. Would he abandon his Class Points to collude with you?"

"How many points would last place deduct?"

Kaoru paused deliberately. "Besides, you've noticed, haven't you? Nagumo plans to kill two birds with one stone—arranging someone to target Horikita-senpai's class in the female group too."

Understanding dawned on Ryuuen.

To prevent incidents in the female group, Horikita Manabu could collaborate with Kaoru to create a counter-incident in the male group—a tactical retaliation.

"Heh. Planning mutual destruction?"

Ryuuen forced a laugh. "Won't work. Someone like Horikita would save everyone, but Ishikura could choose to rescue just one. Class A would lose more than their Class B. Ishikura still profits!"

"But you'd get expelled."

Kaoru reminded him.

After a tense silence, Ryuuen recognized the predicament.

If Kaoru insisted on mutual destruction, Class 1-A would lose eight hundred points at worst, while his Class 1-C would plunge into negative territory—demoting directly to Class 1-D.

Though Personal Points were tempting, he couldn't ignore Class Points.

His usual indifference stemmed from knowing instant promotion to Class A was impossible.

But negative points changed everything.

"Class C would forfeit five hundred Class Points plus twenty million Personal Points. Do you think Nagumo can compensate for losses this extreme?"

"You know exactly how many Personal Points he holds—maybe twenty or thirty million at most. The only reason you accepted his deal is because you're eyeing not just those points, but also Nagumo's future gains—backed by an entire grade's resources."

"But how long can this situation last? With Kiriya-senpai deciding to openly oppose him alongside me, Class 2-B has effectively withdrawn from his system. The remaining Class 2-C and Class 2-D have already lost significant Class Points due to the exams in the previous two semesters. How much more Personal Points can they squeeze out?"

"Even in Nagumo's own class, his control is waning. Didn't a traitor emerge during the last final exam? That's right—you guessed it. He's one of mine, and he's not the only one."

"Nagumo has recently squeezed out even more Personal Points, and resentment is growing among the second-years. Do you really think he'll continue to reap long-term benefits?"

By the end, Kaoru's expression was cold as he delivered his ultimatum.

"The only reward you can get from him now is the few million Personal Points he holds. But is that really enough?"

Ryuen fell into a prolonged silence.

To compensate for the losses of Class 1-C, a mere two or three million wouldn't suffice.

After all his efforts, he had lost 500 Class Points and still had to fork over 20 million Personal Points.

In the end, he might only net a little over 10 million—far too little in exchange.

He had considered this before, but as Kaoru had pointed out, he had judged that Nagumo would hold out for at least a while longer, and that this "stock" would yield further returns.

But if Nagumo collapsed too soon, Ryuen would be left holding the bag.

The critical question now was when Nagumo would fall.

At this moment, Ryuen was like an investor losing confidence, hesitating over whether to cut his losses and bail.

"Mitoma, I'll admit your words have a strange persuasiveness. But I'm not conceding to you."

Ryuen snorted. "If you want me to stop, it's simple—just have your Class A give me 10 million."

If Nagumo could no longer inspire market confidence, then of course the "investor" would shift his capital elsewhere to recoup his losses.

"Do you really think you're in any position to bargain with me now?"

Kaoru's gaze was filled with pity.

"Katsuragi has already informed Horikita-senpai of the situation. Nagumo might even suffer heavy losses in his own class. Do you really think he can protect you?"

Ryuen's face stiffened.

The only reason he could stand up to Kaoru was because of the Personal Points Nagumo had provided.

Without that, defeating Kaoru would be nearly impossible.

He was beginning to regret joining Katsuragi's group back then.

"What do you want?" Ryuen asked.

Kaoru replied, "Starting tonight, you cancel your original plan. No more attacks on my people."

"You also have to guarantee that neither you nor Katsuragi will target Class C. If you dare to name any of my people... well, I'll give you a little surprise."

Ryuen hadn't forgotten his suspicions about Kaoru.

Sooner or later, he'd find a way to contact the agency.

If it was confirmed to be the real deal, Ryuen would report it immediately.

Ignoring him, Kaoru continued, "Second, cancel our previous contract."

There was an agreement between Class 1-A and Class 1-C, signed during the uninhabited island exam.

Ryuen would provide them with supplies, and in return, they would pay him Personal Points—continuing until graduation.

However, Kaoru later extorted millions of Personal Points from Ryuen, using those very points to fulfill the contract's payments to him.

This move of getting something for nothing left Ryuen with nothing to gain.

It wasn't until this semester that he finally waited for Kaoru to distribute the Personal Points that originally belonged to him.

Yet now, Kaoru wanted to cancel the contract.

Ryuen was practically gnashing his teeth as he glared at Kaoru.

However, considering that the initial contract hadn't extorted much to begin with, even if he insisted on keeping it, he probably wouldn't have gotten more than ten million over two years.

"Heh, if you want it back, I'll generously return it to you."

Though he spoke these words, his heart was filled with frustration.

Ryuen swallowed his anger because he already knew how to make up for the loss.

For instance, Nagumo would surely be very interested in this conversation—it could fetch a good price.

Moreover, Kaoru had exposed his own plan to team up with Horikita Manabu against Nagumo.

Thinking of this, Ryuen desperately suppressed the smirk threatening to break across his face.

Even a sinking ship like Nagumo had some scrap metal worth salvaging!