

Cote 471

Chapter 471: The Unlucky Senpai.

The winter dusk exuded a biting chill inside and out.

As nightfall approached, the mountains gradually darkened, their silhouettes merging with the faint glimmers of silver snow buried among the peaks.

In the vast mountain forest, only this place radiated light.

The cafeteria's glow spilled onto the snow-covered ground, shimmering brightly, occasionally accompanied by the distant sounds of chatter.

Tachibana Akane huddled in a corner outside, like a small animal afraid of the dark, her shoulders hunched and her cheeks flushed from the cold.

Half of her delicate face was buried in her knees as she sat dejectedly.

No one was likely to pass by here—after all, everyone was at dinner.

Yet the girl's ears suddenly perked up.

Panic flashed in her eyes, but before she could flee, a familiar figure appeared before her.

"Senpai, sometimes you really need to pay more attention to your own people."

Kaoru sighed as he watched Akane hurriedly rubbing her eyes.

Even while attacking him, Nagumo never forgot about Horikita Manabu—just what was going on between those two?

"I was being careful." Horikita looked somewhat awkward.

Horikita had asked him to find Akane, after searching for ages, he still hadn't located her.

Yet Kaoru had effortlessly discovered where she was hiding.

"It's because you didn't consider that Nagumo would collude with Ishikura, Senpai. Even though he's targeting me now, that won't stop him from taking a shot at you."

Kaoru hesitated for a moment. "Honestly, did you do something to him in the past?"

Horikita's lips twitched slightly. "No. I've always tried my best to avoid direct conflict with him."

"But it seems he holds you in high regard. You never acknowledged his philosophy of individual strength, and he never accepted your ideals either."

Kaoru felt that even without his involvement, Nagumo would have inevitably clashed with Horikita.

As the two exchanged words, Akane's face flushed red, and she couldn't hold back any longer.

"Why are you two here?"

Kaoru chuckled before crouching in front of her. "Senpai, were you dropping little pearls here?"

Akane didn't understand his words, but she recognized the teasing look in his eyes and snapped.

"I wasn't crying!"

Then, as she met Kaoru's gaze, her voice softened. "I didn't cry... I really didn't."

Kaoru patted her head.

Her small group happened to belong to the same larger group as Miki Yamamura's, and it wasn't anyone's core group—similar to Kaoru's situation.

The leader was a girl from Class D of the third year.

However, among the second-year groups, there were die-hard supporters of Nagumo.

"Wah! What are you touching me for?!"

Tachibana Akane felt utterly humiliated, being treated like a child—especially in front of Horikita Manabu.

She couldn't bear the embarrassment!

"Because you're kind of cute right now, senpai."

Kaoru smiled faintly. "And you're not crying. You've been working hard."

"Are you praising me or mocking me?"

As she spoke, Akane's grievances swelled.

Seeing him right in front of her, the emotions she had been suppressing surged like floodwaters.

She wanted to throw herself into his arms, and once she recovered, she'd definitely hit him.

But she still remembered their earlier conversation.

Sniffing slightly, she muttered, "Did you guys already know?"

"Sorry, Tachibana. That was my oversight."

Horikita Manabu was the one who answered. "Nagumo-kun approached Ishikura, and he also reached out to Class D. Nagumo-kun is responsible for uniting the three groups, and both Ishikura and Nagumo-kun will compensate Class D. That's why Class D is pushing for your expulsion."

Akane froze for a long moment before murmuring, "How did you know?"

At first, even she hadn't noticed.

But the students from Class 3-B and Class 3-D had been closing in on her—forcing her to wake up early to cook, and today, they deliberately left her behind during the long-distance run, leaving her exhausted.

"Because it's the same tactic."

Kaoru said, "Nagumo is trying to expel someone from Class A through me. He figured since we're all in the same large group, and you're here too, he might as well take you down with them."

Akane was too stunned to even feel upset.

She stared at him with a dark expression, as if he were some kind of mind reader who could decipher Nagumo Miyabi's every thought.

If Kaoru knew what she was thinking, he'd probably shake his head.

What a joke.

The entire school was under his watch now.

When it came to intelligence warfare, no one could match him.

"At least we caught it early, and the one responsible is from Class D."

Horikita pondered for a moment. "If it were Ishikura, things would've been much trickier."

Hearing this, Akane only looked more guilty.

In the end, she was still causing trouble for Horikita.

"Senpai, are you blaming yourself again?"

Kaoru chuckled. "Actually, Nagumo and the others didn't necessarily have to target you. They had plans for the boys' group too."

"Someone in the boys' group is also being targeted?!"

Akane was shocked.

Did that mean two people from Class 3-A were now at risk of expulsion?

"It's Shimamura-kun's group. But both Mitoma-kun and I believe it's just a smokescreen—an attempt to pressure me into lowering my own points to protect Shimamura-kun's group."

Horikita paused. "Since Shimamura-kun already told me yesterday, we should be able to resolve this by today."

The unspoken implication was: Even Shimamura spoke up. Why didn't you?

Akane's face burned red.

After a long silence, she finally mumbled, "I didn't want to trouble you."

But Horikita's expression turned stern. "There's no such thing as 'trouble.' We're all classmates. If you're struggling, you should speak up. That's only natural."

Akane lowered her head and let out a soft, barely audible "Mm" through her nose.

"Senpai." Kaoru spoke again. "Sometimes, staying silent only puts you in greater danger."

Akane stole a glance at him, her lips moving slightly as she silently mouthed a few words—no sound escaping.

Kaoru was stunned for a long moment—this girl was simply too outrageous!

Tachibana Akane subtly averted her gaze, remaining silent.

"Horikita-senpai, how do you plan to resolve this now?"

Kaoru had no choice but to steer the conversation back on track.

"Fortunately, Ishikura didn't use his own people, which makes the problem much easier to solve."

Horikita Manabu's approach was simple and direct—if they could bribe Class D, so could he.

"Probably because they didn't want to spend their own points," Kaoru mused. "Besides, Nagumo doesn't have enough points to let them sacrifice their own people either."

Nagumo had to allocate his limited points to Kaoru's side, leaving no room to support Class 3-B.

If Class 3-B were to engage in a point-draining battle with Horikita, both sides would lose roughly 400 Class Points, effectively canceling each other out.

Thus, they had no choice but to rely on Class 3-D, a class that had already given up.

Offering them some Personal Points to sacrifice one student wouldn't make much difference anyway.

After all, the third-years would graduate in just two and a half months.

"What about your situation?" Horikita asked, having already heard the details from Katsuragi.

"Do you want me to help lower the scores together?"

"Nagumo is definitely on high alert against my moves right now, so it's best if we stay inactive. Instead, I'd like to ask for your help with something else."

"Go on."

"I want you to step in and persuade the second-years for me."

"Persuade them?"

"Yes. Their grade has that agreement with Nagumo, right? The lower-ranked classes don't dare disobey out of fear of his retaliation. But if you intervene, I think they might agree."

Horikita frowned.

He didn't believe his influence was strong enough to dispel their concerns with just a few words.

Then it suddenly hit him.

Kaoru must have already secured half the battle—now he just needed Horikita's name to bolster the lower-ranked classes' confidence.

"I'll help, but are you sure about this?" Horikita said. "That man doesn't care how many losses his subordinates suffer unless you target him directly."

Nothing would rally morale more than defeating Nagumo head-on.

"No, times have changed, senpai," Kaoru shook his head. "Now Nagumo has to consider his class's feelings, or they'll abandon him."

Saving someone required not just Personal Points—using Class Points needed the class's approval.

In other words, Class 2-A now had Nagumo Miyabi in their grip.

If Class 2-A decided Nagumo was nothing but trouble, his actions could easily ignite long-suppressed resentment.

It wouldn't be strange to see an ostracism play out.

Horikita fell silent for a moment.

Was Nagumo about to be expelled?

"Akane, let's go."

But when he turned, he noticed Akane hadn't moved, which struck him as odd.

"I... I'd like to stay here a little longer," she murmured, her fair neck flushing crimson. "I'll update you about the group situation tomorrow."

Horikita seemed to realize something and left without another word.

Seeing this, Kaoru started to rise, only for the girl to suddenly clutch his sleeve.

"You—you stay too!" Akane blurted out, then immediately seemed to regret it as her entire face burned red.

"I-I have something to say to you. You're not allowed to leave!"

Kaoru's expression darkened.

He still hadn't eaten dinner.

Chapter 472: The Atmosphere of a Confession

The two of them crouched on the ground, staring wide-eyed at each other.

In this awkward atmosphere, Kaoru finally had time to take in the girl before him—her slightly reddened eyes, her sniffing little nose, and the way she nervously lowered her gaze under his scrutiny.

Because of the cold weather, she was also wearing a jacket, and her "sports sitting" posture made her usually unnoticeable chest press together into a full, rounded shape.

He had never realized she had such a figure—probably on par with Karuizawa.

"Didn't you have something to say to me?"

Kaoru broke the silence.

"I—I haven't figured it out yet, just wait a second!"

Tachibana Akane's face burned.

Truthfully, she didn't even know why she had stopped Kaoru in the first place.

She had no reason—she just wanted him to stay by her side.

How embarrassing.

Unable to bear it, Kaoru spoke up: "Earlier, senpai, you said you didn't want me to know. What was that about?"

Akane's lips were easy to read—thin like silkworms, and at this distance, they constantly drew attention.

"I don't want you to know... means I don't want you to know! Why do you care so much?"

Akane bit her lower lip, glaring at him with dissatisfaction.

"And also, were you deliberately trying to make fun of me? Letting Horikita see me like this?"

"But you didn't cry, right?" Kaoru looked puzzled.

"N-no, I didn't cry, but... I was planning to confess to Horikita, and now I—I look so pathetic!"

Akane couldn't take it anymore.

She raised a small fist, ready to hit him. "It's all your fault, all your fault, all your fault!"

Kaoru quickly caught her fist, but she refused to stop.

The two of them flailed around in a messy tussle, like kittens play-fighting.

Frustrated that her punches weren't landing, Akane decided to just headbutt him to death instead.

With a sudden thunk, Kaoru was caught off guard and sent sprawling onto his back.

"Hah! That—that feels much better!"

Akane straddled him, all traces of her earlier timidity gone, a hint of triumph flashing in her eyes.

"Even though I've decided to give up on Horikita, I'm still a little annoyed."

"I'm the annoyed one here," Kaoru gritted out. "Get off."

"Could you not talk to your senpai like that?"

Akane pouted. "You're always like this, seriously. Can't you be a little more polite?"

"You're the rude one."

The moment Kaoru moved, Akane noticed.

Quick as lightning, she tried to pin him down, but the physical gap between men and women wasn't something she could easily overcome.

Seeing Kaoru about to push her off, Akane hastily clamped her legs around him and grabbed his wrists to stop him from resisting.

Yet, the man's hands were like charging elephants—unstoppable.

Akane was forced back step by step.

As Kaoru sat up, the girl found herself with nowhere to retreat.

She was about to be flipped onto the ground, panic flashing in her eyes.

The next moment, she felt herself tilting backward—only for her waist to be caught and gently lowered to the floor.

"Senpai, this isn't about confessing anymore. If you keep acting like this, you'll get expelled."

Akane lay on the floor, staring up at the man looming over her.

After a dazed moment, she turned her face away and muttered, "What's the difference between expulsion and graduation if I'm leaving this place anyway?"

Kaoru was stunned for a moment before replying, "The difference is that being expelled is like a little dog being chased out of school."

"You're the little dog here!"

Akane glared at him, then slumped dejectedly. "We were being so careful too. Horikita told us to spread out so no single group would be targeted and we wouldn't lose too many points. Yet this still happened."

Both Horikita Manabu and Nagumo Miyabi had carried their entire classes single-handedly.

Without Horikita, students like Tachibana Akane would likely have been overtaken by Class 3-B long ago.

In fact, the current point gap between them was only about three hundred points.

One careless mistake in a special exam could erase that difference entirely.

Akane knew exactly where she stood - she, like most of her classmates, were essentially dead weight.

"Like I said earlier, this isn't your fault, senpai. Even if it weren't you, someone else might have been next - like Shimamura," Kaoru said. "He's currently the group leader, and his subordinates aren't cooperating. They want him expelled."

A leader could designate someone for expulsion if that person deliberately sabotaged the exam and affected the group's performance.

However, if everyone simply tried their best but could only score below average, this kind of "impact" wouldn't trigger the rule.

After all, no one could demand everyone score highly.

"So we're dragging Horikita down," Akane muttered gloomily. "I don't even want to confess to Horikita anymore."

"Whether you confess is your business, but senpai, you can't drop out now." Kaoru placed his hands on either side of her, leaving just ten centimeters between them as their eyes met.

"And actually, you're pretty amazing. Don't sell yourself short like this."

"What's so amazing about me?"

Akane stared intently.

Kaoru spoke softly, "Back then, most of the student council work was handled by you. Nagumo didn't lift a finger, and even the accounting tasks were checked by you. Horikita-senpai only handled the approvals."

"And what else?"

Akane's gaze remained fixed.

"Horikita-senpai said you helped him with a lot—dealing with special exams, handling enemies, dealing with Nagumo. He might not have managed without you."

"Is that all?"

"..."

Kaoru averted his eyes, but the girl stubbornly cupped his face, forcing him to look back at her.

"Whether Horikita ever said that about me, I don't know. But you still haven't told me how you feel about me."

Perhaps it was because she was touching his face, but Kaoru felt his heartbeat quicken.

"Senpai is uniquely innocent and adorable, like a girl."

Akane showed a flicker of confusion before her expression turned annoyed.

"What do you mean, 'like a girl'? I am a girl!"

Kaoru chuckled, then lowered his voice.

"And how does senpai feel about me?"

Akane stiffened.

How did she feel about him?

Just then, she snapped back to reality—the way he phrased it sounded like something between a couple flirting.

What had she just been asking?

Flustered, she tried to push Kaoru away, but remembering how she had been no match for him earlier, her mind grew even more chaotic.

The moment her eyes met his, her entire body burned.

"I—I-I-I... You... You're just a rude underclassman!"

"Senpai, you shouldn't say things like that to people so easily."

"I'll say whatever I want!"

"In that case, I'll be even ruder."

As he spoke, Kaoru's gaze drifted downward, his meaning unmistakable.

At first, Akane didn't react.

But after a brief pause, a wave of embarrassment surged up her cheeks, turning her face crimson.

"Pervert!"

"I like you."

"You're disgusting, stay away—"

Mid-sentence, Akane froze, staring blankly at Kaoru.

Chapter 473: The Problem Lies Here

This wasn't Tachibana Akane's first time being confessed to.

From middle school until now, several boys had written her love letters—all of which she rejected.

Because back then, she had no interest in romance whatsoever.

Of course, Horikita Manabu had been an exception.

Tachibana had never met a boy like him before—someone who made her feel like a child, tiptoeing around him in caution.

She didn't know what "liking" someone meant. She only knew she cared deeply about Horikita.

Akane thought she had hidden these feelings well, that no one had noticed—until a strange, ill-mannered freshman joined the student council.

From the very first meeting, this guy had the audacity to criticize Horikita, which irritated Akane to no end.

She tried to warn him to watch his words, but he completely ignored her, only fueling her frustration.

Ever since he joined the student council, Akane found herself constantly angry—whether it was his laziness, napping on the student council sofa, sneaking glances at her while she ate, or shamelessly prying into her relationship with Horikita.

Things no one else knew, this guy had somehow figured out—and worse, he had the nerve to tell her to just confess outright.

Every time she thought about it, she only grew angrier.

Who did he think he was? Just an outsider meddling in her business.

However, considering he had leverage over her, Akane reluctantly treated him a bit better, revealing some small secrets to him.

Perhaps it was precisely because she was too kind that he became increasingly bold, clinging to her every day.

Fortunately, her term was about to end.

Akane thought this would finally free her from him, but to her surprise, he didn't even say goodbye—how utterly rude.

Akane was displeased.

Even though she would soon graduate, he didn't seem to cherish their remaining time at all.

Later, Akane heard he had gotten a girlfriend.

Someone actually accepted this guy's confession? That fact shocked her.

If even he could succeed, maybe she could too.

Akane extended an invitation for a date—strictly as practice, of course.

As for what they practiced, the girl had completely forgotten.

All she remembered was that she was about to graduate, and he already had a girlfriend.

"Hah... hah..."

Her small frame trembled as Akane forced a smile. "W-what kind of joke is this? Don't do something so disrespectful to your senpai!"

A fake confession—it had to be fake!

Or maybe she had misheard entirely. That had to be it!

Because she suddenly remembered: the person before her had a girlfriend—Ichinose Honami.

"I heard your graduation ceremony is on March 24th," Kaoru said, gazing down at the girl below him.

"That means there are only two months left."

"Someone told me that if I don't seize the opportunity in time, someone else might take it first."

Seize the opportunity? Akane bit her lip hard, her eyes brimming with unshed tears as she swallowed them down.

"You already have a girlfriend!"

Yes, no matter what Kaoru had to say, she knew it was impossible.

Because this guy was just too infuriating!

He had moved faster than her—she hadn't even confessed yet, and he already had a girlfriend. So unfair, so unfair, so unfair!

"These past few days, you must have heard about Asahina-senpai, right?"

Kaoru remained calm. "People say I stole Nagumo's childhood friend. Now I can admit it to you—that's exactly what happened. Asahina-senpai and I are in a relationship now."

Yet Akane shoved him away.

"So sneaky! An ambush like this is just despicable—it's not fair at all!"

Without giving Kaoru a chance to speak, Akane fled down the hallway, dashed down the stairs, and sprinted back to the girls' dormitory.

'Was it too much for her?'

Just like Amikura Mako, Kamuro Masumi, and Sakayanagi Arisu, her instinctive reaction had been resistance and rejection.

But that was a normal response.

Kaoru looked down at his hands.

Even if it was selfish, someday in the future, he didn't want to shed tears over words left unspoken or actions left undone.

No matter whose tears they were.

...

"Honestly, this is just reckless. Of course Tachibana-senpai would be angry."

After hearing Kaoru's explanation, Ichinose Honami was dumbfounded and let out a deep sigh.

"That's her problem!"

Karuizawa, on one hand, felt a sense of empathy, but on the other, a strong sense of crisis.

"Even though I dated Hirata-kun before, I never liked him. But this Tachibana-senpai definitely has feelings for Horikita-senpai."

The thoughts of girls are too complex; sometimes even they don't know what they're thinking.

"Kei has a point, but I think Kaoru was too sudden. The girl wasn't prepared, and the mood wasn't right!"

Ichinose kept a stern face, momentarily distracted, nearly letting Kaoru succeed again.

"Even if Tachibana-senpai has feelings for you, with exams and graduation coming up, she'd definitely hesitate."

"Right, right!"

Karuizawa nodded emphatically.

Seeing both girls criticize him, Kaoru felt a bit frustrated. "I'll figure something out. But why are the two of you together today?"

Leaving aside last night's incident with Tachibana Akane, today he unexpectedly saw Ichinose and Karuizawa together—and they were the ones who sought him out.

For a moment, Kaoru felt inexplicably guilty.

"Because we wanted to take advantage of this training camp to bring everyone closer," Ichinose said, holding Karuizawa's hand with a bright smile.

"That's something you and Kikyō taught me. The experience back then was really wonderful."

Thankfully, Karuizawa didn't understand what she was talking about.

Even Kaoru blushed for her—openly saying such things out loud? Honami was beyond saving.

"Speaking of which, Kaoru's problem lies here," Karuizawa puffed her cheeks. "You won't even spare the upperclassmen? Just how many more people are you planning to involve?"

Kaoru wanted to tell the truth, but he didn't know how to handle it.

Whether it was the girls or the idols, if any of them found out about the others, the situation would spiral out of his control.

"Even if you stay silent, we won't let you off the hook, you know?" Karuizawa said. "Today, Honami and I wanted to discuss something with you."

"Fine, I'll agree," Kaoru surrendered without hesitation.

This outcome took Karuizawa by surprise. "I haven't even said it yet!"

"If I refuse, both Honami and Kei would get mad, right?" Kaoru asked.

"Y-yes, we would. But aren't you going to ask what it is?"

Karuizawa was both happy and frustrated.

She had prepared a whole list of arguments to persuade Kaoru, but now they were useless.

"As long as you two aren't angry, I'll do anything. So there's no need to ask."

Kaoru figured that if he ever really let them meet, as long as they had no objections, he could do whatever he wanted.

Karuizawa sulked, while Ichinose giggled.

"Alright, alright. Actually, we just wanted you to consider everyone's feelings. If you keep adding more people, everyone will feel uneasy."

Relationships need nurturing.

Without daily interaction, how can there be harmony?

Kaoru shifted his gaze from Ichinose to Karuizawa who pouted.

"Why are you looking at me?"

"Sometimes I can't believe I have two adorable and gentle girlfriends."

"Ugh, shut up!"

Kaoru took both their small hands in his.

Karuizawa turned her face slightly away, while Ichinose's cheeks flushed faintly.

"It's not just me and Kei—Kikyō and Suzune feel the same way. You can keep acting according to your preferences, but we also want to know if the person is suitable."

"And if they're not, what would you think?"

"It depends on Kaoru's thoughts."

A faint glimmer flashed in Kaoru's eyes—did that mean there was room for negotiation?

To be honest, he was genuinely surprised that Ichinose Honami could even accept Karuizawa Kei.

The two had grown so close that they were now calling each other by their first names, clearly becoming good friends.

"As for Tachibana-senpai, I'll help Kaoru test the waters next."

As a member of the student council, Ichinose had plenty of reasons to interact with Tachibana Akane.

The two had already built a decent relationship during their time in the council.

Kaoru didn't know what to say—his girlfriend was helping him pursue someone else?

However, in the next moment, his girlfriend suddenly became a little terrifying.

"Ah, I almost forgot—when was the last time Kaoru did something bad?"

Chapter 474: My Girlfriend is a Succubus.

"This is the forest school, I don't have time to do bad things. Kei should know that very well."

Seeing him shift the question to her, Karuizawa's face flushed red to the tips of her ears.

The girl wanted to brush it off, but she also felt a pang of frustration.

"You'd better think carefully!"

She had secretly done bad things with Kaoru—though she was the one who initiated it—but wasn't Kushida even worse?

Kaoru froze while thinking to himself, 'Your relationship is way too good, suddenly teaming up against me like this.'

"Alright, alright, I did do some things."

Kaoru surrendered, raising his hands in defeat. "But... why are you two asking about this?"

At this question, Ichinose also grew embarrassed, her cheeks turning pink as she lowered her head slightly.

Her moist lips looked temptingly red.

"Actually... I didn't mean to interrogate you or anything."

The girl fidgeted with her fingers, perhaps feeling shy about saying such things in front of a boy.

"It's just... these kinds of desires are normal, and Kaoru is usually pretty perverted anyway, so... um..."

She stammered for a while, as if the person who had just been talking about "bad things" wasn't her at all.

Watching her, Karuizawa's face gradually reddened too. Biting her lip, she decided to just say it outright for her.

"What Honami-chan means is that, as your girlfriends, we can satisfy your desires! You don't need to sneak around with some... with other people to do bad things!"

Ichinose wanted to cover her face—that phrasing was way too indecent!

Likewise, Karuizawa's face burned red.

She thought about Ichinose and Kushida.

This kind of talk seemed to imply two-on-one action... how shameless!

But at the same time, a sour feeling churned in her stomach. He's done so much with them... it's only fair I get a little too, right?

Even if it was "bad things," being the only one left out felt awful.

"No wonder Kei said those things earlier."

Kaoru chuckled. "I'm not the type to favor the new and neglect the old. Even if you hadn't brought it up, I would've come to you eventually."

"Eh, r-really?"

Ichinose Honami brightened, then quickly added, "We're not trying to force you or anything! But... occasionally, it'd be... nice."

Nice? Kaoru did his best to keep a straight face.

If he showed any weird expression, the girls would realize something was off.

"D-don't expect too much!"

Karuizawa, having done plenty of "bad things" with him, could somewhat guess his thoughts.

"This kind of thing is only occasional, not an everyday thing."

Kaoru often called himself a pervert, so Karuizawa wondered—if I drain him dry, will he still have energy to be perverted with others?

"But didn't you say you'd satisfy my desires?"

Kaoru deliberately teased the two girls. "What if I have these thoughts every day?"

The two girls, holding hands, blushed furiously and exchanged a silent glance.

The atmosphere grew awkward.

Kaoru scratched his head—had he said something wrong?

Just as he was about to lighten the mood, they suddenly grabbed his hands and forcefully pulled him toward the school building.

"This... isn't the way to the cafeteria, is it?"

Kaoru felt something was off, but neither girl answered, making him realize the situation had taken a strange turn.

"Kei, if you're with me like this, someone might see us."

"See us?" Karuizawa finally spoke up, "It doesn't matter anymore. Everyone knows you're always flirting with girls anyway—even daring to pursue senior students. What's one more like me?"

Kaoru was momentarily speechless.

While he had publicly acknowledged his relationship with Ichinose, he hadn't done the same for Karuizawa—partly out of concern for her reputation.

Karuizawa wasn't truly a "bad girl"; she was just strong-willed and had experienced bullying in the past.

If her standing in class worsened because of him, there was no telling what might happen to her today.

"Even if everyone sees us, I don't think it's a problem," Ichinose said firmly, gripping both their hands.

"Bigamy might not work, but we're in a free relationship. Who says you can't have two girlfriends? Who says we can't share the same boyfriend?"

Kaoru swallowed hard.

What on earth had these two discussed during their shared lodgings? First Asahina Nazuna, and now this—what exactly had Ichinose been filling their heads with?

...

It was lunchtime, with teachers and students enjoying meals in the cafeteria, yet Kaoru found himself led by the two girls to the school building, sneaking into a classroom.

"I told you this place wouldn't be locked—there are still afternoon classes," Karuizawa said smugly, closing the door behind them the moment they entered.

"Plus, there aren't any surveillance cameras here!"

"The boys' classrooms aren't much different from ours. I thought there'd be some distinction," Ichinose remarked as she walked to the window.

"Wow, you can see the track field from here!"

"Sometimes we catch glimpses of you girls passing by," Kaoru said, standing beside her. "Yesterday, I saw you and Shiina-san doing warm-up exercises together. Seems like she's not very athletic."

"Everyone has their weaknesses," Ichinose laughed, her eyes teasing. "So Kaoru's been peeping at girls from here every day, huh?"

"No, I was only peeping at you," Kaoru replied without missing a beat.

Now it was Ichinose's turn to blush.

How could he say something like that with a straight face?

"Where does Kaoru usually sit?" Karuizawa interjected, moving closer. "By the window, right?"

Though unsure of their intentions, Kaoru pointed to his seat.

"I thought so. I wouldn't want to touch any other guy's seat," Karuizawa said cheerfully as she sat down, then suddenly realized something.

"Ahem, Honami-chan, what now?"

Kaoru glanced quizzically at Ichinose beside him.

What kind of riddle were these two playing at?

"Well... now..." Ichinose's cheeks flushed crimson as if embarrassed.

She tugged lightly at Kaoru's sleeve. "After holding back for days... don't you want to do something, Kaoru?"

Kaoru's Adam's apple bobbed.

Were these two succubus?

"Actually, with Tachibana—"

"We... we know about that," Ichinose murmured, her face still red. "But you've been holding back too, right?"

She added in a whisper, "And... I kind of feel like being a little naughty myself."

Kaoru pulled the girl before him into an embrace, breathing in her unique warmth and soft fragrance.

The gentle curves of her body stoked a man's desires yet also brought an odd sense of calm—especially when she slowly returned the embrace

"You're going to corrupt me."

"Haven't you already been corrupted?"

"I guess I have... Fine, it was me who led you astray."

"Mhm, want a kiss?"

Kaoru pressed his lips against hers—soft and tender—while his arms tightened around her slender waist, then gradually slid downward.

Karuizawa bit her lip slightly as she watched, but she knew this was Ichinose's exclusive time with him.

One person could have exclusivity, and so could two.

Whether it was memories shared between one or several, they could Take all.

Chapter 475: A Foot Fetish

Anyone passing by the classroom might have heard intermittent gasps mixed with strange rustling sounds.

The curtains had been drawn over the windows.

As the sun dipped past the mountain ridge, faint light seeped through the hazy fabric, outlining delicate curves—peaks of snowy-white skin tinged with a fiery glow, tender as cherries that seemed ready to burst with juice at the slightest bite.

Human desire was truly like a bottomless abyss.

No sooner was one craving satisfied than the next demanded attention. Even the greed of a glutton paled in comparison.

Ichinose Honami's shoulders trembled slightly.

Her once-clear eyes grew hazy, her cheeks flushed like she was drunk, and her damp lips pressed tightly together, occasionally revealing a glimpse of pink between her teeth.

Her breath came in light pants as Kaoru's movements forced her to arch her pale neck.

Her hands weakly gripped his shoulders—as if resisting, yet refusing to let him go.

Leaning against the wall, her long hair cascaded over her shoulders.

Her jacket hung loosely, exposing the soft, fair skin of her stomach, which quivered with each unsteady breath.

Her tits glistened with moisture, her snow-white skin exuding a faint, honeyed sweetness as if she had been dipped in syrup.

Kaoru's hands were far from well-behaved.

The girl's breathing grew heavier, her smooth, flushed face tensed as if holding something back.

Her eyes shimmered with unshed tears, and her lips parted in a whisper—almost like a plea.

"Kaoru... I-I'm gonna... break... ngh... ah..."

She couldn't take it anymore.

This was too much.

But she wasn't a mother—there was nothing here to nurture a baby.

Kaoru pulled her close.

Despite her voluptuous figure, her body was petite, delicate, and fragile.

Her collarbones were finely sculpted and the huge breast stood proud as snow-capped mountains—trembling like flower buds in a winter breeze, cradled in his palms, leaving behind a lingering warmth.

"Do you two always play like this?"

Karuizawa sat stiffly in her seat, legs pressed tightly together, her face burning.

She was no innocent girl anymore.

Just one glance, and her body reacted on its own.

Her heart pounded violently—as if she, not Ichinose, was the one overwhelmed.

It was as if they shared a connection.

Every slow, teasing stroke Kaoru applied to Ichinose resonated within her, sending faint electric currents that made her cheeks flush hotter.

"N-No... Only sometimes." Ichinose panted, then nudged Kaoru. "Alright, hurry up and go torment Kei."

At this distance, the girl could already sense Kaoru's thoughts.

She didn't want him to hold back, so she let him release his desires on Karuizawa.

"W-what kind of torment?"

Karuizawa blushed. "Didn't we agree you'd go first?"

"I'm not ready yet."

Ichinose spoke very softly, feeling embarrassed.

Even though they had done this so many times, she still felt completely clueless.

Karuizawa grew even more flustered.

Though she had been bold earlier, now that the moment had arrived, she felt a bit timid.

"It feels like I'm at the mercy of you two right now."

Kaoru kissed Ichinose. "But you're the ones who started this. Even if you refuse now, I won't let you off."

And so, Ichinose was tormented once more, her eyes brimming with tears, her body so weak she could barely stand.

Kaoru walked up to Karuizawa, who gulped nervously.

"Whose idea was this?"

Dragging him to the classroom during lunch break—this couldn't have been a spur-of-the-moment decision.

With both of them approaching him together, it was clearly premeditated.

"That's none of your business."

Karuizawa was a little scared.

He had completely drained Ichinose's energy in an instant, but she still stubbornly retorted.

"Do you and Suzune have some kind of list?"

Kaoru froze for a long moment.

Had Horikita even told them about that?

Had their relationship progressed so much in just a few days of living together?

Noticing his expression, Karuizawa bit her lip. "Actually, I can do it too. Kaoru, do you want to try?"

The girl was wearing a tracksuit.

Unlike a leotard, the winter-style outfit didn't accentuate her charm, covering her entire body and revealing nothing.

Yet, the blush on her delicate face stirred an inexplicable excitement in him.

"Isn't this bad?" Kaoru felt as if his peculiar fetish had been exposed to broad daylight.

Even he found it hard to put into words.

"What's wrong with it?"

Karuizawa's face flushed red. "I'm the one who decided to satisfy you. No matter what you want to do, I won't dislike it!"

At this point, Kaoru's gaze lingered on the girl's body with desire.

"Kei, can you step on me?"

Karuizawa was visibly stunned, but soon, a strange smile curled on her lips.

"I thought they were joking, but you really do have this kind of fetish, huh?"

"Actually, it's not just feet."

"Okay, I get it. I'll take them off now."

Barefoot, the girl placed her delicate, slender soles on Kaoru's body.

Perhaps due to meticulous care, the pinkish hue of her soles was visible, and her slightly curled toes looked like adorable little pearls.

Her movements were light, gliding over like a massage, then pressing down like kneading dough.

The touch of skin brought a uniquely warm and delicate sensation.

She was completely inexperienced, appearing very green, occasionally stealing glances at Kaoru's expression.

Seeing his comfort, Karuizawa would show a happy and proud expression.

For a girl, being able to satisfy someone she liked was a small joy in itself—not something she found repulsive at all.

Before long, Kaoru stood up, took hold of Karuizawa's feet, and stood before her.

The arches of her feet formed a slight gap, the tender red soles curling together.

Her face flushed crimson as she leaned back against the chair, her hands poised as if holding something, completely still as she faced Kaoru, quietly awaiting his next move.

Ichinose approached, gently wrapping her arms around Kaoru's waist, biting his earlobe as her fragrant breath brushed against his sensitive neck.

"Wow, this is... a lot. Does this really feel that good?"

Karuizawa fumbled awkwardly, her face burning as she stared at her own hands.

"Looks like you've been holding back for a while."

Ichinose seemed pleased.

At any rate, making him feel better was a good thing.

"Huh, it's still moving. Should we keep going?"

"You two..."

Kaoru panted. "Class is about to start. Even if you don't care about skipping, someone's bound to come here soon."

The two girls froze for a moment—right, they'd completely forgotten about that.

"Then... tonight?"

The moment she said it, Ichinose wanted to crawl into a hole.

She felt like some kind of pervert right now!

"I'll deal with you two after the exams are over."

Kaoru's expression remained blank.

It was the sixth day—just two more until they could go back.

Karuizawa licked her fingers, then helped clean Kaoru up, flashing him a playful wink in the process.

"Heh, I think someone better not forget what they said."

Karuizawa wasn't entirely convinced by Ichinose's claims—doing it all day? She and Kaoru only ever did it two or three times at most.

She seriously doubted the truth of it.

They must just be terrible at it.

Chapter 476: The Official Exam

By the seventh day, Horikita Manabu had not only resolved his own class's crisis, but rumors were spreading that he was about to launch a fierce attack against Nagumo Miyabi.

People like Tonokawa Sosuke hurriedly gathered information, only to learn that Nagumo had allied with Class 3-B to strike at Horikita Manabu.

The attack, of course, failed.

Nagumo couldn't afford the price Class 3-B demanded, so they cautiously turned to Class 3-D instead, planning to have others launch a kamikaze-style assault.

Thus, Horikita Manabu neutralized Class 3-D.

Upon hearing the news, Nagumo nearly laughed in frustration.

He had never agreed with Class 3-B's plan—if they didn't use their own people, betrayal was all too likely.

Only their own classmates would be truly committed to pushing their class to A-rank.

Everyone else was unreliable.

Yet, Class 3-B ignored Nagumo's advice.

After all, using their own people would cost them 400 points—hardly worth it—and they couldn't just sacrifice a classmate so casually.

Fortunately, Nagumo didn't dwell on it too much.

The reason he had cooperated with the other party was that he also needed their help—otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to deal with Kaoru.

After receiving Kaoru's warning, Ryuen didn't immediately seek out Nagumo.

Instead, he deliberately waited until today to leisurely report the situation to him.

"Heh, if he wants to act, let him. Does he really think I care?"

Upon hearing Ryuen's report, Nagumo immediately scoffed.

"If I were bothered by one or two students dropping out, the class wouldn't have made it this far."

That's what he said, but in reality, Nagumo had already broken into a cold sweat.

Yes, Kaoru's assessment of Class 2-A wasn't wrong.

The current Class 2-A desperately needed a victory to prove that, under Nagumo's leadership, their position as the A-Class remained unshakable.

Losing one or two students would only invite more doubts about Nagumo within the class.

Nagumo believed Class 2-A wouldn't outright overthrow him because of this, but it would still significantly weaken his influence. N

ext time, he might not be able to command them so easily.

"I don't care about your conflict, but should we proceed with the original plan?"

Ryuen looked completely indifferent. "Even if we don't, you still owe me what was promised."

Nagumo's face darkened.

How dare this insignificant worm try to exploit him in his moment of weakness?

"Have you even been doing your part? Why did Mitoma find out so quickly?"

"Who could've kept this hidden? The moment that woman told him, he would've figured it out. Don't tell me you suspect I leaked it?"

"Can you handle it?"

"Heh, that depends on whether you can give me enough points."

Nagumo's expression flickered uncertainly.

Right now, he truly couldn't afford to part with more than three million Personal Points.

He could only insist, "Mitoma couldn't possibly have four million. Just go ahead with it!"

Ryuen grinned. "You're willing to gamble, but I'm not. For me, points I can actually see are more reliable."

Nagumo sneered. "If you don't act, you won't get a single point from me!"

The atmosphere grew tense and awkward.

The two stood facing each other in a secluded corner of the school building until Ryuen finally broke the silence.

"Right now, you're the one in danger, Nagumo. For all we know, he might be coming for you this time."

"That's none of your concern. I have my own ways."

Nagumo had anticipated this and had already submitted several suggestions to the school.

"In the end, the mistake was you joining their group in the first place."

He gritted his teeth—that was the most frustrating part.

Ryuuen shrugged. "If you ever have Personal Points to spare later, feel free to call me anytime. I'm always ready to help you deal with Mitoma."

Nagumo's expression softened slightly.

It seemed he hadn't lost Ryuuen yet.

Though the guy was cunning, his goals were clear. Nagumo could be certain he wouldn't side with Kaoru.

"By the way, the value of this information is five hundred thousand."

"...Ryuuen, who do you take me for?"

"Just kidding. The friendship price is three hundred thousand—for the sake of our long-term cooperation."

Though resentful, Nagumo still agreed.

Because at the core of this matter was Ryuuen's lack of faith in his ability to provide enough points.

Perhaps with a hint of anxiety, Nagumo believed he had demonstrated his strength and composure to Ryuen.

He wasn't afraid of Kaoru or Horikita Manabu.

In fact, he was eager for Kaoru and Horikita Manabu to attack him—that would give him a reason to mock the useless fools in his class.

Without him, they were nothing but lambs to the slaughter!

What Nagumo needed to do now was gauge their intentions and prevent this attack.

...

"Are you ready?"

Kaoru glanced at his group and saw Hashimoto smiling leisurely.

"We've done all we can. Now it's just about adapting on the spot."

Ishizaki curled his lips. "Don't expect too much. At best, I'll just pass. First place belongs to Class C."

It seemed that no matter how hard the school tried to teach students the diversity of interpersonal relationships, some still didn't get it.

Kaoru didn't respond.

Even if troublemakers like Ishizaki Daichi and Kouenji Rosuke fell behind, he wouldn't react.

Because the real test was about to begin.

On the eighth and final day of the forest school, all thirty-six groups from the school would face their last assessment.

After breakfast, Kaoru and the other first-year boys were led by their teacher to the familiar dojo, where the first exam would soon commence.

Zazen meditation.

"This exam consists of two parts: observing the rules upon entering the dojo, your movements, and whether there is any restlessness during meditation. Once meditation ends, please wait in the classroom for instructions on the next exam. Those whose names are called may now enter..."

As the announcement concluded, the teacher began calling names one by one.

Unlike the usual group arrangements, the exam order seemed randomly assigned.

Kaoru was fourth from last.

He entered the dojo respectfully, sat perfectly straight on the floor, and quietly meditated on the day's plans.

Soon, the meditation session ended smoothly.

The next exam was a written test, covering content related to the training camp.

Unless someone was particularly bad at thinking or paying attention, it was unlikely they'd score poorly.

Kaoru controlled his score and left the exam hall once it was over.

On the way, he overheard a few upperclassmen discussing something strange—apparently, someone had fallen during the long-distance run.

The exam order for upperclassmen differed from the first-years.

The second-years' first exam was a relay race, while the third-years had a speech.

So, it was the second-years who had run into trouble.

Kaoru listened for a moment before silently heading to the next exam venue.

The third exam was the relay race.

The school had arranged buses to transport students to their respective relay points.

Kaoru had already discussed the strategy with his group beforehand—placing those with weaker stamina in the earlier, flatter sections of the race.

The rougher, more challenging sections would be handled by students with strong endurance, like Kouenji Rosuke, Kaoru Mitoma, and Hashimoto Masayoshi.

Chapter 477: Unexpected

By 5 p.m., the exams had officially concluded.

Kaoru and the others gathered on the track field, where the girls gradually appeared as well.

Their faces showed varying degrees of exhaustion—after a whole day of grueling tests, those with poor stamina were likely suffering.

But none of that mattered.

The atmosphere among the senior teams seemed particularly tense, with Nagumo interrogating several students while Tonokawa Sosuke and others wore expressions of deep suspicion.

"You fell during the competition?"

"Y-yes, it was Yamamoto-kun who accidentally—"

"Don't joke around. Didn't I warn you all to give 100% focus to this exam?"

"..."

"And besides your group, someone from Sato's team claimed to be physically unwell?"

"I-it seems they said it was food poisoning..."

There was no need to ask further.

Suppressing his anger, Nagumo Miyabi had spent the past two days waiting for Kaoru and Horikita Manabu to make their move, never expecting they'd hold out until exam day itself.

Throughout this period, he hadn't received even a whisper of information.

Nagumo had considered the possibility that Mitoma might seek a breakthrough through Muto Hiromichi's group.

Just yesterday, he'd specifically sought out Muto to probe for information.

If Muto had defected to Kaoru's side, Nagumo could always buy him back.

The problem was—Muto Hiromichi didn't appear to have joined Kaoru.

Though Muto's evasive responses gave Nagumo an uneasy feeling, what right did lower-class students have to betray him?

Through his carrot-and-stick approach, Nagumo had established absolute authority over these lower classes.

He refused to believe Kaoru could possibly undermine his influence.

Yet now, Nagumo was beginning to sense something amiss—though he resisted acknowledging it.

After all, he'd specifically promised Muto Hiromichi five million Personal Points if no second-year Class A students were eliminated from his group.

As group leader, would Muto really sacrifice himself to wholeheartedly assist Kaoru?

Whatever Nagumo's thoughts might be, the exam was now drawing to a close.

"Over these eight days at the forest school, you've all worked hard," the teacher in charge of the camp announced from the podium.

"Though the exam content differed, this was a special test held only once every few years, and overall results have surpassed previous performances."

"Today, I'll keep it brief," the teacher continued with a smile. "In this exam, all female groups scored above the school's benchmark. With zero expulsions, this is the best possible outcome!"

Without question, Nagumo Miyabi had failed.

His chosen pawns proved insufficient to overpower Kaoru and Horikita Manabu, suffering consecutive defeats across both first-year and third-year cohorts.

"We'll now announce detailed results. For the female groups, first place goes to—third-year Class B's large group led by Saikawa Harumi!"

As rankings were announced, cheers erupted from the female teams, with first-year Classes B and D appearing particularly delighted.

Kaoru noticed Sakayanagi maintaining her usual serene expression. Of course—with their delicate princess present, first-year Class A's meditation and relay events had naturally been one member short.

Surprisingly, first-year Class D secured second place.

Horikita Suzune must have been working hard beyond his observation.

"For the male groups, first place goes to—third-year Class C's large group under Ninomiya Kuranosuke's leadership!"

This was the group containing Horikita Manabu, Kiriya Ikuyo, and Katsuragi Kouhei.

As expected, first-year Class A secured over three hundred points.

Second place went to the large group led by Nagumo Miyabi and Ryuen Kakeru, while third place was claimed by Kanazaki's team.

As for Kaoru—

"However, regrettably, among the male participants, one large group fell below the average score—the last-ranked group from Class 3-C, led by Sato Keisaku."

This announcement likely took everyone by surprise.

A faint smile appeared on Kaoru's face.

Having already subdued the third-years and manipulated the second-years, it was no wonder this group ended up in last place.

Nagumo's expression darkened at the news.

He had received no prior intelligence about this.

The realization sent a chill through his limbs.

Indeed, aside from Ryuen's attempt to extort him, he hadn't gotten even the slightest warning.

Thunder always precedes rain—yet he had heard no rumors about this group's downfall, despite deliberately placing two to three students from Class 2-A in each team.

Not a single one had alerted him in advance.

Nagumo glanced at Tonokawa Sosuke and the others, only to find these fools equally stunned.

Clearly, Kaoru Mitoma had even managed to keep them in the dark.

"The group that failed to meet the benchmark is the second-year team led by Mutou Hiromichi. As per the rules, the leader will face expulsion. That is all."

As the announcement concluded, some sighed in relief, while others wore even grimmer expressions.

Kaoru turned his gaze toward the second-years, locking eyes with Nagumo Miyabi.

The darker Nagumo's expression grew, the wider Kaoru's smile became.

'Well then, it's your turn now. Will you save him or not?'

'If you don't, you'll still retain millions in Personal Points, losing only one classmate and a hundred Class Points. You could still pose a threat to me.'

'But in exchange, this failure will shatter your authority.'

'The only reason people tolerate you is because you've led them to victory.'

'Now that you've failed, they might abandon you at any moment.'

'If you do save him, the losses will be even more severe, and your authority won't recover—just a slow, inevitable decline.'

"Unbelievable. The one getting expelled is actually a second-year."

Hashimoto sidled up to Kaoru. "I heard someone in their group got injured, which is why they ended up in last place."

Though he didn't say it outright, the implication was clear—Did you have a hand in this?

"Quite unexpected. Can they designate someone else for expulsion?"

Kaoru noticed Tonokawa Sosuke stepping forward to negotiate with Mutou Hiromichi, likely trying to uncover the truth or even pay their way out of trouble.

But that wouldn't work.

Chapter 478: Nagumo gone mad

"Who do you think it'll be?" Hashimoto studied his reaction.

Before Kaoru could answer, Mutou Hiromichi made his designation in the next moment.

"I designate Morita from Class 2-A!"

Silence.

A rare, heavy silence fell over the second-year crowd.

At first, some uninformed students from Class 2-C paled.

This designation was practically a direct challenge to Nagumo Miyabi—the consequences would be severe.

"Mutou, it seems you've prepared yourself."

Nagumo suppressed his fury. "Or are you acting recklessly because you know you're already doomed?"

Muto Hiromichi, on the other hand, laughed softly and said.

"I just never thought I'd be the one saying these lines one day. In the past, you were the only one who could decide who gets expelled."

Just last semester alone, over a dozen second-year students had dropped out, most from the lower classes.

Some perished due to exam rules, while others were chosen by Nagumo Miyabi to be sacrificial pawns—casualties from the lower classes.

"Hehehe, I know you don't have the guts for this. Spit it out—who put you up to this?"

Nagumo Miyabi knew the situation was beyond salvaging, so he could only pressure Muto Hiromichi into revealing the truth, shattering Tonokawa Sosuke and the others' illusions.

"There is someone."

Muto's answer sent a chill through many, but then he pivoted, "But this is also our own decision. You've always just dangled Personal Points in front of us, treating us like your dogs. But who knows if you'd ever actually let a dog into Class A?"

Nagumo raised an eyebrow. "I'm the student council president now. My proposal has been approved by the school—you'll see the results soon enough."

"You've been saying that for ages. You claim you'll break down class barriers, that anyone with ability can rise to Class A."

Muto scoffed. "Whether we'll ever make it to Class A, I don't know. But what I do know is that you've been exploiting us for a year or two!"

It was bad enough that Class 2-A had to pay tribute to their so-called "emperor," but even the lower classes had to cough up—not just in points, but in lives.

Even the so-called rewards were just scraps from what they had already handed over.

"So Kiriya wants to rebel, and now you all do too?"

Nagumo sneered repeatedly. "What did Mitoma promise you?"

Only Kaoru could pull something like this.

He didn't even need to think—it had to be Kaoru luring these idiots with Personal Points or cash!

"Mitoma?"

Muto seemed puzzled. "You mean that first-year guy?"

"Who else could it be?!"

Nagumo snapped with certainty.

As he spoke, Nagumo glared coldly at Tonokawa Sosuke and Mizuto Mizowaki.

"See? This is the choice you made. Do you really think he cares more about Class 2-A than I do? To bring me down, he wouldn't hesitate to let all you fools get expelled!"

Tonokawa's face was equally pale, his mind buzzing.

So it was true—Kaoru had united the entire grade against Class 2-A.

"Muto, go ahead and name names. I won't lift a finger to save anyone."

Nagumo's voice was icy. "This exam, Class 2-A earned over a hundred points. That'll cover the losses. We don't have to sacrifice a thing."

Yes, this was the most rational choice—for the class, and for himself.

Class 2-A hadn't gotten this far without losing a student or two along the way.

Yet Muto, as if he had anticipated this, turned to the students of Class 2-C and 2-D behind him and shouted in one breath:

"Everyone, see his true colors now? This guy won't even save his own classmates—who here still believes he'll help us rise to Class A? Don't be fools! He's nothing but a selfish, stingy bastard. Why should we keep honoring that old contract?!"

As he spoke, his finger remained pointed squarely at Nagumo.

In that instant, Nagumo's expression froze.

"Rather than trust this guy, it's better to keep the points with us. How we use them is our own business!"

Although Nagumo Miyabi still had die-hard supporters who would endure anything for Class A, seeing him mercilessly abandon his comrades inevitably caused a momentary waver in their resolve.

And that fleeting moment might one day resurface—when they recall Muto Hiromichi's words or replay today's scene in their minds.

"Enough! Without me, do you really think you can climb to Class A?"

Nagumo, his face flushed with anger, noticed the doubt in their eyes.

"This guy has been brainwashed by Mitoma! Now he's trying to brainwash all of you!"

The next moment, an unexpected voice cut through the tension.

"You're wrong, Nagumo-kun."

Horikita Manabu stepped forward from the crowd, his expression calm. "I was the one who urged them to terminate the contract. Muto-kun hasn't been influenced by anyone—this is his own conviction."

At Horikita's appearance, Nagumo Miyabi sensed something amiss, and his fury only intensified.

To think they would shift the blame onto Horikita and have him step forward!

Just as Nagumo had feared, Horikita's intervention emboldened those who had previously lacked confidence.

Their dissatisfaction with the contract had been simmering, and whether or not they could rise to Class A in the future, seizing this chance to abolish it was undeniably in their favor.

At its core, the contract had always been Nagumo's tool to dominate the entire year and exploit everyone under the guise of "uniting for exams"—merely a more convenient way for him to control the grade.

Now, Nagumo found himself trapped in a dilemma of his own making.

"Fine. Terminate the contract if you want. But don't expect me to take responsibility for what happens next."

Nagumo glared at Muto Hiromichi.

"As for you, Muto... I hope we never cross paths again."

Class 2-C didn't have enough points to save Muto Hiromichi—unless Kaoru Mitoma intervened.

Nagumo doubted that would happen.

In fact, he secretly hoped Kaoru would step in, because if he did, the exam's objective would be indirectly achieved.

Chapter 479: The Playboy

Someone getting expelled wasn't unusual—it shouldn't have been shocking, especially in the second year, where the expulsion rate was notoriously high.

Yet, those in the know could tell this training camp had been aimed squarely at Nagumo Miyabi.

For the first time in a long while, Class 2-A found itself in a lose-lose situation.

Not only had their opponents targeted a member of Class 2-A, but they had also severed the contract Nagumo used to exploit the lower classes—an act as audacious as what Kiriya Ikuyo had pulled during the sports festival.

The first-years likely didn't grasp the full implications, but compared to the upperclassmen's struggles, the fact that none of them had been expelled was a blessing.

As the training camp exam came to a close, Ishizaki Daichi happily returned to Class 1-C's ranks with Albert in tow.

Kaoru's group hadn't secured first place, which lifted his spirits considerably.

"Heh, what a spectacle today. You've been quite the busy matchmaker these past few days, Mitoma-boy."

Kouenji Rosuke, who had clearly witnessed the second-years' drama, smirked.

"I'll miss these times. Waking up early to cook was... quite the experience."

Not that he'd actually done much.

He probably just found it amusing.

After Kouenji left, Kaoru turned his gaze to Ayanokoji.

This guy had a knack for controlling scores—quite the seasoned veteran.

"Mitoma, well done."

Out of nowhere, Ryuen approached, cutting off their silent exchange.

"You managed to handle both the second and third years. The next student council president will be you, won't it?"

Even if Nagumo Miyabi insisted on holding an election now, the likely winner would still be Kaoru Mitoma.

"Not necessarily me."

Kaoru motioned for Ayanokoji to leave. "But in reality, it's close enough. I'll have Katsuragi elected as president."

It sounded almost like a foregone conclusion.

Ryuen's eyes gleamed. "Why not take control of the student council yourself?"

"Because I don't like student council work."

Kaoru had already spotted Ishizaki, Ibuki, and Albert standing behind Ryuen, giving off the aura of a "Generals."

Ryuuen scoffed at his words. If he didn't like it, why join the student council in the first place?

"Never thought you'd actually take down Nagumo. What did you offer that guy?"

Ryuuen's thoughts aligned with Nagumo's—he suspected Kaoru had given Muto an offer he couldn't refuse.

"I did give him a little something, but I wasn't the one who pushed him to act."

Kaoru paused. "I just had Horikita-senpai step in for me, deal with the people around him, and then handle him afterward."

Ryuuen blinked.

So Horikita Manabu dealt with Muto's inner circle first, then used them to pressure Muto himself?

"That alone wouldn't have been enough. After all, the one getting expelled was Muto himself, so they needed an outlet for their dissatisfaction with Nagumo."

Kaoru continued, "Once they realized their resentment toward Nagumo, all it took was a little incentive to make things go smoothly."

Admittedly, this situation arose because Nagumo had been exploiting them too harshly.

The lower-ranked classes following him couldn't even count on scraps, and Nagumo kept dangling empty promises—like how they'd soon get 20 million points and rise to Class A.

In reality, the more likely outcome for those classes was expulsion.

Kaoru didn't even need to show his face in all this.

Compared to a junior like him, they trusted Horikita Manabu more to deliver justice—a testament to the credibility he'd built during his time as student council president.

Though Kaoru also mediated disputes among students, he was far from Horikita's gentle fairness, Nagumo's terrifying efficiency, or Ichinose Honami's kindness and consideration.

"I see. But there's one thing I don't get."

Ryuuen stared at Kaoru. "Why did you pick Ishizaki and Albert for your group? Aren't you afraid I'll pull something?"

Nagumo was still stuck in his old ways, expecting someone to tip him off.

But Ryuuen was different—his sharp intuition quickly led him to suspect Kaoru might target Muto.

And he was right.

What Ryuuen didn't understand was, if he decided to mess with Kaoru and drag his group's average score down, wasn't Kaoru afraid of getting expelled himself?

"Because you'd still be the one losing out."

Kaoru replied coolly. "Even if you sabotage things behind the scenes—or keep tormenting the girls' group—you'd still subconsciously feel like you're getting the short end of the stick."

"Heh, do you think I'll lose out? The losses for Class A and Class C are different. You'll lose 800 points, while I'll only pay 200."

Ryuuen thought Kaoru was being delusional. After all, they had nothing to lose.

"That may be true, but can you be sure whether Nagumo will keep the points for himself or actually pay you?"

Kaoru pointed directly at Ishizaki without hesitation.

"Today, we can expel him. Next, we can sacrifice Ibuki-san, then Albert-kun, and eventually others. But with each person lost, you'll lose a valuable asset. If you're left as a lone commander with no one to lead, what do I have to fear?"

Ryuuen fell silent.

Though Ishizaki was a fool, he was one of his most loyal subordinates.

"He's got a point, Ryuuen," Ibuki said, displeased. "I only agreed to follow you because you promised to lead our class to Class A. If this is how we climb, you might as well go to Class A alone!"

"Yeah, sacrificing Rika? No way!" Shiho chimed in, blinking at Kaoru as if unconcerned about being seen.

Ryuuen's patience wore thin.

"Don't let his words fool you," he said coldly. "In the end, we haven't lost anything."

He had come to realize that Kaoru's words carried a terrifying persuasive power—an almost demonic ability to sway minds without notice.

"Ryuuen, I hope you'll consult us in the future," Ibuki frowned.

Every time Ryuuen made a decision, he never explained his reasoning to them.

"No need. Even if I explained, could you guarantee you'd execute it flawlessly?" Ryuuen scoffed. "If you have a problem with me, Ibuki, feel free to challenge me."

Ibuki gritted her teeth.

This tyrant only knew how to dictate!

"My, my, what a lively discussion. Mind if I join?"

Sakayanagi Arisu's voice cut through the tension as she appeared before Kaoru, leaning on her cane with her usual smile.

"Still smiling, huh? We boys took first place, you know!" Katsuragi followed, his loud voice accompanied by his lackey, Totsuka Yahiko.

"My apologies, Totsuka-kun. The girls have had quite the trouble," Sakayanagi unexpectedly expressed regret.

"Thankfully, we have you boys to rely on."

Totsuka Yahiko faltered, his face flushing.

He had only meant to provoke Sakayanagi out of habit.

"Honestly, you should just hand your position over to Mitoma," Ryuen laughed. "Sakayanagi's health is frail, Katsuragi hitched a ride on the express train, but this guy outright seized your contract. He even swindled upperclassmen—who knows how many millions of Personal Points he's sitting on!"

His words stunned the group before realization slowly dawned.

The contract?

Class 1-A did indeed have a contract, but since someone had repaid the debt, no one had given it much thought.

"You took the contract back?" Totsuka couldn't hide his shock, and even Katsuragi looked surprised.

"It's a long story, but consider this Class C's price," Kaoru reminded Ryuen. "Next time, don't take such risks alone. Otherwise, it won't end like this."

Kaoru didn't know what expression to wear when it came to Ryuen.

This was a man who dared to survive alone on a deserted island for days and now had the audacity to infiltrate Class 1-A's group single-handedly—truly ruthless to himself.

Ryuen snorted.

If he hadn't stepped in personally, would these useless classmates have managed it?

Chapter 480: The Doctrine of Great and Small

"The influence this guy wields is far more terrifying than any of you realize. Need I remind you, Katsuragi, that you're one of his people too?"

Ryuen deliberately stirred the tension in Class 1-A. "Sakayanagi, who does that ring on your finger belong to? On the surface, you two seem opposed, but perhaps this is all part of his grand design. What a frightening man."

"What are you implying?!"

Totsuka Yahiko glared at Ryuen with fury.

"Heh. Figure it out yourself, idiot."

Though he hadn't gained any advantage this time, Ryuen was satisfied.

The awkward atmosphere he left behind would now be Kaoru's problem.

With that, Ryuen turned and walked away, thoroughly pleased.

Observing their reactions—especially the boys'—Kaoru fell into brief contemplation.

"Actually..."

Before he could finish, Sakayanagi suddenly covered her ring with a faint blush coloring her cheeks.

"I-I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cause trouble for Mitoma-kun. Right now, my only goal is to lead everyone through all the exams successfully."

Kaoru fell silent.

Women were natural-born actors.

With effortless grace, she redirected the malice aimed at him while instantly dispelling any implications about the ring.

Katsuragi was his pawn, making him the shadowy mastermind, while Sakayanagi positioned herself as the noble leader who only wanted to "guide everyone to victory."

Of course, she could have polished her image even further—but she was too greedy.

She wanted to keep the status of being his fiancée too.

Gritting his teeth, Kaoru found himself wishing he could ask Ichinose for help.

Maybe she could teach this scheming little devil a lesson or two?

On the way back that night, strange rumors began spreading among the first-years.

Some said a certain someone kept multiple lovers.

Others claimed he was planning to abandon his official girlfriend.

There were whispers about him secretly manipulating Class A's leader, bullying a sickly girl, threatening Ichinose Honami, or being an incorrigible playboy—echoing the malicious speculation he'd faced in the entertainment industry years ago.

....

Class Points:

Class A: 2056

Class B: 1112

Class C: 494

Class D: 191

After the training camp exams, every first-year class saw significant growth.

Class 1-A surpassed 2000 points, while Class 1-B, after eight months, finally climbed back above 1000.

Not only did they earn Class Points, but the top three students also received substantial Personal Points as rewards.

Katsuragi had already been awarded 1.08 million Personal Points by the school.

After deducting the negative points from Kaoru and others, the remaining sum would be distributed equally among the class.

Truthfully, Class 1-A wasn't lacking in points.

Rumor had it that Morishita Ai alone had accumulated over 20 million Personal Points.

Thus, Kaoru also received his share.

After two semesters of spending, his Personal Points were nearly depleted. Ryuuen's taunts had only exposed his bluff.

But he wasn't worried. Calmly, he activated the Wish Machine for a draw.

Through Kushida Kikyo, Karuizawa Kei, Ichinose Honami, and Horikita Suzune, he had already fulfilled quite a few embarrassing wishes.

Even after accounting for the promises made to the Wish Machine, Kaoru still had enough for a 10x draw.

[Congratulations on obtaining the reward—[Fate Coin]!]

[[Fate Coin]: When used, there is a 50% chance to either restore health or worsen illness/injury. Please use with caution.]

...

[Congratulations on obtaining the reward—[Repair Dock]!]

[[Repair Dock]: A specialized, all-weather repair dock built for shipgirls. Injured shipgirls can recover by entering the dock. Non-shipgirls should use with caution.]

...

[Congratulations on obtaining the reward—[Choir]!]

[[Choir]: Can summon a choir team. Under solemn prayers, all units within 100 meters will recover a certain amount of HP and gain a morale boost.]

...

[Congratulations on obtaining the reward—[Blood Replacement]!]

[[Blood Replacement]: Can be used on any target. Swaps injuries between a wounded target and a healthy one, healing the wounded target.]

[Energy Tonic], [Peach], [Tissue], [Wisdom Fruit]...

Looking at this assortment of random items, Kaoru fell silent for a moment before asking the Wish Machine if the reward matching criteria could be more precise.

["You might as well rob me at knifepoint. Even capitalists wouldn't sell you a guaranteed winning lottery ticket."]

Kaoru felt it was the Wish Machine's fault.

Wouldn't it be better to replace the lottery system with an exchange? If all rewards were clearly priced, he could just buy what he needed outright.

["I may usually be dumb, but I'm not stupid. Did you think I wouldn't jack up the prices?"]

Damn.

Kaoru realized he couldn't manipulate this thing.

["If you want to cure that girl, why not flip the coin?"]

A 50% chance—was he really supposed to gamble Sakayanagi Arisu's life on it?

Kaoru proceeded to draw the remaining rewards.

Aside from something called [Bloodstained Holy Grail], everything else was unremarkable junk.

[[Bloodstained Holy Grail]: Stained with strange blood. It is said that after performing seven miracles upon it, the Holy Grail will reveal its true form, capable of unleashing a single divine act.]

If it was divine power, curing a heart condition should be effortless.

But what exactly constituted a "miracle"?

Before Kaoru could ponder further, the person in question arrived beside him.

Someone tactfully stood up and vacated the seat, leaving the two of them alone.

"After deducting the penalties for last and second-to-last place, Mitoma-kun earned 296 points this time. That's quite impressive, especially under the watchful eyes of Nagumo and Ryuen."

In the evening light, aboard the steadily moving bus, the petite girl sat beside him.

Her reflection in the window shimmered like fireflies as she smiled. Kaoru took a deep breath—she smelled sweet too.

"You flatter me. Truthfully, Horikita-senpai gave me a hand."

Kaoru knew that in this cooperative game, teammates were the most crucial factor.

If Horikita Manabu hadn't chosen Katsuragi's group, today's outcome would have been different.

"But convincing them to trust you—that's a skill in itself."

Sakayanagi noticed something and curved her lips into a smile. "Mitoma-kun, turn this way. Look at me properly."

Kaoru met her gaze and also caught the hostile glares from the surrounding boys.

Indeed, after learning that Kaoru not only had Ichinose Honami—a sweet and gentle girlfriend—but was also Sakayanagi Arisu's fiancé, these boys had completely lost it.

At this moment, even Kamuro Masumi was sitting up straight, afraid that the murderous aura might somehow be directed at her.

"How could you be in fourth place?"

Kaoru couldn't help but suspect that Sakayanagi Arisu was playing him—the girls under her guidance seemed to be acting entirely on their own.

"I misjudged the upperclassmen's situation, but I made quite a few friends."

Sakayanagi didn't dwell on the topic. "Should we skip this special exam?"

"No, let's leave it as is. Either you surpass me, or you lose to me—there are only two possible outcomes."

Kaoru chuckled. "You wouldn't acknowledge a draw anyway, right?"

"There won't be a draw. I already have a sixty percent chance of winning."

Sakayanagi exuded confidence, subtly straightening her posture.

Though the small, unconscious movement wasn't meant to emphasize anything, Kaoru couldn't help but glance.

Since ancient times, humanity has always been a believer in the supremacy of boobs—religious faiths and artistic creations centered around them are far from rare.

In fact, compared to apples, watermelons are clearly more thirst-quenching.

Kaoru was human, and he too had an instinctive appreciation for such attributes.

But he wasn't blindly devoted to any particular doctrine—whether generous or modest, he held no prejudice.

Though it might have been his imagination, he had once caught a faint milky scent from Sakayanagi, noticeably richer than what he'd noticed from Ichinose Honami and the others.

Perhaps it was a sign her body was still developing.

But Kaoru didn't think Sakayanagi was lacking in any way compared to them.

"That look... Are you thinking something rude again?"

Sakayanagi seemed to notice his distraction. "Are you planning to do something indecent to me on the bus?"

"A hundred times worse than you imagine."

Kaoru averted his gaze.

He must have eaten something bad recently—how else could their ample charms feel so gentle?

Sakayanagi blinked.

Most girls would have been embarrassed, but not her.

Instead, she asked, "Worse than last time?"

"Worse."

Kaoru noticed her extending a small hand toward him. "What are you doing?"

"Give me your room key."

She stated it as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Kaoru was speechless. "If I give it to you, how am I supposed to get back in?"

"You can get another one from the administrator. He won't refuse you."

Sakayanagi Arisu smiled faintly, "Am I inferior to them that I don't even have this right?"

Kaoru wasn't unwilling to give it to her, but he was mainly worried she might barge in anytime.

After hesitating for a while, he finally handed her the key.

"Fufufu, I'll come find you for chess anytime."

Sakayanagi Arisu contentedly pocketed the key.

It seemed she was still brooding over her previous defeat.

But wasn't she afraid it might turn into an R-18 chess mode?