

Cote 501

Chapter 501: Father-in-law.

Although Kaoru thought the White Room's concept was fanciful, Ayanokoji Atsuomi had indeed taken in many children of politicians and capitalists.

These individuals, whether due to unsavory circumstances or believing in the White Room's model, entrusted their children to Ayanokoji Atsuomi.

In a sense, Ayanokoji Atsuomi had also connected with them.

Even if most children would be eliminated in the White Room, as long as these people saw their children appearing smarter than others, Ayanokoji Atsuomi could continuously receive more children.

Children who could solve high school problems at six or seven years old would be considered prodigies anywhere, enough to astonish anyone.

With these children, Ayanokoji Atsuomi was steadily weaving his own network of connections.

Over time, even if his superior did not step down, he would have his own power.

Kaoru was naturally aware of this; during his time as a producer, he inevitably had to deal with so-called dignitaries.

Facing the malice of peers and the interests of the powerful, he managed to create a grand stage for his idols in two years, which was not merely a matter of selling hooks.

He also had his own connections and influence, even though he once thought he wouldn't lead these people for long.

"He has been quite active in politics lately, gathering quite a few supporters under the guise of a return."

Sakayanagi Narumori subtly revealed Ayanokoji Atsuomi's situation.

ANHS was a special school supported by the authorities and, in theory, would be subject to official regulation.

Thus, if anything happened to the authorities, ANHS would naturally be affected.

Sakayanagi Narumori himself was not particularly interested in politics; he only wanted to improve education, so it was normal for him to be affected.

"I see. However, I'm a bit curious; did they specifically want to replace you just to make Ayanokoji-kun drop out?"

Kaoru did not underestimate the importance of the greatest masterpiece to them, yet Ayanokoji Kiyotaka had escaped for a year without being caught?

Not only had he not been caught, but it was also half a year after Ayanokoji Kiyotaka enrolled that Ayanokoji Atsuomi finally reacted and rushed to the school to retrieve him.

"It seems so. After I saw his information, I decided to help him hide, but I didn't expect Ayanokoji-sensei to come looking for him."

Sakayanagi Narumori's voice carried a hint of helplessness and regret.

He felt sorry for the children of the White Room; those who came out were either devoid of emotions or had psychological issues.

Kaoru finally understood why Sakayanagi Narumori initially thought Ayanokoji Atsuomi was a kindred spirit; this chairman still retained a hint of childlike innocence in his heart.

The reason ANHS had the privilege of Class A and could maintain it for two to three decades was not due to the official endorsement but because everyone believed these graduates had sufficient capabilities.

Without capability, ANHS would not continuously receive official endorsement, nor would it become a benchmark; otherwise, the receiving parties would feel immense dissatisfaction.

At the beginning of the school year, Kaoru had checked the graduates of ANHS, many of the publicly active graduates were already prominent in the political and business circles, clearly forming their own factions.

The White Room was a counterpart to ANHS; the more Ayanokoji Atsuomi sought to attract more people, the more he had to prove that the White Room was superior to ANHS.

Otherwise, people like Kouenji Rosuke would only appear at ANHS, not at the White Room.

Just having a few illegitimate children was no longer sufficient for Ayanokoji Atsuomi's ambitions; he also needed legitimate firstborns like Kouenji Rosuke.

Kaoru felt that Ayanokoji Kiyotaka's task should be to defeat the entire ANHS, even though Ayanokoji Kiyotaka himself seemed unaware of this.

"Mitoma-kun, I know this matter has nothing to do with you, but I'm a bit worried that the school might face changes in the future."

Sakayanagi Narumori said with concern, "To be honest, some people are dissatisfied with the school's current situation, and Nagumo-kun's ideas align quite well with their appetites."

Perhaps there had been no changes; after all these years, the students who could graduate from Class A were still this batch, often with one superhuman leading a group of underperformers.

Nagumo Miyabi advocated for only superhumans, not underperformers, which indeed resonated with certain individuals.

Under the external pressure from Ayanokoji Atsuomi and the internal dissatisfaction, Sakayanagi Narumori, this old stubborn, could only yield.

"Chairman, do you want me to help?"

"Haha, I didn't say that. I won't interfere in the internal matters of the students. If Ayanokoji-kun really ends up dropping out because of this, as long as it's within the rules, I won't oppose it."

"But this acting chairman will likely change the rules to make Ayanokoji-kun drop out, right?"

"I've thought about that too, so I requested that they cannot change the school rules. As for the specific exams..."

Sakayanagi Narumori smiled, "The rules of the exams can be changed every year; these won't have an impact."

The impact could be significant, Kaoru felt frustrated; adjusting the rules for the exams would also affect their Class A for the year.

"Don't worry, he won't go too far. Although I've left, the members of the school's team are still mine."

Sakayanagi Narumori was confident that Ayanokoji Atsuomi could only parachute in a chairman but could not parachute in an entire team.

Kaoru pursed his lips, but out of respect for Sakayanagi Arisu's father, he had to ask.

"Why are you telling me all this?"

At this point, some things couldn't be left unsaid; which chairman would discuss such matters with a high school student?

Recalling that this middle-aged man and his daughter had peeked at his information, Kaoru suspected something was written there; otherwise, it wouldn't make sense.

No, it was possible that he and Sakayanagi Arisu had an incident.

"Well, hehe, you should know best."

Sakayanagi Narumori's tone was somber, "You left my school inexplicably and then inexplicably acquired shares in the Shinomiya Financial Group, which has drawn a lot of attention."

In recent years, the most extraordinary figure was a producer rumored to be exceptionally skilled in hypnosis, talented, armed, able to leap across rooftops, and drinking a cup of his water could reverse aging.

He had a team of beautiful warrior maidens around him, and kissing the back of his hand could lead one to Takama-ga-hara.

No one knew his origins, nor did anyone know his secrets.

The producer's greatest characteristic was his ability to perform magic at any time, conjuring millions of yen out of thin air when he was broke, even acquiring rival companies.

Sometimes he would mumble about rewards, obsessing over the feet of idols, yet at other times, he was dead serious, not even glancing at women who approached him.

"Concern for me?" Kaoru feigned surprise, "Could it be that someone would personally come to the school to drive me away?"

Sakayanagi Narumori fell silent for a moment, then chuckled softly.

"Not necessarily, Mitoma-kun."

This uncle seemed to have some malicious interest, and Kaoru felt a deep sense of malevolence.

"Hehe, I heard you've been getting close to Arisu lately?"

Kaoru straightened up; after all, he was the chairman, and nothing happening in the school could escape his notice.

"Yes, I was just about to discuss this matter with you, Father-in-law."

Chapter 502: The Inevitable End Approaches.

No one knew what Kaoru and Sakayanagi Narumori discussed at that time.

When Tonokawa Sosuke walked back into the office, he found Kaoru gazing out the window, his expression melancholic, as if the sky were falling.

Tonokawa Sosuke couldn't help but ask, "Mitoma-kun, what was that phone call about?"

Kaoru came back to his senses, saw his expression, and immediately knew the outcome.

Clearing his throat, he chuckled lightly, "Just an application for leaving school; it's nothing serious."

This was indeed nothing serious; everyone knew that going out was against school rules, and even members of the student council had no right to leave the school.

The previous phone call was clearly intended for him to overhear; both of them understood.

Tonokawa's mood was heavy, there was nothing more to say now.

Nagumo Miyabi could not deal with such a person; he could only hope that this time he would truly keep his word.

"There will be a special exam during the second-year final exams; we can pay some price."

Tonokawa sighed, his gaze becoming resolute. "However, our class can only bear this price."

The so-called price was naturally losing Nagumo Miyabi.

Kaoru shook his head slightly, "I don't have much ambition for the upper grades, and besides, I have things to attend to in the first year."

Tonokawa thought to himself, what could you possibly have to do in the first year?

Class A was leading the entire grade by an absolute advantage, and the leader of Class B was your wife.

Though he thought this, he still had to put on a show.

After a moment of contemplation, he said, "We could join forces with Kiriama-kun to isolate Nagumo-kun's die-hard supporters; the rest would be easier to handle."

Kaoru did not object, "You can give it a try."

Nagumo Miyabi retained quite a few Personal Points, and Tonokawa Sosuke's mind turned a few times, trying to find a way to deplete these points, but he felt a bit reluctant.

"By the way, can we also look at Nagumo's proposal?"

Kaoru inquired about the previous reform.

He remembered having seen Nagumo Miyabi's draft but was unsure of the school's current stance.

"Sure."

Tonokawa Sosuke replied with understanding, "Not just that proposal; Nagumo-kun has also been discussing changes to the exams with the school recently."

The president of the student council could represent the student council and all students in dialogue with the school.

Generally, the secretary should be present, and Tonokawa knew the details.

"Changing the exams?"

"Yes, but not participating in the specific rule-making. Nagumo-kun can propose to the school, such as adding a special exam or increasing the difficulty, etc."

"It seems he only has the right to suggest, with the specifics decided by the school, right?"

"Exactly. However, Nagumo-kun's draft has already received the school's approval; I sent it to you before."

Although Kaoru had seen it, the school wouldn't fully comply; they had their own ideas, and Tonokawa Sosuke had recently learned the general situation.

"The school plans to optimize the S system, incorporating students' personal data, seemingly called Overall Ability, to comprehensively quantify students' individual capabilities."

Tonokawa Sosuke said, "According to the school's intentions, students who do not meet the standards will face penalties. They plan to raise the students' individual levels."

Kaoru understood; the school had taken Nagumo Miyabi's opinions into account, believing that students should feel some pressure individually.

This approach was likely to prevent underperformers from infiltrating the group.

After all, not every student graduating from Class A had an extremely high level.

The school not only wanted to control the overall quality but also aimed to enhance individual levels, which aligned with Kaoru's previous thoughts.

In situations where a superhuman carried an entire class, the receiving parties would likely be very dissatisfied.

"Besides the S system, the exams for the next academic year will also be more intense and brutal. I've heard they are preparing to attempt changes to certain rules."

Tonokawa Sosuke was also unclear about the specifics; the school wouldn't disclose too detailed information to him or Nagumo Miyabi.

Kaoru shrugged; compared to the S system and special exams, he was now more worried about a future day.

He had thought that his reunion with them would be at the next Christmas, but who knew they could strike at ANHS at any moment? He had foolishly sent a letter.

Speaking of the letter, Kaoru felt quite uncertain.

He had left a farewell letter for them before hanging himself, believing he had made no mistakes and had left behind enough inheritance for them to live on for a lifetime.

He felt a headache; at that time, his "feet" condition was just an excuse; he simply didn't know how to face them, thinking they were NPCs, but he fell deeper and deeper, ultimately having to avoid them, thinking that crossing over to the next world would solve the problem.

If Asakura Toru stormed into ANHS, tugging at his tie with tears in her eyes, gritting her teeth and asking if he was an idiot, how would he respond?

Fuyuko Mayuzumi would probably kill him herself, right?

Kaoru thought for a moment; even if they came to kill him, he could still plead with Madoka Higuchi.

After all, this girl had never considered that he had expressed any special feelings.

Because of this, he felt at ease letting Madoka Higuchi see him one last time.

With her usual calmness, she likely wouldn't do anything outrageous and would handle his affairs according to his farewell letter; she was one of the assistants he had always trusted.

If it were Amana and Tenka, Kaoru estimated they would be unable to eat for a month.

He wondered if Kochizu and Chiyuki were taking care of these children.

He had checked on the 283 Agency's recent situation, which was still operating normally.

However, it only gradually resumed its business status about six months after his death, though some had announced their departure from the agency, such as Ikaruga Luca, and others had declared they would retire after their contracts expired, like Ichikawa Hina.

The most reactive individuals were basically the problematic children from back then, making Kaoru feel both relieved and pained, especially seeing Fuyuko Mayuzumi's alternate account venting negative energy online.

However, he hadn't expected that the ones representing the agency to the outside world now were Suzuki Hana and Asakura Toru, who had also managed to soothe the feelings of the others.

That seems reliable.

Kaoru didn't think too much about it—they must have helped Madoka Higuchi.

As for the problem children in the agency, it was precisely because he was worried about them that he had deliberately handed out his envelopes, hoping to keep them around.

"Mitoma-kun?"

Tonokawa Sosuke's voice snapped Kaoru out of his thoughts.

He blinked slightly before smiling apologetically. "Sorry, I was just thinking about something. Tonokawa-senpai, are you planning to help me deal with Nagumo-kun during the final exams?"

"Yes, we'll fully cooperate with you this time. But, can we...?"

Tonokawa Sosuke hesitated. Could he still negotiate terms now?

"Tonokawa-senpai, I won't personally interfere in second-year matters." Kaoru smiled faintly.

Of course, he wouldn't intervene directly, but Kiriya Ikuyo could collaborate with the lower-ranked classes.

Tonokawa Sosuke seemed to have swallowed a calming pill, letting out a relieved sigh as a smile spread across his face.

"That's great. Like I said earlier, our Class A can also work with Kiriya-kun."

"Good. Discuss it among yourselves."

Kaoru nodded, then abruptly changed the subject.

"However, we first-years also have exams. I might not be able to assist you in this special exam."

Tonokawa Sosuke didn't quite understand.

How could he have known about Kaoru's agreement with Sakayanagi Arisu? He assumed Kaoru was worried about expulsion.

Then another thought struck him—was Kaoru testing him?

Was he expecting Tonokawa and Mizowaki to prove their loyalty?

At this realization, Tonokawa's expression turned serious as he said to Kaoru.

"You don't have to worry. Even if Nagumo-kun doesn't want to drop out, we'll cut off his escape route."

Kaoru nodded woodenly, his mind drifting back to them again.

At the same time, he recalled Sakayanagi Narumori's earlier shock and anger, wondering just how much effort he'd have to put in from now on.

...

On the way back, Kaoru finally had time to question a certain someone.

[Why do you even care? It's not like it'll affect your wish fulfillment. Don't you trust me with the data?]

The Wish Machine thought Kaoru was making a big deal out of nothing.

She hadn't interfered with his actions, and besides, she'd long forgotten what she had written in the records back then.

[What? I don't understand humans? Don't be ridiculous. I'm the Wish Machine—do you think I don't know what you humans are thinking?]

Kaoru had always believed this thing was utterly useless.

Aside from repeatedly chanting [My wish] and creating noise, it had no concept of being considerate toward its employees.

He even suspected the Wish Machine's work was outsourced, to the point where it didn't even know the origin of the wishes.

[I am NOT outsourced! I supervise you every day, always watching you—I'm very diligent!]

Kaoru was reminded of bosses who only knew how to micromanage.

After he quit, the company collapsed due to incompetence.

[I-I'm not scared of you quitting at all! Stop talking nonsense!]

Yet, its flustered tone betrayed its true feelings.

Kaoru fell into thought.

No wonder this thing had refused to disclose anything—it was afraid he'd quit and abandon it for a more comfortable life.

[That's not it! I have plenty of outsourced workers—you're not important at all! And I don't watch you every day! I'm usually very busy—I was just joking earlier... W-well... There are others more capable than you, and I talk to them all the time...]

Kaoru was momentarily speechless.

When you're lying to yourself, could you at least not shed those little tears?

[You misheard. That's another Wish Machine crying. It has too many wishes and no one to help it work. I'm always the top performer!]

Kaoru said calmly, "If you had a physical form, I'd be beating you up right now."

In an instant, the previously noisy Wish Machine fell completely silent, emitting no further sounds.

Kaoru paid it no more attention.

No matter what the records said, or whether someone coveted his ability to return from death, he ultimately had the power to flip the table if needed.

In contrast, even Sakayanagi Narumori seemed skeptical now—it seemed even he didn't truly believe miracles could exist in this world.

Chapter 503: That Damn Guy

Though nearing the end of January, snowflakes continued to flutter down these past few days, much like the heated discussions on the school forum where Kaoru's name had become ubiquitous.

Many were anticipating a legendary showdown, with certain senior girls gathering around Ichinose, subtly probing her thoughts about Kaoru's alleged infidelity.

Yet, contrary to expectations, there was no sign of any dramatic confrontation or love triangle.

When encountering Sakayanagi or Kushida on campus, Honami would greet them with a radiant smile, as if they were the best of friends—and they'd often return equally genuine smiles, showing no trace of jealousy.

Asahina Nazuna's behavior was even more shocking.

Witnesses reported seeing her shopping with Honami, frequently leaning close in intimate gestures resembling best friends.

Only Tachibana Akane somewhat matched public expectations.

Whenever Kaoru's name came up, she'd bristle, warning everyone never to mention it in her presence.

But rather than jealousy or hostility, her reactions seemed more like inexpressible embarrassment—childish sulking, waiting for someone to give her an out.

Some began doubting the rumors' accuracy, while others insisted they were true, theorizing Kaoru must be using some hypnotic app on Honami and the others.

Without Kaoru lifting a finger, the narrative had already skewed.

Most refused to believe any girl would tolerate her boyfriend's infidelity.

Regardless of public opinion, with Nagumo Miyabi absent, Kaoru took over student council duties.

He and Honami frequently worked together across campus, resolving student disputes.

Beyond this, Hasebe Haruka would occasionally summon him, bringing along two little animals—their former Study Group had effectively become a gossip circle.

Kushida sometimes forcefully joined too. Her social standing in Class 1-D far exceeded Haruka and Airi's, allowing Kaoru to watch as she cheerfully led them through various games.

He'd considered discussing Haruki Yamauchi with Airi, but seeing her gradually open up to friends made him reconsider the urgency.

He could handle it himself.

Time flowed quietly until Friday.

After school, Kaoru caught up with Morishita Ai as she headed to the dorms.

"Are you going to confess to me?"

Her words cut off Kaoru's prepared script.

Staring at the girl's delicate, pretty nose bridge and the wariness in her eyes directed at him, Kaoru fell silent for a long moment.

"So Morishita-san wants me to confess to you right now?"

Similarly, his words left Ai Morishita speechless. The two stared at each other wide-eyed.

"Seems I misunderstood. I thought you were finally making your move on me."

Ai didn't seem embarrassed at all. "You've been trending on the forums lately. Someone listed my name too, claiming I'm involved."

He did have that intention, just lacked the opportunity, Kaoru thought to himself.

"This isn't the place to talk. Would you come to the café with me for a while?"

Ai studied him.

Being seen with him would likely damage her reputation, but since it was already ruined, it shouldn't matter.

Thus, she followed Kaoru to the café, still bustling with students spending their after-school hours with friends.

"Did you have something to tell me?"

Ai reasoned he wouldn't seek her out without cause. If not a confession, then what?

Thinking back, he'd seemed to target her from the start—forcing her into the treasurer position, frequently stealing glances at her in class.

Ai knew she was cute, but that wasn't license for constant staring.

She'd just found it troublesome to confront him.

Fortunately, Kaoru only looked without acting, so Ai assumed they had no real connection.

She wanted to end this pointless chat quickly and leave.

"How many Personal Points are under your management?"

Ai turned her phone screen toward Kaoru, revealing an astonishing figure: 26,920,000.

Anyone would be shocked by that balance. Undoubtedly, this girl might be wealthier than Nagumo.

Though these Points were entrusted to her by everyone's collective trust.

"Can you transfer them to me?" Kaoru's tone suggested not embezzlement, but a loan.

Yet even as a loan request, Ai found it bizarre—seeking her out just for Points?

"Give me a reason, Kaoru."

The girl was serious.

As custodian of these Points, she bore responsibility. "I can't transfer them privately. You'd need everyone's consensus."

Usually spacey, now she was sharp-eyed.

Kaoru felt relieved, speaking gently. "Don't worry, I got no ill intent. I just need to borrow them briefly—maybe just minutes."

"No. You must specify why. Not even for minutes."

Ai was firm, simultaneously puzzling over Kaoru's purpose for the Points.

Over 20 million Points could only suggest class transfer fees, but she knew it went beyond that. What could utilize Points' full potential?

With no special exams now, was this against Nagumo?

"Morishita-san can operate it yourself."

Kaoru handed her his phone. "Transfer 26,920,000 to me now, then I'll return them immediately."

Morishita Ai was stunned for a moment.

Under the table, her legs pressed together tightly, the thick black pantyhose slightly squeezing her plump thighs.

She instinctively straightened her posture, thinking he was teasing her, but his expression didn't carry the smugness or mockery of someone playing games—it almost seemed like he was serious.

"Let me handle it?"

"Yes, you do it yourself. I'll just watch."

"W-wait..."

Before Ai could resist, the man naturally scooted closer, his shoulder crossing that subtle boundary until it lightly brushed against hers.

Then, he placed his phone in her hand.

Their fingertips barely touched, and he subtly grazed her smooth, jade-like hand.

Ai froze for a second, her mind racing with thoughts as she numbly allowed him to lean against her.

"You're acting strange today," the girl suddenly said. "Pretending to get close, taking advantage—but this won't distract me. What are you trying to do?"

Seems the plan failed.

Kaoru had no choice but to admit, "I need a screenshot to prove I'm rich."

Ai pondered for a moment. "I see. You want to trick the upperclassmen into thinking you actually have tens of millions in Personal Points, making it easier to deal with Nagumo Miyabi, right?"

Kaoru nodded. "I have to say, you're really sharp, Morishita. It's like you see right through me."

"You're just too easy to read."

Ai smiled faintly. "I don't mind helping, but next time, find someone who'll obey you to hold your points."

With that, she handed the phone back to him.

Kaoru watched as she tapped a few times, and then a notification popped up on his screen.

[Corresponding transaction detected. Confirm deposit?]

[Current rejections: 3/3]

Faced with the prompt from the [Cup of Greed], Kaoru chose to accept—after all, he had deliberately rejected Shiho Manabe's transfer earlier.

Thus, Ai remained completely unaware that something peculiar had happened when her transfer reached Kaoru's account.

8,076,000.

The effect of the [Cup of Greed] was that each rejection doubled the gains. Having rejected three times, the amount had tripled.

Not only that, the moment the points arrived, Kaoru activated another tool—[Unrestricted Voucher], a reward he had drawn months ago.

Its effect allowed him to use something without any restrictions; until the effect ended, no one would question or doubt it.

Kaoru wasn't naive about the school's surveillance.

An account suddenly gaining over 80 million would definitely raise alarms.

So, he had to protect these points, ensuring the school wouldn't suspect a thing.

Using both the [Cup of Greed] and [Unrestricted Voucher] here felt like a waste—he had originally planned to save them for later.

But with Sakayanagi Narumori gone and a new chairman arriving soon, he figured it wasn't a bad idea to use them now.

"Is this enough?" Ai stared at Kaoru, noticing a strange shift in his expression—almost like relief?

Kaoru openly showed her his phone, and the balance displayed made the girl's eyes widen.

"No way?"

Morishita Ai couldn't help feeling angry. "You have so many points, why did you need to borrow from me?"

She'd been tricked.

This guy was probably just playing with her, and she'd obediently fallen for it.

Seeing her expression, Kaoru felt reassured.

Her first reaction wasn't to question the source of the points—perfect.

"Congratulations, Morishita-san, you've passed the test. I've decided to invite you to join the student council. You can have either the treasurer or secretary position."

"I refuse. Believing your lies was my mistake. In any case, hurry up and return my points."

"Aren't you the one who dislikes this duty, Morishita-san?"

"I'm just not interested. Though watching the points accumulate does give me a strange sense of satisfaction."

"I see. But don't move—you'll knock over the coffee."

Perhaps out of anger, Morishita Ai tried to snatch the phone from him, but Kaoru anticipated her move and caught her wrist.

"Bullying a girl is really low, Kaoru."

Even though it was Morishita who had been restrained, her expression and tone made it seem as if she were the one pinning him down.

"Give it up. I won't join the student council."

"Why not?"

Kaoru said, "You can still sleep in at the student council—the sofa and air conditioning are more comfortable, plus there are snacks. And when dealing with disputes outside, you can put your reasoning skills to use and help us analyze situations. We really need you, Morishita-san."

Morishita Ai remained unfazed, replying coolly, "How can you prove you won't lay a hand on me?"

Kaoru realized—he was still holding the girl's delicate hand. His body had grown accustomed to taking liberties.

"Truthfully, I wouldn't lay a finger on anyone. If I break that promise, I'll kneel and kiss your feet—or let you trample me to death."

Seeing the seriousness in his expression, Morishita Ai decided he wasn't lying and promptly pulled her hand free.

"You already tricked me once."

Kaoru blinked, testing the waters. "Should I apologize to you now?"

"An apology isn't necessary. Just return my points."

Morishita Ai didn't dwell on it—his proposal was far too self-deprecating anyway.

Kaoru transferred the original 26.92 million back.

As long as his Personal Points weren't fully depleted, the effect of the [Free Use Voucher] would remain.

"Are the rumors about you and them true?" Morishita Ai suddenly asked.

The forum was flooded with fragmented gossip, making it hard for her to discern what was real.

"The relationships are real. The details, not necessarily." Kaoru didn't hide it from her.

"Why?"

Morishita Ai was curious. "Does Ichinose allow your philandering? Do they all know?"

"Of course." Kaoru said, "Otherwise, I'd already be dead."

"But you don't seem all that proud of it."

Morishita Ai studied his expression closely. "If anything, you look a little melancholic. What's troubling you?"

Kaoru thought for a moment before asking, "Do you think I'm despicable?"

Morishita Ai gave him a deep look, then suddenly smiled—like a fleeting ray of sunlight breaking through the clouds, bright and captivating.

"People who think they're despicable are the most despicable of all."

Chapter 504: Mysterious Matters

Kaoru formally submitted a request to the school for an off-campus trip.

He asked for two days outside, bringing Ichinose along—the total cost for both was 8 million points.

Indeed, the reason he had used two of the miraculous tools wasn't just to prepare for upcoming situations but also to gather enough points for this trip.

The school approved his request—or rather, Sakayanagi Narumori personally authorized it.

However, both sides maintained discretion.

This school rule wasn't announced to all students—unless someone else sought to leave campus, the teachers would then bring up this regulation.

Thus, on Saturday morning, no one knew that two students had boarded the bus leaving the school.

The teacher in charge was a senior homeroom instructor whom Kaoru didn't recognize, though the teacher seemed familiar with him and was quite curious.

This trip was to handle matters regarding shares.

Kaoru intended to let Ichinose return to her home first, planning to visit her afterward once he finished his own business.

During the journey, Ichinose talked endlessly to Kaoru about her life—how she took care of her younger sister as a child, the things she experienced in middle school—chatting nonstop the entire way.

Kaoru listened until she reluctantly hugged him, and then the two parted ways at the station—one heading home, the other off to work.

Two days later, he had mostly grasped the situation regarding Ayanokoji Atsuomi.

It had taken a bit longer than expected.

Kaoru had originally thought he might have some time to spend with Ichinose outside, but instead, he had to rush back to school without delay.

Similarly, no one knew that two students had returned from the outside world—except for a few girls.

"You really went out?"

In Kaoru's room, Karuizawa sat on the edge of the bed, staring at him and Ichinose in utter astonishment.

"Yeah! I was even more surprised than you!"

Ichinose excitedly recounted the experience. "The school arranged a bus for us, and then I just went home!"

Karuizawa immediately felt a pang of jealousy.

She assumed the two had gone off without her, spending two whole days having fun outside—something even more outrageous than dating on campus!

"It's not what you think," Kaoru explained. "I had a necessary reason to leave—it was related to the shares from before. The school just permitted me a temporary absence."

He already understood her personality well—she cared deeply but would act petty, refusing to admit it outright.

"These matters might take a while to resolve. Next time, I can sneak out with you too, Kei."

"You sure have a lot going on."

Karuizawa pouted slightly, though her mood improved a little.

"Isn't the school an official institution? I didn't think they'd bend the rules for students. I assumed they'd never pay us any attention."

The topic was a bit beyond typical student discussions.

Seizing the moment while Karuizawa wasn't paying attention, Ichinose suddenly wrapped her arms around the smaller girl's shoulders and laughed.

"Kei, you're overthinking it! Kaoru just wanted me to visit my sister, so he didn't bring you along. Plus, he had work to do, so don't be mad! Next time, he'll definitely take you!"

As she hugged her, Ichinose's ample chest pressed and swayed against Karuizawa, who flushed bright red and tried to push away her playful, nuzzling face.

"Going home is fine, but why are you so worked up about it?"

"Of course I'm excited! I haven't seen my sister in so long!"

Ichinose rubbed against Karuizawa enthusiastically. "Huh, did you take a bath?"

Wasn't that obvious?

Kaoru subtly averted his gaze.

In truth, Karuizawa hadn't just taken a bath—she was currently wearing loose sleepwear.

Though it was a long-sleeved style, Ichinose's antics had caused the fabric to shift, faintly revealing the soft, jiggling curves of the girl's chest, pressed into odd shapes with slight protrusions.

It wasn't hard to imagine the state beneath.

"I-I-I was waiting for you guys to come back! It's so late—of course I took a bath!" Karuizawa didn't know how to explain it, but in her subconscious, Kaoru's room had already become her second bedroom.

She had left quite a few personal belongings here, including this set of pajamas, all of which had significantly encroached upon Kaoru's original space.

If anyone saw his room now, they would undoubtedly realize he definitely had a girlfriend.

"How could you? I was thinking of taking a bath with Kei!"

"The bathtub isn't big enough!"

"It is!"

"It's not!"

No matter what Ichinose said, Karuizawa wouldn't agree.

What kind of joke was this? Feeling the presence of those big bunnies, who could possibly stay calm enough to bathe with her?

"Ahem, actually, the bathtub here can fit three people."

As soon as Kaoru finished speaking, he saw the two girls staring at him in silence.

The atmosphere turned awkward, especially when Ichinose quietly asked Karuizawa,

"Did you two go overboard the other day?"

"A little... We used up all the protection."

"I see."

Hearing their conversation, Kaoru felt slightly embarrassed.

Weren't they the ones who told him to be honest before?

"Since I'm in a good mood, I might indulge Kaoru's wishes a little."

Ichinose's lips curled into a faint smile, but then she changed her tone upon seeing his expression.

"But not right now."

The excitement in Kaoru's heart instantly vanished. T

hen, noticing her slightly flushed face as she whispered, "Anyway, we'll do it sooner or later. Hurry up and go take your bath!"

What did that mean? It was strangely unsettling.

Kaoru almost wanted to press further, but it was clear she wouldn't say anything more.

"Got it. Can I peek at Honami while she's bathing later?"

"No peeking!"

"But you let me before?"

"I never did! When did I ever say you could peek?"

"Because you barged in on me first. Isn't it my turn now?"

"..."

Kaoru didn't get his way tonight—he nearly ended up sleeping on the floor.

However, what he didn't know was that while he was showering, the two girls were exchanging information.

Ichinose was earnestly asking Karuizawa for advice about... intimate knowledge.

Karuizawa turned red, stammering incoherently.

Eventually, they even turned to Kushida for help, who enthusiastically poured even more "knowledge" into them.

Beyond just learning, Ichinose even made a decision that left Karuizawa stunned for a while.

By the time Kaoru came out, the two were sprawled on the bed, whispering to each other, their faces growing redder by the second.

"What are you two doing?"

His voice startled them like frightened little animals—one rolled away, wrapping herself in the blanket, while the other hid her face behind a pillow, not daring to look at him.

"N-Nothing! It's my turn to bathe!"

Ichinose tossed the pillow aside, quickly got up, and hurried to the bathroom door with her head down.

Then, she suddenly stopped. "I'm staying over tonight too!"

Without waiting for Kaoru's response, she dashed into the bathroom.

"I left your clothes inside."

Kaoru didn't think much of it. I

chinese didn't have pajamas prepared here, so she'd have to make do with his long-sleeved shirt.

However, come to think of it, they were wearing their own shirts and seemed to have nothing on underneath.

Chapter 505: Love-Struck Minds

Time moved forward to February, shortly after the midterm exams.

The homeroom teacher immediately announced the schedule for the final exams and emphasized that a mock exam would be held in the middle of the month.

Since there was no mention of the dreaded pop quizzes, the atmosphere in the class relaxed somewhat, though the necessary vigilance remained intact.

Thanks to past experiences, most first-year students were well aware of the school's tactics.

This was the final semester—the end of the academic year—and they didn't believe the school would remain idle.

Thus, it was highly likely that a special exam awaited them.

Students with good connections in clubs had also gathered information from the upperclassmen.

Both second and third years were undergoing special exams, especially the third-year seniors, who not only had to deal with the current tests but also prepare for the graduation exams after the finals.

"Ahaha, looks like we'll have to hold another Study Group session. Exams really are the worst. High school life should be more relaxed, shouldn't it?"

The former Study Group members had gathered again in the school café.

Hasebe Haruka slumped listlessly over the table in a rather unrefined posture, her chest pressing against the edge as if trying to lift the round table in front of her.

"B-but we have to study. If we mess up the exams, someone might get expelled."

Miki Yamamura had already taken out her textbooks and notebooks.

"Mitoma-kun said both of you need extra tutoring."

Before Airi could speak, Haruka suddenly sat up straight and covered her ears.

"I don't wanna hear it, I don't wanna hear it! Tutoring can wait until the last week at least. Until then, we should enjoy the final semester!"

"But your humanities scores are too weak. Even Airi is doing slightly better than you. We can take it slow with the review."

After spending time together, Miki had gradually grown accustomed to Haruka and Airi's presence.

In the past, she would never have dared to speak so boldly to others.

"O-okay, fine!"

Haruka had no choice but to comply, though she couldn't help voicing her curiosity.

"Hey, Miki-chan, are your grades really good?"

"Not really. I just study hard." Miki replied softly.

In truth, her grades weren't bad—they were much better than Haruka's—but she lacked confidence, feeling she was nowhere near the likes of Sakayanagi and Kaoru.

"No wonder Miki is so nervous. You should relax once in a while."

Haruka nudged Airi beside her without much thought.

"Right, Airi?"

The sudden contact seemed to startle Airi, who flusteredly glanced around before realizing both girls were staring at her.

With a soft "Eep!", her face flushed bright red.

"Oh-ho? What were you thinking about just now, Airi?"

Haruka's eyes gleamed with mischief. "You've been spacing out ever since we sat down. Thinking about someone special?"

"N-no! I wasn't thinking about anyone..."

Airi stammered, "I-I-I... was just wondering when he'd come over... N-not that I—ah, um—"

She had tangled herself up in her own words, nearly biting her tongue in the process.

Tears welled up in her eyes.

"He'? You mean Mitoma-kun?"

Miki tilted her head. "He's been busy with student council work lately. He said he'd come find us when he's free."

In truth, they all knew Kaoru's schedule was packed—either running around for the student council, spending time with upperclassmen, or going on dates with his girlfriends.

"I... I see..." Airi's disappointment was palpable.

Ever since the semester began, she'd been in a constant daze.

"So Airi's been hung up on Kaoru, huh? No wonder you've been zoning out." Haruka chuckled. "Want to invite him out this weekend?"

Airi's face instantly burned crimson as she frantically waved her hands. "N-no! I can't do that! He has a girlfriend!"

The moment the words left her mouth, she froze—realizing she'd slipped up.

Eep!

Sure enough, Haruka gave her a knowing look, nodding as if in approval.

"Good thinking, Airi. The girlfriend hurdle is a tough one. One wrong move, and it could turn into a bloody battlefield."

Thud!

Airi slammed her forehead onto the table, utterly mortified. She'd completely exposed her feelings, and Haruka's sharp gaze had sliced through her mask like a knife.

"So when did you start liking him?"

"P-please stop, waaah!"

"Come on, this is a rare, serious love talk!"

"Guh... Just kill me..."

"Wait, don't die, Airi! Get up already!"

Haruka tried pulling Airi upright, but the latter refused, convinced she'd rather perish than face the humiliation.

"Uh... What are you two talking about?"

Miki, slow to catch on, asked timidly. "Love talk...? You mean Mitoma-kun and Ichinose-san?"

Haruka blinked, studying the quiet girl before her.

With her cool, reserved demeanor, it was hard to imagine Miki had much experience in this area.

She'd always struggled with social interactions, often lagging behind others when it came to navigating relationships.

"Miki, do you know something?"

"Huh? Should I know something?"

"Isn't he super popular lately? Rumor has it he has at least four girlfriends and brings different girls back to his room every night for wild parties."

"W-wild parties every night is way too much!"

As she spoke, Miki's cheeks and neck flushed slightly. "He's definitely not that kind of person. Don't listen to their nonsense."

The way this girl defended him piqued Haruka's curiosity, so she asked, "Aren't Kamuro-san and Sakayanagi-san from your class quite close to him? I heard the ring on Sakayanagi-san's finger was a gift from him."

"I... I don't know, but it can't be as bad as they say. I believe in Mitoma-kun."

Miki was convinced that Kaoru wasn't a bad person.

Even if he were, he must have had his reasons—someone who could be redeemed at any moment.

So how could Kaoru possibly play with girls' feelings?

Haruka's expression turned odd.

It seemed this guy still had that same ability to bewitch people, just like back then.

After all, some idols had joined the agency purely because of him.

"I believe in him too," Airi murmured softly. "Even if he really... really did play with girls' feelings, he's not a bad person."

Haruka slapped her forehead.

Great.

She had known this Study Group might end up as his harem—after all, he had a habit of grazing near his own nest—but was this really going to be a full-on surrender?

She had been planning to make a stealthy advance herself, keeping things ambiguous while stringing him along.

Yet here were her two teammates, surrendering faster than she could.

"Fine. Since you both believe in him, I'll believe in him too—just in his lecherousness."

With that, Haruka bit down on her coffee straw.

She didn't want to resort to seducing Kaoru, but now it seemed like her only play.

The other option, of course, was to take it slow.

She didn't mind the idea of his harem.

Before this, she hadn't even had a chance to get close to him—only seeing his face in her dreams, always out of reach.

If she couldn't be his idol, couldn't she at least be his friend this time?

Or maybe... something more.

Haruka suddenly chuckled, realizing how obsessive she sounded.

Maybe this was just the recklessness of youth.

"Ahem, should we keep talking about romance?"

Miki and Airi exchanged a glance before answering in unison:

"No!"

Chapter 506: Airi's Feelings

Even so, Haruka quickly found a new topic.

Miki had no illusions about getting Haruka to shut up and quietly review their textbooks, so she resigned herself to letting her ramble on.

After nearly two hours at the café, today's Study Group meeting finally came to an end.

"Suddenly, it all feels a little unreal," Haruka said lazily, stretching before smiling at Miki and Airi.

"Before this, I was used to doing everything alone. Having friends who'll actually listen to me really does make things better."

Miki froze for a moment

The words struck a chord in her heart—had she really just made friends?

"B-but I thought Haruka-chan already had people to talk to in class?"

In Airi's eyes, Haruka couldn't possibly be considered an outcast like herself.

She was beautiful, showed no signs of being withdrawn, and got along well with those around her.

The current atmosphere in their group was largely shaped by Hasebe Haruka, while Kaoru remained more of an elusive, mysterious figure who appeared and disappeared unpredictably.

"Are you talking about Kikyo and her friends?"

Haruka thought seriously for a moment before earnestly telling Airi, "Some relationships are just superficial. I'm not part of their circle—to them, I'm just a passerby they can talk to at best."

"B-being able to talk to them... is actually really impressive..."

Airi murmured softly, "I feel like if you wanted to, Haru-chan, someone would definitely accept you into their group. I remember they invited you to their gatherings before."

In Class 1-D, Airi and Haruka were only separated by Sato Maya, so she had some recollection of Haruka's past interactions.

"I think so too. Why don't you hang out with them, Haru-chan?" Miki agreed with Airi's words but found it strange.

"Huh? Didn't I tell you guys before?" Haruka seemed surprised. "Dealing with strangers is a hassle, and having too many friends isn't necessarily a good thing. You have to work hard to maintain those relationships, and if you're not careful, it could turn into a full-blown war among girls."

"A war... among girls?" Miki was bewildered.

"For example, to complain about someone more conveniently, they'd create a group chat without her and all vent about her there. Or, out of jealousy over her abilities, they might deliberately spread rumors about her." Haruka spoke as if she had firsthand experience, her tone laced with resentment.

This kind of social warfare was far too advanced for Miki, whose phone only had a few contacts.

She had never even considered such things.

"Besides, not everyone is worth being friends with, right, Airi?"

Airi hadn't given it much thought before, but recalling recent events, she nodded subconsciously, her expression turning slightly uneasy.

"Like the boys in our class—they're all getting worse, except for a few like Hirata-kun. I can't even be bothered to deal with them."

Haruka was practically itching to rant, especially about certain idiots who spouted vulgar nonsense in front of girls.

"Airi, you'd better not engage with those kinds of people either."

"I-I definitely won't!" Airi's voice trembled with agitation.

Haruka gave her a strange look, causing Airi to shrink back immediately.

"Good. But it seems Kaoru was right—our group is like combining like terms. Similar people should stick together, and I feel comfortable with you guys."

Haruka didn't dwell on it. She simply thought this group was good—but also bad, because it had two problem children.

Fortunately, they were just highly guarded loners, not extreme social phobics who'd run at the sight of people.

Being with them, Haruka was satisfied—at least she wouldn't have to deal with the petty, hair-raising conflicts that erupted over trivial matters like in middle school.

Since Kaoru hadn't shown up today, the group naturally disbanded.

...

Airi walked back to the dorm with them.

Seeing her empty room, she quietly sighed in relief—but also felt a pang of loneliness.

Not only did Haruka feel comfortable, but Airi also found it quite pleasant.

The reason she had withdrawn into herself was due to various incidents she had experienced in the past, coupled with her inherently non-confrontational personality, which led her to retreat weakly into the shadows.

Now, Kaoru had pulled her out of those shadows and helped her make new friends.

Since she wasn't truly autistic in the clinical sense, she felt genuinely happy inside.

Having grown accustomed to darkness and endured bone-chilling cold, she naturally cherished the hard-won light.

However, there was one thing that weighed heavily on Airi Sakura's mind—so much so that it filled her with frustration.

He actually had a girlfriend!

Airi felt as if the sky had fallen.

Ever since she learned that the account harassing her was none other than Kaoru himself, she had mentally prepared herself to accept everything—even interpreting his past words to her as foreshadowing.

After all, his actions made him seem like an utterly obsessive, twisted fan—so much so that his affection for her had crossed into something perverse.

She had encountered deranged fans before, but the reason she had panicked when faced with the store clerk's harassment was because he was right in front of her, armed with her personal information, making the situation extremely dangerous.

Yet, that clerk had immediately been dealt with by an even more extreme fan.

At the time, Airi had thought she was going to die—only to discover that the person behind it was Kaoru.

Her emotions were complicated.

On one hand, she was terrified, unsure of what he might do to her.

On the other, she was happy—because it was him.

After an intense and conflicted internal struggle, Airi had resolved to accept Kaoru.

He had done so much for her—wasn't it only natural that she tolerate his strange fetishes in return?

But when she offered him her "gift," he refused to take it!

Airi couldn't sleep. Based on his past comments, shouldn't he like her? Why wouldn't he accept it?

Did she have to personally "help him out"?

Thinking about his alternate account made her face burn with embarrassment. She believed that, at this point, she understood Kaoru's hidden side better than anyone else.

And in truth, her intuition wasn't wrong—after all, Kaoru had sent all his desires directly to her for convenience.

Now, aside from Horikita, Airi was the one who knew Kaoru's other side best.

Too shy to bring it up herself, Airi had waited for Kaoru to make a move on her.

But then—he had a girlfriend!

Airi couldn't comprehend it.

Had she misread everything?

At this point, she couldn't just go up to Kaoru and demand an explanation. Left with no choice, she bottled up her feelings, remaining unhappy ever since.

Today, Haruka had nearly pried her thoughts out of her.

Thankfully, Miki had stepped in to help—though Airi could tell that she, too, harbored unusual feelings for Kaoru.

The only difference was that Miki didn't seem to realize it yet.

The more she dwelled on these thoughts, the worse her mood became. Suddenly, she slapped her cheeks lightly to snap herself out of it.

"Who cares about him? He's just a creep who harasses people from behind a screen."

Muttering to herself, Airi pulled out her textbooks and notes from her bag, then picked up the digital camera on her desk.

After staring at it for a moment, she tucked it away inside her bag.

When feeling unhappy, she would choose to take landscape photos to cheer herself up.

These days, she had already taken quite a few photos of the campus in winter and planned to take a few more sets.

If she could capture the melting lake surface during the thaw, it might turn out even more beautiful.

Chapter 507: Airi's Feelings (Part 2)

Learning from past lessons, Airi Sakura was being very cautious. She wore an overcoat, a mask, and a hat, doing her best to minimize her presence.

However, her luck wasn't great.

The elevator she was in stopped on the fourth floor, and as the doors opened, the voices of several boys immediately flooded in, startling her and making her instinctively retreat to the corner.

"We're definitely having barbecue today! It's been so long since we had a proper feast!"

"Damn it, after all our hard work, we only got 191 points. Just how blissful must life be for those Class A bastards?"

"Stop complaining. If it weren't for Horikita, our class would still be at zero points."

"I admit it now—Horikita is the prettiest girl in our class!"

"Of course she is! She's our last hope. Even our little angel has fallen into the clutches of the Harem King. Damn it!"

"Even Karuizawa betrayed us! That damned Harem King!"

There was no mistaking these voices—they belonged to Sudou Ken, Ike Kanji, Yamauchi Haruki, and the ever-inconspicuous Ayanokoji Kiyotaka from their class.

Seeing them enter, Airi immediately regretted her decision.

Should she have taken the emergency stairs instead?

But the girls' dormitory was generally on the higher floors, and Airi lived on the 11th floor. If she had to climb all those stairs, her stamina would probably give out halfway.

Sudou didn't pay any attention to Airi. Ike glanced at her, slightly puzzled by the combination of an overcoat and mask, but he didn't dwell on it.

Compared to Airi, Ike was far more preoccupied with Kushida.

His little angel had actually been on a date with Kaoru recently!

And when questioned by everyone, Kushida neither admitted nor denied it, maintaining an ambiguous attitude and simply saying she had a good relationship with Kaoru.

Yamauchi Haruki had once told him that their little angel might have already become Kaoru's "cream puff," perhaps even posing with a peace sign.

Ike Kanji nearly got into a fight with him over that, refusing to let him insult his little angel like that.

How could such a pure and cute girl possibly do anything indecent?

If anyone was going to teach her about those things, it should at least be him!

"Hey, hey, Ken, why don't you hurry up and confess to Horikita?" Ike said loudly. "I think she'd definitely accept you. She doesn't even acknowledge the Harem King, and she always turns to you for things—she must like you!"

Sudou was also tempted.

In their eyes, Horikita Suzune did treat them a little differently—she tutored them, cared about his club activities, and even supported him as a leader during the sports festival.

The only regret was that he hadn't secured the title of grade-level MVP during the sports festival, missing the chance to deepen their relationship.

"No, no, that's too rushed. I want to confess to her properly," Sudou said.

He knew Horikita Suzune was fixated on reaching Class A, so he planned to wait until they defeated Class A or until Class D rose to a higher position before confessing. He wanted to tell her she wasn't fighting alone.

"If I were you, I would've confessed long ago, Kikyo-chan. Both Karuizawa and Hasebe are involved with the harem king, only Horikita remains unmoved—she must like you!"

The so-called "harem king" in Ike Kanji's words was none other than Kaoru.

Even perverts like them found it outrageous how he could openly maintain a harem, and they couldn't help but feel envious deep down.

However, they were completely unaware of Horikita Suzune's situation.

After all, she always maintained an aloof demeanor and seemed to have no connection with Kaoru. Whenever his name was mentioned, she would frown as if harboring some deep-seated grudge.

Not just Ike Kanji, even Sudou believed Horikita Suzune would never yield to anyone.

What they didn't know was that the only reason Horikita tutored them was because they paid tutoring fees—fees she then transferred to Kaoru as part of her debt repayment.

Her concern for Sudou Ken's club activities was also tied to Personal Points, as the student council rewarded outstanding club performances.

While they thought Horikita was cold toward Kaoru, they had no idea she and Kushida had simultaneously become cream puffs.

Horikita didn't want to hear Kaoru's name for a simple reason: she was determined to prove her worth beyond just being a cream puff.

Despite this, unbeknownst to everyone, she still honored their agreement by spending a few days each month as a cream puff—even forcing herself on him when he resisted.

Meanwhile, as they chatted, Airi felt immense pressure under Yamauchi Haruki's persistent gaze.

"Y-you're Sakura, right?"

Airi's soul nearly left her body in fright. How had this guy recognized her?

"N-no, I'm not!"

Yamauchi's eyes lit up—he'd only been suspicious before, but that bust size and voice could belong to no one else.

"Heh, I knew it was you. From what I've heard, there aren't many girls in school who can rival you."

Smacking his lips, he added, "Though Hasebe might be slightly bigger."

"Haruki, who are you talking to?" Ike asked, confused. "Who's Sakura?"

Just then, the elevator reached the first floor. Seizing the moment while Yamauchi was distracted, Airi kept her head down and bolted out.

"W-wait, Sakura! Where are you going?"

Yamauchi's initial excitement turned to panic as a terrible thought struck him—was Airi Sakura about to fall into the harem king's clutches too?

Ignoring his shouts, she sprinted out of the dormitory until she was completely out of sight.

"Sakura... that name sounds familiar," Sudou mused before suddenly realizing, "Wait, that glasses girl?"

"Yeah, her! A bit plain-looking, but great body," Yamauchi admitted, regretting not blocking her escape in the elevator.

"Oooh, didn't she confess to Haruki once?" Ike said enviously. "If it were me, lights off—all girls are the same!"

Haruki Yamauchi laughed awkwardly.

In truth, he had been bragging—Airi Sakura had never paid him any attention, let alone confessed to him.

But at this point, there was no way he would admit that and embarrass himself.

"She ran off so fast—was she too shy to face you?"

"Ah, women are so troublesome. Honestly, I would've considered saying yes. Feelings can grow over time, but she just bolted too quickly."

"Damn, I'm so jealous of you, you bastard!"

Under Ike Kanji's envious gaze, Haruki felt his confidence returning.

He was convinced that sooner or later, he'd win Airi over.

He'd been observing her closely lately and noticed that Kaoru hardly ever spent time with her—their interactions were practically nonexistent.

Plus, with all the rumors about Kaoru being involved with multiple girls, Airi had probably grown to dislike him.

Haruki was sure his chances were high.

Just imagining the body hidden beneath her baggy clothes sent a rush of heat to his lower abdomen.

Like Ike said, Airi's outward appearance was plain, but in the dark, it wouldn't matter. He didn't care.

Once he started dating her, he'd finally lose his virgin status!

Still, a flicker of unease nagged at him.

Airi covered herself up so thoroughly—it didn't seem like she was just cold. More like she was hiding something.

Was she meeting someone?

So he came up with a flimsy excuse, claiming he'd forgotten his phone, and told Sudou Ken and the others to go ahead and secure seats at the barbecue place—he'd catch up soon.

Sudou and Ike didn't think much of it, slinging their arms over each other's shoulders as they left the dorm.

After months of frugality, they planned to splurge with their newly issued Personal Points.

No one noticed Ayanokoji standing nearby, expressionless as he sent a message to someone.

"Hey, Ayanokoji! Hurry up! You can't miss out on this barbecue!"

At Ike's shout, Ayanokoji pocketed his phone and silently followed.

He knew the only reason they invited him was to split the bill.

After they left, Haruki reappeared in the dorm lobby, sneaking off in the direction Airi had gone.

Chapter 508: Airi's Feelings (Part 3)

To be honest, Airi really wanted to take outdoor selfies.

The snow-covered campus was full of perfect spots—by the artificial lake, inside the grove, even the bustling Keyaki Mall.

But doing so would risk exposing her identity. Besides, she'd be too embarrassed to take photos under the gaze of strangers. Even running into a single passerby would make her heart race.

So she found herself back at the familiar Special Instruction Building, home to science labs, home economics rooms, and audiovisual classrooms.

Normally, no one came here outside of class hours.

Occasionally, a few clubs held activities here, but most gathered in the club activity building instead, further reducing the chances of encountering anyone.

As usual, Airi slipped into one of the classrooms with practiced ease, shutting the door behind her before setting up for her shoot

.She fiddled with the digital camera in her hand, involuntarily recalling their previous encounter, and her mood suddenly plummeted.

She knew absolutely nothing about cameras—specs, techniques, none of it mattered to her.

The only reason she'd bought this digital camera was because she happened to have the Personal Points to spare, and it took clearer, more beautiful photos than her phone.

Kaoru had taught her many little photography tricks, all of which had been incredibly helpful.

Though she'd been interested in photography since elementary school, her introverted nature had meant no one had ever really guided her before.

From then until now, Airi Sakura had mostly taught herself.

Fortunately, the internet age allowed for the spread of vast amounts of knowledge, and she had watched countless videos on photography techniques.

Airi walked over to the window, raised her camera, and aimed it at the glittering white expanse of the lake outside.

With the click of the shutter, the last rays of the sun skimmed across the frozen artificial lake.

The frost-covered railings cast faint, lingering shadows on the ground, while the trees dotting the white landscape stood bare yet striking, their upright forms perfectly captured in her camera.

The distant mountains resembled an old man on the verge of slumber—though, against the backdrop of the soon-to-be-glittering cityscape, they might have been better described as gently rolling hills.

Winter's snow had draped everything in a white blanket, like a kingdom sculpted from frost, adorned with countless shimmering jewels that sparkled brilliantly under the setting sun, ever-changing.

She had been here for nearly a year now. She had photographed sunrises and sunsets, summer and winter, day and night, empty spaces and bustling crowds.

Sometimes, she would lose herself in these solitary moments, where she could most directly perceive the existence of beauty—nature, indifferent and unrestrained, pouring out its charm in full.

Airi had taken many photos. It was a shame she didn't have the key to the rooftop, forcing her to settle for limited angles from where she stood.

If possible, she would have preferred sneaking into the club activity building to secretly snap a few shots of everyone engaged in their club activities—though she had managed to stealthily photograph them preparing for the sports festival.

Scenery was beautiful, but people were worth photographing too. Airi didn't limit herself to just one subject; she simply enjoyed the act of taking photos.

Perhaps the reason she had debuted as a gravure idol was precisely because it allowed her to freely document another side of herself—exposing her most unfiltered self before the lens, without pretense, without shrinking under others' gazes.

"He said Shizuku-chan was cute... What a playboy..."

Airi muttered under her breath as she adjusted her camera. Then, she took off her coat and mask, set her glasses aside, and fixed her hair.

Now, the famously eye-catching curves of her chest were on full display, far surpassing what would be considered normal for someone her age.

Haruka Hasebe had once been intensely curious about this. After comparing herself to Airi, she was relieved to find that she was slightly bigger.

At this moment, Airi Sakura was also quite at ease.

The special teaching building only had surveillance cameras installed in certain classrooms, with many areas remaining uncovered—such as this storage room filled with miscellaneous items.

This was one of Airi Sakura's secret hideouts. She sat atop a discarded desk, her camera placed on the floor, propped up by her bag as she adjusted the angle. Setting a timer, she had five seconds to strike a pose that satisfied her.

In her mind, she imagined this was the classroom of Class 1-D, where she was attending a lesson. The camera would capture her from below, making it seem as though she were diligently studying.

Click—

The camera faithfully captured the scene. From the low angle, the first thing visible in the frame was a pair of slender legs clad in black thigh-high socks, pressed neatly together.

Her knees bore a faint blush, and where the socks slightly dug into her skin, the fullness of her thighs was already evident.

The smooth, fair skin of her thighs carried the delicate softness unique to a girl her age. Beneath the hem of her skirt, a faint glimpse of her snow-white hip curve could be seen, the dim lighting teasing at something even more mysterious.

Yet, moving upward, her slender waist made it hard to believe that such a massive pair of peaks could obstruct the view above—so much so that they nearly obscured her pretty face.

Fortunately, she tilted her head slightly, her sharp chin entering the frame as her eyes gazed forward, truly resembling a studious student.

In the next photo, the girl was no longer looking ahead. Instead, she turned her head, seemingly startled as she noticed the camera, her brows lifting slightly in surprise.

Then, she smiled—as if greeting the unseen voyeur.

In the final shot, Airi Sakura gently lifted the hem of her skirt, exposing a generous expanse of her smooth, tender thigh—enough to glimpse the very top of her thighs and the curve of her hips—only to stop at the last moment, leaving the viewer in agonizing suspense, wishing they could tug it up just a little more.

"T-this is so indecent..."

Airi blushed as she reviewed the photos.

This was a method Kaoru had taught her—to tease and tantalize.

"I-I'm not some idol... Even my past gravure shoots weren't this lewd..."

In this regard, Airi was somewhat unfair to Kaoru.

Had she stayed longer, her future photo collections would only grow bolder—after all, that was what the audience craved.

Still, Airi felt a small flicker of happiness.

She was well aware of the caliber of her figure, often sensing strange gazes that only made her more withdrawn, afraid to lift her head.

But here, through photography, she could freely express herself—perhaps a form of liberation in its own way.

Airi snapped a few more shots of her thighs, examining them closely. She couldn't see anything particularly special about them.

Why did he always insist on looking at her legs?

Well, whatever.

He had Ichinose to admire anyway.

By now, he probably wouldn't even spare a glance for Shizuku-chan.

Airi decided to continue her self-portrait session. Adjusting her pose and angle, she was prepared to switch to her phone if the camera failed her—either way fine in her eyes.

And so, when Kaoru pushed the door open, he was met with the sight of her flashing a peace sign at the lens, beaming brightly.

With her posture straightened and her jacket deliberately unbuttoned at the top, her overwhelmingly ample bust instantly seized his attention.

"Ara... ara..."

Airi Sakura turned her head stiffly to look at him, murmuring incomprehensible sounds under her breath.

It was as if she had seen something particularly terrifying, her mind completely shutting down.

Chapter 509: It Hurts

Perhaps never expecting someone to appear here, Airi Sakura froze completely for half a minute before letting out a startled "Wah!" and nearly jumping out of her skin.

"W-w-w-what are you doing here!?"

No sooner had she spoken than, in her flustered state, she instinctively tried to retreat—only to tilt too far back and topple over along with her chair, creating an even louder crash.

"Oww... it hurts, it hurts..."

Tears welled up in Airi's eyes as she felt like her head had been struck, buzzing and throbbing with pain.

More importantly, her entire body ached.

"Is it really that surprising to see me here?"

Kaoru was startled by her sudden fall.

Closing the door behind him, he quickly approached. "Where did you hit? Are you—"

His voice cut off abruptly. The fall had left the girl's skirt in complete disarray, hiked up past her thighs, revealing a stretch of dazzlingly fair skin.

Even more eye-catching was the childish light-pink undergarment hugging the gradually rounding curves of her hips, faintly outlining a small, rising mound.

At the same time, a notification of a fulfilled wish flashed briefly across his vision.

"Wah!"

Noticing Kaoru's gaze, Airi flushed crimson and hurriedly adjusted her skirt, pressing both hands firmly against it, unable to utter a single word.

At this moment, the girl's brain simply couldn't process any coherent thoughts.

Someone she thought was worlds away had suddenly appeared right before her—anyone would be stunned in such a situation.

"Were you taking photos here?"

Kaoru felt somewhat awkward, though his eyes had already caught sight of the nearby bag and camera.

The phone screen was even pointed toward Airi, suggesting quite a few shots had been taken.

"Guh... y-you saw everything?"

Airi stammered as she looked up at him, her pain momentarily forgotten as panic over being discovered flooded her mind.

What should she do now?

Wait, why was she even worried about this? Kaoru already knew, didn't he?

The moment the words left her mouth, she relaxed slightly. As long as it wasn't anyone other than Kaoru who saw, it was fine.

"I saw. You looked adorable."

Seeing that she was unharmed, Kaoru felt relieved. "Without your glasses and with your hair slightly styled, you really do look prettier than usual."

Anyone who saw Airi now would surely be shocked.

The rustic braids she usually wore were undone, her smooth, long hair cascading like a waterfall down to her waist.

Her delicate shoulders made her appear even more slender and endearing.

The bothersome glasses were gone, leaving only her clear, beautiful eyes, slightly upturned nose, and flawless cheeks fully exposed without any concealment.

Not only that, Kaoru noticed she wasn't wearing any makeup—her beauty was entirely natural.

Upon closer inspection, she might even surpass Karuizawa and Kushida in looks.

Even without deliberately staring, it was hard to miss the buttons on her blouse.

With her outer coat unbuttoned, the shirt beneath was partially visible, barely containing the plump curves beneath—soft and full like ripe papayas, exuding a tantalizingly sweet allure.

Airi Sakura's face flushed red.

She knew Kaoru was staring at her—it wasn't like she hadn't encountered such gazes before.

Normally, people would notice her ample chest, let alone now.

"I-I'm not doing anything weird."

The girl sounded guilty. "This... this is just normal photography. P-please don't get the wrong idea, and also, stop staring at me like that, waaah..."

No one would have thought anything strange until you said that—now it's even easier to misunderstand.

"Can you stand up?"

Kaoru extended his hand toward her.

Even though the classroom had heating, sitting on the floor for too long wasn't a good idea.

Airi hesitated for a moment before slowly taking his hand. In her daze, she seemed to see that scene again—exactly like now.

"Waaah!"

Once she was on her feet, Airi finally realized how much the fall had hurt. Instinctively, she covered her bottom—aside from her head, this was probably the sorest spot.

"Does it hurt back there?" Kaoru asked tactfully.

Airi took a few steps back, waving her hands frantically, her cheeks burning as she denied it.

"N-no!"

"If not, then why are you covering your butt?"

Kaoru pulled out a [Painkiller] from his pocket—a reward he had obtained earlier. Its effect was quick pain relief and HP recovery.

"Here, take this. It's just one capsule. Hurry up and swallow it."

Regardless of Airi's thoughts, Kaoru shoved the [Painkiller] into her hand, his gaze compelling her to take it.

Unsurprisingly, this assertive approach worked well on Airi.

Though she had some reservations about the [Painkiller], trusting Kaoru implicitly, she swallowed the pill without a second thought.

"Are you still updating your tweets?"

Since the medicine would take a moment to work, Kaoru casually brought up the photos.

"N-no, I won't update anymore."

Airi denied in a small voice. "I'll keep these photos as mementos. Maybe I'll post a little bit later."

Photos involving ANHS definitely couldn't be shared, but who would care if she posted selfies?

Admittedly, some fans could be as obsessive as that store clerk from before, but they were in the minority.

Airi had been considering whether to continue as an idol.

Especially after talking with Kaoru—she realized the entertainment industry was far bigger than she thought, with many areas she had never explored.

She had assumed that appearing in a magazine and having a few thousand followers was already impressive, but it turned out she was just getting started.

"Have there been any weird people following you lately?" Kaoru asked again.

Airi blinked, trying hard to recall. If there had been a stalker, she would have noticed, right?

Aside from Haruki Yamauchi from class sneaking glances at her, nothing particularly strange had happened recently.

Wait—was he warning her?

"K-Kaoru, do you think there might be a stalker recently?"

Airi looked at Kaoru cautiously. She remembered his alt account saying he would watch her every day, always keeping an eye on her.

Stalking an idol—such extreme behavior was indeed terrifying. But considering it was Kaoru's kink, Airi could reluctantly accept it.

Wait, that didn't seem right. If it was stalking, couldn't it just be walking to school together or going home together?

At that thought, Airi felt happy.

A stalker like that—she wasn't afraid at all. "There might be, but since you didn't find it strange, perhaps it's just my imagination."

Kaoru had no intention of mentioning Haruki Yamauchi's matter. Since they were in the same class, telling Airi Sakura might frighten her.

However, his tone inadvertently led Airi Sakura to misunderstand.

"T-this is fine too... it's okay..."

The girl muttered softly, her words unclear, but she sounded oddly happy.

"Ahem, did I interrupt your photo session?"

Kaoru assumed she was muttering about that. Seeing the girl's flushed face today had been quite impactful.

Moreover, Kaoru couldn't quite grasp Airi Sakura's thoughts.

Airi Sakura knew about his alternate account—something he had indirectly revealed.

Yet, she showed no reaction, nor any signs of dislike toward him.

Although Kaoru usually maintained their relationship carefully, it seemed to have little effect.

Chapter 510: Who Is the Prey?

When he mentioned the photos, Airi Sakura finally realized her current state. Her face turned crimson, and she quickly turned away, fumbling to button up her blouse.

Oh no, oh no! He's really going to think I'm some kind of indecent girl now!

Airi had completely forgotten what Kaoru had taught her earlier. The emotions she had suppressed surged back, leaving her flustered.

At that moment, no matter how hard she tried, the buttons just wouldn't cooperate—her ample chest kept getting in the way.

"The student council has been inspecting the school facilities after classes lately, checking for any issues," Kaoru said from behind. "You should avoid going out too much. Even though this place is secluded, you still need to be careful not to be seen."

In truth, he was making excuses.

Kaoru had rushed here after receiving a message from Ayanokoji, tracking the location.

But Airi Sakura didn't question his reasoning.

'Ugh, I can't button it up at all!'

Airi hated her large chest—it was useless most of the time, only causing trouble at the worst moments.

"Has the pain from earlier subsided?"

The [painkiller] should have taken effect by now.

Airi wasn't complaining of pain anymore.

Kaoru glanced at the girl's petite backside—not that he meant to, but with her turned away, aside from her slender legs, there wasn't much else to look at.

The winter uniform hadn't changed the skirt's length.

As always, the hem lifted slightly, faintly revealing the curve of her plump hips and a glimpse of her fair, delicate thighs.

The black knee-high socks stopped just below her calves, while her small leather shoes concealed her feet, leaving only a hint of her ankle's contour.

It was hard to decide where to focus.

"Huh?"

Airi instinctively touched her backside. "It doesn't hurt anymore... and my head feels fine too."

"Good. But next time you want to go out for photos, you can call me," Kaoru said, remembering Airi's fondness for landscape photography.

"Hiding here just to take a few selfies is such a waste of our digital camera."

Airi pursed her lips and turned to face him, murmuring, "But don't you have to go to the student council?"

"It's not like I'm required to be there every day."

Kaoru's gaze drifted to the buttons on her chest—only one was fastened, leaving a glimpse of her pristine collarbone.

"Oh." Airi Sakura was momentarily at a loss for words. She had originally intended to ask about Ichinose.

"I'm sorry I couldn't make it to your gathering today," Kaoru said. "I'll go tomorrow. After the mock exams, I should have some free time. I'll need to tutor both of you."

Truthfully, tutoring wasn't necessary. Her grades weren't bad enough to risk expulsion, so there was no need for him to take time out for them.

Airi walked sullenly to the table, picked up her phone, and asked without a trace of jealousy, "Everyone's been talking about you lately. Did you really do it?"

She expected Kaoru to deny it—or even come up with some excuse. But instead, he admitted without changing his expression.

"Yeah, I did all of it. Probably worse than what the rumors say."

Airi stared at him blankly before her face twisted in shock. "You actually cheated!?"

"It's not cheating. Honami knows."

"W-wait, what do you mean she knows?" Airi was completely bewildered. "Even if she knows, it's still cheating!"

Admittedly, anyone would react that way upon hearing this for the first time—it was the natural response.

"To be precise, Honami knows, and so do they. Everyone's acknowledged it," Kaoru said after a moment of thought.

"They probably get along well in private. They're always discussing something behind my back."

Finally, Airi understood.

No wonder Ike Kanji and the others had called him a "harem king."

She had been a little angry at the time, but it turned out to be the truth!

"No one's mad?"

"Not right now."

"Even the upperclassmen?"

"Asahina-senpai and Tachibana-senpai are included, of course. But, Airi, I didn't know you were this nosy."

"W-well, it's hard not to be curious about this!"

Airi's face flushed with panic. "Y-you—you're really too much! Dating so many girls at the same time!"

The moment the words left her mouth, she regretted them. Seeing the silence in Kaoru's eyes, she grew uneasy.

Then another thought struck her—Kaoru had chosen to be with all those girls, yet he had never made a move on her, even though he had harassed her with a fake account!

How strange.

Logically speaking, shouldn't Kaoru like her?

Airi Sakura was getting angry again, her cheeks puffing up unconsciously like steamed buns as she sulked.

"Are you... mad, Airi?" Kaoru suddenly spoke.

Caught off guard by his directness, Airi instinctively flinched before quickly composing herself.

"I-It's normal to be angry, right? Only bad people play with girls' feelings."

"In your eyes, dating multiple people means playing with them?" Kaoru countered.

"Doesn't it?" Airi retorted, displeased. "Even TV dramas don't have plots like this."

"I already told you—Honami and the others know and don't mind. Does that still count as playing with them?" Kaoru sighed. "Seems like you tend to judge others based on your own biases. I thought I could make you trust me."

His words left Airi scrambling. "D-Don't be mad... I... I was wrong... I'm sorry..."

Kaoru shook his head. "It's not your fault. It's mine. I like them, but I haven't given them a normal relationship."

Airi froze.

This was the first time she had heard Kaoru say the word "like."

So... he really doesn't like me?

But then why did he harass me with a fake account? Was it just a prank? Was he just toying with me?

And who was that girl he was talking to back then?

Airi visibly deflated, the light in her eyes dimming.

"Um... I think I'll go home now."

Without waiting for Kaoru's response, the girl hurriedly packed her things, shoving her camera haphazardly into her bag before slinging it over her shoulder.

Head bowed, she turned to leave the classroom.

"Wait, Airi—you forgot your coat."

Listlessly, she took the coat from his hands, looking like a defeated soldier surrendering to the enemy as she trudged back to her own "prison camp."

"Can I see what you took pictures of today?"

Kaoru's sudden question caught her off guard.

Airi stopped in her tracks. See her photos from today?

In an instant, her mind raced. She had taken landscape shots, but Kaoru had seen her taking selfies—he couldn't be asking about the scenery.

So... he was asking for her photos?!

Before, Kaoru had always used a fake account to ask for her pictures—sometimes demanding leg shots, other times chest shots.

Back then, she had even foolishly asked the real Kaoru if he wanted her to send them, only to end up sending the tame ones to the fake account while the more revealing ones were intercepted by him.

At the same time, Airi recalled Kaoru's earlier implication.

Could it be... that Kaoru has feelings for her too?

Taking a deep breath, Airi made up her mind.

No matter what, she was going to get an answer today!

"You can't see the photos I just took." Kaoru's expression darkened.

So she was angry—was it because of the others?

Just as he was about to speak, Airi suddenly pulled out her camera and shoved it into his hands.

Her face was burning red, but her gaze was firm.

"But... you can take whatever kind of photos you want of me!"

The memory of her earlier selfie made her blush even harder.

Even if he wanted those kinds of photos, she'd do her best to comply—after all, this was her chance to test Kaoru's true feelings.

From the comments on the alt account, Airi Sakura could see another side of Kaoru.

She thought that if he liked her, he wouldn't be able to resist doing something bad.

She could use this as leverage and confront him about it!